

2 Images and Words for the Bishop

The first problem in analysing poetry about bishops is to assess whether it is about bishops at all, and if so, in which terms it identifies its subject. For our poems to be about bishops, they must come from a time when the notion of bishop was sufficiently developed to be at the centre of such a treatment, a question that may not have a straightforward answer, for although the notion of episcopate may well be already developed, the difference between it and other notions (patronage, priesthood) might still not be as clear as that difference is to our modern eyes. And even if a developed and specialised notion of bishop is already in use, nothing assures us that it will be reflected in the language of the poems. As regards contemporary notions of the episcopate, I will pass on taking for granted the results of historians, and I will concentrate on the way and why this concrete reality is reflected in the language of our poets.

As far as we know, both Ephrem and Gregory were moving in uncharted territory when they composed poems on bishops. Furthermore, prose language for bishops, though much more developed, was still fluid enough to allow variations and further change. Therefore, the first theme treated in this section will be the poets' relationship with contemporary language on the episcopate, beginning with the more specialised terms and moving towards the generic: first, I will trace the terms that later became customary for referring to a bishop in our authors (*ἐπίσκοπος* and similar at §2.1.1); then, I will examine other names and titles, divided according to the functions of the episcopate that they denote—namely, leadership or guidance (§2.1.2) and priesthood (§2.1.3).

Moreover, when new words are needed (and the early church surely needed many new words and expressions), one useful resource is metaphor. In the realm of ecclesiastical hierarchy, some metaphors had developed to such an extent that in the fourth century they were almost institutionalised as titles: the best example is perhaps the word that may be translated “shepherd” or “pastor” (§2.2.1). The second part of this section will treat the metaphors employed by Ephrem and Gregory, beginning with the more fixed ones, which they inherited from contemporary church life, and then analysing the more occasional and fluctuating ones. In general, both titles and metaphors are strongly Bible-driven, in that they can be traced back to Bible passages or interpretations thereof. One important metaphor is exceptional in this regard, and it is worth anticipating it here: the bishop is often compared to a work of art or a mirror—in any case, an image. This metaphor will be analysed in its diversified development and aims (§2.2.3).

2.1 Names

In the Syriac tradition, as well as in the Greek and the Latin ones, the names of ministries in the church became, with time, titles and thus standardised¹. In all these traditions, the clergy is divided in three hierarchical classes: the bishop, the priests, and the deacons. From the third century, documents witness to a further development of hierarchy among bishops, giving rise later to the titles of chorepiscopus, archbishop, metropolitan and patriarch. These finer distinctions among bishops gain force of law by the time of Justinian, as the *Codex Iustinianus* testifies². However, at the time of Ephrem and Gregory the lower echelon of ecclesiastical hierarchy (deacons, priests, monarchical bishop) is already a reality, and canonical documents present distinctions between bishops³. Before taking on the individual usage of Ephrem and Gregory, it is sensible to present here the titles of deacon, priest, and bishop in the three languages (Latin, Greek, and Syriac) as they were established in the traditions of the churches:

English	Latin	Greek	Syriac
Bishop	<i>episcopus</i>	ἐπίσκοπος	ʿepīsqōpā/ḥasyā (“saint”)
Priest	<i>presbyterus</i>	πρεσβύτερος	qaššīšā (“elder”)
Deacon	<i>diaconus</i>	διάκονος	mšammšānā (“servant”)

As is clear from the table, Latin borrowed its terminology from Greek. A similar feature of the two languages is that the term *sacerdos*/ιερεύς is used in ancient texts without distinction for priests and bishops, but later it becomes a specialised term referring only to a priest, as modern Greek ιερέας and Italian *sacerdote* demonstrate⁴. The situation is no different in the Syriac world: the three ranks of priesthood are named with two calques from the Greek titles and a loanword, and the word for *sacerdos* (*kāhnā*) is employed indifferently for priests and bishops in earlier times⁵. An interesting feature of Syriac

1 Guerra y Gomez 1962, 323, 334–337; Lizzi 1998, 87–88; Rapp 2000, 381; Rapp 2005, 25–26, 42.

2 Rapp 2005, 276–279; Di Berardino 1998, 40; Barone Adesi 1998, 54–55; Jerg 1970, 86–89, 103–104. In inscriptions, they are received only late: Feissel 1989, 803–812 (archbishop, metropolitan, patriarch); the chorepiskopoi as well as the periodeutes, subordinates of the urban bishop, are attested already from the third and fourth century respectively (Feissel 1989, 814–819).

3 See the *Canons of Nicaea* 4, 6, 7 for “metropolitan”; 8 for “chorepiscopus”; canon 18 for the distinction and hierarchy of bishop, presbyter and deacon, which is for the first time found in Ignatius of Antioch (Ign. *Trall.* 2, 3; 7, 2; *Magn.* 6, 1; *Smyrn.* 8, 1; 12, 2).

4 Jerg 1970, 103; Lampe 1961, 670, s.v. ιερεύς; Λεξικό της κοινής νεοελληνικής, s.v. ιερεας (https://www.greek-language.gr/greekLang/modern_greek/tools/lexica/triantafyllides/search.html?start=140&lq=%CE%99*&dq=, accessed 21.12.20, 12:06); *Vocabolario Treccani*, s.v. sacerdote (<https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/sacerdote>, accessed 21.12.20, 12:22).

5 Payne Smith 1879–1901, 1683, s.v. ܐܡܝܢ; Bou Mansour 2019, 23–32. It is however possible that the term *qaššīšā* had already a religious sense for pagan Syrians, if it must be interpreted so in the inscription of Serrin; see Drijvers/Healey 1999, 195.

is that it preserves alternative names for the bishop. The later one is *ḥasyā*, literally meaning “pure”, “saint”, but it is used as a perfect equivalent of “bishop”—for example, in the *Chronicle* of Bar Hebraeus⁶. Another similar word is *mdabbrānā*, “leader”, an equivalent of such Greek terms as *προστάτης*, *προιστάμενος*, *ἡγούμενος* or *ἀρχων* and of the Latin word *antistes*, all terms that are used interchangeably with *ἐπίσκοπος* and *πρεσβύτερος* in the New Testament but that did not become fixed titles⁷. Therefore, it is difficult to understand whether the writers employing such titles are using them in their generic sense of “leader” or “guide”, only occasionally applied to clergymen, or if they employ them as titles equivalent to the word *ἐπίσκοπος*/*epīsqōpā*/*episcopus*. For even though these writers may know of a generic use of these words in other contexts, this does not exclude the possibility that they intend a more specific sense when using these words to refer to a bishop. This is a problem in the case of Ephrem and Gregory, too.

2.1.1 ἐπίσκοπος/*epīsqōpā*

How much does the usage of Gregory and Ephrem reflect this situation? Ephrem knows the threefold structure of ecclesiastical authority and calls priests and deacons by their name: in more than one instance, Ephrem mentions *qaššīšē* and *šammāšē* (which is an alternative form of *mšammšānē*). As regards bishops, though the situation is much more confusing, one thing is certain: Ephrem never uses the loanword *epīsqōpā*, except in the title of *CN* 17⁸. Such an instance, however, is to be discarded, since titles can be the result of later editorial work. The reasons for such an exclusion can be many: either Ephrem did not know the term, or it was not used in that sense, or he did not deem it proper to poetic language and we have lost prosaic instances of the term, or we have lost these instances altogether, both in prose and in poetry. However, it must be admitted that the avoidance of the term *epīsqōpā* is entirely in keeping with Ephrem’s broader linguistic habits: Even if Aramaic in general, and Syriac in particular, had been in close contact with Greek for centuries at the time of Ephrem, and even if Syriac borrowed many words from Greek, Ephrem seems less fond of such borrowings: not only does he employ fewer Greek loanwords than later poets, as is to be expected given the growing contacts between Greek and Syriac; he also employs fewer loanwords than earlier texts⁹.

⁶ Payne Smith 1879–1901, 1326, s.v. *ܡܚܝܝܐ*. Note however that this seems a very late (medieval) development: before being a title, the word was used as an honorific.

⁷ Guerra y Gomez 1992, 323–337; *mdabbrānā*: Murray 2006, 192–193; Bou Mansour 2019, 446–455.

⁸ Bou Mansour 2019, 24–26; Beck 1984, 95–96; for the three ranks of holy orders see, e.g., *CN* 21, 5.

⁹ For Greek-Aramaic contacts: Butts 2016, 201–202. For the growth of Greek influence and loanwords in Syriac: Brock 1999–2000; Butts 2016, 205. For the number of Greek loanwords in Ephrem and in earlier texts: Butts 2016, 203.

It is worth noting that a Syriac author roughly contemporary to Ephrem, Aphrahat, employs *ʿepīsqōpā* twice; however, the instances are in the same page of a work whose authenticity was doubted on other grounds and in its letterhead: like any other kind of paratext, a letterhead is prone to editorial reworkings or to being treated separately from the rest of the text. Moreover, the two instances appear as part of an identical fixed expression, “bishops, priests, deacons [and the whole church of God] with her children” (*dem.* 14, 1). Furthermore, the Peshitta uses *ʿepīsqōpā* to translate only one of the five occurrences of the word ἐπίσκοπος in the New Testament. The three parallel texts of Phil. 1:1, 1Tim. 3:2 and Tit. 1:7, referring to the head of the community, are rendered with *qaššīšā*, the same word that translates πρεσβύτερος (see Tit. 1:5). The only occurrence of *ʿepīsqōpā* in the Syriac NT (here in the form *ʿepīsqōpā*) is at Act. 20:28, and here too the word, referring to the heads of the community in Ephesus, is equivalent to *qaššīšā*/πρεσβύτερος (see Act. 20:17). This hints that in earlier times the Syriac church did not know of any distinction between bishop and priest. The assumption is reinforced by the fact that at 1Petr. 2:25 the Greek ἐπίσκοπος, in reference to Jesus, is rendered with the calque *sāʾōrā*, meaning “inspector”. For, since the Syriac language had a calque for the Greek ἐπίσκοπος, as it had it for πρεσβύτερος and διάκονος, and the translators chose not to use it in the case of the title ἐπίσκοπος (as opposed to the generic sense of the word employed by 1Petr. 2:25), this could hint that the difference between πρεσβύτερος and ἐπίσκοπος was not felt by the translators¹⁰. Again, *ʿepīsqōpā* never appears in the Peshitta of the Old Testament, and the ἐπίσκοποι in the Greek translation are rendered variously in Syriac as *pāqōdā* (Num. 31:14; Iudc. 9:28; 2Reg. 11:18; 1Macc. 1:51), *sāʾōrā* (Sap. 1:6, referring to God’s wisdom), *rabbā* (2Reg. 11:15), *qāyōmā* (2Chron. 34:17), and so on, but never as *ʿepīsqōpā* or *qaššīšā*. Therefore, the Greek loanword *ʿepīsqōpā* was still fairly rare in Ephrem’s time, and the poet might well have ignored its usage as a title. Even though he knows the distinction between priest and bishop, Ephrem has not developed a specific title for the monarchical function and still relies on a wide variety of terms.

As one would expect, Gregory’s usage is much more similar to what would then become the standard use of titles in the church. In his prose works, especially in the *ep.*, Gregory frequently employs the word ἐπίσκοπος as an ecclesiastical title¹¹. Not only does he know the difference between πρεσβύτερος and ἐπίσκοπος, but he also

¹⁰ The term *sāʾōrā*, however, resurfaced later among the Syriac ecclesiastical titles, as an equivalent of the Greek περιδεύτης: Payne Smith 1879–1901, 2688, s.v. ܣܝܐܪܐ.

¹¹ Greg. Naz. *or.* 5, 29; 18, 33; 21, 14.21.33; 25, 9; 33, 4; 42, 23; 43, 48.50.58.59; *ep.* 7, 3–4; 19, 2; 40, 2.4; 41, 4; 42, 2; 50, 2–3; 87, 3; 120, 4; 125, 5; etc. A similar situation in Gregory of Nyssa: he distinguishes πρεσβύτερος from ἐπίσκοπος, especially in the paratext of the letters (Mann 2001, 443–444, s.v. ἐπίσκοπος; Mann 2009, 654, s.v. πρεσβύτερος; cf. Greg. Naz. *ep.* 43; 202.249 and *ep.* 101–102). However, as is the case for the Nazianzen’s prose, Nyssa prefers in general the word ἱερεύς (Mann 2002, 448, s.v. ἱερεύς; for Greg. Naz. ἱερεύς 108x and ἐπίσκοπος 65x in prose).

distinguishes between a simple bishop and a μητροπολίτης¹². The situation is somewhat different in his poetic works. Here, he uses ἐπίσκοπος more rarely and with a clear distinction between iambs and hexameters. The word lends itself to both metres, though it is arguably more easily employed in iambs, because if the last syllable of a line is long, it contains a cretic, which is not permitted in hexameters. In the iambs, the word is used as a title in some instances, especially in the autobiographical poems¹³. I found one instance of generic usage in the sense of “protector”¹⁴. This meaning is the only one attested in hexameters: there, the word ἐπίσκοπος is never used for the heads of the church¹⁵. This is due to Homeric usage, where clearly the word ἐπίσκοπος was not used for the head of the church, but neither was it used as a title or to mean a position of authority, as in prosaic Greek. In fact, the ἐπίσκοπος for excellence in Homeric poetry is the god or the δαίμων that protects the hero, and Gregory employs the word precisely in this sense, thus demonstrating his adherence to correct Homeric usage and his command of παιδεία¹⁶.

As regards specifically our texts, the word ἐπίσκοπος is found only in three places of the same poem, II, 1, 12, if we do not count the occurrences in the titles. This makes sense if we remember that II, 1, 10 and 17 are in elegiac verse and II, 1, 13 is hexametric. At II, 1, 12, 35 Gregory exhorts the reader to avoid “bad bishops” (τοὺς κακοὺς ἐπισκόπους), asserting that they are worse than lions, leopards, and vipers¹⁷. At II, 1, 12, 503 and 508, the word is employed in connection with the consecration of a new bishop: at line 503 it refers to the imposition of hands (ἐπισκόπων χέρες), while at 508 it refers to the “judgement” (κρίσις) of bishops¹⁸. However, Gregory employs other, more generic terms for the majority of this poem. It is difficult to determine what moves Gregory to choose or reject the word ἐπίσκοπος on each occasion. As regards II, 1, 12, 35, the word may be used almost as a naturalistic label, as ἐπίσκοποι are compared with the λέων (lion), the πάρδαλις (leopard), and the ἄσπις (viper). Lines 503 and 508 allude to the role of bishops in consecrating a new bishop, a role that was their strict prerogative. Only bishops could impose hands; therefore, their very hands are used as a metonymy for the rite of ordination, and their judgement is called upon in the matter of the effects of this rite. Hence, Gregory seems to employ the word with a certain emphasis on its nature as a title, as an accurate label for the role. This is suggested also by his use of the

12 Πρεσβύτερος/ἐπίσκοπος: Greg. Naz. or. 2, 69; 37, 21; 43, 27; Μητροπολίτης: 40, 26. This distinction seems to be absent from Gregory of Nyssa, for example.

13 II, 1, 11, 538; 610; 1633; 1712; 1913; II, 1, 30, 116; II, 1, 41, 6.

14 I, 2, 8, 146.

15 I, 1, 27, 73; I, 2, 2, 39; II, 1, 45, 89.

16 Guerra y Gomez 1962, 377.

17 Θάρρει λέοντα· Πάρδαλις τῶν ἡμέρων· Ἀσπίς τάχ' ἂν σε καὶ φύγοι δεδοικότα· Ἐν ἐκτρέπου μοι, τοὺς κακοὺς ἐπισκόπους (II, 1, 12, 33–35).

18 Εἶποι τάχ' ἂν τις, ὡς ἐπισκόπων χέρες / Τό τ' ἐν μέσῳ κήρυγμα λουτροῦ τις χάρις / Ἄς τ' ἐκβοῶμεν, ὡς ἀνάξιοι, μέσας / Φωνὰς διδόντες τὴν κάθαρσιν τῇ κλίσει / Καὶ τῷ τυραννήσαντι δῆθεν Πνεύματι – / Κρίσει δικαίων καὶ σοφῶν ἐπισκόπων (II, 1, 12, 503–508).

word ἐπισκοπή (II, 1, 12, 176 and 180) in the sense of “episcopate”, which is its sense in 1Tim. 3:1 but is not the most widespread meaning of the word in the Greek Bible (Septuaginta and New Testament), where ἐπισκοπή usually refers to God and corresponds to the Latin *visitatio*¹⁹.

Interestingly, Gregory employs the word πατριαρχία at II, 1, 12, 799²⁰. The vocabulary by Lampe gives the generic sense of “position of authority” to this occurrence, thus finding it to align, for example, with Basil’s *ep.* 169, 1²¹. Basil, however, is referring to a deacon who claims an illegitimate authority over a group of virgins, whereas Gregory employs the word for the positions of authority that were specifically available to the bishops and that they contended with each other for. It seems like Gregory intends πατριαρχία as a *terminus technicus*, meaning the most important episcopal seats, the patriarchates; yet the first known examples of this use of πατριάρχης/πατριαρχία come from the fifth century. The context suggests this might be the earliest attestation of the word used in this sense. Gregory reproaches the bishops at the Council of Constantinople for their ambition to “inherit patriarchates”, and canons 2 and 3 of the same council are concerned precisely with the establishment and confirmation of the privileges of what would be later known as “patriarchal sees”—Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, and Antioch. The problem of the succession in Antioch was the cause of Gregory’s resigning, and the election of a new bishop for Constantinople was its effect, so that Gregory might well have been, and in fact was, disconcerted by this jostling with the major episcopal seats, the same that would be later called patriarchates. Moreover, in his report of the decisions of the council, Socrates refers to the establishment of bishoprics with regional jurisdiction by stating that πατριάρχας κατέστησαν, “they established patriarchs”²². Describing the appointments emerging from the synod, Socrates employs the expression πατριαρχίαν κληροῦσθαι, the same that employed Gregory at II, 1, 12, 799²³. Among the names mentioned by Socrates, only Nectarius as bishop of Constantinople would be a patriarch in the later sense of the term, but these names correspond to some of those in a law by Theodosius dated July 30, 381 (*Cod. Theod.* 16, 1, 3), that establishes which bishops are to be considered bulwarks of the Nicene faith. This places them in a position

19 Guerra y Gomez 1962, 178–181; Ἀλλ’ οὐ κάκιστα ταῦτα, οὐδ’ ἐπισκοπῆς, / Ὡ λῶστε; μὴ τοσοῦτον ἀρχαίως φρονεῖν, / Ὡς τηλικούτο πρᾶγμα τιμᾶσθαι κακῶς, / Μηδ’ εἰ λίαν τὸ χθαμαλὸν σπουδάζεται· / Οὐ γὰρ κάκιστον ἢ ἐπισκοπή. (Greg. Naz. II, 1, 12, 176–180); Liddle-Scott-Jones 2011, 657 s.v. ἐπισκοπή.

20 Χαίροιτε, ὑβρίζοιτε, πατριαρχίας / Κληροῦσθε, Κόσμος ὑμῖν εἰκέτω μέγας (II, 1, 12, 799–800).

21 See Lampe 1961, 1052, s.v. πατριαρχία. Gregory of Nyssa employs πατριαρχία and πατριάρχης the majority of times in reference to biblical patriarchs and his only occurrence in reference to bishops makes explicit reference to biblical patriarchs (see Mann 2009, 261–262, s.v. πατριάρχης).

22 Ἐβεβαίωσάν τε αὖθις τὴν ἐν Νικαίᾳ πίστιν· καὶ πατριάρχας κατέστησαν διανεμόμενοι τὰς ἐπαρχίας, ὥστε τοὺς ὑπὲρ διοικήσιν ἐπισκόπους ταῖς ὑπερορίοις ἐκκλησίαις μὴ ἐπιβαίνειν (Socr. *h. e.* 5, 8, 37–40).

23 Καὶ κληροῦται Νεκτᾶριος μὲν τὴν μεγαλόπολιν καὶ τὴν Θράκην· τῆς δὲ Ποντικῆς διοικήσεως Ἑλλάδιος ὁ μετὰ Βασίλειον Καισαρείας τῆς Καππαδοκῶν ἐπίσκοπος, Γρηγόριος ὁ Νύσσης ὁ Βασιλείου ἀδελφός, (Καππαδοκίας δὲ καὶ ἦδε πόλις,) καὶ Ὀτρίχιος ὁ τῆς ἐν Ἀρμενίᾳ Μελιτηνῆς τὴν πατριαρχίαν ἐκληρώσατο (Socr. *h. e.* 5, 8, 41–45).

of special authority over any other bishop. Comparing Socrates and Gregory, we see a complex picture emerge: the concept of patriarchate as found in the fifth century is not clearly affirmed in the Council of Constantinople; however, a regional jurisdiction is already introduced, and particular honour is ascribed to Rome and Constantinople. It is possible that the council fathers used the term *πατριάρχης* as an honorific title for bishops of special authority, whether for their confession of faith or for the importance of their seat, rather than as a specific term defining a jurisdiction, and that, though in use, the term did not find its way into the canons. According to this sense, Gregory laments the bishops' ambition, because they try to obtain the most prestigious seats.

2.1.2 Terms of primacy

Both Gregory and Ephrem seem not exceedingly fond of the simple title *ἐπίσκοπος*, while making ample use of words expressing primacy, leading role, and authority. In this semantic field, too, Gregory shows different levels of style and a more specialised language. The word *προστάτης* is used only in iambs and is the most commonly employed word for “bishop” in II, 1, 12²⁴; the word *προέδρος* is employed both in iambs and in hexameters (though more rarely).²⁵ In hexameters no single word imposes itself; rather, we find a wealth of different expressions, sometimes metaphorical, that identify the bishop as head or main administrator of the community.

2.1.2.1 In Gregory

Of the five words that the New Testament uses to identify the heads of a church, Gregory employs *ἐπίσκοπος* and *ποιμήν* (on which §2.2.1); *πρεσβύτερος* has a different meaning in his times; *προϊστάμενος* and *ἡγούμενος* apparently are not found in our poems²⁶. However, the word *προστάτης*, used by Gregory in both prose and iambic poetry, is clearly an equivalent of *προϊστάμενος*, as a passage of *or.* 4 demonstrates²⁷. *Προϊστάμενος* in fact is never attested in Greek poetry, and Gregory conforms to this rule²⁸. On the other hand, *προστάτης* is regularly found in iambic poetry, even in tragedy, but is avoided in hexametric poetry, because it is cretic: here, too, Gregory abides by traditional usage. Therefore, the *προϊστάμενος* of the New Testament becomes, in Gregory's poetry, a *προστάτης*.

²⁴ II, 1, 12, 357; 376; 540; 629; 646; 710; 734; 749.

²⁵ II, 1, 12, 393; 567; 721; II, 1, 13, 58; II, 1, 17, 75.

²⁶ Guerra y Gomez 1962, 323, 347, with a useful summary table at p. 333.

²⁷ τούτους τίς ἂν πείσειεν ἡμέρους εἶναι καὶ καθεκτοὺς, θεοῖς χρωμένου ὁδηγοῖς τῶν παθῶν καὶ προστάταις· ἔνθα τὸ κακὸν εἶναι καὶ τίμιον, ὡς θεῶν τινα προϊστάμενον, οὐδὲ τὸ πάθος ἐστὶ βωμοῖς τε καὶ θυσίαις τιμώμενον, καὶ παρῥησίαν εὐλογοῦς ἔννομον (*or.* 4, 120).

²⁸ Except for Eupolis *frag.* 301 K..

This word choice is also semantically significant because the word had political connotations. Προστάτης and the abstract noun προστασία are regularly employed to describe the role of a *patronus*²⁹. The core meaning of this word-family unites authority over someone and guidance on one side and protection and providing for the subject on the other: the relationship is both mutual and asymmetrical. This double significance, of guidance and protection, is like that of ἐπίσκοπος in its literal sense, so much so that Gregory the Thaumaturge rewrites 1Petr. 2:25 (τὸν ποιμένα καὶ ἐπίσκοπον τῶν ψυχῶν ὑμῶν) as τῷ προστάτῃ τῶν ἡμετέρων ψυχῶν καὶ σωτῆρι³⁰. As noted by Brown, the relationship of patronage was one of the building blocks of late antique society: everyone was patron of many people or had many patrons, and even the relationship with the divine sphere could be thought of as a patronage³¹. Similar social institutions had existed in the Greek world—though not on the same terms as those of Roman patronage—well before the imperial age. This explains the wide variety of contexts in which the word προστάτης is employed from classical times onward. Just to limit the examples to poetic usages, the word προστάτης can mean a democratic magistrate (Aristoph. *pax* 684), a generic “ruler” on a land (Eur. *Herc.* 964; *Iph. Aul.* 373), one who is charged with supervision of something and is therefore its protector (Aeschyl. *sept.* 408.797–798), the protector of a suppliant in the context of a sacred social bond like patronage and hospitality (Aeschyl. *supplic.* 963–964; Sophocl. *Oed. rex* 302–304), and finally a god—a patron, protector, and ruler par excellence (Sophocl. *Oed. rex* 882; *Trach.* 210)³². In Christian literature, apart from God and Christ, saints and martyrs can be patrons and, hence, προστάται³³. The Cappadocians and John Chrysostom employ the term abundantly in relation to the bishop, with Basil highlighting the social and economic protection the bishop can offer to the disenfranchised, whereas Gregory of Nazianzus and John privilege the spiritual and political guidance of the community³⁴. Therefore, on Gregory’s

29 οἱ δ’ ἀπὸ τῆς πατρωνείας: οὕτω γὰρ ἐκάλουν τὴν προστασίαν (Plut. *vit. Rom.* 13, 2); τοὺς πάτρωνας οὕτως γάρ οἱ Ῥωμαῖοι τοὺς προστάτας καλοῦσι (*vit. Mar.* 5, 4); See Gautier 2002, 122 for bibliography.

30 Gregorius Thaumaturgus, *Oratio panegyrica* 4. The same attributes are given to Tiresias in Sophocl. *Oed. rex* 303. Earlier in the sentence, Gregory defines God as βασιλέα καὶ κηδεμόνα, with the same duplicity of authority and providing which defines the institution of patronage, in particular as described by Plutarch: τοὺς πρώτους καὶ δυνατωτάτους πατρικῇ κηδεμονίᾳ καὶ φροντίδι προσήκειν ἐπιμελεῖσθαι τῶν ταπεινοτέρων (Plut. *vit. Rom.* 13, 3).

31 Brown 1981, 64–66; Brown 1982, 115–120.

32 ἀποστρέφεται τὸν δῆμον ἀχθεσθεῖς ὅτι / αὐτῷ πονηρὸν προστάτην ἐπεγράψατο. (Aristoph. *pax* 683–684); τοῖς τῆσδε χώρας προστάταισιν οὐ δοκεῖ. (Eur. *Herc.* 964); μηδέν’ ἀνδρείας ἕκατι προστάτην θείμην χθονός (*Iph. Aul.* 373); τῶνδ’ ἀντιτάξω προστάτην πυλωμάτων (Aeschyl. *sept.* 408); καὶ πύλας φερεγγύοις / ἐφραζάμεσθα μονομάχοισι προστάταις (797–798); προστάτης δ’ ἐγὼ / ἄστοί τε πάντες (*supplic.* 963–964); πόλιν ... ἥς σὲ προστάτην σωτήρᾳ τ’, ὦναξ, μόνον ἐξευρίσκομεν (Sophocl. *Oed. rex* 302–304); θεὸν οὐ λήξω ποτὲ προστάταν ἰσχυῶν (882); Ἀπόλλω προστάταν (*Trach.* 210). The idea of προστάτης as the protector of a suppliant is present in Greg. Naz. *or.* 43, 56, where the protector is God.

33 Lampe 1961, 1182, s.v. Προστάτης, 1.e.

34 Lizzi 1998, 95n35, with abundant references to sources. See also the more restricted use of προστάτης by Gregory of Nyssa, which seems to prefer the abstract προστασία (Mann 2009, 787, s.vv. προστασία, προστάτης).

general use of *προστάτης* instead of *ἐπίσκοπος* it can be said that the word correctly maintains in its meaning the two key-features of the word *ἐπίσκοπος*, guidance and protection; that it is a faithful rewriting of New Testament terminology (*προϊστάμενος*) in a more dignified form; that it is used in accordance with the distinction of styles of classical Greek poetry (i.e., in iambs but not in hexameters); that it inherits a long tradition of poetic *προσάται*, but also represents the contemporary reality of patronage. It is hence presumable that the word expressed but also prescribed a certain social role for the bishop.

In particular instances in II, 1, 12, *προστάτης* oscillates between a more general sense of “leader” (even if ostensibly applied to bishops) and a more specific one of “bishop”: the specific sense is clearly visible at 747–749, where *προστάτης* is perfectly paralleled by *ποιμὴν* (and at 751 by *ιερέως*) and the choice of a *προστάτης* is compared to that of “an accountant” (*λογιστής*)³⁵; the general sense is seen at 709–711, where Gregory speaks of a bad candidate bishop as “a perfect leader/patron” (*ἐντελής προστάτης*)³⁶. Between these two passages, Gregory develops a polemic on the nature of episcopal patronage, and thus the word *προστάτης* is in some way the bone of contention here, as shown by 732–735, where the question is “Who is the best and right leader [*προστάτης ἄριστος καὶ δεξιός*]?”³⁷. What he is refusing is precisely the idea that civic patronage and episcopal patronage should be similar, so that the successful civic patron would be a viable or favourite candidate to the episcopate. Against a patronage understood as political leadership, manoeuvring, and economic administration, Gregory intends *προστασία* as a moral primacy and a responsibility towards Christian souls. This emerges clearly from other passages, such as when the poet notes that Christian doctrine prescribes moral perfection for the leader, in order that he may be an example to the congregation³⁸; similarly, but on the negative side, Satan gives an immoral leader to a society as “a summary law of wickedness”, meaning that the wickedness of the leader will be imitated by the community. Notably, in this case no reference is made to church leaders; Gregory refers to leaders of people or cities³⁹. This means that the idea

35 Τοῦτ’ οὖν ὁρῶν ἑκαμνες εὐρεῖν ποιμένα. / Ὡς μικρὸν ἐσπούδαζες ἔγκαλύπτομαι. / Ὡσπερ λογιστὴν ἐσκόπεις τὸν προστάτην. / Κόπρων μέλει σοι, μειζόνων δ’ ἐμοὶ λόγος. / Ἐν ἔργον ἔστω τοῦ ιερέως, καὶ μόνον. . . (II, 1, 12, 747–751). This could be an indirect reference to the accusations of financial malpractice raised against Gregory at Constantinople (see II, 1, 11, 1475–1495; Gautier 2002, 124–125).

36 Ἀλλ’ εὐστροφὸς τις οὗτος ἐν τοῖς πράγμασιν, / Ὅν οὐκ ἐπαινεῖς, ἐντελής τε προστάτης / Τρίβων παλαιῶν καὶ νέων κινήματων (II, 1, 12, 709–711).

37 Πῶς οὖν ἀχρηστον, εἰπέ μοι, τοῦτον καλεῖς, / Πρὸς ὃν βλέποντες βελτίους γενοίμεθ’ ἂν; / Ἡ πῶς ἄριστον προστάτην καὶ δεξιόν, / Πρὸς ὃν βλέπων σὺ, τοὺς ἐμοὺς διαπτύεις (II, 1, 12, 732–735).

38 Περιφρονεῖν γὰρ οὐδὲ τοῦτ’ ἐμὼν νόμων, / Οἱ πάντοθεν ξέουσιν, ὡς ἀγαλμά τι, / Τὸν προστάτην, ὡς μή τι τοῦ λαοῦ βλαβὴ (II, 1, 12, 538–540).

39 Οὕτω σοφίζετ’ εὐστόχοις πονηρίας, / Ὅταν δῆμόν τιν’, ἢ πόλιν πληξάι θέλῃ / Πρὸς οἷς ἐκάστου πειράται, καὶ σύντομον / Νόμον δίδωσι πονηρίας τὸν προστάτην (II, 1, 12, 643–646).

of the leader as an example-setter could be employed for any type of leadership, and Gregory employs it a fortiori for the bishop⁴⁰.

The word πρόεδρος, which Gregory employs in prose, iambic poetry, and hexameters, is never attested in poetry before him, even though the abstract προεδρία is attested in some passages of Aristophanes: stylistically, both words are prosaic and day-to-day⁴¹. The abstract is more generic, in that it points to any primacy in a gathering, even the front seats at games or at a theatre. In case of civic assemblies with political power, the term has a political meaning, because the purely exterior honour of having front seats becomes in these instances a primacy of authority and often even a leading role. Therefore, the word πρόεδρος is frequently employed by Athenian authors, especially orators and historians, to describe political institutions of their democracy (in particular, the *prytaneis*) and of other cities. The fundamental meaning of the word is “one who presides, leads an assembly,” and it is not rare to find the term linked with ἐκκλησία, the ancient Athenian assembly. This may have suggested the Christian use of πρόεδρος to mean “bishop”, since no trace of this use can be detected in the New Testament. Moreover, the Christian use of the term begins in the fourth century, with Eusebius of Caesarea as the first author to use it consistently⁴²: since Eusebius was well read, it is perfectly conceivable that the word comes completely from classical tradition.

Gregory is a great user of the word, as many occurrences listed in Lampe’s dictionary demonstrate. One of these occurrences is particularly interesting because it refers not, as is mostly the case, to bishops, but to Rome, the πρόεδρος among the cities (II, 1, 11, 571). In general, the word πρόεδρος fluctuates, like προστάτης, between a generic sense of “leader” and a more specific usage as a substitute for ἐπίσκοπος⁴³. The usage in our poems is no exception: A general sense can be detected even at II, 1, 12, 721, where the theme is obviously the choice of the bishop, but the requirements listed can easily fit other kinds of leader⁴⁴. In other words, it is always the context, not the word per se, that makes πρόεδρος and ἐπίσκοπος equivalent, either as the same title or as meaning the same person. The two hexametric occurrences deserve a mention. At II, 1, 13, 58 Gregory

⁴⁰ The occurrences of II, 1, 12, 357 and 376 are both referred to the bishop, but the word is employed as a general “leader”. In fact, 376 has λαοῦ προστάτας, where λαός is almost a technical term for the Christian community. Line 629 has προστάται, referred to bishops, determined by τέκων ἀσάρκων, a periphrasis for “Christians” or “ascetics” (on the bishop as leader of the ascetics in his community, see §3.2).

⁴¹ Liddell/Scott/Jones 2011, 1476 s.vv. πρόεδρος, προεδρία; note however that the word προεδρία can be found in Xenophanes of Colophon’s *frg.* 2, 7 D.-K. (Athen. *dipnos.* 10, 6, 9).

⁴² Lampe 1961, 1144–1145 s.vv. Προεδρεύω, προεδρία, πρόεδρος. Gregory of Nyssa, on the other hand, uses it more rarely (Mann 2009, 684, s.v. πρόεδρος).

⁴³ For example, at II, 1, 11, 1586 the term clearly substitutes ἐπίσκοπος, in much the same way as the first occurrence of προεδρία at *or.* 26, 15 refers to Gregory’s episcopal charge, whereas a few lines later, in a very general remark on the misery of institutional hierarchy, the very same προεδρία has a much more general bearing.

⁴⁴ Εἰ δ’ οὗτος ἡμῖν καὶ πρόεδρος ὦν τύχῃ, / Εἰ μὲν κάκιστος καὶ πονηρίας πλέως, / Τοῦτ’ ἔστ’ ἐκείνῳ ῥάμνον ἄρχειν τῶν ξύλων (II, 1, 12, 721–723).

writes *λαοῖο πρόεδροι*, an expression similar to *λαοῦ προστάται*, found at II, 1, 12, 376, because in both cases the genitive *λαοῦ* (epic form *λαοῖο*) represents the church, so that the general sense of the words *προστάτης* and *πρόεδρος* is specified and the reference is clearly to bishops⁴⁵. At II, 1, 17, 75, Gregory employs *πρόεδρος* in its concrete sense of “seating in the front row”, and he specifically applies it to a public event: *πρόεδρος ἐὼν ἱεροῖς ἐνὶ χώροις*—that is, “being seated in the front row and presiding in the holy places”⁴⁶. The reference is clearly to his role, as a bishop, of president of the liturgical assembly, but the expression has a strong concrete and spatial connotation, highlighted by the complement of state *ἱεροῖς ἐνὶ χώροις*. Naturally, Gregory’s role in this situation does not end at his privileged physical position, but entails a task of presiding over the liturgy, as the following lines show, when they refer to his duty of preaching. The verb *προεδρεύω* is used with a similar connotation, as referring to bad bishops at *or.* 43, 26, where the prelates are identified as “those occupying the first places in the tribune” (*προεδρευόντων ἐν βήμασιν*)⁴⁷. The equivalence is clear, if one recalls that the *βῆμα* is the part of a church from which the preacher would speak.

Finally, the last two occurrences of *πρόεδρος* in II, 1, 12 should be mentioned, because of their link with *or.* 43, 26:

Ἐπαινῶ τὸν νηίτην νόμον, ὃς τὴν κώπην πρότερον ἐγχειρίσας τῷ νῦν κυβερνήτῃ κάκειθεν ἐπὶ τὴν πρῶραν ἀγαγὼν καὶ πιστεύσας τὰ ἔμπροσθεν, οὕτως ἐπὶ τῶν οἰάκων καθίζει, μετὰ τὴν πολλὴν τυφθεῖσαν θάλασσαν καὶ τὴν τῶν ἀνέμων διάσκεψιν· ὥς δὲ κὰν τοῖς πολεμικοῖς ἔχει· στρατιώτης, ταξίαρχος, στρατηγός. Αὕτη ἡ τάξις ἀρίστη καὶ λυσιτελεστάτη τοῖς ἀρχομένοις. Τὸ δ’ ἡμέτερον πολλοῦ ἂν ἦν ἀξίον, εἰ οὕτως εἴχε.

Οὐ γὰρ ἐξ ἀρετῆς μᾶλλον ἢ κακουργίας ἢ προεδρία, οὐδὲ τῶν ἀξιωτέρων ἀλλὰ τῶν δυνατωτέρων οἱ θρόνοι. Σαμουὴλ ἐν προφήταις, ὃ τὰ ἔμπροσθεν βλέπων· ἀλλὰ καὶ Σαοὺλ, ὁ ἀπόβλητος⁴⁸. Ροβοὰμ ἐν βασιλεῦσι, ὁ Σολομώντος· ἀλλὰ καὶ Τεροβοὰμ, ὁ δοῦλος καὶ ἀποστάτης. **Καὶ ἱατρός μὲν οὐδεὶς οὐδὲ ζωγράφος, ὅστις οὐ φύσεις ἀρρωστημάτων ἐσκέψατο πρότερον, ἢ πολλὰ χρώματα συνεκέρασεν ἢ ἐμόρφωσεν· ὁ δὲ πρόεδρος εὐρίσκεται ῥαδίως μὴ πονηθεῖς, καὶ πρόσφατος τὴν ἀξίαν, ὁμοῦ τε σπαρεῖς καὶ ἀναδοθεῖς, ὥς ὁ μῦθος ποιεῖ τοὺς Γίγαντας. Πλάττομεν αὐθημερόν τοὺς ἁγίους, καὶ σοφοὺς εἶναι κελεύομεν, τοὺς οὐδὲν σοφισθέντας, οὐδὲ τοῦ βαθμοῦ προεισενεγκόντας τι, πλὴν τοῦ βούλεσθαι.** (*or.* 43, 26)⁴⁹

45 Ἡμετέρην κακίην, ὅποσοι λαοῖο πρόεδροι. (II, 1, 13, 58); Ἡμεῖς δὲ πάντας ῥαδίως καθίζομεν, / Ἐὰν μόνον θέλωσι, λαοῦ προστάτας (II, 1, 12, 375–376).

46 Οὐδὲ μὲν οὐδὲ πρόεδρος ἐὼν ἱεροῖς ἐνὶ χώροις, / Ἦ μόνος, ἢ πλεόνων εἰς ἓν ἀγειρομένων, / Φθέγγομαι οὐασι τερπνά, τὰ Πνεύματος ἔκτοθι ῥίψας. . . (II, 1, 17, 75–77).

47 Οὐκ ἐπαινῶ γὰρ ἐγὼ τὴν παρ’ ἡμῖν ἀταξίαν καὶ ἀκοσμίαν, ἔστιν ὅτε καὶ ἐφ’ ᾧ προεδρευόντων ἐν βήμασιν (*or.* 43, 26).

48 For the almost proverbial reference to Saul prophesising, see II, 1, 12, 401 and Meier 1989, 116, *ad loc.*

49 “For I do not praise the disorder and irregularity which sometimes exist among us, even in those who preside over the sanctuary. I do not venture, nor is it just, to accuse them all. I approve the nautical custom, which first gives the oar to the future steersman, and afterward leads him to the stern, and entrusts him with the command, and seats him at the helm, only after a long course of striking the sea

Καὶ εἰ τοσοῦτο τὴν ἐμὴν ἔργον μόνην (385)

Ψυχὴν κυβερνᾶν ἐν βίου τρικυμiais,
Πῶς παντὶ δώσεις αὐχένας λαοῦ τόσου,
Πλὴν εἰ καταδῦσαι τὸ σκάφος σπουδὴν ἔχους;
Πόθεν λίθοι μὲν δυσπόριστοι τῶν καλῶν
Καὶ γῆς ἀρώματ' οὐ τόπου παντὸς φέρειν, (390)
Ἴππος δ' ὁ μὲν κάκιστος ἐν μέσῳ πολὺς,
Τὸν δ' εὐγενὴ τρέφουσιν οἴκοι πλουσίων,
Ὁ δὲ πρόεδρος ῥαδίως εὐρίσκεται
Μηδὲν πονηθεὶς πρόσφατος τὴν ἀξίαν;
(II, 1, 12, 385–394)⁵⁰

Πύκτης μὲν οὐδεὶς, ὅστις οὐ τὸ πρὶν χέρα (555)

Προῦβαλλεν οὐδ' ἐσκέψατ' εὐκαιρον στάσιν,
Οὐδὲ σταδιεὺς μὴ τῷ πόδε προγυμνάσας.
Αὐλοὺς δὲ τίς ποτ' εὖ φρονῶν αὐθημερόν
Τέτμηκεν, ἐξήσκησεν, ἠγωνίσαστο;
Γραφεὺς δὲ τίς ποτ' ἄκρος ἠκούσθη ποτέ (560)

Μὴ πολλὰ μίξας χρωμάτων μορφώματα;
Ἐρρητόρευσεν δ' ἡ νόσους τίς ἤλασεν
Πρὸ πλειόνων λόγων τε καὶ νοσημάτων;
Μικροῦ γ' ἂν ἦσαν αἱ τέχνηαι τιμήματος,
Εἰ τῷ θέλειν ὑπῆρχε τὸ κτᾶσθαι μόνον. (565)

Τὸν δὲ πρόεδρον δεῖ κελευσθῆναι μόνον
Εἶναι καλὸν τε κάγαθόν παραυτίκα.
Καὶ τοῦτ' ἐκεῖνο· Πρᾶξις ἐστὶν ἡ φάσις.
Χριστὸς κελεύει, καὶ κτίσις παρίσταται.
(II, 1, 12, 555–569)⁵¹

and observing the winds. As is the case again in military affairs: private, captain, general. This order is the best and most advantageous for their subordinates. And if it were so in our case, it would be of great service. But, as it is, there is a danger of the holiest of all offices being the most ridiculous among us. For promotion depends not upon virtue, but upon villainy; and the sacred thrones fall not to the worthiest, but to the most powerful. Samuel, the seer into futurity, is among the prophets: but Saul, the rejected one, is also there. Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, is among the kings, but so also is Jeroboam, the slave and apostate. And there is not a physician or a painter who has not first studied the nature of diseases or mixed many colours or practised drawing: but a prelate is easily found, without laborious training, with a reputation of recent date, being sown and springing up in a moment, as the legend of the giants goes. We manufacture those who are holy in a day, and we bid those to be wise who have had no instruction and have contributed nothing before to their dignity, except the will" (Browne/Swallow 1894, 404).

50 "And if 'tis such a big deal to steer / only my own soul through the mighty swells of life, / how dare you give the reins of such a community to anyone, / except if you truly want to drown the ship? / How come when precious stones are difficult to find, / and spices are not grown on any place of earth, / many are the cheap nags on the market, / while the high bred are nurtured in the houses of the rich, / that the leader is easily found, / without training, ready and fresh for the office? / What quick reversal of ways and habits!"

51 "There is no boxer who hasn't begun by holding forth / his hand or by looking for the favourable position; / nor a runner not training his feet in advance; / which sane human, in just one day, / has ever

The three passages share the same theme—Gregory’s criticism of hasty or improper ordinations—and the same use of *πρόεδρος* and *προεδρία* to speak of the bishop. However, there are macroscopic differences of context. The prose passage, which unites all contents present in the other two passages, is part of a longer disclaimer on Basil’s career in his posthumous eulogy, highlighting the orderly course of Basil through the grades of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Basil’s respectful and gradual ascent from baptism to episcopate is favourably contrasted with a contemporary reality of ambition and hasty elections: Gregory’s favourite method of appointment is that exemplified by Basil, which rewards preparation and moral virtue. In the poem, Basil’s positive experience disappears to make room only for a bitter criticism of those who elect unworthy or unprepared people to the episcopate. Here, however, the argumentation is split into two different parts: lines 385–394 are part of a polemic analysis of the status quo, whereby the failures of bishops are explained by failures in their election process, in particular by the disregard for the personal qualities of the candidate and the haste of the choice; lines 555–569 actually argue in the reverse order that, if someone unqualified becomes bishop, he will end up being unworthy or incapable of leading his more advanced faithful.

Coming to the texts proper, the main difference is that the prose passage relates generally to church hierarchy, whereas the poem is clearly concerned with bishops. This is a clue of Gregory’s tendency to conflate his considerations of the clergy without much regard to the difference between priest and bishop. The prose passage presents Gregory’s model first—that is, the gradual ascent through the hierarchy—then describes through biblical examples the current situation, and closes by presenting the paradox of this situation, where people think through the election of clergymen less than they think through their choice of painters and physicians, as if they believed that simply telling someone unworthy to behave worthily made them worthy. Gregory employs both biblical and pagan examples⁵². The poetic passages, perhaps surprisingly, don’t retain these examples. The prose passage and II, 1, 12, 385–394 share the same reference to navigation, even though in prose the simile is much more developed, whereas in the iambs it is a metaphor to express the bad consequences of a bad leader. Instead of the painter and the physician, the rarities that lines 385–394 contrast with the bishop are precious stones, spices, and thoroughbred stallions: here, the point of view is not that of the candidate, who has to hone his craft before he is admitted to office, but of the bishops who have to

cut, wrought, and played a flute in a contest? / Of which consummate painter has it ever been heard / that he did not mix many different qualities of colours? / Who harangued or healed a disease / before many pleas and many diseases? / Small indeed would be the renown of art / if the bare will sufficed to its acquisition. / Yet the prelate is required, and he alone, / to be admirable and excellent straightway. / But, as the saying goes, “No sooner said than done”: / Christ orders, and a creature forms.”

52 The biblical examples come from 1Reg. and 2Reg., and they are a good and a bad prophet, a good and a bad king. However, there is no reference to good and bad Ancient Testament priests: this hints at Gregory’s mainly doctrinal and political concerns, and his relative lack of interest to the liturgical function of bishops. See §2.1.3.1 and §3.1.2.

choose someone; hence, the candidate is compared to rare luxuries, which one has to search for. The concluding sentence, “The leader is easily found, without training, ready and fresh for the office”, is identical in the two passages, except for minor changes due to the metric. All in all, 385–394 is linguistically prosaic. In the second poetic passage, as well as in the prose speech, the point is not so much the rarity of good leaders, as at 385–394, but the hard work necessarily required to become one. The paradox of believing that the election is per se a title of merit is expressed in prose with the comparison to the Giants, who, being born already armed, resemble the newly baptised who are immediately made bishop⁵³. By contrast, II, 1, 12, 555–569 compares the election to Christ’s creative act, in which speaking and being coincide; perhaps the word choice of the prosaic passage echoes this when Gregory says that the electing bishops “form” (πλάττωμεν) the good bishops who are elected, because the verb πλάττω has been associated, since the Greek version of Gen. 2:7, with God’s creative activity⁵⁴. Moreover, Gregory’s formulation of the similes of the physician and the painter adapts to the genre: the prosaic verb μορφώω/μορφάω (in verse only once, Arat. 1, 375) corresponds to the poetic μορφώματα, as the ζωγράφος is replaced by the γραφεύς, found at Eur. *Hec.* 807; the utterly pedestrian, almost technical, ἀρρώστημα becomes a tragic νόσημα; furthermore, the simple ιατρός is paraphrased as νόσους ἤλασε, a phrase coined by Gregory. In general, both of the verse renditions of the theme are less plain and explicit in their construction, but also richer in images and similes. Their lists are digressive, but also carefully constructed to create a climax and to refer back to classical models, as Meier rightly notes in his commentary⁵⁵.

Other terms signifying primacy are employed only rarely. Among these, ἡγητήρ appears twice in the same sentence at II, 1, 13, 164–165: “Such are the leaders [ἡγητῆρες]. Then follows closely the people [λαὸς], / prone to wickedness, even without a leader [ἡγητήρος]”⁵⁶. The choice of words is very interesting: ἡγητήρ is employed only in hexameters and is a very rare word. Most occurrences before Gregory are found in Oppian’s *Halieutica*, to signify the pilot-fish, although two classical examples are known, one in Sophocles’s *Oedipus at Colonus* (1521) and one in Pindar’s first *Pythian* (69). Sophocles employs the word in the iambs for the guide of a blind man, while Pindar uses it in dactylo-epitrites in relation to Hiero of Syracuse. This word is a rarer and more precious variant of the word ἡγήτωρ, which is widely attested; as is often the case, later poets prefer the rarities of classical language to the standard forms. Gregory, however, employs both ἡγητήρ and ἡγήτωρ (and both only in hexameters), introducing a dis-

53 On the giants: Hesiod. *theog.* 185–186; see also Thebes’ σπαρτοί in Apollod. *bibl.* 3, 4, 1. The recipient of these criticisms is clearly Nectarius, who was chosen as bishop of Constantinople instead of Gregory even though at the time he was not even baptised. For a discussion of the relationship between competence, charisma and sacraments, see §3.3.2.1.

54 Lampe 1961, 1089, s.v. πλάσσω.

55 Meier 1989, 115, ad 389–394 and 133, ad 555–639.

56 Τοῖα μὲν ἡγητῆρες· ὁ δ’ ἔσπεται ἐγγύθι λαὸς, / Πρόφρονες ἐς κακίην, καὶ ἡγητήρος ἀνευθεν (II, 1, 13, 164–165).

tion, for he uses ἡγήτωρ only for the Godhead, and ἡγητήρ for human leaders⁵⁷. His usage of ἡγητήρ is very stereotyped, so much so that there are only two contexts in which the word appears⁵⁸. The first is the quasi-proverbial idea that most people tend towards evil, even without evil leaders, an idea employed in a fortiori reasonings to condemn bad leadership: it is found in much the same terms as in II, 1, 13, 164–165 and at II, 2, 5, 153–155, with the difference that in II, 1, 13, a focus of the present study, the bad leadership is that of bishops, whereas at II, 2, 5 the pagan gods are bad leaders and example-setters⁵⁹. Notably, while at II, 2, 5, 154 ἡγητήρ is used in relation to pagan gods, ten lines after, at 164, God is called ἡγήτωρ. The other stereotypical usage of ἡγητήρ is the military metaphor, whereby the devil is accused of trying to throw the church into confusion by eliminating or corrupting her leaders, hoping that, like an army without officials, she will be destroyed. One such usage appears in the same II, 1, 13, at 43–58. The passage is worthy of comparison with the other occurrence at I, 1, 9, 9–12:

Λυσσῆεις, κακοεργός, ἐπεὶ, μερόπεσσι μεγάϊρων,
 Ἐξέτι τοῦ ὅτε πρῶτον Ἀδὰμ βάλεν ἐκ παραδείσου,
 Ζωῆς τ' ἀθανάτου, κλέψας δηλήμονι καρπῷ, (45)
 Καὶ πολλοῖς κρατεροῖς τε τινάγμασιν αἰὲν ἀτάζων,
 Οὐ σθένεν, ὡς ποθέεσκεν, ὅλον γένος, οἷσι δῆλοιαι
 Γυνῆ βαλέειν (σπινθήρ δὲ λόγου, καὶ πυρσὸς ἀερθεῖς,
 Πᾶσαν ἐπέδραμε γαῖαν αἰοιδίμος, οἱ δὲ διώκται
 Καὶ πλέον ἐστήριζαν ἀεθλοφόροιαι παγέντας), (50)
 Δεύτερον εὖρατο μῆχος ἐπὶ κλοπον. Ὡς στρατὸν ἔγνω
 Καρτερὸν, ἡγητήρσιν ὀλοῖτον ἔμβαλεν ἔχθος.
 Καὶ γάρ, ἀγοῦ πίπτοντος, ὅλος στρατὸς ἐς χθόνα νεύει.
 Ποντοπόρον δέ τε νῆα κακὸς πρήνιζεν ἀήτης, (55)
 Ἥ σκοπέλοισιν ἔαζε, κυβερνητήρος ἀτερθεν.
 Ὡς δὲ δόμους τε, πόλεις τε, χόρους, βόας, ἄρματα, πῶϋ
 Βλάβεν αἰδρεῖν σημάντορος, Εἰδόσι μῦθος
 Ἥμετέρην κακίην, ὅποσοι λαοῖο πρόεδροι.
 (II, 1, 13, 43–58)⁶⁰

57 For ἡγήτωρ, see II, 2, 5, 256; 6, 164.

58 Except for the occurrence at II, 2, 5, 238, where μύθων ἡγητῆρες are the professors of rhetoric.

59 Φράζέ μοι καὶ τοῦτον ἐπὶ φρονα μῦθον ἄριστον / Οἱ πλέονες κακίους, καὶ ἡγητῆρος ἀνευθεν / Πρόφρονες εἰς κακίην. (II, 2, 5, 153–155). Gregory then continues: Εἰ δὲ θεοὺς στήσεας ἀτασθαλῆς μεδέοντας / Πρὶν μύθου δνοφεροῖτο λῦσαι ζόφον ἔμφορνι μύθῳ, / Μυθόλατριν διέπερσας ἐπισπόμενον φαέεσσιν (157–159).

60 “Rabid, malevolent, grudging mankind / ever since he first cast Adam out of paradise / and immortal life, deceiving with the baneful fruit, / and always striking us with many and powerful disruptions, / because he managed not, even as he desired, to cast down / our whole race with his cunning (the spark of Word and lifted torch / spread all over the earth with fame, while the persecutors / confirmed even more those convinced by the martyrs), / he found another wily means. Recognising the power / of the army, he threw a deadly enmity between its leaders. / Thus, once the chief is fallen, the whole army declines, / a bad gale can capsize a seafaring ship, / or break it on the cliffs when it is without helmsman. / Thus households, cities, choruses, cattle, chariots, flocks / destroyed the ignorance of their guide. I speak to those who know / the vice of all of us, guiding the people.”

Λυσσῆεις ὅτε πρῶτον Ἀδάμ βάλεν ἐκ παραδείσου,
 Κλέψας ἀνδροφόνιο φυτόῦ δηλήμονι καρπῷ, (10)
 Ὡς στρατὸν ἡγητῆρος ὀλωλότος ἐγχεῖ τύπτων,
 Δίξετο καὶ τεκέεσσι κακὸν καὶ κῆρα φυτεῦσαι
 (I, 1, 9, 9–12)⁶¹

The idea of defeating an army by eliminating its commanders is found also elsewhere in Gregory's production, expressed with the same words⁶². For example, the expression ἡγητῆρος ὀλωλότος, found at I, 1, 9, 11 is divided and doubled in II, 1, 13 between ἡγητῆρσιν ὀλοῖον (52) and ἀγοῦ πίπτοντος (53). The first preserves the lexical material (ἡγητήρ and the root ὀλ- of the verb ὀλλυμι and the adjective ὀλοῖός), while the second preserves the syntactic form (absolute genitive) and the general meaning of "once the general has fallen"⁶³. Apart from identical expressions highlighted in the text, there are also meaningful differences: the ὥς in ὥς στρατὸν (II, 1, 13, 51; I, 1, 9, 11) has a temporal value in the poem against bishops and a comparative one in the theological poem, thus making the same image of the army a metaphor in II, 1, 13 and a simile in I, 1, 9; moreover, the situation described by the image is very different, and accordingly the tenors of the metaphor are different. In the theological poem, the general is Adam, and the army is mankind, whereas in II, 1, 13, the generals are the bishops and the army the church, so that ἡγητήρ is plural at II, 1, 13 and singular at I, 1, 9. Thus, the same metaphor can be employed to conceptualise the doctrine of original sin and the current status of church politics. Anyway, it is clear that here ἡγητήρ means "general", "military commander" and is applied to the bishops only through metaphor: the correlation with στρατός, which cannot be construed to mean "church" (as, for example, λαός at II, 1, 13, 58 might be), as well as the parallel metaphor of the ship and the helmsman (53–54), demonstrates it. Given these examples, the word ἡγητήρ cannot be considered a poetic transcription of ἡγούμενος, a standard term in prose texts to signify Christian leaders, and especially bishops. When ἡγητήρ does not

61 "When his madly raging enemy first drove Adam from Paradise, cheating him by the destructive fruit of the tree which brought death to the human race, he acted as one who attempts to strike an army when its general has been killed by a spear, seeking to plant in Adam's descendants also evil and death" (from Sykes's translation, Moreschini/Sykes 1997, 43).

62 For example, II, 1, 34, 135–137.

63 Ἀγός is a poetic word for a commander in military contexts (for example, in many of the 22 occurrences in the *Iliad*) and for nobles or powerful people in a civic context (as the πόλεως ἀγοί of Aeschyl. *supplic.* 248.905, one in iambs the other in lyric metre), though the civic and military are often difficult to distinguish (see Pind. *Nem.* 1, 51). Among late poets, Eudocia seems particularly fond of it (four occurrences, only Homer has more). A Hesiodic fragment is particularly interesting: ὅ[τα δ'] Ὑπερμήστρη λαὼν ἀγὸν Ἀμφιάρηον / γε[ῖ]νατ' Ὀϊκλῆος θαλερὸν λέχος εἰσαναβάσσα / Ἀ[ρ]γεί ἐν ἵπποβότῳ πολέων ἡγήτορα λαῶν (Hes. *catalog. frag.* 25, 34–36). Here, ἀγός and ἡγητήρ are employed as synonyms for the same person and with the same genitive specification (λαῶν).

refer very generally to a leader, its proper use entails a military metaphor, even when it is applied to bishops.

On the basis of II, 1, 13, 57, it is possible to analyse another leadership term, *σημάντωρ*. In the quoted text, *σημάντωρ*, without any qualification, is put in relation with the household (*δῶμος*), the city (*πόλις*), the chorus (*χόρος*), the cattle (*βόες*), the flock (*πῶς*), and the chariot-horses (*ἄρμα*). A more generic term would be hard to find: the word means here only “guide”, “leader,” with hardly any connotation. Its application to the bishops can be explained either as a metaphor, implying that the church is a family, a city, a chorus, a flock, a herd, and a chariot, which is possible, or as a proof by induction, whereby the bishop and the church are not mentioned but implied as just another case of the general rule exposed by the other examples. Yet at II, 1, 13, 100–102 Gregory employs the word *σημάντωρ* more specifically for the bishop, when he says: “Therefore, let no ploughman, no carpenter, no tanner, / no hunter of prey, no one running the blacksmith’s business / remain afar, nor let him have someone else as guide to God [*σημάντορα θεῖον*]”⁶⁴. In later poetry (mainly Nonnus and his imitators), the word is used as an adjective, with the meaning of “signalling”, “which signals”, but Gregory sticks to classical usage, employing the word as a noun meaning “leader”. He shuns also previous Christian authors’ habit of employing the term in prose with the meaning of “signal”, “sentry,” or “messenger,” especially for the prophets⁶⁵. Gregory’s usage mirrors perfectly the classical one: the word is employed only in hexameters, never in iambs, and it is a very generic term of leadership. It is equally well suited for the shepherd’s conduct towards his flock and the Godhead dominating over the universe and human life⁶⁶. In two similar passages, Gregory employs the term for human authorities: he prescribes that a newly married woman ought to honour her husband right after God, and to virgins he says they must honour the priest (probably the bishop) right after God⁶⁷. After all, Gregory himself, in the same way, obeyed his father and the mysterious person who ordered him to preach in Constantinople⁶⁸. In sum, the term

64 Μὴ τέ τις οὖν ἀροτὴρ, μὴ τέκτων, μὴ σκυτοεργός, / Μὴ θήρην μεθέπων, μήτ’ ἔμπυρον ἔργον ἐλαύνων, / Τῆλε μένοι, μὴ δ’ ἄλλον ἔχοι σημάντορα θεῖον.

65 Clem. Alex. *strom.* 6, 18, 166, 5; [Athanasius] *haer.* PG 28, 513, 45; 520, 29; *occurs.* PG 28, 993, 25. But see also [Aristotle] *mund.* 399B, 9. A prose occurrence in the sense of leader is Herodt. 7, 81, 6.

66 Cf. οἱ δ’ ὥς τ’ ἤε βοῶν ἀγέλην ἢ πῶς μέγ’ οἰῶν / θῆρε δὺς κλονέωσι μελαίνης νυκτὸς ἀμοργῶ / ἐλθόντ’ ἐξαπίνης σημάντορος οὐ παρεόντος, / ὥς ἐφόβηθεν Ἀχαιοὶ ἀνάλκιδες (Hom. *Il.* 15, 323–326) with our *σημάντωρ* in relation to the βόας, ἄρματα, πῶς of II, 1, 13, 56–57; the formulaic Κρονίωνα θεῶν σημάντορα πάντων / Διὶ Κρονίωνι, θεῶν σημάντορι πάντων (*Hymn. Hom.* 4, 367; Hesiod. *scut.* 56; *frg.* 5, 3) with Οὐτ’ ἄλλον τιν’ εὐοικὸς ἔχειν σημάντορα παντὸς, / Ἢε τὸν ὅς μιν ἔτευξεν (referred to divine Providence, at I, 1, 5, 14–15).

67 Ἄζεο μὲν πρῶτιστα Θεόν, μετέπειτα δ’ ἀκοίτην, / Ὀφθαλμὸν βιότοιο, τεῆς σημάντορα βουλῆς (II, 2, 6, 12–13); Ἄζεό μοι πρῶτιστα Θεόν, μετέπειθ’ ἱερῆα Χριστὸν ἐπιχθόνιον, ζωῆς σημάντορα σείο (I, 2, 2, 346–347).

68 Αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ ζωῆς σημάντορι καὶ τόδ’ ἔαδεν / Ἡμετέρης, ἄλλοις με Λόγον καὶ Πνεῦμ’ ἀναφῆναι, / Ξεῖνοις, τρηχαλέοισιν, ἀκανθοφόροισιν ἀρούραις (II, 1, 19, 57–59). The editor in the *Patrologia Graeca*

σημάντωρ is a very generic term of leadership, which can be employed in almost any context but has the advantage of being consecrated by Greek poetic tradition.

Since the frequent use of terms of primacy betrays that Gregory conceives of the episcopate as first of all an authority, it is only logical that bad bishops should be marked with the title of the bad leader—that is, τύραννος. The word appears three times in II, 1, 12: at line 439, it refers to the bishop's handling of sacraments and liturgy, at 481 to his moral conduct, and at 797 to the power and authority bishops contend for⁶⁹. In the first two instances (439 and 481), the word connotes the usurpation of liturgical authority (of the Eucharist and of the baptism) caused by a morally unworthy bishop. Line 797 seems more generic, but given the context of denouncing of the episcopal “spoil system”, a negative connotation for the term in the sense of “usurped authority” is appropriate (see §5.2.2).

2.1.2.2 In Ephrem

Coming to the Syriac side of the question, the Syriac New Testament offers little choice of primacy terms: apart from the already studied *ʿepīsqōpā* and *qaššīšā*, the only noun employed is *mdabbrānā*, translating the Greek ἡγούμενοι at Hebr. 13:7.17.24, whereas προϊστάμενοι is rendered as a verb with *qāymīn* (“standing”, “supervising”) at 1Thess. 5:12. Even though *mdabbrānā* is a perfectly legitimate word for the bishop and can be found in this sense in many passages of texts contemporary to Ephrem, the poet not only avoided it but outright rejected it⁷⁰. *Mdabbrānā* is a *nomen agentis* formed from the active participle of the verb and the suffix *-ānā*⁷¹; in this case, the verb is the second, intensive form of *dbar* (i.e., *dabbar*), meaning “to govern”, “to command”, “to lead,” and “to administer”. In his polemic against rigorism, Ephrem explicitly rejects a model of leadership—one that he expresses with the verb *dabbar*—based on coercion, fear,

assumes it was Basil who advised Gregory to go to Constantinople. This mysterious character appears elsewhere in Gregory's poems, notably at II, 1, 11, 595–596.607–608 and II, 1, 12, 77–82; 90–92 (see also: *or.* 25, 19; 26, 15.17; 33, 13; 36, 3.6; 42, 19; 43, 2). The σημάντωρ ἡμετέρης ζωῆς may be Basil as well as Meletius, or the Holy Spirit, whom Gregory evokes in many of these passages. For a terminological analysis of different passages on this call to Constantinople, see §2.2.1.2; for an analysis of content in view of autobiographical elements in Gregory's poetry, see §5.1.2.1; for an evaluation of the episode in terms of the role of charisma in the selection of bishops, see §3.3.2.1; finally, for scholarly opinions on who called Gregory in the end, §5.1.2 n. 25.

69 Μετῆλθες εἰς τὸ βῆμα, καὶ κρατεῖς θρόνου, / Ἐπειτα πάντα συλλαβὼν ἔχεις βίᾱ, / Τέλος τυραννῶν καὶ Θεοῦ μυστήρια, / Οἷς οὐδὲ θαρρεῖν προσβλέπειν ἐχρῆν ἴσως / Τοὺς μὴ λίαν πόρρωθεν ἡγυρετισμένους; (II, 1, 12, 437–441); Σαυτὸν καθαίροις, ἀλλὰ νυνὶ μὴ γελῶ, / Ἄλλους καθαιρῶν αὐτὸς ἐσπιλωμένος; / Εἰ μὴ μόνῳ σοι τοῦτο ἐκ Θεοῦ γέρας / (Ὡς ἂν γράφει χεῖρ βασιλέως πρὸς χάριν) / Τὸ καὶ προσεπαινέσθαι [sic] σε τῆς τυραννίδος; (II, 1, 12, 477–481); Θρόνους μὲν οὖν ἔχοιτε, καὶ τυραννίδας (II, 1, 12, 797).

70 Murray 2006, 187–193.

71 Nöldeke 1880, 73, §130; Duval 1881, 234, §250.c. The abstract feminine derived from this name, *mdabbrānūtā*, corresponds to Gr. οἰκονομία (e.g., at Eph. 1:10; 3:2.9; Col. 1:25), an important concept for the episcopal office.

and punishment: “And if one should say that people / are driven [*mdabber*] only with force and the stick, // well, even fear drives the thief, / and threat the plunderer, // and shame the fool” (CN 15, 18); “Never did a mirror compel [*dabbrat*] / with violence its observer” (CN 16, 6, 1–2)⁷². For this reason, he will not call his bishops *mdabbrānā*. This negative connotation of the word could come from its usage by some gnostics. For, in the *Book of the laws of the countries*, a product of the school of Bardaisan, we can read a refutation of astrologic fatalism, where some *mdabbrānē* are mentioned: “And the fate of the *mdabbrānē* does not force them [i.e., Christians] to conform to what is unclean for them”⁷³. In the context of this refutation, where the customs of different nations are compared unfavourably to Christian morality, it is probable that the *mdabbrānē* here corresponds to the ἄρχοντες, the angels in charge of every nation, who, for some gnostic thinkers, could determine the fate of the people they controlled⁷⁴. The evaluation of these ἄρχοντες oscillates in different sources between the role of mediators of providence and that of evil spirits alienating nations from God. Here, there seems to be a negative view of the *mdabbrānē*, and if Ephrem, being very well read in contemporary heretics, knew of this usage of the word, it is clearly understandable why he would have outright rejected it in talking of his bishops.

The lexical poverty of the Syriac New Testament notwithstanding, nearly half the words used for the bishops by Ephrem are terms of primacy and authority, and they all stem from two roots: one is *rabbā*, the root of “great” but also of “much”, and *rēšā*, etymologically meaning “head”, but similar in its many meanings to the Greek ἀρχή, joining the ideas of “first”, “most important”, “most high,” and “that which begins and causes something”. Both words are mostly employed in their primitive form, but Ephrem uses also derivatives, such as *mrabbyānā* from *rabbā* and *rēšāyā* or *rēšānā* from *rēšā*. *Rabbā*, when used as a noun and not as a modifier, has a wide spectrum of meanings: apart from its meaning of “firstborn” (which, notably, even the Greek πρεσβύτερος has), the word can identify any type of leadership, be it religious, military or political, or even eschatological, as in the Gospel sayings at Mt. 18:1 and 23:11. Among these meanings, a remarkable and specific one is that of “teacher” or “master”, clearly showcased in another Gospel saying, Mt. 10:24: “The disciple [*talmīdā*] is not above his master [*rabb-eh*]⁷⁵. The contrast of *rabbā* with *talmīdā* reveals the “didactic” connotation built into

⁷² On the role of coercion in Ephrem’s characterisation of the bishops, see §3.1.4.3; §4.2.

⁷³ Drijvers 1964, 60.

⁷⁴ Lampe 1961, 241, s.v. ἄρχων; Dibelius 1950.

⁷⁵ The reading is identical in the Peshitta and in the *Vetus syra* on the Sinaitic Palimpsest. Other notable Gospel passages are Joh. 1:38, where the Greek gloss interpreting ῥαββί as διδάσκαλε is not translated in any ancient version and ῥαββί is simply rendered as *rabb-an* (“our teacher” instead of “my teacher”, because the speaker is intended as a first-person plural); at Mt. 23:8 in Greek, Jesus says to the apostles not to let themselves be called ῥαββί, because only one is ὁ διδάσκαλος, “the teacher”, while in Syriac, both ῥαββί and διδάσκαλος are rendered as *rabbā*. Interestingly, at Joh. 20:16, the Peshitta renders Greek ῥαββουνί as *rabbulī*, an affectionate diminutive, and translates διδάσκαλε in the gloss as *mallpānā*,

the term. In our poems, Ephrem uses the term with four different meanings⁷⁶: the main meaning, that of authority and command, is used of the bishop relative to the community and can be very generic (CN 13, 10, 6; CN 17, 2, 9; CN 19, 14, 1–2)⁷⁷; the most employed sense is that of “teacher”, either as teaching the community (CN 13, 12, 4; CN 14, 17, 3; CN 17, 1, 9; CN 21, 5, 5)⁷⁸ or as teaching Ephrem himself (CN 14, 26, 3)⁷⁹ or, in reference to the predecessor of the bishop, as his “master” (CN 17, 2, 5; CN 19, 8, 6)⁸⁰; the use of *rabbā* to mean the deceased bishop in relationship with his successor is widespread, and sometimes it seems that *rabbā*, more than teacher, means “senior”, “older brother,” or “elder”, and not only in relation to the chronological succession of the bishop but also for the authoritative role of the predecessor towards his successor (CN 17, 5, 5; 18, 1, 1.5)⁸¹; finally, there is an instance of *rabbā* employed as attribute of

which means “teacher” more literally. However, the Old Syriac version in the Sinaitic Palimpsest omits the gloss, showing that *rabbulī* was perfectly understandable in its “didactic” overtones.

76 If one does not count CN 19, 10, 1, where *rabbā* refers to the prominent laymen in the community.

77 Both CN 13, 10, 6 and 19, 14, 1–2 associate *rabbā* with the community as “triumphing” or “triumphant” (*nṣaḥ(w)* and *naṣṣiḥā*, cf. Payne Smith 1879–1901, 2437–2438, s.v. *ܢܨܚܐ*). The context remains quite ambiguous and the meaning of *rabbā* could be very generic; however, the triumphal associations suggest that here the term should be interpreted as a military command. CN 17, 2, 9, on the other hand, parallels *rabbā* with *rēšā*, suggesting that the two must be taken as generic names of authority: “and he was confirmed and made head (*rēšā*), / and he was lifted and made chief (*rabbā*) (CN 17, 2, 8–9).

78 At CN 13, 12, the three bishops Jacob, Babu and Valgash are given different titles corresponding to the different needs of the community: “to her need [*sunqān-āh*] came fulfilment [*mullāy*].” The need associated with the title of *rabbānē* at line 4 is *puršānē*, the plural of *puršānā*, “understanding”. Here, the plural means the different stages of development of the understanding and intellect of the community and the different bishops correspond to these stages of cognitive development. Given this intellectual background, *rabbānē* can easily be interpreted as “teachers”. The same idea of a progressive development is found at CN 14, 17, where Ephrem personifies the community as a growing girl (*bartā d-tarbitā*, 1) or as a child (*šabrā*, 4). In this context the bishops appear as *rabbān-ēh w-’abāh-ēh*: the second word means “her fathers”, so that, considering the community as a child, the first word can be interpreted as “teachers”. The same nexus of childhood (*šabrūtā*) and teaching (*rabbā*) appears at CN 21, 5, 5. At CN 17, 1, 9, the new bishop is the fourth *rabbā*, having been “disciple” (*talmidā*) of the three predecessors. It is not clear whether his teaching office is aimed here at the community or at a hypothetical successor, and probably Ephrem intended here the title of “master” or “teacher” in the absolute sense of one who has reached an excellent understanding and mastery, rather than as related to the pupils.

79 The three bishops as “three teachers” (*tlātā rabbānīn*) and the poet as their “disciple” (*talmidā*), with the same lexical contrast of Mt. 10:24.

80 At CN 17, 2, 5 the predecessor and successor are, respectively, *rabbā* and *talmid-eh*, “the teacher and his disciple”. At 19, 8 the relationship between the bishop and his successor is modelled after that of Elijah and Elisha. The new bishop has inherited his predecessor’s poverty—that is, he has learnt his ascetic practices, so that now he can teach as his “master” (*rabbā*) did. Admittedly, this occurrence is not too clear, it could well be that *rabbā* here has purely a meaning of primacy, authority and precedence.

81 At CN 17, 5, 5, the poet exhorts the new bishop to (lit.) “occupy the place of his master” (*tmallē dukkat rabb-āk*). Following Bou Mansour 2019, 444n204 against Beck 1961, 55n9, I take this expression as idiomatic for “represent”, “fill in for” and not literally, with *dukkat* meaning “bishop’s throne” (see Payne Smith 1879–1901, 835–836, s.v. *ܕܡܠܟܐ* for numerous examples of the idiom). This interpretation

rēšā (CN 19, 12, 5)⁸². From this overview of the usage of *rabbā* in our poems emerges a strong emphasis on the bishop's task of teaching and an attention to the relationship between a new bishop and his predecessor.

The didactic emphasis emerges in another passage, CN 16, 14, where Ephrem mentions the bishops in Nisibis as shepherds (*rā'awātā*), fathers (*'abāhē*), and teachers, this time using the term *mallpānā*, which has an unmistakably didactic meaning. When this didactic meaning of *rabbā* is referred to the community, and similarly for this one occurrence of *mallpānā*, the word is connected with the notion of a progressive growth of the community, made explicit by references to childhood (as at CN 14, 17 and CN 21, 5) or to the parental role of the bishop (at CN 13, 12, 3; 14, 7; and 16, 4). Hence, Ephrem ties the traditional idea of a *munus docendi* for the bishop to his personal argument for the orderly succession of bishops, an argument he advances by personifying the community, which progresses and develops (more on this at §2.2.4.1 and 4; §3.1.4.3; §4.1.2; §4.2).

The word *rēšā* largely corresponds in its semantic values to the Greek root of ἀρχή and ἄρχω, meaning the beginning, the first part, the extremity (ἄκρον), but also the cause and the commander of someone. In the New Testament, *rēšā* consistently translates Greek words from the roots of ἀρχή, ἄγω and πρῶτος, most of all the different names of civil and social authorities. In later ecclesiastical language the term is used especially for the heads of monasteries⁸³. In Ephrem, the word is reserved to the bishop among ecclesiastical authorities, as demonstrated by his rendition of the stereotypical formula “bishops, priests, and deacons” as *rēšē, qaššišē w-šammāšē* at *hymn. haer* 22, 21, 1–2. He employs it accordingly in our poems⁸⁴. On other occasions, however, he uses the word in a literal sense, meaning “head”, and sometimes it is difficult to discern clearly if the metaphor is dead or alive. One such example appears at CN 18, 10, 3: the phrase *ṭulšā l-rēšā lā yāyē* can be understood as a metaphor, “filth is not fitting for the head” or, as a dead metaphor, “impurity is not fitting for the bishop”. The end meaning is the

is confirmed by the analogy with the expression *nāṭar dukktā* employed by Ephrem for worldly kings as vicarious of Christ's kingship (see Papoutsakis 2017, 73–78). Therefore, I find that the emphasis here is not on the previous bishop as teacher of homiletics for the following, but simply as predecessor. Similarly, at CN 18, 1, 1 and 5, there is no hint of a teacher-pupil relationship, but of a mere succession: the new bishop is “priest after his master” (*kāhen bātar rabb-eh*) and his master doesn't leave him alone (*rabb-āk menn-āk lā šannī*). These instances demonstrate that the relationship between a bishop and his predecessor expressed through the word *rabbā* need not entail a didactic connotation.

⁸² “May you be a great leader” (*tehwē 'a(n)t rēšā rabbā*).

⁸³ Payne Smith 1879–1901, 3900, s.v. ܪܝܫܐ.

⁸⁴ CN 15, 7, 4; 12, 1; CN 19, 2, 5. The usage is apparent at CN 17, 1, 7.9 and 2, 7–8, where *rēšā* is paralleled by *rabbā*. At CN 17, 1, 7 *rēšā* is related to the word *mar'itā*, which originally means “flock”, but in Syriac is used also as “diocese”. The fact that here there is no hint of pastoral imagery suggests that here *mar'itā* has already its later sense. See §2.2.1.1 and 3.

same, but stylistically the two interpretations would be different; now, considering that the two preceding lines and the following contain living metaphors, it is likely that here too the expression is metaphorical. This passage stands out because Ephrem uses here a metaphor involving the head, which does not describe the relationship between the bishop (as head) and his community (as members). All other metaphorical instances of *rēšā* fall into the latter category.

These metaphorical usages of *rēšā* are found mostly in *CN* 15 and 18. In these instances, the bishop is spoken of as the “head” of the body of the church, whereas the faithful are the limbs. This metaphor, as Murray demonstrated, is widespread in Ephrem’s writings, with the place of the head occupied in turn by Christ, St. Peter, or the bishop⁸⁵. The history of such a metaphor in the ancient world is remarkable in the variety of its witnesses: the most famous occurrence in classical literature is Menenius Agrippa’s speech to the Roman plebs as related by Livy (2, 32, 9–12), but similar fables can be found in Xenophon’s *Memorabilia* (2, 3, 18), in Cicero’s *De officiis* (3, 22), and in various Aesopic collections (Perry 130). Most relevant, Paul applied the simile to the church (1Cor. 12:13–31), no doubt reaching back to the pagan tradition of the fable, but also developing clues on the corporate personality of the religious community available in biblical language and biblical exegesis. The function of this metaphor is particularly clear at *CN* 18, 3–4, two stanzas devoted to the circumstances of the election of the new bishop Abraham:

ܐܡܪܐ ܕܠܐܡܪܐ ܕܠܐܡܪܐ ܕܠܐܡܪܐ ܕܠܐܡܪܐ ܕܠܐܡܪܐ ܕܠܐܡܪܐ ܕܠܐܡܪܐ ܕܠܐܡܪܐ ܕܠܐܡܪܐ ܕܠܐܡܪܐ ܕܠܐܡܪܐ	ܐܡܪܐ ܕܠܐܡܪܐ ܕܠܐܡܪܐ ܕܠܐܡܪܐ ܕܠܐܡܪܐ ܕܠܐܡܪܐ ܕܠܐܡܪܐ ܕܠܐܡܪܐ ܕܠܐܡܪܐ ܕܠܐܡܪܐ ܕܠܐܡܪܐ ܕܠܐܡܪܐ	3
ܐܡܪܐ ܕܠܐܡܪܐ ܕܠܐܡܪܐ ܕܠܐܡܪܐ ܕܠܐܡܪܐ ܕܠܐܡܪܐ ܕܠܐܡܪܐ ܕܠܐܡܪܐ ܕܠܐܡܪܐ ܕܠܐܡܪܐ ܕܠܐܡܪܐ ܕܠܐܡܪܐ	ܐܡܪܐ ܕܠܐܡܪܐ ܕܠܐܡܪܐ ܕܠܐܡܪܐ ܕܠܐܡܪܐ ܕܠܐܡܪܐ ܕܠܐܡܪܐ ܕܠܐܡܪܐ ܕܠܐܡܪܐ ܕܠܐܡܪܐ ܕܠܐܡܪܐ ܕܠܐܡܪܐ	4

⁸⁶ ܐܡܪܐ ܕܠܐܡܪܐ ܕܠܐܡܪܐ
(*CN* 18, 3–4)

⁸⁵ Murray 2006, 89–93.

⁸⁶ “The last musterer, who was lifted / and became head of his limbs [*rēšā l-haddām-aw(hī)*] // the little who took primogeniture, / not at a price like Jacob, // nor through jealousy like Aaron, / envied by his brothers, the Levites, // but through love [*b-ḥubbā*] took it, like Moses, / because he was older than Aaron: // your brothers rejoiced in you as Moses. / **Blessed is he who chose you through concord!** // 4. There isn’t jealousy nor envy / among the limbs in the body [*bēt-haddāmē da-b-gušmā*], // for they obey it for love [*b-ḥubbā*], / they are ordered by it for affection [*b-raḥmē*]: // the head is the limbs’ watchman [*dawqa-(h)w rēšā l-haddāmē*], / for he can see all parts; // though exalted, he is humble for love [*ba- ḥnānā*], / he stoops even to the feet, // to take away their pain. / **Blessed is he who joined your love with us!**”.

The two stanzas are cleverly constructed as a unity, because the image of the head and the limbs introduced at the beginning of stanza 3 is not developed until stanza 4; instead, stanza 3 plays out a series of Old Testament types of accession to primacy. The theme is how the “last musterer”, the youngest brother, could become the chief of all: this probably ties into a real situation, whereby Abraham became bishop *in spite of* his young age. Ephrem justifies this unusual election by highlighting the concord surrounding it⁸⁷. The metaphor of the head and the limbs is instrumentally right in this respect, because it presents the bishop as organic to the community because of the universal acclaim he received, and it frames resistance to his election as absurd, like a cancer. As he often does, Ephrem refrains from explicitly stating this negative consequence of the metaphor, though the consequence is implied by the first four lines of stanza 4. As regards the sources of this treatment of the metaphor, the idea of love (*ḥubbā*, *rahmē*, or *ḥnānā*) as the force which unites the limbs stands out. It may be a Christian interpretation of some philosophical or physiological concept of ἔρως or φιλία as ordering principle of the animal body. Something of this kind is present in Eryximachus’s speech in Plato’s *Symposium* (Plat. conv. 186D, 5–187C, 5). However, I could not find other traces of this conception in Greek medical writings. Paul, on the other hand, describes marriage, and consequently the relationship between the community and its head (here, Christ), as the love between different parts of the same body⁸⁸.

The same metaphor, however, has another implication, which is developed at lines 5–9: the bishop, as head of the limbs, must have a loving and humble attitude and perform a series of tasks for the benefit of the limbs. It is always difficult to evaluate passages of this kind, because they are ostensibly descriptive, in that they simply state what the bishop *does*, and yet one feels that they could be also intended in a paraenetic way, suggesting what the bishop *should do*, or even polemically, denouncing what a bishop should do and the bishop *is not doing*. Here, our almost complete loss of the context in which the poems were delivered weighs strongly against the possibility of comprehending the tone of these lines. Among the tasks of the bishop, there is that of the “watchman”, expressed by the word *dawqā*. Payne Smith discusses in the corresponding entry on his lexicon whether the word *dawqā* may be translated also as ἐπίσκοπος (“supervisor” or “bishop”) and not only as σκοπός (“watchman”), as most occurrences suggest⁸⁹. The word is closely associated with bishops, as its metaphorical use in Aphrahat suggests, and in fact texts like the “Doctrine of the Apostles”, appended to the *Doctrine of Addai* and edited in two different versions by Lagarde and Cureton

⁸⁷ On the likely critics of Abraham: §3.1.1.1; §3.1.4.4.

⁸⁸ The husband is the *rēšā* of the wife in the same way as Christ is the *rēšā* of the church (1Cor. 11:3; Eph. 5:23) and, since she is his own body (*pagrā*), in the same way as the Christians are *haddāmē* of Christ, the man must love her (verb *ḥabb*) (Eph. 5:28–30).

⁸⁹ Payne Smith 1879–1901, 849, s.v. *דאוקא*.

and Wright, seem to use it as a title for the bishop⁹⁰. Moreover, the term translates Greek ἐπίσκοπος in two verses of the Syro-Hexaplaric version of the Bible (Judc. 9:28; Symmachus's version of Jer. 29:26). However, the term did not take root so as to become a title, though it preserved its association with the figure of the bishop. Ephrem uses it only here, and though it admittedly shows a close link to the bishop and his essential tasks, he probably is not implying a relationship with Greek ἐπίσκοπος, a word he never uses (see §2.1.1). Moreover, the meaning of “watchman” in this case is perfectly apt to the metaphor, since the bishop is the head in the body and the head is spatially the highest organ of the body, the one endowed with the organs of vision and hearing, making it a very sensible candidate for the role of “watchman” of the whole body. Height, implies Ephrem, is functional to the whole and not to the part, and entails a task.

When it appears at CN 15, the metaphor of the head and the limbs is much more extended:

ܠܚܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܠܚܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ	ܠܚܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ 1 ܠܚܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܠܚܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ
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ܠܚܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܠܚܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ	ܠܚܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ 3 ܠܚܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܠܚܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ⁹¹
	...
ܠܚܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܠܚܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ	ܠܚܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ 19 ܠܚܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܠܚܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ

90 “5. Moreover, the apostles established that there should be priests [*qaššišē*] and deacons [*mšam-mšānē*] as the Levites, and subdeacons [*hupdyaqānē*] as those who bore the vessels of the atrium of the temple of the Lord, and a watchman (*dawqā*) that he may be a leader [*mdabbrānā*] for all the people, as Aaron, head [*rēšā*] and chief [*rabbā*] of all the priests [*kāhnē*] and Levites of the whole city.” (Cureton/Wright 1864, ܬܕ). “Moreover, the apostles established that there should be priests [*qaššišē*] as the priests [*kāhnē*] sons of Aaron, and deacons [*mšammšānē*] as the Levites, and subdeacons [*hupdyaqānē*] as those who bore the vessels of the atrium of the shrine of the Lord, and a watchman [*dawqā*] that he may be a leader [*mdabbrānā*] for all the people, as Aaron, the High Priest [*rēš-kāhnā*], chief [*rēšā*] and leader [*mdabbrānā*] of all priests [*kāhnē*], Levites, and of the whole encampment.” (De Lagarde 1856, ܬܕ).

91 “If had not been the head straight, / perhaps would have murmured the limbs, // for from a crooked head / the course of limbs is disturbed, // and they’d find the cause in the head. /// If now, that he is totally righteous, / we ascribe him our vices, // how much more if he was vicious! / Even with God, though sweet, // the embittered found fault. /// O limbs, imitate the head: / acquire stillness in his serenity, // and kindness in his meekness, / in his holiness splendour, // and in his wisdom instruction.”.

ܠܠܚܬܐ ܠܠܬܬܐ ܠܠܬܬܐ ܠܠܬܬܐ 20
 ܠܠܬܬܐ ܠܠܬܬܐ ܠܠܬܬܐ ܠܠܬܬܐ
 (CN 15, 1–3; 19–20) ⁹² ܠܠܬܬܐ ܠܠܬܬܐ ܠܠܬܬܐ

Its extension notwithstanding, the metaphor here is employed with much less precision and development. Ephrem does not employ the biological function and anatomical position of the head as a metaphor for the bishop's tasks; nor does he define the relationship between head and limbs precisely. The situation portrayed in these stanzas is much more one-sided, because the poet mentions only the duties of the limbs towards the head, and not vice versa. In fact, all the imperatives address the limbs, which are also rebuked at the end for their rebelliousness. In this frame, the head projects its leadership, for bad or for good, onto the limbs, which should simply accept the leadership of the head. Certainly, there is the risk of a "crooked head", whose leadership may misguide the members, but Ephrem rejects this scenario in the second stanza, a scenario he evoked only to make the limbs' rebellion even worse, since they rebelled against a perfect head. The metaphor is so simplified here that its rationale seems to fail, as Ephrem exhorts the limbs to "imitate" (*dammaw*) their head, thus downplaying the idea of unity in difference of tasks expressed by the body metaphor. On the contrary, assimilation and unity among the members are greatly enhanced in this particular use of the metaphor. Even in the last two stanzas, where the difference in rank among the members is more obvious, Ephrem reaffirms that the proper aim of the limbs is to "run with" (*rhaṭ 'am*) the head, so that "the body as a whole" (*kull-eh gušmā*) may move. The stress placed on unity, even to the point of uniformity, should be seen as a conscious rhetorical strategy on the part of Ephrem: the poem addresses a breach in Bishop Valgash's authority, likely caused by his soft approach to leadership (§4.2). Through this interpretation of the metaphor, Ephrem plays down division in the community, totally exonerates the bishop, and lays guilt at the foot of the community, while at the same time inviting them to see themselves as less different from the bishop—and therefore freer—than they currently do. Ephrem employs the same traditional and well-known metaphor in two considerably different ways at CN 15 and 18, according to the pragmatic of his discourse⁹³.

92 "If with the head as first / the limbs had run as second, // they would have lesd the third, / and all the whole body would have // followed them. /// But the second neglected the first, / and the third the second, // the rank were despised one by the other. / It's because the citizens neglected each other, // that the strangers too trod them down."

93 A similar, though not wholly the same, metaphor is found at CN 17, 3, 5–8: "He lifted and fixed him as the mind (*re'yānā*) / inside the large body [*gušmā rabbā*] of the church, // and his limbs [*haddām-aw(hī)*] surrounded him, / to be supplied from him with life". Here, though the role of the faithful as limbs and of the church as body is the same, the bishop is not the *rēšā* "head" but the *re'yānā* "mind". As *rēšā* may be taken both as a metaphorical body part and a title of authority, so *re'yānā* has a root similar to *rā'yā*, a typical title for the bishop. The value of the metaphor is roughly the same as CN 18, 3–4, because it expresses a reciprocal relationship between the mind, which leads the limbs, and the limbs, which in

Of the two derivatives of *rēšā* used in our poems, *rēšāyā* and *rēšānā*, the first, an adjective meaning “best”, “chief”, “finest”, is ascribed to the bishop at *CN* 17, 2, 10, corresponding to the *rēšā* of line 8. The latter, *rēšānā*, is more complicated. Normally, the word identifies the magnates of the community, or secular officers; only rarely is it used as an ecclesiastical title⁹⁴. However, Beck gives a very idiosyncratic translation of the lines where the word appears (*CN* 19, 3, 7–9); the new bishop should be exhorted to “watch over [*ʿaqīm*] the priests [*kāhnē*] in purity, / in humility over the suffragan bishops [*rēšānē*] / in righteousness over the people”⁹⁵. The verb in the causative form *ʿaqīm* is rendered in a meaning rarely attested⁹⁶. It is true that the most natural meaning of the word—“to appoint”, “to consecrate”—cannot be adopted here, because, while it fits perfectly for the priests and the *rēšānē*, it doesn’t make sense in the case of the people. However, one can also avoid the rare meaning chosen by Beck and adopt a common one, “establish”, “make steadfast”—and all the more so, considering that the verb is accompanied by three adverbs, which can easily be translated as predicative of the object: “establish the priests in (their) purity, / in (their) humility the *rēšānē*, / in (its) righteousness the people”. Another strange translation by Beck is “suffragan bishop” for *rēšānē*. To be more precise, Beck translates the word as “leaders”, and it is only in the note that he identifies these leaders with the suffragan bishops, since the term *rēšanūtā* unambiguously means “episcopate” in other passages; but the bishop of Nisibis can be only one, so these leaders must be bishops of other cities; and since the line gives the bishop of Nisibis oversight over these bishops, they must be the suffragan bishops in relation to the metropolitan of Nisibis. The idea may well be historically accurate:

turn benefit of the life the mind supplies them. This is due to the fact that *CN* 17 and 18 are addressed to the same bishop in much the same situation (his accession), whereas *CN* 15 has a totally different aim and context. The “life” supplied by the bishop is clarified by 9–10 of the same stanza, as Ephrem shifts metaphor and represents the bishop’s teaching as “a new bread” and the bishop as its “barn” (*ʿawšrā*). Teaching and obedience are thus represented as complementary and reciprocal benefits in the context of a natural and necessary relationship. A dubious instance is *CN* 19, 12, 5–6, where the bishop is *rēšā* and the people the jewels of his crown. Beck’s translation preserves the ambiguity, giving “das hohe Haupt” for *rēšā rabbā*. However, *rabbā* does not mean “high” (Payne Smith 1879–1901, 3783–3784, s.v. ܪܒܐ) and, since “big head” in a literal sense cannot be the right translation, here *rēšā* must be taken in its sense of “leader”, even though the metaphor of the crown and the jewels may remind the reader of the anatomical sense of the word *rēšā*. And yet a “leader” may well be wearing a crown, so the meaning “head” here is by no means necessary.

94 Payne Smith 1879–1901, 3909, s.v. ܪܫܐ.

95 Beck 1961, 61.

96 Beck 1961, 61 (the rarity of the meaning prompts the translator to justify his choice by appending a note referring to Payne Smith); Payne Smith 1879–1901, 3528, s.v. ܩܝܡ. Beck copies the example wrongly: it is not *mqīm l-āk* (“may God watch over you”) but *mqīm l-eh* (“may God watch over him”). The translation given by Assemani/Assemani 1758, 4, *custodiat eum Dominus Noster*, and accepted by Payne Smith and Beck, is not necessarily true, given the context: it is a colophon with dedication, and the phrase is the wishing well for the dedicatee. Here, too, as in the other occurrences listed by Payne Smith, nothing prevents us to take the verb *pace* Assemani as “may God comfort/establish firmly/confirm him”.

the concept of a metropolitan bishop with overview on the bishops of his region was affirmed in the Council of Nicaea, well before CN 19 was written. According to canonical sources and medieval chronicles, the first metropolitan of Nisibis had been Jacob⁹⁷. Even in our poems, there is a passage which might hint at these suffragan bishops⁹⁸.

And yet this translation can be called into question. First of all, in a secular context the most frequently employed sense of *rēšānā* is “leader” or “chief”, and its applications to church hierarchy are not at all prominent: at the very least, it must be admitted that *rēšānā* is a very generic term of leadership⁹⁹. The abstract *rēšanutā* shares this wide spectrum, of meanings. Unambiguous mentions of the suffragan bishops are lacking in these poems, and the one possible allusion is in a completely different context: elsewhere, Ephrem never exhorts the bishop Abraham, or any other bishop, to care for suffragan bishops. This might be due to the fact that the *kāhnē* at line 7 probably already comprises bishops. Finally, if *rēšānē* were intended to refer to bishops, the *climax* of the passage (7–9) would be lost, because bishops are higher in rank than priests; but Ephrem orders other, similar exhortations carefully in descending or ascending order¹⁰⁰. For these reasons, I propose taking *rēšānē* as a generic term for all secular authorities of the city, be it *curiales*, civil servants, or military. This way, not only would the *climax* be preserved (from the church hierarchy to powerful laymen, to the people at large), but the line would agree with a similar exhortation in this poem to promote humility for the elite and collaboration between the powerful and the weak in society (at CN 19, 10)¹⁰¹.

97 Fiey 1977, 23n46.

98 CN 14, 1, 1–4, more on the ‘*allānē*’ of this passage at §2.2.1.4.

99 Payne Smith 1879–1901, 3909, s.v. ܪܫܐܢܐ.

100 At CN 19, 4, 1–4 (the stanza immediately following ours) Ephrem orders the kind of sheep the bishop has to tend according to the severity of their situation, in ascending severity: the healthy, the sick, the wounded and the one utterly lost. At CN 21, 5, Ephrem exhorts the bishop to: honour the charge of bishop and the liturgy; be a brother for the priests; a chief for the deacons (1–4). Then, he passes to laypeople in rising order of importance: the young, then the old, the continent and the virgin, finally the church as a whole (5–9).

101 “Do not overlook the great [*rabbā*], / do not despair of the weak, // soften and instruct [*raggē w-al-lep*] the rich [*attirā*], / entice and win the poor, // with the harsh couple the patient, / and the long-suffering to the wrathful, // chase the bad with the good, / and the greedy // with the giving, / and the impure by hand of the holy” (CN 19, 10, 1–9). The verb rendered as “soften” (*raggī*) means literally “to make wet”. The connotation of softness, meekness, and kindness that this word conjures up are easily relatable to the humbleness (*makkikā’it*) in the relationship between *rēšānē* and bishop at CN 19, 3, 8. Another parallel text is *Resurr.* 2, 9: “Let the chief pastor [*rā’yā rabbā*] weave together / his homilies like flowers // let the priests [*qaššišē*] make a garland of their ministry / the deacons of their reading // strong young men of their jubilant shouts, / children of their psalms, // chaste women [*nakpātā*] of their songs [*madrāšay-hēn*] / chief citizens [*rēšānē*] of their benefactions [*su’rānay-hōn*], // ordinary folk [*šhīmē*] of their manner of life [*dubbāray-hōn*]” (transl. Brock/Kiraz 2006, 177). The word *su’rānā* is ambiguous, in that it signifies “action”, “cure”, “visitation” but it also translates the gr. ἐπισκοπή (Payne Smith 1879–1901, 2687, s.v. ܪܫܐܢܐ; Sokoloff 2009, 986–987, s.v. ܪܫܐܢܐ). However, *rēšānā* cannot mean “suffragan bishop” nor *su’rānā* can mean ἐπισκοπή, because the *rēšānē* come after bishop, priests, deacons, young ascetics, and virgins and right before “poor men” (*šhīmē*), and this collocation would hardly be appropriate for the

Only once does Ephrem employ the term *pāqōdā*. At CN 21, 5, Ephrem instructs and at the same time wishes his bishop to be apt to his different tasks in the community. Among these tasks, the bishop is asked “to be a brother [*’ahā*] for the priests [*qasšišē*] / and a chief [*pāqōdā*] for the deacons [*šammāšē*]” (3–4). The relationship of priests and bishop is more equal than that with deacons. In respect to the deacons, the bishop must be a *pāqōdā*. The word is a *nomen agentis* built from a verb¹⁰². Given that the verb *pqaḏ* means “to give orders”, “to command”, the noun is a perfect equivalent of ἡγητῆρ/ἡγήτωρ and σημάντωρ and a synonym of *mdabbrānā*, meaning “commander”. Biblical occurrences are particularly interesting, because *pāqōdā* appears as the standard Peshitta word corresponding to the Septuagint ἐπίσκοπος in the Old Testament¹⁰³. This relationship between *pāqōdā* and ἐπίσκοπος is continued in later documents, as testified by Payne Smith’s occurrences¹⁰⁴. Here too, however, as in the case of *dawqā*, Ephrem does not seem to know of the institutional development of the term and of its link with the Greek title. The poet employs it to describe the bishop in relation to his deacons, implying an asymmetrical relationship, whereby the bishop is in a position of power and command, while the deacons are subservient to him.

The title Ephrem employs to address directly, in the second person, a bishop, is *mār(y)*, literally “my lord”. Beck’s notes to his translation identify this usage both at CN 21, 7, 9 and at 21, 9, 9¹⁰⁵. Beck’s interpretation is correct regarding 21, 7, 9, as is proved by the imperative of the verb “to be”, which requires a subject in the second person, who must be the bishop, since all other second persons in the stanza, from its first to the last line, refer to the bishop¹⁰⁶. At 21, 9, 9, however, where the form is *mār-an*, “our lord”, the verb is in the third-person singular (*neskur*), not in the second person (if the meaning were as Beck translates—“verschliess, o Herr”—the form required would have been *skur* or *teskur*). Therefore, *mār-an* is not a vocative and does not refer to the bishop, but to Christ.

bishops. Therefore, the *rēšānē* must be secular leaders (so also Rouwhorst 1989, 92: “les nobles leurs actions// les simples (fidèles) leurs vies”). In this context, the word *su’rānā* might be taken in its specialised meaning of “office”, “public charge”, attested at least from the fifth century (Payne Smith 1879-1901, 2687, s.v. ܣܘܪܢܐ; Sokoloff 2009, 987, s.v. ܣܘܪܢܐ).

¹⁰² Of the type described at Nöldeke 1880, 64, §107; Duval 1881, 217, §232.

¹⁰³ Num. 31:14; 2Reg. 11:18; 1Macc. 1:51. At Jes 60:17, the Greek has τοὺς ἄρχοντας ... καὶ τοὺς ἐπισκόπους, which the Peshitta renders as *pāqōdē w-šallitē*, so that *pāqōdā* doesn’t exactly count as the translation of ἐπίσκοπος, though the similarity of concept between ἄρχων and ἐπίσκοπος, as well as between *pāqōdā* and *šallitā* blurs the distinctions and makes this an interesting passage. At Jer 20:1, *pāqōdā* translates ἡγούμενος, which is another word later used of Christian leaders.

¹⁰⁴ Payne Smith 1879–1901, 3216, s.v. ܦܩܕܐ.

¹⁰⁵ Beck 1961, 69n18.

¹⁰⁶ “In your tenure may Mammon be ashamed, / who was master of our freedom, // may fade from us the illness, / to which we were accustomed and consenting: // destroy the causes that preserve / our customs full of detriment! // wickedness acquired us by habit, / may goodness acquire us by habit: // be, Excellence, the cause of our relief! / **Blessed is he who chose you for our salvation!**” (CN 21, 7). The only two characters Ephrem can address in the second person are God and the bishop. But God does not have a “tenure” (as in the first line) nor he *is chosen* for salvation; on the contrary, the bishop has a tenure and God has chosen him to save the Nisibenes.

After all, this interpretation agrees with the lexica, where *mār-an* is reserved exclusively for addressing Christ, whereas *mār(y)* is used as an honorific, especially for the clergy¹⁰⁷. Hence, Ephrem is consistent with later usage as regards the vocatives for the bishops.

When we consider the terms signifying primacy or authority, the main difference between Ephrem and Gregory is that Gregory's usage is two-tiered, entailing one set of words employed in prose and iambs and another for hexameters and elegiacs. There are of course overlapping (πρόεδρος) and further differentiations (προϊστάμενος never used in poetry), but in general Gregory carefully abides by the conventions of genre. In Ephrem, on the other hand, we have no linguistic convention banning some words from a metrical form. This difference, however, points to a deeper similarity: both Gregory and Ephrem have a very generic language, when it comes to terms of primacy, so that Gregory can easily employ different terms for the bishop according to genre; if they did not operate with the same flexibility, we would not observe this difference between the two. In fact, they both know a term more specialised than others for the bishop, ἐπίσκοπος in the case of Gregory and *rēšā* for Ephrem, but they also both retain the original meaning of the term when it is suited and employ generic terms of leadership (προστάτης, *rabbā*) equally or even more often. Ephrem's refusal to employ *mdabbrānā* together with the specialised meaning he gives *qaššišā* and Gregory's limited use of ἐπίσκοπος in favour of terms with a classical pedigree show the independence of both poets from New Testament usage. I do not think this points to an acknowledgement on their part of the differences between the situation implied by the New Testament and the reality they lived in. These choices are fundamentally literary: for Gregory it is classicism and the hot topic of patronage (in the word προστάτης); for Ephrem the avoidance of a word with undesirable connotations in favour of a more conciliatory framing of the role of the bishop, whether as organic part of the community (*rēšā*) or as teacher (*rabbā*). It is also interesting that Ephrem employs two terms used to translate Greek ἐπίσκοπος in contemporary or slightly later Christian texts—namely, *dawqā* and *pāqōdā*—but he uses them in their generic sense and not as *terminus technici*. This fact, together with the absence of *ʿepīsqōpā* and of its calque *sā'ōrā*, manifests Ephrem's distance from Greek conventions.

In any case, the two words that stand most apart are *rabbā* in Ephrem and προστάτης in Gregory. The first has a strong didactic connotation, which Ephrem assumes and employs, in agreement with a broader early Syriac tendency to consider the clergymen, as well as other authoritative figures in the life of the church, primarily as teachers. Προστάτης has a decidedly political character in Greek, and in imperial times it pointed at a particular political institution, the patronage, yet Gregory consciously plays down its political value, discussing whether a good bishop should be also a good patron and concluding that the true leader should be above all an example-setter. However, this choice of words testifies to Gregory's acute awareness of the political role the bishop was expected to play, so much so that he appropriates a powerful tag of ancient political language, τύπαννος, to speak of bad bishops.

107 Payne Smith 1879–1901, 2205, 2207, s.vv. ܡܪܝܢܐ; Sokoloff 2009, 824 s.v. ܡܪܝܢܐ;

2.1.3 Liturgical priesthood

Liturgical priesthood is problematic, because the tasks described in the New Testament inside the community don't comprise it, so that the text does not offer terms to express it¹⁰⁸. Ἐπίσκοπος, πρεσβύτερος, and other terms of primacy do not seem to be associated with liturgical tasks, nor does the term διάκονος have this meaning¹⁰⁹. Priesthood in the New Testament entails sacrifice and is dependent on Old Testament conceptions and the temple (as demonstrated by the relationship between the community of the apostles and the temple), and when it is not used for a traditional priest (be it Jew or pagan), the term ἱερεύς is applied to Jesus (notably in Hebrews) or to the church as a whole¹¹⁰. The problems did not end when the word began to be used for Christian hierarches: as we have seen, "priest" could mean the bishop or the πρεσβύτερος or both, and this ambiguity remained at least until the Middle Ages¹¹¹. According to Lizzi, the ambiguity is conscious in works treating the moral requirements and duties of the priest, because πρεσβύτεροι were called to the same high standard of the bishops, and the priestly order was seen as a single reality, different only in degree and not in quality¹¹².

Syriac Christianity has one more problem, since Syriac has two words for the priest, *kāhnā* and *kumrā*¹¹³. The usage of these words has been extensively studied in early Syriac¹¹⁴: in general, there are not many differences, except that *kāhnā* may have a wider spread than *kumrā*. In the Hebrew of the Old Testament, while *kohēn* (the form analogous to Syriac *kāhnā*) can refer to any type of priest, whether pagan or Jew, and also to the priesthood of Melchizedek, *komēr* (Syr. *kumrā*) is rarely used, and only for pagan priests¹¹⁵.

¹⁰⁸ The lists of charisms in Paul (Rom. 12:6–8; 1Cor. 12:28–30; Eph. 4:11) never comprise ἱερεύς or similar words. On the other hand it is illuminating that at Rom. 12, just before the list of charisms, Paul exhorts the community as a whole to "present your bodies a living sacrifice [θυσίαν/*debhtā*], holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service [τὴν λογικὴν λατρείαν/*tešmeštā mliltā*]" (Rom. 12:1), thereby implying that every single member of the community, independently of his particular charism, has a priestly office.

¹⁰⁹ Guerra y Gomez 1962, 333. διάκονος is associated with liturgy at Hebr. 1:14 (the angels) and at 2Cor. 9:12 (the offering), and in both cases it is a service or help offered to someone else, and not directly a liturgical service.

¹¹⁰ Apostles and Temple: Act. 2:46; 3:1. ἱερεύς for the church: Act. 6:7; Apc. 1:6; 20:6. A pagan priest at Act. 14:13. See Von Campenhausen 1960, 276–280.

¹¹¹ Rapp 2005, 25–26, 42; Di Berardino 1998, 43–44; Jerg 1970, 156–157 (imperial letters to bishops).

¹¹² Lizzi 1998, 87.

¹¹³ Something similar happens with Latin *sacerdos* and *pontifex* (Di Berardino 1998, 45–46), though in much fewer texts and with much less regularity.

¹¹⁴ Murray 2006, 178–181; Bou Mansour 2019, 9–15.

¹¹⁵ Brown/Driver/Briggs 1906, 463, 485, s.vv. כֹּהֵן, כֹּמֵר. Interestingly, of the three occurrences of the term in the Masoretic Text, the Septuagint has no correspondence: the term is either left untranslated (Zeph. 1:4, Jerome translates *aeditui*), or it is transliterated (χωμαριμ, 2Reg. 23:5, Jerome: *aruspices*), or is mis-translated as παραπικραίνω, "to irritate" (Hos. 10:5, Jerome: *aeditui*), which is not Hebrew but from an Aramaic root *k-m-r* of the same meaning.

The Peshitta version preserves all three Hebrew occurrences of *komēr* as *kumrā* but also expands the usage of this word, substituting it many times for *kohēn/kāhnā*, without apparent distinctions of meaning¹¹⁶. The situation is slightly clearer in the New Testament, where the only pagan priest (Act. 14:13) is rightly a *kumrā*, whereas the ἀρχιερεῖς of Mt 2:4 and the ἱερεὺς of the healed leper (Mt. 8:4; Mc. 1:44; Lc. 5:14) are Jewish *kāhnē*. Interestingly, the discussion of Christ's priesthood in Hebrews always features the term *kumrā*, even though Christ's priesthood there clearly replaces the Levitical priesthood. However, the model is that of Melchizedek, whose priesthood is always signified by *kumrā* (Gen. 14:18; Ps. 110:4).

2.1.3.1 In Gregory

In our texts, Gregory uses the word ἱερεὺς rarely, only four times, twice in the same line in two different poems (II, 1, 10, 1 and II, 1, 13, 1). Ephrem, on the other hand, employs priesthood language much more, so that it constitutes almost the other half of terms for bishops, the first half being the terms of primacy and authority. The indiscriminate use of *kāhnā* and *kumrā* in Syriac notwithstanding, Ephrem's usage is more similar to that of Gregory than one would expect: he ends up using *kāhnā* in all occasions, save one. Another interesting feature of both poets is that they employ the language of religious service, which is institutionally linked to the order of deacon, in relation to the bishop.

Ἱερεὺς shows a clear distribution in Gregory's poetry: it is amply attested, but found only twice in iambs, whereas all other occurrences are hexametric. Of these two iambic occurrences, one is II, 1, 12, 751, where the choice of the word is perhaps very significant, since it introduces a definition of the tasks of the bishop, expressed with liturgical language:

Ἐν ἔστω τοῦδ' ἔργον ἱερέως καὶ μόνον,
 Ψυχὰς καθαίρειν ἐν βίῳ τε καὶ λόγῳ,
 Ἄνω φέροντα ἐνθέοις κινήμασι,
 – Γαληνὸν, ὑψίνουν τε τὰς θείας μόνας
 Ἀκηλιδῶτους ἐμφάσεις τυπούμενον, (755)
 Ὡσπερ κάτοπτρον ἐνδοθεν μορφούμενον –
 Ἀγνάς τε πέμπειν προσφορὰς ὑπὲρ τέκνων,
 Ἔως ἂν αὐτοὺς προσφορὰν καταρτίσῃ.
 (II, 1, 12, 751–758).

Leave to the priest one task and one only,
 to purify souls through life and words,
 bringing them upwards with inspired impulses,
 being gentle and high minded, only by the divine,
 spotless reflections moulded, (755)
 as a mirror reflecting from within,
 and to send pure offerings on behalf of his children,
 until he has restored them as an offering.

¹¹⁶ Payne Smith 1879–1901, 1757, s.v. ܙܡܪܐ.

Liturgical language has multiple applications here: the bishop should first purify (καθαίρειν), and then offer (ἄνω φέρειν, προσφορά) his community; but in order to obtain purification, he should first offer the Eucharist (the “pure offerings”) on behalf of the community, and to do so, he must be pure in the first place (ἀκκληλιδώτους ἐμφάσεις τυπούμενον). This is in accordance with Old Testament precepts: Ex. 30:19 shows Aaron and his sons washing hands and feet before the sacrifice, just as Lev. 21:17 and 22:7 prescribe that the priest be without blemish (μῶμος) and pure (καθαρός); Lev. 22:21, on the other hand, prescribes the same absence of blemishes for the sacrificial victim, which should be kosher too (Gen. 7:23; Lev. 9:47; 14:4; 20:25; Dtn. 14:11.20). The relevance of this Old Testament context is demonstrated by Gregory’s word choice: ἀναφέρω, which he renders as ἄνω φέρω, is used together with its derivative name ἀναφορά as a term for the sacrifice in the OT; the same can be said of προσφορά and προσφορέω¹¹⁷. Even though ἀκκληλιδωτός has no direct correspondence in the context of OT sacrifices, it can easily be seen as a moralising paraphrase of the word ἄμωμος, which is widely attested in that context. Therefore, this passage, thanks to its allusions to OT sacrifices, is to be read as a typological interpretation of those sacrifices¹¹⁸. The Eucharist and the moral progress of the community (its going “upwards”, ἄνω) are the fulfilment of the old sacrifices, and the bishop is the true heir of the Hebrew priest. Probably, it is not a coincidence that in such a context Gregory chose to name the bishop ἱερεύς—all the more so, since a few lines earlier, when the context was still a generic one of guidance, he used the word ποιμήν.

The other two occurrences of the word ἱερεύς are just as context specific as this. In fact, II, 1, 10, 1 and II, 1, 13, 1, the same line, sound: “O priests [ιερῆς], you who offer [πέμποντες] bloodless sacrifices [θυσίας ἀναιμάκτους]”. The sacrificial context is clear: the verb πέμπω is the same as in II, 1, 12, 757, and also the expression found there, ἀγνὰς προσφοράς, is the equivalent of θυσίας ἀναιμάκτους, both denoting the Eucharist, a bloodless sacrifice, and therefore “pure”, since blood was a miasmatical substance in many streams of late antique religious thought. The equivalence of this expression with those at II, 1, 12 is even clearer when we read the following lines of II, 1, 13:

Ὡ θυσίας πέμποντες ἀναιμάκτους, ἱερῆς!
 Ὡ ψυχῶν ταμίαι μεγακύδεες! Ὡ μέγαλοιο
 Πλάσμα Θεοῦ χεῖρεσσιν ἐν ὑμετέρησι φέροντες!
 Ὡ Θεὸν ἀνθρώποισι μέγ’ ἐξοχὸν εἰς ἐν ἄγοντες!
 Ὡ κόσμοιο θέμεθλα, βίου φάος, ἔρμα λόγοιο, (5)
 Μυστοπόλοιο ζωῆς ἀτελευτήτοιο φαινῆς,
 Χριστοφόροι, θώκοισιν ἐνεδριόωντες ἀρίστοις
 (II, 1, 13, 1–7)

117 Muraoka 2009, 47, 600, s.v. ἀναφορά, προσφορά, προσφορέω.

118 Something similar but based on passages of Malachi, at *or* 2, 61; but see also *or* 2, 94, 1–9 (Gautier 2002, 117).

Oh priests, you who offer bloodless sacrifices!
 Oh most glorious ministers of souls, bearing
 in your hands the image of the great God!
 Oh, you who the Supreme God with men together bring!
 Oh, world's pillars, life's light, foundation of the doctrine, (5)
 initiators to the shining mysteries of life immortal
 Christ-bearers, sitting on the topmost thrones

Here the context blurs the lines between liturgical offering and spiritual leadership of the community, which should be the true offering: not only *ιερῆς* at line 1 but also the term *μυστοπόλοι* (6) alludes to the ministration of sacraments; however, the images of the administrator (*ταμίαι*, 2), of the light (*βίου φάος*, 5), and of the thrones (*θώκοισιν*, 7) allude to the bishops' role of leaders in the community (see §2.2.4.6). This same role is expressed by the metaphor of “bearing in the hands the creation of God [i.e., man]” (3) and by the title of *ἔρμα λόγιοι*: the first phrase highlights the bishop's responsibility over the salvation of others, while the second reminds the audience of the bishop's duty to defend orthodoxy. Sacramental and leadership roles are synthesised in the line *Ὡς Θεὸν ἀνθρώποισι μέγ' ἔξοχον εἰς ἐν ἄγοντες* (4), which, through a metaphor of movement which recalls the liturgical movement of offering, expresses the bishop's goal to mediate between God and men, leading the community to spiritual advancement¹¹⁹.

Another parallel of these expressions is found at II, 1, 17:

Τοῖος καὶ Χριστοῖο μεγακλέος ἀρητῆρσι
 Θυμός· Ὁ μὲν βροτέου λάτρης αἰσθενέος,
 Κλινόμενος καιροῖσι, δόναξ πολύκαμπτος ἀήταις, (20)
 Παντοίης κακίης οὐκ ἄκος, ἀλλὰ τύπος
 Αὐτὰρ ὃ γε τρομερῆσι καὶ εὐαγέσιν παλάμῃσι
 Δῶρον ἄγει, Χριστοῦ σαρκὶ χαρίζόμενος,
 Καὶ μεγάλοις παθέεσσι, ἅπερ Θεὸς ἐνθάδ' ἀνέτλη,
 Ρύσιον ἀρχεγόνων ἡμετέρων παθέων·
 Ὡς ζῶει μούνῳ καὶ τέρπεται· ὧς ῥα κεάζει (25)
 Θυμὸν ἀπὸ χθονίων ἐνθεν ἀνιστάμενος.
 . . .
 Ἀλλὰ νόον καθαροῖσι νοήμασιν αἰὲν ἀέζων, (35)
 Ἦδη καὶ Τριάδος ἅπτεται οὐρανίης,
 Ἦς τύπον ἐστήριξεν ἐνὶ πραπίδεσσιν ἑῇσι,
 Κῦδος ἐν ἐν τρισσοῖς κάλλεσι δερκόμενος,
 Καὶ λαὸν θυέεσσιν ἁγνοῖς θεοειδέα τεύχων,
 Ὑστάτιον ψυχῆς θύματ' ἀναιμα φέρει. (40)
 (II, 1, 17, 17–26; 35–40)

119 On the term *Χριστοφόροι* (7), see Rapp 2005, 56–60.

Such is the heart even of glorious Christ's priests.
 The one is slave to the ever-shifting strength of mortals,
 bowing to opportunity, a cane oftentimes bent by winds,
 of all kind of vices not remedy, but model, (20)
 whereas the other with trembling and cleansed palms
 offers the Gift, reconciled by the flesh of Christ
 and by the great sufferings that God bore down here,
 ransom of our ancestral passions.
 For him alone he lives and rejoices, for him he rips (25)
 his heart apart from earthly things, turned away from here.
 ...
 Rather, nourishing his mind with pure thoughts, (35)
 he already grasps the heavenly Trinity,
 Whose image he fixed in his own senses,
 beholding one glory in triple beauties;
 then, making the people Godlike with holy sacrifices,
 he will finally bring the bloodless offerings of soul. (40)

In these lines is represented the same priestly dynamic of offering the sacrifice of the Eucharist to make of the community a sacrifice to God. The two equivalent sacrifices, the θύος of Eucharist (39) and the θῦμα of the people (40), are here respectively ἀγνόν and ἀναιμον, demonstrating the equivalence of the two terms¹²⁰. The priest's requirements of moral purity and assimilation to God, found also at II, 1, 12, 754–755 (τὰς θείας μόνας / ἀκηλιδώτους ἐμφάσεις τυπούμενον), are here brought up (II, 1, 17, 35–38) in the context of a comparison between the good and evil priest. The term Gregory uses for “priest” in this instance is ἀρητήρ (17), a rare and precious word, attested thrice in Homer (*Il.* 1, 11.94; 5, 78) and employed as a poetic substitute of ἱερεύς, as Aristotle had already recognised¹²¹. Gregory and Nonnus employ the word twice each. The whole passage is clearly a paraphrase of II, 1, 12, 751–758, as shown by poetic substitutions, such as ἀρητήρ for ἱερεύς, or the expression θεοειδέα τεύχων (II, 1, 17, 39), with the very epic verb τεύχω, for προσφορὰν καταρτίζω at II, 1, 12, 758. :

All these passages (II, 1, 10, 1; II, 1, 12, 751–758; II, 1, 13, 1; II, 1, 17, 39–40) sum up a doctrine expressed by Gregory extensively in his speeches, and especially in *or.* 2¹²².

¹²⁰ It is worth noting again Gregory's tuning of the words to the stylistic context: the offerings are called προσφοραί in the iambic poem, and θυσία, θύος or θῦμα in hexameters, since προσφοραί is a prosaic word, used of sacrifices beginning with the Septuagint (see Liddell/Scott/Jones 2011, 1530 s.v. προσφορά, 2), whereas θυσία (in the plural according to poetic usage) and θῦμα are found in poetry, although not in Homer (θυσία twice in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 312 and 368, more widespread in later literature and the *Orphic Hymns*; θῦμα used in tragedy, rarer in hexameters, notably in Lycophron's *Alexandra* and many times in Gregory's poetry), and θύος at the plural is Homeric. Similarly, the word for “restore” at II, 1, 12, 758, καταρτίζω, is prosaic and a favourite NT word (Meier 1989, 158), whereas II, 1, 17, 39 has θεοειδέα τεύχων, with the verb τεύχω, which is almost exclusively poetic.

¹²¹ Aristot. *poet.* 1457b 35.

¹²² The corresponding, though longer, passage, is *or.* 2, 94–95: Οἶδα δ' ἔγωγε μηδὲ τοὺς ἐν τοῖς σώμασι μώμους τῶν ἱερέων, ἢ τῶν θυμάτων ἀνεξετάστους μένοντας, ἀλλὰ τελείους τέλεια προσάγειν

The priest should have purified himself through philosophy before serving, and his aim should be to draw closer to God his community¹²³. As correctly pointed out by Elm, these precepts were intended for priests as well as bishops, as demonstrated by the fact that their most organic presentation is given in *or.* 2, which was delivered when Gregory was ordained priest, not bishop¹²⁴. Accordingly, the terms *ιερεύς* and *ἀρητήρ* do not refer specifically to a bishop or a priest. From the context of II, 1, 17, it is clear that Gregory is speaking of bishops, and the same can be said of II, 1, 12 and of II, 1, 13, whereas II, 1, 10, 1 could also be addressing the priests in Constantinople¹²⁵. Now, the majority of occurrences of *ιερεύς* in *or.* 2 are found in OT quotations or allusions, which confirms the close link of the term with OT typology. Elsewhere in the same speech, however, the term seems to be employed indifferently to mean bishops and priests¹²⁶. This is true also

νενομισμένον, σύμβολον, οἶμαι, τοῦτο τῆς κατὰ ψυχὴν ἀρτιότητος· ... μηδεὶς ἄξιος τοῦ μεγάλου καὶ Θεοῦ, καὶ θύματος, καὶ ἀρχιερέως, ὅστις μὴ πρότερον ἑαυτὸν παρέστησε τῷ Θεῷ θυσίαν ζῶσαν, ἀγίαν, μηδὲ τὴν λογικὴν λατρείαν εὐάρεστον ἐπεδείξατο, μηδὲ ἔθυσσε τῷ Θεῷ θυσίαν αἰνέσεως καὶ πνεῦμα συντετριμμένον, ἦν μόνον ὁ πάντα δοῦς ἀπαιτεῖ παρ' ἡμῶν θυσίαν, πῶς ἐμελλόν θαρρήσῃ προσφέρειν αὐτῷ τὴν ἑξωθεν, τὴν τῶν μεγάλων μυστηρίων ἀντίτυπον· ἢ πῶς ἱερέως σχῆμα καὶ ὄνομα ὑποδύεσθαι, πρὶν ὅσiois ἔργοις τελειῶσαι τὰς χεῖρας; See also: Ταῦτα οὖν εἰδὼς ἐγὼ, καὶ ὅτι μηδεὶς ἄξιος τοῦ μεγάλου Θεοῦ, καὶ θύματος, καὶ ἀρχιερέως, ὅς μὴ πρότερον ἑαυτὸν παρέστησε τῷ Θεῷ θυσίαν ζῶσαν, μᾶλλον δὲ, ναὸς ἅγιος ἐγένετο Θεοῦ ζώντος καὶ ζῶν· ... Καὶ διὰ τοῦτο καθαρτέον ἑαυτὸν πρῶτον, εἴτα τῷ καθαρῷ προσομιλητέον (*or.* 20, 4).

123 See the contributions of Elm, such as Elm 2000a; Elm 2012, 156, 171; also Louth 1997, 284. One of the most quoted passages for this conception is *or.* 2, 22.

124 Elm 2012, 156.

125 This ambiguity is reflected in the titles the manuscript tradition gives to the poems. II, 1, 12 is consistently titled “against the bishops” (ἐπίσκοποι, Meier 1989, 33, *apparatus criticus*), as is II, 1, 13 (at least according to the Maurine edition in the *Patrologia Graeca* 37, 1227). II, 1, 17 is a more moralising and general poem, and it never explicitly mentions bishops, though knowing Gregory’s story it is not difficult to understand the references to the bishops of the Constantinopolitan Council. Accordingly, traditional titles oscillate between κατὰ ψευδιερέων and εἰς ἐπισκόπους (PG 37, 1262), a more general and a more particular option. For II, 1, 10, PG 37, 1027 gives only πρὸς τοὺς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως ἱερέας, which – given that a city cannot have more than one bishop – would suggest the poem to be addressed to the priests. On the contrary, Tuilier/Bady/Bernardi 2004, 54, *apparatus criticus*, report unanimity of the manuscripts on the title εἰς ἐπισκόπους. Moreover, even the expression Κωνσταντινουπόλεως ἱερέας must not mean “priests of Constantinople”, if we think that II, 1, 10 is clearly written as if the Council were still going on, meaning that the *ιερεῖς* of the city could just as rightly be the bishops there gathered: in fact, line 27 lists also the *ιερεῖς* among the things Gregory wilfully leaves behind in Constantinople – which, given his fondness for the Constantinopolitan community and his bitterness towards his colleagues, must mean “bishops”.

126 ἡνίκα πολεμεῖ μὲν ἀλλήλοις τὰ μέλη, οἴχεται δὲ τῆς ἀγάπης, εἰ καὶ τι ἦν λείψανον, ὄνομα δὲ κενὸν ἄλλως ὁ ἱερεὺς, ἐκχυθείσης ἐπ’ ἀρχοντας ἐξουθενώσεως, ὥσπερ εἴρηται (*or.* 2, 78); Πρὶν δὲ ταύτην ὑπερσχεῖν ὅση δύναμις καὶ ἀνακαθάραι ἱκανῶς τὴν διάνοιαν, ὑπὲρ τε τοὺς ἄλλους μακρῶ γενέσθαι τῇ πρὸς Θεὸν ἐγγύτητι, ἢ ψυχῶν προστασίαν δέξασθαι, ἢ μεσιτείαν Θεοῦ καὶ ἀνθρώπων (τοῦτο γὰρ ἴσως ὁ ἱερεὺς), οὐκ ἀσφαλὲς εἶναι γινώσκω (91, a passage very similar to II, 1, 12, 751–758); ἄνδρες ὁμοῦ καὶ γυναικες, νεανίσκοι καὶ παρθέναι, πρεσβῦται μετὰ νεωτέρων, ἱερεῖς καὶ λαὸς, οἱ μοναδικοὶ καὶ μιγάδες, οἱ τῆς ἀπλότητος καὶ τῆς ἀκριβείας, ὅσοι τῆς θεωρίας, καὶ ὅσοι τῆς πράξεως (10).

of other poetic occurrences¹²⁷. In sum, the word ἱερεύς is employed only rarely as specific of bishops, and almost always in their sacrificing and offering capacity, with clear links to Old Testament priesthood, even when it is interpreted spiritually. The term does not exclude priests (πρεσβύτεροι), though in our poems it is used only of bishops¹²⁸.

2.1.3.2 In Ephrem

Compared to other early Syriac authors, like Jacob of Serugh or Aphrahat, Ephrem's usage of *kāhnā* and *kumrā* is more consistent with New Testament usage. His tendency is to employ *kāhnā* for Jewish priests and for the Christian hierarchy (bishops/priests), reserving *kumrā* for pagan priests, for Melchizedek, and for Christ: although Ephrem expresses clearly and in full form the story of the rightful passage of Jewish priesthood from John the Baptist or Simeon (Lc. 2:25) to Jesus, and from him to the apostles and the bishops, his use of language highlights the peculiarity of Christ's priesthood in respect to the traditional succession of Jewish priesthood, in that he refers to Christ mainly as *kumrā*, the term he and the Syriac Bible reserve to Melchizedek¹²⁹. Another characteristic of Ephrem's usage is that he rarely distinguishes between priests and bishops when

¹²⁷ Θεὸν φόβου πρόωιστα, καὶ γονεῖς τίμα, / Ἱερεῖς ἐπαίνει, πρεσβύτας σεπτῶς ἔχε (I, 2, 32, 15–16), which is the iambic paraphrase of Ἀζέο μοι πρόωιστα Θεὸν, μετέπειθ' ἱερῆα / Χριστὸν ἐπιχθόνιον, ζωῆς σιμάντορα σεῖο (I, 2, 2, 346–347). In the hexametric text, ἱερεύς is probably the bishop, whereas the plural form of the iambic occurrence could suggest that there it means “priests”. Moreover, the difference between ἱερεῖς and πρεσβύτας is no indication that the first means “bishops”, since the second can't mean “priest”. However, the plural could be due to metrical grounds (avoiding hiatus and resolution of the second *ictus*, after the resolution of the first one). The name remains generic. Two occurrences in the epigrams confirm this picture. At *Anth. Gr.* 8, 165, 1, Gregory defines himself as ἱερεύς μέγας, which could mean “bishop”, but the presence of the adjective μέγας hinders any conclusion on the value of the word ἱερεύς as such. Finally, Nicomedes is said to have been a ἱερεύς at *Anth. Gr.* 8, 140, 5. It is almost certain that Nicomedes was no bishop, though he may have been a priest (McLynn 2006, 230n59). Here, however, the choice of terms is prompted by the language of sacrifice and offering of the text: δῶκεν ἀγνὴν θυσίην παρθενίην τεκέων (4, but see also τίς δὲ Θεῷ πέμψει φρὴν τελέην θυσίην at *Anth. Gr.* 8, 139, 4 on the same person).

¹²⁸ It is worth mentioning here briefly the word θυηπόλος, rare and poetic (2x in Eur. *Iph. Aul.*, once respectively in Aristophanes and Aeschylus), meaning “diviner” or “performing sacrifice”, which Gregory employs often as a synonym of ἱερεύς in connection with Old Testament sacrifice: Πιστὸς ἐνὶ προτέροισι θυηπόλος ἔσκεν Ἀαρών (Greg. Naz. I, 2, 1, 316); Καὶ πῦρ ξεῖνον ὄλεσσε θυηπόλου ἐν προτέροισι / Παῖδας, μὴ καθαρῶς ἀπομένους θυσίης (again Aaron, II, 1, 34, 99–100); Ἦν θύος, ἀρχιερεὺς δέ· θυηπόλος, ἀλλὰ Θεός περ (I, 1, 2, 75, this line sums up the priestly typology of Hebr.). In some cases, the word appears to be more generic (I, 2, 22, 5; II, 2, 7, 21), but still referring to the priestly office in the church. In our poems, it appears at II, 1, 13, 111, in the portrait of the perfect candidate for priesthood: since at line 107 it is explicitly stated that the perfect candidate is hindered from priesthood, the word θυηπόλος must be interpreted here not as a synonym of ἱερεύς, but as one who offers a more spiritual sacrifice, in the context of its ascetic portrait (see §3.2.2).

¹²⁹ Bou Mansour 2019, 10–12, 270–288; Murray 2006, 178–181; on the passage of priesthood from Moses to Jesus, the *locus classicus* is *hymn. haer.* 22, 19. The only exception to the use of *kāhnā* for Old Testament priesthood is *Epiph.* 3, 12, 1, from a probably inauthentic poem.

using the term *kāhnā*, which he applies to both ranks of the holy orders indifferently. Moreover, he seems to avoid compounds such as *rab-kāhnē* for the bishop, thereby eschewing the parallel between Christian and Jewish priests or between a Christian bishop and a Jewish high priest¹³⁰. This overview of Ephrem's usage shows that it agrees with Gregory's: Christian liturgical priesthood is linked but not identical with its Jewish forebears, Christ and Melchizedek enjoy a certain separateness (though they share some traits with the Christian hierarchy), and, as regards liturgical priesthood, bishop and priest differ more in degree than in nature, so that liturgical priesthood is conceived as a unity, in which bishops and priests partake.

As regards the distribution of *kumrā* and *kāhnā*, our poems agree with the general overview: only once is *kumrā* attributed to the bishop. The passage is worth quoting:

ܐܚܢܝܡ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ
¹³¹ܐܚܢܝܡ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ ܕܡܪܝܢܐ
 (CN 21, 5, 1–4)

Ephrem is expressing wishes and at the same time giving advice to Abraham, the new bishop, and the stanza continues with similar sentences referring to laymen. Lines 3–4 are clear: the bishop is thought of, or should behave, as a *primus inter pares* with the priests and as an authority with the deacons: with these lines, Ephrem expresses the different relationships the office of bishop should entertain with the other two ranks of church hierarchy (see §2.1.2.2). The sense of the first two lines is much more ambiguous. If we take them as parallel to 3–4, *kumrūtā* refers to the college of presbyters, and *tešmeštā* (literally, “the service”) to the deacons (*šammāšē*). In this sense, the lines express in abstract and metaphorical terms what the following lines express concretely—namely, that the bishop should be the highest and most honoured priest (the “crown”) and should lead the deacons to do their job in the best way possible. Yet we can also take the lines as parallel to each other: “be crown” (*tehwē klilā*) may be taken as a synonym for “be glorified by you” (*b-āk tezdahhē*). In this case, *kumrūtā* would be also a synonym for *tešmeštā*. In such a context, *tešmeštā* could mean only one of two things: either the office of bishop, or the divine service—that is, liturgy¹³². Thus, *kumrūtā* in these lines has three possible meanings: it can mean priesthood in general, comprising bishop and presbyters but excluding deacons; it can mean episcopate, the office of bishop; it can mean priesthood in its most narrow liturgical and sacrificial sense, the role of the one celebrating the liturgy. I would exclude that here *tešmeštā* means either diaconate or episcopate, because in the examples given in Payne Smith's *Thesaurus* the word in this sense is always accompanied by an attribute or a specification, clarifying the nature of the office. The easiest sense for the word taken by itself is “liturgy”.

¹³⁰ Bou Mansour 2019, 26–29.

¹³¹ “Be thou a crown for priesthood [*kumrūtā*] / and through you be glorified the worship [*tešmeštā*] // be thou a brother for the priests [*qaššišē*], / a chief for the deacons [*šammāšē*], too.”.

¹³² Payne Smith 1879–1901, 4228–4229, s.v. ܐܚܢܝܡ.

However, the *Thesaurus* does not give instances where *kumrūtā* identifies the sacrificial liturgy or identifies the priest narrowly understood as the celebrant of such liturgy. Therefore, the synonymous parallelism between lines 1 and 2 should be abandoned, as should the parallelism between 1–2 and 3–4. It remains true that *tešmeštā* refers to liturgy and *kumrūtā* to the office of the episcopate. In this way, the stanza expresses all aspects of the bishop's tasks: not only must he work with the priests and lead deacons and the community, but he also has liturgical duties and the obligation to discharge his office with dignity. To express it in Weberian terms, the bishop has to add his personal charisma to the charisma of the office and avoid detracting from the charisma of the office by misdemeanours¹³³. It remains to explain why Ephrem used *kumrūtā* here instead of *kāhnūtā*. The choice of words may not be absolutely determinative of meaning, given that the distinction between *kāhnā* and *kumrā* is far from being neat and consequent. However, a similar passage may hint at a meaningful usage by Ephrem in these poems:



¹³⁴

 (CN 19, 2, 1–4)

Here, line 2 is a clear parallel to CN 21, 5, 1: the adornment the incumbent brings to the office corresponds to the “crown” of the previous poem. Yet CN 21 has *kumrūtā* and CN 19 *kāhnūtā*. The context helps distinguishing the different meanings: at CN 21, Ephrem was giving advice and wishes for the *future* of the elected bishop; hence the imperfect aspect of the verb *tehwē*. Here at CN 19, on the other hand, Ephrem uses the *past* credentials of the elected person to celebrate the goodness of his election. These lines remind the audience that the new bishop has been a good priest previously and that, though he might seem younger than other priests, he is fit for the task. Therefore, while at CN 21 Abraham is called to bring honour to the episcopate, at CN 19 he is said to have brought honour to the presbyterate or the priesthood in general. Hence, Ephrem employs *kumrūtā* to mean “episcopate” and *kāhnūtā* for “priesthood”. This is confirmed by the fact that, a few lines after CN 19, 2, 1–4, and precisely at CN 19, 3, 7, the bishop is exhorted to establish *kāhnē* “in splendour”¹³⁵. From the parallel objects of the same verb (for example, the *quṭrānā* at 9), it is clear that the verb presumes a superiority of the bishop over the objects of the verb, including these *kāhnē*, who, consequently, should be interpreted as the presbyters of the community.

¹³³ Weber 1922, 144.

¹³⁴ “O fitting fruit of modesty, / by which was priesthood (*kāhnūtā*) adorned, // youngest of his brothers as Jesse’s son! / The horn, fervent, anointed you. . .”

¹³⁵ “Establish [*ʿaqtm*] the priests [*kāhnē*] in splendour, / the powerful in humility, // and the people [*quṭrānā*] in righteousness.” (CN 19, 3, 7–9). On the meaning of *ʿaqtm*, see §2.1.2.2 n. 96.

Anyway, in the great majority of cases Ephrem employs the term *kāhnā* to mean the bishop in a very generic fashion: even though single aspects of his idea of the episcopate may be associated with these occurrences, there seems to be no necessary association between the word *kāhnā* and one or more of these aspects. For example, in more than one case the word *kāhnā* is associated with the idea of tradition and succession (*yubbālā*)¹³⁶. However, at CN 16, 14–21 the same idea is associated with family images, with the name “shepherd” (*rā’yā*) or “teacher” (*mallpānā*). Furthermore, there are occurrences of *kāhnā* associated with the task of leadership at CN 19:

ܠܬܝܬܐ ܠܥܡܐ ܩܪܝܢܐ (CN 19, 12, 8–9)	... 12 ¹³⁷ ܩܪܝܢܐ ܠܥܡܐ ܩܪܝܢܐ ...
ܩܪܝܢܐ ܠܥܡܐ ܩܪܝܢܐ ܡܕܝܬܐ ܠܥܡܐ ܩܪܝܢܐ ¹³⁸ ܡܕܝܬܐ ܠܥܡܐ ܩܪܝܢܐ (CN 19, 14, 4–8)	... 14 ܡܕܝܬܐ ܠܥܡܐ ܩܪܝܢܐ ܡܕܝܬܐ ܠܥܡܐ ܩܪܝܢܐ

Here, Ephrem expresses the theme of leadership by example in a way similar to how Gregory’s metaphor at II, 1, 13, 43–58 does: all collectives, and armies in particular, tend to conform to their leaders, so that if the leader is a bad example or incompetent, the collective as a whole will be incapable of doing its task. Interestingly, in the first passage “priest” is correlated to “people”, whereas in the second instance *kāhnā* corresponds to *mar’ūtā*, which is an ambiguous word, because literally it means “flock”, but in the majority of later occurrences, it means “diocese”, “Christian community under a bishop”¹³⁹. This ambiguity will be explored later, but the fact that here the word corresponds to *kāhnā* and not to “shepherd” (*rā’yā*) suggests that both *kāhnā* and *mar’ūtā* here have an institutional meaning (“bishop” and “diocese”) and not the literal one.

Even if the usage of *kāhnā* is not restricted to the priestly function, the priestly function is almost always defined through this term. The best example of this usage of *kāhnā* in a liturgical context is at the end of CN 18:

¹³⁶ CN 13, 1, 1; 3, 1; 17, 2.4; CN 14, 4, 1.3; 21, 1.3.5; CN 18, 1, 1; 15, 2.

¹³⁷ “that we may fit, one with another; // people [*ammā*] and priest [*kāhnā*], in harmony.”

¹³⁸ “The church is like a mirror, // which, like the countenance of its beholder, / accordingly, wears his shapes, // for, like the king such his host, / like the priest [*kāhnā*], such his flock [*mar’ūt-eh*].”

¹³⁹ Payne Smith 1879–1901, 3948, s.v. ܡܕܝܬܐ.

¹⁴⁰ “Appoint for you scribes and lawyers, / gatherers and givers, too, // and patrons and supporters, / all giving their service to each other, // lest may be sullied by care, / or defiled by anxiety, // the mind and the tongue / by which you offer the intercession [*bā’ūtā*] // propitiating [*l-ḥussāyā*] for the whole community. / **Blessed is he who cleanses your worship** [*tešmešt-āk*])! /// How much the mind may be purged, / and may the tongue too be purified, // how much the hands may be scoured, / and may the whole body be cleansed, // is not enough for the title of priest [*l-kāhnā w-kunnāy-ēh*], / since he, offering [*mqarreb*] the

ܐܪܡܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܠܡܢ ܡܢ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ	11 ܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
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¹⁴⁰ ܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
(CN 18, 11–12)

The ritual context is very clear from words like “intercession” (*bā’ūtā*), “propitiation” (*ḥussāyā*), “worship” (*tešmeštā*) and “offering” (*mqarreb*). As in the passage from Gregory (II, 1, 12, 751–758), the priest is a mediator between the people and the Godhead, and, as such, he must be pure. This common Old Testament image, however, is employed in considerably different ways. While Gregory spiritualises the offering as a moral progression, Ephrem clearly refers to the Eucharist (the “living body”, *pagrā ḥayyā*), thus superimposing Christian cult on Old Testament sacrifices. While Gregory insists on the purity of the offering as well as the priest, Ephrem mentions only the purity of the priest. Moreover, Gregory employs terms of purity found also in the Greek version of the Old Testament. Ephrem, on the other hand, employs nonbiblical terms of purity and impurity¹⁴¹. These nonbiblical terms highlight that the purity of which Ephrem is talking, much like the purity of Gregory’s ἱερεὺς, is not a ritual but a moral one. Another similarity with Gregory is that both strongly emphasise the link between this ritual image and the priest (ἱερεὺς, *kāhnā*): as at II, 1, 12, 751, the ritual is the one and only task of the ἱερεὺς, so here the very title of priest (*kunnāyā*) is associated with the “offering of the living body”. This association is corroborated by other passages, where the name *kāhnā* occurs in the context of a liturgical function, and in particular with the intercessory function¹⁴². Even more important, at CN 14, 5–6 Valgash’s preaching is contrasted with Aaron’s behaviour in the episode of the golden calf, and, in contrasting the bishop with the Old Testament figure, Ephrem calls the bishop *kāhnā*¹⁴³.

living body, // should purify all himself all time, / to stand as a mediator [*meš’āyā*] // between God and humanity. / **Blessed is he who purified his servants!**”

¹⁴¹ Moreover, many of these terms are also metaphorical. Terms of impurity: *šhet* (“to rust”, CN 18, 11, 5); *šā’ā* (“to be filthy”, 6). Purity: *zhā* (“to be splendid”, 11, 10; 12, 4); *špā* (“to be plain”, 12, 1); *šallel* (“to filter”, 12, 2; 7; 10). The only biblical term is *mraq*, “to polish”, “purify”, which is found at Lev. 6:28 for a bronze vessel *after* the sacrifice.

¹⁴² CN 13, 17; CN 14, 4.

¹⁴³ “Aaron had stripped the ears / of earrings, to make a calf, // [. . .] Yet our third priest [*kāhn-an dēn tltāyā*] / pierced the heart’s ears. . . .” (CN 14, 5, 1–2; 6, 1–2). The opposition is clear from the content and is signalled grammatically from the particle *dēn* (“yet”). The suffix-pronoun of the first-person plural (*-an*) clarifies that the *kāhnā* Ephrem is talking of is *not* Aaron (as would be expected) but the bishop.

Given that Aaron was considered as the paradigm of Jewish priesthood and the first priest of Israel, the link between the word *kāhnā* and the liturgical function, as modelled on its Old Testament forerunners, should be clear. Naturally, there are still exceptions to this privileged link between *kāhnā* and the liturgical functions of the bishops. At CN 17, for example, attributes and actions typical of the priest are found side by side with the shepherd imagery¹⁴⁴.

The occurrences of *kāhnā* in the last part of CN 21 belong to a category of their own¹⁴⁵: here, *kāhnā* and *kāhnūtā* are compared and contrasted with *malkā* and *malkūtā*. This comparison has both an abstract and a concrete side: on the concrete side (CN 21, 21, 1–6) real bishops and Roman emperors are compared; on the abstract side (CN 21, 21, 7–23, 10), the new emperor and the new bishop receive wishes and exhortations on how king and priests should behave. If then the concrete part of the passage suggests that *kāhnā* should be translated as “bishop” and *malkā* as “emperor”, since those mentioned were indeed bishops and emperors, nevertheless the abstract comparison of the ideal *malkā* and *kāhnā* seems to hint at the more general and biblically attested functions of “king” and “priest”. On one side, this means that the biblical function of priesthood has been concretely transferred, in Ephrem’s thought, to the bishop. However, since the presbyters shared in the name (see CN 19, 3, 7), we cannot say that the priestly function, the rank of bishop, and the title *kāhnā* are coextensive. At the very least, admitting that the priestly function is attached to the term *kāhnā*, we must also rule out that this function is exclusive of the bishop.

In the semantic field of liturgy there is another group of names used for the bishops: in the same manner as *ιερεύς/kāhnā* is shared by both bishops and priests, so the bishop is sometimes referred to with terms that commonly refer to a deacon. Twice Ephrem uses his word for “deacon”, *šammāšā*, to identify the lesser rank of priesthood (CN 21, 5, 4; 19, 7). He identifies the bishops with this same term three times, but with three different connotations. At CN 18, 12, 10, the bishops are the “purified servants of God” (*šallel šammāš-aw(hy)*): this is a line that comes after a stanza crowded with references to ritual purity and the Eucharist as sacrifice. The refrain of the previous stanza mentioned the “liturgy” (*tešmeštā*) of the bishop (CN 18, 12, 9). In this context, the liturgical connotation of the bishop’s “service” is unambiguous. The same word, with the same

144 “He chose him in the multitude of musterers [*‘allānē*], / because he gave proof of his faith; // Time examined him in the flock [*‘ānā*], / [. . .] may your fasting [*šawm-āk*] be an armour to our land, / your prayer [*šallūt-āk*] a shield for our city, // your thurible [*pīrm-āk*] may obtain reconciliation [*l-tar’ūta*]. / **Blessed is he who sanctified your sacrifices** [*debhāt-āk*]! /// The shepherd [*rā’yā*], appointed from his flock [*‘ān-eh*], / fed it on spiritual meadows, // and with his victorious staff / from invisible wolves guarded it; // come on, fill the office of your teacher [*rabb-āk*], / because there’s thirst of the sound of his voice: // he put you as a pillar / in the citadel of a quivering people, // that relies on your prayers [*ba-šlwāt-āk*]” (CN 17, 4, 1–3.7–10; 5).

145 CN 21, 14, 8; 21–23.

specification, “Your [Christ’s] servants” (*šammāšay-k*), has a completely different sense at CN 14, 14, 6, because there the theme is the good deeds of Christ and “his servants”¹⁴⁶, and indeed, in the following stanzas the “service” is one of education and guidance, not of liturgy. As a consequence, in this instance *šammāšā* expresses the submission of the bishops to Christ, in a temporal, causal, ontological, and functional way. In this respect a possible pun could be playing a role: Ephrem is saying that the deeds of the “servants” can be narrated only because of the previous and more ancient deeds of Christ himself; and this primacy through antiquity is expressed a reference to Christ’s deeds as *qaššišīn*, “older” (CN 14, 14, 4). Now, the word *qaššišā* is used overwhelmingly for humans, not for objects. Here, therefore, deeds are being personified. However, the choice of the term *qaššišā* for “ancient” might be intended to signal the hierarchical difference between deeds of Christ, those of the “priests” (*qaššišē*), and those of the bishops, who are only “deacons” (*šammāšē*) in comparison to Christ’s. Finally, the bishops are called *šammāšē* in relation to the church at CN 13, 11, 6, here again in the sense of educating and leading it¹⁴⁷.

Even Gregory employs the vocabulary of service and servitude for the bishops at II, 1, 10. At line 2, for example, he refers to the bishops, who in line 1 were represented as offering the Eucharist, as God’s servants, employing a word, *λάτρες*, of great poetic value: not only a Euripidean favourite (18x), but also a term never attested in Homer and employed by elegiac poets, such as Theognis (302; 486) and Gregory’s model, Callimachus (*aet. frg.* 80, 7; *Hec. frg.* 344, 1). Gregory employs it more than any other poet, except perhaps Nonnus. The word is mostly used in hexameters, but there are three iambic occurrences (II, 1, 11, 199; II, 1, 20, 1; II, 1, 30, 47). It is not used only of bishops, but in general of any kind of devotion and worship, even nonliturgical ones. Such is the occurrence of the term at II, 1, 17, 97, where it refers to ambition towards a prestigious episcopal seat¹⁴⁸. Therefore, the term is quite generic and certainly not a *terminus technicus* for the deacon or any role in the liturgy, even though at II, 1, 17, 18, where good and evil priests are compared and the good priest is shown offering the Eucharist, the word *λάτρης* may well be used to scorn the evil bishops’ worshipful attitude towards powerful men¹⁴⁹. At II, 1, 10, 2, it is likely that the expression *μεγάλης μονάδος λάτρες ἐν Τριάδι* has the function of binding the addressees (the bishops at the Council of

146 “For if he who has no beginning / is the Firstborn of all creations, // then his deeds too are the firstborns, / being older [*qaššišīn*] than the creations. // Your deeds, O Lord, permit / to narrate of your servants [*šammāšay-k*].” (CN 14, 14).

147 “For her ornament corresponds to her beauty [*šupr-āh*], // because her help is like her time, / and her servant is like her help. /// As much as she lacked in her need, / to her need came fulfilment: // her parents apt to her birth / and her teachers apt to her notions, // her nourishment apt to her growth / and her clothing apt to her stature” (CN 13, 11, 4-12).

148 Οὐ γὰρ ἔμῃς πολλῆς παίδειν, καὶ λάτριν αἰετῶς / Ἐμμεναι ἀντὶ θρόνων, ὧν πέρι μαρνάμενοι / Σχίζονται, καὶ κόσμον ὅλον τέμνουσιν ἀθέσμως. (II, 1, 17, 97–99).

149 Τοῖος καὶ Χριστοῦ μεγακλέος ἀρητῆρσι / Θυμός. Ὁ μὲν βροτέου λάτρης αἰσθενέος / ... Αὐτὰρ ὁ γε τρομερῆσι καὶ εὐαγέσιν παλάμησι / Δῶρον ἄγει, Χριστοῦ σαρκὶ χαριζόμενος (II, 1, 17, 17–18; 21–22).

Constantinople) to their Nicene faith, so that the following point raised by the poet—that is, his personal merits in establishing a firm Nicene community in the capital—will be more effective. Two more words are used at II, 1, 10, 15 and 16: respectively, θεοῦ θεράποντες and θεοῦ θέραιες. Semantically, the words are equivalents, and they belong more or less to the same linguistic register: they are both poetic words, though θέραις is rarer and more sophisticated¹⁵⁰. The words mean “servant”, though not in a derogatory way, since they are used by Homer to mean “squire” of a champion, and more often and in all kinds of poetry to identify the attendant of a god. Therefore, they could be used to express a personal devotion to a divinity: it is so that Archilochus is “attendant of Ares”—namely, a soldier and a war-poet—and the poet of Aristophanes’s *Birds* is a “servant of the Muses”¹⁵¹. In a sense more similar to the liturgical role of a Christian deacon, the word θεράπων is used of the attendants at the Temple of Apollo at Delphi by Euripides¹⁵². However, Gregory seems to employ the word in the sense of devotion towards God, rather than as an allusion to the liturgical service: the “good servants of God” (II, 1, 10, 15) are the bishops who appointed Gregory preacher in Constantinople, and the “servants of God” of the following line are the bishops who at the time were arguing in Constantinople¹⁵³. The context bears no reference to the liturgy; therefore, the terms should be interpreted as highlighting one facet of the bishops’ role—that is, their dependence to God—in order to cast doubts on their adequacy to the task, juxtaposing their inadequacy with their failure to retain the good Gregory in his place. It is not a coincidence that the sentence itself is not directed to the bishops, but to Christ, who is addressed in the vocative as Χριστέ ἄναξ, underlining his lordship and the dependence of his servants. The concentration of the vocabulary of service and servitude for the bishops in the first part of II, 1, 10 corresponds to a unitary rhetorical strategy: the bishops are called to answer for their behaviour towards Gregory in light of their role as servants of God. They should be devoted to the Trinity (i.e., the Nicene faith)—line 2 implies—and therefore uphold Gregory’s Nicene preaching in Constantinople (9–13); they had been “good servants” of Christ the Lord when they had put Gregory in charge of the capital (15); but now, though still in the service of Christ (16), they are shamefully arguing among themselves to choose a substitute for Gregory (17).

Wrapping up this section, we can highlight one major similarity between Ephrem and Gregory, and many differences. Both poets represent the bishop in terms resembling Old Testament priests, and both poets associate this representation with the title

¹⁵⁰ Liddell/Scott/Jones 2011, 793, s.vv. θεράπων, θέραις.

¹⁵¹ εἰμι δ’ ἐγὼ θεράπων μὲν Ἐνναλίοιο ἀνακτος, / καὶ Μουσέων ἐρατὸν δῶρον ἐπιστάμενος (Archil. *frag.* 1); Μουσάων θεράπων ὀτρηνός (Aristoph. *av.* 909).

¹⁵² ἀλλ’, ὦ Φοίβου Δελφοὶ θέραιες (Eur. *Ion* 94).

¹⁵³ Ἄλλον ... Ἀρθέντ’ ἐξαπίνης θῶκον ἐπ’ ἀλλότριον, / Οὐ με Θεός τ’ ἐπέβησε, Θεοῦ τ’ ἀγαθοὶ θεράποντες; / Ταῦτα νόσος στυγερὴ, ταῦτα Θεοῦ θέραιες, / Οἱ δὴριν στονόεσαν ἐπ’ ἀλλήλοισιν ἔχοντες, / Χριστέ ἄναξ, οὐ μοι ταῦτα νοοῦσι φίλα. (II, 1, 10, 14–18).

of “priest” (ιερεύς/*kāhnā*). However, the memory of the Old Testament liturgy plays a different role in the two poets: if both of them tend to interpret Old Testament ritual purity in a moralising or spiritualising way, the proper “offering” of the new priesthood is intended differently, in that Ephrem interprets it as the Eucharist, whereas Gregory, though recognising the role of the Eucharist, asserts salvation of the souls as the ultimate offering of the bishop. Another difference is that Gregory employs the word ιερεύς only rarely, and always in association to this Old Testament imagery, while Ephrem employs *kāhnā* much more: he surely recognises its liturgical sense but does not limit the word to this function. “Priesthood” is more than sacrificial offering, and, as for Gregory, the bishop is not the only priest, since the inferior orders also participate in priesthood. However—and here lies another difference between Ephrem and Gregory—Ephrem seems to have employed a word to distinguish bishops from the more generic “priests”—that is, *kumrā*. Even if this is not attested elsewhere, nevertheless it seems to be the case here at CN 21, 5, 1. A final difference between the two writers is that Ephrem employs the word for “deacon” (*šammāšā*) for the bishop, not only in a liturgical sense—which clearly points to the ecclesiastical title of deacon—but also as a more generic term of servitude or service; Gregory does not employ the word “deacon” in our poems, and the terms of servitude referring to the bishop are not linked to the liturgical service. This and the different interpretation of Old Testament sacrifice by the poets demonstrates that liturgy is much more present in Ephrem’s idea of bishop than in Gregory’s. Probably, the liturgical context of performance (§1.2.1) influenced Ephrem’s language in this direction, whereas Gregory’s learned recitations lacked this powerful contextual pressure.

2.2 Metaphors

In the previous section, I analysed the simple nouns used to designate the bishop, beginning with the words that later become standard terms and moving towards more generic ones. In all these cases, save for the Syriac term *rēšā* (“head”), words were used in their proper sense. The question was how precisely they designated the episcopal office as opposed to other tasks or titles. For example, the Syriac *rabbā* originally meant “teacher”, “master”, and the Greek προστάτης means “patron”. Since the majority of these words had not acquired a specialised meaning of “bishop”, the usage of the one or the other by the poet highlighted a particular function or character of the episcopal office.

Yet the vocabulary to speak of bishops is much more varied than the simple terms examined, because the two poets enrich it with metaphors. Here, the main question becomes the vitality of such metaphors: which of these have retained their original meaning, and thus entail an authentic translation of meaning from one semantic field to the other, and which have become dead metaphors, and therefore specialised terms to talk about ecclesiastical roles. Two dead metaphors for the bishop (and the clergyman in general) are familiar even today—namely, that of shepherd (or pastor) and that of

father. Furthermore, the Bible provided the poets with a wealth of images to define the Christian leader: sometimes they have employed them; sometimes—and this is perhaps more significant—they have avoided them. However, the poets did not limit themselves to biblical images, but in various cases have drawn from contemporary culture and life to further enrich their language.

In the following sections I will analyse three important metaphors from the poems: shepherd imagery (§2.2.1), agricultural language (§2.2.2) and what I have called the “iconography of the bishop” (§2.2.3)—namely, all metaphors treating the bishop as a visual image of some sort. Finally, the fourth section (§2.2.4) will examine metaphors from both poets that do not occur so often as to require a separate treatment. The analysis was guided by two fundamental questions: first, whether the metaphor is already in the Bible in some form and how the poets have adapted (or ignored) the biblical use of the metaphor in their works; second, what the metaphor means—that is, whether the metaphor is still alive or dead, which traits of the various bishops it highlights and what purpose it serves in the wider economy of the poems. In every section I begin with the first question and move on to the second, treating Gregory and Ephrem separately or together depending on whether the points of contact between the two are sparser or more frequent. In the fourth section, I begin with biblically attested metaphors and treat the independent ones thereafter.

2.2.1 Shepherd

In the following section I will analyse the most important metaphor for the bishop, namely the “shepherd”/“pastor” imagery. First, I will present the biblical usage that serves as a model for both poets (§2.2.1.1). In this context, it is necessary to treat also the fisherman imagery, because the latter is associated with the apostles, and the bishops claimed to be the apostles’ heirs and descendants, whereas leaders in the Old Testament are normally allegorised through shepherd imagery. Then, I will define the semantic field of this image in Greek and Syriac, so that my criteria for categorising the texts as I did may be clearer. After this, the main part of the section is an analysis of the occurrences of this metaphor in our poems, first in Gregory’s (§2.2.1.2) and then in Ephrem’s (§2.2.1.3). In this analysis, I strove to answer two questions: First, were the words of this semantic field used in their proper sense by way of a living metaphor; or, instead, was the metaphor already dead, with the result that the words had come to properly mean “bishop”? Second, if and when this metaphor was still alive, what was its informative content, or, in other words, which traits of the bishop and his role is the metaphor supposed to express and visualise? In my discussion of Ephrem, the question arises about the meaning of the word *‘allānā*, which I answer in the last part of this section (§2.2.1.4).

2.2.1.1 The Bible: Shepherds and fishermen

The title “shepherd” and pastoral imagery are a commonplace for prelates, and since ancient times they had been employed for civil leaders. This is true for both of the foundational texts of Gregory’s and Ephrem’s literary universe: the Bible and Homer. The expression ποιμὴν λαῶν, for example, is regularly employed by Homer for Agamemnon, the chief of the Achaean army, and other heroes¹⁵⁴. Other similar usages of ποιμὴν with the objective genitive are attested in tragedy¹⁵⁵. Murray has noted that pastoral imagery is used of civic and political leaders also in ancient Mesopotamian literature¹⁵⁶, a background which could play a part in Ephrem’s imagery.

In this respect, the heritage of the Bible is more ambiguous. The Old Testament is quite straightforward: the shepherd metaphor is a favourite for religious as well as civic leaders, so that both priests and kings can be signified by the term. Single instances of pastoral imagery are countless, but the fundamental text is no doubt Hes. 34, God’s invective against Israel’s shepherds¹⁵⁷. The New Testament’s heritage is more complex: on one side, it continues the shepherd metaphor; on the other, for the apostles it prominently introduces the metaphor of fishing. The shepherd metaphor is conspicuously employed for Christ, most of all in the parable of the lost sheep and in the allegory of the good shepherd, which, referring back to Ezekiel’s prophecy, is tantamount to a self-declaration of the role of Messiah¹⁵⁸. It is perhaps of special importance for the bishop’s titles that 1Petr. 2:25 calls Jesus ὁ ποιμὴν καὶ ἐπίσκοπος τῶν ψυχῶν ἡμῶν. Sometimes the term is used also of the leaders of the community, less in a messianic sense, as was the case for Jesus, and more in line with OT usage¹⁵⁹. The remarkably new metaphor of the “fishers of men” goes back to Jesus’ calling of his first disciples as narrated in the Synoptic Gospels (Mt. 4:19; Mc. 1:17; Lc. 5:10) and is expanded by the parable of the fish-net at Mt. 13:47–50. These two metaphors are facing each other in the epilogue of the Gospel of John, chapter 21. The chapter combines a miraculous draught of fish with a dialogue between Christ and Peter, in which Jesus gives Peter three similar commands requiring him to shepherd Jesus’s followers: “Feed my lambs. . . . Tend my sheep. . . . Feed my sheep” (Joh. 21:2–8 and 15–17). Raymond Brown is aware of this double symbolism in the chapter, which is justified—in his mind—by a difference of substance: while the

154 For all Homeric occurrences, see Cunliffe/Dee 2012, 334, s.v. ποιμὴν. For a comparison of Homer’s usage with Mesopotamian usage see West 1999, 226–227; at 533, West discusses occurrences of the image referred to gods.

155 Liddell/Scott/Jones 2011, 1430, s.v. ποιμὴν.

156 Murray 2006, 187.

157 Cf. Jer. 23:1–6; Zach. 11:4–17; some single occurrences: 1Reg. 22:17; Jer. 2:8; 3:15; 10:21; 31:10; referred to God: Gen. 48:15; 49:24; Jes. 40:11; Ps. 23; 80:2; 95:7. Ezekiel’s text served as the *Vorlage* for Augustine’s homily *On Pastors* (Aug. *serm.* 46).

158 The lost sheep: Mt. 18:12–14; Lc. 15:4–7; the good shepherd: Joh. 10:1–18. Passing references at Mt. 9:36; 10:6; 15:24; Mc. 14:27.

159 Act. 20:28–29; Eph. 4:11; 1Petr. 5:1–4.

draught of fish in the first half symbolises the mission of the apostles, Jesus's reference to the sheep implies a role of care and guidance entrusted to Peter¹⁶⁰.

This contrast between fisherman and shepherd imagery is already clear to Maruthas of Maypherkat, writing between the end of the fourth century and the first decade of the fifth. In his homily for the Octave of Easter, the preacher asks why during the old dispensation God appointed shepherds as leaders of the people—the preacher brings the examples of Moses guarding Jethro's sheep, David, Jacob's sons, and the prophet Amos—whereas Jesus in the New Testament chose fishermen as apostles. The difference, which Marutha finds at first only in the profession of prophets and apostles, reflects a different task, connected with fundamental differences in the Old and New Alliance. The shepherd is entrusted with a closed group of animals, which are also marked, and he works in a fixed location: his profession reflects the close and defined group of Israel, the target of the prophets' ministry. The fisherman, on the other hand, has no fixed target, because he does not know what he is going to catch as he throws the net. Any kind of fish can enter his net, and indeed Peter's net contained *all kinds* of fish. Similarly, the apostles venture into the unknown, and their target is not fixed and marked beforehand¹⁶¹.

It is interesting to see how this ambivalent biblical heritage is reflected in our texts, even when there are not any signs that the poet is conscious of such an ambivalence. Since the bishops are the successors of the apostles—a belief displayed by both Gregory and Ephrem—it would make sense to apply to them the same imagery as that which is applied to the apostles. Furthermore, authors (such as Ephrem and Gregory) who emphasise the novelty brought about by Christianity in respect to Judaism and who have found in the New Testament Jesus's solemn self-styling as the messianic shepherd might have wanted to avoid the shepherd imagery for the church's clergy. Yet what is found in the texts is the exact opposite: Gregory and Ephrem employ often shepherd imagery, and rarely that of the fishermen. And even when they employ this imagery, it seems to have a different function than it has in the New Testament.

Gregory never refers to a bishop as a fisher in our poems. The only time he discusses the apostles as fishers, at II, 1, 12, 192–224, he does so by taking “fishermen” in a very concrete sense. He is anticipating an objection that may be raised to his idea that bishops should be chosen based on their theological proficiency (more on this at §3.1.3.3); an opponent of the idea might well say that the apostles, the models of the bishops, demonstrate just the opposite of such proficiency, because they were chosen among “publicans and fishermen” (τελῶναι καὶ ῥαλιεῖς) and yet managed to evangelise the whole world. Gregory's answer may be resumed through the closing lines (222–223): “Peter was the chief of the disciples, but he was Peter / not as fisherman but because full

¹⁶⁰ Brown 1999, 1369 (double symbolism); 1386–1387 (on the fishing symbolising the mission).

¹⁶¹ Kmosko 1903, 412–414; Murray 2006, 177–178.

of zeal”¹⁶². In this passage, Peter’s job is mentioned as just a job, because its demeaning nature presupposes that Peter was not theologically proficient: the following line mentions the fishing net (τὸ δίκτυον) only as a metonymy of the job and of its humility¹⁶³. Nevertheless, Gregory knows the symbolic meaning of the apostles’ profession, because in the same passage, at lines 194–195, he refers to it¹⁶⁴. He just avoids applying it to the bishops. Here there is something deeper to unpack: it is true that Gregory’s retort against the example of the apostles as ignorant forerunners of bishops is based on the delineation of a kind of knowledge different from the one commonly intended by the educated classes of the time. However, his description of the deeds of the apostles (II, 1, 12, 194–195 and 238–244) and of those of the bishops (for example, II, 1, 12, 184–188) are also remarkably different from each other: he praises the apostles for evangelising *outside* the Christian community, while he calls the bishops to preserve existing communities in a time of doctrinal confusion¹⁶⁵. In other words, Gregory attributes to the apostles their traditional task of propagating the faith, and to the bishops their equally traditional task of governing and transmitting the faith. In Maruthas’s words, the apostles’ mission was addressed to everyone and no one in particular, whereas the bishops’ ministry, like that of the prophets, targets the religious community. As we will see, Gregory does not lack a concept of the bishop’s role in converting pagans, but this concept does not entail a specific or planned action in this direction: Gregory’s church is much less preoccupied with proselytising than it is with preserving existing communities.

Ephrem employs the term “fisherman” (*ṣayyādā*) only once for the bishops, at CN 19, 10, 10, where God is acclaimed during the inauguration of bishop Abraham: “Blessed is he who chose you as our fisherman!” The image caps a stanza with two important references to fishing: at CN 19, 10, 4, the bishop is exhorted to “entice” (*garreg*) the poor, but with a verb used also for the baiting of fish, and whose active participle in the first form, *gārgā*, is employed as a substantive meaning “bait”¹⁶⁶; lines 7–9 are three couples of objects and instrumental complements, all governed by the verb *ṣawwed*, meaning “to chase” or “to fish”. Here, the bishop should “fish” sinners (“the bad”, *bīšē*; “the rapacious”, *bāzōzē*; “the impure”, *ṭamma’ē*), thanks to good Christians (“the good”,

162 Πέτρος μαθητῶν ἄκρος, ἀλλὰ πέτρος ἦν / Οὐχ ὡς σαγηνεὺς, ἀλλ’ ὅτι ζήλου πλέως (II, 1, 12, 222–223). The word σαγηνεὺς is very rare and, even though it is used in poetry (*Anth. Gr.* 7, 276, 1 and 295, 3), it is not exclusively or prevalently poetic (Plut. *vit. Pomp.* 73, 3; Diod. Sic. 9, 3, 2; 13, 2).

163 Πείθει με τιμᾶν καὶ τὸ δίκτυον ὁ τρόπος. (II, 1, 12, 224). Gregory employs the metonymy of the instrument of a profession instead of the profession in order to increase the demeaning connotation of said profession: see §5.2.1.

164 Κόσμον σαγηνεύσαντες εὐτελεῖ λόγῳ / Καὶ τοὺς σοφοὺς λαβόντες εἴσω δικτύων (II, 1, 12, 194–195).

165 Καὶ νῦν μάλιστα ἐν ζάλῃ γλωσσαλγίας / Καὶ τῶν μεγίστων ἀστέων καὶ συλλόγων, / Ὡν καὶ μενόντων ἀσφαλῶς κέρδος πλεόν, / Καὶ μὴ μενόντων ἢ βλάβη πληρεστέρα (II, 1, 12, 184–188); Πόθεν βασιλεῖς τε καὶ πόλεις καὶ συλλόγους, / Κατηγοροῦντας, εὐθύνοντας ἐν λόγοις, / Πρὸ βημάτων τε καὶ θεάτροις ἐν μέσοις, / Σοφοὺς, νομικοὺς, Ἑλληνας ὠφρυωμένους, / Δημηγοροῦντας, εὐστομοῦντες καίρια / Ἐπειθον, ἐξήλεγχον ἐν παρρησίᾳ, / Εἰ μὴ λόγου μετεῖχον, οὗ σὺ μὴ δίδως; (238–244).

166 Payne Smith 1879–1901, 773–774, s.vv. .

ṭābē; “the giving”, *yāhōbē*; “the chaste”, *qaddīšē*)¹⁶⁷. Ephrem certainly knew the symbolism behind the apostles’ fishing trade, as he demonstrates in *hymn. virg.* 32, 8, a stanza completely built on this idea. However, the sense of the metaphor here is different, because the action of the bishop is not explicitly addressed to outsiders or pagans and does not entail a missionary movement. Moreover, Ephrem develops the imagery quite differently than the Gospels, because he is underlining a different trait of the image of fishing, which must correspond to a different trait of the bishop: the fishing nets and the variety (in Luke’s version) or quantity (in John) of fish symbolise the universality and unity of the apostolic mission; the boats moving in these passages symbolise the roaming of the apostles. Ephrem, on the contrary, does not mention boats nor nets, but only the bait as instrumental to the fishing. This detail, together with the list of different kinds of people and sinners, invites us to read the metaphor as describing two requirements of the bishop’s style in approaching different types of sinners—namely, an individualised approach, giving to each what might benefit them, and, consequently, an attracting approach, designed to entice the person, not to scare her off. This piece of advice is repeated in the following stanza, there with a medical metaphor (on which, see §2.2.4.7)¹⁶⁸. For these reasons, even though an allusion to the Gospels cannot be excluded from the passage, one must admit that in *CN* 19, 10 it is very faint and fundamentally changed in its symbolic meaning: even when the bishop is called “fisher”, he is so in a sense that is specific to his role, as the skilful “physician of souls” (to quote Gregory), knowing the right bait for each sinner; therefore, he is still firmly bound to his community and to a role of guidance, not of mission¹⁶⁹.

Once the preeminence of shepherd imagery over fisherman metaphors inspired by the Gospels has been assessed, the next question is: How much of this metaphoric field is still alive, and how much of it is stereotyped and frozen? In this case, the object of inquiry is not just a word, “shepherd” (ποιμήν/*rā’yā*), but a whole semantic field, which is allegorically transferred to the language of church and community. This is

¹⁶⁷ “Do not overlook the great, / do not despair of the weak, // soften and instruct the rich, / bait [*garreg*] and win the poor, // with the harsh couple the patient, / and the long suffering to the wrathful, // draw [*sawwed*] the bad with the good, / and the greedy with the giving, // and the impure by hand of the holy. / **Blessed is he who chose you as our fisherman** [*ṣayyādā*]!” (*CN* 19, 10). The same imagery, in a negative sense, in a line by Gregory: Καὶ χαλκὸς λοχῶν πικρὴν νεπέδεσσιν ἔδωδὴν (II, 1, 13, 163). Bad bishops are as baits, concealing death in the appearance of food.

¹⁶⁸ “Take with you myriads of drugs, / rise and go among the sick, // to the weak offer a drug, / and to the one who’s healthy preservation; // do not give any drug / that may not suit the illness, // but apply abundantly any help, / that may bring the illness to recovery, // even you must learn experience. / **Blessed is he who toiled on our wounds!**” (*CN* 19, 11).

¹⁶⁹ That the imagery of fishing would not appear in these fourth-century authors for the bishops should not surprise us, when we think how much the Council of Nicaea (see canons 15 and 16) and later of Constantinople (canon 2) emphasised the link between bishop and city, in keeping with a tendency of the church hierarchy to define itself more and more around the city and its relationship with the Empire and its environs (see Barone-Adesi 1998).

very clear in Syriac, where, besides the term for “shepherd”, there is a synonym that may also identify “musterers”, or subordinate shepherds under the authority of a head shepherd (*ʿallānā*), a verb for “feed”, another for “tend” (*rʿā*, whence the name for shepherd, *rāʿā*), and a whole wealth of words to mean “sheep” (differentiating sex and age) and “flock”¹⁷⁰. Moreover, different words identify the shepherd’s crook and the pastureland¹⁷¹. Over time, many words of this semantic field took on a technical meaning in Christian language, without ever losing their literal sense: *rāʿyā* was both “shepherd” and “pastor”, being applied to bishops and patriarchs, and *ʿallānā* became much more associated with church hierarchy than sheep tending¹⁷²; *marʿitā* is equally the flock, the pasture, and the ecclesiastic diocese; *ḥuṭrā*, *šabbuqtā*, and *mōrānītā* were used for the shepherd’s crook but were also synonymous with *taqdā*, the bishop’s “crosier”; the words for “sheepfold” and “pen”, *gezrā*, *dayrā*, and *tyārā*, became also terms for “monastery” and “cloister”.

Greek has a great lexical variety, too: besides ποιμήν, the shepherd may be called νομεύς¹⁷³, the words for “sheep” move from generic πρόβατον or κτήνος (which can also identify other cattle), to μῆλον or θρέμμα (for sheep and goats alike), to οἷς and ἀρήν (the latter meaning also “lamb”), to terms specific for the age and sex of the animal¹⁷⁴. Naturally, all these words form derivatives and composites with prepositions or other semantic roots. There are also many synonyms for the flock, the shepherd’s staff, and the sheepfold¹⁷⁵. Among these many words, some have entered church language through metaphor, apart from the frequently employed ποιμήν: the bishop might be called νομεύς or κριός (“ram”, as most prominent in the flock), the faithful are sometimes πρόβατα, sometimes a ποίμνη or a ποίμνιον (“flock”), more often θρέμματα, and the church is called figuratively αὐλή or σῆκος (“sheepfold”), whereas the bishop’s crosier and the shepherd’s crook share the name ῥάβδος; sometimes the church or a

170 Sheep: *ʿerbā*, *neqyā* (sheep, but also ewe), *qenyānā* (corresponding to Gr. κτήνη, generic word for cattle), *ʿemrā* (lamb), *paʿrā/parā* (lamb and ewe in the feminine), *barḥā* and *dekrā* (ram); flock: *ʿānā*, *marʿitā*, *rʿitā* (both also “pasture”); sheepfold: *dayrā*, *dārā/dārtā*, *gezrā*, *tyārā* (generic word for any delimited space, as a court, an atrium, a hall), *marbōʿitā*, *rbāʿā*. This does not take into account terms specific to cattle, goats and horses.

171 For pasture, besides the already mentioned *marʿitā* and *rʿitā*, and the Greek loanword *nōmē*, we have the rare *nāwītā* (Payne Smith 1879–1901, 2319, s.v. ܢܐܘܝܬܐ, but not with this meaning, which is given in Sokoloff 2009, 898, s.v. ܢܐܘܝܬܐ), *bēt-reʿyā* and *margā*, a Persian loanword meaning also “meadow”. For the shepherd’s crook: *maqʿālā*, *šebṭā*, *ḥuṭrā*, *šabbuqtā*, *mōrānītā*.

172 Payne Smith 1879–1901, 2879, 3945, s.vv. ܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ.

173 Other synonyms: ἀρηνοβοσκός, μηλάτης, μηλοβοτήρ and μηλοβότης, μηλονόμης and μηλονομεύς. There are also composites with preposition, such as ἀρχιποίμην or ἐπιποιμήν.

174 Lamb: ἀμνός (ewe: ἀμνή, ἀμνίς, or ἀμνάς), ἀρήν, φάγιλος (when it can be eaten); ram: κάρνος, κριός.

175 Flock: πῶν, ποίμνη/ποίμνιον, νόμευμα, κτήνη (pl., as Syr. *qenyānā* “possession” becomes its metonymy, cattle; Latin shows the opposite process in the word *pecunia*). Shepherd’s crook: καλαῦροψ, λαγώβολον, ῥάβδος, χαίος/χαῖον. Sheepfold: αὐλή (generic as Syr. *tyārā*), μάνδρα, δστριμον, σηκός. There are also many synonyms for “meadow”, “pasture”: βοτάνη, εἰαμενίη, λειμών, νέμος, πῖσος, χόρτος. As before, the terms related to ox cattle and horses are omitted.

monastery is compared to a λειμών, a meadow, and μάνδρα, “sheepfold”, is used of the church, the Jewish temple, a heretic sect, and a monastery¹⁷⁶.

2.2.1.2 In Gregory

In our texts, Gregory shows a great flexibility in employing the shepherd metaphor, since sometimes the metaphor is clearly alive and developed, but other times the term ποιμήν seems almost like a synonym for ἐπίσκοπος. A case of developed metaphor occurs in the hexameters of II, 1, 13, 141–142: “I am wearied by the wolves [λύκοις] hurting the flock [ποιμνης], / with the shepherds [ποιμέσι] I strove long”¹⁷⁷. Here, the word ποιμήν is used to signify the bishops, but in the same context the community is referred to as a “flock” (ποιμνη) rather than as a “church”, and the external enemies are called wolves (λύκοι), so that, even if ποιμνη could have been intended as a *terminus technicus* for the Christian congregation, the presence of “wolves” makes clear that the words ποιμήν and ποιμνη preserve their literal sense and are employed by way of metaphor. The idea of a flock endangered from without by wolves and from within by bad shepherds has deep biblical roots: Hes. 34 and Joh. 10 are the *Vorlage* against which Gregory presents his efforts in church politics. This is part of his broader strategy of representing himself as *alter Christus*¹⁷⁸. On the other hand, at II, 1, 12, 136 and 747 Gregory employs ποιμήν without referencing other terms of the semantic field of sheep herding, so that these usages may be safely interpreted as frozen metaphors, not dissimilar from the title ἐπίσκοπος in their connotation¹⁷⁹.

The passage at II, 1, 12, 694 is less clear: here the term ποιμήν is an antonomasia for the patriarch Jacob. However, the example of Jacob is inserted in the broader context

176 The list of Syriac synonyms have been retrieved querying with key-words “shepherd”; “sheep”; “lamb”; “ewe”; “ram”; “flock”; “sheepfold”; “fold”; “pasture”; “meadow”; “crook”; “staff” Beth Mardutho’s *Sedra* (<https://sedra.bethmardutho.org/lexeme/get/bygloss>, accessed: 09.12.20, 16:49), then confronting the results with Payne Smith 1879–1901. The same keywords have been queried into the “English-to-Greek” search engine of Perseus (<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/search>, accessed: 09.12.20, 16:51). The results have been compared to Lampe 1961 to find ecclesiastical usages of the terms.

177 Κέκμηκα λύκοις δηλήμοσι ποιμνης, / Ποιμέσι μαρνάμενος δηρὸν χρόνον (II, 1, 13, 141–142).

178 See §1.3.2; §5.1.2 and Hofer 2013, 178.

179 Ἀλλ’ οἱ καλοὶ τε κάγαθοι συμποίμενες / Φθόνῳ ῥαγέντες (ἴστε τοὺς Θρασωνίδας / Οὐ γὰρ φέρει παίδευσιν ἢ ἀγροικία) / Καὶ τὴν ἔμην λαβόντες ἔκγονον πόνων / Ἀρρώστιαν συνεργὸν . . . (II, 1, 12, 136–140); “Ταῦτ’ οὖν ὁρῶν ἔκαμνες εὐρεῖν ποιμένα; / Ὡς μικρὸν ἐσπούδαζες Ἐγκαλύπτομαι. / Ὡσπερ λογιστὴν ἐσκόπεις τὸν προστάτην. / Κόπρων μέλει σοι, μειζόνων δ’ ἐμοὶ λόγος. / Ἐν ἔστω τοῦδ’ ἔργον ἱερέως, καὶ μόνον . . . (747–751). Note in the first quotation the use of συμποίμενες, a term which stresses the parity and collegiality of the bishops: the “horizontal” relationship between bishops is the fundamental theme of Gregory’s poems, whereas Ephrem is more concerned about the relationship between bishop and community or to the “vertical” relationship of the bishop with his predecessors and successor. In the second quotation, it is clear that ποιμήν is just another synonym for ἐπίσκοπος because in a few lines, Gregory employs ποιμήν, προστάτης and ἱερέως as variations of the same subject.

of an invective against (probably) Maximus, Gregory's archenemy. Here, Gregory references Jacob's and Laban's pact to share the newly born sheep of Laban's flocks:

Πῆξόν τι καὶ σὺ τῶν ἐμῶν, ἂν του λάβῃ (690)
 Τῶν μαλθακωτέρων τε καὶ νόθων ἐμοί.
 Τούτων τί ἂν γένοιτο ἐνδικώτερον;
 Ἔστω Λάβαν τὰ λευκά· τὰπίσημα δέ
 Τοῦ πολλὰ μοχθήσαντός ἐστι ποιμένος,
 Νυξὶν παγέντος, ἡλίῳ κεκαυμένου. (695)
 (II, 1, 12, 690–695)

But rip you too something mine, if you can find something (690)
 too feeble or fake in me.
 What would be more right than this?
 Let Laban keep the white flocks, but the spotted ones
 are of the shepherd who has long laboured,
 frozen by nights and baked by the sun. (695)

According to Meier, the example of Jacob and Laban is a reference to the true and the false bishops, and the “spotted sheep”, who belong to the true bishop, would be the baptised. This interpretation can be supported by two clues: first, the ring-composition of section 658–695, whereby the idea presented at the beginning—that the unworthy should not administer what is not his (baptised people)—comes to fruition here at the end through the biblical allusion; second, the traditional interpretation of the “spotted sheep” of Gen. 30¹⁸⁰. However, Meier's reading deviates too much from the line of Gregory's argument. First of all, if there is a ring-composition between 658 and 695, then it does not suggest that the biblical example should be interpreted in relation to the bishop and his community. To the contrary, the theme of the first lines of this passage is hypocrisy: “maintain either the luxury or the mop! / Why do you strive to possess both what's yours and what's not?”¹⁸¹ Gregory laments Maximus's hypocrisy, since the man presents himself as an ascetic and a cynic and yet does not avoid mundane pleasures. Maximus feigns primacy in the fields Gregory sees as his own, most of all asceticism. Gregory, on the contrary, would be happy if only Maximus would strip him of his shortcomings and weaknesses. Therefore, Gregory is confronting Maximus on a personal level, raising doubts about the ascetic and moral credentials of his rival. He does not mention the office of bishop or baptism, making the reference to the traditional exegesis of Gen. 30 irrelevant to the passage. Moreover, such a reference would not make sense with the example: If the point of the argument were leadership over baptised people, why mention Laban's white sheep? Following Meier's reading, white sheep would be unbaptised people, implying that Maximus should become bishop of the unbaptised or perhaps evangelise them. On the contrary, the point of this comparison is to establish

¹⁸⁰ Meier 1989, 151–152.

¹⁸¹ Ἐπίσχες ἢ τρυφῆν ἢ τὰς τρίχας. / Τί καὶ τὰ μὴ σὰ καὶ τὰ σὰ ζητεῖς ἔχειν; (II, 1, 12, 660–661).

a distinction between two sets of behaviours—Gregory’s virtuous one and Maximus’s wicked one—and to argue that all virtuous behaviours should belong to the virtuous, and all wicked to the wicked¹⁸².

Finally, a good example of Gregory’s ambivalent use of the word “shepherd” to mean the bishops is found at II, 1, 12, 81, where the poet narrates how he was chosen to preach in Constantinople:

II, 1, 12, 79–82

Εἴτ’ οὖν τὸ θεῖον Πνεῦμα, εἴθ’ ἁμαρτάδες,
Ὡς ἂν δίκας τίσαιμι τῆς ἐπάρσεως
Τὸ δ’ οὖν πρόδηλον σύλλογοί τε ποιμένων (80)
Καὶ λαὸς ὀρθόδοξος, ἀλλ’ οὐπὼ πλατὺς,

Maybe the Holy Spirit, maybe my sins,
that I may atone for my conceit.
This, however, was clear: that the assemblies of shepherds (80)
and the orthodox people, not yet so widespread

II, 1, 11, 595–596

ἔπεμψεν ἡμᾶς ἡ χάρις τοῦ πνεύματος (595)
πολλῶν καλούντων ποιμένων καὶ θρεμμάτων

at the instance of many pastors and their flocks, (595)
the grace of the Spirit sent me
(transl. Meehan 1987, 94)

II, 1, 10, 14–15

θῶκον ἐπ’ ἀλλότριον,
Οὐ με Θεός τ’ ἐπέβησε, Θεοῦ τ’ ἀγαθοὶ θεράποντες; (15)

a throne not his own,
upon which God had brought me, and God’s good worshippers (15)

The agency is divided between three subjects: God, the bishops, and the Nicene community in Constantinople. The agency of the people is underplayed in II, 1, 10, where the point is less the reconstruction of Gregory’s call to Constantinople and more the defence of his election to the episcopate (θῶκον) in the city. At II, 1, 12, 81, the bishops are called ποιμένες, “shepherds”, but the community is identified with the ordinary λαός (“people”). In this instance, ποιμήν seems not to be used as a metaphor, but as a simple

¹⁸² This might seem paradoxical, and it is so, but it is better understood if we compare this passage with II, 1, 11, 791–798: Καὶνόν τιν’ εἶπεῖν ἐν κακοῖς λόγον θέλω / ἐχρῆν τὸν αὐτὸν πᾶσιν εἶναι δὴ τρόπον, / ἢ τὸν κακῶν ἀπειρον ἢ τὸν ποικίλον. / ἥττον γὰρ ἐβλάπτοντ’ ἂν ἐκ τινῶν τινες / ἀντιζυγούντων ἢ συνεστώτων τρόπων / νῦν δ’ εἰσὶ θήρα τῶν κακῶν οἱ βελτίους. / τίς ἢ τοσαύτη σύγχυσις τοῦ πλάσματος; / ὥς σφόδρ’ ἀνίσως ἐζύγημεν ἐκ Θεοῦ. Gregory is conscious of the paradoxicality of his assertions (Καὶνόν τινα λόγον), but still affirms that bad people should appear bad too, and should be bad in everything, for the sake of good people. The idea is motivated by Maximus’ affair (see §5.2.4).

title. This is confirmed by II, 1, 10, 15, where the same ποιμένες become θεράποντες, demonstrating that names can vary even when the poet is describing similar things. One could object that the difference between ποιμένες II, 1, 12 and θεράποντες at II, 1, 10 is due to the different metres and genres of the poems, but ποιμήν recurs also at II, 1, 13, 142, that is in the same metre as II, 1, 10. On the other hand, II, 1, 11, 596, describing the same event as II, 1, 12, 79–82, has θρέμματα instead of λαός; now, θρέμματα is used sometimes for Christians, but its literal and more widespread meaning is “cattle”. In this case, the shepherd metaphor has been revived. This suggests that ποιμήν was employed as a normal title for the bishop, but it was still possible to revitalise the metaphor.

Even though it is impossible to draw a perfect line, a research of all occurrences of ποιμήν in Gregory’s poetry reveals the following tendency: while in iambs the word is employed indifferently alone as a title equivalent to ἐπίσκοπος or is coupled with λαός or δῆμος and thus highlights the leadership of the bishop or is used as a living metaphor with words like ποιμνη or λύκοι, in hexameters and elegiacs there is a stronger tendency to employ ποιμήν in its original sense and only by means of a metaphor applying it to the bishop¹⁸³. This might account for the use of θεοῦ θεράποντες at II, 1, 10, 15, where, since the reference to the community was absent, the poet could not employ the shepherd metaphor. As a general tendency, valid for both iambs and hexameters, ποιμήν identifies the bishop in his relationship with the community; it does not identify the bishop taken by himself or the position of the bishop¹⁸⁴.

¹⁸³ Iambic usages of ποιμήν as title: II, 1, 11, 56; 858; II, 1, 12, 136; 747; II, 1, 68, 47; with λαός or δῆμος: II, 1, 11, 661; 1070; II, 1, 12, 81; II, 1, 23, 23; II, 1, 68, 59; as a metaphor: II, 1, 11, 596; II, 1, 30, 186; II, 1, 68, 101. The occurrences at II, 1, 11, 847.912; 924 are metaphorical, but there the invective against the “cynic” (i.e., “dog”), Maximus, prompts a contrast between dog and shepherd, cynic and bishop: it is a different metaphor, with a different meaning. In hexametric poetry, the majority of occurrences is metaphorical: II, 1, 13, 142; II, 1, 16, 64; II, 1, 19, 102; II, 1, 45, 218; *Anth. Gr.* 8, 17–18. Exceptions: *Anth. Gr.* 8, 15 (with λαός); II, 1, 102, 9 (used as title). Interestingly, both exceptions are elegiacs and from epitaphs.

¹⁸⁴ Sometimes the metaphor is alluded to, without actually employing the word ποιμήν. At II, 1, 12, 38 for example, Gregory speaks of evil bishops alluding to Jesus’ saying at Mt. 7:15 on false prophets, that they are wolf in sheep’s clothings: τὸ κώδιον παρέλθε, τὸν λύκον βλέπε. A similar image at II, 1, 13, 162: Διπλὸς ἐστὶν ἕκαστος, οἷς λύκον ἀμφικαλύπτων. At II, 1, 12, 115–116, Gregory describes his own exploit in Constantinople and, though he does not use the word ποιμήν, it is clear that he presents himself as a shepherd in the best biblical tradition, defending his flock against wolves and giving it water: Κέκλημ’, ἐπηξα λαὸν ἐν μέσῳ λύκων, / Ποίμνην ἄνδρῶν τοῖς λόγοις ἐπήγασα. In this case, the metaphor is wholly meant in a doctrinal sense, i.e., Gregory reinforced the faith (ἐπηξα) of the Nicene community (λαὸν) living in an Arian city (ἐν μέσῳ λύκων) and educated through preaching (τοῖς λόγοις ἐπήγασα) a community (ποίμνην) in need of better instructions on dogmatic matters. It is curious that Gregory employs the verb πήγνυμι inside a flock-metaphor, because this reminds us of the relative stability conjured up by the shepherd metaphor compared to the fisherman metaphor. Finally, at II, 1, 12, 574, there is a cowherd metaphor, expressing how difficult would be for an unworthy bishop to lead a saintly faithful: Μὴ βοῦς ἐλαύνῃς κρείσσονας βοηλάτου (on this line see Meier 1989, 135).

2.2.1.3 In Ephrem

As in Gregory, also in Ephrem the name “shepherd” (*rā’ā*) is found as a frozen metaphor. In these instances, *rā’ā* is a mere substitute of *rēšā* or *rabbā*. Two examples of this usage are found in our poems:

ܐܢܝܢ ܕܥܠܝܢ ܕܥܠܝܢ ܕܥܠܝܢ ܕܥܠܝܢ ܕܥܠܝܢ ܕܥܠܝܢ ܕܥܠܝܢ ܕܥܠܝܢ	ܐܢܝܢ ܕܥܠܝܢ ܕܥܠܝܢ 14 ܕܥܠܝܢ ܕܥܠܝܢ ܕܥܠܝܢ ܕܥܠܝܢ ܕܥܠܝܢ ܕܥܠܝܢ 185
... 19	
ܐܢܝܢ ܕܥܠܝܢ ܕܥܠܝܢ ܐܢܝܢ ܕܥܠܝܢ ܕܥܠܝܢ (CN 16, 14; 19)	ܐܢܝܢ ܕܥܠܝܢ ܕܥܠܝܢ ܐܢܝܢ ܕܥܠܝܢ ܕܥܠܝܢ ܐܢܝܢ ܕܥܠܝܢ ܕܥܠܝܢ 186

The two stanzas are concerned with the succession of bishops in Nisibis (Jacob, Babu, and Valgash). In stanza 14, the bishops are called “shepherds,” “teachers,” and “fathers” in lines 3–6. These three lines are clearly built in a synonymic parallelism; therefore, in this instance the three names *rā’awātā*, *mallpānē*, and *’abāhē* are to be intended as synonyms, stripped of their original meaning and employed as variations of the word *rēšā*, for “bishop”, highlighting its leadership function (see §3.1.3–4). In stanza 19, Nisibis speaks in the first person of her development, presenting herself as a growing child. In the previous stanza (18), the bishop was called *’abā*, “father”, in keeping with this personification. Here, however, the same bishop is called “shepherd” (*rā’yā*), and, since the words *ṭalyūtā* (“infancy”) and *laymūtā* (“youth”), referring to Nisibis, are used only for human beings, it would be absurd to retain the name “shepherd” in its literal sense: consequently, it must be used as a generic term for “bishop”. A similar semantic shift happened to the word *mar’itā*, which is ordinarily employed to mean “diocese”. However, all usages of the word in this sense given by Payne Smith are later than Ephrem¹⁸⁷. And yet Ephrem seems to know this derived meaning for *mar’itā*:

ܐܢܝܢ ܕܥܠܝܢ ܕܥܠܝܢ ܐܢܝܢ ܕܥܠܝܢ ܕܥܠܝܢ ܐܢܝܢ ܕܥܠܝܢ ܕܥܠܝܢ 188 (CN 14, 20)	ܐܢܝܢ ܕܥܠܝܢ ܕܥܠܝܢ ܐܢܝܢ ܕܥܠܝܢ ܕܥܠܝܢ ܐܢܝܢ ܕܥܠܝܢ ܕܥܠܝܢ
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185 “Look then how God / framed my generations // through the pastors [*b-rā’awātā*] I had, / and through the teachers [*b-mallpānē*] he gave me, // and through the fathers [*b-’abāhē*] he numbered for me.”

186 “When I was lifted from the ages / of infancy and youth [*ṭalyūtā wa-’laymūtā*], // the former terror passed, / passed the following fear, // and he gave me a mild pastor [*rā’yā bassīmā*].”

187 Payne Smith 1879–1901, 3948, s.v. ܐܢܝܢ.

188 “Of the first [bishop], who begot the diocese [*d-īled mar’itā*], / his bosom kept her infancy [*yallūdūt-āh*], // the middle with his glad countenance / praised and gladdened her childhood [*ṭalyūt-āh*], // the last with his solemn countenance / inspires awe to her youth [*la-’laymūt-āh*].”

ܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
 ܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
 ܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
 (CN 19, 14, 4–9)

...
 ܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
 ܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
 ܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
 189 ܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ

In the first example (CN 14, 20) Ephrem personifies again the community of Nisibis: again we find terms like *ʿlaymūtā* or *ṭalyūtā*, suggesting a human metaphor, and this time the phrase “the first [bishop] who begot the *marʿitā*” excludes the literal meaning of the word *marʿitā* as “flock”, for the image of a bishop begetting a whole flock of sheep would be absurd. At CN 19, 14, Ephrem argues that collectives are shaped by the example of their leaders. An obvious example is the king with his army (7), and the same mechanism plays a role in church life. If in Ephrem’s example *mašrītā* (“army”) is paired with *malkā* (“king”), then the name of a religious group should be paired with *kāhnā*. This means that, in this context, *marʿitā* cannot have preserved its literal sense, and must mean “congregation”, “parish,” or “diocese”. These are not the only places where Ephrem employs the word *marʿitā* with this meaning¹⁹⁰. To understand the semantic values of *marʿitā* in Ephrem’s language, as opposed to other terms with the same original meaning, such as *ʾānā*, we may compare it to English “flock” as opposed to, for example, “herd”: both terms retain the original meaning of “group of sheep or goats controlled by humans”, but “flock” is also habitually employed to identify a

189 “The church is like a mirror, // which, like the countenance of its beholder, / accordingly, wears his shapes, // for, like the king such his host, / and like the priest, such his parish [*w-a(y)k kāhnā ʿāp marʿit-eh*], // each is shaped by them after themselves.”

190 See: “Three priests dazzling / in likeness of the two luminaries, // In shifting transmitted one to the next / throne, orders and diocese [*kursyā w-ʿidā w-marʿitā*].” (CN 13, 1, 1–4, here *marʿitā* is grouped among typical attributes of the bishop); “yet, since you had no spouse [*ba(r)t-zawgā*] / like was Sarah for Abraham, // here, your spouse is your diocese [*hā marʿit-āk ba(r)t-zawg-āk*]! / Rear her children with your fidelity;” (CN 19, 1, 3–6, here *marʿitā* is again used inside a longer family metaphor; therefore, it is highly unlikely that the image is that of the flock of sheep). Other instances are more dubious, because, though the sentence in which they appear seems to require the derived sense, in the same stanza a reference to shepherding may activate the metaphor: “like that merchant [*taggārā*] of our flock [*marʿit-an*], / who multiplied the talent of your doctrine, // then parted and went to your haven: / I will speak of his musterer [*ʿallān-eh*], // who became head of the flock [*marʿitā*]” (CN 17, 1, 3–7, here the name recurs two times but, while at 7 it is clearly intended as a metaphor, as demonstrated by *ʿallānā* at 6, the occurrence at 3, with the bishop called “merchant”, seems to require the derived sense; unless Ephrem is introducing the metaphor already there); “Me too, the dregs of the flock [*šēhlā d-marʿitā*], / I did not skimp on what was due, // I painted an image of both, / with the dyes of both, // that the herd [*ʾānā*] may see their ornaments, / and the flock [*marʿitā*] their beauties; // and since I am a speaking lamb [*ʿemrā*] / for You, God of Abraham, // in Abram’s tenure I praise You” (CN 17, 12; when *marʿitā* appears at line 1, nothing suggests it should be taken literally, for the name *šēhlā* has no relation to the semantic field of shepherding; later at 6 the term is repeated in parallelism with *ʾānā* at 5, which can only mean “flock” or “herd” in the literal sense, and with Ephrem’s self-definition as “lamb” at 7, so that in this case *marʿitā* should retain its original meaning, and maybe even the word at 1 should be taken in this sense).

“religious community”, such as a parish or a diocese, while “herd” does not have this established meaning, though it can still be used metaphorically for a group of people¹⁹¹.

In most cases, however, terms from the semantic field of shepherding remain in that semantic field and are employed metaphorically for the bishop, with a strong link to scriptural precedents. There is a wealth of parallel texts throughout the poems on Abraham (CN 17–21) that show these characteristics:

יחזק בתי לך אִתְּךָ
 192 בְּיָדְךָ בְּתֵיבָה
 (CN 17, 5, 1–4)

יחזק אִתְּךָ בְּתֵיבָה
 חֲבֵנֵי שְׂפִילָה בְּיָדְךָ

מִמֶּנּוּ מִשְׁמֵינֵי שְׂפִילָה
 193 בְּיָדְךָ בְּתֵיבָה

3 מִיָּדְךָ בְּתֵיבָה
 חֲבֵנֵי שְׂפִילָה בְּיָדְךָ
 ...

מִשְׁמֵינֵי שְׂפִילָה
 מִשְׁמֵינֵי שְׂפִילָה
 מִשְׁמֵינֵי שְׂפִילָה
 194 בְּיָדְךָ בְּתֵיבָה
 בְּיָדְךָ בְּתֵיבָה

4 מִשְׁמֵינֵי שְׂפִילָה
 מִשְׁמֵינֵי שְׂפִילָה
 מִשְׁמֵינֵי שְׂפִילָה
 מִשְׁמֵינֵי שְׂפִילָה
 מִשְׁמֵינֵי שְׂפִילָה

שְׂפִילָה בְּתֵיבָה
 בְּיָדְךָ בְּתֵיבָה
 בְּיָדְךָ בְּתֵיבָה
 195 בְּיָדְךָ בְּתֵיבָה
 בְּיָדְךָ בְּתֵיבָה

5 מִשְׁמֵינֵי שְׂפִילָה
 מִשְׁמֵינֵי שְׂפִילָה
 מִשְׁמֵינֵי שְׂפִילָה
 מִשְׁמֵינֵי שְׂפִילָה
 מִשְׁמֵינֵי שְׂפִילָה

191 See the entries on Merriam-Webster online: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/flock> and <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/herd> (last accessed: 17.07.2024, 16:34).

192 “The shepherd, appointed from his herd [rā’yā da-praš men ‘ān-eh] , / fed it [rā’-āh] on spiritual meadows [margē], // and with his victorious staff [huṭr-eh] / from invisible wolves [debē] guarded it.”

193 “Here is your flock [mar’it-āk], o blessed, / rise and tend it [s’ūr-eh], o diligent! // Jacob ordered the sheepfolds [gezrē], / you order these speaking sheep [‘erbē]. . .”

194 “The healthy sheep keep safe, / and heal [s’ūr] the one who’s sick, // and bind up the one who’s broken, / and seek the one who’s lost; // feed it on the meadow of Scriptures [rā’-ēh b-margē] / and quench it with the fountain of doctrine; // May firmness be a bulwark for you, / may the cross be a crook [huṭrā] for you, // and may be justice peace for you! / **Blessed is he who increased your victories!**”

195 “May be with you among your sheepfold [b-gezr-āk] / the strength that was with David, // for if he a transient sheep [‘emrā] / from the mouth of the lion delivered, // how becoming of you, o winner, / to jealously wrest from the Enemy // the soul, which is above all, / since nothing can ransom it, // but Christ’s blood. / **Blessed is who, sold, bought back everything!**”

ܠܐܡܢ ܕܥܠܐ ܕܥܠܐ ܕܥܠܐ ܕܥܠܐ ܕܥܠܐ ܕܥܠܐ ܕܥܠܐ ¹⁹⁶ ܕܥܠܐ ܕܥܠܐ ܕܥܠܐ ܕܥܠܐ (CN 19, 3, 1-4; 4-5; 6, 6-10)	... 6 ܠܐܡܢ ܕܥܠܐ ܕܥܠܐ ܕܥܠܐ ܕܥܠܐ ܕܥܠܐ ܕܥܠܐ ܕܥܠܐ
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This chain of texts comes from different contexts. The four lines of CN 17 are part of a longer celebration of the newly elected Abraham, CN 19 extensively employs biblical examples to exhort the new bishop, and finally CN 20 is concerned with the preservation of orthodoxy and the avoiding of schisms in the community. The passages from CN 19 showcase many of the biblical models of the shepherd metaphor. At CN 19, 3, 3-4, Ephrem mentions Jacob's ordering of the flocks of Laban (Gen. 30), a passage already encountered in Gregory's II, 1, 12, 690-695, though in a completely different context. What the two poems have in common their references to Jacob is his role as the paradigmatic shepherd among the patriarchs: Gregory does not even mention him by name, but only as *ὁ ποιμήν*. In the stanza that follows the passage from Ephrem quoted above (stanza 4), Ephrem reworks the prophecy of salvation in Hes. 34, following closely the wording in the Peshitta¹⁹⁸. Ezekiel's prophecy has God tending the sheep, but Ephrem applies it to the bishop: this might be explained by the reference later in Hes. 34 to a

¹⁹⁶ "[...] Moses committed to Joshua // a sheepfold [*gezrā*] whose half was wolves [*dēbē*], / whereas to you a flock [*mar'itā*] was entrusted // whose third and fourth part is consecrated. / **Blessed is he who adorned your flock** [*mar'it-āk*]!"

¹⁹⁷ "It is meet for a new shepherd [*rā'yā*] / to inspect the herd [*nes'ūr 'ānā*] anew, // to know how great is its number [*minyān-āh*] / and to see which is its need. // This is the herd [*'ānā*] redeemed by the blood / of him, who is Master of the shepherds [*rabbā d-rā'awātā*]. // Call the sheep [*'erbā*] by its name and let it pass, / for the flock's [*d-mar'itā*] name and census [*hušbān-āh*] // are written in the Book of Life. / **Blessed is he who claims its number** [*minyān-āh*]!"

¹⁹⁸ Cf.: "the healthy sheep keep safe" (*neqyē da-ḥlīmē naṭṭar*) (1) with "I will guard the fat and strong" (*d-šammīnā wa-d-'aššīnā 'aṭṭar*, Hes. 34:16) and the word *neqyē* employed at Hes. 34:17 and 20; "and heal the one who's sick" (*wa-s'ūr l-'aydā da-krihā*) (2) with "[I] will strengthen that which was sick" (*da-krihā 'aḥīl*) (Hes. 34:16); "and bind up the one who's broken" (*wa-šūb l-'aydā da-tbūr*) (3) with "[I] will bind up that which was broken" (*w-da-tbūrā 'e'aššeb*) (Hes. 34:16); "and seek the one who's lost" (*wa-pqūd l-'aydā d-'abīdā*) (4) with "I will seek that which was lost" (*d-'abīdā 'eb'ē*) (Hes. 34:16). Ephrem quotes Hes. 34:16 backwards, starting with the last item of the list (guarding the strong sheep) and following faithfully the sequence until the first (seeking the lost). Note that the verb at line 2, *s'ar* is often employed by Ephrem (CN 19, 3, 2; 4, 2; CN 20, 3, 2) for the shepherd's review of his flock. In Hes. 34:11-12, the same verb is used of God's review of the flock of Israel, and the Greek version has the verb ἐπισκέπτομαι. Similarly, the word ἐπίσκοπος used for Christ at 1Petr. 2:25 together with ποιμήν is translated in the Peshitta as *sā'ōrā*, "reviewer", from the same root (see §2.1.1).

messianic shepherd, a “David”, enacting God’s plan for the people, so that this David may be interpreted as the mediator of God’s promise in the preceding verses¹⁹⁹. That Ephrem interpreted Hes. 34 in this way is shown by the comparison of the bishop with David in the stanza immediately following (stanza 5). Here, with a reference to 1Sam. 17:34–36, David is presented as another paradigmatic shepherd in the Bible, this time among the kings, as Jacob was among the patriarchs²⁰⁰. This is due to David’s having been a literal shepherd before he became king, just as Jacob, before becoming a patriarch, had been a shepherd for Laban. Stanza 6 completes the cycle, comparing episcopal succession to prophetic succession, in this case the succession of Moses and Joshua. Like David for kings and Jacob for patriarchs, Moses is the paradigmatic shepherd for prophets, because he served in that role for his father-in-law, according to biblical narrative²⁰¹. Moreover, already in the Bible itself, the succession of Joshua to Moses’s position is represented through pastoral imagery²⁰². Therefore, CN 19 presents a complete summary of Old Testament shepherd metaphors, transferring them from the patriarchs, kings, and prophets to the bishop and employing them to frame the tasks and powers of the bishop.

At CN 20, 3 the situation is different, since here the theme is orthodoxy and its defence against heresy; thus, Ephrem refers much more to the New Testament, because it contains more material on this topic. On one side, the bishop has some traits of Christ as “the good shepherd”, calling the sheep by name and leading them out of the fold²⁰³. On the other, Ephrem echoes John the Evangelist when he says that Jesus redeemed the flock by giving his blood, thus making the Saviour the true “good shepherd”²⁰⁴. The rela-

199 As regards CN 19, 4, 9 “may be justice [*quštā*] peace [*šlāmā*] for you!”, I could not find parallels for the couple *quštā/ šlāmā* except for Isaiah’s prophecy on Hezekiah’s reign at 2Reg. 20:3.19 and Jes. 38:3; 39:8. Even though the words are different, line 9 echoes Old Testament messianic prophecies such as Ps. 85:11–12.

200 “And David said unto Saul, Thy servant kept his father’s sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock: and I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him. Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God.” (1Sam. 17:34–36). Ephrem mentions only the lion and not the bear, because he wants to give a spiritual interpretation of the passage and the “Enemy” (CN 19, 5, 6), the devil, is famously compared to a lion at 1Petr. 5:8.

201 Ex. 3:1. Both Moses and Jacob were shepherd under their father-in-law, David under his father.

202 “And Moses spake unto the Lord, saying, Let the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, which may go out before them, and which may go in before them, and which may lead them out, and which may bring them in; that the congregation of the Lord be not as sheep which have no shepherd (*ʿa(y)k ʾānā d-layt l-āh rāyā*). And the Lord said unto Moses, Take thee Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay thine hand upon him; And set him before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation; and give him a charge in their sight.” (Num. 27:15–19).

203 Cf.: “Call the sheep by its name and let it pass” (*qrāy w-ʿaʿbar ʿerbā ba-šm-eh*) (CN 20, 3, 7) with “he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out.” (*hū qārē ʿerbā ba-šm-eh w-hū mappeq l-eh*), in the Old Syriac (from the Sinaitic Palimpsest) of Joh. 10:3. In the Peshitta, “sheep” is at the plural (*ʿerbē*): Ephrem’s formulation suggests an Old Syriac reading.

204 Cf.: “This is the herd [*ʾānā*] redeemed by the blood / of him [*da-zbīnā ba-dm-eh*]” (CN 20, 3, 5–6) with “I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. [. . .] and I lay down my life for

tionship between Christ and bishop envisaged in this stanza is one of proxy, as demonstrated by Christ's attribute of *rabbā d-rā'awātā*, "head" or "master of the shepherds" (6). The source of this divine delegation to the bishops, the idea of a flock purchased by Christ's blood, and the danger that heresies pose—as wolves endanger a herd—to this order of things are the substance of Paul's last speech to the Ephesian bishops in Acts 20, a passage containing the word *ἐπίσκοπος*/*'epīsqupā*²⁰⁵. However, the expression "master of the shepherds" is found at 1 Petr. 5:4, a similar passage in which an apostle gives final advice to the bishops/presbyters of a community, reminding them of their dependence upon Christ's leadership²⁰⁶. This hierarchical dependence also entails a chronological limitation of the bishop's mandate, which 1Petr. 5 stresses by evoking the "glory that shall be revealed", the future reappearance of the "master shepherd" and the crown of undying glory that awaits the bishops as a reward for their service. This eschatological perspective is alluded to also by Ephrem, as he mentions the biblical tradition of the heavenly "book of life" (*spar hayyā*, 9). This literary motif is found already in the Old Testament, though its interpretation is not always eschatological, whereas in the New Testament it is decidedly so²⁰⁷. Indeed, the majority of biblical occurrences are in Revelation. There the idea of the number of the saved is prominent: the biblical model is clearly the Old Testament censuses, projected onto the eschatological level²⁰⁸. Another apocalyptic book in which these literary elements are prominent is the book of

the sheep." (Joh. 10:11.15). Ephrem paraphrases the "giving of his own life" by Jesus with the theme of redemption through blood (see Mt. 26:28; Rom. 3:25; Eph. 1:7; Hebr. 9:14; 1Petr. 1:19) thanks to the OT tradition that blood is life (Lev. 17:11.14; Dtn. 12:23).

205 προσέχετε ἑαυτοῖς καὶ παντὶ τῷ ποιμνίῳ (*mar'itā*), ἐν ᾧ ὑμᾶς τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον ἔθετο ἐπισκόπους (*'epīsqōpē*) ποιμαίνειν (*d-ter'ōn*) τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ θεοῦ, ἣν περιποιήσατο διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ ἰδίου (*da-qnā-h ba-dm-eh*). ἐγὼ οἶδα ὅτι εἰσελεύσονται μετὰ τὴν ἄφιξίν μου λύκοι (*dēbē*) βαρεῖς εἰς ὑμᾶς μὴ φειδόμενοι τοῦ ποιμνίου (*mar'itā*), καὶ ἐξ ὑμῶν αὐτῶν ἀναστήσονται ἄνδρες λαλοῦντες διεστραμμένα τοῦ ἀποσπᾶν τοὺς μαθητὰς ὅπισω αὐτῶν. (Act. 20:28–30; Peshitta readings in parentheses). The connotation of "delegate" or "proxy" for someone else's authority in the word *ἐπίσκοπος* is pointed out by Guerra y Gomez 1962, 181, 377.

206 Πρεσβυτέρους (*qaššīšē*) τοὺς ἐν ὑμῖν παρακαλῶ ὁ συμπρεσβύτερος καὶ μάρτυς τῶν τοῦ Χριστοῦ παθημάτων, ὁ καὶ τῆς μελλούσης ἀποκαλύπτεσθαι δόξης κοινωνός· ποιμάνετε (*r'aw*) τὸ ἐν ὑμῖν ποῖμνιον (*mar'itā*) τοῦ θεοῦ ἐπισκοποῦντες (*s'ūr(w)*) μὴ ἀναγκαστῶς ἀλλ' ἐκουσίως κατὰ θεόν, μηδὲ αἰσχροκερδῶς ἀλλὰ προθύμως, μηδ' ὡς κατακυριεύοντες τῶν κλήρων (*mar'itā [sic!]*) ἀλλὰ τύποι γινόμενοι τοῦ ποιμνίου· καὶ φανερωθέντος τοῦ ἀρχιποίμενος (*rab-rā'awātā*) κομιεῖσθε τὸν ἀμαράντινον τῆς δόξης στέφανον (1Petr. 5:1–5; Peshitta readings in parentheses).

207 Old Testament occurrences: Ex. 33:32–33; Ps. 68:28; Jes. 4:3; Hes. 13:9; Dan. 7:10; 12:1; Mal. 3:16, but only those in Daniel are decidedly eschatological. In the New Testament: Lc. 10:20; Phil. 4:3; Hebr. 12:23. In Revelation: Apc. 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12.15; 21:27. Other occurrences in Ephrem: *Epiph.* 6, 13; 10, 18; *hymn. eccl.* 8, 6; 11, refrain; 8–9.

208 Apc 7:4, where the Syriac version has *minyānā* for the Greek ἀριθμός but note that at 7:9 the multitude before the throne and the Lamb has a number (*minyānā*) that no one can count. The topic of census surfaces at: Ex. 30:12; Num. 1:2.49; 4:2; 14:29; 26:2; 2Sam. 24:2.9=1Chron. 21:2.5 (*minyānā w-ḥuṣbānā*). The word *ḥuṣbānā* is employed also at Mt. 19:23, in the parable of the unforgiving servant, which has a clearly eschatological meaning.

Enoch²⁰⁹. However, we need not posit that Ephrem knew Revelation or Enoch directly; he could be subscribing to a literary tradition in common with these books, whose elements were all already in the Old Testament: the census of the people, the book of life, God the Shepherd holding the shepherds of the people to account.

From the point of view of content, the shepherd metaphor serves to define the tasks of the bishop and moral expectations placed upon him, a function that goes back to the figure's use in the Bible. As I already mentioned regarding the metaphor of the head and the body, it is far from clear whether these definitions of the bishop's activity served to praise the individual bishop, to bind him to model behaviours, or to denounce his failure to conform to these behaviours. In general, the shepherd metaphor stresses the leadership role of the bishop, but a leadership conceived as care and providing. This care goes in two directions: inwardly, the bishop is called to take care of the sheep in their individual needs (hence the imagery taken from Hes. 34:16) and, collectively, to educate them on Scripture, identified through the image of the pasture or meadow (*margā*); outwardly, the bishop should defend the congregation from wolves (*dēbē*), a common biblical image to identify heretics and heretical teachings. This model of the bishop agrees with Gregory's self-presentation in Constantinople (II, 1, 10, 15–16; see note 31): sound doctrine feeds the flock; heretical teaching is like the wolves lying in ambush around the sheepfold. On the other hand, Ephrem's stress on right biblical teaching can be linked to the Syriac view of Christianity as a "school", and of the prelates as primarily teachers (see §2.1.2.2).

2.2.1.4 The term 'allānā

Finally, there is one lexical item worth discussing on its own, the noun 'allānā. The word is found only once in the Bible: "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the LORD of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered: and I will turn mine hand upon *the little ones*" (Zach. 13:7). The King James Version here follows the Masoretic Text, which at the end of the verse has 'al-ha-ššo'ārīm, meaning "the little ones". However, the Septuagint has ἐπὶ τοὺς ποιμένας, and the Peshitta has 'al-'allānē. This rendering suggests that the term means "musterer", someone who leads a flock but is lesser in rank than a "shepherd". However, the term is overwhelmingly attested as a title for bishops and prelates and, in a few early sources (among which Ephrem and Aphrahat), with the meaning "disciple"²¹⁰. Ephrem's use of the term appears contradictory, and since we do not know much about the organisation

²⁰⁹ *Hen. aeth.* 47, 47 (theme of the book and of the number of the saved); 89, 68–77 and 90, 20 (the shepherds, the books and the Master of the shepherds); 103, 103 (the Book of Life).

²¹⁰ Payne Smith 1879–1901, 2879, s.v. ܐܠܠܢܐ. On Ephrem's usage for Old Testament leaders and the apostles see Bou Mansour 2019, 32–35.

Blessed is he who gives life to the body at one time
And life to souls at another!
Through a clear shepherd, give me to drink
From the clear river of Books!
(*hymn. fid.* 35, 10, 9–12)

...
ܕܢܝܢ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ
ܕܢܝܢ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ
ܕܢܝܢ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ
ܕܢܝܢ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ

The pastors of our day, having seen
Him so disgraced because of his sheep,
Like those drunk with the taste of wine,
Think that he is the chief of pastors and shepherds
(*hymn. fid.* 36, 4)

ܕܢܝܢ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ
ܕܢܝܢ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ
ܕܢܝܢ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ
ܕܢܝܢ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ

The clear font, never troubled,
That proceeds from the Clear One: debaters have
disturbed it,
And it has become troubled, because impurity has
come in
It has rendered serenity troubled
and the flock has gone mad,
Along with its shepherds
(*hymn. fid.* 59, 11)²¹⁶

ܕܢܝܢ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ
ܕܢܝܢ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ
ܕܢܝܢ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ
ܕܢܝܢ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ

ܕܢܝܢ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ
²¹⁷ܕܢܝܢ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ
(*Homilies on Faith* 6, 13–16)

ܕܢܝܢ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ
ܕܢܝܢ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ

ܕܢܝܢ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ
(*hymn. haer.* 56, 10, 1–3)

ܕܢܝܢ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ
²¹⁸ܕܢܝܢ ܕܡܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܥܡܐ

Among these passages, the word ‘*allānā*’ is sometimes employed for bishops: at *CN* 33, 6, 1, where it refers to the bishop of Harran; at *hymn. fid.* 36, 4, where it is employed for heretical bishops at line 1 and for bishops in general at 4; at *Homilies on Faith* 6, 14, where it stands in synonymous parallelism with *rā’yā*, again for heretical bishops; at *hymn. fid.* 59, 11 it again refers to the leaders of the church quarrelling over the Trinity, and therefore probably to bishops. These cases are sometimes doubtful, as the parallelism of *rā’yā* and ‘*allānā*’ at *hymn. fid.* 36, 4, 4 and *Homilies on Faith* 6, 13–14 may well include bishops *and* priests. The occurrence at *hymn. fid.* 35, 10, 11 is highly uncertain, because the context is not clear and seems to point to a divine figure behind the ‘*allānā*’, Christ or the Spirit, but it could also be a reference to the bishop as teacher of Scripture. Anyway, the passage is probably spurious, so its authority is not equal to the

²¹⁵ “Your musterer [‘*allān-āk*’] imitated / You, o Lord of All.”

²¹⁶ Translations of the *hymn. fid.* from Wickes 2015, 207, 209.

²¹⁷ The shepherd (*rā’yā*) fights with his peer / and the musterer (‘*allānā*’) with his companion: // in the strife of the shepherds (*rā’awātā*) / perished the herd and the flock (‘*ānā w-mar’itā*).’

²¹⁸ “Let not, o Lord, without reward / the works of your musterer [*d-‘allān-āk*], // for I have not perturbed your herd [‘*ān-āk*].”

others²¹⁹. In the other occurrences, the term identifies a subordinate of the bishop. This is clear for *hymn. haer.* 56, 10, 1–3, *CN* 31, 30–31, and *CN* 14, 1: in the first case, Ephrem is referring to himself, and since there is no indication that he was ever a bishop, the noun must be referring to another role in the church, a subordinate role; at *CN* 31, 30–31, the *‘allānē* in the plural are opposed to the *rā’yā*, in the singular, but Ephrem hopes that they will turn back and follow him in providing for the lambs; at *CN* 14, 1, the *‘allānē* are related to the shepherds (*rā’awātā*)—that is, the first three bishops of Nisibis, as the many villages in the countryside are related to the fortified (*karkā*, 4) city of Nisibis, which points to a subordinate relationship. The occurrence at *CN* 18, 3 is interpreted by Beck as referring to the bishop Abraham as bishop²²⁰. This is probably due to the attribute (*‘a*)*hrāyā*, which is attached to the noun, because in many cases this attribute is ascribed to the latest elected bishop²²¹. However, the noun *‘allānā* should be interpreted also here as referring to a subordinate to the bishop, because *CN* 18, 3 is a text parallel to *CN* 17, 1, 6–9; 3, 3–4; 4, 1–4, where Ephrem expresses in different ways the same fact: Abraham was chosen from among the “musterers” before becoming “the head”—that is, the bishop—of the flock. The attribute (*‘a*)*hrāyā* is explained by line 3 of the same *CN* 18, 3: Abraham was not only a musterer but also the youngest among the musterers, the “last” in this sense. Therefore, *‘allānā* can identify a bishop as well as some subordinate of the bishop; the term preserves always a connotation of “subordinate”, “delegate,” and it can be adapted to the bishop on the basis of the dependence of that bishop’s authority on the authority of Christ, which Ephrem hinted at in *CN* 20, 3²²².

It remains to see what kind of subordinates of the bishop the term *‘allānā* means. Beck interprets the term flexibly, sometimes as “suffragan bishop” (notably at *CN* 14, 1) or as priest (the occurrences at *CN* 17) or as deacon, a translation suggested by Ephrem’s self-styling as *‘allānā* (*hymn. haer.* 56, 10) and the ancient biographical tradition identifying him as a deacon²²³. Indeed, the case of Ephrem is the only one in which we can compare his use of the word to external sources employing more traditional terms, such as “deacon”²²⁴. Bou Mansour has recently criticised Beck’s interpretations of the term²²⁵. On the idea of *‘allānā* as “suffragan bishop” at *CN* 14, 1, Bou Mansour denies that such a title is attested in early Syriac times. On the possibility that the term means *both* priest *and* deacon at *CN* 17, he is sceptical, because Ephrem says that Abraham was chosen as bishop from among the *‘allānē*, and there is no trace of evidence that a deacon was

219 Wickes 2015, 203n1.

220 Beck 1961b, 43n1.

221 E.g., *CN* 13, 1, 6; 2, 6; 4, 5; 6, 5; 7, 6; 14, 5; 15, 5; 16, 6; 17, 5; *CN* 14, 3, 5; 4, 5; 15, 5; 18, 5; 20, 5; 24, 6; *CN* 21, 21, 6.

222 This is clear at *CN* 33, 6, where the bishop is *‘allānā* of Christ and at *hymn. fid.* 36, 4 where the bishops wrongly define Christ as *just* the *rēš-‘allānē*, the head of the musterers. Murray 2006, 168n4.

223 Beck 1961b, 43n1, 54n2.

224 Apart from the unreliable *Vita* tradition, Ephrem is called deacon by Jerome (*vir. ill.* 115)

225 Bou Mansour 2019, 32–35.

ever elected to the episcopate in Syriac antiquity. Therefore, the “fold of musterers” at *CN* 17, 3, 3 (*dayrā d-‘allānē*), rejoicing for the continuity of its succession, should indicate bishops rejoicing in the election of a new bishop.

Bou Mansour’s arguments are not conclusive: three points can be raised against them. First, the exclusion of deacons from the ‘*allānē*’ of *CN* 17 is not really warranted: from the earliest time of the church until at least the end of the fourth century, deacons were very important, and it was not impossible that a deacon would become bishop (see §1.2.1). It is true that no such cases are documented in Syria, but neither are there clues that exclude this possibility, and a comparison with the rest of the church suggests that a deacon could indeed become bishop.

Second, the “fold of musterers” at *CN* 17, 3, 3 (*dayrā d-‘allānē*) may well be composed of priests and deacons of the city, as Beck interprets it, as well as of bishops convened to elect Abraham, as per Bou Mansour²²⁶. Admittedly, the expression “succession of their orders” (*yubbāl-dargay-hōn*) suggests primarily bishops, since the term *yubbālā* is frequently used by Ephrem for the episcopal succession. However, as Beck rightly notes, in all other instances in *CN* 17 the word ‘*allānā*’ means deacon or priest, and it is used to highlight the fact that Abraham was priest or deacon *before* he became bishop. It would be very awkward if the word would mean “bishop” only here and *ex abrupto*. But if the musterers here are not the bishops, what is the “succession of their orders”? If we consider that only the local bishop could order priests and deacons, then it is possible to see the election of a new bishop as the continuation of the other holy orders. Moreover, Abraham was elected bishop when he was a priest or a deacon, a ‘*allānā*’, so that his election can be seen as a succession in the holy orders, from priest or deacon to bishop, and therefore as a pledge of continuity and unity between them. There is more than one way to make sense of the expression *yubbāl-dargay-hōn* even without admitting that *dayrā d-‘allānē* refers to bishops instead of priests and deacons.

Third, there is no reason to rule out the existence of suffragan bishops at Ephrem’s time, for, as has already been said, the organisation of ecclesiastical regions around the metropolis, and of synods of bishops around the metropolitan, reaches back to the third century and is sanctioned by the Council of Nicaea. The various chronicles covering the fourth century confirm that the Nicene canons on metropolitans were indeed enforced in Nisibis and surroundings²²⁷. In this context, it is easy to see why Beck would have

²²⁶ *Dayrā* appears also at *CN* 21, 12: “may the discerning [*pārōšē*] pray with you, / and proclaim a fast for the educated [*yaddū‘ē*], // and may your pen [*dayr-āk*] be in sorrow, / for the one that is lost [*‘ebad*] to sin, // that he may turn to repentance. / **Blessed is he who found the lost sheep!**”. The context is still a shepherd metaphor, though not a very developed one. The word *dayrā* is not employed for the flock at large, but for the clergy (as at *CN* 17, 3) and for the “discerning” and “educated”, maybe meaning the ascetics. The application of the metaphor anticipates the later, figurative meaning of the word, “monastery”. This meaning could not have been present at the time of Ephrem, lacking the underlying reality of coenobitic monasticism.

²²⁷ §2.1.2.2 n 92.

seen the *'allānē* of CN 14, 1, 2 as suffragan bishops: lines 1–4 establish a parallel between the three bishops of Nisibis and the fortified city (*karkā*) on one side and the many “musterers” and daughters of the city all around on the other; if the bishops take care of the church in the metropolis, then the “musterers” must be those who take care of the churches all around, in the “daughters” of the city (that is, its villages). This is confirmed by the fact that the same mother-daughter relationship is envisaged by Ephrem at CN 34, 3 for Edessa and Harran, and Edessa is the metropolis of Harran²²⁸. Naturally, there is no need to envisage the relationships between episcopal seats hinted at in these texts as organised with the same precision as in the Latin and Greek world. Such precision is not to be totally excluded, since the vagueness of titles may be due to the medium of poetry more than to a lack of canonical precision on the ground, and yet, in the absence of direct testimony on Ephrem’s times, a certain vagueness must remain in our reconstruction: it is safe to say that some seats (like Edessa and Nisibis) enjoyed a privileged status and that other seats (like Harran) depended on them; there must have been some kind of enforcement of the canons of Nicaea in the Roman East, and there must have been a kind of metropolitan structure. It remains unclear whether villages and cities had their own bishops, whether these were “suffragan bishops” or “chorepiscopi” or simply priests, and, in general, how the hierarchy of the clergy was configured under the metropolitan²²⁹.

In all this vagueness, it is clear that *'allānā*, a word used both for the bishop and for his subordinates, expresses a role of guidance while at the same time limiting it²³⁰: the “musterer” has the task of guiding the flock, but he acts under the orders of the true shepherd, or the “master of the shepherds”, Christ. The metaphorical language of shepherding allows Ephrem to represent with adequate flexibility the complex relationships of hierarchy and community, to present them in a biblical framework, and to make them poetically lively and evident.

To wrap up this survey, we should highlight how Gregory’s and Ephrem’s treatments of the shepherd metaphor are similar. Both refuse to connect the bishop to the apostles by way of the fisherman metaphor, preferring to look at the OT rhetoric of leadership developed through the shepherd imagery. Both already know of a use employ of the metaphor for the bishop but can also still revitalise it when the context requires it. As regards the requirements of context, both poets tend to employ the living meta-

228 “But you, o Harran, my treasure is in your neighbourhood, / the glorious Edessa, the beautiful! / Daughter, imitate your mother, who is salt in the world, / and season with her doctrine your mind!” (CN 34, 3, 3–6).

229 Murray 2006, 22 quotes and discusses fifth-century documents from the church of the East on the titles and hierarchy.

230 Therefore, my interpretation is in agreement with Sokoloff’s analysis of the term: at Sokoloff 2009, 1105, s.v. *حَلَم*, he defines it at the same time as “servant of a shepherd”, “leader” and “clerics aside from bishop, clergy”. Note the ambivalence between leadership and submission and the purely negative definition of the canonical status of the *'allānē* as something *other* than the bishop.

phor when they want to describe (or prescribe) a model of leadership for the bishop in relation to his community. The main element of difference between the two is the genuinely poetic one: while Gregory's poetry follows clear standards of style imposed by *paideia*, so that his metaphorical use of ποιμήν is concentrated in hexametric poems, Ephrem's poetry finds its artistry in the creative relationship with the biblical text, so that Ephrem evokes, among the categories of patriarchs, prophets, and kings, those who had been shepherds, or he recovers the word 'allānā from Zach. 13:7 to express the ambiguous position of the bishop and his clergy between a higher authority and responsibility towards their subjects.

2.2.2 Farmer/vintner

Agricultural metaphors have been employed ever since Old Testament times for the people and its relationship with God. Among these metaphors, the comparison of Israel to a vine having God as a vintner is probably the most important²³¹. The metaphor becomes parable in the New Testament, in the tale of the wicked husbandmen and in that of the workers in the vineyard, and it becomes an allegory when Jesus speaks of the "true vineyard"²³². Other parables are concerned with the cultivation of cereals, such as the parable of the sower and that of the tares²³³. However, agricultural metaphors are less important in defining the relationship between God or leader and people in the Bible than the shepherd imagery, and, as a consequence, they had less impact on ecclesiastical titles.

In Gregory's poems, the metaphor is scarcely present. At II, 1, 13, 41, it has a clearly biblical tone. The line is in fact a paraphrase of Ps. 79:14 (in the Septuagint; Ps. 80:13 in the KJV):

II, 1, 13, 41

Πῶς δέ τε σὺς μονόφορβος ἐμὴν δηλήσαθ' ἄλων;
How come a lone-grazing boar spoils my vineyard?

Ps. 80:13 (79:14 Septuagint)

ἐλυμήνατο αὐτήν σὺς ἐκ δρυμοῦ, καὶ μονιὸς [v.l.: ὄνος] ἄγριος κατενεμήσατο αὐτήν.
The boar out of the wood doth waste it, and the wild beast of the field doth devour it.

The vineyard is clearly the church, and the boar, as the following lines (43–45) clarify, is Satan, spoiling the church through bad leaders. A comparison of the two lines makes clear how much Gregory is indebted to the school exercise of paraphrasis and how well

²³¹ Gen. 49:22; Hos. 10:1; Jes. 5:1–7; 27:2–5; Jer. 2:21; 5:10; 6:9; 12:10; Hes. 15:1–8; 17:3–10; 19:10–14; Ps. 80:9–19; Cant. 2:15; 8:11–12.

²³² Mt. 20:1–16; 21:33–46; Mc. 12:1–12; Lc. 20:9–19; Joh. 15:1–2. See also Mc. 4:26–29; Jac. 5:7.

²³³ Mt 13:1–43; Mc. 4:1–20; Lc. 8:4–15.

he commands it. The ἄμπελος of Ps. 80:9 becomes a much more poetic ἄλωή, uniquely written (if the edition in the *Patrologia Graeca* is right) with rough breathing like the Attic form ἄλως, ἄλω²³⁴. Instead of the verbs λυμαίνομαι and κατανέμομαι, never used in hexameters, Gregory writes the very epic δηλέομαι. The σῦς remains a σῦς, because the noun is employed by Homer and preferred to the form ὕς: indeed, the term appears in *Il.* 9, 539 for the Calydonian boar, which wreaks havoc on Oeneus's vineyard (ἄλωή)²³⁵. Μονόφορβος is a Gregorian creation and means literally “which grazes [φορβή] by himself [μόνος]”. It is employed only in one other passage, another paraphrase of Ps. 80, this time referring to himself:

Ἡ μεγάλην, φραγμοῖο διαρραισθέντος, ἄλωήν
 Νηλειῶς τρυγῶσι παρατροχάοντες ὀδῖται,
 Καὶ δρυμόθεν μονόφορβος ἐῷ δηλήσας ὀδόντι
 Αὐτὰρ ἐμοὶ πόνος ἐστὶν ἀγάστονος
 (II, 1, 1, 189–192)

Since in this passage δρυμόθεν is the Homeric paraphrase of ἐκ δρυμοῦ in the psalm, μονόφορβος should paraphrase μονιός ἄγριος. The expression is highly problematic: the Masoretic text has *zīz-śāday*, “the *zīz* of the field”, with the rare word *zīz*, attested only here, at Ps. 50:11, and at Jes. 66:11, and variously interpreted²³⁶. The Greek translators chose the word ἄγριος to translate “of the field”, which seems correct, and to translate *zīz* they used μονιός, which, however, is an adjective, so that the sentence lacks a noun, and μονιός is also redundant in respect to ἄγριος, meaning “savage”, “lonely”. Indeed, the Vatican and Sinaitic manuscripts of the Septuaginta have ὄνος instead of μονιός at Ps. 79:14, which would make much more sense, but Gregory's choice of the prefix μονο- shows that he read μονιός there²³⁷. Gregory then interprets μονιός ἄγριος as referring to the boar, and synthesises an epic-sounding epithet, combining the meaning of κατανέμομαι and of ἄγριος/μονιός. Here we see how, thanks to the constraints of Homeric language, the paraphrastic exercise becomes both a form of biblical exegesis and an artistic creation.

At II, 1, 12, 117, the metaphor of the sower follows that of the shepherd to express Gregory's work in Constantinople: “[I] sowed the faith that struck root thanks to God”²³⁸.

²³⁴ Liddell/Scott/Jones 2011, 75, s.v. ἄλωή

²³⁵ ἡ δὲ χολωσαμένη δῖον γένος ἰοχέαιρα / ὤρσεν ἐπὶ χλοῦνην σὺν ἄγριον ἀργιόδοντα, / ὅς κακὰ πόλλ' ἔρδεσκεν ἔθων Οἰνῆρος ἄλωήν (*Hom. Il.* 9, 539).

²³⁶ For an overview of the interpretations of the word *zīz*, see Wazana 2008, who traces its interpretation as a mythological giant bird in Jewish sources but has also a good note on the different biblical versions and translation at 118n32.

²³⁷ See Thomas 1965, who, however, is not entirely clear in his formulation. The Vaticanus and Sinaiticus both offer the reading ὄνος and in both this reading has been corrected in μονιός. The Alexandrinus, on the other side, has only μονιός. Thus, Greg. Naz. II, 1, 1, 191 and II, 1, 13, 41 may be added to the *testimonia* in favour of μονιός.

²³⁸ Ἐσπεῖρα πίστιν τῷ Θεῷ ριζουμένην (II, 1, 12, 117).

As noted by Meier, the idea is found in the parable of the growing seed (Mc. 4:26–29), but also in 1Cor. 3:6–9²³⁹. The link to these passages of Scripture reminds the audience that Gregory, as bishop, did not have an absolute power over the community, whose growth is always God's work; and on the other side, his success proves that God approved of the mission, since only God could have granted it. Finally, the image of the single ripe grape in an unripe cluster, employed in Jes. 65:8, is adapted by Gregory at II, 1, 12, 89: there, it was the good among the people that God would spare from his judgement; here, Gregory portrays the Nicene community of Constantinople, surrounded by heretics and in a hostile environment²⁴⁰.

Agricultural metaphors are much more developed in Ephrem, both for their quantity and for their nature as quasi-titles for the bishop. The scope and meaning of the vine and vintner metaphor of CN 13 will be treated at §4.3. Here, the farmer metaphors will be analysed. The majority appear in the poems on Abraham:

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239 Meier 1989, 88. ἐγὼ ἐφύτευσα, Ἀπολλῶς ἐπότισεν, ἀλλ' ὁ θεὸς ἠύξανεν· ὥστε οὔτε ὁ φυτεύων ἐστὶν τι οὔτε ὁ ποτίζων ἀλλ' ὁ αὐξάνων θεός. ὁ φυτεύων δὲ καὶ ὁ ποτίζων ἐν εἰσιν, ἕκαστος δὲ τὸν ἴδιον μισθὸν λήμψεται κατὰ τὸν ἴδιον κόπον· θεοῦ γάρ ἐσμεν συνεργοί, θεοῦ γεώργιον, θεοῦ οἰκοδομή ἐστε (1Cor. 3:6–9). The metaphor is an extension of the reasoning of Ps. 126:1–2.

240 Οὕτως λέγει κύριος "Ὁν τρόπον εὐρεθήσεται ὁ ῥῶξ ἐν τῷ βότρυι καὶ ἐροῦσιν Μὴ λυμήνη αὐτὸν ὅτι εὐλογία κυρίου ἐστὶν ἐν αὐτῷ, οὕτως ποιήσω ἔνεκεν τοῦ δουλεύοντός μοι, τοῦτου ἔνεκεν οὐ μὴ ἀπολέσω πάντας (Jes. 65:8); "Ἡ τις μέλαινα ῥάξ ἐν ἁώρῳ βότρυϊ (II, 1, 12, 89).

241 "May your doctrine [*mallpānūt-āk*] grow / through works more than words: // when you few words sow [*zāra'*], / then farm [*plūh*] our land [*ar'ā*] through works, // that through much farming [*pulhānā*] / the scarce seed [*zar'ā*] may grow rich. // The ancient seed spontaneously [*kātā*] / ripened thirtyfold among us, // but your new seed sixtyfold. / **Blessed is he who multiplies a hundredfold!**"

242 ܐܢܝ ܕܥܠܝܢ ܕܥܠܝܢ ܕܥܠܝܢ (CN 18, 8–9)	ܐܢܝ ܕܥܠܝܢ ܕܥܠܝܢ ܕܥܠܝܢ
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243 ܐܢܝ ܕܥܠܝܢ ܕܥܠܝܢ ܕܥܠܝܢ (CN 20, 2)	ܐܢܝ ܕܥܠܝܢ ܕܥܠܝܢ ܕܥܠܝܢ

The farmer imagery combines different recurring themes with a great lexical variety. On a very basic level, the bishop is addressed as “farmer” (*‘akkārā*), and his work is “sowing” (*zra’*) and “cultivating” (*plah*) the “earth” (*‘ar’ā*)—namely, the community. The image can be turned negative, with Julian the emperor as farmer, and with “thorn”, “tares”, or “briar” (*ya’rā*, *zizānē*, *kubā*) instead of the normal “seed” or “wheat” (*zar’ā*, *ḥeṭṭē*). Moreover, Ephrem can expand on details, mentioning parts of the plant such as the stalk or the root (*qanyā*, *‘eqrā*) and natural processes such as the spreading of tares (*sar’ep*) and their climbing on other plants (*sbak*). Besides sowing (*zrā’ā*), he mentions the second sowing (*lqišāyā*) and spontaneous growth on the fallow (*kātā*). The literary sources and themes of these four stanzas are very clear: CN 17, 7 and 18, 9 are inspired by the parable of the sower and exhort the new bishop to lead by example more than by word. CN 18, 8 and 20, 2, inspired by the parable of the tares, are a call to beware of heresy in the community, with CN 20, 2 combining both parables. Stanzas 17, 7 and 18, 9 are very similar, even in the details of formulation, with CN 17, 7, 3–6 and CN 18, 9, 1–4 being almost identical, while CN 17, 7, 1–2 and CN 18, 9, 5–6 on one side and CN 17, 7, 7–10 and 18, 9, 7–10 on the other agree in their content²⁴⁴. In these

242 “As the apostate farmer [*‘akkārā d-‘aḥnep*] began / to sow thorns [*zra’ hwā kubbā*] with his left hand, // the righteous farmer [*‘akkārā kēnā*] was upset / and cut and mowed [*gdam psaq*] his left hand; // his right hand was full and sowed [*zra’*] / in the heart living words, // and, lo!, our sense was cultivated [*metpalhā*] / by prophets and by apostles: // by you were our souls cultivated (*netpalhān*). / **Blessed is he who chose you as our farmer** [*‘akkār-an*]! /// And if your words are scarce, / farm our land with works, // for with labour much / the stalk and the root [*qanyā w-‘eqrā*] will get stronger: // better is one fair deed / than listening to ten thousand words. // May your first seed [*zrā’-āk*] bring the hundredfold, / and the second sowing [*lqišāyā*] sixtyfold, // and even the fallow [*kātā*] thirtyfold. / **Blessed is he who multiplied your harvest** [*‘allāt-āk*]!”

243 “O farmer [*‘akkārā*], burn against the tares [*b-zizānē*] / that spread [*sar’ep(w)*] and cling upon the wheat [*ḥeṭṭē*], // may the briar [*ya’rā*] be wholly uprooted, / that grew out of negligence: // if a quick air raises it, / it boldly overwhelms the seed. // What the three farmers [*‘akkārē*] sowed, / may it return three times, // thirtyfold, sixtyfold and hundredfold. / **Blessed is he who made your harvest** [*‘allāt-āk*] **abundant!**”

244 Cf.: *d-qallil mellē zārā-‘a(n)t / plūḥ-ēh l-‘ar-an ba-‘bādē* // *da-b-pulḥānā saggī’ā / ne’tar zar’ā zallilā* (CN 17, 7, 3–6) with *w-‘en-(h)u d-mellay-k z’ōrān / plūḥ-ēh l-‘ar-an ba-‘bādā* // *da-b-gaw pulḥānā rabbā / ne’san qanyā w-‘eqrā* (CN 18, 9, 1–4). The syntactic structure and meaning of these lines is the same. However, Ephrem is careful not to repeat himself and even the most similar lines are slightly varied (7, 4 and 9, 2 have plural and singular of *‘bādā*, at 7, 5 *da-b* contrasts with *da-b-gaw* at 9, 3 and *saggī’ā* with

stanzas, the link to the parable of the sower, apart from obvious lexical elements such as “seed” and “sowing” (*zar’ā* and *zra*), is given by the reference to the thirtyfold, sixtyfold, and hundredfold yield of the seeds²⁴⁵. Ephrem deviates from the imagery of the parable, in that he highlights the role of farming (*plah*) on the part of the farmer: this different perspective explains why he does not use the word *zārō’ā* (“sower”) and prefers *’akkārā*, originally meaning “ploughman”, but, differently from *zārō’ā*, having also a more general meaning of “farmer”. A synonym could be *pallāhā*, but Ephrem reserves it for the vintner and uses *’akkārā* for the farmer growing cereals. The difference of imagery points to a difference of meaning: the sower of the Gospel parable is an image of the apostle, spreading the word everywhere and devoting a limited time to each region of his ministry, with little care for its concrete results, because these are left to the goodwill of those who receive the message; the farmer carefully cultivating his plants, on the other side, is an image of the bishop, who is bound to a geographic space and a concrete community and responsible—this is the message Ephrem wants to convey—for the spiritual results of his congregation. The link to the parable of the tares is less explicit: at CN 20, 2, 1 it is conveyed mainly through the word “tares” (*zizānē*), identical to that in the Gospels; at CN 18, 8, the link is the general image of an enemy sowing bad seeds in the field of the good farmer, although there are no clear lexical links²⁴⁶. The most notable difference from the parable in the Gospels is that Ephrem straightforwardly contradicts the Gospel parable’s message, as he exhorts the bishop to cut, mow, or uproot the foreign weed in his field. This is due to a difference in interpretation: when Jesus explains the parable at Mt. 13:36–43, he refers to the “children of

rabbā, etc...). This is a significant difference with Gregory, who is not afraid to repeat in different poems identical lines. Also cf.: *mallpānūt-āk tetyattar / ba-’bādā ṭāb men mellē* (CN 17, 7, 1–2) with *ṭāb-(h)u ’bādā šappirā / men šem’ā d-rebbū mellīn* (CN 18, 9, 5–6); *kāt-eh d-zar’ā ’attiqā / ḥad ba-tlātīn tētē b-an // w-zar’-āk ḥa(d)tā ḥad ba-štīn / briḳ-(h)u d-msaggē ḥad b-mā’ā* (CN 17, 7, 7–10) with *zrā-’āk nētē ḥad b-mā’ā / wa-lqīšāyā ḥad b-’eštīn // ’āp kātā ḥad ba-tlātīn / briḳ-(h)u d-’asgī ’allāt-āk* (CN 18, 9, 7–10) and *d-’akkārē tlātā zar’u(h)y / ba-tlātā ’a’pīn nētē // ba-tlātīn we-štīn w-mā’ā / briḳ-(h)u d-ma’tar ’allāt-āk* (CN 20, 2, 7–10).

245 Cf. CN 17, 7, 7–10; CN 18, 9, 7–10 and CN 20, 2, 7–10 with: *w-y(h)ab pērē ’īt d-mā’ā w-’īt de-štīn w-’īt da-tlātīn* (Mt. 13:8, Peshitta and Old Syriac Sinaitic); *w-ya(h)bat pērē w-rabb(w) w-y(h)ab(w) ’īt d-mā’ā w-’īt de-štīn w-’īt da-tlātīn* (Mt. 13:8, Old Syriac Curetonian); *w-yāheb pērē w-’ābed ’īt d-mā’ā w-’īt de-štīn w-’īt da-tlātīn* (Mt. 13:23, Peshitta and Old Syriac Sinaitic); *w-yāheb pērē ’īt d-mā’ā w-’īt de-štīn w-’īt da-tlātīn* (Mt. 13:23, Old Syriac Curetonian); *w-y(h)ab pērē ’īt da-tlātīn w-’īt de-štīn w-’īt d-mā’ā* (Mc. 4:8, Peshitta); *w-y(h)ab pērē wa-rbā w-y(h)ab ba-tlātīn wa-štīn w-mā’ā* (Mc. 4:8, Old Syriac Sinaitic); *w-yā(h) bīn pērē ba-tlātīn w-ba-štīn wa-b-mā’ā* (Mc. 4:20); *wa-’bad pērē ḥad b-mā’ā* (Lc. 8:8, Peshitta); *w-y(h)ab pērē ḥad b-mā’ā* (Lc. 8:8, Old Syriac). Ephrem does not conform perfectly to any formulation known: as a verb, he uses *’etā* instead of *y(h)ab* and *’bad* of the Gospels; he differentiates the thirtyfold, sixtyfold and hundredfold yield as Mark and Matthew, but employs the expression *ḥad b-* as in Luke, except at CN 20, 2, where he employs the same formulation as Mc. 4:8 in the Old Syriac version; at CN 17, 7, 7–10 and CN 20, 2, 7–10 he uses the ascending order (30, 60, 100) of Mark, and at CN 18, 9, 7–10 the descending order (100, 60, 30) of Matthew.

246 On the contrary, the enemy at CN 18, 8, 2 does not saw tares (*zizānē*) but thorns (*kubbē*), which are present in the parable of the Sower (Mt. 13:7.22; Mc. 4:7.18; Lc. 8:7.14).

the kingdom” as the wheat and to the “children of the evil one” as the tares, and in this sense, the parable discourages the apostles from dividing between good and bad people in the here and now; but Ephrem subscribes to an interpretation common in the early church, to the effect that the good and bad seed are not individuals, but doctrines, or virtues and vices. If this is true, it makes perfect sense that the bishop would eradicate wrong ideas and evil behaviours from his congregation.

The function of the metaphor at *CN* 17, 7 is to introduce a new theme: *CN* 17, 1–6 focused on Abraham’s election, his worthiness for the charge, and the continuity between him and his predecessor, whereas beginning at *CN* 17, 7 Ephrem sketches the future of Abraham as bishop. He does so sometimes through explicit exhortations in the imperfect tense, as in stanza 7 and 9–10, and sometimes through a description in the perfect tense (stanza 8). Stanza 7 seems to refer to the bishop’s *munus docendi* (here *mallpānūtā*, 1), but Ephrem avoids a direct reference to teaching, arguing that deeds are actually the most effective way of teaching. This corresponds to his broader theological stance in the Trinitarian disputes, whereby, rather than arguing for or against a dogmatic formula, he prefers to define the limits of enquiry and defend the authority of revelation and ecclesiastical tradition²⁴⁷. Therefore, Ephrem advises Abraham not only to adopt the most effective pedagogical method but also to be very prudent in matters of teaching, to avoid stirring up controversy and division in favour of a pragmatic approach. Moreover, Ephrem employs the original idea of a thirtyfold, sixtyfold, and hundredfold yield to sketch the ideal progress of the community, attributing the thirtyfold to the community in its spontaneous betterment, coming as per inertia from the “ancient seed” of previous bishops, the sixtyfold to the action of the bishop, and the hundredfold to God’s grace. The different revenues are not intended, as was the case in the parable, to signify different and legitimate results of different people, but different potential results of the same community on the basis of its situation. This builds a hierarchy of efficiency having the people at its lowest level, the bishop in the middle, and God at the top.

CN 20 is concerned with the problem of schismatic and heretical groups. Ephrem exhorts the newly elected bishop to prevent doctrinal division from entering the community. In this context he employs the metaphor of the tares, modifying the parable. As an argument for unity, the poet reminds the new bishop (and the audience) that his task is to preserve what the three preceding bishops have already grown, thereby stressing the continued episcopal succession and the legitimacy of Abraham. Here the triple yield of the parable is associated with the three previous bishops, suggesting a historical progress of the community (see §4.1).

The two themes of *CN* 17, 7 and 20, 2 are combined at *CN* 18, 8–9. Structurally, these two stanzas are a hinge between the second and third parts of *CN* 18: having

²⁴⁷ See the long discussion of Ephrem in the context of the Arian controversies in Wickes 2015, 19–52. The attitude transpires from our poems, too: see §3.1.3.2.

Here, the metaphor is used to outline the succession of the first three bishops of Nisibis accompanying the growth of the community. The role each bishop had for the community is represented as a different task in beginning a cultivation, each in its order: the first ploughing and freeing the soil, the second enclosing it, and the third sowing. The process represented here is similar to the one described in Ps. 80:8–9, where God transplants a vine from Egypt in the promised land, a symbol of Israel's liberation. Since in Ps. 80:8 (verse 9 in the Peshitta) God has “cast away the pagans” (*ʿawbedt ʿammē*), it is probable that the “briar and thorns” the first bishop Jacob has uprooted in *CN* 14, 3, 2, are in fact pagan cults. Not that Jacob had literally uprooted every pagan cult from Nisibis; rather, the mere introduction of Christianity to a city is represented as the vanquishing of heathenism. Another interesting parallel is the word *syāgā*, meaning “hedge”, “enclosure”, and present both in *CN* 14, 3, 4 and in Ps. 80:12. This idea of the church as an enclosure, inspired by Old Testament symbology of Israel such as that in Ps. 80, is found also by Gregory, as he laments the moral unworthiness of church hierarches: “But now ’tis one the place known for wickedness and doom / by everyone, the strangers as well as our fellow believers [ἔρκεος ἡμετέρου], / the former august seat of the wise, hedge [ἔρκος] of the best”²⁵⁰. Gregory does not use the same word as Ps. 80:12 (φραγμός, in the Septuaginta Ps. 79:13), because it is too prosaic, and employs an epic term, ἔρκος, instead. However, the fundamental idea of this metaphor is the same for Ephrem, Gregory, and the Bible—namely, that the community is composed of carefully elected people, taken apart from the rest of the world and in a hostile relationship with the rest of the world. The fence or hedge serves to establish this difference, or sanctity, and to preserve the people from the forces of the world. Finally, note how in *CN* 14, 3, 1–4 Ephrem hints at the image of the vine, with his reference to Ps. 80 and the verb *plah* used for “till”, but also meaning “cultivate” a vine. However, lines 5–6, with their reference to sowing and the barn (*ʿawṣrā*), break the implicit metaphor of the foregoing lines and settle for a corn metaphor.

To sum up, Gregory and Ephrem treat the agricultural metaphor, coming from the Bible, in completely different ways. First of all, Gregory scarcely employs it, whereas Ephrem uses it often, with particular reference to the parables of the sower and of the tares. Second, when he compares the bishop to a sower, Gregory wants to highlight the divine action that gave him success in Constantinople: if the bishop is but a sower and God is the one who makes grow, then the successful bishop may claim divine legitimacy. In Ephrem the use of the metaphor is the opposite, because it expresses the work and effort poured by the bishops into educating the community. This basic meaning can be applied to such diverse situations as the problem of the correct way of teaching, heresy and unity, Julian's reign, and so on. The bottom line of these uses, however, is that Ephrem tends to reinterpret the imagery, often to the apparent opposite of its original

250 Νῦν δ' ἓνα χώρον ἴσασιν ἀτασθαλίας τε μόρου τε / Πάντες, ὅσοι ξεῖνοί τε καὶ ἔρκεος ἡμετέρου, / Τὸ σεπτὸν τοπάροιθε σοφῶν ἔδος, ἔρκος ἀρίστων (II, 1, 13, 66–68).

meaning. Besides these differences, Ps. 80 (79) seems a favourite of both poets: Gregory paraphrases it, Ephrem alludes to it. This psalm gives them a way to envisage their community and a way to trace its movement through history. Both see the community as an enclosed space (ἔρκος/*syāgā*), but Gregory employs the image to denounce a moment of decadence, whereas Ephrem in the planting, enclosing and cultivating of the psalm sees the progress of his community through time.

2.2.3 Iconography of the bishop

There is a group of related metaphors that is very productive in both Ephrem's and Gregory's poetry. These are "iconographic" metaphors—namely, comparisons of the bishop to a figurative work of art or to something or someone capable of reproducing the hue and shape of things, such as a mirror. This kind of metaphor lends itself to different treatments, but it is also a strikingly shared theme between the two poets. In a sense, each of these metaphors is a *mise en abîme* of the poems as a whole, as literary representations of the perfect bishop.

2.2.3.1 Sources of the metaphor

Metaphors of this kind are much more remarkable because their biblical precedence is, to say the least, scanty. In general, there are three different kinds of biblical utterance on images. The first kind represents the relationship between God and man as that of an artist or a model to his work, a case most prominently represented by the creation of man "according to the image and resemblance" (εἰκών, ὁμοίωσις/*šalmā, dmūtā*) of God in Gen. 1:26–27²⁵¹. A good number of narrative passages detail works of arts, figurative and not, linked with the temple and the ark of the covenant, and there are passages in Exodus that attribute artistic ability to God's inspiration²⁵². However, commandment passages reveal hostility towards figurative arts, a hostility paired by the prophetic visions of Ezekiel and Daniel, involving a painting and a statue, respectively, and in no friendly terms²⁵³. In the New Testament, Paul's writings compare earthly knowledge about God to an image in a mirror²⁵⁴: in this case, as well as at Gen. 1:26–27, iconographic language aims at limiting human pretensions to divine reality, even as it affirms the link between God and man.

Even though the Bible does not offer any iconographic metaphor for the formation of the religious leader, Gregory seems to imply this at II, 1, 12, 539–540:

²⁵¹ See also Jes. 29:16; 45:9; 64:8; Jer. 18:1–11.

²⁵² Ex. 31:3–6; 35:31–35; 36:1.

²⁵³ Ex. 20:4.23; 34:17; Lev. 19:4; 26:1; Dtn. 4:16–23; 5:8; Hos. 13:2–3; Ezekiel's vision: Hes. 23:14–16; Daniel's vision: Dan. 2:31–35.

²⁵⁴ 1Cor. 13:12 (ἑσποτρον/*maḥzītā*); 2Cor. 3:18 (κατοπτρίζονοι/*maḥzītā*); see also Jac. 1:23 (ἑσποτρον/*maḥzītā*). Similar imagery, though with a different meaning, in the Wisdom of Solomon, where the wisdom is "mirror of God's action" (ἑσποτρον/*maḥzītā*) and "image of his goodness" (εἰκών/*šurtā*) (Sap. 7:26).

Ὁ δ' ἐκτὸς οὐδέν οἶδε, πλὴν εὐδοξίας
 Ὅρον τίθεσθαι τοῦ καλοῦ τῆς πίστεως
 Ὅς τῶν μὲν αὐτοῦ μηδὲ ἐν λογίζεται,
 Τῶν σῶν δὲ πικρὸς ἵσταται κατήγορος·
 Πῶς τοῦτον, εἰπὲ, πείσομεν δόξαν λαβεῖν (535)
 Ἄλλην, παρ' ἣν δεδώκαμεν τῷ πρὶν βίῳ;
 Πῶς γλώσσαν ἐμφράξομεν ἢ τίσιν λόγοις;
 Περιφρονεῖν γὰρ οὐδὲ τοῦτ' ἐμῶν νόμων,
 Οἱ πάντοθεν ξέουσιν, ὡς ἀγαλμὰ τι,
 Τὸν προστάτην, ὡς μή τι τοῦ λαοῦ βλαβῆ. (540)
 (II, 1, 12, 531–540)

But the pagan has, apart from our reputation,
 no other standard for the goodness of the faith:
 he, who doesn't care for his vices,
 becomes a grudging prosecutor of yours.
 How are we, tell me, to persuade him to change (535)
 his mind, from the one we gave him formerly?
 How are we to put to rest his tongue, with which words?
 Indeed, 'tis not in our laws to despise what
 in any respect polishes, as a kind of statue,
 the leader, lest the people suffer any damage. (540)

The comparison to a sculpture concludes one of Gregory's arguments for the necessity of morally superior leaders—namely, that they should dispose pagans favourably towards the church. A good bishop may confute and (rarely) convert pagans, whereas a bishop who lived a wayward life will probably enhance criticism towards the church, perhaps even persecution. That the focus here is not conversion of pagans but protecting the church from persecution is demonstrated by the word “people” (λαός, 540), the usual term for the Christian insiders, and by the characterisation of the pagan outsider as an “accuser” (πικρὸς κατήγορος, 534): the aim is to defend the existing community, not to convert.

Probably the reason Gregory compares the Christian leader to a statue is to allude to the many biblical and canonical exhortations aimed at community leaders, whereby leaders are urged to amend their ways and be beacons of virtue; or he may be alluding to texts prescribing the choice of virtuous men as leaders in the congregation. Here the good reputation of the bishop and his previous experience in the community are strongly emphasised (i.e., he should not be a neophyte)²⁵⁵. Indeed, the Gregorian passage seems

255 The prime example are the parallel passages of 1Tim. 3:1–7 and Tit. 1:5–9: πιστὸς ὁ λόγος Εἴ τις ἐπισκοπῆς ὀρέγεται, καλοῦ ἔργου ἐπιθυμεῖ. δεῖ οὖν τὸν ἐπίσκοπον ἀνεπίληπτον εἶναι, ... δεῖ δὲ καὶ μαρτυρίαν καλὴν ἔχειν ἀπὸ τῶν ἑξῶθεν, ἵνα μὴ εἰς ὀνειδισμόν ἐμπέση καὶ παγίδα τοῦ διαβόλου. (1Tim. 3:1–2; 7); δεῖ γὰρ τὸν ἐπίσκοπον ἀνέγκλητον εἶναι ὡς θεοῦ οἰκονόμου (Tit. 1:7). These doctrines are developed in the *Const. apost.* 2, 6, in particular paragraph 7 where the bishop is said to be a σκοπός (“aim”, “target”, but in the *Didasc. apost.* 4 we have *dmūtā*, “model”, “exemplar”) for his community (the meaning of the word is shifted later to “sentry”, “scout” through the quotation of Hes. 33; correspondently, the Syriac translation of σκοπός in the quotation is *dawqā*).

almost a paraphrase of 1Tim. 3:7: “those outside” (τῶν ἔξωθεν) becomes in Gregory a generic singular “outsider” (ὁ δ’ἐκτός, 531; term attested in Homer, unlike ἔξωθεν); instead of the *koine* Greek expression μαρτυρία καλή in Paul, Gregory adopts the term εὐδοξία, perfectly acclimatised to high poetry²⁵⁶; the strongly connoted διάβολος becomes a more “Athenian” κατήγορος. However, no text, in the Bible or in canon laws, compares the leader’s moral amendment to the sculpting of a statue: indeed, this comparison stems from pagan philosophy. Epictetus is the first to compare moral philosophy to sculpting, and a famous passage in Plotinus’s *On Beauty* develops this theme²⁵⁷. Gregory may well have known Plotinus’s passage. II, 1, 12, 539–540 demonstrates that the source of this kind of imagery is often found outside the Bible or Christian literature²⁵⁸.

2.2.3.2 Shape-shifting politician or holy icon (II, 1, 12, 709–760)?

The passage in which Gregory discusses the iconography of the bishop in the most organic way is II, 1, 12, 709–760. Since most other occurrences of this theme can be brought into relation with this treatment, I will analyse this text extensively:

Ἀλλ’ εὐστροφός τις οὗτος ἐν τοῖς πράγμασιν,
 Ὅν οὐκ ἐπαινεῖς, ἐντελής τε προστάτης (710)
 Τρίβων παλαιῶν καὶ νέων κινημάτων·
 Ὅ δ’ εὐσεβὴς μὲν, χρήσιμος δ’ αὐτῷ μόνῳ.
 Τίς ταῦτά φησιν; ὡς λίαν κακότροπος.
 Οὐδεὶς γάρ ἐστιν ὅστις αὐτῷ ζῇ μόνῳ,
 Οὗτ’ οὖν καλῶν τις οὔτε μὴν τῶν χειρόνων. (715)
 Ἀλλ’ ὥσπερ οὗτος οὐ τύχοι σπάσας ἀήρ
 Εὐωδίας μετέσχευεν ἢ δυσωδίας,

²⁵⁶ On the use of μαρτυρία as an honorific term instead of its judicial meaning, see Liddell/Scott/Jones 2011, 1082, s.v. μαρτυρία (only inscriptions and papyri are brought as examples for this meaning of the word); Kokkinia 2017. At Liddell/Scott/Jones 2011, 710, s.v. εὐδοξία, examples from Simonides, Pindar and Euripides (together with classic prose writers as Plato and Demosthenes) are given.

²⁵⁷ οὐκ ἐπαγγέλλεται, ἔφη, φιλοσοφία τῶν ἐκτός τι περιποιήσιν τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ: εἰ δὲ μή, ἔξω τι τῆς ἰδίας ὕλης ἀναδέχεται. ὡς γὰρ τέκτονος ὕλη τὰ ξύλα, ἀνδριαντοποιοῦ ὁ χαλκός, οὕτως τῆς περὶ βίον τέχνης ὕλη ὁ βίος αὐτοῦ ἐκάστου (Epict. diss. 1, 15, 2); Ἀναγε ἐπὶ σαυτὸν καὶ ἴδε· κἂν μήπω σαυτὸν ἴδης καλόν, οἷα ποιητῆς ἀγάλματος, ὃ δεῖ καλὸν γενέσθαι, τὸ μὲν ἀφαιρεῖ, τὸ δὲ ἀπέξεσε, τὸ δὲ λεῖον, τὸ δὲ καθαρὸν ἐποίησεν, ἕως ἔδειξε καλὸν ἐπὶ τῷ ἀγάλματι πρόσωπον, οὕτω καὶ σὺ ἀφαίρει ὅσα περιττὰ καὶ ἀπεύθυνε ὅσα σκολιά, ὅσα σκοτεινὰ καθάρων ἐργάζου εἶναι λαμπρὰ καὶ μὴ παύση <τεκταίνων> τὸ σὸν <ἀγαλμα>, ἕως ἂν ἐκλάμψει σοι τῆς ἀρετῆς ἡ θεοειδὴς ἀγλαία, ἕως ἂν ἴδης <σωφροσύνην ἐν ἀγνῷ βεβῶσαν βάθρῳ> (Plot. enn. 1, 6, 9, 7–15). On the relationship of the bishop/ascetic’s demeanour to the conventions of *paideia* and their iconic value, see Gautier 2002, 190–191.

²⁵⁸ Another source may be epigraphic practice: if I am reading correctly the dedicatory epigram of a bishop Constantine in Baetic Thebes, he defines himself as an ἰχόνα [sic] in the first line (Daux 1968, 863 fig. 10). Moreover, Gregory (and maybe Ephrem too) could see a link between the μαρτυρία καλή prescribed by the apostle and statues, since it was customary that successful officials and provincial notables, enjoying good fame, had statues of themselves with dedicatory epigrams in public places of their city. I would not push the link too much, however.

Οὕτω τάχιστα τοῖς πέλας ποιούμεθα,
Καλοῖς μὲν ἦττον, τοῖς κακοῖς δὲ καὶ λίαν.
Μᾶλλον γὰρ εὐμίμητον ἢ πονηρία. (720)

Εἰ δ' οὗτος ἡμῖν καὶ πρόεδρος ὦν τύχοι,
Εἰ μὲν κάκιστος καὶ πονηρίας πλέως,
Τοῦτ' ἔστ' ἐκείνο ράμνον ἄρχειν τῶν ξύλων·
Εἰ δὲ κράτιστος, αὐθις ἐν στύλῳ πυρὸς
Ἦγουμενῷ πορεύετ' Ἰσραὴλ μέγας (725)

Πρὸς ἣν ἅπαντες σπεύδομεν γῆν ἐλπίδος,
Κᾶν μὴ κυκλῶν τις μὴδ' ἀγοραῖος ὦν τύχοι,
Πρωτεὺς σοφιστῆς εἰς κλοπὰς μορφωμάτων
Ἦ καὶ Μελάμπους ἢ τις ἄλλος ἄστατος
Πᾶσιν τὰ πάντα ραδίως τυπούμενος (730)

Πρὸς τὴν ἁπάντων ἀθρόαν καταστροφὴν.
Πῶς οὖν ἄχρηστον, εἰπέ μοι, τοῦτον καλεῖς,
Πρὸς ὃν βλέποντες βελτίους γενοίμεθ' ἄν;
Ἦ πῶς ἄριστον προστάτην καὶ δεξιόν,
Πρὸς ὃν βλέπων σὺ τοὺς ἐμοὺς διαπτύεις; (735)

Τό τοι περιττὸν καὶ πρόσαντες τοῖς σοφοῖς·
Τὸ δ' εὐγενὲς μάλιστα πιθανώτατον.
Ἐκείνος εἴης, ὥς σοι φρήν, οὗτος δ' ἐγώ.
Ἦ καὶ γραφῆων ἄριστος οὗτός σοι δοκεῖ,
Οὐχ ὃς γράφει κινούμεν' ἀπλοῖς χρώμασι, (740)

Ζεῦξίς τις ἢ Πολύκλειτος ἢ τις Εὐφράνωρ,
Ἀλλ' ὅστις ἀνθηραῖς τε καὶ παντασίοις
Βαφαῖς ἁμορφα σώματ' ἐξεργάζεται,
Ἵν Καλλίμαχος, καὶ Κάλαις ἦσθην, ὥς δοκῶ,
Μόγισ γράφοντες εἰκόνας τῶν εἰκόνων; (745)

Τοιοῦτός ἐστι πᾶς ἀνὴρ πολύτροπος,
Ταῦτ' οὖν ὁρῶν ἔκαμνες εὐρεῖν ποιμένα;
Ὡς μικρὸν ἐσπούδαζες! ἐγκαλύπτομαι.
Ὡσπερ λογιστὴν ἐσκόπεις τὸν προστάτην.
Κόπρων μέλει σοι, μειζόνων δ' ἐμοὶ λόγος. (750)

Ἐν ἔστω τοῦδ' ἔργον ἱερέως, καὶ μόνον,
Ψυχὰς καθαίρειν ἐν βίῳ τε καὶ λόγῳ
Ἄνω φέροντα ἐνθέοις κινήμασι
– Γαληνόν, ὑψίνουν τε τὰς θείας μόνας
Ἀκηλιδῶτους ἐμφάσεις τυπούμενον, (755)

Ὡσπερ κάτοπτρον ἐνδοθεν μορφοῦμενον –
Ἀγνάς τε πέμπειν προσφορὰς ὑπὲρ τέκνων,
Ἐως ἂν αὐτοὺς προσφορὰν καταρτίσῃ.
Τὰ δ' ἄλλ' ἀφείσθω τοῖς τὰδ' ἐντελεστέροις.
Οὕτως ἂν ἡμῖν ἀσφαλῶς ἔχοι βίος. (760)

(II, 1, 12, 709–760)

“Still he knows his way around in business,
this one you blame, and is a perfect leader,
practised in old and new movements,
whereas that pious one is useful only to himself.” (710)

Who says such things? Someone too malignant.
 For no one exists to live for himself only,
 neither among the good nor among the evil. (715)
 Rather, as this air, depending on who draws it,
 acquires a pleasant or a bad odour,
 so we are made like our neighbours most quickly,
 less, however, from the good, but too much from the evil.
 Wickedness in fact is easier to imitate. (720)
 But if such a man should become also our leader—
 that is, if he is mean and full of wickedness—
 then this is the proverbial bramble ruling the trees,
 whereas if he's excellent, by the pillar of fire
 once more led, the Great Israel will proceed (725)
 to that land of hope we all earnestly pursue,
 even if its leader is not always around in the marketplace,
 nor a Proteus skilful in stealing appearances,
 nor a Melampus nor another restless man
 easily adapting himself in everything to everyone else, (730)
 based on everyone's continuous changing.
 So why do you call useless—tell me—the one
 whose imitation can make us better?
 Or why is the best leader and right the one
 whose imitation makes you despise ours? (735)
 Excess is unsuitable for the sage,
 while generosity is most trustworthy.
 You can be that one, if you desire, but I'm this.
 Do you hold as the best of painters
 not the one painting lively forms with simple colours, (740)
 a Zeuxis or Polyclitus or a Euphranor,
 but anyone who with bright and shadowless
 dyes contrives misshapen bodies,
 like Callimachus and Calais did, in my opinion
 barely representing the copies of the copies? (745)
 Such is every manifold man.
 Is it with this in mind, then, that you were striving to find a shepherd?
 How small an effort! I'm ashamed for you.
 You look for a bishop as for a city curator.
 You care for dung, but my concerns are wider. (750)
 Leave to the priest one task and one only,
 to purify souls through life and words,
 bringing them upwards with inspired impulses,
 being gentle and high-minded, only by the divine,
 spotless reflections moulded (755)
 as a mirror reflecting from within
 and to send pure offerings on behalf of his children,
 until he has restored them as an offering.
 Let other tasks be left for the ones in them more accomplished.
 This way, we can have a secure life. (760)

This discussion is a part of the longer polemic against morally unworthy bishops and the hasty ordination of morally unfit candidates. It follows the tirade against falsehood, implicitly aimed at Maximus: everyone should be true to himself and not feign to be someone he is not (see §5.2.4). At this point, Gregory, with a well-known rhetorical technique, introduces a fictive speaker objecting to his ideas (709–712): the speaker considers the moral requirement for the office of bishop to be of secondary importance in respect to more mundane gifts; a bishop who is also a good politician could secure advantages for the church. This objection is no rhetorical fiction: historical research demonstrates that the ability to be a good patron for the church was a paramount requirement in the choice of a bishop²⁵⁹. This means Gregory is reacting to a widespread (and, with some limitations, accepted) habit of his times, and he must defend an unpopular position.

The core of Gregory's counterargument is that the bishop has an exemplary role before his community, and his morality can influence the morality of every faithful person. Since morality is a requirement for salvation, any earthly advantage secured by a wire-pulling bishop pales before the good example offered by the good bishop. The first bit of argument (713–720) aims at demonstrating that everyone is an example setter. Gregory does this in two ways: by comparing good and bad persons with good and bad smells (716–717) and by appealing to common sense (718–720)²⁶⁰. The comparison between the renown, fame, and influence of one's moral character on one side and good or bad smell spreading in the air on the other has New Testament and Christian antecedents, but occurs also in rabbinic and Roman literature²⁶¹. In Christian and Jewish literature, the origin of the theme can be found in the good scent of sacrifices (Gen. 8:21; Ex. 29:18; Lev. 17:4; Num. 28:2), a theme shared with Greek literature, where good scent is a token of divine presence²⁶². This may anticipate the sacrificial imagery of the final passage (751–760; see §2.1.3.1). The idea that the people we associate with influence our moral character is first attested in Theognis (27–38), an author Gregory often employed, but also in biblical wisdom (Prov. 13:20; 14:7; Sir. 6:33–37). Then, with an *a fortiori* argument (721–726), Gregory applies this principle to the bishop, illustrating its consequences with two biblical references: a bad leader is like the bramble ruling the trees (Judc. 9:7–15); a good leader, like the pillar of fire guiding Israel towards the promised land (Ex. 13:21–22).

At this point it is clear that Gregory's argument revolves around imitation of the bishop and its consequences. Therefore, Gregory plays out the implications of a lobby-

²⁵⁹ Cracco Ruggini 1998, 8; Lepelley 1998, 19–20, 24–25; Martin 1998, 61; Rapp 2005, 183, 199–201, 274. A discussion of this theme in Gregory's works in Gautier 2002, 122–125, where the author limits the scope of Gregory's rejections of patronage, an expectation of Christian communities from their bishops, because they are usually inserted in the polemic against Nectarius and in the defence of his works in Constantinople.

²⁶⁰ Useful parallels for the theme of "living for oneself" are given by Meier 1989, 153–154.

²⁶¹ 2Cor. 2:14–16; Lampe 1961, 394, s.v. *δυσωδία*; 585, s.v. *εὐωδία*; Harvey 2006; Toner 2015; Green 2015; Bradley 2015; Stevens 2015–2016.

²⁶² Clements 2015.

ist-bishop for the example he sets, and, resorting to classical literature, he compares the bishop with Proteus and Melampus. These characters are presented as famous shape-shifters, tapping into one of Gregory's *Leitmotiven*, contemporary bishops' cynical facility for changing their positions in order to gain material advantages²⁶³. First, it is interesting to note that Gregory chooses pagan exempla for the behaviour of bad bishops, whereas normally he would use biblical examples in our poems. Second, Gregory's language is noteworthy here, as he speaks of "forms" (μορφώματα, 728) and "self-shaping" (τυπούμενος, 730): the language here introduced will be developed later on. Third, it is remarkable that Gregory here criticises the shape-shifting bishop, "easily adapting himself in everything to everyone else, / based on everyone's continuous changing" (Πᾶσιν τὰ πάντα ῥαδίως τυπούμενος / Πρὸς τὴν ἀπάντων ἀθρόαν καταστροφὴν, 730–731). The behaviour here criticised bears striking resemblances with Paul's method of preaching: ἐγένόμεν τοῖς ἀσθενέσιν ἀσθενής, ἵνα τοὺς ἀσθενεῖς κερδήσω· τοῖς πᾶσιν γέγονα πάντα, ἵνα πάντως τινὰς σώσω (1Cor. 9:22). The two passages have the same threefold polyptotus (πᾶσιν, πάντα, ἀπάντων or πάντως). However, the result is very different, because Paul aims at salvation (σώσω), while the bad bishop blindly follows the whims of the moment, whims which Gregory expresses with the word καταστροφή, rich in negative connotations: καταστροφή is a "change", but also "subjugation" and "ruin", the exact opposite of "salvation".

The same varied and shifting approach adopted by Paul is suggested by Ephrem to the bishop Abraham:

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²⁶³ Proteus was the proverbial shape-shifter (Jungk 1974, 186; Ambühl 2006; Brown 2016). Melampus never appears as a shape-shifter outside Gregory, a problem studied by Lefherz 1958, 40–44 (see also Meier 1989, 155). Melampus occurs only here and in the parallel text of Greg. Naz. or. 4, 82, coupled with Proteus. Since the shape-shifting ability is otherwise unattested, the coupling with Proteus may be either due to the shared prophetic ability of the two, or to their Egyptian origin (for Melampus see Herodt. 2, 49). It is possible either that Gregory found the coupling already in compilations on mythology for the rhetorician, or that he himself combined the two characters. In the first case, he may have found the two together as proverbial prophets, and mistakenly attributed Proteus' shape-shifting ability also to Melampus. In the second case, he may be led to couple the two at II, 1, 12, based on their common Egyptian provenance, since his polemic against incoherent bishops has much to do with Gregory's conflict with Egyptian clergy (cf. also the use of Proteus against Maximus at II, 1, 11, 808). In this case, however, the passage at or. 4, 82, referred to Julian, remains unexplained. On the incoherence of bishops see II, 1, 12, 336.648 and more at §5.2.2.1.

²⁶⁴ "Let one be the voice of your faith, / and the voices you borrow [š'īlē] countless; // let the image [šalmā] of truth be on your heart, / while every countenance [kul-demwān] is on your face: // sad, rejoicing or feeble: / to the erring show that you are wrathful, // to the modest show that you are joyful. / Be one for Divinity, // and for humanity be many. / **Blessed is he who with all men was all things!**"

Ephrem elaborates on Paul's model, neatly dividing the roles of unity and multiplicity. The "faith" or "truth" (*šarrārā, quštā*), the content of the bishop's preaching, should remain the same, while the approaches to different people should change according to the needs of those people. The similarities in language are striking because both poets employ the same iconographic metaphors: the "image" of truth (*šalmā*, 3) corresponds to the word τύπος implied in Gregory's verb τυπούμενος (II, 1, 12, 730), whereas the phrase "thefts of appearances" (κλοπαὶ μορφωμάτων, 728) contains the same ideas as the words "countenance" (*dmūtā*, 4) and "borrowed" (*š'īlā*, 2): both phrases refer to outward appearance and to something feigned or inauthentic. Both Gregory and Ephrem employ iconographic imagery to describe and evaluate behaviour. Moreover, their respective organisations of the polarity of "one" and "many" in this case are very similar: Ephrem distinguishes the one and authentic "voice" or "image", which is inner ("in the heart") and visible to God, from the various countenances which are only "borrowed" and instrumental at winning other people, so that they are exterior and visible to people. The similarity with Gregory will be apparent when the positive side of Gregory's argument is examined later. For now, it is enough to note the common idea of "borrowed" or "stolen" appearances, with Gregory emphasising the negative connotation through the choice of the word "theft" (κλοπή). Yet Gregory, like Paul and Ephrem, favourably evaluates the shape-shifting behaviour of the bishop elsewhere²⁶⁵. It is for contextual reasons that he here gives a negative turn to the theme. In the case at hand, multiplicity is examined from the point of view of the example it gives to the community and not from the point of view of guidance for every single individual, as in the cases of Paul and Ephrem. This perspective is chosen purposefully to give a negative view of this otherwise praiseworthy ability, because in the wider context of the poem and of Gregory's defence after the 381 council this ability could be more credibly claimed by Gregory's opponents, Maximus and Nectarius. In fact, the other bishops, from Rome to Antioch (and probably even in Cappadocia), did not impute to Gregory a bad conscience in regard to the proceedings of the council, but incompetence and a certain lack of flexibility²⁶⁶.

²⁶⁵ See Beeley 2008, 244–247 for a discussion of Gregory's prose passages on the multiplicity required of the priest. An example from *or.* 2: οὕτως ἐκ πολλῶν καὶ διαφορῶν καὶ ἡθῶν καὶ λόγων, καθάπερ ἐνὸς ζώου συνθέτου καὶ ἀνομοίου, τοῦ κοινοῦ τούτου τῆς Ἐκκλησίας συγκειμένου σώματος, πᾶσα ἀνάγκη καὶ τὸν προστάτην ἀπλοῦν τε εἶναι τὸν αὐτὸν κατὰ τὴν ἐν πᾶσιν ὁρθότητα· καὶ ὅτι μάλιστα παντοδαπὸν καὶ ποικίλον κατὰ τὴν πρὸς ἕκαστον οἰκείωσιν, καὶ τὸ τῆς ὁμιλίας πρὸς πάντας ἐπιτήδειόν τε καὶ πρόσφορον (*or.* 2, 44). The multiplicity is linked, both in Gregory's orations (Elm 2000a) and in Ephrem's poems, with the image of the priest as physician (see below, §2.2.4.7; Gautier 2002, 118). Ephrem expresses variety of treatments also through the image of the shepherd and of the fisherman (see §2.2.1.1).

²⁶⁶ McGuckin 2001a, 384–385; Simonetti 1975, 534–535. This relates to the criticisms that Gregory received for his handling of the council (and of the schism in Antioch in particular), but it is important to distinguish these criticisms, which Gregory appropriated and morphed into a title of merit, from the reality of a skilled *curialis* who, after he succeeded in a number of political situations, failed in an incredibly complex and fraught political moment as was the Council in 381. Recent bibliography is conscious of

Lines 733–738 insist on the bishop’s function as an example setter. The comparison between the good and bad example-setting bishop introduced by these lines is developed in the following passage (739–746) through an analogy with painters. Gregory asks the fictive speaker which painter does a better job, associating two styles of painting with the two types of bishops. This analogy belongs clearly to a larger group of stock arguments for cultural polemics in Greek culture. Rhetors would gladly describe or comment upon paintings (e.g., the *Imagines* by Philostratus or the *Zeuxis* by Lucian). Moreover, the comparison of painting with rhetoric or poetry was a commonplace of ancient aesthetics. Examples of such proceedings are to be found in Dionysius of Halicarnassus’s *opuscula*. It is likely that Gregory had in mind something like these passages as he wrote II, 1, 12, 739–746: he contrasts simple colours and accurate shapes with the mixing of many colours, and he evaluates this latter style negatively, as a kind of delusion, as does Dionysius in *Isae*. 4²⁶⁷. From *Isoc*. 3, he seems to take some items for his lists of names, which is baffling, since *Isoc*. 3 is concerned with sculptors, whereas Gregory is talking about painters, so that Polyclitus, Calamis (written “Kalais” because of an ancient error),²⁶⁸ and Callimachus are out of place here²⁶⁹. Zeuxis, mentioned among the “simple” painters, was in fact a pioneer of mixing colours and chiaroscuro; in ancient sources, he is frequently compared to Parrhasius, who was instead famous for the accurate design of shapes²⁷⁰. Another difficulty is presented by the adjective παντάσκιος, because it is a hapax of Gregory, occurring only here and in Hesychius, who explains it as “completely without shadows”. In Dionysius’s description at *Isae*. 4, but also in the other sources, there is a stable relation between quantity of colours, prominence of shades and shadows, skill, and realism, all elements which—since the works of Xenocrates of Sicily—had been seen as progressively growing throughout the fifth and fourth century BC, until they reached perfection in Lysippus²⁷¹. Gregory’s utterances cannot be interpreted in this traditional framework: he extols simplicity of colour but criticises absence of shades; he enrols Zeuxis among the masters of outline

this difference between rhetoric and reality: McGuckin 2001a, 110–112, 131–133, 140–143, 145–146; Elm 2000a; Elm 2000b; Elm 2001, 69–71; Storin 2017, 278–280. More on this at §5.1.2.1.

267 ἵνα δὲ μᾶλλον ἢ διαφορά τῶν ἀνδρῶν γένηται καταφανής, εἰκόνι χρήσομαι τῶν ὁρατῶν τινι. εἰσὶ δὴ τινες ἀρχαῖαι γραφαί, χρώμασι μὲν εἰργασμέναι ἀπλῶς καὶ οὐδεμίαν ἐν τοῖς μίγμασιν ἔχουσαι ποικιλίαν, ἀκριβεῖς δὲ ταῖς γραμμαῖς καὶ πολὺ τὸ χαρίεν ἐν ταύταις ἔχουσαι. αἱ δὲ μετ’ ἐκείνας εὐγραμμοὶ μὲν ἦττον, ἐξεργασμένοι δὲ μᾶλλον, σικᾷ τε καὶ φωτὶ ποικιλλόμεναι καὶ ἐν τῷ πλήθει τῶν μιγμάτων τὴν ἰσχὺν ἔχουσαι. τούτων μὲν δὴ ταῖς ἀρχαιοτέραις ἔοικεν ὁ Λυσίας κατὰ τὴν ἀπλότητα καὶ τὴν χάριν, ταῖς δὲ ἐκπεπονημέναις τε καὶ τεχνικωτέραις ὁ Ἰσαῖος. ἦν δὲ περὶ αὐτοῦ δόξα παρὰ τοῖς τότε γοητείας καὶ ἀπάτης, ὥς δεινὸς ἀνὴρ τεχνιτεῦσαι λόγους ἐπὶ τὰ πονηρότερα, καὶ εἰς τοῦτο διεβάλλετο (Dion. Hal. *Isae*. 4).

268 Meier 1989, 156.

269 δοκεῖ δὴ μοι μὴ ἄπο σκοποῦ τις ἂν εἰκάσαι τὴν μὲν Ἰσοκράτους ῥητορικὴν τῇ Πολυκλείτου τε καὶ Φειδίου τέχνῃ κατὰ τὸ σεμνὸν καὶ μεγαλότεχρον καὶ ἀξιοματικόν, τὴν δὲ Λυσίου τῇ Καλάμιδος καὶ Καλλιμάχου τῆς λεπτότητος ἕνεκα καὶ τῆς χάριτος (Dion. Hal. *Isoc*. 3).

270 Childs 2018, 139–140.

271 Lapatin 2012, 279–280.

over colour and seems to prefer the more ancient style of painting (against the progressive paradigm introduced by Xenocrates), while at the same time insisting on realism. Anyway, the polemic against virtuosic, overspectacular, and more modern art forms is a trope equally applied to music (in the polemic against New Music), tragedy (discussions surrounding Euripides and Agathon), and rhetoric (Plato's polemic against the Sophists). Gregory exploits these well-known cultural disputes to frame Christian strife²⁷².

Interestingly, line 739 establishes the comparison with a focus on the *painter*, but in fact the significant attributes are attached to the *paintings*. After all, at 733–738 the bishop was the one “to whom to look” (πρὸς ὃν βλέποντες, 734). Elsewhere, Gregory compares the bishop directly to a painting for his exemplary value, even if in a negative sense²⁷³. To understand Gregory's analogy better, it is worthwhile to compare it with another passage from our poems, in which its significance is clearer:

Ζωγράφος ἐστὶν ἄριστος, ὃς ἐν πινάκεσσι χαράσσει
 Μορφὰς ἀτρεκέας, ἔμπνοα δερκομένας·
 Οὐχ ὃς χρώματα πολλὰ καὶ εὐχρῶα μὰψ ἐπιμίξας,
 Λειμῶνα γραπτὸν δείκνυσιν ἐκ πινάκων.
 Νῆα δὲ ποντοπόρειαν ἐπήνεσα, οὐ παρασήμοις
 Κάλλεσιν, οὐ πρύμνης ἄνθεσι λαμπομένην·
 Ἀλλ' ἦν ναυπηγοῖ χέρες γόμοισιν ἄριστα
 Δῶκαν πηξάμεναι κύμασι θαρσαλέην.
 Καὶ στρατὸς ἐστὶν ἄριστος, ἀρήϊος ἀντὶ καλοῖο,
 Καὶ δόμος αἰγλήεις δεύτερος εὐπαγέος.
 Ὡς δὲ βίων βροτέων. Ὁ μὲν ἄμβροτος, ὃν τινα Χριστῷ
 Τάρβος ἄγει, πλεκτῆς ἀλλότριον κακίης,
 Ἐμπεδον, ἀστυφέλικτον, ἀπενθέα. Ὅς δὲ κάκιστος,
 Ἐνδοθεν ἀδρανέων, ἔκτοθε κάρτος ἔχων,
 Ὡκύμορον, φρενοπλῆξιν ὁμοῖον, οἷσιν ἅπαντα
 Δινήεντα πέλει ἀστατέουσι νόον.
 (II, 1, 17, 1–16)

A painter is excellent when he draws on his canvas
 the exact shapes, looking as if they were alive,
 not when, mixing many colours and bright aimlessly,
 he makes a meadow of painting of the canvas.
 I praise the seafaring ship, not the one counterfeited
 in her beauty or splendid with garlands on the stern,
 rather the one the hands of the shipwright had fastened in the best way

272 MacDougall 2017.

273 Εἰκὼ μὲν τις ἔγραψεν ἀπ' εἰκόνης ἀρχετύποιο, / Στησάμενος προπάροιθε, πίναξ δ' ὑπεδέξατο μορφήν / Ὑμᾶς δ' εἰσορόων τις, ἐναντίον οἶμον ὁδεύει. / Καὶ τόδε μόνον ὄνειαρ ἀφ' ὑμετέρης κακότητος (II, 1, 13, 112–115). Here, the analogy is not explicitly linked to the discussion of bad bishops, however it is clear that the bad bishop is compared and contrasted with an “archetype”, a previous painting (ἀπ' εἰκόνης ἀρχετύποιο) that the painter should reproduce. The contrast lies in the fact that a bad bishop should not be imitated, whereas, when one paints from a model, one wants to reproduce and learn from an excellent archetype.

with bolts and, confident, given to the swells.
 Even a host is excellent if braver, not if fair-looking,
 and the dazzling house is second to the sound and solid one. (10)
 Such are even the lives of mortals. The one is immortal whom awe
 brings to Christ, an alien unto twisted vice,
 steadfast, unshaken, imperturbable. The other most wretched,
 inside being feeble, outside feigning force,
 short-lived, the like of the idiots, to whom everything (15)
 whirls as their mind is unstable.

At the beginning of II, 1, 17, Gregory contrasts different specimens of the same things, distinguishing the praiseworthy from the useless. This serves as an analogy to introduce two different kinds of “life” (βίος)—namely, two different kinds of bishop. The description of the βίοι at lines 11–16 shows us the distinctions we should find also in the analogies: stability, coherence (between appearance and essence) and the actualisation of its natural aim are the signs of the good life, and the contrary applies to the evil life. The first analogy employed by Gregory is an elegiac rewriting of the painting analogy at II, 1, 12, 739–746²⁷⁴.

Good painting, according to Gregory, reproduces above all the shape (μορφή) of things, in an accurate manner (ἀτρεκί). The result must seem “alive” (ἐμπνοος). On the contrary, a bad painter will focus on colour (χρῶμα), looking for its variety and individual excellence (πολλὰ καὶ εὐχρῶα), so that the result looks like a “meadow” (λειμών), likely meaning a chaotic and self-referential big picture. Clearly, Gregory sees shape as the content of painting, and colour as its appearance. Therefore, colour should not be pursued for colour’s sake, but only according to the coherence and stability of the represented subject. The same ideas are present at II, 1, 12, 739–746: here, Gregory downplays the role of colour in good painting (ἀπλοῖς χρώμασιν, 740) and underlines the exigency of realism, as he says the “bodies” depicted should be “moving” (κινούμενα, 740); bad painters, instead, neglect form (ἄμορφα σώματα), giving undue prominence to colour, using it without shades (παντασκίοις βαφαῖς) and thus producing tones that are too bright and “flowery” (ἀνθηραῖς). Here, Gregory stresses not only the need for coherence and stability of form but also realism as basic requirement, when he says that bad painters “barely represent the copies of the copies” (745). If coherence and stability are clearly linked to the theme at hand—that is, bishops who are too “political” (ἀνὴρ πολύτροπος)—it is less clear how comparing bishops to painters (instead of paintings) and pointing out their failure to reproduce their models (instead of their being bad models) would serve Gregory’s argument against political bishops—namely, that they give a bad example to the people.

This is clarified by what follows. Having scoffed at his imaginary opponent for his earthly preoccupations (747–750), Gregory explains what the function of the bishop is. The passage has already been examined (§2.1.3.1); therefore, I will only bring attention

274 Among the other three analogies, the army (9) bears a resemblance to Archilochus’ *frg.* 114 W. (the poet does not want a beautiful general, but a brave one). The coupling of ships and armies reminds of Sappho’s *frg.* 16 V.

to a detail: Gregory compares the ideal bishop to a mirror (κάτοπτρον) shaped inside (μορφούμενον, 756), because he should receive the impressions (τυπούμενον, 755) produced by the Godhead on him (θείας . . . ἐμφάσεις, 754–755). The parallel passage at II, 1, 17, 37, examined at §2.1.3.1, employs the same language of divine “image” (τύπος)²⁷⁵. This language comes ultimately from Gen. 1:26–27, through Paul (1Cor. 13:12; 2Cor. 3:18) and Origen’s theology. It is a cornerstone in Gregory’s conception of ecclesiastical authority. Since the aim of the church is the salvation of mankind, the leaders of the church are responsible for the salvation of the people. In Gregory’s theology, salvation is construed as *theosis*, becoming similar to God. Therefore, chief task of the bishop is making the faithful similar to God²⁷⁶. As for Origen, for Gregory assimilation to God is achieved chiefly through contemplation²⁷⁷. However, contemplation requires leisure and talent, two resources not everyone can spend freely; here the role of the bishop is paramount: he is the mediator between God and the people, to the effect that he contemplates God, becomes assimilated to God, and offers his own example to the people, who, assimilating themselves to the bishop, are truly assimilating themselves to God. This theological device makes Gregory’s emphasis on the example set by the bishop and the use of iconographic metaphors to express it understandable. For this reason, Gregory compares the bishop to a mirror reflecting God and to a painter who should be very faithful to his subject (i.e., God). Clarity of lines, stability of shapes, and realism are admired in the painting metaphor because they secure an effective, faithful, and orthodox or true reproduction of God’s image in the bishop, and then in turn a reproduction of the bishop’s image in the people. The prominence of colour and the instability of shapes, on the other hand, signify the attractiveness without substance of a political bishop and his facility in deviating in matters of morality or doctrine according to political convenience, thereby jumbling the image of God in himself.

These iconographic metaphors, as well as the concept of the bishop as an example setter justifying them, contain a good deal of simple moralism. And yet in II, 1, 12, 709–760 Gregory approaches this traditional Christian moralism critically. This piece of advice may be much more than moralism and rhetoric: electing as bishop someone who was too implicated in politics could have caused the church substantial harm. An ex-official too prone to anger, someone who upset the tight network of provincial elites or who might provoke critics just as well as attract supporters, might not only fail to represent the church among other members of the elite but also—considering that Gregory writes in a period of high-rank conversions (from paganism as well as from Christian confessions that had fallen out

275 Ἦδη καὶ Τριάδος ἄπεται οὐρανίης, / Ἦς τύπον ἐστήριξεν ἐνὶ πραπίδεσσιν ἔῃσι (II, 1, 17, 36–37).

276 The concept of *οικείωσις* πρὸς τὸν θεόν, with particular emphasis on its Stoic and Platonic origin, has been deeply investigated and put to fruit in interpreting Gregory’s orations by Elm 2012.

277 On the coincidence of love, contemplation and assimilation in Origen’s theology: Orig. in *Joh. comm. frg.13*; in *Joh. comm.* 1, 16, 92–93; 2, 2, 18; 19, 4, 22–25; in *1 Cor. comm. frg. 72*; Crouzel 1956, 232–236; Crouzel 1961, 518–523.

of grace) and that elite citizens must have wanted to avoid losing face when converting—disgrace himself and thus really hinder important converts from joining.

Through his apparently disjointed (in reality, very compressed) way of arguing, Gregory plays out a contrast between two equally traditional Christian ideas of the bishop: the bishop as example setter on one side and the bishop as patron on the other²⁷⁸. The contrast brings Gregory to an almost complete formulation of his ideal for church leadership (751–760). In this formulation, not only deep theological arguments play a role, but also his personal experience in Constantinople and the need for a defence before the people who preferred the meddlesome Maximus and the politician Nectarius to Gregory as bishop of Constantinople. Real-life discussions, the theological heritage of Origen, and Christian tradition are brought together in a creative synthesis, skilfully expressed through language and symbols from the Bible and from classical tradition²⁷⁹.

2.2.3.3 Mirrors and paintings in Ephrem

The metaphors of mirror and painting appear also in Ephrem's poems. Interestingly, sculpture (Gregory's *ἄγαλμα*) is totally absent. Like Gregory, Ephrem employs iconographic imagery to define the role of the bishop as example setter, although his reasons in doing so and the significance of this role for his community are quite different. One of the most organic treatments of the theme, through the image of the mirror, opens CN 16:

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²⁷⁸ On the bishop as patron see above and n. 259. The need for a credible leader is emphasised already by Paul at 1Tim. 3:1–7, and the exemplary character of the episcopate becomes a trope at least from the fourth century: Rapp 2005, 51–52, 170–171; Sterk 2004, 52n92, 53–64, 123.

²⁷⁹ Iconographic metaphors appear in other passages regarding bishops. At II, 1, 12, 225–229, the theme is the correct imitation of the apostles, and how to interpret their example. At II, 1, 12, 455–456 the moral character of the bishop is compared to a wax tablet, which might be blank, or well or badly written. The word *τύπος* is employed at 586 for the marks asceticism leaves on the body, and at 369–370 and II, 1, 17, 20 for the bad example set by the bishop.

ܠܚܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ	ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ 4 ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ
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(CN 16, 1–6)

This preamble, which appears rather generic, refers to Bishop Valgash, as demonstrated by the rest of the poem, discussing the bishop's merits. Moreover, similar passages, though shorter, occur at CN 18, 10, 3–4 and CN 19, 13–14 for Abraham: in these passages, the mirror describes the exemplary function of the bishop for his community.

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(CN 18, 10, 1–4)

(CN 19, 14)

280 "In this is a mirror [*maḥzītā*] culpable, / if its clarity is clouded // because of its own spots, / because the filth on it became // a veil [*taḥpītā*] before the beholder [*ḥazzāyā*]. // **Blessed is he who polished our mirror** [*maḥzīt-an*]! // Since beauty is not adorned by it, / nor is stain despised by it, // it is a real damage to the beautiful, / because their beauty cannot gain // its profit of adornment. // Stains are not uprooted by it, / as ornaments are not increased by it; // the abiding stain is like a damage, / the lack of ornament is a loss, // so that in it loss and damage convene. // Our mirror, if it's dark, / is a real joy for the foul, // whose stains remain unreprieved, / yet if polished and shining, // then 'tis our freedom that adorns itself. // By it, damage doubled through loss / for the foul and for the fair, // since the fair are not crowned / nor are the foul adorned: // the mirror shares only damage. // Never did a mirror compel / with violence its observer, // nor is the mercy that came / upon the justice of the law // compulsory as the law."

281 "Light that is damped is unseemly, / salt that loses its flavour is unfit, // stain is not fit for the chief, / as dirt is not for the mirror."

282 "As her leaders were her customs, / as with a loose leader she was loose, // and with a shining one she was splendid. / The church is like a mirror [*maḥzītā*], // which, like the countenance [*paršōpā*] of its beholder [*ḥāyar b-āh*], / accordingly, wears his shapes [*demwāt-eh*], // for, like the king such his host, / like the priest, such his parish, // each is shaped [*mettabb'a*] by them after themselves. / **Blessed is he who shaped her after himself** [*ṭabb'-āh ba-dmūt-eh*]!"

CN 19, 14 is clear: here the church is the mirror, reflecting the image of the bishop, meaning that the moral character of the bishop, by virtue of his exemplary role, will influence the moral character of the community. The bishop can “shape” his community, and note that Ephrem employs here the verb *ṭbaʿ*, whose original meaning is “to press”, “to imprint”, so that this verb can be considered synonymous of the Greek root *τύπος*. In CN 18, 10, the mirror serves as an analogy for the bishop, after two Gospel images (salt and the lamp; see Mt. 5:13–16; Mc. 4:21–22; 9:50; Lc. 8:16–18). The idea is that, as the mirror must be polished and without stains to perform its function, so the bishop should be morally pure to perform his task. The image, however, says something about the nature of this task, too. Salt, light, and mirror all express an outward action of the bishop, who should influence his environment in a positive way: as salt gives taste and light expands and illuminates, so the mirror makes us see things we could not see by ourselves. Therefore, the same task of moral improvement of the community is here expressed with a simile opposite to that of CN 19, 14.

CN 16, 1–6 has the same aim, though in a different context. For CN 18 and 19 have a conative function on the bishop and the community, instructing the bishop on his tasks and prompting the community’s consensus in favour of the new prelate. CN 16, on the other hand, is apologetic for Valgash, who suffered a breach of leadership (see §4.2). The apology is already implied in the first stanza: here, Ephrem limits the culpability of a mirror to its being dirty (1, 1–3), but has the people or the choir singing that God has polished their mirror in the following refrain. Since the mirror is a symbol for the bishop, the voice of the people is induced to let go its grievances against Valgash already in the first stanza. Stanzas 2 to 5 expound the analogy: the mirror’s function is only to reveal to the viewer his own condition, not to change it; therefore, the mirror’s only requirement is to be clean enough to let the viewer see himself. If we take the language of beauty and ugliness and of clarity and filth as metaphors for moral values, then Ephrem’s thought is clear and agrees with the rest of the poem²⁸³: the bishop is required only to be morally exemplary, especially as an ascetic, in order to implicitly blame the immoral and praise the moral. The beautiful reflecting himself in the polished mirror means that the good find legitimation in the fact that the bishop is similar to them and that they may eventually better themselves. The bad, shamed by the fact that their leader is so different from them, may find motivation for betterment. Conversely, an immoral bishop will enable immorality and undermine morality. This conceptualisation of the bishop’s role is chosen

²⁸³ The moral meaning is attested as a derivative meaning for many words of these semantic field Ephrem employs: *ṣapyūtā* (CN 16, 1, 2) can mean “clarity” or “transparency” as well as “sincerity”, “simplicity” or “purity” in a moral sense (Payne Smith 1879–1901, 4261–4262, s.v. *ṣḥṣṣṣ*); *ṣātā* (CN 16, 1, 4) is equally a physical, ritual and moral contamination (Payne Smith 1879–1901, 3351, s.v. *ṣḥṣṣ*); a *mūmā* (CN 16, 2, 2; 3, 1; 3, 3; 4, 3) can be a physical as well as a moral flaw (Payne Smith 1879–1901, 2037–2038, s.v. *ṣḥṣṣ*); the words for “fair” (*ṣappīrā*) and “foul” (*sanyā*) have both moral and aesthetic application (Payne Smith 1879–1901, 2669, 4275–4276, s.vv. *ṣḥṣṣ* . *ṣḥṣṣ*); the “crown” (CN 16, 5, 3) is a Pauline metaphor for the reward for a Christian life (and eventually of martyrism). Finally, Ephrem’s emphasis on the concepts of “adornment” and “brightness”, expressed respectively with the roots *ṣ-b-t* and *n-h-r*, imply an ascetic behaviour (see §3.2.1).

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 286

[illegible]

The first problem posed by these metaphors is that of sources, because, as I already said, the Bible afforded little material for this kind of imagery, and in the case of Gregory, these metaphors come mostly from the Greek rhetoric tradition of *ekphrasis* and discussion on works of art and artists. Ephrem does not seem to know this tradition; for example, he does not mention either individual painters or technical details like the use of colours. His metaphors should then be explained differently. The influence of the Bible and the Christian tradition of typology can account for *CN* 19, 1, 10, where “painting” (*ṣār*) is employed to express the typological relationship between the Old Testament Abraham and the bishop Abraham. A similar case is *CN* 19, 15, 1–6, where the three previous bishops left to the community a “model” (*ṭupsā*) of evangelical poverty. Here, the word *ṭupsā*, a loanword from Greek τύπος, expresses the example set by the departed bishops. However, both the use of this particular word and the fact that the example left by the bishops constitutes their “testament” (*diātēkē*, another loanword, from Greek διαθήκη) and is gained by meditation on the two Testaments suggest that the use of *ṭupsā* is prompted by the practice of biblical exegesis²⁸⁸: Ephrem compares the example of the bishops, fruit of their sound biblical faith, to an “Old Testament” that the behaviour of the community, as a “New Testament”, will fulfil.

286 "Blessed is he who painted you [*ṣār-āk*] in Abraham!"

287 “Without testament departed those / three priests dazzling, // but since they meditated / those two testaments of God, // a big inheritance [yurtānā] they left us, / namely the model [tupsā] of poverty”. The text at line 5 reads *yutrānā*, “gain”, “profit”, “possession”. It is easy to surmise an error for *yurtānā*, “inheritance” “inherited possession”. The conjecture is satisfying both because of the context (the metaphor of the last will and testament of the former bishops in this stanza), and because *yutrānā* would be *lectio facillior* (a generic “profit” instead of the specific “inherited good”) and a common error. In fact, in at least two places of the Syriac text of Genesis in the Peshitta version (Gen. 23:9 and 49:30), *yurtānā* is given for Greek κτήσις and Hebrew *‘ahūza*, both meaning “profit”, “utility”. This translation is a clear corruption of an original *yutrānā*, testifying for the easy confusion between these two words.

288 The Peshitta version of 1Cor. 10:6 and 1Petr. 3:21 has *ṭupsā* for Greek τύπος/ἀντίτυπον and the two passages are a prime example of typological interpretation of Old Testament narrations. In other such passages (e.g., Rom. 5:14), Syriac translates Greek τύπος with *dmūtā*.

The metaphor of a legacy, implying legitimate succession, links CN 19, 15, 1–6 to the other passages containing the metaphor of painting—namely, CN 17, 11–12 and CN 18, 1. The principle uniting all these instances of the metaphor is that of historical continuity, be it from Old to New Testament, from Bible to church, or from deceased bishops to the future of the community and their successor. However, the metaphor is here developed differently: at CN 18, 1, 10 biblical Abraham was the image painted, and the bishop the true image, and at CN 19, 15 the image left by previous bishops is aimed at the whole community; here, instead, the living bishop is the painted copy, and the deceased predecessor is the original, and the example left by the predecessor is meant to be picked up by the new bishop only. The detail of the personal traits (*demwātā*, CN 17, 11, 2 and CN 18, 1, 7) of the previous bishop and the repetitions of the verb *šār*, “to paint,” suggest the painted portrait as the tenor of the metaphor. A biblical precedent for this metaphor may be found in Gen. 5:3, where Adam’s generation of Seth is *ba-dmūt-eh a(y)k šalm-eh*, “in his likeness according to his image”, as was God’s creation of Adam (Gen. 1:26–27; 5:1). However, in the idea of generation, contrary to that of creation, the notion of succession is implied, which the biblical text of Gen. 5 makes very clear in presenting a succession of patriarchs, each giving birth to his successor and then dying. Ephrem employs the same words, *dmūtā* (mostly in the plural *demwātā*) and *šalmā*, as Gen. 5. Yet another influence might be at play here. A significant clue is in CN 17, 11, 3–5 and 18, 1, 5–6, where Ephrem stresses the *presence* of the portrayed predecessor in his living portrait. If Abraham’s being a portrait of his predecessor is reason enough to affirm the presence of the predecessor, then Ephrem betrays here a belief in the strong presence of the model in the image. Such expressions may be influenced by the Greek literary trope of the work of art so perfect it lacks only the word or breath to be alive²⁸⁹. But if we look in the Syriac context, the concept resonates with contemporary cultural phenomena. The association of a sacred portrait, the Edessan Mandyllion, with the Abgar legend developed probably in the second half of the fourth century: in its first witness, the *Doctrine of Addai*, the Mandyllion works as an *Ersatz* of Jesus’s presence in Edessa²⁹⁰. Another important element in the culture of the image that may have influenced Ephrem is Manichaeism, which gave great prominence to painting, so much that one of its sacred books was an illustrated treatise that the Coptic sources title εἰκών²⁹¹. Obviously, the Edessan legend and Manichaeism cannot be classified as “sources” of Ephrem’s metaphor;

289 A classic example are the epigrams on Myron’s *Cow* (*Anth. Gr.* 9, 713–742; 793–798; Posidippus 66 A.-B.; Auson. *epigr.* 63–71); see also Steiner 2012, 29–31.

290 First witness to the Abgar legend is Eusebius of Caesarea (*h. e.* 1, 13, 5–22), in the first half of the fourth century; Egeria in the second half of the same century still does not mention the image in Edessa (*peregr.* 17, 1; 19, 3–19), but only the letter from Jesus to the king (note, however, that at 19, 6 Egeria is shown by the bishop of Edessa the *archiotypae* of Abgar and his son Magnus, i.e., probably sculpted images of their face). The *Doctrine of Addai* (beginning of the fifth century) bears a remarkable similarity to Ephrem’s formulation at CN 17, 12: “because he [Hannana] was the painter [*šayyārā*] of the king, he painted [*šār*] the portrait [*šalm-eh*] of Jesus with choice dyes [*b-sammānē gbayyā*]” (Phillips 1876, A. 7).

291 Pers. *Arzhang*; see Asmussen’s article in the *Encyclopedia Iranica* (Asmussen 1987) and Gulácsi 2015. Ephrem knew of Mani’s link with writing, calligraphy and even art: Vööbus 1958, 129–130.

rather, they should be seen as signs of a cultural context that, the apparent iconoclasm of the Bible notwithstanding, was keenly aware of the power of painted images; in such a context, Ephrem's metaphor makes more sense, because it presupposes from its audience not only acquaintance with painted portraits but also ideological grappling with this form of art.

As regards the meaning and function of this metaphor, it expresses, like the other metaphors of painting, the exemplary value of the bishop. Differently from the metaphor of the mirror and from Gregory, this example is not aimed at the community, but is the example every bishop sets for his successor. Therefore, the function of this metaphor is to underline the similarity between a bishop and his predecessor, so that it is not at random that every instance of the metaphor is found in CN 17–21, poems dedicated to a newly elected bishop. The metaphor legitimises the new bishop and the transfer of power, without thereby binding his hands: Ephrem explicitly names the traits of the old bishop inherited by the new one, his *demwātā*, and they are all very generic moral and ascetic virtues, like modesty, sobriety, fasting, wakefulness (CN 18, 1, 1–4). Even when the poet details characteristics specific to each of the predecessors (CN 17, 11, 6–8), urging Abraham to imitate them, the content of the exhortation is rather generic and does not involve the new bishop in specific choices or policies. In this way, the bishop is requested only to adopt a morally decent behaviour and engage in ascetic practices to secure his legitimation via the similarity with his predecessor, without being bound to any political continuity with them.

At CN 17, 12, Ephrem employs the metaphor of painting in yet a different way: this time the poet himself is the painter, and both bishops, the old and the new, are the subject of his portrait. As was said above, these iconographic metaphors are a *mise en abîme* of the whole poems, and this is demonstrated by Ephrem's use of the painting metaphor in a metapoetic sense. The poems are a painting of the bishops, revealing to the senses of the audience the inner characters of the prelates; at the same time, they are “due”, a thanksgiving prompted and compelled by the excellency of the bishops. These declarations on the part of Ephrem make explicit the double direction of these poems: on one side, they are addressed to the community and aim at legitimising their new leader, showing his virtues; on the other, they are meant to be known by the bishop, as a sign of loyalty and a *captatio benevolentiae* from the poet. In this context, Ephrem's self-definition as “Harp of God” (*kennār-eh*, CN 17, 12, 10) stands out in all its importance, because, sealing the praise of the new bishop, it reminds the prelate of the power of public poetry that Ephrem is putting at his disposal.

In conclusion, iconographic metaphors, though relatively unimportant in the Bible, have a very important function in both Ephrem's and Gregory's poetry: they serve to express a widespread notion in the contemporary church—namely, that the bishop should be a paragon of morality for the community. However, this exemplary function of the bishop is inserted by both poets in the framework of their theology. To put it in a general way, Gregory conceives of the exemplarity of the bishop according to a vertical model, whereas Ephrem has more of a horizontal model: in Gregory's thought there is a hierarchy going from God to the people in the church, with the priest (or bishop)

as the link between the human and the divine plane of existence; in Ephrem, the historical development of the church prevails, a path leading from Old Testament figures to Jesus and the apostles and to the apostolic tradition within the church. Therefore, exemplarity runs for Gregory from God above to the church down here: the bishop models himself like a mirror towards God, and the people are taught by the bishop's example. For Ephrem, instead, exemplarity is a mode of typology, with Old Testament characters setting the example for bishops; but the same mechanism functions for the apostolic succession, with each bishop having his predecessor as an example. In this case the scholarly stereotypes on Gregory and Ephrem are (at least partially) true: Gregory's vertical model denounces his debt to Greek philosophy—Neoplatonism in particular—and, in its stillness and abstraction, it contrasts with Ephrem's horizontal model, which is dynamic, historical, and concrete, a product of Semitic culture and biblical thinking.

2.2.4 Other metaphors

In this section I review other metaphors, in a cursory way, either because they have been already sufficiently studied or because the material is not as abundant or as interesting as what has been analysed until now.

2.2.4.1 Family

There is a group of metaphors that has unique characteristics: family metaphors. First, they are articulated, developed, and widespread in Ephrem's poetry and almost absent from Gregory's poems. Second, their articulation leads often to ambiguities in the relationship of the bishop to his community, which are worth considering. Third, the metaphor of the father became fixed with time, until the word was employed as a title for prelates and monastics²⁹². This group of metaphors has already been studied for Ephrem, whereas in Gregory, being less important, it has not captured scholars' attention²⁹³. In many passages of Ephrem's poems, the bishops are called "father", or they have a parental role towards the community, which is represented as a child or a young girl²⁹⁴. There is more than one *tertium comparationis* in this metaphor. First, the role of the bishop towards the community is very similar to that of a father towards his offspring, because the bishop should educate and guide the community. Furthermore, the

²⁹² Lampe 1961, 1050, s.v. πατήρ; Payne Smith 1879–1901, 5, s.v. ܐܒܝܐ. See Jerg 1970, 103–104 for the evolution of the terms πατριάρχης and πάπας in the official documents.

²⁹³ Murray 2006, 150–162; Bou Mansour 2019, 102–108.

²⁹⁴ The bishop(s) as "father" (*abā*): CN 13, 12, 3; CN 14, 13, 4; 17, 3; 22, 1; CN 16, 14, 5; 18, 1; 21, 2; CN 19, 1, 2. Two long passages presuppose the metaphor of the community as a young girl and the bishops as parents: CN 14, 16–22; CN 16, 17–21. At CN 19, 1, the bishop is the father of the single faithful.

bishop through his administering of baptism effectively brings forth the single Christians, so that his role can really be considered that of a father on the spiritual level. Moreover, the father-daughter relationship presupposes a growth and a progression in the daughter. Second, the relationship between bishop and community is fundamentally asymmetrical, the bishop being endowed with all authority and the community being bound to absolute obedience. This reflects father-children relationships in late antiquity. Third—and this is perhaps the most neglected and most important point—this metaphor naturalises the relationship between bishop and community as described here: insisting on the paternity of the bishop, Ephrem (as well as other ecclesiastical writers) sought to express the unavoidable necessity of the relationship, removing it from the domain of man-made, socially constructed relationships and projecting it into the natural order. In other words, fatherhood language for the episcopate amounts to a defence of its theological necessity and divine, not human, institution.

There might be an analogous use of the metaphor in Gregory, though a less developed one: at II, 1, 10, 8, he laments his exile from Constantinople as a removal from his “holy offspring” (ιερώων τεκέων), a theme repeated in the iambic miniatures linked to our longest poems²⁹⁵. Here, naming the community in Constantinople as “offspring” implies that Gregory’s exile is not only very cruel but also an act against nature. In II, 1, 12 the community is twice termed “offspring” (τέκεια), yet in one case the bishop is not πάτηρ, but προστάτης, because paternity is reserved to the Spirit²⁹⁶. Finally, on one occasion it is Gregory who compares himself to a father, but this time the metaphor has nothing to do with the bishop’s role in relation to the community, because here the poet is addressing the other bishops²⁹⁷. In this case, the image in the last words, that of a dying father, aims to produce that very sense of asymmetry that the father metaphor enshrines, while at the same time it binds the addressees through pity for an old man and through the shame of not fulfilling the last words of a dying man: the metaphor of the dying father is a clever construction because of the inherent contrast between the hierarchical superiority of the father figure and the fragility of the old, dying, and failing man; therefore, it commands compliance through pity.

2.2.4.2 Marriage and wedding

A metaphor that apparently contradicts the language of fatherhood is that of wedding and marriage: the bishop is sometimes compared to a husband, and the community

²⁹⁵ οἷά μ’ ἔοργεν / Ὁ φθόνος; ὡς ἱερῶν τῆλε βάλεν τεκέων (II, 1, 10, 7–8); Ποθῶ λόγων γέννημα τῶν ἐμῶν τέκων (II, 1, 5, 2); Τῶν δ’ ἐμῶν τέκνων τυχὸν / Ἄλλοι κατασκιρτῶσι (II, 1, 6, 8–10); Ὡ μοι ἐμῆς Τριάδος! ὦ μοι ἐμῶν τεκέων! / Ὡ φθόνε, τίπτε μ’ ἔοργας; (II, 1, 16, 52–53).

²⁹⁶ Ἐπειτ’ ἀσάρκων εἰσὶ τέκνων προστάται, / Ἄ πνεῦμα τίκτει σαρκὸς ἐξενωμένον (II, 1, 12, 629–630); Ἀγνάς τε πέμπειν προσφορὰς ὑπὲρ τέκνων (II, 1, 12, 757).

²⁹⁷ Πλήν ἐξιτήριόν τιν’, εἰ δοκεῖ, λόγον, / Βραχὺν μὲν, ἀλλὰ χρήσιμον, δέξασθέ μου / Ὡς οἱ πατρῶας λαμβάνοντες ἐν τέλει / Φωνὰς ἐπισκήψεις τε μνήμης ἀξίας / Μεθ’ ἃς λόγος τις οὐκέτ’ ἐξακούεται, / Ὡ καὶ πλέον μένουσιν ἐν βάθει φρενός (II, 1, 12, 811–817).

to his wife²⁹⁸. This metaphor is only apparently contradictory, because, exactly as the father metaphor, it expresses an asymmetrical relationship, since the wife was not on par with the husband²⁹⁹. The sense of this metaphor is to express the exclusivity of the relationship between bishop and community, binding the bishop to the community to which he was ordered and restating the office *as a function* of the community and not as an attribute owned by the office's recipient³⁰⁰.

Both the images of fatherhood and of marriage are developed in another direction by Ephrem: the true Father is God, the true Groom is Christ; therefore, the bishop acts only as a mediator between the Godhead and the community. In one case, Ephrem very explicitly says that the bishop, in his capacity of sacrificial priest, “stands as a mediator between God and mankind”, a sentence strikingly similar to 1Tim. 2:5, referring to Jesus³⁰¹. So it is that in CN 16, 17, 2 the first bishop, Jacob, is called *mrabbyānā*, meaning “foster father”, because he was tasked with making Nisibis's community grow in her first years, whereas her true Father waiting for her is God. The same concept of hierarchy as mediation is applied to marriage imagery. In this respect, it is interesting to note that whereas the bishop is called “groom” (*ḥatnā*) or “father” (*ʿabā*), the community is never called “bride” (*kalltā*) or “betrothed” (*mkirtā*), but always “spouse” (*ba(r)t-zawgā*) or “wife” (*ʿa(n)ttā*): this means that Ephrem actually distinguishes two different metaphors, marriage and wedding. In the metaphor of marriage, the bishop is the husband, and the community is the wife, and the metaphor expresses their union as an accomplished fact to stress its binding value and its permanence through time. The metaphor of betrothal and wedding has a different meaning: here, the betrothed and bride is still the church, but the groom is Christ, whereas the bishop has the role of a paranymph, betrother or go-between for the true groom—Christ—and the church³⁰². In this case,

298 “Aptly your name is Abraham, / for you are father of many; // yet, since you had no spouse / like was Sarah for Abraham, // here, your spouse [*ba(r)t-zawg-āk*] is your diocese! / Rear her children with your fidelity; // may you have spiritual offspring, / and children born of the promise, // who may in Eden inherit. / **Blessed is he who painted you in Abraham!**” (CN 19, 1); “O virgin that was bridegroom [*ḥatnā*], / stir up a bit your understanding // towards the wife of your youth [*ʿa(n)tat ṭalyūt-āk*]” (CN 20, 1, 1–3).

299 As shown by Harvey 1993, even though the influence of Marcionism favoured egalitarian experiences in Syriac culture, the responses were ambiguous, oscillating between acceptance and even more misogyny than in Greek culture. Furthermore, Paul's heritage, which Harvey stresses as fundamentally egalitarian (see Gal. 3:28), was ambiguous too (see 1Cor. 11:3; Eph. 5:22–24).

300 Bishops were officially bound to their seat at least since the Council of Nicaea (canons 15 and 16). The canon was seldom respected in the fourth century, but with time the jurisdiction of the bishop became more and more linked with the city where he resided, both officially and in reality; see Barone Adesi 1998.

301 *D-hu qāyem ʿa(y)k meṣʿāyā / bēt-ʿallāhā la-naṣutā* (CN 18, 12, 8–9); *w-ḥad-u meṣʿāyā d-ʿallāhā w-da-bnaynāšā barnāšā iṣuʿ mšiḥā* (“and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus”, 1Tim. 2:5).

302 This theme is elaborated in three stanzas: “Listen to the Apostle, as he speaks / to that virgin [*btūltā*] whom he had betrothed [*mkar*]: // “I burn for you, but with the ardour, / with the ardour of God, // not that of the flesh, but of the spirit.” / You too for her burn purely, // that she may know who is and whence,

the imagery preserves the primacy of Christ in relationship to the church and frames the bishop as instrumental to this relationship, while at the same time stressing that his authority depends on that of the Bridegroom, Christ. If marriage implies duration in time, betrothal is destined to end at the moment of wedding; this image is not static, like that of marriage, but points to the eschatological theme of Christ's wedding with the church. Within the framework of this theme, the bishop's role as paranymp implies a future review of his work by the Groom, who will hold the bishop accountable, both for the doctrinal (CN 20, 4–5) and for the moral (CN 19, 13) shortcomings of his community, so that, in a nuanced way, the use of the imagery of mediation is also a strong conative reminder to the bishop of his responsibilities. As demonstrated by this metaphor group's occurrence in CN 20, the antiheretical poem, both metaphors (marriage and betrothal) are instrumental in preserving unity under the bishop while at the same time delegitimising doctrinal dissent: a breach in communion from the bishop is presented in Old Testament fashion as an act of adultery by the community and heretical leaders.

2.2.4.3 Stewardship

Another typically Ephremian image of episcopal mediation is that of the steward, administrator, or treasurer³⁰³. This image has obvious biblical precedents, most of all in the Gospels, where many parables and sayings involve administrators and stewards and problems of delegation and administration. Ephrem employs this metaphor, going so far as to call the bishops “treasurers” (*gēzabrē*)³⁰⁴. Usually, the figure refers to their task of teaching doctrine, because the Word of God is seen as a depository, whence the prelate should choose the right teaching at the right time. Gregory, too, employs this imagery once in our poems. At the beginning of II, 1, 13 (line 2), in his address to the bishops, he calls them ψυχῶν ταμίαι, “ministers of souls”, using the word ταμίαι, attested since Homer and with a wide range of meanings: from referring to the person tasked with making the parts of a meal and distributing them to Zeus as dispenser of all things to referring, in prose, to the financial administrator of a temple, a king, or a

/ and through you may long for, through you may love // Jesus, her Faithful Bridegroom [*ḥatn-āh da-šrārā*]. / **Blessed is he whose zeal is holy!**” (CN 19, 13); “Here with you is the betrothed of your Lord [*mkīrat mār-āk*], / keep her from all harms, // and from any man violating her, calling / the churches by their own names. // The name of her Betrothed [*mkīr-āh*] she's given, / she should not whore with another name: // since she wasn't baptised in a name of man, / the names in which she's baptised she should profess // of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. / **Blessed is he in whose name she's called!** /// The Apostle, her matchmaker [*mākōr-āh*], had zeal / that she may not be violated by names, // not only by fake names, / but not even by the trustworthy ones, // nor Peter's nor even his own name; / those that were trustworthy matchmakers [*mākōrē šarrīrē*] // gave her the name of her Betrothed [*mkīr-āh*]; / the fake ones as adulterers // put their own names on the flock. / **Glory to your name, Our Creator!**” (CN 20, 4–5). Behind these passages lies 2Cor. 11:2.

³⁰³ This has been studied by Murray 2006, 193–195.

³⁰⁴ The bishops are called *gēzabrē* at CN 13, 3 and CN 19, 8, 10; other occurrences: CN 14, 3, 5; CN 21, 2, 9–10. At CN 17, 3, 10, the bishop himself is the repository containing teaching.

city³⁰⁵. This imagery extols the bishops as leaders of the community, at the same time reminding them that they are responsible to God and that their power springs from a delegation.

In general, the metaphors expressing delegation are more common in Ephrem than in Gregory. As a result, the triangular relationship of God/Christ, bishop, and community is more visible in Ephrem: the single links (God-bishop, bishop-community, God-community) are described by Gregory, too, but Ephrem gives a more consequent image of how all three should relate to one another. He does this partly by subtly introducing the eschatological *redde rationem* of bishops through the metaphor of the wedding. This way, his representation of this relationship is inscribed in a historical framework: as evidenced by Papoutsakis in the case of the relationship between God and Israelite kings, the insistence on vicariousness is linked in Ephrem to the orderly succession in office through time; and this, in turn, is precisely the most important theme of the poems on the bishops³⁰⁶.

2.2.4.4 Teaching

It is a common conception among the scholars that the monarchic episcopate emerged also from the necessity to counter doctrinal divisions in the communities, to reduce teaching under a single authority, at least at the local level. Since doctrinal distress did not end in the third century—much to the contrary, the fourth century witnessed the virulent Arian controversy—it is only normal that the *munus docendi*, the bishop's task of teaching, should be an important element of his role. This is also demonstrated by the Greek inscriptions on bishops, which frequently mention διδάσκαλος as an attribute of the bishop, characterising him essentially as the people's teacher³⁰⁷.

Indeed, both Ephrem and Gregory present bishops as teachers and use teaching imagery for their aims. Ephrem employs mostly the world *rabbā*, and sometimes the more specific *mallpānā*, often tying them to the personification of the community as a little girl growing and learning³⁰⁸. In other instances, the relationship between master and pupil describes the relationship between a bishop and his successor, implying a continuity in their magisterium and making the transfer of powers less traumatic³⁰⁹. In one case, Ephrem describes himself as the disciple of the three bishops, at the same time boasting of his intimacy with these prestigious figures and giving a concrete example of their fulfilling their task in his person³¹⁰. Finally, a notable metaphor in these poems,

³⁰⁵ Liddell/Scott/Jones 2011, 1754, s.v. ταμίας.

³⁰⁶ Papoutsakis 2017, 85–87: to the vicarious kings of the House of David and their antitypes of the House of Constantine, one must therefore add the bishops as vicars of Christ as enjoying this unique complementarity of orderly succession and vicariousness. On the theme of episcopal succession: §4.1.

³⁰⁷ Feissel 1989, 802n8.

³⁰⁸ *CN* 13, 12, 4; *CN* 14, 15–16; see also §2.1.2.2.

³⁰⁹ *CN* 17, 1, 8–9; 2, 5. See §4.1.1.

³¹⁰ *CN* 14, 26, 3–4.

a figure with a clear biblical ancestry, is that of teaching as a food and learning as eating³¹¹: in *CN* 14, 16, the evolution of the community and the teaching of the bishop are described as a weaning, in terms similar to those used by Paul at 1Cor 3:1–2³¹²; in *CN* 17, 2, 8–9, the bishop's teaching (*yullpānā*) is called “new bread” (*lahmā ḥa(d)tā*), probably a reference to Gospel passages in which Christ describes himself as bread³¹³.

Even though it is generally known that Syriac culture tends to see the bishop as a teacher and Christianity as a school, while Greek culture has a more political approach to the bishop's role, Gregory calls the bishops διδάσκαλοι in a number of instances in II, 1, 12³¹⁴. This usage has two main functions. The first is to underline the moral decadence of the church caused by the moral decadence of bishops, because they are appointed to *teach* morality to the people, so that their failures reflect poorly on the community³¹⁵: teaching expresses a causative link between the moral character of leaders and the moral character of the people led. More importantly, the use of διδάσκαλος and the representation of the bishop's work as teaching are part of the wider strategy of “rationalisation” of the bishop's office enacted by Gregory, whereby teaching presupposes competence and knowledge, which must be acquired through training, learning, and exercise (see §3.1.3.3; §3.3.2.1). Therefore, Gregory not only stresses twice the paradox of a teacher knowing less than his pupil as a symbol of the neophyte-turned-bishop being less Christian than many of his faithful³¹⁶, but he also mocks and unmasks these bishops through the fable of “Venus and the Cat” (Perry 50):

³¹¹ See Jer. 15:16; Jes. 55:1–2, similar to wisdom's feast at Prov. 9:1–6; see the vision of prophets eating a book: Hes. 3:3; Apc. 10:9–10.

³¹² “The first with all simplicity / gave milk [*ḥalbā*] to his infancy [*l-yallūdūt-eh*], // the middle with all readiness / gave a taste [*t'ūmā*] to his childhood [*l-šabrūt-eh*], // the third with all perfection / gave food [*uklā*] to his maturity [*la-gmīrūt-eh*].” (*CN* 14, 16); “And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes [*l-yallūdē*] in Christ. I have fed you with milk [*ḥalbā*], and not with meat [*mēkultā*]: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able.” (1Cor. 3:1–2). See also: “For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk [*ḥalbā*], and not of strong meat [*mēkultā šarrirtā*]. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe [*šabrā*]. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age [*gmīrē*], even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.” (Hebr. 5:12–14); “As newborn babes [*yallūdē šabrē*], desire the sincere milk [*ḥalbā*] of the word, that ye may grow thereby” (1Petr. 2:2).

³¹³ “To be supplied from him with life, / the new bread of doctrine.” (*CN* 17, 3, 8–9); see in particular Joh. 6 with its long discussion on Jesus as bread.

³¹⁴ On Syriac emphasis on learning and doctrine: Becker 2004, 179–182; Becker 2006, 22–40; on the bishop as a political leader in Greek culture: Rapp 2005, 131–132.

³¹⁵ Ταχθέντες εἶναι τοῦ καλοῦ διδάσκαλοι / Κακῶν ἀπάντων ἐσμέν ἐργαστήριον / Σιγῇ βοῶντες, κἂν δοκῶμεν μὴ λέγειν / Πρόεδρος ἡ κακία· πονεῖτω μὴδὲ εἷς / Κακοὶ γίνεσθε, τοῦτο συντομώτατον / Καὶ λῶον. ἡ δὲ πρᾶξις ἴσταιται νόμος. / Μόλις γὰρ ἂν τις ἐκ βίας διδασκάλων / Νεύσειεν εἰς τὸ κρεῖσσον· εἰ δ' ἔχοι τύπον / Μοχθηρόν, ἥλω, Ροῦς κατὰ πρανοῦς τρέχων (II, 1, 12, 362–370).

³¹⁶ Ἀλλ' οὐχὶ τοῦτο· ἀλλ' ἐκεῖνο πῶς φύγῃς / Ὅμοῦ μαθητῆς καὶ διδάσκαλος δοκεῖν / Θήγοντα θήγων (ὡς ὀδόντες τῶν συῶν), / Δέον διδάσκειν ἐκμαθόντα τοὺς νόμους; / Τίς ἡ τοσαύτη σύγχυσις τοῦ πράγματος;

Αἰσχροῶν μὲν οὖν αἰσχιστον ἢ τρόπου πλάσις.
 Ὅμως φύλασσε καὶ μ' ἐπαινέτην ἔχεις.
 Νῦν δ' οἷόν ἐστι τοῦτο καὶ τῷ προσφερέεις;
 Ἄρ' ἐστι καὶ παῖξαι τι τερπνῷ πλάσματι
 Σπουδῆς μεταξύ· καὶ γέλως ἐν δακρύοις· (700)
 Γαλῆν καθίζει μῦθος εἰσω παστάδος·
 Νύμφην γὰρ εἶχε νυμφικῶς ἐσταλμένη·
 Ἔδνα, κρότοι, γέλωτες· ἦν λαμπρὸς γάμος.
 Ἡ δ' ὡς ἶδεν μὺν διατρέχοντ' ἐν τῷ μέσῳ,
 Νύμφη μὲν ἦν, γαλῆ δέ· τῷ φανέντι γὰρ (705)
 Ἐπιδραμοῦσα δεῖπνον εἶχεν, οὐ γάμον.
 Τοιοῦτός ἐστι πᾶς νόθος διδάσκαλος.
 Τὸ γὰρ πεφυκὸς οὐ ταχέως μεθίσταται.
 (II, 1, 12, 696–708)

Therefore, feigning one's character is the worst of shames;
 however, if you hold fast, I will praise you.
 But how is it this, and to what is it similar?
 Can I play a bit with a pleasant fable
 while being serious? There is laughter even in tears. (700)
 The tale places a kitten in a bridal chamber,
 because it depicts her as a bride in bridal garments;
 Gifts, applauses, laughter: 'twas really a brilliant wedding.
 Then, she saw a mouse running through the middle of the room.
 She was a bride, yea, but still a cat: at that sight (705)
 she ran upon it and had dinner, not wedding.
 Such is every false teacher:
 Nature is not easily changed.

2.2.4.5 Light

A metaphor related to the representation of bishops as teachers and common to Ephrem and Gregory is that of the doctrine or learning as light. Gregory employs this image in particular for his preaching of Trinitarian dogma in Constantinople,³¹⁷ and in this sense the expression “life's light” (βίου φάος, II, 1, 13, 5) must be understood as being

(II, 1, 12, 549–553); Ὁ δ' ἐγκρατὴς ἔστηκεν ἡτιμωμένος, / Κάτω νενευκῶς, πρὸς Θεὸν μόνον βλέπων, / Στέργων μαθητοῦ χώραν, οὐ μὴδ' ἄξιος / Ἵσως μαθητῆς οὗτος ὁ νῦν διδάσκαλος, / Εἴπερ τὸ κρατεῖν οὐ τόπῳ γνωρίζεται. (II, 1, 12, 637–641). See also the usage of the verb διδάσκω as Gregory presents the doctrinal curriculum of a good bishop: Δίδαξον ἡμᾶς, ὡς θέλεις, δίδασκε δέ· / Τίς ἡ Τριάς μοι. . . / Μὴ με στερήσης· εἰ δὲ πάντα τυφλὸς εἼ, / Τί χειραγωγεῖς μὴ βλέπων; Ὡ τοῦ σκότους / Τῷ μὴ βλέποντι χρωμένον διδασκάλῳ, / Ὡς εἰς βόθρον πέσωσι ἀγνοίας ἅμα (II, 1, 12, 309–310; 326–329).

³¹⁷ Δηρὸν ἀεθλεύσαντα, φασεφόρον οὐρανίοισι / Δόγμασι, καὶ πέτρης ἐκπροχέοντα ρόον. (II, 1, 10, 9–10); Τριάδ' ἔλαμψα τοῖς πρὶν ἐσκοτισμένοις. (II, 1, 12, 118). Naturally, the adjective φαέσφορον is the poetic equivalent of the more ordinary ἐλαμψα. The image has biblical roots: the prophecy at Jes. 9:1 is fulfilled in Christ's preaching at Mt. 4:16; this means that Gregory presents his own preaching as analogous to that of Christ, an usual proceeding in his autobiographical writings (see Hofer 2013, 175–181; §1.3.2).

applied to the bishops, because they are tasked with repeating in space (through collegiality) and in time (through succession) the one teaching (hence the singular φάος) of the church. Ephrem's usage of this image clearly depends on biblical sources: in *CN* 21, 1, he compares the bishop to John the Baptist, whom Jesus described as a lamp (whereas Jesus is the Light itself)³¹⁸; in *CN* 18, 10, the reference to a light not to be concealed is taken from a saying of Christ³¹⁹. In both of these cases, the imagery of light implies the presence of a darkness to be overcome. This is the case also for Gregory's use of the image in relation to his ministry. Hence, the imagery of light, which also, because of its biblical antecedents, implies the presence of darkness, is employed by both poets when the *munus docendi* implies concurrent teachings or the chasing away of ignorance. Concretely speaking, both Gregory and Ephrem seem very concerned with the bishops' task of dispelling heresies in the community. A more developed example of this imagery occurs in *CN* 13 with a different meaning. Here, the bishops of Nisibis are called "luminaries" (*nahhīrē*) already in the first stanza (*CN* 13, 1, 2), anticipating the deeper development of the image in the second, where it is clear that Ephrem is alluding to the creation of the sun and the moon in Gen. 1:14–19³²⁰. Here, the focus is not so much teaching as guidance, because the "three darknesses" to which the poet refers clearly represent the three Persian sieges, and the biblical passage that is the source of the text speaks of the luminaries (*nahhīrē*) as "governing" (*šlat*): the bishops were leaders in the hard times of the community. The image is reprised at stanzas 7–9, where the bishops are compared to different phases of the sun during a single day, because

318 "John was a lamp [*šrāgā*] / that exposed and rebuked the perverse, // they hurried and quenched the lamp / that the whim of their appetites refused. // Be a torch [*lampēdā*] resplendent / and silence the servants of darkness [*heššōkā*], // for your doctrine shines [*nhar*] so much / that no one in its splendour [*b-denḥ-eh*] dares // to serve the whims of darkness. / **Blessed is he who made you our lamp** [*lampēdā*]!" (*CN* 21, 1); cf. "He was a burning and a shining [*manhar*] light [*šrāgā*]: and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light [*b-nuhr-eh*]." (Joh. 5:35); "He was not that Light [*nuhrā*], but was sent to bear witness of that Light." (Joh. 1:8); "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light [*šrāgā*] that shineth [*manhar*] in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts" (2Pet. 1:19, relevant because Christians considered John the last Old Testament prophet: Lc. 16:16).

319 "Light [*nuhrā*] that is damped is unseemly, [...] and if perchance is light [*šrāgā*] damped, / the stumbling is increased: // may your light [*nuhr-āk*] chase our darkness [*heššōk-an*]! / **Blessed is he who made you our lamp** [*lampēd-an*]!" (*CN* 18, 10, 1; 7–10). Cf. Mt. 5:14–16; Mc. 4:21–22; 9:50; Lc. 8:16–18.

320 "Three priests dazzling [*našṣiḥē*] / in likeness of the two luminaries [*nahhīrē*]" (*CN* 13, 1, 2); "He, who created the two luminaries [*nahhīrē*], / chose for himself this three luminaries [*nahhīrē*] // and fixed them in the threefold / dusk [*heššōkē*] of the past sieges. // As was quenched that couple of luminaries / truly the last blazed." (*CN* 13, 2). Cf. "And God said, Let there be lights [*nahhīrē*] in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years: And let them be for lights [*manhrīn*] in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth: and it was so. And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule [*l-šulṭānā*] the day, and the lesser light to rule [*l-šulṭānā*] the night: he made the stars also." (Gen. 1:14–16).

each in his way made the community grow in different stages, this time likely with reference to their magisterium³²¹.

2.2.4.6 Metonymies

One tool of figurative language that both poets employ frequently to talk about the bishop or the episcopate is metonymy. It is very common that “bishop” or “episcopal office” are substituted by concrete objects associated with the bishop. For example, Ephrem uses the word “key” (*ʿaqlidā*, from Greek κλείς) to talk about the power of the bishop, an image already current in the Bible and studied and widely used by writers of early Syriac literature³²². In the Bible, the keys and the power to “bind” and “loose” are very generic attributes of people in power, always reminding them of their divine mandate. In the subsequent Jewish tradition, “bind” and “loose” refer to halachic allowances and prohibitions established by Jewish authorities. When referring to the Christian priesthood, the image can assume different meanings, the most common being the discipline of penance, and more generally, the bishop’s spiritual guidance of the community and its individual members.

Another frequent metonymy is the hands, because the most important part of the consecration of a bishop was the imposition of hands by other bishops. It was understood that every bishop received the imposition of the hands from a previous bishop, in an uninterrupted chain that went back to the apostles³²³. In the Syriac tradition, as attested by Ephrem at *hymn. haer.* 22, 19, the priestly tradition went back even further, from the apostles to Christ, and from Christ to John the Baptist or Simeon as last representative of the Aaronic priesthood of Israel, reaching back to Moses and the Sinai³²⁴.

321 “Behold! In three generations, / as in symbol or mystery, // wrath has become like the sun: / it has dawned from the first, // grew by the middle, / set and disappeared by the last. /// Even the sun shows / three forms in quarter three: // dazzling and bright his beginning, / strong and harsh his middle, // and like a candle perfected / soft and mild his end. // Swift and bright his beginning, / which came to the sleepers to wake them, // hot and harsh his middle / coming to ripen the fruits, // gentle and mild his end / because it has reached his perfection.” (*CN* 13, 7–9).

322 See: *CN* 13, 3, 3–6; *CN* 17, 6, 3; the basis of this use is Mt. 16:19 (see also Jes. 22:22), referenced at *CN* 21, 3, 7–10. The underlying image is that of the treasurer or administrator (see above). A thorough study of the theme is given by: Murray 2006, 182–187 and Papoutsakis 2017.

323 New Testament occurrences: Act. 6:6; 13:3; 14:23; 1Tim. 4:14; 2Tim. 1:6 (maybe also 1Tim. 5:22). The Greek word for “ordination” is χειροτονία (Lampe 1961, 1522–1523, s.vv. χειροτονέω, χειροτονία), Syr. *sām-ṭdā* (but see Bou Mansour 2019, 367n60 for a bibliography on the different terms employed). Book 8 of the *Apostolic Constitutions* discusses ordinations, and in Syriac the *Testamentum domini*.

324 On this theme: Murray 2006, 55; Bou Mansour 2019, 246; 365–369. Old Testament occurrences are limited to Moses’ passing of his charisma to Joshua: Num. 27:18; 23; Dtn. 34:9. For Ephrem: “The Highest inclined towards Mount Sinai / and laid his hand on Moses // Moses laid it on Aaron / and it reached till John. // For this reason, Our Lord said / “it is justice to be baptised by you”, // lest that order may be lost: / Our Lord gave it to the Apostles, // so that now it is transmitted inside our church / Blessed is he who delivered us his order!” (*hymn. haer.* 22, 19). See also: *hymn. haer.* 24, 22; *Nat.* 4, 21. Ephrem clearly knew

For Ephrem, the imposition of hands is very important, because it guarantees the apostolic genealogy of a bishop, differentiating the true church from heretical sects³²⁵. For this reason, Ephrem mentions the imposition of hands mostly against heretics and Jews, as an argument for the legitimacy of the church. It is so important that, according to Bou Mansour, it becomes a substitute for the word “priesthood” itself³²⁶. Against this interpretation are two passages from our poems, where the “hands” are mentioned in parallel with other facets of the bishop’s role:

ܐܝܬܝܢ ܕܝܗܝܢ ܕܡܫܝܚܝܢ ³²⁷ ܕܡܫܝܚܝܢ ܕܡܫܝܚܝܢ ܕܡܫܝܚܝܢ (CN 13, 1, 1–4)	ܕܡܫܝܚܝܢ ܕܡܫܝܚܝܢ ܕܡܫܝܚܝܢ ܕܡܫܝܚܝܢ ܕܡܫܝܚܝܢ ܕܡܫܝܚܝܢ ܕܡܫܝܚܝܢ ܕܡܫܝܚܝܢ ܕܡܫܝܚܝܢ (CN 17, 6, 1–7)
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Bou Mansour explains that in these passages, even though the “hand” is linguistically on the same level as the other attributes of the episcopate, since the others (the throne, the key, the diocese) express a function, the hand, expressing the source of the bishop’s power, is still the most important. Another argument in favour of Bou Mansour’s interpretation is that “hand” is here governed by verbs, such as *’ašlem* and *yabbel*, meaning “to deliver”, “to hand out”, “to transmit”, whereas if it meant only “consecration,” it should have been governed by *sām*, “to put”, as in Num. 27:18.23 and Dtn. 34:9. One could even interpret this unusual construction as a zeugma in CN 13, 1, 3–4, but CN 17, 6, 1 leaves no doubt that here *’idā*, “hand”, is objectified and does not refer to the imposition of hands proper. This is all the truer since, at least in theory, no bishop could consecrate his successor, so that the imposition of hands was always performed by bishops from other dioceses. The term *kursyā*, equivalent of Greek καθέδρα/θρόνος and meaning “throne”, “seat”, may symbolise the bishop’s *munus docendi* or his judicial function inside the community³²⁹. The terms *mar’itā* and *gezrā* point to the leadership

that the main OT model for the imposition of hands was Moses’ election of Joshua as his successor, as he delves on this episode at CN 19, 6.

³²⁵ See Griffith 1999.

³²⁶ Bou Mansour 2019, 366. See also the passage by Jacob of Serugh quoted in Papoutsakis 2017, 83, with explanation.

³²⁷ “Three priests dazzling / in likeness of the two luminaries, // In shifting transmitted [*yabbel(w) w-’ašlem(w)*] one to the next / throne, hand and diocese [*kursyā w-’idā w-mar’itā*].”

³²⁸ “He delivered his hand [*’ašlem ’id-eh*] to his own disciple, / the seat [*kursyā*] to the one who was worthy of it, // the key [*qlidā*] to the one who was faithful, / the pen [*gezrā*] to the one who was excellent; // meet for your hand is the consecration [*l-’id-āk ruhḥāpā*], / for your offering [*l-qurbān-āk*] the atonement, // and for your tongue [*l-lišānā*] the comfort.”

³²⁹ See Payne Smith 1879–1901, 1837, s.v. ܡܫܝܚܝܢ; Lampe 1961, 687. For the judicial function, the *locus classicus* is Mt 19:28, which has καθίξειν ἐπὶ θρόνον/θρόνους (for both the Son of Man and the apostles) in Greek, but in Syriac (Peshitta and Curetonian) *tronōs* for the Son of Man and *kursyā* for the apostles

over the diocese, while the keys, as already noted, indicate the disciplinary authority of the bishop. If this symbolism is correct, then “hand” should mean something less general than “priesthood”, *pace* Bou Mansour, and it should rather indicate a particular task of the bishop, passed on by the predecessors to their successors: I suggest “hand” here means the power to consecrate bishops, priests, and deacons. This seems to be confirmed by *CN* 17, 6, 5, where Ephrem says to the living bishop: “It is meet for *your* hand [*l-ʿīd-āk*] the consecration³³⁰”, a sentence which cannot be interpreted as referring to the consecration of the same bishop but must refer to his worthiness to consecrate others. Moreover, the same wording is employed in another passage to express kingly succession, and there the objects mentioned are the throne and the crown, which must be intended on the same level, facilitating this reading in our case too³³¹. Gregory refers to the hands too, but his usage of the term is linked much more strongly to the concrete ritual of consecration than Ephrem’s: in *II*, 1, 12, 503, he discusses the idea that ἐπισκόπων χέρες, the imposition of hands, may forgive all sins as a second baptism; in *II*, 1, 13, 89–91, the throne and the imposition of hands are used as metonymies for the episcopate, which is given away to anyone³³².

Indeed, the throne (θρόνος) is the preferred episcopal attribute for Gregory: when he wants to express the office of bishop with a concrete term through a metonymy, he chooses θρόνος. Ephrem, on the other side, employs *kursyā* (the equivalent of Greek θρόνος or καθέδρα) only twice in the already mentioned *CN* 13, 1, 4 and *CN* 17, 6, 2. In many occurrences, a θρόνος is a substitute for the charge of a bishop and shares in its authority³³³: the throne has an intrinsic charismatic authority (ἀξία), and its recipient should contribute to the charisma of the charge by being himself charismatic (ἀξιός)³³⁴. A particular use of this metonymy is in the many passages criticising the bishops’ ambitions: the throne objectifies the episcopate and expresses its link with a particular place, the bishopric, which is not neutral because there are more and less important

(the Sinaitic version has *kursyā* for both). On the original judiciary function of bishops: Rapp 2000, 381; Rapp 2005, 242–252.

330 For the many meanings of the term *ruhḥāpā* in Syriac, see Bou Mansour 2019, 367n60.

331 *yabbel(w) w-ašlem(w) kursyā w-tāgā* (*Nat.* 24, 2); see Papoutsakis 2017, 81–82.

332 Εἶποι τάχ’ ἂν τις, ὡς ἐπισκόπων χέρες / Τό τ’ ἐν μέσῳ κήρυγμα λουτροῦ τις χάρις (*II*, 1, 12, 502–503); Δεῦρ’ ἴτε θαρσαλέοι. πᾶσι θρόνος εὐρύς ἔτοιμος, / Δεῦρ’ ἴτε, δεξιτερῆσι νέους κλίνετε τένοντας / Πᾶσι προφρονέως, καὶ μὴ ποθέουσι τέτανται (*II*, 1, 13, 89–91).

333 *II*, 1, 12, 142; 437; 474; 572–573; 635; *II*, 1, 13, 68; 89; *II*, 1, 17, 29.

334 Gregory recognises the dignity of the throne, but this dignity does not cover for the indignity of the recipient: Ἐν ἐκτρέπου μοι, τοὺς κακοὺς ἐπισκόπους, / Μηδὲν φοβηθεὶς τοῦ θρόνου τὴν ἀξίαν (*II*, 1, 12, 35–36); unworthy recipients may appear worthy on the spot, but they must be proved so in long time: Ἡμεῖς δὲ πάντας ῥαδίως καθίζομεν, / Ἐὰν μόνον θέλωσι, λαοῦ προστάτας / Οὐδὲν σκοποῦντες τῶν νέων ἢ τῶν πάλαι, / Οὐ πρᾶξιν, οὐ λόγον τιν’, οὐ συνουσίαν, / Οὐδ’ ὅσον ἤχον γνωρίσαι νομίσματος, / Οὐδὲ χρόνου πύρῳσιν ἐνδεδειγμένους, / Ἀλλ’ αὐτόθεν φανέντας ἀξίους θρόνων (*II*, 1, 12, 375–381). On the “charisma of office” (especially in the church) and on the testing of charisma, see Weber 1922, 144–145 and below, §3.3 (especially §3.3.2.3 for the charisma of office).

dioceses. Therefore, the image helps to visualise the shameful strife and commerce around episcopal seats, thereby eliciting outrage in the reader³³⁵. Anyway, the term employed by Gregory is not always *θρόνος*. In hexametric poetry, for example, in addition to *θρόνος* he uses *θῶκος*, an Ionic term current in epic and rare in prose (there used in the form *θαῖκος*)³³⁶. This usage of *θῶκος* is found also in celebrative epigrams for bishops as benefactors, a usage derived from celebrative epigrams for secular officials in the same quality³³⁷. In one instance, Gregory plays with the word *ἔδρα*: *Ὡς ὄφελον Γετθαῖαν ἀναπλήσαιεν ἀνίην, / Ἐνδικὸν ἐδρήεσαν, ἐφ' ἔδρη τίσιν ἔχοντες* (II, 1, 13, 149–150). Having described the ambition of the bishops, Gregory wishes they could be punished (*τίσιν ἔχοντες*) with the “pain of Gath”—that is, haemorrhoids (1 Sam. 5). This punishment would be very appropriate (*ἐνδικόν*), not only because the Gittites were punished for possessing the ark of the covenant without being worthy, as the bishops would occupy their seat without being worthy, but also because the bishops’ object of desire is a “seat” (*ἔδρα*), and the haemorrhoids strike precisely the body part that would most enjoy the undeserved prize, a body part that in Greek can be called *ἔδρα*, so that Gregory calls the malady *ἐδρήεσσα*, “of the seat”³³⁸. Finally, in one case Gregory employs *θρόνος* in a name, to designate the other bishops: *ὁμόθρονος*, a word which resembles the already mentioned *συμπομῆν*, in that it stresses the collegiality of the episcopate, but it is built upon a different metaphor³³⁹.

2.2.4.7 Medicine

A much-studied metaphor for the bishop is that of the physician. Healing, medicine, and the profession of physician are widespread metaphors for Christ and salvation in all Christian literature. Both Gregory and Ephrem use this metaphor with a variety of aims: Gregory employs it in his speeches on priesthood, as part of his wider strategy of

³³⁵ *Θρόνους μὲν οὖν ἔχοιτε, καὶ τυραννίδας / Ὑμεῖς, ἐπεὶ καὶ πρῶτα ταῦθ' ὑμῖν δοκεῖ / Χαίροιτε, ὑβρίζοιτε, πατριαρχίας / Κληροῦσθε, Κόσμος ὑμῖν εἰκέτω μέγας / τόπους ἀμείβοιτ' ἐκ τόπων, τοὺς μὲν κάτω / Βάλλοιτε, τοὺς δ' ὑψοῦτε· ταῦθ' ὑμῖν φίλα* (II, 1, 12, 797–802); *Ὡν, οἱ μὲν θώκων ἱερῶν πέρι δῆριν ἔχοντες, / Ἀντία κυμαίνοντες, ἐπασσύτεροισι κακοῖσι / Βαλλόμενοι, βάλλοντες, ἀτειρέες εἰσὶ μαχηταί* (II, 1, 13, 145–148); *Οὐ γὰρ ἐμῆς πολιῆς παίζειν, καὶ λάτριν ἀεικῶς / Ἐμμεναι ἀντὶ θρόνων, ὧν πέρι μαρνάμενοι / Σχίζονται, καὶ κόσμον ὅλον τέμνουσιν ἀθέσμως* (II, 1, 17, 97–99).

³³⁶ II, 1, 10, 14; II, 1, 13, 7; 98; 145.

³³⁷ Robert 1948, 41–43.

³³⁸ *καὶ λέγουσιν οἱ Γεθθαῖοι Μετελθέτω κιβωτὸς τοῦ θεοῦ πρὸς ἡμᾶς· καὶ μετῆλθεν κιβωτὸς τοῦ θεοῦ εἰς Γεθθα. Καὶ ἐγενήθη μετὰ τὸ μετελθεῖν αὐτὴν καὶ γίνεται χεῖρ κυρίου ἐν τῇ πόλει, τάραχος μέγας σφόδρα, καὶ ἐπάταξεν τοὺς ἄνδρας τῆς πόλεως ἀπὸ μικροῦ ἕως μεγάλου καὶ ἐπάταξεν αὐτοὺς εἰς τὰς ἔδρας αὐτῶν, καὶ ἐποίησαν ἑαυτοῖς οἱ Γεθθαῖοι ἔδρας.* (1Sam. 5:8–9). The Hebrew text is even more explicit, employing the word *ʾāpālīm*, glossed with the Aramaic *ṭəḥorīm*, both meaning “haemorrhoids”. The adjective *ἐδρήεις* is glossed by Hesychius as *ἐδραῖος*. *Ἐδραῖος* means generally “steadfast” or “sedentary”, not “relative to sitting” nor “on which one sits” (except at Eur. *Rhes*. 783). Therefore, Gregory here probably creates an adjective in analogy to such epic attributes as *σιγαλόεις* or *αιγλήεις*.

³³⁹ II, 1, 13, 203; II, 1, 17, 91.

“rationalising” the category of bishops³⁴⁰. Surprisingly, the metaphor is not so important in our poems, and it never appears in Gregory’s II, 1, 12, which also advocates for a sort of professionalisation of the bishops³⁴¹. Ephrem’s poems have two references to medicine. At CN 16, 21, 4, the three first bishops are compared to medications (*sammānē*) apt to the diseases (*kēbē*) of the community. The more sizeable reference is CN 19, 11, a whole stanza addressing the bishop as a physician:

ܕܠܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܠܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܠܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܠܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܠܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ	ܕܠܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܠܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܠܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܠܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܠܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ
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³⁴² ܕܠܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ
(CN 19, 11)

Ephrem’s recommendations are rather general and have the effect of using the physician metaphor to prescribe a differentiated approach to each member of the community. It is probably in this respect that we should understand Ephrem’s insistence on pharmacological treatment, as the variety of medications and their necessary adaptation to the disease are a good symbol of the different strategies the bishop should adopt to spiritually guide his community, whereas the traditional Syriac idea of the “medicine of life” (*sammā d-hayyā*)—namely, Christ—is not relevant here, since Ephrem’s point is precisely that the bishop should not use only *one* medicine, but a multitude³⁴³. The adaptation of the medicine to the malady may just be commonsensical, but a similar idea can be found in the *Corpus Hippocraticum* (*de locis in homine* 45)³⁴⁴. The only line that may point to a specific acquaintance with medical knowledge on the part of Ephrem is 9: “Even you must learn [*tēlap*] experience [*nesyānā*]”. The word *nesyānā* is used, for example, in the Syriac translation of the first aphorism of Hippocrates, to translate Greek *πείρα*, “expe-

³⁴⁰ On Ephrem’s use of the metaphor: Shemunkasho 2005 (with only 424–425 devoted to the bishops of Nisibis); Murray 2006, 199–203; on Gregory’s use in the *or*: Elm 2012, 171; Gautier 2002, 118; Elm 2000a. More on the rationalisation of the bishop’s office: §3.3.2.1.

³⁴¹ The only occurrence at II, 1, 17, 96 serves to differentiate Gregory’s lifestyle from that of other bishops, underlining his moral aptitude and his being beneficial to his community: Τῶνδε γὰρ εἵνεκ’ ἔγωγε μέσος χθαμαλοῖσι κάθημαι / Ἱητρὸς παθέων, αὐτὸς ἄνουσος ἐών. (II, 1, 17, 95–96).

³⁴² “Take with you myriads of drugs [*sammānē*], / rise and go among the sick [*mār’ē*], // to the weak [*l-da-krih*] offer a drug [*sammā*], / and to the one who’s healthy [*da-ḥlim*] preservation [*nuṭṭārā*]; // do not give any drug [*sammā*] / that may not suit the illness [*l-kēbā*], // but apply abundantly any help, / that may bring the illness to recovery, // even you must learn experience [*nesyānā*]. / **Blessed is he who toiled on our wounds!**”

³⁴³ On the “medicine of life” theme, see: Murray 2006, 320; Shemunkasho 2002, 141, 147–151; Brock 1992, 19–20, 99–106, 175n4; Payne Smith 1879–1901, 2652, s.v. ܕܡܪܝܬܐ.

³⁴⁴ Φάρμακα οὐ χρὴ τὰ ἰσχυρὰ φύσει ἐπὶ τῶν ἀσθενέων νοσημάτων διδόναι, ὀλιγότῃ τοῦ φαρμάκου ἀσθενὲς ποιεῦντα· ἀλλὰ τοῖσι μὲν ἰσχυροῖσι φύσει φαρμάκοις ἰσχυροῖσι χρῆσθαι, τοῖς δ’ ἀσθενέσι φαρμάκοις μὴ ἰσχυροῖσι, μὴ δὲ μεταποιεῦντα τὸ φάρμακον, ἀλλὰ κατὰ φύσιν ἐκάστοισιν· τοῖσι μὲν ἀσθενέσι ἀσθενῇ φάρμακα φύσει, τοῖσι δὲ ἰσχυροῖσι νοσήμασιν ἰσχυρὰ φύσει τὰ φάρμακα. (Hippocr. *De locis in homine* 45).

rience”³⁴⁵. However, contrary to the aphorism, Ephrem seems to see experience as the physician’s source of knowledge, a position corresponding to a long tradition in Greek medicine. This position is reflected in the Syriac language by the *Syriac Book of Medicines*, edited by Budger: not only does the author advocate for dissection, vivisection, and an empiric approach throughout the text, but at the beginning it says explicitly, “Are not all physicians as those who learn (*yālpīn*) from experience (*nesyānā*)?”³⁴⁶. It is possible that Ephrem had at least a superficial knowledge of contemporary medicine and used this model of empirical activity to characterise the bishop in *CN* 19, 11, in much the same way as Gregory did in his homilies, though not with the same depth and profusion.

2.2.4.8 Merchant

Some metaphors bear the marks of the two different cultural traditions to which Gregory and Ephrem belong. For example, Ephrem twice employs the metaphor of the merchant for the bishop, whereas Gregory does not employ it³⁴⁷. Even though this metaphor has a common model in the parables from the Gospels treating commercial affairs, in particular the parable of the pearl of great price (Mt. 13:45–46 and *Ev. Thom.* 76), the parable itself, the image of the pearl, and that of the merchant have had a far greater impact on Syriac-speaking Christianity than in the West³⁴⁸. In Ephrem, the metaphor is not linked—as is usual—to the concept of mission and evangelisation, but to the parable of the talents, expressing the bishop’s success in disseminating the Christian doctrine in the community³⁴⁹. As in the case of the contradictory metaphors of the bishop as shepherd or as fisherman, even when using the missionary and apostolic metaphor, Ephrem bends it to the necessity of a city bishop and his urban community.

³⁴⁵ Ὁ βίος βραχύς, ἡ δὲ τέχνη μακρὴ, ὁ δὲ καιρὸς ὀξύς, ἡ δὲ πείρα σφαλερὴ, ἡ δὲ κρίσις χαλεπὴ. Δεῖ δὲ οὐ μόνον ἑωυτὸν παρέχειν τὰ δεόντα ποιέοντα, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸν νοσέοντα, καὶ τοὺς παρεόντας, καὶ τὰ ἐξῶθεν (*Hippocr. aph.* 1). For the Syriac translation see Pognon 1903, 3.

³⁴⁶ Budge 1913, 10 (for the quote) and CLXV (for the cultural outlook of the author). For more recent takes on this text: Bhayro 2015; Bhayro/Rudolf 2018.

³⁴⁷ *CN* 17, 1, 3–7; *CN* 19, 16, 10.

³⁴⁸ The paramount text in this case is the *Acts of Thomas*, where the apostle reaches India in his mission thanks to a merchant and in which the so-called “Hymn of the Pearl” or “Hymn of the Soul” was inserted, one of the first poetic texts of the Syriac tradition. On merchants in the Syriac tradition, see: Teixidor 1987; Drijvers 1989; Harra 2002; Borbone 2015. The bishop as merchant: Murray 2006, 171–176; Ephrem wrote also a cycle of poems on the pearl, *hymn. fid.* 81–85.

³⁴⁹ “like that merchant of our diocese [*taggārā d-mar’it-an*], / who multiplied the talent [*kakkar*] of your doctrine, // then parted and went to your haven:” (*CN* 17, 1, 3–5). The expression “merchant of our flock”, taken by itself, seems to obliterate the literal meaning of the word “merchant” (as it surely does with “flock” and as it seems to do at *CN* 19, 16, 10), except the following lines clearly presuppose a living metaphor. The two main features of the merchant, the search for profit and his mobility, are interpreted outside the traditional schemes of gaining of souls and mobility in space, but as a gain in doctrine (deepening, preventing of error, education of the already converted) and a temporal mobility, the succession of different “merchants” who come and go (i.e., are elected and die).

2.2.4.9 Performing arts

On the other hand, Gregory demonstrates a wide range of metaphors taken from the Greek culture of performing arts and sports. Apart from conventional uses of the word *χόρος* and its derivatives, Gregory employs such metaphors in a positive way only once, as he evokes the boxer, the runner, and the flute-player—all both showmen and contenders for prizes—as a fortiori examples of the preparation needed to be a good bishop³⁵⁰. Normally, however, the metaphors referring to Greek show culture have a negative connotation, because that culture is seen negatively, as demonstrated by the disapproval for bishops who were involved with the world of sports and performing arts before their election. Gregory expresses this disapproval in an invective at II, 1, 12, 402–410 (see §5.2.2). There, however, references to theatre and other spectacles are not metaphorical; they claim that those bishops really were performers or spectators before. More interesting for our purpose are passages where Gregory employs these occupations as metaphors for the behaviour of reigning bishops. Gregory's favourite image in this sense is that of theatre: Gregory employs a number of features of theatrical performance—in particular, masks—to denounce the hypocrisy of prelates, with the additional connotation of moral defect inherent in the profession of actor³⁵¹. It is worth quoting in full one such passage because of its structure:

Ὡ θυσίας πέμποντες ἀναιμάκτους, ἱερῆς! (1)
 Ὡ ψυχῶν ταμίαι μεγακύδεις! Ὡ μέγαλοιο
 Πλάσμα Θεοῦ χεῖρεςσιν ἐν ὑμετέρῃσι φέροντες!
 Ὡ Θεὸν ἀνθρώποισι μέγ' ἔξοχον εἰς ἐν ἄγοντες!
 Ὡ κόσμοιο θέμεθλα, βίου φάος, ἔρμα λόγοιο, (5)
 Μυστοπόλοιο ζωῆς ἀτελευτήτοιο φαεινῆς,
 Χριστοφόροι, θώκοισιν ἐνεδριόνωντες ἀρίστοις,
 Ὑψηλοὶ, θεάτροισι γεγηθότες εὐπρεπέεσσι,
 Σκηνοβάται, κώλοισιν ἐφισταότες ξυλίνοισιν,
 Ἀδρανέως χάσκοντες ἐν ἄλλοτρίοισι προσώποις, (10)
 Εὐσεβίης ὅσα δ' ἐντός, ὁμοῖα πᾶσιν ἔχοντες
 Ὑμεῖς μὲν παίζετε, τὰ περ καὶ παίζετ' ἀεικῶς,
 Καὶ σοβαρὸν φθέγγοισθε, τὰ δ' ἔρδετε ὡς μάλ' ἐλαφρά.
 (II, 1, 13, 1–13)

³⁵⁰ Conventional uses of the word *χόρος*: II, 1, 13, 15; 69; another conventional metaphor is that of the leader (in this case the bishop) as charioteer: II, 1, 17, 103–106 (for this metaphorical usage in classical authors, see Liddell/Scott/Jones 2011, 775, s.v. ἡνία (B), 2). Performers as positive examples of preparation: II, 1, 12, 555–559 (on which see §2.1.2.1; §3.3.2.1).

³⁵¹ Some examples: before his tirade against the low morality of bishop, Gregory says he will present a “scene” (σκηνή) more beautiful than reality, judging the “masks” (the types) and leaving the true faces for “later” (meaning the Final Judgement): II, 1, 12, 359–360; religious piety is a comic mask, which can be worn all of a sudden even when one is utterly unworthy: II, 1, 12, 397–399. As long as the church will keep electing clowns – says Gregory – it will resemble a circus. On the comic elements in these invectives: §5.2.1; on the deceit of bishops: §5.2.4.

O priests, you who offer bloodless sacrifices! (1)
 O very glorious ministers of souls, bearing
 in your hands the image of the great God!
 O you who the Supreme God with human beings together bring!
 O world's pillars, life's light, foundation of doctrine, (5)
 initiators to the shining mysteries of life immortal
 Christ-bearers, sitting on the topmost thrones,
 most high, rejoicing in good-looking theatres,
 stage treaders, standing on wooden stilts,
 feebly yawning through alien masks, (10)
 for what pertains to religion, the very same as everyone else.
 Yea, you may play, although you play shamefully,
 and your speech may be haughty, yet what you do is really shallow.

The poem begins like II, 1, 10, and the first lines (1–7) extol the role and importance of bishops along the lines of Gregory's conception of *theosis* already described in respect to II, 1, 12, 709–760 (see §2.2.3.2 and §2.1.3.1). Yet lines 9–13 overturn the praise and attack the bishops as hypocritical: they wear a mask (προσώποις, 10) to go “on stage” (Σκηνοβάται, 9), which is alien (ἀλλοτριόισι, 10) to their true self, and feign a devotion they do not have (11). Moreover, they are bad actors, because their actions are opposed to their speech. The “wooden stilts” (κῶλα ξύλινα, 9) contrast with the “topmost thrones” (θῶκοι ἄριστοι, 7) on which they think they are sitting: even their elevation is fake. The hinge line between praise and invective is 8, which can be read in two completely different senses: the attribute “most high” (ὕψηλός) can reference back to the importance of the bishop's office, but also forward to the haughtiness of bishops; the “good-looking shows” (θέατρα εὐπρέπεα) can be interpreted as the audience of the bishop, being beautiful because it is Christian, and as the audience of a public spectacle, with beautiful appearances (εὐπρεπές) but ultimately meaningless, specious. This antithetical structure is meant to highlight the awesome dignity of the episcopate, while at the same time making painfully visible how short real-life bishops fall of the inherent charisma of their office.

Gregory again compares the public appearance of a bishop, himself, with that of performers in II, 1, 17, 75–82:

Οὐδὲ μὲν οὐδὲ πρόεδρος ἐὼν ἱεροῖς ἐνὶ χώροις, (75)
 Ἦ μόνος, ἢ πλεόνων εἰς ἓν ἀγειρομένων,
 Φθέγγομαι οὐασὶ τερπνὰ, τὰ Πνεύματος ἔκτοθι ῥίψας,
 Ὡς κεν ἔοιμι πρόφρων, φίλτρον ἔχων πλεόνων,
 Τερπόμενός τε κρότοις, καὶ ἐν θεάτροισι χορεύων, (80)
 Κρημνοβάτης ἐπέων ἀντικουρσομένων,
 Ἀθλοφόροιςιν ὁμοῖα, πολυγνάμptoις τε λώβαις,
 Ἦ καὶ μαινομένους ἀντίπαλ' ἡνιόχοις'
 (II, 1, 17, 75–82)

Nor, presiding in the holy places, (75)
 be I alone or with many gathered as one,
 Shall I utter something pleasant to hear, excluding the Spirit,

that I may be prudent and loved by the majority,
 enjoying the applause and dance in the theatres,
 a tightrope walker of fighting speeches, (80)
 the like of winning athletes and much-modulating disgraces,
 or even the mad antagonist charioteers:

Here, the preaching of the bishop in the church (ιεροῖς ἐνὶ χώροις, 75), either alone or in the framework of the council, where many other bishops may have been present (πλεόνων εἰς ἓν ἀγειρομένων, 76), runs the risk of becoming a spectacle. The risk peculiar to Gregory is omitting the divinity of the Spirit for the sake of political expediency, and therefore with a gain in prestige and popular acclaim. For our purposes, this particular theological problem is less important than the more general situation it is coated in: the bishop abuses his liturgical position (πρόεδρος ἐὼν ἱεροῖς ἐνὶ χώροις) to give and receive pleasure from his audience (Φθέγγομαι οὔασι τερπνὰ; Τερπόμενός τε κρότοισι, 77; 79) so as to become a favourite (πρόφρων, φίλτρον ἔχων, 78). The whole situation already has theatrical elements, such as the applause (κρότοισι, 79), the pleasure of the performance, and the affection between crowd and performer³⁵². Gregory gives it away in the following lines (79–82), comparing the abuse of power by the bishop to the behaviour of different ancient performers: the mime, uniting acting and dance (ἐν θεάτροισι χορεύων), the acrobats but also the extravagant rhetors (Κρημνοβάτης ἐπέων ἀντικορυσσομένων), the athletes (Ἀθλοφόροισιν), the charioteers (μαίνομενοις ἀντίπαλ' ἡνιόχοις), and, maybe, the musicians (πολυγνάμτοις τε λώβαις)³⁵³. All these performers contribute a vice to the image of the bishop, with the mime exemplifying the shameful movements required to appease the masses, the acrobat facing the danger of falling into heresy when discussing doctrines, the rhetor displaying a misplaced fastidiousness in discussing anything—danger strongly related to that of the acrobat—the winning athlete pandering to the mob, musicians signifying inconsistency through their modulations, and, finally, the charioteer being marked by his aggression³⁵⁴. It is more

352 On the pleasure conveyed by spectacles (which are themselves called “pleasures” in late antiquity, lat. *voluptates*, gr. ἀπολαύσεις): Webb 2008, 169, 186. On the consideration enjoyed by actors: Leppin 1992, 160–168; Webb 2008, 139–196.

353 The ἐπέων ἀντικορυσσομένων seem an epic rewriting of the rhetorical exercise of the δίσσοι λόγοι. In the expression πολυγνάμτοις λώβαις, the word λώβη does not say anything on who is meant. The word πολυγνάμτοις seems to have been used only of objects in classical poetry (see Liddell/Scott/Johnson 2011, 1437, s.v. πολυγνάμτος). Considering that γνάμπτω is the Homeric form of κάμπτω, the latter verb could be taken to mean two things: either to guide the chariot around the turning-post in the hippodrome, or to turn and twist a melody (with a negative connotation linked to the New Music; see Liddell/Scott/Johnson 2011, 873, s.v. κάμπτω, II and III). Therefore, πολυγνάμτοις λώβαις are either “the many-races pests” or “the many-modulations pests”. Since the expression is connected to the following ἡνιόχοις by ἢ καὶ, I am inclined to take it as something different to the charioteers and, consequently, to refer it to musicians.

354 Same characterisations of charioteer and mime at II, 1, 12, 395–433, with the barrister taking on the characters of the musician and the rhetor and dance treated separately from theatre; see §5.2.3.

difficult to assess the real import of these performance metaphors. One can go from a minimum of significance—namely, that they were chosen for their expressive force and nothing else by the poet—to a maximum of significance, claiming that Gregory had observed in his time a transformation of the liturgy into a sort of show, perhaps with bishops consciously modelling themselves on the contemporary spectacle-ethos to compete with public shows. I find it difficult to exclude the possibility that these metaphors imply a similarity between the bishop's role in liturgy and that of public performers. Given the mocking intention of these metaphors, which define a negative model for the bishop, Gregory clearly felt that this association must be avoided. If we observe this phenomenon in the wider context of his poems on bishops, such a risk of spectacularising the bishop's role appears even more concrete: Gregory pushes for a rationalisation of the bishop, and he even does so by comparing him with performers, as already said (and see also §3.3.2.1). The stakes of this game are very clear to our poet: the element of shame in these metaphors highlights the subordinate position the bishop falls into when he wants to appease his audience. His formal position of *πρόεδρος* (75), so highly extolled at II, 1, 13, 1–8, would be substantially eroded. Short-term political gain leads to long-term, strategic defeats (see §5.2.5).

Another metaphor typical of Gregory is that of the bishop as helmsman³⁵⁵. Its importance is accounted for by the link with the metaphor of the sea storm—so important in the construction of Gregory's literary character—and with the metaphor of the community as seafaring ship, a staple of Greek literary imagery³⁵⁶. Among the occurrences of the metaphor, the one in Plato's *Republic* (488) is particularly relevant for Gregory, because Plato employs it to argue for a rationalisation of leadership: in arguing that philosophers must be kings, Plato equates philosophy with a *τέχνη*, an art useful for government and to be learnt slowly before one applies it to oneself to govern others. This attitude towards leadership is accepted also by Gregory (see §3.3.2.1).

2.3 Conclusion

It is worthwhile to briefly review the general results of this linguistic analysis before tackling the next chapter, because some points discovered here will prove helpful in the following inquiry. The most prominent characteristic of both Ephrem's and Gregory's language on bishops is their shunning of specialised titles (*ἐπίσκοπος*, *πρεσβύτερος*) in favour of more generic words or of metaphors (§2.1). The consequence is that the distinction between bishops and priests is blurred and much of what is said of bishops

³⁵⁵ II, 1, 12, 385–388; II, 1, 13, 29–30; 154–155; 204; II, 1, 17, 5–8.

³⁵⁶ On the storm at sea: Lorenz 1979; on the ship of state: Brock 2013, 53–68 (for classical Greek writers); Rahner 1971, 239–564, Peterson 1950 and Goldammer 1950 (for Christian writers).

may be applied to priests, too³⁵⁷. In the case of Ephrem, this lack of precision prevents us from understanding how the hierarchy was articulated below the bishop of Nisibis: the relationship of Nisibis with countryside and village churches, the rank of the clergy ministering in those churches, and their relationship with the bishop of the city are all subject of speculation and not of knowledge, as demonstrated by the controversial interpretation of the word *'allānā* (§2.2.1.4). The main difference between Gregory and Ephrem as regards the choice of words is that Gregory has different specialised languages for different genres and metres, from prose to epic poetry, whereas Ephrem employs the same register and the same words regardless of metre. The fact that in Greek poetry genres prescribe not only a form but also a language and vocabulary, together with contemporary school practices, explains the phenomenon of passages in Gregory with the same or very similar content in different works and with different terms but similar structure: a passage in iambs might have been rewritten following the conventions of hexametric poetry and included in a poem in hexameters, or a prose passage might have been adapted to the iambic rhythm with minimal changes. In such cases, the words for “bishop” may have a prose or iambic form and a hexametric one.

As regards the sources, the place of honour is given to the Bible, not so much because the poets employ the same terminology as the New Testament, but because the imagery of the bishop comes almost entirely from Old Testament metaphors and Jesus's parables. Though the doctrine of apostolic succession was well known to both poets, the apostles play only a minor role in the characterisation of bishops. Furthermore, Christ's priesthood “after the order of Melchizedek” remains exclusive of the Messiah. The model of Old Testament, Aaronic priesthood is much more consequential for the construction of the image of the bishop (§2.1.3). The differences in use and interpretation notwithstanding, both Gregory and Ephrem conceive the liturgical role of the bishop primarily based on Old Testament temple worship, with its sacrifices and purity laws.

Nevertheless, liturgical priesthood is a minor component in the bishop's image. Most titles and metaphors emphasise the bishop's role of leadership in the community, be it through teaching, through the example, or through the imposition of discipline (§2.1.2). In this context, the term *προστάτης* and the abstract *προστασία* are particularly interesting (§2.1.2.1), because they could be construed as a metaphor for NT *προϊστάμενος*, while at the same time being a term widely attested in tragedy for traditional roles of protection and commonly used to translate Latin *patronus*. Because of these multiple associations, the term lent itself to a discussion of the bishop's role in society, differentiating it from or associating it with traditional figures, such as the Roman *patronus*. The fact that leadership was the distinguishing feature of the bishop for the poets is demonstrated also by the great prominence of the metaphor of the shepherd, in its many elaborations (§2.2.1). Much more than OT priesthood or the apostles-fishermen of

357 This will still be the case for John Chrysostom's *On Priesthood* (Malingrey 1980, 72n1; Lochbrunner 1993, 184–190) and for Gregory the Great's *Pastoral Care* (Floryszczak 2005, 188–193).

the NT, it is OT leadership, without institutional precision (as in Ezekiel's speech to the shepherds), that influences the discourse on bishops for both poets. In most cases, the bishop is seen in the context of his relationship to the community. Another important metaphor linked to this role is that of the bishop as a teacher as a light who dispels darkness through his teaching (§2.2.4.4–5).

"Image is everything", proclaimed a famous tennis player in a notorious commercial³⁵⁸. When it comes to bishops, Ephrem and Gregory would certainly concur, though perhaps not in the same sense as the aforementioned commercial. Both poets attach so much importance to the personal example set by the bishop with his behaviour that his leadership—his main function—is almost totally occupied by this modality of guidance. At the basis of this attitude is the same desire for a morally consequential episcopacy, a desire to be guided by an elite of devotion and morality. Moreover, both poets present and justify this idea through the same group of metaphors, which I have called "iconographic": mirrors, sculptures, and, above all, paintings serve to articulate how the personal behaviour of the prelate relates to the community, to God, to predecessors, and to outsiders (§2.2.3). This is all the more notable since the Bible scarcely uses such metaphors and has on the whole a hostile view of figurative culture. This means that Gregory and Ephrem must have drawn them from contemporary reality and non-Christian culture. Each poet, however, employs the metaphors in the framework of his own theology. Gregory uses the metaphor of painting in a vertical scheme, going from God to the community, with the bishop as mediating ring of the chain, absorbing the images of God in himself and showing them outside so that the community may imitate them and thereby imitate God. Ephrem links the succession of bishops to the relationship between Old and New Testament, with one being the "type" or "figure" of the other, thereby endorsing development without denying the validity of past experiences. For him, the bishop's teaching by example is very important because it preserves the freedom of the community to follow the teaching or not.

Finally, Ephrem employs several metaphors absent or scarcely represented in Gregory—namely, agriculture, family (the bishop as father and husband), administration, medicine, and commerce. Gregory, on the other side, engages contemporary performing arts in a dialogue with the figure of the bishop, on one side rejecting them, while on the other he adopts their imagery to talk about the public role of the bishop. Finally, both Ephrem and Gregory employ metonymies to indicate the office of bishop, but while Ephrem tends to list the different attributes of the office (keys, throne, hands, and so on), Gregory employs often the simple "throne" to mean not only the office of bishop *as such* but also its territorial limitation. Thus, he shows himself to have a more objectified view of the office as a definable unity.

358 Agassi 2010, chapter 9.