

‘THE INTERIOR LIMBS’ IN ST ISAAC OF NINEVEH AND SOME OTHER SYRIAC WRITERS

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In memory of Robert Beulay, OCD

THE ‘INTERIOR LIMBS’ AND THE ‘INTERIOR PERSON’

At one point in a collection of thirty prayers in ‘the Second Part’ (V.20) of his writings Isaac exclaims ‘O Unbinder of our nature, unbind from me the hidden bonds which have been cast around my *interior limbs*’ (*haddamay gawwaye*). The phrase recurs again in XVIII.14, where he speaks of the interior limbs being impaired in the case of people ‘whose heart is naturally torpid’. The phrase ‘interior limbs’ seems to be first attested in Syriac in the *Book of Steps* (XXVIII.6–7 *haddame gawwaye*; XXVIII.7 *haddame dal-gaw*), which is usually thought to date from the late fourth century. In the first half of the fifth century, it is found a couple of times in John the Solitary’s *Discourse on the Soul* (ed. Dederig, pp. 49, 83), where again the two forms, *haddame gawwaye* and *haddame dal-gaw*, respectively are found. From the late fifth century we find it in Philoxenus’ *Against Habbib* (PO 40, p. 202), while closer in time to Isaac is a passage in Sahdona’s great work *On Perfection* (Part II.11.33 = ed. de Halleux, III, p. 92), ‘Thus all the internal and external limbs minister to one another and give honour each in their own way’. A related phrase in Isaac is ‘hidden limbs’ (Second Part, X.41).¹

Each of these ‘interior limbs’ has its own physiology, as it were, but before turning to this aspect, it is important to be aware of the Syriac usage of the wider

¹ Other phrases with the same meaning include ‘spiritual limbs’ (Philoxenus, *Discourses*, p.163; Sergius of Resh’aina, *On the spiritual life*, 64); and ‘noetic (*metyadd’ane*) limbs’ (Gregory of Cyprus, Vat. syr. 123, f.9b); cf. ‘limbs of the soul’ (Macarius, ed. Strothmann, Al. h. 160).

term ‘the interior person’ (*barnasha gawwaya*, or *dal-gaw*).² This is, of course, based on Ephesians 3:16 where both the Peshitta and the Harklean represent the Greek *ton esō anthrōpon* by *barnashkon* (Harklean, *barnasha* = Greek) *dal-gaw*, and this is the form in which it is found in the *Book of Steps* (X.5), and in several passages in the writings of John the Solitary (e.g. ed. Dederling, *On the Soul*, pp. 5, 6, 8; ed. Strothmann, II.103, VI, 179), as well as a couple of times in Part I of Isaac’s writings (ed. Bedjan, pp. 125, 483). John the Solitary, who was particularly fond of the phrase, slightly more frequently employs the adjectival form, *gawwaya*, instead of the prepositional *dal-gaw* (thus, e.g. ed. Dederling, *On the Soul*, pp. 7, 8, 23, 39, 41, 91; *Letters*, pp. 41, 65). In this usage he is anticipated by both Aphrahat (*Demonstration* VI.1, [col. 252]) and Ephrem (*H. against Heresies*, 32:12). It is this form that features once in the Third Part of Isaac’s writings (10.7 in the forthcoming edition by S. Chialà).³

In Greek writers an interest in ‘the interior limbs’ goes back above all to Origen (notably in his Homilies on Jeremiah). Rather surprisingly ‘the five limbs’, by implication interior (since they are listed as *nous*, *ennoia*, *phronēsis*, *enthumēsis* and *logismos*), feature in the Greek form of a prayer in the Acts of Thomas (ch. 27 = ed. Bonnet, p. 142), where the counterpart in the Syriac just as ‘Messenger of conciliation (*izgadda d-tar’uta* = ed. Wright, p. 193).⁴

With these preliminaries, we may proceed to exploring what ‘limbs’ each in turn of the heart (*lebba*), soul (*napsha*), intellect (*hawna*), thought (*hushshaba*), mind (*mad’a*, *re’yana*), and the intelligence (*tar’ita*).⁵ It should be noted that the present discussion does not cover phraseology involving the ‘interior’ or ‘spiritual senses (*regshe*)’, which can also be found in Syriac writers from John the Solitary onwards.⁶ Nor is the spatial imagery (such as ‘earth’, ‘palace’, ‘altar’, etc.) dealt with here.

² For the background, going back to Plato’s *Republic* (9.588–9), see T. K. Heckel, *Der Innere Mensch* (WUNT 2:53; 1993). Heckel’s view, that the metaphor was subsequently dropped by orthodox writers due to its use in Gnostic literature, and was only taken up again by the orthodox in the 4th cent., is rightly questioned by C. Marksches, ‘Die platonische Metapher vom “inneren Menschen”’, *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 105 (1994), pp. 1–17.

³ There are several other related terms, in particular *barnasha kasya*, ‘hidden person’, used especially by John the Solitary and John of Dalyatha; for the latter, see R. Beulay, *L’Enseignement spirituel de Jean de Dalyatha* (Paris, 1990), index, p. 515.

⁴ Though the Greek version of the Acts of Thomas often seems to point to an earlier form of Syriac text, the full listing of the five constituents would seem to be an inner-Greek development, though it has intriguing similarities with a Manichaean text, cited below, at note 11. One might suggest that *tar’uta* was a corruption of *tar’ita*, and that at one stage the Syriac might have referred to the ‘limbs’ of the *tar’ita*, even though this particular phrase appears not to turn up in later monastic writers (the nearest would be ‘*ebay tar’ita*, in Sahdona (ed. de Halleux, I, p. 85), but there ‘*ebre* may mean ‘wings’, rather than ‘limbs’. Alternatively, it is just as possible that the Greek translator misread *tar’uta* as *tar’ita*, and then expanded on this. Compare also the listing of the ‘limbs of the soul’, below.

⁵ For the interchangeability of *hawna*, *mad’a* and *re’yana*, see R. Beulay, *La Lumière sans forme* (Chevetogne, 1987), pp. 45–8.

⁶ Examples of early uses are: ‘interior senses’: John the Solitary, *On the Soul* (ed. Dederling), p. 6; (ed. Strothmann), II.54, X.167–8; ‘spiritual senses’: John the Solitary (ed. Strothmann), I.241; ‘senses of the soul’: *Book of Steps*, XXVIII.7; John the Solitary, *On the Soul*, p. 3; ‘of the *hawna*’: Aphrahat, *Dem.* 1:1, 9:2; *Life of Antony* (ed. Draguet), 41; ‘of the *mad’a*’: John the Solitary, *Letters*, p. 108; ‘of the *re’yana*’: Ephrem, *H. on the Nativity* 3:10; John the Solitary, *Letters*, p. 118; ‘of the *tar’ita*’: Aphrahat, *Dem.* 14:35;

Of the heart

Although Isaac has a great deal to say about the workings of the heart, the spiritual centre of the human person, he is not interested in speaking of its individual 'members' or 'limbs', and the only place where he mentions 'the eyes of the heart' is in a passage (First Part, p. 158) where he is quoting Paul (Ephesians 1:18). The 'eye', or 'eyes' of the heart feature not infrequently in other Syriac authors on the spiritual life, from Aphrahat (*Dem.* 1:1) onwards.⁷ The actual phrase 'limbs of the heart' is found in the Discourse on the Persian Martyrs attributed to Marutha (ed. Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum* II, p. 112) and Philoxenus (*Discourses*, ed. Budge, p. 34).

In other writers the heart can have a 'head' (Book of Steps X.3), 'lips' (*Odes of Solomon* 37:2),⁸ and 'ears'; this last is found in both the Syriac Macarius (ed. Strothmann, p. 174) and Evagrius (Brit.Lib. Add. 14,578, f.23b), as well as in Cyrillona (ed. Griffin, Scourges, 36). In the East Syriac monastic writers 'ears of the heart' appears to be confined to Babai (*Comm. on Evagrius' Kephalaia Gnostica*, ed. Frankenberg, f.73a) and Dadisho' (*Comm. on Abba Isaiah*, ed. Draguet, XV.28). In the Syriac translation of Nilus the heart can also have 'hands' (ed. Bettolo, p. 185; similarly, Severus, *Homily* 79, PO 23, p. 304).

Of the soul

The 'limbs' of the soul are enumerated in the Greek Macarian Homilies (ed. Dörries, *Hom.* 7:8) as *nous*, *suneidēsis*, *thelēma* and *logismoi*.⁹ In Syriac, the phrase 'limbs of the soul' (*haddame d-napsha*) already occurs in the *Book of Steps* XXVIII.7.¹⁰ Using the adjective *napshanaya*, Isaac also once speaks of the limbs of the soul (*haddame napshanaye*; First Part, ed. Bedjan, p. 53), a form which he will have already found in Evagrius (British Library, Add. 14578, f.27b [*Discourse to Eulogius*]).

An interesting Manichaean parallel is to be found in the Sogdian version of the Manichaean missionary history, where Mar Adda is quoted as saying: 'The soul is comparable to the body, which is divided (into five) limbs, (a head), two (arms), and two feet ...'.¹¹

'of the *maḥshabta*': Aphrahat, *Dem.* 14:35. On the spiritual senses in Syriac see especially A. Pirtea, *Die 'geistige Sinne' in der ostsyrischen christlichen Mystik* (Diss. Freie Universität, Berlin, 2017), and S.P. Brock, 'I sensi spirituali e il discernimento nei padre siriaci', in L. Cremaschi and A. Mainardo (eds), *Discernimento e Vita Cristiana* (Monastero di Bose, 2019), pp. 153–73.

⁷ 'Eye' of the heart also appears in poems attributed to Ephrem (*H. on Epiphany* 9:6; *H. on Julian Saba* 2:14).

⁸ This is found in the Greek Macarius (ed. Berthold, *Hom.* 7.18.6–7), together with 'mouth', 'hand' and 'foot'.

⁹ Compare ed. Berthold, *Hom.* 49.2.8, which lists the correspondence between the limbs of the body and those of the soul. In the Syriac Macarius 'limbs of the soul' occurs, but without any enumeration (ed. Strothmann, pp. 24, 146).

¹⁰ The phrase also occurs in one of the Letters of Isho'yahb III (ed. Duval, p. 222).

¹¹ I cite from the translation in S.N.C. Lieu, *Manichaeism in Mesopotamia and the Roman East* (Leiden, 1994), p. 27.

The image of ‘the eye of the soul’ is familiar in Greek writers from Plato onwards. Isaac uses both the singular (Second Part, XXXIV.3) and the plural ‘eyes’ (First Part, pp. 157, 315 [*napshanayata*], 464; Second Part, *Kephalaia* III.60, IV.52). The singular is already found in Ephrem (*H. on Faith* 5:18) and the plural in his *H. on the Nativity* (22:22). In the monastic authors examples of either singular or plural can be found, for example, in Sahdona (ed. de Halleux, II, p. 36), Shem’on d-Taybutheh (ed. Mingana, Woodbrooke Studies VII, f.175a, 188a) and John of Dalyatha (*Letters*, 45.1). Dadisho’, in his *Commentary on Abba Isaiah* (V.16), talks of the ‘pupils (*babata*) of our soul’.

In one of his prayers Isaac speaks of ‘bowing the head of my soul’ (Second Part, V.1), for which one might compare two passages in Sahdona where he speaks of the ‘neck of the soul’ (ed. de Halleux, I, p. 156; III, p. 120), and the Syriac Anaphora of St Cyril (ed. A. Raes, *Anaphorae Syriacae* I, 3, pp. 334–6; this is an image which is also found in Greek in a prayer in the *Apostolic Constitutions* (VIII.9.8) and in the Greek Anaphora of St Mark. The soul can also have ‘ears’ (Jacob of Serugh, ed. Bedjan, I, p. 540; Daniel of Salah, *Comm. on Ps. 59*; Dadisho’ *Comm. on Abba Isaiah* IV.1), and even ‘hands’ (Daniel of Salah, *Comm. on Ps. 142*) and ‘feet’. ‘Feet’ is also attested once in Isaac (First Part, p. 490), who perhaps borrows it from Macarius (ed. Strothmann, p. 108; singular) or Nilus (ed. P. Bettolo, pp. 189, 225).¹² In Babai’s *Commentary on Evagrius’ Kephalaia* the soul is also described as having a ‘palate’ (*hekka*; ed. Frankenberg, f.114a). Much less surprising, though rarely found, is ‘wings’ (thus Jacob of Serugh, ed. Bedjan, I, p. 553).

Of the intellect (*hawna*)

In a single passage (First Part, p. 315) Isaac speaks of ‘the eyes of the intellect’, and this is found earlier in Narsai (ed. Mingana, II, pp. 42, 138). The singular, ‘eye of the intellect’ already features in Ephrem (*H. on the Fast* 6:6) and is subsequently found in Philoxenus (*Letter to Patricius* 66, ed. R. Lavenant), and Joseph Hazzaya (*Letter on the Three Stages*, PO 45, 137). Isaac also talks of ‘the wings (*geppe*) of the *hawna*’ (ed. Bedjan, pp. 93, 217), a phrase probably taken over from Evagrius (thus *Kephalaia Gnostica* III.56), which also occurs in Shem’on d-Taybutheh (Woodbrooke Studies VII, p. 298b).

Outside Isaac we find the *hawna* having a ‘palate’ (‘Abdisho’, ed. Mingana, Woodbrooke Studies VII, p. 273a); ‘wings’ (Dadisho’, *Comm. Paradise* I.43.33; I.77.85) ‘shoulders’ and ‘wings’ (Shem on d-Taybutheh, *ibid.*, p. 313a), and ‘feet’ (Narsai, Patriarchal Press edn, II, p. 605; and Joseph Hazzaya, PO 45, 83).

Of the thought (*hushshaba*)

The ‘limbs of the *logismoi*’ is a phrase found in the Macarian Homilies (ed. Dörries, *Hom.* 4:4), but this does not feature in the Syriac translations.

¹² The Greek original of the Macarius passage (Letter 5.2) is to be found in an Athens manuscript, edited by P. Géhin (*Recherches Augustiniennes* 31 (1999), pp. 89–147, here p. 122). See also the Manichaean text cited at note 8.

In one of his prayers in the Second Part (V.21) Isaac speaks of the 'feet of my thoughts'. a phrase found earlier in Sahdona (ed. de Halleux, III, p. 133, sing.) and later taken up by Elia of Resh'aina in the *Hudra* (ed. Darmo, I, p. 577). Earlier than Isaac Barhadbeshabba has the curious image 'let not the foot of (the Church's) thought be made wet in the sea of Satan' (*Ecclesiastical History* 16 = PO 23, p. 135). In Philoxenus (*Discourses*, p. 568) we find 'the shoulder of thought' (*katpa d-hushshaba*), while in Isho'yahb III's *Life of Isho'sabran* (ed. Chabot, p. 580) the thoughts can also have 'hands.' Much earlier, Ephrem twice speaks of 'the eye of thought' (*mahshabta*; *H. on Faith* 15:10 and 79:11).

Of the mind (*mad'a*)

Isaac mentions only the 'palate' of the mind (Second Part, XX.20), a phrase that is used earlier by Philoxenus (*Letter to a Novice*, 6), and subsequently several times by Joseph Hazzaya in the *Letter on the Three Stages* (PO 45, 109, 124, 136–7, 145; likewise, in Woodbrooke Studies VII, p. 264a).

Much more common, though never used by Isaac, is 'eye/eyes of the mind', to be found already in the *Book of Steps* (XIX.38) and then in a number of later monastic authors, both native Syriac and translated from Greek.¹³

Other 'limbs' which occur in this literature are 'mouth' (John the Solitary, *Letter to Hesychius* 1), 'tongue' (John of Dalyatha, *Letter* 1.6), 'ears' (*Book of Steps* XIX.1, and Joseph Hazzaya, PO 45, 224), 'feet' (Dadisho', *Comm.Paradise* I.28.35), 'heels' (Gregory of Cyprus, Vatican Syr. 123, f.5b), and 'wings' (Philoxenus, *Discourses*, ed. Budge, p. 224; and a supplement to Basil, *Letter* 2 in Add. 17,192, f.191a).

Of the mind (*re' yana*)

Although he never talks of the 'eyes of the *mad'a*', Isaac on several occasions uses the phrase 'eye', or 'eyes of the *re' yana*'. Thus, he has the singular in the First Part, p. 230, and Second Part, XXXV.3; and the plural in the First Part, pp. 230 and 305. The singular is already found in Ephrem (*H. on Paradise*, 1:2, 6:16) and both singular and plural occur in several early Edessene texts such as the *Teaching of Addai* (ed. Cureton, pp. 29, 42, 44). Both singular and plural also occur in the Syriac translation of Evagrius (Br.Libr. Add. 14,578, ff.19b, 23b, 24b, 33a (all the *Discourse to Eulogius*), and of Macarius (ed. Strothmann, p. 196). In East Syriac monastic writers, it is found in Babai (*Comm. on Evagrius' Centuries*, f.235b) and Isaac's contemporary, Dadisho' (*Comm. on Abba Isaiah*, II.11 and XIII.11; and Woodbrooke Studies VII, p. 219b).

Isaac also speaks of 'the mouth of the *re' yana*' (Second Part, XIV.18): humility being the bridle in the mouth of the mind which exalts itself. In Gregory of Cyprus the *re' yana* possesses *nibe*, 'molars, fangs' (ed. Hausherr, p. 46) and a 'hand' (British Library, Add. 17,192, f.162b). Less surprisingly, Ephrem accords it wings ('*ebre*; *H.*

¹³ E.g. Macarius (ed. Strothmann), pp. 70, 171, 184, 220; Dionysius Areopagita, *On Myron* (ed. Strothmann), p. 20; Philoxenus, *Discourses*, pp. 172, 202; Babai, *Commentary on Evagrius' Keph. Gnostica*, f.35a; Gregory of Cyprus (ed. Hausherr, p.82; Sahdona (ed. de Halleux), III, pp. 154, 156; Dadisho', *Comm. on Abba Isaiah*, XV.23, 35; Shem'on d-Taybutheh, Woodbrooke Studies VII, p. 287b; John of Dalyatha, *Letter* 5.3.

on *Faith* 53:12), as do Philoxenus (*Discourses*, ed. Budge, p. 418) and Sahdona (ed. de Halleux, I, p. 83), though using *geppe* instead.

Of the intelligence (*tar'ita*)

Isaac talks of the 'eyes of the *tar'ita* on a couple of occasions (First Part. p. 39; Third Part, VI.5), and this is already found in John the Solitary (*Letters*, p. 47), while the singular goes back to Ephrem (*H. on the Church* 29:12, *Letter to Publius* 5). Not surprisingly both also occur in translations from Greek (Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.* I.2.6; Evagrius, Add. 14,578, f.18a; Nilus, ed. Bettolo, pp. 193, 222), as well as in some of the seventh-century East Syriac monastic authors: thus Sahdona (ed. de Halleux, I, pp. 65,141; II, p. 27; IV, p. 65); Dadisho' (Woodbrooke Studies VII, p. 240b); Shem'on d-Taybutheh (*ibid.*, p. 289a).

Sahdona is particularly prone to allocating limbs to the *tar'ita*, providing it with 'ears' (ed. de Halleux, III, pp. 8, 15, 68), 'hands' (II, p.27), 'loins' (I, p. 62, taken from 1 Peter 1:13), 'heels' (I, p. 59), and 'wings' (I, pp. 82–3, *geppe*; I, p. 85, *'ebray*). It is perhaps surprising that he does not add 'foot/feet', seeing that John the Solitary interprets the 'foot' of Qohelet 5:1 ('guard your foot when you go to the House of God') as the *tar'ita* (*Commentary on Qohelet* 5:1, ed. Strothmann, p. 62). This is actually found in Barhadbeshabba's *Ecclesiastical History* 15 (PO 23, p. 109), as well as in the Syriac translation of Gregory Thaumaturgus (ed. Pitra, *Analecta Sacra* IV, p. 128).

Nilus provides one further item, 'shoulder' (ed. Bettolo, p. 278, referring to Gen. 22:6), and the Syriac translation of Cyril's *Homilies on Luke* adds 'neck' (ed. Payne Smith, p. 116).

THE MAIN SPIRITUAL LIMBS INDIVIDUALLY

1. Eyes

The spiritual eye is by far the most frequently found of the interior limbs, and already in the *Commentary on the Diatessaron* (15:22), under Ephrem's name, we find the phrase 'interior eyes' (*'aine dal-gaw*); among related phrases it might be noted that *'aine d-ruh* is especially common in Babai's *Commentary on Evagrius' Kephalaia*, while 'noetic (*met'yadd'anita*) eye' is found in John of Dalyatha (*Letter* 40:1).

The interior eyes may be of the heart (already Ephesians 1:18; Aphrahat, John the Solitary, Macarius, Evagrius, Sahdona, John the Solitary); of the soul (Ephrem, Evagrius, Nilus, Philoxenus, Babai, Sahdona, Isaac, Shem'on, John of Dalyatha); of the *hawna* (Ephrem, Narsai, Philoxenus, Isaac, Joseph Hazzaya); of the *mad'a* (Book of Steps, Macarius, Philoxenus, Babai, Gregory of Cyprus, Sahdona, Dadisho', Shem'on, John of Dalyatha, 'Abdisho'); of the *re'yana* (Ephrem, Evagrius, Macarius, Babai, Isaac, Dadisho'); and of the *tar'ita* (Ephrem, John the Solitary, Evagrius, Nilus, Sahdona,

Isaac, Dadisho', Shem'on). Ephrem also has eyes of the *maḥshabta*, and a number of later writers speak of the eye(s) of *paroshuta* ('discernment').¹⁴

2. Ears

Aphrahat already speaks of the 'hidden ears' ('*edne kasyata*; *Dem.* 23:3).

The 'ears' may be of the heart (Cyrillona, Evagrius, Macarius, Babai, Dadisho'); of the soul (Jacob of Serugh, Daniel of Salah, Dadisho'), of the *mad'a* (Book of Steps, Joseph Hazzaya); or of the *tar'ita* (Sahdona).

3. Mouth

This is found only of the *mad'a* (John the Solitary); of the *re' yana* (Isaac), though in the Greek Macarian Homilies the heart also has a mouth.

4. Lips

These are only found of the heart: Odes of Solomon (and the Greek Macarian Homilies).

5. Tongue

Only of the *mad'a* (John of Dalyatha).

6. Palate

This may be used of the soul (Babai), of the *hawna* ('Abdisho'), and of the *mad'a* (Philoxenus, Isaac, Joseph Hazzaya).

7. Teeth

Gregory of Cyprus offers the surprising image of 'the fangs (*nibe*) of the *re' yana*'.

8. Head

Isolated examples concern the 'head' of the heart (*Book of Steps*), and of the soul (Isaac).

9. Neck, shoulders

'Neck' is found in connection with the soul (Sahdona) and 'thought' (Philoxenus); outside monastic writers, also with the *tar'ita* (Cyril of Alexandria). 'Shoulder' is used of the *hawna* (Shem'on) and of the *tar'ita* (Nilus).

¹⁴ Thus Philoxenus, *Discourses*, p. 552; Gregory of Cyprus (ed. Hausherr), p. 94; Abraham of Nathpar (British Library, Or. 6714, f.77a).

10. Loins

The Peshitta translates 1 Peter 1:13, *osphyas tēs dianoias*, ‘loins of the mind’, as *ḥaṣṣe d-tar’ita*, and this is picked up in the monastic writers by Sahdona.

11. Hands

This is used of the heart (Nilus, Severus); of the soul (Daniel of Salah); of the *re’yana* (Gregory of Cyprus); and of the *tar’ita* (Sahdona). Outside the monastic writers, it is also used of the ‘thoughts’ (Isho’yahb III).

12. Knees

The ‘knees of the heart’ feature in the Prayer of Manasseh (whence, for example, I Clement 57:1), which is known in Syriac in several different recensions, but the image appears not to have been picked up in the Syriac monastic authors.

13. Feet

This is used of the soul (Macarius, Nilus, Isaac); of the *hawna* (Narsai, Joseph Haz-zaya); of the *tar’ita* (Sahdona, Gregory Thaumaturgus, Barhadbeshabba); and of the ‘thoughts’ (Sahdona, Isaac, Elia of Resh’aina). ‘Heels’ (*eqbe*) are found with both the *mad’a* (Gregory of Cyprus) and the *tar’ita* (Sahdona).

14. Wings

Whereas the *ruḥa* may have ‘wings’ (Ephrem, Macarius, Sahdona), the soul is surprisingly only rarely described as having them (Macarius, Jacob of Serugh), and the heart never. By contrast ‘wings’ do feature for the *hawna* (Evagrius, Isaac, Dadisho’, Shem’on), the *mad’a* (Philoxenus), the *re’yana* (Ephrem, Philoxenus, Sahdona), the *tar’ita* (Gregory of Nazianzus, Sahdona), and the thoughts (Philoxenus).

THE USAGE OF INDIVIDUAL AUTHORS

Finally, it is of some interest to note the preferences (and avoidances!) of some important individual authors; these are listed in approximate chronological order:

Aphrahat: eye (of heart, of *mad’a*; also, of *ti’rta* [Dem. 14:34]).

Ephrem: eyes (of heart, of soul, of *hawna*, of *re’yana*, of *tar’ita*, of thought); wings (of *re’yana*).

Book of Steps: eyes (of *mad’a*); ears (of *mad’a*); head (of heart).

Evagrius: eyes (of the heart, soul, *re’yana*, *tar’ita*); wings (of *hawna*).

Macarius: eyes (of heart, soul, *mad’a*, *re’yana*); ears (of heart); feet (of soul); wings (of soul).

John the Solitary: eyes (of heart, *tar’ita*); mouth (of *mad’a*).

Nilus: eyes (of soul, *tar’ita*); shoulder (of *tar’ita*); hands (of heart); feet (of soul).

Philoxenus: eyes (of soul, *hawna*, *mad’a*); shoulder (of thoughts); palate (of *mad’a*); wings of *mad’a*, *re’yana*).

Babai the Great: eyes (of soul, *mad’a*, *re’yana*); ear (of heart); palate (of soul).

Gregory of Cyprus: eyes (of *mad’a*); fangs (of *re’yana*); hands (of *re’yana*); heels (of *mad’a*).

Sahdona: eyes (of heart, of soul, of *mad’a*, of *tar’ita*); ears (of *tar’ita*); neck (of soul); hands (of *tar’ita*); feet (of thoughts); heels (of *tar’ita*); wings (of *re’yana*, *tar’ita*).

Isaac of Nineveh: eyes (of heart, soul, *hawna*, *re’yana*, *tar’ita*); mouth (of *re’yana*); palate (of *mad’a*); head (of soul); feet (of soul, thoughts).

Dadisho’ Qatraya: eyes (of *mad’a*, *re’yana*, of *tar’ita*); ears (of heart, of soul); feet (of *mad’a*) wings (of *hawna*).

Shem’on d-Taybutheh: eyes (of soul, of *tar’ita*); shoulders (of *hawna*); wings (of *hawna*)

John of Dalyatha: eyes (of heart, soul, *mad’a*); tongue (of *mad’a*).

Joseph Hazzaya: eyes (of *hawna*); ears (of *mad’a*); palate (of *mad’a*); feet (of *hawna*).

BY WAY OF CONCLUSION

The aim of this small contribution in memory of Père Robert Beulay¹⁵ has been simply to collect and classify a cluster of metaphors which take their inspiration from Paul’s phrase the ‘interior person’, and which feature quite prominently in Syriac monastic literature. Although these metaphors concern the interior life of the spirit, the discussion here has been deliberately restricted to their exterior aspect.

While it is of course impossible to make a hard and fast distinction between Greek and Syriac usage, one can nevertheless observe a general tendency that Greek writers usually prefer to speak of the spiritual ‘senses’, using abstracts such ‘sight’, ‘hearing’, ‘tasting’, whereas Syriac authors like to use more concrete imagery, referring to the interior ‘limbs’, either in general, or individually. Within the Syriac material, apart from some quite marked individual preferences, what is striking is the heavy preference for visual, rather than auditory, imagery, thus (to speak in very general terms) reflecting, in this respect at least, the Greek background to a greater extent than the biblical.

¹⁵ The present text was originally submitted in 2008 for a memorial volume which, however, never materialized; it has only been slightly updated.