

# Joseph as a Type of Christ in Syriac Literature

*Kristian S. Heal*

Kept among the marvelous manuscript treasures of the British Library is a fifth-century Syriac manuscript containing details of the lectionary readings, or Old and New Testament passages for religious services.<sup>1</sup> Prominently featured among the Old Testament readings prescribed for Easter are the account of the binding of Isaac<sup>2</sup> and excerpts from the story of Joseph.<sup>3</sup> The story of binding Isaac is clearly apposite to the crucifixion. What is not so clear perhaps is the appropriateness of the story of Joseph as an Easter reading. This is in part because Joseph is often viewed in modern times solely as an example of moral fortitude in the face of temptation.<sup>4</sup> However, the Christological aspect of the Joseph story was also important for early Christians. In fact, in order to understand why the reading of the story of Joseph was appropriate for Easter, one must know that Joseph was seen in early Syriac Christianity first and foremost as a type of Christ.<sup>5</sup> This article will show the extent of this typological connection in the early writings of the Syriac-speaking Christians and will also show how this typological connection affected one particular retelling of the Joseph narrative.

The interest in the Joseph narrative (in Genesis chapters 37 and 39–50) among Syriac authors should not come as a complete surprise. At least from the time of the Hellenistic period and onward, the narrative has caught the attention of its readers and has been retold and commented upon extensively in the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions.<sup>6</sup> Among early Christian writings, numerous Greek and Latin works include references to the story, and a number of homilies and poems are devoted to the theme.<sup>7</sup> But it is in the writings of the poet-exegetes from the early Syriac tradition that the figure of Joseph is explored most extensively.<sup>8</sup>

The majority of these Syriac retellings of the story of Joseph are classified as dramatic dialogue poems. These are poems that are characterized by the presence of dialogue, often within a narrative framework, and, in some forms, interspersed with homiletic material. The extended cycles of verse homilies (*memrē*) on Joseph stand apart from other examples of dramatic dialogue poetry in that “they alone cover a whole series of episodes, thus taking on the dimensions of an epic narrative.”<sup>9</sup>

In this article, I shall limit my explorations to the writings of Aphrahat (fourth century A.D.) and to the cycle attributed to Narsai (d. A.D. 503). As the table of comparisons (at the end of this article) between the life of Joseph and the life of Jesus shows, however, a much broader tradition stands behind this Christological interpretation of the Joseph story. The table includes references drawn from all the relevant published works in Syriac, as well as texts in Greek and Armenian.

### **Aphrahat**

We shall first examine how the figure of Joseph is used in the writings of Aphrahat,<sup>10</sup> a Syriac-speaking Christian from Persia.<sup>11</sup> Though little is known of his life, Aphrahat is one of the most important and gifted writers of the early Syriac tradition, and he is the first known writer in the Syriac tradition to make any specific comparisons between the life of Joseph and the life of Jesus. He is survived only by his collection of twenty-three demonstrations, which he wrote between A.D. 337 and 345, but these reveal much about his ideas and beliefs, particularly with respect to scripture.<sup>12</sup>

Throughout these demonstrations, Aphrahat employs a rhetorical technique that involves producing a sequence of “exemplary figures or events, mainly from the Old Testament,” to illustrate a particular example or point.<sup>13</sup> Father Robert Murray has made an extensive study of Aphrahat’s use of this rhetorical device and has classified the material as “examples (1) of prayer, (2) of various virtues, (3) of those who were led into sin, (4) of reversals of fortune, [and] (5) of righteous figures who were persecuted.”<sup>14</sup> Joseph features prominently in Aphrahat’s lists, particularly in those of categories two, four, and five. Other examples of Aphrahat’s use of the figure of Joseph fall outside of Murray’s classification system. Joseph is numbered among those whose purity was a perfect fast before God (A. 101:7–8); those whom Satan attacked by means of women (A. 256:26–257:2); those who were justified though they did not keep the Sabbath (A. 557:20–27); those who, though one, were esteemed more than the many by God (A. 824:17–19); and those through whom the Spirit spoke (A. 984:11–12).

A further development in the hermeneutical functions attributed to Joseph is found in a “complex syncrisis, or ‘Comparison-series’”—a development of the simpler list sequence that Murray refers to as “Aphrahat’s favorite party piece.”<sup>15</sup> Syncrisis is a rhetorical figure in which one thing is compared with another; it is used of the “figure which consists of a repeated Simile, . . . or of a number of separate comparisons used together.”<sup>16</sup> Syncrisis is often used in the Old Testament—for example, in Isaiah 32:2, where the prophet says, “And a man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.”

In demonstration 21, Aphrahat lists biblical characters who were persecuted, contrasting their fates with those of their persecutors: “Jacob was persecuted, and Esau was the persecutor. Jacob received blessings and the right of the first born, but Esau was rejected from both of them. Joseph was persecuted and his brothers were the persecutors. Joseph was exalted and his persecutors bowed down before him and his dreams and visions were accomplished” (A. 953:3–8). At this point, however, Aphrahat’s sequence transforms into a comparison series by means of a single connecting line: “The persecuted Joseph is a type of the persecuted Jesus” (A. 953:8–9). Aphrahat then provides a list of eighteen examples of how the life and figure of Joseph can be compared with those of Jesus:

Joseph’s father clothed him [with] the long sleeved coat, and the Father of Jesus clothed him [with] a body from the virgin. Joseph’s father loved him more than his brothers, and Jesus was the friend and beloved of his Father. Joseph saw visions and dreamed dreams, and Jesus fulfilled visions and the prophets. Joseph was a shepherd with his brothers, and Jesus was the chief of the shepherds. When Joseph’s father sent him to visit his brothers, they saw him coming and planned to kill him; and, when his Father sent Jesus to visit his brothers, they said “this is the heir; come, let us kill him” (Matt. 21:38).<sup>17</sup> Joseph’s brothers cast him into the pit; and the brothers of Jesus sent him down in the grave. Joseph came up from the pit, and Jesus arose from the grave. After Joseph came up from the pit he ruled over his brothers; and after Jesus arose from the grave his Father gave him an excellent and great name so that his brothers were subject to him, and his enemies were laid beneath his feet. When Joseph saw his brothers, they were ashamed and afraid and marveled at his majesty; and when Jesus comes in the latter time, when he is revealed in his majesty, his brothers will be ashamed and afraid and greatly alarmed, for they crucified him aforesaid. Now, Joseph was sold into Egypt at the advice of Judah; and Jesus was delivered to the Jews by Judas Iscariot. When they sold Joseph, he did not speak [literally, “give”] a word to his brothers; and Jesus did not speak and give a word to the judges who judged him. Joseph’s master delivered him unjustly to prison; and Jesus, the sons of his people condemned him unjustly. Twice Joseph gave up his

garments, once by means of his brothers and once by the hand of his master's wife; and Jesus yielded up his garments and the soldiers divided them among themselves. Joseph, as a thirty year old, stood before Pharaoh and became a lord to Egypt; and Jesus, as a thirty year old, came to the Jordan to be baptized and he received the spirit and went out to preach. Joseph provided food for the Egyptians with bread; and Jesus provided for the whole world with the bread of life. Joseph took the daughter of a wicked and foul priest; and Jesus took to himself the church from the unclean nations. Joseph died and was buried in Egypt, and Jesus died and was buried in Jerusalem. Joseph's brothers took up his bones from Egypt; and Jesus, his Father raised him up from the grave/sheol and took his body with him to heaven without corruption. (A. 953:9–957:10)

Joseph is not the only biblical character whose life Aphrahat sees as typifying that of the Lord. In fact, the section beginning with the comparison of Joseph and Jesus is something of a tour de force in which Aphrahat makes comparisons between the life of the Lord and the life of Moses (fifteen comparisons), Joshua (nine comparisons), Jephtha (four comparisons), David (twelve comparisons), Elijah (eight comparisons), Elisha (eight comparisons), Hezekiah (eleven comparisons), Josiah (eight comparisons), Daniel (eighteen comparisons), the Three Young Men (eight comparisons), and Mordecai (eleven comparisons).

### Narsai

Narsai,<sup>18</sup> “the most profound and original theologian of the great Church of the East,”<sup>19</sup> was the head of the School of Edessa and then founder of the theological School of Nisibis. He is reputed to have written a verse-homily for every day of the year, though only eighty-one of these are known to have survived. Two works on Joseph have come down to us under his name. The first is a single verse-homily on Joseph, which can be attributed to Narsai with certainty.<sup>20</sup> The second, which is the focus of this study, is a cycle of four verse-homilies on Joseph.<sup>21</sup> This latter work is attributed to Narsai in four of the eight manuscripts in which it is preserved.<sup>22</sup> However, doubts have been raised both as to Narsai's authorship and as to the unity of the collection, and one must be satisfied with considering this an anonymous early work.

In the second homily in this latter collection, the author makes it most clear that he sees Christological typology as the central hermeneutical function of the biblical story of Joseph. “This wondrous story,” he states, is full of “symbols and types of the son of God” (N. 42:1–2).<sup>23</sup> The author later informs us that in telling the story of Joseph, he is, in fact, also telling the story of Jesus: “The story of Joseph will go on now, as well as that of the

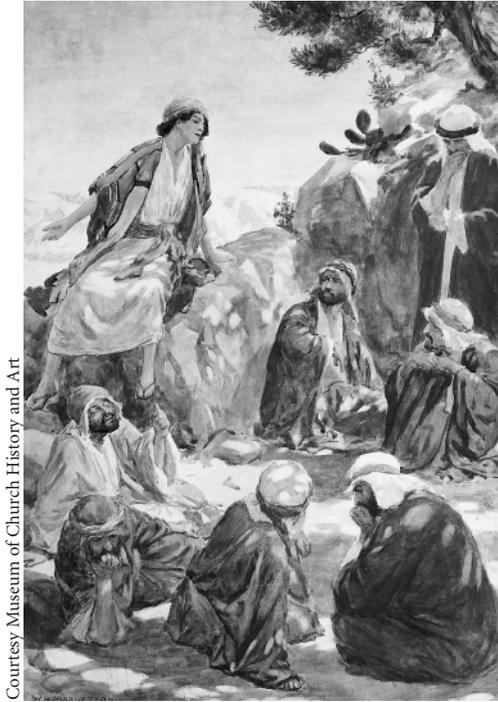
Messiah, And we will see how much the story of this one [Joseph] is like [the story of] that one [Jesus]" (N. 43:19–20).

Retelling the Joseph story in terms of Christological typology is presented not only as an appropriate interpretation of the biblical narrative but also as a necessary one. For in making this particular aspect central, the author succeeds in making Christ central to the narrative and thereby, in his eyes, ensuring that his work is of some lasting value to its listeners. As the author puts it, "The power of the word of the *memrā* [homily] is great in the presence of the listeners When [perhaps with the meaning of 'only when'] it is spoken with the voice of the spirit of prophecy. But every *memrā* in which the messiah the king is not mentioned Is rejected as foul and is not received by the listeners" (N. 43:1–4). The author, therefore, calls the discerning to "give heed to this . . . story" and appreciate its abundance of Christological types (N. 42:1–2). Only then is one able to drink from the cup of Joseph and become full and gladly intoxicated, for "the blood of the messiah is mingled in the vessel of the son of Israel" (N. 42:12–15).

This last line is doubly significant for the author. First, the line refers to the Lord "put[ting] his testimony in Joseph" (N. 41:19), an allusion to Psalms 81:5, signifying that the Lord ordained Joseph to act as a type of him (N. 44:18–19). Second, in a more general sense, the Lord was in Israel. As the author states earlier, "The leaven of life was hidden in the Israelite people Until the time that the light [of the world] shone forth from them" (N. 40:7–8). Joseph's role in the preservation of Israel was essential, therefore, not only to ensure that the house of Israel might abound numerically but also to protect the lineage of the Messiah. These two results are linked to the promise made to Abraham that his seed would multiply and that all the nations would be blessed through him and his seed (N. 39:11). So it was for the purpose of fulfilling both clauses of the Abrahamic promise that "the Lord sent him [as] a remnant before the sons of Jacob That he might give them life, so that they would not also perish in the time of famine" (N. 38:4–5).

The metaphorical presence of Christ in Israel is employed later in the second homily, when the brothers are about to return to Joseph with Benjamin. In the biblical narrative, Judah offers some assurance to his father by saying that he will "be surety for [Benjamin]" (Gen. 43:9). The scene is considerably expanded in this Syriac retelling. Here, Jacob actually demands a surety for Benjamin, feeling confident that unless this is done, the propensities of his children will result in his eventually having to mourn for both sons of Rachel (N. 45:10–11).

Reuben steps up first and offers his two sons as surety. Reuben's pledge, however, is not received because Jacob "will not receive the son who



Courtesy Museum of Church History and Art

FIG. 1. *Joseph Tells His Brothers about His Dreams.* William Henry Margetson, 1891–1940. Watercolor, pencil on paper.

despised the bed of his father” (N. 61:8). Seeing Reuben’s failure, Levi offers to pledge his own son for the sake of Benjamin, to which Jacob responds by saying, “the sin and iniquity that you have committed are more displeasing than that of your brother” (N. 61:13). Jacob is concerned because of Levi’s angry temperament (N. 61:14) that had caused him to take revenge upon the Shechemites (Gen. 34:25–40) and because he thought that Levi would simply exchange Benjamin for Simeon in order to save his companion in vengeance: “And perhaps, instead of [Simeon] you will deliver [Benjamin] that your brother [Simeon] may be saved” (N. 61:17).

Seeing the failure of his brothers to offer an acceptable pledge to their father because of their past misdeeds, Judah, who also wants to offer himself as a pledge, is understandably reticent, due to his conduct in Genesis 38. Nevertheless, he does offer himself as a pledge, and his pledge is accepted. Jacob is willing to overlook Judah’s misdeeds and to entrust Benjamin to him because “God Almighty has entrusted you with the son and from you he shall shine forth” (N. 62:15). Jacob is delivering Benjamin not so much to Judah as to the “Treasury of Life who is kept within [his] limbs” (N. 62:20). In this instance, it is Judah who functions as a type of Christ.

The author of these homilies was not content simply to point out that the story of Joseph is full of “symbols and types of the son of God” (N. 42:1–2); like Aphrahat, he offers us his own list of examples in the form of a comparison series.<sup>24</sup> Before giving the comparison series, the author tells of the great famine in the land of Canaan and how necessity had called the brothers, the eleven stars, to go down to Egypt. “They went down to the

land of Egypt and worshipped the dreamer of dreams” (N. 43:9). This, the author points out, is “a great symbol of the Son of God” because it is exactly what will “happen to all the crucifiers on the day of resurrection” (N. 43:10, 12).

The author is so overwhelmed with the Christological typology that he is not “permitted to go along the path quickly” (N. 43:16) but must rather demonstrate how much the story of Joseph (fig. 1) is like that of Jesus:

Joseph dreamed dreams of his brothers but they did not believe it. And as much as he dreamed, the treacherous brothers hated him much [more]. Our Lord spoke with the crucifiers in parables, And the more he spoke the more they envied him. Joseph interpreted for the Egyptians and they believed, As also the gentiles believed in our Lord and his parables. Joseph revealed himself to his brothers in the inner chamber, And the Lord of Joseph revealed [himself] to his disciples in the upper room. His mistress confined Joseph the just in prison, And Zion confined our savior in the tomb. Joseph went out from prison and took off his outer garments, While our Lord went out from the tomb and put on glory. Joseph interpreted the dreams of Pharaoh just as they were, And he sat upon the throne and was a king of the whole of Egypt. And our Lord revealed and made himself known to his disciples And ascended and sat on the right hand of the Father, who sent him. Joseph purchased the whole of Egypt with ordinary bread, And the Lord of Joseph [purchased] the whole of creation with His body and His blood. (N. 43:21–44:17)

The comparison sequence is not intended to be exhaustive—hence the author’s admonition to the discerning to give heed to the story (N. 42:1). Furthermore, the author makes a number of other links to the life of Christ during the course of the narrative, often by means of adding specific rhetorical connections to the New Testament. These links divide into two groups: those in which there is an explicit typological reference made and those in which the typological connection appears to be intended, though it is left implicit in the narrative. I have approached the identification of the latter group in two steps. First, by means of the explicit typological references, it is possible to build up a picture of the events in the life of Joseph that are construed as corresponding to events in the life of Jesus. From this it can be seen that, with few exceptions, all of the explicit typological links are made either to the trial and death or to the resurrection and future coming of the Lord. Second, I have examined the portions of the narrative in which typological links are likely to occur to see whether any specific rhetorical links have been added at that point to the New Testament text.

The trial and death of the Lord is linked typologically with two events in the life of Joseph. Aphrahat suggests this connection in two entries in his comparison sequence. First, “After Joseph came up from the pit, he ruled

over his brothers; and after Jesus arose from the grave, his Father gave him a grand title so that his brothers were subject to Him” (A. 956:3–4). Here Aphrahat makes Joseph’s pit and Christ’s prison typologically synonymous and moves quickly on to the next important typological link, that of Joseph being exalted in Egypt and the Second Coming of the Lord. Second, Aphrahat connects the stripping of Joseph’s garments at the hands of his brothers and at the hands of Potiphar’s wife with the single instance of Jesus yielding up his garments to the soldiers (A. 956:19–22).

Narsai follows Aphrahat’s interpretive model, also providing two instances in which Joseph is stripped of his garments,<sup>25</sup> two people who petition for the life of Joseph,<sup>26</sup> and two individuals who are instrumental in bringing about Joseph’s demise.<sup>27</sup> Of these six links, however, only one is explicitly made in Narsai.

The one explicit link is in an exegetical comment on Reuben’s suggestion to throw Joseph into the pit:

Reuben did not say [this] out of wickedness, But he said this out of lovingkindness for the sake of [saving Joseph’s] life. [He] did not speak this word of himself, Lovingkindness placed the word in his mouth and thus he spoke. Something else was in the heart/mind of Reuben but this in his mouth, Because he [really] wanted to deliver [Joseph] and send him back to his parent. How much Reuben struggled here for the sake of Joseph, like Pilate who struggled for the sake of Jesus. (N. 8:13–20)

In the corresponding instance, Potiphar is struggling for Joseph’s freedom against the word of his wife. In the biblical narrative, Potiphar’s wrath is immediately kindled upon hearing the accusation made by his wife, and he throws Joseph into prison (Gen. 39:19–20). Narsai recasts this account so that Potiphar replies to the accusation made by his wife: “If you are pure, why does the garment of the slave remain with you? If Joseph audaciously came to lie with you, He would have taken your garment and not you his. Behold, your lack [of intelligence] is revealed together with your transgression” (N. 24:1–4).

The ingenious Potiphar proceeds, like Sherlock Holmes, by suggesting that both Joseph and his wife should stand before him and then he would be able to see from their faces which one was the guilty party. For obvious reasons, Potiphar’s wife calls this plan madness and insists that Joseph be cast into jail. Her argument is subtle, the convincing line being “that I may never again chance to see him before me in this house” (N. 24:13).<sup>28</sup> Potiphar replies, “I will hearken to you . . . And I will send him to prison according to your will” (N. 24:14–15). The link between Potiphar and Pilate is suggested further by the connection Narsai makes in his comparison series between Potiphar’s wife and the Jews who brought about the death of

Jesus: “His mistress confined Joseph the just in prison, And Zion confined our savior in the tomb” (N. 44:8–9).

Potiphar’s wife also seems to be the subject of a different typological link made during the course of narrating her attempt to seduce Joseph. In the biblical narrative, the only reported speech we have from Potiphar’s wife is “Lie with me” (Gen. 39:12). In Narsai we are presented with a fuller account of her persuasive ways:

Hear me Joseph, because I love you and accept my advice  
And carry out my desire and let not your heart quake because of Potiphar.  
For I can kill him quickly with poison. Now, instead of a servant, be a King and  
Lord of the house. Lie with me Joseph and carry out my will and don’t  
be afraid, And be mine and I and whatsoever belongs to me is yours.  
(N. 18:19–19:3)

The offer of kingship and dominion as part of the temptation suggests a corresponding episode in the New Testament: “Again, the devil taketh him up into a high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me” (Matt. 4:8–9). The following line, included in an authorial comment praising Joseph’s resisting of temptation, adds validity to the linking of these two episodes: “The Chief of the Air [that is, Satan] hid a snare for you by the agency of Eve” (N. 21:3). It is not surprising that the author, writing for a monastic community steeped in a misogynistic tradition, would equate Potiphar’s wife—and also, by implication, women generally—with the adversary. One is mindful of the list composed by Aphrahat in which he recounts the instances in which the devil has tempted men by means of women (A. 256:25–260:12).<sup>29</sup>

The same comparative approach continues after Joseph is made regent. Whereas in the biblical narrative, Potiphar and his wife are no more heard of, in the Narsai retelling, an extended account is given of the reaction of Potiphar and his wife to the news of Joseph’s newly exalted position. Potiphar is racked with guilt and fear, thinking, “Perhaps [Joseph] will remember that which I did to him and will do away with my life.” However, Joseph forgives him, saying, “For that folly of the prison was not your fault” (N. 33:12, 16). Potiphar’s wife is understandably even more concerned; she fears for her life and “storms gather . . . in her eyes” (N. 34:21). She confesses her sin to her husband and dictates to her scribe a petition begging forgiveness, which she delivers to Joseph. After reading the petition, Joseph “dismissed her in peace, and her mind was at rest” (N. 37:5). By inserting this account, the author creates a neat chiasmic pattern of events:

Joseph departs from his father.

The brothers throw Joseph into the pit and sell him to Egypt.

At the hand of Potiphar and his wife Joseph is cast into prison.

Joseph is exalted in Egypt.

Joseph meets Potiphar and his wife and forgives them.

The brothers come to Egypt and are reunited with Joseph, who forgives them.

Joseph is reunited with his father.

At the center of this pattern of events is Joseph being exalted in Egypt, linked both implicitly and explicitly with the glorious return of the Lord (N. 43:9–16; 44:6–7; A. 956:1–11).

The author of this retelling of the Joseph narrative has succeeded in his aim of putting Christ at the heart of the homilies. Drawing and building upon Aphrahat's typological framework, the author has included direct and indirect typological references and augmented the narrative to bring out this hermeneutical function of Joseph more fully. Though not the most poetically beautiful of the cycles on Joseph,<sup>30</sup> this collection certainly excels in its creative use of typology and narrative expansion.

Numerous hints have been made in this article to the centrality of typology in Syriac literature, particularly of the early period. For early Syriac writers such as Aphrahat and his younger contemporary Ephrem, typology was a central mode of expression. God revealed his mysteries through the types and symbols found in scripture and nature, and their apparent abundance led Ephrem to exclaim, "Lord, Your symbols are everywhere."<sup>31</sup> In this and other respects, early Syriac Christianity demonstrates its affinity with its Jewish heritage. In both literatures, we find the use of "testimonia, typology, periphrastic quotation, [and] haggadic expansion,"<sup>32</sup> and in many instances there is a clear relationship between the Syriac and the Jewish traditions.<sup>33</sup> We find, then, in the literature of this early period of Syriac Christianity one of the few examples of a "genuinely Semitic-Christian literature."<sup>34</sup> For this and numerous other reasons, Syriac literature is a great storehouse of treasures that are worthy of pursuit.

In the following table, A. stands for Aphrahat, as quoted in Ioannes Parisot, ed., *Aphraatis Sapientis Persae Demonstrationes*; A. C. is from Edward G. Mathews, *The Armenian Commentary on Genesis Attributed to Ephrem the Syrian*;<sup>35</sup> N. refers to Paul Bedjan, ed., *Homilae Mar Narsetis in Joseph*; and E. is from Stephanus Evodius Assemani, *Sancti patris nostri Ephraem Syri opera omnia*.<sup>36</sup> Except for the passages from Mathews and Assemani, the translations in the table are the author's own. In some cases, Mathews and Assemani have been quoted and in others paraphrased.

**TABLE 1**  
**Syriac Comparisons of Joseph and Jesus**

Reference	Life of Joseph	Life of Jesus
A. 21:9	Joseph was a shepherd with his brothers (cf. Gen. 37:2).	Jesus was the chief of the shepherds.
A. 21:9	His father clothed Joseph with the long-sleeved coat (cf. Gen. 37:3).	His Father clothed Jesus with a body from the virgin.
A. 21:9	Joseph's father loved him more than his brothers (cf. Gen. 37:3).	Jesus was the Friend and Beloved of his Father.
A. C. 143:18–20; 143:20–21	Before Joseph came to the land of the Egyptians, he was with his father in splendor and honor (cf. Gen. 37:2–4).	Our Lord, before he came to this earth, was with the One who sent him in glory and praise.
A. 21:9	Joseph saw visions and dreamed dreams (cf. Gen. 37:5, 9).	Jesus fulfilled the visions and words of the prophets.
N. 43:21–44:1; 44:2–3	Joseph dreamed dreams of his brothers, but they did not believe it; rather, they hated him (cf. Gen. 37:5–11).	Our Lord spoke with the crucifiers in parables, and the more he spoke, the more they envied him.
E. 31–32; 33–34	The youth Joseph from Jacob's bosom was sent to inquire about his own brothers (cf. Gen. 37:13–14).	The Lord was sent to us from the Father's bosom to save us all.
A. 21:9	When Joseph's father sent him to visit his brothers, they saw him coming and planned to kill him (cf. Gen. 37:18).	When his Father sent Jesus to visit his brothers, they said, "This is the heir, come, let us kill him" (cf. Matt. 21:38).
A. C. 143:8–11; 143:11–13	When the brothers of Joseph saw him, they said, "Behold, here is the dreamer coming toward us; come, let us kill him, and let us see whether his	And when the husbandmen saw our Lord, they said, "This is the heir to the vineyard. Come, let us kill him, and henceforth the inheritance

Reference	Life of Joseph	Life of Jesus
	dreams come of anything” (cf. Gen. 37:18–20).	will be ours” (cf. Mark 12:7; Luke 20:14).
E. 35–39; 39–42	Joseph’s harsh brothers, as soon as they saw him approaching, began to devise evil against him, though he was bringing them peace from their father (cf. Gen. 37:18).	The Jews also, ever hard of heart, as soon as they saw the Savior, said, “This is the heir, let us kill him, and all will be ours.”
N. 8:11–19; 8:20	Reuben petitioned for the life of Joseph (cf. Gen. 37:22).	Pilate petitioned for the life of Jesus (cf. Matt. 27:2–26, 58–66; Mark 15:1–15, 42–47; Luke 23:1–25, 50–53; John 18:28–19:22, 31, 38).
E. 43–45; 46–47	Joseph’s brothers said, “Let us do away with him, and let us be set free of his dreams” (cf. Gen. 37:20).	The Jews said, “Come, let us kill him and lay hold on his inheritance.”
A. C. 143:13–14; 143:14–16	Joseph fell into two pits: into one because of his dreams and into the other for the sake of victory over desire.	Our Lord was enclosed in two pits: in the flesh because of his mercy and in Hades for the sake of his victory over death.
A. 21:9	Joseph’s brothers cast him into the pit (cf. Gen. 37:24).	The brothers of Jesus sent him down into the grave.
A. 21:9	Joseph came up from the pit (cf. Gen. 37:28).	Jesus arose from the grave.
A. C. 143:6–7; 143:7–8	Joseph rose from the pit to rule the kingdom and from disgrace to glorious honor.	Our Lord rose from the cross into the heavens, and from Hades into the throne of glory.
A. 21:9	After Joseph came up from the pit, he ruled over his brothers.	After Jesus arose from the grave, his Father gave him an excellent and great name so that his brothers were subject to him and his enemies were laid beneath his feet.

Reference	Life of Joseph	Life of Jesus
A. 21:9	Joseph was sold into Egypt at the advice of Judah (cf. Gen. 37:26–27).	Jesus was delivered to the Jews by Judas Iscariot.
E. 48–49; 50–51	Joseph’s brothers, while eating, sold him, slaying him in intent (cf. Gen. 37:25–27).	In the same way, the “abominable” Jews, while eating the Passover, slew the Savior.
A. 21:9	When they sold Joseph, he did not speak or give a word (cf. Gen. 37:28).	Jesus did not speak or give a word to the judges who judged him (cf. Acts 8:32–35).
A. C. 144:11; 143:12–13	The kid was slain, and Joseph lived (cf. Gen. 37:31).	Our Lord gave his flesh to the cross for the salvation of his Church.
A. C. 144:13–14; 144:14–15	Joseph’s cloak was soaked with blood, but his flesh was not harmed at all (cf. Gen. 37:32).	They seized the flesh of our Lord, but not his divinity.
E. 52; 53	Joseph descended into Egypt.	Our Savior descended to Earth.
A. C. 143:26–27; 143:27–28	Joseph entered the land of the Egyptians, and his mistress desired him (cf. Gen. 39:7).	Our Lord entered into the tomb, and Hades desired him.
A. C. 143:28; 143:29	His mistress hastened to corrupt Joseph (cf. Gen. 39:7).	Hades hastened to corrupt our Lord.
E. 54–57; 58–61	Joseph, within the marriage chamber, trampled down all the strength of sin, putting on the bright prizes of victory against the Egyptian woman, his mistress (cf. Gen. 39:11–12).	The Lord, the Savior of our souls, descended into hell, destroying there all the power of the dread and near invincible tyrant.
A. C. 143:29–30; 143:30–31	The woman was unable to overcome the strength of Joseph (cf. Gen. 39:11–12).	Hades was unable to overcome the strength of our Lord.
A. C. 143:31–32; 143:32–144:1	Joseph’s mistress grabbed his clothes, but Joseph escaped (cf. Gen. 39:11–12).	Hades grabbed the garment of our Lord, but his flesh ascended and rose up.

Reference	Life of Joseph	Life of Jesus
A. 21:9	Twice Joseph gave up his garments, once by the hands of his brothers and once by the hand of his master's wife (cf. Gen. 39:11–12).	Jesus yielded up his garments, and the soldiers divided them among themselves.
N. 44:8; 44:9	His mistress confined Joseph the just in prison (cf. Gen. 39:16–20).	Zion confined our Savior in the tomb.
A. 21:9	Joseph's master delivered him unjustly to prison (cf. Gen. 39:20).	The sons of his people condemned him unjustly.
E. 62–63; 64–65	When Joseph had conquered sin, he was put in prison until the hour of his crowning (cf. Gen. 39:20).	So, too, the Lord, that he might take away every sin of the world, was placed in a grave.
A. C. 143:23–25; 143:25–26	Joseph stood in shame in prison like an evildoer although he was clothed with every meekness and chastity (cf. Gen. 39:20).	Our Lord came to the cross like a sinner although he had overcome the world.
A. C. 144:2–3; 144:3–4	Joseph entered into prison and comforted those who were captive (cf. Gen. 39:20–23).	Our Lord entered into Hades and comforted the dead.
E. 66–67; 68–69	Joseph in prison spent two whole years in great freedom (cf. Gen. 41:1).	The Lord, as powerful, remained in the tomb for three days, not undergoing corruption.
A. C. 144:4–6; 144:7–9	Joseph interpreted the dreams for the servants of Pharaoh—the first one he enabled to return to his job as chief butler, while the other, Pharaoh hanged on a cross (cf. Gen. 40:1–23).	Our Lord led one thief into the garden of delights because of his faith, while upon the other he set a decree of punishment because of his doubt.
N. 44:10; 44:11	Joseph went out from prison and took off his outer garments (cf. Gen. 41:14).	Our Lord went out from the tomb and put on glory.

Reference	Life of Joseph	Life of Jesus
A. C. 144:15–16; 144:17–18	Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh (cf. Gen. 41:46).	Our Lord was thirty years old when he was baptized in the Jordan River.
A. 21:9	Joseph, as a thirty-year-old, stood before Pharaoh and became a lord of Egypt (cf. Gen. 41:46).	Jesus, as a thirty-year-old, came to the Jordan to be baptized, and he received the Spirit and went out to preach.
E. 70–73; 74–77	Joseph, on Pharaoh's order, was brought out graciously from prison, as a true type, when he easily interpreted the meaning of the dreams indicating the abundance of grain that was going to be (cf. Gen. 41:14–37).	Our Lord, Jesus Christ, was raised from the dead by his own power, despoiling hell, offering to the Father our liberation, proclaiming resurrection and everlasting life.
N. 44:4; 44:5	Joseph interpreted for the Egyptians, and they believed (cf. Gen. 41:14–37).	The Gentiles believed in our Lord and his parables.
N. 44:12–13; 44:14–15	Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dreams just as they were, and he sat upon the throne and was a king of the whole of Egypt (cf. Gen. 41:14–43).	Our Lord revealed and made himself known to his disciples and ascended and sat on the right hand of the Father, who sent him.
E. 78–79; 80–83	Joseph took his seat in Pharaoh's chariot, having received authority over the whole of Egypt (cf. Gen. 41:43).	Our Savior, king before the ages, ascending into heaven on a cloud of light, took his seat with glory at the Father's right hand, above the cherubim, as the Only Begotten Son.
A. 21:9	Joseph took the daughter of a wicked and foul priest to wife (cf. Gen. 41:45).	Jesus took to himself the church from the unclean nations.
A. C. 143:16–17; 143:17–18	Joseph, instead of his licentious mistress, took Asenath as his wife (cf. Gen. 41:45).	Our Lord, instead of that first murderous congregation, chose for himself the holy Church.

Reference	Life of Joseph	Life of Jesus
A. 21:9	Joseph provided food for the Egyptians with bread (cf. Gen. 41:55–56).	Jesus provided for the whole world with the bread of life.
N. 44:16; 44:17	Joseph purchased the whole of Egypt with ordinary bread (cf. Gen. 41:56).	The Lord of Joseph purchased the whole of creation with his body and his blood.
A. 21:9	When Joseph saw his brothers, they were ashamed and afraid and marveled in his majesty (cf. Gen. 45:3).	When Jesus comes in the latter time, when he is revealed in his majesty, his brothers will be ashamed and afraid and greatly alarmed, for they crucified him aforetime.
A. C. 144:1; 144:2	Joseph fed those who were captive (cf. Gen. 43:31–34).	Our Lord was a light-giver to the dead in Hades.
A. C. 144:9–10; 144:10–11	Joseph judged his judges and cast into prison those who had put him to shame in the pit (cf. Gen. 42:24).	Our Lord is the judge of those who crucified him.
E. 84–100; 101–110	When ruling over Egypt, Joseph received authority against his enemies, and his brothers were brought willingly before the tribunal of the one who had died through them; they were brought to prostrate themselves with fear and trembling before the one who had been sold by them to death, and with fear they prostrated themselves before Joseph, whom they had not wanted to be king over them. But Joseph, recognizing his brothers, revealed them as murderers by a single word. They, when they realized, stood dumbfounded in great shame, not daring to utter,	So, too, on that fearful day when the Lord comes on the clouds of the air, he will take his seat on the throne of his kingdom, and all his enemies will be brought, bound by fearsome angels, before the judgment seat— all those who did not want him to rule over them. For the lawless Jews thought then that if he were crucified he would die as a human, the wretches not being persuaded that God had come, for salvation, to save our souls.

Reference	Life of Joseph	Life of Jesus
	not having anything at all to say in their defence, knowing exactly their own sin at the moment when they sold him, while he, who seemed to have been destroyed by them in Hades, was suddenly found to be ruling over them.	
N. 43:11; 43:12	And they knelt down upon their faces and worshipped before the son of Rachel (cf. Gen. 42:6).	The crucifiers will kneel before our Lord on the day of resurrection.
E. 111–114; 115–118	Joseph said quite openly to his brothers, making them fear and tremble, “I am Joseph, whom you sold [into slavery], but now I rule over you, though you did not want it.”	The Lord showed the cross in an image formed of light to those who crucified him, and they recognized the cross itself and the Son of God, who was crucified by them.
N. 44:6; 44:7	Joseph revealed himself to his brothers in the inner chamber (cf. Gen. 45:1).	The Lord of Joseph revealed himself to his disciples in the upper room.
A. C. 144:18; 144:19–21	The brothers recognized Joseph on the second occasion.	At the Second Coming of our Lord will the congregation recognize and know that he is the Christ.
A. 21:9	Joseph died and was buried in Egypt (cf. Gen. 50:26).	Jesus died and was buried in Jerusalem.
A. 21:9	Joseph’s brothers took his bones up from Egypt (cf. Ex. 13:19).	The Father raised Jesus up from the grave/sheol and took his body with him to heaven without corruption.

Kristian S. Heal (kristian\_heal@byu.edu), editor and research associate at the Institute for the Study and Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts at Brigham Young University, received his B.A. in Jewish history and Hebrew from University College, London, and his M.St. in Syriac studies from Oxford University. He is currently doing research for his doctoral dissertation at the University of Birmingham. His research is focused on the Syriac exegetical tradition, with a particular emphasis on the figure of the Old Testament patriarch Joseph (Genesis 37–50) in early Syriac literature.

1. The manuscript (B.M. Add. 14528) is discussed in F. Crawford Burkitt, “The Early Syriac Lectionary System,” *Proceedings of the British Academy* (1921–1923): 301–39. On the lectionary more generally, see R. H. Fuller, “Lectionary,” in *A Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship*, ed. J. G. Davies (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 211–12.

2. Gen. 22:1–19 (Good Friday or the Eve of Easter). On this text in the Syriac tradition, see Sebastian Brock, “Gen. 22 in Syriac Tradition,” in *Mélanges Dominique Barthélemy: Études bibliques offertes à l’occasion de son 60e anniversaire*, eds. Pierre Casetti, Othmar Keel, and Adrian Schenker (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1981), 2–30.

3. Gen. 37 (Thursday before Good Friday); Gen. 40 (Good Friday—optional); Gen. 42:3–43:14 (Holy Saturday—optional); Gen. 40 (Holy Saturday—optional); Gen. 43:15–45:13 (Easter Sunday—optional).

4. For recent examples by Latter-day Saint writers, see Arthur R. Bassett, “Joseph, Model of Excellence,” *Ensign* (September 1980): 9–13; Mark E. Petersen, *Joseph of Egypt* (Salt Lake City: Randall Book, 1985); George Horton, “Joseph: A Legacy of Greatness,” in *Genesis to 2 Samuel: Studies in Scripture*, vol. 3, ed. Kent P. Jackson and Robert L. Millet (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 63–92 (includes a table of comparisons between Joseph and Jesus). A forthcoming volume by Brian Hauglid, Kristian Heal, and Stephen Ricks will examine the figure of Joseph in Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and Latter-day Saint tradition.

5. See, in particular, A. W. Argyle, “Joseph the Patriarch in Patristic Teaching,” *Expository Times* 67 (1956): 199–201; Martine Dulaey (Amiens), “Joseph le patriarche, figure du Christ,” in *Figures de l’Ancien Testament chez les Pères*, Cahiers de Biblia Patristica 2, ed. Pierre Maraval (Strasbourg: Centre d’analyse et de documentation patristiques, 1989), 83–105. The Syriac material was not taken into account in either of these articles.

6. For a useful summary of the impact of the Joseph story in later biblical writings, see James L. Kugel, *In Potiphar’s House: The Interpretive Life of Biblical Texts*, 2d ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), 13–27. For Joseph in Philo, Josephus, and Targumic literature, see Maren Niehoff, *The Figure of Joseph in Post-Biblical Jewish Literature*, Arbeiten zur Geschichte des Antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums, vol. 16 (Leiden: Brill, 1992). For Joseph in the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs, see Harm W. Hollander, *Joseph as an Ethical Model in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, Studia in Veteris Testamenti Pseudepigrapha, vol. 6 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981); H. W. Hollander and M. de Jonge, *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: A Commentary*, Studia in Veteris Testamenti Pseudepigrapha, vol. 8 (Leiden: Brill, 1985); and George W. E. Nickelsburg Jr., *Studies on the Testament of Joseph*, Septuagint and Cognate Studies, no. 5 (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1975). For a general survey of oriental texts (Syriac, Arabic, Persian, Turkish) on Joseph, see Eberhard Hilscher, “Der biblische Joseph in orientalischen Literaturwerken,” *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Orientalforschung* 4 (1956): 81–108. For an illuminating study of the development of some aspects of the Joseph story in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic tradition, see Kugel, *In Potiphar’s House*.

7. For references see Argyle, “Joseph the Patriarch”; and “Joseph (Le Patriarche),” in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité, Ascétique et Mystique Doctrine et Histoire* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1974), 8:1276–1289.

8. For a survey of Syriac retellings of the Joseph narrative, see Hilscher, “Der biblische Joseph in orientalischen Literaturwerken,” 81–108. The most important study to date on the Joseph narrative in Syriac literature is Heinrich Näf, *Syrische Josef-Gedichte: Mit Übersetzung des Gedichts von Narsai und Proben aus Balai und Jaqob von Sarug* (Zürich: Schwarzenbach, 1923).

9. Sebastian P. Brock, “Dramatic Dialogue Poems,” in *IV Symposium Syriacum 1984: Literary Genres in Syriac Literature*, ed. H. J. W. Drijvers and others (Rome: Pont. Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1987), 140.

10. References to the writings of Aphrahat, indicated by A. and included in parentheses, are to column and line number of Ioannes Parisot, ed., *Aphraatis Sapientis Persae Demonstrationes*, Patrologia Syriaca, 2 vols. (Paris: Didot, 1894, 1907). English translation by Kristian S. Heal.

11. For an introduction to Aphrahat, see Marie-Joseph Pierre, *Aphraate le sage persan: Les exposés*, Sources chrétiennes, no. 349 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1988), 33–199.

12. For further details, see Tjitze Baarda, *The Gospel Quotations of Aphrahat, the Persian Sage: Aphrahat’s Text of the Fourth Gospel*, 2 vols. (Amsterdam: Vrije Universiteit, 1975); Robert J. Owens, *The Genesis and Exodus Citations of Aphrahat the Persian Sage*, Monographs of the Peshitta Institute, no. 3 (Leiden: Brill, 1983); Kuriakose A. Valavanolickal, *The Use of the Gospel Parables in the Writings of Aphrahat and Ephrem*, Studies in the Religion and History of Early Christianity, vol. 2 (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1996).

13. Robert Murray, “Some Rhetorical Patterns in Early Syriac Literature,” in *A Tribute to Arthur Vööbus*, ed. Robert H. Fischer (Chicago: Lutheran School of Theology, 1977): 109. The same technique is used in Hebrews 11, where the author gives examples of faith.

14. Murray, “Rhetorical Patterns in Early Syriac Literature,” 111.

15. Murray, “Rhetorical Patterns in Early Syriac Literature,” 110.

16. E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1898; reprint, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1968), 734.

17. On the use of the parable of the wicked tenants in Aphrahat and Ephrem, see Valavanolickal, *Use of the Gospel Parables*, 133–48.

18. References to the cycle on Joseph attributed to Narsai, indicated by N. and included in parentheses, are to page and line number of Paul Bedjan, ed., *Homiliae Mar Narsais in Joseph* (Paris: Harrassowitz, 1901). For information on the life and work of Narsai, see S. Gero, *Barsauma of Nisibis and Persian Christianity in the Fifth Century*, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium (Louvain: Peeters, 1981), 426:60–72; and Arthur Vööbus, *History of the School of Nisibis*, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium (Louvain: Secrétariat du Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, 1965), 266:57–121. For details of published and unpublished works, see S. P. Brock, “The Published Verse Homilies of Isaac of Antioch, Jacob of Serugh, and Narsai: Index of Incipits,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 32 (1987): 279–313; and William F. Macomber, “The Manuscripts of the Metrical Homilies of Narsai,” *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 39 (1973): 275–306.

19. Macomber, “Manuscripts,” 275.

20. Homily 41 on Joseph, in Alphonse Mingana, ed., *Narsai Doctoris Syri Homiliae et Carmina*, 2 vols. (Mausilii, 1905), 2:265–88. The homily does contain some Christological typology, but it is Jacob, not Joseph, who is seen as a type of Christ (lines 97–106):

The love [shown] towards Joseph by his parent is like that [love] which Christ [showed] towards John [who] loves his Lord. Spiritually speaking, our

Lord also begat 12 [sons], and one of them he honored with his love more than his companions. In the manner of Jacob, who begat the tribes in the number of the months, in that same manner, our Lord chose the disciples for the instruction of man. He ordered them according to the number of the sons of Jacob so that the symbol of the nation [the Jews] would resemble the salvation of the nations [the Gentiles]. In the likeness of our savior, Jacob begat twelve tribes and [thereby] depicted a likeness of the [group of] twelve Christ chose.

21. The cycle extends to approximately 2200 lines and is comprised of four *memrē*. The first, second and fourth *memrē* are written in 12+12 syllable couplets, while the third *memrā* is written in 7+7 syllable couplets. The content of the four *memrē* may be summarized as follows: The first *memrā* covers the period from when Joseph relates his dreams to his brothers until he becomes viceroy of Egypt (Gen. 37:5–Gen. 41:52). The second *memrā* recounts the events from the beginning of the period of famine until the announcement to Jacob that Joseph is still alive (Gen. 41:53–Gen. 45:28). The third *memrā* tells of Jacob’s departure with his family to go down to Egypt and his meeting with Joseph (Gen. 46). The fourth *memrā* describes a conversation between Jacob, Joseph, and Dinah, in which Joseph relates in dramatic terms how he came to be in Egypt. This *memrā* ends with Jacob adjuring Joseph to forgive his brothers (compare Gen. 50:15–21).

22. See A. S. Rodrigues Pereira, “Two Syriac Verse Homilies on Joseph,” *Jahrbericht Ex Oriente Lux* 31 (1989–90): 96–97, in which he lists eight manuscript witnesses, four of whom positively attribute authorship to Narsai. Two manuscripts (Ms. Oxford, Bodleian Library 135 and Ms. Berlin, Königl. Bibliothek 59), which contain only the first two *memrē*, attribute authorship to Jacob of Serugh. Nāf rejects this attribution (*Syrische Josef-Gedichte*, 38–39) partly on the grounds that another collection of *memrē* on Joseph can be more positively ascribed to Jacob.

23. See also N. 43:17: “The type of our Lord is depicted in the stories of Joseph and his brothers.” Other hermeneutical functions are also attributed to Joseph. See, for example, N. 40:17–20, in which the function of Joseph as one who conquered bodily desires is mentioned: “Blessed be the one who chose Joseph the just and glorified him in the land, And set him up as a model and an example for all the just, And that they might be delivered from bodily desires And might inherit the good and new life of the kingdom.”

24. The author also introduces the comparison series using a line very similar to that used by Aphrahat: “The type of our Lord is depicted in the stories of Joseph” (Ps. N. 43:17).

25. N. 21:7–11; compare A. 956:19–22. Joseph’s nakedness is not specifically mentioned in the episode with Potiphar’s wife. It seems to have been made specifically by the author to make the twofold typological link.

26. Reuben: N. 8:11–20; Potiphar: N. 24:1–9.

27. Judah: N. 8:5–10, 10:2–5; Potiphar’s wife: N. 24:10–15; 44:8–9.

28. Note that when Joseph is reporting to Potiphar’s wife about how he had been instructed concerning her, Joseph observes that Potiphar “cautioned [him] exceedingly” on this point (N. 19:15). Also of interest is part of Joseph’s response to Potiphar: “[I am] wronged by the debauched one, But if I say that it is not true, who will believe me? For she is the mistress and everything she desires is authorised for her And you listen to everything she says and believe [her]” (N. 24:18–21). There seems to be an implicit warning here against marriage in which the wife rules over the husband and is also likely to be unfaithful.

29. However, it should also be noted that the role of biblical women is often expanded and portrayed very positively in the Syriac tradition. For references, see Susan Ashbrook Harvey, "Spoken Words, Voiced Silence: Biblical Women in Syriac Tradition," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9, no. 1 (2001): 105–31.

30. Nāf finds the cycle attributed to Narsai to be stylistically and literarily deficient. *Syrische Josef-Gedichte*, 15, 36.

31. Hymns on Faith 4:9, quoted in Sebastian Brock, *The Luminous Eye* (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian, 1992), 55.

32. For a good discussion of parallels with Jewish exegesis and doctrine, see Robert Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition* (reprint; London: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 281–94.

33. Sebastian P. Brock, "Jewish Traditions in Syriac Sources," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 30 (1979): 212–32.

34. Sebastian P. Brock, "An Introduction to Syriac Studies," in *Horizons in Semitic Studies: Articles for the Student*, ed. John Herbert Eaton ([Birmingham]: [Department of Theology, University of Birmingham], 1980), 4.

35. Edward G. Mathews, *The Armenian Commentary on Genesis Attributed to Ephrem the Syrian*, *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* v. 572–73, *Scriptores Armeniaci*, t. 23–24 (Louvain: Peeters, 1998). Quotations are from the English translation of *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* v. 573.

36. Stephanus Evodius Assemani, *Sancti patris nostri Ephraem Syri opera omnia*, 3 vols. (Rome: Ex Typographia Vaticana apud Joannem Mariam Henricum Salvioni, 1732–46). Quotations are from the electronically published translation of Archimandrite Ephrem Lash (<http://www.anastasis.org.uk/>).