

## HYMNS AGAINST JULIAN

- as the molten calf led you out of Egypt!<sup>49</sup>
- 18 A king, the Babylonian king, suddenly became a wild ass,<sup>50</sup>  
but he learned to be subjugated; he who used to kick, kicked no  
more.
- A king, the Hellenic king,<sup>51</sup> suddenly became a bull  
and gored the churches, but he was dragged away.  
The circumcised saw the bull imprinted on the staters,  
and they rejoiced that the calves of Jereboam were revived.<sup>52</sup>
- 19 Perhaps because of that silver coin on which the bull was portrayed,  
the Jews were overjoyed that [Julian] carried it in his heart  
and also in his purse and in his hand  
as a type of that calf of the wilderness  
that was before his eye and heart and mind;  
and probably in his dreams he used to see the calf.
- 20 A king, the Babylonian king, went mad and went out into the  
countryside.
- He was made to wander in order to be gathered in; he was  
maddened in order to come to his senses.<sup>53</sup>
- He made God rejoice and made Daniel exult.
- A king, the Hellenic king, has been rebuked,  
for he angered God and denied Daniel,<sup>54</sup>  
and there near Babylon he was judged and condemned.<sup>55</sup>

49. Exod. 32.8.

50. Although the reference is clearly to Nebuchadnezzar, as Beck suggests, cf. Dan. 4.28-33, it is odd that Ephrem refers to him as a "wild ass," (*ʿaḏ*) where the Peshitta uses "bull" or "wild ox," (*ʿawr*), the same word he used for the image on the coinage and in the next lines for Julian, "the Hellenic king."

51. In referring to Julian as "the Hellenic king" (*mlk ywvn*) Ephrem emphasizes his "Hellenism," i.e., his pagan beliefs. If he meant to refer simply to Julian as Roman Emperor, the metrically equivalent *mlk rwm*, would be more normal parlance since Syriac writers continued to refer thus to the emperors well into the Byzantine period.

52. Jereboam instituted a rival to the Jerusalem cult by setting up golden calves at Bethel and Dan and telling the people this was the god who brought them up out of Egypt, as in str. 17 above; cf. 1 Kings 11.26-15.34, esp. 12.26-32.

53. Cf. Dan. 4.31-37.

54. By attempting to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem, Julian denied the testimony of Daniel 9.24-27, which Ephrem and many other Patristic writers understood to prophesy the permanent destruction of the Temple, cf. CJ 4.20.

55. Julian's death on the Persian campaign is the divine punishment for his apostasy; further, cf. CJ 3.1-9, 13-17.

Here Ephrem alludes to the tenth chapter of John's gospel which portrays the good shepherd whose sheep know him and who lays down his life to protect them from the wolf. Like Jesus, Constantius was a true shepherd, but Julian is a wolf in sheep's clothing. Characterizing the Jews as goat kids, he enlarges on the theme introduced at the end of the previous hymn, Jewish acceptance of Julian's leadership (str. 1). He implies that the emperor was a false messiah for them since he played the roles of prophet, king and priest (str. 2). Alluding to the attempt to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem, he claims that the emperor's "pledge" swayed them to continue to accept him after he shed his "sheep's clothing" by declaring his polytheistic beliefs (str. 1, 3.4). This shows, he argues, that the Jewish rejection of Jesus had been motivated by a hidden yearning for polytheism (str. 3).

Ephrem then returns to the larger theme of the divine purpose in these events. God has made Julian a mirror in which to see the falsity of pagan religion and the destruction that awaits those who put their trust in its oracles (str. 4-15). He claims that, despite the personal asceticism of the emperor, his religion is characterized by lascivious revelry, resembling the Israelite worship of the golden calf (str. 4-7). Just as the golden calf was destined for destruction, Julian, like an unwitting goat kid, was prepared for sacrifice by the falsity of his pagan oracles (str. 8-15). Nisibis is also a mirror displaying a contrapuntal lesson: As long as the people placed their trust in God and were faithful to him, they were preserved from Persian capture; only when they succumbed to idolatry was the city lost to the Persian forces (str. 16-27). Ephrem describes the dramatic and successful earlier defenses of Nisibis, associating their success with the piety of Constantius as well as of the city's inhabitants (str. 19-20, 25). The city was taken only when the inhabitants restored an idolatrous cult, and when they were led by an emperor who entrusted his plans to soothsayers, who nevertheless proved vulnerable even to the mundane deceit of traitors (str. 12, 15, 17, 18, 25). Even Shapur grasped the lesson God intended all to see in the fate of Nisibis, for he showed

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respect for the Christian religion but not for Julian's paganism (str. 22–24, 27). Although the apostasy of some of the city's Christian inhabitants and the restitution of the pagan cult have resulted in God's anger and the loss of the city, the freedom of its inhabitants to emigrate to Roman territory rather than being exiled eastward into the Persian realm is a sign of divine mercy (str. 26–27).

### 2

- 1 The wolf borrowed the clothing of the True Lamb; the innocent sheep sniffed at him, without recognizing him, for he had greatly deceived that shepherd who died.<sup>56</sup> But when the wolf emerged from within the lamb, stripped off [and] shed his beauty, the kids took his scent. They hated the ewes, but loved him as a shepherd.

*Refrain: Blessed is He Who blotted him out  
and has afflicted all the sons of error!*

- 2 They rejoiced that he was a Chaldean; they were jubilant that he was a soothsayer. They became arrogant that he was king; they were joyful that he was a priest. They rejoiced that he filled the place of many, of kings and queens of the sort of Ahab<sup>57</sup> and Jeroboam,<sup>58</sup> of Jotham<sup>59</sup> and Manasseh,<sup>60</sup>

56. The Emperor Constantius, unaware of Julian's pagan beliefs, had appointed him Caesar.

57. Ahab is best remembered for marrying Jezebel and introducing Baal worship in Israel, cf. 1 Kgs. 16.29–34.

58. Cf. CJ 1.18.6 and note ad loc.

59. Jotham, son of Uzziah, ruled Judah for sixteen years. Although he is presented in 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles as a good king, Ephrem apparently wishes to recall the criticism that he did not put an end to the worship in the high places that Jeroboam had reestablished, cf. 2 Kgs. 15.32–38, 2 Chron. 27.1–9.

60. Manasseh not only reinstated the Baal worship his father had ended, he also practiced child-sacrifice, augury, divination and magic, and he introduced an idol into the Temple at Jerusalem. When he was captured by the Assyrians and taken in chains to Babylon, however, he repented. Restored to power, he later purified the worship of Judah and regained the favor of Yahweh, cf. 2 Chron. 33.1–20.

## HYMN 2

- of Jezebel<sup>61</sup> and Athaliah,<sup>62</sup> sources of paganism.<sup>63</sup>
- 3 They rejected the Savior, the witness of the True One, Who, when they asked Him, taught, "One alone is God."<sup>64</sup> Being pagans, they crucified Him and went astray with many [gods]. They rejoiced in the abominable pledge.<sup>65</sup> Through his sacrifices he hired and brought ten gods<sup>66</sup> to heap up sheaves of thorns for Gehenna.
- 4 He led his gods and the goddesses he forged. He clothed himself in auguries and set out—he and the soothsayers and conjurers. All the sons of error equipped him with their prayers, and he set out with the promises of powerful men. He took his conveyance<sup>67</sup> and smote it and brought a crown of disgrace for all his partisans.
- 5 The goddesses rampaged with his gods, and the one who denied chastity<sup>68</sup> was not ashamed to proclaim

61. Jezebel, wife of King Ahab, came to her Baal worship naturally, being the daughter of Ethbaal, King of Tyre. Her corrupting influence on Israel is well-known, as is her persecution of the prophet Elijah and his successors, and her ignominious death, cf. 1 Kgs. 16.31, 1 Kgs. 18, 19, 21, and 2 Kgs. 9.30–37.

62. Athaliah, who was a daughter of Omri, a consort of Ahab and the mother of Ahaziah, ruled for six years. A devotee of Baal, she was killed when Jehoiada, a priest of Yahweh, led a revolt against her, cf. 2 Kgs. 8.26 and 11.1–20.

63. In his second invective against Julian, Gregory Nazianzen also invokes the images of Ahab and Jeroboam in connection with the rebuilding of the Temple, but rather than the other kings and queens of Israel whom Ephrem mentions here, he adds Nebuchadnezzar and Pharaoh to his list; cf. Greg. Naz. Orat. 5.3.

64. Mark 12.29.

65. The pledge is Julian's promise to rebuild the Temple, cf. CJ 1.16–20 and 4.18–25.

66. The Syriac word here indicates a group of ten, for which there is no English equivalent. "A dozen gods" would give the sense loosely.

67. The Syriac here can mean chariot or throne. Since the context is a description of Julian's setting out on the Persian campaign, possibly this is an allusion to his fleet and its destruction as Beck suggests ad loc.

68. The Syriac word *nkpwrt* may mean modesty or chastity in a general sense, or it may be a *terminus technicus* for monasticism. Julian was critical of Christian monasticism, which he saw as akin to the "pseudo-Cynicism" of his time; cf. Bowersock, Julian, 81f. and Malley, Hellenism, 148–55. The emperor was, however, himself very dedicated to an ascetic lifestyle, justified in neo-Platonic terms; cf. Amm. Mar. 25.4.2–6, Libanius Orat. 18.179, Bowersock, Julian, 79–93, and Malley, Hellenism, 226–35. Even his devotion to the Great Mother (Cybele-Atargatis) was compatible with his asceticism since she had acquired astrological and philosophical underpinnings by this time, as Julian's hymn to her demonstrates; cf. the introduction II.D. Ephrem's point, however, is that this juxtaposition is not possible. John Chrysostom voices a similar complaint about Julian's devotions to Aphrodite, probably another reference to the same syncretistic cult; cf. *Liber in Sanctum Babylam Contra Julianum et Gentiles* 14, noted by Beck ad loc.

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- male idols who raved after female idols.<sup>69</sup>  
 A he-goat and also a priest he was for them.  
 For a shameful [goddess] he abstained [from cutting] his beard and  
     let it grow,  
 and he bent down to let the smoke of the fumes rise into it.<sup>70</sup>
- 6 Agreeable to him was the feast of the detestable idol  
 on whose feastday women and men rave,  
 virgins fornicate, and wives become lascivious,  
 vomit out [and] speak words of shame.<sup>71</sup>  
 He loved filthy feasts and despised the blessed  
 feastdays of chastity and the Pasch of honor.<sup>72</sup>
- 7 The pagans carried their idols and raved,  
 and the circumcised blew trumpets and raged,  
 and all of them chanted with their voices and behaved wantonly.<sup>73</sup>  
 It was a festival like the one in the wilderness.  
 The Gracious One Who chastened those who rampaged with a calf,  
 [and] Who chastened the many who rampaged with a king—
- 8 He broke that calf to pieces to cut short the rampage,  
 and He undid that diadem to cut off the frenzy.  
 Like a physician He cut off the cause of the rampage.

69. Or "and lusted after" or "raved in pursuit of female idols." The Syriac is alliterative.

70. Clearly aware that Julian's beard is intended to symbolize his philosophical and theological commitments, Ephrem mocks this idea by the use of the root *nzzr*, "to abstain, to become a Nazirite." In the context of Israelite prophecy the Nazirite vow to abstain from wine and the razor was a sign of a charismatic call; cf. Num. 6.1-21, 1 Sam. 1.22, Judg. 13.2-7. The notion carried over into early Christianity and especially in the Jewish-Christian encratite environment; cf. Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 210f. Given his insistence that Julian was promoting obscene worship, his use here is strongly ironic, and the characterization of the emperor as a he-goat both alludes to his beard and carries the suggestion of lewdness. Popular mockery of his beard in Antioch had led Julian to write his satirical *Misopogon*, where he himself refers ironically to goats; cf. Jul. Imp. Misop. 338C-339B, and Bowersock, *Julian*, 13. The criticisms continued and included mockery of his "billy goat's beard" as well as his excessive sacrificial offerings and his inappropriate assumption of priestly prerogatives, so that they called him "a slaughterer rather than a high priest," cf. Amm. Mar. 22.14.2-3.

71. For a similar description of the feast of the "raving goddess," cf. CH 9.8.3.

72. Alternatively "and honorable merriment," but since the pagan celebration of which he complains here is probably the festivities of the Great Mother in late March, cf. CJ 2.5.2 and note ad loc., a specific comparison with Easter is more likely.

73. Although it sounds as if pagans and Jews celebrated a festival together, for his polemical purpose Ephrem has merged the celebrations of the two communities. Possibly he has in mind the celebration of Passover which would be at about the same time as the Great Mother's feast. In addition, Julian's announced intention to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem may have been the cause of additional rejoicing for the Jewish community. Further cf. CJ 4.18-23 and notes ad loc.

## HYMN 2

- In the south<sup>74</sup> both were overthrown.  
 By means of hard iron He destroyed that calf,  
 and with a terrible spear he destroyed that king.<sup>75</sup>
- 9 He-goats from the people<sup>76</sup> of that goat-kid,  
 who grew their curls and stank in their beards,<sup>77</sup>  
 surrounded the black one who did not look at marriage,  
 who was continent and purified for his shameful [goddess].<sup>78</sup>  
 The flocks of the left hand stirred up by their oracles  
 the goat-kid who set out to become a victim in the midst of Persia.<sup>79</sup>
- 10 By their oracles they broke the reed of the tares,<sup>80</sup>  
 the pillar and column upon which had been supported  
 thorns, sons of his people, and brambles, sons of his race.<sup>81</sup>  
 As he set out he threatened the grains of wheat  
 that he would return and bury them in the thicket of his  
     paganism.<sup>82</sup>  
 The Cultivator of justice destroyed the tares.
- 11 That haughty and arrogant thornbush, as it is written,<sup>83</sup>

74. In Sinai and Babylon, respectively.

75. In the case of the calf, the precise allusion is unclear, cf. Exod. 32.20, but for Julian's case, cf. CJ 3.14.

76. Here and in CJ 2.10.3 "his people" is *gnsb*, from Greek γένος, not 'mm' as in references to the Jewish people.

77. Ephrem puns on *spry* "goat-kid" and *zprw* "they stank." The emperor's philosophers and religious advisors are the subject here.

78. Here and in CJ 2.5.5 one might read "for his shame" or "to his disgrace" rather than "for his shameful goddess," but Beck's suggestion that this is an allusion to a goddess is most probable since the word may refer to an idol (*bbtr*; cf. Margoliouth 37a). On Julian's preference for continence, cf. CJ 2.5 and note ad loc. He specified the relationship between the Great Mother's cult, allegorically interpreted, and abstinence of various sorts, cf. Jul. Imp. Orat. 5 174B-178D.

79. The pagan oracles and interpreters of omens encouraged Julian to undertake his Persian campaign. Yet, at least according to the hindsight of Ammianus, it seems that many omens were negative or at least ambiguous as the campaign proceeded; cf. Amm. Mar. 22.12.6-8, where Ammianus expresses doubt over the qualifications of some of those consulted; Amm. Mar. 23.1.4-7, 23.2.6-8, 23.5.6, and 24.6.17 for unfavorable omens; Amm. Mar. 23.3.3, for unfavorable dreams; Amm. Mar. 23.3.6 and 23.5.8-14 for omens Julian mistakenly interpreted as favorable. As a convinced pagan, Ammianus had an interest in showing that Julian's disastrous campaign was not encouraged by the gods, just as Ephrem wished to show that the emperor had the best advice available from pagan sources.

80. Ephrem alludes both to Pharaoh as a broken reed (2 Kgs. 18.21) and to the parable of the wheat and tares (Matt. 13.24-30).

81. The Syriac is *twbmb*.

82. Julian's anti-Christian measures reached a peak in spring 363 as he set out on his Mesopotamian campaign, cf. Bowersock, *Julian*, 79-93, esp. 92.

83. 2 Kgs. 14.9. The thornbush of Lebanon writes to the cedar of Lebanon asking for his

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- determined to bend down cedars and cypresses  
and willed to grow thorns and tares.  
[God] made it a broom,<sup>84</sup> but it did not disperse.  
The Just One swept together in him the abomination of paganism  
and took [and] hurled his paganism into a distant place.
- 12 For Truth to conquer one at a time would have been a small thing.  
He swept together [and] bound up the diviners and soothsayers in  
one king  
and gave them the opportunity to put on a helmet and arm  
themselves,  
and in the one he conquered all of them,  
and upon all of them he stretched out the measuring line of disgrace,  
for the sons of error lied, all of them in everything.
- 13 If all of them together lied in their oracles,  
taken individually how much each one lied in his oracle!  
Hogs got down [and] wallowed in their detestable filth.  
This is the herd [of swine] that defiled the world,  
who came down and rolled in dust and got up and shook themselves  
off.  
It has happened and does happen that they lead many astray.
- 14 The king, the king of Babylon, confuted the Chaldeans,  
nor did he summon others, for he tested one in another.<sup>85</sup>  
He cast them out [and] expelled them; to slaughter he gave them.  
That one, indeed, whose own they were, renounced them.  
But if they misled him, how much indeed will they mislead you!  
For if all of them lie, who indeed will trust one?
- 15 For [Julian] foretold and promised and wrote and sent to us  
that he would come down and trample it; Persia he would  
disperse.<sup>86</sup>  
Singara he would rebuild.<sup>87</sup> [This was] the threat of his letter.

daughter to be given in marriage to his son; he is trampled by the animals of Lebanon as they pass by.

84. For *mknt'* as "broom," cf. Payne-Smith I, 1774f., *scopa*, *verriculum*. This meaning suits the context here and in the remainder of the strophe where God is portrayed as the Great Housekeeper in the Sky.

85. Dan. 2.1-13. When Nebuchadnezzar tested the soothsayers in his kingdom, on the basis of the answers of some, he convicted all and condemned them to death.

86. The Syriac also contains a pun: Persia . . . disperse = *lprs mprs'*.

87. Singara had been taken by the Persians in 360, Amm. Mar. 20.6.

HYMN 2

- Nisibis was taken away by his campaign,  
but by his conjurers he cast down the power in which they  
believed.<sup>88</sup>  
As a [sacrificial] lamb, the city saved his encampment.<sup>89</sup>
- 16 Nisibis that was captured—as a type of mirror<sup>90</sup>  
[God] set it up, that we might see in it the pagan who set out  
to take what was not his; he lost what was his.  
For it was the city that proclaimed to the world  
the shame of his conjurers and became his constant reproach.  
He surrendered the constant unwearied herald.
- 17 This is the herald that with four mouths<sup>91</sup>  
cried out into the whole world the disgrace of his conjurers.  
The gates that were opened by the sieges also opened  
our mouth for the praise of our Savior.  
Behold! Shut up today are the gates of that city  
that the mouth of pagans and heretics might be shut up with them.
- 18 Let us seek the cause how and why  
the shield<sup>92</sup> of all the cities, that city, was given up.  
The madman raged and set fire to his ships near the Tigris.  
Without his being aware the bearded ones deceived  
the he-goat who promised that he knew secret things.<sup>93</sup>

88. Pace Beck, who citing Ephrem's claim of widespread paganism in the Roman army, cf. CJ 3.10, here translates, "das Heer, das an ihn glaubte."

89. I.e., Nisibis was ceded to Persia in exchange for safe passage for the Roman army.

90. The image of the mirror is used variously by Ephrem. Here the image in the mirror serves as a warning example, cf. Beck, Spiegel, esp. 10-16.

91. The four mouths are the city gates; thus the news went out in all directions.

92. The word has the same root as "shut up" in the previous strophe, *str*.

93. According to Libanius, Julian simply decided to burn his fleet rather than risk the Persians' acquisition of it or the continued commitment of manpower needed to bring it in the upstream retreat (Libanius, Orat. 18.262-3; repeated by Zosimus, *Historia Nova* 3.26, 28, 29). The same explanations are offered by Ammianus Marcellinus, but he mentions traitors who admit to deceit when they are tortured, and he describes a belated reversal of the decision to burn the boats (Amm. Mar. 24.7.4-6). The fullest explanation would seem to be in Gregory Nazianzen's second invective against Julian (Greg. Naz. Orat. 5.11-12). According to Gregory, Julian was deceived by a Persian nobleman who represented himself as alienated from Shapur, but who was in reality still in the service of the Persian ruler. Using essentially the same arguments that Libanius and Ammianus attribute to Julian himself, this supposed renegade persuaded him to burn his fleet and promised that he himself would conduct him by a secret overland route to his troops in the north. Once the ships had been torched, however, the Persian had disappeared. The discussion in Bowersock, Julian, 114f., is most helpful. Browning's account of two Persian noblemen who confess when put to torture, is apparently a conflation of Ammianus Marcellinus' and Gregory's accounts, cf. Browning, Emperor, 208f. The only discrepancy between Gregory's version and Ephrem's is that Ephrem, like Ammianus Marcellinus,

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- He was deceived in visible things to be disgraced in hidden things.
- 19 This is the city that had heralded the truth of its Savior:  
 seas broke through suddenly, battered it, but were overcome.  
 The earthworks were brought down, but the elephants were  
 drowned.  
 The king by his sackcloth preserved it.<sup>94</sup>  
 The tyrant by his paganism cast down the victory  
 of the city that prayer had crowned with triumphs.
- 20 Truth was its bulwark and fasting its rampart.  
 The Magi came, threatening, but Persia was disgraced in them,  
 [as] Babylon in the Chaldeans and India in the sorcerers.  
 For thirty years the truth encompassed it.<sup>95</sup>  
 In the summer in which an idol was set up in the city,<sup>96</sup>  
 compassion fled from it, and anger overran it.
- 21 For empty sacrifices emptied its fullness.  
 Demons, sons of the wasteland, laid waste to it by libations.  
 The [pagan] altar<sup>97</sup> that was built, rooted out and expelled  
 that altar whose sackcloth<sup>98</sup> had delivered us.  
 The feasts of frenzy silenced His feastday.  
 While the sons of error served, they put to an end His service.
- 22 The Magus who entered our place regarded it as holy, to our  
 disgrace.  
 He neglected his fire temple but honored the sanctuary.<sup>99</sup>  
 He cast down the [pagan] altars built by our laxity;  
 he destroyed the enclosures<sup>100</sup> to our shame.

refers to two or more men, rather than a single man. On the other hand, if Gregory were somehow aware of Ephrem's remarks as well as Ammianus' account, his version could be an elaboration on them.

94. In the third siege of Nisibis in 350, the Persian strategy, which entailed damming the Mygdonius River to flood the city walls, met with some success, but the Nisibenes managed to rebuild the walls and save the city; cf. CNis 1-3. Ephrem here credits the success to the piety of Emperor Constantius.

95. As Beck notes, the precise period between the first attacks and the fall of Nisibis was twenty-six years, 337-63 C.E.

96. For further evidence of the idolatry in Nisibis, cf. Beck ad loc. and Soz. HE 5.3.

97. Literally "high place," *hr*, in contrast to *mdbh* in the following line.

98. Cf. CNis 4.27, and Beck's remarks ad loc.

99. Syriac *mqdš*, apparently the Christian church.

100. Syriac *hbwt*. Beck suggests that heretical cult rooms are meant, citing CH 1.18.1, where the reference is to the Bardaisanites. That is, the cult places are destroyed by Shapur to the shame of Christians, who should themselves have destroyed them.

## HYMN 2

- For he knew that from one temple<sup>101</sup> alone emerged  
 the mercy that had saved us from him three times.<sup>102</sup>
- 23 How much indeed truth revealed its face in our city!  
 Everywhere it showed itself through our breaches  
 to the point that even the blind saw it in our preservation.  
 The king in our deliverance recognized it.  
 Since he had seen it outside of our city in triumphs,  
 when he entered into the city, he honored it with offerings.
- 24 The war was a crucible, in which the king saw  
 how beautiful the truth and how ugly falsehood is.  
 He learned through experience that the Lord of that house  
 is gracious and just in all things.  
 For He wearied him and did not give him the city that believed in  
 Him,  
 but when the sacrifices angered Him, He surrendered it without  
 effort.
- 25 The sackcloth of the blessed one preserved the city that was head  
 of the region of Mesopotamia, and it was magnified.  
 The tyrant by his blasphemy humbled and abased it.  
 Who can weigh how great is its dishonor?  
 For the city that had been head of the entire West  
 was made the hind feet<sup>103</sup> of the East.
- 26 [This] city was not considered like all the [other] cities.  
 For how many times did the Gracious One deliver it from within  
 Sheol  
 [in] the battle under the earth and the battle above it,  
 but when it refused its Savior, He abandoned it.  
 The Just One, Whose anger is mighty, mingled His love with anger,  
 so that He did not lead us away as captives and exile us, [but] let us  
 dwell in our land.<sup>104</sup>

101. Syriac *bykl'*.

102. That is, he recognized that the Christian God had saved the city in the three unsuccessful sieges.

103. Literally, the "other heels."

104. That is, God did not punish the people of Nisibis by allowing Shapur to exile them to the distant East, as in the case of Singara, cf. Amm. Mar. 20.6.7, and Fiey, Nisibe, 36. Although it is unclear whether "our land" refers to the Syriac-speaking region or the Roman Empire, in either case Edessa would be included. Alternatively, but less plausibly, one might surmise that Ephrem composed this hymn before learning of the need to vacate the city.

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- 27 Whereas the [Roman] king became a [pagan] priest and dishonored  
our churches,  
the Magian king honored the sanctuary.  
His honoring our sanctuary has doubled our consolation.  
[God] saddened and gladdened us but did not exile us.<sup>105</sup>  
He reproved that errant one by means of his erring counterpart;  
since the priest oppressed, He rewarded the Magus.<sup>106</sup>

105. Alternatively, the subject could be Shapur rather than God.

106. Again, the subject could be Shapur, translating as Beck, "while the priest oppressed, the magus rewarded." The more obvious sense, however, is that God reproved Julian by rewarding Shapur.

## 3

Ephrem continues the argument he began in the previous hymns, that the loss of his city to Persia was a great divine lesson on the errors of idolatry. The keynote here is the coincidence in time of the raising of the Persian standard over the city and the bringing of Julian's corpse into the city, to which he has himself been witness (str. 1-3). The poet portrays himself mocking the corpse of the emperor and his presumptuous claims, meditating on the transience of temporal power as compared with God's, and mourning the folly of those who succumbed to the pretenses of Julian (str. 4-6). Next he addresses the principal difficulty in his view: the lengthy and inconclusive struggle for survival under Constantius (str. 7-12). The war remained without a decisive victory in the first half of the fourth-century not because the Christian God was unable to bring victory but because he was waiting for Julian's paganism to come into evidence so that he could serve as an example for all the world of the inefficacy of the Hellenic deities and their oracles (str. 7-9). Even Roman defeats under Constantius and the standard of the cross can be explained away as the fault of hidden pagans among the soldiers, just as Joshua's defeat at Ai was not a sign of the weakness of the Ark of the covenant but of the disbelief of some of the army (str. 10-11). Finally, Ephrem, to whom human freedom is supremely important, argues that Julian's death was the just and freely chosen consequence of his pride coupled with his stubborn refusal to admit the error of his religious beliefs and the injustice of his anti-Christian measures (str. 12-16). Divine justice and respect for human freedom does not, however, prevent God's providing an intricate interlacing of symbolism for the edification of all. In this case Ephrem discovers a fourfold mystery of lances (str. 14), and a pun linking Julian's mocking epithet of the "Galileans" with the angelic "wheels" of God's mighty chariot (str. 17). To his way of thinking these relationships serve as substantiation of his argument no less than the example of Joshua at Ai.