Melkite Syriac Hymns to the Mother of God (9th–11th centuries): Manuscripts, Language and Imagery[1]

Natalia Smelova

A few years ago in the Russian National Library in St Petersburg I came across a Syriac manuscript containing a number of hymnographical pieces dedicated to the Virgin Mary. In the catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts in Leningrad (the former name of St Petersburg), published in 1960 by Nina V. Pigulevskaya, the content of the manuscript was described as the *Akathistos Hymn*. My research has revised this conclusion and identified the manuscript as a rare collection of the short Melkite hymns to the Virgin called *theotokia* translated from Greek into Syriac.[2] The collection is divided into eight chapters according to the eight-tone (ὀκτὼ ἤχοι) structure of the Byzantine *Octoechos* (Ὀκτώηχος). I have named this remarkable collection of Marian hymns, to which this chapter for the most part is devoted, 'Syriac *theotokia*'.

I will discuss here the different translations and verbal expressions of the salutations to the Mother of God as they appear in the Greek papyri, Syriac *theotokia* collections, and later Greek and Syriac liturgical books – the latter

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[2] For a preliminary report on the manuscript see: N. Smelova, 'Melkite canticles to the Virgin from a Syriac MS in the Russian National Library in the context of Eastern Christian liturgical literature', in F. Young, M. Edwards and P. Parvis, eds, *Papers Presented at the Fourteenth International Conference on Patristic Studies*, *Studia Patristica* 41 (Leuven, 2006), 83–7.

originating from both Chalcedonian and anti-Chalcedonian (Jacobite) milieux in medieval Syria and Palestine.

The *theotokion* (θεοτοκίον, pl. θεοτοκία) appears in the Greek liturgical tradition as a hymn dedicated to the God-bearer (Θεοτόκος), accompanying kanons, *stichera*, *kathismata* (hymns sung during vespers and matins attached to a verse of Psalm or a division of Psalter) and some other hymnographical forms. *Theotokia* can be found in all of the liturgical books that were in constant use from approximately the ninth century, including the *Octoechos*, *Triodion*, *Pentekostarion*, *Menaion*, *Horologion* and so on. The genre of the *theotokion* is in fact much earlier than that, since the most ancient examples are found in the Greek papyri from the fourth century onwards.

Arguably the earliest and certainly one of the most famous Marian hymns, 'Ὑπὸ τὴν σὴν εὐσπλαγχνίαν' is found in the fourth-century (?) papyrus 470 from the John Rylands Library (University of Manchester) as well as in the papyrus P. Vindobon. G 17944, dated to the sixth or seventh century, from the Austrian National Library in Vienna.[3] This piece was later adapted to the liturgical use as a *theotokion* of the fifth tone within the *Octoechos*, *Triodion* and *Horologion*.[4] Besides that, the hymn is very widely used in the Ambrosian rite as a *responsorium*, 'Sub tuum praesidium'; and in the Coptic tradition it is sung during the service to the Virgin Mary.[5] Its earliest Syriac translation is found in the St Petersburg manuscript of *theotokia* (fol. 9r).

Another well-known Marian hymn, 'Χαῖρε Θεοτόκε ἀγαλλίαμα τῶν ἀγγέλων', found on the recto of Greek papyrus 1029 (sixth century) of the British Library, was carefully studied in the 1910s by Anton Baumstark, who identified it as a *theotokion* of the eighth tone attached to a dismissal from the *Horologion*[6] and also as a hymn belonging to the Coptic daily Marian *akolouthia*, also called *theotokia*.[7] Three other acrostic Marian strophes accompanied with the refrain

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[3]   C.H. Roberts, *Catalogue of the Greek and Latin Papyri in the John Rylands Library*, *Manchester* (4 vols, Manchester, 1911–52), vol. 3 (1938): *Theological and Literary texts* (nos. 457–551), 46–7, pl. 1; K. Treu and J.M. Diethart, *Griechische literarische Papyri Christlichen Inhaltes*, Mitteilungen aus der Papyrussammlung der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek, n.s. 2 (Vienna, 1993), 56, pl. 16.

[4]   *Parakletike etoi Oktoechos e Megale* (Rome, 1885), 446; *Triodion Katanyktikon* (Rome, 1879), 112, 133; *Orologion to Mega* (Rome, 1876), 244.

[5]   P.F. Mercenier,'L'antienne mariale grecque la plus ancienne', *Le Muséon* 52 (1939), 229–33; O. Stegmüller, 'Sub tuum praesidium. Bemerkungen zur ältesten Überlieferung', *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 74 (1952), 76–82; H. Husmann, 'Hymnus und Troparion. Studien zur Geschichte der musikalischen Gattungen von Horologion und Tropologion', *Jahrbuch des Staatlichen Instituts für Musikforschung Preussischer Kulturbesitz* (1971), 9–13.

[6]   *Orologion to Mega*, 249. The same *theotokion* can also be found in the *Octoechos* and the *Triodion*.

[7]   A. Baumstark, 'Ein frühchristliches Theotokion in mehrsprachiger Überlieferung und verwandte Texte des ambrosianischen Ritus', *Oriens Christianus*, n.s. 7–8 (1918), 37–61; F.G. Kenyon and H.I. Bell, *Greek Papyri in the British Museum: Catalogue, with Texts* (7 vols, London, 1907), vol. 3, 284. See also P. Maas, 'Ein frühbyzantinische Kirchenlied auf Papyrus', *BZ* 17 (1908), 307–11.

'σε μεγαλύνομεν' ('we magnify you') were found in the Greek papyrus P. Heid. IV. 1058 (sixth to eighth century) from Heidelberg.[8]

Many other ancient hymns to the Virgin can be found in papyri from the sixth to the eighth century from the Vienna and Berlin collections.[9] One of the earliest examples of liturgical book (probably a *Tropologion*) indicating tones and containing hymns to the Virgin is represented by fragments of a papyrus codex, P. Vindobon. G 19934 (sixth century), from the Austrian National Library in Vienna.[10]

Being products of the early Byzantine hymnography and represented in the earliest liturgical book known as the *Old Tropologion*, these hymns were subsequently identified as a separate category under the name of *theotokia* and became incorporated into the established system of the liturgical books. First of all, the full range of the *theotokia* of eight tones is represented in the book of *Octoechos* containing different hymns for the non-festal Sunday (and later, daily) services, arranged in eight general sections reflecting the division of the ecclesiastical year in eight-week cycles.[11] The earliest witness to the formation of the book of *Octoechos* is a late eighth- or early ninth-century three-part Greek parchment manuscript, Sinait. gr. 776 + Sinait. gr. 1593 + Brit Lib. Add. 26113, which contains kanons, *stichera* and *kathismata* of eight tones, accompanied by extensive sets of *theotokia* for every tone.[12] Handwriting in the manuscript suggests its Palestinian origin. The form of the *Octoechos* was changing gradually as it experienced the influence of Palestinian (Sabbaite) and Constantinopolitan (Stoudite) hymnography. By the tenth or eleventh century, a new form of the *Octoechos*, or *Parakletike*, appeared, as demonstrated by the extensive collection Sinait. gr. 778 (tenth or eleventh century), originating from Constantinople, and by other manuscripts of the same type.[13] It contains almost the same sets of *theotokia* as the Palestinian *Octoechos*, which means that

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[8]   B. Kramer and D. Hagedorn, *Griechische Texte der Heidelberger Papyrus-Sammlung* (Heidelberg, 1986), 34–38, pl. IV. See also P. Maas, S.G. Mercati and S. Gassisi, 'Gleichzeilige Hymnen in der byzantinischen Liturgie', *BZ* 18 (1909), 345–6.

[9]   Treu and Diethart, *Griechische literarische Papyri*, 52–6, pls 15–16; P. Sarischouli, *Berliner Griechische Papyri: christliche literarische Texte und Urkunden aus dem 3. bis 8. Jh. n. Chr.* (Wiesbaden, 1995), 48–64, 76–82, pl. 4.

[10]   Treu and Diethart, *Griechische literarische Papyri*, 28–51, pls 9–14.

[11]   A. Cody, 'The early history of the Octoechos in Syria', in N.G. Garsoïan, T.F. Mathews and R.W. Thomson, eds, *East of Byzantium: Syria and Armenia in the Formative Period* (Washington DC, 1982), 89–113.

[12]   K.W. Clark, *Checklist of Manuscripts in St. Catherine's Monastery, Mount Sinai, Microfilmed for the Library of Congress, 1950* (Washington DC, 1952), 10; G. Cavallo, *Ricerce sulla maiuscola biblica*, Studi e testi di papirologia 2 (2 vols, Florence, 1967), vol. 1, 120; Husmann, *Hymnus und Troparion*, 33–4; see also descriptions of the manuscript in the following nineteenth-century catalogues: V.E. Gardthausen, *Catalogus codicum graecorum sinaiticorum* (Oxford, 1886), 167; E.A. Bond, E.M. Thompson and G.F. Warner, *Catalogue of Ancient Manuscripts in the British Museum* (2 pts, London, 1881–84), pt. 1: Greek, 23–4; E.A. Bond and E.M. Thompson, *The Palaeographical Society. Facsimiles of Ancient Manuscripts* (second series, 2 pts, London, 1884–94), pt. 1, pl. 4.

[13]   Clark, *Checklist of Manuscripts in St. Catherine's Monastery*, 10; Gardthausen, *Catalogus Codicum Graecorum*, 167.

their arrangement and introduction into the hymnographical books probably took place in the Greek-speaking religious milieu of Palestine.

At different times after this, the Greek *theotokia* were translated into the various languages of the Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian traditions of Eastern Christianity, including Syriac, Arabic, Coptic, Ethiopian, Slavonic and others, for further liturgical use. One of the first stages in the translation history of the *theotokia* is represented by the St Petersburg collection, Syr. new series 11.

This is not the only manuscript collection of Syriac *theotokia.* Few other rare examples of such a collection may be found in the catalogue of Syriac fragments discovered in 1975 in the Monastery of St Catherine on Mt Sinai, published by Sebastian Brock. There are a few separate bifolia, which Brock dates to between the ninth and eleventh centuries, containing hymns to the Virgin described as *theotokia* (Sinait. syr. Sp. 68, 69, 70).[14] These bifolia either belonged to a different liturgical book or constituted a part of a separate *theotokia* collection similar to that in St Petersburg.

However, the manuscript Syriac new series 11 from the Russian National Library seems to be the only almost complete collection of the Syriac Marian hymns. The history of its acquisition from C. Tischendorf in 1859, along with the attendant circumstances, may provide indirect evidence of its presence in the Monastery of St Catherine, while its textual correspondence to the above-mentioned bifolia may testify even to its Sinaitic production.

The manuscript is written in a Melkite hand of approximately the ninth century. The closest example of Melkite writing may be found in the *Lives of Holy Women* of AD 779, which was written over the Old Syriac version of the New Testament of the fourth century in the famous palimpsest Synai Syr. 30.[15]

The unquestionable Melkite origin of Syr. new series 11 is demonstrated by its contents, as well as by the palaeography. Firstly, its most significant feature is the title 'Theotokos' (Syriac ܐܠܗܐ ܝܠܕܬ) which appears in a modified form in the manuscript's heading: ܬܐܘܛܩܐ ܟܬܒܝܢ ('we write *theotokia*'). Then a number of Greek words transcribed with Syriac characters such as ܩܝܡܠܝܘܢ (κειμήλιον), ܦܐܪܪܗܣܝܐ (παρρησία), ܠܝܡܐܢ (λιμήν) and so on, testify to the affinity of the Syriac *theotokia* to their Greek prototypes. Finally, Christological formulas defining the unity of the divine and human natures in Christ strongly distinguish these texts from those belonging to non-Chalcedonian Syriac traditions (Jacobite and so-called Nestorian). The texts collected in the manuscript are in fact selected *theotokia* of *stichera* and *kathismata*, including four *theotokia dogmatica* which, however, have no special marking. The latter, a type of *theotokia* which contains certain statements from the doctrine of the

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[14]   S.P. Brock, *Catalogue of Syriac Fragments (New Finds) in the Library of the Monastery of Saint Catherine, Mount Sinai* (Athens, 1995), 66–7, 268–71.

[15]   S.P. Brock, 'Syriac on Sinai: the main connections', in V. Ruggieri and L. Pieralli, eds., *EUKOSMIA: Studi miscellanei per il 75° di Vincenzo Poggi S.J.* (Soveria Mannelli, 2003), 106; see also A.S. Lewis, *Select Narratives of Holy Women from the Syro-Antiochene or Sinai Palimpsest as written above the Old Syriac Gospels by John the Stylite, or Beth-Marī Qanūn in AD 778*, Studia Sinaitica 9–10 (London, 1900).

Incarnation as its compulsory elements, are traditionally attributed to John of Damascus. In the early Greek and Syriac manuscript traditions, *dogmatica* were not sorted out from other *theotokia*. The later manuscripts studied by H.J.W. Tilyard provide us with a fixed number of *dogmatica* (32), while S. Eustratiades, in his survey of John of Damascus's works, published *incipits* of 48 *dogmatica*.[16]

Theotokia hymns represent clear evidence of a well-elaborated Old Testament typology of the Virgin Mary,[17] which I have recently discussed in connection with the language and phraseology of the Greek and Syriac versions of the Old and New Testament.[18]

By the eleventh century, somewhat later than the time at which the *theotokia* collections were compiled, a Syriac translation of the *Octoechos* and some other liturgical books had appeared. An example of the earliest Syriac version of the *Octoechos*, partially preserved and considerably damaged, is the British Library manuscript Add. 17133, undated and of unknown origin. It seems that Syro-Melkite translation activity reached its climax no earlier than the thirteenth century. It is from this time onward that we have a considerable number of liturgical books, including the *Octoechos* or *Parakletike*, translated into Syriac. The most remarkable items containing numerous respective *theotokia* for eight tones are now held in the British Library and in St Catherine's Monastery on Sinai. These include Brit. Lib. Add. 14710 (dated by colophon to 1258), Brit. Lib. Add. 17233 (undated), Sinait. syr. 25 (1255), Sinait. syr. 123 (1286), Sinait. syr. 208 (1225), and Sinait. syr. 210 (1295).

Most of these manuscripts were copied in north-western and western Syria, since the colophons mention towns and villages in the regions of modern Aleppo (Sinait. syr. 208) and Homs (Brit. Lib. Add. 14710); two of the manuscripts were copied in the Monastery of the Virgin (later dedicated to St Catherine) on Mt Sinai (Sinait. syr. 25 and Sinait. syr. 210). These facts testify firstly to the presence of strong Melkite communities in Syria in the thirteenth century, which still kept Syriac as a language of their liturgy (soon after this

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[16]   H.J.W. Tillyard, *The Hymns of the Octoechus*. Monumenta Musicae Byzantinae, Transcripta V (2 pts, Copenhagen, 1949), pt. 2, 105–62; S. Eustratiαdες, Ὁ Ἅγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Δαμασκηνὸς καὶ τὰ ποιητικὰ αὐτοῦ ἔργα, *Νέα Σιών* 27 (1932), 703–12.

[17]   Archimandrite Ephrem Lash, 'Mary in Eastern Church literature', in A. Stacpoole, ed., *Mary in Doctrine and Devotion* (Dublin, 1990), 58–80; M.B. Cunningham, 'The meeting of the old and the new: the typology of Mary the Theotokos in Byzantine homilies and hymns', in R.N. Swanson, ed., *The Church and Mary*, Studies in Church History 39 (Woodbridge, Suffolk and Rochester NY, 2004), 52–62; C. Hannick, 'The Theotokos in Byzantine hymnography: typology and allegory', in M. Vassilaki, ed., *Images of the Mother of God: Perceptions of the Theotokos in Byzantium* (Aldershot, 2005), 69–76; see also G.R. Woodward, *The Most Holy Mother of God in the Songs of the Eastern Church* (London, 1919).

[18]   N. Smelova, 'Biblical allusions and citations in the Syriac *theotokia* according to the manuscript Syr. New Series 11 of the National Library of Russia, St Petersburg', in D. Thomas, ed., *The Bible in Arab Christianity*, The History of Christian–Muslim Relations 6 (Leiden, 2006) 369–91; *idem*, 'The language of symbols: the typology of the Mother of God in translated Syriac hymnography', *Symbol* 55 (2009), 94–120 (in Russian).

Syriac was completely replaced by Arabic); secondly, they testify both to the existence of a considerable number of Syriac-speaking monks on Sinai at this time and to a full range of services in Syriac.

By the eleventh century, Greek and Melkite Syriac texts penetrated into the West Syrian tradition, frequently called 'Jacobite' after Jacob Baradaeus, the founder of the West Syrian ecclesiastical hierarchy. This process was attested by appearance of *tköptí* (ܬܟܫܦܬܐ) hymns (lit. 'supplications'), divided into eight tones in the early collections of hymns (proto-*byt gzí* (ܒܝܬ ܓܙܐ)), dating back to the beginning of the eleventh century. This octonary structure of *tköptí* hymns seems to be based on the Greek system of the *Octoechos*. Moreover their very name is probably the calque (loan translation) of the Greek παρακλητική ('pleading'), the other name of the book of *Octoechos*. The earliest manuscripts containing *tköptí* hymns are kept in the Vatican Library (Vat. sir. 94 [between 1010 and 1033]) and in the British Library (Add. 14714 [1074–1075]; Add. 17140 [eleventh century]).[19] Manuscript Vat. sir. 94 was copied in the region of the Euphrates near modern Malatia in Turkey; the other two are of unknown origin. All three manuscripts are known to have been acquired from the Monastery of the Virgin (Dair as-Suriani) in Wadi-Natrun in Egypt, which from the tenth century was the greatest depository of the West Syrian manuscripts in the Middle East.

From the thirteenth century onward, we find a great number of manuscripts containing *tköptí* hymns, the most remarkable of them being Brit. Lib. Add. 17238, Paris Syr. 337 and Cambridge Add. 1993 (all undated). Later tradition ascribed this type of hymn to Rabbula, bishop of Edessa († 435), as in Brit. Lib. Add. 17238 and the much later codex Orientalis 308 (XL) of the Laurenziana Library in Florence;[20] and also to St Ephrem the Syrian († 373), as in Mingana 372 in the Birmingham University Library.[21] Although both of these attributions are obviously uncertain, the former has survived until the present day, since the name for the hymns in the modern *byt gzí* collections is *tköptí rbwytí*; in other words, 'supplications of Rabbula'.[22]

Among the *tköptí* in the earliest collections, one can find the following types of hymns: 'of repentance' (ܕܬܝܒܘܬܐ), 'to martyrs' (ܣܗܕ̈ܐ), 'for the departed' (ܕܥܢܝ̈ܕܐ) and finally 'to the Theotokos' (ܕܝܠܕܬ ܐܠܗܐ). Among these latter I have found textual equivalents to the *theotokia* from the ninth-century collections as well as from the eleventh-century – thirteenth-century Melkite books of the

[19] S.E. Assemani and G.S. Assemani, *Bibliothecae Apostolicae Vaticanae codicum manuscriptorum catalogus* (3 vols, Rome, 1758–59), vol. I/2, 500; G.S. Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis Clementino-Vaticana* (3 vols, Rome, 1719–28), vol. 1, 487, 613; W. Wright, *Catalogue of the Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum* (3 pts, London, 1870–72), pt. 1, 324.

[20] J.J. Overbeck, ed., *S. Ephraemi Syri, Rabulae Episcopi Edesseni, Balaei aliorumque opera selecta* (Oxford, 1865), 245–6; S.E. Assemani, *Bibliothecae Mediceae Laurenzianae et Palatinae codicum MSS Orientalium Catalogus* (Florence, 1742), 78, XLIII.

[21] A. Mingana, *Catalogue of the Mingana Collection of Manuscripts* (3 vols, Cambridge, 1933–39), vol. 1, cols. 683–5.

[22] Overbeck, *S. Ephraemi Syri*, 245–8.

Octoechos. Thus the development of the texts of *theotokia* in Greek and Syriac proves to be a complicated and prolonged process, some stages of which, as represented by the manuscripts mentioned above, can be illustrated by the following scheme:

Greek Marian hymns, fourth (?) – sixth century:
(papyri: JRL 470, P. Vindob. G 17944, P. Heid. IV. 1058, etc.)

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Greek *Tropologion* (Old Palestinian, then New Palestinian), sixth – eighth century
(papyrus codices: P. Vindobon. G 19934, etc.)

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Greek *Octoechos*, eighth – ninth century (Sinait. gr. 1593)

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Syriac *theotokia* collections,   **Greek *Parakletike*,**
ninth century   **tenth century onward**
(Syriac New Series 11; Sinait. syr. Sp. 68)   (Sinait. gr. 778, etc.)

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Syriac *Octoechos*, before the eleventh century (Brit. Lib. Add. 17133)

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Syriac *Octoechos*,   **West Syrian *tköptí* hymns,**
from the thirteenth century   **eleventh century**
(Brit. Lib. Add. 14710, Brit. Lib. Add.   (Vat. sir. 94, Brit. Lib. Add. 14714,
17233, Sinait. syr. 208, Sinait. syr. 210,   Brit. Lib. Add. 17140)
Sinait. syr. 25, Sinait. syr. 123, etc.)

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West Syrian *tköptí* hymns,
from the thirteenth century onward
(Brit. Lib. Add. 17238, Paris Syr. 337,
Cambridge Add. 1993, and later byt gzí
manuscripts)

The translation of Greek hymnography into Syriac poses a number of questions which I will briefly discuss in this chapter. First, there is the problem of how possible it is to translate Greek prosody into Syriac. Scholars accept that the ancient Greek quantitative metrics, which are dependent on syllabic length (the quantity) and a certain rhythm system, were considerably modified in the first four centuries of the Christian era. Early Byzantine hymnography was closer to a rhythmical prose that spread widely in both Syriac and Greek literature after the influence of St Ephrem the Syrian than it was to classical Greek literary tradition. The principle of isosyllabism was one of the most important elements of early Byzantine poetry (see, for example, Romanos the Melode's *kontakia*), testifying to a strong Syriac influence.[23] Nevertheless, some of the earliest hymns

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[23]   S.P. Brock, 'Syriac and Greek hymnography: problems of origin', in E.A. Livingstone, ed., *Papers Presented to the Seventh International Patristics Conference*, *Studia*

and *troparia* contain a prose accentuation and inconstant number of syllables, which are criteria of the so-called 'free verse'.

I shall take as an example the above-mentioned early Christian hymn, 'Ὑπὸ τὴν σὴν εὐσπλαγχνίαν', for which I provide in the first column the text contained in the papyrus John Rylands Library 470, transcribed and reconstructed by P.F. Mercenier, and in the second column, the text of the *theotokion* which remains in constant liturgical use up to the present day. Here the Greek text is followed by the Syriac Melkite translation found in the manuscripts Brit. Lib. Add. 17133, Brit. Lib. Add. 14710, Sinait. syr. 208, Sinait. syr. 210, Sinait. syr. 123 and Syr. new ser. 11.

ὑ]πὸ [τὴν σκέπην τῆς εὐσπλ[αγχνίας σου	Ὑπὸ τὴν σὴν εὐσπλαγχνίαν	Under your mercy
καταφε[ύγομεν, ὦ	καταφεύγομεν, Θεοτόκε·	we take refuge, o God-bearer.
Θεοτόκε· τ[ὰς ἡμῶν ἱκεσίας μὴ πα[ρ-	Τὰς ἡμῶν ἱκεσίας μὴ παρείδῃς ἐν περιστάσει·	Do not disregard our supplications in misfortune,
εῖδες ἐν περιστάσ[ει ἀλλ᾽ ἐκ κινδύνου	ἀλλ᾽ ἐκ κινδύνων λύτρωσαι ἡμᾶς,	but deliver us from dangers,
ῥῦσαι ἡμᾶς [σὺ ἡ μόνη [ἀγνὴ καὶ	μόνη ἀγνὴ, μόνη εὐλογημένη.[24]	the only pure and blessed one!
ἡ εὐλογ[ημένη[25]		

Under the cover of your mercy
we find protection, God-bearer,
and we offer our supplication to you:
Do not reject the prayer of your servants,
but deliver us from every suffering,
as you are the only
pure and blessed one.

Even here we can observe that the translators neither intended nor were able to convey the rhythm and melody of the Greek hymn in a Semitic language. A definitive assessment of the nature of the Syriac prosody has yet to be made. Elena Mescherskaya, who has studied the issue, defines this as an accentual-syllabic type of which is strongly connected to the musical system. She has also distinguished between the metrical types of translated Syriac verse and original Syriac compositions.[26]

I prefer not to determine a special metre for the Syriac hymns studied in this chapter, but accept a priori a sequence of accents that corresponds to

Patristica 16 (Berlin, 1985), 77–81; repr. in S.P. Brock, *Studies in Syriac Christianity. History, Literature and Theology* (Aldershot, 1992).

[24]   *Parakletike etoi Oktoechos e Megale*, 446. A translation of this version is given in the third column.

[25]   Mercenier, 'L'antienne mariale grecque la plus ancienne', 230.

[26]   E. Mescherskaya, 'Syriac prosody: the main issues', *Palestinskiy Sbornik* 28/91 (1986), 171–7 (in Russian).

Syriac standard spelling (just as in early medieval Greek hymnography). One can at least say that both the number of syllables and placement of accents in the Syriac translations are quite different from those in the Greek originals. Moreover, as one can see from the other examples of Syriac *theotokia*, the translation always contains many additional epithets and expressions and does not follow the Greek model of using words of the same root and of similar sounds (as, for example, below in the *theotokion* of the first tone built on the contrapositions). All of this completely changes the sound perception of a translated Syriac text in comparison with the Greek.

The next question is whether it was possible to reproduce Greek morphological structures by means of a Semitic language. It is obvious from the Syriac *theotokia* which can be compared with their Greek prototypes that Syriac sentences almost always follow the Greek colons, or phrases, which are the keys to hymnography and church music. Sometimes, as in the case of the *theotokion* of the seventh tone below, the word order in a sentence, usually flexible in Syriac, follows a specific Greek order – but this is an exception rather than a rule for the Syriac *theotokia*. Epithets are for the most part interpreted in Syriac as participles, adverbs are mostly complex, the adverbial participle is usually translated as a verb, and so on.

As for the set expressions used by the translators, the most common are ܠܟ ܫܠܡ ('peace be to you') for χαῖρε or χαίροις, ܡܠܝܬ ܛܝܒܘܬܐ ('full of grace') for κεχαριτωμένη ('one to whom grace has been shown') and παμμακάριστος ('all-blessed'), ܛܘܒܐ ܝܗܒ ('give blessing') for μακαρίζω, ܕܠܐ ܙܒܢ ('beyond time') has no Greek equivalent, but it seems to have the same meaning as ܩܕܡ ܥܠܡܐ ('before the ages') for πρὸ αἰώνων and so on.

The third problem consists in tracing the ways in which Greek hymnography penetrated into the West Syrian milieu. The only method which provides us with representative results is to undertake a comparative study of Greek, Syro-Melkite and West Syrian texts of the relevant Marian hymns.

Firstly, let us turn to the Greek *theotokion* of the first tone found in the tenth-century manuscript from St Catherine's Monastery, Sinait. gr. 778 (fol. 4v), as well as in the modern editions of the *Parakletike:*

Χαίροις παρ' ἡμῶν,	Hail to you from us,
ἁγία Θεοτόκε Παρθένε,	holy God-bearer and Virgin,
τὸ σεπτὸν κειμήλιον	the sacred treasure
ἁπάσης τῆς οἰκουμένης,	of the whole universe,
ἡ λαμπάς ἡ ἄσβεστος,	the unquenchable lamp,
τὸ χωρίον τοῦ Ἀχωρήτου,	the container of the Uncontainable,
ὁ ναὸς ὁ ἀκατάλυτος·	the indestructible temple.
Χαίροις, ἐξ ἧς Ἀμνὸς ἐτέχθη,	Hail, for the Lamb was born from you,
ὁ αἴρων τὴν ἁμαρτίαν τοῦ κόσμου.	Who has taken [away] the sin of the world.

The Syro-Melkite version represents a free interpretation with a number of corrections. It is represented by the ninth-century *theotokia* collection of St Petersburg, as well as by the thirteenth-century manuscripts of the

Octoechos (Sinait. syr. 25, Sinait. syr. 208, Sinait. syr. 210 and Brit. Lib. ddd. 14710):

Syriac	English
ܥܠܡ ܠܟ ܡܢ ܟܠ ܩܕܝܫܐ	Hail to you, the most holy of us all,
ܝܠܕܬ ܐܠܗܐ ܘܒܬܘܠܬܐ	God-bearer and Virgin,
ܒܝܬ ܡܥܡܪܐ ܕܡܟܝܟܘܬܐ	the abode of humility
ܕܒܗ ܗܘܘ ܐܝܟ ܠܚܝܐ ܒܪܝܬܐ	in which every creature finds life.
ܠܟ ܠܫܪܓܐ ܕܠܐ ܕܥܟ	[Hail] to you, the unquenchable lamp,
ܐܝܟܪ ܐܝܟ ܘܠܐ ܡܬܕܪܟܢܐ	the abode proper [to God] and inconceivable,
ܘܗܝܟܠܐ ܡܫܒܚܐ ܘܠܐ ܡܬܚܒܠܢܐ	the temple glorified and indestructible.
ܥܠܡ ܠܟ ܕܝܠܕܬ ܐܡܪܗ ܕܐܠܗܐ.	Hail to you, as you gave birth to the Lamb of God
ܗܘ ܕܩܒܠ ܚܛܝܬ ܘܥܘܠܗ ܕܥܠܡܐ.	Who accepted the sin and impiety of the world.[27]

The West Syrian supplicatory hymn to the Virgin of the first tone is found in the manuscripts Vat. sir. 94, Brit. Lib. Add. 14714, Brit. Lib. Add. 17140, Brit. Lib. Add. 17238, Paris Syr. 337 and others. It was evidently translated from the same Greek original, but the West Syrian translation is quite different from the Melkite one:

Syriac	English
ܥܠܡ ܠܟ ܡܢ ܟܠ ܩܕܝܫܐ	Hail to you, the most holy of us all,
ܝܠܕܬ ܐܠܗܐ ܘܒܬܘܠܬܐ	God-bearer and Virgin,
ܓܙܐ ܡܫܒܚܐ ܘܫܘܐ	the treasury glorified and worthy
ܕܟܠܗ ܬܒܝܠ.	of the whole universe,
ܠܫܪܓܐ ܕܢܒܥ ܠܗܒܐ.	the lamp shedding the flame
ܘܡܥܡܪܐ ܕܠܐ ܗܘܐ ܡܬܕܪܟܢܐ	and the dwelling-place of the inconceivable one,
ܘܗܝܟܠܐ ܕܟܝܐ ܕܒܪܘܝܐ ܕܟܠܗ ܒܪܝܬܐ.	the pure temple of the Creator of the whole creation.
ܥܠܡ ܠܟ ܕܒܐܝܕܝܟ	Hail to you, as through you
ܐܡܪܐ ܐܫܬܡܗ ܗܘܐ.	the Lamb took his name
ܗܘ ܕܩܒܠ ܚܛܝܬܗ ܕܥܠܡܐ	who accepted the sin of the world
ܘܦܪܩ ܠܗ.	and saved it.[28]

Differences were obviously introduced into the Syriac translations for the purpose of explaining and elucidating the original Greek text. When comparing the two Syriac versions, we find that the West Syrian supplication is sometimes closer to the Greek text than the Melkite hymn is, since the latter gives many additional epithets and images which lead to the further development of imagery. For instance, we read in Greek, 'τὸ σεπτὸν κειμήλιον ἀπάσης τῆς οἰκουμένης' ('the sacred treasure of the whole universe'), which is interpreted in the West Syrian tradition as 'treasury glorified and worthy of the whole universe'. Meanwhile, the Melkite text reads, 'the abode of humility in which every creature finds life': the sentence is thus enlarged and given the extra nuances in meaning.

When translating the epithet 'ὁ ναὸς ἀκατάλυτος' ('the indestructible temple'), the Melkites add the attribute 'glorified' whereas the West

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[27]   Syr. new series 11, fol. 1v. The translation is a modified version of that published in Smelova, 'Biblical allusions and citations in the Syriac *theotokia*', 382.

[28]   Vat. sir. 94, fols 142v–143r.

Syrians add 'pure'. In Melkite interpretation, the image of the Lamb (Ἀμνός) is given an additional specification, namely, the Lamb of God (Jn 1:29, 36). Thus this example of the *theotokion* indicates a direct influence of the Greek text on West Syrian hymnography without the participation of a Melkite translation.

West Syrians tried to represent the images and notions of the Greek hymns as accurately as possible and for the most part avoided adding anything, as long as there was no disagreement with their doctrinal position.

An example of such an approach is the *theotokion* of the sixth/second tone. Its original Greek text is found in the oldest Greek manuscripts of the *Octoechos*, Sinait. gr. 1593 (fol. 66r) as well as in the eleventh-century Sinait. gr. 778 (fol. 38r). The text below is quoted from the edition of the *Parakletike* where it is placed within the Saturday Vespers service on 'κύριε, ἐκέκραξα' (such a position as well as its contents suggest the designation of the *theotokion* as a *dogmatikon*).

Τίς μὴ μακαρίσει σε,	Who will not proclaim you blessed,
Παναγία Παρθένε;	all-holy Virgin?
Τίς μὴ ἀνυμνήσει σου,	Who will not glorify you,
τὸν ἀλόχευτον τόκον;	birth-giver without labour?
ὁ γὰρ ἀχρόνως	For timelessly
ἐκ Πατρὸς ἐκλάμψας	the only-begotten son
Ὑιὸς μονογενής,	has shone from the father,
ὁ αὐτὸς ἐκ σοῦ τῆς Ἁγνῆς	and from you, the pure one, the same
προῆλθεν ἀφράστως σαρκωθεὶς,	was incarnate and born inexplicably.
φύσει Θεὸς ὑπάρχων,	Being God by nature,
καὶ φύσει γενόμενος	He for us became man by nature,
ἄνθρωπος δι' ἡμᾶς·	
οὐκ εἰς δυάδα προσώπων	not being divided into two persons,
τεμνόμενος,	
ἀλλ' ἐν δυάδι φύσεων	but in two natures
ἀσυγχύτως γνωριζόμενος·	without confusion is acknowledged.
Αὐτὸν ἐκέτευε,	Supplicate to him,
Σεμνὴ Παμμακάριστε,	O humble and all-blessed one,
ἐλεηθῆναι τὰς ψυχὰς ἡμῶν.[29]	that our souls may be granted mercy.

The Syriac translation is found in the eleventh- to thirteenth-century manuscripts of the *Octoechos*, including Brit. Lib. Add. 17133, Brit. Lib. Add. 14710, Sinait. syr. 25, Sinait. syr. 208 and Sinait. syr. 210, as well as the manuscript Syr. new series 11. It is curious that in the St Petersburg manuscript this *theotokion* is placed within the second tone, while in the other Syriac Melkite manuscripts as well as in the Greek tradition it is placed in the sixth, or the second plagal tone:

ܡܢ ܠܐ ܡܟܪܙ ܠܟ ܛܘܒܬܢܝܬܐ	Who will not proclaim you blessed,
ܒܬܘܠܬܐ ܕܟܝܬܐ ܘܩܕܝܫܐ.	pure and holy Virgin?

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29 *Parakletike etoi Oktoechos e Megale*, 451.

ܡܢ ܠܐ ܢܘܪܒ ܘܢܣܓܘܕ.	Who will not magnify and worship
ܠܗܘ ܕܕܠܐ ܙܘܘܓܐ ܐܬܝܠܕ ܡܢܟܝ.	the one who without intercourse was born from you,
ܗܘ ܕܡܢ ܐܒܐ ܕܠܐ ܫܘܪܝ	who has shone from the Everlasting Father
ܘܕܢܚ ܘܐܬܐ ܠܢ ܒܪܐ ܝܚܝܕܝܐ.	and came to us, the Only-begotten Son,
ܗܘ ܕܡܢ ܡܪܒܥܟܝ ܕܟܝܐ	who from your pure womb
ܩܘܡ ܘܐܬܓܫܡ ܕܠܐ ܡܬܡܠܠܐ.	was incarnate and born inexplicably?
ܟܕ ܐܠܗܐ ܗܘ ܒܟܝܢܗ.	Being God by his nature,
ܘܒܪܢܫܐ ܗܘܐ ܫܪܝܪܐܝܬ.	he truly became man
ܡܛܠ ܚܘܒܢ.	for the sake of love towards us;
ܠܐ ܟܕ ܡܬܦܠܓ ܠܬܪܝܢ ܩܢܘܡܝܢ.	not being divided into two persons,
ܐܠܐ ܒܬܪܝܢ ܟܝܢܝܢ	but in two natures
ܕܠܐ ܒܘܠܒܠܐ ܡܣܓܕ ܘܡܫܒܚ.	without confusion worshiped and glorified.
ܘܡܛܠ ܗܢܐ ܨܠܝ ܘܐܬܟܫܦ.	And therefore pray and supplicate,
ܐܘ ܡܟܝܟܬܐ ܘܡܠܝܬ ܛܝܒܘܬܐ.	O humble one and full of grace,
ܚܠܦ ܦܘܪܩܢܐ ܕܢܦܫܬܢ ܀	for the salvation of our souls.[30]

The same Syriac translation, with a few variant readings, can be found in the West Syrian collections of hymns, including Vat. sir. 94, Brit. Lib. Add. 17140 and Paris Syr. 337. Unlike the Melkite versions, this hymn belongs to the second mode, just as it is in the *theotokia* collection from St Petersburg.

ܡܢ ܠܐ ܢܛܘܒ ܠܟܝ ܒܬܘܠܬܐ	Who will not proclaim you blessed,
ܕܟܝܬܐ ܘܩܕܝܫܬܐ ܡܪܝܡ.	pure and holy Virgin?
ܡܢ ܠܐ ܢܣܓܘܕ ܘܢܪܒ.	Who will not venerate and worship
ܠܒܪܐ ܕܐܬܝܠܕ ܡܢܟܝ.	the son who was born from you,
ܗܘ ܕܡܢ ܐܒܐ ܕܠܐ ܡܬܡܟ.	who from the inexhaustible Father
ܘܕܢܚ ܘܡܬܐ ܒܪܐ ܝܚܝܕܝܐ.	has shone and has come, the Only-begotten Son,
ܗܘ ܕܟܕ ܗܘ ܡܢ ܡܪܒܥܟܝ ܕܟܝܐ.	who from your pure womb
ܐܬܓܫܡ ܕܠܐ ܫܘܚܠܦܐ.	embodied without an alteration?
ܟܕ ܐܠܗܐ ܗܘ ܒܟܝܢܗ.	Being God by his nature,
ܘܒܪܢܫܐ ܗܘܐ ܫܪܝܪܐܝܬ.	he truly became man
ܡܛܠ ܚܘܒܢ.	for the sake of love towards us.
ܠܐ ܟܕ ܡܬܦܠܓ. ܠܬܪܝܢ ܟܝܢܝܢ ܗܘܐ.	Not being divided into two natures,
ܐܠܐ ܒܚܕ ܟܝܢ ܡܣܓܕܐ ܕܠܐ ܒܘܠܒܠܐ.	but in one nature without confusion
ܕܡܣܓܕ ܘܡܫܒܚ.	worshiped and glorified.
ܨܠܝ ܐܬܟܫܦ ܠܗ.	Pray and supplicate to him,
ܐܘ ܡܫܒܚܬܐ ܡܠܝܬ ܟܠ ܫܘܦܪܝܢ.	O glorified one and full of all our beauties,
ܕܢܗܘܐ ܦܘܪܩܢܐ ܕܢܦܫܬܢ ܀	for the salvation of our souls.[31]

The West Syrian translation is quite close to the Melkite one and attests the borrowing of the existing Syriac text into a non-Chalcedonian milieu, where considerable correction was made in terms of vocabulary and in the interpretation of dogmatic formulas. Lexical variant readings apply to the use of verbs, nouns and adverbs, as in the cases of 'magnify' (ܢܘܪܒ, M), 'venerate' (ܢܣܓܘܕ, W-S), 'incarnated' (ܐܬܓܫܡ, M), 'embodied' (ܐܬܓܫܡ, W-S), 'inexplicably' (ܕܠܐ ܡܬܡܠܠܐ, M), 'without an alteration' (ܕܠܐ ܫܘܚܠܦܐ, W-S), 'full of grace' (ܡܠܝܬ ܛܝܒܘܬܐ, M), and 'full of all our beauties' (ܡܠܝܬ ܟܠ ܫܘܦܪܝܢ, W-S).

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[30]   Syr. new series 11, fol. 3v. The translation is taken from Smelova, 'Biblical allusions and citations in the Syriac *theotokia*', 383–4.

[31]   Vat. sir. 94, fols 145v–146r.

However, the most important difference between the two translations is expressed in the doctrine of the Incarnation. Thus instead of the Greek and Melkite sentence, 'Not being divided into two persons, but in two natures in their unity without confusion [he is] worshiped and glorified', we read in the text which has been altered in the West Syrian milieu: 'Not being divided into two natures, but in one nature without confusion [he is] worshiped and glorified.' This is a clear illustration of West Syrian borrowing of the Melkite Syriac translation of the Greek hymnography, and adapting it to their theological doctrine.

Finally, I would like to give an example of a different approach of West Syrian communities to the text produced in the Chalcedonian milieu. Below there is another *dogmatikon* of the seventh tone which was found in the Greek manuscripts of the *Octoechos*, including Sinait. gr. 1593, fols 82r–82v and Sinait. gr. 778, fol. 44r. I quote the Greek text from the *Parakletike* edition where it is placed, just as the previous one, within Saturday Great Vespers service on 'Κύριε, ἐκέκραξα'.

Μήτηρ μὲν ἐγνώσθης	You were known as mother
ὑπὲρ φύσιν, Θεοτόκε,	above nature, O God-bearer,
ἔμεινας δὲ παρθένος·	but you remained a Virgin
ὑπὲρ λόγον καὶ ἔγνοιαν·	beyond word and thought.
καὶ τὸ θαῦμα τοῦ τόκου σου	And the miracle of your birth-giving
ἑρμενεῦσαι γλῶσσα οὐ δύναται	cannot be explained by the tongue.
παραδόξου γὰρ οὔσης τῆς	Miraculous is your
συλλήψεως, Ἀγνή,	conception, O pure one,
ἀκατάληπτός ἐστιν ὁ τρόπος	and incomprehensible is the manner
τῆς κυήσεως·	of your pregnancy.
ὅπου γὰρ βούλεται Θεός,	For as God wills,
νικᾶται φύσεως τάξις.	he overrides nature's order,
Διό σε πάντες Μητέρα τοῦ Θεοῦ	therefore, acknowledging you as
γινώσκοντες,	Mother of God,
δεόμεθά σου ἐκτενῶς·	we all pray to you incessantly:
Πρέσβευε τοῦ σωθῆναι	Intercede for the salvation
τὰς ψυχὰς ἡμῶν.[32]	of our souls.

The Syriac Melkite translation was revealed in all of the *Octoechos* manuscripts that I have studied, including Brit. Lib. Add. 17133, Brit. Lib. Add. 14710, Brit. Lib. Add. 17233, Sinait. syr. 208, Sinait. syr. 210, Sinait. syr. 25, and Sinait. syr. 123:

	You are called mother
	above nature, O God-bearer,
	you have remained and stayed a Virgin
	beyond word and thought.
	And the miracle of your glorious birth
	can not be explained by the power of tongue.
	Therefore is full of miracle
	the way of your conception, O pure one,
	and incomprehensible

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[32]   *Parakletike etoi Oktoechos e Megale*, 535.

Syriac	Translation
ܕܡܘܠܕܟ ܟܠܗ ܕܘܡܪܐ	is the way of your wonderful birth.
ܐܝܟ ܓܝܪ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܨܒܐ	For as God willed,
ܟܝܢܐ ܠܗ ܠܛܟܣܐ ܕܟܝܢܟ.	the order of nature submitted to him,
ܘܡܛܠܗܕ ܠܟܠ ܚܢ	and because of that we all
ܐܡܟ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܡܫܪܪܝܢܢ.	confirm you Mother of God
ܘܟܠܝܢ ܡܢܟ ܐܡܝܢܐܝܬ.	and pray to you incessantly:
ܒܥܝ ܘܐܦܝܣܝ	Pray and beseech
ܕܢܬܦܨܐ ܢܦܫܬܐ ܕܟܠܢ܀	for the salvation of souls of all of us.[33]

A West Syrian translation is found in the eleventh-century manuscripts Vat. sir. 94, Brit. Lib. Add. 17140 and Brit. Lib. Add. 14714:

Syriac	Translation
ܐܡܐ ܡܢ ܐܬܩܪܝܬܝ.	You are called mother
ܠܥܠ ܡܢ ܟܝܢܐ ܝܠܕܬ ܐܠܗܐ.	above nature, O God-bearer,
ܩܘܝܬܝ ܕܝܢ ܘܟܬܪܬܝ ܒܬܘܠܬܐ.	you have remained and stayed a Virgin
ܠܥܠ ܡܢ ܡܠܬܐ ܐܦ ܚܘܫܒܬܗܐ.	beyond word and thought.
ܘܠܝܬ ܠܗ ܚܝܠܐ ܠܠܫܢܐ ܕܢܦܫܩ.	The tongue does not have the power to explain [this],
ܡܛܠ ܓܝܪ ܕܡܠܐ ܬܕܡܘܪܬܐ.	because full of miracle
ܗܘ ܐܘܪܚܐ ܕܒܛܢܟ ܐܘ ܚܒܝܒܬܐ.	is the way of your conception, O meek one,
ܘܠܐ ܡܬܡܠܠܢܐ ܗܘ	and ineffable
ܐܦ ܗܘ ܕܡܘܠܕܟ ܟܠܗ ܕܘܡܪܐ.	is also your wonderful birth.
ܐܝܟ ܓܝܪ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܨܒܐ	For as God willed,
ܟܝܢܐ ܠܗ ܠܛܟܣܐ ܕܟܝܢܟ.	the order of nature submitted to him,
ܘܡܛܠܗܕ ܠܟܠ ܐܡܟ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܡܫܪܪܝܢܢ.	and because of that we confirm you Mother of God
ܒܥܝ ܐܦܝܣܝ ܐܡܪܝܢ ܚܢ.	and we all pray [to you]: Beseech
ܕܢܬܦܨܐ ܢܦܫܬܐ ܕܟܠܢ܀	for the salvation of souls of all of us.[34]

All three versions of the hymn are fairly close to each other. Syriac syntax here follows in most cases that of the Greek hymn. It is quite significant that the particles ܓܝܪ and ܡܢ are in full accordance with their prototypes γάρ and μέν in the Greek text (using particles in Syriac translations of Greek texts became the norm from approximately the sixth century onward).[35] The West Syrian version of the hymn proves to be nothing more than the full borrowed text of the Melkite translation, with minimum alteration. There are only a few variant readings between the two Syriac texts, and these are for the most part unimportant: they include ܚܘܫܒܐ (M), ܕܟܝܐ ('pure', W-S), ܠܐ ܡܬܡܠܠܢܟ ('ineffable', M), ܠܐ ܡܬܕܪܟܢܐ ('incomprehensible', W-S), and others. The only significant variant is the total omission of the phrase, ܘܠܡܕܡܘܪܬܐ ܕܡܘܠܕܟ ܡܫܒܚܐ ('the miracle of your glorious birth'), in all of the studied West Syrian manuscripts containing this hymn. This probably results from a scribal error that occurred in one of the earlier copies which was the source for all later manuscripts.

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[33]   Syr. new series 11, fols 11v–12v. The translation is taken from Smelova, 'Biblical allusions and citations in the Syriac *theotokia*', 389.

[34]   Vat. sir. 94, fol. 165r.

[35]   S.P. Brock, 'A history of Syriac translation technique', OCA 221 (1983), 7; repr. Brock, *Studies in Syriac Christianity*.

Thus the three Syriac hymns to the Mother of God may serve as illustrations for three different types of penetration of Byzantine hymnography into Syriac-speaking Christian communities of the Middle East. First, Syriac Christians made their own translations of Byzantine hymnography; second, they partially borrowed from existing Syriac (Melkite) translations and edited them according to the dogmatic formulas accepted by the denomination; and finally, they borrowed existing translations with minimum alteration.

Sebastian Brock, in his article on Syriac translation techniques, deliberately leaves out the translation of Greek liturgical books carried out by the Melkites from the ninth century onward.[36] Indeed, this section of the Syriac literature stands apart from the original compositions by Syriac authors. One can note that the language of these translations differs from the Syriac language proper, in particular from the classical language of the fourth through to the seventh centuries. Its phraseology is in many respects adapted to the structure of the Greek language. This is reflected in the somewhat limited vocabulary, frequent use of transcription of Greek nouns and particles, peculiar punctuation, correspondence of Syriac phrases to Greek colons and other characteristics.

At the same time, the Syriac translations of the Greek *theotokia* are poetic texts which are filled not only with theological terms and doctrinal statements, but also with artistic images. These latter, being expressed by the means of a Semitic language, develop in their own way the typology of the Mother of God which is so characteristic of Byzantine hymnography.

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[36]   Brock, 'A history of Syriac translation technique', 3.