Ephraem the Syrian, who died on 9 June 373 in Edessa, was a writer of prodigious output if it is true, as the church historian Sozomen tells us, that he wrote three million verses. Certainly, the Catalogues of Syriac Manuscripts in the British Library list ninety or so manuscripts which contain works by or attributed to Ephraem. These include twenty-five dated manuscripts, for Syriac scribes were in the habit of adding a colophon giving their name, the date and place of writing. They may have inherited this habit from cuneiform scribes, for similar dated colophons have been found on cuneiform tablets of two millennia earlier. The manuscripts are fairly evenly distributed by century (counting manuscripts dated in the Catalogues to the ‘fifth/sixth century’ as belonging to the earlier date) from the fifth to the thirteenth centuries: six in the fifth, fourteen in the sixth, four in the seventh, eleven in the eighth, nineteen in the ninth, seven in the tenth, twelve in the eleventh, eight in the twelfth, and eleven in the thirteenth century. Besides prose commentaries on Daniel and the Old Testament, there are numerous hymns and metrical sermons, many of them in Choral Service Books, or in large collections of hymns by several authors: Add. MS. 17232 of A.D. 1210 contains the ‘Paradise’ or ‘Treasury’ of 351 hymns by Severus and others (including hymns and prayers of Ephraem), and other manuscripts contain 310 or 337 or even 465 hymns of this collection. Three manuscripts contain the famous ‘Nisibis Hymns’ written to encourage the faithful to endure the tribulations of three long sieges by the Sassanid king, ended only by a humiliating surrender after the Emperor Julian was killed in 363. The five Hymns against Julian rejoice at the death of the Apostate. There are collections of demonstrations from the Holy Fathers against various heresies: Add. MS. 12154 of the eighth/ninth century is such a collection in defence of Monophysite beliefs against the Nestorians. Since Ephraem lived before the divisions in the Church, his testimony was valued by all the later branches of the Church.

Ephraem’s works were translated into several languages. Much was translated into Greek: Sozomen in the fifth century and Photius in the ninth century give lists which we can identify in part. The ‘Commentary on the Diatessaron’, of which about half survives in a Syriac manuscript in the Chester Beatty Library, has been discovered complete in two manuscripts in Armenian; and the almost complete text in Armenian of Ephraem’s sixteen Hymns to Nicomedia, which suffered a catastrophic earthquake.
shortly after dawn on 24 August 358, was published in 1975 by Charles Renoux. There are fragments of the Syriac text in Add. MSS. 12164, 12168 and 17185. The British Library's Armenian manuscripts include the life of Ephraem in volumes of Lives of Saints, his prayers, and homilies on St Stephen, the Last Judgment, penitence, confession, the Psalms, and a fragment of a homily on Fasts. His life occurs in a Georgian manuscript (Add. MS. 11281, of the eleventh century).

Among the Arabic manuscripts is an Arabic translation of Ephraem's Commentary on Genesis (Or. MS. 1330, dated 1386), and five manuscripts of what is known as 'the Arabic Ephraem Collection'. Thirty-five manuscripts of this collection are known, six in the Bibliotheque Nationale, dating from the eleventh century to the fifteenth. The collection consists of works translated from the Greek, and includes texts that have not survived in Syriac and may be original compositions in Greek based on Ephraemian material. It is a mark of Ephraem's enormous reputation that such an extensive corpus of works in Greek was gathered under his name. Where no Syriac original has survived, the question of authenticity arises. Syriac literature has not survived the passage of the centuries without losses, but some works have come down to us translated into another language, for example the Nicomedia hymns in Armenian. Why not also in Greek? Some passages in the Greek corpus do in fact correspond to Syriac originals. Even works which do not show such correspondence breathe the air of Syriac poetry, but the question whether the Syriac original is the work of Ephraem or another must be left to others to decide. The Greek works may not be so much translations as adaptations in the spirit of Ephraem using his favourite images. A widely held judgment is that the corpus is 'sporadically authentic'. In Madame Hemmerdinger-Iliadou's view this can be equally interpreted as 'sporadically inauthentic'. I propose to consider a more limited question: in the metrical sermon 'On Repentance', which Greek manuscript or group of manuscripts is the source of translations into other languages?

'On Repentance' is No. 10 in the Arabic Ephraem Collection, and it was also translated into Armenian, Georgian, Slavonic and Latin. The Slavonic translation, discussed by Mme Hemmerdinger-Iliadou, has been printed by G. Bojkovsky and R. Aitzetmüller. The Latin translation is more immediately accessible and I have been able to collate eighty-five Latin manuscripts and twenty-five Greek manuscripts of this text. To make the discussion more generally comprehensible I have selected twenty-eight variants which show up in English and should therefore show up in other languages too. The variants are keyed to the English translation in the British Library Journal, Vol. XIII (1987), pp. 16–23, which represents a composite or improved text.

I shall use Latin to mean the united reading of all the Latin manuscripts, and capital letters to indicate the Greek witnesses as follows:

Ba Berlin West, Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz, MS. gr. fol. 18, ff. 39–44v (13th–14th cent.)
E Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, MS. theol. gr. 10, ff. 212–15v (10th cent.; see fig. 1)
Fig. 1. Witness E: The beginning of Ephraem, 'On Repentance', 10th cent. Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, MS. theol. gr. 10, f. 212. By courtesy of the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek
Fig. 2. Witness Q: The beginning of Ephraem, 'On Repentance', 13th cent. Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS. Regin. gr. 8, f. 131v. By courtesy of the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana
Of these witnesses A is not available for variants 16–28, X is not available for variants 1–8, 27–28.

From the examples which follow and from other evidence, it is clear that the Greek
tradition is divided into a short recension (e.g. the text printed by Assemani, Paris gr. 598, and Vatican gr. 439) and a long recension. The long recension, which typically includes the six Greek lines of variant 3, is divided into three branches: (1) F Ph Q TY; (2) E G; (3) Pb Pj Ba U.

1. line 3: teaching us A H N O Pa Pb Pc Pd Pe Pf Pg Ph Pj Q S T V W and Latin] himself teaching us E F G U Y

2. line 12: incurable E F G Pb Pg Ph Pj T Q U Y and Latin] omit. A Ba H N O Pa Pc Pd Pe Pf Pi S V W or

3. lines 13-19: and refuse to show your wounds to the doctor so that he may cure them? How long will you so evilly neglect your wound, so that the putrefaction of the wound may become more incurable? Why beloved do you hate yourself? Do you not wish to be freed from your secret wounds? Ba E F G Pb Pg Ph Pj Q T U Y and Latin] omit. A H N O Pa Pc Pd Pe Pf Pi S V W

4. line 19: freed Latin] reconciled Ba F Pb Pg Ph Pj Q T U Y; cured E G

5. line 28; frankly and fearlessly] fearlessly A G H N O Pc Pd Pe Pf Pg Pi S W; fearlessly and without hesitation Ba Pb Pj T U V and Latin; fearlessly without hesitation E F Ph Q Y

6. line 42: to be saved by his own tears. For nothing is too difficult to be cured by tears] to be cured by his own tears and to be saved S o r: to be cured by his own tears for nothing is too difficult to be cured by tears A Ba E F G N Pb Pc Pd Pe Pf Ph Pj Q T V W Y: to cure each one, washing him with the medicine of tears, for nothing is too difficult to be cured by the medicine of repentance Latin (we assume that the earliest Latin version was like almost all the Greek manuscripts); U vac.

7. line 53: see your sloth A Ba H N O Pb Pc Pd Pe Pf Pi Pj S W] see you slothful and always contemptuous E F G Ph Q T U V Y; see you slothful and contemptuous Latin

8. line 56: have despised it A Ba H N O Pb Pc Pd Pe Pf Pg Ph Pj Q S T U V W Y and Latin] despising it F; despising it, what do you have left? E G

9. line 97: to be healed A H N O Pc Pd Pe Pf Pi S W X] to worship him and be cured E F G Ph Q T V Y; worship and beseech him U Latin; to beseech him Ba Pb; omit. Pj

10. line 104: treasures A N O Pc Pd Pf Pi S V] mercies Ba E F G Pb Ph Pj Q T U X Y and Latin; tears H W; vac. Pe Pg


12. line 141: there is no such thing, here comfort, there persecution Latin but a group of ten Latin manuscripts have the correct ‘ultio’ (vengeance) instead of ‘no such thing’] there vengeance, here comfort, there persecution Ba E F G Pb Ph Pj Q T U Y (correct); there persecution H N O Pc Pd Pf Pi S V W X o r; omit. A; vac. Pe Pg

13. lines 151-2: the unsleeping worm F Q U X Y r] the torture of the worms Latin; punishment H O Pc Pd Pe Pf Pi S W o; the worm Ba E G Pb Ph Pj T V; vac. Pg

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14. line 167: weep there for ever A H N O Pb Pe Pg S V W X] weep there for ever that you may not be humiliated F G Q T Y; weep there for ever; humiliate yourself here that you may not be humiliated (E) U Latin

15. line 172: choose A Ba H N O Pb Pc Pd Pe Pf Pg Pi Pj S T V W X] see E G F Ph Q U X Y and Latin

16. lines 190–1: and sorrow of heart H N O Pc Pd Pe Pf Ph Pi S U V W X] and continual sorrow of heart I say this frequently Ba E F Pb Pg Pj Q U T Y and Latin; and seized in the heart by sorrow, I say this continually G

17. line 249: bridegroom E F G Pb Pg Ph Pj Q T U (X) Y r and Latin] bridal chamber H O Pc Pd Pe Pf Pi S V o

18. lines 252–3: you have no lamp] omit. G

19. lines 253–4: How can you enter? Will you enter contumely but if you enter contumeliously Ba Pb Pg Pj U and Latin


23. line 271: Are you not afraid, man G H N O Pe S V W X] Are you not afraid, man, because He has come? Do you not blush? E F Q T U Y; Are you not afraid, man, because He has come? Do you not tremble? Latin (for this purpose I equate the Latin word translated ‘tremble’ with the Greek word translated ‘blush’: it probably means ‘Are you not ashamed?’)

24. line 278: for that hour o r] as long as you have time, prepare yourself for that hour Ba E F G Pb Pg Ph Pj Q T U V (X) Y; N Pf W add prepare yourself for that hour; in that hour (day O) prepare yourself for that hour O (Pd) Pe Pi; through repentance prepare yourself H

25. line 282: to give H N Pf W X] to repay Latin; to give all Ba E F G O Pb Pc Pd Pe Pg Ph Pj Q S T U V Y

26. lines 291–2: add for whom you have endured before for whom you have suffered H N Pe Pc S V W or after for whom you have followed your discipline E F G Pb Ph Pj Q T U Y; omit. O X o r Latin

27. line 300: saints] angels E; just ones G


A typical variant seems to be No. 4, where Latin agrees with F Q T U Y against E G in the first place and A H N O Pe S V W X o r in the second place. This impression is confirmed by a count of agreements. If we take the variants nearest to the Latin, we obtain a table of agreements of the Latin with the Greek witnesses (Table I). This table shows clearly a bipartite division in the Greek tradition. The left hand column, whose agreements with the Latin range between 22 and 15, represents a longer recension of the
The right-hand column, whose agreements with the Latin range between 12 and 3, represents a shorter recension of the text which omits a series of passages present in the longer recension. Of the two witnesses in the middle column, Pg is a full member of the longer recension which has lost a large chunk of its text, and X, although defective at the beginning, is a genuine intermediate witness with some readings from each recension. The Latin translation was made many centuries earlier than any of the surviving manuscripts from a member of the longer recension: it agrees in the main with the group F Ph Q T Y, but it shares some significant readings with U (e.g. Nos. 9 and 14) and with Pb Pj Ba U (e.g. Nos. 5 and 20). Pj may be a direct copy of Pb, for it agrees in content up to a certain point, and agrees very closely with it in the text of ‘Repentance’. E (see fig. 1) and in part G (G has a number of eccentric readings) form a distinct group of the longer recension, e.g. Nos. 4, 8, and probably 27, where E and G have different replacements for the perfectly satisfactory word in the rest of the manuscripts. This group, however, is much less closely related to the Latin translation. Since the translation into Old Slavonic has been printed with a German translation, I have been able, with the help of Pamela Willetts, to collate it against the Greek text. It is a literal translation and keeps very close to the word order of the Greek. Where there are variants in the Old Slavonic manuscripts, I have assumed that the variant which agrees with the Greek is the original one, and that the others can be ignored. If we compare the Slavonic with the Greek in the twenty-eight variants in my list we see at once that the Slavonic translation belongs to the long recension: it agrees with the majority of Greek manuscripts in variants 8, 11, 18, 22, 25, 27; with the long recension in variants 2, 3, 5, 10, 13, 16, 17, 20, 24, 26, 28; with the short recension alone in variant 12; with the short recension together with Pb Pj Ba U in variants 7, 14, 15, 21; with Pb Pj Ba U in variants 5, 19, 23, 26; it is uncertain in variants 4 and 6 and omits variant 9.

I noted that the Old Slavonic translation agreed with Pb Pj Ba U in eight variants, and decided to make a fuller collation. I found that it agreed with this group in sixty variants, to the exclusion of any other group. For example, at line 22 of the English translation, ‘nor burning nor bitter drugs’, the Slavonic has ‘nor painful (бользного) burning or
cruel drug'. To be more precise, one part of the Slavonic tradition has this reading: the other part has an abbreviated version. The group Pb Pj Ba has ‘nor again does he give pain with a burning or cruel drug’ οὐτε πάλιν ἀλγύνει καυσικὸ ἢ ἀὐστηρῷ φαρμάκῳ, which agrees with the longer Slavonic reading. The printed Greek text lacks ἀλγύνει, and its last four words are in a different order, φαρμάκῳ ἀὐστηρῷ καὶ καυσικῷ.

The lacuna marked at line 95 of the Slavonic text (p. 334) also occurs in Pb Pj Ba. It corresponds to the words at lines 181–2 of the English translation: ‘a little, begging the Lord to forgive your soul’s debts.’ Another omission shared by the Old Slavonic and Pb Pj is at lines 275–6 of the English translation: ‘the heavenly trumpet has received the divine nod? And what will you do there?’ (i.e. God has given the signal to sound the trumpet to summon all creation to judgment). At line 274 of the English translation, instead of ‘(all stands) ready’, ἔτομα, the Slavonic (line 136) shares with Pb Pj Ba U the reading ‘naked’, γυμνά in Greek, hara in Slavonic. Again, at line 86 of the English translation ‘He says rest and promises life’, the Slavonic (line 43) and Pb Pj Ba have ‘honour’ instead of ‘life’.

One more example will clinch the question. At line 272 of the English translation, ‘Do you not fear this? Are you not afraid, man?’, the printed Greek text has ἀρα οὐ φοβή ταῦτα; οὐ τρέμεις οὐ ἀνθρώπε. The manuscripts of the long recension show numerous variations but can be divided in general into, on the one hand, F Q Ph Y and E G, and on the other hand Pb Pj Ba U Pg. Pb Pj have οὐ φοβή ταῦτα ἀρα, οὐ τρέμωσε, οὐκ ἑρμηνεῖς λοιπόν καὶ τρέμεις which corresponds to the Slavonic: ‘Are you not therefore afraid, o man, do you not grow numb furthermore and tremble?’ The Greek can be translated ‘So do you not fear this, man, do you not feel shame therefore and tremble?’

After I had demonstrated that the Slavonic translation of ‘On Repentance’ depended on a manuscript very like Pb (Paris gr. 593), I learned that Irina Ågren had connected the Slavonic translation of the whole Ephraemic corpus with a Grottaferrata manuscript, and in particular with Vat. MS. gr. 440. For ‘On Repentance’ we can use Pb to throw light on the Slavonic text. For example, the editors of the Slavonic text were understandably puzzled by the variant ‘naked’ for ‘ready’. The explanation must be sought in the Greek exemplar. Very likely the variant spelling ἔτομα gave rise to a different word γυμνά. Further, the lacuna at the same line 136 of the Slavonic translation reflects a lacuna in the Greek exemplar. At line 149 of the Slavonic translation, corresponding to αὐτὸς ο ποθοῦμενος ‘the longed-for one himself’, it seems that three manuscripts read the equivalent of αὐτός ο ποθοῦμενος κύριος with Pb, and another αὐτός ο κύριος. The fifth reads something slightly different, but nevertheless adds κύριος. The addition of ‘the Lord’ goes back to the Greek exemplar.

In a few cases the Slavonic manuscripts less favoured by their editors have the same reading as Pb, and therefore are presumably right. At line 155 of the Slavonic translation we find a division between ἐπιλέγεται ἐπιλεγομένων ‘the chosen ones of God’ and ‘those who are worthy of God’. The printed Greek text has something quite different and better, ‘those who have striven here’. ‘Those who are worthy of God’, itself an inferior reading in Greek, is the reading of the less favoured
The beginning of Ephraem, ‘On Repentance’, in the Arabic translation, 1344. BL, Arundel Or. MS. 1, f. 97v
Slavonic manuscripts and Pb, and the relationship with the Greek proves that it is ‘the chosen ones of God’ which is the secondary reading in the Slavonic. Similarly, at line 112 συ δημος μεσελατα θα, ‘they rejoice in God’, corresponds exactly to the printed Greek text. In this case Pb agrees with the printed Greek text, which means that the less favoured Slavonic manuscripts with this reading are right, and the editors’ favoured manuscript, which reads ‘in godly joy’ δημοσελέια, must have the secondary reading.

The Slavonic translation has a number of variants from the printed Greek text which are not accounted for. They do not agree with any of the Greek manuscripts I have yet seen. They may be the results of accidents in the transmission in the Slavonic tradition, or the translator’s whim, but in view of the extraordinarily close correspondence with the Greek manuscripts, it would be dangerous to rule out the possibility that some or all are genuine witnesses to an unknown Greek manuscript. I noted six examples in the first quarter of the text (the first fifty lines of the Slavonic translation):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Variants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>χς (Christ) or самъ χς (Christ himself)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>приступит к нему (to approach him)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31–2</td>
<td>показания (of repentance)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>молю тκ (I beseech you)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>lacuna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>lacuna</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A preliminary examination of the Arabic version reveals that it lacks the six lines of variant 3, and it reads ‘immortal’ not ‘without sin’ at variant 28. That is enough to place it in the shorter recension, and to prove that it is completely unrelated to the Slavonic version. The text in Arundel Or. MS. 1 (fig. 3) is incomplete, but it appears in several other manuscripts, including Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, MS. ar. 135. The Georgian translation clearly belongs to the shorter recension too, for it lacks ‘incurable’ at variant 2, it lacks the six lines of variant 3, and it reads ‘immortal’, not ‘without sin’ at variant 28. For this information I am indebted to Professor Khintibidze, Pro-rector of Tbilisi University, who was so obliging as to provide photocopies of MS. A-154, ff. 220v–3v, of the K. Kekelidze Institute of the Academy of Sciences of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic, and to Professor J. N. Birdsall, who very kindly examined the photocopies.

Up to this point it has not been necessary or appropriate to consider which readings are the correct ones. That involves a subjective judgment which, however, cannot be put off for ever, for we do want to know what the author wrote. The correct readings must fit the sense and the metre in Greek, and in some cases we shall have to decide that a change in one direction is more likely than a change in the opposite direction. For example, in No. 19, παραχρημα ‘at once’ is such an obvious word in the context that it

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is more likely to have been changed from an original παρρησία, ‘publicly’, than that ‘at once’ was changed to ‘publicly’. The text has a great deal of rhetorical repetition to reinforce the urgency of repentance and the imminence of the Last Judgment so that, other things being equal, the longer text is more likely to be the original text and the shorter text is more likely to have lost something. We shall assume also that ‘On Repentance’ was composed in Greek in stanzas of four seven-syllable lines. The text as printed fits this pattern so badly that we would welcome a substantial number of additional lines in the hope of fitting the ideal pattern.

Consequently, I propose these improvements in the text, keyed to page, division and line of Assemani:8

1. 148A6 ήμᾶς] αὐτὸς ήμᾶς mending the metre by adding ‘himself’.
2. 148B6 πραίμασα] πραίμασα ἀνίσα mending the metre by adding ‘incurable’.
3. 148B7 πραίματων] Add the six lines beginning μὴ βουλόμενος δεῖξαι ‘and refuse to show your wound’ (omitted by haplography, ‘secret wounds’ to ‘secret wounds’).
4. 148B7 ἰαθήναι ‘be cured’ is metrical.
5. 148C5 ἀφόβως] ἀφόβως ἀδιστάκτως ‘fearlessly without hesitation’, mending the metre.
13. 150E2 κόλασις ‘punishment’] Read τὸν σκώληκα ‘the worm’. ‘Punishment’ occurred two lines above; ‘the unsleeping worm’ is too long for the metre.
24. 152F3 πρὸς τὴν ἁραν ἐκείνην ‘for that hour’] Read ἐως ὁδικῶν ἐχεῖς εὑρέτισον σεαυτὸν ἐἰς τὴν ἁραν ἐκείνην ‘as long as you have time prepare yourself for that hour’.
25. 152F7 ήμῖν ‘us’] πᾶσιν ήμῖν ‘us all’ mending the metre.
28. 153E6 ἀθάνατος ‘immortal’] ἀναμάρτητος ‘without sin’ fits the context better.

This small sample of twenty-eight variants illustrates the division of the Greek manuscripts into two recensions, long and short, as well as the subdivisions of the long recension. The sample also produces a number of improvements to the published text. Both the long and the short recension go back to the tenth century at least, and if the long recension produces a number of additions to the text, the short recension, particularly Paris gr. 598, offers a number of corrections which do not show up so well in translation, such as the omission of a hypermetric article, or superior grammatical forms like στήκει for ἵσταται at 151E7. To judge from results so far, a respectable Greek text of ‘On Repentance’ could be constructed using only Vienna theol. gr. 10 and Paris gr. 598, following the Paris manuscript in general and incorporating the additions of the Vienna manuscript. The other manuscripts would be needed to fill the gap in the Paris manuscript and to elucidate the later phases of the tradition, including the translations into other languages.

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