



## AFRAHĀṬ, YA'QŪB

**AFRAHĀṬ, YA'QŪB**, Persian bishop of the mid-4th century A.D., author in Syriac. (The younger form of the name, Farhād, is given in the 13th century by Bar Hebraeus.) Ya'qūb Afrahāṭ was born between A.D. 260 and 275 and died shortly after 345. Famous as “the Persian sage” (*ḥakkīma farsāyā*), he was the first historically distinct Iranian Christian of outstanding importance. An uncertain later tradition (a MS of A.D. 1364) connects him with the monastery of Mār Mattai (Matthew) near Mosul, ancient Nineveh. In elegant, exemplary Syriac (with only sixty-two Greek and sixteen Iranian loanwords, the latter including *gwn'*, *dšn'*, *zyn'*, *ptkr'*, *ptgm'*, *nḥšyr'*) he wrote twenty-three homilies (*mēmre*, so named by Afrahāṭ himself, but also known as *taḥwyātā*, i.e., *demonstrationes*, *exempla*, *paradigmata*), twenty-two of them alphabetical according to the letters of the Syriac alphabet; the separate Homily 23, “On the Cluster” (*tōṭīthā*; cf. Isaiah 65:8), is an outline of the entire history of the Old Testament. Homilies 1-9 were written in A.D. 337, 9-22 in 344, and Homily 23 in 345, during the heavy persecutions under Šāpūr II (A.D. 309-79). The homilies are preserved in three manuscripts of the 5th and 6th centuries in the British Museum. They deal partly (1-9) with fundamental aspects of Christian theology (e.g., 1, “On Faith;” 3, “On Fasting;” 4, “On Prayer;” 6, “On the Sons of the Covenant;” 7, “On Penance;” 8, “On the Resurrection of the Dead”) and partly with questions of importance for defining an attitude toward the Jews (e.g., 11, “On Circumcision;” 12, “On the Paschal Sacrifice;” 13, “On the Sabbath;” 15, “On Making Distinctions among Foods;” 16, “On the Peoples Which Are in the Place of the People;” 17, “On the Messiah, That He Is the Son of God”), but devoid of any outspoken anti-Semitism. Homily 14 is unique, in



so far as it is a letter addressed to Christians assembled in Seleucia-Ctesiphon. The teaching of the homilies, founded upon the canonical Scriptures, both of the Old and the New Testament, is ascetic and, as far as dogmatic detail is concerned, peculiar and in portions rudimentary, since it is totally uninfluenced by the Nicene decisions of A.D. 325 (which were first accepted, in part at least, by the Synod of Mār Eshāq in Seleucia-Ctesiphon, A.D. 410). Selections from Afrahāt's writings were translated into Armenian, Georgian, and Ethiopic.

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