

Robert Phenix

## The Sermons on Joseph of Balai of Qenneshrin

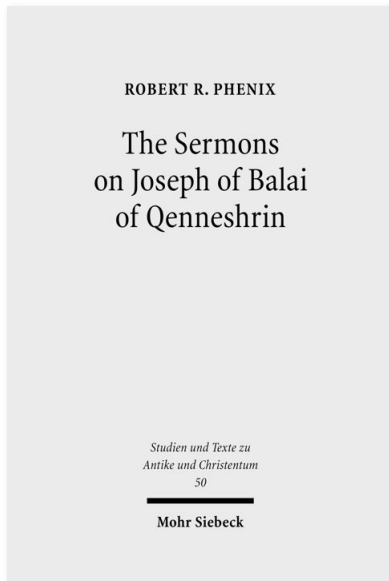
Rhetoric and Interpretation in Fifth Century Syriac Literature

[The Sermons on Joseph of Balai of Qenneshrin]

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Robert Phenix investigates the collection of twelve Syriac poetic sermons recounting the story of Joseph in Genesis 37 and 39-50. The authorship of these poems has been disputed, but this is the first study to attempt to argue from all aspects of the evidence that Balai of Qenneshrin is the author. The study then examines all of the data that can be associated with Balai: the religious environment of Qenneshrin and nearby Aleppo, Balai's connections with the »monk-bishops« of central Syria in the late fourth and early fifth centuries, particularly Acacius of Beroea/Aleppo and Rabbula of Edessa, the status of chorbishops, and the presence of Syriac speakers. Since it is argued in this study that Balai's source for the *Sermons on Joseph* was a Jewish text, this section also carefully examines the evidence for the Jewish community in Qenneshrin. As part of the background of the author, links between characters and the physical setting of the *Sermons on Joseph* and Qenneshrin are investigated. The relationship of the Sermons on Joseph to other Syriac Joseph sources and Joseph material in the Pseudepigrapha and at Qumran is discussed, followed by the question of the origin of the story, which is located in a lost Greek Jewish composition. The last section of the work examines the author's use of Hellenistic rhetoric and literary themes. The many speeches in the *Sermons on Joseph* reveal rhetorical arrangements that are strikingly close to the models of arrangement found in Late Antique handbooks, such as the *Hermogenic Corpus*. Several of these arguments are examined, as are the elaborate prefaces that introduce some of the individual *Sermons on Joseph*. The literary themes and motifs of the *Sermons on Joseph* are explored. It can be shown that some motifs known only in Syriac religious literature are employed in the *Sermons on Joseph* in non-religious literary contexts.

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