

A Syriac fragment on the Sixth Council

by

Sebastian P. Brock

The acephalous text published below consists of a list of reasons why 'we' (by whom, as will be seen, the Maronites are most probably meant) 'find fault with' the Sixth Council of 680-1, and is to be found in BM Add. 7192, f. 66^{a-b}. The text incidentally contains some interesting historical references.

BM Add.7192 in fact combines two manuscripts of very different provenance¹: ff. 1-50 contain part of the polemic work against Damian, by Peter, the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch (†591), and is written in a hand which Wright dated to the seventh century²; ff. 51-78, however, are in a slightly later hand, of the seventh or eighth³ century according to Wright (this seems very plausible), and contain an extremely interesting collection of texts, several of which are almost certainly of Maronite provenance. These texts are as follows:

- (1) ff.51^a-57^b: Fragment of the Julian Romance, published by Hoffmann in *Julianos der Abtrünnige*, pp. 242-59; cp also Nöldeke in *ZDMG* 28 (1874) pp. 660-74.
- (2) ff. 57^b-65^b: Astronomical and meteorological work ascribed to Dionysius the Areopagite, published by Kugener in *Actes du XIVe Congrès International des Orientalistes, Alger 1905* (Paris, 1907), pp. 137-98 (text: pp. 146-64).
- (3) f.66^{a-b}: The text published below; the beginning is lost.
- (4) ff.66^b-71^a: Questions to be posed to the Maximianists (sic), on their belief in two wills (in Christ); in 26 sections.
- (5) ff.71^a-72^b: Questions to be posed to the Maximianoi (sic), on their belief in two operations (in Christ); in 11 sections.⁴

¹ See W. Wright, *Catalogue...*, p. 1206. This important fact was overlooked in the description of the manuscript in the Catalogue of Rosen-Forshall, and as a consequence the true significance of the contents of the second half has been missed.

² Wright, *loc.cit.*, in Rosen-Forshall the whole manuscript is dated to the tenth century. Wright's dating is without any doubt the more probable.

³ The text published here in fact shows that the *terminus post quem* is 681.

⁴ Nos 4 and 5 are described by Baumstark (*Gesch. der syrischen Literatur*, p. 247) as 'Jacobite', and are attributed to Shem'un of Qenneshre (on whom see below), but this is no doubt because, relying on Rosen-Forshall and ignoring Wright's correction, he thought that they belonged to

Commentary

1. Probably an entire folio is missing at the beginning (see above). One may conjecture that this contained complaints about the lack of representation of bishops in the East (as in Michael the Syrian), and perhaps some reference to the controversy over the *Trisagion* (see below).

This procedural complaint is in part confirmed by the Acts⁷, where the various lay officials present are indeed mentioned before the clergy.

2. The conflicting evidence in the sources (especially Theophanes⁸) on the deposition of Constantine IV's brothers has been well discussed by E.W. Brooks in *English Historical Review*, 30 (1915) pp. 42-51, "The brothers of the Emperor Constantine IV", where he points out the importance of the oriental sources, in particular Michael the Syrian⁹ and Mahbub (Agapius)¹⁰. Brooks' reconstruction of the events is nicely confirmed by our document.

"*emperor*": Constantine IV (668-85).

"*the new David*": not known from other sources; compare, however, the acclamation in Mansi XI, 655ff, where Constantinople is styled "Sion".

"*half way through the synod*": The names of Heraclius and Tiberius appear in the *Acta* of all the sessions (the last being on 16 September 681), although perhaps significantly they are not given the imperial title. Since Constantine's name alone appears in the edict of 13 December 681 confirming the Synod, Brooks, who noted only the presence of the names in the *Acta* and not the absence of the titles, suggested that their deposition took place between 16 September and 13 December (the dates for the deposition in Theophanes and Michael the Syrian¹¹ are not precise)¹². In view, however, of the absence of the imperial title, it is possible that their deposition indeed took place 'half way' through the Synod.

"*mutilated*": this is not mentioned in Michael the Syrian or Agapius, but it

⁷ Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum nova..collectio*, XI, 207ff.

⁸ Ed. de Boor, p. 352 and 360 (under AM 6161 [= AD 669/70] and 6173 [= AD 681/2] respectively).

⁹ Ed. Chabot, II, p. 455-6 (trans.) = IV, p. 437 (text). (I quote from the photographic reprint, 1963).

¹⁰ Ed. Vasiliev, *PO* VIII, p. 494.

¹¹ Michael the Syrian, II, p. 455-6 = IV, p. 437; elsewhere (II, p. 452 = IV, p. 434) he writes that 'they failed to introduce the emperor's brothers into the synod, since they were well aware that they would not accept the innovation involved in its decision, and that they would not go against their father Constans'.

¹² Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (ed. J.B. Bury, V, p. 178) states that the mutilation took place in the presence of the council, but it is not clear on what evidence (if any) this is based.

is to be found misplaced (as Brooks convincingly showed) in Theophanes, under AM 6161 (=AD 669-70), where it is stated that he cut their noses off. "his mother": not mentioned in the other sources.

"commanders...*Patricius Leon*": Our text again confirms Brooks' reconstruction of the events: the misplaced item in Theophanes says that the opposition to the emperor came from the Anatolic theme (presumably corresponding to the "commanders" here), while Michael the Syrian and more briefly Agapius state that it came from a certain Leo, who is styled "patricius" (as here) only in Agapius.

"three kings...*Trinity*": variants of the same story are found in Theophanes (under AM 6161¹³) and Michael the Syrian¹⁴.

"eleven officers": the number is not given in the other sources.

"crucified": In Michael and Agapius he is mutilated.

3. "will proper to each nature": i.e. *θέλημα φυσικόν* in Greek terminology.

"moral will": Syr. *tar'ita*, which I take to be a rendering of *γνώμη*.

"more than one": lit. 'that can be numbered, capable of plurality', reflecting Greek *ἀριθμητός*.

The dyotheletes maintained that two *θέλήματα φυσικά* in Christ did *not* imply two *θέλήματα γνωμικά* (which, in turn, would imply the possibility of mutual conflict), whereas the monotheletes evidently denied that this distinction was valid.

Provenance and significance

The ecclesiastical allegiance of the compiler of the manuscript as a whole comes out most clearly in the last item, the *Life of Maximus*, for, whereas the *Questions against the Maximianists* (i.e. dyotheletes, or Byzantine Orthodox) could in theory be of Syrian Orthodox origin¹⁵, in that this church took a hostile view to the Sixth Council¹⁶, the *Life of Maximus* was written by someone who accepts the Chalcedonian hierarchy of Maximus's lifetime as his own, but rejects the 'innovations' introduced by Maximus and Sophro-

¹³ Ed. de Boor, p. 352 : οἱ δὲ τοῦ θέματος τῶν ἀνατολικῶν ἦλθον ἐν Χρυσόπολει λέγοντες ὅτι . « εἰς τριάδα πιστεύομεν . τοὺς τρεῖς στέψωμεν ».

¹⁴ Ed. Chabot II, p. 456 = IV, p. 436 : (The people followed Leon, who had been arrested for his opposition to Constantine's deposition of his brothers, and as he went he cried out) "The Trinity reigns in heaven ; may a trinity reign on earth. I do not deny the Trinity in heaven, and I shall not reject the trinity on earth".

¹⁵ Thus Baumstark and Ortiz de Urbina (see note 4), but this judgement rests on the misconception that Add. 7192 represents a single manuscript ; see note 1.

¹⁶ See, for example, Michael the Syrian, II, p. 452 = IV, p. 434. For a Syrian Orthodox author who wrote against the Maximianists, see below.

nius. Such a person can only have been a monothelite¹⁷. That one can go further and say that the author was actually a Maronite is suggested by the following circumstances. The *Life of Maximus* in this manuscript turns out to be the ultimate source of the short notices about Maximus in three Syrian Orthodox chronicles, Michael the Syrian¹⁸, the anonymous chronicle *ad annum 1234*¹⁹, and Barhebraeus²⁰. Now the anonymous chronicler happens to inform his readers at this point that his source of information for the life of Maximus was a refutation of the heresy of Maximus by Shem 'un, a priest of the monastery of Qenneshre, and that Shem 'un had in turn made use of "*Maronite* books against the Maximinians", among which our *Life of Maximus* must definitely have figured, for it is quoted verbatim on several occasions.

That the text here published is also of monothelite origin is quite clear on internal grounds, for the author evidently accepts the Chalcedonian hierarchy and doctrinal position, and rejects only the Sixth Council's teaching on the two operations and wills. Can one go further and say that it is also of Maronite origin? If so, the text would be of considerable importance, for it would provide the only unambiguous²¹ evidence available that the Maronites openly rejected, or to use the precise term here, 'found fault with', the Sixth Council.

It is well known that the early history of the Maronite church is shrouded in obscurity thanks to the paucity of sources, but that nevertheless much ink has been spilt on the subject with the aim of proving or disproving the 'perpetual orthodoxy' of the Maronite church, in the light of medieval accusations that it was of heretical — in other words, monothelite — origin, accusations which are first clearly found in the tenth century Melkite writer Eutychius.

While this is not the place to re-examine the whole question, certain aspects of the problem do call for reconsideration here. Let it be said at the outset, however, that this is done *sine ira et studio*.

It is now generally accepted that the Maronite church gained its name from the famous monastery of Mar Maron, (re)founded in 452 by the emperor Marcian²². In the following centuries the monks of this monastery were strong defenders of the Chalcedonian doctrinal position against the attacks

¹⁷ I employ the terms 'monothelite', 'dyothelite' simply for convenience, *sine odio theologico*.

¹⁸ Ed. Chabot II, p. 433f = IV, p. 423f. For details see my edition of the Syriac *Life of Maximus* (forthcoming).

¹⁹ Ed. Chabot, I, p. 264f.

²⁰ *Chron. Eccl.*, ed. Abbeloos-Lamy, I, cds 277-80.

²¹ For the rather muddled passage in Germanus (Patriarch of Constantinople 715-30) in *PG* 98 cols 81/2, see P. Dib in *DTC* 10, col. 18.

²² See P. Naaman, *Théodore de Cyr et le monastère de Saint Maroun*, Beirut, 1971, *passim*.

of the monophysite opponents of the Council. In the seventh century, under Heraclius, they benefited from the imperial support given to the Chalcedonian communities in Syria,²³ and thus far they are undifferentiated from the other Chalcedonians, or Melkites, of the area. The division into two separate Chalcedonian communities, Melkite and Maronite, took place only in the latter part of the seventh century, or early eighth century, which is precisely a time for which we have practically no contemporary sources.

Amongst those who argue for the 'perpetual orthodoxy' of the Maronites²⁴, it is normally claimed, following the important article of V. Grumel²⁵, that the Chalcedonians of Syria-Palestine were quite unaware of the dyothelete/monothelete controversy during the seventh century, having been cut off politically and ecclesiastically from the Byzantine world by the Islamic conquests. According to this view, it was only in 727, almost half a century after the Sixth Council, that the issue was introduced, thanks to the arrival in the area of Greek prisoners. The passage on which this view is based is to be found in Michael the Syrian's *Chronicle*, and is worth quoting in part²⁶:

Within the Byzantine Empire this opinion (i.e. the 'heresy of Maximus' and the opposition to the christological addition to the Trisagion) had reigned since the time of Constantine (IV), but in the regions of Syria it had not been accepted. It was introduced now (i.e. 727) by the prisoners and settled in Syria. Those who allowed themselves to be perverted by this opinion and who accepted it were above all the towns people with their bishops and leaders; doubtless they did it out of respect for the Byzantine empire. One of these was Sergius, son of Mansur, who greatly oppressed the faithful in Damascus and Homs, and not only did he make them remove the phrase "who was crucified" from the Trisagion, but he also won over to this heresy a number from our church (i.e. Syrian Orthodox).

This heresy also perverted the sees of Jerusalem, Antioch, Edessa²⁷, and other towns where the Chalcedonians had lived ever since the time of Heraclius. The monks of Beth Maron, together with their bishop and some others refused to accept this opinion, but the majority of the towns people and bishops did accept it.

²³ The theory that the Maronites derive from converts from monophysism made by Heraclius in the early 630s rests on a misunderstanding of a passage in Michael the Syrian (II, p. 412 = IV, p. 410).

²⁴ E.g. P. Dib in *DTC* 10, col. 8ff, and *Histoire de l'église maronite*, Beirut, 1962, ch. III.

²⁵ 'L'église maronite du Ve au IXe siècle', *Echos d'Orient* 9 (1906), pp. 257-67, 344-61.

²⁶ Ed. Chabot, II, p. 492-3 = IV, p. 457-8.

²⁷ Compare III, p. 32 = IV, p. 495, where, nearly a century later (in AG 1125 = AD 823/4) a certain Theodoricus of Edessa went around propagating the teaching of Maximus.

Two points should be made here. In the first place it is important to notice the link between the controversy over the will(s) and operations(s) and that over the Trisagion²⁸. It is clear from a number of sources that in Syria the Chalcedonians, as well as the Syrian Orthodox, employed the addition "who was crucified for us"²⁹, and it is likely that the Byzantine opposition to this usage proved far more controversial than the highly abstruse doctrine of the two wills and operations, for here was a difference that was at once obvious to all who attended the divine liturgy.

In the second place, it should be emphasized that, according to Michael the Syrian, the dyothelete theology 'had not been accepted' (ܡܠܟܐ ܕܝܘܬܐܠܝܬܐ ܠܐ ܩܒܠܐ) in Syria prior to 727. This is rather different from 'was not known of', which is how some modern writers appear to take it³⁰. If one is to believe Michael, it would appear then that all the Chalcedonians of Syria were adherents of the monothelete theology prior to 727.

In connection with this, one may note that elsewhere Michael, when writing about the Sixth Council³¹, complains that there was present at it 'no bishop from Egypt, Syria, Palestine or Armenia'. The implication is that the bishops of these regions were opposed to the dyothelete theology, and that, had they been present, the outcome of the Council might well have been different. In other words, the Patriarch of Antioch, Macarius, though he lived far from his flock, thanks to the political situation, was at least representative of their opinions. It is also significant that the only Syrian who was present at the Council and who intervened³², was also opposed to the dyothelete theology.

Actually it would appear that the controversy had been introduced, in some places at least, rather earlier than 727, for there exists an unpublished letter of Sophronius, Patriarch to Jerusalem, to Arcadius, bishop of Cyprus, on the subject of the Trisagion, in a Syriac translation made in Edessa in AG 1032 = AD 720/1 "by the deacon Constantine in the time of the metropolitan Iohannan"³³. In this letter Sophronius urges Arcadius to reject the addition to the Trisagion, and he represents the issue to Arcadius as being a choice between accepting the teaching of Peter the Acephalous and the Council of Chalcedon. Since Sophronius was one of the main defenders of the dyothelete theology, it is hardly likely that this defence for the Byzantine

²⁸ This comes out also in the Syriac *Life of Maximus*, §8.

²⁹ See my commentary on the Syriac *Life of Maximus*, §8.

³⁰ E.g. Dīb, in *DTC* 10, col. 12.

³¹ Ed. Chabot, II, p. 452 = IV, p. 434.

³² Mansi, XI, 617-8.

³³ BM Or. 8606, ff. 127^a-140^b.

position over the Trisagion was translated into Syriac without any awareness of the (by then) linked issues over the will(s) and operation(s).

Furthermore, when looking at the whole controversy, it should be remembered that almost all our information about it comes from dyothelete sources, and as seen through dyothelete spectacles. The opposition, as can be seen most clearly in the Syriac *Life of Maximus*, regarded matters very differently: to them the monothelete theology, far from being a compromise move introduced by Theodore of Pharan, Sergius of Constantinople and others, aimed at facilitating union with the monophysites, in fact represented the traditional teaching of the church, while the dyothelete theology was regarded as a nestorianizing innovation.

With this background in mind it is time to return to the document in hand. In what survives of the text, it will be noted that most of the space is taken up with objections of a procedural nature, and it is perhaps to a document of this nature that Michael the Syrian's account³⁴ of the Council goes back, for there similar objections are made. This interest in the political background strongly suggests that the text was drawn up shortly after the end of the Council (September 681), and no doubt the information about this background goes back to the entourage of Macarius. Whether or not the document was originally written in Greek is not entirely clear, but if it was, it must have been of sufficient interest and importance to Chalcedonians in Syria to have it translated into Syriac. If this translation was made prior to 727, it would simply confirm the view taken here that the Chalcedonians of Syria were *actively* opposed to the dyothelete theology prior to that date (and from these Chalcedonians the present Melkite and Maronite communities derive); if, on the other hand, the translation was made after 727, it is only logical to describe it as of Maronite provenance, since it is an accepted fact that the opposition to the dyotheletes or 'Maximianists' after that date was centred on the monastery of Mar Maron.

In conclusion it may be said that the present short fragment bears an importance out of all proportion to its size for the history of the monothelete/dyothelete controversy in the Levant, for it, together with the Syriac *Life of Maximus*, shortly to be published, demands a reappraisal of current views of the part played in the controversy by the Chalcedonians of the Syria-Palestine area.

³⁴ See note 31 for reference.