# Youhanna Nessim Youssef

# Coptic fragment of a letter of Severus of Antioch\*

Severus of Antioch was a prolific writer, but only a few of his letters survive. It seems that the corpus of his letters was translated into Coptic but only very few have been published. The text published hereafter has been identified for the first time by Porcher<sup>2</sup> but has never been published before. 3

# The Manuscript

The text is written on parchment. The provenance of this manuscript is unknown but it seems to be originally from the library<sup>4</sup> of the White Monastery of Sohag.<sup>5</sup> The handwriting is that of a skillful scribe. The dialect is pure Sahidic. Some crosses decorate the title at the beginning of the text, on one colomn only.<sup>6</sup> The initial letter of the text is bigger without any ornamentation which could be compared with the manuscript of the Hamouli Collection. It is hard to date the text but we may assume that it is from the Xth century judging from the round M and the small 2.<sup>7</sup>

The attribution to Severus of Antioch seems to be authentic. We find in this text several quotations from the Bible. The letter should be written soon after

- \* I would like to thank professor Dr. Dr. Hubert Kaufhold editor of Oriens Christianus for his kind suggestions and improvements of my text and attract my attention to several important points.
- 1 A. Van Lantschoot, "Une lettre de Sévère d'Antioche à Théognoste" Le Muséon 59 (1946) 469-477. [CPG 7070 (9)]. G. Garitte, "Fragments coptes d'une lettre de Sévère d'Antioche à Sotérichos de Césarée" Le Muséon 65 (1952) 185-198. [CPG 7070 (13)].
- 2 R. Porcher, "Sévère d'Antioche dans la littérature copte" ROC 12 (1907) 122. [CPG 7070 (14)].
- 3 E. Lucchesi, Répertoire des manuscrits Coptes (Sahidiques) publiés de la Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris, Cahiers d'Orientalisme I, Genève 1981, p 70.
- 4 M. Krause, "Libraries" *Coptic Encyclopedia*, edited by A. S. Atiya, Vol. 5, McMillan New-York 1991, p. 1447-1450. (Hereafter *CE*).
- 5 Cf R-G. Coquin & M. Martin, P. Grossmann, Hans Georg Severin, "Dayr Anba Shinudah" *Chronique d'Egypte* 3, p. 761-770.
- 6 J. Leroy, Les Manuscrits Copte et Copte-arabe illustrés Bibliothéque Archéologique et Historique, Tome XCVI, Paris 1974, p. 65.
- 7 M. Cramer, Koptische Paläographie, Wiesbaden 1964, Tafel 11, 24.

the exile of Severus from Antioch, for he still had many supporters among the hierarchy.8

## Recto

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<sup>8</sup> For the historical cricumstances of Severus, cf. W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of the Christianity*, Philadelphia 1984, p. 810-830.

<sup>9</sup> Sic. Read NTOYHY.

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#### Verso

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кон фшпе еүтооме **ΕΤΕΚΚΛΗCΙΑ ΝΤ[ΑΝ** ΤΙΟΧΙΑ. ΕΧΝ ΤΕΤΝΜΠΤ сфтп етентфти пе **Χ**Ε ΠΝΟΥΤΕ ΓΑΡ ΟΥ**ω**Ν2 **СВОХ ПОРОСІМ 2М ПКУ**5 THP9. AYO CENAMOY ТЕ ЕПОУРАН ЕВОХ 2ІТМ пиолде иму еиез же трини итдіклюс **АИН ЄХФ ЦЕООЛ И ИТМИТРЕЧФИФЕНОУ** TE KAI FAP 2N NEI BAICIC THPOY ETMOK [2 NTAYEL EXWN NTA TE TNXPO AN MMATE. SYOSY ATETN PROYE **ХРО КАТА ПШАХЕ М** ΠλΠΟΣΤΛΟΣ ΚΑΙ ΓΑΡ YLELNOAMNS EBOY SN ОҮМЕ ЖЕ ОҮДЕ МП МОҮ OAYE WY MNS OAYE ПКЕСЕЕПЕ ЕТИНУ МП NCA NAI . NAW6M60M еперхтнути етага ΠΗ ΜΠΝΟΥΤΕ . ΤΑΙ ΕΤ EM HEXT HT HENXOEIC. 2M HTPETENCOTHC FAP NHTN EGISA SOB NIM .

<sup>10</sup> Sic. Read ειωτε.

<sup>11</sup> Sic. Read EYPWK2.

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## Translation

#### Recto I

And also another epistle from the holy Patriarch and archbishop of Antioch Apa Severus which he wrote for the Church of Antioch (it means) those who fear (God): the clergy, and the faithful congregation.

I wish to let you know that *neither* when I (stop) ceased also in your city before the day, I did not leave y[ou] behind me *but* I withdraw myself a little *according to* the *law*. I listened to the great shepherd, God, and the *Saviour Christ*, *making law* and saying: "When they persecute you in this *city*, flee you to another "<sup>12</sup> And I am strong in heart (take courage) that this (Christ) will pasture His flock in the place

## Recto II

]of leaf. He said: "I will not leave you orphans." I will come to you 14 but even also if I am now separated from you in flesh I am not far from your sublime mind in God, but being as if I am in the midst of you. 15 I call for me this blessed Paul, which he left these (sayings?) for us as example, I said also: "Even if I am absent in body, I am present in spirit." [ ] and I look to your order and strength of your faith which bring near Christ.

I did not say these (things) before; you did them in the matter after the

13 Jn 14:18. **Χ** ε Ν†ΝΑΚΑ[ΤΗΥΤΝ ΑΝ ΕΤΕΝΟ ΝΟΡΦΑΝΟC Cf. H. Quecke, Das Johannesevangelium Saidisch, Papyrologica Castroctaviana, Roma- Barcelona 1984, p 177. Ν†ΝΑΚΑΤΗΥΤΝ ΑΝ ΕΤΕΤΝΌ ΝΟΡΦΑΝΟC.

14 Phil 2:24 †NΗΥ ϢλΡωΤΝ cf. G. Horner, The Coptic version of the New Testament in the Southern Dialect- Otto Zeller Osnabrück 1969, Vol. V., p. 290 †NΗΥ 2Ν ΟΥΘΕΠΗ.

15 ANNA ENGIO NOG NGIZN TETNMHTE Free quotation from Col. 2:5. "EUXE . ... ANNA † NЙМНТИ 2Й ПСПЙХ ANNA ENGIO NOG NGIZN ТЕТИМНТЕ cf. Horner, The Coptic version ..., Vol. V, p. 334.

16 I Cor 5:3. χε καν †2ατν τη τη αν 2ΜΠΟ ΔΜΑ . αλλά † ΝΜΜ]ΗΤΝ 2Μ ΠΕΠΝΑ different from the reading of G. Horner, *The Coptic Version ...*, Vol. IV, p. 198 "ανοκ γαρ εν†2ατετη τη αν 2Μ ΠΟ ΔΜΑ ΕΙΣΑΤΕΤΗΥΤΝ ΑΘ 2Μ ΠΕΠΝΑ"

<sup>12</sup> Mt 10:23.

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accomplishment of virtuous actions. But also before the day, I had mentioned them and I confirmed them in the heart by the oppression. For in fact who ordered me the flight according to the Law 17

## Verso I

Altogether [ ] your strength and your firmness in the *faith*. And he had informed me that they will ask all of you questions by *pressure* (affliction) as a test of like a burning summer heat. But there is a dew of cloud will come upon you after the test so that I will say at that time with Isaiah the prophet: "This is the manner which Lord told me that there is a firmness which will happen in the city like a light of burning in the time<sup>18</sup> of noon and a cloud of dew in the day of the Lord."

#### Verso II

be fitting to the Church of Antioch on your choice we agreed. For God reveals the light to the whole world. And its name will be called by God for ever 'Peace of righteousness' to say its glory of worshipping God. As for in all these painful pressures which befall us you did not win much but you did more than winning according to the word of the apostle, as for you have truly confessed that neither death nor life nor the other (things) which will come after these can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. For when you pray to take everything, you take all to them and you disdain all who belong to this place. You look for eternal life which will be. For they hear by ...

<sup>17</sup> Flight from persecution was a recurrent theme in the patristic theme, cf. O. Nicholson, "Flight from persecution an imitation of Christ: Lactanius Divine Institutes IV: 18:1-2" *Journal of Theological Studies*, n. s. 40 (1989) 48-65.

<sup>18</sup> Repeated in Coptic.

<sup>19 ?</sup> Is 5:4.

<sup>20</sup> Free quotation from Rom 8:35-39.

# Commentary

Although the beginning of the this letter corresponds to a Syriac letter published by Brooks<sup>21</sup> the rest does not follow the Syriac version. We have several example where Coptic texts relating to Severus are always different from the Syriac tradition such as

- a. The Homily on Saint Leontius of Tripoli.<sup>22</sup> The Coptic Sahidic is more developed than the Syriac one and contains in additional an autobiographical section which is omitted in the Syriac text.
- b. The letter of Severus to the deaconess Anastasia.<sup>23</sup> This letter survives in Bohairic Coptic, Arabic, Syriac and some Greek fragments. In this text we can find that the Coptic and the Arabic agreed well while the Syriac is different with some addition or ommission
- c. The first Cathedral homily of Severus of Antioch, where we have Sahidic Coptic and Syriac, the Coptic is more developped than the Syriac.<sup>24</sup>
- d. Recently, I was able to identify two new copies of the book of the Philalethes<sup>25</sup> of Severus of Antioch in Arabic, with some Coptic words. The comparison between the Syriac and the Copto-Arabic version shows many differencies which I intend to treat them in a separate article.
- e. Although the Coptic version of the Cathedral homily 103 of Severus of Antioch is fragmentary, it shows some additions and ommisions in each tradition.<sup>26</sup>
- f. The other texts of the Coptic Corpus of Severus of Antioch are too fragmentary and did not allow us to do the comparison.<sup>27</sup>

21 E. Brooks, Select letters of Severus, London 1904, Vol. 2, Number IV.8

22 G. Garitte, "Textes hagiographiques orientaux relatifs à Saint Léonce de Tripoli" Le Muséon 79 (1966) p. 357-358 §IV. M. Brière, F. Graffin, Les Homiliae Cathedrales de Sévère d'Antioche,

PO 35/3, Turnhout 1969, p. 358-367.

23 M. Chaîne, "Une lettre de Sévère d'Antioche à la diaconesse Anastasie" Oriens Christianus 11 (1913) p. 32-58. E. W. Brooks, A Collection of Letters of Severus of Antioch, PO XIV/1 N° 67, Paris 1920 (<sup>2</sup>ed Brepols, Turnhout 1988), p. 75-118. G. Mercati, "La lettera di Severo Antiocheno su Matt 23,35" Oriens Christianus 12 (1915) p. 59-63. Youhanna Nessim Youssef, "Letter of Severus of Antioch to Anastasia the Deaconess" BSAC 40 (2001) p. 126-136.

24 For the first homily, E. Porcher "La première homélie cathédrale de Sévère d'Antioche" Revue de l'Orient Chrétien 19 (1914) p. 69-78, 135-142. E. Lash, Les Homélies Cathédrales de Sévère d'Antioche, Homélies I-XVII, Patrologia Orientalis 38/2, Turnhout 1976, p. 253-268.

25 Youhanna Nessim Youssef "Arabic Manuscripts of the Philalethes of Severus of Antioch" Proche Orient Chrétien 51 (2001) p. 261-266.

26 E. Lucchesi "Un fragment Copte inédit de l'homélie CIII sur l'Epiphanie de Sévère d'Antioche" JTS 30 (1979) p. 197-201, especially notes 4, 5, 7, 9, 11.

27 (For the homily 14) E. Porcher, "Un discours sur la sainte Vierge par Sévère d'Antioche"

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This text highlight the need and the importance of completing the pionneer study of Lash on the techniques of the translation from the original Greek to the other languages mainly Coptic and Syriac.<sup>28</sup>

Revue de l'Orient Chrétien 20 (1915-1917) p. 416-423. E. Lucchesi, "Notice touchant l'homélie XIV de Sévère d'Antioche" Vigiliae Christianae 33 (1979) p. 291-293. S. J. Voicu, "Un frammento copto dell'omelia Cattedrale 77 di Severo d'Antiochia" Augustinianum 32 (1992) p. 385-386. A. I. Elanskaya, The literary Coptic Manuscripts in the A. S. Pushkin State Fine Arts Museum in Moscow, Leiden 1994, p. 372-377. This text E. Lucchesi has identified the homily 67 but as far as I am aware the text did not appear yet.

28 C. J. Lash, The techniques of a translator: "Work-notes on the Methods of Jacob of Edessa in translating the homilies of Severus of Antioch" Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen,

herausgegeben von F. Paschke, Berlin 1981, p. 365-383.