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## A new fragment of a life of Severus of Antioch?

Severus of Antioch is by far the most venerated saint in the “Monophysite” christianity, i.e. Syria and Egypt hence Ethiopia. We found also that some of his biographies came to our knowledge through the Syrian, the Copto-Arabic-Ethiopian traditions.

### *Biographies of Severus*

- The biography of Severus by his friend Zacharias the Rhetor. The whole life is preserved in Syriac.<sup>1</sup>
- The Biography of Severus by John of Beith Aphthonia. The whole life survives in Syriac<sup>2</sup> and a part of this biography was found in the Monastery of Epiphanius,<sup>3</sup> and in a fragment preserved in John Rylands Library.<sup>4</sup>
- The homily of George Bishop of the Arabs survives only in Syriac.<sup>5</sup>
- The biography of Severus by Athanasius of Antioch. We have a few fragments, in Coptic Sahidic, which were published by W. E. Crum.<sup>6</sup> and some others by W. Till,<sup>7</sup> H. Munier<sup>8</sup> and T. Orlandi.<sup>9</sup> A fragment of a

1 M. A. Kugener, *Vie de Sévère Patriarche d'Antioche, par Zacharie le Scolastique, Patrologia Orientalis* 2/1, Paris 1904, p. 1-115.

2 M. A. Kugener, *Vie de Sévère, par Jean Supérieur du monastère de Beith Aphthonia, Patrologia Orientalis* 2/3, Paris 1904, p. 205-264.

3 W. E. Crum & H. G. Evelyn White, *The Monastery of Epiphanius at Thebes (The Metropolitan Museum of Art – Egyptian Expedition)*, Part II, New York 1926 (Reprint 1973), N° 81 p. 25 (text), p. 172 (translation).

4 W. E. Crum, *Catalogue of the Coptic Manuscripts in the Collection of John Rylands Library Manchester*, Manchester 1909, N° 99, p. 51.

5 K. E. McVey, *George, Bishop of the Arabs, A Homily on blessed Mar Severus, Patriarch of Antioch*, CSCO 530 = Syr 216 (text), 531 = Syr. 217 (translation), Louvain 1993.

6 E. Goodspeed and W. E. Crum, *The Conflict of Severus Patriarch of Antioch by Athanasius*, PO IV/6, Paris 1908, p. 578 [10] - 585 [17].

7 W. Till, *Koptische Heiligen- und Martyrerlegenden, (Orientalia Christiana Analecta 102)*, Rome 1935, p. 188-200. W. Till, *Koptische Heiligen- und Martyrerlegenden, (Orientalia Christiana Analecta 108)*, Rome 1936, p. 141-143.

8 H. Munier, *Manuscrits coptes (Catalogue Général des Antiquités Egyptiennes du Musée du Caire)*, Le Caire 1916, p. 52-53.

9 T. Orlandi, “Un Codice Copto del ‘Monastero Bianco’ Economii de Severo di Antiochia,

- Bohairic manuscript also survives.<sup>10</sup> The Arabic version will be published soon<sup>11</sup> and the Ethiopian version was published by Goodspeed.<sup>12</sup>
- In addition to this, the Sahidic Coptic homily on Saint Leontius by Severus of Antioch contains an autobiographical section.<sup>13</sup>
  - A homily delivered by a bishop of Assiut in the XV century on Saint Severus of Antioch and his sojourn in Upper-Egypt.<sup>14</sup>

Here we will examine another witness of the life of Severus of Antioch according to John of Beith Aphtonia.

But it is important to keep in mind several facts:

1. The *Coptic texts relating to Severus are always different from the Syriac tradition* such as
  - a. The Homily on Saint Leontius of Tripoli.<sup>15</sup>
  - b. The letter of Severus to the deaconess Anastasia.<sup>16</sup>
2. The *works of John of Beith-Aphtonia were known in Egypt*, especially the life of Severus and the hymn to Severus.
3. *The archaeological context of this text*, i.e. the monastery of Balaizah which is not far from the monastery of Rifah, named after Severus of Antioch, *suggests that this fragment belongs to Severus' life*. As for the monastery of Rifah, a colophon of a manuscript attested the existence of this monastery of Severus in Rifah.<sup>17</sup> At the beginning of the twelfth century, the bishop of Misr (old Cairo), Sanhut, was obliged to flee from his see and took

Marco Evangelista, Atanasio Di Alessandria”, *Le Muséon*, 81 (1968), 351-405 and especially p. 371.

- 10 Goodspeed and Crum, *The Conflict*, p. 585 [17].
- 11 M. Simaika, *Catalogue of the Coptic and Arabic Manuscripts in the Coptic Museum, the Patriarchate, the principal Churches of Cairo and Alexandria and the Monasteries of Egypt*, Vol. I/part II, Cairo 1945, p. 154 n° 357 (190 Theol.). G. Graf, *Catalogue des Manuscrits Arabes Chrétiens conservés au Caire, StT 63*, Vatican 1934, p. 121-123. n° 333 (394).
- 12 Goodspeed, *op. cit.*,
- 13 G. Garitte, “Textes hagiographiques orientaux relatifs à Saint Léonce de Tripoli” *Le Muséon* 79 (1966), 357-358 § IV.
- 14 While visiting the microfilm library in the Monastery of Saint Menas (Mariout), thanks to the hospitality of Father Polycarpus of Apa Mina, I discovered under number 261/129 a manuscript from the library of the Church of Saint George in Tuhk Dalaka. It will be published in the *Collection Patrologia orientalis*.
- 15 Garrite, *op. cit.*, M. Brière, F. Graffin, *Les Homiliae Cathedrales de Sévère d’Antioche*, PO 35/3, Turnhout 1969,
- 16 M. Chaîne, “Une lettre de Sévère d’Antioche à la diaconesse Anastasie” *Oriens Christianus* N. S. 3, (1913) 32-58. E. W. Brooks, *A Collection of Letters of Severus of Antioch*, PO XIV/1 N° 67, Paris 1920 (2. ed Brepols, Turnout 1988), p. 75-118. G. Mercati, “La lettera di Severo Antiocheno su Matt 23,35” *Oriens Christianus* 4, 1915, p. 59-63. Youhanna Nessim Youssef, “Letter of Severus of Antioch to Anastasia the Deaconess” *BSAC* 40, (2001) 126-136.
- 17 A. van Lantschoot, *Recueil des colophons des manuscrits chrétiens d’Egypte*, Louvain, (= *Bibliothèque du Muséon* 1) n. LXX:7.

refuge in the monastery of Saint Severus in the mountain of Assiut.<sup>18</sup> According to Abū al Makārim/Abū Ṣāliḥ<sup>19</sup> mentioned “Rifah and Dronka”. Here there is a church named after the Lady, the Pure Virgin Mary; a church of the glorious martyr Victor; two churches of the valiant martyr Theodore; a church named after the Saviour; a church named after Saint John; two churches named after the two martyrs Thomas and Severus; and a monastery named after the great Sinuthius.<sup>20</sup> Later the same author devoted a fairly long notice to it. He notes that the monastery was flourished up to the arrival of the Ghuzz and the Kurds (1161 AD), but they heavily taxed the monastery.<sup>21</sup> According to the Muslim historian Macrizi († 1441 AD) the Monastery of Saint Severus is on the quarry of Dronka. This monastery was named after the Lady Mary. Severus was a respected monk, who was made patriarch; and at his death a miracle took place. He had foretold to the monks, when he went to Upper Egypt, that when he should die the mountain would split, and a great piece of it fall upon the church, without injuring it; and one day a piece of mountain fell, as he said, and then the monks of the monastery knew that Severus was dead; and when they reckoned up they found that that event corresponded to the time of his death, and they called the monastery from that time after his name.<sup>22</sup>

4. According to this fragment, the age of this bishop corresponds roughly to the age of Severus since he became monk.
5. The same event is narrated also by George Bishop of the Arabs.

18 A. S. Atiya, Yassa ‘Abd al-Masih, O. H. E. Burmester, *History of the Patriarchs of the Egyptian Church*, Le Caire 1959, p. 248 (text), 396 (translation).

19 Our references refer to the edition of Samuel al-Suriani, *Tarikh al-kanā’is wal-‘adyara*, Cairo 1984, 4 vols., and also B. T. Evetts and A. J. Butler, *The Churches and Monasteries of Egypt and some Neighbouring countries, attributed to Abū Ṣāliḥ, the Armenian*, Oxford 1895. For specific studies cf. Samuel al-Suriani, “Icônes et iconographie d’après le manuscrit d’Abu el-Makarim, publié en arabe au Caire 1984” *Le Monde Copte* 18, (1990) 78. (For codicology and composition) U. Zanetti, “Abu l-Makarim et Abu Salih” *BSAC* 34, (1995) 85-133. (For the authorship and influence) J. Den Heijer, “The Composition of the History of the Churches and Monasteries of Egypt – Some preliminary remarks” *Acts of the Fifth International Congress of Coptic Studies Washington 12-15 August 1992*, ed D. Johnson, Vol. 2 Part 1, Roma 1993, 209-219. (Social study of the Delta) M. Martin, “Le Delta chrétien à la fin du XII<sup>e</sup> s.” *OCF* 63, (1997) 181-199. Id., “Alexandrie chrétienne à la fin du XII<sup>e</sup> siècle d’après Abū l-Makārim” *Alexandrie médiévale* 1, edited by C. Décobert and J. Y. Empereur, *Etudes alexandrines* 3, Cairo 1998, p 45-49. Id., “Chrétiens et musulmans à la fin du XII<sup>e</sup> siècle” *Valeur et distance: Identités et Sociétés en Egypte*, Paris 2000, p. 83-92. Youhanna Nessim Youssef, “Multiconfessional churches in Egypt during the XII Century” *Bulletin of Saint Shenouda the Archmandrite Coptic Society* 5, (1998-1999) 45-54.

20 Evetts, op. cit., p. 214.

21 Evetts, op. cit., p. 250-251.

22 Girgis Morcos, *القول الأبريزي للعلامة المقريري*, Cairo 1898, p. 94.

The table shows the thematic resemblance between three texts:

Balaizah document <sup>23</sup>	Life of Severus by John of Beith Aphthonia <sup>24</sup>	The homily on Severus by George, Bishop of the Arabs <sup>25</sup>
He should [follow] the word of the rulers who were the doctors.	His own and the doctors forced him to have a bath.	Fulfill our desire and command us to have you enter into a bath. Perhaps you would be healed and would obtain health from it.”
	He refused saying	The saint listened, and with sighs he spoke to them: “Do not trouble me because the time is drawing near when I am to depart. Behold, ever since I made a covenant with the Lord to travel in His way, I have not seen my body bare of the habit. How should I now loose the vestment of abstinence and let go and abandon the pure yoke that I have put upon myself?”
	that he did not see his body naked since he promised Christ to carry the yoke of the monkhood.	They answered mournfully and urged him: “For the sake of the Church entrust yourself to us and do not leave us.
	They forced him saying “You will sit, for our sake, in the bathhouse, and before the time you shall not separate your soul from your body. Would not you mourn for the loss of the Church. We will not force you to see your body. We will make you enter to the bathhouse with your garments.	In your modest garments and tunic, we will have you enter and we will not break your modest vow with God.”
And when he was unable to grieve them, he went to the public building and went to the public bath that he should wash.	They convinced him by such words and many similar other words.	Thereupon the chaste man consented to them according to their will to care for him although he knew that he would not be healed. They carried his blessed body according to their wish, and

23 P. E. Kahle, *Bala'izah, Coptic texts from Deir El-Bala'izah in Upper-Egypt*, The Griffith Institute, London 1954, Vol. 1, p. 441-443, Text number 41.

24 M. A. Kugener, *Vie de Sévère, par Jean Supérieur du monastère de Beith Aphthonia*, *op. cit.*, p. 259-260.

25 K. McVey, *George, Bishop of the Arabs*, *op. cit.*, Lines 833-855.

When he was inside  
the vapour-bath  
with his habit,

Having let him entered  
to the bathhouse with  
his garments,  
they stretched him on a slab  
of marble on the floor.  
I ignore whether this for  
warming his body, which  
was already dead, or because  
he was not able to sit ...

they had him enter and set him  
in the midst of the bathhouse  
so that he might be warmed.  
They stretched him out, who  
by his toils was all dried up,  
and they extended him and put  
him upon a slab in the bath-  
house. Although the pious man  
was not healed at all by it,  
he ...

he commanded that no  
man should come with  
him for it was sixty years  
he had not washed with  
water, nor, indeed, had  
suffered himself to behold his  
own nakedness. And as  
he came, walking in the  
heat, [a man] served him  
and poured water on  
him with a silver jar until  
he came out.

It is important to mention that the hymn to Severus by John of Beith Aphthonia is included in the Sahidic *Antiphonarion*<sup>26</sup> of Hamouli<sup>27</sup>.

<sup>28</sup> ⲗⲥⲱⲗ ⲛⲁⲛ ⲙⲡⲟⲟϩ ⲛⲜⲈ ⲛⲟϥϫⲟⲤⲐⲢⲈ  
ⲈⲐⲐⲗⲒⲛ ⲛⲧⲈ ⲛⲆⲓ ⲛⲈⲢⲢⲙⲈⲈϩⲈ ⲛⲤⲈϩⲎⲢⲟⲤ  
ⲡⲓⲛⲟⲤ ⲛⲁⲣⲭⲓⲈⲢⲈⲢϩⲤ ⲛⲁⲓ Ⲉⲛⲱⲗⲛⲡⲱⲟⲩ ⲈⲢⲟⲘ  
ⲈⲢⲈⲢⲟⲡⲡⲈ ⲱⲁⲢⲈ ⲛⲈⲛⲛⲟϩⲤ ⲭⲓⲤⲈ  
ϩⲱⲗ ⲛⲧⲈ ⲡⲛⲗ ⲈⲢⲈ ⲤⲈϩⲎⲢⲟⲤ ⲛⲤⲛⲧⲢⲧ  
ϩⲱⲣⲱⲗ ⲛⲛ ⲛⲈⲢⲟϩⲗⲗⲐ ⲛⲧⲢⲟϩ

The remembrance of the Great Arch-  
priest Severus arose to us, today, like a  
star in the sky. This, (feast) when we  
reach it in the year, our minds are lifted  
up to the heaven, the place where Severus  
is, he celebrates the feast with all saints.

26 *Antiphonarion* (Arabic *Difnar*). This book contains a collection of hymns for the whole year. The hymn of the *Antiphonarion* is sung in the service of the *Psalmody* which follows the office of *Compline*. Cf. Gawdat Gabra, "Untersuchungen zum *Difnar* der koptischen Kirche. I Quellenlage, Forschungsgeschichte und künftige Aufgaben," *BSAC* 35 (1996), 37-54, Id., "Untersuchungen zum *Difnar* der koptischen Kirche. II zur Kompilation," *BSAC* 37 (1998), 49-68.

27 The Coptic text is not entirely published; some extracts are published by Yassa Abd Al-Masih, "Doxologies in the Coptic Church" *BSAC* 5 (1939), 175-191; J. Drescher, *Apa Menas, a selection of Coptic Texts relating to St. Menas*, Le Caire 1946, p. 176-182. For a German translation of certain parts concerning St Mercurius, Theodore the General etc, but the text of Severus of Antioch is not mentioned. Cf. M. Cramer, *Koptische Hymnologie in deutscher Übersetzung*, Wiesbaden 1969. The Manuscript of *Antiphonarion* in the Collection of the Library of Pierpont Morgan XIV, 93M 575 Fol. 46r:23. Cf. L. Depuydt, *Catalogue of Coptic Manuscripts in the Pierpont Morgan Library, (Corpus of illuminated Manuscripts)*, Leuven 1993, N° 58, p. 107-112 and especially p. 110.

28 Fol 47r:19-47v:9.

ΝΕΣΒΟΟΥΕ ΜΠΝΟΒ ΣΕΥΗΡΟΒ ΠΕΙΣΟΦΟΒ  
 ΜΠΑΤΡΙΑΡΧΗΒ ΟΥΒΪΝΡΩΒ ΤΕ ΝΑΚΡΪΒΗΒ  
 ΝΤΕ ΝΣΑΒ ΤΗΡΟΥ ΕΤΟΥΛΑΒ ΣΕΟΥΟΝΒ  
 ΕΒΟΛΒΡΑΪ ΝΖΗΤΓ ΝΒΪ ΝΨΑΧΕ ΝΚΩΒΤ ΝΤΕ  
 ΪΓΝΑΤΙΟΒ ΠΘΕΦΟΡΟΒ ΛΥΩ ΠΜΑΡΤΥΡΟΒ  
 ΜΝ ΝΕΣΒΟΟΥΕ ΕΤΟΥΛΑΒ ΝΤΕ ΝΣΑΒ  
 ΛΘΝΑΒΑΪΟΒ ΠΪΝΟΒ ΝΑΡΧΪΕΡΕΥΒ ΛΥΩ  
 ΝΑΠΟΒΤΟΛΪΚΟΒ ΜΝ ΝΘΕΟΛΟΓΪΑ  
 ΕΤΧΟΒΕ ΜΠΝΟΒ ΒΑΒΪΛΪΟΒ ΜΝ ΓΡΗΓΟΡΪΟΒ  
 ΝΪΣΟΦΟΒ ΝΑΪΕΤΦΟΡΕΪ ΜΠΕΧ̄Β ΛΥΩ  
 ΝΕΣΒΟΟΥΕ ΜΠΪΪΚΩ̄Ν ΜΠΧΡΗΒΟΒΔΟΜΟΒ  
 ΪΩΒΛΑΝΝΗΒ ΝΑΪ ΕΤΒΑΤΕ ΖΝ ΟΥΩΨΒ ΝΘΕ  
 ΝΟΥΠΥΛΑΓΟΒ [ ] ΕΤΒΟΤΠ  
 ΝΝΔΩΓΜΑ ΕΤΟΥΛΑΒ ΝΚΥΡΪΛΛΟΒ ΠΕΪΣΟΦΟΒ  
 ΛΥΩ ΠΝΟΒ ΜΠΑΤΡΪΑΡΧΗΒ ΣΨΟΟΠ ΟΝ  
 ΒΡΑΪ ΝΖΗΤΓ ΝΒΪ ΤΜΝΤΚΛΘΑΡΟΒ ΜΠΕΥΒΪΟΒ  
 ΜΝ ΝΕΥΠΟΛΗΤΪΑ ΕΤΟΥΛΑΒ ΛΥΩ  
 ΝΕΥΑΚΚΥΒΑΪΟΒ ΕΝΪΡΕ ΜΠΕΥΨΑ  
 ΕΤΟΥΛΑΒ ΜΠΟΟΥ ΕΝΪΘΟΥ ΜΠΕΧ̄Β  
 ΠΑΪ ΝΤΑΥΑΛΑΝ ΝΜΠΨΑ ΝΣΩΟΥΒ ΖΝ  
 ΤΪΕΚΚΛΗΒΙΑ ΕΤΟΥΛΑΒ ΕΝΕΪΡΕ ΜΠΜΕΥΕ  
 ΜΠΕΨΩΒ ΛΥΩ ΠΡΕΜΪΨΕ ΕΧΝ  
 ΤΠΪΣΤΪΒ ΝΤΕΤΡΪΑ<sup>(sic)</sup> ΕΤΧΗΚ  
 ΕΒΟΛ ΕΒΖΝ ΟΥΜΝΤΝΟΥΤΕ ΝΟΥΨΤ

The teachings of the great Severus, this wise patriarch, is precisely the manner of work of all the holy masters. The burning words of Ignatius<sup>29</sup> the God-bearer and the martyr appeared in it, with the holy teachings of the master Athanasius, the great Archpriest and the apostolic, and the high theology of the great Basil and Gregory, these wise men Christ-bearers. And the spiritual teachings of John Chrysostom, these which flow in breadth like a huge [ ] the choosen, the holy dogmae of Cyril this wise and great patriarch. The purity of their lives and their holy virtues and their asceticism are in you. By celebrating his holy feast, today, we glorify Christ, who made us worthy to assemble in this holy church and make the remembrance of our shepherd and the fighter for the faith of the Perfect Trinity from unique Divinity.

This part of the *Antiphonarium* is a free translation of the hymn of John of Beith-Aphthonia on Severus of Antioch.<sup>30</sup>

To conclude, the Bala'izah fragment shows several thematic similarities with the life of Severus of Antioch according to John of Beith Aphthonia, but the text is not identical. It could either an "Egyptian" version of this life or at least the author of this text got inspiration for this life.

29 It seems that the author of this text plays on the meaning of the proper name of Ignatius. This may indicate that this text was originally written in Greek. For other examples of translated puns cf. Youhanna Nessim Youssef, "La genèse de la légende sur le roi Dioclétien," *BSAC* 28 (1986-1989), 107-110.

30 Cf. E. Brooks, *The Hymns*, PO 7/5, Paris 1911, p. 653-654 N° 191, or the French translation by Kugener, *Vie de Sévère*, PO 2/3, Paris 1904, p. 327.