

## ANTIOCH AS ‘THE HOLY CITY’ IN COPTIC HAGIOGRAPHY

Anna A. Rogozhina

*National Research University Higher School of Economics, Moscow, Russia*  
arogozhina@hse.ru

*Abstract.* This article discusses the literary *topos* of Antioch as the holy city, ‘equal to Jerusalem’. Looking at evidence from martyr passions and encomia created in Egypt between the 7<sup>th</sup> and the 9<sup>th</sup> centuries, one sees that a great number of martyrs venerated by the Coptic Church are said to have had a connection with Antioch. They were either born there or were brought to Antioch for trial; moreover, Antiochene connections might be inserted into the stories of saints whose tradition originally had nothing to do with Antioch. Antioch is also firmly connected with the two emperors, Diocletian and Constantine, who played a vital role in the formation of the identity of the Church of the Martyrs. The article discusses historical evidence of the links between the two miaphysite communities of Alexandria and Antioch and the reasons that compelled Coptic hagiographers to re-imagine Antioch as the birthplace of popular martyrs and the place of their glorious death.

*Keywords:* Antioch, Alexandria, Constantine, Coptic hagiography, Egypt, Diocletian, martyrs, miaphysite (monophysite) community, monasteries

## АНТИОХИЯ КАК «СВЯТОЙ ГОРОД» В КОПТСКОЙ АГИОГРАФИИ

А. А. Рогожина

*Национальный исследовательский университет «Высшая школа экономики», Москва, Россия*  
arogozhina@hse.ru

*Аннотация.* В статье рассматривается литературный тоpos Антиохии как святого города, равного Иерусалиму или даже превосходящего его своей славой. При изучении агиографических коптских текстов (мученичеств, энкомиев), созданных в период между VII и IX в., мы обнаруживаем, что многие мученики, почитаемые в коптской церкви, оказываются тем или иным образом связанными с Антиохией: они либо происходят оттуда, либо доставляются туда властями для допросов и мучений. Более того, в некоторых случаях привязки к Антиохии добавляются даже в истории тех святых, чья традиция изначально не имела ничего общего с этим городом. Антиохия также

---

*Данные об авторе.* Анна Алексеевна Рогожина – DPhil (Оxon), преподаватель Школы востоковедения НИУ ВШЭ.

представляется тесно связанной с двумя римскими императорами, Диоклетианом и Константином, период правления которых Коптская церковь впоследствии считала самым важным в своей истории. В статье рассматриваются исторические свидетельства связей между миафизитскими общинами Антиохии и Египта и причины, которые побуждали коптских агиографов представлять Антиохию как место рождения почитаемых в Египте святых и место их славного мученического подвига.

*Ключевые слова:* Антиохия, Александрия, Константин, коптская агиография, Египет, Диоклетиан, мученики, монофизиты, миафизиты, монастыри

I bless the true Creator, the Christ, Who has remembered my city of Antioch and has raised up for us these great and brilliant luminaries, these true pearls in the house of righteous kings, these warriors who were mighty men of war.

*Enc. Th. Anat.*, 4–5.

The observant reader of the Coptic hagiography will undoubtedly notice that in these texts, especially those connected with Diocletian's persecution, the city of Antioch plays a very special role. In Coptic texts Diocletian's residence is always located in Antioch, not in Nicomedia<sup>1</sup>; the persecution itself starts in Antioch, not in Nicomedia where in fact it began with the burning of its newly built cathedral in February 303<sup>2</sup>. The trials of the martyrs usually take place at the palace or the theatre in Antioch, and so do the miracles and final executions of those martyrs who are not sent to Egypt or elsewhere. Thus, it appears that the authors of the Coptic martyr passions and of the encomia in honour of these martyrs have established Antioch as a very strong literary *topos* in their works.

Indeed, even a cursory glance at the Coptic *Synaxarium* shows that more than forty martyrs are reported either to have been born in Antioch (for example, Eusignius, the members of the Basilides family, Cyprian, Philotheus, and others), or to have lived in Antioch for a while (like the brothers Cyrus and John, natives of Alexandria<sup>3</sup>), or to have been brought to Antioch for trial – such as Sarapamon, a Jew from Jerusalem, who became a monk in Egypt, then a bishop of Nikiou and was then summoned to Antioch where he was questioned by Diocletian and sent back to Alexandria for beheading<sup>4</sup>. Moreover, Coptic hagiographers find ways to insert Antiochene connections even into the lives of those saints who otherwise have no connection with Antioch whatsoever: thus, only in Copto-Arabic tradition is it stated of the famous *anargyroi*<sup>5</sup> brothers Cosmas and Damian, who were in fact martyred somewhere in Asia<sup>6</sup> (different versions of their passions suggest Cilicia, Pheremma, Rome), that they were summoned to Antioch for trial by the governor Lysias and underwent tortures in the great theatre of

<sup>1</sup> For example, in the stories of Ter and Erai, Justus, the two Theodores, and others.

<sup>2</sup> Barnes 1981, 22.

<sup>3</sup> O'Leary 1937, 119; on the evidence of their cult in Egypt see also Papaconstantinou 2001, 135–136.

<sup>4</sup> O'Leary 1937, 244–245.

<sup>5</sup> This epithet – *anargyroi*, 'unmercenaries' – is applied to those saints who did not take payment for their medical help. Apart from Cosmas and Damian, it is usually applied to the martyrs Cyrus and John, Pantaleon, Tryphon, and Sampson the Hospitable, who founded a hospital for the poor in Constantinople.

<sup>6</sup> Van Esbroeck 1981.

this city<sup>7</sup>. Their mother Theodote was also brought to Antioch and was tortured and killed by Diocletian, who did not allow anyone to bury her body – only a boy Victor, son of Romanus, a future martyr for Christ and one of the most popular military saints of Egypt, was brave enough to bury Theodote's body<sup>8</sup>. Naturally, this enraged Diocletian and set conditions for the future banishing of Victor to Egypt; this episode served as a link between the *Cycle of Victor* and the Copto-Arabic passion of Cosmas and Damian. These persistent appearances of Antioch in the lives of different saints naturally raise a question: why was Antioch, a foreign and distant city, so important for the Copts?

In this article I will try to offer some answers to this question by focusing on one of the enduring motifs of Christian hagiography – the image of the 'holy city', which in Coptic martyr passions is represented by Antioch. I will look at the representations of Antioch in Coptic hagiography and, more specifically, in the texts belonging to the Antioch cycle. The second part of this article will discuss the possible reasons for this hagiographical re-imagining of Antioch and historical evidence for the connections between Antioch and Egypt.

#### ANTIOCH IN HAGIOGRAPHICAL REALITY

While composing numerous hagiographical texts concerning the Antiochene saints the Copts created – probably unintentionally – a hagiographical reality in which Antioch, in a way, replaced Jerusalem as the Holy City. In this hagiographical universe Antioch had much stronger connections with Egypt than it had in historical reality and assumed some special features which were meant to assert its status as the City of the Martyrs. Peters, discussing the phenomenon of the holy city and holy places in Christianity and Islam, writes:

What constitutes a holy city is not then the mere existence of such holy places, but rather the presence in the city of a *sacrum*, or perhaps several, of such an order of importance or allure that the cultus connected with it exercises an attraction not merely on the city's immediate hinterland but over an extended network<sup>9</sup>.

The special holiness of Antioch, as constructed by Coptic writers, although it could not really surpass the holiness of Jerusalem, because Jerusalem was the place of Jesus' life, passion and resurrection, was nevertheless regarded as something close to it and certainly had great influence over an extended network reaching to Egypt. For the Copts the *sacrum* of Antioch was the blood of the thousands of martyrs converted to Christianity by the famous leaders – Victor, Claudius, Theodore and others, who then shed their own blood in Antioch or in Egypt (or in both places), thus creating a network of shrines and relics. In this respect Antioch could, as the Copts saw it, rival Jerusalem.

This attitude is best expressed in the *Encomium to the Theodores* attributed to a certain Theodore, archbishop of Antioch, found in a tenth-century Bohairic codex (Vat. Copt. 65)<sup>10</sup>.

---

<sup>7</sup> In order to underline the saints' connection with Antioch the authors of their Coptic life insert the episode with the treacherous bishop into this text. See also Crum 1908.

<sup>8</sup> This story is related in the *Enc. Vict.*, 133–152.

<sup>9</sup> Peters 1986, 3.

<sup>10</sup> *Enc. Theod.*, 1–72 (=Acta Martyrum II, 90–156).

The title of the encomium<sup>11</sup> states that it was delivered in the martyrdom of St Theodore Anatolius (or Eastern) in Antioch on the day of the feast of the other Theodore, called the General (Stratelates), on the 20<sup>th</sup> of the month Epiphi. The author, claiming to be speaking at the time of the Emperor Constantine, frequently compares Antioch and Jerusalem in the long *prooemium* of the encomium. He then moves on to describe in brief some of the miracles and victories of the mighty heroes, the martyrs of Antioch, finishing this introduction with a praise of Antioch as the city “whose seed are the ones who dwell in heaven and in Sion” (*Enc. Theod.*, 9)<sup>12</sup>.

The next part of the *Encomium* is dedicated entirely to the praise of Antioch: the city is compared to a spring of pure water in a beautiful garden full of trees laden with sweet-smelling fruits. This garden is ruined and defiled by a wicked tyrant who cuts down the trees and pollutes the spring, bringing the wrath of God on himself. By God’s will the spring – “the city of Antioch which abides in the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ” – reappears in the garden, bubbling happily and feeding the roots of the trees which start to grow again. The trees which had been cut down but then were restored are the glorious martyrs of Antioch (apart from the two Theodores, Claudius, Ter, Victor, Justus, Eusebius, Basilides, Sisinnius, Stephen, and Apoli are mentioned) whose bodies are revealed to the faithful and perform signs and wonders, curing the sick (*Enc. Theod.*, 9–12). Another, different *Encomium in honour of St Theodore Anatolius* attributed to the same bishop Theodore also likens his native city to a garden; this comparison, in his opinion, equates Antioch with the heavenly Jerusalem:

The orchard is a pleasant place, and trees in it cluster round about it, they blossom and are laden with fruit... All the great ones are around it, and the mighty men and the generals rejoice and are glad in it. These words do not [apply] to Antioch only, but also to the heavenly Jerusalem, the habitation of all the saints (*Enc. Th. Anat.*, 2).

This image of an orchard takes on a new meaning in Coptic hymnography where it is employed to assert the connection between the two churches. In the acrostic *Hymn to the martyr Claudius of Antioch*, preserved in the manuscript M574 from the Pierpont Morgan Collection, Antioch is again represented as a garden of fruit-bearing trees, but here we see these trees transplanted into the new soil where they bear more fruit (stanzas 15 and 16):

For when from fruit-bearing trees/ one takes away shoots/ and plants them in new earth / they will bear much fruit./ Behold, Victor and Claudius/ were taken to Antioch,/ and they were brought to the land of Egypt./ They healed everyone who was sick<sup>13</sup>.

But the author of the *Encomium to the Theodores* has not finished comparing Antioch and Jerusalem – in a following lengthy passage he suggests that Antioch is the ultimate answer to the riddle found in the Psalms: “Their blood they have shed like water all

---

<sup>11</sup> The title ‘encomium’ is a self-designation of the text, but in fact it is difficult to place it among the classical Christian encomia. On the Coptic encomia of the late sixth and seventh centuries see Sheridan 2012, 253–275. The present encomium has a very long and lavish prooemium and is written in a very ‘high style’, but the main body of the text – that is, the stories of the two Theodores – is quite convoluted and confusing; the events in both storylines occur at the same time and are not properly linked or explained, and the language is much poorer.

<sup>12</sup> This kind of rhetorical praise of the city might have been inspired by Byzantine hagiography, where it appears as one of the typical elements of hagiographical discourse; see Saradi 2014, 437–438. H. G. Saradi shows how in hagiographical texts the holiness of a saint sanctifies also the city where he or she was born and gives it transcendental qualities.

<sup>13</sup> Kuhn, Tait 1996, 45–46. English translation by K. H. Kuhn and W. J. Tait.

around Jerusalem, and there was no one to bury them” (Ps 79:3). The preacher asks his audience a question, thus engaging them in the solving of this riddle – “who are those people slain around Jerusalem whose bodies were not buried?” He insists that the bodies of the prophets and the Apostles were buried and these words do not, therefore, refer to them, and then rhetorically addresses David himself: “Now, my father the prophet, tell me of those who were slain near the city if not the little children whom Herod killed from among his people, for their bodies were many”. The comparison between the Massacre of the Innocents in Bethlehem and the persecution of the Christian people in Antioch which was so severe that streets of the city ran with streams of blood leads the author to a rather unusual conclusion: “The wonder of my city surpasses that of Jerusalem, because her great and mighty warriors and her rich men” died of their own will, unlike the little children of Jerusalem who were not voluntary martyrs, because “they were killed against their own wish and that of their parents”. It is the author’s opinion that the little children of Jerusalem “stand waiting before” the martyrs of Antioch who had to make greater sacrifices than those innocent souls, since the martyrs of Antioch were mainly people of noble birth and considerable wealth which they abandoned for Christ’s sake (*Enc. Theod.*, 11–12).

At this point the name of Stephen the Protomartyr, the true glory of the Church of Jerusalem, is brought up before the audience by the preacher – and again, the author of the encomium finds a way to show that Antioch can also boast of her own protomartyr. His name was also Stephen, the first fruit of the confessors of Antioch, since he was the man who tore down the decree of Diocletian. But his zeal was even greater than that of Jerusalem’s Stephen, for his head, severed from his body by Diocletian’s own hand, kept “crying aloud abundantly mentioning all the saints of Antioch” and continued to do so from the ground even after its burial, so that the king ordered the head to be placed in a vessel of lead with its mouth sealed and cast into the sea (*Enc. Theod.*, 13–14). Having told this bizarre story, the author returns to the memorial of St Theodore the General and explains why the body of this saint, which, as it might seem, belongs to Antioch, now abides in Egypt and why its burial in Egypt should not cause any disturbance among the Christians of Antioch. In the course of the story the audience learns that for St Theodore Egypt “was not a foreign land, but the land of his fathers” and it is only natural that his body had been returned there.

This account, however fantastic and improbable it may sound, reveals much about the intentions of the author of this encomium – the aim of this discourse is not only to explain the importance of Antioch and even her superiority over Jerusalem in certain aspects, but also to assert the special connection between Antioch and Egypt through the network of the saints’ martyria and relics. It also reflects the dual perception of Antioch as the place where previously the martyrs had been tried and tortured and where now the Christian faith shines forth through their victory over the evil tyrant and through their posthumous miracles which occur at the shrines.

The contrast between the former Antioch, that of Diocletian and his abominable gods, and the Antioch of now, ‘the Christ-loving city’, is underlined in a number of texts, especially in the encomia attributed pseudonymously to various Antiochene bishops (Theodore, Severus and others). The writers of these encomia assign great importance to the physical imprints of the persecution on the city of Antioch which have now become places of worship and prayer. Thus, the *Encomium to Theodore Anatolius* asserts that

The tree on which Theodore Anatolius was crucified was made into the doors of his martyrion by the command of the Emperor Constantine and into the apse of his chamber of service, and into the bier on which his holy body [lay]... (*Enc. Th. Anat.*, 4)<sup>14</sup>.

Since Theodore Anatolius was crucified in Antioch, the presence of these relics in Antioch might seem plausible to the audience. But the preacher mentions also other relics, those pertaining to the cult of St Victor: his golden shield and the sword with which he was killed. They could only have been brought to Antioch from Egypt, probably as a symbol of union and friendship between the two churches in the context of the text. The mention of these relics, apparently originating from Egypt, brings in another point of discussion – a regular accentuation of the special connection between Antioch and Egypt.

And when I see their martyrion that have been built around my city of Antioch like a wall, and when I hear the bells of gold that hang behind the curtain inside their martyrion, and when I see the multitudes of people exulting in their holy festivals, I rejoice immediately and bless my King, Christ (*Enc. Th. Anat.*, 6).

The emphasis on the existence of the saints' martyrion both in Antioch where these saints were born or suffered, and in Egypt where their relics are kept, which we noticed in both encomia attributed to Theodore of Antioch, is quite significant. In his theoretical work on hagiography H. Delehaye maintained that the name of the place where a saint was born or grew up was not so relevant for hagiographers; the only indispensable piece of information, the first hagiographical coordinate (the second being the date of the martyr's death or the day of his/her commemoration), was the name of the place where the saint's body was kept<sup>15</sup>. This hagiographical coordinate, the so-called martyrion, was usually a focal point of a saint's cult<sup>16</sup>.

But in both encomia quoted above the model proposed by Delehaye is not wholly applicable – the strong and unbroken connection of the Antiochene martyrs whose bodies mostly reside in Egypt (this is the case especially with Victor, Claudius, Theodore the General) with their birth-place is constantly underlined. It is also unusual that the hagiographical texts, especially encomia attributed to the Antiochene bishops, do not contain any mention of the purported authors' wish to bring these relics, or at least some parts of them, back to Antioch, where the martyrion in honour of these saints supposedly exist. The division of the saints' relics was already practised in the fourth century<sup>17</sup> and one would expect that at least some parts of the martyrs' bodies would be sent to their native city, as was done, for example, with the bones of St Ignatius of Antioch, martyred

---

<sup>14</sup>This detail is a purely Coptic invention. Eusebius describes Constantine's death in great detail (*Vita Const.* IV. 65) and does not mention any wooden bier, but describes how the soldiers lifted the body from the couch and placed the body in a golden coffin, "which they enveloped in a covering of purple, and removed to the city which was called by his own name".

<sup>15</sup>Delehaye 1934, 13.

<sup>16</sup>On martyrion in general see Grabar 1946, esp. 335–385 (the chapter on martyrion built for the relics of the saints). However, Grabar's methodological approach to the problem of the origins of martyrion of the saints and their influence on the Holy Sepulchre Martyrion in particular was challenged by R. Ousterhout (1990) who suggested that the Holy Sepulchre Martyrion is in fact derived from the Old Testament Temple and the Ark of the Covenant.

<sup>17</sup>On the change of attitude towards disinterring of the martyrs' bodies and the distribution of relics see Markus 1990, 139–155, esp. 148–149. By the end of the eighth century no church could be consecrated without at least a small part of the relics of a saint (Canon 7 of the Seventh Ecumenical Council of 787).

in Rome. On the contrary, the encomia emphasize that it was very natural for the relics of the Antiochene saints to be kept in Egypt.

This discrepancy between the historical reality and the hagiographical reality in the encomia ascribed to the Antiochene bishops allegedly writing at the time of Constantine – the fictitious Theodore and Theopompus – could perhaps be explained by the absence of such practice in this early period. But the same anomaly is also observed in a text ascribed by Coptic editors to Severus of Antioch, in whose time the practice of division and translation of relics was wide-spread. Thus, in the *Encomium to Claudius* we read how Severus, following the instructions of Claudius given in a vision, finds his relics in Egypt and erects a martyrion at the place of Claudius' burial with the help of local people. After the consecration of the martyrion, Severus departs, leaving a local holy man in charge of the shrine. He does not take any parts of the relics with him; neither does he mention any intention to bring back to his city anything material related to the martyr<sup>18</sup>.

Since there is no evidence in the sources discussed that any relics of the Antiochene saints who had been martyred in Egypt were ever taken back to their native city, the question arises as to why Coptic hagiographers put so much energy into providing a convincing Antiochian background for these saints – i.e. the alleged existence of their martyrion in Antioch? In answering this question one has to bear in mind that “sources composed in Coptic were directed at an exclusively Egyptian audience”<sup>19</sup>.

This means that the Coptic authors, among other things, were addressing a specifically Egyptian problem here: the cult of the martyrs' relics. By the time of St Shenute (fifth century) the problem of questionable or, in some cases, openly fake relics, was already very serious. Shenute was clear in his objections to the hunt for the martyrs' bones: in the homilies *'Since it Behooves Christians'* and *'Those Who Work Evil'* he ridicules the 'visions' in which evil spirits in the disguise of 'martyrs' appear to gullible souls and convince them to seek for their bones, which later turn out to be dogs' bones (*Shen. Hom.*, 208); Shenute says that they dig up some random bones, give them the empty name 'martyrs' and then they build martyrion for them or bring them into churches for veneration<sup>20</sup>. If this is taken into consideration, then the answer to the above question becomes obvious – apart from establishing the sense of unity between Alexandria and Antioch, Coptic writers were trying to provide a certain historical background for the relics of the Antiochene martyrs kept in the Egyptian shrines which were already very

---

<sup>18</sup> *Enc. Claud.*, 486–507. The authenticity of this homily has been questioned already as early as 1944, cf. Drescher 1944. He insists that this “work is an Egyptian writing for Egyptians”. However, he admits that there is one point that might prove its authenticity – the mention of St Drosis, whose cult was very well established in Antioch partly because of Severus' efforts to promote it. Both Chrysostom and Severus dedicated homilies to her (Chrysostom, *Homily on St Drosis*, PG 50, pp. 683–691; Severus, *Homeliae cathedrales*, Homily 100, PO 22.2/108, pp. 230–248 and Homily 114, PO 26.3/127, pp. 290–306); Severus also composed a hymn in her honour (PO 7.5/35, pp. 621–622). Despite her great popularity in Antioch, her cult was never really strong in Late Antique Egypt, cf. Papaconstantinou 2001, 76–77. She appears in the *Synaxarium*, however, and there are hymns for her in the *Difnar*, but it is difficult to assess how late her tradition is.

<sup>19</sup> Wilfong 1998, 178.

<sup>20</sup> *Shen. Hom.*, 212ff. However, it must be noted that Shenute does not attack the cult of martyrs as such, only the extremes that he observes.

numerous in the fifth century<sup>21</sup>. The shrines were built, the cults were thriving, and the people who came to venerate the relics needed a convincing story of their provenance<sup>22</sup>. Hence the elaborate stories of the martyrs' childhood, youth and adolescence in Antioch, the city of the martyrs, and of their later banishment to Egypt where the final executions take place.

But there is one more striking feature in the narratives describing the background of the Antiochene martyrs. In the Coptic account of the building of the martyrium at the grave of the martyr Claudius in Egypt, Severus, addressing his (probably fictitious) Antiochian audience, mentions specifically that he noticed the unanimity and great endurance of the Egyptian people: "I saw there a nation that carried the cross and worshipped with one heart", says Severus, "and I gave glory to God" (*Enc. Claud.*, 504). This compliment, which the authors of the encomium put into the mouth of Severus, one of the most respected Church writers, is not just a formal courtesy – it plays an important role in establishing Egypt as a 'land of saints'. This 'Egyptocentric' focus, characteristic for Coptic hagiography in general<sup>23</sup>, very often emerges in the narratives connected with Antioch. In such texts the roles of Antioch and Alexandria are reversed and Egypt is depicted as a source of sacramental grace and a birth-place of the martyrs who come *from Egypt to Antioch* and shed their blood there.

#### REVERSING THE ROLES OF ALEXANDRIA AND ANTIOCH

The *Synaxarium* of the Coptic Church commemorates on the 7<sup>th</sup> of Hator the memory of the martyr Naharoua (Nehroua), who was a native of the Fayyum. When he heard about the deeds of the martyrs, he went to Alexandria to die for Christ. However, he was told in a vision that he must go to Antioch. While Naharoua was thinking of how to go there and was looking for a ship to embark on, the archangel Michael carried him on his wings from Alexandria to Antioch and set him down before Diocletian. Diocletian asked him about his name and his country, and offered Naharoua much money and many prizes to turn him away from his faith. Naharoua refused, and therefore Diocletian ordered that he be tortured in many different ways. He was tortured by beasts, by burning in a fire, by squeezing in the wheel, and by being boiled alive; finally, he was beheaded. Thus, Naharoua became a counterpart for those from Antioch who were martyred in the land of Egypt. His body, it is said, was returned to Egypt by the author of many Coptic martyr stories, Julius of Aqfahs, who happened to be in Antioch at that very moment<sup>24</sup>. The martyr Naharoua does not feature in any Syriac sources and is, most probably, a fictitious character, whose story was also aimed at promoting the

---

<sup>21</sup>On the transformation of the cult of saints and the change in the spread of relics and shrines see Papaconstantinou 2007.

<sup>22</sup>Papaconstantinou suggests that this should be considered the main reason for the appearance of such texts; she insists that they were "made up to justify the discovery of the martyrs' relics over a century after their supposed death, and the establishment of new shrines in their name" (Papaconstantinou 2011, 329). But we should also take into consideration the liturgical aspect of the hagiographical production and the church-political context of the composition of the martyr passions.

<sup>23</sup>On Egyptocentrism in Coptic hagiographical writing see Behlmer 2007.

<sup>24</sup>O'Leary 1937, 28. His story appears in a fragment from Vienna Library (Wien K. 9509–12), published by Till 1935–1936 I, 3–14. Another fragment of Naharoua's miracles was published by Bouriant 1883, 153–154.



union between Alexandria and Egypt<sup>25</sup>. This story is undoubtedly late as it belongs to the cycle of Julius of Aqfahs, but the same idea of exchange in grace appears in a much earlier text – the story of Eudoxia, dating to the seventh century. When Constantine, the Christian Emperor, the antipode of Diocletian the Persecutor, decides to receive baptism, he invites priests from Egypt to Antioch as if there are no priests or bishops in Antioch:

The king had not received baptism. After the glory of Christ Michael the Archangel of heaven came to him and instructed him, [saying]: ‘Send to Egypt for the holy ones, seventy two in number, so that they come and baptize you and teach you the faith of your salvation’.

And the king did according to everything which the Angel of the Lord [ordered] him. He sent and brought them. They taught him and all those who were in his house. They baptized him and those who were in his household and they had with him a celebration in the offering of salvation<sup>26</sup>.

This account certainly cannot be reconciled with the version of Eusebius which claims that Constantine was baptized on his deathbed (Vita Const. IV. 62–63), but the reason for its existence is rather obvious – the legend was created at a time when such late baptism would provoke serious doubt about the strength of the emperor’s faith. The urge to provide an earlier baptism for the first Christian emperor has resulted in other legends as well: one of the most popular ones in the West is the baptism of Constantine by St Sylvester, who was the bishop of Rome at the time of Constantine’s reign (314–335)<sup>27</sup>. The figure of Sylvester was Orthodox enough to quieten the unease caused by the fact that in historical reality Constantine was baptized by the Arianizing bishop Eusebius of Nicomedia. The baptism received from “the seventy two holy men of Egypt” in the Eudoxia narrative plays the same role in the Egyptian context – as Drake points out, “their participation helped assimilate Constantine to local traditions” (*Eud.*, 107). But it also underlines that special connection between Egypt and Antioch which is so important for the Copts.

Another such story, accentuating the importance of Egypt (or, in this case, of Alexandria in particular) for the very existence of the Christian faith in Antioch, appears in two sources: the *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria* and the *Encomium of Flavianus on Demetrius, archbishop of Alexandria*. These accounts are virtually identical, with only a few differences in names (the latter provides names for all personages, while in the former they mainly remain anonymous) and details. The story in the *Encomium on Demetrius* goes as follows:

The wife of a certain Zokrator, one of Diocletian’s officials from Antioch, named Martyria (a charactonym rather than a real name) wanted to baptize her children in Alexandria. She took the children and went to Alexandria on her own. Shortly after their departure from the port of Antioch the ship was seized by a mighty storm. Martyria, fearing that her children might die before they were baptized, took a knife, cut her right breast and drew three drops of blood from it with which she made the sign of the cross on her sons’ foreheads in the name of the Holy Trinity. She dipped them in the sea three times, saying the baptismal formula, and prepared to die together with them, but then the storm was stilled.

---

<sup>25</sup>Naharoua’s story, in its turn, is counterbalanced by the story of the martyr Hour (Hor), a soldier from Antioch who went to Alexandria seeking martyrdom. His memory is celebrated on the 29<sup>th</sup> of Paone; see O’Leary 1937, 155.

<sup>26</sup>*Eud.*, 42; English translation by B. A. Pearson.

<sup>27</sup>One of the versions of this legend is related in the famous medieval forgery *Donatio Constantini*.

Martyria arrived in Alexandria and sent her children along with the others to be baptized by the archbishop. When St Peter attempted to submerge the children in water, the water congealed and became like stone; this miracle occurred three times, while the other children were baptized normally. The archbishop invited Martyria to tell her story and, having heard her account, said a prayer over her and her sons and blessed them. Upon their return to Antioch, Martyria and her sons were brought to Diocletian by Zokrator, who accused his wife and Peter of Alexandria of adultery. Diocletian was enraged and sent an order to execute St Peter, whom he had hated before for his preaching against idolatry; then he questioned Martyria and, receiving no answer from her, ordered her to be burnt together with her sons (*Enc. Dem.*, 149–155). The encomium abruptly finishes here with a short discussion of the meaning of the true east, to which Martyria turned her face at the time of death. The *History of the Patriarchs* proceeds further, telling the story of St Peter in prison and his voluntary death for the sake of his congregation.

In both narratives Egypt is represented as a source of sacramental grace for people in Antioch. The situation is described as if one could not receive baptism in Antioch at the time of persecution or shortly thereafter and had to turn for it to Egypt, the land of ‘the holy men’. As Behlmer points out, there was no real necessity for that trip and the point of this episode was to show the higher level of ‘readiness for martyrdom on the part of the Coptic Church’, represented in the story by St Peter<sup>28</sup>. But such narratives, especially when accumulated in the minds of the Egyptian Christians, also conveyed another, latent message: they underlined the doctrinal links with an Antiochene tradition which also held to a miaphysite confession. They also showed that the connection between the two ecclesiastical bodies – symbolised by generic ‘Antioch’ and ‘Egypt’ – had a very long history, extending into the time of the Great Persecution. This connection, they maintained, was established through the blood of martyrs and was beneficial for both communities, as they exchanged their saints and shared the grace.

However, there is a certain internal contradiction with other accounts of the Antiochene saints – we see in their lives that most of them had been baptised in Antioch prior to their trials or exiles. From the existing narratives<sup>29</sup> one might deduce that although the churches did exist after the beginning of the persecution, they were either closed or did not function properly: the priests were in hiding, and the sacraments had to be obtained in secret (*Mart. Phil.*, f. 84r a) or elsewhere (in Alexandria). However, with the end of the persecution the situation changes abruptly, since the God-loving emperor Constantine opens the churches which had been closed and builds new martyria in Antioch. Coptic authors put a lot of effort in creating a more or less convincing background for them, but did these Antiochian martyria, so carefully and lovingly described in Coptic texts, really exist?

This question has been answered by Mayer and Allen in their recent collaboration on the churches of Syrian Antioch in the period between 300 and 638. They discuss the validity of the material provided by Coptic hagiographical texts, using as particular examples the panegyrics dedicated to St Victor and the arguments of J. Lassus<sup>30</sup> and

---

<sup>28</sup> Behlmer 2007, 165.

<sup>29</sup> Philotheus is baptized in Antioch (*Mart. Phil.*, f. 84r a), Victor attends Eucharistic gatherings (Budge 1914, 6), the baptism of Theodore Anatolius and Claudius is celebrated by the whole city of Antioch (*Enc. Th. Anat.*, 8–9).

<sup>30</sup> Lassus 1947.

P. Maraval<sup>31</sup> who supported some of the claims of the Coptic authors, and come to the conclusion that legends from Coptic cycles that purport to situate martyria or shrines of Egyptian saints at Antioch have to be dismissed<sup>32</sup>. These legends, composed in Egypt, have relevance there “for the period that they were composed (seventh to eighth centuries), not Antioch during the period under investigation here”<sup>33</sup>. For the same reason they also exclude from the list of reliable sources the topographical borders of the so-called Danielstoff, a piece of textile from the collection of the Berlin Museum, published by J. Strzygowski in 1901, which depicts Daniel in the lions’ den; the borders of this textile depict some stylized churches and buildings with names. This piece attracted a lot of attention, since it was considered by some scholars to be connected with the Yakto mosaic<sup>34</sup> and, therefore, with Antioch<sup>35</sup>. It appears that, unless new systematic excavations provide new evidence for their existence, one has to accept the view of W. Mayer and P. Allen – there were no martyria dedicated to the martyrs depicted in the Coptic cycles, despite the claims of the hagiographers. It is possible though, that the authors of the texts describing the existence of the martyria in Antioch tried to show the dire contrast between the situation before the persecution and the situation in which the Christians found themselves during the period of the active persecution and shortly after its end. This contrast is also quite noticeable in the narratives dealing with the reigns of Diocletian and Constantine respectively.

#### ANTIOCH AND THE EMPERORS

The Copts saw Antioch as the main residence of Diocletian and, consequently, the place where the persecution broke out and where the majority of martyrs were tried and either killed, or tortured before being exiled to Egypt where they would finish their valiant struggle. In the Diocletianic martyrdoms, Antioch at the time of persecution is depicted as a frightened city, where Christians are hiding in fear; its streets are covered with the blood of the martyrs; the Christian churches are shut or destroyed while the pagan temples are thriving. But everything changes once the God-loving Emperor Constantine is enthroned: the churches are reopened, the pagan temples are demolished, and the prisoners are released. This dramatic change is reported by the author of the *Encomium to Theodore Anatolius*:

For when I look upon the palace of Diocletian, this murderer of the mighty men of Antioch, which is now under the settled order of the God-loving Emperor, and when I see his places [of worship] of idols, which are now destroyed, and which have been made into churches, wherein are read the books of the gospels, and when I see his throne of lawlessness, which has been removed from under him, and his bedchamber of lawlessness, which has been destroyed, I exclaim: “Well it is that the pride of that arrogant man Diocletian has been humiliated, and that there has been raised for us the humble and God-loving Emperor Constantine, who remembered his fellowship with them and his rank of general, and that the throne of Antioch has been given to him!” (*Enc. Th. Anat.*, 5).

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, Maraval’s claim for existence of the shrine of Claudius at Antioch, which is based on the *Encomium to Claudius*, pseudo-attributed to Severus (Maraval 1985, 339).

<sup>32</sup> Mayer, Allen 2012, 22–26.

<sup>33</sup> Mayer, Allen 2012, 27.

<sup>34</sup> The Yakto mosaic (dated approximately to 450–460), also referred to as the Megalopsychia Hunt, shows hunters attacking or fighting beasts. It was found in the Yakto complex at Daphne. For description of this mosaic see Lassus 1934.

<sup>35</sup> Papaconstantinou (2000) discusses the ‘Danielstoff’ and comes to a conclusion that the textile might have been produced in the sixth century somewhere in Egypt, not in Antioch.

Although Diocletian's connection with Antioch technically finishes with his death, in fact it extends into the following period as well. Therefore, it is necessary to say a few words about Antioch and Constantine, who in the Coptic tradition is Diocletian's direct successor<sup>36</sup>. Despite the fact that historical sources available to Coptic hagiographers clearly speak of Galerius, Maxentius and Constantius (see, for example, John of Nikiou, *Chronicle* LXXVII), they do not seem concerned with historical verisimilitude, but rather with the moral and edifying effects of the narrative. That is why Constantine appears in the Coptic narratives as Diocletian's heir and antagonist – his function in these texts is to contrast the evil Persecutor in every aspect by playing the role of the first Christian emperor. However, texts featuring Constantine the Christian Emperor are few in comparison to those featuring Diocletian. There was not enough time for such texts to be composed and become popular, since the attitude of the Church of Egypt to the Church of the Metropolis had always been rather complicated and became rather hostile in the course of time with the growing tensions between the Chalcedonian and anti-Chalcedonian factions.

Constantine could not escape the pull into the legendary fabric of martyr stories – as Diocletian was made a paradigmatic villain, Constantine was also turned into a symbol, the model of a Christian ruler, a triumphant vanquisher of enemies (usually represented in Coptic hagiography by generic 'Persians'), the redeemer of the evil deeds of his predecessor. Since the persecution started and was centred in Antioch, the deliverance also had to start in Antioch. That is why Coptic writers introduced Antiochene connections into the story of Constantine as well: not only was he baptized in Antioch, but the edict of tolerance towards Christians (which at first sight strongly resembles the edict of Milan) was actually issued in Antioch, as the authors of the Eudoxia legend claim. Thus, the Eudoxia story asserts that after his enthronement Constantine immediately wrote to his subjects and commanded them to leave idolatry, make the pagan temples 'places of lamentation', and build churches and celebrate the Eucharist in them. Those Christians who were in exile or in prison were to be "set free from the second day of the month of Tobe" (*Eud.*, 40). This proclamation was sent from Antioch to every province of his realm and the orders of the emperor were followed straightaway. H. A. Drake suggests that this edict from the Eudoxia narrative is not in fact the famous edict of Milan, but a much later document issued by Constantine in 324, described by Eusebius in the *Vita Constantini*<sup>37</sup>. In any case, the authors of the Eudoxia story obviously made an effort to emphasize the fact that the edict was issued in the same city of Antioch which used to be the centre of persecution.

But connecting Constantine with Antioch was also done on a deeper level, in the best traditions of cyclic linking; it was certainly not enough for the composers and editors of Coptic texts to place Constantine in Antioch in a merely geographical sense. There had to be deeper and stronger ties, as required by the conventions of cyclic editing, and of course, Coptic hagiographers discovered, or rather invented, them. The usual way to connect characters in Coptic cycles was to establish family relations between them, but this method was not applicable in this situation and the hagiographers had to choose other means. The introductory part of the *Encomium to Theodore Anatolius*

---

<sup>36</sup> For a general overview of the Constantine legend in Coptic texts and especially of his role in the interactions with the Persians, see Wilfong 1998, 177–188.

<sup>37</sup> Orlandi, Pearson, Drake 1980, 101–105.

reveals that Constantine and some of the Antiochene martyrs knew each other and were battle comrades before their martyrdom:

Our God-loving Emperor has known their might from the time when they were in the flesh [while alive] with him, for they were warriors who fought the wicked barbarians. When Constantine saw that he had become Emperor he knew that he had needed them in the war, for he knew that they were more of value than many mighty men of war (*Enc. Th. Anat.*, 6).

It is this old friendship and admiration for their strength that inspired Constantine to build their martyria and seek for their bodies. The introduction finishes with the author's claim that Constantine especially admired Theodore Anatolius to whom the encomium is dedicated, which allows the author to turn to the story of this saint.

As if this friendship with one of the most popular Antiochene saints and receiving baptism in Antioch were not enough to establish the link between the God-loving emperor and the God-loving city, the Copts added another association. The *Discourse on the Cross*, pseudo-attributed to Cyril of Jerusalem<sup>38</sup>, which contains another version of Constantine's involvement in the finding of the True Cross, slightly different from that in the Eudoxia legend, suggests that his claim to the authority over the whole empire was approved by the Council of Antioch as well as by the Senate of Rome<sup>39</sup>:

And by the providence of God the members of the Senate and the Council of the two cities, Rome and Antioch, took Constantine and placed him on the throne of Rome, and put the crown of the kingdom on his head and the sceptre. And the noblemen of the two cities brought him gifts<sup>40</sup>.

Despite the general fictitiousness and the church-political background of the Coptic accounts concerning Constantine's connection with Antioch, they do reflect – in their own manner – some historical facts. The composer of the *Encomium to Theodore Anatolius* specifically praises Constantine for building martyria of the saints in Antioch. Constantine did in fact build many churches around the empire and Antioch was no exception. Eusebius reports that Constantine built a magnificent church in Antioch, “a church of unparalleled size and beauty” (*Vita Const.* III. 50).

G. Downey points out that although no remains of the church have as yet been found, there is no reason to doubt its existence, as it is mentioned in various sources and there is also an archaeological representation of this church, if somewhat conventional, in the Yakto mosaic of Antioch. This church was known as ‘the Golden Church’ or ‘the Great Church’; in the fifth century sources it is sometimes referred to as ‘Repentance’, or Concordia (Omonoia)<sup>41</sup>. It probably stood on the island in the Orontes, in the so-called New City, and it was “placed in close association with the imperial palace there”<sup>42</sup>.

However, as is clear from the sources examined here, Coptic hagiographers are not overly concerned with the historicity of their compositions: they never refer to this famous church and prefer to describe the multiple martyria, the existence of which is

---

<sup>38</sup>Orlandi marks this homily as spurious, as it belongs to the ‘Cyrillian Cycle’ (Orlandi 1991, 681–682).

<sup>39</sup>This is a passage from a slightly later manuscript (11<sup>th</sup> century), published by E.A.W. Budge (see Budge 1915, 6). Earlier manuscripts of this homily do not mention Antioch at all (Campagnano 1980, 126–127). However, the homily itself might be dated to the late sixth or seventh century (Campagnano 1980, 14).

<sup>40</sup>Budge 1915, 214–215.

<sup>41</sup>Downey 1961, 342–349.

<sup>42</sup>Downey 1961, 346.

very doubtful. Let us now turn to the goals that they tried to achieve by creating the image of the holy city of Antioch.

#### HISTORICAL RELATIONS BETWEEN THE CHURCHES OF ALEXANDRIA AND ANTIOCH

The truth has appeared from the land of Egypt, and righteousness has arisen from the East. Egypt and Syria have become one in doctrine; Alexandria and Antioch have become one Church, one virgin-bride of one pure and chaste bridegroom, who is the Lord Jesus Christ, the Only-begotten Son, the Word of the Father<sup>43</sup>.

One of the objectives pursued by the authors of Coptic hagiographical texts connected with Antioch, as has been argued above, was to underline the links between the two communities belonging to the same strand of the Eastern Christian tradition, which is very often defined as 'monophysite' or 'miaphysite'. Behind this objective was a certain historical background which I will now briefly outline.

The great division between the so-called Oriental Orthodox and the rest of the Christian world began in the fifth century, when Dioscorus of Alexandria and some other Egyptian bishops refused to accept the Christological formulas of the Council of Chalcedon of 451. This schism, which resulted in the separation of a great part of the Universal Church, emerged slowly and was not caused by theological disagreements only; although the Christological formulas were the most important issue, political and ecclesiastical problems were also debated during that period.

The main stages and personalities in the history of the monophysite ('miaphysite' is a more correct term, though not entirely satisfactory) movement have been exhaustively described by W. Frend in his classic *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement*<sup>44</sup> and there is no need to repeat them here, but it is important to outline briefly the relations between the Egyptian and Syrian miaphysite communities in the period relevant for this study, i.e. the period of the production of the main body of Coptic hagiographical texts between the sixth and ninth centuries.

#### *The formation of the miaphysite community; the union of 617*

After the deposition of Dioscorus in 451 the power was for a time in the hands of the pro-Chalcedonian bishops. During the second phase of the controversy (in 482–535) Egypt had six anti-Chalcedonian archbishops; from around the 530s the emperors began to show their support for the pro-Chalcedonians in a more pronounced way<sup>45</sup>. Before the appearance of Severus (465–538) on the stage of church politics the anti-Chalcedonians did not act as a consolidated body in Egypt or in Syria. Some of the provinces of the empire (Egypt, Antioch, eastern Syria and Mesopotamia, and the provinces of Isauria and Pamphylia) were mostly anti-Chalcedonian, while Constantinople with its clergy, the European provinces and western Syria were mostly pro-Chalcedonian. However, the arrival and activity of Severus in the capital changed the situation dramatically. As Frend points out,

---

<sup>43</sup>These are the words of Athanasius of Antioch (595–630) at the assembly in Egypt where he preached before the clergy of Alexandria, cf. *Hist. Patr.*, 482.

<sup>44</sup>Frend 1972. See also a more recent work which includes material on the history of the miaphysite movement: Harvey 1990.

<sup>45</sup>Pietri *et al.* 1998, 528 *suiv.*

The activities of Severus as patriarch mark the transition between anti-Chalcedonianism and monophysitism. He provided opponents of Chalcedon with a clear-cut alternative theology that justified rejection of the *Tome* and the council. His organizing ability resulted, even against his will, in a rival Monophysite hierarchy challenging that of the Chalcedonians in many parts of the empire<sup>46</sup>.

After Severus' deposition and flight to Egypt in 512 the breach between the two parties continued to grow rapidly – in no small measure because of the imperial persecution of the miaphysite clergy<sup>47</sup>. In 536 Severus was condemned as a heretic by the local synod in Constantinople and from that point on all efforts to reunite Chalcedonians and Miaphysites were unsuccessful. Paul of Tinnis, appointed by Justinian in 538 as archbishop of Alexandria, was ordained in Constantinople by Menas, which was against all traditions, as the *History of the Patriarchs* did not fail to point out<sup>48</sup>. The successors of Paul, the so-called Melkites, were also ordained in the capital by the patriarch of Constantinople. This dependence or even subjugation of the official Alexandrian hierarchy to the imperial church led to a certain opposition on the part of the monastic establishments, so much so that the emperors had to support their candidates with armed force<sup>49</sup>.

The miaphysite party soon began to ordain its own clergy and became more and more consolidated, especially after the missionary work of bishop Jacob Baradaeus, who visited and maintained individual miaphysite congregations between 542 and 578. As Frend notes, the success of his mission, “especially in eastern Syria, indicated both the underlying anti-Chalcedonian sentiment of the mass of the people and their readiness, at least in matters of belief, to oppose the will of the emperor”<sup>50</sup>. By the end of the sixth century the Miaphysites controlled most of the countryside of Egypt and Syria, while the Chalcedonians had control over the cities and major towns. The miaphysite bishops mostly resided in the monasteries, which continued to grow and accumulate more and more power in the sixth century.

The miaphysite patriarchs of Alexandria and Antioch, despite their shared doctrinal stance, were not always united on the level of church politics. From the time of Paul the Black, deposed by Peter IV of Alexandria in 575, the Syrian and Egyptian miaphysites were at loggerheads. There was an attempt at reconciliation between Alexandria and Antioch during the pontificate of Damian (569–605)<sup>51</sup>, himself Syrian by origin, but the negotiations did not succeed and Damian broke off communion with the archbishop of Antioch, Peter Callinicus. The first major success in restoring ecclesiastical unity took place in 616/617<sup>52</sup>, when Athanasius ‘the Camel Driver’ of Antioch and Anastasius of

---

<sup>46</sup> Frend 1991, 1672.

<sup>47</sup> On the imperial policy towards the anti-Chalcedonians in the sixth century see Van Rompay 2005, 239–266. On the persecution of the anti-Chalcedonian clergy in Egypt see also Harvey 1990, 84–87, 103–104.

<sup>48</sup> *Hist. Patr.*, 469.

<sup>49</sup> Pietri *et al.* 1998, 529–530.

<sup>50</sup> Frend, 1991, 1675.

<sup>51</sup> Hardy 1991, 688–689; see also den Heijer 2004a, 127–128.

<sup>52</sup> D. Olster places this union in 616 (see next footnote); however, Ph. Booth in discussion of this union gives a reference to the yet unpublished thesis of M. Jankowiak who fixed it “in the second half of 617”, cf. Booth 2013, 104.

Alexandria signed a union<sup>53</sup>. This important event is featured in the *Chronicle* of Michael the Syrian (10. 26–27)<sup>54</sup> and in the *Hist. Patr.* 481 ff.

On the administrative level the union between the two sister Churches continued to exist. The Churches used to exchange so-called synodical letters: each time a new patriarch was elected, he would send an official letter professing his faith to his counterpart in the sister Church. Moreover, some of the patriarchs of Alexandria were actually Syrian by origin (Damian, Simon I, Abraham ibn Zura and others)<sup>55</sup>; the names of the patriarchs of Antioch were commemorated in the liturgy in Coptic churches and vice versa.

### *Communication between the miaphysite communities of Egypt and Syria*

Apart from the official contacts on the level of church administration, there were also connections on a smaller scale. J. M. Fiey in his comprehensive study ‘Coptes et Syriacques, Contacts et Échanges’<sup>56</sup> provides an excellent overview of the history of contacts between various ecclesiastical groups. In Fiey’s opinion, the most important and productive network was the one that connected monastic movements in Egypt and Syria. Hagiographical legends illustrate certain tendencies in these monastic contacts. One such tendency is the appropriation of certain Syriac monastic saints by the Copts, such as, for example, St Ephrem the Syrian<sup>57</sup>. Fiey relates the legend of St Ephrem’s visit to Egypt and his conversations with Anba Bishoi, which itself is a part of a late legend of the translation of his relics to the monastery of Anba Bishoi.

Fiey provides a list of similar narratives describing the visits of Syrian monks to Egypt<sup>58</sup>. Egyptian monks, also, travelled to Syria, and these visits are attested by such names as James the Recluse or Egyptian (who was martyred in 421).

A more recent article by J. den Heijer on the contacts between Egyptian and Syriac monastic groups as witnessed by the epigraphic evidence from the Monastery of the Syrians<sup>59</sup> shows that the dialogue and collaboration continued long into the late Middle Ages. A key role in this continuous dialogue was played by the Monastery of the Syrians (Dayr al-Suryān) in Wadi al-Natrun, southwest of the Nile Delta. It was built as a counterpart of the monastery of Anba Bishoi for the followers of Severus of Antioch who moved there from the monasteries controlled by the party of Julian of Halicarnassus (also known as the Gaianites), probably in the early sixth century. Later, after the reconciliation of these two groups around 710, this monastery was purchased by a certain Marutha, a man of East Syrian origin (presumably a miaphysite from Takrit in Iraq), and converted into a Syrian monastery; by the late sixteenth century there were still Syrians among the monks. Dayr al-Suryān is still functioning as a monastery, although its congregation is now entirely Coptic.

The Syriac inscriptions at Dayr al-Suryān, which can be dated to a period extending from the end of the eighth or the beginning of the ninth century to the end of the eleventh century, witness “the Coptic-Syriac coexistence within the monastery from

---

<sup>53</sup> On this union in the context of the Persian war and the role of the Byzantine official Nicetas see Olster 1985, 93–108.

<sup>54</sup> See summary of Michael’s account in Booth 2013, 104.

<sup>55</sup> See den Heijer 2004a, 127 *suiv.*

<sup>56</sup> Fiey 1972–1973, 295–365.

<sup>57</sup> Fiey 1972–1973, 298–302.

<sup>58</sup> Although these two saints belonged to the Church of the East, not to the miaphysite Church.

<sup>59</sup> Den Heijer 2004b, 923–938.



the early eighth century until far into the sixteenth century”<sup>60</sup>. At certain stages the monastery was inhabited simultaneously by Coptic and Syrian monks<sup>61</sup>. The oldest inscription discovered in Dayr al-Suryān to date reads ‘saintly Cyriacus, patriarch of Antioch’, which, L. Van Rompay suggests, most probably refers to the Syrian patriarch of Antioch, Cyriacus (793–817). The second inscription is dated by Van Rompay to 818/819 A.D. There are two patriarchs named in this inscription – Ya’qūb of Alexandria (819–830) and Dionysius of Tel-Mahre (818–845). Den Heijer points out that ‘the inscription is dated to the very beginning of both patriarchates, and thus to a time when there had not yet been any direct contact between them, for it was only in 825 and in 830 that Dionysius would personally travel to Egypt to deliver his synodical letters’<sup>62</sup>. Two other inscriptions are found on the wooden doors of the church; they are dated to 914 and 926<sup>63</sup>.

### *Appropriation of foreign saints in Egypt*

Although the epigraphic data from Dayr al-Suryān mainly provide evidence for the mutual recognition of the hierarchy in both communities, they also show that the connection between the Syrian and Egyptian miaphysite groups was still strong in the late eighth to tenth centuries, the period in which the majority of the passions of the Antiochene martyrs was copied and gained popularity in Egypt. These monastic networks and connections, suggests Fiey, served as a medium for the process of the exchange of saints: the saints of Syria and especially those of Antioch (together with the so-called Persian saints) start to infiltrate the menologia of Egypt<sup>64</sup>. Among the ones who are best known are the martyrs Theodore Anatolius, James the Sawn Asunder (Intercisus or Persian), Sergius and Bacchus, the female martyrs Drosis and Febronia, Symeon Stylite and others. Some of these saints have their commemorations on the same days as in Syriac menologia (Febronia, Barsauma); in other cases the commemoration dates do not coincide (as is the case with Ephrem or James the Sawn-Asunder)<sup>65</sup>. It must be noted that in his study Fiey does not do justice to the spread of the cult of the Antiochene military saints, although he mentions some of the names – for example, Hour and his family, and Theodore Anatolius. In any case, the Antiochene saints whose lives belong to the Coptic literary cycles are found only in late Syriac menologia, which indicates yet again that their stories were composed in Egypt and have no background in Syria.

The appropriation or, in some cases, exchange of saints between Egypt and Syria is a complex and sometimes perplexing phenomenon<sup>66</sup> and exceeds the scope of this article. But certainly this borrowing of saints, especially on the Egyptian side, was not a spontaneous action – there was a certain ideology behind this process. We can clearly see that Coptic authors developed a strong interest in Antioch and Antiochene saints: this interest begins to form in the texts composed in the seventh century, such as the

<sup>60</sup> Den Heijer 2004b, 924.

<sup>61</sup> On the Syrian monks in Scetis in general see Innemée, Van Rompay 1998, 167–202.

<sup>62</sup> Den Heijer 2004b, 927.

<sup>63</sup> Innemée, Van Rompay 1998, 193–194.

<sup>64</sup> Fiey 1972–1973, 305.

<sup>65</sup> Fiey 1972–1973, 305–308.

<sup>66</sup> For example, two very popular Antiochene saints – martyrs Romanus and Pelagia – never made it into the Coptic Synaxarium, despite the fact that their cults were promoted in Antioch by Chrysostom and Severus.

legend of Eudoxia. It reinforces in the following two centuries and results in the creation of a hagiographical Antioch in the martyr passions composed in the eighth century and later<sup>67</sup>.

#### CONCLUSIONS

The image of Antioch as the 'holy city', equal to or even surpassing in some aspects Jerusalem, the Holy City of Christianity, was constructed by Coptic authors in the period of massive hagiographical production in the seventh to ninth centuries. This coincided with the formative period for the Coptic Church's identity as a Church of Martyrs (which stimulated the development of the Coptic cults of the Antiochene military martyrs) and as a miaphysite community, strongly opposed to the pro-Chalcedon Church of Constantinople, its former metropolis. It is no surprise that Antioch, a famous ancient centre of Christianity, was chosen to replace Jerusalem and to fulfil the functions of a 'holy city' as a birthplace of some popular martyrs, such as Victor, Claudius, Macarius and others, since Antioch was also – for a certain period<sup>68</sup> – a stronghold of the miaphysite confession in the East.

Thus, Coptic hagiographers artfully used the pre-existing link between the two communities, established through official communications between the miaphysite patriarchates and through monastic networks, and created a monumental image of the city washed in and sanctified by the blood of martyrs who were then sent to Egypt and sanctified it, too, by their sufferings and posthumous miracles. This legend of Antioch, like the legend of Diocletian in its Coptic re-working, consists of many parts scattered in different texts that together form what might be called the 'Cycle of Antioch'. This group of texts includes martyr passions, in which Antioch is used for creating the necessary urban background; texts connected with the emperors Diocletian and Constantine, such as the legend of Eudoxia and the *Discourse on the Cross*, pseudo-attributed to Cyril of Jerusalem, in which Antioch is used to emphasize the contrast between the two types of the ruler – the Persecutor Diocletian and the God-loving Constantine; and hagiographical panegyrics in honour of the Antiochene saints ascribed to various fictitious bishops of Antioch.

Supported by the approximately contemporary hymnographic texts, which also praise Antiochene saints and describe Antioch as the orchard from where shoots of fruit-bearing trees are transferred into the new soil of Egypt and bear more fruit, this *Cycle of Antioch*, taken as a whole, also provided solid background for the martyria and relics of these saints in Egypt. The problem of dubious relics and questionable martyria witnessed as early as the fifth century by the colourful sermons of Shenute thus received a solution: since some of the texts forming this *Cycle* are ascribed to bishops of Antioch

---

<sup>67</sup>This increase of interest in Antiochene saints is also reflected in the collections of liturgical texts, which were forming in the same period. Thus, the earliest dated liturgical Coptic manuscript in Sahidic dialect (M574 of the Pierpont Morgan Library), contains thirteen acrostic hymns in honour of the Lord, the Mother of God, and the saints. Four out of these thirteen hymns are dedicated to the martyrs – and only one to the Mother of God. Five hymns altogether are dedicated to the saints who originated from Antioch: the martyrs Victor, Claudius, Theodore and two hymns in honour of Severus of Antioch.

<sup>68</sup>The later miaphysite patriarchs of Antioch were unable to reside in Antioch itself because it was a stronghold of the Chalcedonians. But for the Copts the name of Antioch was associated with the Syrian miaphysites, even though the city itself had turned against them. The same attitude can be observed in Egypt: the Egyptian miaphysites spoke of Alexandria as of their see, although the miaphysite patriarchs had to live in monasteries outside of Alexandria.

(and especially to such respectable figures as Severus), who all claim to be eye-witnesses of certain events in the lives of the martyrs or of their posthumous miracles at the martyria in Antioch, there was no reason for the Coptic audience to question the origins of a particular martyr. The passions and encomia in honour of the martyrs read at their shrines depicted their childhood and adolescence in Antioch, their first encounters with the pagan authorities and their subsequent banishment to Egypt, explaining in this way their connection with the birthplace; the hymns performed at the celebrations in honour of the saints also affirmed these ideas. In the course of time, inserting Antiochene links into the story of a saint became rather fashionable and led to the construction of new links, as in the case of Cosmas and Damian and their mother Theodote. W. Mayer notes that:

...in Egyptian circles the introduction into a saint's life of a connection to Antioch became a means of increasing that saint's prestige. Setting events at Antioch under the rule of Diocletian is a characteristic of this cycle of Coptic hagiography that both magnifies the saint's confession and lends historical verisimilitude<sup>69</sup>.

Antiochene connections also helped to boost the significance of Egypt as a land of martyrs: the stories of saints who travel from Egypt, usually symbolised as Alexandria, to Antioch or vice versa, suffer martyrdom in the respective counterpart places (Naharoua goes to Antioch from Egypt, Martyria travels to Egypt to baptize her children) and thus establish the network of miracles and shrines. All these small pieces in the end formed an impressive mosaic image of the holy city Antioch, closely connected with Egypt by ties of faith and by common saints.

## References

- Barnes, T.D. 1981: *Constantine and Eusebius*. Cambridge (Mass.)—London.
- Behlmer, H. 2007: Patriotische Heilige in Ägypten. In: D.R. Bauer, K. Herbers, G. Signori (eds), *Patriotische Heilige. Beiträge zur Konstruktion religiöser und praktischer Identitäten in der Vormoderne*. Stuttgart, 157–178.
- Booth, P. 2013: *Crisis of the Empire: Doctrine and Dissent at the End of Late Antiquity*. Berkeley.
- Bouriant, U. 1883: Fragments de manuscrits thébains du Musée de Boulaq. *Recueil de travaux relatifs à la philologie et à l'archéologie égyptiennes et assyriennes* IV, 153–154.
- Budge, E.A.W. (ed.) 1914: *Coptic Martyrdoms, etc. in the Dialect of Upper Egypt*. Vol. I. London.
- Budge, E.A.W. 1915: *Miscellaneous Coptic Texts in the Dialect of Upper Egypt*. London.
- Campagnano, A. 1980: *Omelia copta sulla Passione, sulla Croce e sulla Vergine*. Milan.
- Crum, W.E. 1908: Place-Names in Deubner's *Kosmas und Damian*. *Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archaeology* 30, 129–136.
- Delehay, H. 1934: *Cinq leçons sur la méthode hagiographique*. Bruxelles.
- Den Heijer, J. 2004a: Les Patriarches coptes d'origine syrienne. In: R.Y. Ebied, H. Teule (eds), *Studies on the Christian Arabic Heritage: In Honour of Father Prof. Dr. Samir Khalil Samir S.I. at the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*. Leuven, 125–150.
- Den Heijer, J. 2004b: Relations between Copts and Syrians in the Light of Recent Discoveries at Dayr as-Suryân. In: M. Immerzeel, J. van der Vliet (eds), *Coptic Studies on the Threshold of a New Millennium, I–II: Proceedings of the Seventh International Congress of Coptic Studies*. Leuven, 923–938.
- Downey, G. 1961: *A History of Antioch in Syria: from Seleucus to the Arab conquest*. Princeton.
- Drescher, J. 1944: An Encomium attributed to Severus of Antioch. *Bulletin de la Société d'Archéologie Copte* 10, 43–68.
- Fiey, J.M. 1972–1973: Coptes et Syriaques, Contacts et Échanges. *Collectanea* 15, 295–365.
- Freund, W.H.C. 1972: *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement*. Cambridge.
- Freund, W.H.C. 1991: Monophysitism. In: *Coptic Encyclopedia*. Vol. V. New York, 1669–1678.
- Grabar, A. 1946: *Martyrium: recherches sur le culte des reliques et l'art chrétien antique*. Paris.

<sup>69</sup> Mayer, Allen 2012, 22; see also Papaconstantinou 2001, 32–34.

- Hardy, E.R. 1991: Damian. In: *Coptic Encyclopedia*. Vol. II. New York, 688–689.
- Harvey, S.A. 1990: *Asceticism and Society in Crisis: John of Ephesus and the Lives of the Eastern Saints*. Berkeley–London.
- Innemée, K., Van Rompay, L. 1998: La présence des syriens dans le Wadi al-Natrun, Egypte. *Parole de l'Orient* 23, 167–202.
- Kuhn, K., Tait, W.J., 1996: *Thirteen Coptic acrostic hymns from MS M574 of the Pierpont Morgan Library*. Oxford.
- Lassus, J. 1934: La mosaïque de Yakto. In: G.W. Elderkin (ed.), *Antioch-on-the-Orontes I*. Princeton, 114–156.
- Lassus, J. 1947: *Sanctuaires chrétiens de Syrie. Essai sur la genèse, la forme et l'usage liturgique des édifices du culte chrétien, en Syrie, du III<sup>e</sup> siècle à la conquête musulmane*. Paris.
- Maraval, P. 1985: *Lieux saints et pèlerinages d'Orient: histoire et géographie des origines à la conquête arabe*. Paris.
- Markus, R.A. 1990: *The End of Ancient Christianity*. Cambridge.
- Mayer, W., Allen, P. 2012: *The Churches of Syrian Antioch (300–638 CE)*. Leuven.
- O'Leary, E. De Lacy 1937: *The Saints of Egypt*. London.
- Olster, D. 1985: Chalcedonian and Monophysite: the Union of 616. *Bulletin de la Société d'Archéologie Copte* 27, 93–108.
- Orlandi, T. 1991: Cyril of Jerusalem. In: *Coptic Encyclopedia*. Vol. III. New York, 681–682.
- Orlandi, T., Pearson, B.A., Drake, H.A. (eds) 1980: *Eudoxia and the Holy Sepulchre: a Constantinian legend in Coptic*. Milano.
- Ousterhout, R. 1990: The Temple, the Sepulchre, and the Martyrion of the Savior. *Gesta* 29, 44–53.
- Papaconstantinou, A. 2000: Antioche ou l'Égypte? Quelques considérations sur l'origine du «Danielstoff». *Cahiers archéologiques* 48, 5–10.
- Papaconstantinou, A. 2001: *Le culte des saints en Egypte: des Byzantins aux Abbassides: l'apport des inscriptions et des papyrus grecs et coptes*. Paris.
- Papaconstantinou, A. 2007: The cult of saints: A haven of continuity in a changing world? In: R. S. Bagnall (ed.), *Egypt in the Byzantine World, 300–700*. Cambridge, 350–364.
- Papaconstantinou, A. 2011: Hagiology in Coptic. In: S. Efthymiadis (ed.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiology*. Vol. I. Farnham, 323–343.
- Peters, F.E. 1986: *Jerusalem and Mecca: the Typology of the Holy City in the Near East*. New York.
- Pietri, L., Mayeur, J.-M., Beaujard, B. (eds) 1998: *Histoire du christianisme des origines à nos jours*. T. 3: *Les églises d'Orient et d'Occident (432–610)*. Paris.
- Saradi, H.G. 2014: The City in Byzantine Hagiology. In: S. Efthymiadis (ed.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiology*. Vol. II. Farnham, 419–454.
- Sheridan, M. 2012: *From the Nile to the Rhone and Beyond: Studies in Early Monastic Literature and Scriptural Interpretation*. Rome.
- Till, W.C. 1935–1936: *Koptische Heiligen- und Martyrerlegenden*. Vols. I–II. Rome.
- Van Esbroeck, M. 1981: La diffusion orientale de la légende des saints Cosme et Damien. In: *Hagiographie, cultures et sociétés: IV<sup>e</sup>–XI<sup>e</sup> siècles: actes du colloque organisé à Nanterre et à Paris, 2–5 mai 1979*. Paris, 61–77.
- Van Rompay, L. 2005: Society and Community in the Christian East. In: M. Maas (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*. Cambridge, 239–266.
- Wilfong, T.G. 1998: Constantine in Coptic: Egyptian Constructions of Constantine the Great. In: S.N.C. Lieu, D. Montserrat (eds), *Constantine: History, Historiography and Legend*. London, 177–188.

## Abbreviations

- |                |   |   |
|----------------|---|---|
| Enc. Claud.    | – | Constantine of Assiout, Encomium to Claudius of Antioch. In: G. Gordon (ed.), <i>Textes coptes relatifs à Saint Claude d'Antioche</i> (PO 35.4/166). Turnhout, 1970.                                |
| Enc. Dem.      | – | Encomium of Flavianus on Demetrius, archbishop of Alexandria. In: E.A.W. Budge (ed.), <i>Coptic Martyrdoms in the Dialect of Upper Egypt</i> . London, 1914, 137–156.                               |
| Enc. Th. Anat. | – | [Theodore of Antioch], Encomium to Theodore Anatolius. In: E.A.W. Budge (ed.), <i>Miscellaneous Coptic Texts in the Dialect of Upper Egypt</i> . London, 1915, 1–48.                                |
| Enc. Vict.     | – | [Theopompus of Antioch], Encomium on St Victor. In: L. Depuydt, A. B. Scott (eds), <i>Encomiastica from the Pierpont Morgan Library: Five Coptic Homilies</i> (CSCO 544/47). Leuven, 1993, 133–152. |

- Enc. Theod. — [Theodore of Antioch], Encomium to Theodore Anatolius and Theodore the General. In: I. Balestri, H. Hyvernât (eds), *Acta Martyrum*. II. Paris, 1924, 90–156; E. O. Winstedt (ed.), *Coptic Texts on Saint Theodore the General, St. Theodore the Eastern, Chamoul and Justus*. London–Oxford, 1910, 1–72.
- Eud. — Orlandi, T., Pearson, B.A., Drake, H.A. (eds), *Eudoxia and the Holy Sepulchre: a Constantinian legend in Coptic*. Milano, 1980.
- Hist. Patr. — Evetts, B. (ed.), *History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria I–IV* (PO 1.2/2, p. 105–211; 1.4/4, p. 383–518; 5.1/21, p. 3–215; 10.5/50, p. 359–551). Paris, 1904; 1909; 1914.
- Mart. Phil. — Martyrdom of Philotheus. In: H. Hyvernât (ed.), *Bibliothecae P. Morgan codices coptici photographice expressi*. T. XLI. Rome, 1922, 149–204.
- Shen. Hom. — Homilies of Shenute. In: E. Amelineau, *Oeuvres de Schenoudi*. Texte copte et traduction française. T. I. Paris, 1907.