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A COPTIC LITURGICAL TEXT RELATING TO SAINT LEONTIUS

Introduction

Saint Leontius[1] is a great martyr of the fourth century. He played an important role in the conversion of the most important key person in the non-Chalcedonian churches i.e. Severus of Antioch (512-518 Patriarch and died 538AD). Despite his importance, we find only one Coptic liturgical texts relating to him.

The name of Leontius in the Coptic Synaxarium

There are four martyrs bearing the name of Leontius:[2]

> **Leoniius of Tripoli,** martyr, 22 Abib (16 July). Not an Egyptian martyr but one who became popular and prominent in Egypt. His cult was of early date and the historian Theodoret classes him with the Apostles Peter and Paul as one of the great martyrs of the Church. He was a soldier and had a beloved brother who was a priest: both were natives of Tripoli in Syria.
> Leontius was a devout Christian much given to the study of the scriptures and especially the Psalms: he preached to his fellow soldiers and led many of them to adopt Christianity. Complaints of this were made to the commander and he was called upon to explain his conduct. He answered boldly, declared that he was a Christian and determined to be loyal to Christ, reviling the idols worshipped by the heathen. The commander was greatly enraged at the freedom of his speech and had him beaten, but Leontius praised God at this punishment. Other tortures followed. A fellow soldier had pity on him and whispered: 'Say but one word, that you will sacrifice, and I will save you' (cf. passion of St. Victor). But Leontius answered: 'Go away, Satan'. He was executed in prison. A wealthy 'woman gave large sums of money to be allowed to take away the martyr's body, which subsequently became one of the most famous relics of Syria. It is not clear which emperor he suffered under, perhaps Vespasian or Valerian.
> **Leontius,** martyr, 18 Tout (12 September). A Syrian martyr of the days of Maximian.
> **Leontius** the Arab, martyr. Companion to Theodore the Oriental. After the Basilides family had been sent to Egypt he also was arrested and sent to Tripoli in Syria where he suffered martyrdom. This sending to Tripoli is

[1] Michel van Esbroeck, "Leontius of Tripoli, saint," in Aziz Surayal Atiya (ed.), *The Coptic Encyclopedia,* MacMillan, New York, 1991, pp. 1442-1444.

[2] De Lacy O'Leary, *The saints of Egypt,* Society for promoting Christian knowledge, London, 1937, pp. 177-179.

perplexing: in all probability it shows confusion with the celebrated martyr of Tripoli (above) thus. Again it is noteworthy that Leontius the Arab appears in several other combinations, e.g., Leontius and Publius in the Syriac passion.
Leontius the Syrian, 1 Tubeh (27 December), martyr. His reputation as a Christian was made known to the Emperor Maximian, and especially the fact that he taught soldiers the doctrines of Christianity. The Emperor, knowing that he had a great influence in the army, tried every means to win over his support and offered him great wealth and high rank if he would consent to sacrifice, but he refused. He was tortured, thrown into boiling oil, and made to suffer many other torments, and at length was beheaded. (who is our concern today).

Veneration of Leontius in Egypt

The veneration of Saint Leontius is attested since the sixth century as is apparent by many churches after him in Arsenoe, Hermopolis, Hermonthis, Medamûd.[3] His martyrdom was copied in the monastic circles[4] There is no church or sanctuary recorded in the book the *History of churches and monasteries* in the twelfth century.[5]

Veneration of Leontius outside Egypt

1. *The sanctuary of Saint Leontius was in Daphne* in the vicinity of Antioch,[6] it was mentioned by Severus of Antioch in the homily 27[7] in the place of the Apollo temple. The sanctuary is mentioned in homily 50.[8]

2. *In Tripoli the sanctuary* of Leontius[9] is attested in fifth century as Severus of Antioch attended the feast,[10] this church replaced a pagan temple.

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[3] Arietta Papaconstantinou, *Le Culte des Saint en Égypte des Byzantins aux Abbassides, l'apport des inscriptions et des papyrus grecs et coptes,* Le Monde Byzantin & CNRS, Paris, 2001, pp. 151-152.

[4] René-Georges Coquin, "Le catalogue de la bibliothèque du couvent de saint Élie « du rocher » (Ostracon IFAO 13315)", *Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale* 75 (1975) 207-239.

[5] We checked Samuel al-Suriani, *Tarikh al-kana'is wal-'adyara,* Cairo, 1984, 4 volumes, and also B.T. Evetts & A.J. Butler, *The Churches and Monasteries of Egypt and some Neighbouring countries, attributed to Abû Salih the Armenian,* Oxford, 1895.

[6] E. Jeffreys, M. Jeffreys & R. Scott, *The Chronicle of John Malalas*, Melbourne, 1986 (= *Australian for Byzantine Studies - Byzantina Australiensa* 4), Book 16, p. 223.

[7] M. Brière & F. Graffin, *Les Homiliae Cathedrales de Sévère d'Antioche. Homéliies XXVI-XXXI,* Brepols, Turnhout, 1974 (= *Patrologia Orientalis* 36), fasc. 4, nº 170, pp. 558[24]-573[39] especially pp. 571-573.

[8] M. Brière & F. Graffin, *Les Homiliae Cathedrales de Sévère d'Antioche. Homéliies XLVI-LI,* Brepols, Turnhout, 1969 (= *Patrologia Orientalis* 35), fasc. 3, nº 165, p. 363.

[9] J.M. Fiey, "Un grand sanctuaire perdu? Le martyrion de saint Léonce à Tripoli", *Le Muséon* 95 (1982) 77-98.

[10] M.-A. Kugener, *Textes Syriaques relatifs à la vie de Sévère, patriarche d'Antioche, Première partie. Vie de Sévère* par Zacharie le Scholastique, Firmin-Didot, Paris, 1904, (= *Patrologia Orientalis* 2.1), n° 6, p. 73[73], p. 80[80].

3. *In Damascus* in the sixth century there was a church named after him.[11]

4. *In Bostra* there was a martyrion erected in 512-513 during the reign of the bishop Julian.[12]

There are many commemorations for Saint Leontius in the Syriac church 7. 18, 19 June (Huzayzan)[13] the renovation of the sanctuary of Leontius, 10 July (Ilul), 5 May, the second Friday after the resurrection

The Syriac version of the martyrdom of Leontius is on the 18 June[14] which is the date of the two homilies 27 and 50,[15] the date is shared also in the Byzantine tradition.[16]

The feast of Leontius has different dates in Coptic and in Syriac tradition, the was noted by J.M. Fiey.[17]

There is fact in the Coptic church to have a feast for the martyrdom and six months later another for the consecration of church.[18] The date of the martyrdom of Leontius attested in the homily of Severus of Antioch[19] and his passion is the first of Tubah, hence the commemoration of the consecration of his church is on the 1st of Ba'unah.

It is worth mention that the first of Tubeh is the feast of saint Stephen who is more important than Leontius, so the Difnar consecrates his texts to this saint.

This commemoration is attested in all the edition of the Synaxarium.[20]

There is a commemoration is some edition of the Synaxarion on the 15 of Tût. The confusion may be caused that the feast of Saint Stephen lies on the same day as the feast of Leontius on the 1st of Tubeh, hence the 15 of Tût the translation of saint Stephen introduced the feast of Leontius?

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[11] P. Maraval, *Lieux saints et pèlerinages d'Orient Histoire et géographie des origines à la conquête arabe*, Éditions du Cerf, Paris, 1985, p. 335.

[12] J. Lassus, *Sanctuaires Chrétiens de Syrie*, *Essaie sur la génèse, la forme et l'usage liturgique des édifices du culte chrétien, en Syrie, du IIIe siècle à la conquête musulmane*, P. Geuthner, Paris, 1947 (= *Bibliothèque Archéologique et Historique* XLII), volume 1, p. 140.

[13] R. Akhrass, كلندار الأعياد السيدية وتذكارات القديسين في كنيسة أنطاكية السريانية الأرثوذكسية [calendar of the Lordly feasts and the commemorations of the saints in the Syriac Orthodox Antiochian Church], Damascus, 2015, p. 117. p. 14.

[14] G. Garitte, "La Passion syriaque", *Le Muséon* 61 (1968) 415-440 especially p. 418.

[15] M. Brière, *Les Homiliae Cathedrales de Sévère d'Antioche. Homéliies CXX-CXXV,* Firmin-Didot, Paris, 1960 (= *Patrologia Orientalis* 29), fasc. 1, nº 138, p. 53[557], p. 55[559].

[16] H. Delehaye, *Synaxarium Ecclesiiae Constinopolitanae,* Socios Bollandianos, Bruxelles, 1954, pp. 755-756. H. Follieri *Initia Hymnorum ecclesiae Graecae,* Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Città del Vaticano, 1966 (= *Studi e Testi* 215 bis), volume 5.2, p. 203.

[17] J.M. Fiey, "Coptes et Syriaques contacts et échanges", *Studia Orientalia Christiana Collectanea* 15 (1972-1973) 295-366 especially 306-310.

[18] Youhanna Nessim Youssef, "Les fêtes d'été et les fêtes d'hivers dans le calendrier copte", *Aula Orientalis* 11 (1993) 173-178.

[19] G. Garitte, "L'Homélie copte de Sévère d'Antioche", *Le Muséon* 79 (1966) 335-386, especially p. 355.

[20] O. Meinardus, *Christian Egypt Ancient and Modern,* American University in Cairo Press, Cairo, 1977, 2nd edition, p. 116.