TRANSACTIONS

# Syrian Stylites

## Rereadings and Recastings of Late Ancient Superheroes

EDITED BY BARBARA CROSTINI & CHRISTIAN HØGEL

SWEDISH RESEARCH INSTITUTE IN ISTANBUL
TRANSACTIONS VOL. 26

# Syrian Stylites

# Syrian Stylites

*Rereadings and Recastings of Late Ancient Superheroes*

Edited by Barbara Crostini & Christian Høgel

SWEDISH RESEARCH INSTITUTE IN ISTANBUL
TRANSACTIONS, VOL. 26

Cover illustration: The remains of the column of St Symeon Stylites in Qal'at Sim'an, Syria, 2005. Photo by Olof Heilo.
Cover design: eddy.se ab

© 2024 The Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul and the Authors
Logotype: Bo Berndal
Printed in Latvia by ADverts, in collaboration with Printpool, 2024
Distributor: eddy.se ab
ISBN: 978-91-89840-24-9
ISSN: 1100-0333

# Table of Contents

Preface ........ 7

Barbara Crostini
How Did You Meet Your First Stylite? An Introduction to the Stylite World ........ 9

Part I

**Textual Reception: Stylites and Their Texts**

Andreas Westergren
The Laughing Stock: The First Stylite Biography as Paradoxical Myth ........ 45

Charles Kuper
A Critique of Stylitism: Parody and Imitation in the *Life of Theodulus the Stylite* ........ 67

Barbara Crostini
Corpse Bride and Holy Relic: Forgiving Necrophilia in Antonios's *Life of St Symeon the Stylite the Elder* ........ 99

Thomas Arentzen
In the Shadows of Pillars ........ 129

Christian Høgel
Stylites in the Metaphrastic Menologion ........ 139

Béatrice Caseau and Charis Messis
Stylites in the Middle Byzantine Period: the Case of the Novelistic Life of Theodore of Edessa ........ 161

Fabrizio Conca and Laura Franco
Beyond the Pillar. The Reception of Symeon in Modern Poetry: Tennyson, Nencioni and Καβάφης .......... 181

## Part II

## Visual Reception: Stylites and Their Images

Esen Öğüş
The Stylite and the Roman Honorific Statue: On the Visual and Conceptual Impact of a Human Figure on a Pillar ....... 199

Tiffany Apostolou
Stylite Portraiture and Power: Observing the Column between Late Antique and Contemporary Art .......... 227

Basema Hamarneh
On the Edge of Heaven: Stylite and Recluse Monks in the Levant in the Byzantine and Islamic Periods .......... 243

Maria Raffaella Menna
Stylites of Cappadocia .......... 269

Maria Veronese
Buñuel's *Simon of the Desert* between Earth and Heaven ......... 293

Christine Amadou
The Stylite is Present: Performance and Reclusion in Interplay ... 311

## Part III

## An Anthology

An Anthology of Images and Poems about Stylites .......... 327

Charles Lock
Translating Rilke's "Der Stylit" .......... 344

# Preface

Riksbankens Jubileumsfond generously sponsored the international workshop at the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul on 10–12 October 2019. The workshop was originally entitled 'The Reception of Stylites: Rereadings and Recastings of Late Ancient Syrian Super-Heroes'. We are very grateful to the scholars who attended the workshop and brought their contribution of knowledge and debate to the topic of stylitism. It was a fun and memorable occasion before the days that made most of us into recluses due to the pandemic.

That extended period of reclusion which began in 2020 has caused delays in the volume's developments, but we are now very pleased to have assembled the critical mass of studies presented here. We are very grateful to the contributors for working with us towards this publication and to Ingela Nilsson, Olof Heilo, Thomas Arentzen, Tonje Sørensen, and the staff of the Swedish Institute at Istanbul, as well as to RJ, for supporting this initiative.

Barbara Crostini and Christian Høgel

BARBARA CROSTINI

# How Did You Meet Your First Stylite? An Introduction to the Stylite World

How did you meet your first stylite? If this survey was carried out among Byzantinists, the answer may be through Bollandists' editions, or via the image of a pilgrimage token or seal published in some general survey on Byzantine material culture. But if the same question was extended to the average citizen, answers may well be different. Granted, not everyone will have met their stylite at all, as yet. But chances are that some notion of a person on a pillar will have reached even a modern secular audience through an unplanned encounter in a range of different contexts. For example, illusionist and endurance artist, David Blaine (b. 1973) performed a stunt in Bryant Park, NY, on May 22, 2002, standing unaided for 35 hours on a 100-foot high, 22-inch-wide pillar against the silhouette of the surrounding skyscrapers. His website declares that the feat, entitled 'Vertigo', assembled 50,000 live spectators at least at its conclusion, when Blaine jumped off the pillar in free-fall landing onto a layer of cardboard.[1] No reference is made to ancient stylites, but one cannot refrain from associating Blaine's backdrop with the final scene from the famous film by Luis Buñuel, *Simón del Desierto* (1965), where a Jumbo transports the ascete from his Syrian pillar to the American Big Apple, at the same time a spatial, temporal, and cultural feat of transportation.[2] The comparison is not just visual, but extends to contents too. Were pillar saints just trying to impress with their strange habits? Were they simply testing the limits of the human body in the same way that this professional 'endurance artist' pursues – and sells – his stunts as a career?

[1] https://davidblaine.com/vertigo/ (accessed 13/07/2022). With thanks to Laura Franco for showing me these pictures during the conference in Istanbul.

[2] Summary in Rush, *Cinema and its Discontents*, 137–39. See in this volume the paper by Maria Veronese.

Social media have also spread the experience of contemporary pillar dwellers with a religious twist, such as that of the Georgian monk Maxime Qavtaradze, 59, who chose a natural rock formation of venerable memory to establish his diminutive dwelling with balcony on the surrounding valley. His rock is 40 meters high, and at its foot lies a monastery to which the 'stylite' is connected. Besides the high place where the monk dwells, images of his life include a system of pulleys through which food supplies are sent up to him, and a vertical ladder which he ascends or descends when he has to go down for some duty to the monastery.[3] Such features are also found on images of ancient stylites, such as pilgrims' seals. Closer to home and reminiscent of her medieval predecessor Symeon of Trier, an athletic looking woman has rented from the local council a hermitical space in the tower of the Austrian city of Linz and blogged her way through months of solitude.[4] Whether looking at the saintly Maxime, or at the daring Blaine, modern audiences may catch more than a glimpse of the phenomenon with which this book contends from a longer historical perspective. The impression of perilous height and physical endurance remains the same whether one thinks of the fourth- or of the twentieth-century pillar dwellers.

A vast crowd will have met their first historical stylite at an extraordinarily popular exhibition organized by Élodie Bouffard and Raphaëlle Ziadé at the Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris (26/6, 2017–14/1, 2018)[5] and Tourcoing (23/2–11/6, 2018).[6] The exhibition was entitled 'Chrétiens d'Orient, 2000 ans d'histoire'. Its aim was to raise awareness of the harsh predicament of Christians in Arab countries by showing their ancient artistic heritage. The exhibition featured a number of stylite artefacts from Syria, including the famous stele of Gibrin, normally at the Louvre, monastic robes with the typical *koukoulion*, and a glass flask with a stylite.[7] An even larger public will have met their first stylite at the cinema: most likely, through the already mentioned reel by Luis Buñuel, a cult movie in turn referenced in a memorable scene of *Il Pap'occhio* (1980),[8] an Italian-produced Catholic satire film directed by Renzo Arbore. While Arbore met his stylite in Buñuel, the great Spanish film maker apparently read about stylites for the first time in the medieval collection of saints'

[3] https://ivoflavio-abela.blogspot.com/2013/10/maxime-qavtaradze-lultimo-stilita.html?m=1 (accessed 13/07/2022). See also http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/09/19/katskhi-pillar-monk-georgia-maxime-qavtaradze_n_3950192.html http://orthodoxologie.blogspot.it/2013/09/un-stylite-en-georgie.html http://it.notizie.yahoo.com/foto/ultimo-stilita-slideshow/last-of-the-stylites-photo-1378470897244.html.

[4] https://www.kirchenzeitung.at/site/themen/kunstkultur/blog-turmeremitin-268 (accessed 14 May 2024).

[5] https://www.imarabe.org/fr/expositions/chretiens-d-orient-deux-mille-ans-d-histoire (accessed 29 June 2022).

[6] http://www.muba-tourcoing.fr/EXPOSITIONS/Expositions-passees/CHRETIENS-D-ORIENT-2000-ANS-D-HISTOIRE (accessed 29 June 2022).

[7] *Chrétiens d'Orient: 2000 ans d'histoire*, 52–57.

[8] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VRYlf7gyF9Y (accessed 29 June 2022).

Lives, the *Golden Legend*, by Jacopo da Voragine, introduced to the subject by his friend, the poet García Lorca (1898–1936).[9] Stylites are unlikely infiltrates in a secular world, yet their incursions reveal peculiarly post-modern traits. For example, Virginia Burrus has highlighted the stylite's hybridity, their identity seen and transmitted as 'a hybrid of man and pillar'.[10]

All the while, Christian religious environments have continued to present stylites among the saints worthy of veneration. The Syrian origin of their cult and its connections to Byzantium have of course generated a particular interest for these saints in the Orthodox Churches, where they are perhaps best known. Although they are commonly perceived as less popular in the Catholic world (as the scene from *Il Pap'occhio* implicitly underlines), their Lives circulated in early Latin redactions and their images were, already according to Theodoret of Cyrrhus, well-known in Rome. Like the Parisian Sainte Geneviève, whose body defended the city from attack in the sixth century, so the body of Symeon the Elder was considered a bulwark for Antioch. A connection between these two saints is recorded in Geneviève's Life as mutual knowledge mediated by travelling merchants.[11] While their liaison is legendary, based on their similar corporeal function as protective relics one could argue that these saints were representative of a similar attitude in their respective communities. Even now, their relationship is made visible through an icon where they figure side by side. It hungs in the chapel at Saint-Étienne-du-Mont, Paris, where the body of Geneviève is housed in a large coffin surrounded by votive candles. A pilgrim to her tomb might therefore unexpectedly be introduced to stylites in that way. From all these various opportunities, one may conclude that it is more likely than what might at first be thought to have met a stylite even in the twenty-first century. Texts, images, and relics continue to radiate their presence and their stories among secular and religious audiences alike.

## Scholarship on Stylites

The time seemed ripe, then, for a more conscious analysis of this insistent and recurrent presence through a diachronic assessment of this phenomenon. Stylites matter to us not only for the underlying political urgency linking their cultural and spiritual fortunes to those of Syrian Christianity, but also, from the scholarly point of view, because a critical mass of primary materials has by now been published that enables and indeed demands further study. Both primary critical editions and a number of translations into modern languages facilitate

[9] Veronese in this volume, 293–309.

[10] Burrus, "Hagiography Without Humans." Also quoted in this volume by Apostolou, 227–241.

[11] Nasrallah, "Survie de saint Siméon," 174; Caseau, "Puanteur," 11 n. 28.

this work, even though it is still far from complete.[12] The cohort of 'official' stylites defined in the seminal work by Hippolyte Delehaye – in the order of his chapters: Symeon the Elder, Daniel, Symeon the Younger, Alypios, Luke and Lazarus – has been expanded by the much more wide-ranging evidence assembled by Peña, Castellana and Fernandez, who prove the success of stylitism much beyond its named first, or most famous, champions.[13]

To begin with the more restricted pantheon, study of Symeon the Elder has been greatly facilitated by Robert Doran's English translations of the three main texts, two in Greek and one in Syriac, published in one volume.[14] However, concerning the critical edition of the originals, the Syriac recensions are not totally published and the Greek versions were edited in 1908 from a restricted number of manuscripts.[15] An ancient Latin Vita, available from the Acta Sanctorum (BHL 7957), has not yet been critically edited or translated, despite the interest of this version that seems to antedate (or at least not to be the same as) the Greek by Antonios.[16] As for Symeon's successor, and at the same time his double, St Symeon the Younger, a relatively recent edition of his Life (BHG 1689) in two volumes by Paul van den Ven provides an ample introduction and commentary and is accompanied by a French translation, offering a solid basis for further research.[17] The second volume also prints a critical text of the Life of Martha with notes but without translation.[18] The latter text was also transmitted in Georgian, which some argue may have even been its original language. Translations into other languages include Georgian versions of the Life of the two Symeons, Daniel, Alypios and Timothy the Stylite.[19]

Daniel the Stylite has fared a little better in terms of modern translations. His Life is available in a French,[20] English,[21] Spanish,[22] and Italian version,[23] all

[12] See for example the considerations by Kuper in this volume, 67–98.

[13] Peña, Castellana, Fernandez, *Les Stylites syriens*. See also Hübner, "Saulenheilige im Ostjordanland."

[14] *Lives of Simeon*, ed. Doran.

[15] Flusin, "Syméon et les philologues."

[16] On the relation between the Latin text and the mural paintings at Zelve, Cappadocia, see Jolivet-Lévy, "Contribution à l'étude," 37–40; Caseau, "Puanteur," 14–15; see further in this volume, Menna, 269–292.

[17] *La Vie ancienne de S. Syméon Stylite le Jeune*, ed. van den Ven.

[18] *La Vie ancienne de S. Syméon Stylite le Jeune*, ed. van den Ven, vol. 2, 253–314.

[19] Gabidzashvili, *Philological and Textological Studies*, 187–88; *Vies géorgiennes de s. Syméon Stylite*, ed. Garitte; *Life of Symeon the Stylite the Younger and Life of Timothy the Stylite*, eds. Kekelidze; the Life of Alypios survives only in the Metaphrastic versions that are not edited. I thank Sandro Nikolaishvili for providing this information for me.

[20] Festugière, *Moines d'Orient*, vol. 2, 93–165.

[21] *Three Byzantine Saints*, ed. Daws and Baynes, 7–84.

[22] *La vida sobre una columna*, ed. Palmer, 47–151.

[23] Franco, *Tra terra e cielo*. I would like to thank Laura Franco for assistance with bibliography on stylites.

done on the Greek text established by Hippolyte Delehaye.[24] Claims concerning the historical value of this text as an early source for the ecclesiastical life of Constantinople have increased its value in the eyes of scholars, eager to use it as confirmation of scant information about the capital. Robin Lane Fox has securely anchored the historicity of this text in its echo of rare historical sources.[25] That the text does everything to present itself as historical does not necessarily mean that it is truly ancient, but the scepticism of scholars, while sharp before any retelling of miracles, quickly fades before the exciting discovery of adherence to historical facts confirmed through independent documents. Of course, those same documents, however rare, could conceivably have been available to the anonymous writer of this Life in eleventh-century Constantinople, when the earliest extant copies of Daniel's Life are attested. The construction of the veracity of this text in terms of its ancient date could therefore have been intentional on the part of the author. Lane Fox's assurance would be worth revising in the light of the literary function of stylites as emblematic cultural figures that emerges from this volume. If there surely were stylites, they need not be those reflected by the most famous stories.

Luke and Alypios are much less known figures. An edition of Luke's Life with French translation is available but has not so far attracted much comment.[26] The last recorded medieval stylite, the eleventh-century Lazarus of Mount Galesion, whose Life is extant in a single thirteenth-century manuscript, has received more attention both textually and critically thanks to Greenfield's English translation.[27] Lazarus shows that the interest in this practice had not waned through the centuries and that its geographical compass had extended much beyond Syria. In fact, a constellation of rewritings of stylite lives around the middle Byzantine period confirms an enduring and even increasing attention to this phenomenon, both celebrated and discussed. Part of this volume's attention is dedicated to finding reasons for the stylites' lasting popularity, whether determined by contingent political factors or intrinsic in the fascination of this life-form.

From this brief survey of the published evidence about the stylite 'core group' some discrepancies emerge. For example, despite evidently Syrian roots and focus, the textual weight about stylites lies with the Greek language, shifting their relevance more decidedly towards Byzantine heritage. The polymorph and multilingual Syro-Greek character of Symeon the Elder is replaced by the

[24] Delehaye, *Saint stylites*, 1–94; Delehaye also published the abridged version and another, Metaphrastic version (Vita tertia) at pp. 104–47. See Franco, "*Vite* di Simeone," 97–101; Franco, "Psychological Introspection," 266–68; See also Høgel in this volume.

[25] Lane Fox, "The Life of Daniel," *Life of Daniel.*

[26] *Vie de saint Luc*, ed. Vanderstuyf.

[27] *Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion*, ed. Greenfield. See also Franco, *Al di sopra del mondo*, 159–184.

Younger's Greco-Georgian imprint.[28] The move to incorporate stylites into mainstream Constantinopolitan ascetic manifestations, culminating with Daniel, was clearly successful. Repercussions of this official operation are even felt nowadays in the privileged attention received by the only Constantinopolitan pillar saint, Daniel. However, the historical criteria applied in unison by Bollandists and positivist scholars alike are no longer the only possible ones for the study of saints and their hagiographies. Equally relevant are the intellectual (and spiritual) repercussions that the diffusion of these texts brought with them. Meeting one's first stylite was as significant then as now as a cultural phenomenon that brought with it deep questions and spontaneous gut reactions. Stylites embraced an extremism designed to provoke, and this provocation echoed through the literary and artistic output of Christian empires throughout the centuries.

## Viewpoints for Approaching Stylites

Stylites allow many different points of entry. The papers in this volume exemplify a few, adding to the handful of critical studies so far published. Among these, scholarship has overwhelmingly addressed the problem of origins. Where does this strange phenomenon, of men deciding to climb on pillars, come from? Sensibly, the contextual environment and pagan practices and beliefs have been brought to bear on this issue.[29] Yet, continuities always come with differences that exploit the familiar to transform its message. Two essays by Esen Öğüş and Tiffany Apostolou in this volume creatively tackle the issue of the relation between pagan and Christian pillars, not just by looking back to imperial and honorary columns as constitutive paradigms, but also forward to the portraits of stylites upon them, unraveling the subversive power of the Christian take on pillars. Climbing up a pillar to exhibit asceticism rather than imperial military prowess and glory was a rather clever move with a ripple effect of significances that the plainer discourse of origins cannot even begin to tackle.

Anthropologically, the pillar-column reaches deep into the human view of the universe among the archetypal symbols that structure sacred space.[30] Stretching up between earth and heaven, the pillar sustains the vault of the universe and guarantees its stability for ethnically diverse cultures around the

[28] Lucy Parker presented evidence in this sense in the medieval tradition of Symeon the Younger's monastery as related to Georgian manuscript witnesses. See also Parker, "Paradigmatic Piety," 101 n. 9, reporting on the *Life of Abibo* as an indirect source for the saint.

[29] Wright, "Simeon's Ancestors" and "The Heritage of the Stylites"; Drijvers, "Spätantike Parallelen"; Frankfurter, "Stylites and *Phallobates*"; arguments usefully summarized in Stang, "Digging Holes," 450–54. See also Menze, "The Transformation."

[30] Eliade, *Il Sacro e il Profano*, 27–28; cf. Stang, "Digging Holes," 464–68.

globe and across history.[31] Saint Augustine, for example, was aware of a form of North African cult of church pillars and church stones, which he places side by side to the cult of martyrs and the veneration of images as practices unfairly ridiculed by pagans.[32] Church pillars welcomed the first images of saints, whether painted or chiseled, as if covering themselves with appropriate objects of veneration and acquiring a double identity.[33] The presence of stark pillars, not otherwise ornamented or structurally useful, in small structures such as a *martyrion* in Jbeil (ancient Byblos) could be a relic of this practice under cover of dedication to Mar Semaan (Saint Simeon).[34] The cult to Simeon's empty column at Qalat Siman clearly indicates that human presence was not necessary, nor did the memory of the saint at his original shrine necessarily include his image.

The disjunction of saint from column, even in this case, may be more than a natural historical development requiring an ad hoc contingent response. The divorce may be more intentional, signaling familiarity with pillars as cult objects in themselves. A miniature in the Hamilton Lectionary (11th cent.) for September 1st juxtaposes the scene of Jesus reading in the synagogue from Luke 4 with Symeon's death by representing the latter distended on a straw mat at the foot of his column.[35] The miniature is unusual among stylite images in not showing the saint on his column. Moreover, its caption, ἡ κίων τοῦ ἁγίου Συμεῶνος, draws attention to the column itself, at once separating it from the bodily spoil of the saint, and uniting it directly with his memory. This tension between pillar and saint has been noted by scholars as a significant element in the cult of Symeon the Elder.[36] While, for obvious reasons, most are reluctant to consider the column's independent value, it still conferred particular weight to this form of ascetic piety. Reviewing Frankfurter's and Wright's work, Stang concludes that "a far-reaching pillar piety – local but also widespread because de-centered –" formed the essential substratum to the cult of stylites. An example of the broader phenomenon is the "life giving pillar" of Mzcheta, Georgia, fixing the markers for the region's Christianization through legend and art.[37]

[31] Miller, "Naturalizing Buddhist Cosmology," provides a good example from another faith and context.

[32] O'Daly, *Augustine's City of God*, 115 n. 37: Mainz Sermon 62, ed. Dolbeau no. 26 (=Ser. 198, augm.). See *Augustinus*, *Vingt-six sermons*, ed. Dolbeau, 360–61 (AD 404?).

[33] Dolbeau, *Augustinus*, *Vingt-six sermons,* ed. Dolbeau (as above n. 32) 85 n. 92, with reference to Mortet, "Colonnes."

[34] Crostini, "Devotion to Saints as Busts on Pillars," 53 and fig. 5. See also Menze, "The Transformation," 220, fig. 16.7.

[35] New York, Morgan Library, Hamilton Lectionary M. 639, fol. 294r. The image is available online at http://ica.themorgan.org/manuscript/page/26/121467 (accessed 8/8/2023).

[36] Eastmond, "Body vs Column," cited extensively in this volume. Boero, "Promoting a Cult Site without Bodily Relics."

[37] Hoffmann and Wolf, "Licht und Landschaft." I thank Erik Thunø for sending me this reference after listening to his talk entitled "The Life-giving Pillar from Mtskheta. New Evidence" at the VIIth Seminar Series on Armenian and Early Christian Art (online), on 27 April 2021.

Devotion to the pillar of the flagellation of Christ is another development of a cult to a column-like object. The pillar was visible to the Bordeaux Pilgrim (6th cent.) as part of the House of Pilate.[38] Another ancient guide to the city, the *Breviarium*, places it in the Holy Sion church where the Piacenza pilgrim also saw it.[39] Both pilgrims note the miraculous marks of Jesus' hands imprinted on the column surface which were apparently used for making 'measured replicas' for healing purposes.[40] A medium-sized granite column is still today exhibited as a relic in Santa Prassede, Rome, encased in glass and under a baldachin.[41] Besides the metaphorical idea of Christ as pillar, this relic-column makes concrete the memory of Christ's suffering by providing a tangible element of the Passion narrative. The pillar is not explicitly mentioned in the Gospels, but the 'flogging post' was part of the procedure for such punishment. Besides the relic, an enormous pictorial tradition developed around this scene.[42] Among the most famous and least conventional later depictions, a painting by Piero della Francesca shows a fluted marble column with a classical capital, bearing on it the golden figure of a naked standing man with outstretched arm. The statue has been interpreted as alluding to classical antecedents for Christ, such as Heracles and the emperor, and also perhaps to David, precursor of Christ, celebrating Christ as 'Lord of Glory' even at the dire hour of the Passion.[43]

An element that may be relevant to the relation between these two elements, the column and the man standing on it, is the prophetic aspect of both pillars and stylites. Raised stone features in Greek temples provided spaces for oracular responses, and the Serpent column, belonging to the Delphic oracle, was transported to the Hippodrome in Constantinople where it featured among other obelisks.[44] As Charles Kuper shows in his essay, the Hippodrome obelisk with carvings featured prominently in the historical background to the literary

[38] Bordeaux Pilgrim, *Itinerary*, 592–93: Peters, *Jerusalem*, 145.

[39] Peters, *Jerusalem*, 155; same witness in Theodosios, *Topography*, 40–45: Peters, *Jerusalem*, 157.

[40] Peters, *Jerusalem*, 145: "You go… to the large Basilica of the Holy Sion, containing the column at which the Lord Jesus was scourged. There is a mark where his hands grasped it, like an impression on wax" (Bordeaux Pilgrim); see also 167. Piacenza Pilgrim 17–18: "… the pillar at which the Lord was scourged … has on it a miraculous mark. When he clasped it, his chest imprinted itself on the stone, and you can see the mark of both his hands, his fingers and his palms. They are so clear that you can use them to take "measures" for any kind of disease, and people who wear those measures around their necks are cured…". Peters, *Jerusalem*, 599 n. 39, explains that "these measures are measured replicas. Similar measures were taken for shrouds at the tomb of Jesus in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher."

[41] Barry, *Painting in Stone*, 212–13 and fig. 9.8, also discussing previous competitors and other significant columns in the sacred artistic vocabulary.

[42] Some stunning medieval examples can be seen in Hourihane, *Pontius Pilate,* figs 24, 29, 36, 38 etc. See also the Moldavian examples where Christ is tied up to the column: Bedros, "Le Christ à la colonne," esp. figs 1, 2 and 6.

[43] Lavin, *Piero della Francesca: La Flagellazione*, 41, 76–79, detail at fig. 46.

[44] Stephenson, *The Serpent Column*.

fiction about the stylite Theodoulos.[45] While snakes also occasionally feature in stylite representations, most notably that of the giant, scaly creature wrapping the column of a sixth-century silver plaque of Symeon the Elder,[46] the aspect of prophecy or divining finds echo in the widespread function of ascetic pillar men as providers of key answers to personal, local, and international crises. Similarity in origin may correspond to later developments of similar functions: the stylite's prophetic abilities, attested in a multitude of stories, reflect and replace the role of divinatory columns in pagan temples. Similarly, stylites performed miracles of healing, for which the silver serpent plaque may constitute a token of thanksgiving (*ex voto*) like Symeon tokens bearing the *hygieia* stamp.[47]

Relevant to their origin, too, and connected to some literary traits in stylite narratives, would seem to be their similarity with (presumed) statues of the Archangel Michael on pillars, for example, at Sosthenion.[48] The church of St Michael at the locality of Anaplous/Sosthenion is mentioned in the *Life of Daniel* as a key node for stylite cult, where the inscribed column of the stylite was purported to stand and the relics of St Symeon the Elder were meant to have been translated.[49] A commemoration in the Synaxarion of Constantinople for 26 July would pinpoint this connection, completing the transformation of the memory to the archangel into one for stylite ascetes.[50] Thus, the confusion between fleshly man and winged angel, encapsulated in an episode of the Life of Symeon where a disciple needs to touch the saint – like Doubting Thomas – in order to believe he is a real man,[51] would then refer not only metaphorically to the spiritual status attained by ascetic practice and expressed on the ontological plane (becoming from man an angel),[52] but also connect to a visual and aetiological background woven into the narrative through another, more

[45] See Kuper in this volume, 67–98.

[46] https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010256428; Sodini, "Remarques sur l'iconographie," 52, fig. 19, endorses the interpretation of the snake as a depiction of an anecdote in Antonios's *Life* about the healing of a female snake by the entreaty of its male (see Festugière, *Antioche*, 503; *Lives of Simeon*, ed. Doran, ch. 25, 227, only preserved in some mss); another snake miracle is found in the Syriac Life, ch. 90, *Lives of Simeon*, ed. Doran, 168. But, was the iconography derived from the text, or the text from such an iconography? See figure on p. 331.

[47] Vikan, *Early Byzantine Pilgrimage Art*, 52 and fig. 17.

[48] Tycner, "Fundacja Konstantynopola." A later example of the representation of Michael on a pillar was placed by Michael Palaeologos in front of the Holy Apostles: Haftmann, *Das italienische Säulenmonument*, 50.

[49] *Life of Daniel*, in Delehaye, *Saints stylites*, ch. 13, 15, 17; Mango, "St Michael and Attis," 58–59.

[50] *Synaxarium Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae*, ed. Delehaye, 844, ll. 42–43, and 49–50 (in mss Patmiac. gr. 266, 10th cent. and Vindob. theol. gr. 33, 13–14th cent.): Τοῦ ἐν ἁγίοις πατρὸς ἡμῶν πρεσβυτέρου γενομένου καὶ ἀρχιμανδρίτου Συμεὼν τοῦ στυλίτου, ἐπέκεινα τοῦ Ἀνάπλου. Follieri, "Un reliquiario," 80 v. 5; see also 81 for problems with the date of the commemoration.

[51] Discussed in the volume by Apostolou, 227–241.

[52] A gender twist is given to this metaphorical interpretation by Muehlberger, "Simeon and Other Women," 601–02.

concrete motif: that of the archangel on a column. Although ancient remains are lacking,[53] its visual effect can be compared to the statue of St Theodore slaying the dragon on a twelfth-century column still standing in Piazza San Marco, Venice.[54]

The Sosthenion column belongs to the Constantinian imaginary. Constantine is made to exclaim by Malalas that he saw 'an angel in the habit of a monk' (ἀγγέλου σημεῖον σχήματι μοναχοῦ).[55] Cyril Mango demonstrates that the figure of the winged Attis could best fit such a description, specifically because of his wearing a cowl as part of a long, hooded garment.[56] The style of Attis's Phrygian cap or hood is not unlike that of the stylite *koukoulion*, so that the resulting iconography would have actually resembled that of a stylite with wings. Further, the Michaelic associations resonate with ancient traditions from Syro-Mesopotamia,[57] where both a strong cult of the archangel and the natural homeland of the stylites is found.

These echoes remind us that the tradition of stylites preys on a number of interconnected significances, some of which emerge more clearly only through a diachronic analysis up to and including our times. The shadow of the archangel, cast by its wings (and projected onto the ascetic prototype of St John Prodromos too in his winged representations), signals the deep indebtedness of Christian tradition to Jewish faith. The roots of stylitism in the Hebrew Bible are underscored in a verse inscription from the reliquary of St Symeon the Stylite's head, preserved in the Italian monastery of Camaldoli but of Byzantine manufacture, datable to the tenth century as the commission of Basil Lecapenus.[58] The inscription occupies the arms of a cross joined by a central disk, each segment bearing six lines of text in majuscule script. Enrica Follieri perfected the edition, from which the following English translation can be made:

[53] In the ruins of the castle of Rumelihisari or Bogazkesen Castle on the Bosphoros, at the site presumed to be ancient Anaplous, which I visited with Glenn Peers and Laura Franco at the end of the conference, there is a curious brick tower-like structure within a tower with a spiral staircase which is not part of the fortifications: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rumelihisar%C4%B1#/media/File:Interior_Zaganos_Pasha_Tower,_Rumeli_hisar%C4%B1.jpg. On the location, see Pargoire, "Anaple et Sosthène"; Janin, "Les Sanctuaires byzantins de saint Michel."

[54] Haftmann, *Das italienische Säulenmonument*, 135. For the column habit in other parts of the world, see Flood, "Pillars, Palimpsests, and Princely Practices."

[55] Malalas, Bonn ed., 77; Engl. transl. book 4, par. 78, 38 (Argonauts); Mango, "St Michael and Attis," 58; Linardou, "Michaelion," 247–52.

[56] Mango, "St Michael and Attis," 60–61, fig. 11 (statuette of winged Attis from the Louvre).

[57] Cf. Josephus, *Ant. Jud*. XII, 3; Mango, "St Michael and Attis," 53.

[58] Follieri, "Un reliquiario." See figure on p. 333.

> A column of fire before Israel (was) leader / to the good land from the land of Egypt; / a column also for you, o Symeon, father divine, a guide from earth to the heavenly path. / I, the imperial Basil,[59] adorn your venerable head *ex voto*.[60]

The short dedicatory poem clinches an important parallel between stylite columns and the biblical imaginary, anchoring Symeon's emblem in the Exodus story. The verses pick one of the two columns leading the Israelites out of Egypt, the fiery one by night: "And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night" (Ex 13:21 King James).[61] The choice of the pillar of fire is appropriate because it resonates with Theodoret's comparison of Symeon to a beacon of light, as Andreas Westergren reminds us.[62] The multiple function of stylite towers may have included a practical way-sign system for deserted expanses, orienting the traveller step-by-step across a 'web of sightlines' that could always be easily spotted across the horizon.[63] Moreover, fire was a recurrent element in stylite descriptions and imagery, including allusions to Sassanid coinage where the figure on the pillar is surrounded by flames. This web of interlocking significances offers piecemeal clues from texts and images making up a Byzantine imaginary where these ancient superheroes thrived and multiplied. These are the only threads – material and immaterial – that open a vista onto the complex world of stylite saints, even though such elements may not be forced to reconstruct a totally coherent picture of the performative world of pillar ascetics.

## A 'Geometrical' Approach

Another aspect explored in the scant literature about stylitism is precisely the question of 'geometry', as Charles Stang synthesizes following Eliade.[64] The architecture of the pillar frames the direction of movement upwards from earth to heaven, leading to a metaphorical reading of processes of ascent and descent, as in the homily by Philagathos of Cerami for 1 September: "All these sanctify

[59] Follieri notes the same designation for Basil as 'basilikos' in the reliquary for St Stephen the first martyr: Follieri, "Un reliquiario," 78; Lafontaine-Dosogne, *Itinéraires*, 203 n. 2.

[60] Στῦλος πυρὸς πρὶν Ἰσραὴλ ὁδηγέτης |εἰς γῆν ἀγαθὴν ἀπὸ Αἰγυπτίας· |στῦλος δὲ καὶ σοί, Συμεών, θεῖε πάτερ, |ἐκ γῆς ὁδηγὸς εἰς τρίβον οὐρανίαν. |Κοσμῶ τὸ λοιπὸν σὴν σεβασμίαν κάραν |ὁ βασιλικὸς Βασίλειος ἐκ πόθου. Follieri, "Un reliquiario," 75. My translation.

[61] ὁ δὲ θεὸς ἡγεῖτο αὐτῶν, ἡμέρας μὲν ἐν στύλῳ νεφέλης δεῖξαι αὐτοῖς τὴν ὁδόν, τὴν δὲ νύκτα ἐν στύλῳ πυρός.

[62] See below Westergren, 45–65.

[63] Schachner, "Archaeology of Stylite," 379, cited by Frank, "Travelling Stylites?," 261; Sitz, "Architectures of Surveillance," fig. 1: map of limestone massif.

[64] Stang, "Digging Holes," 449.

the beginnings of the year:... mighty Symeon by the example of his column bids us to lift ourselves through virtue from earthly things and to keep our mind set on heavenly things".[65] Stang notes a contrast between this ascending impetus and the descending forms of underground *askesis* experienced by Symeon the Elder, for example, digging a cistern or tomb to dwell in.[66] Philagathos, too, rhetorically plays with this narrative tension in his homily, where Symeon becomes one who has "lifted himself above the ground".[67] Yet the ascending dimension does not fully reckon with the orthogonal position of the pillar as a marker bearing other types of associations, such as those commonly described as ethical uprightness and connected with a consolidated apprehension of masculinity. Did stylites feed into or otherwise contend with the upright modality of thinking? Did the standing man-on-the-pillar embody the rigidity of the column and confirm its message of skywards rocketing? Or did some intervening trait modify this expected model of righteousness, so pervasive in Christian thought, yet also, as Adriana Cavarero shows,[68] so radically misguided by gender bias and open to criticism? In other words, did the geometry of the column bend by being harnessed to the ascete's evangelical experience?

The man-on-the-pillar is and is not one with the vertical structure supporting him. Ancient pillar figurines from the Middle East sprouted limbs and heads along a column-like body.[69] Some representations of stylites follow this symbiosis, showing a head as the apex of the pillar,[70] or suffering a standardized leglessness – they are just busts on pillars.[71] However, many other representations introduce elements of interaction that alter the verticality and the rigidity of the compositions. In some, oblique ladders form the bridge between the saint (or the saint's portrait) and the devotee(s); in others, a dialogue is established between the stylite and his visitors for which the saint leans forward from his platform.[72] Unlike the statuary column, imposing a view from below, the living person taking the statue's place is mobile thanks to his animation. As a moving human being (despite the ideal of *stasis*),[73] he breaks the rigidity of the upright linear direction, and introduces the view from above towards the world below. Onlookers who might come for a unidirectional experience automatically become objects of the holy man's gaze, mediating God's presence to their lives.

[65] Gaspar, "Praising the Stylite," 101, ch. 10.
[66] Stang, "Digging Holes," 455–56, 461.
[67] Gaspar, "Praising the Stylite," 103, ch. 14.
[68] Cavarero, *Inclinations*.
[69] Kletter, *Judaean Pillar-Figurines*.
[70] As analysed by Tiffany Apostolou in this volume. See also Menze, "The Transformation"; Sodini, "Remarques sur l'iconographie," 34, figs. 2, 4–8.
[71] Burrus, "Hagiography Without Humans."
[72] Frank, "Traveling Stylites?," 263, emphasizes all aspects of this interconnectedness.
[73] On stasis, see Williams, *Immovable Race*, 89, together with the fresh thoughts of Frank, "Travelling Stylites?," 274.

In Cavarero's terms, the saint's *inclination* towards others balances or at least mitigates the straightness of his quintessentially phallic contraption.[74]

The miniatures of stylites in MS Vat. gr. 752 are particularly telling in this respect, since the captions bear messages exchanged between saint and visitor. I have argued that these miniatures, however, are not live representations of stylites understood as people whose legs merge with the column shaft, but rather commemorate the liturgical continuation of such visits at the saints' shrines across space and time by depicting the shrines themselves.[75] This liturgical modality is demonstrated by the inclusion among these pillar iconographies of saints whose lives are not those of classical pillar ascetes, such as St Dorotheos of Gaza in the Psalter manuscript just mentioned, or even St Benedict, the Latin monastic founder, in the Armeno-Georgian church of Axt'ala.[76] These iconographical choices should not be considered mistakes on the part of ignorant painters. Rather, they follow a deliberate pattern in moulding saints' images according to ancient canons of representation, as busts on pillars. A ninth-century example from Armazi Church in Georgia (864) shows a playfulness between architecture and mural painting by placing heads to look as if they emerged at the top of pillars.[77] The semantics of the word 'stylite' underwent a broadening, denoting an exemplary ascetic lifestyle near to the monastic experience.

What comparison with Atargatis' *phallobates* in Lucian's satirical play highlights is not so much a precedent for climbing pillars, but rather a mode of pious interaction with an ascetic person singled out by his lofty and somewhat striking position from which he could hear prayers, take alms, and distribute advice and blessings to each of his visitors. The relational identity of stylites, rendered in iconography and narrative, captures what Christian Høgel has characterized as 'an intense in-group exchange' where the saint's 'total devotion' is performed before others.[78] The visibility of the pillar as a public arena for ascetic performance is another key element in understanding the pillar dynamics at play. Criss-crossings between the ascete above and the people at the foot of the column ultimately prevent considering the upright position of the column as the determinant factor or as the preferred metaphor for correct human moral aspirations. Although appealing to the masses because of an extraordinary, impressive kind of spiritual life that generated wonder and admiration, the stylite does not simplify the concept of sanctity to a rough-and-ready model of exceptional living, but rather complicates the issue about sanctity's definition by

[74] Cavarero, *Inclinations*.
[75] Crostini, "Devotion to Saints as Busts on Pillars."
[76] Menna, "S. Benedetto 'stilita'."
[77] Mepisaschwili/Tsintsadze 1975, 20–21; Shevjakova 1962, 257. With thanks to Christian Høgel for help with this reference.
[78] Høgel, "Total Devotion."

performing a living paradox that awakens deeper questioning. Here Christine Amadou's comparison with Dada theatre turns out very fitting indeed.[79]

Comparing the potential effects of upright geometry on the apprehension of stylites also raises the question of gender. There is no escaping the fact that the overwhelming number of known stylites, and all those known more than by name, are male.[80] Although one may hesitate to call Theodoret's depiction of Symeon that of a woman, one can still take Muehlberger's provocative reading by agreeing on the fact that there is no need to push for a macho-image of these superheroes. The assimilation of Symeon's body to female characteristics plays in the hands of Theodoret's theory of equality (or equalization) between men and women in interesting ways.[81] Nevertheless, this gendering exercise is not an attempt to package Symeon as female, trading on established bipartitions, but rather to introduce ambiguity at the level of his body and its corporeal performances, too. The straining to bend the phallic pillar by introducing paradox in the depiction of the ascete is in fact in line with the strategies we have just explored. Even from the point of view of gender, then, a tension is operative, always ready to unsettle stereotypes.

It is notable that, among the novelties introduced by Symeon the Younger is that of a more prominent role for his mother, Martha, who even gets her own Life. This change in gendered perspective introduces a significant difference, and is reflected in the representations of female devotees who appear at the foot of the pillar, touching the shaft as a sign of devotion or sending up provisions to the saint with motherly affection, as in the icon by Youssef Al Moussawir from seventeenth-century Aleppo. Alypios's mother is also embracing the column while holding a rosary in her hand, according to another seventeenth-century icon by the Greek painter Emmanuel Tzanes-Bouniales (or his workshop) at the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek in Copenhagen.[82] Although one could argue that these women's position is anyway subordinate to the fame of their children who remain the ones raised high above them on their pillars, their existence is nevertheless a sign of openness to the other sex.

Lucy Parker has noted how prominent the mention of cultic performances and liturgies is in the Life of Martha, which she analyses as a composite text with a didactic scope. In fact, participation in celebrations and a cult of relics is in tension with one type of understanding of the stylite vocation as a singular, aloof experience of divinity and as a strict and solitary path to salvation. The juxtaposition of these views within the stylite domain by means of Martha, mother of Symeon the Younger, functions as a heavy counterbalance to the

[79] Amadou, 311–323.

[80] Peña, Castellana, and Fernandez, *Les Stylites syriens*, 83, give some women examples that need to be verified.

[81] Muehlberger, "Simeon and Other Women," 602–03.

[82] Fleischer, Hjort and Rasmussen, *Byzans*, no. 161, 151–52. See figure on p. 341.

eccentric path of stylitism, bringing it back to a communal ecclesial dimension. Besides, the focus on death and the subsequent celebration and hallowing of Martha's bodily relics underscore a polemic about the sanctity of bodies with which stylite cults are shot through.[83] An episode in the Life of Martha contemplates the punishment of a devotee who was struck by fever because "he refused to go near to any corpse, thinking this an abomination". His fault was to have treated even Martha's spoils with equal disdain, presumably refusing to carry her processional bier (if "nor did he put his shoulder underneath [the relic of the blessed woman]" means this).[84] Purity concerns could be interpreted in this sense, and the love for bodily relics as a central understanding of Christian identity was no clearer then than it is now across different denominations. The didactic role of these texts was not necessarily a preaching aimed at the simple faithful. The themes it pointedly addresses reflect internal dissent and theologically disputed positions.

Martha's inclination as a serviceable, caring person is emphasized in the narrative, and, together with her horizontal position at death,[85] alters the geometry of the upright pillar. But one shouldn't underestimate the intentional construction of her character, signalled already in her name. As Lucy Parker points out, the Martha of the Gospel of Luke is a conscious model for the character of this hagiographical narrative. The implications of this model bring the gendered perspective to the fore again in a significant way, since, as Ellie Ernst has shown so eloquently, Martha was an emblem for women's agency in the early church, embodying a 'diakonia' which is not reducible to table service but includes apostolicity in its various roles, including impersonating a kind of second Peter figure.[86] In the Life of stylite-related Martha, too, she is busy directing choirs and administering the Eucharist as a means for healing (though in a dream).[87] What commentators have not underlined, besides her role as mother, is Martha's status as widow, an independent woman with a clear role in the ranks of the early church.[88] It is, in fact, this category and no other that applies to her process of sanctification as a 'standard path' open to (man-less) women.[89]

While the family model re-proposes the stance of Mary Mother of Jesus at the foot of the cross in the pose of Martha below her son's pillar (equally an instrument of suffering), both women's man-less state and their lone responsibility with respect to their exceptional offspring are simultaneously put for-

[83] See the paper by Barbara Crostini in this volume.

[84] Parker, "Paradigmatic Piety," 117. See Caseau and Messis in this volume, 161–180.

[85] Cavarero, *Inclinations*, 81–87 on Elias Canetti; Canetti is also evoked by Cremonesi, "L'ultimo *theama*," 219.

[86] Ernst, *Martha from the Margins*, 23–66.

[87] Parker, "Paradigmatic Piety," 105, 118, 124.

[88] Maier, "Entrepreneurial Widows."

[89] This category is strangely absent from Constantinou, *Female Corporeal Performances,* 17–18. See Parker, "Paradigmatic Piety," 106, n. 35.

ward. These analogies can be interpreted as a patterning of *Christomimesis*, but need not be limited to it. Underlying the issue is the question of comparison between Christ and the stylite, taken up in the iconography but dealt ambiguously in the texts. This problem should be explored further as a key to discerning different trends in stylite spirituality in comparative perspective.[90] Rather than concluding on one status quo in the relationship between stylites and the crucified Christ, measuring the gradient of this factor reveals the position of the hagiographer and his/her text.[91]

## The Ambiguity of Stylites

By looking at stylites through a cultural lens, this volume's contributions unearth surprising connections that take the debate on stylites further away from the point of origin, as well as from the limiting discourse of historicity, and discover in it exciting new strands of reflection. Imposing remains of monastic compounds associated with the memory of stylite saints, for example at Telanissos, have left a mark in the Syrian landscape.[92] Besides these, documented remains of the presence of solitaries in towers equipped for long-term use, including provision of a seated latrine, within monastic enclosures or not distant from them, place questions about the actual practice of stylitism beyond reasonable doubt.[93] On top of this, legislation and other documents clearly mention stylites as important participants in the ecclesiastical landscape.[94] Theodore Stoudite asserted that the candidate to the patriarchate should be elected from a group of trusted men, where stylites were singled out together with bishops, abbots, recluses and clerics as eligible people.[95] Yet an appropriate catchword for this volume is a word that

[90] See Crostini, "Between the Pillar and the Cross"; "Humbert's Crux," 162–65; Williams, *Immovable Race*, 149, reports the fixity of the stylites like a nailing to the cross and refers to Chitty, *The Desert a City*, 75 f.; Stang, "Digging Holes," 452–53 and his striking interpretation of the giving of the stylite's body-worms as food, like Christ, 460. Woods, "Some Dubious Stylites," notes that the intersection of the pillar iconography with that of the crucifixion causes ambiguity in object interpretation.

[91] Lafontaine-Dosogne, *Itinéraires*, 184, n. 3, for example, signals an increase in positive *Christomimesis* in the rewriting of the Life of Symeon the Younger by Nikephoros Ouranos (BHG 1690) (Crostini, "Humbert's Crux," 165); see also Caseau-Faillant, "Renouveau du culte," 798. This Life is printed in *Acta Sanctorum Maii* 5, 298–401, ed. C. Jannick. See Oğus in this volume, 199–225.

[92] Biscop, "Réorganisation du monachisme," 136–62.

[93] See Hamarneh in this volume, 243–268.

[94] Peña, Castellana, and Fernandez, *Les Stylites syriens*, 63, cite two canons (103 and 105 of the *Corpus iuris*) with rules about permanence at the top of the column, and include punishments in case women are found to have climbed up at night, and allowances for coming down in case of impending danger. See also *A Letter from Jacob of Edessa*, ed. Rignell.

[95] Theodore Stoudite Ep. 16 (to Emperor Nikephoros), ed. Fatouros, vol. 1, 157* (summary) and 47 ll. 32–35 (Greek text). See also Alexander, *Nicephorus*, 67 and n. 3. Theodore wrote Ep. 15 to the stylite Theodoulos: ed. Fatouros, vol. 1, 156* (summary) and 44–45 (Greek text).

can be found time and again in nearly all the essays: 'ambiguity'. Like the Lives of holy fools, stylites' narratives cannot easily be reduced to a pious paradigm set up for imitation, a concept and an expectation that pervades the approach to hagiographical narrative but that finds little confirmation in the actual texts, or images, of saints and martyrs. On the contrary, narratives here examined emerge as a battlefield of contrasting viewpoints, and offer jolting reflections on the status of the divine in a human, transient world, or rather of the human confronted with an immense, divine universe, without any ready-made comfort on offer. Just as a stylite on his column, man stands naked and defenceless, exposed to the surrounding environment, the sky and the elements. The extremity and absurdity, as well as the captivating fantasy of life on a pillar, offer the perfect setting for a liminal, contested space: an experience that, for this reason, may ultimately if unconventionally coincide with an evangelical and spiritual message.

The ambiguity of the stylites consists in their occupying a middle space between heaven and earth, a position from which they embrace the vocation of bridging gaps between the ordinary of human life and the extraordinary of the divine. This intermediate stance allows them to inhabit different spheres at once, creating a tension between them. Placed as the focus of admiration like an imperial, pagan statue, they benefit from public attention and transform that environment through their staunch affirmation of Christian faith. At the same time, creating spectacle draws the masses which they are trying to flee by the same displacement and unreachable position.[96] Like performers on stilts, they exploit height for visibility and impact, perhaps even for inspection and control of what is around them. Exposing their life, as Amadou tells us, like a performance artist, stylites do not fulfil a role according to an established script, but plainly lay open to view their daily activities so that the crowd of observers can pass the final verdict on their sanctity and integrity. Despite their distance from the crowd gained through the column, stylite sanctity is not made of aloofness, a point that stands out in the literary treatment of Symeon by Theodoret and of Theodoulos the Stylite by the anonymous author. If seeing the stylite is easier than touching him, ladders are placed to enable access to the stylite's level in case of need, so that the ascete is far from unreachable: he can be touched by climbing up, he can definitely be smelled too. In fact, modern interpretations of the ancient stories highlight the key role of communication attributed to these figures, whether through their gestures or voices. They are not silent, nor immobile statues, but a narrative develops around them despite their immobility. If they can be compared to Cynics for their extremist feats, they are nevertheless

[96] Jacobs, "'I Want to be Alone'," 146, notes the paradox that "pleas for solitude only amplify an audience's desire for access". Jacobs applies modern celebrity studies to deconstruct the dynamics of pillar asceticism.

friendlier and more approachable, if not necessarily more easily understandable. They inspire at once admiration and disconcertment, a combination that gives them a winning ticket to public imagination, by which they are not abandoned.

## Summary of the Papers

The present volume is divided into three parts. The first part comments on texts ancient and modern; the second part deals with material remains and artistic expressions across time and space; the third part presents a short anthology of select texts and images, like the catalogue of an ideal exhibition where further testimonies on stylitism are gathered. The cumulative impact is a taster of these superheroes' recastings that underscores their popularity and their seriousness while probing the questions that they raise with their unusual but effective pillar experiences.

Andreas Westergren opens the volume with the most ancient account of the first stylite – the founder of this lifestyle and dynasty – the Life of Symeon the Elder by Theodoret of Cyrrhus. Scrutinizing telling details, Westergren skilfully points out the fine line that Theodoret treads between praise and critique, something that no general outline of the account can demonstrate without detailed linguistic scrutiny. In the imagery and language chosen, in which the learned can recognize themes in pagan literature, Theodoret inserts his doubts and projects Symeon's peculiar asceticism into the realm of myth. Westergren shows how Theodoret implicitly compares the stylite to Heracles, setting in motion a mechanism through which a whole mindset of popular admiration is transformed and sacralised, while at the same time keeping an ambivalent position that does not renounce a sceptical edge. Highlighting the rays that emanate from the high figure of Symeon like a beacon to orient navigation, Westergren argues that Symeon becomes the reference point for the masses who marvel at his spectacle (*thauma/theama*), consciously replacing and subverting the classical ideal enshrined in Heracles' deeds, including those of sexual prowess.

Westergren's approach exemplifies a much more subtle method for dealing with the interpretation of ancient sources on Symeon, a method alert to intertextual echoes and rhetorical choices, open through them to drawing out significances that challenge obvious conclusions and keep, as we have said, the ambiguity of approach to stylites that is appropriate for anyone with any sense. The case analysed by Charles Kuper, like the smaller example chosen by Barbara Crostini, bring to the table other fruits of a similar approach to the sources.

Charles Kuper speaks of "crossed and blurred boundaries" in the literary stitching together of a text narrating the Life of Theodoulos the Stylite. Kuper identifies two scenes held together by an intermediate transitional passage. This structure would suggest an oral origin for this text, originally perhaps put

together as a play and only at a second stage written as a continuous text to be read aloud, though Kuper stops short of articulating these possibilities. Through intertextual references, partly identified by previous scholarship in the Life of Alypios the Stylite, Kuper demonstrates the intricate undertones of the story, partly working as political satire through recognizable historical references, and partly addressing philosophical and ethical concerns through dialogues and action. Although the role of the stylite Theodoulos – a name meaning 'servant of God' – is that of the protagonist, two women also play prominent roles that reflect back on the appreciation of the ascete: Theodoulos's wife, who questions his choice to abandon her and dies in the first act, and then the salvific role of a prostitute who receives the charity of Paphnoutios – another 'servant of God' by name, thus Theodoulos's *alter ego* –, himself an actor who is declared spiritually more advanced than the stylite, to the latter's chagrin. Kuper leads us with sure hand into the paradoxes of this story which he aptly defines as a 'cleverly crafted parody'. The enjoyment that ensues is infinitely greater than that expected from a moralistic exemplum. The world of this text is not far from that of the Hippodrome, as Kuper explains in detail, and of that place it absorbs the atmosphere and does not keep aloof from its contorted machinations. Spectacle is woven into the story, which is itself a commentary on the exhibitionist ambitions of ascetes on pillars, yet also reaches out to actual historical tragedies that demand both justice and redemption.

Barbara Crostini's critique of pious and positivist scholarly approaches focuses on one episode only of the Life of Symeon the Elder in the Greek version by Antonios: the healing of a demoniac by the tombs at the passing of Symeon's funeral procession. This is the first and only posthumous miracle and one of the few points of contact between the Syriac and the Greek lives. Despite its singularity, no detailed analysis of the passage had been done so far. The narrative by Antonios expands the scene of healing into a story about the demoniac involving an episode of necrophilia, where the madness struck him at the same site – a cemetery – where the saint passed by to save him. Beside the folkloristic flavour of the tale, there is in this episode both an element of performance found in the emotional involvement of the crowd in the story and the action and speech required in the rhythm of the stopped procession, and a serious intent. The necrophile impulse finds complete reversal only when the man turns with love to another dead body, that of the saint, whose remains, carried in procession, restore the balance of sanity between the world of the living and of the dead. While necrophilia is forbidden, the impulse to join the two worlds is not – as in the film *Corpse Bride*, it preserves a romantic aspect that witnesses to love without bounds. Here once more we discover the saint's ability at penetrating hybrid situations and enlightening grey areas without applying searing judgment, but rather with infinite tenderness and mercy for the human condition. The tale of necrophile love is treated, both comically

and tragically, as an archetypal test for delimiting boundaries, for example, in Laqueur's medical literature or in the medieval tales collected by Walter Map in Constantinople. Exploiting the intertextuality of the Gerasene demoniac in the Gospels, Antonios creates a significant moment through an idea that has a medieval progeny and that captures some essential themes in the discourse about sanctity and relics.

Ambiguity is further explored in the paper by Thomas Arentzen, whose poles are shaped by two substances, stone and wood, the first referred to the stylite vocation, the second to the dendrite's. Arentzen sensitively explores the arboreal world of ascetics, finding a different impulse for the ascent of living trees to that of dead columns. The latter, it would seem, was the more public exercise, a cause of civic pride, while the tree's embrace – as he calls it – offered a cosier shelter in which to perform songs and prayers. If Theodoret's text exposed the mythical roots of narrative, Arentzen's stories of paired ascetes from John Moschos and John of Ephesos introduce us to a nearly magical, fairy-tale like world, yet one still implicated in the turmoils of real life, including death, illness, and escape from attackers. In Arentzen's depiction, columns look more barren, open, and brutally exposed than the shelter of trees.

Christian Høgel offers an expert analysis of stylites in the Menologion of Symeon Metaphrastes, whose collection peculiarly comprises only three stylite champions: Symeon the Elder, Daniel, and Alypios. Causes for the limited choice – which contrast, for example, the wider selection in the illustrated Menologion of Basil II – are thought to be perhaps guided by local criteria. The Metaphrastes, whose friend, Nikephoros Ouranos, produced a rewriting of the Life of Symeon the Younger, had nothing against including stylites but did not seem to consider them a specific category worthy of special attention. Rewritings are always elusive and demand painstaking attention to compare readings and assess variations. This is what Høgel homes into, giving an example of the subtle changes of wording in three cases: Metaphrastes' dealing with the geography of Hadrianople in the case of Alypios, his shift to making Daniel into more of a hidden saint than the column would suggest, and finally a process of intensification of the light in which Symeon bathed in his monastic setting. Surely these shifts are significant beyond their elevation in tone and style. It is important to keep gathering such information in order to form a better sense of the placing of the Metaphrastes vis-à-vis contemporary politics as played out in saints' lives (if the enterprise of the Metaphrastic Menologion was to produce high-level written texts, the performativity of stylites would seem immediately at odds with this intent).

Béatrice Caseau has been one of the most prolific and attentive scholars to the Byzantine fortune of stylites. Here she writes with Charis Messis about the sure revival of stylite popularity and fortunes in ninth to twelfth century Byzantium. Interestingly, the more critical stance towards stylite exhibitionism

found in middle Byzantine writers may not be as innovative as at first perceived, when compared to the tongue-in-cheek approaches of Theodoret or the intricate parody of Theodoulos's Life. Caseau and Messis provide a wide range of cases where stylites are mentioned in other Lives not always as positive influences. They consider the reconquest of Palestine and Syria of the late tenth century as a political reason behind the renewed fortune, placing Nikephoros Ouranos's personal role as the primary mover. They also remind us of the contribution of Georgian sources in this revival, and mention many different examples before focusing on the role of the stylite as spiritual adviser to Theodore of Edessa, in a Life also available in Georgian and Arabic. Only the Greek version though characterizes Theodore's spiritual guide as Theodosius the Stylite, while in the other translations he is a recluse or ascete (which reminds one of the grouping of ascetes in the headpiece miniature of the *Ladder* of John Climax, MS Sinait. gr. 418, fol. 254r, where the stylite is one of three possible forms of retreated lifestyle).[97] Caseau and Messis contend that the stylite plays a pivotal role in the understanding of the protagonist, Theodore, particularly as mediator in the encounter between bishop and caliph. In this case, the ambiguous patch inhabited by the ascete is that outside the constraints of an ecclesiastical hierarchy, admitting of a greater flexibility and a more generous sensitivity to the real issues of morality and identity.

Another pair of scholars, Laura Franco and Fabio Conca, takes us much further in time to three modern rewritings of Symeon the Stylite's story by poets Tennyson, Nencioni and Cavafy. Although Tennyson's sceptical take on Symeon's feats may be attributed to Gibbon's ironical portrait of the saint, the caustic spirit was, we have seen, never totally absent from the ancient view on stylites either. Tennyson writes in the form of a monologue, an appropriately theatrical choice for this self-portrait. As Franco and Conca underline, despite such irony the portrait is not totally negative, but rather balanced and not devoid of a candid admiration. The Italian Nencioni's sonnets are more manneristic, yet he succeeds in capturing the cosmic communion of saint and natural world, picking up the light theme we found in Theodoret and also comparing Symeon to a solitary tree. The poet's own reaction is that of shivering at the sight of such a human being. Cavafy's shorter poem is perhaps the most powerful, but also the most difficult. It is a literary construct framed around the experience of writing poetry, as if the saint was himself a poet and literary expert, while at the same time being capable of wrenching the poet away from his craft: the stylite delivers raw experience of just what the poet was truly after, yet could not find, in the world of literary artifice. Franco and Conca provide insightful commentaries for each poem, concluding that the verses present in each case an

[97] https://www.loc.gov/resource/amedmonastery.00279380435-ms/?sp=258&r=-0.24,-0.006,1.475,0.718,0 (accessed 08/08/2023).

ambiguity with respect to the figure of Symeon, and in each case, though partaking of Gibbon's sceptical look, they also go beyond his 'rigorous rationalism'. They conclude that the stylite, as a literary figure, acts as a perfect intermediary between ancient and modern paganism, as well as between a sceptical and a Christian world view. They speak of stylites as 'marginal historical figures' to which poets could ally themselves to escape the strictures of logic and determinism. Like Renzo Arbore's admiring young man looking up at a church statue of Symeon in *Il Pap'occhio*, so the youth's admiration expressed in Cavafy's poem connects a specific attitude of innocence to the encounter with the stylite.

Although these essays do not cover all the stylite texts available – leaving unexplored in particular a view on Symeon the Younger,[98] as well as Syriac works such as the homilies of Jacob of Serugh[99] – their common thread about the stylite's performative ambiguity and sustained cultural value attain an unexpected and welcome coherence. Together, they open the scholarly field of stylite studies to more complex analysis than those so far offered by a historical positivistic school of thought, or by a confessional attitude to these figures as canonized saints.

Part II of the volume turns to material evidence and visual transmission of images of stylites, further exploring the role of the column as a place for stylite portraiture besides and beyond its use as a feature of the stylite's ascetic practice. Looking backwards to Roman statuary, Esen Öğüş elegantly peruses the 'visual and conceptual impact of a human figure on a pillar', in comparison to other honorific statues thus portrayed. She convincingly submits the theory that stylites counted on 'the popularity of the visual and cultural stimulation that a human figure on a pillar provided', but further probes her theory in specific contexts for stylite representation such as Chrysostom's Antioch, where the famous Riot of the Statues took place. Here again we meet an ambiguity between exploiting an obvious, coded message through recourse to familiar objects and exploring their subversion by 'alternative religious figures' who appropriated only some of those expected characteristics. Öğüş presents stylites as a rural alternative to city statuary figures, yet sees them as partaking of Neoplatonic principles through which images and bodies became interchangeable. Öğüş refers to the work by Patricia Cox Miller whose explorations of late ancient visuality directly engage with examples of stylite saints. After a sustained reflection on the use of statues as metaphors for concrete or spiritual realities, Öğüş lyrically concludes with this striking phrase: "the stylite much more than an emperor's effigy was a visual sedative soothing the bureaucratic and spiritual victims of the changing times, a pillar of justice, a landmark of moral integrity". In her view, the stylite provided an alternative realm and

[98] Parker, *Symeon Stylites the Younger*.

[99] See http://syri.ac/jacob-serugh-two-homilies-symeon-stylite and Muraviev, "Memra."

introduced an alternative age, precisely in being the same yet different to the expected honorific statue displayed in Roman cities.

A similar subversion is operated in the analysis by Tiffany Apostolou, looking forward in her reflection on columns to contemporary art. Apostolou considers both audiences and columns. Her visitors to stylites climb, as often shown in stylite portraiture, on outside ladders through which they reduce the distance imposed by the pillar. Stylites, in her view, are influencers, not outliers. One looks up to them both physically and metaphorically. Her main analysis, though, revolves around the object column. She reflects on its function as frame and support, as the main part of stylite portraiture above which the actual figure is often reduced or schematically drawn. The person becomes a diagram, as if the entire ensemble was but a geometrical compound. This visual cue brings her to consider three modern artworks, installations that provide different takes on the column. Perceptively, she analyses their take on the shape and material of the column, appreciating how these artists (Zuzanna Czebatul, Andreas Angelidakis and Seon Ghi Bahk) appropriated and transformed the classical institutional symbol into a more approachable object by changing position and texture to the otherwise solid, immovable, aloof pillars. Apostolou remarks that these works, like the stylites themselves, blend secular and religious signifiers, again resulting in ambiguous, but not for this opaque alternative statements, where values of solidity, firmness, structure are reinterpreted in oblique ways through the dematerialization of the columns themselves. Although the installations chosen are purely graphic, featuring no human figures, nonetheless comparison with stylite iconography works well to bring out the alternative significance of stylite portraits and enables us to reflect on their subversive potential.

The journey of Basema Hamarneh is more concrete but no less eye-opening. Touching a real stylite tower and seeing its simple cross decoration, and its basic functionalities, including measurements of a high room slightly over 2 x 2 meters and the shaft of a latrine discharging to the ground, provides a rare sense of the reality of this particular business. Hamarneh is best qualified in the study of these regions and the exploration she conducts, with scientific rigour in keeping all options open, is also a journey in the mentality of the Eastern provinces of Palaestina and Arabia. Stylites even hide in minarets in this kind of mixed cultural world, where true love for God becomes manifest in more straightforward ways than theological disputes might allow. Hamarneh's stylites really span two worlds, at least, and their shelters provide refuge to itinerant monks, or are connected with the care of recluse women at Gethsemani. The colophon of a Georgian manuscript now on Sinai again provides a glimpse of a Georgian stylite, Peter, from Jerusalem. In this survey, we break out of the Syrian enclave to enter the neighbouring regions where, significantly, stylites were also found. Although called a column in a semantic slippage, the tower structure would seem to provide a stronger foundation for life on high.

Similarly, the natural conical heights of Cappadocian rocks were exploited by recluses who considered themselves stylites in the tradition of Symeon the Elder. This phenomenon, with connected artistic expressions, is carefully presented in the research of Maria Raffaella Menna on Cappadocia. Menna also explains the semantic slippage between Georgian *swéti* (towers) and stylite columns, and between the natural rocks and the 'styloi' of the Cappadocian formations that are described as 'stone reliquaries' for the ascete's body. The paintings of the cave at Zelve of Niketas the stylite are analysed together with the theory that their story yields a version earlier than Antonios' Greek Life of Symeon. Stylite places also invite graffiti, attesting to the popularity of these caves for visitors and pilgrims. The unusual illustrations of MS Athos, *Esphigmenou* 14, of four episodes of the Life of Symeon are also described, together with other useful manuscript comparanda. The first four essays of this section keep focus on visual material, whereas the last two, that we turn now to consider, expand the vista to performative arts.

Maria Veronese provides a competent and insightful overview of Buñuel's movie, so central to the inspiration of this volume. Her account is aware of technical issues in the shooting of the scenes, including some cuts, and in different versions of the script according to languages and translations. It emphasizes the extraordinary success of this movie. It also specifies that the Simón of the movie is an emulator of the great Symeon, a device by which Buñuel surely avoids offending any ecclesiastical authority and gains in freedom on how to manipulate and invent his character even by keeping much of the blueprint of the original account (Theodoret's) concerning the saint. The fascinating part of her essay concerns the dealings of the director with modern questions concerning the usefulness of life as a stylite given the total alienation of the saint from the world's mentality. Like Tennyson, Buñuel stood between two worlds but did not ultimately share, or at least did not do so completely, Lorca's cut-and-dried judgement that such "penance is useless, very selfish, and full of coldness". His Simón is very alive, however edging towards paradox. He is defeated, perhaps, and flown to a different – but similarly high – world, but he remains a cultural cypher transformed into a fashionable local intellectual in Greenwich Village. Difficult to imagine that the ragged stylite exerted the same attraction in the Syrian desert, yet perhaps the difficulty is due to our prejudice, and the artist's surreal take could shake us into going beyond that limitation. Veronese concludes that Buñuel's portrait of Simón is ambiguous, and offers more doubt suffused with an admiring curiosity than answers or reassurances about what is positive or negative, or any 'lesson' to be learnt.

Christine Amadou boldly compares the descriptions of Symeon on his column (using Theodoret's and the Syriac Life as basis) to the contemporary performance artist Marina Abramović. To do so, she concentrates not so much on the contents of the performance, as on its effect on the public. The meeting

of the artist's life, acted in slow motion outside the normal environment and constraints of real life, produces a stillness and a meditative attitude in those who come to see her. Similarly, the space afforded to others by the ascete on his pillar comes to play a determinant role in the encounter with the divine. Up on his column, the saint has emerged from the ordinary while still continuing a plain human existence. Amadou speaks appropriately of a stylite's installation, which brings us close to the comparisons of Apostolou's paper that call into play contemporary art. In an even more daring part of her paper, yet one that succeeds entirely in its intent, Amadou connects the 1916 Zurich experimental theatre of the DADA movement, the shows at "Cabaret Voltaire", with the strangely liberating performances of the stylites (or stylists!), who artfully constitute their show-selves. This is not meant in any negative way, and Amadou is ready to admit the apparent misfit between these two worlds. Except that her comparison well explains Buñuel's Simón's departure to New York, a forest of pillars (the skyscrapers), where a loud discothèque still leaves the ascete detached in his fundamental attitude to the world – the city no more seductive than the shepherd's country goat. Amadou has a solid ground on which to base her connection with DADA art in a book by the movement's founder Hugo Ball which includes a perceptive chapter on Symeon. According to Amadou, looking at DADA performance art helps us understand Symeon's 'endurance art', just as it does Marina Abramović's. Amadou also points out the role of the spectators as integral to the fashioning of the stylite's role. In her view, the cultural role of the stylite likens him to "the busts of Aeschylus and Homer".

Overall, the challenge that the odd practice of stylitism presents to the modern commentator is one demanding a creative approach in which forms and significances are put in dialogue. This challenge has suited post-modern critics who, like Virginia Burrus, have picked up the thread of ambiguity that these essays point to, making of it a thoroughly post-human discourse: the hybridity of being that the man-pillar suggests disrupts precisely those categories fragmented and recomposed by modernity to produce a new take on what is human.[100] Yet episodes such as the healing of the necrophile demoniac point to these categories being in upheaval all along.[101] The diachronic angle on the reception of stylites has provided a useful lens in which to develop some new approaches. We need not sit sternly at the foot of the pillar, at least not as sternly as we would at the foot of the cross. Despite the similarities with Christ's predicament, stylite iconography, and stylite stories, both inherited and proposed a wider range of emotional stimuli, causing laughter as well as tears, raising emotional responses in their performativity that always envisaged the role of an

[100] Burrus, "Hagiography Without Humans."

[101] The upshot of the story in Walter Map's monstruous child is also a pointer to the exploration of mixed categories and blurred boundaries: see the introduction to Clay, ed. *Beasts, Humans and Transhumans*.

audience, individual and collective. In this perspective, the statue on the pillar loses its statuesque immobility and its daunting aloofness. It is a presence for the people, a performative presence mucking in with all aspects of the human condition. It is a living presence.

## Bibliography

### Sources

*A Letter from Jacob of Edessa to John the Stylite of Litarab Concerning Ecclesiastical Canons*, ed. Karl-Erik Rignell. Lund: Liber Läromedel/Gleerups, 1979.

Augustinus, *Vingt-six sermons au peuple d'Afrique: retrouvés à Mayence*, ed. François Dolbeau. Paris: Institut d'Etudes Augustiniennes, 1996. Orig. pr. as François Dolbeau, "Nouveaux sermons de saint Augustine pour la conversion des païens et des donatistes (IV)." *Recherches Augustiniennes* 26 (1992): 69–141.

Bordeaux Pilgrim, *Itinerary: Itinerarium Burdigalense.* https://web.archive.org/web/20171114071219/, http://www.christusrex.org/www1/ofm/pilgr/bord/10Bord01Lat.html

*Breviarius de Hierosolyma, in Itineraria et alia geographica*, ed. Robert Weber, in *Itineraria et alia geographica* (Corpus Chistianorum, series Latina 175), 109–112. Turnhout: Brepols 1965. Online resource with translation by John Wilkinson: https://doi.org/10.25446/oxford.13923083.v1

*Itinerarium Antonini Piacentini: Un viaggio in Terra Santa del 560–570 d.C.*, ed. Celestina Milani. Milan: Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, 1977.

Josephus, *Antiquitates Judaicae*, ed. and transl. by Ralph Marcus. *Josephus, Jewish Antiquities Books XII-XIII.* Loeb Classical Library 365. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998.

*La Vida sobre una columna: Vida de Simeón Estilita, Vida de Daniel Estilita*, ed. José Simón Palmer. Madrid: Editorial Trotta, 2014.

*La Vie ancienne de S. Syméon Stylite le Jeune (521–592)*, ed. and transl. Paul van den Ven, 2 vols., Subsidia Hagiographica 32. Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1962, 1970.

*Les Saints stylites*, ed. Hippolyte Delehaye. Bruxelles: Société de Bollandistes, 1923.

*Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion*, ed. Richard P. H. Greenfield. Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 2000.

*Life of Symeon the Stylite the Younger (Georgian)*, ed. by Korneli Kekelidze. *Kimeni* I, 215–40. Tbilisi, 1918.

*Life of Timothy the Stylite (Georgian)*, ed. by Korneli Kekelidze. *Etiudebi* VI, 311–406. Tbilisi, 1960.

*Lives of Simeon Stylites*. Translated, with an introduction by Robert Doran. Cistercian Studies Series 112. Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1992.

Malalas, *Chronicle*: ed. L. Dindorf, *Iohannis Malalae Chronographia,* Corpus scriptorum historiae byzantinae. Bonn: Teubner, 1891. Engl. transl.: *The Chronicle of John Malalas*, by Elizabeth Jeffreys, Michael Jeffreys, and Roger Scott. Melbourne: Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, 1986.

*Synaxarium Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae*, ed. Hippolyte Delehaye. Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes, 1902.

Theodore Stoudite, *Theodori Studitae Epistulae. Pars 1: Prolegomena et textum (epp. 1–70) continens. Pars 2: Textum (epp. 71–560) et indices continens*, ed. Georgios Fatouros. Berlin: De Gruyter, 1992.

Theodosios, *De situ terrae sanctae*, ed. Paul Geyer in *Itineraria et alia geographica* (Corpus Chistianorum, series Latina 175), 113–125. Turnhout: Brepols, 1965. Online resource with translation by John Wilkinson: https://doi.org/10.25446/oxford.13922726.v1

*Three Byzantine Saints: Contemporary Biographies of St. Daniel the Stylite, St. Theodore of Sykeon and St. John the Almsgiver*, ed. Dawes, Elizabeth and Norman H. Baynes. Oxford: Blackwell, 1948.

*Vie de saint Luc le stylite (879–979)*, ed. and transl. François Vanderstuyf, Patrologia orientalis 11. Paris, 1915.

*Vie de Syméon le Nouveau théologien*, ed. Irenée Hausherr. OCA 12. Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 1928.

*Vies géorgiennes de s. Syméon Stylite l'ancien et de s. Éphrem*, ed. Gérard Garitte. CSCO 171, Script. Iberici 7. Louvain: L. Durbecq, 1957.

## Secondary Literature

Alexander, P.J. *The Patriarch Nicephorus of Constantinople: Ecclesiastical Policy and Image Worship in the Byzantine Empire*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1958.

Barry, Fabio. *Painting in Stone: Architecture and the Poetics of Marble from Antiquity to the Enlightenment*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2020.

Bedros, Vlad. "Le Christ à la colonne. Notice sur l'iconographie Moldave de la fin du XVe siècle." *Revue roumaine d'histoire et d'art. ser. Beaux-Arts* 53 (2016): 155–62.

Biscop, Jean-Luc. "Réorganisation du monachisme syrien autour du sanctuaire de Saint-Syméon." In *Les églises en monde syriaque,* edited by F. Briquel Chatonnet, 131–67. Études syriaques 10. Paris: Geuthner, 2013.

Boero, Dina. "Promoting a Cult Site without Bodily Relics: Sacred Substances and Imagined Topography in the Syriac Life of Symeon the Stylite." In *Religious Competition in the Greco-Roman World*, edited by Nathaniel P. DesRosiers and Lily C. Vuong, 233–46. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2016.

Burrus, Virginia. "Hagiography Without Humans: Saint Symeon the Stylite." In *Classical Literature and Posthumanism*, edited by Giulia Maria Chesi and Francesca Spiegel, 237–44. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020.

Caseau, Béatrice. "Syméon Stylite l'Ancien entre puanteur et parfum." *Revue des Études Byzantines* 63 (2005): 71–96.

Caseau, Béatrice and Marie-Christine Fayant. "Le renouveau du culte des stylites syriens aux Xe et XIe siècles." In *Autour du Premier humanisme byzantin & des Cinq études sur le XIe siècle quarante ans après Paul Lemerle,* edited by Bernard Flusin and Jean-Claude Cheynet, 701–732 [= *Travaux et Mémoires* 21.2]. Paris: Association des amis du Centre d'histoire et civilisation de Byzance, 2017.

Cavarero, Adriana. *Inclinations. A Critique of Rectitude*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016.

Chitty, Derwas. *The Desert a City: An Introduction to the Study of Egyptian and Palestinian Monasticism under the Christian Empire*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1966.

*Chrétiens d'Orient: 2000 ans d'histoire: exposition, Institut du monde arabe à Paris du 26 septembre 2017 au 14 janvier 2018 et au MUba Eugène Leroy à Turcoing du 23 février au 12 juin 2018*, edited by Raphaëlle Ziadé. Paris: Gallimard, 2017.

Clay, J. Eugene, ed. *Beasts, Humans and Transhumans in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*. Arizona Studies in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Turnhout: Brepols, 2020.

Constantinou, Stavroula. *Female Corporeal Performances: Reading the Body in Byzantine Passions and Lives of Holy Women*. Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis 9. Uppsala: Uppsala University, 2005.

Cremonesi, Chiara. "L'ultimo *theama* di un "eroe cristiano": Il corpo esposto di Daniele lo Stilita." In *Eroi, eroismi, eroizzazioni dalla Grecia antica a Padova e Venezia,* edited by Alessandra Coppola, 219–32. Padova: S.A.R.G.O.N. Editrice e Libreria, 2007.

Crostini, Barbara. "Resolving Humbert's Crux? Anti-Greek Polemics and the Question of Crucified Saints." In Contra Latinos et Adversus Graecos: *the Separation between Rome and Constantinople from the Ninth to the Fifteenth Century*, edited by Alessandra Bucossi and Anna Calia, 153–81. Leuven: Peeters, 2020.

Crostini, Barbara. "Devotion to Saints as Busts on Pillars: Solving the Enigma of Non-Stylite Stylites in Psalter *Vat. gr.* 752." *IKON* 14 (2021): 45–56.

Crostini, Barbara. "Between the Pillar and the Cross: Stylite Saints in Late Antique Perception." In *Acts of the XVII International Conference of Christian Archaeology* (CIAC) (in press).

Drijvers, Hendrik J.W. "Spätantike Parallelen zur altchristlichen Heiligenverehrung unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des syrischen Stylitenkultes." In *Göttinger Orientforschungen I. Reihe: Syriaca 17, vol 2: Erkentnisse und Meinungen,* edited by Gernot Wießner, 78-113. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1978.

Eastmond, Antony. "Body vs. Column: The Cults of St Symeon Stylites." In *Desire and Denial in Byzantium: Papers from the Thirty-first Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Brighton, March 1997,* edited by Liz James, 87–100. Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999.

Eliade, Mircea. *Il Sacro e il Profano*. Milan: CDE, 1984.

Ernst, A. M. *Martha from the Margins: the Authority of Martha in Early Christian Tradition*. Leiden: Brill, 2009.

Festugière, A.J. *Les Moines d'Orient*. 2 vols. Paris: Cerf, 1961.

Fleischer, Jens, Øysten Hjort, and Mikael Bøgh Rasmussen. *Byzans. Senantik og byzantinsk kunst i nordiske samlinger.* Copenhagen: Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, 1996.

Flood, Finbarr B. "Pillars, Palimpsests, and Princely Practices: Translating the Past in Sultanate Delhi." *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 43 (2003): 95–116.

Flusin, Bernard. "Syméon et les philologues, ou la mort du stylite." In *Les saints et leur sanctuaires à Byzance*, edited by C. Jolivet-Lévy, M. Kaplan, and J.-P. Sodini, 1–23. Paris: Sorbonne, 1994.

Follieri, E. "Un reliquiario bizantino di San Simeone Stilita." *Byzantion* 35 (1965): 62–82.

Franco, Laura. "Le *Vite* di Simeone Metafrasta." In *Bisanzio nell'età dei Macedoni. Forme della produzione letteraria e artistica. Atti dell'VIII Giornata di Studi Bizantini*. Milano, 15–16 marzo 2005, edited by F. Conca and G. Fiaccadori, 95–117. Milano: Cisalpino, 2007.

Franco, Laura. "Psychological Introspection and the Image of Sanctity in the Metaphrastic *Menologium*." In *Metaphrasis: A Byzantine Concept of Rewriting and its Hagiographical Products*, edited by S. Constantinou and C. Høgel, 249–69. Brill: Leiden, 2020.

Franco, Laura. *Al di sopra del mondo: Vite di Santi Stiliti.* Milano: Einaudi, 2023.

Frank, Georgia. "Traveling Stylites? Rethinking the Pillar Saint's *Stasis* in the Christian East." In *Les Mobilités monastiques en Orient et en Occident de l'Antiquité tardive au Moyen Âge (IVe–XVe siècle),* edited by Olivier Delouis, 261–73. Rome: Publications de l'École française de Rome, 2019.

Frankfurter, David. “Stylites and *Phallobates*: Pillar Religions in Late Antique Syria.” *Vigiliae Christianae* 44 (1990): 168–98.

Gabidzashvili, Enriko. ენრიკო გაბიძაშვილი. შრომები II: ფილოლოგიურ-ტექსტოლოგიურიკვლევები [*Works II: Philological and Textological Studies*]. Tbilisi: Saqartvelos Mac‘ne, 2010.

Gaspar, C.-N. “Praising the Stylite in Southern Italy: Philagathos of Cerami on St Symeon the Stylite (BHG 822).” *Annuario* 4 (2022): 93–108. http://ktistes.altervista.org/stylite.html

Haftmann, Werner. *Das italienische Säulenmonument: Versuch zur Geschichte einer antiken Form des Denkmals und Kultmonumentes und ihrer Wirksamkeit für die Antikenvorstellung des Mittelalters und für die Ausbildung des öffentlichen Denkmals in der Frührenaissance.* Leipzig and Berlin: Verlag von B.G. Teubner, 1939.

Hoffmann, Anette and Gerhard Wolf. “Licht und Landschaft: Zur Sakraltopographie Mzchetas in Georgien.” In *Inszenierungen von Sichtbarkeit in mittelarterlichen Bildkulturen*, edited by Henriette Hofmann, Caroline Schärli, and Sophie Schweinfurth, 21–48. Berlin: Reimer, 2018.

Hourihane, Colum. *Pontius Pilate, Anti-Semitism, and the Passion in Medieval Art*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009.

Hübner, Ulrich. “Saulenheilige im Ostjordanland.” In *Studia Eurasiatica. Kieler Festschrift für Hermann Kulke zum 65. Geburtstag*, edited by Stephan Conermann and Jan Kusber, 139–59. Hamburg: EB-Verlag, 2003.

Høgel, Christian. “The Pillar Saint Seen as a Totally Devoted Emperor: the In-Group around Symeon Stylites the Elder.” *Religion* 53.1 (2023): 161–75.

Jacobs, Andrew S. “‘I Want to Be Alone’. Ascetic Celebrity and the Splendid Isolation of Simeon Stylites.” In *The Garb of Being: Embodiment and the Pursuit of Holiness in Late Ancient Christianity*, edited by Georgia Frank, Susan Holman, and Andrew Jacobs, 145–68. New York: Fordham University Press Scholarship Online, 2019.

Janin, R. “Les Sanctuaires byzantins de saint Michel.” *Echos d’Orient* 33 (1934): 37–40.

Jolivet-Lévy, Catherine. “Contribution à l’étude de l’iconographie mésobyzantine des deux Syméon Stylites.” In *Les saints et leur sanctuaires à Byzance*, edited by C. Jolivet-Lévy, M. Kaplan, and J.-P. Sodini, 35–47. Paris: Sorbonne, 1994.

Kletter, Raz. *The Judaean Pillar-Figurines and the Archaeology of Asherah*. British Archaeological Reports: International Series. Oxford: Tempus reparatum, 1996.

Lafontaine-Dosogne, Jacqueline. *Itinéraires archéologiques dans la région d’Antioche: recherches sur le monastère et sur l’iconographie de S. Syméon Stylite le Jeune.* Bruxelles: Editions de Byzantion, 1967.

Lane Fox, Robin. "The *Life of Daniel*." In *Portraits: Biographical Representation in Greek and Latin Literature of the Roman Empire*, edited by Mark Edwards and Simon Swain, 175–225. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997.

Lavin, Marilyn Aronberg. "Piero della Francesca's *Flagellation*: the Triumph of Christmas Glory." *Art Bulletin* 50 (1968): 321–42; Italian transl. by Andrea Bonavoglia, *Piero della Francesca: La Flagellazione*. Roma: Fogli e Parole D'Arte, 2011.

Linardou, Kalliroe. "A Resting Place for 'the First of the Angels': The Michaelion at Sosthenion." In *Byzantium, 1180–1204: 'The Sad Quarter of a Century?'*, edited by Alicia Simpson, 245–59. Athens: National Hellenic Research Foundation/Institute of Historical Research, 2015.

Maier, H. O. "The Entrepreneurial Widows of 1 Timothy." In *Patterns of Women's Leadership in Early Christianity*, edited by J.E. Taylor and I.L.E. Ramelli, 59–73. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021.

Mango, Cyril. "The Archangel Michael and Attis." *Δελτίον τῆς χριστιανικῆς Αρχαιολογικῆς Εταιρείας* 12 (1984): 39–62. doi: 10.12681/dchae.946

Menna, Raffaella. "S. Benedetto 'stilita' nelle pitture di Axt'ala." *Nea Rhome. Rivista di ricerche bizantinistiche* 15 (2018): 167–76.

Menze, Volker. "The Transformation of a Saintly Paradigm: Symeon the Elder and the Legacy of Stylitism." In *Religious Identities in the Levant from Alexander to Muhammed*, edited by M. Blömer, A. Lichtenberger, and R. Raja, 213–26. Turnhout: Brepols, 2015.

Mepisaschwili, R. and V. Tsintsadze. *Arkhitektura nagornoi chasti istoricheskoi provnitsii Gruzii – Shida Kartli* [*Architecture of the Mountainous Part of the Historical Province of Georgia*]. Tbilisi: Shida Kartli, 1975.

Miller, Tracy. "Naturalizing Buddhist Cosmology in the Temple Architecture of China: the Case of the Yicihui Pillar." In *Heaven on Earth: Temples, Ritual, and Cosmic Symbolism in the Ancient World,* edited by Deena Ragavan, 17–39. Chicago: Oriental Institute, 2013.

Mortet, V. "Colonnes." *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie* 3.2 (1914): 2277–321.

Muehlberger, Ellen. "Simeon and Other Women in Theodoret's *Religious History*: Gender in the Representation of Late Ancient Christian Asceticism." *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 23 (2015): 583–606.

Muraviev, Alexey. "Memra by Jacob of Sarug on Symeon the Stylite." *Symbol* 55 (2009): 308–23 (in Russian).

Nasrallah, J. "Survie de saint Siméon Stylite l'Alépin dans les Gaules." *Syria* 51 (1974): 171–97.

O'Daly, Gerard. *Augustine's City of God, A Reader's Guide*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020, 2nd edn.

Pargoire, J. "Anaple et Sosthène." *Izviestija russkago arkheologitcheskago instituta v Constantinopolie* III (1898): 73–82.

Parker, Lucy. "Paradigmatic Piety: Liturgy in the Life of Martha, Mother of Symeon Stylites the Younger." *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 24.1 (2016): 99–125.

Parker, Lucy. *Symeon Stylites the Younger and Late Antique Antioch: From Hagiography to History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022.

Peña, Ignace, Pascal Castellana, and Romuald Fernandez. *Les Stylites syriens*. Milan: Studium biblicum Franciscanum, 1975.

Peters, F. E. *Jerusalem. The Holy City in the Eyes of Chroniclers, Visitors, Pilgrims, and Prophets from the Days of Abraham to the Beginnings of Modern Times*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985.

Rush, Zachariah. *Cinema and its Discontents: The Dialectical Nature of Character*. London: McFarland, 2016.

Schachner, L. "The Archaeology of the Stylite." In *Religious Diversity in Late Antiquity*, edited by D.M. Gwynn, Susan Bangert, and Luke Lavan, 329–97. Leiden: Brill, 2010.

Shevjakova, T. "K voprosy o vozniknovenii i kharaktere freskovykh rospisei v Gruzii VIII-IX vv." [Concerning the Origin and Character of Fresco Painting in Georgia in the 8th-9th c.]. *Proceedings of the Georgian Academy of Sciences* 1 (1962): 256–68.

Sitz, Anna M. "Architectures of Surveillance. Houses and Stylites in the Northern Syrian 'Dead Villages'." In *Architecture and Visual Culture in the Late Antique and Medieval Mediterranean: Studies in Honor of Robert G. Ousterhout,* edited by Vasileios Marinis, Amy Cassens Papalexandrou, and Jordan Pickett, 19–33. Turnhout: Brepols, 2020.

Sodini, J.-P. "Remarques sur l'iconographie de Syméon l'Alépin, le premier Stylite." *Monuments et mémoires de la Fondation Eugène Piot* 70 (1989): 29–53.

Stang, Charles M. "Digging Holes and Building Pillars: Simeon Stylites and the 'Geometry' of Ascetic Practice." *Harvard Theological Review* 103 (2010): 447–70.

Stephenson, Paul. *The Serpent Column: A Cultural Biography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

Tycner, Marta. "Fundacja Konstantynopola 8 listopada 324 r. i jej chrześcijańskie konotacje." *U schyłku starożytności. Studia źródłoznawcze* 12 (2013): 43–72.

Vikan, Gary. *Early Byzantine Pilgrimage Art*. Dumbarton Oaks Byzantine Collections Publications 5. Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1982.

Williams, Michael Allen. *The Immovable Race: A Gnostic Designation and the Theme of Stability in Late Antiquity*. Leiden: Brill, 1985.

Woods, David. "Some Dubious Stylites on Early Byzantine Glassware." *Journal of Glass Studies* 26 (2004): 39–49.

Wright, George R. H. "Simeon's Ancestors (or the Skeleton on the Column)." *Australian Journal of Biblical Archaeology* 1, no. 1 (1968): 41–49.

Wright, George R. H. "The Heritage of the Stylites." *Australian Journal of Biblical Archaeology* 1, no. 3 (1970): 82–107.

PART I

# Textual Reception: Stylites and Their Texts

ANDREAS WESTERGREN

# The Laughing Stock: The First Stylite Biography as Paradoxical Myth*

## Introduction

The shift of perspective comes suddenly in Luis Buñuel's 1965 film, *Simon in the Desert*. After having followed this Stylite up and down his column, with complete access to his whereabouts, the audience is drawn from on-high into a New York basement discothèque, in which a throng of people is dancing, frantically. At a table next to the dancers, Symeon sits, bored. The shift is a loss of perspective. Once removed from his column and the strange landscape of the desert, there is no room to move, no place to make magic anymore, no space to rise above the usual and be singled out, a solitary. In a modern world, everything seems available to everyone at the same time, and there is no God, nor devil, to lure anyone out of the ordinary, no easy exit from empirical realities, such as a dance floor. Buñuel's story, it seems, is one of secularization. Or, in other words, of myth becoming mundane. Similarly, the first chronicler of Symeon, Theodoret of Cyrrhus (383–466 CE), also struggled to gain his perspective on the Stylite (ca. 385–459 CE). Writing an account, no less visual than Buñuel's, he had probably been standing there, below the column, looking up, trying to

* I am grateful for the invitation to attend and present at the conference on superheroes at the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul, during which we naturally watched Buñuel.

make sense of it all.[1] For him, the pillar was a down-to-earth empirical fact,[2] and the Stylite a contemporary about the same age as himself. Nevertheless, as a writer and a bishop, he needed to rise higher and find an appropriate viewpoint. In other words, I will argue, he was trying to transform the mundane into *myth*, and perhaps even an amusing one.

In the following, I will therefore explore ways in which Theodoret's *Life* of Symeon qualifies as a myth. Several scholars have struggled to make sense of the Stylite,[3] but here I will try to address what does not make sense. Are we allowed to laugh at the saint, without turning into the "lovers of mockery" this biography so clearly condemns?[4] Peter Brown, who sparked much interest in this Stylite in a "seminal article" from 1971,[5] once remarked that his greatest mistake had been to imagine the saint in "splendid isolation."[6] Here, it is exactly this impression that I am investigating, arguing that it is significant to compare the literary portrayal of Symeon not only to Anthony, the first monk, but also to Heracles, the great hero. What the myth of Heracles offers, I suggest, is ambivalence – a space to move between positive and negative traits, between praise and blame – and we will study a tension between fame and fate, and between strength and exaggeration that is shared by Symeon and Heracles alike.[7] While Buñuel zoomed out from the pillar, we will start from an eagle's view, discussing Theodoret's take on myths and his ambiguous portrait of other immovable saints, before circling closer to consider the first Stylite's early struggles, and eventually approaching the pillar, to discuss this narrative's value as a paradox.

[1] Apart from the encounters recounted in Theodoret's *History of the Monks of Syria*, Symeon is supposed to have been involved in Theodoret accepting the Formula of Reunion in 433 CE. Theodoret's letter describing the event is preserved in Latin, see Festugière, *Antioche païenne et chrétienne*, 420–21. For a short account of the event, see Frend, *Rise of Christianity,* 761–62. For short accounts of Theodoret's life and writings by leading scholars, see Azéma, "Théodoret de Cyr," 418–35, and Guinot, "Theodoret von Kyrrhos," 250–54.

[2] For the archaeological records, see Tchalenko, *Villages antiques*, 1:227–76. A groundbreaking study on Symeon and the Stylite tradition is Delehaye, *Saints stylites*. A presentation of stylite life in Syria and a list of 123 stylites (including a few stylitesses) from the fifth to the nineteenth centuries can be found in Peña, Castellana and Fernandez, *Stylites syriens*, 79–94.

[3] This study builds on Westergren, *Sketching the Invisible*, esp. 275–293. For a few early, pivotal investigations of the biographies, see Lietzmann, *Leben*; Peeters, "S. Syméon Stylite," and Festugière, *Antioche*, 347–401. Cf. Blersch, *Säule im Weltgeviert*. Studies by other scholars are mentioned below.

[4] Theod. *Phil. hist.* 26.14. For a discussion of this expression, see below.

[5] Peter Brown portrayed a society defined by the holy man as a new patron on the basis of the Stylite. Brown, "Rise and Function," 99. The characterization comes from Cameron, "Holy Man," 27.

[6] Brown, "Saint as Exemplar," 11.

[7] For a recent re-evaluation of monastic sources in light of Greek *paideia*, see Larsen and Rubenson, *Monastic Education*, with an updated bibliography.

## Panegyric and Myth

There are three major narrative sources about Symeon that are more or less contemporary with his life, but only one of them was written before his death.[8] Theodoret's *Life* of Symeon is one of approximately thirty saints' lives in his *History of the Monks of Syria* (in Greek *Philotheos historia*), a work written around 444 CE, i.e. fifteen years before Symeon's death.[9] Since the *Life* of Symeon is the most elaborate composition, and has been transmitted as a unique text outside of the *History*,[10] it has often been treated on its own by scholars. Still, it should not be forgotten that it is a narrative written within the larger scope of Theodoret's whole enterprise.

At the outset of the *History of the Monks of Syria*, Theodoret makes clear that his writing is neither myth,[11] nor eulogy, but rather that "the account will proceed in narrative form, not following the rules of panegyric but forming a plain tale of some few facts", relying primarily on eye-witnesses.[12] By speaking in such terms, Theodoret follows a long tradition of Christian apologetic,[13] and displays his awareness of the terminology. Even though no mention is made of it, a traditional education can be presumed on the basis of his learned manners and letters to both sophists and philosophers.[14] Despite his claim, his writing *is* a panegyric.[15] At once on a narrative, a syntactic, and a philological level, an "Atticist cant" echoes throughout his whole history,[16] and perhaps nowhere more clearly than in the *Life* of Symeon.[17] Therefore, Theodoret's overt denial of panegyric is a signal that merits attention, and has in fact already received some.[18]

[8] A translation into English of all three texts can be found in Doran, *Symeon Stylites*. See also Harvey, "Jacob of Serug's Homily on Simeon the Stylite."

[9] For a discussion of the date of composition, see the critical edition, with translation into French, in Canivet and Leroy-Molinghen, *Histoire Philothée*, 30–31.

[10] Apart from the Greek manuscripts, the *Life* of Symeon has survived in Arabic as well. The Greek *Life* contains some later interpolations, such as the story about his death. Canivet and Leroy-Molinghen, *Histoire Philothée*, 1:66–69. I follow R. M. Price in accepting the whole of § 13. Price, *Monks of Syria*, 174, n.17.

[11] Theod., *Phil. hist.* Pr. 10.

[12] Theod., *Phil. hist.* Pr. 9: Ἀφηγηματικῶς δὲ ὁ λόγος προβήσεται, οὐ νόμοις ἐγκωμίων χρώμενος, ἀλλ᾽ ὀλίγων τινῶν ἀτεχνῶς ποιούμενος τὴν διήγησιν. Cf. Pr. 10. Translations are from Price, *Monks of Syria*, sometimes slightly modified.

[13] For the use of *diēgēsis* in early Christian literature, see Rapp, "Storytelling."

[14] In a letter, Theodoret mentions Diodore of Tarsus and Theodore of Mopsuestia as his teachers. Theodoretus, *Ep. (CS)* 16. Cf. Theod., *Ep. (CP)* 27, 28, 38, 44, 52, *Ep. (CS)* 30, 66. An important study of Theodoret's networks is Schor, *Theodoret's People*.

[15] Cf. Harvey, "Sense of a Stylite," 378, and Canivet, *Monachisme syrien*, 70, mentions a manuscript that only contains the *Life* of Symeon under the heading of an encomium.

[16] Trombley, *Hellenic Religion*, 1:106–7.

[17] Canivet and Leroy-Molinghen, *Histoire Philothée*, 1:66. Cf. also Ridings, *Attic Moses,* and Hult, *Syntactic Variation*, 223, who argues that the *Phil. Hist.* "sides with the 'humble' monk-biographies in content, but is very unlike them in its syntax."

[18] For this line of argumentation see Gaşpar, "Greek Dress," 193–229 and Gaşpar, *Unlikely Holy Men*.

By that same token, his denial of myth is another gesture, although one that has so far been less explored by scholars. The very vocabulary chosen by Theodoret reverberates with literary portraits of mythical figures. On one occasion in the narrative, for example, two female ascetics leave their home for a wild chase outside of the ordinary, seemingly unaffected by the pain and hunger they should normally feel. Two keywords that underpin this story allude to the maenads, the followers of Bacchus.[19] Aware of these connotations, the author alludes to a classical depiction of female ecstatics, amplifying the ascetics' experience beyond the reference to their immediate Christian paradigms.

To consider what a myth is, we should primarily turn to Theodoret himself. In the first paragraph of the *Life* of Symeon, which closely mirrors the *Prologue*, Theodoret states his fear that "the narrative may seem to posterity to be a myth totally devoid of truth."[20] A myth, it seems, is basically something that happened in the distant past, and which is not true.[21] And yet, in another, early work of his, the *Cure of Hellenic Maladies*, Theodoret deals more extensively with the topic, and elaborates on the obvious connection to Greek myths, the basis for late antique *paideia*. His comparison of the foundational narrative of the Christians to the myths of Hesiod and Homer has, not surprisingly, a polemical tone, while at the same time disclosing his erudition.[22] Alluding to Homer, Theodoret concludes that the difference between the stories of the Christians and the 'pagans' is as great as that between the heavens and Tartaros, and continues by saying that he does not wish to spread any of those lies, fearing to be laughed at.[23] Another trademark of the myths, he seems to suggest, is their absurdity. In fact, he very much agrees with Plato's ridicule of myth *as* comedy,[24] while at the same time denouncing any figurative reading of myths.[25] Despite this attitude, arguably one that softened during the course of his career,[26] Theodoret still admits that a comparison between myths and Gospel stories is possible, and Emperor Julian's insistence on the Gospels being fables is the other side of the same coin.[27] In a while, we will address Emperor Julian's point of view; however, there is one more specific comparison to take into account first. In the eighth

[19] Theod., *Phil. hist.* 29.7 ἐξεβάκχευσε… ἐξέμηνεν. Cf. Kraemer, *Blessings,* 36–37. Cf. also *PH* XXIX:6.

[20] Theod. *Phil. hist.* 26.1 δέδοικα τὸ διήγημα μὴ τοῖς ἐσομένοις μῦθος εἶναι δόξῃ πάμπαν τῆς ἀληθείας γεγυμνωμένος.

[21] Cf. the emphasis on falshehood in the rhetorical handbooks, e.g. Aphthonius, *Progymnasmata* 147: Ἔστι δὲ μῦθος λόγος ψευδὴς εἰκονίζων ἀλήθειαν.

[22] Cf. Theod. *Cur.* 1.60.

[23] Theod. *Cur.* 2.91–97; 96, quoting Hom. *Il.* 8.16.

[24] Cf. Theod. *Cur.* 1.60 for the use of κωμῳδός.

[25] Theod. *Cur.* 3.43.

[26] Christian Gaşpar has argued that there is a shift of emphasis in Theodoret's own literary enterprise, between the *Cure*, a work written by a monk, and the *History of the Monks*, written by a bishop. Gaşpar, "Greek Dress," 200.

[27] Julian, *Gal.* 39b.

book of the *Cure*, Theodoret turns his attention to the cult of martyrs and juxtaposes it to the veneration of heroes and gods. One of his examples is Heracles, whose memory is said to fill temples, festivals, and the speeches of educated people, even in Theodoret's own time.[28] Building on Eusebius and many ancient sources, Theodoret intends to prove that Heracles's life was nothing but a myth about an ordinary human being, albeit one living a particularly licentious life. Just like Gregory of Nazianzus before him,[29] Theodoret calls to mind the story of Heracles's fifty bedfellows during one night, suggesting mockingly that this must have been his thirteenth deed, alongside his 12 other labours.[30] His death at his own hand is also criticised, because it proves he was not a god.[31]

Being the most famous mythological hero, and having an afterlife both as model and counter-model in a Christian era, a more general characterisation of Heracles can serve us further, because it confirms the kind of perspective that Theodoret might have had of such a hero. Maybe one could even argue that ambiguity is *the* consistent characteristic of Heracles in his "peculiar, partly autistic isolation."[32] His strength, endurance and courage continuously threaten to capsize into excess and hubris, either as violence or as passion, thus creating a rather ambivalent literary persona, as much a contrast as an ideal. Speaking about Heracles in Homeric epic, Frank Bezner writes:

> Diverse as these portrayals are, they betray a common tendency connecting a rather negative estimation with a narrative function. Heracles becomes an exemplum cited as a contrast, by means of which the protagonists can be presented in terms of their relationship to the gods, the quality of their 'fame' (*kleos*), their (potential) hubris and the legitimacy of their conduct.[33]

Can we imagine the Stylite along similar lines, as a contrast as much as an ideal, a myth as much as reality? Now I am not suggesting that Theodoret wrote his portrait with Heracles in mind, but there is much in the portrayal of mythical heroes and "their relationship to the gods, the quality of their fame, their hubris and the legitimacy of their conduct" that resonates in the *Life* of Symeon. In a sense, neither hagiography nor panegyric sufficiently explain traits that call myth, and comedy, to mind, even in the visualization of a living legend. Indeed, the introduction to Diodore of Sicily's long portrayal of Heracles in the fourth book of his *History*, a work Theodoret calls attention to explicitly in the *Cure*,[34] displays the same motifs as Theodoret's first paragraph about Symeon

[28] Theod. *Cur.* 8.12–18.
[29] Gregory, *Or.* 4.121.
[30] Theod. *Cur.* 8.16.
[31] Theod. *Cur.* 8.17.
[32] Bezner, "Heracles."
[33] Bezner, "Heracles."
[34] Theod. *Cur.* 3.28.

the Stylite. Both prologues speak in terms of paradoxical myth, worldwide fame as a result of extraordinary deeds, and issue a warning not to measure the improbable against one's own human horizon.[35] There is a difference between these texts: while Diodore needs to confess that we cannot believe everything that happened long ago, Theodoret is able to rest assured and claim veracity for his story. And yet, Theodoret also admits something, namely that in order to believe the account, training, or more precisely initiation, is needed. It will be difficult to understand Symeon, he says, "by those uninitiated in divine things," in contrast to those "educated in divine things."[36] Also in this sense, the *Life* of Symeon is like a myth, which needs a philosophical interpretative effort in order to prove useful. More than anything, readers should take care to provide an explanation of the details that stand out, things that are unreservedly peculiar, such as a pillar. With the example of Heracles in mind, let us orbit closer to the column, viewing the mythological landscape of the pillar and Symeon's circle of sacred friends, some of whom, on closer inspection, make one think of maniacs as well as saints.

## A Mythological Landscape and an Immovable Race

In two cases, interpretative keys to unlock the myth of Symeon are found in other chapters of the *History of the Monks*. With these keys, a spatial and a temporal dimension are opened to the reader, and a mythical landscape and lineage is revealed. The spatial dimension is most clearly expressed in a passage directly following the *Life* of the Stylite, underlining the care with which Theodoret has composed his narratives.[37] Here, the ascetic practices of all saints are situated in concrete environments, either in human-built or natural dwellings, and their locations depicted as a movement towards heaven that at the same time seems like the climbing of a mountain. The trajectory does not simply reflect a spiritual journey, whatever that is, but carefully profiles each step of the ascent as a loosening from human dependence. And yet, the starting point of this ascent is human society itself. Therefore, as I have suggested elsewhere, Theodoret envisages here a one-space-model, which connects the celibates with the monasteries, and ultimately with society.[38] The consequences of this logic, in which it is possible to move in two directions, both away from society, and back into it, is played out in different ways on the pages of the *History of the Monks*.

[35] Diod. Sic. *Bibl. hist.* 4.8. Cf. Theod. *Phil. hist.* 26.1.

[36] Theod. *Phil. hist.* 26.1 τοῖς τῶν θείων ἀμυήτοις ... οἵ τε τὰ θεῖα πεπαιδευμένοι.

[37] Theod. *Phil. hist.* 27.1.

[38] Westergren, "Monastic Space," 48–65. Cf. Charles Stang, who has traced the motif of ascent in all three *vitae,* connecting it with Eliade's idea of an *axis mundi*. See Stang, "Digging Holes," 447–70, 455–58.

Most importantly, the narrative of the rise of monasticism in Syria resembles the story known from several ancient authors about human society recovering gradually from a flood.[39] Only after several generations were the children of the survivors, who had sought refuge on a mountain, able to descend and eventually build new cities. The *Life* of Symeon, which starts at the bottom and moves upwards, follows a similar trajectory, albeit in the opposite direction. When Symeon tumbles down into a well, and slowly rises from the ruins of his open-air mountain cell, he does so in conversation with other heroes moving between the netherworld and the high Olympus. Indeed, Symeon's column stood close to the top of Sheikh Barakat, which housed a shrine to Zeus Malbachus, something Theodoret had previously revealed in a panoramic view of the monastery of Teleda.[40]

The temporal dimension is most clearly addressed in the *Epilogue* to the *History of the Monks*. There, the tradition of the church is defined by the love of God, and the mystic blended with the church.[41] Theodoret traces a kind of *ecclesia ab Abel*,[42] a community of people filled with divine *eros,* beginning with Abel and continued by prophets, apostles and martyrs, before one reaches the most recent group: the ascetics. In the *Life* of Symeon, this traditional framework is mirrored closely. Not only is his early development traced to four Christian milieus – the (church-going) family, the church, the martyr shrine and the monastery – but a parallel chronological trajectory of biblical models is also put forward.[43] Symeon is, in this sense, a direct follower of this tradition, completely shaped and controlled by it. His ascent, spurred on by an extreme zeal, is at the same time carefully positioned within a Christian tradition, of which he is a part. Again, comparison with the *Cure of Hellenic Maladies* makes clear to what extent such a collective identity is played out against other sacred communities, notably those of the heroes, the demi-gods, and the gods.[44]

However, Symeon is also part of yet another lineage, which complicates matters. This lineage is that of the stationary saints, who, like Symeon, per-

[39] Cf. Homerus, *Ilias* XX:216–218; Plato, *Leg.* 677a–681e; Strabo, *Geographica* 13.1.25.

[40] Cf. Theod. *Phil. hist.* 4.2. Cf. Westergren, "Monastic Space," 53–56.

[41] Theod. *Phil. hist.* Ep. 16.

[42] Cf. Congar, "Ecclesia ab Abel," 79–108.

[43] Theod. *Phil. hist.* 26.1–4. First, Symeon is compared to Old Testament saints who also were shepherds. These are introduced in chronological sequence, beginning with Jacob and Joseph, and followed by David, Micah and the other prophets. Then, Symeon listens to the words of Christ in the liturgy's Gospel reading. If these two moments represent the 'old' and the 'new' covenants, the next scene is the church dedicated to martyrs, i.e. a succeeding stage in Christian history from Theodoret's point of view. And finally, the monastery presents the church's 'new' martyrs, the monks. Additionally, the monastery is presented from the perspective of a lineage of elders, from its founders up to its leadership at the time of the writing.

[44] See also Papadogiannakis, *Christianity and Hellenism*; cf. Urbano, *Philosophical Life*, 273–93, and Schor, *Theodoret's People*, 156–79. For these, and other monk stories as civic, foundation narratives, see Westergren, "Monastic Paradox," 299–302.

form their ascetic practice in one spot, in the open-air. The story about this kind of asceticism begins with Maron (in *Phil. hist.* 16), who was the first ascetic "embracing the open-air life,"[45] but takes on new significance in the *Life* of James of Cyrrhus (*Phil. hist.* 21) and the succeeding narratives (*Phil. hist.* 22–25), a series that has been considered a literary unit together with the *Life* of Symeon (*Phil. hist.* 26).[46] From the perspective of the one-space model, in which there is a movement towards a more divine way of being, it is instructive to see that some of the most 'extreme' practices, such as "monks chaining themselves to rocks, living in cages, carrying weights around their necks and wearing heavy iron belts" are mainly drawn from these later narratives.[47] There is an intensification at the end, and Symeon belongs to a new group of superheroes who do not act exactly as their predecessors did, but rather strangely, to say the least. In addition to the *Life* of Symeon, the other major narrative in this literary context is the *Life* of James of Cyrrhus, another contemporary of Theodoret and Symeon.[48] Here, one example suffices to illustrate the way in which Theodoret makes it possible to ridicule his saint. With the same kind of panegyric terminology as in the *Life* of Symeon, praising the saint for his "endurance" (καρτερία),[49] one of the first major stories concerns the saint suffering from a stomach upset in the open.[50] The problem is pressing. "Under the eyes of spectators,"[51] like in a theater, the saint is "torn by contrary impulses: while nature pressed him to go and evacuate, shame before the attendant crowd compelled him to stay in the same position."[52] The situation is delicate, not least for "a man trained in the highest philosophy,"[53] and not solved until the bishop chases away the onlookers.

Such an instance is a vivid example of how Theodoret treats his saints: on the one hand situating them in a sacred sphere, in a kind of mythological landscape and lineage, and yet at the same time locating them at a certain distance, so that one can have a look at them and wonder what it is they are doing. There is a game of show and tell, in which not all the good things that are told corre-

[45] Theod. *Phil. hist.* 16.1: τὸν ὕπαιθρον γὰρ ἀσπασάμενος βίον.

[46] See Devos, "La structure," 319–35, 334–35. Devos sees the *Phil. hist.* as culminating with the *Life* of Symeon. As support for this, he mentions that the manuscript tradition for the following narratives is unstable.

[47] Siniossoglou, *Plato and Theodoret*, 133. The examples are taken from Theod. *Phil. hist.* 26.10, 27.2, 3.19, 10.2 and 21.8, 29.4–5.

[48] Theod. *Phil. hist.* 21. Cf. Westergren, "Relic *in Spe*," 25–29.

[49] Theod. *Phil. hist.* 21.3.

[50] Cf. the disgusting death of Arius in Theod. *Phil. hist.* 1.10. The *Life* of James of Cyrrhus is not only preserved in Greek, but also in an Arabic translation. See Canivet and Leroy-Molinghen, *Histoire Philothée*, 63.

[51] Theod. *Phil. hist.* 21.5: ὑπὸ θεαταῖς.

[52] Theod. *Phil. hist.* 21.5: καθῆστο διχόθεν βαλλόμενος· ἡ μὲν γὰρ φύσις ἰέναι ἐπὶ τὴν ἔκκρισιν κατηνάγκαζεν, ἡ δὲ τῆς παρεστηκυίας πληθύος αἰδὼς μένειν ἐπὶ σχήματος ἐβιάζετο.

[53] Theod. *Phil. hist.* 21.5: ἀνδρὶ τὴν ἄκραν φιλοσοφίαν ἐξησκημένῳ.

spond directly to what we see.[54] The stationary saints are an "immovable race,"[55] but at the same time a stock that one can have a laugh at, because of their lack of restraint. With this ambivalence in mind, let us approach Symeon.

## The Stylite School

It is in the first half of the *Life* of Symeon that readers get to know his unbending character. However, as we will soon see, he actually changes character in the course of the narratives. Despite keeping his resolve, he will eventually learn to listen. But in order to learn, he must first make mistakes. The stories are vivid and well-known: his sudden conversion to asceticism in a church service, much like Anthony, but then being chased out of a monastery due to his dangerous conduct, and seeking out the bottom of a cistern to spend his life, before being dragged up. And then the hut in which he almost dies, fasting, and the iron chain that he fastens to himself, wandering in circles like an animal, before eventually becoming famous, and building something to stand on, a kind of column, in order to escape the many visitors. Some of these stories are not exclusively Theodoret's, but can be found in other authors as well. Nonetheless, the perspective is Theodoret's own. While a heavenly creature approaches Symeon in a dream at the outset of the *Syriac Life*,[56] and praises him for his coming deeds, a similar event in Theodoret is in quite another mood. Symeon has already received the "call from on high" in a church service when he runs to a martyr shrine and falls asleep.[57] The scene is set for incubation, a revelatory dream. As some have noted, spectacular phenomena, such as dreams, are normally kept out of the *History of the Monks* as a possible reaction to greater ascetic pretensions, thereby asking readers to stay alert in this one instance.[58] A "sweet sleep" (ὕπνον ... γλυκύν) comes upon Symeon, a Homeric phrase indi-

[54] For another example, see James of Nisibis, an angry saint, teaching self-control. Theod. *Phil. hist.* 1, and my interpretation in Westergren, *Sketching the Invisible*, 48–54. For the difference between "telling" and "showing", see Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism*, 126–30, and Bal, *Narratology*, 44–45.

[55] Although faced with an endless number of possibilities and challenges, James of Cyrrhus remains in a single spot. The ideal of standing immovable, like a statue, was not new, but evoked a Platonic imagery with a very general applicability in many contexts. Cf. Williams, *Immovable Race*. Cf. Theod. *Phil. hist.* 21.

[56] *Vita S. Simeonis Stylitae* 3.

[57] Theod. *Phil. hist.* 26.1: τῆς ἄνωθεν κλήσεως.

[58] Canivet, *Monachisme syrien*, 117–45, esp. 124–25 for Symeon. Among the trademarks of the Messalians, as they appear in the eyes of the heresiologists, ascetic practices were no longer needed if the soul had been purified by prayer and filled by the Spirit. See e.g. Theod. *Hist. eccl.* 4.11 [*NPNF2* 3, 4.10].

cating divine revelation.[59] A classical *topos*, the oracle dream is taking place in a firmly Christian setting here, but the message is a word of warning: the saint needs to build a firm foundation first. The account in Theodoret sets a sombre tone, advising Symeon to dig deep before rising high. While the *Syriac Life* seeks to praise its saint from the start, the *History of the Monks* stresses that training, presumably in a monastic setting, is necessary first.

But Symeon obviously does not follow this recommendation. In clear contrast to the other stories in the *History of the Monks*, Symeon is the only monk who does not give in to persuasion.[60] The decision of his superiors to chase him out of the monastery is understandable, because such "savagery" could harm "those with a weaker bodily constitution who might try to emulate what was beyond their powers (τὰ ὑπὲρ δύναμιν)."[61] Also, in comparison to the most emblematic of all saint's stories, the *Life of Anthony*, a narrative which surely casts its shadow on the *History of the Monks*,[62] Symeon is a bad boy. Both saints were called to the ascetical life during a reading in the liturgy, and progressed with zeal, living in tomb-like circumstances.[63] However, while Anthony showed temperance in his efforts, Symeon lacks that balance in his early career. While Anthony "sincerely submitted" to his teachers,"[64] and "gathered into himself the virtues of each,"[65] Symeon does not wish to learn from anyone, especially not his superiors. While Anthony retreats because of his popularity, Symeon, who is trying hard to be a superman, is loved by no one and forced out of sight, away from human company, until, at a much later point, he will heed advice and become as attractive as Anthony. As the story continues, Symeon will slide down a slippery slope before being able to build a base that is going to last.

Several scholars have noted the role that church leaders play in order to keep Symeon at bay in this early phase, and prevent him committing suicide.[66] But it should also be noted how they differ from one another, not least the abbot of Teleda, Heliodorus, and the bishop of Antioch, Meletius. The literary portrayal of the personality of these male leaders clarifies the development of Symeon's

[59] As Charles Stang has noted, the message of the dream, to dig deep foundations before building, echoes the saying from *Luke* 6:47–48. Stang, "Digging Holes," 455–56. See also Canivet, *Monachisme syrien*, 124, n. 31.

[60] Cf. Urbainczyk, *Theodoret*, 98, 100.

[61] Theod. *Phil. hist.* 26.5: τὴν ὠμότητα… τοῖς ἀσθενέστερον τὸ σῶμα διακειμένοις ζηλοῦν τὰ ὑπὲρ δύναμιν πειρωμένοις.

[62] Elsewhere, too, the *Life of Anthony* acts as a paradigm for Theodoret: see *Hist. eccl.* 4.27 [*NPNF2* 3, 4.24] for an explicit comparison between Anthony and Julian Saba. Sydney Griffith has suggested that "major events in Julian's career parallel some of those in Anthony's." Griffith, "Julian Saba," 186.

[63] Cf. Crostini, in this volume, at 107–109.

[64] Ath. *Vit. Ant.* 4.1 [transl. Brakke]: γνησίως ὑπετάσσετο.

[65] Ath. *Vit. Ant.* 4.2 [transl. Brakke]: λοιπὸν αὐτὸς τὰ παρ' ἑκάστου συνάγων εἰς ἑαυτὸν.

[66] Susan Ashbrook Harvey has for example characterized the *Life* of Symeon as a "handbook of church order" in Harvey, "Stylite Liturgy," 532.

learning. Although both are "marvellous,"[67] they are so in rather different ways. Whereas Heliodorus is the 'simple monk', Meletius is the cunning leader. The virtues of each reflect this contrast. Heliodorus, on the one hand, displays "simplicity of character" and "purity of soul."[68] The first of these terms, *aplotēs*, can mean 'singleness', or 'simplicity', but also 'naivety', and 'stupidity'.[69] In 2 Corinthians 11:3, the term appears to depict the ideal believer in a rhetorical context, contrasting the "foolishness" of Paul with the "cunning" of the serpent, so the underlying sense of *aplotēs* as a negative term is there even when it is used for other purposes.[70] Heliodorus's "simplicity of character" could therefore also be translated as his "stupid manners," and the fact that he is unable to control Symeon in the following paragraph underlines that impression. The image of the abbot as a 'holy fool' not quite fit for this world,[71] at least not for accommodating future stylites, is made graphic by a funny story telling that Heliodorus "claimed not even to know the shape of pigs or cocks or other animals of this kind."[72] By contrast, the bishop, Meletius, was "a wise man of brilliant intelligence and gifted with shrewdness."[73] The last of these gifts, shrewdness, will prove particularly important as he cleverly manages to convince Symeon that he does not need the chain, which hurts him, but only his will, in order to control his body. For the first time, Symeon actually follows someone's advice.

These examples make clear the ambivalence Theodoret permits, or even invites. This ambiguity is reminiscent of the heroic myth: as much a contrast as an ideal. In comparison to Heracles, Symeon also performs 'labours' and 'deeds', to the extent that his *philosophia* is even defined as *philoponia*, love of labour.[74] Like Symeon and other stationary saints, Heracles fights the elements of nature, both heat and cold, needing neither food, nor human company.[75] The heroic persona of both characters is distinguished by "endurance" more than anything, to the point of dying on several occasions. Failing to give up, both manifest a pride that can easily turn into bad behaviour. Just as Theodoret criticised Heracles for his suicide,[76] Symeon has to be reminded that a "violent death" is not

[67] Theod. *Phil. hist.* 26.4, 7 and 11.

[68] Theod. *Phil. hist.* 26.4: τῶν τρόπων … τὴν ἁπλότητα … τὴν τῆς ψυχῆς καθαρότητα.

[69] LSJ ἁπλότης; cf. Lampe ἁπλότης.

[70] 2 Cor 11:3 [RSV 2.ed.].

[71] For the early tradition of the 'holy fool', not least that of another Symeon in light of the Cynic tradition, see Krueger, *Symeon the Holy Fool*, 109, with reference to the first Stylite.

[72] Theod. *Phil. hist.* 26.4: Ἔφασκε δὲ μηδὲ αὐτὸ εἰδέναι τῶν χοίρων ἢ τῶν ἀλεκτρυόνων ἢ τῶν ἄλλων τῶν τοιούτων τὸ εἶδος.

[73] Theod. *Phil. hist.* 26.10: ἀνὴρ φρενήρης καὶ συνέσει λάμπων καὶ ἀγχινοίᾳ κεκοσμημένος.

[74] For ἆθλος and πόνος, see e.g. 21.4, 26.3, 6, 9, 24, 25, 28, and 31.1; for πρᾶγμα, see e.g. 26.3, 5, 7, and 13. The vocabulary is sometimes qualified, with words as "philosophical," or "virtuous," so that Symeon is described as a "contestant in piety," rather than simply an athlete, or a hero. Theod. *Phil. hist.* 26.5: τῆς εὐσεβείας ἀγωνιστής. Cf. 9.1 and 11.1.

[75] Cf. Theod. *Phil. hist.* 21 and 31.2–4 with Julian. *Or.* 7, 219c–d.

[76] Theod. *Cur.* 8.17.

a "virtue."[77] In line with the rhetoric of the Second Sophistic, Theodoret also loves terminology that underlines exaggeration.[78] Symeon does not simply walk into the desert, but to the "more deserted places."[79] In the first paragraphs of the *Life* of Symeon, the prefix *hyper* is employed consistently, to suggest what is both beyond description and surpassing human capability.[80] The only thing conspicuously missing in comparison to Heracles are sexual partners.

Symeon is not only a hero, but also beyond the heroic; in other words, he is a superhero. In due time he will face his shortcomings and learn to tame his powers in order to make use of them in the best of ways. Once he has finished his training and climbed the pillar, Symeon still displays extreme endurance, but, interestingly enough, also undergoes what seems a change of mind. If his youthful 'I' constantly tended towards conflict and excess, he is now as calm and tame as a sheep. Paradoxically, his new extremism is his friendly manners:

> Despite such labors, and the mass of his achievements and the quantity of his miracles, he is as modest in spirit as if he were the last of all men in worth. In addition to his modest spirit, he is extremely approachable, sweet and charming, and makes answer to everyone who addresses him, whether he be artisan, beggar, or peasant.[81]

The expression 'modesty of spirit', which is repeated, should be highlighted, since it plays with the contradiction of extremism, namely moderation and balance. Unlike Heracles, Symeon is now in full control. He has trained to live as he now teaches. Properly interpreted, his life is a lesson to be learned. Strange as it is, the pillar has a message, but just like the old myths, its symbolic value is not self-evident. People may laugh at the pillar, but it still fulfills a specific pedagogical role, not only for Symeon, but also for the people watching him, and reading about him. At last, we can see the pillar at close range.

## The Laughing Stock

It is at the high point of the narrative, when Symeon climbs his pillar, that Theodoret takes time to respond to so-called "fault-finders" and "lovers of mockery" who cannot see the point of this odd habit, but instead make fun of it.[82] This

[77] Theod. *Phil. hist.* 26.7: μὴ νομίζειν ἀρετὴν εἶναι τὸν βίαιον θάνατον. Employing the same expression in the *Cure*, Theodoret in fact discusses fallen heroes, and seems to agree a violent death *could* be commendable, but not necessarily so. Theod. *Cur.* 8.40.

[78] Cain, "Style of *Historia Monachorum*," 87–88; cf. Cain, Historia Monachorum, 117–18.

[79] Theod. *Phil. hist.* 26.6 τὰ ἐρημότερα.

[80] See e.g. Theod. *Phil. hist.* 26.4, 5, 7, and 13.

[81] Theod. *Phil. hist.* 26.25 Ἐν τοσούτοις δὲ πόνοις καὶ κατορθωμάτων ὄγκῳ καὶ πλήθει θαυμάτων οὕτως ἐστὶ τὸ φρόνημα μέτριος πάντων ἀνθρώπων κατὰ τὴν ἀξίαν ὕστατος. Πρὸς δὲ τῷ μετρίῳ φρονήματι καὶ εὐπρόσοδος λίαν ἐστὶ καὶ γλυκὺς καὶ ἐπίχαρις καὶ πρὸς ἕκαστον τῶν διαλεγομένων ἀποκρινόμενος, εἴτε χειροτέχνης εἴτε προσαίτης εἴτε ἄγροικος εἴη.

[82] Theod. *Phil. hist.* 26.12 τοὺς μεμψιμοίρους; 26.14 τῶν φιλοσκωμμόνων.

apology, I think, deserves careful consideration, not least because it brings the people laughing at the saint into view. Both of these derogatory designations, "fault-finders" and "lovers of mockery" belong to a shared semantic field.[83] As kinds of 'tavern terms', they point out unstable, emotional people who cannot control themselves, perhaps due to too much wine,[84] although what they really need to do is "curb their tongue and not let it be carried away at random."[85] In short, they are not simply lacking understanding, but more fundamentally, self-discipline. One can only imagine the nature of the jokes they are cracking about the pillar.

Responding to these adversaries, Theodoret still directs attention to their point of view, from which the pillar becomes a laughing stock. Now, he could have attempted to play down the singularity of the column, and concentrate only on the virtues and the miracles of the saint.[86] But rather than simply redirecting attention, Theodoret keeps his focus on the strangeness of the event. In this sense, therefore, he basically shares the same vantage point as the people ridiculing the saint. Standing close to them, he tries to make the pillar consistent by means of its inconsistency, and in the end, it is people like them, the common people, who can be turned to the Christian God by such a sensation.

Because of its "strangeness" (*τῷ ξένῳ*), Theodoret says, the sight will "draw all men to look."[87] The pillar is built for a specific use, he clarifies, namely for the "benefit of the easy-going,"[88] which is another derogatory way of identifying individuals who lack direction and self-control. Not surprisingly, the people depicted as coming to the pillar, therefore, are primarily barbarians, who gather *en masse*. There is an ongoing stress on their primitive ways, and several examples of "barbarian quarrel" and tumultuous encounters "in a somewhat barbarian manner."[89] These are people with little education, and understanding, who are attracted primarily to physical signs, blessings and miracles,[90] all of which the pillar abundantly bestows. These visitors do not just stand out-

[83] In deliberate contrast stand other passionate souls, notably the "fervent lovers of the beauty of God," i.e. the monks. Theod. *Phil. hist.* Pr. 5 *Ἐρασταὶ γὰρ θερμοὶ τοῦ θείου κάλλους*.

[84] See examples in LSJ, φιλοσκώμμων: Plutarch, *Sull.* 2.2, clearly indicates a drinking context, and Herodotus, *Hist.* 2.174 for a parallel between φιλοσκώμμων and φιλοπότης (lover of drink). Cf. also LSJ, *σκῶμμα*, a "joke [which] … generally implies scurrility, but not necessarily."

[85] Theod. *Phil. hist.* 26.12 *χαλινῶσαι τὴν γλῶτταν καὶ μὴ ἐπιτρέπειν ὡς ἔτυχε φέρεσθα*. Cf. 31.3, and LSJ, μεμψίμοιρος.

[86] Theod. *Phil. hist.* 26.12.

[87] Theod. *Phil. hist.* 26.12 *τῷ ξένῳ πάντας ἕλκων εἰς θεωρίαν*. Canivet remarks that the words that are used to underline the strangeness (*καινόν, ξένον, παράδοξον*) are "les elements constitutifs du phénomène religieux" which call for an explanation. Canivet and Leroy-Molinghen, *Histoire Philothée*, 2:188, n.4.

[88] Theod. *Phil. hist.* 26.12 *τῶν ῥᾳθυμοτέρων εἵνεκεν ὠφελείας*. In LSJ, *ῥάθυμος* is translated as "light-hearted, easy-tempered, frivolous, careless." Later on in the same paragraph a similar expression is used: *τῆς τῶν ῥᾳστώνῃ συζώντων… ὠφελείας*.

[89] Theod. *Phil. hist.* 26.15, 14 διαμάχης βαρβαρικῆς; Βαρβαρικώτερον.

[90] Cf. Gaşpar, "King of Kings," 63–88.

side Christian faith, but also outside of culture. The depiction of the Ishmaelites coming to receive baptism is a telling example of how change of religion results in seemingly rapid civil development. Just as much as their conversion is a matter of Christianization, it is civilization. They will not depart vainly from Symeon, with a sensational feeling only; rather, they will be "instructed in divine things."[91] Having climbed the pillar, Symeon is now a light shining down on all peoples; the image of a "ray" shining down (κατέπεμψεν) being used consistently.[92] The image of the "light of the world" fits perfectly with the depiction of people from all over the world being "illuminated" as they are baptized.[93] The Stylite's example is logical from the point of view of its usefulness for the enlightenment of less developed human beings. Rather than being designated for those who are advanced, Symeon's life is a preliminary exercise for those who are not yet "nurtured in the faith."[94]

Symeon's reason for constructing and climbing the column in the first place seems simple enough: the life of a saint is made impossible by the many visitors.[95] Still, this fact does not suffice as an argument, because what happens is explained as part of "divine economy."[96] Symeon's climb is given a higher meaning, as part of a transcendent arrangement for earthly realities. Two examples are offered to illustrate this game plan, one biblical, and one more general. On the one hand, the strange habits of Old Testament prophets are displayed: Isaiah and Jeremiah without clothing, Hosea with a harlot, and Ezekiel performing strange, symbolic acts.[97] On the other hand, mention is also made of a king minting eye-provoking images on his coins to stir interest.[98] This second example is as important as the biblical because it highlights a public imagery and thereby a public legitimation for Symeon that is not just Christian: just as

[91] Theod. *Phil. hist.* 26.12 τὰ θεῖα παιδευθείς.
[92] Theod. *Phil. hist.* 26.14.
[93] Theod. *Phil. hist.* 26.13: ἐφώτισε.
[94] Theod. *Phil. hist.* 26.12: τῶν τροφίμων τῆς πίστεως.
[95] Cf. Theod. *Phil. hist.* 6.4 and Ath. *Vit. Ant.* 49. There have been many different attempts by scholars to find precedents for or influences over Symeon's pillar. See, above all, David Frankfurter, who brought new life to an old discussion between G.R.H. Wright and Han Drijvers, by considering local religious practices in Northern Syria. Frankfurter, "Stylites and *Phallobates*," 168–98. See also Trombley, *Hellenic Religion*, 2:184–99 for an attentive reading of religious mentalities that could have made Symeon attractive to neighboring peoples. Cf. Eastmond, "Body vs. Column," 87–100, 97.
[96] Theod. *Phil. hist.* 26.12: τῆς θείας οἰκονομίας.
[97] Theod. *Phil. hist.* 26.12. As has been pointed out by Doran, the Syriac *Life* presents a similar, but extended row of biblical heroes in quite a different manner, "for the Syriac composer does not want Simeon's behaviour to be classed as weird, but by the repetition of Abraham, Moses, and Elijah, to place Simeon within God's normal pattern of action." Doran, *Lives of Simeon*, 58.
[98] This second example is hardly noted by scholars, who almost exclusively focus on the theological side of the argumentation, and thereby risk not seeing that a "comparison," like an "example," is an often-used building block in a "chreia" or an "encomium," for example. See e.g. Aphthonius, *Prog.* 4–7, 21–28.

the emperor seeks to attract attention, so God has displayed his image in this instance. As such a strange image of God, Symeon is able to attract "everyone from every side and every road."[99]

This kind of argumentation, which stresses how strange sensations can lure those regarded as 'simple' into a better position, actually belongs to a specific philosophical discourse that concerns the merit of myths. One of its late advocates was Emperor Julian, a 'pagan' who, like the critics of Symeon, himself was ridiculed as a "lover of mockery" in contemporary Christian sources.[100] As already mentioned, he compared the Gospels to fables for children.[101] In so doing, he explored Jewish, Christian and Hellenic stories *as* fabricated myths, and argued that one needs an allegorical key in order to unlock their true meaning, otherwise the gods were blasphemed.[102] In this regard, the language of paradox becomes important.[103] Julian writes that "paradoxical myths" are used "in order that, by means of the paradox and the incongruity, the fiction might be detected and we might be induced to search out the truth."[104] In one instance, he even discusses the impossible elements in the life of a specific superman, namely Heracles.[105] Just like Plato, Julian admits that myths can be demoralizing children's stories, but, properly edited, they will serve "as a form of pre-rational, imaginative education in moral and political values."[106] Because they are "suited to initiation,"[107] myths are therefore particularly fitting for the "common people."[108] It is striking to what extent Theodoret follows the same line of reasoning as Emperor Julian when he presents the Stylite. Just like a paradoxical myth, Symeon's example also serves a pedagogical purpose.

The consistent identification of paradox in Theodoret merits attention, because it connects Symeon's pillar to other marvels, namely the wonders of the world. On two occasions in the apology, Symeon is called a "paradoxical sight,"[109] an expression that can be found, for example, in the already-mentioned survey of the world by Diodore of Sicily, in which he presents a new, but

[99] Theod. *Phil. hist.* 26.11: πάντων πανταχόθεν ... καὶ πάσης ὁδοῦ.
[100] For Cyril of Alexandria's consistent use of φιλοσκώμμων in his writing against Julian, see e.g. Cyril. *C. Jul.* 2.2. For Theodoret's characterization of Emperor Julian's death, see Theod. *Phil. hist.* 2.4.
[101] Julian, *Gal.* 39a–b.
[102] Julian, *Gal.* 94a.
[103] Cf. e.g. Julian, *Gal.* 106c, about the Hebrew Bible.
[104] Julian, *Or.* 5, 170a [transl. Wright] μύθοις παραδόξοις, ἵνα διὰ τοῦ παραδόξου καὶ ἀπεμφαίνοντος τὸ πλάσμα φωραθὲν ἐπὶ τὴν ζήτησιν ἡμᾶς τῆς ἀληθείας προτρέψῃ.
[105] Julian, *Or.* 7, 219b–220a.
[106] O'Meara, *Platonopolis*, 123.
[107] Julian, *Or.* 7, 217b; cf. c. τῶν τελεστικῶν μύθων.
[108] Julian, *Or.* 5, 170b τοῖς ... ἰδιώταις.
[109] Theod. *Phil. hist.* 26.12: τῷ τῆς θεωρίας παραδόξῳ; παράδοξον ... θέαμα. There are also several examples of Christian authors making use of an expression such as "paradoxical sight" to highlight crucial passages in the Scriptures. The burning bush was such a sight, just as Job sitting in the ashes, or Christ lying in a manger. See e.g. Basil. *Hex.* 6.3, Jo. Chrys. *Comm. Job.* 2.8, *Phil. (Anom.*

strangely familiar candidate for fame: an obelisk.[110] As a historian, Theodoret was naturally aware that wonders were almost as expected in historical treatises as in plain myths. Throughout the *History of the Monks*, Theodoret consistently plays on the similarity between seeing, *theaomai*, and marvelling, *thaumazō*.[111] In this vein, Symeon is both a *thauma*, a wonder, and a *theama,* a sight to be seen.[112] As might be expected, Theodoret is not the first to make this wordplay, but it was a common one, not least in describing the so-called "seven wonders of the world."[113] In the very first sentence of his *Life*, Symeon is actually called "the great wonder of the world."[114] Lists of wonders of the world are known from the first centuries before the Common Era and continued to attract interest.[115] The topic was widely discussed in Roman times and into the Byzantine period, and also caught the attention of Christian authors.[116] A well-known element of most wonders was height, as with the Pyramids, the Colossus of Rhodes, and the Pharos in Alexandria. That lighthouse provides an intriguing comment to the column of Symeon, which is described as a "dazzling lamp (sending out) rays in all directions, like the sun."[117] By way of comparison, the lighthouse in Alexandria, with Zeus *Sotēr* atop it, was a token of civic pride, and spread its light not only on the Egyptian harbour, but all over the empire on coins minted by emperors in Late Antiquity.[118] Similarly, Theodoret informs us that "images" of Symeon were spread everywhere, like coins.[119] The Stylite could also be (mis)-taken as a sun-like god, or an angel – a suspicion that is denied in a later story, but which betrays that the hunch is not far-fetched.[120] After all, gods placed

*hom. 6)* PG 48:753. See also Jo. Chrys. *Mart.* PG 50:666 for martyrs, and Josephus, *AJ* 5.125 for a race of giants providing such spectacles.

[110] Diod. Sic. *Bibl. hist.* 2.11,5. See also Diodore's depiction of a snake given to Ptolomy as another spectacular sight in 3.37. Lucian points to strange animals, such as a griffin and a Phoenix. Luc. *Nav.* 1 and 44. Cf. Theod. *Cur.* 2.95 and 3.28.

[111] See e.g. Theod. *Phil. hist.* 26.4: When Theodoret introduced the monastic leader mentioned above, he took pride in having 'had the benefit of seeing' this 'wonderful' man, who had not 'seen' anything of the world, not even pigs.

[112] About the role of vision and marvel, see Frank, *Memory of the Eyes*, 35–78, 45.

[113] Clayton and Price, *Seven Wonders*, 4–5.

[114] Theod. *Phil. hist.* 26.11: τὸ μέγα θαῦμα τῆς οἰκουμένης. One should remember that Symeon is not just the saint on the pillar but also the architect of the monument, devising its rise. Theod. *Phil. hist.* 26.12. See also 26.10 for Symeon ordering the ring of stones.

[115] Clayton and Price, *Seven Wonders*, 159–63. Clayton mentions Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Tours as Christian authors who show awareness of the topic, the latter as someone also contributing to new lists where the ark of Noah and the temple of Solomon were even placed among the "seven" wonders.

[116] Clayton and Price, *Seven Wonders*, 159–63. Clayton mentions Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Tours as Christian authors who show awareness of the topic, the latter as someone also contributing to new lists where the ark of Noah and the temple of Solomon were even placed among the "seven" wonders.

[117] Theod. *Phil. hist.* 26.13: ὁ φανότατος οὗτος λύχνος ἡλίου δίκην πάντοσε τὰς ἀκτῖνας ἐξέπεμψε.

[118] Clayton, "Pharos," 148–51.

[119] Theod. *Phil. hist.* 6.11: εἰκόνας.

[120] See Theod. *Phil. hist.* 26.23.

on columns were not a novelty. Although implicit, the connection between Symeon and the wonders of the world emphasises that the pillar is indeed the strangest of sensations, but still comparable to the greatest human achievements. If it was a laughing stock, it was also something to be admired.

## Conclusion

What the first biography about a stylite consistently pinpoints is ambivalence. From within the narrative, there is a learned hesitation, a tension between praise and blame that reflects a negotiation about the saint, who is made part of a pantheon of Christian heroes, but at the same time depicted as being as idiosyncratic as any of his pagan predecessors. Symeon is a savage on the outside, yet due to his unwilling inclusion into a larger community, he can be part of saving the world. As Theodoret argues, the paradoxical portrayal of Symeon is not primarily intended for the audience of his narrative, but just like the myths it is intended for the *hoi polloi*. The Stylite might be a laughing stock, but exactly as a funny example which stands out, people will be drawn close, so they can receive initiation.

If Luis Buñuel, in his film about a stylite, created a tale of secularization, Theodoret provides a story of sacralization, in which the living legend is embedded in echoes of the past, and a contemporary myth created. Symeon is like one of those ancient heroes, recounted in the myths, but also something more, a superhero, because he is part of a new universe of Christian saints – and because this story is true. The example of Heracles, I have suggested, throws light on processes of myth-making in the text, not least the ambiguous tension between strength and endurance on the one hand, and the risk of exaggeration on the other. One of the few things Christian authors could appreciate about Heracles was his "capacity to change,"[121] and in this regard Symeon followed suit. Down on the ground he was nothing but trouble, but up on the pillar, at a safe distance, he did not seem to distress anyone anymore. Putting him on a pedestal, in 'splendid isolation', it was also possible to laugh at him. He was not a model to copy, rather one to admire. The pillar was a paradoxical sign that attracted those from the outside, but that, unless interpreted, could become an idol. Symeon resembles one of the riddles Emperor Julian searched for in the myths, or one of the "stumbling blocks" Origen found in the Scriptures,[122] and which he, similarly, suggested was a divine pedagogy to attract attention in order to lead from the physical to the spiritual. The point, Theodoret would argue, is spiritual flight.[123]

[121] Bezner, "Heracles," with reference to Orig. *Cels.* 3.66.

[122] See e.g. Orig. *Princ.* 4.2.9.

[123] Cf. Theod. *Phil. hist.* 24.3 and 26.5, 12.

## Bibliography

### Sources

Aphthonius, *Progymnasmata*: H. Rabe, ed. *Aphthonii progymnasmata*, Rhetores Graeci 10. Leipzig: Teubner, 1926.

Athanasius. *Vita Antonii*. In *Athanase d'Alexandrie: Vie d'Antoine*, edited and translated by G. J. M. Bartelink. Sources Chrétiennes 400. Paris: Cerf, 1994. Translated by David Brakke. "Athanasius of Alexandria: Life of St. Anthony of Egypt." In M*edieval Hagiography,* edited by Thomas Head, 1–30. New York: Garland, 2000.

Julianus Imperator, *Contra Galilaeos.* In *Juliani imperatoris librorum contra Christianos quae supersunt*, edited by K.J. Neumann. Leipzig: Teubner, 1880.

Julianus Imperator, *Orationes 5* (*Eis tên mêtera tôn theôn)*. In vol 2:1 of *L'empereur Julien: Oeuvres complètes*, edited by Gabriel Rochefort, 103–31. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1963. Translated by Wilmer Cave Wright. In vol. 1 of *The Works of the Emperor Julian*, 443–503. Loeb Classical Library 13. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1913. Repr., London: William Heinemann, 1980.

Julianus Imperator, *Orationes 7.* Translated by Wilmer Cave Wright. In vol. 2 of *The Works of the Emperor Julian*, 73–161. Loeb Classical Library 13. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1913.

Theodoretus, *Graecarum affectionum curatio.* In *Théodoret de Cyr: Thérapeutique des maladies helléniques*, edited and translated by Pierre Canivet. 2 vols. Paris: Cerf, 1957.

Theodoretus, *Philotheos Historia.* In *Théodoret de Cyr: Histoire des moines de Syrie, Histoire Philothée,* edited and translated by Pierre Canivet and Alice Leroy-Molinghen. 2 vols. Sources Chrétiennes 234, 257. Paris: Cerf, 1977, 1979. Translated by R.M. Price in *Theodoret of Cyrrhus: A History of the Monks of Syria.* Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian, 1985.

### Secondary Literature

Azéma, Yvan. "Théodoret de Cyr." In vol. 15 of *Dictionnaire de spiritualité ascétique et mystique: doctrine et histoire*, edited by A. Derville, P. Lamarche, and A. Solignac, 418–35. Paris: Beauchesne, 1991.

Bal, Mieke. *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative.* 3. edn. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009.

Bezner, Frank. "Heracles." In: *Brill's New Pauly Supplements I – Volume 4: The Reception of Myth and Mythology*. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2214-8647_bnps4_e509010.

Blersch, Hartmut Gustav. *Die Säule im Weltgeviert: Der Aufstieg Simeons, des ersten Säulenheiligen*. Trier: Paulinus, 1978.

Brown, Peter. "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity." *Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971): 80–101.

Brown, Peter. "The Saint as Exemplar in Late Antiquity." *Representations* 2 (1983): 1–25.

Cain, Andrew. "The Style of the Greek *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*." *Revue d'études augustiniennes et patristiques* 58 (2012): 57–96.

Cain, Andrew. *The Greek* Historia Monachorum in Aegypto: *Monastic Hagiography in the Late Fourth Century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

Cameron, Averil. "On Defining the Holy Man." In *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages: Essays on the Contribution of Peter Brown,* edited by James Howard-Johnston and Paul Antony Hayward, 27–43. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Canivet, Pierre. *Le monachisme syrien selon Théodoret de Cyr*. Paris: Beauchesne, 1977.

Clayton, Peter A. "The Pharos at Alexandria." In *The Seven Wonders of the Ancient World,* edited by Peter A. Clayton and Martin Price, 138–57. London: Routledge, 1988.

Clayton, Peter A. and Martin Price, eds. *The Seven Wonders of the Ancient World*. London: Routledge, 1988.

Congar, Yves. "Ecclesia ab Abel." In *Abhandlungen über Theologie und Kirche: Festschrift für Karl Adam,* edited by Marcel Reding, 79–108. Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1952.

Delehaye, Hippolyte. *Les Saints stylites.* Subsidia hagiographica 14. Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1923.

Devos, Paul. "La structure de l'*Histoire Philothée* de Théodoret de Cyr. Le nombre chapitres." *Analecta Bollandiana* 97 (1979): 319–35.

Doran, Robert. *The Lives of Simeon Stylites.* Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian, 1992.

Eastmond, Antony. "Body vs. Column: The Cults of St Symeon Stylites." In *Desire and Denial in Byzantium: Papers from the Thirty-first Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Brighton, March 1997*, edited by Liz James, 87–100. Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999.

Festugière, André-Jean. *Antioche païenne et chrétienne: Libanius, Chrysostome et les moines de Syrie.* Paris: E. de Boccard, 1959.

Frank, Georgia. *The Memory of the Eyes: Pilgrims to Living Saints in Christian Late Antiquity.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.

Frankfurter, David. "Stylites and *Phallobates*: Pillar Religions in Late Antique Syria." *Vigiliae Christianae* 44 (1990): 168–98.

Frend, W. H. C. *The Rise of Christianity*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984.

Gaşpar, Cristian-Nicolae. "The King of Kings and the Holy Men: Royal Authority and Sacred Power in the Early Byzantine World." In *Monotheistic Kingship: The Medieval Variants,* edited by Aziz Al-Azmeh and János Bak, 63–88. Budapest: Central European University Press, 2004.

Gaşpar, Cristian-Nicolae. *In Praise of Unlikely Holy Men: Elite Hagiography, Monastic Panegyric, and Cultural Translation in the* Philotheos Historia *of Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrrhus.* Ph.D. diss., Central European University, Budapest, 2006.

Gaşpar, Cristian-Nicolae. "An Oriental in Greek Dress: The Making of a Perfect Philosopher in the *Philotheos Historia* of Theodoret of Cyrrhus." *Annual of Medieval Studies at CEU* 14 (2008): 193–229.

Griffith, Sydney. "Julian Saba, 'Father of the Monks' of Syria." *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 2 (1994): 185–216.

Guinot, Jean-Noël. In vol. 33 of *Theologische Realenzyklopädie,* edited by Gerhard Müller, 250–54. 36 vols. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2002.

Harvey, Susan Ashbrook. "The Sense of a Stylite: Perspectives on Simeon the Elder." *Vigiliae Christianae* 42 (1988): 376–94.

Harvey, Susan Ashbrook. "Jacob of Serug's Homily on Simeon the Stylite." In *Ascetic Behavior in Greco-Roman Antiquity: A Sourcebook*, edited by Vincent Wimbush, 1–15. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1990.

Hult, Karin. *Syntactic Variation in Greek of the 5th Century A.D.* Gothenburg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 1990.

Kraemer, Ross Shepard. *Her Share of the Blessings: Women's Religions among Pagans, Jews, and Christians in the Greco-Roman World.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.

Krueger, Derek. *Symeon the Holy Fool: Leontius's Life and the Late Antique City.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.

Larsen, Lillian I. and Samuel Rubenson, eds. *Monastic Education in Late Antiquity. The Transformation of Classical Paideia.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

Lietzmann, Hans. *Das Leben des heiligen Symeon Stylites.* Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1908.

O'Meara, Dominic J. *Platonopolis: Platonic Political Philosophy in Late Antiquity.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Papadogiannakis, Ioannis. *Christianity and Hellenism in the Fifth-Century Greek East: Theodoret's Apologetics Against the Greeks in Context.* Washington, D.C.: Harvard University Press, 2012.

Peeters, Paul. "S. Syméon Stylite et ses premiers biographes." *Analecta Bollandiana* 61 (1943): 29–71.

Peña, Ignace, Pascal Castellana, and Romuald Fernandez. *Les Stylites syriens.* Milan: Franciscan Press, 1975.

Rapp, Claudia. "Storytelling as Spiritual Communication in Early Greek Hagiography: The Use of Diegesis." *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 6 (1998): 431–48.

Resseguie, James L. *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament: An Introduction.* Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005.

Ridings, Daniel. *The Attic Moses: The Dependency Theme in Some Early Christian Writers.* Gothenburg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 1995.

Schor, A.M. *Theodoret's People: Social Networks and Religious Conflict in Late Roman Syria*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011.

Siniossoglou, Niketas. *Plato and Theodoret: The Christian Appropriation of Platonic Philosophy and the Hellenic Intellectual Resistance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Stang, Charles M. "Digging Holes and Building Pillars: Simeon Stylites and the 'Geometry' of Ascetic Practice." *Harvard Theological Review* 103 (2010): 447–70.

Tchalenko, Georges. *Villages antiques de la Syrie du Nord: Le massif du Bélus à l'époque romaine. 3* vols. Paris: Librairie orientale Paul Geuthner, 1953–1958.

Trombley, Frank R. *Hellenic Religion and Christianization c. 370–529.* 2 vols. 2. edn. Boston: Brill, 2001.

Urbainczyk, Theresa. *Theodoret of Cyrrhus: The Bishop and the Holy Man.* Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 2002.

Urbano, Arthur P. *The Philosophical Life: Biography and the Crafting of Intellectual Identity in Late Antiquity*. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2013.

Westergren, Andreas. *Sketching the Invisible: Patterns of Church and City in Theodoret of Cyrrhus*' Philotheos Historia. PhD diss., Lund University, 2012.

Westergren, Andreas. "A Relic *In Spe*: Theodoret's Depiction of a Philosopher Saint." In *Studia Patristica LXVIII, vol. 16: From the Fifth Century Onwards (Greek Writers),* edited by Markus Vinzent, 25–29. Leuven: Peeters, 2013.

Westergren, Andreas. "Monastic Space: The Ascetic Between Sacred and Civil Spheres in Theodoret of Cyrrhus." In *Spaces in Late Antiquity: Cultural, Theological and Archaeological Perspectives*, edited by J. Day, R. Hakola, U. Tervahauta, and M. Kahlos, 48–65. London: Routledge, 2016.

Westergren, Andreas. "The Monastic Paradox: Desert Ascetics as Founders, Fathers, and Benefactors in Early Christian Hagiography." *Vigiliae Christianae* 72:3 (2018): 283–317.

Williams, Michael Allen. *The Immovable Race: A Gnostic Designation and the Theme of Stability in Late Antiquity*. Leiden: Brill, 1985.

CHARLES KUPER

# A Critique of Stylitism: Parody and Imitation in the *Life of Theodulus the Stylite**

> The arrogance of your heart has puffed you up, as you have made your dwelling in the hollows of rocks, exalting in your high station and saying in your heart, "Who will bring me back down to earth?" If you soar above like an eagle and make your nest among the stars, even from there shall I bring you low, says the Lord.
>
> Obadiah 1:3–4[1]

## Introduction

From the time that the first stylite, Symeon the Elder (ca. 390–459)[2], ascended his pillar in the Syrian wilderness, the landscape of Christian asceticism was forever changed. These other-worldly ascetics crossed and blurred many boundaries. Poised halfway between heaven and earth, they literally exemplified the

* I would like to thank Thomas Arentzen, Barbara Crostini, Olof Heilo, Ingela Nilsson, and Tonje Sørensen for their invitation and hospitality at the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul, where I first presented this essay in October 2019. I also presented an updated version at the 2021 Annual Meeting of the Society for Classical Studies in Chicago. The questions and comments from participants in both places were of great help as I worked through my ideas. I would also like to thank Janet Ahlberg, Dina Boero, Barbara Crostini, and Christian Høgel, who graciously read this essay at various stages. Their insights improved its quality greatly. Finally, Robert Ousterhout gave a 2013 lecture on-site in the Hippodrome that fundamentally shaped my thinking on the Theodosian Obelisk. Without that experience, I could not have written this essay, which I dedicate to his memory. All errors and deficiencies remain my own.

[1] Ὑπερηφανία τῆς καρδίας σου ἐπῆρέν σε κατασκηνοῦντα ἐν ταῖς ὀπαῖς τῶν πετρῶν, ὑψῶν κατοικίαν αὐτοῦ, λέγων ἐν καρδίᾳ αὐτοῦ, τίς με κατάξει ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν; ἐὰν μετεωρισθῇς ὡς ἀετὸς καὶ ἐὰν ἀνὰ μέσον τῶν ἄστρων θῇς νοσσίαν σου, ἐκεῖθεν κατάξω σε, λέγει κύριος, LXX. All translations are by the author.

[2] All years are CE unless noted otherwise.

'angelic life' (ἀγγελικὸς βίος), standing on their columns as 'living statues' and enduring the harsh elements. Ostensibly anchorites, they escaped from the world, but their vertical destination necessitated that they were conspicuously on display.[3] Such a lifestyle also meant that stylites depended completely on the presence of others to provide for their physical needs. The paradoxes inherent to this extreme form of asceticism naturally made stylites an object of wonder but also of suspicion. Because of this, explanation and justification were often required to negotiate and shape the varied responses to these saints.

Of course, there were many stylites in late antiquity, both men and women, most occupying their columns for short periods of time, but the tradition of stylites has been disproportionately shaped by a few well-known figures. The introduction to the tenth-century *Life of Luke the Stylite* exemplifies this tendency. The anonymous hagiographer begins his funeral oration by rehearsing the great stylite saints of the late antique past, though slightly out of order for thematic effect. They were Symeon the Elder (ca. 390–459), Symeon the Younger (521–592), Daniel the Stylite (409–493), and Alypius the Stylite (ca. 525–ca. 625). After briefly describing the careers and exploits of each, the orator then grafted Luke onto this illustrious family tree, calling him "the fifth" great stylite.[4] Similarly, the lavishly illuminated synaxarion known as the Menologion of Basil II (ca. 1000) contains a magnificent spread of pages for Luke and his late antique counterpart Daniel. Each lived in the area around Constantinople and died on the eleventh of December, although about five centuries apart.[5] In the early eleventh century, the stylite Lazaros of Galesion personally visited Symeon the Younger's monastery on the Wondrous Mountain near Antioch, before ascending his own column near Ephesus.[6] He even used Symeon as his model for the physical structure of his column, in particular the decision to forego an enclosed shelter on the top of his column.[7]

That these four saints had become the 'Mount Rushmore' of stylites by the Middle Byzantine period comes as no surprise. The extant corpus of material and literary evidence for stylites from late antiquity overwhelmingly attests to their popularity and importance. There are clay tokens stamped with their

[3] For the reception of statuary in late antiquity, see Marsengill, "Christian Reception," and the bibliography cited therein. See also Öğüş in this volume.

[4] *Life of Luke the Stylite* 3. Some selective but representative resources for these four stylites are the following. For Symeon the Elder, see Brown, "The Rise and Function," Harvey, "The Sense of a Stylite," and Boero, "Symeon and the Making of the Stylite." For Daniel, see Lane Fox, "*Life of Daniel*" and McEvoy, "Emperors, Aristocrats, and Columns." For Alypius, see Kuper, "Alypios the Stylite." For Symeon the Younger, see Henry, "The Pilgrimage Center," Boero and Kuper, "Steps toward a Study," and Parker, "Symeon Stylites the Younger."

[5] Vat. gr. 1613, 237–38.

[6] *Life of Lazaros of Galesion* 25.

[7] "Lazaros decided to remove the roof from his column and live on it under the open air according to the model of the wondrous Symeon" (ἔκρινε τοῦ ἆραι τὴν στέγην καὶ αἴθριον αὐτὸν ἐν τούτῳ τελεῖν κατὰ μίμησιν τοῦ θαυμαστοῦ Συμεῶν), *Life of Lazaros of Galesion* 31.

images that pilgrims carried throughout the Mediterranean world.[8] Monumental architecture has been excavated at their cult sites and continues to be visited in some capacity today.[9] Most relevant to this chapter, all four have extensive *Vitae*, which were copied, read, and adapted throughout the Middle Ages. As expected, the treatment of stylites is almost unanimously positive in these sources. They were originally composed or commissioned by the saint's own cult-keepers, who were both sincerely devoted to their leader and also had a personal stake in promoting his great piety. Moreover, the very genre of the literary evidence also predetermines the prominence of praise. As Aelius Theon advises during his discussion of the encomium in his rhetorical handbook, focusing on the negative aspects of the dedicatee was ill-advised: "Slanders should be omitted entirely, since this calls to mind their shortcomings, or they should be treated as indirectly and inconspicuously as possible. Otherwise, we make the mistake of defending our subjects rather than praising them."[10]

It is only by reading between the lines of these texts that we can catch glimpses of less positive attitudes towards stylites and their ascetic practices. These moments usually arise when the author feels compelled to explain the stylite's questionable behaviour or narrates the punishment levied upon those who failed to respect the stylite as they should. For example, in the anonymous *kontakion* on Symeon the Elder attributed to Romanos the Melodist, the hymnographer justified Symeon's apparent cruelty when he refused to admit his own mother before his column by emphasizing the stylite's righteous priorities, his devotion to God over his parents.[11] In the *Life of Symeon the Younger*, the hagiographer uses imagery from the Gospels to preempt any criticism of Symeon's desire for a taller column, "No one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket; he puts it on a lampstand so that it illuminates the whole house."[12] Symeon the Younger, if the homilies attributed to him are in fact authentic, implicitly defends himself against this very charge by citing Paul and positively comparing his performance of piety to that of actors in the hippodrome.[13] In the *Life of Martha the Mother of Symeon*

[8] Perhaps most famous is the token depicting Symeon the Younger discovered in the monastic church of Bobbio in Italy, which can be dated to the early seventh century. See Delehaye, "Les ampoules," 456, and for a recent discussion of the tokens, see Boero, "Between Gift and Commodity." A description of a monk using one of these tokens is found in the *Life of Martha* 54–56.

[9] Scholarship on Symeon the Elder's cult site at Qalʿat Simʿān and Symeon the Younger's at the Wondrous Mountain is vast. For recent studies, see Biscop, "Le sanctuaire et le village des pèlerins" and Henry, "The Pilgrimage Center of St. Symeon the Younger."

[10] Τὰς δὲ διαβολὰς ἢ οὐ δεῖ λέγειν· ἀνάμνησις γὰρ γίνεται τῶν ἁμαρτημάτων· ἢ ὡς οἷόν τε λάθρα καὶ ἀποκεκρυμμένως, μὴ λάθωμεν ἀπολογίαν ἀντ᾽ ἐγκωμίου ποιήσαντες, Theon, *Progymnasmata* 112.10–13.

[11] *Kontakion on Symeon Stylites the Elder*, strophe 24. See Kuper, "The Pseudo-Romanos *Kontakion*," 95.

[12] Οὐδεὶς ἅψας λύχνον τίθησιν ὑπὸ τὸν μόδιον, ἀλλ᾽ ἐπὶ τὴν λυχνίαν, καὶ λάμπει πᾶσι τοῖς ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ, *Life of Symeon the Younger* 34. Cf. Matthew 5:15–16.

[13] Symeon Stylites the Younger, *Homily* 17.1; cf. 1 Cor. 4:9. For more on these texts and the available bibliography, see Boero and Kuper, "Steps toward a Study," 376–79.

*the Younger*, a visiting monk later becomes convinced that Symeon was a magician (φάρμακος) and angrily throws his clay pilgrimage tokens into a fire. However, he is immediately tortured with a terrible affliction for his transgression, and he must repent before his health is restored.[14]

Other textual sources sometimes provide clearer examples of negative attitudes towards stylites, though the emphasis is often restricted to bishops whose authority was threatened by the popularity and charisma of local stylites. Gregory of Tours, for example, recounts the tragic story told to him by the Lombard Vulfulaicus, who had previously lived as a stylite near Trier.[15] When Vulfulaicus was much younger, he discovered a group of villagers venerating a statue of the Roman goddess Diana. He responded to this dilemma by erecting a column from which he preached against their pagan practices and performed great feats of asceticism to inspire them—a living statue to replace their mute idol. The plucky stylite was embraced by his community, but the local bishops were not amused. They chastised his arrogant attempt to imitate the great Symeon of Antioch, and they even razed his column to the ground after they had sent him on a fruitless errand.[16] A similar attitude of episcopal hostility can be found in a decree issued by Jacob, the bishop of Edessa, who prohibited stylites from celebrating the Eucharist on their columns.[17]

This brings us to the subject of this chapter, the relatively unknown hagiography describing the career of the saint whom we may call the 'other late antique stylite,' the *Life of Theodulus the Stylite* (*BHG* 1785; hereafter, *Life of Theodulus* or *LT*).[18] Surviving in a single eleventh-century manuscript, the possibly seventh-century *Life of Theodulus* differs from all other extant stylite hagiographies in its structure, tone, and historicity.[19] Rather than comprising a continuous account of the saint's life from birth until death, the *Life of Theodulus* includes only two extended scenes connected by a brisk transition. Both scenes, when viewed on their own, hover between positive and neutral in their portrayal of the stylite, but when their interrelated themes are read in parallel,

[14] *Life of Martha* 54.

[15] Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks* 8.15.

[16] "The path that you have chosen is not right. A lowly person like you is no match for Symeon, who lived on a column in Antioch" (*non est aequa haec via, quam sequeris, nec tu ignobilis Symeoni Anthiochino, qui colomnae insedit, poteris conparare*), Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks* 8.15.

[17] Vööbus, *Syriac and Arabic Documents*, 93–6, cited in Schachner, "The Archaeology of the Stylite," 350 n. 70.

[18] The full title found in the manuscript is "The life and conduct of Theodulus, the Prefect of Constantinople, who became a monk and stylite" (βίος καὶ πολιτεία Θεοδούλου ὑπάρχου Κωνσταντινουπόλεως, γενομένου μοναχοῦ καὶ στυλίτου), *Life of Theodulus* tit., Laur. Plut. 9.14, fol. 138r.

[19] The manuscript is currently located in the Laurentian Library in Florence (Laur. Plut. 9.14, fol. 138r–147v, 149r, 149v). For more on this manuscript, see Cerno, "Aquileia e l'agiografia di Salona," 797ff. Further discussion of this manuscript will be included in my edition and translation of the *Life of Theodulus*, which is currently in preparation.

the 'saint's' actions become much less praiseworthy, even contemptible. Additionally, the *Life of Theodulus* provides almost no historical details or context for its saint, his civil and monastic careers, or the monastic community and cult site that allegedly developed around his column in Edessa. The few details recorded are themselves problematic. According to the text, Theodulus was the urban prefect of Constantinople during the reign of Theodosius I, a claim that is easily refuted by the historical record and is also inconsistent with the well-known tradition of stylites described above. If Theodulus had flourished during the reign of Theodosius (379–395), he would have preceded the first stylite, Symeon the Elder (ca. 390–459), in ascending his column!

These unusual features explain the almost complete absence of the *Life of Theodulus* in scholarly literature. Hippolyte Delehaye is terse and dismissive of this text in his magisterial study of stylites, *Les saints stylites*, which is now a century old. According to the great Bollandist, the *Life of Theodulus* is nothing more than a derivative romance "incapable of teaching us anything about the lives of stylites."[20] Although these harsh words probably played an unfortunate role in dissuading later scholars from reading this text, they do point out something true about the *Vita*.[21] Theodulus is, in fact, a fictional literary persona, not a historical person, and his hagiographer seems mostly unconcerned with creating a plausible account of the saint and his career. Consequently, there are also no pilgrimage objects, monumental architecture, or contemporary art available to study for this imaginary stylite. If these types of evidence comprised everything relevant to our understanding of stylites, then Delehaye's verdict would be justified and conclusive. Such a view, however, ignores the importance of how stylites were received.

As I hope to show below, the *Life of Theodulus* provides crucial evidence for the reception of stylites, that is, what people thought about them, how they could function in literature, and even how they could be criticized. This *Vita*, I argue, is much more than a straightforward ethical tale. Instead, it is a cleverly crafted parody that revels in the inversion of its historical and literary subtexts.[22] This parody, which is signalled to the reader through a series of learned references, critiques the ostentatious ascetic behaviour of stylites in particular, and, more broadly, it questions the validity of asceticism as superior to marriage in the path to Christian sanctity.

[20] "La Vie de Théodule, où la colonne n'apparaît que comme motif de décoration, ne peut rien nous apprendre sur la vie des stylites," Delehaye, *Les Saints stylites*, cxix.

[21] I take a different approach from the short entry in "The Cult of the Saints in Late Antiquity." See Rizos, de Reichenfeld, and Cerioni, "Theodoulos the Stylite."

[22] For recent studies of parody and satire in Byzantium see Marciniak and Nilsson, ed., *Satire in the Middle Byzantine Period*, especially, Nilsson, "A Brief Introduction," 1–9, Messis and Nilsson, "Parody in Byzantine Literature," 62–78, and Constantinou, "Hagiographical Narratives," 81–103.

In order to make this argument, I have divided the rest of the essay as follows. In Part 1, I summarise the *Life of Theodulus* and pay special attention to its tripartite structure: the first scene set in Constantinople, the second scene set mostly in Damascus, and the narrative structures that join them into a recognizable, if atypical, hagiography. In Part 2, which contains three subsections, I demonstrate the following elements of parody in each part of the *Life of Theodulus*: 2.1) that the narrative structure of Theodulus's career is an irreverent inversion of the model described in the *Life of Alypius the Stylite* (*BHG* 65); 2.2) that the scene in Damascus is an adaptation of the story of Paphnutius from the *History of the Monks of Egypt*, which is signalled by the identical etymology of Theodulus and Paphnutius (both meaning "servant of God"); and 2.3) that the initial scene in Constantinople caricatures the historical urban prefect during the reign of Theodosius I, Proclus the son of Eutolmius Tatianus, who was responsible for erecting the Theodosian Obelisk in the Hippodrome. His identity is signalled in the text by the name of Theodulus's wife, Procla. I then conclude with a new, unified reading of the three interrelated parts of the *Life of Theodulus*, and I also make some preliminary observations about future steps for this understudied stylite hagiography.

## Part 1: A Summary of the *Life of Theodulus* and its Narrative Structure

### Summary

The *Vita* begins with a brief proem that sketches the historical context and the saint's conduct, both earthly and divine. Theodulus was urban prefect of Constantinople during the reign of Theodosius I (379–395). He understood the fleeting nature of the material world, so he stored up many heavenly treasures for himself through secret acts of mercy (*LT* 1).[23] The narrative then begins *in medias res* with a pair of opposing speeches between Theodulus and his wife Procla. The former expounds upon the impermanence of worldly things and the futility of marriage, citing Paul's letter to the Corinthians.[24] Thus he encourages Procla to join him in donating all their possessions to the poor and to embrace monastic life (*LT* 2–3). Using her own selection of Pauline quotations, Procla responds by chastising her husband for intending to abandon her so soon after their marriage.[25] She also criticizes him for taking her virginity and the diffi-

[23] The section numbers cited below differ slightly from those found in the *Acta Sanctorum* because they correspond to my own edition and translation of the *Life of Theodulus*, which I intend to publish soon. All Greek cited in this essay is from my edition.

[24] Cf. 1 Cor. 7:29–31.

[25] 1 Cor. 7:27 and cf. 1 Cor. 7:5.

culty that this would present if she were to attempt to enter a monastery. Their debate remains unresolved (*LT* 4). The following day, Theodulus meets with the emperor and requests to be relieved of his duties as urban prefect. He feigns an illness as a pretext. The citizens of Constantinople gather to protest his release (*LT* 5). Theodosius grants Theodulus's request and then addresses the people's concerns about losing such an exemplary public official. He states that Theodulus has earned a reprieve from his duties by his meritorious conduct and that he may reinstate him if he lives to see Theodulus's health improve (*LT* 6). When Procla learns of this development and guesses her husband's aims, she confronts him again in a series of exhortations, attacking his decision with different arguments. First, she evokes pity by emphasizing her inability to support herself in his absence and even hints that she might be forced into prostitution. Next, she threatens him with divine punishment on the day of judgment for his callous treatment of her. Finally, she suggests a compromise—they sell all their possessions but continue to cohabitate in a celibate relationship "like brother and sister." Procla successfully dissuades Theodulus, who accepts his defeat and makes no counter-argument (*LT* 7–8). However, when he returns to his quarters and falls asleep, Christ appears in a vision and asks him why he has failed to begin his ascetic journey. The saint relates the obstacles presented by Procla and seeks guidance. Christ informs Theodulus of his wife's imminent death, which occurs the following day. On her deathbed, Procla instructs her husband how she wants her property to be distributed to the poor (*LT* 9–10).

A short narrative interlude consisting of two sections follows. In the first, Theodulus attends to Procla's funeral and makes the necessary arrangements for donating their property. He then travels east to Edessa where he receives permission from the local bishop to become a stylite, which he does after a period as an enclosed recluse (*LT* 11). The second section is especially important because it contains the only details about Theodulus's virtuous conduct as a stylite. They are mostly generic—fasting, healing the sick, casting out demons—but there is one detail specific to the dependent lifestyle of a stylite. A certain pious person attended to the saint, bringing him some bread, raw vegetables, and water for his sustenance each day after sunset (*LT* 12).

Decades pass before the events included in the second half of the *Vita*. Theodulus, now an aged stylite, prays that his coheir in the kingdom of heaven be revealed to him. God answers his prayer immediately and informs him that Cornelius, a musician living in Damascus, will join him in his inheritance (*LT* 13). This revelation devastates Theodulus, who breaks into a lengthy lament, contrasting his pious asceticism with the lecherous behaviour of the ostensibly degenerate musician. In the end, however, the stylite reaffirms his trust in God's wisdom (*LT* 14). Theodulus descends his column, apparently for the first time in almost fifty years, and travels south to Damascus, where he discovers Cornelius leaving the hippodrome, arm in arm with a courtesan (*LT* 15). The stylite promptly

falls at the musician's feet and begs him to reveal his pious conduct. Cornelius is startled by this unexpected request but finally relents once they have retreated to a private place (*LT* 16). His story, which spans the next three sections, is as follows. One night, Cornelius passed an extraordinarily beautiful prostitute on his way home and solicited her. Although she accepted his advances, she immediately broke into uncontrollable tears when he reached out to touch her. Asked what was wrong, she in turn related the following embedded story (*LT* 17). She had been given in marriage to a respectable man by her parents, who died soon afterwards. Her husband then squandered both his own money and her dowry, resulting in his imprisonment. During the subsequent eight months, the nameless woman found no one to help her and failed to secure enough money by begging. At a breaking point, she decided to become a prostitute to feed her husband and herself. Cornelius would have been her first client (*LT* 18). The musician is filled with compassion. He immediately runs home and gathers enough money and other precious items to resolve their debt. He gives them to the woman and asks for her prayers before departing (*LT* 19). Theodulus is astounded at Cornelius's generosity and returns to his column in Edessa. He dies five years later, whereupon he again meets Cornelius, who had preceded him in death. The local community assembles to perform funeral rites for Theodulus (*LT* 20). The author remarks that many posthumous miracles are recorded in that place "even until today" and concludes with a short doxology (*LT* 21).

## Condensed Summary

Introduction, Section 1

(1) The saint is introduced. His virtue is praised.

Part I, Sections 2–10, Constantinople

(2–4) Opposing speeches of Theodulus and Procla.

(5–6) Theodulus meets with the emperor; the emperor addresses the congregated citizens.

(7–8) Procla dissuades her husband from his plans to leave her for the monastic life.

(9–10) Christ visits Theodulus in a dream; Procla dies the following day.

Interlude, Sections 11–12, Constantinople to Edessa

(11) Theodulus attends to Procla's funeral and donates all their possessions to the poor.

(12) Theodulus travels to Edessa, lives as a recluse for two years, and then purchases a column and becomes a stylite.

Part II, Sections 13–19, Edessa and Damascus

(13–14) Theodulus's prayer and lament.

(15–16) Theodulus travels to Damascus and asks Cornelius to reveal his virtue.
(17–19) Cornelius's story
(17) One night, Cornelius solicits a prostitute, which prompts a conversation.
(18) The woman's account of her misfortune and her final desperate effort.
(19) Cornelius is filled with compassion and secures enough money for her debts.

Epilogue, Sections 20–21
(20) Theodulus returns to Edessa and dies five years later, meeting Cornelius in heaven.
(21) Many miracles are recorded in the place, "even until today."

## Observations on Structure

The *Life of Theodulus* follows the general literary models found in other stylite *Vitae*. For example, the account of the column's construction and Theodulus's ascension of it occur near the exact midpoint of the narrative, which can be readily compared to the *Lives* of Symeon the Younger and Alypius.[26] This structural choice neatly divides the text into two distinct but complementary halves, the times before and after becoming a stylite. The first half of the *Vita*, therefore, comprises Theodulus's secular life as urban prefect in Constantinople and focuses on his conversations with his wife Procla about his ambitions to retreat from the world. The second half outlines his ascetic career and foregrounds his encounter with a musician in Damascus near the end of his life.

Yet this structural make-up also poses several interpretative problems. One of the most puzzling is the dissonance between the narrative super-structure and the two extended scenes nested within it. In the former, which includes the proem (*LT* 1), the transitional interlude (*LT* 11–12), and the conclusion/doxology (*LT* 20–21), the author paints a positive, if cursory, picture of Theodulus's conduct. He begins with a laudatory proem, describes the saint's decision to become an ascetic, narrates his self-denial and almsgiving, and finally concludes with his death, entrance into heaven, and posthumous miracles. Within this superstructure, however, the author seems to tell a different story. In the first scene, for example, Theodulus's voice falls mostly silent after his initial decision to become a monk. The spotlight then shifts to other characters, who criticize and undermine the saint's intentions more often than they support them. Pro-

[26] Symeon's ascension of his final column, the *megas stylos*, occurs near the middle of his monumental *Vita* (*Life of Symeon Stylites the Younger* 113). Likewise, Alypius mounts his column at the midpoint of his own *Vita* (*Life of Alypius the Stylite* 13). A similar phenomenon can be seen in the entry for Daniel the Stylite in the Menologion of Basil II (Vat. gr. 1613, f. 237).

cla successfully wields her counter-arguments against her husband on multiple occasions, while he accepts defeat in silence. Likewise, the author chooses to narrate only the emperor's words during the saint's audience with him. Although the emperor is enthusiastic in praising his 'loyal' prefect, his praise is blunted because it is elicited by Theodulus's dishonest request to be relieved of his civic duties. The historical subtext of Proclus, the actual urban prefect during this period, also adds an unsettling irony to Theodosius's speech.[27] Much the same can be said for the second major scene.

The *Life of Theodulus*, therefore, is like a wolf in sheep's clothing. From a distance, it passes for a standard, even nondescript, hagiography, but under closer inspection, it becomes clear that there is something awry, perhaps even sinister. This is not to say that these episodes are exclusively negative in their assessment of Theodulus, but only that their inconsistency and ambiguity raise urgent questions about the author's motivations in composing such a text. In order to answer these questions, it is essential to grasp the parodic elements associated with each of the text's three parts.

## Part 2: Three Elements of Parody

### 2.1 The Intertextual Inversion of *Life of Alypius the Stylite*

The earliest version of the *Life of Alypius the Stylite* (*BHG* 65, hereafter, *Life of Alypius*) can be plausibly dated to the mid-seventh century, perhaps in the decades before or after the death of Emperor Heraclius in 641.[28] Composed as a funeral oration (ἐπιτάφιος λόγος), the rhetorically elevated *Vita* recounts Alypius's career as a stylite and the growth of a monastic community, which included his mother and sister, around his column in Paphlagonian Hadrianopolis during the sixth and early seventh centuries.[29] The literary afterlife of Alypius's *Vita* was particularly rich in the Middle Byzantine period. It was presumably the sole source for the version included in the Menologion of Symeon Metaphrastes in the tenth century (*BHG* 64), as well as for a contemporary encomium by the monk and priest Antonios (*BHG* 66d). Additionally, Alypius was the subject of another, later encomium by the twelfth- and early thirteenth-century monk Neophytus the Recluse, when he commemorated his mother's death on

[27] See the discussion below in Section 2.3.

[28] The dates of Alypius's birth and death can only be approximated. In most manuscripts, the title of the *Vita* includes the detail that Alypius died during the reign of Heraclius (610–641). One exceptional manuscript (Vat. gr. 807, f. 269v), however, places his death during the reign of Maurice (582–602). If the tradition is accurate, Alypius died sometime during 610–641 and was born exactly ninety-nine years earlier. See Delehaye, *Saints stylites*, lxxvi–lxxxv.

[29] *Life of Alypius* 25.

26 November, which happened to fall on Alypius's feast day (*BHG* 66).[30] Compared to the literary evidence, there is significantly less material evidence for Alypius's column and the associated double-monastery, but recent archaeological surveys have begun to shed more light on the area around this site.[31]

The main points of Alypius's life and career, for which his hagiographical *Vita* is the sole source, can be summarized as follows.[32] When Alypius was born under miraculous circumstances, his mother entrusted her young son to the local bishop. As the young Alypius grew in wisdom and holiness, he was ordained a deacon and entrusted with various ecclesiastical duties. The saint, however, found this course of life to be unfulfilling so he decided to travel eastward to perfect himself through more extreme asceticism. He departed in secret, but halfway into his journey, he was visited in Euchaita by an angel who convinced him to return to his homeland of Paphlagonia. Upon returning, Alypius searched for a location suitable to his desires, and after he was dissuaded from dwelling on the peak of a mountain, he settled on a column situated outside the city and surrounded by ancient tombs. After organizing the construction of a small martyrion in honour of the martyr Euphemia, he lived for two years as an enclosed recluse nearby before he ascended the column and became a stylite. Almost immediately, a monastic community seems to have grown around his column. Initially, it consisted of only his mother who lived in a hut at the foot of his column, but soon a formal double monastery was constructed to house the growing number of both men and women who had joined the community.[33] At the ripe age of ninety-nine, Alypius passed from this life, probably during the reign of Heraclius.[34]

At first glance, the *Life of Theodulus* and the *Life of Alypius* could not be more different in their approaches to narrating stylites' lives. As mentioned above, the *Life of Theodulus* omits many elements associated with the genre of "*Life*" (βίος καὶ πολιτεία) and provides surprisingly few details about the career of its protagonist.[35] The *Life of Alypius*, on the other hand, adheres to the expectations of its

[30] The text by Antonios, unknown to Delehaye, was later edited by Halkin. See Halkin, *Inédits byzantins: d'Ochrida, Candie et Moscou*. For critical editions of the other three Greek texts, see Delehaye, *Saints stylites*, 148–169 (*BHG* 65), 170–187 (*BHG* 64), and 188–194 (*BHG* 66). For Neophytus and his literary output, see Galatariotou, *The Making of a Saint*, 19–39, esp. 28–29 for Alypius.

[31] See Eichner, "Ein Martyrion des heiligen Alypios," 679–88.

[32] For a more detailed treatment along with a full English translation, see Kuper, "Alypios the Stylite."

[33] Unfortunately, the *Vita* does not provide us with enough information to understand exactly how the monasteries were organized. It is also likely that the author compresses many of the details. For double monasteries, see Stramara, "Double Monasticism," 269–312.

[34] Alypius's age varies in the tradition. Some synxaria record that he lived to be 120. Cf. Delehaye, *Synaxarium*, 258.

[35] For a summary of the major subgenres of hagiography and their elements, see Hinterberger, "Byzantine Hagiography and its Literary Genres," 25–60.

genre and paints, in a relatively short space, a vibrant picture of Alypius's activities as well as the inhabitants of the double monastery near his column. The saint's miraculous birth and upbringing are recorded. His rebellious ecclesiastical career and his subsequent escape into the wilderness, where he throws down a pagan statue from a column before taking its place, add comedy and personality to the narrative. His battles with demons, his endurance against the harsh elements, and his miraculous healings of the sick, all of which are directly connected to his stylitism, are given due attention. Even the renowned singing of his monastic community is recorded.[36] Compared to this, the sparse details about Theodulus's diet of bread and raw vegetables are jejune indeed.

Despite these differences, there are uncanny parallels between the two *Vitae*, especially within the narrative superstructure of the *Life of Theodulus*. Some of these parallels are shared with the wider tradition of stylite hagiography, but many are unique to the *Life of Alypius* and the *Life of Theodulus*, which suggests a direct, intertextual relationship. What further supports this view is that the unique points of contact are far from innocuous. In the *Life of Alypius*, these features exhibit themes and rhetorical strategies of self-presentation consonant with hagiographical practice, while the *Life of Theodulus* consistently parodies these elements, often having its protagonist act in the opposite way to Alypius. The result is a portrait of Theodulus as a sort of anti-Alypius doppelgänger who, brazenly or ignorantly, achieves his aims by nontraditional means. I will discuss the four most important aspects of parody below.

First is the pivotal conversation in which the saint discloses his ambitions to depart from the world and embrace a lifestyle of extreme asceticism. For Alypius, his mother is his confidant, and she receives his words with great joy and encouragement. She does not, as the author notes, try to dissuade him with "the common complaints of women," namely their isolation (μόνωσις) or their widowhood (χηρεία).[37] Theodulus makes his revelation to his wife Procla, who has the opposite reaction of Alypius's mother. Strikingly, she uses the exact words that Alypius's hagiographer says his mother avoided: "Have compassion on my isolation (μόνωσις)... Do not let me, my lord, speak also of my widowhood (χηρεία)."[38] Her caustic criticism even dissuades her husband from his selfish

[36] For more on Alypius, see Delehaye, *Saints stylites*, lxxvi–lxxxv, and Kuper, "Alypios the Stylite."

[37] Cf. "[Alypius's mother] immediately cooperated with her son's plan, suffering in no way what many women are accustomed to suffer—complaining, for example, about their widowhood (χηρείαν) and loneliness (μόνωσιν) and [saying] that they cannot at all bear to see their dearest children desert them" (ἡ δὲ παραχρῆμα τῇ προθέσει συνέπραττεν τοῦ παιδὸς παθοῦσα γυναικεῖον οὐδὲν καθάπερ αἱ πολλαὶ εἰώθασιν, χηρείαν ἴσως καὶ μόνωσιν προβαλλόμεναι καὶ ὡς οὐ φέρουσαι ἐπὶ πολὺ τῶν φιλτάτων ὁρᾶν τὴν ἀπόλειψιν) *Life of Alypius* 6.

[38] [Procla speaking] "Have compassion on my isolation (μόνωσιν) and my orphanhood. Have pity on the fact that I am far from home. Do not let me, my lord, speak also of my widowhood (χηρείαν)" (σπλαγχνίσθητι εἰς τὴν μόνωσίν μου καὶ εἰς τὴν ὀρφανίαν μου. σπλαγχνίσθητι εἰς τὴν ξενιτείαν μου. μὴ συγχωρήσῃς με, κύριέ μου, εἰπεῖν καὶ εἰς τὴν χηρείαν μου), *Life of Theodulus* 8.

decision. Later on, Alypius's mother joins her son in his community, is ordained a deaconess, and accepts the monastic habit of a nun, while Procla's spectre continues to haunt Theodulus at the end of his life when he hears of the compassion that Cornelius had on another abandoned woman.

Second is the stylite's desire to travel eastward, presumably to Syria, which causes a panic among the local people.[39] In the *Life of Alypius*, the future stylite begins his journey eastward but is persuaded through divine intervention to turn back before he arrives at his destination. An angel (or Christ) appears to him in a dream and sagely reminds him that "holy places are wherever one who loves God chooses to live piously."[40] Reassured, Alypius returns to his homeland and settles there. Theodulus, however, simply travels east to Edessa with no further comment and no explicit suggestion that such a decision might be problematic. In both cases, there is a public outcry by the local community at the prospect of losing access to their holy man, but the resolutions to these crises are drastically different. In the case of Alypius, the local bishop pursues him far and wide, grieving for him "like a mother cow lowing for her lost calf," and he succeeds, with God's help, in returning him to his fold.[41] The Emperor Theodosius, in contrast, makes no effort to retain Theodulus, who is allegedly his most trustworthy official. He lets him go freely, and that is all.[42]

Third is how the saint prepared for, acquired, and ultimately ascended his column in negotiation with the local bishop. Schematically, these series of events are nearly identical for each of the two saints. They both discover a column in the outskirts of their respective cities. They both spend a two-year period as enclosed recluses in preparation for their ascension. They both also receive permission for their stylitism from their local bishop. They differ, however, in how the columns were financed. This issue was a great concern to Alypius's hagiographer, who performed rhetorical gymnastics both to confirm that Alypius's conduct was appropriate, and to direct attention away from this touchy subject to the impressive wonders of his superhuman endurance. Most importantly, the hagiographer explicitly states that some friends recognized Alypius's self-imposed poverty and donated the money required for his column. Alypius had absolutely no hand in procuring his own column.[43] Theodulus, in

[39] For an excellent map of the known locations of stylites, see Schachner, "The Archaeology of the Stylite," Figure 1. With relatively few exceptions, stylites were concentrated in Syria and the Levant, especially in the North Syrian Limestone Massif.

[40] Cf. ἐκεῖ γὰρ εἶναι τοὺς ἁγίους τόπους ὁ φανεὶς νύκτωρ ἐφθέγγετο, ἔνθα ἄν τις ἀγαπῶν τὸν Θεὸν ἕλοιτο ζῆν εὐσεβῶς, *Life of Alypius* 7. This is clever rhetoric for explaining the atypical location of Alypius and his column, which is one of the outliers on Schachner's map (see previous note).

[41] Cf. καὶ ἦν βλέπειν τῇ ἀθυμίᾳ τὸν ἄνθρωπον καθάπερ βοῦν μυκωμένην ὅταν τὸν ἴδιον μόσχον ἀποπλανηθέντα ζητεῖ, *Life of Alypius* 7.

[42] *Life of Theodulus* 6.

[43] Cf. "Furthermore, some of his companions who recognized his poverty cheerfully funded the expenditure required for his pillar" (ὅθεν καὶ τὴν ἐπὶ τῷ στύλῳ δαπάνην τῶν συνήθων τινὲς καὶ τῶν συνεπισταμένων τὴν τοῦ ἀνδρὸς ἀκτημοσύνην ἐκαρποφόρησαν σὺν εὐθυμίᾳ πολλῇ), *Life of*

contrast, casually pays for his column himself, and the abruptness of this surprising claim is further marked by the contradictory detail immediately preceding, that Theodulus had donated his entire fortune to the poor.[44]

Fourth and finally is the rhetorical comparison (σύγκρισις/*synkrisis*) of the stylite with another figure who serves as a foil for extolling the saint's virtue.[45] In the *Life of Alypius*, the stylite is juxtaposed with Job, which succeeds in elucidating the stylite's great deeds by measuring them against a paradigmatic model of patient asceticism. Nor was the orator content with equality. He boldly claims that Alypius surpassed Job in virtue—the stylite endured more terrible trials and for a longer time than Job did, and he did so without any embarrassing complaints.[46] Theodulus, in contrast, gives voice to his own *synkrisis* when he learns that the musician Cornelius is to become his heavenly coheir. He breaks into a pitiful lament, and the comparison that he makes is less than flattering.[47] Although Cornelius is later revealed to be secretly virtuous, the relationship between the stylite's and the musician's deeds continues to be ambiguous because the reader is encouraged throughout the episode to compare Theodulus's previous treatment of Procla with the musician's treatment of the nameless woman abandoned by her negligent husband.

As these four elements show, the author of the *Life of Theodulus* used the *Life of Alypius* as a model for composing his account of Theodulus's career as a stylite. This was not, however, an unoriginal or uncritical imitation of the source material. Instead, the *Life of Theodulus* parodies the *Life of Alypius* by consistently subverting the rhetoric of its source. On the surface, therefore, the narrative trajectory of the *Life of Theodulus* appears unremarkable, but for

*Alypius* 11. This seems to conflict slightly with the claim earlier in the same chapter that Alypius had himself commissioned and dedicated a 'modest' martyrion in honor of St. Euphemia.

[44] "After the customary days of mourning, Theodulus sold everything and gave it to the poor and destitute, as well as to monasteries and chapels. He also freed all his slaves and gave them a stipend. Then he made his journey to the east. When he arrived in Edessa, he found a large pillar nearby and bought it" (μετὰ οὖν τὰς νενομισμένας ἡμέρας τοῦ πένθους, πάντα διαπωλήσας ὁ αὐτὸς Θεόδουλος διέδωκεν πτωχοῖς καὶ ἐνδεέσιν· οὐ μὴν ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῖς μοναστηρίοις καὶ εὐκτηρίοις. καὶ ἐλευθερώσας καὶ λεγατεύσας τοὺς αὐτοῦ πάντας οἰκέτας, τὴν ὁρμὴν ἐποιήσατο ἐπὶ τὴν ἀνατολικὴν χώραν. καὶ ἀπελθὼν πλησίον Ἐδέσης τῆς πόλεως καὶ εὑρὼν κίονα παμμεγέθη, τοῦτον ὠνήσατο), *Life of Theodulus* 11.

[45] That the protagonists are compared at length to another figure comes as no surprise since *synkrisis* is closely tied to speeches of praise in late antique rhetorical literature. See Aphthonius, *Progymnasmata* VIII.36 and X.42.

[46] *Life of Alypius* 24.

[47] The language used in this comparison also seems to be intertextually related to the *Life of Alypius*. Theodulus refers to himself as "the one who has been monumentalized (*stēlōmenos*) on his column" (ὁ ἐν τῷ κίονι ἐστηλωμένος), *Life of Theodulus* 14. This striking usage of the Greek verb *stēloō*/στηλόω ("to raise a monument/stele") to describe the act of becoming a stylite is first attested in the *Life of Alypius*, where Alypius claims that he "has made himself a monument on his pillar" (ἑαυτὸν στηλώσας ἐπὶ τῷ κίονι). The only other parallel of which I am aware is found in the *kontakion* on Symeon the Elder attributed to Romanos the Melodist. See Kuper, "The Pseudo-Romanos *Kontakion*," 92 n. 53.

those familiar with the literary tradition of stylites and the *Life of Alypius* in particular, the irreverent disregard for protocol is surprising. The joke is simple but effective. Theodulus was a bad stylite.

## 2.2 The Pointed Adaptation of the *History of the Monks of Egypt*

Even in his brisk dismissal of the *Life of Theodulus,* Delehaye displayed his encyclopedic knowledge of Greek literature by pointing out one essential feature of the *Life of Theodulus*, namely, that Theodulus's conversation with the musician Cornelius is an adaptation and synthesis of the story about Paphnutius in the *History of the Monks of Egypt*.[48] In fact, the author of the *Life of Theodulus* even clues the reader to this intertextual relationship through the choice of the protagonist's name. The relatively uncommon name Theodulus is the Greek equivalent of the Coptic name Paphnutius.[49] Both mean 'servant of God' in their respective languages, an etymology known to late antique authors.[50] And the name games do not end here. Besides the historical significance of Procla's name (Πρόκλα), which will be discussed in the following section, the author's choice of Theodulus appears doubly significant. Not only does it signal the Coptic Paphnutius, but it also recalls the name of the prophet Obadiah, which means 'servant of God' in Hebrew.[51] If my interpretation is correct, the author of the *Life of Theodulus* also had in mind the opening verses of the Book of Obadiah, which I have used as the epigraph of this essay, when he chose the name of his protagonist.[52]

[48] Delehaye, *Saints stylites*, cxix, n. 1. André-Jean Festugière, following Delehaye, also notes this in his commentary. See Festugière, *Historia monachorum in Aegypto*, ad loc.

[49] In the *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, there are no entries for "Theodulus" in vol. 1 (260–395), and there are six entries in vol. 2 (395–527), the most interesting of which is a certain Theodulus who served as a *cornicularius* under the urban prefect of Rome at the turn of the fifth century.

[50] One example comes from a manuscript containing a Syriac translation of the *Life of Euphrosyne*: "There once was an honorable man in Alexandria whose name was Paphnutius, which means "servant of God" (*ʿabdā d-ʾalāhā*), BnF Syriaque 234, 214r col. 1.2–6. An edition of the Syriac *Life of Euphrosyne* (*BHO* 288) was prepared by Paul Bedjan, but this etymological gloss is not recorded in the main text or in the apparatus criticus (cf. *Life of Euphrosyne* 1). For more on the name Paphnutius, see Blumell and Wayment, *Christian Oxyrhynchus*, 581 n. 8.

[51] Jerome makes this observation in one of his letters: "Obadiah (*Abdias*), whose name means "servant of God" (*servus Dei*) thunders against Esau (cf. Obad. 1:6), that ruddy and corporeal person, who was always his brother Jacob's rival (*Abdias, qui interpretatur 'servus Dei,' pertonat contra Edom sanguineum terrenumque hominem, fratris quoque Iacob semper aemulum*), Epistles, 3.53.

[52] Obadiah 1:3–4. The later literary tradition about stylites even uses the avian imagery found in these very verses. Cf. "[Alypius] contrived, like a bird, to make a higher nest for himself, and he soared upward to what was more divine" (ὑψηλοτέραν δὲ διανοεῖται πήξασθαι καλιὰν ὁ λογικὸς οὗτος ὄρνις καὶ ὑψιπέτης πρὸς τὰ θειότερα), *Life of Alypius* 13 (*BHG* 66d), and "[Stylites] fashion nests for themselves, living uncovered beneath the air and without comforts as the winged

Turning to *The History of the Monks of Egypt* (Ἡ κατ᾽ Αἴγυπτον τῶν μοναχῶν ἱστορία, hereafter, the *History*), this popular text was one of the most influential monastic works in late antiquity from the time of its composition in Jerusalem during the 390s. It was translated into nearly every language spoken in the Mediterranean world, with the most well-known version being the Latin translation by Rufinus (*Historia monachorum in Aegypto*).[53] Unraveling the complicated history of this text has long been a topic of scholarly debate, specifically how to make sense of the triangular relationship between the Greek versions, the Latin translation of Rufinus, and Sozomen's *Ecclesiastical History*. Fortunately, this question does not concern us here, as the account of the monk Paphnutius is unrelated to these source-critical issues.[54]

The episode concerning Paphnutius in the *History* is as follows.[55] The anonymous author recounts that he personally met with the famous anchorite shortly before his departure from this life. Paphnutius, he claims, had performed many feats of asceticism, but he decides to restrict his narrative to a series of three thematically related events occurring near the end of the saint's life. The first encounter is immediately recognizable to the reader of the *Life of Theodulus*. Paphnutius has reached impressive heights in his ascetic practices, so he prays that his spiritual equal be revealed to him. An angel immediately appears and discloses the relevant information. His coheir is an *aulos*-player who resides in the city nearby.[56] Paphnutius then travels there and asks him to disclose his virtuous deeds. The musician acquiesces, admitting that he had recently performed two virtuous deeds while living among a group of bandits. First, he rescued a woman from an impending threat of sexual violence from his companions and returned her to safety. Second, he discovered a starving woman wandering alone in the desert. The woman's husband had been imprisoned for his debt, which also resulted in their three children being sold into slavery. Filled with compassion, the nameless musician gave her three hundred gold coins and escorted her home, where they freed her husband and children. Paphnutius is impressed by the musician's generosity but informs his interlocutor that there is still one more thing he must do to perfect himself—he must become a monk. On cue, the man throws his musical instrument onto the ground and follows the anchorite into the desert, where he spends three years before his death.[57]

creatures do" (καλιάς τε πηξάμενοι καθάπερ ὄρνιθές τινες φιλέρημοι τῷ ἀέρι τε μέσον ἄστεγοι καὶ ἄσκευοι πτηνῶν δίκην ἐνδιαιτώμενοι), *Life of Luke the Stylite* 3.

[53] For a discussion of the provenance, date, and authorship of this work, see Cain, *The Greek 'Historia'*, 33–57.

[54] For a summary of these issues and a new solution, see Cain, *The Greek 'Historia'*, 9–32.

[55] The story of Paphnutius is usually the fourteenth Vita in the *History*. See also, Cain, *The Greek 'Historia'*, 209–10.

[56] *History of the Monks of Egypt* 14.2

[57] *History of the Monks of Egypt* 14.3–9.

Paphnutius has two more encounters, which are of less interest here because they have no parallel in the *Life of Theodulus*.[58]

Just as was true for the *Life of Alypius* above, the author of the *Life of Theodulus* was neither passive nor purposeless in how he adapted the *History* to his literary programme. In addition to paring down the Paphnutius-story to create a tighter narrative, he also made pointed alterations to the source material. These changes, which correspond closely to details found in the first half of the *Life of Theodulus*, are significant because this is where the parody comes into sharper focus. They can be summarised as follows, and they will be treated in turn: 1) how the saint reacts to learning the identity of his heavenly coheir; 2) how the meeting between the saint and the musician transpires and is resolved; and 3) how the two women saved by the musician have been reimagined into a single character.

First, Paphnutius and Theodulus react and conduct themselves differently in response to the news that their spiritual equals are musicians. The Egyptian anchorite, on the one hand, calmly accepts this revelation, and he sets out to meet the musician at once (μετὰ σπουδῆς ὁρμήσας). Theodulus, on the other hand, is devastated. He begins crying and complains of the injustice.[59] He is also reluctant to obey the divine message, as he remains rooted to the top of his column where he agonizes (ἐναγώνιος) over this unwelcome news for an indeterminate number of days.[60] Only then can he finally bring himself to descend from his column and travel to Damascus.[61]

[58] In the second, Paphnutius meets with a leader of a village, whose hospitality to strangers and fairness to his fellow citizens is exemplary. Like the musician before him, the leading citizen is praised for his conduct but must also follow Paphnutius into the desert to become a monk. In the third and final episode, Paphnutius meets with a rich merchant after he arrives to distribute his vast wealth to the local monasteries and to the poor. Again, the previous script repeats. The man drops everything at Paphnutius's exhortation and follows him into the desert, where he dies after a short time. *History of the Monks of Egypt* 14.18–22.

[59] "What is the meaning of this shameful pairing? He who has been monumentalized on his column [is to be compared] to a musician, Lord?" (τίς οὖν ἡ ἄτιμος αὕτη συγκαταρίθμησις; μετὰ πανδούρου, δέσποτα, ὁ ἐν τῷ κίονι ἐστηλωμένος;), *Life of Theodulus* 14. The lengthy lament continues to fill almost an entire section of the *Vita*.

[60] Ἐναγώνιος (*enagōnios*) is a clever choice of word here as it can mean both "in agony" and "ready for a contest," which is the point of the joke. Theodulus should be eager to meet his rival as Paphnutius was (the latter meaning), but, he has instead crumbled under the pressure (the former meaning). See Lampe, "ἐναγώνιος."

[61] That Theodulus was willing to descend his column should probably also be read as critical. Daniel the Stylite is known to have come down from his column temporarily to aid the patriarch Akakios during a period of political turmoil, although only after he was reassured in a divine vision (*Life of Daniel* 72), but by the sixth and seventh centuries, it had become taboo for a major stylite to leave his column. Alypius, for example, persisted in standing on his column for fifty-three years, and he continued to lie horizontally on the column's top for another fourteen years after his legs failed him (*Life of Alypius* 25). Likewise, it is implied in the *Life of Symeon the Younger* that Symeon did not even touch the ground when he changed columns. He rode a foal from his second column to the peak of the Wondrous Mountain (*Life of Symeon the Younger* 66), and his disciples

Second, the nature and the resolution of the meeting between the ascetic and the musician are different. Paphnutius remains in control of his emotions throughout their conversation. He warmly acknowledges the musician's piety but is also quick to proclaim his own achievements.[62] In the end, however, Paphnutius seizes the upper hand as he informs the musician that his path to sanctity is incomplete. He must abandon his secular life, enter the desert, and become a monk to reach perfection, which he promptly does, thereby confirming the superiority of monasticism.[63] Theodulus, on the other hand, loses his composure from the beginning. He falls at Cornelius's feet (προσέπεσεν), as he weeps and begs (μετὰ δακρύων δυσωπῶν) him to reveal his pious conduct.[64] Like Paphnutius, Theodulus praises Cornelius when he learns of his virtuous deeds, but the stylite has no swagger. He falls to the ground weeping a second time, and he makes no attempt to convert his interlocutor to the monastic life. Instead, he simply takes leave of Cornelius and returns to his column in Edessa.[65]

Third and finally, the author of the *Life of Theodulus* has rewritten details about the women described in the *History* by reimagining them as a single, composite character. In the *Life of Theodulus*, the nameless woman decides as a last resort to become a prostitute, she has no children, and she explicitly claims that her husband is responsible for squandering their money.[66] The first woman in the *History*, in contrast, is under threat of sexual violence rather than seeking sex work to provide for herself, while the second woman has three children and gives an ambiguous account about the cause of her husband's debt.[67] These changes might appear inconsequential at first glance, but their significance emerges when they are read within the wider context of the *Life of Theodulus*, specifically with regard to Procla. In the first half of the *Vita*, Procla condemns Theodulus for abandoning her to future hardships through his negligence.[68] She fears that she will be forced into prostitution and warns him that he will pay the penalty on the day of judgment for his behaviour.[69] She also laments that her husband has

carried him around the monastery in a lavish ceremony before he ascended his final column (*Life of Symeon the Younger* 113).

[62] Cf. [Paphnutius speaking] "I am unaware of having done anything myself quite like this, but you have heard, no doubt, that I am renowned for my ascetic practice. For I have not lived my life carelessly" (ἐγὼ μὲν οὐδὲν ἐμαυτῷ σύνοιδα τῶν τοιούτων τι κατωρθωκότι· ἐν δὲ τῇ ἀσκήσει πάντως ἀκήκοάς με εἶναι διαβόητον. οὐ γὰρ ῥαθύμως τὴν ἐμαυτοῦ ζωὴν διελήλυθα), *History of the Monks of Egypt* 14.33–36.

[63] For a discussion of pious competition in the *History*, see Cain, "*History*," 241–42.

[64] *Life of Theodulus* 16.

[65] *Life of Theodulus* 19.

[66] *Life of Theodulus* 18.

[67] *History of the Monks of Egypt* 14.

[68] "My lord, do not bring any sort of defilement against your servant. I am a foreigner without any support. I do not know where I could turn" (κύριέ μου, μηδαμῶς ἔχε κηλίδα τὴν οἱανοῦν κατὰ τῆς δούλης σου. ξένη γὰρ οὖσα καὶ ἀπερίστατος, ποῦ περιστραφῆναι οὐκ οἶδα), *Life of Theodulus* 7.

[69] "Take care that you do not have to give an account of my soul on that fearsome, terrible day. Beware lest I stand against you, because I have sinned but the fault is yours" (ὅρα μὴ ζητηθῇ παρὰ

not even given her the consolation of a child "so that by seeing [his] reflection in [their] offspring as in a mirror (κατοπτριζομένη), [she] might have the constant reminder of the man who kicked [her] aside so suddenly."[70]

A mirror is a useful image for understanding how the author of the *Life of Theodulus* coordinated the adaptation of the Paphnutius-story from the *History* with the debate between Theodulus and Procla in the first half of the *Vita*. Each scene, when taken on its own, could arguably be read as a sympathetic portrayal of the stylite, but they appear in a new light when they are viewed in parallel. Theodulus's treatment of Procla is mirrored in Cornelius's treatment of the nameless woman, but the reflection is distorted, like in a funhouse mirror. This is because everything laudable about Cornelius simultaneously questions the morality of Theodulus's actions earlier in the *Vita*. Cornelius compassionately saved a destitute woman abandoned by her husband, while Theodulus was a negligent husband who selfishly abandoned Procla to fend for herself so that he could pursue his ascetic aspirations. The underlying criticism has more bite here than the parody of the *Life of Alypius* described above. Not only is Theodulus a bad stylite, but he is also a cruel person.

## 2.3 Theodulus as Caricature of Proclus, the Historical Urban Prefect of Constantinople

Daniel Papebroch, the Bollandist scholar who prepared the seventeenth-century *editio princeps* of the *Life of Theodulus*, serves as a useful starting point for the historical subtext of this *Vita*. Papebroch adopted a more charitable approach toward this text than the dismissive attitude later characterized by Delehaye. His first inclination was to take what he read at face value and search for corroborating historical evidence. The *Life of Theodulus* clearly states in the opening sentence that its protagonist was entrusted with the office of urban prefect (τὴν ἐπαρχότητα τῆς πόλεως ἐμπεπιστευμένος) by Theodosius I (ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις Θεοδοσίου τοῦ μεγάλου βασιλέως), so he pored over the Theodosian Codex to determine whether he could discover documentation to support whether Theodulus held the prefecture or another related office.[71] His findings were inconclusive, but he inferred that Theodulus was very likely urban prefect

σοῦ ἡ ψυχή μου ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ φοβερᾷ καὶ φρικτῇ. ὅρα μὴ καταπροσέλθω σου ὡς παρ᾽ αἰτίαν σου πλημμελήσασα), *Life of Theodulus* 7. For an example of the legal usage of πλημμελήσασα (*plēmmelēsasa*) for sexual misconduct, cf. *Novellae* 115.3.11.

[70] Ἵνα κἂν κατοπτριζομένη τούτου τὸν χαρακτῆρα, ἐφ᾽ ἑκάστης ὥρας ὁρῶ τὸν οὕτως ἄφνω ἀπολακτίσαντά μου, *Life of Theodulus* 4.

[71] "In the days of Theodosius the Great, a certain man named Theodulus had been entrusted with the prefecture of the city by the most serene emperor" (ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις Θεοδοσίου τοῦ μεγάλου βασιλέως ἦν τις Θεόδουλος ὀνόματι τὴν ἐπαρχότητα τῆς πόλεως ἐμπεπιστευμένος ὑπὸ τοῦ γαληνοτάτου βασιλέως), *Life of Theodulus* 1.

sometime during 387–391. His reasoning for this was as follows, and I quote in full because of the relative inaccessibility of the text:

> Had Theodulus been praetorian prefect during the reign of Theodosius the Great, it would have been impossible for his name not to be found in the Theodosian Codex, where for every year of Theodosius's reign there are many laws addressed to this particular sort of prefect, so much so that we can reconstruct a complete list for this office. This is not the case for the urban prefects, to whom far fewer laws are addressed, and for the period of 387–91, there are none at all. If there were *rescripta* addressed to the Urban Prefects during this period, we might assume that Theodulus's name would be found among them.[72]

Although this clever hypothesis happens to be factually incorrect, Papebroch was closer than Delehaye to grasping the significance of the historical details included in the *Life of Theodulus*.[73] The urban prefecture of Constantinople indeed remained a significant position from the later Roman imperial hierarchy well into the Middle Byzantine period, so the claim that Theodulus held this position was oddly specific and, therefore, fairly easily falsifiable.[74] Papebroch was correct that such a claim demanded further investigation. He only needed to cast his net a little more widely. This is because, as has been already made clear above, we do know the identity of the urban prefect during this period. What is more, his name, his death, and his most famous civic accomplishment are all directly related to the *Life of Theodulus*. He was none other than Proclus, who was the son of Eutolmius Tatianus and the namesake for the wife of his literary caricature in the *Life of Theodulus*, Procla.[75]

To begin with Proclus's father, Tatianus had a successful political career himself over the course of the fourth century. Originally from Syria, Tatianus quickly rose through the ranks of the late antique *cursus honorum*. He held various offices, including the position of *comes Orientis*, but he reached the pinnacle of his career in 388 when he was appointed Praetorian Prefect of the East by Theodosius. At the same time, his son Proclus was named Urban Prefect of Constantinople, a position that he held until 392 when he met his unfor-

[72] Sed si Praefectus Praetorio Theodulus fuisset, imperante Theodosio magno, fieri vix posset ut eius nomen non inveniretur in Codice Theodosiano, ubi nullo non anno Theodosii inveniuntur plures leges ad huiusmodi praefectos directae, unde eorumdem (*sic*) series integra haberi potest; non item Praefectorum urbis, ad quos multo pauciores leges extant et pro annis CCCLXXXVII et quatuor sequentibus omnino nullae: ut si horum annorum rescripta ad urbis praefectos data extarent, credi possit Theoduli nomen in his inveniendum fuisse, *Acta Sanctorum*, *Maii VI*, 757.

[73] See the note below for one decree addressed to the urban prefect during this period.

[74] See *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, "Urban Prefect."

[75] Proclus is usually styled "Proculus" in Latin and "Proklos" in Greek (Πρόκλος). I refer to him as Proclus throughout.

tunate demise.[76] The main source for their careers is the *New History* of Zosimus, but the invectives of Claudian and the Theodosian Codex also contain important evidence.[77] Stefan Rebenich's 1989 article remains the best overview of Tatianus and his son Proclus.[78]

'Unfortunate' is an understatement in describing the gruesome end of Proclus's life. Although it is difficult to reconstruct the details with complete confidence, it is clear that at the height of their power, Proclus and his father Tatianus were exiled by Theodosius when false charges were brought against them by the ambitious consul Flavius Rufinus.[79] But embarrassment and exile were not the end of their troubles. Later on, Rufinus tricked Tatianus into believing that the political turmoil had passed and all was forgiven. Convinced, Tatianus summoned Proclus out of hiding through a letter, but when he arrived, Rufinus betrayed them once again. According to Claudian's account, Rufinus had Proclus executed in front of his father (*ante patrum vultus*), whom he then sent into exile in the east.[80] Zosimus gives a less sensationalised account, although it includes the same basic details.[81] In any case, such a grisly series of events makes Proclus an ignominious figure upon which to base a saint's life, and this unsavoury subtext does occasionally rise to the surface in the *Life of Theodulus*. The clearest example is found in Theodosius's public address, where the emperor makes a puzzling statement about the possibility of reappointing Theodulus to the prefecture. He says, "Perhaps I will later reappoint him to his office *when he is healthy and if I still linger in this life*."[82] Why would the author make this strange reference to the order of Theodulus's and Theodosius's deaths? The unsettling answer lies in the historical career of Proclus. As the informed reader will undoubtedly realize, this reappointment will never come to pass because of Proclus's brutal death, which was possibly commanded by Theodosius himself.

Equally relevant to the *Life of Theodulus* is what Proclus accomplished as urban prefect while he was still alive. Like a stylite, Proclus is famous for raising one of the most important columns in the city of Constantinople, the Theodo-

[76] See especially Zosimus, *New History*, 4.45.1.

[77] For one decree addressed to Proclus when he served as urban prefect, see *Codex Theodosianus*, 4.4.2, which can be dated to 23 January 389.

[78] Rebenich, "Beobachtungen."

[79] Zosimus was adamant that Tatianus and Proclus had discharged their offices honourably and without corruption. Zosimus, *New History*, 4.52.1

[80] "The necks of sons, dripping with blood, lay fallen before their fathers, struck by the axe. An aged father, once a consul, survived the death of his son only to be forced into exile" (*iuvenum rorantia colla ante patrum vultus stricta cecidere securi; ibat grandaevus nato moriente superstes post trabeas exul*), *Ad Rufinum* 1.239–243.

[81] Zosimus also seems to exonerate Theodosius from any direct responsibility in this affair. Cf. Zosimus, *New History*, 4.52.3–4.

[82] Ἔπειτα τοῦτον τῷ θρόνῳ ὑγιασθέντα κελεύσει ἡμετέρᾳ ἐγκαταστήσωμεν, εἴ γε καὶ περιεσόμεθα, *Life of Theodulus* 6.

sian Obelisk, which remains standing *in situ* in the hippodrome today [Fig. 1.][83] After Theodosius's defeat of Magnus Maximus, he entrusted Proclus with erecting this Egyptian obelisk, which had been retrieved and unfortunately damaged en route from Alexandria, in the hippodrome in 390.[84] Proclus's leading role in this monumental endeavour was even memorialised on the obelisk's base. On the north-eastern face of the base, the raising of the obelisk is illustrated with a series of small scenes, and just to the left of center stands a figure, almost certainly Proclus, directing the work [Fig. 2.].[85] Moreover, Latin and Greek verse inscriptions are found on the south-east and north-west faces of the base respectively,[86] both prominently displaying Proclus's name. The Latin inscription is as follows [Fig. 3.]:

DIFFICILIS QVONDAM DOMINIS PARERE SERENIS
IVSSVS ET EXTINCTIS PALMAM PORTARE TYRANNIS
OMNIA THEODOSIO CEDVNT SVBOLIQVE PERENNI
TER DENIS SIC VICTVS EGO D<O>MITVSQVE DIEBVS
IVDICE SVB PROCLO SV<PERA>S ELATVS AD AVRAS

Once unruly, I was commanded to obey serene masters
And to carry the victory for them now that the tyrants have
been vanquished. All yield to Theodosius and his eternal progeny.
In thrice ten days' time, I also was defeated and conquered,
Raised to the sky above by Proclus *iudex*.

On the other side, the Greek reads [Fig. 4.]:

ΚΙΟΝΑ ΤΕΤΡΑΠΛΕΥΡΟΝ ΑΕΙ ΧΘΟΝΙ ΚΕΙΜΕΝΟΝ ΑΧΘΟC
ΜΟΥΝΟC ΑΝΑCΤΗCΑΙ ΘΕΥΔΟCΙΟC ΒΑCΙΛΕΥC
ΤΟΛΜΗCΑC ΠΡΟΚΛΩ ΕΠΕΚΕΚΛΕΤΟ ΚΑΙ ΤΟCΟC ΕCΤΗ
ΚΙΩΝ ΗΕΛΙΟΙC ΕΝ ΤΡΙΑΚΟΝΤΑΔΥΩ[87]

[83] The literature on the Theodosian Obelisk in particular and the hippodrome more generally is vast. For a very recent survey, see Akyürek, *The Hippodrome*, but see also some representative studies, Basset, "Antiquities in the Hippodrome," Geyssen, "Obelisk Base," Safran, "Points of View," and Yoncacı-Arslan, "Christianizing the Skyline."
[84] Geyssen, "Obelisk Base," 47–48.
[85] On the identification of this figure with Proclus, see Akyürek, *The Hippodrome*, 26.
[86] As Linda Safran has pointed out, the imperial language of Latin faces the palace, while the Greek faces outward towards the city. Safran, "Points of View," 419–20.
[87] *CIL* 3, 737. There is some uncertainty about the original form of Proclus's name in the Greek. The inscription currently reads ΠΡΟΚΛΟC, but these letters replace the originals effaced through *damnatio memoriae*. The nominative Πρόκλος is certainly incorrect as the syntax and meaning would not fit the elevated, archaic style of the elegiacs. The accusative Πρόκλον and the dative Πρόκλῳ have both been proposed, but I favor Πρόκλῳ on metrical grounds. Furthermore, as the spacing of the letters in the inscription shows (cf. Fig. 3), six letters fit the space of the effacе-

The four-sided column lay ever a burden upon the earth,
which the Emperor Theodosius alone dared to raise.
He commanded Proclus, and this great column
stood upright in thirty-two passes of the sun.

As these two inscriptions show, Proclus's name was displayed next to that of Theodosius on a prominent column located at the core of Constantinopolitan public life.[88] Equally conspicuous is the fact that his name has been effaced through *damnatio memoriae*, which occurred during his fall from grace, and was clumsily replaced sometime later.[89] This means that a later reader, even if uncertain of the exact details of the urban prefect's career, would be sure that Proclus had come to some ill end within the context of Theodosius's court.

The character of Theodulus, therefore, can be confidently read as a caricature of Proclus through their close connection with columns, their identical positions in the court of Theodosius I, and the author's clue to these connections given by Procla's name. But how does this impact our reading of the *Life of Theodulus* as a whole? The answer to this question is twofold. First, the historical Proclus and his calamitous downfall add further weight to the negative characterization of Theodulus as a bumbling, incompetent stylite seen elsewhere in the *Vita*. And second, Theodulus's identification as urban prefect also adds humour and hypocrisy to some of his actions. For example, his refusal to enter the hippodrome in Damascus where Cornelius performed appears even more sanctimonious.[90] Overseeing the hippodrome was one of the primary responsibilities of the urban prefect, and it is even likely that the prefect had a personal office in the hippodrome itself.[91]

## Conclusions

To review, I have argued that the *Life of Theodulus* provides crucial evidence for the critical reception of stylites. To make this argument, I demonstrate how its anonymous author parodied two late antique literary texts, namely the *Life of Alypius the Stylite* and the *History of the Monks of Egypt*, as well as the historical career and downfall of Proclus, who served as urban prefect under Theodosius I. The result of this multifaceted parody is an enigmatic 'hagiography'

ment better than seven, especially because the nus (N) are typically wider than the sigmas (C) in the inscription.

[88] Akyürek, *Hippodrome*, 4.

[89] Safran, "Points of View," 410.

[90] Cornelius's presence in the hippodrome in Damascus is an invention of the author of the *Life of Theodulus*. There is no corresponding detail in the *History of the Monks of Egypt*. Cf. *Life of Theodulus* 15–16.

[91] Safran, "Points of View," 416 n. 20.

that appears to be a generic ethical tale but under closer inspection is revealed to be something more. That the *Life of Theodulus* critiques stylites, therefore, is beyond doubt, but how far this criticism can be taken, how seriously it is meant, and what the author's motivations were for composing this text must be further unpacked and explained.

I find two themes that emerge from reading the text as I have proposed to be particularly useful in beginning to answer these questions. The first is the assessment of asceticism and marriage as competing paths to Christian virtue that develops over the course of the text. In the first half of the *Vita*, victory seems to be clearly on the side of asceticism, but, as I demonstrate in Section 2.2, the second half of the *Vita* complicates this view when the introduction of Cornelius and his compassion for a woman neglected by her husband forces readers to reassess earlier assumptions. The second theme is the tension between the conspicuous performance of great wonders in public and the secret virtue of those who work their deeds in private, characterized respectively by Theodulus and Cornelius.[92] The intersection of these two themes, I think, does much to explain the presence of stylites in this text. The author was not necessarily interested in his imaginary saint's stylitism for its own sake, but in the rhetorical capital of the stylite as representing ostentatious piety *par excellence*. Stylites fit neatly into both of these discourses, and their paradoxical nature is rich for parody.

To conclude, I want to stress that my reading of the *Life of Theodulus* is neither exhaustive nor final. As the first scholarly article written on this text, my interpretation is necessarily preliminary and must be tested under wider scrutiny. There are also many other issues, some of them fundamental, which I have addressed only in passing or not at all (for example, the date, location, and circumstances of the text's composition).[93] There is, therefore, still much to do, and I hope that this essay brings this fascinating text to the attention of scholars of hagiography.[94]

[92] Rizos, de Reichenfeld, and Cerioni made a similar observation about Cornelius as a sort of secret saint in their entry on Theodulus. See Rizos, de Reichenfeld, and Cerioni, "Theodoulos the Stylite."

[93] These issues pose several difficulties and need to be explored further. Currently, I am only comfortable with setting the *terminus post quem* at the composition of the *Life of Alypius* (mid-seventh century?) and the *terminus ante quem* at the date of the single extant manuscript (eleventh century).

[94] The lack of any modern language translation and the poor quality of the only printed Greek text remain major obstacles to accessibility. I am working to publish my edition and translation as soon as possible to remedy this.

*Figure 1. The Obelisk of Theodosius with the Serpent Column in the foreground, Hippodrome, Istanbul (facing north). Photo by the author, October 2019.*

*Figure 2. The raising of the obelisk in the hippodrome (lower register). The figure standing on a pedestal and overlooking the work (left of center) is probably intended to be Proclus himself. North-eastern face of obelisk base. Photo by the author, October 2019.*

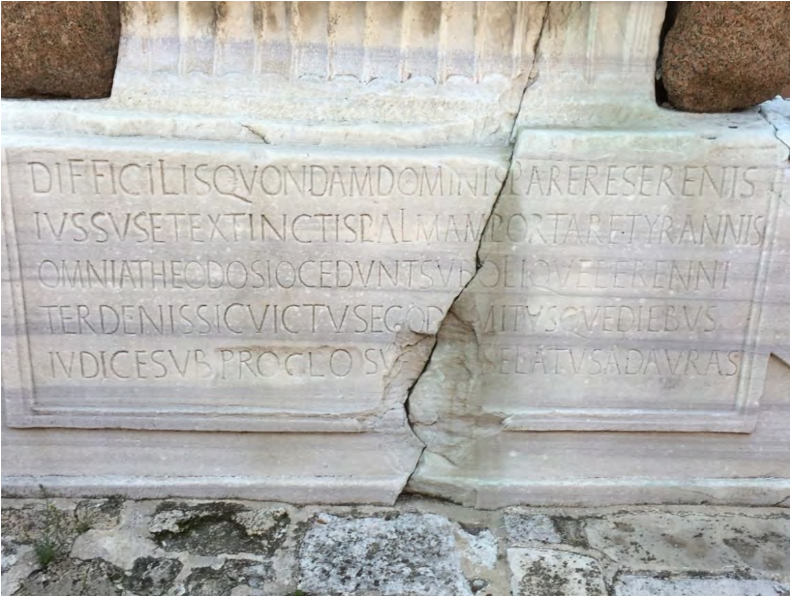


*Figure 3. Latin dedicatory inscription, south-eastern face of obelisk base. Photo by the author, October 2019.*

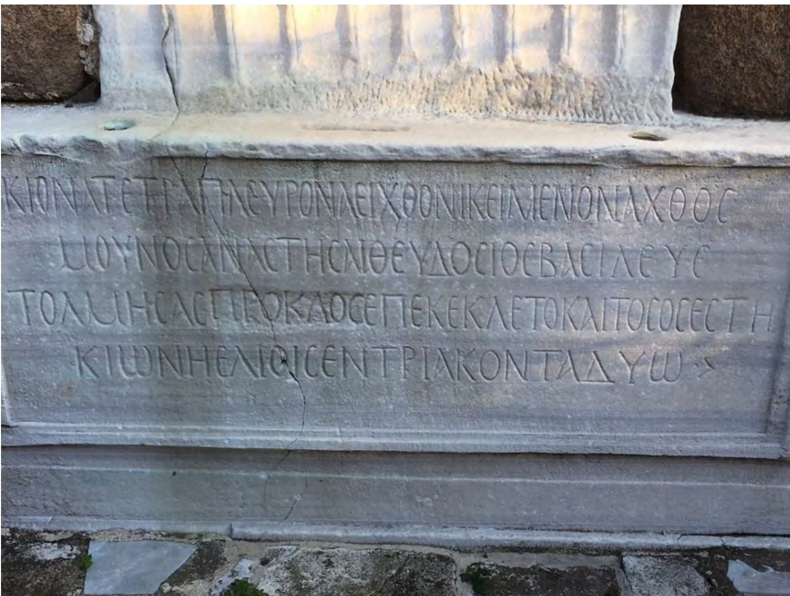


*Figure 4. Greek dedicatory inscription, north-western face of obelisk base. Photo by the author, October 2019.*

# Bibliography

## Sources

Aelius Theon, *Progymnasmata*: Michel Patillon and Giancarlo Bolognesi, ed. *Aelius Théon: Progymnasmata*. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1997.

Aphthonius, *Progymnasmata*: H. Rabe, ed. *Aphthonii progymnasmata*, Rhetores Graeci 10. Leipzig: Teubner, 1926.

Claudian, *In Rufinum*: J. B. Hall, ed. *Claudii Claudiani Carmina*. Leipzig: Teubner, 1985.

*Codex Theodosianus*: Theodor Mommsen and Paul Meyer, ed. *Theodosiani libri XVI cum constitutionibus Sirmondianis et leges Novellae ad Theodosianum pertinentes*. Berlin: Weidemann, 1905.

Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks*: Bruno Krusch, ed. *Libri historiarum X*, Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum I.1 (fasc. 2), editio altera. Hannover: Hahn, 1942.

*History of the Monks of Egypt*: André-Jean Festugière, ed. and trans. *Historia monachorum in Aegypto*, Subsidia Hagiographica 53. Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1971.

Jerome, *Epistles*: Isidore Hilberg, ed. *Sancti Eusebii Hieronymi Epistulae*, CSEL 54–56. Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1910–1918.

*Life of Alypius the Stylite* (*BHG* 65): Hippolyte Delehaye, ed. *Les Saints stylites*, Subsidia hagiographica 14. Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1923, 148–69.

*Life of Daniel the Stylite* (*BHG* 489): Hippolyte Delehaye, ed. *Les Saints stylites*, Subsidia hagiographica 14. Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1923, 1–94.

*Life of Euphrosyne* (*BHO* 288): Paul Bedjan, ed. *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum*, vol. 5, 7. Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1893, 386–405.

*Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion* (*BHG* 979): Hippolyte Delehaye, ed. *Acta Sanctorum: Novembris* III. Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1910, repr. 1965, 508–88.

*Life of Luke the Stylite* (*BHG* 2239): Hippolyte Delehaye, ed. *Les Saints stylites*, Subsidia Hagiographica 14. Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1923, 195–237, and cf. F. Vanderstuyf. "Vie de saint Luc le stylite (879–979)." *Patrologia orientalis* 11 (Paris, 1915): 145–299.

*Life of Martha, the Mother of Symeon Stylites the Younger* (*BHG* 1174): Paul van den Ven, ed. and trans. *La Vie ancienne de S. Syméon Stylite le Jeune (521–592)*, 2 vols. Subsidia Hagiographica 32. Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1962, 1970, vol. 2, 253–314.

*Life of Symeon Stylites the Younger* (*BHG* 1689): Paul van den Ven, ed. and trans. *La Vie ancienne de S. Syméon Stylite le Jeune (521–592)*, 2 vols.

Subsidia Hagiographica 32. Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1962, 1970, vol. 1, 1–224.

*Life of Theodulus the Stylite* (*BHG* 1785): *Acta Sanctorum*: *Maii VI* (1688): 756–65, tert. ed. 748–55; the text used in this chapter comes from a new edition and translation in preparation by Charles Kuper.

*Menologion of Basil II*: Vat. gr. 1613 (https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.gr.1613); J.-P. Migne, ed. *Patrologiae cursus completus* (series Graeca) 117, 20-332. Paris: Migne, 1864.

*Novellae*: W. Kroll and R. Schöll, ed. *Corpus iuris civilis,* vol. 3, 1-795. Berlin: Weidmann, 1895, repr. 1968.

Pseudo-Romanos the Melodist, *Kontakion on Symeon Stylites the Elder*: P. Maas and C. A. Trypanis, ed. *Sancti Romani Melodi Cantica: Cantica Dubia*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 1970.

Septuagint (LXX): A. Rahlfs, ed. *Septuaginta*, 2 vols. 9th edn. Stuttgart: Württemberg Bible Society, 1935, repr. 1971.

Symeon Stylites the Younger, *Homilies*: Hom. 1–3, Paul van den Ven. "Les écrits de S. Syméon Stylite le Jeune avec trois sermons inédits." *Le Muséon* 70 (1957): 33–55; Hom. 4–30, Angelo Mai, ed. *Novae patrum bibliothecae*, vol. 8, part 3. Rome: Typis Sacri Consilii Propagando Christiano Nomini, 1871, 4–156.

*Synaxarion of Constantinople*: Hippolyte Delehaye, ed. *Synaxarium ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae e codice Sirmondiano nunc Berolinensi*. Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1902.

Zosimus, *Historia Nova*: F. Paschoud, ed. and trans. *Zosime. Histoire nouvelle*, vols. 1–3.2. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1971–1989.

## Secondary Literature

Akyürek, Engin. *The Hippodrome of Constantinople*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021.

Basset, Sarah Guberti. "The Antiquities in the Hippodrome of Constantinople." *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 45 (1991): 87–96.

Biscop, Jean-Luc. "Le sanctuaire et le village des pèlerins à Saint-Syméon-le-Stylite (Syrie du Nord): nouvelles recherches, nouvelles méthodes." *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* 153.4 (2009): 1421–44.

Blumell, Lincoln H. and Thomas A. Wayment, ed. *Christian Oxyrhynchus: Texts, Documents, and Sources*. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2015.

Boero, Dina. "Symeon and the Making of the Stylite: The Construction of Sanctity in Late Antique Syria." PhD diss., University of Southern California, 2015.

Boero, Dina. "Between Gift and Commodity: The Distribution of Tokens and Material Substances at the Pilgrimage Sites of Stylites." In *Syriac Hagiography: Texts and Beyond*, edited by Flavia Ruani and Sergey Minov, 281–339. Leiden: Brill, 2021.

Boero, Dina and Charles Kuper. "Steps toward a Study of Symeon the Stylite the Younger and his Saint's Cult." *Studies in Late Antiquity* 4.4 (2020): 370–407.

Brown, Peter. "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity." *The Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971): 80–101.

Cain, Andrew. *The Greek 'Historia monachorum in Aegypto': Monastic Hagiography in the Late Fourth Century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

Cerno, Marianna. "Aquileia e l'agiografia di Salona." In *Le Passioni dei martiri aquileiesi e istriani II*, Fonti per la Storia della Chiesa in Friuli. Serie Medievale 14, edited by E. Colombi, 797–1031. Roma-Udine: Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medioevo, Istituto Pio Paschini, 2013.

Constantinou, Stavroula. "Satirical Elements in Hagiographical Narratives." In *Satire in the Middle Byzantine Period: The Golden Age of Laughter?*, edited by Przemysław Marciniak and Ingela Nilsson, 81–103. Leiden: Brill, 2021.

*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* (CIL). Berlin: Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1863–.

Delehaye, Hippolyte. "Les femmes stylites." *Analecta Bollandiana* 27 (1908): 391–92.

Delahaye, Hippolyte. *Les saints stylites*, Subsidia Hagiographica 14. Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1923.

Delahaye, Hippolyte. "Les ampoules et les médaillons de Bobbio." *Journal des savants* 10 (1929): 453–57.

Eichner, Ina. "Das Bischofsviertel von Hadrianoupolis — Standort für ein Martyrion des heiligen Alypios?" In *Lebenswelten zwischen Archäologie und Geschichte. Festschrift für Falko Daim zu seinem 65. Geburtstag*, edited by Jörg Drauschke, Ewald Kislinger, Karin Kühtreiber, Thomas Kühtreiber, Gabriele Scharrer-Liska, and Tivadar Vida, 679–88. Mainz: Verlag des Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums, 2018.

Galatariotou, Catia. *The Making of a Saint: The Life, Times, and Sanctification of Neophytos the Recluse*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Geyssen, John. "Presentations of Victory on the Theodosian Obelisk Base." *Byzantion* 68 (1998): 47–55.

Halkin, François. *Inédits byzantins d'Ochrida, Candie et Moscou*. Subsidia Hagiographica 38. Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1963.

Harvey, Susan Ashbrook. "The Sense of a Stylite: Perspectives on Simeon the Elder." *Vigiliae Christianae* 42.4 (1988): 376–94.

Henry, Ayşe. "The Pilgrimage Center of St. Symeon the Younger: Designed by Angels, Supervised by a Saint, Constructed by Pilgrims." PhD diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2015.

Hinterberger, Martin. "Byzantine Hagiography and its Literary Genres. Some Critical Observations." In *The Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography. Volume II: Genres and Contexts*, edited by Stephanos Efthymiadis, 25–60. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014.

Kazhdan, Alexander, Alice-Mary Talbot, *et al*. *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*. 3 vols. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.

Kuper, Charles. "Alypios the Stylite." In *The Cult of the Saints: A research project on the Cult of Saints from its origins to circa AD 700, across the entire Christian world*, 2018 (http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk/record.php?recid=E06497).

Kuper, Charles. "The Pseudo-Romanos *Kontakion on Symeon Stylites the Elder*." *Patristica Nordica Annuaria* 34 (2019): 79–98.

Lampe, G. W. H. *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961.

Lane Fox, Robert. "The *Life of Daniel*." In *Portraits: Biographical Representations in the Greek and Latin Literature of the Roman Empire*, edited by Mark J. Edwards and Simon Swain, 175–225. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997.

Marciniak, Przemysław and Ingela Nilsson, ed. *Satire in the Middle Byzantine Period: The Golden Age of Laughter?* Leiden: Brill, 2021.

Marsengill, Katherine. "The Christian Reception of Sculpture in Late Antiquity and the Historical Reception of Late Antique Christian Sculpture." *Journal of the Bible and Its Reception* 1.1 (2014): 67–101.

Martindale, J. R., A. H. Jones, and J. Morris, ed. *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*. 3 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971–1992.

McEvoy, Meaghan. "Emperors, Aristocrats, and Columns: Christian Imperial Politics in the Late Fifth Century CE as Reflected in the *Life of Daniel the Stylite*." *Journal of Late Antiquity* 15.2 (2022): 428–61.

Messis, Charis and Ingela Nilsson. "Parody in Byzantine Literature." In *Satire in the Middle Byzantine Period: The Golden Age of Laughter?*, edited by Przemysław Marciniak and Ingela Nilsson, 62–78. Leiden: Brill, 2021.

Nilsson, Ingela. "It is Difficult Not to Write Satire: A Brief Introduction to the Satirical Mode." In *Satire in the Middle Byzantine Period: The Golden Age of Laughter?*, edited by Przemysław Marciniak and Ingela Nilsson, 1–9. Leiden: Brill, 2021.

Parker, Lucy. "Paradigmatic Piety: Liturgy in the *Life of Martha, Mother of Symeon Stylites the Younger*." *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 24.1 (2016): 99–125.

Parker, Lucy. *Symeon Stylites the Younger and Late Antique Antioch: From Hagiography to History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022.

Rebenich, S. "Beobachtungen zum Sturz des Tatianus und des Proculus." *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 76 (1989): 153–65.

Rizos, Efthymios, Giovanni Hermanin de Reichenfeld, and Lavinia Cerioni. "Theodoulos the Stylite." In *The Cult of the Saints: A research project on the Cult of Saints from its origins to circa AD 700, across the entire Christian world*, 2018, (http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk/record.php?recid=E06497).

Safran, Linda. "Points of View: The Theodosian Obelisk Base in Context." *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 34 (1993): 409–35.

Schachner, Lukas Amadeus. "The Archaeology of the Stylite." In *Religious Diversity in Late Antiquity*, Late Antique Archaeology 6, edited by David M. Gwynn, Susanne Bangert, and Luke Lavan, 329–97. Boston: Brill, 2010.

Vööbus, Arthur, ed. and trans. *Syriac and Arabic Documents Regarding Legislation Relative to Syrian Monasticism*. Stockholm: Etse, 1960.

Yoncacı-Arslan, Pelin. "Christianizing the Skyline: The Appropriation of the Pagan Honorary Column in Early Constantinople." PhD diss., University of California at Los Angeles, 2015.

BARBARA CROSTINI

# Corpse Bride and Holy Relic: Forgiving Necrophilia in Antonios's *Life of St Symeon the Stylite the Elder**

> *Will a sexuality that stands opposed to the possibilities of society, in opposition to procreation, that sickens our minds, that has the potential to destroy life in its desire for death, be forever marginalized because of its degeneration? … Is there some place in our memory where necrophilia is a rite of passage? Somewhere to enact the 'fundamental differentiation' between life and death? … Or is this sexual intensity, this coexistence of potential life with death, always to be denounced as dark and desperate?*
>
> (Steve Finbow, *Grave Desire*)[1]

In the first posthumous miracle of the first Syrian stylite saint, Symeon the Elder, a 'place in our memory' may be found where even the necrophilic taboo is examined and enlightened by the mercy of God. Antonios's Greek *Life of Symeon* (henceforth LSG) describes, at chapter 31, how the saint effected a miracle during the last journey that took his corpse from his column at Telanissos to the city of Antioch.[2] As the funeral cortège moved past a cemetery, a demoniac living in the tombs is healed. Antonios provides an explanation for the demoniac's state in the form of a short background story. Apparently, the man had been drawn to open the tomb of a woman he had fallen in love with. She

* Thanks are due to Christian Høgel and Georgia Frank for precious comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

[1] Finbow, *Grave Desire*, unpaginated online version.

[2] In this article, LSG always refers to Antonios's version, rather than to Theodoret's, since the latter's account did not originally include Symeon's death. I will use the spelling of the name Symeon with a 'y' as I mostly speak about the Greek text. For all versions, I cite the English translations by Doran, *Lives of Simeon Stylites*.

was married, and although while living he had not consummated his passion, after her death he had sought to do so. He was therefore struck deaf and dumb and lived as a wild being in that desolate place of the dead.

While a great deal of scholarly attention has been bestowed on the death of Symeon the Stylite as a sensitive point in which to grasp the import of the various versions of the story of the founder of pillar asceticism,[3] the healing of the demoniac has gone practically unnoticed. The reasons for this oversight might rest with a sense of respect for ancient authors, or perhaps with modern sensitivities. In any case, the details of Antonios's account of Symeon's posthumous miracle, foregrounding necrophilia, have so far gone unremarked.

The purpose of this essay is to draw attention to this neglected passage, and to analyze the implications of Antonios's identification of necrophilia as the cause of the affliction suffered by the man who receives the saint's healing. While I cannot solve the intricate puzzle concerning the relative place of each source about Symeon, if ever a solution were possible, I apply a literary rather than a historical perspective to my analysis. By foregrounding the socio-cultural importance of stories circulating widely in the Byzantine world, I emphasize the folkloristic aspect of saints' stories, whose themes return across time in literature. For this reason, the article concludes by briefly tracing the reception of the necrophilic theme with an example from Walter Map's *Courtier's Trifles*.

While a surfeit of piety might have led even scholarly analysis of this passage to avoid mention of necrophilia by simply ignoring the cause of the demoniac's sin, I argue that only by entering this forbidden and forbidding dimension, easily considered alien to a concept of sanctity, can the full impact of Antonios's composition be grasped. In fact, while ostensibly abandoning the Gospel pattern in form, Antonios strikes an evangelical depth that not only adheres to, but even goes beyond, the use of those models. The specific background of necrophilia attached to the first posthumous miracle of Symeon confers an added dimension to the scene: the saint not only physically restores the man's powers of communication with the world around him, but also undoes the sin that had warped those powers through misplaced love. Like Jesus's miracles, Symeon redeems the man's entire fallen condition, granting him renewed health and freedom by redefining the boundaries between life and death.

## A Blind Spot in Symeon Scholarship

The scholarly discussion on the different versions of the *Life of Symeon the Stylite the Elder* has focused on the description of his death in the extant versions and the problem of reconciling different chronologies for the events surrounding

[3] Flusin, "Syméon et les philologues."

his death. Bernard Flusin has summarized the debate in a helpful article, trying to go beyond what had effectively become a war between the historical value of the ancient Syriac Vita and the anecdotical, possibly much later tenor of the LSG.[4] Paul Peeters, who denigrated Antonios's account as a spurious construct from sixth-century Constantinople,[5] did not mention the necrophilic passage, even though it might have provided further ammunition to his position. Flusin considers that the less choreographed account of Symeon's death in LSG is more spontaneous and therefore more likely.[6] Dwelling on the details concerning Symeon's burial procession could undermine this attempt at redeeming the Greek tradition. In the interest of Antonios's rehabilitation, focus on the similarities of the funeral procession and the healing miracle rather than on the embarrassing extra details found in the Greek narrative was required.

As summarized in scholarship, the outline of this episode in LSG, ch. 31,[7] and in the Syriac *Vitas* (V, ch. 127; B, ch. 135)[8] appears identical: the saint's dead body is carried in procession on a cart to Antioch and, on the way, he performs a healing. Commentators refer to this passage in generic terms as a miracle of healing, a self-evident building-block (*topos*) of hagiography that does not call for further unpacking. The differences are glossed over. Roberta Mazza speaks of "un ultimo miracolo … compiuto in presenza del feretro lungo la strada per Antiochia" (a last miracle… accomplished before the corpse along the road to Antioch),[9] while in his introduction to the Spanish translation, José Simón Palmer briefly mentions "el milagro de la curación de un poseído" (the miracle of healing of a possessed).[10] Palmer's otherwise meticulous comparative discussion says nothing at all about this episode. Bernard Flusin notes simply the coincidence between the versions of a "guérison d'un possédé habitant un tombeau".[11] Only Robert Doran spends a few remarks about this passage in the introduction to his translations of the different versions, to which I return below.[12]

[4] Flusin, "Syméon et les philologues." See also the shorter summary of the *status quaestionis* in Efthymiadis with Déroche *et al.*, "Greek Hagiography in Late Antiquity," 51–52.

[5] Peeters, "Un saint hellénisé," 93–136 (with thanks to Johan Heldt for help with this reference); argument summarized in Flusin, "Syméon et les philologues," 11–12.

[6] Flusin, "Syméon et les philologues," 17–18.

[7] *Das Leben des heiligen Symeon Stylites*, ed. Lietzmann, 72–77 (parallel versions of the Greek and apparatus of 4 manuscripts); *Lives of Simeon Stylites*, ed. Doran, 99.

[8] The Vatican Vita (V) was edited by Assemani and translated by Doran, *Lives of Simeon Stylites*, ch. 127 at 193–94. The Vita B was edited by Bedjan and translated by Lent, "Life of St. Simeon," ch. 135 at 642–43, available at https://www.tertullian.org/fathers/simeon_stylites_vita_01_trans.htm (accessed 6 June 2022). For reference to the parallel passages in all the Syrian versions, see Doran, *Lives of Simeon Stylites*, Appendix I, 205 and Boero, "Making a Manuscript," 63, 65, 67. This passage is present in all three known versions.

[9] Mazza, "Di fronte alla città."

[10] *La Vida sobre una columna: Vida de Simeón Estilita, Vida de Daniel Estilita*, ed. Palmer, 15.

[11] Flusin, "Syméon et les philologues," 4.

[12] *Lives of Simeon Stylites*, 55–57.

No reference is made to the man's purported necrophilia. Summaries of this episode highlight similar plots in the various versions and thereby discourage further comparison. Besides the tendency to rehabilitate LSG, another reason for this blind spot might be that, since this episode does not provide historical fact, its analysis can serve no useful purpose.[13] The historical approach continues to dominate discussion, despite Susan Ashbrook Harvey's encompassing implementation of a more subtle, spiritual approach to Saint Symeon beyond the purely historical.[14] But perhaps blindness towards this episode goes even deeper, touching more directly on the subject-matter involved in the explanation.

What effect does the insertion of the theme of necrophilia, not found in Syriac, have upon the story of Symeon's burial and how does it reflect on the image of the saint? Is this a gratuitous addition on Antonios's part, to satisfy a sterile curiosity about the man's condition? Or does it derive from, or point to, folkloristic motifs that potentially tarnish the authentic tradition of the memory of the great stylite saint? Peeter's impression that LSG is a fictional and unreliable reworking of a Syriac original may well be confirmed, unless this odd aside, reading as an authorial insertion, can be shown to serve some further purpose. Although at first sight Antonios's additions seem artificial, literary, and perhaps also in bad taste, further analysis shows that the grueling anecdote about the demoniac's necrophilia does not merely serve to satisfy a superficial, base curiosity, but rather pointedly amplifies the significance of the saint, specifically by furthering a meditation on the reception of his relics. This striking scene powerfully brings together the themes of love and sex, fully dramatizing the outline of an evangelical-type miracle story and adding value to it. By scrutinizing Antonios's text more closely in its various recensions in comparison to the parallel passage in Syriac *Vitas*, I aim to bring chapter 31 of LSG into the wider scholarly discussion and to provide some answers to the questions posed above.

## The First Posthumous Miracle: Comparing Syriac and Greek Versions

Among the few elements that the Syriac and Greek versions of Symeon's *Life* have in common is the saint's first –and only recorded– posthumous miracle.[15]

[13] Flusin's French translation of the Vita B (Bedjan), printed as an appendix to his article, omits this passage altogether: Flusin, "Syméon et les philologues," 23.

[14] Harvey, "Sense of a Stylite," 378.

[15] *La Vida sobre una columna*, 17–19; *Lives of Simeon Stylites*, 55: "There are … only four narrative episodes in common". Of these, only two are contained in all three sources: Symeon's first conversion and the cord which Symeon wrapped around his waist while still at Teleda. The funeral procession is the third, shared by Syriac and Antonios, while an apology for stylitism is found only in Theodoret and Syriac.

John Doran helpfully prints a parallel text of this episode in his translations.[16] Doran's remarks are a good starting point for grasping the essential elements in the comparison. He says: "This healing of a deaf and dumb man follows the basic pattern of a miracle and one can immediately note expansions and divergences between the two accounts. Antonius explains why the man was possessed; the Syriac shows Scripture being fulfilled".[17] With this comment, Doran sets up a basic contrast between the two accounts that reflects, according to him, different mentalities: the Greek approach is to provide causes in human terms, while the Syrian attitude is to proceed to an understanding closer to Scripture. Doran's reticence in entering the details of the cause offered by the Greek *Vita* is in line with the general erasure of this episode in scholarship noted above.

Doran also highlights another difference by pointing out that in the Greek *Life* the deranged man interacts with other people coming to give him food and drink, whereas "in the Syriac Life no one dares approach him".[18] While the exclusion of the demoniac from Syrian society is total, the charitable attitude of passers-by in the versions of LSG is variously exploited in relation to the scene, as we shall see. These observations are insightful, calling for further analysis. Disappointingly, Doran does not discuss these differences further. Rather, following the pattern of the discovery of hagiographical *topoi*, he is content to note that this episode "follows *the basic pattern* of a miracle" and again stresses how "[s]uch a healing also belongs to the *general narrative pattern* which describes the arrival of relics in a town".[19] While *topoi* can provide useful tools for literary analysis, recognizing standard motifs is more often, as in this case, treated as an end in itself, which dispenses from, rather than leads to, further comment.

Doran is concerned to distance the two sources, Syriac and Greek, even in the passages that they have in common, in order to claim that the accounts run parallel according to conventions for the genre rather than show dependence on one another.[20] Although in a comparison it is natural to assume, given the relative dating of the manuscripts,[21] that Antonios elaborated on the Syriac text, Susan Ashbrook Harvey has pointed out that Antonios may also have drawn from independent, oral source material.[22] At the current state of research, with the dossier only partially critically edited,[23] it is not possible to state with precision how the extant texts relate to each other. By focusing on the moment of the

[16] *Lives of Simeon Stylites*, 55–56, comparing the text by Antonios with the Syriac in ms V.
[17] *Lives of Simeon Stylites*, 56.
[18] *Lives of Simeon Stylites*, 56.
[19] *Lives of Simeon Stylites*, 26.
[20] *Lives of Simeon Stylites*, 57: "It is to this general pattern that Simeon's funeral procession should be related, rather than to dependence of one story on another".
[21] Brock, "Syriac Hagiography," 260, 268, the BHO 1124 version of the Syriac life is dated only 14 years after the saint's death; Boero, "Making a Manuscript."
[22] Harvey, "Sense of a Stylite," 386.
[23] *Das Leben des heiligen Symeon*; for the inadequacy of Lietzmann's edition, see Flusin, "Syméon et les philologues," 8.

saint's death, Flusin attributes differences in narrative to different perspectives and aims: while the Syriac *Life* publicizes a cult around the column at Telanissos, the Greek version aims at establishing the importance of Symeon's portable relics, first enshrined at Antioch, and then also taken to Constantinople.[24]

Flusin nuances the cruder distinction between ethnic communities that Lietzmann, the editor of the Greek versions, had adopted as his meter for the change of viewpoint in the narratives. Such clear-cut differences are difficult to maintain when we simply do not know enough about the context of these texts to hazard such precise theories.[25] A similar dichotomy is highlighted by Antony Eastmond, as the title of his article 'Body vs Column' neatly encapsulates.[26] Surely these tensions reflect not only the transition from a cult of a living person to that of a dead saint (since sanctity could anyway only be sanctioned after death), but also, to an extent, retrace the complex connections between Syria and Byzantium, as the cult of stylites moved north towards the capital, Constantinople. The complete 'transfer' of the cult of stylite saints to Byzantium required the mediation of a home-spun exemplar: Daniel the Stylite.[27] Refashioning the stylite hero in a manner that would ensure the survival and transmission of his cult entailed making it conform to audience expectations.

## Narrative in the Biblical Mould

As Nancy Caciola writes, "Christianity early developed a strong and distinctive thanatology that came to be at the center of its narrative of human history and salvation."[28] In her sharp and insightful book, *Afterlives*, Caciola retraces the evolution of a cult that seemed to others "unusually macabre", because it revolved around "veneration of the violently killed", the martyrs, in places such as cemeteries, using their bones and body parts as relics.[29] Antonios's chapter 31 brings this aspect of the Christian religion especially to the fore by combining Symeon's relics with the background to his healed devotee's experience and the cause of his former sickness.

As Doran noted, the anonymous compiler of the Syriac *Life* wrote about his hero with Scriptures as model. He cast this episode in the mould of the healing of the Gerasene demoniac in the Gospel of Mark (Mark 5:1–17; cf. Lk

[24] Flusin, "Syméon et les philologues," 15–16.
[25] Flusin, "Syméon et les philologues," 16.
[26] Eastmond, "Body vs Column."
[27] On Byzantine reception of stylites, see Caseau and Fayant, "Le renouveau du culte"; on Daniel, Lane Fox, "*Life of Daniel*"; Eastmond, "Body vs Column," 91–92. I am unconvinced that the early historicity of this text can be satisfactorily proved: see Introduction at p. 13.
[28] Caciola, *Afterlives*, 25.
[29] Caciola, *Afterlives*, 25. The phenomenon, then, is much more ancient that its ninth-century flourishing on which see Geary, *Living with the Dead*, 178–80.

8:26–37). The setting of the cemetery, as a special and secluded place, functions as a shorthand linking the two texts. As in the Gospel passage, a few lines are devoted to outlining the man's subhuman state. In both cases, a man has been rendered inhuman by an evil, unclean spirit who lives in him; as a consequence, he lives among tombs rather than in normal human dwellings. His bestial sounds and extraordinary strength discourage other people from coming near, so that consciousness of him is only obtained at a distance:

| *Vsyr* ch. 127, Doran, p. 193 | Mark 5, 2–5 |
| --- | --- |
| For a man in whom dwelt an evil spirit had lived among the tombs for many years. (...) His ability to speak intelligently had been taken away, and his understanding removed. He roared all the time and paced back and forth at the entrance of the cemetery. He did not recognize anyone and no one dared approach him for fear and because of the sound of his roaring. | [A] man with an impure spirit came from the tombs to meet [Jesus]. This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain. For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones. |

The presence of the evil spirit makes these men feral and fearsome. They are strange and unapproachable.[30]

By contrast to other humans, who keep a distance from any deranged and dangerous being, Jesus attracts the person to him when passing by and effects a salvific transformation. Both cemetery-dwellers are drawn to their respective source of healing:

| *Vsyr* ch. 127, Doran, p. 193 | Mark 5, 6–8 |
| --- | --- |
| When he saw the saint's body passing by on the chariot –as if heaven's mercies shone on him, as if it were for this that he had been reserved– he left the cemetery where he dwelt and ran at full speed and threw himself on the coffin in which the saint's body lay. | When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. He shouted at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?..." For Jesus had said to him, "Come out of this man, you impure spirit!" |

The verbs – seeing, running, falling down – highlight specular images of the action. As a consequence, Jesus's presence is matched by the bodily remains of

[30] Toensing, "Living Among the Tombs," compares these symptoms to those of mental illness in modern understanding and medical speech.

the saint in his coffin. What sets them apart is the absence of dialogue. Where in the Gospel the exchange is vocal and loud, the Syriac *Life* keeps silent (but the Greek, as we shall see, does not).

The power of Jesus's presence can be compared to that of Symeon's corpse. Both healers have a calming effect that restores reasonableness and banishes derangement; both, too, are in motion, arriving at the spot of healing and then moving on beyond it. The healing on the pattern of the Gerasene demoniac strongly suggests a comparison with the healing, specifically exorcising, activity of Christ.[31]

In the Syriac *Life*, this episode is wrapped in a fateful aura, and the conclusion – the man's complete mental recovery – is presented as fulfilment of Scripture. A verse from Psalm 110 (111):6, "He has shown his people the power of his works", is quoted to seal divine agency through Symeon in the accomplishment of the healing miracle. This psalm also ends in a significant verse that, though not quoted, is well suited to the context of our story: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding" (v. 10). Even though Psalm 110 is not quoted at all in the Greek Life, its penitential message is not alien to it. The sick man's mental derangement becomes clarity of vision when, healed, he follows the saint's procession. The context of memorialization, conversion, forgiveness, and glorification is appropriate to the solemn moment at which the saint manifests his enduring powers.

Antonios's version avoids Scriptural quotations and his narrative deviates from the Gospel model in several details. The man in question is not just mentally deranged by living in tombs, but is also physically deprived of his senses: he is deaf and dumb. Being thus weakened, he is less frightening than his Syrian equivalent. His voice breaks out in a loud but articulate cry, as the scene's dramatic action unfolds through dialogue.[32] Here, Antonios is closer to the Gospel in allowing the man to speak despite his dumbness and to call for his own salvation:

| Antonios's *Life*, transl. Doran, p. 99 | Mark 5:7 |
| --- | --- |
| "Have pity on me, holy one of God, Symeon!" ... The man cried out: "Today I have been saved by you, servant of God, for I had perished in sin". | He shouted at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? In God's name, don't torture me!" |

[31] On the dangers of this activity, entailing closeness to evil powers, see Tiermeyer, "Dumping Your Toxic Waste," 21.

[32] Unlike healing incantations made of unintelligible syllables, the 'spell' is here worked through a normal dialogue. Cf. Webster, "Soundscape," 123.

In this version of the Greek text, there is no question of demonic possession, although, as we shall see below, one version of the Greek text does keep the demonic force in play. The man's senses, including his reason, were all bound by "what had restrained him". This unnamed force is a combination of psycho-physical factors that are developed through the anecdote about the man's necrophilia. Beginning with a sudden halting of the procession, the episode is crafted around the man's living-in-a-tomb experience, and the story of his necrophilia answers the hypothetical spontaneous question from the passers-by, asking what happened to this poor wretch. The healing makes the man intelligent and intelligible, and, as in the conclusion to Psalm 110 (111) quoted in the Syriac *Life*, it guarantees that his dialogue with the (dead) saint proceeds from sanity of mind, one regained through contact with the holy after prolonged contact with unholy and defiled tombs. Here, too, the demoniac shares Symeon's experience on the threshold between the sublime and the repellent.[33]

## Multi-purpose Tombs and Repentant Sinners

As the Gospel passage of the Gerasene demoniac shows, living in tombs was a sign of derangement, of confusion between the world of the living and that of the spirits. But such confusion, or rather, such a wilful pushing of the boundaries between life and death could also be part of the ascetic exercise: to choose to live in a sepulchre was a constant reminder of man's mortal condition.[34] This purpose is well stated in the saying of John the Dwarf: "Shut yourself in a tomb as though you were already dead, so that at all times you will think death is near".[35] Thus, Egyptian ascetics lived in tombs, usually for a period rather than permanently, and examples of their Syrian colleagues are found in Theodoret.[36]

In the Syriac *Life*, before becoming a stylite, Symeon himself lives in a self-made tomb in his monastery's garden: "He dug for himself a spot in the corner of the garden up to his chest. All summer he stood in it in the hot and sultry weather and it was like a fire".[37] The half-bust emergence and the mention of fire conjure up images of eternal purgation. Since inhabiting a tomb was a practice inaugurated by St Antony the Great,[38] this passage may also be intended as a comparison with the paradigmatic ascete and monastic founder. Its short reprise at ch. 22–23,[38] where Symeon asks to spend some time again in the sep-

[33] As well demonstrated by Caseau, "Syméon Stylite l'Ancien."

[34] Kyrtatas, "Living in Tombs."

[35] *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, transl. Ward: John the Dwarf 34, quoted by Kyrtatas, "Living in Tombs," 245.

[36] E.g. Theodoret, *Religious History*, 12.2.

[37] Doran, *Lives of Simeon Stylites*, ch. 16, 112.

[38] Life of Antony, 8: Kyrtatas, "Living in Tombs," 247–48.

ulchre in order to respond to an attack from the devil that had made him blind, strengthens the echoes between Antony the Great's model hagiography attributed to Athanasius of Alexandria and the Syriac *Life* of Symeon. At the same time, Symeon's tomb experience is peculiarly similar to that of the demoniac on whom he takes pity. The parallel has implications for their encounter and may account for the special compassion that the (dead) saint had for the deranged man living in tombs as a kind of involuntary, ongoing expiation of sin. The two men share liminal experiences.

Living in a tomb was associated with extreme expiation of sin. In the case of Alexandra from Palladius's *Historia Lausiaca*, she confined herself for ten years to a tomb "motivated by a severe sense of guilt".[39] Interestingly, her self-burial was intended to forestall the advances of a man who "was distressed in mind because of [her]". Symeon's demoniac shows that not even (real) tombs can effect the quenching of desire. Similarly, another man mentioned in the Lives of the Desert Fathers chose to repent by living in a tomb for the rest of his life.[40] Neither of these tomb-dwellers were perceived as deranged, although their choice may well have been considered odd by some. Their quirky placement was more than just eccentric: it directly related to Christianity's central themes, such as the meditation on death and the message of resurrection.

Nancy Caciola aptly describes the landscape created by the spread of Christianity as a web of tombs: "The symbolic terrain of early Christianity was a grid of graves".[41] Yet, while the areas of interment in the Syriac *Life* appear self-contained, with a designated cemetery area from which the man enters and exits, and the entrance of Symeon's body into Constantine's great church at Antioch is signposted as a first-time innovation, LSG leaves a greater margin of doubt about just how this grave and its deranged inhabitant appeared along the processional road. It specifies that the tomb lay on the right-hand side, an auspicious placing for omens. In Antonios's imagination, less precise boundaries are implied, which correspond well to what we know about the placing of funerary monuments along the roads of Syria. According to De Jong,

> [l]andscapes of burial were both delineated and blurred. The people of Roman Syria separated city and cemetery, but the placement of cemeteries along roads created a spatial link between the living community and the deceased. They also integrated landscapes of production, leisure, worship, and burial. Urban cemeteries often

[39] Kyrtatas, "Living in Tombs," 247 and n. 9 (Palladius, *Lausiac History*, 5).
[40] Kyrtatas, "Living in Tombs," 247 and n. 10 (*The Lives of the Desert Fathers*, transl. Russell: John of Lycopolis 1.37–43).
[41] Caciola, *Afterlives*, 34.

> incorporated aqueducts, shrines, gardens, and circuses, whereas rural cemeteries included agricultural and hydraulic installations.[42]

Peculiarly, some of these tombs were tower-like, recalling stylite dwellings.[43] Thus, Antonios's text mirrors Roman expectations of what could be found along the road, as the Roman practice of roadside commemorative monuments spread to the East. His expansion of this episode departs from expectations of separation between the worlds of the living and the dead for reasons of purity, which the Syriac life is more careful to delineate.

## Corpse Meets Relic: Contrasting Attitudes to the Dead Body

The description of the funeral procession in chapter 31 of LSG begins matter-of-factly with the placing of the coffin (γλωσσόκομον)[44] on a mule-drawn cart (καροῦχαν). There is nothing exceptional in this arrangement. The religious character of the procession is indicated by the bier being embellished "with wax tapers and incense and the singing of psalms".[45] The procession was moving towards Antioch. But,

> [w]hen they were about five miles from the city in a place called Merope, the mules stood still and would not budge. There, an extraordinary mystery happened, for on the right of the road stood a tomb and a certain man stayed in it. Now this is what the man had done: he had loved a married woman twenty years earlier, but could not possess her, and the woman died and was laid in the tomb. Then, so that the hater of good might gain the soul of that man, he went to the tomb, opened up the tombstone, and had intercourse with the dead body. He immediately became deaf and dumb, and was held fast to the tomb and could not leave that place. Travellers-by would notice him sitting on the steps of the tomb, and each, for God's sake, would offer something to him – some water or some food. When, by the will of God, the venerable corpse came by on that day and the crowd and the carriage stood still, the man who neither spoke nor heard came out of the tomb crying out and saying, 'Have pity on me, holy one of God, Simeon'. When he reached the carriage, what

[42] de Jong, *Archaeology of Death*. See https://www.ancientjewreview.com/articles/2018/8/27/book-note-the-archaeology-of-death-in-roman-syria-burial-commemoration-and-empire

[43] See Basema Hamarneh's article in this volume.

[44] LSJ point out that this is a form of γλωσσοκομεῖον which means 'casket' or 'case to keep the reeds or tongues of musical instruments', which could be made of bone, for example, or hippopotamus ivory. This term may well point forward to the expected contents: bone relics, rather than a full body. It should probably be translated 'chest'. The term is not used in the Septuagint.

[45] Note that it specifies psalms rather than hymns, perhaps indicating a distinction between a liturgical and a para-liturgical setting.

> had restrained him was immediately taken away and his mind was restored. All who saw what happened glorified God, and that place shook from the shouts of the people. The man cried out, 'Today I have been saved by you, servant of God, for I had perished in sin'.[46]

The explanatory sketch of why the deranged man was living in the tomb comes as an aside that could easily be taken out of the narrative. The explanation of the reason for the man's possession is absent from the Syriac version. Its presence in Antonios's text is all the more notable given the relatively short length of LSG compared to the Syriac *Life*.

Yet the contents of this apparently superfluous aside are deeply enmeshed with its narrative significance. A corpse that is inert –the saint's holy body– acts powerfully over a man whose sin was to have treated a dead body –that of his beloved– as if it were alive even after death. This mirror conception allows one to perceive this anecdote as more than a passing curiosity. In its pointed drama, the tale embodies the contrast between a sinful necrophilia intended as a desire to prolong sexual contact after death, which causes insanity and cripples the mind, and a pious 'necrophilia', a longing for closeness to saints' bodies and bones that instead liberates the person who desires it and enables healthy living. The *vestigia* of the holy person thus extend their beneficial power beyond the grave.[47]

The dramatization plays out the search for a correct perspective on death that is not merely philosophical, but involves real emotions. Reference to necrophilia, easily dismissed as frivolous, brings to the fore an entire debate on the acceptability of closeness to corpses, as well as on the limits of Christian forgiveness. Both hesitations are swept aside by the force of this story, and their combination and simultaneous defeat is significant of a complicating attitude to rules: not all closeness with death brings impurity, or insanity; and even as disordered and distorted a sexuality as that leading this man to open a grave to commit a multiple sin can be condoned because there is no limit to what can be forgiven. All human weakness is understandable. In particular, the wish to prolong life's actions beyond the grave is abundantly reflected in the ancient and medieval practices of gift-giving to the dead, in which these boundaries were constantly renegotiated.[48] Like the tender spouse in *Corpse Bride*,[49] one can imagine the woman in question buried in her tomb dressed in finery and adorned with jew-

[46] Doran, *Lives of Simeon Stylites*, 99.

[47] Hunter-Crawley, "Divinity Refracted," 276–77, speaks more about objects than about personal remains.

[48] On Syrian practices of burial with goods, enacting a continuation of the activities in life in a spirit of offering, see de Jong, *Archaeology of Death*, 77–100 (chapter on 'Gifts for the dead: function and distribution of grave goods'). On the negotiation of boundaries between living and dead, esp. through the exchange of gifts, see Geary, *Living with the Dead*, 77–90, esp. 78–80.

[49] *Corpse Bride* (2005), directed by Mike Johnson and Tim Burton.

els. Physical decay does not destroy emotional bonds. Although the story about the man's necrophilic background may appear anecdotal and curious, its implications are very far-reaching.

While it is well known that Jewish customs forbid contact with corpses as a source of pollution, prescribing strict practices of separation and purification when dealing with burial rites,[50] a parallel polemic in Christian circles debated the correct attitude concerning the cult of martyrs and saints. In commenting on the writings by Victricius of Rouen, who was opposed to relics, Gillian Clark points out how even Roman fourth-century practice favoured contact relics, in contrast to the public discovery, display and veneration of bones that Ambrose of Milan famously inaugurated.[51] Clark notes that Rome was perhaps the exception in this respect, and that Ambrose "shared the general willingness of the eastern churches to move and dismember the bodies of saints".[52] Such enthusiasm for bodily relics could be read as an unnatural crossing of the boundaries between life and death, regulated by strict purity laws. The healing episode in Symeon's Greek *Life* probes all these issues together by juxtaposing various scenarios and attitudes to dead bodies in one scene.

In the Jewish spectrum of beliefs and practices, Syrian customs were unusual in disregarding the boundaries set by purity laws. Significantly, human finger bones were found in a foundation deposit at the door of the third-century synagogue at Dura Europos, a town on the Euphrates. Jodi Magness argues that this find demonstrates a range of attitudes concerning the cult of the dead and the placing of their bodily remains.[53] Jewish ossuaries in the shape of relics caskets were in vogue in the first century,[54] and a representation of one such item can be seen in the Dura synagogue's paintings as the vehicle for Moses's floating on the Nile.[55] Thus, Ambrose depended on Syria not only for his hymns,[56] but also for this unusual attitude to bodily remains, which he 'translated' to Italy and made normative for a certain strand of Christian practice that prevailed in the course of the Middle Ages.

[50] Arazi, "Corpse Impurity in Second Temple." See also Klawans, *Impurity and Sin*, 16–17, 124–25.

[51] Clark, "Victricius of Rouen," 365 (with thanks to Georgia Frank for this reference). On Ambrose, see Bartlett, *Why Can the Dead Do Such Great Things?*, 12, 16–17.

[52] Clark, "Victricius of Rouen," 369 n. 13, with reference to Séjourné, "Reliques," 2335.

[53] Magness, "Foundation Deposit." Magness demonstrates that the rabbis differentiated between fleshed and defleshed bones, and whether defilement came upon direct contact or could be avoided by placing the bones in a 'Tent' (presumably, the casket-like containers). This requirement may explain the delay between Symeon's death and the procession of his 'casket' if it contained just bones.

[54] Magness, "Ossuaries and the Burials of Jesus and James;" for examples see Rahmani, *Catalogue of Jewish Ossuaries*.

[55] Kraeling, *Synagogue*, 173–74; Weitzmann and Kessler, *Frescoes of the Dura Synagogue*, 28–29.

[56] Williams, "Hymns as Acclamations," 112.

## Symeon's Petrified Procession

The processional setting of the incident, half-way between a funerary commemoration and a relics translation, provides another focus for analysis. Recent scholarship has emphasized the public resonance and political performativity of processions as a means of large-scale communication in antiquity.[57] The heightened emotional setting of funerals made them into sensitive moments at which controversy and identity were negotiated and displayed.[58] This perspective can help clarify the episode further as a demonstrative account that plays on the interaction between crowd and saint during the performance of this first posthumous miracle.

The (dead) saint's agency in this episode is manifested in the stilling of the living, and the quickening of the (half-)dead. Marvellous signs were expected from processions, not least at Antioch where the exhumation of Saint Babylas caused the burning down of the sacred precinct of Apollo in a kind of war between religions for dominance over urban space.[59] Funerary processions were, in particular, connected with 'rites of passage'. That the unfortunate pressing of the crowd around the corpse of Saint Basil carried in procession across Constantinople to his final resting place caused casualties seemed a natural by-product of the funeral event to his brother Gregory, who nonchalantly celebrates these victims as 'companions' of the saint's departure.[60] Here, too, the world of the living intertwines with the celebration of a special dead, involving the actors in the funerary cortège in a deeper participation than they may have bargained for. Their tragic experience heightens the awareness of the separation between life and death.

In Symeon's case, the crowd following the procession behind the saint's body with sacred song could literally not continue moving forward when it reaches the demoniac in the tomb. Note that in the account the procession is forced to stop *before* the man becomes visible. He comes out of the tomb as a consequence of perceiving the presence of the bier held at a standstill, even though he cannot see it because he is blind. The aural dimension of the interaction becomes dominant. The immobilized cortège conveyed a kind of communication between the

[57] Recent studies on ancient and medieval processional activity call attention to themselves here. See Favro and Johanson, "Death in Motion;" Stanfill, "The Body of Christ's Barbarian Limb;" *Moving Subjects*, ed. Ashley and Husken. See further below.

[58] Zaman, "Death, Funeral Processions."

[59] John Chrysostom, *De s. hieromartyre Babyla* 8 (BHGa 207; CPG 4347) PG 50:527-34, ed. Schatkin, *Jean Chrysostome: Sur Babylas*, 294–312, esp. 308–12; tr. W. Mayer in "*Let Us Die That We May Live*", 140–48, esp. 146–47, cited in Frank, *Unfinished Christians*, 41–42. My thanks to Georgia Frank for letting me read the chapter before its publication.

[60] Gregory of Nazianzos, or. 43.80, ed. Bernardi, 300–03; tr. McCauley, 27–99, 97, cited in Frank, *Unfinished Christians*, 49–50.

dead saint and the tomb-dwelling wretch, which the pious crowd was called to witness.

This dynamic has precedents that demonstrate how this episode is both surprising and subversive. Georgia Frank notes that processions that froze in place could be an indictment on the crowd by a holy person, as in the case of the Bacchic frenzy stilled by Abba Apollo when an (un)holy parade filed past his monastery. Apollo kept them under the baking hot sun and let them go only after they had repented of their unruly conduct, some of the once-rowdy crowd even going as far as joining the Abba's monastery as a result of the experience. In Symeon's procession the moral judgement is reversed: the pious followers of the saint are stopped in their tracks by a sinner, whose pitiful predicament has drawn the dead saint's attention –if one may say so. The group acts together as one body, transformed from animated and moving to still and stationary. The crowd bears witness to the relic's miraculous intervention, but it could also be there to judge and be judged by the numinous presence.

Another example of "the ability to petrify a procession", as Frank elegantly calls it, was occasioned by the translation of the head of John the Baptist on a cart. The mules refused to go further than the outskirts of Chalcedon and never made it to Constantinople, their intended destination.[61] This tale seems to have an aetiological purpose, like the story of the translation of Heraclius's relic of the cross in Psellos's 'Oration on the Archangel Michael', where the precious item stopped at Sykeon out of its own volition and forced the emperor to build a suitable structure to house it there.[62] Although the animals involved in Symeon's transport are not given a specific role, the episode may have served to draw attention to the periphery of Antioch where it took place, since the area is important enough to be named in all versions of the story.[63] In fact, the location at the margins of the city carried with it almost automatic associations with a place of mystery, where the civil order of the city gave way to the unruly and desolate countryside, and where cemeteries were located both in reality and fiction.[64]

A distant echo of disruptions to the flow of the funeral procession may be found in modern Jewish funerals, when the mourners halt the carrying of a corpse to the grave seven times. The unexpected manifestation of the numinous in an otherworldly manner has been tidied into a precise ritual. Each collective stop evokes the remembrance of a worldly 'vanity': "Each of these 'vanities' is

[61] Frank, *Unfinished Christians*, 53.

[62] Crostini, "Another True Cross," 103–04.

[63] The place is called Maru (V) or Marwa (B) in Syriac and Merope in Greek. It is always possible to invent an etymology that connects the name with the processional event –Merope was the mythological princess raped by Orion, and μεροπήϊος means 'human'– but the point is not elaborated in the text.

[64] Doroszewska, "Liminal Space," 5–6.

symbolized by a pause, as one carries the casket to the grave. With each stop, the fact of ultimate death teaches us to avoid the life of vanity, to be creative and kind, to repent of evil, to walk in the path of goodness".[65] These choreographed stages in the ritual procession are enacted in order to provide meditative space to those who accompany the dead. In the sudden halting of Symeon's mule-drawn cart, a keener awareness of their special task in accompanying Symeon's bodily relic is projected onto the crowd. It is thus possible that the framework of the processional event may have constituted the catchword for the expansion of the episode of the demoniac: a stop that gave rise to a performance, not only of the miracle by the saint, but also of the personal drama of the human actor involved.[66]

## Detailing the Healing Miracle in Two Versions of Antonios's Greek *Life*

In both versions of LSG, the story of the healing miracle and of its necrophilic background is retold. One could say that both versions consider this scene as conveying a basic and important point about the saint. Nevertheless, there are some slight differences between these versions, which I shall examine here according to the edition by Lietzmann, who distinguishes two main recensions as Vita A and Vita X.

In Vita A,[67] the care that the inhabitants continuously take in feeding the demoniac as they see him sitting on the steps of the monument presupposes their familiarity with the awkward story of his demise, which is provided by the narrator's voice in the middle of the story (ll. 5–12). The two, however, are not explicitly connected. In Vita X,[68] knowledge of his story is provided only after the healing has taken place (from l. 12 ff.). Here, a causal connection is spelt out between the pitiful narrative of the man's necrophilic passion and the community's indulgent and loving care. The passers-by who take pity on the man's feral condition and provide food and drink do so because they have learnt about his story: *πάντες δὲ οἱ οἱδοποροῦντες μαθόντες τὰ περὶ αὐτοῦ ἀνέφερον αὐτῷ τὴν*

[65] https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/281569/jewish/A-Jewish-Burial-and-Procession.htm

[66] See Frank, *Unfinished Christians*, 120 n.15, citing Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and McNamara, "Processional Performance:" "[processions] highlight symbolism, ceremony, performers and spectators, movement and stops (stations) as constituting performance (thereby including pilgrimage as a variant of procession)". See also *Moving Subjects*.

[67] This version is translated by Doran and is found printed on the left-hand page of Lietzmann's edition. For a clarification of Lietzmann's mise-en-page, see Flusin, "Syméon et les philologues," 7.

[68] This version is printed on the right-hand page of Lietzmann's edition but there is no full English translation. In apparatus, variants from a ms 'Y' are noted, but these will be disregarded in the present analysis.

τροφὴν ἕως τῆς ἐπιδημίας τοῦ μακαρίου.[69] The man here has received charitable nourishment that kept him in touch with the world of the living. The everyday passers-by merge with the procession's participants, who bring a different kind of charity with their movement, and especially with their arrest: they enact the healing of the possessed.

But, pausing to think about the wretched man's predicament, one could well describe it as twice sinful. To begin with, he falls in love with a married woman, and is therefore unable to physically unite with her:

| Vita A (L. p. 74, l. 6) | Vita X (L. p. 75, l. 13) |
|---|---|
| οὐκ ἠδυνήθη αὐτῆς κυριεῦσαι. | οὐκ ἠδυνήθη αὐτῆς τυχεῖν. |

Then, the man visits her tomb and is tempted to open the lid, drawn to consummate his desire on the dead corpse of the woman:

| Vita A (L. p. 74, ll. 7–10) | Vita X (L. p. 75, ll. 14–16) |
|---|---|
| καὶ ἵνα πως κερδήσῃ ὁ μισόκαλος τὴν ψυχὴν τοῦ ἀνδρός, ἀπελθὼν ἐν τῷ μνημείῳ παρανοίγει τὴν πλάκα τοῦ μνήματος καὶ συγγίνεται τῷ νενεκρωμένῳ σώματι. | Καὶ ἀπελθὼν οὗτος ἀπεγύμνωσεν τὸν τύμβον καὶ συνεγένετο τῷ μεμαραμμένῳ σώματι τῆς γυναικὸς ἐκείνης. |

Vita A shifts the blame of the sinful passion onto the devil, who plots to capture the man's soul through this crazy desire (we remember the Syriac *Vita*'s demon). His action has eschatological implications. Vita X refrains from inserting an external evil cause, and puns on the verb ἀπεγύμνωσεν to suggest at the same time the revealing of the tomb's contents, perhaps concealed under drapery, and the stripping naked for the sexual act. The substitution of the rare participle μεμαραμμένῳ (X) for the more usual νενεκρωμένῳ (A) to describe the woman's body recalls the shrinking of a dried leaf, but also the consuming of an ascete's body by fasting and open-air exposure that recalls Alexandra's tomb asceticism.[70]

Instantly, the man's choice to have sex with the dead deprives him of his senses, both his hearing and his speech, and he remains glued to the spot as if chained there:

[69] Lietzmann, *Leben*, 77, ll. 1–3.

[70] It is used in this sense by Theophanes, *Praise of Theodore Graptos* (BHG 1745z), ch. 36, l. 12: αἱ σάρκες μὲν ἐγκρατείᾳ μεμαραμμέναι; see Featherstone, "Praise of Theodore Graptos."

| Vita A (L. p. 74, ll. 10–12) | Vita X (L. p. 75, l. 16–p. 77, l. 1) |
| --- | --- |
| Καὶ εὐθέως ἐβοβώθη καὶ ἐκρατήθη ἐν τῷ μνήματι καὶ οὐκέτι ἠδύνατο ἀναχωρῆσαι τοῦ τόπου ἐκείνου. | Καὶ ἀπ'αὐτῆς τῆς ὥρας ἐβοβώθη[71] καὶ ἐδέθη ἐν τῷ τόπῳ ἐκείνῳ μήτε ἀκούων μήτε λαλῶν μετά τινος τεσσαράκοντα ἔτη. |

To counterbalance the deranging action of the demonic force, the saint's passing-by, carried in procession, is explicitly God-ordained in Vita A: κατὰ βούλησιν δὲ θεοῦ παρερχομένου τοῦ τιμίου λειψάνου ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ....[72] Besides mention of the devil, this version is also closer to the sense of fateful fulfillment of the Syriac text. The crowd acts both as a witness and as a sounding board for the miraculous experience of the man restored to life and speech: καὶ πάντες ἰδόντες τὸ γεγονὸς ἐδόξασαν τὸν θεόν, ἀπὸ δὲ τῆς κραυγῆς τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐσείετο ὁ τόπος ἐκεῖνος. ὁ δὲ ἄνθρωπος ἔκραζεν· Ἐγὼ σήμερον διὰ σοῦ ἐσώθην, δοῦλε τοῦ θεοῦ, ἀπολωλὸς γὰρ ἤμην τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ.[73] Contrasting the initial silence of the tombs, the man, here called '*anthropos*' for the first time, regains his human faculties, which include a voice to proclaim his own salvation with. Suddenly, the scene is animated by human sounds as the single shouting of the healed man's proclamation multiplies in the vocal reactions of the crowd. The collective sound waves vibrate through the ground making it shake (ἀπὸ δὲ τῆς κραυγῆς τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐσείετο ὁ τόπος ἐκεῖνος). Everyone is shouting and the whole scene is filled with a happy noise that replaces both the silence of the tombs and the composed former chanting of psalms.[74]

The healing of the deranged man, deaf and dumb since he consummated the unspeakable sexual act over the dead body of his illegitimate beloved, is a powerful means to affirm and proclaim the sanctity of Symeon's spoil. By contrast to the usual immobile aloofness of the stylite on his pillar,[75] Symeon's funeral procession has made his unmoving body mobile, carried by a crowd of faithful, himself part of ancient 'portabilia', in Georgia Frank's terms. Processing past a tragic human disaster by the cemetery, Symeon's numinous presence extends its agency beyond the grave by attracting the deranged man out of his macabre hiding place.

In Vita X, the man is said to 'rise up' out of the sarcophagus (ἀναστὰς ὁ ἄνθρωπος – L. p. 75, l. 9), as if resurrected by the passing of the dead saint. The

[71] From βοβόομαι; hapax.
[72] Lietzmann, *Leben*, 74, ll. 14–15.
[73] Lietzmann, *Leben*, 74, l. 20–76, ll. 1–4.
[74] Frank, *Unfinished Christians*, 43, points to the recent interest in soundscapes within processional experience in antiquity: *Senses of the Empire*, ed. Betts. For the liturgical sphere, the sensorium has received much attention; suffice to cite here the work of Palazzo, *L'invention chrétienne des cinq sens* and Caseau, "Experiencing the Sacred." See also the collected volume *Knowing Bodies, Passionate Souls*, ed. Harvey and Mullett.
[75] Williams, *Immovable Race*, 89; Cox Miller, *Corporeal Imagination*, 140–41.

demoniac man was brought out of his state of death and made to live again. Rather than point to the Gerasene demoniac, this Greek version therefore connects more readily to Jesus's miracles of resurrection, particularly to the raising of the widow's son in Luke 7:11–17, which also features a funeral cortège.

One might expect the man's double sin to have generated comment. Beside the compassion of the passers-by who knew his story, no special fuss is made over the particular sin of necrophilia, not to mention adultery. No special explanation is given as to why the saint's healing could and should extend to such a sinful person. By contrast, this kind of debate on the posthumous fate of sinners was considered to be important in sixth-century Byzantium.[76] The man's salvation during his lifetime was perhaps meant to show, via the saint, the extent of God's mercy even in the next life. This man's state of sin was due to his ontological and epistemological confusion of life with death and death with life. The destructive mix is undone in the healing formula, where suddenly "what had restrained him was immediately taken away and his mind was restored" (*εὐθέως ἠνηῷχθησαν αὐτοῦ τὰ χαλινὰ καὶ αἱ φρένες αὐτοῦ ἦλθον εἰς διάνοιαν* – L. p. 74, ll. 19–20). A simple, sudden reverence for the saint's dead body restored for the necrophilic demoniac a correct understanding of the limits between life and death.

## Following the Thread of Necrophilia in Folk Tales

The post-modern book by Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex*, opens with contrasting interpretations of an anecdote about a necrophiliac:

> The story begins when a young aristocrat whose family circumstances forced him into religious orders came one day to a country inn. He found the innkeepers overwhelmed with grief at the death of their only daughter, a girl of great beauty. She was not to be buried until the next day, and the bereaved parents asked the young monk to keep watch over her body through the night. This he did, and more. Reports of her beauty had piqued his curiosity. He pulled back the shroud and, instead of finding the corpse "disfigured by the horror of death", found its features still gracefully animated. The young man lost all restraint, forgot his vows, and took "the same liberties with the dead that the sacraments of marriage would have permitted in life". Ashamed of what he had done, the hapless necrophilic monk departed hastily in the morning without waiting for the scheduled interment.[77]

[76] Silvano, "De Philentolo Fornicatore," 371, 382. Note that stylites are mentioned in the story among people participating in this debate (374).
[77] Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 1.

The discussions that interest Laqueur are about the signs that intercourse can provide about a person's living state, rather than about the moral consequences of the (pseudo-)monk's deeds. The story was taken from an eighteenth-century medical compilation, where it performed duty as an example of the difficulty in ascertaining bodily death.[78] Such collections were popular and testify to lively discussions. Boundaries between the living and the dead were not easy to determine, and the play of make-belief and equivocation, combined with the hope of marvellous resurrection, was used as the stuff of apocryphal tales.[79] More recently, in some Central European countries, these boundaries were considered fluid: apparently, a groom was still allowed to 'marry' his bride should she happen to die just before the wedding.[80] The cut-off point of love – or perhaps of legal or canonical consequences dependent on the consummation of marriage – were not so simple to establish in the face of cruel death. The poignant pathos of bereavement at the time of marriage, which should signal the fullness of life and the promise of more life through procreation, leads us once more to the feature *Corpse Bride*. Laqueur's story ends with the unnatural pregnancy of the insentient body of the dead woman. In this version, the sexual act is performed in the comfort of an inn chamber and not the squalor of a tomb.

Such paradoxical predicaments are explored, with a comical edge, in the apocryphal *Acts of John*, where the protagonist, Drusiana, is involved in a case of necrophilia. Avoiding the lusting Kallimachos by letting herself die, Drusiana is disturbed in her tomb where Kallimachos has entered by bribing the custodian. While busily stripping the dead body of Drusiana in the frenzy of satisfying his desire, Kallimachos does not see that a venomous snake has come to avenge her and immobilizes him. Drusiana is then revived by the apostle John, who forgives the repentant Kallimachos and frees him from his temporary paralysis. In the final scene of this rocambolesque adventure, John and his new band of disciples celebrate the Eucharist in the tomb.[81] Although the woman in LSG plays a secondary role, the theme of rape-in-the-tomb and the punishment of paralysis are comparable between these narratives. It is difficult to gage the impact of apocryphal texts, but it is likely that they were quite popular since the *Acts of John* still needed to be condemned at the Second Council of Nicaea in 787 CE, when their docetic content was finally banned.[82] Antonios's redaction of the text may therefore owe something to the popularity of these apocryphal

[78] Bruhier, *Dissertation*, 74–79, in turn relying on 'Pechlin': see Johann Nikolaus Pechlin (1646–1706), *De aeris et alimenti defectu et vita sub aquis meditatio*. On the medical implications of earlier thought, see Caciola, *Afterlives*, 66–108.

[79] Notably, the Acts of John use this device for the plot (see below).

[80] According to Prins, *Bizarre Behaviours*, this concession was still accorded until about 200 years ago.

[81] *Acta Iohannis*, 63–85, summarized by Berglund, "Conversion, Community, and Courage," 223–24; Bolyki, "Miracle Stories."

[82] Pervo, "Narratives about the Apostles," 69–71.

tales and their version of combining issues of life and death with themes like sex, rape, and forgiveness in a necrophilic setting.

Another combination of both elements, spiced up with the further horror of a monstruous birth, is found in a medieval collection of tales from Constantinople. The story, known as 'The haunted shoemaker of Constantinople', is gathered in the rag-bag work of Walter Map's *Courtier's Trifles* (*De nugis curialium,* ca. 1181–92 CE).[83] An online summary of the story runs thus:

> Once, a shoemaker fell hopelessly in love with a beautiful high-born lady, only to see his advances repeatedly rejected by her father. Distraught, the shoemaker left for the sea, becoming a feared pirate and determining to "gain by force her whom his low birth and lack of estates denied." But then news reached the shoemaker that the lady had suddenly died. Grief-stricken, he immediately returned home and headed to her grave. There, he broke into his love's tomb, embraced her "and to the dead like to the living entered her". Having committed his necrophilic crime, he heard an eerie voice from the dead echoing around the tomb, ordering him to return to collect what the lady's corpse would give birth to. Obeying, he returned and "received from the dead a human head." All who set eyes upon the ghastly head instantly perished "without word or groan".[84]

The anecdote ends in a rewriting of the story of the Gorgon/Medusa's head. Map's necrophilic tale is set in Constantinople, and that setting cannot but remind one of the large upturned Medusa head in the Akakios cistern, whose ominous presence echoes this complex story – the monstrous head in Map's tale is thrown down into the sea, as Medusa's floats in the cistern's water.[85]

Walter Map's collection is certainly inspired by folklore he gathered from hearsay, and this popular aspect is reflected in the tone of the work, which Monika Otter defines as "not antireligious but cynically resigned to a world in which divine things are remote and almost impossible to attain".[86] This narrative is totally secularized, without reference to any religious connection between the perpetrator and the sexual crime. The continuation, however, seems more than a punishment for sin: the dead woman gives birth without coming back to life, and her creature is a giant Medusa-head that kills anyone who looks at it. The "father" uses the monstruous head at first for his own gain, until his new wife turns it against him and kills him. The act is a just revenge for the greatest abomination.

[83] Walter Map, *De nugis curialium*, ed. and trans. James, Brooke and Mynors, 364–69.

[84] During Covid lockdown, I could only access the text via this resource, from which the summary is taken: https://folklorethursday.com/legends/tales-medieval-crypt-walking-corpses-devils-haunted-shoemakers-walter-maps-de-nugis-curialium/

[85] No reference to Constantinople in Leeming, *Medusa*.

[86] Otter, *Inventiones*, 115.

Map's work belongs in a courtly, learned setting, while at the same time one might presume that its parodic and sarcastic tone appealed to a much broader, popular public.[87] However different in many respects to the vignette of the demoniac in Symeon's *Vita*, Map's story alerts us to the wide appeal of such themes.[88] Although the actors in this story have changed, the horror of necrophilia and its dire consequences are conveyed in even more fantastic, but equally stark terms. The man in question undergoes no change and is killed by the monster he has produced.

From a literary perspective, the episode contributes an element of folklore, another neglected aspect in the study of hagiography.[89] While literary motifs have gained scholarly attention in recent readings of hagiographical works as narratives, an increased expectation about levels of spiritual as well as stylistic attainment of written genres, and an aversion for anything that does not match these levels, has produced a blind spot where folk motifs are concerned, despite their widely acknowledged importance in the work of anthropologists and semioticists. Curiously, in Stith Thompson's index the motif of necrophilia is not clearly categorized, coming under a more general group defined as 'Intimate relations of dead and living'.[90] It is intriguing, nonetheless, to follow a thread that leads from this episode in Antonios's Byzantine hagiography to tales from Constantinople in the collection of *De nugis* by Walter Map. This coincidence does not necessarily mean that the horror-story element was operative in the hagiographical composition. However, a certain dose of comic relief may have been part of Antonios's narrative, for example when the demoniac is described as literally stuck to the tomb by his sin.[91]

## Recasting Saints' Lives

From this analysis of one chapter of LSG, one could conclude that Antonios's narrative does not meet the criterion of historical veridicity.[92] However, I have

[87] Gordon, "Parody, Sarcasm, and Invective," 84.

[88] Some scholars interpret his work as "satirizing the literary tastes of his contemporaries", Gordon, "Parody, Sarcasm, and Invective," 85, citing Ralph Hanna and Warren Smith.

[89] No study dedicated to folk motifs appears in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography*, vol. II: *Genres and Contexts*, where entries for 'folklore' are limited to pp. 68, 105, 107, 328. See also Guidorizzi, "Motivi fiabeschi."

[90] Thompson, Motif-index of folk-literature, available at Tales Online (https://sites.ualberta.ca/~urban/Projects/English/Content/Motif_Help.htm), E470. For a critique of the category criteria, see Niditch, *Prelude*, 3–4.

[91] See the contribution by Andreas Westergren in this volume.

[92] Analogously, the same questions about historical truthfulness are asked of Walter Map's collection. See further Otter, *Inventiones*, 111–28.

argued that Antonios's version of Symeon's first posthumous miracle intersects other expectations, arising from Byzantine perceptions of Syria as a world where exotic and strange stories could find currency. The liminal drama that unfolds during the saint's funeral procession gives those events a special concreteness through the deranged man's actual predicament, while at the same time provoking a reflection on several serious issues: the boundaries between life and death; the appropriate domains of a saint's intervention; and the limits –or perhaps the limitlessness– of forgiveness required from a Christian point of view. Along the lines of Flusin's appreciation of the dynamics of the hagiographical construct on its own terms, the particular arrangement of themes and details is suited to the new audience of LSG.

An anachronistic attitude of relentless piety, even in scholarly circles, has prejudiced the reception of hagiographical texts, by almost automatically avoiding parts of the narrative that might disturb the general, comfortable assumption that hagiographies reflect only approved saintly behaviour. This example brings to light both the limits of this attitude and the presence of such uncomfortable folk themes in hagiography, advocating that special notice should be taken of these elements, and demonstrating the value in doing so for the understanding of the hagiographical enterprise.

As Finbow explains,

> Necrophilia (love of the dead) – also called thanatophilia – is one of the last great taboos of humankind. A paraphilia combining both Eros and Thanatos, necrophilia is a nihilistic act of procreation and an elevation of the corpse to a level of desire, it is an overstepping of traditional ethics and a re-evaluation of sexuality, it is foremost an intricate constituent of human history, religion and culture....[93]

By including an episode of necrophilia in Symeon's first posthumous miracle, LSG does not depart from the evangelical model followed by the Syriac Life, but rather elaborates on it. It constructs a story not on the obvious pattern of the tomb-dwelling Gerasene demoniac, but on that of Jesus's miracles of resurrection and healing that encompass both the physical and the spiritual dimension, absolving from sins together with the removal of physical symptoms.

Curiously, in the *synkrisis* of the Syriac Life, Symeon is also compared with the Hebrew Bible prophet Hosea: 'To Hosea a holy prophet he [i.e. God] commanded: "Take a harlot for a wife"'.[94] God's plans occasionally break our conventional expectations and lead through liminal, marginal experiences in order to forge wisdom and holiness. If one reasoned that the quality of the sin of necrophilia was something embarrassing, it would seem more likely that such a

[93] Finbow, *Grave Desire*.

[94] Doran, *Lives of Simeon Stylites*, ch. 111, 180.

passage should be dropped rather than added in textual transmission. The Syriac would then have to be considered a sanitized, theologically sounder approach to the episode. However, this kind of direct reaction of one text against another cannot be proved.[95] Rather, these versions answer different needs and tastes, in different regions and times, and are all equally literary approaches to the subject matter: Symeon the superhero.

## Bibliography

### Sources

*Acta Iohannis*, ed. Eric Juneaud and Jean-Daniel Kaestli, Corpus Christianorum Apocryphorum 1. Turnhout: Brepols, 1983.

*Athanase d'Alexandrie: Vie d'Antoine*, edited and translated by G. J. M. Bartelink. Sources Chrétiennes 400. Paris: Cerf, 1994; transl. Robert C. Gregg, New York: Paulist Press, 1980.

Bruhier, Jacques Jean. *Dissertation sur l'incertitude des signes de la mort.* Paris, 1749, 2nd edn.

*Das Leben des heiligen Symeon Stylites*, ed. Hans Lietzmann. Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur 32:4. Leipzig: De Gruyter, 1908.

Grégoise de Nazianze, Discours 42–43, ed. J. Bernardi, Sources Chrétiennes 384, Paris: Cerf, 1992; tr. L. P. McCauley, *Funeral Orations by Saint Gregory Nazianzen and Saint Ambrose*, 27–99. Fathers of the Church 22. Washington, 1953.

Jean Chrysostome: *Discours sur Babylas,* ed. M. A. Schatkin *et al*. Sources Chrétiennes 362. Paris: Cerf, 1990; transl. W. Mayer in *"Let Us Die That We May Live": Greek Homilies on Christian Martyrs from Asia Minor, Palestine, and Syria (c. AD 350–450)*, edited by Johan Leemans, 140–48. London: Routledge, 2003.

*La Vida sobre una columna: Vida de Simeón Estilita, Vida de Daniel Estilita*, ed. José Simón Palmer. Madrid: Editorial Trotta, 2014.

*Lives of Simeon Stylites*. Translated, with an introduction by Robert Doran. Cistercian Studies Series 112. Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1992.

Map, Walter. *De nugis curialium*, ed. and trans. M.R. James, C.N.L. Brooke and R.A.B. Mynors. Oxford Medieval Texts. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983.

Palladius, *The Lausiac History*, trans. Robert T. Meyer. New York: Newman Press, 1964.

[95] Burrus, "An Unstable Heroine," 167.

Pechlin, Johann Nikolaus (1646–1706), *De aeris et alimenti defectu et vita sub aquis meditatio*.
*The Lives of the Desert Fathers*, transl. Norman Russell, London and Oxford: Mowbray, 1980.
*The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*, transl. by Benedicta Ward. London and Oxford: Mowbray, 1984.
*Theodoretus, Philotheos Historia*. In *Théodoret de Cyr: Histoire des moines de Syrie, Histoire Philothée,* edited and translated by Pierre Canivet and Alice Leroy-Molinghen. 2 vols. Sources Chrétiennes 234, 257. Paris: Cerf, 1977, 1979. Translated by R.M. Price in *Theodoret of Cyrrhus: A History of the Monks of Syria*. Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 2008.

## Secondary Literature

Arazi, Eliran. "Corpse Impurity in Second Temple Judaism: a Revised Approach in Light of the Order of Meaning of Honor and Shame." *Journal of Ancient Judaism* 10.3 (2019): 354–94.
Bartlett, Robert. *Why Can the Dead Do Such Great Things?* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013.
Berglund, Carl Johan. "Conversion, Community, and Courage: Narrative Functions of Liturgical Practices in the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles." In *Why We Sing*: *Music, Word and Liturgy in Early Christianity, in Honour of Anders Ekenberg*, edited by Carl-Johan Berglund, Barbara Crostini, and James Kelhoffer, 207–29. Vigiliae christianae Supplements. Leiden: Brill, 2022.
Betts, E. (ed.) *Senses of the Empire: Multisensory Approaches to Roman Culture,* London: Routledge, 2017.
Boero, Dina. "Making a Manuscript, Making a Cult: Scribal Production of the Syriac *Life of Symeon the Stylite* in Late Antiquity." *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 73 (2019): 25–68.
Bolyki, János. "Miracle Stories in the Acts of John." In *The Apocryphal Acts of John*, edited by Jan Bremmer, 15–36. Kampen: Pharos, 1995.
Brock, Sebastian. "Syriac Hagiography." In *The Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography, vol. II: Genres and Contexts*, edited by Stephanos Efthymiadis, 259–83. Abingdon: Ashgate, 2014.
Burrus, Virginia. "An Unstable Heroine: the Life and Lives of Constantina." In *Constructing Saints in Greek and Latin Hagiography: Heroes and Heroines in Late Antique and Medieval Narrative*, edited by Koen De Temmerman, Julie van Pelt, and Klazina Staat, 157–72. Turnhout: Brepols, 2023.
Caciola, Nancy Mandeville. *Afterlives: the Return of the Dead in the Middle Ages*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016.

Caseau, Beatrice. "Syméon Stylite l'Ancien entre puanteur et parfum." *Revue des Études Byzantines* 63 (2005): 71–96.

Caseau, Beatrice. "Experiencing the Sacred." In *Experiencing Byzantium: Papers from the 44th Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, April 2011*, edited by Cl. Nesbitt and M. Jackson, 59–77. Farnham: Ashgate, 2012.

Caseau, Béatrice and Marie-Christine Fayant. "Le renouveau des cultes stylites aux Xe et XIe siècle? La Vie abrégée de Syméon Stylite le Jeune (BHG 1691C)." In *Autour du premier humanisme et des cinq études sur le XIe siècle: Quarante ans après Paul Lemerle = Travaux et Mémoires* 21/2 (2017): 701–32.

Clark, Gillian. "Victricius of Rouen: Praising the Saints." *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 7.3 (1999): 365–99. *Project MUSE*, doi:10.1353/earl.1999.0071.

Cox Miller, Patricia. *The Corporeal Imagination: Signifying the Holy in Late Ancient Christianity*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009.

Crostini, Barbara. "Another True Cross: Psellos, Heraklios, and the Cross of the Archangel Michael at Sykeon." *Jahrbuch des Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 69 (2019 [2020]): 99–112.

de Jong, Lidewijde. *The Archaeology of Death in Roman Syria: Burial, Commemoration, and Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.

Doran, Robert. *The Lives of Simeon Stylites*. Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1992.

Doroszewska, Julia. "The Liminal Space: Suburbs as a Demonic Domain in Classical Literature." *Preternature: Critical and Historical Studies on the Preternatural* 6.1 (2017): 1–30.

Eastmond, Antony. "Body vs. Column: the Cults of St Symeon Stylites." In *Desire and Denial in Byzantium*, edited by Liz James, 87–100. Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999.

Efthymiadis, Stephanos, with Vincent Déroche *et al*. "Greek Hagiography in Late Antiquity (Fourth–Seventh Centuries)." In *The Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography, vol. I: Periods and Places*, edited by Stephanos Efthymiadis, 35–94. Abingdon: Ashgate, 2014.

Favro, Diane and Christopher Johanson. "Death in Motion: Funeral Processions in the Roman Forum." *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 69.1 (2010): 12–37.

Featherstone, Jeffrey. "The Praise of Theodore Graptos by Theophanes of Caesarea." *Analecta Bollandiana* 98 (1980): 104–50.

Finbow, Steve. *Grave Desire: a Cultural History of Necrophilia*. London: zero books, 2014. (quoted from googlebooks)

Flusin, Bernard. "Syméon et les philologues, ou la mort du stylite." In *Les saints et leur sanctuaires à Byzance*, edited by C. Jolivet-Lévy, M. Kaplan, and J.-P. Sodini, 1–23. Paris: Centre de civilisation byzantine, 1994.

Frank, Georgia. *Unfinished Christians: Ritual Objects and Silent Subjects in Late Antiquity*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2023.

Geary, Patrick J. *Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994.

Gordon, Stephen. "Parody, Sarcasm, and Invective in the *Nugae* of Walter Map." *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 116 (2017): 82–107.

Guidorizzi, Giulio. "Motivi fiabeschi nell'agiografia bizantina." In *Studi bizantini e neogreci. Atti del IV congresso nazionale di studi bizantini*, edited by Pietro Luigi Leone, 457–67. Catania: Congedo, 1983.

Harvey, Susan Ashbrook. "The Sense of a Stylite: Perspectives on Simeon the Elder." *Vigiliae Christianae* 42.4 (1988): 376–94.

Harvey, Susan Ashbrook and Margaret Mullett, eds. *Knowing Bodies, Passionate Souls: Sense Perception in Byzantium*. Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 2017.

Hunter-Crawley, Heather. "Divinity Refracted: Extended Agency and the Cult of Symeon Stylites the Elder." In *Lived Religion in the Ancient Mediterranean World: Approaching Religious Transformation from Archaeology, History, and Classics*, edited by Valentino Gasparrini, Mail Patzelt, Rubina Raja, Anna-Katharina Rieger, Jörg Rüpke, Emiliano Urciuoli, 261–86. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2020.

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, B. and B. McNamara. "Processional Performance: An Introduction." *The Drama Review* 1 (1985): 1–4.

Klawans, Jonathan. *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Kraeling, Carl H. *The Excavations at Dura-Europos conducted by Yale University and the French Academy of Inscriptions and Letters: Final Report VIII, Part I: The Synagogue*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956.

Kyrtatas, Dimitris J. "Living in Tombs: the Secret of an Early Christian Mystical Experience." In *Mystery and Secrecy in the Nag Hammadi Collection and Other Ancient Literature: Ideas and Practices. Studies for Einar Thomassen at Sixty*, edited by Christian H. Bull, Liv Ingeborg Lied, and John D. Turner, 245–57. Leiden: Brill, 2012.

Lane Fox, Robin. "The *Life of Daniel*." In *Portraits: Biographical Representation in Greek and Latin Literature of the Roman Empire*, edited by Mark Edwards and Simon Swain, 175–225. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997.

Laqueur, Thomas. *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990.

Leeming, David. *Medusa in the Mirror of Time*. London: Reaktion Books, 2013.

Lent, Frederick. "The Life of St. Simeon Stylites: A Translation of the Syriac Text in Bedjan's *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum*, vol. IV." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 35 (1915): 103–98 (available at https://www.tertullian.org/fathers/simeon_stylites_vita_01_trans.htm).

Magness, Jodi. "Ossuaries and the Burials of Jesus and James." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 124.1 (2005): 121–54.

Magness, Jodi. "The Foundation Deposit from the Dura Europos Synagogue Reconsidered." In *Architecture of the Sacred*, edited by B.D. Westcoat and R.G. Ousterhout, 231–44. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Mazza, Roberta. "Di fronte alla città: il santo 'antipolitico'? Antonio, Vita e ascesi del beato Simeone Stilita." *Storicamente* 4.1 (2008). DOI: 10.1473/stor288.

*Moving Subjects: Processional Performance in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, edited by Kathleen Ashley and Wim Husken. Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 2001.

Niditch, Susan. *A Prelude to Biblical Folklore: Underdogs and Tricksters*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987, repr. 2000.

Otter, Monika. *Inventiones. Fiction and Referentiality in Twelfth-Century English Historical Writing*. Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996.

Palazzo, Erik. *L'Invention chrétienne des cinq sens dans la liturgie et l'art au Moyen Age*. Paris: Cerf, 2014.

Peeters, Paul. "Un saint hellénisé par annexion: Syméon Stylite." *Analecta Bollandiana* 61 (1943): 29–71, repr. in *Le tréfonds oriental de l'hagiographie byzantine*, 93–136. Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes, 1950.

Pervo, Richard I. "Narratives about the Apostles: Non-canonical Acts and Related Literature." In *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Apocrypha*, edited by Andrew Gregory, Christopher Tuckett, *et al.*, 65–89. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Prins, Herschel. *Bizarre Behaviours: Boundaries of Psychotic Disorders*. London: Routledge, 1990.

Rahmani, Levi Y. *A Catalogue of Jewish Ossuaries in the Collections of the State of Israel*. Jerusalem: The Israel Antiquities Authority, 1994.

Séjourné, P. "Reliques." *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique* 13 (1936): 2312–76.

Silvano, Luigi. "*De Philentolo Fornicatore* or the Tale of the Soul Stuck Betwixt Heaven and Hell. A Curious Story and a Theological Paradox." *Byzantion* 86 (2016): 367–418.

Stanfill, Jonathan P. "The Body of Christ's Barbarian Limb: John Chrysostom's Processions and the Embodied Performance of Nicene Christianity." In *Revisioning John Chrysostom: New Approaches, New Perspectives*, edited

by Chris L. de Wet and Wendy Mayer, 670–97. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2019.

Thompson, Stith. *Motif-index of folk-literature: a classification of narrative elements in folktales, ballads, myths, fables, medieval romances, exempla, fabliaux, jest-books, and local legends*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1955–58.

Tiermeyer, Lena-Sofia. "Dumping Your Toxic Waste Abroad: Exorcism and Healing in Zechariah's Vision Report and Beyond." In *Healing and Exorcism in Second Temple Judaism and Early Christianity*, edited by Mikael Tellbe and Tommy Wasserman, 11–31. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019.

Toensing, Holly Joan. "'Living Among the Tombs.' Society, Mental Illness, and Self-Destruction in Mark 5:1-20." In *This Abled Body: Rethinking Disabilities in Biblical Studies*, edited by Hector Avalos, Sarah M. Mecher, and Jeremy Schipper. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007.

Webster, Colin. "The Soundscape of Ancient Greek Healing." In *Sound and the Ancient Senses*, edited by Shane Butler and Sarah Nooter, 109–29. London: Routledge, 2019.

Weitzmann, Kurt and Herbert L. Kessler. *The Frescoes of the Dura Synagogue and Christian Art*. Dumbarton Oaks Studies XXVIII. Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1990.

Williams, Michael Allen. *The Immovable Race: a Gnostic Designation and the Theme of Stability in Late Antiquity*. Leiden: Brill, 1985.

Williams, Michael Stuart. "Hymns as Acclamations: the Case of Ambrose of Milan." *Journal of Late Antiquity* 6.1 (2013): 108–34.

Zaman, Muhammad Qasim. "Death, Funeral Processions, and the Articulation of Religious Authority in Early Islam." *Studia Islamica* 93 (2001): 27–58.

## Online Resources

https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/281569/jewish/A-Jewish-Burial-and-Procession.htm

https://folklorethursday.com/legends/tales-medieval-crypt-walking-corpses-devils-haunted-shoemakers-walter-maps-de-nugis-curialium/

https://sites.ualberta.ca/~urban/Projects/English/Content/Motif_Help.htm

https://www.ancientjewreview.com/articles/2018/8/27/book-note-the-archaeology-of-death-in-roman-syria-burial-commemoration-and-empire

THOMAS ARENTZEN

# In the Shadows of Pillars*

A Greek folk song tells of a wife who has taken herself a lover. She sings delightfully: "My husband is marble, the stranger [i.e. the lover] is a tree, like the full-leafed cypress ...".[1] The woman is torn between two good things, the stone and the tree – a solid handsome reliability, perhaps, versus the beauty of the tall, elegant cypress. She cherishes the stone but longs for the tree. Stones may be hard to move, while trees are alive and sway in the wind in ways not always predictable. The tree is her lover, a beautiful stranger.[2]

As an ancient Greek speaker might exclaim: "Why all this about trees and rocks?" The question is attested in ancient Greek sources. Why all these words about something else?[3] Why wood and stone?

The rhetorical division of the material world into these two categories attests to their importance to humans. In religious life, too, wood and stone have vied to be the most significant material. The singer in the Ugaritic Baʿal cycle from ca. 1550–1200 BC listens for "a word of tree and a whisper of stone."[4] The Hebrew Bible similarly features passages where stones complement trees or vice versa. The prophet Ezekiel instructs his people never to think that they are like other nations, never to entertain the longing to "be like the nations, like the tribes of the countries, and worship wood and stone."[5] Holy places, however – even in the ancient Israelite world – were composed of trees or stones, and they were capable of conveying holiness in a preeminent way. In the Book of Joshua, the Hebrew leader himself "took a large stone, and set it up there under the oak

* This chapter is part of the project Beyond the Garden: An Ecocritical Approach to Early Byzantine Christianity (2018-01130) funded by the Swedish Research Council. I should like to thank, in particular, Glenn Peers, in dialogue with whom this chapter developed.

[1] Quoted from Alexiou, *After Antiquity*, 400.

[2] Both cypresses and marble may connote death or grave as well, which adds a darker undertone to the imagery of this song.

[3] The expression (τί ἤ μοι ταῦτα περὶ δρῦν ἢ περὶ πέτρην;) is found in for instance Homer, *Iliad* 22.126 and Hesiod, *Theogony* 35.

[4] Reconstruction and translation in Wyatt, *Word of Tree*, 181. For a broader approach to the topic of wood and stone, see Arentzen, Burrus, and Peers, *Byzantine Tree Life*, 117–23.

[5] Ezekiel 20:32.

[in Shechem] in the sanctuary of the Lord." Joshua says that "this stone [...] has heard all the words of the Lord that he spoke to us."[6] Between stone and tree, gods and creatures meet.

Christian holy men were also attracted to these two substances. Pillars and trees drew the ascetics towards themselves. As a young man – before he became a pillar saint – Symeon the Stylite experimented with various forms of ascetic exercises. He girded his skin with a belt made of palm leaves, according to Theodoret of Cyrrhus.[7] The Syriac text of the stylite's life relates that the young Symeon would stand on a rounded piece of wood, and later the other monks would search for him and find him standing in a corner, praying on a pile of wood.[8] Symeon had a background in tree attraction. The hagiographer also tells of a vision in which Symeon – now standing on a stone – appeared as a fruitful tree.[9] There was an affinity between ascetics and trees that paralleled the affinity between ascetics and stone columns, and the two ways of life may not have been entirely distinct – at least according to literary sources. John of Ephesus relates how two ascetic brothers, Abraham and Maro, lived side by side as neighbours, the former on a pillar and the latter in the trunk of a tree. Maro was in other words a so-called *dendrite,* someone who spends his or her ascetic days in a tree. The two shared similar urges in a different medium.[10]

In this essay, I concentrate on wood – the alternative to stone – in an attempt to (at least momentarily) move it out of the shadow. Although the lifestyles of tree- and pillar-dwellers had much in common, dendrites have received much less attention from ancient and modern commentators alike. In fact, tree dwellers almost seem to hide from the textual sources just like they escape the gaze of others in their trees. While stylitism clearly involved a public performance of asceticism, staged as a spectacle, tree dwelling often had something covert to it.

What, then, happened in the shadows of the stylites, among those charmed by tree rather than stone? Susan Ashbrook Harvey has suggested that dendrites were more humble or less social than their impressive stylite counterparts,[11] and if one thinks of those dendrites who lived among branches and boughs – such as the most famous of all Christian dendrites, St David of Thessaloniki[12] – their ascetic struggle must have been even more arduous, as the ascetics would try

[6] Joshua 24:26–27; for a scholarly treatment of ancient Hebrew ideas, see Zakariassen, *Human-Divine Interaction*, 111–14.

[7] Theodoret, *Life of St Symeon the Stylite* 5; for a study of Symeon's transformations, see Burrus, *Ancient Christian Ecopoetics*, 123–35, esp. 127–28.

[8] *The [Syriac] Life of St Symeon the Stylite* 5.

[9] *The [Syriac] Life of St Symeon the Stylite* 11.

[10] For studies of dendrites, see, for instance, Charalampidis, *The Dendrites*; Harvey, "Dendrites"; Smith, "Dendrites," and Arentzen, "Arboreal Lives." For dendrites and stylites as hybrids, see Arentzen, Burrus, and Peers, *Byzantine Tree Life*, 107–67.

[11] Harvey, "Dendrites."

[12] For a study, see Arentzen, Burrus, and Peers, *Byzantine Tree Life*, 107–45.

to stay put while the tree, offering no stable surfaces, would constantly be in motion. I am focusing here, however, on those who chose to reside, for shorter or longer periods of time, *inside* trees, within their hollow trunks. Of course, a trunk physically resembles a pillar, yet if stylites transpired as spectacles, trunk life was a more clandestine affair. Trees offered a living, secretive space to humans.

## Early Trunk Lives

In his *Spiritual Meadow*, the seventh-century author John Moschos relates the short tale of a monk, Adolas, who lived in the trunk of a plane tree in Thessaloniki.[13] The urban tree-dwelling elder seems to have been social enough, for he spoke to visitors through a window. With his saintly powers he was able to attack raiding barbarians. The author leaves his readers with few visual details – indeed, few details at all; Adolas is simply described as being in the tree, a holy arboreal force, somewhere in the city, somewhere in Moschos's meadow.

An earlier Christian trunk dweller was the already mentioned Maro. According to John of Ephesus (sixth century) the brothers Abraham and Maro both eventually "gained distinction upon a pillar."[14] The older brother, Abraham, first settled in a monastery on the top of a mountain, not far from modern Diyarbakir in Turkey. He became a stylite who, from his height, worked miracles, healing the sick and driving out demons. Maro followed in his elder brother's footsteps, but he did not climb up on the pillar. He "made a great segment from a hollow tree and set himself up inside it … and he used to stand in it. And there was a little door, and he would stoop and come out by it when he wanted."[15] Maro was a quiet little tree dweller who seems, at least initially, to have escaped the public attention that Abraham drew. He lived a simple life in his trunk.

It may seem ironic, but it was the tree-dwelling brother who was most adversely affected by the harsh weather conditions. As snowstorms raged in the winter, he would go out of his hollow tree to shovel snow – "his [skin] colour was changing nature from the intensity of the snow."[16] The tree trunk was not so much his ascetic challenge as his refuge. Maro actually *left* the tree whenever he was to sing the services or do hard work, but apart from that, he escaped the severe conditions of the world outside and found serenity inside the trunk.

[13] John Moschus, *Spiritual Meadow* 70.

[14] John of Ephesus, *The Life of the Eastern Saints* 4; trans. from Brooks, "John of Ephesus," 56. See also Whitby, "Maro the Dendrite."

[15] John of Ephesus, *The Life of the Eastern Saints* 4; Brooks, "John of Ephesus," 57.

[16] John of Ephesus, *The Life of the Eastern Saints* 4; Brooks, "John of Ephesus," 58.

Abraham – who appears to be covered by a hut on his pillar[17] – teases his little brother, who exposes himself all the time: "Wherefore are you thus killing yourself? ... Why do you afflict yourself?"[18] Maro, however, perseveres.

For eleven years, Maro lives inside the tree.[19] After that, he is forced to surrender, for when Abraham dies, the local people demand that someone take his place on top of the column. Clearly, the villagers are more eager to boast a visual ascetic atop the looming stone than to have a concealed one, who walks in and out of wood. Against his will, Maro is turned into a stylite. But his eleven years in the tree had, according to John's description, been a period of vigorous devotion and freedom.

## Arboreal Nights

Almost half a millennium later, another stylite-to-be spent his formative years frequenting a tree trunk. Luke was a tenth-century man who eventually found his column in Chalcedon. He was also a generous man who cared for God's creation; during the great famine in the 920s, he provided food not only for humans, but for the animals too. Before he settled on a pillar, the young man had embraced an ascetic lifestyle as a monk in the monastery of St Zacharias on the Bithynian Mount Olympus.[20] There, he devoted himself to a life of absolute silence, and for three whole years he did not speak a word, but kept quiet all day long. On the rare occasions when Luke needed to ask a question, he would write it down on a wooden tablet (πινακίδιον). Apart from that, he did not communicate with the other monks.

Surprisingly, however, Luke had a secret life, a nocturnal affair. Unnoticed and presumably against the monastery's regulations, the holy man breaks his own verbal fast as darkness falls. He sneaks out and sneaks back in: "every night he came out of the monastery gates and without sleep performed the entire traditional office according to the liturgical rule, having found a hollow in a tree that could hold him."[21] Despite his vow of silence, Luke goes out in the dark for a surreptitious rendezvous. He has a date, one might say, with a hollow tree, spending those covert hours hidden within its trunk.

Why is he drawn to the tree – why does he spend his noctambulating hours embraced by wood? The story does not give an answer. But he communicates with the help of wooden tablets and sings inside a wooden trunk; apparently, wood and tree had become his means of verbalizing. In the tree he is free to sing

[17] John of Ephesus, *The Life of the Eastern Saints* 4; Brooks, "John of Ephesus," 59.
[18] John of Ephesus, *The Life of the Eastern Saints* 4; Brooks, "John of Ephesus," 58.
[19] John of Ephesus, *The Life of the Eastern Saints* 4; Brooks, "John of Ephesus," 83.
[20] *Life of St Luke the Stylite* 7–8.
[21] *Life of St Luke the Stylite* 8 (my trans.; critical ed. Delehaye, *Saints stylites*, 203.)

the office; in the tree he is unseen and unwatched; in the tree he is both hidden and embraced. In the end his secret life was disclosed and compromised, and Luke went on to find new and more solitary ways to practice asceticism, including life on a pillar.

## A Heart of Oak

Years before Luke was living his secret nocturnal life, a holy man came and settled in Thessaly. His name was Nicholas, and he was to be known as Nicholas the Younger – or Nicholas of Vounaina.[22] Nicholas did not have any stylite connection, but he had a very strong tree connection. Not unlike Luke and Maro, he came to enjoy a close relationship with a particular tree, and the stories about him describe the arboreal intimacy in some more detail than we have for Luke and Maro. A certain Presbyter Achaïkos wrote the *Encomium* about St Nicholas sometime in the tenth century.

Nicholas escaped Avar attacks in Larissa and fled to the hills of Ternavon, to an idyllic place of forests and woods. Hunted down again, however, he sought a life even further away from the cultured world of humans, and he finally reached Mount Vounaina. There, in the hilly wilderness, he settled down as an ascetic in a beautiful, wooded spot: "The place he inhabited was like a grove … and formed a pleasing habitat," relates the anonymous and almost contemporary account, the *Martyrdom of Nicholas*.[23] There was even a spring close by. In this *locus amoenus*, as Presbyter Achaïkos reports, he "found a huge oak and stood in its hollow."[24]

The Tall Oak plays a vital role in the rest of Nicholas's life. He remains in the tree and blends, as it were, into the oak: "The cave of the oak held (εἶχε) … the martyr."[25] It is as if the tree embraced the man with its trunk. Despite the beauty of the place, Nicholas longed to give his life to Christ. From inside the oak, "every day he prayed to become a martyr."[26] And, as we imagine the trunk dweller standing below the branches, it becomes clear that in a certain sense he is already crowned to be a martyr, his wreath (στέφανος) of martyrdom being the leaves of the oak; the oak itself takes part in his martyrdom. He is, as it were, crowned in advance; the oak has offered him his wreath. He is already in a paradise, as a tree.

[22] For a more detailed treatment of Nicholas's lives, see Arentzen, "Arboreal Lives," 123–40.
[23] *Martyrdom of Nicholas* 6; Eng. trans. (slightly modified) and Greek text in Kaldellis and Polemis, *Saints*.
[24] Presbyter Achaïkos, *Encomium of Nicholas the Younger* 4; Eng. trans. (slightly modified) and Greek text in Kaldellis and Polemis, *Saints*.
[25] Achaïkos, *Encomium* 5.
[26] Achaïkos, *Encomium* 4.

But the Avars have not given up. Eventually they find Nicholas and kill him. His soul ascends directly to Christ, while the body, according to the *Martyrdom*, remains on the ground among the trees:

> His precious, martyred body that suffered so much became for us a treasury of miracles. It lay there, protected by God's grace: no force brought against it could weaken it. The Tall Oak we mentioned above – growing even larger than before, as if at God's command – miraculously took the martyr's precious body within itself, and kept it intact, undamaged, and free from harm. That is how it happened.[27]

The oak that embraced Nicholas's living body now guards and protects it after his soul has left it. Even in his afterlife, he is united with the tree, in a relationship that transcends death.

When he has passed away, Nicholas's arboreal site turns into a place of healing. A governor in Thessaloniki, by the name of Euphemianos, grew ill with leprosy and sought cures everywhere. After several failed treatments, he is advised to go up to Mount Vounaina. God says: "In the middle (μέσον) of a dense forest you will discover a tall oak, and outside it a clear spring, but in the middle (μέσον) of the oak the long-suffering body of my martyr Nicholas."[28] Nicholas's body is to be found in the middle of the arboreal location; it comes across as an entirely integrated part of the idyll that emerges in the forest clearing. In the other version, the *Encomium*, it is instead the saint himself who appears to the governor in a dream, directing him towards his own body. Nicholas says enigmatically: "You will discover me there [on the mountain] next to something tall, lying under a big oak."[29]

The governor travels up in the hills:

> [He] found the forest. He saw the clear spring, observed the Tall Oak, and was filled with joy and happiness. In the middle of the oak lay the long-suffering body of the martyr, emitting a spiritual fragrance. It lay there completely intact, perfect, so that perhaps even the nature of the trees might be sanctified – whether they be pine, oak, or cypress. When the governor found what he was hoping for [i.e. the body in the oak], he was filled with joy, with more joy than one could say. He embraced [it], kissing [it], taking [it] in his arms, and drenching [it] with tears of joy.[30]

The text veils the concrete object of Euphemianos's kisses and embraces, and so it is possible to read his arms as embracing the oak or embracing the body of the holy man. This lack of distinction emphasizes the arborealization of Nicholas,

[27] *Martyrdom of Nicholas* 8.
[28] *Martyrdom of Nicholas* 12.
[29] Achaïkos, *Encomium* 7.
[30] *Martyrdom of Nicholas* 13.

or vice versa. Their merged bodies, shrouded in a wonderful scent, grant healing and sanctification to pines, oaks, cypresses, and governors.[31]

Again, Achaïkos tells the story a bit differently. People from the city come with the governor and find the tree on the mountain: "They discovered that extremely tall oak. As soon as they came near it, their nostrils were filled with the fragrance that it emitted." And the author adds: "They also saw the body of the saint, which was lying in a stately manner."[32] Here the focus is clearly on the oak, and it is this tree that blesses the place with the delightful fragrance.

The Tall Oak constitutes the centre of Nicholas's pleasant habitat, emanating a pleasant odour at the sacred site, sanctifying both humans and trees, embracing the sacred body of the human martyr.

## Trunk-Boled

We do not know what attracted ascetics to the trees, but the narratives highlight the tree in the saints' lives, the boles and their bodies. None of the stories gives the tree a particularly ascetic function; the arboreal hollow is not, like Anthony's desert, the place you go to fight demons. Tree trunks are peaceful places.

The literary trunks, moreover, avoid typological work. There is little or no reference to the tree of the cross; on the contrary, the reader is left with the impression that inside the trunks – or very close to them – is where these men really wish to be. All the stories share the sense that tree and holy man are intimately intertwined; for a shorter or longer period, they become a union, almost hidden to the world. Luke had his nightly emissions of song – on his path towards stylitism. Maro, leading an unspectacular trunk life in the shadow of his impressive stylite brother, would "shut his door and remain silent" inside the tree.[33] Nicholas clearly found a little paradise for himself, in a secluded space, where he could become one with his Tall Oak. These hollows offered a covert and potentially sanctified embrace, where a man could be enfolded into wood and elusively arborealized. This intertwining is most evident in Nicholas's story, where the human protagonist expires into the tree. And trunks have indeed continued to attract Christian holy men; in the late fifteenth century, for instance, the Russian monk, Tikhon of Kaluga, famously took up his abode in a hollow oak.

[31] Many scholars have worked on issues of Byzantine Christianity and the senses in recent decades; see not least Caseau, "*Euodia*"; Caseau, "Les usages médicaux"; Harvey, *Scenting Salvation*; Harvey and Mullett, *Knowing Bodies*.

[32] Achaïkos, *Encomium* 7.

[33] John of Ephesus, *The Life of the Eastern Saints* 4; Brooks, "John of Ephesus," 57.

Trees are enigmatic, and unlike pillars and marble stones they do not represent immovable permanence, nor monumental display. Strange yet lovable, they may bend and move and are hard to pin down. In these stories, holy men seek the inside of trees, to live intimately with them, to hide or to be hugged, and almost become one with them, and – like dryads perhaps – to dwell in them and become a personal numinous presence in them. The vigorous secrecy of the arboreal realm attracted certain holy men, as trunks conceal, it seems, veiled indwellings.

## Bibliography

Alexiou, Margaret. *After Antiquity: Greek Language, Myth, and Metaphor*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002.

Arentzen, Thomas. "Arboreal Lives: Saints among the Trees in Byzantium and Beyond." *Scandinavian Journal of Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 5 (2019): 113–36.

Arentzen, Thomas, Virginia Burrus, and Glenn Peers. *Byzantine Tree Life: Christianity and the Arboreal Imagination*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021.

Brooks, E. W. "John of Ephesus: Lives of the Eastern Saints (I)." *Patrologia Orientalis* 17 (1923): 1–307.

Burrus, Virginia. *Ancient Christian Ecopoetics: Cosmologies, Saints, Things*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019.

Caseau, Béatrice. "*Euodia*. The Use and Meaning of Fragrances in the Ancient World and their Christianization (100-900 A.D.)." Princeton University [doctoral dissertation], 1994.

Caseau, Béatrice. "Les usages médicaux de l'encens et des parfums: Un aspect de la médicine populaire antique et de sa Christianisation." In *Air, Miasmes et Contagion: Les épidémies dans l'Antiquité et au Moyen Age*, edited by Sylvie Bazin-Tachella, Danielle Quéruel, and Evelyne Samama, 74–85. Langres: Dominique Guéniot, 2001.

Charalampidis, Constantine P. *The Dendrites in Pre-Christian and Christian Historical-Literary Tradition and Iconography*. Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 1995.

Delehaye, Hippolyte. *Les Saints stylites*. Subsidia Hagiographica 14. Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1923.

Harvey, Susan Ashbrook. "Dendrites." In *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World*, edited by Glen W. Bowersock, Peter Brown, and Oleg Grabar, 407. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999.

Harvey, Susan Ashbrook. *Scenting Salvation: Ancient Christianity and the Olfactory Imagination*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006.

Harvey, Susan Ashbrook and Margaret Mullett, eds. *Knowing Bodies, Passionate Souls: Sense Perception in Byzantium*. Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2017.

Kaldellis, Anthony and Ioannes Polemis. *Saints of Ninth- and Tenth-Century Greece*. DOML 54. Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 2019.

Smith, Kyle. "Dendrites and Other Standers in the History of the Exploits of Bishop Paul of Qanetos and Priest John of Edessa." *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 12 (2009): 117–34.

Whitby, Michael. "Maro the Dendrite: An Anti-Social Holy Man?" In *Homo Viator: Classical Essays for John Bramble*, edited by Michael Whitby, P. Hardie, and Mary Whitby, 309–17. Oak Park, Ill.: Bristol Classical Press, 1987.

Wyatt, N. *Word of Tree and Whisper of Stone and Other Papers on Ugaritian Thought*. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2007.

Zakariassen, Kari. "*'My people consult their tree ….'* Human-Divine Interaction in Arboreal Spaces in the Ancient Levant." University of Oslo [doctoral dissertation], 2019.

CHRISTIAN HØGEL

# Stylites in the Metaphrastic Menologion*

Sylites are in a sense conspicuous and centrally placed in the Metaphrastic Menologion – the collection of hagiographical texts which Symeon Metaphrastes produced towards the end of the tenth century by thoroughly rewriting the well-known stories. As in many other lists of saints, Symeon Stylites here opens the collection as the very first saint, since his feast day was on September 1, the beginning of the orthodox church year. And Symeon Metaphrastes included two more Lives of stylites, those of Daniel and Alypios, among his 148 texts. But as with the other Lives in Symeon's collection, so also the texts on stylites went through Symeon's usual rewriting, making the presentation of them more alike. The new elevated rhetorical style of Symeon Metaphrastes made all the well-known stories of the saints appear more homogeneous, even if he retained the narrative backbone of the stories. His rewritings, therefore, mostly concern literary style (rhetorical or classicizing Greek instead of simple late antique Greek), but in addition to this he did introduce some changes, especially concerning narrative traits, imperial connections, and light metaphors, which the following analysis will attempt to show.

## Symeon Metaphrastes and the Selection of Stylites in the Metaphrastic Menologion

Symeon Metaphrastes is the one major rewriter of saints' Lives in the Byzantine tradition. He was an imperial employee with a long career, attaining the post of *logothetes tou dromou,* perhaps before, but certainly under, Basil II (976–1025

* This article is a part of my research within the frame of the research programme Retracing Connections, financed by Riksbankens Jubileums-fond (M19-0430:1). On Symeon Metaphrastes, see Høgel, *Symeon Metaphrastes: Rewriting* and Høgel, "Symeon Metaphrastes and the Metaphrastic Movement."

CE), but he seems to have fallen out of favour, probably in 985 CE. A later source ties this fall to Symeon's hagiographical activity, but this is far from certain.[1] His Menologion, which we have difficulties dating more precisely than to the 970s–80s CE, reproduced all the features of existing Menologia: books containing saints' Lives in full (not abridged), ordered in liturgical sequence according to feast days.[2] Since saints' Lives could be long, a volume would often only contain texts for one month (hence the name *meno-logion*) or, in some cases, even only half a month. Copyists and commissioners display a very free choice in choosing which saints and which texts to include, often – it seems – taking a model as starting point but swopping some saint with another, or some text version with another. For this reason, and because there is an enormous quantity of extant manuscripts, the field is hard to get a general overview of. Within this productive sphere (especially in the eleventh and twelfth centuries), Symeon Metaphrastes takes up a central position. His Menologion in 10 volumes, containing (mainly) his own rewritten versions of existing (late antique or more contemporaneous) Lives, had a great success, with around 700 extant manuscripts and fragments. The 148 texts included in the Metaphrastic Menologion therefore experienced a wide circulation, being probably the most read saints' Lives in Byzantium. Both Symeon's selection of saints and his presentation of them therefore tell us much about Byzantine notions of sainthood, while at the same time also reflecting his particular choices. As a case study within this larger field, Symeon's treatment of stylites will here be evaluated, in terms of choices, rewriting procedures, Symeon's enhancement or even introduction of (new) themes, and the general conclusions that may be drawn from all this.

As mentioned, of the 148 hagiographical texts in the Metaphrastic collection three Lives feature stylites – Symeon Stylites, Daniel Stylites, and Alypios Stylites.[3] Another, unnamed stylite is briefly mentioned in the Metaphrastic *Life of Loukas the Younger* but will not be discussed here.[4] Symeon's decision to include the three mentioned stylites is not wholly surprising. Symeon Stylites is the towering figure among stylites and, perhaps by chance, his feast day ended

[1] See Høgel, *Symeon Metaphrastes: Rewriting,* 127–34: Magdalino, "The Liturgical Poetics," 116–32.

[2] The fundamental study is Ehrhard, *Überlieferung und Bestand*. Much of the information given by Ehrhard is now (partly corrected and) retrievable on the Pinakes site: https://pinakes.irht.cnrs.fr.

[3] The editions of stylite lives used here are from Delehaye, *Saints stylites*; Lietzmann, *Das Leben*, and Migne, *Patrologia graeca* with indication of the following abbreviations:

Alypios Stylites – Old Life: Delehaye 148–169 (= *AlypStyl*); Metaphrastic Life: Delehaye 170–197 (= *MetAlypStyl*)

Daniel Stylites – Old Life: Delehaye 1–94 (= *DanStyl*); Metaphrastic Life: Delehaye 104–147 (= *MetDanStyl*)

Symeon Stylites – Old Life (by Theodoret): *Lietzmann* 1–18 (= *SymStyl*); Metaphrastic Life: PG 114.336–392 (= *MetSymStyl*).

[4] For this Life, see Connor and Connor, *The Life and Miracles*.

up coinciding with the very first day of the Byzantine church year, September 1.[5] In a collection of liturgically ordered saints' Lives, he could hardly not appear.[6] Symeon's decision to include Daniel Stylites in his collection is also explainable: Daniel's column, or rather columns, had in the fifth century formed a central part of city life in the capital Constantinople, the place where Symeon Metaphrastes worked and produced his rewritten Lives. So here Symeon could include a local saint. But Constantinopolitan saints are, in fact, not very conspicuous in the Metaphrastic Menologion, and this is a common feature of any larger selection of Orthodox saints. Against such a background, one could then argue that the Metaphrastic Menologion did more to adopt a Constantinopolitan orientation by including texts such as those on the Translation of the Mandylion, Stephanos the Younger, and the brothers Theodore and Theophanes Graptoi. But in the end, even Symeon's Menologion can hardly be called very Constantinopolitan in terms of its selection of saints. Third in our list of Metaphrastic stylites comes Alypios. His appearance is perhaps more surprising. His Life was probably not very popular, so we can either count his appearance among the less important saints that Symeon included (for reasons that may be hard to ascertain), or we could see Alypios as an almost Constantinopolitan saint, spending all of his life in neighbouring Paphlagonia.[7] The importance of such geographical considerations will also occupy us below, but as for being selected, the appearance of none of these stylites in the Metaphrastic Menologion is a complete surprise.

More surprising are perhaps the absences, or in fact one particular absence. No Life of Symeon Stylites the Younger was included in the Metaphrastic Menologion, and in view of his importance, this looks surprising.[8] One simple explanation could be that the feast day of Symeon Stylites the Younger falls in May (May 24 or 25 according to BHG), and the Metaphrastic Menologion has far fewer saints for the period from mid-February till end of August than in the other half of the year from the beginning of the church year (September 1) till mid-February (which boasts almost a saint per date).[9] Many important saints

[5] See Ehrhard, *Überlieferung,* I.25–35. It is impossible to trace the order of events that led up to the dates coinciding, see Høgel, "The Pillar Saint."

[6] Symeon Stylites appears in all fully extant (non-Metaphrastic) menologia and year collections (Ehrhard's *Jahressammlungen*), including Ehrhard's reconstructed old September Menologion, see Ehrhard, *Überlieferung,* I.154–456.

[7] For this Life, see the full English translation by C. Kuper on the Oxford Cult of Saints site: http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk/record.php?recid=E07158. Delehaye's edition of the Life is based on the three extant manuscripts.

[8] On Symeon Stylites the Younger, see Caseau and Messis in the present volume.

[9] See my discussion of all this in Høgel, *Symeon Metaphrastes: Rewriting*, where it is also suggested that the Metaphrastic Menologion was not completed according to its original plan. We may also note that the feast days of our three represented stylites are: September 1 (Symeon Stylites), November 26 (Alypios Stylites), December 11 (Daniel Stylites), so all lying within the period covered with more or less a daily saint in the Metaphrastic Menologion.

with feast dates in the second half of the Orthodox church year are therefore not included in Symeon Metaphrastes's collection. But the non-appearance of Symeon Stylites the Younger is even more intriguing: a rewritten version of his Life actually appeared just about the time that Symeon was composing his Menologion, and this *metaphrasis* (the Byzantine word for rewriting) was produced by none other than Nikephoros Ouranos, who was Symeon Metaphrastes's close friend.[10] Did Ouranos produce this rewriting in order for it to be included in the Menologion? If so, why is it not there? Or did he produce it too late? Nikephoros lived on beyond the year 1000 CE, and Symeon certainly died before him, and since the downfall of Symeon and others did not affect Nikephoros, the incident in 985 CE may have caused a disruption in the friendship and collaboration. We have little knowledge about the chronology of both the Menologion and the precise dating of Ouranos's rewriting, so only future studies may solve this issue.

## The Narratives of Metaphrastic Stylite Lives

As has been repeatedly stressed in evaluations of Symeon Metaphrastes's rewritings of earlier saints' Lives, his main aim was stylistic.[11] Symeon put his energy into elevating the style of a central body of Greek hagiographical accounts, rephrasing them in the high-level Greek used by Byzantine literati. According to Psellos, this was done to save the texts from ridicule, which implies that at least some – not least Psellos, who was himself a rewriter – found the old texts embarrassing in terms of style.[12]

But Symeon did more than that. As already noted by Lackner, Symeon incorporated material from secondary sources into a number of his rewritings.[13] This information mainly he extracted from church histories or other saints' Lives, and in some cases, Symeon even included quotations from the writings of the portrayed saint.[14] One central case displaying an extensive combination of sources is Symeon's rewriting of the Life of Symeon Stylites (the Elder). As shown already by Lietzmann, Symeon Metaphrastes here took the account by Theodoret (of Cyrrhus) as his narrative backbone but included further informa-

[10] Nikephoros wrote a dirge at the death of Symeon, edited in Mercati, "Versi di Niceforo." On the hagiographical milieu, to which both Symeon Metaphrastes and Nikephoros Ouranos belonged, see Magdalino, "The Liturgical Poetics."

[11] On Metaphrastic rewriting, see Zilliacus, "Zur stilistischen Umarbeitungstechnik"; Peyr, "Zur Umarbeitung"; Schiffer, "Metaphrastic Lives"; Hinterberger, "Die Aneignung des Anderen"; on the early history of Byzantine metaphrasis, see Resh, *Metaphrasis in Byzantine Hagiography.* On metaphrasis in general, see Constantinou, "Metaphrasis. Mapping."

[12] See Fisher, "Michael Psellos."

[13] Lackner, "Zu Editionsgeschichte."

[14] Høgel, "The Actual Words."

tion from (at least) another *Life of Symeon Stylites* by Antonios, from the *Life of Daniel Stylites*, from the *Life of Theodosios the Koinobiarch*, and from the *Church History* of Evagrius (Scholasticus).[15] Symeon Metaphrastes's reasons for adding secondary sources to his prime model, Theodoret, are obvious. Theodoret knew Symeon Stylites from personal acquaintance and close contact with the saint, and he wrote about his deeds and miracles within the lifetime of the saint, so his *Life* of the stylite did not tell of his death. To tell the story of the stylite's demise, Symeon Metaphrastes was therefore obliged to go to Antonios to find an account of this. But here we must note that Symeon Metaphrastes had made the choice to base his new version on Theodoret's account, even though the *Life by Antonios* offered a full account of the life of Symeon Stylites. Symeon Metaphrastes clearly preferred working with Theodoret's text as his basis; it offered a better style and grander view, but also a number of very personal perspectives and stories, relating Theodoret's own visits and experiences with the stylite, passages that Symeon Metaphrastes had to rewrite into the third person in order to make his own narrative voice the mouthpiece of the story. The *Life of Daniel Stylites* and the *Life of Theodosios the Koinobiarch* gave Symeon Metaphrastes a few more scenes (ch. 39–41), depicting the encounters of Symeon Stylites with Daniel and Theodosios and his words of advice and reassurance to both on each occasion. And the *Church History* of Evagrius provided some further description of Symeon, not least seen through the admiration of the Emperor Theodosios II, and a final posthumous miracle to round off the presentation (more on the latter below).[16] Speaking of these sources, we must of course remember that Symeon Metaphrastes included none of them in their existing verbal form, but reproduced the narratives of his sources in a rewritten manner, even if Theodoret's classicizing prose was close to the style that Symeon aimed for. In the Metaphrastic *Life of Daniel* (but not in that of Alypios), we find a similar inclusion of secondary sources, but only from a single source.[17]

The use of secondary sources in the Metaphrastic *Life of Symeon Stylites* is, as mentioned, extensive and goes beyond Symeon Metaphrastes's normal procedures. Nowhere else in his collection are so many other texts blended into a single account, nowhere else does the demise of the saint originate from a source other than the main one, and nowhere else does Symeon Metaphrastes explicitly tell us, as we shall see, that he has combined several accounts into one. This he does in his prologue to his *Life of Symeon Stylites*, and this prologue, the first of the collection, in fact comes closest to being a prologue to the collection

[15] Lietzmann, *Das Leben,* 210–11, lists the sources for all the sections of the Metaphrastic version. See also Høgel, *Symeon Metaphrastes: Rewriting,* 107.

[16] *MetSymStyl* ch. 21–22, 50 and 58–59, respectively.

[17] See Lackner, "Zu Editionsgeschichte."

as such.[18] The following quote from Symeon Metaphrastes's prologue to his *Life of Symeon Stylites* is his own account of his sources and what he himself has achieved in terms of rewriting. It comes right after Symeon has reproduced – with very minor changes – the first sentence found in Theodoret's prologue:

> Μέγας τοίνυν οὗτος ὤν, καὶ πολὺς τὴν φήμην γενόμενος, πολλῶν ἔτυχε καὶ τῶν συγγραφέων· ἀλλ' οὐδεὶς οὐδέπω κατὰ μέρος τὰ κατ' αὐτὸν διεξῆλθεν, οὐδεὶς ἅπαντα καθῆκεν ἑαυτόν, οὐδὲ ἀκριβῶς, ὅπως ἕκαστα εἶχεν ἀνέγραφε. Ἀλλὰ τοὺς ἄνω χρόνους ἐν κεφαλαιώδεσιν ἐπιτομαῖς εἰπόντες, ἔνιά τε τῶν ἐν μέσῳ παρέδραμον, καὶ οὐδὲ πρὸς αὐτὸ τὸ τέλος τῶν τούτου πράξεων ἦλθον. Ἡμῖν δὲ χρήσιμος μάλιστα ὁ περὶ αὐτοῦ λόγος ἔσται, ἄνωθέν τε ἀρχομένοις, καὶ ἐπὶ τὰ τελευταῖα τοῦ ἀνδρὸς καταβιβάζουσι τὴν διήγησιν.[19]
>
> So as this man (Symeon Stylites) was great and became of much renown, he also acquired many biographers. But no one has yet told his story in careful order, no one has shown the whole man, nor written diligently of all details, but some have given an account of his first years in abridged chapters, others have cursorily presented what happened in his mid-life, without however reaching the end of his life. For us it will serve a good purpose to start from the beginning and to reach the end of the account of the man.

So, Symeon Metaphrastes criticizes his source material for its shortcomings, exaggerating the problems a bit since the *Life* written by Antonios, which Symeon himself draws material from, actually contains a narrative from birth to death. But through this initial statement, Symeon Metaphrastes does step forward and present himself as the new narrator/redactor who will now complete what the others failed to achieve. His narration claims completeness, taking us through the whole life of the stylite, and Symeon thus claims authorship. This has few parallels elsewhere in the Metaphrastic collection.[20]

The narrative structures of the Metaphrastic *Life of Daniel Stylites* and *Life of Alypios Stylites* are much simpler. Here Symeon closely followed the narrative sequence of his (main) source in the respective cases. However, in the *Life of Daniel Stylites*, which is very long, he skipped a number of chapters, and he also changed the order of narration of certain stories, transposing elements to form new thematic clusters (more on this below). This confirms observations from parallel readings of many other Lives, showing that Symeon must in many cases have read the whole text (or at least longer passages) carefully, before entering

[18] On the lack of prologue to the Metaphrastic Menologion, see Høgel, *Symeon Metaphrastes: Rewriting,* 127–34.

[19] *MetSymStyl* ch. 1.

[20] For prologues in which Symeon Metaphrastes seems to claim some authorship, see Høgel, *Symeon Metaphrastes, Rewriting,* 103–05.

upon the actual rewriting process, at which point he must already have decided upon such narrative re-orderings of certain passages.[21]

Another feature observable in these rewritings is the strong Metaphrastic narrator voice, as already touched upon above.[22] Due to the elevated style, the Metaphrastic narrator would, to Byzantine readers and listeners, have sounded like high-status literature. Texts meant for a learned (i.e. well-read) milieu were, according to Byzantine standards, to be phrased in the quasi-Attic used in courtly and other high circles. This linguistic level was not easily accessible to any ordinary church-goer, or even monk or nun, except perhaps after hearing it regularly.[23] The Metaphrastic narrator voice also often changed what had in the earlier version been direct speech, into his own indirect presentation (though cases of the opposite do also occur) and made frequent use of rhetorical questions, prompting the expectations of the audience (with questions like "and what did the saint then do?"). These features make the Metaphrastic narrator result much more in control of the story than the narrators of the pre-Metaphrastic versions.[24] Even if Symeon Metaphrastes very seldom speaks in his capacity of redactor (as we saw one instance of in the prologue to the *Life of Symeon Stylites* above), his voice is dominant, it sounds learned and pertaining to a higher social order; it takes over the words of others, prompts audience responses, and in fact introduces new emotional details.

Finally, a last Metaphrastic feature worth mentioning here is the importance given to the geographical origin of a saint. It was common in Greek-Byzantine hagiography to flag up the geographical origin or birthplace of a saint early in the account of their life, in some cases to further identify the saint (in addition to his or her name). But in Symeon's more authorized Menologion, geography also came up as a theme of variation.[25] Every saint would now, in a more coherently composed collection, highlight a new place, either within the empire or somewhere beyond it. This new function leads to more extended descriptions of geography. We see a clear example of this if we juxtapose old and Metaphrastic versions of the *Life of Alypios*:

[21] Not much has been written on the question of reordering, but see Høgel, *Symeon Metaphrastes: Rewriting,* 98–99.

[22] On the Metaphrastic narratorial voice, see Papaioannou, "Voice, Signature, Mask."

[23] The clearest example of consistent (intended) use of the Metaphrastic Menologion as liturgical book (to be read aloud on the given feast days) is found in the Evergetis typicon, on which see Gautier, "Le typikon."

[24] See Papaioannou, "Voice, Signature, Mask."

[25] On authorization in the case of Symeon Metaphrastes, see (though talking more of style and authority) Papaioannou, "Voice, Signature, Mask," 135–49, and the introduction to Papaioannou, *Christian Novels*.

> πατρίδα μὲν ἔσχεν, εἰ δεῖ πατρίδα λέγειν τὴν ἐπὶ γῆς, τὴν Ἀδριανοῦ πόλει ὁμώνυμον, ἥ μία τῆς Παφλαγόνων καθέστηκεν χώρας·[26]
>
> His fatherland was, if we must speak of a fatherland on Earth, the one sharing name with Hadrian's city, which is one of those in the land of Paphlagonians.

> Ὧι πατρὶς μὲν ἡ πρὸς ἥλιον ἀνίσχοντα κειμένη πόλις μία τῶν Μαρυανδυνῶν καὶ αὐτὴ τῆς τῶν Παφλαγόνων γῆς ὑπάρχουσα, Ἀδριανούπολις οὕτω καλουμένη· ἥτις οὐ τοσοῦτον ἐπὶ τῷ ταύτην δειμαμένῳ γῆς τε καὶ ὡρῶν εὖ ἔχουσα σεμνύνεσθαι πέφυκεν, ὅσον ἐπὶ τῷ τηλικοῦτον ἄνδρα φῦναί τε καὶ θρέψαι καὶ πόνους αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀγῶνας τοὺς ὑπερφυεῖς ἰδεῖν καὶ εἰσέτι καὶ νῦν ἐγκόλπιον ἔχειν καὶ χαρίτων ἐκείνου καὶ θαυμάτων κατατρυφᾶν.[27]
>
> His fatherland was the city of the Maruandynoi lying towards the east and which was the leading city of the Paphlagonians, called Hadrianopolis. This city, prospering from land and seasons, did not pride itself as much on its founder, as on having bred and nourished a man of such age and having seen his marvellous toils and strivings, even now holding him to its bosom and enjoying his graces and miracles.

We see that Symeon not only repeats and rephrases information from his source, but he also adds new historical details about the original inhabitants, called the Maruandynoi, and about the ancient founder of the city. The pride of the city now becomes a perspective from which to view the achievements of the saint. In Symeon's collection, geography gained both a literary and a spatial value. And, as we shall see, Symeon often enhances the importance of secular matters and in some cases the Metaphrastic rewriting even juxtaposes the saintly with the imperial, especially in the Metaphrastic Lives of saints who, like Symeon Stylites or Daniel Stylites, had direct dealings with emperors, as we shall see below. But on the basis of the observations made above, concerning the narrative voice in the Metaphrastic stylite Lives, we may state that these Lives went through a redactional process very similar to that of other Metaphrastic texts. Only the *Life of Symeon Stylites* is perhaps an exceptional case, due to the complex situation of available sources and the claims to authorship that Symeon Metaphrastes made for his *Life* of this towering saint.

## A Thematic Enhancement: the Empire in Metaphrastic Stylite Lives

As we saw above, in his description of the place of origin of Alypios, Symeon Metaphrastes added information on historical names and founders. Such

[26] *AlypStyl* ch. 2.
[27] *MetAlypStyl* ch. 2.

ample expansion of the description of geographical origin does not occur in Symeon's rewriting of the *Life of Symeon Stylites*. In the prologue to this *Life,* Symeon Metaphrastes simply restated the imperial geography that already played a significant role in the original version by Theodoret. Theodoret's prologue mentions that Symeon Stylites was known to all subjects of the Roman (i.e. Byzantine) empire, and that his fame spread even to Persians, Indians, Ethiopians, and (nomad) Scythians; this information is later supplemented by stories involving Ishmaelites and Lazi, and by the detail that images of him even hung in shops in Rome.[28] The Metaphrastic version repeats all this information on empires and more or less distant nations (and empires), and some of this imperial spirit may have gone into Symeon's adding of imperial touches to the rewriting of the *Life of Daniel Stylites*. Unlike Symeon Stylites, Daniel chose to be a stylite in the Byzantine capital, a fact that Symeon Metaphrastes wished to enhance, as we shall see.

Daniel Stylites took up his column life on the outskirts of Constantinople around the middle of the fifth century, and centrally placed he came into direct contact with emperors, an empress, and several high officials. In a sense, Daniel is – and was also to the original anonymous writer of his Life – a Constantinopolitan/imperial version of Symeon Stylites, his role model whom he had met and been confirmed by in his mission.[29] This is not the place to give a detailed account of the many dealings that Daniel had with imperial powers, but it is relevant to catalogue the divergences which Symeon Metaphrastes allowed himself in rewriting the old account. Before looking at passages where imperial features are intensified, we should however note that Symeon left out some chapters dealing with prominent people of the empire. Symeon probably skipped all these chapters because he found them of little interest for his audience around the end of the tenth century; they did little to show the workings of the saint, even if further documenting his close contact with imperial powers. But in terms of imperial additions to the *Life of Daniel*, things are quite clear. Already in the prologue, Symeon introduced a new military analogy to describe the importance of the *Life of Daniel*. The very beginning of the text reads:

> Ὥσπερ ἐπὶ τῶν ἀριστέων, ὁπόταν περὶ πολέμων καὶ ἀγώνων καὶ τροπαίων τις διαλέγηται, αὐτίκα τε αὐτοῖς ἡ ψυχὴ διανίσταται καί που καὶ παρατάξεις ἐπιζητεῖ καὶ πρὸς συμπλοκὴν πολεμίων ὁρμᾷ, καὶ ὅσῳπερ ἂν μᾶλλον τοὺς περὶ τούτων ἀκούωσι λόγους, ἐπὶ πλέον τε αὐτοῖς ἡ ὁρμὴ αὔξεται καὶ τοιούτων ἔργων εὐθὺς ὀρέγονται· οὕτω καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν τῆς ἀρετῆς ἐραστῶν ἂν ἀσκητικούς τις αὐτοῖς διέρχηται βίους καὶ διὰ πάσης ἀρετῆς ἥκοντας, ὁπόσαι Θεῷ οἰκειοῦσιν, ἅμα τε διαθερμαίνονται καὶ τῶν

[28] *SymStyl* ch. 1. Συμεώνην τὸν πάνυ, τὸ μέγα θαῦμα τῆς οἰκουμένης, ἴσασι μὲν ἅπαντες οἱ τῆς Ῥωμαίων ἡγεμονίας ὑπήκοοι, ἔγνωσαν δὲ καὶ Πέρσαι καὶ Ἰνδοὶ καὶ Αἰθίοπες, καὶ πρὸς Σκύθας δὲ τοὺς νομάδας ἡ φήμη δραμοῦσα τὴν τοῦδε φιλοπονίαν καὶ φιλοσοφίαν ἐδίδαξεν = *MetSymStyl* ch 1.

[29] On his Life, see Lane Fox, "The *Life of Daniel.*"

> ὁμοίων ἐφίενται καὶ ὅλως οἰκείως διατίθενται τοῖς λεγομένοις καὶ παρασκευάζονται πρὸς τὴν μίμησιν.[30]
>
> Just as the soul of those who excel in valour, when someone speaks to them of wars, fights, and trophies, is instantly awakened and somehow seeks out battles and hastens towards engagement with enemies, and their engagement will increase the more they hear talks about these things, and they will immediately strive for such deeds; likewise will the lovers of virtue, if someone narrates to them the lives of ascetics who have reached complete virtue, among those virtues that are befitting God, will at the same time feel the heat and long for similar achievements, and feel completely in harmony with the words and prepare to set themselves up for imitation.

Saints' lives often state that reading or listening to hagiography leads to an urge to copy the deeds and virtues of the saints portrayed, but the use of a military analogy to convey this notion, as seen here, is exceptional. Much Greek hagiography employs the image of the running course (*dromos*), the competition or combat (*agon*) in a similar way, and even if the word for competition/combat, the Greek *agon,* is also found here in the prologue to the *Life of Daniel*, the use of military imagery to visualize the saintly virtues in a prologue (or elsewhere) seems to be without parallel, even in *Lives* of military saints. But Daniel is, if not a military saint, certainly a saint who battles for the empire through his direct interaction with imperial powers, even to the degree that he expresses his mission as "leading an army in favour of the heavenly King".[31] As is clear from his prologue, Symeon Metaphrastes wanted to highlight this martial importance right from the beginning of his account. And martial features normally characterize an emperor or a general, fighting for the empire, rather than a saint.

In fact, Symeon Metaphrastes gives a sharper profile to the empire in specific and quite central parts of the *Life of Daniel*. For example, when Daniel is to travel from Jerusalem to Constantinople, on the advice of an old monk whose resemblance to Symeon Stylites is stressed, the importance of Constantinople is enhanced. Whereas the monk in the old Life simply stated that Daniel should "go to Byzantium and see the second Jerusalem, Constantinople", the Metaphrastic text rephrases his words into "take the road towards Byzantium, which is second to Jerusalem in sanctity, but in fact also first, since the seniority of the latter (Jerusalem) has now through God passed on to the former (Constantinople)".[32] In fact, in the Metaphrastic version the monk ends up stating (with no parallel in the old version) that "there is no reason to believe that you may only

[30] *MetDanStyl* ch. 1.

[31] *DanStyl* ch. 60: Ἐγὼ ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν στρατεύομαι τῷ ἐπουρανίῳ βασιλεῖ; *MetDanStyl* ch. 37: Ἐγὼ, φησί, τοῦ λοιποῦ τῷ ἐπουρανίῳ ἔγνων στρατεύεσθαι βασιλεῖ. See also *DanStyl* ch. 14.

[32] *DanStyl* ch. 10: ἄπελθε εἰς τὸ Βυζάντιον καὶ βλέπεις δευτέραν Ἱερουσαλήμ, τὴν Κωνσταντινούπολιν; *MetDanStyl* ch. 8: τὴν ἐπὶ τὸ Βυζάντιον ἐπιστρέψας πορεύου, δευτέραν εἰς ἁγιασμοῦ λόγον ὑπάρχουσαν Ἱερουσαλήμ, μᾶλλον δὲ καὶ πρώτην, ἐπεὶ καὶ τὰ ἐκείνης πρεσβεῖα ταύτῃ νῦν παρὰ Θεοῦ δέδοται.

meet God in Jerusalem and not in the city of Byzas (i.e. Constantinople), for God is not circumscribed, my dear".[33] Constantinople is here clearly receiving increased attention.

Another passage may be quoted, this time more fully, to illustrate Metaphrastic views towards imperial issues, now in the very juxtaposition of stylite and emperor. The *Life of Daniel* was to become central in Byzantine hagiography, not least for its depiction of a saint living in Constantinople with direct influence on the imperial family, the patriarch, and others. Hardly any saint, before or after in the history of the empire, was to wield such direct power over an emperor. Emperors fairly often visited saints, but normally in dwellings far from the centre of the empire. The Metaphrastic Life emphasises Daniel's uniqueness in various places, but the scene that most clearly demonstrates how the exchange between saint and emperor should be viewed is their first personal encounter. Prior to this, patriarch Gennadios, who is also referred to as (arch) bishop, had paid a visit to Daniel, and hearing of this, the Emperor Leo I then also decides to climb the ladder of Daniel's column. The old version gives an account of this focusing on such details as how the ladder was brought to the emperor (the first quotation below), whereas the Metaphrastic version is much more interested in what the virtue of the saint means for the empire (the second text quoted):

> Καὶ κατελθὼν ὁ ἐπίσκοπος καὶ εἰσελθὼν ἐν τῷ παλατίῳ ἀνήγγειλεν τῷ βασιλεῖ ἅπαντα τὰ γενόμενα. Καὶ εὐφράνθη ἐπὶ τούτοις ὁ τῆς εὐσεβοῦς μνήμης ὁ μακάριος Λέων· καὶ μετ' οὐ πολὺ καταλαμβάνει τὸν προλεχθέντα τόπον, ἐν ᾧ ὑπῆρχεν ὁ ὅσιος, καὶ παρακαλεῖ τεθῆναι τὴν κλίμακα, ἵνα ἀνελθὼν εὐλογηθῇ. Τεθείσης δὲ τῆς κλίμακος, ἀνῆλθεν ὁ βασιλεὺς πρὸς τὸν δοῦλον τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ παρεκάλει τῶν ποδῶν αὐτοῦ ἅπτεσθαι.[34]
>
> And the bishop [Patriarch Gennadios] descended [from the column], entered the palace, and related all the events to the emperor. And the blessed Leo, of pious memory, was delighted, and shortly thereafter he went to the aforementioned place in which the holy man resided, and he asked for the ladder to be raised so that he could ascend and honour the saint. Once the ladder was placed, the emperor ascended to the slave of God and asked if he could embrace his feet.

> Ταῦτα δῆλα καὶ τῷ βασιλεῖ γίνεται καὶ τῆς ὁμοίας αὐτὸν ἐμπίπλησιν ἡδονῆς καὶ ἐκπλήξεως. Οὐδὲν οὖν μέγα οὐδὲ τῆς ἀρχῆς φρονήσας οἰκεῖον, ἀλλὰ μαθὼν ὅσον ἐστὶ βασιλείας ἀρετὴ τιμιώτερον, ἄνεισι καὶ αὐτὸς πρὸς αὐτὸν καὶ ὥσπερ τὸν τῦφον καὶ τὴν βασίλειον ὀφρὺν κάτω λιπὼν καὶ ἀποδυσάμενος, βάλλει μὲν ἑαυτὸν εἰς γῆν,

[33] *MetDanStyl* ch. 8: Πρὸς τούτοις οὐ χρὴ νομίζειν ἐν Ἱεροσολύμοις μὲν ἐντυχεῖν τῷ θεῷ, ἐν δὲ τῇ Βύζαντος οὐδαμῶς· οὐ γὰρ περιγράφεται τὸ θεῖον, ἀγαπητέ.

[34] *DanStyl* ch. 43–44.

> ἅπτεται δὲ τῶν ἱερῶν ἐκείνου ποδῶν, καθαπερεὶ τῷ ταῦτα ποιεῖν μεῖζον ἢ κατὰ βασιλέα τιμώμενος.[35]
>
> All this was made known to the emperor and filled him with a similar pleasure and surprise. And with no thought about what is big and befitting of power but having understood how much more honourable virtue is to empire, also he ascends to the saint, and as if leaving behind below vanity and the imperial superciliousness and stripping himself of (them), he prostrated himself on the ground and embraced the holy feet of the other [Daniel], as if he by doing this honoured him more than one would an emperor.

We see that the Metaphrastic narrator skips the information about the bishop (in fact patriarch Gennadios) returning to the palace at the beginning of our parallel versions, but then adds several details to highlight the meeting of emperor and saint, or – as he seems to suggest – of sanctity and earthly power. Let us go through the details: the delight of the emperor in the old version becomes his "pleasure and surprise" in the Metaphrastic version.[36] Also, plenty of new aspects have been added in the Metaphrastic version. The emperor now brushes aside any concerns for imperial propriety, for – as the narrator tells us without making clear whose perspective he is now taking – virtue (which must mean saintly/ascetic virtue) takes precedence. In fact, the emperor now "leaves behind below and strips himself of vanity and the imperial superciliousness", paying honours, as our narrator concludes, surpassing those that are due an emperor.

Saintly virtue stands higher than imperial pride, at least when this emperor pays a visit to the stylite. So, in a version of the story (and in a hagiographical collection in general) where the perspective of empire is enhanced, the eventual superiority of sainthood to imperial glory is also played out. Symeon Metaphrastes was a man of secular employment, but also member of a lay religious confraternity.[37] In looking at the meeting point between secular and religious he seems, at least when acting as hagiographer, to be giving precedence to the world of faith. In fact, when the Emperor Leo later brings his ally Gubazios, king of the (Georgian) Lazi, to the column of Daniel, the Metaphrastic narrator makes Emperor Leo simply state, "This is the wonder of my empire". In the old version, it just said that Gubazios "beheld the wonder [of Daniel]".[38] So in

[35] *MetDanStyl* ch. 25–26.

[36] It should be noted that Symeon Metaphrastes probably adopted the notion of 'surprise' or 'astonishment' in the Greek *ekplexis* from the exposition of Evagrius (Scholasticus, the church historian), who describes the reaction of the Antiochaean bishop Domnos as ἐκπλαγεὶς τὴν στάσιν καὶ τὴν διαίταν, "astonished at the standing and the manner of living", Evagr. *Hist. Eccl.* I.12.

[37] Magdalino, "The Liturgical Poetics."

[38] *MetDanStyl* ch. 31. The two parallel passages read: Old version: Παραλαβὼν οὖν αὐτὸν ἀναβαίνει πρὸς τὸν ὅσιον· καὶ **ἰδὼν τὸ ξένον θέαμα** ὁ Γουβάζιος ῥίπτει ἑαυτὸν ἐπὶ πρόσωπον καὶ

a sense, both military analogies and imperial praises become favourite foils for extolling the glory of the saint whom Symeon Metaphrastes is portraying.

## The Hidden Saint with a Mission and the Light Metaphor

When trying to determine how stylites are perceived and described by a tenth-century rewriter such as Symeon Metaphrastes, as opposed to his predecessors, i.e. the authors of the old Lives, we are often left with the open question of how to evaluate a changed vocabulary. The rather simple sentences and syntax of the older texts become the high-style, ornate speech of Symeon Metaphrastes. This obviously affects all aspects of the texts, including descriptions, direct speech of saints and other characters, notions of virtue, miracles, holiness etc., with a huge impact on readers or listeners. These readers may in fact not always have been the same; I believe it safe to say that some people would only have been able to follow the simple version, whereas others might, out of aesthetic and/or educational preferences, not have cared to read this but would have been delighted to hear or read the Metaphrastic one. Diversion between old and new versions is therefore a complex issue. Tracking the inclusion or exclusion of factual information, of value assessments, or of (narrator) perspectives is the safest approach, but may not be a sufficient one. In the following, some further issues of important divergences in the Metaphrastic portrayal or characterization of stylites will be pointed out, but with the caveat indicated above in mind.

The climbing of a column is the obvious feature that singles out a stylite among saints, leading also to the coining of the Greek word *stylites.* Sitting on a column places the saint in an elevated position, which could imply that they not only were closer to God but also – and more controversially – that they had become the object of some sort of adoration. Earlier accounts seem to avoid paying attention to this problem or, at best, they give half-hearted explanations for why stylites chose to spend their lives on the raised platform of a pillar top. Here, the Metaphrastic narrator seems to be more confident. When portraying Symeon Stylites, he twice describes his position as *metarsios*, 'elevated'.[39] In the first instance, in the very first description of Symeon on top of his column (*MetSymStyl* ch. 11–12), the Metaphrastic narrator expands on Theodoret's presentation, with much added description of Symeon's asceticism (partly taking its

λέγει… (*DanStyl* ch. 51); Metaphrastic version: λαβὼν δὲ αὐτὸν καὶ πρὸς τὸν ὅσιον ἀγαγών· «**Τοῦτο, ἔφη, τῆς ἐμῆς βασιλείας τὸ θαῦμα.**» Κἀκεῖνος πρὸς τοσοῦτον ἐξέστη τὴν καρτερίαν ἰδών, ὥστε μὴ τὸν ἅγιον μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸν κίονα ἐφ' οὗ ἵδρυτο σὺν δάκρυσι προσκυνῶν πολλὰς ὁ βάρβαρος.

[39] The second instance comes in the Metaphrastic rewriting of Evagrius I.13 in his chapter 21 of *MetSymStyl*.

cue from other passages in Theodoret's version), but in general with much more emphasis on notions of up and down, high and low, and combining words and notions assembled from various passages in his sources (especially Theodoret and Evagrius). In this description and expanded initial thematization of the features of Symeon's pillar life, Symeon Metaphrastes adds a sentence that seems to then become central to his exposition; it is also slightly hard to translate:

> Ἐπειδὴ δὲ μετάρσιον αὐτὸν εἶχε ὁ κίων, ἐπιλανθάνεται μὲν τῆς κοινῆς ἁπάντων φύσεως.[40]
>
> When the column held him in an exalted position, he forgot the common nature of all.

The Greek verb *epilanthanomai* normally means to forget, but in the verb stem *lath-* lies also the idea of hiding, of not being visible. And both meanings may in fact be alluded here. The passage leads up to a description of how Symeon would not accept sitting or lying down on the column (but stayed erect by tying himself to a beam), thus "forgetting" what humans are normally naturally capable of. But the idea of becoming hidden from the world reappears in other Metaphrastic descriptions of stylites, especially of Daniel Stylites. It is as if the paradox of sitting exalted – *metarsios* – on a column and disappearing from nature becomes combined with the notion of hiding, possibly on the basis of the associations in the Greek verb stem *lath-*. In the Metaphrastic version of Daniel's Life, the theme of hidden sainthood occurs, briefly but significantly, in three central scenes. Symeon Metaphrastes may have taken his cue for this from a single passage in the old version of the Life, where Daniel leaves his monastery in Syria for Constantinople "without telling it (to his fellow monks)".[41] But, in the Metaphrastic version, Daniel operates in a hidden manner even at an earlier stage in the story, now also leaving the monastery before his encounter with Symeon Stylites "secretly, without telling anyone about the secret of his soul".[42]

More significantly, secrecy becomes involved in the scene of Daniel's ascension of his column in the Metaphrastic version. Here are the old and the Metaphrastic versions, respectively:

> Καὶ ἀνελθὼν ὁ μακάριος Δανιὴλ ἔστη ἐπὶ τοῦ κίονος ἔσωθεν τῆς βούτης εἰπών· «Κύριε Ἰησοῦ Χριστέ, ἐπὶ τῷ ἁγίῳ σου ὀνόματι ἐπιβαίνω τῷ ἀγῶνι τούτῳ· δέξαι μου τὴν πρόθεσιν καὶ τελείωσόν μου τὸν δρόμον.» Καὶ λέγει τῷ ἀδελφῷ· «Ἆρον τὸ ξύλον καὶ τὸ περισσὸν τοῦ σχοινίου καὶ κάτελθε συντόμως, ἵνα, ἐάν τις ἔλθῃ, μὴ εὕρῃ σε.»[43]

[40] *MetSymStyl* ch. 11–12.

[41] *DanStyl* ch. 13 reproduced with little alteration in the Metaphrastic *MetDanStyl* ch. 9.

[42] *MetDanStyl* ch. 7. Πάντα τοίνυν οὕτω καταλιπων **καὶ μηδενὶ τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς ἀπόρρητον ἐξειπών, λαθὼν** ἔξεισι τῆς μονῆς, καὶ καταλαμβάνει μάνδραν ἐκείνην, ᾗ καὶ ὁ τοῦ μακαρίου Συμεὼν ἥδραστο στῦλος.

[43] *DanStyl* ch. 26.

> And having ascended, the blessed Daniel stood on the column, inside the barrel and said: "Lord Jesus Christ, on account of Your holy name I ascend this challenge. Receive my offer and fulfill my running". And he said to his (spiritual) brother [Sergios]: "Raise the wood construction and the rest of the rope and go down instantly, so that should someone come, he may not find you".

> γενομένου δὲ καὶ τοῦ συνήθως καλουμένου μοδίου καὶ τῇ κεφαλῇ τοῦ στύλου προσαρμοσθέντος, κελεύει περὶ μέσας αὐτῷ νύκτας τὸν τοῦ ναοῦ τοῖχον διατρηθῆναι, καὶ οὕτω πάντας λαθὼν ἀνῄει. Εἶτα καὶ προσευχὴν ἐπιλέγει μεθ' ἡδονῆς οὕτως ἔχουσαν· «Δόξα σοι, Χριστὲ ὁ Θεός, ὅτι τοιούτων κἀμὲ ἀγαθῶν καὶ πολιτείας τοιαύτης ἠξίωσας. Ἀλλ' αὐτὸς οἶδας, δέσποτα, ὅτι σοι μόνῳ θαρρῶν τὸν κίονα ἀναβαίνω καὶ τὸν ἀγῶνα τοῦτον ὑπέρχομαι. Δέξαι μου τὴν πρόθεσιν, ἐνίσχυσον πρὸς τὸν δρόμον, τελείωσον τό ἐγχείρημα.» Οὕτως ὁ μακάριος οὐ κατὰ πνεῦμα μόνον τελεῖν οὐράνιος, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὡς οἷόν τε κατὰ σῶμα ἐξεβιάζετο καὶ τοῦ λοιποῦ μόνος ἦν ἐν τῷ κίονι, μεθόριον ἑαυτὸν θέμενος οὐρανοῦ τε καὶ τῆς γῆς, σαρκὶ μὲν καὶ πνεύματι ἀφιστάμενος, πρὸς δὲ τὸν ἐπειγόμενος.[44, 45]

> Once what is normally called the socket had been put in place and had been made similar to the head of the column, [Daniel] orders that a hole be made at night in the church wall and in this way he secretly ascends, and then pronounces with joy the following prayer: Glory to you, Christ our God, that you have deemed also me worthy of such goods and such manner of life. But you know, my Lord, that only due to my faith in you do I ascend the column and undertake this challenge. Receive my offer, strengthen me for the running, complete the endeavour." In this way, the blessed put his forces into becoming heavenly not only in spirit but also, as far as possible, in body, and remaining from there on alone on the column, placing himself midway between heaven and earth, in flesh and soul abstaining from the earth and yearning towards heaven.

As we see, the old version hardly adds any dramatic effect to the ascension of Daniel: he simply ascends and prays. In the Metaphrastic version, we hear a string of new details concerning the importance of Daniel's ascension, many of these assembled from other parts of the old narration, but a significant novelty is also introduced: Daniel ascends secretly. If we go back to the old version, we see that Daniel tells Sergios to go down so nobody will find him.[46] Daniel's only concern here seems to be left alone on his column, with no further idea of personal secrecy involved.

[44] *MetDanStyl* ch. 15.

[45] The text (in the PG printing but also as found in Par. gr. 1461 and 1469) here seems to be lacking a word or two at the end; these have been added in the translation.

[46] *DanStyl* ch. 26, quoted above.

The idea that Daniel is somehow a hidden saint, or that God's protection makes him invisible, returns a third and last time in the Metaphrastic narration. When confronted by the angry bishop Gelanios, who has arrived at Daniel's dwelling place in the company of attendants with the intention of tearing down his column, God sends a storm, putting an end to this attack. The two versions completely agree on this episode and also on the following description of the storm, but in the Metaphrastic version it is added that "God … praised his servant in his hiding", making the storm an occasion to again depict his protagonist as involved in some secret act or position.[47] Again, we see the idea that Daniel is a hidden saint being thematized.

It is hard to say what dramatic, or possibly theological, aims Symeon Metaphrastes had in mind with the transformation of Daniel into a hidden saint. It added a dramatic touch, but it did not wholly transform his role as a crucial agent in public life and imperial policies, which comes out clearly, even if somewhat abbreviated, in the Metaphrastic version. We may, however, interpret the theme of hidden sainthood as serving to explain some of Daniel's decisions, to introduce more personal agency into the Metaphrastic version. A first instance where the Metaphrastic text deviates from the old version in this respect comes at an early point in the story. In the old version, Daniel's mother tells her son, now twelve years old, that she will hand him over to the local bishop. This turning point in the life of young Daniel becomes his own wish, with no mention of the mother, in the Metaphrastic version.[48] Apart from thus reducing the importance of the mother's agency (more on this below), Daniel now appears as more in control of himself. In the Metaphrastic version he also instantly becomes sure about his wish to imitate Symeon Stylites, when first standing in front of his column; this only happens later in the old version.[49] And when Daniel secretly ascends his column, the old version only reproduces a short prayer to Christ, while the Metaphrastic makes this prayer longer, with Daniel now asking for Christ's support in his *agon,* and with the narrator adding that Daniel placed himself "between heaven and earth".[50] So, in the end, the idea of pre-

[47] *MetDanStyl* ch. 16. The full passage reads like this: Ἀλλ' ὁ ἀεὶ θαυμαστὸς ἐν τοῖς ἁγίοις αὐτοῦ Κύριος οἷα καὶ νῦν ἐποίει, ἐκεῖνον τε θρασυνόμενον ἀναστέλλων καὶ τὸν αὐτοῦ θεράποντα δοξάζων κρυπτόμενον, "The Lord, always wonderful towards his holy persons, raised him [Daniel] as brave and praised his servant in his hiding".

[48] Compare *DanStyl* ch. 4 and *MetDanStyl* ch. 4.

[49] *MetDanStyl* ch. 6. The phrase of the old version: ἔτι δὲ καὶ ἣν ἐνεδείξατο πρὸς αὐτοὺς ἀγάπην, ἐξεπλάγησαν (*DanStyl* ch. 7) is in the parallel Metaphrastic section rephrased into: Ὁ δὲ μακάριος Δανιὴλ οὐ μόνον ἐξεπλήττετο καὶ ἐθαύμαζεν, ἀλλὰ καὶ πρὸς τὴν μίμησιν ἠρεθίζετο, καὶ κέντρον ἀγαθοῦ ζήλου τῇ ψυχῇ παρεδέχετο, where the surprise of Daniel and his fellow travellers is transferred to Daniel alone, with the added expression of his wish to imitate (μίμησιν).

[50] Compare old (*DanStyl* ch. 26) and Metaphrastic (*MetDanStyl* ch. 15): Καὶ ἀνελθὼν ὁ μακάριος Δανιὴλ ἔστη ἐπὶ τοῦ κίονος ἔσωθεν τῆς βούτης εἰπών· «Κύριε Ἰησοῦ Χριστέ, ἐπὶ τῷ ἁγίῳ σου ὀνόματι ἐπιβαίνω τῷ ἀγῶνι τούτῳ· δέξαι μου τὴν πρόθεσιν καὶ τελείωσόν μου τὸν δρόμον.» Καὶ λέγει τῷ ἀδελφῷ· «Ἆρον τὸ ξύλον καὶ τὸ περισσὸν τοῦ σχοινίου καὶ κάτελθε συντόμως, ἵνα, ἐὰν τις ἔλθῃ, μὴ

senting Daniel as a hidden saint may originate with some dramatic features, but it may also have been included as a Metaphrastic improvisation, drawn from an intimate knowledge of Greek hagiography across a long tradition. Other saints were much more obviously hidden, and the almost paradoxical idea of hiding the perhaps most visible type of saint, the stylite, attracted Symeon Metaphrastes from an aesthetic point of view.

A similar transformation, but with more overtly theological implications, is the introduction of a light metaphor into the descriptions of Metaphrastic stylites. Light is, in fact, of central importance already in the old *Life of Alypios Stylites*: early in the narration, Alypios's birth and saintly life are predicted through a dream about two lights that appear to his mother. These two lights, which in this old account only illumine the family home and announce the birth of the saint, will in the Metaphrastic version also "almost light up the entire world … in the manner of the sun", as well as announce the coming birth of the stylite.[51] Likewise, in the Metaphrastic description of Daniel Stylites's childhood we now hear that "the shadows of the virtues already followed him [Daniel] who travelled through light".[52] This sentence, which has no parallel in the old Life, receives no real further support in the rest of the story, just as light did not become a pervasive metaphor in the Metaphrastic *Life of Alypios*. But the two instances (of emphasis and addition, respectively) do combine (also a bit depending perhaps on order of composition) into an extended use of a light metaphor in the Metaphrastic stylite lives. The clearest example of such extended importance of light comes towards the end of the Metaphrastic *Life of Symeon Stylites*. Here Symeon Metaphrates rounded off his version of the *Life,* by inserting a rewritten version of a miracle story that the church historian Evagrius tells us took place at the church of Symeon, erected around his column after his death. In this rewriting, Symeon Metaphrastes retained much of Evagrius's wording, and it would involve too many details to point out the exact changes to the text. Instead, the full Metaphrastic account will here be quoted, with comments below explaining how Symeon Metaphrastes changed the one-time miracle, narrated by Evagrius, into an ever-lasting image of the great stylite, his namesake Symeon:

εὕρῃ σε.» Ὁ δὲ ἐποίησεν καθὼς εἶπεν αὐτῷ. Metaphrastic version: καὶ οὕτω πάντας λαθὼν ἀνῄει. Εἶτα καὶ προσευχὴν ἐπιλέγει μεθ' ἡδονῆς οὕτως ἔχουσαν· «Δόξα σοι, Χριστὲ ὁ Θεός, ὅτι τοιούτων κἀμὲ ἀγαθῶν καὶ πολιτείας τοιαύτης ἠξίωσας. Ἀλλ' αὐτὸς οἶδας, δέσποτα, ὅτι σοι μόνῳ θαρρῶν τὸν κίονα ἀναβαίνω καὶ τὸν ἀγῶνα τοῦτον ὑπέρχομαι. Δέξαι μου τὴν πρόθεσιν, ἐνίσχυσον πρὸς τὸν δρόμον, τελείωσον τό ἐγχείρημα.» Οὕτως ὁ μακάριος οὐ κατὰ πνεῦμα μόνον τελεῖν οὐράνιος, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὡς οἷόν τε κατὰ σῶμα ἐξεβιάζετο καὶ τοῦ λοιποῦ μόνος ἦν ἐν τῷ κίονι, **μεθόριον ἑαυτὸν θέμενος οὐρανοῦ τε καὶ γῆς**, καὶ τῆς μὲν σαρκὶ καὶ πνεύματι ἀφιστάμενος, πρὸς δὲ τὸν ἐπειγόμενος.

[51] *MetAlypStyl* ch. 2. Here the Metaphrastic text, with the important additions in bold: ἀλλ' **ὅλον μικροῦ τὸ οἰκούμενον ἀρετῇ καταλάμπων·** καὶ οὕτω μὲν πρὸ τοῦ τόκου καὶ τῆς εἰς τόνδε τὸν ὀδυνηρὸν βίον προόδου, οἷος ἔμελλεν ἔσεσθαι, δι' ἐμφάσεων ἐδηλοῦτο, **παραπλησίως τῷ ἡλίῳ** καὶ πρὸ τοῦ φανῆναι ἱλαραῖς αὐγαῖς ὑποφαίνων αὐτοῦ τὴν πρόοδον.

[52] *MetDanStyl* ch. 4. τῶν ἀρετῶν αἱ σκιαὶ ἤδη τῷ διὰ φωτὸς ὁδεύοντι ἠκολούθουν.

Τούτοις πεισθέντα τὸν αὐτοκράτορα ἐφεῖναι Ἀντιοχεῦσι τὸν κοινὸν θησαυρόν· ὁ δὲ εἰ καὶ παρ᾽ αὐτοῖς ἦν ἀλλ᾽ ἐχώρει διὰ πάντων τοῖς θαύμασι, καὶ ἴδιος ἑκάστου πλοῦτος ἐγίνετο. Τῆς μέντοι κορυφῆς τοῦ ὄρους, ἐν ᾧ τοὺς μεγάλους ἐκείνους ὁ θεῖος Συμεὼν ἄθλους διήνυσεν, ἱδρυμένον ἐφ᾽ ἑαυτῆς τέμενος ἱερὸν φερούσης, σταυρὸς ἦν τοῦ εὐκτηρίου τὸ σχῆμα, τέσσαρσι στοαῖς ἐφ᾽ ἑκατέρᾳ τῶν πλευρῶν διειλημμένος. Τὴν δὲ στοὰν λίθου ξεστοῦ κίονες ἤρειδον ἐφ᾽ ὑψηλοῦ τοῦ ὀρόφου. Καὶ τὸ μεταξὺ ὕπαιθρος ἦν αὐλὴ πολλῷ περιλαμπομένη πάντοθεν τῷ ἡλίῳ. Ἐν αὐτῇ δὲ ὁ στύλος, ἐκεῖνος ὁ τεσσαρακοντάπηχυς ἵστατο, ἐφ᾽ οὗ τὴν ἀγγελικὴν ἐκείνην ἐποιεῖτο πολιτείαν. Ἐν γε μὴν τῇ τῶν στοῶν ὀροφῇ καὶ θυρίδες ἦσαν, δι᾽ ὧν τὰ ἔνδον τὸ τῆς ἡμέρας φῶς κατεδέχοντο. Κατ᾽ ἐκεῖνο τοίνυν τὸ μέρος, οὗπερ ἐν ἀριστερᾷ εἰσιόντι ὁ κίων ἵστατο, ἀστήρ τις ἐξέλαμπε πολλῷ τοὺς οὐρανίους ἀστέρας, κατά γε τὸν τῆς λαμπρότητος καὶ τοῦ μεγέθους λόγον, ἀποκρυπτόμενος, καὶ νῦν μὲν δυόμενος, νῦν δὲ ἀνίσχων, καὶ κατὰ πᾶν μέρος τῆς θυρίδος διᾴττων, ὑπὸ τῶν παρόντων ἐφαίνετο, τῷ τε πρόσγεια φέρεσθαι, καὶ τὴν γῆν οἱονεὶ περιπολεῖν, καὶ τῇ ἀμηχάνῳ ἐκείνῃ λαμπρότητι καὶ τῷ κάλλει οὐδεμίαν θαύματος ὑπερβολὴν καταλείπων, καὶ τοὺς ὁρῶντας εἰς θεῖον ὕμνον τοῦ θείου ὡς ἀληθῶς Συμεὼν ἐκκαλούμενος, ἅτε δὴ τῆς ἐχούσης αὐτὸν ἐντεῦθεν στοχαζομένους λαμπρότητος, ἧς ἐκεῖνος ἀπολαύει διηνεκῶς, τῷ μεγάλῳ Φωτὶ παρεστώς, τῇ Τριάδι τε καθαρώτερον ἐλλαμπόμενος, καὶ τὴν μίαν αὐγὴν ἐκ μιᾶς τῆς Θεότητος εἰσδεχόμενος, ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τῷ Κυρίῳ ἡμῶν, ᾧ πᾶσα δόξα, τιμή, καὶ κράτος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων. Ἀμήν.[53]

Persuaded by these words the emperor left the common treasure [Symeon's relics] to the Antiochians. So, it stayed with them but has also reached all people through the miracles and has become the private richness of every person. While the summit of the mountain, where the holy Symeon performed his great deeds, is the seat of his sacred precinct built upon it, the shape of the temple is that of a cross, adorned with four colonnades, one on each side. Columns of polished stone support the stoa under the lofty ceiling, while the centre is occupied by an unroofed court, **all bathed in the light of the sun**. In it stands the pillar, of forty-cubits, on which he lived his angelic life. In the roof of the colonnades there were **windows, through which the inner parts received daylight**. In that area, where the pillar appears to the left of those who come in, **a star did shine forth**, **concealing all other stars because of its light and size**, and now setting, now rising again, darting through all parts of the window, it became visible to all present by winning over all what belongs to the earth and seemed somehow to traverse the earth, and **by its inconceivable light** and beauty leaving no room for greater wonder and calling upon all onlookers to divine song to the truly divine Symeon, since **glimpsing the light that envelops him from up there, that light which he enjoys eternally, being in the presence of the great light, shining clearer through the Trinity, receiving the**

[53] *MetDanStyl* ch. 58–59; with minor correction.

> **one light from the one Godhead**, in Jesus Christ, our Lord, to whom is all glory, honour and might in all eternity. Amen.[54]

We clearly see (from the words in bold) that it was Symeon Metaphrastes's intention to have his narration of the life of Symeon Stylites end with an all-encompassing image of light. The portrayal of Symeon's church "all bathed in the light of the sun", with light streaming in through the windows, and with a star of unusual brightness appearing near a pillar is all taken from the *Church History* of Evagrius, but there it is told as a one-time miracle. In the Metaphrastic rewriting, the one-time miracle is still audible ("a star did shine forth"), but in combination with the following description of Symeon himself (with no parallel in Evagrius) as glimpsed by onlookers through "the light that envelops him up there", the scene becomes more of a continuous epiphany, suggesting that seeing the heavenly light means seeing Symeon, clad in divine light. Symeon is here enveloped in a light theology, drawing loosely on the Gospel of John and the teaching of Dionysios the Areopagite.[55]

## Conclusion

Stylite Lives do not form a specific category in the Metaphrastic Menologion. The kind of rewriting that they undergo resembles that of other rewritings, pertaining to an elevation of style. Yet, some things can be said about Metaphrastic stylites in particular. Certain thematic aspects are introduced, especially the idea of the hidden saint (in the case of Daniel Stylites), which added direction and mission to Daniel's actions, and the light metaphor, already found in the old *Life of Alypios* but intensified here and introduced to supply a whole new ending to the Metaphrastic *Life of Symeon Stylites*. We also see that the (Byzantine) empire, already a great theme in the old *Life of Symeon Stylites*, received new attention especially in the Metaphrastic *Life of Daniel Stylites,* even if used primarily to emphasize the superiority of saintly to imperial virtue. Symeon Metaphrastes was a lay author but in his stylite Lives he clearly sided with his pillar saints. What we witness in Symeon Metaphrastes's rewritten versions are texts meant for more learned readers, who would enjoy his elevated literary style but also his full version of the *Life of Symeon Stylites,* constructed through a combination of several sources. And if we go by number of extant manuscripts, these were the pillar saints' Lives most read in Byzantium.

[54] I thank Marianne Wifstrand-Schiebe for expert comments and corrections to my translation of this passage.

[55] On the teaching of Dionysios, see the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/pseudo-dionysius-areopagite/ and Rorem, *Dionysian*.

## Bibliography

### Sources

Connor W.C.R. and C. L. Connor. *The Life and Miracles of Saint Luke of Steiris: Text, Translation and Commentary.* Archbishop Iakovos Library of Ecclesiastical and Historical Sources 18. Hellenic College Press 1994.

Delehaye, Hippolyte. *Les Saints stylites*. Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes, 1923.

Gautier, P. "Le typikon de la Théotokos Évergétis." *Revue des Études Byzantines* 40 (1982): 5–101.

Kuper, Charles. Life of Saint Alypios the Stylite. http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk/record.php?recid=E07158.

Lietzmann, H. *Das Leben des heiligen Symeon Stylites.* Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des altchristlichen Literatur 32. Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1908.

Mercati, S. "Versi di Niceforo Uranos in morte di Simeone Metafraste." *Analecta Bollandiana* 68 (1950): 126–34.

### Secondary literature

Constantinou, Stavroula. "Metaphrasis. Mapping Premodern Rewriting." In *Metaphrasis: A Byzantine Concept of Rewriting and Its Hagiographical Products,* edited by S. Constantinou and C. Høgel, 3–60. Leiden, Brill: 2020.

Ehrhard, A. *Überlieferung und Bestand der hagiographischen und homiletischen Literatur der griechischen Kirche*. Leipzig and Berlin: J.C. Hinrichs, 1936–52.

Fisher, Elizabeth. "Michael Psellos on the Rhetoric of Hagiography and the Life of St Auxentius." *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 17 (1993): 43–55.

Hinterberger, Martin. "Die Aneignung des Anderen: Die Viten des Kyrillos von Skythopolis bearbeitet von Symeon Metaphrastes. Beobachtungen zur Umarbeitungstechnik." *Travaux et Mémoires* 23.1 (2019): 333–51.

Høgel, Christian. *Symeon Metaphrastes: Rewriting and Canonization*. Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum, 2002.

Høgel, Christian. "Symeon Metaphrastes and the Metaphrastic Movement." In *The Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography*, edited by S. Efthymiadis, vol. 2. Farnham: Routledge, 2014.

Høgel, Christian. "The Actual Words of Theodore Graptos: A Byzantine Saint's Letter as Inserted Document." In *Medieval Letters. Between Fiction and Document,* edited by C. Høgel and E. Bartoli, 307–16. Turnhout: Brepols, 2015.

Høgel, Christian. "The Pillar Saint Seen as a Totally Devoted Emperor: the In-group around Symeon Stylites the Elder." *Religion* 53.1 (2023): 161–75.

Lackner, W. "Zu Editionsgeschichte, Textgestalt und Quellen der Passio S. Polyeucti des Symeon Metaphrastes." In *Byzantios. Festschrift für Herbert Hunger zum 70. Geburstag,* edited by W. Hörandner, J. Koder, O. Kresten, and E. Trapp, 221–31. Wien: Ernst Becvar, 1984.

Lane Fox, Robert, "The *Life of Daniel*." In *Portraits: Biographical Representations in the Greek and Latin Literature of the Roman Empire,* edited by Mark J. Edwards and Simon Swain, 175–225. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997.

Magdalino, P. "The Liturgical Poetics of an Elite Religious Confraternity." In *Reading in the Byzantine Empire and Beyond*, edited by T. Shawcross and I. Toth, 116–32. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

Papaioannou, Stratis. "Voice, Signature, Mask: The Byzantine Author." In *The Author in Middle Byzantine Literature. Modes, Functions, and Identities*, edited by Aglae Pizzone, 21–40. Boston: De Gruyter, 2014.

Papaioannou, Stratis. *Christian Novels from the Menologion of Symeon Metaphrastes.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017.

Peyr (Schiffer), Elizabeth. "Zur Umarbeitung rhetorischer Texte durch Symeon Metaphrastes." *Jahrbuch der österreichischen Byzantinistik* 42 (1992): 143–55.

Resh, Daria. *Metaphrasis in Byzantine Hagiography. The Early History of the Genre (ca. 800–1000).* PhD thesis. Providence, RI: Brown University, 2018.

Rorem, Paul. *The Dionysian Mystical Theology*. Minneapolis: 1517 Media, 2015.

Schiffer, E. "Metaphrastic Lives and Earlier *metaphraseis* of Saints' Lives." In *Metaphrasis. Redactions and Audiences in Middle Byzantine Hagiography*, edited by C. Høgel, 22–42. Bergen: Research Council of Norway, 1996.

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/pseudo-dionysius-areopagite/

Zilliacus, H. "Zur stilistischen Umarbeitungstechnik des Symeon Metaphrastes." *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 38 (1938): 333–50.

BÉATRICE CASEAU AND CHARIS MESSIS

# Stylites in the Middle Byzantine Period: the Case of the Novelistic Life of Theodore of Edessa*

## Introduction

Although living the life of a stylite atop a column emerged as a monastic lifestyle during late antiquity and reached its most glorious period during the fifth and sixth centuries, this form of extreme asceticism continued to be present in the Caucasus, the Balkans, and in the Christian East during the Middle Ages and, with adaptations, until quite recently. Hippolyte Delehaye listed most references to stylites in Byzantine hagiography and provided examples of stylites until the nineteenth century.[1] The most famous stylites remain those of the late antique period: Symeon Stylite the Elder lived in the fourth-fifth centuries,[2] Daniel the Stylite during the fifth century,[3] Symeon Stylite the Younger during the sixth century,[4] and Alypios during the sixth-seventh centuries.[5] Their

* The writing of this article has been undertaken within the frame of the research programme Retracing Connections (https://retracingconnections.org/), financed by Riksbankens Jubileumsfond (M19–0430:1). We wish to thank Stratis Papaioannou and Elizabeth Zanghi for reading and bettering drafts of this article.

[1] Delehaye, *Saints stylites*, CXXXV. The tradition endures in Georgia, where monks living in cells established on the last floor of a tower are called stylites.

[2] Greek Texts in Lietzmann, *Das Leben*; English translation Doran, *The Lives*. See also Delehaye, *Saints stylites*, I–XXXIV; Peeters, "Saint Syméon Stylite"; Frankfurter, "Stylites and *Phallobates*"; Caseau, "Syméon Stylite l'Ancien"; Boero, "Making a Manuscript."

[3] Greek texts in Delehaye, *Les saints stylites*, 1–147; Introduction, XXXV–LVIII; English Translation, Dawes and Baynes, *Three Byzantine Saints*. See also, Kaplan, "L'espace et le sacré"; Id., "Un saint stylite."

[4] Van den Ven, *Vie ancienne*. See also Déroche, "Quelques interrogations"; Caseau, "Syméon stylite le jeune"; Millar, "The Image of a Christian Monk"; Boero and Kuper, "Steps toward a Study of Symeon."

[5] Greek texts in Delehaye, *Saints stylites*, 148–94; Introduction, LXXVI–LXXXV; English Translation, Kuper, "The 'Life of Alypius the Stylite'."

Middle Byzantine followers drew inspiration from their past accomplishments, but times had changed, and living on top of a column was no longer met with unrestricted admiration and approval: voices emerged to condemn ostentatious asceticism and denounce the risk of pride in elevating oneself above others. This article attempts to evaluate the place of stylites in the literary imagination of the Middle Byzantine period (tenth-twelfth centuries) and their presence in Byzantine society.

## Stylites in the Tenth to Twelfth Centuries

The demanding stylite lifestyle was chosen by only a very small number of monks, and each one of them needed the assistance of a community of disciples. Unlike hermits, who, unless they are recluse, can manage on their own, stylites need others to feed them and assist them in other ways The stylite's lifestyle was presented as holy by saints' Lives, which publicized this type of monastic holiness. It is now well established that instead of suffering a regression during the Middle Byzantine period, the phenomenon of stylitism experienced a degree of revival during the ninth-twelfth centuries. New hagiographic texts emerged during this period, with particular characteristics, notably concerning the level of asceticism and the tastes of the intended audience, adapted to the hagiography of the time. Thus, the literary representation of stylites, although inspired by the models of the late antique past, often differs from ancient stylites. In addition to the two great figures of Middle Byzantine stylitism, Luke the Stylite[6] and Lazarus of Mount Galesion,[7] who have saints' Lives written to account for their exploits and who died on their columns, Middle Byzantine stylitism is often only a stage in the life of a saint or marks an important step in their trajectory to 'becoming a saint', but it is not the main and lasting form of asceticism. Thus, Euthymios the Younger in the second half of the ninth century settled on a column near Thessalonica during an interval between his stays on Mount Athos,[8] and several other less well-known stylites acted in the same way. In the case of Symeon of Lesbos, who also lived during the ninth century

[6] Greek text in Delehaye, *Saints stylites*, 195–237; Introduction, LXXXVI–CV and Vogt, "Vie de S. Luc le stylite." See also Vanderstuyf, "Étude sur saint Luc le Stylite." On the stylites of the ninth century, see also Kazhdan, "Hermitic, Cenobitic," 479–81.

[7] Greek text in *AASS* Nov. III, 508–588; English translation, Greenfield, *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion*.

[8] *Life of Euthymios the Younger*, ch. 23.3–24.1, ed. Alexakis, "The Life of Euthymios," 68–69: "Euthymios … went a little way out of the city and climbed up high on a column like the great Symeon, so that he might be seen as being elevated closer to God and might provide advice from there to those who visited him. He remained on the column for a short time, guiding many people … and, after making the archbishop aware of the situation, he descended from the column and gave himself over once more to Athos."

during the iconoclastic period, the political situation forced him to abandon his column and to live hidden in a Constantinopolitan monastery.[9]

Most of the other stylites, whether identified or not by Delehaye, are only secondary holy figures compared to the main characters in a saint's Life. They are only alluded to in passing. Such is the case for the stylites mentioned in the ninth-century Lives of Anthony the Younger[10] and Gregory of Dekapolis,[11] and, in the tenth century, for the stylite of Patras, close to whom another Luke, who was active in Greece, remained for six years.[12] We can also cite the anonymous stylite who met John Doukas during his journey to the Holy Land at the end of the twelfth century.[13]

Another element concerning the literary treatment of stylites during the Middle Byzantine centuries is that some stylites 'fall', both physically, precipitated to the ground by natural elements such as storms,[14] and morally, precipitated by demons and turning into grotesque figures in a desperate search for holiness. Theodore Studite, in the ninth century, describes three stylites who fell like this; one, in a state of ecstasy, fell from his column, another fell into heresy after descending from the column, and the third behaved badly, switching from one type of asceticism to another:

> How was stepping on a column profitable for the monk called Psaltery? Did he not fall from there while in ecstasy? Now he is neither a cenobite nor a stylite monk. How was the same column profitable for Saprites? Didn't he get down from there for some orthodox reason and fell into heresy and now hasn't he become the most uncompromising of the persecutors? Amphilochios who still lives, had he not first

[9] Greek text in van den Gheyn, "Acta Graeca ss. Davidis"; English translation: Abrahamse and Domingo-Forasté, "Life of Sts. David, Symeon, and George of Lesbos."

[10] *Life of Antony the Younger*, ch. 22–23, ed. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, "Βίος καὶ πολιτεία," 202–03. Eustratios the Stylite tonsures monk Anthony who starts to live in a cell at the foot of his column, but he has to face the wrath of Anthony's friends and brother who threaten him to throw the column to the ground and kill him.

[11] *Life of Gregory of Dekapolis*, ch. 43 and 65, ed. Makris, *Ignatios Diakonos*, 104 and 128.

[12] *Life of Luke of Steiris*, 43, ed. Sophianos, *Ο βίος τοῦ ὁσίου Λουκᾶ,* 149.

[13] John Doukas, alias Phocas, *Description of the Holy Land*, ch. 23, PG 133, 952D; the author cites another monk as a stylite, without providing any detail: *ibid*., ch. 16, 948D. English translation of the text in Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrimage,* 315-36. On the author and the text, see also Messis, "Littérature, voyage et politique."

[14] For example, Leo the Deacon, *History* X.X, ed. Hase, *Leonis Diaconi*, 176.9–10: ὁπινήκα καὶ ὁ ἐν τοῖς Εὐτροπίου στύλος τῇ βίᾳ τῶν κυμάτων κατηνέχθη καὶ ὁ ἐν αὐτῷ μοναστὴς ἐναπεπνίγη τοῖς θαλασίοις ῥοθίοις δεινῶς. English translation Talbot and Sullivan, *The History of Leo the Deacon*, 218: "when the column in the quarter of Eutropios was knocked over by the force of the waves and the monk who lived on it was cruelly drowned in the currents of the sea." This stylite was a successor of Luke.

> become a stylite, then a recluse and now he spends his time shamefully, failing here and there?[15]

The most complete example of moral failure is, however, that narrated by Neophytos the Recluse at the end of the twelfth century about a Georgian stylite in the Lavra of Saint Sabas in Palestine. This monk, named Gabriel, suffered hallucinations in 1185 because of his arrogance. The demons who visit him whisper blasphemous words against the Theotokos, probably under Nestorian influence, and show him the figures of Symeon Stylite the Great, of Sabas, the founder of Lavra, and of the monk Stephanos Trichinas to convince him.[16]

Finally, many of the ancient stylites' Lives are rewritten at this time; this renewed interest in the late antique Syrian stylites is linked to the recapture of Antioch at the end of the tenth century by Byzantine troops and the central role that this city continues to hold in the Byzantine worldview until the twelfth century. Antioch becomes a place where envoys from Constantinople meet with the local elite and, during the tenth and eleventh centuries, the Wondrous Mountain is the main centre for the diffusion of stylite asceticism. The ancient column of Symeon Stylite the Younger is surrounded by a thriving, pluri-cultural monastic community as well as a flourishing estate. The emperors send handpicked generals to the Antioch region. One of these important figures is Nikephoros Ouranos, a close friend of Basil II, who was sent to Antioch as *doux* in 999 and was 'ruler of the East' until perhaps 1011. Ouranos was a very pious man who not only ruled over the region but also protected the monastic community at the Wondrous Mountain, and decided to write a long paraphrase of the already lengthy late antique Life of saint Symeon Stylite the Younger (BHG 1690). His connections at court and in Constantinople may have helped revive the interest in Syrian stylites in the capital, as seen in the abridged saint's Lives written during this period, probably in Constantinople.[17]

Of the two Syrian stylites, Symeon the Younger and his monastic community attracted most of the donations and attention, in part because the monastery had remained Chalcedonian, while the community at Qalat Seman had

[15] Theodore Studite, *Short Catecheses*, no. 27, ed. Auvray, *Theodori Studitis,* 139–40: Τί ὠφέλησε τὸν λεγόμενον ψαλτήριον ἡ ἐπὶ τὸν στύλον ἄνοδος; οὐχὶ ἐκεῖθεν κατηνέχθη ἐκστατικῶς; καὶ νῦν οὔτε ὑποτακτίτης οὔτε στυλίτης. Τί ὠφέλησε τὸν Σαπρίτην ὁ αὐτὸς στύλος; οὐχὶ ἐκεῖθεν κατῆλθε δι' ὀρθοδοξίαν, καὶ πέπτωκεν εἰς αἵρεσιν προδότης ἀληθείας γενόμενος; καὶ νῦν ἐστιν ἐν διώκταις δριμύτατος ... Οὐχὶ καὶ Ἀμφιλόχιος ὁ ἔτι περιὼν στυλίτης γέγονε πρότερον, ἔπειτα ἐγκλειστός; καὶ νῦν ἐνασχημονεῖ ὧδε κἀκεῖσε ἀλώμενος.

[16] Neophytos, *Oration about a monk of Palestine*, ed. Papatriantafyllou-Theodoridi, *Πανηγυρική Α', λόγος 5*, 142–158. For this story, see also Delehaye, "Saints de Chypre," 280–82; Efthymiadis, "Redeeming the Genre's Remnants," 310–11 and Caseau and Messis, "Saint Syméon Stylite le Jeune," 267.

[17] On these abridged *Lives*, see Bompaire, "Abrégés de la Vie de saint Syméon"; van den Ven, *Vie ancienne*, I, 45*–53*; Caseau and Fayant, "Le renouveau du culte des stylite"; Caseau and Messis, "La Vie abrégée de Syméon Stylite le Jeune."

chosen a miaphysite theology. Moreover, the monastic community established at the Wondrous Mountain was close to the road connecting Antioch with its harbour, while Qalat Seman was further east and closer to enemy lines. The estate of the monastery established at the Wondrous Mountain grew large enough to welcome numerous monks of different origins. The community became a major cultural centre, where translations were written and cultural transfers took place.[18]

The revival of the cult of Symeon Stylite the Younger was clearly linked to the prosperity and attractiveness of his monastery on the Wondrous Mountain during the second Byzantine period. In the late tenth and early eleventh centuries, both in Byzantium and in Georgia,[19] which was spiritually very dependent on the region of Antioch, a new interest in the Syrian stylite saints arose. The two Syrian stylites bearing the name of Symeon exemplified the perfection of this type of asceticism. In one of his letters to a recluse in Jerusalem, Nikon of the Black Mountain, one of the most important intellectual figures of the eleventh century in the region of Antioch, invited those monks who desired it to imitate the two stylites, while noting the dangers present in the exercise of such asceticism. He compared the two famous late antique stylites:

> As the Fathers say, columns and enclosures such as those of these famous sites (Antioch and his region) are harmful and dangerous, unless one achieves the same degree of perfection as those of the ancient fathers. These two stylites, guides in this form of asceticism, engaged in the same profession, but followed different paths concerning discipline. The miracle worker, born after a <holy> promise, fed in an extraordinary manner, living without consideration for the flesh (ἄσαρκος), behaved in a superhuman manner concerning women. God endowed him in many ways to teach, heal and do good through his miracles and mercy, without using gifts from others. God was the only one to provide food and belongings for him, for his disciples and for foreigners, not always through an angel, but also through the divine blessing and multiplication of his holy monastery's properties, as the Saint's Life recalls. The other, Symeon the Great, was born and fed as humans do, and it is this way that he spent his life in an ascetic manner until his death. He received universal and substantial principles and lessons from God, through the hands of angels. In a similar manner, his disciples and guests received food, thanks to donations by Christ-loving persons, under the guidance of divine angels.[20]

In this comparison, where Symeon the Younger has a clear advantage, because his destiny and his way of life were sealed by divine decisions, stylitism becomes

[18] Todt, *Dukat und griechischorthodoxes Patriarchat*; Glynias, "Byzantine Monasticism on the Black Mountain"; Caseau and Messis, "Saint Syméon Stylite le Jeune."

[19] Loosley Leeming, *Architecture and Asceticism*, 85–102.

[20] Nikon, *Lettres*, no 33, ch. 21–22, ed. Hannick *et al.*, *Das Taktikon*, 860–62.

a religious and cultural heritage to be imitated in a less glorious monastic era plagued with material concerns. Nikon, after the comparison of the two stylites, adds: "What takes place until now is not a blessing, but the result of tyrannical nature, cupidity and the end of imperial authority (καὶ μᾶλλον ὡς ὁρῶμεν γινόμενον ἄρτι, τυραννικοῦ εἴδους καὶ πλεονεξίας καὶ τέλους βασιλικῆς τάξεως, καὶ οὐκ εὐλογία)."[21]

The twelfth century saw the intensification of criticism towards stylitism and all other forms of rigorous and spectacular asceticism, a trend which also clearly discredited new attempts at being a stylite. Although Eustathios of Thessaloniki writes a discourse on behalf of an anonymous stylite of Thessalonica,[22] he praises the column rather than the stylite, and in his catalogue of ascetic practices likely to shelter hypocrites, stylitism figures prominently.[23]

Stylites nevertheless continued to settle around big cities and were granted some recognition for their ascetical efforts. Symeon Eulabes, spiritual father of Symeon the New Theologian, reveals that at the end of the tenth century, monks of the Stoudios preferred to ask "stylites, recluses, and solitaries" for spiritual advice and confession. He recommends that they find instead their own spiritual fathers inside the cenobitic community.[24] This advice shows that stylites were still surrounded by a halo brighter than cenobitic monks.

Stylites could sometimes play a role in the political events taking place in Constantinople.[25] According to the account of Niketas Choniates, during the rebellion of Branas, Isaac Angelos turned to stylites, among others, for moral support;[26] and according to Robert of Clari's account of the conquest of Constantinople during the Fourth Crusade, stylites were granted prophetic abilities to foretell the fate of the city:

> There were elsewhere in the city still another great marvel: there were two columns[27], each of them at least three times the reach of a man's arms in thickness and at least fifty *toises* in height. And hermits used to live on the top of these columns, in little shelters that were there, and there were doors[28] in the columns by which one could ascend. On the outside of these columns, there were pictured and written by prophecy all the events and all the conquests which have happened in Constantinople,

[21] *Ibid*.

[22] Eustathius, *Oration for a Stylite*, ed. Tafel, *Eustathii metropolitae*. See also Stratigopoulos, "Orator or Grammarian."

[23] Eustathius, *On Hypocrisy*, ch. 38, ed. Tafel, *Eustathii metropolitae*, 97.

[24] Symeon Studites, *Ascetic Discourse*, 35.28–29, ed. Alfeyev, *Syméon le Studite Discours*, 118.

[25] On the critics against extravagant monks, see Magdalino, "The Byzantine Holy Man in the Twelfth Century."

[26] Choniates, *History*, ed. van Dieten, *Nicetae Choniatae Historia*, 383.

[27] Probably the column of Theodosius in the Forum Tauri and the column of Arcadius at Xyrolophos.

[28] *Huis* corrected as *vis* would mean a winding flight of stairs.

> or which were going to happen. But no one could understand the event until it had happened; and when it had happened, the people would go there and ponder over it, and then for the first time they would see and understand the event.[29]

Besides the precise description of the architecture of the column used by the stylites, the author mentions a kind of exhibition of prophecies after the fact, where image and words combine to illustrate and animate the history of the city. Without saying so explicitly, Robert de Clari lets one suppose that these "cartoons" were prepared by the stylites before the events happened, even though they only became visible post-factum. Whether or not Robert gives us exact information or depicts a complete fantasy, the stylites, in his opinion, are a worthy attraction to catch the eye and are part of the wonders of the conquered city.

## Stylites in the Life of Theodore of Edessa

Having surveyed this diverse and varied literary landscape of the Middle Byzantine period, we wish now to explore more particularly the presence and the role of stylitism in the Life of Theodore of Edessa, a hagiographic novel written or rewritten at the beginning of the eleventh century and preserved in Greek, Arabic, Georgian, and Old Slavonic.[30] This text forms a kind of encyclopaedia of holiness in Syria and Palestine, creating a narrative space where one finds Mar Saba monks, patriarchs of Jerusalem and Antioch, bishops of Edessa, Emesa and Babylon/Baghdad, lonely desert monks, scholars of Christianity and Judaism who engage in public debates, and neo-martyrs who suffer terrible deaths at the hands of Muslims.

In its Greek version, the narrative reserves[31] a place of honour for stylitism when it makes the stylite Theodosius both a spiritual guide for the main hero, Theodore, and the one who anticipates the central vicissitudes of the plot.

[29] Robert de Clari, *The Conquest of Contantinople*, ch. 92, ed. Dufournet, *Robert de Clari*, 182–83; transl. Mc Neal, *Robert de Clari*, 110–11.

[30] Greek text (though based only on two mss): Pomjalovskij, *Zhitie*. For this text see also, Vasiliev, "The Life of saint Theodore of Edessa"; Gouillard, "Supercheries et méprises littéraires"; Abel, "La portée apologétique"; Griffith, "The Life of Theodore of Edessa"; Binggeli, "Converting the Caliph"; Messis and Papaioannou, "Translations I."

[31] The Arabic versions make Theodosius a hesychast or an anchorite; see Griffith, "The Life of Theodore," 150, n. 18 and 162.

## The Text and its Contents

The Life of Theodore is a very particular text within Byzantine hagiographic production. The text is preserved, in its Greek version, in whole or in fragments in several manuscripts, the oldest of which is a manuscript of the Athonite monastery of Iviron (now Moscow), Sinodalis graecus 15 (Vlad. 381), dated to 1023 and signed by the copyist Theophanes Ivirites.[32] Moreover, the choice of texts gathered in this manuscript shows a taste for hagiographic novels (including a penchant for colourful miracles by Saint George and the Lives of Alexis, the man of God, and that of Pancratios of Taormina).[33]

It is very important to note that the anonymous sponsor of the manuscript also inserts the Life of Symeon Stylite the Younger, in the form of the recently rewritten paraphrase by Nikephoros Ouranos, into this collection of hagiographic texts.[34] This Life of Symeon the Younger is the source of inspiration for the first years of Theodore,[35] and also, we suppose, for the attribution to a stylite of the key role of Theodore's spiritual guide. The manuscript thus provides a *terminus ante quem* for the composition of the Greek version of the Life of Theodore, namely a date before 1023. The *terminus post quem* must be the beginning of the eleventh century, date of the rewriting of the Life of Symeon the Younger by Nikephoros Ouranos.

According to Robert Volk and Alexander Kazhdan, the Novel of Barlaam and Ioasaph has many textual affinities with the Life of Theodore of Edessa,[36] which looks like a product of the Georgian scriptorium gathered around Euthymios the Iberian on Mount Athos between the end of the tenth and the beginning of the eleventh centuries.[37] The Iberian origin of the manuscript might even be underlined by a wink that the author addresses to his readers by making the three faithful companions of the caliph Georgians. The caliph follows them

[32] On this manuscript see Ehrhard, *Überlieferung und Bestand*, v. III, 741 n. 2.

[33] On the hagiographic saga of Pankratios, see now Stallman-Pacitti and Burke, *The Life of Saint Pankratios*.

[34] On this rewriting of Nikephoros Ouranos, see van den Ven, *Vie ancienne*, I, 34*–45* et II, 347–351; on Ouranos and his career, see *Pmbz* 25617; Darrouzès, *Epistoliers byzantins*, 44–48; McGeer, "Tradition and Reality"; Magdalino, "The Liturgical Poetics," 120–23; Glynias, "Byzantine Monasticism," 429–31; Masterson, "Nikephoros Ouranos, Eunuchism, and Masculinity."

[35] Binggeli, "Converting the Caliph," 96, n. 69.

[36] Volk, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, 82–85; Kazhdan, "Where, When and by Whom"; Kazhdan, *A History*, 99.

[37] On Euthymios the Iberian, see Høgel, "Euthymios the Athonite." Griffith's position ("The Life of Theodoros," 154) that the text was written "in the émigré monastic milieu in Constantinople" in the tenth century is less plausible. Binggeli ("Converting," 96) proposes that the text was composed in Greek in the first decades of the eleventh century in the region of Antioch. Messis and Papaioannou ("Translations I"), following the arguments of Datiashvili ("The Life of Theodore"), as reinforced by Volk (*Die Schriften,* 81–86), attribute the *Life* to Euthymios.

in his decision to become a Christian and, eventually, a martyr.[38] The problem of authorship remains open, however, and the new edition –in preparation– of the text that will consider all its versions will hopefully shed additional light on this.[39]

The facts narrated by the Life take place during the first half of the ninth century. The only explicit reference to historical reality is the mission of Theodore, bishop of Edessa and ambassador of the caliph of Baghdad, to Constantinople during the reign of Michael III and the regency of his mother Theodora.[40] The presumed author of the text, who participates in the narration and displays his presence next to Theodore at the most crucial moments of the intrigue, is Basil, the bishop of Emesa and nephew of Theodore.[41] This implication of the author in the narration further underlines the fictitious character of the text.[42]

Many modern scholars have seen behind Theodore of Edessa a novelistic biography of Theodore Abu Qurrah, who was a monk of Saint Sabas and a prolific writer.[43] He had lived in Baghdad at the time of the caliph Al-Mamoun and led theological discussions with the Muslims. This hypothesis is very seductive, but Theodore, the hero of the Greek version, is so far removed from reality that any resemblance to Abu Qurrah is slim.

The text first relates the birth of the saint to a Christian family of Edessa and his difficulties with his studies, difficulties which disappear miraculously.[44] Then Theodore continues to study and becomes a competent scribe of the Scripture and theological books.[45] After the death of his parents, Theodore prepares the marriage of his sister (the mother of the author). He then distributes his belongings to the poor and goes to Jerusalem to become a monk at the Lavra of Saint Sabas. There, after a long period of asceticism in a hermitage close to the convent and after becoming the assistant of the abbot, he receives a disciple named Michael who joins him. The author inserts a first digression in his

[38] *Life of Theodoros*, ch. LXXXII; Pomjalovskij, 85.16–17: εἶχε δὲ ὁ βασιλεὺς τρεῖς αὐτοῦ πιστοὺς οἰκέτας ἐξ Ἀλανῶν καταγομένους.

[39] See Papaioannou, Messis, Resh, and Skrekas, *Euthymios "the Iberian,"* for a new critical edition of the text (with introduction, English translation, and commentary), attributed in this case securely and with further arguments to Euthymios.

[40] *Life of Theodoros*, ch. LXXXIV, Pomjalovskij, 89.6–7: Μιχαὴλ τοῦ ὀρθοδόξου βασιλέως τηνικαῦτα (Constantinople) τὰ σκῆπτρα κατέχοντος τῆς βασιλείας, ἅμα Θεοδώρας τῆς εὐσεβεστάτης αὐγούστης. Transl.: When Michael, the orthodox emperor along with Theodora the very pious empress held the sceptres of imperial power over there (Constantinople).

[41] *Life of Theodore*, ch. 1 and 2, Pomjalovskij, 2.18–19; 3.10–11.

[42] For the presence of the author in hagiographic texts, see Hinterberger, "The Byzantine Hagiographer and his Text."

[43] Peeters, "La Passion de s. Michel le sabaïte," 85; *ODB*, 2043; Griffith, "The Life of Theodoros," 153–154. According to John Lamoreaux, "The Biography of Theodore Abu Qurrah," 26–32, it is rather the Georgian *Passion* of Michael that makes the connection between the two Theodores and the two Theodores cannot be confused. See also Pataridze, "Christian Literature," 60–62.

[44] *Life of Théodore*, ch. IV, Pomjalovskij, 5.5–15.

[45] *Ibid*., ch. XVI, 13.6–8.

narration ("I introduced this story in the present text as a digression to be useful"[46]): the martyrdom of Michael at the hands of the Persians during the visit to Jerusalem of the royal couple, Abd al-Malik/Ἀδραμέλεχ[47] and Seïda.[48] The Passion of Michael the Neo-martyr circulated as an independent text in Arabic and Georgian and narrated an event that had occurred a century before Theodore's lifetime,[49] but that chronological discrepancy did not bother our author. Thereafter, Theodore is appointed bishop of Edessa by the patriarch of Antioch, who is visiting Jerusalem to celebrate Easter.[50] He then takes his seat and is confronted by several heretics (mostly Nestorians) and Muslim authorities who, incited by the heretics, persecute true Christians.[51] Theodore then decides to plead the cause of Christians with the caliph of Babylon, Mavias (Al-Mamoun, according to the Arabic version).[52]

Upon leaving Edessa, Theodore meets the stylite Theodosius. The author introduces a second digression, to which we shall come back. Once in Babylon/Baghdad, Theodore heals the caliph from an eye disease,[53] befriends him,[54] and teaches him the principles of Christianity. The caliph accepts baptism with his three faithful companions and receives the baptismal name of John.[55] Theodore then carries out the mission to Constantinople, bringing a letter to his emperor from the caliph, who asks for a piece of the Cross – a request satisfied by Michael III.[56] As soon as he returns, he engages in a public dialogue with a Jew who, vanquished, converts to Christianity.[57] With the caliph, he then visits the brother of the stylite of Edessa, who is an anchorite in the desert surround-

[46] *Ibid.*, ch. XXXV, Pomjalovskij, 30.18–20: ταύτην μὲν οὖν τὴν διήγησιν παρεκβατικώτερον κατέταξα τῷ παρόντι λόγῳ χάριν περισσοτέρας ὠφελείας

[47] *Ibid.*, ch. XXIV, Pomjalovskij, 17.24–25: Ἀδραμέλεχ ἀνὴρ πραότατος και οὐδένα τῶν χριστιανῶν ἤθελε κακοποιεῖν.

[48] The story of Michael covers the ch. XXIV–XXXIV (Pomjalovskij, 17–30).

[49] Peeters, "La Passion" (Latin translation); English translation: Blanchard, "The Georgian Version of the Martyrdom of Saint Michael." See also Griffith, "Michael, the Martyr and Monk of Mar Sabas Monastery"; Lamoreaux, "The Biography."

[50] *Life of Théodore*, ch. XLII, Pomjalovskij, 38.2–9.

[51] *Ibid.*, ch. LXVIII–LXIX, Pomjalovskij, 70–72.

[52] *Ibid.*, ch. LXIX, Pomjalovskij, 72.21–25. On the problem of Babylon/Baghdad, see Lamoreaux, "The Biography," 30, n. 29.

[53] *Ibid.*, ch. LXXI, Pomjalovskij, 74–76.

[54] *Ibid.*, ch. LXXVIII, Pomjalovskij, 81.5–7: ἤθελον, προσφιλέστατε, ἀχώριστός εἶναί σου καὶ ἀδιάσπαστος κατά τε τὸν παρόντα βίον καὶ τὸν μέλλοντα· ἀρρήτῳ γάρ τινι φιλίας δεσμῷ συνδέεταί σοι ἡ ψυχή μου.

[55] *Ibid.*, ch. LXXXII, Pomjalovskij, 85–86.

[56] *Ibid.*, ch. LXXXIV–LXXXV, Pomjalovskij, 88–91. A story about a piece of the Holy Cross which arrives, in this case, from Jerusalem to Symeon Stylites the Younger at the Wondrous Mount is contained in the *Life of Saint Martha* (van den Ven, *Vie ancienne de Syméon*, ch. 52–70), a hagiographic text reworked probably in the Georgian environment of Syria-Palestine in the tenth/eleventh century. On the Georgian origin of the *Life*, see Peeters, *Le tréfonds oriental*, 161–62; on a contrary opinion which privileges the Greek environment, see van den Ven, *Vie ancienne de Syméon*, 67*–92*. On the text, see also Parker, "Paradigmatic Piety."

[57] *Life of Théodore*, ch. LXXXVI–XCI, Pomjalovskij, 93–97.

ing Baghdad and who predicts the martyrdom of the caliph,[58] before taking leave and returning to Edessa. The description of the desert that surrounds Babylon is strongly reminiscent of India's adventure novels:

> in the desert stretching to the inland areas of India, to the shores of the Red Sea, where the river Ganges throws herself into the sea, where elephants reside, tents for the one-horned animals (monoceros), villas for lions and leopards, nests for aspics and dragons, on the slopes of the Arkanos and Hyrkanos mountains, are huge barrels, made by men of the past, who are not placed standing but which lie on the coast. Many of the noble and wealthy Christians of that country abandoned the world and the affairs of the world, distributed all their wealth to the poor, and with nothing and only one garment dwelt in these barrels.[59]

The caliph John, preparing for his martyrdom, returns the piece of the True Cross and a lot of money to Theodore to distribute to the pious houses of Palestine and Syria and bids farewell.[60]

The third great digression concerns the martyrdom of the caliph and his three Georgian companions, when he reveals his conversion to his people, his burial, and the miracles he performs.[61] The story then moves to Edessa and Theodore, with a vision of the caliph announcing his death.[62] Three years later, another vision of the caliph announces to Theodore that he will die soon.[63] Theodore decides to go to Jerusalem and to retire in his old cell at Saint Sabas until his death. He is buried near the tomb of his disciple Michael on July 19, thus performing a Christian career that begins and ends at Saint Sabas,[64] forming a sort of pious but adventurous circle.

[58] *Ibid.*, ch. XCII–XCIX, Pomjalovskij, 97–107.

[59] *Ibid.*, ch. XCV, Pomjalovskij, 101.21–102. 2: ἐν γὰρ τῇ ἐνδοτέρᾳ τῆς Ἰνδικῆς χώρας πανερήμῳ κατὰ τὰς ὄχθας τῆς Ἐρυθρᾶς θαλάσσης, ὅπου Γάγης ὁ ποταμὸς αὐτῇ ἐπιμίγνυται, ἔνθα εἰσὶν οἰκητήρια ἐλεφάντων καὶ σκηναὶ μονοκερώτων, ἐπαύλεις τε λεόντων καὶ παρδάλεων, φωλεοὶ ἀσπίδων καὶ δρακόντων, ἐν μεθορίοις τῶν μεγίστων ὀρέων Ἀρκάνου καὶ Ὑρκανοῦ εὑρέθησαν πίθοι παμμεγέθεις, ἔργα τῶν ἀρχαίων ἀνθρώπων, οὐχ ὄρθιοι ἱστάμενοι, ἀλλ᾽ ἐπὶ πλευρὰν κείμενοι. Πολλοὶ τοίνυν τῶν κατ᾽ ἐκείνην τὴν χώραν χριστιανῶν, εὐπατρίδαι καὶ πλούσιοι, καταλιπόντες κόσμον καὶ τὰ ἐν κόσμῳ, πᾶσαν τὴν ἑαυτῶν οὐσίαν πένησι διαδιδόντες, ἀκτήμονες καὶ μονοχίτωνες εἰς ἐκείνους κατῴκησαν τοὺς πίθους.

[60] *Ibid.*, ch. CII, Pomjalovskij, 111.

[61] *Ibid.*, ch.CVI–CX, Pomjalovskij, 113–15.

[62] *Ibid.*, ch. CXI, Pomjalovskij, 116.

[63] *Ibid.*, ch. CVIV, Pomjalovskij, 118.

[64] *Ibid.*, ch. CXV, Pomjalovskij, 118–19.

## The Role of Theodosius the Stylite

It becomes clear from this brief summary that Theodore's life acts only as the background scenery, before which several stories of holiness unfold, independent of one another but subject to a single narrative teleology. In this disparate landscape, the figure of Theodosius the stylite is the real driving force of all that is happening in Theodore's life, from the moment he becomes bishop of Edessa until his death.

The first reference to stylitism in the Life occurs when Theodore travels to Edessa; there, he finds several columns whose construction dates back to the time of Emperor Maurice:

> During these days it happened that the saint came out of the city and, seeing several well-built columns, installed in a pleasant place, asked what they were. The priests of the church who were walking beside him replied that they were built during the reign of the pious Emperor Maurice, and that several stylites lived there during all their lives at different periods.[65]

In the middle of the ninth century, the supposed time of the visit, however, these columns were no longer in use. For the author, this peculiar monastic lifestyle is a thing of the past; its flourishing belongs to another era. Yet, one "romantic" figure still persists in actually living on a column. He is a sort of living "relic" of a glorious past. This stylite epitomizes, in addition to his behaviour as exemplary stylite (which is not precisely described), some of the characteristics of another type of holiness, also from the past, that of a holy fool:

> Leaning from the top of the column he looked at the passers-by and promised or announced happy news to some of them and in front of others he cried, calling them unhappy and calling himself so. Whence he was considered a fool.[66]

The insistence of the stylite that the discussion with Theodore remain secret reactivates a very common *topos* of the holiness of a *salos*.

[65] *Ibid.*, ch. LIV, Pomjalovskij, 52.18–24: Ἐν ἐκείναις τοίνυν ταῖς ἡμέραις ἐγένετο τὸν ὅσιον ἐξελθῆναι ἔξω τῆς πόλεως καὶ ἰδὼν στύλους πολλοὺς καλῶς ᾠκοδομημένους καὶ τερπνήν τινα τὴν θέσιν ἔχοντας, ἐπυνθάνετο τι ταῦτα εἴη. Οἱ δὲ τῆς ἐκκλησίας ἱερεῖς συμπορευόμενοι αὐτῷ ἔφησαν ἐπὶ τῶν ἡμερῶν τοῦ εὐσεβοῦς βασιλέως Μαυρικίου αὐτοὺς οἰκοδομηθῆναι καὶ πολλοὺς ἐν αὐτοῖς στυλίτας κατὰ διαφόρους καιροὺς κατοικήσαντας πάντα τὸν τῆς ζωής διανύσαι βίον.

[66] *Ibid.*, ch. LV, Pomjalovskij, 52.28–53.3: παρακύπτων γὰρ ἄνωθεν καὶ τοὺς παριόντας ὁρῶν, οἷς μὲν ἐπαγγέλεται καὶ χαρμόσυνα ἐπιφθέγγεται, οἷς δὲ ἐποδύρεται ταλανίζων ἑαυτόν τε κἀκείνους, ὅθεν καὶ ὡς ἐξεστηκὼς διὰ τούτων δείκνυται. On the presence of stylites in this *Life*, see also Kazhdan, "Hermitic, Cenobitic," 473–74. Kazhdan points out that "the evidence of the Life of Theodore of Edessa cannot be discounted, for it reveals a certain change of attitude, a social and psychological shift that has been taking place by the end of the ninth century."

Between the bishop and the stylite begins a discussion which will dominate the central part of the narration and which contains edifying stories, stories useful to the soul, paradigms of redemption, autobiographical stories, and prophecies that work as prolepses for what follows. More precisely, the stylite announces to Theodore that he will manage to convert the caliph of Babylon to the Christian faith.[67] He then narrates the story of Athanasius and his wife[68] and the story of a prostitute who was led to salvation by the wife of Athanasius and his own intervention,[69] because he controls everything that happens from the height of his column. Finally, he delivers a moving autobiographical narrative that is the profound message of his hagiographic career, by answering the question asked by Theodore: "tell me, my spiritual father, how long did you live on this column and what is the reason for your retirement here?"[70]

Having retired, still young, with his older brother John to the desert of Babylon to live as anchorites in different caves (the literary avatars of this couple are probably Symeon Salos and John,[71] but for the Middle Byzantine author, the bond that unites these two people is no longer friendship, but kinship), something happened to him that changed his life. Theodosius sees his brother John from afar: he has encountered something on his path that terrorizes him, which makes him run to his cave. Curious, Theodosius approaches and sees abundant gold coins thrown onto the path; he picks up the coins with the necessary precaution (prayer) and transfers them to his cave without his brother knowing. He then goes down to the city, buys some land well-protected by a wall, builds a church and a hospital for the sick, and creates a cenobitic monastic community. He spends all his money on charity before returning to the desert near his brother, considering himself better than him, because he knew how to use the money in a way useful for the Christian community. But John disappears and his guardian angel is not happy at all and appears to him in a vision, reproaches him for these thoughts, and asks him to repent by becoming a stylite in Edessa, after having pronounced a diatribe against those who want to please men and not God.[72]

This story assigns a moral advantage to the brother John, who remains a hermit, while Theodosius lives as a stylite as punishment for his pride. Theodosius spends forty-nine years on the pillar fighting demons, until his guardian angel appears to him again to tell him that his penance is over and that his reward is a gift of *diorasis*, namely the ability to foresee the future and to penetrate the souls of those who approach him.[73] The autobiographical story ends thus, but

[67] *Ibid.*, ch. LV, Pomjalovskij, 54.

[68] *Ibid.*, ch. LVI–LVIII, Pomjalovskij, 54–58.

[69] *Ibid.*, ch. LIX–LXI, Pomjalovskij, 58–62.

[70] *Ibid.*, ch. LXV, Pomjalovskij, 63.24–64.1.

[71] On the relationship between these two monks, see Rapp, *Brother-Making*, 157–61.

[72] *Life of Theodore*, ch. LXV–LXVI, Pomjalovskij, 64–68.

[73] *Ibid.*, ch. LXVI, Pomjalovskij, 68.12–14: καὶ ἰδοὺ δέδοταί σοι χάρις διορατικοῖς ὄμμασι καθορᾶν τοὺς δικαίους τε καὶ ἁμαρτωλούς.

the role of the stylite does not disappear. He continues to play the role of guide in every decision that Theodore must make. Thus, when Theodore decides to go to Babylon, he first asks the stylite, who gives him advice and a letter for his brother John.[74] Returning from Constantinople, Theodore passes first by Edessa and makes a mandatory visit to Theodosius, to whom he narrates his adventures. Then, Theodore gives Theodosius the letter that John addressed to him, and Theodore receives a new piece of advice and new messages addressed from Theodosius to his brother.[75] Towards the end of the story, when Theodore has a vision that announces the caliph's martyrdom, he rushes to the stylite for confirmation of the facts.[76] Theodosius the stylite dies, having a vision that announced the death of his brother John, and he is buried by Theodore in the church of St. George of Edessa, where his relics perform miracles.[77]

Theodosius always assures Theodore that his choices and decisions are the right ones. In this hagiographic saga, there is a kind of spiritual affiliation which runs from Theodosius to Theodore and from him to the caliph John. In this chain, where one is the spiritual father of the other, the role of the stylite is fundamental, as we have seen, both at the level of the conception of holiness and at the level of the plot. Theodosius, with his gift of *diorasis,* organizes the staging of the facts, but also the arrangement of the story in consecutive units. Theodosius is one of the constitutive figures of this hagiographic plot.

## Conclusion

The figure of Theodosius the Stylite and his role in the Life of Theodore of Edessa are very intriguing. He is a mediator between hagiographic past and eschatological future, between history and myth, between Edessa and Babylon with its desert where all miracles are possible, including the conversion of a caliph to the Christian faith. Theodosius is the true director of the story of a paradigmatic meeting between bishop and caliph. According to the author of the Greek version of the Life of Theodore of Edessa, he exemplifies, with his brother John, an old-fashioned holiness that preserves the soul of Christianity and ensures its moral advantage. But against the eremitical life, the life of a stylite remains suspended between penance and perfection, because it defines a fluid space between the city and the desert.

The eleventh and twelfth centuries are not a heroic epoch for stylites, but a period during which they continue to forge a path towards holiness, among

[74] *Ibid*., ch. LXX, Pomjalovskij, 72–73.

[75] *Ibid*., ch. LXXXV. Pomjalovskij, 90.26–91.8.

[76] *Ibid*., ch. CII, Pomjalovskij, 117.1–3: ἅμα δὲ πρωὶ πρὸς τὸν ὅσιον ἀπῆλθε κιονίτην καὶ διηγησάμενος τὰ ὁραθέντα ἐδέξατο παρ᾽ αὐτοῦ πληροφορίαν ἀληθῆ ταῦτα εἶναι.

[77] *Ibid*., ch. CII, Pomjalovskij, 117.10–16.

other monastic lifestyles, both within Byzantine society and in its literary imagination. Their numbers are not decreasing, but, during this same period, the official Church treats them with increased mistrust and the hagiographical discourse begins to ignore them. The *discretion* of their presence during this period is not a social issue, but a question of literary taste and an indication of the Church's gradual grip on the definition of holiness.

## Bibliography

### Sources

Auvray, Emmanuel. *S. patris nostri et confessoris Theodori Studitis præpositi Parva Catechesis*. Paris: Paulus Bousrez Tubonibus, 1891.

Bompaire, Jacques. "Abrégés de la Vie de saint Syméon Stylite le Jeune." *Ἑλληνικά* 13 (1954): 71–110.

Darrouzès, Jean. *Epistoliers byzantins du Xe siècle*. Paris: Institut français d'Études byzantines, 1960.

Delehaye, Hippolyte. "Saints de Chypre." *Analecta Bollandiana* 26 (1907): 161–297.

Delehaye, Hippolyte. *Les Saints stylites*. Subsidia hagiographica 14. Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1923.

Eustathius, *On Hypocrisy*, edited by Theophilus Tafel. *Eustathii metropolitae Thessaloniciensis opuscula*, 88–98. Amsterdam: A.M. Hakkert, 1964.

Eustathius, *Oration for a Stylite*, edited by Theophilus Tafel. *Eustathii metropolitae Thessaloniciensis opuscula*, 182-196. Amsterdam: A.M. Hakkert, 1964.

Jean Doukas, alias Phocas, *Description of the Holy Land*. In PG 133, 928–61.

Leo the Deacon, *History*, edited by Carolus Hase. *Leonis Diaconi Caloensis Historiae Libri decem*. Bonn: Impensis Ed. Weberi, 1828.

*Life of Alypios the Stylite*, edited by Hippolyte Delehaye. *Les Saints stylites*. 148–94. Subsidia hagiographica 14. Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1923.

*Life of Antony the Younger*, edited by Antonios Papadopoulos-Kerameus. "Βίος καὶ πολιτεία τοῦ Ὁσίου Ἀντωνίου τοῦ νέου." *Pravoslavnij Palestinskij Sborni*k 19:3 (1907), 186–216.

*Life of Daniel the Stylite*, edited by Hippolyte Delehaye. *Les Saints stylites*, 1–147. Subsidia hagiographica 14. Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1923.

*Life of Euthymios the Younger*, edited by Alexander Alexakis. "Life of Euthymios the Younger." In *Holy Men of Mount Athos*, edited by Richard Greenfield and Alice-Mary Talbot, 1–125. Cambridge Mass. and London: Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library, 2016.

*Life of Gregory of Dekapolis*, edited by Georgios Makris. *Ignatios Diakonos und die Vita des hl. Gregorios Dekapolites*. Stuttgart and Leipzig: Teubner, 1997.

*Life of Lazaros of Galesion*. In *AASS* Nov. III, col. 508–88.

*Life of Luke of Steiris*, edited by Dimitrios Sophianos. *Ο βίος τοῦ ὁσίου Λουκᾶ τοῦ Στεριώτη*, Athens: Akritas, 1989.

*Life of Luke Stylites*, edited by Albert Vogt. "Vie de S. Luc le stylite." *Analecta Bollandiana* 28 (1909): 5–56.

*Life of Martha*, edited by Paul van den Ven. *Vie ancienne de Syméon Stylite le Jeune*. Vol. II, 253–314. Subsidia hagiographica 32. Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1962.

*Life of Pankratios,* edited by Stallman-Pacitti Cynthia and John Burke. *The Life of Saint Pankratios of Taormina*. Leiden: Brill, 2018.

*Life of Symeon Stylite the Elder*, edited by Hans Lietzmann. *Das Leben des Heiligen Symeon Stylites*. Leipzig: Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur. 3. R, 2. Bd., 1908.

*Life of Symeon Stylite the Younger*, edited by Paul van den Ven. *Vie ancienne de Syméon Stylite le Jeune*. Subsidia hagiographica 32. Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1962.

*Life of Symeon of Lesbos*, edited by Joseph van den Gheyn. "Acta Graeca ss. Davidis, Symeonis et Georgii Mitylenae in insula Lesbo." *Analecta Bollandiana* 18 (1899): 211–59.

*Life of Theodore of Edessa*, edited by Ivan Pomjalovskij, *Zhitie izhe vo svjatych otca nashego Feodora archiepiskopa Edesskogo*, St. Petersburg: Imp. Akademii nauk, 1892.

Neophytos, *Oration about a Monk of Palestine*, edited by Niki Papatriantafyllou-Theodoridi. *Πανηγυρική Α΄, λόγος 5.* In *Ἁγίου Νεοφύτου τοῦ Ἐγκλείστου Συγγράμματα*, v. 3, 142–58. Paphos: Ekdosi hieras vasilikis kai sravropigiakis monis Agiou Neophytou, 1999.

Niketas Choniates, *History*, edited by Ioannes van Dieten, *Nicetae Choniatae Historia*. CFHB 11.1/2. Berlin-New York: De Gruyter, 1975.

Nikon, *Letters*, edited by Christian Hannick *et al.*, *Das Taktikon des Nikon vom schwarzen Berge*, 2 vols. Monumenta linguae slavicae dialecti veteris. Freiburg: Weiher, 2014.

Robert de Clari, *The Conquest of Constantinople,* edited by Jean Dufournet. *Robert de Clari, La conquête de Constantinople*. Paris: Champion Classiques, 2004. English translation: Mc Neal Edgar. *Robert de Clari, The Conquest of Constantinople*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1969.

Symeon Studites, *Ascetic Discourse*, edited by Hilarion Alfeyev. *Syméon le Studite Discours ascétique*. Sources Chrétiennes 460. Paris: Les éditions du Cerf, 2001.

Volk, Robert. *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos VI/1–2: Historia animae utilis de Barlaam et Ioasaph (spuria)*. Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 2009.

## Secondary Literature

Abel, Armand. "La portée apologétique de la Vie de St Théodore d'Edesse." *Byzantinoslavica* 10 (1949): 229–40.

Abrahamse, Dorothy and Douglas Domingo-Forasté. "Life of Sts. David, Symeon, and George of Lesbos." In *Byzantine Defenders of Images: Eight Saints' Lives in English Translation*, edited by Alice-Mary Talbot, 143–241. Washington: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1998.

Binggeli, André. "Converting the Caliph: a Legendary Motif in Christian Hagiography and Historiography of the Early Islamic Period." In *Writing 'True Stories': Historians and Hagiographers in the Late Antique and Medieval Near East*, edited by Arietta Papaconstantinou, Muriel Debié, and Hugh Kennedy, 77–103. Turnhout: Brepols, 2010.

Blanchard, Monica. "The Georgian Version of the Martyrdom of Saint Michael, Monk of Mar Sabas Monastery." *ARAM* 6 (1994): 150–63.

Boero, Dina. "Making a Manuscript, Making a Cult: Scribal Production of the Syriac *Life of Symeon the Stylite* in Late Antiquity." *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 73 (2019): 25–68.

Boero, Dina and Charles Kuper, "Steps toward a Study of Symeon the Stylite the Younger and His Saint's Cult." *Studies in Late Antiquity* 4 (2020): 370–407.

Caseau, Béatrice. "Syméon stylite le jeune (521–592): un cas de sainte anorexie?" *Kentron* 19 (2003): 179–203.

Caseau, Béatrice, "Syméon Stylite l'Ancien entre puanteur et parfum." *Revue des Études Byzantines* 63 (2005): 71–96.

Caseau, Béatrice and Marie-Christine Fayant. "Le renouveau du culte des stylites syriens aux Xe et XIe siècles." In *Autour du Premier humanisme byzantin* & *des Cinq études sur le XIe siècle quarante ans après Paul Lemerle*, edited by Bernard Flusin and Jean-Claude Cheynet, 701–32 = *Travaux et Mémoires* 21.2. Paris: Association des amis du Centre d'histoire et civilisation de Byzance, 2017.

Caseau, Béatrice and Charis Messis. "La Vie abrégée de Syméon Stylite le jeune par Jean Pétrinos (BHG 1691) et le milieu de sa production." In *Mélanges Bernard Flusin*, edited by André Binggeli, Vincent Déroche, and Michel Stavrou, 95–120 = *Travaux et Mémoires* 23/1. Paris: Association des amis du Centre d'histoire et civilisation de Byzance, 2019.

Caseau, Béatrice and Charis Messis. "Saint Syméon Stylite le Jeune et son héritage au XIe–XIIe siècle." *Βυζαντινά Σύμμεικτα* 31 (2021): 241–80.

Datiashvili, Lela. "The Life of Theodore of Edessa and the Abukura." In *Questions of Old Georgian Literature and Rustaveli Studies* 5 (1973): 144–74.

Dawes, Elisabeth and Norman Baynes, *Three Byzantine Saints: Contemporary Biographies of St. Daniel the Stylite, St. Theodore of Sykeon and St. John the Almsgiver*. Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1948.

Déroche, Vincent, "Quelques interrogations à propos de la Vie de Saint Syméon le jeune." *Eranos* 94 (1996): 63–83.

Doran, Robert. *The Lives of Simeon Stylites*. Collegeville: Cistercian Studies, 1992.

Efthymiadis, Stephanos. "Redeeming the Genre's Remnants: Some Beneficial Tales Written in the Last Centuries of Byzantium." *Scripta & e-Scripta* 8–9 (2010): 307–25.

Ehrhard, Albert*, Überlieferung und Bestand der hagiographischen und homiletischen Literatur der griechischen Kirche von den Anfängen bis zum Ende des 16. Jahrhunderts*, 3 vols. Leipzig: PJ.C. Inrichs Verlag, 1937–1952.

Frankfurter, David. "Stylites and *Phallobates*: Pillar Religions in Late Antique Syria." *Vigiliae Christianae* 44 (1990): 168–98.

Gouillard, Jean. "Supercheries et méprises littéraires. L'oeuvre de saint Théodore d'Edesse." *Revue des Études Byzantines* 5 (1947): 137–57.

Glynias, Joe. "Byzantine Monasticism on the Black Mountain West of Antioch in the 10th–11th Centuries." *Studies in Late Antiquity* 4 (2020): 408–51.

Greenfield, Richard. *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion: an Eleventh-Century Pillar Saint. Introduction, Translation*. Washington: Dumbarton Oaks Byzantine Saints' Lives in Translation, 2000.

Griffith, Sidney. "Michael, the Martyr and Monk of Mar Sabas Monastery, at the Court of the Caliph 'Abd al-Malik: Christian Apologetics and Martyrology in the Early Islamic Period." *ARAM* 6 (1994): 115–48.

Griffith, Sidney. "The Life of Theodore of Edessa. History, Hagiography, and Religious Apologetics in Mar Saba Monastery in Early Abbasid Times." In *The Sabaite Heritage in the Orthodox Church from the Fifth Century to the Present*, edited by Joseph Patrich, 147–69. OLA 98. Louvain: Peeters, 2001.

Hinterberger, Martin. "The Byzantine Hagiographer and his Text." In *The Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography. Volume II: Genres and Contexts*, edited by Stephanos Efthymiadis, 211–46. Farnham–Burlington, 2014.

Høgel, Christian. "Euthymios the Athonite, Greek-Georgian and Georgian-Greek Translator – and Metaphrast?" In *Mélanges Bernard Flusin,* edited by André Binggeli, Vincent Déroche, and Michel Stavrou, 353–64

= *Travaux et Mémoires* 23/1. Paris: Association des amis du Centre d'histoire et civilisation de Byzance, 2019.

Kaplan, Michel. "L'espace et le sacré dans la Vie de Daniel le stylite." In *Le sacré et son inscription dans l'espace à Byzance et en Occident*, edited by Michel Kaplan, 199–217. Paris: Editions de la Sorbonne, 2001.

Kaplan, Michel. "Un saint stylite et les pouvoirs: Daniel le Stylite († 493)." In *Figures de l'autorité médiévale. Mélanges offerts à Michel Zimmermann*, edited by Pierre Chastang, Patrick Henriet, and Claire Soussen, 183–97. Paris: Editions de la Sorbonne, 2016.

Kazhdan, Alexander. "Hermitic, Cenobitic, and Secular Ideals in Byzantine Hagiography of the Ninth Century." *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 30 (1985): 473–87.

Kazhdan, Alexander. "Where, When and by Whom was the Greek Barlaam and Ioasaph Not Written." In *Zu Alexander der Grosse. Festschrift G. Wirth zum 60. Geburtstag am 9.12.86*, edited by Wolfgang Will and Johannes Heinrichs, 1187–1209. Amsterdam: Verlag Adolf M. Hakkert, 1987–1988.

Kazhdan, Alexander (in collaboration with L. Sherry – C. Angelidi). *A History of Byzantine Literature (650–850)*. Athens, 1999.

Kuper, Charles. "The 'Life of Alypius the Stylite': Introduction, Translation, and Commentary." In *The Cult of Saints: A Research Project on the Cult of Saints from its Origins to circa AD 700, across the entire Christian World*. Oxford: 2018. http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk/results.php

Lamoreaux, John. "The Biography of Theodore Abu Qurrah Revisited." *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 56 (2002): 25–40.

Loosley Leeming, Emma. *Architecture and Asceticism: Cultural Interaction between Syria and Georgia in Late Antiquity*. Texts and Studies in Eastern Christianity 13. Boston: Brill, 2018.

Magdalino, Paul. "The Byzantine Holy Man in the Twelfth Century." In *The Byzantine Saint*, edited by Sergei Hackel, 51–66. New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001.

Magdalino, Paul. "The Liturgical Poetics of an Elite Religious Confraternity." In *Reading in the Byzantine Empire and Beyond*, edited by Teresa Shawcross and Ida Toth, 116–132. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

Masterson, Mark. "Nikephoros Ouranos, Eunuchism, and Masculinity during the Reign of Emperor Basil II." *Byzantion* 89 (2019): 397–419.

McGeer, Eric. "Tradition and Reality in the *Taktika* of Nikephoros Ouranos." *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 45 (1991): 129–40.

Messis, Charis. "Littérature, voyage et politique au XIIe siècle: *L'Ekphrasis des lieux saints* de Jean 'Phokas'." *Byzantinoslavica* LXIX (2011) *[= Ekphrasis. La représentation des monuments dans les littératures byzantine et byzantino-slaves. Réalités et imaginaires*]: 146–66.

Messis, Charis and Stratis Papaioannou. "Translations I: From Other Languages into Greek, III. Arabic." in *The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Literature,* edited by Stratis Papaioannou, 195–219. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2021.

Millar, Fergus, "The Image of a Christian Monk in Northern Syria: Symeon Stylites the Younger." In *Being Christian in Late Antiquity. A Festschrift for Gillian Clark*, edited by Carol Harrison, Caroline Humfress, and Isabella Sandwell, 278–95. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Papaioannou Stratis, Charis Messis, Daria Resh, and Dimitrios Skrekas. *Euthymios "the Iberian", Life of Theodoros of Edessa* (in preparation).

Parker, Lucy. "Paradigmatic Piety: Liturgy in the Life of Martha, Mother of Symeon Stylites the Younger." *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 24 (2016): 99–125.

Pataridze, Tamara. "Christian Literature Translated from Arabic into Georgian: A Review." *Annual of Medieval Studies at CEU* 19 (2013): 47–65.

Peeters, Paul. "La Passion de s. Michel le sabaïte." *Analecta Bollandiana* 48 (1930): 65–98.

Peeters, Paul. "Saint Syméon Stylite et ses premiers biographes." *Analecta Bollandiana* 61 (1943): 29–71.

Peeters, Paul. *Le tréfonds oriental de l'hagiographie byzantine*. Subsidia hagiographica 26. Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1950.

Rapp, Claudia. *Brother-Making in Late Antiquity and Byzantium*. Onassis Series in Hellenic Culture. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

Stratigopoulos, Dimosthenis. "Orator or Grammarian? Eustathios in his Work *Ad Stylitam quondam Thessalonicensem*." In *Reading Eustathios of Thessalonike*, edited by Filippomaria Pontani, Vassilis Katsaros, and Vassilis Sarris, 243–51. Berlin and Boston: de Gruyter, 2017.

Talbot Alice-Mary and Denis Sullivan. *The History of Leo the Deacon. Byzantine Military Expansion in the Tenth Century*. Washington: Dumbarton Oaks Studies, 2005.

Todt, Klaus-Peter. *Dukat und griechischorthodoxes Patriarchat von Antiocheia in mittelbyzantinischer Zeit (969–1084)*. Mainzer Veröffentlichungen zur Byzantinistik 14. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2020.

Vanderstuyf, François. "Étude sur saint Luc le Stylite (879–979)." *Echos d'Orient* 12 (1909): 138–44 and 215–21.

Vasiliev, Alexander. "The Life of Saint Theodore of Edessa." *Byzantion* 16 (1942–43): 165–225.

Wilkinson, John. *Jerusalem Pilgrimage 1099–1185*. London: Hakluyt Society, 1988.

FABRIZIO CONCA AND LAURA FRANCO

# Beyond the Pillar. The Reception of Symeon in Modern Poetry: Tennyson, Nencioni and Καβάφης*

The figure of the first stylite, Symeon the Elder, with his unprecedented mode of asceticism, exerted a strong fascination and stimulated the creativity of many artists, writers and even film directors. This contribution explores echoes of this stylite saint in the poetry of three modern authors: Tennyson, Nencioni and Cavafy. All of them were familiar with Gibbon's work and with his corrosive considerations regarding the inventor of the peculiar ascetic discipline of stylitism. Moreover, Cavafy and Nencioni were well acquainted with the work of the Victorian poet and were both influenced, in different ways, by his poem on the figure of Symeon, producing in turn a couple of poems devoted to his charismatic character.

The aim of this paper is to explore the distinct literary outcomes, in different languages and cultural contexts, inspired by the intriguing and sometimes controversial personality of the first pillar saint.

## Evaluating Tennyson's Irony

As is well known, the Victorian poet Alfred Tennyson (1809–1892) devoted a lengthy monologue to the figure of Symeon the Elder: a poem of two-hundred and twenty blank verses, written in 1833 and published in 1842, in which the figure of Symeon is described, rather ambiguously, as a sinner saint affected

* F. Conca wrote the section on Nencioni (185–188), L. Franco the sections on Tennyson and Cavafy (181–185 and 188–193). We would like to warmly thank Anne Alwis for improving our English and Antigoni Chadjitheodorou for discussing some points of the text by Cavafy.

by narcissism. This work has been considered as the prototype of the Victorian dramatic monologue.[1]

Tennyson's encounter with the stylite originated from two sources:[2] William Hone's volume on saints, *The Every Day Book*,[3] and, more importantly, Edward Gibbon's pages on the origins and the development of Eastern monasticism. From the rational perspective of the famous English historian, the extreme ascetic discipline practiced by Egyptian and Syriac monks was a form of superstition, an entirely irrational and indecent behaviour for a human being. It may suffice to quote a couple of comments among Gibbon's many caustic observations: "The aspect of a genuine anachoret was horrid and disgusting; every sensation that is offensive to man was thought acceptable to God; and the angelic rule of Tabenne condemned the salutary custom of bathing the limbs in water and of anointing them with oil".[4]

Gibbon's authoritative judgment[5] certainly exerted an influence on Tennyson's presentation of the stylite as a hubristic figure, dominated by the anxiety of achieving salvation through the practice of this particularly odd kind of asceticism, and it may explain the sceptical, even sarcastic attitude, that emerges throughout the poem. Tennyson's critique of extreme religious practice is unquestionable and the overzealous pillar saint is described with evident irony.[6]

However, this is not the only perspective that can elucidate Tennyson's attitude towards the rigorous asceticism of the first stylite: his approach is far more complex and can be read in many different ways since the poet's perspective is ambivalent and constantly oscillates between scepticism and admiration.[7] This

[1] See Tucker, "From Monomania." See also Fredeman, "A Sign Betwixt."

[2] Cf. Fisher, "The Becoming Character," esp. 315.

[3] Hone, *The Every Day Book*, which, in turn, elaborates on Butler's *Lives of Saints*, a work that was probably also known to the poet, cf. Brummer, "Let them Take Example," 17–31 (esp. 18).

[4] Gibbon, *Decline and Fall*, chapter 37: "Conversion of the Barbarians to Christianity and Arianism." In the same chapter we also read: "The freedom of the mind, the source of every generous and rational sentiment, was destroyed by the habits of credulity and submission; and the monk, contracting the vices of a slave, devoutly followed the faith and passions of his ecclesiastical tyrant. The peace of the Eastern church was invaded by a swarm of fanatics, incapable of fear, or reason, or humanity".

[5] *Ibid*. On Symeon: "Among these heroes of the monastic life, the name and genius of Simeon Stylites have been immortalised by the singular invention of an aerial penance. (…) He sometimes prayed in an erect attitude with his outstreched arms in the figure of a cross; but his most familiar practice was that of bending his meagre skeleton from the forehead to the feet; and a curious spectator, after numbering twelve hundred and forty-four repetitions, at length desisted from the endless account." (…) On monastic literature: "These extravagant tales, which display the fiction, without the genius, of poetry, have seriously affected the reason, the faith, and the morals of the Christians. Their credulity debased and vitiated the faculties of the mind; they corrupted the evidence of history; and superstition gradually extinguished the hostile light of philosophy and science".

[6] Walker, "A Life of Death," esp. 126.

[7] See Brunner, "Let them Take Example," 19.

polarity is reflected by the protagonist of the monologue, who is represented as suspended between "arrogant self-assertion and cosmological doubt".[8]

On the one hand, Symeon is characterised by self-denigration and by a sort of avidity in his pursuit of sanctity. Tennyson indulges in a description of a list of repellent details related to Symeon's bodily condition: "From scalp to sole one slough and crust of sin" (2)[9]; "And both my thighs are rotted with the dew" (4); "In coughs, aches, stitches, ulcerous throes and cramps" (13). The tone of the monologue –pronounced by the ascetic himself in the first person– becomes often confused and almost delirious, revealing the idiosyncratic (if not megalomaniac) personality of the saint, whose flaunted asceticism betrays an immeasurable vanity.[10] In the view of the Victorian poet, Symeon fluctuates between two equally pernicious extremes: from self-contempt to self-exaltation. From considering himself the "basest of mankind,/ From scalp to sole one slough and crust of sin" (1–2), "mad with blasphemy"(4), "A sinful man, conceived and born in sin" (120), "a sinner viler than you all" (134), "A vessel full of sin" (167), he even states that "Pontius and Iscariot by my side / Showed like fair seraphs" (165–166). Symeon then proceeds to the opposite extreme and indulges in self-complacency by praising his capacity of enduring "whole years long, a life of death" (53). He applauds his deeds as "superhuman" (11), aspiring to "The meed of saints, the white robe and the palm" (20), stating that "no one, even among the saints/ May match his pains with mine" (136–137).

Symeon's body is thus portrayed as disgusting, but at the same time its mortification represents the 'fleshy' path through which the Stylite can attain salvation.[11] His search for sanctity originates from vainglory and from his mundane ambition of being 'canonised'.[12] His sainthood must eventually be recognised by men, so that he can be "calendared" (130) among saints and become an example, as it is clearly stated in line 185: "To make me an example to mankind", and repeated to 'seal' the final lines of the poem: "let them take/ Example, pattern: lead them to thy light" (219–220). Even though it is undeniable that in the latter lines Symeon, with his claim to become a paradigm for mankind, is the object of the poet's mockery, from a historical point of view it was well-known that the stylite became a model and exerted a remarkable influence in eastern Christendom.[13]

Thus, Symeon's concern with his own public image and with his official status as a saint contribute to build a caricature, as does his immodest propensity to become the 'hagiographer' of himself; but, at the same time, the rough pen-

[8] Walker, "A Life of Death," 127.
[9] Ricks, *Alfred Lord Tennyson*, 42–48.
[10] Brunner, "Let them Take Example," 21–22.
[11] See Bernardini, "The Tennysonian Paradox," 366.
[12] Cf. Fredeman, "A Sign Betwixt," 77.
[13] See Platizky, "The Watcher on the Column," 185–86.

ances he endures succeed in attracting a huge crowd of followers at the foot of his pillar. Even though they may be labelled as "silly people" (125), it is the crowd, the 'audience' that legitimates not only his sanctity but also the act of speaking the dramatic monologue.[14]

On the other hand, as a number of critics rightly observe,[15] it would be too simplistic to consider Tennyson's monologue as a mere critique of religious fanaticism, and Symeon as the parody of a saint. Saints' Lives represent a genre that proved particularly effective in transmitting communal values by presenting canonised characters functional to public use. Moreover, it is patent that the poet was deeply impressed by the gigantic personality of the stylite, who, standing alone on his column becomes a metaphor of the artist's solitude. His physical position, upon a pillar, makes him an emblematic figure when he asks himself the crucial question: "What am I?" (124). This, as it has been stressed, represents the "questioning of the self's status with which dramatic monologue came into being".[16]

Symeon constitutes an exemplar because he illustrates how Christianity was successful in imposing its doctrines on mankind. The saint is a product of his cultural milieu, which is permeated by the idea that suffering is commendable. Moreover, the poem was written shortly after the death of Arthur Hallam,[17] Tennyson's best friend and, as a consequence, it could also be read as a meditation on human destiny: life is represented as an *agon* (a struggle), aimed at enduring all sorts of suffering and pain. Symeon's figure is dominated by the idea of living his life as a daily martyrdom: "I die here/ Today, and whole years long, a life of death» (53), "Bear witness, if I could have found a way/ (....) More slowly-painful to subdue this home/ Of sin, my flesh which I despise and hate/ I had not stinted practice, O my God" (56–58). Another disturbing aspect of the multi-faceted personality of the Stylite is that of madness: his disconnected speech may be interpreted as the result of a delirium and his religious zeal often seems to cross the boundary of insanity.[18]

In general, Tennyson's contemporary critics considered the poem a satire and witnesses stated that the poet himself recited it aloud, making grotesque grimaces[19] to stress the caustic spirit of his work, as suggested, for example, in

[14] Cf. Bernardini, "The Tennysonian Paradox," 370.

[15] Cf. again Fisher, "The Becoming Character," 321, where the public character of the saint, that becomes a model suitable for shaping collective memory, is emphasised.

[16] Cf. Tucker, "From Monomania," 127–28.

[17] As it is well known, Hallam died in Vienna in 1833 due to a brain haemorrage, and Tennyson devoted to him the famous poem *In Memoriam*, completed in 1849.

[18] Cf. again Platizky, "The Watcher," esp. 183–84. For a psychiatric analysis of the first stylite (based on the *Life* of Symeon by Theodoret of Cyrrhus), see Leroi and Meagher, "A Psychiatric Examination," 24–31.

[19] As Edward FitzGerald reported his "laughing aloud at times", see Tucker, "From Monomania," 127.

lines such as 124: "here come those that worship me? Ha ha!", or 125: "The silly people take me for a saint". Nonetheless, it seems too reductive to take even these verses at face value where a sarcastic tone seems to prevail, as they still betray the poet's admiration for the exceptional character of the saint and his astonishment in the face of Symeon's strength in enduring his daily ordeal. Moreover, the Stylite's thirst for transcendental meaning can hardly be dismissed as a mere overambitious and grotesque desire for visibility: as it has been noted, certain sections of the monologue where he expresses his doubts, fears and hopes, which reach the verge of madness, display a tension that is rich with Shakespearean resonances.[20]

## From Tennyson to Nencioni

A wholly different perspective characterises the verses written by the Italian poet Enrico Nencioni. It is highly likely that Nencioni discovered the stylite saint while analysing Tennyson's work, to whom he devoted a lengthy essay, *Lord Tennyson*, in his 1892 *Nuova Antologia* (*New Anthology*), commemorating the death of the poet.[21]

In 1880, Nencioni (1837–1896) published a volume of poetry, *Poesie*. While still in print, the verses he devoted to Symeon in *San Simone Stilita* immediately attracted the praise of his friend and companion, Giosue Carducci, who mentioned this poem in the *epistola* dated 12 November 1879. A few years later, on the occasion of Nencioni's death, Gabriele D'Annunzio mentioned this poem in the eulogy he composed for the poet, *Per la morte di un poeta* (*For the Death of a Poet*), published in the newspaper *La Tribuna di Roma* (1 September 1896).

We offer here our English translation of Nencioni's poem (literal):

***San Simone stilita***

| I | I |
|---|---|
| Sul bianco cranio del divin vecchiardo | On the white cranium of the divine elder |
| Piove il sole a torrenti – il sol d'agosto, | the sun rains torrents – the August sun |
| Onde fuman le gialle erbe ne' campi: | under which the yellow grasses steam in the fields: |
| Ei dell'ardua colonna in su la cima | on the top of the arduous column |
| Drizzasi, statua viva, ed animata | he stands up, like a living statue, animated |
| Dall'alito di Dio ferrea compage. | by the breath of God, as iron architecture. |

[20] See, for example Tucker's considerations on lines 200–205: *Is that the angel there/ That holds a crown? Come, blessed brother, come./ I know thy glittering face. I waited long;/ My brows are ready. What! deny it now?/ Nay, draw, draw, draw nigh. So I clutch it. Christ!/ 'Tis gone: 'tis here again; the crown! the crown!* Tucker, "From Monomania," 133.

[21] On the reception of Tennyson in Italian literature see Pieri, "Critical Reception," 85–104 and ead., "Sleeping Beauties," 105–23.

| II | II |
|---|---|
| Nel Sagittario è il sol. Fiocca dal cielo | The sun is in Sagittarius. From heaven |
| In su la terra desolata, e nuda | down on the waste land, naked |
| Come la man d'un mendicante, in larga | like the hand of a beggar, snow falls in large |
| Copia la neve. Ogni animal d'un tetto | amounts. Every animal seeks the shelter |
| Si fa schermo, e sol erra il boreale | of a roof, and alone the Boreal |
| Orso... ma dritto là sulla colonna | Bear wanders... but upright, there on the column |
| Il divino vecchiardo ancor m'appare. | the divine elder still appears to me. |

| III | III |
|---|---|
| Dall'indomita pioggia ecco allagati | By indomitable rain, now the fields |
| I campi – e in ogni solco ecco un ruscello | are flooded – and every furrow is a stream, |
| Dal monotono ciel grigio si versa | stubborn water continuously pours |
| Continua l'ostinata acqua – e grondante | from a monotonous grey sky – dripping |
| Siccome un'alber solitario, in cima | like a solitary tree, on the top |
| Della fatal colonna eccoti ancora, | of the fatal column, there you are again |
| O re dei Santi-Martiri, Simone! | o King of Holy Martyrs, Symeon! |

| IV | IV |
|---|---|
| O Santo, io tremo a te pensando. E credo | O Saint, I am shivering, thinking of you. And I believe |
| Che il sol, le stelle, ed i vaganti uccelli | that the sun, the stars and the wandering birds |
| Che quarant'anni contemplar nei campi | that for forty years contemplated your slim profile |
| Dell'aria il magro tuo profilo, e i venti | in the fields of air, and the winds |
| Che ti agitar la veneranda barba | that shook your venerable beard |
| Come spuma di mar canuta - e tutta | white as the froth of the sea – and all |
| La Natura tremasse al tuo cospetto. | Nature trembles before you. |

The structure of the poem is simple: four stanzas in loose hendecasyllables, of which the first comprises five lines and the others seven lines. These are dominated by the figure of the saint, heedless of any discomfort and suffering caused by the alternation of the seasons. This poem, as well as the rest of Nencioni's poetic production according to Benedetto Croce's judgment, may appear "slightly weak [...] as if one seldom speaks and with a soft voice; nevertheless, it is genuine and free from any artificial pretentiousness". Yet, the poem incisively describes the saint on top of the pillar as a "living statue, animated by the breath of God" (4–5). Symeon is flooded by the overwhelming rays of the August sun, which spreads its beams as "torrents" of rain on his "white cranium" (1–2). In the latter verses we can most probably detect the influence of the Tennysonian *incipit* referring to the saint's "scalp" (2) combined with the image of the sun burning his head, which appears in another section of the monologue: "whose

brain the sunshine bakes" (163). In the second stanza, the image of the earth covered in snow "waste and naked / as the hand of a beggar" is placed in strong contrast to the fields scorched by the sun. However, the sequence of the seasons, characterized by a simple, though not banal, choice of adjectives, does not discourage the saint, who does not search for shelter, as even animals do. In addition, the image of the roof that protects even domestic animals probably echoes Tennyson's line: "And wear warm clothes, and even beasts have stalls" (107). On the contrary, the image of Symeon standing on the pillar (11) seems to identify the saint with nature, naked in the hard winter.

After the snow comes the rain that floods the fields and transforms every furrow into a stream. The rain is "indomitable" (13) and "stubborn" (16), just like Symeon, who is then compared by Nencioni to a solitary "tree" (17). Nencioni's admiration in the face of this impressive *enkrateia* (endurance) is expressed by the adverbial *iunctura* "there you are, again!" that anticipates the emphatic exclamation at the end of the third stanza: "King of the Holy Martyrs, Symeon!" (lines 18 and 19).

With an intense climax, admiration makes the poet shiver: "Oh Saint, I am shivering, thinking of you!" (20). He realizes to what extent Symeon's impassivity can surprisingly overturn the balance of power between man and Nature, which has contemplated an unparalleled miracle for such a long time and seems to surrender in the *agon*, even trembling in front of the saint, thus unexpectedly witnessing the *thauma*, celebrated by hagiographical sources (25–26).

One last significant suggestion seems to seal the poem as a *sphragis*, and is strengthened by the style of the fourth stanza. This is characterized by the hammering sequence of the *enjambements*,[22] which are generally present throughout the poem (with the exception of lines 2, 3, 14 and 18). They effectively express the intensity by which the images of the ordeals faced by Symeon throughout "forty years" come to the mind of the poet (20). The saint is marked by thinness and a "venerable beard /white as the froth of the sea" (24–25), which may be reminiscent of Tennyson's lines 30–31 "(...) and all my beard/ Was tagged with icy fringes in the moon". The position of the adjective "white" confers a particular emphasis to this last image: it is a touch of colour highlighting both the "beard" as well as the "froth of the sea". As a consequence, heaven and earth are not irreconcilable spaces, arousing "ecstasy" and "awesome terror" respectively as, accordingly to Nencioni's essay *La letteratura mistica*, was suggested in medieval Catholicism.[23] They are, on the contrary, strictly related to each other

[22] In the second stanza as well.

[23] In Nencioni, *Saggi critici*, 7: "come il lato sofistico del Paganesimo era di consacrare la natura umana anche nel suo lato cattivo; il lato sofistico del Cattolicismo medievale è di gettare un anatema troppo assoluto sulla Natura, di gustare l'abietto e l'ignobile, di vivere come lo Stilita sospeso tra il cielo e la terra, guardando a quello con estasi, a questa con un sacro terrore". (Transl.: just as the sophistic side of paganism consisted in consecrating human nature in its evil aspect, so

and they transform asceticism into a hard and rough experience of the soul, in a process of triumphant edification beyond the limits of human possibilities.

## At the Foot of the Pillar: Constantine Cavafy

The perspective of the Greek poet Constantine Cavafy (1863–1933), who was also familiar with Tennyson's lines, offers, in turn, a different reading of the stylite's figure in his unpublished poem *Simeon* written in 1917. Here we have twenty-eight loose verses, articulated into six stanzas consisting of iambic metres of uneven length. They concisely depict the feeling of distance between the society of the well-educated *litterati* and the reality of the expanding Christian world, from the perspective of a pagan narrator. The action takes place in Syria about 454 CE.[24]

| **Συμεὼν** | **Simeon** (transl. by D. Mendelsohn) |
|---|---|
| Τὰ ξέρω, ναί, τὰ νέα ποιήματά του·<br>ἐνθουσιάσθηκεν ἡ Βηρυτὸς μ' αὐτά.<br>Μιὰν ἄλλη μέρα θὰ τὰ μελετήσω.<br>Σήμερα δὲν μπορῶ γιατ' εἶμαι κάπως ταραγμένος. | I know them, yes those new poems of his.<br>All Beirut is passionate about them,<br>I'll take a careful look another day.<br>Today I cannot, since I'm rather upset. |
| Ἀπ' τὸν Λιβάνιο πιὸ ελληνομαθὴς εἶναι βεβαίως.<br>Ὅμως καλύτερος κι απ' τὸν Μελέαγρο; Δὲν πιστεύω. | Certainly he's better versed in Greek than Libanius.<br>But even better than Meleager? I don't believe so. |
| Α Μέβη, τί Λιβάνιος! καὶ τί βιβλία!<br>καὶ τί μικρότητες!..... Μέβη, ἤμουν χθὲς—<br>ἡ τύχη τό 'φερε— κάτω ἀπ' τοῦ Συμεὼν τὸν στύλο. | Ah, Mebes, so what of Libanius! and so what of books!<br>And all such trivialities!..... Mebes yesterday I was—<br>quite by chance it happened— at the foot of Symeon's pillar. |
| Χώθηκα ἀνάμεσα στοὺς Χριστιανοὺς<br>ποὺ σιωπηλοὶ προσεύχονταν κ' ἐλάτρευαν,<br>και προσκυνοῦσαν· πλὴν μὴ ὄντας Χριστιανὸς<br>τὴν ψυχικὴ γαλήνη των δὲν εἶχα—<br>κ' ἔτρεμα ὀλόκληρος καὶ ὑπόφερνα·<br>κ' ἔφριττα, καὶ ταράττομουν, καὶ παθαινόμουν. | I slipped in among the Christians<br>who were praying silently and worshipping,<br>and kneeling down; but since I'm not a Christian<br>I didn't have their serenity of mind—<br>and I was trembling all over, and suffering;<br>and I was horrified, upset, deeply distressed. |

also the sophistic side of Medieval Catholicism placed too absolute an anathema against Nature, tasting the vile and ignoble, and living like the Stylite hanging between heaven and earth, looking at the former with ecstasy and at the latter with a sacred terror).

[24] As it may be inferred from verse 16, where it is said that Symeon (†459) had lived for thirty-five years on his pillar. See also: Lavagnini, *Konstantinos*, 1030–33; Pentani, *Constantino*, 50–53, 96.

Α μὴ χαμογελᾶς· τριάντα πέντε χρόνια, σκέψου—
χειμῶνα, καλοκαῖρι, νύχτα, μέρα, τριάντα πέντε
χρόνια ἐπάνω σ' ἕναν στύλο ζεῖ καὶ μαρτυρεῖ.
Πρὶν γεννηθοῦμ' ἐμεῖς — ἐγὼ εἶμαι εἴκοσι ἐννιά
ἐτῶν,
ἐσὺ θαρρῶ εἶσαι νεότερός μου—
πρὶν γεννηθοῦμ' ἐμεῖς, φαντάσου το,
ἀνέβηκεν ὁ Συμεὼν στὸν στύλο
κ' ἔκτοτε μένει αὐτοῦ ἐμπρός εἰς τὸν Θεό.

Ah, don't smile; thirty-five years, just think—
winter, summer, night and day, thirty-five
years he's been living atop a pillar, martyring himself.
Before we were born —I'm twenty-nine years old,
and you, I daresay, are younger than I—
before we were born, imagine it.
Simeon went up onto the pillar
and ever since he's stayed there before his God.

Δὲν ἔχω σήμερα κεφάλι γιὰ δουλειά.—
Πλὴν τοῦτο, Μέβη, κάλλιο νὰ τὸ πεῖς
ποὺ ὅ,τι κι ἂν λὲν οἱ ἄλλοι σοφισταί,
ἐγὼ τὸν παραδέχομαι τὸν Λάμονα
γιὰ πρῶτο τῆς Συρίας ποιητή.

Today I have no head for work
Except for this, Mebes: better if you say
that, whatever the other sophists say,
I myself acknowledge Lamo
as first among the poets of Syria.

Cavafy's anonymous narrator addresses his companion Mebes[25] in an imaginary dialogue, which, in fact, is a monologue, for the questions posed by the interlocutor are formulated by the protagonist. Both the young men are sophists, who belong to a cultured pagan milieu. They comment on the poetry of a fictional poet, Lamon, whose new poems have recently appeared in Syria, and whose name is revealed only at the end of the poem.

In the first six lines the protagonist discusses the poetic skills of this new poet, comparing him to Libanius and Meleager, but he promptly declares: "I shall study them carefully another day. Today I cannot do so, for I am rather distressed. *Μιάν άλλη μέρα θα τα μελετήσω. Σήμερα δεν μπορώ γιατ'είμαι κάπως ταραγμένος*" (4). He then exclaims that Libanius and books are trivial matters ("so what of Libanius! so what of books! / and such trivialities!... *τι Λιβάνιος! και τι βιβλία! /και τι μικρότητες!.....*"), thus creating a pause, which is underlined by a sequence of suspension points, and followed by an abrupt change of topic (7–8).

In the next line the reason for the protagonist's discomfort is revealed (8). The day before, by pure chance ("*η τύχη τώφερε*"), he found himself under Symeon's pillar (9). He sneaked among the Christians, "who were silently praying, worshipping, and kneeling down" ("*που σιωπηλοί προσεύχονταν κ' ελάτρευαν, / και προσκυνούσαν*" 11–12). The sequence of these three verbs, in the imperfect, creates a climax, aimed at emphasising the intensity of the action of praying, which causes a profound emotion in the observer.

[25] This is a fictional character. The same name appears in one of Cavafy's published poems, dated to 1926 and addressed to a sophist who is leaving Syria. Here Mebes is referred to as an expensive prostitute, described as the most handsome boy in Antioch.

In the last part of this stanza, the mixed feelings of the protagonist when faced with this disturbing scene are described as a combination of admiration and awe. Since he is not Christian, the speaker reckons that he does not possess their inner peace: "but since I'm not a Christian /I didn't have their serenity of mind (πλην μη όντας Χριστιανός /την ψυχική γαλήνη των δεν είχα)" (12–13), and he reacts with fear. Five verbs illustrate panic and pain: "and I was trembling all over, and suffering/ and I was horrified, upset, deeply distressed (κ' έτρεμα ολόκληρος και υπόφερνα·/κ' έφριττα, και ταράττομουν, και παθαινόμουν)" (14–15).

Only a relatively small portion of the poem is devoted to the description of the stylite's ascetic discipline (verses 16–23). The circumstances under which he endures his *agon* are concisely described in a single line, vaguely echoing Tennyson's poem: "winter, summer, night and day... (χειμώνα, καλοκαίρι, νύχτα, μέρα...)" (17).[26] In the final verses (24–28) the speaker returns to the initial assertion, in a sort of ring structure, and states that his encounter with Symeon left him totally incapable of resuming his work. He perceives the strength of Symeon's extraordinary experience, if perhaps only momentarily. His bewilderment seems to be short-lived, and is superseded by other matters. The poem concludes, with a typical Cavafian 'twist', with the protagonist's return to his usual trivial and bookish occupations, the same that were resolutely dismissed in the first lines. Thus, he finally praises Lamon as the first poet in Syria.

We are left with the impression of a substantial ambiguity, which seems to be a reflection of the poet's attitude. This is all the more so because in Greek Lamon (γλάμων) means 'one-eye' or 'bleary'.[27] Metaphorically, this could be an allusion to the 'myopic' vision of the pagans who fail to realize that their world is rapidly shrinking, and that the Christian faith represents the new order that will prevail over pagan culture. A similar mixture of disturbing feelings caused by the contemplation of Christian rituals can be detected in one of Cavafy's longest poems, published twelve years later, *Myres. Alexandria 340 A.D.* (1928). Here the protagonist, another pagan, finds himself surrounded by Christians at the funeral of his young Christian lover. As in the case of the narrator who saw Symeon's worshippers, he is astonished by the devotion of the faithful and by the attention and care with which they perform the funerary service. In a *crescendo* of discomfort, he is eventually overwhelmed by a profound sense of alienation, both toward the Christians and toward his deceased lover.[28] As already mentioned above, *St Simeon Stylites* is one of the poems that Tennyson wrote in response to the death of his friend Arthur Hallam. It is thus extremely

[26] "Thrice ten years (11) (...) Rain, wind, frost, heat, hail, damp, and sleet, and snow" (16).

[27] Cf. the proverb: Εν τυφλών πόλει, (γ)λάμων βασιλεύει.

[28] *Myres. Alexandria 340 A.D.*: "I was becoming a stranger to him, very much a stranger (ξένος εγώ, ξένος πολύ)... perhaps I had been fooled by my passion, had always been a stranger to him" (*Cavafy*, ed. Mendelsohn, 159).

likely that Cavafy's *Simeon*, as well as *Myres*, found a source of inspiration in a sort of dialogue with his 'predecessor'.[29]

In both poems, the point of view is that of a pagan who feels uneasy in front of Christian spirituality. Nevertheless, we are far from Gibbon's sarcastic judgment of monastic fanaticism: Cavafy's attitude is antithetical to the English historian's rigorous rationalism. His rejection of Gibbon's dismissive (if not contemptuous) evaluation of Byzantium and Christianity can be explained by the influence of a contemporary Romantic and nationalistic vision of Greek identity as a continuum from ancient to modern times.[30] In this sense, the figure of the stylite may function as a go-between, like the many other Cavafian historical figures revitalised by the 'poet-historian', as Cavafy used to define himself. Moreover, the choice of a relatively obscure personage as the stylite saint seems to be in tune with Cavafy's predilection for 'marginal' historical figures,[31] which emerges throughout a large part of his poetical production. Under Symeon's pillar the poet/narrator is overwhelmed by the saint's superhuman capacity of endurance and by the tenacity with which he pursues a life in complete solitude. It is not by chance that the poem is set at the foot of the column, among humanity, in contrast to Tennyson's monologue, where the speaker is Symeon himself. From Cavafy's perspective, the protagonist is not the saint but the observer and the effect that the stylite's extreme asceticism produces on men: Symeon's intense spirituality belongs to heaven, the poet remains on the earth. As a pagan, he does not possess the tools to achieve the 'serenity of mind' of the Christian devotees. He can only observe their inner peace and admire the saint's rigor in witnessing his faith in front of God.[32] Moreover, the isolated life of the ascetic, which is an essential condition to exert his virtue, finds a parallel in the solitary confinement in which Cavafy chose to withdraw to perfect his art. This interpretation appears to be corroborated by Cavafy himself. In one of his prose works, datable to 1899, he wrote some considerations about Symeon as an historical figure. These consist of a few lines of marginal notes to Gibbon, written in English, where Cavafy expresses his great admiration for the stylite. He then refers to Tennyson's work, stating that it was inadequate vis-à-vis the towering figure of the Syriac ascetic, which, in the verses of the Victorian poet,

[29] Cf. Ricks, "From Ulysses to S. Simeon," 32.

[30] More specifically, Cavafy was influenced by the work of the Greek historian Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos, *History of the Greek Nation*, published between 1860 and 1877. On the 'Byzantine' poems by Cavafy (in general, not on Symeon in paricular), see, Agapitos, "Byzantium in the Poetry" and Lavagnini, *Sette nuove poesie*, with bibliography.

[31] Jusdanis, "Cavafy, Tennyson," 128.

[32] On Cavafy's religious thought see the important work by Haas, *Le problème religieux*. On his controversial relationship with Christianity, see Dimoula, "C. P. Cavafy's Christianity," 162–64 (on Symeon).

"fails in tone" and "has been handled in a common, almost vulgar manner".[33] It is worth quoting Cavafy's observations in full:

> This great, this wonderful saint is surely an object to be singled out in ecclesiastical history for admiration and study. He had been, perhaps, the only man who has dared to be really *alone*.
>
> There is no exaggeration in the words "Simeon was repeatedly saved from pious suicide". To make the sense clearer the word *unintentional* should be added. St. Blasius once saved Simeon when he was on the point of expiring from suffering.
>
> The height of the column is correctly given by Gibbon. There is an extant passage of Evagrius in which it is stated that Simeon Stylites built a small house, or rather a small room on the top of the column. But a modern German savant, Gregorovius, is of the opinion that Simeon must have used the room only during the first years till he got used to the vertiginous height, and must afterwards have pulled it down.
>
> The glory of Simeon filled and astounded the earth. Innumerable pilgrims crowded round his column. People came from the farthest West and from the farthest East, from Britain and from India, to gaze at the unique sight – on this candle of faith (such is the magnificent language of the historian Theodoret) set up and lit on a lofty chandelier.
>
> I have met with only one poem on Simeon Stylites, but it is in no way worthy of the subject.
>
> The poem of Tennyson, though it contains some well-made verses, fails in tone. Its great defect lies in its form of a monologue. The complaints of Simeon, his eagerness for the "meed of saints, the white robe and the palm", his dubious humility, his latent vanity, are not objectionable in themselves and maybe were necessary to the poem, but they have been handled in a common, almost vulgar manner. It was a very difficult task – a task reserved perhaps, for some mighty king of art – to find fitting language for so great a saint, so wonderful a man.[34]

This last observation clearly shows that, almost twenty years later, Cavafy's *Symeon* was written as a response to Tennyson's poem, to which it is bound in an intertextual relationship.[35] At this stage of his life Cavafy had achieved the poetical maturity necessary to face the challenge, but the difficulty of creating a work worthy of this extraordinary saint can possibly explain the choice to leave it unpublished.

[33] On the relationship between Cavafy and Tennyson, see Ricks, "Cavafy's Quarrel with Tennyson." For the reception of Tennyson in the Greek-speaking world up to 1930 see Gotsi, "Tennyson in Greek Letters." On the theme of the stylite in the poetry of Tennyson, Cavafy and Varnalis, see Constantinou, "Το διακειμενικό τρίγωνο Tennyson, Καβάφη, Βάρναλη."

[34] Cf. *Κ.Π. Καβαφης*, ed. Σαββιδης, 184–85.

[35] On the relationship between Cavafy and his 'predecessor', see Ricks, "From Ulysses to S. Simeon," 21–33 and Jusdanis, "Cavafy, Tennyson," 123–36.

## Conclusions

From this brief overview, it emerges that three poems, written in different languages, and distant from each other in terms of style, tone and perspective, originated, in different ways, from Gibbon's account of the origins of Eastern monasticism. Tennyson was inspired by Gibbon and shared certain ideas with the historian, namely a strong distaste for extreme asceticism and self-loathing. However, Tennyson is captivated by the powerful personality of the Syrian monk. His fascination for Symeon's unusual form of asceticism provokes both restlessness and admiration in the poet. Tennyson, in turn, inspired Nencioni. We cannot be sure whether Nencioni also read Gibbon but it is extremely likely, given his deep knowledge of English literature. However, he interpreted the same theme in a completely different spirit: in *Simone,* the poet contemplates the stylite with veneration and he is overwhelmed by stupefaction and reverence. Cavafy did not know Nencioni, but, like the Tuscan poet, he came across Symeon by reading Gibbon and Tennyson. His angle is possibly the most elusive among the three: he was Greek and thus deeply familiar with 'Eastern' cults of saints.[36] He certainly admired Symeon, but he seems hesitant to get too close to the stylite: he remains, in a sense, at the foot of the pillar, uncertain between known and unknown.

## Bibliography

### Sources

Lavagnini, Renata (ed.). *Sette nuove poesie bizantine di Costantino Kavafis*. Rome: Università La Sapienza, 1988.

Lavagnini, Renata (ed.). *Konstantinos Kavafis. Poesie e prose.* Milan: Bompiani, 2021.

Mendelsohn, Daniel (ed.). *C. P. Cavafy. Complete Poems*. London: Harper Collins, 2009.

Nencioni, Enrico. *Saggi critici di letteratura italiana*. Florence: Le Monnier, 1911.

Pontani, F.M. *Costantino Kavafis. Poesie nascoste*. Milan: Mondadori, 1974.

Ricks, Cristopher (ed.). *Alfred Lord Tennyson. Selected Poems*. London: Penguin, 2007.

Σαββιδης Γεώργιος. Π. (ed.). *Κ.Π. Καβαφης. Κρυμμένα Ποιήματα 1877–1923*. Athens: Ikaros, 1993, 1997, 2000.

[36] On the aspect of Cavafy's Mediterranean 'religious' spirit and orthodox devotion to saints versus Tennyson's "Protestant outlook", see again Ricks, "Cavafy's Quarrel," 350–51.

## Secondary Literature

Agapitos, Panagiotis A. "Byzantium in the Poetry of Kostis Palamas and C.P. Cavafy." *Κάμπος Cambridge Papers in Modern Greek* 2 (1994): 2–20.

Bernardini, Claire. "The Tennysonian Paradox: Privacy and Sociality in 'Ulysses' and 'Symeon Stylites'." *Victorian Poetry* 31. 4 (1993): 363–84.

Brummer, L. "Let Them *Saints* Take Example: Failed Asceticism in Tennyson's St Simeon Stylites." *Victorian Poetry* 35.2 (1986): 17–31.

Butler, Alban. *The Lives of the Fathers, Martyrs and Other Principal Saints*. London: J. Duffy, 1756–59.

Constantinou, Stavroula. "Το διακειμενικό τρίγωνο Tennyson, Καβάφη, Βάρναλη: Συμεών ο Στυλίτης." In *Ο ελληνικός κόσμος ανάμεσα στην Ανατολή και τη Δύση 1453–1981*, edited by A. Αργυρίου, K. A. Δημάδης, A. Δ. Λαζαρίδου, 414–22. Athens: Ελληνικά Γράμματα, 1999.

Dimoula, Vasiliki. "C. P. Cavafy's Christianity in the Context of Fin de Siècle Discourses on Pleasure: The Vicissitudes of Reinvented Love." *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 37 (2019): 149–78.

Fisher, Devon. "The Becoming Character of Tennyson's Symeon Stylites." *Victorian Poetry* 48.3 (2010): 313–26.

Fredeman, William. "A Sign Betwixt the Meadow and the Cloud: the Ironic Apotheosis of Tennyson's St Simeon Stylites." *University of Toronto Quarterly* 38 (1968): 69–83.

Gibbon, Edward. *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. J.B. Bury, ed. 7 vols, 7 edns, London: Methuen, 1898–1925, reprinted New York: AMS Press, 1974.

Gotsi, Georgia. "Tennyson in Greek Letters, 1830–1930: From *Enoch Arden* to 'Ulysses'." In *The Reception of Alfred Tennyson in Europe*, edited by Leonce Ormond, 303–38. London: Bloomsbury, 2017.

Haas, Diana. *Le problème religieux dans l'oeuvre de Cavafy. Les années de formation (1832–1905)*. Paris: Sorbonne, 1996.

Hone, William. *The Every Day Book*. London: T. Tegg, 1825, 1827.

Jusdanis, Gregory. "Cavafy, Tennyson and the Overcoming of Influence." *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 8 (1982/83): 123–36.

Leroi, I. and J.B.A. Meagher. "Saint Simeon the Stylite, A Psychiatric Examination of the Life of a Fifth-Century Monk." *Jefferson Journal of Psychiatry*, 14.2 (1999): 24–31.

Ormond, Leonce (ed.). *The Reception of Alfred Tennyson in Europe*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017.

Pieri, Giuliana. "The Critical Reception of Tennyson in Italy." In *The Reception of Alfred Tennyson in Europe*, edited by Leonce Ormond, 85–104. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017.

Pieri, Giuliana. "Sleeping Beauties and Femmes Fatales: Tennyson, Gabriele D'Annunzio and Italian Pre-Raphaelitism." In *The Reception of Alfred Tennyson in Europe*, edited by Leonce Ormond, 105–23. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017.

Platizky, Roger S. "The Watcher on the Column: Religious Enthusiasm and Madness in Tennyson's "St Symeon Stylites." *Victorian Poetry* 25.2 (1987): 181–86.

Ricks, David. "From Ulysses to S. Simeon Stylites: Cavafy's debt to Tennyson." *Neograeca Bohemica* 10.1 (2010), 21–33.

Ricks, David. "Cavafy's Quarrel with Tennyson." In *The Reception of Alfred Tennyson in Europe*, edited by Leonce Ormond, 339–56. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017.

Tucker, Herbert F. "From Monomania to Monologue: St Symeon Stylites and the Rise of the Victorian Dramatic Monologue." *Victorian Poetry* 22.2 (1984): 121–37.

Walker, Richard J. "A Life of Death: Alfred Tennyson's 'St Simeon Stylites'." In *Labyrinths of Deceit. Culture, Modernity and Identity in the Nineteenth Century*, edited by R. J. Walker, 124–35. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007.

PART II

# Visual Reception: Stylites and Their Images

ESEN ÖĞÜŞ

# The Stylite and the Roman Honorific Statue: On the Visual and Conceptual Impact of a Human Figure on a Pillar

When the first known stylite in history, Symeon, ascended his pillar in 412 CE in Syria, the act was probably considered unusual even by that day's standards; at least, it was implied as such by Palladius, who, writing in 419–20, reports about Macarius of Alexandria. When Macarius observed the Pachomian monks at Tabennisi following the Lenten penitential practice of standing all night, but getting some relief by sitting during the day, he "took his stand (*estē*) in a corner and stayed there — night and day, presumably — until Easter without kneeling or lying down." The result of this act was a loud complaint from the other monks about "this fleshless one (*ton asarkon*), who had to go or else they would all leave."[1]

Of the many possible ways of expressing devotion to God, it is of note that the 'fleshless' stylites of Late Antiquity chose to stand up; furthermore, they chose a pillar to stand on. Why did they not stand on the ground, on a table, or on a roof? Some scholars have sought the origins of Symeon's 'odd' act in a phallic pillar cult surviving from pagan Syria. As narrated in Lucian's *De Dea Syria,* there were priests who mounted phallus-shaped pillars (*phallobates*) at the cult site of the goddess Atargatis at Hierapolis in the second century.[2] Others have explained the initiation of Symeon's act and its lasting popularity by attempting

[1] Palladius, *Lausiac History* 18.14–17, summarized by Williams, *Immoveable Race*, 87. Translation from Cox Miller, "On the Edge," 185.

[2] Lucian, *De Dea Syria*, 28–29 (trans. by Harmon, *Lucian,* 379–80). See also Wright, "Simeon's Ancestors"; Wright, "Heritage"; Frankfurter, "Stylites and *Phallobates*"; Eastmond, "Body vs. Column," 96.

to establish a visual link between the stylite and Christ on a cross.[3] Although both are strong arguments, well-supported by evidence, neither the possible pagan origins of Symeon's act nor the visual links of the stylite's body to that of Christ fully explain the popularity and longevity of the stylite throughout the Roman world, as advertised by Theodoret in reference to Symeon:

> For it is not only inhabitants of our part of the world who pour in, but also Ishmaelites, Persians and the Armenians subject to them, the Iberians, the Homerites, and those who live even further in the interior than these. Many came from the extreme west: Spaniards, Britons and the Gauls who dwell between them. It is superfluous to speak of Italy, for they say that he became so well-known in the great city of Rome that small portraits of him were set up on a column at the entrances of every shop to bring through that some protection and security to them.[4]

The swift dissemination and acceptance of the stylite's act in Constantinople, eastern Anatolia, Asia Minor, and Greece also requires further explanation beyond pagan origins and religious evocations of the unusual act.[5]

Visually speaking, a human figure on a pillar carries a large cultural and historical baggage that needs to be fully discussed and integrated into the narrative of a stylite's motives, and of the public reception of his devotion. It has long been recognized that there is a visual and functional correlation between the stylites and Roman honorific statues, particularly imperial statues mounted on tall columns — the most ubiquitous form of human figure on a pillar in Late Antiquity.[6] The correlation between the holy man and the honorific image was also raised by ancient authors. Theodoret, writing in the fifth century, openly compares holy men and women to those men whose memories are venerated by painted panels — no doubt honorific in character.[7] Elsewhere, Theodoret refers to the holy men of Syria as "living images and statues."[8] St. Theodore of Sykeon, who lived in the sixth century, was also compared to an image: he was reported to have "stood like an iron statue through the night and without sleeping continued in praise to God."[9]

[3] Drijvers, "Spätantike Parallelen," attempted to explain the popularity of the column cult in terms of the imitation of Christ on the cross, although Frankfurter, "Stylites and *Phallobates,*" 175, 186 rejected the idea. Another idea explores the materiality and power of the stylite's column as an extension of personhood: Hunter-Crawley, "Divinity Refracted."

[4] *Sym. Styl.* 11 (trans. Doran, *Lives*, 75); also Eastmond, "Body vs. Column," 96–97.

[5] A list of stylites is given in Peña, Castellana and Fernandez, *Les Stylites*, 79–84.

[6] Eastmond, "Body vs. Column"; James, "Pray not to Fall," 18; Cox Miller, "On the Edge," 184–85.

[7] Theodoret, *HR*, Prologue, 3 (trans. Price, *History of the Monks*).

[8] Theodoret, *HR*, 2. 27–28 (trans. Price, *History of the Monks*).

[9] *Life of Theodore of Sykeon,* 115 (trans. Dawes and Bayes, *Three Byzantine Saints*).

It is my aim in this essay to delve into the details, scale, and significance of this possible visual and cultural link between the stylite and the honorific statue in general, and the imperial statue in particular. I will argue that it may not have been entirely coincidental that a stylite chose a pillar or a column to show his devotion. On the contrary, the stylite, consciously or unconsciously, chose the visual vocabulary of a bygone age — ubiquitous in major urban centers well into the Medieval period — to predict a future one. The meaning of a human figure on a column and the reasons why it received adoration were probably different in rural Syria, where the stylite tradition began, from what they might be in Anatolia, or in major urban centers like Antioch or Constantinople. However, the reception of the devotional act, performed with awe and respect in various corners of the ancient world, presupposed the popularity of the visual and cultural stimulation that a human figure on a pillar provided. Therefore, I also question how the functioning of a column and the imagery of the human figure on its top — whether an inanimate statue or an unmoving holy man — acted as visual media that expressed power, leadership, and justice over a society desperately in need of these qualities.

To demonstrate my thesis, I begin with a brief introduction to the honorific statue habit of Late Antiquity, and the historical context in which the stylite devoted himself to God. The following section scrutinizes the semantic and perceptual link between an image and a human body, and dwells on the value of imaging living bodies in Late Antiquity. The final section includes examples in which an honorific statue and the stylite's body functioned, and were perceived, similarly.

## Honorific Statues in Late Antiquity and Historical Context

The world of the late antique stylite was certainly not devoid of human images standing on tall bases and columns. For one thing, Constantinople was going through a very ambitious programme of building columnar monuments on which the statues of emperors and their families were mounted, dominating the hills of Constantinople so that they would be visible from afar. Constantine I's colossal bronze statue stood on a porphyry column set up in 324 in his Forum in Constantinople [Fig. 1].[10] This column was followed by that of Theodosius I (386–394), set up in the Forum of Theodosius (Tauros), a column that was later reused as a base for the statue of Emperor Anastasius (506). The spiral column in the Forum of Arcadius crowned by the colossal statue of Arcadius (401–421)

[10] Ousterhout, "The Lives and Afterlives."

came next.[11] Other imperial columnar monuments were set up in various places in Constantinople: Eudoxia, empress and wife of Arcadius (403), had a column in 'Pittakia' (later known as the Forum of Leo), Theodosius II (402–450) in the Hebdomon, Marcian (450–452) in the Forum of Marcian, and Leo I (457–474) in the Forum of Leo.[12] The imperial tradition of statues on tall columns continued up to Justinian and was ended by Phokas in 609.[13] These columns of Constantinople themselves complemented an earlier tradition of Republican and Imperial columns in Rome, for instance those of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius.[14]

While a rural holy man like a stylite could not have been in full command of the history and cultural implications of a human image on a column, he could not have been entirely ignorant of the visual examples around him; indeed, he had probably himself witnessed the devotion and reverence on the one hand, and hatred and insult, on the other, that people displayed toward imperial images on tall bases. The column of the first stylite, Symeon, was set up only about 40 miles away from Antioch, one of the biggest cities of the Late Empire. We know from literary and archaeological sources that several honorific statues on bases were displayed at Antioch. For instance, the sixth-century author John Malalas narrates that there was a huge column in the city in the centre of four basilicas (probably porticoes) bearing a column of Emperor Valentinian I (364–375), a description that evokes columnar monuments in Constantinople.[15] Some statues at Antioch are visually represented on the border of the so-called Megalopsychia mosaic in the rural villa of Yakto (Daphne), a suburb of Antioch [Fig. 2].[16] Moreover, the honorific statues came to the forefront of public discourse during the infamous Riot of Statues in 387, when people enraged by a newly imposed tax pulled down the bronze honorific statues

*Fig. 1. Column of Constantine. Fourth century C.E. Istanbul. Photo: author.*

[11] *LSA* 2458, 2459.

[12] Eudoxia: *LSA* 27; Theodosius II: *LSA* 31; Leo I: *LSA* 2462; Marcian: *LSA* 2461.

[13] Justinian: *LSA* 2463; Phocas: *LSA* 2774.

[14] Trajan: Maffei, 1993b; Marcus Aurelius: Maffei, 1993a.

[15] LSA 2709; Malalas, *Chronographia* 13 (339 Dindorf).

[16] Levi, *Antioch*, 323–45, pl. 79.c; Dunbabin, *Mosaics*, 180–83.

of Theodosius I and his family from their bases, chopped some of them to pieces, and dragged others through the streets of Antioch.[17] This event caused the frightened public to fear that Theodosius would order the city's total destruction. Inhabitants fled from the city to the surrounding mountains, leaving their relatives and belongings behind; others were arrested and executed; and the streets were filled with dramatic scenes of mothers shedding tears fearing for their sons' lives.[18] Symeon had not yet set up his column at the outskirts of Antioch at the time of the Riot, but probably either personally witnessed the drama at Antioch, or heard about the city's dark history, constantly evoked by the still-standing honorific statues.

*Fig. 2. Border on the Mosaic of Megalopsychia, Antioch. Late fifth-early sixth century C.E. Excavated in 1932. Antioch Expedition Archives, Department of Art and Archaeology, Princeton University.*

On the other hand, when Daniel Stylite, a follower of Symeon, set up his column in 451 on the outskirts of Constantinople, the city's skies had already been populated by imperial columns. After visiting Daniel on his column, Emperor Leo I (who ascended to the throne in 457), following the imperial tradition of columnar statue monuments, had a statue of himself installed on a tall column in the last imperial agora of Constantinople, the Forum of Leo (also known as 'Pittakia').[19]

Aside from the question of whether a stylite was aware of the visual connotations of a human image on a pillar, the swift and welcome dissemination of the stylite habit to rural Anatolia, around the Marmara Sea, and later to Greece, needs to be examined with regard to the visual and social prominence of the medium of honorific statuary, which are essentially human figures on pillars, and the general cultural practices of viewing and admiring these imperial statues in the Greek East.

[17] Libanius, *Or.* 22.7–9; Theodoret, *Hist. Ecc.* 5.20.1 (trans. Price, *History of the Monks*); Sozomen, *Hist. Ecc.* 7.23 (Schaff and Wace, *Select Library*); Downey, *History of Antioch*, 426–33; Stewart, "Destruction"; van de Paverd, *John Chrysostom*; Anderson, "The Disappearing Imperial Statue," 301.

[18] Stenger, "Staging."

[19] *LSA* 2467.

The honorific statuary of Late Antiquity is still remarkably prevalent in places where the imperial tradition was strong, such as North Africa, Italy, Greece, and Asia Minor.[20] This last is the area, second to Italy, where the honorific habit was the strongest. The habit shows continuity with the Imperial Period, especially in terms of conception and functioning of statuary, and yet exhibits several differences as well. These include a noticeable decline in the overall honours, and a significant change in the composition of honorands from a high proportion of honours for civic notables in the early period (first to third centuries) to being primarily emperors, the imperial family, and imperial office holders (governors) in the late period (fourth to sixth centuries).[21] Probably the most remarkable shift in the habit is the intensive re-use of imperial statue monuments. Re-use had always been common practice, but its volume and manner of execution in Late Antiquity makes it the mainstream behaviour, rather than the exception; almost *all* bases and more than half of the statuary were re-used.[22]

While reuse was the rule, rather than the exception, in the fourth century, new statues in new costumes of chlamys and late antique toga were also produced, starting in the late fourth and continuing into the fifth century.[23] The popularity of the stylites in Asia Minor and Greece in the fifth century thus meaningfully coincides with the rejuvenated production of honorific statuary in the Greek-speaking provinces around this time. These statues were dedicated mostly to emperors and imperial officials, and were displayed on tall bases in prominent spaces in the Greek East, such as the agora, the columnar facades of public buildings, and other closed spaces such as inside the porticoes. From the Theodosian Period onwards, and over the course of the fifth century, a popular display space came to be along the colonnaded street, not inside the portico, but in front of it.[24] An important example of this late antique layout is the Embolos Street in Ephesos, the street that connected the State Agora and the Library of Celsus, where late antique statue ensembles dedicated to emperors and governors lined both sides of the street in front of the porticos, hence becoming more visible and accessible to the public.

The bases of statues, on the other hand, came in different types, shapes, and materials around the Empire.[25] In most cases, they were rectangular monolithic blocks of varying heights, with a separately added crowning element and a plinth. Bases could also be of masonry construction, for instance at Corinth,

[20] Smith, "Statue Practice," 5.

[21] For a general account of the changes, demonstrated with statistics, see Smith, "Statue Practice," 1–27; and Ward-Perkins, "Statues," 28–40. Decline in the honors: Smith, "Statue Practice," 8, fig. 1.6. Composition of honorands: Smith, "Statue Practice," 5, fig. 1.3.

[22] Statues 50 percent, heads 65 percent, busts 30 percent; see Smith, "Statue Practice," 4.

[23] Smith, "Statue Practice," 15–19.

[24] Jacobs, "Creation," 144–45; Lavan, *Public Space*, 34–47, 235–62.

[25] Ward-Perkins, "Statues," 29–31.

in which case inscribed marble plaques were attached to cover the masonry surface.[26] Bases were sometimes in the form of tall columns, more modest in a provincial city such as Caesarea, and, as mentioned, more elaborate and tallest in Constantinople.[27] Shorter columns were also used for imperial honorific statues, for instance, in Nicaea (Bithynia) and Aphrodisias [Fig. 3].[28] Overall, given the ubiquity and visibility of honorific statues and bases, a human image on a pillar was not at all an unusual sight by the time the stylites came along.

The visual and functional affinity between the honorific statue and the stylite's act must also be situated within the broader historical context in which the stylite operated. The imperial statue standing on a tall column was the landmark of the city, while the stylite was the landmark of the countryside. Peter Brown discusses the social role that the holy man played in rural Syria, where the monk occupied the semi-desert fringes of cultivated land and played a conspicuous role in society.[29] In Asia Minor, on the other hand, where the stylite tradition took root and at the same time the honorific statue tradition was remarkably strong, Sozomen noted the geographic and climatic conditions and pointed out that monks were to be found in cities and villages, since severe winters prevented them from living in the real wilderness.[30] In reality, this might be a simplistic view; while it is true that many monastic settlements were established in areas that had ease of access to big cities, such as on the Asiatic coast of Bosporus, the environs of Constantinople, Nicomedia, and Ancyra, other monastic settlements in inland Anatolia were to be found in remoter parts of the countryside.[31]

*Fig. 3. Columnar statue base used for Julian, emperor, later used for Theodosius. Aphrodisias (Caria). Late fourth century C.E. Courtesy of the Aphrodisias Excavations.*

[26] For instance, *LSA* 863. Other examples from Corinth, e.g. *LSA* 16, 26, 50, 52, see Brown, "Corinth," 181.

[27] Caesarea: *LSA* 11, 12, 1090, 1100, 1105, 1106, 1107. Constantinople: *LSA* 2457, 2458, 2459, 2461, 2463, 2497.

[28] Nicaea: for Arcadius (383–408), *LSA* 296. Aphrodisias: *LSA* 164, 166, 167, 197.

[29] As opposed to Egypt, where the monks lived in the true desert, remote from secular communities. See Brown, "Holy Man"; Mitchell, *Land, Men, and Gods*, 110.

[30] Sozomen, *HE* 6.34.7–9. Mitchell, *Land, Men, and Gods*, 111.

[31] Mitchell, *Land, Men, and Gods*, 111, 115–17. A follower of Symeon, Carinus, established himself close to the main highway between Constantinople and Nicomedia where Theodore sought him out (*Life of Theodore of Sykeon,* 155.9; Mitchell, *Land, Men, and Gods*, 130). Around the walls of Nicomedia, there was a whole community of hermits, including John the Syrian and the virgin Moschous (*Life of Theodore of Sykeon,* 159.89–103). There were also Theodore's own followers: Andreas, who became a hermit at Briania, 13 km from Sykeon (*Life of Theodore of Sykeon,*

Whether remote from the big centers or not, holy men in rural Anatolia had significant impact on the political and social life of the area. They became the referee, the caregiver, and the justice-dispenser for the rural community. They were 'alternative' religious figures of authority, an aspect of their character most notoriously attested by their tense relationship with the episcopal church at Constantinople. The pagan historian Zosimus, describing events around 400, recorded the remarkable hostility between the bishop, John Chrysostom, and the monks.[32] Moreover, several of the canons of the Council of Chalcedon, held in 451, laid down rules for the subordination of monasteries and individual ascetics to bishops.[33] The conflict between monks and bishops was a feature of ecclesiastical politics in the provinces as much as in Constantinople. The Life of Thecla, for instance, produced in Seleucia in the later fifth century, contains illustrations of this antagonism.[34] John Chrysostom himself expressed hope that one day monasteries would become useless, since life in the cities would be so well-ordered that no one would need to take refuge in the desert.[35]

Evidence from Egypt suggests that in the fifth century there was a breakdown of orderly administration.[36] We see a similar phenomenon in Asia Minor, where, starting from the fourth century, the centuries-old mechanism of euergetism started to fall apart, councils went into decline, and city councillors, the most respected members of the local community, began to lose their preeminence to privileged imperial officials and governors.[37] The councillors (*curiales*) began to suffer after legislation passed under Constantine the Great. They were not allowed to leave their city and were forbidden to reside permanently on their estates. Not only was their freedom limited, but also, they had to bear the burden of the expenditures expected of them, including for grain supply, public order, and public buildings in their city. While in office as magistrates, they had to finance public games. They were required to collect the poll tax and land tax in their community; they were threatened by severe penalties in case of default and made personally liable for the sums raised. For this reason, they were considered tyrants in their own communities, and the rank of *curialis* came to be

48.6–10); and Arsinus, a stylite near the village of Galenoi on the upper Siberis (*Life of Theodore of Sykeon,* 48.11–23). Remote parts: a Novatian, Eutychianus, was living a hermit's life on the slopes of Mysian Mount Olympus before the death of Constantine and introduced a form of monastic life to Constantinople by the 340s, more than thirty years before the practice became widespread there (Sozomen, *HE* 1.14.9).

[32] Zosimus 5.23 for a discussion of the relationship between John and monks in Constantinople. See Liebeschuetz, *Barbarians and Bishops*, 208–16.

[33] Mitchell, *Land, Men, and Gods*, 115, n. 46.

[34] Dagron, *Vie et miracles*, chs. 12, 46; Mitchell, *Land, Men, and Gods*, 115, n. 48.

[35] John Chrysostom, *Adversus oppugnatores vitae monasticae*, PG 47. 328–9, cf. 48. 992. See Mitchell, *Land, Men, and Gods*, 111.

[36] Liebeschuetz, *Antioch*, 207–8.

[37] Robert, "Épigrammes"; Mitchell, *Land, Men, and Gods*, 120–22. For the decline of the councils, see Liebeschuetz, *Antioch*, 175–86.

considered not as a privilege, but as a punishment.[38] Many of the *curiales* sought ways to flee from their duties. Some found respite by joining the army, despite legislations that demanded their return to the *curiae*.[39] Others sought refuge at the hands of a powerful landowner.[40] Decurions frequently sold their estates to buy an imperial office — and they could not do this without the permission of the governor — that would raise them to senatorial rank, which came with immunity from tax duties for themselves and their sons.[41]

At the same time as councils began to decline, cities became centres of wrongdoing and injustice, factors which, combined with poor economic conditions, justified the move to the countryside for philosophical contemplation. Although, from the early sixth century, wealthy local men in major cities were given the title of the 'father of the city' (*pater tes poleos*) and took credit for new construction or restoration of old buildings, many smaller cities had by then already lost their classical character, and simply became market towns, whose population alone distinguished them from larger villages.[42]

The former elite ruling class increasingly fled to their rural estates where their power bases lay, and from which they even challenged the dominant state authority.[43] In the absence of an effective local government, peasants retained a patron who would draw the attention of an imperial official to their situation or, failing this, remedy the grievance with his own power.[44] During the time of Justinian, we hear of the governor of Cappadocia controlling landowners who commanded small private forces in the form of gangs of armed peasants.[45] Similar events transpired in Paphlagonia, where an inscription contains the edict of an imperial official, passed onto the population by the bishop of Hadrianopolis in Honorias; the edict aimed to abolish *xylokaballoi*, mounted club-bearers, who had carried out acts of terror and brigandage in the interests of powerful local landowners.[46]

The inscription from Paphlagonia also implies that the local bishop was the only competent local authority with whom the imperial government could communicate, and confirms that the government, by the mid-sixth century, was in the hands of the Church. John Chrysostom even insisted that the bishop was greater than the emperor: "for the sacred laws take and place under his hands even the imperial head, and when there is need of any good thing from above,

38 Alföldy, *Social History*, 201.
39 *CTh* 12.1.22.
40 The legislation against, from 319 CE, is included in the *CTh* 12.1.6 as well as *CJ* 5.5.3.
41 Jones, *Later Roman*, 761–63.
42 Jones, *Later Roman*, 739–62; Liebeschuetz, *Decline and Fall*, 110. Also see Roueché, *ALA,* IV.23.
43 Liebeschuetz, *Antioch*, 201–4.
44 Liebeschuetz, *Antioch*, 203, also 192–208.
45 Justinian, *Nov.* 31.
46 Feissel and Kaygusuz, "Mandament." Also see Mitchell, *Land, Men, and Gods*, 121.

*Fig. 4. Line drawing for the inscribed statue base of Oecumenius, governor. Aphrodisias (Caria). Late fourth-early fifth century C.E. Drawing by K. Görkay. Courtesy of the Aphrodisias Excavations.*

the Emperor is wont to resort to the priest, but not the priest to the Emperor".[47] The era of great power in the history of the Church was the fourth and early fifth centuries, and in the period that followed, Christian leadership was usurped by ascetics, monks, and above all by holy men. As power slipped from the hands of urban leaders to rural property owners, so the monks, hermits, and holy men of the countryside usurped the authority of city-based clergy.[48]

The lacuna of leadership in rural Syria that occurred in the fourth and fifth centuries was thus characterized by large and prosperous villages, an increase in the new class of independent farmers, and the break-up of great estates.[49] Similar conditions in large, wealthy villages were attested in sixth-century Anatolia, which also featured a series of holy men, among whom were well-known stylites such as Alypius from Hadrianopolis (Paphlagonia).[50] These are the historical conditions in which the rural holy man in general, and the stylite in particular, became an alternative to the urban clergy; they filled a lacuna of religious leadership, which in the civic sphere was filled by the rural landowner.[51]

To stand on a pillar, just like the statues of the emperors and state officials whose realm was the city, offered an important medium for the ascetic to express himself as a visual and practical rural 'alternative' to the prototype of the inanimate statue — a medium which the late antique viewer would comprehend, appreciate, and venerate. It is no wonder that when Daniel approached the palace of Hebdomon (modern Bakırköy), a Goth leaned out of the window, seeing the holy man come along, and said: "here's our new consul!", perhaps referring to the rectangular statue bases on which a consul's statue would be situated, or to the ironic high-status of a common man like Daniel.[52]

[47] Chrysostom, *Homilies to Statues*, 3.6 (trans. Setton, *Christian Attitude*, 214).

[48] Mitchell, *Land, Men, and Gods*, 121, n. 94.

[49] Tchalenko, *Villages antiques,* 317, 385.

[50] Prosperous and large villages in Anatolia: Justinian, *Nov.* 24, 1: κῶμαι μέγισται…καὶ πολυάνθρωποι καὶ πολλάκις πρὸς αὐτοὺς στασιάζουσαι. Also Brown, "Holy Man," 91, n. 134.

[51] Brown, "Holy Man," 87, 89–90.

[52] *V. Dan*. c. 75. Brown, "Holy Man," 94, n. 176. Also see MacMullen, "Pictures," for appropriate demeanor and clothing.

The statue base of the governor Oecumenius from Aphrodisias (late fourth-early fifth century) [Fig. 4] praises its honorand for his moral superiority: "what greater reward than that of being well-remembered can the man find who is pure in mind and in hand?"[53] The stylite hit just the right note by climbing on top of a pillar, displaying his body to God and mortals, and dispensing justice and hope, much like a portrait statue, substituting its prototype on a tall statue base, and advertising his "purity of mind and hand".

## Imaging the Body in Late Antiquity

Even if the stylites offered a rural alternative to urban statue monuments, what was the particular appeal of evoking these monuments by standing on a pillar? Was there a semantic and perceptual correlation between the statue standing still on a base, and the mortal body of the holy man standing still on a pillar? How can we explain the fact that whereas on the imperial column the image stood in for the imperial subject, at Qalat Siman Symeon himself became the image?

It was a new trend in Late Antiquity to iconize the human body, image the living person, and declare it to be immobile as a statue, and yet paradoxically to enliven it.[54] Neoplatonic philosophy was one of the factors that precipitated the 'body as image' and 'image as body' interchangeability. In Neoplatonism, the metaphor of the human body as statuesque artifact indicates the stillness needed for contemplating the divine as well as the wisdom of the philosopher that linked him to the gods.[55] Porphyry, writing in the third century, begins his biography of the contemporary Neoplatonic philosopher Plotinus by expressing that he objected to sitting for a painter or sculptor by asking:

> Why really, is it not enough to have to carry the image in which nature has encased us, without your requesting me to agree to leave behind me a longer-lasting image of the image (*eidōlou eidōlon*), as if it was something genuinely worth looking at?[56]

The likeness of the body to the image is also explained by the fifth-century philosopher Proclus:

> The theurgist, by attaching certain symbols to statues, makes them better able to participate in the higher powers; in the same way, since universal Nature has, by creative

[53] Translation from Roueché, *Aphrodisias*, no. 31. Also see Smith, "Oecumenius"; and *LSA* 151.
[54] Cox Miller, *Corporeal Imagination*, 139–42.
[55] Cox Miller, "On the Edge," 184.
[56] Porph., *Enneads* 1.1 (trans. Armstrong, *Plotinus*).

> corporeal principles, made [human] bodies like statues of souls, she inseminates in each a particular aptitude to receive a particular kind of soul, better or less good.[57]

In another passage, Proclus entirely unites human bodies, images, and *symbola*, and clearly assimilates human bodies to statues:

> ...the soul is composed of the intellectual words [*noeroi logoi*] and from the divine tokens [*theia symbola*], some of which are from the intellectual ideas, while others are from the divine henads. And we are in fact statues of the intellectual realities, and we are the statues of the unknowable *synthēmata*.[58]

Several other accounts from this period show that it was not at all surprising, but was on the contrary appropriate, for sophists to 'act' as statues. Some fifty years before Proclus, Eunapius of Sardis, another Neoplatonist, wrote his *Lives of the Philosophers and Sophists*, in which he presented two of his philosopher-heroes as if they were statues. One of them was Antoninus, whose students "encountered a statue" when they asked him questions; "fixing his eyes and gazing up at the sky he would lie there speechless and unrelenting."[59] The metaphor of the statue here indicates the stillness needed for contemplation of the divine.[60] The other philosopher was Eunapius' teacher Prohaeresius. Eunapius reported that the crowds listening to him "licked the sophist's breast as though it were the statue of some god."[61] Eunapius also adds that a crowd listening to the sophist "marveled at his physical beauty and great stature, while they gazed up at him... as though to behold some statue."[62]

Along with its role in a philosophical context, the substitution of the physical human body for an image played a significant role in expressing social and political power. During the imperial period, the power of living persons was still enhanced by their correct comportment and posture.[63] Making an impact on one's fellow citizens in Late Antiquity depended not only on one's costume, posture, voice, eloquence, and a carefully maintained beard and hair, but also increasingly on silence, contemplation and successful reflection of the character of the person. While imperial statues were frequently being carried in chariots during official processions, wreathed, hailed, and addressed as witnesses,

[57] Procl., *Commentary on the Timaeus*, I.51. 25–31 (trans. Cox Miller, "Shifting Selves," 26, n. 87).
[58] Procl., *The Chaldean Oracles*, v. 8–11 (trans. Cox Miller, "Shifting Selves," 26, n. 88).
[59] Eun., *VS* 472 (trans. Wright, *Philostratus*).
[60] Cox Miller, "On the Edge," 184–86.
[61] Eun., *VS* 489 (trans. Wright, *Philostratus*).
[62] Eun., *VS* 492 (trans. Wright, *Philostratus*).
[63] For imperial deportment and appropriate behavior in the public, see Gleason, *Making Men*, 159–62; see also Smith, "Cultural Choice."

the emperors themselves imitated and acted like their statues.[64] An example is provided by Ammianus, who observed the behaviour of Constantius upon his entry into Rome in 357 CE. Ammianus first depicts the cavalry that preceded the emperor as "statues polished by the hand of Praxiteles, not men."[65] He then describes the emperor's attitude:

> He both bent his rather short frame low upon entering the lofty gates and, as if his neck were in a brace holding his line of sight straight ahead, he turned his head neither right nor left; and as if he were an image of a man (*tamquam figmentum hominis*) he neither nodded when the wheel jolted, nor spat, nor wiped or rubbed his face or nose, or was ever even seen to move his hand. And although this was affectation on his part, yet these and various other features of his more intimate life were tokens of no slight endurance, granted to him alone, as was given to be understood.[66]

Ammianus attributes the unmoving demeanor of Constantius to his vanity, perhaps unjustly so.[67] The emperor chose to 'become' an image because he believed in the virtue of such pretension to impress common people. Moreover, he made sure that everyone acknowledged that he was not an ordinary mortal, but a potent statue. Therefore, he *acts* like a statue — a statue of himself. In this case, there seems to have been a mutual understanding between the emperor pretending to be a statue and the people perceiving him as one.[68]

The motionlessness of the emperor went back to the rules of the theater, as when Nero on the stage observed "the full rules of the harp — not to sit down if weary, not to wipe away the sweat except with the robe he was wearing, to permit no discharge from the mouth or nostrils to be visible."[69] The appropriate imperial comportment centered around the emperor's serenity, the tranquility of his eyes and countenance.[70] Emperors put on an act of immobility, probably because such behaviour hinted at their powers of endurance, and because they assumed it would make more perfect their resemblance to a god; this physical similarity could, if needed, be completed by painting their eyes or by adding a wig.[71] With the same ambition of reaching out to divine powers, the afore-

[64] MacMullen, "Some Pictures," 439.

[65] Amm. Marc., 16.10.8; Francis, "Living Icons," 577–78.

[66] Amm. Marc., 16.10.10–11 (trans. from Francis, "Living Icons," 577).

[67] Jones, *Later Roman*, 116–18; Ammianus's exaggeration of the emperor's vanity: Barnes, *Ammianus Marcellinus*, 132–35. Other references about the *adventus* and immobility of Constantius: Cameron, *Claudian*, 382–86; Matthews, *The Roman*, 231–35; MacCormack, *Shadows*, 40–45; and O'Daly, *City of God*, 13, which highlights the change of Constantius's attitude while sightseeing in Rome and mixing with the people.

[68] Francis, "Living Icons," 577–78.

[69] Tacitus, *Annals* 16.4 (trans. Jackson, *Tacitus*).

[70] MacMullen, "Some Pictures," 439, n. 20. *Serenitas* is a frequent title, e.g. *CTh* 1.12,5; 6.29, 3.

[71] Endurance: Charlesworth, "Imperial Deportment," 36–37. Resemblance to a god: MacMullen, "Some Pictures," 439. Unless of course wigs also had the purpose of giving a full head of hair,

mentioned Macarius motivated himself to stand upright by emphasizing that immobility elevated him out of the human realm into the divine one:

> I gave these orders to my mind: "Do not descend from heaven, for there you have angels, archangels, the powers above, the God of all of us; only do not descend from heaven."[72]

The immobility of the body *as if* it were a statue was seen not only as the most appropriate comportment for the philosopher and the emperor, but also for the late antique holy man. As Peter Brown has observed, "the ideal holy man was thought of as immobile as a statue."[73] Gregory of Nazianzus, writing in the fourth century, pictured Basil standing in church, "his body, his gaze, his whole attention fixed rigid, like a statue set up in honor of God and His altar."[74] Basil himself encouraged Christians to make themselves icons of icons:

> just as painters in working from models constantly gaze at their exemplar and thus strive to transfer the expression of the original to their own artistry, so too he who is anxious to make himself perfect in all the kinds of virtue must gaze upon the lives of the saints as upon statues, so to speak, that move and act (ἀγαλματά τινα κινούμενα καὶ ἔμπρακτα), and must make their excellence his own by imitation.[75]

The metaphor of the immobile, statuesque body is most vividly entertained by the ascetic, more particularly the stylite. The stylite needed to act dramatically above society, as 'inhuman', to continue the rural leadership role he had been given.[76] He was the man who could resist the ties of family and economic interest, and someone who was so resilient as to reject food and shelter from the blazing sun. The stylite was a dissociated stranger, so much so that Daniel the Stylite only spoke Syriac near Constantinople, and Symeon would have been ashamed had he been seen at ground level.[77] We learn from *Historia Monachorum* that the monk John stood for three years, thus withdrawing, as the author remarked, from "sensible things."[78] This deliberately placed abyss between the stylite and the surrounding community is not so different from a statue stand-

which expressed power. See, L'Orange, *Apotheosis*, 33–35, 68–70, 94; MacMullen, "Some Pictures," 439, n. 18.

72 Palladius, *Lausiac History* 18.17 (trans. and annot. Meyer, *Palladius*).

73 Cox Miller, "On the Edge," n. 41; Brown, "Dark-Age Crisis," 13, n. 2.

74 Greg. Naz., *Or.* 43.52.2 (PG 36.561D-564A). Translation from Brown, "Dark-Age Crisis," 13, n. 2.

75 Basil, *Epistle* II (trans. Marsengill, "Portraits and Icons," 66).

76 Brown, "Holy Man," 91–92.

77 Daniel: *V. Dan*. c. 17. Symeon: *Syriac Life*, 110 (trans. Doran, *Lives*, 179).

78 *Historia monachorum* 13.3, 13.11 (trans. Norman Russell, *The Lives*, 93–94).

ing erect on a column, night and day, being perceived as making its prototype closer to the God (or gods) above than to humans below.

There is a significant link, therefore, between the stylite's body and the lifeless statue. It is another question how that link was perceived, not only by the theurgist and philosopher, but in practice by ordinary people. The following section will explore how the stylite's body and pillar were regarded by the public, and the overlapping functional aspects of the imperial column and the stylite pillar.

## The Functioning of the Stylite's Column

The 'above-human' and 'statuesque' comportment of the holy man resulted in a 'cult' that centered on the stylite's body. We learn from Theodoret that after harvest and threshing, the rural crowd would build up throughout the high summer and autumn, streaming from the villages to the deathbed of the holy man, in the hope of snatching his body as a relic.[79] In pursuit of relics from the stylite's body, the said body was often mutually agreed to be an unmoving image rather than a breathing person. There is a plethora of examples that illustrate this semantic shift. The holy man Salamanes locked himself in a cell as a form of living corpse; his body was stolen while he was still alive, carried to a new village, and locked in a new cell. When this theft was discovered, the first village came and stole him back again — all without Salamanes ever speaking or resisting.[80] When James of Cyrrestica fell ill, the relic-taking from his body began even before he was dead; his hair was plucked out by peasants, but, fortunately, he was not conscious at the time.[81]

The body cult involving Symeon's remains at Antioch is also well-attested to have inspired awe even among ancient authors. When the holy man died, so many people from local villages and armed Arabs gathered in the hope of seizing the body that Ardabourios, *magister militum per Orientem*, required a force of 600 men to safely deliver the body to the patriarch and the people of Antioch.[82] After the body's deposition in the Domus Aurea, the octagonal church built by Constantine the Great, the people of Antioch claimed that the body's presence at Antioch was a guarantee of the city's protection, as if it was the Trojan Palladium: "we brought him to be for us a fortified wall that we might be protected by his

[79] Theodoret, *HR*, 1433 C (trans. Price, *History of the Monks*).
[80] Theodoret, *HR*, XIX.3 (trans. Price, *History of the Monks*). See also Westergren in this volume.
[81] Theodoret, *HR*, XXI.9 (trans. Price, *History of the Monks*).
[82] Antonius, *Life* (trans. Doran, *Lives*, 98); also Eastmond, "Body vs. Column," 90. See also Crostini in this volume.

prayer."[83] The body of the stylite, therefore, was an asset of fascination, much like an ancient statue, which provided the city with a protective aegis.

Much like the lifeless body of the stylite managed marvels, the image of the stylite was perceived to work miracles. Symeon the Stylite the Younger gave the sick tokens made of wax or earth that were stamped with his image.[84] He even commands one man, who is begging to stay physically by his column, to "take the token made of my dust, leave, and when you look at the imprint of our image, it is us that you will see."[85] The potency of the stylite's physical body is transferred to an object embodying him, hence functioning close to — if not exactly the same way as — an icon.[86]

Fascination with the body of the stylite exhibited similarities to the fascination with the emperor and his accessible prototype — the honorific statue. Particularly in the context of the *proskynesis* and *adventus* ceremonies, the body of the stylite and his pillar were treated very similarly to the imperial column and the statue on top. These ceremonies were officially reserved for the honorand of a statue, most importantly, the emperor.

Functionally speaking, there is not much difference between the emperor and the body of the stylite in terms of their acting as an object of adoration (*proskynesis*). Adoration was paid either to the emperor or to his image, and image and emperor were identical before the law, and in curious fashion in the thought of the period.[87] Gregory of Nazianzen says neither the crowns and diadems, the purple robes and palace guards, nor the multitude of their subjects, were enough to establish the sovereignty of the Roman emperors. They also had to be accorded adoration; they had to appear more awesome than other men. But it was not enough that they should receive adoration in person; their statues and pictures had also to be adored in order that they might thus receive a more complete and unqualified veneration.[88]

Christians adored imperial images as late as the fourth century, throughout which writers including Eusebius, Chrysostom, Athanasios, and Gregory of Nyssa commented on the power and importance of the imperial image and the need to perform adoration (*proskynesis*) before it.[89] We learn about the ceremonies of adoration from several late antique authors; for instance, Procopius says of imperial images of Anastasius (491–518), "your images are honored by ora-

[83] *Syriac Life*, 128 (trans. Doran, *Lives*, 194). Also Evagrios, *Ecclesiastical History*, I. 13 (Festugière, "Evagre," 220).

[84] Symeon, *Life*, 116.17–22; 163.2–5; 231.39–41 (ed. van Den Ven, *La vie,* 1: 95, 145, 206; 2: 118–19, 169–70, 231); Cox Miller, *Corporeal Imagination*, 113–14, notes 64–67; Boero, "Gift and Commodity."

[85] Symeon, *Life*, 231.39–41 (ed. van Den Ven, *La vie,* 1: 206; 2: 231).

[86] Vikan, *Byzantine Pilgrimage Art*, 27–28; Vikan, "Icons," 569–76; Hahn, "Loca Sancta."

[87] Setton, *Christian Attitude*, 198.

[88] Greg. Naz. *Or.* 4, 80 (PG 35, 605 B-C), see Setton, *Christian Attitude*, 202–3.

[89] Setton, *Christian Attitude*, 196–211.

tions, and with that the Muses honor you... the cities because of their good fortune make wreaths, dedicate inscriptions, and sing hymns."[90] The eighth-century narrative *Parastaseis*, though admittedly a controversial source, also mentions that when the statue of Constantine was dedicated in the Forum, it was honoured with many 'hymn-singings,' *hymnodiai*, and the city was acclaimed.[91] A chapel was later built at the base of the porphyry column of Constantine the Great; moreover, the column continued to act as a significant stop for urban liturgical processions in Constantinople.[92] According to the tenth-century Typikon, 46 out of 68 processions had an intermediate service at the Oratory of Constantine in the base of his column.[93] One of these ceremonies was, significantly, the Feast of Symeon Stylites, celebrated on 1 September as the beginning of the Byzantine administrative year.[94]

Both the imperial column and stylite's pillar attracted zealous visitors to admire and venerate the images, and, in cases where the images were gone, the pillars on which they once stood. In the twelfth century, the chronicle of the Jacobite patriarch of Antioch, Michael (1126–1199), describes that when the Persians arrived in Syria in 618, the invaders found the site of Qalat Siman on Symeon's feast day full of men, women, and children who "in place of fasting, vigils, and psalmody... had abandoned themselves to intemperance, to drunkenness, to dancing and other forms of lust and debauchery."[95] We learn from Theophanes that the statues of Eudoxia in Constantinople attracted Manichaean supporters of paganism who danced around the column in the same way as those who danced around Symeon's column at Qalat Siman.[96] Moreover, both the imperial column and the stylite's column functioned as locations for gathering and ritual activity. Much like the emperor's image was a symbol of power and authority to which people turned, the stylite's column was where people turned for justice and guidance. For instance, the porphyry column set up in Constantinople in 403 for the silver statue of Eudoxia was adorned with an inscription, which established it as a locale for the dispensation of justice.[97] Hermits also served as arbiters of justice, and the cult of Symeon the Stylite is

[90] Procopius of Gaza, 29–30 (trans. from MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony*, 69).

[91] Roueché, "Acclamations," 197. *Parastaseis* 56 (trans. Cameron and Herrin, *Parastaseis*). Philostorgius also attests to adoration of Constantine, see Philostorgius, II, 17 (PG 65, 479A). Also, Setton, *Christian Attitude*, 204.

[92] Mango, "Porphyry Column," 110.

[93] Baldovin, *Urban Character*, 212, also 220–26, and 292–300.

[94] Baldovin, *Urban Character*, 212.

[95] *Chronique de Michel le Syrien*, 2.422 (Chabot (ed.), *Chronique*), trans. Eastmond, "Body vs. Column," 96.

[96] Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia* (ed. de Boor, *Theophanes Confessor. Chronographia,* 79. Trans. Mango and Scott, *Chronicle*, 121).

[97] Janin, *Constantinople Byzantine*, 80–1.

recorded to have decided a range of issues, from the price of cucumbers to more critical matters such as the imperial policy toward Jews.[98]

Much like *proskynesis* was a formal ceremony of adoration, *adventus*, as an official ceremony for welcoming emperors, generals, and high officials by public crowds and city representatives, acted as a mutual way to link imperial images and the imaged bodies of stylites. The right of cities to host an *adventus* would be guaranteed by law, and participation could be obligatory.[99]

The relevance of the *adventus* ceremony to the 'cult' surrounding a stylite's body lies in the enactment of the ceremony not only for the actual emperors, but also for their portrait images, which symbolically substituted for their imperial subjects.[100] We first hear of the *adventus* of the images in the third century, and it continued in the fourth, when the imperial portraits of Constantine and Maxentius were sent out to various cities in order to gain recognition of their rule.[101] Anthemius also sent his images to Constantinople after his accession in 467, with the same objective.[102]

Ecclesiastical *adventus* and the procession of relics gradually became a phenomenon of its own in Late Antiquity, particularly in the era of Theodosius.[103] In processions, the emperor brought to the city Paul's skull, the remains of African martyrs Terentius and Africanus, and the head of John the Baptist.[104] In the fourth century, we find relics of holy men being given *adventus* on arrival in a city. The first recorded example is ca. 381, when the body of bishop Meletius was sent home to Antioch from the Eastern capital. Sozomen informs us that "by the command of the emperor, the relics were received within the walls in every city, contrary to Roman custom, and were honoured with singing of psalms antiphonally in such places, until they were transferred to Antioch."[105] Relics of Samuel Stylite arrived at Constantinople in 406 via the Chalcedonian jetty, and were led in *adventus* by the Emperor Arcadius, the praetorian prefect,

[98] For example, when a poor cucumber farmer found his field sabotaged by bullies, seeking help for livelihood and justice in the *Syriac Life*, 39 (trans. Doran, *Lives*). More on Symeon and his column, see Eastmond, "Body vs. Column," 88.

[99] Adventus guaranteed by law: Ulpian, *de officio proconsulis,* Book 1, in *Dig.* 1.16.7; *Cassiod. Var.* 5.14.5. For more on *adventus* in the Roman Empire, see MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony*, 17–61. For Christian *adventus*, ibid. 62–89. Obligatory (the bishop of Alexandria arrested for failing to attend *adventus* in 367 C.E.): Lavan, *Public Space*, 154: *Hist. Aceph.* 5.11–13; Lib. *Or.* 27.42, *Or.* 56.1–2, 56.6, 56.9–12.

[100] A well-studied inscription from Ephesus dating to 104 C.E. implies that the silver statues of Trajan and his wife Plotina were substitutes for the emperor and empress in processions. Rogers, *Sacred Identity*, 91.

[101] Lavan, *Public Space*, 155, n. 22.

[102] Lavan, *Public Space*, 156.

[103] Brown, *Cult*, 92–93; Croke, "Reinventing Constantinople," 255.

[104] Paul: Socrates, *Hist. Eccl.* 5.9.1–2; Terentius and Africanus: Nicephorus Callistus, *Hist. Eccl.* 2.62, PG 86.213A; John the Baptist: Sozomen, *Hist. Eccl.* 7.21.5. Discussed in Croke, "Reinventing Constantinople," 255.

[105] *Sozomen Hist. Eccl.* 7.10; Lavan, *Public Space*, 156, n. 25.

the city prefect, and all the Senate, prior to their deposition in Hagia Sophia.[106] Later, in 438, the bones of John Chrysostom were welcomed in Constantinople.[107] The arrival of the body of Symeon the Stylite into Antioch in 459 was in many ways similar to the arrival of an imperial image. The whole *adventus* ceremony for Symeon was considered beyond description by his biographer, as mentioned above; he was given an escort of troops as well as of clergy.[108]

The similar treatment of imperial images and the relics of the stylite's body in the *proskynesis* and *adventus* ceremonies shows that the image of the emperor and the imaged body of the stylite were conceptually — if not politically — perceived as similar. The body of the stylite became an acceptable and unintimidating version of the pagan statue on a pillar, not frowned upon or dangerous because of the demons inside it, and yet serving a similar purpose.[109] We can further nuance the similarity of perception of the two by comparing actual events involving the emperor's image and the stylite's body. In Constantinople, during the annual ceremony on May 11th, the foundation day of the city, a gilded wooden effigy of Constantine the Great 'left' the forum of Constantine, 'entered' a triumphal chariot, and was escorted to the Hippodrome, where the effigy 'arrived' before the imperial box and received the homage of the reigning emperor.[110] Shortly after the death of Daniel the Stylite in the late fifth century, his body was treated in a remarkably similar way:

> …by the Archbishop's orders the plank was stood upright—the body had been fixed to it so that it could not fall—and thus, the holy man was displayed to all on every side; and for many hours the people all looked at him and also with cries and tears besought him to be an advocate with God on behalf of them all.[111]

The body of the stylite, therefore, was imaged like the emperor, and his column became the spot of justice, adoration, and commemoration, like the columnar base of the imperial statue. This is not to claim that the stylite was an alternative to the emperor — he never was or could be. But the stylite was also much more than what the emperor's effigy was: a visual sedative soothing the bureaucratic and spiritual victims of the changing times, a pillar of justice, and a land-

[106] Chron. Pasch. *Olympiad* 1. 296 (AD 406).
[107] Theodoret, *Hist. Eccl*. 5.36; Marcellinus Comes 438.3 (Marcellinus Comes, *Chronicon*, ed. Mommsen, 39–101. Trans. Croke, *Marcellinus Comes*); Theophanes AM 5930 (*Theophanes Confessor. Chronographia* ed., de Boor. Trans. Mango and Scott, *The Chronicle*). Arrival of relics, with bibliography: Lavan, *Public Space*, 156, n. 25.
[108] Lavan, *Public Space*, 156–57.
[109] The perception of demons inside pagan statues discussed with references in Kristensen, *Making*, 9–22; also see Cox Miller, *Corporeal Imagination*, 141–42.
[110] John Malalas, 321.22–322.16 (trans. Jeffreys, Jeffreys and Scott, *The Chronicle*, 175); Bauer, "Urban Space," 34–35.
[111] *Life of Daniel Stylite*, 99 (trans. Dawes and Bayes, *Three Byzantine Saints,* 69).

mark of moral integrity. What the honorific statue could no longer provide, the stylite did, and in reward, his medium of devotion lingered for many centuries to come.

## Conclusion

The visual affinity of the stylite to the honorific statue remained so strong that after the production and setting up of honorific statues had ceased in the sixth century around most of the Empire, and that of the pagan and mythological statues even earlier, the available statue bases in Asia Minor served as stylite columns. The seventh-century Saint Alypios of Hadrianopolis (Paphlagonia) is a good example: in a demon-infested old cemetery, by using an icon, a cross, and a crowbar, he knocked a bull-lion statue (*tauroleonta*) off its column, claimed the column for his own, and stood on top of it for 53 years.[112] Cyril Mango also suggested that Luke, the tenth-century stylite of Chalkedon, may have taken the column that marked the death of the Emperor Maurice and his sons, although it is not known what might have originally surmounted this column.[113]

The stylite thrived in an alternative age and realm in the Eastern Mediterranean. The honorific system in the Imperial Period relied on honoring the elite benefactor and urban aristocrat for new benefactions, and, in Late Antiquity, on honouring the emperor and his bureaucrats to guarantee continual favours. A stylite, by contrast, while serving God, also served to disseminate justice and appease the souls of those in the countryside at the mercy of the rural landowner.

The stylite's act lies at the end of a very long line of entanglement of the physical body with the honorific statuary, the latter of which substituted the former. The stylite took over the visual vocabulary and effect of an honorific statue, which had acquired a well-deserved spot in public visual memory over the centuries, and consciously or unconsciously exploited it to demonstrate his own devotion. The stylite was rural, but by no means an impoverished sufferer: Symeon, for instance, was a comfortable farmer, who could feed the village poor off his land, and who needed a camel to carry his valuables to a monastery.[114] He climbed on a pillar and lived in rags and on minimal food not because he was poverty-stricken, but rather, just like the prototype of the honorific image, because he had to appear 'above others.' He imaged his body in love of God and

[112] Delehaye, *Saints stylites*, 148–69; Ousterhout, "The Lives and Afterlives," 322.

[113] Mango, "Memorial," 15–16.

[114] *Sym. Styl.* 11–13 (trans. Doran, *Lives*, 86–87). According to Peter Brown, the rise of asceticism in Syria is a sign not of a brutal 'democratization' of the upper classes, so much as of a 'fragmentation' of what had liked to consider itself a homogenous class of urban aristocrats, see Brown, "Holy Man," 86, n. 82.

was in return treated like an image. His body — alive or dead — was met in a proper *adventus* ceremony, and his column received the necessary *proskynesis* action. The stylite's body and column, therefore, served as the alternative to the statue of the emperor or the imperial official in a rural, spiritual realm, dispensing justice and hope, and promoting its main tenet: the still, imaged, and 'fleshless' human body as a symbol of resilience and devotion.

## Bibliography

### Sources

Cameron, Averil and Judith Herrin (eds.). *Constantinople in the Early Eighth Century. The Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai. Introduction, Translation and Commentary*. In Conjunction with Alan Cameron, Robin Cormack and Charlotte Roueché. Leiden: Brill, 1984.

Chabot, Jean Baptiste. *Chronique de Michel le Syrien, patriarche jacobite d'Antioche, 1166–1199.* Vol 2. Paris: E. Leroux, 1899.

Croke, Brian. *Marcellinus Comes. The Chronicle of Marcellinus, a Translation and Commentary*. Byzantina Australiensia 7. Sydney: Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, 1995.

Dagron, Gilbert (ed.). *Vie et Miracles de Sainte Thècle: Texte grec, traduction, et commentaire*. Subsidia Hagiographica 62. Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1978.

Dawes, Elizabeth and Norman, H. Baynes. *Three Byzantine Saints: Contemporary Biographies of St. Daniel the Stylite, St. Theodore of Sykeon and St. John the Almsgiver.* Oxford: Blackwell, 1948.

de Boor, Carolus (ed.). *Theophanes Confessor. Chronographia*. Leipzig: Teubner, 1883–1885.

Delehaye, Hippolyte. *Les Saints stylites.* Subsidia Hagiographica 14. Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1923.

Doran, Robert. *The Lives of Simeon Stylites*. Cistercian Studies Series 112. Kalamazoo: Cistercian Press, 1992.

Harmon, Austin M. 1925. *Lucian. Vol IV.* Loeb Classical Library 162. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA, 1925.

Meyer, Robert T. *Palladius: The Lausiac History* (translated and annotated). London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1965.

Mommsen, Theodor. *Marcellinus Comes, Chronicon*. Berlin: Weidmann, 1894.

Norman, Albert F. (ed. and trans.). *Libanius. Selected Works, Volume II: Selected Orations.* Loeb Classical Library 452. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977.

Price, Richard M. *A History of the Monks of Syria, by Theodoret of Cyrrhus*. Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1985.

Russell, Norman. *The Lives of the Desert Fathers*. Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1980.

Schaff, Philip and Wace, Henry. *A Select Library of Nicene and post-Nicene Fathers of Christian Church. Second Series. Volume II. Socrates, Sozomenus: Church Histories*. Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976.

van de Paverd, Frans. *St. John Chrysostom, the Homilies on the Statues: An Introduction*. Rome: Pontificium Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1991.

van den Ven, Paul. *La vie ancienne de S. Syméon Stylite le jeune*. 2 vols. Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1962–70.

Wright, Wilmer C. *Philostratus and Eunapius: The Lives of the Sophists*. Loeb Classical Library 134. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968.

## Secondary Literature

Alföldy, Geza. *The Social History of Rome*. Translated by David Braund and Frank Pollock. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988.

Anderson, Benjamin. "The Disappearing Imperial Statue: Toward a Social Approach." In *The Afterlife of Greek and Roman Sculpture: Late Antique Responses and Practices*, edited by Troels Myrup Kristensen and Lea Stirling, 290–309. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016.

Armstrong, Arthur H. *Plotinus. Porphyry on Plotinus. Ennead I*. Loeb Classical Library 440. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969.

Baldovin, John F. *The Urban Character of Christian Worship. The Origins, Development, and Meaning of Stational Liturgy*. Orientalia Christiana Analecta 228. Rome: Pont. Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1987.

Barnes, Timothy D. *Ammianus Marcellinus and the Representation of Historical Reality*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998.

Bauer, Franz A. "Urban Space and Ritual: Constantinople in Late Antiquity." *Acta ad archaeologiam et artium historiam pertinentia* 15 (2001): 27–61.

Boero, Dina. "Between Gift and Commodity: The Distribution of Tokens and Material Substances at the Pilgrimage Sites of Stylites." In *Syriac Hagiography. Texts and Beyond*, edited by Sergey Minov and Flavia Ruani, 281–339. Texts and Studies in Early Christianity, 20. Leiden: Brill, 2021.

Brown, Amelia. "Corinth." In *The Last Statues of Antiquity,* edited by Roland R.R. Smith and Bryan Ward-Perkins, 174–89. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

Brown, Peter. "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity." *The Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971): 80–101.

Brown, Peter. "A Dark-Age Crisis: Aspects of the Iconoclastic Controversy." *English Historical Review* 88, no. 346 (1973): 1–34.

Brown, Peter. *The Cult of the Saints. Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982.

Cameron, Alan. *Claudian: Poetry and Propaganda at the Court of Honorius*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970.

Charlesworth, Martin P. "Imperial Deportment: Two Texts and Some Questions." *Journal of Roman Studies* 37, no. 1–2 (1947): 34–38.

Cox Miller, Patricia. "Shifting Selves in Late Antiquity." In *Religion and the Self in Antiquity*, edited by David Brakke, Michael L. Satlow, and Steven Weitzman (eds.), 15–39. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005.

Cox Miller, Patricia. *Corporeal Imagination. Signifying the Holy in Late Ancient Christianity*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009.

Cox Miller, Patricia. "On the Edge of Self and Other: Holy Bodies in Late Antiquity." *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 17 (2009): 171–93.

Croke, Brian. "Reinventing Constantinople: Theodosius I's Imprint on the Imperial City." In *From the Tetrarchs to the Theodosians. Later Roman History and Culture 284–450 CE*. Yale Classical Studies Volume XXXIV, edited by S. McGill, C. Sogno, E. Watts, 241–64. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Downey, Glanville. *A History of Antioch in Syria from Seleucus to the Arab Conquest.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961.

Drijvers, Hendrik J.W. "Spätantike Parallelen zur altchristlichen Heiligenverehrung unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des syrischen Stylitenkultes." In *Göttinger Orientforschungen I. Reihe: Syriaca 17, vol 2: Erkentnisse und Meinungen*, edited by Gernot Wießner, 78–113. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1978.

Dunbabin, Katherine. *Mosaics of the Greek and Roman World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Eastmond, Antony. 1999. "Body vs. Column: the Cults of St Symeon Stylites." *Desire and Denial in Byzantium. Papers from the Thirty-first Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Sussex, Brighton, March 1997,* edited by Liz James. Ashgate: Aldershot, 87–100.

Feissel, Denis and Ismail Kaygusuz. "Un mandament impérial du VIe siècle dans une inscription d'Hadrianoupolis d'Honoriade." *Travaux et Mémoires* 9 (1985): 397–419.

Festugière, André-Jean. "Evagre, *Histoire Ecclésiastique*." *Byzantion* 45 (1975): 187–479.

Frankfurter, David T.M. "Stylites and *Phallobates*: Pillar Religions in Late Antique Syria." *Vigiliae Christianae* 44 (1990): 168–98.

Francis, James A. "Living Icons: Tracing a Motif in Verbal and Visual Representation from the Second to Fourth Centuries C.E." *The American Journal of Philology* 124, no. 4 (2003), 575–600.

Gleason, Maud. *Making Men: Sophists and Self-Presentation in Ancient Rome*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995.

Hahn, Cynthia "Loca Sancta Souvenirs: Sealing the Pilgrim's Experience." In *The Blessings of Pilgrimage*, edited by Robert Ousterhout, 85–96. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1990.

Hunter-Crawley, Heather. "Divinity Refracted: Extended Agency and the Cult of Symeon Stylites the Elder." In *Lived Religion in the Ancient Mediterranean World: Approaching Religious Transformations from Archaeology, History and Classics*, edited by Valentino Gasparini, Maik Patzelt, Rubina Raja, Anna-Katharina Rieger, Joerg Rüpke, and Emiliano R. Urciuoli, 261–86. Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2020.

Jackson, John. *Tacitus. Annals: Books 13–16*. Loeb Classical Library 322. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1937.

Jacobs, Ine. "The Creation of the Late Antique City: Constantinople and Asia Minor During the 'Theodosian Renaissance'." *Byzantion* 82 (2012): 113–64.

James, Liz. "'Pray Not to Fall into Temptation and Be on your Guard'. Pagan Statues in Christian Constantinople." *Gesta* 35 (1996): 12–20.

Janin, Raymond. *Constantinople Byzantine. Développement Urbain et Répertoire Topographique*. Paris: Institut Français d'Études Byzantines, 1950.

Jeffreys, Elizabeth, Michael Jeffreys, and Roger Scott. *The Chronicle of John Malalas*. Byzantina Australiensia 4. Melbourne: Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, 1986.

Jones, Arnold H. M. *The Later Roman Empire, 284–602: A Social, Economic, and Administrative Survey*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986.

Kristensen, Troels M. *Making and Breaking the Gods. Christian Responses to Pagan Sculpture in Late Antiquity*. Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2013.

Lavan, Luke. *Public Space in the Late Antique City. Vol I. Streets, Processions, Fora, Agora, Macella, Shops*. Leiden: Brill, 2020.

Levi, Doro. *Antioch Mosaic Pavements. Vols. I and II*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947.

L'Orange, Hans P. *Apotheosis in Ancient Portraiture*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1947.

MacCormack, Sabine G. *Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of Berkeley Press, 1981.

MacCormack, Sabine G. *Shadows of Poetry. Virgil in the Mind of Augustine*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.

MacMullen, Ramsay. “Some Pictures in Ammianus Marcellinus.” *Art Bulletin* 46, no. 6 (1964): 435–56.

Maffei, S. “Columna Marci Aurelii Antonii.” *Lexicon topographicum urbis Romae*. Vol. I, edited by Eva M. Steinby, 302–05. Rome: Edizioni Quasar, 1993a.

Maffei, S. “Forum Traiani: columna.” *Lexicon topographicum urbis Romae*. Vol. II, edited by Eva M. Steinby, 356–359. Rome: Edizioni Quasar, 1993b.

Mango, Cyril. “Constantine’s Porphyry Column and the Chapel of St Constantine.” *Deltion tes Christianikes Archaiologikes Hetaireias* 10 (1981): 103–10.

Mango, Cyril. “A Memorial to the Emperor Maurice?” *Deltion tes Christianikes Archaiologikes Hetaireias* 42 (2003): 15–20.

Mango, Cyril and Roger Scott (ed.). *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor. Byzantine and Near Eastern History. AD 284–813.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997.

Marsengill, Katherine. “Portraits and Icons in Late Antiquity.” In *Transition to Christianity: Art of Late Antiquity, 3rd–7th Century AD*, edited by Anastasia Lazaridou, 61–66. New York: Alexander S. Onassis Public Benefit Foundation, 2011.

Matthews, John. *The Roman Empire of Ammianus*. London: Duckworth, 1989.

Mitchell, Stephen. *Land, Men, and Gods in Asia Minor. Vol II: The Rise of the Church*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995.

Liebeschuetz, John H.W.G. *Antioch: City and Imperial Administration in the Later Roman Empire.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972.

Liebeschuetz, John H.W.G. *Barbarians and Bishops. Army, Church, and State in the Age of Arcadius and Chrysostom*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992.

Liebeschuetz, John H.W.G. *Decline and Fall of the Roman City*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

O’Daly, Gerard. *Augustine’s City of God. A Reader’s Guide.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999.

Ousterhout, Robert. “The Life and Afterlife of Constantine’s Column.” *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 27 (2014): 304–26.

Peña, Ignace, Pascal Castellana, and Romuald Fernandez. *Les Stylites syriens*. Milan: Franciscan Press, 1975.

Robert, Louis. “Épigrammes relatives à des gouverneurs.” *Hellenica* 4 (1948): 35–114.

Rogers, Guy M. *The Sacred Identity of Ephesus. Foundation Myths of a Roman City*. London and New York: Routledge, 1991.

Roueché, Charlotte. "Acclamations in the Later Roman Empire: New Evidence from Aphrodisias." *Journal of Roman Studies* 74 (1984): 181–99.

Roueché, Charlotte. *Aphrodisias in Late Antiquity: The Late Roman and Byzantine Inscriptions Including Texts from the Excavations at Aphrodisias conducted by Kenan T. Erim*. London: The Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies, 1989. http://insaph.kcl.ac.uk/ala2004/

Setton, Kenneth M. *Christian Attitude Towards the Emperor in the Fourth Century*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1941.

Smith, Roland R.R. "Cultural Choice and Political Identity in Honorific Portrait Statues in the Greek East in the Second Century A.D." *The Journal of Roman Studies* 88 (1998): 56–93.

Smith, Roland R.R. "Late Antique Portraits in a Public Context: Honorific Statuary at Aphrodisias in Caria, AD 300-600." *The Journal of Roman Studies* 89 (1999): 155–89.

Smith, Roland R.R. "The Statue Monument of Oecumenius: A New Portrait of a Late Antique Governor from Aphrodisias." *The Journal of Roman Studies* 92 (2002): 134–56.

Smith, Roland R.R. "Statue Practice and the Late Roman Empire: Numbers, Costumes, and Style." In *The Last Statues of Antiquity,* edited by Roland R.R. Smith and Bryan Ward-Perkins, 1–27. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

Stenger, Jan. "Staging Laughter and Tears: Libanius, Chrysostom and the Riot of Statues." In *Greek Laughter and Tears*, edited by Margaret Alexiou and Douglas Cairns, 166–86. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017.

Stewart, Peter. "The Destruction of Statues in Late Antiquity." In *Constructing Identities in Late Antiquity,* edited by R. Miles, 159–189. London and New York: Routledge, 1999.

Tchalenko, Georges. *Villages antiques de la Syrie du Nord. Vol. I. Le Massif du Bélus à l'époque Romaine.* Institut Français d'Archéologie de Beyrouth. Bibliothèque Archéologique et Historique, Tome L. Paris: Geuthner, 1953.

Vikan, Gary. *Byzantine Pilgrimage Art.* Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies, 1982.

Vikan, Gary. "Icons and Icon Piety in Early Byzantium." In *Byzantine East, Latin West: Art-Historical Studies in Honor of Kurt Weitzman*, edited by Christopher Moss and Katherine Kiefer, 569–76. Princeton, NJ: Department of Art and Archaeology, Princeton University, 1995.

Ward-Perkins, Bryan. "Statues at the End of Antiquity. The Evidence of the Inscribed Bases." In *The Last Statues of Antiquity,* edited by Roland R.R. Smith and Bryan Ward-Perkins, 28–40. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

Wright, George R.H. "Simeon's Ancestors (or the Skeleton on the Column)." *Australian Journal of Biblical Archaeology* 1, no. 1 (1968): 41–49.
Wright, George R.H. "The Heritage of the Stylites." *Australian Journal of Biblical Archaeology* 1, no. 3 (1970): 82–107.

TIFFANY APOSTOLOU

# Stylite Portraiture and Power: Observing the Column between Late Antique and Contemporary Art

## Introduction

Throughout history, the column obtained and maintained a prominent place as a symbolic visual element in representational art. It became associated with concepts of institutionalism, power, influence, and stability, in the broader sociopolitical sense of the term. This paper delves into the use of the column in this symbolic context, as expressed through the unique and abstracted relief portraits of stylite saints and draws connections with contemporary art practices. It observes portraiture examples alongside the role of the column in communicating the broader institution of stylitism as a new, holy influence that arose in the desert during Late Antiquity. The contemporary art examples examined alongside stylite portraiture also address authority. Both groups of artistic practice, though seemingly unrelated, seek to depict the rise of alternate power structures, simultaneously questioning, whether directly or indirectly, the efficacy of their respective rigid or unapproachable institutional constructs. They do so through reimagined visual vocabulary and the use of materiality and the human scale, tools also observed in stylite relief portraiture. Though cross-temporal, the column features as a central element in all cases, vital to what the respective artwork seeks to communicate.

## An Initial Look at Stylites

Many stylites achieved great fame during their lives. They drew countless pilgrims of all social ranks, from every corner of the empire, to their columns.[1] It might be easy to set the stylites within the limits of theological influence; however, for the late antique viewer, the secular and religious often intertwined, and organically so. These polyglot and diverse pilgrims visited, not surprisingly, in search of anything from a blessing to a healing. However, many also approached with requests for intervention on matters concerning social, civic, and even economic disputes.[2] As a result, we are aware today that stylite saints came to be great influencers of their time on not just theological, but also secular matters. In simpler terms, they became proverbial pillars of society, a characteristic worth studying in how it is reflected in the abstracted relief portraiture of their time.

The most notable element of their appearance was, evidently, their styluses or columns. Saints Simeon and Daniel, in their respective Lives, are both described as gradually increasing the height of their columns at the beginning of their practices.[3] As time progressed, the columns became an ever more prominent part of the saint's identity, informing his fame and influencing his portrayal, both during and after his life. This is apparent in the texts chronicling the lives of the stylites who succeeded Saint Simeon the Elder, where the column takes a more prominent place in the narrative. Its growing importance is also visible in the plethora of visual material that has survived since Late Antiquity, where the column and the saint's body appear connected to a point of near-merging. The eye traces along the stele looking for where the column ends and the holy body begins. As Virginia Burrus aptly notes, "Iconographic tradition consistently gives us the stylite as a hybrid of human and column [...] fully human and also fully nonhuman thing."[4]

There is a plethora of scholarship on stylites, observing them alongside the idea of a kinship between the holy portrait image and the living sanctified person (body and soul). Drawing from this research I focus on the relief portrait of the stylite saint, and the importance of the column as an object loaded with meaning. In turn, the column's inherent symbolism is traced to today, through examples of contemporary art revealing a continuity between notions of institutional influence and structure in artistic vocabularies.

It is fascinating, therefore, to observe the visual identity of the stylite in *stelai*, also referred to as relief portraits, in connection to works of contemporary art that also center around the column. Through observations on relief por-

[1] Vickan, *Byzantine Pilgrimage Art*.

[2] As read in the Life of Simeon, and The Life of Daniel.

[3] Lent, "The Life of St. Simeon Stylites"; see also Baynes and Dawes, *Three Byzantine Saints*, and van den Ven, *Symeon the Younger*.

[4] Burrus, "Hagiography Without Humans," 237–44.

traits of stylite saints from the late antique period I wish to question the role of the column as a visual signifier of the stylites' influence and trace references to their visual presence as a symbol of a new, more approachable and anthropocentric power alongside contemporary works of art by Seon Ghi Bahk, Zuzanna Czebatul, and Andreas Angelidakis.

By observing the column as a symbol of structure, power and influence, a practice that has persisted in various ways throughout art history, stylite relief portraits present a large body of compelling abstract depictions. This makes for fertile grounds to discuss stylite portraiture, particularly in relation to the treatment of the human body and the column as a conceptual object representing a new, for-the-people figure of influence, and perhaps even an effective institution, mediating to the Divine. Similarly, the contemporary works referenced play with scale and the human body and the materiality of the column as a structural element, prompting the viewer to question current sources and structures of power, and implying, at times, even a need for change.

## Typologies in Relief Portraits of Stylite Saints

There are a number of different ways in which stylite saints are depicted in Late Antiquity, including painting, portable iconography, and miniature carving. Relief portraits of stylites, *stelai*, cover a considerable portion of the surviving visual material from that period. Stylites are incised on steles, icons, as well as smaller pilgrim *eulogiai*, and present a number of compelling issues concerning the role of the column in the depiction of the stylite's body, and person. What is more, the iconography on these relief portraits appears to follow particular typologies, each within their own category but also amongst each other.

Nevertheless, there appears to be a particular iconographic pattern throughout stone relief icons, or *stelai*, of the fifth and sixth centuries, as can be seen, for example, in *Bas-Relief of Saint Simeon Stylite*, 500 CE; *Saint Simeon Stylites on his Pillar*, fifth or sixth century CE at Bode Museum, Berlin and *Stela with Saint Simeon* (?), sixth century CE, at the Musée du Louvre, Paris [Fig. 1]. On these portraits, the image of the saint on his column is placed closer to one edge of the work, rather than occupying its centre. Attached to one side of the column is a ladder, being ascended by a figure approaching the saint. While this additional instrument shifts the weight of the image slightly to the side occupied by the saint, it creates a sense of movement in the remaining space. This iconography presents a pattern that strays from popular static depictions of such figures.

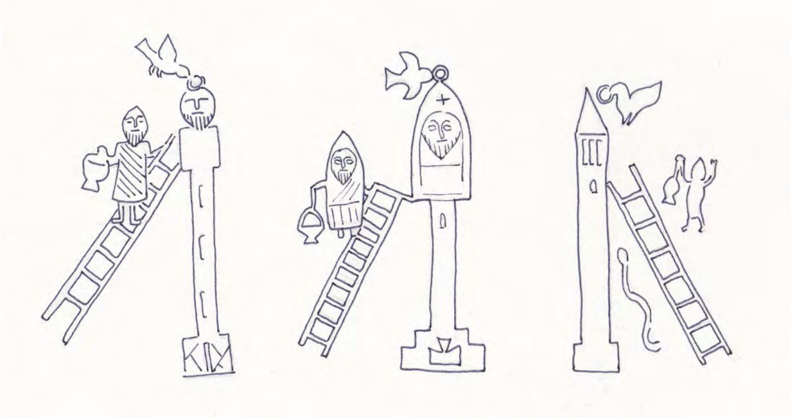

*Fig. 1. Diagrammatic rendering of stelai typology by author (from left to right):* Saint Simeon Stylites on a bas-relief*, AD 500. Basalt, 66 x 78 x 16 cm. From the Hama region and held in the Hama Museum, Syria.* Saint Simeon Stylites on his Pillar*, 5th or 6th century, Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (see p. 339), and* Stele with Saint Simeon (?)*, 6th century Paris, Musée du Louvre, Département des antiquités chrétiennes.*

The column upon which the saint sits often bears incisions in the shape of small tower windows. Given that stylite columns are not known to have been wide enough to hold interior stairwells, it is understood that these windows are most likely a metaphor or symbol for inhabitance. The diagonal ladder, often attached to the column very near its top where the saint is, carries an unidentified monk or pilgrim, bearing a censor or basket, who is approaching the saint. This is an illustration of an action described in many instances in the Lives of Saint Simeon, as well as in the Lives of other stylites.

The pilgrim ascending the ladder may remain vague and unnamed on these relief portraits, not simply because the attention must fall chiefly on the saint, but also because the pilgrim is one example of many who performed the same action.[5] This is a significant aspect of these relief icons as it draws further attention to the column and its figure, emphasizing the saint as an authority figure with the power to commune with the divine. Yet he is approachable, technically accessible to anyone. As a result, the addition of the action of ascension beside the stylite can be seen as democratizing the saint to a degree that other authority figures of the time shown on a column or between columns could offer.[6]

More specifically, Patricia Cox Miller presents an apparent visual similarity of the image of the stylite on his column, whether one saw him directly or

[5] Vikan, *Byzantine Pilgrimage Art*. The author addresses the issue of the questionable specificity of the figures portrayed through examples of objects many of which portray stylites. The stylites are also not always specified allowing one to question who it is exactly that is portrayed.

[6] See Empress Ariadne, Ivory Plaque of 490–510 AD, Kunsthistorisches Museum,Vienna. Image available at https://www.thebyzantinelegacy.com/ariadne-vienna. The empress is portrayed between prominent columns and below a dome, symbols of stability and ascension respectively.

through his portrait, to that of an emperor's sculpture on the top of an imperial column.[7] Perhaps, as the saint pauses his prayer to address the public gathered to hear him speak, he becomes all the more likened to a talking portrait, fulfilling what a simple statue portrait could, of course, not.[8] The pilgrims would, thus, look up towards the saint in a similar way to how they would look up to an imperial statue on a column. While this is an effective comparison, the most notable difference between the stylite's portrait image and imperial columns lies in the very presence of a ladder attached to the image of the saint in his portrait. Emperors' sculptural portraits on tall imperial columns were physically out of the viewer's reach.[9] One could only stand below and look up at them in constant awareness of their difference in social and political rank.

In the case of stylite saints, according to various accounts in their Lives, pilgrims were often able to ascend the ladder attached to the column and speak to the saint at a closer level, just as the relief portraits indicate. It was in the power of the saint to refuse visitors by not allowing the ladder to be placed, yet even this veto was practiced in moderation as their calling was one that dictated communication with the public. In the Syriac Lives of Saint Simeon the Elder, the author describes a moment when the saint was reprimanded by an angel after having refused to address his visitors for three consecutive days. The angel's reprimand was based on the premise that God had placed Saint Simeon in his position not only to serve his personal goals of attaining great spirituality, but also to spread the Word.[10]

## The Column, the Body, and Power

The column is an element used widely within late antique portraiture. It is seen in imperial columns such as the Column of Emperor Marcian, erected circa 450–452 CE in Constantinople (present-day Fatih district, Istanbul). Columns can even be seen in framing figures on ivory or metal reliefs and textiles, for example in a silver Plaque with Saint Peter, 550–600 CE.[11] Considering the column metaphorically, as an object that supports, can inform the way its use in portraiture of this period is understood. The column on a portrait and its characteristics can indicate to the viewer information regarding the subject's position and type of power.

[7] Cox Miller, *Corporeal Imagination*.

[8] Cox Miller, *Corporeal Imagination*, 148–63.

[9] There are a number of shorter column-shaped bases that held sculptural portraits of emperors.

[10] Lent, "The Life of St. Simeon Stylites."

[11] The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Accession no. 50.5.2, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/468348?searchField=All&sortBy=Relevance&ft=byzantine&offset=160&rpp=20&pos=162.

By comparing the stylites praying on their columns, alongside imperial columns, the statuesque in the saints' appearance becomes clearer. According to Patricia Cox Miller, an ascetic's stillness during prayer in *stasis,* as the stylites were known to do*,* further relates him to the concept of an artwork of portraiture.[12] The lack of inscriptions, together with the schematic rendering of the saints on their relief portraits, seem to permit additional interpretations. Perhaps, while being portraits of the individual saint, these reliefs can be seen also as portraits of their collective institution.[13] In the case of Saint Daniel Stylites, his choice to inhabit a column occurs after having been called to this practice by Saint Simeon's spirit, who visited him in a dream, and after receiving the latter's cloak.[14] Here, simply by hearing this part of the saint's life, Saint Daniel is described as quite literally continuing Saint Simeon's image. The question thus arises, whether the image of the stylite monk, when not labeled, may also be, in a way, allegorical portraiture. As Richard Brilliant notes: "Knowledge of the 'what' about someone supersedes knowledge of the 'who if indeed there can ever be truly separate forms of knowledge about the identity of a person."[15] Stylites' dual identity as saintly human pillars and human individuals is ever evident in their portraits. When observed in relation to the texts, Saint Daniel is described as both his person as well as a continuation of the stylite institution. In other words, the image of Saint Daniel, after ordination as a stylite, in the reader's mind, merges with Saint Simeon's, not unlike how the institution of the Church continues through history, starting with the image of Christ or the Cross.[16] The founding of the Church, starting with Christ as the simultaneously divine and human founding pillar, had disrupted Roman secular society to a degree that instigated persecution. The teachings of Christ called the notions of power and societal structure, considered previously as unshakable, into question and created paths for change. With the passing of the years, saints, clergy, and the faithful became the continuation of the Church and the new realities it was advocating for. Similarly, one stylite following the other can be seen as creating not so much a wider network, but rather a new living and present institution that facilitates direct communication with the Divine. Even if each saint is a separate individual, they are a continuation of the original structure of stylitism.

Since the saint appears as a human pillar of two powerful institutions intricately intertwined at the time, the heavenly and the earthly, the portrait

[12] Cox Miller, *Corporeal Imagination*, 148–63. See also: Thurston, "Stylites or Pillar-Saints."

[13] Stewart, *Statues in Roman Society*, 79–117, at 92. See also: Nodelman, "How to Read a Roman Portrait," 27–33.

[14] Baynes and Dawes, *Three Byzantine Saints' Lives*.

[15] Brilliant, *Portraiture*, 104–35.

[16] The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bowl Base with Saints Peter and Paul Flanking a Column with the Christogram of Christ, Accession no. 16.174.3, http://metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/463714.

of the stylite shown on, and as one with, his column evokes the same ideas, albeit through image. To the modern viewer, the inseparable visual relationship between the body and the column may appear as an abstracted depiction open to interpretation. Where the column and the body have merged on the stone in the bas-relief of Saint Simeon [Fig. 1], the portrait image of the saint extends beyond physical likeness while retaining its power as substituting for the presence of the saint. What the case may have been for the late antique viewer, nonetheless, is essential to question. There is no line or incision on the *stele* that can permit the viewer to unquestionably distinguish the saint from the architectural element he is shown inhabiting. In fact, the saint's face is the only part of his body that can be traced with any certainty, even it is presented schematically with lines that simply indicate a beard, nose and two eyes. In other words, the likeness of this portrait to the actual holy person also remains vague. The question is to what degree this was purposeful.

In all *stelai* mentioned so far, the stylite appears almost as a diagram depicting a transformed person of curiously great height. It is not entirely clear whether the saint is portrayed as a full-body portrait, in the traditional sense of sculpting the bust, arms and legs of a figure, or as just his bust on top of the column capital. Perhaps it can, more interestingly, be argued that the column in these two portraits has in fact become a part of the saint's body and not simply a tool facilitating his spiritual goals, effectively resulting in a full-body portrait in the reliefs. This fusion renders both column and human as conceptual elements and integral parts of stylitism, and perhaps we can go as far as to suggest that this fusion unifies secular and religious powers with the modest, weak 'humanness' of the saint-as-man and his followers – a fairly revolutionary new view and presentation of traditional power structures of the time. What might have previously felt unapproachable and distant can now appear as a symbol for change and restructuring of the past power structures that society came to rely on, or even a destabilization of people's perception of purely secular Roman officials as the ultimate ruling and deciding powers.

In contemporary art, the column can often be seen used to express a questioning of, or need for, a movement away from traditional societal or political structures. Zuzanna Czebatul's exhibition titled *T-Kollaps* at Gdańska Galeria Miejska, Gdańsk, Poland in March 2019 poses an apt example [Fig. 2]. Having taken apart the structural orders that she has recreated with transparent and thermoplastic polyethylene, she used them to 'build' new structures. Thus, the inflated plastic columns appear less imposing to the viewer, more so when they become deflated, flexible and lose their shape. While, in this particular installation, Czebatul explores the history of decay of the Parthenon, she also addresses all that this monument came to symbolize throughout history. The artist asks the viewer to consider changes that the ancient institution of democracy has

*Fig. 2. Zuzanna Czebatul "T—Kollaps" exhibition, photo Bartosz Górka. Image courtesy of Gdańsk City Gallery and the artist. © Gdańsk City Gallery 2019.*

undergone, and whether there are aspects that have now changed and become unstable.

The column, a prominent part of the ancient building, became the ultimate symbol of the institution of the democracy that held up the State of Athens, simultaneously alluding to progress and innovation. By rendering the column an inflatable object made of soft transparent plastic, Czebatul questions the idealization of past sociopolitical structures that were riddled with hidden inequity and injustice: immovable features supporting the ancient idealized structure are now translucent, soft and malleable, easily rearrangeable by the viewer. Like the staircase by the stylite column on the stelai, Czebatul makes what was previously unapproachable approachable, and takes it a step further by giving the viewer not just the liberty to approach the previously unchallenged institutionalism, but even to alter it.

In strictly technical terms, the column is an architectural element that supports a larger structure. It is a load-bearing object designed to support – to hold something up. As a result of this work/function, it is an appropriate symbol for alluding to the concept of property and, by extension, to wealth. As a supporting structure, the column begins to encompass broader notions and can be used to symbolize institutions that 'uphold society'. In Late Antiquity this could look like the institution of the Empire, the Church, or Stylitism. In more contemporary terms, the column can symbolize the institutions of the Justice System or even Democracy, returning to the ancient Greek ideas of those institutions as upholders of society. Resulting from this, incorporating the column

in artworks can immediately communicate references to strength, influence and power.

In *Soft Ruin*, 2015, by Andreas Angelidakis, for example, the artist prints a concrete motif on textile, which is then sewn together over foam, perfectly emulating pillars, columns and other structural elements at a one-to-one scale.[17] The artist uses the contrast between the logical mind's understanding that a concrete pillar is a strong immovable structure, and the reality of a soft, foam object, to address ideas of traditional civic structures losing efficiency. This is a work he revisits over the years, while also expanding it via works on paper, and the even more immaterial medium of virtual three-dimensional reproductions.

In this body of work, Angelidakis uses an existing vocabulary for strength and support and renders it useless, which leads the viewer to contemplate what metaphorical structures might be useless today. In the case of stylites, we see these unlikely and unique ascetics, who left for the desert to be away from people and closer to God, become massively influential on all matters of daily life. They became unsuspecting figures of power and influence who came to emulate a holier, more sanctified image of someone with as much power as an emperor, yet also someone who uses such power for good. In the stories in the Lives that describe the resolution of financial or civic disputes by stylites, they appear as more reliable and efficient than the earthly judicial and civic institutions that had failed to solve these disputes in the first place. In the iconography, we see this function embedded within the merging of the body and column. Where the column should be a stiff structural element, the stylite's presence changes the existing visual vocabulary. Adding the pilgrim on the staircase only emphasizes this.

As previously noted, the saints' interventions on matters that extended far beyond the theological complicates the interpretation of their social position. Authority and power, as concepts alluded to in portraiture, can take different meanings depending on context. For example, political power is exuded from imperial portraits and those of consuls and state officials, while martial power can be read in portraits of military officials. The viewer can read, in said portraits, smaller or larger signifiers of position, history, work and even personality qualities.[18]

In the case of religious portraits, power comes to bear an altogether more complicated meaning. As Peter Brown notes in "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity", the Syrian ascetic often took on responsibilities far less spiritual and intervened on matters that other patrons may have also worked to resolve.[19] In the various Lives, however, these saints are described

[17] Images available at https://issuu.com/thebreeder/docs/2016_angelidakis, 26-27 (accessed 09/08/2023).

[18] Stewart, *Statues in Roman Society*, 79–117.

[19] Brown, *Society and the Holy*, 152–53.

as though their judgment, resolutions and actions come through prayer and strict *askesis* by which they lead their lives. Their ability to exercise divine power comes from the spiritual levels they attain through their *askesis*. This is influence that a non-spiritual patron cannot have, which is visually clear to those who visit the stylites in hope of gaining the saint's help, or address them through their portrait icons. The power exercised by the stylite, therefore, incorporates additional ideas such as power over the physical body, of knowing the truth of God and having the ability to speak it to the masses, as well as mediate on their behalf. As a result, the stylite saint is a figure whose power is not entirely his own, as it derives from God, rendering his position somewhere between heaven and earth. This ambivalent position held by the stylite is also reflected in the iconography of his relief portraits, particularly through the rendering of his body and the presence of the ladder.

## Scale

'Height', and 'ascension', are central terms ever present in the narratives of the Lives of the stylite saints. The overall mental impression one gains from reading the stories of their life and work is that of ascending. As a result, one can question whether the portrayal of the saint's body in unison with his column conforms to an artistic intention aiming to emphasize the importance of the column to the saint's *being* – to his person. Considering this matter together with the diagrammatic rendering of the stylite's face, it can additionally be argued that the physical likeness to the saint is not in fact the main point of interest. As Peter Stewart has pointed out, the portrait in Late Antiquity went far beyond just the likeness to a person's physical characteristics, and "portraits have so often served to place the subject in a generally recognized social role."[20] The social role of the stylite saint, however, is one that extends to both spiritual and secular levels.

The ladder propped against the stylite column, on which the anonymous pilgrim is shown, emphasizes the idea of ascension already embedded within the representation of the stylite. More specifically, the stylite saint is understood by the viewer as having attained great heights literally by dwelling on a column, as well as by having reached a higher spiritual level.

On one hand, when looking at the stylite's relief portrait, the viewer recognizes Saint Simeon's accomplishment in attaining spiritual heights. On the other hand, the pilgrims climbing the ladder, regardless of their position within society, illustrate the viewer's potential desire, and freedom to approach sim-

[20] Stewart, "Portraits and the Statuesque," 48, and 79; Lent, "The Life of St. Simeon Stylites," 150–51.

ilar levels. Additionally, the incorporation of this action beside the still portrait affirms the viewer's liberty to actively and immediately commune with the stylite and, through him, with God himself. Altogether, one reads on the *stele* an active relationship between individual, saint and the invisible Divine. Depending on the viewer's actions, the scale of their person becomes dynamic, as it can change in relation to that of the stylite.

Smaller objects with relief portraits of stylite saints, such as coins, tokens and small vessels, appear to follow a similar path in their iconography. Namely, they depict the saint on his column, to which a ladder is sometimes attached and ascended by a pilgrim. The portraits, on these objects too, are not always labeled, nor bear particular signifiers that would allow absolute certainty in identifying the precise individual portrayed.[21] They, however, never lack the necessary general signifiers of holiness. The major iconographic difference that they, together with their larger counterparts, present is that the saint does not often appear in a traditional full-body depiction, but resembles a bust portrait on a columnar base, though here, too, often practically inseparable from the column. There are additional examples where the body even appears as though it is also the capital of the column. Either way, the saint is still read as being in unison with the pillar.

In the first case, the relationship appears similar to that of a portrait bust on its base. Bases often identified the portrait's subject and were therefore integral to the viewer for the identification process. In the second case, body and column become meshed in an intriguing way that is challenging to clarify definitively. In Saint Daniel's Life there is a moment when the author describes a pilgrim inscribing a dedicatory poem on the saint's column-base. In the same text, the author tells of pilgrims embracing Saint Daniel's column in gratitude and love, as they would the saint's person.[22] In one instance the column is seen as taking on the role of a statue base, and moments later, as receiving the treatment one gives to a beloved person.[23] Both, nevertheless, reveal a closeness felt between pilgrim and stylite. The image of the column and the saint's spiritual ascension, instead of intimidating the viewer, offers space for interaction, which can reach varying levels of personal familiarity, with both individual stylite and the institution they represent.

We see a similar balance between structure and closeness in Angelidakis's *Soft Ruin* where the work's parts appear as imposing as the remains of a ruin, yet are soft and inviting once in contact with them. In both Angelidakis's and Czebatul's work, the scale of the columns and the nature of the works as installations invite the viewer to experience them up close and immerse themselves in the narrative

[21] Vikan, *Byzantine Pilgrimage Art*.

[22] Baynes and Dawes, *Three Medieval Saints*.

[23] You may find many instances of people speaking to or treating icons as living presences. In addition, see Pentcheva, *The Sensual Icon*.

of the work. The softness of the materials becomes inviting and alluring in its contradictory appearance. Thus, we see these contemporary examples alongside the stylite imagery, regardless of their timeline, as having the power to evoke a sense of immediacy and proximity in the viewers and inspire them to direct action and interaction. Whether that action be to seek resolution to their needs by approaching the Divine as opposed to the secular power, or to search for their role in the now crumbling institutions of the past and whatever new institutions could be created, the pillars are at the (visual) core.

## Materiality

The column is a popular motif in late antique religious iconography, both as a literal object that is built and decorated, as well as a metaphorical one illustrating the concept of support. The Greek word for column, *stylos*, from whence the characterization *stylites* derives, was widely used in Christian text and hymnography, especially in the context of 'support'. The Theotokos, Christ, Evangelists and countless saints are sung as *styloi* of Christianity.[24] Descriptions of the Church itself often describe it in architectural terms, illustrating Christ as the foundation upon which the institution is built and raised through the (bodies of) saints and worshippers. Saints are often seen painted on physical columns of churches or depicted as, and on, columns, such as in the apse painting of the Red Monastery Church in Sohag. This emphasizes a play between the idea of the physical and conceptual body through which stylites can be observed.

The ascetic practice of stylite monks invites the numbing of the body's physical desires and needs. The body's expression of physical needs is described as interfering with attaining spiritual perfection through communion with God.[25] As James E. Goehring notes:

> The Syrian ascetic embarked on a monastic career not to punish or subdue the flesh but to offer the body as a symbol of the faith. The body was not seen dualistically in opposition to the spirit but as a portion of the person through which the faith might be acted out and become visible.[26]

[24] This word can be found in numerous texts in saints' Lives, in texts regarding the Evangelists, as well as in hymns to the Theotokos. Some of these texts are of a later date, which indicates the popularity and persistence of the use of this term, as well as of the idea of a body supporting the Church of Christ. See also His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, *Encountering the Mystery*.

[25] Stewart, "Portrait Statues and the Statuesque," 79–117.

[26] Goehring, *Ascetics, Society and the Desert*, 248.

*Fig. 3. An Aggregation 2014010-Column, 2014, charcoal, nylon threads, and mixed media, approximately 500 cm, and 90 cm diameter, in nine parts. Image courtesy of the artist. © Bahk Seon Ghi* 朴善基 박선기

Therefore, the image of a stylite can be seen as one of a holy figure concerned about the role of his body in attaining spiritual goals and of making the invisible visible. He is a figure in a complex state of being evident in the perplexing way in which his body and column are rendered as one on the relief portraits in question.

This blending of the immaterial with the material element can also be seen evoked in the suspended works by Seon Ghi Bahk. In these works, the artist evokes architectural space in a schematic, diagrammatic form. For example, in *An Aggregation 2014010-Column* [Fig. 3], the artist suspends nylon cords from which hang charcoal pieces. The suspended charcoal is arranged in groupings that create a three-dimensional, practically diagrammatic allusion to columns. The mind reads the columns in a physical way, as with a 3D rendering or an architectural drawing, yet the physical experience is that of ascension and lightness. It is as though the creative, cerebral part embedded within the design process is experienced physically, while the physical and architectural reality of the structure implied is experienced in the mind, like a pilgrim communing with the stylite's being by looking upon the carved image of them. In both cases the viewer is simultaneously present with the physical object (the artwork) and that which it stands for, which exists in an immaterial realm. What is more, the artist's use of suspended charcoal leads the mind to the notions of destruction and re-birth. His suspended columns seem to rise up, and from charred remains form the idea of new structure.

## Conclusions

Overall, stylite relief portraiture reveals a fusion of religious and secular visual signifiers that connote an elevated saint/statue with influential oratorical and miracle-inducing power granted to him by God. An incident in the Syriac Lives describes Saint Simeon evidently requesting, on occasion, that the pilgrim pray with him to God so as to be endowed with the help besought. In such moments the saint on the column becomes, more literally, a living icon. Kneeling and praying before them is done just as it would in the presence of a crafted icon/ portrait in request of the saint's mediation to God.

Speech was integral to the lives of the stylite saints.[27] They did not simply have popularity that gave them opportunities to speak to crowds, they also had the obligation to do so. Whether this was known and, thus, communicable to their viewers through the relief portraits can be debated. Nonetheless, with this in mind, the stylite saint is understood even more as a public person with influence and power.[28]

Finally, Stylite saints, of whom a plethora of *stelai* and other portraits have survived since Late Antiquity, are individuals who gained widespread influence. Their position between heaven and earth impacts their relief portraiture, which comes to combine visual characteristics of late antique portraiture of both religious and secular character. The column, a central element to the stylite practice, comes to be that very object which informs their portrait in a way that reflects the uniqueness of their positions.

The way the column is used in stylite portraiture reveals, additionally, a continuity with ideas and concerns of contemporary society, as well as with its use in contemporary art seeking to enliven them. A simple example can be found in people seen seeking solutions to their problems through alternative figures when the established institutions fail them. Through reference to the form of the column, and experimenting with its metaphorical side through scale and materiality, artists create installation works that, in turn, produce intense experiences. By means of these experiences, contemporary artists too communicate concerns around antiquated or problematic sociopolitical structures, and exhort the viewer to question, and even to action.

[27] Lent, "The Life of St. Simeon Stylites."
[28] Brilliant, *Portraiture*, 104–05: "They [influential figures] [...] appear subject to stereotyping, to the projection upon them of the audience's cognitive representation of what such persons [...] should be like, so that portraits of influential people are informed by prior ideas embedded in the viewers' consciousness".

## Bibliography

Bartholomew, His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch. *Encountering the Mystery: Understanding Orthodox Christianity Today*. New York: Doubleday, 2008. Greek edition. Athens: Akrita, 2011.

Baynes, Norman H. and Elizabeth Dawes. "The Life of Daniel the Stylite." In *Three Byzantine Saints: Contemporary Biographies of St. Daniel the Stylite, St. Theodore of Sykeon and St. John the Almsgiver*. London: St. Vladmir's Seminary Press, 1948.

Brilliant, Richard. *Portraiture.* London: Reaktion Books, 1991.

Brown, Peter. "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity." *The Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971): 80–101.

Brown, Peter. *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989.

Cox Miller, Patricia. *The Corporeal Imagination: Signifying the Holy in Late Ancient Christianity*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012.

Goehring, James E. *Ascetics, Society, and the Desert: Studies in Early Egyptian Monasticism*. London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 1999.

Lent, Frederick. "The Life of St. Simeon Stylites: A Translation of the Syriac Text in Bedjan's *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum*." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 35 (1915): 103–98.

Nodelman, Sheldon. "How to Read a Roman Portrait." *Art in America*, Issue January/February 1975, 27–33.

Ouspensky, Léonide and Vladimir Lossky. *The Meaning of Icons*. New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1982.

Pentcheva, Bissera. *The Sensual Icon*. University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2010.

Stewart, Peter. *Statues in Roman Society: Representation and Response*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Thurston, Herbert. "Stylites or Pillar-Saints." *An Irish Quarterly Review* 12, no. 48 (1923): 584–96.

van den Ven, Paul. *Ancient Life of Saint Symeon the Younger* [*La Vie Ancienne de St. Syméon le Jeune*]. Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1970.

Vikan, Gary. *Byzantine Pilgrimage Art*. Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies, 1982.

BASEMA HAMARNEH

# On the Edge of Heaven: Stylite and Recluse Monks in the Levant in the Byzantine and Islamic Periods

The forms of asceticism in Late Antiquity included several extreme expressions, among which stylitism stands out as one of the most austere.[1] Pursued equally by men and women,[2] this practice is documented in literary sources, hagiographic texts, archaeological and material remains, all of which attest to the veneration and popularity accorded to stylites, especially in the Byzantine *Oriens*.[3]

Surviving monuments, such as stylite columns and towers, stand along transport and communication routes, dominating the surrounding landscapes of rural areas, especially in Northern Syria and Mesopotamia, while a few are

[1] Stylites, whose merits lay in their conduct while alive and not in their martyrdom, retreated onto columns or towers, exposing their bodies to uncomfortable positions and severe weather conditions. John Moschos mentions that John the Stylite, who was living 40 miles from Egea, a city in Cilicia, died after being struck by lightning (*Pratum Spirituale* 57, col. 2911). Some stylites even wore chains to increase self-discipline and mortification. Kazhdan and Ševčenko, "Stylite," 1971. An example of such practice, linked to a form of extreme ascesis, was discovered in a cave tomb at Khirbat Tabaliya, half way between Jerusalem and Bethlehem. The skeleton, found in an inner underground rock-cut chamber, was wound in 6 kg chains; these were wrapped across the pelvis, crossed on the back, and worn over the shoulders, suggesting that the deceased was not bound against his will. The memorial built over the tomb may indicate that the person enjoyed a post-mortem devotional attendance. Kogan-Zehavi, "Tomb and Memorial," 140.

[2] On female stylitism: Delehaye, "Femmes stylites," 391–92. In 2023, a grave close to the apse of the monastic church in Khirbet al-Masani (four kilometers northwest of Jerusalem) yielded a chained skeleton. Iron rings encircled the skeleton's hands, feet, and neck. A 30- to 60-year-old female individual was identified through analysis of surviving teeth; she may have been a nun practicing extreme asceticism. Kotli *et al.*, "Antiquity Validation," 5–6. Two chained nuns, Marana and Cyra  are mentioned by Theodoret of Cyrrhus (*Historia religiosa* 29, 4).

[3] Some Stylites established their pillars in an urban context, such as Daniel the Stylite in Constantinople. Kazhdan and Ševčenko, "Stylite," 1971.

*Fig. 1. Map showing the Provinces of Arabia and Palaestina in the Byzantine period (© Hamarneh; drawing by M. Ben Jeddou).*

also documented in Asia Minor and Egypt.[4] However, inscriptions and archaeological remains strongly support the argument that this practice extended to the provinces of *Arabia* and *Palaestina* [Fig. 1], which deserves special consideration here due to its peculiar forms, devotional history, and reception by subsequent Islamic tradition.

[4] Sansterre, "Saints stylites," 37–39; Perrone, "Monasticism," 31–32; Schachner, "Archaeology," 382–86; Boero, "Space of the Stylite," 198–99.

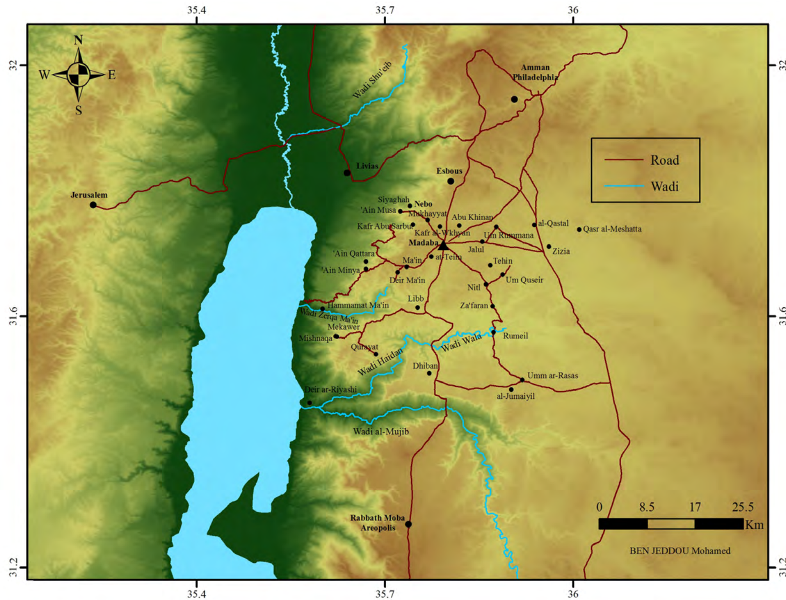


*Fig. 2. Map of the Diocese of Madaba (© Hamarneh; drawing by M. Ben Jeddou).*

The most striking evidence in Arabia is offered by a group of buildings containing an exceptionally well-preserved, tall and slender square tower, located about 1300 meters north of the modern town of Umm er-Rasas (the Byzantine Kastron Mefa'a in the Diocese of Madaba)[5] [Fig. 2]. The unfamiliar aspect of this monument [Fig. 3] has captured the fantasy of local Bedouins and the attention of foreign travellers. One of the earliest descriptions, by Buckingham in 1816, emphasized the solidity and elegance of its construction.[6] In 1872 Tristram argued that the tower was "by far the most interesting ruin of Um Rasas".[7] Weser, while excluding that it has functioned as a minaret, thought of it as a military watchtower (*Wachturm*).[8] However, Wilson was the first to identify in the nearby ruins a small monastery, and to suggest that the tower belonged to a stylite.[9] While reporting local legends, Palmer focused his attention on the architectural decoration of the building and the carved crosses on the side walls.[10] Saller thought that the tower functioned to control access to the large cisterns hewn in the bedrock nearby.[11] In 1987 archaeological excavations of

[5] The town of Umm er-Rasas developed in the fifth to sixth century engulfing an abandoned Roman military *castrum*.

[6] Buckingham, *Travel*, 99.

[7] Tristram, *Land*, 145.

[8] Weser, "Unter," 103.

[9] Wilson argued that its position, lower than the town, does not favor its function as a watchtower. Wilson, "Address," 316.

[10] Palmer, *Desert*, 499.

[11] Saller and Bagatti, *Town*, 249–51.

*Fig. 3. Tower of Umm er-Rasas (photo D. Bianchi).*

the church at the foot of the tower, supported by Marino and Piccirillo's study of the architectural elements, provided valuable insight into the function of the complex, confirming the theory of a monastic settlement first advanced by Weser.[12]

[12] The church was identified by Savignac (Savignac, "Pistes," 244). For a summary see: Marino and Piccirillo, "Torre," 9–12; Piccirillo, "Églises," 290–92; Fulcherio, "Relazione," 668–73; Hamarneh and Marino, "Torri stilite," 59–65; a study of the surrounding area was conducted by

## The Structure

The imposing, freestanding 15-meter-tall structure, built of regularly cut limestone blocks, displays a predominantly smooth surface that was originally coated in plaster,[13] and is decorated at half height on the eastern side by a *crux clipeata* [Fig. 4], a second similar *crux* on the north side [Fig. 5], and at the top of the eastern façade with two more crosses carved on corner stones.

The tower concludes at the top with a properly built chamber originally covered by a dome.[14] The chamber had a door on the south side and narrow windows on each of the other three sides; in the southwest corner a latrine conduit connected the upper chamber with the base of the tower.[15]

The chamber contains a projecting cornice with double moulding framed by corner columns, on top of which runs an entablature with three rounded bands and four projecting corner capitals. The capitals, still in situ, are carved with extreme care in three alternating ornamental designs – five-point rosettes joined in a circle, a large rosette formed by interlaced circles, and a basketweave motive – while either arched motives and crosses or three pointed lilies line the upper part of the external frame on each side [Fig. 6].[16] On the outer edges at the base of each capital, remnants of poorly preserved additional decoration can be seen.[17] The chamber itself is very simple, measuring around 2.20 meters per side, and was provided with a built-in latrine seat.[18]

The lack of stairs to the upper chamber suggests that the tower was accessed only by an external ladder, and the hygiene installation strongly suggests that the space on the summit served someone who intended to stay there on a permanent basis or at least to spend an extended period of time at the top.[19] Such a

Bujard, see Bujard, *Kastron Mefaa*, 110–15; Foran, "Stylites," 76–77. A static examination and a 3D-laser scan of the tower were made in 2017. Cazzolino *et al*., "Combined Use."

[13] Piccirillo, *Madaba*, 302.

[14] For the typology of recluses' cells see: Peña, Castellana and Fernandez, *Les Reclus*, 61–62; on typologies of shelters and roofs in Schachner, "Archaeology," 353.

[15] The conduit has a square section of 25 x 30 cm, and it runs vertically along the southwest corner. Marino and Piccirillo, "Torre," 10; Kennedy, "Christianity," 238.

[16] Similar decorative elements appear on liturgical furniture discovered in some churches of Umm er-Rasas. See Acconci, "Arredo," 292, 308 and in particular the capital found in St Stephen church: Acconci, "Arredo," 310.

[17] Piccirillo mentions that the decoration included eagle heads or similar. Marino and Piccirillo, "Torre," 11.

[18] Marino and Piccirillo, "Torre," 12; latrines on the eastern side are mentioned in tower A in Jeradé (Butler, *Syria*, 129), in Cheikh Soleiman and Kefr Hawwar (Peña, Castellana and Fernandez, *Les Reclus*, 64), while a proper latrine seat is attested in the tower of Refade. Peña, *Vita,* 114. On hygiene instalments in stylite and recluse towers see also: Peña, *Vita,* 112–15.

[19] The lack of internal stairs was pointed out in the study by Marino and Piccirillo ("Torre," 11–12) and confirmed by the recent 3D laser-scanning of the structure. Cazzolino *et al*., "Combined Use," 2. On hygiene structures in recluse towers see Peña, Castellana and Fernandez, *Les Reclus*, 64. According to Kazhdan and Ševčenko, some saints spent only a few years on columns that were closely connected to monasteries. See Kazhdan and Ševčenko, "Stylite," 1971.

*Fig. 4–5. Eastern (left) and northern (right) façade of the tower with cross (photo D. Bianchi).*

harsh lifestyle and voluntary seclusion can only be compatible with the path of a stylite or a recluse.[20]

Additional support for this interpretation is the fact that the tower stands at the centre of a proper physical context consisting of a rectangular court, enclosure or *mandra*, measuring 32 m x 22 m,[21] with a small church on the south side that is accessible only from the court via two doors in its northern wall. A third door on the north-eastern end leads to two service rooms built within the enclosure [Fig. 7].[22]

The small basilical church (9 x 13 m in plan) has an inscribed apse and a sanctuary raised by two steps and delimited by a chancel screen.[23] A reliquary and a U-shaped altar table were found inside the presbytery.[24] The church floor

[20] Marino and Piccirillo, "Torre," 10–11. The exceptional height of the tower must be taken into consideration: normally stylite masonry columns ranged from 5.5 m to 6.50–7.00 m. See Schachner, "Archaeology," 339–42.

[21] Festugière and Delehaye emphasized the link between the pillar and the enclosure (*mandra*). See Festugière, *Moines*, 41, n. 2; Delehaye, *Saints stylites*, cxxxii, cxxxviii and clix. Several cases with both features are documented in Syria in the case of recluse monks' towers (Peña, Castellana and Fernandez, *Les Reclus*, 65–66) and in stylite pillars (Schachner, "Archaeology," 332–33).

[22] Fulcherio, "Relazione," 673. Two additional smaller enclosures can be seen to the north and to the west. Bujard, *Kastron Mefaa*, 110.

[23] Small fragments were still inserted in the chancel posts. Most chancel screens, post-columns and other sculptural material discovered in the churches of Umm er-Rasas was made of the local oil-shale.

[24] Piccirillo, *Madaba*, 302.

*Fig. 6. View of the upper chamber (photo D. Bianchi).*

*Fig. 7. Aerial view of the complex (© APAAME_20160918_DLK-0258, courtesy of APAAME).*

*Fig. 8. Lateral nave of the church (photo M. Piccirillo, courtesy of the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum – Jerusalem).*

was covered by a smooth lime-mortar. The area flanking the presbytery to the north was paved instead with flagstones, with a small sarcophagus reliquary of white roughly-shaped limestone with its base inserted slightly below the pavement level [Fig. 8].[25] The reliquary's lid, clearly visible from the floor level, was punctuated in the centre by a hole that allowed liquid to be introduced into the cavity [Fig. 9].[26] Its exterior was covered by a thick deposit of carbonized seeds, mostly legumes such as chickpeas and lentils, as well as traces of an oily substance that was probably dispersed on the surface while being poured inside through the hole in the lid. Among the seeds a gold solidus of Justinian I (r. 527–565 CE) was also found.[27]

The reliquary contained the incompletely cremated bones of an adult,[28] probably a female between 54 and 65 years of age.[29] The skeletal remains were

[25] The roughly worked reliquary box has a sliding roof with a hole in the center. Piccirillo, *Madaba*, 302.

[26] The oil or another substance, once poured into the reliquary, could not be retrieved. This practice gave the relics a liturgical, protective and devotional function. Similar reliquaries are located more often directly under the church altar. See Piccirillo, *Chiese*, tav. 55, photo 10–11 (St Basil Church Rihab); Piccirillo, "Reliquiario," 376–77. The Piacenza pilgrim (around 570 CE) mentions that oil was blessed by being put next to holy relics. Such practice took place in the Holy Sepulcher where the Holy Cross was kept: "While the cross is being worshipped, the star [appearing from heaven] stands above it, and oil is brought to it to be blessed in moderate-sized flasks. At the time, however, when the wood of the cross touches these flasks, the oil boils up out of them, and unless they are quickly closed, it all pours out". Wilkinson, *Jerusalem*, 83; the oil was mixed with dust, earth and water taken from the place and applied to heal the sick. Gessel, "Öl," 183–87.

[27] The brief report on the excavation does not provide a description or a photograph, thereby keeping the mint and year of issue unknown. Piccirillo, *Madaba*, 302.

[28] An anthropological study of the skeletal remains suggests that they were cremated much later than the death of the person, after the remains had been reduced to a skeleton. Fulcherio, "Relazione," 674.

[29] The individual suffered from severe osteoarthritis that deformed the cervical vertebrae and affected to a lesser extent the remaining portions of the spine and costovertebral joints. Fulcherio, "Relazione," 676. Similar pathologies were detected in monastic burials in Khan al-Ahmar and Deir 'Ain Abata. See Judd, "Commingled Crypts," 8. The age of the person at death is also worth underscoring, as some monks chose seclusion at an advanced stage of life. In this regard, Leontios of Damascus recounts that St Stephen the Sabaite advised Abba Martyrius from Jerash

*Fig. 9. The Reliquary (photo M. Piccirillo, courtesy of the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum – Jerusalem).*

mixed with soil, coal, ash, along with bones of small mammals, including rodents, shells of terrestrial gastropods, a few fish bones, carbonized seeds, berries, pieces of glass, pottery and metal [Fig. 10].[30]

At the bottom of the reliquary, a bronze coin of Justin I and Justinian, minted in 527 CE, the only year of the two emperors' co-regency, was found. The coin provides a possible *terminus post quem* for the deposition of the relics.[31] The specific architectural arrangement, though very simple, suggests the existence of a venerated shrine, making it possible to identify the chapel as a *martyrium* built in the first decades of the sixth century.[32]

(Gerasa) to choose seclusion, having passed most of his life wandering in the desert, and by then had reached the appropriate age to receive visions and divine inspirations (*Life of St Stephen the Sabaite* 17 [Pirone, *Vita*, 104–105]). According to a sample demographic study conducted by Judd on monastic tombs, 55% of aged individuals were older than 35 years of age at time of death. 25% of Khan al-Ahmar and 20% of Ain Abata were estimated to be over 50 years at time of death. Judd, "Commingled Crypts," 10. As for the issue of biological sex, bioarchaeological analysis suggest that few females were buried in monastic graves; this is the case of two women: one in Mount Nebo monastery and one at St Lot monastery at ʿAin Abata. Judd, Gregoricka, and Foran, "Monastic Mosaic," 458.

[30] It cannot be excluded that some of the contents of the reliquary were placed intentionally, although it is difficult to determine if any of these materials may have had a specific meaning or value. Unfortunately, archaeobotanical studies were not undertaken at the time of the excavation. See Fulcherio, "Relazione," 673; Schick, "Burials," 172.

[31] The preliminary report provides no information on the *officina* (place of mint).

[32] The habit of depositing venerated relics in chapels to the right of the apse is typical for Syria. Peña, *Christian Art*, 133; also Peña, Castellana, and Fernandez, *Les Stylites*, 194–200; however,

*Fig. 10. Human and animal bones found in the reliquary (photo R. Schick, courtesy of the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum – Jerusalem).*

A tomb was placed under the pavement of the nave and covered by flat sandstone slabs; it was slightly oriented towards the north-eastern aisle, which included the reliquary. The burial was opened illegally by gravediggers, leaving only an ivory button decorated with small circles and the sole of a sandal.[33]

Churches constructed near stylite towers or pillars are a common feature in northern Syria, as exemplified by sites such as Qalb Loze, Jeradé, Ma'ssarte, Bazuriyya and Sukkariya.[34] At Sukkariya in particular the three-storey tower, dated to the sixth century, was set within an enclosure.[35] The features of Umm er-Rasas correspond to a common typological and spatial setting comprising a combination of prominent architectural elements: tower, church, tomb and enclosure.[36] The enclosure or court had an important function by limiting, or rather controlling, the flow of visitors and access times.[37] The same holds true for direct contact between the community and the ascetic monk by means of an external ladder. According to his Life, Daniel the Stylite, for instance, who lived in the suburbs of Constantinople in the mid-fifth century, did not allow the archbishop to mount the ladder, and so the latter was not able to reach the top of the column on which the saint was

it is not possible, at this stage of research, to connect the bone remains of the reliquary with the stylite / recluse who lived on the top tower.

[33] Fulcherio, "Relazione," 673.

[34] Peña, Castellana and Fernandez, *Les Reclus*, 81–82.

[35] Genequand, "Implantations Umayyades," 38–43.

[36] Schachner argued that a tripartite architecture is the most common, that is when a pillar, enclosure and tombs are comprised. Schachner, "Archaeology," 356. At any rate this complex must also include a church built on the premises.

[37] Regulation of visiting time was an important aspect of interaction with the community; a passage from the Life of Symeon the Stylite states that: "He can be seen judging and delivering verdicts that are right and just. These and similar activities, he performs after the ninth hour for the whole night and the day till the ninth hour he spends praying. But after the ninth hour he first offers divine instruction to those present, and then, after receiving each man's request and working some cures, he resolves the strife of those in dispute. At sunset he begins his conversation from then on with God" (*Life of Symeon Stylite*, 26). Delehaye, *Saints stylites*, cxliv–clxxvi, and Doran, *Life*, 18–23 and 29–36; Schachner, "Archaeology," 340 and 351.

standing (*Vita Danieli* 42 and 43).[38] John Moschos writing in the seventh century reports a story told by Abba Athenogenes, bishop of Petra, about a stylite in his territory whom locals visited (*Pratum Spirituale* 129).[39] The column had no ladder, thus visitors stood at its base, while the stylite would move to the side of the plinth so they could talk. The access to the area where the column stood probably had a gate, so that the stylite himself would decide when and whom to admit, and allow the gate to be opened.[40] These functions or services had to be provided by others living in an adjacent monastery.

## The Monastery

The second group of buildings located to the north-west of the Tower of Umm er-Rasas was also built within a rectangular enclosure [Fig. 11]. It consists of rooms, several covered cisterns, a quarry, and a wine press.[41] Among these, a square tower originally possessing three levels was erected in large squared-off limestone blocks.[42] The chamber on the ground floor had one entrance and a roof supported by arches. It was poorly illuminated by simple, narrow ventilation openings in the north and west walls [Fig. 12].[43]

A second entrance, served by an external flight of stairs, lead to the middle floor, which had a window in its north façade. Externally the window has a lintel with an encircled *crux* in a *tabula ansata* and a second cross carved above. The upper level, of which nothing remains, was accessed by stairs directly from the middle floor room.

The lower part of the north and east façades is entirely covered in graffiti;[44] several crosses are incised on the sides of the entrance, on the architrave and on the arches inside the room, which may attest to assiduous devotional attendance of those who dwelled in the room on the ground floor of the building [Fig. 13].[45]

[38] *Vita Danieli* 42 and 43 (Delehaye, *Saints stylites*); Kaplan, "L'espace," 199.

[39] Delehaye, *Saints stylites*; Callot and Gatier, "Stylites," 585. It is worthy of mention here that Syriac sources refer to both tower and pillar as *estuna*. Schachner, "Archaeology," 333.

[40] John Moschos, *Pratum*, 129 (transl. Wortley, *Spiritual Meadow*, 107).

[41] Bujard, *Kastron Mefaa*, 113.

[42] According to Peña several typologies of recluse towers existed: they ranged from one story up to seven, and each served one recluse as in Northern Syria. See Peña, *Vita*, 58–61.

[43] The *Life of St Stephen the Sabaite* describes the voluntary seclusion of an elderly monk, who was locked in, the door walled up and only small openings left for bodily needs and for communication with visitors (*Life of St Stephen the Sabaite* 17 [Pirone, *Vita*, 104–105]). For other examples see: Peña, *Vita*, 60–61.

[44] Some can be identified as written in tribal *wusum* (Syr. *wasm*), such as those documented, together with earlier *kufic* Arabic inscriptions, on the walls of Qusair ʿAmra in central Jordan. See Lash, "Kitabat," 18–20.

[45] Similar pilgrim crosses are incised on the lower parts of the pillars that stand along the Jordan river at the baptismal site of ʿAinun Sapsaphas. Hamarneh, "Hagiography and Archaeology," 43.

*Fig. 11. Aerial view of the monastery, cisterns and quarry (© APAAME_20160918_DLK-0273, courtesy of APAAME).*

*Fig. 12. View of the main building of the monastery (photo D. Bianchi).*

*Fig. 13. View of the northern façade of the monastery (photo D. Bianchi).*

Some graffiti on the north façade show the symbol of a small square divided by a line; such an element is documented on the external walls of many towers in Syria associated, as argued by Peña, Castellana and Fernandez, with *inclausus* or *reclausus* and could be a schematic drawing of a cell.[46] Notably, these forms of asceticism were mentioned by Theodoret of Cyrrhus, John Moschos and John Chrysostom.[47] The topographic and architectural arrangement of the buildings permits its identification as a small monastery that included cells of other recluse monks, and a community serving the needs and regulating the contacts of the visitors with the recluse atop the main tower.

## The Regional Context

Extreme devotional practices are documented in several cases in *Arabia* and *Palaestina* from the first decades of the fifth century. The Syriac Life of Peter the Iberian recounts that, during his first stay in the monastery of Mount Nebo around 430 CE, the Bishop of Maiumas visited a Sketian monk dwelling there. The holy man, who had spent 40 years in his cell without crossing the thresh-

[46] Peña, Castellana and Fernandez, *Les Reclus*, 409, 417.

[47] Theodoret of Cyrrhus refers to recluses as *katheirgménos*, Moschos uses the term *enkleistos* (*Pratum Spirituale* 45 [transl. Wortley, *Spiritual Meadow*, 35–36]), while Chrysostom refers to *enkleisménos*. Peña, Castellana and Fernandez, *Les Reclus,* 33.

old, was, according to the Syriac *Vita,* "an ascetic and prophet and full of the grace of God".[48]

The diversity of the archaeological evidence around small monasteries supports an interpretation that some areas could have been used by itinerant monks for periods of retreat or extended fasting.[49] The Greek inscriptions found in one of the three caves of Hammam 'Afra, south of Wadi 'Afra and Wadi el-Hasa, mention John the abbot and the hermit Theodore, suggesting that the hermitage depended on a nearby monastery.[50] The caves were equipped with a cistern for collecting rainwater and finely decorated with paintings representing crosses, fish and birds.

In *Palaestina* recluses are attested in communal monasteries and as founders of their own monasteries. John the Hesychast lived in a cell in the Great Laura (*Vita Sabae* 62, 75), while John and Elias had their own monasteries, and four recluse monks are mentioned in Scythopolis.[51] One of them, Elias, whose name is recorded in the Greek inscription of the monastery of Lady Mary, probably dwelt in one of the towers of the city walls.[52]

The list of the archimandrites of *Arabia*, dated most probably to 570 CE, and therefore composed during the reign of Justin II, contains 137 subscriptions and allows at least 8 monks to be identified as recluses. Some dwelt in monasteries associated with the Arabs, and most likely with Ghassanid power and patronage.[53] However early monastic sources rarely refer to stylites. Cyril of Scythopolis mentions a certain Pancratius, a stylite who took part at the council held in Constantinople in 553 CE with other delegates from the Judaean desert monasteries (*Vita Sabae* 90).[54]

Some archaeological evidence suggests that the habit of retreating on columns was also known in the area. According to Peña, the remains of a large column made of ten drums (1.22 m in diameter, reaching 4.98 m in height) at Khirbet Deir al-Amoud, north-west of Siyar el-Ghanam in the Judaean desert,

[48] Saller, *Memorial*, 110–11. According to John Rufus (the biographer of the *Life*), the cell was 5 cubits in size and not very bright (*Life of Peter the Iberian* 118 [ed. Horn and Phenix, *Lives*, 172–73]). Palladius recounts the duration of the seclusion of some Desert Fathers: Nathaniel spent thirty-seven years in his cell, and Dorotheus remained in his for sixty years (*Historia Lausiaca* 2.1 and 16.3 [ed. Meyer, *Lausiac History*]); Brooks Hedstrom, "Geography," 756.

[49] The habit was introduced by Euthymius, was attested by monks following the rule of Sabas, and was still practiced in the eighth century as attested in the *Life of St Stephen the Sabaite*. Di Segni, "Greek Inscriptions," 449; Piccirillo, *Arabia Cristiana*, 106–09; Pirone, *Vita*, 85, 97.

[50] See Piccirillo, "Epigraphical Note," 363–64.

[51] Di Segni, "Greek Inscriptions," 450.

[52] The Monastery of the Lady Mary was built near the walls on the northern edge of the city. Its construction probably took place around the mid sixth century. See Tsafrir and Foerster, "Urbanism," 104. John of Ephesus recounts a recluse named Andrew who was expelled from his tower by the supporters of the church council of Chalcedon (John of Ephesus, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 54).

[53] Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs*, 824–25.

[54] Cyril of Scythopolis provides no information regarding the monk's origin. See Baldelli, Mortari and Perrone, *Storie*, 355.

can be identified with the abode of a stylite. The column stood at the centre of an enclosure (*mandra)* measuring roughly 12 m on each side, and was associated with a small monastery and an oil press.[55]

At Ramat Bet Shemesh, located 25 km southeast of Jerusalem, excavations uncovered the remains of a monastery comprising a basilical church, an elongated narthex, an open atrium, and an elaborate side chapel. The church complex is dated to the mid sixth century based on the Greek inscriptions uncovered in the mosaic pavement of the atrium. Not far from the monastery a large column drum was found, although one must exercise caution in interpreting it as evidence of a stylite having been there.[56]

## Ascetics in the Rural Context

Towers systematically mark the ascetic landscape of the rural areas of the *massif calcaire*, northeast of Hama and southwest of Aleppo in Syria, as demonstrated by those in Qirq Bizé, Kafr Kila, Deir Dehes, Banastour, Borjiké, Burj 'Akkouch, Dana, and Borj 'Abdallah, to mention just a few.[57] They speak to the spread of this practice in the Byzantine East and the attention it received among the rural population. Ascetics and stylites appeared as rightful contenders within the established status quo that favoured urbanite landowners as the traditional 'protectors' of the interests of rural communities, which grew due to the booming economy and growing population especially in the sixth century.

Villages and village dwellers were able to obtain blessing and protection from these ascetics who enjoyed a privileged position, following the example of Symeon Stylite the Elder.[58] Monastic Lives and hagiographic texts draw attention to the way specific sacred built environments developed over time around these columns, towers and caves. A pivotal role is attributed to the outstanding 'holy men' living secluded lives in their cells or in towers, located in or in close proximity to villages. Some chose familiar spots: according to Hieronymus, Hilarion chose to live in his native village of Thabatha (*Vita Sancti Hilarionis* 29); John Rufus mentions that Peter the Iberian settled in Palaea, near Ascalon (Ashkelon);[59] Symeon of Olives (Sham'un al-Zaytuni of Harran) founded the monastery of St Lazarus in his hometown Habsanas in the eighth century and also built a tower where monks would take turns practising seclusion.[60]

[55] The site was not excavated. See Peña, "Un Stylite," 143–46.

[56] Personal communication from Dr. Benyamin Storchan of the Israel Antiquities Authority.

[57] Peña, Castellana and Fernandez, *Les Reclus*, 252, 263 and 387.

[58] On the background and possible ascendance of pagan practices see: Frankfurter, "Stylites," 168–69; Ashkenazi, "Holy Man," 748–49.

[59] Rufus 105 (ed. Horn and Phenix, *Lives*, 157).

[60] Peña, *Vita*, 57.

The harsh practice of ascetics contributed to mythologizing monks during their lifetimes, while insight, healing and miracles attracted the attention of all social levels and drew crowds of pilgrims, enhancing the reputation of individual monastic communities over others. The coexistence of many holy men in the region and their connections to secular society during the sixth and seventh centuries is likely a reflection of this attitude.[61] Di Segni points out that about 31% of the correspondents of Barsanouphios and John, both recluses in the monastery of Abba Seridus near Gaza, were laymen.[62] Several references in the *Spiritual Meadow* of John Moschos point to the constant interaction between rural society and monastic communities.[63]

In this regard, the strong social impact of recluses can be evinced from the mosaic inscriptions of the monastery of Lady Mary (Beth Shean-Scythopolis) dated, according to Fitzgerald, to 567 CE.[64] The mosaic text in Chapel G, located at the southeast corner in proximity to a tomb, states that Elias the *enkleistos* shall "curse and anathematize everyone" who may hinder Lady Mary or any of her family members from being buried in that spot, or those who dare to remove his inscription.[65]

## Stylites and Recluse Monks in the Islamic Period

The material evidence examined here provides sufficient information to recognize that a monastic centre flourished around the tower of Mefa'a (Umm er-Rasas), although no mention of it is recorded in the Byzantine sources of the time. The site appears instead in the biography of the prophet Mohammed written by the Arab author Ibn Hisham (d. 834 CE), which was based in turn on earlier material collected by Ibn Ishaq (d. 768 CE). The account narrates that a certain Zayd Ibn ʿAmr ibn Nufayl had renounced polytheism and travelled from Mecca to Syria and Mesopotamia in search of the true faith.[66] The story details how he proceeded, questioning monks and rabbis on the true religion along the way, until he reached a monk in Mayfa'ah in the land of the

[61] Theodoret of Cyrrhus depicts the fear of villages that did not have a holy man or woman of their own. One village even seized a neighboring town's recluse, who was shortly thereafter kidnapped back. See Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Historia religiosa*, 19, and Öğuş in this volume.

[62] Lovato and Mortari, *Epistolario*; Di Segni, "Monk and Society," 32; Perrone, "Monasticism," 51–52.

[63] Di Segni, "Monk and Society," 33–35.

[64] Fitzgerald, *Monastery*, 15–16.

[65] The same chapel contained the tomb of Georgia, the recluse's sister. Fitzgerald, *Monastery*, 14–15; also Starr, "Byzantine Inscriptions," 87–88.

[66] Griffith, "Mayfa'ah," 51–52. The reference to Mayfa'ah follows the transcription of the toponym in the Arabic sources.

Balqa. This monk prophesied to him the arrival of Islam in Mecca through the prophet Mohammed.[67]

Later authors like al-Halabi Nur ed-Din, writing in the seventeenth century and quoting Ibn Asakir (twelfth century), inaccurately indicated that Mayfa'ah was the spot where Mohammed met Bahira, the monk who, according to Islamic tradition, recognized the signs of Mohammed's prophetic vocation already in his youth.[68] At any rate, the reference to Mayfa'ah must not be viewed as a mere coincidence: a possible explanation could be that this location, well defined by specific architectural features, maintained a tradition that was familiar to Arab authors of the Umayyad period. One also should not forget the relevance of the ascetic movement at the core of Islamic mysticism, known as *zuhd*, that was connected specifically to Arab monks in Syria and Mesopotamia.[69] Arab poets often mention stylite and ascetic monks, comparing the lamps they lit at night to beacons guiding the caravans;[70] others, such as the Christian-Arab al-Akhtal al-Taghlibi (d. 708) in his *Diwan,* swore by "the name of God of the ascetics walking on the summit of their columns".[71] According to Yahya ben Yahya, the Caliph al-Walīd ibn Abd al-Malik (r. 705–715 CE), while inspecting one of the minarets of the Great Mosque of Damascus, is reported to have found a monk using it for his ascetic practice.[72]

In *Arabia*, strong evidence of this practice survives in the small monastery of the Theotokos at 'Ain al-Kanisah near Mount Nebo. The complex comprised a chapel, tombs, service rooms, internal court, and a cistern.[73] The remains of a small tower east of the spring may bear witness to the practices of seclusion. The Greek inscriptions imbedded in the mosaic floor of the chapel, attesting its renovation in 756 CE, mention Abba Longinus the stylite and George the recluse,[74] providing tangible evidence of the coexistence of various forms of

[67] Guillaume, *Life*, 103.

[68] Griffith, "Mayfa'ah," 52; Griffith, "Muhammad," 148; Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs*, 189.

[69] Lemmes, *Etudes*, 248; Peña, Castellana, and Fernandez, *Les Stylites*, 46–47; Bowman, *Monastic Life*, 149–50.

[70] Lemmes, *Etudes*, 243; Peña, *Vita*, 48. The poem refers indirectly to the location of stylite towers and columns on communication routes.

[71] Al-Akhtal, *Diwan*, 71,5; Lemmes, *Etudes*, 244.

[72] The Caliph told the man to leave, but the monk, apparently talking incessantly, paid no attention to the Caliph, who had to drag the monk out of the minaret by the scruff of his neck. Sauvaire, "Description," 189; Peña, Castellana, and Fernandez, *Les Stylites*, 47; Foran, "Stylites," 70.

[73] Piccirillo, "Due iscrizioni," 521–22; a hypogeum tomb was built in the façade of the church. See Piccirillo, "Chapelle," 418–19; Foran, "Stylites," 77.

[74] The mosaic pavement underwent some substantial remodeling in the eighth century. According to the accurate observation of Leah Di Segni, the first inscription mentioning the stylite, located near the steps leading to the presbytery, displays some paleographical aspects that point to a date in the late sixth or seventh century, while the second, which refers to the recluse, was added together with the date of renovation in 756 CE. Di Segni, "Greek Inscriptions," 448.

monastic asceticism in the Umayyad period.[75] The religious landscape of the monastery of the Theotokos, with the tower located downhill to the east, offers analogies to Umm er-Rasas, pointing to the fact that forms of seclusion could flourish at the core of coenobitic communities, or triggered the development of small monasteries around the cell of an ascetic monk.[76]

In *Palaestina*, stylitism, originating from *Bilad ash-Sham*, remained limited to some isolated cases that attracted the attention of travelling pilgrims after the ninth century.[77] Most evidence points to the survival of stylite cults adjacent to important sanctuaries, especially in the Holy Land. The monk Athanasios of Sinai mentions that a disciple of a Damascene stylite named John dwelled on a column in Diospolis (Lydda).[78] In the *Commemoratorium de Casis Dei*, dated around 808, two hermits are reported to reside on columns, following the example of St Symeon in Bethlehem,[79] and a third hermit dwelling on a column is mentioned at Shechem (Neapolis) in Samaria.[80] According to apparently inaccurate remarks made by Epiphanios (*De situ Terrae Sanctae*, 8), who travelled the Holy Land in the ninth century, there was a monastery at Gethsemane with 100 secluded women who were fed through a window by a stylite.[81] Much more interesting in this regard is the colophon of the Georgian *Parakletike* (*Sin. Geo.* 13) conserved in Sinai and dated to 1044 CE. The manuscript was written by Peter, a stylite from Jerusalem, and acknowledges his ascending the column after the death of his spiritual master: "[t]his Saint Parakletike was written on the tomb of Saint Virgin in Saint Gethsemane (litt.: Gesmia), at the place where all (people) gather, in the pillar of my spiritual master Zakaria, who passed away on Sinai, may his grace help us, amen".[82]

The tradition continued into the twelfth century, as the Russian Abbot Daniel saw a stylite living on the Mount of Olives, near the cave with the tomb of St Pelagia, during his travels in the Holy Land in 1106 and 1107 CE.[83] He

75 Piccirillo, "Due Iscrizioni," 525–29; Di Segni, "Greek Inscriptions," 448–50. In Qasr Brad a tower and a stylite column (now lying on the ground) are located in the same area. Schachner, "Archaeology," 348.

76 Piccirillo, "Monastic Presence," 216–17.

77 A decline of the stylite movement in Byzantium in the ninth century was followed by a revival in the tenth century. Kazdhan, "Hermitic," 473–74; Kazhdan and Ševčenko, "Stylite," 1971; Peña, Castellana, and Fernandez, *Les Stylites*, 82–84.

78 Bagatti, "Stiliti," 67.

79 McCormick, *Charlemagne's Survey*, 209.

80 Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims*, 255–56; McCormick, *Charlemagne's Survey*, 54–56.

81 Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims*, 212.

82 Monastery of St Catherine, Sinai, *MS Sin. Geo.* n. 13, f. 270v (Aleksidze *et al.*, *Catalogue*, 387). Other cases of stylites as authors can be mentioned, for example: a former stylite, Pseudo-Dionysius of Tall Mahre, a resident at the monastery of Zuqnin near Amida, wrote a universal chronicle (*Vatican Syriac 162*) in 774/775 CE; John of Athareb, a stylite, also wrote a chronicle in the eighth century. See Harrak, *Chronicle*, 8–9.

83 Wilkinson, Hill and Ryan, *Jerusalem Pilgrimage*, 135.

mentions another one in old Bethlehem.[84] John Phocas, who went on pilgrimage in 1177 CE, reports that he visited the tomb of John, "a famous stylite", near the Laura of Sabas.[85] He also provides vivid details of his encounter with an Iberian hermit living on a column near the destroyed church of St Gerasimus. The Georgian worked miracles and was possessed by divine grace. He even persuaded two lions to bring him wood from the Jordan river to fabricate crosses which he gave as blessings to visitors.[86] The chronologically last mention of stylites is provided by the twelfth-century Cypriot abbot Neophytos the Recluse in his *Narratio de monacho Palaestinensi* (ch. 16–17). He reports the story of a Georgian monk, Gabriel the Stylite, who after living as a recluse for eleven years requested admittance to the monastery of St Sabas in the Judaean desert around 1160 CE. After several years, he was permitted to live as a stylite. The poor monk, unable to cope with the austerity and extreme harshness of his new life, began to suffer tremendous hallucinations, and, tormented by demons, abjured the Virgin Mary and started to worship the Devil instead of Christ. He even descended from the column and attempted to murder a solitary monk named David.[87] The abbot of the monastery sent him to the monastery of St Euthymius to seek a cure, where he stayed until the fall of Jerusalem to Salah ed-Din in 1187 CE. Then the monk, fleeing from St Euthymius to St Sabas, fell into the hands of the Arabs who took him to Damascus.[88]

## Conclusion

Archaeological evidence and literary sources point to the diversity of ascetic practices. Recluse monks are attested in several contexts in *Arabia* and *Palaestina* from the mid-fifth century onwards, some living in monastic cells, in or close to monastic communities. They not only enabled further the spread of monasticism in the region, but also contributed to the creation of sacred areas by encouraging devotional practices and attracting devotees on the local and regional levels. The tower complex of Umm er-Rasas reflects the way extreme ascetic practices were adapted to the local environment, spreading probably to

[84] Wilkinson, Hill and Ryan, *Jerusalem Pilgrimage*, 144, and Caseau and Messis in this volume.

[85] "Close to it [i.e. the church of Sabas] and around it in the ground one sees the monuments of the Holy Fathers who lived their glorious lives in the desert. And among them one sees also the tombs of the ancient Poets, Cosmas and John: near them those of the forty inspired men who were chosen from the rest, and of whom six spoke directly with God. Their names are Stephen, Theodore and Paul. The fourth came from the great city, the fifth was an Iberian, and the sixth, famous for his spiritual vision, was the Stylite John". See Wilkinson, Hill and Ryan, *Jerusalem Pilgrimage*, 327.

[86] Wilkinson, Hill and Ryan, *Jerusalem Pilgrimage*, 329–30.

[87] Delehaye, *Saints stylites*, 170–71; Bagatti, "Stiliti," 67.

[88] Delehaye, *Saints stylites*, 172–73; a marginal note in the manuscript refers that Gabriel resumed his life as "silentiary". Patrich, *Introduction*, 15.

the area when Christian-Arab *foederati* moved there from Syria, where these practices are mostly attested.[89]

Nonetheless, stylitism according to the written sources is attested in *Arabia* and *Palaestina* only around the seventh century. One possible reason is that Palestinian monasticism developed mostly in the desert, governed by geo-morphological and harsh climatic conditions that did not favour such movement. Other factors that caused such late development may lie in the area's particular historical circumstances: economic fluctuations, natural disasters, and consequences of the Persian invasion and the Arab conquest.[90] The loss of the protection of Constantinople hindered the expansive phase of monasticism, depopulated communal monasteries, and forced the mobility of monks, allowing the practice to arise beyond Syria, leading to its revival in Mesopotamia, Anatolia, *Palaestina* and *Arabia*.[91] The Chronicler of Zuqnin mentions that, in northern Syria, antagonisms grew between the two communities especially during the governorship of Musa bin Mus'ab (governor of Musul in 769–770 CE) to an extent that "[t]hey attacked hermits, recluses, and stylites bringing down many from their pillars and driving recluses out of their cells".[92]

At the same time, as Patrich argued, monastic communities became more Arabic-speaking, novices came from among the Melkites of former *Palaestina*, *Arabia* and Syria as part of the new Jund established after the Arab Conquest, while Arabic replaced Greek as the literary language.[93] Whether stylitism in the area should be viewed as a form of Christian life designed to attract attention and to re-solidify devotional practices in areas where Christian communities were prosperous, or rather as a specific phenomenon of later monasticism under Umayyad and Early Abbasid rule, still requires further research. However, the legacy of these mediators between heaven and earth left an enduring mark on the surrounding spatial environment and on the lives of their contemporaries and beyond.

## Acknowledgements

The author gratefully acknowledges the contribution of several colleagues and friends: Barbara Crostini for her warm invitation to contribute to this volume; Fr. Giovanni Claudio Bottini OFM, Fr. Eugenio Alliata OFM, Fr. Rosario

[89] Ghassanid dynastic names are attested in Nitl and in Tall al-'Umayri East not far from Umm er-Rasas.

[90] On the effects of these events on the monasticism of the Judaean desert see: Patrich, "Impact," 208–09; McCormick, *Charlemagne's Survey*, 159–63; Bowman, *Monastic Life*, 69–77.

[91] According to Callot and Gatier, stylitism in the area of Antioch suffered a clear regression from the seventh century onwards. Callot and Gatier, "Stylites," 587.

[92] Harrak, *Chronicle*, 294.

[93] Patrich, "Impact," 218; Griffith, "Greek into Arabic," 117–20.

Pierri OFM from the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum of Jerusalem, and to APAAME (Aerial Photographic Archive for Archaeology in the Middle East) who generously shared publications and images; Leah Di Segni and Benyamin Storchan for kindly bringing to my attention recent research in Israel; Paolo Cesaretti and Michel Kaplan for their kind suggestions; and especially Tamar Pataridze for the translation of the colophon of the Sinai Georgian manuscript.

## Bibliography

### Sources

Al-Akhtal, *Diwan*, ed. Antun Salhani. Beirut, 1891–1892 (in Arabic).

Harrak, Amir. *The Chronicle of Zuqnin* Parts III and IV A.D. 488–775. Medieval Sources in Translation 36. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1999.

John of Ephesus, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, ed. E.W. Brooks, vol. III, Louvain, 1936.

John Rufus, *The Lives of Peter the Iberian, Theodosius of Jerusalem, and the monk Romanus*, edited and translated by Cornelia B. Horn and Robert R. Phenix Jr. Atlanta: Society for Biblical Literature, 2008.

Guillaume, Alfred. *The Life of Mohammad: A Translation of Ibn Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah*. Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1978.

Leonzio di Damasco, *Vita di Santo Stefano Sabaita: testo arabo, introduzione e note*, ed. B. Pirone. Studia Orientalia christiana Monographiae 4. Cairo and Jerusalem: Terra Santa Edizioni, 1991.

Lovato, Teresa M.F. and Luciana Mortari. *Barsanufio e Giovanni di Gaza, Epistolario*. Roma: Città Nuova, 1991.

Moschus, John. *The Spiritual Meadow*, trans. John Wortley. Collegeville, Mi: Cistercian Studies, 2008.

Palladius, *The Lausiac History*, trans. Robert T. Meyer. New York: Newman Press, 1964.

Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *A History of the Monks of Syria*. Translated by R.M. Price. Kalamazoo: Cistercian Studies, 1985.

### Secondary Literature

Acconci, Alessandra. "L'arredo liturgico." In *Umm al-Rasas Mayfa'ah I. Gli scavi del complesso di Santo Stefano*, edited by Michele Piccirillo and Eugenio Alliata, 290–317. Jerusalem: Franciscan Press, 1994.

Aleksidze, Zaza, Mzek'ala, Sanize, Xevsuriani, Lili, and K'avt'aria, Mixeil (eds). *Catalogue of Georgian Manuscripts Discovered in 1975 at St. Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai*. Athens: Greek Ministry of Culture – Mount Sinai Foundation, 2005.

Ashkenazi, Jakob. "Holy Man Versus Monk. Village and Monastery in the Late Antique Levant: Between Hagiography and Archaeology." *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 57 (2014): 745–65.

Bagatti, Bellarmino. "Gli stiliti in Palestina." *La Terra Santa* 1/25 (1950): 62–67.

Boero, Dina. "The Space of the Stylite: Columns and their Topographical Contexts." *Studies in Late Antiquity* 8/2 (2024): 159–207.

Bowman, Bradley. *Christian Monastic Life in Early Islam*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021.

Brooks Hedstrom, Darlene L. "The Geography of the Monastic Cell in Early Egyptian Monastic Literature." *Church History* 78, no. 4 (December 2009): 756–91.

Buckingham, James Silk. *Travels Among the Arab Tribes Inhabiting the Countries East of Syria and Palestine*. London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1825.

Bujard, Jacques. *Kastron Mefaa. Un bourg à l'époque byzantine. Travaux de la mission archéologique de la Fondation Max van Berchem a Umm al-Rasas, Jordanie (1988–1997)*. Fribourg: University of Fribourg, 2016.

Butler, Howard Crosby. *Publications of an American Archaeological Expedition to Syria in 1899 – 1900 (vol. 2): Architecture and Other Arts*. New York: The Century Co., 1903.

Callot, Olivier and Pierre-Louis Gatier. "Les stylites de l'Antiochène." *Topoi. Orient-Occident*. Supplément 5 (2004): 573–96.

Cozzolino, Marilena, Gabrielli, Roberto, Galatà, Pasquale, Gentile, Vincenzo, Greco, Giorgia, Scopinaro, Eleonora. "Combined Use of 3D Metric Surveys and Non-Invasive Geophysical Surveys at the Stylite Tower (Umm ar-Rasas, Jordan)." *Annals of Geophysics* no. 62/3 (2019): 1–9.

Delehaye, Hippolyte. "Les saints de Chypre." *Analecta Bollandiana* 26 (1907): 161–301.

Delehaye, Hippolyte. "Les femmes stylites." *Analecta Bollandiana* 27 (1908): 391–92.

Delehaye, Hippolyte. *Les Saints stylites.* Subsidia hagiographica 14. Paris: Picard, 1962.

Di Segni, Leah. "The Greek Inscriptions." In *Mount Nebo. New Archaeological Excavations 1967–1997*, edited by Michele Piccirillo and Eugenio Alliata, 425–67. Jerusalem: Franciscan Press, 1998.

Di Segni, Leah. "Monk and Society. The Case of Palestine." In *The Sabaite Heritage in the Orthodox Church from the Fifth Century to the Present*, edited by Joseph Patrich, 31–36. Leuven: Peeters, 2001.

Doran, Robert. *The Lives of Simeon Stylites*. Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1992.

Frankfurter, David, T.M. "Stylites and *Phallobates*: Pillar Religions in Late Antique Syria." *Vigiliae Christianae* 44 (1990): 168–98.

Festugière, André-Jean. *Les Moines d'Orient*. Paris: Cerf, 1961.

Festugière, André-Jean. "La *Vie de Sabas* et les tours de Syrie-Palestine." *Revue Biblique* 70 (1963): 82–93.

Fitzgerald, Gerald M. *A Sixth-Century Monastery at Beth-Shan (Scythopolis)*. Philadelphia: The University Museum, University of Pennsylvania, 1939.

Foran, Debra. "The Stylites of Nebo: A Syrian Tradition in the Highlands of Central Jordan." *Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies* 5 (2005): 68–81.

Fulcherio, Ezio. "Relazione sui resti scheletrici rinvenuti nel reliquiario litico ritrovato in loco nella chiesa della Torre a Umm al-Rasas." *Liber Annuus* 57 (2007): 668–76.

Genequand, Denis. "Projet «Implantations Umayyades de Syrie et de Jordanie». Rapport de la mission de prospection (Juin/Juillet 2002)." In *Fondation Suisse-Liechtenstein pour les recherches archéologiques à l'étranger*, Jahresbericht 2002, 31–96.

Gessel, Wilhelm. "Das Öl der Märtyrer: Zur Funktion und Interpretation der Ölsarkophage von Apamea in Syrien." *Oriens Christianus* 72 (1988): 183–202.

Griffith, Sydney Harrison. "Greek into Arabic: Life and Letters in the Monasteries of Palestine in the Ninth Century." In *Arabic Christianity in the Monasteries of Ninth-Century Palestine*, edited by Sydney Harrison Griffith, 117–38. Aldershot: Ashgate, 1992.

Griffith, Sydney Harrison. "Mayfa'ah: Un sito dimenticato nella primitiva tradizione islamica." In *Umm al-Rasas Mayfa'ah I. Gli scavi del complesso di Santo Stefano*, edited by Michele Piccirillo and Eugenio Alliata, 51–54. Jerusalem: Franciscan Press, 1994.

Griffith, Sydney Harrison. "Muhammad and the Monk Bahīra: Reflection on a Syriac and Arabic Text from Early Abbasid Times." *Oriens Christianus* 79 (1995): 146–74.

Hamarneh, Basema. "Between Hagiography and Archaeology. Pilgrimage and Monastic Communities on the Banks of the River Jordan." In *Pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Journeys, Destinations, Experiences across Times and Cultures*, edited by Falko Daim, Johannes Pahlitzsch, Joseph Patrich, Claudia Rapp and Jon Seligman, 41–56. Byzanz zwischen Orient und Okzident, Band 19. Mainz: Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums, 2020.

Hamarneh, Basema and Luigi Marino. "Le torri stilite del Vicino Oriente. La torre di Umm er Rasas in Giordania." *Kermes* 121/34 (2021): 59–67.

Judd, Margaret A. "Commingled Crypts: Comparative Health among Byzantine Monastics in the Levant." *American Journal of Biological Anthropology* 172, no. 1 (2020): 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1002/ajpa.23993

Judd, Margaret A., Lesley Gregoricka, and Debra Foran. "The Monastic Mosaic at Mount Nebo, Jordan: Biogeochemical and Epigraphical Evidence for Diverse Origins." *Antiquity* 93 (2019): 450–67.

Kaplan, Michel. "L'espace et le sacré dans la Vie de Daniel le Stylite." In *Le sacré et son inscription dans l'espace à Byzance et en Occident. Études comparées*, edited by Michel Kaplan, 199–217. Byzantina Sorbonensia 18. Paris: Éditions de la Sorbonne, 2001.

Kazhdan, Alexander P. "Hermitic, Cenobitic and Secular Ideals in Byzantine Hagiography of the Ninth Through the Twelfth Centuries." *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 30/4 (1985): 473–87.

Kazhdan, Alexander P. and Nancy P. Ševčenko. "Stylite." In *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, edited by Alexander P. Kazhdan *et al.*, 3 vols, 3 :1971. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.

Kennedy, David. "Christianity in the Hinterland of Roman and Umayyad Philadelphia: Evidence and Inference in the Belqa." In *Text and the Material World. Essays in Honour of Graeme Clarke*, edited by Elizabeth Minchin and Heather Jackson, 227–42. Uppsala: Astrom Editions, 2017.

Kogan-Zehavi, Elena. "The Tomb and Memorial of a Chain-Wearing Anchorite at Kh. Tabaliya, Near Jerusalem." *Atiqot* 35 (1998): 135–49.

Kotli, Paula, Morgenstern, David, Nagar, Yossi, Katina, Corinne, ʻAdawi, Zubair. "Antiquity Validation by Amelogenin Peptidomica Profile: Sex Determination in an Ascetic Burial." *Research Square* (August 24, 2023), https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-3279131/v1

Lammens, Henri. *Etude sur le siècle des Omayyades*. Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1930.

Lash, Ahmad. "Kitabat ʻala judran Qusair ʻAmra al-Umaoui." *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 58 (2017): 7–36. (in Arabic)

Marino, Luigi and Michele Piccirillo. "La torre di Umm er-Rasas – Kastron Mefaa." In *Materiali da costruzione e tecniche edili antiche*, edited by Luigi Marino, 9–12. Florence: Alinea, 1991.

McCormick, Michael. *Charlemagne's Survey of the Holy Land. Wealth, Personnel, and Buildings of a Mediterranean Church between Antiquity and the Middle Ages*. Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2011.

Palmer, Edward Henry. *The Desert of the Exodus*. London: Bell and Daldy, 1871.

Patrich, Joseph. "The Sabaite Heritage: An Introductory Survey." In *The Sabaite Heritage in the Orthodox Church from the Fifth Century to the Present*, edited by Joseph Patrich, 1–27. Leuven: Peeters, 2001.

Patrich, Joseph. "The Impact of the Muslim Conquest on Monasticism in the Desert of Jerusalem." In *Le Proche-Orient de Justinien aux Abbassides. Peuplement et dynamiques spatiales*, edited by A. Borrut, M. Debié, A. Papaconstantinou, D. Pieri, P. Sodini, 205–18. Turnhout: Brepols, 2011.

Peña, Ignace, Castellana, Pasquale and Fernandez, Romualdo. *Les Stylites syriens.* Milan: Franciscan Press, 1975.

Peña, Ignace, Castellana, Pasquale, and Fernandez, Romualdo. *Les Reclus Syriens. Recherches sur les anciennes formes de vie solitaire en Syrie.* Jerusalem: Franciscan Press, 1980.

Peña, Ignace. "Un stylite dans les environs de Jérusalem." *La Terre Sainte* 5–6 (1982): 142–46.

Peña, Ignace. *La straordinaria vita dei monaci siri secolo IV–VI*. Milan: Edizioni Paoline, 1990.

Peña, Ignacio. *The Christian Art of Byzantine Syria,* trans. Eileen Brophy and Francisco Reina. Reading: Garnet Publishing Ltd., 1996.

Perrone, Lorenzo. "Monasticism in the Holy Land: From the Beginnings to the Crusaders." *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 45 (1995): 31–63.

Piccirillo, Michele. "An Epigraphical Note." In Burton MacDonald. "The Hermitage of John the Abbot at Hammam 'Afra, Southern Jordan." *Liber Annuus* 30 (1980): 363–64.

Piccirillo, Michele. *Chiese e mosaici della Giordania Settentrionale*. Jerusalem: Franciscan Press, 1981.

Piccirillo, Michele. *Chiese e mosaici di Madaba*. Jerusalem: Franciscan Press, 1989.

Piccirillo, Michele. "Les églises paléochrétiennes d'Umm er-Rasas (Jordanie): cinq campagnes de fouilles." *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 135/2 (1991): 273–94.

Piccirillo, Michele. "Le due iscrizioni della cappella della Theotokos nel Wadi 'Ain al-Kanisah sul Monte Nebo." *Liber Annuus* 44 (1994): 521–38.

Piccirillo, Michele. "La chapelle de la Théotokos dans le Wadi 'Ayn al-Kanisah au Monte Nébo en Jordanie." *Annual of the Department of Archaeology of Jordan* 39 (1995): 409–20.

Piccirillo, Michele. "The Monastic Presence." In *Mount Nebo. New Archaeological Excavations 1967–1997,* edited by Michele Piccirillo and Eugenio Alliata, 193–219. Jerusalem: Franciscan Press, 1998.

Piccirillo, Michele. *L'Arabia Cristiana. Dalla provincia imperiale al primo periodo islamico*. Milan: Jaka Book, 2002.

Piccirillo, Michele. "La chiesa del reliquiario a Umm al-Rasas." *Liber Annuus* 56 (2006): 375–88.

Saller, Sylvester. *The Memorial of Moses on Mount Nebo*. Jerusalem: Franciscan Press, 1941.

Saller, Sylvester and Bellarmino Bagatti. *The Town of Nebo*. Jerusalem: Franciscan Press, 1949.

Sansterre, Jean-Marie. "Les saints stylites du V$^{e}$ au XI$^{e}$ siècle. Permanence et évolution d'un type de sainteté." In *Sainteté et martyre dans les religions du Livre*, edited by Jacques Marx, 33–45. Bruxelles: Éditions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 1989.

Sauvaire, Henri. "Description de Damas." *Journal Asiatique,* mars-avril (1896): 185–285.

Savignac, Michel Raphael. "Sur les pistes de la Transjordanie méridionale." *Revue Biblique* 45/2 (Avril 1936): 235–62.

Schachner, Lukas Amadeus. "The Archaeology of the Stylite." *Late Antique Archaeology* 6 (2010): 329–98.

Schick, Robert. "Types of Burials in Churches in Jordan in the Byzantine and Early Islamic Periods." In *Death and Burial in the Near East from Rome to Islamic Times*, edited by Christoph Eger and Michael Mackensen, 171–80. MBA 7. Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2018.

Shahid, Irfan. *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century. Ecclesiastical History*, Vol. I, 2, Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1995.

Starr, Joshua. "The Byzantine Inscriptions of Bethshan-Scythopolis." *The American Journal of Philology* 58, 1 (1937): 83–89.

Tristram, Henry Baker. *The Land of Moab. Travels and Discoveries on the East Side of the Dead Sea and the Jordan*. London: J. Murray, 1873.

Tsafrir, Yoram and Gideon Foerster. "Urbanism at Scythopolis-Bet Shean in the Fourth to Seventh Centuries." *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 51 (1997): 85–146.

Tsagareli, Aleksandre. *Pamatniki gruzinskoi starini v Svetoi Zemle i na Sinai*. Pravaslavnei Palestinskii Sbornik 10. Sankt Peterburg: tipografia V.F. Kirshbauma, 1888. (in Russian)

Weser, Hermann. "Unter den Beduinen Moab's." *Mitteilungen des Vereins für Erdkunde zu Leipzig* (1872): 55–112.

Wilkinson, John. *Jerusalem Pilgrims before the Crusades*. Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1977.

Wilkinson, John, Hill, Joyce, and Ryan, William F. *Jerusalem Pilgrimage 1099–1185*. London: Hakluyt Society, 1988.

Wilson, Charles W. "Address Delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Fund." *Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement* 31, no. 4 (October 1899): 304–16.

MARIA RAFFAELLA MENNA

# Stylites of Cappadocia*

The landscape of Cappadocia, with its unique landscape of valleys, pillar- and cone-shaped rocks – the characteristic 'fairy chimneys' – formed by erosion of the volcanic deposits [Fig. 1], has accommodated forms of monastic life since the early Christian period and the region played a particularly important role in the Byzantine church.[1] It was here that the thinking of the Cappadocian fathers – Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa[2] – originated and Basil developed a model of cenobitic monastic life that would become the most widespread in the Byzantine world.[3]

Cappadocia was a region steeped in profound spirituality, where the presence of natural caves and the ease with which the rock could be excavated favoured the spread of monastic cave settlements, some of which were very complex and featured churches, funerary chapels and refectories linked to residential complexes and production facilities. These were placed alongside the residential structures of the landed aristocracy, who were closely linked to the capital and owned vast estates in Cappadocia.[4] The largely rural region, with just two

* This research began within the survey of Tuscia University (Viterbo, Italy), *Painting in the Rock Churches in Cappadocia. For a project of knowledge, restoration and enhancement*, directed by Professor Maria Andaloro, of whose team I have been a member since 2013. Images of landscape, settlements and rock paintings of Cappadocia in this article are from the survey archive (photographs: Gaetano Alfano, Domenico Ventura).

[1] On the formation of the Cappadocian landscape Akin and Orhan, "Geological Structure," 119–24; Andaloro, "Natura," 202–04. On the agrarian landscape and the changes to it Haldon, "Cappadocia," 215–30; Cooper and Decker, *Life and Society*, 49–67; Barbera, "Agrarian Practices," 102–03.

[2] Van Dam, *Becoming Christian*; Métivier, *Cappadoce,* 171–322.

[3] Cooper and Decker, *Life and Society,* 110–11; Cremaschi, "Vita comune"; Bordino, "Development," 95–98. The Cappadocian church had close ties with the Holy Land and played a key role in the spread of the Christian faith, towards more eastern kingdoms such as Armenia and Georgia: Gain, *Église de Cappadoce*, 6–7; Métivier, *La Cappadoce,* 252–66.

[4] The exclusively monastic vision of Cappadocia (Kostof, *Caves of God*; Rodley, *Cave Monasteries*) was reviewed in studies carried out in recent decades through the identification and study of 'courtyard' residential complexes: Mathews and Daskalaris-Mathews, "Islamic Style"; Kalas, "Cappadocia"; Ousterhout, *Visualizing Community*, 271–368 and previous bibliography.

*Fig. 1. Cappadocia, landscape. Archive of Tuscia University's Mission in Cappadocia.*

important cities, Caesarea (Kayseri) and Melitene (Malatya), was of strategic importance for defending the empire because it bordered with the Arab caliphates along the Taurus mountain range and the course of the River Lamos.[5]

The presence of paintings in churches and burial chapels from the sixth to the thirteenth century demonstrates the importance and continuity of the monastic settlements over time, up to the conquest of the territories by the Seljuk Turks.[6]

Cenobitic monasticism prevailed in Cappadocia, but hermitic practices were also widespread and referred to in the writings of the Fathers of the Church: Basil mentioned rocks and caves as places that awaited him;[7] Gregory of Nazianzus, in a letter to Basil dated 361 CE, described the place where he had withdrawn to spend time as a hermit – probably the Ihlara Valley – as deserted, wild and particularly difficult to reach.[8]

Later on, the same natural conformation of the region, with its rocky cones and pinnacles, favoured forms of stylite monasticism: rocky cones were particularly suited to the needs of ascetics who wanted to imitate the lifestyle of Saint Simeon the Elder and Saint Simeon the Younger.[9]

[5] Haldon and Kennedy, "Arab-Byzantine Frontier."

[6] Studies on painting in Cappadocia started in the 1920s with the Jesuit priest Guillaume de Jerphanion who conducted the first study and documentation campaigns. De Jerphanion, *Nouvelle province;* Thierry and Thierry, *Nouvelles églises*; Restle, *Byzantine Wall Painting;* Thierry, *Haute Moyen-Âge,* I; Thierry, *Haute Moyen-Âge*, II; Jolivet-Lévy, *Cappadoce médiévale*; Thierry, *Cappadoce;* Jolivet-Lévy, *Un siècle après*; Ousterhout, *Visualizing Community*; Andaloro, "Cappadocia."

[7] Basil of Caesarea, *Epistola CI ad Amphilochium*, IV, ed. Deferrari, Saint Basil*, Letters*, 370–71; Thierry, *Cappadoce*, 201.

[8] Gregory of Nazianzus, *Epistula IV a Basilio di Cesarea*, ed. Barrois, *Fathers Speak*, 19.

[9] Bordino, "Development," 94.

*Fig. 2. Kızılçukur Valley. Archive of Tuscia University's Mission in Cappadocia.*

## Rocks as columns

In Kızılçukur Valley (Red Valley) [Fig. 2] and Paşabaği Valley (Valley of the Monks) [Fig. 3] two hermitages of stylite monks remain: that of the monk Nicetas in Kızılçukur[10] and that of the monk Simeon in Zelve, in Paşabaği Valley.[11] In both cases the term 'stylite' is attested in the inscriptions.[12] They were 'Cappadocian stylites' who, instead of living on columns, lived in cells carved into the top part of cones; these cells have been partly preserved to this day.

The possibility of the stylite's column being replaced by other tall elements is also attested in other instances. The sources, mostly hagiographies, report that in some cases ancient buildings were used instead of a column.[13] St Alypios is mentioned in the sixth century in relation to a funerary monument with a column surmounted by the statue of a lion, an animal that he replaced with a cross, associating the place with the cult of St Euphemia;[14] in Constantinople in the thirteenth century stylites are mentioned on the column of Theodosius and of Arcadius;[15] and in the seventeenth century a stylite is mentioned on the lintel of the Temple of Olympian Zeus in Athens.[16]

[10] Schiemenz, "Die Kapelle"; Thierry, "Art Byzantine"; Ousterhout, *Visualizing Community,* 406.

[11] De Jerphanion, *Nouvelle province*, 351–80; Ousterhout, *Visualizing Community,* 406–09.

[12] The iscription of monk Nicetas in Kızılçukur is transcribed by Nicole Thierry (Thierry, *Haut Moyen-Âge*, ii, 255–81); the inscription of monk Simeon in Paşabaği Valley by Guillaume De Jerphanion (De Jerphanion, *Nouvelle province*, I.2, 577).

[13] Schiemenz, "Die Kapelle," 254–55.

[14] Delehaye, *Saints stylites,* CXLIX and *Vita,* c. 9

[15] Delehaye, *Saints stylites,* CXXXIII and CXLIX; De Clary, *Prise*, 92.

[16] Delehaye, *Saints stylites,* CXXXIV. It is depicted on a drawing attributed to J. Carey (Omont, *Athènes,* 22).

*Fig. 3. Paşabaği Valley. Archive of Tuscia University's Mission in Cappadocia.*

To protect the stylite, who lived on a narrow platform enclosed by a balustrade, there was a shelter, made of skins or other materials,[17] but sometimes, as was the case in Palestine, a closed cell was placed on top of the column and in such situations the column became ἐγκλεστήριος στῦλος, as John Phocas mentioned in 1177 in his description of the Holy Land with regard to the stylite John at the Holy Lavra of Saint Sabas.[18] The monk's reclusion is combined with ascesis on the column.[19] The variation between the two types of eremitism is also reported in other cases, for example for Neophytos the Recluse of Cyprus (1134 – after 1214) who, in the titles of his works, defined himself as Νεοφύτου τοῦ ἐγκλείστου, but is sometimes also referred to as a stylite.[20] After living for 17 years in the same cell, the saint, on moving to a new cell carved out higher up in the rock, compares this change to a process of ascension up to God, similar to that of the stylites whom he greatly admired.[21]

An alternative to the column in Georgia were the towers mentioned by Brosset. These were square towers close to monasteries, with a cell at the top to house hermits; they were known as swéti (column), like the one at the church of Oubé in Radcha mentioned in the inscription dated 1141[22] and the one that was still inhabited in 1848 at the Martvili monastery in Upper Svaneti.[23]

[17] Delehaye, *Saints stylites,* CLV–CLXII.

[18] PG CXXXIII, col. 952.

[19] Delehaye, *Saints stylites,* CXXXII and CLIX.

[20] Delehaye, *Saints stylites,* CXXXVIII; Galatariotou, *Making of a Saint*, 102–05.

[21] In particular Saint Alypius. Galatariotou, *Making of a Saint*, 104.

[22] Brosset, "Douzième rapport," 104; Delehaye, *Saints stylites,* CXXXI–CXXXII. The inscription mentions the monk John Simeon who thanked God for having been able to construct a monastery and a column in 1141.

[23] Brosset, "Septième rapport," 16–17; Delehaye, *Saints stylites,* CXXXV. In the following decades there were reports of a monk who referred to himself as a stylite in Tismana, Romania.

The fact that the hermit lived in isolation enclosed within a structure brings this type of eremitism closer to that of the recluse, but it is interesting how it is the term 'swéti' that unequivocally assimilates the condition of the saint enclosed at the top of the tower to that of the stylite.[24]

Confirmation that the column could be replaced by a natural, column-shaped element appears in the sources in reference to Mount Latmos, a highly important area for Eastern monasticism from the ninth century onwards.[25] In the Life of Paul the Younger it is recorded that in the time of Emperor Michael II (820–829) the monk Athanasios climbed a rock in the form of a column ἀχειροποίητον (not made by human hand), and remained there for 22 years.[26] A century later, Paul the Younger (+955), wishing to build a column on which to practise the ascetic life, was directed to use the same natural column as the monk Athanasios;[27] a monastic settlement was to be built around it, called ἡ λαύρα τοῦ Στύλου, a definition that offers an unequivocal analogy between a rocky pinnacle and column.[28]

This use, which could be called extensive, of the term stylite is also documented in Thessaly in relation to Gregory, the spiritual father of Saint Athanasius of Meteora (1303/4-1380) He lived in a hollow on the side – and not at the top – of a rock near Stagi, and since the rock was known as στύλος the saint took the epithet Saint Gregory Stylites (Γρηγόριος ὁ στυλίτης), even though he lived in the lower part of the rock.[29]

The Latmos testimony is similar to the Cappadocian cases where the demarcation between man-made and natural elements is more blurred, since all the structures, from monasteries to churches, from civil dwellings to production centres, are carved into the rock, as if made in the negative.[30] The 'stylites of Cappadocia' had their particular connotation in this very close relationship with the rock, despite also being closely linked to the tradition founded by Saint Simeon the Elder.

[24] In Georgia the devotion to stylite saints was very strong and widespread, in particular to Saint Simeon the Elder and to Simeon the Younger. To the latter the Georgians built the famous and impressive monastery near Antioch, on the Mons Admirabilis (541–565) (Djobadze, *Archeological Investigations*, 57–59. See also Lafontaine-Dosogne, "L'influence du culte").

[25] Wiegand, *Milet,* III–1, *Der Latmos,* 105–35.

[26] Τὸν ἀχειροποίητον τοῦτον ἀναβαίνει στύλον: *Vita S. Pauli,* 43; Delehaye, *Saints stylites*, CXXXII and CLIX; Schiemenz, "Die Kapelle," 254.

[27] Ὁ τοίνυν Ἀθανάσιος οὗτος ὁ τὸν στύλον ἀξιωθεὶς δείμασθαι, διερμηνεύει τῷ μεγάλῳ στύλον ἄλλον ἀψεροποίητον: *Vita S. Pauli*, 42.

[28] *Vita S. Pauli*, 43; Delehaye, *Saints stylites,* CXXXI, CXLVIII; Schiemenz, "Die Kapelle," 254–255; Jolivet-Lévy, "Contribution," 502. The church of the monastery conserves paintings datable to the early thirteenth century (Schiemenz, *Die Malereien*, 46–53; Peschlow-Bindokat, *Latmos*, 82, 84, fig. 116).

[29] Nicol, *Meteora*, 92.

[30] Andaloro, "Natura e figura," 189–92 and previous bibliography.

*Fig. 4. Kızılçukur, cone of the Monk Nicetas. Archive of Tuscia University's Mission in Cappadocia.*

## The Stylite Nicetas in the Kızılçukur Valley

The stylite Nicetas lived in the Kızılçukur Valley; his cell was in the highest part of the cone, while the church was in the lower part and preserves an image of Saint Simeon Stylites, which is probably the oldest one surviving as a wall painting [Fig. 4]. The church, known in Turkish as Üzümlü (Church of the Grapes), was excavated in the seventh century and the paintings, made after the monk's death at the behest of Eustratios *kleisourarch* of Zeugos and Klados, probably date to the same century.[31] It has a single nave with an apse and a narthex. In the apse there are depictions of the Theotokos with the child among angels, a series of apostles on the walls of the naos, and a luxuriant plant decoration with bunches of grapes on the vault [Fig. 5]. On the wall leading to the presbytery there is an important painting of the Crucifixion, with Christ dressed in the colobium, at whose sides are the Virgin and St. John the Evangelist [Fig. 6]. They are joined on the left by the figure of Saint Simeon Stylites, who is juxtaposed on the right by Saint John the Baptist, considered to be the initiator of hermitic life. The image of the stylite is in a prominent place and was clearly visible to the faithful as they entered the church.

Simeon [Fig. 7] is depicted on an imposing white column, simulating marble, which ends with a stylised, Ionic capital with a simple red band and two small side volutes. Directly above it is a large clipeus enclosing the half-bust image of the saint; above this an inscription in red letters states his name without specifying whether he is the Elder or the Younger, which would suggest that he is the Elder.[32]

Simeon's head is surrounded by a halo, and although the painting has suffered some damage in the area of the face, some distinctive features can be seen: the *koukoulion*, the typical headdress worn by monks, and a long dark beard.[33] In contrast to later depictions such as the portrait in the Menologion of Basil II

[31] Thierry, *Haut Moyen-Âge*, II, 255–81; Jolivet-Lévy, *Eglises*, 55–56, 346; Thierry, *Cappadoce*, entry 15; Jolivet-Lévy, *Un siècle après*, I, 153–54; Andaloro, "Cappadocia," 66–68. The paintings were dated to between the 7th and 8th centuries by Thierry (*Haut Moyen-Âge*, 255–81; Thierry, *Cappadoce*, entry 15); to within the late seventh century by Andaloro ("Cappadocia," 66–68). A dating to the post-iconoclastic period, at the end of the ninth century, was instead proposed by Schiemenz and followed by Ousterhout (Schiemenz, "Die Kapelle," 256–57; Ousterhout, *Visualizing Community*, 406).

[32] Jolivet-Lévy, "Contribution," 502–03. On the first depictions of Saint Simeon the Elder and Saint Simeon the Younger in the Syrian context in workshops linked to the large sanctuaries refer to Lafontaine-Dosogne, *Itineraires*, 169–96; Tomekovič, *Saints ermites*, 36–37.

[33] The iconography of Saint Simeon the Elder, like that of Saint Simeon the Younger, has two variants, with or without a headdress, the former spread in particular from the eleventh century as in the refectory of Udabno in the desert of Davit Gareja (Georgia) (Eastmond, *Udabno Monastery*) or the church of the Anargyroi in Kastoria (last decades of the twelfth century) (Pelekanidis, *Kastoria*, fig. 11; Malmquist, *Byzantine 12th-Century Frescoes*, 90), without entirely replacing the image without a headdress which is still found in the mosaics of Nea Moni on Chios (1049–55) (Mouriki, *Mosaics,* I, 171–76; II, pl. 87b). They can also have beards of various shapes: short and

*Fig. 5–7. Kızılçukur, Üzümlü (Church of the Grapes), vault and crucifixion scene with St Symeon. Archive of Tuscia University's Mission in Cappadocia.*

*Fig. 8–9 (next page). Città del Vaticano, BAV, Vat. gr. 1613, Menologion of Basil II, f. 2r, Simeon the Stylite the Elder; Moscow, Hist. Mus. MS. D.129, Khludov Psalter, f. 3v, Simeon the Stylite the Elder. PD-Art.*

(985 c.) (BAV, Vat. gr. 1613, f. 2) [Fig. 8], the bust is surrounded by a clipeus that connects directly to the column, without the balustrade that would later become a recurring element.[34] On the left side of the column there is a dedicatory inscription.

The direct connection between the end of the column and the clipeus containing the bust of the saint reveals the archaic nature of the composition; this element did not appear again thereafter and may be further proof of the early dating of the paintings.

In the miniature on f. 3v of the Khludov Psalter [Fig. 9] from the mid-ninth century, considered to be the earliest depiction of the saint in painting that can be dated with certainty, the saint is represented with short hair, bareheaded, with a medium-length beard that ends in a point, and is shown coming out of the shelter at the top of the column.[35]

The great importance of the image of Saint Simeon in the church is made clear by the dedication painted in letters next to the figure of Saint Simeon: "For the prayer and salvation and the forgiveness of sins of Nicetas, stylite, by the faith of the ascetic....".[36] This refers to the monk Nicetas, who is described as a stylite and ascetic, and therefore lived according to the teachings of Simeon the Elder.

Nicetas lived in this same cone, in the highest part, in a small chamber about 10 metres high, which is still partly preserved today [Fig. 10].[37]

rounded, long and pointed or divided into two parts, without these elements being distinctive (Tomekovič, *Saints ermites,* 37–38).

[34] Patterson Ševčenko, "The Imperial Menologia." The manuscript is available online at https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.gr.1613. The depiction on the column, as Tomekovič points out, is not so much an effigy as a 'scene of normal life for the saint' who lived for 47 years on a series of taller and taller columns near the monastery of Telanissos, the last of which reached 40 cubits (Tomekovič, *Saints ermites,* 38–39).

[35] Ščepkina, *Miniatjury*, c.3; Jolivet-Lévy, "Contribution," 510–11.

[36] Thierry, *Haut Moyen-Âge*, 266–67.

[37] Difficult to access today, it was the subject of a photo campaign in 2016. Andaloro, "Cappadocia," 70; Ousterhout, *Visualizing Community*, 406; Rodley, *Cave Monasteries*, 184–89.

There is a large sculpted cross on the vault, niches on the walls and a small room to the northeast.[38] Originally, an external staircase provided access to the room.[39] The ascetic appropriated the height of a natural cone to live in isolation and the column is perfectly replaced by the height of the rock from which Nicetas showed himself to the faithful, turning the cone into a sort of 'stone reliquary' that housed the sanctity of his life.[40]

*Fig. 10. Kızılçukur, Hermitage of the Monk Nicetas, cell. Archive of Tuscia University's Mission in Cappadocia.*

## The Stylite Simeon in Paşabaği Valley

In Paşabaği Valley (Valley of the Monks), around one kilometre from Zelve, now part of the site of the Paşabaği and Zelve Ruins [Fig. 3], is the hermitage of the monk Simeon. This hermitage preserves the only cycle of wall paintings depicting stories from the life of Saint Simeon Stylites.[41]

The site, with its numerous characteristic 'fairy chimneys' with multiple shafts and 'hats', houses numerous chapels and hermitages, signs of a strong monastic presence. Within an isolated cone, with separate entrances and different levels, we find the stylite's dwelling in the upper part and a single-nave church in the lower part [Fig. 11].[42]

The cell was accessed on the west side by a staircase carved into the rock, which featured simple notches used as footrests at the upper levels. The staircase leads to a quadrangular room that in turn, after a few steps, leads to the monk's cell. On the west wall of the cell there are two beds, complete with head pillows,

[38] Ousterhout, *Visualizing Community,* 406.

[39] Rodley, *Cave Monasteries*, 187.

[40] The expression was used by Andaloro, "Cappadocia," 71.

[41] De Jerphanion, *Nouvelle province*, I.2, 552–80; Thierry, *Haut Moyen Age*, II, 320–62; Thierry, *La Cappadoce*, entry 15; Lemaigre Demesnil, *Architecture*, 17–29; Gülyaz, "Paşabaği and Zelve," 193–99.

[42] De Jerphanion, *Nouvelle province*, I.2, 552–80; Giovannini, ed. *Arts*, fig. 27; Rodley, *Cave Monasteries,* 189–92; Jolivet-Lévy, *Les églises byzantines*, 7–12; Jolivet-Lévy, *Un siècle après*, 134–35; Ousterhout, *Visualizing Community*, 404–07.

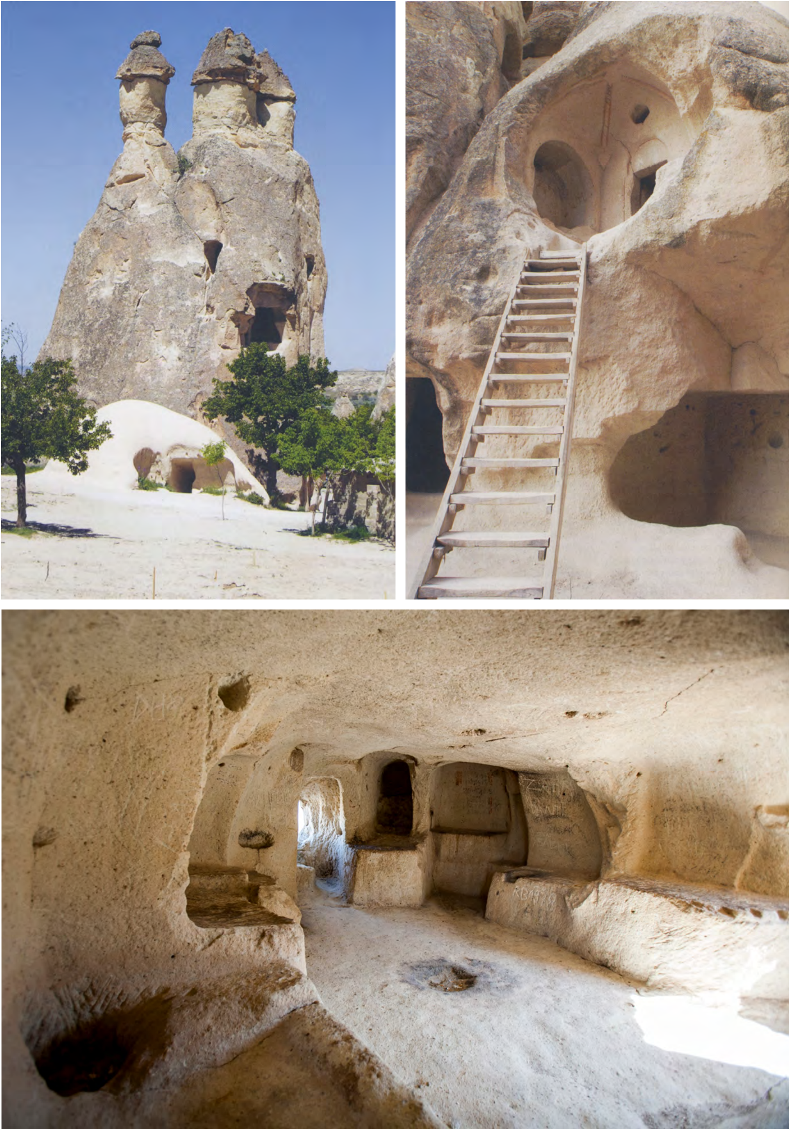

*Fig. 11–13. Paşabaği, Hermitage of the Monk Simeon. Archive of Tuscia University's Mission in Cappadocia.*

carved out of the rock, and on the opposite side there is a table and a deep niche probably intended to house an altar [Fig. 12].[43]

The church, accessed from the opposite side of the cone, has a deep narthex with an arcosolium at the northern end and four tombs dug into the floor

[43] Rodley, *Cave Monasteries,* 190–91*;* Ousterhout, *Visualizing Community*, 406 and 407 fig. 4.40; Jolivet-Lévy, *Un siècle après*, 134–35.

[Fig. 13].[44] Numerous graffiti on the walls invoke Saint Simeon Stylites, the saint to whom the building was likely dedicated.[45] The single-nave church was originally entirely painted. De Jerphanion left a detailed description of the paintings, most of which are now destroyed or difficult to read, and datable to the tenth century based on their similarity to the group of churches known as 'archaic'.[46] The apse shows Christ in a mandorla among four living beings, and on the south wall there is an unusual cycle with stories of Saint Simeon Stylites the Elder identified on the basis of the inscriptions accompanying the individual scenes, with other figures of saints on the walls.[47]

The cycle with the stories of Saint Simeon is unique in wall painting and has no relation with the only other known illustration of the saint's life in the miniatures of the Athonite codex Esphigmenou 14, dating to the eleventh century.[48] The stories unfold on the south wall in five scenes, from right to left, starting at the counter-façade – thus not following the normal reading direction, but rather the movement of the faithful towards the apse – and concluding on the east wall, where the imposing figure of Simeon on the column is placed on the right, depicted in half-bust with a short white beard, headdress and in a praying position.[49]

De Jerphanion noted that the inscriptions correspond precisely to the life of the saint written by the monk Anthony, a direct disciple of Simeon the Elder, known through Latin versions and, in particular, in the text used for the Bollandists' edition.[50] The inscriptions reveal that the redaction of the life of Saint Simeon was known in Cappadocia before the tenth century as it formed the basis for the Latin versions, and the paintings are the only evidence of the lost Greek text.[51]

[44] De Jerphanion, *Nouvelle province,* I.1, 55. There are two other arcosolia from a later period outside (Ousterhout, *Visualizing Community*, 406).

[45] De Jerphanion, *Nouvelle province,* I.2, 568–69.

[46] The definition "décorations archaïques" is by de Jerphanion and indicates a group of churches with similar figurative programmes characterised by the presence of numerous evangelical episodes and the same stylistic features. De Jerphanion, *Une nouvelle province*, I.1, 67–94; Jolivet-Lévy, *Un siècle après*, 19. Also: Cormack, *Byzantine Cappadocia*, 19–36.

[47] De Jerphanion, *Nouvelle province*, I.2, 553–69*;* Jolivet-Lévy, *Les églises byzantines*, 7–12; Jolivet-Lévy, *Un siècle après*, 135–36.

[48] Christopulos, Bardas, Pelekanidis, *Treasures*, II, 362, pls. 327–28. Jolivet-Lévy, "Contributions," 505.

[49] De Jerphanion, *Voix,* 137–38; De Jerphanion, *Nouvelle province,* I.2, 557–69. The paintings underwent a re-reading with minimum iconographic corrections by Jolivet-Lévy (Jolivet-Lévy, *Contribution*, 503–08 and figs. 3–4; Jolivet-Lévy, *Cappadoce médiévale*, 313–15; Tomeković, *Saints ermites*, 135–38, 296; Jolivet-Lévy, *Un siècle après*, 135). The paintings in the narthex were already destroyed by the time of Jerphanion (De Jerphanion, *Nouvelle province*, I.2, 552).

[50] *Acta Sanctorum*, Januarii Tomus Primus, 264–67.

[51] De Jerphanion, *Nouvelle province,* I.2, 566*;* Jolivet-Lévy, "Contributions," 504. On the life of Saint Simeon: Halkin, *Bibliotheca*, 256–59; Halkin, *Auctarium*, 175; Lietzmann, *Das Leben*; Delehaye, *Saints stylites*, I–XXIV.

On the south wall, the scenes graphically reconstructed by Jolivet-Lévy[52] follow one another with no division and sometimes without respecting the chronological order. Starting from the right, the first is made up of two figures and depicts the vocation of the young Simeon as he asked an old man to explain the meaning of "continence of the soul".[53] The second scene illustrates the moment when the hegumen of the monastery of Teleda, shown on the left wearing a headdress and scapular, accompanied by a monk, checked the form of penance that the saint had imposed upon himself by tying a rope of palm fibre around his waist, which had caused a deep maceration of the flesh. The saint has a naked torso and part of the rope running across his chest can be seen. The episode, mentioned in the long inscription, is only briefly described in the Life of Saint Simeon written by Theodoret of Cyrrhus,[54] while it is related in greater detail in the Life by the monk Anthony. This Life derives from an original lost Greek text and is known in different Latin versions that emphasise the malodorous condition of the sores that bothered the community of monks.[55] The inscription below reports the hegumen's questioning of Simeon about the cause of the foul odour, his order to the monks to undress him, his anger at the discovery of the rope macerating his skin and his order to remove it, but not without suffering since it had penetrated the flesh.[56]

The following scenes appear linked to each other and relate to miracles by the saint, who is never depicted in the scenes but only on the wall of the apsidal arch. The female figure, smaller than the previous figures, with a hand on her face as a sign of affliction, according to the inscription, represents the healing of a woman who had swallowed a small snake that had been growing in her stomach for three years.[57] At the bottom, a large snake, next to which De Jerphanion read the word 'wood' (ξύλον), is linked to the miracle of the snake that was wounded by a piece of wood stuck in its eye and had taken refuge at the saint's column, and was thereby healed.[58]

The last scene is more complex; it depicts Saint Simeon's mother addressing the saint on the column, painted, as said, only on the eastern wall, with her hands in a gesture of intercession, asking to see him again, even though women

[52] Jolivet-Lévy, *Contribution*, 503–08 and figs. 3–4; repr. in Jolivet-Lévy, *Cappadoce médiévale,* 314 (image) and in Tomeković, *Saints ermites*, fig. 158.

[53] De Jerphanion, *Voix,* 137–38; De Jerphanion, *Nouvelle province,* I.2, 558; Jolivet-Lévy, "Contribution," 505.

[54] PG LXXXII, col. 1468.

[55] *Acta Sanctorum*, Januarii Tomus Primus, 265 and 269.

[56] De Jerphanion, *Voix*, 139–44; De Jerphanion, *Nouvelle province*, I.2, 559–60; Jolivet-Lévy, "Contribution," 505–06.

[57] *Acta Sanctorum*, Januarii Tomus Primus, 267. De Jerphanion, *Voix,* 144–46; De Jerphanion, *Nouvelle province,* I.2, 561. The inscription once around the head of the figure indicated the duration of the illness.

[58] *Acta Sanctorum*, Januarii Tomus Primus, 271; De Jerphanion, *Voix,* 146–47; De Jerphanion, *Nouvelle province,* I.2, 562–63; Jolivet, "Contribution," 506.

were forbidden from approaching the column; in response Simeon says that they will see each other again soon, in the next life.[59] The figure of the mother stretched out is repeated above, when, after her sudden death, she is miraculously transported to the foot of the pillar; Saint Simeon entrusts his mother to the Lord and upon hearing his voice she miraculously awakens for a few moments, smiling.[60]

On the east wall, the figure of the saint on the column is not accompanied by any inscription. Due to the presence of the small figure dressed in a tunic embracing the column, De Jerphanion thought the image might refer to the episode of the repentant brigand who fled from Antioch and embraced the saint's column for seven days until his death,[61] but in the absence of inscriptions it is more likely to be the representation of a supplicant, as proposed by Jolivet-Lévy, who wished to highlight the saint's role as an intercessor as well as a thaumaturge.[62]

The only other cycle of Saint Simeon the Elder is in the miniatures of the codex Esphigmenou 14, and consists of just four entirely different episodes inspired by the text of the Menologion by Simeon Metaphrastes, which became widespread from the eleventh century onwards.[63] Fol. 2r depicts the arrival at the monastery of Teleda and, in the lower part, the penance in the well interrupted upon the order of the hegumen;[64] fol. 2v depicts the daily activity of the saint who blesses and welcomes knights and various kinds of people, and the lower part depicts Simeon's appearance to Daniel [Fig. 14].[65]

*Fig. 14. Simeon Metaphrastes, Menologion, stories of saint Simeon. Mount Athos, Esfigmenou Monastery. Cod. 14. PD-Art.*

In Paşabaği Valley, 120 metres to the east, there is another hermit-

[59] De Jerphanion, *Voix*, 147–49; De Jerphanion, *Nouvelle province,* I.2, 564–66. *Acta Sanctorum*, Januarii Tomus Primus, 266 and 271.

[60] De Jerphanion, *Voix*, 149–52; Jolivet-Lévy, "Contribution," 506–07.

[61] Jolivet-Lévy, *Un siècle après*, 135; pl. 43.3; *Acta Sanctorum*, Januarii Tomus Primus, 266.

[62] Jolivet-Lévy, "Contribution," 504, note 11. Jolivet-Lévy detected the presence of several female saints in the iconographic programme, a good seven in the wall of the counter-façade, which she interprets as a sign of the role played by a female figure in the chapel's foundation and in the choice of the iconographic programme. Jolivet-Lévy, "Contribution," 507–08; Jolivet-Lévy, *Un siècle après*, 135, pl. 132, 3–4.

[63] Tomekovič, *Saints ermites,* 135–38; Patterson Ševčenko, *Illustrated Manuscripts*.

[64] PG 114, 337–40 and 340–41; Christopulos, Bardas, Pelekanidis, *Treasures*, II, 362, pl. 327

[65] PG 114, 361–64 and 376–77; Christopulos, Bardas, Pelekanidis, *Treasures*, II, 362, pl. 328.

age with a chapel and two monastic cells, which de Jerphanion related to the church.[66] The narthex of the chapel houses the tomb of the monk Simeon within an arcosolium, excavated into the north side, which opens onto a burial chamber [Fig. 16]; around the arch there is a long epitaph painted in red letters on a white background, stating the name of the monk and the day of his death, though this was already missing the year by the time de Jerphanion made his transcription.[67] The long inscription reflects on human mortality and ends with the words "still living I prepared and excavated grave/ o, Tomb, receive me too, like (my namesake) the Stylite", and continues: "the servant of God Simeon the monk, died the ninth of June… in the year…"[68]

The word 'Stylite' is fully justified by the name of the deceased and by the desire to establish a comparison with the saint who inspired him; everything points to the idea that by choosing the life of the stylite saint as a model of life, the anchorite also took his name.[69] Opposite the church is the hermit's cell,

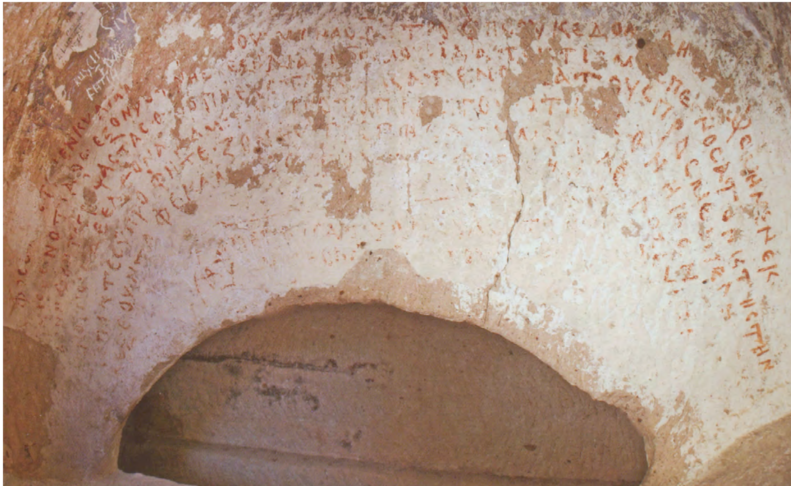

*Fig. 15. Paşabaği, Tomb of the Monk Simeon. Archive of Tuscia University's Mission in Cappadocia.*

[66] De Jerphanion, *Nouvelle province*, I.2, 571–77; Jolivet-Lévy, *Un siècle après*, 135–36. The interior of the church has paintings from different periods. The Theotokos in the apse with St George and St Christopher on either side can be dated to the eleventh century. Jolivet-Lévy, *Un siècle après*, 136; Ousterhout, *Visualizing Community*, 406.

[67] De Jerphanion, *Nouvelle province*, I.2, 577; Rhoby, *Byzantinische Epigramme*, 257–303; Jolivet-Lévy, *Un siècle après*, 136 and 135, pls. 1–2.

[68] De Jerphanion, *Nouvelle province*, I.2, 575–80. "I was formed an infant in my mother's womb. For nine months not consuming normal nourishment,/ I came out from my own mother/ I saw the creation, and I recognized the creator/ I [?learnt] the divinely-inspired scriptures/? and understood those sent to me/? Who came, sons of Adam, the first-created, /that he had died, and all the prophets./Still living, I prepared an excavated grave;/ so, tomb, receive me too, like (my namesake) the Stylite". The English translation of the inscription is in Rodley, *Cave Monasteries*, 192; Gülyaz, "Paşabaği and Zelve," 196.

[69] De Jerphanion proposed the integration of the word .ο.λ. ην in Στ]ο[ι]λ[ιτ]ην on Cumont's recommendation (De Jerphanion, *Nouvelle province*, I.2, 579).

with an arcosolium containing a bed carved into the rock and inscriptions with prayers by the monk Simeon.[70] On an upper level, accessed through a hole in the middle of the ceiling, there is a second cell with a niche on the east wall.[71]

De Jerphanion assumed that the monk Simeon mentioned in the inscription of the arcosolium is the same person as the one mentioned in the graffiti of the church containing the stories of Saint Simeon Stylites, based on the fact that the name Simeon was particularly rare in Cappadocia.[72] According to this hypothesis, Simeon himself, a Cappadocian stylite, may have been the patron of the church's painting programme depicting stories about the saint, and in his old age he would have moved to a more easily accessible cell, abandoning the previous cell in the cone of the church.[73] However, the graffiti in the narthex of the church, like the epitaph on his tomb, do not provide conclusive evidence for this connection. Ousterhout prefers to think of two different personalities separated by time: a first stylite monk living in the early tenth century, in relation to the church with the paintings about Simeon, and a second non-stylite monk who lived about a century later.[74] However, it must be stressed that the choice of name in both cases cannot be accidental and, taking into account the rarity of the name Simeon in Cappadocia, the second settlement, even if it was later, would testify to the rootedness and continuity of this practice of asceticism in Cappadocia.

Similar hermitages, with cells excavated inside cones close to churches and burial chambers, have also been found in Güllü Dere near the Ayvalı kilise (church no. 4 and church no. 5).[75]

## Other Images of Stylites in Cappadocia

In addition to the only cycle with stories of Saint Simeon, Cappadocia also preserves a large number of images, dating from the tenth century onwards, of stylite saints in different forms: half-bust on a column, full-length without a column, half-bust within a clipeus. These various representations took shape within the general process of broadening the Byzantine sanctoral, which in Cappadocia was documented prior to the dissemination of the first illus-

[70] De Jerphanion, *Nouvelle province*, I.2, 571; Ousterhout, *Visualizing Community*, 407; Jolivet-Lévy, *Un siècle après*, 136 and pl. 133.

[71] Ousterhout, *Visualizing Community*, 407.

[72] De Jerphanion, *Nouvelle province*, I.2, 571–80.

[73] Jolivet-Lévy, *Les églises byzantines*, 76–79.

[74] Ousterhout, *Visualizing Community*, 407. He notes that there is a burial site in the church and there was no need to make a different burial chamber for the stylite. The second settlement further to the east would not necessarily have been stylitic as the only mention of stylitism is in reference to the homonymy.

[75] Rodley, *Cave Monasteries*, 207–13; Lemaigre Demesnil, *Architecture rupestre*, 41–44, fig. 20.

trated edition of the Menologion by Symeon Metaphrastes.[76] As Jolivet-Lévy has pointed out, the presence of holy monks is only significant in a few cases where it is justified by the connection between the church and monastic complexes.[77] They are numerous: at Saint John's in Güllü Dere (913–920), linked to the Panagia monastery;[78] in the New Tokali (960), linked to the monastery dedicated to the archangels, as attested by the inscription on the cornice of the central nave;[79] in St. Eustachius, where there are numerous inscriptions with monks' prayers;[80] in Karabaş Kilise in Soğanli, where monks are painted among the patrons, and the monk Niphon, linked to the aristocratic Skepidis family, is mentioned in the inscription of the second pictorial phase in 1060.[81]

The depiction of the stylites –Simeon the Younger, Daniel, Alypius, Arsenius– is recurrent from the tenth century onwards. In the paintings in the New Tokali the image of Saint Simeon is in the northern apse, in a panel he shares with Anthony, Timothy, the rare St Epiphanius and the Stylite Arsenius [Fig. 16][82] Simeon is not depicted on a column but instead in an entirely original way on a pillar resting on three steps at the base and without a capital; the structure of the pillar is similar to a tower.[82] The shelter, unlike that in the Khludov Psalter, is rendered as a gabled structure, with classical architectural forms [cf. Fig. 9], which would not occur later. The inscription above, of which only a small part remains, has been interpreted as *Συμεόν*, identified as the Elder.[83] The saint, without a headdress, has white hair and a long pointed beard, a style which is generally more common for Saint Simeon the Younger.[84] The nearby Arsenius, with a damaged face, on the other hand, is not depicted on the column but standing, with short hair and a mid-length rounded beard, dressed

[76] Tomekovič, *Saints ermites,* 99. The oldest preserved examples of the Metaphrastic Menologion are from 1056 (Paris, BNF, ms gr. 580) and 1063 (Moscow, Historical Museum, ms 9).

[77] The absence of holy monks is justified in relation to the largely secular patrons, linked to the aristocratic families who lived on the region's estates and who for the most part financed the construction of the monasteries and burial chapels (Jolivet-Lévy, *Les églises*, 347; Jolivet-Lévy, *Cappadoce médiévale*, 29–32).

[78] Bordino, "Monk Saints"; Thierry, "Ayvalı Kilise," 99–101; Thierry, *Haute Moyen-Âge* I, 137–38.

[79] Wharton Epstein, *Tokalı kilise*, 33 and 79. Transcription in De Jerphanion, *Nouvelle province*, I.2, 304–07.

[80] Bordino, "Monk Saints."

[81] De Jerphanion, *Nouvelle province*, II.2, 334–39, 356–59; Jolivet-Lévy, *Les églises byzantines*, 267, 270; Jolivet-Lévy, *Après Jerphanion*, 273–77; Bordino, "Monk Saints." Monks are also depicted in the first decorative phase of the church.

[82] Jolivet-Lévy, "Contribution," 508–09; Tomekovič, *Saints ermites*, 37.

[83] De Jerphanion, *Nouvelle province*, I,2, 326; Wharton Epstein, *Tokalı kilise*, 68, fig 106.

[84] Jolivet-Lévy pointed out the difficulty of identifying the saint with certainty due to the variations in the iconography of Saint Simeon the Elder and Saint Simeon the Younger, since the Younger is often depicted with the same features as the Elder, and suggests that, on the basis of the largely disfigured inscription, which does not allow a certain identification, we cannot rule out the fact that this may be a different saint from Saint Simeon (Jolivet-Lévy, "Contribution," 508 n. 26).

*Fig. 16–17. New Tokali, north apse, Saint Antony and Saint Simeon; intrados of the arch of the prothesis, Saint Alypios. Archive of Tuscia University's Mission in Cappadocia.*

in a tunic and cape.[85] Alypius the Stylite is also depicted in the intrados of the arch of the prothesis, also full-length, without a headdress and in a praying position [Fig. 17].[86] In the church of St. Eustachius, which houses a number of rather rare saints, Saint Simeon was depicted full-length and without a column, both on the counter-façade, together with the stylite Arsenius, and on the south wall, now largely lost.[87]

There are many variations in how the physiognomy of the stylites is depicted: Arsenius, for example, is shown without a headdress in the New Tokali and with short hair and a short beard, while in St John's in Güllü Dere he has a headdress, grey hair and a long pointed beard that reaches his chest [Fig. 19];[88] similarly, Alypius may have long or mid-length hair covering his ears.[89]

[85] The saint was only shown on the column, surrounded by the grid closure, starting from the Menologion of Basil I (Tomekovič, *Saints ermites,* 39–40) and this is also the case in the mosaics of Nea Moni (Mouriki, *Mosaics*, 171–73, 175–76).

[86] Wharton Epstein, *Tokalı kilise,* 67. Alypius is also portrayed together with Arsenius in the cistern church paintings of Avcilar (Göreme) from the first quarter of the eleventh century, but this time with a long white beard and hair, as part of the compact series of monk saints populating the arches and pillars (Jolivet-Lévy, *Les églises byzantines*, 80–82; Jolivet-Lévy, *Un siècle après,* 116; Thierry, *La Cappadoce*, n. 39).

[87] Such as Cattidius and Cattidianus of Egyptian origin on the south wall, or Justus of Rome on the east wall: De Jerphanion, *Nouvelle province*, I.1, 147–70; Restle, *Byzantine Wall Paintings,* I, 68–69, 119–20; Jolivet-Lévy, *Les églises*, 112–16; Jolivet-Lévy, *Un siècle après,* 39–41; Bordino, "Chiesa di Sant'Eustachio," 88.

[88] Tomekovič, *Saints ermites*, 39–40.

[89] Tomekovič, *Saints ermites,* 294.

*Fig. 18. Güllü Dere, Church of St. John. Saint Arsenios. Archive of Tuscia University's Mission in Cappadocia.*

In some contexts, the stylites occupy a prominent position: for example, in the Church of Saint Barbara in Soğanli, Saint Simeon the Stylite and Saint Daniel the Stylite are in the apse, next to Saint John Caliste and Sabas of Jerusalem;[90] in the Saklı kilise (Goreme 2a), ca. 1070, Saint Simeon the Elder and Saint Simeon the Younger are depicted at the ends of the east wall.[91]

From this extensive evidence, Cappadocia appears to be particularly linked to the stylite tradition reformulated in the rock version. This inheritance is attested by the hermitages with cells at the top of rocky cones, the early presence of the painted image of Saint Simeon Stylites, the existence of a cycle of the saint's life, and the early spread of images of other stylite saints depicted with different iconographic variants, sometimes in particularly prominent positions.

## Bibliography

*Acta sanctorum quotquot toto orbe coluntur vel a catholiciis scriptoribus celebrantur, que ex Latinis et Graecis, aliarumque gentium antiquis monumentis collegit, digessit, notis illustravit Ioannes Bollandus*, Januarii Tomus Primus. Parisiis, 1863.

[90] Saint Daniel follows the most common depiction: he has no headdress and has shoulder-length white hair divided into bands. De Jerphanion, *Nouvelle province,* I.1, 314–15; Jolivet-Lévy, *Les églises,* 260; Tomeković, *Saints ermites*, 296.

[91] Restle, *Byzantine Wall Paintings*, I, 50–52; II, fig. 20; Jolivet-Lévy, *Les églises,* 85–87; Thierry, *La Cappadoce*, 195–96 and entry 40; Jolivet-Lévy, *Un siècle après,* 51.

Barrois, Georges A. ed. *The Fathers Speak: St. Basil the Great. St. Gregory of Nazianzus, St. Gregory of Nyssa*. Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1986.

Deferrari, Roy J., ed. Saint Basil, *The Letters*, II: LIX–CLXXXV. London-New York: Heinemann-G.P. Putnam's, 1928.

*Vita S. Pauli Iunioris in Monte Latro cum interpretatione latina Iacobi Sismondi*. Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes, 1892.

Akin, Mutluhan and Ahmet Orhan. "The Geological Structure and the Vulcanic Nature of Cappadocia: a Brief Review." In *Güllüdere and Kızılçukur: the Rose Valley and the Red Valley in Cappadocia,* edited by Patrizia Boschiero and Luigi Latini, International Carlo Scarpa Prize for Gardens 2020–2021, 31st edition, 119–24. Treviso: Fondazione Benetton Studi Ricerche Antiga, 2020.

Andaloro, Maria. "Natura e figura in Cappadocia." In *Medioevo natura e figura. La raffigurazione dell'uomo e della natura nell'arte medievale*, Proceedings of the International Conference, Parma, 20–25 September 2011, edited by Arturo C. Quintavalle, 189–213. Milano: Skira, 2015.

Andaloro, Maria. "Cappadocia. Deep in the Rocks among Valleys and Painted Churches." In *Güllüdere and Kızılçukur: the Rose Valley and the Red Valley in Cappadocia,* edited by Patrizia Boschiero and Luigi Latini, International Carlo Scarpa Prize for Gardens 2020–2021, 31st edition, 37–60. Treviso: Fondazione Benetton Studi Ricerche Antiga, 2020.

Barbera, Giuseppe. "Agrarian Practices and Rural Landscape of the Valleys." In *Güllüdere and Kızılçukur: the Rose Valley and the Red Valley in Cappadocia,* edited by Patrizia Boschiero and Luigi Latini, International Carlo Scarpa Prize for Gardens 2020–2021, 31st edition, 102–18. Treviso: Fondazione Benetton Studi Ricerche Antiga, 2020.

Bevilacqua, Livia. *Arte e aristocrazia a Bisanzio nell'età dei Macedoni. Costantinopoli, la Grecia e l'Asia Minore.* Roma: Campisano, 2013.

Bordino, Chiara. "La chiesa di sant'Eustachio a Gorëme e la sua decorazione pittorica attraverso il database 'Cappadocia. Arte e habitat rupestre'." *Hortus Artium Medievalium. Journal of the International Research Center for Late Antiquity and Middle Ages* 24 (2018): 80–89.

Bordino, Chiara. "The Development of Christianity in the Nevşehir Region (4th–10th centuries) and its Role in the Promotion of the Visual Arts." In *Güllüdere and Kızılçukur: the Rose Valley and the Red Valley in Cappadocia,* edited by Patrizia Boschiero and Luigi Latini, International Carlo Scarpa Prize for Gardens 2020–2021, 31st edition, 89–100. Treviso: Fondazione Benetton Studi Ricerche Antiga, 2020.

Bordino, Chiara. "Monk Saints in the Middle Byzantine Paintings of Cappadocia." In *Proceedings of the 22nd International Symposium on Medieval*

*and Turkish Excavations and Research in Art History, Istanbul, Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University, 24–26 October 2018*, in press.

Brosset, Marie-Félicité. “Douzième rapport.” In *Rapports sur un voyage archéologique dans la Georgie et dans l’Armenie executé en 1847–1848*. St. Pétersbourg: Académie Imperiale des sciences, 1851.

Brosset, Marie-Félicité. “Second rapport.” In *Rapports sur un voyage archéologique dans la Georgie et dans l’Armenie executé en 1847–1848*. St. Pétersbourg: Académie Impériale des Sciences,1851.

Christopulos, Georgios, John Bastias, and Stylianos Pelekanidis. *Treasures of Mount Athos, II. The Monasteries of Iveron, St. Panteleimon, Esphigmenou, and Chilandari*. Athens: Ekdotike Athenon, 1975.

Cooper, J. Eric and Michael J. Decker. *Life and Society in Byzantine Cappadocia*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

Cormack, Robert. “Byzantine Cappadocia: The Archaic Group of Wall-Paintings.” *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 30 (1967): 19–36.

Cremaschi, Lisa. “La vita comune secondo Basilio.” In *Basilio tra Oriente e Occidente. Basilio il Grande e il monachesimo orientale,* Proceedings of the International Conference, Cappadocia, 5–7 October 1999, edited by Comunità di Bose *et al.*, 93–101. Magnano: Qiqajon, 2001.

De Clary, Robert. *La prise de Constantinople*. Berlin: Weidmann, 1873.

Delehaye, Hippolite. *Les Saints stylites*. Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes/ Paris: Libraire Auguste Picard, 1923.

De Jerphanion, Guillaume. *Une Nouvelle province de l’art byzantin. Les églises rupestres de Cappadoce*, 5 voll. Paris: Geuthner, 1925–42.

De Jerphanion, Guillaume. *La voix des Monuments. Nouvelle série*. Roma: Pontificio Istituto Orientale/Paris: Les Éditions d’Art et d’Histoire, 1938.

Djobadze, Wachtang. *Archaeological Investigations in the Region West of Antioch-on-the-Orontes*. Forschungen zur Kunstgeschichte und christlichen Archäologie 13. Stuttgart: Steiner, 1986.

Eastmond, Antony, “Udabno Monastery in Georgia: Innovation, Conservation and the Reinterpretation of Medieval Art.” *Iconographica* 7 (2008): 23–43.

Gain, Benoït. *L’église de Cappadoce au IVe siècle d’après la correspondance de Basile de Césarée (330–379)*. Roma: Pontificium Institutum Orientale, 1985.

Galatariotou, Catia. *The Making of a Saint: the Life, Times and Sanctification of Neophytos the Recluse*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Giovannini, Luciano, ed. *Arts de Cappadoce*. Genève: Nagel, 1971.

Gülyaz, Murat E. “Paşabaği and Zelve Ruins.” In *Güllüdere and Kızılçukur: the Rose Valley and the Red Valley in Cappadocia,* edited by Patrizia Boschiero and Luigi Latini, International Carlo Scarpa Prize for Gardens

2020–2021, 31st edition, 193–200. Treviso: Fondazione Benetton Studi Ricerche Antiga, 2020.

Haldon, John F. "'Cappadocia Will Be Given over to Ruin and Become a Desert.' Environmental Evidence for Historically-Attested Events in the 7th–10th Century." In *Byzantina Mediterranea. Festschrift für Johannes Koder zum 65. Geburtstag*, edited by Klaus Belke *et al.*, 215–30. Wien-Köln-Weimar: Böhlau, 2007.

Haldon, John and Hugh Kennedy. "The Arab-Byzantine Frontier in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries: Military Organisation and Society in the Borderlands." *Zbornik Radova Visantoloskog Instituta* 19 (1980): 79–116.

Halkin, François. *Bibliotheca hagiographica graeca*. Subsidia hagiographica 8. Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes, 1957.

Halkin, François. *Auctarium Bibliothecae hagiographicae graecae*. Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes, 1969.

*Il Menologio di Basilio II: Cod. Vaticano gr. 1613*. Codices e Vaticanis Selecti 8. Torino: Bocca, 1907.

Jolivet-Lévy, Catherine. *Les églises byzantines de Cappadoce. Les programme iconographique de l'abside et de ses abords*. Paris: Édition du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1991.

Jolivet-Lévy, Catherine. "Contribution à l'étude de l'iconographie mésobyzantine de deux Syméon stylites." In *Les saints et leur sanctuaries à Byzance. Textes, images et monuments,* edited by Catherine Jolivet-Lévy, Michel Kaplan, and Jean Pierre Sodini. Byzantina sorbonensia 11. Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1993, 35–47. Reprinted in Jolivet-Lévy, Catherine. *Études cappadociennes*, 498–518. London: Pindar Press, 2002.

Jolivet-Lévy, Catherine. *La Cappadoce médiévale. Images et spiritualité.* Saint Léger-Vauban: Zodiaque, 2001.

Jolivet-Lévy, Catherine. *La Cappadoce un siècle après Guillaume de Jerphanion,* avec la collaboration de Nicole Lemaigre Demesnil. 2 vols. Paris: Geuthner, 2015.

Kalas, Veronica. "Cappadocia's Rock-Cut Courtyard Complexes: a Case Study for Domestic Architecture." In *Byzantium in Housing in Late Antiquity. From Palaces to Shops,* edited by Luke Lavan, Lale Özgenel, and Alexander Saranitis, 393–414. Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2004.

Kostof, Spiro. *Caves of God: The Monastic Environment of Byzantine Cappadocia*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1972.

Lafontaine-Dosogne, Jacqueline. *Itinéraires archéologiques dans la région d'Antioche: recherches sur le monastère et sur l'iconographie de S. Syméon Stylite le Jeune*. Bruxelles: Editions de Byzantion, 1967.

Lafontaine-Dosogne, Jacqueline. "L'influence du culte du saint Symeon le Jeune sur les monuments et les représentations figurées de Géorgie." *Byzantion* 41 (1971): 183–96.

Lemaigre Demesnil, Nicole. *Architecture rupestre et décor sculpté en Cappadoce (Ve–IXe siècle).* Oxford: Archaeopress, 2010.

Lietzmann, Hans. *Das Leben des heiligen Symeon Stylites: in Gemeinschaft mit den Mitglieden des Kirchenhistorischen*. Leipzig: Heinrichs, 1908.

Malmquist, Tatiana. *Byzantine 12th-Century Frescoes in Kastoria. Agioi Anargyroi and Agios Nikolaos tou Kasnitzi*. Uppsala: Institute of the History of Art, 1989.

Mathews, F. Thomas and Anne C. Daskalaris-Mathews. "Islamic Style Mansions in Byzantine Cappadocia and the Development of the Inverted T-plan." *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 36. 3 (2005): 294–315.

Métivier, Sophie. *La Cappadoce, IVe–Ve siècle: une histoire provinciale de l'empire romain d'Orient*. Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2005.

Mouriki, Doula. *The Mosaics of Nea Moni on Chios*. Athens: Commercial Bank of Greece, 1985.

Nicol, Donald. *Meteora: the Rock Monasteries of Thessaly*. London: Variorum Reprints, 1975.

Omont, Henry. *Athènes au XVIIe siècle: dessins des sculptures du Parthénon attribués à J. Carrey et conservés à la Bibliothèque Nationale, accompagnés du vues et plans d'Athène et de l'Acropol.* Paris: Leroux, 1898.

Ousterhout, Robert G. *Visualizing Community: Art, Material Culture and Settlement in Byzantine Cappadocia*. Dumbarton Oaks Studies 46. Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 2017.

Pelekanidis, Stylianos. *Kastoria*. Athens: "MELISSA" Publishing House, 1985.

Peschlow-Bindokat, Annelise. *Der Latmos: eine unbekannte Gebirgslandschaft an der türkischen*. Mainz: Phillip von Zabern, 1996.

Restle, Marcell. *Byzantine Wall Painting in Asia Minor*. Recklinghausen: Verlag Aurel Bongers, 1967.

Rhoby, Andreas. *Byzantinische Epigramme auf Fresken und Mosaiken*. Wien: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, 2009.

Rodley, Lyn. *Cave Monasteries of Byzantine Cappadocia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

Ščepkina, Marfa V. *Miniatjury chludovskoj psaltyri grečeskij illjustrirovannyj kodeks IX veka*. Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1977.

Schiemenz, Günter Paulus. "Die Kapelle des Styliten Niketas in den Weinbergen von Ortahisar." *Jahrbuch der österreichischen Byzantinistik* 18 (1969): 239–58.

Schiemenz, Günter Paulus. "Die Maelereien der Paulos-Höhle aud dem Latmos." *Pantheon* 29 (1971): 46–53.

Ševčenko Patterson, Nancy. *Illustrated Manuscripts of the Metaphrastian Menologion*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1990.

Ševčenko Patterson, Nancy. "The Imperial Menologia and the "Menologion" of Basil I." In *The Celebration of the Saints in Byzantine Art and Liturgy*, Variorium collected studies series 975. Farnham: Ashgate Variorum, 2013. [English version of article in *El Menologio de Basilio II, Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostólica Vaticana, Vat. gr. 1613, Libro de Estudios con Ocasión de la edición facsímil*, edited by F. D'Aiuto, 231–59. Vatican City/Athens/Madrid, 2008.]

Thierry, Nicole. "Ayvalı Kilise ou pigeonnier de Güllü Dere. Église inédite de Cappadoce." *Cahiers archéologiques. Fin de l'antiquité et moyen-âge* 15 (1965): 97–154.

Thierry, Nicole. *Haute Moyen-Âge en Cappadoce. Les églises de la région de Çavuşin*, vol. I–II, Paris: Libraire orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1983, 1994.

Thierry, Nicole. *La Cappadoce de l'antiquité au moyen âge*. Bibliothèque de l'Antiquité tardive 4. Turnhout: Brepols, 2002.

Thierry, Michel and Nicole Thierry. *Nouvelles églises rupestres de Cappadoce. Région du Hasan Dağı.* Paris: Klincksieck, 1963.

Tomeković, Svetlana. *Les saints ermites et moines dans la peinture murale byzantine.* Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2011.

van Dam, Raymond. *Becoming Christian: the Conversion of Roman Cappadocia.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003.

Wharton Epstein, Ann. *Tokalı Kilise: Tenth-Century Metropolitan Art in Byzantine Cappadocia*. Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1986.

Wiegand, Theodor. *Milet: Ergebnisse der Ausgrabungen und Untersuchungen seit dem Jahre 1899,* III, 1 *Der Latmos*. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1913.

MARIA VERONESE

# Buñuel's *Simon of the Desert* between Earth and Heaven*

*Simon of the Desert*[1] is Luis Buñuel's most award-winning work.[2] It has been regarded as one of the Spanish director's finest films,[3] and marked the end of his Mexican phase. Based on a story written by Buñuel himself and turned into a screenplay he co-authored with Julio Alejandro, this medium-length film revolves around Simon, who for years has been living on top of a column in the middle of the desert,[4] subsisting only on a few lettuce leaves and gulps of water brought to him each week by the monks of a nearby monastery. Venerated by the people who flock to see him, he performs various miracles and resists the temptations to which he is subjected by fellow men and the devil. The latter transports him one day from the fifth to the twentieth century on a jet, showing him New York's skyscrapers – like modern columns.[5] The devil then takes Simon to a nightclub: dressed and coiffured in the Beatles style of the 1960s,

* This article is a revised and updated version of my contribution published in Italian: Veronese, "Sospeso."

[1] Year: 1965; producer: Gustavo Alatriste; photography: Gabriel Figueroa; editing: Carlos Savage; music: Raúl Lavista; main actors: Claudio Brook (Simon), Silvia Pinal (the devil), Enrique Álvarez Félix (Matias), Hortensia Santoveña (mother), Luis Aceves Castañeda (Tryphon), Jesús Fernández (dwarf herder).

[2] In 1965 the film received no less than five awards, including a Silver Lion, at the 30th International Venice Film Festival – "a record unmatched by any of my other movies", Buñuel acknowledged in *Breath*, 240.

[3] Georges Sadoul provides a compelling description of the film: "...this is one of Buñuel's finest films, filled with aggressive, scathing humour, and unforgettable sequences ... The film unfolds from one (sometimes gag-like) sequence to another with utter perfection. It is replete with paradoxical, surreal, magical, and picaresque ideas, like a 'summa' of what's best in Buñuel" (Sadoul, *Il cinema*, 464; my transl.).

[4] A spatial analysis of the film is provided by Ripley, *Search*, chap. 3, who explores the liminal meaning of the desert, and later of the New York nightclub, in relation to the construction of the protagonist's character.

[5] According to Durgnat (*Buñuel*, 138), Simon's column is replaced by the New York skyscrapers – half prisons, half anthills. This metropolitan forest of modern columns, filmed from above, "could be the spawn of Simon's monument to individualist asceticism".

like some sort of intellectual from Greenwich Village.[6] The hermit smokes a pipe and gazes, with a vacant stare, at the frantic dancing called "radioactive flesh". Other scenes that Buñuel had planned to shoot were cut due to problems with the Mexican producers, who also forced the director to shorten the ending.[7]

The idea for this screenplay can be traced back to Buñuel's early days at the Student Residence in Madrid. It was inspired by his reading of a text suggested to him by his friend Federico García Lorca.[8] In *My Last Breath*, which Buñuel referred to as "my semiautobiography",[9] he recalls: "Through Lorca, I discovered poetry, particularly Spanish poetry, which he knew intimately, and Jacobus de Voragine's *The Golden Legend*, where I found my first references to St. Symeon of the Desert".[10] The passage that most captivated the bright imagination of the two young men was one describing how "the hermit's excrement, which ran the length of the column, looked like the wax from a taper. (In reality, since all St. Symeon ate was lettuce leaves, it must have looked more like goat turds)",[11] a detail which Buñuel also evokes in his film.

The fascination with the figure of the stylite saint which the Aragonese director developed in those youthful days was to accompany him throughout his career. It was nourished by his keen interest in hagiographical literature, which he first acquired while studying at a Jesuit school.[12] In 1922 Buñuel and

[6] Buñuel, *Screenplays*, 243: "He is dressed in the latest fashion; he is wearing a small beard and his hair is cut in the Beatle style"; cf. Sanders, *Celluloid Saints*, 63. Fofi in Buñuel, *Sette film*, 320: "He is the classic Greenwich Village intellectual" (my trasl.); Tinazzi, *Cinema*, 157.

[7] After having shot five of the eleven reels that had been agreed upon, Buñuel was forced "to cut a full half of the film" (*Breath*, 240) and to shoot an ending that had been written in a night: see Torres, *Buñuel*, 55, and Cattini, *Buñuel*, 91. In some interviews, the Aragonese director states that, for the ending, he had envisioned Simon dying on top of his column; but the idea that, upon returning back from the twentieth century after having committed a mortal sin, he might die in the odour of sanctity "no me gustó mucho": see Aub, *Conversaciones*, 488, and Fuentes, *Mundos*, 113. Among the various scenes he had planned Buñuel recalls one under the snow, some pilgrimages, a visit by the emperor, and Simon's move onto a twenty-metre-tall column by the sea: see Pérez Turrent and de la Colina, *Buñuel*, 172.

[8] Buñuel spent the years between 1917 and 1925 at the Residencia de Estudiantes in Madrid; in 1919 he was joined by Federico García Lorca, with whom Luis established a deep and brotherly friendship: see Buñuel, *Breath*, 61–64.

[9] Buñuel, *Breath*, 5.

[10] Buñuel, *Breath*, 63. The same point is made in the interviews with Pérez Turrent and de la Colina, *Buñuel*, 170. Symeon Stylites is not actually mentioned in Jacobus de Voragine's work, although the latter was constantly revised and expanded over the centuries, with the result that a life of St. Symeon, modelled on the ancient Greek *Life* written by Antonios, is indeed found in certain later versions, see Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend* (ed. Caxton), 7,67; 3,130.

[11] Buñuel, *Breath*, 240. As this episode is not featured in the *Golden Legend*, Buñuel probably had a memory slip: he may have read about this in a volume by Spanish neurologist Gonzalo Rodríguez Lafora, which discusses both stylite saints and Jacobus de Voragine's book. See De Ros, *Buñuel's Miracles*, 73, and Salvador Ventura, *Imagen*, 332.

[12] Buñuel, *Breath*, 28: "Religion had the lead role; we studied apologetics, the catechism, the lives of the saints". Aub, *Buñuel*, 44 (with regard to the readings made for *The Milky Way*): "These are

Lorca jotted down a first story about this figure, which over four decades later was to provide an outline for the film.[13] In the early 1940s, Buñuel redeveloped this tale which was to inspire *Simon of the Desert*.[14]

## The Hagiographical Model

In developing the figure of his protagonist, Buñuel makes Simon an *imitator Christi* by drawing upon two elements. The first is Jesus's withdrawal into the desert, where he is tempted by the devil, and the second the exercise of miraculous powers.[15] But alongside this Christological model, we can detect the strong influence of the hagiographical model that inspired Buñuel.

In contrast to what several superficial reviews suggest, the film does not portray the life of St. Symeon Stylites but that of a faithful imitator of his. The model that inspired the figure of the protagonist is made explicit at the beginning of the film, where the bishop, who has reached the foot of the column, urges Simon on with the words: "You may continue to exhort our brothers by your penitence, following the path that our father, Simon the Elder, has shown us".[16]

Buñuel's Simon indeed presents numerous affinities – starting with the quasi-homonymy between the two figures – with the hagiographical model of the Stylite, whom the director became familiar with through André-Jean Festugière's book.[17] It is worth noting, however, that one should not make too much of the historical-hagiographical aspect, since the life of the ancient Syriac saint only serves as an initial source of inspiration for the development of a character and setting that are typical of Buñuel's work.[18]

The first similarity lies in the exterior appearance of the character: like St. Symeon, our Simon looks repellent, a characteristic of Syriac monks. When he is first shown onscreen, he looks prematurely aged and emaciated because of all the fasting, penances, and the time he has spent exposed to the sun on top of his

things I have read in recent years for *Simon of the Desert*. In any case, I have always enjoyed reading saints' lives, martyrologies, although saint's lives are all much the same" (my transl.).

[13] Bernardi, *Scandalo*, 66.

[14] Pérez Turrent and de la Colina, *Buñuel*, 155.

[15] On the use of this Christological model and strong biblical allusions, see Veronese, "Sospeso," 248–56.

[16] Buñuel, *Screenplays*, 202.

[17] Buñuel himself states so in *Breath*, 240. Festugière's volume, *Antioche*, also features a French translation of the long chapter 26 of Theodoret of Cyrrhus' *Historia Philothea*, devoted to St. Symeon, and of Antonios's *Vita graeca*. It seems likely that Buñuel was also familiar with another crucial volume on this topic, namely Hippolyte Delehaye's *Saints stylites*.

[18] Setting out from the observation that the central theme of the film is the departure from nature and the polluting of the world, Largier stresses that Buñuel has no interest in historical-biographical aspects, but that these nonetheless represent a means by which the figure of the ascetic takes shape, turning itself into an artwork: *Die Kunst*, 17–18.

column. His gaunt body is covered in a threadbare habit; his limbs are covered in sores; his long hair is bushy, unkempt, and filthy; and his long beard is parted in two long strands.[19] The same physical features are also mentioned in ancient sources describing the ascetics of the Syriac desert: "the wild look, the shaggy and dirty hair, the wrinkled skin of the face, the skeletal limbs", as Festugière sums them up.[20] With regard to St. Symeon, particular emphasis is placed on his thinness due to his extremely rigorous fasting: whereas other monks would eat every three days, he would fast the whole week, only breaking his fast on Sunday; furthermore, throughout Lent he would eat nothing at all, following the example set by Moses and Elijah.[21]

When Simon's legs are shown we see that they are covered in festering sores, just like those of the Stylite, who suffered from a foot ulcer, as well as various other infected and worm-infested sores that would miraculously heal.[22]

Another recurring detail is the smell of the saint: the Life written by Antonios recalls that, during the period which St. Symeon spent in a monastery, his brethren complained to the abbot about the ascetic's odour – a "reeking dog" – which made it impossible for people to be near him.[23] The film features two scenes related to the theme of bad smell and bodily hygiene: the first focuses on a conversation between Simon and the young Matias, "a lay brother of about eighteen. He is extremely clean and neatly dressed. The expression on his beardless face is one of innocence".[24] Matias has been asked by the prior to bring Simon some food and to urge him to eat more, an order which the Stylite, of course, humbly yet firmly refuses to obey.[25] After bidding the young man farewell, Simon gazes at him intently. As though noticing Matias's physical appearance for the first time, Simon bursts out: "Son, you are very spruce". The young man blushes and thanks the ascetic, taking his words as a compliment. But Simon harshly rebukes him: "But remember that the cleanliness of the body and its clothing, although

[19] Buñuel, *Screenplays*, 214: "He must be about forty years old, but a life spent in the open air and in constant fasting has made him look much older. His emaciated body is covered with cuts, especially on his legs and feet where they are deepest. His hair hangs in long strands, falling almost to his waist. His beard is parted in the middle and reaches to below his chest. The state of his hair is deplorable: the only cure for it would be to shave his head. His dark eyes are ablaze; sometimes they seem implacable, at others gentle. He is dressed in sackcloth, faded by the weather and torn in places. His feet are bare. His dry lips move in prayer, but only a murmur and a few words that are spoken out loud are audible."

[20] Festugière, *Antioche*, 292: "l'air sauvage, la chevelure hirsute et crasseuse, la peau du visage toute ridée, les membres squelettiques".

[21] Theodoret, *Hist. Phil.* 26, 5; 7; 9 (SC 234, 166–168; 172–174; 176); *Vita graeca* 6 (ed. Lietzmann, 26).

[22] Theodoret, *Hist. Phil.* 26, 23 (SC 234, 206–08); *Vita syriaca* (ed. Lietzmann, 90–91); *Vita graeca* 17 (ed. Lietzmann, 44).

[23] *Vita graeca* 5; 8 (ed. Lietzmann, 24; 30).

[24] Buñuel, *Screenplays*, 212.

[25] Buñuel, *Screenplays*, 215: "I appreciate his concern but beg him to forgive me for I know better than he how much I must fast… And you forgive me too".

innocent enough in the laity, is a sin for all who take up the religious life"[26] – a recurrent theme in ancient and medieval hagiography.

Towards the end of the film Simon finds himself fending off yet another attack by the devil, who appears at the foot of the column in a feminine guise. With anger and contempt, the hermit calls him "Vile spirit of darkness!", adding: "You revolt me… I can smell the stench of your breath from here!". At this point, as Simon continues to gaze down, the camera zooms out, and the devil suddenly appears directly behind him, uttering the following response: "You don't smell very good either".[27]

St. Symeon's choice to settle on top of a column, like that of our Simon, is due to two reasons: his desire to lift himself up toward the heavens and, at the same time, to flee the throngs of pilgrims who were visiting him, interrupting his prayers.[28] For the same reasons, after making his way up the first column and thus inaugurating the practice of stylitism, over the course of forty-seven years Symeon changed to a higher column several times – three or four times, according to the ancient sources – ultimately spending the last twenty-five years of his life on a column forty cubits (approximately sixteen metres) high.[29] This detail of the passing from a lower column to a taller one is also found in Buñuel's film. This opens with a procession of chanting people who file through a deserted area and then stop near a column roughly three metres tall, on top of which Simon lives. The bishop addresses the saintly hermit, inviting him to move on top of another column, almost eight metres tall, generously donated by the wealthy Praxedes in return for the miraculous healing wrought by the saint. Buñuel originally planned to have Simon move onto yet another column, one no less than twenty metres tall and located near the sea.[30]

St. Symeon's relationship with his mother is rather interesting. Antonios's *Vita graeca*[31] records that she finally succeeded in finding her son again after twenty (or twenty-seven) years;[32] she was eager to see him, but was denied the opportunity to do so; she indirectly received the following words from her son: "If we are worthy of it, we will meet again ἐν ἐκείνῳ τῷ αἰῶνι" (i.e. "in the afterlife" according to Delehaye, "in this world" according to Festugière, who interprets it as a reference to the miracle that the saint is about to perform).[33]

[26] Buñuel, *Screenplays*, 216. See Durgnat, *Buñuel*, 136.

[27] The original script reads: "Tú tampoco hueles muy bien", whereas in the English translation of the script (Buñuel, *Screenplays*, 240) we find: "'Of my breath!' (He points to the corpse) 'The stench is coming from *him*'."

[28] Theodoret, *Hist. Phil.* 26, 12 (SC 234, 184): ἀναπτῆναι γὰρ εἰς οὐρανὸν ἐφίεται καὶ τῆς ἐπιγείου ταύτης ἀπαλλαγῆναι διατριβῆς.

[29] For an analysis of the sources in relation to this aspect, see Delehaye, *Saints stylites*, XV–XVI.

[30] Cf. *supra* n. 7.

[31] *Vita graeca* 14 (ed. Lietzmann, 38).

[32] Delehaye, *Saints stylites*, III.

[33] Delehaye, *Saints stylites*, IV; Festugière, *Antioche*, 497.

The woman insists and climbs up a ladder, only to have a bad fall; at this point Symeon has others tell her to calm down and rest, because her son will meet her later; but in the meantime, the woman dies and her son has her buried on the nearby hill. In the Latin translation of Symeon's life, this scene is abridged and simplified: before the saint's peremptory answer: *Propositum meum violare non possum*, his mother weeps and gives up.[34]

The film also presents the figure of the saint's mother; and like the Stylite, Buñuel's protagonist chooses to sever his family bond for good. Simon meets his mother during the opening procession, when the old woman is accompanied by the abbot Zeno and pushed through the crowd until she finds herself before her son, who is walking from one column to the other. The bishop exhorts Simon to welcome and embrace his elderly mother, who yearns to live with her son until the end of her days. The hermit initially replies: "Woman, you would have done better to stay home in peace and even, were it possible…". However, pressured by a monk, Simon then makes the following concession: "Live near me, Mother, if you so desire, but with my embrace I must bid you farewell in this life. The love I bear you cannot come between the Lord and His servant. Goodbye – when we meet again it will be in His presence".[35] With her son's permission, then, Simon's mother moves into a hovel near the column; she is a constant presence in the film, marking almost every sequence. We see her: lying down on a straw mattress; staring at an anthill; chasing hens; carrying a jug of water and some kindling; and gazing at her son, yearning for a sign of affection or a glimpse, yet without ever succeeding in drawing his attention. Only after the aforementioned visit by the young Matias does Simon – at once annoyed and distracted – yield to desire to run at breakneck speed,[36] indulging in a tender daydream: he imagines that he is playing chase with his mother and that, exhausted, he rests his head on her knees, as though in a *Pietà*, with the column-cross looming in the distance.

The *Vita graeca* of St. Symeon[37] would appear to be the source of the penance that Simon imposes upon himself: to punish himself for having mistaken the tempting devil for the Good Shepherd, Buñuel's stylite decides to spend the rest of his days on one foot.[38] The Syriac saint is instead forced into this position when the devil causes a festering and worm-infested boil to appear on one of his feet.

[34] Delehaye, *Saints stylites*, IV.
[35] Buñuel, *Screenplays*, 205.
[36] Buñuel, *Screenplays*, 217: "How tempted I am to go down and feel the mother earth beneath my feet and to run… to run".
[37] *Vita graeca* 17 (ed. Lietzmann, 42–44). Theodoret (*hist. phil.* 26, 23 [SC 234, 206]), and the *Vita syriaca* (ed. Lietzmann, 131–34) only mention the detail of a festering sore on the right foot.
[38] Buñuel, *Screenplays*, 234–35: "I deserve eternal penitence. Until You, O Lord, choose to call me to Your bosom, I shall stand on one leg alone".

Another detail drawn from the hagiographical tradition is St. Symeon's staunchness and perseverance. These virtues elicit not just considerable admiration, but incredulity, with some people even doubting that what they see on the column is a man of flesh and blood. Theodoret recounts that a virtuous and widely-respected individual one day asked the saint whether he was a man or an immaterial being, causing considerable bewilderment; when asked why he was posing such a question, he answered: "I hear everyone saying again and again that you neither eat nor sleep, which are two things necessary for man: for no one with a human nature could ever live without food or sleep".[39] The man was then invited to walk up the column and, like St Thomas (cfr. Jo 20:25–27), was urged to touch the saint's hands, feet, and sores to ascertain that he was truly a creature of the flesh. Likewise, our Simon must persuade a dwarf herder that he is indeed a human being by stating that the little food he eats is enough to meet his needs. The saint concludes: "I am not a pure unfettered spirit but a man who bears his earthly covering with pain…".[40]

Equally inspired by the hagiographical model is the veneration of the saint by people, expressed by their desire to touch him and receive some blessing by coming into contact with his garments, in a similar way to the bleeding woman healed by Jesus (cf. Lk 8:43–48). Just as everyone yearns to touch St. Symeon's leather cloak,[41] so Simon, when passing from one column to the other, finds himself surrounded by a crowd of people calling out his name with arms outstretched; one faithful stoops to kiss his sore-ridden feet, while another tears a strip off his threadbare habit.[42]

St. Symeon's main occupation, in addition to prayer, was to preach to the people twice a day, having received the gift of teaching (τῆς διδασκαλίας… τὸ δῶρον); on these occasions he would also offer advice, settle disputes, give blessings, fulfil prayers, and perform miracles of various sorts.[43] Likewise, Buñuel's Simon is also a teacher who, standing in a prayerful position, imparts lessons to the monks gathered around his column.[44]

The hagiographical tradition may, in turn, have inspired the opening scene of the film, in which the bishop seeks to bestow the priestly ordination on the Stylite. In the *Life of St. Symeon Stylites the Younger*[45] we read that the bishops

[39] Theodoret, *Hist. Phil.* 26, 23 (SC 234, 206–08): ἄνθρωπος εἶ ἢ ἀσώματος φύσις; My own translation from the Greek.

[40] Buñuel, *Screenplays*, 236. Simon's words echo not only an expression found in the *Life of St. Symeon*, but also several Gospel passages about Jesus (Mt 14: 26; Mk 6: 49; Lk 24: 37–39).

[41] Theodoret, *Hist. Phil.* 26, 12 (SC 234, 184).

[42] Buñuel, *Screenplays*, 204.

[43] Theodoret, *Hist. Phil.* 26, 25 (SC 234, 210) and cf. 26, 11 (SC 234, 180–82).

[44] Buñuel, *Screenplays*, 223.

[45] The life of this saint features episodes reminiscent of those in the lives of St. Symeon the Elder and of Buñuel's Simon, such as the move from a lower to a taller column, and the saint's relationship with his mother. The text has been edited by Paul van den Ven, *Vie ancienne*.

repeatedly proposed that the hermit be ordained to the priesthood, but that he always refused, until a heavenly voice told him to accept.[46] Unlike the saint, Buñuel's stylite does not give in, but vigorously refuses this honour.[47]

One of the scenes that the director was unable to shoot is that of the Byzantine emperor's visit to Simon's column. According to Theodore Lector's *Ecclesiastical History*, Emperor Marcian visited St. Symeon's column in disguise, although historians regard this information as unfounded.[48] Likewise, the scene that Buñuel was planning to shoot under snow[49] may have been inspired by the episode behind St. Symeon's conversion: a snowstorm prevented the young Symeon from putting his flock of sheep out to pasture, leading him instead to a church, where he was struck by a reading of the Beatitudes and realised that an ascetic lifestyle was the best way to achieve such spiritual goals.[50] However, the director's imagination may also have been struck by an intriguing passage from Theodoret's life of St James, in which the hermit is buried in snow when he remains deep in prayer during a snowstorm.[51]

## Suspended between Heaven and Earth: Neither Saint Nor Man

Simon's condition has been described as that of a "hopeless hero":[52] he finds himself caught in the middle, as though suspended between heaven and earth. He is a man who yearns to abandon the baseness of human life and to rise up to the heavenly abode, but who actually proves to be neither a saint nor a man: on the one hand, he is not a saint yet, because he displays all the weaknesses typical of man and yields to temptation and sin (pride, intolerance towards others, gluttony, and lust); on the other, he is no longer a man as he is isolated from society, he has consciously cut himself off and has no intercourse with human beings. The struggle between these two dimensions, the human and the heavenly, takes place far from the earth, on a column extended towards the sky; its summit, cordoned off by a rope, is turned into a veritable ring on which Simon fights his battle between his aspiration for sainthood and human and demonic temptations.

Simon proves himself to be far from 'saintly' on several occasions.

[46] *Vita* 132–133 (ed. van den Ven 1, 124–126).

[47] Buñuel, *Screenplays*, 205.

[48] Theod. Lect., *Hist. Eccl.* 2, 42 (PG 86, 205B). See Delehaye, *Saints stylites*, XVII.

[49] Buñuel, *Breath*, 240.

[50] Theodoret, *Hist. Phil.* 2 (SC 234, 160–62); *Vita syriaca* 3 (ed. Lietzmann, 81).

[51] Theodoret, *Hist. Phil.* 21,13 (SC 257, 90).

[52] Wood, *San Simeon*, 132.

In the first part of the film, in which the bishop seeks to bestow the priestly ordination on him, Simon first finds himself at a loss, but then tries to stop him; when the bishop insists, Simon adds: "I don't want to receive this grace... I am an unworthy sinner". In the end, though, he snatches a stick from a herder and brandishes it against the bishop, who at that point gives up.[53] In another scene, we see Simon praying on top of his column and the camera moves up, with a very close shot. Simon spells out a few words, individual expressions taken from the Psalms,[54] but then immediately stops, realising that he no longer remembers them. He tries to resume his recitation from where he left off, but to no avail. The same occurs during a blessing: in a rush of religious zeal, after thanking God for the lettuce core he has just eaten, Simon fixes his eyes on the clouds in the sky and blesses them; he then looks down at his feet and glimpses a cricket: holding it in the palm of his hand, he blesses it as an innocent creature that sings God's glory, before tossing it off the column. At this point, he gazes around and asks himself: "What can I bless now? Blessing is not only a saintly exercise, it's amusing and hurts no one". After a short moment of silence, though, Simon seems to return to his senses and wonders what he is doing. His thoughts are interrupted by the voice of a dwarf below, who asks Simon to bless his pregnant she-goat. The episode reaches its climax when, immediately afterwards, Simon removes a piece of cabbage from his teeth: he stares at it intently and raises his right hand in a blessing gesture, only to correct himself at the last moment and throw the scrap away.[55]

The ensuing brief dialogue with the dwarf herder is highly significant. The figure of the dwarf is dear to Buñuel, who uses it in several films, such as *Nazarín* and *Tristana* – where the dwarf is played by the same actor, Jesús Fernández – but also in *The Milky Way*. This figure embodies the natural fulfilment of primary instincts, in contrast to alienation and sublimation.[56] In *Simon of the Desert* the dwarf is often shown standing near the column with his flock: he admires the beauty of his she-goat Domitilla, especially her udders, which shocks the young monk Matias;[57] he keeps to his own and wolfs food down as the scene with the demon-possessed Tryphon unfolds; he reassures Matias when Simon orders that he be removed from the monastery until he grows a

[53] Buñuel, *Screenplays*, 206.

[54] Buñuel, *Screenplays*, 215. The passages are: Ps 84:5: *averte iram tuam*...; Ps 129:2: *non potuerunt mihi*..., *passim*: *cor meum*.

[55] Buñuel, *Screenplays*, 235–36.

[56] Durgnat, *Buñuel*, 138: "The dwarf ... seems to represent a kind of life-force – stunted, perhaps, but engagingly scurrilous".

[57] Buñuel, *Screenplays*, 212–13: "The goatherd notices that Matias is stroking one of the goats. He goes up to him. GOATHERD: 'You like that one, eh? She's new. Domitila I call her'. He strokes her, touches her udders and feels their weight. 'See how firm they are. You only have to touch them and they tremble. The old...'. Matias blushes and the goatherd laughs foolishly. [...] MATIAS: 'And don't be too fond of those animals. Be careful, for the devil's loose in the desert'."

beard, and invites the young man not to take "that hairy bunch" too seriously;[58] finally, he asks Simon to bless the pregnant goat but does not wish to receive the same blessing as her, and in exchange offers Simon a nice cup of fresh milk, which the saint does not accept.[59] This renunciation makes no sense to the dwarf, who scratches his head in perplexity and concludes: "I don't think that you're quite right up here. (He taps his head.) Must be all this fresh air".[60] The dwarf, a natural and instinctual being, does not recognise Simon as a man, since he deprives himself of what nature has to offer; for his part, the Stylite tried to explain his choice to the herder: "I eat and drink all I need. I am not a pure unfettered spirit but a man…". The dwarf still looks perplexed, but Simon goes on to explain that his "other need" in addition to eating, namely the need to excrete, is readily met because his faeces are like those of the dwarf's goats, "for my body is withered". But the dwarf does not understand Simon's words at all and returns to his flock, saying with a shrug: "I didn't understand a word of what you said except 'withered'".[61]

What more explicitly illustrates the absurdity, and especially the uselessness, of the protagonist's choice is the scene immediately following. On a long ladder, reaching the platform on top of the column, we see the monk Daniel, who has come to seek the saint's pardon and blessing. After the monk obtains them, his hesitation shows that this was actually only an excuse for him to discuss with Simon what is happening in the 'world': "There is little rest for the servants of God".[62] Simon does not stir as Daniel lists the calamities that are befalling the world: "The armies of the Antichrist are marching on Rome… Soon they may even reach here". The saint's reply is, of course, otherworldly and reflects an eschatological dimension: "Blessed be defeat, if it helps us to win God's glory". Daniel continues: "Men are always engaged in fratricidal wars. It's the curse of 'mine' and 'thine'".[63] But Simon "is puzzled" by this issue; he clearly struggles to understand what Daniel is saying and repeatedly asks him for explanations: "What are you talking about? … I don't understand…".[64] After various attempts to get him to grasp the concept of property, the monk tries to do so through a concrete example: seizing Simon's haversack, he cries: "Simon, this bag is mine!", expecting the Stylite to react. But in the face of the aggres-

[58] Buñuel, *Screenplays*, 231.
[59] Buñuel, *Screenplays*, 235–36.
[60] Buñuel, *Screenplays*, 236.
[61] Buñuel, *Screenplays*, 236.
[62] Buñuel, *Screenplays*, 237.
[63] In the English translation of the script, the lines are inexplicably divided between Simon ("Men are always engaged in fratricidal wars") and Daniel ("It's the curse of 'mine' and 'thine'"): see Buñuel, *Screenplays*, 237.
[64] Buñuel, *Screenplays*, 237–38. A criticism of private property is also found at the beginning of *Nazarín*, where Father Nazario – the protagonist, who has been robbed of all his belongings – states: "To me nothing belongs to anyone. Everything is for whomever needs it first".

siveness feigned by Daniel, who repeats that that is his haversack, Simon – who, according to the rules of the world, ought to quarrel with the monk to reclaim his property – displays an impassive and mild attitude. In the end, Simon says: "Take it, then":[65] Daniel is gobsmacked and gives up on his vain attempt. The English translation of the script brings the dialogue to a close here, noting: "Unconcerned by either the problem or its implications, and forgetting both Daniel and the bag, Simon kneels and begins to pray. His companion looks at him affectionately and, without another word, begins to climb back down the ladder".[66] The original script, however, includes two additional lines that effectively sum up Buñuel's verdict on the Stylite's experience:

> DANIEL: Your unselfishness is admirable and very efficacious for your soul. But I fear that, like your penance, it is of little use to men.
>
> SIMON: (leaning against him). I don't understand you. We speak different tongues. Go in peace, brother.
>
> Simon blesses him, turns and stands on one leg.[67]

This brief exchange has been described as Buñuel's most effective staging of the theme of the lack of communication and dialogue between human beings.[68] This incommunicability is heightened by the fact that the two men who are speaking are shown against the shapeless backdrop of the sky. The rope that cordons off the summit of the column, and which is visible behind them, points to the enclosed area in which the Stylite lives in the desert. The latter "is neither home nor alien for the protagonist, who, despite being a fifth-century desert father, is closer to 'the first astronaut, alone on a Space Platform'".[69]

As in *Nazarín* and *Viridiana*, in Daniel's last words Buñuel underscores the uselessness of individual sacrifice – the extreme decision taken by his protagonist – as well as the impossibility of accomplishing Christian utopia in history. In one of the closing scenes of *Nazarín*, a sacrilegious thief addresses the priest sharing his prison cell with the words: "Look I… I do nothing but bad things

[65] This scene, too, is reminiscent of the beginning of *Nazarín*, where – much to the bewilderment of two engineers from an electrical company – Father Nazario, just robbed, gives a female neighbour a pot, and the woman also makes off with a bundle of wood, nonchalantly remarking: "You are not going to use it".

[66] Buñuel, *Screenplays*, 239.

[67] https://lbunuel.blogspot.com/p/guion-de-simon-del-desierto-la-columna.html: "DANIEL: Tu desinterés es admirable y muy eficaz para tu alma. Pero temo que, como tu penitencia, no sirva mucho a los hombres.
SIMÓN: (contracampo sobre él). No te comprendo. Hablamos lenguas diferentes. Ve en paz hermano.
Simón le bendice, se vuelve y se mantiene sobre una pierna."

[68] Fuentes, *Buñuel en México*, 156.

[69] Ripley, *Search*, ch. 5, quoting Durgnat, *Buñuel*, 138.

and… well… What good is your life for? You go to the good side and I to the bad side: we're both insignificant and worthless". Equally fruitless is Viridiana's philanthropic choice to open up the house she has inherited from her uncle to beggars, who pay her back for her generosity by despoiling the place and attempting to rape her. These three characters are "the new Don Quixotes, pure and naive, who insist on fighting battles that have already been lost".[70]

## Conclusions

The exchange between Simon and Daniel strikingly encapsulates the meaning of Buñuel's cinematography. While unfinished, this medium-length feature presents all the motifs dear to the Aragonese director: surrealism, picaresque, symbolism, sarcasm, irony, criticism of the ritualism of society and religion,[71] uselessness of Christian ideals, and criticism of the concept of ownership.

It has been aptly observed that "it is in the 'checkmate', in the defeat, that the true character of the film director lies".[72] Indeed, Simon's story also stresses the closeness of the protagonist to the world, his rejection of human and social reality, his alienation, and – ultimately – his failure. As in *Nazarín* and *Viridiana*, what initially seemed to be a 'positive' protagonist, in the end reveals the vacuousness of his choices, the uselessness of his sublimation and individual experience, and the irreconcilability between the message of the Gospel and its fulfilment.[73] As in the other two films, what is missing in *Simon of the Desert* is

[70] Laura, "Sono ateo," 66: "novice Don Quixotes, pure and naïve, who persist in fighting battles already lost" (my transl.); cf. Bernardi, *Buñuel*, 115: "Father Nazario, Viridiana, Simeon the Stylite, Priscillian, the *pâtelier* priest, the Jesuit, and the Jansenist are all driven by sincere faith. For this reason, though, blinded by their beliefs, they forget about man in his concrete condition of suffering" (my transl.).

[71] Andrew Horton (*Laughing*, 82–83) speaks of a film charged with "irreverent anarchistic humor". The criticism of habit as mere appearance, of repetition devoid of any deep value, "involves insignificant everyday gestures, codified gestures, and sacralised gestures, lumping them together as reflecting the same baseless exteriority" (Tinazzi, *Cinema*, 57; my transl.). The film provides some significant examples of this, with comical and surreal effects. Take the scene in which Tryphon, who is possessed by a demon, bursts out in a long sequence of blasphemies, to which the monks respond, creating an alternation between "Up with…!" and "Down with…!" across the two sides; at some point, though, Tryphon shouts "Down with Jesus Christ!" and a distracted monk responds "Down with…!", only to correct himself: "I mean… Up with…!" (these lines were censored in France). In the same dialogue, among various other curses, Tryphon praises apocatastasis and the monks respond by shouting "Down with…! Down with…!", but then stare at one another, wondering what apocatastasis might be, which leads the monk Urbicius to state: "This devil knows more theology than we do!" (see Buñuel, *Screenplays*, 226–27).

[72] Tinazzi, *Cinema*, 61. See also Edwards, *Companion*, 126–27; the author stresses in particular the protagonist's intolerance towards others, which expresses the enduring problem of religious fanaticism and translates into a rejection of human society, with all of its imperfections.

[73] See e.g. Gabutti, *Buñuel*, 63–64; 75–76; Clausi, "Viridiana," 126–28; and Tomasi, "Cinema d'autore," 187; 190.

a positive alternative, in line with Buñuel's principle not to make films with a message, but to remain in ambiguity, in doubt.[74]

Simon's individualistic perspective, which brings no benefit to society, agrees with the words of a Syriac hermit recorded by Theodoret of Cyrrhus. They must have been familiar to Buñuel, since they are quoted quite prominently in the book by Festugière that the film director used as a source. Theodoret recounts that the monk James, who had withdrawn to a mountain, was annoyed at the number of people who would visit him, distracting him from his prayers; after some time, he would send these visitors off, saying: "It is not for them that I came to this mountain. It is for me".[75]

Only the Jesuit priest Artela Luvisiaga detected a positive message in the story of Buñuel's Simon, who had taught him to get down "from his column".[76] For the most part, though, modern historians and writers have shared Buñuel's scepticism towards the extreme experience embodied by his model, St. Symeon. Indeed, over the last two centuries the figure of the Stylite and the phenomenon of stylitism have been a frequent focus of interest, with many questioning the social usefulness of such a choice. In 1833 Alfred Tennyson composed the poem *St. Simeon Stylites*, published in 1842, in which the constant emphasis on the life choice of this figure, expressly regarded as superior to that of saints and martyrs, ultimately translates into a firm condemnation by the poet of a kind of asceticism that only amounts to a way of satisfying one's vanity and pride.[77] In the mid-nineteenth century, the English traveller, diplomat, and writer Robert Curzon wrote an account of his visits to Eastern monasteries. While praising the steadfastness of the Greek saints, who lived in holes like rats, dug into the rock with their knees and mortified their emaciated flesh with iron chains, Curzon concluded: "but they did nothing whatever to benefit their kind".[78] Likewise, after twice reading Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the*

[74] Pérez Turrent and de la Colina, *Buñuel*, 175: "I do not make films with a message, be they religious or atheistic"; ibid., 174 (on the miracle of the hands): "There is always an element of mystery, doubt, ambiguity. I have always been ambiguous. I am pervaded by an innate ambiguity that shatters fixed, immutable ideas" (my transl.).

[75] Festugière, *Antioche*, 306: "Ce n'est pas pour eux que je suis venu sur cette montagne. C'est pour moi". Cf. Theodoret, *Hist. Phil.* 21,33 (SC 257, 120): Οὐκ ἄλλου τοῦ χάριν, ἔφη, ἀλλ' ἐμαυτοῦ τὸ ὄρος κατείληφα.

[76] See Fuentes, *Mundos*, 112 n. 30: "Es la obra que a mí personalmente, come sacerdote, 'más me ha ayudado', porque me ha hecho ver cómo debo bajarme de mi columna".

[77] Consider the significant repetition of 'I', which occurs eighty-odd times in vv. 45–53 and 127–130 (ed. Page, 64; 67): "O Jesus, if thou wilt not save my soul, / Who may be saved? who is it may be saved? / Who may be made a saint, if I fail here? / Show me the man hath suffered more than I. / For did not all thy martyrs die one death? / For either they were stoned, or crucified, / Or burn'd in fire, or boil'd in oil, or sawn / In twain beneath the ribs; but I die here / Today, and whole years long, a life of death [...] And I, in truth (thou wilt bear witness here) / Have all in all endured as much, and more / Than many just and holy men, whose names / Are register'd and calendar'd for saints." See also in this volume the essay by Conca and Franco.

[78] Curzon, *Visits*, 240.

*Roman Empire*, which devotes a few pages to the "aërial penance" inaugurated by St. Symeon,[79] Isaac Asimov felt aversion to this penitent's practice of living on top of a column and questioned the claim that this might be a welcome feat in God's eyes.[80]

Certainly, in developing his Simon, Buñuel must have recalled what his dear friend Federico García Lorca had written in his youth, devoting a few pages to a sharp description of the Miraflores Charterhouse in Burgos. Emphasising the Carthusians's choice to lead a solitary and isolated life, Lorca chiefly criticises the lack of brotherly solidarity among these men – who actually address one another as 'brothers' – and their separation from other human beings. "Without having done anything good", these monks condemn themselves to "deserts of pain", an idea that is perfectly consonant with Buñuel's representation of the protagonist of his film:

> These men bury their bodies here, but not their souls. [...] The eyes weep, the lips pray, the hands wring their hands, but it is useless; the soul remains passionate, and these good, unhappy men, who seek God in these deserts of pain, must have understood that the tortures of the flesh were useless when the spirit asks for something else.
>
> It is complete cowardice, these examples of the Carthusian monks. They desire anxiously to live close to God by isolating themselves... but I ask what God is possibly the one the Carthusians are looking for? He will surely not be the Jesus... No, no... If these men wretched by the blows of life were to dream of the doctrine of Christ, they would not enter the path of penance but that of charity. Penance is useless, very selfish, and full of coldness. Nothing is achieved by prayer, just as nothing is achieved by maceration. [...] The only path is charity, to love one another.
>
> [...] These men who call themselves Christians should not flee from the world, as they do, but enter into it, remedying the misfortunes of others, consoling them in order to be consoled, preaching good and spreading peace. In this way, with their self-sacrificing spirits, they would be true Christs of the ideal Gospel.
>
> [...] Here they die having drunk the cup of spiritual passion and without having done any good....[81]

[79] Gibbon, *Decline*, IV, chap. 37, 319–21.

[80] Asimov, *Roman Empire*, 208.

[81] García Lorca, "Impresiones," 94–96: «Estos hombres sepultan aquí sus cuerpos, pero no sus almas. [...] Lloran los ojos, rezan los labios, se retuercen las manos, pero es inútil; el alma sigue apasionada, y estos hombres buenos, infelices, que buscan a Dios en estos desiertos del dolor, debían comprender que eran inútiles las torturas de la carne cuando el espíritu pide otra cosa. Es harta cobardía estos ejemplos de los cartujos. Ansían vivir cerca de Dios aislándose... pero yo pregunto ¿qué Dios será el que buscan los cartujos? No será el Jesús seguramente... No, no... Si estos hombres desdichados por los golpes de la vida soñaran con la doctrina del Cristo, no entrarían en la senda de la penitencia sino en la de la caridad. La penitencia es inútil, es algo muy egoísta y lleno de frialdad. Con la oración nada se consigue, como nada se consigue tampoco con la maceración. [...] La única senda es la caridad, el amar los unos a los otros. [...] estos hombres que se llaman cristianos

## Bibliography

Asimov, Isaac. *The Roman Empire*. Boston: Mifflin Houghton, 1967.

Aub, Max. *Conversaciones con Buñuel, seguidas de 45 entrevistas con familiares, amigos y colaboradores del cineasta aragonés*. Madrid: Aguilar, 1985.

Aub, Max. *Buñuel. Il romanzo*. Palermo: Sellerio editore, 1992.

Bernardi, Auro. *L'arte dello scandalo. 'L'âge d'or' di Luis Buñuel*. Bari: Dedalo, 1984.

Buñuel, Luis. *Three Screenplays: Viridiana, The Exterminating Angel, Simon of the Desert*. Translated by Anthony Pagden, 197–245. New York: Orion Press, 1969.

Buñuel, Luis. *Sette film. L'età dell'oro, Nazarín, Viridiana, L'angelo sterminatore, Simone del deserto, La via lattea, Il fascino discreto della borghesia*, edited by G. Fofi, transl. S. Esposito. Torino: Einaudi, 1974.

Buñuel, Luis. *My Last Breath*. Translated by Abigail Israel. London: Fontana Paperbacks, 1985.

Cattini, Alberto. *Luis Buñuel*. Milan: Il Castoro, 2006[3].

Clausi, Benedetto. "*Viridiana*, o della santità impossibile." In *Cinema e religione*, edited by Sergio Botta and Emanuela Prinzivalli, 113–29. Roma: Carocci, 2010.

Curzon, Robert. *Visits to Monasteries in the Levant*. London: John Murray, Albermarle Street, 1849.

Delehaye, Hippolyte. *Les Saints stylites*. Subsidia hagiographica, 14. Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes – Paris: Auguste Picard, 1923 (Facsimile repr. 1962).

De Ros, Xon. "Buñuel's Miracles: the Case of *Simón del desierto*." In *Buñuel, siglo XXI*, edited by Isabel Santaolalla Ramón, 73–79. Zaragoza: Prensas de la Universidad de Zaragoza, 2004.

Durgnat, Raymond. *Luis Buñuel*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977[2].

Edwards, Gwynne. *A Companion to Luis Buñuel*. Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2005.

Festugière, André-Jean. *Antioche païenne et chrétienne. Libanius, Chrysostome et les moines de Syrie*, avec un commentaire archéologique sur l'*Antiochikos* par Roland Martin. Bibliothèque des écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome, 194. Paris: E. De Boccard, 1959.

Fuentes, Víctor. *Buñuel en México: iluminaciones sobre una pantalla pobre*. Teruel: Instituto de Estudios Turolenses, 1993.

debian no huir del mundo, como hacen, sino entrar en él remediando las desgracias de los demás, consolando ellos para ser consolados, predicando el bien y esparciendo la paz. Así serían con sus espíritus abnegados verdaderos Cristos del Evangelio ideal.

[...] Aquí mueren habiendo apurado la copa de la pasión espiritual, y sin haber hecho ningún bien...».

Fuentes, Víctor. *Los mundos de Buñuel*. Madrid: Editorial Akal, 2000.

Gabutti, Giuseppe. *Luis Buñuel: l'utopia della libertà*. Roma: Edizioni Paoline, 1981.

García Lorca, Federico. "Impresiones y paisajes (1918)." In *Obras* VI, *Prosa* I, edited by Miguel García-Posada. Madrid: Ediciones Akal, 1994.

Gibbon, Edward. *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. 4 vols. Boston: Sampson Phillips, 1854.

Horton, Andrew. *Laughing Out Loud. Writing the Comedy-Centered Screenplay*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.

Jacobus de Voragine. *The Golden Legend or Lives of the Saints*, englished by William Caxton. Westminster, 1483; repr. London: J. M. Dent and co., 1900.

Largier, Niklaus. *Die Kunst des Begehrens: Dekadenz, Sinnlichkeit und Askese*. München: C. H. Beck, 2007.

Laura, Ernesto G. "«Sono ateo, grazie a Dio». Il cinema di Luis Buñuel." In *Il cinema delle parabole*, edited by Dario E. Viganò, 2 vols, 2: 59–82. Cantalupa (TO): Effatà, 2000.

Pérez Turrent, Tomás and José de la Colina. *Buñuel secondo Buñuel*. Milan: Ubulibri, 1993.

Ripley, Mark. *A Search for Belonging. The Mexican Cinema of Luis Buñuel*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2017.

Sadoul, George. *Il cinema. I film M–Z*. Florence: Sansoni, 1968.

Salvador Ventura, Francisco José. "Una imagen fílmica rigurosa de la antigüedad tardía: *Simón del desierto* de Luis Buñuel." *Habis* 38 (2007): 329–43.

Sanders, Theresa. *Celluloid Saints: Images of Sanctity in Film*. Macon: Mercer University Press, 2002.

Tennyson, Lord Alfred. *Selected Poetry*, edited by Norman Page. London: Routledge, 1995.

Tinazzi, Giorgio. *Il cinema di Luis Buñuel*. Palermo: Palumbo, 1973.

Tomasi, Dario. "Il cinema d'autore europeo degli anni Cinquanta e Sessanta." In *Introduzione alla storia del cinema. Autori, film, correnti*, edited by Paolo Bertetto, 185–204. Strumenti del DAMS, 13. Torino: UTET Università, 2008.

Torres, Augusto M. *Buñuel y sus discípulos*. Madrid: Huerga y Fierro Editores, 2005.

van den Ven, Paul. *La vie ancienne de s. Syméon Stylite le jeune* (521–592), 2 vols. Subsidia hagiographica, 32. Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes, 1962–70.

Veronese, Maria. "Sospeso tra cielo e terra: il Simón di Buñuel." In *Cristianesimo e cinema*, edited by Marcello Marin and Vincenzo Lomiento, 239–64. *Auctores Nostri*. Studi e testi di letteratura cristiana antica, 10. Bari: Edipuglia, 2012.

Wood, Michael. "*San Simeon* (sic) *del desierto (Simon of the Desert). 1965.* Directed by Luis Buñuel." In *The Hidden God: Film and Faith*, edited by Mary Lea Bandy and Antonio Monda, 130–33. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2003.

CHRISTINE AMADOU

# The Stylite is Present: Performance and Reclusion in Interplay

In 2010 the performance artist Marina Abramović sat for three months on a chair at MoMA, the Museum of Modern Art in New York. She was in place for eight hours a day, six days a week, wearing a long red dress, without eating or drinking, without talking. Sitting immobile, she invited people, one by one, to take a place and sit silently on a chair in front of her. Some stayed for minutes, others for hours. All in all, nearly 1,400 people experienced this face to face with the artist. None of them was untouched. This performance, called *The Artist is present,* is the most well-known of Abramović's performances. Already in the late 1990s, she declared that the traditional encounter between the public and a work of art had to be changed, and that her new way of encounter could be modelled on her meeting with a monk just coming out from seclusion, having spent several years in a cave. They had no common language, but the artist felt a presence that led to a state of clarity where she "just stopped thinking".[1] With her Serbian background, a pious grandmother and a granduncle being a patriarch, it is not surprising that references to Orthodox spirituality are legion in Abramović's works. Knowledge of this tradition can help us understand her projects, such as her insistence of the body as a medium, the need for physical verification (for example in her performance from 1975: *The Lips of Thomas*) and the fascination with ascetic endurance. Nevertheless, the ascetic tradition is not only a key to understand Abramović's exploration of the gaze, the wordless meeting between people, and the deeper meaning of the human *presence*. The connection can also go in the other direction. In this essay, I will consider the stylites, or more precisely Symeon Stylites, against the background of the ideas of performance and of 'endurance art'. This perspective makes it possible to study the stylite as a social person, interacting with other humans through

[1] Richards, "Abramović (1946–)," 471.

gaze, words, silences, and offering a unique presence from the top of his pillar. The study of the stylite as a performer also allows one of the founders of the Dada movement, Hugo Ball (1886–1927), to enter the scene. His strange performances at the 'Cabaret Voltaire' in Zurich between 1916 and 1919 were followed by a conversion (back) to Catholicism and a book on three Byzantine saints, among them Symeon Stylites.[2] Hugo Ball's presentation will be a central reference in this exploration of the interplay between ascetic performance and the stylite's transforming encounter with 'the world'. For even these extreme figures among hermits and anchorites were dependent on society. They were travelling humans seeking liberation from this same society. And vice versa, the worldly society needed the hermits in order to find new ways of thinking about communication and coexistence.

But now, back to Abramović. In a video work from 1995, *The Onion*, she pursues, as did Henrik Ibsen in *Peer Gynt* a century earlier, the idea of modern humans as having no kernel, but only layers and layers of skin. Whereas Peer was only peeling the onion, Abramović ate it entirely in front of the camera. However, the modern artist lacks Peer's egocentric arrogance and shifting identities. Her works represent a series of dynamic encounters between the artist and other humans, spaces where they are transported in glimpses out of ordinary life. This means that the kernel is less important. In the performative encounters between the artist and her public, we can even suspect compassion. In her performance *The House With the Ocean View* from 2002, created in New York in the aftermath of 9/11, Abramović lived for twelve days without eating, just drinking pure water, in an open house consisting of a bathroom, a sleeping room and a living room, where the public could follow all her movements 24/7, even the most intimate acts. As 'endurance art', such an experiment would have had little meaning without the spectators; it depends fully on their observation. She relates:

> I have in this period people who came first just for a few minutes and then they stay for three hours, four hours, and came the next day to stay even longer, without really understanding what's happening. But there's something like I almost think that if you are in the present and you are purified that you can create a kind of energy field, that you can change on atomic level of the space in a certain way with the public and feel and just be in the present time.[3]

This is what Mary Richards defines as "the important role Abramović increasingly gives the spectator in the world".[4] Her own spiritual search, her endur-

[2] Ball, *Byzantinisches Christentum*.

[3] Marina Abramović, https://www.moma.org/audio/playlist/243/3129.

[4] Richards, "Abramović (1946–)," 473.

ances, seem in some way to depend on the presence of other people – not as a form of exhibitionism (for the performance artists this is another matter altogether), but as an exploration of what happens when people experience meetings in spaces outside their daily life, or when the daily life is slowed down and exposed. The question is whether this importance of the interplay between humans applies to a saint on a pillar in Late Antiquity as well.

Symeon, often called "the Elder", lived from ca. 389 to 459 CE in Syria and was the first stylite, followed, as far as we know, by around fifty others. Some years ago, I translated his Greek *vita*, written by Theodoret, bishop of Cyrrhus. Among the translator's struggles was my computer's insistent correcting program, where the 'stylite' was consistently transformed into a 'stylist'. Maybe not as stupid as it sounds. Whatever concepts of 'self-fashioning' may be used to characterize the pious man, we have no sources where he himself relates his choices and experiences. Theodoret's version has to be read together with the Syriac version, the most complete *Vita* of Symeon, written during his life and immediately after the saint's death.[5] The texts consistently maintain the narrative perspective of the other, the spectator. In other words, the author repeats what people who had met Symeon had experienced, and what he himself had seen with his own eyes.[6] Theodoret even has to insist on the credibility of the second-hand sources: "I'm afraid that the narrative may seem to posterity to be a myth totally devoid of truth. For the facts surpass human nature [...]".[7] One of the purposes of Theodoret's text is to convince the reader of the veracity of the story of a man that seems 'beyond nature'. To achieve this, the author uses the accounts of more or less credulous spectators.

Following a *topos* in the hagiographic literature, Theodoret introduces Symeon as a poor and illiterate young man. He was a son of shepherds and prepared to be a shepherd himself. But one day, a heavy snowstorm hindered him in this work, and he went to the church where he heard the Gospel's word, which "declares blessed those who weep and mourn, calls wretched those who laugh, terms enviable those who possess a pure soul" (ch. 2). When he asked how this could be achieved, Theodoret relates how he was told that the way was a solitary life. That did not necessarily mean living completely alone. Symeon joined a community of ascetics and, as in so many early saints' *vitae*, he outdid all his brothers in the community in religious devotion and zeal: "He had eighty fellow contestants, and outshot all of them; while the others took food every other

[5] The Syriac *Life* translated into German was published in Leipzig in 1908 as "Syrische Lebensbeshreibung des hl Symeon," in *Das Leben des heiligen Symeon Stylites,* [...] mit einer deutschen Übersetzung der syrischen Lebensbeschreibung und der Briefe von Heinrich Hilgenfeld, *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur,* 80–180.

[6] I quote from the English translation of the *Life of Symeon*, found in the collection of Lives of Monks in the Syrian desert: Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *History of the Monks of Syria*, translated by R. M. Price. For the Greek text: Théodoret de Cyr, *Histoire des Moines de Syrie* 2:158–214.

[7] Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Life of Symeon*, ch. 1.

day, he would last the whole week without nourishment" (ch. 5). After two years, Symeon left the community in search of an even more "philosophical" life. He fasted for forty days, like Elijah in the desert, enclosed in a small cottage and without even touching the jars full of water that were placed there. After a while, Symeon went further and settled on a mountain, fastened to a big rock with a solid chain, enduring solitude and renunciations. He quickly attracted numerous people, as his reputation of being a miraculous healer spread rapidly. "As his fame circulated everywhere, everyone hastened to him, not only the people of the neighborhood, but also people many days' journeys distant, some bringing the paralyzed in body, others requesting health for the sick, others asking to become fathers." (ch. 11) However, Symeon did not feel comfortable with this human flow: "Since the visitors were beyond counting and they all tried to touch him and reap some blessings from his garments of skin, while he first thought the excess of honour absurd and later could not abide the wearisomeness of it, he devised the standing on a pillar [...] for he yearns to fly up to heaven and to be separated from this life on earth." (ch. 12) In this way, the first stylite was born, fleeing from the omnipresent crowd. When he was standing on the pillar, they could not touch him, but they could still *see* him. Theodoret takes a literary detour among the prophets of the Old Testament, who did amazing things "for the benefit of the easygoing." (ch. 12) He comes back to Symeon via Isaiah: "For who could not have been astounded at seeing a man of God walking naked? [...] Therefore, just as the God of the Universe ordered each of these actions [in the Old Testament] out of consideration for the benefit of those inured to ease, so too, he has ordained this new and singular sight in order to draw all men to look, and to make the proffered exhortation persuasive for those who come [...]." (ch. 12) Theodoret even compares the sight of stylites and other extraordinary devotional practices to royal effigies on coins and seals. The Lord of Heaven had "coin-typed these new and various ways of life" (ch. 12), to be seen and recognized by believers and non-believers alike.

Theodoret describes the stylite performing miracles, giving prophetic advice about the future, answering and solving conflicts. What interests us in this 'performative' reading is, however, the spectators who were just that, spectators. They were all men. Even when the queen of the Ishmaelites, as recorded in chapter 21, gave birth to a child thanks to the saint's miraculous intervention, she was, as a woman, not allowed to come and be present at the blessing of the child. Instead, she had to send the newborn to the stylite with a written, grateful recommendation. Theoderet's main concern is to describe how this crowd of men from all levels of society and from all regions of the inhabited world came to see the stylite's "daily needs", how his frugal diet and lack of sleep "transcend narration" (ch. 21) and how he was standing night and day in the sight of all, "exposed to all as a new and extraordinary spectacle." (ch. 22) Most miraculous was his bending down in honour of God – somebody tried to count the number

of bendings but had to give up after 1,244 times – an exercise facilitated by his meagerness: "for his stomach's receiving food only once a week, and little of it, enables his back to bend easily." (ch. 22)

One of the most stunning episodes is related by Theodoret in ch. 23. The stylite was suffering from an ulcer on his leg. One of the visitors comes from Rabaena, "even a Deacon of Christ." When he saw Symeon on the pillar, he could not believe this was a human being and not an angel: "Are you a man, and not a bodiless being?" The visitor even insists that he can confirm that no human being can live without sleeping and eating. Confronted with this incredulity, the stylite asks for silence among the visitors, lets a ladder be placed along the pillar and asks the incredulous deacon to mount on it. Once he reaches the height of the stylite, Symeon orders him to put his hands inside his cloak to touch his leg and even the ulcer. He also confirms that he did not eat. The man descends the ladder and tells the author himself about this bodily confirmation of the stylite's humanness.

However, most of the visitors did not touch the saint – they watched him. Lukas Schachner has studied the physical presence of the stylites, and by calculating the pillar heights, he assumes that a stylite was visible as a landmark in a radius of up to ten kilometers.[8] The stylites were "like stars in the east and reached the ends of the world with their rays".[9] This makes the stylites a striking contrast to all the hermits who lived in holes and distant places, and apparently also to Symeon's first impulse: "he told how he heard the Gospel utterance which declares blessed those who weep and mourn, calls wretched those who laugh, terms enviable those who possess a pure soul [...]. He then asked one of those present what one should do to obtain each of these. He suggested the solitary life and pointed to that consummate philosophy." (ch. 2) When Symeon left the brothers, he went down into a cistern. Later on, he enclosed himself, as we have seen, in a cave. Before mounting the pillar, he stayed for three years on the top of a hill where he had made a circular enclosure. This installation is the first of Symeon's dwellings where he seems to have been a *visual* attraction. The spectators must even have been close to him as they could count the bugs in his garments:

> When a piece of leather, which had been tied to his leg to prevent the iron injuring his body, had to be torn apart (for it had been sown together), people saw, they said, more than twenty large bugs lurking in it; and the wonderful Meletius said he had seen this. I myself have mentioned it in order to show from this example as well the endurance of the man: for though he could easily have squeezed the leather with his

[8] Schachner, "The Archaeology of the Stylite," 379.

[9] Theodoret's introduction, ch. 9.

> hand and killed them all, he steadfastly put up with their painful bites, welcoming in small things training for greater contests. (ch. 10)

This is the occasion for Theodoret to use his impressive imagery: "People came from all over the world and with everyone arriving from every side and every road resembling a river, one can behold a sea of men standing together in that place, receiving rivers from every side." (ch. 11) This is also the occasion for Symeon to build the pillar and create a physical distance to his visitors. He could have fled into a distant desert or down into a new cistern, but instead he maintained and even accentuated his visibility.

The building of the pillar also represented a geometrical contrast, as Charles Stang has analyzed, to Symeon's first calling.[10] In fact, his first vocational dream was to dig a trench: "I had to make the trench deeper. After adding to its depth as he told me, I again tried to take a rest; but once more he ordered me to dig and not relax my efforts. After charging me a third and a fourth time to do this, he finally said the depth was sufficient." Stang notes the vertical continuity in Symeon's building activity, the biblical resonances they had, but also Theodoret's double explanation of the pillar construction. He presents it as a practical way of getting rid of the crowd, but he also insists on the pillar as a divine call, "I myself do not think that this standing has occurred without the dispensation of God." (ch. 12) Stang has also found a spiritual continuity between Symeon's digging and the pillar, a continuity related to the image of a tree with deep roots. He finds this image elaborated in the Syriac version of Symeon's *vita*: "The descent and the ascent should be understood together, complementary, just as a tree requires roots firmly grounded if it is to weather storms."[11] In Symeon's dream, as related in the Syriac *vita*, he saw a tree full of flowers and fruits, with long branches, and the meaning of the simile is in fact explained: "Now the tree was the saint and the branch cut off his brother Mar Shemshi [...]."[12]

In a recent article, Georgia Frank has followed up this focus on physicality and explored the *mobility* of the pillar saints.[13] Paradoxically, she finds movements and spatial displacements a central element in the stylites' lives. She draws on Michel Certeau's definitions of place as an "indication of stability" and place as the "intersection of mobile elements".[14] She argues that in the case of the stylites (her example is Symeon the Younger, 521–596), we can see three different types of mobility:

[10] Stang, "Digging Holes."
[11] Stang, "Digging Holes," 463.
[12] Syriac *vita*, 105, quotation from Stang, "Digging Holes," 463.
[13] Frank, "Traveling Stylites?."
[14] Frank, "Traveling Stylites?," 265.

> 1) Vertical mobility, as marked as a series of columns; 2) topographical mobility, as in the tales mapping the stylite's presence well beyond the pillar; 3) place-making mobility, that is to say tales about the encounters between the stylite and other agents – human or otherwise – in the process of making of new places proximate to the column.[15]

What interests us here is the last category, the place-making. In her analysis of Symeon the Younger's *vita*, Georgia Frank defines this as "a mobility that permits the saint to transform the space surrounding the column into a monastery [...]."[16] Here we are back to the stylite's interactivity, and to the interplay between him and the visitors and admirers. In the *vita* of Symeon the Elder, the description of the building activity is not as concrete as in the life of his namesake and successor. But in Theodoret's text we can see the same insistence on the *effects* of the stylite on the community that is in embryonic form under his feet. Theodoret writes about the flow of people, but underlines that not only the life on the pillar, but also the life on the ground, is part of God's providential plan, just as were the strange acts of the Old Testament prophets:

> [...] just as the God of the universe ordered each of these actions out of consideration for the benefit of those injured to ease, so too he has ordained this new and singular sight in order by its strangeness to draw all men to look, and to make the proffered exhortation persuasive to those who come – for the novelty of the sight is a trustworthy pledge of the teaching, and the man who comes to look departs instructed in divine things. (ch. 12)

In Theodoret's eyes, the *novelty* was a central part of Symeon's attraction. The originality was due to the spectacular position, and to Symeon's extreme renunciation. People came to see how a human could live without being bound to normal human activities. They could watch him *not* eating, *not* sleeping, *not* lying down. This sight of a human (and as we have seen, his humanness had to be proved) living, but transgressing the boundaries made by physical needs and pains, was the instruction in divine things.

An explicit aim of many artists in the twentieth century was to reverse the relation between the public and the art, often by giving people something they were not prepared for. This conception of art as surprising and provocative was central when the Dada movement was founded in Zurich in 1916. The Dada performers had their stage at the 'Cabaret Voltaire' and announced the programme in quite a cryptic, but also exciting way:

[15] Frank, "Traveling Stylites?," 267.
[16] Frank, "Traveling Stylites?," 269.

> DADA!! the latest thing!!! bourgeois syncope, BRUITIST [noise] music, the new rage, Tzara song dance protest — the bass drum — red light, policemen — songs cubist tableaux postcards Cabaret Voltaire song — simultaneous poem … two-step alcohol advertisement smoking toward the bells / we whisper: arrogance / Ms. Hennings' silence, Janco declaration. transatlantic art = people rejoice star projected on Cubist dance in bells.[17]

The Cabaret Voltaire with its red lighting, noisy music and alcohol is probably as far as you can get from the elevated stylite. Nevertheless, the *primus motor* in the Dada movement, Hugo Ball, represents a bridge between the two. Only six years after his formulation of the anti-art manifesto ("How does one achieve eternal bliss? By saying dada. How does one become famous? By saying dada"[18]) he wrote his book on the Byzantine, Christian world as represented through three saints. This is not the place to study the possible continuity in Ball's artistic and spiritual itinerary. As Nicola Behrmann has recently pointed out, apropos the performances at Cabaret Voltaire, Ball's focus on birth and creation was linked to ideas with religious resonances: "These performances [the shows staging birth at the Cabaret Voltaire] are inextricably linked with each other and oscillate between fantasies of creation without procreation, the possibility of giving birth as a creator and of being born through one's work."[19] One may suspect that Hugo Ball brought with him these reflections on art, on self-fashioning and self-creation when he turned to Orthodox theology and that these 'learnings from DADA' can help us understand the performative force of Symeon's 'endurance art'.

Hugo Ball's book entitled *Byzantinisches Christentum* contains three essays, on John Climacus, Dionysius the Areopagite, and on Symeon.[20] The stylite chapter has an introduction to "God's Language" and the "Hymn of the Shepherds". It then relates the life of the stylite, referring both to translations of the Greek and the Syriac versions.[21] Then follow two more theological chapters on "Satan and the Watch of God" and "The Signs of Omnipotentia". In the biographical part, Hugo Ball presents the stylite in the following way:

[17] Tristan Zara, "Chronique Zurichoise," entry for 26th February 1916.

[18] Hugo Ball, DADA manifesto, read at the first public soirée at the Cabaret Voltaire in Zürich 14 July 1916. Downloads/Ball%20Dada%20Manifesto.pdf.

[19] Behrmann, "Scenes of Birth," 335.

[20] Ball, *Byzantinisches Christentum*. All translations from the German text are made by Brian McNeil.

[21] Hugo Ball uses the German edition made by Hans Lietzmann with translations by H. Hilgenfeld, *Das Leben des heiligen Symeon Stylites*. In his "Anmerkungen" he also refers to an early work by Hippolyte Delehaye: "Les stylites" (1895), whereas Delehaye's major work on the stylites, *Les Saints stylites*, was to be published the year after Ball's book, in 1923.

> One who looks into the stylite's eyes forgets enmity and hatred. Encamped around his mountain, the peoples make treaties with each other. He never sleeps, he never eats. Nor does he say much. He prays from sunrise to noon, then he heals the lame and the deaf, the mute and the blind. With the sinking sun, he sinks down again into his prayers – but not into sleep; for his column, so lofty it sways in the storm, measures only three ells in diameter. He is a constant waking dream, God's wonder watch. The whole earth sets out on pilgrimage to him.[22]

As we see, Ball's interest is in the *effects* of the stylite. The first paragraph is not taken from the ancient *vitae*, but echoes Ball's fascination with the gaze and the human interplay. The last paragraph in this citation depends also entirely on Ball himself, and the idea of the miracle watch – *das Wunderuhr* – is taken from the northern European late medieval churches. These astronomical watches were made to give an image of the whole universe and the places of the earth, the moon, the sun and the planets, but also to let the visitor reflect on time and vanity.

In the Syriac version we find the strongest images of the crowd coming to Symeon:

> After the day had come and the door to the enclosure of the blessed lord was opened, God set the whole of humankind in motion. As if a heavenly command had come from the heights upon the entire world, human beings without number left their homes and came to this place. (ch. 54)

Hugo Ball accentuates the importance of the world *around* Symeon. All the visitors are an instrument to display God's miracles, that is to say, eyes through which we can see Symeon. As I read Hugo Ball, he also suggests that the crowd is an indispensable element in the 'fashioning' of the stylite, and this (as Ball could find confirmed in quotations like the one just below) was part of God's providential will.

As we have seen, the crowd came already when Symeon was on the hill and the visitors were helping to build the column. Ball sets his own stamp on the story, introducing Psalm 96, as used also in the Syriac version:[23]

> In order not to be disturbed in prayer, he [Symeon] takes the final step: "Bring, O peoples, bring the Lord glory and power. All the gods of the heathens are idols, but the Lord has made the heavens." And all the people come. Kings alongside beggars. The column grows. The people pile it higher. First twelve ells, then twenty, then thirty, then forty ells. The holy one of the Lord towers up, solitary and ever more

[22] Ball, *Byzantinisches Christentum,* 237.
[23] Bedjan, *Leben des Symeon Stylites (syrisch)*, 167.

> unapproachable. The work is completed with a double wall with which they girdle him. It certainly was not Simeon who raised himself up: they have placed him in mist and night, in sun and storm, in stars and rain, in hail and lightning.[24]

Ball's insistence on the people's active role and participation in the stylite's life is important with regard to the difference between the stylite and other saints. In the chapter "*Die Wunder der Heiligen*," he writes: "No matter how great their suggestive power or how deep their absurdity may be, they [the saints] all have a milieu around them. Daily life finds its way to them".[25] In Ball's reading, this means that the saints are like signs that can be decoded: "They unveil themselves, in some way and at some point. Their perfection suffers. They can be interpreted."[26] The miraculous novelty of Symeon was, according to Ball, that he was beyond interpretation: "Symeon is the first stylite. He is exempt from interpretation. [...] He cannot be touched; he cannot be reached. This is the secret of the exciting impact he had on his contemporaries."[27] This does not mean that he has no interaction with the world. "He always remains a shepherd, although his flock is the human race [...]. He follows only the virtues that he has learned as a boy with his flock [...] calmness, equanimity, patience."[28] The shepherd needs the flock as the flock needs him. But this unusual shepherd is not as clearly interpretable as other saints: "he becomes a sign of something unheard of [*Zeichen des Unerhörten*]."[29] And as a new and mysterious sign, "he immerses himself in the mystery of the crowd, in the conditions of the flock."[30]

Symeon was not the first to transgress the borders of human needs; Late Antiquity has given us hundreds of stories about ascetics who chose a life in total renunciation and were admired for it. The stylite's uniqueness was his position as an immobile watchman, and his total vulnerability – exposed to all weather conditions, but more importantly, to people's eyes from long distances. In a book from 2000, Georgia Frank has explored the pilgrimages to living saints, and the importance of the personal inspection.[31] Frank points out the question of divine presence as a central theological question, as well as the "valorization of the senses" as an important background for the fast-growing pilgrim movement. "Christian writers shared with the larger Greco-Roman culture an impulse to render the unseen visible."[32] She also found a shift between the fourth and later centuries, from a "primacy of sight [...] to the increasing use of touch" in the

[24] Hugo Ball, *Byzantinisches Christentum*, 235–36.
[25] Ball, *Byzantinisches Christentum*, 238.
[26] Ball, *Byzantinisches Christentum,* 238.
[27] Ball, *Byzantinisches Christentum*, 238.
[28] Ball, *Byzantinisches Christentum*, 239.
[29] Ball, *Byzantinisches Christentum,* 239.
[30] Ball, *Byzantinisches Christentum,* 234–35.
[31] Frank, *Memory of the Eyes*.
[32] Frank, *Memory of the Eyes*, 17.

descriptions of the pilgrims' transformative moments.[33] If she is right, the role of Symeon is intriguing. He deprives the pilgrims of sensory experiences like touch and smell – only sight is left. But what a sight! As Hugo Ball puts it: "From the *De profundis* to the *In excelsis,* he encompasses the entire expanse of prayer. His foot rests in corruption, the top of his head touches the stars. The four cherubic angels fly around his head."[34] The position of *omnipotentia* makes the stylite see and be seen. This living portrait becomes the model for widespread copies, as Ball retells Theodoret and other biographers: "His picture is widespread in the principal cities of the Roman Empire; it recalls the busts of Aeschylus and Homer".[35] In Theodoret's *vita,* those portraits are said to be "so celebrated in the great city of Rome that at the entrance of all the workshops men have set up small representations of him, to obtain thereby some protection and safety for themselves."[36]

Something must have happened in the interplay between the living saint, his portrait and the people of the world. The first stylite, who was in Ball's words "exempt from interpretation", had a unique position and was a sign in himself. He attracted visitors from all over the world and the result was "a sea of tears". He was a living seal, permitting Theodoret to compare him to a new effigy on a coin, when the Sovereign "tries to make the gold coin more valuable with the strangeness of this kind". His portraits, spread over the Roman world, if we are to believe Theodoret, had the same effect at a distance, they were marvellous protections. But all these ways of being a living sign of God depended on the people, "the sea of humans", who came to him. Hugo Ball's readings of the old texts help us see this human dynamic.[37]

As Ball's successor in the field of endurance art and performances, Marina Abramović can help us to see how such dynamics *work*. Her performance "The Artist is Present" created an effect of vulnerability, both for the artist and for the visitors, which originated in a common humanness. Transported to Late Antiquity, this humanness implied the recognition of a fallen nature in need of healing and salvation. Abramović's instruments to create the situations of shared presence were, to use concepts drawn from the stylite, her *stasis* and her slowed down time. In her context, the *stasis* means that she stayed in the same chair and in the same position for seven hours a day. The slowed down time that she invited the public into was another time 'zone', liberated from all the minute activities that fill ordinary lives. In Ball's introduction to the essay on Symeon, called "The language of God," he exposes this other time, God's time, as it is reflected in the holy persons: "The language of God has no need of the

[33] Frank, *Memory of the Eyes*, 32.
[34] Ball, *Byzantinisches Christentum*, 250.
[35] Ball, *Byzantinisches Christentum*, 237.
[36] Theodoret, *Life of Symeon*, ch. 11.
[37] All references in this paragraph are from Ball, *Byzantinisches Christentum*, 223–24.

human language in order to make itself comprehensible. [...] The language of God has time, much time, and rest, much rest. [...]".[38] For Ball, "the saints belong to the vocabulary of God". When he wrote this, Ball had already explored the mysterious language in his 'Cabaret Voltaire'. His performances made use of strange sounds and murmurings, as well as of silences. This connects him in an astonishing way both to the enduring stylite and to the modern enduring artist. Their performances have different sources and aims, but through silences, gaze, and a merciless presence they transmit.[39]

## Bibliography

Ball, Hugo. *Byzantinisches Christentum*, Zürich: Benziger Verlag Einsiedeln 1922. New commented and critical edition: *Byzantinische Christentum. Drei heiligenleben.* Herausgeben und kommentiert von Bernd Wacker. Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2011.

Bedjan, Paul. *Leben des Symeon Stylites (syrisch). Mit einer deutschen Übersetzung der syrischen Lebesbeschreibung von Heinrich Hilgenfeld.* Leipzig: Acta martyrum et sanctorum Syriae, 1894–1908.

Behrmann, Nicola. "Scenes of Birth and Founding Myths: Dada 1916/17." *The Germanic Review: Literature, Culture, Theory* 91, no. 4 (2016): 335–49.

Frank, Georgia. *The Memory of the Eyes. Pilgrims to Living Saints in Christian Late Antiquity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.

Frank, Georgia. "Traveling Stylites? Rethinking the Pillar Saint's *Stasis* in the Christian East." In *Les mobilités monastiques en Orient et en Occident de l'Antiquité tardive au Moyen Âge (IVe–XVe siècle)*, edited by Olivier Delouis, 261–73. Rome: Publications de l'École française de Rome, 2019. https://books.openedition.org/efr/4305.

Lietzmann, H. *Das Leben des heiligen Symeon Styiltes.* Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des altchristlichen Literatur 32. Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1908.

Richards, Mary. "Abramović (1946–)." In *The Routledge Companion to Performance Practitioners*, edited by Frank Chamberlain and Bernadette Sweeney. London: Routledge, 2020.

Schachner, Lukas Amadeus, "The Archaeology of the Stylite." In *Religious Diversity in Late Antiquity,* edited by David M. Gwynn, Susanne Bangert, and Luke Lavan, 329–397. Late Antique Archaeology 6. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2010.

[38] Ball, *Byzantinisches Christentum*, 223.

[39] Symeon's first call came when he heard the Gospel, Matt. 5:4: "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."

Stang, Charles M. "Digging Holes and Building Pillars: Simeon Stylites and the 'Geometry' of Ascetic Practice." *Harvard Theological Review* 103 (2010): 447–70.
Théodoret de Cyr, *Histoire des Moines de Syrie*. 2 vols. Sources chrétiennes 256–257. Paris: Cerf, 1979.
Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *History of the Monks of Syria*, translated by R. M. Price. Collegeville: Cistercian Publications, 1985.
Zara, Tristan. "Chronique Zurichoise," entry for 26th February 1916. Translation by Charles Cramer and Kim Grant: https://smarthistory.org/dada-performance/.

## Online Resources

Abramović, Marina. https://www.moma.org/audio/playlist/243/3129.
Ball, Hugo. DADA manifesto. https://ia802708.us.archive.org/9/items/zinelibrary-torrent/hugo_ball_print.pdf

PART III

# An Anthology

# An Anthology of Images and Poems about Stylites*

## St Symeon Stylites

*Alfred Tennyson*

Although I be the basest of mankind,
From scalp to sole one slough and crust of sin,
Unfit for earth, unfit for heaven, scarce meet
For troops of devils, mad with blasphemy,
5 I will not cease to grasp the hope I hold
Of saintdom, and to clamour, mourn and sob,
Battering the gates of heaven with storms of prayer,
Have mercy, Lord, and take away my sin.
Let this avail, just, dreadful, mighty God,
10 This not be all in vain, that thrice ten years,
Thrice multiplied by superhuman pangs,
In hungers and in thirsts, fevers and cold,
In coughs, aches, stitches, ulcerous throes and cramps,
A sign betwixt the meadow and the cloud,
15 Patient on this tall pillar I have borne

* Curated by Barbara Crostini with the collaboration of Laura Franco, Olof Heilo, Lovisa Jakobsson, Charles Lock and Katarzyna Rossby. All illustrations are listed on p. 349.

Rain, wind, frost, heat, hail, damp, and sleet, and snow;
And I had hoped that ere this period closed
Thou wouldst have caught me up into thy rest,
Denying not these weather-beaten limbs
20 The meed of saints, the white robe and the palm.
O take the meaning, Lord: I do not breathe,
Not whisper, any murmur of complaint.
Pain heaped ten-hundred-fold to this, were still
Less burthen, by ten-hundred-fold, to bear,
25 Than were those lead-like tons of sin that crushed
My spirit flat before thee.
O Lord, Lord,
Thou knowest I bore this better at the first,
For I was strong and hale of body then;
And though my teeth, which now are dropped away,
30 Would chatter with the cold, and all my beard
Was tagged with icy fringes in the moon,
I drowned the whoopings of the owl with sound
Of pious hymns and psalms, and sometimes saw
An angel stand and watch me, as I sang.
35 Now am I feeble grown; my end draws nigh;
I hope my end draws nigh: half deaf I am,
So that I scarce can hear the people hum
About the column's base, and almost blind,
And scarce can recognize the fields I know;
40 And both my thighs are rotted with the dew;
Yet cease I not to clamour and to cry,
While my stiff spine can hold my weary head,
Till all my limbs drop piecemeal from the stone,
Have mercy, mercy: take away my sin.
45 O Jesus, if thou wilt not save my soul,
Who may be saved? who is it may be saved?
Who may be made a saint, if I fail here?
Show me the man hath suffered more than I.
For did not all thy martyrs die one death?
50 For either they were stoned, or crucified,
Or burned in fire, or boiled in oil, or sawn
In twain beneath the ribs; but I die here
Today, and whole years long, a life of death.
Bear witness, if I could have found a way
55 (And heedfully I sifted all my thought)
More slowly-painful to subdue this home

Of sin, my flesh, which I despise and hate,
I had not stinted practice, O my God.
For not alone this pillar-punishment,
60 Not this alone I bore: but while I lived
In the white convent down the valley there,
For many weeks about my loins I wore
The rope that haled the buckets from the well,
Twisted as tight as I could knot the noose;
65 And spake not of it to a single soul,
Until the ulcer, eating through my skin,
Betrayed my secret penance, so that all
My brethren marvelled greatly. More than this
I bore, whereof, O God, thou knowest all.

70 Three winters, that my soul might grow to thee,
I lived up there on yonder mountain-side.
My right leg chained into the crag, I lay
Pent in a roofless close of ragged stones;
Inswathed sometimes in wandering mist, and twice
75 Blacked with thy branding thunder, and sometimes
Sucking the damps for drink, and eating not,
Except the spare chance-gift of those that came
To touch my body and be healed, and live:
And they say then that I worked miracles,
80 Whereof my fame is loud amongst mankind,
Cured lameness, palsies, cancers. Thou, O God,
Knowest alone whether this was or no.
Have mercy, mercy; cover all my sin.
Then, that I might be more alone with thee,
85 Three years I lived upon a pillar, high
Six cubits, and three years on one of twelve;
And twice three years I crouched on one that rose
Twenty by measure; last of all, I grew
Twice ten long weary weary years to this,
90 That numbers forty cubits from the soil.
I think that I have borne as much as this -
Or else I dream -and for so long a time,
If I may measure time by yon slow light,
And this high dial, which my sorrow crowns -
95 So much -even so.
And yet I know not well,
For that the evil ones come here, and say,
"Fall down, O Simeon: thou hast suffered long
For ages and for ages!" then they prate
Of penances I cannot have gone through,
100 Perplexing me with lies; and oft I fall,
Maybe for months, in such blind lethargies
That Heaven, and Earth, and Time are choked.
But yet
Bethink thee, Lord, while thou and all the saints
Enjoy themselves in heaven, and men on earth
105 House in the shade of comfortable roofs,
Sit with their wives by fires, eat wholesome food,
And wear warm clothes, and even beasts have stalls,
I, 'tween the spring and downfall of the light,
Bow down one thousand and two hundred times,

110 To Christ, the Virgin Mother, and the Saints;
Or in the night, after a little sleep,
I wake: the chill stars sparkle; I am wet
With drenching dews, or stiff with crackling frost.
I wear an undressed goatskin on my back;
115 A grazing iron collar grinds my neck;
And in my weak lean arms I lift the cross,
And strive and wrestle with thee till I die:
O mercy, mercy! wash away my sin.
O Lord, thou knowest what a man I am;
120 A sinful man, conceived and born in sin:
'Tis their own doing; this is none of mine;
Lay it not to me. Am I to blame for this,
That here come those that worship me? Ha! ha!
They think that I am somewhat. What am I?
125 The silly people take me for a saint,
And bring me offerings of fruit and flowers:

And I, in truth (thou wilt bear witness here)
Have all in all endured as much, and more,
Than many just and holy men, whose names
130 Are registered and calendared for saints.
Good people, you do ill to kneel to me.
What is it I can have done to merit this?
I am a sinner viler than you all.
It may be I have wrought some miracles,
135 And cured some halt and maimed; but what of that?
It may be, no one, even among the saints,
May match his pains with mine; but what of that?
Yet do not rise; for you may look on me,
And in your looking you may kneel to God.
140 Speak! is there any of you halt or maimed?
I think you know I have some power with Heaven
From my long penance: let him speak his wish.
Yes, I can heal him. Power goes forth from me.
They say that they are healed. Ah, hark! they shout
145 "St Simeon Stylites." Why, if so,
God reaps a harvest in me! O my soul,
God reaps a harvest in thee. If this be,
Can I work miracles and not be saved?
This is not told of any. They were saints.
150 It cannot be but that I shall be saved;
Yea, crowned a saint. They shout, "Behold a saint!"
And lower voices saint me from above.
Courage, St Simeon! This dull chrysalis
Cracks into shining wings, and hope ere death
155 Spreads more and more and more, that God hath now
My mortal archives.
O my sons, my sons,
I, Simeon of the pillar, by surname
Stylites, among men; I, Simeon,
160 The watcher on the column till the end;
Sponged and made blank of crimeful record all
I, Simeon, whose brain the sunshine bakes;
I, whose bald brows in silent hours become
Unnaturally hoar with rime, do now
From my high nest of penance here proclaim
165 That Pontius and Iscariot by my side
Showed like fair seraphs. On the coals I lay,
A vessel full of sin: all hell beneath

Made me boil over. Devils plucked my sleeve,
Abaddon and Asmodeus caught at me.
170 I smote them with the cross; they swarmed again.
In bed like monstrous apes they crushed my chest:
They flapped my light out as I read: I saw
Their faces grow between me and my book;
With colt-like whinny and with hoggish whine
175 They burst my prayer. Yet this way was left,
And by this way I 'scaped them. Mortify
Your flesh, like me, with scourges and with thorns;
Smite, shrink not, spare not. If it may be, fast
Whole Lents, and pray. I hardly, with slow steps,
180 With slow, faint steps, and much exceeding pain,
Have scrambled past those pits of fire, that still
Sing in mine ears. But yield not me the praise:
God only through his bounty hath thought fit,
Among the powers and princes of this world,
185 To make me an example to mankind,
Which few can reach to. Yet I do not say
But that a time may come—yea, even now,
Now, now, his footsteps smite the threshold stairs
Of life—I say, that time is at the doors
190 When you may worship me without reproach;

For I will leave my relics in your land,
And you may carve a shrine about my dust,
And burn a fragrant lamp before my bones,
When I am gathered to the glorious saints.
195 While I spake then, a sting of shrewdest pain
Ran shrivelling through me, and a cloudlike change,
In passing, with a grosser film made thick
These heavy, horny eyes. The end! the end!
Surely the end! What's here? a shape, a shade,
200 A flash of light. Is that the angel there
That holds a crown? Come, blessed brother, come.
I know thy glittering face. I waited long;
My brows are ready. What! deny it now?
Nay, draw, draw, draw nigh. So I clutch it. Christ!
205 'Tis gone: 'tis here again; the crown! the crown!
So now 'tis fitted on and grows to me,
And from it melt the dews of Paradise,
Sweet! sweet! spikenard, and balm, and frankincense.
Ah! let me not be fooled, sweet saints: I trust
210 That I am whole, and clean, and meet for Heaven.
Speak, if there be a priest, a man of God,
Among you there, and let him presently
Approach, and lean a ladder on the shaft,
And climbing up into my airy home,
215 Deliver me the blessed sacrament;
For by the warning of the Holy Ghost,
I prophesy that I shall die tonight,
A quarter before twelve.
But thou, O Lord,
Aid all this foolish people; let them take
220 Example, pattern: lead them to thy light.

(1833; first published in *Poems*, 1842)

## Der Stylit

*Rainer Maria Rilke*

Völker schlugen über ihm zusammen,
die er küren durfte und verdammen;
und erratend, dass er sich verlor,
klomm er aus dem Volksgeruch mit klammen
Händen einen Säulenschaft empor,

der noch immer stieg und nichts mehr hob,
und begann, allein auf seiner Fläche,
ganz von vorne seine eigne Schwäche
zu vergleichen mit des Herren Lob;

und da war kein Ende: er verglich;
und der Andre wurde immer größer.
Und die Hirten, Ackerbauer, Flößer
sahn ihn klein und außer sich

immer mit dem ganzen Himmel reden,
eingeregnet manchmal, manchmal licht;
und sein Heulen stürzte sich auf jeden,
so als heulte er ihm ins Gesicht.
Doch er sah seit Jahren nicht,

wie der Menge Drängen und Verlauf
unten unaufhörlich sich ergänzte,
und das Blanke an den Fürsten glänzte
lange nicht so hoch hinauf.

Aber wenn er oben, fast verdammt
und von ihrem Widerstand zerschunden,
einsam mit verzweifeltem Geschreie
schüttelte die täglichen Dämonen:
fielen langsam auf die erste Reihe
schwer und ungeschickt aus seinen Wunden
große Würmer in die offnen Kronen
und vermehrten sich im Samt.

All around him they swarmed,
those who sought to be saved by him, or damned,
until it dawned on him that he himself was lost,
and then with sticky hands he clawed
his way above the human mass

and mounted a column that reached
ever higher, bearing nothing,
until alone on its high platform he began
to weigh, foremost, each of his weaknesses
against the glory of the Lord.

Of this there was no end; as he measured,
so grew the Other, vaster yet and vaster.
And the shepherds, the farmers, the rivermen,
saw him growing both smaller yet, and yet more exalted.

always in debate with those in the sky,
rained upon sometimes, sometimes sunlit;
his howls were falling on those below
as though he had howled into each one's face;
through all these years he'd never noticed
how the crowds were still swarming around him,
for not even the shining of royal jewels would glimmer so far above.

But up there, already damned by their stubbornness, shunned,
alone with his veil-rending cries,
he wrestled with his daily demons.
Slowly, onto the uppermost tier of those below,
heavily, awkwardly, from out of his wounds, monstrous maggots
plopped into the crowns' hollow circlets,
spawning their velvet selves.

(1908)
Translated by Charles Lock.

Willink '39
A.C. WILLINK GEB. 1900

# Στυλίτης

*Kostas Varnalis*

Νά! της αγάπης ο άστερας, φλογάτο κρίνο,
μαράθηκε, ως τον άγγιξεν η πρώτη αχτίνα.
Κι εγώ, που μάτι με σκοτάδ' ή φως δεν κλείνω
κι όμοια με δέρνουνε γυμνό βροχάδες, ήλιοι,
θαρρώ, πως ξένα σωθικά θερίζ' η πείνα
και σ' άλλα σώματα οι πληγές μου τρέχουν ύλη.

Ω! κυπαρίσσι, που όλο πας να ξεπεράσεις
το ψήλος σου και πρώτο στ' άπειρο γαλάζο
πίνεις το φως, χωρίς ποτέ σου να γεράσεις,
εμένα η θέλησή μου μ' έχει εδώ στεγνώσει
πέτρα στην πέτρα, κάθε μέρα να ετοιμάζω
το λυτρωμό μου με του θάνατου τη γνώση.

Νά! με κορμάκια λαστιχένια έφηβοι ωραίοι
τον ήλιο χαιρετάν με κρόταλ' απ' ασήμι.
στυφοί Ρωμαίοι, Έλληνες ψεύτες, φίδια Οβραίοι!
Νά! μανιασμέν' ιθύφαλλοι (θεός φυλάγει!)
κιθαριστάδες, αυλητάδες, γέροι μίμοι,
γραμματικοί, ρητόροι, φιλοσόφοι τράγοι·
παιδούλες, που το φως ντυθήκανε, με κόμη
κοντή με μια κορδέλα μεταξένια μπλάβη
γύρω στην ήβη, που δεν ίσκιωσεν ακόμη·
μαστόρισσες εταίρες στη χαρά της μέρας
σε στέρνες από μάρμαρο βουτάνε ομάδι,
ανθός κάθε γιαλού, κάθε φυλής αθέρας...
η κολασμένη πολιτεία μέσα στη σκόνη
φλέγεται, ουρλιάζει και κυλιέται χάμου
και πιο στην αμαρτία βουτάει, μα δεν πατώνει...

Μακριά! Μακριά μου!... Οδεύει οκνά το
καραβάνι
οι γκαμήλες κι ο Αράπης, ως περνάει σιμά μου,
φτάνει και μου πετάει κοπριά, που δε με φτάνει·
τι κάθε μέρα και ψηλότερα ψηλώνω
για να σε φτάσω, Θε μου Αγάπη, όπου κι αν
είσαι,
πιο πάνου από ζωή και θάνατο και χρόνο.

Here! The star of love, burning lily,
he withered, as the first ray touched him.
And I, who do not close an eye with darkness nor with light
and the same, rains and suns beat me naked,
I think, that hunger scythes foreign flesh
and in other bodies my wounds flow matter.

Oh! cypress, you always try to surpass
your height and first in the infinite sky-blue
you drink the light, without ever growing old,
as for me, my will has dried me up here
stone on stone, every day preparing
my redemption with the knowledge of death.

Here! Handsome adolescent boys with elastic little bodies
they greet the sun with silver rattles.
Stiff Romans, Greek liars, Hebrew snakes!
Here! rabid ithyphalloi (God forbid!)
guitarists, pipers, old mimes,
grammarians, orators, goat philosophers;
little girls, who dressed the light, with short
hair with a turquoise silk ribbon
around their pubes, which did not yet grow a shadow;
hetairai master in the joy of the day
dive altogether into marble cisterns,
flower of every bay, of every ethereal tribe...
the infernal city in the dust
burns, screams and rolls down
and plunges deeper into sin, but does not reach bottom...

Far away! Far away from me!... The caravan is moving
sluggishly
the camels and the Arab, as he passes near me,
reaches me and throws dung at me, which does not reach
me;
for every day I grow even higher
to reach you, my God Love, wherever you are,
beyond life and death and time.

Στου τέκνου σου το δάκρυ, που λουστεί δεν κλαίει!
Συ μου 'πες: .Τα 'χεις όλα, αν όλα τα στερείσαι!
Κι είναι σοφός που δε σαλεύει και δε λέει.!...

Τα θύματα χιλιάδες των πολέμων κάτου
σέπονται με της πείνας, της σκλαβιάς αντάμα,
με της αρρώστιας, του δαρμού — δόξα θανάτου!
Όλοι του Παραδείσου ισάγγελοι! Μα εγώ,
που ξεψυχώ και δεν πεθαίνω, το 'χω τάμα
να τυραννιέμαι ακόμα μόνος. Όσο αργώ,
τόσο και θησαυρίζω πιότερα στα ύψη!...
Μα νά τος πάλι ο Πειρασμός, αχώριστός μου,
(πιότερο εγώ τονε πειράζω· κι αν μου λείψει,
θα μου κακοφανεί!) μου ξαναλέει: —.Κουνήσου!
Δε σώζεις την ψυχή σου, τους κυρίους του Κόσμου
με τη φυγή, την αρνησιά και τη θανή σου.
Όχι με λόγια, μ' έργα τ' Άδικο πολέμα!
Κι όχι μονάχος! Με τα πλήθη συνταιριάσου!
Τ' άδικο μ' αίμα θρέφεται! Πνίξε το με αίμα.
Κι άμα θα σπάσουν οι αλυσίδες τ' αδερφού,
η λευτεριά η δικιά του θα 'ναι λευτεριά σου,
κι ανάγκη πια δε θα 'χεις κανενός Θεού...

Those who bathe in the tear of your child, they do not cry!
You told me: You have everything, if you deprive yourself of everything!
And he is wise who does not waver and does not say.!...

Thousands of victims of wars rot down
from the hit of hunger, of slavery
along with disease and blows — glory of death!
All equal to angels of Paradise! But I,
who leave my last breath but do not die, I have pledged
to still continue torturing myself alone. The more I run late,
the more I earn treasures in the heights!...
But here he is again, Temptation, my inseparable one,
(rather I tease him; and if I miss him,
it will look bad on me!) he tells me again: -.Move!
You do not save your soul, the masters of the World,
with your flight, denial and death.
Not with words, but with deeds fight Injustice!
And not alone! Blend in with the crowds!
Injustice feeds on blood! Drown it in blood.
And once the brother's chains are broken,
his own freedom will be your freedom,
and you won't need any God anymore...

(1918)

Translated by Laura Franco with thanks to Dr Charalambos Dendrinos.

## The Stylite

*Clark Ashton Smith*

Upon his pillar stands upright
The rigid anchoret: his pose,
Over the desert, toward the sky,
Prolongs the rectitude of stone,
The rising and unbroken line.

Emmets and men go by beneath.
The veering vultures fan his brow:
He sees them not: his sanctity
Enfolds him like the fuming cloud
A thousand thuribles might yield.

At evening pass in pompous file
The larvae sent by Satans.
To mock him, on a pagan height
The ram pant sagittary stands,
Stallion of maenads half-equine;

And pulsing soft horizons fall
And swell with forms the heathen shun-
Dark sisters of the Ashtaroth
That crawl from undescended gulfs
Or slither over sliding scaurs.

With kelpy tresses weather with foam,
Voluptuous cold Nereides
Upon the surging desert float;
And Cypris, as from out the sea,
Rises reborn with veil nor zone.

Behind dissolving peristyles
Lithe sphinxes crouch and rear in rut;
And mincing from Gomorrah's night,
Vague-membered gods androgynous
Invert an ithyphallic sign.

The reeking shames of Sheol glow
And writhe before him... Still upright

The saint exalts the columned stone
With folden arms and changeless eyes-
In chastity long ankylosed.

(1951)<br>First published in *The Dark Chateau and Other Poems*, Arkham House<br>http://www.eldritchdark.com/writings/poetry/551/the-stylite

## Święty Szymon Słupnik

*Stanisław Grochowiak*

Powołał go Pan
Na słup.
Na słupie miał dom
I grób.

A ludzie chłopaka na szafot przywiedli,
Unieśli mu głowę w muskularnej pętli.
Powołał go Pan
na stryk.

Powołał go Pan,
By trwał.
By śpiewał mu pieśń
i piał.

A ludzie dziewczynę wśród przekleństw gwał-cili
I włosy jej ścięli, i ręce spalili.
Powołał ją Pan
na gnój.

Powołał go Pan
Na słup.
Na słupie miał dom
i grób

A ludzie mych wierszy słuchając powstają
I wilki wychodzą żerującą zgrają...

The Lord called him upon the pillar.
There was his home and his grave.

And the people brought a boy to the scaffold.
They raised his head in a sturdy loop.
The Lord called him to the noose.

The Lord called him,
To guard.
To sing Him songs and crow.

And the people were raping a girl among the curses
They cut her hair and burned down her hands.
The Lord called her to the muck.

The Lord called him upon the pillar.
There was his home and his grave.

And the people listening to my poems uprise
And wolves come out in packs to devour...
The Lord called me to rebel ...

(1956)
Published in *Ballad of the Knights*
Translated by Katarzyna Rossby, with thanks to Magdalena Slyk.

## Translating Rilke's "Der Stylit"

*Charles Lock*

Every translation represents both a challenge and a temptation. A challenge to convey the 'sense' and a temptation to adjust the sense, however slightly or subtly, to bring sense (*Sinn*) into line with meaning (*Bedeutung*), or 'the sense' (definite) into line with 'a meaning' (one among many). Frege's opposition between *Sinn* and *Bedeutung* might be set against St Paul's distinction between the letter that kills and the spirit that gives life (2 Cor. 3:6). The problem is that the very act of translation assumes that there can be no literal remainder; there is only the spirit that conveys 'the sense' between two languages which may not have even an alphabet in common. It is generally agreed that a translation should aspire to convey 'the sense', however elusive that sense may be. It is also widely accepted that a translation can deploy stress or emphasis to lend a text a particular meaning. One sense, often elusive; many meanings, as prolific and as inevitable as the falling short of 'the sense' represented by any 'meaning'.

Rilke's 'Der Stylit' seems to have attracted rather more translations than commentaries. It is a poem with which even admirers of Rilke (1875–1926) may be unfamiliar, and this because its 'sense' seems so inimical to everything else we know about Rilke and his attitude to Russia, its post-Byzantine culture and its Orthodox Christianity. Those themes, of 'ordinary piety', the monastic life, the making of icons, are developed through the poems written between 1898 and 1903 when Rilke was a frequent visitor to Russia. (See Patricia Pollock Brodsky, *Russia in the Works of Rainer Maria Rilke*. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1984; Donald Prater, *A Ringing Glass: The Life of Rainer Maria Rilke* (Oxford: OUP, 1986), 52–67.) Though the poems of *Das Stunden-Buch* (1905) are far too idiosyncratic to offer any sort of solace to those in search of doctrinal affirmations, they afford no comfort whatever to those who would mock. Over and again Rilke respects the humility of ordinary Russians and celebrates the mystery of creation (and the creative) as, most daringly, when the iconographer himself brings the Divine into being: what would the Divine be if we had no sign by which to recognize or identify His presence? Unless a monk makes an icon, how can we even begin to know God? This leads to vertiginous paradoxes in which humility strives against hubris: what would You be, oh Lord, if, in and through this icon, I had not created You?

The tensions and antinomies in Rilke's apprehensions of Russian Orthodoxy have defied adequate unfolding, and they might well do so unto the ages of ages. But there can be no doubt that it was his experiences in Russia that gave Rilke not only a vocation but a practice: to make poetry out of what the angels say; to make poems that are less representations than intimations of the divine. And to sense the divine as that which we as humans can never wholly be.

Hence, the puzzle presented by 'Der Stylit': a poem whose Byzantine theme is treated with a distaste and contempt matched by Alfred Tennyson (1809–92) in what must be the most famous of Stylite poems. Published in 1842 though composed in 1833, Tennyson's 'St Simeon Stylites' was reviewed by the essayist Leigh Hunt in terms which articulate the Protestant condemnation: '... a powerfully graphic and in some respects appalling satire on the pseudo-aspirations of egotistical asceticism and superstition ... We do not recollect to have met with a more startling picture of the sordid and the aspiring—the selfish and the self-sacrificing ... the abject, the dominant, the stupid, the imaginative ... all mixed up in the poor phantom-like person of the almost incredible Saint of the Pillar—the almost solitary Christian counterpart of the Yogees of the Hindoos ... We say Christian, out of Christian charity; for though real Christianity is a quintessence of good sense ... as the flower of it will in due time make manifest, yet these and other dark absurdities have, no doubt, lurked about its roots, and for a time, with equal absurdity, have been confounded with the flower.' (Cited in *The Poems of Tennyson*, ed. Christopher Ricks. London: Longmans, 1969, 542.)

Tennyson's own motivation remains obscure; there was no emerging cult of Stylitism in early Victorian England. In the 1840s the Prime Minister, William Gladstone, was prominent in supporting the establishment of convents, and the revival of monasticism in England might well be reckoned as defying the notion of Christianity as the quintessence of good sense. John Henry Newman went over to Rome in 1845 and some fairly extreme ascetic practices were encouraged by certain of the religious orders newly established in England; of

these we have a detailed account in the novitiate of the convert, Gerard Manley Hopkins, who entered the Society of Jesus in 1868. Yet no source among theological or ecclesiological matters c. 1833–1842 has been convincingly proposed as the specific provocation of Tennyson's poem.

We might rather look for an explanation in the newly devised poetic mode of the 'dramatic monologue' in the works of Tennyson and Robert Browning (1812–1889), each of whom published now-canonical exemplars in 1842: Tennyson's *Poems* hold 'St Simeon Stylites' and 'Ulysses' (both composed in 1833) while Browning's 'My Last Duchess' and 'Porphyria's Lover' are among the *Dramatic Lyrics* of 1842. If the lyric voice is too easily mistaken for the poet's own, then the dramatic monologue serves to distinguish them. The dramatic monologue most forcefully asserts its generic identity by being voiced in words and manner unmistakably not the poet's. Though he was not yet Lord Tennyson, the Poet Laureate, Tennyson's was already an established identity not to be confounded with one who might say: 'Although I be the basest of mankind, / From scalp to sole one slough and crust of sin …' Of the four exemplary dramatic monologues here named, it might be argued that the least successful as dramatic monologue is the one most often recited in public: 'Ulysses'. This tends now to be treated as the barely mediated voice of the Victorian sage that Tennyson became. That Tennyson chose in 1833 to assume the voices of both Ulysses and Simeon helps us to hear how the dramatic depends on the different, and how the different is deployed against confusion. Nobody would suppose that Tennyson was 'speaking through' Simeon, nor Browning through the Duke of 'My Last Duchess'—yet it is that 'speaking through' which most recitings of 'Ulysses' take as given: the words of Ulysses are misheard as those of the poet.

If there is no evident provocation for Tennyson's poem—beyond the sheer difference between the English poet and the Syrian stylite—we might no less wonder why Rilke should think of writing a poem on a figure at once so exotic and so unsympathetic. Both Tennyson and Rilke had read what remains the standard account of Simeon, to be found in Ch. XXXVII of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*—though Rilke would have known Gibbon through *Geschichte vom Verfall und Untergang des römischen Imperiums*. (On Gibbon in German, see C.F. Berghahn & T. Kinzel, eds., *Edward Gibbon im deutschen Sprachraum*, Heidelberg: Winter, 2015.) 'Der Stylit' was written in 1908, some years after Rilke's intense engagement with Russia and with Orthodox Christianity, and it confounds our expectations that Simeon would be presented with a measure of sympathy, just as Russian monks had been. Tennyson himself is hardly more scathing and Rilke's admirers have hardly known what to make of the poem; it has received little critical attention.

Tennyson as a poet is, characteristically, clear; there's little difficulty in making 'sense' of his poem. By contrast, while we can at once appreciate Rilke's

antipathy towards Simeon, it is exceedingly difficult to make sense of his poem. (The obscurity of Rilke is quite as characteristic as Tennyson's clarity.) Hence the particular pressure and challenge of translation, for every translation serves as a gloss, and a translation can often be the most efficient and even the most convincing way of bringing out the 'sense' of a poem. Yet faced with a poem whose sense is so difficult, the act of translation is more than usually a temptation: one is tempted to amplify, to coordinate, to deploy apposition by way of definition and clarification.

While not deliberately distorting the poem, I have in making this translation had a certain notion of its 'meaning'; without such a notion I could not have begun the task, and yet, given such a notion, 'sense' can no longer be told

apart from 'meaning'. 'The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life': axiomatic enough, but in translation we can convey nothing but the spirit. Fidelity to the letters can be judged only by those without need of the translation. But how can we have any idea of the spirit if we have no letters, or no access to their 'sense'? Yet even in studying a poem within 'one's own language' one uses other words by way of parsing and paraphrasing. Translation is thus analogous to the problem posed by Rilke's monk to the Lord: how could we know You if I did not paint You? How are letters to be understood except through the betrayals of translation?

The present translation assumes that the poem expresses a contempt for the sort of Christian gnosticism that would lead the faithful to aspire to a disembodied condition, untrammeled by the needs and desires of human nature. At its close seems to be an implicit injunction that we should not forget that, however high we ascend, we must still let fall what must fall. Marcion as a Gnostic wished to deny that Christ could have been subject to the basest necessities, and the Church was obliged to insist that, in the fulness of his humanity, Christ was not spared the abjections of excrement: 'Deification and Defecation' is the lucid title of a recent article by M. David Litwa in *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 31:1 (2023). Marcion was a figure much discussed among German Protestant theologians throughout Rilke's lifetime, although the most influential and admiring study, Adolf Harnack's, was not published until 1923. This was the very year that Hugo Ball startled those who had known him as a Dadaist by publishing *Byzantinisches Christentum*, in which, together with pseudo-Dionysius and John Climacus, Simeon Stylites is honoured as a saint, at considerable length and without irony or equivocation. (See Deborah Lewer, 'Hugo Ball's Religious Conversion,' *German Life and Letters* 63: 3 (2023).) The coincidence of those publications in 1923, by Harnack and Hugo Ball, might be taken as a symptom of a gnostic affinity between Marcion and Simeon.

With its insistence on the Incarnation, on the materiality of the sacramental, on the artefacts of worship, and on the earth—the earth as soil in all its senses—Russian Orthodoxy is far from Gnosticism. Yet because Simeon is a phenomenon of the Byzantine tradition there has been too casual a conflation of stylites with other modes of eremitic and ascetic living. Rilke always reserves high praise for the humble, for those who acknowledge their dependence on the earth. His monk, like any artist, works with matter, and may strive to make matter holy; privileged among artists, the iconographer turns matter into signs by which we might recognize the Lord. Simeon is not only theologically and ethically misguided; what drops from him into those open or hollow crowns is all that he can be said to have made. His life is an offence to our created being, and to us—for whom creation is yet to be created, and being is yet to be.

## List of Illustrations

*1. Detail from September Menologion, Barocci 230, fol. 3v., 11th century. Bodleian Library. Public Domain, bodleian.ox.ac.uk.*

*2. W. E. F. Britten, St. Symeon Stylites. Photogravure for the 1901 edition of Tennyson's early poems. Public Domain, Wikimedia Commons.*

*3. St. Symeon Stylites. Gilded silver plaque from the treasury of the church of Ma'aret in Noman in Syria, end of 6th century. Musée du Louvre. Public Domain, Wikimedia Commons.*

*4. Relic of the skull of Symeon the Elder with a 10th-century Byzantine gold mount. Monastery of Camaldoli, Italy. Photo: Livia Bevilacqua.*

*5. Icon of St Symeon, Greece, 18th century, Petit Palais. © Petit Palais / Roger-Viollet.*

*6. Carel Willink,* Simeon, de pilaarheilige *(1940). Kunstmuseum den Haag. © Kunstmuseum den Haag / Henk Kusters.*

*7. St Symeon, basalt relief. Syria, 5th-6th century. Berlin, Bode-Museum (Museum für Byzantinische Kunst, inv. no. 9/63) / Antje Voigt; CC BY-SA 4.0.*

*8. St Alypios and his mother, icon. Glyptoteket, Copenhagen. © Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek.*

*9. Robert Morris,* Column *(1961). Photo: Courtesy of Castelli Art Gallery, New York.*

*10. St Symeon, lead medallion. Berlin, Bode-Museum (Museum für Byzantinische Kunst, inv. no. 32/73) / Antje Voigt; CC BY-SA 4.0.*

*11. Saint Symeon the Stylite and September's First Week Church Calendar, second half of the 19th century. Byzantine Museum of the Holy Bishopric of Tamassos and Oreinis, Episkopeio, Lefkosia, Cyprus, Inv. n. TE2837. Photo: Ourania Perdiki, courtesy of the Bishop Isaias of Tamassos and Oreinis.*

*12. The Annunciation, detail with stylites. Icon, Mount Sinai. Photograph courtesy of Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria Expeditions to Mount Sinai.*

# Syrian Stylites

## Rereadings and Recastings of Late Ancient Superheroes

Edited by Barbara Crostini & Christian Høgel

This volume presents thirteen papers on different aspects of the cult of pillar saints – stylites – and their reception in texts and images. It highlights the ambiguities and disruptive potential of this Syrian hagiographical heritage, an outstanding aspect of Late Antiquity which breaks free of conventional piety and becomes enmeshed with social and political discourses beside the spiritual and religious ones. The two main parts on textual and visual reception – from Theodoret of Cyrrhus to Luis Buñuel – are followed by an anthology of literary and artistic interpretations of stylites, demonstrating how their powerful message has kept fascinating readers and beholders from the Late Ancient to the Modern period.

ISBN: 978-91-89840-24-9


SWEDISH RESEARCH INSTITUTE IN ISTANBUL
TRANSACTIONS VOL. 26

*Distributed by eddy.se ab*