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B. Caseau – Ch. 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 5th and 6th 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 included examples of stylites until the 19th century.[1] The most famous stylites remain those of the Late Antique period: Symeon Stylite the Elder lived in the 4th-5th century,[2] Daniel the Stylite during the 5th century,[3] Symeon Stylite the Younger during the 6th century,[4] and Alypios during the 6th-7th century.[5] Their 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 (10th-12th century) and their presence in Byzantine society.

Stylites in the 10th-12th centuries

This demanding 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 reclused, can manage on their own, stylites need others to feed them and help them out. The stylite's lifestyle was presented as holy by saints' Lives, which publicized this type of monastic

[1]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.
Delehaye, *Les 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, *Les 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 Bayness, *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, *Les saints stylites*, 148-194; Introduction, LXXVI-LXXXV; English Translation, Kuper, "The 'Life of Alypius the Stylite'."

holiness. It is now well established that instead of suffering a regression during the Middle Byzantine period, the phenomenon of stylitism even experienced a certain revival in the 9th-12th centuries. New hagiographic texts emerged during this period, with certain characteristics adapted to the hagiography of the time notably concerning the level of asceticism and the tastes of the intended audience. Thus, the literary representation of stylites, although inspired by the models of the late antique past, often differ 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 his trajectory in 'becoming a saint,' but it is not his main and lasting form of asceticism. Thus, Euthymios the Younger in the second half of the 9th century settled on a column near Thessalonica during an interval between his stays on Mount Athos,[8] and several other less notorious stylites acted in the same way. In the case of Symeon of Lesbos, who also lived during the 9th century 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, 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. This is the case of the stylites mentioned in the 9th century Lives of Anthony the Younger[10] and Gregory of Dekapolis,[11], and, in the 10th century, of the stylite of Patras, close to whom another Luke, who is 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 12th century.[13]

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[6] Greek text in Delehaye, *Les saints stylites*, 195-237; Introduction, LXXXVI-CV and Vogt, "Vie de S. Luc le stylite." See also, S. Vanderstuyf, "Étude sur saint Luc le Stylite." On the stylites of the 9th century, see also Kazhdan, "Hermitic, Cenobitic," 479-481.

[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."

[9] Greek text: 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," 202-203. 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, *Ὁ 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*. On the author and the text, see also Messis, "Littérature, voyage et politique."

Another element concerning the literary treatment of stylites, during the middle Byzantine centuries, is that some stylites "fall," both physically, precipitated on 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 9th 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.[15] The most complete example of a moral failure is, however, the example narrated by Neophytos the Recluse at the end of the 12th century about a Georgian stylite in the Lavra of Saint Sabbas 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 Sabbas, 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 for the late antique Syrian stylites is linked to the recapture of Antioch at the end of the 10th century by Byzantine troops and the central role that this city continues to hold in the Byzantine worldview until the 12th century. Antioch becomes a place where envoys from Constantinople meet with the local elite, and during the period of the 10th and 11th 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 sent carefully chosen 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 as "ruler of the East" until perhaps 1111. 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

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[14] For example, Leo the Deacon, *History* X.X, ed., Hase, *Leonis Diaconi*, 176.9-10: ὀπινήκα 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.

[15] Theodore Studite, *Minor Catecheses*, no 38, ed. Auvray, *Theodori Studitis,* 139-140: 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," 280-282; Efthymiadis, "Redeeming the genre's remnants," 310-311 and Caseau and Messis, "Saint Syméon Stylite le Jeune," 267.

already long late antique *Life* of saint Symeon Stylite the Younger. 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 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 Stylites the Younger was clearly linked to the prosperity and attractivity of his monastery on the Wondrous Mountain during the second Byzantine period. In the late 10th and early 11th 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 took place; 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 11th 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 super human 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

[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."
[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.

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 a religious and cultural heritage to be imitated in a less glorious monastic era plagued with material concerns. Nikon, after the comparison of two stylites adds: "What takes place until now is not a blessing, but the result of tyrannical behaviour, 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 12th 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. Though 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 in a prominent place.[23]

Stylites nevertheless continued to proliferate 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 10th century, monks of the Stoudios preferred to bother « stylites, recluses, and solitaries » for spiritual advice and confession. He recommends that they keep their own spiritual fathers inside the monastery.[24] This shows that stylites were surrounded by a halo brighter than cenobitic monks.

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[20] Nikon, *Lettres*, no 33, ch. 21-22, ed. Hannick et alii, *Das Taktikon*, 860-862.
[21] *Ibid*.
[22] Eustathius, *Oration for a Stylites*, ed. Tafel, *Eustathii metropolitae*. See also Stratigopoulos, "Orator or Grammarian."
[23] Eustathius, *On Hypocrisy*, ch. 38, ed. Tafel, *Eustathii metropolitae*, 97: Ἔτι σεσημείωνται παρὰ τοῖς ἀνέκαθεν ἁγίοις ὀλίγοι μεγάλοι στυλῖται, οἱ οὐρανοβάμονες, οἳ ὅσα καὶ διὰ κλιμάκων, τῶν στύλων, προσέσχον τῷ οὐρανῷ. Ἡ δὲ νῦν γενεὰ οἷα καὶ δένδρα συχνὰ ἐν ξυλόχῳ πολλαχοῦ γῆς τὸ στυλιτικὸν φῦλον ἀναδίδωσιν, οὐ ζωῆς ὂν αὐτὸ ξύλον, οὐδὲ γνώσεως ξύλον, ἀλλὰ παρά τι βραχὺ ξύλον αὐτόχρημα, καὶ οὐδὲ κατὰ Δωδωναῖον ἐκεῖνο, οὗπερ ἦν τις λόγος, ἀλλὰ ἑτεροῖον καινόφωνον, ἐξ οὗ μόνον ἔστι τρυγᾶν τὸ εὐλόγησον.
[24] Symeon Studites, *Ascetic Discourse*, 35.28-29, ed. Alfeyev, *Syméon le Studite Discours*, 118.

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 Angel turned to stylites, among others, for moral help,[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, 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, but they only became visible after their completion. Whether or not Robert gives us exact information or carries out 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.

Having surveyed this diverse and varied literary landscape of the middle Byzantine period, we wish 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 11th century and preserved in Greek, Arabic, Georgian, and Old Slavonic.[30] This text forms a kind of encyclopaedia of holiness in Syria and Palestine, namely creating a narrative space where one finds Mar Saba monks, patriarchs of Jerusalem and Antioch, bishops of Edessa, Emesa and

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[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.
[29] Robert de Clari, *The Conquest of Contantinople*, ch. 92, ed. Dufournet, *Robert de Clari*, 182-183 ; trad. Mc Neal, *Robert de Clari*, 110-111.
[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"; A. Abel, "La portée apologétique"; Griffith, "The Life of Theodore of Edessa"; Binggeli, "Converting the Caliph"; Messis and Papaioannou, "Translations I."

Babylon/ Bagdad, 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 honor to stylitism when it makes the stylite Theodosius a spiritual guide for the main hero, Theodore, and one who anticipates the central vicissitudes of the plot.

The text and its contents

The Life of Theodore is a very particular text in 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 preserved in 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 first shows a taste for hagiographic novels (including a taste for colorful 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 sponsor of the manuscript inserts the *Life* of Symeon Stylite the Younger, in the form of the recently rewritten paraphrase by Nikephorus Ouranos, into this collection of hagiographic texts.[34] This *Life* of Symeon the Younger is his source of inspiration for the first years of Theodore,[35] and also, we suppose, for the attribution to a stylite as 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 11th 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, constituted on Mount Athos around Euthymios the Iberian at the end

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[31] The Arabic versions make Theodosius a hesychast or an anchorite; see Griffith, "The Life of Theodore," 150, n. 18 and 162.
[32] On this manuscript see Ehrhard, *Überlieferung und Bestand der hagiographischen und homiletischen Literatur*, 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 Nikephorus 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," 120-123; Glynias, "Byzantine Monasticism," 429-431; 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.

of the 10th and the beginning of the 11th century.[37] The Iberian origin of the manuscript could even be underlined by a wink that the author addresses to his readers by making Georgians the three faithful companions of the caliph, who follows them through his decision to become a Christian and eventually through martyrdom.[38] The problem of authorship remains however perhaps open, and the new edition of the text with all of its versions, which is underway, shall shed additional light on this complex issue.[39]

The facts narrated by the *Life* take place during the first half of the 9th 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 Sabbas and a prolific writer.[43] He had stayed in Baghdad at the time of the caliph of Al-Mamoun and had led theological discussions with the Muslims. This hypothesis is very seductive, but Theodore, the hero of the Greek version, takes so much distance with 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, he continues to

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[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 10th century is less plausible. Binggeli ("Converting", 96) proposes that the text was composed in Greek in the first decades of the 11th 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.

[38] *Life of Theodoros*, ch. LXXXII; Pomjalovskij, 85.16-17: εἶχε δὲ ὁ βασιλεὺς τρεῖς αὐτοῦ πιστοὺς οἰκέτας ἐξ Ἀλανῶν καταγομένους.

[39] 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, see Papaioannou, Messis, Resh, and Skrekas, *Euthymios "the Iberian."*

[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.

[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 that the two Theodores cannot be confused. See also, Pataridze, "Christian Literature," 60-62.

[44] *Life of Théodore*, ch. IV, Pomjalovskij, 5.5-15.

study and becomes a competent copyist 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 Sabbas. 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 the first digression in his 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 does 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 heretics, persecute true Christians.[51] Theodore then decides to plead the cause of Christians with the caliph of Babylon, of the name of Mavias (Al-Mamoun, according to the Arabic version).[52]

Leaving Edessa, Theodore meets the stylite Theodosius. The author introduces a second digression, on which we shall come back. Once in Babylon/Baghdad, Theodore heals the caliph suffering 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 his baptismal name is 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 - demand satisfied by Michael III.[56]

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[45] *Ibid*., ch. XVI, p. 13.6-8.
[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, p. 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

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 surrounding 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, returned the piece of the True Cross and a lot of money to Theodore to distribute to the pious houses of Palestine and Syria and gave him his 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-Sabbas until his death. He is buried near the tomb of his disciple Michael on July 19, thus

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Georgian environment of Syria-Palestine in the 10th-11th century. On the Georgian origin of the *Life*, see Peeters, *Le tréfonds oriental*, 161-162; 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.

[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, 113-115.

[62] *Ibid*., ch. CXI, Pomjalovskij, 116.

[63] *Ibid*., ch. CVIV, Pomjalovskij, 118.

performing a Christian career that begins and ends at Saint-Sabbas,[64] forming a sort of pious but adventurous circle.

The role of the stylite

It becomes clear from this succinct summary that Theodore's life is only a background scene in 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 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 goes to Edessa; he finds several columns whose constructions date back to the time of the 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 9th century, the supposed time of the visit, however, these columns are no longer in use. For the author, this peculiar monastic lifestyle is something of the past; its flourishing belongs to another era. Yet, one "romantic" figure still persists and lives on a column. He is a sort of living "relic" of a glorious past. This stylite epitomizes, in addition to the behaviour of an exemplary stylite (which is not precisely described), some of the characteristics of another type of holiness also from the past, that of a saint *salos*:

> "Leaning from the top of the column he looked at the passers-by and some of them promised and announced happy news and in front of others he cried, calling them unhappy and calling himself so. Whence he was considered a fool."[66]

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[64] *Ibid*., ch. CXV, Pomjalovskij, 118-119.

[65] *Ibid*., ch. LIV, Pomjalovskij, 52.18-24: Ἐν ἐκείναις τοίνυν ταῖς ἡμέραις ἐγένετο τὸν ὅσιον ἐξελθῆναι ἐξω 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 ζωῆς διανύσαι βίον.

[66] *Ibid.*, ch. LV, Pomjalovskij, p. 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," 473-474. 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."

The insistence of the stylite that the discussion with Theodore remain secret reactivates a very common *topos* of the holiness of a salos.

Between the bishop and the stylite begins a discussion which will dominate the central part of the story 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 avatar of this couple is probably Symeon Salos and John,[71] but for the middle Byzantine author, the bond that unites 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 which he picks up with the necessary precaution (prayer) and transfers 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, he 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 gives a moral advantage to the brother John who remains a hermit, while Theodosius lives as a stylite as a punishment for his pride. Theodosius spends forty-nine years

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[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*, 157-161.
[72] *Life of Théodore*, ch. LXV-LXVI, Pomjalovskij, p. 64-68.

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 the role of the stylite does not disappear. He continues to play the role of a 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 he performs 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 intermediary role in the Life of Theodore of Edessa between hagiographic past and eschatological future, between history and myth, between Edessa and Babylon with its desert where all the miracles are possible, including the conversion of a caliph to the Christian faith, is very intriguing. 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, with his brother John, he exemplifies an old-fashioned holiness that preserves the soul of Christianity and ensures its moral advantage. But

[73] *Ibid*., ch. LXVI, Pomjalovskij, 68.12-14: καὶ ἰδοὺ δέδοταί σοι χάρις διορατικοῖς ὄμμασι καθορᾶν τοὺς δικαίους τε καὶ ἁμαρτωλούς.
[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.

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 11th and 12th centuries were not an heroic epoch for stylites, but a period during which they continued to forge a path towards holiness, among 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.

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