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SOME NOTES ON A RECENT EDITION OF THE LIFE OF ST. STEPHEN OF MAR SABAS*

The hagiographic texts of Syro-Palestine from the early Islamic period are of inestimable value for those scholars of Islam and Christianity alike who are concerned with social-historical issues; they offer precious insight into strata of society only hinted at in the voluminous Muslim sources in Arabic. Of these hagiographic texts, one of the most important is the Life of St. Stephen of Mar Sabas (d. 794), written in Greek by Leonius of Damascus, a disciple of the saint for the last few years of the former's life [BHG 1670]. Not only does it offer us our fullest glimpse of Palestinian monasticism in the early Islamic period, but also a host of insights into such things as Muslim/Christian relations, the effects of Islamic taxation on the Christian communities, and the transition to an Arabophone society. At a time when contemporary Muslim sources tend to concentrate on the activities of a religious and political elite, with an eastern purview focusing on Muslim activities in Khurasan and Iraq, any source which sheds light on the undercurrents of Syro-Palestinian history is much to be welcomed.

*I would like to express my sincerest thanks to the editors of the Analecta Bollandiana, in particular Prof. U. Zanetti s.j., for helpful comments on an earlier version of this communication.


²See, for example, the comments of Y. HIRSCHFIELD, The Judean Desert Monasteries in the Byzantine Period, New Haven, 1992, p. 248 (“His [Stephen's] biography is thus one of the most important sources regarding monastic life in the Judean desert after the Byzantine period”); as well as those of G. GARETTE, Le début de la vie de S. Étienne le Sabatte retrouvé en arabe au Sinai, in AB, 77 (1895), p. 332 (“La Vie ... du moine Étienne de Saint-Sabas ... est un document du plus haut intérêt, qui trace un tableau extrêmement vivant et détaillé de la vie des moines palestiniens au vith siècle et qui fournit des données précieuses pour l'histoire de l'Église de Jérusalem.”)
The original Greek version of this *Vita* is not wholly extant; the codex Paris Coislin 303, the only Greek ms. in which the text is preserved, transmits it less its first three quaternions (of a total of 15.5). This achronal text has been edited, provided with a Latin translation, and published in the *Acta Sanctorum*. In 1954 G. Garitte discovered a Georgian version of chapters 159-165 of the Greek Life, an autonomous sermon on the importance of the vigil for monks; this he published with a Latin translation. Although he suspected that the Georgian fragment may have been translated not from Greek, but from a Semitic intermediary (either Arabic or Syriac), the question remained open until 1959, when he announced the discovery of two copies of a complete Arabic version of the Life at Mount Sinai (codices 505 and 496). At the same time, he translated into Latin that portion of the Arabic *Vita* corresponding to the lost beginning of the Greek original, announcing also his intention to do a complete edition and translation for the *CSMO*, a project apparently either abandoned or unfinished by the time of his death.

Recently the study of the Life of St. Stephen has reached a new level with an edition of the full Arabic Life (with Italian translation) by Bartolomeo Pirone. This is an edition which forms the subject of this notice. My comments are divided into four parts: (i) the principles of Pirone's edition, (ii) his choice of base manuscript, (iii) comments on a number of obscure passages, and (iv) the accuracy of Pirone's edition.

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3 AASS, 111, t. 3, pp. 524-613.
5 *G. Garitte, Un extrait géorgien...*, p. 77.
7 The Greek text of the vita was translated into Italian in 1983 by Camillo Carta, with introduction and notes by B. Bagatti, *Leonzio di Damasco, Vita di S. Stefano Sabatai* (725-794) (= *Quaderni di 'La Terra Santa'*, Jerusalem, 1983. For that part of the text which is only extant in Arabic, the translator had recourse to Sinai Arabic 505, nevertheless following closely Garitte's Latin translation of the relevant sections (pp. 15-16). Carta's translation is nowhere cited in the bibliography to Pirone's edition/translation (see n. 8). This strange, for he was clearly dependent upon it for the content of many of his notes: compare, for example, notes 1, 2, 3, and 1 (pp. 378-82) of Pirone's edition/translation with notes 121-115 (pp. 151-153) of Carta's translation.
9 Note that Garitte had referred to ms. 505 as A, and ms. 496 as B. In what follows, Pirone's system of references is used.
10 The importance of the fragments was first, I think, noted by Nasrallah, *Histoire du mouvement littéraire dans l'Église Melchite*, p. 155. He, however, seemed unaware that these two fragments represented an excerpt from the Life of St. Stephen, rather than an independent ascetic treatise.
13 Leonzio di Damasco..., p. 5, 19.
14 Ibid., p. 5.
Pirone’s decision to follow his base manuscript without excessive standardization is especially brave given the learned censure this practice has received at the hands of Khalil Samir\textsuperscript{14}. At issue here: whether these deviations stem from the copyists or are present in the original form of the Arabic Vita. If the former be the case, then how best should such texts be edited when autographs are lacking, especially when dealing with works such as the Life of St. Stephen represented by only a few manuscripts? This extremely complex but crucial set of questions I treat at greater length elsewhere\textsuperscript{17}.

(ii)

Pirone’s choice of A as the base for his edition is unfortunate. Not only is the manuscript carelessly written, but also the scribe was seldom consistent in his use of diacritical marks (\textit{nuqat})\textsuperscript{18}. Indeed, many words in A are only to be explicated by recourse to B. That A is dated and B is not, seems a wholly inadequate justification for choosing it as a base manuscript. Moreover, it is quite probable that A is in fact a direct copy of B, not both A and B from a now lost exemplar.

First, as Garitte has already pointed out\textsuperscript{19}, in ms. B (f. 108\texttt{r}, line 5) the final \textit{bahu} in the word \textit{fa’aśābahu} is written in the margin perpendicularly to the lines of the text (as was the scribe’s custom when lacking space at the end of a line). As this \textit{bahu} resembles the letter \textit{ḥā’}, the scribe of ms. A read the word as \textit{fa’aẓāḥa} (f. 40\texttt{r}, line 13), a reading which makes no sense in the context and can best be accounted for by supposing the direct dependence of A on B.

Second, in ms. B (f. 112\texttt{r}, line 4) the \textit{mīm} in \textit{wālibi-kītiḥ} is poorly formed, merging with the following \textit{wāw} in such a way as to be barely legible. The scribe of A (f. 45\texttt{r}, line 3) read this word as \textit{wālibi-kītiḥ}, a reading not only unintelligible but also morphologically impossible – again, a mistake that is best explained by supposing the direct dependence of A on B.

Although it is clear that A should not be taken as the base manuscript for an edition, further work must be done on the relation of the manuscripts of the Life of St. Stephen. Not only is the status of the fragment represented by C unclear (as well as Garitte’s Georgian version of that same autonomous sermon), but also both A and B bear numerous corrections (between the lines and in the margins) by later hands, the provenance of which is unclear.

(iii)

We turn now to a number of problematic passages.

1. In chapter 70 of the \textit{Vita} (345.13-14), Leontius gives an account of an occasion when the Holy Spirit spoke through St. Stephen in a manner much more direct than was usually the case. In the midst of this account, he describes the radiance with which Stephen’s face shone. In ms. A (f. 140\texttt{v}, lines 10-12), as well as in Pirone’s edition, we read the following: \textit{bal zahara lī fi ḍālikā al-waqīt mumtali’ tawarru’} wa-ḥaybah wa-wadā’ah wa-faraḥ wa-bi-ḥaybah kāfīrah. The passage is problematic on two accounts: (i) the repetition of \textit{haybah} and (ii) the syntax of the preposition \textit{bi}.

Although this is not noted by Pirone, in ms. B (f. 188\texttt{v}, line 4) the critical phrase reads: \textit{wālibi-kītiḥ}, with two dots below the \textit{lām}. As it stands, the reading of ms. B makes no sense.

Perhaps the text is best to be emended by supposing that \textit{wālibi-kītiḥ} is actually the two words \textit{bīha ūbīha} written too close to one another. As hamzas are seldom written in the ms., this would be the scribe’s way of writing \textit{bīha ūbīha}, which would be a fair attempt at rendering the participle \textit{kāthābulāmēmēn} of the original Greek (sec. 157, 598E). Supposing then that A copied directly from B, when confronted with this anomalous text, the scribe read \textit{wālibi-kītiḥ} as a feminine noun following the preposition \textit{bi}, emended the \textit{lām} to a \textit{yā}, and changed to feminine the gender of \textit{kāfīrah}. Perhaps also it was the same scribe who added two dots below the \textit{lām} in ms. B: his way of correcting the text from which he was copying.

2. In chapter 73 (357.9-10) Leontius describes a monk named Theodulos who was unable to bear living in a single place, but much preferred to wander about from monastery to monastery. After Theo-
Arabic translator intends the expression yurid wa yumāḥik to function as an equivalent of φιλονεῖκος, each word of the two capturing one aspect of its semantic range. But how to account for the syntax? One possible solution would be to posit an otherwise unattested (but related) meaning for māḥak: e.g., ‘to strive vigorously’. Another option: to understand wa yumāḥik as a rather careless wāw al-ḥāl. alternatively, one can appeal to a phenomenon well-attested in Syriac: two verbs so closely associated ‘that the government of the one, which may not be at all that of the other, operates for the entire combination, and the object stands next to the verb to which it by no means belongs. Of the three, the latter option seems the better. The resulting text would thus be translated: ‘Whoever through gluttony and satiety (of food) wishes and is contentious that he might conquer the devil of adultery, resembles one who extinguishes the flames of a fire with oil’.

4. Towards the end of chapter 75 (373.5-7) Stephen is presented as exhorting his disciples to imitate ‘the few, the chaste [fathers]’. The passage is as follows (following ms. A rather than Pirone’s edition):

At question here is the phrase: فان القليل في كل محل. Water damage in ms. B (f. 196, line 17) makes the word following kull unreadable; but it is clear in ms. A (f. 152, line 6). I am not able to identify محل in such a way as to make sense of the phrase. Neither, seemingly, was Pirone, for the word in question is followed in his
is a question of a single root, not the two or perhaps three implied in Pirone's edition. That root is h-d-d and it seems to bear the meaning 'to be intent upon something, meditate upon something'.

(iv)

Unfortunately, Pirone's edition of the Arabic text is plagued with errors. A few of these have been pointed out above. Many are no doubt a result of misprints; others, however, stem from misreadings of the manuscripts or lack of care in recording significant variants between mss. A and B. To give a sense of the pervasiveness of these errors, I include here a list of the major problems found in just the first chapter of the text (pp. 23, 25): (i) the first word of the text proper: bodes a rather inauspicious beginning: in Pirone's edition we read مَن (men), whereas both mss. contain مَن (man); (ii) after the word the messenger (23.4) both mss. add the adjective المجهول (23.7), both mss. read من (23.9) both mss. add the word the messenger (23.15), ms. B reads the latter fitting the context more closely; (vi) the reading — is only found in ms. B, where it seems to be a correction of the second hand written over an erasure; as for ms. A, the reading is unclear, perhaps من or the messenger; or even the latter fitting well the context, even if forcing the reading; it seems rather hard to read it as من — as Pirone does, p. 25, note 10; (vii) the reading — the reading of ms. A is as, recorded p. 25, note 10: though we should remark that it seems to be written over an erasure; it may in fact be that the latter being a 'home-made' — intended to parallel the following word, hukamā'; and (viii) instead of the manuscript reading — (25.8), ms. B reads the latter.

Lexical support for this is rather hard to find in the standard dictionaries of Classical Arabic. Lane offers two basic meanings of h-d-d: 'to cut something quickly' or 'to read/recite something quickly'; so also, A. de B. Kazimirski and al-Muqaddasi, al-Wasiti. The root is not present in Dozy, Fagnan, and Wehr. Only al-Munqid (17th edition) comes close, offering, in addition to the two meanings signaled by Lane, the equivalent 'ihaṣa bibi'.
Any edition, even a poor one, is better than none at all: a fact of which all dedicated users of Migne are well aware. In this regard Prof. Pirone is to be thanked, offering as he does an earnest attempt at editing a rather difficult text of the utmost importance for scholars of the early Islamic period. But the shortcomings of this edition are not to be ignored. Enough has here been indicated to show that extreme circumspection must be exercised, that the edition cannot yet replace the mss. of the Vita.

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Résumé. L'article est consacré à la récente édition par B. Pirone (Jérusalem – Le Caire, 1991) de la version arabe de la Vie de S. Étienne de Mar Sabs (BHG 1670), une source importante pour l'histoire de la Terre Sainte au début de la période islamique. Y sont abordés : les principes d'édition, le choix du manuscrit de base, l'interprétation de quelques passages obscurs et la qualité du texte édité. L'article, à travers plusieurs corrections textuelles proposées du texte établi par B. Pirone, illustre aussi les difficultés rencontrées par les éditeurs de textes arabes chrétiens.