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Homiletic Collections in Greek and Oriental Manuscripts

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Cover

The front cover shows the three church fathers Cyril of Jerusalem, Nicholas of Myra and John Chrysostom in a 16th-century fresco of the Church of the Archangels in Matskhvarishi, Latali, Svanetia (photography by Jost Gippert). All three fathers bear a board with text fragments from the *Liturgy* by John Chrysostom (CPG 4686) in Georgian; the text passage held by Cyril of Jerusalem is the beginning of the sentence რამეთუ სახიერო და კაცთ-მოყუარე ღმერთი ხარ ‘For you are a benevolent and philanthropic God’, which also appears in lines 6–7 of Fig. 1 on p. 2 below (from an 11th-century scroll of the Iviron Monastery on Mt Athos, ms. Ivir. georg. 89).

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

- 2 | Homiletic Collections in Greek and Oriental Manuscripts – Histories of Books and Text Transmission from a Comparative Perspective
by Jost Gippert and Caroline Macé

ARTICLES

- 7 | The Earliest Greek Homiliaries
by Sever J. Voicu
- 15 | Gregory of Nyssa's Hagiographic Homilies: Authorial Tradition and Hagiographical-Homiletic Collections. A Comparison
by Matthieu Cassin
- 29 | Unedited Sermons Transmitted under the Name of John Chrysostom in Syriac Panegyric Homiliaries
by Sergey Kim
- 47 | The Transmission of Cyril of Scythopolis' Lives in Greek and Oriental Hagiographical Collections
by André Binggeli
- 63 | A Few Remarks on Hagiographical-Homiletic Collections in Ethiopic Manuscripts
by Alessandro Bausi
- 81 | Cod.Vind.georg. 4 – An Unusual Type of Mravaltavi
by Jost Gippert
- 117 | The Armenian Homiliaries. An Attempt at an Historical Overview
by Bernard Outtier
- 123 | Preliminary Remarks on Dionysius Areopagita in the Arabic Homiletic Tradition
by Michael Muthreich
- 131 | Compilation and Transmission of the Hagiographical-Homiletic Collections in the Slavic Tradition of the Middle Ages
by Christian Hannick
- 143 | Contributors
- 145 | Picture Credits
- 146 | Indices
- 146 | 1. Authors and Texts
- 157 | 2. Manuscripts and Other Written Artefacts
- 161 | Announcement

Article

The Earliest Greek Homiliaries

Sever J. Voicu | Vatican City

A preliminary remark: in this paper the word *homiliary* exclusively applies to a collection of homilies by several authors that has some intentional connection with the liturgical year. Thus, we shall not deal with other types of collections, such as those by one author arranged according to a liturgical cycle, e.g. the corpus of Severus of Antioch¹ and the selection for liturgical use of sixteen homilies by Gregory of Nazianzus² or the Sahidic manuscript London, British Library, Oriental 5001, which contains homilies by a variety of authors but has no visible connection with a liturgical cycle.³

The obvious foundation of this paper is the enormous inventory of homiliaries established by Albert Ehrhard in his work on Greek homiletic and hagiographical manuscripts.⁴ Ehrhard's book conveys most of the data relevant to our purpose, but some bits of new information were published later and they will pinpoint Ehrhard's hypothesis that homiliaries were first created in the sixth century. However, some unsolved issues will remain concerning the place and the precise date of this process.

1. Majuscule Greek homiliaries

The only sensible starting point for our investigation is the earliest majuscule Greek homiliaries.⁵ However, there is room for some disappointment, because such manuscripts are few and often in poor condition. Moreover, dating majuscule codices is still largely a question of guesswork.

¹ Described by Brière 1960, 50–62.

² See Somers-Auwers 2002 (also with other examples of similar collections).

³ Published by Budge 1910.

⁴ Ehrhard 1937–1952.

⁵ Two Syriac homiliaries were translated from Greek probably during the seventh century and underwent some local adaptation. But Vaticanus sir. 368 (mid-eighth century) and Vaticanus sir. 369 (first half of the ninth century) will not be used here, since their description by Sauget (1961) is not satisfactory (but see Sergey Kim, this volume, 31ff.). The Georgian homiliaries described by Van Esbroeck 1975 are comparatively late and do not supply useful information for our purpose. On the *khanmeti* fragments, see Jost Gippert, this volume, 86.

1.1. Grottaferrata B. a. LV

Some of these issues are visible in the Grottaferrata homiliary. It is a palimpsest and its folia have survived in four different codices. Originally, its two volumes comprised almost 500 folia and contained around 90 texts. Fewer than 200 folia are extant and to a large extent their content has not been identified.⁶

Grottaferrata B. a. LV is a palaeographical *unicum*. According to Charles Martin it is probably a Western product.⁷ However, some of its features point decidedly to the city of Rome, where it could have been copied in one of the numerous Greek-speaking monasteries.⁸

The first hint – so far unnoticed – is the existence of two fragmentary homilies devoted solely to the apostle Paul towards the end of the second volume. They were probably assigned to June 30, which is in accordance with the Roman rather than the Byzantine practice.⁹

In addition, the second volume begins at Easter with a still unpublished *Festal Letter* by Eulogius, Patriarch of Alexandria (580–607/8).¹⁰ Grottaferrata is the sole witness of this unique text, and no other festal letters by Eulogius have survived. Its inclusion in the homiliary is best explained either by the known fact that Eulogius and Gregory the Great (590–604) certainly were acquainted, as proven by their

⁶ The systematic description of Crisci 1990, I, 220–235, should be completed with Voicu 2002–2003. In addition, a few remarks by Charles Martin have escaped Crisci's attention; see Ehrhard 1937–1952, I, 713.

⁷ Martin 1936, 341 (mainly).

⁸ See Sansterre 1983.

⁹ Even now, June 29 is still officially devoted to both Peter and Paul in the Roman Church. However, in practice it long ago became the feast of Peter alone, and the celebration of Paul has been postponed to the following day. This Roman custom is never met with in the East, but already obtained in some early Roman homiliaries. See, e.g. the *Homiliary of Agimundus* (beginning of the eighth century; Vat. lat. 3835 and 3836), described by Grégoire 1980, 365–370, nos 95–114. The ancient liturgical order of probable Antiochian origin that commemorates Peter and Paul on different days is totally unrelated. See Voicu 2004.

¹⁰ Martin 1936, 341–343.

correspondence,¹¹ or as a late instance of the prescription of the Council of Nicea of 325 that the *Festal Letters* were to be sent by the Patriarch of Alexandria to the other main sees.

I wonder whether there is not an additional text pointing to Rome. The first volume of Grottaferrata B. a. LV ends on Holy Saturday with a fragmentary witness of *In sanctum Pascha sermo 6* under the name of Hippolytus of Rome.¹² This is the only Greek homily attributed to a bishop of Rome. Unfortunately, Hippolytus of Rome probably never existed, so the attribution is unlikely to be true. *In sanctum Pascha* has a definite link with the Lateran Synod of 649, convened in the presence of none other than Maximus the Confessor, since it is quoted by its florilegium precisely under Hippolytus's name.¹³ This is an exceptional circumstance, since – leaving aside one quotation transmitted in a Syriac florilegium¹⁴ – all the other witnesses ascribe this homily to John Chrysostom.

In sum, since palaeographical evidence is indecisive, there is an acceptable possibility that the homiliary of Grottaferrata was composed in the early years of the seventh century¹⁵ and actually used in 649.¹⁶

1.2. *Sinaiticus* gr. 491 + 492

Although Sin. gr. 491 + 492 (Fig. 1) is not a palimpsest, it is fairly lacunose.¹⁷ The analysis of its contents shows that it is an ancient collection that has been augmented with Palestinian materials, since it is the only known witness to two

homilies by Hesychius of Jerusalem.¹⁸ Its Palestinian origin is confirmed by palaeographical evidence. The date of Sin. gr. 491 + 492 is unknown but it may be rather late, perhaps ninth–tenth century. Anyway, its scribe was not very well acquainted with Greek and the manuscript has many defective spellings and syntactic mistakes.

1.3. *Vaticanus* gr. 2061A

Vat. gr. 2061A is a fragmentary palimpsest produced in southern Italy.¹⁹ Its date in the eighth–ninth century is conventional. The surviving folia comprise parts of the Holy Week and Eastertide.²⁰

1.4. *Patmos, Joh. Theol.*, 190

Patmos 190²¹ is so fragmentary that its remains are unfortunately useless for our purposes.

1.5. *Escorial Φ. III. 20*

Despite a long lacuna in its first part, Escorial Φ. III. 20 is the best-preserved majuscule homiliary, since it offers a continuous sequence of texts from the Saturday of Lazarus until the beheading of John the Baptist on 29 August, that is to say almost up to the end of the Byzantine liturgical year.²² This collection contains several homilies that point to a Constantinopolitan origin, notably by Theodore Studite and Germanus of Constantinople. However, palaeographical evidence indicates that it was probably produced in southern Italy, perhaps during the tenth century.

Unfortunately, its choice of texts makes it scarcely suited for our purposes, since it has been largely adapted to the later Byzantine calendar.

1.6. *Paris, BNF, grec 443*

For the sake of completeness, mention should be made of another palimpsest, Paris grec 443. This, however, is a major

¹¹ Only the letters sent by Gregory have survived; see Norberg 1982, II, 1136 (index).

¹² *Clavis patrum Graecorum* (CPG) 4611; critical edition: Visonà 1988.

¹³ This quotation is published in Riedinger 1984, 282. See also Visonà 1988, 192–193. But if our considerations about the date of the Grottaferrata manuscript are right, then the quotation was simply taken from the lost folio of *In sanctum Pascha sermo 6*.

¹⁴ Rucker 1933, 64–67.

¹⁵ Sharing the widespread scepticism about the dates assigned to majuscule manuscripts, the late Paul Canart affirmed in a private communication that the writing of the Grottaferrata manuscript could be earlier than the traditional date around the ninth century; see Crisci 1990, II, Tav. 103–105.

¹⁶ If we are dealing with a later copy, it must have been extraordinarily faithful to its model, since it has kept some of the archaic features we shall consider later.

¹⁷ See Ehrhard 1937–1952, II, 195–197 and I, 134–137, updated by Van Esbroeck 1978. A fragment of the index was found among the new manuscripts discovered at Mt Sinai (now MF 61), but its provenance was not recognised; see *The new finds of Sinai*, 152 and Tab. 80.

¹⁸ See Aubineau 1972, mainly 61 and 119.

¹⁹ Full description of its remains and connections in Voicu 1982–1983.

²⁰ Vat. gr. 2061A is clearly related to the minuscule homiliary Vaticanus gr. 2013, described by Ehrhard 1937–1952, II, 143–146. The similarities between the two manuscripts are obvious for the Holy Week, but there are none for Eastertide. This fact shows that both homiliaries depend on ancient models in two volumes, the second beginning at Easter, as in the Grottaferrata palimpsest.

²¹ Description in Ehrhard 1937–1952, II, p. 10–11. This manuscript was probably produced in southern Italy.

²² Description in Andrés 1965–67, II, 77–80.

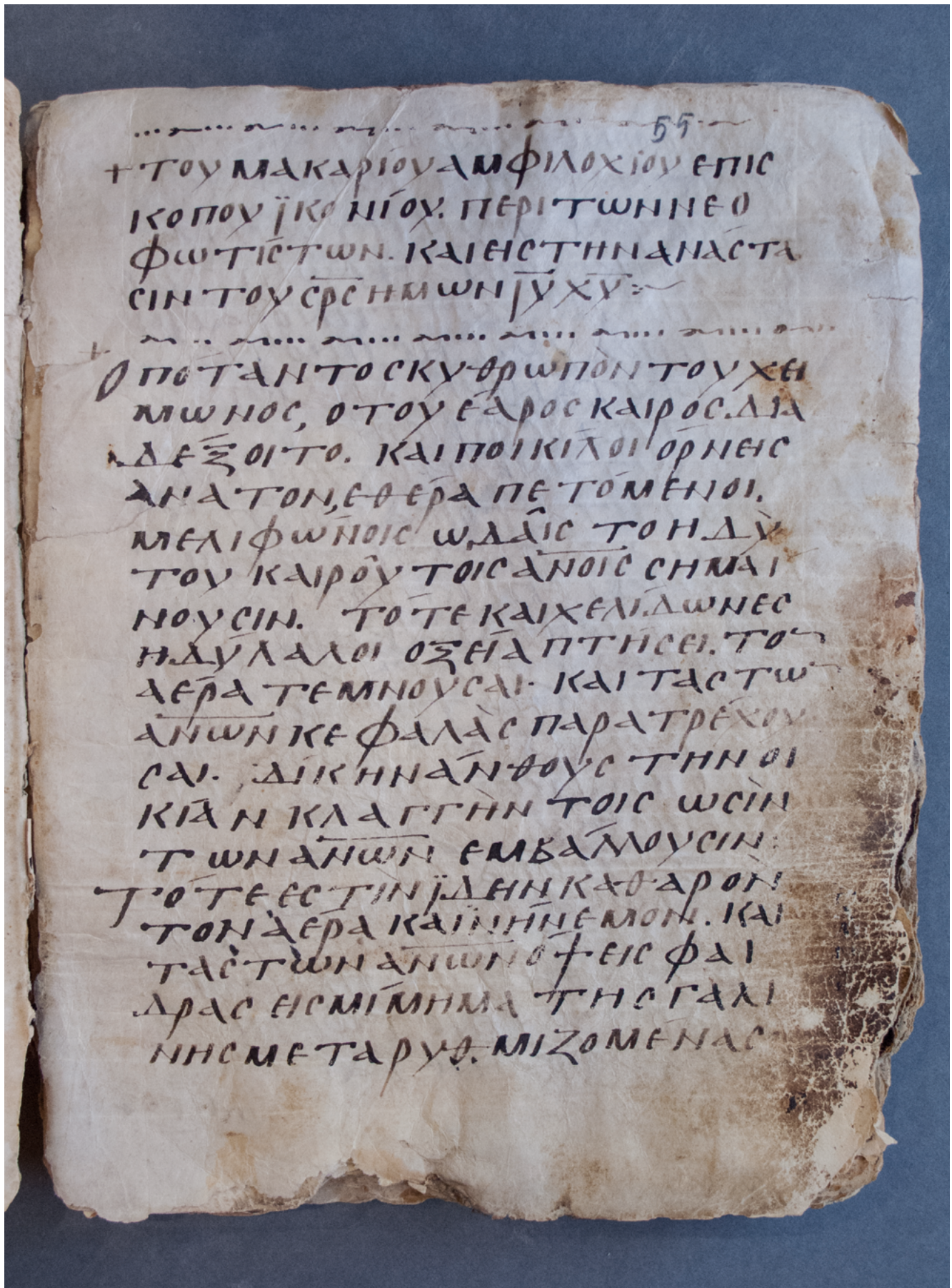


Fig. 1: Mt Sinai, Saint Catherine's Monastery, gr. 492, fol. 55r.

disappointment, since it already contains a full-fledged Byzantine liturgical cycle for Lent and a number of commemorations of saints, at least in its first part (the second part is almost totally lost).²³

2. Analysis of the evidence

These homiliaries are very different and show an amazing variety in their choice of texts. The evolution of the liturgical year and their geographic estrangement easily explain most of the differences among them.

However, their comparison reveals some important common elements and confirms the hypothesis that all known homiliaries descend – perhaps in devious ways – from one and the same initial project. These common features can be found around the great feasts, both at a structural level and in some texts shared by several collections. But only a restricted, even though very important portion of the liturgical year, namely from Holy Thursday to Pentecost, supplies reliable information that has some bearing on the question of the origin and date of the earliest homiliaries.²⁴

2.1. Eastertide

The first hint is related to the liturgical calendar. Sin. gr. 491 + 492 and Vat. gr. 2061A concur on one point: they foresee a little-developed Eastertide, the only two mandatory feasts between Easter and Pentecost being the first Sunday after Easter (Sunday of Thomas)²⁵ and Ascension.²⁶

Perhaps Grottaferrata B. a. LV, too, bears witness to the same situation, since it has no texts between these two days. However, it is better not to draw any conclusion from this fact, given the lacunose state of its reconstruction. Be that as it may, this mirrors an ancient situation, since Ascension was celebrated on the fortieth day after Easter already by the end

of the fourth century²⁷ and the Sunday of Thomas is firmly attested by the mid-fifth century.²⁸

Anyway, neither Sinai nor Vat. gr. 2061A reveal traces of the Byzantine cycle that appears in the ninth-century *Typikon of the Great Church*,²⁹ where every paschal Sunday has a prescribed Gospel lection taken mostly from the Gospel of John (the Samaritan woman, the man born blind, the paralytic).

A rather surprising fact is that none of the earliest collections commemorates Mid-Pentecost. This feast is seemingly of Western origin and not earlier than the fifth century,³⁰ but it is attested in the East at the beginning of the sixth century by Severus of Antioch in his *Cathedral Homily* 46.³¹ Perhaps Mid-Pentecost was introduced by Severus himself³² and for some time remained just a local Antiochian custom.

2.2. Baptismal catecheses

Following an analysis by Charles Martin,³³ Ehrhard highlighted striking similarities between the Grottaferrata and the Sinai codices, although he was in no position to properly assess them.³⁴

The most important common feature shared by both manuscripts is the presence of two homilies showing that adult Christian initiation was still relevant in the original system, since Pseudo-Chrysostom's *De recens baptizatis*³⁵ and Pro-

²⁷ See also Voicu 2016d, 422.

²⁸ The pseudo-Chrysostomian homily *In sanctum Thomam Apostolum* (CPG 5832) has been attributed to Proclus of Constantinople, but its authenticity has never been clearly established.

²⁹ Mateos 1962–1963, II, 108–131.

³⁰ See Drobner 1993. It must be noted that other homilies for Mid-Pentecost – most of them attributed to John Chrysostom – have not yet been investigated. The only exceptions are two homilies by Leontius of Constantinople explicitly devoted to the feast, which undoubtedly presuppose the late Byzantine system. However the traditional date of Leontius – towards the mid-sixth century – is but one of the many problems attached to his corpus. Voicu 2016b proposes a seventh-century date for Leontius, but an overall assessment of his oeuvre is still lacking.

³¹ CPG 7035. Brière and Graffin 1969, 288–303.

³² Severus might have been acquainted with some Western liturgical practices, for example the closing of the baptistery at the beginning of Lent, which is attested only in Toledo and Gaul. See Voicu 2016a, 325.

³³ Martin 1936, 349.

³⁴ Ehrhard 1937–1952, I, 135.

³⁵ CPG 3238. The attribution of this homily to Amphilochius of Iconium in the Sinai manuscript stems from a transmission problem. See Voicu 1993, 470, n. Its real author was a Cappadocian priest (?) active in Constantinople

²³ Full description in Noret 1970.

²⁴ E.g., authentic homilies by Gregory of Nazianzus and John Chrysostom are common for Christmas, Epiphany and Easter, but they do not supply historical data about the circumstances of their insertion in the homiliaries.

²⁵ The first Sunday after Easter was devoted to the dismissal of the newly baptised already by the end of the fourth century. But apparently – at least in Constantinople – the reading of the apparition of Christ to Thomas was not prescribed for the occasion, witness the homily *In ascensionem et in principium Actorum* (CPG 4187), delivered by Severian of Gabala in 402. See Bishop and Rambault 2017, 137.

²⁶ The same scheme is followed also by the Syriac homiliaries Vat. sir. 368 (see Sauget 1961, 408–409) and Vat. sir. 369 (Sauget 1961, 421–422).

clus's *Homily 31*³⁶ are both clearly catecheses delivered at the occasion of Easter baptismal ceremonies.³⁷

Also the homily *In s. Pascha et in recens illuminandos* by Basil of Seleucia confirms the relevance of Christian initiation, since it is devoted to the dismissal of the newly baptised combined with the apparition of Christ to Thomas.³⁸ We do not know when Christian initiation became irrelevant in the East. In Antioch it was still flourishing up to the time of Severus, at the beginning of the sixth century,³⁹ but his texts are the latest actual catecheses we know of. Anyway, it is sure that by the eighth century – if not earlier – adult Christian initiation had become largely obsolete, as shown by the so-called *Sermo catecheticus in Pascha*⁴⁰ falsely attributed to John Chrysostom, which is addressed to an audience of only baptised believers.

2.3. Severian of Gabala, *De lotione pedum* (CPG 4216)

Among the texts for Holy Thursday, the collections very often include the homily *De lotione pedum* by Severian of Gabala.⁴¹ It exists in three homiliaries, namely Grottaferrata, Sinai and Vatican.⁴² Therefore, it is reasonable to suppose that it belonged to the earliest stratum of the collections.

However, it should be noted that in the direct tradition, *De lotione pedum* is never attributed to its true author, but always to John Chrysostom. This fact conveys some chronological information, since it has been proven that Severian's

homiletic corpus was placed under Chrysostom's name towards the mid-sixth century.⁴³

3. An unexpected witness: Severus of Antioch, *Homily 77*

A minuscule homiliary consisting of Vatican City, BAV, Ott. gr. 85 (first tome) plus Vat. gr. 1990 (fragments from the second tome)⁴⁴ is the earliest known Greek manuscript containing the *Cathedral Homily 77* by Severus of Antioch (Fig. 2).⁴⁵ This text is devoted to a *uexata quaestio*: the contradictions between the Gospels about Christ's apparitions after his resurrection. It was probably deemed a convenient reading for Easter and played an important role in the original project.

We find here a rather unexpected clue that points again towards the mid-sixth century, since Severus's oeuvre was condemned in 536 and this fact provoked the destruction of almost all his writings in Greek, except a large number of fragments in florilegia and catenae. Apparently the only work that has survived in its entirety is precisely *Homily 77*.

Even if the corpus of the *Cathedral homilies* survived somewhere for at least a century,⁴⁶ it is difficult to imagine that much later than the mid sixth century a homily written by such a controversial author would have been chosen for a pivotal role at Easter.

Severus's name is absent from the manuscripts, where it has been replaced by a more palatable author: Hesychius of Jerusalem.⁴⁷ Probably in some cases it was decided to omit this text altogether when planning a new homiliary. It is not far-fetched to imagine that this was the solution chosen for the majuscule manuscripts, where Severus's homily is never encountered.

4. Provisional conclusion: when and where

If we combine the pride of place of Severus's *Homily 77* and the role conferred upon the homily *De lotione pedum* by Severian of Gabala, the former being condemned in 536 and

towards the end of the fourth century. On this attribution, see Voicu 2013 (with previous bibliography). Some additional discussion of this issue can be found in Bonnet and Voicu 2012, 89–94.

³⁶ CPG 5830; edition: Leroy 1967, 224–225.

³⁷ Both homilies are extremely rare in Greek, proof that they had soon lost their relevance. However, their fate was slightly different. Whereas Proclus's *Homily 31* survives only in the two homiliaries of Grottaferrata and Sinai, *De recens baptizatis* (CPG 3238) exists also in a third manuscript and enjoyed some indirect tradition, including its reuse in later texts and an Armenian translation – in turn translated into Georgian.

³⁸ PG 28, 1081–1092; CPG 6658. This text is transmitted and was published under the name of Athanasius of Alexandria, to whom it is attributed in the Grottaferrata homiliary. On its attribution to Basil of Seleucia, see Tevel 1990, 67.

³⁹ See Voicu 2016a, 322.

⁴⁰ PG 59, 721–724; CPG 4605.

⁴¹ CPG 4216. Edition: Wenger 1967. Its authenticity was confirmed by Voicu 1994.

⁴² It is also transmitted by the manuscript Vatican City, BAV, Ott. gr. 85 (see below).

⁴³ Voicu 2006. It has also been surmised that this change may have had some connection with the condemnation of Severus of Antioch in 536. See Voicu 2006, 332.

⁴⁴ Ehrhard 1937–1952, II, 13–17.

⁴⁵ CPG 7035. Critical edition: Kugener and Triffaux 1922.

⁴⁶ See Kugener and Triffaux 1922, 768–769 [8–9].

⁴⁷ Its attribution to Gregory of Nyssa and, perhaps, John Chrysostom is secondary.

the latter being somehow rescued in the following years, we should posit that the earliest Greek homiliary was composed around the mid-sixth century.⁴⁸

The interest in Severus may indicate that the homiliaries originated in an anti-Chalcedonian milieu and were later adopted by the Byzantine Church. But this is speculative because of the vagaries of theological ideas under Emperor Justinian and his changing attitude towards the Cyrillian party.⁴⁹

It is reasonable to suppose that the homiliaries were first composed at an important ecclesiastical see. Alexandria and Jerusalem can be ruled out, since their authors are poorly represented in the earliest manuscripts. The absence of texts for Mid-Pentecost is best explained if the project did not start in Antioch. Therefore the only remaining candidate is Constantinople.

An additional argument in favour of Constantinople may be inferred from the homily by Severian of Gabala, since apparently his homiletical corpus was placed under Chrysostom's name in the Byzantine capital.⁵⁰

The homiliaries were probably born in a context in which preaching was deemed a hazardous job that made it preferable to resort to what approved Fathers had already said.⁵¹ The project might have been prompted by two causes that are not mutually exclusive: the need to warrant the orthodoxy of the predication⁵² and some cultural decay in the Greek realm.

⁴⁸ The earliest Latin homiliaries were produced around the mid-seventh century. See Bouhot 1985.

⁴⁹ See, however, Sauget 1961, 400, n. 1, about the possible Monophysite origin (or adaptation?) of the ancient Syriac homiliaries.

⁵⁰ See the conclusions of Voicu 2006, 331–332. Also the presence of the two catecheses *De recens baptizatis* and Proclus's *Homily 31* points to a Constantinopolitan origin of the system.

⁵¹ Reading and reusing earlier patristic texts as literary and, probably, theological sources certainly had become common practice by the end of the fifth century. E.g. the pseudo-Chrysostomian homily *In ascensionem Domini* (CPG 4908) depends on a large spectrum of texts by Chrysostom; see Voicu 2016c, 168–175.

⁵² I am grateful to Mario Re for this suggestion, which in fact is confirmed by the prescription of the so-called Council *In Trullo* (691–692) in its canon 19: 'Those presiding over the churches (bishops) (...) should not deviate from the already established limits or the tradition limits of the God-bearer Fathers' (translated from Ohme 2013, 33; see also Sergey Kim, this volume, 29). This injunction is a clear invitation to preachers to play it safe and prefer relying on earlier homilies to composing their own homilies. It also supplies a reasonable explanation about the comparative paucity of Greek homilies surely delivered after the Council of Chalcedon (451).

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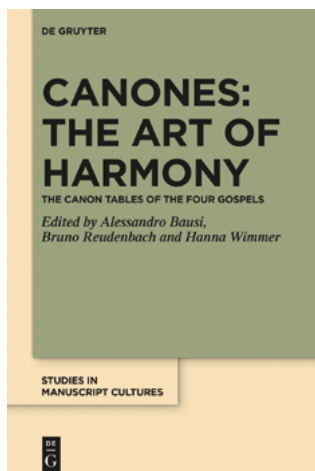
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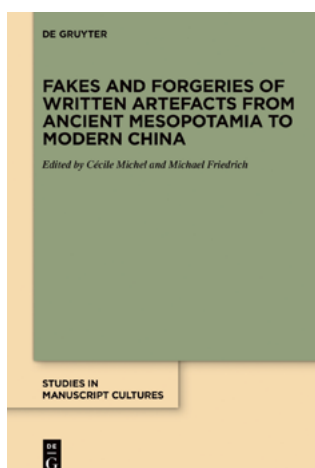


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