



Universiteit  
Leiden  
The Netherlands

## **Another Athanasius : four Sahidic homilies attributed to St. Athanasius of Alexandria. Introduction, editions, translations**

Saweros, I.K.I.

### **Citation**

Saweros, I. K. I. (2016, November 9). *Another Athanasius : four Sahidic homilies attributed to St. Athanasius of Alexandria. Introduction, editions, translations*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/44031>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/44031>

**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Cover Page



Universiteit Leiden



The handle <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/44031> holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation.

**Author:** Saweros, I.K.I.

**Title:** Another Athanasius : four Sahidic homilies attributed to St. Athanasius of Alexandria. Introduction, editions, translations

**Issue Date:** 2016-11-09

## Appendix: A Note on Possible Arabic Versions

In editing a corpus of texts attributed to Athanasius of Alexandria in Coptic, one should take one step back to see if this corpus once had Greek originals and one step forward to see if the corpus found its way into Arabic. The question of possible Greek originals was briefly discussed in my chapter on 'Authorship, Date and Place of the Homilies'. In this appendix, I will examine the corpus of texts circulating under the name of Athanasius in Arabic and present a brief report on the homilies that share features with the Coptic ones edited here.

The Arabic corpus attributed to Athanasius of Alexandria contains texts of various kinds. In some cases we can be sure of a Greek original. Others were written directly in Arabic. Still others are translations from the Coptic corpus of Pseudo-Athanasian texts. The latter include Biblical commentaries, homilies on various topics, letters, canons as well as polemic and dogmatic writings.<sup>1</sup> Here I want to investigate if and how the Sahidic homilies, which are edited in this dissertation, found their way into the Arabic context. For this purpose I examined a large number of works belonging to the Arabic pseudo-Athanasian corpus. I found three homilies that allow comparison with two of the Sahidic homilies edited in this dissertation.

### *On Michael.*

Arabic manuscripts that contain works claiming to be about Saint Michael the archangel and attributed to Athanasius of Alexandria are countless. In his history of Christian Arabic literature, Georg Graf classified them as a single homily for which he recorded

---

<sup>1</sup> G. Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur*, vol. 1, Vatican City, 1944, p. 310-316; L. Cheikho, *Catalogue des manuscrits des auteurs arabes chrétiens depuis l'Islam*, Beirut, 1924, p. 24-25; S. Khalil (ed.), *The Lamp that Lights the Darkness in Clarifying the Service by Ibn-Kabar, the Priest of the Hanging Church*, vol. 1, Cairo, 1974, p. 292 (in Arabic).

many manuscripts.<sup>2</sup> There are still more manuscripts beyond those cited in Graf's work.<sup>3</sup> These various manuscript versions share the same structure and contents.

They start with a short introduction in which Athanasius declares that all the inhabitants of the earth and the heavens should rejoice because of Saint Michael's feast, for Michael is the greatest intercessor and his prayers are accepted by God. Then the author starts to praise Michael as the captain of the celestial hosts, as an angel who is close to God and entrusted with the Lord's orders.

As Graf already noted, two miraculous stories occupy the largest part of the homily. The first is about a lazy man from Alexandria who used not to work but asked Michael to help him. After many days of begging by day and by night, Michael appears to the lazy man and advises him to go and meet somebody to borrow three hundred dinars from him. When the lazy man got the money, he left his city in order to invest his money. Michael supported him and facilitated his ways. Thus, the three hundred dinars turned into a big fortune. The man decided to pay back the three hundred dinars. He puts six hundred dinars in a box and threw it in the sea, asking Michael to help him and cause the money to reach its owner. Saint Michael prepared a big fish to catch the box. Then the rich man, who lent the lazy man the money, caught the fish and got his money back. The lazy man paid an extra three hundred dinars to the Church of Saint Michael.

The second story is about a poor pregnant woman whose husband had deserted her because they were very poor.<sup>4</sup> The woman asked

---

<sup>2</sup> Graf, *Geschichte*, vol. 1, p. 542.

<sup>3</sup> For example, in a manuscript preserved at the Coptic Museum in Cairo (History 576), dated AD 1715; see W.F. Macomber et al., *Final Inventory of the Microfilmed Manuscripts of the Coptic Museum, Old Cairo, Egypt*, Utah, 1995, Roll: B-12, Item 1. G.

<sup>4</sup> An edition of the story based on two different manuscripts appeared in O. von Lemm, "Die arabische Version des Codex Gothanus", in: J. Schick, *Corpus Hamleticum: Hamlet in Sage und Dichtung, Kunst und Musik*, vol. 1:

Michael to give her a boy to help her. Michael asked the Lord on her behalf and He promised that she shall deliver a boy and that the boy shall inherit all the properties of her rich greedy neighbour. When her neighbour heard this, he decided to kill the boy. He put him in a basket and threw him in the sea. Saint Michael picked the boy up and took him to a very far city. Some shepherds found the boy and raised him. Later the rich man met one of the shepherds and heard their story about the boy, who was called Thalason (in later versions *Bahri*). The rich man again tried to kill the boy by sending him to his wife with a message. In the message he asked his wife to kill the boy. Once more, Michael saved the boy by changing the message for another one that tells the wife of the rich man to let the boy marry her daughter. When the rich man came back and saw the wedding, he fell down and died. When his wife saw his dead body, she fell dead as well. The boy married the daughter of the rich man and inherited all his treasures. God's promises were kept, thanks to the almighty powers of Saint Michael.

In the epilogue of the homily, the author speaks about the end of days. He describes the horrible fate of the sinners and the great rewards promised to the righteous ones. Michael here appears as one who begs God to give the sinners another chance to repent. God always accepts the prayers of Michael. The text presents Michael as the great intercessor and encourages the congregation to ask for his help.

When the author wants to stress that the speaker is Athanasius himself, he uses the expression: "as for me, your father, Athanasius", which is frequently found in the Coptic pseudo-Athanasian homilies. The text may therefore be a translation from a lost Coptic homily. This becomes even more likely when one

---

*Sagengeschichtliche Untersuchungen*, Berlin, 1912, p. 340-354 (text), 355-364 (translation); another edition appeared in I. Kratskovsky, "A Miracle of the Archangel Michael in Palestine", *Al-Mashriq* 12, 1909, p. 448-454 (in Arabic).

considers that the name of the Archangel Gabriel appears suddenly beside that of Michael as one of the main actors in the stories. Some Coptic homilies, such as the encomium *On Michael and Gabriel, the Archangels*, were about both angels. In the Arabic homily, however, the homilist focuses on Michael, for liturgical purposes, and the name of Gabriel may have slipped in by inadvertence.

The name of the boy from the second story, Thalason, apparently deriving from the Greek *θάλασσα*, 'sea', suggests that the story was translated from Greek or Coptic. In later versions, the scribes preferred to translate the name into *Bahri*, which means 'the one of the sea' in Arabic. Moreover, a Sahidic fragment that contains a portion of the story was discovered<sup>5</sup> and there are indications that the same story was composed originally in Greek and later found its way into Ethiopic.<sup>6</sup> It seems that the entire homily was translated from Greek or Coptic into Arabic and then into Ethiopic. In any case, the story of the boy Thalason was widely known.

The homily briefly presented above is related to the encomium *On Michael and Gabriel, the Archangels* in many respects. Both use storytelling as a basic technique to persuade and amuse the audience. The stories work as a method and as a purpose in themselves. They occupy most of the homily. Presenting the miraculous powers of the saint is the main point of the stories. The stories neither adopt a clear literary style nor do they play with words to produce rhetorical effects. In comparison with any genuine work of Athanasius, one can easily discover that this homily is certainly not his, also because Athanasius' milieu is totally absent in this homily.

---

<sup>5</sup> Von Lemm, "Codex Gothanus", p. 365-373.

<sup>6</sup> Von Lemm, "Codex Gothanus", p. 374-379.

*On Pentecost.*

Georg Graf in his handbook on Christian Arabic literature states that there are two homilies on Pentecost attributed to Athanasius of Alexandria. Both homilies are preserved in many manuscripts, kept in the Vatican, Beirut and Cairo. Graf mentioned one more homily on Pentecost kept in Paris but was not able to decide whether it was a recension of one of those mentioned earlier or a different one.<sup>7</sup> Here I present a brief report on the contents of Paris. ar. 143. f. 116v-122r,<sup>8</sup> which contains the same text as preserved in Coptic Museum Theo. 395. f. 200r-202v, and a notice on the second one, as preserved in the same codex of the Coptic Museum, Theo. 395. f. 202v-211r.<sup>9</sup>

The Parisian manuscript is a voluminous codex consisting of 353 folios. It is a paper codex mostly made of oriental paper with occasional parts on western paper. All folios measure 18 × 12 cm. and the number of lines is 14-18 line per page. The codex has two colophons. On f. 151r, a first colophon declares that the scribe is deacon Ilyas (Elijah) and dates the manuscript to the year 6818 since Adam (AD 1310). A second one, on f. 353v, mentions a priest Abd al-Masih as the restorer of the codex for the sake of metropolitan Gregory of Hauran in the year 7159 since Adam (AD 1651). The codex contains a number of homilies, most of them attributed to John Chrysostom.

---

<sup>7</sup> Graf, *Geschichte*, p. 314.

<sup>8</sup> G. Troupeau, *Catalogue des manuscrits arabes*: 1re Partie: tome I: *Manuscrits chrétiens*, Nos. 1-323, Paris, 1972, Nr. 143.14, p. 105. Basic descriptions and tables of contents of the Arabic manuscripts kept at the Bibliothèque nationale de France were made available recently for subscribers via its official website: <http://www.bnf.fr/fr/acc/x.accueil.html>.

<sup>9</sup> M. Simaika, *Catalogue of the Coptic and Arabic Manuscripts in the Coptic Museum, the Patriarchate, the Principal Churches of Cairo and Alexandria and the Monasteries of Egypt*, vol. 1, Cairo, 1939, Nr. 59, p. 31-32; W.F. Macomber et al., *Final Inventory*, Roll A-16, Item 1, Nr. 32-33.

The homily that concerns us here begins with a short title that states the name of the author, Saint Athanasius, patriarch of Alexandria, and the theme, the holy feast of Pentecost. The body of the homily starts with Athanasius asking for the great grace that came upon the apostles on the day of Pentecost in order that he too may speak well (f. 117r). Then Athanasius declares that Christ has promised his apostles to send them the Holy Spirit. Athanasius quotes many verses from the Bible to prove that it was God's plan since the beginning that people should see the Son in a human nature. Then the Son will prepare them to receive the fruits of the Spirit (f. 117r).<sup>10</sup>

Then the author relates the details of the day of Pentecost. He speaks about the number fifty and how it refers to seven weeks according to Moses' law.<sup>11</sup> He goes on to describe the divided tongues of fire which rested upon each of the apostles (f. 118r).<sup>12</sup> The author attacks the 'ignorant Jews' who did not understand the real meaning of their feasts. They, according to the author, knew Christ's symbols in the Old Testament but could not grasp their full meaning. Although the Jews were there on the day of Pentecost and Peter spoke to them, they didn't believe (f. 118r–119v).<sup>13</sup> The author compares the flame of fire which appeared upon the bush before Moses<sup>14</sup> with the tongues of fire which came upon the apostles (f. 120r). He also compares the events that occurred when God confused the languages of all the earth after the erection of the tower of Babel<sup>15</sup> with those of Pentecost when the apostles were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance (f. 120v–121r). The author ends his homily by advising his audience

---

<sup>10</sup> Gal. 5: 22.

<sup>11</sup> Lev. 25: 8.

<sup>12</sup> Acts 2: 1-6.

<sup>13</sup> Acts 2: 5-39.

<sup>14</sup> Ex. 3: 2.

<sup>15</sup> Gen. 11: 9.

to keep in mind how God performed miracles for his apostles so that He may do the same for them (f. 122r).

The Parisian version of the Arabic homily on Pentecost shares certain features with the Sahidic homily on *Pentecost*. Both share their title and the false attribution to Athanasius. Both their authors show their good knowledge of the Bible by giving many Biblical quotations in support of their points of view. Storytelling is absent in both of them.

The other Arabic homily on Pentecost which is attributed to Athanasius of Alexandria is preserved in Coptic Museum, Theo. 395. f. 202v-211r. It is made of modern paper and dated 7 Baramudah 1437 AM (13 April, AD 1721). It consists of 228 folios and its size is 29 × 18 cm. The codex contains a collection of various homilies on the feasts of the Lord.

This homily starts with a short title that attributes it to Saint Athanasius the Apostolic, patriarch of Alexandria, and sets the subject as Pentecost. The author introduces his homily with the difference between the promises of God in the Old and the New Testaments. Then he begins a lengthy speech about the three hypostases, their nature and the relationship between each other (f. 203r–204v). After this the author comments on the number seven and its meanings (f. 205r). Then he comes to the details of the day of Pentecost, which he describes by quoting a wealth of Biblical verses (f. 206r–208r). The author speaks about the Holy Spirit and why it resembles fire (f. 208v-209r). He ends his homily by an epilogue, declaring that the Holy Spirit is equal to the Father and the Son (f. 211r).

The nature of the Coptic Museum homily on Pentecost is quite different from the Sahidic one edited here. Overall, the Arabic homily on Pentecost looks like an apologetic text rather than a homily composed to preach people during a festival. The largest part of the homily is taken up by the theme of the hypostases and

the author's defence of the dogma of the Trinity. Precisely these topics earned more importance after the Islamic conquest of Egypt.

It must be stressed that both homilies share with the Sahidic homily *On Pentecost* practically only their pretended author and their title. The language of both Arabic homilies is of a high standard. The authors choose their words carefully, especially when discussing theological themes. Both contents and style of the two Arabic homilies are strikingly different, however.

The Parisian homily presents spiritual contemplations on the day of Pentecost. Pentecost is really its main topic, rather different than the Sahidic homily *On Pentecost*, which deals with many other themes, such as the Christian household and wealth and poverty. Judging from its genre, the Parisian homily is really suitable to be preached during the feast of Pentecost. Its textual units are interrelated. Every point smoothly introduces the audience to the next one. One does not observe any sudden jumps to foreign themes.

The other homily, here represented by the Coptic Museum manuscript, is completely different. It looks much more like our Sahidic homily *On Pentecost* in that the theme mentioned in the title is marginal to the general context, whereas other themes, not mentioned in the title, occupy most of the homily. The language is clear, simple and attractive, although the topic is considered difficult. The author builds his sentences carefully in order to give them the exact meaning which he needs. He does not try to make his language more attractive by playing with the word order. His sentences are short and simple.

To conclude, no traces of any of the Sahidic homilies edited in this dissertation have been found in Arabic till present. The Arabic homily on Michael shares some literary strategies with similar Coptic homilies, such as false attribution, the occasion on

## A Note on Possible Arabic Versions

which the homily is delivered, long paraenetic passages and the technique of storytelling that is adopted in order to bring out the glory of the subject and his efficacy as a helper of mankind. Yet it is different in its substance, in particular the stories are totally different. The similarities are best explained by the hypothesis that the Arabic homily was translated from a lost Greek or Coptic model.

The Arabic homilies on Pentecost, even if they would derive from Greek or Coptic models, are entirely different in spirit and in contents. They contain an orderly and well written exegesis of the events of Pentecost (in the Parisian text) and a discussion of complicated theological issues related to Pentecost (in the Coptic Museum homily). Both, therefore, differ substantially from the Sahidic homily *On Pentecost*.

