

SAINT VICTOR STRATELATES, or Victor the General

[This son of the Roman governor Romanus miraculously survived death three times before being martyred during the persecution under Diocletian (feast day: 27 Baramudah)]

COPTIC TRADITION

About Victor Statelates we have four complete accounts and several that are incomplete.

1. The martyrdom itself was published by E. Wallis Budge in 1914 from the manuscript in the British Museum (Or. 7022) dated A.D. 951.
2. The panegyric attributed to CELESTINUS OF ROME is attached to the *Acts* in the same manuscript and in the same edition.
3. Another panegyric attributed to THEODOSIUS OF JERUSALEM was published by U. Bouriant in 1893, from a Paris codex dated 941 (Bibliotheca Hagiographica Orientalis 1243, pp. 247-82) in the original Coptic pagination.
4. The Pierpont Morgan codex (in Volume 41 of the photographic edition) offers a panegyric on Victor by Theopemptus of Antioch, which has been neither edited nor published. In addition, four leaves from Vienna were edited by W. Till in 1934; these are connected rather with the panegyric of Celestinus, but might also belong to another type of martyrdom. Bouriant's codex contains, moreover, a very long panegyric, which must be attributed to [JOHN CHRYSOSTOM](#) (Bibliotheca Hagiographica Orientalis 1242) according to a passage in the text, for the title is lost. In view of the lacunae in the original codex (1-34, 37-96, 125-128, and 245-246), it is not possible to verify even one item in the Paris codex. O. von Lemm published leaves 125-26, which were at Saint Petersburg. [F. Rossi](#) also published some columns in 1893, according to the Turin

fragments. From [reading](#) the Ethiopic derivatives, one infers that other Coptic items have undoubtedly disappeared.

The hagiographic record of Victor, son of Romanus, is typically Coptic. What has ended up in the Greco-Latin tradition on 11 November is minimal, considering the importance of the Coptic records. The following is an outline of the martyrdom, in which the fundamental concepts of Christianity are personified and represented as in a geometrical drawing. DIOCLETIAN, with his tetrarchy consisting of BASILIDES, Romanus, and Euaios, institutes the cult of seventy divinities, among whom Apollo and Artemis are prominent.

Victor, twenty years old, is the son of Romanus, and has been promised by his parents to the daughter of Basilides. Romanus himself has proceeded from Antioch to Alexandria. Victor, although tempted by Satan disguised as a soldier, privately renounces all the advantages of his rank to his father. His father, therefore, finally hands him over to Armenius, [duke](#) of Rakote. The four soldiers who take him away submit him to harsh questioning on 1 Baramudah. The interview with Victor's mother (whose name, Martha, is not quoted) is longer and more moving.

Victor reaches Armenius, whose appointment in rank close to his father he had formerly approved. But this wicked man returns [evil](#) for good. He submits Victor to torture on the wheel, which he endures with the help of the archangel MICHAEL, Victor's soul having already been carried off up to heaven during the torture. Subsequently, Victor is burned with lamps and thrown in vain into the furnace. Finally, Armenius sends him back to Eutychanus, [duke](#) of the Thebaid.

On 20 Baramudah, he reaches ANTINOOPOLIS, but the [duke](#) awaits him still farther south. Eutychanus improvises a tribunal and submits him to the tortures (which resemble those to which Saint George is subjected in the Coptic and Nubian cycles of this martyrdom) of the cutting of his tongue and ears, of needles in the skin, and iron helmet over burning

coal, and boiling bitumen in the throat. Then he exiles him to a desert camp at Hierakon, still farther south, where Christ, in the form of an old man, comes in person to aid Victor, who is fasting every day in solitude.

Finally, Sebastianus, along with the praetor Asterius and the [duke](#) Soterichos, submits him to a last trial. Victor remains inflexible while he is eviscerated, treated with boiling oil with ashes and vinegar in his mouth, with red-hot knives in his skin, while his eyes and his tongue are pulled out, and he is finally dispatched by the sword. At this moment a fifteen-year-old girl, the daughter of a soldier, Stephanou, proclaims her faith and is also martyred.

Horion, the executioner, beheads the girl, but she does receive Victor's blessing. Only this last episode has passed into the [Greek](#) in the *Martyrdom of Victor and Stephanis* (Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca 1864), the entirety being placed under the emperor Antoninus, under Sebastianus, governor of Italy at Damascus (sic). This text exists also in Latin (*Analecta Bollandiana* 2, 1883, pp. 291-99), as E. Galtier already noted in 1905, quoting the martyrdom of Victor and Corona. The same author draws up a family tree of the family of Basilides and his cycle.

The two published panegyrics have a similar structure: a classic eulogy, provided with *synkriseis* (comparisons) according to the rules of sophistry, surrounds the account of some miracles. Thus for Theodosius of Jerusalem there are cures at Victor's chapel—a man made blind by illness, a rich epicure who had fallen from his terrace and been attacked by gangrene, a mason rescued in mid-air during a fall from the wall of the saint's chapel, a woman ill with dropsy. In these accounts, Victor appears as the healer, wearing his general's uniform. The miracles in Celestine's panegyric are more original. A child dedicated to Saint Victor by his parents is redeemed by them for forty gold pieces, since they find him too handsome to surrender the boy.

Victor strikes the boy with illness, and the child is saved only by prayer.

After that the boy commits himself to the religious life as before promised by his parents. Kalliotropia, the niece of Honorius, is healed of an incurable illness. The architect of the saint's chapel in Rome is also cured, as well as a patrician. One of Constantine's generals, the founder of the cult of Victor in Rome, sets off to drink the saint's water in the chapel at Antioch, but is sent back to drink it in Rome where it has the same curative virtues. A rich man, nearly 100 years old, is cured of elephantiasis as is a blind man, and both undertake the service of the chapel.

An invasion by the Sabans is stopped just after Constantine has left the front in Armenia. Finally, a rich and generous man whose grape harvests are blessed by Saint Victor exhorts his son to generosity. Since the son does not follow his father's example, the wine is spoiled and the son is obliged to do penance in the saint's chapel, after which prosperity is restored to him. The panegyric attributed to [John](#) Chrysostom is of a different kind. It has to do with scriptural, theological, and moral developments in the text of the Passion.

Celestinus, the fifth-century anti-Nestorian champion, quotes his predecessors, Eusebius (but here it is a question of the fictitious substitute for Eusebius of Nicomedia, the baptizer of Constantine), Julius, and Innocent. The three panegyrics touch Rome, Antioch, and Jerusalem, despite the fact that the existence of the cult of Saint Victor in these cities is highly improbable. Theodosius of Jerusalem is the antipatriarch opposed to Juvenal after the Council of CHALCEDON in 451 (cf. Rufus, PO 8, 1912, p. 62).

The support of these patrons gives to the cult of Saint Victor a strongly anti-Chalcedonian tone. Constantinople is excluded, as well as Pope LEO, in the name of an orthodoxy that is projected back into the era of the martyrs under Diocletian. We shall not go far wrong in allowing the dawn of this speculation at the end of the fifth century, at the time when no shadow separated Antioch from Alexandria.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bouriant, U. "L'Eloge de L'Apa Victor, fils de Romanos." *Mémoires de la Mission archéologique française au Caire* 8 (1893):145-266.
- Budge, E. A. W. ed. and trans. *Coptic Martyrdoms etc., in the Dialect of Upper Egypt*, pp. 1-101. London, 1914.
- Galtier, E. "Contributions a l'étude de la littérature arabe-copte. III. Les Actes de Victor fils de Romanos." *Bulletin de l'Institut français d'Archéologie orientale* 4 (1905):127-40.
- Rossi, F. "Di alcuni manoscritti copti che si conservano nella Biblioteca Nazionale di Torino." *Memorie della Reale Accademia di Torino*, ser. 2, 43 (1893):326-29.
- Till, W. *Koptische Heiligen- und Märtyrerlegenden*. Orientalia Christiana Analecta 102. Rome, 1935.

MICHEL VAN ESBROECK

Copto-Arabic Tradition

The Copto-Arabic tradition concerning Saint Victor Stratelates, son of Romanus, is particularly rich. Unfortunately, none of it has as yet been edited, and it is hence practically unknown. Graf (1944, p. 540) collected a considerable portion of the material; however, his classification of the manuscripts has resulted in more confusion than clarification. What is more, he mixed this material up with that concerning Saint VICTOR OF SHU without realizing it. As for Sauget (1969) he practically ignores the Arabic tradition (cf. *Bibliotheca hagiographica orientalis*, 1910, pp. 269-270, nos. 1242-44).

To clarify matters a little we must distinguish the various pieces. In order to do this, until the texts are published, the incipit ([insofar](#) as it is given by the manuscript catalogs) is the only more or less reliable criterion. This is because the other elements, such as authors or titles, are anonymous or subject to modification. Hence, for each piece we shall

transliterate a few words from the beginning of the real Arabic incipit (leaving aside the prologues or initial formulas), followed by its translation in full.

Here we have collected two types of texts. On the one hand, we have five different accounts of the martyrdom of Saint Victor; these are panegyrics (encomia) for his feast on 27 Baramudah. On the other hand, we have two different accounts of miracles for the anniversary of the dedication of his church on 27 Hatur.

Panegyric by Cyriacus of al-Bahnasa

The panegyric by Cyriacus is the one most frequently encountered in the manuscripts. In the two oldest manuscripts it is attributed to Cyriacus, Coptic bishop of al-Bahnasa; in the four nineteenth-century manuscripts it is attributed to Demetrius, patriarch of Antioch. This text is particularly developed, taking up over 200 pages in certain manuscripts. Graf (1944, p. 476) mentions the first two manuscripts, questioning the authenticity of the attribution.

The incipit, according to the manuscript in Paris (Arabe 212) reads in Arabic: *“Hasanan dhahara lana al-yawm”* which may be translated, “Beautifully appeared for us to-day the source of perfumed flowers, in this month of Baramudah, o my dear friends.”

The manuscripts containing this text are the following (but see also below), in chronological order:

- Paris Arabe 212 (Egypt, A.D. 1601), fols. 149r-212v
- Cairo, Coptic Patriarchate Hist. 27 (Egypt, A.D. 1723), fols. 1r-44v (Graf no. 470; Simaika no. 614)
- Paris Arabe 4782 (Egypt, nineteenth century), fols. 65v-166r
- Paris Arabe 4793 (Egypt, nineteenth century), fols. 163r-164v, 159r-162v, and 165r-234v

- Paris Arabe 4877 (Egypt, nineteenth century), 142 fols.
- Paris Arabe 4879 (Egypt, nineteenth century), fols. 84r-111v.

Panegyric by Demetrius of Antioch

A second panegyric, attributed to a certain (unknown) Demetrius, patriarch of Antioch (cf. Graf, 1944, p. 354, no. 8; but the “Nützliches über den Neujahrstag” is rightly attributed to Demetrius, the twelfth Coptic patriarch, who reigned from 189 to 231), is found in two complete manuscripts. This text is also highly developed, indeed even longer than the foregoing.

The incipit, according to the manuscript in Paris (Arabe 131), which opens in Arabic: “*Tabarak ism al-rabb,*” may be translated as “Blessed be the name of our Lord who has made us worthy today to gather in this [holy place](#) to commemorate Him whom God has glorified in heaven and on earth.”

The two manuscripts are

- Paris Arabe 131 (Egypt, A.D. 1440), fols. 2v-71v
- Cairo, Coptic Patriarchate Hist. 27 (Egypt, A.D. 1723), fols. 90v-126v (Graf 470; Simaika 614).

Panegyric by Celestinus of Rome

A third panegyric, attested by one complete manuscript and one incomplete one, is attributed to “Saint Celestinus, Archbishop of Rome.” This text is shorter than the foregoing ones. It may be the translation of the Sahidic Coptic text published by E. A. Wallis Budge under the title *The Encomium of Celestinus, Archbishop of Rome, on Victor the General*.

The incipit, according to the manuscript in Paris (Arabe 4782), which opens in Arabic, “*Indama arada Allah al-Khaliq,*” may be translated as

“When God the Creator, who made everything, wished . . . to remember us, the work of his hands. . . .”

The two manuscripts referred to above pose certain problems. The text of Graf 470 is incomplete, and the Paris manuscript Arabe 4782 contains an account of miracles contained also in the Paris Arabic manuscript 150 (cf. the section on the *Building of the Church*, below). However, these may not belong to our panegyric but to the text preceding it (fols. 166v-249v), which contains the account of the miracles of Saint Victor, which, however, lacks the very same miracles 3 to 10.

Panegyric by Theopemptos of Antioch

The fourth panegyric is found in one manuscript, kept at the Coptic Patriarchate of Cairo, and described by Graf (1934, p. 179) as follows: “Mimar concerning Saint Victor, composed by Tabuntus Archbishop of Antioch.” However, ten years later, Graf doubted his own [reading](#) and wrote (1944, p. 540, lines 22-23): “from (?), Archbishop of Antioch.”

Actually, the name was not so deformed in Arabic. We find in the Pierpont Morgan Library (Coptic 591, Vol. 28 of the photographic edition) a panegyric of Saint Victor composed by Theopemptos of Antioch. This is probably the same text as Cairo’s.

Unfortunately, Graf omitted to give an [incipit](#) for this text in his catalog, which would have enabled us to identify it. The only known manuscript is the *Cairo Coptic Patriarchate* (Hist. 27 [Egypt, A.D. 1723], fols. 45r-80r; Graf 470; Simaika 614). On the basis of the calligraphy of this manuscript, the present text corresponds to 80 percent of the length of the panegyric attributed to Cyriacus of Bahnasa (above).

Biographical Note by Michael of Atrib and Malij

A brief note, only three pages long, for the feast of Saint Victor on 27

Baramudah, composed by Mikha'il (Michael), bishop of Atrib and Malij, in the mid-thirteenth century, appears in the second half of the Coptic-Arabic Synaxarion. This text has been edited twice (by R. Basset and J. Forget) and translated into French and Latin.

The incipit (according to Basset, pp. [980]-[983]), which opens in Arabic: "*Hadha al-Qiddis kan yuqal abuh Rumanus,*" may be translated as "The father of this saint was called Romanus, minister of the Emperor Diocletian and his counsellor. He shared [Basset translates against the sense here: "he was against"] the Emperor's [Basset: "the prince's"] opinion concerning the cult of idols" (Forget omits to translate the second sentence; cf. Forget, II, p. 92).

The Building of the Church of Saint Victor and His Miracles by Demetrius of Antioch

The title of this text is customarily given as "Homily of Saint Demetrius, Patriarch of Antioch, on the building of the Church of Saint Victor, son of the Vizier Romanus, and on his miracles." The text is in fact two pieces joined together: a homily on the building of the church and the account of the miracles (generally fourteen) that accompanied this event. As we read in the only text edited to date, that is, the account of the Synaxarion for 27 Hatur (see the section on the Synaxarion, below), miracles occurred when the two churches dedicated to the saint were consecrated in Antioch and in Upper Egypt.

The text usually begins with a long preamble (four pages in the Paris manuscript Arabe 150), the [incipit](#) of which begins in Arabic: "*al-Majd lillah al-wahid bi-al-dhat,*" which may be translated as "Glory to God, One in His Essence." The preamble does not belong to the original text. It was composed directly in Arabic, as is evident from the style, whereas the rest is translated. It is not found in all the manuscripts (it is lacking, for example, in the Paris manuscript Arabe 4782). It is also found as a prologue to other pieces (we have discovered in the only catalog of

Christian Arabic manuscripts in Paris twenty or so different pieces beginning in this way).

The true incipit (according to the only two manuscripts the incipits of which are given by the catalog—the Coptic Museum manuscript and the Paris Arabe 150) reads in Arabic: “*Hasanan huwa qudum shahr barmudah . . .*,” which may be translated as “Beautiful is the advent of the month of Baramudah toward us, o my dear friends, for it is full of joy and delight.”

This [incipit](#) poses two problems. On the one hand, it is reminiscent of that of the panegyric of Cyriacus of al-Bahnasa (see the section on the *Panegyric by Cyriacus*, above). On the other hand, it speaks of the month of Baramudah, as in this panegyric, whereas all the manuscripts attribute this homily to 27 Hatur, the date of the commemoration of the dedication. This may be an adaptation of the panegyric of Cyriacus in abridged form, to which was added the account of the fourteen miracles.

We have four manuscripts of this homily: Coptic Museum, Cairo, History 471 (Egypt, fourteenth century; 31 pages, not numbered; Graf, no. 714/5th; Simaika no. 100/4th); Paris, Arabe 150 (Egypt, A.D. 1606; fols. 49r-92v); Paris, Arabe 4782 (Egypt, fourteenth century; fols. 166v-233r, without the preamble; the sheets are out of order and should be rearranged as follows: [1] homily; fols. 167-70, 172-210, and 216-20; [2] miracles 1-2: fols. 221-23; [3] miracles 11-14: fols. 170-72, 210-16, 223-33; as for miracles 3-10, they are inserted somewhere in fols. 251-85: cf. the discussion of the *Panegyric by Celestinus*, above); and Paris, Arabe 4887 (Egypt, nineteenth century; fols. 143v-262r).

In certain manuscripts there is a fifteenth miracle (not numbered) added after the others, entitled: “Miracle worked at the occasion of the dedication of his church.” It is found in two manuscripts: Paris Arabe 150 (fols. 93r-100v) and Paris Arabe 4782 (fols. 233v-249v). The incipit (according to the Paris Arabe 150), reads in Arabic: “*Kan rajul shammas,*”

which may be translated as “There was a man who was a deacon, in the region [*kurah*] of Misr, of the people of the city of Akhmim; his name was Samuel.”

Account of the Construction of the Two Churches, in the Synaxarion

The author of the first half of the Coptic-Arabic Synaxarion (who was not Michael, bishop of Atrib and Malij), recounts on 27 Hatur the building of two churches in honor of Saint Victor, as reported by his mother, Martha. The first was in Antioch, under the patriarch Theodore; the second was in Upper Egypt, in the palace of al-Bariqun [sic], where the saint had spent a whole year before his martyrdom.

At each of these two consecrations the miracles of Saint Victor are evoked. At Antioch, oil was exuded from his body on the day of his feast, “and all who were ill and were anointed with this oil recovered immediately” (Basset; p. [270]/11). In Upper Egypt, immediately following the divine liturgy of consecration of the new church, “all those who had various illnesses went up to Saint Victor’s reliquary and were cured of their illnesses. . . . This took place on 27th Hatur, and countless miracles and wonders were manifested in this Church” (Basset, p. [272]/9-12).

Unidentified Texts

There are also manuscripts dealing with Victor the General the identification of which is impossible or uncertain because of the excessively vague information given by the catalogs. They are Birmingham, Mingana Christian Arabic Add. 265 (Egypt, A.D. 1749); catalog: Mingana no. 258; fragment [nine sheets] of a life of Saint Victor, numbered 14-18, 70-71, and 138-39); Coptic Museum, Cairo, History 482 (Egypt, seventeenth century; catalog: Graf, 726, Simaika, 113; fragment of fifteen sheets, numbered 23-27, of a life of Saint Victor); Coptic Patriarchate, Cairo, History 79 (Egypt, eighteenth century?; Simaika,

680; 210 folios, containing *The Life of Saint Victor Son of Romanus and His Miracles and Wonderworkings*

[incomplete at the end]); Louvain, *Fonds Lefort Arabe A 7* (burned in 1940; miracles of Saint Victor).

Churches and [Monasteries](#) Dedicated to Saint Victor

The following data have been gleaned from medieval Coptic- Arabic texts concerning churches and [monasteries](#) named for Saint Victor. Most come from the *History of the Churches and [Monasteries](#) of Egypt* attributed to ABU [SALIH](#) THE ARMENIAN around 1210. In geographical order, from north to south, they are:

- Church at Ard al-Habash, near Cairo (Abu Salih, fol. 41b; Amélineau, pp. 579/6 and 581/7) Church opposite the afore- mentioned (Abu Salih, fol. 42a)
- Church at al-Jizah (Abu Salih, fol. 59a)
- Church at Jalfah, in the district of Bani Mazar (Abu Salih, fol. 74a)
- Church at al-Qalandamun, near Antinoopolis, in the province of al-Ashmunayn (fol. 92a)
- Church at Saqiyat Musa, south of al-Ashmunayn, in the district of Itlidim (Abu Salih, fol. 92a)
- Church at al-Khusus, east of Asyut, in the mountains, where his body is conserved (Abu Salih), fol. 90a; this may be the same monastery of Saint Victor to which the ninety-seventh Coptic [patriarch GABRIEL VIII](#) [1587-1603] withdrew when he composed, in January 1597, his profession of faith of union with the church of Rome [Graf, 1951, p. 122]; this monastery was situated in the vicinity of Abnub)
- Church at Qift (Abu Salih, fol. 103a)
- Church and monastery at Qamulah, in the district of Qus (Abu Salih, fol. 104a; it was here that Athanasius, bishop of Qus, the author of the famous Coptic grammar who lived at the end of the thirteenth and the beginning of the fourteenth century, became a monk [cf.

Graf, 1947, p. 445]).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Budge, E. A. W., ed. and trans. *Coptic Martyrdoms, etc., in the Dialect of Upper Egypt*. London, 1914.
- Sauget, J.-M. "Victore il generale." In *Bibliotheca Sanctorum*, Vol. 12, cols. 1258-1260. Rome, 1969.

KHALIL SAMIR, S.J.

Tags: [Eminent](#)