

Orthodox Manuscripts Copied in Antioch¹ By *Elia the Antiochian*



*Antioch from Mt. Silpius crossed by the Orontes River,
and surrounded by the Black Mountain (R) and Mount Kasius (L)*

Syriac manuscripts of the Rum/Melkite Chalcedonian Orthodox provenance are most numerous in the 12th and 13th centuries. They disappear after the 17th century, when Syriac was finally replaced entirely by Arabic as the liturgical language in Orthodox communities of Syria and Lebanon. Among the Orthodox manuscripts there is a group whose colophons inform us that they were written on the **Black Mountain**, to the west of Antioch, between 1022(?) and 1242; this was around the time of the Constantinopolitan re-conquest of Antioch (969-1085).

In the late 4th century, the hermit **Theodosios** had already made the Black Mountain his home.² The area is also known from its association with:

- The encyclopaedist **Nikon of the Black Mountain** (11th-12th c.);
- The Georgian translators St. **George Atoneli/Mtatsmindeli** (the Athonite/Hagiorite, †1065), who became the third Abbot of the Georgian/Iberian Monastery on Mount Athos (Iveron);
- St. **Ephrem Mtsire** (the Lesser, †1101/3);
- St. **Arseni of Iqalto** († ca.1127);
- The Armenian writer St. **Nerses of Lambron**, Archbishop of Tarsus (†1198).

In addition to the Antiochian Greek, Syriac, and Arabic speaking monks, both **Chalcedonian** (e.g. the monasteries of the Theotokos, St. Panteleimon/Prophet Elia, St. George, etc.) and **Non-Chalcedonian** (e.g. the Monastery of St. George), the Black Mountain also was the home of **Georgian**³ and **Armenian** monasteries (e.g. the Monastery of St. Thomas). During the Crusader occupation of Antioch (1098-1268), there were **Latin** monastic communities as well (i.e. Augustinian, Benedictine, Carmelite, Cistercian, Dominican, and Franciscan; e.g. the Benedictine Monastery of St. George of Jubino, which later became Cistercian). Clearly this was, especially in the 11th century, a multicultural monastic centre of considerable importance.

A very large number of manuscripts were written, translated, and copied in different languages (Greek, Syriac, Arabic, Georgian, Armenian, and Latin) in the monastery scriptoria of the Antiochene region, particularly on the Black Mountain. According to information in the colophons, or rubrics, or twelve surviving Chalcedonian Syriac manuscripts written on the Black Mountain, we can learn quite a lot concerning the **Rum Orthodox Monastery of Great Martyr Panteleimon**,

¹ For further information, see **Sebastian Brock**'s "Syriac Manuscripts Copied on the Black Mountain, near Antioch."

² **Theodoret the Bishop of Cyrus: A History of the Monks of Syria**, 10.

³ For a list of Georgian Monasteries, see *The Antiochian 4 (2013)* on *Antioch Centre* website.

also known as that of the **Prophet Elia/Elijah**. This Monastery appears to have been situated to the north of Bitias (north of Musa Dag/Mt. Moses), on the Black Mountain.

These manuscripts' colophons used different eras:

- *Era of the Seleucids/Greeks (AG)*,
- *Era of the Creation of the World (AM)*,
- *Era of Adam (AA)*,
- *Era of the Incarnation of the Lord/Nativity of Christ (AI)*.

1 – **Gospel Lectionary**, a manuscript held at the British Library. The colophon reads as follows: *“This Synaxarion of lections from the four Gospels Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, was written and completed to the glory, honour and praise of the Holy Co-essential Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in the Holy Monastery of St. Panteleimon the Martyr, also known as the Monastery of St. Elia the Prophet, in the region of the town of Seleucia (Pieria), which is built on the Black Mountain, that is named ‘Boar’s Head’. The poorest sinner of the entire brotherhood in Christ God which is gathered there wrote this, namely **John**, son of the late **Joseph**... It was ‘collated’ from an exact Greek manuscript, against the Syriac, on Saturday 1st February, AG 1134, at the 3rd hour of the day (sic, an error for AG 1335 = AD **1024**). Let everyone who reads this pray, saying ‘May the Lord pardon... the owner of this book, the priest **John** (later altered to **Maurice**), who has the same name as I, **John** the scribe, have, and who is a priest in the church of St. Elia the Prophet in the City of God (Theoupolis), Antioch.”*

There follows an autographed note in Greek by **Athanasios**, Bishop of Qara (Central Syria), dated AM 6644 (AD 1135/1136), and then in Syriac, after a list of lections, a list of the Bishops of Qara, written by Bishop **Michael**, the successor of **Athanasios**, a known scribe.

2 – **Praxapostolos Lectionary**, a single leaf containing the colophon held at Birmingham University. The folio is almost certainly from the Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai. After some details about the distribution of lections the scribe ends: *“This Synaxarion of Lections from the Acts of the Apostles, and from Apostle Paul, and from the Holy Gospel, was written and completed to the glory, honour, and praise of the Holy Co-essential Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the Holy Monastery of St. Panteleimon the Martyr of Christ, in the region of the town Seleucia (Pieria), which is built on the Black Mountain, which is named ‘Boar’s Head’. It reached the end on Wednesday 20th May, AG 1339 (sic, an error for AG 1341 = AD **1030**).”*

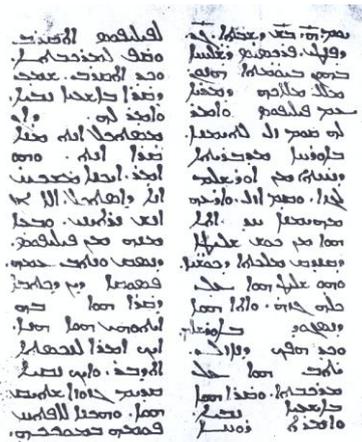
3 – **Gospel Lectionary**, a manuscript held at the Vatican. The colophon states that the manuscript was written by **John**, son of **Joseph**, in the Monastery of Martyr Panteleimon, also known as the Monastery of Prophet Elia, in the region of Seleucia Pieria, in the Black Mountain, known as the Boar’s Head, on Friday 2nd November (year not given; possibly in AG 1334, 1345, 1351, 1356, or 1362 = AD **1022, 1033, 1039, 1044, or 1050**), at the 3rd hour.

A later note by Monk **Ephrem** states that after **John**’s death the manuscript was donated to the Monastery in the time of Abbot **Gregory**; a later note states that he died on Tuesday 29th December, AM 6650 (= AD 1141), after twenty years as Abbot.

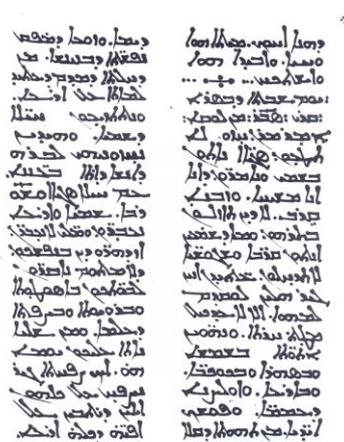
4 – **Praxapostolos Lectionary**, a manuscript held at the Vatican. It contains an intriguing reference to the Church of the Theotokos where the Holy Lance was revered on Holy Friday – long before its ‘discovery’ in 1098. The long colophon reads as follows: *“Ended with the help of God is the Synaxarion of the entire year, Lections from the Acts of the Apostles, and from the Epistles of Apostle Paul. This manuscript of Lections according to the Rite of the Greeks was translated from one of theirs. It was written and accomplished on Saturday 31st October, AG 1353 (= AD **1041**), around the 3rd hour, in the Holy Monastery of St. Panteleimon the Martyr of Christ our Lord, in the Black Mountain, that is in the region of the City of God (Theoupolis), Antioch.”* It continues:

“There wrote this book of the Synaxarion of Lections of Saturdays, Sundays, and Feast Days for the whole year, without any abbreviation, but complete in everything, according to the order of the Greeks, **John**, son of the late **Joseph**, known as among the priests of the Church of the Holy Martyr Panteleimon. Abba and honoured Elder **George** had it written for his disciple, the chaste Monk **Moses**.” A later note says that the manuscript was acquired by “**Gabriel the Stranger**, by name, a Hieromonk and Recluse in the Tower of St. Domitian, next to the Church of St. Paraskevi in the City of God (Theopolis), Antioch.”

We know of a Greek manuscript written in St. Domitian in 1162. Subsequent notes in Arabic state that it was taken to St. Domitian on 13 June, AM 6770 (= AD 1262), and then it was transferred to the ‘Cathedral of Antioch’, and that at a later date, **Paul** son of **Sion** gave it to the Monastery of the Theotokos, Saidnaya (Central Syria), on 11 July, AM 6790 (= AD 1282).



Folio from No. 4



Folio from No. 5

5 – **Gospel Lectionary**, a manuscript held at the British Library. The scribe provides the following colophon: “*This Synaxarion of Lections from the Gospel, according to the arrangement of the Greeks, was written and accomplished to the glory, laud, honour, and praise of the Holy Co-essential Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, on Saturday 6th December, AG 1357 (sic, an error for AG 1358 = AD 1046), around the 3rd hour... in the Monastery/Lavra of St. Elia on the Black Mountain, named Boar’s Head.*” The scribe then identifies himself as “**John the priest, of Duqsa**”, and states that it was acquired by the Priest Abba (name erased, and replaced by **Damianos**) of the town of Duqsa “*who yoked himself in obedience to Abba **Joseph the Elder and Abbot***”, and had been commissioned by Abba (name erased, and replaced by *the Priest **Theodore***).

A later note states that it was given to “*the Holy Church of the Zealous Elia on the Black Mountain*” by the Hieromonk **Peter**.

6 – **End of a Triodion** (perhaps from the Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai), a manuscript held at the British Library. The colophon reads: “*This book of the Three Odes, together with Canons – which was translated from Greek into Syriac in the days of Abraham the King’s scribe at the hands of Abba **Antonios**, the excellent Hieromonk – has been written, accomplished, and brought to all end: it was written in the Holy Monastery of St. George, Great among the Martyrs, known as Beth Mayya (Springs), in Daphne. An unworthy priest and wretched sinner **John**, son of the late **Joseph** wrote it; he is known among the priests of the Holy Church of St. Panteleimon on the Black Mountain, on Thursday 1st February, AG 1367 (= AD 1056), around the 9th hour.*” The scribe **John** uses a form of the ‘Ship’ colophon: “*As a ship arriving in a harbour, so is the last line for the scribe.*” He then states that it was commissioned by the Priest Abba **Michael**.

7 – **Parakletike** (Octoechos), a manuscript held at the British Library. The scribe states that the manuscript was commissioned by the “*Monk Abba Simeon, son of **Abraham**, from the region of*

Maipharqat, the City of Martyrs (Martyropolis; northern Mesopotamia, eastern Tigris River)”. Then he states that: “This Parakletike was completed on 29th July, AG 1367 (= AD 1056). It was written on the Black Mountain in the Monastery of St. Elia, Great among the Prophets. The unworthy Priest and sinner **Peter** wrote this Parakletike; he is also called **Polycarpos**, son of the late **Joseph**.” The scribe **Peter/Polycarpos** uses a form of the ‘Ship’ colophon: “Like a ship (arriving) at harbour, so too is the scribe at the last line”.

Folio from No. 7

8 – **Gospel Lectionary**, a manuscript held at the Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai. It was written “in the Holy Monastery/Lavra of St. Elia the Prophet, on the Black Mountain, beside the City of God (Theoupolis), Antioch, in AM 6577 (= AD 1068/1069)” by **Theodosios** “the Bishop who has abdicated and is residing there in solitary life.”

9 – **Parakletike** (Octoechos), a manuscript held in Goslar, Germany. The colophon reads: “It took its end and completion on Thursday 20th June, AA 6698 (sic, an error for AA 6699 = AD 1191), around the 3rd hour, at the hands of the feeble sinner **Michael**, son of the late Priest **Abu l-Faraj**, son of **Lu’lu’**, from the town Sini (?), the Seat of the Syrians, by name a Monk and by rank, although unworthy so to be called, a Priest, and Abbot of the Lavra of St. Elia on the Black Mountain.”

10 – **Praxapostolos Lectionary**, a manuscript held at the Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai. The colophon states that it was completed “on Friday 9th July, AA 6700, AG 1544, and AI 1240 (sic, error for AA 6740, AG 1543 = AD 1232), at the 9th hour.” The remainder of the text, giving the scribe’s name and the place is somewhat confused: “**Gabriel**... in the City of God (Theoupolis), Antioch, on its (Black) Mountain, in the Monastery of St. Elia the Prophet, exalted among the Prophets... Monk **Gabriel** son of **Mark**... **Gabriel** of Maipharqat (Martyropolis; northern Mesopotamia, eastern Tigris River)... from the village... **Trmnin** (?) in the district of the City of Martyrs (Martyropolis, Maipharqat).”

11 – **Anthologion** for the Feast of Prophet Elijah, a manuscript held at the Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai. The colophon reads: “The Priest **Gabriel**... whose place of birth was Maipharqat, City of Martyrs (Martyropolis), a region to the east of the great River Tigris... (was written) in the Monastery of the Theotokos (uncertain whether this is the same Monastery known as “the Monastery of Jarajima”), which is named ‘the Episcopate’ (Seat of the Bishop) in the region of the Black Mountain above the harbour of Rhossos (north-western Antioch; rather than Seleucia Pieria, south-western Antioch)... in the days of our Father **Simeon** (II Ibn Abi Shayba, ca.1206 – ca.1245) the Patriarch of Antioch, the City of God (Theoupolis)... This Book of Canons, which is for the

Pannychida was completed on Wednesday 10th December, AA 6751, AG 1554, and AI 1251 (= AD 1242), at the 9th hour.”

12 – A single tear among the Syriac fragments belonging to the New Finds at the Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai from the **second quarter of the 11th century**. It contains a colophon which states that the scribe was the Priest **John** (perhaps the same scribe as **John**, son of **Joseph**), of the Church of St. Panteleimon, and that he wrote the manuscript for the Recluse **Onophrios** of the Monastery of Prophet Elia. It should be dated to the second quarter of the **11th century**.

It is also important to mention the information available from the colophons of two Arabic manuscripts, which were also written in the same Monastery in the Black Mountain.

13 – An Arabic manuscript held in one of the monasteries’ libraries in Lebanon contains some *works* of Great St. Theodore Abu Qorra copied in AD 1735 from a manuscript written by Monk **Agapitos** in the Monastery of Prophet Elia on Antioch’s Black Mountain in AM 6559 (= AD **1050/1051**).

Theodore (ca.750-820/825) was originally from Edessa (northern Mesopotamia), and became the Bishop of Harran (795-812), near the modern Turkish-Syrian border. He was the first Christian Apologist to write theology in the Arabic language.

14 – An Arabic manuscript held at the Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai. It contains St. John Chrysostom’s Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, originally translated from Greek into Arabic by Abba **Antonios**, the Abbot of the Monastery of St. Simeon the Stylite the Lesser on Mount Admirable (Mount Simeon/Saman Dag). It was copied by Monk **Agapitos** at the Monastery of Prophet Elia on Antioch’s Black Mountain in AD **1053**.

Syriac scribes regularly give their names and so we learn the names of several Antiochian scribes and their dates:

- Priest **John** son of Joseph (Nos. **1, 2, 3, 4, 6, and 12**; between 1024 and 1056; he was the brother of the Priest **Peter/Polycarpos**),
- Priest **Peter/Polycarpos** son of Joseph (No. **7**; 1056; he was the brother of the Priest **John**),
- Priest **John** of Duqsa (No. **5**; 1046),
- Bishop **Theodosios** (No. **8**; 1068/1069),
- Hieromonk and Abbot **Michael** son of the Priest **Abu l-Faraj** son of **Lu’lu’** (No. **9**; 1191),
- Hieromonk **Gabriel** from Maipharqat (Nos. **10 and 11**; between 1232 and 1242),
- Monk **Agapitos** (Nos. **13 and 14**; between 1050/1051 and 1053).

In addition, we learn the names of four Abbots of this great Monastery and their dates:

- **George** (No. **4**; ca.1041),
- **Joseph** (No. **5**; ca.1046),
- **Gregory** (No. **3**; ca.1121-1141),
- **Michael** (No. **9**; ca.1191).

Furthermore, one colophon (No. **11**) indicates that **Simeon II** Ibn Abi Shayba, the Patriarch of Antioch (ca.1206 – ca.1245) was still alive in 1242.

Another rubric (No. **1**) provides us with the names of two Bishops of Qara (Central Syria), **Athanasios** (in AD 1135/1136) and his successor **Michael**.

Besides the **Monastery of Great Martyr Panteleimon and Prophet Elia** on the Boar’s Head, in the Black Mountain, where all but one of the manuscripts were written (No. **11**), the colophons also mention several other places:

- The **Monastery of the Theotokos** above the harbour of Rhossos (No. **11**),
- The **Monastery of Great Martyr George** in Daphne (No. **6**),
- The **Tower of St. Domitian** and the **Church of St. Paraskevi** in Antioch (No. **4**),
- The famous **Monastery of the Theotokos** in Saidnaya, Central Syria (No. **4**).

All the surviving Syriac manuscripts from the Black Mountain were written for liturgical use, therefore, we have:

- four *Gospel Lectionaries* (Nos. **1, 3, 5, 8**),
- three *Praxapostolos Lectionaries* (Nos. **2, 4, 10**),
- two *Octoechos* (Nos. **7, 9**),
- one originally had the *Triodion* (No. **6**),
- one *Anthologion* for the Feast of Prophet Elia (No. **11**).

Three colophons (Nos. **1, 4, 6**) give information about the source of the text:

- No. **1** was “collated” from a Greek manuscript;
- No. **4**, which describes itself as containing “*Lectons according to the Rite of the Greeks*”, was “translated” from a Greek Lectionary;
- No. **6** states that “*the book of the Three Odes (Triodion), together with Canons, was “translated”, from Greek into Syriac*” in the time of “*Abraham the King’s Scribe*” by the Hieromonk Abba **Antonios**.

It is clear that all these manuscripts are the product of the process of the Constantinopolitanization of the Antiochian Rite of the Rum Orthodox Church in Antioch that took place in the aftermath of the Byzantine re-conquest of the area (969-1085). As a result of this adaptation most surviving Rum Orthodox liturgical manuscripts contain, not the original Antiochian Rite that had previously been in use, but its Constantinopolitanized form. In the 11th, 12th, and 13th centuries, both forms of the Rite evidently existed side by side for a while, the original Antiochian Rite being known as the “*Rite of the Syrians*”, and the Constantinopolitanized form as that “*of the Greeks*”.

In the case of the *Lectionaries*, it was only the arrangement, not the actual text, which was taken over from “the Greeks”, for the biblical text used remains that of the Peshitta (the same applies in the case of the contemporary Constantinopolitanization of the Christian Palestinian Aramaic liturgy).

The *Triodion*, on the other hand, was clearly translated entirely from Greek, and the reference to the imperial Scribe **Abraham** and to the translator Abba **Antonios** (No. **6**) would be of particular interest if it were possible to identify these two men. With some hesitation one might suggest that the former might be the famous **Abraham the Antiochian, son of John, the Protospatharios**, active as a translator from Greek into Arabic (end of the 10th - beginning 11th century); while the latter could conceivably be Abba **Antonios**, Abbot of the Monastery of St. Simeon the Stylite the Lesser on Mount Admirable, also active as a translator from Greek into Arabic (around end 10th c.). This Abba **Antonios** is not known to have translated into Syriac, as well as into Arabic.

Whether or not these identifications are acceptable, it seems very likely that the process of translating Greek liturgical texts into Syriac began in the last decades of the 10th century, following the Constantinopolitan re-conquest. And, to judge by the number of surviving manuscripts from the Monastery of St. Panteleimon/Prophet Elia, it is very likely, too, that this Monastery played an important role in the dissemination of the newly Constantinopolitanized Rite in Syriac translation in Antioch.