

Athanasius of Alexandria in the Coptic Memory

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Abstract: Coptic literature presents the life of Athanasius of Alexandria in a different way compared to what his contemporaneous historians narrates about him. Some features of his personality was ignored, such as being a famous theologian and writer, and some different features were added, such as being a maker of marvels. Was this change intended? Was this random? Can we find reasons for this reformatting of the personality of Athanasius as it is presented in Coptic literary texts? The most recent conceptions of memory studies were applied -as a proper new methodology- on several Coptic pseudo-Athanasius texts, in order to find answers to these questions. This article presents a model for those who want to study historic figure via literary texts.

Keywords: Memory Studies, Collective Memory, Athanasius of Alexandria, Coptic Literature.

أثناسيوس السكندري في الذاكرة القبطية

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المخلص: يقدم الأدب القبطي حياة البابا أثناسيوس السكندري بطريقة مغايرة لما يروي عنه المؤرخون المعاصرون له. بعض ملامح شخصيته تم تجاهلها، مثل كونه كاتب ولاهوتي، وقد أضيفت لشخصيته ملامح أخرى مختلفة، مثل كونه صانع معجزات. هل كان هذا التغيير مقصوداً؟ هل كان عشوائياً؟ هل يمكن إيجاد أسباب لهذا التغيير في شخصية أثناسيوس كما تقدمها النصوص القبطية الأدبية؟ لقد تم تطبيق أحدث مفاهيم دراسات الذاكرة - كمنهج بحث مناسب وجديد - على عدد كبير من النصوص المنحولة على اسم أثناسيوس، من أجل الوصول لإجابة هذه الأسئلة. لعل هذه المقالة تُقدم نموذجاً لمن يريد دراسة شخصية تاريخية من خلال النصوص الأدبية.

الكلمات الدالة: دراسات الذاكرة، الذاكرة الجمعية، أثناسيوس السكندري، الأدب القبطي.

During the second half of the twentieth century until now, the term memory has gained extreme importance in several fields of the studies of humanities. The whole story of memory studies started with the seminal book of the theorist Maurice Halbwachs.¹ For Halbwachs, memory is not a process of a single human brain to recall something from the past, but it can help a certain group of people to create their own united collective identity. Halbwachs proved that memory constructs the past for the sake of the present, especially when it is related to the social group of the one who remembers. Thus, a social group of people is to be identified according to their collective memory.² Pierre Nora continued the work of Halbwachs and enlarged it in his massive publication.³ He gave much attention to the places where memory is kept. Nora concluded that collective memory could be seen in very numerous and diverse manifestations such as monuments, persons, symbols and rituals. In several volumes of Nora's publications, the Greek and Roman identity in antiquity were well examined.⁴

Jan Assmann, in several publications as well, improved the work of his predecessors. He made a difference between two types of collective memories. The communicative memory, which lasts between 80-100 years, the period in which one generation can deliver memories on certain events and figures to the next. Whenever after this period, the so-called cultural memory takes over. Through the cultural memory, social groups shape their identity. The transition from the communicative memory to the cultural memory is in the hands of a group of people. This group is to do some work to keep the cultural memory in several manifestations including literary written texts from the past.⁵

Consequently, through the literature of a certain religious/social group of people, their identity as they want to present it, appears clearer. From this point, the ancient literature reflexes the history of the group who produced it in the way they wanted. In this history, the narrator participates in two roles, as an actor and a narrator of the preserved events.⁶ The process of remembering and silencing certain events that reached us through literature enable us to make sense of our past.⁷ In different words, memory may be examined from variety of points of views including literature.⁸

On the other hand, two Coptologists have used the conceptions of memory in their researches. Hugo Lundhaug pointed out that individual memory and collective memory are very much intertwined when studying the monastic literature of Pachomius and

¹ Maurice Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1950).

² Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, edited, translated with an Introduction by Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 46-51.

³ Pierre Nora, *Les lieux de mémoire*. 3 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1984-1992).

⁴ Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les lieux de mémoire," *Representation* 26 (1989): 7-24.

⁵ Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (München: C.H. Beck, 2000), 48-66.

⁶ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon, 1995), 2.

⁷ Monika Palmberger, *How Generations Remember: Conflicting Histories and Shared Memories in Post-War Bosnia and Herzegovina* (London: The Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 12.

⁸ Jeffrey A. Barash, *Collective Memory and the Historical Past* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 211.

Shenoute.¹ Lundhaug concentrated on the way that monks, who are living together, memorize certain parts of the Scriptures, and how this shaped their life and appeared in their written works.² Malcolm Choat examined dozens of Coptic inscriptions from several monastic sites of Egypt. These inscriptions are mainly lists of proper names start with mentioning the Holy Trinity down to the founders of the monastic community till the current occupant of the cell, where the inscription is written.³ Choat concluded that these inscriptions were kind of lists that function as scaffold for collective memory of the monastic community. It connects heaven and earth from the current monk to the Lord via the local saints of the monastic community.⁴ Both Lundhaug and Choat successfully managed to use the conceptions of memory studies to provide better understanding of the old texts and to provide an explanation why these texts came to exist in this certain way.

More or less, forty Coptic texts⁵ are circulated under the name of Athanasius of Alexandria, the twentieth archbishop of Alexandria (ca. 296/298-2 May 373).⁶ These texts are mixture of all types of texts such as Biblical commentaries, festal letters, monastic and homiletic writings. In terms of authenticity, most of the preserved works in Coptic are inauthentic, very few are debateable, and the rest are authentic.⁷ For their original language, although the majority of these texts are not attested in Greek, the language with which Athanasius spoke and wrote, there is a strong possibility that they were composed in Greek.

The focus of this article is the pseudo-Athanasian works preserved in Coptic in addition to the Coptic texts, which were written by others to glorify him, apparently centuries after his death. One Arabic life of Athanasius was taken into consideration because it is a complete version of the fragmentary Coptic version. These texts will be examined in order to give an overview of how the Copts kept Athanasius of Alexandria in their collective memory through time and if possible for what reasons.

In a sermon entitled *Concerning Brothers Who Came to Us* (CPG 2186, Clavis Coptica 0047),⁸ Athanasius welcomes and gives a speech to a group of monks. No certain occasion of the visit is mentioned and no time frame is given in this short but complete sermon. Athanasius calls the monks the sons of the one who was crucified and

¹ See Hugo Lundhaug, "Memory and Early Monastic Literary Practices: A Cognitive Perspective," *Journal of Cognitive Historiography* 1 (2014): 114-116.

² Lundhaug, "Memory and Early Monastic Literary Practices," 109-110.

³ Malcolm Choat, "Narratives of Monastic Genealogy in Coptic Inscriptions," *Religion in the Roman Empire* 3 (2015): 410-413.

⁴ Choat, "Narratives of Monastic Genealogy," 424-425.

⁵ For a list, see Bernd Witte, "Koptische Tradition," in Peter Gemeinhardt (ed.), *Athanasius Handbuch* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 390-397 and more updated data can be reached via <https://atlas.paths-erc.eu/authors/23>, accessed on February 2021.

⁶ For his life, see David M. Gwynn, *Athanasius of Alexandria: Bishop, Theologian, Ascetic, Father* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁷ For the authenticity of many Athanasian writings in Coptic, see David Brakke, "The Authenticity of the Ascetic Athanasiana," *Orientalia* 63 (1994): 17-56.

⁸ Arnold van Lantschoot, "Une Allocution à des moines en visite chez S. Athanase," *Angelicum* 20 (1943): 249-253.

the patrons our fathers. He praises their purity and their fight against the devil. The author applies Moses' blessings for Levi upon the monks.¹ The title of the text is given by the beginning of the text and the name of Athanasius of Alexandria is provided after it. The text is preserved only in Coptic in one single manuscript and was dated to the eleventh century.²

It is clear that this is not a letter because the author preaches a group of monks in his presence, but it could be a later redaction of a letter. Since the text had come to us from monastic milieu, it is a kind of support to monasticism of the archbishop of Alexandria. On the other hand it presents the strong relationship between Athanasius himself and monks. They appear as friends to the archbishop, who regularly visit him and listen to his speech. I discussed the same theme, the friendship between Athanasius and monasticism, in the light of some pseudo Athanasian texts in an earlier article.³

In a well written homily on *The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard*⁴ (CPG 2181, 2181, Clavis Coptica 0060),⁵ Athanasius provides his listeners with a perfect piece of Biblical exegeses. He interprets the workers who were hired by the landowner to work in the vineyard as the prophets of God. He identifies the workers who came at nine o'clock in the morning with Moses, Aaron and Joshua son of Nun.⁶ For the author, the ones of the afternoon are Samuel and David. And he continues like this till he says that the last ones are the apostles of Christ. By this way he explains God's mercy who wanted the redemption of his people through ages. He delivers his spiritual lesson smoothly with simple commentaries on the parable.

The worker who contradicted against what he thought as inequality among the workers in the end of the parable is identified by Athanasius as Judas of Iscariot. The author attacks him severely and accuses him with all kinds of evil deeds.⁷ Through the entire homily, Athanasius provides a massive number of quotations from the Old and New testaments which he describes as the oars of the ship of salvation.⁸ The homily represents Athanasius as a good shepherd who preaches his congregation in a very gentle way and warns them not to be like Judas who betrayed the Lord and contradicted his method to redeem the world. Athanasius is depicted as Biblical commentator and a preacher.

To complete the mental image of Athanasius as a Biblical exegete and a preacher, I will rely on one more text of Biblical exegesis nature circulated under his name only in

¹ van Lantschoot, "Une Allocution à des moines," 253, n. 6.

² Brakke, "The Authenticity of the Ascetic Athanasiana," 34-44.

³ Ibrahim Saweros, "The Perception of St. Athanasius of Alexandria in Later Coptic Literature," in Gawdat Gabra and Hany N. Takla (eds.), *Christianity and Monasticism in Northern Egypt* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2017), 109-117.

⁴ Matthew 20: 1-16.

⁵ Wallis Budge, *Coptic Homilies in the Dialect of Upper Egypt Edited from the Papyrus Codex Oriental 5001 in the British Museum* (London: Order of the Trustees, 1910), 80-89 (Sahidic Texts), 226-236 (English Translation).

⁶ Budge, *Coptic Homilies*, 81, 227.

⁷ Budge, *Coptic Homilies*, 86-87, 232-234.

⁸ Budge, *Coptic Homilies*, 88, 234.

Coptic. It is a homiletic work in which he comments on the parable of the midnight friend¹ (CPG 2194, Clavis Coptica 0057).² Since the very beginning of the homily *On Luke 11:5-9*, it is said that the commentaries will be provided in two standards. The first is material explanations in which the author recounts the parable in his own words and identifies its main actors.³ The second is a spiritual interpretation of the parable in which Athanasius provides his listeners with the values to be learnt from it and the meanings which are hidden within the parable.⁴

Athanasius says that the three demanded loaves for the midnight friend are fasting, prayers and tears. To make his interpretation persuasive to his audience, he quotes three Biblical verses contain the three words but have nothing to do with the context. Athanasius presents the Lord as the friend who is at home and the one who walks to him in the midnight is every human. He advises his audience not to wait to midnight, namely the end of their lives, to return to God.⁵ This homily supports the view of Athanasius of Alexandria as a preacher and a Biblical commentator in the Coptic mentality.

Bishop Constantine of Asyut⁶ has written two encomia to praise Athanasius of Alexandria. In the first encomium (Clavis Coptica 0123),⁷ Athanasius is given a date in the Coptic calendar (the 7th of Pachon) to be commemorated as a saint. In the encomium, Constantine narrates that Athanasius managed to save Alexandria from a great storm coming from the sea. He mentions that Athanasius brought a copy of the Book of Genesis and opened it on the verses in which the Lord promised Noah not to bring any more floods to destroy earth (Gen. 8: 21; 9: 11-12).⁸ By this action, the Lord stopped the dangerous storm for the sake of his saint, Athanasius.

Constantine, the narrator of the episodes in the encomium, while telling some marvels, which were achieved by Athanasius, made a try to persuade his audiences that he is recounting true stories. He mentioned that he heard these episodes from somebody who was an eyewitness of the events, by this Constantine made a chain that connects him with Athanasius and gave authenticity to his own words.⁹ In one of these

¹ Luke 11: 5-9.

² Ibrahim Saweros, *Another Athanasius: Four Sahidic Homilies attributed to Athanasius of Alexandria, Two Homilies on Michael, the Homily on Luke 11: 5-9 and the Homily on Pentecost*, 2 vols., CSCO 675-656, (Leuven: Peeters, 2019), I: 41-56 (Sahidic Text), II: 33-47 (English Translation).

³ Saweros, *Another Athanasius*, I: 53-54, II: 41.

⁴ Saweros, *Another Athanasius*, I: 54-58, II: 41-42.

⁵ Saweros, *Another Athanasius*, I: 56, II: 34.

⁶ Not much is known about his biography. He was ordained a bishop by Damian (578-607). Many Coptic and Arabic texts are attributed to him. He was considered a vicar and a consultant of the archbishop of Alexandria. About him see, René-Georges Coquin, "Saint Constantin, évêque d'Asyut," *Studia Orientalia Christiana Collectanea* 16 (1981): 151-170, and most recently, Phil Booth, "A Circle of Egyptian Bishops at the End of the Roman Rule (c. 600)," *Le Muséon* 131 (2018): 30-35.

⁷ Tito Orlandi, *Constantini episcopi ubris Siout: Encomia in Athanasium duo*, CSCO 394-350, (Leuven: (Leuven: Peeters, 1974), I: 1-21 (Sahidic Text), II: 1-12 (Latin Translation).

⁸ Orlandi, *Constantini episcopi ubris Siout*, I: 8-10, II: 5-6.

⁹ Orlandi, *Constantini episcopi ubris Siout*, I: 12, II: 8. For more examples of the same technique of persuading in Coptic literature, see Gesa Schenke, "Creating Local History: Coptic Encomia Celebrating Past Events," in Arietta Papaconstantinou (ed.), *Writing True Stories: Historians and Hagiographer in the*

marvellous stories, Constantine relates that while escaping of his opponents, Athanasius was washing vegetables in a water basin together with a young boy in a poor shelter in Upper Egypt. His enemies, apparently the followers of Arius, reached the place and saw him, but they could not recognize his face by God's will. Athanasius stayed safe of his enemies, and later, many wonders used to happen to those who visit the place of the water basin.¹

In the beginning of the second encomium on Athanasius (Clavis Coptica 0124),² Constantine comments on the exceptional title of Athanasius, 'the Apostolic'. He mentions the titles of other patristic fathers and says that everyone deserves his own title according to his works, but Athanasius is the only one who is comparable to the apostles of Christ. Later, Constantine uses Athanasius as a supreme example of priesthood in order to preach the priests of his time. The priests who are listening to him during Athanasius feast day.³

Close to the end of this encomium, Constantine speaks (in the first person pronoun) to Athanasius himself. Constantine asks Athanasius to be his intercessor that he might receive the glory that Athanasius took from God and people. Constantine also begs Athanasius for his own salvation.⁴ I think that, it is clear enough what the writings of Constantine wanted to present about Athanasius, i.e. a saint and an intercessor. He is an example for perfect priesthood and the one that God supported him with marvels all his life especially during his exile times.

As Mark Sheridan noted, Constantine insisted to manifest the superiority of Athanasius. In the first encomium, Constantine compares Athanasius with Moses. Moses faced many obstacles from the Israelites and in the same way Athanasius faced the Arians. In the second encomium, Constantine reminds his listeners of the teachers of the church and their epithets such as the cases of Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus, and others. Then, Constantine concludes that Athanasius' epithet, the Apostolic, is superior to them all.⁵

Although both of the encomia do not provide any historical data about Athanasius that to be used as a persuasive tool for the listeners of the sanctity of Athanasius, the encomia present the current state of Athanasius in the Coptic Church as a saint, few centuries after his repose. Not only this, but even put him in the highest rank among other Biblical figures and Church fathers. The legend of Athanasius is growing as a

Late Antique and Medieval Near East (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 21-23. See also, William G. Rusch, "Coptic as a Resource in the Quest of the Historical Athanasius," *Enchoria* 8 (1978): 87.

¹ Orlandi, *Constantini episcopo ubris Siout*, I: 12-13, II: 8. The same story is to be compared with the miracles happened via the water wells of which Christ drank during the flight of the Holy Family into Egypt according to the Coptic tradition. See for example, Cornelis Hulsman, "Tracing the Route of the Holy Family Today," in Gawdat Gabra (ed.), *Be Thou There: The Holy Family's Journey in Egypt* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2001), 31-52. Photos of these wells are attached to the article.

² Orlandi, *Constantini episcopo ubris Siout*, I: 22-38 (Sahidic Text), II: 14-23 (Latin Translation).

³ Orlandi, *Constantini episcopo ubris Siout*, I: 25-27, II: 15-17.

⁴ Orlandi, *Constantini episcopo ubris Siout*, I: 35-36, II: 22-23.

⁵ Mark Sheridan, "The Encomium in Coptic Literature of the Late Sixth Century," in Paola Buzi and Alberto Camplani (eds.), *Christianity in Egypt: Literary Production and Intellectual Trends, Studies in Honor of Tito Orlandi* (Rome: Institution Patristicum Augustinianum, 2011), 459-461.

super hero of the church. He is presented as a fighter against heresy and a maker of marvels. As these are encomia, which were written to celebrate Athanasius on his feast day and the listeners came to the church to celebrate and to listen to some praises for their saint, thus a common knowledge of the saint has been shared among the encomiast and his audience. This means that the mental image of Athanasius as described in the encomia –at least to some extent- was already well known to the congregation.

In another encomium on Athanasius, attributed to Cyril of Alexandria (CPG 5273, Clavis Coptica 0180),¹ the legend of Athanasius as a saint who is able to cure people of their diseases by marvellous powers, gets clearer. Athanasius is depicted as a real living saint that people come to him looking for healing of their illnesses.² In a different manuscript witness of the same encomium, Athanasius was able to raise a young boy of death in the city of Isauria.³ In this story, the author is modelling Athanasius on the shape of Christ himself.

This encomium connects Athanasius with the city of Isauria and the Isaurian people. In the year 359 two councils were gathered, one in Seleucia in the district of Isauria in Asia Minor for the eastern bishops and the other in Ariminum in Italy for the western ones. The basic aim of the two councils was to agree on a united creed for the universal church, but the result was a big divide and the two councils reached contradicted conclusions.⁴ Athanasius of Alexandria could not attend both. Soon, he wrote his book 'About the Councils' (CPG 2128) in which he favoured the Nicene creed.⁵

Although no single historical source of Athanasius registers a visit to Isauria, neither a visit of the Isaurians to him, many fictitious stories used this theme to build Athanasius' image in the memory of the Copts through centuries. Essentially, Isauria is presented as a place of exile where Athanasius spent some years. There he was busy in converting the Isaurians into Christianity as a faithful apostle after Christ's apostles as the above mentioned encomium recounts.⁶

It is worth to be noted here that in the afore-said homily *On Luke 11: 5-9*, the theme of the Isaurians was used in a very intelligent way by inventing a counter visit of the leaders of Isauria to Athanasius in Alexandria. The final editor of the homily must have known such traditions, as is shown by the somewhat cryptic eulogy that Athanasius

¹ Tito Orlandi, *Testi Copti, 1- Encomio di Atanasio, 2- Vita di Atanasio* (Milan: Istituto Editoriale Cisalpino, 1968), 17-42 (Sahidic Text), 55-71 (Italian Translation).

² Orlandi, *Testi Coptic*, 21-23, 59-60.

³ Victor Ghica and Antonia St. Demiana, "His Toil was not in Vain: Two Unpublished Coptic Fragments of the Encomium on Athanasius attributed to Cyril of Alexandria (IFAO Inv. 79-80)," in Paola Buzi, Alberto Camplani and Federico Contardi (eds.), *Coptic Society, Literature and Religion from Late Antiquity to Modern Times: Proceedings of the Tenth International Congress of Coptic Studies, Rome September 17th – 22th, 2012 and Plenary Reports of the Ninth International Congress of Coptic Studies, Cairo, September 15th- 19th, 2008* (Leuven: Peeters, 2016), 958-960.

⁴ Gwynn, *Athanasius of Alexandria*, 14-15; Timothy D. Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius: Theology and Politics in the Constantinian Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 144-148, 161-162.

⁵ Gwynn, *Athanasius of Alexandria*, 15.

⁶ Orlandi, *Testi Coptic*, 27-28, 61-62.

addresses to his Isaurian guests.¹ The Isaurians are included for two purposes: first, to embed the homily in the career of the historical Athanasius and to present him as a good shepherd, even for the Isaurians, and, secondly, to use the questions of the Isaurian clergy to give the homily a semblance of unity. Because after the well written exegesis of the parable of the midnight friend, the homily has a story about Pachomius and the bishop Phouibamon, commentary on the friendship between David and Jonathan and a fanciful acts of the Nicene council. The three themes have nothing to do with the parable of the midnight friend, neither with each other. Thus, the redactor used the Isaurians as a tool to connect the incoherent themes. He just started every new theme of the homily by mentioning that Athanasius is speaking about it as a reply to the inquiries of the Isaurians.²

It is clear enough that the Copts kept in their collective memory about Athanasius that he is a wonders performer and a kind of apostle who was sent, by exile, to convert the city of Isauria into Christianity. The same memories of Athanasius continue into the Arabic texts circulated under Athanasius' name.³ In the very long and extant *Arabic Life of Athanasius* which is a mere translation of the Coptic one,⁴ it is observed that Athanasius received the gift of healing people since his early age, when he was a deacon under Alexander of Alexandria, his predecessor. *The Arabic Life* narrates several wonders related to his healing abilities and thus, he is comparable to Saint Peter, the apostle.⁵

The anonymous translator of *The Life* concentrates on modelling Athanasius as an apostle like Peter. The author mentions that Athanasius preached large number of the people of Isauria, and managed to baptise 3000 of them at once,⁶ exactly like what Saint Peter did after the Pentecost (Acts 2: 41). It seems that Athanasius wins most of the inhabitants of Isauria for Christ and he achieved much as an apostle. Later, Isaurians needed to build a large church for which Athanasius ordained a bishop called Konon who is also known from the encomium of Cyril of Alexandria.⁷

During one of his troubles as a persecuted shepherd who defends the true Orthodox faith, Athanasius escaped to Upper Egypt. There he lived for three years among his fellows of Upper Egypt who were so kind to him not realizing that he was the archbishop of Alexandria. He also did not want to reveal his personality to them in order to catch the fruits of his toil, the heavenly reward. Athanasius worked as an assistant of a poor dyer in Panopolis (modern Akhmim). There, Athanasius accepted all kinds of humble works that his master, the dyer, puts upon him, including serving him

¹ Saweros, *Another Athanasius*, I: 51-52, II: 39-40.

² See for example, Saweros, *Another Athanasius*, I: 64-65, II: 50.

³ For a list of these texts, see Ibrahim Saweros, "The Arabic Corpus of Pseudo Athanasius of Alexandria," in Gawdat Gabra and Hany N. Takla (eds.), *Christianity and Monasticism in Alexandria* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2020), 139-148.

⁴ A critical edition of the Arabic text with no translation appeared in Wadi Awad, "Arabic Life of St. Athanasius translated from Coptic," *The Friend of the Priest* 56-58 (2016-2018): 38-45, 42-48.

⁵ Awad, "Arabic Life of St. Athanasius," §33-63.

⁶ Awad, "Arabic Life of St. Athanasius," §83.

⁷ Awad, "Arabic Life of St. Athanasius," §84-85; Ghica and St. Demiana, "His Toil was not in Vain," 959.

and his visitors, prepare the food for them and cleaning their dishes. This humility of Athanasius during his escape, as it is attested in the Sahidic homily *On Murder and Greed and on Michael the Archangel*, (CPG 2191, Clavis Coptica 0048)¹ is a basic feature of his personality as an apostle in the memory of the Copts. Although he has all these super spiritual powers, he lives in a very humble way. This also supports the idea of Athanasius as being a faithful monk and a supporter of monasticism.

The Arabic Life adds one more wonder, which happened during Athanasius' escape in Panopolis, in a very exaggerating way. It recounts that Athanasius was walking with one of the dyer's assistants beside a pagan temple. Then, Athanasius spoke to those who recently converted to Christianity about the endless powers of God. Athanasius said that God is able even to perish massive pagan temples. And when Athanasius came closer to the temple, it was destroyed into small stone pieces by heavenly powers.² Again, this story of the destruction of the pagan temples is a try to modelling Athanasius in the shape of the child Jesus during his visit to Egypt where the pagan temples used to tremble and fall down when He crosses next to it. These stories were popular in Egypt since the fourth century at least.³

There are more Coptic texts that connect Athanasius with the heavenly figures. Two homilies attributed to him were written partly or completely to praise the two archangels Michael and Gabriel. In the homily *On Michael and Gabriel the Archangels*,⁴ the author puts on Athanasius' tongue many stories in which the two archangels support oppressed people. The archangels are used to persuade the listeners that the heavenly creatures will reveal the hidden sins of humans in order to deliver the spiritual lesson for the listeners, not to commit sins. On the other hand, the stories narrated by the pseudo author, Athanasius became powerful and very persuasive. Through the homily, Athanasius speaks about the archangels as being one of them. He is aware how the archangels speak and behave, what they do and how they look like.⁵ He not only relates narratives about them, but also he gives long paranetic speech about them. Athanasius is showing up his knowledge and his provable relations to the archangels. He quotes several Biblical and apocryphal sources to explain their role in history and the in life of the current listening believers. Athanasius as a kind of eyewitness and a retailer of the episodes in which the archangels are involved, appears as a kind of bridge between his congregation and the heavenly figures.

It should be noted here that the narratives which Athanasius relates are connected with anonymous people. He speaks about the marvels that happened to very normal and unknown people to his listeners by the archangels. Consequently, there are no means to

¹ Saweros, *Another Athanasius*, I: 39, II: 34-35.

² Awad, "Arabic Life of St. Athanasius," §110-118.

³ Stephen J. Davis, "Ancient Sources for the Coptic Tradition," in Gawdat Gabra (ed.), *Be Thou There: The Holy Family's Journey in Egypt* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2001), 142-146.

⁴ Saweros, *Another Athanasius*, I: 3-19, II: 1-15.

⁵ For example in the story of the son of the rich man from Pentapolis, Athanasius relates a dialogue between the two archangels, Michael and Gabriel, which is supposed to take place in a night vision that was granted to the young oppressed boy. In the dialogue, it becomes clear to the listeners how the archangels discussed the case and decided how they will react, and Athanasius appears as being well connected with the angelic figures. Saweros, *Another Athanasius*, I: 8-10, II: 5-7.

examine the authenticity of the stories from the side of the listeners. The only choice left to them is to believe. The same idea is stressed when Athanasius as the narrator appears as the protagonist in the same time. In the homily *On Murder and Greed*, Athanasius relates that after spending three years in escape in Upper Egypt, God sent him the archangel Michael to console him and announces him that his temptation has come to an end. The most striking part in the episode is the long descriptions that Athanasius provides about Michael. He narrates "I raised my eyes to the sky and saw a great light above me like a flash of fire. And I saw the archangel Michael while his appearance was of splendid height and his wings were stretched out and each of his wings more than five cubits (long), resembles flaming fire. He was dressed in armour of fire, his legs were like fine brass melting in a furnace, and a huge wand of light was in his right hand, a fiery sword in his left, while his face and his eyes radiated fire into my face..."¹ These very colorful descriptions of Michael are obviously given to seal the issue of the relationship between Athanasius and the angelic figures in the mind of the audience of the homily.

In shaping the cultural memory of the Copts about Athanasius of Alexandria, not all of the texts attributed to him are of much use. For example, in the homily *On Mercy and Judgment* (CPG 2180, Clavis Coptica 0079),² Athanasius is represented as a preacher who provides Biblical commentaries on certain verses of the Pauline epistles. He deals with daily life basic issues such as richness and poverty.³ The same theme is addressed in much rich details in the homily *On Pentecost* (CPG 2192, Clavis Coptica 0052) attributed to Athanasius of Alexandria without adding new features to the personality of Athanasius.⁴ The purpose of both is to present Athanasius as a good shepherd who instructs his audiences with daily life issues. It should be noted that these issues are secular and has nothing to do with monastic milieu where the texts were produced.

Athanasius, as a preacher and a Biblical exegete, can be seen more clearly in the homily *On the Resurrection of Lazarus* (CPG 2185, Clavis Coptica 0049).⁵ After Christ has ordered Lazarus to come out of his tomb, Lazarus came out wrapped with straps of linen. Then, Christ asked the people around him to Loosen Lazarus (John 11: 38-44). From this short episode, Athanasius starts to comment on the necessity of working together with God in order to be redeemed.⁶ Athanasius is revealed to the audience of this pseudo sermon as a great preacher and Biblical commentator. The same idea can be followed in the homily *On the Passion of Christ and the Judgment Place* (CPG 2184, Clavis Coptica 0051).⁷ In this homily, Athanasius preaches about the passions that Christ accepted for the sake of humanity. He speaks about the day in which he delivers the homily as a feast day, most probably he means the

¹ Saweros, *Another Athanasius*, I: 46, II: 36.

² Budge, *Coptic Homilies*, 58-65 (Sahidic Text), 204-211 (English Translation).

³ Budge, *Coptic Homilies*, 64, 210.

⁴ Saweros, *Another Athanasius*, I: 84-98, II: 67-79.

⁵ Joseph B. Bernardin, "The Resurrection of Lazarus," *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 57 (1940): 262-290.

⁶ Bernardin, "The Resurrection of Lazarus," 269, 287.

⁷ Joseph B. Bernardin, "A Coptic Sermon attributed to St. Athanasius," *Journal of Theological Studies* 38 (1937): 113-129.

commemoration of the Holy Friday. He also equals those who commit sins and do not repent with those who crucified Christ.¹ From the last examples, one understands that Athanasius is depicted in the memory of the Copts as a preacher who delivers his sermons on the different occasions of the Coptic calendar. He preaches about the episodes of Christ's life, the marvels of Christ in addition to homilies to praise the heavenly saints.

As is well evidenced, literature has three roles to play in the production of the cultural memory. These roles are being medium of remembrance, object of remembrance and medium for observing the production of cultural memory.² The above quoted literary works were a tool in the hands of the Copts for centuries to reproduce their heroic figure, Athanasius of Alexandria. The process of reproducing the historic figure is certainly influenced by certain historical drama. The Church of Alexandria received its first shock after the council of Chalcedon 451.³ After this council and the excommunication of the archbishop of Alexandria Dioscorus I (444-458),⁴ the Coptic Church started to think of itself as a newborn independent church.⁵ Every newborn religious foundation would need a strong connection with the past. This connection is basically needed to glorify it and to keep its followers behind it. The figure of Athanasius is a great model to connect the independent church with its glorious history. Athanasius was reformed to fit with the new needs of the Church. He is presented as a homeliest who delivers sermons on different occasions of the Coptic calendar. He is also depicted as a Biblical expositor and through his interpretation the spiritual messages are to be delivered. In addition to this, as a saint from the past, he should have been performing numberless marvels.

Here we are facing a 'recycled' Athanasius. It is not totally invented out of the blue, but older texts and stories were recycled to produce a new one.⁶ This new one is simply marked with all what the new 'masters' of the church need. As they are monks, Athanasius should appear as a real monk and much cooperated with the leaders of the monks of his age. Monks are certainly to be identified with the 'experts of memory' as described above. Those monks were very active in book production and their monastic centers were the place where almost every Coptic literary work was produced.⁷ They

¹ Bernardin, "A Coptic Sermon,": 121-124.

² Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney, "Literature and the Production of Cultural Memory: Introduction," *European Journal of English Studies* 10 (2006): 112.

³ For its history and acts see, Richard Price and Michael Gaddis, *The Acts of the Council of Chalcedon*. 3 vols. (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005).

⁴ Martiniano P. Roncaglia, "Dioscorus I," in Aziz S. Atiya (ed.), *The Coptic Encyclopedia*, vol. 3, (New York: Macmillan, 1991), 912-915.

⁵ Stephen J. Davis, *The Early Coptic Papacy: The Egyptian Church and its Leadership in Late Antiquity* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2004), 88-91.

⁶ About reproducing new texts from older ones in Coptic, see Tito Orlandi, "Coptic Literature," in Aziz S. Atiya (ed.), *The Coptic Encyclopedia*, vol. 5, (New York: Macmillan, 1991), 1450-1560, and for wider understanding of such phenomenon, see the 'Hypoleptischer Horizen' in Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis*, 280-285.

⁷ Chrysi Kotsifou, "Books and Book Production in the Monastic Communities of Byzantine Egypt," in William E. Klingshrin and L. Safran, *The Early Christian Book* (Washington: The Catholic University in America Press, 2007), 48-60.

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took over the mission of safeguarding the cultural memory of the Copts and reproduced Athanasius as one of them. It should be noted that in transmitting the personality of Athanasius through time, some well known features of his personality were silenced. The most striking point is presenting Athanasius as the true hero of Orthodoxy without explaining what Orthodoxy is. Athanasius is not a theologian in the memory of the Copts. Theological debate was totally avoided in such texts. Probably to make the final literary product fit with the new audience, who is not well educated, and perhaps it is a feature of the new independent Coptic Church. As the theological debate was the start point of the troubles of the church, they simply decided to keep away of it.

Thus, in this study I tried to use the memory studies as a new methodology in understanding the pseudo Coptic literature of Athanasius of Alexandria. The same methodology may be applied on other authors, to whom a large number of Coptic literary works is attributed, in several case studies. By this, I assume, we can reach better interpretation of Coptic literature and why we have this large number of pseudo literary works.

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