

# Presbeia Theotokou

The Intercessory Role of Mary across Times and Places in Byzantium  
(4<sup>th</sup>–9<sup>th</sup> Century)

Edited by

LEENA MARI PELTOMAA  
ANDREAS KÜLZER  
PAULINE ALLEN

Verlag der  
Österreichischen Akademie  
der Wissenschaften



Wien 2015

**OAW**

Vorgelegt von w. M. JOHANNES KODER in der Sitzung vom 30. Jänner 2015

Veröffentlicht mit Unterstützung des  
Austrian Science Fund (FWF): PUB 218-G19



Mit Beschluss der philosophisch-historischen Klasse in der Sitzung vom 23. März 2006 wurde die Reihe *Veröffentlichungen der Kommission für Byzantinistik in Veröffentlichungen zur Byzanzforschung* umbenannt; die bisherige Zählung wird dabei fortgeführt.

Cover:  
Paavo Pirttimaa: "Maria, auta!" (Mary, help!). 2014

Diese Publikation wurde einem anonymen, internationalen Peer-Review-Verfahren unterzogen.  
This publication has undergone the process of anonymous, international peer review.

Die verwendeten Papiersorten sind aus chlorfrei gebleichtem Zellstoff hergestellt,  
frei von säurebildenden Bestandteilen und alterungsbeständig.

Alle Rechte vorbehalten.  
ISBN 978-3-7001-7602-2  
Copyright © 2015 by  
Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Wien  
Satz: Werbeagentur Crossdesign GmbH, A-8042 Graz  
Druck und Bindung: Prime Rate kft., Budapest  
<http://epub.oeaw.ac.at/7602-2>  
<http://verlag.oeaw.ac.at>  
Printed and bound in the EU

## Antioch-on-the-Orontes and its Territory: A “terra dura” for Mariology?

Evidence of the cult of Mary from the region of Antioch in the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries is patchy<sup>1</sup>. What evidence we have has been interpreted by scholars to suggest that this territory was far from fertile where mariology is concerned. The greatest stumbling-block here has been the depictions of Mary in the work of that most influential Antiochene, John Chrysostom. In 1933 Louis Meyer, in an otherwise hagiographical work on the famous preacher, detected “un ton un peu détaché que Chrysostome – comme tous les théologiens d’Antioche – affecte envers la Très sainte Vierge”.<sup>2</sup> In 1952 Ignaz Ortiz de Urbina wrote: “Antiochia è stata sempre un terreno abbastanza duro per la teologia mariana”.<sup>3</sup> For his part, Giuseppe M. Ellero concluded in his 1964 dissertation that while Antiochene mariology goes back to Origen’s view of the less-than-perfect Mary, Chrysostom’s view of her failings was much more serious, and he proposed that Chrysostom’s mariology was also influenced by a local tradition.<sup>4</sup> Two decades after Ortiz de Urbina, Marek Starowieyski echoed that scholar’s negative view of Antiochene mariology in part of his doctoral dissertation (composed in Latin): “[Antiochia] vere erat “terra dura” in theologia Mariana evolvenda”.<sup>5</sup> Winfried Stoellger, in his 1973 dissertation, pointed out Chrysostom’s representations of Mary’s troublesome traits (πάθη, φιλοτιμία, κενοδοξία, and ἀπόνοια) and wrote of his “kaltsinniges Marienbild”.<sup>6</sup> More recently Catherine Broc-Schmezer has determined: “l’on ne peut parler chez lui [Chrysostome] de “mariologie” que pour designer une reconstruction faite d’après les indications éparses dans son oeuvre.”<sup>7</sup>

At the outset this brief overview of pre-Ephesine scholarship does not look promising for an examination of the intercessory role of Mary, which is the goal of this volume, particularly as Theotokos is a title not used by Chrysostom. Moreover, later fifth-century works from the region of Antioch, dominated as they are by the Nestorian and post-Chalcedonian debates, fail to give us a consistent mariological picture. Mary was certainly discussed by the Antiochene theologians Theodore of Mopsuestia, Nestorius himself, and Theodore of Cyrrhus, but the evidence is disparate, fragmentary, and often polemical. Some fifty years later we are fortunately on firmer ground, thanks to the remarkable set of 125 homilies that survives from Severus, patriarch of Antioch from 512–518; it is on these pieces, and to a lesser extent on his hymns, that I propose to concentrate in this paper.<sup>8</sup>

On Severus himself we now have an exhaustive study by Frédéric Alpi,<sup>9</sup> and we have been well served by studies of the patriarch’s christology.<sup>10</sup> At our disposal are also reconstructions of the liturgical year in Antioch,

<sup>1</sup> The writing of this contribution was made possible by Australian Catholic University and the Australian Research Council. The following abbreviations are used: CSCO = Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium; PO = Patrologia Orientalis.

<sup>2</sup> Saint Jean Chrysostome, maître de perfection chrétienne. Paris, 1933.

<sup>3</sup> “La mariologia nella patristica orientale”, in P. Sträter (ed.), *Mariologia*, vol. 1. Rome, 1952, 92.

<sup>4</sup> Maternità e virtù di Maria in S. Giovanni Crisostomo (*Dissertationes ad lauream in Facultate Theologica “Marianum”* 3). Rome, 1964, 46–47, 50.

<sup>5</sup> Maria nova Eva in traditione Alexandrina et Antiochena (saeculo V), *Marianum* 34 (1972) 329–385.

<sup>6</sup> Das Marienbild des Johannes Chrysostomos. Diss. Heidelberg, 1973, 174 and 208 respectively.

<sup>7</sup> Les figures féminines du Nouveau Testament dans l’oeuvre de Jean Chrysostome (*Collection des Études Augustiniennes. Série Antiquité* 185). Turnhout, 2010, 244–245.

<sup>8</sup> The following select references are to studies on Mary in the Byzantine tradition, where Severus must be situated: L.M. Peltomaa, *The Image of the Virgin Mary in the Akathistos Hymn (The Medieval Mediterranean 35)*. Leiden, 2001; N. Constat, *Proclus of Constantinople and the Cult of the Virgin in Late Antiquity. Homilies 1–5, Texts and Translations (Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 66)*. Leiden–Boston 2003; Av. Cameron, *The Cult of the Virgin in Late Antiquity: Religious Developments and Myth-making*, in R.N. Swanson (ed.), *The Church and Mary (Studies in Church History 39)*. Rochester NY, 2004, 1–21; eadem, *Introduction to: Images of the Mother of God. Perceptions of the Theotokos in Byzantium*, ed. M. Vassilaki. Aldershot–Burlington VT, 2005, xxvii–xxxii (all with lit.).

<sup>9</sup> *La Route royale. Sévère d’Antioche et les Églises d’Orient (512–518) (Bibliothèque archéologique et historique Tome 188)*. Vol. 1 Texte, vol. 2 Sources et Documents. Beirut, 2009. See too P. Allen and C.T.R. Hayward, *Severus of Antioch (The Early Church Fathers)*. London–New York, 2004, 185–192.

<sup>10</sup> See esp. the foundational work by J. Lebon, *Le monophysisme sévérien. Étude historique, littéraire et théologique sur la résistance monophysite au Concile de Chalcédoine jusqu’à la constitution de l’Église Jacobite*, Louvain, 1909; revised in idem, *La christologie du*

which are necessary for an examination of the homilies,<sup>11</sup> and a treatment of Severus' exegetical method in the same corpus.<sup>12</sup> Some years ago I approached the mariology of Severus's homilies as part of an examination of the state of the homily in the sixth century,<sup>13</sup> but, with the exception of the article by my colleague Youhanna Nessim Youssef on the Coptic tradition,<sup>14</sup> the mariological aspect of Severus' preaching has received little further systematic attention since then. With the allotted space I am unable to consider all references to Mary in these homilies, references such as "born from Mary the virgin," in which these pieces abound.<sup>15</sup> Rather, it will be necessary to concentrate on those homilies which contain a sustained exposition of the place of Mary in the patriarch's thought. This study is prefaced by a *caveat* concerning the texts we have of Severus' homilies, for, with the exception of one homily which survives in Greek and of numerous fragments, we have to rely on Syriac translations.<sup>16</sup>

## HOMILY 2

This homily, dated to November/December 512<sup>17</sup> and dealing with the Annunciation, belongs to a long tradition of Greek homilies delivered on this feast.<sup>18</sup> Surviving in several Greek fragments apart from an entire Syriac translation, it betrays an adversarial tone, explained by the fact that it was delivered soon after Severus's consecration, in an environment where non-Chalcedonians were still not in the ascendant.<sup>19</sup> The first ten sections deal with one-nature christology, and only after that do we meet the angel Gabriel, who has realised that his message to Mary has been misunderstood by her. Gabriel had intended to make known to her that his salutation was not simply that, but that it had effected an extraordinary action, namely, the conception of the Word.<sup>20</sup> The connection

---

monophysisme syrien, in *Das Konzil von Chalkedon. Geschichte und Gegenwart*, vol. 2, ed. A. Grillmeier and H. Bacht. Würzburg, 1951, 425–580; R. C. Chesnut, *Three Monophysite Christologies. Severus of Antioch, Philoxenus of Mabbug and Jacob of Sarug*. Oxford, 1976, 9–56; A. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. 2, From the Council of Chalcedon (451) to Gregory the Great (590–604). Part Two, The Church of Constantinople in the Sixth Century. London–Louisville, KY, 1995 [with T. Hainthaler; trans. J. Cawte and P. Allen], 17–173; I.R. Torrance, *Christology after Chalcedon. Severus of Antioch & Sergius the Monophysite*. Norwich, 1998; 2nd edn, *The Correspondence of Severus and Sergius (Texts from Christian Late Antiquity 11)*. Piscataway, NJ, 2011.

<sup>11</sup> See A. Baumstark, *Das Kirchenjahr in Antiocheia zwischen 512 und 518*, *Römische Quartalschrift* 11 (1897) 31–66; G. J. Cuming, *The Liturgy of Antioch in the Time of Severus (513–518)*, in: *Time and Community. In Honor of Thomas Julian Talley*, ed. J.N. Alexander. Washington, 1990, 83–103; Alpi, *La Route royale*, vol. 1, 135–147. W. Mayer and P. Allen, *The Churches of Syrian Antioch (300–368 CE) (Late Antique History and Religion 5)*. Leuven, Paris, and Walpole, MA, 2012, include Severus' homilies and hymns in their assessment of the role of churches in Antioch.

<sup>12</sup> R. Roux, *L'exégèse biblique dans les Homélies Cathédrales de Sévère d'Antioche (Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum 84)*. Rome, 2002.

<sup>13</sup> P. Allen, *Severus of Antioch and the Homily: The End or the Beginning?* in: *The Sixth Century – End or Beginning?*, ed. P. Allen and E. M. Jeffreys (*Byzantina Australiensia* 10). Brisbane, 1996, 165–177. On Severus as a homilist in general see Baumstark, *Das Kirchenjahr*, (a negative view); A. Olivar, *Sever d'Antioquia en la història de la predicació*, *Rivista Catalana di Teologia* 5 (1980) 403–442; idem, *La Predicación Cristiana Antigua (Biblioteca Herder. Sección teología y filosofía 189)*. Barcelona, 1991, 180–201; P. Allen, *A Bishop's Spirituality: The Case of Severus of Antioch*, in *Prayer and Spirituality in the Early Church*, vol. 1, ed. P. Allen, R. Canning, and L. Cross. Brisbane, 1998, 169–180.

<sup>14</sup> The Coptic Marian Homilies of Severus of Antioch, *Bulletin de la Société d'Archéologie Copte* 43 (2004) 127–140.

<sup>15</sup> See further J. Lécuyer, *L'homélie cathédrale de Sévère d'Antioche*, in: *De cultu mariano saeculis VI–XI. Acta congressus mariologici-mariani internationalis in Croatia anno 1971 celebrati. Vol. III. De cultu mariano saeculis VI–IX in scriptis summorum pontificum, patrum et theologorum necnon in conciliis particularibus*. Rome, 1972, 1–15; H.-J. Höhn, in Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 2/2, 132–133.

<sup>16</sup> See further C.J.A. Lash, *Techniques of a Translator. Worknotes on the Methods of Jacob of Edessa in Translating the Homilies of Severus of Antioch*, in: *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen*, ed. J. Dümmer, J. Irmscher, and K. Treu (*Texte und Untersuchungen zur altchristlichen Literatur, Bd. 125*). Berlin, 1981, 365–383.

<sup>17</sup> The dating of the homilies follows that of M. Brière, *Les Homélies cathédrales de Sévère d'Antioche. Introduction générale à toutes les homélies*, PO 29/1, 50–62.

<sup>18</sup> PO 38/2, 270–291. See T. Antonopoulou, *The Homilies of the Emperor Leo VI (The Medieval Mediterranean 14)*. Leiden, 1997, 166–170 on this tradition. Cf. J.-M. Sauget, *Une découverte inespérée: l'homélie 2 de Sévère d'Antioche sur l'Annonciation de la Théotokos*, in: *A Tribute to Arthus Vööbus. Studies in Early Christian Literature and Environment, Primarily in the Syrian East*, ed. R. H. Fischer. Chicago, 1977, 55–62; E. Lucchesi, *Notice touchant l'homélie XIV de Sévère d'Antioche*, *Vigiliae Christianae* 33 (1979) 291–293; P. Allen, *The Greek Homiletic Tradition of the Feast of the Hypapante: The Place of Sophronios of Jerusalem*, in K. Belke, E. Kislinger, A. Külzer, M. A. Stassinopoulou (eds), *Byzantina Mediterranea. Festschrift für Johannes Koder zum 65. Geburtstag*. Vienna, Cologne, Weimar, 2007, 1–12; Alpi, *La route royale*, vol. 1, 135–136; P. Allen, *Portrayals of Mary in Greek Homiletic Literature (6th–7th centuries)*, in L. Brubaker and M. B. Cunningham (eds), *The Cult of the Mother of God in Byzantium: Texts and Images*. Aldershot, 2012, 69–88.

<sup>19</sup> See further Allen and Hayward, *Severus of Antioch*, 12–13.

<sup>20</sup> PO 38/2, 278, ch. 11.

between the salutation and the conception is a commonplace in Greek Patristic homiletic literature,<sup>21</sup> and can be found in other homilies of Severus.<sup>22</sup> In chapters 13–14 Severus stresses that Mary’s conception and the gestation of her child were natural, but effected without male seed<sup>23</sup> – again a recurring theme in his homilies and other works. Gabriel next gives Mary a pep-talk, telling her not to let her human thoughts get the upper hand as she digests his message. Mary’s disbelief is a *topos* in the Patristic exegesis of the Annunciation story, and may derive from an early tradition which was negative to certain aspects of her role in salvation history.<sup>24</sup> According to Severus, the angel’s few words contain an ocean of divine thoughts, but still Mary hesitates.<sup>25</sup> Gabriel, in the patriarch’s version of events, explains to her that “the Lord who is with” her is the Word of God, one of three hypostases: in Mary, God has become incarnate, without change, and without confusion. This last statement, with its quotation of two of the famous adverbs from the Definition of the Council of Chalcedon, recurs time without count in Severus’s works.<sup>26</sup> Gabriel’s anachronistic grasp of christological niceties goes further: instead of announcing to Mary: “Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, in him indeed is the Son of God”, he omits the punctuation between the two clauses and says: “Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God” (Luke 1:35). This he does, according to Severus, in order to deny the Nestorians the opportunity to assert that the Son is associated with the one born of Mary by name and by the Son’s power.<sup>27</sup> The homily concludes with general ethical precepts, without reference to Mary as an *exemplum*, and with no intercession to her.

#### HOMILY 14

Bearing the description: “Preached in memory of the holy Mother of God and ever-virgin Mary”,<sup>28</sup> this homily was delivered in the church of the Theotokos in Antioch on 2 or 3 February 513 on the feast of the Hypapante.<sup>29</sup> Severus opens the homily by urging his congregation to offer praise to all the saints—the prophets, the apostles, and martyrs, then sets himself the task of showing that Mary, the Mother of God, must be honoured as prophet, apostle and martyr, all of which requires a considerable amount of exegetical ingenuity.<sup>30</sup> Mary is a prophet, he says, because of Isaiah 8:3–4, “And I went to the prophet and she conceived and bore a son,”<sup>31</sup> and also because of her own prophecy to Elizabeth in Luke 1:48–50.<sup>32</sup> She is an apostle because she surpasses the apostles, being counted with them from the beginning, as Acts 1:14 testifies. Again, if the words the apostles heard from the Saviour, “Go, teach all nations” (Matthew 28:19), made apostles of them, what nation has the virgin not taught and led to knowledge of God?<sup>33</sup> Mary is also a martyr in many ways: she put up with the rash judgement of Joseph,

<sup>21</sup> See Constat, Proclus of Constantinople, 297–298.

<sup>22</sup> See Homily 23: PO 27/1, 114, 14–25; cf. Homily 115; PO 26/3, 309–310. Cf. Letter 65, PO 14/1, 17. The conception is less instantaneous in Philoxenus, *De Trinitate et Incarnatione*, ed. A. Vaschalde, CSCO syr.ser. 2, vol. 27. Paris, 1907, 47.

<sup>23</sup> PO 38/2, 278 and 280.

<sup>24</sup> On this negativity see R. B. Eno, *Mary and Her Role in Patristic Theology*, in: *The One Mediator, The Saints, and Mary. Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VIII*, ed. H.G. Anderson, J. F. Stafford, and J. A. Burgess. Minneapolis, 1992, 161–165. Cf. Severus, Homily 115, PO 26/3, 309–310, on Mary’s perplexity in the face of Gabriel’s announcement. On negative views of Mary in Severus’s elder contemporary, Philoxenus, see A. de Halleux, *Philoxène de Mabbog. Sa vie, ses écrits, sa théologie*. Louvain, 1963, 405–406, n. 4.

<sup>25</sup> PO 38/2, 284, ch. 25.

<sup>26</sup> PO 38/2, 286, ch. 29.

<sup>27</sup> PO 38/2, 288, ch. 31.

<sup>28</sup> For the Syriac text and French translation see PO 38/2, 400–15; first ET in Allen and Hayward, Severus of Antioch, 111–118. The homily also survives in an extended Coptic translation, presently being edited by Y. N. Youssef; the Coptic fragment edited by E. Porcher, *Un discours sur la sainte vierge par Sévère d’Antioche*, *Revue de l’Orient Chrétien* 20 (1917) 416–423, and registered in the *Clavis Patrum Graecorum* separately as no. 7038, is in fact part of our Homily 14. Several Greek fragments also survive: see Brière et al., PO 38/2, 399, and F. Petit, *La chaîne sur l’Exode I. Fragments de Sévère d’Antioche. Texte grec établi et traduit par F. Petit. Glossaire syriaque par L. Van Rompay (Traditio Exegetica Graeca 9)*. Leuven, 1999, no. 568, 40–43. Cf. Alpi, *La route royale*, vol. 1, 139, 152.

<sup>29</sup> On the church see G. Downey, *A History of Antioch in Syria from Seleucus to the Arab Conquest*. Princeton NJ, 1961, 659; more recently W. Mayer and P. Allen, *The Churches of Syrian Antioch (300–638 CE)*. (*Late Antique History and Religion* 5). Leuven, 2012: Part 1, Theotokos, Church of, 107–109.

<sup>30</sup> What follows incorporates part of the argument in my paper, Severus of Antioch and the Homily, 168.

<sup>31</sup> PO 38/2, 400 and 402, ch. 3. The same argument is found in Homily 101, PO 22/2, 266, and Homily 119, PO 26/3, 383–384.

<sup>32</sup> PO 38/2, 404, ch. 7. On the Patristic theme of Mary as prophet see the old but still useful article by A. Grillmeier, *Maria Prophetin. Eine Studie zur patristischen Mariologie*, *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 2 = *Mémorial Gustave Bardy* (1956) 295–312 (= *Mit Ihm und in Ihm*; Freiburg, Basel, Vienna, 1975, 198–216). Cardinal Grillmeier was unable to adduce this text because it was unpublished at the time.

<sup>33</sup> PO 38/2, 404, ch. 8.

then lived on a daily basis with the Jews, and led a life which was very close to death.<sup>34</sup> The homilist sums up this part of his encomium on the Mother of God by saying that patriarchs, prophets, martyrs, and doctors of the church honour her.<sup>35</sup> Severus continues by showing how Mary destroyed the Manichees and the followers of Eutyches. In this part of the exposition Moses is said to be the opponent and enemy of the Manichees.

*For he saw a bush which was on fire and which was not consumed, which was symbolizing figuratively in advance the indivisible union of God the Word with the human creature, a union which was something undertaken for the sake of love of mankind and (was effected) without change. Now the bush is a thorny plant, which shows that he was made a partaker (except in respect of sin; cf. Heb. 4:14) of the nature which is thorny and under sin on account of Adam's transgression of the commandment ...*<sup>36</sup>

The image of the bush, here equated with Mary, is a favourite with Severus and is common in Patristic literature.<sup>37</sup> In Homily 14 Mary is also said to have chased away Apollinaris and to have refused to support the folly of Nestorius. She brought forth Emmanuel, who is without division and without confusion, from two natures – the classic anti-Chalcedonian statement found countless times in Severus' works. In a lyrical passage he sings her praises:

*In this Mother of God we pride ourselves too, because we have her as the adornment of our race: the spiritual earth, from which the second Adam fashioned himself according to the flesh, the unfashioned and uncreated one; the branch of virginity, from which Christ, the heavenly ladder, was constructed according to the flesh through the Spirit, so that by fixing our foot firmly on it we might be able to climb to heaven; the spiritual mountain of Sinai, which is not smoking but is lit up by the sun of justice, and not bestowing ten commandments only, but the law-giver himself, seen on earth and associating with us human beings, and instructing and catching by persuasion not one people, Israel, but every people and race.*<sup>38</sup>

The image of Mary as the “spiritual mountain” recurs in Severus's works.<sup>39</sup> Returning to the theme of his introduction, the veneration of the saints, in a significant passage the patriarch claims that we honour the virgin because more than all the other saints she is capable of praying for us.<sup>40</sup> The homily concludes with exhortations to avoid fornication, but, despite the pre-eminent place the preacher has given to her, there is no explicit intercession to the chaste Mother of God.

## HOMILY 36

This piece was delivered on the feast of the Nativity on 25 December 513. Here the emphasis is on incarnational theology, until the homilist turns his attention to the virgin, explaining that he will offer her a separate treatment, because she could give rise to a number of discourses.<sup>41</sup> In emphasising Mary's true motherhood Severus attacks Eutyches, Apollinaris, and the “Jewish cutting” of Nestorius, before exhorting his listeners to honour the virgin Theotokos and pray to her to intercede for them.<sup>42</sup> In honouring her, he proposes, the women present should avoid ostentation in their dress and give alms to the needy in order to please Mary.<sup>43</sup> The significance of this homily lies in the fact that it is one of only two homilies in which Severus brings Mary's intercession explicitly into play: he urges his congregation to honour her and to pray to her to intercede for them.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>34</sup> PO 38/2, 404 and 406, ch. 9.

<sup>35</sup> PO 38/2, 406, ch. 10. On Mary receiving honour from prophets, apostles, and martyrs see Severus, Hymn 118; PO 6/1, 157–158.

<sup>36</sup> Trans. in Allen and Hayward, Severus of Antioch, 115. Greek text in Petit, *La chaîne*, no. 71, 5.

<sup>37</sup> See further below on Homily 67; cf. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition* 2/2, 39 with n. 50, on the fact that the image was used on every side of christological divisions in different periods of the Patristic era. See further Constas, Proclus of Constantinople, 150.

<sup>38</sup> I have translated from the Greek text established by Petit, *La chaîne*, 42. Compare the English translation of the Syriac in Allen and Hayward, Severus of Antioch, 117 (ch. 18).

<sup>39</sup> See Lécuyer, *L'homélie cathédrale* LXVII, 8–10.

<sup>40</sup> PO 38/2, 412, ch. 18. Cf. Homily 36 for the theme of Mary's intercession.

<sup>41</sup> PO 36/3, 468.4–6. See the discussion of Mary in this homily in Allen, Severus of Antioch and the Homily, 167–168.

<sup>42</sup> PO 36/3, 468 and 470.

<sup>43</sup> PO 36/3, 470 and 472.

<sup>44</sup> PO 36/3, 470. See the discussion of the end of Homily 14, above.



## HOMILY 63

Delivered on 25 December 514 on the feast of the “Nativity or the Epiphany,” this homily also contains a sustained mariological treatment, but only after a long introduction. Mary is first mentioned in the context of the entry of the Word into the world through the divine, royal door of virginity – the image of Mary as the door or gate being a familiar one in Patristic literature, and possibly inspired by Genesis 28:17 or Ezekiel 44:1–2.<sup>45</sup> After explaining Mary’s descent from the tribe of Judah, Severus turns to confront the partisans of Eutyches, and in this context Christ is called the second Adam. The patriarch stresses that Mary is virgin before and after the birth, that there was no male seed involved, and no concupiscence – again a recurring theme in Severus.<sup>46</sup> After disposing of the Manichees, albeit without any reference to Mary, he goes on to denounce those who maintain that Christ’s birth took place through a passage in an allegorical manner, that he passed through, as it were, a canal, like a flash of lightning.<sup>47</sup> These ideas were anathema to Severus, who says elsewhere:

*If anyone says that the flesh of the Lord descended from heaven or passed through the Virgin as through a channel, and describes it not rather as from her in accordance with the law of conception, even if formed without man, he is condemned.*<sup>48</sup>

In this homily the patriarch of Antioch is firm in stating that the conception was complete and real, so that the incarnation was genuine and without φαντασία. The next part of the homily is devoted to arguing that, because Adam was deceived not by the serpent but by Eve, God the Word decided to heal her transgression and to raise womankind to greater honour, which was achieved through Mary’s mediation.<sup>49</sup> This leads the patriarch to address the women in the congregation, telling them to provide their husbands with good advice which will induce them to gentleness with regard to debtors and the needy, and to renounce expensive clothing and jewellery themselves. The women should concentrate on the Mother of God and the book of holy doctrines, and if they restrain their husbands they will be applauded by the angels, together with the blessed virgin and all the saints.<sup>50</sup> Severus turns next to a popular mariological theme, namely the double descent of Mary, from the kingly line of David on the one hand, and from the priestly line of Levi on the other.<sup>51</sup> Thus the words of Gabriel, “See, your cousin Elizabeth has conceived” (Luke 1:36), are, according to Severus, filled with a mystery worthy of God; because Mary shared in the Holy Spirit she recognised this, and therefore gladly went to visit Elizabeth as soon as she could.<sup>52</sup> The theme of Mary’s foreknowledge recurs in the treatment of the marriage at Cana in Homily 119. Despite the high mariology in Homily 63 there is no intercession to the Theotokos.

## HOMILY 67

Delivered on 2 February 515, in the newly extended church of the virgin in Antioch,<sup>53</sup> this homily received a sensitive treatment over thirty years ago at the hands of Joseph Lécuyer. At the time of writing, however, Lécuyer did not have at his disposal an edition of the other homily of Severus dedicated to Mary under her titles of Mother of God and ever-virgin, Homily 14.<sup>54</sup> Homily 67 also survives in Greek fragments, two of which have been edited and translated into French by Françoise Petit.<sup>55</sup> Attributed sometimes in the manuscript tradition to Cyril of Alexandria,<sup>56</sup> this homily is first and foremost a classic exposition of the one-nature christology, but at the same

<sup>45</sup> PO 8/2, 296–297. See Lécuyer, *L’homélie cathédrale LXVII*, 7–8, Peltomaa, *The Image of the Virgin Mary*, 192–193, and Constatas, *Proclus of Constantinople*, 132 with n. 6, and 156, on the image.

<sup>46</sup> PO 8/2, 297–299.

<sup>47</sup> PO 8/2, 301.

<sup>48</sup> *Oratio 1 contra Nephaliū*, CSCO 120, 6.28–7.17; trans. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition* 2/2, 52. See Lécuyer, *L’homélie cathédrale LXVII*, 6 and n. 22, for other instances in Severus.

<sup>49</sup> PO 8/2, 303.

<sup>50</sup> PO 8/2, 306.

<sup>51</sup> PO 8/2, 8–9.

<sup>52</sup> PO 8/2, 310.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. n. 29 above. Severus tells us that it had been extended by porticos (PO 8/2, 366). Homily 83, from 25 December in the same year on the feast of the Nativity/Epiphany, was delivered in the same place, which, we are told in the title, had been extended and restored through the generosity of the orthodox (εὐσεβής) emperor Anastasius, a theme taken up later in the homily (PO 20/2, 399 and 418).

<sup>54</sup> *L’homélie cathédrale LXVII*, 1–15. Cf. Alpi, *La route royale*, vol. 1, 139, 152.

<sup>55</sup> See *La chaîne*, no. 764 (pp. 64–67) and no. 767 (pp. 66–69).

<sup>56</sup> See Lécuyer, *L’homélie cathédrale LXVII*, 1–2 with n. 5.

time it contains some striking images of the Mother of God.<sup>57</sup> It was this homily, with its use of the image of the Ark of the Covenant as the incarnation of the Logos from the virgin, which was used against Severus by his opponent, Julian of Halicarnassus, to demonstrate the incorruptibility of Christ.<sup>58</sup> Citing Exodus 3:5: “Do not come near; take your shoes off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground,” the preacher tells his congregation that they cannot contemplate anything holier or superior to the Theotokos, for to go near her is to go near holy ground and approach heaven.<sup>59</sup> There follows a passage devoted to the miracle of the incarnation, a process in which the seal of Mary’s virginity was not broken. This leads Severus to echo Jacob’s words in Genesis 28:17: “How awesome is this place ... this is the gate of heaven.”<sup>60</sup> The burning bush on the summit of the mountain (Exodus 24:17) is next mentioned, and the mountain gradually becomes the image of the Theotokos, who did not receive God (θεοδόχος) as the God of Sinai, but brought forth God (θεοτόκος),<sup>61</sup> who descended onto the mountain as incarnate without change. She is thus the “spiritual mountain” from which God was born. Severus cannot bear to look at the interior of this mountain – just as he would be fearful of looking at the Holy of Holies, and Mary’s role in salvation history lights up his heart.<sup>62</sup> These considerations enable the preacher to make the transition to the theme of the Ark of the Covenant, which is seen as a type of the incarnation: the pure gold applied to the exterior and interior of the Ark is the divinity of Christ, whereas his humanity is represented by the wood of the ark, which is subject to corruption.<sup>63</sup> Once again Severus stresses that the conception of the Word was pure, without male seed, effected by the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary.<sup>64</sup> Imagining himself inside the Holy of Holies in the midst of rising incense, in a series of mixed metaphors Severus remarks that the external appearance of the ark, namely Mary, rivals the golden interior, for she is the yeast of the new creation and the root of the true vine, who has intervened to call us from war to peace.<sup>65</sup> The Mother of God is held up for admiration by virgins and married women alike. Once again, despite the high mariology of this piece, the homily ends only with an injunction to give alms, without any intercession to Mary.

#### HOMILY 77

The transmission of this homily in the original Greek is probably due to its mixed attribution in the manuscripts to Gregory of Nyssa, Hesychius of Jerusalem, and Severus.<sup>66</sup> Its theme is the harmony of the Gospels, and it was delivered between 21 July and 6 September 515. The problem of the different Gospel accounts occupied many writers, preachers, and congregations in the Patristic period,<sup>67</sup> and Severus and his congregations were no exceptions, as Homily 77 and the trilogy devoted to the exegesis of the different genealogies of Jesus, Homilies 94, 95, and 96, testify. In Homily 77, a very long and technical piece, generally inspired by Eusebius of Caesarea’s *Quaestiones evangelicae* (CPG 3470),<sup>68</sup> which would have tested the endurance of its listeners, it is a question of the four varying accounts of the resurrection, which Severus treats methodically, one by one.<sup>69</sup> I shall confine

<sup>57</sup> The christological import of the homily was exploited by Christ in Christian Tradition, 2/2, 87–89. Cf. Lécuyer, L’homélie cathédrale LXVII, 2: “Il s’agit d’un texte central pour connaître la pensée de l’auteur sur la Vierge Marie.”

<sup>58</sup> See Grillmeier, Christ in Christian Tradition, 2/2, 87–89.

<sup>59</sup> PO 8/2, 349–350.

<sup>60</sup> PO 8/2, 351.

<sup>61</sup> PO 8/2, 355. See Lécuyer, L’homélie cathédrale LXVII, 10 for a discussion of the assumed pun in the Greek original; Peltomaa, The Image of the Virgin Mary, 149 with n. 126, on earlier uses of the two terms.

<sup>62</sup> PO 8/2, 356.

<sup>63</sup> PO 8/2, 357–360. See Peltomaa, The Image of the Virgin Mary, 201–202, on the use of the Ark as a marian epithet from the fourth century onwards.

<sup>64</sup> PO 8/2, 357.

<sup>65</sup> PO 8/2, 364–365. On the unsystematic piling up of arguments in Patristic literature to convey a picture of Mary, see A. Smitmans, Das Weinwunder von Kana. Die Auslegung von Jo 2, 1–11 bei den Vätern und heute (*Beiträge zur Geschichte der biblischen Exegese* 6). Tübingen, 1966, 253; cf. Constan, Proclus of Constantinople, 129.

<sup>66</sup> See PO 16/5, 769–785. S. Voicu has identified a Coptic fragment of the homily: Un frammento copto dell’Omelia Cattedrale 77 di Severo di Antiochia, *Augustinianum* 32 (1992) 385–386. For treatments of this homily see Roux, L’exégèse biblique, 80–86; D. Gonnet, LXXVII<sup>e</sup> homélie de Sévère d’Antioche: pourquoi est-elle conservée en grec?, *Parole de l’Orient*, forthcoming.

<sup>67</sup> See Roux, L’exégèse biblique, 79 n. 1, for a select bibliography on the harmony of the Gospels in the Patristic period.

<sup>68</sup> Ed. C. Zamagni, SC 523. Paris 2008. For Severus’ inspiration here see Gonnet, LXXVII<sup>e</sup> homélie de Sévère d’Antioche, forthcoming.

<sup>69</sup> On Severus’s *modus operandi* see Roux, L’exégèse biblique, 82–85.



myself here to the mentions of the several Marys in these accounts.<sup>70</sup> The “other Mary” in Matthew’s account, maintains Severus, is the Theotokos,

*because she was not removed from the passion, but stood by the cross, as John relates; it was to her that the joyous good news was fitting, because she was the origin [lit. “root”] of the joy, and had deservedly heard (the words), “Hail to you, full of grace” – fulfilling the Lord’s command, she certainly announced the news to the disciples .... But Mary Magdalen, who was walking with the Theotokos and who was equally eager to make the announcement, experienced something human (πέπονθέν τι καὶ ἀνθρώπινον).<sup>71</sup>*

Mary Magdalen’s human experience was, of course, doubt at what she thought she had seen, and for several pages she and her incredulity are centre-stage in Severus’ exposition.<sup>72</sup> What is remarkable about this passage is that, although in John Chrysostom we find the risen Jesus appearing to his mother against the Gospel accounts,<sup>73</sup> she is said elsewhere in the Chrysostomic corpus to have experienced “something human” (ἀνθρώπινόν τι πάσχει).<sup>74</sup> In other words, a little over a century later Severus has upgraded Mary by removing from her this human frailty and applying it to Mary Magdalene instead.

When Severus turns to John’s Gospel, it is a question of three Marys, those at the foot of the cross (John 19:25).

*I mean that we believe that it is Mary, called mother of James and Joseph in the other evangelists, who is the Theotokos, and no other. For just as, because of the divine plan and the concealment of the divine birth and the non-disclosure to the bloodthirsty Jews, it is related that, at the very moment when the virgin was about to be led to the marriage chamber to conceive by the Holy Spirit, Joseph was called the husband of the virgin and the father of Jesus – in the same way the Theotokos was both called and named the mother of Joseph and James, who were the children of Joseph the carpenter, young boys from a previous marriage and from a late wife. This is why the Jews said blasphemously against the Saviour: “Isn’t this the carpenter’s son? Isn’t his mother called Mary, and (aren’t) his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Jude?” (Matthew 13:55)<sup>75</sup>*

According to Severus, it is because John the Evangelist is always mindful of the divinity of Christ that he calls Mary the true mother of Jesus, whereas the other evangelists, with their emphasis on the economy, call her the mother of James and Joseph, who were the older and better known of Joseph’s children. In this way, Mary was able to stand unrecognised in the crowd at the foot of the cross; otherwise the Jews would have killed her.<sup>76</sup> The idea of the happily blended family of Jesus seems to go back to Epiphanius of Salamis;<sup>77</sup> in any case, it was a handy way of demonstrating that Mary had no children other than Jesus, thereby making her perpetual virginity a possibility. Also to be noted is that Mary’s conception is not as instantaneous here as it is in Homily 2, where she conceives upon hearing Gabriel’s message. Significant in Homily 77 is the fact that although Mary is show-cased as being the recipient of a post-resurrection appearance by her son, and her human frailty as portrayed by Chrysostom is transferred to Mary Magdalen, she is still not lofty enough to be hailed as a vehicle of intercession

<sup>70</sup> The pedigree for including Mary the mother of Jesus in the resurrection scene apparently goes back to Tatian via John Chrysostom, as demonstrated by C. Giannelli, *Les témoignages patristiques grecs en faveur d’une apparition du Christ ressuscité à la Vierge Marie*, *Revue des études byzantines* 11 (1953) 106–119; see also Gonnet, LXXVII<sup>e</sup> homélie de Sévère d’Antioche, forthcoming. This theme is also found in the homily of John of Thessalonica, *Homilia in mulieres unguentiferas* (CPG 7922); PG 59, 635–644, and in Maximus the Confessor (?), *Life of the Virgin* 92; Georgian text ed. by M.-J. van Esbroeck, *Maxime le Confesseur. Vie de la Vierge*. CSCO 478. Scr. Iber. 21. Leuven, 1986, 118–120; English trans. with notes in S.J. Shoemaker, *The Life of the Virgin. Maximus the Confessor*. New Haven and London, 2012, 119–120.

<sup>71</sup> PO 16/5, 810.1–4 and 7–9. My translation from the Greek.

<sup>72</sup> Well captured by Gonnet, LXXVII<sup>e</sup> homélie de Sévère, forthcoming.

<sup>73</sup> In *Matth. hom.* 88/89; PG 58, 777. See further Giannelli, *Témoignages patristiques*, 107–108.

<sup>74</sup> In *Matth. hom.* 4.4; PG 57, 45.

<sup>75</sup> PO 16/5, 846.6–848.2. My translation from the Greek.

<sup>76</sup> PO 16/5, 848.2–9. Cf. Homily 94; PO 25/1, 69, where Severus claims that if the Jews had known of Mary’s virginity and Christ’s miraculous birth, they would have killed her. Living with the Jews on a daily basis is said in Homily 14 to make Mary a martyr. See above.

<sup>77</sup> For a discussion of this see Eno, *Mary and her Role*, 167, who explains that Epiphanius embroidered the story to make Joseph an eighty-year-old widower with six children, four boys and two girls. Cf. Severus, Homily 96, PO 25/1, for the argument that the status of Jesus as “first-born” does not mean that he was the first of several children, because Joseph had children by a previous marriage, and was known as the father of Jesus.

## HOMILY 83

The fourth occasion on which Severus preached on the Nativity or Epiphany was 25 December 515 in Homily 83. This homily, like Homily 67 of the same year, was delivered in the newly-renovated church of the Theotokos in Antioch.<sup>78</sup> It is only after a long introduction dealing with prophecies of the incarnation that we come to a passage which concerns Mary. Here Severus chides “the Jews” (who may well, as in other passages, be Chalcedonians) for saying that the scriptural verse, “a virgin shall conceive and bear a son” (Isaiah 7:14), refers to a young and married woman, and not to a virgin. The preacher counters this with recourse to Deuteronomy 22:27 and Judges 21:11–12.<sup>79</sup> Returning to the prophecies of Isaiah, he cites 7:15 concerning the messiah: “He shall eat curds and honey.” But, Severus objects, since a new-born child takes its mother’s milk, not curds and honey, we have to understand the prophet’s words figuratively, meaning that Mary’s milk was viscous and coagulated, because it was not the result of pleasurable intercourse with a man, from which come weakness and dissolution.<sup>80</sup> The homily then deals with aspects of the one-nature christology before returning to the theme of the extension of the church, which was necessitated, says Severus, because of the large number of people who gathered there. He seemed to hear the Theotokos repeating to him the words of Isaiah 49:20: “This place is too narrow for me; make room for me to dwell in”.<sup>81</sup> Mary is then held up to the congregation as an object for contemplation: in considering her, men should lead a chaste and honest life; virgins should guard their purity, and married women should devote themselves to their husbands and children.<sup>82</sup> At the end of the homily, the preacher contradicts those who maintain that it is forbidden for women to say the doxology, on the grounds that if women are allowed to sing, then they are allowed to say the doxology. In fact Miriam, the sister of Moses, did just that in Exodus 15:21. In coming to the defence of women, Severus calls on the Mary as a helper (συνήγορος), whose son gave dignity to the female sex, but there is no explicit intercession to her.<sup>83</sup>

## HOMILY 94

This homily is the first of a trilogy (94–96) devoted to the exegesis of the genealogies in Matthew and Luke which were delivered between May and September 516, during which period the Olympic games were celebrated in Antioch.<sup>84</sup> I shall take this homily as representative of the trilogy. Like Homily 77 on the harmony of the Gospels, it is a detailed discussion of biblical *minutiae*, for which the homilist excuses himself in the introduction: the beginning of Matthew’s Gospel, he says, had been read the previous Sunday, after which he had been approached by two different groups in the congregation. The first complained that the endless procession of names and people they had to listen to in Matthew’s genealogy of Jesus was tedious and without profit. The second group, seemingly more intelligent, had precise questions and doubts about what they had heard.<sup>85</sup> Whether indeed a busy patriarch like Severus had time to listen to such reactions to liturgical readings, or whether this is a *captatio benevolentiae* for more tedious exegesis, must remain an open question.<sup>86</sup> In any case, some of the doubts which exercised his congregation concerned the role of Mary in Matthew’s genealogy. Firstly it is asked why Joseph is counted in the families of Jesus when Mary was a virgin and the birth was miraculous and occurred without intercourse. Severus retorts that this is a pagan objection, but could equally be entertained by followers of Eutyches, who would deny

<sup>78</sup> See the discussion of Homily 67, above. Cf. Alpi, *La route royale*, vol. 1, 150 who refers to the church as an oratory or chapel. See further Mayer and Allen, *The Churches of Syrian Antioch*, 107–109.

<sup>79</sup> PO 20/2, 412–413.

<sup>80</sup> PO 20/2, 414. See Peltomaa, *The Image of the Virgin Mary*, 168, on the representation of the Theotokos in the *Akathistos* hymn, where she is the promised land flowing with milk and honey.

<sup>81</sup> PO 20/2, 418.

<sup>82</sup> PO 20/2, 419.

<sup>83</sup> PO 20/2, 419–420.

<sup>84</sup> On the local Olympic games in Antioch see G. Downey, *A History of Antioch in Syria from Seleucus to the Arab Conquest*. Princeton NY, 1961, 649–650; C. Millon and B. Schouler, *Les jeux olympiques d’Antioche*, *Pallas* 34 (1988) 61–76; Alpi, *La Route royale*, vol. 1, 180. See Renoux, *L’exégèse biblique*, 86–96, on the exegesis of these homilies, in which he detects the use of Eusebius and John Chrysostom.

<sup>85</sup> PO 25/1, 51–52.

<sup>86</sup> With reason one would also be sceptical about the patriarch’s assertion at the beginning of Homily 95 that his congregation had been on tip-toe and jumping for joy at the exegesis of the genealogies (PO 25/1, 76).

the human birth, or conversely by the Nestorians, who viewed the birth as completely human.<sup>87</sup> The homilist explains that it was customary in Judaism to include male and female in a genealogy, but to count heads of dynasties from the male side only.<sup>88</sup> Again, one of the more attentive listeners on the previous Sunday supposedly raised the question why Joseph is called “Mary’s husband” (Matthew 1:16) and is told to take “Mary, your wife” (Matthew 1:20), because these terms point to a physical union.<sup>89</sup> Severus refutes this on the basis of Deuteronomy 22: 23–24, maintaining that it was customary to call the fiancée “wife” and the fiancé “husband.” Part of the rationale of the genealogy, continues the preacher, is to hide Mary’s virginity and her conception by the Holy Spirit, because, if this had come to the notice of the Jews, they would have killed her.<sup>90</sup> In a similar way, the Jews sought to kill Lazarus because he was the sign of a miraculous event (John 12:10–11).<sup>91</sup> Here Severus is able to cite his predecessor in the see of Antioch, Ignatius, who wrote: “Mary’s virginity was hidden from the prince of the world [sc. the devil], and her giving birth as well, and in the same way the Lord’s death too: three brilliant mysteries, which were effected in God’s silence.”<sup>92</sup> It is then but an easy step, in the context of so many adversaries to the truth on the one hand, and of the local Olympic games on the other, for the homilist to present himself as an athlete contesting for the truth,<sup>93</sup> and subsequently to link all bad influences to attendance at the games, the pleasure park of Daphne, and the theatre.<sup>94</sup> There is no further mention of the Mother of God and no intercession to her.

### HOMILY 119

More than any other of his homilies, Severus’ Homily 119, delivered on 25 February 518 in the year of his banishment, has been the subject of study, although not predominantly from a mariological perspective.<sup>95</sup> Its theme is the marriage feast at Cana, and it is directed against Romanos, bishop of Rhosos in Cilicia Secunda. This Romanos is a somewhat shadowy figure, but he must have been of encratite persuasion,<sup>96</sup> and from this homily he is known to us as the author of a work called *The Ladder*.<sup>97</sup> The homily is very long, and for this reason Smitmans alleged that it was not delivered live;<sup>98</sup> this, however, is to ignore the date of delivery noted in the manuscripts. The homily falls into four distinct parts: a *prooimion* on the goodness of marriage and the role of Scripture; a commentary on the Gospel in both the literal and figurative senses; a refutation of Romanos and his exegesis of John 2:1–11; Patristic *testimonia* against Romanos’s position on sin; and a section of ethical imperatives.<sup>99</sup> The exegesis of the marriage feast at Cana was a Patristic favourite, as illustrated by Smitmans, and in it a special role was assigned to Mary because of Jesus’s words to her in John 2:4: “Woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come.” The pre-Ephesine tradition, which, particularly in the East, betrays a sometimes negative view of Mary, took this pericope as a rebuke.<sup>100</sup> Severus, however, like some later Latin writers,<sup>101</sup> accords Mary a very positive role in the narrative, and to do this he has to deal carefully with the texts of Chrysostom and Cyril, whose presentation of Mary in this episode was also negative.<sup>102</sup> To begin with, Severus argues that Mary’s state-

<sup>87</sup> PO 25/1, 61–63. In Homily 95, PO 25/1, 76, the objection is said also to be Jewish and heretical.

<sup>88</sup> PO 25/1, 63.

<sup>89</sup> This question is also taken up in Homily 95, PO 25/1, 76.

<sup>90</sup> PO 25/1, 69.

<sup>91</sup> PO 25/1, 70.

<sup>92</sup> PO 25/1, 70–71. From Ignatius, Ad Eph. 19.1 (cf. CPG 1025), ed. P.T. Camelot, Ignace d’Antioche, Polycarpe de Smyrne, Lettres. Martyre de Polycarpe (*Sources Chrétiennes* 10). Paris, 1998<sup>4</sup>, 74. Cf. Lécuyer, L’homélie cathédrale LXVII, 5 with n. 18.

<sup>93</sup> PO 25/1, 71–73.

<sup>94</sup> PO 25/1 73–74. Cf. Homily 95, PO 25/1, 93–96, where bad influences are linked to visits to Daphne, to demons, and to paganism.

<sup>95</sup> See Smitmans, Das Weinwunder; P. Allen, Severus of Antioch as Pastoral Carer, *Studia Patristica* 35 (2001) 353–368; Roux, L’exégèse biblique, 112–117.

<sup>96</sup> On the identity of Romanos see further S. P. Brock, Some New Letters of the Patriarch Severos, *Studia Patristica* 12 (1975) 17–24 at 23–24; Alpi, La Route royale, vol. 1, 285–286. See too Homily 124, PO 29/1, 223–224. Cf. CPG<sup>3</sup>, 7117–7121.

<sup>97</sup> See Roux, L’exégèse biblique, 113–114, on this work.

<sup>98</sup> Das Weinwunder, 200 n.1.

<sup>99</sup> See Roux, L’exégèse biblique, 113.

<sup>100</sup> On this negativity in general see Smitmans, Das Weinwunder, 253–254; Eno, Mary and Her Role, 168, on Chrysostom; P. Allen, Full of Grace or a Credal Commodity? John 2:1–11 and Augustine’s View of Mary, in: P. Allen, M. Franzmann, and R. Strelan (eds), “I Sowed Fruits into Hearts” (Odes Sol. 17:13). Festschrift for Professor Michael Lattke (*Early Christian Studies* 12). Strathfield, 2007, 1–12.

<sup>101</sup> See Smitmans, Das Weinwunder, 257–259.

<sup>102</sup> See the discussions in Smitmans, Das Weinwunder, 113, and Stoellger, Das Marienbild, 210.

ment to Jesus: “They have no wine” (John 2:3), was made out of sympathy, and that her son’s response was not meant to be a rejection or a mark of disrespect: it was not a reprimand, and Mary did not construe it as such because she knew what was going on.<sup>103</sup> In a similar vein, the homilist presents Mary as knowing in advance that the miracle would happen, since, being filled with the Holy Spirit, she was a prophet.<sup>104</sup> In a passage of figurative exegesis she is presented as seeing that the wine, that is, the teaching of the synagogue of the Jews, was running out, and consequently pushing her son to look after the mystical wine of the mysteries.<sup>105</sup> Further on, Severus defends Mary from Romanos’ encratite accusation that she was of loose morals and took part in a feast of corruption at Cana.<sup>106</sup> It may have been the defence of the Theotokos against the extreme criticisms of Romanos which led Severus to what we might call a high mariology in this homily, but, on the other hand, for the patriarch of Antioch elsewhere too Mary tends to be an assured figure, albeit one in a christocentric framework.<sup>107</sup> Even with the high status accorded to her in this homily and the tacit corrections to the negativity in Chrysostom and Cyril, however, there is no statement of Mary’s intercessory role.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

In summing up this study of the mariology of Severus’ homilies, it will be helpful to have an overview of the data found thus far, and to contextualise these by reference to the hymns of Severus himself. First of all, it is clear that the mariology of the homilies has an unmistakable christological underpinning: Mary is the enabling factor of the incarnation of the Word, who became human without change and without confusion; she is a virgin both before and after the birth, and the conception takes place with no male seed and therefore with no concupiscence; it is also mostly portrayed as instantaneous upon the delivery of Gabriel’s message. Yet Mary’s birth-giving is no φάντασμα, but is real, although the seal of her virginity is not broken. All of these points adduced by Severus argue against the Apollinarian, Eutychian, and Nestorian positions. Consequently, Mary is presented as confounding all heresy.

In terms of her life, Severus stresses Mary’s double descent from the line of David and of Aaron, in order to ensure a royal and priestly pedigree for her son.<sup>108</sup> The genealogy in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke conceals her virginity and conception by the Holy Spirit in order to keep her safe from the “bloodthirsty” Jews, who otherwise would have killed her. Her disbelief in the face of Gabriel’s message belongs to a negative tradition, possibly best exemplified in Syria by Philoxenus of Mabbog, who believed that Mary only began to believe after Pentecost.<sup>109</sup> Against that, Severus presents us with a Mary who, because of her conception by the Holy Spirit, has a certain foreknowledge of events which leads her to visit her cousin, Elizabeth. As well as being the mother of Jesus, Mary is also the step-mother of the children of the widower, Joseph. At Cana, she again has some foreknowledge and is presented more positively than in John Chrysostom and Cyril.<sup>110</sup> She is present at the cross, but again unrecognisable to the Jews, who otherwise would have killed her. Finally, in the resurrection narrative, she is the “other Mary,” more entitled than any other to convey the news of her son’s resurrection to the disciples and not suffering the human frailty imputed to her by John Chrysostom.

For Severus, the Theotokos is an *exemplum* of many facets of Christian life: an *exemplum* first of all of purity for both male and female, then conversely an *exemplum* against fornication. She is held up as a model for women who exhibit ostentation in their dress and manners, and is presented as an incentive for almsgiving.

These *exempla* are reinforced by a large number of epithets: burning bush, spiritual mountain, door/gate, Ark of the Covenant, Holy of Holies, prophet, apostle, martyr, spiritual earth, heavenly ladder, branch of divinity, yeast, and root. Sometimes these epithets are heaped up, almost to the point of being confusing, but they occasionally

<sup>103</sup> PO 26/3, 379–380.

<sup>104</sup> PO 26/3, 383–384. On Mary as prophet see the discussion of Homily 14, above. Cf. Smitmans, *Das Weinwunder*, 259–260.

<sup>105</sup> PO 26/3, 389.

<sup>106</sup> PO 26/3, 390–391.

<sup>107</sup> See further Smitmans, *Das Weinwunder*, 260, on the christocentricity of Patristic mariology; see Allen, Severus of Antioch and the Homily, 168, on Mary as an assured figure.

<sup>108</sup> This pedigree by double descent was not new and not specifically eastern; see e.g. Augustine, *Sermo* 198, and *De consensu evangelistarum* 4.2.

<sup>109</sup> See de Halleux, Philoxène de Mabbog, 405–406, n. 4.

<sup>110</sup> Contrast Romanos Melodos, *Kontakion* 18, ed. J. Grosdidier de Matons (*Sources Chrétiennes* 110). Paris, 1965, 295–321, where Mary is presented as knowing much and believing in her son’s divinity, but he knows better than his mother.

enable the patriarch to justify the place of the Theotokos as an intercessor with her son, and as bestowing honour on womankind through her example and mediation.

Some of the epithets which Severus uses of Mary in homilies are found also in his hymns. There too she is the Holy of Holies, the ark, and the spiritual mountain.<sup>111</sup> In one instance she is said to be present with the heavenly beings at the synaxis.<sup>112</sup> But above all in the hymns, she is explicitly the vehicle of intercession: “Her let us all entreat”; “let us pray to supplicate and entreat for us”; “Her as the God-bearer let us beg and entreat to pray for us”; “when we offer up our prayers in faith through thee to the Lord”; “whom [we] beg and pray to keep us in incorruption”.<sup>113</sup> Similarly in Romanos Melodos we have images of Mary such as the door and the burning bush,<sup>114</sup> and again she is explicitly the vehicle of intercession.<sup>115</sup> No doubt the genre of hymnography lent itself more than the homily to an affective and more immediate approach to the Theotokos: the hymnographic tradition represented by the *Akathistos* hymn demonstrates that marian epithets were well established in this genre.<sup>116</sup>

It is pertinent here to recall Theodoret’s remarks on the proper nomenclature for Mary: theological accuracy demands that she be styled both Theotokos and Anthropotokos out of deference to Christ’s two natures. However, concedes the bishop of Cyrrhus, in hymns and panegyrics it is permissible to use solely the title Theotokos.<sup>117</sup>

Elsewhere I have argued for the necessity of studying an author’s mariology genre by genre, rather than aggregating a score of mariology across all of that writer’s works.<sup>118</sup> If we apply this maxim to Severus’ homilies, it is clear that Mary the Theotokos we encounter there, while for the most part an assured figure, is presented as a vehicle of intercession on only two occasions, and she is less immediate than in his hymns where she is entreated to intercede for those singing. Nonetheless, Severus’ composite picture of the Theotokos demonstrates that sixth-century Antioch was far from being a mariological “terra dura”, for it prefigures the considerable liturgical evolution later in this period, in which the introduction of the two great mariological feasts, the Annunciation and Dormition, played a significant part, and various large-scale building programmes were established in honour of the Theotokos.<sup>119</sup>

<sup>111</sup> Hymn 119-III-VII, PO 6/1, 158 (Holy of Holies); *ibid.*, 158–159 (ark); Hymn 120-IV-VIII, *ibid.*, 160–161 (spiritual mountain).

<sup>112</sup> Hymn 230–1; PO 7/5, 685–656.

<sup>113</sup> See Hymn 117-I-V, PO 6/1, 156–157; Hymn 118-II-VII, *ibid.*, 157; 121-V-VII, *ibid.*, 162; and Hymn 122-VI-VI, *ibid.*, 162–163. Ed. and trans. E.W. Brooks. Cf. Alpi, *La route royale*, 117–122 and 230.

<sup>114</sup> Kontakion 10, strophe 9 (*Sources Chrétiennes* 110), 58–61 (door); Kontakion 14, strophe 9, *ibid.*, 184–185 (door); Kontakion 12, proimion, 118–119 (bush), and often.

<sup>115</sup> See e.g. Kontakion 10, strophe 23 (*Sources Chrétiennes* 110), 74–75; Kontakion 14, strophe 18, *ibid.*, 196–197; Kontakion 18, strophe 21, *ibid.*, 320–321. See further L.M. Peltomaa, *Romanos the Melodist and the Intercessory Role of Mary*, in Belke, Kislinger, Külzer, and Stassinopoulou (eds), *Byzantina Mediterranea*, 495–502.

<sup>116</sup> See Peltomaa, *The Image of the Virgin Mary*, *passim*. Cf. the salutations in the *Akathistos* (trans. Peltomaa): Hail, acceptable incense of intercession! (strophe 5); Hail, unsilenced mouth of the apostles! (strophe 7); Hail, unvanquished courage of the martyrs! (strophe 7); Hail, from whom flow milk and honey! (strophe 11); Hail, gate of salvation! (strophe 19); Hail, greater than the Holy of Holies! (strophe 23); Hail, ark gilded by the Spirit! (strophe 23).

<sup>117</sup> Ep. 151 ad eos qui in Euphratesia et Osrhoena regione, Syria, Phoenicia et Cilicia vitam monasticam degunt (CPG 6276); PG 83, 1416–1433 at 1429CD. Cf. P.B. Clayton, Jun., *The Christology of Theodoret of Cyrus. Antiochene Christology from the Council of Ephesus (431) to the Council of Chalcedon (451)* (Oxford 2007) 140–141.

<sup>118</sup> See P. Allen, *The International Mariology Project: A Case-Study of Augustine’s Letters*, *Vigiliae Christianae* 60 (2006) 209–230.

<sup>119</sup> See further Allen, *Severus of Antioch and the Homily*, 168–170, with lit.