

The Miracle of Ibn Zar'ah in Coptic Tradition Texts and Icons

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There is a Coptic tradition that refers to the transfer of Mount al-Muqattam during the Caliphate of al-'Aziz (975 - 996), or perhaps that of al-Mu'iz li-din Allah the Fatimid (972 - 975), after a calumny by a Jewish advisor.¹ In this article, I will discuss the different sources for this legend, its iconographic depiction in an icon at the Church of Mu'allaqah,² and the tradition linking a pillar at that church to the appearance of the Virgin Mary to the Coptic patriarch Abraham ibn Zar'ah.

Egyptian Sources

The earliest reference to this incident is in the Fifteenth Canon of Patriarch Christodolus (1047 - 1077 AD), which mentions the addition of three days to the Fast of the Nativity. Although it does not provide a reason, later tradition justified the addition as a commemoration of the Miracle of the Transfer of the Muqattam:³

Likewise the Fast of the Holy Nativity shall be from the Feast of Saint Menas (Mīna), i.e. the fifteenth day of Hatūr, to the twenty-ninth day of Kyahk. ⁴

An explanation is not given by Ibn al-Assal in his Nomocanon,⁵ or Ibn Kabar (+1334 AD) in his *Lamp of Darkness*.⁶

According to the *History of the Patriarchs*, written by Michael Bishop of Tinnīs and compiled by Mawhub ibn Mansūr in the eleventh century:⁷

¹ For this site and another approach cf. Yusuf Ragib, 1999, pp. 159-184.

² The miracle itself does not enter in our scope; we are studying the evolution of a text and its impact on an icon.

³ Heg. Yuhanna Salama, Vol II, 4th edition, Cairo 1979, p. 386.

⁴ Burmester, 1932, pp. 74-75 (text), p. 79 (translation).

⁵ Graf, 1947 pp. 388-403; Samir Khalil, 1985, pp. 1-30; idem, 1985a, pp. 285-296; idem, 1991, pp. 2075 - 2079. For his nomocanon, see Girgis Filuthāūs 'Awad, 1908, p. 172.

⁶ L. Villecourt, 1925, p. 265.

⁷ J. Den Heijer, 1989, pp. 9-10, 96-116.

It happened after some days that he (the Bû Jacob ibn Killis the Jew) found a way (to have) an audience to say to al-Mu'izz: "It is written in the Gospel of the Christians 'If one hath faith as a grain of mustered-seed and he saith to the mountain: Be thou removed and be thou cast into the sea, it shall be done. (Matt. 17:20) Let the Commander of the Faithful see his way to ask them to prove the truth of this saying, so that he may know they are frauds and are liars. If they do not do (this), it is requisite that there should be done to them what they deserve on account of their lie.'" He (al-Mu'izz) approved of this word. The king al-Mu'izz sent to summon Anba Abraham and said to him "What sayest thou concerning this word?" Is it in your Gospel or not?" The Patriarch said: "Yea, it is in it"

The patriarch ordered the monks in the patriarchal cell to assemble in the Church of the Virgin Mary to fast and pray:

This blessed gathering took place in Church of the Mistress in Kasr al-Sham' known as the Mu'allaqah. When it was the morning of the third day, the saintly patriarch to the ground from grief of heart and from his fasting and wearing, and he slept for a while. He saw the Lady, the pure Mistress, Mary and she said to him.⁸

It is clear that the *History of the Patriarchs* indicated that the vision was in a dream, though it does not mention the pillar. It should be noticed also that the first narration of this miracle is nearly one hundred year after the event.

The Book of the *Churches and Monasteries*⁹ attributed to Abû Sâlih in the late twelfth century, mentions the story of the transfer of Mount al-Muqattam in the context of the discussion about the church of Saint Mercurius. The author of that book refers to a copy of the *History of the Patriarchs*:¹⁰

⁸ A.S. Atiya, Y. Abd-al-Masih, O.H.E. Burmester, 1948, pp. 94 -96 (text), pp. 140 - 144 (translation).

⁹ Samuel al-Suriani, 1984, 4 vol., and also Evetts and Butler, 1895. For specific studies cf. Samuel al-Suriani, 1990, p. 78. (For codicology and Composition) Zanetti, 1995, pp. 85-133. (For the Authorship and Influence) Den Heijer, 1993, pp. 209-219. (Social study of the Delta) Martin, 1997, pp. 181-199; Youhanna Nessim Youssef, 1995, pp. 101-103; idem, 1998-1999, pp. 45-54.

¹⁰ Martin, 1997, pp. 181-199 especially p. 184.

Then in the time of this patriarch (anba Ephraim the Syrian), inquiries were made about the creed of the Christians, whether they believed in the truth or in a lie. So the Christians assembled and went out to the mountain and the Muslims and Jews went out at the same time, on account of a certain event which is related in the History of the Church...Then the patriarch came forward them, and the *Tanner*, from whom God had performed a miracle followed him... This miracle took place through the faith of the *Tanner*, who had plucked out his own eye by the root, and in the presence of al-Aziz (975 - 996).¹¹

Nearly all the manuscripts of the synaxarium of the Coptic Church mention the commemoration of this patriarch on Kyahk 6th.¹²

When it was the dawn of the third day, the Lady, the pure Mistress, Mary the Mother of God appeared to him and informed him about a holy Tanner.¹³

None of these sources associate the vision with a pillar. Likewise the commemoration in the *Difnar* (Antiphonarium) on the 6th of Kyahk:¹⁴

ΑΜΟΥ ΨΑΡΟΝ ΜΦΟΟΥ Ω ΠΙΣΥΜΝΟΤΟΣ ΠΙΟΥΡΟ ΝΔΙΚΕΟΣ
ΔΑΥΙΔ ΠΙΠΡΟΦΗΤΗΣ

ΖΙΝΑ ΝΤΕΚΣΑΧΙ ΉΕΝ ΟΥΠΑΡΡΗΣΙΑ ΕΠΙΜΑΚΑΡΙΣΜΟΣ ΝΤΕ
ΠΙΡΩΜΙ ΝΟΜΗΙ

ΠΕΝΙΩΤ ΜΠΑΤΡΙΑΡΧΗΣ ΑΒΒΑ ΑΒΡΑΑΜ ΠΙΜΑΚΑΡΙΟΣ ΕΤΙΡΙ
ΖΑΝΨΦΗΡΙ

ΠΕΧΑΔ ΧΕ ΩΟΥΝΙΑΤΩ ΜΠΙΡΩΜΙ ΝΟΜΗΙ ΕΤΕΡΖΟΪ ΉΑΤΖΗ
ΜΠΟΣ ΠΕΦΝΟΥΪ

ΝΖΡΗ ΉΕΝ ΝΕΦΕΝΤΟΛΗ ΕΦΕΩΨ¹⁵ ΕΒΟΛ ΕΦΕΧΕΜΧΟΜ ΉΕΝ
ΠΚΑΖΙ ΝΧΕ ΠΕΦΧΡΟΧ

ΠΙΡΩΜΙ ΝΔΙΚΕΟΣ ΑΒΒΑ ΑΒΡΑΑΜ ΝΕ ΟΥΣΕΡΟΣ ΠΕ ΉΕΝ ΠΣΑ
ΝΝΙΜΑΝΨΑΙ

¹¹ B.T. Evetts and A. Butler, 1895, fol. 34b.

¹² Except Ms N° 4869 from *Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris* edited by Basset; cf. Meinardus 1977, p. 89.

¹³ Forget, 1963, pp.137-138. For a study of the different versions of this liturgical book, see Coquin 1977, pp. 351-365.

¹⁴ For a study of this liturgical book cf. Gawdat Gabra, 1996, pp. 37-52. 1998, pp. 48-64.

¹⁵ Read ΕΦΕΟΥΨ.

ἈΦΙ ΕΨΗΡΗ ΕΧΗΜΙ ΝΟΥΜΗΩ ΝCΟΠ ΉΕΝ ΟΥΠΡΑΓΜΑΤΙΑ ΧΕ
 ΝΑΦΟΙ ΝΕΩΩΤ
 ΕΤΑΥΝΑΥ ΕΡΟΦ ΧΕ ΟΥΡΩΜΙ ΝΘΜΗ ΑΥΙΡΙ ΜΜΟΦ
 ΝΟΥΑΡΧΗΕΡΕΥC
 Α Φ† ΠΙΜΑΙΡΩΜΙ ΙΡΙ ΕΧΕΝ ΝΕΦΧΙΧ¹⁶ ΝΖΑΝΝΙΩ† ΜΜΗΝΙ ΝΕΜ
 ΖΑΝΩΦΗΡΙ ΕΥΟΩ
 ΑΦΦΩΧΙ ΝΧΕ ΠΙΩΜΙ ΖΙΤΕΝ ΝΕΦΕΥΧΗ ΑΦΒΙCΙ ΝΧΕ ΠΙΤΩΟΥ
 ΟΥΟΖ ΑΦΙ ΕΠΕCΗΤ
 ΑΦΩΕΠ ΖΑΝΜΗΩ ΝΗΙCΙ ΖΙΧΕΝ¹⁷ ΝΙΤΑΡΑΝΟΜΟC Α ΠΧC
 ΝΟΖΕΜ ΜΜΟΦ ΉΕΝ ΝΕΦΖΟΧΖΕΧ ΤΗΡΟΥ
 ΑΦΜΤΟΝ ΜΜΟΦ ΉΕΝ ΠΑΙΕΖΟΟΥ ΦΑΙ ΑΦΩΕΝΑΦ ΖΑ ΠΧC ΦΗ
 ΕΤΑΜΕΝΡΙΤΦ
 ΖΙΤΕΝ ΝΙΕΥΧΗ

Come to us, today, o *psalmist*, the *righteous* King David the
prophet
In order to speak openly about the *blessing* of the righteous man
 Our father the patriarch Abba Abraam the *blessed*, who
 performed miracles
 He (David) said: "Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, his
 God and he shall find joy in His commandments. His
 descent shall be the mightiest in the land."¹⁸
 The *righteous* man is Abba Abraam who was a *Syrian* from the
 East.
 He came down to Egypt many times for *commerce* since he was
 a merchant.
 When they [people and clergy] saw that he was a righteous man,
 they made him *patriarch*.
 God the lover of mankind made great miracles and many
 wonders through him¹⁹
 The stone broke down though his prayers, the mount was lifted
 and came down.²⁰
 He received many pains through the *impious*; *Christ* saved him
 from all his suffering

¹⁶ Arabism a literal translation of the Arabic translation عمل على يديه

¹⁷ Read ΖΙΤΕΝ.

¹⁸ Ps 112[111]:1

¹⁹ Lit. "on his hands."

²⁰ De Lacy O' Leary, 1926, pp. 78-79.

He rested in this day and he went to *Christ* whom he loved
Through his *prayers*

ἈΒΙCΙ ΓΑΡ ΕΜΑΥΩ Ω ΠΕΝΙΩΤ ΜΠΑΤΡΙΑΡΧΗΣ ΝΖΡΗΙ ΉΕΝ
 ΤΦΕ ΝΕΜ ΙΧΕΝ ΠΙΚΑΖΙ ΑΒΒΑ ΑΒΡΑΑΜ ΠΙCΕΡΟC
 ΟΥΝΙΩΤ ΟΝ ΠΕ ΠΕΚΤΑΙΟ ΝΕΜ ΠΕΚΒΙΟC ΝΑΓΓΕΛΙΚΟΝ ΝΕΜ
 ΠΕΚ[ΘΕΒΙΟ] ΠΑΡΘΕΝΙΑ ΕΤΧΗΚ ΕΒΟΛ
 ΠΑΙΡΗΤ ΔΕΧΩΚ ΕΒΟΛ ΕΧΩΚ ΝΧΕ ΠΙCΑΧΙ ΜΠΕΝCΩΤΗΡ
 ΉΕΝ ΠΕΦΕΥΑΓΓΕΛΙΟΝ ΕΘΥ ΜΠΑΙΡΗΤ ΕΔΧΩ ΜΜΟC
 ΧΕ ΝΕΩΤΕΝ ΗΑ ΝΗ ΕΤΑΥΟΖΙ ΝΕΜΗΙ ΝΖΡΗΙ ΉΕΝ ΝΑΠΙΡΑCΜΟC
 †ΝΑCΕΜΝΙ ΝΕΜΩΤΕΝ ΝΤΕ †ΔΙΑΘΗΚΗ ΕΘΥ
 ΕΡΕΤΕΝΟΥΩΜ ΕΡΕΤΕΝCΩ ΝΕΜΗΙ ΖΙΧΕΝ ΤΑΤΡΑΠΕΖΑ ΝΖΡΗΙ
 ΉΕΝ ΤΑΜΕΤΟΥΡΟ ΉΕΝ ΠΙΕΖΟΟΥ ΝΗΑΕ
 ΕΡΕΤΕΝΖΕΜCΙ ΖΙΧΕΝ ΖΑΝΘΕΡΟΝΟC ΉΕΝ ΟΥΩΟΥ ΝΑΤCΑΧΙ
 ΜΜΟQ ΕΡΕΤΕΝ†ΖΑΠ Ε†ΙΒ ΜΦΥΛΗ ΝΤΕ ΠΙCΛ
 ΑΠΑΙCΑΧΙ ΜΠΝΑΤΙΚΟΝ ΧΩΚ ΕΒΟΛ ΕΖΡΗΙ ΕΧΩΚ Ω ΠΙΝΙΩΤ
 ΝΑΡΧΙΕΡΕΥC ΠΕΝΙΩΤ ΕΘΥ ΑΒΒΑ ΑΒΡΑΑΜ
 ΚΕ ΓΑΡ ΑΚΙΡΙ ΝΖΑΝΩΦΗΡΙ ΝΕΜ ΖΑΝΧΟΜ ΉΕΝ ΝΙΛΑΟC
 ΔΙΩΑΝΤΑΟΥΕ ΟΥΚΟΥΧΙ ΝΗΗΤΟΥ ΨΑΡΕ ΠΙCΑΧΙ
 ΟΥΩΩC ΕΜΑΥΩ
 ΕΤΑΦΟΥΩΩ ΝΧΕ ΠΧC Ε†ΜΤΟΝ ΝΑΚ ΉΕΝ ΝΕΚΗCΙC
 ΑΦΟΥΘΕΒΕΚ ΝΝΕΔCΚΥΝΗ ΝΕΠΟΥΡΑΝΙΟΝ ΨΑ ΕΝΕΖ
 ΟΥΟΖ ΑΚΜΤΟΝ ΜΜΟΚ ΉΕΝ CΟΥC ΜΠΙΑΒΟΤ ΧΟΙΑΚ ΑΚΕΡΨΑΙ
 ΝΕΜ ΝΗ ΕΘΥ ΉΕΝ ΤΧΩΡΑ ΝΤΕ ΝΗ ΕΤΩΝΗ
 ΉΕΝ ΠΑΙΕΖΟΟΥ ΕΘΥ ΑΦΒΙ ΜΠΙΧΛΟΜ ΝΑΤΑΩΜ ΝΤΕ
 †ΕΜΤΜΑΡΤΥΡΟC ΝΧΕ ΠΙΠΡΕCΒΥΤΕΡΟC ΑΠΑΤΟΛΟC
 ΖΙΤΕΝ ΝΟΥΕΥΧΗ ΕΘΥ ΠΧC Φ† ΠΕΝCΩΤΗΡ ΑΡΙΟΥΝΑΙ ΝΕΜΑΝ
 ΝΑΓΑΠΗ ΉΕΝ ΠΕΚΜΑ†ΖΑΠ ΕΤΟΙ ΝΖΟ†

You became elevated, O our father *patriarch*, in heaven and on
 earth, Abba Abraam the *Syrian*
 Great also is your honor and your *evangelical life* and your
 perfect humility and virginity
 The word of our *Saviour* in His holy *Gospel* has been
 accomplished upon you, saying thus:
 “You are he who stood (firmly) by me in my times of *trial*; I will
 establish with you a holy *covenant*
 You shall eat and drink at my *table* in my kingdom in the last
 day

You will sit on *thrones* with unspeakable glory and you will judge the twelve *tribes* of Israel.”²¹
 This *spiritual* word was accomplished on you, O great *patriarch*, our holy father abba Abraam
 For you performed miracles and powers for the peoples, if I utter a little of them, my discourse shall be extremely long.
 When *Christ* wished to give rest to him from your pains, he transferred you to His heavenly eternal dwelling.
 And you rested on the sixth day of the month of Kihak, you make the feast with the saints in the *lands* of living.
 On that holy day, the *priest* Apatolos took the imperishable crown of the *martyrdom*
 Through their holy *prayers*, *Christ* God our *Saviour* have mercy and *charity* upon us in your fearful *tribune*.

Both texts make an allusion to the miracle of the transfer of the mountain, without giving details about the prayer, the icon of the Virgin, or any allusion to pillar. It shows perhaps an earlier stage of the life of the patriarch Abbam the Syrian.

The *History of the Patriarchs* attributed to Anba Yusab Bishop of Fuwwah (consecrated in 1235 AD) did not mention the name of the Tanner. Additionally, the fast of three days was only for the monks of St. Macarius in the patriarchal cell.

When it was the dawn of the third day, the patriarch fall asleep from fasting and grief. Soon thereafter the Lady, the Mistress, appeared to him and said to him, “Why are you so sad?”²²

Butrus Ibn al-Rahib (XIII century) briefly mentioned the story,²³ stating for the first time that the apparition of the Virgin was next to a pillar.²⁴ The Ethiopian Synaxarium of the 6th month (Tahscasch) identifies the Tanner as Simon the Shoemaker,²⁵ and states that the revelation was by the Virgin Mary. The Synaxarium dedicated a Sallam (Praise) for Simon the Shoemaker.²⁶ This story is mentioned in a Syriac manuscript written in Garshuni with many details.²⁷ An

²¹ Lk. 28 :30.

²² Samuel al-Suriani and Nabih Kamel Daoud, 1992, pp. 91-92, fol. 88 v-89r.

²³ A.Y. Sidarus 1982, pp. 396-397.

²⁴ L. Cheikho 1962, p. 134.

²⁵ For this book, see Colin 1988, pp. 273-317.

²⁶ Grébaut 1926, pp. 618-628 [76-86]

²⁷ Leroy, 1909, pp. 380-340; 1910, pp. 26-41.

earlier version of that text may be sought in Ms Arabe 282, which preserves an intermediate phase between the text of the *History of the Patriarchs* and that preserved in the Syriac manuscript.²⁸ Three Manuscripts from the XVII - XVIII centuries kept in the Library of the Coptic Patriarchate narrate this story with details.²⁹

As we can expect, Maqrizi (XV century) did not mention this story, though he mentioned the patriarch.³⁰ Ibn Saïd al-Antaqi did not mention the story, but he mentioned that the news concerning the death of al-Mu'izz had been hidden for eight months and that during his life his son al-'Aziz had been elected Caliph.

*Western Sources*³¹

Symon Semeonis an Irishman who visited Egypt between 1322 and 1324 AD mentioned the marble pillar from where the Virgin had talked to a Jacobite for the liberation of the Christian. Nicolas de Poggibonsi (1346 - 1350 AD) purportedly saw a sculpture of the Virgin on the pillar. In 1384 AD, Frescobaldi mentioned that a sculpture of the Virgin on a pillar spoke in the presence of the sultan. Poloner, in 1422, made an allusion to a pillar from which a voice came out. Lannoy (1421 - 1423 AD) called the Church of Mu'allaqah the Church of the Pillar. Van Ghistele, in 1485, is more precise, stating that a voice came out of the marble pillar on the left, and hence the church was named the Church of the Pillar.

Neither Thenaud 1512 nor Affagart mentioned the pillar. Vansleb, writting in 1672 - 1673 AD, states:³²

At the entry of this Church (Maallaca) a little Image is to be seen, at the right hand, upon one of the pillars which Image, the Copties say, spoke to Ephrem, one of their Patriarchs, to comfort him in his affliction when Meez me din alla, The Califf, commanded him to transport Mount Gebel il mocattam, which nom stands behind the Castle of Cairo, to prove the truth of his Religion, because our Saviour Christ faith in the Gospel, If you had faith as a grain of Mustardseed, you should say to this

²⁸ Den Heijer, 1994, pp.192-202, especially pp. 198-199.

²⁹ Simaika, 1942, N°625/6 (dated 1664 A.D.), 640/10 (undated), 659/11 (dated 1787 A.D.). See also Troupeau 1974, N° 4777/4 p. 28, N°4788/6 Manuscript from the XIX Century; cf. Graf, 1947, p. 306.

³⁰ Macrizi, 1979, p. 25 (text).

³¹ Coquin, 1974, pp. 74-75, 79.

³² For Vansleb, cf. Delahaye, 2003, pp. 113-122.

*Mountain, remove; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.*³³

Fourmont (1746 - 1750 AD) copied Vansleb's description word by word.

The Icon of Ibn Zar'ah and Simon the Tanner

The icon is preserved in the Church of Mu'allaqah.³⁴ It depicts the patriarch at the center with a white beard, wearing the patriarchal vestment, and holding a staff in his right hand. His left hand is holding Simon the Tanner who is wearing a short tunic and carrying on his shoulder two pots of water.

The Virgin Mary is presented in a mandorla pointing to the patriarch. The mandorla is above a pillar. According to Raouf Habib, there is an Arabic inscription that dates this icon to the fifteenth century.³⁵ It is important to mention that Simon the Tanner is depicted with two opened eyes not one eyed as in the abovementioned texts.

The Icon of Ibn Zar'ah and the Book of Glorifications

The book³⁶ of Glorifications contains a hymn for the Virgin Mary, we will give the text in full:

ΦΑΙ ΠΕ ΦΛΥΜΗΝ ΝΤΘΕΟΤΟΚΟΣ ΜΑΡΙΑ ΘΜΑΥ ΝΙΗC ΠΧC
 ΟΥCΤΥΛΛΟC ΕΤΕΡΟΥΩΙΝΙ ΜΑΡΙΑ ΤΘΕΟΤΟΚΟC
 ΕΘΒΕ ΦΑΙ Α ΠΕΝCΩΡ ΟΛQ ΕΘΟΥΝ ΕΤΕΜΕΤΟΥΡΟ
 ΑQΤΝΑQ ΝΝΙΑΓΑΘΟΝ ΝΗ ΕΤΕ ΜΠΕΒΑΛ ΝΑΥ ΕΡΩΟΥ
 ΟΥΩΝΙΑΤ ΝΘΟ ΜΑΡΙΑ ΤΒΩ ΝΑΛΟΛΙ ΝΤΑΦΜΗ
 ΝΘΟ ΓΑΡ ΠΕ ΠΥΡΓΟC ΕΤΒΟCΙ ΚΑΤΑ ΠCΑΧΙ ΜΠCΟΦΟC
 ΝΘΟ ΓΑΡ ΟΥCΩΤ ΝΑΔΑΜ ΝΕΜ ΝΕQΩΗΡΙ ΤΗΡΟΥ ΕΥCΟΠ
 ΜΑΡΙΑ ΦΡΑΩΙ ΝΝΙΑΓΓΕΛΟC ΜΑΡΙΑ ΠΙΧΛΟΜ ΝΝΙΜΑΡΤΥΡΟC
 ΠΙΑΓΙΟC ΝΙΜ

This is the *icon*³⁷ of the *God-Bearer* Mary the mother of Jesus
Christ

³³ Vansleb, 1678, pp. 141-142.

³⁴ Nabil Selim Atalla, 1993, p. 40a.

³⁵ Raouf Habib, 1966, p.14.

³⁶ For this book, see Youhanna Nessim Youssef 1993, pp. 139-147; 1995, pp. 77-83.

You are the luminous *pillar*, Mary the *God Bearer*
 Therefore our *Saviour* lifted him to His kingdom
 He granted him the *good things*, which an eye has not seen³⁸
 Blessed are you Mary the true vine
 For you are the high *tower*, according to the word of the wise
*man*³⁹
 For you are the salvation of Adam and his all children together
 Mary is the joy of the *angels*, the crown of the *martyrs*, the *saint*
 So So⁴⁰

The text refers to an icon of the Virgin Mary in the first and second stanzas. This text gives the Virgin the title of “luminous pillar,” which is a title of Christ according to the Lobsh of the Theotokia of Friday:

ΝΘΟ ΠΕΤΑΡΕΦΑΙ ΗΑ ΠΙΣΤΥΛΛΟΣ ΕΤΑΦΝΑΥ ΕΡΟΣ ΝΧΕ
 ΜΩΥΧΗΣ ΕΤΕ ΦΑΙ ΠΕ ΠΩΗΡΙ ΜΦΤ ΕΤΑΦΙ ΑΦΩΩΠΙ ΗΕΝ
 ΤΕΝΕΧΙ

You are the one who carried the *Pillar*, which Moses saw, who is the Son of God who came and dwelt in your womb.⁴¹

The stanza refers to Ex. 13:21-2, 14:19. The third and fourth stanzas are taken from the doxology of Saint Menas and the other martyrs. It is important to mention that the text here is addressed in masculine not feminine. Mary as the “true vine” is a title of the Virgin in the *Horologion* for the *troparia* of the Third Hour.⁴² As for the last stanza, “Mary the crown of the martyrs, saint,” it is clear the text here is a patchwork. If we consider this text with the icon of Mu’allaqah, however, it becomes comprehensible.

The first two stanzas are pointing to the icon and the Virgin as a pillar, which corresponds exactly to our icon. The third and fourth stanzas are addressed to the Patriarch Abraham ibn Zar’ah who was considered as martyr. The icon shows the Virgin Mary on the pillar as a high tower. The last stanza, “You are the salvation of Adam and all

³⁷ For this word, see Godron, 1983, pp. 1-52; Godron 1990, pp. 43-47; Youhanna Nessim Youssef, 1997, pp. 101-105. For other words for icons, see Coquin, 1993, pp. 171-174.

³⁸ 2 Cor 12:4.

³⁹ Proverbs 18:10.

⁴⁰ Attalla Arsenios al-Moharraqqi, 1972, pp. 13-14.

⁴¹ For the Theotokia, see Youhanna Nessim Youssef, 1997, pp. 153-170; idem, 2003, pp. 93-108; idem, 2004, pp. 127-140.

⁴² Burmester, 1973, p. 43 (Coptic text), p. 164 (Translation), p. 22 (Arabic).

his children,” refers indirectly to the Christian of Egypt threaten by the governor and saved by the vision of the Patriarch who saw the Virgin.

Conclusion

From what we exposed, we can follow the development of the story of Simon the Tanner. The first mentioned of the account is in the *History of the Patriarchs* written in Coptic by Michael bishop of Tinnis in the middle of the eleventh century, which was translated into Arabic by Mawhub ibn Mansur later that same century. This places the earliest account nearly a century after the event. There, nothing is mentioned about the Tanner and the vision of the Virgin is considered a dream. By the end of the twelfth and the beginning of the thirteenth centuries, the compilers of the Book of the *Churches and Monasteries* (Abu al-Makarim/Abu Salih) mentioned this story and added the name of the Tanner (anonymous till now). The Coptic Arabic Synaxarium (thirteenth century) narrated the same story with the same details as Abu al-Makarim.

The Antiphonarium's account is very brief and does not give much detail. While the Ethiopian Synaxarium revised the Arabic text and added the name of the Tanner and enriched the text with more details, it did not mention the vision of the Virgin at the pillar. Starting in the fourteenth century and continuing through the eighteenth century, most western travellers mentioned the story of the transfer of the mountain according to an oral tradition and added that the Virgin appeared at the pillar.

The history attributed to Ibn al-Rahib in the fourteenth century clearly refers to the pillar. The icon at al-Mu'allaqah depicts the same tradition. The doxology in the *Book of Glorification* should hence be dated no earlier than the fourteenth century; the author mentioned the pillar and the salvation of the Children of Adam (meaning the Copts).



Icon of Patriarch Abraham ibn Zar'ah and Simon at al-Mu'allaqah

(N.S. Atalla, 1993, 40a)

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