Zacharias the Priest between Liturgical Texts and Images

زكريا الكاهن بين النصوص الليتورجية والصور

Youhanna Nessim Youssef*

ملخص

تعرض هذا المقالة إلى شخصية زكريا الكاهن، وعلى الرغم من أن ذكره عابر في الأناجيل، فإننا نجد له كثيرًا من الرسومات الحائطية في كثير من المواقع. ويستعرض المقال ما ورد في البرتوافنجليوم ليعقوب، ثم يُعرِّج المقال على ذكر زكريا في التقاويم المختلفة، ويتهي ياستعراض النصوص القبطية المختلفة التي تخص زكريا؛ مثل الذكصولوجيات، والدفنار، والطروحات، مع التعليق على كل نص وأهميته.
Zacharias the Priest between Liturgical Texts and Images

Introduction

While only few lines mention Zacharias in the New Testament, mainly the Gospel of Luke 1: 5-80 (while there is mention of a certain Zacharias Matthew 23:35); we find some liturgical texts relating to Zacharias. In this paper, we will overview wall paintings that depicted Zacharias and we will provide the texts commemorating him in liturgy.

Zacharias on the Wall-Painting

Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, a great saint is invoked in many inscriptions. He is depicted in the Chapel XVIII of the Monastery and the Necropolis of Bawit as the man holding the Bible with the inscription “Saint Zacharias priest” “ⲟⲁⲅⲓⲟⲥ ⲥⲁⲭⲁⲣⲓⲁⲥⲟⲩⲏⲏⲃ” (sic). He is also depicted in the rock church of Deir Abu Hinnis, as well as the Church Colluthus near Antinoopolis. All these churches are small, and are located in remote areas, and were probably funerary churches.

Later, Zacharias is depicted on the Ciborium of Abu Saifin among other priests. There is also a Greek icon preserved in the Coptic Museum depicting the cruelty of the massacre of Zacharias the prophet.

Zacharias in the literary texts

Zacharias occupies a very important place in Coptic literature, as well as in all the literature relating to John the Baptist such as the Homily by Theodosius.

The Apocryphal books, such as the Protoevangelium of James narrates the story of the assassination of Zacharias the priest:

23 (1) Herod was searching for John, and sent officers to Zacharias saying, ‘Where have you hidden your son?’ And he answered and said to them, ‘I am a minister of God and serve in the temple of the Lord. I do not know where my son is.’ (2) And the officers departed and told all this to Herod. Then Herod was angry and said, ‘His son is to be king over Israel!’ And he sent to him again saying, ‘Tell the truth. Where is your son? You know that you are at my mercy.’ And the officers departed and told him these things. (3) And Zacharias said, ‘I am a witness of God. Pour out blood! But the Lord will receive my spirit, for you shed innocent blood at the threshold of the temple of the Lord.’ And at about daybreak Zacharias was slain. And the children of Israel did not know that he had been slain. 24 (1) But at the hour of the salutation the priests were departing, and the customary blessing of Zacharias did not take place. And the priests stood waiting for Zacharias to greet him with prayer and to glorify the Most High. 2. But when he failed to come they were all afraid. But one of them took courage and went in and he saw beside the altar congealed blood; and a voice said, ‘Zacharias has been slain, and his blood shall not be wiped away until his avenger comes.’ And when he heard these words, he was afraid and went out and told the priests what he had seen. (3) And they took courage and entered and saw what had happened. And the ceiling panels of the temple wailed, and they split their clothes from the top to the bottom. And they did not find his body, but they found his blood turned into stone. And they were afraid, and went out and told all the people that Zacharias had been slain. And all the tribes of the people heard and they mourned him and lamented three days and three nights. (4) And after the three days the priests took counsel whom they should appoint in his stead and the lot fell upon Symeon. Now it was he to whom it had been revealed by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death until he had seen the Christ in the flesh.
The Apocalypse of Paul briefly mentions the assassination of Zacharias:

“Zacharias said, ‘I am he whom they killed while I was presenting the offering to God; and when the angels came for the offering, they carried up my body to God, and no man found where my body was taken.’

The Egyptian Calendars

The commemoration of Zacharias is mentioned in liturgical calendars such as the Synaxarion, in the monologues of the Gospels (8 Tût = 5 September), in the calendar of Ibn al-Rahib, as well as in the calendar of Abu Barakat Ibn Kabar (8 Tût).

However, it is not mentioned in the Calendar of Qalqašandi.

The reading of this day commemorates Moses and Zacharias. Both are prophets, hence it is hard to determine what relates to Moses or Zacharias.

The Commemoration of Zacharias in Other Calendars

A. Sahidic calendar: The feast of Moses corresponds to 8 Tût in Lower Egypt, is commemorated on the 22 Kihak. Unfortunately, the day of the 8th is missing in the manuscript.

B. The Synaxarion of Constantinople: Revised by the order of the Emperor Basil II (975-1025 AD). The commemoration of Zacharias the priest is on 5 September.

In the tenth century, the Melkites began a translation of their synaxarium into Arabic. The Arabic translation of the Melkite Synaxarion has a great influence on the Copto-Arabic Synaxarium, however this commemoration is absent in the Manuscript Paris Arabe 254 fol. 6v-7r. There is no hymn for this feast.

C. Syriac calendar: The 5 November (Aylûl) commemoration of Šarbal, and his sister, Babûlâ, Zacharias the prophet and repose of John from Kafrisín.

Zacharias in the Coptic liturgical texts

Despite a relatively large number of wall-paintings and icons, as well as the different usages in the cycle of John the Baptist, and in the funerary of Bawit, and in the ciborium, there are very few liturgical texts.

There is no doxology for this date from the seven manuscripts used by ‘Abd al-Masih in his studies on the doxologies.

From among the seven manuscripts used by Bishop Samuel for his edition of the book the Order of the Church “Tartîb al-Bay’ah”, no manuscript includes this commemoration.

The Doxology

No doxology is found in the collection of manuscripts used by Yassa Abd al-Masih.

• Ms 75 Liturgy from the collection of the Church of Sammanûd.

• Ms Paris Copte 123, which contains the doxologies for the first half of year, the manuscript was originally from the Monastery of al-Muḥarraq.
### Commentary

The text exists in a Church of Lower Egypt (Sammanûd), and in the Monastery of Middle Egypt (al-Muharraq). However, it is amazing that the misspelling of words occurs in both manuscripts, such as in the first stanza or the fourth stanza. This means that the original was already corrupted before the eighteenth century.

The title is “Repose” and not “Martyrdom”, while from the text it is clear that Zacharias was killed.

The text does not use any Greek words, except “Spirit” and “Christ”. The text is inspired by the first chapter of the *Gospels of Luke and Matthew* 2:1 and 23:35.

The seventh stanza is inspired by the Protoevangelium James, which is reflected in the *Letter of Severus of Antioch to Anastasia the Deaconess*, as it is known in Arabic, Coptic, Greek and Syriac; we will provide the beginning of the *Letter* according to the Arabic text:

> “A letter written by the holy great father Anba Severus, Patriarch of Antioch, to a holy virgin, called Anastasia, the deaconess. It is the explanation of a saying in the holy *Gospel of Matthew*, which the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Translation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>έτα πνοι ι εαξαρις+ εταλε ευγοιονουγι εποιη+ αναγενυ ενεραφι+ αργηκ.</td>
<td>When the lot came to Zacharias to offer incense, he entered the temple and accomplished his ministry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31ⲉⲧⲁ ⲡⲓⲟⲡ ⲓ̀ ⲉⲍⲁⲭⲁⲣⲓⲁ ⲉⲧⲁⲗⲉ ⲉⲟⲩⲥⲑⲟⲓⲛⲟⲩ ⲡⲓⲟⲩⲏⲃ</td>
<td>Gabriel appeared to him on the right of the altar: “Do not fear Zacharias for your prayer was heard.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ⲉⲧⲉⲕ鲉ⲓⲛ ⲛⲥⲙⲓⲥⲃⲉⲧ ⲛⲋ ⲛ̀ⲟⲩϣⲏⲣⲓ ⲕⲉⲙⲟⲩϯ</td>
<td>“Your wife Elisabeth shall bear for you a son and you shall call his name John, he shall be great in front of the Lord.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ⲉⲧⲉⲕⲁⲥⲓⲙⲓ ⲛⲥⲁⲃⲉⲧ ⲛ̀ⲟⲩϣⲏⲣⲓ ⲕⲉⲙⲟⲩϯ</td>
<td>Immediately his father opened his mouth and he was filled of the Holy Spirit and he blessed God of Israel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ⲉⲧⲉⲕⲁⲥⲓⲙⲓ ⲙⲡⲓⲡⲓϩ ⲙⲡⲛⲉς ⲙⲡⲙⲓⲥⲓ ⲛⲛⲉⲪⲓϩ ⲕⲉⲙⲟⲩϯ</td>
<td>He sent fifteen(?) soldiers to Zacharias the priest, he killed him (Zacharias) in the temple inside the sanctuary.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The text is inspired by the first chapter of the *Gospels of Luke and Matthew* 2:1 and 23:35.

The seventh stanza is inspired by the Protoevangelium James, which is reflected in the *Letter of Severus of Antioch to Anastasia the Deaconess*, as it is known in Arabic, Coptic, Greek and Syriac; we will provide the beginning of the *Letter* according to the Arabic text:45

> “A letter written by the holy great father Anba Severus, Patriarch of Antioch, to a holy virgin, called Anastasia, the deaconess. It is the explanation of a saying in the holy *Gospel of Matthew*...
Lord, the Saviour said to the Jews, that upon you may come all the righteous bloodshed upon the earth from the blood of the righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom you slew between the temple and the altar”. To be read in the blessed day of the eighth of Tût. May his blessings be with all the sons of the Baptism. Amen”.

The text of the doxology contains the main themes which occur in the Sahidic Antiphonarion. These include the following:

**The Difnar**

| Zacharias the priest, on the right of the altar turning with the incense Gabriel talked to him: | Your wife Elisabeth shall give birth to you a son (he will) be a joy to you and the gladness in his birth |
| Zacharias the priest, on the right of the altar turning with the incense Gabriel talked to him: | How this will happen for I am an old man and my wife Elisabeth is barren and not to give birth |
| Zacharias the priest, on the right of the altar turning with the incense Gabriel talked to him: | You shall be dumb until the birth of the child, when your eyes will see him, you will glorify Lord God.” |
| When the lot came to Zacharias to offer incense, he entered the temple and accomplished his ministry. | An Angel appeared to him in the right of the altar: Do not be afraid Zacharias, for your prayers were heard |

| 1- The vision of the Zacharias in the sanctuary. |
| 2- The prophecy of Zacharias about his son John the Baptist. |
| 3- The martyrdom of Zacharias between the temple and the sanctuary. |
Your wife Elisabeth will give birth to a son to you and you will call his name John.

When his days of Elisabeth were filled to give birth to her son, she called his name John.

Blessed is the Lord God of Israel for He visited and He redeemed his people He raised a horn of salvation to us.

Pray to the Lord on our behalf…

Commentary

Like the Doxology, the text of the Difnar is inspired by the first chapter of the Gospel of Luke. The text appears to be two texts amalgamated into one. The first four stanzas narrate the story of Zacharias and after the fifth stanza; the text is almost identical to the Doxology, while nothing is mentioned of the martyrdom of Zacharias.

Only the Psali tune Batos survives and there is no Psali tune Adam.

The Book of Turuhat

Oswald H.E. Burmester was the first to study the Turuhat. However, before his leading studies, very few studies were carried out on this subject.

Turuhat Coptic Museum 323 Lit

The following are not in the Graf Catalogue.\textsuperscript{54}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Youhanna Nessim Youssef</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>Abgadiyat 2020</td>
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<tr>
<td>The following are not in the Graf Catalogue.\textsuperscript{54}</td>
<td>On the 8\textsuperscript{th} day of the month of Thot Zacharias the priest Tune Batos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>σογον ον δεν πιναι ἦν ἤδοντα ζαχαριας πιγνιβ</td>
<td>Zacharias the priest, on right of the altar turning with the incense, Gabriel talked with him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ινχος βατος</td>
<td>Zacharias the priest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ζαχαρας πιγνιβ· σαγουννη· ἵππαλεραφαουννη· εφακα· ἵνα πισονωγιυα· και γαβριαλ σαλι νεναμ</td>
<td>Your wife Elisabeth will give birth to a son and joy and gladness will be to you in his birth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ἰς τεκγηνι ειςαγετ· εσενις ἱουνηρτι· ἐρε ουραριν ὁμα δικ ην εν ὑγεινηςι</td>
<td>Zacharias the priest of the Elevated God, answered talking with Gabriel the burning angel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>άμερουμ ινε ζαχαρας πιγνιβ ·ινε φι επτεσατς· εφακα· ἵνα γαβριαλ· πιγκελος ινε ιυγριν</td>
<td>“How this will happen to me for I become old and also my wife Elisabeth is barren and will not give birth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Πέξε γαβριαλ πιγκελος· εφακα· ἵνα πιπελλος· ζαχαρας πιγνιβ· ἓπιριτ ινος</td>
<td>Gabriel the Angel said, talking with the elder Zacharias the priest saying thus:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Τεβαχρη ινε νεπουνι· ανασι ινε ειεσαγετ· αμογιαν Ἰρα· ινα γαβριας· κατα πεαχι ἵππαγελος</td>
<td>“You will be dumb till the birth of the child until your eyes see him you will glorify the Lord God”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ποτε ἄμερος εβολ ἵνα ουδα ακουαβ</td>
<td>The days was accomplished Elisabeth gave birth, Zacharias opened his mouth according to the word of the Angel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Τοτε ἄμερος εβολ ἵνα ουδα ακουαβ</td>
<td>Then He was filled with the Holy Spirit prophesied saying thus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ἰς γεναιραυτ ινε πιτιν· φι· ιπεσια· και ανασπανιν ινεραηονυατ· ινα·τοινος ουται ινοροννην νεν</td>
<td>Blessed is the Lord God of Israel for He visited and redeemed He raised up a horn of salvation for us</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pray…
## Commentary

Like the previous text, this one is also inspired by the first chapter of Luke, but this text adds the prophecy of Zacharias without mentioning his martyrdom.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text in Arabic</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>لوله اما ادم</td>
<td>To him also Adam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>نحن اياذكariah+ او نوين</td>
<td>You became worthy of a great glory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>نحن اياذكariah</td>
<td>O priest of God, Saint Zacharias the father of the precursor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>نحن اياذكariah+ او نوين</td>
<td>You are extremely elevated and you are glorified from all the priest who have preceded you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>نحن اياذكariah</td>
<td>You were announced by Gabriel the birth of your son John the precursor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>نحن اياذكariah+ او نوين</td>
<td>You accomplished your life in good old age and you pleased to God by your holy service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>نحن اياذكariah+ او نوين</td>
<td>The Jews killed you between the temple and the altar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>نحن اياذكariah</td>
<td>Because of the envy and great jealousy for the precursor John your son.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>نحن اياذكariah</td>
<td>Then what is written in the Gospels was fulfilled saying thus:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>نحن اياذكariah</td>
<td>That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>نحن اياذكariah+ او نوين</td>
<td>from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias whom you killed between the house and the altar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>نحن اياذكariah+ او نوين</td>
<td>Blessed are you Zacharias for you received two crowns one for the prophecy and one for the martyrdom</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Laucna*
Commentary

This text combines the annunciation of John the Baptist and the martyrdom of Zacharias.

Also this text is unique to mention the crowns which are usually associated with the acts of the martyrs (... he received the imperishable crown of the martyrdom).

Conclusion

Despite the importance of Zacharias, as it is clear from the inscription, wall-paintings and icons, very few Coptic texts have his commemoration.

We were able to find only one doxology Batos in two manuscripts from Middle Egypt and Lower Egypt. It is clear that they were copied from a similar original, as the misspellings are the same in both manuscripts. The Doxology text is mainly inspired by Luke chapter 1, and Matthew chapter 2, and 23:35.

The book of Difnar contains only one Psali Batos for Zacharias, the text seems to be a combination of two texts as we find repetition.

The Book of Turuhat contains two hymns for Zacharias, while the hymn Batos resembles the previous texts, the hymns Adam has some special features.

All the texts which mention the martyrdom of Zacharias indentify him as the one mentioned in Matthew 23:35. This was defended by Severus of Antioch in his letter to Anastasia.

This paper shows once more the importance of linking the liturgical with literary texts, as well as the wall paintings and inscriptions.
Notes

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1 I would like to thank Daniel Kisliakov for his kind help in reviewing this paper.

2 We will discuss this in the later pages.


4 J. Clédat, Le monastère et la nécropole de Bawit, Mémoires publiés par les Membres de l’Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale du Caire, 12 (Le Caire, 1904), 93 pl. LXIX et LXXIII


7 A. Jeudy, ‘Icônes et ciboria: relation entre les ateliers coptes de peinture d’icônes et l’iconographie du mobilier liturgique en bois, Eastern Christian Art 1 (2004), 67–88, such as Aaron, Moses etc.

8 Coptic Museum number 3869.


10 K.H. Kuhn, A Panegyric on John the Baptist, attributed to Theodosius Archbishop of Alexandria, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 268 Coptici 33 (Louvain, 1966).


12 I. Forget, Synaxarium Alexandrinum, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 1 Arabic 18 (Paris, 1905), 97–100; R. Basset, Le Synaxaire Arabe Jacobite, (rédaction Copte), 2 Mois de tout et de Babeh, Patrologia Orientalis 3.3 Numéro 13 (Paris, 1907), 268[192], 270[194].


17 M. Fenoyl, Le Sanctoral Copte, Recherches publiées sous la direction de l’Institut de Lettres Orientales de Beyrouth 15, (Beyrouth, 1960), 63.


20 Delehaye, Synaxarium Ecclesiae, col. 716.


23 The text jumps from 4 September to 6 September cf. J. Schiro, Analecta Hymnica Graeca e codicibus eurta italiane inferioris (Roma 1966), 97–99.
24 R. Akhrass, Calendar of the Lordly feasts and the commemorations of the Saints in the Church of Antioch the Syriac Orthodox (Damascus, 2015), 134. (It is identified by the editor as 5 BCE, however the Coptic and Greek calendars make us think that the father of John the Baptist is meant here).

25 For the technical liturgical terms cf. Y.N. Youssef, Historical Dictionary of the Coptic Church (Lanham, Maryland, Toronto, Plymouth UK, 2008), ss.vv.


27 [Samuel al-Surianî, the Order of the Church according to the manuscripts of the Patriarchate in Cairo, Alexandria and the Manuscripts of the Monasteries and the Churches, part 1 (Cairo 1984), 106.


29 L. Delaporte, Catalogue sommaire des manuscrits Copites de la Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris (Première Partie Manuscrits Bohairiques). (Paris, 1912), 84 Numéro 123 CANONS ET HYMNES (bohairique) pour les six premiers mois de l’année

30 This reading appears in both A and B, read άνάγκη

31 B adds ά γάρ, the reading of A is better

32 Read αναγγέλλω

33 A. B. the same, read άναθρ

34 B wrongly read άγιαν περ hazard influence of the Arabic where the plural used the third person singular.

35 Read αναγγέλλω

36 A. B. read άναθροι

37 B correctly read σάγοντας

38 B correctly read άφη

39 Read αναγγέλλων

40 A. B. read άφιλας

41 Read εναθρούν

42 ВоАртев

43 Вαμοσίων αυ είναι περια παρταν ήνοι (?)

44 Read εναθρούν

45 Read πυρσοπυρέλλοι


51 Read ελείσβετ


53 M. Simaika and Y. ‘Abd al-Maish, Catalogue of the Coptic and Arabic Manuscripts in the Coptic Museum, the Patriarchate, the Principal Churches of Cairo and Alexandria and the Monasteries of Egypt, volume 1 (Cairo, 1939), 84 Number 171.
54 G. Graf, *Catalogue de manuscrits arabes Chrétiens conservés au Caire*, Studi e testi 63 (Città del Vaticano, 1936).

55 The Arabic translation differs from the Coptic ‘on the eighth day of Tût also the feast of Zacharias the priest’.

56 Reading based on the Arabic render $\text{ⲁⲩϩⲓϣⲉⲛⲛⲟⲩϥⲓ}$.

57 The following occurs only in Arabic.