

## THE PSEUDO-ROMANOS KONTAKION ON SYMEON STYLITES THE ELDER

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### Abstract:

Compared to the authentic *kontakia* of Romanos the Melodist, whose importance has been illustrated by recent studies, the corresponding pseudepigraphic tradition has received very little scholarly attention. One reason for this lacuna is the complete lack of translations into any modern language. This article represents a first step in correcting this gap by including a brief introduction and full translation of one of these texts, the hagiographical *Kontakion on Symeon Stylites the Elder*. The poetic form of the *kontakion* has two effects on the presentation of this saint's life. Its shorter length and divisions into strophae distill the narrative into a brisk, manageable story, and its literary language elevates the diction to match its lofty subject. Symeon's withdrawal from the world, his ascension of the column, his subsequent asceticism and miracles, and the circumstances of his death and burial are all treated in turn, but the anonymous hymnographer also added his or her own personal touch. Most notable is the extended episode about Symeon's mother. In her tragic visit to the column, she relays a message to her son in direct speech, a first in the tradition for Symeon the Elder. Her sanctity is also put on equal footing with her son's. This hymn contributes to our understanding of later devotion to Symeon and the evolution of Byzantine *kontakia* post-Romanos.

### Key words:

Byzantine poetry, Greek poetry, Romanos, kontakion, Symeon the Stylite, stylites, Roman Syria

## Introduction

Stylites or “pillar-saints” represent Christian asceticism at its most extreme.<sup>1</sup> These men and women stood on columns and endured the harsh elements, sometimes for decades, while fasting, praying, and interacting with pilgrims who traveled from near and far to visit them.<sup>2</sup> Most stylites in late antiquity (AD 300–700) were concentrated in Syria, but they could also be found in Anatolia, Egypt, Constantinople, and even Gaul.<sup>3</sup> Symeon the Elder (c. 390–459), Daniel (c. 409–493), Symeon the Younger (521–592), and Alypius (c. 525–c. 625) are the most well-known, but there were many others.<sup>4</sup> Symeon the Elder, who lived in Telanissa (modern-day Taladah, about 40 km west of Aleppo), is the subject of this *kontakion*, a genre of Greek hymns closely associated with Romanos the Melodist (c. 485–c. 560).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Greek word *stylos* (στῦλος) means “column” or “pillar.”

<sup>2</sup> The name of only one female stylite, Maia (Μαῖα), is known from an inscription on a pillar in Amasia (Amasya in modern Turkish). This is also the only attested example of the feminine form of the word stylite, “stylitissa” (στυλιτισσα). See Hippolyte Delehaye, “Les femmes stylites,” *Analecta Bollandiana* 27 (1908), 391–392 (392), and Franz Cumont, “Nouvelles inscriptions du Pont,” *Revue des Études Grecques* (1904), 329–334 (332–333).

<sup>3</sup> For an overview of stylites and their geographic distribution, see Lukas Amadeus Schachner, “The Archaeology of the Stylite,” in: David M. Gwynn, Susanne Bangert, and Luke Lavan (eds.), *Religious Diversity in Late Antiquity* (Late Antique Archaeology 6), Boston: Brill 2010, 329–397.

<sup>4</sup> By the tenth century, these four saints had become almost a canonical group. See the *Life of Luke the Stylite* 3, in: Hippolyte Delehaye (ed.), *Les saints stylites* (Subsidia Hagiographica 14), Brussels: Société des bollandistes 1923.

<sup>5</sup> For an introduction to Romanos and his poetry, see Thomas Arentzen, *The Virgin in Song: Mary and the Poetry of Romanos the Melodist*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 2017, 1–45. For another important study on Romanos, see José Grosdidier de Matons,

Scholars have long recognized that this *kontakion* about Symeon is spurious, despite its attribution to the famous hymnographer. Jean Baptiste François Pitra, the nineteenth-century editor of this hymn, remarked, “The matter is self-evident; it betrays its own deceit.”<sup>6</sup> Paul Maas, who prepared the most recent critical edition with C. A. Trypanis, also came to the same conclusion.<sup>7</sup> Because the authenticity of a text and its perceived literary quality often correlate, it is perhaps unsurprising that neither scholar was shy in his critique of this hymn. To account for the text’s “barbarisms,” Pitra posited a later interpolator who left us only traces of what could have been the original words of Romanos himself.<sup>8</sup> Maas drew attention to the “long-drawn” narrative, the “inept” use of dialogue, and the lack of “rhetorical polish.”<sup>9</sup> During their analyses, Pitra and Maas both made an additional observation that, although framed as further evidence for their negative evaluations, proves to be crucial for understanding the literary and historical context of this *kontakion*: the anonymous hymnographer used the *Life of Symeon Stylites the Elder* by Antonius as his or her source text.<sup>10</sup>

There are three hagiographical traditions describing the life of Symeon the Elder: the *Life of Symeon* by Theodoret (BHG 1678–1681),<sup>11</sup> the

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Romanos le Mélode et les origines de l’hymnographie byzantine, Paris: Université Lille 3 Charles-de-Gaulle dissert. 1974.

<sup>6</sup> “Ipsa res clamat proditique mendacium,” Jean Baptiste François Pitra (ed.), *Analecta sacra Spicilegio Solesmense parata*, vol. 1, Paris: Jouby et Roger 1876, 210, cited in P. Maas and C. A. Trypanis (eds.), *Sancti Romani Melodi Cantica: Cantica Dubia*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 1970, 196.

<sup>7</sup> Maas initially favored reading the hymn as authentic. See Maas and Trypanis, *Cantica Dubia*, 197 n. 63.

<sup>8</sup> Pitra suggests that the proem and the first strophe might have been penned by Romanos himself, with the original acrostic being Τοῦ Ταπεινοῦ Ῥωμανοῦ. See Pitra, *Analecta sacra*, 210.

<sup>9</sup> See Maas and Trypanis, *Cantica Dubia*, 197, esp. n. 65.

<sup>10</sup> Pitra, *Analecta sacra*, 210; Maas and Trypanis, *Cantica Dubia*, 197, n. 66.

<sup>11</sup> It is important to note that what is conveniently called the *Life of Symeon* is actually a chapter from Theodoret’s longer work, *Religious History*, which is often called *The History of the Monks of Syria*. Greek text: P. Canivet and A. Leroy-Molinghen (eds. and trans.), *Théodoret de Cyr. L’histoire des moines de Syrie* (Sources chrétiennes 234 and 257), Paris: Éditions du Cerf 1:1977, 2:1979; English translation: R. M. Price (trans.), *A History of the Monks of Syria*, Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications 1985. For an important treatment

Syriac *Life of Symeon* by Bar-Hatar and Symeon Bar Eupolemos (BHO 1121–1124),<sup>12</sup> and the *Life of Symeon* by Antonius (BHG 1682–1685).<sup>13</sup> Despite this relative abundance of witnesses, it is certain that the Antonius vita was the primary, if not exclusive, source for the composition of this hymn. Not only is Antonius, who is unknown to the other two traditions, explicitly named,<sup>14</sup> but the entire hymn follows its structure and language with great fidelity.<sup>15</sup> Pitra was quite right in noting that the *kontakion* amounts to a versified epitome of the Antonius vita.<sup>16</sup> In fact, the parallels are so close that it might even be possible to determine which recension of the Antonius vita the author read.<sup>17</sup> Of course, there are places where the *kontakion* departs from its source, but the original passages are best characterized as poetic expansions on the source material. Most often, these take the form of invented speeches or “personification” (προσωποποιΐα, *fictio personae*) such as Symeon’s response to the abbot in Strophe 13,<sup>18</sup> and the extended speech given to Symeon’s mother in Strophe 21.<sup>19</sup> The beginning of the hymn is another

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of Symeon and these hagiographical sources, see Susan Ashbrook Harvey, “The Sense of a Stylite: Perspectives on Simeon the Elder,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 42.4 (1988), 376–394.

<sup>12</sup> Syriac text: J. S. Assemani (ed.), *Acta Sanctorum Martyrum Orientalium et Occidentalium in duas partes distributa, adcedunt Acta S. Simeonis Stylitae*, 2 vols., Rome: Joseph Collins 1748, vol. 2; English translation: Robert Doran (trans.), *The Lives of Simeon Stylites*, Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Studies 1992. For a discussion of this tradition and its complexity, see Dina Boero, “Making a Manuscript, Making a Cult: Scribal Production of the Syriac *Life of Symeon the Stylite* in Late Antiquity,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 73 (2019), 25–67.

<sup>13</sup> Greek edition: Hans Lietzmann (ed.), *Das Leben des heiligen Symeon Stylites* (Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur 32.4), Leipzig: Verlag Hinrichs 1908; English translation: Robert Doran, *The Lives of Simeon Stylites*. For scholarly literature about this vita, see below.

<sup>14</sup> See Strophe 22 in the translation.

<sup>15</sup> See the Appendix for the relationship between the two texts.

<sup>16</sup> “Ille barbarus (sc. the author) nihil melius excogitavit, quam humilem vitam ab Antonio, Simeonis discipulo, scriptam κατὰ πόδα sequi et retractare,” Pitra, *Analecta sacra*, 210.

<sup>17</sup> Strophe 6, for example, appears to follow the XY recension more closely than it does A or B, but further study of the textual tradition of the Antonius vita is required before any determination can be made.

<sup>18</sup> This speech replaces the succinct statement in the vita that “Symeon did not stop weeping and beseeching God,” (Ο δὲ ἅγιος Συμεών οὐκ ἐπαύετο κλαίων καὶ δεόμενος τοῦ Θεοῦ), *Life of Symeon* 12.

<sup>19</sup> The actions of Symeon’s mother are described in detail, but she is not given any direct speech in the vita. Cf. *Life of Symeon* 14.

notable example of original composition, which might account for the stylistic differences observed here by Pitra.<sup>20</sup>

We might expect that this close intertextual relationship would shed light on the circumstances and dating of the *kontakion*, or at the very least, establish a firm terminus post quem. Yet even this proves difficult because the *Antonius vita* has stubbornly resisted scholarly efforts to understand all of its complexities. The text purports to be an eyewitness account by one of Symeon's disciples, an otherwise unknown Antonius, and although it contains details consistent with other sources for Symeon's life, it also includes elements attested nowhere else in the tradition. Such is the case for the famous story of a maggot that fell onto the ground from Symeon's rotting flesh and was transformed into a pearl.<sup>21</sup> Unattested episodes like this are fairly innocuous, but what has troubled historians are the falsifiable details in the *Antonius vita* that contradict established facts about Symeon and his cult site. These include the great significance given to Symeon's mother, the description of architectural features in Symeon's monastery that have no basis in the archaeological record, and the anachronistic account of where Symeon's relics were laid and subsequently relocated. As scholars have noted, these additions betray an awareness of political, literary, and theological activity in the second half of the sixth century and the first half of the seventh century – one or even two centuries after the saint's death.<sup>22</sup> How and why these new elements entered the tradition is still a subject for debate, but it means that we can date the *Antonius vita* to this period with some confidence.

In light of this, what can we say about the date of the *kontakion* on Symeon the Stylite? The earliest that we could reasonably place the terminus post quem for this hymn is the mid-sixth century, though this

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<sup>20</sup> Namely the proem and Strophae 1 and 2. See Pitra, *Analecta sacra*, 210

<sup>21</sup> Though this story is not without some connection to the Syriac vita. See Harvey, "The Sense of a Stylite," 387.

<sup>22</sup> See Bernard Flusin, "Syméon et les philologues, ou la mort du stylite," in: C. Jolivet-Lévy et al. (eds.), *Les saints et leur sanctuaire*, Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne 1993, 1–23 (9); Robert Lane Fox, "The Life of Daniel," in: Mark J. Edwards and Simon Swain (eds.), *Portraits: Biographical Representations in the Greek and Latin Literature of the Roman Empire*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1997, 175–225 (184–185); and Béatrice Caseau, "Syméon Stylite l'Ancien entre puanteur et parfum," *Revue des études byzantines* 63 (2005), 71–96 (80–83). Caseau, in particular, provides a good survey of the scholarly literature on this issue.

is probably a few decades premature. The only secure terminus ante quem is the date of the earliest manuscript, which is from the tenth or eleventh century.<sup>23</sup> Maas and Trypanis viewed the iconoclastic periods (717–843) as the height of interest in hagiographical *kontakia* and suggested that many of the pseudepigrapha of Romanos fit this context well.<sup>24</sup> This may be true generally and even for this hymn specifically, but we should proceed with caution. In my view, it is unwise to take anything for granted about this corpus while it is still so poorly understood. Only time will tell if Maas' and Trypanis' hypothesis is correct. Until then, each hymn should be read on its own terms, and the *kontakion* on Symeon the Stylite is no exception.

In this vein, I would like to stress that I have only scratched the surface of what this *kontakion* has to offer for students and scholars of Byzantium. I approach this text primarily as an example of stylite literature and the reception of late antique hagiography. Those who are more familiar than I with Romanos and Byzantine hymnography (both in Greek and in Syriac) will undoubtedly find many things that have escaped my notice. My aim here is merely to make this hymn more accessible and raise some questions to stimulate further study. I would also like to add that I do not subscribe to the traditional assessment of the literary quality of this *kontakion*. It may not shine with the brightness of Romanos' *The Nativity of Christ* or *The Raising of Lazarus*, but few hymns can rival these masterpieces. This *kontakion* deserves to be read not just for its contributions to scholarship but for its own intrinsic beauty. I hope that readers find my translation useful for both.

### On the Translation

I have tried to represent the diction and style of the original Greek as accurately as possible, while also creating a readable English text. I made no effort to translate into verse, but I have retained the acrostic: "This hymn is by the humble Romanos."<sup>25</sup> The relatively slight interfer-

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<sup>23</sup> Athous Batopediou 1041. See Maas and Trypanis, *Cantica Dubia*, xiv.

<sup>24</sup> Maas and Trypanis, *Cantica Dubia*, xi–xiii, esp. xiii.

<sup>25</sup> The proem excluded, the first letter of each strophe spells out the following sentence, ΤΑΥΤΗ Η ΩΔΗ ΤΟΥ ΕΛΑΧΕΙΣΤΟΥ ΡΩΜΑΝΟΥ, which I have translated as "This hymn

ence caused by this is, I think, outweighed by the payoff, as it reproduces one of the most striking and well-known features of this poetic genre. The refrain is also translated consistently: “interceding unceasingly on behalf of us all.”<sup>26</sup> Its four variants are all translated accordingly with a note of explanation. As a final point, it is worth noting that there is reasonable doubt about the correct reading of the Greek in some cases. This *kontakion* is preserved in five known manuscripts, but most are incomplete. Three contain just the opening strophae. The fourth is nearly complete, lacking a single strophe. The fifth is the only manuscript that has the hymn in full.<sup>27</sup> The rhythmic structure of the *kontakion* precludes extreme variations, but there are many slight variations, some that are significant.<sup>28</sup> The translation should be read with this in mind.

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is by the humble Romanos.” It was common for anonymously composed *kontakia* to be attributed to Romanos in this way. For more on the acrostic, see my note at the beginning of the translation.

<sup>26</sup> Greek, *προσβεύων ἀπαύστως ὑπὲρ πάντων ἡμῶν*.

<sup>27</sup> There is a slight typographical error in Maas’ and Trypanis’ edition. A missing comma implies that “A” and “G” include the proem and Strophae 1–4, “J” the proem and Strophae 1–2, “M” the proem and Strophae 1–3, and “b” all but Strophe 20. In reality, “A” preserves the entire hymn, and the rest of the information is correct as printed. For these abbreviations and more on the manuscript tradition, see Maas and Trypanis, *Cantica Dubia*, xiv–xvi.

<sup>28</sup> See Maas and Trypanis, *Cantica Dubia*, xv.

## Translation

*On Saint Symeon the Stylite*<sup>29</sup>

Acrostic: THIS HYMN IS BY THE HUMBLE ROMANOS<sup>30</sup>

*Proem*

Seeking what is above, joined to what is above,  
 even making your column a chariot of fire,  
 you have become the companion of angels through it, O holy one.  
 [Petition] Christ our God with them, as you continue  
*interceding unceasingly on behalf of us all.*<sup>31</sup>

*Strophe 1*

The blameless life of Symeon, what human tongue could ever sufficiently praise it?  
 Yet I shall sing of God's wisdom – the hero's struggles and toils,  
 who appeared to all mortals like a lamp upon the earth,  
 shining brightly, because of his endurance, among the choir of angels.  
 Indeed, singing endlessly to Christ with them, he acquired self-control  
 and holiness,  
*interceding unceasingly on behalf of us all.*

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<sup>29</sup> *Kontakion* 70 according to Maas' and Trypanis' numbering. Greek text: P. Maas and C. A. Trypanis (eds.), *Sancti Romani Melodi Cantica: Cantica Dubia*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 1970, 71–78. The metrical patterns (model stanzas) for the hymn are Τὰ ἄνω ζητῶν for the proem and Τράνωσον for the strophae. The melody is sung in the second mode or ἤχος β'. For more on the rhythmic and musical structures of the *kontakia*, see Maas and Trypanis, *Cantica Dubia*, 210–211.

<sup>30</sup> Greek, ΤΑΥΤΗ Η ΩΔΗ ΤΟΥ ΕΛΑΧΕΙΣΤΟΥ ΡΩΜΑΝΟΥ. The “EI” in ἐλάχ(ε)ιστου functions as a unit and is represented by εἶδον in Strophe 17. This acrostic and my translation of it should not be mistaken for a number of related acrostics containing the word *tapeinos* (ταπεινός), which is found in many authentic *kontakia* and is often translated into English as “humble.” The word *elach(e)istos* (ἐλάχ(ε)ιστος), which means “lowest” or “least,” is unique to this hymn. See Maas and Trypanis, *Cantica Dubia*, 197 n. 67.

<sup>31</sup> I have stretched the English translation slightly to preserve the refrain. I do the same for Strophe 12 below.

*Strophe 2*

He possessed grace from above and heavenly glory, which was granted  
to him from within his mother's womb,  
and at the height of his youth, he never left the church,  
heeding, with righteous faith, the rhythmic<sup>32</sup> words of divine scripture.  
Guided by God's trustworthy teaching, the wise saint  
walked the straight path and found safe harbor,  
*interceding unceasingly on behalf of us all.*

*Strophe 3*

Inspired by the Holy Spirit, his faith overflowed, his self-discipline  
increased,<sup>33</sup> and he no longer cared for temporal [things].  
Because of his desire for a life of poverty, he abandoned his unstable  
lifestyle.  
His parents were unaware of their son's actions.  
Though searching everywhere, they could no longer find their beloved  
[son].  
Though shedding streams of tears, they could not quench the living  
flame, which was  
*interceding unceasingly on behalf of us all.*<sup>34</sup>

*Strophe 4*

So he removed his worldly garment, and to achieve his toilsome prize,  
the wise man assumed a rough cloak.  
He then subjected his flesh through trials and entwined it with an un-  
defiled<sup>35</sup> rope.

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<sup>32</sup> A self-referential nod to the performative context of the *kontakion*.

<sup>33</sup> Greek, κραταιούται ψυχῆ; literally, "he is strengthened in his soul."

<sup>34</sup> This marks the first time that the hymnographer modifies the refrain to fit the context. In this case, Symeon is called a living flame that cannot be quenched by his parents' tears – a metaphor, which also continues the imagery of the stylite as a lamp from the previous strophe. To account for this, the word "interceding" is changed from its usual masculine form (προεβέβυον) to a neuter form (προεβεβυον), because the Greek word *pyr* (πῦρ), which means "fire/flame," happens to be grammatically neuter. This distinction, however, is only apparent in writing, as the pronunciation of the two words was the same. For other variants of the refrain, see Strophae 10, 11, 19, and 22–5.

<sup>35</sup> An unusual way to refer to a rope in any other context (Greek, ἀσήπτω). Here the hymnographer is alluding to the story of the putrefaction of the saint's body caused by the rope, which is described in the following lines. Cf. *Life of Symeon* 5 and 8.

What he did was unobserved, even hidden from his fellow monks.  
 Throughout this secret affair, he happily endured the pain,  
 praying, with faith, to the Creator that he persist unwavering and with-  
 out reproach,  
*interceding unceasingly on behalf of us all.*

*Strophe 5*

His actions were perceived by one of his companions. Moved by jeal-  
 ousy, he related the following to the abbot with treacherous intent:  
 “Father, I have discovered one here transgressing the rule of the whole  
 monastery.

Expel him from our mandra<sup>36</sup> without delay.  
 For he is troublesome to all. No one can accept him because of his ex-  
 treme fasting,  
 his giving nourishment to the poor, and his mastery of self-denial,  
*interceding unceasingly on behalf of us all.”*

*Strophe 6*

Yearning to observe the man, [the abbot] ran to the place, and saw that  
 his cot was full of worms, as has been written.<sup>37</sup>

Speechless he stood there. Then he commanded the holy man to un-  
 dress,  
 but upon seeing him uncovered, he became more astounded, even  
 terrified.

There were wounds upon him, a horrifying, grievous affliction  
 venting an abominable stench. Dreadful agony plagued him, as he was  
*interceding unceasingly on behalf of us all.*

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<sup>36</sup> The Greek word *mandra* (μάνδρα) means “sheepfold” and was often used to denote a monastery, especially in Syria.

<sup>37</sup> This formula usually marks a biblical citation, though it is uncertain what is meant here. This line has an affinity to a verse from the Book of Job: “My flesh is clothed with worms and dirt; my skin hardens, then breaks out again” (Job 7:5, NRSV), which is further supported by the abbot’s remark in the corresponding passage in Antonius’ *Life of Symeon*, “Behold the new Job” (*Life of Symeon* 7), and the explicit mention of Job in the following strophe of this *kontakion*. Another possibility is that the author is referring directly to his hagiographical source text, as all recensions of the *Life of Symeon* contain a close parallel to this line. A third possibility is a sort of compromise between the two, that is, the hymnographer mistakenly believed that this passage from the *Life of Symeon* represented the Book of Job more closely than it actually does.

*Strophe 7*

Mangled was his rotting flesh, as they cut away the rope coiled in his innards,  
but he happily bore the pain like Job on the dung pile.<sup>38</sup>  
Though the dreadful drama had no audience in either case,  
one [actor] was unwilling, while Symeon himself eagerly accepted his role.<sup>39</sup>  
Unarmed, the holy man defeated the deceit of the fleshless [demon],<sup>40</sup>  
as he was  
*interceding unceasingly on behalf of us all.*

*Strophe 8*

Now let us examine these contests closely, two examples of the same story, delightful and impressive.  
Long ago, when Job endured his affliction, reproaches were found upon the lips of kings.<sup>41</sup>  
Now, Symeon was expelled from his monastery because of envy.  
This is only natural. The mighty<sup>42</sup> is mocked when he falls;  
the poor and impoverished<sup>43</sup> is persecuted by those who do not know the Lord,<sup>44</sup> as he is  
*interceding unceasingly on behalf of us all.*

*Strophe 9*

Into the desert, the wise man tearfully departed, and coming upon a waterless well, he descended deep below,  
where he was tortured, in both of his limbs, with agony upon agony of the body.  
For there was a lair of fearsome serpents and other beasts.

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<sup>38</sup> See the previous note.

<sup>39</sup> For the prevalence and significance of theatrical language in Romanos, see Arentzen, *The Virgin in Song*, 17–32.

<sup>40</sup> For ἄσαρκος as a term referring to demonic powers, see Geoffrey W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1969, s.v. ἄσαρκος B.1.d. There is also a play here on the similarity between the Greek words *palamē*, παλάμη (palm, hand; translated as “unarmed”) and *planē*, πλάνη (error, deceit).

<sup>41</sup> That is, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite.

<sup>42</sup> That is, Job.

<sup>43</sup> That is, Symeon.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Matthew 25:37–40.

Yet the venerable saint chose to dwell within this nest of vipers,  
imitating the zeal of Elijah. He became invisible; the desert his only  
friend, as he was

*interceding unceasingly on behalf of us all.*

*Strophe 10*

Suddenly, in the middle of the night, the Lord appeared to the abbot in  
a dream-vision and with a sharp rebuke.

A fearsome sight to behold! He was flanked by a dazzling host of angels.

Searching for Symeon, the Savior cried out to the abbot,

“Where is my chosen one, who is condemned to a terrible punishment?

Blameless and obedient, he will shine like a radiant light in my glory,

*interceding unceasingly on behalf of you all.”<sup>45</sup>*

*Strophe 11*

Before daybreak, the [abbot] awoke from his sleep in terror, so he re-  
lated the vision of his dream to the community.

He then ordered all [the monks] to search for the saint in every place.

They meticulously combed the mountains of the whole surrounding  
area.

They scoured the uninhabitable wilderness during their search.

At the end of their exhaustive pursuit, they finally came upon that place,

*where he was interceding on behalf of us all.<sup>46</sup>*

*Strophe 12*

Yielding to the Holy Spirit’s command, they descended into the well,  
and raised him whom they had previously banished.

With unchecked wrath, they violently dragged and set him before the  
abbot like a criminal.

When [the abbot] saw him, he fell before him with sincere belief.

He poured out streams of tears asking him for forgiveness,

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<sup>45</sup> The hymnographer changes the word “us” (ἡμᾶς) to “you” (ὁμᾶς) as it would be non-sensical for God to speak the normal refrain. But like Strophe 3, the difference is only apparent in writing, as the pronunciation of both words was the same.

<sup>46</sup> The third time that the refrain is modified in some way. Here the adverb “unceasingly” (ἀπαύστως) is omitted so that the refrain can become a subordinate clause and, therefore, syntactically coherent. This same refrain is repeated in Strophae 24 and 25.

that he find compassion in his acceptable heart, while he [petitioned] the Lord,<sup>47</sup>  
*interceding unceasingly on behalf of us all.*

*Strophe 13*

Tears constantly fell down his cheeks as he responded to the one making this request; he cried out to him something like the following words:

“Father, have compassion on me, the condemned; ease my spirit.

I groan bitterly that I could not finish this race.<sup>48</sup>

I had begun but not yet completed it when I was caught and brought before you.

Therefore, I pray, with even stronger faith, that I remain steadfast and resolute,

*interceding unceasingly on behalf of us all.”*

*Strophe 14*

Hearing great words of praise, the meek and thrice-blessed saint begrudgingly returned to his place,<sup>49</sup>

where he subjugated his entire body [to his spirit] and dedicated his spirit to the Creator.

After faithfully spending three years there,

he departed in secret and eagerly entered the wilderness.

Called by God’s providence, he glorified the Lord with thanksgiving,

*interceding unceasingly on behalf of us all.*

*Strophe 15*

Even as he camped in the wilderness, he constructed a dwelling just as Abraham once constructed an altar to the Lord.<sup>50</sup>

Having fled from the world as if it were his enemy,<sup>51</sup> he lived alone

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<sup>47</sup> The Greek is difficult to capture in English while retaining the refrain.

<sup>48</sup> Symeon is referring to when he asked the monks searching for him to let him die in the well (cf. *Life of Symeon* 11). This imagery also recalls 2 Tim. 4:7, a common theme in hagiographical literature.

<sup>49</sup> That is, his place in the monastery.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Genesis 12:7.

<sup>51</sup> Literally, “having fled life as if it were violence.” The hymnographer is playing on the Greek words for “life” (*bios*, βίος) and “violence” (*bia*, βία).

there,  
 where he was preserved like a hind escaping from dreadful traps,  
 or like birds eluding the hunt or released from snares.  
 Crossing riverbanks and mountains, the wise man was unfailingly  
 guided, as he was  
*interceding unceasingly on behalf of us all.*

*Strophe 16*

He armed himself with powerful grace; he found favor for his faith, just  
 like Enoch,<sup>52</sup> offering holocausts to God.  
 He imitated Daniel, singing hymns to the Creator while praying and  
 fasting.  
 For a long time, he endured winter's biting freeze,  
 its icy frost and cold. During the oppressive heat of summertime,  
 he was burnt by the sun's fiery wrath. He was beaten by the wind and  
 rain, as he was  
*interceding unceasingly on behalf of us all.*

*Strophe 17*

Uniting from both near and far away, they visited this all-holy saint  
 during his great fasting, and all were very amazed  
 because he possessed a divine power, a gift of heavenly healing.  
 The holy one cast out dire illnesses from the sick;  
 he cured pain, the agony hidden within various parts of the body.  
 He relieved all their struggles, since everything was subjected to him, as  
 he was  
*interceding unceasingly on behalf of us all.*

*Strophe 18*

Moved by faith, the crowds raised a column like a monument,<sup>53</sup> setting  
 him high upon it.  
 He saw the glory of those above, the entire firmament with its power,

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<sup>52</sup> Cf. Genesis 5:24.

<sup>53</sup> The connection made here between the Greek words for "column" (*stylos*, στῦλος) and "monument" (*stēlē*, στήλη) is not unique in stylite literature. The seventh-century author of the *Life of Alypius the Stylite* (BHG 65) makes a similar claim (*Life of Alypius the Stylite* 13). For a discussion and full translation of this vita, see Charles Kuper, "Alypius the Stylite," Oxford Cult of the Saints Project (<http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk/> ID E06497 & ID E07158).

just as Jacob once observed angels at night,  
when he was by the well and saw the Lord on a ladder.<sup>54</sup>  
The Creator blessed him; so also did He bless this one on the column  
*interceding unceasingly on behalf of us all.*

*Strophe 19*

By then the illustrious renown of the holy man's miraculous healings  
had spread throughout creation.  
The saint's mother learned of this, and leaving everything behind, she  
began to make her way.  
Constant was her fervent prayer to look upon her son.  
Fueled by her longing, she made the long journey effortlessly.  
She traveled from far across the earth and arrived at his side like a swift  
runner,  
*as she was interceding on behalf of us all.*<sup>55</sup>

*Strophe 20*

Lifting her eyes upward at journey's end,<sup>56</sup> she looked upon the mar-  
velous place where the faithful one was. Immediately her desire was  
rekindled to see him, whom she had borne before in her arms.  
But the entrance to the column was closed to her,<sup>57</sup> and wisely so,  
since the all-holy man prohibited her from visiting him.  
Although he broke her heart with grief, still he refused to be seen,  
*interceding unceasingly on behalf of us all.*

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<sup>54</sup> Cf. Genesis 28:10–19.

<sup>55</sup> This marks the greatest departure from the standard refrain in this *kontakion*. The hymnographer has changed the refrain to indicate that the stylite's mother, not Symeon, is interceding on behalf of all humanity. The participle "interceding" is unambiguously feminine (*poiouσα*, ποιούσα).

<sup>56</sup> My translation is a bit loose to accommodate the acrostic; literally, "After she had traveled from the ends (of the earth)."

<sup>57</sup> Symeon's monastic complex was (in)famous for its strict prohibition of women from the inner area where Symeon and his column were located. So widely known was this fact, that even Gregory of Tours was aware of it. Gregory of Tours, *In gloria confessorum* 26, in: Bruno Krusch (ed.), *Miracula et opera minora* (Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptorum rerum Merovingicarum I.2), Hannover: Hahn 1885 (reprint 1969).

*Strophe 21*

Even so, her heart burned with unquenchable fire, and she cried out the following words,  
“Although so many years have gone by, not one hour have I passed without grief.  
Now, my son, I am about to see you as if you are emerging from your tomb.  
Do not bring additional harm to the wounded.<sup>58</sup> Your father has died – I will look upon you!  
Observe my widow’s clothes and the breasts from which you nursed, as you are  
*interceding unceasingly on behalf of us all.*”

*Strophe 22*

Responding to this speech, the servant Antonius relayed to her<sup>59</sup> the saint’s orders:  
“Cease, Mother, from your laments. You will see me in the time to come.”  
She immediately uncovered her loosely kept tresses,  
wailing with a piercing cry and rending her garments of mourning.  
Beating her chest with her hands, she was greatly disheartened,  
*as he was interceding on behalf of us all.*<sup>60</sup>

*Strophe 23*

Once he had gained insight from the Holy Spirit, he replied to her in turn: “Relax from your grief and pray that you will soon see me.” She then ran and prayed upon the ground. In her great anticipation to see [him], she was filled with joy, but feverish with unspeakable anxiety, she died from longing. Despite having traveled long and perilous roads, she did not see her son,  
*as he was interceding on behalf of us all.*<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Literally, “Do not burn the wounded.”

<sup>59</sup> Maas and Trypanis mark this hemistich with daggers as it does not fit the rhythmic structure of the *kontakion*. Another manuscript reads, “He responded to her cry.”

<sup>60</sup> This refrain has been modified to fit the syntax of this strophe, which requires the omission of the word “unceasingly” (ἀπαύστως). It is also repeated in the next strophe.

<sup>61</sup> See the previous note.

*Strophe 24*

Many might suspect that this divine man was heartless, but they should recognize only that he put nothing before Christ.

In fact, he prayed on her behalf, and her bones shook with gladness from it.

Those standing around her were seized with great fear, when they saw her delighting in her son's gaze.

Then they buried her faithfully, setting her in that place,  
*where he was interceding on behalf of us all.*<sup>62</sup>

*Strophe 25*

All [who were afflicted] with various diseases and evil spirits, came to him, seeking succor.

Some came upon a doe attempting to escape from a trap.

On this animal they swore a solemn oath in Symeon's name, and it froze in fear. They promptly seized and slaughtered it.

Yet they were tormented by this food until they related their transgression at the column,

*where he was interceding on behalf of us all.*<sup>63</sup>

*Strophe 26*

Now a young girl was tortured by a hidden disease; she suffered from severe thirst. One night, she drew water and also swallowed a young serpent.

As she unwittingly fostered this venomous beast, this parasite, the girl began to convulse violently all day long.

Stricken with this terrible misery, she visited the holy place, where she purged the treacherous creature, which the faithful one destroyed through prayer,<sup>64</sup>

*interceding unceasingly on behalf of us all.*

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<sup>62</sup> See the note on Strophe 11.

<sup>63</sup> See the note on Strophe 11.

<sup>64</sup> In most recensions of the *Life of Symeon* by Antonius, the snake pays homage to Symeon before dying. Nor is Symeon responsible for its death (cf. *Life of Symeon* 16).

*Strophe 27*

Once the Savage One<sup>65</sup> saw that incurable illnesses were healed there,  
 he was possessed with immeasurable rage.  
 The Destroyer then caused a dire affliction within the hero's body,  
 and he filled that abominable wound with maggots.  
 But the saint persevered by enduring his torments,  
 and even prayed that he continue his asceticism more nobly than before,  
 as he was  
*interceding unceasingly on behalf of us all.*

*Strophe 28*

So he fell asleep with gladness – that blessed man, Christ's athlete, the  
 companion of angels.  
 With his cohort, the honorable Ardaburios<sup>66</sup> removed him from his col-  
 umn  
 during the reign of the pious Emperor Leo,<sup>67</sup>  
 and he set him on a cart.<sup>68</sup> The heavens and earth rejoiced.  
 With faith, they laid him in a tomb in dear Antioch, [where he continues]  
*interceding unceasingly on behalf of us all.*<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> That is, the Devil.

<sup>66</sup> Ardaburios, consul 447, was *magister militum per Orientem* 453–466. See J. R. Martindale, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire, Volume II A.D. 395–527*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1980, 135–137.

<sup>67</sup> Leo reigned 457–74.

<sup>68</sup> I read καρούχαν for the edition's Καρούχαν. *Caroucha*, a rare Latin word for a four-wheeled cart or coach (*carruca*, sometimes *carrucha*), is also used in the Antonius vita for the cart that carried Symeon's body during his funeral: "They set the saint's sarcophagus upon the cart (*caroucha*), and so they bore him to their city Antioch with candles, incense, and singing," (Ἐπιτιθοῦσιν οὖν τὸ γλωσσόκομον τοῦ ἁγίου ἐπὶ τὴν καρούχαν καὶ οὕτως μετὰ κηρῶν καὶ θυμιαμάτων καὶ ψαλμωδίας ἀποφέρουσιν αὐτὸν εἰς τὴν πόλιν αὐτῶν Αντιόχειαν), *Life of Symeon*, 31.

<sup>69</sup> As the words in brackets indicate, the refrain requires some adjusting to make sense syntactically. Although Maas and Trypanis might be correct in printing this refrain as it is, there is not a single manuscript that supports their reading. The final strophe of the *kontakion* is only preserved in two manuscripts. Neither contains the normal refrain. Manuscript "b" has the alternative refrain found in Strophae 22 and 23. "A" only contains three letters, "πε," which begin the normal and variant refrains.

## Appendix

The correspondence between *Kontakion 70* and the *Life of Symeon Stylites* by Antonius

<i>Kontakion 70</i>	<i>Life of Symeon</i>	Notes
Proem	—	Original rhetorical introduction by the hymnographer.
1	—	
2	—	
3	5	
4	5	
5	6	
6	6/7	
7	8	
8	—	A summary akin to rhetorical comparison (σύγκρισις).
9	9	
10	10	
11	10/11	
12	11	
13	12	Poetic expansion (added speech by Symeon)
14	12	
15	12	
16	12	
17	13	The hymnographer has rearranged the longer narrative to fit the <i>kontakion's</i> form.
18	12	
19	14	
20	14	
21	14	Poetic expansion (added speech by saint's mother)

## ARTIKLAR

22	14	The scene with Symeon's mother is given special prominence in this <i>kontakion</i> .
23	14	
24	15	
25	15	
26	16	
27	17	
28	28, 29, 31	The hymnographer compresses many concluding details into one strophe.