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Taming the saint: Hilaria's case

Аннотация. Легенда об Иларии относится к группе житий, объединенных общим мотивом трансвестизма, и повествует о вымышленной дочери византийского императора Зинона, подвизавшейся в мужской одежде среди монахов Скита. Возникнув в коптской среде (VI–VII вв.), эта легенда была переведена на сирийский, арабский и эфиопский языки. В настоящей статье рассматриваются те изменения, которые она претерпела в ходе редактирования и которые могли быть вызваны противоречивым отношением к ее сюжету со стороны переводчиков и переписчиков, учитывая, что они в основном происходили из монашеской среды. Сирийская версия свидетельствует о том, что ее автор, расширяя имевшуюся у него сокращенную редакцию, обращался к другим легендам о святых того же типа, в частности, к житию Евфросинии, но руководствовался также и стремлением «исправить» историю Илария в соответствии со своими представлениями об идеале мужественной святой женщины. Так, он сделал ее старше, более подготовленной к аскетической жизни физически и духовно, однако предпочел изменить концовку легенды, добавив сюжет, встречающийся в других историях о святых-трансвеститах. Если в коптской версии житие Илария в мужском монастыре санкционировано авторитетом аввы Памво, которому, благодаря откровению свыше, известен ее пол, то в сирийской версии Памво вовсе отсутствует, и это исчезновение можно проследить в арабских редакциях.

Ключевые слова: св. Илария, св. Евфросиния, кросс-дрессинг, трансвестизм, гендер, перевод, коптская агиография, сирийская агиография

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Abstract. The legend of Hilaria belongs to a group of narratives about cross-dressing saints and tells the story of a fictional daughter of the Byzantine emperor Zeno: disguised as a man, she led a life of rigid asceticism among the monks of Scetis. Having emerged in the Coptic milieu (6th–7th centuries), the legend was translated into Syriac, Arabic and Ethiopic. The present article examines the changes undergone by the story in the process of rewriting, which might have been caused by translators' and scribes' ambivalent attitude towards the plot, given that they were mainly from a monastic society. Analysis of the Syriac version demonstrates that its author, who expanded the abridged redaction he had in his possession, borrowed some details from other, similar legends, in particular, from the Life of Euphrosyne, but he was also guided by the intention to "correct" the story of Hilaria in accordance with his conception of the ideal manly "holy woman". Therefore, he made her older, more prepared for ascetic life both physically and spiritually, but chose to change the end of the legend by attaching a narrative, which exists in other stories about cross-dressing saints. Whereas in the Coptic version Hilaria's stay in the monastery is sanctioned by the authority of abba Pambo, who becomes aware of her true sex through divine revelation, in the Syriac version he is completely absent, and his disappearance can be traced in Arabic redactions.

Keywords: St Hilaria, St Euphrosyne, cross-dressing, transvestism, gender, translation, Coptic hagiography, Syriac hagiography

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1. Introduction

The *Legend of Hilaria* belongs to a group of hagiographical narratives about so-called "transvestite saints" or "holy cross-dressers": the protagonist here is a female monk, who lives under disguise of a man[1]. The stories emerged in 5th–7th century Byzantine Empire, and some of them, including Hilaria's *Life*, are likely to be a product of the Egyptian monastic society of Scetis.

John Anson, stressing the fact that these stories were written by monks, interprets them as reflecting "a psychological opportunity to neutralize the threat of female temptation" [Anson 1974: 5]. Indeed, they may tell us more about their male authors, compilers, and translators than about their fictional female heroines. Following this notion, I want to shift the focus to the changes undergone by the stories in the process of rewriting and translating: many of them exist in variants written in different languages of the Christian world. Scholars who edited and studied them, tended to prioritize synchronic rather than diachronic analysis, but recently this situation has changed due to the growing interest in *metaphrasis*[2]. My question is whether we can trace the scribes' discomfort with the content of the stories, and how it might have affected the plot or at least the details.

The answer to the first part of the question is positive. Stephen J. Davis has shown how Thecla, who is thought to be the earliest figure on which some other cross-dressers' legends are based[3], "is effectively tamed, domesticated, and regularized for male consumption" [Davis 2015: 588] through omitting the notion of cross-dressing and by stressing her femininity in the Arabic version of the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* copied in 1755 in Egypt. Earlier, Kim Haines-Eitzen has compared several versions of this legend and demonstrated how some scribes were trying to downplay its erotic language and to erase transgressive details [Haines-Eitzen 2007]. Klazina Staat analyzes two Latin versions of the *Passion of Eugenia* and concludes that Thecla remains an example for imitation, however, in the later version, which "probably reflects the growing concern about the authority of the hypotext" [Staat 2022: 277], there are no explicit references to her figure.

Thecla's cross-dressing is temporary, and it does not impact the development of the plot, while in the majority of the legends the act of cross-dressing is very important for constructing the narrative because it is the male disguise that attests to the female monk's holiness. Consequently, we may presume that the editing process was limited to smoothing away some abrasive features or adding new details without changing the plot completely.

To explore these matters, I want to look closely at the *Legend of Hilaria* (BHO 379) and its versions (Coptic, Syriac, Arabic, Arabic Garshuni) with special attention to such modifications that might be considered as evidence for "taming the saint". The best-preserved Coptic version was published and translated by James Drescher

[1] For the list of cross-dressers, see: [Patlagean 1976: 600–602; Delierneux 1997: 239–240]. See also about Eupraxia of Olympus, whose Life is not included in the lists: [Ivanov, Pichkhadze 2008]. For a history of the scholarship and the methods applied to the texts under discussion, see: [Lubinsky 2013: 41–72].

[2] For recent discussion and bibliography, see the following volume: [Constantinou, Høgel 2021].

[3] This hypothesis, proposed by Anson [1974], remains debatable.

in 1947 (hereafter *CoptH1*) [Drescher 1947][4]. Earlier, in 1911, Arent Jan Wensinck had published Syriac, Garshuni and Ethiopic versions [Wensinck 1913][5]. He also translated Coptic fragments (hereafter *CoptH2*) edited previously by Émile Amélineau [1888] and Noël Giron [1907], and two Arabic versions. According to Wensinck, the legend emerged in Coptic no earlier than the 6th century; later it was rendered into Arabic, and on the basis of Arabic versions, Syriac and Ethiopic texts were produced. The Syriac version (hereafter *SyrH*) seems to be dependent on the same type of the legend as preserved in the short Arabic text [Wensinck 1913: xxxi]: at least, we can claim with certainty that the author of the former possessed an abridged Arabic or Syriac version and dared to fill logical gaps relying on other similar legends he knew or texts he had at hand. Therefore, the Syriac version significantly differs from the Coptic original. The long Garshuni version (hereafter *GarH2*) has the same plot as the Syriac one, but the relation between them is indirect. The short Garshuni text (hereafter *GarH1*) shows some minor peculiarities, but does not deviate from the original plot[6].

2. The story

The legend runs as follows. The emperor Zeno (474–491)[7] has two daughters, Hilaria and Theopiste. The elder, eighteen-year-old Hilaria, is yearning for the monastic life, and is afraid that she will not be admitted to any Byzantine monastery because of her status. One day, during the Sunday service, she hears several quotes from the Bible and receives them as a sign. Thereafter, she disguises herself as an imperial bodyguard, and pretending to be on a mission goes to Alexandria by ship. Here, she visits two churches, and again listens to words from the Scripture. The deacon Theodorus, whom she has met in the city, accompanies her to Scetis, where they are received by abba Pambo[8]. At first, abba Pambo advices her to go to the Enaton, the rules there being less strict and more appropriate for a wealthy man, but she insists on staying with him. Pambo gives Hilaria a habit and a cell, and visits her twice a day for instruction together with the Greek-speaking abba Martyrion. Three years later, Pambo discovers through revelation that Hilarion is a woman, but lets her stay. Nine years later, the brethren nickname her "Hilarion the eunuch" because she is beardless. Meanwhile, Hilaria's younger sister Theopiste falls ill and is brought to Scetis. Hilaria bursts in tears after recognition, while the sister does not recognize

[4] His edition is based on MS Pierpoint-Morgan 583 (dated 848). English translations of the Coptic text are taken from Drescher's edition. For a Russian translation see: [Elanskaya 2001: 305–313].

[5] The oldest Syriac MS dates from the 9th century, the oldest Garshuni MS from the 13th or 14th century.

[6] Translations of Syriac and Garhuni versions are taken from Wensinck's edition, with minor changes.

[7] The legend emerged in the Monophysite milieu: Zeno was praised for the *Henoticon* (482), aimed at the reconciliation of the sees of Constantinople and Alexandria. Michel van Esbroeck notes that "the day of Hilaria's death, 21 Tubah, is the Feast of the Dormition of the Virgin, a symbol of the resistance at Jerusalem to the Council of Chalcedon" [Esbroeck 1991: 1231]. See also: [Voytenko 2004].

[8] Anachronism. St Pambo, a founder of the Nitrian desert monastery, is one of the most famous Desert Fathers, who lived in the 4th century, more than a hundred years before Zeno.

her because Hilaria's appearance has changed. Abba Martyrion suggests entrusting the girl to Hilarion, who is free of passion, and Hilaria heals her in a week through constant prayer. Theopiste tells her father that Hilarion used to kiss her on the mouth and to sleep with her on the same bench. Zeno sends for Hilarion on the pretext of one nobleman's illness. Hilaria discloses her identity to the family after making her father swear an oath that he will not hinder her return to the monastery. From then on, the emperor sends an annual gift of wheat and oil to the monastery. Twelve years later, after Hilaria dies in Scetis, Pambo tells the brethren her story and writes it down.

3. How to make a large story from a short one

As has already been stated, the Syriac version differs considerably from the Coptic one. The main differences are as follows. Hilaria is the fruit of her parents' many prayers; her pious governesses tell her about holy virgins and the fathers of Scetis; she starts practicing asceticism secretly while living in the palace; a detailed episode tells how she manages to escape her waiting-woman by asking her to buy monastic garb for a poor nun (in fact, it is a unisex garb) and by fleeing to Alexandria disguised as a monk; she is twenty-five at that moment; in the Abba Macarius monastery, she introduces herself to its presbyter (no name is given) as John the eunuch, manumitted by a nobleman from Constantinople; her sister was born after her departure to the desert; in the monastery, she stays with Hilaria for five years; on her return, she tells her father about John's harsh asceticism (and not about kissing and sleeping on the same bench as in the Coptic version) so that Zeno suspects that John is no eunuch; after recognition, Hilaria asks the emperor to help with building works, and Zeno sends his servants to help the monastery; since he makes inquiries about her every month, Hilaria, who is honored by the monks, secretly withdraws to the wilderness; ten years after, she dies in a cave. Three monks, Isidorus, Isaie and Isac, find her dying and bury her; touching her corpse, they understand that this is a woman; through divine revelation they are told about Hilaria's identity.

In the Syriac version, there are neither scenes of hearing the quotes from the Bible nor any epistles, which are three in the Coptic text, but there are some speeches and prayers added. This impels us to suggest that the compiler used an abridged version that he tried to "restore". The last episode attached to the original narrative has much in common, even in the details, with a story from John Moschus' *Pratum Spirituale* about an anonymous female hermit [Moschus 1863: 3037 (caput 170)]; we encounter a similar *fabula* in *Apophthegmata Patrum* [Chaîne 1960: 70, 142 (§ 238)], in the *Life of Syncletica of Palestine* (BHG 1318w), and in the *Life of Anastasia Patricia* (BHG 79–80; BHS 1019).

Another text which exhibits striking intertextual relations with *SyrH* is the *Life of Euphrosyne of Alexandria* (called Smaragdos): from Greek (BHG 625) it was translated into Syriac (hereafter *SyrEuphr*) — the earliest Syriac version is preserved in the famous Sinai Palimpsest (dated 697 or 775) [Lewis 1900]. It seems that the author of *SyrH* filled the gaps by deriving some details directly from *SyrEuphr*. The main similarities, which are absent in the Coptic version, are as follows. Euphrosyne's parents were barren, and her father begged a famous abbot for his intercession before God; Euphrosyne questions a monk about monastic life, and he tells her that the monks fast according to their ability; in the monastery,

she is entrusted to Agapios, an elderly ascetic; during the scene of recognition her face is covered with a hood; having recognized his daughter, Paphnutios falls down like dead, and so do Hilaria's parents; Agapios sprinkles Paphnutios with water to reanimate him, and so does Hilaria.

4. Male authority: abba Pambo vanishes

The first feature of the Syriac version I want to discuss is the absence of abba Pambo. His disappearance might be a result of the abridged version which was in possession of the author of *SyrH*, but it is not the only reason. If we examine different versions collected by Wensinck, we will see that Pambo is present in Coptic and Arabic texts (in Arabic he is *Bamfu* or *Bamu*), while in the Syriac version he is replaced by an anonymous "presbyter" (ܩܫܝܫܐ) [Wensinck 1913: 44]; in the short Garshuni text there is a "father of the desert" (اب البرّيّة) [Ibid.: 60] who receives Hilaria, and in the long Garshuni version he is called "prior of the monastery" (ريّس الدير) [Ibid.: 70]. What is more important is the absence of revelation, which might be viewed as a consequence of the ambiguity of the story. Given that the saint serves as a role model to emulate, this situation, where the head of a male monastic community sanctions a female living among the brethren, must have been considered embarrassing.

In *CoptH1,* it is said that "after she had remained there for three years, the Lord revealed to Apa Pambo that she was a woman but he did not know that she was the king's daughter" [Drescher 1947: 6, 75]. In the short Arabic version, Hilaria herself on arrival tells Pambo that she is a woman. In the long Arabic text, although the revelation is omitted, it is clear at the end that Pambo had been aware of Hilaria's identity. As we have already noted, in *SyrH* Pambo is absent, and so is the revelation. In *GarH1*: "the Holy Ghost had revealed to him that she was a woman. But he concealed this and put her into a grotto, where she remained thirteen years" [Wensinck 1913: 60]. In *GarH2*: "Then the grace came down upon the prior of the monastery and he knew that he [Hilaria] was one of the Lord's chosen (منتخب من الله)" [Ibid.: 71]. The last variant is remarkable: instead of erasing the revelation entirely, the scribe edited the passage in such a way that Hilaria's stay in the monastery still remains sanctified, while the prior becomes less responsible for admitting a woman into his monastic community. Furthermore, in *GarH2* the following episode, which we do not attest in *SyrH*, confirms the prior's lack of knowledge: Zeno himself visited the monastery when he was seeking for Hilaria, but the brethren's prayers did not help to find her because "she beseeched Christ to conceal it, and her prayer was accepted and got the upper hand over the three hundred so she was not found out" [Ibid.: 75]. Here, again, we see a derivation from *SyrEuphr* [Lewis 1900: 55].

Only in two cross-dressers' Lives, apart from Hilaria's story, a monk deliberately allows a woman to live among brethren. The first is the *Passion of Eugenia* (BHG 607w–607z; BHS 282): Helenus, a bishop of Hierapolis, when admitting Eugenia to the monastery, had already known her identity through a dream. Nevertheless, there are several important differences from Hilaria's legend: Eugenia is a daughter of heathen parents, and her cross-dressing is temporary; she is a martyr and not an ascetic. It is notable that the bishop's holiness is emphasized by the embedded narrative included in the main story: a Christian tells Eugenia and her comrades

about Helenus' miraculous triumph over the wizard Zareas. The second is the *Life of Anastasia Patricia* (BHG 79–80; BHS 1019): abba Daniel of Scetis, who, unlike Helenus, is well-known from other stories, which constitute a cycle, helps Anastasia to hide herself from unwanted attention of the emperor Justinian. Anastasia spends her life as a recluse so that even Daniel's disciple sees her for the first time only on her deathbed.

Unlike Helenus and Daniel, Pambo at the beginning does not know that Hilaria is a woman, but it is revealed to him later, after her three-year stay in the desert. Another disguised saint, Matrona of Perge (BHG 1221), in the same situation is expelled by the bishop Bassianos and has to enter a nunnery. Whether Pambo is a historical figure or not, it is not a coincidence that he bears the same name as the famous fourth-century disciple of St Anthony. It is Pambo's own holiness that sanctions Hilaria's secret abode in the monastery. Similarly, abba Daniel is portrayed as neither a miracle-worker nor an intercessor before God, but as one who is able to discern holiness in others, even under a disguise. Pambo's function is comparable to that of Daniel: he also possesses a gift to recognize God's chosen and therefore the authority to sanction Hilaria's decision.

No matter how great and infallible this power is, we have seen the tendency to erase Pambo's important function not only as an authoritative figure but also as an eye-witness of holiness: in the original version, it is he who writes down Hilaria's story. In the *Life of Apolinaria* (BHG 148), which seems to be related to our text since the plot is almost the same[9], abba Macarius[10], who admits Apolinaria to Scetis, becomes aware of her true sex and identity only after her death. He even marvels that it had not been revealed to him earlier.

5. Preliminary training

It is not an uncommon feature for hagiographical account to stress that a saint is well-educated and excels in wisdom. In *CoptH1* Hilaria's father had taught his daughters "letters as befitted their high rank" and the Psalms [Drescher 1947: 2, 70]. The scribe who composed *SyrH* was not content with this short notion and added more detailed description of Hilaria's training: apart from the Scriptures and the Psalms, the nuns "told her about the life of holy men and humble virgins who had given themselves to God and were betrothed to Christ and had mortified their flesh by asceticism" [Wensinck 1913: 39]. Hilaria decides to emulate ascetics by symbolically practicing monasticism, fasting steadily and sometimes eating only every evening or every second day, with long vigils and constant standing in prayer, day and night, reading the holy Scriptures and the stories of elect holy men and holy women" while living in the palace [Ibid.: 39–40]. She manages to hide it from her royal parents by admitting them only every fifth or tenth day. Nevertheless, it does not escape Zeno's attention:

[9] The text is edited by Drescher [Drescher 1947: 152–159]. It is not clear whether Hilaria's story derives from that of Apolinaria, but they certainly have a common source [Ibid.: 126–127].

[10] As in Hilaria's case, this is again an anachronism: Apolinaria is the daughter of the emperor Anthemius (467–472), while Macarius the Great flourished in the 4th century.

> Then it happened that the king, when visiting her, perceived that the grace and royal beauty, that was spread over her handsome face, was fading away (ܡܥܛܪ), that her body was becoming emaciated (or feeble: ܐܫܬ), that her strength was diminishing (ܡܬܚܣܠ) and day by day she was fading away (ܢܡܟ) and decaying (ܡܬܒܠܥ) and that she was sinking into a serious decline. So he said: "What has befallen to you, my daughter? Perhaps you are sick and, because of your bashfulness, you will not reveal it to us? Or is there a sickness of heart of which you inform us not? Verily, you give us much trouble and pain, on seeing you fading away (ܢܡܟ) and decaying (ܡܬܒܠܥ) like one wounded and sick" [Wensinck 1913: 40].

Hilaria soothes her father by telling him that there is no pain but joy in her heart. Wensinck has already noted that John of Tella in the *Life* written by his disciple Elias (after 538) "begins ascetic practices in his home, like Hilaria" [Wensinck 1913: xxiii]. We can add that this similarity is present even in the details: John is reading the Lives of the saints, and it is the *Life of Thecla* that inspires him to pursue a monastic career; he is taught to recite the Psalms by his *pedagogue* (ܦܕܓܘܓ), under whose supervision John is fasting and keeping vigil. Furthermore, the most striking detail is that John's mother, like Zeno, becomes anxious because of her son fading away: "And when his praiseworthy mother saw that the color of her son's face and the brightness of his youth had changed (ܡܥܫܠܟ), she asked his tutor, 'What a sign is this that I see in my son, that he looks so sad?'" [Brooks 1907: 43]. The tutor calms her down, saying that John "reads a lot at night". It would be too audacious to claim that the scribe who edited *SyrH* based his addition on the very episode from the *Life of John of Tella*, or vice versa, but it is tempting to presume a common source for these two texts[11]. The main difference is that in John's case the bodily changes are described more briefly with the neutral verb "to change" (ܫܠܟ), while in *SyrH* there are five different verbs emphasizing the process. The reason for such a difference might result not only from the fact that beauty is more important for a girl, who is to be married, but from the editor's intention to portray Hilaria both as spiritually prepared for monastic life and outwardly less dangerous for men. Interestingly, he also made her older: she is twenty-five in *SyrH* (but not yet betrothed!) while eighteen in Coptic versions.

In the tenth-century Metaphrastic redaction of the *Life of Euphrosyne*, there is an addition probably made by Symeon himself [Symeon Metaphrastes 1863: 309 (§ 5)] and inserted between two significant episodes: first, when Euphrosyne visits the monastery and learns about monastic life, and second, when she secretly flees to the same monastery dressed as a man. On her return home, she stops washing her face, gives her jewels to the poor and prefers conversation with other pious girls or local monks to women's idle-talk. In other words, she is free from the habits ascribed to women. It adds much for characterizing Euphrosyne as spiritually mature, despite the fact that she is only eighteen years old. Nevertheless, her young beauty has not faded away, and the abbot of the monastery, where she abides under disguise of a eunuch, decides to isolate her in a cell lest she should lead astray one of the brethren.

[11] Thus, Flavia Ruani argues that the author used literary sources for describing John's early years [Ruani 2022: 159–167].

Matrona of Perge practices asceticism while living with her husband: she avoids intercourse with him, does not take baths nor uses cosmetics. The author stresses, however, that her fasting and vigils are without excess:

> She did not consider the body to be the most evil of foes, after the manner of the hateful and loathsome Manicheans, but constrained its unreasonable urges with great wisdom; she was then twenty-five years old, when she accomplished ascetic feats before becoming an ascetic, training herself in advance (προγυμνάζουσα ἑαυτὴν) and preparing (προπαρασκευάζουσα) for the future [Delehaye 1910: 791][12].

The importance of preliminary training is stressed also in the *Life of Syncletica* spuriously attributed to Athanasius. Syncletica of Alexandria is not a cross-dresser, but is also praised for her manly endurance. She despises beautiful clothing, jewels, music, and avoids conversations that are not profitable for her soul [Athanasius 1887: 1492]. The major part of the text consists of her sayings, and the narrator's tone is explicitly didactic:

> Then she was again in her paternal courtyards, being trained sufficiently in sufferings (ἱκανῶς προγυμνασθεῖσα τοῖς πόνοις); and having been led to the very height of the stadium, she made progress in virtues. How many then approached this divine mystery unprepared and unadvisedly (ἀγυμνάστως καὶ ἀσκέπτως), and fell short of the object of their desire, not having considered everything ahead of time? [Athanasius 1887: 1493][13].

As we see, there are two intermingling tendencies in the Greek accounts about holy women: one is to stress the importance of spiritual and physical preparation for the austerities of monastic life, the other is to avoid any description of radical bodily changes resulting from this preparation. We might assume that it depends mainly on the extent to which the author is concerned about his intended audience and the didactic purpose of his text. In other words, it might be dangerous to encourage a female reader, likely well-educated and from high society, to imitate extreme ascetic behavior. On the contrary, this is not often the case for texts written or rewritten in Coptic and Syrian communities.

6. Taming the saint: body

Physical transformation is an inevitable consequence of ascetic practice, and outstanding asceticism is a sign of holiness. Since cross-dressing figures, with few exceptions (Thecla, Eugenia and Susanna), are not martyrs but ascetics, their abstinence and humility are often emphasized and eulogized. Bodily changes disfigure feminine beauty, a dangerous quality that can easily become the devil's snare. Scholars generally agree that male disguise, including both cross-dressing and physical changes, serves as a symbol of spiritual transformation of weak feminine nature, which was thought to be a cause of sinfulness [Castelli 1991; Dahlman 2007: 242–243; Constantinou 2005: 90–106].

[12] Trans. by J. Featherstone [Talbot 1996: 20].
[13] Trans. by E. Castelli [1990: 271].

As Terry Wilfong points out, "female ascetics in Coptic are most often described in terms of stench and waste of the ascetic body, or else in terms of the effect of asceticism on the bodily characteristics of gender" [Wilfong 1997: 127]. Here are examples from the different versions of Hilaria's legend:

1. *CoptH1*: For her breasts, too, they were not as those of all women. Above all, she was shrunken with ascetic practices (ⲁⲥϣⲟⲟⲩⲉ ⲉⲓⲧⲛ ⲧⲁⲥⲕⲩⲥⲓⲥ) nor was she subject to the curse of women: since God Almighty ordained for her the thing appointed [Drescher 1947: 6, 75].

2. *CoptH1*: How should she (Hilaria's sister. — *L. E.*) know her since her flesh had withered through mortification (ⲁ ⲛⲉⲥⲥⲁⲣⲝ ϣⲟⲟⲩⲉ ⲉⲓⲧⲛ ⲧⲁⲥⲕⲩⲥⲓⲥ) and the beauty of her body had altered, and her appearance (ⲁ ⲡⲥⲁ ⲙⲡⲉⲥⲥⲱⲙⲁ ϣⲓⲃⲉ ⲙⲛ ⲡⲉⲥⲥⲛⲟⲧ), she being nought but skin and bone (ⲡⲕⲁⲥ ⲙⲛ ⲡϣⲁⲁⲣ)? Besides all this she was wearing a man's garb [Ibid.: 8, 77].

3. *CoptH2*: For her color had altered (ⲁⲫϣⲓⲃⲉ), the beauty of her body had withered (ⲁⲫⲧⲁⲕⲟ ⲛⲟⲓ ⲡⲥⲁ ⲙⲡⲉⲥⲥⲱⲙⲁ), her eyes were sunken in (ⲁ ⲛⲉⲥⲃⲁⲗ ϣⲱⲕϩ ⲉⲡⲉⲥⲏⲧ), she was only bones and skin (ⲕⲉⲉⲥ ⲙⲛ ⲡⲉⲥϣⲁⲁⲣ) [Amélineau 1888: 197; Wensinck 1913: 12].

4. *SyrH*: For he [the presbyter] thought that she was a man because of her manly dress and the changed color of her face which had become dusky and black (ܚܫܒ ܗܘ ܩܫܝܫܐ ܡܛܠ ܕܠܒܫ ܓܒܪܢܝ ܘܫܚܠܦ ܙܝܘ ܦܪܨܘܦܗ ܕܐܬܚܫܟ ܘܐܬܩܕܪ ܠܫܚܘܡ) " [Wensinck 1913: 45].

5. *GarH1*: Her skin grew black, her appearance became altered and her bones grew thin [Ibid.: 60].

6. *GarH1*: The monk was like a shadow or a spider: his skin had grown black and his bones had become thin [Ibid.: 61].

7. *GarH2*: While they were stripping off her clothes, they found her breasts withered on her pure bosom like leaves wither beneath the trees [Ibid.: 87].

8. *GarH2*: She went, confiding in God, barefoot, on the thorns and pebbles and thistles till the blood ran from her feet and the sun had burnt her skin and her beauty had faded away and she had become like an Abyssinian (حبشية) [Ibid.: 69–70].

In the Lives of cross-dressers, the bodily changes are obviously referred in three contexts: first, as an explanation for the fact that a female manages not to disclose her sex and passes as a eunuch when entering a male monastic community (4) or after several years of living there (1, 5); second, in the scene when she is not recognized by her relatives (2, 3). In the latter case, male attire helps her to hide both her sex and her identity. Finally, during postmortem recognition (7). To these three contexts we can add another one discussed in the previous section. In *SyrH*, Hilaria's transformation begins at home and proceeds later during the pilgrimage to Egypt: "the changed color of her face which had become dusky and black" is like a mask that covers her femaleness. This, however, was not enough for the scribe who produced the long Garshuni version: he made Hilaria walk barefoot (8) instead of going by ship, until "her beauty had faded away and she had become like an Abyssinian".

Describing the ascetic body in terms of emaciation is a common feature regardless of its sex, and passage 3 is very similar to the description of the famous abba Shenoute (5th century):

> His body was dried up (ϣϣογι), and his skin was very fine (ⲉⲁϥϣⲛⲁ ⲉⲙⲁϣϣ) and stuck to his bones; tears to him were sweet as honey, so that his eyes were deeply sunken (ⲛⲧⲉⲛⲉϥⲃⲁⲗ ϣⲱⲕ ⲉⲡⲉⲥⲏⲧ), like holes in walls, and because of the great flow of tears continually streaming from his eyes like water, they had become very black (ⲛⲥⲉϣϣⲟⲡⲓ ⲛϧⲁⲛⲉ ⲉⲙⲁϣϣ) [Leipoldt 1906: 12–13][14].

Fading pertains to female beauty or, rarely, to youth in general, but dark or black skin and comparison with an Abyssinian (Ethiopian) is a common detail, particularly for describing female ascetics. This motive occurs elsewhere both in the Lives of the cross-dressed (Athanasia, Theodora, Pelagia) and not cross-dressed (Mary of Egypt, Theoktiste of Lesbos, Onesima) women. Here, the Ethiopic image has nothing to do with demons, as it is often the case in monastic literature, but dark skin functions as defeminizing detail which is "used to describe the opposite of female beauty" [Dahlman 2007: 236]. Furthermore, it symbolizes not only defeminization or maleness, but also otherness and non-belonging to this world. In this sense, Hilaria transcends her female nature[15] and therefore she is no longer dangerous to the male monastic community.

Austere asceticism leads one to a condition that is featured as alien to the social identity of a "normal" person. In *GarH1*, it is highlighted by comparison with a spider (passage 6 above). Furthermore, Apolinaria, before going to Scetis, spends many years in the marsh until her body dries up and her skin becomes like a turtle's skin because of mosquitoes (γέγονεν τὸ σῶμα αὐτῆς ὡς χελώνης δέρμα) [Drescher 1947: 157]. This detail is reminiscent of Macarius' the Roman appearance, whose skin is also compared with that of a turtle [Vassiliev 1893: 151]. On the other hand, the episode of living in the marsh might have been modeled after a story about Macarius of Egypt: he does penitence there for many days until "his body gets swollen because of mosquitos" [Amélineau 1894: 224]. Interestingly, the first person Apolinaria meets after leaving the marshes is abba Macarius.

Stephen J. Davis examines the intertextual features in the Coptic *Legend of Hilaria* with its relation to Athanasius' *Life of Anthony*: he refers to the latter as the subtext for the former and concludes that "in retracing the footsteps of her intertextual model Anthony, Hilaria is understood to be actualizing a distinctively male piety" [Davis 2001: 21]. Davis, however, limits his comparative analysis to the episode of monastic calling, and does not go further. In the *Life of Anthony*, there is one remarkable detail I want to highlight. Athanasius says that the body of Antony was the same as it had been before twenty years in the desert: "It grew neither fat because of lack of physical exercises nor thin because of fasting and combat with the demons" [Bartelink 1994: 172]. It notably differs from what we have seen in the case of Hilaria.

Finally, the author of *SyrH* does not allow Hilaria to die as a cenobitic monk, but expels her to the desert where she is enclosed in a cave. This tendency to isolate female body is present also in *GarH1*: "the Holy Ghost had revealed to him that she was a woman. But he concealed this and put her into a grotto, where she remained

[14] Trans. by D. N. Bell [1983: 45–46].

[15] It is reasonable to use the term "asexual" ("asexué"), as Nathalie Delierneux suggests [Delierneux 1997: 229].

thirteen years" [Wensinck 1913: 60]. It is problematic for a cross-dressed woman to stay in a male monastery: for example, Matrona, Susanna, Eugenia and Euphrosyne the Younger return to their initial gender role, Pelagia and Anastasia spend their lives as anchorites, while Euphrosyne (Smaragdos) is isolated in a separate cell by the abbot. Like Hilaria in *SyrH*, Anna and Euphrosyne the Younger voluntarily go to a remote place because of fear that their identity will be discovered.

7. Conclusion

The redactors of Hilaria's *Life* tried to enhance her story by adding new details and episodes. These additions depend considerably on the rewriters' own experience as readers: thus, they borrowed much from other cross-dressers' Lives they knew. The changes we see in the Syriac version reflect also the author's attitude towards the ambiguity of the plot. In order to portray Hilaria as an ideal "male woman", who is allowed to live among monks, he makes her older and more prepared, both spiritually and physically, for ascetic deeds. Preliminary preparation is emphasized in other cross-dressers' Lives too, but there bodily transformation occurs after taking a monastic habit, while in the Syriac version Hilaria is portrayed as an ascetic before she reaches the desert. Another important feature of the Syriac version is that abba Pambo ceases to have the supporting character's role. In the Coptic original it is he who teaches Hilaria, sanctions her presence in the monastery despite knowing her true sex, and finally transmits the story of her life to the brethren and — by writing it down — to the reader. Since he disappears in the Syriac text and the later Garshuni version, his role as observer of Hilaria's holiness is given to the monks who discover the saint on her deathbed. Whereas in the original version she died in the monastery among the brethren, who were eye-witnesses of her ascetic deeds, the author of the Syriac version decided to isolate Hilaria in the wilderness.

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