GOD AS IMPERSONATOR OF SAINTS IN LATE ANTIQUE HAGIOGRAPHY: THE CASE OF THE *LIFE* OF JOHN BAR APHTONIA († 537)

Dirk KRAUSMÜLLER

Yrd.Doç.Dr., Mardin Artuklu Ünv., Edebiyat Fakültesi, Tarih Bölümü

Özet

Geç Antik Dönem Hagiografisinde Azizlerin Tanrı'yı Temsili: Yuhanna bar Aphtonia Örneği (ö. 537)

Bu makale altıncı yüzyılın başlarında Suriye'de yaşamış olan bir rahip ve başkeşiş olan ve monofizit lider Antakyalı Severus'a oldukça yakın olan Yuhanna bar Aphtonia'nın hayat hikayesini başlangıç noktası olarak almaktadır. Bu hayat hikayesi şu olgunun ilk referanslarından birini içermektedir: Ölü azizler müminlere göründüğünde aslında Tanrı ve onun melekleri o azizlerin dış görünüşlerine bürünerek görünmektedirler. Metnin analizi gösteriyor ki aslında çağdaşlarının aksine bu hagiografya yazarı azizlerin öldükten sonra pasif olduklarına inanmıyor. Bu nedenle temsil kavramı, metinde ortaya çıktığı bağlamda düşünülmelidir: Yuhanna'nın hagiografyasını yazan kişi Tanrı'nın aziz kılığında göründüğü rüyayı manastır kurallarındaki bir ihlali meşrulaştırmak için kullanmaktadır. Çağdaş hagiografik metinlerden yorum için bir çerçeve oluşturmak mümkündür. Bu metinlerde rüyalar genellikle dış güçlerin yaptıkları baskılarla rahipler ve manastırların geleneklerinden kopması ve vaziyeti kurtarma gibi bir işlevleri olduğunda ortaya çıkmaktadır. Bu çerçeve Yuhanna'nın hayatında neden temsile başvurulduğuna dair bir açıklama önermemize izin vermektedir. Bir cemaatin koruyucu azizinin rolü genellikle ruhban sınıfından olmayan

ama manastırı koruyan kişiler tarafından belirlenir. Sonuç olarak azizler, üzerlerine bir takım baskılar kurabilen ve onlardan eşitmiş gibi taleplerde bulunan ruhban olmayanlarla aynı sosyal katmana ait olurlar. Bu nedenle, şöyle bir hipotez sunulabilir: Hagiografya, yazarı temsil kavramını bu sorunu bertaraf etmek için kullanmıştır. Hagiografya yazarının temsil kavramını bu kadar rahat kullanmasının nedeni yaşadığı sosyal çevrede araştırılabilir: Aziz Thomas katı bir koenobitikti ve kişinin isteklerini bastırması bu ideolojinin merkezindeydi. Dolayısıyla, temsil kavramı bu modelin doğaüstü alemine bir yansıması olarak anlaşılabilir. Yuhanna'nın hagiografya yazarı, ölü azizleri güçlü ve ilgili oldukları kişilerin münasebetlerine müdahale eden bağımsız koruyucular gibi göstermekle ilgilenmiyordu. Bu bulgular Gilbert Dagron'un temsil kavramının sadece *Sorular ve Cevaplar* literatüründe çıkan bir özellik olduğu kanısını sorgulamamıza olanak vermektedir çünkü hagiografya yazarları azizlerin rüyalarda ve vizyonlardaki gerçek varlıkları üzerinde genellikle ısrar ettiler. Yuhanna'nın hayat hikayesi gösteriyor ki Geç Antik hagiografisi monolit değildi ve "aydın" bir *Sorular ve Cevaplarla,* "muğlak" hagiografinin basit bir çakıştırması mümkün değildi.

Anahtar kelimeler: Temsil, rüyalar, azizler, manastır kuralları.

Abstract

This article takes as its starting point the *Life* of John bar Aphtonia, a monk and abbot who lived in early sixth-century Syria and was a close associate of the Monophysite leader Severus of Antioch. This text contains one of the earliest references to the notion that when dead saints appear to the faithful it is not the saints that appear to them but rather God or angels taking on their outward appearance. Analysis of the text reveals that unlike his contemporaries the hagiographer does not subscribe to the belief that saints are inactive after their death. Therefore the reasons for the

use of the concept of impersonation must be sought in the context in which it appears: John's hagiographer uses the dream in which God impersonates a saint in order to legitimise a breach of the monastic rule. Through parallels from contemporary hagiographical texts it becomes possible to create a framework for the interpretation. In such texts dreams often appear in contexts where the pressure of powerful outsiders forces monks and monasteries to deviate from their traditions and where they have the function of face-saving devices. Application of this framework permits us offer an explanation for the recourse to impersonation in the *Life* of John. The role of the patron saint of a community was fashioned after that of lay protectors of monasteries. As a consequence saints belonged to the same social stratum as the laypeople that put pressure on monastic communities and it was possible for these people to appeal to them as social equals. Therefore one can hypothesise that the hagiographer used the concept of impersonation in order to avoid this problem. The reason why John's hagiographer felt comfortable with using the concept of impersonation is most likely to be sought in the social environment of the hagiographer: St Thomas was a strict coenobium where the suppression of the will of the individual was a central part of the ideology. Thus one can conclude that the concept of impersonation could be understood as a projection of this model onto the supernatural realm. John's hagiographer had little interest in presenting dead saints as powerful and independent patrons who personally interfered in the affairs of their clients. These findings permit us to challenge the contention of Gilbert Dagron that impersonation was exclusively a feature of the *Questions-and-Answers* literature of the time because hagiographers always insisted on the real presence of saints in dreams and visions. The *Life* of John bar Aphtonia shows that Late Antique hagiography was not a monolith and that simple juxtaposition between 'enlightened' *Questions and Answers* and 'obscurantist' hagiography is impossible.

Keywords: Impersonation, dreams, saints, monastic rules.

Kurte

Temsîlkirina Ezîzan ya Xwedê di Hagîografyaya Antîka Dereng de: Mînaka Yuhanna bar Aphtonîa

Ev gotar çîroka jiyana Yuhanna bar Aphtonîa weke destpêk qebûl dike ku ew nêzîkî Severûsê Hatayî yê keşe, serkeşe û pêşengê monofîzît bû ku di serê sedsala şeşan de li Sûrî jiyaye. Ev çîroka jiyanê, yek ji ewilîn referansên vê diyardeyê di xwe de dihewîne; dema *ezîz*ên mirî xwe nîşanî mirovan didin di eslê xwe de Xwedê û melekên wî ne ku di şubhetê *ezîz*an de xwe nîşan didin. Analîza metnan nîşan dide ku ev nivîskarên hagîografya berovajiyê hevçerxê xwe bawer nakin ku piştî ezîz dimirin pasîf bin. Ji ber vê yekê têgeha temsîlê divê li gor pêwendiya metnê bê famkirin: Kesê ku hagîografyaya Yûhanna nivîsiye, xewna ku Xwedê di şubhetê ezîzekî de xuya dike ji bo meşrûkirina îhlaleke nav manastirê dîtiye. Pêkanîna çerçoveyekê, ji metnên hagîografîk mimkun e.

Di van metnan de xewn bi piranî dema ku hêzên derve zorê li keşe û manastiran dikin û wan ji kevneşopa wan dûr dixin û karê xelaskirina wê rewşê dikeve ser milê wan, diqewime. Ev çerçove musaade dide me ku em li ser jiyana Yuhanna tiştinan bibêjin bê çima ewqas cih daye temsîlê. Rola ezîzê parazvanê civata manastirê bi piranî ji aliyê kesên ku manastirê diparêzin û ne ji sinifa rûhanî ne tê diyarkirin. Weke encam ezîz û kesên ne rûhanî ku li ser ezîzan zordariyê dikin û mîna ku wek hev bin daxwazan dikin, dikevin heman qata civakî.

Ji ber vê yekê hîpotezeke wisa dikare bê pêşkêşkirin: Nivîskarê hagîografya têgeha temsîlê ji bo ku vê meseleyê safî bike bi kar aniye. Sedema ku nivîskarê hagîografyayê ewqas rehet tev geriyaye, di derdorê civakî de dikare bê lêkolîn: Ezîz Thomas koenîtîkekî hişk bû û çewisandina daxwazên takekesî di navenda vê îdeolojiyê de bû. Ji ber vê yekê têgeha temsîlê weke rengvedana vê modelê ya li derxwezayê dikare bê famkirin.

Nivîskarê hagîografyaya Yuhanna bi nîşandayîna ezîzên mirî ya mîna ku kesên xurt û serbixwe ne û midaheleyî

derdora xwe dikin, eleqedar nebûne. Ev diyarde îmkanê dide me ku em pirsiyar bikin ku têgeha temsîlê ya Gîlbert Dagron ku tenê taybetiyeke ku di lîteratura *Pirs û Bersiv*an de heye. Ji ber ku nivîskarên Hagîografya bi piranî li ser heyberên rasteqîn ên di xewn û vîzyonên ezîzan de israr kirin. Çîroka jiyana Yuhanna nîşan dide ku Antîka Dereng ne hagîografîsîmonolît bû û têkelkirineke basît ya *Pirs û Bersiv*ên "rewşenbîr" û hagîografyaya "*mixlaq*" ne mimkun bû.

Bêjeyên Sereke: Temsîl, xewn, ezîz, rêzikên manastiran.

الملخص

تمثيلية العزيزين الإلهَ في الهاجيوجراف (سيرة العزيزيين) في العهد الأثري المتأخر: نموذج يوحنًا بار آبهتونيا (م. 537)

تتخذ هذه الدراسة سيرة يوحنًا بار آبهتونيا المتقرب جدًّا من الراهب والبطريق والقائد المونوفيزي سَوَرُوس الأنطقياي الذي عاش في سوريا في أوائل القرن السادس نقطة الانطلاق. تحتوي هذه السيرة واحدةً من مبررات تلك الحقيقة؛ وهي إذا تجلّى العزيزيون الأموات للمؤمنين، تجلّى في الحقيقة الإله وملائكته بالتحلي بصورة أولئك العزيزيين الظاهرية. تحليل هذا المتن يدلّ على أنّ كاتب هذه الهاجيوجراف (سيرة العزيزيين) لا يؤمن بركود العزيزيين بعد الموت بخلاف معاصريه. فلذلك يجب أن يوضع اصطلاح التمثيل بالاعتبار بالمعنى الذي هو في المتن: الذي كتب سيرة يوحنًا يستخدم الرؤيا التي يظهر فيها الإله في صورة العزيز ليبرّر بها مخالفةً في أنظمة الديرة. يمكن تشكيل إطار للتحليل من المتون الهاجيوجرافية الحديثة. في هذه المتون تتجلّى الأحلام غالبا بالضغوط الخارجية عندما يكون لها دور في مثل الانقطاع عن عادات الرهبان والأديرة ولتدارك الوضع الحالي. وهذا الإطار يأذن لنا أن نطرح إيضاحًا عن سبب اللجوء إلى التمثيل في حياة يوحنًا. دور العزيز المحافظ على هذه الجماعة يُحدّد غالبًا من قبل أشخاص يحرسون الديرة و ليسوا من طبقة الرهبان. وفي النهاية، يكون العزيزيون في نفس طبقة اجتماعية مع من يقدر على الضغطِ عليهم إلى حدّ ما، ويطالبهم طلبات سواسية كأنهم ليسوا مِمَّن ليسوا من الرهبان. لذلك يمكن عرض هذا الإدّعاء: استخدم كاتب الهاجيوجراف اصطلاحَ التمثيل لدفع هذا الإشكال. وسبب استعمال كاتب الهاجيوجراف اصطلاح التمثيل بهذه السهولة يمكن أن يبحث في البيئة الاجتماعية التي عاش فيها: كان العزيز ثوماس كوءنوبيتيكا صلبًا، وكان في مركز هذه الإدولوجيا كبت المرء رغباته. لذلك يمكن أن يُفهم أنّ اصطلاح التمثيل انعكاس لهذا الطراز في عالمه الخارق الطبيعة. كاتب الهاجيوجراف ليحنًا لا يهتمّ بإبراز العزيزيين الأموات أقوياء، ولا كمن يتدخّلون كحُرّاس محايدين في شؤون من يبالون به. هذه القرائن تتيح

لنا إمكانية أن نتساءل عن اعتقاد جلبرت داجرون أنَّ اصطلاح التمثيل
خصوصية ظهرت في مصادر الأسئلة و الأجوبة، لأنَّ كتّاب هاجيوجرافات
أسرّوا عمومًا على وجود العزيزيين الحقيقي في الأحلام والواقعيات. تدلّ
الهاجيوجراف ليحنّا أنَّ الهاجيوجراف في العهد الأثري المتأخر لم تكن
مونوليتا، وأنّ متقاطعة بسيطة "للمفكر" للأسئلة والأجوبة والهاجيوجراف
"الغامض" غير ممكنة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التمثيل، الأحلام، العزيزيون، أنظمة الأديرة.

This article hopes to shed more light on a peculiar Byzantine belief, namely that when the faithful see saints in dreams and visions it is not the saints themselves that appear to them but rather God or angels taking on their guise. This belief engendered a controversy that can be followed through the centuries from Late Antiquity to the High Middle Ages (Gouillard, 1981, s.180-181; Constas, 2001, s.110-112). The seminal document is a lengthy treatise against the detractors of the cult of saints by the Presbyter Eustratius, the disciple and hagiographer of Patriarch Eutychius of Constantinople (552-565) (Van Deun, 2006, s.1-113; Darrouzès, 1960, s.1718-1719). According to Eustratius, his adversaries maintained that after the separation from their bodies souls were inactive and then explained apparitions of the dead with the concept of divine impersonation. In his turn Eustratius stressed the continuing activity of disembodied souls and insisted that through dreams and visions saints could intervene in the affairs of the living (Constas, 2002, s.267-285).

Eustratius' treatise gives the impression that there existed two coherent and diametrically opposed belief systems and that the concept of impersonation was firmly linked to one of these systems. However, other evidence suggests that the fault lines were much less clear-cut than Eustratius would have us believe. In collections of *Questions and Answers* from the seventh and eighth centuries we find statements that show a striking resemblance to the position of Eustratius' adversaries. Anastasius of Sinai, for example, subscribed not only to the concept of impersonation but also to the same anthropological model (Richard, Munitiz, 2006, s.29-35). However, in one point Anastasius diverged from the position of his forebears: he made an exception for saintly souls, which he considered to remain active. This shows that the rejection of personal involvement of saints in apparitions was not necessarily linked to the belief in a sleep of the souls and that it did not always imply hostility to saints.

Eustratius of Constantinople and the authors of the collections of *Questions and Answers* engage in a complex discourse, which gives an unparalleled insight into the Byzantine word-view. Thus it is no surprise that in the last decades these texts have attracted the interest of scholars. Gilbert Dagron in particular has attempted to situate the surviving writings in their historical context. In his article 'L'ombre d'un doute' Dagron focused on the literature of *Questions and Answers* because the authors of these texts not only mention the concepts of posthumous inactivity and impersonation but also give an insight into the reasoning behind these concepts (Dagron, 1991, s.23-31; Dagron, 1992, s.59-68). In Anastasius of Sinai's use of 'physiological' arguments Dagron saw the reflection of a more general movement that stressed the legitimacy of scientific explanations.

In my article 'God or angels as impersonators of saints' I have sought to elaborate and qualify Dagron's conclusions (Krausmüller, 1998-1999, s.10-24). I first showed that Anastasius' argument owes as much to the Old Testament as it does to empirical observations. Then I explored the reasons for opposition against the personal appearance of saints. I argued that Eustratius' adversaries were worried that the delegation of divine power to the saints could lead to fragmentation and strife in the supernatural sphere. Accordingly they rejected the role of saints as a privileged group of mediators and insisted that God was the sole actor in all dealings of the faithful with the supernatural. In order to establish Anastasius of Sinai's motivations, I focused on his first speech on man as the image of God (Uthemann, 1985, s.29). From this text it is evident that Anastasius wished to liberate dead saints from the onerous task of ministering to the wishes of the faithful. This permitted me to draw two conclusions, firstly that models of social interaction played a prominent part in the debate, and secondly that the concept of impersonation could be held for radically different reasons.

In this article I address a part of Dagron's hypothesis, which I left aside in my previous treatment of the topic. In 'L'ombre d'un doute' Dagron argued that with their critical position the authors of the *Questions and Answers* tried to undermine an unquestioned belief in the personal appearance of saints that found its expression in contemporary hagiography (Dagron, 1992, s.61-63). Thus Dagron created a straightforward link between this literary genre and the rejection of impersonation, which he then used to characterise Late

Antique hagiographers as obscurantist (Dagron, 1992, s.62).[1] At first sight his claim seems to be borne out by the evidence because Eustratius argues predominantly with hagiographical sources. However, Eustratius' selection of texts was determined by his wish to support his position and therefore cannot be used for the reconstruction of a 'hagiographical' position.

The relevant passages in the collections of *Questions and Answers* show that their authors had in mind a specific type of hagiography. When they deny dead saints the ability to interact with their living worshippers they speak about 'visions in the churches and at the tombs of the saints'.[2] What they refer to are the apparitions experienced by the faithful in the context of the highly formalised ritual of incubation, which took place at established cult centres. Such visions were often recorded in great detail in collections of healing miracles.[3] A survey of miracle narratives suggests that the concept of divine impersonation was indeed absent from these collections.[4] This is hardly surprising since the authors acted as propagators of the various cult centres and consequently would have had little interest in questioning the reality of apparitions of the saints venerated there. We can conclude that as far as collections of miracles are concerned Dagron is justified in juxtaposing hagiography with the literature of *Questions and Answers*.

However, Dagron does not limit his conclusions to such accounts of miracles: when he speaks about 'les tranquilles et tacites certitudes de l'hagiographie' without further qualifications, it is obvious that he extends his interpretation to the whole hagiographical genre (Dagron, 1992, s.62). As the example of Eustratius shows it is not difficult to find evidence for the presence of the belief in the personal appearance of dead saints in other types of hagiographical texts. However, this does not permit the conclusion that the concept of impersonation is necessarily incompatible with hagiographical

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[1] Cf. also Dagron's interpretation of the victory of the iconophile party: 'cette victoire se transcrit dans une hagiographie libérée du "doute méthodique" (Dagron 1992, s. 66).

[2] Αἱ ὀπτασίαι αἱ γινόμεναι ἐν τοῖς ναοῖς ἢ σοροῖς τῶν ἁγίων (Richard, Munitiz, 2006, s. 33). Cf. Ps-Athanasius, *Quaestiones ad Antiochum ducem*: αἱ ἐν τοῖς ναοῖς καὶ σοροῖς τῶν ἁγίων γινόμεναι ἐπισκιάσεις καὶ ὀπτασίαι (Migne, 1867, s. 613).

[3] I have searched the following texts: Deubner, 1907; Fernandez Marcos, 1975; Nesbitt, Chrysafulli 1995.

[4] This does not mean that there is always identity of appearance and agent. One episode in the *Miracles* of Cyrus and John shows that the authors of such collections could apply the model of impersonation to account for apparitions of their saints 'in different guise', cf. *Miracle* 17.19-22, ed. Fernandez Marcos, 398. It is evident that here the wonderworking saint takes the same place as God in the cases of divine impersonation.

literature. As I have already pointed out it can be found in authors like Anastasius of Sinai who were not opposed to the cult of saints. Moreover, hagiography is not a monolithic block but comprises texts that originate from different social settings and transport different ideologies. I have therefore broadened my survey to encompass other Late Antique hagiographical texts.[5] This survey has yielded at least one instance of divine impersonation. It is found in the Syriac *Vita* of John bar Aphtonia, the author of a *Life* of Severus of Antioch and a leading representative of the Monophysite faction in the first half of the sixth century.[6] In the following I shall present the evidence from the *Life* of John and explore the reasons for the use of the concept of impersonation in this text.

Before delving into the analysis, however, I will make a few remarks about the saint and his hagiographer (Nau, 1902, s.97-100; Vööbus, 1988, s.435-436). A native of Edessa in Syria, John entered the monastery of St Thomas near Seleucia in Pieria while Palladius was patriarch of Antioch (490-498) (Nau, 1902, s.122-123). After the death of Emperor Anastasius (d. 518) the Chalcedonians gained the ascendancy over the Monophysites and John's monastery was drawn into the conflict. The abbot went over to the Chalcedonian party, which led to a split within the community. The monks who remained Monophysite then proceeded to elect John as their abbot. Eventually they were forced out of St Thomas (Nau, 1902, s.128). They then went to Qenneshrin and founded a new monastery, which became one of the most important spiritual and intellectual centres of the Monophysite church in Syria (Nau, 1902, s.131). The author of John's *Vita* was an eyewitness of the events he described. A member of the Monophysite faction at St Thomas, he had taken part in the election of John and had then gone into exile with him (Nau, 1902, s.128-131). He probably wrote his text at the new monastery in Qenneshrin (Nau, 1902, s.132).

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[5]The survey is based on the Vitae of the following saints: Porphyry of Gaza, Daniel the Stylite, Melania the Younger, Auxentius, Symeon the Stylite (the Syriac *Life*), Euthymius, Sabas, John the Hesychast, Theognis, Theodosius the Coenobiarch (both *Lives*), Marcellus the Acoemete, Eutychius of Constantinople, Matrona, Elisabeth, Domnica, Severus of Antioch (both *Lives*), John Bar Aphtonia, Symeon of the Wondrous Mountain, Martha, Theodore of Sykeon and Alypius the Stylite.

[6]John Bar Aphtonia is repeatedly mentioned in sources relating to the struggle between Chalcedonians and Monophysites: in 537 when Severus was in Constantinople John liased between the patriarch and the Monophysite monks of Syria (Kugener, 1907, s. 224).

John's *Vita* contains only one account of an apparition, which is found at the beginning of the narrative. When John was fifteen years old his widowed mother Aphtonia presented him to the abbot of St Thomas. At first the abbot rejected her request to have him tonsured because he was as yet beardless. However, a divine intervention made him change his mind and eventually he received the boy into the community. The hagiographer describes this divine intervention as follows: 'God appeared in a dream to the elder, the superior of the monks, in the shape of the apostle'.[7] This is a clear example of the concept of divine impersonation: the formula 'in the shape of', in Syriac 'ba-dmut', which corresponds to the Greek phrases ἐν εἴδει or ἐν σχήματι, has close parallels in the *Refutation* of Eustratius and in the collections of *Questions and Answers*.[8]

How are we to account for the appearance of this concept in a saint's life? The obvious starting point for the interpretation is the context in which it appears in the narrative. In the *Vita* the abbot's dream follows the account of the actions of John's mother Aphtonia after her request has been rejected: she goes to the oratory of the apostle Thomas where she prays until nightfall.[9] Although the hagiographer does not specify to whom Aphtonia addressed her prayer the location implies that it is directed not only to God but also to the apostle. This interpretation can be supported when we turn to a similar passage earlier on in the narrative. On her way to the monastery Aphtonia 'prays to God as well as saint Thomas, his herald and apostle, to incline the minds of the monks towards her'.[10] Thus she clearly believes that Thomas is capable of directly influencing the community on her behalf.

This is in marked contrast to the passage that follows Aphtonia's prayer in the oratory of the monastery. There the hagiographer first states that 'God did not forsake her' and then

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[7]'Dieu … apparût en songe au vieillard, supérieur des moines, sous la figure de l'apôtre' (Nau, 1902, s. 125).

[8]An especially close parallel is found in the Ps-Athanasian *Quaestiones ad Antiochum ducem*: δι' ἀγγέλων μετασχηματιζομένων εἰς τὸ εἶδος τῶν ἁγίων (Migne, 1867, s. 613) The dream of the abbot of St Thomas has been discussed in recent secondary literature but without reference to the concept of divine impersonation (Escolan, 1999, s. 170).

[9]'Elle se dirigea tout droit vers le bâtiment où était l'oratoire de l'apôtre ... la nuit arriva durant ses prières prolongées' (Nau 1902, 125).

[10]'Elle commmença par supplier Dieu, ainsi que saint Thomas son héraut et son apôtre, d'incliner vers elle les esprits des moines' (Nau, 1902, s. 124).

narrates the dream in which God takes on the guise of Thomas.[11] It is evident that at this point God is the sole actor and there is no sign that Thomas participates in the interaction. Significantly, after the dream the apostle is not mentioned again. The abbot tells Aphtonia that 'her offering ... is accepted by God',[12] and on returning home Aphtonia herself gives thanks 'to the Saviour who had miraculously accepted her offering' without referring to Thomas.[13]

There can be little doubt that to contemporary readers of the narrative the concept of impersonation would have come as a surprise. Since the abbot's dream is presented as the immediate consequence of Aphtonia's prayer in the church of St Thomas, one would have expected a scenario in which Thomas goes from his church to the abbot and tells him to accept the boy. Such a scenario would have been in keeping with the Late Antique belief that saints lived in the churches that were dedicated to them.[14] Indeed, the discrepancy between the two parts of the narrative suggests that the hagiographer had at his disposal a story that conformed to this pattern, which he then deliberately modified. In this case he would have used the same interpretative device as the adversaries of Eustratius of Constantinople when they explained away the apparitions of saints.

However, this does not mean that John's hagiographer shared their conceptual framework. In a passage at the end of the *Life* he reassures the community that the saint 'flew to the celestial abodes from where he always looks down on us and where he takes care of us in order to preserve and to help us'.[15] This statement shows clearly that he did not hold the belief that the souls of the saints are inactive or even that they are incapable of influencing the affairs of their followers. We can therefore assume that he had no principal objections against Aphtonia's assumption that Thomas could act on her behalf.

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[11]'Dieu ne l'abandonna pas, il voulut exalter sa foi et sa (bonne) volonté, comme pour la Chananéenne. Il apparut … sous la figure de l'apôtre' (Nau 1902, s. 125).

[12]'Ton offrande sacerdotale … est accepté par Dieu' (Nau, 1902, s. 126).

[13]'Celle-ci ... retourna chez elle, en adressant des louanges d'actions de grâce au Sauveur qui avait miraculeusement agrée son offrande' (Nau, 1902, s. 126).

[14]Cf. e.g. the *Life of George of Choziba* where Mary is clearly regarded as living, at least intermittently, in her 'house' in Choziba from where she leaves to go to other places (Houze, 1888, s. 127).

[15]'Il s'envola vers les demeures célestes d'où il regarde surtout vers nous et où il s'occupe de nous pour nous conserver et nous secourir, il supplie afin de nous voir arriver sans fautes devant le terrible tribunal' (Nau, 1902, s. 132).

Why then is the apostle excluded from the transmission of God's decision to the abbot? In order to determine the reasons we need to resume the analysis of the context. As I have pointed out before the abbot's dream is closely related to Aphtonia's request to have her son tonsured. When she arrives at the monastery the abbot tells her: 'I will not transgress the laws which our fathers have fixed',[16] whereas on the next morning she is informed that 'her offering which the rule did not want is accepted by God'.[17] The function of the dream is evident: it serves to overcome an impasse in the narrative. This impasse is carefully prepared by the hagiographer. At the beginning of the narrative we are told that Aphtonia looks for the most perfect community and for abbots who enforce strict observance of the monastic rule.[18] When the monastery of St Thomas is then mentioned for the first time two statements are made about it, firstly that the monks follow the commandments of God, and secondly that they do not accept beardless boys.[19] Thus the very reason that makes Aphtonia choose St Thomas prevents her from carrying out her wish. The background against which the narrative unfolds is the tension between rule and exception, which is conceived of as a 'clash' of two divine plans. The rule of the monastery is explicitly identified with God's will.[20] At the same time, however, Aphtonia's wish to have her adolescent son tonsured at the monastery of St Thomas is presented as the consequence of divine providence.[21] Thus it is not surprising that the hagiographer appeals to divine intervention: God is the giver of the rule and only he can abrogate it.

From the *Life* it is evident that the strict adherence to the monastery's traditions played an important role in the self-definition of the community.[22] This raises the question: why did the monks of St Thomas at all give in to the request of John's mother? The *Life*

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[16]'Je ne transgresserai pas les loi que nos pères ont établies' (Nau, 1902, s. 124).

[17]'Ton offrande sacerdotale, dont la règle ne voulait pas, est accepté par Dieu' (Nau, 1902, s. 126).

[18]'Elle s'informa … de la communauté la plus parfaite parmi toutes les autres et de la régularité des supérieurs' (Nau, 1902, s. 124).

[19]'Il y avait un monastère nommé de l'apôtre Thomas qui était plus relevé que tous les monastères, convenait mieux à la vie monastique et était plus soigneux à pratiquer les commandements; mail ils n'admettait en aucune maniere les jeunes gens' (Nau, 1902, s. 124).

[20]'Notre supérieur … prenait des ordres près de Dieu pour nous les transmettre' (Nau, 1902, s. 129).

[21]'Elle apprit par un homme, comme si Dieu l'avait poussé (à cela) que dans le voisinage de Séleucie il y avait un monastère nommé de l'apôtre Thomas' (Nau, 1902, s. 124).

[22]This is evident from the end of the *Life* where John enjoins his successor Alexander to preserve the monastery's rule unchanged (Nau, 1902, s. 132).

suggests that they were swayed by Aphtonia's high social standing. At the beginning of the narrative we hear that John's family belonged to the ruling class of their hometown Edessa.[23] Aphtonia's elevated rank is further evident from the hagiographer's comment that she gained access to Patriarch Palladius of Antioch although he had never met her before.[24] As we have already seen she was a resourceful woman: having decided to consecrate her son to God she was prepared to travel across Syria in order to find the best monastery for him. Clearly foreseeing opposition she then obtained a letter of recommendation from Palladius, which she presented to the abbot.[25] This was a shrewd move because by enlisting the support of the patriarch she could exploit an on-going power struggle between the monastery and the lay church.[26]

One can assume that when Aphtonia appeared at the monastery in a self-assured manner and in possession of a patriarchal letter the monks realised that she was somebody not to be trifled with. Thus they gave in to her demands and contented themselves with damage limitation: John was not allowed to live in the monastery but was sent to a hospice owned by the community (Nau, 1902, s.126). However, as we have seen the *Life* does not present the events in this way but instead lets the abbot's change of mind be caused by a divine dream. One can therefore conclude that this dream was introduced into the narrative as a face-saving device. It permitted the monks to keep up the fiction that the rule had not been broken because of external pressure and it ensured that they remained in control of admission because it prevented others from using John's case as a precedent.

Comparison with other Late Antique hagiographical texts shows that the author of the *Life* of John bar Aphtonia availed himself of a *topos*, which is often used to justify the breach of a monastic rule. A typical example can be found in Cyril of Scythopolis' *Life* of Euthymius. In his account of the founding of the *Lavra* of Euthymius Cyril first states that the saint wished to remain a hermit and therefore

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[23]'Ses parents étaient de ceux qui dirigeaient et gouvernaient cette ville' (Nau, 1902, s. 123).

[24]'Elle le supplia, bien qu'il ne l'eût pas encore vue d'ailleurs, mais elle était d'aspect et des manières imposantes' (Nau, 1902, s. 124).

[25]'Elle supplia (sc. Palladius) … de persuader les moines par des ordres différents de ceux que donnaient les supérieurs de ce monastère' (Nau, 1902, s. 124).

[26]For patriarchal meddling in the affairs of the monastery cf. the letter of Severus of Antioch to Nonnus of Amida, the bishop of Seleucia in Pieria, in which the patriarch complained about the monk Pelagius who appeared to have introduced to the convent of the apostle Thomas in Seleucia a 'Nestorian' (Honigmann, 1951, s. 30).

sent all those who wanted to join him to the neighbouring coenobium of Theoctistus (Schwartz, 1939, s.25). However, when the brothers Cosmas, Chrysippus and Gabrielius approached him, Euthymius accepted them as his disciples. The hagiographer presents this sequence of events as being engineered by God: 'but when God resolved that his place should be settled he first sent three brothers in the flesh'.[27] However, the following story shows that it is not all plain sailing: Euthymius first fails to recognise this divine plan and therefore refuses to accept them. As a consequence a divine intervention is necessary: 'He sees in that night somebody who says to him: "Accept these brothers because God has sent them, and do no longer turn away anybody who wants to be saved!"[28] The next morning Euthymius calls the eldest brother Cosmas and tells him: 'See, I have done what God has told me.'[29]

This elaborate set-up is necessary because there is more involved than a simple transition from a solitary to a communal lifestyle. Euthymius justifies his refusal to accept the brothers not only with his desire for stillness but also with 'their young age and the fact that Gabrielius was a eunuch from his birth'[30] His reaction is not surprising since acceptance of youths and eunuchs went against the monastic traditions of Palestine. This can be seen from an episode in Cyril's *Life* of Sabas: when the young Sabas asks to be admitted to the *Lavra* of Euthymius, he is denied his wish and sent to the coenobium of Theoctistus (Schwartz, 1939, s.91). In this case Euthymius tells the newcomer: 'Child, I do not consider it to be right that you as a youth stay in a *lavra*', and points out the dangers arising for both parties.[31] Cyril then justifies the rejection of the future saint with the commentary that this was an 'ancient law' (Schwartz, 1939, s.91).

Like the admission of John into the community of St Thomas, Euthymius' acceptance of the three brothers thus constituted an exception, which could have had disastrous consequences, and again the dream serves to preclude its use as a precedent. Significantly, Euthymius, too, immediately sets out to limit potential damage: he

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[27]Ὅτε δὲ ηὐδόκησεν ὁ θεὸς οἰκισθῆναι τὸν τόπον αὐτοῦ ἀπέστειλεν ἐν πρώτοις τρεῖς ἀδελφοὺς σαρκικούς (Schwartz, 1939, s. 25).

[28]Καὶ ὁρᾷ τῇ νυκτὶ ἐκείνῃ τινὰ λέγοντα αὐτῷ· δέξαι ἀδελφοὺς τούτους ὅτι ὁ θεὸς ἀπέστειλεν αὐτοὺς καὶ μηκτ' ἀποστρέψῃς τινὰ θέλοντα σωθῆναι (Schwartz, 1939, s. 25).

[29]Ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ καθώς μοι ἐνετείλατο ὁ θεὸς πεποίηκα (Schwartz, 1939, s. 26).

[30]Τὸ νέον αὐτῶν τῆς ἡλικίας καὶ τὸ εὐνοῦχον εἶναι ἀπὸ γεννήσεως τὸν Γαβριήλιον (Schwartz, 1939, s. 25).

[31]Τέκνον οὐ νομίζω δίκαιον εἶναι νεότερόν σε ὄντα εἰς λαύραν μένειν (Schwartz, 1939, s. 91).

enjoins Cosmas not to let his eunuch brother ever come out of his cell 'for it is not right that a female face lives in the *lavra* because of the war of the enemy'.[32] It is possible that Euthymius yielded to the same pressures as the abbot of St Thomas in the *Life* of John bar Aphtonia.[33] Cyril volunteers no information about the background of the three brothers but their later careers in the monastery and in the Palestinian episcopate suggest that they, too, were of high social status.[34]

We can conclude that there is an evident similarity between this episode and the *Life* of John bar Aphtonia. However, there exists one discrepancy: in the *Life* of Euthymius an anonymous figure communicates the will of God. Therefore this story does not help us to understand why the author of the *Life* of John felt the need to interpret the apparition of Thomas within the conceptual framework of impersonation. In order to find an answer we need to turn to narratives that involve apparitions of individual saints. Such a narrative is found in a collection of miracles of the Virgin Mary for the Palestinian monastery of Choziba, which was written by Anthony, the disciple and hagiographer of George of Choziba († 625). In the first of these miracles we hear about a patrician woman from Constantinople who suffers from an incurable disease and makes a pilgrimage to Jerusalem in search of a miraculous cure.[35] When her quest remains unsuccessful she embarks on a tour of the monasteries around the city. At first Choziba is not on her list because she knows that the monks there deny women access to their monastery. Then, however, she has a vision of Mary who tells her that she is to go to Choziba if she wants to be cured. She manages to enter the monastery unnoticed by the monks. When the abbot hears of her presence he runs out into the courtyard. First he intends to have her removed but when he hears about the vision he immediately gives up his resistance. The woman is taken to the vestry of the church where the Virgin heals her in the same night.

The central theme of this narrative is not the healing miracle but the breach of the monastery's rule. The story is introduced as an explanation for this breach: 'Once women did not enter the monastery

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[32]Οὔτε γὰρ δίκαιόν ἐστιν ὄψιν γυναικείαν ἐν λαύρᾳ διάγειν διὰ τὸν πόλεμον τοῦ ἐχθροῦ (Schwartz, 1939, 26).

[33]Significantly, the next applicant whom Euthymius accepts is a relative of the patriarch of Antioch (Schwartz, 1939, s. 26).

[34]About the careers of the brothers cf. Schwartz, 1939, s. 32, 35, 55. Moreover, Chrysippus became a well-known author of *encomia* of saints and Gabrielius could write in Latin, Greek, and Syriac (Schwartz, 1939, s. 56).

[35]The following is a summary of *Miracle* 1 (Houze, 1888, s. 360-362).

of Choziba; and the reason for their entering was such'.[36] This theme recurs in the conversation between the noblewoman and Mary when in response to Mary's question: 'Why have you not come into my house?'[37] the woman points out: 'I hear, lady, that women do not enter there',[38] and then again in the ensuing exchange between the woman and the bearers of her litter,[39] when the latter first reject her order to take her to Choziba with the statement: 'No woman enters there'.[40]

There can be little doubt that here, too, the monks bowed to external pressure. One can easily imagine that desperate for a cure, the patrician woman deliberately chose a time when the monks were in the church in order to gate-crush the monastery. Again the monks are reduced to damage limitation: the woman is taken to the vestry and not to the church proper. Comparison with the other examples for this *topos* shows parallels and discrepancies. In Choziba, too, a vision is the cause for a change of mind. However, the recipient of the vision is not the abbot but an outsider. This difference is crucial because only when the abbot is the dreamer does the community have control over the interpretation of the event. This may well explain why in St Thomas and the *Lavra* of Euthymius the admission of beardless boys remained an exception whereas in Choziba the rule that women should not enter was altogether abolished.

More important for the interpretation of the *Life* of John bar Aphtonia, however, is the fact that the noblewoman has a vision of an individual saint. Can this feature help us to understand why John's hagiographer had recourse to the concept of impersonation? From the narrative it is evident that Mary's power over the monastery is absolute. We hear that once the abbot is informed about the vision, 'he conferred with the clerics and the elders and said: "This is from the lady; we cannot object."[41] At the same time, however, Mary shows herself supremely unconcerned about the regulations of 'her' monastic

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[36]Ποτὲ οὐκ εἰσῄει γυνὴ εἰς τὴν μονὴν τοῦ Χωζιβᾶ, καὶ ἐγένετο τοῦ εἰσιέναι ἀφορμὴ τοιάδε (Houze, 1888, 360).

[37]Θεωρεῖ ἐν ἐκστάσει τὴν ἁγίαν δεσποίνην ἡμῶν τὴν θεοτόκον λέγουσαν αὐτῇ· διατί ... εἰς τὸν οἶκόν μου οὐκ εἰσῆλθες (Houze, 1888, s. 361).

[38]Λέγει ἡ γυνή· ἀκούω δέσποινα ὅτι γυνὴ οὐκ εἰσέρχεται ἐκεῖ (Houze, 1888, s. 361).

[39]Ἄρατέ με ἔφη ἡ γυνὴ ἡ γὰρ δέσποινα τοῦ κόσμου αὐτή με παρεκαλέσατο κατελθεῖν αὐτόθι (Houze, 1888, s. 361).

[40]Οὔτε δὲ γυνὴ εἰσέρχεται ἐκεῖ (Houze, 1888, s. 361).

[41]Τότε ὁ ἡγούμενος συμβουλευσάμενος μετὰ τῶν κληρικῶν καὶ τῶν γερόντων ἔφη· ἀπὸ τῆς δεσποίνης ἐστὶ τοῦτο, ἀντειπεῖν οὐ δυνάμεθα (Houze, 1888, s. 362).

community.[42] When the patrician woman objects that the monastery does not admit females Mary simply answers: 'Come, go down and I shall introduce you and shall also give you healing.'[43] At this point the hagiographer adds the comment: 'All this she did as I believe in order to let everybody know that this holy place is hers and that whatever concerns it is in her power when she wills it and as she wills it.'[44]

How are we to explain Mary's behaviour? I suggest that her role is modelled on that of female founders and protectors of monasteries. Terms like 'lordship' and 'power' have a precise legal meaning: they indicate that Mary is the owner of the monastery (Thomas, 1987, s.79-89). This has an obvious parallel in the numerous cases of pious women who founded monasteries on their estates. A similar parallel exists for Mary's role as the protector of Choziba. In an episode in the *Life* of George of Choziba robbers try to raid the monastery and she prevents them from entering 'through the sound of soldiers' (Houze, 1888, s.123-126). Again one can easily imagine noblewomen using their influence to secure military protection for their foundations. However, such protection could have unwelcome consequences: in one of his letters the seventh-century spiritual author Maximus the Confessor mentions a patrician woman who meddled in the affairs of a convent (Migne, 1868, s.460). It is evident that this provides a counterpart for Mary's overruling of the regulations in her monastery. There can be no doubt that the affinity between Mary's behaviour and that of female protectors of monasteries and convents would have been obvious to contemporary readers. After all, female founders and protectors of monasteries were accorded the same titles of 'lady' and 'mistress' as Mary in the miracle story from Choziba.[45] We can conclude that Mary belongs to the same social stratum as the patrician woman.[46] Indeed, the narrative presents Mary as her

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[42]Mary then actively contributes to the breach of the rule. When the noblewoman and her entourage arrive at the monastery all the fathers are in the church at the evening prayer and the porters are absent. This is explained as an οἰκονομία of Mary.

[43]Ἔφη αὐτῇ ἡ εὐλογημένη· δεῦρο κάτελθε κάγώ σε εἰσάγω καὶ δωροῦμαι σοι καὶ τὴν ἴασιν (Houze, 1888, s. 361).

[44]Τοῦτο δὲ ὅλον πεποίηκεν ὡς οἶμαι ἵνα γνωρίσῃ πᾶσιν ὅτι αὐτῆς ἐστιν ὁ τόπος οὗτος ὁ ἅγιος καὶ ἐν τῇ ἐξουσίᾳ αὐτῆς ἐστιν ὅτε θέλει καὶ ὡς θέλει τὰ περὶ αὐτοῦ (Houze, 1888, s. 361).

[45]Cf. Maximus Confessor, *Letter* 12, *PG*, 91, 460B1-2: γράμμα ... παρὰ τῆς κοινῆς ἡμῶν δεσποίνης τῆς θεοφυλάκτου πατρικίας ... κεχαραγμένον πρὸς τόν ... ἔπαρχον, and 460C4-5: τὸ περὶ τὴν δέσποιναν ἡμῶν τὴν πανεύφημον πατρικίαν.

[46]It is significant that when Mary wants to remind the abbot that Choziba is a place for the poor and not for the rich, she omes to the monastery not in her customary appearance but 'in the guise of a poor woman': γυνή τις ὡς πτωχὴ τῷ εἴδει (Houze, 1888, s. 124).

'doppelganger'. Comparison of her conversation with Mary and her following exchange with the bearers of her litter shows that in the second case the woman assumes the same position of authority that before had been accorded to the Virgin. The result is a case of divided loyalties: Mary does a favour to a social equal and overrules the concerns of her dependents. Thus one can argue that the hagiographer of John bar Aphtonia employed the concept of impersonation in order to avoid such projection of mundane social interaction to the plane of the supernatural and to exclude a scenario in which Thomas could have sided with the noblewoman Aphtonia against the members of the monastic community that bore his name.

However, this need not be the only reason for the appearance of divine impersonation in John' *Vita*. We have seen that in his *Life* of Euthymius Cyril of Scythopolis let an anonymous supernatural agent speak to the saint. This raises the question: why did John's hagiographer not simply suppress the involvement of the saint? One possible answer is that he based his account on oral traditions and therefore could not simply omit Thomas from his narrative. However, one must also consider the possibility that he deliberately employed the concept of impersonation because it allowed him to express his own convictions. In order to identify such an agenda it is necessary to look at the text as a whole. I have already pointed out that the hagiographer puts strong stress on the monks' coenobitic life-style. Indeed, the monastic environment that is presented in the *Life* is exceptional in its strictly coenobitic ethos and its devotion to the concept of moderation.[47] There is no room for eccentricity: even as an abbot John continues to follow the same precepts and laws as his flock (Nau, 1902, s.129-132). When he is called 'rule, mirror and unwritten law' for all monks this does not mean that he acts according to his own whim but rather that he embodies the law of God.[48] This means that God is the ultimate source of the rule and John as abbot simply transmits it to the community.[49] As a consequence the abbot's personality disappears behind his function as the mouthpiece of God.

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[47]'Jean … se faisait grandement admirer par … la prudence de sa conduite qui l'élongait à la fois d'une trop grande promptitude et de l'indolence' (Nau, 1902, s. 126). Significantly, when John is called the emulator of Elijah and John the Baptist there is no reference to their life-style but only to their outspokenness before kings (Nau, 1902, s. 130).

[48]'Il était pour tous les moines une règle et un miroir, une loi non écrite et un exemple vivant; on recevait ses arrêts comme des révélations de Dieu' (Nau, 1902, s. 130).

[49]'Il était ainsi un intermédiaire entre Dieu et nous: il prenait des ordres près de Dieu pour nous les transmettre' (Nau, 1902, s. 129).

The affinity of this configuration with the concept of impersonation is evident and thus may have facilitated the author's replacement of Thomas with 'God in the guise of the apostle'.

So far I have concentrated on the vertical aspect of social interaction. However, there may also have been a horizontal dimension. One of the most striking features of the text is a long deliberation of John's mother Aphtonia before she chooses St Thomas as the future home for her son. There can be no doubt that the hagiographer uses this deliberation as a device to present his monastic ideal. He lets Aphtonia juxtapose coenobia with more loosely organised communities and then points out that her choice was determined by the fact that in all other settings monks act 'according to their own will' whereas the members of coenobitic monasteries 'embrace the apostolic life-style with different… bodies but showing only one will'[50] This 'one will' is, of course, that of God. This is made explicit in the narrative of John's election as abbot: here the unanimity of the monks is not presented as merely human but as caused by divine inspiration (Nau, 1902, s.128-129). Thus one can argue that the ideal of unanimity provides a further explanation for the appearance of God as the impersonator of a saint: use of this concept allowed the hagiographer to project the coenobitic ideal of one will in different bodies to the community of saints in heaven.[51]

This conclusion can be corroborated when we turn to the negative foil of non-coenobitic monks who follow their own will. Late Antique holy men often chose idiosyncratic life-styles and did not subject themselves to the rules they gave to the communities that gathered around them. Moreover, these men were considered to be powerful patrons who could pit their will against that of God and negotiate reversals of his decisions in favour of their clients. From there it was only one step to regard them as acting and using their power independently from God. Once God's will as the unifying bond

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[50]'Comme elle s'informait avec soin de la vie des moines, c'est-à-dire des cénobites et de ceux qui vivent en communauté, elle apprit qui les uns se conduisent d'après leur propre volonté et selon ce qui leur plaît de manière particulière: ils one une perfection qui n'est pas éprouvée et contrôlée et ne sont bons que pour eux seuls tandis que les autre qui choisissent la vie commune embrassent la vie apostolique avec des statures et des corps divers mais ne montrent qu'une volonté, s'aident les uns les autres, s'entraînent mutuellement vers la perfection et se fortifient' (Nau, 1902, s. 123-124).

[51]The link is even more obvious when we further consider that Thomas is an apostle and that in Aphtonia's deliberation unanimity is characterised as the 'apostolic life-style'. The Biblical model is *Acts* 4:32, a central passage for the justification of coenobitic monasticism.

was no longer perceived, this could have grave consequences since then nothing prevented holy men from opposing each other. A reflection of this crude belief is found in the *Questions and Answers* where Anastasius of Sinai is asked whether someone who had been cursed by one holy man could go to another to have the punishment taken away.[52]

This model of social interaction was also projected onto the supernatural level. In a monastic context we have already come across an example in the discussion of the miracle of Mary in Choziba. A survey of the hagiographical texts from Choziba shows that there is hardly any reference to a higher authority on which Mary depends.[53] It may be no coincidence that Choziba was a relatively loosely structured community that allowed for the coexistence of communal and eremitic life-styles.[54] The interventions of Mary in the affairs of Choziba show a clear affinity with the miracles of wonderworking saints who were also regarded as independent actors with total control over their clients. Compared with these settings the community of St Thomas was indeed a different world.

So far I have argued that the appearance of the concept of impersonation in the *Life* of John bar Aphtonia must be seen against the backdrop of the coenobitic ideal. However, in St Thomas the concept of the 'one will in different bodies' may have had a further dimension. I have already mentioned that the monastery founded by John bar Aphtonia was one of the centres of the Monophysite movement in the sixth century. Thus one can wonder whether the stress on unanimity should not be seen in the context of contemporary debates about the incarnation.[55] As is well known Monophysite theologians such as Severus of Antioch maintained that in Christ there exists only one will: that of the divine Word (Grillmeier, 1989, s.112-113). Some authors went even further and extended this model to the field of soteriology. Jacob of Sarug, for example, states in his *Homily*

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[52] Athanasius answers that saints cannot be opposed to each other, cf. Anastasius of Sinai, *Questions and Answers*: πλὴν οὐδὲ οἱ ἅγιοι ἐναντιοῦνται (Migne, 1867, s. 648).

[53] Only at the very end of the miracles we find Mary and George interceding with God as a higher authority on behalf of the monks (Houze, 1888, s. 370).

[54] Choziba was a coenobium but the example of George of Choziba shows that the community made provisions for those who wanted to live as hermits.

[55] The hagiographer creates a parallel between the division of the two natures of Christ and the discord brought about by those who adhere to this teaching (Nau, 1902, s. 127-128). In the same passage he also speaks about the division of the Trinity, which introduces the corresponding horizontal level. It is possible that this theme is a reflection of the Tritheite controversy.

on the Ascension that when Christ gave the apostles the Holy Spirit it 'replaced the soul' (Boulos Sony, 1984/5, s.161-171; Chesnut, 1976, s.120). When the human soul is overwhelmed by the Holy Spirit, God becomes the sole actor whereas the human component is limited to the body. The result of this process is thus strikingly similar to the belief that the disembodied human soul is inactive and a divine force is acting in its stead. Since the belief in a sleep of the souls is characteristic of Nestorianism it could be argued that in the concept of impersonation there is a meeting of extremes (Gavin, 1920, s.103-120; Krüger, 1959, s.193-210).

To conclude: In this article I have drawn attention to the *Life* of John bar Aphtonia, which includes one of the earliest examples of divine impersonation. I have shown that the author does not subscribe to the belief that saints are inactive after their death and that most likely he does not even rule out the possibility of apparitions of saints in general. I have argued that the reasons for the use of the concept of impersonation must be sought in the context in which it appears: John's hagiographer uses the dream in which God impersonates a saint in order to legitimise a breach of the monastic rule. Through parallels from contemporary hagiographical texts I have then attempted to create a framework for the interpretation. I have shown that dreams often appear in contexts where the pressure of powerful outsiders forces monks and monasteries to deviate from their traditions and that they serve as face-saving devices. I have then offered an explanation for the recourse to the specific feature of impersonation in the *Life* of John. I have argued that the role of the patron saint of a community was fashioned after lay protectors of monasteries. As a consequence saints belonged to the same social stratum as the laypeople that put pressure on monastic communities and it was possible for these people to appeal to them as social equals. Therefore I have suggested that the hagiographer used the concept of impersonation in order to avoid this problem. I have then attempted to explain why John's hagiographer felt comfortable with using the concept of impersonation. I have argued that the reason must be sought in the social environment of the hagiographer: St Thomas was a strict coenobium where the suppression of the will of the individual was a central part of the ideology. This has resulted in the conclusion that the concept of impersonation could be understood as a projection of this model onto the supernatural realm. John's hagiographer had little interest in presenting dead saints as powerful and independent patrons who personally interfered in the affairs of their clients. It is evident that his position is thus much closer to that of Anastasius of

Sinai than to the authors of miracles collections. The *Life* of John bar Aphtonia thus shows that Late Antique hagiography was not a monolith and that simple juxtaposition between 'enlightened' *Questions and Answers* and 'obscurantist' hagiography is impossible.

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