



NEW SYRIAC VERSION OF THEODORET'S ST. MARON ACCOUNT HAS BEEN DISCOVERED

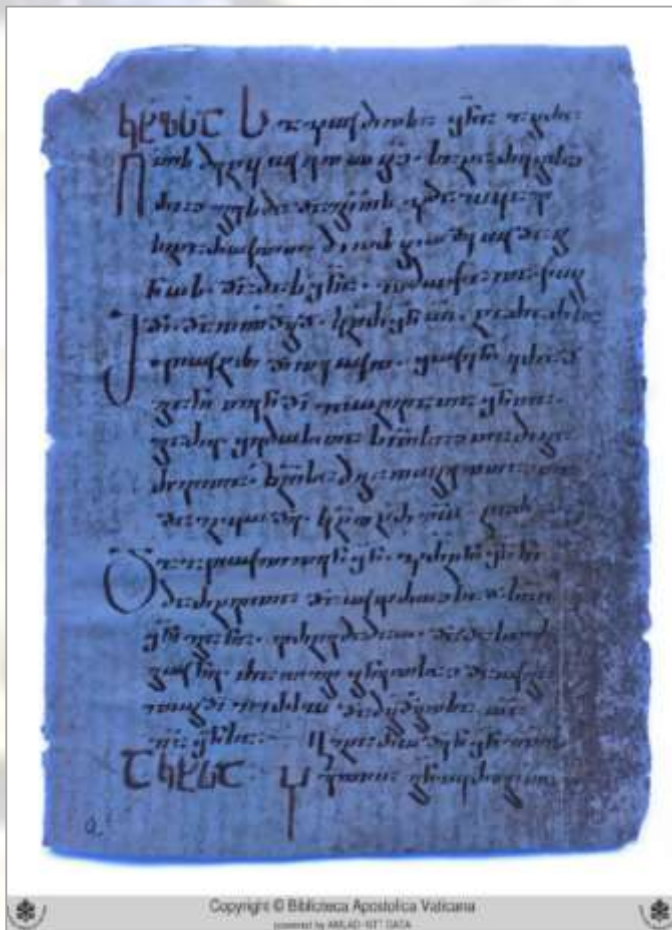
Guita Hourani * Maronite Research Institute * April 2023

According to a recent [article](#),¹ four Syriac documents with undertexts in two² previously unexplored Vatican Library holdings of *membra disjecta* revealed Syriac versions of [Theodoret of Cyrrhus'](#) *Historia Religiosa*,³ including two Syriac portions of Theodoret's life of [Saint Maron](#) (d. 410 AD).

Historia Religiosa is a book written around 440 AD by Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrrhus. The book includes brief biographies of thirty notable ascetics who lived in the Antioch and Cyrrhus area during Theodoret's time. The book is the primary source for Saint Maron's vita as well as an important source for early Syriac asceticism.

[Grigory Kessel](#), the author of the aforementioned article, identified the documents⁴ as palimpsests. Palimpsests are manuscript pages whose original text has been erased for reuse, but the pages still contain traces of their original content. Because writing materials were expensive in the Early Middle Ages (5th to 10th centuries), it was common practice to erase original texts to make way for new ones.

Kessel writes that these manuscripts were derived from other codices of the monastery of St. Catherine on Sinai, and that the undertexts, which are in various languages (see Schema of the three layers in Vat. Iber. 4), were discovered thanks to advanced technologies such as x-ray fluorescence (xrf) imaging with the Synchrotron



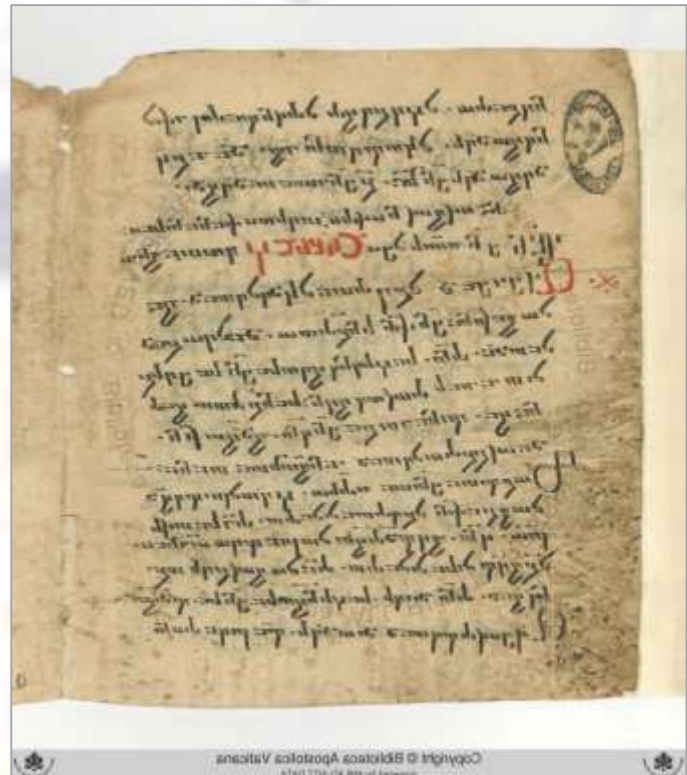
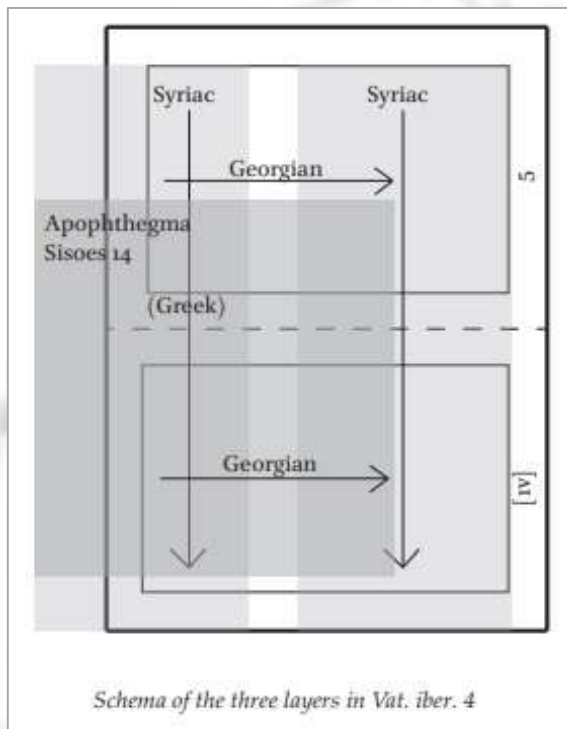
¹ Kessel, G. (2022). *Membra disjecta sinaitica III: Two (Palimpsest) Fragments of Sin. geo. 49 and Their Four Syriac Undertexts*. *The Vatican Library Review*, 1(2), 257-270. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1163/27728641-00102003>.

² (Vat. iber. 4 and Collegeville, MN, Hill Museum & Manuscript Library, Special Collections [= HMML], Ms. Frag. 32). Kessel, G. (2022). *Membra disjecta sinaitica III: Two (Palimpsest) Fragments of Sin. geo. 49 and Their Four Syriac Undertexts*. *The Vatican Library Review*. https://brill.com/view/journals/vlr/1/2/article-p257_7.xml.

³ Ibid.

⁴ The documents are available in their entirety in open access at the following URL: https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.iber.4.

Radiation Lightsource. Kessel discovered, among other things,⁵ accounts of Saint Maron written in Syriac under texts in two fragments.⁶ "While the Greek text of the *Historia Religiosa* is extant," Kessel argued, "the Greek text of the *Historia Religiosa* is extant, one should not dismiss the value of the Syriac version for... there are forty-two manuscript witnesses, the oldest of which comes from the 10th century. Hence the Syriac version must have been produced using a much older Greek exemplar."⁷



Vat.iber.4_0046_fa_0010v_s

Kessel stated in an email exchange that Vat.iber.4_0029_fa_0006r.[02.wl.0000]_s contains nearly half of St. Maron's account. He concluded that recycled manuscript copies were rare and one-of-a-kind witnesses to the texts they once contained, which explains the excitement surrounding this discovery.⁸

⁵ The life of Eusebius of Teleda, the life of Macedonius, and the life of Maris.

⁶ (Vat. iber. 4 and Collegeville, MN, Hill Museum & Manuscript Library, Special Collections [= HMML], Ms. Frag. 32). Kessel, G. (2022). *Membra disiecta sinaitica III: Two (Palimpsest) Fragments of Sin. geo. 49 and Their Four Syriac Undertexts*. The Vatican Library Review. https://brill.com/view/journals/vlr/1/2/article-p257_7.xml.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.