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A TRIAL FOR SORCERY ON AUGUST 22, A.D. 449

By ERNEST HONIGMANN

WHEN, 1500 years ago, the Vandals invaded Africa and conquered Carthage (A.D. 439), many bishops of the African provinces, terrified at the brutality of the ruthless conquerors, fled to different parts of the Eastern Roman Empire, which a century later was destined to liberate these provinces from their oppressors. The names of some of these refugee bishops appear in the lists of those who took part in the councils of this time. One of these refugees, CYPRIANUS, appealed to the famous Church historian THEODORET of Cyrrus in Syria, who then wrote a letter recommending him to his colleague SOPHRONIUS of Constantina, beginning with the words: "I know how willingly and generously your right hand gives (Καὶ τὸ φιλόδωρον καὶ τὸ μεγαλόδωρον τῆς σῆς δεξιᾶς ἐπιστάμενος)," and asking aid for his impoverished colleague who had formerly been charitable himself, to enable him to reach "other harbors" equipped with further letters of recommendation.¹

SOPHRONIUS was the bishop of the Osroënian city called Constantina in Greek, Tellā or Tellā de-Mawzelath in Syriac, and Tall Mawzan in Arab; to-day its site is simply called Viranşehir, the Turkish for "ruined city."² It is this SOPHRONIUS of Tellā who, at the second session of the so-called "Robber-Council" or *Latrocinium* of Ephesus, on August 22, A.D. 449, was accused of practising the magical arts of phialomancy, tyromancy, oömancy, and other kinds of divination.

The document enumerating the accusations against SOPHRONIUS exists only in a Syriac translation of the lost Greek minutes of this session. Thus no attention has been paid to it by those scholars who collect and study the texts concerning ancient magic and divination, though it was translated long ago into German, French, and English.³

¹ THEODORETUS, *Epist.* 53, ap. MIGNE, *Patrol. Graec.*, vol. LXXXIII, col. 1228^D-1229^A.

² Cf. FRAENKEL, *R. E.*, I, col. 2571, s.v. *Antoninopolis*; IV, col. 953, s.v. *Constantia* No. 4. J. MARKWART, *Südarmenien und die Tigrisquellen* (Vienna 1930), p. 427 f.

³ GEORG HOFFMANN, *Verhandlungen der Kirchenversammlung zu Ephesus am 22. August 449*, Universitäts-Festschrift (Kiel 1873); reprinted together with the Syriac text by JOHANNES FLEMMING, *Akten der Ephesinischen Synode vom Jahre 449 syrisch mit Georg Hoffmanns deutscher Uebersetzung und seinen Anmerkungen hrsg., Abhandlungen d. Kgl. Gesellsch. d. Wissensch. zu Göttin-*

I give below PERRY's English translation of the Syriac original,⁴ with some minor changes and a few notes. Like GEORG HOFFMANN, I add in brackets the numbering of the folios in the Syriac Ms. as well as the Greek words occurring in the Syriac text.

(Fol. 54^r) Documents (ὑπομνήματα) drawn up against Sophron(ius), bishop of the city of Tellā.

John, Presbyter and Prime Notary, said: Simeon, Presbyter, and Eustathius, Deacons of Tellā, present Libels (of Indictment, λίβελλοι) to your Holiness, which I hold in my hand⁵ and will read, if your Great and Blessed Synod will command it.

Juvenal, Bishop of Jerusalem, said: Let them be read and be deposited along with the Documentary Transactions (πράξις of the ὑπομνήματα).

And he (John) read:

To the Holy, God-loving, and Œcumenical Synod which, by the Grace of God, is assembled at Ephesus the Metropolis, from Simeon, Presbyter, and Cyrus and Eustathius, Deacons, and the rest (of the Clergy) of the City of Tellā.

We, having learnt from the Holy Fathers to accept those who honor God and to reject those who blaspheme Him, pray that the Libel (of Indictment, λίβελλος) which we bear, may be accepted, and that the same may be read before your Holy and Œcumenical Synod. Whereas, then, Sophronius, Bishop of our City of Tellā, who is son of the paternal uncle of Hībā (Ibas), Bishop of Edessa,⁶ has put aside the fair name (fol. 54^v)

gen., phil.-hist. Kl., N. F. Band XV (Berlin 1917), No. 1, p. 80. 82. 84 (Syriac text); p. 81. 83. 85 (German transl.). L'Abbé [JEAN PIERRE PAULIN] MARTIN, *Actes du Brigandage d'Éphèse*, Amiens 1874, p. 89-94 (extrait de la *Revue des sciences ecclésiastiques*). *The Second Synod of Ephesus; together with certain extracts relating to it; from Syriac MSS preserved in the British Museum, and now first edited* by the Rev. S[AMUEL] G[IDEON] F[REDERIC] PERRY, M.A., Vicar of Tottington, in the Diocese of Manchester. Syriac text (Dartford, Kent 1877); English version (ibid. 1881), p. 189-199.

⁴ British Museum, cod. Syr. 905 (Add. 14. 530), fol. 54^r-57^r. Cf. WILLIAM WRIGHT, *Catalogue of the Syr. Mss. in the Brit. Museum*, II, p. 1027-1030.

⁵ Translation of the Greek μετὰ χειρῶν ἡμῶν ἐστὶ: *Acta Conciliorum Œcumenicorum*, ed. EDUARD SCHWARTZ, t. II, vol. I, pars I, p. 83, 20 (*Acta Chalced.*, I, 85) or ἐξω μετὰ χειρῶν *ibid.*, pars III, p. 70 [429], 1. 21. 33 (*Acta Chalced.* XV, 16. 30. 36).

⁶ *Dictionary of Christian Biography (DCB)*, ed. W. SMITH and H. WACE, III (1882) p. 192-196. EDUARD SCHWARTZ, *Prosopographia et topographia Actorum Chal-*

of Priest, beloved of God, and whereas he ought to have persevered night and day in prayer, with the view to obtain pardon not only for his own personal sins but also for those of the lay people (λαός) — none of these things has been thought of doing; but on the contrary, he has been participating in the Daemons' Table,⁷ in the forbidden Calculations (of Astrology), and in the motion and aberration of the Stars,⁸ and in Divination (μαντική) and in the vaticinate Art of the Pagans. Not being satisfied with the miserable Doctrine of Nestorius⁹ which he learnt from his relative Hībā, he has in addition thrown himself into all these miserable occupations. We, therefore, pray of your Piety to deign to listen to the few words we wish to say, in all humility, relative to the conduct of Sophronius.

Once upon a time as he was travelling, he happened to lose a considerable amount of gold; and when his suspicion rested on certain persons and he had made them take the oath upon the Evangelists,¹⁰ — not satisfied with this — he, further, testing them by the ordeal of bread and cheese¹¹ like the heathen, compelled them to eat. And when he still did not find (the money), he prepared himself (and used) a divining Cup¹² affirming that "the money is to be found with such and such a person, whose name is so and so, and who is clothed in such and such way." (Fol. 55^r.) And many times the

cedonensium et Encycliorum (Berolini et Lipsiae 1938), *Acta Conc. Oec.*, t. II, vol. VI, p. 32, s. v. "Ιβας. DANIEL of Carrhae, another accused bishop of Osrhoëne, was also a nephew of IBAS.

⁷ I Cor. X. 21: τραπέζης δαιμονίων.

⁸ i.e. Astrology.

⁹ The chief purpose of this synod was the suppression of all "Nestorians." The assertion that SOPHRONIUS was Nestorian was the only one that mattered in the opinion of the assembly, but there is no evidence justifying it.

¹⁰ Christendom was often considered as compatible with magical divination. Cf. S. JEROME, *Vita Hilarionis*, chap. 20, MIGNE, *Patrol. Lat.*, XXIII, col. 36^D–38^A. ARMAND DELATTE, *La catoptromancie grecque et ses dérivés, Bibliothèque de la Faculté de philosophie et lettres de l'Université de Liège*, fasc. XLVIII (Liège-Paris 1932), p. 178–180 (trinity). L.-F. ALFRED MAURY, *La magie et l'astrologie dans l'antiquité et au moyen âge* (Paris 1877), p. 438.

¹¹ Τυρομαντεία (HESYCHIUS, s.v. AELIAN, VIII, 5. ARTEMIDORUS, *Onirocrit.*, II, 69). A. BOUCHÉ-LECLERCO, *Histoire de la divination dans l'antiquité*, I (Paris 1879), p. 183. THEODOR HOPFNER, *Griechisch-ägyptischer Offenbarungszauber*, II (*Studien zur Palaeographie und Papyruskunde*, XXIII, Leipzig 1924), p. 148, § 326 (cf. *ibid.*, I, *Studien* . . . , XXI, Leipzig 1921, p. 135, § 531).

¹² The φιαλομαντεία or divination by gazing into a bowl (cf. Papyr. Mag. Paris, I, 3209. 3243, ed. WESSELY, *Denkschr. d. Wiener Akad.*, XXXVI, 2 [Wien 1888], quoted in LIDDELL-SCOTT-SMITH, *Diction.*, 2nd edit., II [Oxford 1940], p. 1931) was a kind of lecanomancy (λεκανομαντεία). Cf. BOEHM, *R. E.*, IX (1914), col. 79–86, s.v. *Hydromanteia*. GANZSYNIEC, *R. E.*, XII (1925), col. 1879–1889, s.v. *Λεκανομαντεία*. WILLIAM REGINALD HALLIDAY, *Greek Divination* (London 1913), p. 145–162, chap. VIII. THEOD. HOPFNER, *loc. cit.*, II, pp. 114–133, § 228.

Daemons, wishing to confirm him in the imposture, pointed out the thief,¹³ not because they wanted to convict him (the thief), but because they were eager to plunge (overwhelm) the Bishop into perdition.

On another occasion, too, he was guilty of this same thing, and had recourse to the Divining-cup (phial-Divination, φιαλομαντεία), as we learnt from Simeon, who used to act as Server to him at the Bishop's House (ἐπισκοπέιον): for, he once took this man's son¹⁴ and introduced him quite alone into his bed-chamber (κοιτών), with one Abraham, Deacon, a relative of his, together; and, having placed a table in the middle, they put under the table Incense,¹⁵ destined for the Daemons, but, upon the table, a phial (dish, φιάλιον), in which were oil and water,¹⁶ and he placed the lad, in a state of nudity,¹⁷ at the side of the table; and the whole was covered with clean linen.¹⁸ Then, the Deacon began intoning words¹⁹ which the Bishop had formulated for him from his wicked divining-art. Then they questioned the lad,²⁰ saying to him: "What do you see in the Phial?" and he said, "I see flames (sparks) of fire²¹ going upwards out of it"; and again, after a little while, he questioned him, saying: "What do you see yet?" and he said, "I see a man sitting on a throne of gold, and clad in purple, and a crown upon his head." They then dug near (behind) the door and made there a deep hole (well),²² which they filled with oil (fol. 55^v) and water,

¹³ Cf. Pap. Anast. 176: τὸν κλέπτην ἐμφανῆ ποιῆσαι (GANZSYNIEC, *l. c.*, col. 1887, 46).

¹⁴ Boys as mediums in lecanomancy: HALLIDAY, p. 160–162. GANZSYNIEC, col. 1882, 15 f. (divinatio per puerum). HOPFNER, *Offenbarungszauber*, I, p. 236, § 846; the same, *Die Kindermedien in den griechisch-ägyptischen Zauber-papyri*, *Recueil Kondakov*, (Prag 1926), p. 65–76. A. DELATTE, *Anecdota Atheniensia*, I (Liège 1927), table alphab., s.v. παιδίων.

¹⁵ Cf. BOEHM, *R. E.*, IX, col. 83, 7.

¹⁶ HALLIDAY, *loc. cit.*, p. 147. SAMUEL DAICHES, *Babylonian Oil Magic in the Talmud and in the later Jewish Literature* (London 1913), p. 39–41 (*Jewes' College London*, Publication No. V). LYNN THORNDIKE, *A History of magic and experimental science*, I, General Index, p. 801, s.v. *Oil*. HOPFNER, *Offenbarungszauber*, II, p. 115, § 231 f. DELATTE, *La catoptromancie*, p. 208, Index alphab., s.v. *huile*.

¹⁷ FRIEDR. PFISTER, *R. E.*, XVI (1935), col. 1546, s.v. *Nacktheit (in Religion und Magie)*. HOPFNER, *ibid.*, XIV (1928), col. 360 f., s.v. *Mageia (Reinheit)*.

¹⁸ Cf. BOEHM, *R. E.*, IX, col. 83, 44. IBN KHALDUN, *Proleg.*, p. 221 f., transl. by M. G. DE SLANE (Paris 1862–8): "un rideau s'interpose entre lui [le devin] et le miroir." MAURY, *loc. cit.*, p. 435.

¹⁹ The whispering of charms: MAURY, p. 180 (carmina diabolica). BOEHM, *R. E.*, IX, col. 82 (*Zauberformeln*).

²⁰ "HIPPOLYTUS tells how the magicians pretend that the spirits give response through a medium to questions" (ἐρωτήσεις): THORNDIKE, *l. c.*, I, p. 467.

²¹ Ps.-IAMBLL., *De myst. Aeg.*, III, 14, p. 132, 7 ff. ed. PARTHEY. BOEHM, *R. E.*, IX, col. 82, 43. HOPFNER, *loc. cit.*, II, p. 122, § 246; p. 125, § 256.

²² Divination at wells: HALLIDAY, p. 151–153. It was said that the star of the Magi could be seen in the well of

and they made the lad stand there, and said to him: "What do you see in the hole (well)?" and he said, "I see Ḥabbīb, the Bishop's son, proceeding on the road" (for, he was on a journey to Constantinople); "and I see him," the lad continued to say, "seated on a black mare-mule that is blindfolded; and behind him two men on foot." Further still, they brought an egg,²³ and, when they had opened it, they threw away what was the white of the egg, and left the yolk of it; and they said to the lad: "What do you perceive in the shell of the egg?" and he said, "I perceive Ḥabbīb proceeding on the road,²⁴ on horse-back, and he has put a collar round his neck,²⁵ and before him are going two men." And on the day after, the Bishop's son arrived from Constantinople, just as his father had divined.

This the lad confessed on oath upon the Evangelists, along with his Father and Mother, in the presence of witnesses, who affirmed that the circumstance took place exactly as it was visioned to the lad. Moreover, the lad went on to say: "For eight months, I used to be walking, (when) seven men, dressed in white, constantly went in front of me." And in the lapse of these eight months the lad was out of his mind, having been driven mad (lost his reason); and it was with difficulty that, after having brought him into holy places and anointed him with consecrated oil, they succeeded in curing his insanity.

Now, what about these Astrological (ἀστρολόγος) writings of his (Sophronius)? There are those, too, who wrote them; the very scribes, who copied them, are at Tellā (fol. 56^r); there is Maras, the Sub-Deacon (ὑποδιάκονος), and there are Aedesia and Stratonice, Deaconesses of the Church; there is Peter, the Chief Physician (ἀρχιατρός) of the City; lastly, there is Uranius, Deacon of the same, who confessed to have read them²⁶ when he went to the Episcopal Palace (ἐπισκοπέιον) for the purpose of getting a ticket of Alms (πιττάκιον) signed, and there saw the good²⁷

Bishop carrying and inspecting²⁸ the brass-sphere (σφαῖρα) destined for his criminal incantations (divination); and, on coming out, he told his colleagues all he had seen. Not satisfied with giving himself over to these wicked practices, his son Ḥabbīb introduced a Jew, Hesychius, and bid him step up to the Bishop's House and ate with him Jewish food²⁹ in his Father's absence; and in the Week of Pentecost (πεντηκοστή), when we ourselves fast, he was feasting with the Jew, at the Bishop's House (ἐπισκοπέιον); and for about ten hours, this man continued feasting with the Jew, up to the time when he took him (the Jew) into the Church of the Apostles, whilst the Service was being held. The City and the Clergy, shocked by this conduct, expelled both the Jew and Ḥabbīb, who sought refuge in the Praetorium (πραιτώριον) of the Commandant (Duke, δούξ) Florus.³⁰ The impious and pagan Florus, becoming irritated, rushed upon the City, where (his people) murdered a great number of men and boys and wounded more than a hundred, (fol. 56^v) whilst those who, in despair, had fled to the Holy Altar,³¹ there, and with the arrows remaining unextracted from their bodies, had their blood shed before the Altar, and many of them died clasping the Altar.

We have, then, prayed this of your Holy Synod: to avenge us of this pestilent and murderous man, since all the Lay-people, and the company (τάγμα) of the Monks have taken oath, declaring, "We will not for the future receive this man any more, or hold communication with him, or have any intercourse with him at all"; because they have seen that any connection (relation) with him is dangerous. Already the Masters of the World have taken cognizance (of our complaints), and have ordered that they be reserved, until your Holy

²⁸ Sphere: DELATTE, p. 41 ("un globe de verre ou de cristal"). Cf. the "crystal-gazing" of the later Middle Ages: HALLIDAY, p. 150 f. DELATTE, p. 115.

²⁹ Cf. the following canons of the council of Laodicea: (No. 37) "No one shall accept festal presents from Jews and heretics, or keep the festivals with them." (No. 38) "No one shall accept unleavened bread from the Jews, or take part in their profanity"; a similar canon figures among the so-called Apostolic Canons (Canon 70; HEFELE, *A History of the Christian Councils*, Eng. trans., I [Edinburgh 1871], p. 485. II [1876], p. 318).

³⁰ He was not *Dux Mesopotamiae* (G. HOFFMANN, *ad locum*), but *Dux Osrhoenae*. Cf. AMMIAN. MARC. XXIV. 1. 2: SECUNDINUS dux Osrhoenae (363 A.D.); *Codex Theodosianus*, XVI, 10, 8: Palladio duci Osdroenae (Novemb. 30, 382 A.D.). *Notitia dignitatum*, oriens, I, 46. XXXV. OTTO SEECK, *Regesten der Kaiser und Päpste für die Jahre 311-476 n. Chr.* (Stuttgart 1919) p. 261.

³¹ FRANZ CUMONT, *Études Syriennes* (Paris 1917), p. 330 f. MARTROYE, *L'asile et la législation impériale du IV^e au VI^e siècle*, *Mémoires de la société nationale des antiquaires de France*, LXXV (1918), p. 158f. H. LECLERCQ, *Dictionnaire d'Arch. et de Liturg.*, IV (Paris 1921), col. 1549-1565, s.v. *Droit d'asile*. LOUIS JALABERT and RENÉ MOUTERDE, *Inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie*, I (Paris 1929), p. 97, No. 160 (*Bibliothèque archéol. et historique*, t. XII).

Bethlehem (GREG. TURON., *Glor. Mart.* 1. EPIPHAN. monach., *Enarrat.*, MIGNE, *Patr. Graec.*, CXX, col. 264^B. GANSZYNIÉC, *R. E.*, XII, col. 1882, 1).

²³ Ὠμαντέλα: DELATTE, *La catoptromancie*, p. 178-180; ψασκοπία: HOPFNER, *l. c.*, II, p. 148, § 324. LIDDELL-SCOTT, II, p. 2035. TH. HOPFNER, *Ooskopia und Ooman-teia*, *R. E.*, XVIII (1939), col. 538 f. F. J. DOELGER, *Das Ei im Heilzauber nach einer Predigt des hl. Augustinus*, in *Antike und Christentum*, VI (1940), p. 57-60 (both articles are quoted in *Byz. Ztschr.*, XL [1940], p. 239).

²⁴ The circumstances of a distant relative were often the object of questioning in astrology. Cf. DELATTE, *La catopt.*, p. 168: "... la situation des voyageurs qui rentrent au pays."

²⁵ G. HOFFMANN thinks that the wearing of a collar (Syr. zīrā: p. 82, 8 ed. FLEMMING) points to a Persian custom.

²⁶ According to GEORG HOFFMANN, the phrase "who confessed to have read them" refers to PETER, the Chief Physician of the City.

²⁷ Ironically, cf. ὁ χρηστὸς Διάσκοπος: *Acta Conc. Oec.*, t. II, vol. I, pars I, p. 66, 34.

Synod has effected the Deposition (*καθαίρεσις*) of Hībā and Sophronius.

This is what we learnt when the City, the Clerks and Monks included, was assembled to draw up Documentary Acts (the *πράξις* of the *ὑπομνήματα*) in the presence of the Defender (*ἔγδικος*) of the City. From the persons belonging to the household (of Sophronius) we have our information. Others have heard it besides us. Those Documentary Acts are in the custody of the Defender of the same City. We, therefore, fall at the feet of your Holy Synod, entreating you to have compassion on us, and on our City, and on all the region (*χώρα*) that is scandalized by Sophronius; (fol. 57^r) and to rid our Church of him, which, being filled with the arms and the blood of those who were slain in the very middle of the sanctuary, has been closed for two months.

I, Cyrus, Deacon, present (this Libel) in conjunction with those of my Confraternity.

I, Eustathius, Deacon, present (this) with those of my Confraternity.

* * *

It is very probable that the indictment I have quoted unabridged made an unfavorable and perhaps even painful impression upon the assembly. From its wording it appears that the accusers, members of the clergy in a remote provincial city of the East, also believed in sorcery and demons. Furthermore, the chief witness was a boy who, according to their statement, lost his reason for eight months after having served as medium. This shows, moreover, that SOPHRONIUS was accused of the transgression long after its alleged perpetration, which must have occurred before the end of A.D. 448. The irreverent utterances not only against the bishop and his metropolitan, but also against the *Dux* of Osrhoëne, as well as the hidden menace to the assembly expressed in the remark that "the Masters of the world" were informed of the complaints against SOPHRONIUS, may have irritated the bishops. But of course a downright rejection of the motion preferred by zealous Monophysites would have been unwise; it was, moreover, inadvisable to offend them, for the council needed the support of the numerous monks led by the warlike archimandrite BARSUMAS. In these circumstances the only ex-

pedient was an adjournment of the procedure against SOPHRONIUS, and this was the solution proposed by THALASSIUS of Caesarea in Cappadocia. He suggested that an inquiry should be made by a provincial synod of the Osrhoënian bishops, to be held after the appointment of a new metropolitan of Edessa. This suggestion was approved by the entire synod; but it is significant that, when JUVENAL of Jerusalem declared his consent to THALASSIUS's proposal, he added: "and whoever shall find Nestorians in the province shall eject them, and (so) purify the Church." These words implied that for him only one charge against SOPHRONIUS mattered, i.e., that of professing the doctrine of two natures in Christ; all the other accusations were insignificant. But just of this "Dyophysitism" the accusers had failed to produce any proof, and perhaps Abbé MARTIN reflected the real reaction of the bishops when he asserted that "en réalité, son crime était d'être cousin d'IBAS."³²

Probably the proposed provincial council never took place; for, when two years later the opposite party won the day, SOPHRONIUS still represented the bishopric of Constantina, continuing to hold it at least until A.D. 458.³³ In the minutes of the council of Chalcedon there is no mention of any Monophysitic rival-bishop representing his bishopric, while Edessa was represented there by the two bishops, IBAS (HĪBĀ) and NONNUS.

But, whether SOPHRONIUS was guilty or not, the record of his trial remains an interesting document concerning the various kinds of divination practised throughout the Roman Empire in violation of numerous secular and ecclesiastical laws.

³² MARTIN, *Revue des questions historiques*, 9^e année, t. XVI (Paris 1874), p. 38; idem, *Le Pseudo-Synode connu dans l'histoire sous le nom de Brigandage d'Éphèse* (Paris 1875), p. 184.

³³ Concerning the life of SOPHRONIUS see M. LE QUIEN, *Oriens Christianus*, II (Paris 1740), col. 967. LENAIN DE TILLEMONT, *Mémoires*, XV, p. 579. 886. E. V[ENABLES], *DQB*, IV (London 1887), p. 718. A complete enumeration of all passages of the minutes of the councils of Antioch and Chalcedon in 444 and 451 A.D. and of the *Encyclia* of 458 A.D., where SOPHRONIUS is mentioned, is to be found in Ed. SCHWARTZ's *Prosopographia*, p. 63, s.v. *Σωφρόνιος* No. I.