APPENDIX VII

TEMPLE CONVERSIONS AND THE SURVIVAL OF CULTS IN THE EARLY SIXTH CENTURY

A review of Waddington’s collection brought additional evidence to light that is entirely consistent with the previous discussion about sixth-century temple conversions and the survival of cult in Djebel Hauran and the Ledjä.

The first instance concerns Busr el-Hariri, which lies some 10 km. directly east of Zorava in the Ledjä. The descendants of an otherwise unattested Praetorian Prefect named Maiorinus were quite prominent there in the later fifth and early sixth centuries.¹ A well preserved funerary inscription composed in Epic verse commemorates his career in a small church (Waddington 2474), as do two inscriptions on the “great church” of the site (Waddington 2475, 2476). Of significance is another inscription yet which commemorates the foundation of a church of St. Sergius, as it implies a temple conversion. The date is 517/8 (Waddington 2477):

(Cross) Flavius Chrysaphios built the church of St. Sergius because of the admonition of his brother Elias the rationalis of blessed memory, and of Evangelos the presbyter, who offered him the undesired building that was in this place before, along with the apses and revetting. In consequence, it (or “he”) lies in this place. Under the superintendancy of Elias the archdeacon, of the family of Maiorinus. In the year 412 of the province. In the eleventh year of the indication. (= 1 Sept. 517–21 March 518)

The crucial phrase is “the undesired building that was in this place before” (τὸ πρῶτον ἐνθα ἀπόθητον), an evident euphemism for a pagan temple.² The presbyter apparently gave away a site (προοφεροντος) that had come into the hands of the church in recent years. Flavius Chrysaphios’ deceased brother had enjoined him to build the church “out of admonition” (ἐξ ὑποβολῆς (sic)), a peculiar phrase when one considers that the village or komopolis

² Waddington observes: “Les mots . . . indiquent sans doute que l’église a été bâtie sur l’emplacement d’un temple païen.”
already had two churches. The temple of an unnamed god evidently existed at Busr el-Hariri, but no one had come forward with the funds necessary to demolish or modify the eyesore until Elias seemingly made this dying request. The monies evidently came out of the latter's heritable property.

It is quite possible that the temple was not demolished, for while the inscription affirms that Fl. Chrysaphios built the church (ἐκτισεν τὸν ναόν), it adds that he built it “with apses and revetting” (μετὰ ἀψίδων καὶ πλακώσεως). The work may only have entailed knocking out walls to add the apses for the altar, reliquary, and *diakonikon*, and furnishing the interior suitably with cut marble slabs.

Whatever the case, a temple conversion at this time would have been consistent with events taking place at Zorava, where a temple of Theandrites was demolished to make way for an octagonal *martyrion* in 515. The ecclesiastical structure at Busr el-Hariri was well established by 517/8. The archdeacon Elias was evidently a subordinate of bishop Varus of Zorava or his predecessor. The resident presbyter Evangelos will have celebrated the Christian liturgy in the churches. This Elias will have been as well the heir apparent to the succession of the see of Zorava.

An important and pious Christian family, that of Maiorinus, was on the scene in the later fifth century. Its estates were evidently in Busr el-Hariri. Their influence was perhaps of critical significance for shifting the religious allegiances of the southern Ledjä in the direction of Christianity, and of having a bishop installed at Zorava. They will have formed a close association with John and Theodore, both of them decurions of Zorava, who seem to have converted to Christianity in the first decades of the sixth century. If these arguments be accepted, they provide an example of a secular family taking the initiative in Christianizing a locality, much as Fl. Eusebius was responsible for introducing the new religion to Dar Qita at Djebel Barisha in the Limestone Massif in the Antiochene.

It would not have been surprising if pagans had continued to make sacrifice in the rural temples of Djebel Hauran in the early sixth century to judge from the evidence seen so far. There is plausible corroboration of this, depending on how one restores an inscription from Qasr el-Bir. I have been unable to discover a map reference for the site, but it seems from Waddington’s notes to have lain in the vicinity of ancient Salamanestha on the eastern side of

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3 Supra, Ch. XI, Sect. 3.
4 Supra, Ch. X, Sect. 3.