Quotations from the Works of St. Severus of Antioch in Peter of Callinicus’ *magnum opus* ‘Contra Damianum’

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The purpose of this paper is to identify, enlist, and reproduce (together with an English translation and commentary) the numerous quotations, in their Syriac dressing, from the various seminal works of St. Severus of Antioch, which are contained in Peter of Callinicus’s *magnum opus* ‘Contra Damianum’. But first I shall begin with a brief account of the Tritheist controversy which broke out more than a hundred years after the acrimonious controversy over the Council of Chalcedon had cooled down.1 I will focus mainly on the dispute over the doctrine of the Trinity between Peter of Callinicus and Damian of Alexandria which, in turn, led to the schism between Antioch and Alexandria lasting about 30 years and also precipitated Peter’s authorship of his *magnum opus*.

Everybody, or at least everybody who is interested in reading about the controversy between Peter of Callinicus the ‘miaphysite’ patriarch of Antioch (581–591)2 and Damian (578–605) his counterpart and spiritual superior of Alexandria, will know that they fell out over the doctrine of the Trinity. When the dust had settled on their graves and when churchmen turned their minds to assuaging the bitterness of the rift between fellow-believers, men pronounced the whole quarrel a mere logomachy, a battle of words in which the contestants had been at cross-purposes.3 No doubt these churchmen were in part, at least, right—even if in matters of this kind, ecclesiastical diplomacy, as so often happens, puts *akribeia* to flight and remoulds the past to its own liking. No doubt too as Gregory the Theologian observes (and that for both our contes-

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tants, Peter and Damian, is almost the equal of a divine utterance) ‘men must have something to blaspheme or life would be unliveable’—or, to paraphrase more charitably, a living theology demands adventurous debate, and the adventure runs the perpetual risk of turning into temerarious blasphemy. No doubt, moreover, a calm student of church affairs would have good cause to point to this quarrel as one further symptom of the rickety structure of a miaphysite church which lacked secular authority to moderate its internal doctrinal disagreements. All that would be true, or at least, partly true. Yet it would all, also, be beside the point. Peter and Damian were in dispute about the substance of the faith. That is what they believed and, if we are to understand them, what we must try to believe too. When Peter called Damian a ‘Sabellian’ and Damian retorted by calling Peter a ‘Tritheist’ each meant what he said.

About 586 Peter of Callinicus became involved in a stormy controversy with his patron Damian, Patriarch of Alexandria, over a problem which arose during the course of anti-Tritheist polemics. Damian was accused by Peter of Sabellianism on the grounds that in the course of refuting Tritheism he had taught that the divine hypostases were themselves the characteristic properties of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Thereupon Damian accused his critic of Tritheist sympathies. What follows is a brief word about Peter’s writings. But I will confine myself here to those which contain the seminal quotations from the works of St. Severus of Antioch, viz. his Anti-Tritheist Dossier and Adversus Damianum.

The Anti-Tritheist Dossier

Peter wrote at least three treatises, one of which is his Anti-Tritheist Dossier which also concerns us here and which has survived in only one manuscript, viz. British Library Add. 12155, containing an extensive florilegium, and which was published by Ebied, Van Roey and Wickham. It bears the title: ‘Rebuttal of those who are charged with Sabellianism and who therefore maliciously spread

4 _Oratio_ xxxi, 2.
5 For a detailed discussion of Peter’s writings, see Rifaat Y. Ebied, Albert Van Roey and Lionel R. Wickham, _Petri Callinicensis Patriarchae Antiocheni Tractatus Contra Damianum, i Quae Supersunt Libri Secundi_ [Corpus Christianorum, Series Graeca, 29] (Turnhout: Brepols, 1994), xiv ff.