WHEN DID LEONTIUS, PRESBYTER OF CONSTANTINOPLE, PREACH?

BY

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Introduction.

A homilist whose work until recently had received little attention is Leontius, presbyter of Constantinople. Although we find two of his homilies printed in PG 86,¹ he has scarcely been accorded a mention, except in reference works and in a single article. Aubineau has the honour of being the first among more recent scholars to highlight Leontius’ place in homiletic literature. In 1972 he published in his *Homélies Pascales* two unedited paschal homilies of Leontius, provided with an extensive commentary and preceded by an instructive introduction based on material from the two paschal homilies and the two sermons in PG 86.² Aubineau comes to the conclusion that with Leontius we are indeed dealing with a presbyter of Constantinople, who probably lived in the sixth century, like a number of other writers of the same name. His situating Leontius in the sixth century stems partly from his supposition that in one of his homilies Leontius drew on an Easter Sermon of ps. Chrysostom (Aldama 237), which he dates to the fifth century on grounds of internal evidence and its use by Leontius. He characterises Leontius with the words: “ce pourrait être un compilateur de grand talent”.³ In an article written in collaboration with Pauline Allen I have shown that the relationship between ps. Chrysostom and Leontius is precisely the opposite, namely that it was Leontius who was copied by ps. Chrysostom.⁴ As a result of this conclusion we lose some supporting evidence for the dating of Leontius’ work.

In 1977 M. Sachot published an article concerning the homiletic works of Leontius, in which he attributed twenty-five sermons to our homilist, exclusively on the grounds of stylistic criteria.⁵ Eleven of these are ascribed to Leontius in the manuscripts themselves, while the remainder have been transmitted under the names of John Chrysostom,
Timothy presbyter of Jerusalem, Timothy presbyter of Antioch, Athanasius of Alexandria and Amphilochius of Iconium. Sachot believes that in order to have his sermons included in homiliaria Leontius deliberately gave the name of other authors to works of his own, especially to sermons of which more than one dealt with the same subject. He concludes his article with the words: "Mais, s'il s'agit vraiment d'un faussaire, sommes-nous certains qu'il s'appelait véritablement Léonce, prêtre de Constantinople?" Further investigation will prove to what degree Sachot's position is tenable. To some extent I am personally sceptical about it: to doubt Leontius' very existence seems to me at the present time extremely premature, not least in view of what follows in this article.

In his *Clavis Patrum Graecorum* III 7888-7900, Geerard takes over the suggestions of Sachot, whose article he calls brevis sed gravis. The grounds on which Leontius is listed among the homilists of the seventh century is not made clear. In the course of preparing an edition of Leontius' sermons for the *Series Graeca* of the *Corpus Christianorum*, together with Pauline Allen, I have naturally had to consider if in the absence of external evidence there exist in Leontius' homilies internal indications, which would enable us to propose a more precise date than the sixth or seventh century. A more precise date would furthermore give us a firmer footing in determining the authenticity of the homilies attributed, or later ascribed, to Leontius. I hope to show here that a precise date for Leontius is in fact possible, and at the same time to demonstrate how cautious one must be in dealing with homiletic literature.

*Leontius' homily on the birth of John the Baptist.*

In the manuscripts two homilies on the birth of John the Baptist are attributed to Leontius. One of these (*BHG* 861p; *CPG* III 7908) is also transmitted under the name of Aetius, presbyter of Constantinople, and in an edition of this homily, forthcoming in *Analecta Bollandiana*, I have been able to show that this text has definitely to be accredited to Aetius, and that the sermon itself was preached in the year 453. The second homily has to the present no number in *BHG* and the *Auctuarium*, nor in the *Clavis*. It is transmitted only in two manuscripts, Vallicellianus B.34, ff. 78'-80' and a copy of the same, Vatic. Barb.