Preliminary paper on The Lectionary System in Constantinople according to Severian of Gabala

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0. Introductory remarks

The following is a revised version of a chapter in an unpublished thesis, written in 1973 for the University of Aarhus, The Use of the Bible in the Greek Homilies of Severian of Gabala (in Danish). The paper will have a double purpose:

1. Shed new light on the early lectionary system in Constantinople based on evidence from the homilies of Severian of Gabala and compared with other relevant liturgical sources.

2. Perhaps add some new information concerning the liturgical and chronological order of the homilies of Severian.

The corpus of homilies used in my thesis are those classified by H.D. Altendorf as genuine (almost identical with the list in CPG). I have only consulted later additions to the corpus sporadically, a shortcoming I hope to amend at some point in the future.

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I. Introduction

My hypothesis is that the main structure of the Scripture readings in the Byzantine lectionary system was established in Constantinople already in the year 401, as shown by the homilies of Severian of Gabala.

The readings at the Divine Liturgy on Saturdays and Sundays throughout the year, and on feast days, were only from the New Testament: the first was the Apostle and the second was the Gospel. Readings from the Old Testament were limited to services without Eucharist, that is, vigils, weekday services in Lent, and other preparatory services.

The reform, or possibly the establishment, of the Byzantine lectionary system in the sixth, or maybe eighth century, did not change the main structure of the system already in existence in Constantinople in the fifth century; it only concerned the choice of pericopes and the fixation of specific lections for every day in two yearly cycles.

Some of the lections in the Byzantine lectionary were probably already fixed in Constantinople around the year 401: the Genesis homilies by Severian of Gabala seem to presuppose fixed lections from Genesis at the weekday services in Lent that were almost identical with the lections at Great Vespers in the Greek-Orthodox (Byzantine) system.

It also seems that the Byzantine system, with readings from the Gospel according to St. John beginning at Easter Sunday, was in the main established when Severian of Gabala preached in Constantinople, and that the Epistle in the paschal season was taken from the Acts of the Apostles.

I assume that Severian's homilies were delivered in Constantinople and that, for the most part, they were held the same year (AD 401). My argumentation concerning the main structure of the lectionary system is based on the observation that it is impossible to find lections from both the Old and the New Testament in the same homily.

A.G. Martimort has argued (in 1984), starting with the Armenian lectionary concerning Jerusalem in the fifth century, that John Chrysostom cannot be claimed as a witness to a supposed lectionary system in Constantinople with three lections in every Divine Liturgy: Old Testament, Apostle, Gospel. Severian's homilies, contemporary with John Chrysostom, seem to support Martimort's claim.

This is not supported by direct evidence, but must primarily be based on an argumentation ex silentio, which requires taking into account all relevant evidence in Severian's homilies. I have tried to do so, but the work is not yet finished, and further evidence will perhaps show up in the Armenian homilies (which I am only able to read in translation) and in some of the newly identified Greek homilies. Nevertheless, I have found sufficient references to liturgical readings in the homilies to ensure that the conclusion is relatively certain.

II. Readings from Genesis

Together with other sources, the 67 Genesis homilies by John Chrysostom, held in Antioch in AD 388, testify that already in the fourth century there was a tradition of reading Genesis in Lent, beginning on Monday of the first week of Lent. The conclusion drawn by A. Rahlfs (1915, p.120) was, however, that the preacher was not determined by the lections but, conversely, that the lections were determined by the preacher.

The Genesis homilies by Severian, preached in Constantinople in AD 401, testify to a similar tradition of reading Genesis in Lent, starting on Monday of the first week of Lent. In the first homilies it seems that the preacher is determining the lections, but in the later homilies it becomes evident that there was a fixed series of lections from Genesis, independent of the individual preacher.

In the homily *De cherubim* (CPG 4232, cod.Vat.gr. 559, ff 51v-58v), Severian of Gabala refers to a lection from Genesis about Noah (Gen 6-8), but the homily gives an interpretation of Gen 3,24 about the Cherubim, as a continuation of the homily *De creatione* 6 about Gen 3,1-19. This is clear evidence of a fixed series of lections from Genesis, independent of the preacher. In the same service there must have been yet another lection from the Old Testament: Hosea 10,12.

In *De sacrificiis Caini* (CPG 4208, cod.Vindobonensis theol. gr. 64, ff 98-113) Severian gives an interpretation of Gen 4-6 about Abel and Seth and the Giants, probably a continuation of the interpretation he gave in *De cherubim*. Again he refers to a lection from Genesis which is different from the chapter that he is interpreting. It is not clear from where in Genesis the lection was taken, but I suppose that it was from Gen 7-8.

In *De Noe et de arca* (CPG 4271) the lection from Genesis deals with Noah and the Flood, and the interpretation in the homily is mostly in accordance with the lection. In the beginning of the homily Severian mentions that it is now the middle of Lent, so this homily was most probably held on Monday in the fourth week of Lent. According to the Byzantine typicon from Constantinople (tenth century, ed. J. Mateos), the reading from Genesis at Great Vespers on Monday of the fourth week of Lent is Gen 8,21-9,7, which is about Noah after the Flood. There appears to be a very significant agreement between this homily by Severian of Gabala and the later Byzantine lectionary.

This specific agreement points to a more general agreement between the readings from Genesis mentioned in the homilies by Severian and the series of readings from Genesis at Great Vespers in the Byzantine lectionary:

- a) They both have readings from Genesis during daily services in the late afternoon (Monday to Friday).
- b) The series begins on Monday of the first week of Lent.
- c) The reading from Genesis is combined with a different reading, also from the Old Testament and never from the New Testament. The Byzantine lectionary has a reading from Proverbs here. In Severian's Genesis

homilies there is no reference to readings from the Apostle or the Gospel, only references to two Old Testament Psalms (118,105 and 140,2) and a Prophet (Hos 10,12).

d) The series of readings from Genesis on weekdays was probably interrupted on Saturdays and Sundays, where the readings are taken from the New Testament. Severian's homily *Ad imaginem* may be an exception: in a letter, written to Charles the Great, pope Hadrian I refers to this homily and mentions that it was held on a Saturday.

This agreement, between the Byzantine lectionary and the Genesis homilies by Severian of Gabala, has no parallel in any other known lectionary system.

The lectionary systems that originate in Jerusalem have lections from Genesis in Holy Week (Monday to Thursday). This arrangement is found in the Old Armenian lectionary (ed. Renoux), in the Palestinian Syriac lectionary (ed. Lewis) and in the Old Georgian lectionary (ed. Tarchnischvili), and this arrangement is different from the system in the Genesis homilies by Severian of Gabala.

The family of lectionaries with origin in Jerusalem have only readings from the Old Testament on weekdays in Lent. At this point there is probably a correspondance with Severian's Genesis homilies, but the lectionaries from Jerusalem have no readings from Genesis here (with some exceptions in the Georgian lectionary), and the two oldest do not have daily service, but only on some weekdays (Wednesday and Friday).

In the Nestorian lectionary system there are readings from Genesis, beginning in the first week of Lent. These Genesis readings are found in the first, the fourth (middle) and the seventh week of Lent (Holy Week), and on all Fridays or Saturdays, and on Sundays. Although there are similarities between Severian's Genesis readings, there are also differences .The Nestorian system has Genesis readings on Fridays or Saturdays, and on Sundays, a feature apparently not found in Severian's homilies. The Nestorian system has four readings, two from the Old Testament and two from the New Testament. In the Genesis homilies by Severian I have not found traces of readings from the New Testament.

An old witness to a similar system is found in the early Syriac lectionary (ed. F.C. Burkitt). The series of readings from Genesis in Lent is mainly identical with the later Nestorian lectionary. The early Syriac system has one, or two, more lections from the Old Testament than the Nestorian system, and the actual choice of the remaining lections is different from the Nestorian system. What is said about the relation between Severian's Genesis homilies and the Nestorian system can also be said about the Early Syriac lectionary.

The Genesis homilies by Severian of Gabala thus seem to testify to a series of Genesis readings at the Great Vespers in Lent, established in Constantinople in AD 40l, and it also seems that the main structure of the lectionary system in Lent was the same in AD 401 as in the later Byzantine system. **III. Other readings from the Old Testament (apart from Genesis and Psalms)** Apart from references to liturgical use of the Psalms, I have only found clear references to readings from the Old Testament in two homilies by Severian. They were not connected to readings from the New Testament, and they were read in non-liturgical (non-eucharistic) services.

Thus the homilies by Severian of Gabala seem to testify that the Old Testament was not generally read in the Divine Liturgy, but only in vigils and on weekday services in Lent.

A clear reference to a reading from the Old Testament is found in *De cherubim* (CPG 4232), where Severian mentions a reading from Hosea (Hos 10,12). This homily is part of the Genesis homilies and held in the evening, probably on a weekday in the third week of Lent. A second clear reference to a reading from the Old Testament is found in the homily *In illud: In principio erat Verbum* (Jo 1,1, ed. PG 63,543-550). In this Easter homily Severian mentions a reading from Isaiah (Is 66,8); however, this text was not read at the service, where Severian interprets Jo 1,1-3, but at the Baptism before the Easter service.

Since it is essential for my argumentation, that I do not ignore any reference to readings from the Old Testament in the homilies by Severian, I will comment upon some possible (more or less probable) references to readings from the Old Testament.

In the homily at Pentecost *In pentecosten* (PG 63,933-938) Severian interprets Ex 19. In the same homily he also interprets Acts 2 and 1 Corinthians 12. There is no explicit references to liturgical readings, but this homily may perhaps be an example of an eucharistic service with four readings: Ex 19, Acts 2, 1 Cor 12, Gospel (not mentioned). This might be a significant agreement with the Nestorian lectionary system, and the possibility deserves serious deliberation.

In the homily *In pretiosam crucem* (Savile 5,898-906, CPG 4213) Severian mentions "a prophetic word this day", which could be a reading or a sermon. If it is a reading, this could be Numbers 20,11, which is referred to in the beginning of the homily. In the remaining part of the homily, Severian interprets Matt 11,3 f., which is explicitly mentioned as a liturgical reading. Since there is a Gospel reading, there would doubtless have been been an Apostle as well. This homily could thus be an example of a service with three readings, of which the first was taken from the Old Testament. But I do not think it is probable.

In the homily *In illud: Quomodo scit litteras* (in Jo 7,15, ed. PG 59,643-542) the liturgical Gospel was taken from St. John (Jo 7,15), which determined the topic of the homily. But at the end of the homily Severian gives an interpretation of Judges (Jdc 6,36-40), which perhaps could be a reflection of a liturgical reading from the Old Testament. But I do not think it is probable.

In the Armenian homily *De adventu Domini* (Akinian no. 13, CPG 4246) an interpretation of Zechariah (Za 9,9 f) is given. It could perhaps be a liturgical

reading from the Old Testament, but more probably it is only a reflection of the Gospel (Matt 21,1-11) for Palm Sunday; this text is accessible to me, partly in Latin translation, but for the most part only in the resume by Henning Lehmann.

At the end of the homily at Epiphany *In Dei apparitionem* (PG 65,16-26) Severian interprets Isaiah (Is 35,1-2). This probably reflects a liturgical reading, since it is also found in the Armenian lectionary from Jerusalem as a reading at the vigil before Epiphany, and in the Byzantine lectionary as a reading in connection with the Benediction of Waters on the 5th of January. In the same homily Severian interprets Psalm 79,2-4, which is said to have been sung or read before the homily. This Psalm is also found at the vigil before Epiphany in the Armenian and in the Byzantine lectionary, so probably the homily was held in connection with the vigil, and the reading from Isaiah was consequently not combined with readings from the New Testament.

The last homily in which I have found a possible reading from the Old Testament is *In memoriam* (PG 52,827-836). This is a very important homily in this context, since Severian explicitly talks about "the two readings of the day" (PG 56,827,34-35). The Gospel was John 10,11-30, and the first of the two readings could perhaps be Is 53, 7, but is most probably Acts 8,32, where this verse from Isaiah is quoted. Thus this homily becomes perhaps the clearest, and the only direct witness to an early lectionary system in Constantinople with only two readings at the Eucharistic service: an Apostle and a Gospel.

The Psalms have not been taken into account in the present context, since they have a special status and should not be considered readings from the Old Testament on the same level as readings from the Law or from the Prophets.

Generally speaking, the claim that readings from the Old Testament in the liturgy of Constantinople mostly or exclusively were limited to services without Eucharist (and without readings from the New Testament), seems justified, according to the homilies of Severian of Gabala. The homily *In pentecosten* may be an exception.

IV. Readings from Acts and Epistles

Several explicit references to readings from the Apostle (eight references) can be found in the homilies by Severian of Gabala. They are all, except one, connected with an explicit reference to a reading from the Gospel, but in none of them have I found traces of readings from the Old Testament (with the exception of the liturgical use of the Psalms).

This observation is not an undeniable proof of the existence in 5th-century Constantinople of a lectionary system at eucharistic services with only two readings from the New Testament (Apostle and Gospel), but in my opinion it is a very significant indication.

The eight homilies with explicit reference to an Apostle are the following:

In ascensionem (CPG 4187)	Act 1,1-10	Jo 20,19-29
In memoriam (CPG 4189)	Act 8,32	Jo 10,11-30
In Rm 7,19 (CPG 4203)	Rm 7,9-15	
In filium prodigum (CPG 4200)	2 Cor 11,3	Lc 15,11-32
De paenitentia (CPG 4186)	2 Cor 12,21	Me 2,5 (or Mt-Lc)
In Mt 26,39 (CPG 4215)	Gal 2,9-10	Lc 11,5-9
De serpente (CPG 4196)	Gal 3,1	Ps 65,4 / Mt 20,18
In Ps 95,1 (CPG 4191)	Gal 4,27	Ps 95,1 / Jo 14,6

Sometimes Severian is interpreting a lection one or more days after the service in which it was read, so that some of the pairs (Apostle and Gospel) are not completely contemporary. This concerns *In ascensionem*, where the homily is held two days after the Ascension Day on which Act 1,1-10 was read. In the homily *In filium prodigum* Severian interprets Lc 15,11-32, which was read at a service one or more days earlier. This phenomenon testifies that there was a rather fixed lectionary system in Constantinople around AD 401.

The readings from Acts are combined with readings from St. John and belong in the time between Easter and Pentecost, whereas readings from the Pauline letters mostly are combined with readings from the Synoptics. An exception is the homily *In Psalmum 95*, where the Apostle reading from Gal 4,27 is combined with an Gospel from St. John (14,6). The explanation could be that this homily was held during Lent.

It is tempting to suppose a lectio continua in some of the readings from the Apostle: 2 Cor 11,3 / 2 Cor 12,21 / Gal 2,9-10 / Gal 3,1 / Gal 4,27. But I am not sure that it can be combined with the relative chronology between the homilies.

Besides the explicit references to readings from the Apostle, a few homilies have interpretations that may reflect a liturgical reading from the Apostle.

Rom 9,14-22 is interpreted extensively in the homily *In chananaeam* (PG 59,653-664, CPG 4202), where the Gospel was Matt 15,21-28. This could perhaps be a reflection of a reading from Romans.

Titus 2,11-13 is mentioned in the homily *In psalmum* 96 (PG 55,603-612, CPG 4190) and could perhaps have been the Apostle of the day.

In the homily *In pentecosten* (PG 63,933-938) there is no explicit reference to readings, but implicitly perhaps two Apostolic readings, from Acts 2 and 2 Cor 12, besides a reading from Ex 19.

V. Readings from the Gospels

The homilies of Severian carry several references to readings from the Gospels and most are explicitly marked as liturgical readings.

In seven cases they are combined with a reading from the Apostle. But in no cases are they combined with a reading from the Old Testament (again with the exception of the Psalms). I have found only three possible references to the Old

Testament, and they are so questionable, that it seems justified to exclude them. Many of the references to readings from the Gospels stand alone, without any reference to other readings in the same service.

It seems justified to claim that readings from the Gospels in the lectionary system of Constantinople in the 5th century were only combined with a reading from the Apostle, and not with a reading from the Old Testament.

In some of the homilies there are references to a Gospel reading on the day before, and it seems probable that the homilies with Gospel readings mostly constituted pairs on two consecutive days (Saturday and Sunday). This same lectionary structure is found in the Byzantine lectionary (and partly also in the Old Armenian lectionary).

Further similarities with known lectionary systems would be most significant, if they could be found in homilies, where *B* Severian of Gabala in the same homily mentions both the Apostle and the Gospel for the day. But such similarities I have not succeeded in finding.

Evaluated from internal evidence and chronology, most of the readings from the Gospel of St. John belong in the time between Easter and Pentecost (the same it the case for the readings from Acts).

Probably John 1,1-17 is the Gospel reading for Easter Sunday, as in the later Byzantine lectionary, and some of the other readings from John could perhaps also correspond with the lections in the Byzantine lectionary for the time between Easter and Pentecost.

Concerning the Gospel readings from the Synoptics I have not been able to find any correspondence between Severian's homilies and the Byzantine lectionary, but based on the internal chronology between the homilies, some fragments of the old lectionary of Constantinople may be reconstructed.

The homilies with readings from the Gospels are the following:

De apostolis (arm. CPG 4242)	Mt 10, 2-5	
In crucem (CPG 4213)	Mt 11,3 f	? (Num 20,21
In chananaeam (CPG 4202)	Mt 15,21-28	? (Rm 9,14 -22)
Fragment (ed. Dyoboun. 148-9)	Mt 20,1-16?	
De serpente (CPG 4196)	Mt 20,18 Ps 65,4	/ Gal 3,1
De filiis Zeb. (arm. CPG 4249)	Mt 20,20?	
De adventu Dom. (arm. CPG 4246)	Mt 21,1-11	? (Za 9,9 f)
Contra Ioudaeos (CPG 4207)	Mt 21,18-32	
In qua potestate (CPG 4193)	Mt 21,23-27	
In proditionem (CPG 4205)	Mt 26,17-19?	
De paenitentia (CPG 4186)	Mc 2,5 (or parallel)	2 Cor 12,21
De pace (CPG 4214)	Lc 2,10?	
De legislatore (CPG 4192)	Lc 5,1-11 ?	Ps 96,1
In centurionem (CPG 4230)	Lc 7,1-10	
In Mt 26,39 (CPG 4215)	Lc 11,5-9	Gal 2,9-10
In filium prodigum (CPG 4200)	Lc 15,11-32	2 Cor 11,3

De pascha (arm. CPG 4243)	Jo 1,1-14?	
In Jo 1,1 (CPG 4210)	Jo 1,1-3?	Baptism before
De sigillis (CPG 4209)	Jo 1,14?	
In Jo 7,15 (CPG 4201)	Jo 7,15 ?	(Jdc 6,36-40)
Contra loudaeos (uned.)	Jo 7,37	
In memoriam (CPG 4189)	Jo 10,11-30	Act 8,32
In incarnatione (arm CPG 4240)	Jo 10,32-33	
In proditionem (CPG 4205)	Jo 13,1-15?	
In Ps 95,1 (CPG 4191)	Jo 14,6	Ps 95,1 / Gal 4,27
<i>In ven. trinitatem</i> (arm CPG 4248)	Jo 14,8-17	
In ascensionem	Jo 20,19-29	Act 1,1-10

VI. Index of readings (or topics) in Severian's homilies In biblical order.

Gn 1,1-5	De creatione 1	PG 56,429-438
Gn 1,6	De creatione 2	PG 56,438-447
Gn 1,9-19	De creatione 3	PG 56,447-456
Gn 1,20-26	De creatione 4	PG 56,457-471
Gn 1,26	Ad imaginem	unedited
Gn 1,26 + 2,7-25	De creatione 5	PG 56,471-484
Gn 2,7 + 21-22	Quomodo animam	Savile 5,648-653
Gn 3,1-19	De creatione 6	PG 56,484-500
Gn 3,24 (not lection)	De Cherubim	unedited, CPG 4232
Gn 4-6 (not lection)	De sacrificiis Caini	CPG 4208
Gn 6-8	De Cherubim	unedited, CPG 4232
Gn 8-9	De Noe et de arca	unedited, CPG 4271
Ex 19 (?)	In pentecosten	PG 63, 933-938
Nm 20,11 (?)	In sanctam crucem	Savile 5,898-906
Jdc 6,36-40 (?)	In Jo 7,15	PG 59,643-652
Ps 65,4 (LXX)	De serpente	PG 56,499-516
Ps 79,2-4	In Dei apparitionem	PG 65,19-26
Ps 95,1	In Ps 95,1	PG 55,619-630
Ps 96,1	In Ps 96,1	PG 55,603-612
Ps 96,1	De legislatore	PG 56,397-410
Ps 118,105 (?)	De creatione 3+4	PG 56,447-471
Ps 140,2 (?)	De creatione 3+4	PG 56,447-471
Os 10,12	De Cherubim	unedited, CPG 4232
Za 9,9 (?)	De adventu Domini	Aucher no. 11 / Akin.13
Is 35,1-2 (?)	In Dei apparitionem	PG 65,16-26
Is 53,7 (?)	In memoriam	PG 52,827-836
Is 66,8	Baptism (In Jo 1,1)	PG 63,543-550

Mt 21,18-32Contra loudaeosPG 61,793-802Mt 21,23.27In Mt 21,23PG 56,411-428Mt 26,17-19 (?)In proditionemPG 59,713-720Mc 2,5De paenitentiaPG 49,323-336Lc 2,10 (?)De pacePapadopoulos-Ker.Lc 5,1-11 (?)De legislatorePG 56,397-410Lc 7,1-10In centurionemAubineauLc 11,5-9In Mt 26,39Zellinger-MartinLc 15,11-32In filium prodigumPG 59,627-636Jo 1,1-14 (?)De paschaAucher 5Jo 1,1-3 (?)In Jo 1,1PG 63,543-550Jo 7,15In Jo 7,15PG 59,643-652Jo 7,37Contra ludaeosuneditedJo 10,11-30In memoriamPG 52,827-836	
Jo 13,1-15 (?) In proditionem PG 59,713-720 Jo 14,6 In Ps 95,1 PG 55,619-630 Jo 14,8-17 In venerabilem trin. Akinian 10	
Jo 20,19-29 In ascensionem PG 52,773-792	
Act 1,1-10In ascensionemPG 52,773-792Act 2 (?)In pentecostenPG 63,933-938Act 8,32In memoriamPG 52,827-836Rm 7,9-15In Rm 7,19PG 59,663-6741 Cor 12 (?)In pentecostenPG 63,933-9382 Cor 11,3In filium prodigumPG 59,627-6362 Cor 12,21De paenitentiaPG 49,323-336Gal 2,9-10In Mt 26,39Zellinger-MartinGal 3,1De serpentePG 56,499-516Gal 4,27In Ps 95,1PG 55,619-630Tit 2,11-13 (?)In Ps 96,1PG 55,603-612	

VII: Table of lections from Genesis in the homilies by Severian compared with the Typicon of the Great Church (Constantinople, 10th cent.)

Typicon		Severian, topic	lection
I. Mond. 1. Tuesd. 1. Wedn. 1. Thursd. 1. Frid.	1,1-13 1,14-23 1,24-2,3 2,4-19 2,20-3,20	1,1-5: De creat. l 1,6: De creat. 2 1,9-19: De creat. 3 1,20-26: De creat. 4 2,7 + 21-22: Quomodo ani 1,26: Ad imaginem	mam
2. Mond. 2. Tuesd. 2. Wedn. 2. Thursd. 2. Frid.	3,21-4,7 4,8-15 4,16-26 5,1-24 5,32-6,8	1,26 + 2,7-25: De creat. 5 3,1-19: De creat. 6	
3 . Mond. 3. Tuesd. 3. Wedn. 3. Thursd. 3. Frid.	6,9-22 7,1-5 7,6-9 7,11-8,4 8,4-21	3,24: De Cherubim 4-6: De Cain	6-8: De Cherubim 7-8(?): De Cain
 4. Mond. 4. Tuesd. 4. Wedn. 4. Thursd. 4. Frid. 	8,21-9,7 9,8-17 9,18-10,1 10,32-11,9 12,1-7		8-9: De Noe et de arca
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5. week

6. week

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