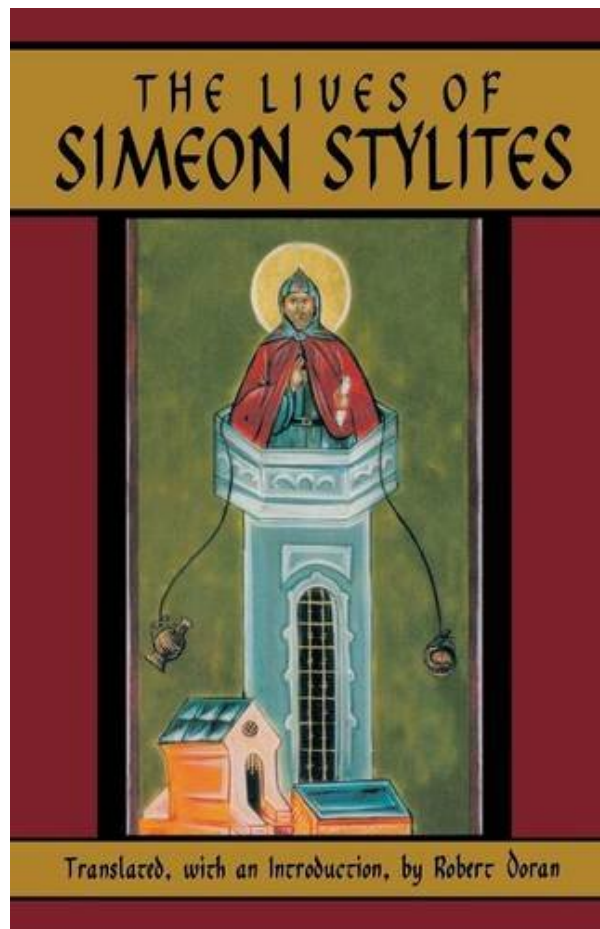


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THE LIVES OF SIMEON STYLITES



Translated, with an Introduction, by Robert Doran

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Text: English (translation)

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About the Author

Robert Doran is Associate Professor of French and Comparative Literature at the University of Rochester, USA. He is the author of "The Theory of the Sublime from Longinus to Kant "and the editor of "The Fiction of Narrative: Essays on History, Literature, and Theory, 1957-2007", by Hayden White, and "Mimesis and Theory, Essays on Literature and Criticism, 1953-2005", by Rene Girard.

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In the flood of christian ascetics who left the world to seek God alone, Simeon chose a novel withdrawal. He mounted a pillar and remained there the rest of his life. To him came supplicants with al kinds of problems: personal anguish, sickness and pain, infertility, sin, and social transgression. Public issues were mediated at his shrine and slaves manumitted. Three views of the Stylite in three lives.

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A very useful text about a truly fascinating saint

By Florentius

This book presents, in English translation, three different lives of the fascinating late Roman saint, Simeon the Stylite. Simeon was the original "pillar saint"--a type of Eastern ascetic who took up his station between heaven and earth on a high pillar and never came down. In Simeon's case, he was atop the pillar for nearly 40 years!

The accounts in this book offer an interesting glimpse into this form of Christian asceticism that, frankly, strikes the modern reader as bizarre. Some of the anecdotes about Simeon recorded in these lives are awful--in the literal sense of that word--meaning that they fill the reader with a sense of awe that a man could actually suffer so much. He was afflicted by horrifying illnesses and his flesh eaten by worms. Because he was always standing, his feet became ulcerated. Yet, through all of this, Simeon trusted in God and never even considered coming down from the pillar even when urged to do so by his disciples. However, when ordered by a bishop to come down as a test of his obedience, Simeon showed himself willing. (He was stopped before he could do so.)

Because Simeon was such a holy man, he was able to work tremendous miracles through the power of God. Simeon's biographers offer a litany of dozens of such miracles--from curing cripples, to bringing rain, to saving Christians in distress hundreds of miles away.

This bulk of this book is made up of a translation of the anonymous Syriac life of St. Simeon which was written right after his death. It also contains two much shorter lives written during the life of the saint or immediately thereafter--that of Theodoret of Cyrhus and of Antonius.

My only problem with the work concerns the introduction which is lengthy, highly theoretical, and dense. For a general reader or someone who wants to read the work as a spiritual exercise, it can be offputting. The author also goes on an extended tangent in the introduction comparing the ascetic practice of Simeon with that of the so-called "phallus climbers" who existed in Syria several hundred years before Simeon's day. The author concludes that Simeon almost certainly had never heard of this pagan practice. So the question is, why discuss it at all, then, beyond a passing mention?

Overall, however, this book is good and useful for comparing the Lives of St. Simeon on a scholarly level and putting them all together in one package. If you're looking for a life of St. Simeon Stylites to read for devotional purposes, however, I suggest *The Life of Saint Simeon Stylites: A Translation of the Syriac Text in Bedjan's Acta Martyrum Et Sanctorum*. Though an older translation, this work has the virtue of presenting in English the most complete recension of the Syriac Life.

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Five Stars

By Mark Lemar

Thankful to find this rare book.

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