

# *On Cana of Galilee:* A Sermon by the Coptic Patriarch Benjamin I

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Benjamin I, 38th Patriarch of Alexandria (622-661 AD), is one of the most prominent figures in Coptic history. His tenure withstood one of Egypt's most turbulent ages: he witnessed the Persian occupation, ten years of Chalcedonian persecution, and the early years of the Arab Conquest. But despite his importance and long tenure, precious little is known about him. Most biographical sketches are primarily based upon the biography included in the *History of the Patriarchs*, and only fragments of his writings have survived. The major exception to this rule is his sermon *On Cana of Galilee*.<sup>1</sup> In the words of C. Detlef G. Müller, the sermon is "one of the best examples of Coptic homiletics that we possess;" it is indeed "a powerful work."<sup>2</sup>

In addition to its literary merit, the sermon is crucial in gaining an understanding of the patriarch. Through it, one can discern the character of the man described in the *History of the Patriarchs*. It is possible to see Benjamin as a lucid exegete,<sup>3</sup> a patriarch who is sought after for his authority,<sup>4</sup> a reformer who openly admonishes his clergy,<sup>5</sup> and a humble monk, who while Patriarch of Alexandria humbly asks an anchorite for "a word" as if he were a novice.<sup>6</sup> The sermon also provides much information that is of historical, social, and theological interest.

## *Life of the Patriarch*

Benjamin was born around AD 590 in Barshut, a region in the western Delta, from two "very rich parents." At the age of thirty he entered the monastery of Canopus and became a monk under the spiritual guidance of a tested elder named Theonas.<sup>7</sup> As a monk, Benjamin was especially noted for his asceticism and fondness for the Gospel of St. John, which he memorized.<sup>8</sup> After spending some time in the monastery, the elder introduced him to Patriarch Andronicus (616-22), who was so pleased with Benjamin that he ordained him a priest and made him his personal assistant. Before his death, during the Persian Occupation, Andronicus named Benjamin as his successor.<sup>9</sup> Later, in 631, the emperor Heraclius appointed Cyrus the

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<sup>1</sup> In the Coptic Orthodox Church the miracle is commemorated on the 13<sup>th</sup> of Tobi (January 21), and is numbered among the "Seven Minor Feasts" of that church. In addition, the miracle is repeatedly alluded to in the Coptic marriage rite.

<sup>2</sup> C. Detlef G. Müller, *Die Homilie über die Hochzeit zu Kana und weitere Schriften des Patriarchen Benjamin I von Alexandrien* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1968), 9: "Es handelt sich um eines der besten Zeugnisse koptischer Predigtkunst, das wir besitzen--ein kraftvolles Werk, das der Persönlichkeit unseres Patriarchen alle Ehre macht."

<sup>3</sup> Fols. 10v-18r. To facilitate referencing the two available editions of the Coptic text (see notes 18 & 19), I will reference the folios of the manuscript rather than specific page numbers.

<sup>4</sup> Fol. 18r. & v.

<sup>5</sup> Fols. 19v. and 24v-25r.

<sup>6</sup> Fol. 26r.

<sup>7</sup> The monastery of Canopus is also known as the monastery of the Metanoia; see Jean Gascou, "Metanoia, Monastery of the," *Coptic Encyclopedia*, ed. A.S. Atiya, (NY: Macmillan Pub., 1991), 5:1608-1611. Gascou sifts through the conflicting data that makes it difficult to categorize the monastery of Canopus "Chalcedonian"; cf. Aloys Grillmeier and Theresia Hainthaler, *Christ in Christian Tradition*. Vol. 2.4, *The Church of Alexandria with Nubia and Ethiopia after 451* (Mowbray, 1996), 82. Cf. James E. Goehring, "Chalcedonian Power Politics and the Demise of Pachomian Monasticism," *Occasional Paper 15* (Claremont: Institute for Antiquity and Christianity, 1989); repr. in his *Ascetics, Society, and the Desert*. Studies in Antiquity and Christianity (Harrisburg: Institute for Antiquity and Christianity, 1999), 241-261.

<sup>8</sup> "Life of Benjamin" in B. Evett's, trans., *History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria: Peter I to Benjamin I (661)*. Patrologia Orientalis I.4 (Paris, 1948), 488. For a synopsis of the life of Benjamin see C. Detlef G. Müller, "Benjamin I" in *Coptic Encyclopedia*, 2: 375-77; and "Benjamin I, 38. Patriarch von Alexandrien," *Le Muséon* 69 (1956), 53-72.

<sup>9</sup> *Life of Benjamin*, 489.

bishop of Phasis in the Caucasus (hence Ar. *al-Muqawkas*) Chalcedonian Patriarch of Alexandria. Granted both ecclesiastical and civil (prefectural) authority, Cyrus' mission was to reconcile the non-Chalcedonian Copts to the Chalcedonian cause. The coming of Cyrus forced Saint Benjamin into a self-imposed exile for thirteen years. During this period the sermon informs us that he traveled from place to place with a small group of followers, most likely, the two disciples mentioned in the *History of the Patriarchs*.<sup>10</sup>

Cyrus launched a ten-year persecution, which was the worst in Egypt since the Great Persecution of the early fourth century. Many non-Chalcedonians were martyred (most notably Menas, Benjamin's brother). By using his authority, Cyrus tried to force the Copts into accepting the Monothelite doctrine, which attempted to sidestep the language of "nature" and concentrated on the "will" of Christ.<sup>11</sup> In 641 Cyrus' reign came to an end as a result of the Arab Conquest of Egypt, which was completed in 642. Benjamin, however, remained in hiding until 644, at which time he returned to Alexandria to meet the Arab general 'Amr ibn al-'As<sup>12</sup>--who is treated very kindly in the Coptic sources.<sup>13</sup> When 'Amr met the Patriarch, he is reported to have said to his companions, "In all the lands which we possess until now, I have not seen a man of God like this one."<sup>14</sup> 'Amr then asked Benjamin to pray for him, a request that was granted. Interestingly, even where we might expect it (esp. fol. 20v and fol. 30r), there is no reference at all to 'Amr or the Arab conquest in the sermon. The Patriarch then went to the Monastery of Metras, which served as the patriarchal seat.<sup>15</sup> For the remainder of his tenure, Benjamin was busy restoring monasteries and churches as well as the Coptic Church itself in Egypt.<sup>16</sup> Later in life, Benjamin--like Andronicus his predecessor--took a disciple, Agathon, who succeeded him as patriarch. After a two-year sickness, the Patriarch was reposed on the eighth of Tobi (January 3rd,) 661 AD. In the Copto-Arabic Synaxarium he is commemorated on that same day.

#### *Date of the Sermon*

77 Soon after his return from exile, Patriarch Benjamin delivered the sermon *On Cana of Galilee*. At that time the Patriarch was forced to deal with a number of problems that sprang up during the chaos of the preceding decade. Many of them can be gleaned from the sermon; Benjamin's attention was divided between dealing with those who accepted the Chalcedonian creed, rebuilding the monasteries that had been in ruins since the Persian Occupation and reforming a lax clergy.<sup>17</sup>

Although the year in which the sermon was delivered may not be ascertained, indirect evidence may hint at the month and day of its delivery. The latter portion of the sermon dealing with the hermit Isidoros states that the good monk died on the thirteenth of Tobi (January 21). And although it goes unmentioned in Benjamin's sermon, this is also the same date on which the miracle at Cana is celebrated in the Coptic liturgical year (in the Synaxarium). It appears that the Patriarch was delivering a sermon to commemorate the miracle at Cana and used the occasion to eulogize Isidoros (an anchorite who is the subject of the last third of the sermon) on the anniversary of his departure. The thirteenth of Tobi (AD 644/5?) then, may very well be the date on which the sermon was delivered.

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. fol. 20r and *Life of Benjamin*, 490.

<sup>11</sup> Usually, in the case of ecclesiastical figures, Cyrus would demand that they sign a *tome* and celebrate the liturgy with him, thus entering into communion. See A. Alcock, ed./tr. *The Life of Samuel of Kalamun by Isaac the Presbyter* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips Ltd., 1983), 9.21-23, pg. 42-44.

<sup>12</sup> The distinction between the ten years during which Benjamin was physically persecuted and the three years he waited until it was safe to return is reflected in the *Life of Benjamin*, 496. The sermon gives eleven years as the duration of the persecution "from place to place," fol. 29v. Interestingly, the sermon does not mention anything about the Arab conquest.

<sup>13</sup> R.H. Charles. *The Chronicle of John, Bishop of Nikiu* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1916), 200. Also see *Life of Benjamin*, 493-7.

<sup>14</sup> *Life of Benjamin*, 496.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 498.

<sup>16</sup> The Coptic Church had suffered a number of material losses since the time of the Persian raids and numerical losses since the time of John the Almsgiver, the Chalcedonian Patriarch of Alexandria, who was greatly admired for his generosity to the poor. See "The Life of our Holy Father John the Almsgiver" in *Three Byzantine Saints*, tr. Elizabeth Dawes and Norman H. Baynes (Oxford, 1948; repr. SVS, 1977), 202.

<sup>17</sup> *Life of Benjamin*, 500.

### *Editions of the Sermon and this Translation*

The complete Bohairic text of *On Cana of Galilee* is found in the tenth-century manuscript, *Codex Vaticanus Copticus* 67, 9r-33v. It has been published twice: first in Henri de Vis' *Homélie coptes de la Vaticane*, with a French translation;<sup>18</sup> later as the subject of a critical edition by C. Detlef G. Müller in his *Die Homilie über die Hochzeit zu Kana*,<sup>19</sup> accompanied by a German translation. In the same work Müller also published a 9/10th century Sahidic fragment (*Paris Copte* 129<sup>14</sup>, fol. 122r-123v) that coincides with fols. 18r-19v of the Bohairic manuscript, as well as a seventeenth-century Arabic manuscript of the same sermon.<sup>20</sup> This important sermon has also been translated into Italian, without the Coptic text.<sup>21</sup>

In general, the Sahidic version is very close to the Bohairic, with very minor additions and omissions that do not alter the meaning of the sermon to any great extent. The Arabic text is a good translation,<sup>22</sup> but in some instances it omits phrases and in others offers a summary of the Coptic rather than a translation (which is useful at times). The Bohairic version is of course a translation of the Sahidic, the dialect in which, it may be assumed, the sermon was delivered.

For the purposes of this English translation of *On Cana of Galilee*, I have mainly relied on Müller's edition of the Bohairic text. Still, I have compared it with de Vis' edition, the Sahidic fragment, and the Arabic manuscript. I have also compared the existing French and German translations to my own.

### *Content of the Sermon*

Leaving aside the introductory and concluding paragraphs, the sermon can be divided into three, almost autonomous, sections. Only the first section, up to the middle of fol. 18r, is concerned with the miracle that Christ performed in Cana of Galilee (Jn 2:1-11) while the later two sections are largely autobiographical/historical in nature.

In the first section, the patriarch comments on the miracle from a number of angles, explaining how and why it was performed and the reasons why each of the twelve disciples were present.<sup>23</sup> Prominent in the account is the intercessory role of the Virgin Mary, "that is, she who gave milk to his divine mouth" (fol. 13v). In addition, a number of other topics are treated; among which, is the role wine plays in the miracle and in the Patriarch's own time. He is careful to affirm that wine was created for the pleasure (Cop./Gr. *euphrosunê*) of humanity and that Christ himself drank from it;<sup>24</sup> yet, at the same time he went through great pains to instruct his congregation to abstain completely from it.<sup>25</sup> Of special interest are also Benjamin's Christological declarations that are found in fol. 16v. He puts forward an orthodox theology that directly contradicts the popular depiction of "Monophysitism" in Western scholarship. Finally, he also comments on the importance of baptism.

The second section (fol. 18r-25v) describes two incidents that took place during the thirteen years that the Patriarch was in hiding. Both incidents involve corruption within the priesthood and conclude with Benjamin's heartfelt exhortations to all clergy. The first relays the story of a priest who was excommunicated on account of fornication. The second concerns two so-called "Manichean" priests. The general exhortations to all clergy found at the end of each of the incidents would seem to confirm the state of laxity and negligence ascribed to the clergy of this time by the *History of the Patriarchs*.

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<sup>18</sup> Henri de Vis, *Homélie coptes de la Vaticane*. Coptica vol. 1 (Haunia: Gyldendalske Boghandel-Nordisk Forlag, 1922. Repr. Louvain: Peeters, 1990).

<sup>19</sup> C. Detlef G. Müller, *Die Homilie über die Hochzeit zu Kana und weitere Schriften des Patriarchen Benjamin I. von Alexandrien* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1968). Prof. Müller also deals with this sermon in his *Die alte koptische Predigt* (Heidelberg, 1954), 22, 39-49, 300-49.

<sup>20</sup> Ms.or.fol. 533, 96r-113v *Preußischen Staatsbibliothek*, Berlin. The Arabic text has been published as a small booklet by Bishop Samu'il of Shubin al-Qanatir in 1998.

<sup>21</sup> Tito Orlandi trans. *Omelia copte* (Torino: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1981), 276-86.

<sup>22</sup> Much better than I gave it credit in a brief paper presented at the *First Annual St. Shenouda the Archimandrite Coptic Symposium*. The paper, along with the rest of the papers presented at that conference, was published in the Society's *Annual Bulletin* vol. 3 (1998).

<sup>23</sup> At this point, the Patriarch does not follow the historical narrative in the Gospel of St. John; at the time of the miracle Christ had only gained five disciples.

<sup>24</sup> Fol. 13r.

<sup>25</sup> Fols. 17r-18r.

In the last section (fol. 25v-33r) Benjamin shares the story of his encounter with Isidoros the anchorite.<sup>26</sup> During their first meeting, Isidoros, through prophetic knowledge, informed Benjamin about the upcoming Chalcedonian persecution, assured him that God would protect him, and that he would once again see Benjamin when the ordeal was over. Based on internal evidence, it seems that Benjamin's first encounter with the anchorite was in 630/1. The Patriarch confirms that the prophecy was fulfilled, and then narrates his second encounter with the anchorite shortly after his return from hiding in 644. The account ends with a long depiction of the anchorite's death.

In this last section, the position of the Eucharist in the monastic community is clearly revealed. The three questions asked of the anchorite were: how do you eat; how do you drink; and how do you receive communion? From a seventh-century perspective, the Eucharist was an essential element for life.<sup>27</sup>

#### *A Reconstruction of the 13 Years of Exile According to the Sermon*

Three accounts are relayed in the last two-thirds of the sermon: the account of the sinful priest; that of the two Manichean priests; and the encounter with (and death of) the monk Isidoros. If the three stories are placed side by side, it is possible to reconstruct the three into a single narrative, which *may* provides a brief sketch of Benjamin's years in exile.

First, some time early in 631, Benjamin visited the conglomeration of monasteries known as the Enaton (Ar. *dayr al-Zujaj*). There he was informed about, and met with the monk Isidoros from the Monastery of the Fathers (Ar. *dayr al-aba'*), one of the monasteries of the conglomeration. During their meeting, Benjamin was prophetically told by the monk about the upcoming persecution. Shortly thereafter, during that same year, Cyrus came to Egypt and Benjamin went to the South. At some point on that trip he and his companions rested in a chapel where they came across the two Manichean priests and a mysterious voice crying out "Give the holies to the holy." After five months, Benjamin left that chapel and continued on his way towards the Monastery of St. Shenoute. Once he arrived there, he was presented with the sinful priest whom some villagers wanted to reinstate. To resolve the matter, the Patriarch prayed a liturgy in which he made a special request of St. Shenoute to personally intervene, and so he did.

While at the Monastery of St. Shenoute, the Patriarch received word that it was safe to return to Alexandria. On his way back north he again encountered the same chapel with the same two Manichean priests and the same mysterious voice crying out. He interrogated the two priests separately and discovered that they were Manicheans who were hiding some Eucharistic remnants—the consecrated Body and Blood of the Lord. After resolving that situation (retrieving the remnants and sending the two Manicheans to the duke of Antinoë), he returned to Alexandria where, although the sermon does not say so specifically, he probably met 'Amr ibn al-'As upon arrival (an encounter which was arranged by Shenoute, the duke of Antinoë, who negotiated the return of the Patriarch). Later, after he "rested for a few days," he returned to the Monastery of the Fathers where he again met with the monk Isidoros who rejoiced at the return of the Archbishop. Later that same day Isidoros fell into a fever-induced coma. The following morning he woke up, spoke with Benjamin, and embraced him. Grabbing Benjamin's hands and putting them over his eyes, he "gave his spirit to the hands of the Lord." This fulfilled another prophecy that he had told the Archbishop on their first encounter thirteen years earlier, namely that no one will put his hands upon his eyes except Benjamin.

All this would indicate that the thirteen-year exile was spent in a single trip in which the Patriarch traveled from Alexandria to the Monastery of St. Shenoute and back.<sup>28</sup> Also, if the pattern in the story of the two Manicheans was typical, we can deduce that the Patriarch and his two companions traveled from one remote chapel to another spending a number of months in each one as they eventually made their way to the Monastery of Apa Shenoute.

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<sup>26</sup> See Peter Grossmann, "Der Bericht Benjamins I über den Mönch Isidor und was an historischen Nachrichten in diesem Bericht enthalten ist," in *Divitiae Aegypti: koptologische und verwandte Studien zu Ehren von Martin Krause*. ed. Cäcilia Fluck (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1995).

<sup>27</sup> See also the discussion in Tim Vivian's *Paphnutius: Histories of the Monks of Upper Egypt and the Life of Onnophrius* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1993; revised 2000), 26-30.

<sup>28</sup> It would not be too difficult to incorporate the route mentioned by Girgis in this general scheme. See Girgis Daud Girgis, "Abba Benjamin the Coptic Patriarch in the 7th Century" in *Nubia et Oriens christianus: Festschrift für C. Detlef G. Müller zum 60. Geburtstag* ed. Piotr O. Scholz and Reinhard Stempel (Köln: Verlag Jürgen Dinter, 1988).

### *Liturgical Terms*

In addition to the usual liturgical terminology, e.g. *anaphôra*, *prosphora*, *kanôn*,<sup>29</sup> the sermon utilizes a number of lexicalized expressions. The first, *fi phrôoush* (also *firôoush*),<sup>30</sup> literally “to take care,” comes to mean “to prepare for/to attend to the liturgy.” This is apparent from the end of fol. 18v, where the expression is spelled out: *pjinthrifi phrooush ntianaphora ethouab*, “attending to/taking care of the holy Anaphora.” The Sahidic equivalent, which fortunately has been preserved, is *aifi ntanaphora etouaab*. In the other instances the designation of liturgy/*anaphôra* is implied.

The second expression, *chi smou / ti smou*, literally “to receive/give blessing,” is lexicalized to mean “to receive communion.”<sup>31</sup> On two occasions the expression retains its literal meaning (fol. 19r and 25v).<sup>32</sup>

The meaning of *chi smou* may also be deduced from its Sahidic and Arabic translations. The Sahidic fragment uses the term *sunage* (Gr. *sunagein*), “be present at Eucharist; admit to the *sunaxis* or Eucharist.”<sup>33</sup> The Arabic usually employs some form of the verb *qurb*, literally “to draw near, approach,” which is lexicalized in Arabic (and Syriac) Christian literature to mean, “receiving communion.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *anaphora* fols. 18v & 23r. *prosphora* fol. 21v. *kanôn* fol. 33r.

<sup>30</sup> Fols. 18v, 19r, 22v. (It is used twice in 18v).

<sup>31</sup> See W.E. Crum, *A Coptic Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1939; rep.1979), s.v. *smou*, 335a-336b, esp. 336ab. It is used in this manner in fol. 18v, 19r, 22v, 25v, 27r (twice). A similar construction (although not used in this sermon) is used with *sha* to mean give/receive communion (*ti* or *ji sha*). See Crum, s.v. *sha*, 542b-544a, esp. 543b.

<sup>32</sup> Of the two, Müller and I disagree on the usage found in 19r. It is possible to understand the passage using either meaning, though in that instance I prefer a more literal rendering.

<sup>33</sup> G.W.H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), s.v. *sunago*.

<sup>34</sup> Georg Graf, *Verzeichnis arabischer kirchlicher Termini*. Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium v.147, Sub. Tom. 8 (Louvain, 1954), s.v. *q-r-b*. The same terms (*sunagesthai*, *ti smou*, *chi smou*, and Ar. *qurb*) are used in the almost contemporary sermon on the consecration of an altar in the monastery of St. Macarius which is attributed to Patriarch Benjamin, but is possibly the work of his successor--Agathon. See René-Georges Coquin. *Livre de la Consécration du Sanctuaire de Benjamin*. Bibliothèque d'Etudes Coptes 13 (Cairo: Institut Français de'Archéologie Orientale, 1975).

A SERMON DELIVERED BY OUR HOLY FATHER  
THE SPIRIT-CLAD ABBA BENJAMIN  
THE ARCHBISHOP OF ALEXANDRIA  
CONCERNING THE WEDDING FEAST  
THAT TOOK PLACE IN CANA OF GALILEE

In the peace of God, amen.

It is the custom of shepherds to tend [their] sheep in pastures devoid of weeds; but even more so, to bear the trepidations of the wolf. For this reason they<sup>35</sup> do not fall asleep lest the wolves<sup>36</sup> enter the pen while the sheep are inside and capture one of them. (9v) Further, they diligently (stand) guard during the night against the plot of the evil thieves, that they may not steal any sheep easily. We also, my fathers and brothers, according to the commandment of our fathers, eagerly pray to God at all times to keep us in the perfect faith of our holy fathers Athanasius, Alexander, and Cyril--the equal, unwavering balance of the dogmas of faith; that we may diligently guard ourselves against the evil wolves--the devil and his evil demons.<sup>37</sup>

The prudent one,<sup>38</sup> [who was] a virgin since he came from his mother's womb, the great Basil said in a sermon that as the sun shines everywhere, likewise the devil is also found in every place. Consequently, let us strive to escape his snares.<sup>39</sup> But let us return to the topic at hand (10r) and begin it.

Stand, holy virgin and evangelist, John the theologian.<sup>40</sup> Come into our midst today and guide us in this endeavor. Listen, God-loving people, lest we speak to you about the words of John the theologian and you leave this holy place and destroy the things we have heard and each one returns to his evil way. But let us listen, act, and cling to the things that we have been taught. If we listen and do the things we hear, then we have heard correctly. [But] if we listen and do not do the things we hear, what have we gained by hearing? We would not profit, but on the contrary, suffer a great loss for not putting into practice what we have heard.<sup>41</sup> But let us return to the matter at hand: glorifying God and his saints.

(10v) "On the third day a wedding took place in Cana of Galilee. The mother of Jesus was there, and Jesus was also invited with his disciples to the feast."<sup>42</sup> What a great wonder! He said that the mother of Jesus was there. Why was she there? She was there for the preparation of the wedding, as she prepared it with all the women. For while Moses walked in front of the men--I speak of the Israelites--Miriam also walked in front of the women with her cymbals.<sup>43</sup> However, you will ask me, "Why was the mother of Jesus there before him?"<sup>44</sup> I will ease your heart, my friend. Was it not the relatives of the bride who prepared the wedding?<sup>45</sup> For this reason Mary went early to help with the wedding preparations until the time the men arrived. You, yourselves, know that [it is] the women who make the wedding preparations.

Also, not [only] was Jesus invited, but his disciples as well. Do you want to know why his disciples were invited? I will tell you. (11r) Peter, the first among the apostles,<sup>46</sup> was invited so that when Jesus

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<sup>35</sup> Müller identifies this "they" as the sheep, "sie (die Schafe)"; however, the reference is more likely to the shepherds (die Hirten).

<sup>36</sup> Lit.: *they*.

<sup>37</sup> This theme of protecting the heard from thieves--heretics, and wolves--devils, is very common. It can also be found in the *Life of Benjamin*.

<sup>38</sup> Lit.: *The one wise in his words*.

<sup>39</sup> See 1Tim. 3:7; 2 Tim. 2:26.

<sup>40</sup> These three titles--virgin, evangelist, and theologian--are still the distinctive titles of St. John within the Coptic Orthodox Church today. The portion of the *hymn of the cymbals* (which is prayed at every vespers and matins service) relating to John reads: *chere ioannes pieuaggelistes: chere pisotp mparthenos ouoh pitheologos*, "Hail to John the evangelist, hail to the chosen virgin and theologian."

<sup>41</sup> This contrast between hearing and doing is found in Mt. 7:24-26, Lk. 6:46-7, and James 1:22-25.

<sup>42</sup> Jn. 2:1-2.

<sup>43</sup> See Ex. 15:20.

<sup>44</sup> Lit.: *Jesus*.

<sup>45</sup> Another Coptic tradition states that St. Mary was the aunt of the bride. See Forbes Robinson, *Coptic Apocryphal Gospels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1896; repr. Liechtenstein: Kraus Reprint Limited, 1967), 165-167, Fragment II.

<sup>46</sup> The same sentiments are still found in the doxologies of the Coptic Orthodox Church. The *Doxology of the apostles*

completes his passion upon the cross Peter would succeed the True Groom, our Lord Jesus Christ, take the cup, and pour for everyone from the Holy Blood of the Son of God,<sup>47</sup> the life of everyone.<sup>48</sup> Andrew was invited to teach the youth about the true wedding feast of the church, and that they should not be defiled but pure in their bodies. James was invited to tell the guests,<sup>49</sup> and not only them, but also the whole world, “I saw the face of my Savior shining like the sun and his garments white as snow.”<sup>50</sup> John was invited to tell all the guests, or rather the whole world, “this is the Word that became flesh.”<sup>51</sup> This is the Lamb of God who bears the sin of the world.<sup>52</sup> Philip was invited in order to call everyone in his family to the feast. Thus, he would invite (11v) the whole world to the true wedding feast of the Church. Bartholomew was invited for, previously, he was a winegrower and a vegetable-seller<sup>53</sup> who sold vegetables to whomever wanted them. He told the whole feast, or rather the whole world, “I have stopped selling vegetables. From now on I give the word of God freely to whomever wants it.” Thomas was invited and told the whole world and the feast, “a wedding feast will take place for the whole world—that is the Church. And she rejoices like a bridegroom coming from his chamber.”<sup>54</sup> And this name was given to her: ‘Apostolic Church.’” Matthew was invited to tell (those at) the wedding feast, “I [was] a tax-collector and became an evangelist. When my Savior completes his dispensation, I will take my gospel and preach it to the whole world. And I will begin from the genealogy of David until the birth of the True Bridegroom who is now in your midst eating and drinking with you.” (12r) James the son of Alphaeus, being bound by the girdle of the Spirit in his heart, cried out to the whole feast, “Soon you will see a miracle that my Savior will perform, that all of you may believe in him.” Thaddaeus was invited to the feast to testify to the whole world, “I drank from the water

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begins with: *pishorp khen niapostolos eumouti erof je simon petros*, “first among the apostles, he is called Simon Peter.” To understand the position of St. Peter in the Orthodox Church it is important to look to another doxology. It is “to be said for the patriarch during his enthronement, at his presence in the church during vespers and matins, and at the consecration of bishops as they put on the *skema*.” In it, the newly ordained bishop is told: *akchi mptaio mpeniot petros pianajoj nniapostolos*, “you have received the honor of our father Peter the head of the apostles”. And also, *aftehoutk enishosht nte thmeouro mnipheoui*, “He (Christ) entrusted you with the keys of the kingdom of heaven.” In chanting this at every consecration of a bishop, the Coptic Orthodox Church reiterates her belief that every bishop, not just that of Rome, is a successor of St. Peter and the apostles. Unfortunately, as a reaction to Roman Catholic claims of universal authority the trend throughout the past century in the Coptic Church has been to minimize the role and importance of this saint among the disciples. This, however, from an Orthodox perspective this simply confuses the issues. St. Peter did enjoy a certain privilege among his peers, as the biblical and patristic records clearly demonstrate, and the Coptic tradition (prior to the past century or so) concurs. This, however, does not automatically mean that he (or his successors) had authority *over* the other disciples. The real issues are: first, the nature of his privilege—which is at the heart of the matter—and, second, whether it could be transferred over to his successors who were bishops and not apostles. For a fuller treatment of this issue see Severus/Maged S.A. Mikhail, “A Reappraisal of the Current Position of St. Peter the Apostle in the Coptic Orthodox Church,” in the *First St. Shenouda Conference for Coptic Studies: July 31 - August 1, 1998* (Los Angeles: St. Shenouda Society, 2000), 55-74.

<sup>47</sup> Nicholas Koulomzine in his “Peter’s Place in the Primitive Church,” in *The Primacy of Peter. Essays in Ecclesiology and the Early Church*. John Meyendorff ed., (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1963, rep. 1992), 13, states: “Was Peter the first to take the Lord’s place at the celebration of the Holy Banquet? New Testament texts do not say so, but the Church’s life has always centered on the Eucharist. Peter, in the midst of the Twelve and the first community at Jerusalem, was probably first in breaking the Bread.” This is in line with what many of the Fathers have stated included Mar Ephraem who stated “[Christ] stretched His right hand towards Simon, and gave the cup to him first,” D.J. Sheerin, *The Eucharist* (Delaware, 1986), 140.

<sup>48</sup> This is a liturgical phrase. It is found in the current liturgy of the Coptic Orthodox Church, see Committee formed by His Holiness Pope Shenouda III, *The Coptic Liturgy of St. Basil* (Cairo: St. John the Beloved Publishing House, 1993), 266.

<sup>49</sup> Lit.: *those who recline*, Coptic *ne etroteb*. The norm of the time was to be reclining around the dinner table. In this translation the expression will be translated loosely, often as “guests.”

<sup>50</sup> See Mt. 17:1-8; Mk. 9:2-8; Lk. 9:28-36.

<sup>51</sup> Jn. 1:14.

<sup>52</sup> Jn. 1:29.

<sup>53</sup> See Oscar von Lemm, *Kleine koptische Studien* (Leipzig, 1972), 211-13 (according to continuous pagination). *oukomaritēs pe ncanouoti* seems to be a common description for Bartholomew’s occupation. Von Lemm cites a number of texts in which it is used. An exact parallel in Sahidic is presented on p. 212. *oukomaritēs* is a bit difficult to assess. Both de Vis and Müller read it as *nomaretiēs* (See Müller 72, 352, 388; de Vis, 61). Understanding it as a synonym for the Coptic *ncauoti*, they translate the whole phrase as “vegetable-grower.” Von Lemm, on the other hand, reads the word as *kōmaritēs* meaning “winegrower.” He also demonstrates that the term was at times translated by the Coptic *chmê*, and that the tradition depicting Bartholomew as a wine grower is found in Coptic literature.

<sup>54</sup> Ps. 19:5. The order of the disciples follows the Gospel of St. Matthew 10:2-4.

that he changed into wine, and not only I, but the whole wedding feast.” Simon the Canaanite was invited in order to see the men filling the water (jars) to the brim. Then, through the power of Christ, wine was drawn [from them] and he went forth and preached the wondrous things that he saw. [Now] sit yourself down, Judas, with your wife who gave you this evil advice.<sup>55</sup> And prepare for yourself a rope for the time when you will hang yourself, die, and your soul perishes in Hades—the place you will go to. I do not invite you at all to my wedding feast, that is the Church.

Indeed, I will say that a single Judas betrayed his Lord at that time, (12v) but I do not know from where all these Judases came. But you will ask me, “Do you know who they are?” I will tell you about each one of them. He is Arius,<sup>56</sup> he is Nestorius,<sup>57</sup> he is Macedonius,<sup>58</sup> he is the impious Leo,<sup>59</sup> he is Ibas, he is Theodore, he is Theodoret,<sup>60</sup> he is Leontius,<sup>61</sup> he is the abominable Julian,<sup>62</sup> he is George the Arian and Gregory his brother who resembled him in his deeds.<sup>63</sup> He is the one whose name is not worthy of mention, who brought great evils upon the church, the impious Cyrus who is defiled in all his deeds.<sup>64</sup> He is Victor,<sup>65</sup> the bishop who bears the sins of his whole city, and he is also Melitius in Upper Egypt.<sup>66</sup> Are they not all Judases? They were cast out of the wedding feast because they did not wear wedding garments.<sup>67</sup>

However, let us return to the words of John the theologian. He said, “Jesus was also invited with his disciples to the wedding.”<sup>68</sup> (13r) What a great wonder! He who invites everyone to his true wedding feast, was himself invited to eat and drink with the (guests) as a man. He, who created humanity according to his image and likeness,<sup>69</sup> himself went to the wedding and sat with the men. He, who created wine for the pleasure of humanity, himself drank from the wine that he created.<sup>70</sup> He who created bread that people may eat for sustenance<sup>71</sup> reclined and ate with the guests.

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<sup>55</sup> A tradition states that Judas was married and had children, see Robert W. Thomson, *Athanasiana Syriaca*, part IV, CSCO vol 387/168 (Louvain, 1977), 72 & 145. Pierre Lacau, *Fragments d'apocryphes coptes* MIFO 9 (1904), 34. 2nd fragment.

<sup>56</sup> Arius (ca. 250-336) was a noted preacher and ascetic. He was entrusted with the service of the church of St. Mark, at Baucalis. He taught a subordinationist Christology which led to his excommunication first at a council in Alexandria, then at the First Ecumenical Council of Nicea (325).

<sup>57</sup> Nestorius (d. 453) became Patriarch of Constantinople in 424. Later he was condemned as a heretic at the Ecumenical Council of Ephesus (431) for teaching a dualistic Christology that placed two persons (God and a man) in Christ Jesus.

<sup>58</sup> Macedonius (d. 362), Patriarch of Constantinople, is credited with leading the *Pneumatomachoi*, or “Spirit-fighters,” who denied the divinity of the Holy Spirit. He was excommunicated at the Ecumenical Council of Constantinople (381).

<sup>59</sup> Leo I (d. 461 AD), Pope of Rome, wrote a *Tome* that served as the wedge that drove the church into the Chalcedonian Schism. To the non-Chalcedonians the *Tome* savored of Nestorianism.

<sup>60</sup> Ibas, bishop of Edess (435-449), Theodore, bishop of Mopsuestia (ca. 350-428), and Theodoret, bishop of Cyrrhus (d. 423) are usually mentioned together. All three were accused of being (Semi-) Nestorian. Their writings were first condemned as heretical at Ephesus II (449)—which was labeled by the West as “the Robber Council.” Their writings were then accepted at the Council of Chalcedon (451). Finally at Constantinople II (553), the *Three Chapters* (writings ascribed these men) were again anathematized—this time by the Chalcedonians themselves.

<sup>61</sup> Leontius of Byzantium (fl. 6th c.) wrote tracts against Theodore of Mopsuestia and Severus of Antioch.

<sup>62</sup> Julian of Healicarnassus (d. after 518) was a heretic who claimed that the flesh of Christ was consubstantial with that of the pre-fall Adam. His heresy was opposed by Chalcedonians and non-Chalcedonians alike, but most notably by his contemporary St. Severus of Antioch.

<sup>63</sup> Both George and Gregory were Cappadocian Arian bishops who were appointed patriarchs of Alexandria while St. Athanasius was in exile. George was appointed in 357 and lynched in 359. Gregory was appointed in 339 and died in 345. The Patriarch reversed their chronological order in the sermon.

<sup>64</sup> Cyrus was the Chalcedonian bishop of Alexandria (631-41). He was granted prefectural powers, which he used in an attempt to force a reunion between the Chalcedonians and the non-Chalcedonians. His persecution of the non-Chalcedonians was severe.

<sup>65</sup> Victor bishop of Fayyum was one of the Coptic bishops who entered into communion with Cyrus.

<sup>66</sup> Melitius, bishop of Lycopolis (modern *Asyut*), was a confessor of the Great Persecution. After the persecution, however, he disagreed with St. Peter of Alexandria as to how to treat the lapsed. He favored a much more rigorous policy than Peter I; in the following years a schism ensued. The Melitians cooperated with the Arians against St. Athanasius, and later developed doctrinal deviations that moved them from the ranks of schismatics to heretics.

<sup>67</sup> See Mt. 22:11-13.

<sup>68</sup> Jn. 2:2.

<sup>69</sup> Gen. 1:26.

<sup>70</sup> The Arabic leaves out the word “pleasure.” This may demonstrate the translator’s sensitivity to his environment. While wine is accepted to various degrees in Christian circles, it is prohibited in Islam. Muslims at times used this in a

Now as they were celebrating, eating and drinking according to custom, the wine ran out, and they did not have any more to offer the guests. Indeed it is shameful for the men to remain without wine while the wedding has not yet concluded. Then, I hear that the wine has run out!<sup>72</sup> Eventually, through the women who made the preparations with her, the news reached the Virgin. They said to her, “The wine has run out and we do not have (any) to offer the guests. (13v) Indeed, we are embarrassed in front of [our] guests, and do not know what we will do. Look, we have also invited your son and we do not have the means to purchase [more wine] to complete our celebration joyfully. His disciples will also say, ‘If they cannot provide for the wedding, why did they invite us?’ Indeed, we do not know what we will do.” When the Virgin heard this, she answered them joyfully, “Do not be afraid, my son is here, he will take away the shame of poverty. Look, (he) is sitting with the guests, and he will perform a great miracle for you.”

Then she approached Jesus, that is, she who gave milk to his divine mouth, and said to him, “They have no wine.”<sup>73</sup> Desiring to obey his mother, he said, “Woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come.”<sup>74</sup> Nevertheless, I will fulfill your heart’s desire and not grieve you.” Likewise, my beloved, if a woman sees that her son aims to please her (14r)—for whether a king or a notable, he would only want her to ask anything of him—she would speak with him, being confident that her son would obey her. She would approach and ask him to [grant] the people’s request, and he would quickly fulfill her wish. This is like the Virgin, who is confident that her son will fulfill anything she asks of him.

She approached and informed him that the wine had run out. [And he answered her,] “Woman, what have you to do with me? My mother, I knew that the wine ran out before you informed me, but my hour has not yet come. My mother, I knew that they were poor before I came to their wedding. However, it is the poor of the world whom I have chosen;<sup>75</sup> but my hour has not yet come. Nevertheless, if you wish, my mother, I will fulfill your heart’s desire. I will show everyone the power of my divinity, I will reveal my glory (14v) to my disciples. I will bless this wedding. I will make everyone glorify me with my Good Father and the Holy Spirit.” Then Jesus said, “Fill the water jars,” and they filled the water jars to the top.<sup>76</sup> John the evangelist said it thus: “And there were six stone jars placed inside for the purification of the Jews, holding twenty or thirty gallons each.”<sup>77</sup>

Jesus said, “Fill the jars with water,” and they filled them to the top. And he said, “Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward,” and they brought it to him. When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, it was not a common type of wine, but a wine better than the previous. He did not know from where it came, but the servants who filled the water knew what it was, [for] they had filled [the jars] with their own hands. (15r) The miracle of God, the joy of the Virgin at that hour! Surely these are the words Christ spoke to his mother: “My mother, I have granted your request. This wine was not purchased; I changed the water into wine. My mother, I have revealed the glory of my divinity. This miracle that took place is mine and my Father’s, [for] my Father and I are one.”<sup>78</sup> I do not do anything by my self except that which my Father, who sent me, tells me.<sup>79</sup> Look, my disciples believed in my Father and me. For I have said to them: you are my brothers, my disciples, and my evangelists.<sup>80</sup> Because of this I have performed the [miracle] before them that they may preach about the wondrous things they have seen, so that everyone may give glory to my Father with me.” The head of the banquet called the bridegroom and said to him,

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polemical manner against Christians. The words of the Patriarch are almost directly borrowed from the *Apostolic Constitutions* VIII.4.44 which is also the basis for the medieval Arabic rendering found in *al-Majmu’ al-Safawi*, ed. Girgis Philotheos ‘Awad (Cairo, 1908), vol 2, p 414.

<sup>71</sup> Lit.: Strength of the body.

<sup>72</sup> This was a common rhetorical device used in delivering sermons at this time. Compare to the style of Rufus of Shotep in J. Mark Sheridan ed. and trans. *Rufus of Shotep: Homilies on the Gospels of Matthew and Luke* (Rome: C.I.M., 1998). Sheridan conveniently lists the relevant passages on pgs. 33-35.

<sup>73</sup> Jn. 2:3.

<sup>74</sup> Jn.2:4. Here, as in the next paragraph, I have followed the RSV’s translation, which is closest to the Coptic text and Patriarch Benjamin’s understanding of the verse. Note in this paragraph and the next how he tries to soften the literal sense of the verse.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. James 2:5.

<sup>76</sup> Jn. 2:7. In Coptic tradition, St. Mark is said to have been one of the servants who filled the water jars and witnessed this miracle. See “Life of St. Mark,” in the *History of the Patriarchs*.

<sup>77</sup> Jn. 2:6. The Coptic reads “two or three *metretes*.” A *metretes* contains almost nine gallons.

<sup>78</sup> Jn.10:30.

<sup>79</sup> See Jn. 5:19; 14:10.

<sup>80</sup> “My brothers,” Mt. 12:49; 28:10. Jn. 20:17. “My disciples” is mentioned often, e.g. Mt. 26:18.

“Everyone serves the good wine first and afterwards, when the (guests) have become drunk, the inferior (wine) is brought out. But you have kept the good wine until now.”<sup>81</sup> Truly this is the wine (15v) of blessing, this is the wine of joy, this is a wine having all merriment. This is pure wine [in which] there is no deceit.<sup>82</sup>

But surely someone will ask me, “Could not God have said to the jars, ‘Fill with wine,’ without filling them with water? Certainly, he has power over everything.” But listen and I will tell you. If he had done this, the miracle would not have been attributed to him, but the (guests) would have said that the wine had been provided by the host.<sup>83</sup> But knowing everything by his incomprehensible wisdom, he did this so that disbelievers would believe, and that the miracle might be publicized<sup>84</sup> by those who filled the water with their own hands [and that they may] state, “We filled them,” and their testimony would be truthful.

Again, do you want another proof? I will give it to you. At the time he changed the water into wine, he could have also said to the jars, “Fill with wine” without [filling them with] water, [for] he can make wine from anything. But he knew that there (16r) were sinners and virtuous people attending the feast, and he knew that water is cleansing.<sup>85</sup> For this (reason) he, in his wisdom, wanted to change the water into wine so that whoever drank from it would be cleansed from their sins.

Do you want another proof? Again listen. No one will be included among<sup>86</sup> the Christians without the water of holy baptism. For when those who received baptism descended into the water, they were renewed and reckoned among the number of Christians.<sup>87</sup> Water is also the life of every tree of the field, bird, and wild animal. And humans especially need water more than anything (else). Because of this (Christ) commanded his disciples, “Go out into the whole world and baptize everyone in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”<sup>88</sup> For this reason the Creator,<sup>89</sup> who knows everything—namely that water is the life of everyone—(16v) changed it into wine. [Indeed], God could make wine out of jars, or wood, or anything whatsoever without water.

However, let us return to the matter at hand and complete it, lest we cause anyone to say that these sayings of the gospel are not true—for indeed, they are true. And lest one of the heretics say that Christ ate and drank like a man.<sup>90</sup> Leave, defiled dog! I believe that my Savior did everything that is normal for a man except sin alone.<sup>91</sup> I believe that he was hungry—he, the satisfaction of those who hunger. I believe that he was thirsty—he, the quenching of everyone who thirsts. I believe that he tolerated everything for the sake of humanity. I believe that he went to the feast, ate, drank, and celebrated with the guests and that he changed the water into wine—not in appearance, but in reality. My beloved, let us not trust<sup>92</sup> the heretics, lest they mislead us and take us to perdition with them. Do not let us doubt the words of the gospels. (17r) For it is written, “he who mocks my words will fall little by little.”<sup>93</sup>

Let us keep ourselves from the drunkenness of wine. For any degree of drunkenness is obscene. Is there a man here today who drank, became drunk, and was not moved by wine? When one among (the men) said a sensible word, the drunkard, because of [his] intoxication, said “It is not true, you are a liar!” And the devil came into their midst, drunkenness prevailed among them, a dispute began, and they fought with each other.<sup>94</sup> Some were hurt, others tore their clothes, and some were wounded. The matter was brought before the magistrate, and they were beaten and fined. How unfortunate were those present. They suffered the same punishment as the drunkard. What did they gain?<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Jn. 2:19-20.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. Jn. 1:47.

<sup>83</sup> Lit.: *belonged to the wedding*.

<sup>84</sup> Cop. *ermishti*.

<sup>85</sup> Or *purifying*.

<sup>86</sup> Lit.: *no one will be counted among the number of Christians*.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Tit. 3:5.

<sup>88</sup> Mt. 28:19.

<sup>89</sup> Cop./Gr. *technites*.

<sup>90</sup> The context of the paragraph, especially the latter half, indicates that the main fault of the heretics was not believing that Christ ate and drank like a man—as Benjamin himself believes—but rather that they understood these actions as proving that Christ was not God. The Patriarch is essentially forwarding an anti-Eutychian theology.

<sup>91</sup> See. 2 Cor. 5:21, Heb. 4:15, 1 Pet. 2:22, 1 Jn. 3:5.

<sup>92</sup> Lit.: *place the heart with*.

<sup>93</sup> Sir. 19:1.

<sup>94</sup> Cf. Sir. 31:29-30.

<sup>95</sup> The translation of this sentence is heavily dependent upon my sense of the text. The Coptic is not clear, it reads, “O

Is there any man here today who drank, became drunk, and did not commit theft<sup>96</sup>--which led to his capture and execution, [rendering] his body unworthy of the tombs of his ancestors? (17v) Is there any man here today who drank, became drunk, committed theft, and was not attacked by wild animals which devoured his flesh? How many men has drunkenness killed before their time? If only there were forgiveness for them! Instead, they will receive worse punishment because of the thefts they have committed. For the law states, "Do not steal at all."<sup>97</sup> Is there any man here today who drinks wine, becomes drunk, and walks naked, who, at the end, does not have the Scriptures fulfilled concerning him? For "every wine drinker will wear rags."<sup>98</sup> And again, "thorns will grow out of the hands of the drunkard."<sup>99</sup> Are there not men today who are evicted from their hometowns on account of their drinking debts? Creditors will even take away their homes because of wine. Is there a woman here today who becomes drunk due to an excess of wine and does not dance in the tavern until she deceives the patrons? She throws poisoned darts in their hearts. (18r) Indeed, I dare say that there are many men and women being punished on account of wine. Now, my children flee from wine, for it is very evil. Let us flee from theft, not allowing it to close our mouths and kill us. Let us flee from drunkenness, that it may not evict us from our homes. Let us guard ourselves from the evil oath that leads humanity to the Abyss, which is Hell. For our Savior commands us, "Do not swear at all."<sup>100</sup> Indeed, it is fearful to swear truthfully, and even more so to swear falsely.

### *The Sinful Priest*

I will tell you of a marvelous thing that happened because of a false oath as I saw it with my (own) eyes when God gave us relief from the sufferings heaped upon us by Cyrus the criminal. As I, the insignificant Benjamin, traveled south,<sup>101</sup> by the will of God, and arrived at the monastery<sup>102</sup> of the holy Archmandrite Apa Shenoute, some men from that diocese<sup>103</sup> (18v) quickly brought to me a priest whose bishop had excommunicated on account of fornication. They asked me to reinstitute him. I spoke with them saying, "This matter," namely fornication, "is abominable before God and men." I summoned the bishop of that diocese and inquired concerning this matter. He said, "Some witnesses came to me and testified against him."<sup>104</sup> And as they<sup>105</sup> stood [to leave], bowing before my feet, my soul was greatly troubled. I commanded that preparations [for the Eucharist] be made that we may receive communion. I summoned that priest and said to him, "My son, this title of 'priest' belongs to holy men. If you are guilty of this sin, stop, lest you burn." Frightened, (the man) began to swear terrible oaths [which were] troubling to hear. I left him that day. As I attended to the holy Anaphora,<sup>106</sup> I bowed my head before (19r) the altar and said, "Holy Archimandrite, my father Apa Shenoute, I know that you are in our midst now and your glory fills this whole place. Ask Christ Jesus our Lord to reveal the matter of this priest to us--whether he is pure or not--so he might not be judged [falsely]."<sup>107</sup>

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that they are not poor. They demand everything. Where is the advantage of these?" Müller's translation is along the lines of this literal rendering. De Vis offers a partial translation, but states that he does not see a possible meaning. This sentence is omitted altogether in the Arabic. Also Cf. Sir. 31:28.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. Prov. 23:21.

<sup>97</sup> Ex. 20:15.

<sup>98</sup> Prov. 23:21.

<sup>99</sup> Prov. 26:9.

<sup>100</sup> Mt. 5:34.

<sup>101</sup> Cop. *khet*: "north" is awkward here, it may simply be a scribal error in the Sahidic (cf. Sahidic fragment) which was retained in the Bohairic version. As is, this would indicate that the Patriarch traveled south past the White Monastery (thus allowing him to encounter the monastery as he was returning north), which is very doubtful. See the internal evidence found in fols. 29v-30r, where a prophecy and later the Patriarch's own words confirm that the Monastery of St. Shenoute was the southern-most point of his travels in exile. Also see the beginning sentence in the next account (fol. 20r); it is almost identical to the one we have here and it states that Benjamin traveled "south."

<sup>102</sup> Cop./Gr. *topos*, "place," is often used to denote a "monastery," (or a church) it will be translated as such.

<sup>103</sup> Cop. *thosh* may be translated as a *nome*, *district*, or *diocese*.

<sup>104</sup> Lit.: *concerning him*. Sahidic adds, "and I excommunicated him."

<sup>105</sup> I.e. those who brought the excommunicated priest.

<sup>106</sup> I.e. liturgy of the Eucharist. Lamp, 129-8, s.v. *anaphora*.

<sup>107</sup> The Coptic reads *je nnekfai hok kha pikrima*.

The following morning I woke up and commanded that we make preparations [for the Eucharist] in order to receive communion. I summoned the priest, whom we were just discussing, and said, "Wear your service clothes and stand according to your rank." He did this with great arrogance. And as (the book of) Acts was being read, a great fearful miracle occurred; hear it. An old monk entered with two soldiers walking beside him—they were frightening. They stood in front of us as the bishops and the priests stood according to their rank, while the deacons asked<sup>108</sup> to read the Holy Gospel that we might receive (its) blessing. (19v) But the soldiers pushed the clergy and the monks to and fro crying out, "Which one is he?" The monk then pointed to the priest in question and said, "It is this one!" [The soldiers] approached that priest; each grabbed a side of his beard, and they (dragged him) out of the church. That priest was never seen again. Then the monk approached the altar and disappeared. It was then that we knew that the monk whom we saw was the holy priest, Apa Shenoute, and that the two soldiers were Powers from God. My beloved, you see what a false oath did to that man.

Priests, keep yourselves from sinning in front of the altar, lest the angel (20r) of the altar rise against you. O the loss that he reaped, my brothers! The perdition that he inherited! Where is that miserable (priest) now? (Only) God knows.

### *The Manichean Priests*

I will also tell of another miracle that is fearful to hear. Indeed, it is miraculous and worthy of relaying to everyone. It happened to me, the insignificant Benjamin, while I fled from persecution.<sup>109</sup> I traveled south and lived in several places. As I was walking on the road with the brothers who accompanied me, we arrived at a small chapel and went inside to rest. By chance, two priests also came, wanting to stay there. They were foreigners, merchants from Egypt.<sup>110</sup> At night, they slept near us in the chapel. Now in the middle of the night, I heard a voice crying out, "Give the holies (20v) to the holy."<sup>111</sup> The voice cried out until dawn.

We spent five months there, after which we journeyed (further) south, [where] the brothers received us with great enthusiasm. But God ordained that those two priests could not leave the chapel<sup>112</sup> at all. [After we left] they entered the chapel and stayed until the following day. But when they attempted to go on their way, it was as if they were bound by iron; they could not leave or go anywhere.

Now after this took place, the good God desired to give us relief from our sufferings. The peace of the church blossomed again, and the people rejoiced with us. We returned north by the will of God, and advanced toward Alexandria.<sup>113</sup> And as I approached that chapel I decided<sup>114</sup> to go inside and learn [the meaning of] the saying I had heard there. I entered the door with the crowd of believers who accompanied me, as the voice cried out again: "Give the holies (21r) to the holy." I spent a week there as the voice cried out day and night, "Give the holies to the holy." And God inclined me<sup>115</sup> not to depart from there until I understood the entire matter.

I thought in my heart that perhaps those priests had [concealed] some bones of martyrs. I summoned one of them and said to him, "Before you arrived, there was not a sound here; [however] since you came, all these voices began. Perhaps you have the stolen bones of martyrs in your possession. If indeed (this is the case), bring them here to me so I can return them peacefully to their place. If not, believe me, I will

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<sup>108</sup> Lit.: *as the deacons asked me to allow them to read the holy gospel.*

<sup>109</sup> Lit.: *the face of the persecution of those who rose up against me.*

<sup>110</sup> The use of the word *shot*, "salesman/trader," with regard to priests, often indicates Manicheans. As, indeed, these men turn out to be. The term indicates a "salesman of bodies/spirits," Crum, 590b, s.v. *shot*. Also see three paragraphs below, fol. 21v. It was usually the case that Manichean missionaries were merchants by trade.

<sup>111</sup> This is a reference to a liturgical phrase found in the Liturgy of St. Mark. Also see Liturgy of St. Basil in Committee, 274. As will later become apparent in the narrative, the "holy things"--*ne ethouab*--are the elements of the Eucharist. The same usage of *ne ethouab* to refer to the elements is found in the current Coptic liturgy: see Committee, 241.

<sup>112</sup> Cop./Gr. *topos*.

<sup>113</sup> This would place this incident some time in 644 AD.

<sup>114</sup> Lit.: *put it in my heart.*

<sup>115</sup> Lit.: *gave it to my heart.*

send both of you to the magistrate at Antinoë,<sup>116</sup> [where] you will be thoroughly interrogated. Nevertheless, tell me the whole truth.”

(The priest) was very frightened and said to me, “My holy father, (21v) we have committed a grievous sin. Nevertheless, I will tell you what we did. For over five years I have traveled with my friend here. We, being Manicheans, traded in the body of the Lord. When (our deeds) were discovered, we were persecuted in our district; by order of the magistrates severe punishments were prepared for us. We paid large fines until they pardoned us, and as they chased us from our district they said, ‘The day we find you in this district your sin will be upon you; fire will be your punishment.’ We left our home and came to this district, and quickly entered a church, as a large crowd came to it annually on pilgrimage.<sup>117</sup> Men from the village took us into a church that we might worship<sup>118</sup> in it. We offered up a great Prospora,<sup>119</sup> divided it, and took (22r) all the remnants—all the bodies<sup>120</sup> that we divided—with us on the road, so that we might go to the sea and offer them to the devil that is in it.<sup>121</sup> Believe me, my holy father, since we came into this chapel it was as if shackles had been put upon us; we could not step outside the door. When we decided<sup>122</sup> to leave, we were as though bound. And of course, the voice would cry out, [as] you heard and inquired about it. Indeed, you are the Archbishop and the shepherd; as you command, so be it.”

As I heard this, my whole body shuddered and my soul filled with fear. I wept greatly, and cried out, “Woe is me, I the wretched one. How sin rules over the whole world! God, my God, have mercy. Forgiver, do not be angry at your inheritance<sup>123</sup> because of the sinners of the earth. (22v) But, Lord, pay back the evildoers and destroy the sinners.” I ordered that the [other] unlawful priest be brought in. He, likewise, said these things to me. After listening to them, I rose with the bishops, priests, and some others among the clergy and ordered them to light candles and [burn] incense. We went to the house [of the two Manicheans]; they brought out the (remnants) and gave them to me on a silver paten. I cried out weeping, “Woe is me, the wretched man! I lie upon smooth beds while the body of my Savior is in the hands of these criminals. Woe is me, the wretched one! I eat and drink while the very body of my Savior is in the hands of these criminals, as they peddled it in several places.” I made them guard the two [priests] while I carried the holy remnants to the church. The (board)<sup>124</sup> was struck and we attended to [the Eucharist] in order to receive communion. (23r) When we concluded the holy Anaphora, I made them bring the holy remnants up onto the altar, and immediately blood poured out until it saturated the altar coverings.

When the congregation<sup>125</sup> was dismissed, I sat and wrote a letter to the God-loving duke, Shenoute of Antinoë. I wrote to him thus: “Who will count the grains of sand spread on the shores of the sea, as it is written in the Scriptures?<sup>126</sup> Who will count the heavy sins of the devil’s children? I speak concerning those who sell the body of the Lord. Again now they receive his price, just like Judas who sold his Lord for thirty coins unto crucifixion.<sup>127</sup> Who can shut his ears so as not to hear the things we write to your benevolence? Truly, heaven trembles because of the things we will declare to your child-like love of God. The earth quaked because of the audacity of two criminals (23v) who are worthy of the perdition of Arius whose belly burst<sup>128</sup>--a death worse than any. Believe me, my God-loving one, as I write with my hand to inform you about what has happened, my whole body trembles and my eyes weep; I cannot utter what took place.

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<sup>116</sup> Gr. *Antinoopolis*, Ar. *Ansinâ*.

<sup>117</sup> Lit.: *visiting*.

<sup>118</sup> Cop. *ti smou--give praise/blessing*.

<sup>119</sup> I.e. Eucharistic Liturgy. Lamp, 1184, s.v. *prospora*.

<sup>120</sup> The use of “bodies” is most likely modifying the word “remnants,” rather than indicating the presence of multiple consecrated oblations.

<sup>121</sup> Comparing this account with the one preserved by Mallon involving St. Cyril of Alexandria, it seems that the association between Manicheans and devil-worship/sorcery was common; See Alexis Mallon, *Grammaire Copte: Bibliographie, Chrestomathie et Vocabulaire* (Beyrouth: Imprimerie Catholique, 1904; 4th ed 1956), Chrestomathie 76-78, “Conversion d’une femme manichéenne et de sa fille.” A similar association was also made during this later period between Melitians and sorcery, B. Evetts, trans., *History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church: Agatho to Michael I (766)*. *Patrologia Orientalis* V.1 (Paris, 1947), 454.

<sup>122</sup> Lit.: *if we put it in our heart*.

<sup>123</sup> Cf. Ps 74:2; 68:9.

<sup>124</sup> This probably refers to the *simandron*, a wooden sounding board that was struck to call the faithful to prayer.

<sup>125</sup> “Liturgy” would also be a suitable translation. Lamp, 1302-3, s.v. *sunaxis*.

<sup>126</sup> Sir. 1:2.

<sup>127</sup> Cf. Mt. 26:15.

<sup>128</sup> Socrates, *Ecclesiastical History*, I.38. And Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History*, II.29. See Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, 2nd Series, vol. 2, ed. P. Schaff and H. Wace.

Nevertheless, it is necessary for us to inform your Piety concerning what took place. And when you yourself hear, your body will tremble. For if thieves, adulterers, and the like<sup>129</sup> would examine themselves,<sup>130</sup> men like themselves would forgive them. But if men sin against the good God, who will absolve them from the punishment he will bring upon them? For we have not sent many writings to your Piety,<sup>131</sup> [but] we have bound and sent to you the brothers of Judas the traitor. (24r) Indeed, as Judas sold the Lord, these have also sold (him). But while Judas sold the Lord once, these have sold him many times. And while the Jews crucified the Lord once, these have crucified the Lord many times.<sup>132</sup> For this we have sent to you these Manicheans who sell the Lord for riches. Now then, the throne of Mark the evangelist commands you, God-loving one, to do with them according to your wisdom. Farewell, our beloved son, we pray that you may complete your salvation in the Lord.”<sup>133</sup>

Now as we wrote (this letter), we shackled and sent (the two Manicheans) to Antinoë. When (the duke) read the letter, he was not at all negligent. He ordered that a copper kettle be filled with oil and pig grease, and [a fire] be kindled below it until the flame increased greatly. He bound them and threw them in it. The fire burned their entire bodies; nothing was left of them.<sup>134</sup>

You see that the one who commits transgression and iniquity will fall into sin, especially sin against the Holy Spirit.<sup>135</sup> (24v) Now then, priests guard yourselves and do not sin. If you are not saved in this world, you will not be saved in the next, but you will receive great punishment. Woe to everyone like these! Indeed, I will not stop crying for these. Why? Because they are deserving of tears. Woe to a priest who holds the body of God in his hands and is not pure! Woe to every one in any of the ranks of the church, each one according to his rank, who partakes of any sin, especially Manicheans like these. Whether [he is] an adulterer, a thief, a bandit, one who quarrels in the affairs of the church, a slanderer, a perjurer, one who jests as the body of God is in his hands, a gossip, a sorcerer, a homosexual, one who looks at women in church or on the streets, one who encourage others in their evil deeds, (25r) a drunkard, or one who openly scoffs at every sin that defiles him<sup>136</sup>--woe to him three-fold! For his punishment [will] be very severe.

My beloved, let us guard ourselves on every side--whether cleric or layman--that a day may not come that we regret.<sup>137</sup> That a day may not come when we [will] weep and no one will hear us. That a day may not come when no one will have pity on us. That a day may not come when we say, “If only we were given a few days to repent!” That a day may not come [in which] we cannot eat anything because our mouth and throat are shut.<sup>138</sup> What a great and fearful thing is the separation of the soul from the miserable body! O the great fear that is greater than any other, the encounter with the Righteous Judge.<sup>139</sup> May all of us find mercy (25v) before the Righteous Judge, our Lord Jesus Christ. For that place is fearful, [in which each one] whether a saint or a sinner, receives according to his deeds.<sup>140</sup>

### *Isidoros the Anchorite*

Indeed, a perfect monk who was greatly chosen lived at the (Monastery) of the Fathers.<sup>141</sup> He was shut in his cell and never come out. He had spent thirty-six years shut in alone and would exercise great austerities

<sup>129</sup> Lit.: *those who commit any sin.*

<sup>130</sup> Confess (?)

<sup>131</sup> Cop. *ntekmetshamshenouti.*

<sup>132</sup> Cf. Heb. 6:6.

<sup>133</sup> Cf. Phil. 2:12.

<sup>134</sup> This appears to have been the normal punishment for sorcerers. See B. Evetts, *History of the Patriarchs*, Patrologia Orientalis V.1, pgs. 286, 459; R.H. Charles, *Chronicle of John Bishop of Nikiu*, 140, 162. Cf. Clyde Pharr, trans., *The Theodosian Code* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), 9:16.

<sup>135</sup> Cf. Mk. 3:29.

<sup>136</sup> Lit.: *them.*

<sup>137</sup> Lit.: *eat our heart.*

<sup>138</sup> This sentence is paraphrased, the Coptic is very wordy.

<sup>139</sup> 2Tim. 4:8. Also see Gen. 18:25, Judg. 11:27, Job 9:15, Ps. 94:2, Jas. 4:12, 5:9.

<sup>140</sup> See Mt. 16:27, Rev. 2:23, 22:12. Cf. Jer. 17:10, Ps. 28:4, 62:12, Jn. 5:28-29, 2Tim. 4:14, Rev. 18:6, 20:12.

<sup>141</sup> Gr. *ton pateron*—“the (Monastery) of the Fathers” was one of the conglomeration of monasteries that formed the Enaton. Situated nine miles west of Alexandria (hence the name < Gr. *ennea* “nine”), the Enaton was one of the major strongholds of Coptic Orthodoxy. See Jean Gasco, “Enaton” in *The Coptic Encyclopedia* 3:954-8. Also Paul van Cauwenbergh, *Étude sur les moines d’Égypte depuis le concile de Chalcedoine (451) jusqu’à l’invasion arabe (640)*

that no one can count. The Father of the Monastery<sup>142</sup> would go to him desiring to receive a blessing and learn about his way of life: what he ate, what he drank, how he received communion, and his whole story. He went to him many times, but he would never open the door; instead, (the monk) would say to him, “Go, my son, for no one may see my face except Benjamin the father of the faith; he will see my face in the body.” (26r) The Father of the Monastery came and spoke with me, saying, “My father, there is a brother monk who practices asceticism nearby. I have often desired to know his way of life, but he never opens the door to us. He just says, ‘No man will see my face except Benjamin, the father of the faith.’”

When I heard this I accompanied the Father of the Monastery, and as we entered the Monastery [of the Fathers] I left him<sup>143</sup> in a church and went to the cell of the saint. I found the door open before me, and called out, “Bless me my holy father of God.” Then like an angel of God he replied, “Come in, my father, that I may greet you.” When I entered, I greeted him, prayed, and sat down. I said to him, “Forgive me, [but] from the time God has informed me about your holiness<sup>144</sup> I wanted to ask you for a word.” He replied, “As you command, my father.” I said to him, “The Father of this Monastery informed me about (26v) your chosen life, for you are a righteous man before the Lord. He said to me that you never open your door, [but] when I came to your paternity today I found it open.” He said to me, “My father the archbishop, you are our father after God. You are the father of the faith. I will not hide anything from you. I tell you, my father, he who entered [the upper room of] his disciples while the doors were shut<sup>145</sup>--God, who accepted suffering for us--continues to speak with my sinfulness until now. He went out of the door, as he is the only one who opens it. Surely he knew that you were coming and left the door open for you. Indeed, my father, [it is] thirty-six years today since I closed the door of this cell, and I have not opened it for a single day.” I asked him, “What do you eat and what do you drink?” He answered, “He who sustains the birds (27r) of heaven through his lovingkindness is the one who sustains me.”<sup>146</sup> And I asked him, “How do you receive communion?” He answered, “Thomas the apostle is the one who gives me communion.”<sup>147</sup> When he finished speaking to me [I said], “My father, do not be angry with me, but I wanted to ask you about this saying.” He replied, “If you were not a man of Christ I would not have allowed you to see me. But now you are the father of us all after God. Because of this I cannot hide anything from you.” I said to him, “I want you to tell me where you are from, and what happened to you until you came here.” He answered, “I will tell you about my whole life.

“When I was a child in my parents’ house, along with my young brother and sister, my parents named me Isidoros. The names of my young brother and sister were Anastasios and Stephano. We were residents of the district of Ashmun<sup>148</sup> as were our ancestors. (27v) My sister was older than my brother and I. By the ordinance of God, a great plague occurred. When it first broke out, my father, mother, and brother died within half a day. My sister and I lived in our home as orphans; she was older than my brother and I, as I have said. She would wake me up daily at dawn saying, ‘My brother, get up. Let us (go to) the house of God and pray to him. Perhaps he will keep us together.’ I was thirteen years old at that time. Then six months after our parents died, the providence of God was that my young sister also left the body. I was in great misery alone. How great was the misery that seized me at that time! But God, who desires the salvation of everyone,<sup>149</sup> (28r) the Merciful and Compassionate One, moved<sup>150</sup> the heart of a sailor from my

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(Paris, 1914; repr. 1973), 64-72.

<sup>142</sup> Cop. *phiot mpitopos*, lit. “the father of the place,” will be translated as “Father of the Monastery,” as *topos* often indicates a monastery or a church (cf. footnote 102). Both the Coptic expression and its Greek equivalent (*pater tes mones*) rarely, if ever, referred to the superior of the monastery but rather it was the title of the individual who oversaw the financial affairs of the monasteries. In reference to the Coptic term See P.E. Khahle, *Bala’izah: Coptic Texts from Deir el-Bal’izah in Upper Egypt*, 2 vols. (London: Griffith Institute, 1954), 1:33; in reference to the Greek equivalent see B. Kramer, J.C. Shelton, and G.M. Browne, eds., *Das Archiv des Nephros und verwandte Texte* (Mainz: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 1987), 15, 73-75. The Enaton had a single superior (Gascou, 956). It may also have been the case that there was a single fiscal administrator.

<sup>143</sup> Lit.: *the father of the monastery*, i.e. the Enaton.

<sup>144</sup> Lit.: *your holy face*.

<sup>145</sup> Jn. 20:19.

<sup>146</sup> Ch. Mt. 6:26, Lk. 12:24.

<sup>147</sup> See Vivian, “Life of Paphnutius,” 156, 164, for similar stories in which the anchorites were given communion by an angel.

<sup>148</sup> See Timm, 1:198-220, s.v. *al-Ašmunen*.

<sup>149</sup> 1Tim. 2:4. Cf. Ezek. 18:23,32.

<sup>150</sup> Lit.: *gave it to the heart*.

village. He came to me and said, 'Isidoros, you will rise and come with me to Alexandria with my cargo, and I will give you a good wage.' I agreed and sailed off with him.

"Now as we boarded the ship, the passengers were speaking about the honor of the monks who are in the Monastery<sup>151</sup> of Apa Shenoute--the old monks who were perfected in this life.<sup>152</sup> My heart was very inclined to their words, and I put it in my heart to become a monk. Four days after we arrived at Alexandria and rested, I was walking in the market when I met a perfect monk from the Enaton. I spoke with him saying, 'My father, I want to become a monk.' He said, 'Follow me,'<sup>153</sup> and I (obeyed). He took me to the Enaton, [where] I lived under the shadow of his holy prayer. When I saw his deeds (28v) and his way of life I admired him greatly. I spent seven months with him, as he was very pleased with me<sup>154</sup> and knew that I was very zealous for the work of God. For he would not eat except once a week, and I would emulate him.

"Now after the completion of a year he said to me, 'My son, I want to go into the desert and spend the Forty Days of summer there.'<sup>155</sup> I said to him, 'My father, I will also come with you.' But he said to me, 'No, my son, but rise and follow me, so I may take you to the (Monastery) of the Fathers. I have an old cell there; stay [in it] until I return from the desert.' I said, 'As you wish, by the will of God, I will obey you.' I rose and walked with him. He brought me to this cell and stayed with me for twenty-two days. Afterwards, he left me and shut the door of this cell with his hands, and I have not opened it until today. The name of that elder was Samuel. (29r) Believe me, my holy father, I did not see him again in the body but God informed me about him in a vision, as he came out of the body surrounded by righteous [people] and angels."

Now as he was saying these things he strayed from his speech and began to speak with me in ecstasy. I thought that he was coming out of the body. Then he stood up and said to me, "My father woe, woe!" I asked him, "My holy father what happened?" But he embraced me and cried with a bitter heart. Then I began<sup>156</sup> asking him to tell me the reason for his tears. He looked at my face and cried with an exceedingly bitter heart. I was troubled; again I said to him, "My father, tell me what is the matter, or I may be disheartened until death." He replied, "My father, you are the cause of my tears and my grief. (29v) My father, during this year a devil will come to this city to persecute you.<sup>157</sup> For the Romans will rule over the country of Egypt and they will persecute you until they cast you from your throne. You will flee to Upper Egypt as they persecute you until you reach the monastery of the Archimandrite Abba Shenoute.<sup>158</sup> You will suffer great evils. As it is written, the shepherd will be struck and the sheep of the fold will scatter.<sup>159</sup> You will spend eleven years persecuted from place to place.<sup>160</sup> But do not fear. No one will overcome you, nor will the evil one seize you.<sup>161</sup> After this, God will remember you and he will return you joyfully to your throne. And I shall see you again in good health. The Lord also knows that no one will put his hands upon my eyes except you. Then do not fear; God will send his angel before you and he will guard you everywhere (30r) you go."<sup>162</sup> He was very sad when he said this to me. Nevertheless, I said, "Let the will of God be done." I left as he cried out, "Do not fear! God will be with you."

I went to Alexandria. And you know how much the evil one persecuted us and how great was the danger. I fled from place to place until I went to the Monastery of the Saint Apa Shenoute according to the

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<sup>151</sup> Cop. *toou*: "mountain," is often lexicalized to mean "monastery." Cf. the usage of the Gr. *oros* and Ar. *jabal* in monastic literature.

<sup>152</sup> Cf. Heike Behlmer, "Visitors to Shenoute's Monastery" in D. Frankfurter ed. *Pilgrimage and Holy Space in late Antique Egypt* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1998), 362-63. Similar statements were said about the Shenoutian monks during the fifth century.

<sup>153</sup> Cf. Mt. 9:9, Lk. 9:59.

<sup>154</sup> Lit.: *as his heart rested on me*.

<sup>155</sup> I.e. Lent.

<sup>156</sup> Lit.: *stood*. See Albertyna Dembska, "A Note on the Meaning of the Coptic Verb *tooun* 'arise', 'rise'," *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* 46 (1989), 105-110.

<sup>157</sup> This would place this entire incident early in 631.

<sup>158</sup> This would indicate that the Monastery of St. Shenoute (*al-Dayr al-abyad*), in modern day Sohag, was the farthest extent of Benjamin's travels.

<sup>159</sup> See Mt. 26:31, Mk. 14:27, Zach. 13:7.

<sup>160</sup> Although Benjamin was in hiding for about thirteen years, the text would seem to be correct in stating that he was only physically persecuted for eleven, i.e. 631-641.

<sup>161</sup> Cyrus is addressed by the title of the devil as used in the Lord's Prayer. The inference is also made in the following paragraph.

<sup>162</sup> See Ex. 23:20. & Ps. 91:11.

prophecy of the saint. All the things that he told me took place. Afterwards, God the Merciful again had pity on his church. The people rejoiced with us, and we returned to Alexandria. After we rested for a few days, I went to that saint. As I stood outside his door, he cried out from inside, “The archbishop, the new Dioscorus,<sup>163</sup> has returned safely. Come in, gift of God.”<sup>164</sup> I went in and greeted him; (30v) he grabbed my hands, kissed them, and rejoiced greatly.

After we prayed and sat down, he sighed greatly and said to me, “My father the archbishop, now the house shakes.<sup>165</sup> Now they have come asking for the rent. Now the vinedresser<sup>166</sup> wants to visit the vineyard. But God knows whether or not it has brought forth good fruit, if it is ripe, whether it has any sour grapes, if it is devoid of weeds, or if its fruit is sweet. Woe, woe!” I was troubled and asked him, “Will a storm of persecution rise again upon the Church?” But he said to me, “No my father, but they have sent for me wanting to account for the sins I have committed. Then it is necessary that I go. My father, those who pursue me have caught up with me now at an unexpected hour.<sup>167</sup> If only they would find me prepared. I have not done anything good, my father, and the place that I am going to now requires (31r) a good and pure man.” As he said this to me he sat up and said, “My father, pray for me that the will of the Lord be done.” As we prayed he said to me, “Please,<sup>168</sup> bring this old tunic and put it under my head.” I did as he asked. Then I saw him as a great fever [weighed] heavily upon him. He suffered greatly. I asked him, “My father, do you want me to bring a few [pieces of] fruit for you?” But he said, “May I not taste any of the food of this world.” As he said this he stood up, grabbed my hands, and said, “My father the archbishop, where can I escape?” He moved back and forth, shivering, [to the point] that I would almost say that he was running away trying to escape death. I began<sup>169</sup> comforting him so that he might sleep a little. I laid him down, and looked with my eyes here and there, but I did not find any water (31v) to give him to drink, to cool him down a little. I sat and cried over him. Then, he lifted up his eyes and (looked) at my face and said, “My father, weep for me today for I am a wretched sinner--more than all men.”

Then came the evening of that day. And as I wondered where to find some oil to light a lamp for him or where to find a fire, a great miracle occurred. I heard a voice crying out, “Archbishop, I do not need the light of this world. I do not need the water of this world to drink, nor do I need anything from this world at all.” Immediately I looked and saw a brilliant light; and as I looked to the east of the cell, I saw a censor suspended from above, filled with coal and incense. I stood up, grabbed it, and offered up the incense. I never smelled a sweet fragrance like it. (32r) At dawn I greeted him. He was not able to speak clearly, [so] I asked him, “My father, why don’t you answer me today?” He answered me, “My father, my tongue was paralyzed. The market place is near closing, and the grinders have almost ceased working.<sup>170</sup> Dust will return to dust,<sup>171</sup> and God himself knows what the miserable soul will encounter.” I wept and said to him, “My father, are you also fearful, you, a righteous and perfect man?” He raised his face, looked at me, and I saw his face light up like a flame and he said, “Indeed, if Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob came to me and said, ‘You are righteous,’ until I hear the judgment from the mouth of the Righteous Judge, I will not believe them. Woe, woes to every sinful man like me. My father, look at a young child feeding on the milk of his mother. If God seeks after him, (32v) how would he suffer! Indeed, he had never committed any sin. I tell you, my father, Moses who spoke with God five hundred and seventy times,<sup>172</sup> the prophets, our fathers the

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<sup>163</sup> Dioscorus I (444-458), was the Patriarch of Alexandria at the Council of Chalcedon. He was exiled for not accepting it (technically, though, for not obeying a third summons to attend the third session of the council, he was under house arrest). Upon his return, Benjamin was greeted as a new Dioscorus, one who was persecuted for not accepting Chalcedon, and who, like Dioscorus, did not waver in his stance. In the *History of the Patriarchs* Benjamin is called a “confessor” upon his return from exile.

<sup>164</sup> Can also be understood as “oblation of God.”

<sup>165</sup> Cf. Ecc. 12:3.

<sup>166</sup> Cop./Gr. *technites*.

<sup>167</sup> Cf. Mt. 24:13; 24:43-44, Mk. 13:35-6, Lk. 12:39-40.

<sup>168</sup> The Coptic expression is “perform charity” *ari ti-agape*, borrowed from the Greek *poieson agapen*.

<sup>169</sup> Lit.: *stood*.

<sup>170</sup> Cf. Ecc. 12:3.

<sup>171</sup> Ecc. 12:7.

<sup>172</sup> This seems to have been a common Coptic tradition. It is found in the Coptic Synaxarium’s entry for Moses the prophet (Toute 8), in a ninth-century acrostic hymn for St. Shenoute, see K.H. Kuhn and W.J. Tait, *Thirteen Coptic Acrostic Hymns* (Oxford, 1996), 137. And in *Pseudo-Athanasius* III.5, see Francisco Javier Martinez, “Eastern Christian Apocalyptic in the Early Muslim Period: Pseudo-Methodius and Pseudo-Athanasius,” Ph.D. dissertation (Catholic University of America, Washington DC, 1985). Coptic pg 302, English 475.

apostles, and all the saints fear this hour, even though they are righteous. For this hour is difficult for everyone who is born into the world. My father, the road that I will go on I have never traveled. I have never seen the messengers who pursue me. The faces [of those who] pursue me are distorted. What will I say to them? They do not accept bribes to release me, nor are they respectful of gray hair. For this is their job.”

After he said this to me, he was silent for a little while, and then he sprang up and sat as if he had never been sick. I marveled, [wondering] where the fever that gripped him had gone? I said to him, “Get up so that we may pray.” We stood up, prayed, and he said to me, “Remember, I have asked you (33r) to pray for me in your prayers.” Then he laid on the ground as he turned his face toward the east, and said to me, “Approach me so I can embrace you again, my father.” I embraced him and he grabbed my two hands and put them on his eyes, and immediately he gave his spirit to the hands of the Lord on the thirteenth of Tobi.<sup>173</sup> I sat weeping bitterly, and called to the Father of the Monastery<sup>174</sup> along with other holy monks. We performed the liturgy<sup>175</sup> for him and I made the brothers bring a shroud; I wanted to bury him as I saw fit.<sup>176</sup> But as we were doing this, I heard a great voice saying, “Archbishop, I had nothing with me when I was born into the world, and as I came naked, I will also leave naked.”<sup>177</sup> When I heard this, I made them bring the body and place it in a tomb. I arranged a cluster of rocks over it, and went forth and prayed to God. I returned to Alexandria, marveling at the things that I had seen.

Now, my beloved brothers, (33v) let us repent before they seek after us. Let us return to God. He is a lover of humanity, he will accept us unto himself through the grace and the lovingkindness of our Lord, God and Savior, Jesus Christ. He, through whom all glory, honor, and worship is worthy of the Father, with him and the life-giving and consubstantial Holy Spirit, now and at all times and to the end of all ages. Amen.

Mercy to the writer, Amen.  
Peace to the reader, Amen.<sup>178</sup>  
Understanding to the listeners, Amen.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> This is the same day that the miracle at Cana is commemorated in the Coptic Orthodox Church.

<sup>174</sup> Cop./Gr. *monasterion*.

<sup>175</sup> This *kanon* may be the liturgy of the Eucharist (which is most probable), or a special prayer for the departed. See Lamp, s.v. *kanon*.

<sup>176</sup> Lit.: *according to my heart*.

<sup>177</sup> Cf. Job 1:21 and I Tim 6:7.

<sup>178</sup> This “amen” is written in Coptic as the number “99:” *fth/99*. This is the sum of the numerical value of all the letters in the word: (a/1) + (m/40) + (e/8) + (n/50) = 99.

<sup>179</sup> The scribal note at the end reads: “God forgive the sins of the wretched Shenoute of Babylon. Amen.”