

## Acts of Peter

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The Coptic text from which this translation has been made was first published by Carl Schmidt in 'Die alten Petrusakten' *Texte und Untersuchungen* vol. 9 (1903) pp. 1-176 . It is one of the texts in Pap. Berol. 8502, from a Christian burial site in Upper Egypt at Akhmim (on the opposite side of the river to the White Monastery) and dated palaeographically to the 5th cent. It was purchased shortly after discovery in 1896 and donated to the Berlin Museum by Carl Reinhardt.<sup>1</sup>

The Berlin papyrus contains four Coptic texts: *Gospel of Mary*, *Apocryphon of John*, *Sophia of Jesus Christ* and *Acts of Peter*.<sup>2</sup> It was Carl Schmidt who succeeded, in the detailed analysis presented on pp. 10ff., in uncoupling the *Acts of Peter* (and other but not all apocryphal apostolic acts) from association with the phenomenon usually known as Gnosticism and established them as the products of Christian tradition.

One can only speculate about what these four texts, two explicitly Gnostic, one with identifiably Gnostic elements and one that seems to be Gnosis-free, are doing together in the same book? If it was buried with someone, presumably the owner of the book, who either wrote it or commissioned it, what sort of Christian was he or she ? Unlike the Nag Hammadi texts, which contain Christian or Christianized texts, this book was not hidden away in a jar in an unfinished Old Kingdom grave, but rather openly taken to the owner's own grave, either with the owner's consent or at the owner's insistence.

The portrayal of Peter in *Mary* and *Peter* is not without interest: in the former he is resentful of Mary and his attempt to sideline Mary as untrustworthy is belittled by Levi (Matthew); in the latter, however, he is strong and purposeful, confidently dismissing charges of heartlessness, incompetence or negligence in the matter of his daughter's well-being that are levelled against him.

Coptic usually rightly ignores Greek morphology, but here it is noticeable that the vocative form of 'Peter' is used. A word used several times in connection with the body of Peter's daughter is a form of **ΜΟΥΤΝ** (set at ease)/**ΜΤΟΝ** (be at ease) and seems to be used because of its association with relief from illness.<sup>3</sup>

The paragraphs are my own invention to make the text, I hope, slightly easier to read.

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1 Carl Reinhardt was the chief interpreter with the German General Consulate in Cairo. He purchased a number of Demotic, Coptic and Arabic papyri now in various German collections. The Arabic texts were published by C.H. Becker *Papyri Schott-Reinhardt* (1906).

2 The *Apocryphon* and *Sophia* were published as explicitly Gnostic works in W.C. Till and H.-M. Schenke *Die gnostischen Schriften des Pap. Berol. 8502* (1955).

3 W. E. Crum *Coptic Dictionary* 193b.

(128) On day one of the Sabbath,<sup>4</sup> that is Sunday, a crowd gathered and brought a multitude of sick people that he<sup>5</sup> might heal them. One of the crowd made so bold as to speak to Peter: 'Peter, in our presence you have caused many blind people to see and the deaf to hear, you have caused the lame to walk and helped the weak and given them strength. Why then has your daughter grown up into a beautiful girl who believes (129) in the name of God and you have not helped her ? Look, her side is totally paralysed and she lies handicapped<sup>6</sup> in the corner, looking at<sup>7</sup> those you cure. Do not neglect your daughter, Peter.'

Peter smiled and said to him: 'My son, it is clear to God alone why her body is not at ease with her. Know then<sup>8</sup> that God is not weak or powerless to grant His gift to my daughter.' But so that your soul would be persuaded and those present would believe (130) all the more, he<sup>9</sup> therefore looked at his daughter and said to her: 'Arise in your place. No-one has helped you except Jesus alone and walk before all these at your ease and come to me.' She arose and came down to him. The crowd rejoiced over what happened. Peter said to them: 'Now your heart is persuaded that God is not powerless in the matter of anything we ask of Him.' They then rejoiced all the more and gave glory to God.

Peter (131) said to his daughter: 'Go to your place and stay there and resume your illness. For this is good for you and me.' The girl went and stayed there and became as she had been before. The whole crowd wept and begged Peter to restore her health. Peter said to them:<sup>10</sup> 'By the living Lord<sup>11</sup> this is good for her and me. For on the day she was born to me I saw a vision, the Lord saying to me: "Peter, a great (132) trial has been born to you. For this girl will wound many souls if her body is at ease with her." I myself thought that the vision was mocking me. When the girl was ten years old, many were scandalized<sup>12</sup> by

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4 In the LXX this term seems to refer only the day of the week known as Shabat, but by the Christian period came to refer to the 'week' as early as the Gospels cf. H. Liddell and R. Scott *Greek-English Lexicon q.v.*

5 The pronoun must be anaphoric, clearly indicating that Peter has already been mentioned

6 Coptic **εϥϥωϣ** 'impeded'

7 Text: **ϥεναϥ** 'they see'. I have taken the liberty of understanding **εϥεναϥ** 'she seeing'

8 Schmidt (p. 1) says that the word **ϥε** has been written over

9 Schmidt (p. 8) notes that this seems to be a parallel construction to the one in Matt. 9, 6: 'So that you may know... he then said to the paralytic ...'

10 The beginning of the story Peter tells to the crowd.

11 Schmidt (p.8) refers to other examples of this formula

12 The form to be understood here **σκανδαλιζομαι**. It need hardly be said that the girl has done nothing to 'scandalize' anyone, but the absence of **εγκρατεια** on the part of the male population might induce these feelings of being scandalized.

her. A man rich in life<sup>13</sup> named Ptolemy, when he saw the girl doing the washing with her mother,<sup>14</sup> sent for her that he might take her to be his wife. Her mother was unwilling, but he sent to her repeatedly. He was unable to wait...

[2 pages missing]

(135) '[The servants of]<sup>15</sup> Ptolemy brought the girl and placed her at the door of the house and left. When her mother and I learned of this, we came down. We found the girl, the whole of one side of her body from her toes to her head was paralysed and withered. We took her away giving glory to the Lord, Who had saved her from a life of slavery to defilement and pollution and ...<sup>16</sup> This is the reason why the girl has been in this condition until today. So now, it is necessary for you to know what Ptolemy did. (136)

He spent his time beating his heart,<sup>17</sup> grieving night and day for what had happened to him and, as a result of all the weeping he did, he became blind and thought of hanging himself.<sup>18</sup> Lo and behold, at the ninth hour of that day.<sup>19</sup> When he was alone in his room, he saw a great light shining on his whole house and he heard a voice saying (137) to him: "Ptolemy, the vessels<sup>20</sup> of God, it is not for destruction and pollution that He has given them. You should behave as if you believe in me and not defile my virgin, this one whom you will know for yourself<sup>21</sup> as a sister, as if I were for both of you a single spirit. (138) But arise and go quickly to the house of Peter the apostle and you will see my glory and he will tell you<sup>22</sup> about the matter."

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13 Coptic: **ⲚⲙⲠⲃⲒⲐⲐⲟⲥ**, which I take to mean material possessions

14 Almost the reverse of Nausicaa and Odysseus in Bk 6.

15 Schmidt supplies what is almost certainly the reading.

16 The only two letters remaining are **ⲧⲈ**]. Since the word **ⲧⲌⲖⲐⲟ** 'destruction' occurs on p. 137 in a similar context, it seems likely that this is the word to be supplied here. The form **ⲧⲈⲖⲐⲟ** is a close alternative spelling cf. Crum 405a

17 Lit. 'he became (as one) beating his heart' **ⲕⲁⲩⲱⲱⲡⲈ ⲈⲒⲤ ⲈⲒⲐⲱⲎ ⲒⲙⲡⲈⲒⲒⲢⲧ** cf. Crum 395a

18 Coptic: **ⲈⲒⲙⲈⲈⲪⲈ ⲈⲧⲣⲈⲒⲧⲱⲐⲱⲎ ⲎⲒⲟⲧⲟⲒ** 'he thought of arising and hanging himself.' The verb 'throttle, hang' is normally **ⲱⲐⲧ** and, as Schmidt points out, it is metathesized here.

19 3 p.m.

20 Greek **σκεῦος**. Schmidt appositely calls attention to the passage in 1 Thess. 4,4 (which would make it the only Biblical citation in the text), where the word is clearly used as a metaphor, probably of a woman cf. also 1 Pet. 3,7.

21 Coptic: **ⲈⲧⲈⲖⲎⲌⲐⲐⲟⲩⲱⲎⲐ ⲎⲌⲖ**. Crum (370a) does not give this or any other example of **ⲐⲐⲐⲱⲎ** used with the 'ethic dative', as here. It may perhaps be understood as encratite sentiment, referring to a different sort of knowledge to be experienced by Ptolemy, who was guided only by the 'knowledge' of the senses when he first saw Peter's daughter.

22 Presumably a form of the verb in Crum 73b, but this passage is not cited there: **ⲒⲎⲌⲧⲐⲐⲟⲩⲈⲒⲌⲧⲖ**

Ptolemy obeyed.<sup>23</sup> He ordered his servants to show him the way and bring him to me. He said all the things that had happened to him through the power of Jesus Christ Our Lord. He then saw,<sup>24</sup> with the eyes of his flesh and the eyes of his soul. A crowd placed their hope in Christ. He did good things for them. He granted them the gift of God.

Ptolemy later died and went forth from life. He went to his Lord (139). When he made his will, he wrote a plot of a vineyard<sup>25</sup> in the name of my daughter, saying that it was because of her that he had believed in God and was saved. The administration that had been entrusted to her I looked after it zealously for her. I sold the vineyard and it is God alone, neither I nor my daughter. I sold the vineyard and kept back none of the price of the vineyard, but distributed the entire amount to those in difficulty. Know therefore, servant of Christ Jesus, that God regulates what is His and prepares what is good for each of us, we who think that God has forgotten us. Now then, let us mourn and be vigilant and pray. The goodness of God will watch over us and we will look forward to it.'

Other<sup>26</sup> speeches were made by Peter before them all and he gave glory to the name of the Lord (140) Christ. He gave to them from the bread he had broken,<sup>27</sup> arose and went home.

#### The Acts of Peter

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23 Lit. 'He did not neglect' **ΜΠΕΔΡΑΜΕΛΙ**

24 Crum 234a says that **ΝΑΥ ΕΒΟΛ** refers to 'seeing' as distinct from 'being blind'. It seems to mean that he was able to see physically as well as psychically. Whatever it means, it marks a point of conversion or confirmation of belief

25 Coptic **ϸΩΤ ΝΒΩΜ** According to J. Černý *Coptic Etymological Dictionary* (1976) **ϸΩΤ** (p. 164) is the measure known in pharaonic Egypt as *sḏ3t* (aroura), approx. 50 m<sup>2</sup>; **βΩΜ** (p. 331) *k3m* is a 'vineyard, garden'.

26 The text has 'all' **ΤΗΡΟΥ**, but it makes little sense here.

27 For 'breaking bread' on the first day of the week cf. Acts 20,7