

De Aethiopia Invasione

by
Shenoute

Translated
by
Anthony Alcock

The translation presented below has been made from the text published by Johannes Leipoldt, with the help of W.E. Crum, in *Sinuthii Archimandritae Vita aetc Opera Omnia III (Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium: Scriptores Coptici, Series Secunda, Textus, 1908)* pp. 67-77.¹

Shenoute was born in the Upper Egyptian village of Shenaloolet ('wood of the vine'), not far from Akhmim on the opposite bank of the Nile to Sohag in 348, became abbot of the White Monastery (Deir el Abiad) near Sohag when he was about 37 and remained head of the monastery until his death. He is thought to have died c.465. He is sometimes known as Shenoute of Atripe, 'le lieu de son repos', according to a text published by E. Amélineau.² Atripe comes from the name of a Ptolemaic temple that stood there.³ The area has been under archaeological investigation in recent years by a team from Yale University.⁴

The three texts translated here record how he and his monastery contributed to alleviating the sufferings caused by the invasions of marauding tribes from further south.

At this point a brief note on nomenclature might be useful. Descriptions attached in these texts to the various peoples living to the south of Egypt tend to be relatively imprecise. Apart

¹ Coptic manuscripts began to be brought to Europe as early as the 17th cent. by various European travellers, with the result that entire corpora and libraries were dismembered. In the case of the White Monastery an attempt has been made to reconstruct it, but I have not seen any of the publications containing this work

² *Géographie de l'Égypte copte* (1893) p.67

³ *hwt-rpjjt*

⁴ <http://www.360cities.net/de/image/first-chamber-of-the-tomb-of-st-shenoute-monastery-sohag-egypt#87.10,0.00,85.0>

from phrases such 'blood-shedding heathens' and 'barbarians', the only specific name used by Shenoute is ⲉⲃⲟⲩⲩ 'Kushite'. The name is first cited in early Middle Kingdom (c.2000 BC) Egyptian texts, *k3š*, where it is generally preceded by the adjective 'vile' (*hsi*). Demotic writings indicate that the name at some point acquired a prothetic vowel⁵. The name is also known from the Old Testament.⁶ Peoples called Nobatae and Blemmyes also inhabited the area south of Egypt at various times: the former are thought to have been employed by Diocletian to contain the latter (Coptic ⲃⲗⲒⲙⲟⲩ). A letter from Phonen the Blemmyes king to Aburni the Nobades king, datable to the 5th cent. AD, was discovered during the excavations conducted by J.M. Plumley at Qasr Ibrîm: it is in poor Greek, but it seems to be about the unwisdom of breaking the non-aggression pact between the two peoples.⁷

A people mentioned in pharaonic texts is Medjay
(*md3y*)

first mentioned in Old Kingdom texts as an elite warrior force. Gradually their name seems to have lost its meaning as such and, in the Christian period, survives as ⲙⲁⲧⲟⲓ it simply means 'soldier'. Another people known from Arabic sources is the Beja (بجا). But these two groups apparently are not related to each other.⁸ The northern part of the country now known as Ethiopia, from a Greek name used, for example, by Homer in the Iliad and the Odyssey and meaning perhaps 'burnished face', was at that time known as Aksum and is quite a bit further south of the region known to the Egyptians as Kush.

Each of the volumes edited by Leipoldt is accompanied by an excellent Latin translation (in the same series) by H. Wiessmann in which all the Biblical references are given.

⁵ J. Černý *A Coptic Etymological Dictionary* (1975) p.41.

⁶ eg. Jer. 13,23

⁷ T.C. Skeat 'Letter from the King of the Blemmyes to the King of the Noubades' *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 63 (1977): 159-170. Revised by J. Rea 'Letter of Phonen to Aburni' *ZPE* 34, 1979: 147-162.

⁸ Kate Liszka "'We have come from the well of Ibhet': Ethnogenesis of the Medjay" *Journal of Egyptian History* 4 (2011): 149-171 fn. 17

Text 1

(p.67) From the same.⁹

If we say to you, God almighty, 'Do not give us into the hands of these blood-shedding heathens', we are like blasphemers, we people who have given ourselves to pollution to commit every act of impurity. We have filled regions, we have filled cities and towns and roads, wailing about the fear of barbarians, crying out, 'Woe, woe', some 'because of my children', others 'because of my parents and brothers'. Where is the father, where is the mother, where is the brother, where is the man who weeps and grieves that his daughter has taken to prostitution and his son has become impious and his brother ? If there are some who are distressed because their children or brothers are sinning, they really deserve every respect.

Text 2

From the same.

The remaining words of this book or the rest that (p.68) we said or wrote in the second year,¹⁰ after having built this house in the time when the barbarians reached as far as the city called Koeis¹¹ in the course of their depredations, at the time when this great multitude took refuge with us in their flight from those Kushites who boasted of their power because of the powerlessness of the pagan authorities,¹² who in their faithlessness had no idea who created them and who would give them power, Jesus.¹³ But rather our sins, which are many, move

⁹ i.e. Shenoute

¹⁰ Of the invasions.

¹¹ Probably the place not far from Minya in Middle Egypt cf. E. Amélineau *Géographie de l'Égypte Copte* (1893) p.396.

¹² Lit. 'Hellene counts'.

¹³ The association of ignorance of God and weakness finds expression in texts ranging from the books

the inhabited world, that raise them¹⁴ against *us*. But, after all, what are they before God ? Or, where is he who cares about the works of God, each one in his way, that He will give power to us ? Who is the one the Lord God will ask on the day of judgement to give an account of what was allocated to him ? It is I, or someone else like me. Also kings who have accepted rule and power. And soldiers who all rule. Not only those who have been entrusted to works and souls, but even to peoples. It is the purity of our body and our heart. It is the worthiness of marriage. Perseverance in prayer and everything about which the Scriptures make prescriptions..Thus they are blessed who will find the freedom to speak¹⁵ in time of need. Woe (p.69) to us, to whom it is a matter of indifference that they are coming into the hands of God or that He will ask us ...

Text 3

1. Of Shenoute.

Once again I give glory to God and thank Him for for all the good things He has done for us. I will say that this great multitude of this size who have taken refuge with us or have taken up residence outside the gate of these places of assembly and their surroundings together with their wives and children, so that they number is approximately 20,000 or more, all the brothers, except for those who were too weak, ministering to them for three months from what we had in the blessing, there being no other things among those that were sought that were not brought to them. There were seven doctors who administered medical care to those of them who were ill, together with those struck by arrows or wounded by javelins, and we gave them wages, amounting to 50,000 (pieces of) copper.¹⁶ Fourty-four people died, and we

of the Old Testament to much later texts in other Christian cultures, e.g.the British monk Gildas *De excidio Britanniae* (6th cent.) and the English bishop Wulfstan *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* (11th cent.). I have repeated 'power' in line with the repeated use of the Copti **ϫⲟⲙ**.

¹⁴ The invaders

¹⁵ **ΠΑΡΡΗΣΙΑ**

¹⁶ Coptic **ϫⲟⲙⲛⲏⲧ**. Possibly *nummus*, small mostly copper coin. According to R. Bagnall (*Currency and*

buried them with what was ours¹⁷, but the things of Christ the King. Fifty-two were born, and we spent what was necessary on the new born, in one case 25,000 (p. 70) for cooked¹⁸ greens and herbs, in another, 30,000, apart from the greens and herbs which we had. During this entire period 105 xestes¹⁹ of oil were consumed, used daily in cooking, if it was lentils, sometimes sixteen artabs²⁰ daily, sometimes seventeen artabs, sometimes more. Four ovens were baking bread daily, one day eighteen at a time²¹, another day nineteen, another twenty, another seventeen, another sixteen, all eaten. But we did²² not allow the brothers to eat from them that they might find²³. They were not enough for them, let alone their many animals as well, the camels, the sheep, the calves and cattle, their horses and goats, we taking care of them and their entire baggage. And the little spring too was a wonder, for if He²⁴ had not blessed it, it would not have provided enough water for them to drink. But, I will be brief. Truly, if we believe, we know, we who take care of and look after everything from which we take and spend on this vast multitude that has gathered from the onslaught of these enemies, (p.71) apart from the permanent ordinance of the gate²⁵, whether bronze, gold, silver, clothes, sandals, blankets, cloaks, burial shrouds, wheat, bread, barley²⁶, all sorts of seed, whether wine, vinegar, eggs, cheese, pigeons, flour, genuine olive oil,²⁷ grapes, fruit, all the needs of the sick, and all the expenses incurred, they will not be²⁸ less than 57 she²⁹ and 6 myriads of copper. For the wheat and barley alone, they will be half a myriad and 3500 artabs, and more than that. The amount of the oil expended on them was 200 artabs of

Inflation in 4th cent. Egypt) there appears to have been a coin called *μυρία*. The statistics in this section look as if they might have been belonged to records kept at the time and later incorporated into this text.

- ¹⁷ Ms E (Paris 131⁴) has a negative form: 'with what was not ours', which is more appropriate in view of the following 'but ...'
- ¹⁸ Omitted by Paris 131⁴
- ¹⁹ Just over half a litre.
- ²⁰ An artaba was just over 30 kg in weight
- ²¹ The reading in the manuscripts is not unanimous. If it means 'at a time (*νηωπι*)', the figures have to be understood as amounts or units, presumably known to the writer
- ²² The tense used here is the Present in many of the manuscripts, perhaps Historic Present.
- ²³ There is no object, but one probably has to understand 'their own food'.
- ²⁴ The subject must be God.
- ²⁵ I take this to be a reference to the statement made earlier in this section to the place where the refugees were camped out
- ²⁶ Text reads *εκετ*, but has to be emended to *ειωτ* 'barley', as suspected by Leipoldt.
- ²⁷ The description of a valuable commodity as 'genuine' is also known from pharaonic Egypt, where the valuable imported lapis lazuli is described as 'genuine lapis lazuli' (*hsbd m3ct*)
- ²⁸ This use of the future is parallel to the English usage when making calculations in informal speech 'That'll be five pounds, please.'
- ²⁹ Crum (547a) speculates that this is a small bronze coin, equal to a carat. Unfortunately he does not cite this text to provide any idea of the relationship between the two units (*ωε* and myriad).

radishes, which are 40 *eiope*³⁰ of 5 artabs for each one. I have not wished to say them all.

Again in these same years a hundred prisoners lacking nothing, we saved them, a total of 40,000 for each one, apart from money, clothes, expenses and transport costs until they were taken to their homes. And, in truth, there was nothing that they lacked, as I said earlier. But in fact there was additional expense.³¹ And how is it not reprehensible, enough to make one angry and curse, if those who live in these places were in need of the things that satisfy their bodily wants ? Because they neglected their souls in those days.

Do we have all these things available to us ? (p. 72) If so, then we are liars, because we have taken our cross and followed the Lord ? Whence or how do we have these things ? From what field or business do we have them ? We live from our handiwork, apart from the blessing of the blessed Lord God of All. The faithful are in awe when they speak at His holy place, giving glory to Him. For they know that all good things are His. The faithless and the pagans are disturbed when they speak about us, 'Where do these people find all these things ?' For they do not know that it was He who blessed the five loaves of bread and seven loaves.³² They all ate and drank and filled other baskets. He is also the one who now blesses everything belonging to all who believe that He is able to do any thing he wants. That which is ours, will it not be more than that of the widow in Sarepta³³ ? What is in these small vessels ? Where did all this flour and oil come from ? That that prophet who is worthy to be trusted by God might live on them and this widow and her children for three years minus six months without interruption. What will one be able to say ? Is there treasure here ? A large vessel ? Is it not a small flask ? Is it not a water jar ? As the moneylender took away her children. Where did all this oil come from into (p.73) this small vessel until she filled all these vessels from it ? As he said: 'People ate from the ten loaves and left some over', as he said they would.³⁴ For the Lord said and made us worthy of these good and great things that happen to us that we might do them in the second year minus a month from the time we built this house. The one who cares reflects thus and reasons that trouble came to

³⁰ **ειοπε**: a measure used in pharaonic Egypt: *ipt*, of sizes ranging from 40 to 50 *hnw*, one of which was approximately half a litre cf. Rainer Hanig *Großes Handwörterbuch Aegyptisch-Deutsch* (2005) p,

³¹ What follows appears to move seamlessly from an impersonal account of care provided to an outburst of emotion against those who have brought these tribulations upon themselves as a result of their loose living

³² The different figures given in John and Matthew

³³ 1 Kg. 17: 8-24 and Lk. 4-25-26

³⁴ I have not repeated the words, as the Coptic does, but simply made use of an ellipse.

Egypt through the lawlessness of the Kushites. Through the righteousness of those who hope in Jesus joy and peace will be made to happen in heaven. Through their blindness the Kushites sacrificed to Beliar,³⁵ the demon king when they shed blood. Through the piety of the servants of Christ, He to whom people belong, He to whom belong bronze, gold and all things, there will be sacrifices of mercy and giving. They give glory to Him, begging Him, giving thanks to Him for all His benefits, both bodily and spiritual, their belongings that He might bless them and their heart and their soul that He might fill them with every remembrance, they being aware that they are receiving from Him what is His, everything down to a single obol.³⁶

If I am able to confine myself to speaking about this super³⁷-abomination or (p. 74) am allowed to, I will say, 'Blessed are those from whose bones and flesh God will remove this illness and its fever and fire. Woe to those whom He will set alight and burn with ...³⁸ and not extinguish it. Only,³⁹ the house of the Lord God is not built that we may inspect it to see if it is stable and good but so we might inspect ourselves in it to see what sort of people we are before we go so that we do not repeat our actions and do something worthy of repentance.⁴⁰

2. This also related to them.

The matter is clear to the one who is vigilant and who watches and sees what Satan has given of his food which they super-prepare for him in every impiety throughout the entire country. So, it is time for a father or mother to become like a barbarian to their sons and daughters, especially parents according to this life who wish for the purification of their children. Thus also a brother of a brother and sister of a sister. Does salvation happen to

³⁵ There two variants of this name: Belial and Beliar cf. Neil Forsyth *The Old Enemy: Satan and the Combat Myth* Princeton 1987 Page 201 "The form Beliar (e.g. 2 Cor. 6.15) is due to Syriac pronunciation."

³⁶ Probably reference to Matt. 5:26, but the Greek word used there is κοδράντης. The obol seems to be confined to classical Greek usage and figures for example in the speech of Lysias on behalf of the disabled man fighting for his minimum pension *Speech on Refusal of Pension* section 24

³⁷ This somewhat infantile translation is intended to render ζογες- 'more than'. I have also used it below.

³⁸ **ΝΟΥΟΥ** I do not even know how to parse this word means, but I take it to be the word to which the pronoun after the following verb refers:

³⁹ Meaning here 'however'

⁴⁰ I have translated what I understand to be the meaning rather than grapple with Shenoute's complex syntax.

many ? Because there are many who die because of this deceit of false confidence and this false joy which is in them, each one according to his manner and according to his (p. 75) false love. They are overturned and accursed in their joy, laughter, wicked love and comfort because they are mindless and stupid instead of intelligent and knowledgeable, dark instead of light, their love polluted instead of holy. Truly the enemies of God. Fathers and brothers and people who say that they are Christians tolerating each other in the abomination of the Son of Destruction. What is peace to men before God, when their impurity is not concealed from each other, one reproaching the other ? Or how will they escape Scripture: 'There is no joy for the impious' ? Where is there no joy for them ? In the aeon to come or this one ? Which impious one does not rejoice in this ? Truly he is mindless and a scoundrel, like the one who will remain with she who is an adulterer. A father and mother support impure children. For they are ignorant of their worthlessness, there is no shame to them. If I had not known that a father and mother(p. 76) and brother were of the same mind and conviction as the one who commits adultery with their daughters and sisters, I would not say it. If worthy mothers neglected to stand by their daughters in all purity. For they wish and are envious to be like them in every worthiness. There is also woman, if she had not already been seduced, she would not have believed or rejoiced with the one who seduced her daughter. Hence the expression 'like mother like daughter' and 'she is her mother's daughter'. It is also said about a father, 'Your father is an Amorite',⁴¹ not only because he tolerates who debauches his daughter, but because he is a companion who eats and drinks with him and comes into his house, like a son and brother ...⁴² time when he is remembered. who speaks thus, that he is a merciless one, because he raises his children and brothers with every scourge⁴³ that they may escape the judgement of God who is more merciful. On the day when He is said to be merciful He became merciless because He does not cause the flesh and blood of His incorrigible children and brothers to adhere to the rod, but He (p.77) left the place of evil torture to every scourge. Or is there another more cogent teaching than that of 'Behold pollution and sin of all sorts, behold the fire of Gehenna and eternal punishment ?' Now then, what is impiety before the darkness and the worm which await those who commit it ? What is the judgement of a father and mother and brother who bear witness to sons,

⁴¹ In Ezekiel 16,3 Jerusalem is castigated as the offspring of Amorite-Hittite parentage.

⁴² Text is corrupt at this point

⁴³ Shenoute had a reputation for harsh treatment of his charges, and there may be an element of self-justification here.

daughters and brothers of the tribulations and difficulties of the anger to come ? If the blessed are those whom Jesus will save from it, as written, woe to those who will not escape from it.