

# Apophthegmata Patrum 1

## Translation of the Coptic text

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In 1960 Marius Chaîne sadly died before he was able to see the publication of the Sahidic version of the Sayings of the Fathers, which he had gathered together from fragments of a single dismembered codex that had found their way, at various times and in various ways, into European libraries. <sup>1</sup> A table on p. iii of Chaîne's book provides a conspectus of the location and contents of these various fragments.

This not intended to be a study of the collection, but it seems clear enough that at least two different ways of organizing the material in it were used; alphabetical, as in the Greek text in the *Patrologia Graeca* 65, 71-440<sup>2</sup> and thematic, as in the *Patrologia Latina* 73: 855-1022 texts. The arrangement of the Coptic version, probably translated from Greek, is closer to that of the *PL* text.

There are various studies of texts, and recent publications of fragments can be found on Alin Suciu's blog *Patristics, Apocrypha, Coptic Literature and Manuscripts*.

This translation will appear in 4 parts. Names are, as always, a culturally complex matter: I have used the familiar Latin form of some, e.g. Antonius; Egyptian place names have the Egyptian form, e.g. Shiêt rather than Scetis and Rakote rather than Alexandria, a name never used in Coptic, <sup>3</sup> and the name 'Cells' replaces the more familiar Kellia, the area between Rakote and Shiêt. My reason for doing this is quite simple: the written form of the text may originally have been Greek, but I think it can be safely assumed that the language actually spoken by the actors in the texts was Coptic. I have tried to be as literal as I can, but this has not always been possible, and in one or two instances I have used English idiomatic phrases, such as 'Serves you right', for which a literal rendering would be 'Well

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<sup>1</sup> Marius Chaîne *Le manuscrit de la version copte en dialecte sahidique des "Apophthegmata Patrum"* (1960)

<sup>2</sup> English translation by Benedicta Ward *Sayings of the Desert Fathers* (1975)

<sup>3</sup> Anthony Alcock [http://www.academia.edu/6727546/Coptic\\_name\\_of\\_Alexandria](http://www.academia.edu/6727546/Coptic_name_of_Alexandria)

has this happened to you.' <sup>4</sup> Any obvious typographical errors in the Coptic text have simply been ignored.

I hope this translation will be of use to those studying Coptic in the early stages who may read the Apophthegmata.

[pages 1 to 14 are missing]

1. ...he saying: 'I wish to save my soul.' She tried looking at him, but she could not. So she left him. When he went to become a monk, his behaviour became neglectful and he wasted his life.

When his mother died, he became so seriously ill some time later that in an out-of-body experience<sup>5</sup> he was taken to the Judgement, where he found his mother together with those judging him. When she saw him, she was astonished and said to him: 'What is this, my son, that you come to this place to be judged. What did you mean with your claim that you wished to save your soul?' He felt shame at what he heard. He rose hesitatingly with no defence to offer her. By the providence of God, Who loves man, he recovered from his illness when He saw that he had repented in his heart. From the time when this visit occurred through the agency of God, he shut himself off. He sat down to think about his health,<sup>6</sup> weeping over over his previous thoughtless behaviour. His conscience was pricked to such an extent that many urged him to be little more considerate to himself lest he be overcome by so much weeping. He refused to console himself, saying: 'If I have been unable to bear the reproach of my mother, how will I be able to bear the shame of the Day of Judgement before Christ and His angels.'

2. An elder<sup>7</sup> said: 'If the souls of men were able come forth in fear after the resurrection at the appearance<sup>8</sup> of God, the world would die of fear and trembling. What would it be like to see the heavens open and God reveal Himself in anger, an uncountable hosts of angels and the whole of mankind looking on. For this reason, we should think as if each day we were

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<sup>4</sup> ΚΑΛΩΣ ΑΠΑΙ ΦΩΠΕ ΜΜΟΚ

<sup>5</sup> ΕΚΣΤΑΣΙΣ

<sup>6</sup> Spiritual and physical

<sup>7</sup> I have never felt satisfied with 'old man'. The Coptic (ⲉⲗⲗⲟ) can be translated literally as 'old boy', but this would be inappropriate. The Arabic 'sheikh' has quite bit more dignity in my view, but again is hardly appropriate here. 'Elder' seems to be the least unsatisfactory option available.

<sup>8</sup> ΠΑΡΟΥΣΙΑ

about render an account to God about what we have done in our lives.

3. A brother asked an elder: 'My father, why is my heart hard and not fearful of God ?' The elder replied: 'I think that if man controls the censure in his heart, he will generate for himself fear of God. The brother said: 'What is censure ?' The elder replied: 'Let man censure his soul in everything, telling it that we all have to go to God. He should ask his soul: "What have I to do with man ?" If he continues to do this, he will learn the fear of God.'

4. Apa Poimen related that a brother asked Apa Paese: 'What am I to do for my hardened heart ? I have no fear of God.' Paese replied: 'Go to a brother who has the fear of God. By imitating his fear of God you too will have the fear of God.'

5. Someone asked an elder: 'Why, when I am sitting in my cell, does my spirit wander ?' The elder replied: 'It is because the external senses are unhealthy: sight, hearing, smell, speaking. If you exercise them in purity, the internal senses will be at rest and healthy.'

6. Someone asked an elder: 'Why, when I am in my cell, do I feel distressed ?' The elder replied: 'It is because you have not considered the rest that we hope for or the punishments that will come. If you had paid attention to these, even if your cell were full of worms and you were in the midst of them up to your neck, you would bear them and feel no distress.'

7. An elder saw someone laughing. He said ...

[The next thirteen pages are missing]

8. ... for the wild asses, so also is the monk tested by thoughts of unwholesome desire.

9. He also said: 'Fasting is a bridle for the monk that resists sin. He who throws off this bridle is a passionate stud.'

10. He also said: 'The withered body of the monk drags his soul from the bottom of the pit and causes pleasures to wither through fasting.'

11. He also said: 'The prudent monk is crowned on earth and in heaven too is crowned in the presence of God.'

12. He also said: 'The monk unable to control his tongue, especially in time of anger, will never be master of anything.'

13. He also said: 'Do not utter a bad word from your mouth, for the vine does not put out thorns.'

14. He also said: 'It is good to eat meat and drink wine, but not to eat the flesh of your brothers with backbiting.'

15. He also said: 'The serpent whispered to Eve until she was expelled from Paradise. The one who backbites about his brother is like the serpent. For he destroys the soul of the one who listens and does little to save his own soul.'

16. Once there was a feast day in Shiêt<sup>9</sup> and a cup of wine was given to an elder. He said: 'Take this death away from me.' When those eating with him saw this they refused the wine.

17. A pitcher of new wine was taken that a cup be given to each of the brothers. One of them went up to the roof and ran around on it, whereupon the roof collapsed. They went to see about the noise caused by this. They found the brother lying prostrate. They then began to make fun of him: 'You vainglorious wretch. Serves you right.' The elder embraced him and said: 'Leave my son alone. For it is a good thing he has done. As the Lord lives, this roof will not be built in my lifetime, and the whole world will know that a roof in Shiêt collapsed for a cup of wine.'

18. A brother was moved to anger against someone. He began to pray. He begged for patience with his brother and overcame temptation without a wound, whereupon he saw smoke coming from his mouth. When this happened, he stopped being angry.

19. Once a presbyter of Shiêt went to the Archbishop of Rakote. On his return to Shiêt, the

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<sup>9</sup> The Greek form of the name is Scetis. The popular etymology of the name is 'weighing hearts' cf. H. G. Evelyn-White *History of the Monasteries of Nitria and Scetis* (1932) pp. 27ff.

brothers asked what the city was like. He said to them: 'Naturally I saw the face of nobody except the Archbishop alone.' When they heard this, they were strengthened by it so that they keep themselves from the pleasures of the eyes.

20. An elder said: 'The devil usually attaches himself to the faults of the monk. If it is a habit of long standing, it is pronounced and becomes like a natural habit, especially among those who are careless. Any food you know to be strengthening, do not feed your habit with it, especially if you are not ill. What tempts you, do not eat it. Eat what God sends you and be thankful at all times. We give the monks their food and comfort. The work of the monks we have not done it. Tell yourself to keep the seal of Christ, that is, humility.'

21. One of the elders went to visit an elder who said to his disciple: 'Prepare some lentils for us' and he prepared them. 'Moisten the bread', and he moistened it. But they spent the whole day and the whole night talking of spiritual things.

[Pages 33 to 66 are missing]

22. ... You are a layman, with no authority to be here.

23. Apa Isaac said: 'Our fathers and Apa Pambo were wearing old clothes, made from rags and palm fibres. But you wear expensive clothing. Leave this place. You have ruined it.'

24. As they were about to go to harvest, he said to them: 'I will not give you a command again, for you will not keep it.'

25. He also said: 'Apa Pambo said that this was how a monk should wear his garments: throw his garments outside his cell for three days so that nobody would pick them up and take them away to wear them.'

26. Apa Kasianos said: 'A noble, having rejected his wealth, gave it to the poor. He set aside some for his own needs. He did not wish to live as one who had completely rejected everything out of spiritual humility. Apa Basimos, a saint, had a word with him: 'Nobility you have lost, monasticism you have not found.'

27. One of the brothers asked Apa Pastamon: 'What am I to do because people oppress me when I am selling my handiwork ?' The elder replied: 'Apa Djidjoi and the others sell their handiwork. They lose nothing. If you want the full price, say it. But if you want to reduce the price, it is your decision. This is how you will be at peace,' The brother said: 'If I have a need, do you want me not to care about my handiwork ?' The elder replied: 'Even if you have everything, do not abandon handiwork. What you can do, do it, but not when you are troubled.'

28. A brother asked Apa Sarapion to tell him something. The elder said to him: 'What am I to say to you because you have taken the things of the poor, the widows and the orphans. You have put them on your window sill.' For he saw the window sill full of books.

29. The blessed Synkletike was asked if having no property was a perfect good. She replied: 'It is an even more perfect good for those who have no power. <sup>10</sup> For those who endure this, they have tribulation in the body, but grace in the soul. For they are like robust garments that are trampled on and washed and turned round with great violence until they become white; like the soul strong in poverty, it necessarily becomes stronger.'

30. Apa Hyperichos said: 'The treasure of the monk is not to acquire anything for himself. Go into yourself and gather for heaven, for eternal rest has no end.'

31. There was a saint called Philagrius who lived in Jerusalem and worked hard to earn a living. While he was standing in the market place to sell his goods, he found a purse with a thousand denarii. He stood thinking that the one who had lost would come for it, and he did, in tears. The elder took the man to one side and gave him the purse. The man wanted to give him part of the money, but the elder refused. The man began to cry out: 'Come and see a man of God, what he has done.' The elder withdrew unobtrusively and left the town, and it was not known where he went.

[Pages 69 to 72 are missing]

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<sup>10</sup> The Coptic text of Chaïne: ΟΥΑΓΛΑΘΟΝ ΝΖΟΥΟ ΠΕ ΕΦΧΗΚ ΕΒΟΛ ΝΝΕΤΕΜΝΩΟΜ ΜΜΟΟΥ, which is in fact the opposite of the *PG* text (τοῖς δυναμένοις) and Chaïne's translation. I understand the Coptic text as it stands to mean that being destitute alone is not as good as being destitute and powerless. It is precisely this latter condition that is empowering because it exposes one to all the hardships of the world, hence the metaphor of washing clothes and all the violence involved in that activity.

32. Apa Benjamin said to his disciples: 'Walk the royal road and count the miles, and you will not be tired.'

33. Apa Bessarion said: 'I have spent 40 nights in the middle of thornbushes, standing and not sleeping.'

34. A brother in the Cells, a solitary, was troubled. He went to Apa Theodore of Phermes and told him of this. The elder said: 'Go and humble your spirit. Live with others and submit yourself to them.' He went to live with some in the desert. When he returned, he went to the elder and said: 'I found no peace living with men.' The elder replied: 'If you have no peace by yourself or with others, why did you become a monk? Was it not to fight against trials? Tell me, when did you receive this garment?' He replied: 'Eight years ago.' The elder said to him: 'I have been a monk for seventy years, and I have never found peace for one day, and you want it after eight years.'

35. One of the brothers asked him one day: 'Father, if there is suddenly fear, are you are also afraid?' The elder replied: 'If the sky cleaves to the earth, Theodore will not be afraid.' For he had asked the Lord to take fear away from him.

36. It was said about Apa Theodore and Apa Lucian of Henaton<sup>11</sup> that they had spent fifty years deceiving themselves: 'When the winter passes, we leave this place. When the summer passes, we will leave.' This is how our fathers spent all of this time who thought of eternity.

37. Apa Poimen told a story about John Kolobos that he begged God to deliver him from the struggle and be in peace. Now, he went to an elder and told him that he was at peace. The elder replied: 'Go, pray to God that the struggle returns, for it is through struggle that the soul progresses.' When the struggle asserted itself against him, he did not ask God again to take the struggle away, but to support him in his struggle.

38. Apa Macarius the Great went to Apa Antonius. After having knocked at his door, he came out and said to him: 'Who are you?' 'I am Macarius.' He closed the door, went in and left him there. When he saw how patient he was, he opened the door to him and rejoiced

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<sup>11</sup> One of the monasteries around Rakote (Alexandria), which had names that signified their distance from that city, in this case nine miles.

with him, saying: 'I have been wanting to see you for a long time long. I have heard about you.' He received him with great civility and invited him to take his rest, for it had cost him a great effort to make the journey. When evening came, Apa Antonius soaked a few palm leaves for him. Macarius said to him: 'Allow me to soak them for myself .' Antonius replied: 'Soak.' Macarius made a great bundle<sup>12</sup> of palms and concealed it. Antonius saw the number of tresses woven by Macarius. He marvelled and kissed the hands of Macarius, saying: 'Many miracles have come forth from these hands.' They sat and talked about what is good for the soul. They wove from the time of evening. The woven piece came down into the cave from the window. The blessed Antonius went in on the following morning ...<sup>13</sup>

39. Apa Macarius once went from Shiêt to Terenoute. <sup>14</sup> He went into a small ... and took his rest. But he found bodies there ...

[pages 75 to 78 missing]

40. ... the defiled pleasures, they are the ones which have been established for us by law. But if illness renders them powerless before us, the word is superfluous. Why do I say that it is superfluous ? In fact, as a great medicine is very powerful on the body in illness, suffering the destroyer sin exists, and this is the great asceticism of supporting oneself during illnesses and being thankful with hymns addressed to God (that we might raise our eyes to Him with thanks). Let us not be like ones who arise with difficulty, for we have rejected the organs of insatiability and we see the glory of God as in a mirror through the eyes of the heart within, even if the eyes of our body which are external have been taken away from us. Are we becoming deaf ? Let us give thanks for we are losing the faculty of hearing, which is worthless. Are we wounded in our hands ? We have those of the inside ready against attacks of the enemy. Even if our entire body is dominated by illness, nevertheless the health of the interior man becomes correspondingly stronger.

41. She<sup>15</sup> also said: 'In the world those who are afraid, if they are not put into prison, they

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<sup>12</sup> The text reads  $\Psi\lambda\omicron\lambda$  (Bohairic) 'people, but it is probably a simple error for  $\Psi\omicron\lambda$  (Sahidic) 'bundle'.

<sup>13</sup> There is a discrepancy between the position of the Coptic text and the translation. The Coptic  $\mathbf{N\eta\epsilon\tau\epsilon}$  refers to something woven or plaited. The Greek word means 'rope' ( $\sigma\epsilon\iota\rho\acute{\alpha}$ ) and the Arabic equivalent 'wickerwork' ( $\text{ضفيرة}$ )

<sup>14</sup> On the western edge of the Delta, about 70 km north of Cairo.

<sup>15</sup> Perhaps Synklêtikê

keep themselves from sinning. As far as we are concerned, in the matter of our sins, let us keep ourselves to ourselves so that, to gratify our reason, we remove from ourselves punishments that will be. When you fast, do not find an excuse with illnesses. For they who do not fast come to these very tribulations. You have started to do good. Do not go backwards. For the enemy will put a stumbling block before you. He is the one who who is made powerless by our perseverance. Those who begin to sail, at the beginning find a favourable wind and extend their sails. Later there is a counter wind, but the sailors do not throw their cargo overboard because of the winds against them. They remain calm and continue their voyage and struggle against the winds. This is what we do: if there is a strong wind against us, we stretch forth the Cross in place of the sail that we might finish our voyage without danger.

42. It was said about Sarah the virgin that she spent sixty years living above<sup>16</sup> the river without ever setting foot outside out to see it.

43. Apa Hyperichos said that spiritual hymns and ceaseless mediation reduce the attacks to which we are subject.

44. He also said: 'We have to arm ourselves against temptations, for they come and if they find us watchful, we will be glorified.'

45. An elder said; 'If someone is attacked by temptation, the tests multiply for him from all sides so that the he becomes lax and starts to grumble.' He told the following story: 'There was a brother in the Cells who was assailed by temptation. If anyone saw him, he would not speak to him or receive him in his cell. If he needed bread, he would borrow it from nobody. When he came to harvest, he was not summoned not even to the church for the common meal that was customary. Once, during the hot period, he returned to his cell without bread, but he continued to give thanks to God. When God saw his patience, He removed temptation from him ...

[pages 81 to 86 are missing]

46. ... of this sort. I intend to come and live near the water.' But when he said this, he

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<sup>16</sup> I take this to mean 'beside'

turned to see someone following him and counting his footsteps. He then called out to him: 'Who are you ?' The person said: 'I am the angel of the Lord sent to count your footsteps and reward you.' When he heard this, the elder was relieved in spirit and became more diligent. He added another five miles to his withdrawal into the desert.

47. The elders said: 'If temptation overcomes you where you live, do not leave the place at the time of temptation, otherwise you will also find temptation in the place where you escape to. Instead, be patient until temptation disappears, so that your departure will be without scandal and at a moment when you are at peace, so that it does not disturb those who remain in the place.

48. There was a brother who could find no peace while he was in a monastery. He often lost his temper, so he decided that he would live alone: 'I will be a hermit and I will be at peace because I have no contact with others. The passion will disappear.' He went to live in a cave. Now, one day, he filled his jar of water, put it on the ground and it suddenly tipped over. He became angry, took it and smashed it. But when he turned around, he saw that it was a demon that was fighting against him. He thought: 'I am alone. I cannot win. So I will go to the monastery. One has to fight against him everywhere and wait for the help of God.' He returned to his monastery.

49. A brother asked an elder: 'What am I to do, my father, for I do nothing that a monk should do. I find myself negligent. I eat, drink, sleep and, with my impure thoughts, am very disturbed. I go from one thing and one thought to another.' The elder replied: 'Stay in your cell. What you can do, do it without moving. Apply yourself to a little thing you are doing in your cell, as Antonius in the desert did with the bigger things that he was doing. I am convinced that anyone who stays in his cell for God, watching over his conscience, will also find himself in the place of Apa Antonius.

50. An elder was asked how an earnest brother would not be scandalized when he saw those who returned to the world. He replied: 'Look at dogs hunting hares. One of them looks for the hare and pursues it when he sees it. The other dogs, seeing the dog running, begin to run after it. After some time they stop and turn back. Only the dog that has seen the hare continues to pursue it. The dogs who stop are of no concern to him, neither are the thorns and brambles he is running through. This is like the one who seeks for the Lord

Jesus Christ, giving his attention to the Cross unceasingly. He is above every stumbling block that he encounters until he reaches the One Who was Crucified.'

[pages 89 to 108 are missing]

52. ' ... I will struggle with my thoughts not to touch her.' Abraham said to him: 'You have not killed passion. It is alive, but controlled. Again, as you walk on the path, you see stones and sherds and, in between them, gold. Your heart, is it able to consider it them alike ? He said: 'No. But I will struggle with my thoughts not to take it.' The elder said: 'The thought is alive but controlled.' Abraham also said: 'Look, there are two brothers: one loves you and glorifies you. the other hates you and backbites about you. When they come to you, will you receive them in this same thought ?' He said: 'No. I will struggle with my heart to be as kind to the one who hates me as to the one who loves me.' Abraham said to him: 'Which means that passions are living, but controlled by the saints.'

53. One of our fathers told of how there was an elder in the Cells of great long-suffering who wore a mat for his habit. He went to Apa Amona, who, seeing the mat, said: ' This will do you no good.' The elder questioned him 'There are three thoughts that occupy me: whether to retire into the desert, go to another country or lock myself in my cell so as not to see anyone and eat only on alternate days.' Apa Amona said to him: 'None of these will be of any use to you. Stay in your cell and eat a little each day and keep the words of the publican<sup>17</sup> in your heart, and in this way you will be able to save yourself.'

54. Apa Daniel said: 'The stronger the body the weaker the soul. The weaker the body the stronger the soul.'

55. It was said at Shiêt of Apa Daniel that the when the barbarians<sup>18</sup> arrived the brothers fled and the elder said: 'If God does not take care of me, why live ?' He went into the midst of the barbarians, and they did not see him. The elder then said: 'Look, God has taken care of me. I am not dead. You too, do what is human and flee like the other fathers.'

56. Apa Daniel said: 'When Arsenius was at Shiêt, there was a monk who stole things from

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<sup>17</sup> Lk. 18,23

<sup>18</sup> The outlying districts to the Western Delta were home to groups known in Ancient Egypt as the Meshwesh and in later times (e.g. that of the 7th cent. AD Samuel of Kalamun) as Maxyes (Μακρυς), who, undoubtedly for pressing reasons of their own, would from time to time raid settlements in those areas. It is advisable to consult H.G. Evelyn-White *Monasteries* pp. 151 ff. for more information about the people concerned.

the elders. Apa Arsenius, wishing to do good to his soul, took him into his cell and said to him: 'I will give you anything you want, but do not steal.' And he gave him everything he needed, but the monk continued to steal. When the elders saw that he had not stopped, they drove him out, saying: 'If there is a brother with a weakness, he has to be helped until he becomes strong. But if he is a thief, is warned about it and this is not enough, then he has to be driven out, for he will lose his soul and will be a source of trouble for all those in this place.'

57. Initially, Apa Evagrius went to an elder and said to him: 'Father, tell me, how am I to be saved?' The elder said: 'If you wish to be saved, do not be arrogant: if you visit someone, do not speak to him until he questions you.'<sup>19</sup> Evagrius was struck by this and prostrated himself before the elder, saying: 'Forgive me, truly, I have read many books, but have not learned wisdom.' With this additional knowledge he left.

58. ... for the four churches at Shiêt have been destroyed because of boys.'<sup>20</sup>

59. One day Apa Longinus asked Apa Lucius about three thoughts. The first: 'I wish to be a pilgrim.' Apa Lucius told him: 'Wherever you go, you will not be a pilgrim if you do not watch your language.' The second: 'I wish to fast on alternate days.' Lucius quoted Isaiah: *Not even if you bend your neck like a ring will this way be called an acceptable fast.*<sup>21</sup> Continue to struggle against wicked thoughts.' The third: 'I wish to flee from people.' Apa Lucius replied: 'If ... when you are alone, you will not be able to behave well.'

60. Apa Macarius said: 'If we remember the wicked things that people have done to us, we will perish and take away the power of the memory of God. But if we remember the wicked things done by demons, we will remain stainless so that we cannot be pierced.'

61. Apa Matoi said: 'Satan does not know the passion by which the soul is usually conquered. He sows, but does not know if he will harvest: some of his seeds are for fornication, some for backbiting and some for the other passions. The passion that he sees

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<sup>19</sup> There is a clear echo of pharaonic 'wisdom' texts (social etiquette manuals), e.g. Ptahhotep. For an English translation of this guide to How to Get on in the World cf. W. Simpson (ed.) *The literature of Ancient Egypt* (2003) p. 133. The Apophthegmata seem to be firmly in line with this type of text, which seems to be a constant in text production throughout the ages. As indeed is the pairing of book-learning and wisdom.

<sup>20</sup> A certain amount of literature has appeared in recent years on the subject of homosexuality in Egyptian monasteries, cf. C. Schroeder 'Porneia and prophecy in Shenoute's letters' *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 65 (2006): 81ff.

<sup>21</sup> Is. 58,5

the soul following, he leads it.'

62. It was said of Nitira, the disciple of Silvanus that when he lived on Mount Sinai he conducted himself moderately in the matter of bodily needs. But after his elevation to the see of Pharan,<sup>22</sup> he increased the austerity of his life. His disciple said to him: 'Father, when you were in the desert, you did not mortify yourself so completely.' The elder said: 'That place was solitude, peace and proverty. I wanted to regulate my body that I might not become infirm and then have to beg for my needs. Now I am in the world with its resources and, if I am ill here, there will be someone to receive me so that I do not break my monastic vows.'

63. A brother asked Apa Poimen: 'I want to leave here, but I am troubled.' The elder asked him why and the brother replied that he heard that a certain brother was maligning him. The elder told him that this was not true. The brother assured him that it was, because he had heard it from a truthful brother. Apa Poimen said: 'He is not truthful, for otherwise he would not have told you. God heard the voice of the Sodomites, but He did not believe until He saw with His own eyes.'<sup>23</sup> The brother said to him: 'I have seen with my own eyes.' But the elder looked at the ground, took a small straw and said: 'What is this?' 'A straw.' The elder looked at the ceiling of the cell and said: 'What is this?' 'A beam.' The elder said: 'Imagine that your sins are this beam. As for those of your brother, they are the small straw.' When Djidjoi heard this, he [was full of admiration] and cried out: 'How I praise you, Poimen. Your words are a pearl.'

64. ... towards the sky. But now, when we assemble, we do so for backbiting, and each insists on dragging his fellow into the abyss.'

65. An elder said: 'If the inner man lives modestly. it is possible for him to preserve the outer one. If it is not, let us keep our tongue from all wickedness, with all our strength.'

66. He also said: 'There is need of spiritual work, for we have come here for this. The one who teaches by saying and not doing is running a risk.'

67. Another father said: 'A man has to take upon himself something internal. If he applies

<sup>22</sup> In Biblical tradition the southern part of Sinai, but in Arab tradition the area now known as Hijâz.

<sup>23</sup> An allusion to Gen. 18, 16 ff. ?

himself to the work of God, the enemy comes to him from time to time but does not take up residence in him. If on the other hand he becomes a servant of the enemy, the spirit of God continues to come to him, but if wickedness prevents it from entering, the spirit withdraws.'

68. A brother once asked an elder: 'Tell me, how will I be saved?' He replied: 'Let us work gradually and carefully, and we will be saved.'

69. Monks came to Shiêt from Egypt.<sup>24</sup> They saw elders in their extreme hunger because of asceticism, eating greedily. They were scandalized. When the priest found this out, he wanted to chastise them. He preached to the people in church, saying: 'Fast and extend your asceticism, my brothers, because the Egyptians are here.' Now, the Egyptian wanted to go, but they were prevented. When they had fasted on the first day, they became hungry. They were made to fast for two days. Those in Shiêt fasted the whole week. When they reached the Sabbath,<sup>25</sup> the Egyptians sat down to eat with the elders in distress, and an elder took the hand of one of them and said: 'Eat modestly like a monk.' He pushed him away and said: 'Leave me alone, father. I am dying. It is a week since I have eaten what is hot.' He said to them: 'You are utterly faint-hearted at having fasted for two days, and yet you scandalize the brothers who are constantly perfecting their asceticism.' They apologized, received instruction in their asceticism and went away joyfully.

70. A brother received his habit and thereupon withdrew to the desert, saying: 'I am an anchorite.' The elders heard him, seized him and made him go around the Cells of the brothers and apologize, saying: 'I am not an anchorite. I am a sinful novice.'

71. The elders said: 'If you see a young man going to heaven of his own volition, seize his leg and pull him down, for it is not good for him.'

72. A brother said to a great elder: 'I wish to find an elder according to my heart and die with him.' The elder replied: 'Search well.' He told him: 'This is the way.' But he did not understand what the elder meant. When the elder saw that the brother was under the

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<sup>24</sup> The term used is Kême (ⲕⲬⲙⲉ), the 'black land', here probably referring to the Delta. It is essentially a geographical term, the other larger section being the Red Land, which did not survive in Coptic. The Two Lands, used in many pharaonic official texts, seems to have been a largely political term. ⲕⲬⲙⲉ is the term that has survived in Coptic to designate the land, its people and language. Shiêt (mod. Wadi Natrun) was also populated by non-Egyptians.

<sup>25</sup> The same word (ⲘⲐⲃⲁⲦⲐⲚ) is used for 'week' and 'Sabbath'.

impression that he had done his work well, he said to him: 'If you find an elder according to your wish, will you stay with him ?' 'Yes. Certainly.' The elder said: Do not stop following the wish of the elder but ... '

73. ... for a word about something useful and we utter several foreign words in the middle of it. For this reason he does not let him remain with him. But if he comes to ask him for a word, he runs after him.<sup>26</sup>

74. Apa Hamoi said to Apa Pshoi at the beginning: 'How do you see me ?' He said: ' I see you, my father, as an angel.' Finally he said to him: 'How do you see me ?' 'As Satan. And the good word you say to me is like a sword against me.'

75. Apa Salônis said: 'If man does not say in his heart, "I am alone with God", he does not find peace in the world.'

76. He also said: 'If man wishes until the time of evening, he will reach a measure of divinity.'

77. Apa Besarion said when about to die: ' It is fitting for the monk to remain outside of everything.'

78. ... like a Cherubim and Seraphim. Apa Daniel was once walking with Apa Hamoi. Hamoi said to him: 'How long will we sit in the cell ?' Daniel said: 'Who has taken the Lord from us ? The God of the cell is also the God of outside.'

79. Apa Evagrius said: 'Prayer without care is a great thing.'

80. He also said: 'Be mindful at all times of your death. Do not forget eternal punishment, and sin will not live in your soul.'

81. Apa Theodore of Henaton said: 'If God attributes to us neglect because of prayer and imprisonment which happens while we are praying, it is not possible for us to be saved.'

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<sup>26</sup> Chaîne has a translation not justified by the surviving Coptic text but perhaps justified by the Latin or the Greek, which I cannot identify. The word **ϣΜΜΟ** can mean 'foreign' or 'strange', and in the absence of a more complete version I cannot say whether the phrase **ϩΕΝϨΑΧΕ ΝϣΜΜΟ** refers to another language or bizarre speech.

82. Apa Theona said: ' Because of how our heart is occupied contemplating God we have been imprisoned by the passions of the flesh.'

83. Some brothers once tempted Apa John Kolobos, because he did not allow his thought to express itself in matters of this world. They said to him: 'We thank God. Heaven has given its rains several times this year and the dates have drunk and will bring forth their shoots<sup>27</sup> and the brothers will find work to do.' John said to them: 'This is like the Holy Spirit. They are renewed and bring forth shoots in the fear of God.'

84. It was said of him that he would weave the material for two baskets into one, without thinking, because his mind was occupied in contemplation.

85. Apa John Kolobos said: 'I am like a man sitting under a tree who sees many wild beasts and reptiles coming towards him. When he is unable to stand up to them, he hastens to climb up the tree and save himself. In the same way I sit in my cell, seeing evil thoughts surrounding me. When I am unable to resist them, I hasten to flee to God through prayer and I am saved from the enemy.'

86. There was an elder in Shiêt who suffered: his body was in pain and his thoughts were not correct. He went to John Kolobos and asked him about forgetfulness. Having heard the reply he returned to his cell. He forgot what John had said to him and went to ask him again. Once again, he heard the reply and returned to his cell. He forgot it again and in this way many times he ...

87. ... in that place. He said to him: 'When I am in my cell, grief is with me. If someone comes to me or I leave my cell, I cannot find it.' He said to him: "It has never submitted to you, but is like a loan.' He said: 'What does that mean?' He said: 'If man works at something as hard as he can, he will always find what he needs.'

88. While Apa Silvanus was living on Mount Sinai, his disciple went to Zachary to be of service ...

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<sup>27</sup> W.E. Crum Coptic Dictionary (1939), 45a: **ⲃⲏⲧⲁⲧⲉ**, which E. Porcher in the text cited by him (ROC 1913) as 'leaves full of sap' and 'green leaves'. The Greek equivalent is λευκάς, one of whose meanings is 'white'.

89. ... She said: 'We are not without care here. For the Scripture says: *He who stands let him see that he does not fall.*<sup>28</sup> We are sailing in a dark place. For this life is a sea. We have been told by David the Psalmist: *But the sea, there are ...*

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<sup>28</sup> 1 Cor. 10, 12