

## Apophthegmata Patrum 2

### Translation of the Coptic text

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I feel somewhat embarrassed to have to admit that, in the first part of these translations, I failed to mention that M. Chaîne has an invaluable table of concordances on pp. 155-156 of his book that positions the Coptic Sayings in relation to those in the major Latin and Greek versions. He also refers to the equally invaluable work of W. Bousset *Apophthegmata: Studien zur Geschichte des ältesten Mönchtums* (1923), where the correspondence with texts in other languages, including Armenian and Syriac, is given. I have hardly consulted the other versions (except for 155, which breaks off at a critical point), my intention here being simply to provide an English version of the Coptic text.

90. ... one of the elders ... He saw his lifestyle and said to him: 'Do you not have visions from your God?'<sup>1</sup> He said: 'No.' The priest<sup>2</sup> said: 'We have a few services to perform, and the mysteries are revealed to us. You exert yourselves in this way with nightly vigils, asceticism and this silence. You say that you have no wicked thoughts in your heart and what separates you from your God does not reveal to you His mysteries.' When our fathers heard this, they were astonished and said: 'It is truly the wicked thoughts that separate us from God.'

91. It is said that there were seven brothers in the monastery of Apa Antonius who, during the date season, chased away the birds.<sup>3</sup> There was an elder who, when keeping watch on his day, used to cry out aloud: 'Go away, you wicked thoughts inside and you birds outside.'

92. A brother in the Cells soaked his palm leaves. When he was about to sit down to relax,<sup>4</sup> his thoughts said to him: 'Go to so-and-so.' He kept thinking<sup>5</sup> to himself: 'After a few days I will go.' And they kept saying: 'If he dies, what will you do?' Nevertheless he kept speaking about the heat. He kept saying: 'But it is not time.' And he kept thinking: 'While you are

<sup>1</sup> **ΝΑΥ ΕΒΟΛ** 'see' here presumably refers to having visions

<sup>2</sup> **ΖΙΕΡΕΥΣ**: pagan priest. The Coptic word for the same person is **ΖΟΝΤΕ**

<sup>3</sup> Typographical error for **ΖΑΛΛΑΤΕ**

<sup>4</sup> Typographical error for **ΝΟΥΤΙ**

<sup>5</sup> Coptic indicates tense and aspect by prefixes attached to a mutable form of the verb and the prefix used here usually indicates repeated action: **ΨΑΦΜΕΕΥΕ** 'he kept thinking.' It is used within the framework of an internal dialogue.

beating the reeds, there will be time.' He replied: 'Let me take the leaves outside and I will go.' He kept saying to himself: 'But the air is good today.' He then rose and left the leaves soaking, took his cloak and left.

There was also an elder who was his neighbour and kept a watchful eye on things.<sup>6</sup> When he saw the brother making off, he cried out: 'Prisoner, come here.' When he came, the elder said to him: 'Return to your cell instantly.' The brother then told him of the war of all the thoughts that had assailed him. He went into his cell and prostrated himself. The demon cried out in a loud voice: 'You have conquered me, monk.'<sup>7</sup> The mat beneath him became as if fire ... and they became like smoke. They went ... he thought of their energy and wickedness.

93. It was said of an elder that he died in Shiêt. The brothers surrounded his bed. They laid him out and set him at rest, weeping bitterly. He then opened his eyes and smiled. He then smiled again. He continued to smile for the third time. The brothers called upon him: 'Tell us, father, why are we weeping bitterly and you are smiling?' He answered them and said: 'I am smiling because you all fear death. I then smiled the second time [ ...

94. ... his brother gave him, he became poorer, but the brother went away to converse with an elder, and the elder said to him: 'If you will listen to me, do not give to him again. Tell him that you gave to him when you had. Tell him that what he earns he should bring it to you. What he brings to you, take it. When you see a stranger or poor elder, give it to them and ask them to pray for you.' The brother departed and did this. When his lay brother<sup>8</sup> came, he spoke to him, he spoke to him as the elder had said, and the latter went away sad. But then on the first day he took vegetables to eat from his garden and brought them to him. His brother took them and gave them to the elders and asked them to pray for him. He greeted them and went back to his house. He then brought vegetables to cook and three loaves of bread. His brother, as on the first occasion, took them. He came a third time. He received a blessing and returned. He then came many times and brought olives, wine and oil. When the brother saw this, he was astonished. He summoned the poor brothers and distributed these goods among them. He said to his brother: 'Do you need a little bread?'

<sup>6</sup> Lit. 'looking out well' ΕΦΗΛΥ ΕΒΟΛ ΚΑΛΩΣ

<sup>7</sup> It is perhaps too fanciful to read into this an echo of the last words Julian the Apostate is said to have uttered: *νενίκηκάς με, Γαλιλαΐε*

<sup>8</sup> 'Lay brothers' are mentioned later in 155. This 'brother' lives in a 'house' (Η) and not a 'cell' (Π), but it is not known whether the house is religious or secular. I am not sure that the status of people so called has been determined properly.

He said: 'No, my brother. When I needed and received something from you, it was like taking fire home' and he cast it aside. At the time when I receive nothing from you, I have an abundance of everything and God has blessed me.' The brother went and told the elder everything that had happened. The elder said: 'Do you not know that the work of the monk is a fire: everywhere it goes, it burns. This was useful to your brother to make him exercise charity with his work, and he has received the prayers of the saints. In this way he will be blessed.'

95. An elder said: 'He is someone who does a lot of good, and the bad ... in order to spoil the reward for the great good he does.' He said: 'I was living in Pemje<sup>9</sup> once with an elder who gave alms. He was approached by a widow, who asked him for a little grain. He told her to bring a measure and measure the grain out for herself. She brought the measure. He examined it and said that it was big and pushed it out of her hand. He made her ashamed. After the widow had left, I said to him: "Father, did you give the widow grain?" He said "No". I said to him: "If it is for charity that you give, why did you take account of the measure and make her feel ashamed?"'

96. An elder was living with a brother. The elder gave bread to all who came. When the brother saw what was happening, he said to him: 'Give me my portion of bread and do with yours as you wish.' The elder divided the bread between the two of them and continued to give his share as alms. Many came to him when they learned that he gave to everyone. God saw the vow of his heart and blessed his bread. The brother ate his bread and said to the elder: 'As I have little bread, let us share.' The elder said: 'I will do as you wish.' And they resumed their common life. But the time came when those who needed charity came. One day the brother came in and saw that there was not much bread left. A poor brother presented himself. The elder said to the brother: 'Give him some bread.' But the brother replied: 'There is none left, father.' The elder said to him: 'Come and see.' The brother entered and found the bread store full to the top. When he saw, he became afraid and gave to the poor brother. He recognized the faith and virtue of the elder and gave glory to God.

[pages ? to 182 missing]

97 ... in great haste and I want to see the king. Take me to him.' He said to him: 'I will

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<sup>9</sup> Gk. name is Oxyrhynchus (in the region of the lake known as Fayyum).

accompany you halfway.' He said to another companion: 'Take me to the king,' and replied: 'I will go with you to the palace.' He said to another companion: 'Take me to the king,' and he replied: 'I will take you to the king openly<sup>10</sup> and I will speak for you.' He was then asked: 'Explain this parable to us.' And he replied: 'The first companion is asceticism, which takes you halfway. The second is detachment. <sup>11</sup> The third is mercy, which brings one to God openly.

98. The elders said: 'God seeks nothing from novices but obedience.

99. A solitary elder had an attendant who lived in a village. Once the attendant was late in visiting the elder as was customary. The elder found himself without what he needed and without the manual work he did in his cell. Sad that he had nothing to eat or to do, he said to his disciple: 'Will you go and call my attendant ?' The disciple agreed. But the elder decided not to do this after all. They waited, but the attendant did not come. The elder said to the disciple: 'Will you go as far as the village ?' The disciple agreed. He was afraid of going to the village because of scandal, but agreed to go so as not disobey his father. The elder said to him: 'Go, I believe completely in God that He will protect you from all temptation.' He prayed and sent him. When the disciple entered the village, he went to the attendant's house, but found that he and all his sons had all left the village for a remembrance, except for a young girl. He knocked on the door and she opened it. He asked for her father. She invited him in, but he refused. She seized him and brought him inside. Knowing she was leading him into depravity, he began to groan and cried out: 'Lord, help me in this hour because of the prayers of my father. ' As he said this, he found himself at that moment going along the river to the monastery and was brought safely to his father.

100. Two siblings came to a monastery. One of them was ascetic, the other very obedient. If his father told him to do or eat something, he did it or ate it. He was praised in the monastery for his obedience. His ascetic brother became envious. He decided that he would put his brother to the test to see if he was obedient. He went to his father and said to him: 'Send my brother and myself to such-and-such a place.' The father sent them. The ascete took his brother whom he wanted to test. He went along the river, where there were

<sup>10</sup> **ΖἸΝΟΥΠΑΡΡΗΣΙΑ**. The term 'parrhesia' (saying everything, openness of speech) has a rich variety of meanings, some positive, some negatively and, as here, some neutral. A study of the term can be found in G. Scarpata *Parrhesia greca. Parrhesia cristiana* (2001). The term also occurs in a midrash on the passages in Exodus that deal with the handing over of the Torah: **דִּימוֹס פְּרֵה־סִיָּא** (δημοσ παρρησία) 'in the public domain'. The ref. can be found at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parrhesia>

<sup>11</sup> Clearly a Coptic word but the last few letters of the line are missing from my copy of the text, so I cannot read it.

many crocodiles. He said to his brother: 'Go down into the river and cross it.' The brother went down and the crocodiles came, licked his body and did him no harm. The ascete saw this and said: 'Come out of the river.' As they walked along, they found a body stretched out on the way, and the ascete said: 'If you have an old garment, throw it upon him.' The obedient one replied: 'Let us rather pray for him, perhaps he will come back to life.' They began to pray. While they were praying, ...

[pages 185 to 196 are missing]

101. ... accompanying me in the all the streets of the town, they kept striking me saying: 'This monk has taken the virginity of our daughter. Strike him !' And they kept on striking me. I almost died. Some merciful person came to my rescue and said: 'How long are you going to strike this stranger ?' The one who used to serve me came behind me ashamed, and he was abused: 'Is this the anchorite you bear witness to ? See what he has done' And the parents of the girl said: 'We will not release him until he guarantees her alimony.' I then called my attendant, and he agreed to be my guarantor. I returned to my cell. All the baskets I found I gave to him, saying: 'Sell them, give them to my wife that she may eat.' I said to myself: 'Macarius, you have found a woman, you must work harder to support her.' I worked day and night to be able to do this. When she came to have the baby, she was in pain but did not give birth. People said: 'What is this ?' She replied: 'I know. I have slandered this monk and lied. He did nothing to me. It was someone else.' My attendant came to me and said: 'The woman was unable to give birth until she confessed that the anchorite had had nothing to do with her, but that she had lied about him.' And now the entire village wants to come apologize.' When I heard, I arose this and left, that people might not trouble me. I came here to Shiêt, and that is the reason why I have come here.

102. Apa Macarius was walking along the side the marsh with palm leaves, when the devil came to him with a sickle in his hand. He wanted to attack him, but could not. He said to him: 'My ill-treatment you is great, but I have no power <sup>12</sup> over you. Everything you do I do too. You fast for days, and I do too. You spend your nights awake, and I do not sleep. There is one thing in which you are better than me.' Macarius asked him about it.' The devil replied: Humility. I have never been humble, and for this reason I have never prevailed against you.'

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<sup>12</sup> In my copy of this text this word has been cut off and I cannot read it.

103. Apa Mathes once went from Raithu in Gabalon,<sup>13</sup> his brother with him. The bishop took him and ordained him priest. While they were eating, the bishop said to him: 'Pardon me, my father, I know that you did not want that, but I was bold enough to do it so that I could receive a blessing from you.' The elder said to him humbly: 'I did not want it much, but it afflicts me because I will be separated from my brother, for I will be unable alone to perform all the prayers.' The bishop said to him: 'If you know that he is worthy, I will ordain him.' Apa Mathes answered: 'I do not know if he is worthy, but I do know that I am no more worthy than he is.' The bishop ordained the brother and they both died approaching the altar to say Mass. The elder used to say: 'I believe to God that perhaps I will not be condemned for my ordination because I do not say Mass, for it is not man's ...

[pages 199-200 are missing]

104. ... Apa Poimên: How must I behave in the place where I am ?' The elder said: 'Keep the spirit of an exile wherever you live so as not to seek to put your word forward and you will be at peace.'

105. He also said: 'Prostration before God, regarding yourself as insignificant, relegating your own wishes - these are the works of a monk.'

106. He also said: 'Do not make too much of yourself, but attach yourself to someone who behaves well.'

107. A brother asked him: 'What must I observe while I am in my cell ?'

108. He also said: 'A brother asked Apa Allonios, "What is contempt ?" The elder said to him: "It is putting yourself below the beasts and knowing that they will not be condemned."'

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<sup>13</sup> Both place names are in square brackets and Chaîne has supplied them from the Latin text. The Greek version in Migne has εἰς τὰ μέρη Μαγδολῶν, another reading (Codd. Colbert) has Γαβάλων. The Greek name also occurs in Herodotus cf. A.B. Lloyd *Herodotus Book II: Commentary 1-98* (1988): 163. The Greek word looks like the Hebrew word for 'fortress' (צָדָד), and W. Gesenius *Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon* (1846): 447b describes it as the name of a town in Lower Egypt, with assorted Biblical refs. (Jer. 44,1 and 46, 14 etc.). Crum *Coptic Dictionary* 214b also cites it as a place name **Ⲫⲣⲏⲧⲟⲩ** : E. Amélineau *La géographie de l'Égypte à l'époque copte* (1893): 201 identifies it as the place called Elim cited in Exodus 15, 27

109. He also said: 'While the elders were once seated at dinner, he stood up to serve them with Allonios, to whom they paid their respects when they saw him. But Allonios did not reply. Someone said: "Why do you not reply to the elders who give glory to you?" Allonios said: "If I had replied, you would have considered me to be someone who rejoiced in the praise and accepted it."'

110. He also said: 'The ground on which the Lord asks that sacrifice be made to him is the humility of heart.'

111. The elder also said: 'If man keeps his place, he will not be troubled.'

112. Apa Joseph said: 'While we were with Apa Poimên, he called Agathon 'Apa'. We said to him: "He is a novice. Why do you call him 'Apa'? Poimên replied: "It is his mouth that makes one call him 'Apa'".

113. It was said of Apa Poimên that he never wished to give his opinion after that of an elder, but rather to praise that opinion more than his own.

114. The blessed archbishop Apa Theophilus once came to Shiêt. The brothers assembled and said to Apa Pambo: 'Tell the patriarch one thing that he may benefit from it.' The elder said: 'If he does not benefit from our silence, he will not benefit from anything we say.'

115. A faithful<sup>14</sup> brother said: 'We went, seven anchorites, to Apa Djidjoi, who lived on the island of Suez.<sup>15</sup> We begged him to tell us something. He said: 'Pardon me, I am a man of no education, but I have spent time with Apa Hor and Apa Hatre. Apa Hor was sick for 18 years. I prostrated myself before them and said: "Tell me something." Apa Hor replied: "What am I to say? Do what you see. God is not with the avaricious but the one who has been wronged in all things.' Apa Hor and Apa Hatre were from the same nome. The obedience of Apa Hor and the humility of Apa Hatre were both great. I spent some time with them, observing, and I saw a great miracle performed by Hatre. Someone brought them a small fish and Apa Hatre wanted to prepare it for Hor. While he was cutting it, Hatre said: "Hatre, Hatre." And Hatre stopped cutting, left the knife in the middle of the

<sup>14</sup> According to Chaîne, a misunderstanding of the Greek text, which is to be read as Apa Pistos.

<sup>15</sup> Klyasma. Interestingly enough the British army built a fortress called the Green Island (الجزيرة الخضراء) during WW2 about 4km from Suez to protect the Canal from interference of any sort.

fish and ran towards him. I admired his great obedience, for he did not tell Hor to wait until he had finished cutting the fish. And I said to Hatre: "Where did you find such great obedience?" "It is not mine, but that of an elder." And he led me to where the elder was, saying: "Come and see obedience." He cooked the small fish and ruined it deliberately. He gave it Hor, who ate it without a word. Hatre asked: "Is it good, elder?" "Very good," was the reply. He then brought a small one that was very good and said that that he had spoiled it. Hor agreed that it was a little spoiled. Hatre said to me: "Do you see obedience? It is that of the elder." I withdrew from them. What I saw I will retain as much as I can.'

116. A story of Apa Jijoi. 'One of us asked him to tell us something, and he said: "The one who keeps the low opinion of himself knowingly will do all that is in the Scriptures." Another said: "What is the condition of being a stranger, my father?" And he replied: "Silence. Say everywhere you go: "I have no business. This is the condition of being a stranger.'"

117. A brother went to Jijoi in the monastery of Apa Antonius. While they were speaking, he said to Apa Jijoi: 'Have you not yet reached the level of Apa Antonius, father?' He said: 'If I had a single thought of Apa Antonius, I would be all afire. But I have seen a man able to support his own thought with difficulty.'\*

118. The brother asked him again: 'Did Satan also struggle against the ancients like this?' Jijoi replied: 'He struggles more now that his time is near and this troubles him.'

119. Certain people came to him to hear a word. He said nothing, but kept repeating: 'Excuse me.' When they saw his baskets, they said to Abraham his disciple: 'What are you going to do with these baskets?' He said: 'We are sending them here and there.' But the elder heard this and said: 'Jijoi eats here and there.' When they heard this, they derived great benefit and went away joyfully, edified by his humility.

120. A brother asked Jijoi: 'I see in myself that my thoughts are with God.' The elder said to him: 'It is not a big thing to keep your thoughts on God, but it is if you see yourself placed below every creature, for that shows the way to your ability to endure physical suffering: these are the works of a humble heart.'

121. The blessed Synklêtikê said: As it is impossible for a boat to remain together without nails, so also it is impossible to be saved without humility.

122. Apa Hyperichios said: 'Humility is a tree of life pushing upwards.'

123. He also said: 'Be like the tax collector so that you may not be despised with the Pharisee. Choose for yourself the mildness of Moses that you may turn your heart like the rock into springs of water.'<sup>16</sup>

124. Hôrsiêsi said: 'A mud brick thrown as a foundation near the river will not last for a single day. That is which is baked endures like stone. This is like the man who has thoughts of worldliness and is not baked in the fear of God: when he comes to greatness, he dissolves. For there are many trials of this sort in the midst of humanity. It is good for a man to know his own limit that he may avoid the burden of greatness. Those who are strengthened by faith are immoveable.'

125. Concerning Joseph, if one wishes to speak about him, one will say that he was not a man of earth, for how many trials did he suffer and in what sort of country, the place where there was no trace of the worship of God ? But the God of his fathers was with him and he was rescued from every tribulation, and now he is with his fathers in the kingdom of heaven. We too therefore have come to know our own limit. Let us struggle, for in all these things we are hardly able to escape from the judgement of God.

126. An elderly anchorite wandering in the desert said to himself: 'I have been virtuous.' He prayed to God: 'What I am lacking give it to me.' God, wanting to humble his thoughts, said to him: 'Go to such-and-such an archimandrite and do what he tells you.' God revealed this to the archimandrite, saying: 'Such-and-such an anchorite is coming to you. Give him a whip and make him tend the pigs.' The elder came and knocked at the door and went inside to the head of the community. They embraced each other and sat down. The anchorite said: 'What am I to do to be saved ?' The archimandrite said: 'You will do what I tell you.' The anchorite accepted this and the archimandrite said: 'Take this whip and tend the pigs.' Those who know him, when they saw him tending the pigs, began to say: 'Look at

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<sup>16</sup> Nu. 20:11

this great anchorite, whose heart is beside itself,<sup>17</sup> there is a demon on him tending the pigs.' God saw his humility, how it suffered the scorn of people, and sent him home again.

127. There was a man possessed, in great trouble and foaming at the mouth, who struck one of the elders on the cheek. The elder quickly turned the other cheek. The demon, unable to bear this burning humility, left him.

128. An elder said: 'If you have an arrogant thought, examine your conscience to see if you have kept the commandments: Do you love your enemies ? Do you rejoice over the glory of your enemies ? Do you grieve over their deficiencies ? Are you are in your own eyes a worthless servant more sinning than anyone else ? And in all this do you not know that thinking of greatness as if you have been successful destroys everything ?

129. An elder said: 'Do not let your heart malign your brother and say: "I am more sober than he is, I am more ascetic, I know more than he does." Subject yourself to the spirit of poverty for the sake of Christ and obtain love for yourself without deceit so as not to release the pride of spirit that you have. For it is written: *He who stands, let him look lest he fall*<sup>18</sup> and you will be seasoned with the salt of Christ.'

130. An elder said: 'The one who is honoured more than he deserves or who boasts about himself is a complete failure. The one who is not glorified among men gains glory in heaven.

131. An elder was asked: 'Is it good to repent a lot ?' The elder replied: 'We see Joshua the son of Noah prostrated on his face, for God has appeared to him.'

132. An elder was asked : 'Why do the demons struggle with us so much<sup>19</sup> ?' The elder said: 'Because we have cast aside our armour, which consists of contempt,<sup>20</sup> humility, persistence and endurance.'

133. A brother asked an elder: 'If a brother brings words into me from outside, do you want me to tell him not bring them in, father ?' The elder said: 'No.' The brother asked: 'Why ?'

<sup>17</sup> Crum (279b): **πῶψς**, for which the Latin *stupere* is given.

<sup>18</sup> 1 Cor. 10, 12

<sup>19</sup> Lit. 'in this complete way'.

<sup>20</sup> i.e. of the world, oneself.

The elder said: 'Because we are not able to keep to this, lest, telling our neighbour not to do it, we later find ourselves doing it. ' The brother said to him: 'What is it necessary to do ?' The elder said: 'If we choose silence, this mode is enough for our neighbour.'

134. An elder was asked: 'What is humility ?' He said: 'If your brother sins against you, forgive him before he repents.'

135. An elder said: 'In all temptation do not find fault with anyone, but blame yourself, saying: "This is happening because of my sins."'

136. An elder said: 'I have never violated my rank to go above myself' and 'When I am brought down to humility, I am not troubled. My entire concern is to pray to God that He should take the old man<sup>21</sup> away from me.'

137. A brother asked an elder: 'What is humility of heart ?' The elder replied: 'That you should do good to those who do wrong to you.' The brother said: 'If one does not reach this level, what is one to do ?' The elder said: 'Let him choose silence for himself.'

138. A brother asked an elder: 'Tell me something useful, father, even if you say it and we do not grasp it. Because our earth is salted earth.'

139. A brother asked an elder: ' What is the condition of being a stranger ?' He said: 'I know a brother who is a stranger, and he was found in the church at the time of the communal meal. He sat down at the table to eat with the brothers. Some said: "Who is this other person ?" They seized him and made him stand, saying: "Get up and leave." He got up and left. Others, more tolerant, called him. Then one asked: "What were you thinking, to be thrown out and brought back again ? " He said: 'I thought I would be like a dog, who is thrown out and goes and called and comes'''

140. Some people once came from Thebes to an elder, one of them with a demon, that he might cure him. The elder, after having been persuaded, said to the demon: ' Come out from God's creature.' The demon said: 'I will come out and ask you a question: who are the goats and who are the sheep ?' The elder said 'I am the goats and God Who knows them is

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<sup>21</sup> ΠΡῪΝΑΣ: An allusion to Ro. 6,6.

the sheep.' When the demon heard this, he said: 'Look, because of your humility I am coming out.'

141. There was an Egyptian monk in the suburbs of Constantinople with the Emperor Theodosius. The Emperor, walking on that road, left the multitude behind him and came alone and summoned the monk inside. He learned who the monk was and received him as one of the nobility. They went in, prayed and sat. The Emperor began to question him: 'What are our fathers in Egypt doing?' He said: 'They are all praying for your health.' He invited the monk to eat a little bread. He gave him a little oil and salt, and he ate. He gave him a little water, and he drank. The Emperor said to him: 'Do you know who I am?' The monk replied: 'God knows who you are.' He then said: 'I am Theodosius the Emperor.' Whereupon the elder prostrated himself. The Emperor said: 'Blessed are you who truly care nothing for this world. Since the time I was born in the kingdom, I have never filled my belly with bread or water as I have today. Nor have I ever known how sweet they are.' He began to give glory to the monk, who arose, left and returned to Egypt.

142. The elders said: 'If we have no struggle, let us humble ourselves. For God sees our weakness and scrutinizes us. But if we boast, He removes us scrutiny of us and we are destroyed.'

143. The devil changed into an angelic habit of light and appeared to one of the brothers. He said to him: 'It is I Gabriel who have been sent to you.' The brother replied: 'Look. You have been sent to someone else, for I am not worthy.' The devil thereupon disappeared.

144. The elders said: 'Even if an angel truly appears, do not receive him, but humble yourself and say: "I am not worthy to see the angel, I having lived in sin."'

145. It was said about one of the elders that as he sat in his cell struggling, he saw the demons in a vision and they flattered him. The devil saw that alone he was defeated by the elder and came in a vision saying: 'I am Christ.' The elder said: 'I do not wish to see Christ here.' The devil heard this and disappeared.

146. The demons said to another elder, wishing to deceive him: 'Do you want to see Christ?' He said to them: 'You are anathema together with the one you say is Christ.' My

Christ, in whom I believe is the one who said: "If someone tells you that Jesus Christ is here or there, do not believe him." And they disappeared forthwith.

147. It was said of another elder that he spent seventy weeks fasting, eating once a week and asking that a word of divine Scripture be revealed to him. He said to himself: 'I have taken on this great hardship and not received any benefit. I will go forthwith to a brother and ask him.' As he was about to lock the door to go, an angel of the Lord was sent to him, saying: 'These seventy weeks which you have spent have not drawn you near to God. When you became humble enough to go to your brother, I was sent to tell you the word.' His heart was fortified by the word he he had been looking and the angel left him.

148. Our fathers said about someone: 'He asked God for seven years for grace and He gave it to him. An elder heard and was greatly distressed. He said: "It is a great tribulation. Go and spend another seven years praying to God that He might take the grace from you, for it does you no good." He went and did this until the grace was taken away from him.'

149. An elder said: 'If one, in fear of God and humility, orders his neighbour to do something, that word which comes forth because of God causes the brother to submit and do it. If one wishes to order another without the fear of God but out of arrogance, as if wishing to exercise authority over him, God Who sees ...

[pages 211 to 212 are missing]

150. ... if you are able to stand while you are being reviled, it is greater than all the other virtues.

151. An elder said: 'The one who bears contempt and scorn has the power to be saved.'

152. An elder said: 'Do not become too familiar <sup>22</sup> with a governor and do not go into him many times. For from this you will acquire openness of speech<sup>23</sup> and you will yourself wish to be great.'

<sup>22</sup> The Coptic word **ⲧⲁⲡⲓ** is translated by Crum as 'custom, habit': **ⲙⲡⲉⲣⲕⲁ ⲧⲁⲡⲓ ⲛⲁⲕ** 'do not allow yourself habit'

<sup>23</sup> Here **ⲡⲁⲣⲣⲏⲥⲓⲁ** has a negative connotation, perhaps hardly surprising in view of the great value attached to modest silence by the monks. If, however, it is used with in connection with God in the afterlife, it is positive: A. Alcock *The Life of Samuel of Kalamun* (1983): 37, 10 **ⲁⲗⲏⲟⲩⲥ ⲁⲡⲉⲛⲉⲓⲟⲩⲧ ⲛⲁⲓⲕⲁⲓⲟⲥ ⲃⲛⲓⲟⲩⲛⲟⲥ ⲙⲡⲁⲣⲣⲏⲥⲓⲁ ⲛⲁⲗⲣⲙⲓⲡⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲛⲁⲕⲱ ⲛⲁⲛ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲛⲛⲉⲛⲛⲟⲩⲉ** 'truly our righteous father found great freedom of speech with God that He might forgive us our sins'.

153. There was a brother in a monastery<sup>24</sup> on whom was placed the entire burden of the brothers so that he continually blamed himself, even of immoral conduct. Some of the brothers were ignorant of this. One blamed him<sup>25</sup>, saying: 'How many sins does this man commit and how many does he not ?' The father, knowing his work, said to the brothers: 'I prefer a single reed mat at one with his humility of heart to all of yours in your arrogance. If you want to strengthen your heart through God, see.' He brought all their things into him. They all burned except for the small reed mat of the brother. The brothers, when they saw this, were afraid and prostrated themselves before the brother, repenting, and they treated him like a father among them.

154. An elder was asked: 'How is that some say they see angels in visions ? He said to them: 'Blessed is the one who will never see his own sins.'

155. A brother was angry at another brother. The latter heard, came in and prostrated himself, but the other would not open his door. So he went to an elder and told him what the matter was. The elder replied: 'Look, perhaps there are thoughts in your heart as if you want to blame your brother, for he is the one with a sin against him. You censure him, and for this reason his heart is not strong enough to open the door. I will tell you this: even if it is he who has sinned against you, nevertheless go and put it in your heart that you are the one who has sinned against him and praise him more than yourself, then God will strengthen his heart to make peace with you.' The elder told them a similar story<sup>26</sup>: 'There were two pious lay brothers and they made a pact with each other to become monks. They zealously followed the voice<sup>27</sup> of the Gospel, but<sup>28</sup> being ignorant, they circumcised<sup>29</sup> themselves for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. When the archbishop heard, he excommunicated them. They thought that what they had done was good and they were angry with him, saying: " We have made ourselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven and you have excommunicated us. Let us go and appeal to the bishop of Jersuaem." They went

<sup>24</sup> **ΖΗΝΕΕΤΕ**, a survival of the pharaonic *hwt ntr*, one of the words meaning 'temple' that clearly did not offend Christian sensibilities

<sup>25</sup> Typographical error in Coptic text

<sup>26</sup> 'a word resembling this' **ΟΥΘΑΧΕ ΕΦΕΙΝΕ ΠΠΑΙ**.

<sup>27</sup> The 'voice' perhaps refers to the reading aloud in Church.

<sup>28</sup> Probably typographical error in Coptic' **ΧΕ** for **ΔΕ**.

<sup>29</sup> Typographical error in Coptic: probably **ΑΥΣΒΗΤΟΥ**. Allusion to the same passage Origen is said to have followed: Matt. 19, 12. There seems to be a certain amount of the history between Demetrius and Origen here, who from an amicable relationship entered into a feud that started when Origen was ordained priest in Palestine without the authorization of Demetrius. Origen seems to have had support among the Palestinian clergy.

and told him everything. This archbishop too said to them: "I too excommunicate you." They were grieved about this second excommunication<sup>30</sup> and went to Antioch to the archbishop and told him their concerns and he too excommunicated them. They went to the great archbishop of Rome and told him what the archbishops had done to them. "We have come to you," they said, "because you are the head of them all."<sup>31</sup> He said to them: "I too excommunicate you and you are excommunicated."<sup>32</sup> They were both<sup>33</sup> at a loss, saying: 'Each one of these is being charitable to his fellow bishop, for they meet<sup>34</sup> each other at synods. Let us go to the saint of God Epiphanius bishop of Cyprus,<sup>35</sup> for he is a prophet and he is impartial." As they approached his city, he learned about them in a vision and he said to them ...'<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Lit. 'this other one' (ΠΕΙΚΕΤ).

<sup>31</sup> This sounds like a peculiar thing for an Egyptian to say.

<sup>32</sup> Coptic has a form of the verb known as Stative, and it is the form used here: ΤΕΤΝ̄ΚΗ ΖΙΒΟΛ

<sup>33</sup> 'They were at a loss towards each other': ΑΥΑΠΟΡΕΙ ΕΖΟΥΝ Ν̄ΝΕΥΕΡΗΥ

<sup>34</sup> Coptic has a conjugation form that indicates habit or regularity, rather like the English Simple Present used to translate it: ΦΑΥΤΩΜ̄ΝΤ Ν̄ΝΕΥΕΡΗΥ ... It seems an uncharitable thought ('they all stick together') and is perhaps a reference to the Second Ecumenical Council at Constantinople in 381, where the Egyptian Timothy I was president.

<sup>35</sup> Bishop from c.365 to his death in 403.

<sup>36</sup> Despite this cliff-hanger ending, the Latin version has an ending, which is essentially that Epiphanius sends people to discourage them from entering the city, and this makes them re-assess their own culpability in the series of humiliating excommunications to which they have been subjected; Epiphanius receives them *in communionem* and writes to the archbishop of Alexandria urging him to do the same. In the moral epilogue the elder concludes that it is the recognition of one's own culpability that is crucial to the 'health of man' (*sanitas hominis*). The story ends with embraces and the 'greatest peace' (*pax maxima*).