

Shenoute
Apocalypse and Testament

English translation

Anthony Alcock

Both of these texts, the *Apocalypsis* and the *Testamentum*, are translated from the copies of them provided by J. Leipoldt (ed.) *Sinuthii Archimandritae Vita et Opera Omnia* 4 (1913) pp. 198-232, who has also furnished them with titles. Neither text is complete and it is not certain that either was written by Shenoute. Details of the current location and first publication of the manuscripts containing the texts are to be found on pp. xv-xvi of Leipoldt's book.

In his monograph on Shenoute¹ Leipoldt discusses the *Apocalypsis*. He makes the following points about the text:

- it is to be located in Egypt, the evidence for which is the use of Egyptian month names, Epip and Mesore;
- it is of monastic origin, with its reference to the assembly (ϥωϣϥ);
- it evidences elements of style and content not unfamiliar from Shenoute's other works, e.g. the phrases 'I confess to you' (ⲧⲗⲙⲟⲗⲟⲖⲉⲓ ⲛⲏⲧⲏ̅) and 'I say to you' (ⲧⲗⲱ ⲛⲏⲧⲏ̅) and the difficulties experienced by the soul of the disgraced cleric.

The *Testamentum* was first published by G. Zoega *Catalogus Codicum Coptiorum* (1805) no. cxcix pp. 483-486, and the following is an English version of what he says:

Fragment of a sermon which I gather from the subject matter to be that of Shenoute, though the style is more sedate than that which he normally uses. He speaks of a book in which he seems to have given an account of what has happened in the monastery in his own lifetime and predicts that all those curses will come upon those who prevent that book from being read together with that which he has written or will write, while blessings will accrue to those who read his books carefully and observe what is contained in them. He says that he will teach his like-minded brothers to observe all that is written in his books and letters and to preserve his garments which, in great distress and mortification, he has torn repeatedly that they may be shown after his death to all those listen to what is written in his books. And when the latter ask what these torn garments and the contents of his writings mean, those asked are to say that God was sometimes vehemently angry with our monastery and sent upon us great curses and afflictions and temptations. After we had repented in deep and sincere sorrow, He averted His anger, took pity on us and blessed us. He removed corrupt and dishonest men from among us. He did those things for us because we are His servants. He castigated us in mercy because we are His children and He is our father. Those who heed the words in this book will say: Accursed is the one who thinks that the words written in it are idle or cursed. For the dead are unbelievers and

¹ J. Leipoldt *Schenute von Atripe* (1903) pp. 206ff.

estranged from their creator. God is not of the dead but of the living.

Both texts, in a sense, belong together: one contains a vision of the afterlife and the other contains instructions perhaps made before departure to the afterlife.

I have no access to Wiesmann's translation, which can be expected to contain all the Biblical passages cited or alluded to in the text, so I have provided only those which I have been able to identify. The numbers in brackets refer to the page nos. of Leipoldt's text.

S. Emmel *Shenoute's Literary Corpus* (2001) cites the two works on p. 922 as part of his description of the contents of Leipoldt's volume and, on p. 150, has a detailed description of the manuscript containing the *Testamentum Sinuthii*.

The Apocalypse of Shenoute

(198)...] I saw one of the saints. He arose, greeted them, blessed them. I heard him saying words, but did not understand what they were. Some replied to those seated that he was blessing them in Hebrew. I asked who this was. They said that it was Paul the Apostle. He is also the one who blesses those are first to arrive at the assembly who meditate on the Holy Scriptures. I confess to you that I see some meditating in joy and grace. I see the one whose book it is, uttering a multitude of blessings on me. And I see their souls, shining from the flashes of lightning that come from the words of God, as happens to iron when it is thrown into the fire and air is added to the fire: the iron glows exceedingly.

This thing, it was in the month of Epip that I saw it. I saw water below the firmament, men on the ground in mourning and grieving, because they wanted to drink from the water. I saw a man standing on the water, shining like the sun and not willing to give to them.² I was told a number of times that those on earth were begging, while the one over³ the waters held

2 I take it that the unspecified object of the verb is 'water', which probably refers to the Nile. Epip is the 11th month of the year, and Mesore the 12th. The river was at its lowest during these months.

3 Presumably 'in control of'

committed grievous sins.

I was called again on day: *Look and see this soul about to be brought from the body.* I looked and saw one of the [...

II

... after him, a sharp sword in his hand. He plunged it into the man. After he had plunged it, the man uttered a sound from his mouth. Those around him thought that he was beside himself. They were instructed to put irons on him. He made two sounds of the same sort. Afterwards he was brought forth from the body, his tongue hanging two palms¹¹ out his mouth, a ...¹² of fire coming forth from his nostrils. They said: *He is making sound from his nose.* Those who had come after him would not let (201) him say: *'Have mercy on me.'* They said: *He utters boastfulness¹³ from his mouth.* I saw them taking him trapped like dog. The account of his deeds¹⁴ was read aloud, the angels reproving him for his crimes and sexual depravity.

The remainder of the text, from p. 201 to p. 204, is fragmentary, and, since this is not a scholarly publication, I have simply summarized as much as I can understand.

The soul is driven into a pit that is deep and hot. Shenoute's attention is drawn to those in that house, who are lame and blind and scorched. He further sees a monk¹⁵ surrounded by powers.¹⁶ On asking about the soul, he is told that it is a Melitian¹⁷ monk. The Melitian seems to be described as a 'shepherd of boasters and blasphemers'. Shenoute then hears a dreadful sentence pronounced. The assembly is dismissed and the light appears, with

11 The measure **ϠΟΠ** (cf. Crum 547b) refers to the breadth of 4 fingers.

12 The word is **ΧΑΜΩΣ**. It looks Greek, but is not in the index of Greek words. Related to κάμινος? The clearly intelligible word **ϠΑΣ** 'flame' occurs in the same collocation three lines later. I wonder if it is related to the Hebrew **חמח** indicating the sound made by the fire issuing from the nostrils (cf. F. W. Gesenius *Hebrew Dictionary* (Eng. tr. 1846) p. 228b

13 cf. Crum 705b

14 Coptic: **ΧΕΙΡΟΓΡΑΦΟΝ**

15 Or perhaps: 'someone with the name of monk'

16 Demonic powers?

17 Melitius: bishop of Assiut who disagreed with the policy of allowing those who had sacrificed during the Decian persecution in 250 back into the Church. The movement associated with his name seems to have started around the beginning of the 4th cent. almost as a Church within a Church For the violent hostility between the Melitians and other Christians in Egypt see H. I. Bell *Jews and Christians in Egypt* (1924), especially Pap. 1914 (dated to c. 335) on p. 53. the The name is followed by the word (?) **ΕΔΑΚΙΝΑΜ**. which I do not understand.

bright-faced people in radiant garments. Shenoute then saw two brothers. The final section contains a reference to a feminine being (a soul perhaps) with a chain on its neck.

The Testament of Shenoute¹⁸

.. whether man or woman, they will be visited by all these blessings.

All those who will prevent, at that time or now,¹⁹ all the words written in that book or in the letters and our other writings that we have written or are going to write in future from being read and those who will prevent them from being read at that time or now, they will be visited by all these curses.

All those, however, who are at all times zealous in reading them or those who are pleased to hear them, to keep them and to perform them, they will be visited by all these blessings.

For this reason, not only will I enjoin the brothers (**205**) who are of one mind with us to care for all the words which we will write down in that book and that which is written in the letters, but I will also enjoin them to preserve my garments, which my great distress and mortification I have torn so many times that they have finally come apart.²⁰ For this reason I will enjoin the brothers who are of one mind with me, those who are in the days of my death,²¹ to lay down my torn garments before those who come after us and everyone who hears, at that time or now, all the words written in that book or that which is written in the letters that we have written or will write. And they will say: *What are these torn garments and these written words and all these curses ?*

18 The text follows the Apocalypse in Leipoldt's publication. The book spoken of seems to be a register of some sort documenting various activities in the monastery.

19 The phrase **ΖΗΠΕΟΥΘΕΙΩ ΕΤΗΜΑΥ** 'at that time' often refers to the past, but since the relative clause contains the conjugation prefix of the Future (**ΟΥΟΝ ΝΙΜ ΕΤΝΑΚΩΛΕΥΕ**), the times involved would seem to refer to the future and the present. There is a legal 'flavour' to this sort of formulation.

20 A common enough accompaniment to grief in the OT, e.g. Gen. 37, 29.

21 Shenoute is presumably talking about those who will be by his side at his death.

And they will answer and say: *Because the One who looks over the whole earth and who often passes through the whole land secretly at all times and every day, that is God, has looked down upon us secretly at all times and often passed through our convents, not visible to anyone, whether man or woman, but only to His angels.*

And they will say: *At that time²² the Lord became very angry with us and turned His face from us in great wrath to bring upon us great curses and wicked tribulations and severe trials because we had sinned against Him, when Satan came against us like a ravenous and roaring lion, and He²³ struck those who are with us.*

(206) And they will say: *When we repented in great humility, in hunger, thirst, weeping, tears for our hypocrisy, God turned His face towards²⁴ us and suspended His anger so as not to punish us with great wicked trials, and He removed the entire curse from us and showed us great mercy and blessing by bringing His hand upon us with a staff in mercy, He having melted us to the point of purity, as it is written: 'I will bring my hand upon you and melt you to purity.'²⁵ He has also removed from us evil men and irredeemable sinners, as it is written: 'I will destroy those who are disobedient and I will remove all the lawless from you together with all the overweening and I will establish for you a judge, as at the beginning, and a counsellor, as at the end.'²⁶ And they will say: *This is how God behaved, for we are His servants and the Lord has brought us up in mercy, for we are His children and He is our father.**

And those who take or will take heed, now or that time, of all the words written in this book, they will answer and say: *Accursed is the one who says that these words are vanities or curses or blessings which this one says and they will not come upon anyone, as he says. All these curses will come upon them at that time or now.*

And they will say, those without faith,²⁷ that the Lord has done all these things with us,

22 The phrase **ἡμῶν** clearly refers to the past here.

23 I think the subject is God.

24 Crum 128b.

25 Is. 1: 25.

26 The second part of Is. 1,25 (LXX)

27 I take this to be the postponed subject normally introduced by **οὐκ**.

because they kill and (207) are estranged from the One who created them, as it is written: *God is not of the dead, but of the living.*²⁸

And what does this mean ? Does it mean that all those who have died are estranged from God ? Or that those who are living belong to God ? If God is of the living only, but not also of the dead, then how is that the Apostle has said: *None of us will live for himself and none of us will die for himself?*²⁹ If we live, we will live for the Lord. If we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. For this reason Christ lived and died, so that He might watch over the dead and the living. For this reason, when he³⁰ said that God is not of the dead but of the living, he was saying that He is not the God of depravity, pollution, blasphemy, lying, false oaths, contention, strife, envy, hatred, enmity, faithlessness and every form of wickedness.³¹ And this is how the Lord Jesus said in his words: *God is not of the dead but of the living, in purity, virginity, worthiness, righteousness, truth and every form of goodness.*³²

Those who will stand by³³ the words of this book, that they should heed them in the future or now, they will reply and say: *God, God, everyone who conceals the words of this book or scandalizes one of all these words, the Lord will bring upon him all the curses in the Scriptures*³⁴ *while they are on earth and the Lord will bind the anger (208) of His wrath against them on the day of anger*³⁵ *and cast them into the fiery furnace, which, according to the Scriptures, is full of flames.*

People who are not asleep will quickly hear those calling them. And those who are still asleep, if you call them repeatedly, they will awake from sleep. But dead people, concealed beneath the earth or lying in graves, they will not hear even if they are called forcefully with

28 e.g. Lk. 20, 38

29 e.g. Ro. 14,7

30 Paul

31 This string of nouns has a Shenoutean ring to it.

32 Minus the string of nouns the first part seems to be an allusion to Jesus' encounter with the Sadducees, recorded for example in Matth. 22, 31

33 Crum 538a

34 Lit. 'the entire curse that is written in all the Scriptures' (ΜΠCΑ2ΟΥ ΤΗΡCΙ ΕΤCΗ2 2ΝΝΕΓΡΑΦΗ ΤΗΡΟΥ)

35 This phrase seems to be such a common phrase in the OT and NT that it has detached itself from a particular provenance and made its way as a 'standar' phrase into religious rhetoric. The 'fiery furnace'. on the other hand, may be an allusion to Matt. 13,42

many words. But truly, with difficulty, they will perceive in the final trumpet on the day when the trumpets sound and the dead will be raised incorruptible.³⁶

In this way also people who awake zealously through perception and the love of God, they will quickly hear the holy words of the Lord Jesus from those who teach them in the fear of the Lord. And those who are somewhat under the control of forgetfulness and stupefaction, these, if they are taught once and twice from the Scriptures by those who guide them, they will remove themselves [from their sins]³⁷

³⁶ 1 Cor. 15,52

³⁷ This is a suggestion of Leipoldt. Zoega adds nothing.