

## Shenoute

### Ad philosophum gentilem<sup>1</sup>

Anthony Alcock

This translation has been made from the Coptic text published in J. Leipoldt and W.E. Crum *Sinuthii archimandritae opera omnia et vita* (Paris, 1908) pp. 44-62. The biblical references are taken largely from H. Wiesman's Latin translation, a companion volume published 24 years later. The title of the text is that of Leipoldt-Crum.

The text has a tripartite structure: introduction, discourse and conclusion. The introduction provides information about the origin of the discourse and the conclusion about why this copy of it was made. The Coptic title of the text is the *incipit* of the discourse, which has now become the standard way of referring to Shenoute's texts.

The numbers in brackets are the page numbers of the printed Coptic text. According to the information on p. 4 this text has been preserved in 4 manuscripts (Codices A, B, C and D), two of which (B and C) may be part of the same book. Codex A has a note in the lower margin on p. 261 (=page 1 of the text itself): ΚΒ ΣΟΥΣΑΨΩϞ ΝΘΟΟΥΤ ΕΧΜΠΕΝΕΙΩΤ '22, day seven of Thoth, for our father'. Codex C has a note in the lower margin, also on p. 261: ΠΑΠΕ ΠΜΑ ΜΠΖΗΤ ΕΤΕΟΥΝΟΥΤΣΟΦΙΑ 'this is the place of the heart that has wisdom'. And on p. 262: ΕΧΝΣΟΥΚΑ ΝΤΩΒΕ 'on day 21 of Tōbe'.

The discourse, as indicated in the introduction, was held in public, and when Shenoute (on p. 45) points at a peacock and a goose, he may well be pointing at the sort of relief discovered at the Church of Faras.<sup>2</sup> I would suggest that the confrontation recorded here may have taken place in the monastic church, which seems to have been quite a large building, with a corridor, rather like that of the Temple of Edfu, at the side of the church, perhaps used an overspill area for those unable to enter the church. I must admit that I have never been to the monastery and my impression of it derives from the brief descriptions provided on the website devoted to the study of the physical remains of the White Monastery complex: : [http://www.yale.edu/egyptology/ae\\_white\\_church.htm](http://www.yale.edu/egyptology/ae_white_church.htm)

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1 This translates ΖΕΘΝΙΚΟΣ. English has two terms, which are used according to context: in a Jewish context, the term 'gentile' tends to be used to translate the Hebrew גוֹיִם, meaning essentially 'peoples, strangers to the true religion' (Gesenius *Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon* (Engl. Samuel Tregelles, 1949) p. 163; in a Christian context, the term 'pagan' tends to be used to designate those who refuse to accept Christianity.

2 Steffen Wenig *Africa in antiquity: the arts of ancient Nubia and the Sudan*. (Brooklyn Museum, 1978) p. 287.

A striking feature of the text is the extensive use of Biblical allusions, all together more than 170, over 50 of them from the Song of Songs. The battery of quotations and allusions to this astonishing item of erotic-spiritual poetry begins on p. 52 of the published text. I have included some, but by no means all, of them in the notes that follow. The Song is not quoted in the New Testament, but the passages in Matth. 12, 42 and Luke 11, 31 seemed to have suggested to Origen<sup>3</sup> that the 'Queen of the South' was the 'dark and comely' maiden of the Song. The Jewish allegorical treatment of the text, viz. the love of God for his people, seems to have been effortlessly adopted and adapted by Christians in the form of the love of Christ (bridegroom) for the Church (bride). <sup>4</sup>

Even the most cursory comparison of this with other Shenoute texts suggests that the Bible is used here not simply to 'support' Shenoute's text but rather to 'create' it. It seems reasonable to suppose that most, if not all, of these allusions and quotations would have been unintelligible to Shenoute's non-Christian opponent, unless of course he was Jewish. Anti-Judaic sentiment abounds in the text, in particular the passage on p. 57 that quotes Song 3, 3 ('A little way further on ...'), in which the bride/sister (Christian Church) takes her beloved (Christ) back home to meet her mother, who is described as '... the one whom he seeks but who runs away, the wretched woman ... the congregation of the unbelieving Jews'. It is a clever, if somewhat repugnant, elaboration of the Biblical text. <sup>5</sup>

Shenoute's familiarity with rhetorical devices is clear from the six statements on p. 46, about 'the good', beginning with καλῶς: 'Deservedly ...' In the following paragraph there are two statements, about 'the bad', starting with δικαιῶς. \*

Perhaps the most singular feature of the text is the 3rd person eulogy of the Church (one might almost say 'aretalogy') that starts on p. 57 of the printed text. In this portion of the text I have assigned an individual line to each unit of the text. This recital of the 'virtues' is closely followed by a series of sentences of the 'She is X' variety, each of which is followed by a Biblical passage in support of it.

## Introduction

This is the discourse delivered by our holy father and prophet Apa Shenoute when a pagan

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3 J-P Migne *Patrologia Graeca* 13 (1862) pp. 37 ff.

4 William E. Phipps 'The Plight of the Song of Songs' *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 47 (1974) makes a memorably wistful comment on the text: 'It is one of the pranks of history that a poem so obviously about hungry passion has caused so much perplexity and has provoked such a plethora of bizarre interpretations.'

5 Interestingly enough the text known as the Targum (6th-8th cent. AD, depending on the scholar dating it) is thought by Raphael Loewe 'Apologetic Motifs in the Targum to the Song of Songs' in *Biblical Motifs* ed. Alexander Altmann (Harvard U.P.) 1966 on pp. 173-184 to be anti-Christian.

philosopher came to him, for a second time.<sup>6</sup> Shenoute knew that his thoughts towards God were not upright.<sup>7</sup> There were many officials sitting with him and wealthy men who knew the philosopher, and they scoffed at him when he came to hear the discourse. Shenoute began to speak: 'The prophet said: "A lion will roar, and who will not be afraid? The Lord God has spoken, and who will not prophesy?"<sup>8</sup> The Lord it is who commanded, and his spirit.<sup>9</sup> Who will not say the things that are? Or who will conceal the things that are good?"

### Discourse

As I was sitting on a mountain<sup>10</sup>, says the one who says these things,<sup>11</sup> I saw a creature in the air fighting with other creatures on the ground. I felt great joy that the bird was able to contend with the reptile. After some time the reptile turned against the bird and, seizing him, overcame him.

The wise will know that this word is that of every heretic who doubts. For it is not a surprise that a pagan (45) or heretic in the Church has no faith. So the birds themselves are often in the Church. Look at the peacock there, and the goose. If the heretic and the pagan spread their hands or they are assumed to be praying, look at the birds also, they often do this when they spread their wings.<sup>12</sup> Or will you struggle with Satan, you unbelievers, you who do not have the shield of faith,<sup>13</sup> which will enable you to quench his arrows?

Woe to you if you do not go to Church or if you do not receive the body and blood of the

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6 The only named pagan philosopher with whom Shenoute is known to have come into contact is Gesios, mentioned in the Life of Shenoute. In particular, an incident is related there, cf. Leipoldt-Crum *Vita Sinuthii* (1906 p.57), in which Shenoute steals ('at night in secret') idolatrous property from Gesios' house in Panopolis on the other side of the river from the White Monastery. The phrase 'for a second time' suggests that this highly public confrontation might be something of a re-match.

7 Ps. 78, 37 and Acts 8, 21

8 Amos 3, 8

9 Is. 48, 16

10 The use of **ANOK** emphasizes 'I'. high ground on the West Bank is, in my opinion, better described by the English 'hill' rather than 'mountain', which would be more appropriate for high ground in the Eastern Desert.

11 I am not sure that I understand this, but since this is a copy of the text made for Kolthe it may be an unnecessarily oblique way of referring to Shenoute. Kolthe is an abbreviated form of Kollouthos. I can find no information about him. It would be an extravagant flight of fancy to suggest that he and the Colluthus of Lycopolis, who wrote the 400-line hexametric epyllion *The Abduction of Helen* in the late 5th cent., were in any way related to each other.

12 W.E. Crum *Coptic Dictionary* (1939) 339a speculates that the comparison may involve paintings of birds.

13 Eph. 6, 16. The arrows are, of course, burning in Ephesians but omitted here.

Lord. And woe to you too if you go and receive the mystery when you are in doubt.

For you and your children, from the beginning until now, are those to whom the Holy Spirit speaks: 'All your deeds are vain hope and fruitlessness.'<sup>14</sup> As he said: 'It is vanity for you to rise early.'<sup>15</sup> To rise early to do what ? To rise early to worship and pour libations for those who are not gods.

Who among those who pray that God may bring you from the error of the demons will not be distressed at heart over you ? For whom do you rise early ? Whom do you worship ? What will you gain ? You harden your heart against believing in God, the one who does not wish that anyone be destroyed in his creation,<sup>16</sup> the one who fashioned us in his own image and likeness.<sup>17</sup>

There are many small weak flying creatures. Of them the bee is the choicest. All flies are repellent and hateful, but on the other hand<sup>18</sup> there are some (46) like you who think that they are worthy. Moreover, you make flies hope for yourselves, like that faithless monarch who trusted in the fly, the god of the Accaronites, that he might be cured of his sickness, as the Scripture says of his folly.<sup>19</sup> But that bee alone is the chosen and honoured one, as the wisdom of God says: 'He is honoured before everyone and loved.'<sup>20</sup>

Every man under heaven, born into the world, is called 'man'. All the heretics separated from the catholic Church are repellent. It is only the Christians who are honoured and loved by God.

Deservedly the bee is loved. The fruits of his labours are given to kings and people for comfort.<sup>21</sup> Deservedly the Christian is loved, for he pleases God and his Christ in all his deeds of righteousness. He also comforts the bowels of all the saints in heaven.

Deservedly the bee is taken care of by humans and they look after him, killing other

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14 An allusion to Sap. 3, 11. The Coptic text can be consulted in Paul de Lagarde *Aegyptiaca* (1883) p. 69

15 Ps. 126,3

16 An allusion to Sap. 12, 25

17 Gen. 1, 26

18 The grammatical construction used here involves the Greek correlative particle μέν combined with the Coptic **ON**.

19 Allusion to 2 Kings 1, 1ff.

20 Prov. 6, 8 (LXX)

21 As n. 14

creatures inimical to it. Deservedly the bee is taken care of among Christians and watched over by the angels, who confound and destroy the enemy that opposes it.

Deservedly the bee is loved by people, for he brings a dew that is sweet, coming down from heaven through the agency of the Lord.<sup>22</sup> Deservedly the Christian is loved by the angel, for he brings into the storehouses of his soul the sweet dew that descends from heaven above, this which is sweeter than any bee. I am speaking of (47) the word of God and faith, peace, love and hope of all good things.

Rightfully the flies that live on all unclean things is hated. Rightfully you are hated by the beloved of Christ, you heretics, as the Scripture says, because all that you hope for is to commit every act of impurity and every wicked deed. You are the ones who incur the contempt of the Spirit of God that speaks in its own, saying: 'Flies that fly, when they die, destroy the preparation of an oil salve.'<sup>23</sup> You have died and destroyed the preparation of life in you, this which is being kept for them, those among them, namely the Christians. If you are not ashamed to turn to God, who will be ashamed to deride you through the least of creatures ?

There are flies whom everyone calls 'dog flies'. All those everywhere who refuse to become Christian, let us call them 'demonic people'. Their parts as it is written,<sup>24</sup> 'will be parts of the foxes'. The sheep does not belong to the wild beasts but to the shepherd. When dies, it becomes theirs. For it becomes food for them when he gives it to them.

I say this lest you say that Satan has a part of man. Heaven forbid ! For every creation, not only man but also beasts, domestic and wild, and birds and creatures of the water and reptiles including the serpent, it is God who created them (48), but if you die in faithlessness and godlessness, you will belong to the demons. For the Lord Jesus gave you to the unclean spirits, as Scripture says to us: 'These are thing I have given to Satan.'<sup>25</sup>

Some flies live on honey when they find it, some live on bread and others live on carrion. They are found in people's houses and are hated. This word belongs to the pagans and every heretic who doubts. Sometimes they hear the word of God in the place of instruction.

22 Possibly a distant echo of Exodus 16, 31

23 Eccl. 10, 1. LXX σκευασία is rendered by Coptic ⲥⲱⲣⲟ

24 Ps. 63, 10

25 1 Tim. 1, 20

Other times they honour the name of the Lord Jesus, the true bread who came from heaven,<sup>26</sup> the life of the Christians. There are also times when they are found in church, that is, the house of the sons of God. At other times they make the idols and images they worship. Know your shame in these things. I am speaking about you, those who come to the church hypocritically for fear of people. For you are the ones about whom Scripture says: 'He who does the works of the Lord negligently is cursed.'<sup>27</sup>

Perhaps these small creatures in the fruit of the sycamore become like the wind when the fruit is broken open. For they thought before they had come out to the light that they were in storehouses full of light. This is the way of the pagans and all heretics who think that they are in the light and do what is not fitting, though they see that the light of the Gospel of Christ has filled the whole earth. Not only do they become weak or are weak (49), but on the day of their death they will become weak when their wicked way of life and demonic habits come to an end and they become like the wind when the Spirit of God blows them away. As the Scripture says: 'In many places the wind will take them away, that is, the anger of God, and the whirlwind will cause them to fly away, that is the anger of God that will be revealed from heaven.'<sup>28</sup>

If one wishes to ask a pagan or a heretic about something, he might as well ask<sup>29</sup> that insignificant creature whose nature it is to move its head up and down, which small children ask, laughing and amusing themselves: 'Is the water coming?' Those who go to oracles<sup>30</sup> are of this sort, and people who are like them.<sup>31</sup> He who wishes to reproach them for their talkativeness, that they say, in their false knowledge, that which does not exist, he might as well say to them: 'Who is it that asks the frogs if the water is coming?' Jokers do, because frogs can be heard croaking on the banks of the river. What does this achieve? That the servants of the rich word reproach you and say: 'Those who see, do they ask the blind for directions? Or will the light ask the darkness for light? Or will people ask beasts about divine mysteries and secrets? Accordingly, this voice of truth has compared you to unknowing beasts. You have come to resemble them. As it is said: 'The man who enjoys honour but does not know himself has been thrown with the unknowing beasts and has

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26 John 6, 33

27 Jer. 48, 10

28 A mixed set of references: Rom. 1, 6, and Is. 41, 16 and 57, 13.

29 Lit. 'let him ask'

30 Lit. 'question places'

31 The verb **εἶνε** can also mean: 'be like' and 'bring'

become like them.'<sup>32</sup> Or is it surprising in your opinion that those who wear true knowledge on their lips, as it is written,<sup>33</sup> smile at you ? Like those who are distressed over you that the demons laugh at you without your knowing it, because you are ignorant.

(50) Is it not because of your emptiness that wisdom said: 'I will laugh at your destruction, I will rejoice over you if destruction overtakes you' ?<sup>34</sup> For at this time your hard-hearted father Pharaoh, God not only struck him with a plague of extremely painful boils and darkness and destruction and rained down hail from heaven upon him, but also, in order to reveal his shame, afflicted him with frogs, locusts, mosquitoes and lice. Or was it not possible for the Lord God to send an angel down to kill Pharaoh and his army ? As a single angel laid low 18,500 Assyrians in a camp in a single night. But this sort of king, who boasts of himself as tyrant, God had made him weak among the least creatures.'<sup>35</sup> A king who said: 'There is no-one able to stand against me.' God has let him know him of his weakness through the mosquitoes, frogs and lice. What other things are there like this dust ? He was unable to bear them and to recognize God in all these things with which God chastized him, as he caused rivers to turn into blood.

So now, the word of God reproaches you with the words of the Scriptures: ' My God, put them like a wheel and stubble before the wind. Like a fire that burns a place of trees and a beacon that burns mountains, so you will pursue them in your tempestuousness and confound them in your anger. Fill their faces with shame. Let them feel shame and be scattered forever. Let them be confused and destroyed and let them know that your name (51) is the Lord.'<sup>36</sup> And he will shame your stupidity by means of the smallest creatures, especially if you do not avoid the works of demons. It is said: 'Let them go down to hell still alive'<sup>37</sup> How will you escape that ?

Do you want to test the knowledge of the light of the eyes of pagans and heretics ? Look at the light of the eyes of bats and owls. The others are better than them, for they do not err in the things of their nature like you because instead of becoming gods you have become godless. Men of this sort are full of arrogance. Thinking that they are wiser than many, they

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32 Ps. 48, 12

33 Prov. 16, 23

34 Prov. 1, 26

35 A medley of references, starting with Ex. 8, 6ff.

36 Ps. 103, 30ff. and Wisdom 11, 16.

37 Ps. 54, 16

will now not be able to hide their contemptibleness and shame when the word of truth reveals them as worthless.<sup>38</sup>

Do you want to know the heart of everyone without faith ? The one who exposes the entire baseness of their soul because they are full of unclean spirits. Look at the holes of the hyenas and those of all the wild beasts because they are full of all sorts of bones. Do you want to see the heart of everyone who loves God that you may know them ? The one who reveals the beauty of their soul says they are full of a spirit that is holy in every good thing of every sort. <sup>39</sup>Look at the holes in the rock that are full of pigeons and all the places they live. The holes in the rock are at one with it and are not separate from it. The faithful hearts in truth are at one with the Lord Jesus, the rock that pours out honey, for the rock is Christ. And they are separate from it. For he says: 'He caused them to eat honey (52) from a rock and oil from a hard rock.'<sup>40</sup> What therefore is the honey but the word and teaching of the Scriptures ? What is the oil from a hard rock but the grace by which Christians have been saved ?

If water is mixed with wine, it becomes one liquid. But the man of God, if he partakes of the Holy Spirit, he becomes one with the Spirit.

Who is the one Solomon calls 'my companion, my beautiful dove'<sup>41</sup>, if not the Church that gives birth to her Christian children that resemble her ? She it is also of whom it is said: 'My companion, my perfect dove'<sup>42</sup> and 'she is one of her mother' and 'a chosen one of the one who gave birth to her'<sup>43</sup>. And again, 'Rise and come, my neighbour, my good dove, and come, my dove, in the hole of the rock next to the wall outside.'<sup>44</sup>

This means the one in the ascendant or the revelation of the light of the one that came into the world, Christ,<sup>45</sup> 'next to the wall outside'. 'For Moses himself wrote about it in the law.'

<sup>46</sup>

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38 Matth. 25, 30

39 Acts 6, 3

40 Deut. 32, 13

41 Song 2, 10.

42 Song 5, 2

43 Song 6, 8

44 Song 2, 14. Translates the LXX.

45 Jo. 1, 9

46 Jo. 1, 45



Her brother or companion is a witness to her beauty and her glory and her comeliness and her strength, that 'my companion is like love, she was like Jerusalem, inspiring fear like the powers that stand.'<sup>47</sup> And again: 'Behold, you are beautiful, my companion, you are beautiful. Yours are the eyes of a dove.'<sup>48</sup> Which means the prophets and the apostles, who are full of a holy spirit. They too are the ones about whom he says: 'Your two breasts (53) are like two young twin doves'.<sup>49</sup> These are also the ones of whom she said: 'The jar of myrrh is a brother for me, it being between my breasts.'<sup>50</sup> He also says of her: 'We will love your breasts more than wine', that is, the Old and the New Testament, full of the word of God. She also says to him: 'Behold you are good, my brother, and beautiful to behold. You are the awning over our bed.' He also says to her: 'Who is the one who comes from the desert like a column of incense that has been offered up and gives off a fragrance?' This means the Church of the pagans, which rises from idol worship and has become Christian perfume. She then says to him: 'Your breasts are better than wine and the fragrance of your ointment is more pervasive than all fragrances.' And again: 'Your name is an ointment that has been poured out.' He says: 'Who is this looking like the early morning?' This means her hoping and her waiting in which she waits for the Saviour of all. 'Beautiful as the sun, as choice as the moon, as marvellous as those who are assigned.' She also says when asked: 'What is your brother compared with another brother, beautiful woman?' 'The form of my brother is this: he is white and ruddy and quite the most outstanding among ten thousand, his head is like gold of Cephass. his hair bushy, as black as a raven.'<sup>51</sup> This word is: 'The Cushites will be first to give their hands to God.'<sup>52</sup> All the lands of the gentiles will worship in his presence, his eyes like those of doves on swollen waters, they having washed themselves (54) in the dew as they sit on the swollen waters.' He also says: 'Who is the one who ascends totally white and glorying in her brother?' The Church is not separated from wisdom or wisdom from the Church, but they are one. Speaking with him, whom she addresses because she knows who he is: 'I belong to my brother and my brother belongs to me.' And again: 'My brother comes down into his garden to the spice beds that he may feed in the gardens and collect lilies.' And again 'Let my brother come down into his garden and eat the fruit of his trees.' He says: 'My sister, my sister, my betrothed is like an enclosed

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47 Song 6, 4

48 Song 1, 11

49 Song 4, 5

50 Song 13, 6

51 Songs 5, 9. The previous line is addressed by the 'sister' to the 'daughters Of Jerusalem', and this is their reply. The sister then tells the daughters about her brother. The 'name' Cephass is a direct rendering of the LXX *καὶ φάϛ*, the second word of which is a calque of the Hebrew *זָהָב* 'gold'.

52 Ps. 68, 31

garden, surrounded by the faith and the commandment and the teaching of life. A garden that is closed, a spring that is sealed in purity and the hope all good things. In what are you sealed? In the Holy Spirit, as the Apostle said: 'Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in which you are sealed until the day of redemption.' And again he said to her: 'I went into my garden, my sister, my betrothed. I have gathered my myrrh with my spice. I have eaten my bread and honey and drunk my wine with my milk. You too, eat, my brothers and become drunk, my companions. She replied: 'I went into my garden of nuts to see the XXX and whether the vine and the fig tree have germinated. I will give you my breasts. My soul did not know. He put me in the chariot of Aminadab.' He then calls her: 'Come, rise, my companion, my beautiful dove (55), the winter has passed', that is, the ice of disbelief of the Jews has gone and withered. The seeds of faith and hope and love of God have appeared in our land. The time of harvest has arrived, that is, the time of teaching men every good thing has arrived and filled the whole earth. The voice of the turtle dove is heard in our land, the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ the Word made flesh has come to live with us until he raises us from the dead. She also calls him, 'Come to me, my brother, and let us go to the field and be in the villages and arrive early in the vineyards to see whether the tree ...'

(gap)

... faith and also their knowledge. Not for nothing did the Lord hate the Jews. But they hated him and his Father first, as he said. They are the ones about whom he says through the prophet: 'My inheritance has been for me like a lion in the forest.' This is how it 'gave voice at me', crying aloud: 'Take him, take him, crucify him.' For this reason, I hate it. The church of the gentiles is the one that says: 'I have desired his protection. I have sat under it, that is, his peace, for they were enemies, those outside the among the gentiles,<sup>53</sup> they have made their peace with God. It is the commandment also of the Scriptures that he has given it rest. His fruit is sweet in my throat, that is, the Word and the teaching and the commandment. She also says (56): 'His love has taken me.'<sup>54</sup> And what she says to him: 'Let him kiss me with his mouth, because your breasts are sweeter than wine.' He is about whom she said: 'If I find you outside, I will not stop kissing your mouth. For the one outside is not separate from this one, for they have dragged you back to them.' He agrees with this: 'Wisdom desires that we engender it for ourselves.' We sleep. How great is the

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53 This seems an appropriate term in the context.

54 If this is a reference to Songs 5, 8, it is somewhat different from the LXX text and its Coptic translation.

turning aside and the evil of the congregation of the Jews who pursued the Lord to kill him and the gifts of the one who said: 'I will rise therefore and walk around the city and the market places and the squares and seek the one whom my soul loves. We see that not in vain has his love drawn her to himself. But she too asks: 'Tell me, you whom my soul loves, where you feed', and she said: 'I sought the one my soul loves.' Perhaps, that she might test his love, she concealed herself briefly from him. 'I sought him and did not find him. I called him and he did not hear me.' 'The watch found me wandering through the streets. I asked them if they had seen my love. A little way further on, I found my love. I kept him and took him into the home of my mother and the bedchamber of the one who gave birth to me.' How great was her impurity, the one whom he seeks but who runs away, the wretched woman. This is the congregation of the unbelieving Jews, which lanced the Lord, and, in short, committed (57) all the other iniquities on him. How great was her glory, whom they struck because of him and wounded and whose cloak they tried to take away her cloak, but she did not let it go. They took away her cloak, but they could not take away her love for him. They wounded her, but they could not wound her good intention and steadfastness with her stable faith. Those who struck or wounded her are those about whom he said: 'The sons of my mother fought against me.' They said to her: 'What sort of person is your brother compared with others, most beautiful of women, that you have sworn in this way to us?', their lot being with her in the life of her brother. Those who found and wounded her, they threw their lot in with those who crucified the Lord. She has her brother, and they have taken nothing from her. Since the congregation of the Jews is lacking Jesus Christ, they have nothing. What greater evil did they inflict on him than taking away his cloak. For they stripped Jesus of his clothes and divided them while he was looking on and drew lots for it.<sup>55</sup> Thus, there is no limit to the words that can be said about her and all her secrets, for she is:

one and many,  
a virgin and a bride,  
a garden and a spring,  
a land that yields its fruits and a worker on the land,  
a people and a prophet,  
an apostle and a saint,

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<sup>55</sup> According to John 19, 24 the soldiers were familiar with the 'prophecy' in Ps. 22, 18, so they must have been Jewish. On the other hand, the capital punishment of crucifixion was a Roman prerogative and administered by Roman soldiers.

a teacher and a pupil,  
 a sister and a brother,  
 a small child and an elder (58)  
 a daughter and a mother,  
 a house and a city,  
 a sheepfold with a door for coming and going,  
 a shepherd whose voice the sheep listen to,  
 a sheepfold listening to the voice of a shepherd,  
 a person who walks on a path that leads to life,  
 a servant who has a master,<sup>56</sup>  
 a queen who has many servants,  
 a small one and a great one, with breasts different those of all women on earth,  
 a companion,  
 a perfect dove,  
 a grain of seed producing from itself a grain of the fruit of life,  
 a light proceeding from light,  
 a ...<sup>57</sup> on which shines the glory of the Lord,  
 a great multitude and a single one,

But so that we will know that she is one, the Apostle says: 'I have prepared myself to present you to as a holy virgin to one husband, Christ.' By saying 'you', he was revealing that it was a great multitude. Her brother is the one who says to him alone through Solomon: 'She is an enclosed garden, my sister, my bride, a sealed spring' that bubbles forth knowledge and every righteous thing, a field, and those who work the field are the apostles, the prophets and the Lord Jesus.' For it says in the Gospel of John: 'Lift up your eyes and see the lands, for they are white to be harvested.' Does he truly mean a land or not? (59) He means a people, for he says: 'Beg the lord of the harvest to send<sup>58</sup> out his workers for the harvest.' Does the Lord send his apostles to harvest deserts or not? It is to teach all the countries that he sends them. For it is a field of God, as the Apostle said, giving fruit for eternal life. It is also, as it is said: 'Solomon had a vineyard in a place called Belamon.' And there are many places in the Scripture that teach us that she is a vineyard, and the Lord

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56 As the Scripture says: 'Serve the Lord in fear' (Ps. 2, 11) and 'Bless the Lord, all the servants of the Lord', 'servants, bless the Lord, bless his holy name.' (I have extracted this from the main body of the text.)

57 This word is not attested in Crum's dictionary

58 The verbal phrase  $\nu\omicron\upsilon\chi\epsilon\ \epsilon\beta\omicron\lambda$  is usually understood to mean something like 'send away, expel'

also teaches us that she is a small garden, just as he took the vineyard from the farmers who did not give their fruits to him and gave them to others, who would give him their fruits when they were ready. She is a people, because she is a pupil of Christ the teacher. And again she is also a teacher, because she teaches many ignorant souls and prophesies and evangelizes to those near and far. She is a shepherd tending people with her word with the help of God, to whom they cry out: 'Pasture your people with your staff, the flock of sheep of your inheritance, who are by themselves in the ravine.' And again a flock of sheep, in the words of the Lord: 'My sheep listen to my voice and they will follow me.' And again: 'I have other sheep, not of this flock, and it is necessary that I gather them together.' She is a teacher and a shepherd, according to the Scriptures: 'Other shepherds, other teachers for the instruction of the saints.' She is a pupil, as the Lord said: 'There is no pupil greater than his teacher. It is fitting for the pupil to be like his teacher.' She is a mistress or queen, as it is written: 'The queen stood at the (60) right side of you, swathed in multi-coloured garments of gold.' She is a city, as it is written: 'Many gifts have been donated for your sake.' She is a door through which many will proceed to life.' For the Lord says: 'I am the door. If anyone enters through me, he will be saved and proceed and come and find pasture.' She is a wall surrounded by a wall,<sup>59</sup> there being many walls outside the wall, which are of silver: 'If there is a wall, we will surround it with walls of silver' He also says: 'The one who loves the law surrounds it with a wall.' She is a sister who has a brother. He, for his part, promises her brotherhood, as it is written: 'He who does the will of my father in heaven, he is my brother and my sister.' She is a companion who has a companion, as the Lord said: 'You are my companions. If you do what I tell you, I will not call you my servants, but I will call you my companions.'<sup>60</sup> She is a great man, because she is a patriarch, father to all who seek God, as it is written: 'I have made you father of many nations who will hope in God.' She is also a child, as it is written: 'Come, my children, and listen to me and I will teach you about the fear of the Lord.' The Apostle also says: 'My sons, those to whom I will give painful birth, until the Lord takes shape in you.' The Lord also calls his saints: 'Children, do you have any fish?' She is skilled and guileless: skilled at good and guileless at evil. (61) She is a path walking on a path, because she is a catholic church walking on the true path of the Lord, on which many will go forth to life. She is a light walking from the light, who has come into the world, the Lord Jesus Christ, many

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59 Could this also be an allusion to the interesting internal arrangement of the White Monastery, where there is apparently a corridor that separates the church from the outer wall, as in the temple of Edfu, cf. note 9. Coptic uses two words meaning 'wall': **Ⲭⲟⲩⲧ** and **ⲭⲟⲉ**. In earlier stages of the language *sbtj* refers, for example, to the outer wall of a temple complex, while *d3y* refers more to a corridor wall.

60 The second 'I will' conceals a property of the Coptic conjugation form that places emphasis on 'my companions'.

walking in her light, as it is written: 'You are the light of the world.' She is one who calls people to walk in accordance with the worth of the Lord. She, for her part, has also been called for this 'to walk worthily of the calling by which she has been called in all humility and mildness and patience.' As the Apostle announced to all those assembled to present their bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, she is a sacrifice. She is also a kingdom and a priesthood. She is a holy nation, a people for life, as it is written. She is eternal who exists with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Her brother is hers for all time and she his forever. Through parables in the Scriptures, Christ is the brother of the virgin or the bride or that sister. He is a brother, a bridegroom, a virgin, a companion, a child and a master, a sheep and a shepherd, a sacrifice and a high priest, a mountain, a day, a sun, a sword and a lamb, a last and a first, a word and a first-born, and God who will judge the entirety and each one according to his deeds.

The rest of the testimonies of these words, they are (62) all written in the Scriptures. The one who reads them will know them all.

### **Conclusion**

Five letters

I wonder

The Spirit of God

A priest will not stop

When the discourse says the things that belong to this prophecy

As I was sitting on a mountain (ⲈⲒⲘⲞⲞⲤ ⲀⲚⲞⲔ ⲒⲒⲬⲚⲞⲮⲤⲞⲮⲮ)

God. The fifth discourse of our father is complete, its holy blessings will be with us all together. Amen.

This is the book and the great chapter written by our God-loving brother and our father the priest <sup>61</sup> Kolthe and archimandrite of the monastery of our prophetic father Apa Shenoute of the convent of Siut,<sup>62</sup> that he (Kolthe) might read it for the benefit and consolation of those who [live] and hear and the salvation of their soul that the Lord may have mercy on him on the day when he visits him.<sup>63</sup> Amen. Let it be.

Remember me also with love and pray for me, I this wretched sinner.

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61 On this form of the title cf. W.E. Crum *Coptic Dictionary* (1939) : 13b.

62 'Convent' translates the Egyptian word ⲒⲈⲚⲏⲤⲈ, an ancient word meaning 'house of God'. Siut is quite a long way from Sohag, the site of the White Monastery, and I do not know what the connection between the two is.

63 1 Pet. 2, 12

