

Peter I of Alexandria
Coptic fragment

Anthony Alcock

The fragment in question was catalogued by É. Amélineau in his *Catalogue des Mss coptes* (1889) and first published by Carl Schmidt as 'Fragmente einer Schrift des Märtyerbischofes von Alexandrien' in *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur* 20 (1901) fasc. 4 pp. 50ff.

Peter I was the 17th Patriarch of the Egyptian Church from 300 to 311. He had held office for three years before the Great Persecution began. During his patriarchate there was an internal threat to the Church from Arius and Meletius, the former on doctrinal grounds, the latter on ecclesiastical political grounds¹ and the external one known as the Diocletianic or Great Persecution, which broke out in 303 and came to an end in 311. Peter spent several of his patriarchal years hiding from the persecution and was finally executed in 311.²

The organization of the text does not make for easy reading, and I have decided to copy it as a continuous horizontally-oriented text, each page followed by the English version, so that anyone who wishes can consult both text and translation with ease. This after all is not a work of scholarship,³ but, I hope, one that will be useful to those with a casual interest in the language and church history.

The text is from a 9th cent. White Monastery library codex and is now in Paris, where it bears the inventory number Paris copte 130⁵ fols. 123ff. It is written in the 1st person, either as a sermon or a letter: the speaker identifies himself as Peter (p. 90) and is identified as Peter (p.91).

The opening part of the text deals with church attendance on Sunday. Whether 4th cent. reality was as strict as the text would suggest I cannot say. After rebuking three groups of wrongdoers, Peter then talks of a 'wondrous' personal experience while in hiding. The extent of his wanderings⁴ is here confined to a stay in Oyrhynchus.

It may be that Schmidt overestimated the 'importance' of the text as an historical document, but since the context of the fragment, viz. the rest of the book from which it comes, is no longer extant, it is impossible to say very

1 Meletius ordained bishops without the consent of Alexandria, and it is possible that the 6th canon of Nicaea (325) was intended to reinforce the exclusive right of Alexandria to perform this function.

2 B. Evetts 'History of the Patriarchs' *Patrologia Orientalis* 1 (1904) p. 399

3 T. Vivian *Peter of Alexandria* (2004), which I have not read, is undoubtedly a full account of the man and his work.

4 In the *Acts* they are portrayed as having been quite extensive: Syria, Mesopotamia and Palestine.

much about it, beyond the obvious fact that at least 88 pages have not survived before this fragment begins and an unknown number after the fragment ends.

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ϞΟΜΤ ΕΝϞΟ ΝΡΩΜΕ· ΝΤΩΤΝ ΖΩΤΤΗΥΤΝ Ω ΝΕΠΙΣΚΟΠΟC ΜΝΝΑΠΗΥΕ ΝΝΛΑΟC ΜΠΡΚΑΤΗΧΕ ΝΛΑΑΥ
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(89) 3,000 people. You too, bishops and heads of the people, do not give instructions that anyone at all is to remain outside the services of the church, except those in prison and the sick. I order you not to do any work on the holy Day of the Lord and that there be ⁵ disagreements, legal disputes or physical violence, but to read the Scriptures attentively and give bread to the needy. The one who disputes or uses violence or gives a wrong decision or demands restitution of property from anyone on the Day of the Lord or all the known great feasts, people of this sort are outside the community of Christians, both clerics and laity. Accursed is the one who does anything on the holy Day of the Lord except things useful to the soul or feeding the animals. Accursed is the one who abuses his neighbour or his brother. Accursed is the one who bears false witness hatefully against his neighbour with the intention of taking away from him the hope of his life.⁶ This one will be among those who have sold the Resurrection of the Lord for money⁷ and made a lie of their own life. Listen, and I will tell you, lovers of

⁵ The Coptic construction known as the Conjunctive, used in the second part of the sentence without a negative has the effect of 'continuing' the prohibition in the first part, in the sense of *I forbid (a) work and (b) disagreements . . .* A reasonably succinct account of the use of the construction may be found in W. Till *Koptische Grammatik* (1961) §§ 321ff.

⁶ Typographical error in the the text.

⁷ I can only assume that this is meant as a reproach to those who place more value on the material than the spiritual life.

the word,⁸ a wondrous thing.

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ΡΕ ΜΜΟḲ ΕΛΑΦΩΠΕ ΜΜΟΙ ΔΝΟΚ ΠΕΤΡΟC ΠΕΦΒΗΡΚΟΙΝΩΝΟC ΕΝΜΜΟΚḲC ΜΠΕΧC· ΤΕΤΝCΟΟΥΝ
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(90) that happened to me, Peter the one who shared the sufferings of Christ.⁹ You know that for a long time I have been travelling from place to place for fear of Diocletian and his persecution which is now upon us.# I went to the south of Egypt until I came to Oxyrhynchus,¹⁰ that is, Pemje. I was received by clerics and industrious lay people¹¹ joyfully and and with great happiness by the faithful. It was not long since the bishop of that city had died. But they said: “Even if our father the bishop has died, God has still¹² not deprived us of His mercy. Look, He has sent the father of the faithful to us.” I spent some time with them, resting body and soul. The entire town council came to me and pleaded with me to consecrate for them a bishop in place of the one who had died. ¹³I said to them: “Go and choose a man worthy of this great office and bring him to me and I will consecrate him for you before I leave you.” They went and did what I had told them. That night, while I was still sleeping in the place where I was sleeping, I thought about the persecution that Diocletian had brought upon the church and I began to

8 A hybrid word: *μαίλογος*, where the prefix has the same meaning as *φίλο-*. It is probably a rare word in writing because I have been unable to find the Greek form in Lampe's *Patristic Greek Lexicon*.

9 1 Pet. 4, 13

10 It is not very usual to find the Greek name of an Egyptian city in a Coptic text, as the spelling shows: *εζωρικός*.

11 For the meaning of *φιλόπνοος* cf. G.W.H. Lampe *Patristic Greek Lexicon* (1961): 1480a meaning 2.

12 Coptic *ON* cf. W.E. Crum *Coptic Dictionary* (1939) 255b

13 It may perhaps be too fanciful to see anti-Meletius propagand in this episode

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ⲙⲙⲟⲓ ⲉⲓⲭⲱ ⲙⲙⲟⲥ ⲭⲉⲙⲁⲣⲉⲡⲟϥⲱ ⲙⲡⲭⲟⲉⲓⲥ ⲱⲱⲡⲉ: ⲁⲣⲁ ⲡⲟϥⲱ ⲙⲡⲛⲟϥⲧⲉⲡⲉ ⲉⲧⲣⲁⲕⲧⲟⲓ ⲉⲣⲁⲕⲟⲧⲉ
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(91) saying to myself: “Let the will of the Lord be done. Is it¹⁴ the will of God that I return once again to Rakote ?” At that moment a voice came to me: “Peter, last martyr,¹⁵ arise and return to Rakote and instruct your people and entrust them to the care of a good shepherd, for the crown of your martyrdom has approached. The man who will be brought to you tomorrow, do not consecrate him, for he is not worthy. He has committed a great sin in my house.” After the voice had said these things to me, I stopped seeing it.¹⁶ The next day all the people came to me and brought with them a great wealthy presbyter that I might consnecrate a bishop for them. He was man of the city. But when I saw him, I thought of what the voice had said to me, and I said: “My son, tell me what you have done. For it is written: *Say your crimes that you may be justified.*¹⁷ Further: *Reveal your sins to each other that they*

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15 This is an echo of the phrase in the *Acts of Peter*, spoken by a virgin living next to the grave of St Mark at Alexandria cf. F. Combefis *Illustrium Christi Martyrum* (1660) p. 211: πέτρος ἀρχὴ ἀποστόλων πέτρος τέλος μαρτύρων . For the Coptic see H. Hyvernat *Actes des Martyrs* (1886) p. 276 and for the Arabic see Evetts p.399

16 The voice clearly had a visible form.

17 Is. 43, 26

may be forgiven you.¹⁸ He answered me, saying: "I have not sinned, father. " I said to him: "On the contrary,¹⁹ you have made a liar of God, for it is written: *Whoever says that he has not sinned makes a liar of God.*²⁰ I then exposed him: "Murderer, who sold the just man for the impious, will you not say what you

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ⲧⲀⲖⲀⲗⲁⲗ ϫⲉⲕⲁⲥ ⲉⲣⲉⲓⲡⲉⲕⲉⲥⲉⲉⲡⲉ ϣⲟⲧⲉ ⲉⲧⲙⲉⲓⲣⲉ ⲙⲡⲉⲛⲧⲀⲖⲀⲗⲁⲗ· ⲡⲓⲧⲉⲩⲩⲉ ⲛⲁⲓ ϫⲉⲉⲕⲱⲛⲧⲙⲕⲱ
 ⲙⲡⲉⲛⲧⲀⲖⲀⲗⲁⲗ †ⲛⲁϫⲟⲟⲥ ⲛⲧⲉⲟⲩⲕⲱⲗⲧ ⲉⲓ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ϣⲛⲧⲡⲉ ⲛⲣⲟⲩⲟⲙⲕ· ⲡⲉⲕⲁⲗ ϫⲉⲡⲁⲉⲓⲱⲧ ⲟⲩⲛⲟⲃⲡⲉ ⲡⲀⲛⲟⲃⲉ
 ⲁⲩⲱ ⲁⲕⲟⲩⲱ ⲉⲕⲉⲓⲙⲉ ⲉⲣⲟⲗ· ⲁⲛⲟⲕⲡⲉ ⲡⲒⲛⲒⲟⲩⲙⲉⲛⲟⲥ ⲛⲧⲉⲓⲡⲟⲗⲓⲥ ⲉⲓⲗⲁⲣⲁⲧⲗ ⲙⲡⲉⲓⲡⲓⲕⲟⲡⲟⲥ ⲉⲓⲟ
 ⲛⲕⲉⲗⲗⲁⲣⲓⲕⲟⲥ ⲛⲉⲩⲛⲡⲣⲉⲥⲃⲩⲧⲉⲣⲟⲥ ⲁⲉ ⲥⲛⲁⲩ ϣⲛⲧⲉⲓⲡⲟⲗⲓⲥ ⲉⲩⲗⲛⲧⲉⲓⲉⲕⲕⲗⲏⲕⲓⲁ ⲛⲟⲩⲱⲧ ⲉⲩⲗⲛⲧⲉⲓⲁⲩⲗⲏ
 ⲙⲛⲛⲉⲩⲉⲣⲏⲩⲱ ⲙⲡⲉⲥⲛⲁⲩ· ⲡⲟⲩⲁ ⲛⲗⲏⲧⲟⲩ ⲟⲩⲟⲉⲓⲉⲡⲉⲡⲉ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲡⲕⲉⲟⲩⲁ ⲟⲩⲗⲁⲗⲓⲟⲗⲣⲁⲑⲟⲥⲡⲉ· ⲡⲕⲁⲗⲓⲟⲗⲣⲁⲑⲟⲥ
 ⲁⲉ ⲙⲡⲉⲗⲕⲓⲥⲓⲙⲉ ⲉⲛⲉⲗ· ⲁⲩⲱ ⲡⲉⲗⲕⲉⲗⲱⲃ ⲛⲟⲓϫ ⲛⲉⲗ† ⲙⲙⲟⲗ ϣⲁⲗⲃⲥⲱ ⲉⲕⲕⲱⲥ ⲛⲛⲗⲏⲕⲉ ⲛⲧⲡⲟⲗⲓⲥ
 ⲙⲛⲛ[ϣ]ⲙⲙⲟ ⲉⲧⲉⲱⲗⲙⲟⲩ ϣⲛⲧⲉⲓⲡⲟⲗⲓⲥ· ⲡⲟⲩⲟⲉⲓⲉ ⲁⲉ ϣⲱⲱⲗ ⲛⲟⲩ[ⲧⲣ]ⲩⲱⲗⲁ ϣⲛⲡⲟⲩⲱⲙ ⲙⲛⲡⲥⲱ· ⲛⲉⲟⲩⲣⲙⲙⲁⲟ
 ⲗⲁⲣⲡⲉ· ⲛⲉⲩⲛⲟⲩⲕⲟⲩⲓ ⲁⲉ ⲛⲱⲉⲣⲉ ϣⲛⲧⲉⲕⲕⲗⲏⲕⲓⲁ ⲉⲧⲟⲩⲥⲩⲛⲁⲗⲉ ⲛⲗⲏⲧⲥ ⲉⲩⲡⲁⲣⲑⲉⲛⲟⲥ ⲉⲁⲛⲉⲥⲉⲓⲟⲧⲉ ⲉⲣⲏⲧ
 ⲙⲙⲟⲥ ⲉⲧⲉⲕⲕⲗⲏⲕⲓⲁ ⲉⲧⲣⲉⲥⲱⲱⲡⲉ ⲉⲥⲁⲓⲁⲕⲟⲛⲉⲓ ⲛⲗⲏⲧⲥ ⲱⲁⲡⲉⲗⲟⲟⲩ ⲙⲡⲉⲥⲙⲟⲩ· ⲁⲥⲱⲱⲡⲉ ⲛⲟⲩⲗⲟⲟⲩ ⲁⲩⲥⲱ
 ⲛⲟⲩⲕⲟⲩⲓ ⲉⲛⲏⲣⲓ ⲙⲛⲛⲉⲩⲉⲣⲏⲩⲱ ⲛⲟⲓⲛⲉⲡⲣⲉⲥⲃⲩⲧⲉⲣⲟⲥ ⲥⲛⲁⲩ· ⲁⲗⲧⲱⲟⲩⲛ ⲛⲱⲟⲣⲡ ⲛⲟⲓⲡⲉⲡⲣⲉⲥⲃⲩⲧⲉⲣⲟⲥ
 ⲛϫⲏⲣⲁ ⲗⲁⲗⲓⲟⲗⲣⲁⲑⲟⲥ ⲁⲗⲃⲱⲕ ⲉⲡⲉⲗⲏⲓ· ⲛⲧⲉⲣⲉⲗⲛⲁⲩ ⲁⲉ ⲛⲟⲓⲡⲕⲉⲟⲩⲁ ϫⲉⲗⲡⲁⲓ ⲃⲱⲕ ⲛⲁⲗ ⲛⲉⲙⲛⲗⲁⲗⲁⲩ ⲁⲉ
 ⲛⲗⲟⲩⲛ ⲛⲧⲉⲕⲕⲗⲏⲕⲓⲁ ⲙ. . .

(92) have done so that the others will be afraid to do²¹ what you have done. Believe me, if you do not say what you have done, I will speak and fire will come down upon you from heaven and consume you." He said: "My father, my sin is great, and you already know it. I am a hegumen²² of this city, under the bishop, and cellarer.²³ There were two presbyters in the city in the same church and in the same court.²⁴ One was a farmer and one was a calligrapher. The latter had never married. He used to sell his

18 James 5, 16 follows the Sahidic NT (ⲉⲩⲉⲕⲱ ⲛⲏⲧⲛ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ). The Bohairic, not surprisingly, is closer to the Greek ὅπως ἰαθῆτε and translates it ⲛⲧⲉⲧⲛⲟⲩϫⲁⲓ.

19 τούναντίον

20 1 John 1, 10

21 The only refs in CD 721a to ϣⲟⲧⲉ followed by the infinitive do not, as here, have the negative ⲧⲙ.

22 Probably not a monastic title

23 Lampe 741a

24 'Presbyter' could mean 'priest' or 'elder'; 'court' normally refers to part of a house, but it can also have to do with 'entourage' of royalty, but, in this case, perhaps of the bishop.

work for textiles with which to bury the poor and the strangers²⁵ who died in the the city. The farmer was a gourmand in matters of food and drink, for he was wealthy. There was a young girl in the church in which they attended Mass, a virgin who had been betrothed to the church by her parents²⁶ that she might serve in it until the day of her death. One day, when the two were drinking a little wine with each other, the unmarried presbyter, the calligrapher, arose first and went home. When the other one saw that had gone home and there was no-one in . . .²⁷

25 I take this to mean people who had no family in the city.

26 On child donations see W.E. Crum and G. Seindorff *Koptische Rechtsurkunden aus Djême* (1912) nos. 78-114

27 The following reconstruction is purely imaginative: the 'gourmand' committed some outrage on the poor girl and the would-be bishop knew of this but was bribed by the farmer to let the calligrapher 'take the rap', as they say, and the penalty was death.