

An Unknown “Apocryphal” Text From the White Monastery

Alin Suciu and Einar Thomassen

Arguably the most important scholarly achievement of Tito Orlandi is the *Corpus dei Manoscritti Copti Letterari* project. Started early in his career at the Papyrological Institute of the Catholic University Sacro Cuore in Milan,¹ the *CMCL* is destined to become known world-wide once our esteemed mentor and colleague will transfer it to the Università “La Sapienza” in Rome.² The main purpose of this project is the reconstruction of the Sahidic codices that once belonged to the White Monastery, situated in Upper Egypt, near present-day Sohag. During the past four decades, Professor Orlandi classified and studied the White Monastery parchment codices, whose poor remnants are scattered today all over the world. This enterprise has brought him in the select company of such coptologists as Oscar von Lemm, Walter Ewing Crum, Louis-Théophile Lefort, Gérard Garitte, Arnold van Lantschoot, Paul Devos, Enzo Lucchesi and Stephen Emmel.

In this situation, we have considered that it would be fitting to honour him in this *Festschrift* with a contribution related to the library of the White Monastery. We here publish two leaves of a parchment codex that once belonged to this Coptic convent, containing a hitherto unknown dialogue between Jesus and his disciples. The first leaf is now owned by the Norwegian collector Martin Schøyen and holds the number 1991 in the Schøyen manuscript catalogue.³ The second leaf exists in the Bibliothèque

¹ T. Orlandi, “Un projet milanais concernant les manuscrits coptes du Monastère Blanc,” *Le Muséon* 85 (1972) 403–413.

² On the development of the project, see esp. the *CMCL* bulletins issued by T. Orlandi: 1 (1978), 2 (1980), 4 (1981), 5 (1985) and idem, “Realizzazioni e progetti del *Corpus dei Manoscritti Copti Letterari*,” in *Atti del XVII Congresso Internazionale di Papirologia (Napoli, 19-26 maggio 1983)*, ed. M. Gigante (Centro Internazionale per lo Studio dei Papiri Ercolanesi; Naples 1984) 755-761.

³ This leaf was seen by the late Hans-Martin Schenke, who made a translation of the text as an *Anhang* to the translation of the “Unbekanntes Berliner Evangelium” (also known as “the Gospel of the Saviour”) which he prepared for a new edition of Hennecke-Schneemelcher’s New Testament Apocrypha (which has not yet appeared). We are thankful to Uwe-Karsten Plisch for having made available to us Schenke’s unpublished translation and brief introduction to the text, both of which have been helpful,

Nationale as BN Copte 131⁷, fol. 29. The connection between the two folios was made in October 2008 by Alin Suciu, who realised that they are consecutive leaves from the same codex giving a continuous text. On the second leaf the page numbers 13–14 have been preserved; the first leaf, whose upper part has been lost, must therefore be pages 11–12 of the codex. No further folios of this codex have been preserved, as far as we know.

The text is arranged on two columns and is written in a very neat and elegant hand. Whereas the bimodular script⁴ and the peculiar superlineation system⁵ bring the fragments close to the Fayyumic manuscripts copied in the Touton scriptorium,⁶ they exhibit fewer of the decorative mannerisms characteristic of the Toutonian scribes. Noteworthy in this regard is the absence of the budded *diplē*, which constitutes a distinctive mark of the codices from Touton.⁷

even if we are unable to share Schenke's sentiment about the Schoyen text that, "Es scheint derselbe Geist zu wehen, der das UBE so faszinierend macht."

⁴ We employ the term "bimodular" as defined by G. Cavallo, "Grammata Alexandrina," *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 24 (1975) 23–54: a type of script based on the alternation of large and narrow letters. This script was previously known as "Alexandrian script" or "Coptic uncial," cf. also J. Irigoin, "L'onziale grecque de type copte," *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinischen Gesellschaft* 8 (1959) 29–51.

⁵ On this scribal practice, which resembles the Bohairic *djinkim*, see W. H. Worrell, "Bohairic versus Sahidic Pointing," *BSAC* 4 (1938) 91–95; H. J. Polotsky, "Une question d'orthographe bohaïrique," *BSAC* 12 (1946–1947) 25–35; H. Quecke, *Untersuchungen zum koptischen Stundengebet* (Publications de l'Institut Orientaliste de Louvain 3; Louvain 1970), 359 ff.; U. Zanetti, "Le roman de Bakhéos sur les trois jeunes saints de Babylone. Fragments coptes sahidiques," in *Philomathestatos: Studies in Greek and Byzantine Texts Presented to Jacques Noret for his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, eds. B. Janssens et al. (Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 137; Louvain 2004), 713–747, at 724–725.

⁶ Touton was in the Coptic period the name of ancient Tebtunis in the Fayyum; cf. É. Amélineau, *La géographie de l'Égypte à l'époque copte* (Paris 1893), 527–529, without identifying it however with Tebtunis; S. Timm, *Das christlich-koptische Ägypten in arabischer Zeit* vol. 6 (Tübinger Atlas des Vorderen Orients, Beihefte 41/6; Wiesbaden 1992), 2887–2892. On the manuscripts copied in Touton, see L. Depuydt, *Catalogue of the Coptic Manuscripts in the Pierpont Morgan Library* vol. 1 (Corpus of Illuminated Manuscripts 4; Louvain 1993), cx, cxii–cxvi; and most recently Ch. Nakano, "Indices d'une chronologie relative des manuscrits coptes copiés à Toutôn (Fayoum)," *JCoptS* 8 (2006) 147–159.

⁷ Cf. Th. Petersen, "The Paragraph Mark in Coptic Illuminated Ornament," in *Studies in Art in Literature for Belle da Costa Greene*, ed. D. Miner (Princeton 1954) passim; N. S. H. Jansma, *Ornaments*

Though the text contained on these four pages has the form of a dialogue between Jesus and his disciples – or possibly a single, unnamed disciple – it corresponds to no presently known “apocryphal” text. The catalogue of the Schøyen manuscript collection assigns it to the so-called *Gospel of Bartholomew*, even if Bartholomew’s name does not appear on the two extant leaves, nor does the text itself bear much resemblance to the existing apocrypha associated with that disciple – either the *Questions of Bartholomew* (BHG 228; CANT 63) or the Coptic *Book of the Resurrection* (CANT 80; Clavis Coptica 0027).¹⁶ On the other hand, similar revelation dialogues between Christ and one or more disciples can be found in certain Coptic homilies attributed pseudonymously to Euodius of Rome,¹⁷ Cyril of Jerusalem,¹⁸ John Chrysostom¹⁹ and to

Dormientibus); the fragments quoted *infra*, note 22 (Ps.-Severian of Gabala, *In apostolos*). Doubtful: Clarendon Press b.4, fr. 42 and BN Copte 131⁵, fol. 76 (Ps.-Cyril of Jerusalem, *In 24 Seniores*); Vienna K 9284 (unidentified).

¹⁶ For the *Book of the Resurrection*, which continues to receive considerable attention by scholars, we limit ourselves to mention the editions of E. A. Th. Wallis Budge, *Coptic Apocrypha in the Dialect of Upper Egypt* (London 1913), 1–48 (Coptic text), 179–230 (English translation); J.-D. Kaestli and P. Cherix, *L’Évangile de Barthélemy d’après deux écrits apocryphes* (Apocryphes; Turnhout 1993); M. Westerhoff, *Auferstehung und Jenseits im koptischen “Buch der Auferstehung Jesu Christi, unseres Herrn”* (Orientalia Biblica et Christiana 11; Wiesbaden 1999). For an update on the current state of research on the *Book of Bartholomew*, two manuscripts of which were also found in the White Monastery (codices MONB.EZ and MONB.FP), see now I. Gardner and J. Johnston, “The Passover Litany of the *Liber Bartholomaei*: Edition of Bibliothèque Nationale Copte 132¹ f. 40,” *JCoptS* 11 (2009) 61–70; idem, “The *Liber Bartholomaei* on the Ascension: Edition of Bibliothèque Nationale Copte 132¹ f. 37,” *VigChr* 64 (2010) 74–86.

¹⁷ According to Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* III, 22), Euodius was the first successor of Peter to the bishopric of Antioch. For the Copts he belonged to the restricted group of Jesus’ disciples, and this privilege transformed him into an eye-witness of the apostolic times and the keeper of certain words and deeds of the Saviour and of his disciples, unrecorded otherwise, but filled with the expression of Coptic piety. Only Coptic literature transformed Euodius into an author, ascribing to him two or three homilies; see esp. T. Orlandi, in *The Coptic Encyclopedia* vol. 4, ed. A. S. Atiya (New York 1991), 1078–1079, s.v. *Evodius of Rome*. A Coptic homily (CANT 81; Clavis Coptica 0149), presumably by Ps.-Euodius, was considered for a long time to be an apocryphal gospel, but this hypothesis has now been dismissed; see E. Lucchesi, “Un évangile apocryphe imaginaire,” *OLP* 28 (1997) 167–178, and the literature quoted

other Fathers of the Egyptian Church. However, the identity of the present text remains a small mystery.

The dialogue takes place after the crucifixion (see especially 13:38–39). The victorious Christ encourages his disciples to believe that they, too, will be able to conquer. Two themes in particular are highlighted: first, that the incarnated and suffering Christ was fully human as well as divine; and secondly, that the disciples are able to share in him and his power because he is their “head,” “root,” “leaven,” etc., and because they are the recipients of his grace. Some inventive developments of the metaphors describing the relationship between Jesus and his disciples are notable, in particular the Pauline metaphor of the head and the limbs, which inspires the author to display a certain amount of scientific medical knowledge. The style in general is reminiscent of the Farewell Discourses of the Fourth Gospel. Remarkably, the preserved text consists only of lines spoken in the first person and contains no narrative components. We are not told who the speakers are. Jesus, who is not named, speaks about himself consistently as “I,” and addresses his interlocutors as “you” (plural). They on their part refer to themselves as “we.”

On one occasion, however, Jesus seems to use the second person singular: “You have seen...” (ⲁⲕⲛⲁϣ) (14:51). This suggests that Christ may here be addressing one disciple in particular. Due to the fragmentary state of the text at this point, however, no inferences can be safely made in this regard. It cannot be totally excluded that Jesus is

therein.

¹⁸ Concerning the Coptic homilies with apocryphal insertions attributed to Cyril of Jerusalem, see in general T. Orlandi, “Cirillo di Gerusalemme nella letteratura copta,” *Vetera Christianorum* 9 (1972) 93–100, at 96–100. Two sermons on the Passion (*De Vita et Passione Christi* [CPG 3604; Clavis Coptica 0113]; *De Passione 1* [CPG 3598; Clavis Coptica 0114]) are among the most interesting pieces in this regard, both unpublished but attested in several codices, including some from the White Monastery. More than once, parts of these fragmentary manuscripts have been published individually as apocryphal writings, their real identity being revealed only later; cf. in this sense e.g. E. Lucchesi, “Identification de P. Vindob. K 2644,” *Orientalia* 76 (2007) 174–175; idem, “D’une vie de Marie à une homélie sur la Passion,” *AB* 114 (1996) 269–272.

¹⁹ Several Coptic homilies by Ps.-Chrysostom recount “apocryphal” episodes and revelation dialogues between Jesus and his apostles: *On the Four Bodiless Beasts* (CPG 5150.9; Clavis Coptica 0177), *On John the Baptist* (CPG 5150.3; Clavis Coptica 0170) and *On the Resurrection* (CPG 5150.11; Clavis Coptica 0167).

Text and translation

11

11

5

5

παι · ἄνον ζεν
 ρωμε · ἔνεν
 10 τκ οὐρωμε ἵ
 τενζε τεννα
 χοος χε ἵθε ἵ
 ταπαλχο ἵπερ
 σωτῆ · νεν
 15 ναλχο ζωων ·
 εωδε ἵτκ οὐ
 νοῦτε εκχα
 ειτ ἔρωβ νιμ ·
 αῦω νοῦδεω
 20 νιμ · ἄνον ·
 ἄνον ζενρωμε
 ἵσάβωμα ·
 οὐ πε πεντωκ
 ἵζητ ῥῆπαι ·
 25 ἀρηγ πεχαρ νε
 τενζητ ροῦω
 ἔρωτῆ ρατε

(ii)

this. We are
 human. If you were
 10 human like
 us, we would have
 said that just as
 he overcame *his*
 trials, we,
 15 too, might overcome.
 If you, being a
 god, are stronger
 than everything
 and at all times,
 20 we,
 from our part, are humans
 possessing a weak body.
 How can we have confidence
 in this?
 25 Did he perhaps say:
 "You are slow of heart
 until [

(ii)

Notes on the text

p. 11

25–27 For the expression cf. Ps 4:3 ἕως πότε βαρυκάρδιοι (αἰατναγ νετῆρητ χορᾶ ἑρωτῆ Budge, *Psalter* 4:2). αἰατε may be completed as αἰατε[νογ, or with a feminine noun.

38–39 The expression γυμνὴ θεότης is frequent in fourth century writers (Athanasius, Didymus, Chrysostom, etc.) and later: the Son did not reveal his “unveiled divinity,” but appeared in the world as a human being.

45–49 Whereas the proposition that the flesh of the Logos was united with a rational and intelligent soul is orthodox and Chalcedonian, the formulation “united with divinity into ...” is unusual and perhaps betrays a Monophysite position.

53–54 Cf. Matt. 14:31; 28:17.

p. 12

22–27 This and the following sentences are written in a Johannine “I am”-style, though the metaphors are chiefly inspired by Paul. For these lines, cf. 1 Cor 5:6, Gal 5:9.

35–37 A variation on John 15:5 ἐγώ εἰμι ἡ ἀμπελος, ὑμεῖς τὰ κλήματα (cf. also Apoc 22:16).

43–13:11 The image of Christ as the ‘head’ is elaborated in a medical direction: the head provides the body with nourishment and is the source of the sinews giving the body strength and the power to move. This is based on contemporary medical theories. For a study that provides information on the relevant theories, and also attempts to apply them to the interpretation of the Pauline idea itself, see Clinton E. Arnold, “Jesus Christ: ‘Head’ of the Church (Colossians and Ephesians),” in Joel B. Green and Max Turner (eds.), *Jesus of Nazareth Lord and Christ* (Grand Rapids 1994), 346–366.

51–13:5 The theory that the sinews, or nerves (νεῦρα), have their starting point in the meninx is particularly associated with Galen; see e.g. *De Plac. Hipp. Plat.* VII, 3.4–5, 35–36.

p.13

6–8 Cf. Ps.-Galen, *Def. Med.* XIX, 366–367 Kühn: νεῦρα τὰ ἀπ’ ἐγκεφάλου καὶ