

## Letters of Shenoute

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The following is a translation of letters 1-13 in J.Leipoldt (ed.) *Sinuthii archimandritae vita et opera omnia* CSCO 2nd series IV (1931). A Latin translation was made by Hans Wiesmann in the same series and also published in 1931. A notice about Leipoldt's publication of Shenoute texts can now be found in S. Emmel *Shenoute's Literary Corpus*<sup>1</sup> (2004) pp. 914-923 (abbreviated here to *SLC*). Like many of the texts edited by Leipoldt the Coptic text has no title, and this has been supplied by the editor.

I have left the terms *hêgemôn*, *dux*, *comes* (leading civil and/or military officials) and *scholastici* (bureaucrats) untranslated. The several people mentioned in the texts bearing these titles seem to be unknown from sources other than Shenoute's texts.

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<sup>1</sup> Publication details, CSCO Subsidia 599 ( pp. 1-543) and 600 (pp. 544-1007)

## **Letter 1. To a certain archbishop**

Recipient is not identified by Leipoldt, but is identified by Emmel (p. 914) as Dioscorus.

...] all of us. God is blessed and His Christ Jesus, the king of glory who gives strength to you and protects you for us, my father and the father of all of us, your servants, and the father of everyone who puts his hope in God Almighty. Truly, we feel an abundance of piety each time we hear your holy teachings. And ...<sup>2</sup> in the faith of your words of light, not only we, but everyone who hears them. Still, words fail me in the face of your great love for me, this miserable wretch, as you honour me and glorify me beyond my worth and my measure. For there are many who praise you for writing to my wretched self and our wretched selves as well, us your servants and brothers, who are helped by your prayers. Be healthy for us, our beloved and blessed father, remembering us in your prayers acceptable to God at all times.

## **Letters 2 and 4. To Timothy Archbishop of Alexandria**

Letters 2 and 4 are very similar, so I have put them together. In Letter 4 the death of 'our beloved brother' is probably that of Pgol, Shenoute's uncle and predecessor. Since Timothy's death can be fixed at 385, this may mean that Shenoute became abbot before that date.

### **Letter 2.**

By the same author.

Shenoute the lowliest is the one who writes to his beloved father, most beloved of God, Apa Timothy the Archbishop. Greetings in the Lord.

I rejoiced greatly when I received the letter from my holy father through the god-worshipping brother, which has been a comfort and consolation to me. We felt as if, by means of the letter, we had kissed your Christ-bearing image, and we were encouraged when we heard the words of divine wisdom which is in you, from which righteousness proceeds, with glory and wealth to the left and right of it, also bearing the law and mercy on its tongue,<sup>3</sup> that we too may say, like the saint, 'Who am I, Lord my Lord, that you have

<sup>2</sup> As it stands the text makes no sense. The entire passage needs to be emended. Leipoldt is doubtful about the first three letters of ΝΓϞΙΝϞ. If the entire word were omitted, it would perhaps be possible to read, ΑΥΩ ΑΝΡΒΡΡϞ ΖΝΤΠΠΙϞΤΙϞ .... 'and we have been renewed in faith through your words of light'.

<sup>3</sup> Prov. 3,16 (LXX)

loved me as much as this ?'<sup>4</sup> The Lord will grant us the great gift, namely the love of your righteousness, you being for us a shepherd tending us and guiding us in everything, interceding on our behalf with your holy prayers which are acceptable to God. Be healthy in the Lord, our beloved and most holy father.

**Letter 4** ... I rejoiced greatly when I received the letter from my holy father through the god-worshipping brother and father Apa Maximinos, which has been a comfort and consolation to me. We felt as if, by means of the letter, we had kissed your Christ-bearing image, and we were encouraged when we heard the words of divine wisdom in you, from which righteousness proceeds, with glory and wealth to the left and right of it, also bearing the law and mercy on its tongue, 'Who am I, Lord my Lord, that you have loved me as much as this ?' The Lord will grant us the great gift, namely the love of your righteousness, you being for us an encouragement and staff of strength and a shepherd tending us and guiding us in everything, interceding on our behalf with your holy prayers which are acceptable to God. We therefore beg your perfection to pray for us that we too may be worth to complete our course in peace like our beloved brother.

### **Letter 3. To the same**

By the same author.

Sinuthius the lowliest is the one who writes to his beloved father, most loved of God and blessed, Apa Timothy the Archbishop. Greetings in the Lord.

God and His Christ Jesus, our blessed saviour. The Lord God is also blessed ...

### **Letter 5. To the Clergy of Psoi<sup>5</sup>**

It is implicitly the second letter that Shenoute has had to compose, and, like so much correspondence from antiquity, we have only one half of the conversation. The tone of the letter indicates that Shenoute has been upset by the clergy at Psoi, the largest Greek city in Upper Egypt. One can do no more than speculate about

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<sup>4</sup> I Chr. 17,16 (LXX)

<sup>5</sup> Egyptian name of the city of Ptolemais Hermiou, the largest Greek city in Upper Egypt.

the 'violations and spoliations' perpetrated. Had they perhaps been stealing from their parishioners. As he appears to warm to his theme, with a reference to Ahab, whose relationship with prophets could hardly be described as friction-free, the text breaks off. There is no reference to any conflict of the sort in the Life of Shenoute.

Sinuthius is the one who writes to the clerics of Psoi for the second time in the Lord.<sup>6</sup>

Sinuthius is the one who writes for the second time to the clerics of Psoi.

You<sup>7</sup> said 'We come<sup>8</sup> forth to let Satan enter us', because you heard this in the first letter, but how will you say that Satan is not with you? Your violations and spoliations bear witness to you (sing. and pl.) by your stealing what was not yours. I know that my sins before God are numerous and much is the grief to you<sup>9</sup>, companions? Will it be your decision to bring upon yourselves that which the prophet said, 'The law has gone astray from the priest and the counsel from the prophets'<sup>10</sup> and 'The priests have hidden the path of the Lord'<sup>11</sup> and 'The priest who will be like the people'<sup>12</sup>, I will punish his lawlessness and and make him pay retribution for his inmost thoughts'?<sup>13</sup> Is it not through the extent of their anger that the prophets say, 'Go into mud<sup>14</sup> mixed with chaff and trample',<sup>15</sup> that is go into violence and robbery mixed with it until its mud<sup>16</sup> enters your insides? <sup>17</sup>Will you do the things of the house of Ahab in the house of the Lord God Almighty? ...

## Letter 6. To an Elder. About Monastic Vows

This 'letter' is the longest and complex, with four sections: 3 letters and the oath (ΔΙΑΘΗΚΗ). The Coptic *incipit* on p. xv of *SLC* is discussed by Emmel on pp. 601. The English *incipit* appears not to have found its

<sup>6</sup> Why second time?

<sup>7</sup> Despite the title, the pronoun here is singular. I have translated ΕΠΙΔΗ as 'but' at the beginning of the next clause

<sup>8</sup> I think this may be ΝΝΕΝΝΗΥ 'we will not come forth'.

<sup>9</sup> ΤΛΥΠΗ ΝΗΤΝ: I take this to be the noun governed by ΝΑΦΕ-

<sup>10</sup> Jer. 18,18

<sup>11</sup> Hos. 6,9

<sup>12</sup> Suggestion of Kurt Sethe.

<sup>13</sup> Hos. 4,9

<sup>14</sup> ΟΜΕ, indicates the material

<sup>15</sup> Adaptation of Nah. 3,14. The explanation that follows seems to compare mud and straw to robbery with violence

<sup>16</sup> ΛΟΙΖΕ, can also have overtones of impurity

<sup>17</sup> Suggestion of Kurt Sethe

way into the list on p. xx. One can merely speculate about the 'elder' addressed: Leipoldt<sup>18</sup> says that the idea of the oath as part of the formality of joining the monastery was suggested by this xllō and Shenoute<sup>19</sup> imposed it when there were 30 monks in the monastery. It is fairly clear, however, that they must have discussed the subject of vows at some length, for Shenoute is at pains to 'clarify' what he meant and he seems to do this by quoting passages of a letter that we do not have. Coptic unfortunately does not have the equivalent of quotation marks, merely a conjunction *xe* 'that', which introduces both direct and indirect speech, so it is necessary to read the text carefully to see who has said what. In addition to this, some of these quoted passages are framed in questions posed by Shenoute to the *ⲉⲗⲗⲟ*, some are the words of Shenoute. None of this facilitates the understanding of the text.

### 1. By the same author.

Since this matter<sup>20</sup> has gone into your heart, father<sup>21</sup>, 'If this is so, let me cause the brothers to swear an oath to me, whether male or female, not to do any evil including those who have just entered as neophytes',<sup>22</sup> I have been pleased with what you said, that this counsel will give us all rest about these things that distress our hearts. But after I had inspected this matter, because according to the Scripture salvation is in great counsel, I say to you: not only if you cause them to swear by the name of God whom do not see - but I confess or bear witness to you that what I say will be even truer truth - even if God Jesus appears in the place where you will cause them to swear and they swear seeing see Him, those who are sinners will also sin in the convent.<sup>23</sup> Which is the greater one, the Lord of my oath or my oath? For if the remembrance of God does not restrain man from sinning, no oath will do it. For He did not say, 'Swear an oath and you will be without sin.'<sup>24</sup> But He did say, 'Think of the Lord and you will carry out all my wishes.' For it is not fitting to seal an empty grave, let alone that it is full of bones, shrouds and impurity of every sort, with the royal seal, but it is fitting to seal a treasure full of every good thing.<sup>25</sup> For the person who sins in these convents is empty. He is full of bad thoughts, impurity and lawlessness. He is not worthy to utter the name of God, especially to call God as a witness. The name of God belongs to those who fear Him, as is written, that it is to be uttered only decently and positively to the point of swearing, like the one who said, 'I have sworn and made a pact to

<sup>18</sup> J. Leipoldt *Schenute von Atripe* (1903) p. 108 refers to fn.8 in §37, but there is no fn. 8.

<sup>19</sup> The passage in Zoega *Catalogus Codicum Coptiorum* p.375 referring to this shows that it happened under Pgol and not Shenoute.

<sup>20</sup> Of the oath.

<sup>21</sup> Lit. 'elder' *ⲉⲗⲗⲟ*. The Arabic 'sheikh' would be an apt translation.

<sup>22</sup> Presumably a direct quote from a letter to Shenoute

<sup>23</sup> *ⲪⲚⲀⲒⲘⲒⲘ*

<sup>24</sup> Coptic has at least two ways of introducing a Biblical quotation, 'he said' (as here) and 'as it is written'. cf. Eccl. 7,40 and 28,8

<sup>25</sup> An echo of Mat. 23,27

keep the laws of justice.<sup>26</sup> I do not keep those among us who sin from swearing an oath to God. Let them be liable to the anger that will be revealed from heaven because they sin after all these injunctions. But I do keep the holy name of blessed God. Will they be compelled to swear an oath by the name of God not to sin, those impure ones who sin or will sin at all times in these convents ? Or do you not see those who have transgressed after swearing an oath to you that they will not sin<sup>27</sup>, and have done it again ? Or do you say in truth, 'No man will swear falsely among us, male or female.' ? Or has no-one done so ? Or did you not say, 'If they swear false oaths, that is their own fault or their blood is upon them.' ?<sup>28</sup> Indeed, it their own fault and their blood is upon them.<sup>29</sup> But you said, 'You would destroy them and have destroyed them by casting them forth. Let me cause them to swear an oath. Be silent and wait. God will judge them.' How long will be in this tribulation ? Our heart has been destroyed in these troubles. I said to you, 'Have you been troubled or your heart worn down like the one who began to grieve and be sad, his soul having grieved until the death of Jesus ?' After this word and all the others I said to you, I told you that I was not the one to cast forth sinners from these convents or do anything audaciously, imperiously and without consideration. It is God who will cast them forth.

## 2. By the same author

If therefore it accords with the ordinance that God put it in your heart,<sup>30</sup> namely that an oath should be sworn, so that you too might also be holy, together with all the brothers who believe in in their own salvation, but did not take an oath, the blood of those who sin in these convents at all times is upon them and the one who rules over them, if he tolerates them in the convents when they tell him. Only they will not bear witness to the name of the Lord and His Christ, not so that a sin will not count against those who do these works of iniquity among us, but so that you will not defile your love which you have for God. Let those who will transgress against the ordinance imposed on them to do it add sin to their sins, but let the name of God remain holy. Let them become accursed with all their works, but let the name of God be blessed in all things before those who act in all things for the glory of God, as you now wish that they swear an oath to become without sin for His glory,

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<sup>26</sup> Ps. 118,106

<sup>27</sup> Shenoute uses direct speech

<sup>28</sup> The second part is an allusion to Mat. 27, 25.

<sup>29</sup> Leipoldt thinks this is probably dittography, but I am not so sure.

<sup>30</sup> In the first section Shenoute writes that 'the matter has come into the heart' of the father, while here it is clear that this 'matter' has been put there by God.

as it is written, 'Everything, do it for the glory of God.'<sup>31</sup> I myself, the least, I see and have told you through a mystery<sup>32</sup> that it is a better thing to glorify the name of God than to prevent people from swearing by Him, especially since we hear through our abilities.<sup>33</sup> It is not that, if they do not swear an oath by the name of God but make another vow and transgress against that, they will escape the anger that will come upon them on the day of judgement or the day of anger.<sup>34</sup> The name of God is pure, as it is written, 'Let Your name be pure.'<sup>35</sup> People are not worthy to name it, as we weep for our sins or not to fall into sin. For they will swear an oath by it in mindlessness. Because there are many who swear an oath by the name of God, while transgressing against their oath. He who ordered them to swear the oath by it in the past, wishing that they should not know of other gods to swear by them and pieces of wood and stone, He is also the one who ordered, after they had known Him, 'Do not swear by the name of God alone, but swear another oath.'<sup>36</sup> Will we now abandon the word of God at our end for the sake of people who love wickedness more than good? No. How is it that at times they do the things of rulers and at times they swear an oath? Perhaps you think that we will lead life after life, unlike other men? We will go to God. They will also go. If you wish for your heart to be at peace with all your brothers who grieve over your evil deeds which they do among us, if God orders this one to forget, you will be at peace.<sup>37</sup> If He does not order him to forget, even if they swear an oath every day, you will not be at peace. These disturbances will never be removed from our convents. It is therefore the ordinance which is laid down, that you will be a mediator for them before God because it has been agreed that they do nothing that God has not ordered them to do. We will be holy in our body<sup>38</sup>, protecting our heart, speaking the truth and doing every good thing, except for grumbling and evil complaint in this place, as the Scripture says, does it not?

### 3. Oath<sup>39</sup>

Each one therefore will say, 'I confess before God in His holy place, the word that I have

<sup>31</sup> I Cor. 10, 31

<sup>32</sup> Does this mean that Shenoute has used cryptic language (such as one finds in the letters of Pachomius) to illustrate his meaning or does the phrase simply mean 'confidentially'?

<sup>33</sup> **ΑΦΟΡΜΗ**

<sup>34</sup> This relatively convoluted passage seems to mean that all transgressors will be punished, whatever form their vows may take.

<sup>35</sup> Matt. 6,9

<sup>36</sup> Matt. 5,34

<sup>37</sup> Sing. and pl. pronouns

<sup>38</sup> I Cor. 7,34

<sup>39</sup> **ΔΙΑΘΗΚΗ**. The equivalent verb used in the text is **ὁμολογεῖν**.

spoken with my mouth being my witness that I will not defile my body in any way. I will not steal. I will not bear false witness. I will not lie. I will not do anything wrong in secret. If I transgress against what I have confessed, I will see the kingdom of heaven but I will not enter into it, God, in whose presence I have made this testament, will destroy my soul and my body in fiery Gehenna because I have transgressed against the testament I made. About answering back or being disobedient or grumbling or being refractory or contumacious<sup>40</sup> and the things like them, the whole convent will know about them.

#### 4. By the same

Because you said, 'I will cause them to swear an oath from such and such a time to the present', do not ask them. Another has already asked them, one might say indeed, is examining them with all their works. The one who wishes to say these things in penitence will tell you. I mean, the things of that time which we said. I am not speaking of what will happen after this ordinance. Remember what I said to you. I did not conceal a single word from you of all those things. And you will be at peace in your spirit.<sup>41</sup>

### Letter 7. To Mother Tahom

Tachom was the mother superior of a neighbouring convent. There had apparently been a dispute between the two and Shenoute, with a striking phrase in the opening line, describes their relationship as 'barbarian to barbarian'. He seems to use the image of the Tower of Babel as a metaphor of arrogance, presumably her arrogance. The tone of the letter is fairly menacing.

#### Letter of Sinuthius

Shenoute is the one writes to Tahôm<sup>42</sup>, as a barbarian to a barbarian, not as a father to a mother and not as a brother before a sister.

If you have not known me until today, I<sup>43</sup> have known you. For it is not recently that I have come to know you, but I have known you from the beginning. Suppose I say, 'If I had changed, what would you have done?', in other words, 'If I had not changed, would you not have started to build the tower again.'<sup>44</sup> Where are the days on which you<sup>45</sup> know that I

<sup>40</sup> Leipoldt's suggestion

<sup>41</sup> The whole correspondence begins with the  $\alpha\lambda\lambda\omicron$  in a state of disquiet. The final sentence seems to be an attempt to remove this disquiet.

<sup>42</sup> Probably fem. of  $\pi\alpha\lambda\zeta\omega\mu$  (eagle, falcon) CD 25a

<sup>43</sup> Emphasized by the use of the pronoun here and the verbal prefix in the next sentence.

<sup>44</sup> Gen. 11,4

<sup>45</sup> The Coptic pronoun here is sing. and pl.



come to you, and with what punishment, not as your master, but for the love of God, so that the voice of your weakness might fill the town in which you live ? Did not the Lord God scatter their tongues, and did we not hear them or find it written that they had returned to building it, the tower ? I am astonished that God paralysed your tongue so many times between us.<sup>46</sup> I mean, our false knowledge and our wisdom for us alone and our wicked thoughts that deceive us. We return again and again to build the tower. Those people of that time, who made bricks out of earth, their reward<sup>47</sup> was according to their wishes through the patience of the One who gave them according to their desires, God on high. Those who build a tower, and I will not mention them individually, its entire wall exists from the evils of Satan. These are the ones who said, in their derangement, 'We will build it reaching up to heaven.'<sup>48</sup> But those who build it in every place thinking that they are clever , their heart reaches to the throne of God and His tribunal. I said: 'If you<sup>49</sup> do not know that is necessary to send to us for forgiveness, even if we have sinned against you, as we did not manage to send to you in all these days the one you did not think it worthwhile to go and meet, then you still do not know anything. If he is not your father according to rank and the ordinances of God who sent him, then neither are you a mother. Unless you say that the one we sent to you is your brother according to the flesh, then you truly have made a breach between us. But if you say that we are he, then he is the one who writes these words to you. And you did not come to meet him and he was not worthy. Or perhaps you have a dispute with him. If you are not<sup>50</sup> a wise mother, truly all those who call you mother, what do they do that they may be wise without you ? If they are wise, then a hundred of them will not be enough to take counsel with you ... '\*

### **Letter 8. To a pagan magistrate**

... salvation of their soul they are entrusted to him and his places<sup>51</sup>. About the rest of the words you said, we are not disturbed. For we have not yet reached the place of our blood.<sup>52</sup> We recite the Scripture, 'Do not fear those who will kill your body.'<sup>53</sup>

<sup>46</sup> There seems to have been a major 'breakdown in communications' over a dispute between Tahom and an elderly nun called Tapolle, about which Shenoute had not even been informed by Tahom, cf. *Schenute* pp. 154ff. Later on in the letter he expresses his displeasure that Tahom failed to receive his envoy.

<sup>47</sup> There is a word play here, because **ΤΩΒΕ** also means 'brick'.

<sup>48</sup> Gen. 11,4

<sup>49</sup> Fem.

<sup>50</sup> **ΟΝ** : Wiesmann suggests reading the negative particle **ΑΝ** here

<sup>51</sup> **ΤΟΠΟΣ** can often mean 'monastery'

<sup>52</sup> Heb. 12,4

<sup>53</sup> Matt. 10,28

## Letter 9. To Dorotheus the *hêgemôn*

In fact, there are two letters, the first (ΕΠΙΣΤΟΛΗ) from the *hêgemôn* (ΖΗΓΕΜΩΝ) of the Thebaid, Dorotheus, and Shenoute's reply (lit. copy ΑΝΤΙΓΡΑΦΟΝ). The former is not complete, but there is enough of it to make it understandable. It is a straightforward account of a robbery involving gold perpetrated on Themistius, a *σχολαστικός*, which places him somewhere in the legal profession. The thieves are named and are said to be in the charge of (ΖΑΤΗΝ) Shenoute, together with the gold, not an inconsiderable amount. Shenoute is asked to secure the gold. Unfortunately, the following part of the text is incomplete and only the request that the men be sent to the *hêgemôn* can be understood. Dorotheus uses an interesting formulation to the effect that it is fitting for Shenoute to comply with the laws and ΔΙΚΑΙΟΝ, which I take to mean 'jurisdiction'<sup>54</sup>, and that he is using this 'public document' (ΠΕΙΔΗΜΟΣΙΟΝ ΓΡΑΜΜΑ) because this is a serious matter. Shenoute's reply is not quite as straightforward, but the tone of the letter is unmistakable. After the opening lines, in which he acknowledges Dorotheus' communication, there is a gap of unspecified length. Shenoute is clearly annoyed by the *hêgemôn*'s imputation that he is providing asylum of some sort to the men accused of theft.

### 1. Letter of Dorotheus

A letter from Dorotheus the *hêgemôn* to the God-loving holy father Apa Shenoute.

It is Dorotheus who writes to the most devout Apa Sinuthius.

The robbery that they dared to commit on Themistius, the distinguished *scholasticus*<sup>55</sup>

[Several lines missing]

.. a public examination. It has been confirmed<sup>56</sup> that one Martyrius and Abraham his brother are in the charge your Worship, all the gold in their hands. And this is not a small amount that cannot be overlooked, whether holokottinoi or valuable pledges.<sup>57</sup> May your Holiness therefore now be pleased, having received this letter, to have the gold put in safe place but the men who ...<sup>58</sup> May your Worship send them to me (?).

<sup>54</sup> The meaning assigned to it by A. Steinwenter cf. P.E. Kahle *Bala'izah* (1954) vol. 1 p.31 for an easily accessible discussion.

<sup>55</sup> I have left the Gk term as it is. According G.W.H. Lampe *Patristic Greek Lexicon* (1961) p. 1361, it can mean a well-educated person or a lawyer.

<sup>56</sup> *συνίστημι* has a range of meanings cf. Lampe pp. 1332-33

<sup>57</sup> Holokottinos, 'wholly cooked' of gold to indicate its purity.

<sup>58</sup> The verb seems to be *ταγο* (send, produce, utter) followed by a direct object, with the final 'word'

(unspecified gap) ... robbery of this sort. For it is fitting for your Worship to observe the laws and jurisdiction. It follows that I use this public letter<sup>59</sup>, for the matter is not a small one.

The Lord will protect your Worship, my God-worshipping father.

## II Shenoute's reply

The reply which our holy father Dorotheus<sup>60</sup> the *hêgemôn* sent in answer to what he had written to him ... (unspecified gap) ... all sadness. But to be sure<sup>61</sup> it is not fitting for you to add to my grief. When I when I received your letter, we were grateful to God above all that the evil designs conceived against me did not happen to me. You know what the heart of each one will receive and his tongue will be able to say. You will give an account to God. I am coming<sup>62</sup> into His hands and so are you. If you have compared His holy places to dens of thieves, He will certainly ask you. I am holy and His convent is holy. You will not find any sort of impiety relating to the monasteries of Christ. But if they have lied against God according to His scriptures, 'The enemies of the Lord have lied against Him,'<sup>63</sup> then will they not lie, will they not slander those who believe in Him ? We inside our monasteries attend<sup>64</sup> ourselves, while you plot against some things but not others. Rather you said in your letter, 'The gold pieces, keep them. The men, send them to us. You can hardly allocate the objects to us and also the men entrusted to me.' Do you want to make me a party to their crime ? Henceforth I am not a monk or priest. I therefore said, 'You are the ones who know. Any thing you wish, any word you wish, do it and say it, but not too many words. Come. We are very grateful to God and the laws, we do not run away from them and we are not disturbed.

I pray that you be whole in the Lord, my beloved brother whom I love.

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<sup>59</sup> The original was presumably a letter drafted and written in the formal style appropriate to the occasion.

<sup>60</sup> **ⲉⲱⲣⲱⲉⲟⲥ**

<sup>61</sup> I take **ⲉⲱⲭⲉ** to be meaning (d) in CD 64a.

<sup>62</sup> I have used the English Present Progressive here because it is the form of the future that signals a plan or arrangement, however unspecific.

<sup>63</sup> Ps. 80,16

<sup>64</sup> I understand the meaning in CD 648a. This sounds like an implied criticism that Dorotheus could be spending his time more profitably on more important matters

## Letter 10. To Theodosius the *dux*

Shenoute is clearly defending himself against accusations made by Theodosius. For the background to this and the following letter, apparently to the city of Panopolis see *Schenute* pp. 181ff. Shenoute seems to have been an actively vigorous opponent of paganism, which was still alive and well in the region to judge from the descriptions of temples destroyed and the work of Nonnus, though the great Homeric poet may have converted to Christianity, as his Homeric version of the Gospel of John seems to indicate.

The reply concerning the words spoken by Theododius the *dux*.

It is Sinuthius who writes to Theodosius the *comes*.<sup>65</sup>

Since you have written to me, 'Get understanding for yourself'<sup>66</sup> and 'Do not let me find anyone in your place' and 'I have sent word to assemble a synod by the Sabbath', you should know that it is not fitting to believe words that have been spoken against someone. You do not know how to discern. You will judge me in my absence. You know. Thanks ! Each one will give an account to God. You will not find me in anything of this sort and I have not assembled ...

## Letter 11. About Theodosius the *dux*

... conceal them, they will for them beloved companions. Those who conceal in yourselves the things you say I have done are hateful and inimical to me. If you know God or belong to Jesus, you are really execrable and you will not escape being denied before the angels of God. For you have exhibited hypocrisy after having composed a reprehensible<sup>67</sup> text in letter form. It is a disgrace<sup>68</sup> for you to have written it. It is even more of a disgrace on the community for your head<sup>69</sup> that you have allowed me to live if I am worthy of death, according to the things you have written against me. Perhaps indeed this why this great curse came upon that lawless *hêgemôn* from God, as he handed himself over to the kings to wreak vengeance on him before he came into the hands of the One who will judge him and

<sup>65</sup> A detailed account of how these titles were used in the 4th-5th cent. AD is given by B. Palme 'The imperial presence: government and army' in R. Bagnall (ed.) *Egypt in the Byzantine World* (2007) pp. 240-270.

<sup>66</sup> Prov. 4,5. But this is not in the LXX or in the Sahidic version of Proverbs (W.H. Worrell *Proverbs of Solomon in Sahidic* [1931] p.12), which is based on the LXX.

<sup>67</sup> ΠΑΡΑΝΟΜΟΝ

<sup>68</sup> ΑΝΟΜΙΑ

<sup>69</sup> I take this to be a reference to Shenoute himself

you, he because did not take off my head, you because you did not complete your task, companions. If I had not moved against you, Panopolis, according to your works of violence and slavery to Cronos, you would have accused me before the magistrates in vain. How do strangers know me, whether I am good or bad ? How can this unclean judge who was bribed to bring these tribulations dare to say these things, such as what I wanted to do to the monasteries of Christ and that I wanted to kill him ? And so that wretch of a *dux* wrote to me, "Get understanding for yourself". Of what use is he, apart from ...<sup>70</sup>

## **Letter 12. To Caesarius the *comes* on the distinction between monks and the laity**

According to *Schenute* pp. 163-165 Shenoute was on good terms with this dignitary. The 'letter' seems to be a short sermon about doing what one is able to do and feeling good about it, or at least not feeling bad.

By Sinuthius.

A short explanation<sup>71</sup> before Caesarius the *comes* and his *scholastici* and his important people and officials of the city when they said while we were residing in a house in the convent, 'We want the things of God, but are overcome by weakness.'

I replied saying to them, 'Your joy is good, my beloved, your wish for devoutness is laudable.<sup>72</sup> But since we are finding excuses for our weakness, I will tell you a parable.'

A man was building a place he needed. There were many stones in front of him, some big, some small. He saw many he was unable to carry. When he had built it and touched none of them, he thought to himself, 'Is this not madness ? Why did I not carry the light ones ?'

I said to them, 'There are three loads of goods lying next to each other, like the one about which the Lord said, 'My load is light.'<sup>73</sup> These are lighter than each other, as is

<sup>70</sup> If this were deliberate, it might be described as aposiopesis.

<sup>71</sup> ἐξήγησις

<sup>72</sup> φωνή

<sup>73</sup> Matt. 11, 30

written in the Gospel. For He said, 'One gave a hundred, one sixty and one thirty.'<sup>74</sup> Is it not a shame for us if we are able to take the first and the second and neglect the third ?

The two parables furthermore are one. There is nothing of God difficult for those who love Him. But I say this, that if we cannot be a virgin, let us keep to marriage, appointed and purified by God. If we are unable to bear the cross and follow the Lord, let us be merciful to the poor as long as we have them. If we are unable to pray without stopping, let us pray according to our ability. If we cannot observe all the laws and righteousness and are unable to do everything that is good, let us act according to our ability and give joy to the Lord through His mercies giving fruit according to our ability so that He may rejoice about us. If we do this, we will not be distant from life but we will be in the kingdom of Christ and all His saints and the just and the ancients who spent their long lives in a state of perfection and truly pleasing God.

See how the Word says to the one who doubled his five talents,<sup>75</sup> 'Go inside to the joy of your Master.' He said to the one who doubled his two talents, 'Go inside to the joy of your Master. For it is the same zeal, even if only the amount entrusted was different.'

See what sort of grace happened to those of the eleventh hour, whose excuse was, 'Nobody hired us.'<sup>76</sup> These words are the words of all who repent when they are taught. They are especially true of pagans: 'nobody hired us', that is, 'called them' until their Creator comes, the One who had mercy on them, the One who said, <sup>77</sup>'They come from the east and the west, the north and the south and they will lean back and recline in the kingdom of heaven.'

This one, the foal on ass, nobody has ever been on him. He has not been mounted. Does he not know to walk ? But he has been taught and made mild by the One who causes every beast to be from this age, God and the Son of God. This word also, 'They have not been taught, they have not known God.'<sup>78</sup> They came from ignorance to knowledge of the truth by the preaching of the Gospel. This too, 'An ass and a young yoke-bearing foal'.<sup>79</sup> This ass and foal are from among the Jews who knew God in truth, the Saviour. Yoke-bearing means they have known the Father from the beginning, they worship the Father and they have known the Son, worshipped Him and the Trinity has become their hope. Listen, we say this for edification and we do not take away the saying.<sup>80</sup> It came upon them

<sup>74</sup> Matt. 13,8

<sup>75</sup> Matt. 25, 14ff.

<sup>76</sup> Matt. 20,7

<sup>77</sup> Lk. 13,29

<sup>78</sup> Ps. 13,2

<sup>79</sup> Zach. 9,9

<sup>80</sup> Does this refer to the Psalms quotation made earlier ?

in truth according to the prophecies of the saints.

We also, what will we say ? We been called not only by the servants of God, but by the Lord of servants. Who will not run to follow the perfume of his ointments, as it is written ? <sup>81</sup> The interpretation of these things, who will neglect to do his utmost to forget the one who buried his talents and put the *mna* in the napkin ?<sup>82</sup> God forbid. For we will give a hundredfold. The one of thirty will not be distant from the one of sixty. And the one of sixty will not be distant from the one of hundred in the kingdom of heaven according to the Gospel of the One who called us to it, the philanthropic Saviour God and the Son of God. If He did not refuse to give Himself for us, how much more (will He give us) His goods.<sup>83</sup>

After we had said this, we came forth to the whole crowd. And after we had said enough in the presence of them all, the *comes* Caesarius answered, 'Pray for us that we may do what you have said to us.' I said to him, 'I myself will go around collecting the leftovers and throw them in the purse.'<sup>84</sup> And he persuaded many soldiers to sit and set their mind at ease in what they asked him. And afterwards he left us.

### **Letter 13. To the *comes* Taurinus about the unrest in Alexandria**

The unrest mentioned here seems to be unknown from other sources. The opening passage contains what looks a verbal skirmish between the man of God and the men of the government. They ask him a question that is probably intended to confound him, but, like Socrates, he bounces back with a couple of jabs and an uppercut. If it is a letter, it seems to me unlikely that it was sent to Taurinus.

After a few days Caesarius the *comes* took Taurinus the *hêgemôn*. He came up<sup>85</sup>, as was his custom, both of the together with their *scholastici*, dignitaries and valued<sup>86</sup> companions. When they began to speak about what had happened in Alexandria from the first minor riot in the church, they went on to speak with each other at length<sup>87</sup>, disputing as if wishing

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<sup>81</sup> Songs 1,3

<sup>82</sup> Lk. 19,20

<sup>83</sup> Rom. 8,32

<sup>84</sup> It is not easy to see what this means, but CD 766b quotes another passage from Shenoute (ShP 131<sup>4</sup> 161) with similar wording, but there is not enough context to make it understandable. *Schenute* p.17 thinks it may be a reference to the soldiers (mentioned later) receiving their overdue pay

<sup>85</sup> From Antinoopolis perhaps

<sup>86</sup> Gk ἀναγκάιος

<sup>87</sup> Lit. 'in many words'.

us to defend ourselves to them.

After we had seen that there was no value in what they thought and they wished<sup>88</sup> to draw us that we might say words that were unseasonable about the things we had already said, they asking, 'With what people is it possible to commune?', I said to them, 'If I speak with you for myself on that matter, you are intelligent enough to understand the answers to the questions you put.'<sup>89</sup> So, listen. If I am good, commune with me. If I am not good, do not commune. If I am upright, the visit you have paid to us is a wholly good and profitable thing. If I am not upright, do not trouble yourself in vain.'

I also said to them, 'The things you think about in boats, drinking houses, assemblies, cities or anywhere else, put them aside and pay close attention to the words belonging to heaven. When you go home, you will find whether they are of use to you, but they are of no use to you. For this reason I call upon your understanding not to talk of them, but to devote your time to the holy words that will be of use to you. For all these things, if God pleases, will pass. Look at the sun, often there are many clouds that cover it,<sup>90</sup> not only are they unable to stop it in its progress, but it also comes back and is visible, but even brighter.<sup>91</sup> This is like the Church of Christ, but even more so. If the gates of hell are unable to prevail against it, as indeed the Lord said with His true mouth, 'How will they will be able to move against it, heretics and those of unstable faith?'<sup>92</sup> Because they are gates of hell and gates of death, because those who will perish through them are many. It is written, 'Judge those within. God will judge those without.'<sup>93</sup> Those within are those in the heart and the hands of each one as far his house. God will judge those without in every way. Those without are those who come against us beyond our strength, and the healing of them comes from God alone. Similarly, while God and His Christ have given you works by which you will be enriched, hasten to do them for a blessing to yourselves and your whole house.'

I also said to Marcellinus the *hêgemôn* and Chrysippus the *comes* with his children and those with them when they came to us. And he Chrysippus was in the city of Panopolis<sup>94</sup> in the days when we removed all the books from the house of the godless

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<sup>88</sup> I think this is the force of the Coptic Imperfect here.

<sup>89</sup> I suspect the faintest trace of irony here.

<sup>90</sup> **ΕΤΝΛΙΚΤΩ**: perhaps 'which are a covering for it' cf. CD 140a

<sup>91</sup> **ΝΤΟΩ ΝΤΟΩ ΟΝΠΕ ΖΗΠΟΥΘΕΙΝ**: 'it is itself in the light'.

<sup>92</sup> Echo of Matt. 16,18

<sup>93</sup> I Cor. 5,12

<sup>94</sup> Coptic **ΩΜΙΝ**. The use of the Greek name indicates perhaps that this letter was originally composed in Greek, which suggests an important person.



one.<sup>95</sup> And this is how he attached himself to to him<sup>96</sup>, he being intent on doing us harm. A beloved companion told me that Chrysippus had said to that wretch, 'Look, the accusation made against you is now made against me. Now *I*, I am a Christian.'<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> *Schenute* p. 180 identifies this person as Gesios, mentioned elsewhere in the Shenoute corpus as a crypto-pagan. There is a brief sketch of Gesios in A.G. Lopez *Shenoute of Atripe and the Uses of Poverty* (2013) pp.11ff. It is impossible to know whether these books were books of magic, apocrypha or the *Dionysiaca* of Nonnus. Gesios is mentioned by name in the Life of Shenoute (§88): **ΝΕΟΥΑΧΒΕΣΤΙΕ ΜΠΙΖΟΥΟ ΑΥΩ ΝΕΦΕΡΒΛΑΣΦΗΜΙΝ ΜΠΙΧ̄** 'he was excessively impious and used to blaspheme against Christ'. Shenoute predicted a dreadful fate for Gesios in Hell and was subsequently able to confirm this by reason of a vision revealing this fate to the Saint.

<sup>96</sup> He (Chrysippus) ... him (godless one), he (godless one) being intent ...

<sup>97</sup> The Coptic sentence uses the pronoun **ΑΝΟΚ** 'I' twice, once unattached and once attached. This usage probably signals that Chrysippus wishes to distance himself from 'the godless one'.