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The Prophecy of Charour

“Monastics in the declining age
seldom follow the precepts.”

– *The True Dharma Eye: Zen Master Dōgen’s
Three Hundred Kōans* (Boston 2005) 173.

Folios 16r-20v of Pierpont Morgan Library Coptic MS. M586,¹ dated by its scribal colophon to 9 October A. D. 844,² contain a unique text³ that has hardly been studied at all since its publication fifty years ago.⁴ Many points in and aspects of this problematic piece of Coptic prose remain to be elucidated, including its form, genre, and date. It deserves to be regarded as more than just a philologists’ playground of strange words.⁵

In the display-script title on fol. 16r the text proclaims its own designation:⁶ “These are the words of the prophecy (ΠΡΟΦΗΤΙΑ) which Apa Charour (ΒΑΡΟΥΡ) prophesied (ΠΡΟΦΗΤΕΥΕ) about the neglect (ΑΜΕΛΙΑ) that happened in the ΚΟΙΝΩΝΙΑ of Pbow.”⁷ So we are dealing with that well-known phenomenon, a ‘prophecy’ after the fact. The word ‘neglect’ further alerts us to the import, the moral, of the text: that things are not what they used to be (they

- 1 Catalogued as no. 174 in L. Depuydt, *Catalogue of Coptic Manuscripts in the Pierpont Morgan Library*, 2 vols. (Leuven 1993) 1:360-362 (esp. 360-361), 2: plates 290-291.
- 2 Phaophi 12, indiction 8, ‘year by times’ [i. e. Hijra] 230, from Diocletian 561: Depuydt, *Catalogue*, 1:361 (not ‘AM’); A. van Lantschoot, *Recueil des colophons des manuscrits chrétiens d’Égypte* (Louvain 1929) 8-10 (no. IV); read by the present writer from *Bybliothecae Pierpont Morgan Codices Coptici photographice expressi* (Rome 1922) 51: pl. 43; date verified according to R. S. Bagnall / K. A. Worp, *Chronological Systems of Byzantine Egypt*, 2nd ed. (Leiden 2004) 159, 305.
- 3 A stray fragmentary witness was reported fifty years ago from the Coptic Museum in Cairo, but now seems untraceable: L. Th. Lefort, *Œuvres de S. Pachôme et de ses disciples*, CSCO 159-160, Scr. Copt. 23-24 (Louvain 1956) 1:xxx, cf. xviii, xxi.
- 4 Lefort, *Œuvres*, 1: 100-104 (Coptic text), 2: 100-108 (French trans.). See E. Wipszycka, “Contribution à l’étude de l’économie de la congrégation pachômienne,” *Journal of Juristic Papyrology* 26 (1996) 167-210, here 196-201, who accepts (p. 173) the text’s having been composed at the end of the fourth century; as do J.-L. Fournet and J. Gascoü, “Moines pachômiens et batellerie,” in *Alexandrie médiévale*, 2, ed. C. Decobert, *Études alexandrines* 8 (Paris 2002) 3-25, here 17 n. 53.
- 5 Depuydt, *Catalogue*, 1: 361; cf. Lefort, *Œuvres*, 2: 100 n.
- 6 And yet Wipszycka, “Économie,” 196-197 calls it ‘Apocalypse’. Cf. R. Sharpe, *Titulus* (Turnhout 2003) 21-28; and now P. Buzi, *Titoli e autori nella tradizione copta* (Pisa 2005) 44 (no. 0092), 97 (though her typology would imply an early date, which I think untenable).
- 7 Lefort, *Œuvres*, 1: 100; *Codices Coptici*, 51: pl. 33; Depuydt, *Catalogue*, 1: 360.

never are). What is this 'prophecy' text doing in its manuscript context, as well as in its scribal context and its historical context if we can discern it?

The scribe and his productions

The manuscript of which the Prophecy of Charour (hereafter PC) is the third and final item was copied by a scribe named Zacharias. He describes himself as "I, Zacharias, most humble priest and copyist [lit. 'calligrapher', **ΓΑΛΙΟΓΡΑΦΟΥ**], servant (**ΔΟΥΛΑ{Λ}ΟC**)⁸ of the holy monastery of the mount of Kalamon [Qalamun], Amen."⁹ Before this signature and the dating clause, which are in Greek-type script, he wrote in his regular Coptic hand a prayer for the donor, who had commissioned the volume, one Epima.¹⁰ It reads: "With God.¹¹ My holy fathers, bless me; I make obeisance to the dust of your holy feet.¹² Everyone who will read aloud from this book, remember our God-loving brother Papa Epima the son of the late God-loving Papa Damiane, who [D.] by God's mercy and trust administered (**OIKONOMEI**) his life according to His holy will, and completed his end well in the midst of his brothers; and may He have mercy on him in His kingdom. He [E.] took the care and trouble to give it in to the *topos* of the holy Archangel Michael, the monastery of Ho[a]ntoou, for the salvation of his soul."¹³ Thus Epima commissioned a scribe from the nearby Qalamun monastery to copy a book that was to be donated to the library of the Archangel Michael monastery at Phantoou.¹⁴ Zacharias adds a request for himself too: "And bless me; I too make repentance of my little handiwork. Remember me, and may God have mercy on me

8 Is this a calque of the legal term **ΔΟΥΛΟΝ** or **ΖΗΤΑΛ**, 'servant', meaning a person donated and/or tied to a monastery – a status on which much legal scholarship has been expended? See T. S. Richter, *Rechtssemantik und forensische Rhetorik: Untersuchungen zu Wortschatz, Stil und Grammatik der Sprache koptischer Rechtsurkunden* (Leipzig 2002) 372-373. For a different region of Egypt cf. A. Biedenkopf-Ziehner, *Koptische Schenkungsurkunden aus der Thebais* (Wiesbaden 2001), and A. Papaconstantinou, "Θεία οίκονομία: les actes thébains de donation d'enfants ou la gestion monastique de la pénurie," *Travaux et Mémoires* 14 (2002) 511-526.

9 van Lantschoot, *Colophons*, 10; *Codices Coptici*, 51: pl. 43.

10 Probably the same person as the Epima who four years later (in A. D. 848) copied MS. M583, then wrote and annotated MS. M588, and by A. D. 889/90 had commissioned MS. M580: cf. Depuydt, *Catalogue*, 1: 329 n. 5 (under no. 165 [MS. M583]); van Lantschoot, *Colophons*, nos. V, VI, XIV.

11 The remarks of Ph. Luisier, "Cὺν θεῷ«. Signification et destin d'une formule d'invocation en Égypte," in *Κορυφαῖοι ἄνδρες: Mélanges offerts à André Hurst*, ed. A. Kolde et al. (Geneva 2005) 339-346 (esp. 341 n. 15, 343 n. 35), do not take sufficient account of the invocation formulae as in Bagnall/Worp, *CSBE* 2, 99-109, 290-299.

12 Known as an epistolary formula: A. Biedenkopf-Ziehner, *Untersuchungen zum koptischen Briefformular* (Wiesbaden 1983) 94 (d); cf. 100, 245-246. Examples are P.Mon.Epiph. 216 and O. Crum 93.

13 van Lantschoot, *Colophons*, 9-10; *Codices Coptici*, 51: pl. 43; Depuydt, *Catalogue*, 1: 361.

14 S. Emmel, "The Library of the Monastery of the Archangel Michael at Phantoou (al-Hamuli)," in *Christianity and Monasticism in the Fayoum Oasis*, ed. G. Gabra (Cairo 2005) 63-70.

at His fearsome judgment-seat (**ΒΗΜΑ**). Amen, So be it.” His phraseology is that familiar from both documentary and literary copyists of early medieval Egypt.¹⁵

Two other items make up this manuscript: first, a martyrdom of St. Theodore Stratelates (fols. 1r-7v),¹⁶ and second, a martyrdom of Sts. Cosmas and Damian (fols. 8r-15v).¹⁷ Stephen Emmel has discerned that the miscellany-type volumes from the Phantou monastery library tend to have their contents arranged in chronological order according to feast day.¹⁸ Therefore we ought to look for a date – one connected possibly with Pachomian monasticism? – that falls later in the calendar than feasts known for Theodore and Cosmas, as a peg on which to hang the PC.

Two and a half years earlier, on 8 March A. D. 842, our Qalamun scribe Zacharias had also¹⁹ finished copying a multiple work that was to be donated to the same Phantou monastery: Pierpont Morgan Library Coptic MS. M588,²⁰ a collection of texts in honor of the popular St. Mercurius.²¹ At the end of this earlier production (on fol. 31r) he again signs in Greek-type script, designating himself as “I, Zacharias, most humble, both priest and copyist [Γ.] of the holy monastery of Kalamon,” and names a colleague, Paso[n] (‘my brother’)²² Apaêou, “likewise copyist [ΚΑΛΙΟΓΡΑΦΟΥ] of Heracleopolis (or: of the Heracleopolite)²³ and brother [ΑΔΕΛΦΟΥ] of the same, servant [ΔΟΥΛΟΣ] of the same.”²⁴ So at first Zacharias worked as half of a duo,²⁵ and then later alone.

15 See H. Förster, *Wörterbuch der griechischen Wörter in den koptischen dokumentarischen Texten* (Berlin–New York 2002) 134 s. v. **ΒΗΜΑ**; also the index in van Lantschoot, *Colophons*.

16 Depuydt, *Catalogue*, 1: 360. See A. Papaconstantinou, *Le culte des saints en Égypte: des Byzantins aux Abbassides* (Paris 2001) 96–100. (Cf. BHG 1750–1752, but not the same.)

17 Papaconstantinou, *Culte des saints*, 129–132; M. van Esbroeck, “La diffusion orientale de la légende des saints Cosme et Damien,” in *Hagiographie, cultures et sociétés IVe–XIIe siècles* (Paris 1981) 61–77. (Cf. BHG 372–373, 376–379, but again not the same.)

18 Emmel, “Library,” 65.

19 Cf. Y. N. Youssef, “The Monastery of Qalamun during the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries,” in *Fayoum Oasis*, ed. Gabra, 91–102, here 91 with 101 n. 2.

20 Catalogued as no. 126 in Depuydt, *Catalogue*, 1:253–257, 2: plates 109–112. The dating clause gives Phamenoth 12, indiction 5, from Diocletian 558, ‘year by times’ [Hijra] 227 (note the reverse order): Depuydt, *Catalogue*, 1: 255 (not ‘AM’); van Lantschoot, *Colophons*, 7 (no. III); *Codices Coptici*, 29: pl. 61 (fol. 31r); for date cf. Bagnall/Worp, *CSBE* 2, 162, 305.

21 Papaconstantinou, *Culte des saints*, 145–146. (Cf. BHG 1274–1276; CPG 2969, 3515.)

22 Restoration of the nu by the present writer. For this locution see S. J. Clackson, *Coptic and Greek Texts relative to the Hermopolite Monastery of Apa Apollo* (Oxford 2000) 16–17.

23 Not far south of the Fayum.

24 I. e. of the same monastery, Qalamun.

25 The invocation on fol. 31r reads at first: “God of the spirits and Lord of all flesh [the formula of liturgical origin more familiar from gravestones], bless the God-loving brothers who took care for the commemoration of the holy Mercurius. They provided the account of his martyrdom and his miracles; in their taking trouble they gave them in to the *topos* of the holy Archangel Michael of Hantou, that abides in the vine [John 15:4].” (Pace van Lantschoot, *Colophons*, 7 n. 10, this is comprehensible.) Both brothers are referred to as alive in 842; perhaps one was deceased by 844.

St. Mercurius for his part is commemorated on 25 Hathyr,²⁶ so his martyrdom and two encomia on him would all pertain to that feast. What about the succession Theodore – Cosmas – the PC that obtains in MS. 586? For the first two, the usual feast days are 20 Epeiph (14 July [Julian]) and 22 Hathyr (18 November [J.]) respectively.²⁷ That is a big gap; and what occasion might follow in the calendar for the PC to fit – if the pattern of chronological succession holds for this MS. and was followed by the scribe Zacharias? There is also a feast of the consecration of the basilica – healing site, pilgrimage goal – of the ‘fee-free’ medical saints Cosmas and Damian, on 22 Payni (16 June [J.]).²⁸ And there is a special feast for the day St. Theodore – conflated in the Egyptian fashion with his homonym the Tiro of Euchaita – killed the dragon: 18 Payni (12 June [J.]).²⁹ So, if the pattern indeed holds, we are probably dealing with an ordering of Theodore / 12 June – Cosmas and Damian / 16 June – somebody or something in possibly late June to early July. The obvious feast for a text connected explicitly with Pbow would be that of St. Pachomius,³⁰ but he comes earlier, on 14 Pachon (9 May [J.]) – so in that case the order would be broken.

I suggest the feast of Cyril of Alexandria, who shared a feast day with his sixth-century successor Theodosius in late-ninth-century Fayum usage on 3 Epeiph (27 June [J.]).³¹ Attention has recently been drawn to Cyril’s letter to Calosirius of Arsinoe and the stress that patriarch laid on the importance of monastic work.³² Cyril utilizes, as does the ‘prophetic’ putative author Charour (M586, fol. 20v), the Pauline stricture “Whoever does not work does not eat” (2 Thess. 3:10-11). We shall see below how strongly the PC concentrates on that very subject – in its own

26 21 November (Julian). See Depuydt, *Catalogue*, 1: 254 with n. 1.

27 Depuydt, *Catalogue*, 1: 360.

28 M. De Fenoyl, *Le sanctoral copte* (Beirut 1960) 163. This was probably the church at Cyrrhus: see I. Shahid, “Arab Christian Pilgrimages in the Proto-Byzantine Period (V-VII Centuries),” in *Pilgrimage and Holy Space in Late Antique Egypt*, ed. D. Frankfurter (Leiden 1998) 373-389, here 380-382.

29 According to the typika of Shenoute’s monastery: Papaconstantinou, *Culte des saints*, 99. More research is needed on how the usages of this prestigious house spread to other monasteries in other regions of Egypt.

30 He was depicted in the decorative program of a mid-tenth-century church in nearby Tebtunis (Touton), together with St. Theodore Stratelates and St. Mercurius: C. C. Walters, “Christian Paintings from Tebtunis,” *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 75 (1989) 191-208 esp. 193-194, 196, and plates XVI-XXVIII esp. XVII-XVIII, XX; R. W. Boutros, “The Christian Monuments of Tebtunis,” in *Fayoum Oasis*, ed. Gabra, 119-131, here 127.

31 Attested by Pierpont Morgan Library Coptic MS. M575 (no. 58 in Depuydt, *Catalogue*, 1:107-112), an antiphonarium donated to the St. Michael monastery at Phantou by A. D. 892/93: fols. 65v-66r (St. Pachomius occurs on fol. 64r). See M. Krause, “Das koptische Antiphonar aus dem Handschriftenfund von Hamuli,” in *Ägypten – Münster: kulturwissenschaftliche Studien*, ed. A. I. Blöbaum et al. (Wiesbaden 2003) 167-185, here 179; Depuydt, *Catalogue*, 1: 110.

32 S. J. Davis, “Biblical Interpretation and Alexandrian Episcopal Authority in the Early Christian Fayoum,” in *Fayoum Oasis*, ed. Gabra, 45-61, here 51, 58-59 on Fayum monks who refused to work.

way. The PC might well have been read out at St. Michael's – its oral qualities are instantly perceptible – on Cyril's feast day on the calendarically fitting 27 June.³³

The putative author

Since the *editio princeps* it has been taken for granted that the person who composed the PC text was, or was supposed to be, identical with the 'Karour' (Καρούρ) who appears (§25) in the Pachomian text known as the *Letter of Ammon*.³⁴ In fact this is extremely problematic. In Coptic the name begins with the letter chima (Ϣ), in Greek with a kappa. The Greek text (Goehring, *Letter of Ammon*, 147) tells us that near the city of Ptolemais in the Thebaid (Upper Egypt) was a monastery that had been founded by Pachomius's third successor Theodore (superior A.D. 351-368).³⁵ One of its monks was Καρούρ ὀνόματι, ὃ λέγεται παρὰ Θηβαίοις κολοβός: "one named Karour, which means dwarf among the Thebans."³⁶ Notwithstanding a proposed etymology of the Coptic ⲃⲁⲣⲟⲩⲣ from ⲃⲣⲱⲩ, 'to be diminished [or short / crippled]',³⁷ a much easier and more straightforward meaning immediately comes to mind. The Coptic word ⲕⲣⲟⲩⲣ means 'frog' (Crum, *Coptic Dictionary*, 117a),³⁸ and whether spelled with or without an alpha it is attested as a personal name since at least the fifth century, if not since Roman times.³⁹ Metathesis of kappa and chima is so well known and

33 In addition, it seems that Qalamun, where our scribe Zacharias was from, was well thought of by its neighboring monastery of Phantou; not only Samuel of Qalamun himself but also the consecration of the Qalamun church have feast days attested in MS. M575, the antiphonarium (8 Choiak [4 December J.] and 13 Choiak [9 December J.] respectively): fols. 1v-2v of the Berlin fragment and 24r-25v of the New York codex (Depuydt, *Catalogue*, 1: 108-109; Krause, "Antiphonar," 176, 179).

34 See J. E. Goehring, *The Letter of Ammon and Pachomian Monasticism*, PTS 27 (London - New York 1986) 147-148 (Greek text), 175 (Eng. trans.), 270-273 (commentary). Goehring notes the identification by Lefort (271, where he observes that this is also the only occurrence of this character/name in monastic literature); this is accepted by Depuydt, *Catalogue*, 1: 361 ("Charur").

35 J. E. Goehring, "New Frontiers in Pachomian Studies," in idem, *Ascetics, Society, and the Desert: Studies in Early Egyptian Monasticism* (Harrisburg 1999) 162-186, here 167-172.

36 Trans. Goehring, *Letter of Ammon*, 175. The *Letter* does indeed occasionally note what its writer takes to be peculiarities of Theban / Upper Egyptian speech (i. e. Sahidic Coptic): §17 (136, 168, 247-248).

37 Goehring, *Letter of Ammon*, 271, citing Crum, *Coptic Dictionary*, 829b for κολοβός.

38 Cf. W. Brunsch, "Index zu Heusers 'Personennamen der Kopten'," *Enchoria* 12 (1984) 119-153, here 129 (Heuser pp. 21, 74: 'Frosch').

39 F. Preisigke, *Namenbuch* (Heidelberg 1922, repr. Starnberg 1988) 166, 187; D. Foraboschi, *Onomasticon Alterum Papyrologicum* (Milan 1971) 160, 173; W. Brunsch, "Index der koptischen und griechischen Personennamen in W. E. Crums *Coptic Dictionary*," *Enchoria* 13 (1985) 133-154, here 136 (no. 46), 146, 150, 151; see also CO 132 and M. Hasitzka, "Namen in koptischen dokumentarischen Texten" [online], s. v. ⲕⲁⲣⲟⲩⲣ, ⲕⲣⲟⲩⲣ. Cf. J. Gascou and L. MacCoull, "Le cadastre d'Aphroditô", *Travaux et Mémoires* 10 (1987-88) 140 I. 118.

abundantly attested⁴⁰ that it can be disregarded here; and for that matter it is easy to understand how a perhaps short or imperfectly formed person could get the moniker ‘frog’. In addition, the frog was a symbol of resurrection in Egyptian Christianity, coming up out of the Nile mud as it did.⁴¹ What better name to give the putative author of a ‘prophecy’ of how bad things at Pachomius’s monastery were going to get? – a ‘prophecy’ formulated in what seem to be difficult times for monasticism in Egypt. The Karour in the *Letter of Ammon* is a monk known for τῶν ἐκκλησιαστικῶν δογμάτων ἀκρίβεια (Goehring, *Letter of Ammon*, 148; “exactness of ecclesiastical doctrines” [175]), whose ‘good death’ in spite of his other faults is clairvoyantly seen at a distance by Theodore in a vision (272-273). It would seem that this not unfamiliar name, Karour, in an alternate spelling with chima, was appropriated by the Coptic-language composer of the PC for his lamenting ‘prophet’, a figure who will insist on exactness of observance.

The form

No one has yet noticed that the PC text, full of strange words as it is, is composed in a striking form, one well suited to recitation out loud. The first part⁴² consists of twenty-five formulations I have myself thought of as ‘Jabberwocky conundrums’ – ‘Jabberwocky’ since they often use those strange words. They follow a pattern that goes: metaphor | linking signifier (always **ΕΤΕΠΑΙΠΕ**, ‘that is’, Lefort’s ‘c’est-à-dire’) | explanation:⁴³ as though a formulation were to go “The borogroves were not mimsy, and the mome raths have not outgribben: that is: the monks were not attentive, and the reciters have not paid heed to scripture” (*vel sim.*).⁴⁴ All twenty-five of these expressions primarily deplore the neglect of scripture reading (**ΜΕΛΕΤΑ**) and the prevalence of personal greed⁴⁵ and worldliness over cooperative attention to the harvest (clearly both literal and spiritual). The last four of these

40 Crum, *Coptic Dictionary*, 90a, 801a; cf. F. T. Gignac, *A Grammar of the Greek Papyri of the Roman and Byzantine Periods* (Milan 1976) 47, 76-80 (κ/γ since gamma is also found in alternation with chima).

41 J. Leclant, “La grenouille d’éternité des pays du Nil au monde méditerranéen,” in *Hommages à Maarten J. Vermaseren*, ed. M. B. de Boer et al., 2 vols. (Leiden 1978) 2:561-572.

42 Lefort, *Œuvres*, 1: 100 line 5-102 line 15; 2: 100 line 5-104 line 11.

43 Indeed the very first one says **ΠΑΡΑΒΟΛΗ** upon **ΠΑΡΑΒΟΛΗ** (1:100.5-6). – Wipszycka, “Économie,” 197-200 prints in bold the expressions she sees as “direct, not metaphorical” (197).

44 I am grateful to Professor Michael Herren and his work on the Latin text *Hisperica Famina* and other texts of the ‘hermeneutic style’, and for his helpfully pointing me to comparanda in the pseudo-Methodius Apocalypse and in the writer known as ‘Aethicus Ister’ – texts that use arcane, recherché, even neologically created words in making their points.

45 Too much food and drink (cf. Nos. 15 and 25) could, it was feared, also lead to same-sex intimacy: cf. E. Lucchesi, “Deux pages inédites d’une instruction d’Horsière sur les amitiés particulières,” *Orientalia* 70 (2001) 183-192.

formulations⁴⁶ offer a transition to the second part,⁴⁷ itself bipartite, consisting of a double parable (about a military raid) and a dispute about the work of the harvest. (Both of these also occasionally use metaphors with **ΕΤΕΠΑΙΠΕ** explanations.) One Besarion is named as narrator of the parable, and he and one Victor appear as dramatic personae of the dispute (together with a character named Andrew). The first two are actual historical figures:⁴⁸ Besarion is known as Horsiesi's successor as head of the pan-Pachomian congregation, and Victor as builder of the Pbow basilica. This would give a dramatic date of about the middle third to possibly the third quarter of the fifth century, a time when Chalcedonian/anti-Chalcedonian conflict in Egypt was beginning to be rife⁴⁹ and had a great impact on the Pachomian movement. In the PC dispute, Besarion is the 'good' figure and Victor the disobedient rebel.

Examples of the 'Jabberwocky'-type conundrums in the first part are: (No. 7 [numbering by the present writer]), "We made **ΕΜΗΣΕ**-wood staffs, we made onion-skin textiles, we threw the fennel-wood⁵⁰ **ΑΥ** on the riverbank: that is: we rolled around in sleep, we put in place headmen with crooked hearts, we put in *deuterarioi* who were despondent in their thoughts" (1:100 lines 20-23). Compare, this time without recondite words, No. 13 (1:101 lines 1-2): "No sound of footsteps at evening, no sound of pouring water in the day: that is: no sound of reading aloud at evening, no sound of recitation (**ΜΕΛΕΤΑ**) in the day." The boundary between monastery and outside world is felt as much too permeable: No. 22 complains directly "The streets of Pbow are like the streets of Shmin (Panopolis):⁵¹ that is: we talk and shout like (in) the **ΑΓΟΡΑ** of Shmin" (1:101 lines 22-23).⁵² From the opening ("Utter a lament on Pbow, an ode on its congregation: that is: utter a weeping on Pbow, a mourning on its monastery") on, this parallelistic con-

46 I wish I could solve the enigma of the 'Serapion of Coptos' cited as an authority figure in No. 24. Cf. S. Timm, *Das christlich-koptische Ägypten* 5 (Wiesbaden 1991) 2140-2154, here 2144-2145.

47 Lefort, *Œuvres*, 1:102 line 16-104 line 29; 2:104 line 12-108 end.

48 Lefort, *Œuvres*, 2:104-105 nn. 40, 46; Goehring, "New Frontiers," 179-181. (Andrew seems to be a made-up character.)

49 S. J. Davis, *The Early Coptic Papacy* (Cairo 2004) 88-93.

50 Does this recall the fennel stalk in which Prometheus stole fire from heaven? Repeated in No. 8 (1:100 line 25), "the works of the monasteries are like fennel."

51 Note the place reference, closer, one would think, to a Shenoutean than a Pachomian center: *Perspectives on Panopolis*, ed. A. Egberts et al. (Leiden 2002). But this may provide a valuable clue: see below.

52 Next comes No. 23 which says: "They have murmured about the collection of vessels (**ΚΑΚΟΥΒΙ-ΤΟΝ**: cf. **ΚΑΚΟΥΒΙΟΝ** in DuCange, *Glossarium*, 543) in the *epoikion* of Nabershai [Nafer-shor/Nabershor]: that is: the people of many words have stirred up a fight (**ΜΙΩΕ**), crying aloud in the house of Nabershai which is the district of a troop (**ΜΗΗΩΕ** [note the play on words])" (1:101 lines 24-27). The *topos* Nabershai is known from an eighth-century Aphrodito document, *P.Lond.* IV 1419.935, 951 (I thank the late John Oates for checking this).

struction is clearly oral/aural, a part of the expressive culture of its time.⁵³ The PC would have been read aloud to a live audience, probably with oral response.

The second part of the PC begins with Besarion's parable of armed conflict (CTACIC, 1:102 line 25). He tells his hearers to get ready at Easter, with weapons, tunics, breastplates, and belts, and to go to Weavers' Street at Tailors' Gate, and make a stand. The interpretations follow: the weavers will provide bandages, and the tailors repairs, for the combatants. The tunic the hearers are supposed to have put on is knowledge, the breastplate obedience; while the belt must not be left undone to indicate looseness. The tunic is recitation (ΜΕΛΕΤΑ) of the Epistles, the breastplate of the Psalter, the belt of the Gospels (1:102 lines 22-35). All this is of course exegesis on Ephesians 6:11-16, from a monastic point of view.

The parable is followed by the dispute with the rebellious Victor (1:103 line 1-104 line 14). Victor, supervisor of the rope-making monks, "gives up his loom and key, goes out on the terrace and takes his pet dog: that is: abandons patience and silence, becomes prone to conflict and prideful." Besarion tells him to take his tools, that is, men of patient speech, and go harvest the field, that is, do "the works of your life". Victor refuses with proud oaths (ΩΡΚ): "By the kingdom that I control, that is, the rope-makers' steelyard and beam, Victor [3rd person] will never do that: take five hundred solidi instead" (to hire laborers). Besarion, in shock, comes back with the ironic vocative lifted straight from classical Greek oratory Ω ΑΘΗΝΑΙΟΣ, ὦ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι— "Athenians', unruly ones (ΑΤΑΚΤΟΙ) of Pbow!" (1:103 line 25). Having been given the perfect opening, he denounces love of wealth (ΜΑΙΧΡΗΜΑ, line 28), alluding to Isaiah 61:1 and Luke 4:18.

Up jumps one Andrew, a *deuterarios*⁵⁴ labeled the 'wooden horse' and 'spotted one', and a Victor supporter, refusing the three-day work imposition. 'Wooden horse' is explained as 'unruly' (ΑΤΑΚΤΟΣ again), and 'spotted' as ΠΑΡΔΑΛΙΣ,⁵⁵ indicating that he too is a person in the wrong. Besarion then replies with an oath (ΩΡΚ) of his own: "By the cincture bound round me [1:104 lines 4-5],⁵⁶ if you don't go to work there will be" – and there follows a list: "no loaf in your breadbasket, no vegetables in your garden, no legumes/charlock in your *lakon*,⁵⁷ no olives in your jar, no oil in your flask, no cheese in your dish, no mustard in

53 A useful concept: see *Eight Words for the Study of Expressive Culture*, ed. B. Feintuch (Urbana 2003) esp. J. T. Tison, "Text," 69-98.

54 Lefort's note 56 is wrong.

55 Surely the leopard-beast of Daniel's vision in Daniel 7:6.

56 A known Coptic monastic oath formula: see E. Seidl, *Der Eid im römisch-ägyptischen Provinzialrecht* (Munich 1935) 2:143-144, in P.CLT 1, but there CΧΗΜΑ (cf. Förster, *Wörterbuch*, 784-785), not ΜΟΧΛ.

57 On the names for containers in this passage (2:106-107 notes) we now have the help of N. Kruit / K. A. Worp, "Metrological Notes on Measures and Containers of Liquids," *Archiv* 45 (1999) 96-127, and eidem, "Geographical Jar Names: Towards a Multi-Disciplinary Approach," *Archiv* 46 (2000) 65-146. For ΛΑΚΟΝ cf. also Förster, *Wörterbuch*, 460-462.

your pot”.⁵⁸ And his hearers respond, like a chorus, “Not to worry, we will go and do the work.” There follows the biblical interpretation of the oath (ⲁⲛⲁϣ): as for the loaf, remember 2 Thess. 3:10, “Whoever does not work does not eat” (the verse quoted emphatically by Cyril); for the vegetables, they are good food for the weak (Romans 14:2); the oil is like Psalm 103:15, for the face to shine. All then moves quickly to a happy resolution as the *tutti* repeat that they will go and spend the day harvesting, returning to Pbow at evening (avoiding women!) – and quoting Psalm 125:5, “They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.” So ends the prophecy.

Historical context

Notwithstanding the dramatic date,⁵⁹ clearly this text is not late fourth- or mid-fifth century. It comes, though, out of a time when Pachomian monasticism was experiencing stress and threat. There were two such major times: the Chalcedonian/anti-Chalcedonian split in the sixth century,⁶⁰ and the Muslim conquest in the seventh. Which context makes more sense for the composition of the PC?⁶¹

Let us take another look at the matter of the PC’s being in a form, a definite form, and what that form might be.⁶² In one of the very few remarks made on this text in the last half-century, T. Orlandi labeled it an ‘anti-literature’ – a composition motivated by a rejection of ‘literature’ as it was defined in the hegemonic Greek cultural ambiance in Egypt.⁶³ This romantic vision is the opposite, as it were, of helpful. To look deeper once more, the work’s first section or lament-by-metaphors (“Sing a dirge over Pbow ...”), that uses arcane words in balanced locutions to make its points, is deploying structural, hortatory, and ideological stimuli

58 A window into the vegetarian monastic diet: for comparanda from another, earlier community, see B. Layton, “Social Structure and Food Consumption in an Early Christian Monastery: The Evidence of Shenoute’s *Canons* and the White Monastery Federation A.D. 385–465,” *Le Muséon* 115 (2002) 25–55, esp. 44–45 and Table 3. The author of the PC reproves monastic laundry workers for eating dried fish (ⲧⲁⲣⲓⲱⲓⲛ, 1:102 line 4), also a food forbidden to Shenouteans (Layton, “Food Consumption,” 45); see also S. Clackson, “Something Fishy in CPR XX,” *Archiv* 45 (1999) 94–95, and eadem, “Fish and Chits,” *ZAS* 129 (2002) 6–11.

59 “...the manufacture of prophecies often involved deliberately recreating the circumstances of the period in which the prophecy was allegedly made”: A. Kaldellis, “Historicism in Byzantine Literature and Thought,” *31st Byzantine Studies Conference Abstracts* (Atlanta 2005) 68.

60 See J. E. Goehring, “Chalcedonian Power Politics and the Demise of Pachomian Monasticism,” in idem, *Ascetics, Society, and the Desert*, 241–261. Excellent comparanda can be found in J.-E. Steppa, *John Rufus and the World Vision of Anti-Chalcedonian Culture*, 2nd rev. ed. (Piscataway, NJ 2005).

61 Fifty years ago Lefort had dated the fragmentary Cairo manuscript palaeographically late 7th–early 8th century (*Œuvres* 1:xxi); but this is (a) subjective and (b) uncheckable.

62 I have been greatly aided by M. D. C. Drout, *How Tradition Works* (Tempe 2006), esp. chap. 8 – dealing with subject matter from a very different time and place, but thought-provoking nonetheless.

63 T. Orlandi, “Letteratura copta e cristianesimo nazionale egiziano,” in *L’Egitto cristiano: aspetti e problemi in età tardo-antica*, ed. A. Camplani (Rome 1997) 61.

to provoke reactions in the hearer or reader.⁶⁴ What could have been the ancestors of, the models for, this style, which clearly *is* a style? How did the Coptic-using school pupil of late antiquity pick up words from glossaries (e. g.) and acquire the knack of mixing and matching, even neo-coining, indigenous, Greek, and biblical elements? Indeed glossaries and glossing, biblical especially, may be key here. The memorable form is crafted so as to authorize the content the composer wished to convey.⁶⁵

A key metaphor for the monastic decline being lamented is No. 14 (1:101 lines 3-5; 2:102 lines 6-8): "In the nests of [a species of] doves, the **ⲕⲁⲙⲟⲩⲗⲁⲁⲕⲁ** [or **ⲛⲩⲕⲧⲓⲕⲟⲗⲁⲕⲉⲥ**] have laid their eggs: that is: in the monasteries full of holy men, impure men have come to dwell." That is pretty clear: this sneaky, subversive, cuckoo-like⁶⁶ behavior by interlopers has caused a takeover that has pushed the pure ones or 'doves' out of their 'nests'. **ⲛⲩⲕⲧⲓⲕⲟⲗⲁⲕⲉ** is the key.⁶⁷ The model for Part One of the PC is biblical. Even more than the 'night-raven' or 'owl of the desert' of the lamenting Psalm 101:7 (LXX), the 'doleful creatures' are those of Isaiah 13:20-22 and 34:11- 15.⁶⁸ What was once a harmonious garden is now a wilderness of discord.

Who might these sneaky birds have been? Very likely the Chalcedonians. The sixth-century imperial initiative to take over Pbow, backed by Justinian's military force,⁶⁹ seemed to the anti-Chalcedonians to be a grievous transformation of the Pachomian heartland into a wasteland.⁷⁰ Though its community opposed the Chalcedonian doctrinal position, Pbow was too big and tempting a target for Justinian to resist. According to later accounts, the emperor summoned Abraham, the Pachomian abbot general, to Constantinople and held him hostage until the Pachomians should accede to Chalcedon. Abraham managed to return to Egypt and take refuge first with the Shenouteans in the Panopolite, subsequently founding (with a 'faithful remnant') a breakaway non-Chalcedonian house,⁷¹ pointedly

64 Drout, *How Tradition Works*, 76-77.

65 Drout, *How Tradition Works*, 250.

66 Lefort's note (2:102 n. 22) misses the point; we are in Egypt, not Belgium.

67 See W. Vycichl, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue copte* (Leuven 1983) 112ab s. v. **ⲙⲟⲩⲗⲁⲁⲕⲁ**(ⲕ), complete with folklore material (and note too the play on words, involving the concepts of 'to be enmeshed with' and 'to smother, suffocate' recoverable from Crum CD 166).

68 Although these Isaiah passages do not seem to have been liturgical lections in the Coptic church, the Phantou monastery library did own a copy of Isaiah (Emmel, "Library"), Morgan Coptic MS. M568.

69 Compare the parable of the armed raid in Part Two of the PC.

70 For all this see Goehring, "Power Politics," 243-251; also cf. P. T. R. Gray, "The Legacy of Chalcedon," and L. Van Rompay, "Society and Community in the Christian East," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*, ed. M. Maas (Cambridge 2005) 215-238, 239- 266 respectively, esp. 227-235, 247.

71 As did two other brothers who went to Coptos: Timm, *Ägypten* 5: 2144-2145. Perhaps this lies behind the 'Serapion of Coptos' figure mentioned above.

still located in Pachomian territory (at Farshut).⁷² This left Pbow itself presenting the image of a locus or nest of Chalcedonianism – in the eyes of the anti-Chalcedonian majority a lamentable wilderness, where no *correct* ΜΕΛΕΤΑ or scriptural meditation/recitation (a core concept in monasticism) is heard any longer, where neither crops (the good grain) nor souls are harvested owing to selfish greed (i. e. collaboration with the Chalcedonian authorities). The author of the PC depicts the ruin of his community in terms of a hostile takeover.

Notice again the Panopolis reference.⁷³ Why did the author of the PC, lamenting conditions at Pbow, say that the distracting chatter that now prevails is as bad as that in the agora of Panopolis? Why not the closer Ptolemais (linked with the Καρούπ of the *Letter of Ammon*) or Apollinopolis Parva? Panopolis may well have stood for the Shenoutean hospitality offered to that sixth-century Abraham, the staunch and faithful Pachomian who not only refused to accept Chalcedon but even defiantly planted an anti-Chalcedonian house right in the collaborators' back yard, the Pachomian heartland between Shmin and Sne.⁷⁴ However, even the good remnant of Pachomian monasticism – mostly a village and town phenomenon⁷⁵ – may have found that the world – the Panopolite world – came to be too much with them.⁷⁶

Conclusion

It has long been – yet another – truism that Coptic culture, specifically anti-Chalcedonian majority culture, was a deeply monastic culture. The monastic way of life and monastic virtues were held up as the ideal to which all, in or out of vowed status, should aspire to and try to live by. Both those who had made promises to leave the world and those living ordinary lives in the world were influenced by monastic ideological rhetoric – a rhetoric concerned to effect “the transmission of monastic codes ... into metaphors for the secular culture.”⁷⁷ Even recent work has reaffirmed the perception that anti-Chalcedonianism was a deeply monastic phenomenon.⁷⁸ Armed with both metaphors from the present and wise figures

72 Goehring, “Power Politics,” 250 n. 47; see now idem, “Abraham of Farshut: History, Hagiography, and the Fate of the Pachomian Tradition,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 14 (2006) 1-26.

73 There was also an earlier Pachomian house near Panopolis: Goehring, “Power Politics,” 251 n. 48.

74 For Farshut see also Timm, *Ägypten* 2 (Wiesbaden 1984) 945-946, 3 (Wiesbaden 1985) 990-992; cf. 5:2146.

75 Cf. J. Patrich, “Monastic Landscapes,” in *Recent Research on the Late Antique Countryside*, ed. W. Bowden et al. (Leiden 2004) 413-445, here 422.

76 See H. Behlmer, “The City as Metaphor in the Works of Two Panopolitans: Shenoute and Besa,” in *Perspectives on Panopolis*, ed. Egberts et al., 13-27; also cf. S. Emmel, “From the Other Side of the Nile: Shenoute and Panopolis,” 95-113.

77 Drout, *How Tradition Works*, 255.

78 See J.-E. Steppa, “Heresy and Orthodoxy: The Anti-Chalcedonian Hagiography of John Rufus,” in *Christian Gaza in Late Antiquity*, ed. B. Bitton-Ashkelony and A. Kofsky (Leiden 2004) 89-106 esp. 92-94, 96, 105; and idem, *John Rufus*, 25-34, 172-173.

from the past, the author of the PC calls attention to the devastating consequences of sinful and heretical caving in to establishment power. I propose that the Prophecy of Charour was composed in the late sixth to early seventh century by an anti-Chalcedonian Coptic monastic writer,⁷⁹ as a protest against the Chalcedonian assault on the Pachomian network of foundations. In keeping with well-known literary practice, the prophecy is put into the mouth of a character representing the ‘good old days’ to point the contrast with the current state of loss. Not accepting Chalcedon’s formulations meant not accepting its biblical interpretations, even under duress; so in the Pbow that Justinian has forced to ‘go over’, no *correct* ΜΕΛΕΤΑ is heard, and only greed – the expectation of material reward from the powerful – rules. The source of legitimacy for this cultural production was anti-Chalcedonian loyalty on the part of both composer and audience. This text can now be read, I suggest, as a highly poetic depiction of an aspect of the late stage of Pachomian history, one that played itself out in the last half-century or so of Byzantine Egypt. It was probably composed to be recited aloud on a fitting feast day to an audience belonging to that ‘faithful remnant’ that had not collaborated. It was then copied at a time when Egyptian Christians themselves were subject to yet another means of control.⁸⁰

79 Possibly from Kalamun, since the 7th-c. Samuel of Kalamun (our scribe’s house, highlighting the connection) attained fame as an anti-Chalcedonian resister (cf. Davis, *Early Coptic Papacy*, 117-118).

80 I am grateful to the Inter-Library Loan service of Hayden Library, Arizona State University, for obtaining treasures old and new. – In loving memory, as always, of Mirrit Boutros Ghali, who in his lifetime experienced the effects of another kind of ‘hostile takeover’.