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COPTIC CHRISTOLOGY IN PRACTICE

INCARNATION AND DIVINE PARTICIPATION
IN LATE ANTIQUE AND MEDIEVAL EGYPT



Stephen J. Davis

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Coptic Christology in Practice

*Incarnation and Divine Participation
in Late Antique and Medieval Egypt*

STEPHEN J. DAVIS

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Preface

Throughout its long history, the church in Egypt has been home to a dynamic, multi-sensory tradition of reflection on the person and work of Jesus Christ. In the second century, Clement of Alexandria speaks of Christ, the divine Word, as a ‘New Song’ that has ‘many tones of voice, and many methods for the salvation of humankind’.¹ In an early fifth-century sermon, Theophilus of Alexandria calls Christ’s body in the eucharist ‘the fruit of obedience that wards off the evil of the terrible one’, and repeatedly exhorts his listeners to ‘taste and see that I, the Lord, am good’.² A generation later, Cyril of Alexandria uses the metaphor of a flower and its aromatic fragrance to describe the relation of the divine and the human in the person of Christ.³ For other Copts in late antiquity—from Coptic-speaking pilgrims to the increasingly Arabized theological elite—the powerful touch of Christ’s hand in the Gospels and in local traditions about the Holy Family’s flight into Egypt was seen as tangible evidence for his divine power and lordship. Finally, in antiquity as well as today, from the Upper Nile Valley to the modern Coptic diaspora in Europe and North America, Egyptian Christians have worshipped in churches and monasteries where their eyes gaze on images from the life of Christ—images woven into textile hangings, carved into limestone and marble reliefs, and painted on wooden icons and plastered walls.

As seen in these examples, the history of Egyptian Christology cannot be traced merely through an examination of systematic rubrics in theological treatises: also required is a keen sensitivity to different social and linguistic contexts, to different media and metaphors of communication. The aim of this book is to narrate some of the contours of this history. While my primary focus will be on late antique and medieval Egyptian Christology—especially the ways that Coptic Christians represented (and worshipped) Christ from the fifth

¹ Clement of Alexandria, *prot.* 1. 7. 3 and 1. 8. 3 (Stählin and Treu, 7 and 8). For a recent discussion of Clement’s musicology and its relation to his Christology, see Charles H. Cosgrove, ‘Clement of Alexandria and Early Christian Music’, 276–81.

² Theophilus, *Homily on the Institution of the Eucharist* (PG 77: 1016–29); see G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, xxiii (under Cyrillus Alexandrinus). This homily was attributed to Cyril of Alexandria (*hom. div.* 10), but M. Richard (‘Une homélie de Théophile d’Alexandrie’, 46–56) has argued that Theophilus was the actual author, on the basis of close parallels with the anti-Origenist polemic found in his festal letter of 401.

³ Cyril of Alexandria, *schol. inc.* 10 (PG 75. 1380); also *Jo.* 11. 2 (Pusey, i. 639); and L. R. Wickham, ‘Symbols of the Incarnation in Cyril of Alexandria’, 46.

to the thirteenth century—I plan to use my introduction and conclusion to situate this material within an even longer history of christological reflection and interpretation.

Thus, I begin my study with an extended introduction to early Alexandrian Greek Christology in late antiquity, in order to lay the groundwork for showing how early Alexandrian writings served as an interpretative basis for later Egyptian discourse (both verbal and visual) about Christ. Building on this, Chs. 1–4 explore the way that this Alexandrian Christology was contextualized in the teachings and ritual practices of Coptic-speaking communities in the Nile Valley. Here, I guide the reader on a virtual tour of various ritualized sites for the transmission of christological knowledge and *praxis*, with special attention to the monastic literature of Shenoute and the White Monastery (Ch. 1), Coptic liturgy (Ch. 2), processional and pilgrimage practices (Ch. 3), and the role of Coptic visual art in the christological construction of human bodies and church space (Ch. 4). Finally, in my last two chapters, I examine the early Arabization of Egyptian Christology in the tenth-century writings of Sāwīrus ibn al-Muqaffāʿ (Ch. 5) and the continued Arabic Christian reception of Alexandrian Greek Christology into the thirteenth century (Ch. 6). Thus, my story formally ends with the Copto-Arabic ‘Golden Age,’ a flourishing of theological literary expression that took place in the context of Christian–Muslim cultural encounter. In my postscript, however, I provide the reader with something of an epilogue to this tale—a few select glimpses into how Coptic christological reflection and practice has continued into the modern period, in the writings of such figures as Patriarch Matthew IV (17th century), Mattā al-Miskīn and his fellow monks at the Monastery of Saint Macarius (20th–21st century), and Pope Shenouda III (20th–21st century).

In tracing this history, my intention is not to provide a comprehensive account of two millennia of Egyptian reflection on the person and role of Christ. Nor do I aspire to provide an encyclopedic treatment of each figure or work that I discuss in this book. Such an approach to this topic would require multiple volumes, an undertaking that lies well beyond the scope of this study. Instead, I intend to present a series of vignettes, or illustrative case studies, that will shed light on two particular aspects of the Egyptian christological tradition: (1) the doctrine of the Incarnation (i.e. the divine Word’s act of becoming flesh in Christ), and (2) its implications for human salvation—especially notions of human participation in the divine, sometimes described by Alexandrian patristic theologians in terms of human deification. How have Christians in Egypt understood the union of the divine and the human in the person of Christ? In what terms have they addressed the problem of embodiment as it relates to the divine Word? How have Christians in Egypt understood the act of Incarnation itself to be related to human salvation? What were its consequences

for human nature, and more specifically, what were its effects on the human condition of embodiment? How have Egyptian Christians understood the Incarnation to enable human participation in divine or heavenly realities? In what ways have such christological beliefs been enacted in the life of local communities?

In order to answer such questions, I seek to analyse Coptic Christology from an interdisciplinary perspective. If one wants to understand how the doctrine of the Incarnation functioned—how notions of human participation in the Incarnation were lived out in the life of Egyptian communities—it is necessary to focus not simply on the traditional literary sources for histories of doctrine (i.e. theological treatises and letters), but also on other non-traditional sources. I have in mind here monastic, hagiographical, homiletical, and liturgical texts, as well as visual art—alternative media that provide the historian with more direct access to church practices intimately tied to christological reflection. In using this range and diversity of sources, one of my goals is to break down (or at least destabilize) the customary methodological divide between the disciplines of historical theology and social history. In the end, my goal is to provide a more textured description of how the history of doctrine may be fruitfully related to a history of religious practice.

This book, therefore, seeks to forge a new path in the study of early Christian Christology. In addition to the well-tryed approaches of historical theologians, I will draw on the fields of social history, discourse theory, ritual studies, and the visual arts in order to show how Christian identity was shaped by a set of replicable christological practices. How exactly did Egyptian Christians represent—and ritually enact—their beliefs about Christ in monastic liturgy, in pilgrimage, and in the visual production of sacred space? In what ways were such christological practices contested—i.e. shaped by theological controversy and inter-religious debate? Egypt provides an ideal geographical setting for the exploration of these questions: not only is it rich in ancient Christian documentation, but it is also a place where the survival of the Coptic church under medieval Islamic rule allows for a diachronic study of literary and material sources across periods of linguistic change—from Greek, to Coptic, and eventually into Arabic. As a social historian of late antiquity trained in theology, I am keenly interested in investigating how the Coptic church negotiated the cultural transition from late antiquity to *Dar al-Islam* both in thought and in practice.

One of the challenges in attempting to write a book that spans hundreds of years is the need to give adequate account of both discontinuities and continuities over such a long period. By organizing my chapters as a collection of vignettes or case studies, I try to convey something of the distinctiveness (or contextualization) of the Christologies produced by individuals and communities living in different eras and locales. At the same time, however,

I also point to certain diachronic continuities in the production of Egyptian Christology. To this end, I have chosen to highlight three key factors that definitively marked the way that early Alexandrian understandings of the Incarnation were received and ‘traditioned’ across subsequent generations in Egypt: (1) the interpretation of biblical texts and patristic authorities, (2) the production of apologetical literature in the context of theological controversy, and (3) worship and other ritual activities that functioned as privileged venues for christological communication and performance. These three themes—interpretation, apologetics, and especially ritual practice—serve as consistent points for conversation throughout this book as I seek to show how Egyptian images of the Incarnation were variously reappropriated, contested, and enacted in the life of the church.

Acknowledgements

The roots of *Coptic Christology in Practice* trace back just over half a decade to the autumn of 2001, when the editors at Oxford University Press prompted me to submit a proposal for a new book that would allow me to explore the reception of Alexandrian patristic theology in later Coptic and Copto-Arabic literature, material culture, and ritual practice. Little did I know at the time how many people would serve as indispensable companions and guides over the course of my research and writing. Here, I am very pleased to have the opportunity to express my heartfelt thanks to all those who helped facilitate this work and who have so often steered me around hazards and missteps along the way.

I want to begin by expressing my gratitude to Andrew Louth, Gillian Clark, and the other editors at OUP—Hilary O’Shea, Lucy Qureshi, Tom Perridge, Georgia Berry, Alice Jacobs and Sylvia Jaffrey—for the confidence they invested in me and for their excellent work in shepherding this project from its beginning to its completion. In addition, I have also benefited from the critical eye of several colleagues who took time from their busy schedules to read my manuscript and offer advice on specific points. Three deserve special mention. First, Bentley Layton, as always, has been my most trusted scholarly mentor, friend, and advocate. Once again his unfailingly detailed and insightful comments have enhanced my work in innumerable ways. Second, Mark Swanson has demonstrated a deep reservoir of patience in fielding an array of questions about Arabic Christian literature by email, over the phone, and while rooming with me at conferences. Without his guidance, I would surely have lost my way as I tried to develop a workable basis of expertise in that field. Third, Stephen Emmel (along with his wife Barbara), has shown incredible generosity to me and my family during my Humboldt fellowship year in Münster, Germany. Stephen proved to be an exemplary host and invaluable conversation partner in Coptic studies during the final stages of my writing. Among the others who offered feedback on my text, I particularly want to thank Warren Smith for his thoughtful advice regarding my treatment of Alexandrian Greek theology, as well as Janet Timbie for her knowledgeable comments related to Coptic language and literature.

Many other persons and institutions have also offered intellectual, emotional, and material support to me over the course of my research and writing. This project began while I was professor at the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo, and I must thank in particular the seminary president Atef Mehanny

Gendi and my other colleagues from that institution—especially the former coordinators of graduate studies, Michael Shelley and David Grafton—for their friendship and support of my research interests. I am also very grateful to Hani Yusef Kostandi and Safwat Adel Henein for many entertaining and informative conversations related to Arabic language and theology. The framework of this book was considerably fleshed out in a masters-level course on Coptic Christology that I taught as a visiting professor at the seminary during my first leave from Yale in the spring of 2005, and I thank the students of that class for their challenging questions and their lively engagement with the topic. My interest in the Arabic language was originally cultivated while living and working in Egypt from 1998 to 2002, and I want to express my gratitude to the Dar Comboni Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies, and especially to Ashraf Fawzi and Ashgan Ahmad, for the intensive linguistic instruction I received under their tutelage. *Shukran min ‘umq qalbi*.

Since my relocation to New Haven in 2002, the faculty, students, and administration at Yale University have supported my research in a myriad of ways. Departmental chairs Dale Martin and Skip Stout have given their full support and encouragement to me as I have applied for fellowships and grants to fund my leaves and field research. My colleagues and friends Ludger Viefhues, Shannon Craigo-Snell, and Frank Griffel have provided counsel on scholarly matters ranging from cultural criticism to Islamic studies, and on personal matters ranging from parental worries to finding good cuisine. I have also benefited in concrete ways from the insights of both undergraduate and graduate students in my courses on related subjects like patristic Greek, late antique pilgrimage, and Arabic Christian literature. Finally, from the Yale administration, I have been fortunate to receive monetary support in the form of a Morse Fellowship in the Humanities (2004–5), and two Griswold research grants (awarded in 2003–4 and 2004–6) for archival research at the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago, the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris, the Bibliothèque orientale at the Université St-Joseph in Beirut, the Bibliothèque du Centre d’études orientales chrétiennes, the Société d’archéologie copte, and the Coptic Museum in Cairo, and the British Library in London.

This archival research was simply indispensable for the completion of my project. At the Field Museum in Chicago, I was able to examine the Coptic tunic with images from the life of Christ that I discuss in Ch. 4. I want to thank Vasileios Marinis for initially acquainting me with this piece and curator Steve Nash for facilitating my visit to the museum in May of 2004. At the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris in June and July of that same year, due to the kind intervention by Michel Garel and Anne Boud’hors, I was able to gain access to BN Copte 68, a manuscript that contains the early medieval

Coptic liturgical procession that I discuss in Ch. 3. During my time at the Bibliothèque orientale at the Université St-Joseph in Beirut (January 2005), I was able to study and acquire digital copies of two Arabic manuscripts of the *Precious Pearl* by Sāwīrus ibn al-Muqaffa^c discussed in Ch. 5: my thanks to the director, May Seeman Seigneurie, for making that research possible and for her warm hospitality. During my stay in Lebanon, I also enjoyed the hospitality of the Near East School of Theology, where I benefited from the company of Islamic studies professor Jon Hoover and his family. In Cairo, during the spring of 2005, Father Wadi Abullif was incredibly helpful in giving me access to holdings at both the Bibliothèque du Centre d'études orientales chrétiennes and the Société d'archéologie copte in Cairo, including allowing me to photograph his own copy of Maiberger's unpublished edition of chs. 6–15 from the *Precious Pearl* (see again Ch. 5 of this book). During that same visit, the Director of the Coptic Museum, Philippe Halim, kindly helped me acquire permission to reproduce an image of Coptic textile depicting the Holy Family's flight to Egypt (see Fig. 4.12). Finally, I also want to thank the British Library for allowing me the opportunity to examine several Copto-Arabic manuscripts during my visit to London in August of 2006.

My final year of writing and revision was made possible by a research leave funded by the Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung and hosted by Stephen Emmel and the Institut für Ägyptologie und Koptologie at Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster. I want to express my profound thanks to the Humboldt Foundation for their generous support of my work and language study while in Germany, and to Ursela Michels and Cäcilia Nauderer for providing such effective guidance on financial and practical matters. I am also deeply appreciative of the academic support I received from colleagues at the Institute for Coptic Studies in Münster, especially Susanna Hodak, Siegfried Richter, and Samuel Muawwad. Last but not least, I need to acknowledge Stephen and Barbara Emmel once again, along with their neighbours Wolfgang and Heidi Zierau, who quickly became surrogate kin for my family and me in Germany and who went to extraordinary lengths to make our stay a comfortable one, including providing transportation and helping to arrange our housing and our children's schooling. Many, many thanks to them for all their acts of kindness.

Academic conferences and study groups have also provided a crucial setting for developing and presenting my work in conversation with colleagues. I presented different pieces of my research at the Zamalek Group for Christian–Muslim Relations in Cairo, at annual and regional meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature, at the Fayoum and Sohag Symposia on Christianity and Monasticism in Egypt, at the Partakers of the Divine Nature Conference at Drew University, at the North American Patristics Society, at the Eighth International Congress of

Coptic Studies in Paris, and at the St Shenouda Society Annual Meeting in Los Angeles. The questions and comments raised by my listeners at these sessions helped me refine my argumentation at various points. Finally, my three years of chairing the Society of Biblical Literature consultation on ‘Christian Late Antiquity and Its Reception’ gave me the opportunity to profit from a series of excellent contributions on the ways that early Christian theology and material culture were reinterpreted and reworked in later historical settings. My thanks go especially to my steering committee: Christopher Beeley, Kimberly Bowes, and Mark Swanson.

The generosity of everyone mentioned above has been overwhelming and humbling, but even so pales in comparison to the gifts I have received from my family over the past five years. During that time, I have taken great joy in watching my three children, Evanleigh, Harrison, and Rowyn, grow and mature before my eyes, while adapting to the cultures and languages of three different countries. I am grateful for the patience, love, and forgiveness that they demonstrate to me every day, and my love for them knows no bounds. I also want to extend my gratitude to my parents, Donald and Esther Davis, for their unflinching spiritual support, and to Mom and Dad Smith for trusting me with the greatest gift I have ever received—my life-partner, Jenny. Words are not sufficient to sum up what she has contributed to this book as wife, lover, mother, editor, chef, caretaker, counsellor, confidante, and fellow seeker-in-faith. I keep my promise: this book belongs to her.

S.J.D.

Münster, Germany
Epiphany 2007

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Abbreviations and Author's Notes

For the abbreviation of Greek patristic titles, I follow G. H. W. Lampe, *Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), pp. ix–xliii; for classical Greek titles, H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, *A Greek–English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. xvi–xlv; and for Greek papyrological sources, the *Checklist of Editions of Greek and Latin Papyri, Ostraca and Tablets*, 4th edn., ed. John F. Oates, Roger S. Bagnall, William H. Willis, and Klaas A. Worp (*Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists*, Supplement 7; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992).

- ACO *Acta conciliorum oecumenicorum*, ed. E. Schwartz. Leipzig: Walter de Gruyter, 1922– .
- ANF Ante-Nicene Fathers, ed. A. Roberts and J. Donaldson. Buffalo: Christian Literature, 1885–96. Repr. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951–6.
- CCL Corpus christianorum, series latinorum. Turnhout: Brepols, 1953– .
- CE *Coptic Encyclopedia*, ed. A. S. Atiya. New York: Macmillan, 1991.
- CPG *Clavis Patrum Graecorum*, ed. M. Geerard. Turnhout: Brepols, 1983– .
- CSCO Corpus scriptorum christianorum orientalium, ed. J-B. Chabot *et al.* Louvain: L. Durbecq, 1903– .
- CSEL Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum. Vienna: C. Geroldi, etc., 1866– .
- DACL *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*, ed. F. Cabrol, H. Leclercq, and H. Marrou. Paris: Letouzey & Ané, 1913–53.
- GCAL *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur*, ed. G. Graf. 5 vols. Studi e Testi 118, 133, 146, 147, 172. Vatican City, 1944–52.
- GCS Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte. Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1899– .
- NPNF Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, ed. P. Schaff *et al.* 2 series. New York: Christian Literature, 1887–1900. Repr. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952–6.
- PG *Patrologia graeca*, ed. J. P. Migne. Paris: Migne, 1857–66.
- PL *Patrologia latina*, ed. J. P. Migne. Paris: Migne, 1844–65.
- PO *Patrologia orientalis*. Paris: F. Didot, 1906– .
- SC Sources chrétiennes. Paris: Cerf, 1943– .
- SOCM *Studia Orientalia Christiana—Monographiae*. Cairo and Jerusalem, 1987– .

Transliterations

Throughout this book I employ Greek and Coptic scripts, but I transliterate Arabic and Syriac terms. My method of Arabic transliteration largely follows the customs of the ALA-Library of Congress, <<http://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpsa/romanization/arabic.pdf>>; however, I sometimes take liberties in rendering standard phrases and the names of persons and places in an effort to conform to conventional usage and to make them more accessible to Western readers and scholars unfamiliar with the Arabic language.

Use of Parentheses and Brackets

I use square brackets solely to indicate lacunae in manuscripts. Letters or words within square brackets represent reconstructions of the missing material supplied by me or by an earlier editor. When parentheses appear within quoted sections of text they may signify one of two situations: either an original parenthetical remark by the author of the quoted text, or an editorial intervention by me designed to specify a pronoun referent or otherwise clarify the context of the excerpted passage for the reader.

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Introduction

The Roots of Coptic Christology: Incarnation and Divine Participation in Late Antique Alexandrian Greek Theology

From its earliest stages of development in late antiquity to its most recent manifestations in the modern era, Coptic Christology has shown a profound indebtedness to Alexandrian patristic views of the Incarnation and human participation in the divine. In many senses, the history of Coptic thought and practice related to Christ may be understood as a dynamic record of cultural reception in which successive generations have reclaimed and recontextualized the theology of the Alexandrian church fathers. Thus, it is essential that this book should begin with an introduction to early Alexandrian Greek Christology, since the literature produced by such figures as Athanasius and Cyril of Alexandria ended up serving as something of an interpretative database for later theologians and practitioners of the Christian faith in Egypt. As we shall see, the processes of this history of reception were already set in motion in this early period, as Alexandrian authors variously endorsed (or censored), adapted, and elaborated upon the ideas of their predecessors, especially in the context of biblical exegesis and theological controversy.

Much, of course, has already been written about early Alexandrian Christology, and I will not attempt to present an exhaustive account here. Instead, my more modest goal is to provide the reader with a concise account that is textured enough to make my investigation into the later Coptic reception of Alexandrian theology intelligible. For the sake of cohesiveness, I have chosen to focus on a particular theme to guide my discussion—namely, the function of human bodies in Alexandrian theologies of the Incarnation. This focus on the body—especially the relationship between the body of Christ and the bodies of persons who participate in the incarnate Word—will serve as an important theoretical foundation for my account of how Christology became so closely linked to ritual practice in the Coptic church.

PROBLEMATIZED BODIES: ALEXANDRIAN CHRISTOLOGY
IN THE SECOND AND THIRD CENTURIES

The earliest recorded Alexandrian meditations on divine embodiment and its consequences for human salvation come from the second and third centuries. The intellectual environment of Alexandria in that period was comprised of an eclectic mix of commonplace philosophical and religious assumptions—drawn from Pythagorean, Aristotelian, Stoic, and especially Platonic thought—which variously informed the ways that educated Christians of that city interpreted biblical texts and addressed theological questions. For those who participated in this intellectual environment (for Christians, Jews, and Greek philosophers alike) the imperfections of the material world and the human body were viewed as significant stumbling-blocks in their attempts to account for the existence of a perfect, rational, and non-corporeal God.¹

It should perhaps not be surprising then that the earliest extant Alexandrian Christian writers betray some level of discomfort with the implications of proclaiming that the divine Word ‘became flesh’ (John 1: 14). The Christian

¹ This philosophical environment has often been labelled by modern scholars as ‘Middle Platonic’: see e.g. John M. Dillon, *Middle Platonists*. On Middle Platonism and the writings of the church fathers, see Salvatore R. C. Lilla, ‘Middle Platonism’, and ‘Platonism and the Fathers’, in *The Encyclopedia of the Early Church*, ed. A. DiBerardino, i. 557–8 and ii. 589–98.

In a recent study entitled *Origen Against Plato*, Mark Edwards has lodged a sustained critique of what he sees as modern scholars’ misuse of the term ‘Middle Platonic’ in reference to the Alexandrian church fathers, and especially Origen. In particular, he argues that Origen ‘wielded an autonomous philosophy, based chiefly on the Bible and the premisses of the catholic tradition’, and that Origen’s theology was shaped more by Jewish and (so-called) Gnostic patterns of biblical interpretation than by a dependence on Platonic sources (see ch. 1, esp. 36–8). Edwards’s critique has had the benefit of discouraging the careless use of ‘Middle Platonism’ as a blanket label, and for this reason I avoid it here.

However, it should be noted that Edwards himself is equally guilty of using other terms such as ‘Gnosticism’ and ‘catholic tradition’ in an overgeneralizing, anachronistic, and sometimes tendentious fashion. In defending Origen against modern ecclesiastical scholars who have condemned the Alexandrian theologian for his Platonizing (and therefore supposedly ‘unorthodox’) tendencies, and in arguing that Origen (along with Clement) was instead influenced primarily by biblical rather than philosophical concerns, Edwards falls into the same binary trap in argumentation as those he seeks to critique. In the end, his attempt to defend the philosophical perspective of Origen as ‘autonomous’ and biblically based fails to do full justice to the ways in which philosophical and biblical concerns creatively intersect in the Alexandrian’s writings.

J. Rebecca Lyman (*Christology and Cosmology*, 72–3) provides a more judicious description of the mix of elements at work in Origen: ‘Ironically, the complexity of Origen’s Christology lies not merely in the fact that Christian life is explained on the basis of a Platonic grid of hierarchical being, but that these levels of being are linked directly with the life of Christ as reported in Scripture.’ More recently, Catherine Chin (‘Origen and Christian Naming’, 407–36) has shown how this complexity can be mapped out not only in terms of Platonic metaphysics and biblical narrative, but also along the lines of Stoic linguistic concerns, especially the *ars grammatica*.

philosopher Basilides, active in Alexandria around 132–5 CE, acknowledges that ‘the unengendered, unnameable parent . . . sent its first-born, the intellect, called Christ, to save people who believed in it’ and that Christ ‘appeared on earth as a man.’² However, at the same time, he pointedly emphasizes that Christ’s identity as ‘an incorporeal power’ meant that it was impossible for him truly to suffer in the body.³ Another theologian who was presumably active in Alexandria, Valentinus (c.100–c.175 CE), was also reluctant to attribute to Jesus’ human body any kind of change or alteration: ‘Jesus practiced divinity (*θεότητα* Ἰησοῦς ἐργάζετο): he ate and drank in a special way, without excreting his solids. He had such a great capacity (*δύναμις*) for continence that the nourishment within him was not corrupted, for he did not experience corruption.’⁴

This emphasis on the rarefied nature of Christ’s body in the Incarnation had significant repercussions for such writers’ understanding of human salvation. Both prioritized the soul, and not the body, as the locus for salvific action. To this effect, Basilides explicitly asserts, ‘Salvation belongs only to the soul; the body is by nature corruptible.’⁵ For him, human communion with God was mediated through rational ‘intellection’ (*νόησις*), not through bodily means.⁶ This rational intellection naturally corresponds to Christ’s identity as the firstborn, divine intellect. Indeed, all who ‘become acquainted with’ (*cognoscere*) Christ attain a state where they ‘are not even susceptible to suffering on behalf of the name.’⁷ For Valentinus and his followers, even though the Word ‘became a body’ (*ἄφ’ οὐκώμα*),⁸ the salvific purpose of Christ’s Incarnation likewise lay beyond the body. In his resurrection, Jesus himself is said to have ‘put off the corrupt rags (*νιπᾶσε ἐττεκαῖτ*, i.e. of the human body),’ and ‘put on incorruptibility (*τμνῆταττεκο*).’⁹ The function of

² Basilides, *Myth*, preserved in Irenaeus, *haer.* 1. 24. 4 (Rousseau and Doutreleau, SC 264 (1979), 326–8; trans. Layton, 423).

³ *Ibid.* preserved in Irenaeus, *haer.* 1. 24. 4: (Rousseau and Doutreleau, *ibid.* 328; trans. Layton, 423).

⁴ Valentinus, frag. E (Layton; = Völker, frag. 3), preserved in Clement of Alexandria, *str.* 3. 7. 59. 3 (Früchtel, Stählin, and Treu, GCS 52 (=15, 4th edn.) (1985), 223. 12–16; trans. B. Layton, *Gnostic Scriptures*, 239, slightly modified). Valentinus’ teaching about divine modes of digestion may be based on his interpretation of Jesus’ teaching in John 6: 27: ‘Do not work for (*ἐργάζεσθαι*) the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.’ In antiquity, the verb *ἐργάζεσθαι* could convey the sense of either ‘to work’ or ‘to digest’ (Layton, 238).

⁵ Basilides, *Myth*, preserved in Irenaeus, *haer.* 1. 24. 5 (Rousseau and Doutreleau, SC 264 (1979), 328; trans. Layton, 423).

⁶ Basilides, frag. C (Layton), preserved in Clement of Alexandria, *str.* 5. 1. 3. 2 (Früchtel, Stählin, and Treu, GCS 52 (= 15, 4th edn.) (1985), 327.19–25; trans. Layton, 433).

⁷ Basilides, *Myth*, preserved in Irenaeus, *haer.* 1. 24. 6 (Rousseau and Doutreleau, SC 264 (1979), 330; trans. Layton, 425).

⁸ Valentinus (?), *Gospel of Truth* 26. 8 (Attridge and MacRae, 94; trans. Layton, 257).

⁹ *Ibid.* 20. 30–2 (Attridge and MacRae, 88; trans. Layton, 255).

his advent was to enlighten, to instruct, to guide: he came specifically to serve as a teacher of divine ‘knowledge’ or ‘acquaintance’ (Gr. *γνώσις*).¹⁰ For those who have heeded his instruction and have gained personal knowledge of God, the material world and the physical body ultimately pass away ‘in the harmony of unity’ with the Godhead.¹¹

Like Basilides and Valentinus a generation or two before him, Clement of Alexandria (c.160–c.215) placed high value on divine knowledge (*γνώσις*) in his theology, and this emphasis significantly informs his discussion of the Incarnation. Indeed, he explicitly depicts the Word as an instructor (*παιδαγωγός*) who ‘first exhorts, then trains, and finally teaches with all thoroughness.’¹² For Clement, knowledge of God is synonymous with ‘everlasting salvation’; it is ‘the first good work of the perfect person . . . to live one’s life according to the image and likeness of the Lord.’¹³ Accordingly, the function of the Incarnation itself is to instruct humanity in the sober, righteous, and godly life: ‘The Word, providing us with life in the beginning when he formed us as our creator, taught us to live well when he appeared as our teacher, in order that, as God, he might later lead us into eternal life.’¹⁴ Here, Clement specifically situates the Incarnation within the context of a larger biblical narrative that begins with the creation story in Genesis: the Incarnation is presented as the fulfilment of the Word’s role as creator, as the remaking of the divine ‘image and likeness’ in humanity, to whom the Word has imparted knowledge (rationality) and eternal life (immortality).¹⁵

In this context, Clement conspicuously describes the salvific effects of the Incarnation—namely, the human reacquisition of God’s image—in terms of a process of deification.¹⁶ Thus, in his treatise called *The Instructor (Paedagogos)* he exhorts his readers to meditate on ‘the heavenly way of life according to which we have been deified’ (*ἡ ἐπουράνιος . . . πολιτεία, καθ’ ἣν ἐκθεοούμεθα*).¹⁷ Elsewhere, in his *Exhortation to the Greeks (Protreptikos)*, he specifically grounds this heavenly mode of life in the Word’s revelatory act of taking on flesh: ‘The

¹⁰ Valentinus (?), *Gospel of Truth* 18. 18–19. 20 (Attridge and MacRae, 84–6; trans. Layton, 254).

¹¹ *Ibid.* 24. 25–25. 7 (Attridge and MacRae, 92–4; trans. Layton, 257).

¹² Clement of Alexandria, *paed.* 1. 1. 3. 3 (ed. Marrou, SC 70 (1960), 112).

¹³ *Id.*, *str.* 4. 22. 136. 2–137.1 (Früchtel, Stählin, and Treu, GCS 52 (= 15, 4th edn.) (1985), 308–9).

¹⁴ *Id.*, *prot.* 1. 7. 3 (Stählin and Treu, 7–8).

¹⁵ *Id.*, *paed.* 1. 12. 98. 2 (Marrou, SC 70 (1960), 284).

¹⁶ On Clement’s doctrine of ‘deification’ and the language he employs, see Norman Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*, 121–40; and Jules Gross, *La Divinisation du Chrétien*, 159–74. It should be noted that Clement employs several verbal forms to convey the concept of deification, including *θεοποιεῖν*, *θεοῦν*, and *ἐκθεοῦν*; however, the noun form (*θεοποίησις*) does not come into Greek Christian usage until Athanasius uses it in the fourth century: see the detailed study of Clement’s vocabulary in Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*, 122–3.

¹⁷ Clement of Alexandria, *paed.* 1. 12. 98. 3 (Marrou, SC 70 (1960), 284).

Word himself speaks to you distinctly now, shaming your lack of belief; yes, I say, the Word of God became human, in order that you may learn from a human being how a human being may possibly become a god.¹⁸ Clement is the first Alexandrian theologian to utilize the language of ‘deification’ to describe the fruits of the Incarnation for humankind, and (as we shall see) his reciprocal conception of this salvific transaction would later be adopted and popularized by Athanasius of Alexandria in the fourth century.¹⁹

For Clement, it is the Word’s embodiment that specifically enables this human appropriation of the divine life; yet he says fairly little about the salvific effects the Incarnation had upon human bodies. Indeed, his comments on this subject are primarily restricted to his treatise, *The Instructor*, where he describes how Christ, by taking on a body, grants incorruptibility to human flesh: ‘He says, “I will be their Shepherd, and I will be near to them, as the garment for their skin.” He wishes to save my flesh by clothing it in the garment of immortality, and he has anointed my skin.’²⁰ Here, the Word’s own flesh functions as a garment of incorruptibility for the bodies of human beings who are being perfected by the Word. In the same way, the sanctified human body, now rendered incorruptible, is seen to function as ‘incorrupt clothing for the soul’ (ἡ ἀκρίματος τῆς ψυχῆς ἐσθής).²¹ Ultimately for Clement, the true beauty of the human body is realized not through cosmetics or other artificial adornments, but through self-restraint (σωφροσύνη). Through effective self-restraint, a person embodies incorruptibility (the particular kind of beauty belonging to the Word’s own body) and thereby ‘becomes a god because God wishes it.’²²

However, despite these isolated instances where Clement speaks of the body’s role in deification, the primary locus for such deification remained

¹⁸ *Id.*, *prot.* 1. 8. 4 (Stählin and Treu, 9).

¹⁹ Irenaeus earlier originally introduced such an ‘exchange formula’ expressing the relationship between the doctrines of Incarnation and deification in his treatise *Against Heresies* when he affirmed that the Son ‘became what we are in order to make us what he is himself’ (*factus est quod sumus nos, uti nos perficeret esse quod et ipse*): Irenaeus, *haer.* 5. praef (Rousseau, Doutreleau, and Mercier, SC 153 (1969), 14). On Irenaeus’ use of this formula and its possible influence over Clement and Athanasius, see N. Russell (*Doctrine of Deification*, 106, 125, 169). Papyrological evidence has shown that Irenaeus’ work was already circulating in Egypt in the second or third century CE: see *P. Oxy.* iii. 405; C. H. Roberts, *Manuscript, Society and Belief in Early Christian Egypt*, 23; and H. I. Bell, ‘Evidences of Christianity in Egypt during the Roman Period’ 202. Elsewhere, Clement also makes reference to the Greek philosopher Heraclitus in supporting a similar point: ‘Therefore Heraclitus correctly said, “Human beings are gods and gods are human beings.” It is the same Logos. This is a manifest mystery: God is in a human being, and the human being is a god...’ (Clement of Alexandria, *paed.* 3. 1. 2; Marrou, SC 158 (1970), 12).

²⁰ Clement of Alexandria, *paed.* 1. 9. 84. 3–4 (Marrou, SC 70 (1960), 260).

²¹ *Ibid.* 2. 10 bis. 109. 3 (Marrou, SC 108 (1965), 208).

²² *Ibid.* 3. 1. 2 (Marrou, SC 158 (1970), 12). Here, I am particularly indebted to Norman Russell (*Doctrine of Deification*, esp. 127, 135) for his observations on Clement’s theory of deification and its implications for the human body.

for him, in the end, the human intellect or soul. Thus, he writes in his treatise entitled *Stromateis*, or *Miscellanies*, ‘With respect to likeness according to the image, it is not made known according to the body . . . but according to mind and reason, on which the Lord fittingly impresses his likeness both with regard to good work and with regard to rule.’²³ The Incarnation mediates a knowledge (*γνώσις*) of God that ‘guides us to the endless and perfect end’ in anticipation of ‘the life that we will have according to God and with gods.’²⁴ Knowledge purifies human beings, ‘it relocates the soul to what is akin to it—to the divine and holy—and it transports humanity by a certain light of its own across the mystical stages of advancement . . . having taught the person who is pure in heart to gaze (*ἐποπτεύειν*) upon God, face to face, with knowledge and comprehension.’²⁵

Clement significantly draws on both biblical and philosophical terminology in speaking about this divinization of the soul. On the one hand, he borrows Paul’s language of christological ‘imitation’ in 1 Corinthians 11: 1 (*μιμηταί μου γίνεσθε καθὼς καὶ γὰρ Χριστοῦ*) to describe the soul’s ‘assimilation’ (*ἐξομοίωσις*) to God as the aim of faith.²⁶ On the other hand, he borrows from Platonic and Pythagorean thought to underscore that such assimilation is primarily attained through philosophical contemplation. Invoking Plato’s theory of ‘ideal forms’, Clement writes about how human beings partake of ‘the good’ and receive their likeness from it by appropriating virtue and philosophy.²⁷ Elsewhere, appealing to the Pythagorean ideal ‘that humanity ought to become one’ just as God is one, he describes how the person who practises contemplation is ‘deified into a passionless state’ (*εἰς δὲ τὴν ἀπάθειαν θεούμενος*), and ‘becomes a unit’ (*μοναδικὸς γίνεται*).²⁸ According to Clement, it is ultimately the ‘gnostic’ (*ὁ γνωστικός*)—the one who has attained knowledge of God through contemplation of God’s self-revelation in the Incarnation—who has been made

²³ *Id.*, *str.* 2. 19. 102. 6–7 (ed. Früchtel, Stählin, and Treu, GCS 52 (=15, 4th edn.) (1985), 169).

²⁴ *Ibid.* 7. 10. 56. 3 (ed. Früchtel, Stählin, and Treu, GCS 17, 2nd edn. (1970), 41).

²⁵ *Ibid.* 7. 10. 57. 1 (ed. Früchtel, Stählin, and Treu, *ibid.* 41). The verb *ἐποπτεύειν* (‘to gaze upon’) can also convey the sense of being philosophically initiated into the divine mysteries. In commenting on this passage, J. Gross (*La Divinisation du Chrétien*, 163) notes that, for Clement, ‘deification is realized by degrees or stages’, leading from ‘kindness’ to ‘faith’ and then from ‘faith’ to ‘knowledge’ (*γνώσις*).

²⁶ *Ibid.* 2. 22. 136. 5–6 (Früchtel, Stählin, and Treu, GCS 52 (=15, 4th edn.) (1985), 188); J. Gross, *La Divinisation du chrétien*, 160–1.

²⁷ *Ibid.* 2. 22. 131. 2 (Früchtel, Stählin, and Treu, GCS 52 (=15, 4th edn.) (1985), 185). On Clement’s use of Platonic philosophy, see Salvatore R. C. Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria* (1971).

²⁸ *Ibid.* 4. 23. 151. 3–152. 1 (Früchtel, Stählin, and Treu, GCS 52 (=15, 4th edn.) (1960), 315). Gross (*La Divinisation du chrétien*, 169–70) also connects Clement’s description of this passionless state to the Stoic virtue of ‘impassibility’ (*ἀπάθεια*).

‘divine... holy, God-bearing, and God-borne’ (θεῖος... ἅγιος, θεοφορῶν καὶ θεοφορούμενος).²⁹

Finally, Clement also draws on images from the agape meal celebrated at the eucharist to illustrate the way that the Word provides the soul with such knowledge of God through the Incarnation. Presenting a creative, figurative reading of John 6: 54, 56 (‘eat my flesh and drink my blood’), he interprets the flesh as the Holy Spirit and the blood as the Word—as a result, the food shared in the meal signifies ‘the Word of God, the Spirit made flesh, the heavenly flesh sanctified.’³⁰ Following ancient medical theories about the conversion of blood into milk within the body of a nursing mother, Clement further allegorizes the Word and the blood as milk provided by the ‘care-soothing breast of the Father.’³¹ The sacrament, along with the image of the nursing mother, serves as a metaphor for the way that the Word inclined toward humankind as his children and became ‘nourishment’ (τροφή) for human souls. In Clement’s eyes, ‘the Word is everything to the child, father and mother, tutor and nurse’; and accordingly, he interprets the milk of the Word not as a form of physical nourishment but as ‘knowledge which comes from instruction.’³² Ultimately then for Clement, participation in the eucharist does not so much mediate this nourishment in any direct sense; rather, it points mystically toward the Incarnation as the event whereby the Word communicates knowledge of himself—a knowledge that nourishes (ἐκτρέφειν) to immortality and utterly abandons (ἀπολείπειν) the desires of the flesh.³³

A generation after Clement, in the writings of Origen of Alexandria, one encounters really the first systematic attempts by an Alexandrian theologian to think about the problems of divine embodiment posed by the doctrine of

²⁹ Ibid. 7. 13. 82. 2–3 (Früchtel, Stählin, and Treu, GCS 17, 2nd edn. (1970), 58). In laying claim to the designation, ‘gnostic’, Clement distinguishes between the knowledge held by true Christians and the (false) knowledge claimed by ‘heretics’ (str. 7. 15. 90. 1–91. 3; GCS 17, 2nd edn. (1970), 64).

³⁰ Id., *paed.* 1. 6. 43. 2–3 (Marrou, SC 70 (1960), 188; trans. ANF ii. 220).

³¹ Ibid. 1. 6. 43. 4 (Marrou, SC 70 (1960), 188; trans. ANF ii. 220). See also *ibid.* 1. 6. 35. 3 (SC 70 (1960), 174), where the Word is likened to ‘the life-giving substance of milk that wells out from tender-loving breasts’.

³² Ibid. 1. 6. 42. 3 and 1. 6. 36. 4 (Marrou, SC 70 (1960), 186–8 and 176). Clement writes, ‘We are enjoined to cast off... the old nutriment, receiving in exchange another new regimen, that of Christ, receiving him, if we can, to hide him within; and that, enshrining the Savior in our souls, we may correct the affections of our flesh.’

³³ Ibid. 1. 6. 47. 1 (Marrou, SC 70 (1960), 194); see also 1. 6. 47. 3 (SC 70, 196), where he makes the allegorical function of the eucharistic wine explicit. On the eucharistic associations of Clement’s use of John 6 and the image of mother’s milk, see A. H. C. Van Eijk, ‘The Gospel of Philip and Clement of Alexandria’ 106–17; and Anniewies (van de Bunt) van den Hoek, ‘Milk and Honey in the Theology of Clement of Alexandria’ 27–39. Denise Kimber Buell’s resistance to the notion that Clement held to a doctrine of real presence (a resistance that I wholeheartedly share) leads her to take a somewhat equivocating stance on Clement’s symbolic concern with the eucharist in this passage: see *Making Christians: Clement of Alexandria and the Rhetoric of Legitimacy*, 145–6.

the Incarnation. In his masterwork, *On First Principles*, Origen articulates the philosophical dilemma he faced in imagining how God became human, of envisioning how the perfect supreme Being took on imperfect flesh.

When . . . we see in him some things so human that they appear in no way to differ from the common frailty of mortals, and some things so divine that they are appropriate to nothing else but the primal and ineffable nature of deity, the human understanding with its narrow limits is baffled, and struck with amazement at so mighty a wonder knows not which way to turn, what to hold to, or whither to betake itself. If it thinks of God, it sees a man; if it thinks of a man, it beholds one returning from the dead with spoils after vanquishing the kingdom of death.³⁴

Origen expresses the paradox or mystery of the Incarnation as part of a divine ‘economy’ (οἰκονομία) that encompasses God’s providential actions even before the creation narrated in Genesis.³⁵ As in the case of Clement, Origen trains his attention on human souls as the primary beneficiaries of this plan of salvation, but he goes far beyond Clement in developing a fuller account of Christ’s own human soul and the role it played in the Incarnation.

As a speculative theologian, Origen was keenly interested in conjecturing about the nature of the divine realms and raising questions regarding the existence of the cosmos before the creation of the material world. In an attempt to answer such questions, he envisioned a primeval cosmos in which all rational beings (οἱ λογικοί) or ‘minds’ (οἱ νόες) enjoyed a blissful union with God and shared in God’s eternal attribute of love, which is conceived of as a form of warmth or heat.³⁶

However, according Origen’s cosmology, this original union was disrupted by a heavenly fall of these rational beings from the singular, divine perfection. He pictures this fall as one grounded in free will: after becoming distracted from the contemplation of God and choosing to sin, the rational beings begin

³⁴ Origen of Alexandria, *princ.* 2. 6. 2 (Koetschau, GCS 22 (1913), 141. 5–11; trans. Butterworth, 109); J. W. Trigg, *Origen: The Bible and Philosophy*, 100.

³⁵ J. W. Trigg, *Origen* (1998), 26–9. Clement of Alexandria uses the term ‘economy’ (οἰκονομία) extensively to refer to God’s plan of salvation manifest in creation and fulfilled in the coming of Christ: see, e.g., *str.* 1. 11. 52. 2–3; 2. 5. 20. 2; 2. 6. 29. 2; 4. 12. 88. 2; 4. 23. 148. 2; 5. 1. 6. 2; 5. 8. 55. 3, 5. 14. 108. 2; 6. 6. 47. 1, 6. 13. 107. 2; 6. 15. 124. 2; 6. 15. 127. 1; 7. 9. 53. 5 (Früchtel, Stählin, and Treu, GCS 52 (=15, 4th edn.) (1985), 34, 123, 128, 286, 314, 329, 363, 398, 455, 485, 494, 496; GCS 17, 2nd edn. (1970), 40. For selected examples of Origen’s use of the same term, see *princ.* 3. 1. 17 (Koetschau, GCS 22 (1913), 226. 7 and 228. 10); and *Cels.* 2. 65, 69; 4. 8, 14; 5. 50; 6. 78 (Borret, SC 132 (1967), 438, 446; SC 136 (1968), 206, 216; SC 147 (1969), 142, 376).

³⁶ Peter Heimann (*Erwähltes Schicksal*), and Hendrik S. Benjamins (*Eingeordnete Freiheit und Vorsehung bei Origenes*, 140–4) have argued that Origen espoused a doctrine of pre-existent souls that was profoundly indebted to Platonic thought. However, Mark Edwards (*Origen Against Plato*, 89–97) has sharply critiqued this viewpoint, arguing that Origen’s dependence on Plato has been overstated in patristic scholarship and that the Alexandrian theologian does not, properly speaking, hold to the pre-existence of souls.

to cool, condense, and fall away from God.³⁷ In the process, they become souls; for, as Origen observed, the Greek word for soul, *psychē*, comes from the verb *psychesthai*, meaning ‘to cool’. As these souls fall, God transforms their ethereal bodies into material bodies that differed according to their degree of merit or demerit. Some souls end up being assigned to archangels and angels, some to human beings, some to demons and the devil (who is cast as the most material of all such beings).³⁸

According to Origen, the mind of Christ was the only one that did not become distracted and sink away from God; his was the only ‘soul’ that did not cool off in this primeval fall. In remaining united with God, Christ’s soul thoroughly assimilated God’s ‘essential attributes’ (*substantiae*),³⁹ and was therefore ideally equipped to function as the crucial mediating element between the divine Word and Christ’s human body in the Incarnation.⁴⁰

Therefore, in Origen’s thought, the Incarnation marks the union of both the Word and Christ’s human soul (which are bound together from eternity) with the body of Jesus in the womb of the Virgin Mary.⁴¹ As in the case of Christ’s soul and its union with the divine Word prior to creation, so too in the case of his human body assumed by the Word in the Incarnation: in both instances, the superior power of the Word effects a change in that with which it unites.⁴²

³⁷ Origen of Alexandria, *princ.* 2. 1. 1–2 and 2. 8. 3 (Koetschau, GCS 22 (1913), 106–8, 155–61; trans. Butterworth, 76–8, 122–7). On the role of free will in Origen’s theological system, see H. Koch, *Pronoia und Paideusis*, 26–8.

³⁸ It is important to note here that in Origen’s thought ‘the imprisonment of the *logikoi* in coarse and painful material bodies was not entirely punitive’, but rather was intended ‘to rehabilitate the mind by rekindling the heat/fire of their desire to return to the bliss of their heavenly contemplation of God’ (Warren Smith, *per litt.*, 16 January 2007). On this point and others, Warren Smith’s comments were invaluable in helping me present a concise summary of what is a dauntingly complex aspect of Origen’s theology.

³⁹ In comparing the nature of God with that of creatures, Origen contrasts the essential attributes (*substantiae*) of the former to the accidental attributes (*accidentes*) of the latter: see *princ.* 1. 2. 10, 13 and 2. 6. 6 (Koetschau, GCS 22 (1913), 44, 48, 146; trans. Butterworth, 25–6, 28, 113). On this subject, it should be noted that Origen, in drawing a philosophical distinction between the categories of essence and attributes, still leaves room for both the absoluteness and relativity/relationality of God’s attributes. Thus, while he recognizes some of God’s attributes are absolute (e.g. wisdom and power), he also can affirm that some others are relative or relational in character (e.g. sanctification, redemption): see *Jo.* 1. 34. 248 (Preuschen, GCS 10 (1903), 44).

⁴⁰ Trigg, *Origen: The Bible and Philosophy*, 100–1. On the human soul of Christ, see also Rowan Williams, ‘Origen on the Soul of Jesus’, 131–7.

⁴¹ Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers*, 392–4. Wolfson argues that, in Origen’s thought, this union took place ‘not at the conception of the body nor at its birth but at the completion of its human form in the womb’ (393–4), which in antiquity was thought to take place around forty to fifty days after conception: see Philo of Alexandria, *Quaestiones in Genesim* 1. 25 (Mercier, 90); and Aetius, *De placitis reliquiae* 5. 21. 1–2 (Diels, 433).

⁴² Wolfson (*Philosophy of the Church Fathers*, 392, 394) describes Origen’s model of incarnate union as one that emphasizes the ‘predominance’ (*κρατούν; επικρατούν*) of the Word over Christ’s human body and soul: on the roots of this model of union in the philosophy of Aristotle and Alexander Aphrodisiensis, see *ibid.* 377–86.

Having already conferred the ‘essential attributes’ of his divinity upon Christ’s soul, the Word deifies Christ’s body as well. ‘We say that (the Word’s) mortal body and the human soul within it have received the greatest things not only by their communion (*κοινωνία*) with him, but also by their union (*ἔνωσις*) and mixing up (*ἀνάκρασις*): after having partaken of his divinity, they were changed into God.’⁴³ This passage is taken from his apologetic work *Against Celsus*. Earlier in the same treatise, he characterizes Jesus himself as a ‘partaker in the divine nature’ (cf. 2 Peter 1: 4), and then goes on to emphasize that through the Incarnation ‘the human nature and the divine began to be woven together, in order that the human, by communion with that which is more divine, might become divine, not in Jesus alone, but in all those who, with the help of faith, grasp hold of the life that Jesus taught.’⁴⁴

In such passages, one begins to discern how Origen’s doctrine of deification takes the mechanics of the Incarnation as its generative model. In Origen’s other writings, this ‘life that Jesus taught’ is variously described as a form of progress into ‘the order of angels’, a process in which the faithful become ‘sons of God’ and ‘one spirit’ with the divine Son, and a means by which they ‘become superior not only to their bodily nature, but even to the wavering and fragile movements of the soul itself’, by which the soul itself casts off the vestiges of irrationality and is made ‘wholly spiritual’.⁴⁵ Thus, through imitation of Christ’s example, human beings too may be transformed (through the vital agency of the Godhead) into ‘partakers of the divine nature’ (2 Peter 1: 4).⁴⁶

Like Clement of Alexandria before him, Origen describes the fruits of such deification primarily in terms of the rational activity of the human mind or soul.⁴⁷

⁴³ Origen of Alexandria, *Cels.* 3. 41. 7–11 (Borret, SC 136 (1968), 96). For a study of Origen’s christological use of the term *ἀνάκρασις*, see Annewies van den Hoek, ‘Origen’s Role in Formulating Later Christological Language’, 39–50, esp. 45 ff.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 3. 28. 46–9 (Borret, SC 136 (1968), 68); see also Henry Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition*, 91–2; P. Brown, *Body and Society*, 175.

⁴⁵ *Id.*, *princ.* 1. 8. 4 (Koetschau, GCS 22 (1913), 101–2; trans. Butterworth, 72).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 4. 4. 4 (Koetschau, GCS 22 (1913), 355; trans. Butterworth, 319). Norman Russell (‘Partakers of the Divine Nature’, 55) describes Origen’s concept of human participation in the divine as a ‘dynamic’ one in which ‘the higher reality “informs” the lower, endowing it with its attributes’, and eliciting a response of moral imitation. H. Crouzel (*Théologie de l’image de Dieu*, 173) has likewise highlighted how, in Origen’s doctrine of deification, human beings ‘are made gods and sons and *logika*’ through the volitional action of the Father and Son/Logos. Even though Origen can describe both humans and Christ himself as ‘partakers of the divine nature’ (*θείας κοινωνοὶ φύσεως*) in *Against Celsus* and *On First Principles*, Russell (‘Partakers’, 56) is careful to emphasize that the Alexandrian theologian, in his writings on the Psalms, maintains a functional distinction between a person’s becoming a god ‘by participation’ (*κατὰ μετουσίαν*) and Christ’s self-existence as God ‘by nature’ (*κατ’ οὐσίαν*): see Origen of Alexandria, *sel. in Ps.* 135 (PG 12. 1656A).

⁴⁷ See e.g. Origen of Alexandria, *princ.* 4. 4. 9 (Koetschau, GCS 22 (1913), 362; trans. Butterworth, 326), where he defines divine nature as ‘intellectual light’: N. Russell, ‘Partakers of the Divine Nature’, 53.

This is especially evident in ch. 2 of his *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, where he emphasizes the connection between the Word's singular status as divine Reason and our multiple participation in the Word as rational beings: 'The Word (δ λόγος) is the source of the reason (δ λόγος) that is in each rational being (δ λογικός); the reason (δ λόγος) which is in each creature is not like the former called, *par excellence*, the Word (δ λόγος).'⁴⁸ Later in the same work, Origen similarly describes how human beings are endowed with reason, how 'we become rational creatures (λογικοί) in a divinely inspired manner (ἐνθέως).'⁴⁹

Thus, Origen defines human deification in terms of a parallel correspondence between God's divine essence and our participation (μετοχή) in God's attributes.⁵⁰ 'Everything that exists besides the Very God is deified by participation in God's divinity, and is not to be called 'God' (δ θεός, with the article), but rather, more properly, 'god' (θεός, without the article).'⁵¹ In the end, it is the incarnate Christ who effects this transformation in human beings: having drawn divinity from the Godhead like water from a well 'so that they might be deified, he gave them a bounteous share of it according to his good nature.'⁵² Human beings are said to 'take the form of gods' (μορφοῦσθαι θεοί) when they remain, along with the Word, 'in unceasing contemplation of the Father's depths.'⁵³ Through such rational contemplation, human souls hold the potential for reattaining union with God.⁵⁴

While Origen could readily envision the divinization of the human soul, the human body also began to play a role (albeit, a somewhat more ambivalent one) in his doctrine of human salvation. The fact that Christ's body attained union (ἔνωσις) with divinity to such an extent that it was 'changed into God' (εἰς θεὸν μεταβεβληκέναι) raises the potential that it should serve as

⁴⁸ Origen of Alexandria, *Jo.* 2. 2. 15 (Preuschen, GCS 10 (1903), 54).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 1. 37. 268 (Preuschen, GCS 10 (1903), 47).

⁵⁰ Origen is the first Alexandrian writer to use the term 'participation' (μετοχή) in a technical, metaphysical sense to describe the relation of human beings to the divine Word: see H. Crouzel, *Théologie de l'image de Dieu*, 172–5; and Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*, 147–52. Russell (147 ff.) notes three implications of Origen's idea of divine participation: (1) its non-corporeal nature, (2) the fundamental kinship between participant and participated, and (3) the distinction between natural or ontological participation on the one hand and supernatural or dynamic participation on the other.

⁵¹ Origen of Alexandria, *Jo.* 2. 2. 17 (Preuschen, GCS 10 (1903), 54). Later in the same work, Origen describes human appropriation of divine attributes in terms of a correspondence of images mediated through the person of Christ: 'For as the Very God and True God the Father relates to his image (i.e. Christ) and to the images of his image (i.e. human beings) . . . so too the Very Word (δ αὐτόλογος) relates to the reason (δ λόγος) in each human being' (*Jo.* 2. 3. 20; Preuschen, GCS 10 (1903), 55).

⁵² *Ibid.* 2. 2. 17 (Preuschen, GCS 10 (1903), 55).

⁵³ *Ibid.* 2. 2. 18 (Preuschen, GCS 10 (1903), 55).

⁵⁴ Trigg, *Origen: The Bible and Philosophy*, 103.

a model for the ‘deification’ of human physical bodies as well.⁵⁵ Indeed, in Origen’s *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, Christ is identified as ‘the pattern for the entire unified body of the saved’.⁵⁶ However, Origen notably characterizes the nature of Christ’s bodily participation in divinity in terms of a ‘lightening’ of the flesh: ‘It follows upon this to investigate whether it is possible to see in human affairs something between “the Word became flesh” and “the Word was God”—in such a way that the Word was reconstituted and made lighter little by little after he had become flesh, in order that he might become what he was in the beginning, God the Word who is with the Father.’⁵⁷ Thus, when Origen speaks about the deification of the body assumed by the incarnate Word, he in fact is envisioning a process whereby that body is increasingly divested of its fleshly aspects.

One sees a mimetic correspondence to this christological lightening of the flesh in Origen’s eschatological descriptions of human bodies and the forms they are to take in their final redeemed (i.e. deified) state.⁵⁸ While he does not arrive at a definitive answer on the subject, he tends to support the notion that, in this state, human bodies either ‘lead a bodiless existence’, or at the very least are ‘united to best and purest spirits’ and ‘changed . . . into an ethereal condition’.⁵⁹

However, in this life, it is the soul’s contemplation of God that specifically anticipates and enacts this future condition: ‘An intellect which has been purified and has transcended all material things is deified (*θεοποιεῖται*) by what it contemplates in order that it may perfect the contemplation of God.’⁶⁰ Furthermore, prayer and the cultivation of moral virtues are prerequisites for those who wish to be deified: by ‘praying without ceasing’ (1 Thess. 5: 17), one acquires ‘a condition that is being deified by the Word’.⁶¹ Through such prayerful contemplation, souls are ‘fed’ (*τρεφόμενοι*) by the Word—‘the supra-substantial bread’ (*ὁ ἐπουσίσιος ἄρτος*)—and thereby experience a foretaste of deification.⁶² Here, Origen invokes the image of eucharistic participation in the

⁵⁵ Origen of Alexandria, *Cels.* 3. 41. 11 (Borret, SC 136 (1968), 96). Along these lines, Gross sees in Origen’s writings ‘an echo of the physical theory of divinization,’ which provides that doctrine with ‘a proper physiognomy’ (*La Divinisation du chrétien*, 179, cf. 175).

⁵⁶ Origen of Alexandria, *Jo.* 1. 31. 225 (Preuschen, GCS 10 (1903), 40).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 1. 37. 276. 1–6 (Preuschen, GCS 10 (1903), 48–9).

⁵⁸ Gross (*La Divinisation du chrétien*, 172) characterizes resurrection in a glorified body as the final fulfilment of the process of human divinization in Origen’s theology.

⁵⁹ Origen of Alexandria, *princ.* 2. 3. 7 (P. Koetschau, GCS 22 (1913), 125; trans. Butterworth, 93); cf. *ibid.* 1. 7. 5; 2. 2. 1–2; 3. 6. 1–4. For a discussion of Origen’s eschatology of the body, see Trigg, *Origen: The Bible and Philosophy*, 112.

⁶⁰ Origen of Alexandria, *Jo.* 32. 27. 338–9 (Preuschen, GCS 10 (1903), 472).

⁶¹ *Id.*, *or.* 25. 2 (Koetschau, GCS 3 (1899), 358. 21–4). On prayer as a form of spiritual participation and on Origen’s understanding of the word *ἐπουσίσιος* in the Lord’s Prayer, see Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*, 142–3.

⁶² *Ibid.* 27. 13. 1–4 (Koetschau, GCS 3 (1899), 371. 27–372. 2).

body of Christ, but (like Clement) interprets this participation as one that primarily pertained to the spiritual faculties of the human soul.⁶³ For this third-century Alexandrian author, the significance of the human body for eucharistic practice still remained largely unexplored.

REALIZED BODIES: ALEXANDRIAN CHRISTOLOGY IN THE FOURTH AND FIFTH CENTURIES

The fourth and fifth centuries witnessed a marked shift in the way that Alexandrian Greek theologians understood the Incarnation and its salvific import for the process of deification. In the writings of Athanasius and Cyril, one encounters a more positive reassessment of the body's role, both as the locus and vehicle for the Word's action, and as an indispensable setting for human participation in the Word. Earlier, Clement and Origen had understood such deifying participation primarily in three different senses:

1. nominally, or titularly, as a means of interpreting the application of the term 'gods' to human beings in biblical texts such as Psalm 82: 6;
2. analogously, as a means of drawing comparisons between e.g. the status of human beings as sons and gods 'by grace', and the status of Christ as Son and God 'by nature'; and
3. ethically, as a means of describing human 'attainment of likeness to God' through philosophical contemplation, prayer, and the cultivation of moral virtues.⁶⁴

In the fourth and fifth centuries, the writings of Athanasius and Cyril began to introduce into Alexandrian Christian discourse additional ways of understanding human participation in the divine. While retaining aspects of the earlier models, Athanasius embraced what has been called a 'realistic' approach to the doctrine of deification, in which human beings are actually understood to be transformed in some way through the action of the incarnate Word.⁶⁵ For

⁶³ For broader studies of Origen's eucharistic theology, see Lothar Lies, *Wort und Eucharistie bei Origenes*; and Hermann Josef Vogt, 'Eucharistielehre des Origenes?', 277–88.

⁶⁴ Here and in the following discussion, I utilize the system of classification employed by Russell, in *Doctrine of Deification*, 1–2, 163. According to Russell (154–61), the fourth-century Alexandrian monk and teacher, Didymus the Blind, largely followed the paradigm set by Origen on the question of deification.

⁶⁵ Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*, 14; see also Carolyn Schneider ('The Intimate Connection between Christ and Christians in Athanasius', 1–12), who likewise highlights the 'realness' of Athanasian participation in Christ. However, Schneider's almost exclusively Platonic reading of Athanasius' christology prevents her from analysing fully the function of the body in his doctrine of divine participation.

Athanasius, it was expected that such a transformation would make itself manifest in ethical (especially ascetic) action, but its ontological basis was understood to precede such action, to have been actualized in the Word's act of taking on a body. In the following century, Cyril would expand upon Athanasius' 'realistic' approach by exploring more thoroughly the role of the sacraments as a venue for enacting and embodying the ontological transformation brought about by the Incarnation.⁶⁶ In the case of both of these Alexandrian theologians, the relationship between the body of Christ and the bodies of Christians takes on a vital, new significance for their Christology.

Athanasius of Alexandria

Athanasius' *On the Incarnation* (*De Incarnatione*) was the first large-scale treatise by an Alexandrian theologian devoted to the subject of the Word made flesh. Written sometime between 328 and 335 CE, it in fact was the second half of a double work whose first part was entitled, *Against the Nations* (*Contra Gentes*).⁶⁷ In this pair of treatises, Athanasius presented the Incarnation

⁶⁶ While I find Russell's classification system helpful for characterizing and contrasting the different ways that Clement and Origen (on the one hand) and Athanasius and Cyril (on the other) applied the doctrine of deification in their writings, I disagree with his decision to characterize Athanasius' christology as both 'realistic' and 'sacramental'. In applying the latter term to the fourth-century Alexandrian father's christology, Russell (*Doctrine of Deification*, 163) falls prey to an anachronistic tendency to read Athanasius' theology in the light of later developments only fully realized in his fifth-century successor, Cyril.

⁶⁷ Athanasius' treatises *Against the Nations* and *On the Incarnation* bear no traces of the heated issues that arose during the Arian Controversy, and for this reason it was long assumed that the two works were composed prior to the onset of that debate (318 CE), or at latest prior to the Council of Nicaea (325 CE) where Arius' doctrine was condemned. This early range of dating, introduced in the nineteenth century, has been generally adhered to by J. C. M. van Winden and E. P. Meijering: see Winden, 'On the Date of Athanasius's Apologetical Treatises', 291–5; Meijering, *Athanasius: Contra Gentes*, 1–5; and Meijering (with Winden), *Athanasius: De Incarnatione Verbi*, 11–20. Based on the theological maturity of these works and a possible allusion to Athanasius' being in exile (namely, his complaint about not having his teachers' writings at hand in *Against the Nations*, ch. 1), Charles Kannengiesser has pressed for a later date of around 337: see 'La Date de l'Apologie d'Athanasie Contre les païens et Sur l'Incarnation du Verbe', 383–428, esp. 418. The absence of any mention of an Arian threat is explained by Kannengiesser as a result of Athanasius' need to be politically circumspect during his first exile.

More recent theories have targeted the time period between these earlier and later datings. T. D. Barnes (*Athanasius and Constantius*, 12–13), has suggested the date range of 325–8, arguing that Athanasius composed the two works with Eusebius' *Theophany* (c.325) in mind. Finally, Khaled Anatolios (*Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought*, 29) argues that Athanasius' 'subtly magisterial tone' suggests 'a date after Athanasius's ascendancy to the episcopacy and before his exile to Trier', sometime between the years 328 and 335—a period after the condemnation of Arius, during which the Alexandrian bishop 'could pretend, as far as the purposes of this treatise went, that the Arians did not exist', a perspective 'consistent with the philosophy of history propounded by the treatise, wherein the victory of the Word is rapidly gaining ground

as the culminating event within a larger biblical metanarrative that began with creation, continued with humanity's fall into sin and idolatry, and then was fulfilled with the advent of Christ, who came to earth to vanquish the demons to whom humanity had become enslaved.

Athanasius lays the groundwork for this biblical metanarrative in *Against the Nations*. He begins by recalling the story of Adam ('the man who was made first') and characterizes the consequence of his disobedience as a fall from the contemplation of God to 'the contemplation of the body'.⁶⁸ Later he revisits this pivotal event through the lens of Paul's letter to the Romans, portraying Adam's act as a fall from incorruptibility to corruptibility: 'Claiming to be wise, they became fools; and they exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God (ὁ ἀφθαρτος Θεός) for the image of a corruptible human being (φθαρτός ἄνθρωπος), of birds, of four-footed animals, and of reptiles' (Romans 1: 22–3).⁶⁹

For Athanasius, the human sin of idolatry epitomizes this fall into corruption, and at the same time it allows him to introduce the theme of false deification. Thus, in ch. 9 of *Against the Nations*, he laments the base human tendency to worship as gods the celestial bodies, the elements, the stones of the earth, wild beasts, and even 'things that do not exist at all . . . such as the dog-headed and snake-headed and ass-headed gods (worshipped) among the Egyptians'.⁷⁰ To his chagrin, humans have even celebrated their own kind as gods—'human beings and the forms of human beings, some who are still living, and others even after their death'.⁷¹ Once again, Athanasius' own Egyptian cultural landscape is mined for relevant examples: in particular, he singles out the cult of Antinous, the former male lover of the Emperor Hadrian (fl. 117–38 CE) who drowned in the Nile and whose worship was posthumously promoted by the emperor himself.⁷²

and overtaking every adversary' (ibid.). (Anatolios' argument also has the correlative benefit of supporting Barnes's theory about the works' literary dependence on Eusebius' *Theophany*.) For a similar dating based on evidence from Athanasius' *Festal Letters*, see also A. L. Pettersen, 'A Reconsideration of the Date of the *Contra Gentes-De Incarnatione*', 1030–40; and Frances M. Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon*, 69; cf. C. Kannengiesser, 'Le Témoignage des Lettres Festales', 91–100 (where he cites the evidence of the *Festal Letters* to support a slightly later dating).

⁶⁸ Athanasius of Alexandria, *gent.* 3 (Camelot, SC 18 bis (1983), 58. 1–5).

⁶⁹ Ibid. 19 (Camelot, SC 18 bis (1983), 112. 9–12).

⁷⁰ Ibid. 9 (Camelot, SC 18 bis (1983), 76. 12–13, 16–17).

⁷¹ Ibid. 9 (Camelot, SC 18 bis (1983), 76. 1–3).

⁷² Ibid. 9 (Camelot, SC 18 bis (1983), 78. 8–18); see also Clement of Alexandria, *protr.* 4. 49 (Mondésert, SC 2 (1949), 110), where he refers to Hadrian as 'the king of the Romans, who ordained Antinous a god', and goes on to present a scathing portrait of the Egyptian temple rites associated with the latter. The deification of Antinous was effectively promoted through the socio-economic administration of his cult: the city of Antinoopolis was founded in his honour, temples were dedicated to him at Antinoopolis (as well as in other cities), and artefacts with his

The Alexandrian bishop's polemic against the idolatrous deification of human beings and non-existent gods is sustained throughout the course of *Against the Nations*. In ch. 29, he asserts that the true God's nature is 'incorporeal, invisible, and intangible', and asks, 'How can they who deify creation not see that it lies outside such a definition of God?'⁷³ Later, in the very last chapter, Athanasius returns once more to this theme, delivering a final censuring word against those who 'deified things that did not exist instead of the God who actually exists'.⁷⁴

In his treatise *On the Incarnation*, the theological 'sequel' to *Against the Nations*, Athanasius turns his attention to the Incarnation proper, highlighting (1) its connection with the act of creation, and (2) its role in vanquishing idolatry. In weaving together these themes, he brings his biblical metanarrative to its conclusion in the Word's salvific act of taking on human flesh.

In the opening five chapters of his *On the Incarnation*, Athanasius presents an extended exposition on the interrelated themes of creation and incarnation.⁷⁵ The Incarnation itself is presented as the solution to the problem of human sin. Humans, having been created by God out of nothing, have devolved once again through their sin into their original state of non-existence.⁷⁶ Athanasius' operating philosophical assumption is that 'evil does not exist, but the good does'.⁷⁷ God's goodness—the very essence of divine being—is for him the true measure of existence. In this context, the Incarnation then represents the 'renewal' (*ἀνακαίνισις*) of creation by 'the Word who made it according to (the way it was in) the beginning'.⁷⁸ Just as the original creation was an expression of God's goodness (*ἀγαθότης*) and lovingkindness (*φιλανθρωπία*),⁷⁹ so too the

image (coins, medallions, sculptural busts, and plaques) were produced *en masse*. On the ancient Egyptian cult of Antinous, see R. Lambert, *Beloved and God*, esp. 177–97; and Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*, 32–3. In his treatise *On the Incarnation* (*inc.* 49. 2–3; Kannengiesser, 444), Athanasius mentions Asclepius and Heracles as two other mortal heroes who had been 'deified' by the Greeks.

⁷³ Athanasius of Alexandria, *gent.* 29 (Camelot, SC 18 bis (1983), 144. 2–3, 20–2).

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 47 (Camelot, SC 18 bis (1983), 210. 7–8).

⁷⁵ E. P. Meijering (*Orthodoxy and Platonism in Athanasius*, 40) describes the first five chapters of *On the Incarnation* as largely a 'recapitulation' of what was said in his first volume, *Against the Nations*; however, in these same chapters he also clearly highlights the Incarnation as his principal new focus in what was to follow.

⁷⁶ Athanasius of Alexandria, *inc.* 3. 1; 4. 5; 5. 1 (Kannengiesser, 268, 276–8).

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 4. 5 (Kannengiesser, 278). Anatolios (*Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought*, 36) describes the ontological relationship of humans to God in Athanasius as one that exhibits a magnetic polarizing movement 'towards either a secure permanence in communion with God or a confirmed drift to corruption and non-being'. For a judicious discussion of Athanasius' theology of evil in relation to contemporary Neoplatonic views of evil as a privation of the good, see Alwyn Pettersen, *Athanasius and the Human Body*, 94–9.

⁷⁸ Athanasius of Alexandria, *inc.* 1. 4 (Kannengiesser, 262). Virginia Burrus ('*Begotten, Not Made*', 44) describes Athanasius' discourse as 'a narrative of redemption-as-recreation'.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 3. 3 and 4. 5 (Kannengiesser, 270, 276).

Incarnation of the Word naturally flows out of that same goodness and loving-kindness: thus, in the very first chapter of the treatise he writes, ‘Being incorporeal by nature, and existing from the beginning as Word, he has been made manifest to us in a human body for our salvation, in accordance with the lovingkindness and goodness of his own Father.’⁸⁰

This analogy drawn between the divine acts of creation and incarnation is extended and developed later in Athanasius’ treatise. In ch. 14, the author specifically draws on the language of Genesis 1, describing the Incarnation as an act by means of which the ‘image’ (εἰκῶν) of the Father was renewed in humankind.⁸¹ To illustrate his point, he again draws from Egyptian material culture, comparing the divine renewal of humankind to the process whereby the faded outline of a face painted on a wooden panel—like those found on the famous Fayyūm burial portraits—‘is capable of being renewed on the same wood.’⁸² Here, the face or image is likened to the human soul, while the wood is likened to the human body. In this context, Athanasius’ ensuing comments are noteworthy: he emphasizes that ‘on account of that painted image, the wood itself on which (the image) has been painted, is not thrown away, but rather the image is renewed upon it.’⁸³ Here, the body is understood to be not only the bearer of the soul, but also the indispensable setting for the soul’s (and its own) renewal.

The importance Athanasius places on the body for the salvific connection between creation and incarnation is accentuated again in ch. 18, where he describes the nativity of Christ in terms of the Word’s *creation of a body for himself*. ‘On this account, even in the beginning, when he was descending to us, he fashioned for himself the body from a virgin, lest he furnish to all (only) a small token of his divinity, since the one who fashioned this body is himself also the maker of everything else.’⁸⁴ The Incarnation thus becomes a second act of creation, and the creative divine power possessed by the incarnate Word is seen to be confirmed time and time again in the Gospels—as, for example, when Christ transforms the substance of water into wine, when he walks on the surface of the sea, and when he feeds the five thousand with only five loaves.⁸⁵

⁸⁰ Ibid. 1. 3 (Kannengiesser, 262). The author presses the same point home again only three chapters later: ‘For our salvation (the Word) demonstrated such lovingkindness that he was born and appeared in a human body’ (4. 3; Kannengiesser, 276).

⁸¹ Ibid. 14. 2 (Kannengiesser, 314). Commenting on John 3: 3 (‘Unless someone is born anew’), Athanasius argues that the Gospel writer was ‘explaining about the soul that is born and created anew in him (the Son) according to the image (of the Father)’ (ibid.).

⁸² Ibid. 14. 1 (Kannengiesser, 314). For studies of the Fayyūm burial portraits, see Jean-Christophe Bailly, *L’Apostrophe muette*; and Bérénice Geoffroy-Schneiter, *Fayum Portraits*.

⁸³ Ibid. 14. 1 (Kannengiesser, 314).

⁸⁴ Ibid. 18. 5 (Kannengiesser, 332).

⁸⁵ Ibid. 18. 6 (Kannengiesser, 332–4).

The Incarnation also represents the manifestation of the Word's power through his defeat of the demons who for so long had plagued humankind. This is a theme that Athanasius revisits in chs. 30 and 31 of *On the Incarnation*, where he celebrates the fact that at the utterance of Christ's name and at the sign of the cross, 'all magic ceases, all sorcery is brought to nought, and all the idols are deserted and left behind'.⁸⁶ Contemporary manifestations of such power over demons are due to the fact that the incarnate Word *remains alive in the body* after the resurrection:

For the Son of God, being 'living and active (*ἐνεργής*)' (Hebrews 4: 12), works each day, and brings about (*ἐνεργεῖν*) the salvation of all. But death, itself having grown weaker, is put to shame daily, and the idols and demons rather turn out to be dead... If he took for himself a body at all and appropriated it as his own... what was the Lord to do concerning it? Or what ought to have been the end of the body after the Word had come upon it once and for all? For it was not able to avoid death, seeing as it was mortal and it was being offered up to death on behalf of all, for it was on account of this that the Savior furnished it for himself. But it was impossible for it to remain dead, since it had been made the temple of Life. For this reason, it died as a mortal creation, but it came to life again on account of the Life that was in it.⁸⁷

Later, in chs. 46 and 47 of the same treatise, Athanasius traces the history of the demons' defeat to the very moment of the Incarnation itself. According to this (revisionist) history of religious practice, the desertion of idol worship and the cessation of pagan oracular activity had begun only 'since God, the true Word of God, came among humankind', and 'when the Savior manifested himself on earth'—that is to say, after 'the divine manifestation of the Word' (*ἡ θεία ἐπιφάνεια*).⁸⁸ Athanasius sustains this theme in the final few summarizing chapters of his work, where he presses home the fact that it is the Word's act of becoming human (*ἐνανθρώπησις*)—not only his appearance, but also 'all his achievements in the body' (*πάντα τὰ ἐν σώματι*)—that has effectively dispelled 'the darkness of the idols' and illumined human hearts with the true knowledge of God.⁸⁹

Concerning the fundamental purpose of the Incarnation, Athanasius recites the phrase, 'for (the sake of) our salvation'—or alternatively, 'for the salvation of all'—like a mantra throughout his treatise.⁹⁰ Yet, of what does this salvation consist? As we have already seen, for Athanasius, salvation in Christ is understood specifically in terms of both the revelation of divine identity and the

⁸⁶ Athanasius of Alexandria, 30–1, quote at 31. 2 (Kannengiesser, 372–8, quote at 376).

⁸⁷ Ibid. 31. 3–4; cf. 32. 4 (Kannengiesser, 376–8, cf. 380).

⁸⁸ Ibid. 46. 1 and 47. 2 (Kannengiesser, 434, 438).

⁸⁹ Ibid. 54. 4 and 55. 3 (Kannengiesser, 458, 462).

⁹⁰ I count eleven instances in total: see *ibid.* 1. 3; 4. 3; 22. 2; 26. 1; 31. 3; 32. 6; 34. 1; 36. 4; 37. 1, 7; and 52. 1 (Kannengiesser, 262, 276, 346, 358, 378, 380, 384, 394, 398, 452).

recreation of humanity.⁹¹ These two functions directly correspond to his dual emphasis on the Incarnation as both a teaching and a healing event: ‘Let them know that the Lord came not to make a display of himself, but to heal and teach those who were suffering.’⁹² The Word’s act of inhabiting a body, of becoming flesh, therefore proves to be the source of both life and knowledge for humankind: ‘Giving life to all things . . . he has used a human body as an instrument for revealing the truth and for (conferring) knowledge of the Father.’⁹³

It is in this context that Athanasius famously invokes his predecessor Clement of Alexandria’s ‘exchange formula’ to describe the ‘deifying’ effects of the Incarnation: ‘For he became human in order that we might become divine; he manifested himself by mean of a body in order that we might receive an idea of the invisible Father; and he endured the insolent pride of humankind in order that we might inherit immortality.’⁹⁴ Here it can be clearly seen how the Word’s manifestation (and suffering) in the body communicates to humankind the divine attributes of life and knowledge.

While Athanasius first refers to the potential for humans of living ‘as God’ (ὡς Θεός) in his treatise *On the Incarnation*,⁹⁵ he develops a fully articulated theory of deification in his later *Orations against the Arians*, which he probably began to compose around the year 340 while in exile at Rome.⁹⁶ Indeed, it was the challenge of distinguishing his own Christology from that of his Arian opponents that prompted him to adopt more explicit deification language and to define carefully the proper context for its use.

⁹¹ Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon*, 72.

⁹² Athanasius of Alexandria, *inc.* 43. 1 (Kannengiesser, 418). On the teaching function of the Incarnation, see also 45. 2 (Kannengiesser, 430–2); on its healing and restorative function, see also 49. 2 (Kannengiesser, 444), where Christ’s curative powers are compared favourably to those of the Greek god Asclepius.

⁹³ *Ibid.* 42. 6 (Kannengiesser, 418).

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 54. 3 (Kannengiesser, 458).

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* 4. 6 (Kannengiesser, 278). In ch. 4, Athanasius quotes Psalm 82: 6 (‘I have said that you are gods’), a passage that Clement and Origen of Alexandria both cited frequently in their discussions of deification: see Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*, 128–34, 141–7. However, Athanasius’ exegetical interest in biblical passages that refer to human beings as ‘gods’ is much more restricted than that of his predecessors (Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*, 168).

⁹⁶ The first three *Orations* are generally viewed as authentic Athanasiana, while the fourth has been proven spurious. For a time, Charles Kannengiesser argued against the authenticity of the third *Oration* as well, attributing it instead to Apollinaris of Laodicea: see his article, ‘Le Mystère pascal du Christ selon Athanase d’Alexandrie’, 407–42; and his book, *Athanase d’Alexandrie évêque et écrivain*, esp. 310–68. However, Kannengiesser has since abandoned this argument after other scholars raised objections that effectively upheld Athanasian authorship: see esp. the review by G. C. Stead, in *Journal of Theological Studies*, NS 36 (1985), 220–9. D. Schmitz (‘Schimpfwörter in Athanasius’ Reden gegen die Arianer’, 308–20) has demonstrated a continuity in the use of polemical vocabulary across the first three *Orations*. For a discussion of the authorship and dating of the *Orations*, see T. Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, 53–5, and 254–5 n. 26.

In his *Orations against the Arians*, Athanasius uses variants on the verb *θεοποιεῖν* ('to deify') seventeen times to refer to the deification of Christians, more than in all his other writings combined.⁹⁷ In that same treatise, he also distinguishes himself as the first Greek patristic writer to employ the noun form, *θεοποίησις* ('deification').⁹⁸ Athanasius' Arian opponents themselves had no objection to the use of such language: Arius himself (like Origen before him) not only affirmed that human beings could be deified, but also seems to have attributed the same experience to the incarnate Word: thus, he affirmed that Christ 'was deified by means of participation'.⁹⁹ However, for Athanasius, it was the Arians' particular application of this language—specifically, its attribution to Christ—that was cause for objection. In the eyes of the Alexandrian bishop, Arius' statement was anathema, since it threatened to break down the radical distinction established at the Council of Nicaea between all created beings and the fully divine Son of God, who was emphatically 'of the same substance' (*ὁμοούσιος*) as the Father.¹⁰⁰ If this were not the

⁹⁷ Russell (*Doctrine of Deification*, 167 n. 6) has documented thirty cases in Athanasius' extant writings where the Alexandrian author uses the verb *θεοποιεῖν* to refer to the Christian acquisition of divine attributes. In referring to 'pagan' understandings of deification, Athanasius employs the same verb a total of forty-eight times in his *Against the Nations*, but virtually drops its usage thereafter: it appears in such contexts only two more times in the rest of his corpus. By contrast, the vast majority of examples where Athanasius utilizes this term in Christian contexts appear in works produced after the outbreak of the Arian controversy.

⁹⁸ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Ar.* 1. 39; 2. 70; 3. 53 (PG 26. 93, 296, 433).

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* 1. 9 (PG 26. 29). The fragments of Arius' writings, culled from Athanasius and other sources, have been edited by G. Bardy, *Recherches sur saint Lucien d'Antioche et son école*, 246–74. However, his edition encountered some methodological difficulties: for a critique, see G. C. Stead, 'The *Thalia* of Arius and the Testimony of Athanasius', esp. 22–38. According to the theology of Arius and his followers, the Son's existence and divine authority were 'fully and uncompromisingly dependent' upon the will of the Father (R. Gregg and D. Groh, *Early Arianism*, 6). In the third century, one hundred years prior to Athanasius' debate with the Arians, Origen had also understood the Son to be dependent and derivative in relation to the Father. Because he viewed only the Father (*ὁ θεός*, with the article), as *ἀπόθεος* ('divine in and of himself'), he considered the Son, in so far as he himself was divine (*θεός*, without the article), to have been 'deified' (*θεοποιημένος*) by the Father, even as he served as the 'deifier' of humankind: see Origen of Alexandria, *Jo.* 2. 2. 17 (Preuschen, GCS 10 (1903), 54–5); Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*, 142, 154, 170.

¹⁰⁰ While Athanasius is willing to allow that the Father is 'participated in' (*μετέχεσθαι*) he equates this with the fact that 'he begets': accordingly, he describes the Son's relationship to the Father not as one of participation, but as that of a 'proper offspring of the Father's essence' (*Ar.* 1. 15–16; PG 26.43A–45D). This theme is reprised at the beginning of the third *Oration* (*Ar.* 3. 1, cf. 3. 6: PG 26.324C, cf. 333A): 'The Son is not Son by participation, but is the Father's own offspring.' This same perspective is reiterated consistently in Athanasius' later writings: see e.g. his treatise *On the Council of Nicaea*, written sometime in the 350s, where he writes, 'Even if the Father is called unoriginated, the Word is still also the Image of the Father and of one essence (*ὁμοούσιος*) with him. Being Image, he is other than originated things and other than all; for he has identity and likeness with the One whose Image he is' (*decr.* 30. 3: Opitz, 26; trans. Anatolios, *Athanasius* (2004), 209).

case—if the Son were not divine by nature—then he would not be capable of conferring sonship and divine nature upon humankind: ‘If (the Word) had become a human being as a creature, humankind would have still remained just what it was, not joined to God.’¹⁰¹

For Athanasius, the divine agency of the Word was paramount for guaranteeing human salvation. One already gets hints of this in his treatise *On the Incarnation*, where he affirms that the Word moved and controlled the body in the Incarnation, thereby sanctifying it and giving life to all the universe.¹⁰² However, in the *Orations*, Athanasius’ defence of the Word’s agency truly takes centre stage, as he enters into debate with Arian opponents who understood the Word as subject to change in the body. The debate that ensued centred on a select set of biblical passages that the Arians cited to support their view.

The most important of these passages was Proverbs 8: 22—‘The Lord created me as a beginning of his ways for his works.’ Arian exegetes read this verse as a witness to the Father’s creation of the Word before time, and cited a number of other biblical texts—including Hebrews 3: 2, which describes Jesus as ‘faithful to the one who made him’—as further evidence of the Word’s created status.¹⁰³ Athanasius devotes the bulk of his three *Orations* to the task of reclaiming these verses for Nicene theology. In the case of Proverbs 8: 22, he does so by arguing that the speaker in the text (‘me’) was not the Word himself, but rather the body assumed by the Word in the Incarnation.¹⁰⁴ Similarly, Athanasius argues that Hebrews 3: 2 does not refer to the essence of the Word, but rather ‘his descent to humankind’ and his faithfulness *in the body*, ‘for the Word makes, but he himself is not made’.¹⁰⁵

Athanasius’ exegetical defence of the agency (and unchangeability) of the Word impinges on his doctrine of deification as well—specifically, on how the Word, through becoming incarnate, conveys divine attributes to his own body and (by extension) to all other human bodies. The interpretation of two other

¹⁰¹ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Ar. 2. 67* (PG 26.289B–C).

¹⁰² *Id., inc. 17* (Kannengiesser, 324–8). Anatolios (*Athanasius: The Coherence of his Thought*, 78) asserts that ‘this contrast between the unqualified activity of the Word and unqualified passivity of the body is the paradigmatic core of Athanasius’s Christology in the *De Incarnatione*’.

¹⁰³ Over the course of his *Orations*, Athanasius addresses a series of biblical texts (or groups of texts) that had been cited by Arian interpreters as evidence for the Word’s createdness or changeability. Included in the list of pericopes he comments on are the following: Philippians 2: 9–10 (*Ar. 1. 37–45*); Psalm 45: 7–8 (1. 46–52); Hebrews 1: 4 (1. 53–64); 3: 2 (2. 1–11); Acts 2: 36 (2. 12–17); Proverbs 8: 22 (2. 18–82); 7) John 14: 10 (3. 1–6); 17: 3 (3. 7–9); 10: 30 and 17: 11 (3. 10–25); Matthew 11: 27 and John 3: 35 (3. 35–41); Mark 13: 32 and Luke 2: 52 (3. 42–53); Matthew 26: 39 and John 12: 27 (3. 54–8). Athanasius’ commentary on Proverbs 8: 22 takes up the majority of his second *Oration*: in terms of length, he devotes four times the number of pages to it than any other text.

¹⁰⁴ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Ar. 2. 18–82* (PG 26.183–321).

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid. 2. 7* (PG 26.161A).

frequently debated biblical texts proved to be especially crucial to his apologetic against the Arians on this subject. The first of these two was Philippians 2: 9, which proclaimed that God had ‘exalted’ Christ after he had been ‘found in human form’. For Arius and his disciples, this language of exaltation implied that the Word had undergone a change: accordingly, they interpreted the verse as a reference to the Word’s own deification. Athanasius countered by arguing that the term ‘exalted’ referred not to the Word’s essence, but rather to the transformation he effected upon his human nature—to his dual action of sanctifying and deifying ‘that which he put on’.¹⁰⁶ This action performed by the Word upon his own body has as its pre-eminent goal the sanctification and deification of humanity: it is ‘because of our kinship (*συγγένεια*) to his body’ that we received this form of ‘exaltation’ (*ὑψώσις*).¹⁰⁷

Athanasius faced a similar challenge in relation to a second text, Psalm 45: 7 (‘God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness’), which was regularly interpreted in the early church as referring to the Christ’s identity as ‘the Anointed One’.¹⁰⁸ Arian theologians latched on to this verse as further evidence that the incarnate Word had undergone a change, or promotion in status, by virtue of receiving an anointment at his baptism in the Jordan. Once again, Athanasius responds by marshalling a similar logic regarding the Word’s agency with respect to the body. ‘It is not the Word, as Word and Wisdom, who is anointed by the Spirit which is given by him; rather, it is the flesh assumed by him which is anointed in him and by him.’¹⁰⁹ And once again, the Word’s action upon his own body has salvific consequences for humankind: just as his exaltation of the body leads to our exaltation, so too his anointment of his body through the Spirit paves the way for our own anointment in baptism.¹¹⁰

Therefore, on a consistent basis in his anti-Arian exegesis, Athanasius emphasizes the agency of the Word in sponsoring ‘the advancement’ (i.e. deification) of his own body, a process that in his eyes achieves its narrative fulfilment in the Gospel story of Christ’s ascension (Luke 24: 50–3; Acts 1: 6–11).¹¹¹ The scriptural witness to this ‘advancement’—whether expressed in terms of

¹⁰⁶ Athanasius of Alexandria, 1. 41–2 (*PG* 26.96–100, quote at 100A).

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* 1. 43 (*PG* 26.100D and 101B).

¹⁰⁸ The Greek word, *χριστός*, used in the New Testament as a translation of the Hebrew term for Messiah, literally means ‘anointed’ or ‘anointed one’.

¹⁰⁹ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Ar.* 1. 47 (*PG* 26.109C).

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.* 1. 48 (*PG* 26.112A–116A).

¹¹¹ According to Athanasius, at the ascension one is able to perceive how ‘the flesh had risen, had laid aside death, and had been deified’ (*Ar.* 3. 48, cf. 3. 53; *PG* 26.425B, cf. 433B). On Christ’s ascension as the divinization of his humanity and as the ‘climax of the salvific drama’ in the Gospels, see C. Badger, ‘The New Man Created in God’, 96–8.

exaltation, sanctification, anointment, ascension, or glorification¹¹²—serves for Athanasius as evidence for the Word’s progressive ‘deification’ of his own flesh, through which human fleshly existence also came to be ontologically transformed. But for those trying to understand the inner workings of Athanasius’ incarnational Christology, some crucial questions remain. How exactly does this transference of divine attributes work? How are the effects of the Word’s deification of his own human body actually conveyed to humanity as a whole? What is the specific connection between the body of the Lord and human participation in that body? What facilitates this salvific transaction for Athanasius?

To begin to answer such questions requires an investigation of several interrelated aspects of Athanasius’ theology, beginning with his language of ‘appropriation’ (*ἰδιοποιεῖσθαι*) and ‘predication’ (*λέγεσθαι*). In the Incarnation, the Word is understood to appropriate a human body—to make it his own—and as a result ‘the characteristics of both humanity and divinity, in Christ, are predicated of a single grammatical subject’.¹¹³ This has profound implications for how one can speak about both the Word and the body in this union: on the one hand, human characteristics are attributed to the Word in the body;¹¹⁴ on the other hand, divine characteristics are correspondingly attributed to the body appropriated by the Word.¹¹⁵

How does this transference of properties extend to other human bodies? How do human beings come to be, as Athanasius put it, ‘co-corporeal’ (*συσσώμιοι*, cf. Eph. 3: 6) with the Word—i.e. incorporated into his body so that ‘we are saved in accordance with it’?¹¹⁶ Rather than spelling out the

¹¹² In his *Orations against the Arians* (Ar. 3. 38–9; PG 26.404C–408B), Athanasius interprets Jesus’ prayer in John 17: 1, ‘Glorify your Son,’ as a reference to the Word’s glorification of his flesh, through which he both sanctifies and deifies humankind. Towards the end of his public career, in a *Letter to Adelphius* (ep. Adolph. 4; PG 26.1077A–B; written c.370 CE), Athanasius likewise affirms that the Word’s ‘glorification’ of the body in the Incarnation took place ‘in order that he might deify us in himself... in order that he might transfer our wayward race into himself and in order that he might from then on become a holy race and “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet. 1: 4)’. Adelphius, the recipient of the letter, was bishop of Onuphis in the Nile Delta and a supporter of Athanasius at the Alexandrian synod convened in 362.

¹¹³ On the interrelationship between the models of ‘appropriation’ and ‘predication’ in Athanasius’ theology of the Incarnation, see Anatolios, *Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought*, 78–83, 140–4 (quote at 80); id., *Athanasius* (2004), 66–74.

¹¹⁴ Athanasius of Alexandria, inc. 18 (Kannengiesser, 328–34); Ar. 3. 32, 34 (PG 26.389C–392C, 396A–397B).

¹¹⁵ Ibid. 31 (Kannengiesser, 376–8); Ar. 3. 57 (PG 26.441B–444C). In his *Orations against the Arians* (Ar. 3. 34; PG 397A), Athanasius gives Christ’s own body words to celebrate this exchange of attributes: ‘I am from earth and mortal by nature, but later I became the Word’s flesh, and he bore my passions, even though he is impassible; and so I became free of them.’ Anatolios (*Athanasius* (2004), 61–3) points out that the stability and security of ‘abiding’ or ‘remaining’ (*μένειν* or *διαμένειν*) in Christ is one of the divine attributes conferred by the Word on an otherwise unstable and insecure human nature.

¹¹⁶ Athanasius of Alexandria, Ar. 2. 61 (PG 26.277B).

mechanics of our ‘co-corporeality’ in Christ, Athanasius most often seems simply to take it on assumption. To lay bare his assumptions about the role of bodies in his schema of salvation, it is necessary to understand how his Christology coheres with his cosmology.

To start with, it is clear that for Athanasius this correspondence of bodies is rooted in the kinship (*συγγένεια*) of the Word’s flesh and ours. Thus, in his second *Oration*, he avows that by virtue of the Word’s victory over the devil in the body, ‘we all were liberated according to the kinship (*συγγένεια*) of the flesh, and from then on we came to be joined to the Word.’¹¹⁷ A few chapters later, he revisits this theme in commenting on the language of Proverbs 8: 22: ‘(The Word) is ‘founded’ for our sakes when he takes on himself the things that belong to us, in order that we, framed and bound together as those who are incorporated (*συσσώμωι*) in him through the likeness of the flesh, may remain immortal and incorruptible, having arrived at (the status of) a perfect man.’¹¹⁸ One scholar has characterized this likeness as being grounded in a solidarity of shared nature (*φύσις*) or substance (*οὐσία*)—an underlying ‘consubstantiality’ that connects our bodies to that of Christ.¹¹⁹ However, others have dismissed such interpretations of Athanasius as moving too much in a universalizing (Platonist) direction and not doing full justice to the particularity of the body assumed by the Word in the Incarnation.¹²⁰

For a fuller and more satisfying explanation of the soteriological ‘mechanics’ of Athanasius’ Christology, one must turn to a different set of philosophical assumptions—namely, to Stoic cosmology and the notion of correspondence between micro- and macrocosmic bodies. In the ancient world, from the time of Plato to the early Christian era, the universe was commonly conceived of as a macrocosmic body (*σῶμα*).¹²¹ This was a world-view that Athanasius openly shared, as evidenced by a statement he makes in ch. 41 of his treatise *On the Incarnation*: ‘The philosophers among the Greeks say that the universe is a great body (*σῶμα*), and they speak truthfully when they say this; for we see it and its parts as objects of our senses.’¹²² Later, in his *Orations against the Arians*, he writes about how divine Wisdom imprinted herself upon creation ‘so that the whole universe would not be divided, but be in harmony with itself as one body’.¹²³

¹¹⁷ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Ar. 2*. 69 (PG 26.293C).

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.* 2. 74 (PG 26.305A); see also 3.53 (PG 26.433B), where Athanasius writes, ‘What is this so-called advance except, as I said earlier, the deification and grace given by Wisdom to human beings . . . according to their likeness and kinship to the Word’s flesh?’

¹¹⁹ J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 378–9.

¹²⁰ For such an objection, see Pettersen, *Athanasius and the Human Body*, 36, 42.

¹²¹ Plato famously describes the cosmos as a tangible ‘body’ (*σῶμα*) in his *Timaeus* 28B (Bury, 50–1; also Zekl, 28).

¹²² Athanasius of Alexandria, *inc.* 41. 5 (Kannengiesser, 412).

¹²³ *Id.*, *Ar. 2*. 81 (PG 26.317B–C).

This *somatic* conception of the universe had consequences for how the ancients viewed human bodies. Not only philosophers and theologians, but also dramatists, physicians, astrologers, and practitioners of magic acted upon the assumption that a person's body was, in a very real sense, 'a microcosm—a small version of the universe at large'.¹²⁴ This cosmological reading of the human constitution especially came to be associated with popular 'Stoicized' notions of both the universe and human bodies as being held together and animated by *pneuma*, the material life-breath or fiery-airy substance that brings different elements into 'sympathy' (*συμπάθεια*) with one another and thereby enables movement and sense perception.¹²⁵ In this context, it is noteworthy that when Athanasius identifies the universe as *σῶμα* in ch. 41 of *On the Incarnation*, he does so specifically in terms of its perceptibility by the senses ('for we see it and its parts as objects of our senses') and in terms of the Logos' role of 'granting movement' (*κινεῖν*) to it in his providence.¹²⁶ Building on this, he then applies the same observations to the human body inhabited by the Word: 'The one who grants and believes that the Word of God is in the entirety (*τὸ πᾶν*) and that the entirety is illuminated and moved (*κινεῖσθαι*) by him, should not regard it as absurd that one human body was also moved and illuminated by him.'¹²⁷ In Athanasius' Christology, the body assumed by the Word relates to the universe as 'a part of the whole' (*μέρος τοῦ ὅλου*).¹²⁸ On this basis, Athanasius took it on assumption that, in the Incarnation, the life granted to the Word's body (the part) naturally extended to the cosmos (the whole), including other human bodies (as its other constituent parts).¹²⁹ In this way, Athanasius presents Christ's body as the

¹²⁴ Dale Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 16–17 (quote from 16). On the pervasiveness of this cosmological view of the body in ancient philosophy, astrology, drama, and medicine, see also Leonard Barkan, *Nature's Work of Art*, 8–30; Ruth Padel, *In and Out of the Mind*, 43–4; and James Longrigg, *Greek Rational Medicine*, 46). Martin also cites evidence for a similar world view in ancient magical papyri: see especially *Papyri Graecae Magicae* IV. 475–829 (Preisendanz *et al.*, i. 88–100). In early Christian Alexandria, Clement (*prot.* 1. 5. 3; Stählin and Treu, GCS 12, 3rd edn. (1972), 6) conceived of the human being as a 'miniature universe' (*σμικρὸς κόσμος*) and Origen expressed a similar cosmologically inspired anthropology when he discussed the creation of humankind: see C. P. Bammel, 'Adam in Origen', 70–1, and 88 (n. 40–1).

¹²⁵ D. E. Hahm, 'Early Hellenistic Theories of Vision and the Perception of Color', 66–7, 85; Heinrich Von Staden, 'The Stoic Theory of Perception and its 'Platonic' Critics', 97; Margaret T. May, 'Introduction' to *Galen: On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body*, 46–9. For an excellent review of ancient conceptions of material *pneuma* and 'pneumatic bodies', see Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 12–14, 21–5.

¹²⁶ Athanasius of Alexandria, *inc.* 41. 5–6 (Kannengiesser, 412–14).

¹²⁷ *Ibid.* 42. 1 (Kannengiesser, 414).

¹²⁸ *Ibid.* 43. 4, see also 43. 5–6 (Kannengiesser, 420; cf. 422).

¹²⁹ Several scholars have already noted the Stoic elements in Athanasius' cosmology: A. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, i. 311; J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 285; Pettersen, *Athanasius and the Human Body*, 46, 49 (nn. 44, 45), and 87 ('The body of Christ... is naturally one with the whole cosmic body').

cosmological meeting point between God and the world: through the Incarnation, we are corporeally ‘joined to the Word who is from heaven’.¹³⁰

For Athanasius, our deifying participation in the Word reaches its consummation only in the incorruptibility of our resurrection bodies; however, there are still tangible ways that our incorporation into the Word may become manifest in this life. In particular, it was in the ascetic life of monks and virgins (as well as in the stories of their precursors, the martyrs) that Athanasius discerned the transformation of human bodies in real terms: ‘Let whoever wishes to do so contemplate the mark of virtue among the female virgins of Christ and among the young men who observe chastity, and the assurance of immortality in such a great company of his martyrs.’¹³¹ Through their imitation of Christ’s virtues, practitioners of the ascetic life truly become models of what it means to become ‘sons and gods’ (*υιοι και θεοι*) who are ‘all perfect’ (*παντελειος*) and ‘equal to angels’ (*ισος αγγελους*).¹³² However, Athanasius is careful to underscore for his readers that such a transformation in body and soul is wrought not simply through human action but ‘by grace’ and ‘on account of the Word who is in us’.¹³³

While acknowledging Athanasius’ indebtedness to certain Stoic patterns of thought, Anatolios (*Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought*, 70–2 and 222 n. 100) argues that Athanasius’ *somatic* cosmology does not have an ‘analytical’ character, but rather is motivated simply by his ‘apologetic purposes’. As a result, Anatolios claims that what Athanasius is presenting in *On the Incarnation* 41–3 is ‘not a Christology at all, in the strict sense’—that is to say, it is not ‘a direct Christological statement, in the sense of an analytical description of the structure of Christ’s being’ (Anatolios, *Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought*, 70). His argument at this point is primarily motivated by his opposition to Grillmeier’s thesis of a stark ‘Logos-sarx framework’ in Athanasius according to which Christ’s body was understood merely as a passive instrument of the Word. However, by prioritizing only ‘direct’ propositional statements and the problematic category of authorial ‘intent’ in his analysis, Anatolios underestimates the assumptive power of the cosmology that Athanasius takes for granted as a basis for his christology of bodily correspondence.

¹³⁰ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Ar.* 3. 33 (PG 26.393B–C). Commenting on Athanasius’ christology, Lyman (*Christology and Cosmology*, 159) observes that ‘the role of the Son remains profoundly cosmological in reuniting and redeeming the fallen creation’—a redemption that secures for humanity ‘a deliverance from changeability through physical transformation’. Andrew Louth (‘The Body in Western Catholic Christianity’, 121) makes a similar observation: ‘For Athanasius of Alexandria, in the fourth century, the body of Christ was a part of the cosmos, vulnerable and subject to death, in this way sharing in the corruption and death that the Fall of man had introduced into the cosmos. By means of that body, the Word of God became *inward to the cosmos* and thus was able to become subject to corruption and death and thereby overcome them.’

¹³¹ Athanasius of Alexandria, *inc.* 48. 2 (Kannengiesser, 440); see also 51. 1; 52. 5; 56. 2 (Kannengiesser, 448–50, 454, 464).

¹³² *Id.*, *Ar.* 3. 25, 51 (PG 26.376B, 429C–432A). To analyse Athanasius’ theory of asceticism in terms of Russell’s classification of the different models of divine participation (see *Doctrine of Deification*, 1–2, 163), one might say that he has taken the earlier ethical model espoused by Clement and Origen and imbued it with a heightened sense of the transformative potential for observing the effects of deification in principle and in practice.

¹³³ *Ibid.* 3. 19 and 3. 25 (PG 26.364B, 376B).

Nowhere is this pressed home more pointedly than in his *Life of Antony*, where he consistently ascribes the monk's miraculous feats in the body to the agency of the divine Word. Throughout the *vita*, Antony successfully withstands the wiles of the devil—the temptations of wealth, family, food, and the pleasures of the body—which threatened to 'draw him down, away from the ascetic life'.¹³⁴ However, when we read that the devil was 'put to flight by a man in the flesh', we are soon reminded that this was actually due to the fact that 'the Lord, who put on the flesh for our sake and gave the body victory over the devil, was working (συνήργει) with Antony'.¹³⁵ Athanasius is keen to remind us that Antony's superhuman resistance to the devil's temptations is not due to an independently cultivated spiritual prowess, but rather to 'the success of the Savior in Antony'.¹³⁶ Athanasius' biography of Antony follows closely upon his christological exposition by presenting his readers with a practical guide—an ascetic programme—for 'performing' a humanity that has been perfected (i.e. 'deified') in kinship with the body of the Word.¹³⁷

In the bodily and spiritual disciplines of Egyptian monks, Athanasius could see the rarefied effects of the Incarnation being worked out before his eyes. And as we shall see in subsequent chapters, his vision of an ascetic Christopraxis—in particular, his emphasis on the life-giving agency of the Word and on the monastic life as a practical arena for participation in divine virtues—would leave an indelible imprint on later Coptic theological discourse.

¹³⁴ Id., *v. Anton.* 5. 2 (Bartelink, SC 400 (1994), 142). On demonic trials in the *Life of Antony*, see David Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk*, 23–47.

¹³⁵ Athanasius, *v. Anton.* 5. 7 (Bartelink, SC 400 (1994), 144–6). In this context, Athanasius reads the action of the divine Word in Antony as a fulfilment of Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 15: 10, 'Not I, but the grace of God that is in me.' On Athanasius' theological emphasis on the Word's 'activity' (ἐνεργεία) in creation and the Incarnation, and on the Word's 'co-working' (συνεργεία) with Antony, see Anatolios, *Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought*, 177–95.

¹³⁶ Athanasius, *v. Anton.* 7. 1 (Bartelink, SC 400 (1994), 150). On numerous other occasions before his disciples, Antony credits not himself but the Lord for his powers of perseverance, healing, and other miraculous good deeds: see *Ibid.* 38. 1–2; 40. 6; 56. 1–2; 58. 4; 62. 2 (Bartelink, SC 400 (1994), 238, 244, 286–8; 290; 300). David Brakke (*Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, 244) calls the *Life* 'not so much the story of Antony as it is the story of the Word's work through Antony'. Gregg and Groh (*Early Arianism*, 131–59, esp. 142–53) have shown how this emphasis on the Word's agency in the *Life of Antony* fits within Athanasius' larger agenda of wresting the monk away from Arian interpretations of his ascetic virtue and reclaiming him as a pro-Nicene hero.

¹³⁷ Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, 239–40. Virginia Burrus highlights Antony's role as the focus of a dynamic ethic of imitation that underlies this ascetic programme: 'Athanasius's *Life of Antony*. . . draws the reader into a mimetic relation to Antony as the singular icon or 'sufficient representation' of humanity's divinization' ('*Begotten, Not Made*', 69, quoting from *v. Anton.* Prol. 3). However, at the same time, she also recognizes how it is 'via the fixative gift of the Word' that 'the body of the divinized man . . . has transcended its nature' ('*Begotten, Not Made*', 70). For examples of Athanasius' use of mimetic language in the *Life of Antony*, see the following references in Bartelink's edition: (1) μιμείσθαι (to imitate): *v. Anton.* 9. 9; 23. 3; 27. 1; 38. 2; 72. 4–5; and ζηλοῦν/ζήλος (to emulate/emulation): Prol. 2–3; 3. 3; 14. 1; 38. 2; 54. 7; 55. 3; 89. 4; 93. 6.

Cyril of Alexandria

The only theologian who surpassed Athanasius in his influence over Coptic Christology was Cyril of Alexandria, who would come to be extolled not only in Egypt but throughout the Byzantine world as the consummate ‘seal of the Fathers’.¹³⁸ Time and time again, both during his lifetime and after his death, the lines of christological orthodoxy were drawn, and hotly debated, in relation to Cyril’s precedent. From his earliest exegetical writings to his later polemical tracts against his archnemesis Nestorius, Cyril resolutely focused his attention on the Incarnation and its implications for understanding how the human and the divine came to be united in Christ. In doing so, he closely followed Athanasius’ Christology, but he was also instrumental in yoking that Christology to a more fully developed eucharistic theory of participation—a theory of sacramental practice that, in a very tangible sense, brought the bodies of believers into life-giving contact with the incarnate body of Christ.¹³⁹

Cyril’s indebtedness to Athanasius is evidenced on a number of levels: his exegetical strategies, his anti-Arian discourse, his reference to theories of appropriation and predication, and his doctrine of deification are all grounded in readings of Athanasius’ incarnational theology.¹⁴⁰ However, at the same time, Cyril builds upon this Athanasian foundation by developing his own distinctive emphases in each of these areas. This process, by which Cyril impressed his own stamp on the christological body of knowledge he received, is already observable in his exegetical dialogue *Adoration in Spirit and Truth*, and his early biblical commentaries on Isaiah and John,¹⁴¹ all written prior to the outbreak of his famous controversy with Nestorius in 430 CE.

¹³⁸ Anastasius of Sinai, *hod.* (= *viae dux*) 7. 1. 101 (Uthemann, 107).

¹³⁹ The richness of Cyril’s baptismal theology has also been underscored in recent scholarship: see e.g. D. A. Keating, *Appropriation of the Divine Life*, 4–7, 20–39, and 54–63). However, for the purpose of my investigation into Cyril’s influence over later Coptic christology, I will be focusing my attention more on the relation between the Incarnation and the eucharist in his theology.

¹⁴⁰ Cyril’s dependence on Athanasius on the subjects of christology and soteriology has been universally acknowledged by scholars: indeed, G. L. Prestige (*God in Patristic Thought*, 285) went so far as to dub him ‘the super-Athanasian’. For other observations about his dependence on Athanasius, see e.g. Gross, *La Divinisation du Chrétien*, 278; Jacques Liébaert, *Christologie*, 106; Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, i. 415; H. von Campenhausen, *Die griechische Kirchenväter*, 155; Ezra Gebremedhin, *Life-Giving Blessing*, 17; N. Russell, ‘Partakers of the Divine Nature’, 57; id., *Cyril of Alexandria*, 5–6; id., *Doctrine of Deification*, 191; D. Fairbairn, *Grace and Christology in the Early Church*, 64–5.

¹⁴¹ Cyril’s treatise, *Adoration in Spirit and Truth* (*ador.*), in which he tries to reconcile the seemingly contrasting views of the Old Testament law in Matthew 5: 17–18 and John 4: 23, is generally considered one of his earliest works written between 412 and 425 CE: for an uncritical edition of the Greek text, see PG 68.138–1125. His *Commentary on Isaiah* (*Is.*; PG 70.9–1450) may be assigned to the same period. Cyril’s *Commentary on John* was composed between the years 423 and 428. It was edited by P. E. Pusey in 3 vols. (1872; repr. 1965), and translated in two vols. by P. E. Pusey (i., 1874) and T. Randell (ii., 1885). On the dating of Cyril’s works, see G. Joussard, ‘L’Activité

Like Athanasius, Cyril situates the Incarnation within an overarching biblical narrative that opens with the Word's original act of creation and the loss of the divine image through Adam's disobedience. The trajectory of this salvation history is laid out in the early chapters of his *Adoration in Spirit and Truth*, a literary dialogue in which Cyril and an interlocutor named Palladius detail the dire consequences of the primeval sin and then remark on its reversal in Christ.¹⁴²

PALLADIUS: The nature of humankind would have grown sick and would have then been carried away very easily into every kind of strange madness, if the grace of the Savior had not borne that nature up toward virtue, enriching it with its own good attributes.

CYRIL: Well said... for the living bread—that is, the Word of God—nourishes it toward spiritual strength.¹⁴³

Later, in his *Festal Letters*, Cyril would develop a four-stage historical schema to represent 'the whole sweep of the divine economy' in which the Word's act of taking on flesh played the pivotal role.¹⁴⁴ While humanity's disobedience and enslavement to the devil constituted the first act in this divine drama, the rest of the script focused on the life of Christ, beginning with his nativity (stage 2) and ending with his passion and resurrection (stages 3 and 4).¹⁴⁵

For Cyril, just as for Athanasius, it was the Incarnation *per se* that brought about the defeat of the devil and enabled the renewal of human nature in the image of the divine. Thus, in his *Commentary on Isaiah*, Cyril emphasizes that 'insofar as he appeared economically (*οἰκονομικῶς*) as a human being,' Christ 'has justified the Gentiles by condemning Satan who had overreached (in authority).'¹⁴⁶ Cyril saw the Gospel of John as a virtuoso rendition of this divine drama. Commenting on John 1: 11 ('He came unto his own, but his own received him not'), the Alexandrian bishop notes how the evangelist first 'shows the disease of ignorance and of unbelief that had befallen the whole world,' and then 'enters into his account of the Incarnation and gradually works his way down from pure theology to an interpretation of the economy (*οἰκονομία*) in the flesh which the Son rendered for our sake.'¹⁴⁷ As the

littéraire de saint Cyrille d'Alexandrie jusqu'à 428', 159–74; for a succinct summary regarding the state of the question, see Fairbairn, *Grace and Christology in the Early Church*, 64 n. 2.

¹⁴² Bernard Meunier, *Le Christ de Cyrille d'Alexandrie*, 8–16; Russell, *Cyril of Alexandria*, 13.

¹⁴³ Cyril of Alexandria, *ador.* 1 (PG 68.149B).

¹⁴⁴ Russell, *Cyril of Alexandria*, 14. A critical edition of Cyril's festal letters has been prepared by W. H. Burns: *Lettres festales*, 3 vols. (SC 372, 392, 434; Paris: Cerf, 1991, 1993, 1998).

¹⁴⁵ Bernard Meunier, *Le Christ de Cyrille d'Alexandrie*, 16–21.

¹⁴⁶ Cyril of Alexandria, *Is.* 3. 5 (PG 70.852A). Earlier in the same chapter, he notes that Christ 'received dominion over all things' by 'accepting the dispensation (*οἰκονομία*) of the flesh' (PG 70.849C).

¹⁴⁷ *Id.*, *Jo.* 1. 9 (Pusey, i. 130. 8–17).

linchpin in God's economy of salvation, the Incarnation was an event that, in Cyril's theology, quite literally embodied the grace (*χάρις*) and lovingkindness (*φιλανθρωπία*) that God had originally demonstrated at creation by imbuing humankind with the divine image.¹⁴⁸

For Cyril, this narrative arch from creation and Incarnation was epitomized in Christ's role as the second Adam, as the first fruits of a new creation.¹⁴⁹ Cyril touches on this theme in his interpretation of John 7: 39, where Jesus teaches his disciples about the coming of the Spirit. It is the Incarnation itself that enables humankind to receive the Spirit and therefore to be transformed and renewed.

The Only Begotten became human like us, in order that, with good things returning and the grace of the Spirit being rooted (in us), these very things might then in him be fittingly secured for our whole nature. In this way, the Only Begotten and Word who is from God the Father has lent us the unchangeability of his own nature, on account of the fact that the nature of humankind had been judged in Adam as being incapable of infallibility, but falling very easily into perversion. Just as by the twisted actions of the first man the loss of good things pervades the whole nature (*ὅλη ἡ φύσις*), by the same logic, I think, through the one unfamiliar with such twisted action, the profit that comes from the permanence of the divine gifts will be preserved for the whole race.¹⁵⁰

Having been existentially destabilized by Adam's sin, human nature is re-established according to the 'imperturbable stability' of the divine image.¹⁵¹ The incarnate Word, in conferring the Spirit, 'restores human nature to its original state', a condition especially characterized by 'newness of life' and 'incorruption'.¹⁵²

An important observation is in order at this point. Even as he integrates Athanasian binary categories of stability/instability, life/death, and incorruption/corruptibility into his discussion, Cyril develops an Adam–Christ typology that distinctively hinges on the language of 'nature' (*φύσις*).¹⁵³ Cyril uses this term to refer to humankind in its totality and to mark that which fundamentally linked Christ with the first man. Thus, just as 'the whole nature' of humankind was summed up (and corrupted) in Adam, so too 'Christ had the whole (human) nature (*ὅλη ἡ φύσις*) in himself, in order that, having transformed it back to its original state, he might set it all right (*ἵνα πᾶσαν ἐπανορθώσῃ*).'¹⁵⁴ However, in the Incarnation, that nature was not

¹⁴⁸ Cyril of Alexandria, 1.9 (Pusey, i. 133). On Cyril's use of these terms in his early writings, see Lars Koen, *The Saving Passion*, 83–7; and Fairbairn, *Grace and Christology in the Early Church*, 63–104.

¹⁴⁹ R. L. Wilken, *Judaism and the Early Christian Mind*, 93–142; Meunier, *Le Christ de Cyrille d'Alexandrie*, 103–25.

¹⁵⁰ Cyril of Alexandria, *Jo.* 5. 2 (Pusey, i. 694. 4–14).

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.* 5.2 (Pusey, i. 691. 30).

¹⁵² *Ibid.* 5.2 (Pusey, i. 691. 27–8 and 694. 21–2).

¹⁵³ Wilken, *Judaism and the Early Christian Mind*, 110.

¹⁵⁴ Cyril of Alexandria, *Jo.* 5. 2 (Pusey, i. 693. 7–8; cf. 692. 26–7, 'all of humanity was in Christ, insofar as he was a human being'; and 694. 28–9, 'having the whole nature in himself, insofar as he was a human being and one of us').

simply restored; it was, in fact, perfected and glorified: in Christ, it acquired 'the divine dominion' (ἡ θεοπρέπης βασιλεία).¹⁵⁵

Christ stands as 'the firstfruits of this renewed (human) nature' (ἀπαρχὴ τῆς ἀνανευμένης φύσεως).¹⁵⁶ In his *Commentary on John*, Cyril develops this idea especially in relation to the Son's reception of the Spirit at his baptism in the Jordan (1: 32–4).¹⁵⁷ The incarnate Word, who possesses the Spirit 'essentially and by nature' (οὐσιωδῶς καὶ κατὰ φύσιν), and who is 'the supplier (χορηγός) of the Spirit', receives it 'as one of us... in order to preserve it for our nature and plant in us once again the grace that had left us'.¹⁵⁸ The one who is 'life according to his nature' received the Spirit 'in order to sanctify our nature', and died 'in order to raise up all of that nature along with himself'.¹⁵⁹ Here, Cyril echoes Athanasius in the stress he places upon the sanctifying agency of the Word as the giver of the Spirit, but he imbues his exegesis of John with an unmistakable concern for speaking about 'the great mystery of the Incarnation'¹⁶⁰ as a point of intersection between the human and divine natures. Indeed, the term 'nature' (φύσις) would prove to be an indispensable definitional tool for Cyril in his attempts to describe the union of humanity and divinity in Christ: his oft-repeated mantra of the 'one incarnate nature of God the Word' (μία φύσις τοῦ θεοῦ λόγου σεσαρκωμένη) would later lie at the very heart of his later christological controversy with Nestorius.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁵ Id., *Lc. 11: 20* (from *Homily 81, on Luke 11: 19–26*): PG 72.704C; J. Reuss, *Lukas-Kommentare*, 127 (frag. 142). Cyril's commentary on Luke actually consists of a series of homilies: while the Greek text is fragmentary (PG 72.475–949; Reuss, *Lukas-Kommentare*, 54–278), the entirety of the work survives in a Syriac translation: ed. J. B. Chabot, CSCO 70 (1912); Latin trans. R. Tonneau, CSCO 140 (1953); English trans. R. Payne Smith, *A Commentary Upon the Gospel According to Luke*, 2 vols. (1859). In the Syriac, this reference appears in *Homily 81* (trans. R. Payne Smith, ii. 371).

¹⁵⁶ Cyril of Alexandria, *Jo. 5. 2* (Pusey, i. 692. 26–7); Wilken, *Judaism and the Early Christian Mind*, 133.

¹⁵⁷ Cyril of Alexandria, *Jo. 2. 1* (Pusey, i. 174–90).

¹⁵⁸ Ibid. *Jo. 2. 1* (Pusey, i. 174. 3 and 184. 19–23); for the following discussion, I am indebted to the work of Keating, *Appropriation of the Divine Life*, 27–8 and n. 18. In Cyril's theology, humanity's loss of grace was rooted in Adam's loss of the Spirit that had been breathed into him at the time of his creation. Thus, Cyril is able to present Christ's reception of the Spirit on our behalf in his baptism as a reversal of Adam's deficit: the dove that 'alighted' (κατέπετη) on Jesus in the Gospel marks the return of the Spirit that originally 'flew away' (ἀπέπετη) from the human race when Adam sinned (Cyril of Alexandria, *schol. inc. 1* (PG 75.1369C, 1372B)).

¹⁵⁹ Cyril of Alexandria, *Jo. 2. 1* (Pusey, i. 185. 5–9).

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. 2. 1 (Pusey, i. 185. 21–2).

¹⁶¹ In a strange way, Cyril's use of this phrase also vividly reflects his own self-consciousness about the Athanasian legacy he sought to uphold. He employed it believing it to be derived from Athanasius' own writings. However, the roots of this christological slogan can actually be traced to Apollinarian literature (that of Apollinaris and his followers), which passed under the name of Athanasius and other church fathers in Cyril's day: see Hans Lietzmann, *Apollinaris von Laodicea*, 88–92, 146–7, 159–61, 163. The literature transmitted under the name of Athanasius includes Apollinaris' *Letter to Jovian* (ed. Lietzmann, 250–3), and two anonymous treatises

However, before we move on to evaluate the ways that the Nestorian Controversy shaped his thought, it is important to note how Cyril's Christology was first framed by an engagement with Athanasius' anti-Arian apologetic. One sees hints of this in Cyril's aforementioned interpretation of Christ's baptism where he insisted that the Word possesses the Spirit 'not by participation...but essentially and by nature' (οὐ κατὰ μετοχήν...ἀλλ' οὐσιωδῶς καὶ κατὰ φύσιν).¹⁶² This language was designed to rebut doubts about how the Son could be consubstantial (ὁμοούσιος) with God the Father if he received the Spirit only at the moment of his baptism. To Arian interpreters, the act of receiving something implied both a prior lack and a subsequent change in status. If the Son is truly of the same essence as the Father as proclaimed at the Council of Nicaea, then how could he be in need of anything or be changed in any way? Such questions and concerns were still circulating in Cyril's day, decades after the formal end of the Arian controversy at the Council of Constantinople (381 CE).

Cyril's appropriation of Athanasius' anti-Arian exegetical strategies is perhaps most readily apparent in one of his very earliest works, the *Thesaurus on the Holy and Consubstantial Trinity*, where he virtually paraphrases whole chapters of Athanasius' third *Oration against the Arians*.¹⁶³ Cyril calls his readers' attention to the standard list of scriptural passages contested by Arian exegetes and revisits Athanasius' interpretative countermeasures in detail. Prime examples are his readings of Proverbs 8: 22 ('the Lord created me at the beginning of his work') and Colossians 1: 15 ('the firstborn of all creation').¹⁶⁴ In each case, Cyril argues against the Arian view that the Son was a creature by insisting that the creation-language applies not to the eternal essence of the Word but to his existence in the body. Thus, Proverbs 8: 22 does not imply that the Word was created as part of the original creation; instead, it refers to the 'time of his sojourn (on earth), insofar as he had become flesh.'¹⁶⁵

entitled *On the Unity of Christ* (ed. Lietzmann, 294–302) and *On the Incarnation of God the Word* (ed. Lietzmann, 303–7). For other discussions of the transmission of this literature, see P. Galtier, 'Saint Cyrille et Apollinaire', 584–609; Jacques Liébaert, *Christologie*, 110; Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon*, 258–63. John A. McGuckin (*St Cyril*, 85, 207–12) acknowledges that 'the assonance between the pseudepigraphical texts and the writings of Cyril is beyond question', but he thinks the significance of this Apollinarian connection has been 'grossly overstated' in modern scholarship.

¹⁶² Cyril of Alexandria, *Jo.* 2. 1 (Pusey, i. 174. 2–3).

¹⁶³ Chs. 22–4 and 28 of the *Thesaurus* summarize chs. 35–57 of Athanasius' third *Oration against the Arians*: see J. Liébaert, *La Doctrine christologique*, 83, 195 ff.; L. J. Welch, *Christology and Eucharist*, 50–1.

¹⁶⁴ Wilken, *Judaism and the Early Christian Mind*, 170–3.

¹⁶⁵ Cyril of Alexandria, *thes.* 15 (PG 75.284A). While Liébaert (*La Doctrine christologique*, 131) emphasizes Cyril's close reliance on Athanasius in his interpretation of Proverbs 8: 22, L. J. Welch (*Christology and Eucharist*, 134–7) argues that Cyril introduces 'a new twist' by

Similarly, when Paul calls Christ ‘the firstborn of all creation’ in Colossians 1: 15, he speaks of him with regard to the fact that ‘he has become a human being . . . and has reasonably attained a likeness to us.’¹⁶⁶ This kind of Athanasian anti-Arian discourse leavened much of Cyril’s formal biblical commentary as well. In the case of his *Commentary on John*, for instance, he addresses a whole series of textual details that a reader might misconstrue as evidence for the Son’s temporal inferiority to the Father—including not only his reception of the Spirit in baptism, but also his apparent susceptibility to suffering and his final glorification.¹⁶⁷

However, Cyril’s anti-Arian discourse evolved in a new direction with the onset of his christological controversy with Nestorius. The Arian and Nestorian Controversies were actually about very different theological issues: while the former debate concerned the Son’s relation to the Father, the latter focused on the relation of humanity and divinity in the person of Christ. And yet, in his treatises, letters, and sermons against Nestorius, Cyril explicitly brings anti-Arian rhetoric to bear against his adversary, accusing him of denigrating the divinity of Christ by partitioning him into two separate natures.¹⁶⁸ Over the course of their decade-long debate, this polemic came to the fore especially with regard to the contentious issue of Mary’s status as Theotokos, or the ‘Mother of God.’¹⁶⁹

In a sermon delivered early in 429 from his pulpit in Constantinople, the bishop Nestorius publicly rejected the term ‘Theotokos’ as an honorific title for the Virgin Mary.¹⁷⁰ To his mind, the designation ‘Mother of God’ failed to give due place to Christ’s humanity.¹⁷¹ However, for Cyril such a stance was

invoking the Father’s ‘foreknowledge’ even before the creation of the world that the incarnate Word would establish himself as the foundation for our incorruptibility and salvation (see e.g. Cyril of Alexandria, *thes.* 15; *PG* 75.292A–293A). However, Welch (138–40) undercuts his own argument somewhat when he points out the fact that Athanasius also appeals to the Father’s foreknowledge, and that he and Cyril both liken God to a ‘wise architect’ who draws up detailed plans for a building’s foundation before executing the work: compare Athanasius, *ar.* 2. 75 (*PG* 26.305B–C) and Cyril, *thes.* 15 (*PG* 75.296A–B).

¹⁶⁶ Cyril of Alexandria, *thes.* 25 (*PG* 75.404B).

¹⁶⁷ N. Russell, *Cyril of Alexandria*, 97.

¹⁶⁸ Susan Wessel, *Cyril of Alexandria and the Nestorian Controversy*, 112–37, esp. 136. Cyril lodged such accusations against Nestorius even though Nestorius’ own dual-nature christology was designed to safeguard the divinity of Christ against any imputation of human failings. In this context, it should be noted that Nestorius responded in kind, accusing Cyril of falling into Arian error by commingling the human and divine natures in Christ: see esp. Nestorius, *First Letter to Pope Caestine I* (*ACO* 1.2, 13; also F. Loofs, *Nestoriana*, 166); cited by S. Wessel, *Cyril*, 220–1.

¹⁶⁹ This issue is highlighted as the first of Cyril’s scathing Twelve Anathemas against Nestorius: see *Ep.* 17. 12 (*Third Letter to Nestorius*) (*ACO* 1.1, 40; trans. McGuckin, *St Cyril*, 273).

¹⁷⁰ *ACO* 1.1.6, 18.24–31; Loofs, *Nestoriana*, 277–8. For an account of the events leading up to Nestorius’ series of sermons against Mary’s title of Theotokos, see McGuckin, *St Cyril*, 20–31.

¹⁷¹ Russell, *Cyril of Alexandria*, 34. To Nestorius, the title ‘Theotokos’ smacked too much of Apollinarianism—the christology espoused by Apollinaris of Laodicea which substituted the divine Word for Christ’s human soul and thereby effectively denied Christ a full humanity.

incomprehensible and insulting: the title Theotokos had long been part of the theological and liturgical idiom of the Alexandrian church.¹⁷² In response to this perceived outrage, Cyril immediately appealed to the precedent of Athanasius and to the Nicene Creed in order to defend his own continued use of the term as confirmation ‘that he who is born from the holy virgin is God by nature’.¹⁷³ Later, in his direct correspondence with Nestorius, Cyril would press this point home repeatedly, citing the ‘holy and great Synod’ as authorization for his belief that ‘the Only Begotten Word of God himself’ underwent a human birth by ‘taking flesh from the virgin and making it his very own from his mother’.¹⁷⁴ In this way, the Word is ‘made one from his mother’s womb,’ and is said ‘to have undergone a fleshly birth in so far as he appropriated to himself the birth of his own flesh’.¹⁷⁵ For Cyril, the Nicene Creed’s ‘singular vision of Christ’ served as an implicit rebuke of Nestorius and his dual nature doctrine, and Mary’s status as the Mother of God worthily encapsulated the paradoxical ‘mystery of the economy of the flesh’ at work in the hypostatic union.¹⁷⁶

By the time Cyril entered into controversy with Nestorius, his language and ideas about the nature of this hypostatic union were already largely formulated. In seeking to put words on this ‘mystery of the economy with flesh’, he consistently reached his hand into Athanasius’ theological toolbox, in particular drawing on the fourth-century bishop’s theories of appropriation and predication. For Cyril (as for Athanasius), the intimate and inseparable union of the Word with the body was explicable in terms of the Word’s act of substantially appropriating (*ἰδιοποιεῖν*) that body, of making that body his ‘own’ (*ἴδιος*).¹⁷⁷ Thus, for example, in his *Commentary on John*, Cyril writes

¹⁷² Origen and Athanasius had both employed this title for the Virgin Mary: see G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, 639–40; M. Starowieyski, ‘Le Titre *theotokos* avant le concile d’Ephèse’, 236–42; and Russell, *Cyril of Alexandria*, 232 n. 15. The term ‘Theotokos’ also served as a valuable tool in Cyril’s efforts to counter the influence of the Isis cult in Egypt: see J. A. McGuckin, ‘The Influence of the Isis Cult on St Cyril of Alexandria’s Christology’, 295–9; and Stephen J. Davis, *Early Coptic Papacy*, 76–7.

¹⁷³ Cyril of Alexandria, *Ep. 1. 4–6 (Letter to the Monks of Egypt)*; ACO 1.1.1, 11–13; trans. McGuckin, *St Cyril*, 247–8. Cyril cites two instances where Athanasius himself refers to Mary as the Mother of God (Athanasius, *ar. 3. 29, 33*; PG 26.385A, 393A–B).

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 17. 2–3 (Third *Letter to Nestorius*); ACO 1.1.1, 34–5; trans. McGuckin, *St Cyril*, 267–8.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 4. 4 (Second *Letter to Nestorius*); ACO 1.1.1, 27; trans. McGuckin, *St Cyril*, 264.

¹⁷⁶ *Id.*, *Nest. 1. 1* (ACO 1.1.6, 18; trans. Russell, *Cyril of Alexandria*, 135); Wessel, *Cyril of Alexandria and the Nestorian Controversy*, 127, 224–35. Wessel highlights Cyril’s use of paradoxical spatial metaphors to express the mystery of this divine economy: thus, in one of Cyril’s homilies delivered at the Council of Ephesus, the Virgin Theotokos is lauded as ‘the place for the infinite’ and ‘the one who contains the uncontainable’ (Cyril of Alexandria, *hom. div. 4*; ACO 1.1.2, 102; trans. Wessel, *Cyril*, 312). On the dating and occasion for this homily, see M. Santer, ‘The Authorship and Occasion of Cyril of Alexandria’s Sermon on the Virgin’, 144–50; Wessel, *Cyril*, 190–2; and ead., ‘Nestorius, Mary, and Controversy in Cyril of Alexandria’s *Homily IV*’, 6–8.

¹⁷⁷ Andrew Louth, ‘The Use of the Term ‘Idios’ in Alexandrian Theology from Alexander to Cyril’, 198–202; McGuckin, *St Cyril*, 201–7; *id.*, ‘Introduction’ to *On the Unity of Christ*, 44–5;

that the Word comes to be ‘one with his own flesh’ and that the flesh is the Word’s ‘own proper good’.¹⁷⁸ In his later anti-Nestorian writings, one observes an exponential increase in his use of such vocabulary: in works such as his five-part treatise *Against Nestorius* and his dialogue *On the Unity of Christ*, Cyril employs the term ἴδιος and its cognates regularly to argue against Nestorius’ description of the Incarnation as a mere ‘conjunction’ (συνάφεια).¹⁷⁹ To Cyril, Nestorius’ division of Christ into two natures had ‘foolishly unraveled the great design of the fleshly economy’, in which the singular agency of the Word remained paramount.¹⁸⁰

A primary consequence of the union brought about by the Word’s appropriation of the flesh was an exchange of attributes—what later came to be termed a *communicatio idiomatum*—through which the properties (ιδιότητες) of human nature came to be predicated to the Word and, conversely, properties (ιδιότητες) of the divine nature came to be predicated to the flesh.¹⁸¹

Russell, *Cyril of Alexandria*, 26–7; Meunier, *Le Christ de Cyrille d’Alexandrie*, 264–71; see also Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 73, on Athanasius’ influence over Cyril with regard to their shared theory of predication. Liébaert and Gebremedhin distinguish between Cyril’s use of the phrase *ἰδία φύσις* (to refer to the Word’s own divine nature) and his use of the phrases *ἴδιον σῶμα* and *ἰδία σάρξ* (to refer to the Word’s appropriation of the body or flesh): see Liébaert, *La Doctrine christologique*, 213; and Gebremedhin, *Life-Giving Blessing*, 36–8. Fairbairn (*Grace and Christology*, 83–124) presents an illuminatingly detailed analysis of Cyril’s use of ἴδιος and its cognates in his early and later writings, comparing and contrasting it to his use of the parallel term *οἰκειότης* (relationship, communion), and showing why he preferred the former over the latter for describing the incarnate union, especially during his controversy with Nestorius. On Cyril’s employment of the term in trinitarian contexts (to describe the Son’s relation to the Father), see M-O. Boulnois, *Le Paradoxe trinitaire*, 313–31.

¹⁷⁸ Cyril of Alexandria, *Jo.* 12. 1 and 5. 5 (Pusey, iii. 155. 10–11; and ii. 70. 23); Fairbairn, *Grace and Christology*, 88.

¹⁷⁹ Fairbairn (ibid. 121–2 n. 40; plus tables 2 and 3) tabulates the total occurrences of the adjective ἴδιος in Cyril’s writings and shows that it occurs approximately 200 times in his treatise *Against Nestorius* and around 75 times in his dialogue *On the Unity of Christ*. For an extended discourse against ‘a conjunction merely of proximity and juxtaposition’, see the second book of Cyril’s treatise *Against Nestorius* (*Nest.* 2. 5–8; ACO 1.1.6, 41–6; trans. Russell, *Cyril of Alexandria*, 148–57). Commenting on Colossians 1: 21–2 in *On the Unity of Christ*, Cyril writes, ‘Note how (the apostle) says it was “his own body” and “his own flesh” which was given up for us. We must not say, that the flesh and blood was that of another son apart from him, understood as separate and honored by a mere conjunction (συνάφεια) . . .’ (*Chr. un.* 774d; de Durand, *Deux dialogues christologiques*, 500; trans. McGuckin, 128). Cyril believed that Nestorius and his followers, in espousing this theory of conjunction, had compromised the salvific efficacy of the incarnate union.

¹⁸⁰ Cyril of Alexandria, *Chr. un.* 735a (de Durand, *Deux dialogues christologiques*, 430; trans. McGuckin, 100).

¹⁸¹ On the development of this idea in Cyril’s early works, see G. Joussard, ‘S. Cyrille d’Alexandrie aux prises avec la “communication des idiomes” avant 428’, 112–21. On its place in Cyril’s later conflict with Nestorius, see J. A. McGuckin, *St Cyril*, 153–5, 190–3. Russell (*Cyril of Alexandria*, 217 n. 54) notes that the phrase *communicatio idiomatum* itself does not appear before the sixth century, but that the ‘substance of the theory’ already appears in Origen (*princ.* 1. 2. 6; Koetschau, GCS 22 (1913), 34–7) and Athanasius (*ep. Adelp.* 3; PG 26.1073D–1076D).

For just as the quality of being Only-Begotten has become a property of the humanity (*ἴδιον τῆς ἀνθρωπότητος*) in Christ on account of its union with the Logos through an arrangement of the economy, so also the quality of being among many brothers and of being firstborn has become a property of the Logos (*ἴδιον τοῦ Λόγου*) on account of his union with flesh.¹⁸²

Cyril felt no qualm about saying, in virtually the same breath, that the Word of God ‘tasted death’ and that the Lord’s body was divinely ‘life-giving’,¹⁸³ and he could do so because he grounded his christological logic in the single subjectivity of the incarnate Word.

Cyril’s theory regarding this exchange of attributes cut in two important directions. On the one hand, it helped explain for him how the Word of God could be said to suffer in the body, while still remaining impassible in his divinity. Thus, Cyril writes, ‘Even though (the Word) was beyond the power of suffering in his nature as God . . . he wrapped himself in flesh that was capable of suffering, and revealed it as his very own, so that even the suffering might be said to be his (because it was his own body which suffered and no one else’s)’.¹⁸⁴ This applied equally to other human attributes as well. Not only his hunger and fatigue, but also his advancement ‘in wisdom and stature and grace’, belong to him ‘by an economic appropriation’.¹⁸⁵ Here it is important to recognize that, for Cyril, Christ’s experience of human passions was not restricted to the body. Cyril went beyond Athanasius in voicing his recognition of how the ‘personal body of the Word of the Father’ was ‘animated with a rational soul’—a soul whose emotional and sensory affections were likewise made the Word’s own in the hypostatic union of the Incarnation.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸² Cyril of Alexandria, *inc. unigen.* (de Durand, *Deux dialogues christologiques*, 256); Fairbairn, *Grace and Christology*, 89.

¹⁸³ Cyril of Alexandria, *Ep.* 17. 12 (Third Letter to Nestorius) (ACO 1.1, 41–2); cf. *expl. xii cap.* 28–31 (ACO 1.1.5, 24–5; trans. McGuckin, *St Cyril*, 292–3).

¹⁸⁴ Id., *Chr. un.* 766d–e (de Durand, *Deux dialogues christologiques*, 474; trans. McGuckin, 118).

¹⁸⁵ Ibid. 760e–761a (de Durand, *Deux dialogues christologiques*, 456; trans. McGuckin, 110); cf. *schol. inc.* 35 (PG 75.1408C–1412C; McGuckin, *St Cyril*, 331–5).

¹⁸⁶ Ibid. 777e (de Durand, *Deux dialogues christologiques*, 512; trans. McGuckin, 133). Earlier in the same work (759d–e: de Durand, *Deux dialogues christologiques*, 452; trans. J. A. McGuckin, 109), Cyril emphasizes the fact that the Word appropriates ‘not a soulless flesh as some would have it . . . but flesh animated with a rational soul, and in all respects one factor (*προσοπος*) with it’. In his third Letter to Nestorius (*Ep.* 17. 8; ACO 1.1, 38; trans. McGuckin, *St Cyril*, 271), Cyril specifically makes a connection between the Word’s union with a human being ‘ensouled with a rational soul’ and the Saviour’s sayings that reveal ‘the limitations of his manhood’. In his oration *Oration to the Empresses Pulcheria and Eudocia on the Orthodox Faith*, Cyril also appeals to the Son’s union with ‘a body animated by a rational soul’ in explaining Christ’s laments in Matthew 26: 38 (‘My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death’) and John 12: 27 (‘Now my soul is troubled’): *Pulch.* 44 (ACO 1.1.5, 58–9; Welch, *Christology and Eucharist*, 58–9); cf. *Thds.* 21 (ACO 1.1.1., 55). Perhaps Cyril’s most mature statement on the soul of Christ as ‘a self-moving principle’ (*αὐτοκίνητον*) and ‘the natural principle of suffering’ is his second Letter to Succensus: *Ep.* 46 (ACO 1.1.6, 157–62; trans. McGuckin, *St Cyril*,

On the other hand, this doctrine concerning an exchange of attributes also served as an important theoretical basis for understanding how Christ's body came to exercise divine power (*δύναμις*) and energy (*ἐνέργεια*).¹⁸⁷ Through this incarnational exchange, the Word confers his life-giving (*ζωοποιός*) qualities onto the body that he has made his own. 'For since the life-giving Word of God was living in the flesh, he transformed it to his own proper good—that is, to life; and according to the manner of the inexpressible union, he suitably rendered it wholly life-giving, as he is himself by nature.'¹⁸⁸ The body of Christ is made life-giving by virtue of this 'union of divine *δύναμις* and *ἐνέργεια* with flesh.'¹⁸⁹ The Word vivifies the body, and in the process Christ's body itself becomes invested with vivifying powers, evidenced in his ability to heal and to raise the dead simply by the touch of his hand.¹⁹⁰

Cyril uses a number of analogies drawn from human psychology, the natural sciences, and the Scriptures to try to describe the nature of this union and the transference of properties it engendered.¹⁹¹ Most commonly, he calls attention to the 'composition' (*σύνθεσις*) of individual human beings—specifically, the 'union' (*ἔνωσις*) of the soul with the body—as a way of helping his readers understand the dynamics of the Incarnation.¹⁹² As in the case of the soul, the Word likewise is understood to unite with and enliven the flesh without ever losing its own integrity.

359–63; the quotes here are from A. Grillmeier, S. J., *Christ in Christian Tradition*, i. 475). Welch (*Christology and Eucharist*, 51–6) also notes the Cyril's *Commentary on John* contains evidence for the early development of his views on Christ's soul and its relation to suffering.

In the context of the Nestorian controversy, Cyril's teaching concerning Christ's human 'soul' (*ψυχή*) or 'mind' (*νοῦς*) was part of his concerted apologetic strategy to avoid the conclusions of Apollinaris' christology (where the Logos takes the place of Christ's human soul). However, in a critique of modern scholars who import such categories as their own measures or criteria for human personhood, McGuckin (*St Cyril*, 206) points out that for Cyril 'the real substrate of the person' did not lie in the functions of the mind or soul, but rather in 'the divine hypostasis which has imaged itself in the human hypostasis'.

¹⁸⁷ Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, i. 476–7.

¹⁸⁸ Cyril of Alexandria, *Jo. 4. 2* (Pusey, i. 520).

¹⁸⁹ Gebremedhin, *Life-Giving Blessing*, 51. Gebremedhin (48–55) and Keating (*Appropriation of the Divine Life*, 7–8) have both observed how this transference of life to Christ's body is grounded in Cyril's trinitarian theology, in which the Father is also identified as the 'life-giving root' (*ρίζα ζωοποιός*): see Cyril of Alexandria, *Jo. 4. 3* (Pusey, i. 538. 6); and *Lc. 22. 17* (from *Homily 142, on Luke 22: 17–22*; Reuss, *Lukas-Kommentare*, 209; for a translation of the Syriac text, see Payne Smith, ii. 668).

¹⁹⁰ See Cyril of Alexandria, *Jo. 4. 2* (Pusey, i. 530. 8–26; trans. Russell, *Cyril of Alexandria* 115); D. A. Keating, *Appropriation of the Divine Life*, 69.

¹⁹¹ Steven A. McKinion, *Words, Imagery, and the Mystery of Christ*, 188–226; McGuckin, *St Cyril*, 196–200; Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers*, 407–9; Gebremedhin, *Life-Giving Blessing*, 54–5.

¹⁹² Cyril of Alexandria, *Ep. 45. 7* (*First Letter to Succensus*) (ACO 1.1.6, 154; trans. McGuckin, *St Cyril*, 355–6). For other examples of Cyril's christological use of the body–soul metaphor, see his *Letter to the Monks of Egypt* (*Ep. 1. 12*: ACO 1.1.1, 15; trans. McGuckin, *St Cyril*, 251–2); and

The other analogies he employs are primarily sensory in character, meant to stimulate his readers' visual, tactile, and olfactory imaginations as a way of imaging a union that was 'beyond human thought' and in the end 'absolutely ineffable'.¹⁹³ One of his favourite analogies involves fire and the effects of its union with other substances, such as wood, coal, or iron. Ignited by flame, wood 'is changed into the visual form (*ᾠψις*) and power (*δύναμις*) of fire', and becomes one with it, just like the body of Christ is kindled by the divine Word.¹⁹⁴ The prophet Isaiah's vision of a burning coal (Is. 6: 6) served as a handy biblical image for this transformative process: the divine nature is like this fire, and the burning coal (like wood) 'has been completely filled with fire and comes to acquire its power (*δύναμις*) and energy (*ἐνέργεια*)', assimilating its heat and light.¹⁹⁵ Cyril invokes other evocative sensory metaphors as well, including that of a flower (which is likened to the body) and its fragrance (likened to the incorporeal nature of the Godhead). Invoking the 'lily of the valleys' from the Song of Songs (2: 1, LXX), he observes that the lily is 'one thing constituted from both elements' since the fragrance 'uses the body (*σῶμα*) in which it subsists as its own (*ἴδιον*)'.¹⁹⁶ In the same way, he says, '(Christ's) own transcendent and sublime nature of godhead perfumes the world in the humanity as its particular substrate'.¹⁹⁷

This last quotation, taken from Cyril's *Scholía on the Incarnation*, provides us with an initial glimpse into the way that Cyril saw the enlivening effects of this union as extending not just to the Word's own body, but through that body to the entire cosmos. However, unlike Athanasius, Cyril does not introduce a full-fledged theory of micro- and macrocosmic bodies as the theoretical ground for conceiving how human beings are able to participate

his *Explanation of the Twelve Chapters* (*expl. xii cap.* 11: ACO 1.1.5, 18–19; trans. McGuckin, *St Cyril*, 286). Wolfson (*The Philosophy of the Church*, 408–9) argues that Cyril's uses the term 'composition' (*σύνθεσις*) not in the traditional philosophical sense of 'juxtaposition' (*παράθεσις*), but rather as a kind of 'union' (*ἔνωσις*) that conforms to the Aristotelian model of 'predominance'. Wolfson (384–5) locates the theoretical basis for this 'union of predominance' in Alexander Aphrodisiensis' criticism of the Stoic theory of mixture (*μίξις* or *κρᾶσις*).

¹⁹³ Cyril of Alexandria, *schol. inc.* 8 (PG 75.1376C).

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 9 (PG 75.1380A).

¹⁹⁵ *Id.*, *Is.* 1. 4 (PG 70.180D–184A, esp. 181B–C); see also *schol. inc.* 9 (PG 75.1380A). In his dialogue *On the Unity of Christ* (*Chr. un.* 777d–e: de Durand, *Deux dialogues christologiques*, 510; trans. McGuckin, 132–3), Cyril introduces the image of heated iron as another variation on this analogy, noting that 'if it is true that fire has converse with materials which in their own natures are not hot, and yet renders them hot since it so abundantly introduces to them the inherent energy (*ἐνέργεια*) of its own power, then surely in an even greater degree the Word who is God can introduce the life-giving power (*δύναμις*) and energy (*ἐνέργεια*) of his own self into his very own flesh'.

¹⁹⁶ *Id.*, *schol. inc.* 10 (PG 75.1380C). For a discussion of Cyril's christological metaphor of the lily and its fragrance in relation to his *ἴδιον*-language, see Ruth M. Siddals, 'Oneness and Difference in the Christology of Cyril of Alexandria', 207–11.

¹⁹⁷ Cyril of Alexandria, *schol. inc.* 10 (PG 75.1380C; trans. McGuckin, *St Cyril*, 302).

corporeally in the Incarnation. Instead, he shifts the focus of Athanasius' 'realistic' vision—a vision that posits the deification of human bodies as part of a transformed cosmos—towards the ritual life of the church. For Cyril, it is the sacraments which become the pre-eminent loci for human participation in the divine nature.

Cyril follows Athanasius in his employment of 'deification' language in both a christological and an anthropological sense—that is, to refer to both the Word's divinization of his body and our own divinization (which also takes place through the action of the Word).¹⁹⁸ However, Cyril is generally more circumspect than Athanasius in his use of the terms *θεοποιεῖν* and *θεοποίησις*.¹⁹⁹ Indeed, when he has the deification of human beings in mind, he often opts for alternative ways to express the same idea. He shows a special preference for the language of 2 Peter 1: 4 ('partakers of the divine nature', *θείας φύσεως κοινωνοί*),²⁰⁰ which he frequently ties to the notions of sanctification and a dual 'participation' (*μέθεξις*) in the Spirit through baptism and in the flesh of Christ through the eucharist.²⁰¹ In this context, Cyril was able to develop a theory of sacramental participation that accommodated for both a 'spiritual' (*πνευματικός*) and a 'bodily' (*σωματικός*) appropriation of the divine life.²⁰²

Cyril aligns this twofold path for divine participation with the two sacraments and their distinctive effects upon the human person. While he characteristically speaks of baptism in terms of a spiritual indwelling (through which

¹⁹⁸ On Cyril's theology of deification, see Gross, *La Divinization du Chrétien*, 277–97; Russell, 'Partakers of the Divine Nature', 57–60; id., *Doctrine of Deification*, 191–203; D. A. Keating, *Appropriation of the Divine Life*, esp. 7–12, 140–96. For evidence of Cyril's christological usage of the term, see *Thees.* 196, 251 (PG 75.333A; PG 75.428C); and *Nest.* 2. 8–11 (ACO 1.1.6, 44–50). For evidence of its anthropological usage, see *Thees.* 25, 168, 197 289, 313, 335, 349 (PG 75.45A, 284B, 333C, 492B, 532D, 569C, 592D); *dial. Trin.* 5. 640a and 7. 640a, 644c–d (de Durand, SC 231 (1977), 330, and SC 246 (1978), 180). Keating (*Appropriation of the Divine Life*, 10–11 n. 23–9) provides a full list, organized along different lines.

¹⁹⁹ The cause of Cyril's relative caution in his use of deification vocabulary is not completely clear; however, it may have stemmed from apologetic-controversial concerns related to his successive polemics against Jewish, Anthropomorphite, Apollinarian, and/or Nestorian viewpoints throughout the course of his career (Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*, 193; Keating, *Appropriation of the Divine Life*, 194–5).

²⁰⁰ Cyril quotes 2 Peter 1: 4 far more than any of his Alexandrian predecessors (or any other Greek Christian writer, for that matter). In their extant works, Origen and Athanasius cite the verse only three and six times, respectively: Russell, 'Partakers of the Divine Nature', 52; see also A. J. Kolp, 'Partakers of the Divine Nature', 1018–23. Theophilus also alludes to 2 Peter 1: 4 twice in his *Homily on the Mystical Supper* (PG 77.1021B and 1025D; Russell, *Doctrine of Deification*, 201 n. 34). By contrast, Cyril cites it 41 times in his New Testament commentaries alone (Keating, *Appropriation of the Divine Life*, 144 n. 1).

²⁰¹ W. Burghart, *The Image of God in Man*, 70; Keating, *Appropriation of the Divine Life*, 192–3.

²⁰² On Cyril's pairing of these terms or their close equivalents, 'intelligible' (*νοητός*) and 'sensible' (*αἰσθητός*), see Meunier, *Le Christ de Cyrille d'Alexandrie*, 169; and Keating, *Appropriation of the Divine Life*, 75 n. 23.

one's soul is raised up to sonship through the grace of adoption), he typically speaks of the eucharist in terms of a corporeal 'commingling' with Christ's flesh (through which one's body is raised up to incorruption). Given my stated interest in the function of bodies in relation to the Incarnation, I want to examine Cyril's eucharistic theology in more detail. However, before I do so, I must add a couple of important caveats to my summary statement above. First, at various points in his extant writings, Cyril amply demonstrates his awareness of how the eucharist confers not just bodily benefits, but also spiritual ones: thus, he writes in his commentary on Matthew 26: 26–8 that the bread and wine are transformed into a 'spiritual blessing' (εὐλογία ἡ πνευματικὴ) so that by partaking of them 'we may be sanctified in both body and spirit (σωματικῶς καὶ πνευματικῶς).'²⁰³ Second, Cyril also grounds his theology of baptism in the Incarnation event, and indeed on one occasion even hints at a corporeal dimension to baptismal participation when he observes that the body of the one being baptized receives sanctification 'by means of the water that has been sanctified.'²⁰⁴ Nonetheless, despite these caveats, Cyril unquestionably gives the eucharist a privileged place as the primary ritual context for enacting divine participation in the body, for realizing a 'co-corporeality' with the incarnate Word.²⁰⁵

While Athanasius had likewise drawn on the language of Ephesians 3: 6 to describe how human beings could come to be 'co-corporeal' (σύσσωμοι) with Christ, he conspicuously never did so with reference to eucharistic practice.²⁰⁶

²⁰³ Cyril of Alexandria, *fr. Mt.* 289. 6–7 (Reuss, *Matthäus-Kommentare*, 255). On the double modality of the eucharist in Cyril's thought, see esp. Meunier, *Le Christ de Cyrille d'Alexandrie*, 163–78; M.-O. Boulnois, 'L'Eucharistie', 147–72; Gebremedhin, *Life-Giving Blessing*, 105; J. Mahé, 'L'Eucharistie d'après saint Cyrille d'Alexandrie', 677–96, esp. 685 n. 1. Keating (*Appropriation of the Divine Life, passim*) equivocates on this point (along with Cyril himself), arguing alternatively for the primarily bodily or dual nature of Cyril's theory of eucharistic participation, depending on what particular text he is exegeting.

²⁰⁴ Cyril of Alexandria, *Jo.* 2. 1 (Pusey, i. 219. 19–20); Keating, *Appropriation of the Divine Life*, 54–64 (esp. 58–9), 78–9.

²⁰⁵ Id., *Jo.* (Pusey, ii. 542. 6–15, 669. 13–16, 735. 17–23, 736. 16–21, 737. 1–4); see also *glaph. Gen.* 1 (PG 69.29B–C); Meunier, *Le Christ de Cyrille d'Alexandrie*, 168–9, 179–93; Keating, *Appropriation of the Divine Life*, 100–1; L. Janssens, 'Notre filiation divine', 253.

²⁰⁶ Gebremedhin (*Life-Giving Blessing*, 62) and Welch (*Christology and Eucharist*, 127) have cited a passage in a *Sermon to the Newly Baptized* (*fr.* 7; PG 26.1325C–D) attributed to Athanasius as evidence for his view of a descent of the Word upon the elements in the eucharist (i.e. a Logos-epiclesis). However, the authenticity of this sermon is doubtful, and it cannot by itself support such an argument. On the spurious character of most sermons and other miscellaneous fragments preserved under Athanasius' name, see J. Quasten, *Patrology*, iii. 50–2; and CPG ii. 34–6 (no. 2165). More recently, Anotolios (*Athanasius* (2004), 57–60) has tried to argue for the presence of 'Eucharistic overtones' and an 'implicitly Eucharistic framework' in Athanasius' soteriology, citing sacrificial terminology in *On the Incarnation* and the *Orations against the Arians*; however, he is never able to demonstrate that Athanasius explicitly applies this biblical language of 'offering' and 'sacrifice' to a eucharistic context. In any event, a fully developed sacramental theology emphasizing participation in Christ's body is not to be found in Athanasius' extant writings.

Considered in this historical relief, Cyril's application of this language to his theory of eucharistic participation in the Incarnation has often been seen as one of his distinctive contributions to Alexandrian Christology. However, Cyril was not the first to draw such a connection: indeed, the roots of such a sacramental Christology may be traced a generation earlier, to Theophilus of Alexandria and to issues raised by a controversy over the theology of Origen that boiled over at the turn of the fifth century.

In putting forward the possibility of Cyril's christological indebtedness to Theophilus, I want to offer a corrective to surveys of early Alexandrian Christology (including my own) that typically move directly from Athanasius to Cyril, and skip over the intervening decades entirely. The forty years that intervened between the death of Athanasius (373 CE) and the election of Cyril as bishop of Alexandria (412 CE) were by no means uneventful: during this period, Cyril's uncle Theophilus (bishop of Alexandria from 385 to 412 CE) initiated extended public campaigns against Jews and pagans living in Alexandria, as well as against groups of so-called 'Origenist' monks in Egypt. It was especially this latter campaign—one that took the form of a monastic cultural war involving the suppression of Origen's writings—that ended up having a significant impact on how Alexandrian Christology was transmitted in later centuries.

The disagreement that emerged between Theophilus and his opponents centred on the reception of Origen's theology in Egyptian monasteries, and especially on the question of whether an incorporeal God could be 'imaged' (either mentally or visually) in anthropomorphic terms. For all intents and purposes, the public condemnation of Origen under Theophilus severed (or at least severely disabled) the Egyptian church's interpretative ties to its second- and third-century roots.²⁰⁷ At the same time, however, Theophilus' defence of the propriety of 'imaging' the divine in anthropomorphic terms (over against Origenist affirmations regarding the absolute incorporeality of God) implicitly served as a call to re-examine the significance of the 'body of Christ' in relation not only to the doctrine of the Incarnation itself, but also to the eucharist.

Evidence for this connection between the Incarnation and the eucharist in Theophilus' thought comes from a *Homily on the Mystical Supper*, originally believed to be by Cyril, but more recently thought to derive from Theophilus' hand since it echoes the language of one of his *Festal Letters*.²⁰⁸ In this *Homily*,

²⁰⁷ Samir Khalil Samir, SJ ('Origen: Origen in the Copto-Arabic Tradition', *CE* vi. 1851) sums up the thoroughness of Origen's erasure from Coptic church's theological memory: 'No work by Origen was translated into Arabic during the Middle Ages. . . . Furthermore, no trace of him can be found even in the patristic series on the Bible, in the dogmatic anthologies, or in the original works composed by the Copts in the Middle Ages. The only mention of him is made in the context of the history of the church, when speaking of Demetrius or Dionysius of Alexandria. Even then, Origen always figures among the heretics.'

²⁰⁸ Theophilus of Alexandria, *Homily on the Mystical Supper*. PG 77.1016–27; trans. N. Russell, *Theophilus of Alexandria*, 52–60. For discussions of the authorship of this work, its

Theophilus calls monks with Origenist inclinations ‘solitary wolves’ and ‘empty-talking and soul-deceiving servants of Satan’ who think about Christ in a ‘wicked fashion’, and thereby ‘deny utterly the consubstantiality of Christ with the almighty Father with regard to his existence in the flesh.’²⁰⁹ In response, he pointedly exhorts his faithful listeners to ‘imitate Jesus, the originator and perfecter of our salvation,’²¹⁰ and calls attention to the eucharistic bread and wine—considered as the body and blood of Christ in a very real sense—as evidence for God’s solidarity with humankind.

If the body of God is being distributed, then Christ the Lord is true God, and not a mere human being or (according to them) an angel, priest, or one of the incorporeal beings. And if the drink is the blood of God, then the Son of God is not merely God as one (person) of the worshipped Trinity, but is God the Word who has become incarnate.²¹¹

For Theophilus, it is (1) ethical imitation of the incarnate Word, and (2) participation in the sacrament that secure for human beings salvation. Thus, he calls his listeners not only to ‘imitate’ Christ and but also to eat and drink the body and blood of Christ for the purpose of their becoming ‘sharers in the divine nature.’²¹²

To what extent was Cyril’s own ‘realistic’ understanding of the eucharistic body shaped by Theophilus’ example? First of all, it is clear that concerns about so-called Origenism had not disappeared by Cyril’s election as bishop. In his correspondence with Egyptian monks, the fifth-century Alexandrian appropriates elements of Theophilus’ controversialist discourse, disparaging the Origenists’ ‘evil doctrine’ (*κακοδοξία*) as a form of pagan idolatry.²¹³ Over

dating (c.400), its anti-Origenist polemic, and its place within his larger theology, see M. Richard, ‘Une Homélie de Théophile d’Alexandrie’, esp. 52–6; E. Clark, *The Origenist Controversy*, 110–12; and N. Russell, *Theophilus of Alexandria*, 35–40.

²⁰⁹ Theophilus of Alexandria, *Homily on the Mystical Supper* (PG 77.1028B–C).

²¹⁰ *Ibid.* (PG 77.1028B).

²¹¹ *Ibid.* (PG 77.1028D–1029A).

²¹² *Ibid.* (PG 77. 1021B; cf. 1025D).

²¹³ Cyril of Alexandria, *Ep.* 81 (CPG iii 49 (no. 5381, = *Letter to the Monks of Phua*); ACO 3, 201). In my book, *Early Coptic Papacy* (75), I incorrectly identified this letter as having been addressed to the monks at Scetis. For an English translation, see J. McEnerney, *St Cyril of Alexandria: Letters 51–100* (Fathers of the Church 77; Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1987), 105–6.

Cyril’s charge of idolatry against Origenist monks, who notably eschewed the use of images in worship, may seem counterintuitive, but it follows directly from an earlier shift that took place in Theophilus’ polemics. During the first half of his tenure as the Alexandrian archbishop, Theophilus (fl. 385–412 CE) had originally directed such anti-pagan rhetoric against the so-called anthropomorphite monks who believed that the mental and visual imaging of God was both acceptable and vital for Christian worship. However, around the year 400, Theophilus abruptly changed his policy and began supporting those same anthropomorphite monks over against their Origenist brethren. In doing so, he simply began to redirect the force of his accusations of idolatry against his new ideological foes (the Origenists), despite the fact that

against Origenist ideas about the pre-existence of human souls and the dissolution of human bodies after death, Cyril adamantly reaffirms the resurrection of the flesh.²¹⁴ And while he diverges from Theophilus elsewhere in rejecting certain forms of theological anthropomorphism,²¹⁵ he notably retains his predecessor's 'realistic' view of the eucharistic body of Christ—a view that Theophilus had originally advocated in defending the propriety of imaging God in human terms, but which would obtain a new apologetic rationale for Cyril in his christological debates with Nestorius.

Cyril's theory regarding the transformation of the eucharistic elements comes to expression consistently in his commentaries on the Gospels. Speaking of the bread and wine on the altar in his *Commentary on Matthew*, he writes:

Placing the aforementioned things in the sight of God, we earnestly ask that they may be remodeled (*πλασθήναι*) for us into a spiritual blessing, that having partaken of these things, we may be sanctified in body and soul. But (Christ) plainly said, 'This is my body,' and 'This is my blood,' so that you may not hold that these visible things are a type; rather, in some ineffable way the things set out on the table are truly changed (*μεταποιέσθαι*) by God, into the body and blood of Christ. Partaking of them, we ingest the life-giving and sanctifying power of Christ . . . For God, establishing himself in solidarity with our weaknesses, imbues the offerings with the power of life and changes (*μεθίσταται*) them into the energy of his own life.²¹⁶

In his *Commentary on Luke*, Cyril goes on to speak about how, in the celebration of the meal, Christ comes to be 'in us through the Holy Spirit in a way

this ran counter to the rationale of the original charge. Cyril's *Letter to the Monks of Phua* inherits the conflicted logic of this earlier shift in Theophilus' polemical rhetoric. For a more detailed account of the relationship between anti-pagan rhetoric and Theophilus' shift in monastic patronage, see again my *Early Coptic Papacy*, 63–70.

²¹⁴ Cyril of Alexandria, *Ep.* 81 (ACO 3, 201–2). In the late fourth century, Evagrius Ponticus, an avid interpreter of Origen, had spoken about the final dissolution of the human body and soul in his *Letter to Melania* 5 (Frankenberg, *Opera*, 616–17; trans. Parmentier, 'Evagrius of Pontus' "Letter to Melania", 11–12). Theophilus had opposed this viewpoint in his *Synodal Letter* of 400 (=Jerome, *Ep.* 92. 2; Hilberg, CSEL 55 (1996), 149); Clark, *The Origenist Controversy*, 73, 108.

²¹⁵ Cyril's rejection of extreme anthropomorphic views comes to expression in three works edited and translated by L. Wickam, *Select Letters of Cyril of Alexandria*, 132–79 (*Answers to Tiberias*), 180–213 (*Doctrinal Questions and Answers*), and 214–21 (*Letter to Calosirius*). However, the Greek text of Cyril's *Answers to Tiberias* is fragmentary: the complete text survives only in a Syriac version (ed. R. Y. Ebied and L. R. Wickham, 'The Letter of Cyril of Alexandria to Tiberias the Deacon: Syriac Version', *Muséon* 83 (1970), 433–82).

The anti-anthropomorphic strain of these works reveals a tension in Cyril's thought about whether the divine could be imaged in the human body (W. Burghardt, *The Image of God*, 19–24, 100–1). While in this polemical context he locates the image of God in the soul, in other contexts (such as his reflections on eucharistic theology) he is more optimistic about the capacity of bodies to acquire that image in incorruptibility (Welch, *Christology and Eucharist*, 146–8).

²¹⁶ Cyril of Alexandria, *fr. Mt.* 289. 5–12, 17–19 (Reuss, *Matthäus-Kommentare*, 255).

appropriate to the divine . . . mingled with our bodies by means of his holy flesh and precious blood'.²¹⁷ In the sacrament, the Word functions as 'a life-giving seed' in our bodies: he 'infuses the power of life into the things set out before us and changes them into the energy of his own flesh, so that we may have them for a life-giving participation', and thereby be transformed in nature.²¹⁸

However, the *locus classicus* for Cyril's eucharistic realism may be found in his interpretation of John 6, where Jesus identifies himself as 'bread of life' (6: 35) and as 'the living bread that came down from heaven' (6: 51–8).²¹⁹ Commenting on John 6: 35 ('I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty'), Cyril interprets the eucharist as the fulfilment of Christ's promise. Once again, he affirms that the body of Christ, 'when it has become mingled with our bodies (τοῖς ἡμετέροις ἀνακιρνάμενον σώμασι)', endows us with life and incorruption, and that we thereby become 'partakers of the divine nature' through the power (δύναμις) and energy (ἐνέργεια) of the Word united with that body.²²⁰

Later, in commenting on Jesus' 'bread from heaven' discourse in John 6: 51–8,²²¹ Cyril specifically grounds the power of this eucharistic transaction in the Incarnation: it is the Word's ineffable and indivisible union with the body that grants life to that body and (by extension) to all those who partake of it. Cyril even goes so far as to say that, through our participation in the sacrament, we become united with (συννεοούμενοι) the flesh of Christ just as Christ's flesh is united with the Word.²²² Here, our own union with Christ's body takes the Incarnation as its model and type.

For Cyril, this union is by no means merely a physical one: indeed, we are divested of the natural corruptibility of the flesh, and then reordered, or transformed (μεταποιῶν), in accordance with the divine properties of life and immortality.²²³ However, at the same time, the union that we experience with the body of the Word in the sacrament most definitely has a physical, or even physiological, dimension.²²⁴ Referring to the effects of this union, Cyril writes

²¹⁷ Id., *Lc. 22: 17* (from *Homily 142, on Luke 22: 17–22*: Reuss, *Lukas-Kommentare*, 209–10; for a translation of the Syriac text, see R. Payne Smith, ii. 668).

²¹⁸ Id., *Lc. 22: 17–22* (Reuss, *Lukas-Kommentare*, 210; for a translation of the Syriac text, see R. Payne Smith, ii. 668).

²¹⁹ According to Norman Russell (*Cyril of Alexandria*, 230 n. 29), 'Cyril is the first to interpret the sixth chapter of John principally in eucharistic terms.'

²²⁰ Cyril of Alexandria, *Jo. 3. 6* (Pusey, i. 475. 15–476. 27). On Cyril's use of the terms δύναμις and ἐνέργεια in relation to the eucharist, see also Gebremedhin, *Life-Giving Blessing*, 50.

²²¹ Cyril of Alexandria, *Jo. 4. 2* (Pusey, i. 528. 12–536. 18; trans. Russell, *Cyril of Alexandria*, 114–19).

²²² Ibid. 4. 2 (Pusey, i. 530. 6–8).

²²³ Ibid. 4. 2 (Pusey, i. 530. 26–531. 3).

²²⁴ McGuckin (*St Cyril*, 188) writes, 'The physical interchange that occurs when the believer communicates with his Lord in the eucharistic mysteries is no less than a metamorphosis.' Some scholars have shown a profound discomfort with this aspect of Cyril's thought, usually because

that ‘it was absolutely necessary, not only that our soul should be re-created into newness of life by the Holy Spirit, but that this coarse and earthly body should be sanctified by a coarser but analogous participation and called to incorruption.’²²⁵

Notably, Cyril describes this ‘coarser’ participation in terms of a ‘mingling’ or ‘mixing’ of elements in our bodies.²²⁶ His vocabulary here was designed to evoke for his ancient readers a host of physical analogies related to the preparation and eating of food. Thus, in his commentary on John 6: 56 (‘He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him’), Cyril makes reference to Jesus’ parable of the leaven in Matthew 13, comparing the action of yeast in bread to the way that ‘the smallest portion of the sacrament mingles (*ἀναφύρειν*) our whole body with itself and fills it with its own energy (*ἐνέργεια*).’²²⁷

Further, he describes our act of tasting and ingesting the eucharist in tactile terms, highlighting the fact that it is our physical contact with the body of Christ that serves as a catalyst for this salvific transaction. Cyril does so by drawing a comparison between the effect of Christ’s life-giving touch in the Gospels and the parallel but even greater effect of the sacrament’s touch on our lips and within our bodies: ‘If by a single touch of his holy flesh he gives life to that which has perished, how shall we not benefit much more richly from the life-giving eucharist when we taste it for ourselves?’²²⁸

Finally, Cyril describes this profit that accrues to Christians’ bodies through eucharistic participation in nutritional or medicinal terms. The flesh and blood of Christ serve as sufficient nourishment for the body: in principle, a person who has partaken of the sacrament no longer has need of ‘whatever things drive away death from the flesh, i.e. food and drink.’²²⁹ When consumed,

of a concern to avoid reducing his incarnational and eucharistic theology to a ‘physicalist’ or ‘mechanical’ level. However, such a sanitized approach fails to recognize fully how Cyril understood the sanctifying activity of the Word to extend to the body’s natural processes—to his own in the Incarnation and to ours in the eucharist. On the history of debate over Cyril’s view of the mode of divine presence in the eucharist, see Gebremedhin (*Life-Giving Blessing*, 75–89) who, along with J. Mahé (‘L’Eucharistie d’après saint Cyrille d’Alexandrie’, 677–96) and A. Struckmann (*Die Eucharistielehre des heiligen Cyrill von Alexandrien*, esp. 1–3, 151–6) argues that Cyril believes in a substantial corporeal presence of Christ, *contra* the earlier views of G. E. Steitz (‘Die Abendmahlslehre der griechischen Kirche: Cyrill v. Alex.’, 235–45); and E. Michaud (‘Saint Cyrille d’Alexandrie et l’eucharistie’, 599–614, 675–92).

²²⁵ Cyril of Alexandria, *Jo.* 4. 2 (Pusey, i. 531. 12–16; trans. Russell, *Cyril of Alexandria*, 116).

²²⁶ In his *Commentary on John*, Cyril employs three primary verbs when speaking about the ‘mingling’ or ‘mixing’ of Christ’s body with ours: (1) *ἀνακεράννυμι*, (2) *ἀναμίγνυμι* (along with its base noun form, *ἡ μίξις*), and (3) *ἀναφύρω*. For examples, see *Jo.* 3. 6 and 4. 2 (Pusey, i. 475. 23–35 and 535. 7–12, 18–23); also Gebremedhin, *Life-Giving Blessing*, 90.

²²⁷ Cyril of Alexandria, *Jo.* 4. 2 (Pusey, i. 535. 20–1; trans. Russell, *Cyril of Alexandria*, 118).

²²⁸ *Ibid.* 4.2 (Pusey, i. 530. 26–531. 1). In this context, Cyril specifically cites two stories from the Gospel of Luke where Jesus’ touch brings the dead back to life: the raising of the widow’s son at Nain (7: 11–16) and the raising of Jairus’ daughter (8: 41–56).

²²⁹ *Ibid.* 3. 6 (Pusey, i. 475. 18–20).

Christ's life-giving body drives off 'not only death but even the diseases (*νοσήματα*) that are in us', healing our 'infection' (*τὸ συντετριμμένον*) from within.²³⁰ In his use of such nutritional and medicinal language, Cyril follows Theophilus, who described the eucharistic bread as a 'nourishment' (*τροφή*) that renews human nature and the wine as 'an elixir of life' (*ἀμβρόσια*) and a 'quickenning draught of immortality' (*ἀθανασίας γάνυσμα*)... that contracts the pain of the wound' inflicted by Adam's sin.²³¹

However, Cyril's nutritional-medicinal language—including his emphasis on the physical contact of taste, his descriptions of how the ingested elements mix and mingle with the body, and his observations about the life-giving power and energy conveyed in the sacrament—also would have resonated with ancient understandings about how nutriments were transmitted to the body in digestion. The Greek medical theorist, Ps.-Hippocrates, in a treatise *On Nutriment*, speaks about food as having a particular kind 'power' (*δύναμις*) that is passed on to the body when it is consumed.²³² Once inside the stomach, it obtains 'mastery' over the body and 'makes (it) into the likeness of its power' (*ὁμοιοὶ δὲ ἐξ δύναντων*).²³³ This power extends to all the extremities of the body—to bone and to all the parts of bone, to sinew, to vein, to artery, to muscle, to membrane, to flesh, fat, blood, phlegm, marrow, brain, spinal marrow, the intestines and all their parts—and acts upon these members by granting them growth and strength and by 'clothing them with flesh'.²³⁴ In this way, the digested food assimilates itself to every part of the body as it comes into contact with it, with the result that all parts come to be 'in sympathy' and form a unified whole.²³⁵

Cyril describes the dynamic effects of the eucharist upon the body of the believer in similar terms: by receiving 'the flesh of our Christ our Lord' and by drinking 'his precious blood', one becomes 'as one with him, having been

²³⁰ Ibid. 4. 2 (Pusey, i. 536. 10–11, 16–17). Earlier in the same work (1. 9; Pusey, i. 139. 10, 23–4), Cyril compares the Word's action upon the flesh to the treatment a doctor applies to 'the affected part' (*τὸ πεποιθός*) of a body, and asserts that the Incarnation took place 'so that we might see side by side the wound together with the remedy, the patient together with the physician (*ἵνα θεωρῆ τις ὁμοῦ τὸ τραῦμα καὶ τὸ φάρμακον, τὸ νοσοῦν καὶ τὸν ἰατρὸν*)'. For another example of such medical language, see his *Explanation of the Psalms* (Ps. 83. 5; PG 69.1208D), where he writes, 'Just as many are the sick in surgery—and sometimes, by various means, it is possible for each one to obtain the appropriate healing treatment—so too we find it in the churches.'

²³¹ Theophilus of Alexandria, *Homily on the Mystical Supper* (PG 77.1021B–C); cf. 1020C where the wine is called 'the drink of immortality' (*τὸ πόμα τῆς ἀθανασίας*).

²³² Ps.-Hippocrates, *Alim.* 7 (Jones, 344); cf. 21 (Jones, 348), where he asserts that 'nutriment is not nutriment, if it does not have its power (*τροφὴ οὐ τροφή, ἣν μὴ δύνηται*)'.

²³³ Ibid. 3 (Jones, 342).

²³⁴ Ibid. 2 and 7 (Jones, 342–3, 344–5).

²³⁵ Ibid. 23 (Jones, 350–1); see also W. H. S. Jones's 'Introduction' to Ps-Hippocrates' treatise *On Nutriment* (p337–8).

mixed and mingled with him through this participation'.²³⁶ In this way we become, as it were, 'enfleshed' with Christ: our body's own digestive processes become the setting for the incarnate Word's sanctifying work and a tangible witness to our 'co-corporeality' with him. Later Coptic interpreters, following Cyril, would envision the 'natural' (*φυσικός*) union of Christ's flesh with ours in the eucharist in even more graphic, physical terms: the author of one sermon describes how the people 'took the body of the Lord in (their) hands' and 'chewed it with (their) teeth' until 'it went down to (their) intestines, and (they) became one with God'.²³⁷

In the end, this salvific promise enacted in the eucharist—conceived as a 'reactualization' of the unrepeatable union accomplished in the Incarnation—is what was truly at stake for Cyril in his christological battle with Nestorius.²³⁸ This is an underappreciated aspect of their conflict, but one that gets to the heart of how Cyril reoriented incarnational Christology around questions of ritual practice for Alexandrian and Coptic theologians who passed in his wake.

In arguing with Nestorius about the proper way to understand the nature of Christ's flesh in the sacrament, Cyril returns repeatedly to John 6 and to his understanding of the single subject operative in the Incarnation—i.e. the 'one incarnate nature of God the Word'. John 6: 53 ('Unless you eat the flesh of the son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you') and 6: 56 ('He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him') were hotly contested texts in this debate. In reading these verses, Nestorius drew a sharp distinction

²³⁶ Cyril of Alexandria, *Jo.* 4. 2 (Pusey, i. 535. 7–11). There are, of course, aspects of ancient medical theory regarding the digestive process that would have stood in tension with Cyril's eucharistic vocabulary and thought. For example, Galen, in books 4 and 5 of his treatise *On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body* (*De usu partium*), describes how nutrients undergo 'alteration' (*ἀλλοιοῦσθαι*) and 'transformation' (*μεταβάλλεσθαι*) in the body: see *UP* 4. 13 and 5. 7, 13 (Helmreich, i. 224, 273, 284 (= C. G. Kühn, iii. 305. 14–15; 373.13–17; 387. 5–8); trans. May, 226, 261, 268). However, Cyril specifically avoids attributing such terms to the Word in relation to his Incarnation, and to the eucharistic body of the Word: see e.g. his *Letter to Calosirius* (Wickham, *Select Letters*, 218–19), where he writes, 'Christ is not altered (*οὐ . . . ἀλλοιοῦται*) nor will his sacred body change (*οὐδὲ . . . μεταβληθῆσεται*); no, the power (*δύναμις*) of the sacrament, its life-giving grace, inheres in it constantly.' Note, however, that his concern here is to reaffirm the unifying agency and power of the Word in and through the body received in the sacrament and not to doubt the suitability of the human body *per se* as a mediating arena for the Word's action. When Cyril speaks of the mysterious transformation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, he opts for other verbs to designate that change—specifically, *μεταποιεῖν* and *μεθιστάναι* (*Mt.* 26: 27; *PG* 72.512D).

²³⁷ Ps.-Basil, *Second Homily on St Michael Archangel Delivered at Lasike* 17: ed. M. C. Stone, in *Homiletica from the Pierpont Morgan Library*, CSCO 524, 21 (Coptic text); and CSCO 525, 22 (English trans.); see also the discussion in D. Brakke, 'The Egyptian Afterlife of Origenism', 277–93.

²³⁸ On the eucharist as a 're-enactment' and 'reactualization' of the Incarnation, see Gebremedhin, *Life-Giving Blessing*, 67–9. Gebremedhin (67) emphasizes the fact that for Cyril 'what the life-giving Word Incarnate did among men during His earthly ministry, He now does in the eucharistic liturgy'.

between Christ's human and divine natures, arguing that it must be the flesh of the Lord (not his divinity) that one eats in the sacrament. By singling out only the Word's flesh for eucharistic consumption, he hoped to preserve the Word's divinity from any suggestion of change or alteration in the sacrament.²³⁹

Cyril's critique of Nestorius on this point is telling. First, he grounds the eucharist in the Incarnation, the Word's 'mystical and true union with the body'.²⁴⁰ Second, he argues that the body of Christ in the sacrament is not simply the 'visible flesh', but rather 'the flesh united to him . . . that has the power to endow all things with life'.²⁴¹ If it were not, our hope of an efficacious and life-giving participation in Christ's body would be in vain. Thus, in Cyril's eyes, Nestorius' parcelling of Christ into two separate natures is anathema on two counts: on the one hand, it 'brings an indictment against the dispensation (οἰκονομία) of the Incarnation', and on the other, it 'mock(s) the heavenly bread which gives life to the world' and thereby 'ignorantly weaken(s) the power of the mystery'.²⁴² In this anti-Nestorian discourse, one begins to see the lines of Cyril's christological legacy being drawn in bold strokes: indeed, his defence of 'the one incarnate nature of God the Word' and his correlative emphasis on our ritual participation in Christ's life-giving body were destined to become twin pillars of later Coptic thought and practice.²⁴³

²³⁹ Loofs, *Nestoriana*, 228. 4–16 and 355. 13–18; cited by Cyril in his treatise *Against Nestorius* (*Nest.* 4. 4–5 (ACO 1.1.6, 83–4; trans. Russell, 167–8). Accordingly, Nestorius issues a strong censure against 'those who mingle (οἱ κατακινώντες) the nature of the flesh with that of the divinity to produce a single essence' (from Cyril of Alexandria, *Nest.* 4. 7: ed. Loofs, *Nestoriana*, 229. 4–6; ACO 1.1.6, 90; trans. Russell, *Cyril of Alexandria*, 173). In Nestorius' eyes, both Apollinaris and Cyril fell into this camp; however, Cyril was more apt to apply the verb *κατακινάω* to the union of Christ's body with ours in the eucharist than to the hypostatic union that took place in the Incarnation. Indeed, in his treatise *Against Nestorius* (*Nest.* 4. 7; ACO 1.1.6, 91; trans. Russell, *Cyril of Alexandria*, 174), he insists that the Word remained 'without change or alteration' even as he 'made the body born from a woman his own body'.

²⁴⁰ Cyril of Alexandria, *Nest.* 4. 4–5 (ACO 1.1.6, 84; trans. Russell, *Cyril of Alexandria*, 168–9).

²⁴¹ *Ibid.* (ACO 1.1.6, 84; trans. Russell, *Cyril of Alexandria*, 168).

²⁴² *Ibid.* 4. 5, 6 (ACO 1.1.6, 85, 89; trans. Russell, *Cyril of Alexandria*, 169, 171); and *expl. xii cap.* 29 (ACO 1.1.5, 25; trans. Russell, *Cyril of Alexandria*, 188). Cyril also defends his eucharistic christology by way of interpreting John 6 in his third *Letter to Nestorius* (*Ep.* 17. 7: ACO 1.1, 37–8; trans. McGuckin, *St Cyril*, 270–1).

²⁴³ I should mention here that the characteristic confluence of these two themes in Cyril's writings—that is, the interrelationship between the Incarnation and eucharistic theology—may provide a context for understanding why he came to be associated with Theophilus' *Homily on the Mystical Supper*. It is uncertain whether Cyril had any direct knowledge of this sermon; however, one detail in the text may suggest that it went through a later redaction by his hand. At its conclusion (PG 77.1029B), the homily exhorts the audience not to divide 'the inseparable divine (nature) into two persons' (μη διαιρούντες εἰς δύο πρόσωπα τὴν θείαν), a clause that seems anachronistic for Theophilus' time, but fits rather well as part of Cyril's fifth-century polemic against Nestorius. Is it possible that Cyril may have adapted and reused Theophilus' *Homily* for his own purposes? We may never know for sure, but such a hypothesis, if true, would help explain why the work came to be attributed to him in its later history of reception.

After Cyril: The Council of Chalcedon and the Reception of Alexandrian Greek Christology

In Alexandria and in the wider Byzantine world, Cyril's influence over the shape of later Christology was, in a word, ubiquitous. From the urban capital of Constantinople to the deserts of Syria and the Sinai, church leaders appealed to his insistent defence of the thoroughgoing union of the Word with his body—and the single subjectivity produced by that union—as an official stamp or 'seal' of christological orthodoxy.²⁴⁴ However, at the same time, his defence of the 'one incarnate nature of God the Word' bequeathed a contested legacy. Following his resounding condemnation of Nestorius at the Council of Ephesus in 431, and his death thirteen years later, theologians of different stripes and hues wrestled with each other over the proper interpretation of Cyril's writings, even as they joined together in offering him acclaim.²⁴⁵

More than any other event, the Council of Chalcedon (451) exemplified (and contributed to) this contested legacy, and its decisions proved to have unforeseen and far-reaching consequences for church life in Egypt. The quarrels that occasioned the council, and the disagreements that sprang up in its aftermath, reveal an ecclesiastical tug-of-war between Alexandria and Constantinople over Cyril's doctrine of the Incarnation.²⁴⁶

During the late 440s, a Constantinopolitan monk named Eutyches, who had sided with Cyril in opposing Nestorius at the Council of Ephesus, began to protest publicly against those who continued to worship Christ 'in two natures'. When his strict interpretation of Cyril's 'one nature' formula drew censure from the church leadership in the imperial capital,²⁴⁷ the new bishop of Alexandria, Cyril's successor Dioscorus, leapt to his aid by holding a second Council at Ephesus in 449. There, under Dioscorus' leadership, the delegates

²⁴⁴ Anastasius of Sinai, *hod.* 7. 1. 101 (Uthemann, 107).

²⁴⁵ For example, at the second Council of Ephesus in 449, the participants unanimously celebrated the 'eternal memory of Cyril' and declared an anathema upon whoever opposed him: ACO 2.1.1, 101; Paul Galtier, 'Saint Cyrille d'Alexandrie et Saint Léon le Grand à Chalcédoine', 350.

²⁴⁶ For more detailed accounts of these events, see W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement*, 1–49; and S. J. Davis, *Early Coptic Papacy*, 76–84, 85 ff. For an English translation of the acts of Chalcedon, see R. Price and M. Gaddis (trans.), *Acts of the Council of Chalcedon* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005).

²⁴⁷ Eutyches' public confession reveals how he located himself in the Alexandrian tradition of christological reflection. Called before a Home Synod in Constantinople, Eutyches declared, 'I confess that our Lord was of two natures before the union, but after the union, one nature. . . . I follow the teaching of the blessed Cyril and the holy Fathers and the holy Athanasius, because they speak of two natures before the union, but after the union and incarnation, they speak not of two natures but of one nature' (Council of Constantinople, *Sessio VII*: Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum*, vi. 744; trans. Stevenson, *Creeds, Councils and Controversies*, 336). For discussions of Eutyches' role in the controversy, see J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 330–4; W. H. C. Frend, 'Eutyches', *CE* iv. 1074–6.

moved to vindicate the view that there was only ‘one nature after the union’ and to anathematize those who refused this confession, including the bishops of Constantinople and Ephesus.

Within two years, however, the tide would turn. The Council of Chalcedon condemned Eutyches and deposed Dioscorus, confessing Christ ‘in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, or without separation’.²⁴⁸ And yet, it did so (and here is the remarkable thing) while claiming legitimacy in the name of Cyril. In the preface to the christological definition itself, the Council officially canonized Cyril’s second *Letter to Nestorius*.²⁴⁹ Apart from the Nicene and Constantinopolitan Creeds, the only other specifically recognized document not by Cyril was the *Tome* of Pope Leo of Rome, and it did not receive acceptance until the Council was able to come to a consensus on its faithfulness to Cyril’s precedent. This agreement was worked out despite the fact that Leo’s *Tome* emphasized the distinctive, unimpaired, and abiding character of the two natures in the person of Christ.²⁵⁰ In the end, as if to register the point and remove any doctrinal dissonance from further debate, the delegates cried out, ‘The blessed Cyril taught thus. This is the true faith. This is the holy faith. This is the everlasting faith . . . Thus Pope Leo believes; thus Cyril believed.’²⁵¹

How did the Council reconcile its definition (and Leo’s *Tome*) with Cyril’s consistent confession of the ‘one incarnate nature of God the Word’? It did so primarily by interpreting Cyril’s anti-Nestorian correspondence through the lens of the Formulary of Union, which the Alexandrian bishop had signed in agreement with the church at Ephesus in 433 and which he had included in a letter of reconciliation written to his counterpart John of Antioch.²⁵² In that letter, Cyril had acknowledged the propriety of speaking about ‘union of two natures’ and ‘the difference of natures out of which we say the ineffable union was formed’.²⁵³ Later, in a short letter to one of his Alexandrian priests, Cyril would return to his standard confession of ‘one incarnate nature’, explaining that he had signed the agreement to avoid accusations ‘that we teach a

²⁴⁸ *Chalcedonian Definition* 4 (ACO 2.1.2, 129. 30–1; trans. Stevenson, *Creeds, Councils and Controversies*, 353).

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 3 (ACO 2.1.2, 129. 8–11; trans. Stevenson, *Creeds, Councils and Controversies*, 352).

²⁵⁰ For the text of Leo’s *Tome*, see Leo, *Ep.* 28 (ACO 2.2.1, 24–33; trans. W. Bright, in E. R. Hardy (ed.), *Christology of the Later Fathers*, 359–70; also trans. Stevenson, *Creeds, Councils and Controversies*, 336–44).

²⁵¹ ACO 2.1.2, 79–81, quote at 79; see also the discussions by W. H. C. Frend, ‘Chalcedon, Council of’, *CE* ii. 512–15; and Ignacio Ortiz de Urbina, SJ, ‘Das Symbol von Chalkedon’, i. 385–481, esp. 393. For a recent discussion of conciliar procedures and their effect on Christian doctrine in late antiquity, see R. MacMullen, *Voting About God in Early Church Councils*.

²⁵² Cyril of Alexandria, *Ep.* 39 (ACO 1.1.4, 15–20; trans. McGuckin, *St Cyril*, 343–8). The Council also minimized this cognitive dissonance by omitting Cyril’s incendiary *Twelve Anathemas*, which were originally appended to the end of his third *Letter to Nestorius*.

²⁵³ *Ibid.* 39. 5, 8 (ACO 1.1.4, 17–18; trans. McGuckin, *St Cyril*, 345, 347).

mixture or confusion', and as a concession to the 'somewhat obscure' terminology of the Antiochenes.²⁵⁴ In this context, he writes, 'Once we have confessed the union, the things that have been united are no longer separated from one another but are thereafter one Son; and one is his nature since the Word has been made flesh.'²⁵⁵ In invoking his name, the Council of Chalcedon returned not to the Cyril of the incendiary *Twelve Anathemas*, but the more adaptable Cyril of the Formulary of Union who had opened the door to rapprochement with Antioch. In its repeated references to 'one and the same' Son, its language of 'union', and its affirmation of Mary as Theotokos, the Chalcedonian definition thereby sought to couch its 'two-nature' confession in terms that could still lay claim to a Cyrillian pedigree.²⁵⁶

Not everyone was convinced that the Council of Chalcedon had captured the gist of Cyril's lifework. Bishops returning to their constituencies in Palestine and Syria were met with vehement protests over their decision to sign a document that rejected one-nature doctrine. Among the most discontented was the Christian population in Alexandria: the vast majority remained loyal to their Dioscorus and saw the decision of the council as a betrayal not only of Cyril, but also of Nicaea and its most ardent defender Athanasius. In subsequent centuries, the Chalcedonian communion would maintain a sporadic episcopal presence in Alexandria (sometimes backed by imperial military power), but for all intents and purposes, the year 451 delineated a break in the relationship between Alexandria and the churches in Rome and Constantinople.

The history of Alexandrian Greek Christology in the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries was marked by a sustained cultural reaction against the Chalcedonian definition of faith. Sometimes this reaction was strident and unyielding, sometimes it was muted by forms of compromise, but it invariably found its point of reference in Cyril and his articulation of the 'one incarnate nature of God the Word'. To illustrate the tenor of this theological reaction, let me turn to an example from Timothy Aelurus, a companion of Dioscorus in exile and later his successor as the non-Chalcedonian bishop of Alexandria. A decade or two after the council, Timothy composed a treatise, *Against Chalcedon*, which took the form of a line-by-line refutation of Leo's *Tome*.²⁵⁷ In it, he castigates the Roman bishop and the council for

²⁵⁴ Ibid. 44, to Eulogius (ACO 1.1.4, 35–7; trans. McGuckin, *St Cyril*, 349–51).

²⁵⁵ Ibid. 44, to Eulogius (ACO 1.1.4, 36; trans. McGuckin, *St Cyril*, 350).

²⁵⁶ *Chalcedonian Definition 4* (ACO 2.1.2, 129–30; trans. Stevenson, *Creeds, Councils and Controversies*, 352–3). On the formative impact of Cyril's christology at the Council of Chalcedon, see P. Galtier, 'Saint Cyrille d'Alexandrie et saint Léon le Grand à Chalcédoine', 345–87; P. T. Gray, *The Defense of Chalcedon in the East*, 7–16; McGuckin, *St Cyril*, 236.

²⁵⁷ Timothy Aelurus, *Against Chalcedon*: BL Add. MS 12,156, 42^v–51^v and 59^v–61^r; ed. and trans. Ebied and Wickham, in *After Chalcedon*, 115–66.

‘embark(ing) upon Nestorius’ doctrines’ and blaspheming Christ by ‘dividing him into two natures.’²⁵⁸ Over the course of this fairly short work, he cites Cyril (‘our blessed father and archbishop’) six times, setting his writings up in diametrical opposition to Leo’s.²⁵⁹ For this author, the delegates at Chalcedon had it wrong: Cyril and Leo emphatically did not believe the same thing.

In addition, Timothy quotes extensively from two letters written by Dioscorus from his place of exile.²⁶⁰ These letters are revealing, for they show how key tenets of Cyril’s incarnational theology were taken up by his successor—not only his teachings on the Virgin Mary Theotokos and the single subjectivity and ‘one nature’ of the Word-made-flesh,²⁶¹ but also his rationale for human corporeal participation in Christ. This was a participation made possible only in so far as Christ was ‘with us, like us, and for us.’²⁶² While Timothy sees the Saviour’s likeness to us in his rational soul, he also recognizes it in his bodily members, including his ‘nerves, hair, bones, veins, belly,

²⁵⁸ Timothy Aelurus, BL Add. MS 12,156, fos. 44^r and 60^r; ed. and trans. Ebied and Wickham, in *After Chalcedon*, 123 and 140 (Syriac text); 146 and 164 (trans.).

²⁵⁹ Ibid. BL Add. MS 12,156, fo. 43^v (Answers 3, 4, 5), fos. 46^r–47^v (Answers 18, 20, 21); ed. and trans. Ebied and Wickham, *After Chalcedon*, 122, 127–30 (Syriac text); 144–5, 152–4 (trans.). Timothy also quotes from a series of other works (attributed to Athanasius and others) which consistently affirm the ‘one incarnate nature of God the Word’. However, these texts in fact traced back to certain followers of the fourth-century theologian Apollinaris of Laodicea who promulgated their teacher’s christology in the name of other church fathers in good standing. These documents were collected in a florilegium, cited (unwittingly) by Cyril, and hence passed on to later Alexandrian authors, as well as to future generations of Coptic and Copto-Arabic theologians.

For a discussion of the transmission of this florilegium in late antiquity and a collected edition of the Apollinarian excerpts quoted by other authors, see H. Lietzmann, *Apollinaris*, 79–163 (discussion), 167–322 (texts); and Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, i. 473–8. Examples of the reception of this literature by a tenth-century Copto-Arabic author may be found in *The Precious Pearl* (*al-Durr al-thamīn*) by Sāwīrus ibn al-Muqaffa^c (whom I discuss in Ch. 5). The work’s editor, Paul Maiberger, identifies two instances where Apollinarian texts were transmitted under the pseudonyms of the Popes Felix and Julius of Rome: see Maiberger (ed.), *Das Buch der kostbaren Perle von Severus ibn al-Muqaffa*, 127 n. 2, 130 n. 7. For a fuller discussion of these texts falsely attributed to Felix and Julius, see H. Lietzmann, *Apollinaris*, 135–7, 147–9, 156–8, 161–3; for an edition, see Lietzmann, *Apollinaris*, 193–203 (Ps.-Julius (= Apollinaris), *On Faith and Incarnation*); 256–62 (Ps.-Julius (= Apollinaris), *Epistle to Dionysius*); 283–6 (Ps.-Julius (= Apollinaris), *Letter to Prosdokios*); 307–10 (Ps.-Julius (= Anonymous), *Third Letter*); 318–22 (*fr.* 185–191, = miscellaneous anonymous fragments attributed to Julian and Felix).

²⁶⁰ Timothy Aelurus, *Against Chalcedon*: BL Add. MS 12,156, fos. 49^v–50^r (Dioscorus of Alexandria, *Letter to Secundinus*) and fos. 50^r–51^r (Dioscorus of Alexandria, *Letter to the Monks of the Henaton*); ed. and trans. Ebied and Wickham, in *After Chalcedon*, 134–5, 135–7 (Syriac text); 159–60, 160–2 (trans.).

²⁶¹ In his *Letter to the Monks of the Henaton* (a monastery located nine miles west of Alexandria), Dioscorus presents litanies of examples drawn from the Gospels in order to accentuate the divine economy of the Incarnation—the *communication idiomatum* in which human attributes are predicated to the Word because of his appropriation of the body.

²⁶² Timothy Aelurus, *Against Chalcedon*: BL Add. MS 12,156, fo. 50^r; ed. and trans. Ebied and Wickham, in *After Chalcedon*, 135 (Syriac text); 160 (trans.).

heart, kidneys, liver, and lungs'.²⁶³ And it was this likeness in the flesh, rooted in his birth from Mary the Mother of God, that allowed the Word to restore 'the shattered vessels' of our bodies and to raise us up to be 'sons of God'.²⁶⁴

Timothy extols Dioscorus as 'utterly devoted and loyal... at the hour of rebellion' (i.e. at the Council of Chalcedon), comparing him to Joseph of Arimathea on account of the care he showed for 'the immaculate body of Christ our Lord'.²⁶⁵ Thus, when he describes Dioscorus as 'a mighty guardian of the faith and canons of the fathers', Timothy sees him as taking up the mantle of the 'blessed Athanasius' in defence of the Nicene creed and as heir to 'our blessed Father' Cyril in combating what appeared to him as a renewed Nestorian threat.²⁶⁶

This Alexandrian reappropriation of Cyril as a voice of resistance against Chalcedon would continue in earnest into the sixth and seventh centuries; however, at the same time, as one scholar has noted, this period witnessed a 'shift of the anti-Chalcedonian movement from the Greek to the Syriac and Coptic cultural areas, a shift which... reached its completion in the early Islamic period'.²⁶⁷ One figure who epitomized this transition was Severus of Antioch, the Syrian bishop who spent the last twenty years of his life (518–38) exiled in Egypt on account of his anti-Chalcedonian views. While he wrote extensively in both Greek and Syriac, it was in the Syriac tongue that the bulk of his christological writings were transmitted and preserved. In late antiquity, Severus gained a reputation as the most articulate defender and interpreter of miaphysite doctrine, and in his writings Cyril's voice is an audible presence and constant guide. As in the case of Timothy Aelurus, Severus weaves Cyril's words into the fabric of his own discourse. In his correspondence with a certain Sergius (three letters of moderate length), he cites the Alexandrian theologian more than sixty times.²⁶⁸ Severus' unwavering devotion to Cyril and his status as one who had suffered exile in resistance to Chalcedon led

²⁶³ Ibid. ²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ Ibid. BL Add. MS 12,156, fo. 60^r; ed. and trans. Ebied and Wickham, in *After Chalcedon*, 140 (Syriac text); 164 (trans.).

²⁶⁶ Ibid. BL Add. MS 12,156, fo. 51^v (cf. 43^v and 48^v); ed. and trans. Ebied and Wickham, in *After Chalcedon*, 138 (cf. 144 and 157; Syriac text); 163 (cf. 122 and 132; trans.).

²⁶⁷ Lucas Van Rompay, 'Book Review of Pauline Allen and C. T. R. Hayward, *Severus of Antioch*', *Hugoye* 8/2 (2005), s. 2.

²⁶⁸ This dossier of letters (with Sergius' replies) has been edited by J. Lebon, CSCO 119–20, Syr. 64–5 (Louvain: L. Durbecq, 1949); for a discussion and translation in English, see Iain R. Torrance, *Christology after Chalcedon: Severus of Antioch and Sergius the Monophysite*, esp. 143–236 (text). A survey of 113 miscellaneous Severan letters published by Brooks in 1915 yields 24 that contain quotations from Cyril, and 6 contain two or more citations: see E. W. Brooks, 'A Collection of Letters of Severus of Antioch', PO 12/2 (1915), esp. ep. 1, 2, 11, 15, 25, and 45.

him to be celebrated in Coptic liturgy and art as a saint and adopted son of the Egyptian church.²⁶⁹

As in the case of Syria, the development of an indigenous Christology in Egypt—starting with the Coptic writings of the monk Shenoute of Atripe (fourth–fifth century) and continuing through the Golden Age of Copto-Arabic theological literature (thirteenth–fourteenth centuries) into the present—came about largely through the church’s reception and reinterpretation of this same Alexandrian legacy. The sanctioned prehistory of christological reflection for late antique and early medieval Copts likewise traced back through Cyril to Athanasius and his defence of the Nicene Creed.

However, traditions of interpretation can be quite idiosyncratic, and here an observation about the Copts’ christological reception of their own past is in order; for while Athanasius and Cyril are consistently honoured and emulated as Alexandrian church fathers *nonpareil*, one finds, by contrast, almost no citation of Clement and Origen (not to mention Basilides and Valentinus) in later Egyptian Christian literature written in the Coptic or Arabic language.²⁷⁰

There were specific reasons for this conspicuous abandonment of the second- and third-century past. Basilides and Valentinus had long since been branded as ‘gnostic’ heretics by the early church apologists. Clement’s articulation of the Christian faith in the language and imagery of classical Greek literature and philosophy no longer resonated in quite the same way with Coptic- and Arabic-speaking Christians living under Byzantine or Arab rule.²⁷¹ And, as noted earlier, Origen had been posthumously disenfranchised in the Egyptian church after the rancorous fights over his theology at the end of the fourth century.²⁷² While

²⁶⁹ The stanzas of a ninth-century Coptic hymn dedicated to Severus extol his heroism as an opponent of Chalcedon: ‘Vain is all the worship | of the bishops of Chalcedon, | for the doctrines of Severus | destroyed them quickly’ (K. H. Kuhn and W. J. Tait, *Thirteen Coptic Acrostic Hymns*, 73 (hymn no. 6). Severus is also revered as ‘God’s champion’ in the Egyptian *History of the Patriarchs* (ed. B. Evetts, PO 1/4 (1907), 452) and is included as part of a medieval iconographic programme of Egyptian patriarchs in the Monastery of St Antony near the Red Sea (E. Bolman (ed.), *Monastic Visions*, 71, 94, 112, fig. 7.14; see also S. Davis, *Early Coptic Papacy*, 99 ff.).

²⁷⁰ The meagre reception of works by Clement and Origen is reflected in the history of Graeco-Arabic translation. In his study of Christian Arabic literature, Georg Graf (*GCAL*, i. 306) mentions only a few isolated scholia (of unidentified provenance) containing catena on the Gospels attributed to Clement, and these are excerpts that cannot be identified with any of his known writings; furthermore, he does not catalogue any translations of Origen into Arabic.

²⁷¹ For an interesting possible exception, see my discussion of *The Book of the Elucidation* in Ch. 4 below.

²⁷² Origen’s legacy met a similar fate outside Egypt. In the controversy leading up to and including the Fifth Ecumenical Council at Constantinople in 553, his writings were anathematized, and he—along with later like-minded figures such as Evagrius Ponticus and Didymus the Blind—were unceremoniously declared out-of-bounds and thenceforward dropped from the roll of authorized Alexandrian church fathers: see B. J. Kidd, *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Church*, iii. 16–17, 20 (nos. 10 and 12); Antoine Guillaumont, *Les ‘Képhalaia gnostica’ d’Évagre le Pontique*, 124–70; and Columba Stewart, ‘Imageless Prayer and the Theological Vision of Evagrius Ponticus’, 180 n. 33.

elements of Clement's and Origen's thought were picked up and quietly passed on in the writings of Athanasius and Cyril, their names effectively passed out of the authoritative christological 'canon' employed by later Egyptian theologians.

With regard to views of the Incarnation and human participation in the divine, this selective memory of the Egyptian church had major consequences—most notably, it meant that Athanasius' and Cyril's 'realistic' and 'sacramental' models of participation were the ones that came to be determinative for later Coptic theology and practice. It is this interpretative legacy, and the fertile relationship between theology and practice in the Egyptian church, that I seek to highlight throughout the remainder of this book. In Egypt, the cultural and linguistic translation of Alexandrian Christology from Greek to Coptic, and later into Arabic, was mediated not only through the production of theological literature, but also (and often more primarily) in the liturgy and in a host of other ritual settings where beliefs about Christ could be put into regular practice.

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Part I

Coptic Literature and Liturgy

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Incarnation and Ritual Practice in the Fifth-Century Writings of Shenoute of Atripe

The mid-fifth-century writings of the Upper Egyptian monk, Shenoute of Atripe (c.347–465 CE), provide a unique glimpse into the early reception of Alexandrian Greek Christology in a Coptic monastic setting. Shenoute, who died at the age of 118, spent a remarkably long period of his life (more than one hundred years) as a monk, and over eighty years as the spiritual father of a federation of three monasteries in Upper Egypt, near the modern town of Sohag. There were two men’s monasteries and one nunnery in this federation: (1) the White Monastery (*Dayr al-Abyaḍ*), (2) the Red Monastery (*Dayr al-Aḥmar*), and (3) the nunnery of Athribis (Triphiou). Each of these congregations was headed separately by someone titled the ‘Eldest’ (masc. ΠΡΑΛΛΟ; fem. ΤΡΑΛΛΩ). Shenoute himself began his monastic life as a resident in one of these communities, but later lived as a hermit and came to be honoured as ‘The Father of These Congregations’ (ΠΕΙΩΤ ΝΝΕΙCΥΝΑΓΩΓΗ).¹

During his period as an authoritative figure within the federation, Shenoute produced a voluminous body of writings, from which over seventeen volumes survive in total. These writings were edited in two collections, perhaps during Shenoute’s life and under his own direction. The first collection, the *Canons*, includes writings on the administration and application of his monastic rules. The second, the *Discourses*, contains assorted sermons and treatises on a wide variety of topics.

Shenoute’s importance for the history of Egyptian Christian literature can be measured on several levels. His *Canons* and *Discourses* represent the first large-scale corpus of original writings in the Coptic language (in fact the largest by any single author). As such, they provided a foundation for the establishment of Coptic as a literary language for later Egyptian Christian

¹ On the leadership structure and organization of the federation, see Bentley Layton, ‘Social Structure and Food Consumption’, 26–9; and id., ‘Rules Patterns and the Exercise of Power in Shenoute’s Monastery’, 45–73.

authors. In addition, these writings supply contemporary scholars with a deep reservoir of social, historical, and theological information about the life of a particular Upper Egyptian monastic community during the fifth century.²

For Western scholars, Shenoute's importance in the history of Coptic literature and monasticism has long been obscured by the fact that his writings, originally preserved in the library of the White Monastery, were sold and disseminated piecemeal to various academic libraries and collections during the early modern period.³ While isolated editions of Shenoutian fragments began appearing in the late eighteenth century,⁴ there has been an exponential increase in scholarly attention given to Shenoute over the past fifteen years, primarily as a result of Stephen Emmel's magisterial analysis and reconstruction of the almost two thousand fragments of Shenoute's surviving writings.⁵

Previous treatments of Shenoute's Christology have focused primarily on his treatise, *I Am Amazed* (c.445 CE) (see Appendix A.1),⁶ and a sermon of his

² On Shenoute's life and historical importance, see S. Emmel, *Shenoute's Literary Corpus*, i. 6–14.

³ Other factors for Shenoute's obscurity include the fact that his monastery lay outside the range of most early Christian monastic pilgrimage routes, and that he was largely ignored in Graeco-Egyptian historiographical literature after the ecclesiastical split occasioned by the Council of Chalcedon in 451: see Emmel, *Shenoute's Literary Corpus*, i. 14.

⁴ Emmel, *Shenoute's Literary Corpus*, i. 14–18. In the early twentieth century, Johannes Leipoldt (with the assistance of W. E. Crum) published a 3-vol. edn. of Shenoute's works entitled *Sinuthii Archimandritae Vita et Opera Omnia*, CSCO 41, 42, 73 (1906–13). Although Leipoldt's edition was a momentous achievement, it was not based upon a complete, systematic codicological reconstruction of Shenoute's corpus of *Canons* and *Discourses*. Such a reconstruction is currently underway under the direction of Stephen Emmel.

⁵ Emmel's 2-vol. *Shenoute's Literary Corpus* represents a revision of his Yale doctoral thesis of the same title. The capitalized two-letter codes I often cite with reference to Shenoute's writings refer to the original codices reconstructed by him and follow the standardized conventions he established in that work. Emmel's leadership in this field has not only helped inaugurate a collaborative international project to edit and translate his works, but has also enabled several recent dissertations and monographs on Shenoute as a monastic leader and author, including R. Krawiec, *Shenoute and the Women of the White Monastery*; Andrew Crislip, *From Monastery to Hospital: Christian Monasticism and the Transformation of Health Care in Late Antiquity*; and Caroline Schroeder, *Monastic Bodies: Discipline and Salvation in Shenoute of Atripe*.

⁶ Ed. Tito Orlandi, *Shenute contra Origenistas*; cf. 'A Catechesis against Apocryphal Texts', 85–95. Since the Orlandi's publication of this work, however, Emmel (*Shenoute's Literary Corpus*, ii. 646–8) has discovered certain imperfections in that edition, including the erroneous inclusion of material from another Shenoutian work and the omission of some fragments that properly belonged to *I Am Amazed*. The section erroneously included in Orlandi's edition (paras. 200–62) belongs to an unrelated, acéphalous work found in Codex XY. The genuine fragments omitted from Orlandi's edition of *I Am Amazed* had been published previously by É. Amélineau, *Œuvres de Shenoudi* (Paris: Leroux, 1907), i. 332–5 (= HB 67–8, 77–8). More recently, Janet Timbie has also written an article offering improvements on some of Orlandi's manuscript readings: 'Reading and Re-reading Shenoute's *I Am Amazed*: More Information on Nestorius and Others', in James E. Goehring and Janet Timbie, *The World of Early Egyptian Christianity*, 61–71. For a recent treatment of Shenoute's understanding of Christ's embodiment

entitled *And It Happened One Day* (c.455 CE) (see Appendix A.2).⁷ By contrast little attention has been paid to an unedited sermon by Shenoute's called *When the Word Says* (see Appendix A.3),⁸ in which he has occasion to elaborate on his doctrine of the Incarnation and its implications for human salvation. In this chapter, I examine all three of these works with an eye to showing how Shenoute reappropriated the work and legacy of early Alexandrian theologians (including their characteristic modes of biblical interpretation) in the context of heresiological controversy and monastic ritual practice.⁹ Utilizing these three works from Shenoute's *Discourses*, what can we learn about the setting and character of his Christology as it related to his soteriology? In what follows, I plan to analyse Shenoute's doctrine of the Incarnation in its controversial, interpretative, and ritual-liturgical contexts.

in *I Am Amazed*, especially as it relates to the crucifixion and resurrection, see Caroline Schroeder, *Monastic Bodies*, 139–45. I thank both Janet and Caroline for allowing me to have advance access to their work prior to publication.

⁷ Ed. L. Th. Lefort, 'Catéchèse Christologique de Chenoute', 40–5; see also Emmel, *Shenoute's Literary Corpus*, ii. 665–6. For a discussion of Shenoute's theology in this sermon, see Hans-Friedrich Weiss, 'Zur Christologie des Shenoute von Atripe', 177–209.

⁸ Emmel, *Shenoute's Literary Corpus*, ii. 612. I have had to reconstruct the text of *When the Word Says* on the basis of Emmel's collation of codices and fragments. Consecutive and overlapping pieces of *When the Word Says* have previously been published independently from manuscripts in these locations: (1) The Pierpont Morgan Library in New York: US-PM M664A(6), fos. 1–8; ed. L. Depuydt, *Catalogue of Coptic Manuscripts in the Pierpont Morgan Library*, no. 71: 144–9; (2) The University of Michigan University Library: US-MU 158.20a–h; ed. D. W. Young, *Coptic Manuscripts from the White Monastery: Works of Shenute*, no. 27: 160–6 (text), 166–9 (trans.); (3) The John Rylands Library in Manchester: GB-MR 70 fos. 1–7; ed. W. E. Crum, *Catalogue of the Coptic Manuscripts in the Collection of the John Rylands Library*, no. 70: 34–5; (4) The Österreichische Nationalbibliothek in Vienna: AT-NB 9326^{B/A}; ed. Young, *Coptic Manuscripts from the White Monastery: Works of Shenute*, no. 22: 137–9 (text), 142–3 (trans.); (5) The Bibliothèque nationale in Paris: FR-BN 131⁸, fo. 84 (Paris); ed. Young, *Coptic Manuscripts from the White Monastery: Works of Shenute*, no. 23: 140–1 (text), 143 (trans.); (6) The Biblioteca nazionale centrale in Naples: IT-NB IB4, fo. 13; ed. J. Leipoldt, *Sinuthii archimandritae vita et opera omnia*, CSCO 42, 44–5; Amélineau, *Œuvres de Shenoudi*, i. 335–7, 487; G. Zoega, *Catalogus codicum copticorum manuscriptorum*, 451–2; and A. Bertola de' Giorgi, *Favole dell'abate de' Giorgi Bertóla*, clxv–clxvi.

Finally, I have also consulted unpublished folia from Manchester (Rylands Coptic MS 70, fo. 8) and Paris (Paris BN 131⁷, fo. 65)—sections of the text omitted by Crum and Young—in order to reconstruct the concluding section of Shenoute's sermon.

⁹ Shenoute also raises his concern to defend the Virgin Birth and Jesus' divinity in a fourth work, entitled *The Lord Thundered*, but he does not engage in a sustained or systematic reflection on the Incarnation in that context: for relevant passages, see Amélineau, *Œuvres*, i. 368, 379 (= DU 18, 46–7). For a codicological reconstruction of this work, see Emmel, *Shenoute's Literary Corpus*, i. 243–54, 415–18, 429–31, 437–8, 509; ii. 806–8. For a discussion of this work in the context of Shenoute's theology, see Caroline Schroeder, *Monastic Bodies*, ch. 4 (pp. 126–57).

THE CONTROVERSIAL CONTEXT OF SHENOUTE'S
CHRISTOLOGICAL WRITINGS

Shenoute's long life intersected with three periods of theological controversy in the history of the Egyptian church. His childhood and early adulthood coincided with the final decades of the Arian Controversy and its resolution at the Council of Constantinople in 381. Early in his tenure as head of the White Monastery, during the last decade of the fourth century and into the fifth, a debate over the influence of Origen's theology raged in bishoprics and in monastic communities throughout Egypt. Finally, the last decades of his life saw the rise of the Nestorian Controversy and the ongoing christological disagreements leading up to and following the Council of Chalcedon in 451.

In his sermons and treatises, Shenoute engages with each of these controversial contexts, but it was the latter two—Origenism and Nestorianism—that proved to be especially live issues for him in his leadership of the White Monastery during the middle decades of the fifth century. During the earlier patriarchate of Theophilus of Alexandria (385–412), Egyptian monasteries had become centres for theological debate and division over the propriety of Origen's more speculative writings, especially his views on the incorporeal image of God and on the nature of resurrection.¹⁰ Thus, while some monks embraced Origen's views on divine incorporeality for example, others rejected this teaching as a threat to their daily liturgical piety, in which anthropomorphic images were used in monastic churches as visual aids in the worship of God.¹¹ By the end of Theophilus' episcopal tenure—during which he had moved strenuously to suppress Origenist views in the monasteries—the initial storm of the controversy had passed. However, devotion to Origen's ideas continued unabated in some circles under Theophilus' successors, Cyril (412–44) and Dioscorus (444–54). In Upper Egypt, monks with an affinity for Origen's writings remained active even during the last decade of Shenoute's life. Indeed, a Coptic letter written by Dioscorus survives, in which the patriarch urges Shenoute to conduct a purge of Origenist belief in the monasteries around the city of Panopolis (Shmin), just east of the White Monastery across the Nile. Warning Shenoute about a particular Origenist priest, Dioscorus writes that the priest 'should not be found . . . either in the city of Shmin (Panopolis) or in any other city of the Eparchy of the Thebais, or in the

¹⁰ Elizabeth Clark, *The Origenist Controversy* (1992); see also S. Davis, *Early Coptic Papacy*, 63–70.

¹¹ John Cassian, *Conferences* 10. 2–3 (Petschenig, 286–9; trans. Luibheid, 125–7).

monasteries or in the caves in the desert'.¹² This patriarchal letter may, in fact, have been a key impetus for Shenoute's writing of *I Am Amazed*.¹³

Shenoute's opposition to Nestorius' theology in his treatise, *I Am Amazed*, and in his sermon, *And It Happened One Day*, was also motivated by personal and local concerns connected with Shenoute's tenure as monastic leader. Evidence from Shenoute's own writings confirms the fact that Shenoute attended the Council of Ephesus (431) at which Nestorius' theology was condemned.¹⁴ The hagiographical *Life of Shenoute*, purportedly written by his successor Besa, preserves a colourful story that represents Shenoute as the defender of the faith par excellence at that council. In the *Life*, Shenoute approaches Nestorius, publicly rebukes him, and then punches him in the chest to get him to sit down!¹⁵ This narrative account of Shenoute's role at that gathering is probably apocryphal, but it may have embellished upon a particular detail in Shenoute's own writings. In *I Am Amazed*, Shenoute reports on Nestorius' failure to 'stand firm at all against the synod that took place in Ephesus under the blessed and God-loving bishops'.¹⁶

I Am Amazed was probably written around the year 445 CE, in the aftermath of Nestorius' condemnation at the Council of Ephesus, but before the Council of Chalcedon. Shenoute's sermon, *And It Happened One Day* was probably composed a decade later, around the year 455. In that sermon, Shenoute's opposition to Nestorius' Christology may have been motivated by a new concern: the recent physical proximity of Nestorius himself. After his condemnation at the Council of Ephesus (431 CE), Nestorius was exiled to the Kharga Oasis, which lies only 170 km south-west of the White Monastery in the Western Desert, and while in exile he almost certainly spent time in transit in the Nile Valley around Panopolis.¹⁷ Shenoute preached his sermon, *And It Happened One Day*, sometime after Nestorius' death in exile (c.453 CE). Even as Shenoute quotes and condemns Nestorius' writings in this text, he seems intent on silencing his voice and relegating him to the grave: thus, Nestorius is described as the one 'whose tongue has swollen' and 'who died in exile'.¹⁸

¹² Herbert Thompson, 'Dioscorus and Shenoute', 373.

¹³ Timbie, 'Reading and Re-reading Shenoute's *I Am Amazed*', 63, see also Clark, *The Origenist Controversy*, 151–2.

¹⁴ See e.g. the following works by Shenoute: (1) *Blessed Are They Who Observe Justice*, XH 294–6, = Cairo, Institut français d'archéologie orientale, MS Copte 1, fos. 60^v–61^v (Leipoldt, CSCO 42, 35); (2) *I Have Been Reading the Holy Gospels*, AV 139 and HD 1 (ed. Leipoldt, CSCO 42, 219); and (3) *I Have Said Many Times*, XO 306–7, = Cairo, Institut français d'archéologie orientale, MS Copte 2, fos. 125^v–127^r. On Cyril's attendance at the Council of Ephesus, see Emmel, *Shenoute's Literary Corpus*, i. 8; contra Aziz S. Atiya, 'Cyril I', CE iii 671–5, esp. 673.

¹⁵ *Life of Shenoute* 128–30 (Leipoldt, CSCO 41 57–9; trans. Bell, 78–9).

¹⁶ Shenoute, *I Am Amazed* 464 (Orlandi, 50).

¹⁷ Emmel, *Shenoute's Literary Corpus*, i. 10.

¹⁸ Shenoute, *And It Happened One Day*, fo. 84^r (Lefort, 'Catéchèse christologique', 43).

These immediate heresiological concerns—along with a felt need to reaffirm Nicene theology against a remembered Arian threat—crucially frame the way that Shenoute speaks about the divine Word as both pre-existent and incarnate. As I will show, Shenoute’s response to this perceived threat of heterodoxy is grounded in the interpretation of theologically authoritative texts—especially the writings of Alexandrian patristic authors and the Bible. However, at the same time, his monastic Christology is also deeply informed by concerns related to the liturgical and sacramental life of his community.

INTERPRETING THE TEACHERS, INTERPRETING THE FATHERS: SHENOUTE’S HERESIOLOGICAL HERMENEUTIC

In his writings, Shenoute often uses citations from the Alexandrian church fathers and from Scripture as key weapons in his war against heresy. In his treatise, *I Am Amazed*, he makes this rhetorical strategy explicit for his readers. Speaking of heresies as entrapments of the devil, he writes,

But who will destroy those entrapments and who will break their fetters? The teachers in the Scriptures, the prophets and the apostles, as well as the upright fathers in (their) due season, the ones who love their sons (in the faith). And by the flame of the light of their teaching, the Christian people will truly know the error of those who are mad and those who infect (others) with their madness. I speak about the heads of the serpent and also his body—that is, all the heresies and their teachers.¹⁹

By appealing to the writings of the prophets and apostles on the one hand, and the witness of the church fathers on the other, Shenoute seeks to demarcate the boundaries of christological orthodoxy for the Egyptian monks in the White Monastery. In examining Shenoute’s use of earlier Alexandrian church fathers, I want to focus specifically on how he reappropriates the theological legacy of authors such as Athanasius, Theophilus, and Cyril of Alexandria.²⁰

Strategies of Patristic Citation: The Anti-Origenist Use of Athanasius

How does Shenoute appropriate the authority of Alexandrian patristic authors in support of his own Christology? A close reading of *I Am Amazed*

¹⁹ Shenoute, *I Am Amazed* 323 (Orlandi, 24).

²⁰ For a broader look at how Shenoute ties his heresiological critique of Christian heresies to parallel criticisms of ‘pagans’ and Jews, see Schroeder, *Monastic Bodies*, ch. 4.

reveals how Shenoute explicitly cites both Athanasius and Theophilus as part of his attack against Origenist ideas. His use of Theophilus as a testimony against Origenism is more obvious: Shenoute inserts an extensive excerpt from Theophilus' *Festal Letter* of 401 into the body of his treatise. Indeed, Theophilus' letter serves as a centrepiece for Shenoute's discourse: quoted nearly in its entirety, it would have taken up almost one-third (46 out of around 150 pages) of Shenoute's original manuscript.²¹

Shenoute's recycling of Theophilus' *Festal Letter* in the face of a perceived Origenist threat served as a patent ground and occasion for the writing of his treatise. However, his appropriation of Athanasius as a witness against Origenism was more subtle and involved a bit more sleight of hand on the part of the author. The anachronistic application of earlier patristic writings to later theological controversies was a typical feature of early Christian heresiological discourse. In the case of Shenoute, his implicit aim in citing Athanasius is to construct a genealogy of heresies in which Origenism is seen as the offspring of what he viewed as the original theological error—Arianism—a genealogy in which the adherents of both are understood to be members of the same species. Thus, Shenoute writes, 'All heretics do deeds of darkness on account of their ancient heads . . . and if some undiscerning people come into their place in due season, they will become ensnared as well.'²²

On several occasions in *I Am Amazed*, Shenoute cites Athanasius by name, and he does so with a specific purpose in mind: to discourage Origenist speculation on creation and on the nature of the Word's existence before creation.²³ By invoking Athanasius' name to inveigh against such theological speculation, Shenoute quietly sought to shift his readers' attention away from details concerning the pre-existence of the Word to the implications of the Word's Incarnation for the monastic life of piety.

Early in the surviving treatise (its original beginning is lost), Shenoute reaffirms the Word's role in creation, and condemns Origenist ideas about the possible existence of successive independent worlds prior to the present one. Attributing such ideas to a blind dependence on 'apocryphal books', Shenoute quotes Genesis 1: 1 ('In the beginning, God created heaven and earth') in order to prove that God created only a singular 'earth', not multiple ones.²⁴

²¹ Stephen Emmel, 'Theophilus's Festal Letter of 401 as Quoted by Shenoute', 93–8; id., *Shenoute's Literary Corpus*, ii. 647–8; and Timbie, 'Reading and Re-reading Shenoute's *I Am Amazed*', 63. It should be noted that, according to the manuscript record, not very many patristic works were translated into Coptic, which means that Coptic authors such as Shenoute probably had to have access to Greek sources to read such material. The translation of Theophilus' festal letter found in *I Am Amazed* represents an exception to this general trend.

²² Shenoute, *I Am Amazed* 322 (Orlandi, 24).

²³ For a study of Shenoute's use of Athanasius elsewhere in his writings on the subject of virginity, see L. T. Lefort, 'Athanasie, Ambroise, et Chenoute', 55–73.

²⁴ Shenoute, *I Am Amazed* 100–5 (Orlandi, 14).

Later, Shenoute returns to his attack on ‘unlearned’ teachers who proclaim knowledge from apocryphal books. In this context, he quotes from Athanasius’ 39th *Festal Letter*, in which the Alexandrian bishop published his biblical canon and condemned ‘heresies’ whose adherents ‘pride themselves on the things that are called, “apocrypha”’.

Several lines later, Shenoute turns again to ‘the wise archbishop Apa Athanasius the Great’ who ‘revealed the wickedness of those who say (such) impious things (i.e. things based on apocryphal knowledge) along with the rest of their evil words.’²⁵ What follows is a striking litany of Arian theological slogans, probably gleaned from Athanasius’ polemical writings.

‘As for the Word of God, there was a time when he did not exist.’ And, ‘He did not exist before he was born.’ And also, ‘He was not the Son of God by nature.’ And also, ‘He is one among those who have been born and those who have been created.’ And, ‘He is a creature, a created being and thing.’ And, ‘God alone existed and no one else existed with him.’ And, ‘Afterward, when he wanted to create, he created this one then, and he named him Word and Son.’ And, ‘Just as everything that did not exist at first came into existence through the will of God, so too he (the Word) did not exist at first. But it was through the will of the Father that he came into existence.’ And, ‘But it was by means of grace that he himself came into existence.’²⁶

In this way, Shenoute aligns Origenist cosmological speculation not only with the reading of non-canonical books but also with particular Arian assertions about the created nature of the Word, both of which Athanasius vehemently opposed in his 39th *Festal Letter*. For Shenoute, ‘the things that the holy man the archbishop Apa Athanasius said are sufficient to overturn those impieties.’²⁷

Later in the treatise, Shenoute cites Athanasius again and self-consciously utilizes the language of the Nicene Creed to reinforce his linking of Arian and Origenist doctrine. In the context of defending prayer to Jesus as consistent with the doctrine of the ‘consubstantial Trinity’ (Τ(Ε)-ΤΡΙΑC N-ΖΟΜΟΟΥCΙΟC), Shenoute translates this doctrine for his Coptic-speaking audience, appealing to Christ’s ‘single essence’ (ΟΥΟΥCΙΑ ΝΟΥΩΤ) with the Father.²⁸ Then, he caps his argument with an appeal to Athanasius’ authority over against any form of theological inquiry that dares to reopen discussion of such issues:

For with regard to these words of this type, the true man of God, Apa Athanasius the archbishop of Alexandria blamed the ones who meddle (ΡΕΥΤΩΖ), saying concerning

²⁵ Ibid. 325 (Orlandi, 24).

²⁶ Ibid. 325–8 (Orlandi, 24–6).

²⁷ Ibid. 330 (Orlandi, 26).

²⁸ Ibid. 803 (Orlandi, 58); cf. 332 (Orlandi, 26), where Shenoute affirms that the Son and the Spirit share a singular ‘essence’ (ΟΥCΙΑ) with the Father. Elsewhere in the treatise he uses other formulaic language from Nicaea, speaking of the only-begotten Son as ‘God from God’ (475; Orlandi, 54).

them, ‘Why do you dare to look into the things that even the angels do not know? For the creatures will not be able to describe the generation (ⲬΠΟ) of the Creator.’ And he also said, ‘It is sufficient for you that you know that the Father begot the Son before the aeons, but to say how, no one knows.’²⁹

Here again, Athanasius’ words are understood to apply equally to Arian and Origenist doctrines, both of which are grouped under the common ‘type’ of heresy.

In the end, Shenoute’s appeals to Athanasius and this tradition of anti-Arian discourse have a particular restrictive aim: to limit the scope of monastic speculation into the nature of the Word’s pre-existence. In this context, he quotes from Isaiah 53: 8—‘Who will be able to proclaim his generation (ⲦⲈⲐⲚⲈⲗ)?’³⁰ And yet, even as he discourages inquiry into the Word’s invisible ‘generation’ (ⲚⲈⲚⲈⲗ) from the Father, Shenoute is intent on shifting his monks’ attention to a more sanctioned and observable topic, the visible manifestation of the incarnate Word—the ‘birth’ (ⲬΠΟ) of the Word in the flesh.

Shenoute on the Incarnation: Reading Scripture as a Disciple of Cyril

From his treatise *I Am Amazed* and his sermon *And It Happened One Day*, it is clear that Shenoute, as head of the White Monastery, was beset by questions from theologically curious monks on the pre-existence of the Word, and that he responded by redirecting their focus and contemplation towards the nature of the Word’s Incarnation. One of the ways that he did so was through contested readings of Scripture.

One sees this marked shift of attention toward the Incarnation fairly early in the treatise when Shenoute argues against his (Origenist) opponents’ allegorical reading of Genesis 1 in relation to the celebration of the Pascha during Holy Week. Apparently, some Egyptian Christian contemporaries of Shenoute were teaching that the six days leading up to Easter corresponded to the six days of creation, that the Father created the world as a ‘type’ of the Paschal celebration, and that the earthly Pascha reflects a heavenly Pascha performed by God, along with the angels and spirits. Shenoute writes, ‘They speak about the Pascha that we perform on earth, and liken it (ⲈⲒⲚⲈ ⲘⲘⲐⲘ) to the fulfilment (of the days) in which God fashioned all of creation.’³¹ What problem does Shenoute have with this typological reading of Genesis? He

²⁹ Ibid. 815 (Orlandi, 60–2). The Coptic word ⲢⲈⲘⲦⲐⲨ (meddlers) corresponds to the Greek word *περίεργοι* (busybodies) used by the author of 1 Timothy 5: 13 to criticize those guilty of ‘saying what they should not say’.

³⁰ Ibid. 816 (Orlandi, 62).

³¹ Ibid. 312 (Orlandi, 22).

fears that it will lead to misunderstanding regarding the relation of the Godhead to human suffering. Even though the crux of the typological connection appears to be a numerological one (the six days of creation correspond to the six days of Holy Week), Shenoute accuses his opponents of attributing suffering to the divine Father. Thus, he writes, 'Is there another blasphemy greater than saying that God performs a Pascha, or that he experiences suffering?'³² Only fifteen years or so before the writing of *I Am Amazed*, Cyril of Alexandria had wrestled with the challenge of avoiding the imputation of suffering to the Divine while speaking about the death of Christ as the Incarnate Word in his correspondence with Nestorius. In his *Second Letter to Nestorius*, Cyril makes a point of defending himself against accusations that his Christology implies divine suffering: thus, he reaffirms that the Word could be said to suffer in the flesh even while not being subject to suffering in the Godhead.³³ In the case of Shenoute, his solution to this problem is to call attention to the Incarnation as the proper context for understanding the performance of the Paschal mysteries: 'For on what occasion does the Lord perform the Pascha, except indeed at the time when he became human among human beings, and he experienced suffering for our sake and he fasted and prayed and was tested in everything except sin?'³⁴ Thus, Shenoute subtly shifts the allegorical equation for his readers: it is properly the Incarnation itself (and not creation) that is read as the 'type' for the Paschal liturgy.

In another instance, Shenoute's exegesis of the Gospel of John becomes the platform for this 'christological turn'. Towards the end of the work, he defends the theological propriety of prayer directed to Jesus, against those who believe that only prayer to the Father is sanctioned.³⁵ In support of his argument that prayer to God (the Father) and prayer to Jesus are equivalent, he interprets John 10: 30: 'I and the Father, we are one.'³⁶ Shenoute's method of interpretation is to break the verse down into two component parts. 'For when he says, "I and the Father," he reveals the hypostases (ΝΖΥΠΟCΤΑCΙC). But when he says, "We are one," he indicates the oneness of his nature (ΦΥCΙC), because it is a single essence (ΟΥΟΥCΙΑ ΝΟΥΩΤ) which is consubstantial (ΖΟΜΟΟΥCΙΟΝ).'³⁷ According to his reading, the first part of the verse refers to the Father and the Son (or

³² Shenoute, 313 (Orlandi, 22).

³³ Cyril of Alexandria, *Ep. 4* (*Second Letter to Nestorius*) (ACO 1.1.1, 25–8; trans. J. A. McGuckin, *St Cyril*, 262–5); see also *schol. inc. 33* (PG 75.1404–5; trans. McGuckin, *St Cyril*, 327).

³⁴ Shenoute, *I Am Amazed* 315 (Orlandi, 22).

³⁵ This resistance to prayer directed to Jesus probably originated in more extreme Origenist circles among monks who sought to avoid any anthropomorphic imaging of God in prayer and contemplation.

³⁶ Shenoute, *I Am Amazed* 805 (Orlandi, 58).

³⁷ *Ibid.* 806 (Orlandi, 60).

Word) as two hypostases of the Trinitarian Godhead. However, for Shenoute's argument, the second part of the verse is more crucial, for it correlates Cyril's doctrine of the *one nature* of the incarnate Word with the Nicene doctrine of the common *essence* the Word shares with the Father.

At the same time that this reading of John 10: 30 aligns 'one-nature' Christology with the Trinitarian legacy of Nicaea, it also implicitly aligns Nestorian (dyophysite) doctrine with the Arian theology condemned at Nicaea. Thus, having commented on John 10: 30 as support for a one-nature Christology, Shenoute moves on to consider the Arian proof-text, John 14: 28—'My Father is greater than me.' Summarily dismissing arguments that this verse presumes a differentiation of glory and nature, he argues instead that 'the Father and Son have a singular glory, a singular honor, and a singular nature'.³⁸ Shenoute's choice of vocabulary here is significant. According to his heresiological reasoning, the 'single nature' (†ΦΥΣΙΣ ΝΟΥΩΤ) or 'single essence' (ΟΥΟΥΣΙΑ ΝΟΥΩΤ) shared by the Father and Son and denied by Arius is identifiable with the 'oneness of nature' (ΤΜΝ̄ΤΟΥΑ ΝΦΥΣΙΣ) manifest in the Incarnation and denied by Nestorius.³⁹

However, in contrast to his suppression of Arian and/or Origenist speculation into the pre-existence of the Word, Shenoute conspicuously does not shy away from debate on the nature of the Incarnation itself. Thus, he writes,

Let those who meddle hear that it was possible for the wise and for all the church of Christ to know about his birth according to the flesh (ΠΕΦΥΞΠΟ ΚΑΤΑ ΣΑΡΞ). It was described beforehand by the angels and announced by the Gospels and the apostles. And it was also signaled by the great patriarchs. But regarding his begetting (ΠΕΦΥΞΠΟ) from the Father, no angel, nor prophet, nor apostle, nor anyone at all in the whole of creation knows (how) to describe it, except for him alone and his father. It is impious for a person to ask concerning it, especially the heretics.⁴⁰

Here again, Shenoute de-authorizes his monastic readers from engaging in certain kinds of theological speculation, and in order to do so, he must make a sharp distinction between two kinds of 'birth' or 'begetting,' both of which could be expressed by the same verb in Coptic, **ϫΠΟ**. While he declares speculation into the Word's 'begetting (**ϫΠΟ**) from the Father' off limits and a sign of heretical impiety, he appeals to 'the Gospels and the apostles' and to 'the great patriarchs' as uncensored witnesses to Christ's 'birth (**ϫΠΟ**) according to the flesh'.

It is not surprising that this 'christological turn' towards the Incarnation that Shenoute was advocating would inevitably bring him into more direct engagement with Nestorian opinions on the subject. What is somewhat surprising—

³⁸ Ibid. 807–8 (Orlandi, 60).

³⁹ Ibid. 806 (Orlandi, 60).

⁴⁰ Ibid. 809–10 (Orlandi, 60).

especially given Shenoute's explicit appeal to the teaching of 'the great patriarchs' on the Incarnation—is the fact that Cyril of Alexandria is not mentioned by name in any of the three christological works examined in this chapter. Despite this fact, however, it is clear that Shenoute is dependent on Cyril's discourse in his opposition to Nestorian doctrine: elsewhere in his writings, he lauds the fifth-century Alexandrian patriarch as the 'illuminator' and as 'our most holy father and witness'.⁴¹ Even where Cyril is unnamed, echoes of his voice remain audible in Shenoute's anti-Nestorian polemic.

Shenoute's reception of Cyril's thought is not limited simply to his defence of a 'one-nature' Christology. One also sees his dependence on Cyril in his arguments over familiar scriptural passages, his use of the body–soul relationship as a metaphor for the union of the divine and human natures in Christ, his understanding of the Incarnation as the Word's creation of a body, and his defence of the Marian title, Theotokos.

Shenoute devotes one section of his treatise *I Am Amazed* to the refutation of Nestorius' views on the Incarnation, quoting a series of exegetical teachings attributed to him,⁴² and then countering each time with a series of his own scriptural testimonies.⁴³ For example, in response to Nestorius' reading of Christ's lamentation in Matthew 27: 46 ('My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?') as a sign of 'the flesh . . . crying out to the divinity',⁴⁴ Shenoute cites a series of eight biblical passages. These passages, organized in three groupings, reaffirm the divine identity of the crucified one (1 Cor. 2: 8; Acts 3: 15; Phil. 2: 5, 8), attest to the fact that it was 'in the flesh' that such suffering took place (1 Pet. 4: 1; Heb. 2: 14; John 1: 14), and reiterate that the union that took place in the Incarnation resulted from a divine act of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1: 18; Luke 1: 35). What is interesting about Shenoute's choice of passages here is how much he shows himself to be enmeshed in the exegetical debates that raged between Nestorius and Cyril.

⁴¹ Id., *Only I Tell Everyone Who Dwells in This Village*; ZJ 150, = Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, MS Copte 130⁴, fos. 91–2 (Leipoldt, CSCO 42, 88–9); Janet Timbie, 'Non-Canonical Scriptural Citation in Shenoute', Paper presented at the Eighth International Congress of Coptic Studies, Paris, July 2004.

⁴² Shenoute, *I Am Amazed* 464–5, 469–70, 480 (Orlandi, 50, 52, 54). A critical evaluation of Shenoute's accuracy in documenting Nestorian views has produced a mixed verdict: see A. Grillmeier (with T. Hainthaler), *Christ in Christian Tradition*, ii/4, 209–10.

⁴³ Shenoute, *I Am Amazed* 466–8, 471–4, 481 (Orlandi, 52, 54).

⁴⁴ Shenoute, *I Am Amazed* 469–70 (Orlandi, 52). For an example of Nestorius' use of Matthew 27: 46 with reference to the humanity of Christ, see the *Synodical Deposition of Nestorius*: 'Similarly from the same Book, Quaternion 16. Speaking of the Son: It is he who says, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" It is he who submitted to death for three days. Nonetheless I worship him along with the deity in so far as he is a co-operator with the divine majesty' (ACO 1.2.49; trans. McGuckin, *St Cyril*, 374, slightly modified; see also F. Loofs, *Nestoriana*, 260. 4–7). Comparable testimony from Nestorius was also preserved by Severus of Antioch: 'O wise one, it was human nature that said, "God my God, why have you forsaken me?"' (Loofs, *Nestoriana*, 360. 15–16).

In addition to Matthew 27: 46, the passages that Shenoute cites from Philippians (2: 5, 8) and Matthew (1: 18) were ones that Nestorius himself cited in his earlier debate with Cyril over the propriety of Theotokos ('God-bearer') as a title for Mary. In his short *Reply to Cyril's Second Letter*,⁴⁵ Nestorius uses both these texts to support his preference for using the name Christ (rather than such divine epithets as 'God the Word') when speaking about 'the Lord's economy, the birth and the sufferings', which are not applied to the Godhead, 'but to the manhood'.⁴⁶ Thus, he notes that, just as Paul used the title 'Christ' in Philippians 2: 5–8 when referring to the crucified one 'so that no one might imagine that God the Word was passible', so too he used the same title in Matthew 1: 18 when making reference to the human genealogy and birth of Jesus.⁴⁷ It is, then, not coincidental that Shenoute cites these same two texts in close proximity (and in the same order) when arguing against Nestorius' Christology in *I Am Amazed*. Indeed, Shenoute argues that the wording of these passages, in fact, confutes (or confounds) Nestorius' attempts to mark a sharp division between the humanity and divinity of the incarnate Word. First, in the case of Philippians 2, he observes that the one who 'became obedient unto death' was the same one who was 'in a form of God' (ΖΗ ΟΥΜΟΡΦΗ ΝΤΕΠΝΟΥΤΕ).⁴⁸ Then, with reference to Matthew 1: 18, he highlights the fact that it was 'through the Holy Spirit'—through 'the power of his divinity'—that the Word of God became human through the Virgin Mary.⁴⁹ By means of this exegetical strategy of counter-citation, Shenoute effectively seeks to wrest these verses away from his theological opponent and reclaim them for the anti-Nestorian cause.

In this way, Shenoute aligns himself as a compatriot of Cyril in his opposition to Nestorius' theology. Indeed, the archimandrite's paired citation of Hebrews 2: 14 ('[he] participated in flesh and blood') and John 1: 14 ('the Word became flesh') in the same section of *I Am Amazed* significantly echoes Cyril's frequent citation of these two verses in tandem to underscore the union of humanity and divinity in Christ.⁵⁰ One finds no less than four examples of this interpretative pattern in Cyril's writings. The first is found in Cyril's second *Letter to Nestorius* (early 430), where the Alexandrian bishop opposes Nestorius' purported division of 'the One Lord Jesus Christ into two sons', and uses these two verses to clarify the Word's appropriation of the flesh

⁴⁵ ACO 1.1.29–32; PG 77.49; trans. McGuckin, *St Cyril*, 364–8.

⁴⁶ Nestorius, *ep. Cyr.* 2. 4–7 (ACO 1.1.1, 28–32, esp. 30–1; trans. McGuckin, *St Cyril*, 365–6).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Shenoute, *I Am Amazed* 471 (Orlandi, 52).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 474 (Orlandi, 52). Orlandi's edition is incomplete at this point. Here, I follow Timbie's corrected reading of the text: see 'Reading and Re-reading Shenoute's *I Am Amazed*', 67–8.

⁵⁰ Shenoute, *I Am Amazed* 474 (Orlandi, 52). Here, I follow Timbie's corrected reading of the text: see 'Reading and Re-reading Shenoute's *I Am Amazed*', 67.

(‘[he] made his very own a body which was ours’).⁵¹ A little over a year later, during the Council of Ephesus in the summer of 431, Cyril preached a brief homily in that city at the Church of St John in which he quoted both passages in reaffirming that it was the divine Word that was ‘brought into the world’ (cf. Heb. 1: 6) and became united with the flesh.⁵² Later that same summer after the council, Cyril wrote his *Explanation of the Twelve Chapters*, including twelve anathemas directed against Nestorian belief. Anathema 5 is grounded in his reading of these same two verses: ‘If anyone should dare to say that Christ was a God-bearing man and not rather that he is truly God as the one natural Son, since the ‘Word became flesh’ (John 1: 14) and ‘shared in flesh and blood just like us’ (Hebrews 2: 14), let him be anathema.’⁵³ Finally, in his *Scholia on the Incarnation* (written sometime after 431), Cyril uses Hebrews 2: 14 and John 1: 14 to similar effect: namely, to explain how the ‘the body is said to be (the Word’s) very own’ and to argue against notions that in the Incarnation the Word underwent some sort of ‘change’ or ‘metamorphosis’.⁵⁴ In the case of Shenoute, he likewise uses these two texts together to defend the notion that, even as the incarnate Word ‘died in the flesh’, that same Word remained ‘immortal in his divinity’.⁵⁵ Thus, in a work probably written shortly after the end of Cyril’s tenure as bishop, Shenoute shows himself to be in exegetical solidarity with his former patriarch.

Shenoute’s methods of biblical interpretation are also tied to other christological themes that show his self-conscious indebtedness to Cyril—namely, his ardent defence of the term ‘Theotokos’ and in his use of the union of soul and body as a metaphor for the Incarnation. Shenoute takes up Cyril’s mantle as the defender of Mary’s identity as ‘God-bearer’ in both *I Am Amazed* and in his sermon, *And It Happened One Day*. In the former, over against Nestorius’ famous objection to the doctrine of Theotokos,⁵⁶ Shenoute asserts that ‘the one whom the Virgin bore is God’ and ‘therefore, it is necessary to confess, “Mary the God-bearer” (ΤΕΝΤΑΚΣΠΕ ΠΝΟΥΤΕ), just as the Fathers said’.⁵⁷

⁵¹ Cyril of Alexandria, *Ep.* 4. 7 (Second Letter to Nestorius) (ACO 1.1.1, 28; trans. McGuckin, *St Cyril*, 265).

⁵² Id., *hom. div.* 2 (ACO 1.1.2, 94–6; trans. McGuckin, *St Cyril*, 280–1).

⁵³ Id., *expl. xii cap.* 15 (PG 76.304; trans. McGuckin, *St Cyril*, 287).

⁵⁴ Id., *schol. inc.* 25 (PG 75.1396; trans. McGuckin, *St Cyril*, 317–18).

⁵⁵ Shenoute, *I Am Amazed* 474 (Orlandi, 52). Timbie’s revision of the text is crucial at this point. In the place of Orlandi’s original, problematic reading of the phrase in question (‘immortal in his entire soul’, ΝΑΤΜΟΥ ΖΝΤΕΨΥΧΗ [ΤΗΡC], she substitutes the corrected phrase, ‘immortal in his divinity’ (ΝΑΤΜΟΥ ΖΝΤΕΨΜΝΤΝΟΥΤΕ): see ‘Reading and Re-reading Shenoute’s *I Am Amazed*’, 67.

⁵⁶ Shenoute, *I Am Amazed* 480 (Orlandi, 54).

⁵⁷ Ibid. 482 (Orlandi, 54). Shenoute supports this statement by quoting from 1 John 1: 2 (‘[God] appeared to us’) and Matthew 1: 23 (‘Behold, the Virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and his name will be called Emmanuel, which can be translated, “God with us”’).

Shenoute expands upon the theme of Theotokos in his sermon, *And It Happened One Day*. The sermon is organized around his response to three questions. Each of these questions corresponded to one of the three main theological ‘heresies’ that Shenoute combated in his monastic writings. The first question—‘Did (the Word) exist then before he was born of the holy Virgin Mary?’—resonated with certain earlier Arian doubts regarding the pre-existence of the Word.⁵⁸ The second—‘How did he become a human being in the womb of the holy Virgin?’—revisited Cyril’s debate with Nestorius over the nature of the Incarnation.⁵⁹ And the third—‘How is the body and the blood of the Lord bread and wine?’—was placed in the mouths of some who have been ‘stricken by the words of Origen’ in their interpretation of the eucharist.⁶⁰

However, at the same time that these questions reinforce Shenoute’s construction of a heresiological genealogy, his responses betray his thoroughgoing indebtedness to Cyril’s theology and exegesis. For example, in response to the first question, Shenoute quotes a series of passages from the Gospel of John and from Paul’s letters as evidence for the pre-existence of the Word with the Father, many of which were commonly used by Cyril as christological proofs when he addressed this same issue in his own writings.⁶¹ Shenoute’s allusions to John 6: 32 (‘the true bread from heaven’) and John 6: 56 (‘his body is true food and his blood is true drink’) in response to the third question also probably reflects his reliance on Cyril’s Johannine commentary.⁶²

However, it is in response to the second question—on the Word’s becoming human ‘in the womb of the Virgin Mary’—that Shenoute elaborates his view on the doctrine of Theotokos. Twice he reaffirms Mary’s role as ‘God-bearer’ in language rich with Cyrillian phrasings. First, after describing the Incarnation in terms of the Word’s *creation of a body for himself*, he returns to the subject of Mary’s motherhood.

Was the one who took clay from the earth and fashioned for himself a human being according to his image and according to his likeness not capable of building for himself his own temple, the holy body, just as he willed, in the womb of the woman he honored more than all (other) women? Where does the earth find hand and foot,

⁵⁸ Id., *And It Happened One Day*, fo. 87^v (Lefort, ‘Catechèse christologique’, 41).

⁵⁹ Ibid. fo. 82^v (Lefort, ‘Catechèse christologique’, 42).

⁶⁰ Ibid. fo. 84^r (Lefort, ‘Catechèse christologique’, 43).

⁶¹ In order of citation, Shenoute quotes John 8: 56–8; 17: 5; 1: 1–3; 2: 3; 2: 2; 13: 3; 16: 27–8; Colossians 1: 16–17; John 6: 62; 1 Corinthians 10: 4; Colossians 1:26 (or Ephesians 3: 9); and Galatians 4: 4. Hans-Friedrich Weiss (‘Zur Christologie des Shenute’, 188 n. 3) records multiple examples where Cyril uses the same texts from the Gospel of John (1: 1–3; 6:61 ff.; 8: 57; 17: 5) and Paul’s letters (1 Cor. 10: 2–4; Col. 1: 12–20) in the context of defending the pre-existence of Christ.

⁶² For examples of Cyril’s use of John 6: 56 to elucidate the Christological implications of the eucharist, see his *Third Letter to Nestorius* (Ep. 6. 7: ACO 1.1.1, 37–8), his *Explanation of the Twelve Chapters* (expl. xii cap. 29; PG 76.312), and especially his *Commentary on John* (Jo. 4. 2; Pusey, i. 528. 12–536. 18).

height and breadth, head, shining hair, eyes full of light, ears that hear, a mouth and tongue that speak, a nose that smells, bones, flesh, sinews, and all the other marvelous members (of the body)? Even more so then has it been the case for the one whom he loves, the one whom he fashioned in the womb of Mary. According to the economy (ΟΙΚΟΝΟΜΙΑ) she is his mother; according to his exalted divinity, she is his servant.⁶³

Later in the sermon, Shenoute affirms Mary's identity as Theotokos in explicit terms when he describes how on one occasion he and some monks came upon 'some linen items' (ΖΕΝΚΕΥΟC ΝΖΒΟC) embroidered with 'the image belonging to the Savior and holy Mary' and the phrase, 'Mary the God-bearer (ΜΑΡΙΑ ΤΕΝΤΑCΧΠΕ ΠΝΟΥΤΕ)'.⁶⁴ Shenoute uses his memory of this visual encounter as an opportunity to elucidate the doctrine over against the words of Nestorius and 'others of his ilk'—yes, Mary is the one who bears God in her womb, 'but this is according to the flesh. Now, according to his divinity it is he who has fashioned her in the womb.'⁶⁵ Once again, this confluence of themes in Shenoute's sermon corresponds to Cyril's own christological exposition. In his letters, treatises, and commentaries, the Alexandrian bishop had likewise spoken on many occasions of the Word's creation of the human body as a fleshly 'economy' (ΟΙΚΟΝΟΜΙΑ) in the context of offering an anti-Nestorian defence of Mary's role as God-bearer (ΘΕΟΤΟΚΟC).⁶⁶

Finally, one also observes how Shenoute follows Cyril in using the union of the soul and body as a metaphor for the union of divinity and humanity in the Incarnation. In this case, his conception of how the body and soul were united in a human being also had significant ramifications for his rejection of Origenist beliefs concerning the pre-existence of souls (in relation to their bodies) and *metempsychosis*, the transmigration of souls to new bodies after death. In the mid-fifth century, these ideas were apparently being espoused by certain teachers in the vicinity of the White Monastery.⁶⁷ In opposition to such views, Shenoute affirms the simultaneous creation of body and soul in a human being in his treatise *I Am Amazed*: 'The body did not exist before the soul, nor did the soul exist before the body, but God fashioned it and the body together in the womb.'⁶⁸ Elsewhere, in his sermon, *When the Word Says*, he

⁶³ Shenoute, *And It Happened One Day*, fos. 82^v–83^r (Lefort, 'Catechèse christologique', 42).

⁶⁴ Ibid. fo. 83^v (Lefort, 'Catechèse christologique', 42).

⁶⁵ Ibid. fo. 84^r (Lefort, 'Catechèse christologique', 42–3).

⁶⁶ H.-F. Weiss, 'Schenute von Atripe', 195 n. 7; see also my discussion of Cyril in the Introduction to this book.

⁶⁷ Shenoute, *I Am Amazed* 435 (Orlandi, 48): '(They have said that) he created all of them (i.e. all the souls) from the beginning and gathered them together in certain places and in certain chambers for the sake of that work—namely, birth. And that the souls of those who die will come out of them and will enter the bodies of those who are born.' For a discussion of this section of Shenoute's treatise, see Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, ii/4. 197–8.

⁶⁸ Shenoute, *I Am Amazed* 340 (Orlandi, 28); see also Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, ii/4. 198.

also assumes their ultimate, simultaneous judgement: Jesus Christ is ‘the one who will destroy (the heretic’s) body and soul in the wrath of his anger.’⁶⁹

For Shenoute, this understanding of the human body and soul proves to be foundational for two interrelated aspects of his theology: the Incarnation and human salvation. First, as in the case of Cyril, the union of the soul and body in a human being is used to help visualize the relation of humanity and divinity in the incarnate Word.⁷⁰ Thus, Shenoute writes in *I Am Amazed*, ‘If a person is killed, do they say that a body has been killed? Do they not say, ‘We have killed the whole person,’ and yet the soul does not die? Rather, it is only the body that dies. This is the way it is with the Lord. He died in the flesh, while remaining immortal in his divinity.’⁷¹ According to this analogy, when one speaks about the life of a human being, it is assumed that the body and soul have a unified existence, even as it is possible to identify the attributes that respectively belong to each (mortality in the case of the body; immortality in the case of the soul). Here, Shenoute argues (in terms derived from Cyril himself) that the same applies to union of humanity and divinity in the person of Christ.

Second, the union of the soul and body also serves as the anthropological ground for the salvation that the Incarnation makes possible. Thus, Shenoute writes, ‘Observe carefully that it was from earth, and not from other elements that (God) fashioned him and breathed into him, and the human being became a living soul. And moreover, this is what (God) will raise up according to the Scriptures.’⁷² The creation account in Genesis becomes the foundation or template for Shenoute’s understanding of resurrection; and yet, it is the Incarnation itself that serves as the crucial link between these events in all three of the christological works examined here.

Thus, in *I Am Amazed*, the incarnate actions of the Word—his having been ‘born of the Virgin according to the flesh,’ his having been ‘tested in everything except for sin’ (e.g. hunger, thirst, weeping, grief), his having ‘tasted death for our sake,’ and his having ‘raised up his body on the third day’—pave the way for our own resurrection in both soul and body.⁷³ In *When the Word Says*, Shenoute conceives of the Incarnation as the means by which the Word re-creates humanity in his image.

⁶⁹ Shenoute, *When the Word Says*, fo. 3^ra (Depuydt, *Catalogue*, 145).

⁷⁰ For examples of the use of the body–soul metaphor by Cyril, see his *schol. inc.* 8, 25, 33 (PG 75.1376–7, 1396–7, 1405); also L. R. Wickham, ‘Symbols of the Incarnation in Cyril of Alexandria’, 41–53, esp. 45.

⁷¹ Shenoute, *I Am Amazed* 473–4 (Orlandi, 52). At para. 474, I follow Timbie’s corrected reading of the text: see ‘Reading and Re-reading Shenoute’s *I Am Amazed*’, 66.

⁷² Shenoute, *I Am Amazed* 402 (Orlandi, 40; Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, ii/4. 200; see also Schroeder, *Monastic Bodies*, 149.

⁷³ Shenoute, *I Am Amazed* 476–9 (Orlandi, 54).

Consider the pattern of humankind, through whom many things have (indeed) perished, or (consider) of what sort human likeness (ϵΙΝΕ) is. (When you do so) you will understand that, as for the likeness humankind took on when he sinned, along with the shame which resulted, the Lord came to dwell in that likeness for our sake when he became human (ϷΜ ΠΤΡΕϳΡΡΩΜΕ) (fo. 7^rb), in order to bring humankind to its originary state (ΑΡΧΗ) and sinlessness, and to the initial beauty of the soul before it became unclean. Thus he made the soul clean and perfected humanity (ΑϳϸΕΚ ΠΡΩΜΕ).⁷⁴

And finally, in *And It Happened One Day*, God's creation of the human being in both body and soul is read as a type for the believer's encounter with the incarnate Word in the eucharist:

'Is the one who made earth into a human being not able to cause bread and wine to become body and blood?' Or, when he says, 'This is my body; this is my blood,' for your part (fo. 84v) who are you? Who, among those who read the Scriptures well, does not know that the human being whom God created was himself adorned with all his bodily members, but he did not experience any movement at all? However, when the Lord God Almighty breathed into his face a breath of life, he (the human being) became a living being and he moved all of himself, he spoke, he walked, he stretched his hands to (do) their work, and he blessed with his tongue the one who fashioned him. In this way also, the bread and the wine, while they lie on the holy table of the Lord and while they rest on it, are called bread and wine, but when that fearful eucharistic blessing is recited over them, and when the Lord God sends upon them his Holy Spirit from heaven, from this moment on it is no longer bread or wine, but the body and blood of the Lord.⁷⁵

In these three works, one sees how Shenoute adopts the Cyrillian body-soul metaphor and applies it not simply to the Incarnation itself, but also to three soteriological themes connected with the Incarnation: resurrection, recreation, and sacramental participation. In what follows, I want to explore the relation between the Incarnation and sacramental participation in more detail. How specifically was Shenoute's Christology informed by the ritual forms of worship practised within his community? And what role did the sacraments play in his monastic vision of the sanctified life?

INCARNATIONAL PRACTICE: PRAYER, SACRAMENTS, AND SALVATION

A close reading of Shenoute's works reveals how his Christology was intimately shaped by the ritual disciplines of the monastic community he directed.

⁷⁴ Id., *When the Word Says*, fos. 7^ra–7^rb (Depuydt, *Catalogue*, 148).

⁷⁵ Id., *And It Happened One Day*, fo. 84^{r-v} (Lefort, 'Catechèse christologique', 43).

Worship—in its many forms—served as the context in which teachings on the Incarnation were both communicated and embodied. Perhaps the most readily accessible occasions for the dissemination of christological knowledge in the White Monastery were Shenoute's sermons themselves: as this study itself indicates, contemporary historians interested in mining for information on Shenoute's beliefs are necessarily reliant on the homilies preserved in his literary corpus. However, these homiletic sources, along with treatises such as *I Am Amazed*, also give researchers intriguing glimpses of other ritual and liturgical practices that became primary venues not only for the transmission of christological doctrine, but also for what I would call 'incarnational practice'.

In *I Am Amazed*, this intimate connection between Christology and monastic ritual practice may be observed in Shenoute's exhortations concerning prayer. Towards the end of the treatise, the archimandrite addresses the issue of prayer directed to Jesus, supporting the practice against those who suspected that such prayer amounted to falsely 'imaging' the invisible God in anthropomorphic terms (i.e. certain Origenist Christians living in Upper Egypt). In response, he argues passionately that prayer directed to Jesus is equivalent to prayer directed to God the Father, on account of the Nicene doctrine of *homoousios*—the consubstantiality of the Father and Son as persons of the Trinity. To suggest otherwise is to assert that the Son is in fact *heterousios* (different in essence) from the Father.⁷⁶

Several observations are in order regarding the function of such 'Jesus prayers' for the life of Shenoute's community. First, this kind of prayer is presented as an extension of communal worship within the monastery. Indeed, he initially broaches the subject in the context of offering up liturgical blessings to God:

Blessed are you, O God, you and your blessed Son. Your name and his name are one in the mouth of the one who fights against those who speak this new impiety. This is his wealth and his hope. When he goes in, (he says) 'God,' and when he comes out, (he says) 'Jesus.' When he lies down to sleep, 'God,' and when he gets up, 'Jesus.' When he blesses, 'God,' and when he prays, 'Jesus.'⁷⁷

For a monastic audience, Shenoute's references to going in and coming out would have recalled the specific rhythms of ascetic discipline—not only the repeated action of coming and going to and from one's cell, but also the regular, collective act of entering and exiting the places of assembly to observe

⁷⁶ Id., *I Am Amazed* 802–3 (Orlandi, 58). An inscription discovered on the wall of a monastic cell at Kellia voices a similar Trinitarian defence of such prayers to Jesus: see Antoine Guillaumont, 'Une inscription copte sur la 'Prière de Jésus', 310–25, repr. in *Aux origines du monachisme chrétien*, 169–83 (no. 11).

⁷⁷ Shenoute, *I Am Amazed* 802 (Orlandi, 58).

the Hours of Prayer (five times a day), or the church to celebrate the mass (twice a week, on Saturday evening and Sunday morning).⁷⁸

Thus, the act of offering up mantra-like prayers to Jesus as the incarnate Word is understood as a practice that ritually links all aspects of the monks' experience to the liturgical and sacramental life of the community. On the one hand, Shenoute connects it with the practice of invoking the name of Christ (the Son) alone in the sacrament of baptism. Comparing Galatians 3: 27 ('You were baptized into Christ') and Acts 8: 16 ('They received baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ') to the trinitarian formula in Matthew 28: 19 ('Go and teach all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit'), Shenoute concludes that 'when we name the Son, we call upon the Holy Trinity'.⁷⁹ On the other hand, he offers his readers a vision of how this prayer should permeate the everyday life of the Christian, whether monastic or lay:

Seek after the fulfilment of these words and you will find them on your lips and on the lips of your children.⁸⁰ When you celebrate a feast and are joyful, (say) 'Jesus.' When you are grieving in heart and are distressed, (say) 'Jesus.' When your sons and daughters laugh, (say) 'Jesus.' The one who draws water, 'Jesus.' The one who runs in the face of barbarians, 'Jesus.' Those who see wild beasts and something frightening, 'Jesus.' Those who are suffering with pains and illnesses, 'Jesus.' Those who are taken as prisoners of war, 'Jesus.' It is sufficient . . . Those who have suffered perversion of justice and violent treatment,⁸¹ 'Jesus.' The name of the one who is on their lips is their salvation and their life, he himself along with the Father.⁸²

Here, one sees how, in this exhortation, Shenoute was seeking not only to promote this Christocentric prayer as an everyday discipline of his community, but also to leaven the wider society with ascetic forms of piety. In monastic and non-monastic settings alike, the promotion of such prayer practices would have been one way that a particular christological understanding of the Incarnation was 'ritualized' under Shenoute's leadership.

The monastic life, however, served as the ultimate model for this ritualized piety. For Shenoute's monks, to utter the name of Jesus, the incarnate Word—to pray his name without ceasing—was to 'seek after the fulfilment of these words',⁸³ to realize them in one's daily activities. This ethos of constant prayer

⁷⁸ On the cyclical rhythms and 'hierarchy of time' within Shenoute's monastic federation, see Layton, 'Rules, Patterns, and the Exercise of Power', 51–3.

⁷⁹ Shenoute, *I Am Amazed* 818–19 (Orlandi, 62). In paragraph 819, Shenoute reiterates this point a second time in slightly different language: 'Thus (Paul) reveals that when we name (ONOMAZE) Jesus we name (ONOMAZE) the Holy Trinity . . .'

⁸⁰ Lit. 'in your mouth and in the mouth of your sons'.

⁸¹ Lit. 'those for whom justice has been perverted and who have been treated violently'.

⁸² Shenoute, *I Am Amazed* 821 (Orlandi, 62).

⁸³ *Ibid.*

would have been reinforced on a daily basis in the language of communal worship and the physical setting of the monastic cell. Collections of Egyptian liturgical prayers called *Psalis* contained long chains of staccato prayers to ‘my Lord Jesus’, and inscriptions—like one discovered in the niche of a cell at Kellia in the western Delta—served as reminders to residents that such prayers invoked the presence of the Trinity and thereby guarded against demonic deception.⁸⁴ The repetitive everyday acts of eating and breathing would have also had a mnemonic function in underscoring for monks the tangible sense of Christ’s abiding presence.⁸⁵ To pray to Jesus was to take him in and out of one’s mouth with each breath; to eat a simple meal was to have the opportunity to ‘chew on’ his name as a ‘sweet nourishment of life’.⁸⁶ One monastic source from late antiquity exclaims

Happy is he who is found taking hold of the blessed name of our Lord Jesus Christ without interruption and with a contrite heart, for in truth there is not in the whole of asceticism any activity that is better than this blessed nourishment, if you will chew it without stopping as the ewe does when she turns over food in her mouth and savours the sweetness of rumination, until the food penetrates into the inner organs of her heart and spreads there a sweetness and an unction that gives profit to all her inward parts. Don’t you see how beautiful her cheeks are then, filled with the sweetness of what she chews in her mouth? May our Lord gratify us in a like way with the sweet ointment of his name!⁸⁷

Thus, when Shenoute proclaims that ‘the name of the one who is on their lips is their salvation and their life,’ he is envisioning the act of praying Jesus’ name as one way for a Christian to participate in the divine image of the life-giving Saviour.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Emmanuel Lanne, ‘La ‘Prière de Jésus’ dans la tradition égyptienne’, 167–81, 195–9.

⁸⁵ A. Guillaumont, ‘The Jesus Prayer among the Monks of Egypt’, 67–70.

⁸⁶ *Virtues of Saint Macarius* (ed. É. Amélineau, *Histoire*, 163; trans. Guillaumont, ‘The Jesus Prayer’, 68). For other references to the sweetness of Christ’s name in the *Virtues*, see Amélineau, *Histoire*, 132, 133–4, 160–188.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* (ed. Amélineau, *Histoire*, 152; trans. A. Guillaumont, ‘The Jesus Prayer’, 69); cf. 133–4, where Christ’s name is compared favourably to the sweetness of chewing gum (!): ‘I remember that in my childhood, when I was in my father’s house, I noticed that the old women and young girls had something in their mouth, some chewing-gum, that they masticated in order that it might sweeten the saliva in their throat and the bad smell in their mouth, and so moisten and refresh their liver and all their inward parts. If this material thing can obtain so much sweetness for those who chew it, how much more can the food of life, the fountain of salvation, the source of living waters, the sweetness of all sweet things, our Lord Jesus Christ, whose precious and blessed name makes demons disappear like smoke when they hear it in our mouth. This blessed name, if we ruminate on it and chew it constantly, obtains a revelation for the intellect (which is) the driver of soul and body, chases all evil thoughts away from the immortal soul and shows her the things of the heavens, above all him who is on high, our Lord Jesus Christ, King of kings, Lord of lords, the heavenly reward of those who seek him with their whole heart’ (trans. Guillaumont, ‘The Jesus Prayer’, 69–70).

⁸⁸ Shenoute, *I Am Amazed* 821 (Orlandi, 62). For further discussion of these examples of ‘Jesus prayers’ in Shenoute’s writing, see A. Grillmeier, ‘Das “Gebet zu Jesus” und das “Jesus-Gebet”’, 187–202; and *id.*, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, ii/4, 184–9. These prayers to Jesus

In Shenoute's writings, the eucharist serves as another locus that demonstrates the intimate connection between Christology and monastic ritual practice. As mentioned before, Shenoute, as the head of the White Monastery, found himself fielding sensitive questions concerning the nature of the eucharistic elements. In his sermon, *And It Happened One Day*, he voices the words of 'the blasphemer' who asks with a tone of doubt, 'How are bread and wine the body and the blood of the Lord?'⁸⁹ This was by no means an isolated instance. A decade earlier, Shenoute had felt compelled to address the same subject in his treatise *I Am Amazed*, where he expressed frustration with those who said 'that the bread and the cup are not the body and blood of Christ, but are merely a type (ΟΥΤΥΠΟΣ)'.⁹⁰ Of greatest concern to the archimandrite was the fact that some of those who were espousing such views were church leaders who had responsibility for presiding over the sacrament. Calling them more wicked than dogs, swine, beasts, and demons, Shenoute tries to shame them into silence: 'If that one is a presbyter or a cleric according to the order of the priesthood and does not believe that God has the power to do anything greater than this, let him shut his mouth . . .'⁹¹

In defence of the 'real presence' of Christ in the eucharist, Shenoute takes a two-pronged approach. First, he quotes two key biblical testimonies: John 6: 56 ('Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood will live forever') and Matthew 26: 28 ('This is my body and this is my blood').⁹² Second, he cites the words of the eucharistic liturgy itself. Speaking to the priests who deny that the bread and wine are actually the Lord's body and blood, he asks, 'Why have you not shut your mouth . . . when you speak to the Lord, saying, "The bread of the blessing, the bread of purification and immortality and eternal life," and "the cup of immortality, the cup of the new covenant," and "this is the body and the blood of your only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ our Lord"?'⁹³ Over against the 'typological' (i.e. allegorical) interpretation of his opponents (identified by Shenoute as 'the Greeks', ΝΕΕΛΛΗΝ),⁹⁴ Shenoute takes these

continued to have an important function in the Coptic church after its linguistic transition from Coptic to Arabic: see Lucien Regnault, 'Quelques apophtegmes arabes sur la "Prière de Jésus"', 344–55; Samir Khalil Samir, 'Un texte de la Philocalie sur la "Prière à Jésus"', 30–4; and Mark Swanson, "'These Three Words Will Suffice'", 695–714.

⁸⁹ Shenoute, *And It Happened One Day*, fo. 84^r (Lefort, 'Catechèse christologique', 43).

⁹⁰ Id., *I Am Amazed* 348 (Orlandi, 30).

⁹¹ Ibid. 354 (Orlandi, 30).

⁹² Ibid. 349 (Orlandi, 30).

⁹³ Ibid. 355 (Orlandi, 32); cf. 374 (Orlandi, 34): 'Cursed also are those who partake of it faithlessly, and even more the one who confesses him with his mouth and gives to others (saying,) "The body of Christ; the blood of Christ," while denying that it is truly his body and his blood.'

⁹⁴ Shenoute pointedly uses the term ΝΕΕΛΛΗΝ five times in this section of his treatise: see Shenoute, *I Am Amazed* 352, 367, 384, 401, 423 (Orlandi, 32, 34, 36, 40, 46). This term has elicited a fair amount of commentary from historical scholars who have tried to pinpoint the

biblical and liturgical texts quite literally: thus, for him, the bread and wine are indeed the purifying and life-giving body and blood of Christ. His opponents' denial that the elements are truly Christ's body and blood simply confirms not only that they despise the sacrament but also that their work 'slanders the Scriptures'.⁹⁵

In this context, it is significant that Shenoute associates his opponents' rejection of 'real presence' in the eucharist with their rejection of the doctrine of the Theotokos: 'A new lawlessness has been revealed among us—namely, the idea that Mary did not conceive the Savior, and once again, that neither his body nor his blood are what we receive in it (i.e. the eucharist).'⁹⁶ For Shenoute, the reality of the body and blood in the sacrament was grounded in the Incarnation event itself. According to the christological and soteriological logic that Shenoute inherited from Cyril, the divine Word's act of taking on a human body gave life to that body, and in the process made that body life-giving—the source of life for all human nature. Therefore, to despise the eucharistic body is to despise not only the incarnate body of the Word but also one's own body. Shenoute lays out this Alexandrian logic linking the Incarnation to the sacraments and salvation when he says, 'Now do (mere) bread and wine purify a person from sins, or heal him of diseases, and do they become for him a living blessing? . . . Now some others despise the body (σωμα) . . . it is those faithless ones alone who rightly and justly despise their own flesh.'⁹⁷

In the homily, *And It Happened One Day*, Shenoute elaborates on this theme, addressing the questions of the Incarnation and eucharist in sequence. In each case, he responds to his antagonists' questions by invoking the power of God manifest in creation: first, to explain how the Word became human in

socio-economic identity of this group of so-called 'Hellenes'. Janet Timbie has argued that the term served as a code word for Hellenized Egyptians of the upper classes (see her article, 'The State of Research on the Career of Shenoute of Atripe', 268). More recently, David Frankfurter (*Religion in Roman Egypt*, 77) has suggested that they were wealthy pagan landowners living in the vicinity of Panopolis and the White Monastery.

In social terms, lines of religious identity were not always so clearly demarcated, however, and Shenoute himself recognizes that those who were saying that 'it is not his body and his blood' also could be found within his own village and community, i.e. 'from among us' (*I Am Amazed* 352 (Orlandi, 32)). Caroline Schroeder (*Monastic Bodies*, 132–3) has more recently shown how Frankfurter's argument overlooks the way that Shenoute applies such anti-pagan rhetoric to heretical Christian groups. While this epithet often served as a blanket term for Shenoute's 'heretical' opponents, in this context it may have called the attention of his Coptic readers more specifically to the twin threats of Origenism (with its Platonic philosophical orientation) and Nestorianism (with its connection to the Byzantine capital of Constantinople). On the discursive function of this term in establishing lines of communal identity, see Michael Foat, 'I Myself Have Seen', 42–53.

⁹⁵ Shenoute, *I Am Amazed* 350, 367 (Orlandi, 30, 34).

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* 367 (Orlandi, 34).

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* 355–7 (Orlandi, 32).

the womb of the Virgin; and second, to clarify how the sacramental bread and wine are transformed into the body and blood of the incarnate Word.

Was the one who took clay from the earth and fashioned for himself a human being according to his image and according to his likeness not capable of building for himself his own temple, the holy body...?⁹⁸

Is the one who made earth into a human being not able to cause bread and wine to become body and blood?⁹⁹

Throughout the sermon, the head of the White Monastery remains emphatic that it was the same God who created humankind in his image and breathed into Adam the breath of life who became flesh in Mary's womb and who (through the Holy Spirit) makes the eucharistic elements into the body and blood of the Lord. Indeed, when he moves to the conclusion of his sermon, he makes a point of confessing the reality of Christ's body in both the eucharistic rite and in the Incarnation: 'Again, we have written many words on account of the sacrament . . . as for us, we believe that it is his body and his blood, and we will not doubt that it is the true bread that came down from heaven (John 6: 32).'¹⁰⁰ For Shenoute and his community, then, the eucharist functioned as an incarnational rite: by partaking of the true body and blood of Christ with faith, one could participate in 'the fullness of the mystery' inaugurated by the divine Word.¹⁰¹

The unedited sermon, *When the Word Says*, gives us further invaluable insight into how Shenoute envisioned human participation in the Incarnation. The opening section of this sermon consists of a litany of contrary-to-fact conditionals designed to show what would have been the negative consequences had the Word not lived in the flesh, suffered, and died.¹⁰² Here, the nitty-gritty details of Christ's perseverance in the body serve as proof positive (or perhaps better, 'proof negative') for the benefits of life accrued to us. Many of the conditional clauses focus on the theme of escape, especially our escape from death through the auspices of God's intervention in Christ's incarnate suffering.

If he had not been arrested, we would not have escaped . . . If he had not been crucified, we would not have escaped wrath in the day of wrath. If he had not been pierced, we would not have escaped piercing in the day of violence and affliction that will come over all the earth in the day when he will come to judge the living and the dead . . . If he had not suffered, we would not have escaped all pain . . . And if he had not given his back to whips

⁹⁸ Id., *And It Happened One Day*, fo. 82^v (Lefort, 'Catechèse christologique', 42).

⁹⁹ Ibid. fo. 84^r (Lefort, 'Catechèse christologique', 43).

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. fo. 85^r (Lefort, 'Catechèse christologique', 43).

¹⁰¹ Ibid. fo. 84^v (Lefort, 'Catechèse christologique', 43).

¹⁰² Shenoute uses a similar series of conditionals while speaking about the Incarnation in his treatise, *I Am Amazed* 347 (Orlandi, 30).

and his cheek to punches, we would not have escaped death and destruction in the day of your judgment.¹⁰³

Later on in the sermon, Shenoute articulates in more positive terms our participation in the life-giving consequences of the Incarnation. Again the eucharist is presented as the archetypal mode of our participating in the divine life:

And if he had not been given vinegar when he was thirsty, or if he had not been given gall as his food, we would not have partaken (**ΜΕΤΕΧΕ**, ~ Gr. *μετέχειν*) of the food [...]—indeed, it is the true bread, the bread of life who has come down from heaven. Nor would we have obtained this grace, about which he said, ‘Whoever drinks from the water that I will give to him will never thirst, but the water that I will give to him will become in [them] (fo. 2^va) a watery spring, gushing up [to] eternal life’ (John 4: 14). If he had not given himself for our sake, we would not have [...] the gi[ft], as he said, ‘Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life’ (John 6: 54).¹⁰⁴

In what immediately follows, Shenoute identifies Jesus’ endurance of the cross—the central act celebrated in the eucharist—as a constituent (and culminative) feature of his taking on flesh. In these terms, he concludes this string of conditional clauses with words that focus his listeners’ attention on the Incarnation itself and its salvific effects.

If the true light had not come into the world (cf. John 1: 9 and 3: 19), or if the sun of righteousness (Mal 4: 2) had not shone forth to us, evil and the storm would have covered the entire inhabited world. . . . And if he had not been found in form as a human being, even though he was God and the Son of God, humankind would not have become equal to angels (**ΝΖΙCΑΓΓΕΛΟC**, ‘angelic’), especially when one is a celibate (**ΟΥΡΩΜΕ ΜΠΑΡΘΕΝΟC**) among the compassionate people and wise children of the holy mother, the catholic church, (the people) who honor God in their true labor. For if the Lord had not done these things (along with all those other things), we would not have salvation at all. These words belong to the Christians whose hope is the Lord Jesus, and do not belong to the heretics, who do not believe in him.¹⁰⁵

Shenoute’s christological logic follows a recognizable Alexandrian pattern of reflection on the Incarnation, a logic that leads inexorably from the incarnate Word’s granting of life (a life which enables human beings to escape death and judgement), to our participation in the body of the life-giving Word (enacted in the eucharist), to our being raised up to salvation (made manifest by our sharing of divine or angelic attributes even in this life).¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Shenoute, *When the Word Says*, fos. 1^ra–b, 1^va, 2^ra (Depuydt, *Catalogue*, 144–5).

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* fo. 2^rb–2^va (Depuydt, *Catalogue*, 145).

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* fo. 2^va–b (Depuydt, *Catalogue*, 145; Young, *Coptic Manuscripts*, 167).

¹⁰⁶ Shenoute discusses this present and corporeal participation in salvation in his treatise, *The Lord Thundered* (Biblioteca Nazionale ‘Vittorio Emanuele III’, IB 4, fo. 29 (=DU 43);

Here, finally, we see how Shenoute's vision of salvation coheres with traditional Alexandrian notions of deification, the fulfilment of human participation in the divine image and its attributes. However, in the context of this sermon—probably delivered in the main church at the White Monastery—it is the ascetic discipline that epitomizes Shenoute's vision for what this divine participation looks like on earth. Indeed, at one point (quoted above), he specifically equates the celibate life with that of the angels in heaven.¹⁰⁷ Later in his sermon *When the Word Says*, Shenoute's understanding of salvation in these terms becomes even clearer when he speaks about how the Lord 'became human (ΖΗ ΠΤΡΕΦΡΩΜΕ) in order to bring humankind to its originary state (ΑΡΧΗ), to its sinlessness, and to the initial beauty of the soul before it became unclean'.¹⁰⁸ Stories describing the lives of Egyptian monks as angelic in character, or as re-embodying Adam's blissful existence before the fall, were plentiful in late antiquity.¹⁰⁹ Shenoute himself does not explicitly employ the language of deification, but his description of asceticism as an angelic or paradisiacal life may be seen in the context of other late antique monastic discourses where monks are celebrated for attaining a quasi-divine status.¹¹⁰

Amélineau, *Œuvres de Shenoudi*, i. 375–6), where the crucifixion and bodily resurrection of Christ are together taken as a model for human redemption in this life: 'It is our Lord Jesus who died for our sake not only so that we might be raised in a bodily manner on the final day, but also so that we might be raised at the present time from the death of sin.' In her book, *Monastic Bodies* (pp. 146, 152), Caroline Schroeder cites this passage twice in the context of analysing Shenoute's doctrine of the resurrection. For a new introduction and translation, see Janet A. Timbie and Jason R. Zaborowski, 'Shenoute's Sermon *The Lord Thundered: An Introduction and Translation*', *Oriens Christianus* 90 (2006), 93–125.

¹⁰⁷ In another of his works, Shenoute gives evidence that outsiders (laypersons) also considered monks to be like angels on earth, but in that situation he uses this observation to motivate his own monks to curb incidents of misbehaviour that fall short of this ideal: see *Is It Not Written* (XF 241; Amélineau, *Œuvres*, i. 62). I want to thank Janet Timbie for calling my attention to this text.

¹⁰⁸ Shenoute, *When the Word Says*, fo. 2^b–2^va (Depuydt, *Catalogue of Coptic Manuscripts*, 145).

¹⁰⁹ See e.g. the Coptic *Life of Onnophrius*, where the presence of monks effectively transforms the Egyptian desert into a paradise: Pierpont Morgan Codex M.580, fos. 1^v–19^v; trans. Vivian, *Journeying into God*, 166–72 (introduction), 172–87 (text).

¹¹⁰ In late ancient Greek and Coptic literature, examples of such monastic 'deification' especially cluster around the figure of Macarius the Great. One story in the *Apophthegmata Patrum* notes that 'they said of Abba Macarius the Great that he became, as it is written, a god upon earth (θεός ἐπίγειος)' (Macarius the Great 32 [= Coptic 22]; PG 65.273; trans. Ward, *The Desert Christian*, 134). A later Coptic work entitled the *Virtues of Saint Macarius* has an angel visit Macarius and describe for him the spiritual fruits of the ascetic life in terms of what can only be described as a process of deification: 'Christ our God will make you a god (ΝΑΛΙΚ ΝΝΟΥΤΙ) over this land on which will live a multitude of people' (*Virtues of Saint Macarius* 1, ed. Amélineau, *Histoire*, 119; trans. Vivian, *St Macarius the Spiritbearer*, 85). The angel then goes on to characterize the monastic life in starkly christomimetic terms: 'You will be crucified with Christ and you will join him on the cross with the virtues adorning you with their perfume, and your ascetic practices will spread to the four corners of the earth and will raise up a multitude

What gives Shenoute's writing its own particular texture is the way he forges a vital connection between such popular monastic discourses and the theological doctrine of the Incarnation in a local, Coptic-speaking setting. In Shenoute's eyes, the ritualized practices of the monks in the White Monastery—including prayer, eucharistic participation, ascetic celibacy, and the archimandrite's insistent homiletic reflection on these themes—served to mark the common life of the monks as in fact angelic, paradisiacal, and perfected, crucially differentiated from the customs of people living outside in society, as well as from those ecclesiastical 'heretics' whose presence so consistently threatened (and yet also served to reinforce) those boundaries. In such ritualized practices, Shenoute's monks were urged to see themselves performing their participation in the Incarnation, and thereby appropriating the life-gift of the Word made flesh in solidarity with their Alexandrian Fathers.

sunk in the mire of sin . . .' (ibid.). Later in the same work, Macarius' mentor Antony is similarly described as being esteemed 'as a god' as a result of his monastic discipline (*Virtues of Saint Macarius* 4, ed. Amélineau, *Histoire*, 121; trans. Vivian, *St Macarius the Spiritbearer*, 87). For additional analysis of this text, see Vivian, 'The *Virtues of Saint Macarius*, the Manuscript, and Amélineau's Text', 69–76; and id., *St Macarius the Spiritbearer*, 26–34.

Christology in Coptic Eucharistic Liturgies

In the Coptic writings of the fifth-century monk Shenoute, one gets a glimpse of how his ascetic Christology was framed by the language of the liturgy and by other ritual practices constitutive of communal monasticism. In this chapter I turn my attention to Egyptian liturgical rites and to christological elements in Coptic worship. While my primary focus will be on eucharistic invocations, I will also examine how the recitation of saints' names and stories functioned as crucial metaphors for christological participation within the Egyptian mass. As I will argue both here and in subsequent chapters, the intersecting ritual domains of Coptic liturgy and hagiography comprised a set of practices through which the doctrine of the Incarnation was not only communicated, but also re-enacted or performed.

AN INTRODUCTION TO EARLY CHRISTIAN LITURGY IN EGYPT: PROBLEMS AND SOURCES

The task of reconstructing early Christian forms of worship is part science, part guesswork, complicated as it is by the severely fragmentary state of the surviving source evidence from late antiquity. Most relatively complete liturgical manuscripts postdate 800 CE.¹ While these documents represent copies of texts originally composed perhaps centuries earlier, it is often difficult to ascertain the date of their original composition and how much their contents have been adapted over time for new contexts of usage. For this reason, the attribution of many surviving liturgies to well-known apostolic or patristic writers must be treated with considerable caution. While some liturgical scholars fervently seek to establish solid links between named liturgies and their eponymous authors (often by pointing out shared theological themes or emphases), the nature of the evidence precludes historians from being able to

¹ For a brief discussion of historiographical issues related to the study of early Christian liturgy, see R. C. D. Jasper and G. J. Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist*, 3–6.

verify or prove these links. Thus, for example, while one might assert that the fourth-century Cappadocian father, Gregory of Nazianus, could have had a hand in shaping the *Liturgy of St Gregory*, it is by no means resolved among historians what (if any) his specific contribution may have been. Because of the sometimes tenuous historical moorings of individual traditions, historians must also seek out information about the shape of early Christian liturgies from 'second-hand' sources, such as the catechetical instructions and homilies of early bishops, where reference is sometimes made to local services of worship.

For the study of ancient Christian liturgy in Egypt, the manuscript situation is somewhat improved, but many of the same problems still pertain. Due to a drier climate that is more favourable for the preservation of textual remains, Egypt has witnessed the discovery of liturgies on papyri that date as early as the fourth century. However, these valuable sources are most often preserved in a fragmentary state, making it difficult for scholars to reconstruct the complete form of the liturgies that they contain. And, just as in later manuscript traditions from other areas, it is a problematic task to determine how much earlier one might trace back the liturgical practices recorded in these papyrological sources.

With these difficulties in mind, I must turn briefly to the question of historiographical method before I survey the early evidence for the eucharistic liturgy in Egypt and the way that liturgy served as a ritual context for the articulation of christological doctrine. For the purposes of this study, I will necessarily raise questions and make observations related to the history of different texts and rites. However, at the same time, I do not want to forget that liturgical manuscripts were documents typically *composed for use in the practice of worship*. Thus, while individual manuscripts may be dependent on a long genealogy of prior liturgical forms, they also primarily offer the historian privileged windows into church rites as they were actually (or at the very least, textually) being performed at the time when they were edited and transcribed.

The history of the eucharistic liturgy in Egypt has involved a complex process of borrowing and adaptation, as 'indigenous' forms of Egyptian Christian worship have been influenced (and sometimes replaced) by forms of worship from other regions in the Mediterranean world, and then repeatedly modified in local contexts. The eucharistic liturgy of the Coptic Orthodox Church in Egypt today is divided into two halves. The first half follows a set order (the ordinary mass), while the order of the second half—known as the Anaphora, which includes the act of Communion itself—varies depending on the church calendar. The twenty-first century Coptic Orthodox community in Egypt employs three different Anaphoras:

1. the *Anaphora of St Cyril*, originally known as the *Anaphora of St Mark* (now celebrated only during the fasting period and from 27 November to 26 December),
2. the *Anaphora of St Basil* (now the standard form of celebration), and
3. the *Anaphora of St Gregory* (celebrated only on the special feast days of Christmas, Epiphany, Palm Sunday, and Easter).²

Manuscript evidence shows that by the medieval period these three rites had together achieved something of a canonical status. For example, a bilingual fourteenth-century codex from the Monastery of St Antony at the Red Sea preserves all three liturgies together, the Greek text of each paired with an Arabic translation.³ The fourteenth-century Copto-Arabic writer Shams al-Ri'āsa Abu al-Barakāt (Ibn Kabar) also gives witness to this liturgical triumvirate.⁴

However, close study of the available historical data shows that during late antiquity and the early medieval period, Egyptian eucharistic practice was in fact considerably more diverse, varying to some extent in accordance with local conventions. This local diversity may be seen in independently preserved eucharistic liturgies such as the Sacramentary of Sarapion, the Dayr Bala'īzah Papyrus, the Louvain Coptic Papyrus, and the Great Euchologion of the White Monastery—all extant in the manuscript record, but differing in significant respects from the three main liturgical rites that eventually became standardized church practice.

Here, I want to reappraise this body of evidence and its significance for a history of Coptic Christology. What are our sources for reconstructing the historical roots of the three main eucharistic liturgies in Egypt? What can we learn about other local manifestations of eucharistic prayers and practice?

² Ernst Hammerschmidt, *Die koptische Gregoriosanaphora*, 2 n. 2.

³ W. F. Macomber, 'The Kacmarcik Codex', 391–5. The Greek text of these three main eucharistic liturgies have been edited by Macomber in *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 43 (1977), 308–34; and 45 (1979), 75–98. The corresponding Arabic texts have been edited and discussed by Samir Khalil Samir in *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 44 (1978), 74–106 (and pls. 1–3), 342–90 (and pl. 1); and 45 (1979), 308–58.

⁴ Shams al-Ri'āsa Abu al-Barakāt (Ibn Kabar), *The Lamp of Darkness on the Elucidation of Service (Miṣbāḥ al-zulmah fī 'iḍāḥ al-khidmah)*, ch. 17 (Samuel al-Suryānī, ii. 123–4). Samir Khalil edited the entire first volume of *Miṣbāḥ al-ūlmah* (Cairo: Maktabat Kārūz, 1971). Another (uncritical) version, originally published in 1950 by an anonymous group of ecclesiastical editors, is also available in Cairo bookstores. Previously only portions of this text had been made available in published form. A critical edition and French translation of only the introduction and first two chapters of this work has been published by L. Villecourt, E. Tisserant, and G. Wiet, in PO 20/4 (1928), 575–734. Villecourt has also published excerpts in French translation from chs. 6, 12, 13, 16–19, and 24 in 'Les Observances liturgiques et la discipline du jeûne dans l'Église copte', *Muséon* 36 (1923), 249–92; 37 (1924), 201–80; and 38 (1925), 261–320; for additional bibliography, see G. Graf, *GCAL* ii. 438–42. More recently, A. Wadīf has published Arabic editions of chs. 18, 16, and 14 in *Studia Orientalia Christiana Collectanea* 34 (2001), 35–6 (2002–3), and 37 (2004).

And finally, how was incarnational Christology communicated and enacted in these ritual settings?

THE THREE MAIN EUCHARISTIC LITURGIES:
THE EGYPTIAN ANAPHORAS OF SAINTS MARK
(CYRIL), BASIL, AND GREGORY

The Egyptian Liturgy of St Mark (St Cyril)

Of the three main eucharistic liturgies adopted by the Copts, the *Liturgy of St Mark* (later named the *Liturgy of St Cyril*) derives from one of the earliest sacramental traditions extant in Egypt. While the expanded form of its Anaphora did not take its final shape until the thirteenth century under the influence of certain Byzantine elements,⁵ this ‘indigenous’ Egyptian form of eucharistic prayer is witnessed in three important earlier sources: (1) a fourth- or fifth-century papyrus in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Strasbourg,⁶ (2) a sixth-century papyrus from the John Rylands Library in Manchester,⁷ and (3) an eighth-century wooden tablet in the British Museum in London.⁸ The study of these sources has illustrated the uncertainties and challenges related to the dating of early liturgical traditions. Scholars of early Christian liturgy have often been intent on tracing the content of the St Mark anaphora much earlier than the dates of the surviving documents themselves. Thus, the fourth- or fifth-century Strasbourg papyrus is said by some to represent a liturgical practice that dates back to 200 CE. In similar measure, a Greek parchment in the the John Rylands Library and a Coptic wooden tablet in the

⁵ Jasper and Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist*, 57–8.

⁶ Strasbourg Papyrus gr. 254: M. Andrieu and P. Collomp, ‘Fragments sur papyrus de l’anaphore de saint Marc’, 489–515; A. Hänggi, *Prex Eucharistica*, 116–19; trans. Jasper and Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist*, 52–4. It should be noted that the question of whether the Strasbourg text was originally part of a eucharistic rite, or whether it was only later incorporated into an explicitly eucharistic context, remains under debate: P. Bradshaw, *Eucharistic Origins*, 131–3, 154–5. On the question of whether this document represents a complete Anaphora, see H. A. J. Wegman, ‘Une anaphore incomplète?’, 432–50; G. Cuming, ‘The Anaphora of St Mark’, 115–29; B. D. Spinks, ‘A Complete Anaphora?’, 51–5; E. Mazza, ‘Una Anafora incompleta?’, 425–36; id., *The Origins of the Eucharistic Prayer*, 177–94; and W. D. Ray, ‘The Strasbourg Papyrus’, 39–56.

⁷ Manchester, John Rylands Library, parchment 465: C. H. Roberts, *Catalogue of the Greek Papyri in the John Rylands Library, Manchester*, iii. 25–8 (no. 465); Hänggi, *Prex Eucharistica*, 124–7; trans. Jasper and Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist*, 56.

⁸ London, British Museum, papyrus 2037 EF: H. Quecke, ‘Ein säidischer Zeuge der Markusliturgie (Brit. Mus. 54.036)’, 40–54 (text: 43–4); trans. Jasper and Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist*, 54–6.

British Museum, whose contents closely match, are said to preserve a form of the prayer that may actually derive from the end of the fourth century.⁹

Whether these projected earlier datings are accurate is not my concern here. Of greater interest to me is the way that such sources demonstrate the adaptation and evolution of the eucharistic liturgy over time. In particular, the parallel Greek and Coptic witnesses of the Rylands parchment and the wooden tablet in the British Museum show that by the sixth century there were at least two acts of eucharistic consecration (epiclesis) in use in Egypt. This expansion of the liturgical prayer beyond the shorter form attested in the earlier Strasbourg papyrus is significant for our understanding of Egyptian sacramental Christology. In its emphasis on the transformation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, the second consecration (or epiclesis) shows how the Egyptian church had come to adopt ‘a very realistic doctrine of the eucharist’.¹⁰ In this expanded version of the rite, the act of partaking of Christ’s actual body and blood is understood to function on multiple levels in the human person: ‘for faith, for sobriety, [for healing, for joy, for sanctification,] for renewal of soul, body, [and spirit, for sharing in eternal life,] for self-control, and of (*sic*) immortality...’¹¹

Subsequent centuries saw the further development of this Markan (or Cyrillian) eucharistic prayer. In addition to the aforementioned sixth-century redaction, a second version was used in the eighth and ninth centuries by both Chalcedonians and anti-Chalcedonians.¹² By the later medieval period, however, these two communions had begun using separate, modified editions of the Markan rite. It was during this period that a Byzantinized Bohairic translation came into use among anti-Chalcedonian Copts, the version still in use today in the Egyptian church.¹³ These stages of liturgical adaptation and expansion occasionally reveal key emphases in the way that christological

⁹ Jasper and Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist*, 53, 55.

¹⁰ A. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, ii/4, 238; R. Coquin, ‘L’Anaphore alexandrine de saint Marc’, 354–5. The second epiclesis in the Strasbourg papyrus incorporates elements from the Jerusalem Liturgy of St James.

¹¹ Manchester, John Rylands Library, parchment 465, lines 31–3; C. H. Roberts, *Catalogue of the Greek Papyri in the John Rylands Library, Manchester*, iii, 26–7; trans. Jasper and Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist*, 56.

¹² A fragment of the Sahidic *Anaphora of St Cyril* is preserved in a ninth- or tenth-century manuscript at the Vatican (Cod. Borg. copt. 109): H. Lietzmann, ‘Sahidische Bruchstücke der Gregorios- und Kyrillosliturgie’, 106–16.

¹³ R. Coquin, ‘L’Anaphore alexandrine de saint Marc’, 307–56; cf. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, ii/4, 237–8. For the final form of the *Liturgy of St Mark*, see Hänggi, *Præx Eucharistica*, 101–15 (Greek), 135–9 (Latin translation of the Bohairic Coptic); F. E. Brightman, *Liturgies Eastern and Western*, i, 113–43 (Greek), 144–88 (English trans. of the Bohairic Coptic); trans. Jasper and Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist*, 57–66; see also Cuming’s article, ‘The Anaphora of St Mark: A Study in Development’, 115–29.

doctrine was communicated to worshippers. In the Sahidic and Bohairic Coptic versions, Mary's status as Theotokos ('God-bearer') is highlighted.¹⁴ Furthermore, the Bohairic places special emphasis on the reality of the physical transformation that takes place in the eucharist: the priest asks the Holy Spirit to come upon the loaves and cups 'that they may be sanctified and changed' into the body of Christ.¹⁵ In earlier Greek versions, this clause is conspicuously absent.

The Egyptian Liturgy of St Basil

During and after the sixth and seventh centuries, this 'native' Egyptian *Liturgy of St Mark* (or *St Cyril*) began to be influenced by and largely supplanted in regular church practice by Antiochene liturgical types. One prime example is the *Liturgy of St Basil*,¹⁶ which became popular among the anti-Chalcedonian community in Egypt sometime after the fourth century and has served as the regular form of Egyptian worship from the early medieval period to the present.¹⁷

In comparing the early extant Coptic versions of *St Basil* with earlier eucharistic rites (such as that found in the *Apostolic Tradition*), one notes a familiar presentation of a biblical framing narrative—one which begins with a relatively brief account of Christ's role in creation ('through whom you made all things visible and invisible') and which then links this account to the Incarnation as a saving event ('He was made flesh of the Holy Spirit and of the holy Virgin Mary, and became man; he showed us the ways of salvation . . .').¹⁸

¹⁴ For an example of this emphasis on Mary's role as Theotokos, see Lietzmann, 'Sahidische Bruchstücke', 108 lines 15–17; trans. Jasper and Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist*, 62.

¹⁵ Jasper and Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist*, 58 and 66 n. 22.

¹⁶ H. Engberding has tried to argue that Basil of Caesarea had a hand in shaping the liturgy that came to bear his name: see *Das eucharistische Hochgebet der Basileiosliturgie*, esp. pp. lxxxiv–lxxxvi; and also Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. ii/4, 238. However, the idea that this liturgy was originally composed by Basil has since been definitively disproved by Gabriele Winkler, who cites evidence for an older, pre-Basilian version, 'Zur Erforschung orientalischer Anaphoren in liturgievergleichender Sicht II', 407–93; see also P. Bradshaw, *Eucharistic Origins*, 151 n. 35.

¹⁷ While the Basilian liturgy may have found its way into Egypt as early as the late fourth or fifth century, the earliest material evidence for its adoption there comes from an incomplete Sahidic Coptic manuscript dating to the seventh century: see J. Doresse and E. Lanne, *Un témoin archaïque de la liturgie copte de S. Basile*, 14–33; cf. H. G. Evelyn White, *The Monasteries of the Wadi'n Natrûn*, i. 202–13. An excerpt from the text edited by Doresse and Lanne has been translated by Jasper and Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist*, 67–73. For a comprehensive study of the Sahidic manuscript tradition for the St Basil anaphora and critical text of the Greek, Sahidic, and Bohairic versions, see now Achim Budde, *Die ägyptische Basiliös-Anaphora*, 94–106 (discussion of the Sahidic MS tradition), and 140–203 (parallel critical texts, with German trans.). The earliest extant manuscripts of the expanded Bohairic text date from around the year 1200 CE: on the Bohairic manuscript tradition for the St Basil anaphora, see Budde, *Die ägyptische Basiliös-Anaphora*, 107–27.

¹⁸ E. Renaudot, *Liturgiarum Orientalium Collectio*, i. 64–5; trans. Jasper and Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist*, 70.

In the Egyptian *Liturgy of St Basil*, however, the narrative is expanded to include details about the primeval human transgression and expulsion from paradise, as well as Christ's resurrection and ascension as the fulfilment of the Incarnation.¹⁹ In *St Basil*, the presentation of these narrative elements serves as a direct prelude to the Institution Narrative itself.

As celebration of the Egyptian *Liturgy of St Basil* evolved in conjunction with Coptic hymnody, several other distinctive christological emphases came to the fore—Mary's status as Theotokos, the life-giving character of the Incarnation, and the agency of the Word in changing the bread and wine into Christ's true body and blood—all thematic legacies of the Alexandrian theological tradition. The dating of Coptic hymnody and of its integration into the performance of the Coptic Basilian liturgy has proved to be a vexing challenge, due to a general 'lack of ancient textual witnesses'.²⁰ The Coptic hymns in question may be categorized according to different types. One type, known as the *Hōs* (from the Coptic $\rho\omega\sigma$, 'to sing, make music'), has its origins in ancient synagogal rites and represents one of the most ancient Christian canticle forms. Another type, the *Theotokia* (a collection of hymns addressed to the Virgin Mary), also probably derives from the period prior to the Arab Conquest.²¹ Other types seem to have originated later, in the course of early medieval liturgical practice: they include the *Psalis* (metrical hymns designed to accompany either a *Hōs* or a *Theotokia*) and the *Difnar* (biographies of Coptic saints composed in hymnic form), the earliest examples of which survive from the ninth century.²²

A number of these hymns came to be integrated into the Basilian rite as it was performed in Coptic. What light do they shed on the development of Christology in the Egyptian eucharistic liturgy? First, an opening hymn chanted throughout the year except on the feasts of the Nativity, Resurrection, and Epiphany extols Mary's role as God-bearer and mother of the incarnate Word:

Hail to Mary, the queen, the vine who is ageless, in whom seed has not been sown, but in whom is found fullness of life, the Son of God. He became incarnate of the Virgin, and she bore him and he has saved us and forgiven us our sins. You have found grace, O bride. Many have spoken of your honor. For the Word of the Father has come and became incarnate from you. What woman on earth has become the Mother of God other than you? For you, a woman of the human race, have become mother to the Creator.²³

¹⁹ E. Renaudot, i. 65; trans. Jasper and Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist*, 70–1. Jasper and Cuming (68) claim that the addition of the fall was a new element in the Egyptian Basilian liturgy.

²⁰ Aelred Cody, 'Anaphora of Saint Basil', *CE* i. 123.

²¹ R. Mofrah, M. Robertson, M. Roy, and M. Toth, 'Music, Coptic', *CE* vi. 1715–47, esp. 1725–8.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ R. Mofrah, M. Toth, and M. Roy, *The Coptic Orthodox Liturgy of St Basil*, 22–3 (modified and modernized).

A hymn sung later in the liturgy and drawn from one of the Coptic *Theotokia* similarly hails Mary as ‘the fair dove, who bore for us God the Word’.²⁴ Neither of these hymns is recorded in Greek manuscripts of the St Basil rite, although they seem to expand upon its confession of Mary as ‘our holy Lady, Theotokos, and ever Virgin’.²⁵ A ‘Communion Hymn’ further connects Mary’s role as Mother of God with Christ’s granting of life through the eucharist: ‘The bread of life which came down to us from heaven and gave life († ΜΠΩΝΖ) to the world. You also, Mary, bore in your womb the precious manna which came from the Father.’²⁶ This hymn corresponds to another addition in the Bohairic version, where Christ is said to take up the bread in ‘His holy hands which are spotless (ΑΤΑΘΝΙ), and without blemish (ΑΤΘΩΛΕΒ), blessed and life-giving (ΡΕΥΤΑΝΖΟ).’²⁷ In the Greek, this emphasis on the ‘life-giving’ character of Christ’s hands is absent,²⁸ although elsewhere it makes reference to ‘the life-giving appearance (ἡ ζωοποιὸς παρουσία) of the only-begotten Son of God’ in the Incarnation.²⁹

In later versions of the Coptic rite, the Word, as Life-giver, is further identified as the agent of the change that takes place in the sacramental elements. In the Bohairic text, the priest separately calls upon both the Word and the Spirit to transform the bread and wine into the actual body and blood of Christ:

O Master, Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal sharer, the Word of the undefiled Father, consubstantial with him and the Holy Spirit . . . cause your face to shine upon this bread, and upon this cup . . . bless them, sanctify them, purify and transform (ΟΥΘΘΒ) them, that this bread may become your holy body, and the mixture which is in this chalice become your precious blood, that they may be for us all an uplift, a healing, and a salvation for our souls, our bodies, and our spirits.³⁰

²⁴ Ibid. 198; see also De Lacy O’Leary, *The Coptic Theotokia*, 3. This hymn is immediately followed by a hymn of praise to Christ (‘Blessed are you in truth, along with your good Father and the Holy Spirit’), which is identifiable as one of the earliest *Hōs*-forms. This latter text survives on an early Christian papyrus fragment from the Fayum and on a fifth-century ostrakon preserved in the Coptic Museum (see Mofteh *et al.*, ‘Music, Coptic’, *CE* vi. 1726). Such evidence suggests that this hymnic material may have already been integrated into the Basilian rite in late antiquity.

²⁵ Renaudot, *Liturgiarum Orientalium*, i. 80. The earliest Graeco-Egyptian manuscripts of the St Basil rite date quite late (to around the fourteenth century CE) and do not seem to bear a direct genealogical connection to the ancient Greek liturgy of St Basil that would have been used in the early church. For a comparison with the Bohairic version, see Mofteh, Toth, and Roy, *The Coptic Orthodox Liturgy of St Basil*, 665–6 (‘our Lady, the Queen of us all, the Mother-of-God, the Saint, the Pure Mary’).

²⁶ Mofteh, Toth, and Roy, *The Coptic Orthodox Liturgy of St Basil*, 693 (modified and modernized).

²⁷ A. Budde, *Die ägyptische Basilius-Anaphora*, 153 (line 46); see also Mofteh, Toth, and Roy, *The Coptic Orthodox Liturgy of St Basil*, 473–4.

²⁸ E. Renaudot, *Liturgiarum Orientalium*, i. 66 (‘his holy, immaculate, and blessed hands’).

²⁹ Ibid. i. 62; see also Mofteh, Toth, and Roy, *The Coptic Orthodox Liturgy of St Basil*, 358.

³⁰ Mofteh, Toth, and Roy, *The Coptic Orthodox Liturgy of St Basil*, 74–6 (modified and modernized).

And we pray to you, O Lord our God, we your sinful and unworthy servants. We worship you, by the pleasure of your goodness, that your Holy Spirit may descend upon us and upon these offerings placed here, to purify them, transform (ⲠⲮⲠⲖ) them, and manifest them holy to your saints.³¹

In contrast, the earlier Sahidic and Greek versions simply call upon the Spirit to ‘descend upon us and these gifts that have been set before you, (that you) may sanctify them, and make them holy of holies’.³²

A final noteworthy feature of the Egyptian *Anaphora of St Basil*—found commonly in its Sahidic, Bohairic, and Greek versions—is its inclusion of extensive intercessory petitions and its emphasis on the role of the saints.³³ The Sahidic rite affirms that ‘the commemoration of the saints’ is ‘a command of the only-begotten Son’.³⁴ In this vein, it invites remembrance of the seventh-century Alexandrian archbishop Benjamin and his colleague Bishop Colluthus, and offers opportunity for the presiding deacon to read the official list of saints’ names on the diptych. In the Ordinary of the Graeco-Egyptian version of the Mass, other apostolic and patristic fathers are named: St Mark the evangelist, Dioscorus of Alexandria, Severus of Antioch, St John Chrysostom, St Cyril of Alexandria, St Basil, and St Gregory of Nazianzus.³⁵ The Bohairic version adds two other Alexandrian fathers to this list, ‘Saint Athanasius the apostolic, and Saint Peter the holy martyr high priest’.³⁶ Later, near the end of the Bohairic anaphora (the raising up of the elements), the presiding deacon intones an extended litany of Alexandrian patriarchs and Egyptian desert fathers for special remembrance.³⁷

Within the context of the liturgy, the purpose of this litany of saints is not merely for the sake of remembrance in and of itself; it also ties in specifically with traditional Egyptian notions of christological participation in the divine through the eucharist. The presiding priest articulates this connection between our partaking in the eucharist and our communion with the saints when he offers the following petition: ‘Make us all worthy, O Lord, to partake of Thy Holy Sacraments unto the sanctification of our souls and our bodies

³¹ Budde, *Die ägyptische Basilios-Anaphora*, 161 (lines 82–5); trans. Mofteh, Toth, and Roy, *The Coptic Orthodox Liturgy of St Basil*, 493–4 (modified and modernized).

³² For the Sahidic text, see Doresse and Lanne, *Un témoin archaïque*, 20–1; for the Greek, see Renaudot, *Liturgiarum Orientalium Collectio*, i. 13–18; trans. Jasper and Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist*, 71. For the Greek text, see Renaudot, *Liturgiarum Orientalium Collectio*, i. 67.

³³ Jasper and Cuming (*Prayers of the Eucharist*, 68) write, ‘A comparison of Hippolytus, Sarapion, the Strasbourg papyrus of *St Mark*, Cyril of Jerusalem, and *Egyptian Basil* shows a gradual acceptance of increasingly specific intercessions into the anaphora, while they still retain their position in the pre-anaphoral part of the liturgy.’

³⁴ Doresse and Lanne, *Un témoin archaïque*, 24.13–26.2.

³⁵ W. F. Macomber, ‘The Greek Text of the Coptic Mass’, 317.

³⁶ Mofteh, Toth, and Roy, *The Coptic Orthodox Liturgy of St Basil*, 101.

³⁷ Budde, *Die ägyptische Basilios-Anaphora*, 197 (lines 181–2); see also Mofteh, Toth, and Roy, *The Coptic Orthodox Liturgy of St Basil*, 580–3, 610.

and our spirits, that we may become one body and one spirit, and may have a share and an inheritance together with all Thy Saints who have pleased Thee since the beginning.’³⁸ The saints are those who have become ‘sanctified completely in soul, body, and spirit, having become co-corporeal (σύσσωμοι), co-participating (συμμέτοχοι), and co-formed (σύμμορφοι) with Christ’, and therefore the priest, on behalf of the people, asks God to grant that same sanctification through pure participation ‘in the most pure sacrament’.³⁹ As the Bohairic *Liturgy of St Basil* developed, this logical link between the imitation of the saints and assimilation to Christ found expression in the parallel structures of the priestly prayers following the consecutive readings of the Pauline and Catholic Epistles.⁴⁰

Prayer following the Pauline Epistle

Even as he became like you, O Chief of Life, so make us like him in deed and doctrine, that we glorify your holy name and ever be glorified in your cross.

And you are the One to whom we lift up glory and reverence and worship, with your Good Father, and the Holy Spirit. Now and ever and to the ages of all ages. Amen.

Prayer following the Catholic Epistle

Grant us at all times to walk in (the apostles’) footsteps, imitate their wrestling, and have communion with them in the sweat which they accepted for the sake of godliness . . .

This is the One through whom we lift up glory and reverence and worship to you and the holy and life-giving Spirit. Now and at all times and evermore. Amen.

Here one sees how the remembrance and imitation of the saints functioned to promote a particular vision of human participation in the divine: called to walk in the footsteps of the saints, to imitate their pious struggles, and to share in their godly sweat, the eucharistic participant expects to be transformed into the likeness of Christ and to be imbued with his glory.

The Egyptian Liturgy of St Gregory

A second example of the influx of Antiochene liturgical types into Coptic worship is the *Liturgy of St Gregory*, which (like the Basilian rite) also

³⁸ Budde, *Die ägyptische Basilios-Anaphora*, 163–4 (lines 97–8); Mofteh, Toth, and Roy, *The Coptic Orthodox Liturgy of St Basil*, 521; Macomber, ‘The Greek Text of the Coptic Mass’, 317.

³⁹ Renaudot, *Liturgiarum Orientalium*, i. 75.

⁴⁰ Mofteh, Toth, and Roy, *The Coptic Orthodox Liturgy of St Basil*, 150, 197–8 (modified and modernized). Aelred Cody (‘Anaphora of Saint Basil’, *CE* i. 122) has identified the reading of four passages from the New Testament, including texts from both the Pauline and Catholic Epistles, as a ‘specifically Egyptian’ structural component of the Basilian liturgy in Coptic; it stands to reason then that the accompanying prayers should have developed in the same ecclesiastical-geographical setting.

originated in late antique Asia Minor, but which later came to be the festal form of celebration at Coptic Christmas, Epiphany, Palm Sunday, and Easter. On the basis of its rhythmic prose style, liturgical scholars have traditionally conjectured that this rite may have been authored by Gregory of Nazianzus himself. Others, however, noting certain terminological and thematic aspects that problematize this theory, instead suggest that the work may have originated in the fifth century as a later redaction of Gregory's writings, or as an original composition that emulated his style.⁴¹ Unfortunately none of the extant manuscripts of this liturgy predate the ninth or tenth century,⁴² which makes confirming such theories exceedingly difficult.

More easily traceable is the process by which the Liturgy of St Gregory became assimilated into Egyptian worship life. This process was facilitated by successive redactions and translations of the text in Greek, Coptic (first in Sahidic, and later in Bohairic), and finally Arabic.⁴³ Already in the Graeco-Egyptian version there are clear signs that the text has been redacted in an anti-Chalcedonian direction.⁴⁴ In the 'Prayer of the Fraction', the priest first celebrates the fact that in the hypostatic union of the Incarnation, the Word took flesh and came forth from the Virgin Mary, 'having taken the form of a God-man' (*θεανθρωπωθεΐς*).⁴⁵ Then, he follows this with a litany of phrases affirming the oneness of Christ:

Not as two persons then, nor as two forms, nor 'in two natures' (*οὐδὲ ἐν δυοῖ φύσει*) is he known, but as one God, one Lord, one substance (*οὐσία*), one kingship, one rule, one activity (*ἐνέργεια*), one hypostasis, one will, and 'one incarnate nature of God the Word' (*μία φύσις τοῦ θεοῦ λόγου σεσαρκωμένη*), which is also worshipped.⁴⁶

The language of the prayer here is quite pointed, containing two loaded phrases taken straight out of the Chalcedonian controversy. First, it quotes and rejects the terminology of the Chalcedonian credo ('in two natures'), before endorsing verbatim Cyril's confession of the 'one incarnate nature of

⁴¹ A. Gerhards, *Die griechische Gregoriosanaphora*, 244–7; Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, ii/4, 239. Gerhards proposes Proclus of Constantinople (d. 446) as a possible candidate for the composition of this work—i.e. as someone who knew Gregory's writings well and who possessed the requisite rhetorical skills (246).

⁴² The earliest manuscript for the *Liturgy of St Gregory* is Cod. Borg. copt. 109 from the ninth or tenth century: ed. H. Lietzmann, 'Sahidische Bruchstücke der Gregorios- und Kyrillosliturgie', 99–117.

⁴³ The Greek text of the Egyptian *Liturgy of St Gregory* is preserved in Cod. Paris gr. 325, and in the Kacmarcik Codex: Macomber, 'The Greek Text of the Coptic Mass', 308–34. For the Sahidic Coptic version, see Lietzmann, 'Sahidische Bruchstücke der Gregorios- und Kyrillosliturgie', 99–117, esp. 102–6. The Coptic text in the Bohairic dialect has been edited by Ernst Hammerschmidt, *Die koptische Gregoriosanaphora* (BBA 8; Berlin: Akademie, 1957). For the Arabic text, see Samir Khalil Samir, 'La Version arabe de la Liturgie alexandrine de saint Grégoire (codex Kacmarcik)', 308–58.

⁴⁴ P. Hieronymus Engberding, 'Das chalcedonische Christusbild und die Liturgien der monophysitischen Kirchengemeinschaften', 697–733, esp. 714–15, 729.

⁴⁵ Alexandrian *Liturgy of St Gregory* (Renaudot, *Liturgiarum Orientalium Collectio*, i. 106).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

God the Word'. This provenance would not have been lost on Egyptian worshippers, who regularly saw Cyril's figure painted on the walls of their churches and heard his name and life story retold in the register of saints.⁴⁷

Another passage, an insertion near the end of the 'Prayer of Absolution,' probably also derives from the same christological provenance, given its insistence on the perpetual union of humanity and divinity in Christ:

I believe, I believe, I believe and will confess until my final breath that this is the life-giving flesh that Christ our God took from our holy Lady Theotokos, Mary the ever Virgin and (that) you made this flesh one with your divinity, without confusion or mixture or change. . . . I truly believe that your divinity was never separated from your humanity, not even for a moment nor for the blink of an eye. You gave it to those who partake of it as a share in redemption, for the forgiveness of sins and for eternal life.⁴⁸

Of special note here is the emphasis on Christ's life-giving body, on the role of Mary as Theotokos, on the thoroughgoing union of the flesh with Christ's divinity (with absolutely no possibility of separation), and on the fact that a share in the divine nature has been conferred to humanity through sacramental participation. In non-Egyptian Gregorian liturgies, this confluence of themes does not occur with the same density or frequency.⁴⁹

Indeed, scholars have made note of the particular 'christological colouring' of the St Gregory anaphora used in Egypt. Among the evidence for this liturgical 'Christocentrism' is a consistent pattern of direct address to Christ, the emphasis on the Word's role as creator (and therefore as the worthy subject of apophatic divine predicates), praise directed to Christ and to his plan (*οἰκονομία*) of salvation in the Sanctus (38–52, 54–64), the link between the Incarnation and the divine lovingkindness (*φιλανθρωπία*) of the Word in the post-Sanctus (71–146), and the presentation of the eucharist as 'a renewal of the Incarnation of the Logos' in the Anamnesis, where Christ is not only the subject of the remembrance but also the one who receives the offering (183–94).⁵⁰

⁴⁷ It should be noted that Gregory Bar-Hebraeus, a thirteenth-century Syriac writer, invokes an almost identical string of affirmations to describe the ineffable 'union of the divinity with the humanity' before concluding with a double authorial credit: 'as saints Athanasius and Cyril have said'. According to Engberding ('Das chaldonische Christusbild', 730–1), Bar-Hebraeus probably had in mind Cyril's *Letter to Arcadia and Marina*, in which Cyril himself cites Athanasius' *On the Incarnation* as a source for his confession (*Arcad.* 9; *PG* 76.1212A–1213A).

⁴⁸ *Alexandrian Liturgy of St Gregory* (Renaudot, *Liturgiarum Orientalium Collectio*, i. 112–13). On this passage, see esp. Renaudot, pp. xciv–xcviii; Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, ii/4. 239; and H. Brakmann, 'Zu den Fragmenten einer griechischen Basileios-Liturgie', 118–43, esp. 124–5; *contra* H. Engberding, 'Ein Problem in der Homologia vor der Hl. Kommunion in der Ägyptischen Liturgie', 145–54.

⁴⁹ For comparative data on Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian liturgies, see Engberding, 'Das chaldonische Christusbild', 697–733.

⁵⁰ Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, ii/4. 240–7. On Christ as the addressee in the Greek *Anaphora of St Gregory*, see A. Gerhards, *Die griechische Gregoriosanaphora*, 210–42.

The translation of the Gregory mass from Greek into Coptic further highlights the contextualization of its Christology in an Egyptian context. A few telling editorial additions in the Coptic text correspond to key tenets of traditional Alexandrian theology, and also provide suggestive evidence that this translation may have developed in conjunction with the liturgy's prioritized use on particular feast days. Here, a comparison with the Coptic *Synaxarium*, the Egyptian calendrical almanac of saints' lives and corresponding biblical stories, proves to be illuminating—especially readings for the Feast of the Epiphany (Christ's Baptism).

Of the various small editorial changes in the Coptic version of *St Gregory*, one stands out by virtue of its frequency: namely, the addition of the adjective 'life-giving' to descriptions of both Christ and the Holy Spirit. Thus, the Coptic text expands upon the Greek by describing Christ's hands as not only 'holy, spotless and pure,' but also 'blessed' (ΜΑΚΑΡΙΟΝ) and 'life-giving' (ΡΕΥΤΑΝΖΟ).⁵¹ Elsewhere, the Saviour is called 'the good lover-of-humanity' (ΠΙΜΑΙΡΩΜΙ ΝΑΓΑΘΟΣ) and 'the one who gives life' (ΠΙΡΕΥΤΑΝΖΟ) to human souls.⁵² In adding these references to Christ as the source of life, the editor-translator seems to have been elaborating on a theme that was already present in the Egyptian Greek version, where the adjective 'life-giving' (ζωοποιός) is applied to Jesus' death.⁵³ This clause is retained in both the Coptic and Arabic versions (Copt. ΝΡΕΥΤΑΝΖΟ; Ar. *muhyī*).⁵⁴

A similar observation may be made concerning the Holy Spirit in the Coptic *Liturgy of St Gregory*. On at least five occasions, the adjective 'life-giving' (ΡΕΥΤΑΝΖΟ) is paired with the term 'consubstantial' (ΟΜΟΟΥΣΙΟC) to designate the Spirit, a feature missing from the extant Greek text.⁵⁵ In one instance, the editorial insertion of these two adjectives comes in a prayer where the priest also extols Christ's wounds as sanctifying and Christ's body and blood as 'life-giving'.⁵⁶

The ubiquitous addition of this adjective coheres with the consistent Alexandrian and Egyptian emphasis on the Incarnation as a source of life for humanity, a life that is obtained through communion with the work of Christ and the Spirit in the sacraments. In this case, the phrasing of the Coptic *Liturgy of St Gregory* may have been framed by its special use at Epiphany, the celebration of Christ's baptism. Noticably, the *Synaxarium* reading for the day

⁵¹ E. Hammerschmidt, *Die koptische Gregoriosanaphora*, 34 line 156; cf. Gerhards, *Die griechische Gregoriosanaphora*, 32 lines 151–2.

⁵² Hammerschmidt, *Die koptische Gregoriosanaphora*, 62. 321.

⁵³ Renaudot, *Liturgiarum Orientalium Collectio*, i. 97.

⁵⁴ E. Hammerschmidt, *Die koptische Gregoriosanaphora*, 38 line 184; Samir Khalil Samir, 'La version arabe de la Liturgie alexandrine de S. Grégoire', 333 line 30.

⁵⁵ E. Hammerschmidt, *Die koptische Gregoriosanaphora*, 12 line 9; 16 line 29; 20 line 46; 74 line 386; 78 line 405.

⁵⁶ E. Hammerschmidt, *Die koptische Gregoriosanaphora*, 74 lines 383, 386.

before Epiphany (10 Ṭubah) rings with similar language: 'We ask Christ the Lord to purify us from our lapses and to make manifest the glory of his divinity in our hearts, just as he made it manifest at the River Jordan. And to him be the glory with his good Father and *the life-giving Holy Spirit* who is equal to him from the beginning unto all eternity. Amen.'⁵⁷ Here, the 'life-giving' character of the Spirit is inextricably linked with Christ's acts of purifying us from sin and instilling 'the glory of his divinity in our hearts', both of which are seen to be rarefied effects of the Incarnation upon humankind. According to the *Synaxarium* reading for Epiphany itself (11 Ṭubah), our baptism then serves as the tangible sign of our participation in 'the grace of God the Word, Christ the Lord, the Son of God, who became one with us'.⁵⁸

In the context of these *Synaxarium* readings related to Epiphany, two final editorial additions to the Coptic *Liturgy of St Gregory* resonate with added significance. The first appears at the very beginning of the Anaphora where the priest petitions God to cleanse his body and soul 'so that I might become perfect' (i.e. fully sanctified and therefore worthy to approach the holy table).⁵⁹ The second appears at the very end of the eucharistic rite when the priest petitions Christ (along with 'the good Father and the life-giving and consubstantial Holy Spirit') to grant the priesthood and the people 'purity' (ΠΤΟΥΒΟ) in body, soul, and spirit as a consequence of their participation.⁶⁰ Once again, in this confluence of texts linked by a common liturgical usage at Epiphany, one sees how the sacraments of eucharist and baptism were presented together as privileged ritual loci for human participation in the pure, divine life enabled by the Incarnation.

LOCAL EUCHARISTIC LITURGIES IN LOWER AND UPPER EGYPT

While the eucharistic rites of Sts Cyril (Mark), Basil, and Gregory eventually assumed a widespread 'canonical' status in the Egyptian church, this process of liturgical regularization did not preclude the existence of local traditions

⁵⁷ *Synaxarium Alexandrinum*, 10 Ṭubah (Forget, i. 203; my italics). The text edited by Samuel al-Suryānī (ii. 150) describes the Holy Spirit as both 'living and life-giving'.

⁵⁸ *Synaxarium Alexandrinum*, 11 Ṭubah (Forget, i. 204). In the text edited by Samuel al-Suryānī (ii. 152–3), it is through emulating Christ in his baptism that we actually 'enact the salvation of (our) souls'; thus, having been 'purified with the holy water', we obtain a purity 'in heart and body' that is required 'for anyone (who wants) to approach this spiritual table and partake of these divine mysteries'.

⁵⁹ Hammerschmidt, *Die koptische Gregoriosanaphora*, 10. 3.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 76 (line 402); 78 (line 405).

that continued to be practised during the late antique and early medieval periods. In what follows, I want to examine two such local liturgies—one from Lower Egypt and one from Upper Egypt—each of which retains its own distinctive christological emphasis.

The Sacramentary of Sarapion

The first example of such a local liturgy is the *Sacramentary of Sarapion*, a collection of thirty prayers preserved in a lone eleventh-century manuscript, but attributed to a mid-fourth-century, pro-Nicene bishop of Thmuis in the Egyptian Delta (northern Egypt).⁶¹ As in the case of many other liturgies bearing the names of well-known church figures, liturgical scholars have wrestled over the authenticity of this attribution to Sarapion, with most seeking to defend the possibility of Sarapion's authorship. These debates have often centred on perceptions of theological congruence to Nicene theology. While one scholar has raised questions about Sarapion's authorship on the basis of alleged Arian elements in the liturgy,⁶² others have vociferously defended his authorship by demonstrating that the work exhibits a consistency with Athanasian viewpoints.⁶³ However, by contemporary historiographical standards, this theological congruence in and of itself is not a decisive point for dating the work, nor for answering questions of 'authenticity'. The liturgy as it stands could just as easily have been shaped in a later generation through the *reception and reappropriation* of Athanasius' defence of Nicaea. Indeed, even those who insist that 'the language of the prayers accords with that of Athanasius' letters to Sarapion' have had to admit that 'some later editing cannot be ruled out'.⁶⁴ To identify thematic commonalities with early Christian thought (whether Athanasian or pre-Athanasian) is not sufficient proof in and of itself that the *Sacramentary* belongs to the patristic era.

That being said, the *Sacramentary of Sarapion* does seem to retain certain early features that predate the Basilian and Gregorian traditions in Egypt—for example, the inclusion of intercessions towards the beginning of the liturgy (not in the memorial section proper). It is therefore possible that portions of this rite developed concurrently with that of the *Liturgy of St Mark*,⁶⁵ and that

⁶¹ F. E. Brightman, 'The Sacramentary of Sarapion of Thmuis', 88–113; Hänggi, *Prex Eucharistica*, 128–33. The main eucharistic prayer of the *Sacramentary* has been translated and discussed by Dom Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, 162–72; Maxwell Johnson, *The Prayers of Sarapion of Thmuis*, 46–80; and Jasper and Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist*, 74–9.

⁶² B. Botte, 'L'Eucologe de Sérapion est-il authentique?', 50–6.

⁶³ See e.g. G. J. Cuming, 'Thmuis Revisited', 568–75.

⁶⁴ Jasper and Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist*, 74.

⁶⁵ Jasper and Cuming (*Ibid.*) have suggested that 'the pre-Sanctus, Sanctus, and post-Sanctus... seem to have been imported from the Liturgy of *St Mark*, though at an earlier

it represents the survival of an early, semi-autonomous local tradition associated with the Egyptian Delta. The social provenance of the liturgy may also be indicated by its 'regular inclusion of prayer for the departed' (and not just for communicants): these invocations on behalf of the deceased may have developed in conjunction with ancient Christian burial and funerary practice.

One of the distinctive christological features of the *Sacramentary of Sarapion* is its emphasis on the agency of the Word (rather than the Spirit) in the consecration of the eucharistic elements. At first, the bread and wine are already understood as the 'likeness' (ὁμοίωμα) of the holy body and blood of the Only-Begotten, but through the intercession of the Word they become the actual body and blood of Christ. Thus, the priest prays:

Let your holy Word come on this bread, O God of truth, that the bread may become body of the Word; and on this cup, that the cup may become blood of the Truth; and make all who partake to receive a medicine of life for the healing of every disease, and for the empowering of all advancement and virtue.⁶⁶

In these words, the *Sacramentary* draws on a rich, Logos-centred tradition of epiclesis in the early Egyptian church.⁶⁷ Already in the third century, one finds Origen echoing 1 Timothy 4: 5 in affirming that the eucharistic bread is sanctified 'by the word of God and by prayer' (διὰ λόγου θεοῦ καὶ ἐντεύξεως).⁶⁸ A late antique sermon attributed to Athanasius of Alexandria and directed to newly baptized Christians develops this idea more explicitly in relation to the invocation of the divine Word in the sacrament: 'When the great prayers and holy supplications have been sent up, the Word descends upon the bread and the cup, and they become his body.'⁶⁹ Jerome, writing in Palestine in the fourth century, provides corroborating evidence regarding bishops who 'at the eucharist call for the advent of the Lord' (*ad Eucharistiam Domini imprecantur adventum*).⁷⁰ In the

stage than that appearing in the manuscripts'. Elsewhere, Cuming ('Thmuis Revisited', 575) has noted that the author of the *Sacramentary* 'knew an earlier and simpler form of the anaphora of St Mark than that of the *textus receptus*'. Indeed, behind the present form of the *Sacramentary*, Maxwell Johnson and Paul Bradshaw have discerned 'an older nucleus which... has some interesting parallels with the Strasbourg Papyrus' (P. Bradshaw, *Eucharistic Origins*, 133–4; M. Johnson, *The Prayers of Sarapion of Thmuis*, 255–9, 271–6).

⁶⁶ Brightman, 'The Sacramentary of Sarapion of Thmuis', 106. 13–18; trans. Jasper and Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist*, 77–8.

⁶⁷ Johnson, *The Prayers of Sarapion of Thmuis*, 233–53.

⁶⁸ Origen, *comm. in Mt. 11.14* (PG 13.948–9; Klostermann, GCS 40 (1935), 57); cf. *Against Celsus* 8. 33 (Borret, SC 150 (1969), 246); cited by Bradshaw, *Eucharistic Origins*, 108.

⁶⁹ Ps.-Athanasius, *fr. 7* (*Sermon to the Newly Baptized*; PG 26.1325C); cited by Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, 168 (note that Dix's reference to the pagination of Greek text in the *Patrologiae Graecae* is erroneous). The last phrase of the Greek here is grammatically ambiguous, and could be alternatively translated, 'and he (i.e. the Word) becomes his body.' On the dubious authorship of this and other sermons attributed to Athanasius, see J. Quasten, *Patrology*, iii. 50–2.

⁷⁰ Jerome, *Commentary on Zephaniah* 3 (PL 25.1377); cited by Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, 168.

Sacramentary of Sarapion, the descent of the Word upon the elements presents to the liturgical participants an action that parallels the descent of the Word in the Incarnation. In both cases, the text describes the Word's visitation by using the Greek verb ἐπιδημεῖν ('to reside, stay in a place'), a verbal connection that underscores what has aptly been described as a 'eucharistic incarnation principle'.⁷¹ In its emphasis upon the Word's consecration and transubstantiation of the bread and wine, the *Sacramentary of Sarapion* stands in sharp contrast to other early local eucharistic sources such as the Dayr Bala'izah Papyrus⁷² and the Louvain Coptic Papyrus,⁷³ both of which specifically invoke the Spirit's descent upon the elements.

The *Sacramentary of Sarapion* also provides the historian with interesting first-hand information about the perceived effects of eucharistic participation on the human person. Once again, participation is conceived of in terms of both the body and the soul: 'Make our bodies receive purity, and our souls insight and knowledge; and make us wise, God of compassion, by participation in the body and the blood.'⁷⁴ This language has been linked with earlier notions of the sacrament as a 'drug' or 'medicine' of life.⁷⁵ Later in the Anaphora, holistic participation in the sacrament is understood in terms of the community's collective offering to God: 'Receive also the thanksgiving of the people, and bless those who offered the offerings (προσφορά) and thanksgivings, and grant health and soundness and cheerfulness and all advancement of soul and body to all people.'⁷⁶ Here, the act of raising up offerings does not appear to be limited to the priesthood; there seems to be a suggestion that each communicant was expected to bring his or her own gifts to the rite. Thus, it may very well be that for the community that celebrated this liturgy, 'to be one of "the people"' (i.e. the laity), to offer up προσφορά, and to partake of communion, were still all virtually the same thing.⁷⁷ In the context of this multi-layered sense of participation, priests and communicants alike would have seen these acts of offering

⁷¹ Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, 168; J. Betz, *Die Eucharistie in der Zeit der griechischen Väter*, i/1. 285–6; Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, ii/4. 247–8.

⁷² C. H. Roberts and B. Capelle, *An Early Euchologium*, 14–35, esp. 24; Hänggi, *Prex Eucharistica*, 124–7; trans. Jasper and Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist*, 79–81. The Dayr Bala'izah Papyrus has been dated between 500 and 700 CE, although it may have roots in fourth-century Upper Egypt.

⁷³ L. T. Lefort, 'Coptica lovenensia', 22–4, no. 27; Hänggi, *Prex Eucharistica*, 140 (Latin trans.); trans. Jasper and Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist*, 81. Papyrologists have recently matched this Coptic fragment with a fourth-century Greek papyrus preserved at Barcelona.

⁷⁴ Brightman, 'The Sacramentary of Sarapion of Thmuis', 107. 6–9; trans. Jasper and Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist*, 78.

⁷⁵ Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, 169.

⁷⁶ Brightman, 'The Sacramentary of Sarapion of Thmuis', 106. 33–6; trans. Jasper and Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist*, 78.

⁷⁷ Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, 172.

as intimately bound up with the divine agency of the Word. Thus, the presiding bishop is instructed to pray to the Father: 'May the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit speak in us and hymn you through us.'⁷⁸ Ultimately, even the verbal offerings of this local eucharistic liturgy—the very words that were prayed and sung by the people—are understood to be mediated through the action of the incarnate Word, along with the Spirit.

The Great Euchologion of the White Monastery

Another local liturgical tradition that survives in the manuscript record is the *Great Euchologion of the White Monastery*.⁷⁹ Written primarily in Sahidic Coptic and preserved in a tenth- or eleventh-century manuscript now in the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris, this document contains a miscellaneous collection of eucharistic prayers used in the services held at the White Monastery and (presumably) the other monasteries within the federation at Atripe. While Shenoute's rule in the fourth and fifth centuries remains the most studied period in the history of the federation, the community there remained active into the medieval period. During the second half of the fifth century, Shenoute was succeeded as archimandrite by Besa and then later by Zenobios.⁸⁰ Papyrological evidence and stories recorded in the *History of the Patriarchs* and the *Synaxarium* provide information about the abbots who served as heads of the community during the sixth to eighth centuries.⁸¹ Manuscript colophons (the place where the scribe signs his or her name and gives information about the writing of the manuscript) and inscriptions on the walls of the main church give further scant evidence of the leadership and life of the monastery during the tenth to the fourteenth centuries inclusive.⁸² It is not known how and when the monastery became officially inactive, but by the time of the Muslim historian al-Maqrizi (d. 1441), it is clear that only the main church remained standing. Thus, a tenth- or eleventh-century scribe transcribed the manuscript of the *Great Euchologion* during a latter stage of the monastery's ancient lifespan. One might surmise that the purpose of the text was probably twofold: (1) to record and preserve the diversity of monastic prayers in use over its

⁷⁸ Brightman, 'The Sacramentary of Sarapion of Thmuis', 105. 14–15; trans. Jasper and Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist*, 76.

⁷⁹ The text has been edited by E. Lanne, in PO 28/2 (1958), 269–407.

⁸⁰ On Besa, see K. H. Kuhn, 'A Fifth Century Egyptian Abbot', *Journal of Theological Studies*, NS 5 (1954), 36–48, 174–87; and 6 (1955), 35–48; and K. H. Kuhn, 'Besa', *CE* ii. 378–9. For evidence related to Zenobios, see René-Georges Coquin, 'Zenobios', *CE* vii. 2371.

⁸¹ René-Georges Coquin and Maurice Martin, SJ, 'Dayr Anba Shinudah: History', *CE* iii. 761–6, esp. 762.

⁸² *Ibid.* esp. 762–4.

earlier history, and (2) to provide a resource for conducting worship in Coptic during a period in which that language was increasingly falling into disuse.

In what follows, I want to focus specifically on how this unique monastic compendium of eucharistic prayers sheds light on the adaptation and reuse of previously existing liturgical traditions. These were by no means static processes: rather, they were dynamic means by which the Coptic church (or in this case, a particular monastic community in Upper Egypt) sought to appropriate its patristic heritage, to define itself in relation to past theological controversies, and to reinterpret the doctrine of the Incarnation in relation to the physical and visual setting of worship.

The *Great Euchologion* contains a disparate array of prayers borrowed not only from the more ecumenical liturgies of Sts Cyril, Basil, and Gregory, but also from liturgies of an extra-regional character, especially rites that originated in Asia Minor and Syria-Palestine, such as the anaphoras of Timothy of Alexandria, St John of Bosra, St Thomas, Severus of Antioch, St James, and St Matthew.⁸³ In the case of the eucharistic prayers attributed to Timothy of Alexandria and Severus of Antioch, one sees how the liturgy became a venue for the Egyptian reception of traditions attached to well-known anti-Chalcedonian personalities.⁸⁴

The presence of excerpts from the *Anaphora of Severus of Antioch*⁸⁵ in the *Great Euchologion* serves as an instructive example of how Coptic doctrinal identity continued to be marked by the terms of christological controversy in settings of monastic worship. The *Great Euchologion* includes a handful of excerpts from the Severan rite, including the end of the epiclesis, the intercession, the material following the intercession, and the prayer of fraction.⁸⁶ In the first excerpt, containing the end of the epiclesis and the intercession, Jesus Christ is extolled as ‘our God and Saviour’ and the church is identified as ‘the body (σωμα) of Christ’, which should be joined to him as its proper head through the grace of participation in his mysteries.⁸⁷ Then, after an appeal to God to take away all forms of idolatry and heresy, the presiding priest offers a prayer against ‘the heresy that has been gathered together in the churches’ and against ‘those who tear into scraps the holy body (i.e. of Christ)’.⁸⁸

⁸³ On these rites, see F. E. Brightman, *Liturgies Eastern and Western*, i. pp. lv–lix.

⁸⁴ On some of the lesser-known anti-Chalcedonian (i.e. Jacobite) anaphoras, see Renaudot, *Liturgiarum Orientalium Collectio*, ii. 12–28; and Brightman, *Liturgies Eastern and Western*, i. pp. lviii–lix.

⁸⁵ The earlier Syriac version of the *Anaphora of Severus of Antioch* dates to the sixth or seventh century CE: ed. H. W. Codrington, in *Anaphorae Syriacae*, i/1. 49–96 (text: 57–96). For a recent discussion of this text, see B. D. Spinks, ‘The Anaphora Attributed to Severus of Antioch’, 345–51.

⁸⁶ *Great Euchologion*, fos. 101–2, 105–8 (Vat. Borg. 109 [100]), 182. 3–27 (BN-FR 129²⁰, fo. 133v); ed. E. Lanne, PO 28/2 (1958), 312–23, 370–1.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* fo. 101 (Lanne, PO 28/2 (1958), 312).

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* fo. 102. 5–8 (Lanne, PO 28/2 (1958), 314).

Given the larger eucharistic context and the prayer's earlier identification of the church as the body of Christ, there would appear to be at least three levels of reference in this evocative phrasing. That is to say, for Egyptians voicing or hearing this prayer, these words concerning the rending of Christ's body would have been understood as enunciating a triple condemnation. First, they would have stood as a condemnation of Nestorian and Chalcedonian 'dyophysitism'—i.e. the confessional 'division' of Christ into two natures.⁸⁹ Second, they would have expressed dismay at the ecclesiastical schism occasioned by the Council of Chalcedon—i.e. the division of Christ's corporate body, the church. And third, they would have opposed the assumed implications of Chalcedonian doctrine for eucharist practice—namely, the perception that the Chalcedonian 'division' of Christ into two natures threatens the hypostatic union that took place in the Incarnation and thereby also threatens the salvific efficacy of the sacrament.

Later in the collection of prayers, a prayer of the fraction of Patriarch Severus reiterates several key anti-Nestorian and anti-Chalcedonian themes, including an emphasis on Mary's role as Theotokos and an affirmation of the completeness and irreversibility of the hypostatic union in the Incarnation:

Christ our Savior, the one who is, the one who was, the one who has come, is coming again. The one who is seated on the right hand of the Father, the true bread, the one who came from the height of all the aeons, has given life to the faithful who have faith. This great high priest, the head of our salvation, the true light, the one who is over all the aeons, has been begotten from the light. The image and likeness of God the Father, the agreeable and estimable incense has come from the height of the heavens, from the bosom of the one who is unapproachable, the one who is truly immortal. God has taken on flesh without change by means of a holy Spirit in the holy Theotokos (ΘΕΟΔΩΚΟΣ) Mary, the God-bearing Virgin (ΤΕΙΠΑΡΘΕΝΟΣ ΜΜΑC ΝΟΥΤΕ). She gave birth to him from herself and he became man (ΑΦΡΩΜΕ), while not in any way being susceptible to transference (of nature), difference, or change, having made himself one with us according to an incorruptible, unknowable, and unconfused hypostasis. This is (the hypostasis) that he received from the holy womb in all things that belong to this holy Mary (ΤΕΙΖΑΓΙΑ ΜΑΡΙΑ)...⁹⁰

What is most intriguing about this prayer is that while it is labelled as 'the fraction (ΚΛΑCΜΑΤΙΖΕ) of the patriarch Severus', it is not found in the earlier Syriac version of the Severan anaphora. One possible implication is that the substance of this prayer, in fact, may have derived from local Egyptian eucharistic practice—in other words, that it was composed by a Coptic liturgical author and interpolated into the *Anaphora of Severus* in Egypt, where Severus was widely honoured as a faithful defender of Cyril's Christology

⁸⁹ On this point, see also Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, ii/4. 249–250.

⁹⁰ *Great Euchologion*, fo. 106. 4–27 (Lanne, PO 28/2 (1958), 370).

over against Chalcedonian doctrine. Such a reading of the prayer would be supported by its repeated affirmation of Mary as the ‘God-bearer’ (a title conveyed in both Greek and Coptic terminology) as well as by its polemic against notions of any ‘transference (of nature), difference, or change’ attributed to the incarnate Word.

One final detail of this sacramental prayer shows further how the christological language of the Coptic liturgy was vitally shaped by the material setting of Egyptian worship. Here, the incarnate Word is described as ‘the agreeable and estimable incense (that) has come from the height of the heavens,’ a metaphor which plays on the visual and olfactory senses associated with participation in the eucharistic liturgy.⁹¹ The aromatic smoke from censers, which pervades Coptic churches during the mass, is presented here as an image of Christ’s heavenly presence in the Incarnation. Later Coptic hymnody elaborates on this metaphor: a hymn chanted on Holy Thursday and Good Friday extols Mary as the censer and Christ as the incense itself: ‘The censer of gold is the Virgin: its sweet aroma is our Savior: She bore him; he saved us; he forgave us our sins. You are the censer of gold, pure, and bearing the embers of the blessed fire.’⁹²

Where the *Great Euchologion* collection adapts and reinterprets other liturgical traditions, one finds more examples of how the Incarnation was interpreted in relation to the sensory context of Coptic (monastic) worship. At one point, the liturgical editor quotes (and subtly alters) an excerpt from the *Anaphora of Saint Gregory*: ‘You have painted (ΖΩΓΡΑΦΕΙ ~ ζωγραφεῖν) in me the image (ΤΖΙΚΟΝ) of your power. You have placed in me your gift, which is reason (ΠΛΟΓΙΚΟΝ). You have opened for me the door of paradise as a delight. You have given me the teaching of your knowledge.’⁹³ This section of the prayer occurs in the context of an extended narrative of salvation highlighting the link between God’s original act of creation and the new creation that is brought about by the Incarnation.⁹⁴ In speaking about how humans reacquire the divine image (ΤΖΙΚΟΝ), the Coptic editor of the *Great Euchologion*

⁹¹ On the role the sense of smell played in early Christian ritual contexts, see Susan Ashbrook Harvey, *Scenting Salvation: Ancient Christianity and the Olfactory Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

⁹² Mofteh, Toth, and Roy, *The Coptic Orthodox Liturgy of St Basil*, 146 (modified and modernized). The image of the golden censer is a biblical type drawn from sources such as Sirach 50: 9 and Revelation 8: 3. I thank Mark Swanson for drawing my attention to these references.

⁹³ *Great Euchologion*, fos. 27–8 (Lanne, PO 28/2 (1958), 288–91).

⁹⁴ ‘You have bound me up with every medicine that gives me life. You have sent to me the prophets, and have given the law as a help. You, the one against whom I have sinned, have supplied me, the one who is sick, with my health/salvation. You have revealed the true light to the ones who are lost. You, the one who exists in all times and all places, have gone out to those who are ignorant, and have dwelt in a virginal womb.’ (*Great Euchologion*, fo. 28; ed. Lanne, PO 28/2 (1958), 290–1).

version of this anaphora employs the Greek verb *ζωγραφεῖν* (to paint) to portray the Word of God as a divine artist who reworks humanity as his visual masterpiece. This verb is notably absent from the Greek and Bohairic Coptic versions of the *Liturgy of St Gregory*, which instead use more generic verbs of writing—*ὑπογράφειν* in the Greek and *ⲱⲗⲓ* in the Coptic—to describe the Word's re-creative activity.⁹⁵ This subtle yet significant change may provide a glimpse into the interaction of liturgical language and visual setting of worship as it was practised in the churches of the White and Red Monasteries, where the monks participating in the eucharistic liturgy would have done so while gazing up at wall paintings of saints who embodied the divine image of Christ in their lives of ascetic piety.

In a long prayer of final inclination at the end of the *Great Euchologion* manuscript one finds further evidence of how christological invocation in the liturgy was conditioned by the visual culture of Coptic church space. The prayer focuses on the Incarnation, offering up blessings and praise to the divine Word 'who would take on flesh from the holy Virgin Mary as a man', and who took up residence 'in the womb of the holy Virgin Mary', even while he remained 'God in truth and perfection'.⁹⁶ Then, after recalling the story of the Nativity, the prayer resumes its glorification of the Word: 'Blessed are you, you who are in the arms of the holy Virgin Mary. Glory be to you, you who feed on the milk of the Virgin. Blessed are you, you who would go down to Egypt on account of Herod's fear.'⁹⁷ With these words, the priest and the communicants would have had their attention once again directed to their visual environment—to the iconostasis of the church, where they would have beheld the ubiquitous image of the Virgin Mary with the Christ child seated on her lap; or to one of the pillars, where they may have encountered a painted scene of the Holy Family in their flight to Egypt. If the rite were being celebrated in the church at the Red Monastery, this prayer might have drawn the participants' gaze toward the eastern wall of the north transept where an image of the Nursing Virgin, the *Galaktotrophousa*, occupied (and still occupies) a prominent place. Within the monastic federation at Atripe and elsewhere in Egypt, such painted scenes functioned as visual signs of the Incarnation that were activated for worshippers by the words of the eucharistic liturgy. In the next two chapters, I will explore these visual themes and their christological function in more detail: first in the context of ritualized pilgrimage practice and the cult of the saints, and later with regard to art on clothing and the iconographic programmes of Coptic churches.

⁹⁵ Renaudot, *Liturgiarum Orientalium Collectio*, i. 95; Hammerschmidt, *Die koptische Gregoriosanaphora*, 28 line 101.

⁹⁶ *Great Euchologion*, fo. 215 (Lanne, PO 28/2 (1958), 376–7).

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* fo. 216 (Lanne, PO 28/2 (1958), 378–9).

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Part II

Bodies, Practices, and Sacred Space

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Christology in Coptic Pilgrimage and the Cult of the Saints

PILGRIMAGE, HAGIOGRAPHY, AND RITUAL RE-ENACTMENT: A THEORY IN PRACTICE

For early Christian pilgrims visiting Jerusalem, the seven days before Easter—Holy Week—often marked the culmination of a series of visits to the holy places (*loca sancta*) connected with the history of Israel and the life of Jesus. In the pilgrimage diary of the late fourth-century female pilgrim Egeria,¹ one traces the stages of Egeria's journey through the Sinai, Egypt, and Palestine, through Syria and Asia Minor, before following her in reminiscence back again to the gates of Jerusalem and her experience of worship inside (and outside) its walls. With her return to that city via the the avenues and alleyways of memory, her language of description undergoes a perceptible shift as it grows more detailed and dense, as her narrative discourse begins to drip thick with the rhythmic tolling of liturgical time. Indeed, as Egeria describes her participation in the Holy Week liturgy alongside other pilgrims, she conveys the sense that time—at least as she perceived it—had slowed down so that each detail of her movements and activities could be duly noted and recorded.² For much of the week, her steps—leading her up and down the narrow streets, in and out of the city walls—follow an oscillating, well-trodden route between the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the Mount of Olives, as she keeps measure of the final week in Jesus' life, listening in on the scriptural accounts of his passion at each stop.

The Thursday before Easter serves as a crucial fulcrum in the liturgical ordering of Egeria's experience.³ After spending the morning and early afternoon

¹ Egeria, *Itinerarium*: ed. E. Franscheschini and R. Weber, CCL 175 (1958), 27–90.

² Jonathan Z. Smith (*To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual*, 88–95) has noted the way that for Egeria in Jerusalem considerations of time begin to replace those of space: 'It is at this point that formal, liturgical ordering takes hold, establishing a hierarchy of significance that focuses the devout attention, chiefly achieved by adding a temporal dimension to the locative experience' (90).

³ Egeria, *Itinerarium* 35–6 (Francheschini and Weber, 78–80; trans. Wilkinson, *Egeria's Travels*, 134–6).

of that day worshipping and celebrating the eucharist at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in the centre of the city, Egeria follows the crowd out to the Mount of Olives in the late evening where she ‘sings hymns and antiphons suitable to the place and the day, with readings and prayers between until about eleven o’clock at night’,⁴ as she and the other pilgrims effectively re-enact Jesus’ night-long vigil. By morning, the group will make its way to Gethsamene proper, to the garden where Jesus prayed and was arrested.⁵

This communal ‘passage’ from the commemoration of Christ’s passion to its re-enactment is, I would suggest, a transformative moment for participants in the week-long rite. The crowd is ‘tired by their vigil, and weakened by their daily fasting’, but as they descend to Gethsamane ‘they are provided with hundreds of church candles’ to light their way.⁶ In his study of Christian pilgrimage, the social anthropologist Victor Turner has described how at such moments pilgrims became ‘capable of entering in imagination and with sympathy into the culturally defined experiences of the founder’.⁷ This re-enactment may be described in terms of a ritual performance, wherein the participant “‘puts on Christ Jesus” as a paradigmatic mask, or persona, and thus for a while *becomes* the redemptive tradition.’⁸ Turner goes on to identify the performative imitation of Christ as an extension of ‘the salvific, incarnative process’—a process ‘for making saints out of “middling good” Christians.’⁹

More recent experts in the anthropological study of pilgrimage have reaffirmed the transformative function of ritual moments of re-enactment, even as they have critiqued some of the structuralist assumptions that framed Turner’s conclusions. Thus, John Eade and Michael J. Sallnow, who have argued that pilgrimage is in fact a heterogeneous ‘arena for competing religious and secular discourses’, nonetheless have described shrines and sacred locales as ‘transformation stations between earthly heavenly realms’, and furthermore have recognized that for Christians pilgrimage often provides ‘an ideal opportunity to enter into the life of Christ through supposedly following directly in

⁴ Ibid. 35. 3 (Francheschini and Weber, 79; trans. Wilkinson, *Egeria’s Travels*, 135).

⁵ Ibid. 36. 1–3 (Francheschini and Weber, 79–80; trans. Wilkinson, *Egeria’s Travels*, 135–6).

⁶ Ibid. 36. 2–3 (Francheschini and Weber, 79–80; trans. Wilkinson, *Egeria’s Travels*, 135–6).

⁷ Victor and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, 10–11. Turner attributes this process to the pilgrims having been somehow imprinted by ‘a paradigmatic structure’ (11).

⁸ Ibid. 11.

⁹ Ibid. 16. Later in the same work, Turner elaborates on this point: ‘Believers in the message seek to imitate or to unite with the founder by replicating his actions, either literally or in spirit. Pilgrimage is one way, perhaps the most literal, of imitating the religious founder. By visiting the sites believed to be scenes of his life and teaching mission, the pilgrim in imagination relives those events’ (33). In this way, pilgrimage functions as a ‘ritualized enactment of correspondences between religious paradigms and shared human experiences’ (34).

his footsteps . . . or by emulating his sufferings . . . or by simply demonstrating a fundamental Christian charity towards other pilgrims.¹⁰

In this body of theory, one begins to acquire a technical vocabulary for describing Christian pilgrimage as a set of practices oriented towards the Incarnation as an accessible event that—when imaginatively and physically claimed by imitation or re-enactment—helps facilitate for the participant a proleptic transformation in status from the earthly to the heavenly. In this way, pilgrimage, as a form of ritual, reaffirms the differences or boundaries between the sacred and the profane (the divine and the human), while at the same time allowing these boundaries ‘for a few careful minutes’ to break down.¹¹

In this context, it is significant that in the midst of Egeria’s re-enactment of Jesus’ night-long vigil on the Mount of Olives and in the Garden of Gethsamane, Egeria is led in a procession to the top of the mount, to the Imbomon church, ‘the place from which the Lord ascended to heaven’.¹² In addition to its association with the ascension, the site was also linked in earlier pilgrim literature to Christ’s transfiguration: the anonymous Bordeaux pilgrim (c.333 CE) identifies it as ‘the hill on which the Lord ascended to pray and where Moses and Elijah appeared’.¹³ Thus, for Egeria and her fellow pilgrims, their ‘ascent’ to this spot would have called their attention beyond their dark hour of suffering and lament not only to the transfiguring glorification of Christ fulfilled in his resurrection and ascension, but also to their own promised glorification in the body—a glorification whose ritual re-enactment was incorporated into their mimetic vigil.

Jerusalem was not the exclusive venue for the performance of such ritualized transformation. Re-enactments of the Incarnation took place in various other locales as well, and in the process, not only the participants, but also the places themselves became sacralized, bodies and territory transformed into ritual sites where the earthly and heavenly came into creative contact. In this chapter, I want to highlight how the late antique and early medieval landscape of Upper Egypt served as a setting for ritual re-enactment in Christian pilgrimage practice.

¹⁰ John Eade and Michael J. Sallnow, ‘Introduction’, in *Contesting the Sacred*, 24–5.

¹¹ Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, 78, summarizing the perspective of Pierre Bourdieu. For Bourdieu, ritual practice is understood to facilitate ‘passages’, to authorize ‘encounters between opposed orders’, and ‘to sanction the union of contraries’ (Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 120, 135).

¹² Egeria, *Itinerarium* 35. 4 (Francheschini and Weber, 79; trans. Wilkinson, *Egeria’s Travels*, 135).

¹³ Bordeaux Pilgrim, *Itinerarium* 595 (Geyer and Cuntz, CSEL 39 (1898), 23. 16–17).

TRANSFIGURATIONS: LITURGICAL PROCESSION,
CHRISTOLOGY, AND THE MAKING OF SAINTS
AT THE WHITE MONASTERY

For one vivid example of such Christopraxis in Upper Egypt, let us return to the gate of the White Monastery to gather with a crowd of ancient pilgrims who have come to celebrate ‘the feast of the desert of Apa Shenoute.’¹⁴ A Coptic manuscript in the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris (BN Copte 68, fos. 4^r–141^v) preserves the rite that these pilgrims followed as they processed through the grounds of Shenoute’s monastic domain.¹⁵ Parts of this text are missing (including its beginning and ending sections), although a stray page from later in the same manuscript (fo. 158^{r-v}) is also preserved at the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden.¹⁶ While probably copied from earlier models, the surviving manuscript dates to the fifteenth or sixteenth century, a time by which the buildings of the White Monastery, apart from its main church, stood defunct and in ruins. However, the history of the rite itself probably began in late antiquity—sometime after Shenoute’s death in 464 or 465 CE—and continued on his feast days until around the year 1200.¹⁷ The contents of the Paris manuscript present a liturgical script for this rite: the text gives pilgrim participants directions regarding prescribed movements to different stations (stopping points) within the boundaries of the monastic compound and provides various series of scriptural passages (often organized by key word associations) to be read by the gathering at each station.¹⁸ It is in this liturgical intersection between the recitation of Scripture and the physical act of moving in and through sacralized space that we begin to discern important clues as to how local processional practice may have served as a ritual context for christological re-enactment.

¹⁴ BN Copte 68, fo. 4^r.

¹⁵ For an analysis of this unpublished manuscript and the rite that it contains, see Hans Quecke, *Untersuchungen zum koptischen Studengebet*, 488–505; Hans Quecke, ‘Zukunftschauen der Erforschung der koptischen Liturgie’, 164–96, esp. 191–2; Janet Timbie, ‘The Relics of Apa Shenoute and the Use of *thalassa* in BN Copte 68’, 89–93; and ead., ‘A Liturgical Procession in the Desert of Apa Shenoute’, 415–41.

¹⁶ MS Insinger, no. 44; ed. W. Pleyte and P. A. A. Boeser, *Manuscripts coptes du Musée d’antiquités des Pays-Bas* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1897), 244–6.

¹⁷ On issues related to the dating of this pilgrimage rite, see Timbie, ‘A Liturgical Procession’, 416, 418, 435–6, 438, 441. The question of why it was copied in the fifteenth or sixteenth century remains unanswered.

¹⁸ In my choice of language here, I want to suggest (*contra* Timbie, ‘A Liturgical Procession’, 420–2) that the BN Copte 68 rite actually combines elements of both ‘stational practice’ and ‘liturgical procession’. In his study of early Christian stational liturgies at Jerusalem, Rome, and Constantinople, John Baldovin (*The Urban Character of Christian Worship: The Origins, Development, and Meaning of*

With this interaction of bodily movement and textual recitation in mind, let me first reconstruct the local itinerary of this processional rite and then discuss how carefully selected biblical readings would have scripted the congregants' encounter with the holy. Consistent with my focus throughout much of this book, my primary concern will be to trace out the ways that Christology came to expression via ritual practice, and especially how a sense of participation in the Incarnation was mediated to Coptic Christians in such settings.

A Reconstruction of the Processional Rite

While the manuscript preserved in Paris and Leiden has significant gaps, there is, I believe, enough preserved to identify the main stations around which the procession was organized and to map the pilgrims' movements to, in, and around these locations. The rite is structured in three stages of movement and assembly.

First, the pilgrims, who are identified as people from the nearby city of Panopolis (Copt. **ΠΑΝΟΣ**; Ar. *Akhmīm*),¹⁹ begin early in the day with an ascent 'up to the mountain' (**ΖΡΑΙ ΕΠΤΟΥ**) where they gather at 'the corner of the master' (**ΤΚΕΛΧΕ ΜΠΣΑΖ**).²⁰ In Coptic, the word for 'mountain' (**ΠΤΟΥ**) can also mean 'monastery': in this case, the initial movement of the pilgrims apparently took them up past the cultivated land on the west bank of the Nile and into the extensive domains governed by the White Monastery, which included the uncultivated arid terrain that rises to the base of the high cliffs

Stational Liturgy (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1987), 144, 207 ff.) distinguishes between (1) use of the Latin term *statio* to refer to gathering places for indoor liturgies in Western urban settings, and (2) use of the Greek term *λιτή* to refer to outdoor liturgical processions that developed in Eastern cities. Timbie, in attempting to summarize Baldwin's thesis, fails to clarify the methodological rationale for his separate categorization of stational and processional practices. While she follows Baldwin in defining 'stational liturgy' primarily in terms of its location and leadership (in a church located near a city or town and presided over by the bishop or his representative), she frames her definition of ancient 'liturgical processions' almost exclusively in terms of their historical roots or background in pagan practice (Timbie, 'A Liturgical Procession', 420). Baldwin's philological study of word usage, when taken on its own terms, is useful for understanding what terminology came to be applied to different liturgical practices in different geographical locations; however, it does not allow him (or Timbie) to take full enough account of the *adaptability* of ritual forms to new localities. In the case of the BN Copte 68 rite, the text prescribes both 'processional' forms of movement through outdoor spaces and multiple 'stational' gatherings in indoor settings. Baldwin's focus on the primarily urban setting of 'stational practices' need not be a deterrent to this reading of the text: the expansive domain of the White Monastery, a community whose social and topographical complexity has often been compared to that of a large village or small town, may have functioned as an alternative venue—a virtual urban environment—for the performance of processional rites that incorporated stational components.

¹⁹ BN Copte 68, fo. 32^r.

²⁰ *Ibid.* fo. 4^r.

bordering the Nile Valley. The enigmatic phrase, ‘the corner of the master (πκαζ)’, has generated much discussion among scholars eager to pinpoint the location of this first stopping point on the processional route. The noun πκαζ has a wide range of meanings in Coptic. A title of respect often accorded to holy persons such as apostles, saints, and monastic leaders, it could also variously refer to the vocational function of scribes, teachers, or liturgical cantors.²¹ Given the fact that this BN Copte 68 rite is identified as ‘the feast of the desert of Apa Shenoute’, one wonders whether this cryptic ‘corner of the master’ was in fact a place within the monastery associated with Shenoute’s leadership or instruction.²² Indeed, the parallel Arabic text in the document translates this phrase as ‘the hill of the teachers’ (*tall al-mu‘allimīn*): the plural may point to a succession of (monastic) teachers associated with the place. Alternatively, in the context of this particular liturgical rite, the term πκαζ (Ar. *al-mu‘allim*) might also function as a synonym for ‘cantor’, a choir leader who may have also been responsible for the transcription of liturgical rites. Indeed, immediately after this place name, the text names ‘the archdeacon’ (ΠΑΡΧΗΔΙΑΚΟΝΟΣ, 4^r) as the one who was commissioned to lead the pilgrim gathering in the chanting of psalms.²³ Until additional literary or archaeological evidence is forthcoming, any attempt to identify and locate this ‘corner of the master’ will necessarily have to remain conjectural. What is clear, however, is that this particular location within the monastic domains served as the initial gathering place for the pilgrimage procession detailed in BN Copte 68.

The second stage of the processional route involved a further ascent northwards to a church named ‘Etrigamou’ (ΕΤΡΙΓΑΜΟΥ), an epithet for the Virgin Mary derived from the Greek word ἀπειρόγαμος, meaning ‘without experience of marriage’.²⁴ This church is probably identifiable with a church dedicated to the Virgin mentioned in two separate medieval colophons of manuscripts from the library of the White Monastery: one identifies it as ‘the place (τοπος) of the Virgin Mary in the desert of Apa Shenoute, on the mountain of Atripe’, and the other refers to ‘the church on the mountain (named after) the

²¹ On its range of usage, see W. E. Crum, *Coptic Dictionary*, 383b–384a; and Timbie, ‘A Liturgical Procession’, 428–9.

²² BN Copte 68, fo. 4^r. Crum (*Coptic Dictionary*, 108a) links this phrase with a place name at Scetis, where it probably had a similar association.

²³ This is the interpretation favored by Quecke (*Untersuchungen zum koptischen Studengebet*, 75–8, cf. 88 n. 46), who sees the Arabic term *al-mu‘allim* as the equivalent of *al-murattil* (‘chanter’) or *al-‘arif* (‘precentor’ or ‘leader of congregational singing’). Timbie (‘A Liturgical Procession’, 428–9) follows Quecke’s reading of the text here.

²⁴ BN Copte 68, fo. 32^r; J. Timbie, ‘A Liturgical Procession’, 430–1. In a Copticized Greek hymn near the end of the manuscript, Mary is addressed and lauded as ‘God-bearer, Virgin Mother of Emmanuel, mistress without experience of marriage’ (ΘΕΟΔΩΚΕ ΠΑΡΘΕΝΗ ΜΗΡ ΤΟΥ ΛΕΜΑΝΟΥ ΗΛ ΤΗΣ ΠΙΝΑΤΙΡΩΓΑΜΟΥ (~ δέσπου[α] ἀπειρόγαμος), fo. 140^r).

Virgin Mary.²⁵ Once the procession arrives at this church, the rite recorded in BN Copte 68 prescribes a set of four communal actions for the participants. First, they enter the church and listen to a series of biblical readings. Second, one of Shenoute's sermons is read in its entirety.²⁶ Third, while more scriptural verses are recited, the group proceeds to the 'sea (θαλασσα) of Apa Shenoute', which may have referred to a box or repository for relics associated with the famous archimandrite located below the altar of the Etrigamou church.²⁷ Fourth and

²⁵ Arnold van Landschoot, *Recueil des colophons des manuscrits chrétiens d'Égypte*, i. 126–7, 155–6; cf. ii. 51; R.-G. Coquin and M. Martin, 'Dayr Anba-Shinudh', *CE* iii. 761–6. The Copto-Arabic *Synaxarium* (Basset, PO 11/5 (1915), 792–3) calls this church al-Rogamah, probably a corruption of both the Greek ἀπειρογάμος and the Coptic ΕΤΡΙΓΑΜΟΥ; that account describes how 'Pshoi, Shenoute and Pgol . . . built dwellings in the mountains and built a church under the protection of the pure Virgin, Mary . . . (and) called the church al-Rogamah.' On the identification of this church and a discussion of relevant sources, see Timbie, 'A Liturgical Procession', 431 n. 79; see also Peter Grossmann, 'Sohag', 323–5. Grossmann ('Zum Grab des Schenute', 83–103) has more recently argued that this Etrigamou church was identifiable with the main church of the White Monastery; however, the movements prescribed in the processional rite (especially the final descent to the monastery of Apa Shenoute) make this interpretation unlikely in my opinion. Grossmann's argument against the idea that the Etrigamou church could have been another site located at a distance from the main church somewhere higher up at the base of the cliff is based on a couple of tendentious assumptions—namely, that there could not have been two churches or chapels dedicated to the Virgin Mary in the area, and that a procession to a distant church higher up at the base of the cliff would be too strenuous for a pilgrim gathering that might have included older monks. Regarding the latter point, it should be noted that, even today, pilgrims of all ages walk on foot to the White Monastery from villages over 20 km away.

²⁶ Shenoute, *Good is the Time for Launching the Boat to Sail*: Bibliothèque nationale, Paris, MS Copte 68 (= BN Copte 68), fos. 50^r–64^v. Fragments of this sermon survive in two other manuscripts: (1) Leiden, Rijkmuseum van Oudheden, no. 105, fos. 184–5 (Leipoldt, *Sinuthii Archimandritaë*, CSCO 42, 68); and (2) Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, MS Copte 130⁵, fo. 78 (Leipoldt, *Sinuthii Archimandritaë*, CSCO 42, 173–6). On this text, see Stephen Emmel, *Shenoute's Literary Corpus*, ii. 675, 862–3.

²⁷ On the basis of observations made by O. H. E. Burmester (*The Egyptian or Coptic Church*, 22) and A. J. Butler (*Ancient Coptic Churches of Egypt*, ii. 5, 16–17), Janet Timbie argued in her article, 'A Liturgical Procession', 432–6, that the θαλασσα was a receptacle under the altar that contained Shenoute's bodily relics. More recently, Grossmann ('Zum Grab des Schenute', 86 ff.) has taken exception to this interpretation on the basis of the Arabic *vita* of Shenoute (ed. Amélineau, *Monuments*, i. 474–5), which tells the story of how the saint's body was exhumed from its original resting place and deposited in a secret location that was unknown to the larger community. However, other medieval sources give evidence of the veneration of Shenoute's body at the monastery: see *History of the Churches and Monasteries of Egypt*, fo. 82b (Evetts, 104–5 (text), 235–7 (trans.)); and *History of the Patriarchs* (Evetts, PO 5/1, 96–7). While both texts refer to the deposition of Shenoute's remains in an exquisitely wrought chest made of teak-wood, the *History of the Churches and Monasteries* reports that the body of Shenoute was removed from the box in the twelfth century and 'concealed in the ground in an unconsecrated chamber near the altar' (fo. 82b). While Grossmann takes these texts as evidence for locating Shenoute's bodily relics in the main church of the White Monastery, there is actually considerable ambiguity in the *History of the Churches and Monasteries* regarding the locus of veneration. Having just introduced 'the monastery of the great saint Sinuthius, near Ikhmīm' and its 'very large church', the author of the *History* notes that 'the body of the great saint Sinuthius . . . is in a monastery at the top of the mountain called Atribah' (fo. 82b). The fact that this latter location is not marked by a definite article seems to distinguish it from the area associated with the main monastic church.

finally, the pilgrims exit the church, circumambulate the building,²⁸ and assemble once again (probably still outside the church) to the accompaniment of prayers, petitions, and the recitation of more biblical passages.

By this time, evening has begun to approach, and the procession enters its third and final stage with a descent down the mountain to ‘the monastery of our holy father Apa Shenoute’ where the pilgrims congregate at the ‘Church of the Virgin and St George’.²⁹ This church may be securely identified as the main church at the White Monastery, the only structure from late antiquity that has survived largely intact until the present day. While the central sanctuary of this church is dedicated to Shenoute himself, the two side chapels to the north and south bear the names of St George and the Virgin Mary.³⁰ It is into these two side chapels that the early medieval ritual participants enter. As they do so, they sing hymns hailing Mary as the Mother of God (ΘΕΟΔΩΚΟΣ), gaze upon an icon or ‘portrait’ (ΛΙΜΗΝ) of St George, and continue to listen to the chanting of Scripture.³¹ At this point, probably not too far from the end of the rite, the surviving text breaks off.

Grossmann (‘Zum Grab des Shenutes’, 93 ff.) himself has proposed two alternatives to Timbie’s reading of ΘΑΛΑССΑ. First (96–7), he raises—and then rejects—the possibility that ΘΑΛΑССΑ derives from a story in Ps.-Besa’s *Life of Shenoute* (22–3; Leipoldt, CSCO 41, 18; trans. Bell, 49) in which Jesus, in response to a petition from Shenoute, causes the desert to fill with water and ‘a ship to come sailing by’ the place where the saint was sitting. That place came to be marked by an ‘overhanging outcrop of rock’ with a hole pierced through by Shenoute’s finger and thumb that allowed him to tie the boat that Jesus was captaining. While Grossmann ultimately disavows this referent for the term ΘΑΛΑССΑ, I think that this reading at least raises an intriguing alternative possibility—that the Greek loanword may have referred to an area marked by a rocky outcropping where Shenoute was thought to have encountered Christ and where Christ performed the miracle of producing a flood in the desert. (Old photographs show that before the building of the Aswan Dam the floodplain of the Nile extended almost up to the doorstep of the White Monastery.)

Instead, however, Grossmann backs the idea that ΘΑΛΑССΑ refers to the main well at the White Monastery. This interpretation has the benefit of supporting his contention that the processional activity described in BN Copte 68 was organized in the immediate vicinity of the main church at the White Monastery. Thus, for Grossmann, the τοπος of Apa Shenoute must be associated not with Shenoute’s desert retreat, but with the monastic cell that he occupied during his later years after he returned to the central monastic settlement (97–8). Unfortunately, while the main well of the monastery is known from the archaeological record, Grossmann fails to present a compelling case for its role and function within the processional liturgy of BN Copte 68.

In response to Grossmann’s objections and in recognition of the problems involved in reconstructing the location and history of Shenoute’s remains, Timbie has recently presented a revised version of her original theory. While she defends her reading of ΘΑΛΑССΑ as having the function of a reliquary, she raises the possibility that in the case of the processional rite of BN Copte 68, the ΘΑΛΑССΑ of St Shenoute may have contained not his bodily relics, but rather a secondary or derivative relic, such as one of the pieces of clothing that he so famously discarded during his lifetime: Janet Timbie, ‘Once More Into the Desert of Apa Shenoute: Further Thoughts on BN 68’, Paper presented at the Souhag Symposium, Souhag, Egypt, February 2006.

²⁸ BN Copte 68, fo. 82^r.

²⁹ Ibid. fos. 100^r, 137^r–139^r.

³⁰ O. Meinardus, *Two Thousand Years of Coptic Christianity*, 229–30.

³¹ BN Copte 68, fos. 139^v–141^v; see also MS Insinger, no. 44, 158^{r-v} (Pleyte and Boeser, *Manuscripts coptes du Musée d’antiquités des Pays-Bas*, 244–6), where the scriptural readings continue.

Biblical Readings and Ritual Re-enactments

How then did this processional liturgy mediate incarnational theology to the faithful? It did so through litanies of biblical readings connected to the life of Christ, and through the verbal and visual presentation of Shenoute as a holy exemplar of christological assimilation and enactment. In BN Copte 68, the recitation of prayers and biblical texts is carefully coordinated with the physical movement of the pilgrim participants through the physical space of the monastic domains. Thus, when the group congregates at ‘the corner of the master’, the archdeacon leads a litany of passages linked by common themes that reinforce the significance of that action: passages including key words or phrases such as ‘gathering’, ‘in the name of the Lord’, ‘beginning’ (ΑΡΧΗ and ΖΟΥΕΙΤΕ), ‘first’, ‘day’, ‘thousands’, ‘ten thousands’, and ‘crowds’.³² Later, when they arrive at the Etrigamou church, texts highlighting ‘the door of the place’, ‘here’, ‘hall’, (ΑΥΛΗ), ‘open’, and ‘door’ are read aloud.³³ Further scriptural passages with themes connected to food or eating may have designated that second station as a place for sharing a simple midday meal: e.g. ‘table’, ‘readiness’, ‘bread’, ‘salt’, ‘vinegar’, ‘herbs’, ‘olive’, ‘honey’, ‘food’, ‘water’, ‘pots/jars’, ‘wash’, ‘wine’, etc.³⁴ Additional biblical texts featuring water metaphors—‘boat’, ‘sea’, ‘wave’, ‘spring’, ‘water’—accompany the group’s movement to the so-called ‘sea’ (reliquary) of St Shenoute in that same church.³⁵ Finally, during the descent to the main church, the chanting of verses on the themes of ‘light’, ‘lamp’, ‘guide’, and ‘evening’ would have corresponded to the waning hours of the day as the procession neared its conclusion.³⁶

Even more significant than the way that these biblical texts functioned as spatial and temporal markers for the pilgrims’ movement is the way that such readings (1) marked the procession as a way of revisiting and re-enacting key events in the Gospels, and (2) marked the revered holy man Shenoute as the *imitator Christi* par excellence. Indeed, the entire rite—which was notably celebrated at the beginning of the second week of the forty-day fast before Holy Week and Easter—was scripted so as to lead the participants vicariously along Christ’s path to Jerusalem, with the story of the Transfiguration (Matt. 17: 1–13) serving as the distinctive framing event for their journey.

Thus, soon after the people gather at ‘the corner of the master’, the archdeacon recites Psalm 122: 1–4, the ‘song of ascents’ that celebrates the Israelite tribes’ action of going up to Jerusalem for worship in the Temple, followed by an excerpt from the transfiguration narrative in Matthew 17.³⁷ The reading ends halfway through the story at verse 9, where Jesus points forward to the

³² BN Copte 68, fos. 4^v–7^v.

³³ Ibid. fos. 32^r–34^r.

³⁴ Ibid. fos. 34^r–35^v.

³⁵ Ibid. fos. 66^v–68^v.

³⁶ Ibid. fos. 128^v–131^v.

³⁷ Ibid. fos. 8^r–9^v.

resurrection when he admonishes the disciples, ‘Don’t tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.’³⁸ After a gap in the manuscript, one finds a series of songs related to the story from the book of Daniel about the three young men preserved from bodily harm in the fiery furnace.³⁹ The inclusion of these hymns was probably designed to echo important thematic elements in the transfiguration story: as in the case of Jesus who was joined by Moses and Elijah on the mount, the tale in Daniel tells of three figures (Shadrak, Meshak, and Abednego) whose bodies are illuminated and transformed—rendered (at least temporarily) incorruptible—to the wonderment of onlookers.⁴⁰ Finally, after these songs and right before the group embarks for the second station, there is a concluding reading of John 12: 12–36, the story of Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem.⁴¹ It should be noted that both the transfiguration and triumphal entry narratives are specially marked in the Coptic manuscript by the presence of parallel Arabic translations in the right margin, perhaps an indication that in the medieval period these key texts were heard in both languages by the entire assembly.

Christologically speaking, what is interesting about this confluence of biblical texts is the way that it would have immediately called the participants’ attention to the human body of Christ—a body divinely transfigured and preserved from the corruption of death. But not only that, these texts also would have prompted the ritual participants to reorient themselves towards their own bodily participation in these events—a participation mimetically re-enacted in the local performance of a liturgical procession that promised to lead them ‘up to the mountain’ (envisioned as the site of Christ’s transfiguration) and ‘to Jerusalem’ (envisioned as the site of Christ’s final ascension and glorification). This concern for participation is evoked in the language of the text read from John 12, where Christ speaks to the crowd and says, ‘But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself’ (12: 32). A few verses later in the same passage quoted from John, Christ’s instructions would have taken on a special relevance for pilgrims who had gathered early in the day for a liturgical procession that would last into the evening: ‘Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you . . . Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light’ (12: 32, 35–6).⁴² Here, I would suggest, the ritual re-enactment of Gospel events, mediated through a syllabus of selected biblical texts, is presented as a mimetic means to

³⁸ BN Copte 68, fo. 9^v.

³⁹ *Ibid.* fos. 23^r–27^r.

⁴⁰ Shadrak, Meshak, and Abednego are later mentioned by name in a litany of blessings intoned at the Etrigamou Church (BN Copte 68, fo. 86^v).

⁴¹ BN Copte 68, fos. 28^r–30^r.

⁴² *Ibid.* fos. 29^v–30^r.

participate in Christ's virtues as divine Son, especially his attributes as light and light-giver.

In stages two and three of the procession, the liturgical script further underscores the paradigmatic role the transfiguration story would have played for the participants' sense of communal purpose. This is most obviously signalled by a return to the text of Matthew 17 at the end of the surviving portion of the rite. Picking up at verse 9 where the disciples begin their descent down the mountain in the company of Jesus, the cantor and participants, having likewise descended down their own mountain to the main monastic church, recite together the final five verses of the story in the gathering dusk.⁴³ The effect of this scriptural *reprise* would have been that of an *inclusio*—a structured way of marking the beginning and ending of the processional liturgy which would have crucially 'stamped' the character of the actions performed within the temporal boundaries of that ritual space.

Such a framing device would have recalled for the participants the way that the transfiguration functioned as a guiding metaphor throughout the course of the day's events. Indeed, the 'church on the mountain' named Etrigamou—the ultimate destination for the pilgrims' path of ascent and the locus for the second stage of liturgical action—is identified with the transfiguration mount in the context of the ritual. One sees this association reinforced most clearly in a series of five biblical texts read at the close of the 'assembly' (CΥΝΑΓΕ) 93^f) outside the church.⁴⁴

1. Hebrews 9: 2–10
2. 2 Peter 1: 13–19
3. Acts 7: 44–53
4. Psalm 122: 1–4
5. Matthew 16: 13–20

The first and third readings, Hebrews 9: 2–10 and Acts 7: 44–53, each focus on the Old Testament 'tabernacle' and its supersession through Christ. The same word in Coptic (CΚΥΝΗ = Gr. σκηνη) is used in Matthew 17 to refer to the three shelters or dwelling places (ΝΩΘΟΜΝΤ ΝCΚΥΝΗ) that Peter offers to build on the transfiguration mount for Christ and his companions, Moses and Elijah.⁴⁵ The fourth text—Psalm 122: 1–4 on the theme of going up to Jerusalem—had been read earlier in the rite at 'the corner of the master',

⁴³ MS Insinger 44, fo. 158^{r-v} (Pleyte and Boeser, *Manuscripts coptes*, 244–6).

⁴⁴ BN Copte 68, fos. 93^f–97^v. The specific folio references are: Hebrews 9: 2–10 (93^f–94^v); 2 Peter 1: 13–19 (94^v–95^r); Acts 7: 44–53 (95^r–96^r); Psalm 122: 1–4 (96^{r-v}); Matthew 16: 13–20 (96^v–97^v).

⁴⁵ This close verbal play may have been lost somewhat in the Arabic translation, which uses different terms to render the Coptic CΚΥΝΗ: *mazāl* in Matthew 17: 4 (8^v), and *qubbah* in Hebrews 9: 2–10 (93^f–94^v) and Acts 7: 44 (95^r).

immediately before the first recitation of the transfiguration narrative. Text five—Matthew 16: 13–20—focuses on Peter’s confession of Christ’s identity as ‘the Son of the living God’, and immediately precedes Jesus’ prediction of his own death (16: 21–28) and the transfiguration scene (17: 1–13) in the Matthean Gospel.

However, it is the second reading, from 2 Peter 1: 13–19, which features the most explicit links to this guiding theme: indeed, this text may provide a further key to understanding (1) how the Etrigamou church was imaginatively identified with the biblical Mount of the Transfiguration, and (2) how the pilgrims’ presence at that place was interpreted as a form of christological participation. The quoted section of the epistle purports to present the apostle Peter’s recollection of the transfiguration event:

It is right, as long as I am in this dwelling place (ΜΑ ΝΩΩΠΤΕ) to awake you in your memory, since I know that I will place my body in a cloud (ΣΗΠΤΕ), just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed (ΤΑΜΟ) me. . . . We beheld his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when a voice of this sort came to him in majestic glory, saying, ‘This is my Son, my beloved one. It is in him that my will (ΟΥΩΩ) dwells.’ We ourselves heard that voice when it came down from heaven, when we were with him on the holy mountain.⁴⁶

What is striking about this passage is the subtle change made to the text in 2 Peter 1: 13. The original Greek text of 2 Peter uses the term ‘tabernacle’ (σκηνήμα) as a euphemism for the body. However, at the point where one would expect the tabernacle-theme to be highlighted, the text of BN Copte 68 subtly diverges—and it does so by borrowing and inserting an image from the transfiguration story in Matthew.⁴⁷ The vision of Christ’s transfigured body being overshadowed by a cloud in Matthew 17: 5 is superimposed on the fleshly body of Peter, even as the apostle draws his readers’ (or in this case, his listeners’) attention forward to his own death. The transfiguration is appropriated as a proleptic image not only for Christ’s own ascension and glorification, but also for the anticipated glorification of human bodies in the resurrection.

⁴⁶ BN Copte 68, fos. 94^v–95^r.

⁴⁷ The inclusion of 2 Peter 1: 12–17 between the readings from Hebrews (9: 2–10) and Acts (7: 44–53) may provide evidence that the florilegium source used in the liturgy was originally compiled in Greek. In the original Greek text 2 Peter 1: 13, the writer uses the word σκηνήμα (‘tent of this body’) a derivative of σκηνή, the theme word for the surrounding two passages. Unfortunately, the text in BN Copte 68 is corrupted or confused at this point, so it is difficult to determine whether this verbal link might have been maintained at some point in the Coptic manuscript tradition related to this text (assuming there was such a tradition). This divergence of the liturgical text from the Greek original makes it even more clear that, while the processional liturgy was practised in this form, the inclusion of 2 Peter 1: 13 was motivated by its thematic emphasis on the transfiguration.

In the context of the pilgrimage procession at the White Monastery, the rhetorical effect of Peter's use of the first person plural would have been to draw the pilgrim listeners into the company of the apostles as witnesses of Christ's prevenient glorification in the body. And for well-informed listeners, including the cantor and other monks who served as guides and participants in the procession, this text might have evoked the immediately preceding context of 2 Peter 1, where the apostle presents a list of virtues—faith, goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, kindness, and love—motivated by Christ's 'divine power' and emblematic of what it meant to 'participate in (his) divine nature'. The embodiment of such christological participation was a constituent part of the theology practised in this processional rite.

Incarnational Holiness and the Veneration of Shenoute as Saint

Further evidence for how incarnational holiness was communicated and modelled in this rite may be found in the liturgical representation of Apa Shenoute and the Virgin Mary, who are both linked with the Etrigamou church through the practices of local veneration. In this 'feast of the desert of Apa Shenoute', the pilgrims came into the presence of this sainted archimandrite of the White Monastery through aural, visual, and tactile encounter. Having assembled inside the Etrigamou church, they first paused to listen as Shenoute's sermon, *Good is the Time for Launching the Boat to Sail* was read in its entirety.⁴⁸ The words of the late Shenoute would have echoed in the church with a special relevance to the day's events. Indeed, his sermon affirms that 'going up to the high mountain is good', and likens the act of visiting the place to seeking refuge with God (Copt. ΟΥΠΩΤ ΕΡΑΤ̄ ΜΠΝΟΥΤΕ; Ar. *al-iltijā' lillāh*).⁴⁹ In addition, he commends the celebration of the feast (ΠΩΑ), as well as 'bodily works' (ΝΕΖΒΗΥΕ ΝΩΜΑΤΙΚΟΝ) and 'labour' (ΓΡΑCΙΑ) performed 'until the time of evening' (ΩΑ ΠΝΑΥ ΝΡΟΥΖΕ).⁵⁰ Then the group processes to the 'sea of Apa Shenoute,' where they would have had the opportunity to see, and perhaps even touch, sacred relics connected with the saint.⁵¹

Just as the ritualized local space of the Etrigamou church is mapped onto the biblical topography of Matthew 17 as the destination of the pilgrims' ascent up the mountain, Shenoute is likewise cast in the role of key authoritative figures from the text. In the Matthean narrative, it is Moses and Elijah who appear next to the transfigured Jesus on the mount. Through the words of his

⁴⁸ BN Copte 68, fos. 50^r–64^r. ⁴⁹ Ibid. fo. 51^r.

⁵⁰ Ibid. fo. 51^r–^v. ⁵¹ Ibid. fo. 65^r.

sermon, which presents a diatribe against moral abuses and an exhortation toward ascetic obedience, Shenoute is presented as an ascetic lawgiver after the fashion of Moses. Through his embrace of a desert life of ‘self-control’ or ‘continence’ (ΕΚΡΑΤΕΙΑ),⁵² Shenoute fulfils the example of Elijah, who was stereotypically presented in late antiquity as a biblical archetype for early Christian monks.

In this context, it is no coincidence that the final reading from the transfiguration narrative, when it is resumed later in the main church of Shenoute’s monastery, focuses on the figure of Elijah. When the Matthean text states, ‘I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but they did to him whatever they wanted; so also with the Son of Man: how very many sufferings (he will suffer) at their hands,’⁵³ the pilgrims congregated in Shenoute’s church would have had their minds drawn to the close association between Shenoute and Elijah—and, by extension, between Shenoute and Christ. Indeed, in the Shenoutian sermon read at the Etrigamou church, the crowd had heard Shenoute’s own voice proclaim that monastic ‘prayer and self-control’—along with ‘taking up the cross and following the Lord’—were primary means by which one worked for Christ in the body.⁵⁴

This intimate association between Shenoute, Elijah, and Christ would have been reinforced every year during the celebration of Shenoute’s feast day at the White Monastery, when selections from the Coptic *Life of Shenoute* would have been read in worship. The editor of the Bohairic version of that work emphasizes that ‘the whole of (Shenoute’s) life and his intention were like those of Elijah the Tishbite,’ and (only a few lines later) continues by adding that Shenoute ‘bore Christ’ through the honeyed sweetness of his teachings (ΣΒΩΟΥΓΙ) and the perfection of his ‘monastic works’ (ΝΙΖΒΗΟΥΙ ΝΤΕΤΙΜΕΤΜΟΝΑΧΟC), ‘ascetic discipline’ (ΑΚΚΗCΙC), and ‘(ascetic) way of life’ (ΠΟΛΙΤΕΙΑ).⁵⁵ Thus, by visiting Shenoute’s relics at the Etrigamou church, the participants in the BN Copte 68 rite would probably have seen themselves as coming into contact with one who, even in death, bore the imprint of Christ’s life—a repository of life-giving, divine power to the faithful.

At this point, we can begin to discern how the local cult of Saint Shenoute was further tied to Marian devotion and Coptic theologies of the Incarnation.

⁵² BN Copte 68, fo. 52^v.

⁵³ MS Insinger 44, fo. 158^r, 17–21 (Pleyte and Boeser, *Manuscripts coptes*, 245).

⁵⁴ BN Copte 68, fo. 52^v.

⁵⁵ Ps.-Besa, *Life of Shenoute* 10–12 (Leipoldt, CSCO 41, 12–13; trans. Bell, 45, slightly modified). By comparing the sweetness of Shenoute’s teaching to the taste of honey, he further develops this association with Elijah via John the Baptist, whose diet in the wilderness consisted of locusts and wild honey (Matthew 3: 4). Later in the *Life*, Shenoute’s association with Elijah is verbalized by the Alexandrian archbishop Cyril when he exclaims, ‘Bless us, our holy father, the new Elijah!’ (*Life of Shenoute* 19; Leipoldt, CSCO 41, 16; trans. Bell, 48).

In the context of the processional liturgy, it is significant that immediately after the reading of Shenoute's sermon and the visit to his reliquary, the entire gathering exits the Etrigamou church and circumambulates the building while singing hymns to the Virgin Theotokos, Mary 'the Mother of God' or 'God-bearer' (Copt. $\Theta\epsilon\omicron\Delta\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron$ ~ Gr. $\Theta\epsilon\omicron\tau\omicron\kappa\omicron\varsigma$).⁵⁶ For a brief moment, the guiding metaphor of the pilgrimage rite shifts, and the participants find themselves cast in the role of the Magi visiting the birthplace of Christ. After recalling the Magi's journey to visit the Christchild, the hymns they sing continue with the words, 'Behold, the virgin has given birth and God has become a human being . . . The Light from Light has risen for us. We all have become filled with the joy of the psalms along with the Magi. O unbelievers, let us believe on account of the discovery of Christ.'⁵⁷ With this shift, the place of Shenoute's veneration is effectively conflated with the birthplace of Christ. The body of Shenoute, already marked through ascetic practice and ritual enactment as a site of transfiguration, is now reinterpreted in the light of the Incarnation event.⁵⁸ By ascending the mountain to venerate Shenoute's relics, the pilgrims discover Christ in the process of encountering one who, like Mary, 'bore Christ' in his bodily labours—and who, like Christ himself, experienced glorification in the body.

For such late antique pilgrims, this processional ritual would therefore have been a multivalent practice, with a shifting set of spatial, temporal, and textual reference points. Their movement through desert space not only would have marked the monastic domains and the relics of Shenoute as holy sites, it also would have marked the pilgrims themselves as sacralized participants in a biblical drama in which Christ's Incarnation and transfiguration were re-enacted.

IN HIS STEPS: RE-ENACTMENTS OF THE INCARNATION IN HOLY FAMILY PILGRIMAGE

For much of the remainder of this chapter, I want to shift my attention to another setting for Coptic pilgrimage practice where the Incarnation served as

⁵⁶ BN Copte 68, fos. 82–83^v. The hymns in this section are recorded in both Greek and Coptic and are drawn from the Egyptian liturgy, especially the *Theotokia*: see De Lacy O'Leary, *The Coptic Theotokia* (London: Luzac, 1923).

⁵⁷ BN Copte 68, fos. 82^v–83^r.

⁵⁸ During the visit to the Etrigamou church, the liturgy has the cantor chant a series of biblical texts on the themes of 'desert' (BN Copte 68, 65^{r-v}, $\chi\alpha\lambda\epsilon$; 66^r, $\epsilon\phi\eta\mu\omicron\varsigma$), 'cloud' (65^v–66^r), and 'cave' (68^{r-v})—terms that in this ritual context may have variously evoked images of ascetic practice, the transfiguration event, and the nativity in the minds of the listeners.

a mimetic model for ritual participation—namely, travel to sacred sites connected with the Holy Family’s flight to Egypt.⁵⁹ As in the case of the processional liturgy at the White Monastery, so too in these local traditions of Holy Family veneration one sees the fertile intersection of biblical interpretation, local geography, and incarnational piety.

The Gospel of Matthew is the earliest written source that relates the story of how Joseph took his wife and child to Egypt in order to escape the wrath of Herod. The text reads as follows:

Now after (the wise men) had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, ‘Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.’ Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, ‘Out of Egypt I have called my son.’ . . . When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, ‘Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child’s life are dead.’ Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. (Matthew 2: 13–15, 19–21)

In late antiquity, this rather spare account drew attention not only for the information it contained, but also for the information it omitted. Notably absent is any mention of where Joseph and his family might have travelled and found lodging during their purported sojourn in Egypt. In the face of this narrative gap, ancient and medieval readers diligently began to search the Old Testament prophets, and the Egyptian landscape, for further clues concerning the Holy Family’s visit. And indeed, they often found what they were looking for—signs and traces of the Family’s passing inscribed in the archaeology and natural terrain of the Nile Valley and confirmed by scriptural witness.

What resulted was a christological ‘hermeneutic of the land’⁶⁰ that came to expression through the physical act of pilgrimage itself. For early medieval pilgrims seeking to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, the motivating question was not (as it is for some contemporary Anglophone evangelical Christians) WWJD

⁵⁹ For a study of Egyptian pilgrimage related to the Holy Family, see W. Lyster, C. Hulsman, and S. Davis, *Be Thou There*, esp. 133–62 (= ch. 3, ‘Ancient Sources for the Coptic Tradition’). For a more comprehensive, diachronic investigation of how traditions related to Holy Family developed in both Christian and Islamic literature written in the ancient and medieval Near East, as well as in later European Christian sources, see Lucette Valensi, *La Fuite en Égypte*. In ch. 3 of that work (‘L’Égypte est une autre Terre sainte’, 89–113), Valensi specifically explores the sacred topography of Holy Family sites in Egypt. For other treatments of Egyptian source evidence related to this phenomenon, see Otto Meinardus, *The Holy Family in Egypt*; Gawdat Gabra, ‘Über die Flucht der heiligen Familie nach koptischen Traditionen’, 29–50; Youhanna N. Youssef, ‘Notes on the Traditions’, 48–55; Leslie B. MacCoul, ‘The Holy Family Pilgrimage in Late Antique Egypt’, 987–93; and R. P. Michel Jullien, ‘Traditions et légendes coptes’, 10–12, 20–4.

⁶⁰ Stephen J. Davis, ‘A Hermeneutic of the Land’, 329–36.

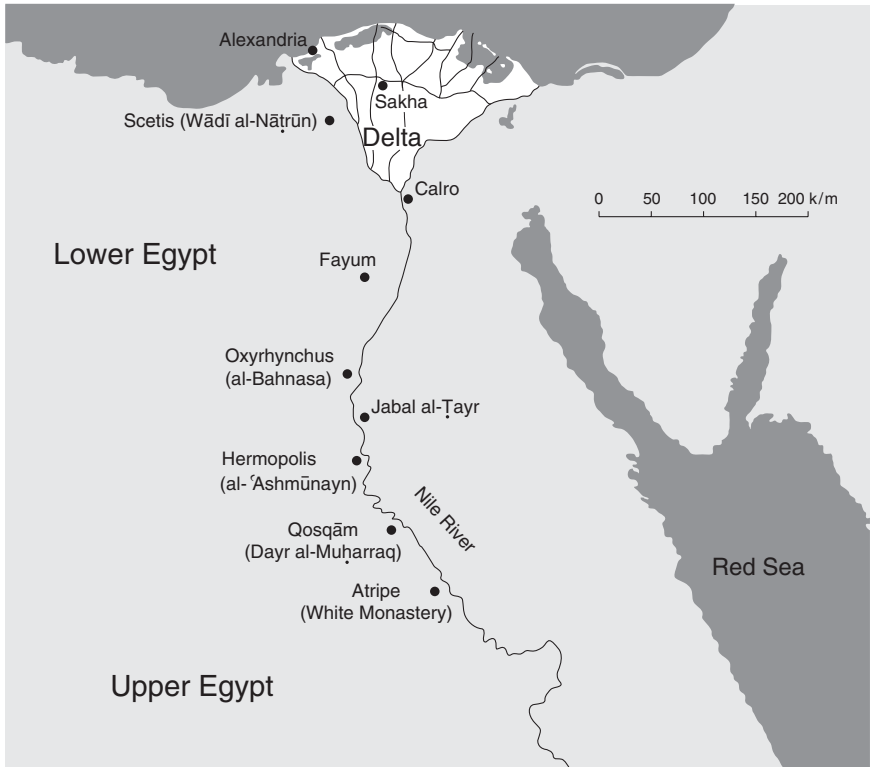


Figure 3.1. Map of Egypt.

(‘What would Jesus do?’), but rather WDJW, ‘Where did Jesus walk?’ By retracing the very steps of their Saviour, Egyptian Christians effectively sought to write themselves into the biblical narrative of the Incarnation—to lay claim to the divine presence that had so indelibly stamped and sanctified their land.

In what follows, I want to focus first on how christological interpretation of Scripture—especially Isaiah 19—functioned as a catalyst for these processes, beginning in the fourth century with such writers as Eusebius of Caesarea and Athanasius of Alexandria. Then, I will examine the origins and spread of pilgrimage related to the Holy Family in the Nile Valley with an eye to showing how notions of christological participation were communicated and enacted in local settings such as ancient Hermopolis (al-ʿAshmūnayn), Qosqām (Dayr al-Muḥarraḡ), Jabal al-Ṭayr (Jabal al-Kaff), and Sakha (ancient Xoīs in the Western Delta) (see map at Fig. 3.1). In doing so, I will pay particularly close attention to the way that such pilgrimage—along with its christological interpretation—was promoted and contested through homiletic

practice (i.e. the preaching of sermons on special feast days) and the production of hagiographical literature.

On Isaiah 19 and the Incarnation: Fourth-Century Biblical Interpretation and the Flight of the Holy Family

The fourth-century Greek writings of Eusebius of Caesarea and Athanasius of Alexandria do not provide us with evidence for actual pilgrimage practice related to the Holy Family; rather, they articulate a biblical hermeneutic that would become a primary catalyst for such pilgrimage, beginning in the fifth century and continuing until the present day. This hermeneutic was grounded in an intertextual reading of Matthew 2 in relation to the prophecy presented in Isaiah 19: 1: ‘An oracle concerning Egypt. Behold, the Lord sits on a light cloud (νεφέλη κούφη) and shall come to Egypt; the idols of Egypt shall shake at his presence and their heart shall be defeated within them’ (LXX).

In the surviving literary record, Eusebius is the first early Christian writer to interpret the Holy Family’s journey to Egypt as a fulfilment of Isaiah 19: 1. On two separate occasions in his apologetic work entitled *Proof of the Gospel* (*Demonstratio Evangelica*, c.314 CE), he trains his attention on this verse, each time using it to interpret Jesus’ coming to Egypt as an action that epitomizes or encapsulates the Incarnation of the Word and its salvific effects.⁶¹ Basically, Eusebius reads the verse as a prophecy on two levels: (1) as a straightforward prophecy of the Holy Family’s arrival in Egypt, and (2) in allegorical terms as a prophecy of the divine Incarnation, of which the Holy Family’s arrival serves as the concrete manifestation for the Egyptian people.

Eusebius’ allegorical reading of Isaiah 19: 1 centres on the cryptic image of the ‘light cloud’ (Gr. νεφέλη κούφη)—a potentially problematic detail in the text for interpreters searching for literal correspondences in the life of Jesus. In presenting his own double-layered interpretation, he offers the phrase, ‘light thickness’ (πάχος ελαφρός), as a meaningful equivalent to ‘light cloud’. Thus, he writes,

Let the sons of the Hebrews tell us, then, on what occasion after Isaiah’s time the Lord visited Egypt, and what Lord he was. For the Supreme God is one: let them say how he is said to ride on ‘light thickness,’ and to alight locally on any part of the earth. And let them interpret ‘light thickness,’ and explain why the Lord is said not to visit Egypt without it... But I contend that it can only be understood consistently, of the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ to humankind. For he, being Word of God and Power of God, fulfilled the aforesaid prediction both literally and metaphorically, visiting the land of the Egyptians on a light cloud. The name, ‘light cloud,’ is allegorically given to the visitation he made by means of the body, which he took of

⁶¹ Eusebius of Caesarea, *d.e.* 6. 20 and 9. 2 (Heikel, 285–9, 407–8; trans. Ferrar, i. 37–42, 154–6).

the Virgin and the Holy Spirit, as the Hebrew original and (the Greek translation of) Aquila clearly suggests, when he says, 'Behold, the Lord rides on light thickness, and comes to Egypt,' naming the body that came from the Holy Spirit, 'light thickness.' And surely this part of the prophecy was literally fulfilled, when . . . the Lord God the Word, uniting with the child's growth, and present in the flesh that had been furnished to him from the Holy Virgin, visited the land of the Egyptians.⁶²

Here, Eusebius plays with subtle variations and nuances in different Greek translations of the Hebrew biblical text in reading Isaiah 19 not only as a literal prophecy of the Holy Family's visit to Egypt, but also more broadly as an allegory for the Incarnation ('the visitation he made by means of the body'). Indeed, he immediately goes on to specify the verbal clues that form the basis for his figurative reading: 'His flesh was "thick" (*παχέϊα*) as representing bodily substance, "light" (*ἐλαφρά*) again through its being better than ours, and it is called 'a light cloud' (*νεφέλη κούφη*) because it was not formed of the sensuous passions of corruption, but of the Holy Spirit.'⁶³ Later in his *Proof of the Gospel*, Eusebius revisits the same text and reiterates his understanding that it 'teaches in a figurative and disguised way about the earthly universe, into which it prophesies that the Lord will come on a light cloud, a figure of the humanity that he took of the Virgin and the Holy Spirit.'⁶⁴

How Eusebius came by this allegorical interpretation of Isaiah 19: 1 remains something of a mystery. Did the interpretation originate with him, or did he borrow it from another source? Given his reputation as a compiler of source materials (both oral and written), one may suspect that he was utilizing material already in use in Christian churches. Could it be, in this case, that he was drawing on an Alexandrian or Egyptian exegetical tradition? Eusebius certainly had both a personal acquaintance with Egypt and ready access to bibliographical materials: only a few years before he wrote his *Proof of the Gospel*, he had been forced to seek refuge in Upper Egypt during the Diocletianic persecution (c. 310),⁶⁵ and his library in Caesarea (Palestine) was famously derived from the research collection of Origen, the third-century Alexandrian theologian.⁶⁶ Unfortunately, however, while such borrowing may

⁶² Ibid. 6. 20. 3–8 (Heikel, 285–6; trans. Ferrar, ii. 37–8, slightly modified and modernized).

⁶³ Ibid. 6. 20. 8 (Heikel, 286; trans. Ferrar, ii. 38).

⁶⁴ Ibid. 9. 2. 5 (Heikel, 408; trans. Ferrar, ii. 155, slightly modified and modernized).

⁶⁵ J. Quasten, *Patrology*, iii. 310. In the book, *Be Thou There* ('Ancient Sources for the Coptic Tradition', 137), I have argued that the parallels between the flight of the Holy Family and Eusebius' own flight from Palestine to Egypt in a time of persecution probably sparked his exegetical interest in Matthew 2 as a fulfilment of Isaiah 19.

⁶⁶ Origen (*Cels.* 1. 28; Borret, SC 132 (1967), 150–2) himself makes brief mention of the 'miraculous circumstances' surrounding the Holy Family's journey to Egypt. Origen's appeal to the divinely guided nature of their journey is designed to counteract the Greek philosopher Celsus' claims that Jesus' powers derived from the the magical arts he learned while in Egypt.

have been possible, there is no concrete evidence for such an allegorical reading in Egypt (or anywhere else) prior to Eusebius.

Athanasius of Alexandria provides us with our earliest evidence from Egypt for the interpretation of Matthew 2: 13–21 as a fulfilment of Isaiah 19: 1. In his treatise *On the Incarnation*, composed perhaps only two decades after Eusebius' *Proof of the Gospel*, Athanasius writes,

That the one who will come is Lord of all they (the prophets) once more announce beforehand, saying, 'Behold, the Lord sits on a light cloud and is coming to Egypt, and the idols of Egypt will be shaken by his presence' (Isaiah 19: 1). And from that place the Father calls him back, saying, 'Out of Egypt I have called my son' (Matthew 2: 15; cf. Hosea 11: 1). . . . Which of the holy prophets or of the early patriarchs from the beginning suffered death for the sake of the salvation of all? Or who was wounded and taken up for the health of all? And who among the righteous ones and kings went down to Egypt, and by means of his descent has put down the idols of Egypt?⁶⁷

While Athanasius does not attempt to allegorize the prophecy in Isaiah 19: 1, he does read this verse—and the story of the Holy Family's sojourn in Matthew 2—as intimately linked to his overarching theme of Incarnation. He does so most notably by describing the Incarnation event as 'the sojourn (*ἐπιδημία*) of the Savior'.⁶⁸ Here, Athanasius uses the same language that Eusebius repeatedly employed to describe the Holy Family's 'visit' or 'sojourn' (*ἐπιδημία*) in Egypt,⁶⁹ only in this case the Alexandrian theologian applies it to the Word's act of taking on a human body—an act by which 'all nations from every place came to know God'.⁷⁰

Furthermore, in the immediate context of his treatise (especially chs. 30–7), he aligns the purpose (and effect) of the Holy Family's visit to Egypt with that of the Word's Incarnation more broadly speaking: namely, both represent God's victory over death and the idols—a victory accomplished in and by means of Christ's body. Thus, Athanasius remarks on how Christ 'trod (death) down with his own body' (a body that the Saviour had 'fashioned' for himself into a 'temple of life'),⁷¹ and how 'by the sign of the cross all magic is stopped, and all witchcraft brought to nought, and all the idols are being deserted and left'.⁷² Indeed, for Athanasius, the evidence that Christ still lives in the body lies in the fact that he continues his work of 'expelling demons and

⁶⁷ Athanasius of Alexandria, *inc.* 33. 5; 36. 4 (Kannengiesser, 384, 394).

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* 35.6 (Kannengiesser, 388).

⁶⁹ Eusebius of Caesarea, *d.e.* 6. 20. 11 (Heikel, 287; trans. Ferrar, ii. 39). Eusebius uses the same word root in its nominal and verbal forms (*ἐπιδημεῖν*) to refer to the Holy Family's action throughout bk. 6 ch. 20 of his *Demonstratio Evangelica*.

⁷⁰ Athanasius of Alexandria, *inc.* 35. 6 (Kannengiesser, 390).

⁷¹ *Ibid.* 30. 2, cf. 31. 4 (Kannengiesser, 372, cf. 378).

⁷² *Ibid.* 31. 2 (Kannengiesser, 376).

spoiling idols' in the present day.⁷³ Such ongoing miraculous signs are understood to be the tangible consequences of the Word's act of taking on a human body 'for the salvation of all'.⁷⁴ Finally, Athanasius concludes by returning to the prophecy in Isaiah 19 to underline this point:

For it is he (the Lord) who caused the star also to signal the birth of his body; since it was fitting that the Word, coming down from heaven, should also have his sign from heaven, and it was fitting that the King of Creation, in coming forth, should be openly recognized by all the inhabited world. . . It is he that even before his appearance in the body took the victory over his demon adversaries and the trophy over idolatry. All of the nations, from every region, swearing an oath against their ancestral custom and the ungodliness of idols, are now placing their hope in Christ, and registering themselves on his side, as it is possible to see with one's own eyes. For at no other time has the ungodliness of the Egyptians ceased, except when the Lord of all, as if seated upon a cloud, came down there in the body and rendered null and void the deception of the idols, and transferred all to himself, and through himself to the Father. It is he who was crucified before the sun and (all) creation as witness, and before those who led him to death. And by his death salvation has come to all, and all creation been redeemed. He is the Life of all. . .⁷⁵

In this passage, one sees most clearly how Athanasius integrates the story of the Holy Family's flight to Egypt—read through the lens of Isaiah 19—into his schematic vision of the Incarnation as the Word's salvific victory over idolatry and over death. This set of christological connections would become determinative for later Egyptian interpreters following in Athanasius' wake. As we shall see, in late antique and early medieval Egypt, the visitation of the infant Christ came to be widely regarded, and creatively utilized, as an eminently applicable local metaphor for incarnational theology and practice.

Emmanuel in Egypt: Localizations of the Incarnation in Coptic Pilgrimage and Homiletic Practice

Despite Athanasius' exegetical interest in Matthew 2, his writings contain no concrete evidence of local pilgrimage practice related to the story of the Holy Family's flight to Egypt. The earliest such evidence dates from the turn of the fifth century and is associated with the city of Hermopolis Magna (modern al-ʿAshmūnayn) in Upper Egypt.

⁷³ Ibid. 32. 4 (Kannengiesser, 380).

⁷⁴ Ibid. 32. 6 (Kannengiesser, 380).

⁷⁵ Ibid. 37. 4–7 (Kannengiesser, 396–8).

Fallen Idols and a Sacred Tree: Hermopolis Magna/ al-ʿAshmūnayn

Sometime around the year 400, an anonymous author wrote *A History of the Monks in Egypt*, a first-person account of a journey he had undertaken a half decade earlier (in 394–5) with six other pilgrims. Their route of travel took them from Palestine to Egypt, where their goal was to visit famous monks and monastic communities along the Nile Valley. This group of seven made it at least as far south as the city of Lycopolis (Asyūt). On their northward trip down the Nile, they made a stop at ancient Hermopolis, which the author recalls in the following way:

We beheld also another holy man named Apollos in the Thebaid, within the limits of Hermopolis, to which the Savior along with Mary and Joseph came fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah: ‘Behold, the Lord is sitting on a light cloud and is coming to Egypt. The idols of Egypt will be shaken by his presence and will fall on the ground.’ For there we see the temple where, after the Savior had entered the city, all the idols fell on the ground upon their faces.⁷⁶

As in the case of Eusebius and Athanasius, the text of Isaiah 19: 1 is cited as a prophetic witness to the veracity of the Holy Family’s visit to Egypt. However, here the writer embellishes the quotation slightly: the idols will not only ‘be shaken’ by the Lord’s presence (as in the original text), but also will ‘fall to the ground’. For the pilgrim author, this added detail is significant, for it provides a more tangible link to the local archaeology of late antique Hermopolis. During their visit, he and his compatriots were apparently shown the ruins of a Pharaonic temple as visible proof for the Holy Family’s passing.⁷⁷

Another source provides additional information about Hermopolite pilgrimage practice related to the Holy Family in the fifth century. The historian Sozomen, writing c. 439–50, records a local tradition concerning a holy tree that came to be endowed with healing properties as a result of Christ’s stay in the city:

At Hermopolis, in the Thebaid, is a tree called Persis of which the branches, the leaves, and the least portion of the bark are said to heal diseases, when touched by the sick; for it is related by the Egyptians that when Joseph fled with Christ and Mary, the holy mother of God, from the wrath of Herod, they went to Hermopolis; when entering at the gate, this largest tree, as if not enduring the advent of Christ, inclined to the ground and worshiped him. I relate precisely what I have heard from many sources concerning this tree.

⁷⁶ *History of the Monks of Egypt* 8. 1–8 (Festugière, 1971), 41.

⁷⁷ In ‘Ancient Sources for the Coptic Tradition’ (138–40), I raise the possibility that these ruins were associated with a temple dedicated to the Egyptian god Thoth that was later converted into a church dedicated to the Virgin Mary. A twelfth-century source documents ‘an ancient temple near the southern gate’ of Hermopolis containing ‘a church called after the Lady, the Pure Virgin Mary’ that was associated with Holy Family devotion: see *History of the Churches and Monasteries of Egypt*, fo. 77a; Evetts, 97 (text) and 221 (trans.).

I think that this phenomenon was a sign of the presence of God in the city; or perhaps, as seems most probable, the tree—which had been worshiped by the inhabitants after the pagan custom—was shaken because the demon who had been an object of worship started up at the sight of (Christ) . . . it was moved of its own accord; for at the presence of Christ, the idols of Egypt were shaken, even as Isaiah the prophet had foretold. On the expulsion of the demon, the tree was permitted to remain as a monument of what had occurred, and was endowed with the property of healing those who believed. The inhabitants of Egypt . . . testify to the truth of these events, which took place among themselves.⁷⁸

Sozomen's account of this miraculous tree that provided healing to sick pilgrims who touched its branches, leaves, or bark seems to have been drawn from oral traditions originating in Egypt: he confesses that he is relating what he has 'heard from many sources', including the testimony of 'the inhabitants of Egypt'.⁷⁹ Indeed, his use of Isaiah 19: 1 as an interpretative key for evaluating local practice conforms to earlier exegetical precedent: in this case, it is the Persis tree that is understood as an idol that had been 'shaken' and consequently sanctified (transformed into a sacred marker) due to the proximity of the infant Christ.

These accounts of a fallen temple and a tree bent low in honour of the Holy Family provide historians with a glimpse into the discursive processes by which the Egyptian church sought to Christianize the Nilotic landscape. It is no coincidence, I think, that these local traditions were emerging at the end of the fourth and in the first half of the fifth century, a time of especially intensive anti-pagan campaigns sponsored by the ecclesiastical leadership in Alexandria and often carried out in local settings by groups of monks. Under the leadership of the archbishop Theophilus (385–412 CE), groups of monks helped ransack and dismantle temple sites in Alexandria, including the famous Serapeum in 391.⁸⁰ Similar anti-pagan unrest subsequently broke out in Upper Egypt: indeed, during the period from 391 to around 420, Shenoute and the monks at the White Monastery actively sought to suppress pagan activity around Panopolis, even to the extent of forcibly removing idols from private homes and tearing down local temples.⁸¹ Legislation issued by the emperor Theodosius in 399 officially authorizing the destruction and removal of pagan temples may have provided an added impetus for such

⁷⁸ Sozomen, *History of the Church* 5. 21. 8–11 (Bidez and Hansen, 229; trans. NPNF, 2nd ser., ii. 343, slightly modified).

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* (my italics).

⁸⁰ *Apophthegmata Patrum*, Greek alphabetic version, Theophilus 3 (PG 65.200A); Libanius, *Pro Templis* 8 (Van Loy, 22); John of Nikiu, *Chronicle* 78. 42–7 (trans. Charles, 74–5); *History of the Patriarchs* (PO 1/4. 419, 426).

⁸¹ Emmel, 'From the Other Side of the Nile', 111–13; David Frankfurter, 'Things Unbefitting Christians', 279; and Heike Behlmer, 'Historical Evidence from Shenoute's *De extremo iudicio*', 13–15.

activity.⁸² In the *History of the Monks of Egypt* and in Sozomen, one observes how the practice of pilgrimage could contribute to the same socio-religious goals: by visiting the ruins of a pharaonic temple and by taking the leaves and twigs of an ancient tree home as healing relics, Egyptian Christian pilgrims were effectively exorcizing the ghosts (or demons) of the past and reclaiming the architectural and natural landscape as holy ground.⁸³

Later Coptic hagiographical sources from the fifth to the ninth centuries inclusive attest to the ongoing vitality of the Holy Family tradition in al-ʿAshmūnayn.⁸⁴ At the same time, however, the practices associated with Holy Family devotion spread rapidly to various surrounding towns and districts, and each in turn laid claim to local stories about the miraculous deeds thought to have been performed by Christ and the Virgin while visiting the area. One early example of the spread of such devotion is found right across the river from al-ʿAshmūnayn on the east bank of the Nile in the town of Dayr Abū Ḥinnis. There, in a church whose iconographic programme of scenes from the life of Christ dates to the fifth or sixth century, one finds a wall painting of the Holy Family's Flight in the midst of other scenes from Christ's infancy—Herod in his palace, the massacre of the innocents, and Joseph's dream in which he is warned by an angel to take his family to Egypt.⁸⁵ The badly damaged scene

⁸² *Theodosian Code* 16. 10. 16 (10 July 399): 'If there should be any temples in the country districts, they shall be torn down without disturbance or tumult. For when they are torn down and removed, the material basis for all superstition will be destroyed' (trans. Pharr, 474). Emmel ('From the Other Side of the Nile', 112 n. 79) points out possible echoes of this legislation in Shenoute's writings (Leipoldt, CSCO 73, 91 (lines 6–24); see also J. Van der Vliet, 'Spätantikes Heidentum in Ägypten', 108–9 and n. 54).

⁸³ Stephen J. Davis, 'Ancient Sources for the Coptic Tradition', 141.

⁸⁴ Hermopolis Magna came to be called Shmoun by Copts in the early medieval period. The fifth-century Coptic *Life of Shenoute* (Ps.-Besa, ch. 157) refers to the tradition that 'a woman had entered the city of Shmoun with a little boy in her arms' (Leipoldt and Crum, CSCO 41, 67. 28–68. 1; trans. Bell, 85–6). For a more detailed treatment of this text in relation to Holy Family pilgrimage in Egypt, see my discussion later in this chapter. In addition to the *Life of Shenoute*, two Coptic martyrologies make reference to the Holy Family's visit to Shmoun. In the *Martyrdom of Apater and Irai* (Hyvernat, 92. 4–5 [fo. 64]), Jesus appears to one of the martyrs in a vision and celebrates the city of Shmoun as a place 'where I received hospitality with Mary, my mother, and Joseph'. The manuscript for this work (Vatican no. 73) dates to the eighth or ninth century: see R. P. Michel Jullien, 'Traditions et legends coptes', 10. Finally, in the *Martyrdom of Paese and Thecla*, the Virgin Mary tells the martyr Thecla the story of how 'I was dwelling in the city of Shmoun, I and my little Son feeding at my breast': ed. and trans. Reymond and Barns, *Four Martyrdoms*, 57 (text), 167 (trans.); see also W. Till, *Koptische Heiligen- und Märtyrerlegenden*, vol. i/1. 80, 91. While the Pierpont Morgan MS of this text dates to the ninth century, the story of Paese and Thecla was known to the writer of a Greek papyrus from the fifth or early sixth century (*P. Berl. Sarisch.* 3).

⁸⁵ On this painting, see J. Clédat, 'Notes archéologiques et philologiques', 51, pl. 2; A. Badawy, *Coptic Art and Archaeology*, 248; M. Rassart-Debergh, 'La Peinture copte avant le XIIe siècle', 238 ff.; ead., 'Painting, Coptic Mural', *CE* vi. 1874; M.-H. Rutschowskaya, 'Le Massacre des innocents et la fuite en Égypte', 53–4 (no. 58); N. Thierry, 'Les Peintures de Deir Abou Hennis', 5–16; G. Gabra, 'Über die Flucht der heiligen Familie', 49; and W. Lyster, 'Coptic Egypt and the Holy Family', 12–13.

of the flight shows Joseph walking beside the Virgin who sits upon a donkey with the Christchild in her lap. In the background, a tree is depicted, perhaps a representation of the Persis tree at Hermopolis/al-ʿAshmūnayn. This iconographic programme shows how the story of the Holy Family was visually depicted as an integral episode in the Gospel accounts of the Incarnation.

In what follows, I will examine the development of Holy Family devotion at four other localities in Upper, Middle, and Lower Egypt: (1) Qosqām (Dayr al-Muḥarraḡ), (2) Jabal al-Ṭayr (Jabal al-Kaff), (3) Pāy ʾĪsūs (al-Bahnasa), and (4) Sakha and the Egyptian Delta. My focus will be on the homiletic traditions associated with pilgrimage at these locales and the way that incarnational metaphors were utilized to frame early medieval pilgrims' sense of embodiment, place, and mimetic practice.⁸⁶

The Holy Mountain: Qosqām/Dayr al-Muḥarraḡ

The first of these places—the town of Qosqām (Dayr al-Muḥarraḡ)—emerged as the southernmost location associated with the Holy Family's journey in early medieval sources. Only 36 km south of Hermopolis, it would have been one of the earliest sites after al-ʿAshmūnayn to have developed its own set of pieties and practices connected with the Family's visitation.⁸⁷ The main source for our knowledge of early pilgrimage to Qosqām comes from a homily known as the *Vision of Theophilus*.⁸⁸ As its title suggests, the *Vision* is attributed to Theophilus of Alexandria and contains an account of a Marian revelation that

⁸⁶ The homiletic texts that I will be analysing below bear a close genealogical relationship to one another, probably representing different stages of traditionalary development. For an analysis of these sermons as a literary 'cycle', see G. Giamberardini, *Il culto mariano in Egitto*, i. 170–1, ii. 37–72.

⁸⁷ On the pilgrimage tradition at Qosqām, see L. B. MacCough, 'The Holy Family Pilgrimage in Late Antique Egypt', 987–93; S. Timm, *Das christlich-koptische Ägypten in arabischer Zeit*, v. 2180–91; and S. Davis, 'Ancient Sources', 144–7.

⁸⁸ M. Geerard, *Clavis apocryphorum Novi Testamenti*, 34 (no. 56). Originally composed in Coptic, the *Vision of Theophilus* is preserved only in Arabic, Syriac, and Ethiopic versions. The earliest surviving Arabic manuscript of the text (Vat. ar. 698, fos. 102^v–131^r), which dates to the year 1371 CE, was edited by M. Guidi, 'La omelia di Teofilo di Alessandria', 381–91 (introduction), 441–69 (text). Expanded Arabic recensions have been published in *Kitāb mayāmir wa ʿajāʾib al-ʿadhrā*, 81–106, and by A. Guidi, in *Rendiconti della Reale Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei*, 217–37 (=Vat. ar. 170, fos. 195^f–219^f). For additional discussions of the manuscript tradition related to this work, see G. Graf, *GCAL* i. 229–32; and G. Gabra, 'Über die Flucht der heiligen Familie', 40. For the Ethiopic version, see E. A. Wallis Budge, *Legends of Our Lady Mary the Perpetual Virgin*, 61–80. An edition based on three extant Syriac manuscripts—Mingana Syr. 5 (1479 CE), Mingana Syr. 48 (1906 CE; copied from a MS dated to 1757 CE), and Borgian Syr. 128 (1720 CE)—has been published by A. Mingana, 'Vision of Theophilus', 1–8 (introduction), 8–43 (English trans.), 44–92 (Syriac text); cf. Guidi, 'La omelia', 15–64 (a transcription of Borgian Syr. 128); and F. Nau, 'La Version syriaque de la Vision de Théophile', 125–32. This Syriac tradition of the text is dependent on an Arabic Vorlage, but it contains some glaring lacunae. In a previous publication (S. Davis, 'Ancient Sources', 154, 158 n. 29), I surmised that

he experienced when praying in the upper chamber of a house that Jesus, Mary, and Joseph were believed to have occupied while visiting Qosqām.⁸⁹ Theophilus' successor, Cyril, is credited with recording the words of this homily for posterity.⁹⁰ While these authorial–editorial attributions seek to imbue the work with an authoritative Alexandrian pedigree, in fact the composition of the work certainly postdates the time of Theophilus and Cyril. The *Vision* was originally written in Coptic probably sometime between the sixth and eighth centuries.⁹¹

The *Vision of Theophilus* notably appropriates key elements of the Holy Family folklore that originated at Hermopolis and adapts those stories to the particularities of the local topography at Qosqām. Thus, while the *Vision* incorporates the earlier traditions regarding the sacred tree and the fall of the statues at Hermopolis (al-ʿAshmūnayn), it also expands upon those traditions by generating parallel narratives that mark the location of the monastery near Qosqām as a holy site. First, an idol with seven veils ‘fell from the roof of the temple down to the ground’ upon the Holy Family’s entry into the town (an event which prompts the temple priests to chase them away with rods and axes).⁹² Second, just south of town, Jesus plants Joseph’s olive-staff and it grows into a tree which stands ‘as a sign (ʿalāmah) in this place for ever.’⁹³

Alongside these borrowed and adapted traditions, new stories arose in the environs of Qosqām itself that provide a further glimpse into the relation between local landscape and pilgrimage practice. The author of the *Vision* comments on a spring that formed where Mary’s tears had fallen and a well in which Jesus bathes, both of which were thought to be endowed with miraculous

this Syriac translation may in fact predate the extant Arabic recensions of the text. I now think that the situation is more complicated and that the Syriac may present at certain points a slightly epitomized translation of an Arabic manuscript quite similar to our earliest Arabic witness. At other places, however, the Arabic text does seem to present expanded (i.e. later) readings; in addition, the earliest Arabic witness has a missing section near the end, for which the Syriac serves to fill in the gap. With these textual difficulties in mind, I will principally rely on Guidi’s first Arabic edition (1917; = Vat. ar. 698), providing my own translations of that text. However, I will also cite relevant parallels in Mingana’s more accessible Syriac edition, and on occasion I will utilize that Syriac text for my primary readings.

⁸⁹ *Vision of Theophilus*: Guidi, ‘La omelia’, 448; Mingana, ‘Vision of Theophilus’, 17 (trans.) and 55 (Syriac text).

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*: 469; Mingana, ‘Vision of Theophilus’, 42 (trans.) and 92 (Syriac text).

⁹¹ On the Coptic composition of the *Vision*, see Guidi, ‘La omelia’, 385–6. For estimated datings of the work to the eighth century (or earlier), see L. MacCoull, ‘The Holy Family Pilgrimage in Late Antique Egypt’, *passim*, and A. Boud’hors and R. Boutros, ‘La Sainte Famille à Ġabal al-Ṭayr et l’homélie du Rocher’, 65–7).

⁹² *Vision of Theophilus*: Guidi, ‘La omelia’, 81–2; Mingana, ‘Vision of Theophilus’, 24–5 (trans.) and 65–6 (Syriac text).

⁹³ *Ibid.*: 82; Mingana, ‘Vision of Theophilus’, 26 (trans.) and 67 (Syriac text). In the Syriac text, the tree stands as a ‘blessing’ or ‘benediction’ (*būrākā*) in that place.

healing properties for pilgrim supplicants.⁹⁴ In the case of the well, which apparently served as a source of drinking water as well as a place for bathing, the writer notably casts it as a distinctively Egyptian holy site, comparing its sweetness to that of the river Nile.

However, the house where the Holy Family was thought to have stayed was the central focus of devotional practice. The child Jesus blesses the structure and predicts that a ‘sanctuary’ will be established on the site, where ‘people will offer sacrifices and ex-votos . . . to the Lord’ and where ‘holy monks’ will reside.⁹⁵ In this same prophetic discourse, he goes on to foretell the kinds of visitors who would come to the sanctuary bringing petitions—farmers, shepherds, scribes, craftsmen, as well as those who are sick, in mourning, or beset by dangers or injustice. For a historian, this list provides something of a demographic profile of ancient pilgrimage practice to the site. In addition, the *Vision* gives us information about a secondary saint’s burial shrine established for veneration at the church. During the Family’s stay in the house, a relative of Joseph named Moses travels to Egypt to warn the Family that Herod has discovered their whereabouts. When Moses dies in their presence after accomplishing his mission, Joseph interments his body just inside the entrance, where ‘his grave serves as a memorial to this day’.⁹⁶

Finally, near its conclusion, the *Vision* presents an elaborated foundation legend for the church, one that links it closely to the narrative trajectory of the Gospels. Mary tells Theophilus how, after the crucifixion, Jesus commanded ‘a luminous cloud’ to carry her and the disciples back to the ‘holy house’ outside Qosqām where they consecrated it as a church (‘there was no church built in the world before it’) before returning to Jerusalem on another cloud.⁹⁷ Here, one sees how the author of the *Vision* has creatively reworked the prophecy of the Lord’s coming to Egypt on a cloud in Isaiah 19 as an aetiological post-resurrection narrative for the founding of the church and monastery at Qosqām.⁹⁸ The tale that results is a wonderful example of intertextuality at work: its language also draws on Matthew 17 (the story of the transfiguration and God’s revelation of Jesus’ divine identity from a ‘bright cloud’) and Acts 1: 9 (the story of Christ’s ascension where ‘a cloud took him out of their sight’).⁹⁹

⁹⁴ Ibid. 85–6; Mingana, ‘Vision of Theophilus’, 29–30 (trans.) and 72–3 (Syriac text).

⁹⁵ *Vision of Theophilus*: Mingana, ‘Vision of Theophilus’, 35–6 (trans.) and 81–2 (Syriac text). There is a lacuna at this point in Guidi’s first Arabic edition (1917).

⁹⁶ *Vision of Theophilus*: M. Guidi, ‘La omelia’, 90; Mingana, ‘Vision of Theophilus’, 34 (trans.) and 80 (Syriac text).

⁹⁷ *Vision of Theophilus*: Mingana, ‘Vision of Theophilus’, 38–9 (trans.) and 86–7 (Syriac text); Guidi, ‘La omelia’, 90. Only the end of this account is preserved in Guidi’s first Arabic edition (1917); the rest is lost in a textual lacuna.

⁹⁸ Davis, ‘Ancient Sources’, 146–7.

⁹⁹ If the legend developed during the early Islamic period, as I think it probably did, then it may also reflect a Coptic attempt to present Jesus as a miracle-working competitor with

Such examples of intertextuality pervade the *Vision of Theophilus*, and they often function to map the local geography of Qosqām onto the biblical landscape—that is, to mark it as territory that is understood to be the privileged setting for the Incarnation, as territory that played host to the Word made flesh. Accordingly, throughout the *Vision*, Qosqām and the monastery established there are referred to as a ‘holy mountain’—‘this pure mountain which God chose and inhabited’.¹⁰⁰ As previously mentioned, in Coptic, the word for ‘mountain’ (ⲧⲟⲟϥ) regularly also means ‘monastery,’ a usage undoubtedly influenced by the religious geography of the Nile Valley, where monastic communities were often established beyond the cultivated valley area on the elevated desert terrain just below the High Desert cliffs. In the early medieval Egyptian church, this linguistic connection between ‘monastery’ and ‘mountain’ frequently triggered exegetical mining operations in the biblical text—attempts by Coptic interpreters to extract thematic and locative parallels from the meaning-rich veins of Scripture. Thus, the author of the *Vision* compares Qosqām to Mount Sinai where the Lord ‘illuminated us with the light of his divinity and his wondrous glory’,¹⁰¹ and to the Mount of Olives ‘which was a dwelling place for our our Lord the Word, his angels, and his pure apostles’.¹⁰² Of special note, however, the sermon also compares Qosqām to Bethlehem, the site of the nativity: ‘O you pure mountain, we saw him when he dwelled in you, and we also saw him in the manger at Bethlehem in the body with which he united himself to us from the holy Virgin Mary, the Mother of God.’¹⁰³

Therefore, the interpretative strategy of the *Vision* has two interrelated trajectories: (1) that of imaginatively merging the monastery at Qosqām with biblical *loca sancta* (Mount Sinai, the Mount of Olives, and Bethlehem),

Muhammad, who was celebrated among early medieval Muslims for his night-time journey to Jerusalem and ascension to the seventh heaven: see *al-Qurān*, Surah 17: 1. This event is also celebrated in Islamic *ḥadīth* literature: see e.g. *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* 4710 (ed. Abd al-Malik Mujahid (Cairo: Dar al-Salam, 1999), 814); and *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* 170 (ed. Mahmoud Matraji and Amira Zrein Matraji, 1A (Beirut: Dar al-Fiker, 1993), 242).

¹⁰⁰ *Vision of Theophilus*: Guidi, ‘La omelia’, 441; Mingana, ‘Vision of Theophilus’, 9 (trans.) and 45 (Syriac text).

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* 442; Mingana, ‘Vision of Theophilus’, 9 (trans.) and 45 (Syriac text). In the Syriac version, the author extols the monastery as ‘a dwelling-place to the Lord’ and praises it, saying: ‘Blessed are you, O holy mountain, which has been glorified more than all the mountains of heaven, and which has been exalted above the mountains of heaven, because the Lord came down upon this holy mountain as He came down once upon mount Sinai.’

¹⁰² *Ibid.* 442; Mingana, ‘Vision of Theophilus’, 10 (trans.) and 46 (Syriac text).

¹⁰³ *Ibid.* 442; Mingana, ‘Vision of Theophilus’, 9 (trans.) and 46 (Syriac text). In the Syriac translation, this intimate bond forged between the nativity and the Holy Family’s journey to Egypt later also comes to expression in a petitionary prayer voiced by Theophilus: ‘I beseech you to reveal to me your coming into the world and to this mountain which you visited together with your holy Virgin mother and to this desolate house in which you inhabited your habitation’ (Mingana, ‘Vision of Theophilus’, 18 (trans.) and 56 (Syriac text)). In the Arabic version (Guidi, ‘La omelia’, 449), the word ‘Egypt’ stands in the place of ‘world’.

and (2) that of grounding the Holy Family's visit to the site in the divine movement revealed in the Incarnation. However, the purpose of the sermon went beyond simple exegetical sleight-of-hand: it aimed at drawing the pilgrim listener *into* the biblical narrative. Indeed, from the perspective of the author-preacher of the *Vision*, to visit the place as a pilgrim is to reinscribe the story of the Incarnation into the land with one's own footsteps. Addressing the land itself, he extols it as sanctified ground:

You are truly the mountain of the Lord, and the house of the God of Jacob, because the one who established the law has dwelt in you with his mother, the holy Virgin Mary; and the way to this place is by faith, and everyone walks today to this derelict mountain, from towns and villages, and narrates (Syr. *meshta'eyn*) the glory of this holy and pure house. Truly this is the desert of life, this is the stretch of land chosen by the Holy Virgin, our Lady Mary, and her Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁰⁴

For visitors to Qosqām, the story of the Incarnation was written into the very beams of the church and monastery that occupied the site, and to tread its ground was to 'narrate' once more (and thereby lay claim to) the glory and the life-giving power of the Word-made-flesh.

The Church of the Rock: Jabal al-Ṭayr

The monastery at Qosqām to the south was by no means the only 'satellite' setting that drew on the early Holy Family traditions from Hermopolis (al-^ḥAshmūnayn). Other pilgrimage sites developed to the north as well—sites which evolved analogous sets of veneration practices during the early medieval period and which eventually came to form a network or itinerary of wayside stop-overs for pilgrims on their way southwards. One of earliest of these sites was the Church of the Rock at Jabal al-Ṭayr, located on the desert cliff on the eastern bank of the Nile about 48 km north of al-^ḥAshmūnayn. During the Islamic period in Egypt, the place name—Jabal al-Ṭayr (Mountain of the Birds)—derived from the ornithological observation that huge flocks of birds would often congregate on the cliff wall during feast days.¹⁰⁵ The twelfth- or thirteenth-century author of the *History of the Churches and Monasteries of Egypt* reports that 'it is wondrous thing to see the multitude of the birds, and to hear their cries, and to witness their assemblage'.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ *Vision of Theophilus*: Mingana, 'Vision of Theophilus', 10–11 (trans.) and 47 (Syriac text). Mingana notes that the sentence structure of the Syriac reflects the syntax of a 'Coptic writer'. The Arabic version (M. Guidi, 'La omelia', 443) presents a divergent (and perhaps derivative) reading at this point.

¹⁰⁵ *History of the Churches and Monasteries of Egypt*, fo. 76a: Evetts, 96 (my trans.); see also al-Maqrīzī, *al-Mawā'iz wa al-i'tibār fī dhikr al-khiṭaṭ wa al-athār* (trans. Evetts, 310–11).

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* fo. 86b: Evetts, 109 (text) and 218 (trans.).

This same text provides valuable evidence for practices of pious visitation to this church. From the valley below, pilgrims would ascend by a series of stairs to reach the church itself, which was carved out of the mountainside. Once there, they would press close to touch a palm-print visible in the rock: according to local tradition, the mountain bowed down in adoration when Jesus visited that place, and the Saviour placed his hand on the stone to prevent it from collapsing.

The natural architecture of the cave church and this story explaining the imprint of Jesus' hand in the rock early on gave rise to alternative designations for the site—Jabal al-Kaff (Mountain of the Palm-Print) and Jabal al-Kahf (Mountain of the Cave).¹⁰⁷ By drawing near to touch this handprint, pilgrims were bringing themselves into tactile contact with a derivative relic from Jesus' visit: in their eyes, the rock itself (and all of Egypt) had been sanctified—physically marked—by Christ's body.

The *History of the Churches and Monasteries* also informs us about the distribution of a natural substance produced at the site that functioned as a portable relic for pilgrims, as an enduring reminder of their visit to the church. A 'fissure' or 'fine perforation' in the rock—located right 'in the impression of the hand'—produced a black substance called collyrium or kohl (Ar. *kuḥl*) that could be extracted by the administrators of the shrine and that could make 'an indelible mark' on the body.¹⁰⁸ Derived from antimony or black oxide of manganese, collyrium has been used in Egypt from ancient times as an emolument to decorate one's eyelids or eyebrows. Here then, in this seemingly innocuous reference, we stumble across evidence for the Coptic practice of painting the skin as a form of christological veneration. Received from the palm of Jesus' own hand, as it were, this sanctified substance marked the bodies of pilgrims and functioned as a physical sign of their identification with Christ.

Such acts of veneration at Jabal al-Ṭayr would have been crucially framed by the regular patterns of liturgy and worship at the Church of the Rock. Fortunately, the surviving manuscript evidence related to this church includes an early medieval sermon that would have been preached at Jabal al-Ṭayr on feast days dedicated to the remembrance of the Holy Family. Entitled the *Homily on the Church of the Rock*, this text provides a unique glimpse into the

¹⁰⁷ For references to the name Jabal al-Kaff, see MS Dayr al-Muḥarraḡ 12/24, fos. 7^v–11^r; MS Coptic Museum, Hist. 477 (4), fos. 221^v–227^r; *History of the Churches and Monasteries of Egypt*, fos. 75b–76a (Evetts, 95–6 (text) and 217–18 (trans.)). For references to the name Jabal al-Kahf, see *History of the Churches and Monasteries of Egypt*, fo. 86a–b (Evetts, 109–10 (text) and 243–4 (trans.)); and al-Maqrīzī, *al-Mawā'iz wa al-ṛtibār fī dhikr al-khiṭaṭ wa al-athār* (trans. Evetts, 310–11)).

¹⁰⁸ *History of the Churches and Monasteries of Egypt*, fo. 75b: Evetts, 95–6 (text) and 218 (trans.).

way that notions of christological participation were reinforced through homiletic discourse and liturgical practice.

While the *Homily on the Church of the Rock* is preserved in its entirety in Arabic, fragments of the text survive in Coptic, its original language of composition.¹⁰⁹ This linguistic background is accentuated in the text itself by the authorial claims embedded in the narrative. After an extended exegetical reflection on the theme of the 'Rock' in Scripture (sects. 1–13), the sermon presents an account of a visit to Jabal al-Ṭayr made by an Alexandrian patriarchal delegation en route to consecrate a church at the Pachomian monastery at Phbow (Ar. *Qāw* or *Fāw Qiblī*).¹¹⁰ The author of this account identifies himself in the first person singular as Timothy (Aelurus), the successor to the famous fifth-century anti-Chalcedonian patriarch Diocorus of Alexandria.¹¹¹ Timothy relates that on this visit to Jabal al-Ṭayr he took with him Peter Mongus, who had served as a deacon under Dioscorus and who would eventually become Timothy's successor as anti-Chalcedonian patriarch of Alexandria. The reason given for his choice of Peter as a companion—because 'he understood the dialects of the Egyptians very well'¹¹²—is significant for understanding the self-consciously marked Egyptian character of this legend. On their journey, Peter serves as patriarchal translator and scribe: indeed, midway through the account, the discourse shifts and Peter even assumes the first-person narrator's voice for a time.¹¹³

In addition, the social backdrop of Pachomian monastic practice—along with the reverence accorded Pachomius throughout the work—further underscores the Upper Egyptian provenance of this homily. In this way, the homily maps Jabal al-Ṭayr not only onto the expanding itinerary of Holy Family sites,¹¹⁴ but also onto an Egyptian monastic geography that featured its own network of pilgrimage destinations. Despite the authorial claims embedded within the work, the *Homily*, which draws significantly on earlier traditions found in the *Vision of Theophilus*, was probably composed later—around

¹⁰⁹ Ed. and trans. into French by A. Boud'hors and R. Boutros, in PO 49/1, no. 217 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001). Boud'hors was responsible for editing and translating the Coptic version, of which only scattered fragments have been preserved (text and trans., 18–64; photographic pl. 65–83). Two versions of the fully preserved Arabic text were edited and translated by Boutros (text B, 86–165; text GT, 166–207). For an analysis of the contents of this homily, see also their article, 'La Sainte Famille à Ġabal al-Ṭayr et l'homélie du Rocher', 59–76.

¹¹⁰ *Homily on the Church of the Rock* 1 (Boutros, PO 49/1 (2001), 86).

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* 14 (Boutros, PO 49/1 (2001), 104).

¹¹² *Ibid.* 15 (Boutros, PO 49/1 (2001), 106).

¹¹³ *Ibid.* 34 ff. (Boutros, PO 49/1 (2001), 140 ff.).

¹¹⁴ In addition to al-Ashmūnayn and Qosqām, the *Homily* also refers to a series of other sites that had come to be incorporated into the itinerary of Holy Family pilgrimage, including Basta, al-Bahnasa (see below), and Itsa: see *Homily on the Church of the Rock* 23–32 (Boutros, PO 49/1 (2001), 118–38).

the seventh or eighth century—in the nearby Pachomian monastery at Phbow, which would have served as an institutional patron for the pilgrimage feasts celebrated at Jabal al-Ṭayr.¹¹⁵

My primary concern here, however, is to trace out the ways that pilgrimage practice itself was seen as an enactment of incarnational theology. As in the case of the *Vision of Theophilus* from Qosqām, the *Homily on the Church of the Rock* links Christ's coming to Egypt—and specifically to Jabal al-Ṭayr—with the Word's action in the Incarnation. The patriarch Timothy is said to have preached this sermon in order to give honour to 'the pure Virgin Mary on account of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ to the land of Egypt, . . . (and) this rock which bears the name of our Lord Jesus Christ as a sign of his coming to Egypt in the body',¹¹⁶ For Egypt, the salvific effects of the Incarnation and the flight to Egypt are one and the same. The land of the Nile 'has been justified through Christ': formerly under a curse, it has been 'bestowed with honor' (*mukarram*) by receiving the footsteps (and handprint) of the Lord.¹¹⁷

The *Homily on the Church of the Rock* underscores this link between the Flight and the Incarnation by highlighting the appearance of *a star in Egypt* to mark Jesus' birth.¹¹⁸ Thus, when the Holy Family arrives in al-ʿAshmūnayn, they are told by the locals that 'the rays of his star had shined on that place', which served as a reminder of the nativity for all of Egypt.¹¹⁹ Later, when an imperial official visits the Rock in the time of the patriarch Timothy, 'a wondrous sign descended from heaven' in the form of a star that 'came down and settled in the middle of the imprint of the right hand of the Lord'.¹²⁰ Shortly afterwards, when Timothy himself visits the Pachomian community at Phbow to consecrate the church there, 'a star appeared in the sky, just like a lamp, . . . suspended above the place of work' at the monastery.¹²¹ In these three episodes, the sites of al-ʿAshmūnayn, Jabal al-Ṭayr, and the Pachomian settlement at Phbow are viewed in light of—and indeed replicate—Bethlehem and the place of the nativity. In the context of such celestial signs, to perform the act of pilgrimage to these sites is to be cast in the role of the Magi, following the star to catch a glimpse of the Christchild.

Perhaps most markedly, this intimate connection between the Incarnation and the flight to Egypt is ultimately forged through the preacher's exegetical

¹¹⁵ On questions of literary influence, date of composition, and ties to Pachomian monasticism, see Boud'hors and Boutros, 'La Sainte Famille à Ġabal al-Ṭayr et l'homélie du Rocher', esp. 65–76.

¹¹⁶ *Homily on the Church of the Rock* 1 (Boutros, PO 49/1 (2001), 86).

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.* 1 (Boutros, PO 49/1 (2001), 88).

¹¹⁸ Boud'hors and Boutros, 'La Sainte Famille à Ġabal al-Ṭayr et l'homélie du Rocher', 63–4.

¹¹⁹ *Homily on the Church of the Rock* 30 (Boutros, PO 49/1 (2001), 132).

¹²⁰ *Ibid.* 40 (Boutros, PO 49/1 (2001), 148).

¹²¹ *Ibid.* 42 (Boutros, PO 49/1 (2001), 150).

reflection on the biblical theme of the 'Rock'. The preacher of the sermon quotes or alludes to a series of scriptural passages linked by this common motif, beginning with Daniel 2: 45 ('I have seen a rock from which was cut a stone without human hands') and Matthew 7: 24 ('Whoever hears my word and keeps it is like a man who built his house upon the rock').¹²² Jabal al-Ṭayr is celebrated as 'more exalted' and 'more honorable' than its Old Testament forebears, including the rock that provided water and honey to Moses and the Israelites in the wilderness (Exod. 17: 6; Deut. 32: 13).¹²³ Of particular note, the preacher makes a point of identifying the cliff at Jabal al-Ṭayr with the Mount of Transfiguration by playing on the themes of 'cloud' and 'rock' as they appear in Matthew 17: 1–13 (cf. Mark 9: 2–13).¹²⁴ Quoting God's words spoken from the cloud in Matthew 17: 5 ('This is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him'), he goes on to evoke the image of the two prophets glorifying the Son while riding 'on the chariot of the clouds' and the three apostles standing 'on the rock below the mountain' witnessing the revelation of the Son's divine identity.¹²⁵ In a final apocryphal embellishment on the transfiguration story in Matthew, Jesus, seeing that 'the mountains reeled and the stones shook violently' at his presence, 'stretched out his hand to the mountains' and 'placed his hand on the rocks and stones' in order to calm them and restore them to their places—the same action that he is said to have performed at Jabal al-Ṭayr as a child when he stopped the mountain from falling into the Nile.¹²⁶ Here again, an Egyptian pilgrimage locale is read onto the biblical topography, and (as in the case of the White Monastery) is presented as a site of transfiguration for those who come to touch the rock with their own hands.

In the end, this florilegium is designed to help the listeners imaginatively identify themselves with the rock at Jabal al-Ṭayr, and, by extension, with Christ the 'Rock'.¹²⁷ The terms of this christological participation are negotiated—

¹²² *Homily on the Church of the Rock 2* (Boutros, PO 49/1 (2001), 90).

¹²³ *Ibid.* 4–5 (Boutros, PO 49/1 (2001), 92).

¹²⁴ *Ibid.* 5–6 (Boutros, PO 49/1 (2001), 92–4).

¹²⁵ *Ibid.* 6 (Boutros, PO 49/1 (2001), 92–4).

¹²⁶ *Ibid.* 7 (Boutros, PO 49/1 (2001), 94); see also the account of Jesus' arrival to Jabal al-Ṭayr, which describes how when he 'stretched out his hand' to calm the waves of the Nile the mountain bowed down in reverence before him and carried the family to the cliffside (*ibid.* 25; Boutros, 122–4), and the account of his departure, which describes how he 'put his hand on' the mountain to prevent it from moving again (*ibid.* 29; Boutros, 130–2).

¹²⁷ The fifth-century writings of Shenoute of Atripe preserve a strikingly similar reflection on Christ as the Rock that is set within the context of local topography and fauna—especially the cliffs bordering the Nile and the birds that made their nests in the rock. In his public sermon, *As I Sat on a Mountain* (Leipoldt, CSCO 42, 51. 23–9; trans. Foat, 'I Myself Have Seen', 101), he says to his listeners, 'Give your heart to the clefts of the rocks that are full of doves and every place in which they dwell. The clefts of the rock are one thing with the rock, and they separate not from it. The hearts of the faithful truly are one thing with the Lord Jesus, the rock that pours forth honey—for the rock was Christ—and they separate not from him.'

mediated—via the physicality of the land itself. The stone not only bears the trace of the ‘hand of the treasure of life’,¹²⁸ but also comes to share in the divine power of Christ, ‘the Rock who cannot be shaken.’¹²⁹ Thus, by coming into contact with the rock at Jabal al-Ṭayr, pilgrims were to see themselves as vicariously coming into physical contact with Christ and his all-pervasive power.

In the *Homily on the Church of the Rock*, we discerns hints of how such christological contact was enacted not only in the eucharist (as we might expect),¹³⁰ but also in the practice of burial as it was associated with Holy Family pilgrimage. At one point in the sermon, the preacher quotes from and comments on Psalm 137: 9 (139:9 LXX):

‘Blessed is the one who takes your children and buries them at the rock’... , for the mountain is a refuge (*makhlas*) for the dead and they deposit their bodies in it. Now the prophet knows the esteem of this rock, for the mountains are made perfect by the rocks and the sure foundation of the Christians is Christ, the rock who cannot be shaken.¹³¹

The quotation of this psalm in the sermon significantly alters the text’s original wording: in the Hebrew and Greek, the psalm confers blessings on the one who violently and vengefully ‘dashes’ or ‘levels’ the children of Babylon against the ‘rock’, as part of a lament over the fall of Jerusalem. By contrast, in the *Homily*, there is a major shift in the passage’s application with the substitution of one word—‘buries’ (Arabic, *yadfinu*). This subtle alteration of the text follows convention of the Coptic Psalter, which translates the Greek verb ἐδαφίειν (‘to level’) with the Coptic verb **ТОМС-** (from **ΤΩΜC**, ‘to bury’).¹³² In the *Homily on the Church of the Rock*, this verb is radically reinterpreted: it is no longer a mark of judgment, but rather a sign of blessing: instead of the far-off Babylonians, the object of this verb is taken to be the Coptic faithful interred at the site. The Coptic text of the Psalms (here encountered via its Arabic translation) is thereby read in conjunction with

¹²⁸ *Homily on the Church of the Rock* 2 (Boutros, PO 49/1 (2001), 90).

¹²⁹ *Ibid.* 10 (R. Boutros, PO 49/1 (2001), 100).

¹³⁰ *Ibid.* 21 (Boutros, PO 49/1 (2001), 116) specifically associates the Magi’s offering (*qurbān*) with the eucharistic offering (*qurbān*) and ‘the Son’s offering (*qurbān*) on the earth’ (i.e. the Incarnation and crucifixion).

¹³¹ *Homily on the Church of the Rock* 10 (Boutros, PO 49/1 (2001), 100).

¹³² E. A. Wallis Budge, ed., *The Earliest Known Coptic Psalter in the Dialect of Upper Egypt* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1898), 143; cf. Gawdat Gabra, ed., *Der Psalter im oxyrhynchischen (mesokemischen/mittelägyptischen) Dialekt* (Heidelberg: Heidelberger Orientverlag, 1995), 200, where the Coptic translation of the verb (ΣΙΟΥΕ ΕΖΦΗ, ‘casts down’) adheres closer to the sense of the Septuagintal Greek. The Bohairic version of the psalm follows the Sahidic text edited by Budge in employing the verb **ТОМС-** (‘buries’): see Gregor Emmeneggar, *Der Text des koptischen Psalters aus al-Mudil: Ein Beitrag zur Textgeschichte der Septuaginta und zur Textkritik koptischer Bibelhandschriften* (Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literature 159; Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), 108.

local burial practices performed at Jabal al-Ṭayr. A culminating analogy brings the christological point home: just as mountains are ‘made perfect’ (i.e. completed) by the rocks with which they are composed, so too are Christians to establish their perfect and sure foundation on Christ the Rock. Thus, in the context of this exhortation, the practice of burial at the Church of the Rock takes on a new importance as a ritual means by which Coptic bodies were buried—and thereby perfected—in Christ.

The House and Heel of Jesus: al-Bahnasa and Sakha

Early medieval evidence for Holy Family pilgrimage at sites in Middle and Lower Egypt conforms to the patterns observed at Qosqām and Jabal al-Ṭayr. Sermons connected with the cities of al-Bahnasa (ancient Oxyrhynchus) and Sakha (in the Western Delta), readily identified as part of the same folkloric cycle as the *Vision of Theophilus* and the *Homily on the Church of the Rock*, show how pilgrims were likewise urged to envision these Egyptian sites in biblical terms and to see themselves as imitating the incarnate Christ in their act of visitation.

For evidence concerning the practice of pilgrimage to al-Bahnasa, one turns especially to a *Homily on the Residence of the Virgin and her Beloved Son at the Holy Monastery now known as Pāy Īsūs (the House of Jesus)*, attributed to a certain bishop of al-Bahnasa named Cyriacus (Ar. *Quryāqūs*).¹³³ While we have no certain dates for Cyriacus, the local legends preserved in this work were already circulating by the seventh or eighth century CE.¹³⁴ Pilgrims who came to al-Bahnasa looking for traces of the Holy Family’s passing would come across a house-turned-church in which Christ took shelter and a stand of three trees reputedly planted by the Saviour himself. The preacher Cyriacus presents the three trees as a sign of the Trinity and of the three archangels Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael, but he also more pointedly associates them with the biblical tree at Mamre where Abraham met the Lord and with the three tents erected for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah on Mount Tabor, the site of the transfiguration in Matthew.¹³⁵ When it comes to the church itself—the

¹³³ An edition of this text based on an unidentified manuscript has been published in *Kitāb mayāmīr wa ‘ajā’ib al-‘adhrā’*, 2nd edn. (Cairo: ‘Ayn Shams Press, 1927), 119–39. The earliest extant manuscript may be found in the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris (Par. ar. 155; 1486 CE); however, at various points, this Paris manuscript seems to represent a later expansion upon the text edited in the published version. For a detailed synopsis of this work, see G. Giamberardini, *Il culto mariano in Egitto*, ii. 148–9; and S. Davis, ‘A Hermeneutic of the Land’, 336.

¹³⁴ The author of the *Homily on the Church of the Rock* had knowledge of the Holy Family tradition associated with al-Bahnasa: see esp. sect. 24 (Boutros, PO 49/1 (2001), 120–2).

¹³⁵ Cyriacus, *Homily (Kitāb mayāmīr wa ‘ajā’ib al-‘adhrā’*, 121–2; Par. ar. 155, fos. 160^v–161^r).

‘House of Jesus’ (Copt. ΠΗΙ ΝΗΣΟΥΣ; transliterated in Arabic as *Pāy Īsūs*)—the local landscape is explicitly read as ground that hosted the incarnate presence of Christ. Thus, it is compared to the heavenly Jerusalem and Mount Sinai, because ‘the one who took on the body from the Virgin stopped here in the flesh.’¹³⁶ In this context, Cyriacus extols the fact that *Pāy Īsūs* ‘came to resemble’ the tomb of Christ and the manger where he was born,¹³⁷ and that the three trees bowed down to Jesus when he took rest under them in imitation of the Magi who bowed down in worship before the Christchild in Bethlehem.¹³⁸

This language of imitation—here attributed to the place itself—is later applied to the persons who come to visit that place. Pilgrims who travel to the House of Jesus are said to imitate Christ in their actions: ‘Blessed is the one who goes to that mountain walking on his feet, in order to be like the Lord of creation when he was a child in the flesh and (when) his mother carried him sometimes and he walked at other times.’¹³⁹ Given the way that the site of *Pāy Īsūs* was viewed in terms of the biblical *loca sancta*—the holy places where ‘the one who took on the body (*ḥalla bi-l-jasad*) from the Virgin visited in the flesh’¹⁴⁰—the act of pilgrimage to the site is presented here as a way for Egyptian Christians to assimilate themselves to Christ, to vicariously embody his physical presence in the Incarnation.

In the case of Sakha, our primary evidence is a *Homily on the Coming of Christ the Lord to the Land of Egypt*, a sermon attributed to bishop Zachariah of Sakha, whose life spanned the end of the seventh and the beginning of the eighth century.¹⁴¹ Zachariah’s *Homily* maps out the Holy Family’s itinerary

¹³⁶ Ibid. 123; Par. ar. 155, fo. 161^v. The reference to Mount Sinai here is probably related to the ancient associations of the burning bush with the perpetual virginity of Mary: for an example from the Coptic liturgy, see De Lacy O’Leary, *The Coptic Theotokia*, 42–4.

¹³⁷ Cyriacus, *Homily* (*Kitāb mayāmīr wa ‘ajā’ib al-‘adhrā*, 122; Par. ar. 155, fo. 161^r). The Paris manuscript also adds a line asserting that ‘the venerable and righteous Joseph the Carpenter was sitting under these trees when the angel of the Lord announced to him the mystery of the incarnation of the Son of God’ (161^r).

¹³⁸ Ibid. 121; Par. ar. 155, fo. 161^r.

¹³⁹ Ibid. 123. The Paris manuscript (Par. ar. 155, fo. 161^v) differs slightly at this place in the text: ‘Blessed is the one who comes to this place, walking on his feet, for indeed the Lord of creation came here as a child along with his Virgin Mother.’

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. 123; Par. ar. 155, fo. 161^v. The text also states, ‘Here he took up residence in the body (*ḥalla bi-l-jasad*) that he took from the Virgin Mary.’ This is an example of Cyriacus’ use of the Arabic term *ḥulūl* (stay, residence, descent) in a technical sense to refer to the Word’s act of taking on a body in the Incarnation.

¹⁴¹ An edition has been published in *Kitāb mayāmīr wa ‘ajā’ib al-‘adhrā*, 56–81, but it is again based on an unidentified manuscript. The relation of this published version to the earliest known manuscripts for the work in Paris (Par. ar. 263; 15th century CE) and the Vatican (Vat. ar. 170; 1719 CE) has yet to be fully determined. No critical edition for the text exists at the present time. For a detailed synopsis of this work, see Giamberardini, *Il culto mariano in Egitto*, ii. 37–55.

in travelling from Lower to Upper Egypt, pausing to add new narrative details about their experiences and encounters in the Western Delta. For example, we are told that they received warm hospitality at two towns in the region (at Mīnyat Janaḥ near Sammanūd and at al-Maṭṭa) but that they were denied a welcome at another (at Shajarat al-Tin near Burullus).¹⁴² Further, we learn how, when they arrived at the town of Bilād al-Sibākh near Sakha, the child Jesus miraculously produced a spring to quench their thirst—identified with a well that ailing pilgrims would later frequent in search of healing.¹⁴³ A church on the site (called in Arabic, Bikhā Īsūs or Ka‘b Yasū‘, i.e. ‘The Heel of Jesus’) is said to have been founded by the Saviour himself: the name was derived from a local legend that Christ took rest there and left an imprint of his foot in a stone (an anatomical counterpart to the handprint venerated at Jabal al-Ṭayr).¹⁴⁴ The twelfth- or thirteenth-century *History of the Churches and Monasteries of Egypt* describes how this relic became an object of devotion for pious pilgrims: ‘The people came from regions far away and cities nearby and put oil in the mark that was in the rock.’¹⁴⁵ The church itself came to be closely associated with a local monastery named Dayr al-Magħṭīs (‘The Monastery of the Bath’) because it was built over a Roman bath.¹⁴⁶

The *Homily* attributed to Zachariah provides another example of how creative readings of Isaiah 19 (and especially the image of the ‘cloud’) were used to interpret christological teaching and the practice of pilgrimage in a particular local setting. Early on in the sermon, the preacher quotes from Isaiah 19 (‘The Lord enters the land of Egypt on a light cloud’) and specifically identifies the subject of this prophecy as the incarnate Word: ‘This is the one who has become incarnate in a human image by his own will and in Adamic form in his own essence/nature (*dhāt*), creating the substance of humanity for himself amongst humankind like a door, speaking to us by the language of divinity from behind the veil.’¹⁴⁷ A little bit later in the text, he revisits Isaiah 19: 1 and once again directs his listeners’ attention to the Incarnation event: ‘O Egypt, you darkened district, the glory of the Lord God has shed light upon you; the light has risen upon you, the light of the divinity of the Son, who became incarnate from the Virgin.’¹⁴⁸

¹⁴² Zachariah of Sakha, *Homily* (*Kitāb mayāmīr wa ‘ajā’ib al-‘adhrā’*, 71).

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.* The Copto-Arabic *Synaxarium* (Basset, PO 16/2 (1915), 408–9) relates an account of how Jesus ‘pressed his heel into a stone’ as a sign of his presence in that place.

¹⁴⁵ *History of the Churches and Monasteries of Egypt*, fo. 45a (Samuel al-Suryānī, i. 60).

¹⁴⁶ Zachariah of Sakha, *Homily* (*Kitāb mayāmīr wa ‘ajā’ib al-‘adhrā’*, 72); *History of the Churches and Monasteries of Egypt*, fos. 44^v–45^r (ed. Samuel al-Suryānī, i. 59).

¹⁴⁷ Zachariah of Sakha, *Homily* (*Kitāb mayāmīr wa ‘ajā’ib al-‘adhrā’*, 57).

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.* (*Kitāb mayāmīr wa ‘ajā’ib al-‘adhrā’*, 60).

In the sermon, the Incarnation and the Holy Family's flight are thus intimately linked according to the divine 'economy' (*tadbīr*) that is mediated via the prophecy of Isaiah and by the motherhood of the Virgin Mary. Just as the Incarnation 'appeared (like a star) in the celestial sphere of her womb, shining brightly in a wondrous economy (*tadbīr* 'ajīb) that did not violate the condition of her virginity',¹⁴⁹ so too the pilgrims gather at the Bikhā Īsūs church to celebrate the 'day in which Christ the Lord (exalted be his name) entered the land of Egypt with his mother the Virgin and Joseph her fiancé through a wondrous mystery and a strange economy (*tadbīr gharīb*), until he cleansed it from the worship of idols'.¹⁵⁰ The image of the incarnate Word in the 'celestial sphere' of Mary's womb may have meant to draw the listeners' attention to the paintings that would have graced the walls of the church at Bikhā Īsūs: in Coptic iconography, the Christchild is frequently portrayed on Mary's lap within a spherical or oval 'body halo' (mandorla, or *clipeus*).¹⁵¹ The image of Mary's womb as a 'celestial sphere' also significantly ties into the author's interpretation of Isaiah 19: 1, where he identifies the 'light cloud' that bore Jesus to Egypt as a reference to Mary herself.¹⁵²

Ultimately, for early medieval pilgrims who came to Bikhā Īsūs, participating in the Incarnation would have been envisioned in tangible, visible ways. By setting their own feet in the footprint left by the incarnate Lord, they would have seen themselves as walking in his very steps. By lifting their eyes to the walls of the church, by gazing upon the image of the Virgin and Child on the east wall, they would have beheld 'the one whose being has been esteemed over (all) qualities and whose attributes has been exalted above all measures', the one who was able to cause them 'to be counted among those who have received him and whom he has given authority to become sons of God'.¹⁵³ And finally, in the presence of the monks around them, they would have understood themselves to have been transported back 'to the blessed paradise', a journey enabled when the Son 'appeared incarnate from the Virgin'.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁹ Zachariah of Sakha, (*Kitāb mayāmir wa 'ajā'ib al-'adhrā*, 57).

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. (*Kitāb mayāmir wa 'ajā'ib al-'adhrā*, 58).

¹⁵¹ One example is the image of the Virgin Mary and Christchild on the eastern wall of the nave in the Church of St Antony at the Red Sea: see E. Bolman, *Monastic Visions*, 56–7, and fig. 4.23.

¹⁵² Zachariah of Sakha, *Homily* (*Kitāb mayāmir wa 'ajā'ib al-'adhrā*, 61). Cyriacus of al-Bahnasa (*Kitāb mayāmir wa 'ajā'ib al-'adhrā*, 120) employs a similar Marian interpretation of the 'light cloud.'

¹⁵³ Zachariah of Sakha, *Homily* (*Kitāb mayāmir wa 'ajā'ib al-'adhrā*, 57). This appeal to participation in the attributes of divine sonship is presented in the context of a quotation from John 1: 3–4 and a reference to 'the intercession of the Virgin who revealed his humanity from heaven within her in the East', another possible allusion to the typical placement of icons depicting the Virgin and Child on the eastern wall of the nave in Coptic churches.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. (*Kitāb mayāmir wa 'ajā'ib al-'adhrā*, 61).

BEARING CHRIST: FROM HOLY FAMILY TO HOLY
MAN IN THE *THE LIFE OF SHENOUTE*

In the case studies discussed above, I have shown how Holy Family pilgrimage came to be intimately linked with monasteries at various locales, including Qosqām (Dayr al-Muḥarraḡ), Jabal al-Ṭayr, and Sakha (Dayr al-Maḡḡtis).¹⁵⁵ Such monastic communities would have played a vital role in providing both material and spiritual forms of patronage for the visitors who came through their doors looking for traces of Jesus' passing. I want to conclude this chapter by exploring another dimension of the interaction between monasteries and Holy Family sites as pilgrimage destinations—specifically, the way that Holy Family stories (and the incarnational theology that they conveyed) could be co-opted and adapted by monastic communities that did not lie on the 'official' itineraries of places thought to have been visited by Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. With this in mind, let me return to where I started—Shenoute's monastic federation at Atriḡe—in order to show how key motifs of christological presence and participation were rearticulated in the production of hagiographical literature such as the Coptic *vita* of Apa Shenoute.

The so-called *Life of Shenoute*, traditionally attributed to Shenoute's late fifth-century successor Besa, in fact developed as a work of multiple recensions in the Sahidic and Bohairic dialects of Coptic and later in the Arabic language.¹⁵⁶ This process of literary expansion was carried out in the library of the White Monastery over the course of centuries: the different versions that resulted represent the combination of (1) early *encomia* (speeches of praise) originally given on feast days dedicated to St Shenoute and (2) narrative episodes from Shenoute's life.¹⁵⁷ The *Life* is, in fact, one of our earliest Coptic-language sources of information for Holy Family pilgrimage in Upper Egypt.

¹⁵⁵ The *Homily* attributed to Zachariah of Sakha also expands the journey of the Holy Family to include the monastic centre of the Wādī al-Natrūn, where Zachariah himself served as a monk before his ordination and election as bishop: see C. D. G. Müller, 'Zacharias, Saint', *CE* ii. 368–9; and Davis, 'Ancient Sources', 151.

¹⁵⁶ For the Sahidic fragments of the *Life*, see E. C. Amélineau, *Monuments pour servir à l'histoire de l'Égypte chrétienne*, i. 237–46 (see also ii. 633 ff.). A complete Bohairic version has been edited by J. Leipoldt and W. E. Crum, *CSCO* 41 (1906), and translated by David N. Bell (1983). The expansive Arabic version of the *Life* (along with a French trans.) is edited by Amélineau, in *Monuments* i. 289–478. In addition to these Egyptian versions, two Syriac *vitae* also have been preserved: see F. Nau, 'Une version syriaque inédite de la Vie de Schenoudi', *Revue sémitique d'épigraphie et d'histoire ancienne* 7 (1899), 356–63; 8 (1900), 153–67, 252–65; and I. Guidi, in the *Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen. Nachrichten* 3 (1889), 46–56. For the purposes of my discussion here, I will be focusing primarily on the complete Bohairic version of the text.

¹⁵⁷ On the transmission history of the text, I am indebted to two recent papers given by Nina Lubomierski, 'Towards a Better Understanding of the So-Called Vita Sinuthii' (2004), and 'The Coptic Life of Shenoute' (2006), as well as to her doctoral dissertation, 'Untersuchungen zur sogenannten Vita Sinuthii' (Berlin, 2005).

Near the end of the Bohairic version of Shenoute's *vita* (chs. 154–60), one runs across a fascinating story about a walk that the famous monk took in the desert.¹⁵⁸ What made this particular stroll remarkable was that 'the Lord Jesus appeared to him', joined him on his way, and began conversing with him.¹⁵⁹ Actually, for readers familiar with the *Life of Shenoute*, this scene might not have seemed so extraordinary. Several earlier episodes also depict Shenoute in conversation with a physically present Christ.¹⁶⁰ In one instance, Christ even gives Shenoute architectural guidance in constructing the main church of the monastery.¹⁶¹ However, the story of Shenoute's walk with Jesus in the desert is distinguished in at least one way—by their encounter with a dead body that had been 'cast upon the mountain'.¹⁶² After Shenoute tells Christ that he has often passed this corpse and wondered who it was and why it was discarded there, the Saviour raises the corpse and commands the resuscitated man to recount his life story. The man then proceeds to tell them that he had lived in Upper Egypt centuries earlier, around the time of Christ's birth, and that he had heard the news 'that a woman had entered the city of Shmoun with a little boy in her arms'—a boy who raised the dead and cast out demons, who made the lame walk, the deaf hear, the dumb speak, and the lepers clean.¹⁶³

This passing reference to Jesus and Mary's visit to ancient Hermopolis (Copt. Shmoun; Ar. al-*Ashmūnayn*) shows again how Holy Family pilgrimage could be promoted in a monastic setting, but at the same time it hints at how an ancient monastic writer could seek to tap into and subtly redirect such devotion to an alternative, 'competing' holy site—in this case, Shenoute's federation at Atri-pe. The story of the raised corpse ends with Jesus, after setting the man at rest again, walking hand-in-hand with Shenoute to 'the cell in the desert' before ascending to heaven, accompanied by an angelic chorus. In these details, Shenoute's cell is presented as a place where Christ trod the earth in latter days—where Shenoute the monk walked and talked with Jesus—and as the site of a second divine ascension. Thus, Shenoute's desert is conspicuously marked (alongside and over against the city of Shmoun) as a pilgrimage destination imbued with traces of Christ's physical presence.

At the same time, the *Life* presents Shenoute himself as a saint who not only walks in the presence of Jesus, but as one who also assimilates Christ's virtues. In describing Shenoute's asceticism, the hagiographer significantly remarks that the monastic father 'bore Christ' (ΦΟΡΙΝ ΜΠΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ), and with regard to

¹⁵⁸ Ps.-Besa, *Life of Shenoute* 154–60 (Leipoldt, 66–8; trans. Bell, 85–6).

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 154 (Leipoldt, 66–7; trans. Bell, 85).

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 22, 25–6, 115 (Leipoldt, 18–20, 54; trans. Bell, 49–50, 75).

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.* 30–2 (Leipoldt, 21–2; trans. Bell, 51–2).

¹⁶² *Ibid.* 154 (Leipoldt, 67; trans. Bell, 85).

¹⁶³ *Ibid.* 157 (Leipoldt, 67–8; trans. Bell, 85–6).

his teaching, he quotes Shenoute as speaking with Christ's own voice: 'No word that I utter comes from myself alone: there is none which Christ does not deliver to me.'¹⁶⁴ Later, we encounter scenes where Shenoute dramatically (re-)enacts Christ's actions from the Gospels: in the midst of a drought he multiplies the loaves of bread and feeds the multitudes; when faced with temptation, he subdues the devil and places his foot upon his head.¹⁶⁵

Most significant, however, is a series of scenes that incorporate a key image from both the biblical story of the transfiguration and late antique interpretation connected with Isaiah 19 and the Holy Family's flight to Egypt—namely, the image of the cloud. Chapters 17–21 of the work describe Shenoute's response to a summons by Cyril of Alexandria to come to Constantinople for the purpose of countering the Christology of Nestorius.¹⁶⁶ When the time comes for Shenoute to return to his monastery and he is denied passage by ship, 'a shining cloud (ΟΥΣΗΠΙ ΝΟΥΩΙΝΙ) came down from heaven, lifted up both him and his disciple, snatched him up into the heights, and flew off with him . . . and in this way the cloud (†ΟΗΠΙ) flew off with him and brought him to his monastery.'¹⁶⁷

This is not the only example of the archimandrite's miraculous transportation by cloud in the *Life*. In chs. 58 and 59 we read of another situation where the emperor Theodosius invites Shenoute back to Constantinople. After Shenoute agonizes about the prospect of a long journey that would take him away from his monastery, 'a shining cloud (ΟΥΣΗΠΙ ΝΟΥΩΙΝΙ) snatched him up, flew away with him to the royal capital, and left him in the middle of the palace in the place where the king was'.¹⁶⁸ Interestingly, when the king asks him how he arrived so quickly, Shenoute attributes the swiftness and mode of his journey to Christ himself: 'It was Christ Jesus, the son of the Living God in whom we believe, together with his good Father and the Holy Spirit, who brought me here to you.'¹⁶⁹ After granting Theodosius his blessing, Shenoute then returns that same night to his monastery by the very same cloud.¹⁷⁰ Notably, this miraculous act prompts the emperor's courier to credit Shenoute with divine or Christlike attributes: 'You are a man whose feet should not be allowed to tread the unclean earth.'¹⁷¹

A third and final example shows how Shenoute, as a monastic saint, was able to confer such attributes onto pilgrim supplicants who sought his aid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. 11 (Leipoldt, 13; trans. Bell, 54).

¹⁶⁵ Ibid. 27–8, 73 (Leipoldt, 20, 36–7; trans. Bell, 50–1, 63).

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. 17–21 (Leipoldt, 15–18; trans. Bell, 47–9).

¹⁶⁷ Ibid. 18–19 (Leipoldt, 16; trans. Bell, 48).

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. 58 (Leipoldt, 31; trans. Bell, 59).

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. 59 (Leipoldt, 32; trans. Bell, 59).

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. 63 (Leipoldt, 33; trans. Bell, 60).

¹⁷¹ Ibid. 65 (Leipoldt, 34; trans. Bell, 61).

The story (chs. 102–8) tells of a duke who comes to see Shenoute to ask him for victory in a war he is waging against a nomadic tribe.¹⁷² The head of the White Monastery emerges from his retreat in the inner desert and gives him one of his leather girdles as a blessing. When the duke remembers to gird himself with it in battle, he begins to overcome his enemies. At that moment, he looks up into the sky and sees ‘our father Apa Shenoute in the middle of a shining cloud (ΟΥΘΗΠΙ ΝΟΥΩΙΝΙ) with a flaming sword in his hands, killing the barbarians’.¹⁷³ Having experienced this vision of the saint, ‘the duke too, went up into the cloud (†ΘΗΠΙ) by the side of our father Apa Shenoute and in this way he smote the barbarians with great ruin’.¹⁷⁴

The key elements of this story—a supplicant coming to the monastery with a special petition, the granting of a derivative relic or blessing from the body of the saint, and a vision of a holy figure mounted upon a cloud—would have evoked for late antique and early medieval Egyptian readers (or listeners) a set of familiar social practices and literary *topoi* associated with Coptic pilgrimage, including the exegetical traditions linked to the flight of the Holy Family. Once again, we witness here a mimetic ‘economy’ at work in this transference of divine potency from the physical presence of Jesus himself, to the ascetic body of the saint, to the pilgrim who comes away from his encounter ‘engirdled’ by the holy. However, by appropriating and reworking elements of Holy Family lore, the *Life of Shenoute* also negotiates a subtle shift in this christological transaction: it is no longer simply the land that mediates the presence of the Incarnate One in Egypt, but it is also the holy person himself who embodies and communicates to pilgrims what it means to partake of Christ’s power. Ultimately, then, by visiting holy places and holy persons, Coptic pilgrims could understand themselves to be coming into contact with, and even putting on, the incarnate presence of the Word who dwelt in the land of Egypt.

¹⁷² Ibid. 102–8 (Leipoldt, 50–2; trans. Bell, 72–4).

¹⁷³ Ibid. 108 (Leipoldt, 52; trans. Bell, 74).

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

Christology and Coptic Art: Images of the Incarnation on Egyptian Bodies and Monuments

INTRODUCTION: BODIES VISUALIZED AND RITUALIZED

In the ancient church, human bodies were contested commodities. Early Christian writers frequently wrangled over the ethical implications of dress and bodily adornment, and sought to regiment various forms of physical interaction and movement within their communities, from sexual contact to pilgrimage travel. Bodies—and how they were used—functioned as privileged markers of Christian identity, as valuable capital in the complex economies of Christian discourse and practice. Nowhere was this more the case than in discussions about Christ’s body and its relation to his divinity. While such christological discussions took place throughout the Mediterranean world, in this chapter I am interested in the visual representation of Christ’s body among Coptic communities, and the relation that representation had to Egyptian Christian understandings of the Incarnation. My focus will be on two particular contexts for such visual representation: (1) images of Christ on Coptic textiles and clothing, and (2) images of Christ on the walls of Coptic churches.

In each of these two cases, I want to explore the ritualized contexts for the wearing and viewing of christological images. In the past fifteen years, Catherine Bell has pointed out the strategic function of ritual in shaping people’s perceptions of the world and in configuring human bodies in relation to that perceived world.¹ Bell’s concern with ‘ritualized bodies’ finds special application in the study of Coptic Christology, especially given its characteristic emphasis on (1) the divine Word’s life-giving transformation (or deification) of Christ’s human body in the Incarnation, and (2) Christians’ salvific participation in that divinized body (e.g. through their partaking of the eucharist).

First, I want to use Bell’s theory of the ritually constructed body in order to show how the Coptic theology of the Incarnation was enacted or performed

¹ Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, esp. 6.

through particular practices of dress.² How did the wearing of special clothing adorned with biblical images help shape late antique Christians' perception of their bodies and their world? How did Christians in late antique Egypt ritually 'put on' the Incarnation? Then, I will turn to the visual environment of Coptic churches and raise further questions about how architectural and artistic programmes—together with the ritual practices of liturgy and music—framed the way that Egyptian worshippers came to view their bodies in relation to the incarnate body of Christ depicted on the walls around them and encountered in the eucharist.

FASHIONING A DIVINE BODY: CHRISTOLOGY AND RITUAL DRESS

In studying extant collections of Coptic textiles, one is struck almost immediately by how relatively rare visual representations of Christ are. Even rarer still are examples of narrative scenes from the life of Christ (as opposed to non-narrative, stylized representations of Christ enthroned or of the Christchild seated on the lap of the Virgin).³ The collection of textiles in the Musée du Louvre in Paris serves as an illustrative data sample. Out of a total of 1,440 pieces documented in Pierre du Bourguet's 1964 catalogue of Coptic textiles in the Louvre, one finds only three undisputed representations of Christ. Of these three, only one displays a narrative scene from the Gospels—an eighth-century linen band with a scene of the Nativity (Fig. 4.1).⁴

² The first half of this chapter is adapted from my article, 'Fashioning a Divine Body', 335–62.

³ Pierre du Bourguet ('Textiles, Coptic: Iconography of Woven Textiles', *CE* vii. 2224) seeks to explain the relative rarity of surviving Christian figural representation on late antique Coptic textiles on the basis of either 'wear and tear' in everyday use or 'the fact that so many surviving Coptic materials, generally the garments serving as shrouds for the dead in Coptic cemeteries, have suffered damage'. However, neither of these explanations is fully satisfactory, since both these factors would also apply in the same measure to non-figural evidence, as well as figural evidence that is not explicitly Christian.

⁴ Paris, Musée du Louvre, inv. E 13945; P. du Bourguet, *Catalogue des étoffes coptes*, 212–13, fig. E 67 (X 4855); M. Durand and F. Saragoza, *Égypte, la trame de l'Histoire*, 93, fig. 3. While there is some degree of uncertainty related to the identification of the two figures immediately below the infant Christ, they most probably represent Joseph and a reclining Mary. Alternatively, it is possible that in this scene we see a conflation of the nativity with early Christian iconography of the annunciation and/or the dormition of Mary, where Mary is conventionally depicted on a bed or couch. In any case, within the context of the primary scene of the nativity, the partially obscured figure in the lower right would appear to be one of the shepherds who were guided by angels to visit the Christchild (Luke 2: 8–20).

The other two non-narrative depictions of Christ in the Louvre collection are both dated from the tenth century CE: first, a roundel depicting Christ enthroned between two imperial figures, perhaps the emperor and his wife (Paris, Musée du Louvre, inv. AF 5737; Bourguet,



Figure 4.1. Linen band with a scene of the Nativity. Paris, Musée du Louvre, inv. E 13945, 8th century CE; Pierre du Bourguet, *Musée National du Louvre Catalogue des Étoffes Coptes*. Volume 1 (Paris: Editions des Musées Nationaux, 1964), 212–13, fig. E 67 (X 4855); Maximilien Durand and Florence Saragoza, *Égypte, La trame de l'Histoire: Textiles pharaoniques, coptes et islamiques* (Paris: Somogy editions d'art, 2002), 93, fig. 3.

Evidence from elsewhere tells a similar story. A limited number of ancient and medieval Egyptian textiles (or textile fragments) displaying scenes from the life of Christ have been documented in museum catalogues and collections found in Europe, North America, and Egypt. Even in the case of such surviving examples, their fragmentary state of preservation often precludes researchers from reconstructing their original setting and function. As a result, it is sometimes difficult to determine whether any particular scrap of textile had a monumental or liturgical function (such as on a church hanging or an altar cloth), or whether it originally was part of a person's dress.

In order to illustrate problems and possibilities in the study of this material, let me focus initially on two particularly rich, documented collections: (1) the Coptic textiles in the Victoria and Albert Museum, catalogued by Kendrick in 1922, and (2) the Coptic textiles in the Staatliche Museum in Berlin, catalogued by Wulff and Volbach in 1926. Taken together, these two collections constitute a veritable treasure trove of data in comparison to the relatively meagre evidence preserved in other museums.

The Victoria and Albert collection contains nine textile pieces decorated with identifiable scenes from the life of Christ: five embroidered fragments from ancient tunics, along with four dyed linen fabrics, probably the remnants of wall hangings. The seventh- or eighth-century embroidered fragments include four roundels (*orbiculi*) and one probable shoulder band: these fragments contain an



Figure 4.2. Roundel (*orbiculus*) with a woven scene of the Annunciation. London, Victoria & Albert Museum, 6th century CE; A. F. Kendrick, *Catalogue of Textiles from Burying-Grounds in Egypt*, volume 3 (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1922), 57, no. 777, pl. XVIII.

assortment of Gospel images, including the annunciation (Fig. 4.2), the Last Supper, Mary Magdalene's witness to the resurrection of Christ, and two scenes depicting the adoration of the Magi.⁵ Among the dyed linen textiles (fifth- or sixth-century), one finds scenes of the annunciation, nativity, Christ's healings and miracles, and a possible depiction of Judas' betrayal.⁶

The vast collection in the Staatliche Museen, Berlin, includes eight embroidered fragments with scenes from the life of Christ. One piece of linen textile shows the flight of the Holy Family to Egypt stitched in wool. It dates to the sixth or seventh century, and was originally found near the Upper Egyptian town of Akhmīm.⁷ The other seven textile fragments—all dated to the same period, and all from Akhmīm—display variations on the nativity of Christ and the adoration of the Magi. The first six of these seven nativity fragments may in fact have originally belonged to the same tunic: in addition to one scrap of material of unidentifiable type,⁸ one finds in this scattered group three embroidered roundels⁹ and two other long, thin strips of cloth (*clavi*) that often functioned as decorative borders on tunics and other pieces of material (Fig. 4.3a–b).¹⁰ This hypothetical reconstruction of a tunic featuring a repeated Gospel theme is supported by the seventh and last of the Berlin nativity fragments, which is a more fully preserved example of the same type.

Catalogue des étoffes coptes, i. 477, fig. G 334 (X 4418); M-H. Rutschowskaya, *Tissus coptes*, 75); and second, a band with a bust of Christ accompanied by an alpha-omega inscription (Paris, Musée du Louvre; Bourguet, *Catalogue des étoffes coptes*, i. 478–9, fig. G 337 (X 4841)).

⁵ London, Victoria & Albert Museum; A. F. Kendrick, *Catalogue of Textiles from Burying-Grounds in Egypt*, iii. 57–9, no. 777, pl. XVIII (Annunciation); no. 778, pl. XVI (Last Supper); no. 780, pl. XVIII (Mary Magdalene and Christ); no. 781, pl. XVII (Magi); no. 782, pl. XVII (Magi). Kendrick tentatively identifies the fragmentary image on the shoulder band (no. 782) as the Adoration of the Shepherds, but I think the iconography that survives—especially, three pairs of legs approaching a seated figure (probably the Virgin)—conforms more closely to late antique representations of the Magi.

⁶ London, Victoria & Albert Museum, inv. 1103–1900; Kendrick, *Catalogue of Textiles*, iii. 64–5, no. 785, pl. XIX (Annunciation; see also Rutschowskaya, *Tissus coptes*, 132–3); 65, no. 786, pl. XIX (Nativity); 65–6, no. 787, pl. XX (Christ's healings and miracles); 66–7, no. 788 (Judas' betrayal?). For a comparison of iconography on embroidered and dyed fabrics, see Bourguet, 'Textiles, Coptic: Iconography of Woven Textiles', and 'Textiles, Coptic: Iconography of Resist-Dyed Fabrics', *CE* vii. 2221–30.

⁷ Berlin, Staatliche Museen, inv. 4663; O. Wulff and W. F. Volbach, *Spätantike und koptische Stoffe aus ägyptischen Grabfunden*, 98, pl. 96, no. 8.

⁸ Berlin, Staatliche Museen, inv. 4668; Wulff and Volbach, *Spätantike und koptische Stoffe*, 105, pl. 96, no. 17.

⁹ *Ibid.* inv. 4608, 4667, 4614; Wulff and Volbach, *Spätantike und koptische Stoffe*, 98, pl. 96, no. 3 (= inv. 4608); 98, pl. 96, no. 9 (= inv. 4667); and 100, pl. 96, no. 2 (= inv. 4614). In the same collection, Wulff and Volbach also documented a textile fragment with a representation of the enthroned Virgin and Child, set within a square-shaped border with slanted corners: *Ibid.* inv. 4667; Wulff and Volbach, *Spätantike und koptische Stoffe*, 98, pl. 96, no. 9.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* inv. 4584 and 4677; Wulff and Volbach, *Spätantike und koptische Stoffe*, 86, pl. 96, no. 4 (= inv. 4584); 87, pl. 96, no. 1 (= inv. 4677).

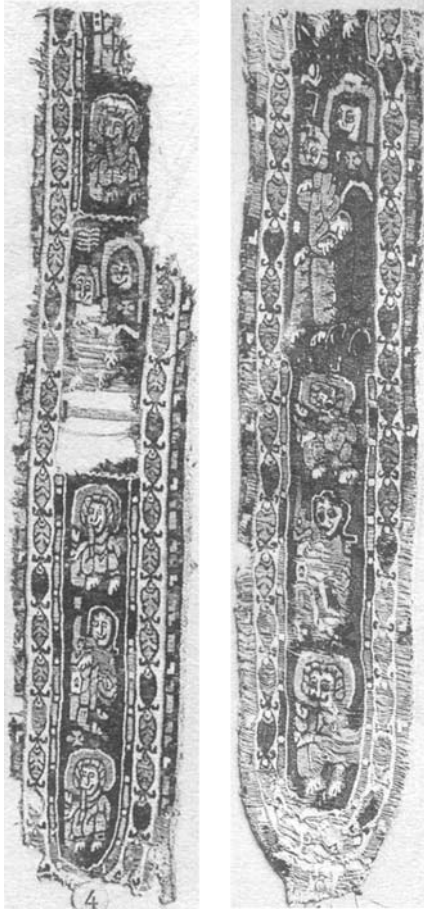


Figure 4.3a–b. Two strips of cloth (*clavi*) with woven scenes of the Nativity. Berlin, Staatliche Museen, inv. 4584 and 4677, 6–7th century CE; O. Wulff and W. F. Volbach, *Spätantike und koptische Stoffe*, 86, Tafel 96, #4; 87, Tafel 96, #1.

Here, the biblical scenes appear on a pair of *clavi* still attached to the remains of a woollen Coptic tunic (Fig. 4.4).¹¹ Each of two *clavi* presents a formulaic representation of the three Magi arrayed in a vertical row below the Virgin and child. There are also traces of another mirroring row of three Magi above the Virgin and child.

The popularity of the three Magi as a visual motif on textiles is attested not only in the case of these examples from Berlin, but also in the case of a

¹¹ Berlin inv. 17 530; Wulff and Volbach, *Spätantike und koptische Stoffe*, 87, pl. 111.



Figure 4.4. Remains of a woolen tunic with scenes of the Nativity. Berlin, Staatliche Museen, inv. 17 530, 6–7th century CE; O. Wulff and W. F. Volbach, *Spätantike und koptische Stoffe*, 87, Tafel 111.

remarkably well-preserved seventh-century tunic in the British Museum on which one finds multiple images of the adoration of the Magi.¹² The scene appears on each of the six large roundels that adorn the front, back, and shoulders of the tunic (Fig. 4.5). The *clavus* strips, which extend down the

¹² London, British Museum, inv. no. 1901–3–14; O. M. Dalton, *Catalogue of Early Christian Antiquities and Objects from the Christian East*, 168–9, no. 951; H. Maguire, ‘Garments Pleasing to God’, 221, fig. 29. Another disputed example is preserved on a textile in the *Musées royaux d’art d’histoire* in Brussels. A seventh- or eighth-century medallion (*orbiculus*), made with silk and linen, depicts a scene variously identified as the adoration of the Magi (Matthew 2: 1–12), or the two Marys’ encounter with the angel at the tomb of Christ (Matthew 28: 1–7): Brussels, *Musées royaux d’art d’histoire*, inv. A.C.O. Tx. 1053; M-C. Bruwier *et al.* (eds.), *Égyptiennes: Étoffes coptes du Nil*, 186, cat. no. 70.



Figure 4.5a–b. Drawing of a Coptic tunic with scenes depicting the Adoration of the Magi, with a detailed photo of one roundel (*orbiculus*). London, British Museum, inv. no. 1901–3–14, 7th century CE; O. M. Dalton, *Catalogue of Early Christian Antiquities and Objects from the Christian East in the Department of British and Medieval Antiquities and Ethnography of the British Museum* (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1901), 168–9; Henry Maguire, ‘Garments Pleasing to God: The Significance of Domestic Textile Designs in the Early Byzantine Period,’ *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 44

torso in front and in back, have a series of panels on which the same scene is rendered 'in abbreviated form'.¹³

These tunics with double-*clavi* from Berlin and London provide all-too-rare glimpses of christological images in their original configuration on pieces of clothing. Contemporary parallels are few and far between. In an exhibition volume of *Weavings from Roman, Byzantine, and Islamic Egypt* at the Krannert Art Museum at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Eunice Dauterman Maguire documented one example of a child's tunic with Christian imagery, including a roundel with a scene of the annunciation.¹⁴ However, the rest of the iconography on the garment remains enigmatic: it has not yet been possible to identify the figures on the two *clavi* with any certainty.

For a better basis of comparison, one may turn to a seventh- or eighth-century tunic in the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago with scenes from the life of Christ (Fig. 4.6).¹⁵ Despite its more fragmentary condition and the enigmatic character of some of the images, there is enough preserved (as in the case of the Berlin and London examples) to reconstruct something of the garment's more varied 'iconographic programme'. The remains of the tattered linen tunic include a central section that would have covered much of the torso and part of the right shoulder of the wearer. Two *clavi* with hanging pendants decorate its front (Fig. 4.7). One *clavus* is fully preserved, and displays a series of scenes from the Gospels. From top to bottom these scenes are the visitation of Mary and Elizabeth, the baptism of Christ, the nativity, an unidentified standing figure, a bust of Christ with halo, and (on the hanging pendant) two unidentified figures without haloes. Only the lower half of the other *clavus* remains intact, and the surviving scenes are considerably more enigmatic: two unidentified standing figures, a possible representation of the Virgin, and on the hanging pendant a male bust that resembles the figure of John the Baptist on the other *clavus*.

In addition to the *clavi*, five roundels belonging to this same tunic are extant. One roundel occupies the shoulder area of the main fragment, but is badly damaged; another mirrors the first in its iconography, which displays three as-yet-unidentified figures. While it is now detached from its linen host fabric, its original placement may have been on the other shoulder of the tunic. The three lower roundels bear scenes of the Nativity with only slight variations in colour scheme. In each, the Christchild is flanked by two figures, presumably Mary and Joseph (Fig. 4.8).

¹³ Maguire, 'Garments Pleasing to God', 221.

¹⁴ Private collection, Rose Choron; E. D. Maguire, *Weavings from Roman, Byzantine and Islamic Egypt*, 168–9, C26.

¹⁵ Chicago, Field Museum of Natural History, inv. no. 173758; Maguire, 'Garments Pleasing to God', 220, figs. 25–6. For my familiarity with this tunic from the Field Museum in Chicago, and for my identification of iconographic themes, I am indebted to Vasileios Marinis and his paper, 'Wearing the Bible: Fashion and Magic in Early Christian Egypt', presented at the Institute for Sacred Music, Yale Divinity School (16 April 2003).

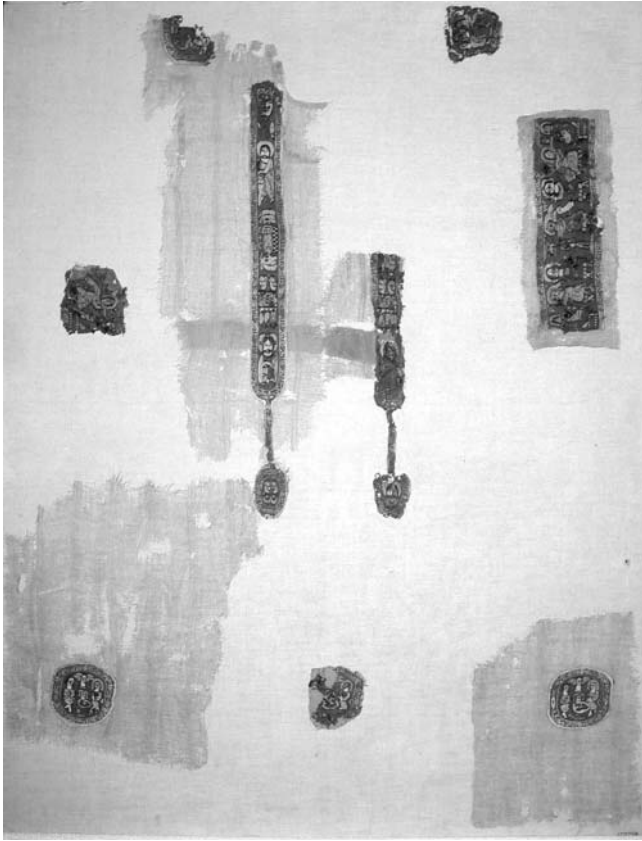


Figure 4.6. Fragments of a Coptic tunic with scenes from the life of Christ. Chicago, Field Museum of Natural History, inv. no. 173758, 7–8th century CE; © The Field Museum, #173758. Henry Maguire, ‘Garments Pleasing to God: The Significance of Domestic Textile Designs in Early Byzantine Period’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 44 (1990), 220, figs. 25–6.

The final surviving pieces of this artefact are the remains of the sleeve bands, now detached from the main portion of the tunic. Even though the right band is virtually complete, its iconography is again somewhat enigmatic (Fig. 4.9). In the middle of the panel, one observes a familiar scene of Christ’s baptism. Less easy to identify are two figures standing on either side of this central image: on the right, a man—probably Christ himself—adorned with a cruciform nimbus; on the left, a haloed woman dressed in blue. They face each other, and the male figure gestures to the woman with his left hand upraised. What we have here is probably a scene of Christ’s encounter with the

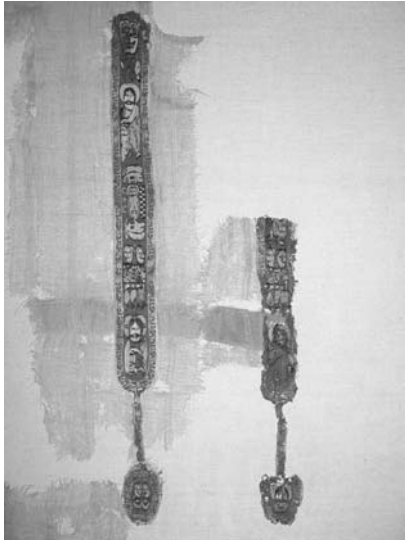


Figure 4.7. Detail of the frontal section from the same tunic, with two woven *clavi*. Chicago, Field Museum of Natural History, inv. no. 173758, 7–8th century CE; © The Field Museum, #173758.



Figure 4.8. Detail of roundel (*orbiculus*) from the same tunic, depicting a scene of the Nativity. Chicago, Field Museum of Natural History, inv. no. 173758, 7–8th century CE; © The Field Museum, #173758.

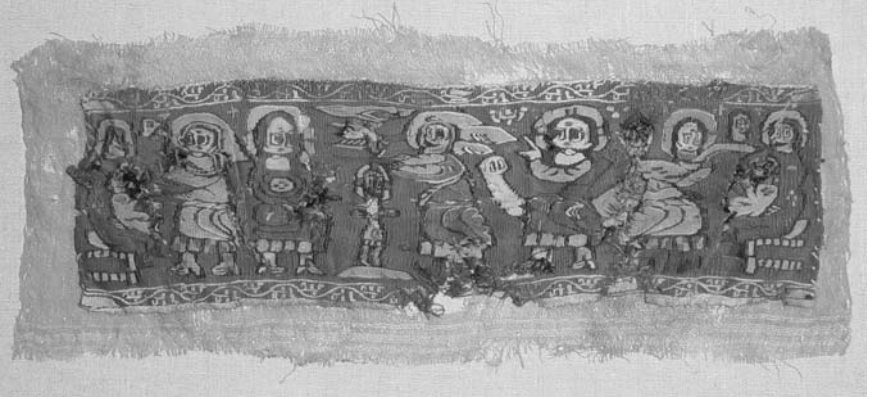


Figure 4.9. Detail of right sleeve band from the same tunic, depicting scenes from the Gospels. Chicago, Field Museum of Natural History, inv. no. 173758, 7–8th century CE; © The Field Museum, #173758.



Figure 4.10. Detail of fragmentary left sleeve band from the same tunic, with a scene of the Adoration of the Magi. Chicago, Field Museum of Natural History, inv. no. 173758, 7–8th century CE; © The Field Museum, #173758.

Samaritan woman (John 4: 1–42), or alternatively one of the healing scenes from the Gospels. Finally, at the far left and right of this full sleeve band are two woven images that show solitary figures approaching the Virgin Mary with some sort of offering while she sits on a chair or couch with the infant Christ in her lap. A similar scene is rendered on the fragmentary remains of the other sleeve band (Fig. 4.10). While there are problematic elements in these parallel scenes that still require explanation (in particular a disembodied head in the scene on the right!), these images are probably still best explained as replications of the adoration of the three Magi in abbreviated form (where one Magi in each scene stands for the full company).¹⁶

The Social Function of Images Worn on the Body: *Mimēsis* and *Apotropē*

This brief (and by no means complete) survey of textiles featuring scenes from the Gospels prompts questions about the social function of such images and the garments on which they appear. Were Gospel-decorated tunics worn by priests as liturgical vestments? Probably not—while liturgical vestments with Christian scenes are in evidence from the later Byzantine period, there is no indication in late antique sources of such usage.¹⁷ The question then remains: who wore this kind of clothing, and for what purpose? How were tunics with images from the life of Christ perceived by ancient viewers, and by their wearers?

Two articles by Gary Vikan and by Henry Maguire (both written in 1990) help us begin to address these questions. In studying pilgrimage art embossed on pewter flasks (*ampullae*) from around the year 600 CE, Gary Vikan observes how pilgrim supplicants to the holy places were frequently portrayed in the guise of the Magi, with ‘bushy beards and flowing hair’ and ‘exotic clothing’ such as pantaloons and Phrygian caps.¹⁸ In addition, Vikan notes the striking prominence of Magi-themes on other pilgrimage paraphernalia. For example, on a series of earthen pilgrimage tokens with biblical scenes constituting ‘a nearly complete

¹⁶ The representation of what looks like a duck’s head in the left scene conforms to other examples where ducks are portrayed as part of the offerings brought by the Magi to the Christchild (Marinis, ‘Wearing the Bible’). The tunic in the British Museum (inv. no. 1901–3–14) mentioned above in n. 12 provides an example of this iconographic motif: Dalton, *Catalogue of Early Christian Antiquities*, 168–9; Maguire, ‘Garments Pleasing to God’, 221, fig. 29.

¹⁷ Maguire, ‘Garments Pleasing to God’, 220. For a later Byzantine example of a Gospel-decorated liturgical vestment, see fig. 20, a fourteenth-century *sakkos* with an elaborate scene of the transfiguration on the back preserved in the Vatican Collection and displayed in 2004 as part of the Metropolitan Museum of Art exhibit, ‘Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261–1557)’: Helen C. Evans *et al.* (eds.), *Byzantium: Faith and Power*, 300–1, no. 177.

¹⁸ Monza, Monza Cathedral Treasury, 1; G. Vikan, ‘Pilgrims in Magi’s Clothing’, 97–107, esp. 103 and fig. 21.

Christological cycle' (including the annunciation, the nativity, the adoration of the Magi, the miracle at Cana, the transfiguration, the entry into Jerusalem, the crucifixion, and the women at the tomb), the Magi appear on nearly 40 per cent of the tokens, more than twice as often as any of the other scenes.¹⁹ Similarly disproportionate attention is shown to the Magi on pilgrimage jewellery such as *fibulae* and pendants.²⁰

Why did the Magi garner such attention in ancient pilgrimage art? Why did early Christian artists and artisans portray their pilgrim contemporaries as latter-day Magi? For Vikan, the answer lies primarily in the mimetic ethos of late antique pilgrimage practice. The Magi who travelled from afar to visit the Christchild were seen as models for imitation by early Christian pilgrims who journeyed to the Holy Land (and, by extension, to other sacred sites): 'As foreign travelers and bearers of votive gifts, pilgrims in effect *became* Magi and the goal of their pilgrimage—whether holy site or holy man—*became* Christ.'²¹

What are the implications of Vikan's work for reconstructing the social function of Coptic tunics bearing images from the Gospels? In my brief survey of documented textile remains in London, Berlin, and Chicago, I made note of the formulaic ways that Magi-scenes were recycled on Egyptian clothing—sometimes interspersed with other Gospel images, sometimes as the dominant iconographic motif. Could it be that such clothing was designed with pilgrimage practice in mind, as a way that Christian pilgrims to the Holy Land visually assimilated themselves to their famous biblical predecessors? In this context, it is worth noting that one of the textile fragments from Berlin bears images of the Holy Family's flight to Egypt (Fig. 4.11).²² Another example appears in the Coptic Museum in Cairo, 'an ornament of a tunic in the shape of a square' that renders the flight of the Holy Family to Egypt in wool (Fig. 4.12).²³ These fragments both date to the fifth and sixth centuries, the period during which pilgrimage sites related to the Holy Family began to proliferate in Middle and Upper Egypt.²⁴ Given this confluence of date, provenance, and theme, it is not inconceivable that some pilgrims visiting

¹⁹ Detroit, Detroit Institute of Arts, U.L.26.152; Vikan, 'Pilgrims in Magi's Clothing', 104 and fig. 23.

²⁰ Vikan, 'Pilgrims in Magi's Clothing,' 104–5 and fig. 24.

²¹ Ibid. 103. H. Maguire has used the term 'analogic' to describe the function of the Magi as archetypes for early Christian travellers: see Joseph D. Alchermes, 'Notes on "The Age of Theodora"', sects. 1–10, where he comments on H. Maguire's conference paper, 'The Empress's New Clothes: Domestic Art and the Cult of the Virgin in Early Byzantium', at <<http://syrcom.cua.edu/Hugoye/Vol4No1/HV4N1CRAIChermes.html#S0100>>, accessed 10 Aug. 2007.

²² Berlin, Staatliche Museen, inv. 4663; Wulff and Volbach, *Spätantike und koptische Stoffe*, 98, pl. 96, no. 8.

²³ Cairo, Coptic Museum, no. 10517 (fifth or sixth century CE); Hishmat Messiha, 'Two Coptic Textiles', 143 and pl. II; id., 'Jesus Christ in Coptic Antiquities', 128 (A4).

²⁴ W. Lyster, C. Hulsman, and S. Davis, *Be Thou There*, esp. ch. 3 ('Ancient Sources').

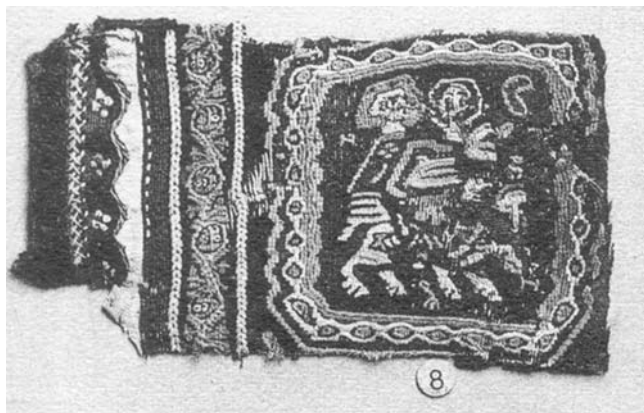


Figure 4.11. Textile fragment with a scene from the Holy Family's flight to Egypt. Berlin, Staatliche Museen, inv. 4663, 6–7th century CE; O. Wulff and W. F. Volbach, *Spätantike und koptische Stoffe aus ägyptischen Grabfunden* (Staatliche Museen zu Berlin; Berlin: E. Wasmuth, 1926), 98, Tafel 96, #8.



Figure 4.12. Textile fragment with a scene from the Holy Family's flight to Egypt. Cairo, Coptic Museum, no. 10517, 5–6th century CE; Hishmat Messiha, 'Two Coptic Textiles,' *Annales du Service des antiquités de l'Égypte* 55 (1958), 143 and pl. II.

Holy Family sites may have donned special attire—attire that visually reflected their self-perception as persons imitating biblical models.

In evaluating *ampullae*, tokens, and jewellery as artefacts of early Christian pilgrimage, Vikan goes on to recognize their common function as objects ‘made to be worn or carried as *amulets*’, and argues that the representation of the divinely guided Magi on these objects would have conveyed to their wearers a sense of ‘sympathetic magic’ and divine protection.²⁵ H. Maguire, in his article, ‘Garments Pleasing to God’, published the same year, argues that clothing with Christian imagery would have had a similar apotropaic function. He writes, ‘The Christian narratives on household textiles were not directed at readers or church-goers in order to engage or instruct. Rather, they were directed at an unseen audience, being intended to invoke the aid of the holy powers and to block the strength of supernatural malice.’²⁶ In arguing for this specific social function of domestic textile designs, H. Maguire notes several features of those designs that approximate the structure of ancient magic charms—in particular, the selectivity, repetition, and compression (or abbreviation) of Gospel scenes. Indeed, the depiction of Christ’s miraculous acts of healing on Coptic tunics (seen also on pieces preserved at the National Museum in Copenhagen and the British Museum in London)²⁷ may very well have been understood to protect the wearer from disease or sickness.

The protective function of such garments would also surely have informed their use in burial settings. Almost all the tunics extant today were originally recovered from Egyptian graves. In some cases, the deceased were dressed in clothing that had seen previous use in life (as evidenced by the wear of fibres); in other instances, however, the deceased were dressed in tunics that were made—or specially altered—for the burial rite itself. In the case of the child’s tunic mentioned above, E. D. Maguire has noted that ‘the unmatched length of

²⁵ Vikan, ‘Pilgrims in Magi’s Clothing’, 105.

²⁶ Maguire, ‘Garments Pleasing to God’, 220.

²⁷ Copenhagen, National Museum, inv. 12137; H. Maguire, ‘Garments Pleasing to God’, 221, fig. 31; London, British Museum, inv. 30806; F. D. Friedman, *Beyond the Pharaohs*, 217, no. 130. On the seventh- or eighth-century *clavus* strip from the National Museum in Copenhagen, one finds a series of images depicting Christ’s miracles from the Gospels. In two scenes, Christ reaches out to supplicants who are lying on a bed or mat, while in another, a supplicant kneels before him. These scenes may have been meant to evoke specific episodes such as the healing of the paralytic (Mark 2: 1–12; Matthew 9: 2–8; Luke 5: 17–26) or the lame man at the pool of Beth-zatha (John 5: 2–9). Alternatively, they may have been meant to highlight the healing character of Jesus’ entire life and ministry, as expressed in Mark 6: 55–6: ‘(The people) began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.’ The *clavus*-fragment in the British Museum displays a similar array of healing scenes. As in the Copenhagen example, the specific references of the individual scenes are difficult to determine, due to the iconographic compression characteristic of this medium. However, it is possible to identify scenes in which the supplicant is bedridden or kneeling before Christ, as well as two scenes in which Christ heals a young child.

the clavi, and their mounting in such a way as to hide their worn condition as much as possible, indicate that they were sewn onto the garment either before or after the child's death, in the hope of heavenly protection.²⁸ The common inclusion of amulets in ancient Egyptian burials²⁹ was tied to this cultural concern to preserve the deceased from baleful or malevolent influence. This practice continued into the early Coptic period among the Christianized population in Egypt, despite the often virulent opposition of church leaders.³⁰ One piece of evidence for this is a fourth-century papyrus codex that includes a set of instructions said to be given by Jesus to his disciples concerning the use of a stone amulet (ϠΗΦΟC) designed to protect them on their journey to heaven after death.³¹ Were tunics with scenes from the life of Christ, when used in funerary settings, similarly designed to ward off ill fortune and garner divine favour in a person's passage to the afterlife?

The studies by Vikan and H. Maguire prove extraordinarily valuable in helping us begin to imagine the ways that Coptic textiles may have been used in everyday life, and how those uses correlate with particular religious views and practices in late antiquity. Of course, the social functions that they highlight would not have been mutually exclusive. For example, tunics with Christian imagery may have been perceived as having both mimetic and apotropaic functions for the wearer in the context of specific practices such as pilgrimage and even burial, where the deceased was often conceived of as embarking on a journey to the heavenly Jerusalem.³² Scenes of the three Magi embroidered on the burial tunic may have been seen as emblematic of that journey, and as having the added benefit of warding off evil spirits that potentially threatened to disrupt one's passage into the next life.

However, in addition to the insights we can draw from Vikan and H. Maguire, I believe it may be possible to say something more about the significance of such christological images woven into the fabric of Coptic dress, and thereby to set the mimetic and apotropaic functions of these images within the larger context of

²⁸ Maguire, *Weavings from Roman, Byzantine and Islamic Egypt*, 168.

²⁹ On the inclusion of amulets in Egyptian graves from the Late Old Kingdom to Roman times, see Wolfram Grajetzki, *Burial Customs in Ancient Egypt*, chs. 4–11.

³⁰ The fifth-century Egyptian archimandrite Shenoute of Atripe rails against the use of amulets as protective devices, and identifies monks in his monastery as distributors of the items: ed. T. Orlandi, *Shenute contra Origenistas*, 19 (lines 255–7). Orlandi mistakenly included this comment as part of his edition of *I Am Amazed*; the fragment has since been designated by Stephen Emmel as A14. An excerpt of this separate work is translated by David Frankfurter in R. Valantasis (ed.), *Religions of Late Antiquity in Practice*, 474.

³¹ *The Second Book of Jeu* 52 (Schmidt and MacDermot, 127–38); see also M. Meyer and R. Smith, *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power*, 66–8 (no. 39, 'Spell for ascending through the heavens').

³² For an example of the early Egyptian Christian association of mortuary space and the deceased's journey to the heavenly Jerusalem, see my discussion of the early Christian wall paintings at the Chapel of the Exodus at the Necropolis of El Bagawat in the Kharga Oasis: S. Davis, *The Cult of St Thecla*, ch. 5.

Coptic theology and ritual practice. I want to allow the two questions I raised in the introduction to this chapter to guide the rest of my discussion. First, how did the wearing of such images reflect and promote Egyptian understandings of Christ and, more specifically, of the Incarnation as a saving event? Here I want to situate this christological iconography in the context of traditional Egyptian doctrines of the Incarnation and *theōsis*, the ‘divinization’ of human beings through participation in Christ’s Incarnation. Second, what might such dress tell us about the ways in which Egyptian christological conceptions were ritually enacted—about the practices that helped produce particular kinds of Christian bodies? In pursuing this second question, I intend to draw on insights from ritual and performance theory to try to get a better sense of how Coptic Christians in late antiquity, through the donning of what I would identify as ritualized dress, ‘performed’ bodies that participated iconically in the divinized body of the incarnate Word.

Putting on Christ: The Art of Dressing Divinely

My interest in turning my discussion towards Coptic theological understandings of the Incarnation is not a gratuitous one. It is based not only on the thematic character of the images themselves, but also on ancient testimony about the wearing of clothing embroidered with scenes from the life of Christ, and about the controversies such clothing engendered.

One source of support for the christological function of fabrics embroidered with biblical motifs is Shenoute’s sermon, *And It Happened One Day*.³³ Dubbed by its modern editor as a ‘catéchèse christologique’, the sermon dwells on the Incarnation and the pre-existence of Christ (‘the birth of the Savior and his divinity’) in relation to Mary’s role as Theotokos. What is interesting is that Shenoute uses embroidered images on ‘linen items’ (ΖΕΝΚΕΥΟC ΝΖΒΟC) as testimonies or proofs (ΜΑΡΤΥΡΙΑ) of such doctrines.³⁴ In fact, he relates to his listeners a conversation he recently had with some of his monastic brothers as they were inspecting textiles adorned with images of apostles, prophets, the Savior (ΠCΩΤΗΡ), and the ‘holy Mary Theotokos’ (ΤΟΥΤΑΑΒ . . . ΜΑΡΙΑ ΤΕΝΤΑCΧΠΕΠΝΟΥΤΕ), and actually describes how he used the embroidery as a didactic tool in identifying and correcting some of the monks’ crypto-Nestorian christological errors.³⁵

³³ Shenoute, *And It Happened One Day* (Lefort, ‘Catéchèse christologique’, 40–5); see also H.-F. Weiss, ‘Zur Christologie des Schenute von Atripe’, 177–209; and S. Emmel, *Shenoute’s Literary Corpus*, ii, 665–6, 854. The sermon is dated to the last period of Shenoute’s life, sometime after the death of Nestorius and the Council of Chalcedon (451).

³⁴ Shenoute, *And It Happened One Day*, fo. 83^v (Lefort, ‘Catéchèse Christologique’, 42).

³⁵ *Ibid.* fos. 83^v–84^r (Lefort, ‘Catéchèse Christologique’, 42–3).

A second relevant source comes from a sixth-century letter written by Severus of Antioch during his exile in Egypt (518–38 CE).³⁶ In the letter, Severus of Antioch also speaks about the practice of weaving together tunics in one piece—such that ‘from the top to the bottom’ one finds ‘no division’ of fabric—as a sign of the Incarnation.³⁷ For Severus, this style of clothing, which was especially popular among those of lower social station, ‘indicates a mystery which shows that the Only Word who was born below in flesh is above from God and the Father.’³⁸ Citing Job 10: 11 (‘you clothed me with skin and flesh’), he goes on to speak about the human body as a garment for the soul, and applies this observation to the body of Christ: ‘So also (it is with) our Savior’s body, if one conceives of it as a kind of tunic that sprang up at the same time, because it was united to the Word invariably by a natural union, was woven from the top, that is by the coming of the Holy Spirit, and not by human seed.’³⁹ For Severus, this defence of the indivisibility of the Word’s union with the body had a specific apologetic purpose—namely, to counter misreadings of John 19: 23–4, the story in which the soldiers ‘divide’ Christ’s clothes among themselves after the crucifixion, but do not tear his ‘tunic’ (χιτῶν), which was ‘seamless’ (ἄραφος) and ‘woven in one piece from the top’ (ἐκ τῶν ἄνωθεν ὑφαντός δι’ ὅλου). In this case, Severus’ interpretation of the ‘tunic’ as Christ’s body (which was indivisibly bound to the Word in the hypostatic union) is presented as an implicit critique of Nestorian and/or Chalcedonian doctrine, where Christ was seen to have been ‘divided’ into two separate natures.⁴⁰ In the end, Severus garners support for this christological reading of John 19: 23–4 by citing two earlier patristic sources—John Chrysostom’s commentary on the Gospel, and a *Homily on the Passion and Crucifixion of Christ* attributed to Athanasius of Alexandria, in which the author reaffirms that the Word ‘came from above’ but ‘is not one divided . . . because, when he became man, he had not a body that was sewn together from a man and a woman, but one that was woven from a virgin alone by the Spirit’s workmanship’.⁴¹

³⁶ Severus of Antioch, *Ep.* 100 (c.519–33 CE) (Brooks, PO 14/1 (1919), 399–416).

³⁷ *Ibid.* (Brooks, PO 14/1 (1919), 412–15).

³⁸ *Ibid.* (Brooks, PO 14/1 (1919), 412–13).

³⁹ *Ibid.* (Brooks, PO 14/1 (1919), 413).

⁴⁰ In a letter addressed to a count named Oecumenius, Severus emphatically rejects the notion that the Word and the flesh could be ‘singly and individually separated and divided from one another’ in their hypostatic union, and thus condemns ‘those who cleave our one Lord Jesus Christ into two natures’ (*Ep.* 1: Brooks, PO 12/2 (1915), 5). Later in the same letter (PO 12/2, 8), Severus laments that Christ should be ‘divided by the fact that they (i.e. Nestorians) speak of two natures after the union’. Elsewhere, he applies the same criticism to the ‘the church of the Romans’ (i.e. Chalcedonians): *ep.* 49 (PO 12/2, 152). For other examples of this anti-dyophysite polemic, see *ep.* 10, 18, 25 (PO 12/2, 29, 40, 71–7).

⁴¹ Severus of Antioch, *Ep.* 100 (Brooks, PO 14/1 (1919), 414–15). The attribution of this homily to Athanasius is not genuine: for the Greek text of the passage cited by Severus, see Ps.-Athanasius, *Homily on the Passion and Crucifixion of Christ* (PG 28.221). For the Greek text of the passage cited from John Chrysostom, see his *hom.* 1–88 in *Jo.* 85. 1. 2 (PG 59.461). In

The earliest ancient source attesting to christological interpretation of embroidered garments comes from a fourth-century homily by Asterius, bishop of Amaseia, a town located in northern Asia Minor (modern Turkey). In this sermon, Asterius speaks out strongly against those who dress themselves in clothes adorned with Gospel-images, as well as those who produce them:

They have invented some kind of vain and curious broidery (*ὕφαντικῆ*) which, by means of the interweaving of warp (*πλοκῆ*) and woof (*κρόκη*), imitates the quality of painting and represents upon garments (*πέπλοι*) the forms of all kinds of living beings, and so they devise for themselves, their wives and children gay-colored dresses (*ἑσθήτα*) decorated with thousands of figures... When they come out in public dressed in this fashion, they appear like painted walls to those they meet... You may see lions and leopards, bears, bulls and dogs, forests and rocks, hunters and (in short) the whole repertory of painting that imitates nature... The more religious among rich men and women, having picked out the story of the Gospels, have handed it over to the weavers (*ὕφανται*)—I mean our Christ together with all His disciples, and each one of the miracles the way it is related. You may see the wedding of Galilee with the water jars, the paralytic carrying his bed on his shoulders, the blind man healed by means of clay, the woman with an issue of blood seizing (Christ's) hem, the sinful woman falling at the feet of Jesus, Lazarus coming back to life from his tomb. In doing this they consider themselves to be religious and to be wearing clothes that are agreeable to God (*ἱμάτια κεχαρισμένα τῷ Θεῷ*). If they accepted my advice, they would sell those clothes and honor instead the living images of God. Do not depict Christ (for that one act of humility, the Incarnation, which he willingly accepted for our sake is sufficient unto Him), but bear in your spirit and carry about with you the incorporeal Logos (*ὁ ἀσώματος Λόγος*).⁴²

H. Maguire cites this passage in support of his argument that garments embroidered with Gospel images were primarily worn by lay persons and that they had an apotropaic function in late antiquity. He focuses his attention especially on Asterius' claim that certain people considered themselves 'to be religious and to be wearing clothes that are agreeable (or pleasing) to God'. Indeed, H. Maguire ends his quotation of Asterius with this phrase, and interprets it to mean that, by means of such clothing, certain early Christians were seeking to obtain divine 'favor' or protection.⁴³

Athanasius' authentic writings, he does refer to the story of 'those who rend Christ's tunic' to refer to (Melitian) schismatics who threaten to divide the church: see Athanasius of Alexandria, *Festal Letters* 5 and 6 (PG 26.1382A; 1386B–C); cf. 10 (PG 26.1402B–C) where he refers to the 'indivisible tunic of God' in reaffirming the unity of Father and Son. For a discussion of these sources, see A. Petterson, 'A Reconsideration of the Date of the *Contra Gentes—De Incarnatione* of Athanasius of Alexandria', *Studia Patristica* 17/3 (1993), 1030–4.

⁴² Asterius of Amaseia, *Homily 1* (PG 40.165C–168B); trans. Mango, *Art of the Byzantine Empire*, 50–1.

⁴³ H. Maguire, 'Garments Pleasing to God', 220.

H. Maguire's reading of this phrase is prescient, but he misses out on a crucial aspect of Asterius' commentary by breaking off his quotation at this point. In what follows, Asterius goes on to forbid his listeners to depict Christ on their clothing because, according to him, 'that one act of humility, the Incarnation . . . is sufficient unto Him' (*ἀρκεί γὰρ αὐτῷ ἡ μία τῆς ἐνσωματώσεως ταπεινοφροσύνη*).⁴⁴ I would argue, here, that Asterius is not simply expressing a rote aniconic sentiment, but instead is giving us a subtle insight into one aspect of the theology espoused by those who engaged in such practices. Why does Asterius feel it necessary to say that Christ's Incarnation was 'sufficient' in and of itself? We know that the sufficiency, and indeed the very nature, of Christ's Incarnation was a contested issue in the theological debates of the fourth and fifth centuries. Did Asterius' opponents on this issue perhaps see the Incarnation not as an isolated and autonomous act, but rather as an act that called for (and indeed required) certain kinds of human participation and agency? Wearing clothes with images from the Gospels may have been one way that certain early Christians believed they were mimetically (and visually) assimilating themselves to Christ's Incarnation.

The notion that Christians were called to assimilate themselves to Christ was, of course, not a new one. It had roots in the first-century writings of St Paul, who often used the metaphor of dress to describe what this assimilation was supposed to look like. For Paul, baptism was a privileged ritual locus of identification with Christ, one in which disrobing and robing were constitutive gestures. Thus, in the baptismal formula of Galatians 3: 27, Paul writes, 'As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.' In Romans 13: 14, he exhorts his readers in similar fashion to 'put on the Lord Jesus Christ'.⁴⁵ In other later New Testament literature, this baptismal metaphor of dress was employed more explicitly to express the notion of human participation in the divine. Thus, the writer of the deutero-Pauline letter to the Colossians claims that the Colossian Christians 'have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed (themselves) with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator' (3: 9b–10).⁴⁶

These Pauline images took on a special resonance in late antique Alexandria and Egypt, especially in conjunction with the parallel notion (from 2 Peter 1: 4) that Christians are enabled to become 'participants in the divine

⁴⁴ Asterius of Amaseia, *Homily 1* (PG 40.168B); trans. Margo, *Art of the Byzantine Empire*, 51.

⁴⁵ On the idea of 'putting on Christ,' see Edgar Haulotte, *Symbolique du vêtement selon la Bible*, 210–33. Sebastian Brock discusses this Pauline language in his article, 'Clothing Metaphors as a Means of Theological Expression in Syriac Tradition', 11–38, esp. 15.

⁴⁶ This passage from Colossians echoes the image-language in Paul's letter to the Romans, where he describes how God predestines Christians 'to be conformed to the image of his Son' (8: 29): J. A. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 525; see also H. D. Betz, *Galatians*, 375–6, both of whom discuss the Pauline notion of conformance to the image in relation to the baptismal formula in Galatians 3: 27.

nature'.⁴⁷ The first Alexandrian Christian writer to connect these themes was Clement of Alexandria, who lived and wrote in the early third century. In his sprawling treatise entitled *The Instructor* (*Paedagogos*), Clement celebrates the fact that the Word has 'remodeled the one born of earth into a holy and heavenly being'.⁴⁸ Exhorting his readers to 'meditat(e) on the heavenly way of life according to which we have been deified (*ἐκθεοούμεθα*)', he describes how, with the help of the Word, we are to be 'well-girded up' (*εὐζώνος*) in readiness for our journey towards 'an eternity of well-being' (*αἰδιότητα εὐζωίας*).⁴⁹ Later, in book two of the same work, in the midst of a stinging critique of people preoccupied with fashion and finery, Clement celebrates the fact that 'those who attend at the court of heaven around the King of all, are sanctified in the pure garment of the soul, that is, the flesh, and in this way they so put on incorruptibility' (*τὴν ἀκήρατον τῆς ψυχῆς ἐσθήτα, τὴν σάρκα, ἀγιάζονται, καὶ ταύτη ἐπενδύονται ἀφθαρσίαν*).⁵⁰ He then goes on to contrast the luxurious worldly garment (*ἐσθήτα τὴν τρυφητικὴν*) with 'the pure vestment, woven of faith, of those who have been shown mercy' (*τὸν ἐκ πίστεως συνυφασμένον ἀκήρατον τῶν ἠλεημένων*).⁵¹

This confluence of themes—becoming divine, putting on immortality—found significant development in the writings of Athanasius and Cyril, the two theologians who definitively shaped Alexandrian Christology during the theological controversies of the fourth and fifth centuries. For both of these writers, the Christian's assimilation to Christ was conceived of as a form of deification or divinization (*theōsis*). Once again, the logic went as follows: in taking on a human body, the divine Word enlivened—or deified—that body (the body of Christ), and by extension the Word likewise transformed and enlivened all human nature, transforming it from the mortal to the immortal, from the corruptible to the incorruptible.⁵²

⁴⁷ N. Russell, 'Partakers of the Divine Nature', 51–67.

⁴⁸ Clement of Alexandria, *paed.* 1. 12. 98. 2 (Marrou, SC 70 (1960), 284).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 1. 12. 98. 3–4 (Marrou, SC 70 (1960), 284–6).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 2. 10. 109. 3–4 (Marrou, SC 108 (1965), 208).

⁵¹ *Ibid.* 2. 10. 110. 2 (Marrou, SC 108 (1965), 210).

⁵² Athanasius of Alexandria, *inc.* 7. 5 (Kannengiesser, 288): 'For it belonged to (the Word) to restore the corruptible to incorruptibility.' Cyril of Alexandria, in his *First Letter to Succensus* (*ep.* 45. 9; PG 77.233C–D), similarly highlights how the divine Word 'became a human being (*ἐνανθρωπήσαι*)... in order to destroy corruption in (the flesh), on account of the fact that he is Life and Life-giver (*ζωὴ καὶ ζωοποιός*)'. In his treatise *On the Unity of Christ* (*Chr. un.* 722e, 723b; Durand, SC 97 (1964), 330; trans. McGuckin, 60–1), Cyril asks 'For how could his body possibly give life to us if it were not the very own body of him who is Life?' (*Τίνι γὰρ τρόπον ζωοποιήσειεν ἂν τὸ σῶμα αὐτοῦ, εἰ μὴ ἔστω ἴδιον αὐτοῦ, ὃς ἐστι ζωή;*) and then goes on to affirm that 'the Word... is ineffably united with it (the body) in a manner beyond all description. Thus it is a holy and life-giving thing (*ἁγίον τε καὶ ζωοποιόν ἐστί*), full of divine energy. And we too are transformed in Christ, the first-fruits, to be above corruption and sin.'

Thus, as we noted earlier, Athanasius writes in his treatise *On the Incarnation*: ‘For (the Word) became human (ἐνηνθρώπησεν) in order that we might be made divine (ἵνα ἡμεῖς θεοποιηθῶμεν).’⁵³ Here, Athanasius’ words echo those of Clement of Alexandria in his *Exhortation to the Greeks (Protrepticus)*: ‘The Word of God became a human being, so that you might learn from a human being how a human may become God.’⁵⁴ Elsewhere, in his second discourse *Against the Arians*, Athanasius elaborates on this idea:

For in this way he took on a human, originate body, in order that, having renewed it as its creator, he might deify it in himself (ἐν ἑαυτῷ θεοποίησιν), and thus might lead all of us into the kingdom of heaven according to his likeness. For, once again, humankind would not have been deified if it had been joined together with a creature, or if the Son had not been true God. Nor would humankind have come to be in the presence of the Father, if the one who had put on the body (ὁ ἐνδυσάμενος τὸ σῶμα) had not been the Father’s true Word by nature. And by the same token, would not have been freed from sin and the curse, if the flesh that the Word put on (σὰρξ . . . ἣν ἐνέδυσάτο ὁ Λόγος) had not been human in nature, for we would have had nothing in common with that which is foreign (to our nature). In the same way, humankind would not have been deified (οὐκ ἂν ἐθεοποίησιν ὁ ἄνθρωπος), if the Word who became flesh had not been from the Father and true and proper to him by nature. Indeed, it was for this reason that the union (ἡ συναφή) was of this kind, so that he might unite that which is human by nature with the one who exists according to the nature of the Godhead, and so that the salvation and deification (θεοποίησις) of humankind might be sure.⁵⁵

In this particular way, soteriology and Christology come together for Athanasius: as he describes it, the divine Word ‘has been made manifest to us in a human body for the sake of our salvation (διὰ τὴν ἡμῶν σωτηρίαν).’⁵⁶

Cyril similarly describes the Incarnation as being ‘for the salvation of us who are on the earth,’⁵⁷ and as the means by which ‘we, having become partakers of the divine nature, shall ascend to life and incorruptibility’ (θείας τε φύσεως γεγονότες κοινωνοί, πρὸς ζωὴν καὶ ἀφθαρσίαν ἀναβησόμεθα).⁵⁸ However, for

⁵³ Athanasius, *inc.* 54. 3 (Kannengiesser, 458).

⁵⁴ Clement of Alexandria, *protr.* 1. 8. 4 (Stählin, GCS 12 (1905), 9).

⁵⁵ Athanasius, *Ar.* 2. 70 (PG 26.296A–B). The importance of 2 Peter 1: 4 for Athanasius’ ideas about deification comes across clearly in his *Letter to Adelphius (ep. Adelph. 4; PG 26.1077A)*: ‘For (the Word) became a human being, in order that he might deify us in himself (ἵνα ἡμᾶς ἐν ἑαυτῷ θεοποίησιν); and he was born of a woman, and begotten of a virgin, in order that he might transfer to himself our wayward act of generation, and that we might become thenceforth a holy race, and “partakers of the divine nature” (κοινωνοὶ θείας φύσεως), as the blessed Peter wrote.’

⁵⁶ Athanasius, *inc.* 1. 3 (Kannengiesser, 262); see also 4. 3 (‘for the sake of our salvation (the Word) demonstrated lovingkindness by being born and appearing in a human body’), and 32. 6 (‘The Father’s own Word, Wisdom, and Power . . . took a body for the salvation of all’) (Kannengiesser, 276, 380).

⁵⁷ Cyril of Alexandria, *ep.* 45. 9 (= *First Letter to Succensus; PG 77.233C*).

⁵⁸ *Id.*, *Jo.* 3. 6 (325c; Pusey, i. 476. 26–7).

him, it is the eucharist that becomes a privileged locus for this human corporeal participation in the divine. By ingesting the eucharistic elements—viewed in a ‘real’ sense as the body and blood of Christ—the Christian physically unites him- or herself with Christ’s incorruptible (deified) body: ‘The Son comes to dwell in us corporeally as a human being, having become commingled and united (with us) through the mystery of the Eucharist.’⁵⁹

It is worth highlighting here the way in which Athanasius (and Cyril after him) often articulated this salvific transaction in unapologetically bodily terms, and (as in the case of Clement) used the image of clothing oneself with Christ as a metaphor to describe what participation in the divine might look like for human bodies. In his treatise *On the Incarnation*, Athanasius writes, ‘For being over all, the Word of God . . . the incorruptible Son of God, being joined with all by means of a like nature, suitably clothed all with incorruption.’⁶⁰ Later in the same work, Athanasius emphasizes the mimetic correspondence between the Word’s life-giving act of ‘putting on’ a body and our ‘putting on’ immortality:

For this reason, the Savior suitably clothed himself in a body (i.e. ‘put on a body’, ἐνεδύσατο σῶμα), in order that the body, having been woven together with life (συμπλεκέντος τοῦ σώματος τῆ ζωῆ), should no longer remain in death as a mortal thing, but instead, when it had clothed itself in immortality (ὡς ἐνδυσάμενον τὴν ἀθανασίαν), should thenceforth rise again and remain immortal. For, once it had clothed itself with corruption (ἅπαξ γὰρ ἐνδυσάμενον φθορὰν), it would not have risen again unless it had clothed itself with life (εἰ μὴ ἐνεδύσατο τὴν ζωὴν).⁶¹

Finally, in his *Festal Letters*, Athanasius uses similar language to describe the human assimilation to the divine image. In particular, he urges his Egyptian readers to ‘put on our Lord Jesus’ and to be ‘clothed with him’ by enacting specific virtues.⁶² Later, he goes on to interpret the parable of the prodigal son—especially, the father’s act of clothing the prodigal in sumptuous garments upon his return home—as an extended metaphor for God’s recreation of humankind ‘in the image of the glory of Christ’.⁶³

In comparison to Athanasius, Cyril’s emphasis on the indivisible union of the human and divine in Christ, and his opposition to Nestorius’ so-called two-nature Christology, made him increasingly reticent about using metaphors

⁵⁹ Cyril of Alexandria, 11. 12 (1001e; Pusey, iii. 2. 27–9). In the same section of text, Cyril goes on to distinguish this ‘corporeal’ indwelling of the Son from a correlative ‘spiritual’ indwelling by the Spirit.

⁶⁰ Athanasius of Alexandria, *inc.* 9. 2 (Kannengiesser, 294–6).

⁶¹ *Ibid.* *inc.* 44. 6 (Kannengiesser, 428).

⁶² *Id.*, *ep. fest.* 4. 3 (trans. Burgess, NPNF iv. 516). For the Syriac edn. of Athanasius’ *Festal Letters*, see William Cureton (ed.), *The Festal Letters of Athanasius* (London: Society for the Publication of Oriental Texts, 1848).

⁶³ Athanasius of Alexandria, *ep. fest.* 7. 10.

of dress to describe the Word's union with the body in the Incarnation. In his view, such language might suggest that this union of human and divine was merely superficial (and potentially reversible).⁶⁴ For Cyril, it was necessary to emphasize that this union was, rather, thoroughgoing and permanent in effect. However, even while Cyril increasingly eschewed notions that the Word merely 'put on' the body, he continued to use such language to describe human participation in the new divine reality inaugurated by the Incarnation. A vivid example appears in his *Commentary on John*, where he observes that 'those who through faith in Christ have been called to adoption as God's sons (εἰς υἰοθεσίαν κεκλημένοι Θεοῦ) have put off the poverty of their own nature; having been splendidly attired (κατηγγλαϊσμένοι) with the grace of the one who honors (them), as if dressed in a radiant garment (ἀμφίω λαμπρῷ), they ascend to a status beyond nature'.⁶⁵

How does the christological language of Athanasius and Cyril inform my study of Coptic tunics? The tunics that I have been examining in this chapter raise the possibility that, in late antique Egypt, discourses of 'putting on' Christ were not always restricted to the metaphorical realm. Indeed, I would like to suggest that the representation of Gospel scenes on Coptic clothing helps us envision one way that Egyptian Christians enacted such discourses through ritualized dress.

Catherine Bell has defined 'ritualization' as 'a way of acting that is designed and orchestrated to distinguish and privilege what is being done in comparison to other, usually more quotidian, activities'. In other words, ritualization involves 'specific strategies for setting some activities off from others, for creating and privileging a qualitative distinction between the "sacred" and the "profane"'.⁶⁶ In the process, a 'privileged contrast' is established in which a particular action (or set of actions) 'differentiat(es) itself as more important or powerful'.⁶⁷ Ancient Coptic tunics with scenes from the life of Christ were a form of 'ritualized dress' in that they marked the bodies of their wearers differently from bodies dressed in everyday wear. In the end, what was produced was sacralized bodies—bodies that visually identified themselves with the Incarnation of the Word.

To borrow language from performance theory, such tunics became means by which christological realities were *performed* and *im-personated*.⁶⁸ As Stanley Tambiah has observed, 'cosmological constructs are embedded . . . in rites', and ritualized gestures 'in turn enact and incarnate cosmological conceptions'.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ Brock ('Clothing Metaphors', 17–18) observes the application of clothing metaphors to the Incarnation in the Syriac tradition.

⁶⁵ Cyril of Alexandria, *Jo.* 1. 9 (91e–92a; Pusey, i. 134. 14–18).

⁶⁶ Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 74.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 90.

⁶⁸ Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 36 and 59 ff.

⁶⁹ Stanley Tambiah, 'A Performative Approach to Ritual', 121.

Here, the visual marking of clothing may be seen as a way of ‘playing’ with one’s bodily condition as a means of ‘realizing’ a particular kind of ritualized body.⁷⁰ Fashion becomes a way of fashioning self⁷¹—in this case, a self ‘imaged’ by the life of Christ.

Ritual theorists have long recognized the transformative character of ritual activity. For example, Victor Turner, in commenting on the reflexivity of ritual performance, writes that such performance involves ‘acting upon the self-made-other in such a way as to transform it’.⁷² According to performance theorist Richard Schechner, ritual practice becomes a means of ‘actualizing’ a new social or ontological status for the participant, of ‘carry[ing] participants across limens, [and] transforming them into different persons’.⁷³ As in the theatre, clothing (or costume) plays a key part in such transformations: what one wears is designed ‘to “make believe” in the literal sense—to help the performer make her/himself into another person or being . . . and to manifest this presence here and now’.⁷⁴ In the fragments of these Egyptian tunics from late antiquity, is it possible that we are seeing traces of the ways that devout Copts ritually enacted—performed, if you will—a divinized body, a body visually transformed from corruptibility to incorruptibility by the Incarnation of the Word?

Contested Bodies: Reconstructing a Late Antique Controversy over Clothing

Let me return briefly to the text from Asterius of Amaseia and his objections to the wearing of ‘christological’ garb. We know from Asterius that the wearing of

⁷⁰ In observing the actions of a waiter in a café, Jean-Paul Sartre describes how he ‘plays with his condition in order to realize it’, and argues that his bodily actions and postures constitute a form of ‘ceremony’ (*Being and Nothingness*, trans. Barnes, 59; cited by Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 76). On the concept of ‘ritualized bodies’, see Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 94–117.

⁷¹ In the modern context, Simone de Beauvoir has argued that women of fashion not only project themselves into various capital goods through their choice of dress and expression, they actually ‘make’ themselves into a kind of commodity (*The Second Self*, trans. Parshley, 536; cited by Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 236). In his book, *How Societies Remember* (1989), Paul Connerton has also drawn attention to how clothes do something to the wearer: citing a Victorian example, he notes how the restrictive corsets worn by women in that era ‘not only signal(led) the existence of categories of behavior’, but also generated those categories and ‘kept them habitually in being by moulding bodily configuration and movement’ (34).

⁷² Victor Turner, ‘Images and Reflections’, 21–32. Richard Schechner (*Performance Theory*, p. xviii) sometimes describes ritual transformations as almost a form of possession: ‘how beings of one order inhabit beings of another order as in a trance’.

⁷³ Schechner, *Performance Theory*, 192–3. On ‘actuals’ and ‘actualization’ in ritual performance, see also p. 26–65, 127 of the same work, where, in describing a ceremonial pig-kill at Kurumugl, Schechner observes that ‘the performance both symbolized and actualized the change in status’ (from actuality 1 to actuality 2) in the relationship between the two participating groups.

⁷⁴ Schechner, *Performance Theory*, 191.

clothes adorned with images of Christ was a contested practice in the early church (at least in some places). What was at the root of such controversy? One detail from Asterius' homily may give us a clue. He identifies 'rich men and women' in the church as the ones who were commissioning and wearing clothing embellished with scenes from the Gospels.⁷⁵ This makes sense economically (such clothing would have been an expensive commodity), and it also helps explain the relative scarcity of such Gospel-scenes among surviving textiles in relation to other more common decorative motifs. Price was one factor that would have contributed to the 'ritualized' character of such clothing—that is, to the ways that the images embroidered on the cloth marked such clothing as having a differentiated status in comparison to more generic, unmarked dress.

However, Asterius' identification of the wearers as 'rich men and women' also may explain something about how his theological objections were intimately intertwined with concerns about social and ecclesiastical authority. There is evidence from various locales in the early church that bishops and influential laypersons (or aristocratic families) continued to vie over patronage claims and the exercise of authority. The cult of the martyrs was one well-known locus for such conflict.⁷⁶ Asterius' objections to what 'rich men and women' were wearing may reflect a similar dispute, one that likewise involved the adjudication of ritual practices and of access to spiritual power. The issue at stake was one of ritual agency. Victor Turner once noted that, within communal contexts of ritual activity, participants are 'subdivided as to allocate to some the roles of agents of transformation and to others those of persons undergoing transformation'.⁷⁷ However, given the reflexivity of ritual practice, a participant can sometimes simultaneously fulfil both of these roles—as agent of transformation and as person undergoing transformation. Asterius' objection seems to have been that those wearing images of the Incarnation were somehow usurping Christ's proper role as the agent of transformation: they thought their clothes would please (and perhaps appease) God. His concern was to safeguard the agency of Christ in the Incarnation, and perhaps to privilege the bishop as the mediating ritual agent for such processes of transformation. In the process, he was also effectively seeking to delimit or restrict the contexts in which lay bodies could be ritualized (and thereby transformed). This strategy would have cohered with contemporaneous efforts by other fourth- and fifth-century church leaders to mark the sacraments administered by authorized priests—especially baptism and the eucharist—as privileged contexts for the ritualized transformation of lay bodies.

⁷⁵ Asterius of Amaseia, *Hom.* 1 (PG 40.168A; trans. Mango, 51).

⁷⁶ Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 34–6; S. Davis, 'Patronage and Architectural Adaptation'.

⁷⁷ Victor Turner, 'Images and Reflections', 25.

Conclusions: Tying Up Loose Threads

The survival of Coptic tunics with christological images from the fifth to the eighth century (and even later) suggests that the efforts of such bishops as Asterius, in the end, were not completely successful. Wealthy Egyptian Christians in late antiquity continued to commission such articles for their use. What can we say finally about the social function—the use and setting—of these garments?

Earlier, I highlighted the potential mimetic and apotropaic functions of Gospel imagery on early Christian clothing. Both of these functions correlate well with my arguments concerning Coptic Christology and ritual dress. The wearing of clothing with images from Christ's life produced ritualized bodies that mimetically participated in the Incarnation, bodies vested with apotropaic power. Of course, such processes would have looked quite different depending on the specific social setting, and here we must give our imaginations free rein. For Christian pilgrims travelling to Bethlehem or Jerusalem, or to local Egyptian shrines, the donning of such garments would have highlighted their identification with biblical and apocryphal models (e.g. as represented in the stories of the Magi or the flight of the Holy Family to Egypt) and would have produced transformed bodies resonant with the christological charisma of the holy sites they were visiting. In the context of burial, the body of the deceased would have been marked as having 'put on' the body of Christ and thereby as having been 'charged' with protective power: the result was a posthumous performance of human assimilation to the divine image, an assimilation that was enabled and effected through the incarnate Word's conquering of death.⁷⁸ We might very well imagine other contexts for the wearing of tunics with scenes from the life of Christ: indeed, the testimony of Asterius of Amaseia suggests that public 'showings' may have been one such venue.⁷⁹

In any case, I hope that such imaginative reconstructions of how Copts enacted their Christology through ritual dress might at the very least help begin to break down traditional disciplinary divides between theology and social history in the study of early Egyptian Christianity. If so, then these tunics will have had a valuable social function for us in the academy today—namely, that of challenging (and perhaps overturning) our own lingering and cherished epistemological dichotomies of mind and body.

⁷⁸ Schechner (*Performance Theory*, 192) identifies funerals, along with a range of initiatory rituals, as 'sites of transformation'.

⁷⁹ Asterius of Amaseia relates how people in his city dressed themselves (*ἐνδυσάμενοι*) in elaborate garments to be seen by others (*Hom.* 1; *PG* 40.165D; trans. Mango, 50). In the early third century, Clement of Alexandria (*paed.* 2. 10. 108. 5; Marrou, *SC* 108 (1965), 206) likewise had criticized the wearing of luxurious and elaborately decorated clothing, notably associating it with public pageantry (*ἡ πομπή*). Public exhibition of dress may be recognized as one form of ritual activity. Schechner (*Performance Theory*, 114) describes such ritual display as 'a showing of a doing', an act that is simultaneously symbolic and actual(izing) of a certain kind of status or position.

BUILDING A DIVINE BODY: CHRISTOLOGY AND SACRED SPACE

In her book, *The Memory of the Eyes*, Georgia Frank describes how early Egyptian pilgrims perceived the bodies of monks as *monumenta*, corporeal ‘monuments’ that recalled remnants and recollections of the biblical past for the pious viewer.⁸⁰ In other social contexts, as we have seen, people dressed in finely embroidered clothing were likened to buildings, appearing ‘like painted walls to those they meet’.⁸¹ Each of these examples demonstrates how late antique observers used architectural metaphors to read—or better, to construct—the human body. In the final part of this chapter, I want to turn this metaphor on its head by showing how the visual equation of *corpora* and *monumenta* could also run in the other direction. To put it quite simply, in late antiquity and into the medieval period, bodies were not only interpreted as buildings, but buildings—such as monumental, decorated church spaces—could also be interpreted as bodies. As I will argue, this way of viewing early Christian art and architecture had profound implications for the way that the Incarnation would have been visually communicated in Coptic worship.

Buildings and Bodies: Architectures of the Flesh

The roots of this connection between churches and bodies may be traced to the first-century writings of the apostle Paul. In his first letter to the Corinthians (12: 12–31), Paul introduces the conception of the *ekklēsia* as the ‘body of Christ’.

For just as the body (*σῶμα*) is one and has many members, and all the members of the body (*σῶμα*), though many, are one body (*σῶμα*), so it is with Christ . . . Now you are the body of Christ (*σῶμα Χριστοῦ*) and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church (*ἐκκλησία*) first apostles, second prophets, third teachers . . . (1 Cor. 12: 12, 27–8)

This same theme is picked up again and developed in the deutero-Pauline letter to the Ephesians, where the letter-writer specifically employs language derived from architectural construction to describe the purpose of Christian leadership roles: ‘The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ (*εἰς οἰκοδομὴν τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ*)’ (Eph. 4: 11–12). A few verses later, Christ is presented as the ‘head’ (*κεφαλή*) of

⁸⁰ Georgia Frank, *The Memory of the Eyes*, 69–78, esp. 69–70. Ancient authors described a *monumentum* as anything ‘produced for the sake of memory’ (Varro, *De lingua Latina* 6. 49) that holds ‘lessons of every kind of experience’ (Livy, *Ab urbe condita*, praef. 10) for the viewer.

⁸¹ Asterius of Amasea, *Homily* 1 (PG 40.165C–168B; trans. Mango, 50–1).

this body, and the body's growth is similarly described as an act of 'building itself up' (οἰκοδομῆ ἑαυτοῦ, Eph. 4: 16). In its original context, the primary focus of this Pauline analogy between church and body was not on buildings *per se*, but rather on the social structure of the Christian community and its leadership roles. However, in subsequent centuries, this archetypal metaphor may have served as an implicit biblical warrant for ecclesiastical authors who interpreted Christian buildings in corporeal terms.

In late antique and early Byzantine *ekphraseis* (verbal descriptions of the visual arts), examples abound of Christian writers who utilize bodily imagery to portray and personify church architecture.⁸² Indeed, one of the primary goals of the ekphrastic technique is 'the transformation of the dead, passive image into a living creature'.⁸³ The church of St Sophia in Constantinople seems to have inspired a number of different authors to view the structure as if its architectural elements were 'enfleshed' as human body parts. In his treatise *On the Buildings* (532–7 CE), the sixth-century historian Procopius describes the eastern side of the church ('the part turned to the rising sun') as its 'face' (πρόσωπον), noting that above its arches 'the first light of day always smiles'.⁸⁴ The significance of this personification for the author becomes clear a little later in the same work when he emphasizes how that space conveys to the viewer a sense of God's presence: 'The visitor's mind is lifted up to God and floats aloft, thinking that He cannot be far away, but must love to dwell (εμφιλοχωρεῖν) in this place which He himself has chosen.'⁸⁵

Later in the same century, Paul the Silentiary expands on Procopius' bodily hermeneutic in two of his ekphrastic works, *Description of St Sophia* and *Description of the Ambo*. In the former, he describes a set of conches as 'deep-bosomed' with columns like 'bent arms stretched out to embrace' the choir.⁸⁶ An arch above is said to have a 'back' upon which 'is planted the base of the divine head-piece of the center of the church'.⁸⁷ Each of the arches to the east

⁸² As a literary mode of expression, *ekphrasis* traces its roots to Homer's description of Achilles' shield in the *Iliad*: J. A. W. Heffernan, *Museum of Words*, 10–22; and M. Krieger, *Ekphrasis*, pp. xiii–xvii. However, this technique of description grew especially popular in late antiquity after it became part of the standard exercises (*progymnasmata*) of rhetorical training in Second Sophistic schools: J. Onianus, 'Abstraction and Imagination in Late Antiquity', 15–17; see also the review of Heffernan's book by Richard Macksey in *MLN* 110/4 (1995), 1010–15.

⁸³ W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, 167; Patricia Cox Miller, '1997 NAPS Presidential Address', 113–38, esp. 128. Cox Miller writes, 'In an ekphrasis, effects of visual and sensory immediacy come together as the writer attempts to bring a painting or other material object alive in words.'

⁸⁴ Procopius, *On the Buildings* 1. 1. 31–41 (Dewing and Downey, vii. 16–20; trans. Mango, 74–5).

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* 1. 1. 61 (Dewing and Downey, vii. 26; trans. Mango, 76).

⁸⁶ Paul the Silentiary, *Description of St Sophia* 362 and 398 (trans. Mango, 81–2). Elsewhere, Paul describes the dome of the church as 'a helmet rounded on all sides like a sphere' (sect. 489: trans. Mango, 83).

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* 398 (trans. Mango, 82).

and west are said to have ‘an unshaken foot’ and curved ‘arms’, while in the north and south, the author sees a variety of bodily associations—the ‘chin’ of the rounded arches, a ‘sinewy juncture’ mounted upon columns just below the women’s seating area, and the ‘massive heads’ of the columns themselves, cut from glittering marble that seems to be ‘graced with locks of golden hair’.⁸⁸

In his *Description of the Ambo*, Paul the Silentiary focuses his attention on bodily characteristics of the stone pulpit in St Sophia. Thus, its base resembles a ‘belly’ (γαστήρ)⁸⁹ and a projection on either side forms a ‘neck’⁹⁰ that rests on the pulpit steps. However, what is most striking is the author’s verbal portrait of the marble, which represents its veined surface as human skin: ‘In parts is seen a rosy bloom mingled with pallor, or the fair brightness of human fingernails. . . . In places the marble is rosy with a tinge of white . . . here and there the veins are traversed by fine sinews.’⁹¹ Pedestals of quarried stone ‘gleam white, but on their white skin a blue vein winds a scattered path.’⁹²

Later, in the ninth century, following the period of iconoclasm, writers who supported the use of images in churches came to describe the destruction of visual programmes as physical wounds inflicted on the body of the church:

See of what beauty was the face (πρόσωπον) of the church bereft? . . . Those men, after stripping the church, Christ’s bride, of her own ornaments, and wantonly inflicting on her bitter wounds, with which her face was scarred, sought in their insolence to submerge her in deep oblivion, naked as she was, so to speak, and unsightly, and afflicted with those many wounds. . . . Still bearing on her body the scars of those wounds . . . she now regains the ancient dignity.⁹³

In this context, the renewal of iconographic programmes and church architecture was sometimes likened to a facelift or a treatment for signs of ageing: thus, in his restoration of the Church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople, Basil I (867–886 CE) is said to have ‘scraped off the signs of old age and removed the wrinkles’, thereby making it ‘once more beautiful and new’.⁹⁴ In

⁸⁸ Ibid. 532 (trans. Mango, 83–4). The light entering through the forty windows at the base of the half dome also reminds the author of golden locks—‘the rays of fair-haired Dawn’ (sect. 506: trans. Mango, 83).

⁸⁹ Id., *Description of the Ambo* 50; cf. 148 (trans. Mango, 91; cf. 93).

⁹⁰ Ibid. 126 (trans. Mango, 92 and 93).

⁹¹ Ibid. 76 and 126 (trans. Mango, 93).

⁹² Ibid. 148 (trans. Mango, 93). John Onianus (‘Abstraction and Imagination in Late Antiquity’, 9–10) cites examples of how sixth-century Christians sometimes even thought they could discern human figures in the marble patterns.

⁹³ Photius, *Homily* 17. 3 (Laourdas, *Photiou Homiliai*, 1959), 167–8; trans. Mango, 187–8, slightly modified).

⁹⁴ *Life of Basil the First* 80 (trans. Mango, 192). For the Greek text, see I. Bekker, *Corpus scriptorum historiae byzantinae* (1838). In the fourth century, Paulinus of Nola evokes the Pauline image of an old person being made new as he celebrated the completion of renovations

other more dire cases, such renovations were actually compared to intensive-care medical treatment given to someone on his or her deathbed: thus, when the church of the prophet Elijah at the Petron was on the verge of ‘expiring’, Basil I ‘nursed it back to health and rebuilt it splendidly.’⁹⁵

These examples of how buildings were ‘read’ as living bodies provide valuable glimpses into how visual perceptions of worship spaces were shaped during the early Byzantine period. Late antique training in ‘demonstrative’ or ‘laudatory’ rhetoric—and especially the art of ekphrasis—would have been one way that (educated) viewers’ visual imaginations would have been primed for such encounters with sacred architecture.⁹⁶ Apart from such formal literary education, a host of other social and ritual practices also contributed to the creation of a shared cultural disposition—a *habitus*—where participants in worship were encouraged to visualize church space in relation to human bodies.⁹⁷ Indeed, it was through just such a process of visual socialization that late antique and early medieval Christians in Egypt became practised in viewing the incarnate body of Christ and their own (saintly) bodies in relation to Coptic church architecture and iconography.⁹⁸

One of these *habitus*-shaping practices was the early Christian cult of the relics, where bodily remains of saints and even physical traces of Christ’s presence were often incorporated into the architecture of churches. One legendary account of the construction of St Sophia in Constantinople tells of how its builders installed twelve courses of bricks in the arches of the dome, made holes in them, and then ‘inserted in the holes sacred relics of

made to the Church of St Felix in Nola: ‘This present of the Lord, this symbol by means of which through Christ’s gift the same person comes into being young and dies to his old self, behold it here, in the double church of Felix, now that the buildings have been restored’ (Paulinus of Nola, *Carmen* 28. 196–8; Goldschmidt, 82–3).

⁹⁵ *Life of Basil the First* 82 (trans. Mango, 194).

⁹⁶ John Onianus, ‘Abstraction and Imagination in Late Antiquity’, 15–17. Onianus argues for ‘a decisive increase’ in the visual response of sixth-century Byzantine spectators—that they could ‘actually see more in the slab’ than their predecessors (10–11). This late antique development of heightened visual imagination—a mimetic faculty of the mind ‘to see forms where none exist’—provides Onianus with a theoretical framework for explaining a ‘parallel decline in artistic naturalism’ (12–13).

⁹⁷ In the work of Pierre Bourdieu, the term ‘habitus’ describes ‘a set of historical relations “deposited” within individual bodies in the form of mental and corporeal schemata of perception, appreciation, and action’ (P. Bourdieu and L. J. D. Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, 16; see also his *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977). Marcel Mauss originally defined the term ‘habitus’ as ‘techniques of the body’ (*techniques du corps*): Mauss, ‘Techniques du corps’, 271–93; repr. in *Sociologie et anthropologie*, 363–86.

⁹⁸ In her article, ‘“Taste and See”: The Eucharist and the Eyes of Faith in the Fourth Century’, *Church History* 70/4 (2001), 619–43, Georgia Frank has noted how late antique catechetical sermons often evoked ‘images of built spaces’ and thereby prompted a kind of ‘iconic visualization’ that ‘situated divine presence in eucharistic space’ for participants in worship.

different saints.⁹⁹ In Egypt, as in other regions, bodily relics of saints were frequently installed under altars and in side chapels where they become the focus of various devotional actions—including physical forms of contact such as touching and kissing. In the Holy Family tradition, we have also seen how visual traces of Christ's body—such as the handprint at Jabal al-Ṭayr—were incorporated into the structures of churches and became objects of pious veneration. These examples demonstrate how practices associated with the cult of the saints further marked Christian architecture as 'embodied'—as being founded upon, and in some cases quite literally composed of, human flesh and bones.

Another setting of ritual practice that became a venue for such bodily readings of sacred architecture was Egyptian monasticism. Once again, the fifth-century writings of Shenoute prove to be an instructive case study: indeed they reveal how he instructed his monks to view the main church at the White Monastery as an architectonic template for their own ascetic bodies.¹⁰⁰ Shenoute writes about the church building itself as a body that houses both the spirit (God) and the flesh (its material construction). The monastic church and the bodies of the monks are both conceived of as sacralized spaces where worship takes place and where offerings are made: in this context, Shenoute exhorts his monks to transform themselves into sanctuaries, to build themselves up 'like a living stone of a spiritual house for holy worship' (cf. 1 Pet. 2: 4).¹⁰¹

In late antique Egypt, Shenoute was certainly not the only writer to envision this intimate connection between monastic spaces and monastic bodies, nor were churches the only architectural structures to evoke this connection. In other monastic literature, the monk's cell also comes to be viewed almost as an extension of his or her body.¹⁰² One of the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers* urges monks to 'go and sit in your cell and give your body in pledge to the walls of the cell, and do not come out of it... do not let your body leave the cell'.¹⁰³ To remain inside the cell was to exhibit care for one's body and soul: thus, another *Saying* compares the activity of gathering materials to build a cell with the way

⁹⁹ *Narratio de S. Sophia* 14 (eight or ninth century CE) (trans. Mango, 98).

¹⁰⁰ Caroline T. Schroeder, 'A Suitable Abode for Christ', 477. In this article, Schroeder traces out a four-tiered relationship between (1) the church (as monumental body), (2) the individual body of the monk, (3) the corporate body of the monastery, and (4) the sacramental body of Christ partaken in the eucharist. A slightly revised version of this article is published as ch. 3 of her book *Monastic Bodies* (pp. 90–123).

¹⁰¹ Shenoute, *God is Holy*, XU 79 (= Biblioteca Nazionale 'Vittorio Emanuele III', IB 7, fo. 13: Amélineau, *Œuvres*, ii. 145; trans. Schroeder, 'A Suitable Abode for Christ', 496). Similarly, Paulinus of Nola speaks about how one should be transformed into 'a suitable abode for Christ' (Paulinus, *Carmen* 28. 279–81; Goldschmidt, 86–7; Schroeder, 'A Suitable Abode for Christ', 514–15).

¹⁰² For this brief discussion of the relationship between the monastic cell and the bodily disciplines of Egyptian monks, I am especially indebted to the dissertation written by Darlene Brooks Hedstrom, 'Your Cell Will Teach You All Things' (Miami University of Ohio, 2001).

¹⁰³ *Apophthegmata Patrum*, Anonymous Saying 205 (Nau, 'Histoires des solitaires égyptiens', 279; trans. Ward, *Wisdom of the Desert Fathers*, 24, no. 73).

monks acquire virtues through bodily discipline.¹⁰⁴ According to Besa (Shenoute's immediate successor as head of the White Monastery), when monks reclaim and reoccupy abandoned dwellings for use as cells, they effectively enact or bring about in themselves the indwelling of Christ's Spirit, who refurbishes previously ruined bodies and souls.¹⁰⁵

Similarly, in the case of Shenoute, material care for the monastic church stands in as a metaphor for the discipline of monastic bodies—bodies that were seen to participate in divine (spiritual) attributes.¹⁰⁶ In this context, he sharply criticizes monks who have not established themselves as a holy sacrifice to God and who have not glorified the Spirit who mixes with their bodies.¹⁰⁷ Rather, the holiness of the individual monk's body (and of the monastery as a corporate body) should rightly mirror the righteousness and perfection of the monastic church:

(Some monks) are humble and perfected in all righteousness, are holy in the holy house of God, and are a model also for multitudes through labor and skills. And the house appears as a house that is perfected, that is bound to its companions through labor and skills. The ones who will be in it, but even more the ones who are in it, will thrive and show forth righteousness.¹⁰⁸

Ultimately, in Shenoute's eyes, 'every adornment that is in the house of God, in wood, in stone, in walls' testifies to the ascetic transformation of flesh into spirit, 'just like the water that became wine in Cana of Galilee'.¹⁰⁹ In Shenoute's church, as well as in more modest mud-brick cells, the visual 'adornment' of walls and the practices of worship would have provided a vital ritual context for promoting such ideational links between monument and monk.

Envisioning and Ingesting a Divine Body: The Incarnation in Coptic Art and Worship

How then did the figural decoration of interior space (whether monastic or non-monastic) help configure the bodies of viewers and ritual participants in specifically christological terms? How were worshippers drawn to see their

¹⁰⁴ *Apophthegmata Patrum*, Poemen 130 (PG 65.353–6; trans. Ward, *The Desert Christian*, 185).

¹⁰⁵ Besa, *On Individual Responsibility for Sins* 3 (= frag. 36): Kuhn, CSCO 157, 119 (text); CSCO 158, 115 (trans.); see also W. E. Crum, *Catalogue of the Coptic Manuscripts in the British Museum*, 68.

¹⁰⁶ C. T. Schroeder, 'A Suitable Abode for Christ', 502.

¹⁰⁷ Shenoute, *God is Holy* (DG 132; Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna, P.Vindob. 9232^{B/A}; Wessely, *Griechische und koptische Texte theologischen Inhalts*, i. 18); Schroeder, 'A Suitable Abode for Christ', 496. Schroeder here reads $\text{M}\Pi\text{N}\alpha\ \epsilon\tau$ ('the Spirit who?') rather than $\text{M}\Pi\text{H}\ \epsilon\tau$ ('that which' or 'the one who').

¹⁰⁸ Shenoute, *God is Holy* (XU 88; Amélineau, *Cœuvres*, ii. 145–6).

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* (XU 104–5; Amélineau, *Cœuvres*, ii. 156); Schroeder, 'A Suitable Abode for Christ', 502.

own bodies in relation to the incarnate body of Christ painted on the walls of churches? In order to answer such questions, we must first recognize the way that late antique visual art was designed to prompt a visceral, moral response in the observer.¹¹⁰ Thus, one ancient writer, in describing a painted rendition of the passion, takes on Christ's own voice and calls his (monastic) reader-viewer to 'fasten in your mind . . . the immense cross pressing on my shoulders and wearied back', to 'see my locks clotted with blood, and my blood-stained neck under my very hair', to 'survey my compressed and sightless eyes', and to 'see the blood streaming from (my wound), and my perforated feet, and blood-stained limbs'.¹¹¹ These graphic details of Christ's suffering are identified by the writer as incitements both to memory and to the enactment of similar virtues.¹¹² By observing the virtues of Christ and the saints who followed his example, one learns 'to become like them, and indeed to become them'.¹¹³ In this way, the building and its painted walls become 'material traces of spiritual work'—work that is facilitated in the body through the act of viewing an artistic exemplar.¹¹⁴ In Coptic churches, the sanctified bodies of Christ and the saints depicted on the walls would have been perceived as collectively framing and shaping the (physical and spiritual) posture of the worshipper who sought to stand in communion with God.

The German sociologist Niklas Luhmann has noted how, in antiquity, 'art was meant to evoke feelings of astonishment (*Verwunderung*) and admiration (*Bewunderung*)' that effectuate 'an otherwise unattainable contemplative state, distanced from daily routines'.¹¹⁵ This distantiating from daily routine would have marked the act of viewing art (in various environments) as a ritualized practice—that is, one that was differentiated, or set apart, from everyday acts of viewing.¹¹⁶ The act of artistic viewing functioned as a visual stimulant or 'irritant' that effectuated a changed posture in the body and soul of the viewer.¹¹⁷ The mimetic response elicited from the viewer was understood as both dynamic and productive in character: viewing art sponsored 'a *corrective imitation* that direct(ed) the awareness of the observer toward the essential and purge(d) it of imperfections and defects'.¹¹⁸ Thus, when early

¹¹⁰ C. Conybeare, *Paulinus Noster*, 97–8; Schroeder, 'A Suitable Abode for Christ', 519–20.

¹¹¹ Ps.-Lactantius, *De passione Domini* 37–45 (Brandt, CSEL 27, 148–51; trans. ANF 7.327–8).

¹¹² 'These *monumenta*, if at any time you find pleasure in thinking over them . . . will be incitements to virtue' (Ps.-Lactantius, *De passione Domini* 58; Brandt, CSEL 27, 151; trans. ANF vii. 327–8).

¹¹³ E. Bolman, 'Joining the Community of Saints', 43. Schroeder ('A Suitable Abode for Christ', 520) comments: 'Paulinus hoped that those who entered his basilicas would become like the saints depicted on their walls and like the basilicas themselves—suitable abodes for Christ.'

¹¹⁴ Bolman, 'Joining the Community of Saints', 46.

¹¹⁵ Niklas Luhmann, *Art as a Social System*, 145.

¹¹⁶ Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 74, 90.

¹¹⁷ Niklas Luhmann, *Art as a Social System*, 352 n. 26.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.* 250 (the italics represent Luhmann's own emphasis).

Christian worshippers encountered wall paintings that depicted ‘improbable and yet possible events’ from the Gospels, those events were ‘rendered plausible’—realizable—to their minds and bodies.¹¹⁹ The sanctified bodies of Christ and the saints depicted on the walls around them would have been perceived as collectively framing and shaping the (physical and spiritual) posture of the worshipper who sought to stand in communion with God.

The ritualized act of reading the body of Christ (and of the saints) onto and into oneself would have been scripted by the liturgy—the readings of Scripture and the saints’ lives, the chanting of prayers and hymns, and the physical action of partaking of the eucharist. The encounter with art in worship was a comprehensive experience that engaged all the senses.¹²⁰ Here, I want to highlight the role of music in conditioning Coptic perceptions of art. Recent ethnographic studies have shown how music ‘evokes and organizes (both) collective memories and present experiences of place with an intensity, power and simplicity unmatched by any other social activity’.¹²¹ Through musical performance, the relationships between ritualized places and bodies are reorganized, renegotiated, and transformed.¹²²

In Egypt, hymns extolling Christ and the saints would have played a large role in situating the worshippers’ bodies in relation to a communal history and lineage as well as highlighting the physical (visual) presence of that lineage as a constituent part of the church body—not only on the level of church architecture, but also in relation to the experience of the community gathered.¹²³ Coptic liturgy and chant would have situated the worshippers’ bodies not only in relation to this historical lineage—the history of salvation and sanctity narrated on the church walls—but also in relation to liturgical time. The temporal sequencing of biblical narrative and ritual performance would have created in the viewer a heightened sense of simultaneity—a convergence of story, space, and liturgical enactment—a series of synchronized

¹¹⁹ Niklas Luhmann, 145, 352 n. 26.

¹²⁰ On the multi-sensory character of medieval perception and the function of oral communion, see *Ibid.* 17–18.

¹²¹ Martin Stokes, ‘Introduction: Ethnicity, Identity and Music’, in *Ethnicity, Identity and Music*, 3.

¹²² *Ibid.* 3–4. Stokes (3) emphasizes how ‘the “places” constructed through music involve notions of difference and social boundary’, as well as ‘hierarchies of a moral and political order’.

¹²³ Comparison might be made here to Peter Parkes’s observations in his article, ‘Personal and Collective Identity in Kalasha Song Performance’, 157–87. Parkes (170–6) highlights the function of eulogies sung in praise of lineage ancestors in shaping communal identity within the Kalasha religious community in Pakistan. Like Coptic church music, Kalasha festival song involves vocal rather than instrumental expression, a monodic style of recitative chant within a narrow tonal register, and collective choral accompaniment (164)—all features that serve to distinguish it from the surrounding Islamic musical forms in that region.

moments when participants would have seen the artistic scenes before them ‘actualized step by step’ in their own worship, in their own bodies.¹²⁴

Bodily actions such as physical participation in the eucharist would have especially conditioned the way that ancient and medieval Copts understood themselves in relation to scenes of the Incarnation painted on the walls of their churches. Study of ritual practice has demonstrated how ‘the use of the body defines the self of the performer for himself and for others.’¹²⁵ Thus, when a participant in worship kneels and prays, he or she does not merely communicate ephemeral words, but actually ‘incarnates’ a body of subordination.¹²⁶ In the same way, I would argue that, in partaking of the eucharist, Coptic worshippers were incarnating—giving substance and form to—bodies capable of hosting the divine. Such a notion of eucharist participation—one that takes the Incarnation as its guiding mimetic paradigm—would have been mediated not only verbally through prayers and sermons, but also visually through strategically placed images of Christ and the Virgin Mary.

The image of the Virgin enthroned with the Christchild on her lap was a common feature in the iconographic programmes of ancient Coptic churches. Mary is often portrayed in a full frontal pose holding a miniature Christ either to her left (in what is known as the *Hodegetria* posture) or in an oval disk (*clipeus*) directly in front of her.¹²⁷ However, a third type proves to be especially interesting for us in our attempts to reconstruct the dynamics of Coptic ritual participation in the Incarnation—namely, the depiction of Mary as the Nursing Virgin (*Galaktotrophousa*), with the infant Christ suckling at her breast (Fig. 4.13).¹²⁸ This scene derived a number of its formal elements from contemporary depictions

¹²⁴ Luhmann, *Art as a Social System*, 20–1.

¹²⁵ Roy A. Rappaport, ‘The Obvious Aspects of Ritual’, 200; repr. in R. L. Grimes (ed.), *Readings in Ritual Studies*, 436.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ Dorothy Shepherd Payer, ‘Christian Subjects in Coptic Art: Virgin Enthroned’, *CE* ii. 542–4. Numerous examples of the *Hodegetria* type have been found at Bawit and Saqqara: see J. Clédât, *Le Monastère et la nécropole de Baouît: Notes mises en œuvre et éditées par Dominique Bénazeth et Marie-Hélène Rutschowskaya*, 51–2, figs. 48 and 50 (chapel 42). J. E. Quibell, *Excavations at Saqqara (1906–1907)* (1908), pl. 55; and *id.*, *Excavations at Saqqara (1908–1909, 1909–1910)*, 22, and pl. 24. One of the wall paintings of the *Hodegetria* Virgin and Child recovered from the Monastery of Apollo at Bawit is now displayed at the Coptic Museum in Cairo (inv. 7118; sixth to seventh century CE): see G. Gabra, *Cairo: The Coptic Museum and Old Churches*, 58–9 (fig. 9). Paintings of the Christchild on Mary’s lap within a *clipeus* have been found not only at Saqqara (Quibell, *Excavations at Saqqara*, pl. 24), but also at the White Monastery and the Monastery of St Antony at the Red Sea: see J. Leroy, *Les Peintures des couvents de desert d’Esna*, pl. XI.B; and E. Bolman, *Monastic Visions*, 56–7, and fig. 4.23.

¹²⁸ For discussions of this iconographic type, see P. van Moorsel, ‘Christian Subjects in Coptic Art: Galaktotrophousa’, *CE* ii. 531–2; *id.*, ‘Die stillende Gottesmutter und die Monophysiten’, 281–90. For more recent comprehensive studies of the Nursing Virgin, see the work of Lucia Langener and Elizabeth S. Bolman cited below.



Figure 4.13. Wall painting of the Nursing Virgin (*Galaktotrophousa*) with the Christ Child. Wadi al-Natrun, Monastery of the Syrians, second half of 7th century cē; Karel Innemée, 'The Iconographical Program of Paintings in the Church of al-Adra in Deir al-Sourian: Some Preliminary Observations,' in *ΘΕΜΕΛΙΑ: Spätantike und koptologische Studien Peter Grossmann zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. M. Krause and S. Schaten (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1998), 151 (fig. 2).

of the Egyptian goddess Isis with her divine son Horus.¹²⁹ The visual parallels would not have been lost on early Christians in Egypt. In the light of her celebrated role as Mother of God (Theotokos), Mary and Christ are presented as effectively usurping the privileged place of Isis and Horus in the Egyptian pantheon. As I have argued elsewhere, this iconographic borrowing had an important symbolic and social function during the anti-pagan campaigns of the fourth and fifth centuries: by commissioning this image in new churches (including former temples that had been converted to Christian use), Egyptian ecclesiastical leaders sought to reclaim and redefine the topography of holy places in Alexandria and the Nile Valley.¹³⁰ However, across the history of its use, beginning in late antiquity proper and continuing into the medieval period, this same image also had an important function in everyday Coptic ritual practice as a visual ‘metaphor for the eucharist’.¹³¹

As early as the first decade of the third century, one finds evidence of how Alexandrian and Egyptian authors interpreted Mary’s milk as a type of Christ’s blood in the sacrament.¹³² Detailing the process by which blood is converted to milk in the body of a nursing mother, Clement of Alexandria says that ‘milk is the lightest and most palatable part of the blood’.¹³³ Accordingly, milk and wine both allegorically symbolize for him ‘the blood of Christ’.¹³⁴ In this context, Clement implicitly merges the image of the Nursing Virgin with that of the church, which supplies the body of the incarnate Logos to its members: thus, the church is ‘at one and the same time virgin and mother, undefiled as a virgin, loving as a mother; inviting her children in, she nurses them with a holy milk, the Word for newborn children’.¹³⁵

In late antique and early medieval sermons and legends, one sees this eucharistic reading of the *Galaktotrophousa* reiterated. A *Discourse on the*

¹²⁹ Lucia Langener, in her monograph, *Isis lactans—Maria lactans* (1996), catalogues and compares examples of nursing images of Isis and Mary. On the basis of minor differences in stylistic detail, some art historians have questioned whether it is possible to argue for a direct genealogical relationship between these images of Isis and Mary: see e.g. V. Tran Tam Tinh, *Isis Lactans* (1973). Here, I am not interested so much in such genealogical relationships, but rather the social function of iconographical isomorphism for late antique viewers.

¹³⁰ Davis, *Early Coptic Papacy*, 77.

¹³¹ Throughout this discussion, I am indebted to the work of E. Bolman, especially her articles, ‘The Coptic *Galaktotrophousa* Revisited’, 1177; and ‘The Enigmatic Coptic *Galaktotrophousa* and the Cult of the Virgin Mary in Egypt’, 13–22; see also her doctoral thesis, ‘The Coptic *Galaktotrophousa* as the Medicine of Immortality’ (Bryn Mawr College, 1997).

¹³² While the image of the Nursing Virgin was certainly not restricted to Egypt and may not have originated there, I want to suggest that it would have sponsored a particular set of viewing practices in the Coptic church—practices that took shape in relation to Egyptian views of Eucharist as an *incarnational rite*.

¹³³ Clement of Alexandria, *paed.* 1. 6. 39. 2–40. 1, quote at 39. 2 (Marrou, SC 70 (1960), 182–4).

¹³⁴ *Ibid.* 1. 6. 47. 2 (Marrou, SC 70 (1960), 194).

¹³⁵ *Ibid.* 1. 6. 42. 1 (Marrou, SC 70 (1960), 186).

Virgin Mary attributed to Cyril of Alexandria emphasizes the heavenly origin of the milk in Mary's breasts, associating it again with the body and blood of Christ offered up on the altar.¹³⁶ Likewise, a medieval legend about the Virgin Mary called the *History of Aur* includes a scene where a group of magicians approach Mary and ask her to give them 'a little milk from thy breast so that we might drink it and never die'.¹³⁷

The image of the Nursing Virgin also continued to be interpreted eucharistically in the language of the Egyptian liturgy. One prayer of inclination in the *Great Euchologion* of the White Monastery includes a series of praises offered up to Christ that, in the practice of the liturgy, would have been vocalized as verbal responses to visual images related to the themes of Incarnation and nativity, including that of the Nursing Virgin:

Blessed are you, you who would take on flesh from the holy Virgin Mary as a man. Glory be to you because you are God in truth and perfection. Blessed are you in the womb of the holy Virgin Mary. Glory be to you, to whom she gave birth . . . Blessed are you, you who are in the arms of the holy Virgin Mary. Glory be to you, you who feed on the milk of the Virgin.¹³⁸

This very prayer, or one like it, may have been used in the early medieval mass celebrated at the nearby Red Monastery (Dayr Anba Bishay), where a scene of the Nursing Virgin is featured prominently in its spectacularly ornamented triconch sanctuary.¹³⁹

Indeed, the earliest surviving Coptic paintings of Mary as the Nursing Virgin come from monastic settings. Three sixth- or seventh-century examples were discovered in excavations of the Monastery of Apa Jeremiah in Saqqara, and two more from the same period were uncovered at the Monastery of Apa Apollo in

¹³⁶ Ps.-Cyril, *A Discourse on the Virgin Mary*: British Museum MS Oriental 6782, fos. 29a–36b: Budge, *Miscellaneous Coptic Texts in the Dialect of Upper Egypt*, 141–3 (text), 719–21 (trans.). Elizabeth Bolman ('The Coptic *Galaktotrophousa* Revisited', 1178) notes that this work is preserved in a tenth-century manuscript that bears a frontispiece with an image of the Nursing Virgin.

¹³⁷ *History of Aur* (trans. Budge, *Egyptian Tales and Romances*, 250); see also Elizabeth S. Bolman, 'The Coptic *Galaktotrophousa* Revisited', 1180.

¹³⁸ *Great Euchologion*, fos. 215. 16–216. 29 (Lanne, PO 28/2 (1958), 376–8).

¹³⁹ In late antiquity and the early medieval period, the Red Monastery belonged to a federation of monasteries which included the White Monastery as well as a women's convent. As such, these three monastic congregations would have shared a common order of worship as well as a common set of rules: B. Layton, 'Rules, Patterns, and the Exercise of Power'. The wall paintings of Red Monastery church are currently being restored under the direction of Elizabeth Bolman and an Italian team of conservators led by Luigi DeCesaris. While more work must be done before the paintings can be definitively dated, Bolman, on the basis of persuasive stylistic parallels, has raised the possibility that the programme may date as early as the seventh or eighth century CE: E. Bolman, 'Aesthetic Intensification at the Red Monastery Church (Sohag, Egypt)?' (2005); and 'Late Antique Aesthetics in Upper Egypt: The Red Monastery' (2006).

Bawit.¹⁴⁰ In each case, these paintings were found on the walls of monks' private cells, which would have served not only as domestic living space, but also as places for prayer, meditation, and worship. By the early medieval period, the *Galaktotrophousa* also came to be integrated into the large-scale iconographic programmes of monumental churches in monasteries such as the Red Monastery (Sohag) and at the Monastery of the Syrians (Wadi al-Natrun).¹⁴¹

Literary evidence suggests that images of the Nursing Virgin also may have graced the walls of churches at Upper Egyptian pilgrimage sites such as Qosqām (Dayr al-Muḥarraḡ) and Jabal al-Ṭayr where monastic communities were active. The *Vision of Theophilus*, a work connected with Holy Family pilgrimage at Qosqām, includes repeated mentions of how Mary used to suckle Jesus at her breast while journeying through Egypt.¹⁴² At one point, Mary makes explicit the eucharistic significance of her act: 'I gave milk to Him while He was feeding all the world.'¹⁴³ A final vignette may offer a clue to the early medieval iconography in the church near Qosqām: Mary, seated in the house that (according to the legend) would later be converted into that church, relates to her listener how 'while my breasts were in the mouth of my Son, I used to see angels and heavenly beings standing before us, genuflecting and worshipping at the holy feet of my Son'.¹⁴⁴ One encounters a similar scenario in the *Homily on the Church of the Rock*, although in this case the setting is not Qosqām but Jabal al-Ṭayr. In the *Homily*, Mary tells about a vision she had at that rock while suckling the baby Jesus at her breast: in this vision, she beholds him descending to the 'deepest abyss' where the dead (lit. 'the bodies', *al-ajsād*) kneel before him, and then ascending to his throne where the heavenly choirs praise him.¹⁴⁵ As in the case of the *Vision of Theophilus*, this set of images in the *Homily*—Mary nursing the Christchild, Christ's descent to rescue the dead, and his ascension to heaven—may have

¹⁴⁰ Bolman, 'The Coptic *Galaktotrophousa* Revisited', 1174 n. 5. Bolman also lists early examples of the Nursing Virgin found in other media, including limestone grave stelae, papyri, and manuscript frontispieces.

¹⁴¹ For an image of the *Galaktotrophousa* from the Monastery of the Syrians, see fig. 4.13. This painting has been published and discussed by Karel Innemée, 'The Iconographical Program of Paintings in the Church of al-'Adrah in Deir al-Sourian', 143–53; and Bolman, 'The Coptic *Galaktotrophousa* Revisited', 1182 and fig. 2.

¹⁴² *Vision of Theophilus*: Guidi, 'La omelia', 73–4, 78–9, 84, 86; Mingana, 'Vision of Theophilus', 18, 19–20, 28, 30 (trans.); 57, 58–9, 70, 73 (Syriac text).

¹⁴³ Ibid. Mingana, 'Vision of Theophilus', 30 (trans.) and 73 (Syriac text). The Arabic text is slightly divergent at this point: 'I used to nurse him at my breasts, and our strength (*qūwah*) came to us from God' (Guidi, 'La omelia', 86).

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. Mingana, 'Vision of Theophilus', 30 (trans.) and 73–4 (Syriac text); M. Guidi, 'La omelia', 86.

¹⁴⁵ *Homily on the Church of the Rock* 27 (Boutros, PO 49/1 (2001), 126–8).

been meant to evoke for the reader-listener specific aspects of the visual programme that visitors would have encountered at the site.¹⁴⁶

How then did viewing this image of the Nursing Virgin frame the way that Copts (monks and non-monks alike) enacted their participation in Christ's Incarnation? I would suggest that, in Coptic churches, the ritual activities of viewing the painting and of consuming Christ's flesh and blood in the eucharist would have yielded a common product—namely, a body that had come to be both imaginatively and physically assimilated with the incarnate body of Christ. In seeing the image of the Nursing Virgin and Child through a mimetic lens, Coptic worshippers would have imaginatively aligned and identified themselves not only with Mary, whose body likewise bore the body of Christ inside it, but also and more especially with the infant Christ, whose body (like their bodies) was fed by the divine Word.

In the sacrament itself, this visual identification with Christ was understood to be realized in starkly physical terms. On this subject, a Copto-Arabic catechetical work entitled *The Book of the Elucidation* (*Kitāb al-Īdāh*) gives invaluable insight into how medieval Coptic views of the body and digestion provided a physiological rationale for the ritual activity of iconic viewing and eucharistic participation.¹⁴⁷ In ch. 4 of that work, the author presents his 'Interpretation of the Passover and the Lamb, and How the Bread and Wine Become the Flesh and Blood of Christ'.¹⁴⁸ In the midst of an extended discussion, he pauses to explain how the Word of God fashioned a body for himself in Mary, and he does so by appealing to the way that human digestive processes resist disease by converting nutriment into healthy flesh (see Appendix B.2).

¹⁴⁶ Elsewhere in the *Homily*, the preacher highlights other visual features of the church: in particular, he calls his listeners' attention to the handprint of Jesus in the face of the rock, favourably comparing it as a relic that conveys Christ's presence along with the wall paintings and wooden icons on the walls of the church: 'When they represent an image of a martyr on a wall and on a panel of wood, they come to it from various regions and bow down to the image represented on the wood. How much more then (do they do so) in the case of the right hand of Christ that created humankind from the earth, the right hand that created Adam and raised him up from the pit of misfortune, the hand that wrote the book of life with the names of the saints, (the names) which we have found represented on the rock' (*Homily on the Church of the Rock* 10 (Boutros, PO 49/1 (2001), 100).

¹⁴⁷ For a fuller discussion of this work, see the excursus at the end of Ch. 5. During the medieval period *The Book of the Elucidation* was attributed to Sāwirus ibn al-Muqaffa' (who was active during the late tenth century), but, as I point out, this attribution is probably false. Instead, the treatise probably dates to the eleventh century CE. Here and in Ch. 5 I shall be using two different sources for this work: the first is the oldest surviving manuscript of the work, Par. ar. 170 (thirteenth century CE); the second is an (uncritical) edition published by Murqus Girgis, *Kitāb al-durr al-thamīn fī idāh al-dīn* (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Jadidah, 1925; repr. 1971).

¹⁴⁸ Ps.-Sāwirus ibn al-Muqaffa', *The Book of the Elucidation*, ch. 4 (Par. ar. 170, fos. 68^r–79^v; Girgis, *Kitāb al-durr al-thamīn fī idāh al-dīn*, 102–17).

According to this account, while such diseases as yellow fever (cholera) eat away at human flesh and deplete the blood, the acts of eating and drinking have the effect of replenishing the body. In the body, bread and water are quite literally understood to be converted into flesh and blood.¹⁴⁹ The author then extends this digestive theory of bodily growth to the process of human reproduction—seeking to explain specifically how the nutrients consumed by the mother are passed on to her child. During pregnancy, ‘God naturally causes part of that bread to flow to the seed, so that it becomes blood,’ which feeds the child in the womb.¹⁵⁰ Likewise, after the birth, God causes some of the mother’s food and drink to flow to her breasts and become milk.¹⁵¹ When the mother nurses her child, this milk passes into the child’s body where it is ‘cooked’ and thus ‘coagulates’ into flesh and blood.¹⁵²

This discussion of the nursing mother’s physiological role in providing nourishment for her child leads directly to a consideration of how the divine Word actually took on a body in the Incarnation.

¹⁴⁹ ‘From the bread and water, the flesh and blood of the human being are produced’ (Ps.-Sawirus ibn al-Muqaffa’, *The Book of the Elucidation*, ch. 4; Par. ar. 170, fo. 77^v; Girgis, *Kitāb al-durr al-thamīn fī ʾidāḥ al-dīn*, 114). One finds this understanding of the conversion of nutrients into human blood in the ancient medical theory of Galen (*On the Usefulness of the Parts* 4. 3 and 4. 13 (Helmreich, i. 197, 224; also Kühn, iii. 269. 7–11 and 305. 4–7; trans. May, 205, 226). The thirteenth-century Copto-Arabic writer, al-ʿafi ibn al-ʿAssāl, alludes to similar assumptions about how the digestive processes work, as quoted by his brother, al-Muʿtaman ibn al-ʿAssal in his *Summary of the Principles of Religion (Majmūʿ Usūl al-Dīn wa Masmūʿ Maḥṣūl al-Yaqīn)* 25. 5 (A. Wadīʿ, SOCM 7a, 73).

¹⁵⁰ Ps.-Sawirus ibn al-Muqaffa’, *The Book of the Elucidation*, ch. 4 (Par. ar. 170, fo. 77^v; ed. Girgis, *Kitāb al-durr al-thamīn fī ʾidāḥ al-dīn*, 114).

¹⁵¹ Here, the logic and sequence of the author’s account are remarkably similar to what is found in Clement of Alexandria’s treatise, *The Instructor*, where he observes how ‘the nutriment . . . having been boiled and digested and changed into blood, pours out into the veins’ and then ‘in women who conceive, blood issues into milk by a change that is not one of substance’ (*paed.* 1. 6. 44. 2–3; Marrou, SC 70 (1960), 190). A little later, Clement goes on to elaborate on this theory of physiological conversion in considerable detail (*paed.* 1. 1. 6. 49. 1–2; Marrou, SC 70 (1960), 198): ‘Now, what is in the stomach is at first a milky composition of fluid; then the same composition takes a fleshy form and is changed into blood; but after it has become solid in the womb by the natural and warm spirit by which the embryo is formed, it becomes a living creature. But also again after the birth, the child is raised up by the same blood, for the flow of the milk is the natural product of the blood; and the milk is the source of nourishment by which a woman, having given birth, becomes a mother and through which she also receives a charm of kind affection.’ It is impossible to know whether the author of *The Book of the Elucidation* had access to Clement as a source for his account, or whether he simply shared a common storehouse of medical assumptions. If he was, in fact, using Clement, it would stand as an exceedingly rare example of the Alexandrian’s reception among later, medieval Egyptian writers.

¹⁵² Sawirus ibn al-Muqaffa’, *The Book of the Elucidation*, ch. 4 (Girgis, *Kitāb al-durr al-thamīn fī ʾidāḥ al-dīn*, 114–15; cf. Par. ar. 170, fo. 77^v, where a short section of this text is absent). The notion of digestion as involving a process of ‘cooking’ by the body’s own heat is articulated in late antiquity by Galen: see M. T. May, ‘Introduction’ to *Galen: On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body*, 53.

Now when the Virgin Mary was pregnant with our Lord Jesus Christ, she did not have a seed with which she became pregnant, because she was a virgin; but rather, (Christ) came to dwell in her (*ḥalla fihā*) through the Holy Spirit (Luke 1: 35), and he took to himself in one part the flesh that was produced for her from the bread, and in the other part the blood that was produced for her from the water and wine, and from this, he raised up for himself a body. . . . From the water and wine and from the bread, our Lord Jesus Christ took to himself a body in the womb of his mother, and when she had given birth to him, she nursed him with her milk, which was also from those things. Then when his body grew just like our bodies grow, he ate bread and drank water mixed with wine (Luke 7: 34), and he was like us in everything apart from sin.¹⁵³

Here one sees how this medieval Coptic author drew on ancient medical knowledge to explain, in mechanistic terms, the constitution of Christ's human body. It was a body that he himself fashioned in the womb from her own flesh and blood—flesh and blood produced from the bread that she ate, and from the mixture of water and wine that she drank. Significantly, in his infancy, Christ continued to form and nurture his body by ingesting milk that he received from Mary's breasts, until the time when he could eat and drink independently for his own sustenance. For Egyptian Christians trained in such catechesis, the image of the Nursing Virgin would have been received as a very tangible, visual sign of Christ's bodily presence in the Incarnation.

Indeed, the author of *The Book of the Elucidation* goes on to extend this digestive 'economy' (*tadbīr*) of the Incarnation one step further—to the eucharist itself, and the Christian's act of ingesting the body and blood of Christ. In the sacramental rite, the body of the believer is organically linked with that of Christ: from the bread 'comes our flesh as well as his flesh', and from the wine (mixed with water) 'comes our blood as well as his blood'.¹⁵⁴ The same language of 'descent' and 'indwelling' applies to both the Incarnation of the Word and the manifestation of Christ's body in the eucharist: Christ descends upon (*yaḥillu ʿalā*) the elements, just as he descended upon (*ḥalla ʿalā*) and indwelt (*ḥalla fī*) Mary's body.¹⁵⁵ Here, the purposes of the Incarnation and the eucharist are seen to mirror one another: Christ transforms (*yuḥawwil*) the bread and wine into his own body and blood, just as he had done with the nutrients provided by Mary's 'flesh and blood'—first via her womb, and later via her breasts.¹⁵⁶ Thus, in eating Christ's flesh and drinking Christ's blood, Coptic communicants were fulfilling the salvific ends of a

¹⁵³ Ps.-Sāwīrus ibn al-Muqaffaʿ, *The Book of the Elucidation*, ch. 4 (Par. ar. 170, fos. 77^v–78^r; ed. Girgis, *Kitāb al-durr al-thamīn fī iḏāḥ al-dīn*, 115).

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. (Par. ar. 170, fo. 78^r; ed. Girgis, *Kitāb al-durr al-thamīn fī iḏāḥ al-dīn*, 115).

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. (Par. ar. 170, fo. 78^r; ed. Girgis, *Kitāb al-durr al-thamīn fī iḏāḥ al-dīn*, 115).

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. (Par. ar. 170, fo. 78^r (cf. 77^v–78^r); ed. Girgis, *Kitāb al-durr al-thamīn fī iḏāḥ al-dīn*, 115).

'sacred food chain' that was visually summarized in the image of the Nursing Virgin. As they gazed upon the walls of their churches, Egyptian Christians could descry in that art and architecture the lines and lineaments of Christ's incarnate body. At the same time, they were also meant to see how their own bodies, ritualized through the coordinated acts of viewing and eating/drinking, had begun to internalize traces of the divine.

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Part III

Arabization and Christian–Muslim Encounter

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Incarnation and Christian–Muslim Apologetics in the Tenth-Century Writings of Sāwīrus ibn al-Muqaffa^c

INTRODUCTION: THE EMERGENCE OF A COPTO-ARABIC THEOLOGICAL TRADITION

I ended the previous chapter with a discussion of *The Book of the Elucidation*, a catechetical text written by an early medieval Copt in the Arabic language. At the time of its composition (probably the eleventh century CE),¹ Egyptian Christians were rapidly losing their everyday facility in the Coptic language, which was increasingly becoming restricted to use in liturgical settings. Indeed, the author of the *Elucidation* explicitly laments the consequences of this language loss at the beginning of his tenth chapter, in which he lays out the conciliar foundations for the ‘(Coptic) Orthodox Faith’.

My friend, you mentioned that at the current time different statements about the orthodox faith have grown numerous among the Copts, that one Copt holds an opinion different from another and calls him an unbeliever, and that you are astonished and perplexed about that. Do not be astonished: the reason for this is their ignorance of their language, for the Arabic language has subdued them. Not one among them remains who knows what is read to him in church in the Coptic language. They have become like those who listen but do not understand.²

Here, he echoes the sentiments with which he began his treatise—namely, that Coptic Christians were fast becoming unable to decipher even the most basic doctrinal vocabulary like ‘Son of God’ in Coptic due to their enculturation within Islamic society (‘their mingling with the Muslim true believers

¹ On the authorship and dating of *The Book of the Elucidation*, see my ‘Excursus’ at the end of this chapter.

² Ps.-Sāwīrus ibn al-Muqaffa^c, *The Book of the Elucidation* 10 (Par. ar. 170, fo. 147^r (with corrected readings on the basis of Vat. ar. 1258, fo. 191^r)); Girgis, *Kitāb al-durr al-thamīn fī idāh al-dīn*, 185). Mark Swanson discusses this passage in his article, ‘The Specifically Egyptian Context of a Coptic Arabic Text’, 217.

(*ḥunafāʾ*).³ In the context of this deeply felt concern about a linguistic shift that was taking place among Christians in Egypt, and the negative effects that shift was having upon the unity of the church, it is significant that the author of the *Elucidation* chose to write his catechetical text in Arabic, perhaps a concession born of the need to make ‘the language of the Qurʾān and the Islamic religious tradition into a vehicle for teaching and preaching the Coptic Christian faith.’⁴

The author of *The Book of the Elucidation* was not alone in this pursuit. Indeed, this linguistic shift was already taking place prior to the eleventh century, as witnessed by the earlier translation of Coptic lectionaries and canon collections, as well as the inclusion of Arabic rubrics in Coptic liturgical texts—aids to congregations in following the order of service.⁵ This process of cultural translation from Coptic into Arabic had profound implications for the way that Christology came to expression in both literary and liturgical settings. In contrast to Coptic, which never generated a formal literature of systematic theological discourse, the Arabic language had served as the medium for erudite philosophical debate and exchange in the Islamic world for at least two centuries before Egyptians began utilizing it as a literary tongue. Thus, by adopting Arabic, Egyptian theologians were arming themselves with a sophisticated syntax and vocabulary well suited for the purpose of Christian–Muslim apologetic encounter. However, even as these authors were crafting a Christology that was finely calibrated to respond to the distinctive challenges raised by the presence of Islam, they continued to ground their understanding of the Incarnation and divine participation in the Alexandrian patristic heritage and the liturgical practices of their own community. In the final two chapters of this book, I shall trace key developments in Copto-Arabic Christology and Christopraxis from the tenth to the thirteenth century, beginning with the so-called ‘father’ of Copto-Arabic literature, Sāwīrus ibn al-Muqaffaʿ.

³ Ps.-Sāwīrus ibn al-Muqaffaʿ, *The Book of the Elucidation* 1 (Par. ar. 170, fo. 5^b). The Girgis edn. (*Kitāb al-durr al-thamīn fī idāḥ al-dīn*, 14) substitutes *ajānīb* (foreigners) for *ḥunafāʾ*.

⁴ Swanson, ‘The Specifically Egyptian Context of a Coptic Arabic Text’, 217. Swanson contrasts this writer’s embrace of Arabic to the attitude found in an earlier Coptic work entitled *The Apocalypse of Samuel of Qalamūn*, whose author condemns Christians who adopt Arabic in childhood education and for use in worship: see A. Alcock, *The Life of Samuel of Kalamun by Isaac the Presbyter* (1983).

⁵ Samuel Rubenson (‘Translating the Tradition’, 4–14) identifies early translations of canonical, hagiographical, and liturgical texts (up to the eleventh century) as the first of three stages in the Arabization of Coptic literature in Egypt. The second stage—from the eleventh to the thirteenth century—witnessed the translation of larger-scale canonical, dogmatic, and historical works (such as the *History of the Patriarchs*). The third stage—a period of more refined Arabic style among Coptic translators—is coincident with the so-called Golden Age of the Copto-Arabic church that emerged in the thirteenth century (see Ch. 7 below). For a summary of the literature produced by Arabic-speaking Copts during these centuries, and on into the sixteenth, see A. Wadī, ‘Introduzione alla letteratura arabo-cristiana dei Copti’, 441–92 (in Arabic).

SĀWĪRUS IBN AL-MUQAFFA^c: THE FATHER
OF COPTO-ARABIC LITERATURE

Professionally active during the latter half of the tenth century, Sāwīrus was the first Egyptian Christian author to produce major, original theological works in the Arabic language—among them, church histories, essays on doctrine, and manuals on liturgy and ecclesiastical leadership, as well as apologetic disputations with other Christians and Jews.⁶ Indeed, during the late medieval period, his renown as a theologian and author was such that later scribes often registered anonymous or collectively authored works under his name,⁷ a posthumous practice that makes it more difficult to determine the actual extent of his life and authentic works.

Despite his literary output, surprisingly little is known about Sāwīrus' personal biography.⁸ The dates of his birth and death are uncertain, and only two events in his life may be assigned to a specific year. We know that in 955 he completed his second book *On the Councils*, and that in 987 (or perhaps 988) he signed a synodal letter of the sixty-third patriarch Philotheus (979–1003).⁹ If these two events took place in his middle adulthood and old age respectively, then his life probably overlapped with three different political dynasties in Egypt: the Abbasids (750–1258, but solely responsible for Egyptian rule from 905 to 935), the Ikhshadids (935–69), and the Fatimids (969–1157).

The details of Sāwīrus' childhood remain obscure. His original name was Abu al-Bishr, and his father answered to al-Muqaffa^c (the shrivelled or crippled one). During the tenth century, young Copts learned Arabic as part of their education, a linguistic training that facilitated their roles in the Arab administration of the country. With this scholastic background, Sāwīrus began his career as a scribe in the government administration. However, he

⁶ For a full listing of works attributed to Sāwīrus, see G. Graf, *GCAL* ii. 300–18.

⁷ A prime example is the *History of the Patriarchs of Egypt*, a work that has traditionally been attributed to Sāwīrus ibn al-Muqaffa^c, but is actually a compendium of several early Coptic sources that were edited and translated into Arabic during the eleventh century. While Sāwīrus may have had a hand in contributing some material, Johannes den Heijer has shown that a deacon named Mawhūb ibn Mansūr ibn Muffarig was primarily responsible for the eleventh-century edition: see *Mawhūb ibn Mansūr ibn Muffarig et l'historiographie copte-arabe* (1989); and 'Mawhub ibn Maṣṣūr ibn Muffarrij al-Iskandarani', *CE* v. 1573–4. Another example is the previously mentioned work, the *Kitāb al-Īdāḥ* (*The Book of the Elucidation*). Swanson, who originally supported the authenticity of this work ('The Specifically Egyptian Context of a Coptic Arabic Text, 214–27), now believes that Sāwīrus could not have written the *Kitāb al-Īdāḥ* ('A Copto-Arabic Catechism of the Later Fatimid Period', 483 n. 38).

⁸ For an accessible account, see Aziz S. Atiya, 'Sāwīrus bin al-Muqaffa^c', in *CE* vii. 2100–2.

⁹ *Ibid.* in *CE* vii. 2101; also Samir Khalil Samir, in Sāwīrus bin al-Muqaffa^c, *The Lamp of Understanding* (1978), 7.

eventually left his post to become a monk, and later he was elected the bishop of al-^ᶜAshmūnayn (ancient Hermopolis Magna) under the name of Sāwīrus (the Arabic form of Severus). In that capacity, he attended the court of the Fatimid caliph al-Mu^ᶜizz (972–5) and is said to have represented the Coptic community in public debates with leaders of other churches (such as the Syrian bishop Yunis ibn al-Shama^ᶜ), as well as with Jewish rabbis and Muslim imams.¹⁰ The *History of the Patriarchs* reports that on one occasion, Sāwīrus and the Coptic patriarch Abraham (Ephraem ibn Zur^ᶜa) attended a gathering hosted by the Muslim caliph where they argued theology with the caliph’s vizir, Ya^ᶜqub ibn Killis, and his personal physician, Musa ibn El^ᶜazar, both prominent representatives of the Jewish community in Cairo.¹¹

Sāwīrus’ writings often echo this social context of formal, inter-confessional disputations. At the same time, however, they also provide a rich reservoir for scholars seeking to trace the early reception of the Alexandrian christological tradition into Arabic. In what follows, I shall attend to both the interpretative and the controversial aspects of Sāwīrus’ Christology, in order to show how this tenth-century Egyptian theologian laid a methodological foundation for later Copto-Arabic writers. How does this tenth-century Coptic Christian recover and reinterpret patristic teachings on the Incarnation in the face of competing claims raised by his Arabic-speaking Jewish and Muslim counterparts in Egypt?

In order to answer this question, I have chosen to analyse three representative (and undisputed) works written by Sāwīrus. The first is a long treatise entitled *The Precious Pearl* (*al-Durr al-thamīn*), in which the author extensively mines biblical and patristic testimonies concerning the Incarnation.¹² The second is an apologetic summary of Christian theology and practice entitled *The Lamp of Understanding* (*Kitāb miṣbāḥ al-^ᶜaql*) (see Appendix B.1).¹³ The third

¹⁰ Samir Khalil Samir, in Sāwīrus bin al-Muqaffa^ᶜ, *The Lamp of Understanding*, 15–20.

¹¹ A. S. Atiya, Y. ^ᶜAbd al-Masīh, and O. H. E. Burmester, *History of the Patriarchs of the Egyptian Church*, ii/2 (1948), 92–4, 137–40. On the Fatimid caliphate’s promotion of debate, see S. Griffith, ‘The *Kitāb Miṣbāḥ al-^ᶜAql* of Severus ibn al-Muqaffa^ᶜ’, 24–5.

¹² Ed. P. Maiberger, ‘*Das Buch der kostbaren Perle*’ von Severus ibn al-Muqaffa^ᶜ (1972). Maiberger included only chs. 1–5 of *The Precious Pearl* in this publication. He edited the remainder of the text (chs. 6–15) in a handwritten edition that was never published. I gained access to this unpublished manuscript through the kindness and generosity of Father Wadī^ᶜ of the Franciscan Center of Christian Oriental Research in Cairo, to whom I owe a deep debt of gratitude. When I refer to Maiberger’s edition in this book, I am careful to distinguish the pagination of his ‘Introduction’ (1–150) from the pagination of the Arabic text itself (1–317, of which only pp. 1–54 appear in the published version). In addition to Maiberger, I have also consulted three manuscripts of this work preserved at the Bibliothèque orientale of the Université Saint-Joseph in Beirut: BO-USJ 574, 575, and 576. My special thanks goes to May Semaan Seigneurie, the Director of the Bibliothèque orientale, for helping facilitate my study of these texts.

¹³ Ed. Samir Khalil Samir (Arabic Christian Tradition 1; Cairo, 1978); see also R. Y. Ebied and M. J. L. Young, *The Lamp of the Intellect of Severus ibn al-Muqaffa^ᶜ*, CSCO 365–6 (1975).

is a two-part work called *The Books on the Councils* (*Kutub fī al-majāmiʿ*). Part one is a *Refutation* of the tenth-century Chalcedonian patriarch of Egypt, Saʿīd ibn Baṭṭīq, also known as Eutychius.¹⁴ Part two is a theological *History* of the events surrounding the Council of Nicaea and the subsequent ecclesiastical schism occasioned by the decisions taken at the Council of Chalcedon.¹⁵

In what follows, I use these sources to focus on three important aspects of Sāwirus' christological discourse. First, I will argue that his methods of patristic citation, and his narration of conciliar history, were coordinated means by which he effectively constructed a theological canon for an Arabic-speaking church in Egypt. Second, I will discuss specifically how Sāwirus' christological language was shaped in relation to his Islamic cultural context, and how the rhetorical strategies of Christian–Muslim, Christian–Jewish, and intra-Christian apologetic encounter merged in his corpus of writings. Third and finally, I will study the way that Sāwirus used biblical, ritual-sacramental, and social models in order to express the nature of the Incarnation and its salvific effect on humanity.

A Chain of Pearls and a Book of Councils: The Textual and Historical Construction of a Copto-Arabic Christological Canon

As one of the first Egyptian writers to produce constructive Christian theology in Arabic, Sāwirus ibn al-Muqaffaʿ helped lay a textual and historical foundation for later Coptic authors writing in this linguistic medium. By studying the way that Sāwirus cited patristic authors on the Incarnation, and the way he renarrated the history of christological controversy in the early church, one can get a clearer sense of the building blocks he used in establishing an architectonic canon for later Egyptian Christian authors.

The textual basis for Sāwirus' Christology may be observed most readily in his treatise *The Precious Pearl*, a florilegium of biblical and patristic quotations and commentaries designed to give support to the doctrine of the Incarnation. This long work comprises over 300 edited pages, and is organized in fifteen chapters of varying length.¹⁶ While the first and fifteenth chapters concern the Trinity, the rest (from ch. 2 to ch. 14) focus on various details from the life of Jesus Christ: his birth and incarnation (chs. 2–3), his baptism by John and temptation in the desert (chs. 4–5), his works and miracles from the time of his baptism to his crucifixion (ch. 6), his suffering and death on the cross (chs. 7–9), his descent

¹⁴ Ed. P. Chébli, 'Réfutation de Saʿīd ibn-Baṭṭīq (Eutychius) (le livre des conciles)', PO 3 (1905), 125–242 [1–122].

¹⁵ Ed. L. Leroy, 'Sévère ibn al-Moqaffaʿ, évêque d'Aschmounaïn, Histoire des Conciles (second livre)', PO 6 (1911), 467–600 [1–136].

¹⁶ The shortest chapter (ch. 14) numbers only seven edited pages in Maiberger's edn., while the two longest chapters (chs. 6–7) number seventy-five and ninety pages respectively.

into Hades (ch. 10), his resurrection and ascension into heaven (chs. 11–12), the promise of his second coming (ch. 13), and his sending of the Spirit (ch. 14). In treating this series of christological subjects, Sāwīrus' method of exposition remains remarkably consistent: after introducing the theme of each chapter via the primary Gospel texts, he then cites a series of additional Old and New Testament witnesses and a series of patristic quotations that confirm traditional church teaching on the subject. Interspersed throughout this chain of *testimonia* is Sāwīrus' own succinct (even spare) commentary, which functions primarily to introduce new themes, provide transitions between quotations, and draw summarizing conclusions. Arranged in this format, *The Precious Pearl* would have served as an invaluable resource for later authors looking to access early Christian testimony on specific questions of doctrine.

Sāwīrus' treatise represents the earliest extant example of a large-scale Arabic Christian florilegium produced in Egypt. The term 'florilegium'—the Latin equivalent of the Greek word *anthologia* ('anthology'), which means 'a chain or collection of flowers'—refers to the literary style of linking together successive proof-texts based on a particular word or subject. In the early church (prior to the rise of mass printing), such florilegia were commonly used as handy research tools—ancient concordances—for interpreters of Scripture and theologians who did not always have the entire corpus of biblical and patristic writings at their fingertips.¹⁷ In the case of the initial generations of Egyptian Christian writers working in Arabic, such anthologies had the important function of making Greek and Coptic writings available in translation to an increasingly Arabized populace that was no longer proficient in those languages. Some of these medieval Arabic florilegia themselves represent translations of earlier anthologies assembled in the Coptic language. Indeed, in composing *The Precious Pearl*, Sāwīrus himself probably utilized such Coptic source collections. The same may be said for an eleventh-century Arabic florilegium called *The Confession of the Fathers* (1078 CE), an anthology of 254 patristic excerpts organized (for the most part) chronologically by author.¹⁸ In the case of both *The Precious Pearl* and *The Confession of the Fathers*, the purpose of the collection was to underscore the christological dogma of the Coptic church, and to demarcate a working canon of authoritative sources for the defence of that dogma.¹⁹

¹⁷ On the use and function of early Christian biblical florilegia (or *testimonia*), see J. Kugel and R. Greer, *Early Biblical Interpretation*, 137–41.

¹⁸ An edition of this work has recently been produced by an anonymous monk of Dayr al-Muḥarraḡ based on three manuscripts from the library of that monastery: *I'tirāfāt al-ābā'* (2002). The editor has mistakenly rendered the title of the work in the plural ('Confessions', *I'tirāfāt*) instead of its original singular ('Confession', *I'tirāf*). On the manuscript tradition of this work, see G. Graf, *GCAL* ii. 321–3. On the medieval editor's use of earlier sources, see Samuel Rubenson, 'Translating the Tradition', 4–14.

¹⁹ G. Graf, 'Zwei dogmatische Florilegien der Kopten', 49–77.

What do the contents of these florilegia tell us about the way that their authors or editors constructed their christological canons? How does the work of Sāwirus and the anonymous editor of the *Confession* demonstrate the early medieval Egyptian translation of Alexandrian christological doctrine into Arabic? Here, statistical analysis proves illuminating. In the case of both *The Precious Pearl* and *The Confession of the Fathers*, there is a marked emphasis placed upon the testimony of Athanasius, Cyril, and other ancient Alexandrian authors. Throughout *The Precious Pearl*, Sāwirus cites a total of twenty-six patristic writers, seven of whom number among the Alexandrian patriarchs: Peter, Alexander, Athanasius, Cyril, Dioscorus, Theodosius, and Benjamin.²⁰ However, even more important than the number of authors cited is the number and concentration of quotations by those authors. Out of a total of 191 total quotations, 82 (or 42%) are attributed to these Alexandrian authors. As might be expected, the bulk of these quotations (67, or 35% of the whole collection), come from either Athanasius (24 citations) or Cyril (43 citations).

To this group may be added Severus of Antioch, who was an avid interpreter of Cyril and who was venerated among many medieval Copts as a surrogate Father of the Egyptian church.²¹ Sāwirus ibn al-Muqaffaʿ himself identifies his namesake Severus as one who ‘came to the land of Egypt’ and who interpreted and clarified the Christology of Athanasius and Cyril by producing ‘a very fine written statement on . . . the wondrous mystery that belongs to the Incarnation of God the Word’.²² Including Severus (28 citations) in our tally brings the number of Alexandrian or Alexandrian-related quotations to 110 (58% of 190). More remarkably still, the three most popular authors—Athanasius, Cyril, and Severus—alone are quoted ninety-five times, just shy of 50% of all the patristic excerpts that appear in *The Precious Pearl*.

Finally, it should be noted that the concentration, or distribution, of these patristic quotations is also significant for understanding Sāwirus’ reliance on this select group of fathers in developing his own Christology (see Table 5.1).

²⁰ For a full catalogue of patristic citations in *The Precious Pearl*, see P. Maiberger, ‘Das Buch der kostbaren Perle’ Introduction, 121–33.

²¹ In the first chapter of his theological *Summa*, the thirteenth-century Coptic author, al-Muʿtaman ibn al-ʿAssāl, includes Severus in the list of ‘Alexandrian’ fathers referenced in his treatise: al-Muʿtaman ibn al-ʿAssāl, *Summary of the Principles of Religion (Majmūʿ Usūl al-Dīn wa Masmūʿ Maḥṣūl al-Yaqīn)* 1. 10, ed. A. Wadīʿ, SOCM 6a (1998), 42; Ibrahim Isaak Sedrak, ‘Al-Muʿtaman ibn al-ʿAssāl (XIIIc.) et sa pensee christologique’, 153–6.

²² Sāwirus ibn al-Muqaffaʿ, *The Precious Pearl* 2 (Maiberger, 27). This reference to Severus’ coming to Egypt appears after a series of nine consecutive quotations from Cyril of Alexandria on the Incarnation: here, Severus is presented as the interpreter and custodian par excellence of Cyril’s Christology. Elsewhere, in ch. 11 of *The Precious Pearl*, Sāwirus again presents the teachings of Cyril and Severus in tandem, even quoting excerpts from Cyril which he discovered in Severus’ corpus of writings: for example, on one occasion he cites a passage from Cyril’s *Commentary of John* included by Severus himself in his *Book of Proofs (The Precious Pearl* 11: Maiberger, 271–3, esp. 272; cf. Introduction, 125 n. 7).

Table 5.1. *The distribution of patristic citations in The Precious Pearl: Alexandrian patriarchs and Severus of Antioch*

| Authors | Citations (no.) | Distribution by chapter | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|---|---|---|----|----|---|---|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 |
| Athanasius | 24 | 3 | 1 | | 1 | 5 | 3 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1 | | | | |
| Cyril | 43 | 2 | 5 | | | 12 | 17 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 7 | 2 | | | | |
| Severus | 28 | 1 | 3 | | 2 | 9 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 3 | | | | 1 |
| Other Alexandrian authors | 15 | 1 | 2 | 1 | | 4 | 3 | 2 | | 1 | 1 | | | | | |
| Peter | 4 | 1 | | 1 | | 2 | | | | | | | | | | |
| Alexander | 3 | | | | | 1 | | 1 | | | 1 | | | | | |
| Dioscorus | 4 | | | 1 | | 1 | 1 | 1 | | | | | | | | |
| Theodosius | 1 | | | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Benjamin | 3 | | | | | | | 2 | | | 1 | | | | | |

Of 111 of the excerpts credited to this group of Alexandrian authors (including Severus), 110 are concentrated in chs. 2–13, the chapters that represent the body of Sāwirus ibn al-Muqaffa^c's christological exposition. These same authors are virtually ignored in chs. 1, 14, and 15 (on the doctrines of the Trinity and the Holy Spirit), the only exception being a solitary quotation from Severus of Antioch in the final chapter. By contrast, other patristic authors such as Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, Epiphanius, and John Chrysostom are cited more liberally in these three non-christological chapters.

The eleventh-century *Confession of the Fathers*, itself also a work with a primarily christological focus, offers similar evidence for this editorial recycling of Alexandrian patristic thought. Of fifty-three authors cited in the *Confession*, fifteen are named Alexandrian figures, with Cyril once again being most prominently featured. Indeed, the bank of quotations from Cyril is over twice as long as that of any other author cited in the florilegium, taking up a total of fifty-seven pages in the printed edition of the text.²³ In addition, the *Confession* includes three other sections dominated by Cyrillian citations. One of these is a series of anathemas recorded from the early church. Even though Cyril is only one of seven authors cited, his *Twelve Anathemas* take up over one-third of the section as a whole (eight out of twenty-two printed pages).²⁴ Immediately following these anathemas, two other sections present a series of sixty-two consecutive quotations on the

²³ *The Confession of the Fathers*, 170–226. Athanasius of Alexandria (46–67) and John Chrysostom (146–67) are the second most quoted authors with twenty-two printed pages dedicated to each. Severus of Antioch (240–56) is also generously represented.

²⁴ *Ibid.* 393–414; for Cyril's *Anathemas* against Nestorius, see 402–9.

Incarnation and the divinity of Christ.²⁵ Strikingly, all but one of these excerpts are from Cyril's writings, the lone exception being a brief interpolated quote from Gregory of Nazianzus.²⁶ Just as in the case of Sāwirus ibn al-Muqaffa^c, we have here an example of a medieval Egyptian editor using a concerted strategy of citation (and translation) to focus the attention of his literate Arabic readers on the christological resources available in the Alexandrian patristic heritage.

The importance of Cyril in *The Precious Pearl* is just as worthy of note, especially in ch. 3 of that work where Sāwirus ibn al-Muqaffa^c strings together thirteen consecutive passages from the Alexandrian theologian—five consecutive pages of quotation and commentary inspired by Cyril's doctrine of 'the one incarnate nature'.²⁷ Sāwirus' citations of Cyril have a dialectic aim, framed within the context of theological controversy and apologetics. Thus, extolling Cyril as the 'pillar of religion' and as the model for 'the most excellent fathers who came after him' (such as Severus of Antioch), Sāwirus presents Cyril's theology as a 'golden middle way' that will guarantee a safe passage between two different christological hazards—on the one side, the Scylla of 'mixture' or 'change' (i.e. Apollinarianism), and on the other, the Charybdis of 'division' or 'separation' (i.e. Nestorianism).²⁸ Thus, by identifying Cyril (and those who followed his teaching) as honoured guides in the true faith, and by naming his doctrinal adversaries who strayed from this 'middle way', Sāwirus reaffirms a particular 'canonical' identity for his church.²⁹

Citation and commentary were not the only means by which Sāwirus defined a christological canon for his readers: he did so also by renarrating the history of ancient christological controversy. In both of his *Books on the Councils*, Sāwirus prefaces his account of the early Christian councils and creeds with chapters emphasizing the narrative biblical context for the doctrine of the Incarnation. In Book One, his *Refutation of Sa'īd ibn al-Baṭrīq*, he dates the Incarnation of the Word from creation: 'His wondrous birth came to be through an ineffable mystery on Tuesday, the 29th of the month of Kīhak, in year 5501 of the world.'³⁰ He dates Christ's resurrection in a similar manner

²⁵ Ibid. 415–26. ²⁶ Ibid. 419.

²⁷ Sāwirus ibn al-Muqaffa^c, *The Precious Pearl* 3 (Maiberger, 23–7).

²⁸ Ibid. (Maiberger, 26–7).

²⁹ Sidney Griffith ('The *Kitāb Miṣbāḥ al-ʿAql*', 26), notes that the naming of adversaries also functions as an identity marker for Sāwirus in his treatise, *The Lamp of Understanding*.

³⁰ Sāwirus ibn al-Muqaffa^c, *Refutation of Sa'īd ibn Baṭrīq* 1 (Chébli, 139). The system of dating that Sāwirus uses both here and in the quote to follow reflects the traditional Alexandrian chronology of Annianos (early fourth century CE). Annianos' system represented one variation on the widespread ancient Christian practice of calculating the date of events from the number of years that had elapsed from the assumed time of the world's creation. In Latin versions of this system, dates were thus registered according to the designation A.M. (*Anno Mundi*, 'in the year of the world'). For a discussion of early Christian chronologies, see H. Leclercq, 'Ère', *DACL* v. 2, cols. 351–3.

to ‘Sunday, the 29th of the month of Barmahāt, in the thirty-fourth year after his birth in the body, which is year 5534 of the world’, and affirms that this event ‘opened the door of paradise, which he had shut since the disobedience of Adam.’³¹ Later in the same work, Sāwīrus underlines this connection between creation and the Incarnation by comparing the darkness of the sun at Christ’s crucifixion to the time between Adam’s disobedience and his expulsion from paradise.³² In Book Two, his *History of the Councils*, Sāwīrus presents the Incarnation not only as a return to the grace held by Adam, but even more as the fulfilment of the covenantal promise given to Abraham (and Moses): ‘(God) restored (*ista‘āna*) his creation in the image of their father Adam, and his appearance took place among the people of the sons of Israel and his Incarnation was from the family of Abraham, just as he had promised.’³³ In linking creation and covenant with the Incarnation, Sāwīrus follows the lines of Athanasius’ and Cyril’s theology. At the same time, however, by prefacing his discussion of the ancient church councils with this biblical narrative of salvation, he effectively presents the early Christian defence of the Incarnation as the logical extension, or fulfilment, of the scriptural story.

The contours of this christological history are integrally shaped by Sāwīrus’ own Egyptian ecclesiastical context. As such, first of all, the Council of Nicaea is understood to be foundational for establishing the divinity of the Word: indeed, a significant portion of Book Two, *The History of the Councils*, is devoted to the exposition and interpretation of the Nicene Creed, including reflection on its role in medieval Arabic Christian ecumenics and Christian–Muslim encounter.³⁴ I will address these latter issues in more detail later in this chapter. For now, however, I want to focus on the way that Sāwīrus recounts the history of christological controversy that arose in the aftermath of Nicaea. Here, one sees how Sāwīrus’ historiography is coordinated with his method of patristic citation in constructing a non-Chalcedonian canon of Alexandrian–Egyptian christological witnesses.

On more than one occasion in Book One, Sāwīrus revisits, in turn, Cyril’s opposition to Nestorius,³⁵ and Dioscorus’ subsequent anti-Nestorian opposition to Leo’s *Tome* and the Council of Chalcedon.³⁶ In the case of the latter, Sāwīrus includes details about Dioscorus’ exile not found in the *History of the Patriarchs*, most notably an account of how Dioscorus sent a loyal priest named Macarius to challenge the authority of the Chalcedonian bishop, Proterius. In

³¹ Sāwīrus ibn al-Muqaffa‘, *Refutation of Sa‘īd ibn Baṭrīq* 1 (Chébli, 142).

³² Ibid. 2 (Chébli, 158).

³³ Id., *History of the Councils* 1 (Leroy, 475).

³⁴ Ibid. 2–7 and 9–10 (Leroy, 478–508, 516–91); see also *Refutation of Sa‘īd ibn Baṭrīq* 3 (Chébli, 162–3).

³⁵ Id., *Refutation of Sa‘īd ibn Baṭrīq* 3 and 4 (Chébli, 166–7, 186–7).

³⁶ Ibid. (Chébli, 168–84, 200–2).

this account, Proterius is closely associated with the (corrupt) authority of the emperor Marcian, and is accused of usurping Dioscorus' rightful place as bishop of Alexandria even though Dioscorus was still living and in exile.³⁷ In Book Two, Sāwīrus traces the roots of the Chalcedonian schism by constructing a genealogy of christological heresy, in which he links, in succession, the doctrines of Apollinaris, Diodore, Theodore, and Nestorius.³⁸ Over against this tradition of false teaching, Sāwīrus once again recalls the leadership of Cyril and Dioscorus at the two Councils of Ephesus, as well as Dioscorus' refusal to sign the Chalcedonian creed and his subsequent exile. In defending the faithfulness of their christological stance against 'two natures', Sāwīrus aligns Cyril and Dioscorus with the anti-Chalcedonian decision of an eastern council that convened under the emperor Basiliscus.³⁹ Later, in the final chapter of his *History*, Sāwīrus associates Leo and the Roman church with Nestorian doctrine, and in response quotes Cyril's *Letter to Succensus* and his second, fifth, and twelfth *Anathemas*.⁴⁰ These same works are quoted extensively to similar effect in *The Precious Pearl*.⁴¹ Thus, one may observe here the confluence of Sāwīrus' citational and historiographical methods. Taken together, they function to reinscribe the canonical role and authority of Cyril, Dioscorus, and other patrons of the Egyptian church in the shaping of christological doctrine.

Christology and Christian–Muslim Encounter in the Tenth Century: Defending the Incarnation among the Mutakallimūn

Even as Sāwīrus ibn al-Muqaffa^c was defining theological authority in relation to the Egyptian Christian past, he was also negotiating issues of authority and identity in relation to his contemporary medieval context. That is, his Christology was carefully crafted for a tenth-century Coptic church living under Islamic rule. Indeed, as we shall see, these two trajectories—his appropriation of the patristic past, and his engagement with the cultural hegemony of an Islamic present—crucially merge at certain points in his apologetic discourse. As I noted earlier, Christian apologetic discourse typically has a double function: on the one hand, it seeks to assimilate itself to the language of the dominant culture; and on the other hand, it seeks to distance itself from unpalatable viewpoints within that

³⁷ Ibid. 4 (Chébli, 200–2).

³⁸ Id., *History of the Councils* 8 (Leroy, 510–11).

³⁹ Ibid. 8 (Leroy, 512–14).

⁴⁰ Ibid. 10 (Leroy, 564, 566–8).

⁴¹ In his treatise *The Precious Pearl*, Sāwīrus quotes from Cyril's two *Letters to Succensus* (Ep. 45–6) on ten separate occasions: see Sāwīrus ibn al-Muqaffa^c, *The Precious Pearl* 3, 6, 7, 9, 11 (Maiberger, 20 ff., 23, 23–6, 32, 36, 72–4, 199–201, 241 ff., 263, 270 ff.). The *Twelve Anathemas* are the second most quoted Cyrillian work, with six citations: *The Precious Pearl* 6, 7, 11, 12; Maiberger, 69 (Anath. 2, 4, 5), 204 (Anath. 10), 274 (Anath. 12), 284 (Anath. 8).

culture (and thereby to define the boundaries of its own communal identity). How then does Sāwīrus use Islamic language to speak about the relationship between the eternal Word of God and the body of Christ, even as he distinguishes his perspective on the Incarnation from that of his Muslim neighbours?

A close study of his *History of the Councils* reveals how extensively Sāwīrus' Christology is steeped in the rhetoric and terminology of medieval Christian–Muslim debate. This is not to say that his treatise reproduces actual debates between representatives of the Christian and Muslim communities. Rather, at certain places in his treatise, Sāwīrus self-consciously utilizes a discernible vocabulary and style borrowed from contemporaneous forensic literature and practice.

In ch. 6, 'A Response to Those Who Discredit the Creed', Sāwīrus' language veritably brims over with Islamic terms and phrases. His adoption of such vocabulary is, in part, designed to help him present Christian beliefs as compatible with Islam, in the face of Muslim accusations to the contrary. Thus, he first defends himself and his community against charges of 'distortion' (*taḥrīf*), 'substitution' (*tabdīl*), and 'corruption' (*ifsād*), common Islamic criticisms of the Christian Bible.⁴² Then, more proactively, Sāwīrus speaks of the theology articulated at Nicaea as 'what was established (*sunnina*) for them by the legal traditions (*sunan*) and what was prescribed (*shurī'a*) for them by the canonical laws (*sharā'i*).'⁴³ Reiterating this point, he notes that with 'the spread and flourishing of the (Gospel) message (*khābar*)' it was necessary that there be the requisite 'recording of (these) laws (*sharā'i*) and traditions (*sunan*)'.⁴⁴ Here, the apostolic writings and creeds of the church are presented as having an authority and function parallel to Islamic stories about the life of Muhammad (i.e. the *sunna*, collected in the form of *aḥādīth*) and the tradition of legal commentary on the Qur'an. Sāwīrus speaks of Scripture in similar terms in his short treatise *The Lamp of Understanding*: 'The Torah and the rest of the Scriptures that our teachers prescribed are the writings (*kitāb*) and speech (*kalām*) of God, his laws (*sharā'i*) and established traditions (*sunan*), his divine precepts (*farā'id*) and judgments (*aḥkām*).'⁴⁵ When referring to Scripture in his *History of the Councils*, Sāwīrus also uses common Islamic designations for holy writings, *kutub al-tanzīl* ('the books of divine revelation') and *kutub al-rusul* ('the books of the prophets').⁴⁶ Likewise, when speaking about the community of Christians, he employs the Qur'anic expression, *al-Naṣāra* ('the Nazarenes'),⁴⁷ as well as *al-bī'ah*, a term that connoted the church's status as a group recognized under a contracted agreement (*bay'ah*) of

⁴² Sāwīrus ibn al-Muqaffa', *History of the Councils* 6 (Leroy, 501–2).

⁴³ Ibid. (Leroy, 501). ⁴⁴ Ibid. (Leroy, 502).

⁴⁵ *The Lamp of Understanding* 6. 8 (Samir, 47).

⁴⁶ Sāwīrus ibn al-Muqaffa', *History of the Councils* 6 (Leroy, 504–5).

⁴⁷ Ibid. (Leroy, 502); cf. 3 (Leroy, 484), where this name is credited to Syrian traditions of nomenclature.

protection (*dhimma*) in Islamic society.⁴⁸ Sāwīrus' familiarity with the Qur'ān is perhaps most on display when he refers to God as 'the Lord of the worlds' (*rabb al-ʿālamīn*).⁴⁹ In this divine name, medieval readers would have heard an unmistakable echo of the opening Sūrah of the Qur'ān, 'In the name of Allāh, the Gracious and Merciful One. Praise be to Allāh, the Lord of the Worlds (*rabb al-ʿālamīn*).'⁵⁰ Sidney Griffith's observations regarding Sāwīrus' *Lamp of Understanding* hold equally true for the *History of the Councils*: 'The faith of the Qur'ān sets the very parameters of the religious discourse . . . and even determines the topics and the order in which they come up for discussion.'⁵¹

Indeed, in reading the *History of the Councils* in Arabic, one is struck not only by Sāwīrus' extensive use of Islamic terminology, but also by the nature of his rhetoric and argumentation. On numerous occasions throughout ch. 10 of his *History*, Sāwīrus adopts a dialogical question-and-answer style to present his christological views, a style of speech customary to medieval Muslims trained in the area of philosophical debate. While similar forms of literary dialogue appear in ancient Jewish and Christian apologetical literature,⁵² in Islamic theological circles this way of structuring an argument came to be known as *ʿilm al-kalām*, which may be translated 'the science of the word' or 'the science of discourse'. In order to construct an apology for 'right belief', Muslim authors would frequently pose, and then answer, a series of theological questions. These questions were often placed in the mouth of an unsympathetic, anonymous opponent. As such, the discourse of *al-kalām* functioned as a rationalist method of defending the theological viewpoints held by the author and the author's community against challenges from other religious perspectives (including Christians, Jews, and other Muslims who differed in viewpoint).⁵³ In due course, the *al-kalām* style was also commonly adopted by Arabic Christian apologists as a formal literary means of engaging with difficult theological queries raised by Muslim critics.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 2 (Leroy, 478–80); 3 (Leroy, 486); 5 (Leroy, 493–5, 499–500); 8 (Leroy 516); and 10 (Leroy 564, 583).

⁴⁹ Ibid. 6 (Leroy, 505).

⁵⁰ *al-Qur'ān*, Sūrah 1 (trans. Pickthall, 1).

⁵¹ Sidney Griffith, 'The *Kitāb Miṣbāḥ al-ʿAql*', 28. Griffith cites a parallel list of examples for Sāwīrus' use of Qur'anic or Islamic language in *The Lamp of Understanding*, including similar terms for the Christian community (*madhāhib al-Naṣārā*, 'the sects of the Christians'; cf. Q 2: 62) and for Scripture (*al-rusul wa-l-anbiyā'*) and *al-injil*, 'the prophets' and 'the Gospel'; cf. Q 3: 3 *et passim*).

⁵² For an early Christian example, see Cyril of Alexandria, *Chr. un.* (Durand, SC 97 (1964), 302–514; PG 75.1253–1361; trans. McGuckin, *On the Unity of Christ*).

⁵³ On the tradition of *ʿilm al-kalām*, see esp. H. A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam*; cf. L. Gardet, 'ʿIlm al-Kalām', 1141–50; G. C. Anawati, 'Kalām', 231–42. Finally, for a detailed treatment of the dialectical logic of *al-kalām* in the Islamic theological tradition, see two articles by Josef van Ess: 'The Logical Structure of Islamic Theology', 21–50; and 'Disputationspraxis in der Islamischen Theologie', 23–60.

Sāwīrus’ employment of this question-and-answer format follows a conventional pattern. He introduces his imaginary opponent’s question with one of several phrases:

- ‘If he says . . .’ (*fa ’in qāla*),
- ‘If they say . . .’ (*fa ’in qālū*)
- ‘If they claim . . .’ (*fa ’in za’amū*)
- ‘If they allege . . .’ (*fa ’in idda’ā*)
- ‘If they continue (to say) . . .’ (*fa ’in marra*)
- ‘If they respond to that (by saying) . . .’ (*fa ’in ajāba*).

Then he prefaces his own response with a (slightly more restricted) set of formulaic phrases:

- ‘it is said to him . . .’ (*fa yuqālu lahu* or *qīla lahu*)
- ‘it is said to them . . .’ (*fa yuqālu lahum* or *qīla lahum*)
- ‘the response to him is . . .’ (*jawāban lahu*).

By means of this highly structured dialogical method, Sāwīrus presents his christological doctrine as a set of ‘proofs’ (*barāhīn*),⁵⁴ and describes his own argumentation in philosophical terms—as a ‘rational argument’ (*hujjah*) made through the presentation of ‘evidence’ (*dilālah*).⁵⁵

The subject of Sāwīrus’ discourse is the nature or character of the Word: he argues throughout that the Word, in essence, is not characterized by the philosophical categories of ‘accidents’ (*a’rāḍ*) or ‘bodies’ (*ajsād*), even though he has taken on a body in the Incarnation. Thus, early in ch. 10, he raises the question of how the visibility of the Saviour is compatible with the invisibility of God. How can the Saviour be divine when he is seen in a body?⁵⁶ Later he returns to this issue, disputing the idea that the Word of God himself is corporeal in essence, or that accidental properties or bodies might be attributed to the Word.⁵⁷ Instead, he cites scriptural proofs to certify the uncreated nature of the Word and Wisdom of God. In this context, the interpretation of Ecclesiastes 24: 14—‘the Lord created me before all his created works’—poses a problem. Sāwīrus attempts to solve this problem by arguing that this passage refers to the body of the Word (or Christ) in the Incarnation, and not his divinity. The body taken up by the Word must then be identified with God’s ‘Wisdom’ in Ecclesiastes. How does Sāwīrus support this claim? He does so by an intertextual strategy of word association. First, he quotes Matthew 26: 61, which refers to Christ’s body as a ‘temple’, i.e. a ‘building’ (*binā*). Then, he

⁵⁴ Sāwīrus ibn al-Muqaffa’, *History of the Councils* 10 (Leroy, 531).

⁵⁵ Ibid. (Leroy, 529–30); see also ch. 6 (Leroy, 501–2).

⁵⁶ Ibid. (Leroy, 530–1).

⁵⁷ Ibid. (Leroy, 535)

closes the circle by citing Proverbs 9: 1, which describes how Wisdom has built for herself a house: ‘The house that was built (*al-bayt al-mabnī*) is the one about which Christ said, ‘Destroy it and I will build it up again in three days’ (Matthew 26: 61).⁵⁸

Building on this biblical line of logic, Sāwirus constructs an intricate philosophical argument in which he defends the eternity of God’s attributes.⁵⁹ As the ‘Word’ (*kalimah* or *kalām*) or ‘Discourse’ (*ḥikāyah*) of God, the Word exists eternally in the One who speaks. As a hypostasis (*uqnūm*), the Word is defined in relation to the divine substance or essence (*jawhar*).⁶⁰ Thus, in his *Lamp of Understanding*, Sāwirus makes a distinction between the Word’s ‘simple, eternal nature’ (*al-dhāt al-basīṭah al-azalīyah*), which is ‘intangible’ (*ghayr maḥsūs*) and ‘imperceptible’ (*ghayr malmūs*), and the characteristics of ‘composite bodies’ (*al-aṣṣād al-murakkabah*) that are ‘tangible’ (*maḥsūs*) and ‘perceptible’ (*malmūs*).⁶¹ The Divine is therefore properly categorized as a *jawhar* (‘substance’ or ‘essence’) and not as a *jism* (‘material body’) or ‘*araḍ*’ (‘accident’).⁶² Both the Word and the Holy Spirit are defined in relation to God’s eternal attributes (*ṣifāt*): ‘This Creator is ‘living’ (*ḥayy*) and ‘speaking’ (*nāṭiq*)—his ‘speech’ (*nuṭq*) is his Word, and his ‘life’ (*ḥayāh*) is his Spirit.’⁶³ As a result, the Word is, once again, ‘a subsistent, constant, eternal, and everlasting attribute (*ṣifah*) of this (divine) essence (*jawhar*),’ not to be confused with ‘attributes (*ṣifāt*) that come to be and (then) cease to exist, or accidents (‘*aʿrāḍ*) that become corrupted and pass away’.⁶⁴

In his familiarity with such philosophical language and concepts, Sāwirus was (at least indirectly) the beneficiary of the translation movement that flourished in Baghdad during the eighth, ninth, and tenth centuries, through which the Arabic-speaking world was reintroduced to the Greek philosophy of Plato and Aristotle.⁶⁵ Sāwirus mentions Plato and Aristotle several times in his *Lamp of Understanding*, and on one occasion he quotes them in tandem as positive witnesses to the fact that the Creator and the heavenly realms are

⁵⁸ Ibid. (Leroy, 539). ⁵⁹ Ibid. (Leroy, 540).

⁶⁰ Ibid. (Leroy, 541; cf. 534). ⁶¹ Id., *The Lamp of Understanding* 7. 19–22 (Samir, 54).

⁶² Ibid. 2. 9–12 (Samir, 14–15); for a discussion, see Griffith, ‘The *Kitāb Miṣbāḥ al-ʿAql*’, 34.

⁶³ Ibid. 2. 30 (Samir, 19); Griffith, ‘The *Kitāb Miṣbāḥ al-ʿAql*’, 34.

⁶⁴ Ibid. 3. 2–3 (Samir, 27); Griffith, ‘The *Kitāb Miṣbāḥ al-ʿAql*’, 35.

⁶⁵ On the translation of Greek philosophy into Arabic, see especially Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arab Culture* (1998). For shorter overviews on this topic, see the following entries on Islamic philosophy in the online *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (ed. E. Craig): Majid Fakhry, ‘Transmission of Greek Philosophy into the Islamic World’ (iv. 155–9), Kiki Kennedy-Day, ‘Aristotelianism in Islamic Philosophy’ (i. 382–6), and David Burrell, ‘Platonism in Islamic Philosophy’ (vii. 429–30). Arabic Christians played a major role in this translation movement. By one scholar’s count, twelve out of the fourteen most prominent early translators were Christians: Michael E. Marmura, ‘Falsafah’, 268, col. 2; M. Swanson, ‘Early Christian–Muslim Theological Conversation among Arabic-Speaking Intellectuals’.

immune from corruption and change.⁶⁶ At the same time, he differentiates his views from each of these Greek philosophers on crucial matters. For example, in his *Lamp of Understanding*, he is reluctant to embrace Aristotle's distinction between the 'first substance' and 'second substance' with regard to God. Instead, it is sufficient for Sāwīrus to differentiate the single divine substance (*jawhar*) from all the bodies ('*ajsād*'), accidents ('*arād*'), and substances (*jawāhir*) of the world—a view that he contrasts not only to that of Aristotle, but also that of Mani, Bardesanes (*Ibn Dayṣān*), Marcion, Arius, Eunomius, and (last but not least) Plato.⁶⁷

In defending God's Word against claims that he was an 'accident' or 'body', Sāwīrus was self-consciously inserting himself onto a crowded field of philosophical debate where he faced off against several historical and contemporary foils. As the title of his *History of the Councils* might suggest, his primary historical antagonists come from the rolls of the early Christian anathemas. For Sāwīrus, Arius remains the heretic par excellence, and he spends a good portion of his energy refuting Arian views of the Word. Thus, in ch. 5 he accuses Arius of 'unbelief' (*al-kufr*), comparing him to the evil priest Phineas, and his words to those of the serpent in Genesis; against Arius, he pointedly cites a pair of Johannine passages (1: 1 and 14: 10–11) in defence of the Word's eternity and uncreated nature.⁶⁸ Sāwīrus returns to this same polemical track in chs. 6 and 10, where he condemns the claims of Arius and Eunomius that the Word and the Spirit are creatures (and therefore not eternal).⁶⁹

In ch. 10, the author widens out this heresiological discourse with corresponding anti-Nestorian and anti-Chalcedonian diatribes in which he accuses both Nestorius and Leo of espousing doctrines that bore a close resemblance to those of Arius. Thus, Nestorius (along with Theodore of Mopsuestia and Diodore of Tarsus) is said to have taught that our worship and salvation are dependent upon

Mark Swanson has kindly pointed out to me that Sāwīrus' language may also suggest his debt to earlier Christian theologians who wrote in Arabic, although such a debt is often hard to measure in the absence of explicit quotation. As an example, Sāwīrus' explanation of the Trinity as the Creator God who is *ḥayy* (by means of his *ḥayah*, i.e. the Spirit) and *nāṭiq* (by means of his *nuṭq*, i.e. his Word) had already appeared in the writings of the Arabic Christian writer, 'Ammār al-Baṣrī: for an edition of this author's *Book of Proofs* and his *Book of Questions and Answers*, see *Kitāb al-burhān wa-Kitāb al-masā'il wa al-ajwibah*, ed. Miṣhāl al-Ḥayik. Swanson identifies the *Kitāb Uṣṭāth* written by a certain Eustathius as another source from which Sāwīrus borrowed ideas: for an analysis of this dependence, see his article, 'Our Brother, the Monk Eustathius', 119–40.

⁶⁶ Sāwīrus ibn al-Muqaffa', *The Lamp of Understanding* 8. 11–12 (Samir, 54); for a complete index of references to Plato and Aristotle, see Samir Khalil Samir, in *The Lamp of Understanding*, 105–6.

⁶⁷ Sāwīrus ibn al-Muqaffa', *The Lamp of Understanding* 2. 20–8 (Samir, 17–18); Griffith, 'The *Kitāb Miṣbāḥ al-'Aql*', 34–5. In ch. 10 of the *History of the Councils* (Leroy, 540, 558), Sāwīrus attributes the theological errors of both Arius and Nestorius to their overdependence on Plato.

⁶⁸ Sāwīrus ibn al-Muqaffa', *History of the Councils* 5 (Leroy, 493). Sāwīrus ends the chapter with an account of Arius' grisly death on account of intestinal malfunction (Leroy, 500).

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 6 and 10 (Leroy, 504, 538–40).

a temporal creation.⁷⁰ Later, Sāwirus groups Leo of Rome with Nestorius among the *ahl al-bid'ah* ('people of doctrinal innovation') and combats their teachings with liberal citations from Cyril of Alexandria's *Letter to Succensus* and *Twelve Anathemas*.⁷¹ Sāwirus develops this heresiological genealogy in the context of his own arguments regarding the eternal and the temporal in Christ, as well as in the context of his use of philosophical language such as 'essence' (*jawhar*) and 'accidents' (*'a' rād*), and references to his opponents as philosophers (*falāsifah*), rhetoricians (*mutakallimūn*), and grammarians (*naḥwīyūn*).⁷²

In such language, one begins to see how Sāwirus conflates the historical and contemporary reference points for his apologetic discourse. Alongside the above-mentioned opponents from Christian antiquity, this tenth-century Arabic Christian author engages with more recent debate partners, including representatives (both named and unnamed) of the medieval Jewish and Muslim communities. His treatise, *The Lamp of Understanding*, provides us with a vivid glimpse into how, through his polemical rhetoric, he manages to insert himself into ongoing theological and philosophical disputes among rival factions of these communities. For example, in critiquing Jewish teachings that attribute creation to an 'angel' (*malāk*) or to a 'minor god' (*ilāh ṣaghīr*), he demonstrates some acquaintance with Karaite and Rabbanite sectarian viewpoints—viewpoints that were influenced during the tenth century by Islamic methods of *al-kalām*.⁷³ Likewise, in defining God as a 'single being' (*jawhar wāḥid*), he situates his theological discourse in the context of contemporaneous debates that raged between Muslim philosophers (*al-falāsifah al-mantiqīyūn*) and dialectical theologians (*al-jadalīyūn*) over the definition of the terms *jawhar*, *jism*, and *'araḍ*, and the appropriateness of their application to the one God.⁷⁴

In both his *Lamp of Understanding* and his *History of the Councils*, Sāwirus singles out one particular group of Muslim theologians for special critique and

⁷⁰ Ibid. 10 (Leroy, 550–1, 558).

⁷¹ Ibid. (Leroy, 563–8). After quoting Cyril's twelfth *Anathema*, Sāwirus concludes by asking his reader, 'Have you not now seen that Leo is in agreement with Nestorius word for word (*ḥarfan bi ḥarfin*)?'

⁷² Ibid. (Leroy, 554, 562–3).

⁷³ Id., *The Lamp of Understanding* 9. 8–11 (Samir, 67–8); Griffith, 'The *Kitāb Miṣbāḥ al-'Aql*', 26–7. As demonstrated by Griffith, Sāwirus is inaccurate in some of his details: for example, he attributes the Rabbanite view about 'the minor god' to Benjamin al-Nahāwandī, who actually adhered to the opposing Karaite school of thought. On the influence of Islamic speculative theology over these Jewish schools of thought, see Daniel Frank, 'Karaism', <<http://www.muslimphilosophy.com/ip/rep/J052.htm>>, accessed 10 Aug. 2007.

⁷⁴ Sāwirus ibn al-Muqaffa^c, *The Lamp of Understanding* 2. 7–8 (Samir, 13–14). Here, *al-jadalīyūn* (the disputants) may be taken as a synonym of *al-mutakallimūn*. Griffith ('The *Kitāb Miṣbāḥ al-'Aql*', 33–4) argues that Sāwirus, in explicitly mentioning these two groups, was striving 'to situate his use of the word *jawhar* (*ὄνσια*: being) to designate the one Creator God within the parameters of the contemporary learned discourse in Arabic about God and the ultimate realities.'

refutation—namely, the Mu‘tazilites, an influential set of early Muslim *mutakallimūn* who embraced rationalist speculative dogmatics and the use of dialectical logic (even as they resisted the wholesale use of Greek thought by certain Arabic philosophers). The first principle of Mu‘tazilite theology was *’aṣl al-tawḥīd* (‘the principle of unity’), a strict profession of monotheism in which the divine attributes were understood to be identical with or indistinguishable from the divine essence (and therefore deprived of real existence in and of themselves). For the Mu‘tazilites, anything other than this simple and singular divine ‘essence’ or ‘substance’ (*jawhar*) must fall into other categories such as that of material ‘bodies’ (*’ajsām*) or more complex, created ‘substances’ (*jawāhir*).⁷⁵

Sāwīrus was well aware of the implications this stance had for the Christian defence of the Word of God as an eternally subsisting divine hypostasis. Thus, he makes a point of comparing the Mu‘tazilite view not only to that of ‘the Jews’ (*al-Yahūd*) but also to that of Sabellius (*Sābilyūs*), an early Christian theologian who viewed the Word as merely a mode or operation of the one Godhead.⁷⁶ The parallels here are significant: from Sāwīrus’ perspective, all three groups ‘have denied the constancy (*thabāt*), substantial existence (*qiyām*), and eternity (*’azaliyah*)’ of the Word as a divine attribute, and ‘make the attributes of the Creator into names that are empty of meaning.’⁷⁷ Here, Sāwīrus’ polemic against early Christian ‘heresies’ substantially intersects with the philosophical terrain of tenth-century Christian–Muslim (and Christian–Jewish) debate—a terrain with which he was personally familiar from his involvement in the caliph’s court.

These two apologetic trajectories merge in an even more thoroughgoing fashion in Sāwīrus’ *History of the Councils*, where he engages with Mu‘tazilite doctrines in the context of an overarching anti-Arian discourse. Thus, he begins ch. 6—an excursus against those who discredit the Council of Nicaea—by pointedly calling the Christian faith ‘the religion of unity’ (*dīn al-tawḥīd*) based on established ‘laws’ (*sharā’i’*) and ‘traditions’ (*sunan*), an unabashed appropriation of Islamic (and more particularly, Mu‘tazilite) terminology of self-description.⁷⁸ And yet, at the same time, Sāwīrus speaks out against ‘a group of our opponents’ who accuse Christians falsely of distorting (*al-taḥrīf*), changing (*al-taghyīr*), replacing (*al-tabdīl*), or corrupting (*al-ifsād*) their own Scriptures.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ H. S. Nyberg, ‘Al-Mu‘tazila’, 791–2; see also D. Gimaret, ‘Mu‘tazila’, 783–93; and Martyr Murtada Mutahhari, ‘Al-Tawhid’, <<http://www.muslimphilosophy.com/ip/kalam.htm>>, accessed 10 Aug. 2007.

⁷⁶ Sāwīrus ibn al-Muqaffā’, *The Lamp of Understanding* 3. 11 (Samir, 30); Griffith, ‘The *Kitāb Miṣbāḥ al-’Aql*’, 37. On Sabellian ‘modalist’ theology, see J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 119–23; and W. A. Bienert, ‘Sabellius und Sabellianismus als historisches Problem’, 124–39.

⁷⁷ Sāwīrus ibn al-Muqaffā’, *The Lamp of Understanding* 3. 10–11 (Samir, 30)

⁷⁸ Id., *History of the Councils* 6 (Leroy, 501–2).

⁷⁹ Ibid. (Leroy, 501, 504).

On this issue, he draws an unfavourable comparison between the Muslim *mutakallimūn* who lodge such accusations and the early Christian heretics Arius and Eunomius, who despite their egregious errors never ‘made undue claims that their opponents were (guilty of) changing or replacing or corrupting (Scripture).’⁸⁰

Later, in ch. 10, in the context of commenting on the Creed and condemning ‘the error of Arius’, Sāwīrus adopts the conventional dialogical style of *al-kalām* to combat the assertions of the Muʿtazilites (*muʿtazilat al-muslimīn*) that the Word of God must be ‘a temporal and subordinate creation’ (*makh-lūqah muḥdathah marbūbah*), if it is thought to have a substantial existence of its own.⁸¹ According to the tenets of Muʿtazilite reasoning, the divine Being cannot truly be divided according to his attributes, since those attributes have no existence apart from God’s singular essence (*jawhar*). Therefore, in order to talk about God’s Word or Speech (*kalām Allāh*), Sāwīrus observes that the Muʿtazilites must resort to alternative philosophical categories: some describe the Word as an ‘accidental property’ (*ʿaraḍ*), while others describe it as a ‘body’ or ‘a corporeal substance’ (*jism*). The latter view Sāwīrus associates especially with Ibrāhīm al-Nazzām, an influential Muʿtazali dialectician who was active in Basra (modern-day Iraq) during the ninth century.⁸²

What is important to note here is the way that Sāwīrus’ critique of Muʿtazalite thought dovetails with traditional Christian polemic against the Arian doctrine of the Word: in this way, Sāwīrus effectively presents his Muslim interlocutors as latter-day followers of Arius. When they described the Word of God as a created ‘body’ or ‘corporeal substance’ (*jism*), Muslim *mutakallimūn* like al-Nazzām were (in Sāwīrus’ eyes) replicating the original error that the Nicene Creed was designed to thwart.

However, while the point at issue for Sāwīrus was the divine status of the pre-existent Word itself, the particular terms of engagement in this debate—especially with regard to the philosophical definition of ‘bodies’—also had enormous consequences for the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation, the Word’s act of taking on a body. Here, Sāwīrus regularly uses the Arabic word *jism* as a synonym for *jasad*, whose three-letter root forms the basis of the verb meaning ‘to become incarnate’ (*tajassada*).⁸³ Thus, in his *Lamp of Understanding*, the author takes

⁸⁰ Ibid. (Leroy, 504).

⁸¹ Ibid. 10 (Leroy, 535). Sāwīrus also associates this viewpoint with a certain Jewish sect called *al-Anāyah*. In contrast he emphasizes that ‘the *Ashmāʿ* at Jews, the rest of the Christians, and all the learned teachers (i.e. the fathers of the church) agree that ‘God (blessed be He) is a Word through which he created creation’ (Leroy, 534).

⁸² Ibid. (Leroy, 537, 538–42). On al-Nazzām, see H. S. Nyberg, ‘al-Nazzām’, 892–3; and J. van Ess, ‘al-Nazzām’, 1057–8.

⁸³ In ch. 5 of *The Lamp of Understanding*, which is entitled ‘Our Statement on the Incarnation’ (*Qawlunā fi-l-tajassud*), Sāwīrus uses the terms *jasad* and *jism* interchangeably. See e.g. 5.

care to distinguish the attributes of material bodies (*ʿajsām*), which are characterized ‘by death, corruption, change, susceptibility to influence, division, separation, and the occupation of space’, from the divine Word’s ‘simple, eternal essence’ (*al-dhāt al-basīṭah al-azalīyyah*) or ‘being’ (*kawn*), which ‘is not characterized by any of these things.’⁸⁴ In appropriating a ‘body’ (*jism*) that suffered and died, the Word *qua* Word nonetheless remained impassible and impervious to death. And yet, at the same time, in the hypostatic union there occurs a mutual communication of attributes in which the human actions of eating, drinking, and dying are predicated of the Word in the body: ‘In this way, whoever says, “Christ ate and drank and died,” believes that the body (*al-jism*) that was united to him truly ate and truly drank and truly was killed. That body is the body of Christ (*jism al-masīh*). The attributes apply to the Incarnate One (*al-mutajassim*) in the body (*fī al-jism*).’⁸⁵ At the same time, the divine attributes of impassibility, constancy, and imperishability begin to be predicated of the body united to the Word, and by extension to all human bodies who participate in Christ’s Incarnation and resurrection. ‘The bodies (*al-ajsām*) after the resurrection are not susceptible to influence. They do not need food or drink. They do not become sick. They do not become decrepit. They do not decay, nor do they undergo change. The same applies to our statement about the body of Christ (*jism al-masīh*) after his resurrection.’⁸⁶ In the end, for Sāwīrus, it was the divine agency of the Word that enabled this communication of these sublime attributes to human bodies—a divine agency that he upheld in the face of the philosophical objections raised by Muslim (and Jewish) *mutakallimūn*.

15–16 (Samir, 41): ‘Indeed, God revealed himself to us and appeared to us in the last days in the body (*jasad*) belonging to his creation, from the body (*jism*) of the Virgin Mary. We heard his discourse from the body (*jism*) with which he was united.’

⁸⁴ Sāwīrus ibn al-Muqaffaʿ, *The Lamp of Understanding* 7. 19–28 (Samir, 54–6).

⁸⁵ Ibid. 7. 39–40 (Samir, 59). The writer continues to describe this communication of attributes as follows: ‘In the same way, the attributes apply to every composite, union, or society of different things. Indeed, all states of being come to be characterized by the states of being with which they have become united, composed, or combined. . . . Thus, we say that Christ is the Creator (*al-Khāliq*), the Provider (*al-Rāziq*), the All-Living (*al-Hayy*), and the All-Knowing (*al-ʿAlīm*), because he is God. And we say that Christ ate and drank, was killed and died, because he is human’ (7. 42, 47; Samir, 60, 61). Here, even though he uses a wider range of terms here to describe the union than Cyril would allow, Sāwīrus’ theory of predication (along with his extensive use of the soul–body metaphor to illustrate the nature of the union) follows the established precedent of the Alexandrian church father.

⁸⁶ Ibid. 7. 15–16 (Samir, 53). In this context, Sāwīrus quotes from Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians: ‘For what has been built up is a physique that does not change and is not transformed, just as the apostle said, “This changeable thing will put on what does not change, and this mortal body will put on what does not perish” (1 Cor. 15: 53).’

**Sāwīrus on the Incarnation and Human Salvation:
Biblical, Sacramental-Liturgical, and Social Dimensions
of Christological Mimesis**

The dense philosophical and controversial texture of Sāwīrus' apologetic Christology does not prevent him from delving into the more practical implications for his doctrine of the Incarnation. Like his Alexandrian predecessors, Sāwīrus understood the Incarnation to have been accomplished specifically 'on account of our salvation',⁸⁷ and I have already noted the significance of his choice of language in speaking about human bodily participation in Christ's resurrection. In what follows, I want to explore some of the other biblical, sacramental-liturgical, and social images he draws on to convey what human salvation might look like for tenth-century Copts.

First, how does Sāwīrus' interpretation of the Bible provide him with metaphors and analogies for envisioning the effects of the Incarnation on humanity? As mentioned earlier, Sāwīrus, in his *History of the Councils*, reads the Incarnation first of all in the light of creation: through Christ, human beings (and all of creation) are understood to have been restored to the state of grace held by Adam.⁸⁸ He also draws out this familiar connection in *The Precious Pearl*, where the Incarnation is said to bring to an end 'the ancient enmity that existed from the disobedience of Adam to the time of (Christ's) coming', and to restore humanity to its original aim and purpose—namely, reconciliation with God.⁸⁹ The language used to describe this reconciliation is also significant: it is an 'indwelling' (*ḥulūl*) of peace in human persons, the reception of the joy of the Holy Spirit for the perfection of their freedom. Thus, just as the Word came to dwell (*ḥalla*) in the womb of the Virgin,⁹⁰ the peace of the incarnate Word (and the joy of the Holy Spirit) comes to dwell in humanity. While this transaction is described here in spiritual terms (i.e. as an action of the Holy Spirit), it also seems to have had a physical aspect for

⁸⁷ Id., *The Precious Pearl* 3 (Maiberger, 29–31). Here, Sāwīrus depends especially upon Athanasius, but prior to this he also quotes John Chrysostom, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Epiphanius to similar effect (chs. 2 and 3; Maiberger, 17, 22; see also my translation in Appendix B). He also discusses the soteriological implications of the Incarnation in his *Refutation of Saʿīd ibn Baṭṭīq* 1 (Chebli, 139); and *History of the Councils* 10 (Leroy, 555).

⁸⁸ Id., *History of the Councils* 1 (Leroy, 475). In ch. 10 of this work (Leroy, 575), Sāwīrus parcels out the salvific significance of Christ's three days in the grave as follows: the first day for Adam, the second day for Eve, and the third day for the rest of creation.

⁸⁹ Id., *The Precious Pearl* 2 (Maiberger, 13–14).

⁹⁰ See both (Maiberger, 17), and the *Refutation of Saʿīd ibn Baṭṭīq* 4 (Chebli, 189), where Sāwīrus uses the same language in translating an excerpt from John Chrysostom's *Homily on the Nativity*: 'In the Virgin, the Sun of Righteousness became incarnate (*ḥalla fiha*).'

Sāwīrus: in his words, the Incarnation ‘conveyed the corporeal glorifications of the people.’⁹¹

In addition to this dual emphasis on creation and reconciliation, Sāwīrus also highlights the biblical themes of illumination and ascension to draw out aspects of human participation in the divine. In his *Refutation of Saʿīd ibn Batrīq* (*Eutychius*), the illumination of Moses’ face after his encounter with God on Mount Sinai (Exod. 34: 9–35) serves as a type of both the Incarnation and of its effects upon humankind. Once again, Sāwīrus negotiates the connection between these events by means of a wordplay on the Arabic verb, *ḥalla* (to dwell or abide). Speaking on the subject of the Incarnation, he first uses the language of the Nicene Creed to identify the divine Son as ‘Light from Light’, and affirms that in the Incarnation the Son ‘came to dwell (*ḥalla*) in the womb of a woman . . . and he appeared among us in incarnate form, in the image of a man, so that the world might be able to see him’.⁹² Then, he turns his attention to the story of Moses’ reception of the Law, using the same language to describe the divine illumination of the prophet’s face:

Moses, when he desired to see the Lord, (the Lord) said to him, ‘No one sees my face and lives. But on account of your position in my eyes, I will show you a measure according to your capacity.’ And (the Lord) shined upon him a light like lightning, and Moses fell upon his face unconscious as if dead. And when the Lord spoke softly to him, his soul came to life and his spirit returned. And when he went down to the sons of Israel, they were not able to look at his face on account of the light that had come to dwell upon him (*ḥalla ʿalayhi*), so Moses wore the veil (*burquʿ*) when he went down to the sons of Israel, and when he went up the mountain he took it off.⁹³

This account has two interrelated applications in Sāwīrus’ christological argumentation. On the one hand, by employing logic ‘from the lesser to the greater’, he uses the ‘enlightenment’ of Moses to argue for the necessity of the flesh taken on by the Word in the ‘economy’ of the Incarnation: ‘How much more is it the case if that divine light appears in the world, in a complete manner in his case—who is able to look at him and live?’⁹⁴ As in the case of Moses’ *burquʿ*, the body belonging to the Word functioned as a ‘veil’ designed to shield uninitiated human eyes from the overpowering glory of God’s presence. Sāwīrus speaks in similar terms about the incarnate body of Christ in his treatise, *The Lamp of Understanding*: ‘(Christ) created the body, renewed the image, and became a complete human being, without a change of essence. He made it into a temple, a place of residence, and a veil (*ḥijāb*)

⁹¹ Sāwīrus ibn al-Muqaffaʿ, *The Precious Pearl* 2 (Maiberger, 14).

⁹² Id., *Refutation of Saʿīd ibn Batrīq* 1 (Chebli, 138).

⁹³ Ibid. (Chebli, 138–9).

⁹⁴ Ibid. (Chebli, 139).

for himself, even as he united with it in a composite union (*ittiḥādān tarkībīyan*).⁹⁵

On the other hand, Sāwirus also implicitly presents Moses' encounter with God as a model for envisioning the salvific effect of God's (incarnate) presence. God has taken on human form and likeness 'so that (the people of the world) might find the way to look at him and listen to his speech, and so that through him there might be salvation for Adam and his descendents'.⁹⁶ Here, human participation in the Incarnation is conceived of in visual and aural terms—terms that replicate Moses' experience of seeing a 'measure' of the divine light and hearing God's voice (i.e. the Word of God). The implication—left unstated by Sāwirus—is that by witnessing the Incarnation human beings (like Moses) are enabled to receive their own measure of illumination and thereby become privileged partakers of the divine presence.

In Sāwirus' writings, Christ's ascension and his attendant glorification serve as another crucial biblical model for envisioning the effect of the Incarnation upon human nature. In ch. 10 of his *History of the Councils*, the author discusses the function of the ascension on two separate occasions, and in each case, his interpretation of this event turns on (1) his commentary on the Nicene Creed, and (2) readings of selected passages from the Gospel of John. Sāwirus initially addresses this subject in commenting on the credal clause, 'He ascended into heaven and is seated on the right hand of his Father.' Beginning with two passages from the Gospel of John, he cites a series of biblical proofs that intimately link Christ's ascension with the prior descent of the Word in the Incarnation. "No one has ascended into heaven apart from the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man" (John 3: 13), and... "How (does this offend you) when you have seen the Son of Man ascending to the place from which he came?" (John 6: 62).⁹⁷ Then he connects Christ's elevation to the right hand of God with the exaltation of humanity in the Incarnation itself: 'By (the phrase), "he sat on the right hand of his Father," they want (to say), his power and majesty and greatness, *and the fact that the humanity with which the Son of God was united arrived at this rank and honor*'.⁹⁸ Sāwirus follows up on this same

⁹⁵ Id., *The Lamp of Understanding* 7. 3–4 (Samir, 49–50). In that account, Sāwirus mentions that he had taught the same thing in a previous treatise entitled, *On the Elucidation of the Union* (*Kitāb fī iḍāḥ al-ittiḥād*). This title may bear some relationship to a work called *The Book of Clarification* (*Kitāb al-bayān*) written by Sāwirus and reported by al-Mu'taman ibn al-'Assāl in his *Summary of the Principles of Religion* 22. 21 (A. Wadīʿ, SOCM 7a (1999), 52). According to al-Mu'taman, in ch. 4 of this *Book of Clarification*, Sāwirus similarly calls the incarnate body of Christ a 'veil' (*ḥijāb*).

⁹⁶ Sāwirus ibn al-Muqaffāʿ, *Refutation of Sa'īd ibn Baṭrīq* 1 (Chebli, 139).

⁹⁷ Id., *History of the Councils* 10 (Leroy, 576). Other passages quoted included Psalm 46: 6; 27: 11; 1 Samuel 2: 10; Hebrews 10: 12; and Psalm 137: 7.

⁹⁸ Ibid. (Leroy, 577, my italics).

theme later in the chapter when he comments on the final clause of the creed: ‘And we await the resurrection of the dead and the life everlasting. Amen.’ In response to questions concerning the nature of our anticipated resurrected state, he once again quotes two passages from John, along with a key passage from 2 Timothy, to emphasize our spatial participation in Christ’s heavenly glory:

If a questioner asks what kind of state this is, he will be answered with the Gospel saying, ‘Where I am, there my servant is also’ (John 12: 26), and also its saying, ‘I am coming, along with my Father, and we will make a place for him’ (John 14: 23) . . . And it is without doubt that (these good things) come about in the state to which the apostle refers as having great significance and lofty position . . . ‘If we come to be with him, we will reign with him’ (2 Tim. 2: 11–12). And if we now ‘will reign with him’—that is, with Christ our Lord—then we have arrived at the most sublime status and most eminent standing.⁹⁹

Adopting the dialogical style of *al-kalām*, Sāwīrus uses the language of Scripture to portray our resurrection as the outgrowth of Christ’s own ascension and glorification.

Sāwīrus similarly highlights the ascension in ch. 12 of his treatise, *The Precious Pearl*, describing the event as the completion of God’s economy of salvation and as the fulfilment of the hypostatic union that took place in the Incarnation.¹⁰⁰ In this context, he reads a selection of biblical, patristic, and liturgical texts to press home the point that Christ’s ascension effects the glorification of human nature. To start with, he interprets the divine actions described in Ephesians 2: 4–7—‘(God) gave us life with Christ, saved us through his grace, resurrected us, and seated us in heaven’—as direct corollaries of a christological narrative whose trajectory spans the Incarnation, resurrection, and ascension.

He means by this that Christ became incarnate in a human body and made that body one with him hypostatically, and through it he suffered and died and rose again from among the dead and ascended into heaven and has been seated on the right hand of the Father. Then he gave the victory to the human race through the resurrection and the eternal kingdom. And just as through Adam there was the fall and lapse into sin, so too through Christ there was for us resurrection and victory. It was appropriate that through the resurrection he raised us, and through the ascension, he caused us to ascend from a ruinous abyss.¹⁰¹

What is striking about this passage is how Sāwīrus reads Christ’s ascension not only as a type of our ascension, but also as the substantive cause of our newfound capacity to transcend the ‘ruinous abyss’ of the human condition.

⁹⁹ Sāwīrus ibn al-Muqaffā, *History of the Councils* (Leroy, 589).

¹⁰⁰ Id., *The Precious Pearl* 12 (Maiberger, 277, unpublished). Ch. 12 is entitled, ‘On Account of the Lord’s Ascension into Heaven’.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. (Maiberger, 282, unpublished).

Later in the same chapter, Sāwirus emphasizes the bodily character of our emancipation from sin and corruptibility through his citation of selected church fathers. At the end of a series of quotes from Athanasius, Cyril, and Severus of Antioch that reaffirm the one incarnate nature of Christ,¹⁰² Sāwirus turns to a Syrian author, Jacob of Serug (c.451–521 CE), to yoke the fate of human bodies to the divine Son's actions in the Incarnation, resurrection, and ascension:

How is it possible for the earth to ascend to heaven (*al-šaʿūd ʿilā al-samāʾ*) unless God sent his Son through the abundance of his mercy, and he freed us and we became emancipated? . . . God descended, was incarnated, and became one body with the race of Adam, and with it (that body) he died and rose again and ascended to the Father, who had delivered to him all the bodies diminished by death. This body (of Christ) rose, and raised up the bodies that were diminished since (the time of) Adam, and in another stroke he renewed them so that they became worthy of the truth of their emancipation. Once earthly beings have seen the body taken from their kind mounted on the throne, they are assured that corruptibility has passed away and come to an end, that death has been brought to naught, and that life has been renewed through our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory with his good Father and the Holy Spirit, forever and ever. Amen.¹⁰³

The fact that Sāwirus ends his chapter on the ascension with these words suggests that this notion of a bodily correspondence—a corporeal cause-and-effect—serves for him as an adequate summation of Incarnation theology and its soteriological implications.

As we will see, he and other early Copto-Arabic writers are typically loath to use the language of deification when talking about human participation in divine attributes such as incorruptibility. However, Sāwirus has no hesitation about describing how the bodily ascension of the incarnate Word not only enabled the 'ascent' (*al-šaʿūd*) of earthly beings into heaven, but also effectively suffused creation with his divine attributes. Indeed, this is a theme that he introduces at the very beginning of his chapter on the ascension, where he quotes the words of Severus of Antioch as they appear in the Coptic *Liturgy of St Gregory*: 'You ascended into heaven in the body and filled up everything with your divinity.'¹⁰⁴

In what other ways does liturgy—and more broadly, Coptic ritual and social practice—provide Sāwirus with a 'practical' vocabulary for articulating human participation in the Incarnation? In order to address this question, I will concentrate on a range of practices—baptism, anointment, and even the paying of taxes—that were conceived of as potential venues for such sanctified

¹⁰² Ibid. (Maiberger, 284–5, unpublished).

¹⁰³ Ibid. (Maiberger, 285, unpublished). The quote is taken from Jacob of Serug's *Homily on the Resurrection*, which is cited twice by Butrus al-Gamil in Vat. ar. 107: 57^r. 10–57^v. 3 (Maiberger, 'Introduction,' in *Das Buch der kostbaren Perle*, 129).

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. (Maiberger, 277, unpublished).

participation. Operative in each of these contexts for Sāwīrus is a mimetic ethic: that is to say, to participate in the Incarnation is to imitate Christ's own actions in this life.

Baptism is highlighted on more than one occasion in Sāwīrus' writings. In ch. 10 of his *History of the Councils*, Sāwīrus recites the credal formula, 'We confess one baptism for the forgiveness of sins,' and then provides his reader with a list of biblical types for the sacrament—the baptism of the flood, the baptism of the Red Sea, the baptism of the Israelites, the baptism of the priests, the baptism of John, and the baptism of the apostles prior to the resurrection.¹⁰⁵ He contrasts these types of baptism that did not confer the Spirit to the one baptism practised after the resurrection and after Pentecost that does confer the Spirit. This latter baptism is called the 'completion of the economy (of salvation)' and is connected with Christ's granting of new life to Christian believers.

Sāwīrus speaks of baptism in similar terms in ch. 4 of his *Precious Pearl*, where he comments on Jesus' baptism by John, which he presents as the fulfilment of 'the divine economy (*al-tadbīr al-ilāhī*) that (God) has providentially arranged (*dabbara*) through his wondrous Incarnation'.¹⁰⁶ Here, the author establishes a mimetic connection between Jesus' baptism and our own: both are recognized as (interconnected) acts that fulfil God's plan for the redemption of humankind. Thus, he recognizes how Christ 'became for us truly a pattern and a way for salvation'.¹⁰⁷ Later in the same chapter, he emphasizes again that the baptism of Jesus was for the sake of fulfilling the economy (*li-kamāl al-tadbīr*), and that in submitting to baptism Christ was an example and forerunner for us.¹⁰⁸ By submitting to baptism, and thereby imitating Christ, human beings are enabled to become 'sons of God'.¹⁰⁹

The ritual practice of anointment was another context in which Sāwīrus may have understood Coptic Christians to be imitating Christ and thus embodying his attributes. In his treatise, *The Lamp of Understanding*, he discusses the reasons why the Word of God was named 'Christ', first with reference to Greek etymology for *Christos* ('the Anointed One') and then with reference to Christ's self-identification in his conversation with the Samaritan woman in John 4: 29.¹¹⁰ However, for Sāwīrus, this title requires further explanation.

¹⁰⁵ Id., *History of the Councils* 10 (Leroy, 584). Sāwīrus goes on to acknowledge that 'the Theologian' (Gregory of Nazianzus) recognizes five types of baptisms: that of Moses, that of John the Baptist, that of the apostles, that of the blood of the martyrs, and that of the blood of sinners. Sāwīrus' concern here is to reconcile these multiple types of baptism with the proclamation of 'one baptism' in the Nicene Creed.

¹⁰⁶ Id., *The Precious Pearl* 4 (Maiberger, 38).

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. (Maiberger, 38).

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. (Maiberger, 40).

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. (Maiberger, 41).

¹¹⁰ Id., *The Lamp of Understanding* 4. 4–5 (Samir, 33–4).

In the early church, the ‘anointed’ status of the Word had already become a point of theological contention. The debate between Athanasius of Alexandria and the Arians is a prime example. While the latter argued that such an anointment implied that the Word was alterable (in that through it he must have received something he did not possess before), the former defended the eternal unchangeable character of the Word and explained that the Word received anointment ‘on our behalf’.¹¹¹ For Athanasius, the purpose of this ‘anointment’ was not for the Word’s exaltation, but so that the Word ‘might provide for us human beings not only exaltation and resurrection, but the indwelling and intimacy of the Spirit’.¹¹²

Cyril of Alexandria, in defending his use of the term ‘Theotokos’ against Nestorius’ criticisms, likewise advocated for the unchangeability of the Word in relation to his identity as ‘the Anointed One’ (*Christos*). In his *Letter to the Monks of Egypt*, he admits that the name Christ (‘anointed’) had been attributed to many others in Scripture, but at the same time he reaffirms the ‘vast distinction’ between ‘those elected and sanctified in the Spirit’ and the divine Word: ‘And so, while all others, as I have said, may quite rightly be Christs on account of being anointed, the Emmanuel is the only Christ who is true God.’¹¹³ In his debate with Nestorius, Cyril was suspicious that his opponent’s rejection of Theotokos implied that he also rejected the divinity of the Word—in other words, that Nestorius was guilty of the same subordinationist error as the Arians.¹¹⁴ In this context, Cyril argues strenuously against the conclusion that the Word’s anointment indicated a change in status: thus, one must not say that ‘it was only and specifically the divine Word born of God who was anointed’, because that would imply that the Word somehow lacked a measure of holiness prior to that anointment.¹¹⁵ In his *Commentary on John*, Cyril makes this point even clearer: the incarnate Word’s anointment by the Spirit in baptism is not for his own sake or for some deficiency in his divine essence, but rather it signifies his act of conferring the anointment of the Spirit upon the rest of humanity through the Incarnation.¹¹⁶

¹¹¹ See e.g. Athanasius, *Ar.* 1. 37, 46 (*PG* 26.88–9, 105–8).

¹¹² *Ibid.* 1. 46 (*PG* 26.105–8; *NPNF* iv. 333, slightly modified).

¹¹³ Cyril of Alexandria, *Ep.* 1. 10–11 (*ACO* 1.1.1, 14; trans. McGuckin, *St Cyril*, 250–1). Cyril cites a series of biblical references that call other human beings ‘anointed’ (*χριστός*), including Psalm 104: 15; 1 Samuel 24: 7; Habakkuk 3: 13; 1 John 2: 20, 27; Acts 10: 38; and Psalm 44: 8.

¹¹⁴ This was a conclusion that Nestorius himself would not have drawn.

¹¹⁵ Cyril of Alexandria, *Ep.* 1. 15 (*ACO* 1.1.1, 17; trans. McGuckin, *St Cyril*, 253). To attribute this reception of anointment to the eternal Word, in Cyril’s view, is to suggest that ‘the Word existed in former times (when he had not yet been anointed) as wholly lacking in holiness’.

¹¹⁶ *Id.*, *Jo.* 1: 32–3 (Pusey, i. 184). On the function of Jesus’ baptism as ‘an outward sign of a sanctification that was fully accomplished in the Incarnation itself’, see D. Keating, *Appropriation of the Divine Life in Cyril of Alexandria*, 21–39, esp. 38; also Marie-Odile Boulnois, *Le Paradoxe trinitaire chez Cyrille d’Alexandrie*, 472–3; and B. Meunier, *Le Christ de Cyrille d’Alexandrie*, 232.

In his *Lamp of Understanding*, Sāwīrus takes this Alexandrian line of reasoning even further. For him, the Incarnation itself becomes the exclusive referent of the Word's 'anointment'. Thus, he writes,

What I myself believe concerning the naming of the Word of God—namely, as the Christ—is what some of the fathers believed: that the Word united with the body and that the union itself was the anointment. Indeed, he was anointed because he became incarnate (*tajassada*), and the Incarnation (*al-tajassud*) is the name of his anointment.¹¹⁷

Once again, as in the case of Cyril, there are subtle hints of an Athanasian (i.e. anti-Arian) concern to safeguard the eternal divinity of the Word. Thus, the Word is called Christ (the Anointed One) not just at the moment of his Incarnation, but 'because he was specially chosen (beforehand) to become incarnate'.¹¹⁸

What is interesting is that Christ's baptism is not even mentioned in this context: the original 'sign' disappears even as the 'signified' remains in view. In its place, Sāwīrus focuses on the image of anointment with oil as a preferred type for the Incarnation. And in doing so, he again employs the philosophical language of 'bodies' or 'substances' (*ajsām*) to develop this typology. 'Just as the one who brings his body (*jism*) to the anointment with oil is called the anointed (*al-masīh*)—and the oil itself is a bodily substance (*jism min al-ajsām*)—so too the Word of God was called Christ (*al-masīh*) because Scripture has taught us that (the Word) became incarnate (*tajassadat*).'¹¹⁹ In this passage, Sāwīrus plays on the words *jism* and *jasad* as synonyms: both connote the body, but the former also has a more technical, philosophical usage that indicates a kind of substance from which the world is composed. His logic is as follows: even as he acknowledges that persons who possess physical bodies (*ajsām*) can share the name *al-masīh* (anointed) because they have been anointed with the substance (*jism*) of oil, he also affirms that the incorporeal Word of God, whose existence is not defined by bodily substances (*ajsām*), is called *al-masīh* (Christ, i.e. the Anointed One) because he has been anointed in the act of taking on a body (*jasad*).

Sāwīrus' purpose here is to use the practice of anointing bodies as a metaphor for understanding the incarnate Word's identity as Christ, the Anointed One, *al-Masīh*. However, for Sāwīrus' readers, the mimetic context of his thought may have suggested another implication of this analogy—an inference that would have reversed the equation and made his christological conclusions a warrant for the ritual practice of anointment in the Coptic

¹¹⁷ Sāwīrus ibn al-Muqaffā', *The Lamp of Understanding* 4. 7 (Samir, 34).

¹¹⁸ Ibid. 4. 10 (Samir, 35). Sāwīrus employs the same logic with reference to the Word's status as 'Son': 'The Son of God, when he was begotten the second time, was called Son; even though before that he was (also) called Son' (ibid.; Griffith, 'The *Kitāb Miṣbāḥ al-ʿAql*', 38).

¹¹⁹ Sāwīrus ibn al-Muqaffā', *The Lamp of Understanding* 4. 9 (Samir, 35).

church. By the tenth century, the use of holy oil was already a ubiquitous feature of Egyptian Christian liturgical piety. Worshippers at local churches and supplicants at saints' shrines would often return home daubed with oil or holy water for the purpose of healing, or carrying small bottles or flasks of the substance blessed by the attendant priest or by contact with the saints' relics. One example of this practice appears in the *Sacramentary of Sarapion*, where the priest intones a 'Prayer over the Offerings of Oils and Waters', invoking the name of Christ in order to invest these substances with healing properties:

We bless these created things through the name of your only-begotten Jesus Christ; we name the name of him who suffered, was crucified, rose again, and sits at the right hand of the uncreated, on this water and oil. Grant healing power to these created things, that every fever and every demon and every disease may be driven away by drinking and anointing; and the partaking of these created things be a healing medicine and a medicine of wholeness; in the name of your only-begotten Jesus Christ, through whom be glory and might to you in Holy Spirit, to all the ages of ages.¹²⁰

For those who engaged in such rites, the intimate connection Sāwirus makes between anointment and Incarnation may have had a mimetic application—namely, that of seeing anointment by oil as a way of imitating Christ and physically 'embodying' the Incarnation.

The potential for such a mimetic reappropriation of Sāwirus' Christology may be found in one last (and most unexpected) area related to medieval Coptic social practice. In ch. 2 of his treatise, *The Precious Pearl*, Sāwirus presents a series of patristic proofs on the nativity of God the Word. Towards the end of this chapter, the author quotes a passage from Gregory of Nyssa in which Gregory celebrates the humility of the Word in becoming human: 'The King of Kings and Lord of Lords has put on the image of the servant. The Judge of All has come to be under the earthly authorities to such an extent that he gave them tribute (*jizyah*).'¹²¹ The language that Sāwirus chooses to use in his translation is significant here: in tenth-century Egypt, the Arabic word *jizyah* most commonly referred to the poll tax charged to religious minorities (Christians and Jews) by the Muslim caliph in exchange for their protection under Islamic rule. Thus, Sāwirus' quotation and translation of this passage from Gregory of Nyssa proves to be a pointed one: the Incarnation of the Word involved a thoroughgoing descent to the human condition

¹²⁰ F. E. Brightman, 'The Sacramentary of Sarapion of Thmuis', 108. 2–12 (trans. Jasper and Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist*, 79). It is noteworthy here that the *Sacramentary* describes the effect of anointment with oil and the effect of participating in eucharistic body and blood in similar terms: while anointment is a 'healing medicine' through which 'every disease may be driven away', the eucharist is 'a medicine of life for the healing of every disease' (ibid. 106. 16–17; trans. Jasper and Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist*, 78).

¹²¹ Sāwirus ibn al-Muqaffāʿ, *The Precious Pearl 2* (Maiberger, 18).

in which he shouldered even the tax burdens known by medieval Copts. Here, one sees again how Sāwirus contextualized his Christology (and his use of the patristic heritage) for an Arabic-speaking audience. However, to understand the full implications of this point, we must keep in mind the larger context of Sāwirus' discourse: especially, his mimetic language of participation and his emphasis on the connected themes of descent and ascent in his Christology. In the context of his mimetic language of participation, the image of Christ paying the *jizyah* serves as a mute call for Egyptian Christians to continue to honour the authorities by doing the same. By paying the poll tax, Christians could therefore rightly see themselves as imitating Christ.

However, at the same time, even as he was implicitly endorsing the Copts' submission to their social duties in an Islamic society, Sāwirus' broader emphasis on the Word's salvific movement from descent to ascent would have subtly communicated a different kind of message—the realization of an eschatological hope that Egyptian Christians would rise above their subordinate protected status as *ahl al-dhimmah*. To this end, he reminds the reader (via an immediately preceding quote from Gregory of Nazianzus) that the Word became incarnate 'so that he might change the body of our humility into the body of his glory'.¹²² In this context, the social obligation of paying the poll tax may be read as yet another potential mimetic context for participating in the Word's movement from humility to glory. Therefore, even as a tenth-century Copt gave tribute (*jizyah*) to the authorities in imitation of the incarnate Word, that very same act could simultaneously serve as a silent testimony to his or her hope for emancipation—an emancipation already accomplished through the Word's Incarnation, resurrection, and ascension.¹²³

EXCURSUS: DIVINE DECEPTION IN THE
BODY—CREATION AND INCARNATION IN
THE BOOK OF THE ELUCIDATION
ATTRIBUTED TO SĀWĪRUS IBN AL-MUQAFFA^c

In this chapter I have concentrated on three undisputed works by Sāwirus ibn al-Muqaffa^c that provide insight into how the Coptic doctrine of the Incarnation began to be re-presented in the Arabic language during the tenth century. These works were his *Precious Pearl*, the *Lamp of Understanding*, and the *Books on the*

¹²² Sāwirus ibn al-Muqaffā', *The Precious Pearl* (Maiberger, 17).

¹²³ On the theme of emancipation in Sāwirus' theology, see *The Precious Pearl* 12 (Maiberger, 285, unpublished).

Councils. Another important treatise attributed to Sāwīrus—the catechetical *Book of the Elucidation* (*Kitāb al-ʿiḏāḥ*), discussed at the end of ch. 4, has been omitted due to recent questions raised about its authorship.¹²⁴ Indeed, the theology of the work, especially its rather elaborate angelology,¹²⁵ seems to diverge from Sāwīrus’ other (genuine) writings. Due to considerations of linguistic style and literary dependence, the *Elucidation* probably dates to the eleventh century.¹²⁶ The abundant surviving manuscript evidence suggests that it was distributed quite widely, probably for the purposes of doctrinal instruction, and that it later became connected with the well-known name of Sāwīrus.

Chapter 2 of *The Book of the Elucidation* presents instruction on the Incarnation, interpreting this event in the light of God’s creation of humankind in Genesis and the divine ‘economy’ (*al-tadbīr*) of salvation, which has as its goal the raising up of Adam’s descendents to the glory of the Son.¹²⁷ While we have observed a confluence of similar motifs in Alexandrian Greek theology, as well as in the authentic writings of Sāwīrus ibn al-Muqaffa^c himself, what especially

¹²⁴ G. Graf, *GCAL* ii. 309–11. For an accessible but uncritical edition of this work, see Murqus Girgis, *Kitāb al-durr al-thamīn fī iḏāḥ al-dīn* (1925; repr. 1971). The oldest surviving manuscript is Par. ar. 170 from the thirteenth century CE. I will be referring to both of these sources throughout this excursus. There has been considerable confusion regarding the proper title for the *Kitāb al-ʿiḏāḥ*. As one might suspect by reading the title of Girgis’s edn., the work has often been mistaken for Sāwīrus’ *Precious Pearl* (*al-Durr al-thamīn*). In recent articles, Mark Swanson has expressed serious doubts about its attribution to Sāwīrus: see ‘A Copto-Arab Catechism of the Later Fatimid Period: “Ten Questions that One of the Disciples Asked of His Master”’, 483 n. 38. As Swanson points out in another article (‘The Specifically Egyptian Context of a Coptic Arabic Text’, 216 n. 9), the title *Kitāb al-ʿiḏāḥ* does not appear in medieval lists of Sāwīrus’ works compiled by Michael of Tinnis and Abū al-Barakāt: on the former, see the *History of the Patriarchs of the Egyptian Church* (A. S. Atiya, Y. ‘Abd al-Masīh, and O. H. E. Burmester, ii/2, 109–10, 164–5); on the latter, see Shams al-Ri’āsa Abū al-Barakāt, *Miṣbāḥ al-zulmah fī iḏāḥ al-khidmah* (Samir, 306–7).

¹²⁵ On the angelology in *The Book of the Elucidation*, see M. Swanson, ‘The Specifically Egyptian Context of a Coptic Arabic Text’, 214–27. At the time that he wrote this article, Swanson still considered this work to have been written by Sāwīrus.

¹²⁶ On the question of literary dependence and influence, Mark Swanson (‘A Copto-Arab Catechism of the Later Fatimid Period’, 499–500) has argued persuasively that the *Kitāb al-ʿiḏāḥ* served as the principal source for a catechetical text entitled *Ten Questions that One of the Disciples Asked of his Master* from the late eleventh or early twelfth century. If the *Kitāb* postdates the life of Sāwīrus ibn al-Muqaffa^c (who died in the late tenth century), then an eleventh-century dating is most likely correct. With regard to literary style, the author of the *Kitāb* has certain turns of phrases in common with Ibn Sinā (980–1037), whose literary career was concentrated in the early decades of the eleventh century: see e.g. his use of the introductory phrase, *yā ḥabīb (ī)*, in ch. 4 (see e.g. Par. ar. 170, fo. 78^v; Girgis, 64). I am indebted to Bilal Orfali for pointing out this similarity of verbal phrasing.

Despite these doubts regarding authorship, it should be noted that the author of the *Kitāb* shares some vocabulary trends in common with Sāwīrus: in particular, both authors use the terms *tajassud* and *ta’annus* interchangeably to refer to the Incarnation: for examples of how these terms are paired in the *Kitāb*, see Par. ar. 170, fo. 30^v, 38^v, 39^v; and Girgis, 49, 60, 62.

¹²⁷ Ps.-Sāwīrus ibn al-Muqaffa^c, *The Book of the Elucidation* 2 (Par. ar. 170, fos. 28^v–30^v; Girgis, 47–9).

characterizes this work is its narrative of divine deception—its presentation of salvation history as an elaborate series of dissimulations through which God tricks Satan and thereby defeats him. The primary mechanism or tool of this divine deception is the human body—first in its original creation, but finally and decisively in the Incarnation itself.

As crucial background to this narrative of divine deception, the author of *The Book of Elucidation* introduces plot details not found in the text of Genesis—especially as related to the legendary story of Satan’s fall from heaven (Isa. 14: 12–15; cf. 2 Pet. 2: 4).¹²⁸ In this author’s account, the creation of humankind was meant to fill the rank of the fallen angels, to replace ‘the number of the host that fell along with Satan’,¹²⁹ Satan (who is variously referred to by the names *Saṭānā’īl*, *Shayṭān*, and *Iblīs*) grows quickly jealous of his lost status and suspects that God has designs on replacing him and his cohorts: ‘He trembled and thought that God created spirits in order to establish them in his place.’¹³⁰ In an attempt to allay Satan’s suspicions and to prevent possible reprisals, God cloaks Adam’s ‘rational spirit’ (*rūḥ ‘āqīl*) in a body resembling those of the animals. Thus, Adam and Eve are created as ‘spirits of angels veiled in a body’.¹³¹ However, Satan does not abandon his suspicions and begins plotting their downfall by concealing his spirit in the serpent.

In the end, of course, Adam and Eve succumb to the wiles of the serpent, and their ‘fall’ ends up having two major consequences for humankind. First, to each of Adam and Eve’s descendents, Satan assigns an unclean spirit that has dominion over that person from birth until death.¹³² Second, as a result of this sin, humankind experiences death, which is described as a separation of the rational spirit from the body. The cause of this separation may be traced to the action of the unclean spirit, who shows ‘his ugly countenance’ to the person and causes his or her blood to dry up out of fear. According to medieval Arabic physiology, a person’s blood was thought to serve as the medium for the rational spirit’s presence and life in the body.¹³³

The Incarnation is presented as the solution to this problem of demonic dominion over the body: indeed, the author understands it as a recapitulation and reversal of key elements from the creation narrative.¹³⁴ For example, the

¹²⁸ Ps.-Sawīrus ibn al-Muqaffāʿ, *The Book of the Elucidation* (Par. ar. 170, fos. 23^r, 30^v–33^v; Girgis, 38, 50–4).

¹²⁹ Ibid. (Par. ar. 170, fo. 23^v, cf. 34^r; Girgis, 38, cf. 55).

¹³⁰ Ibid. (Par. ar. 170, fo. 34^r; Girgis, 55).

¹³¹ Ibid. (Par. ar. 170, fo. 35^r; Girgis, 56).

¹³² Ibid. (Par. ar. 170, fo. 36^r^{8v}; Girgis, 58).

At one point in the text, the author actually articulates a viewpoint quite close to the Western notion of original sin: ‘Because of Adam’s sin, everyone among his descendents who dies descends to Hades, even the children who have not sinned’ (Par. ar. 170, fo. 37^r; Girgis, 59).

¹³³ Ibid. (Par. ar. 170, fo. 36^v; Girgis, 58).

¹³⁴ The origins of this theology of recapitulation may be found in the second-century writings of Irenaeus of Lyons: see especially his treatise *Against Heresies* (*haer.*) 5. 21–4 (Rousseau, Doutreleau, and Mercier, SC 153 (1969), 260–307); M. Swanson, *Folly to the Hunafāʿ*, 27–8.

story of God walking in the garden in search of Adam and Eve after they ate from the tree (Gen. 3: 8) is interpreted as a foreshadowing of the Word's descent to inhabit a body in the Incarnation.¹³⁵ This theme of recapitulation becomes especially marked when the author recalls the events leading up to Christ's crucifixion. The whipping of Jesus with leather bands, his crown of thorns, and his nakedness on the cross all recall and play out the consequences of Adam and Eve's punishment—in reverse order, their shame at their nakedness, the thorns that grew on the earth after their sin, and their act of covering their bodies with animal skins.¹³⁶ In the nailing of Christ's feet and hands to the cross, one witnesses the punishment incurred by Eve when she walked to the tree and plucked its fruit.¹³⁷ Even the wound in his side evokes the creation of Eve out of Adam's rib, a creation that portended her ill-fated choice.¹³⁸ Finally, the Jews' mocking and scorn of the Saviour dramatizes the divine scorn rightfully due to Adam and Eve after their act of disobedience.¹³⁹

Each of these elements of Christ's passion not only recapitulates (and thereby redeems) the primeval fall of humankind, but also contributes to the divine plan (*al-tadbīr*) to defeat Satan through misdirection and 'sleight of body'. From the first hour of his nativity to the final hour of his crucifixion, the Son endeavours to hide his divinity from Satan through gestures of bodily weakness, just as Satan hid himself from Adam and Eve in the body of the serpent. As a result of this divine self-concealment, Satan mistakes Christ for an ordinary man ('he was convinced that he was a weak human being'), and assumes he still has dominion over him.¹⁴⁰ This counter-deception practised on Satan continues through Christ's earthly life during which he strategically balances revelations of his true divine identity by other actions that obscure that identity: 'He did not do any (acts of) power by which he confirmed his divinity to the people unless he also did an act of weakness at the appropriate time to hide his divinity from Satan.'¹⁴¹ Thus, even as the angels were announcing the birth of the Saviour from heaven, Jesus' divinity was hidden on earth amidst his swaddling clothes and his humble manger bed.¹⁴² Later, when his birth was honoured in royal fashion by the visit of the Magi, Satan again suspected that this was no ordinary child, but Christ at that time 'hid his

¹³⁵ Ps.-Sāwirus ibn al-Muqaffāʿ, *The Book of the Elucidation* 2 (Par. ar. 170, fo. 39^v; Girgis, 62).

¹³⁶ *Ibid.* (Par. ar. 170, fos. 44^v–45^r; Girgis, 69–70).

¹³⁷ *Ibid.* (Par. ar. 170, fo. 45^r; Girgis, 70).

¹³⁸ *Ibid.* (Par. ar. 170, fo. 47^r; Girgis, 73).

¹³⁹ *Ibid.* (Par. ar. 170, fos. 44^v–45^r; Girgis, 69–70). Earlier in the treatise, the author specifically compares Christ's death on the cross to Adam's death from eating the fruit of the tree (Par. ar. 170, fo. 26^r; Girgis, 44).

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.* (Par. ar. 170, fo. 25^{r8v}, cf. 30^r; Girgis, 43, cf. 49).

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.* (Par. ar. 170, fo. 25^v; Girgis, 43).

¹⁴² *Ibid.* (Par. ar. 170, fos. 41^r–42^r; Girgis, 64–5).

divinity from him by means of his flight to the land of Egypt.¹⁴³ Indeed, his thirty-year absence from public life and from the Gospel records is explained as part of this attempt to conceal his divine origins.¹⁴⁴ Once more, at Christ's baptism, the Spirit visibly descends upon him and the voice of God identifies him as God's beloved Son, but Satan's growing suspicions are temporarily dispelled by Christ's subsequent period of fasting, hunger, and temptation in the desert.¹⁴⁵ Even Christ's verbal responses to Satan's temptation are understood to play a role in this divine ruse: by restricting himself to the words of the Law, he leads Satan to believe that he was still 'in need of the Law like the rest of those who are under the Law'.¹⁴⁶ Thus, when Jesus subsequently begins performing miracles among the people, Satan assumes that he must simply be one of Israel's prophets who likewise did miraculous deeds and were even called 'anointed ones' and 'gods',¹⁴⁷ and yet were still conveyed to Hades after their deaths.¹⁴⁸ Amidst Christ's demonstrations of power, Satan remains distracted by other contrasting characteristics and actions that appeared all too human—most notably his 'hunger, thirst, fatigue, prayer, fasting, sleep, and words of weakness'.¹⁴⁹

This secrecy surrounding the Son's true divine identity continued 'until the night of his crucifixion'.¹⁵⁰ Indeed, following his agonized prayer in the garden and his visible suffering in the body, his final forsaken cry on the cross proved the ultimate deception in this divine drama.¹⁵¹ Hearing this cry, Satan 'became emboldened' and 'made his countenance hideous in (Christ's) face' in order to cause his blood to dry up in fear just as Satan's demonic host had done to all the descendents of Adam at their deaths.¹⁵² However, even as Christ's spirit separated from his body, his blood did not dry up due to the enduring presence of the divine Spirit, and Satan was not able to seize him. At this moment, the ruse was fully and finally revealed, and Christ was able to seize Satan by means of his divinity (which remained united with both his spirit and his body even as they were separated for a time).¹⁵³ He then

¹⁴³ Ps.-Sawirus ibn al-Muqaffa', *The Book of the Elucidation* (Par. ar. 170, fo. 41^R; Girgis, 64).

¹⁴⁴ The author also sees this period of time as a typological fulfilment of creation, since Adam is assumed to have been created at the age of 30 (*ibid.*).

¹⁴⁵ Ps.-Sawirus ibn al-Muqaffa', *The Book of the Elucidation 2* (Par. ar. 170, fos. 41^R–42^R; Girgis, 64–6).

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.* (Par. ar. 170, fo. 41^V; Girgis, 65).

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.* (Par. ar. 170, fo. 42^V ('*ālīhah wa masīhīn*')); Girgis, 66 ('*ālīhah wa musahā*').

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.* (Par. ar. 170, fo. 37^R; Girgis, 59).

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.* (Par. ar. 170, fo. 42^V; Girgis, 66).

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.* (Par. ar. 170, fo. 43^R; Girgis, 67).

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.* (Par. ar. 170, fo. 45^R; Girgis, 70). Later in the treatise, the author interprets Christ's final cry on the cross in the light of Isaiah 11: 4 ('He strikes the earth with the words of his mouth'). Altering the wording slightly, he comments that with his cry, he has in fact 'struck Satan with the words of his mouth' (Par. ar. 170, fo. 48^R; Girgis, 75).

¹⁵² *Ibid.* (Par. ar. 170, fo. 45^V; Girgis, 71).

¹⁵³ *Ibid.* (Par. ar. 170, fo. 45^V; Girgis, 71).

descended to free the souls held captive in Hades and transported them to paradise, where they would wait until their number equals the number of Satan's host that fell.

This narrative of an elaborate divine deception is not completely original to the author of *The Book of the Elucidation*. In the fourth century, Gregory of Nyssa used the metaphor of fishing to describe how Satan took the 'bait' (δέλεαρ) of Christ's humanity and was thereby reeled in on the 'fishhook' (ἄγκιστρον) of Christ's concealed divinity.¹⁵⁴ A similar emphasis on the deception practised on Satan appears in the works of early Arab Christian apologists, including an anonymous eighth-century work *On the Triune God* (*Fī tathlīth Allāh al-wāḥid*),¹⁵⁵ Theodore Abu Qurrah's treatises *On the Necessity of Redemption* and *On the Possibility of the Incarnation*,¹⁵⁶ and Peter of Bayt Ra's *Demonstration* (*al-Burhān*).¹⁵⁷

What is most interesting for my purposes, however, is the way that the author of *The Book of the Elucidation* applies this narrative to a eucharistic Christology. The final trap for Satan in God's economy of salvation is made possible by the fact that in the Incarnation—and even at the moment of Christ's death—the divinity is never separated from his spirit and body. This mystery both points to and is enacted in the eucharist, where 'he is dead for our sake, for he is twisted up (*malfūf*) on the plate through the act of tearing (off pieces), just as he was twisted up in winding sheets within the tomb; and his blood is poured (*muhraq*) into the cup, just as he poured ('*ahraqa*) it out on Golgotha when he was pierced'.¹⁵⁸ For the author of this work, 'the Holy Spirit is with his body and blood on the plate',¹⁵⁹ and therefore is made available for consumption by the ones who partake of the sacrament.

¹⁵⁴ Gregory of Nyssa, *cat. or.* 24. 4; cf. 23. 3 and 26. 1 (Mérider, 114; cf. 110 and 118–20); Raymond Schwager, 'Der Sieg Christi über den Teufel', 158–68; Swanson, *Folly to the Ḥunafāʿ*, 28–9.

¹⁵⁵ Sinai ar. 154, fo. 106^v. 13–15. For a discussion of this manuscript and its contents, see Samir Khalil Samir, 'The Earliest Arab Apology for Christianity (c. 750)', 57–114; and Swanson, *Folly to the Ḥunafāʿ*, 22–30.

¹⁵⁶ For editions of these two works, see Constantine Bacha (= Quṣṭanṭīn al-Bāshā), *Mayāmīr Tawudūrus Abī Qurrah usqf Harrān, aqdam ta'lif ʿarabī naṣrānī*, esp. 87. 1–2 and 184. 19–185. 4. An English trans. of Abū Qurrah's writings has recently been published by John Lamoreaux, *Theodore Abū Qurrah* (2006). Swanson (*Folly to the Ḥunafāʿ*, 29 n. 28) also cites the example of a text entitled *al-ġāmīʿ wujūh al-ʾimān*, which 'compares Christ's Incarnation with a shepherd's disguising himself in a sheepskin in order to defeat the wolf' (chs. 8 and 17, Q. 19: BL or. 4950, fos. 34^v, 106^v–107^r).

¹⁵⁷ Peter of Bayt Ra (Eutyclus), *The Book of the Demonstration* (*Kitāb al-burhān*) 226: Cachia, CSCO 192, 127 (text) and 209, 103 (trans.); Swanson, *Folly to the Ḥunafāʿ*, 29–30.

¹⁵⁸ Ps.-Sāwirus ibn al-Muqaffāʿ, *The Book of the Elucidation* 2 (Par. ar. 170, fo. 46^r; Girgis, 72).

¹⁵⁹ Ps.-Sāwirus ibn al-Muqaffāʿ, (Par. ar. 170, fo. 46^r; cf. Girgis, 72, where 'the divinity' is read in the place of 'the Holy Spirit'). The author goes on to clarify that while 'the hypostasis (*uqnūm*) of the Son's divinity was united with the spirit of his body... the hypostasis (*uqnūm*) of the Holy Spirit continued to anoint his body, just as he anoints with oil'.

Later in *The Book of the Elucidation*, this eucharistic theology of participation is elaborated in more detail, specifically in relation to the story of the Passover. The author takes the Israelites' action of smearing their door lintels with the blood of the sacrificial lamb as a type for participation in the Christian sacrament. Once again, we encounter an Egyptian author using an architectural analogy to interpret the ritual actions of human bodies.¹⁶⁰ In this case, the author reads the 'body of the believer' as a house in which the Spirit dwells: 'The door of the body is the mouth, and its lintel is its lips, and its threshold is its rows of teeth. And when one drinks the blood of Christ, his lips and teeth become stained.'¹⁶¹ This stain of Christ's blood upon the 'lintel' of the body has the (apotropaic) function of warding off 'the defiling angel Satan' when he comes to take possession of a person at his or her death.¹⁶² Having so marked the body in the eucharistic mass, the blood of Christ thus comes to adhere to the believer's soul and to stamp it. This stamp or mark of blood serves as an entry pass that guarantees safe passage into the gates of Paradise, which is conceived of as an 'ascent' through which humankind is raised up to Christ's glory.¹⁶³

¹⁶⁰ See Ch. 4 of this book for more examples.

¹⁶¹ Ps.-Sāwirus ibn al-Muqaffā', *The Book of the Elucidation* 4 (Par. ar. 170, fo. 71^v; Girgis, 106).

¹⁶² Ibid. (Par. ar. 170, fo. 71^v; Girgis, 107).

¹⁶³ Ibid. (Par. ar. 170, fo. 72^b; Girgis, 107). The author uses the same verb (*ṣa'ada*) to describe this 'ascent' (*ṣa'ūd*) into Paradise as he does in ch. 2 (Par. ar. 170, fo. 30^f; Girgis, 49) to describe how Christ has 'raised up' (*'aṣ'ada*) the faithful to participation in his glory.

From Alexandria to Cairo: The Medieval Golden Age of Copto-Arabic Christology

INTRODUCTION

Sāwīrus ibn al-Muqaffa^c was in many ways a theologian ahead of his time. After his death sometime around the end of the tenth century, the primary literary activity in the Coptic church remained the translation of biblical, apocryphal, hagiographical, liturgical, and doctrinal works into Arabic, and the reinterpretation of such materials in catechetical literature such as that of *The Book of the Elucidation*.¹ It would be over two hundred years before another generation of Egyptian writers would rise to Sāwīrus' level and begin producing original works of Arabic theology that were both voluminous and skillfully wrought. Būlus al-Būshī and the Awlād al-^cAssāl were among this select group of theologians who helped usher in the Golden Age of Copto-Arabic literature in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. In examining these influential figures, we will complete our journey—a journey that began in ancient Alexandria, wended its way through the towns and villages of Upper Egypt, and now concludes within the medieval walls of Cairo.

The history of Cairo as a city is a complicated one.² Founded by the Arab general ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀs in 642 on the eastern bank of the Nile near the Roman and Byzantine encampment of Babylon, the city was originally named Fustat. However, during the lifetime of Sāwīrus ibn al-Muqaffa^c, the tenth-century Fatimid caliph al-Muʿizz founded a new fortified settlement called al-Qāhirah (Cairo)—‘the Conquering or Victorious One’—to the north of Fustat in 973. From its origins as a caliphal city under the Fatimids, al-Qāhirah evolved over the course of the eleventh and twelfth centuries into an independent cosmopolitan centre of government, culture, and trade. As a result, by the thirteenth century and the rise of the short-lived Ayyubid dynasty in Egypt, the area surrounding

¹ The text, *Ten Questions that One of the Disciples Asked of his Master*, is another example of such catechesis: see M. Swanson, ‘A Copto-Arabic Catechism of the Later Fatimid Period’, 473–501.

² For excellent treatments of Cairo’s historical development as an urban centre, see A. Raymond, *Cairo: City of History* (2001); and M. Rodenbeck, *Cairo, the City Victorious* (2000).

Fustat, including the Christian and Jewish settlements at Babylon, had come to be known as Old Cairo.

During the thirteenth century, the city of Cairo played host to a veritable theological renaissance in the Coptic church.³ Indeed, the authors treated in this final chapter—Būlus al-Būshī, al-Ṣafī ibn al-ʿAssāl, and al-Muʿtaman ibn al-ʿAssāl—spent crucial periods of their professional and literary careers in this burgeoning metropolitan area. Under the Ayyubids (1171–1250 CE), the situation for minority religious communities (*dhimmī*) in Egypt had become a bit more tenuous: after the relative tolerance of the Fatimid rulers, Christians and Jews in the capital began to experience somewhat heightened public pressures to restrict themselves to their proper spheres of influence. The first (and most famous) Ayyubid ruler, Saladin, had even promulgated legislation that sought to remove Christians from their (often high) positions in the civil administration: however, the law was inconsistently applied and Copts such as the al-ʿAssāl family patently continued to hold positions of responsibility under subsequent Ayyubid leadership.⁴ It was in the context of such social fluctuation and uncertainty that such theologians as Būlus al-Būshī and the Awlād al-ʿAssāl began producing new christological works that demonstrated a profound engagement with their Egyptian Christian past and with the contemporary challenges posed by Islam.⁵

THE CHRISTOLOGY OF BŪLUS AL-BŪSHĪ, BISHOP OF OLD CAIRO

Let me begin by sketching out what historians know about Būlus al-Būshī.

The name *al-Būshī* reflects the fact that he was from Būsh, a town located in Middle Egypt, just north of modern-day Beni Suef. Būlus al-Būshī's lifespan closely paralleled that of Ayyubid rule in Egypt (1171–1250): he was probably born in the early 1170s, and died sometime around 1250, or shortly thereafter. Much of the early part of his career was spent as a monk, probably at the Monastery of Anba Samuel Qalamun in the Fayum, a large agricultural oasis located adjacent to the Nile Valley, south-west of Cairo.

In the second decade of the thirteenth century (1216 CE), however, Būlus' public profile was suddenly raised when he was nominated, along with three

³ Henceforward in my discussion, I will use the name Cairo to refer to the larger urban area inclusive of both Old Cairo and al-Qāhirah.

⁴ A. Raymond, *Cairo: City of History*, 102.

⁵ The first half of this chapter, on Būlus al-Būshī, has been adapted from my article, 'The Copto-Arabic Tradition of Theosis', 163–74.

other candidates, to succeed John VI (1189–1216) as the Egyptian patriarch. A protracted period of indecision and bureaucratic deadlock ensued within the Coptic church, including a series of complicated negotiations with the Ayyubid government. In 1225, Būlus decided to withdraw his name from consideration in order to forestall the potential for further conflict and disunity in the election, but it would be another ten years before Būlus' colleague Dawūd Ibn Laqlaq was elected patriarch, under the name Cyril III, in 1235.

Cyril III Ibn Laqlaq's long-awaited election was not a panacea for the church's troubles, nor did it mean the marginalization of Būlus as a church leader. During the earlier public wrangling over the election, the new patriarch had had to pay the Ayyubid government a bribe of 3,000 dinar to gain official authorization for his patriarchate. In an effort to recoup those funds, he instituted the practice of simony (*al-sharṭūniyah*)—that is, the selling of church offices for a fee. In order to address this problem, a council of bishops was held at the Citadel in 1240. There, Būlus al-Būshī was named the bishop of Old Cairo, one of the most prestigious of the local Egyptian bishoprics at the time. At the same time, the council named him as the 'warden' or 'guardian' (*raqīb*) of the patriarch. In that capacity, he was charged with the authority to monitor and offer final approval over patriarchal appointments and publications.⁶

In addition to his prominent leadership role in the church, Būlus was also a prolific theological author. His diverse writings include: a treatise on spirituality, a book of confession, biblical commentaries on Revelation and Hebrews, and a series of eight homilies on the life of Christ, corresponding to eight major feasts in the Coptic calendar.⁷ One of Būlus al-Būshī's most important writings, however, is his systematic theology, which is organized in four parts with separate treatises on the unity of God, the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the well-being (or truth) of Christianity.⁸

⁶ For further details on Būlus al-Būshī's life and leadership, see Samir Khalil Samir, *Traité de Paul de Būš*, 15–27; Aziz S. Atiya, 'Būlus al-Būshī', CE ii. 423–4; Joseph Moris Faltas, *Ho megas Athanasios*, 11–17. I am indebted to Joseph Faltas for originally introducing me to the work of Būlus al-Būshī.

⁷ For a complete listing of his works, see Samir, *Traité de Paul de Būš*, 29–40; also Faltas, *Ho megas Athanasios*, 18–25. An uncritical edition of Būlus al-Būshī's eight homilies was published by Manqariūs Awād Allah, in *Maqālāt al-Anbā Būlus al-Būshī* (1972). Nagi Edelby has produced a critical edition of the first sermon in the series, the *Homily on the Annunciation*: see N. Edelby, 'L'Homélie de l'Annonciation de Būlus al-Būshī', 503–65. More recently, Joseph Faltas has also published an edition of the *Homily on Pentecost*: see J. Faltas, *al-Rūh al-qudus: Maymar 'atd al-anṣarah lil-usqaf Būlus al-Būshī* (2006).

⁸ A critical edition of the Arabic text has been produced by Samir Khalil Samir, *Traité de Paul de Būš*, 129–258. The treatise *On the Incarnation* appears on pp. 187–227. This Arabic text has been reproduced with a modern Greek trans. in Faltas, *Ho megas Athanasios*, 29–52.

In the first part of this chapter, I turn my attention to Būlus' treatise *On the Incarnation* (see Appendix B.3). How does Būlus engage with the questions and challenges raised by contemporary Islamic theology? How does he interpret Scripture and appropriate the legacy of the Alexandrian church fathers? And finally, how was his Christology contextualized by worship and the liturgy?

The three main themes highlighted in the questions above—the controversial context of Christian–Muslim encounter, the biblical-patristic inheritance, and liturgy as a setting for christological reflection—are all reflected in the structure of Būlus al-Būshī's masterwork *On the Incarnation*. In Samir Khalil Samir's edition of the text, the chapter headings are organized thus:

- Ch. 1. Introduction to the Study of the Incarnation
- Part One: How Did God the Word Become Incarnate?
 - Ch. 2. How Does God Come to Dwell in the Woman Whom He Created?
 - Ch. 3. How Does the Incarnation Concern One Person of the Trinity Only?
 - Ch. 4. Is the One Who Became Incarnate the Eternal Creator?
- Part Two: Why Did God the Word Become Incarnate?
 - Ch. 5. What Was It That Compelled God to Become Incarnate?
 - Ch. 6. Why Did God Not Send an Angel or a Prophet Apart from Himself for the Salvation of His People?
- Part Three: What Are the Fruits of the Incarnation?
 - Ch. 7. God Has Provided Us With Eternal Life
 - Ch. 8. God Granted Us Participation in the Body of Christ
 - Ch. 9. Conclusion of the Study of the Incarnation

In parts one and two, Būlus conducts a (fictional) dialogue with an anonymous Muslim interlocutor and responds to the questions of how and why the divine Word became flesh. In the third and final part of his treatise, Būlus turns to the issue of soteriology: namely, how the Incarnation of the Word provided for human salvation: in this context, he specifically relies on the Gospel of John (esp. John 6: 51–7) in developing a sacramental theology of the Incarnation that emphasizes our participation in Christ's divinized body.

Christological Apologetics in an Islamic Context: The Form and Content of a Thirteenth-Century Interreligious Debate

First, I want to begin by addressing the question of how Būlus' interpretation was conditioned by Christian apologetic concerns within an Islamic environment. These concerns are most evident in parts one and two of his treatise, where both the form and content are framed by the language of Christian–Muslim theological debate. How did Būlus' shape his apologetic Christology within the

context of his Islamic culture and in response to Islamic criticisms of Christian doctrine?

As we observed in the case of Sāwirus ibn al-Muqaffa^c, Būlus models his theological rhetoric on the Islamic rhetorical and theological convention of *‘ilm al-kalām*. In fact, Būlus actually uses the dialogical style of *al-kalām* to structure the body of his treatise *On the Incarnation*. From chs. 2–6, he introduces each chapter (and several subheadings within each) with a question posed by a group of anonymous Muslim interlocutors. The presentation of these questions once again follows the formulaic structure typical of literary dialogues produced in the *kalām* style.⁹ Each is introduced with the words, ‘If they say . . .’ (*fa ’in qālū*) or ‘If they ask . . .’ (*fa ’in sa’alū*). Following each question, Būlus presents an apologetic response introduced by the words, ‘It is said to them . . .’ (*yuqālu lahum*).

This question-and-answer format not only provides chs. 2–6 with a well-organized structure, it also sets forth a clear thematic agenda for each chapter. At the beginning of ch. 2, Būlus begins by raising a question about the Incarnation and the Creator’s relationship with the created world: ‘If they say, “How does God come to dwell (*yaḥillu*) in the human race whom he created?” It is said to them . . .’¹⁰ Here Būlus’ main concern is to address questions about how Mary, a mortal human being, gave birth to the Incarnate Word. Thus, in response, Būlus invokes the example of God’s self-revelation in the burning bush as an analogy for the Word’s Incarnation through Mary. In the second section of ch. 2, he allows his interlocutor to voice the question, ‘How is the humanity like the bush?’¹¹ In the fifth century, Cyril of Alexandria had made reference to the burning bush—a bush that burned but was not consumed—as a christological type to explain how the Word took on flesh while still remaining undefiled in his divinity, and this image was subsequently taken up in the Coptic *Theotokia* hymns.¹² Būlus’ interpretation of the bush as a christological sign was therefore framed by his church’s weekly liturgical practice.

In Būlus’ case, he specifically applies the image of the burning bush to the Incarnation by means of an argument ‘from the lesser to the greater’: if God was willing to appear in a bush bearing no fruit, then ‘it is (even) more proper and fitting that he should speak to us from the holy body that he took from

⁹ Josef van Ess, ‘The Logical Structure of Islamic Theology’, 23; and ‘Disputationspraxis in der Islamischen Theologie’, 25.

¹⁰ Būlus al-Būshī, *On the Incarnation* 20–1 (Samir, 193).

¹¹ *Ibid.* 29 (Samir, 195).

¹² Cyril of Alexandria, *glaph. Ex. 1* (PG 69.412D–413D); *hom. pasch. 17. 3* (PG 77.53–5); *Chr. un. 737c* (Durand, 378–80; trans. McGuckin, 79). In Coptic worship, the burning bush (βατος) is celebrated as a type for the Virgin Mary and the Incarnation in the liturgical hymns of the Thursday *Theotokia*: see De Lacy O’Leary, *The Coptic Theotokia*, 42–4.

Mary',¹³ Here (and throughout the latter half of the chapter), the author emphasizes the Incarnation as a sign of the great honour conferred on human bodies, including the virginal body of Mary who bore Christ.¹⁴

Chapter 3 concerns itself with the question of whether the Incarnation ends up causing division among the persons of the Trinitarian Godhead. 'And if they say, "How is it possible that the Incarnation concerns one person of the Trinity without concerning the Father and the Holy Spirit, while (at the same time) you describe Him as not being divided into parts?" It is said to them . . .'¹⁵ Būlus answers this query by using the traditional analogy of the sun (which consists of three inseparable attributes—a round disc, heat, and light) to describe the unity of the three persons in the Trinity. Once again, he uses an argument 'from the lesser to the greater' in applying this analogy to the Incarnation: if the sun provides 'power and growth to the plants and the trees . . . (and) dries out every putrid thing and rotten mire, in such a way that it does not become polluted', then 'how much more is it true for the Divine . . . and the sending of his own simple Word'.¹⁶

In ch. 4, Būlus addresses the question of whether the Incarnate One is identifiable with the Creator of all. 'And if they say, "What is the proof that this incarnate one is the creative power for all created things?" It is said to them . . .'¹⁷ In response, Būlus argues that Christ's actions (*af'āl*) in the body witness to his divinity: 'Christ (to him be the glory!) revealed by his activity along with his appearance in the body, that he was God: by appropriate signs, by the greatness of his deity, the honor of his divinity, and the timelessness of his eternity.'¹⁸ In sect. 2 of ch. 4, Būlus fields a second question from his interlocutor, but its content is lost due to a lacuna in the manuscript (line 75). His answer, which is preserved, focuses on the theme of the Word's eternal unity with the Godhead. Interestingly, Būlus shows some self-consciousness about intra-Christian disunity in the face of Muslim criticism here, as he seeks to distinguish his own viewpoint from those of the 'non-Arabs' for whom 'the word of unity . . . is a recent, transitory thing'.¹⁹ Būlus' rhetoric here firmly

¹³ Būlus al-Būshī, *On the Incarnation* 38 (Samir, 196).

¹⁴ One text attributed to Cyril treats the burning bush as a metaphor for the Virgin Mary, who 'gives birth to the light and is not corrupted' (PG 76.1129A). However, G. W. H. Lampe (*A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, pp. xxii–xxiii) has pointed out that Migne's edition is unreliable at this point, and therefore the authenticity of this text must remain under question.

¹⁵ Būlus al-Būshī, *On the Incarnation* 40–1 (Samir, 197–8).

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 57–61 (Samir, 200–1). Būlus also draws a contrast between the sun's habit of remaining absent, or withdrawing, and God's eternal presence, which 'fills up everything and encompasses all things in their entirety through the simplicity of his divinity' (*ibid.* 49–53; Samir, 199).

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 64–5 (Samir, 202).

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 71–2 (Samir, 203).

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 76 (Samir, 204).

situates himself, and his theological enterprise, in an Arab context in which concerns about divine unity were paramount among both Muslims and Christians.

This same dialogical style frames Būlus' discourse in chs. 5 and 6. In ch. 5, he opens with a paired set of questions and answers designed to highlight the Incarnation as an act of God's free generosity (and not one of divine compulsion). 'If they say, "What was it that compelled him to become incarnate?" it is said to them: So then who is the one who compelled him to create Adam and his descendants? And if they ask about that, it is said to them: It was his generosity and his favor!'²⁰ Later in the chapter, God's generosity manifest in the Incarnation is linked with the divine favour demonstrated at creation.

If they say, 'Is it not known that he is generous and full of favor simply by virtue of his creation of Adam and his descendants?'

It is said to them: He has never ceased being generous and full of favor in his essence, just as befits his goodness. However, he demonstrated his favor through his action (in a special way) when he created creation. He had no need for it, but demonstrated his favor toward it . . .²¹

Finally, in ch. 6, he fields questions on why the Incarnation was necessary, and why some other form of mediation would not have sufficed.

If they say, 'Why does He not send an angel apart from himself for the salvation of His people?'

It is said to them . . .²²

And (if) they wonder why God did not arrange what he willed simply by force . . . and (why he did not simply) send a messenger (*raṣūl*) and aid him in the salvation of his people, and if they ask, 'What evidence is there for his Incarnation especially?'

It is said to them . . .²³

In answer to these questions from the interlocutor, Būlus emphasizes that God alone has the power to reconcile and save his creation, and then pointedly argues that the Incarnation 'was not without purpose as you contend', and that this divine purpose in fact 'exceeded by far (the capacity of) your mind, because you were not acquainted with it in your education, and you did not understand the sayings of the prophets and apostles on account of it'.²⁴ The fact that his final response here is placed in the second person plural confirms that Būlus understands his anonymous (and hypothetical) questioner as representing a larger body of opinion than simply that of a single debate partner.

This interchange makes plain how Būlus was seeking to respond to certain distinctive theological challenges that the medieval Coptic community would

²⁰ Ibid. 84–6 (Samir, 205).

²¹ Ibid. 87–90, 93–4 (Samir, 206–7).

²² Ibid. 95–6 (Samir, 208–9).

²³ Ibid. 100–3 (Samir, 209–10).

²⁴ Ibid. 103–4 (Samir, 210).

have faced in dialogue with contemporary, everyday Muslim critics. This is reflected both in his use of specific language and in his employment of *al-kalām* conventions.²⁵ Thus, when his interlocutor is said to wonder ‘how God did not send a messenger (*rasūl*)’ to fulfil salvation,²⁶ the language used to articulate the question reflects a social setting of Christian–Muslim dialogue over the respective roles of Christ and Muhammad the Prophet (*al-raṣūl*). In this context, it is noteworthy that Būlus al-Būshī responds by citing the Qur’ān itself: ‘It is said to them that *God (may he be greatly praised!) did not create anything without purpose* (Surah 23: 115), and that the circumstance of his Incarnation was not without purpose as they contend.’²⁷ Here Būlus cites the sacred text of his theological opponents in order to bolster his own claims about the purposive character of God’s creative action, which he sees manifest in the incarnate Christ.

Thus, not only the form but also the content of Būlus al-Būshī’s treatise resonates with this larger Islamic social and theological setting. This may be confirmed by a study of contemporaneous practitioners of *al-kalām* in Egypt. Within its consistent rhetorical framework, the *al-kalām* tradition also betrays a consistent set of theological concerns around which the apologetic dialogue is constructed. One witness to this set of concerns is the Arabic Jewish writer and philosopher Maimonides (1135–1204 CE). Maimonides’ testimony is valuable in this case because of a coincidence of both geography and chronology. Born in Spain, he moved to Egypt in his adulthood, where he served as the leader of the Jewish community in Old Cairo (and as the personal physician of the sultan) less than half a century before Būlus al-Būshī would serve there as bishop. Thus, his philosophical writings provide valuable contextual evidence for the practice of *al-kalām* in Egypt at the end of the twelfth century.²⁸

In his *Guide to the Perplexed* (*Dalālat al-ḥā’irīn*), Maimonides mentions four religious beliefs as fundamental to *al-kalām* literature: (1) the creation of the world, (2) the existence of God, (3) the unity of God, and (4) the incorporeality of God.²⁹ According to Maimonides, these themes were shared not only by Muslim *mutakallimūn* (that is, writers of *al-kalām*), but also by their Christian and Jewish apologetic counterparts and precursors.³⁰ In examining Būlus

²⁵ At points, Būlus also may be drawing on the insights of earlier Arabic Christian authors, especially Abū Rā’itah’s second *Treatise on the Incarnation* (early ninth century CE): ed. S. Keating, *Defending the ‘People of Truth’ in the Early Islamic Period*, esp. 238–47 (nos. 19–25). Once again, I want to thank Mark Swanson for pointing out this possible connection.

²⁶ Būlus al-Būshī, *On the Incarnation* 95, 101 (Samir, 208–9).

²⁷ *Ibid.* 103 (Samir, 210).

²⁸ For examples of earlier Muslim *mutakallimūn* in Egypt (ninth and tenth century CE), see J. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra*, 729–42.

²⁹ Moses Maimonides, *Dalālat al-ḥā’irīn* 1. 71 (Hussein Atay, 182–6); H. A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam*, 45.

³⁰ On the late antique antecedents of Islamic *kalām* literature, see also Ess, ‘The Logical Structure of Islamic Theology’, 24; and ‘Disputationspraxis in der Islamischen Theologie’, 24–5.

al-Būshī's treatise *On the Incarnation*, one notes that the questions voiced by his anonymous interlocutor closely adhere to this set of themes. The questioners ask how God could become human without compromising God's incorporeal status (ch. 2), how God could become incarnate without sacrificing divine unity and dividing God into parts (ch. 3), how the incarnate one could be considered the source of creation (ch. 4), and how God could be compelled in his essence to become incarnate (ch. 5).

Other near-contemporaneous evidence also confirms the fact that the status and role of Christ were key issues of debate in Christian–Muslim apologetic and polemic encounter in the *kalām* tradition. A good example of this is a work entitled *The Excellent Refutation of the Divinity of Jesus from the Text of the Gospel* (*al-Radd al-jamīl li-ilāhīyat ʿIsā bi-ṣarīḥ al-injīl*). This treatise is attributed to the famous eleventh- and twelfth-century Muslim writer al-Ghazali (1059–1111 CE), but in fact it was probably penned by a later unidentified Egyptian author. Evidence in the treatise suggests that the author was probably a medieval Coptic convert to Islam.³¹ This Egyptian 'pseudo-al-Ghazali' uses a similar question-and-answer rhetorical style that conforms to *al-kalām* tradition. He introduces questions with the phrase, 'And if it is said . . .', and then responds with either 'we say . . .' or 'the response is . . .' This dialogical formula is used on at least thirteen occasions in the treatise to introduce themes and arguments, and of these thirteen occurrences, almost half (six in total) are concentrated in the section of the work in which he critiques Christian doctrine on the 'Divinity and Humanity of Jesus'.³² Thus, in the light of the evidence from Maimonides and this pseudo-al-Ghazali, Būlus al-Būshī's use of dialogical forms and themes in his treatise *On the Incarnation* may be securely situated within the social and literary context of Christian–Muslim debate in medieval Egypt where the tradition of *al-kalām* was often employed for apologetic or polemic ends.

The Fruits of the Incarnation: A Eucharistic Commentary on John 6: 51–7

The final three chapters (part three) of the treatise *On the Incarnation* mark a discernible shift in the author's mode of discourse—a shift from apologetic

³¹ The text of the work has been edited by Muhammad ʿAbdullah al-Sharqawi, *al-Radd al-jamīl li-ilāhīyat ʿIsā bi-ṣarīḥ al-injīl* (1990). For English summaries of the work, see J. W. Sweetman, *Islam and Christian Theology*, 262–309. On the question of authorship, see J. M. Gaudeul, *Encounters and Clashes*, i. 95–8; and more recently, Gabriel Said Reynolds, 'The Ends of *Al-Radd al-Jamīl* and Its Portrayal of Christian Sects', 45–65.

³² Ps. al-Ghazali, *al-Radd al-jamīl li-ilāhīyat ʿIsā bi-ṣarīḥ al-injīl* (Muhammad ʿAbdullah al-Sharqawi, 95, 99, 104, 113, 126–7, 129, 131–2, 133, 135, 153, 154, 168). The section of the work on the 'Divinity and Humanity of Jesus' appears on pp. 125–36.

dialogue and debate to narrative theological exposition and biblical commentary. In part three—where he discusses the ‘fruits of the Incarnation’—Būlus drops his convention of introducing chapters with questions placed in the mouth of a theological antagonist. Instead, starting in ch. 7, he begins to recite Christ’s saving acts in an almost credal form, detailing the Word’s union with the body in the Incarnation, his reception of sufferings ‘for our sake and for our salvation’ (including his descent to Hades to purify the souls in prison), his resurrection from the dead, and his ascension to heaven.

In the case of each of these events, Būlus focuses on how the Word’s action has conferred eternal life on Christ’s body and on the faithful. Thus, in his Incarnation, the Word ‘conferred eternal life upon that body through his union with it’ and then ‘conferred it upon us—that is, on all of those who believe in him.’³³ In his death, he accepted suffering in the body ‘for our sake and for our salvation’ (a phraseology taken from the Nicene Creed) even though in his divinity he ‘transcends sufferings and gives life.’³⁴ His resurrection encapsulated his action of granting eternal life ‘to the body united with him’ as well as to the rest of humanity.³⁵ The resurrection ushered in his ascension, where ‘he raised his body to the highest heaven . . . and he became the head of life and the downpayment of the resurrection for us all—that is, for all of us who have faith in him.’³⁶

This credal recitation of Christ’s saving and life-giving acts in the body leads into ch. 8, where Būlus considers how ‘that eternal life acquired by (Christ’s) body becomes in us completely and rightly natural.’³⁷ For Būlus, this ‘naturalization’ of eternal life in humankind is accomplished specifically through our participation in the sacraments of baptism and the eucharist. It is here that one begins to see more clearly Būlus’ indebtedness to an Alexandrian tradition of Christology and biblical commentary in which the Incarnation and human participation in the divine nature are intimately linked.

Būlus’ sacramental theology is thoroughly grounded in a Johannine hermeneutic, which is especially applied to eucharistic participation. By comparison, his treatment of baptism is quite brief: he dedicates only three or four lines to the subject, one of which is a paraphrase that combines the wording of John 3: 3 and 3: 5. Borrowing language from these verses, Būlus emphasizes that through baptism God confers upon human beings both the Holy Spirit and ‘the second birth for our inheritance of the kingdom.’³⁸ In this context, baptism (as one fruit of the Incarnation) reverses the dual consequences of Adam’s disobedience—the loss of holiness and eternal life.

³³ Būlus al-Būshī, *On the Incarnation* 132–3 (Samir, 215).

³⁴ *Ibid.* 134–5 (Samir, 216).

³⁵ *Ibid.* 134–5 (Samir, 216).

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.* 161 (Samir, 220).

³⁸ *Ibid.* 162–4 (Samir, 221).

Būlus' treatment of the eucharist is much more extensive (comprising eighteen full lines of text), but once again the interpretation of John's Gospel (in this case, John 6: 51–7) is central to his exposition. How does this thirteenth-century Arabic theologian read John in developing his eucharistic Christology? How does he draw on the Alexandrian patristic heritage in speaking about the fruits of the Incarnation, especially with regard to participation in the eucharist?

Būlus introduces his commentary by observing that Christ 'gave us an additional (sign of his) favor, over and above the state Adam was in before his error: he gave us his life-giving body.'³⁹ This lead-in statement not only establishes the thematic framework for Būlus' exegesis of John 6, but it also highlights his profound indebtedness to the Christology of Athanasius.⁴⁰ Like Athanasius before him, Būlus connects the Incarnation both to God's past action in creation and to the God's ongoing work of salvation. Here, his notion that we have received a grace over and above Adam's original paradisaical condition echoes Athanasius' language in his second treatise *Against the Arians*, where he states, 'The human race is perfected in him and restored, as it was made at the beginning, but with even greater grace.'⁴¹ This is not an isolated instance. In the chapters leading up to his interpretation of John in ch. 8, Būlus' treatise *On the Incarnation* is fairly suffused with ideas and phrases drawn from the biblical meta-narrative of Athanasius' earlier, more famous treatise, *On the Incarnation*. The consequences of the fall are described in terms of death and corruption.⁴² The human condition after the fall is likened to 'the life of the beasts',⁴³ and to a state of illness for which the Incarnation serves as the sole remedy.⁴⁴ The Incarnation is understood, just like creation, as having been enacted simply out of God's lovingkindness and good favour.⁴⁵ The miraculous works of the incarnate Christ are celebrated for having manifested the power of divinity in the body.⁴⁶ And finally, the problem of death and corruption is resolved by the Incarnation (the birth,

³⁹ Ibid. 150–2 (Samir, 218).

⁴⁰ For a detailed treatment of Būlus al-Būshī's use of Athanasius, see Faltas, *Ho megas Athanasios*, esp. 86–191.

⁴¹ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Ar.* 2. 67 (PG 26.289).

⁴² Būlus al-Būshī, *On the Incarnation* 107–18 (Samir, 210–12); cf. Athanasius, *inc.* 3. 4–5 (Kannengiesser, 272–4). Būlus al-Būshī and Athanasius both focus on the interpretation of Genesis 3: 3 ('On the day that you eat of it, you will die') in clarifying the distinction between physical death and intellectual death.

⁴³ Būlus al-Būshī, *On the Incarnation* 122–4 (Samir, 213); cf. Athanasius, *inc.* 13. 1–2 (Kannengiesser, 310).

⁴⁴ Ibid. 4–5 (Samir, 189–90); cf. Athanasius, *inc.* 43. 1 and 44. 1–2 (Kannengiesser, 418, 424–6).

⁴⁵ Ibid. 84–6 (Samir, 205); cf. Athanasius, *inc.* 1. 3 and 4. 3 (Kannengiesser, 262, 276).

⁴⁶ Ibid. 71–4 (Samir, 203); cf. Athanasius, *inc.* 18. 1–2 (Kannengiesser, 328–30). Here, both Athanasius and Būlus al-Būshī quote John 1: 38 ('If you do not believe in me, believe my works') as a witness to the manifestation of the Word's divinity in the body.

death, and resurrection of Christ) which offers humanity provision for eternal life.⁴⁷ Thus, when Būlus prefaces his reading of John 6: 51–7 with the Athanasian credo that the Word ‘added to us in grace’ by providing us with ‘his life-giving body’,⁴⁸ he is linking his biblical commentary to the rich Alexandrian tradition of christological reflection.

Būlus’ interpretation of John 6 is presented sequentially. He begins with verse 51 and proceeds step by step to verse 57, first quoting a passage from John and then offering an interpretation of the quoted passage. His purpose here is to draw his readers through an inexorable series of logical steps, starting with the presupposition that the Word’s ‘life-giving body’ is the tangible sign of God’s grace. Būlus first quotes John 6: 51 where he connects this ‘life-giving body’ with the ‘life-giving bread . . . from heaven.’⁴⁹ Then, in commenting on John 6: 53, he links that body further to the theme of eternal life (a theme he had introduced in the previous chapter as the first-fruit of the Incarnation).⁵⁰ In quoting from John 6: 55 and 56, Būlus focuses on the statement, ‘My body is true food,’ and uses it to link Christ’s body and the eucharistic bread to Christ’s divinity; and he does so by effectively reading the word ‘true’ as a cipher for the Word’s divinization of Christ’s body.⁵¹ Finally, Būlus interprets John 6: 57 (‘whoever eats me’) as a witness to the truth of the Incarnation, in which there is no differentiation between Christ’s humanity and divinity in the body.⁵² Once again, he draws this conclusion through a series of word associations: first, ‘me’ (for Christ) means his body; second, his body is identifiable with ‘the living bread’ (from 6: 51); third, that bread was ‘truly’ his body, i.e. ‘divinely’ his body, and therefore a witness to the fact that he is God incarnate—a witness to his identity with God the Father even in the body. From this, Būlus derives his conclusion that the act of partaking in the eucharistic bread grants us a participation in the life-giving, divine body of Christ (line 178).⁵³ Finally, he quotes the apostle Paul (identified simply as *al-rasūl*) and the Nicene Creed as further intertexts to prove his point.⁵⁴

In this line of christological reasoning, Būlus al-Būshī situates himself within a long mystagogical tradition in the ancient Alexandrian and Egyptian church, a tradition of sacramental realism in which typological interpretations of the eucharist were held in tension with interpretations that assert ‘a complete physical identity between the bread and the body of Christ (on the one hand) and between the wine and the blood of Christ (on the other).’⁵⁵ Several

⁴⁷ Būlus al-Būshī, 131–3, 143–7 (Samir, 215, 217); cf. Athanasius, *inc.* 8. 3–4; 9. 1 (Kannengiesser, 290–4).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 150–2 (Samir, 218).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 169–70 (Samir, 222).

⁵² *Ibid.* 174–7 (Samir, 223–4).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 179–82 (Samir, 224).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 166–8 (Samir, 221–2).

⁵¹ *Ibid.* 171–3 (Samir, 222–3).

⁵³ *Ibid.* 178 (Samir, 224).

⁵⁵ E. Mazza, *Celebration of the Eucharist*, 147–8.

well-known examples of mystagogical catechesis in the early church appear in the writings of fourth-century church fathers such as John Chrysostom, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and Cyril of Jerusalem. However, in the Alexandrian tradition, elements of this approach are already evident in the second- and third-century writings of Clement and Origen. In his treatise entitled *The Instructor (Paedagogus)*, Clement cites John 6:53 in developing a figurative reading of the sacrament in relation to the physiological properties of blood in the body.⁵⁶ Similar readings of John 6 appear in Origen as well.⁵⁷ In fact, on one occasion in his *Commentary on John*, Origen quotes John 6: 53–6, applying the text to a eucharistic identification of ‘true food’, ‘the flesh of Christ’, and the Word that has become flesh (cf. John 1: 14).⁵⁸ As I demonstrated in Ch. 1, this same tradition of Johannine interpretation continued in Coptic authors such as Shenoute, who also invokes the words of John 6: 54 in the context of speaking about the eucharist as a life-giving participation in the Incarnation.⁵⁹

However, while Būlus al-Būshi’s interpretation of John shares some things in common with this early Egyptian hermeneutical tradition, the details of his Christology seem to have been shaped more determinately by the writings of Cyril of Alexandria and his ‘realistic’ vision of sacramental participation. Indeed, in Cyril’s *Third Letter to Nestorius*, one observes a confluence of themes and logical steps remarkably similar to that which is found in Būlus’ christological treatise.⁶⁰

Thus we perform in the churches an unbloody worship, and in this way approach mystical blessings and are sanctified, becoming participants in the holy flesh and the precious blood of Christ the Saviour of us all. We do not receive this as ordinary flesh, God forbid, or as the flesh of a man sanctified and conjoined to the Word in a unity of dignity, or as the flesh of someone who enjoys a divine indwelling. No, we receive it as truly the life-giving and very-flesh of the Word himself. As God he is by nature life and since he became one with his own flesh he revealed it as life-giving. So even if he should say to us: ‘Amen, Amen, I say to you, If you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood’ (John 6: 53), we must not consider this as if it were the flesh of any man like us (for how could the flesh of a man be life-giving from its own nature?) but rather that it has truly become the personal flesh of him who for our sakes became, and was called, the Son of Man.

In this text, Cyril first identifies the bread and wine as the ‘holy flesh . . . and precious blood of Christ’, and argues that participation in this flesh and blood

⁵⁶ Clement of Alexandria, *paed.* 1. 6. 42. 3 ff.; 2. 2. 19. 4–20. 1 (Marrou, SC 70 (1960), 186 ff.; SC 108 (1965), 48).

⁵⁷ Origen of Alexandria, *Cels.* 8. 33 (Borret, SC 150 (1969), 246); *hom. in Num.* 16. 9 (Doutreleau, SC 442 (1999), 262).

⁵⁸ Origen of Alexandria, *Jo.* 10. 17. 99 (Blanc, SC 157 (1970), 440–2).

⁵⁹ Shenoute, *When the Word Says*, fo. 2^rb–2^va (Depuydt, *Catalogue*, 145).

⁶⁰ Cyril of Alexandria, *Ep.* 17. 7 (ACO 1.1, 37–8; trans. McGuckin, *St Cyril*, 270–1).

brings sanctification. Second, Cyril says that the flesh of Christ is ‘truly’ life-giving, and seems to associate this language with the divinity of the Word: ‘As God he is by nature life.’ Third, Cyril emphasizes the distinction between the divine flesh of Christ and ‘the flesh of any man like us’, saying, ‘If it were human flesh it would not be life-giving.’ This concern to distinguish the divine state of the (incarnate) Word from that of creatures is inherited from Athanasius’ anti-Arian discourse. For Athanasius, the divinity of the Word had profound implications for human salvation. Thus, in his second treatise *Against the Arians*, he stresses the Word’s divinity as essential for bringing human beings into union with God: ‘For if he were a creature and had become human, humankind would have no less remained just as it was, not joined to God.’⁶¹ It should be noted that a similar point is pressed home by Būlus al-Būshī in ch. 6, in response to the question of why God did not simply send an angel (*malāk*) or a prophet (*rasūl*) down to earth to fulfil the same purpose. However, in the case of Būlus, this anti-Arian soteriological argument inherited from Athanasius and Cyril is now applied to the context of Christian–Muslim apologetic—in particular, the importance of distinguishing Christ’s role from that of the prophets, and from the prophet Muhammad (*al-rasūl Muhammad*).

Finally, in the light of Būlus al-Būshī’s treatise *On the Incarnation*, it is especially significant that Cyril had emphasized these points in the context of interpreting John 6: 53. Cyril’s sacramental reading of John 6 in his *Third Letter to Nestorius* is not an isolated case in his writings. In his *Explanation* of his scathing *Twelve Chapters* against Nestorius, Cyril uses John 6: 57 to support a similar line of christological logic.⁶² Cyril was also surely involved in the *Synodical Deposition of Nestorius* at the Council of Ephesus, which offers a sequential commentary on John 6: 56–8, and uses the Johannine text to argue for the eucharist reality of the incarnate flesh of Christ.⁶³ Finally, in his *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, Cyril offers another sequence of interpretation, focusing on John 6: 53–6, where he dwells at length on the life-giving nature of the body united with the Word and manifest in the eucharist, and on the nature of our union with that body (and, by extension, with the divine) through participation in the sacrament.⁶⁴ Given this evidence from early Alexandrian exegesis, I would argue here that Būlus al-Būshī, in developing his own sacramental theology of the Incarnation, was redeploing this Egyptian hermeneutical tradition within a new cultural context. By reading the Gospel of John through the lens of his own Egyptian interpretative tradition, Būlus was

⁶¹ Athanasius, *Ar. 2*. 67 (PG 26.289).

⁶² Cyril of Alexandria, *expl. xii cap.* 29 (ACO 1.1.5, 25; trans. McGuckin, *St Cyril*, 292).

⁶³ *Synodical Deposition of Nestorius* (ACO 1.2, 51; trans. McGuckin, *St Cyril*, 376).

⁶⁴ Cyril of Alexandria, *Jo. 4*. 2 (Pusey, i. 528. 12–536. 18; trans. N. Russell, *Cyril of Alexandria*, 114–19).

shaping the historical identity of his Arabic-speaking Christian readers as theological heirs to Cyril and the other Alexandrian fathers.

THE CHRISTOLOGY OF THE AWLĀD AL-‘ASSĀL

Up to this point, I have often framed my discussion of Copto-Arabic Christology primarily in terms of the inheritance and reappropriation of patristic literature and themes. Sawīrus ibn al-Muqaffa^c quotes the writings of early Christian Alexandrian authors (especially Cyril) extensively in his works, *The Precious Pearl* and *The Books on the Councils*. Būlus al-Būshī’s biblical interpretation in his treatise *On the Incarnation* is likewise informed by Athanasian and Cyrillian modes of exegesis. Each of these two writers was very much in the business of reinterpreting the patristic legacy for a minority Christian community living in an Islamic culture.

However, in the case of the family of writers treated in the second half of this chapter, we begin to sense a discernible shift in the articulation of medieval Egyptian theological identity—a shift that brings Copto-Arabic Christology into a more thoroughgoing dialogue with the larger Arabic-speaking world.⁶⁵ In the *Awlād al-‘Assāl* (The Sons of the Beekeeper),⁶⁶ we find a set of four brothers—al-Mu’taman,⁶⁷ al-Amjad,⁶⁸ al-As‘ad,⁶⁹ and al-Ṣafī⁷⁰—whose wealth and education placed them among the social and intellectual elite of thirteenth-century Cairo. Originally from the village of Sadamant in the Middle Egyptian province of Beni Suef, the al-‘Assāl family relocated to Cairo where they were placed in

⁶⁵ This is not to say that earlier writers such as Sawīrus ibn al-Muqaffa^c and Būlus al-Būshī had no knowledge of works produced by Arabic Christians in other regions: indeed, I note a couple of examples of possible dependence in the footnotes above. However, with the family of writers introduced in the second half of this chapter, this engagement with the Arabic-speaking Christians from Syria and Mesopotamia becomes more explicit and intentional.

⁶⁶ On this family of writers and theologians, see A. Wadī‘, *Studio su al-Mu’taman Ibn al-‘Assāl*, SOCM 5 (1997), esp. 75–124; id., ‘Introduzione alla letteratura arabo-cristiana dei Copti’, 43–6; Aziz S. Atiya, ‘Awlād al-‘Assāl’, CE 1.309–11; Sedrak, ‘Al-Mu’taman ibn al-‘Assāl (XIII s.) et sa pensée christologique’ (1988), *passim*; G. Graf, ‘Die koptische Gelehrtenfamilie der Aulād al-‘Assāl und ihr Schrifttum’, 34–56, 129–48, 193–204; A. Mallon, ‘Ibn al-‘Assāl. Les trios écrivains de ce nom’, 509–29.

⁶⁷ A. Wadī‘, *Studio su al-Mu’taman Ibn al-‘Assāl*, SOCM 5 (1997), *passim*; Sedrak, ‘Al-Mu’taman ibn al-‘Assāl (XIII s.) et sa pensée christologique’ (1988), *passim*; Aziz S. Atiya, ‘Mu’taman Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm Ibn al-‘Assāl’, CE vi. 1748–9.

⁶⁸ Sedrak, ‘Al-Mu’taman ibn al-‘Assāl (XIII s.) et sa pensée christologique’, 30–2.

⁶⁹ Aziz S. Atiya, ‘As‘ad Abū al-Faraj Hibat Allāh Ibn al-‘Assāl, al-’, CE i. 282–3.

⁷⁰ Samir Khalil Samir, ‘Ṣafī Ibn al-‘Assāl, al-’, CE vii. 2075–9; id., ‘Al-Ṣafī Ibn al-‘Assāl, brefs chapitres sur la Trinité et l’Incarnation’, 615–80.

positions of responsibility under the Ayyubid rulers of Egypt (1169–1250 CE).⁷¹ Their father, Abū al-Faḍl, attained a respected status as an official scribe in Cairo: indeed, in this capacity, he earned the moniker, *al-Kātib al-Miṣrī* (The Egyptian Scribe). While son number two, al-Amjad, served in the government administration as the secretary of the army office (*diwān*), son number three, al-As‘ad, cultivated an active literary life, producing a new translation of the Gospels into Arabic (using Greek, Syriac, and Coptic as a basis), an introduction to an edition of the Pauline epistles, and a grammar of the Coptic language in Arabic.

Here, however, I want to train my attention especially on the eldest and youngest brothers, al-Mu‘taman and al-Ṣafī, who produced major christological works during their literary careers. Their writings represent a monumental contribution to medieval theology and reflect an ecumenical breadth unparalleled in other Copto-Arabic authors. Al-Ṣafī’s portfolio includes liturgical homilies in rhymed prose, a magisterial work on canon law (*al-Majmu‘ al-Ṣafawī*), detailed summaries of earlier eastern Christian literature, four ‘apologetic replies’ to Muslim critics of Christianity (al-Nāshī, Ibn al-Hatīb, al-Ṭabarī, and al-Ja‘farī), as well as works of systematic theology (e.g. *Treatise of the Ten Fundamentals* and *Brief Chapters on the Trinity and the Union*).⁷² In addition to writing a Coptic–Arabic lexicon, al-Mu‘taman is renowned for his *Summary of the Principles of Religion* (*Majmu‘ ‘usūl al-dīn*),⁷³ a theological *summa* in seventy chapters. Such works by al-Ṣafī and al-Mu‘taman represent attempts to catalogue and redefine the scope of Arabic Christian theology in Egypt. In what follows, I want to trace how these authors mediated their patristic (Greek) and post-patristic (Arabic) christological heritage in the context of intra-Christian and interreligious (i.e. Christian–Muslim) dialogues. As we shall see, the terms of these dialogues were framed by both sophisticated philosophical argumentation and a concern for church praxis. What results, I would argue, is a vision of the philosophical-ascetic harmony of the mind and body as a privileged image for human participation in the divine Incarnation.

Arab Christians Reading Arab Christians: Toward a Post-Patristic Christological Ecumenics in the Medieval Near East

In the writings of al-Ṣafī and al-Mu‘taman ibn al-‘Assāl, the terms of Copto-Arabic engagement with early Christian theology have changed in crucial ways.

⁷¹ The family al-‘Assāl had their home in Ḥārat Zuwaylah.

⁷² For an exhaustive bibliography of al-Ṣafī’s writings and a critical edition of his *Brief Chapters on the Trinity and the Union*, see Samir, ‘Al-Ṣafī Ibn al-‘Assāl, brefs chapitres’, 675–80. On his apologetic works against al-Nāshī, Ibn al-Khaṭīb, al-Ṭabarī, and al-Ja‘farī, see A. Wadī, ‘L’Apologétique d’al-Ṣafī ibn al-‘Assāl’, 183–6.

⁷³ Edited by A. Wadī, in SOCM 6a–7a (text), 6b–7b (critical apparatus) (1997–8); Italian trans. Bartolomeo Pirone, in SOCM 8–9 (1998–2002).

While both brothers follow Sawīrus ibn al-Muqaffa^c in the citation of the patristic past, that past is now often mediated through the voices of early medieval theologians writing in the Arabic language. Indeed, the Christology of the Awlād al-^cAssāl comes to expression in the context of a thoroughgoing Arabic Christian spirit of ecumenicity: their language and vocabulary is framed by a deep familiarity with medieval dogmatic literature written in Arabic and produced not only in Egypt but also in other regions such as Syria and Mesopotamia (modern-day Iraq). The reading habits of al-Ṣafi and al-Mu'taman crossed not only geographic but also doctrinal boundaries: their literary canon extended beyond their own non-Chalcedonian communion to a wider circle of Chalcedonian and even Nestorian Christian authors.

Such intercultural and interconfessional contact would have been facilitated by the cosmopolitan social status of the al-^cAssāl family itself. One of the Awlād al-^cAssāl—al-Ṣafi's and al-Mu'taman's brother, al-Amjad—owned large houses in both Cairo and Damascus, and the brothers travelled to Syria on more than occasion, apparently for the purpose of collecting, transcribing, and editing manuscripts only available there. Such familial patronage of literature and the arts served to provide al-Ṣafi and al-Mu'taman with access to Nestorian and Chalcedonian authors, as well as to other non-Chalcedonian theologians from Syrian and Mesopotamian cities such as Nisibis and Bosra—a collection of sources 'that would have been practically impossible to consult in Cairo'.⁷⁴

One finds evidence for this new mix of authoritative sources in al-Ṣafi's production of literary summaries (or epitomes) of earlier theological authors. Alongside summaries of hymns and homilies by the patristic writers Ephrem Syrus and John Chryostom, he also published multiple synopses of works by 'Ammār al-Baṣrī (c.800–50),⁷⁵ Yahyā ibn 'Adī (893–974),⁷⁶ and Elias of Nisibis (c.975–1049),⁷⁷ three Arabic Christian theologians active during the ninth, tenth, and eleventh centuries.⁷⁸ The fact that 'Ammār al-Baṣrī and Elias of Nisibis were Nestorian authors did not dissuade al-Ṣafi from summarizing and disseminating their work.

⁷⁴ Samir, 'Al-Ṣafi Ibn al-^cAssāl, brefs chapitres', PO 42/3 (1985), 631–2.

⁷⁵ Al-Ṣafi produced two epitomes of works by the Nestorian philosopher, 'Ammār al-Baṣrī: (1) a *Book of Proofs*; and (2) a *Book of Questions and Answers*: ed. Miṣhāl al-Ḥāyik, *Kitāb al-burhān wa-Kitāb al-masā'il wa al-ajwibah* (1977); G. Graf, *GCAL* ii. 210–11.

⁷⁶ Al-Ṣafi produced three epitomes of works by the Jacobite theologian Yahyā ibn 'Adī: (1) a collection of 41 opuscles (Graf, *GCAL* ii. 240–1, 247 [no. 37]), (2) his *Refutation of Abū al-Warrāq*, and (3) a work related to christological controversies (see Vat. ar. 115; 1260 CE).

⁷⁷ Al-Ṣafi produced three epitomes of works by the Syrian Nestorian writer Elias of Nisibis: (1) his *Sessions* (Par. ar. 82, fos. 138^f–154^v; fourteenth century CE), (2) a *Book on the Virtue of Chastity* (Vat. ar. 115; 1260 CE; cf. Graf, *GCAL* ii. 185 [no. 2]), and (3) small opuscles and extracts on chastity (Vat. ar. 115).

⁷⁸ For a complete list of al-Ṣafi's epitomes (eleven in total), see Samir, 'Al-Ṣafi Ibn al-^cAssāl, brefs chapitres', 646.

Table 6.1. *A christological accounting: al-Ṣafī on the ecumenical use of philosophical terminology*

| Community | No. of substances | No. of hypostases | No. of wills |
|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|--------------|
| Nestorians | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| Chalcedonians | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| Non-Chalcedonians | 1 | 1 | 1 |

Indeed, in al-Ṣafī's *Brief Chapters on the Trinity and the Union* (see Appendix B.4), one observes how he framed his Christology in terms of a larger concern for ecumenical rapprochement between the different eastern communions. In ch. 8 of that work, al-Ṣafī identifies three points related to the 'union' in Christ upon which he says Nestorian, Chalcedonian, and non-Chalcedonian theologians all agree: (1) Christ's identity as God incarnate (*ilāh muta'annis*), (2) the truth of his humanity and divinity, and (3) the oneness of Christ's lordship.⁷⁹ As for the christological disagreements between the Christian churches, he generally downplays them, attributing them simply to differences in the application of 'philosophical terms' (*alfāz falsifiyah*).⁸⁰ These differences are most noticeable in their respective uses of the terms *jawhar* (substance), *uqnūm* (hypostasis), and *irādah* (will) in relation to the person of Christ. According to al-Ṣafī's accounting (and as Table 6.1 illustrates), only the non-Chalcedonian communion insisted that the incarnate Word was singular in substance, hypostasis, and will.⁸¹

However, even as he acknowledges that the Nestorian and Chalcedonian churches enumerate the substances, hypostases, and wills of Christ differently from his own church tradition, he argues that this divergence is merely a superficial one based on different assumptions about the terms being employed.⁸² For al-Ṣafī, these three communities in fact understand the common need both to preserve the (hypostatic) union of the humanity and divinity of Christ and to avoid 'the accusation that a change took place between the two'.⁸³ In particular, the three communities share a common metaphor for

⁷⁹ al-Ṣafī ibn al-ʿAssāl, *Brief Chapters* 8. 1–4 (Samir, 716). When discussing the Incarnation itself, al-Ṣafī and al-Mu'taman both use the technical term *al-ta'annus* (the act of becoming human) to refer to the 'union' (*al-ittiḥād*) of the humanity and divinity in Christ. This stands in contrast to their contemporary Būlus al-Būshī, who primarily uses the term *al-tajassud* (the act of taking on a body) in such contexts.

⁸⁰ Ibid. 8. 5 (Samir, 716).

⁸¹ al-Ṣafī's actual terms for these communities were Nestorian, Melkite (i.e. Chalcedonian), and Jacobite (i.e. non-Chalcedonian).

⁸² On al-Mu'taman's analysis of these three communities' use of the same terminology, see Sedrak, 'Al-Mu'taman ibn al-ʿAssāl (XIII s.) et sa pensée christologique', 319.

⁸³ al-Ṣafī ibn al-ʿAssāl, *Brief Chapters* 8. 22–6 (Samir, 720–2). In his theological *Summa*, al-Mu'taman also emphasizes points of christological convergence between these communities

describing the mystery of the Incarnation: namely, they agree ‘in comparing the union of the divinity of Christ with his humanity to the union of the soul of the human being with his body’.⁸⁴ Al-Ṣafī uses this metaphor specifically to deconstruct claims about the dual substantiality of the incarnate union. He begins with the premise that the humanity of Christ—one, single substance (*jawhar*)—is the sum of his soul and his body, which themselves originated as two substances (*jawharān*).⁸⁵ From this example of how ‘it is possible that two substances should become one (*yattaḥidu*)’;⁸⁶ he concludes that it should not be surprising that the union of humanity and divinity (two substances) in Christ should produce a singular substance in the person of the incarnate Word. The logic of this theological equation runs thus:

$$\begin{array}{rcl}
 1 \text{ body} & & \\
 + & = & 1 \text{ humanity} \\
 1 \text{ soul} & + & = 1 \text{ incarnate union} \\
 & & 1 \text{ divinity}
 \end{array}$$

Thus, al-Ṣafī’s christological calculations result in a ‘higher maths’ in which one substance plus one substance equals not two, but only one substance.⁸⁷ This alternative arithmetic could equally apply to ecumenical relations where 1+1+1 could also equal not 3 separate communities, but 1 unified faith—a crucial apologetic claim in the face of the critiques and challenges posed by Islam and the Muslim profession of divine unity (*al-tawḥīd*).

Such ecumenical sensitivities may also have influenced al-Ṣafī’s choice of technical vocabulary in reference to the Incarnation. Along with his older brother al-Mu’taman, al-Ṣafī primarily uses the term *al-ta’annus* (the act of

regarding (1) the true humanity and divinity of Christ, (2) the role of the Word in assuming or taking on human nature, (3) the beginning of the union at the annunciation, (4) the birth of Christ’s humanity (and not his divinity), (5) the suffering of Christ’s humanity (and not his divinity), and (6) the resurrection of Christ from the dead and his ascension into heaven by virtue of his own will. On these points, see Sedrak, *Al-Mu’taman ibn al-‘Assāl*, 311–13.

⁸⁴ al-Ṣafī ibn al-‘Assāl, *Brief Chapters* 8. 28 (Samir, 722).

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* 8. 30 (Samir, 722).

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* 8. 35 (Samir, 722).

⁸⁷ It is significant here that this thirteenth-century Copto-Arabic theologian has shifted the focus away from the language of ‘nature’ (and its long, contested history) to the language of ‘substance’ (*jawhar*). In ch. 1 of his *Brief Chapters* (1. 4–6; Samir, 688), al-Ṣafī carefully defines the *jawhar* as ‘that which subsists in itself and not in something else’, in contrast to ‘attributes’ (*al-ṣifāt*), which ‘subsist in a substance and not in itself’, and a hypostasis (*qunūm*), which represents the ‘sum’ (*majmū‘*) of a substance and its attributes. Later, in ch. 10 of the same work (Samir, 730–2), al-Ṣafī applies these definitions to discussions of Christ’s humanity and divinity, where the substantiality of each is contrasted with the attributes (*awṣāf*) of each.

becoming human) to refer to the ‘union’ (*al-ittiḥād*) of the humanity and divinity in Christ. This stands in stark contrast to their contemporary Būlus al-Būshī, who exclusively employs the term *al-tajassud* (the act of taking on a body) in such contexts. What is the reason for this divergence in the use of technical christological vocabulary? In fact, the brothers’ preference for the term *al-ta’annus* may have been due to the wider ecumenical scope of their work as theologians aware of apologetic theology in Damascus and Baghdad, where the three main communions shared a common concern to defend the full humanity of Christ (a humanity consisting of both body and soul) over against views that were thought to compromise that belief. Thus, in employing terminology that emphasized the fact that Christ became fully human (*ta’annasa*), al-Ṣafi and al-Mu’taman may have been subtly seeking to disassociate themselves from Apollinarian forms of belief that affirmed only a union of the divine Word with a human body (*sans* soul) in the Incarnation.⁸⁸ The brothers’ reluctance to use the contested theological term, ‘nature’ (*ṭabīʿah*) in describing the singular product of the incarnate union may also have been motivated by similar ecumenical concerns related to the legacy of the Chalcedonian schism.⁸⁹ In this way, their choice (and avoidance) of marked vocabulary may have been carefully calibrated to open up dialogue across traditional lines of christological disagreement.

Al-Mu’taman’s *Summa* provides a further basis for evaluating the reception of patristic theology through an emerging Arabic Christian theological tradition (see Appendix B.5). In that encyclopedic work one finds extensive references to a wide range of Arabic Christian authors, including once again ‘Ammār al-Baṣrī, Yahyā ibn ‘Adi, and Elias of Nisibis, but also Sāwīrus ibn al-Muqaffaʿ (d. 987), his Copto-Arabic contemporary Būlus al-Būshī, and his younger brothers al-Asʿad

⁸⁸ If I am correct in this argument, the ‘Awlād al-‘Assāl are following Cyril of Alexandria in an attempt to defend the ‘one incarnate nature’ of the Word against Antiochene-Syrian suspicions that this doctrine overlooked the role of Christ’s human soul, and thereby fell prey to Apollinarian error. In fact, Cyril and later Egyptian theologians (including Sāwīrus ibn al-Muqaffaʿ and the Arabic author of *The Confession of the Fathers*) occasionally supported their own *miaphysite* stance by unwittingly citing Apollinarian writings that had been transmitted to them in the name of reputable church fathers such as Athanasius and the Roman popes Julius and Felix: for a discussion of these so-called Apollinarian ‘forgeries’, see H. Lietzmann, *Apollinaris von Laodicea*, 79–163; A. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, i. 473–8, and ii/1, 63–71; and G. Graf, ‘Unechte Zeugnisse römischer Päpste’, 197–233. It should be noted that, while Cyril’s early language was sometimes ambiguous on the question of Jesus’ human soul, after the Council of Ephesus (431) the Alexandrian patriarch took great care to delineate the fact that the incarnate Word was united with a full human being (one who possessed both a human body and a human soul): see e.g. his letter to bishop John of Antioch, where he acknowledges ‘our Lord Jesus Christ . . . to be perfect God and perfect man made up of soul endowed with reason and of body . . .’ (Cyril of Alexandria, *Ep.* 39. 5: *ACO* 1.1.4, 17; trans. McGuckin, *St Cyril*, 344).

⁸⁹ They do use the noun *al-ṭabīʿah* to refer to the ‘human nature’ (*al-ṭabīʿah al-insānīyah*) with which the divine Word unites himself in the Incarnation: see e.g. al-Mu’taman ibn al-‘Assāl, *Summary* 6. 3 (A. Wadīʿ, *SOCM* 7a, 73) (quoting al-Ṣafi’s *Response to al-Nashi*’).

and al-Ṣāfi.⁹⁰ Yahyâ ibn ʿAdi and al-Ṣāfi ibn al-ʿAssāl garner special attention. Al-Muʿtaman cites the former in each of the first forty-five chapters of the *Summa*, lauding him as ‘the authoritative voice of the Christian religion and the proof of the Jacobite (i.e. non-Chalcedonian) faith’, equating his status in the church with that of Gregory of Nazianzus (‘the Theologian’).⁹¹ The latter, al-Ṣāfi, competes for primary place: indeed, he has been recognized by one scholar as ‘the foremost source from which (al-Muʿtaman) draws his literary material’.⁹²

In comparison to these Arabic-language authors, patristic writers are quoted with relative infrequency: out of a total of forty post-biblical Christian authors cited in the work, only ten wrote prior to the rise of Islam.⁹³ Al-Muʿtaman’s use of earlier Egyptian Christian sources conforms to this pattern: of fifteen Alexandrian or Egyptian sources cited, only three come from the pre-Islamic period. These three are Athanasius, Cyril, and Severus of Antioch, who is cited via the Alexandrian *Synaxarium* and is accordingly grouped by al-Muʿtaman among his ‘Egyptian’ or ‘Coptic’ sources.⁹⁴

Perhaps the best example of how patristic Christology came to be refracted through the prism of later Arabic Christian authors comes from ch. 25 of al-Muʿtaman’s *Summa*, where he discusses the classical source-statement for the doctrine of deification—‘God became man and man became God’.⁹⁵ Al-Muʿtaman reads this Athanasian formula through the interpretative lens of his brother, al-Ṣāfi, who commented on it in his treatise, *Response to al-Nāshi*. This was not simply a case of theological nepotism. Rather, al-Muʿtaman’s discussion of this statement reflects the way that it had already been radically reinterpreted within Arabic Christian circles. Indeed, according to al-Ṣāfi

⁹⁰ Al-Muʿtaman also cites three other contemporary Copto-Arabic authors: Muṣṭafâ al-Mulk Abū Yūsif, ʿAlam al-Riʿāṣah Ibn Kātib Qayṣar, and Buṭrus al-Rāhib. For a complete list and discussion of authors cited in *al-Magmuʿ*, see Sedrak, ‘Al-Muʿtaman ibn al-ʿAssāl et sa pensée christologique’, pp. iv–vii, 149–204.

⁹¹ al-Muʿtaman ibn al-ʿAssāl, *Summary* 1. 16; 8. 8 (A. Wadīʿ, SOCM 6a, 43, 164); Sedrak, ‘Al-Muʿtaman ibn al-ʿAssāl et sa pensée christologique’, 170–2.

⁹² Sedrak, ‘Al-Muʿtaman ibn al-ʿAssāl et sa pensée christologique’, 162–5. Al-Muʿtaman cites the following writings by al-Ṣāfi: (1) *The Book of Truths* (*Kitāb al-ṣāḥāʾih*) (chs. 2, 11, 15, 23, 45, 46), (2) his *Response to al-Rāzi* (ch. 40), (3) his *Response to al-Nāshi* ʿal-akbar (chs. 17, 19, 25, 31), (4) various glosses and commentaries (chs. 18, 23, 39, 43, 44), (5) his epitomes of treatises by Yahyâ ibn ʿAdi (chs. 23, 37), and (6) his famous *Nomocanon* (chs. 68–9).

⁹³ Only one Western ecclesiastical author is mentioned, Hippolytus of Rome, whom al-Muʿtaman knew from his influence over church canon law: see Sedrak, ‘Al-Muʿtaman ibn al-ʿAssāl et sa pensée christologique’, 176.

⁹⁴ al-Muʿtaman ibn al-ʿAssāl, *Summary* 1. 10 (A. Wadīʿ, SOCM 6a, 42). Other non-Egyptian patristic authors cited by al-Muʿtaman include Gregory of Nyssa, Basil of Caesarea, John Chrysostom, and Gregory of Nazianzus (‘the Theologian’): for a brief discussion of their influence over al-Muʿtaman, see Sedrak, ‘Al-Muʿtaman ibn al-ʿAssāl et sa pensée christologique’, 176–9.

⁹⁵ al-Muʿtaman ibn al-ʿAssāl, *Summary* 25. 1–2 (Wadīʿ, SOCM 7a, 73).

(as quoted by al-Mu'taman), the notion that 'man became God' does not refer to the deification of human beings as a salvific participation in the divine nature. Instead, it is taken only as a reference to the union of humanity with divinity in the Incarnation—in the person of Christ himself.

The meaning of the Christians' saying, 'God became man, and man became God,' is that God united with one person of human nature from the very beginning of the person's existence who was united to him, not that one of these two realities changed from its own nature to the other, but rather that one (being), Christ, came into existence from the two, and he is God-become-man (*al-ilāh al-muta'annis*).⁹⁶

Al-Ṣafī (still quoted by al-Mu'taman) goes on to interpret this formula in the light of the process by which matter takes on a particular form 'in its essence,' with the result that from the two, one 'kind' (*nawf*) emerges 'whose sense is different from the sense of each one of the two things singly'.⁹⁷ He also explicates the meaning of the verb 'became' in this phrase, insisting that when 'God became man, and man became God,' it was not a transformation of essence (as when food is transformed into human flesh and blood through the process of digestion),⁹⁸ but rather a renewal of condition by virtue of action (as in the statement, 'the writer became a doctor').⁹⁹

Finally, al-Ṣafī quotes a passage from Yahyā ibn 'Adī's treatise, *On the Necessity of the Incarnation* in which the latter grounds the incarnate union (*al-ittiḥād*) in the generous essence (*dhāt*) of God the Creator toward humanity:

It is necessary that God is the most generous, and it is necessary that the most generous is the one who is generous with the most excellent essence, and the most excellent essence is his own. So it is necessary that God is the one who is generous in his essence, and that he is the one who is sought after. Therefore, the union (*al-ittiḥād*) has no meaning except as an expression of the Creator's generosity in his essence toward human nature through his special contact (*al-ittiṣāl*) with it.¹⁰⁰

This discussion of the Incarnation in relation to the categories of form and matter, the relation of 'being' and 'becoming,' and the essential nature of divine generosity, shows how al-Ṣafī and al-Mu'taman sought to develop their Christology in relation to the Greek, Jewish, and Islamic 'intellectual' (*ʿaqlī*) or philosophical (*falsafī*) inheritance of the medieval Near East.

⁹⁶ al-Mu'taman ibn al-ʿAssāl, 25. 3 (Wadīf, SOCM 7a, 73).

⁹⁷ Ibid. 25. 4 (Wadīf, SOCM 7a, 73).

⁹⁸ See my discussion of medieval Arabic theories of digestion at the end of Ch. 4, and in particular its application to incarnational christology and eucharistic practice in Ps.-Sāwīrus ibn al-Muqaffāʿ, *The Book of the Elucidation*, ch. 4 (Par. ar. 170, fo. 77^r; Girgis, 114).

⁹⁹ al-Mu'taman ibn al-ʿAssāl, *Summary* 25. 5 (Wadīf, SOCM 7a, 73).

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. 25. 7 (Wadīf, SOCM 7a, 74).

Arab Christians Reading Aristotle: A Philosophical Christology of ‘Becoming’

As mentioned earlier, starting in the eighth century, the works of Aristotle (along with those of Plato) had become accessible to Arabic readers due to the translation movement initiated in Baghdad in the eighth century. In his *Summa*, al-Mu'taman also makes reference to several Neoplatonic philosophers from the Alexandrian Academy—including Porphyry (third century CE), Proclus, and his student Ammonius (fifth century CE)—whose work was frequently harmonized with (and even mistaken for) Aristotle's by medieval Arab philosophers.¹⁰¹ Indeed, the correlation that al-Mu'taman and his brother draw between being and becoming—in arguing for the compatibility between the eternal, unchanging divine essence and the Word's act of becoming a human being—derives from an Aristotelian tradition mediated through Jewish and Muslim philosophers, as well as Arab Christian theologians such as Yahyā ibn 'Adī.¹⁰² Among al-Mu'taman's Jewish sources, one finds Maimonides (1135–1204 CE),¹⁰³ the physician, philosopher, and polymath who lived in Cairo during the latter decades of the 1100s and produced a voluminous corpus of writings in both Hebrew and Arabic. The work that al-Mu'taman cites—*A Guide for the Perplexed* (*Dalālat al-ḥā'irīn*)—is a prime example of Maimonides' engagement with Aristotelian moral thought. In addition, al-Mu'taman cites a number of medieval Muslim thinkers, including Abū al-Naṣr al-Farābī (d. c.950)¹⁰⁴ and Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna) (986–1037),¹⁰⁵ who are renowned for their translations and commentaries on Aristotle's logic and metaphysics.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ Ian Richard Netton, 'Neoplatonism in Islamic Philosophy' (1998), at <<http://www.muslimphilosophy.com/ip/rep/H003.htm>>, accessed 10 Aug. 2007.

¹⁰² On the correlation of 'being' and 'becoming' in Aristotle, see E. Cassirer, 'The Problem of Form and the Problem of Cause', 87.

¹⁰³ al-Mu'taman ibn al-'Assāl, *Summary* 11. 70–7 and 22. 22–7 (A. Wadī', SOCM 6a, 269–71; 7a, 53–4); Sedrak, 'Al-Mu'taman ibn al-'Assāl et sa pensée christologique', 200.

¹⁰⁴ al-Mu'taman ibn al-'Assāl, *Summary* 7. 34–51 (A. Wadī', SOCM 6a, 155–9); Sedrak, 'Al-Mu'taman ibn al-'Assāl et sa pensée christologique', 197 (however, Sedrak gives the wrong chapter reference).

¹⁰⁵ See e.g. al-Mu'taman ibn al-'Assāl, *Summary* 3. 72–104; 5. 5–29, 51–8; 7. 24; 8. 35–91 (where Ibn Sīnā is mentioned in an excerpt quoted from the philosopher Najm al-Dīn Aḥmad); 17. 24 (Wadī', SOCM 6a, 86–94, 115–20, 124–5, 170–84, 359); Sedrak, 'Al-Mu'taman ibn al-'Assāl et sa pensée christologique', 198–9.

¹⁰⁶ Dimitri Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition* (1988); P. Lettinck, *Aristotle's Physics and Its Reception in the Arabic World* (1994). For briefer treatments of the way that Aristotelian concepts and categories informed Arabic philosophical writers, see Kiki Kennedy-Day, 'Aristotelianism in Islamic Philosophy', <<http://www.muslimphilosophy.com/ip/rep/H002.htm>>; Richard Sorabji, 'Aristotle Commentators', <<http://www.muslimphilosophy.com/ip/rep/A021.htm>>; and R. Walzer, 'Aristutalis or Aristu' <<http://www.muslimphilosophy.com/ei/aristu.htm>>, all accessed 10 Aug. 2007.

This Aristotelian heritage of philosophical reflection had significant repercussions for the way that the brothers' developed their theology of the Incarnation. We have already seen how al-Ṣaḥī and al-Mu'taman read the patristic formula, 'God became man, and man became God' in Aristotelian terms as a commentary on the unchanging or abiding essence (*dhāt baqīyah*) of the Word's divinity in the Incarnation.¹⁰⁷ Al-Mu'taman also applies the Aristotelian category of 'becoming' to his discussion of John 1: 14: 'The Word became flesh (*lahm*).' In ch. 26 of his *Summa*, the author quotes this biblical passage and then supplies an alternative translation, 'The Word became a body (*jasad*),' thereby showing that the terms *lahm* and *jasad* could be taken as synonyms in Arabic readings of the Gospel.

Al-Mu'taman's interpretation of this passage shows how his Christology utilized Aristotelian philosophical discourse in the context of ongoing ecumenical debates with other Christians and Muslims in the Arab world. He focuses particularly on the verb 'became' (*ṣāra*) and tackles the vexing problem of whether the divine Word experienced a change in taking on a fleshly or bodily condition. In doing so, he presents two options interpreting this verb: either it connotes an actual change or alteration (*istiḥāl*) from one condition to another, or it indicates a renewal of condition (*tajaddadat lahā al-ḥāl*) by virtue of action or activity (*fi'l*), as in the case when one says, 'The doctor became an astrologer, and the writer became a soldier.'

Following Aristotle, al-Mu'taman opts for the second reading, an interpretation of 'becoming' that is compatible with the eternity of God's essential condition.

This is the meaning that we desire—namely, that through the union (*al-ittiḥād*) God the Word came to have a condition that had not existed before. It is his contact (*ittiṣāl*) with a human being who possessed bodily and fleshly characteristics (*'insān jasadānī lahmī*), just like the contact between the soul and the body (*ittiṣāl al-naḥs bi-l-jasad*). And yet, he remains eternal in his condition, without change.¹⁰⁸

Al-Mu'taman's other Muslim sources include Abū Sulaymān Ṭāhir al-Mantiqah (tenth century), Najm al-Dīn Aḥmad (eleventh century), and Fakhr al-Dīn Ibn al-Khaṭīb (d. 1210); see Sedrak, 'Al-Mu'taman ibn al-'Assāl et sa pensée christologique', 197–200. In the case of the first and third of these writers, al-Mu'taman may have gained his knowledge through his learned brothers, al-As'ad and al-Ṣaḥī. Abū Sulaymān Ṭāhir al-Mantiqah, a disciple of Yahyā Ibn 'Adī, served as the interlocutor in a disputation written by al-Mu'taman's brother, al-As'ad, and it is this debate that al-Mu'taman cites in ch. 19 of his *Summa* (*Summary of the Principles of Religion* 19. 148–58; A. Wadīf, SOCM 6a, 439–43). In the case of Fakhr al-Dīn Ibn al-Khaṭīb, one of al-Mu'taman's three citations comes from a work of *Refutation* composed by al-Ṣaḥī (al-Mu'taman ibn al-'Assāl, *Summary* 40. 1–33; cf. 6. 69–88 and 17. 7–10; A. Wadīf, SOCM 7a, 142–50; cf. 6a, 140–4, 354–5).

¹⁰⁷ al-Mu'taman ibn al-'Assāl, *Summary* 25 (A. Wadīf, SOCM 7a, 73–4).

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. 26. 6–7 (A. Wadīf, SOCM 7a, 75). On Aristotle's conception of how a being could change in its accidental qualities or attributes, while remaining the same in its 'essence' (*οὐσία*) and 'essential form' (*εἶδος*), see his *Physics*, Book 1 (A 7, 190a 13 ff.); and W. Marx, *Introduction to Aristotle's Theory of Being as Being*, 31–2.

Here, in the light of the aforementioned ecumenical concerns that al-Mu'taman shared with his brother al-Ṣafi, he reads 'a human being with bodily and fleshly characteristics' (*'insān jasadānī laḥmī*) for the word 'flesh' (*laḥm*)—or alternatively, 'body' (*jasad*)—as it appears in the text of the Gospel. This semantic substitution is reinforced by his use of the soul–body connection as an anthropological metaphor for the connection and union that took place in the Incarnation.¹⁰⁹ Finally, in utilizing this Aristotelian theory of 'becoming', al-Mu'taman further legitimizes his interpretation as a recognizable form of argumentation drawn from medieval philosophical debate between Christian and Muslim *mutakallimūn*.

From Proofs to Praxis: The Awlād al-ʿAssāl on the Incarnation and Human Participation in the Divine

In support of this philosophical vision of the divine union, the Awlād al-ʿAssāl present to their Arabic readers a series of 'proofs' (*adillah*: examples) and 'reasons' (*asbāb*: purposes) drawn not only from Scripture and philosophical discourse, but also from historical church practice. Here it is that one begins to get a glimpse of how the brothers' doctrine of the Incarnation cohered with a philosophical-ascetic vision for how humans participated in Christ's divine attributes manifest in the flesh.

As 'proofs' of the Incarnation and the union of divinity and humanity in Christ, al-Ṣafi cites four groups of authoritative witnesses: (1) the ancient prophets, (2) the philosophers, (3) the apostles, and (4) the church fathers.¹¹⁰ The utterances of both the prophets and the philosophers are said to have been fulfilled in the divine economy—the former through their prediction that God will appear in human form, and the latter through their demonstration of how the soul comes to be in union with the body (as a metaphor for the union of humanity and divinity in Christ).¹¹¹ However, it is in the work of the apostles and monastic church fathers that one most tangibly sees evidence for the effect of this incarnate union upon humanity. The disciples were empowered to perform 'dazzling wonders' that testified to Christ's divinity in the flesh.¹¹² For

¹⁰⁹ Used in this context, the metaphor of soul and body carries with it contradictory implications for al-Mu'taman's argument. Even as it affirms that human beings (Jesus included) are properly composed of both a soul and a body, in its christological application the logic of the metaphor implicitly aligns the Word's divinity with the anthropological agency of the soul, and the humanity that the Word assumes with the body that serves as a home for the soul in the human person.

¹¹⁰ al-Ṣafi ibn al-ʿAssāl, *Brief Chapters* 9 (Samir, 724–8).

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* 9. 2–4, 8 (Samir, 724–6).

¹¹² *Ibid.* 9. 15–19 (Samir, 728).

their part, the church fathers demonstrated the truth of the Incarnation through ‘(spiritual) exercise and inner purification.’¹¹³ Having ‘arrived at their utmost end’ through contemplation and ascetic practice, they attained ‘contact’ (*ittiṣāl*) with God to the extent that traces (*āthār*) of God became manifest in them.¹¹⁴

Al-Mu’taman echoes his brother on this point. In addition to the way Christ’s own deeds and knowledge testify to his divinity in the Gospels,¹¹⁵ al-Mu’taman also highlights more recent and local ‘proofs’. In particular, the apostle Paul’s power over animals and the martyrs’ power over fire conspicuously point to their bodily participation in Christ’s divine nature.¹¹⁶ Finally, al-Mu’taman also calls his readers’ attention to the local landscape as bearing traces of Christ’s incarnate presence: he does so by citing the Coptic tradition about the ‘partition (*taqtī*^c) of the Muqattam hill (Jabal Muqaṭṭam) which is visible both in Old Cairo (*Miṣr*) and Islamic Cairo (*al-Qāhirah*)’. The tenth-century Coptic patriarch Abraham (a contemporary of Sāwīrus ibn al-Muqaffa^c) was said to have commanded this mountain ‘to move from one place to another, and it indeed it moved through his supplication and the prayer of his people’.¹¹⁷ Here, we see how the broken cliffs bordering the Nile Valley at Cairo are presented as proof of Abraham’s participation in divine attributes and thereby as indirect yet definitive proof of the incarnate union which instilled those attributes in human nature.

Both al-Ṣafī and al-Mu’taman also outline the reasons and goals of the Word’s Incarnation. On this subject, al-Ṣafī extols God’s generosity (*jūd*)—a generosity manifested and grounded in the acts of creation and incarnation. The acts of creation and incarnation are made possible by virtue of the fact that the divine and the human share a fundamental ‘likeness’ (*shibh*, cf. Gen 1: 26), which al-Ṣafī once again describes in terms of a ‘contact’ (*ittiṣāl*) that facilitates the communication of divine attributes to humankind.¹¹⁸ Thus, in the Incarnation, God ‘united with our nature in order to perfect us’, and ‘generously bestowed his (divine) essence (*dhāt*) upon us... through his contact (*ittiṣāl*) with

¹¹³ al-Ṣafī ibn al-ʿAssāl, 9. 20 (Samir, 728).

¹¹⁴ Ibid. 9. 21–3 (Samir, 728). Aristotle described genuine cognition—the contemplative meeting of mind with mind—as a form of ‘touch’ or ‘contact’ (Gr. *θίγγειν*): see Marx, *Introduction to Aristotle’s Theory of Being as Being*, 8; J. Owens, *The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian ‘Metaphysics’*, 414 n. 15.

¹¹⁵ al-Mu’taman ibn al-ʿAssāl, *Summary* 24. 4–6 (Wadīf, SOCM 7a, 63).

¹¹⁶ Ibid. 24. 9, 13–14 (Wadīf, SOCM 7a, 64, 65). Regarding the apostle Paul, al-Mu’taman alludes to both the canonical Acts (28: 1–6) and the non-canonical *Acts of Paul* (trans. W. Schneemelcher, 238, 253, 264–5) as evidence for his power over snakes and lions. In the canonical book of Acts, ch. 28, Paul suffers no harm from a serpent’s bite, an event which prompts the natives of Malta to exclaim ‘that he was a god’ (v. 6).

¹¹⁷ Ibid. 24. 11 (A. Wadīf, SOCM 7a, 64–5). For an earlier account of Patriarch Abraham’s miraculous deed, see the *History of the Patriarchs*, ed. A. S. Atiya, Y. ʿAbd al-Masih, and O. H. E. Burmester, ii/2, 94–7; for fuller biographical details on Abraham see Subhi Y. Labib, ‘Abraham, Saint’, CE i. 10–11.

¹¹⁸ al-Ṣafī ibn al-ʿAssāl, *Brief Chapters* 11. 2–3, 9–12 (Samir, 732, 734).

us.¹¹⁹ According to al-Ṣafī, nowhere is our sharing in divine attributes, our ‘human perfection’ (*al-kamāl al-’insānī*), more evident than in practices of worship and ascetic piety (*al-tanassuk*).¹²⁰

For the Awlād al-’Assāl, so shaped by the medieval Near Eastern ethos of philosophical debate and dialogue, this perfect participation in the divine essence was conceived of primarily in terms of the intellectual activity that takes place in prayer and contemplation, but this activity was nonetheless intimately linked to ascetic practices of piety. Al-Mu’taman further underscores the profound importance of ascetic contemplation as a means of assimilating God’s attributes in ch. 23 of his *Summa*, where he quotes al-Ṣafī (who himself is summarizing Yahyā ibn ’Adī) on the possibility of humans attaining a mental ‘union’ (*ittiḥād* ^ʿ*aqlī*) with God.¹²¹ According to al-Ṣafī’s theory, when human beings contemplate and comprehend God, their minds are ‘imaged’ (*mutaṣawwar*) by the image of the Creator. This image of the Creator is, in fact, identified with the divine essence—something that is not material but rational in nature, and therefore correspondent to the human rational faculty: ‘His essence (*dhāt*) is (identifiable with) the mind (^ʿ*aql*) of the human being.’¹²² Here we again see the way that the Christology of the Awlād al-’Assāl was forged in the crucible of an Aristotelian tradition of thought in which the mind (*al-’aql*) and that which is comprehended by the mind (*al-ma’qūl*) are understood to become one subject: ‘In reality the mind and that which is comprehended (by the mind) are actually one subject, just as Aristotle made clear. It is necessary that the human being, when he comprehends the Creator, be united (*muttaḥidan*) with him.’¹²³ To comprehend God, then, is to enter into a sort of union with him—a union of attributes that differs from the hypostatic, essential union of humanity and divinity in the Incarnation, but is nevertheless one in which the mind serves as a mirror on which God’s ‘image’ (*ṣūrah*) is ‘imaged’ (*mutaṣawwarah*).

Like Aristotle before him, al-Ṣafī views the supreme human faculty of the mind (Gr. *voûs*; Ar. ^ʿ*aql*) as a trace of ‘God in us’, and the philosopher as one who emulates (and thereby intellectually realizes) pure, divine thought.¹²⁴ For al-Ṣafī,

¹¹⁹ Ibid. 11. 4, 8 (Samir, 732, 734).

¹²⁰ Ibid. 11. 17–23 (Samir, 736).

¹²¹ al-Mu’taman ibn al-’Assāl, *Summary* 23. 13, 19–20, 23 (Wadīʿ, SOCM 7a, 57–60).

¹²² Ibid. 23. 13 (Wadīʿ, SOCM 7a, 57).

¹²³ Ibid. 23. 13 (A. Wadīʿ, SOCM 7a, 57–8). This mental mimesis has its roots in Aristotle’s philosophy, where the act of thinking (*νόησις*) is held to be identical with what the mind thinks (*νοητόν*): ‘In Aristotle, *noema* and *noesis* become the “same”: in the act of apprehending a thing intuitively (*noesis*) that which is intuitively apprehensible (*noema*) becomes an intuitive apprehension (*nooumena*)’ (Marx, *Introduction to Aristotle’s Theory of Being as Being*, 5, 8).

¹²⁴ Aristotle, *Protreptikos* B, 110 (*ὁ νοῦς γὰρ ἡμῶν ὁ θεός*; Berti, *Aristotele: Protreptico, Esortazione alla filosofia*, 64; *Nicomachean Ethics* X. 7. 8 (1177b33; Rackham, 616); Marx, *Introduction to Aristotle’s Theory of Being as Being*, 3, 10. In the passage cited above from the *Nicomachean Ethics*,

it was (once again) the Christian ascetic who truly embodied this philosophical ideal of contemplative union with God through their ‘(spiritual) exercise’ (*al-riyādah*) and ‘inner purification’ (*taṣfiat al-bāṭin*).¹²⁵ Through such training, divine attributes come to be mirrored in the minds (and bodies) of monks. The monastic fathers of the church are accordingly celebrated as ‘those who resembled God in accordance with their ability . . . by means of the correctness of their Christian faith (*siḥḥat al-masīḥīyah*) and their attainment of contact (*al-ittiṣāl*) with God’; by participating with the angels in glorifying God through the constancy of their devotion, the fathers ‘showed forth his (divine) traces.’¹²⁶ Thus, even from their vantage point among the urban elite of thirteenth-century Cairo, the Awlād al-ʿAssāl—like Shenoute of Atripe 800 years earlier—were able to envision ascetic contemplation and discipline as practical sites where the fruits of the Incarnation are on display.

CONCLUSION

In narrating this history of christological reflection and praxis in early and medieval Christian Egypt, I have highlighted three key factors that definitively marked the way that early Alexandrian understandings of the Incarnation were received and reworked: (1) the interpretation of biblical texts and patristic authorities, (2) the production of apologetical literature in the context of theological controversy, and (3) the function of worship and other ritual activities as privileged venues for christological communication and performance. From the late antique Coptic sermons of the monk Shenoute to the medieval Arabic tractates of the Awlād al-ʿAssāl, from the papyrus fragments of early liturgical rites to images of Christ on clothing, icons, and the walls of churches, I have traced how the Egyptian doctrines of the Incarnation have been reinterpreted, contested, and put into practice.

In the process, we have seen how certain ‘sites of memory’ (*lieux de mémoire*) endured even across eras of linguistic and cultural change—sites

Aristotle writes, ‘Such a life as this however will be higher than the human level: not in virtue of his humanity will a man achieve it, but in virtue of something within him that is divine . . . If then the intellect is something divine in comparison with man, so is the life of the intellect divine in comparison with human life’ (trans. Rackham, 617).

¹²⁵ al-Muʿtaman ibn al-ʿAssāl, *Summary* 23. 30 (A. Wadīʿ, SOCM 7a, 62).

¹²⁶ Ibid. Here, al-Muʿtaman cites an expanded version of what appears in al-Ṣafī’s *Brief Chapters*, ch. 9. In the quotation above, al-Ṣafī uses the word ‘traces’ (*āthār*) as a synonym for ‘attributes’ (*ṣifāt*). For an example of how he interchanges these terms, see also al-Muʿtaman ibn al-ʿAssāl, *Summary* 23. 28 (A. Wadīʿ, SOCM 7a, 62).

(including both places and practices) that marked the collective and cultural identity of the Coptic church.¹²⁷ The liturgy, along with a constellation of other ritualized acts, served as a physical and temporal space where Copts were continually reminded of their living connection with the incarnate Word, where key events from the life of Christ, such as the nativity, the transfiguration, and the ascension, were dramatized and enacted. The eucharist became an especially privileged ritual site where such incarnational participation was performed through the act of eating Christ's body, an act aided by olfactory and visual cues such as the smell of burning incense and the sight of Mary and her blessed Child on the walls of the church.

The dynamics of such christological participation in the liturgy continued unabated during the medieval period, and visual art retained its vital function in Coptic churches. During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, large-scale icons were featured in public worship in the Nile Valley and in the capital, Cairo.¹²⁸ One example, discovered at the Church of St Mercurius at Dayr Abū Sayfayn in Old Cairo, will provide us with a final glimpse into the culture of visual-sensory reception cultivated in the context of Copto-Arabic Christology (Fig. 6.1a).¹²⁹

Composed in two registers, this late thirteenth or early fourteenth-century icon presents a series of scenes from the life of Christ and the Virgin Mary

¹²⁷ Here I borrow from the language of Pierre Nora and the field of memory studies in describing the relationship between communal Coptic identity, church practice, and the dynamic reception of christological doctrine. On the concept of *lieux de mémoire* in Nora's writing, see especially his epic work, *Les Lieux de mémoire*, 3 vols.; and his article, 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire', 7–24. On the phenomenon of collective memory, see Maurice Halbwachs's books, *Collective Memory*, trans. F. Ditter, Jr., and V. Ditter; and *On Collective Memory*, trans. L. A. Coser. On the relation of memory and cultural identity, see Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis*; id. *Religion and Cultural Memory: Ten Studies*, trans. R. Livingstone; and Aleida Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume*. For a helpful introduction to this field, see Astrid Erll, *Kollektives Gedächtnis und Erinnerungskulturen*.

¹²⁸ Literary evidence for the medieval Coptic use of icons has been collected by Ugo Zanetti in his article, 'Les Icônes chez les théologiens de l'Église copte', *Le Monde Copte* 19 (1991), 77–92. The scarcity of actual Coptic icons surviving from the period between the seventh and seventeenth centuries has long perplexed art historians (see Langen and Hondelink, 'Icons, Coptic', *ce* iv. 1276–80). However, recent research and restoration work has brought to light at least nineteen icons dated to the thirteenth or fourteenth century and connected with churches in Cairo, see the list of examples in Z. Skálová and S. Davis, 'A Medieval Icon', 216 (A–D). For a more comprehensive catalogue, including icons from late antique, medieval, and modern Egypt, see Z. Skálová and G. Gabra, *The Icons of the Nile Valley*.

¹²⁹ I thank Zuzana Skálová for introducing me to this icon back in 1999 when I was living in Cairo. In the following discussion, I draw extensively on insights from the article she and I co-authored the following year: see Skálová and Davis, 'A Medieval Icon', 211–38. This icon from the Church of St Mercurius at Dayr Abū Sayfayn measures 73 cm in height and 190 cm in width and is characterized by a mixed Coptic-Byzantine style. It was probably commissioned for the church by the Coptic ecclesiastical leadership, and produced either at the Monastery of St Catherine at Mount Sinai or by a cosmopolitan Cairene workshop whose artists were trained similar in Byzantine methods of icon painting.

based primarily on the Gospel of Luke and Acts.¹³⁰ (See Fig. 6.2.) The central panel (Fig. 6.1b; no. 7 in Fig. 6.2) juxtaposes the images of the ascension (lower zone) and the second coming (upper zone).¹³¹ The two scenes are closely linked in iconographic detail and spatial arrangement. In both, Christ is shown enthroned in glory before a dark blue circular disc (or aureole), and no border separates the upper and lower registers as in the case of the other individual panels on the icon. Framed as a single tall panel, the combined images of the ascension and second coming immediately draw the viewer's attention upwards. The central panel's vertical orientation stands in stark contrast to the horizontal movement featured in the rest of the visual narrative. I have discussed the intertextual resonances of this icon in more detail elsewhere,¹³² but here I want to enter imaginatively into the icon's community of reception in order to draw some final conclusions about how such images would have helped facilitate a corporeal aesthetic (or a 'corpothetics') of divine participation in the context of the liturgy.¹³³



¹³⁰ Skálová and Davis, 'A Medieval Icon', 234–5. The one non-biblical scene is the dormition of the Virgin in the final panel. For a detailed study of sources and sites related to the dormition of the Virgin in late antique and early medieval Christianity, see S. J. Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions of the Virgin Mary's Dormition and Assumption* (2002).

¹³¹ The scene of the second coming is identified by the Arabic inscription, *al-majī' al-thānī*.

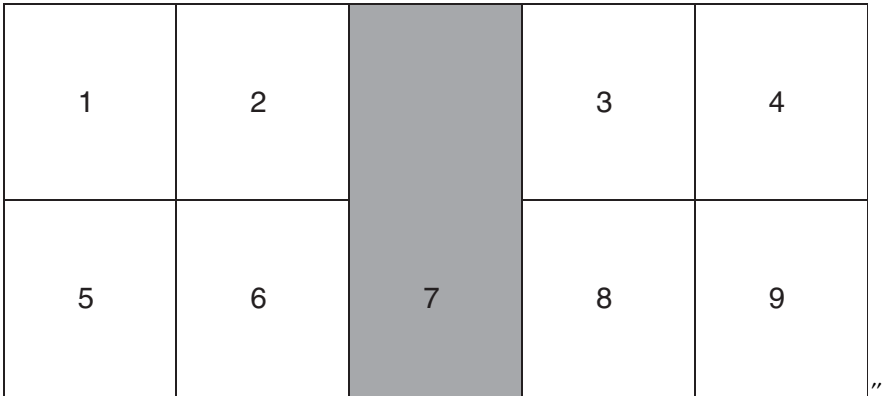
¹³² Skálová and Davis, 'A Medieval Icon', 230–8.

¹³³ I borrow the concept of 'corpothetics' from the anthropologist Christopher Pinney, who employs it to refer to 'the sensory embrace of images, the bodily engagement . . . with artworks' that characterizes some Hindu pieties: see esp. his articles, 'Piercing the Skin of the Idol', 157–79; and 'The Indian Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', 355–69. For a previous example of how this notion of corporeal viewing can be fruitfully applied to the study of Coptic icons and their function, see the paper by Anthony Shenouda, 'The Agency of Images: Copts and the Adoration of the Saints' (2005), at <http://www.brehmcenter.com/visualfaith/Luce/shenoda_icons_&_orthodoxy.pdf>, accessed 10 Aug. 2007.



Figure 6.1a–b. Icon with scenes from the life of Christ and the Virgin (left), with a detailed photo of the central panel depicting the Ascension and Second Coming (above). Cairo, Church of Saint Mercurius at Dayr Abū Sayfayn, late 13th or early 14th century CE. Icon photographed during the process of conservation in 1995. Photo copyright: Zuzana Skalova, Netherlands–Egyptian Coptic Icons Conservation Project, 1988–1996.

For the community of reception at Abū Sayfayn, we possess some valuable, nearly contemporaneous evidence from the writings of Būlus al-Būshī, who presided over the same church during his tenure as bishop of Old Cairo. It was in that space that he probably preached his *Homily on the*



- | | |
|--|-----------------------------|
| 1. Annunciation of Mary | Luke 1: 26-28 |
| 2. Birth of Jesus | Luke 2: 1-20 |
| 3. Presentation of Jesus at the Temple | Luke 2: 21-38 |
| 4. Baptism of Jesus | Luke 3: 21-22 |
| 5. Transfiguration | Luke 9: 28-36 |
| 6. Entry into Jerusalem | Luke 19: 29-40 |
| 7. Ascension/Second Coming | Luke 24: 50-53; Acts 1:9-11 |
| 8. Pentecost | Acts 2:1-4 |
| 9. Dormition of the Virgin | (post-biblical tradition) |

Figure 6.2. Diagram of icon at Fig. 6.1.

Glorious Ascension in the mid-thirteenth century, not too many years before the commissioning and installation of the icon.¹³⁴ Furthermore, the fact that his sermon was copied and survived in multiple manuscripts suggests that it may have been regularly read to the congregation when the feast of the Ascension was celebrated.¹³⁵ This practice would have probably continued even after Būlus’ death, during the period when the icon was actually in place.

In that *Homily*, Būlus comments on the story of the ascension from Acts 1: 1–11 by making reference to a series of passages from the Coptic Psalmody. In

¹³⁴ The Arabic text of this sermon has been edited by Manqariūs Awādallah, *Maqālāt al-Anbā Būlus al-Būshī*, 99–107. The original location of the icon within the church is uncertain. In the late nineteenth century, it was discovered by A. J. Butler on the western wall of the north choir, where it would have been visible only to the liturgical celebrants: for an account of its discovery, see A. J. Butler’s *Ancient Coptic Churches of Egypt*, i. 104–5. While this may have been its setting in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century, it could also just as well have occupied a different (and more prominent) place in the church at the time of its original commissioning and installation.

¹³⁵ For a list of manuscripts containing this homily, see Graf, *GCAL* ii. 357–8.

succession he quotes Psalm 104: 3 ('He mounted the clouds and strode upon the wings of the wind'), Psalm 97: 2 ('Clouds and deep mist surround him; his seat (throne) has perfected justice and truth'), and Psalm 18: 10 ('He mounted the cherubim and flew; he flew upon the wings of the wind'). The images highlighted in these verses—clouds, mist, a seat or throne, and the wings of the wind—correspond strikingly to the visual details of the icon, and are also echoed in the reading from the Coptic *Synaxarium* for the Feast of the Ascension, which tells how Christ 'ascended into heaven on the wings of the cherubim'.¹³⁶ In this multi-layered correspondence of images, one begins to get a more textured sense of how the daily readings, sermon, and church iconography would have been coordinated in order to cultivate among the presiding priests, deacons, and laity a particular interpretative ethos, to foster among the liturgical participants a receptivity of mind, eye, and body.

For Būlus al-Būshī, these images of the ascension were meant to convey to the worshipper a sense of 'the power of (Christ's) divinity'.¹³⁷ In his sermon, this power is further confirmed by the promise of the second coming, when 'he will come in his glory with the holy angels'.¹³⁸ But, at the same time, as we have seen at various points throughout this book, the ascension also served as a way for the Copts to visualize and anticipate their own glorified state. Thus, Būlus writes, 'Through the Lord who raised the body united with him to heaven, heavenly beings have become one with earthly beings'.¹³⁹ For medieval Coptic viewers, the angelic vision of the ascension and second coming so vividly portrayed in the Abū Sayfayn icon may have served as a similar catalyst—an illustrated script—for liturgical participation in this divine ascent.¹⁴⁰ In the iconography, the joining of earth to heaven comes

¹³⁶ *Synaxarium Alexandrinum* (Forget, ii. 108). Several manuscripts of that text explicitly connect this event with a reading of Psalm 18: 10—manuscripts B, C, and G add that Christ's ascension took place 'according to the statement of the most excellent prophet David, "He mounted the cherubim and flew upon the wings of the wind"' (Forget, ii. 108 n. 7).

¹³⁷ *Homily on the Glorious Ascension* (Awādallah, *Maqālāt*, 104).

¹³⁸ *Ibid.* (Awādallah, *Maqālāt*, 105).

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ For further contemporaneous evidence that icons were understood to have a sanctifying effect on viewers, see the comments of the Copto-Arabic author Abū al-Barakāt Ibn Kabar (d. 1324 CE) in his work, *The Lamp of the Darkness* (*Miṣbah al-zulmah fī ḏāh al-khidmah*), where he explains how God authorized Christians to employ images in worship 'à cause du perfectionnement de leur intelligence' (trans. Zanetti, 83); for a brief summary of this work, see Graf, *GCAL* ii. 439–42). In that same context, Abū al-Barakāt specifically mentions the icon-type that depicts Christ seated on a throne carried by the Four Living Creatures—the very image found on the central panel of the Abū Sayfayn icon—interpreting it as a sign of the Word's salvific Incarnation and of the fact that it was this same Word who had earlier appeared to Moses, Ezekiel, and the other prophets (trans. Zanetti, 84–5).

In her article, 'Scetis at the Red Sea: Depictions of Monastic Genealogy in the Monastery of St Antony', Elizabeth S. Bolman has discussed the mimetic function of icons for Coptic viewers.

to most tangible expression in the contrast established between the horizontal and the vertical planes: thus, even as the heavenly scenes of the ascension and second coming break through the horizontal narrative of Christ's earthly life, they also would have drawn the viewer's contemplative sight and bodily orientation upwards towards union with the divine.¹⁴¹

Perhaps it is appropriate to draw this book to a close while we are still gathered with this medieval community of Copts, imaginatively observing them as they incline their ears to hear a sermon read in which the Greek patristic past is bound up with an Arabic present, as they stand with faces lifted upward and eyes widened to discern the painted lines of Christ's glorified body through the shadows, as they wait with bated breath to receive and taste that very body in the eucharistic meal. Over generations, the calendrical repetition of such postures and practices would have produced what might be called a sanctified 'mnemonics of the body'—a habituated set of interpretative and ritual actions that elicited incorporated performances of divine participation in the Incarnation.¹⁴² In this book, I have tried to gather together textual and material traces of these performances from a wide range of sources and media that have not usually been thought about together in christological terms. If there is value in such an approach, it rests in my hope that this work will sponsor new and creative conversations among those in the fields of theology, history, sociology, anthropology, linguistics, art, and archaeology who remain interested in the relation between religious thought and practice.

Depictions of angels (including cherubim and seraphim) in the company of Christ at the ascension and second coming may have contributed to this mimetic visual culture in so far as their presence underscored certain incarnational associations of such artwork. The act of representing angels in (quasi-)human form—of imaging them in 'subtle bodies'—was tantamount to clothing the ineffable in flesh: on the 'subtle bodies' (*λεπτά σώματα*) of angelic beings, see one of the homilies (falsely) attributed to Macarius the Great in *Die fünfzig geistlichen Homilien des Makarios*, ed. H. Dörries, E. Klosterman, and M. Kroeger, 33–4 (= *Homilia*, IV. ix); and Glenn Peers, *Subtle Bodies: Representing Angels in Byzantium*. According to Peers, the visualized tension between the material-corporeal representations of angelic figures and their actual immaterial nature was designed to encourage a 'higher contemplation' in the viewer (125). The angels depicted on late antique and Byzantine wall paintings and icons 'imitate... the secret ineffable divinity, and envelop themselves mysteriously so as to yield divine illumination' (91), and in this way the spiritual world 'was made tantalizingly near and an immanence was provisionally contained' (207) for Christian worshippers.

¹⁴¹ Drawing on the work of Diana Eck and Alfred Gell on Indian religions, Anthony Shenouda ('The Agency of Images') compares Coptic iconic viewing to the Hindu practice of *darshan*—an 'auspicious sight' through which 'the worshipper reaches out and touches the god': see D. Eck, *Darsan: Seeing the Divine Image in India*, 3; and A. Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*, 117. Such a connection between sight and touch would have been enacted by Copts on a regular basis in their gestures of touching and kissing more accessible or portable icons.

¹⁴² On the concepts of 'postural performances', 'incorporated practices', and 'a mnemonics of the body', see Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, esp. 72–4.

Postscript

The Modern Legacy of Coptic Christology

While I have chosen to bring my formal investigation to a close in the thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century Copto-Arabic ‘Golden Age’, a period which marked a renaissance of theological literary production, the Incarnation and its implications for the Christian life have remained live issues for the Coptic community up to the present day. In this postscript, I want to present two illustrative case studies—one from the early modern period and one from the late twentieth and early twenty-first century—in order to show how Egyptian Christians have continued to envision and enact the Incarnation in ritual settings such as monastic practice and the liturgy.

My first example comes from a moment of ecclesiastical encounter between East and West in the seventeenth century. In 1672, the patriarch of the Coptic Church, Matthew IV (fl. 1660–76 CE), composed a *Refutation of the Calvinists*, in which he responded to a French Catholic petition to speak out against Protestant eucharistic Christology (see Appendix B.6).¹ The historical occasion for this work elicited a strange mix of ecumenical openness (towards Roman Catholicism) and polemical diatribe (against Protestants, identified as ‘the heretics from among the Europeans’),² with Matthew defending Coptic belief in the real presence of Christ’s body in the sacrament over against a series of challenges to that doctrine.

According to reports that had reached the patriarch, European Protestants were saying that Christ was not ‘truly’ present on the altar after the consecration of the elements, and that ‘holy eucharistic offering is not the true body

¹ Par. ar. 226 (unpublished). This work was a companion piece to a general *Statement of Faith* (Par. ar. 225) that Patriarch Matthew IV produced for the occasion. On the French Catholic solicitation of eastern ecclesiastical support for their opposition to Calvinist doctrine in the late seventeenth century (1670–89) and the Coptic Patriarch Matthew’s response, see H. Omont, *Missions archéologiques françaises en orient aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles*, 175–221, esp. 185, and Alastair Hamilton, *The Copts and the West, 1439–1822: The European Discovery of the Egyptian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 152–4.

² Matthew IV, *Refutation of the Calvinists* 4. The section numbering system in my translation is my own (see Appendix B.5).

of Jesus Christ under the species of the bread.³ The reason for this was the conviction that Christ's body could not be in two places at once: 'They say that the eucharistic offering, which we call the body of Christ, is not the same body that is in heaven. They say that Christ is only in heaven, and not on the earth in his essence: (according to them) the thing that we see is not the true body, but only bread.'⁴

In the face of such claims, Matthew contests his Calvinist opponents' monadic arithmetic of the body. He asks his readers, 'Now do we say that it is something incredible and improper that we accept (the idea) that one body can be in many places at one moment in time?'⁵ He then responds to this question by noting that the incorporeal God who created the world with a word (*kalimah wāḥidah*) is equally capable of working such wondrous feats of multi-locality through the power of his incarnate Word (*kalimatuḥu*). Thus, in the same way that the Creator gave his body to his disciples in Emmaus 'while being nowhere' (i.e. while remaining incorporeal in his divinity), he also is able to turn the eucharistic bread into his body through the priest's words of institution, 'This is my body.'⁶ The body that 'rose to heaven' at the ascension, and 'is seated on the right hand of the Father on high', is the very same body that is essentially and substantially 'present in the holy eucharistic offering'.⁷

Here one sees how the eucharistic rite is once again understood to re-enact the Incarnation. On this score, Matthew highlights the fact that the divinity of Christ remains 'hidden under the accidents of the bread and wine' just as it was 'hidden in the womb of the Virgin Mary'.⁸ For this seventeenth-century Copto-Arabic author, the eucharist is recognized as the sole and privileged context through which the incarnate Word becomes physically visible and present to the faithful: to partake of the body of Christ with one's mouth is therefore to confess and physically claim the truth of God's salvific action in taking on flesh.

Three hundred years after Patriarch Matthew IV wrote his *Refutation of the Calvinists*, a latter-day namesake, Mattā al-Miskīn ('Matthew the Poor', 1919–2006),⁹ began publishing a series of sermons and theological tractates in which he presents not only the eucharist but also the entire life of the church as 'a manifestation of Christ's Incarnation on earth'.¹⁰ For Mattā al-Miskīn and his monastic disciples at the Monastery of Saint Macarius (Dayr Abū Maqār) in the Wadi al-Natrun, the Incarnation itself also marks the mystical birth of Christ's body, the church. Thus, in his treatise on *Pentecost* (*al-ʿAnṣarah*),

³ Matthew IV.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid. 5.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ At the end of his refutation, Pope Matthew IV also self-deprecatingly refers to himself as 'the poor one' (*al-miskīn*).

¹⁰ Mattā al-Miskīn, 'One Christ and One Catholic Church', 220.

Mattā al-Miskīn writes, ‘Christ was born in Bethlehem so that the church might be born on high.’¹¹ In defending and developing their master’s theology, his monastic disciples later would assert that ‘the essence of the church was established for the first time when the *Logos* came to dwell (*ḥalla*) in the womb of the Virgin and started to take for himself a body from her.’¹² In this vein, they represented the church as a visible extension of ‘the ineffable hypostatic union’ that took place in the Incarnation.¹³

Both Mattā al-Miskīn and his followers have grounded this reading of the nativity in the theological writings of Athanasius and Cyril of Alexandria. Indeed, their emphasis on corporate participation in the divine body of Christ has been inspired by the monks’ rediscovery of the Greek patristic notion of ‘deification’ (*al-ta’līh* or *al-ta’alluh*) and by readings of 2 Peter 1: 4 (‘partakers of the divine nature’) and other key biblical texts.¹⁴ In this context, Mattā al-Miskīn explicitly cites Athanasius’ famous formula to describe the change of nature wrought in humanity by the Incarnation: “‘The Word became human that we might become gods in Him” (that is, partakers of the divine nature).’¹⁵ Elsewhere, the monks at Dayr Abū Maqār invoke Cyril of Alexandria and his interpretation of the Gospel of John to underscore how human union with God is modelled after the Incarnation: ‘Saint Cyril often relies on the saying of John the Evangelist, “The Word became flesh (lit. a body, *jasadan*) and dwelt in us (*ḥalla finā*)” (John 1: 14), in order to establish a link between the Incarnation of the Word and the inhabitation of the Word in each one of us.’¹⁶ For these modern-day monastic interpreters of Cyril, this link is a causal one: the ‘union of divinity and humanity in Christ’ effectively serves as ‘the foundation for our union with God.’¹⁷ Thus, the authors cite several passages from Cyril’s *Commentary on John* as support for their conclusion that it was

¹¹ Id., *Pentecost (al-ʿAnṣarah)*, 25. This same text also appears in *The Holy Spirit, the Life-Giving Lord (al-Rūḥ al-quḍus al-rabb al-muḥyī)*, 156; see also ‘The Birth of Christ and the Birth of the Church (Mīlād al-masīḥ wa-l-mīlād al-kanīṣah)’, 45.

¹² Anonymous monk(s) from Dayr Abū Maqār, ‘The Divine Incarnation in the Theology of Saint Cyril the Great (*al-Tajassud al-ilāhī fī lāhūt al-Qadīs Kīrillus al-Kabīr*)’, 42.

¹³ Ibid. 41. Mattā al-Miskīn (‘One Christ and One Catholic Church’, 216) himself views the catholicity (or ‘wholeness’) of the church as authorized and empowered by the Incarnation: ‘The Church is the new Whole. It is from the nature of Christ—out of which has been formed the Church—that this *wholeness* is derived.’ This ‘wholeness’ embodied by the church is analogous to the concept of Christ’s indivisible, unconfused, and unchangeable nature, and is the context for human participation in the divine (Mattā al-Miskīn, ‘One Christ and One Catholic Church’, 217).

¹⁴ On Mattā al-Miskīn’s understanding of divinization and union with God, see Fayek Mattā Ishak, *Overall Perspectives on the Works of Fr. Matthew the Poor*, 47–9.

¹⁵ Mattā al-Miskīn, ‘Resurrection and Redemption in the Orthodox Concept’, 148.

¹⁶ Anonymous monk(s) from Dayr Abū Maqār, ‘The Divine Incarnation’, 30.

¹⁷ Ibid. 33. The authors emphasize this causal connection by paraphrasing John 1: 14 as follows: ‘The Word became flesh (lit. a body, *jasadan*) so that he might dwell in us’ (my italics).

through ‘the divine body’ of Christ that ‘we have become participants in the divine nature and have become united with God’.¹⁸ This christological re-interpretation of the Alexandrian fathers by the monks of Dayr Abu Maqār has continued into the twenty-first century in such publications as *The Orthodox Patristic Principles in the Writings of Father Mattā al-Miskīn* (2003), where the Word’s salvific ‘deification’ (*ta’līh*) of humankind and the church is likened to the ‘deification’ (*ta’alluh*) of Christ’s own human nature in the Incarnation.¹⁹

Where might the traces of such ‘deification’ be seen in the life of the church? For Mattā al-Miskīn, the process of ‘deification’ is epitomized and embodied by monastic practice and the sacramental liturgy. As in the case of earlier Coptic writers, he uses the story of the transfiguration (Matt. 17: 1–13) as a guiding metaphor for this divine transaction, a transaction that is understood to occur on both a somatic and cosmic level. Having recalled the way that Christ’s body shone like the sun before Peter, John, and James on the mount, he writes, ‘Since then, humankind, even the whole creation, has been groaning in travail together and until now has been waiting for the adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. The whole creation, and not only our bodies, is invited to this transfiguration.’²⁰ The fulfilment of this ascetic call to participate in Christ’s incarnate transfiguration is first witnessed in the assumption of the Virgin Mary when she enters ‘a state of transfiguration in which the body was carried by the hand of angelic powers in preparation for a resurrection fulfilled or to be fulfilled there’.²¹ However, the image of the transfiguration has an equally compelling explanatory power for the life of Christian monks. In this context, Mattā presents a litany of examples of early Egyptian desert fathers whose bodies manifested the glory of Christ’s body in the transfiguration: St Macarius the Great, whose body was ‘shining in the darkness inside his cell’, St Sesoës, whose face radiated ‘with a light that gradually increased until he gave up the spirit’, Abba Pambo, whose face was difficult to gaze upon ‘because of the glory that shone from him’, St Arsenius, whose disciples found his whole body ‘alight like fire’, and St Joseph the Great, whose fingers ‘looked like ten flames of fire’ when he was praying.²² Each of these examples represents ‘a true extension (*imtidād*) of the transfiguration of Christ’ which demonstrates how ‘the transfigured Lord is present in His

¹⁸ Anonymous monk(s) from Dayr Abū Maqār, 35. The texts cited from Cyril include passages from his *Commentary on the Gospel of John* (=Jo.): see PG 73.869C (on John 8: 37) and PG 74.557–60 (on John 17: 20–1).

¹⁹ Id., *The Orthodox Patristic Principles in the Writings of Father Mattā al-Miskīn. Book Two: The Church as the Bride of Christ, the Human Nature United with the Divine Nature* (*al-Uṣūl al-urthūduksīyah al-abā’īyah li kitābāt al-Abi Mattā al-Miskīn. al-Kitāb al-thānī: al-Kanīsa ‘arūs al-masīh ṭabī’ah ‘insānīyah muttaḥidah bi ṭabī’ah ilāhiyah*) (1998), 12–14, 59–65.

²⁰ Mattā al-Miskīn, ‘The Assumption of the Body of the Virgin Mary’, 202.

²¹ Ibid. 201.

²² Ibid. 202.

saints' and infuses their bodies with a sanctifying (i.e. deifying) power that anticipates the final resurrection.²³ Along the same lines, Mattā utilizes the story of Christ's ascension (Luke 24: 50–3; Acts 1: 6–11) as another biblical analogy to describe how monks' bodies acquire attributes of their future resurrected state in this life:

To us monks, the ascension, which represents the height of victory over the world, is our own feast . . . Every monk who effected a genuine exodus from the world in spirit and truth . . . has achieved the power of ascension given to us by God in Christ . . . in preparation for the entire consummation to come. While every person in Christ hopes for the life to come according to the creed, the monk actually lives the world to come because he has died to this mortal world. Ascension is not merely our feast as monks, but it is our daily occupation and the only life left to us.²⁴

Thus, to honour such 'holy and luminous bodies'—to venerate the saints whose bodies have exhibited traces of the divine—is to engage in 'an eschatological act' that extends the transfiguration (and ascension) of the incarnate Word across the centuries into the present.²⁵

Even as Egyptian monks stand as the vanguard and model for the enactment of the divine life, Mattā al-Miskīn still recognizes how such 'incarnational participation' is made available to laypersons through the ritual practices of worship.²⁶ Here finally, this late twentieth century mystical theologian reminds his readers of the multi-sensory ways that such participation is communicated and enacted in liturgical settings. In the thick, rising clouds of aromatic incense and the recitation of the priest's words, Mattā discerns a visual, olfactory, and aural performance of our reunion with Christ through the Incarnation. Thus, in his sermon, 'His Name Will Be Called Emmanuel', he writes,

Through his Incarnation and his birth in our world and from our flesh and blood, Christ secured an eternal covenant that we might live with God (or rather, that God might live with us) . . . because he is the one who came to us, united with us through his Spirit in the person of Jesus Christ . . . and underwent an eternal transformation, that we might go to him with our bodies of dust. This is the meaning of the Incarnation and the power of the birth of Christ Emmanuel—that is, 'God with us' . . . This great hope, O beloved ones, is for us to return to God (or rather, for God to

²³ Ibid. 202–3.

²⁴ Id., 'The Ascension of Christ', 164–5.

²⁵ Id., 'The Assumption of the Body of the Virgin Mary', 202. Elsewhere, the author describes the 'transfiguration of history' that takes place in encounter with the Gospels: see 'The Christ of History: A Living Christ', 59–60.

²⁶ In his tractate, 'One Christ and One Catholic Church', Mattā al-Miskīn writes that 'the Church has the divine capacity attained through Christ to make every single person one with God' (217).

return to us) . . . The church gives expression to this return every day in its liturgical theology, during the act of fumigation in the raising up of incense in the church, whenever the priest faces toward the West in the second *Khurus* . . . and says, 'He has opened the door to paradise and Adam has returned to preside there once again.'²⁷

Here, Mattā presents the liturgy as the ritualized fulfilment of 'God with us' and as a recapitulation and reversal of the creation story, in which the participants are drawn upwards, along with the incense, to the door of paradise.

Central to the performance of this ritualized (re)union with God is the celebration of the sacraments, and here Mattā al-Miskīn places himself in continuity with his late antique Alexandrian Greek forebears in his emphasis on the dual themes of incarnation and deification. In baptism, he says, 'we return to the birth of Christ in Bethlehem', and in doing so we see him in the flesh as one of us and experience a rebirth through which we 'take from Christ the Son of God his attributes and possibilities and capabilities and spiritual gifts that are neither visible nor human (in nature)'.²⁸ Mattā crucially interprets this transaction of (divine) attributes in baptism through the lens of Coptic hymnody and readings from the church fathers. First he quotes from one of the *Theotokia*, a hymn to the Virgin Mary sung in the Friday mass, which intones, 'He took on what belonged to us and gave us what belonged to him, so that we praise, glorify, and raise him up on high.'²⁹ Then he cites a variation on the aforementioned Athanasian formula, 'He became the Son of Man so that we might become sons of God in him, and he became human so that we might become deified in him.'³⁰ Ultimately, the bodily economy of this 'deification' is made explicit in Mattā al-Miskīn's discussion of the eucharist. In the act of eating the body and blood of Christ, we receive and ingest 'the awesome live coal of divinity', we are united with Christ's flesh 'in the full light of divinity', and we experience 'the blood of Christ permeating through us, transmitting to us the Spirit of divinity and pouring it into our being'.³¹

²⁷ Mattā al-Miskīn, 'His Name Will Be Called Emmanuel, Which Means 'God with Us' (*Wa yud'a ismuhu imānū'il illadhī tafīruhu Allah ma'nā*)', 16.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.* Elsewhere in the same work, Mattā al-Miskīn further highlights the role of baptism as an incarnational rite that grants us divine sonship: 'Again I say, through the Incarnation of the Son of God and through his birth as a human being, as man and as God, humankind entered in a decisive and awesome way, through an ineffable mystery, into an inseparable and immortal sonship to God. As for baptism and the anointment of the Holy Spirit, they are the mysteries that grant this sonship to God. That is, they grant to every individual person existing in his essence, whether child or adult man, this great and important gift, which came to belong to humankind generally—namely, the sonship to God that came to be all of ours in Christ through his Incarnation' (13).

³¹ *Id.*, 'The Ascension of Christ', 162.

Mattā al-Miskīn's evocative reappropriation of the patristic doctrine of *theōpoēsis* has not been without controversy in the contemporary Egyptian church. In a series of pamphlets written against Mattā al-Miskīn and his followers, the pope of the Coptic Orthodox communion, Shenouda III, has questioned the notion that the church fathers proclaimed the doctrine of 'deification', and has unequivocally rejected the possibility that human beings can be endowed with divine properties.³² Part of the reason for this disagreement is that Shenouda does not allow for a functional distinction between divine attributes and divine essence, categories fundamental to both the Alexandrian Greek fathers and medieval Copto-Arabic philosophical theologians such as the Awlād al-^ʿAssāl. Thus, he assumes that for human beings to experience 'deification' (*al-ta'lih*) would mean that they become unlimited, omnipresent, omniscient, uncreated, immortal, and fully preserved from error (*ma^ʿṣūm*).³³

Shenouda's objection to this doctrine is also motivated by particular cultural and interreligious sensitivities—namely, his suspicion that Mattā al-Miskīn's theology betrays unwanted traces of Western European (esp. French Catholic) influence,³⁴ and his concern that the proclamation of human 'deification' would elicit sharp and unyielding criticism from the Muslim world. This latter concern comes to expression in an extraordinary and unprecedented fashion when the patriarch adopts the language of Muslim anti-Christian diatribe and directs that polemical rhetoric against the monks of Dayr Abu Maqār. First, he criticizes Mattā al-Miskīn and his followers for being guilty of *al-taḥrīf*, the 'corruption' of Scripture, because of a slight

³² Pope Shenouda III, *The Deification of Humankind, Part One (Ta'lih al-insān, al-juz' al-awwal)* (2004), 9; and *The Body of Christ and the Mystical Body (Jasad al-masīh wa-l-jasad al-sirrī)* (2004), 26. Shenouda writes, 'It is possible for us to say that Christ gave us what was proper to him from his human attributes (*min sifātihi al-nāsūtiyah*), from the things to which it is possible for us to acquire. But the expression, "everything that was proper to Christ," is what is not possible for us to acquire at all.' These two pamphlets, as well as pt. 2 of Shenouda's treatise on *The Deification of Humankind*, have been reprinted (with some revisions): see *New Heresies (Bida' ḥadīthah)* (Cairo: al-Kuliyyah al-iklirikīyah bī-l-^ʿAbbāsiyah, 2006; repr. 2007), 99–116 (*The Body of Christ*), 141–59 (*Deification*, pt. 1), 160–74 (*Deification*, pt. 2). These works originally were published as vols. 3 and 5a–b of his series *On Comparative Theology (Fī al-lāhūt al-muqārīn)*. In pt. 2 of his work on *The Deification of Humankind*, Shenouda specifically directs his polemic against the christological views espoused by the exiled Coptic theologian George Babawī, as well as the monks of Dayr Abū Maqār.

³³ Pope Shenouda III, *Deification, Part One*, 8. In part two of this treatise on *Deification*, Shenouda makes a sharp distinction between our sonship, which comes through adoption and faith, and Christ's sonship, which comes from the essence (*jawhar*) and nature (*tabī'ah*) of the Father (*New Heresies*, 163); however, he does not raise the philosophical issue of how the divine essence might relate to divine attributes.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 14. Later in the same treatise, Shenouda provocatively suggests that Mattā al-Miskīn's monastic disciples share in both Catholic and Protestant erroneous views on the status of the Virgin Mary (28–9).

verbal divergence in their Arabic translation of 2 Peter 1: 4.³⁵ Second, and even more pointedly, he accuses them of committing *al-shirk bī-llāh* ('the act of associating something with God'). The charge of *al-shirk* represents a standard Muslim criticism directed against proponents of Christian Trinitarian doctrine; in this case, however, Shenouda employs this language against a fellow Christian as an expression of opposition to the doctrine of deification.³⁶ In adopting such incendiary language, Shenouda is drawing on a deep historical reservoir of apologetic strategies in order to circumscribe and authorize a particular kind of minoritarian social and religious identity. In this case, his rhetoric is designed to highlight crucial values that the Christian community holds in common with the dominant culture (most notably, in the Islamic context, reverence for holy writ and belief in the oneness of God), while distancing himself from—and thereby seeking to marginalize—his monastic opponents, whose views represent for him potential sources of offence in the church's relation to the wider society.³⁷

In this contemporary christological debate, one gets a vivid glimpse of how notions of incarnation and divine participation continue to be contested and renegotiated among Copts in the twenty-first century. In the writings of Mattā al-Miskīn and Pope Shenouda III, the Egyptian faithful are left with starkly contrasting visions of the Incarnation and its implications for the sanctification of human bodies and souls. While it is unclear how this debate will resolve itself in future generations, its impact on the theology and common life of the church in Egypt will undoubtedly be profound. At stake is nothing less than the cultural legacy of biblical and patristic interpretation, the shape of intra- and interreligious apologetic encounter, and the ritualized ways that Coptic Christians continue to put their Christology into practice.

³⁵ Ibid. 29. While the monks of Dayr Abū Maqār translate the phrase 'partakers in the divine nature' (*shurakā' fī al-ṭabī'ah al-ilāhīyah*), Shenouda adheres to the traditional Arabic rendering, 'partakers of the divine nature' (*shurakā' al-ṭabī'ah al-ilāhīyah*), which follows more closely the genitive construction found in the Greek text of the New Testament (*θείας κοινωνοὶ φύσεως*). Shenouda reads this genitive construction as equivalent to 'partakers with the divine nature' (*shurakā' ma'a al-ṭabī'ah al-ilāhīyah*).

³⁶ Ibid. 31.

³⁷ Pope Shenouda III (Ibid. 30) effectively demonizes the proponents of 'deification' by likening their doctrine to the words of the Satan in Isaiah 14: 14: 'I will become like the Most High.'

APPENDIX A

Translations of Coptic Texts

1. Shenoute of Atripe, *I Am Amazed (Against the Origenists)* (c.445 CE), ed. T. Orlandi, in *Shenute: Contra Origenistas* (Rome: CIM, 1985). trans. S. Davis

A. *On the Incarnation and the Eucharist (345–58, 367–76: Orlandi, 28–36)*

(345) Now there are others who blaspheme, saying that Mary did not conceive Christ and that if she had conceived, then her womb would have distended and retracted.

(346) Let them hear this from us, that if she did not conceive him, then the prophet spoke in vain, ‘Behold the virgin will be able to give birth to a son and his name will be called Emmanuel.’¹ Moreover, ‘The birth of Jesus Christ happened in this way,’² and ‘Behold, you will conceive and give birth to a son, whose name will be called Jesus.’³

(347) If she did not conceive him, then he was not born. If he was not born, then he did not become a human being. If he did not become a human being, then he was not crucified. And if he was not crucified, then he did not rise on the third day, nor ascend to his holy dwelling places where he was at first before the Father sent him to be born of a woman, the holy Virgin Mary.

(348) But now some say that the bread and the cup are not the body and blood of Christ, but are merely a type. I have grown weary saying this. Woe is me! I have become disturbed on account of this ungodliness!

(349) If the Lord himself says, ‘Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood will live forever,’⁴ and moreover, ‘This is my body and this is my blood,’⁵ how great will be the woe to these people when they say that it is not his body and his blood, and how great will be the woe to those who accept their words!

(350) Who is the one who will despise the bread and the cup? Will Jesus not despise that one even more? For that person has despised the Holy Spirit, whom God sends upon them (the bread and the cup) so that they may become the body and blood of Christ.

(351) Who will say, ‘It is not so,’ and not despise the holy place, the altar of those who fall down and prostrate themselves to them? Thus have I known this: for it is not of concern to them, just as if they were merely eating bread and drinking wine.

(352) Truly, those who say that it is not his body and his blood—especially those from among us, not only the pagans—are more wicked than dogs and swine. Do we say that what we partake of is bread? Is it not a mystery according to the Scriptures?

(353) The one who does not believe in what we say is not only more wicked than the beasts, but he is also more wicked than the unclean demons. If you do not accept

¹ Isaiah 7: 14.

² Matthew 1: 18.

³ Luke 1: 31.

⁴ John 6: 55.

⁵ Matthew 26: 28.

the apostle when he speaks and you reject the Gospel in this matter, who is the one who will receive you? Who is the one who will not reject you?

(354) Especially, if that one is a presbyter or a cleric according to the order of the priesthood and does not believe that God has the power to do anything greater than this, let him shut his mouth while praying and petitioning the Exalted One when he says, ‘This is my body which will be given for you for the forgiveness of your sins,’ and also, ‘This is my blood which will be poured out for many for the forgiveness of their sins.’

(355) Now do (mere) bread and wine purify a person from sins, or heal him of diseases, and do they become for him a living blessing? Why have you not shut your mouth, in accordance with what I said earlier, when you speak to the Lord, saying, ‘The bread of the blessing, the bread of purification and immortality and eternal life’, and ‘the cup of immortality, the cup of the new covenant’, and ‘this is the body and the blood of your only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ our Lord’?

(356) Now some others despise the body, saying that this flesh is of swine and that it will be thrown out. They say this because they do not believe that it will arise.

(357) Now if it is of swine, who has made it like this? Who has caused it to become worse than a breeding sow?⁶ Is it not you yourself? But as for the ones who say that when the soul commits a sin it has been given to the body, they make the body like this animal. But it is those faithless ones alone who rightly and justly despise their own flesh.

(358) But as for us, we should never think this, nor despise the body or say that it will not arise. Now, in truth, ‘The man of God truly reproached the ignorance of those who despise the body, saying, “The shadow of Peter healed multitudes.”’⁷

[paras. 359–66 omitted]

(367) Is this not another new impiety⁸ that has appeared among the Greeks? For the work of those people always slanders the Scriptures. A new lawlessness has been revealed among us—namely, the idea that Mary did not conceive the Saviour, and once again, that neither his body nor his blood are what we receive in it (i.e. the eucharist).

(368) You see how numerous among us are those who do not have God, just as is the case for the godless (i.e. the pagans). As for the blasphemies that the godless utter against Christ, how do they exceed what is uttered by those who say, ‘We know him’? Truly wickedness has shut the eyes of these people.

(369) If this is your faith, to whom do you pray? Who is the one who will attend to us? Indeed, do you have a God at all? If you do not accept the Scripture in this matter, why are you speaking? How do you belong to Jesus when you despise his holy body and his honoured blood?

⁶ Based on my examination of a photofacsimile of Par. 130⁴, fo. 122^v (= HB 32, col. 2), I read here ΤΡΕC (caused it) rather than Orlandi’s ΤΡ(Ε)Κ (caused you). In this same passage, Orlandi uses a Latin derivative, *СКРΩΦΑ* (i.e. *scrofa*; a breeding sow).

⁷ Here, Shenoute quotes directly from the writings of the fourth-century heresiologist Epiphanius of Salamis (*Pan.* 77. 17. 8), a passage in which the Greek author paraphrases Acts 5: 15–16. I want to thank Janet Timbie for drawing my attention to this layering of patristic and biblical quotations.

⁸ The corrected text reads *αCΕΒΗC* (impiety) for *ΕΥCΕΒΗC* (piety) (Janet Timbie, *per litt.*, 3 January 2007).

(370) Why do you partake of the holy mystery? Have you not found bread to eat and wine to drink just as we wrote elsewhere, ‘O hypocritical people and the true frauds, the false Christians, whose name is priest and monk, leader and father.’

(371) O woe to those who say these things! Why will you be an enemy towards God? What is the profit which you will have in this? I do not see any, except that you will be displayed before the simple-minded as one who teaches well.

(372) What will this false philosophy and this vain deceit do for you when you will give account to Jesus concerning the souls that you have dragged into your error through the secret and demonic wisdom of the world?⁹

(373) Cursed is everyone who utters this impiety, along with everyone who believes them when they despise the holy mystery, the hope and the life of all. And blessed are those who partake of it with a true heart.

(374) Cursed also are those who partake of it faithlessly, and even more the one who confesses it with his mouth and gives to others, saying, ‘The body of Christ, the blood of Christ’, while denying that it is truly his body and his blood.

(375) Those who believe this among us are worse than those who do not know God, even if no pious person is truly caused to stumble by them, because they know that they are manifestly godless people.

(376) But indeed, many are those who will be caused to stumble by these kinds of people, because they also have confidence in the fact that they have knowledge. In fact, people of that sort who hold the status of ‘father’ or ‘great leader’ really have the power to pollute the hearts of many people in many monasteries of Christ.

B. On the Nature of Christ: Against Nestorius (464–83: Orlandi, 50–4)

(464) But the one whom the cosmic ruler of darkness has bound in his thoughts, Nestorius, that fox who did not stand firm at all against¹⁰ the synod that took place in Ephesus under the blessed and God-loving bishops, did not prevail over them when he said that Christ was a man who had God dwelling in him, and that after he was born of Mary, the Word entered him.

(465) For thus he said that if you examine all the ancient Scriptures along with the new, you will not find that the crucified one is called God. And moreover, that Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Touch me and you will see that a spirit has no flesh and bone as you see that I have.’¹¹ Thus, Nestorius claimed, if Jesus were God, he would have said, ‘Touch me and see that I am a spirit, and that I am God.’

(466) But why did he not understand this? For (Jesus) did not merely say, ‘Look at the hands and the feet of a man,’ but rather, ‘My feet and my hands,’¹² not separating the body from his divinity.

(467) Just as the one who touched him confessed, saying, ‘My Lord and my God,’¹³ in accordance with what was said in another place, ‘the one who existed from the beginning is the one we have heard, the one we have seen with our eyes and perceived, and whom our hands have touched.’¹⁴

⁹ Cf. James 3: 15.

¹⁰ The corrected reading has ΟΥΒΕ instead of ΟΥΤΕ.

¹¹ Luke 24: 39b.

¹² Luke 24: 39a.

¹³ John 20: 28.

¹⁴ 1 John 1: 1.

(468) You see that the Word who exists from the beginning is the one whom they touched [.....] Again, it was said concerning him, ‘They will see the one who was pierced,’¹⁵ and the divinity was not separated from the body at all.

(469) Moreover, he said, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lema Sabachtani,’¹⁶ Nestorius said that it was the flesh that was crying out to the divinity, ‘Why have you abandoned me?’ and that the divinity ascended on high and left the flesh on the cross.¹⁷

(470) Indeed, he said in his writings, ‘The one who cries out, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me,’ him I worship along with his divinity because he was joined with it.’¹⁸

(471) But the words of the apostle put to shame his foolishness, ‘The Lord of glory is the one who was crucified,’¹⁹ and ‘You have killed the author of life.’²⁰ He did not say, ‘He is a man joined with a god.’ But, once more, he said, ‘Although he was in the form of God, he became obedient unto death.’²¹

(472) This was not because the nature of the divinity died. But rather, he died in the flesh, as it is written, ‘Christ suffered in the flesh.’²² For indeed, his divinity did not separate from the body before this while he was on the cross. This is just as in an example from among us:²³

(473) If a person is killed, do they say that a body has been killed? Do they not say, ‘We have killed the whole person,’ and yet the soul does not die? Rather, it is only the body that dies.

(474) This is the way it is with the Lord. He died in the flesh, while remaining immortal in his divinity.²⁴ For, thus, he said, he ‘participated in flesh and blood’ (Heb. 2: 14). As we said many times, ‘The Word became flesh.’²⁵ Where did he become flesh, apart from in the Virgin? Did he not become human in her, just as he willed in the power of his divinity? Has it not been said, ‘She was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit’?²⁶ And ‘It is a holy spirit that is coming down upon you’?²⁷

(475) Because of this, therefore, since the Son is not different from the Father, the Father is a spirit, and the Son also is a spirit. He is God from God, and he is Son from the Father who begot him.²⁸

¹⁵ John 19: 37. ¹⁶ Matthew 27: 46.

¹⁷ ⲁⲦⲕⲁⲧⲈⲠⲤ ⲉⲓⲡⲓⲱⲉ, following Timbie’s correction of Orlandi’s reading of ⲙⲓⲧⲁⲧⲈⲙⲉⲛⲛⲱⲉ.

¹⁸ ⲛⲙⲙⲁⲥ, following Timbie’s correction of Orlandi’s reading of ⲛⲙⲙⲁⲥ.

¹⁹ 1 Corinthians 2: 8.

²⁰ Acts 3: 15.

²¹ Philippians 2: 8.

²² 1 Peter 4: 1.

²³ Following Timbie’s corrected reading of the text, where she substitutes (ⲉⲃⲟⲗ) ⲛⲉⲛⲧⲛ (‘from us’) for (ⲉⲃⲟⲗ) ⲛⲉⲛⲧⲏⲧⲏ (‘from him’).

²⁴ ⲉⲛⲧⲉⲕⲙⲛⲧⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ, following Timbie’s correction of Orlandi’s reading of ‘in his entire soul’, ⲉⲛⲧⲉⲩⲩⲭⲏ ⲧ(ⲏⲤⲈ).

²⁵ John 1: 14.

²⁶ Matthew 1: 18.

²⁷ Luke 1: 35. My trans. here is based on Timbie’s corrected readings of Orlandi’s edn.

²⁸ Once again, I follow the corrected reading provided by Timbie.

(476) When he was born of the Virgin according to the flesh, he came to be tested in everything like we are, except for sin. He hungered, thirsted, wept, and grieved over the hardness of heart of the unbelievers.

(477) So wondrous was the great love of our Lord for us that he saved his servants in the midst of the fire—Ananias, Mizael, and Azarias—along with others as well.²⁹ And for our sake he gave himself over into the hands of those who nailed his hands and feet.

(478) The person who dies lays his body upon the place of rest for those who will prepare him for burial, and his soul goes to God. But the Lord Jesus himself tasted death for our sake. He left his body on the cross and went to those who were in Hades,³⁰ so that he might show grace to those who . . . the works of his hands in that place.

(479) And similarly, he turned and raised up his body on the third day, and he lifted it up to the heavens along with him. He ascended in it; and in it he is coming once again to judge the living and the dead, according to what he said, ‘When the Son of Man comes in his glory,’³¹ along with the events that follow.

(480) In addition, Nestorius said, ‘On account of this, it is not appropriate to say that the Virgin gave birth to God,’ and ‘I will not say that the one who spent three months in the womb, took to the breast, and advanced little by little was God.’ And he said, ‘It is written, “Take the child and flee to Egypt.”³² It did not say, “Take God.”’

(481) Why then is it written that the Lord God ‘appeared to us’?³³ At what time did he appear to human beings apart from when he was born of the Virgin? As it is written, ‘Behold, the Virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and his name will be called Emmanuel, which can be translated, “God with us”³⁴

(482) Therefore, the one whom the Virgin bore is God. And therefore, it is necessary to confess, ‘Mary the Mother of God,’³⁵ just as the Fathers said.

(483) Thus, many are the blasphemies of that one, for I have restrained myself and have loathed to say the words of this unclean man who was not (merely) satisfied to proclaim wickedness from his . . .

C. *On Prayer to Jesus: Defending Nicene Piety (800–25: Orlandi, 58–64)*

(800) Glory be to you and your blessed Son from the highest heavens and everything in them.

(801) Blessed are you, O God. Glory to you and your blessed Son from the inhabited world that belongs to you and everything in it. Blessed are you, O God. Glory to you from all your works, to you and your blessed Son, because your works are his, and his works are yours.

(802) Blessed are you, O God, you and your blessed Son. Your name and his name are one in the mouth of the one who fights against those who speak this new impiety. This is his wealth and his hope. When he goes in, (he says) ‘God,’ and when he comes

²⁹ Daniel 3: 19–30.

³⁰ Cf. 1 Peter 3: 19.

³¹ Matthew 25: 31; cf. Mark 8: 38 and Luke 9: 26.

³² Matthew 2: 13.

³³ 1 John 1: 2.

³⁴ Matthew 1: 23.

³⁵ Lit. the woman who gave birth to God (ΤΕΝΤΑΧΠΕ ΠΝΟΥΤΕ). Shenoute uses the phrase ΤΕΝΤΑΧΠΕ ΠΝΟΥΤΕ as an equivalent to the Greek, θετόκος.

out, (he says) ‘Jesus.’ When he lies down to sleep, ‘God’, and when he gets up, ‘Jesus.’ When he blesses, ‘God’, and when he prays, ‘Jesus.’

(803) In order that we not continue in these (examples), it is manifest that when we say, ‘Jesus’, we speak of the consubstantial Trinity (ΤΤΡΙΑC ΝΖΟΜΟΟΥCΙΟC). But the heretics have said, ‘Show us where this word *homoousios* (ΖΟΜΟΟΥCΙΟC, ‘consubstantial’) is written in the Scriptures.’

(804) But you, tell me from what Scriptures you have understood that the Son is different from the Father in his essence, as you say concerning him that the one who is different in essence is *heterousios* (ΖΕΤΕΡΟΥCΙΟC).

(805) But you do not have any words to say. On account of this, renounce your abominable and lying words, and support the truth. For is the crowning achievement of the Scriptures not the Gospel? Listen to the Lord when he says, ‘I and the Father, we are one.’³⁶

(806) For when he says, ‘I and the Father’, he reveals the hypostases. But when he says, ‘We are one,’ he indicates the oneness of his nature, because it is a single essence which is consubstantial (ΖΟΜΟΟΥCΙΟΝ).³⁷

(807) So that even when he says, ‘My Father is greater than me,’³⁸ let them not think impious thoughts. For they proclaim this when they argue that he is greater always in the honour of (his) glory and that he is different from him in his nature.

(808) Let them understand that the Father and Son have a single glory, a single honour, and a single nature, in accordance with how we have demonstrated this from the Scriptures.

(809) But they have said, ‘How did the Father beget (αΠΟ) the Son?’ Let those who meddle hear that it was possible for the wise and for all the church of Christ to know about his birth (ΠΕΦΑΠΟ) according to the flesh. It was described beforehand by the angels and announced by the Gospels and the apostles. And it was also signalled by the great patriarchs.

(810) But regarding his begetting (ΠΕΦΑΠΟ) from the Father, no angel, nor prophet, nor apostle, nor anyone at all in the whole of creation knows (how) to describe it, except for him alone and his father. It is impious for a person to ask concerning it, especially the heretics.

(811) For it is sufficient to cause the wise and the faithful to know truly that the Son existed with the Father and the Holy Spirit before all of creation, even the archangels, and all the angels, powers, rulers, authorities, seraphim and cherubim, every spirit, and all the rest—heaven and earth, and (all) the things in them.

(812) How could anything have existed before him, when he is the head of all creation and when ‘everything was created through him, and without him nothing was created’?³⁹ Now therefore, the one who seeks, or the one who thinks in his

³⁶ John 10: 30.

³⁷ In this paragraph, Shenoute uses a series of technical theological terms borrowed from the Greek: ΝΖΥΠΟCΤΑCΙC (hypostases), ΦΥCΙC (nature), ΟΥCΙΑ (essence), and ΖΟΜΟΟΥCΙΟΝ (consubstantial).

³⁸ John 14: 28.

³⁹ John 1: 3.

arrogance, ‘I will enquire about Son’s begetting (ⲁⲡⲐⲟ) from the Father,’ that single thunderbolt will come upon him and upon the one who dares to say, ‘I will come to be like the Exalted One.’⁴⁰

(813) On another occasion, I have said, ‘What do you have to do with what neither an angel, nor a prophet, nor an apostle has proclaimed? What does it profit you to seek after what becomes for you another (form of) lawlessness upon your head?’

(814) If it is possible for you to know how the Father begot the Son, then is it also possible for you to know what existed before heaven and earth were created, or where God was, or how he dwelt, and of what nature God is?

(815) For with regard to these words of this type, the true man of God, Apa Athanasius the archbishop of Alexandria blamed those who meddle, saying concerning them, ‘Why do you dare to look into the things that even the angels do not know? For the creatures will not be able to describe the generation (ⲁⲡⲐⲟ) of the Creator.’ And he also said, ‘It is sufficient for you that you know that the Father begot the Son before the aeons, but to say how, no one knows.’

(816) For it is written, ‘Who will be able to proclaim his generation (ⲧⲉⲫⲣⲉⲛⲉⲗ)?’⁴¹ No one knows the Father, apart from the Son. And no one knows the Son except the Father who begot him.

(817) Now he gives witness to the one who existed beforehand. He says that if you give yourself to those words and to Satan’s net, you will be separated from God, just like all the heresies now, along with everyone whom the church anathematizes.

(818) Just as I said earlier, when we name the Son, we call upon the Holy Trinity. Listen to the Lord when he commands his disciples, ‘Go and teach all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.’⁴²

(819) And the apostle also said, ‘You were baptized into Christ,’⁴³ and again in another place, ‘They were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.’⁴⁴ Thus it is revealed that when we name Jesus we name the Holy Trinity, but only the Father as Father, the Son as Son, and the Holy Spirit as Holy Spirit.

(820) Therefore let us not now seek after more than this. ‘For who is the one who will be able to trace his paths?’ as it is written.⁴⁵ Now therefore, do not pay attention to the words of those false teachers. For concerning them it has been written, ‘Many are they who do not subject themselves—those who utter vain speech and those who destroy (people’s) hearts.’⁴⁶

(821) Seek after the fulfilment of these words and you will find them on your lips and on the lips of your children.⁴⁷ When you celebrate a feast and are joyful, (say) ‘Jesus.’ When you are grieving in heart and are distressed, (say) ‘Jesus.’ When your sons and daughters laugh, (say) ‘Jesus.’ The one who draws water, ‘Jesus.’ The one who runs in the face of barbarians, ‘Jesus.’ Those who see wild beasts and something frightening, ‘Jesus.’ Those who are suffering with pains and illnesses, ‘Jesus.’ Those who are taken as prisoners of war, ‘Jesus.’ It is sufficient . . . Those who have suffered

⁴⁰ In place of the verb ⲉⲓⲙⲉ (to know), I follow Timbie in reading ⲉⲓⲛⲉ (to be like, resemble).

⁴¹ Isaiah 53: 8.

⁴² Matthew 28: 19.

⁴³ Galatians 3: 27.

⁴⁴ Acts 8: 16.

⁴⁵ Cf. Job 36: 23.

⁴⁶ Titus 1: 10.

⁴⁷ Lit. in your mouth and in the mouth of your sons.

perversion of justice and violent treatment,⁴⁸ ‘Jesus’. The name of the one who is on their lips is their salvation and their life, he himself along with the Father.

(822) Am I able to mention all the things that those who love God and his Christ are saying with hope in all their affairs, and even more in their prayers?

(823) If we have one God and one Lord—Jesus—why do you not pray to him, O you faithless Jewish minds and other heretics? In this way, they resemble you and you resemble them in the same spirit of deception.

(824) Listen to the holy apostle John, who says, ‘This one is the true God and the life eternal.’⁴⁹ Moreover, the holy apostle Thomas said, ‘My Lord and my God.’⁵⁰

(825) If he is also your Lord and your God, why do you not pray to him? Who will examine the heart of even those types of people, except the Word of God, concerning whom the lawless Jews said, ‘You are a man making yourself out to be God’?⁵¹

**2. Shenoute of Atripe, *And It Happened One Day* (c.455 CE),
ed. L. T. Lefort, ‘Catéchèse christologique de Chenoute’,
Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde
80 (1955), 40–5. trans. S. Davis.**

(fo. 87^v) And it happened one day, when we were speaking about the divinity of the Saviour and saying that he became human and dwelt with human beings while still being God and the Son of God, that some in the crowd responded congenially and without evil intent, being astonished about the things they had heard. They said, ‘Did he exist then before he was born of the holy Virgin Mary?’ I responded to them knowledgeably, ‘This is ridiculous talk.’ The Jews themselves, when they heard the Saviour saying, ‘Abraham our father rejoiced to see my day,’⁵² those ignorant ones did not tolerate this, but they responded shamelessly, saying, ‘You are not yet fifty years old.’⁵³ And he responded to them, ‘Before Abraham was, I am.’⁵⁴

Let us give heed to his words and we will understand the thing that we seek. For, speaking to his Father as a human being, he teaches us according to an ‘economy’ about his perfect divinity, that he existed before the entire world. (fo. 82^r) He said, ‘My Father, glorify me with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.’⁵⁵ And again, ‘The world came into being through him.’⁵⁶ And again, ‘In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. Through him the world came into existence and without him nothing (that exists) came into existence.’⁵⁷ And again, ‘The one who has existed from the beginning is the one who has appeared to us, and we have seen him.’⁵⁸ And, ‘He was with the Father.’⁵⁹ And again, ‘It is from God that he came, and it is to God that he is going.’⁶⁰ And again, ‘I have come from my Father and I have come to the world.’⁶¹ And again, ‘It is by him that the aeons were created,’⁶² and ‘he existed before all things’⁶³ And again, ‘If you see the Son of Man

⁴⁸ Lit. those for whom justice has been perverted and who have been treated violently.

⁴⁹ 1 John 5: 20.

⁵⁰ John 20: 28.

⁵¹ John 10: 33.

⁵² John 8: 56.

⁵³ John 8: 57.

⁵⁴ John 8: 58.

⁵⁵ John 17: 5.

⁵⁶ John 1: 10.

⁵⁷ John 1: 1–3.

⁵⁸ John 2: 3.

⁵⁹ John 2: 2.

⁶⁰ John 13: 3; cf. 16: 27.

⁶¹ John 16: 28.

⁶² Colossians 1: 16.

⁶³ Colossians 1: 17.

going to the place where he was before . . .⁶⁴ And again, ‘the rock was following them, and the rock was Christ.’⁶⁵ Indeed, from the time when Israel was in the desert up to the time (fo. 82^v) of the Holy Mary. And again, ‘The mystery that was hidden from eternity.’⁶⁶ And again, when the fullness of time had come, ‘God sent his Son and he was from a woman.’⁶⁷ Hear it again: ‘He has sent him.’ Where did he send him? Or from whom has he come other than from his holy Father?

As for saying, ‘How did he become a human being in the womb of the holy Virgin?’ who are you, O you meddler? Tell me first how you came to be in the womb of your mother. Likewise, it is necessary for you to know the powers of God and of his Christ. Was the one who took clay from the earth and fashioned for himself a human being according to his image and according to his likeness not capable of building for himself his own temple, the holy body, just as he willed, in the womb of the woman he honoured more than all (other) women? Where does the earth find hand and foot, height and breadth, head, shining hair, eyes full of light, ears that hear, a mouth and tongue that speak, a nose that smells (fo. 83^f) bones, flesh, sinews, and all the other marvellous members (of the body)? Even more so then has it been the case for the one whom he loves, the one whom he fashioned in the womb of Mary. According to the economy she is his mother; according to his exalted divinity, she is his servant. For thus, the Jews and those who resemble them have become delirious and distressed. They have spoken like the crazy ones: ‘Was he not the son of the carpenter? Was his mother not Mary?’⁶⁸

We have spoken many words and we have written them concerning the birth of the Saviour and of his divinity, but we have said these few other things because of those who have enquired, ‘Did he exist before he was born of Mary?’ There is another testimony which is trustworthy and exceedingly great—namely that the Lord our Saviour is with his Father before the ages. Who is the one who says, and to whom does he say, ‘Let us fashion a human being according to our image and according to our likeness’?⁶⁹ Is it not the Father who is speaking with his Son, with his holy Only-begotten?’ For his part, the friend of the prophets and the brother of the apostles, whose words are true, has spoken (fo. 83^v) in his writings, telling us that it is the Father who says to the Son, ‘Let us fashion a human being according to our image and according to our likeness.’ And he did not say ‘I will fashion,’ lest he make the Son a stranger to the act of creation. Nor did he say, ‘You, create,’ lest he make himself a stranger to the act. If we understand that the Son works with his Father for the purpose of (creating) humankind, we will also know that he works with him for the purpose of (creating) the sky, the earth, the sun, the moon, the stars, the sea, the heavens of the heavens, and all the things below.

Do you want us to introduce to you another testimony from some of the humblest works of the humans arts? Listen, for when we decipher some markings which come to us written on linen items, we say, ‘This image is of which apostle? And that image belongs to which prophet? And which righteous person is this?’ And we came upon the image belonging to the Saviour and holy Mary, and there was written, ‘Mary, the

⁶⁴ John 6: 62.

⁶⁵ 1 Corinthians 10: 4.

⁶⁶ Colossians 1: 26; Ephesians 3: 9.

⁶⁷ Galatians 4: 4.

⁶⁸ Matthew 13: 55.

⁶⁹ Genesis 1: 26.

God-bearer.⁷⁰ And I asked the brothers who were with me while we were deciphering them (fo. 84^r), ‘Listen, what were the braiders, the weavers, and the embroiderers saying? They responded, ‘Mary, the God-bearer.’ But this is according to the flesh. Now, according to his divinity, it is he who has fashioned her in the womb and she is rather a young maiden just like all the others he made. But Nestorius himself—he to whom they gave the name bishop, along with the others of his ilk, he whose tongue has swollen, filling his mouth, and who died in exile—said ‘she who gave birth to a good man’,⁷¹ likening him to Moses, David, and the others.

These words (of mine) vex the blasphemer who says, ‘How are bread and wine the body and blood of the Lord?’ There are some among us who have said this, as their heart is stricken by the words of Origen. But I myself give answer to their foolishness, ‘Is the one who made earth into a human being not able to cause bread and wine to become body and blood?’ Or, when he says, ‘This is my body; this is my blood,’ for your part (fo. 84^v) who are you? Who, among those who read the Scriptures well, does not know that the human being whom God created was himself adorned with all his bodily members, but he did not experience any movement at all? However, when the Lord God Almighty breathed into his face a breath of life, he (the human being) became a living being and he moved all of himself, he spoke, he walked, he stretched his hands to (do) their work, and he blessed with his tongue the one who fashioned him. In this way also, the bread and the wine, while they lie on the holy table of the Lord and while they rest on it, are called bread and wine, but when that fearful eucharistic blessing is recited over them, and when the Lord God sends upon them his Holy Spirit from heaven, from this moment on it is no longer bread or wine, but the body and blood of the Lord. All of these things of God are matters of faith. If you have faith, then you have the fullness of the sacrament; if you do not have faith, then (fo. 85^r) you do not have hope in the sacrament and in the Lord of the sacrament.

Again, we have written many words on account of the sacrament, but it is [..... (useful?)]⁷² that we say a little bit more as well. For the beginning (of these words) is sure, and their end is a testimony first and foremost for those who do not believe. As for us, we believe that it is his body and his blood, and we will not doubt that it is the true bread that came down from heaven.⁷³ Bread, along with water, is life for human bodies, but the body and blood of the Lord are spiritual life [.....],⁷⁴ because his body is true food and his blood is true drink.⁷⁵ For he says [.....]⁷⁶ bodily. Those who believe rightly

⁷⁰ ΜΑΡΙΑ ΤΕΝΤΑϸΧΠΕΠΝΟΥΤΕ.

⁷¹ Here, Shenoute presents a pun designed to mock Nestorius’ suggestion that Mary be revered as the Mother of Christ (*Christotokos*) rather than the Mother of God (*Theotokos*). Specifically, he substitutes the word *chrēstos* (good one) for *christos* (anointed one, i.e. Messiah or Christ): thus, according to the terms of Shenoute’s polemic, Nestorius was merely proclaiming Mary as ΤΕΝΤΑϸΧΠΕΟΥΡΩΜΕ ΝΧΡΗϸΤΟϸ, i.e. *Chrēstotokos*, ‘the one who gave birth to a good man’, instead of *Christotokos*, ‘the one who gave birth to Christ’.

⁷² Lacuna: approx. 5–6 letters missing.

⁷³ John 6: 32.

⁷⁴ Lacuna: approx. 8 letters missing.

⁷⁵ Cf. John 6: 55.

⁷⁶ Lacuna: approx. 15 letters missing (with one alpha legible).

[.....]⁷⁷ the spiritual food and the [spiritual drink],⁷⁸ the body and the blood of the Lord Jesus [.....]⁷⁹ our blessing, the Lord and God, both he and his Father. Blessed are those in whose heart is the law (fo. 85^v) of God. The Lord will give them in addition another kind of knowledge, following that which belongs to the Scriptures, and agreeing with them. Truly, blessed indeed are those who follow the Scriptures. Those who follow them follow the Lord of the Scriptures. All his works are wonders upon wonders, both those which he has done since the beginning of creation and those which he will do at the end of the age.

3. Shenoute, *When the Word Says* excerpts from the (incomplete) text ed. L. Depuydt, *Catalogue of Coptic Manuscripts in the Pierpont Morgan Library* (Leuven: Peeters, 1993), 144–9. Trans. S. Davis.

A. Fragmentary Opening of the Sermon (fos. 1^ra, 1^vb–2^vb: Depuydt, 144)

(fo. 1^ra) When the Word says to the ones who belong to the saving prophecy, ‘We saw the Lord and he had neither likeness nor beauty, but rather his likeness was humbled and made sorrowful in comparison with all of humankind,’⁸⁰ let us know [...]

B. ‘If He Had Not’: The Incarnation and the Conditions of Human Salvation (fos. 1^vb–2^vb: Depuydt, 145)

... (f. 1^vb) ... If he had not been sorrowful, or if he had not groaned, this gift and this grace would not have been for all the faithful (fo. 2^ra) who had acted disobediently so that they might enter into the joy of your Lord. And if he had not suffered in the flesh, then woe to us on account of the sufferings which will happen to us, which will come upon us at the hour when we will give our spirit into his hands. If he had not been hit or if they had not thrown him a board of wood, the shame and the blame for our sins would have multiplied upon us, and they would not have been taken away forever. And if he had not given his back to whips and his cheek to punches, we would not have escaped death and destruction in the day of your judgement. If he had not been rejected, just as he said (fo. 2^rb) from his own mouth, ‘It is necessary for the Son of Man to be handed over to the Gentiles, and to be rejected, and to be despised,’ we would not have been reconciled to God. And if he had not been given vinegar when he was thirsty, or if he had not been given gall as his food, we would not have partaken of the food [...]⁸¹—indeed, it is the true bread, the bread of life who has come down from heaven. Nor would we have obtained this grace, about which he said, ‘Whoever drinks from the water that I will give to him will never thirst, but the water that I will give to him will become in [them] (fo. 2^va) a watery spring, gushing up [to] eternal life.’⁸¹ If

⁷⁷ Lacuna: approx. 12 letters missing.

⁷⁸ Cf. 1 Corinthians 10: 3–4. There is a lacuna of approximately 11 letters missing in the manuscript that I reconstruct on the basis of this biblical reference.

⁷⁹ Lacuna: approx. 16 letters missing (with one tau and one epsilon legible).

⁸⁰ Isaiah 53: 2b–3a.

⁸¹ John 4: 14.

he had not given himself for our sake, we would not have [...] the gi[ft.....], as he said, 'Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life.'⁸² If the true light had not come into the world,⁸³ or if the sun of righteousness had not shone forth to us,⁸⁴ evil and the storm would have covered the entire inhabited world. And if he had not raised himself up all at once for the sake of sin, as it is written, his Father would not have looked down on the earth on account of the multitude of the stench and the filths of the sins belonging to those who inhabited it. (fo. 2^vb) And if he had not been found in form as a human being, even though he was God and the Son of God, humankind would not have become equal to angels, especially when one is a celibate among the wise people and discerning children of the holy mother, the catholic church, (the people) who honour God in their true labour. For if the Lord had not done these things (along with all those other things), we would not have salvation at all. These words belong to the Christians whose hope is the Lord Jesus, and do not belong to the heretics, who do not believe in him.

C. An Economy in the Flesh: The Renewal and Perfection of Human Likeness in the Incarnation (fos. 5^vb–7^rb; Depuydt, 147–8)

... (fo. 5^vb; p. 147) For it will be found that he is clothed with rags, lying in a manger, and the angel will speak with Joseph concerning him, saying, 'Arise and take the child and his mother and go up to Egypt, for Herod will seek after the child to destroy him.' Who is the one who will kill—who is the one who will destroy—the soul of Herod, along with his body, in the fiery furnace? For concerning him these things will be heard (fo. 6^ra) in this fashion—indeed, they will be spoken of in this way and they will be repeated concerning him. Namely, that stones will be taken up and thrown at him, and he will be tempted by the devil. And they will seek after him to kill him, and they will say, 'You are mad; it is a demon that is with you!' And they will arrest him and bind him like a thief. And they will nail him to a cross. And they will give him vinegar to drink after he has said, 'I am thirsty.' And they will blaspheme against him, while shaking their heads (at him). And they will insult him in the likeness of all the words that they said. And they will pierce his side (fo. 6^rb) with a spear. In this way, therefore, when he came, (p. 148) the Lord of all was humiliated in this fashion, for the prophet said concerning him, 'He has neither likeness nor beauty.'⁸⁵ Yet truly, he asked a question concerning certain things like a man who lacked knowledge: like when he asked the father of the small child when he wanted to heal him how much time it had been since he had reached him, as if he did not know. Like when he asked about Lazarus, 'Where have you laid him?' And also like when he asked his disciples, 'Who is the one who touched (fo. 6^va) my garments?' as if he was ignorant about who it was. And also, like when his disciples sought him and woke him up when he was sleeping on the boat, saying, 'Teacher, teacher, we will be destroyed,' (he responded) as if he did not know that they were troubled or that they were endangered as the

⁸² John 6: 54.

⁸³ Cf. John 1: 9 and 3: 19.

⁸⁴ Cf. Malachi 4: 2.

⁸⁵ Isaiah 53: 2.

windstorm descended on the lake.⁸⁶ O patience of God, establish the place of the wise that they may understand the things which his Christ did according to an economy.

But as for the ignorant, they have acted lawlessly in their asinine nature because they have not known him. As the word says, 'For if they had (fo. 6^vb) known him, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.'⁸⁷ Nor would they now have become people who cause a disturbance yet again when they answer, so that they become subject to a reckoning. If they had fallen, as it is written concerning the Lord, 'Behold, he is established for the falling and rising of many in Israel, and as a sign against which they will answer.'⁸⁸ 'For the word of the cross is foolishness for those who will perish, [but] for those who will be saved, God's power and wisdom.'⁸⁹ Thus, the word that the prophet said concerning the Lord says, 'We saw him, and he had neither likeness nor beauty, but rather his likeness was humbled and (fo. 7^a) made sorrowful in comparison with all of humankind.'⁹⁰ Until now, he is foolishness to unbelievers since they do not place their trust in Christ. But to us, the ones who are awake and who stand in faith, he is wisdom. We want our Saviour not to be sorrowful when he sees that the creation of his hands, humankind, has perished.

Consider the pattern of humankind, through whom many things have (indeed) perished, or (consider) of what sort human likeness is. (When you do so) you will understand that, as for the likeness humankind took on when he sinned, along with the shame which resulted, the Lord came to dwell in that likeness for our sake when he became human (fo. 7^b), in order to bring humankind to its originary state and sinlessness, and to the initial beauty of the soul before it became unclean. Thus he made the soul clean and perfected humanity.

⁸⁶ I read ΠΕΤΡΩΜ ΝΗΥ (windstorm) rather than Depuydt's ΠΕΤΡΩ ΜΠΗΥ. Shenoute follows here the Sahidic text of Luke 8: 23 (ΑΥΤΡΩΜ ΝΗΥ ΕΙ ΕΠΕΧΗΤ ΕΤΛΙΜΝΗ); ed. G. Horner, *The Coptic Version of the New Testament in the Southern Dialect*, ii. 150.

⁸⁷ 1 Corinthians 2: 8b.

⁸⁸ Luke 2: 34.

⁸⁹ 1 Corinthians 1: 18. Here Shenoute cites a series of verses that play on a common verbal theme—namely, that of falling (ΖΕ) or perishing (ΖΕ ΕΒΟΛ), two concepts which both utilize the same root verb in Coptic.

⁹⁰ Isaiah 53: 2b.

APPENDIX B

Translations of Copto-Arabic Texts

1. Sāwīrus ibn al-Muqaffa⁴, *The Lamp of Understanding*, chs. 4–7, ed. Samir Khalil Samir, SJ, in *Arabic Christian Tradition* (Cairo, 1978), 1. 33–61. Trans. S. Davis.

Chapter Four

(1) Our statement on Christ:

(2) We believe Christ (*al-Masīḥ*) is the Word of God (John 1: 14), and God's Wisdom and Power, as Scripture has said,⁹¹ and indeed we called him Christ, following what God says in his Scriptures. (3) Our friends have differed concerning the meaning of naming the Word of God, Christ. We will clarify this when we have described what the parties differ on and what they agree about. (4) This name was translated into the language of the Greeks, and they designated it by the name, 'the Anointed One'. (5) Because he also called himself Christ in his conversation with the Samaritan woman,⁹² we call him by that name. (6) (We do so) in order that there may be unanimity that 'Christ is coming'⁹³ in addition to the messengers (*al-rusul*) and prophets.

(7) What I myself believe concerning the fact that we name the Word of God, Christ, is what some of the fathers believed—that the Word united with the body and that the union (itself) was the anointment. (8) Indeed, he was anointed because he became incarnate (*tajassada*), and the Incarnation (*al-tajassud*) is the name of his anointment. (9) In any case, just as the one who brings his body (*jism*) to the anointment with oil is called the anointed (*al-masīḥ*)—and the oil itself is also a material body (*jism min al-ajsām*)—so too the Word of God was called Christ (*al-masīḥ*) because Scripture has taught us that he became incarnate (*tajassada*). (10) From this point of view, this Word was called Christ because he was specially chosen to become incarnate, (11) just as the Son of God, when he was begotten the second time (*lammā wulīdā al-mīlād al-thānī*), was called Son, even though before that he was (also) called Son.

(12) Indeed, I have said this to refute whoever has opposed us from among our friends, whoever does not call Christ, 'the Anointed One', except for at the union— (13) (that is, whoever) says that it was necessary to call Christ by this name (only) when the Word was united with the human being. (14) I have clarified everything that has been introduced to this faction in my books on them.

⁹¹ 1 Corinthians 1: 24.

⁹² See John 4: 25–6.

⁹³ John 4: 28.

Chapter Five

(1) Our statement on the Incarnation:

(2) We say that God (blessed be he!) has already come forth and established among us the fact that he possesses far-reaching power and an effective will, (3) and that he appears to his servants and is revealed to his prophets and messengers so that he may make it possible for them to see him. (4) As Scripture has described and has told us, he was the one who spoke to Moses and Jacob.⁹⁴ (5) Jacob said, 'I have seen the Lord face-to-face, and my life was preserved.'⁹⁵ (6) He was revealed to Abraham.⁹⁶ (7) Job said, 'I used to hear with the hearing of my ear, but now I have seen you with the sight of my eye.'⁹⁷ (8) Isaiah said that he saw him sitting on the throne with cherubim and seraphim around him.⁹⁸ (9) In the same way, Daniel, Amos, and Ezekiel (have also spoken). (10) The people of the King have agreed that he is the one who is on the throne, that he is the one sitting on the throne (may He be exalted and glorified!). (11) About his word we are sure; we believe his prophets and we abide in what his Scriptures have described. We do not disavow any word, nor do we reject good fortune (given by God).

(12) We believe that the prophets saw him (may he be blessed and exalted!) and described him in so far as he was able to be seen, (13) but not because he was perceptible, nor because their vision was an actual vision of his essence, nor because his essential substance was (able to be) seen. (14) To our wonderment, in interpreting what the prophets described—concerning the revelatory vision, his enthronement, and his throne—one discovers the finest interpretation, the most easily understood commentary. We will discuss this in the appropriate place. (15) Indeed, God revealed himself to us and appeared to us in the last days in the body belonging to his creation, from the body of the Virgin Mary. (16) We heard his discourse from the body with which he was united. And he caused us to hear his speech, just as he caused Moses to hear his speech and presence from the bush⁹⁹ (17) Just as he revealed to the people of Israel and spoke to them on the mountain and caused them to hear his word,¹⁰⁰ so too he has given us a share in the hearing of his word and his discourse. (18) He has spoken to us from his earth, just as he spoke to those people from heaven.¹⁰¹ (19) He has commanded us from close by, just as he commanded his angels from close by. Our closeness to him is like the closeness of the cherubim and seraphim, and they are also some of his creatures.

(20) God has acted before (may his name be blessed!) and has notified us that he was going to do this for us. (21) Jeremiah the prophet said, 'Truly God will appear on the earth and will suffer among the people.'¹⁰² (22) David the prophet said, 'He bowed the heavens and came down.'¹⁰³ (23) Heaven is his creation and he has spoken to humankind from it. The earth is his creation and he has spoken to his servants from it. The body is his workmanship and he has spoken to his creatures from it. (24) This is our statement concerning the Incarnation.

⁹⁴ Exodus 3; Genesis 32: 23–33.⁹⁵ Genesis 32: 31.⁹⁶ Genesis 18.⁹⁷ Job 42: 5⁹⁸ Isaiah 6: 1–2.⁹⁹ Exodus 3: 2–4: 17¹⁰⁰ Exodus 19.¹⁰¹ Lit. his heaven.¹⁰² Baruch 3: 38.¹⁰³ 2 Samuel 22: 10.

(25) But, (as for the questions,) ‘Did he not become incarnate?’ and ‘How did the Ancient of Days become incarnate by means of an unprecedented event?’ I have already explained them clearly, and I have clarified the matter in a (more) penetrating way in my book, *On the Elucidation of the Union*. (26) I have not given any defamer from all the sectarian parties an opportunity to defame, but I have invalidated him and exposed his error. Indeed, if you want, I will seek it out from there.

(27) Now, the one who speaks to us from the visible and perceptible body is the one who spoke to Moses in the cloud, and to Isaiah and Jeremiah and the rest of the prophets. He is the one who was revealed to Abraham and Isaac and Noah, the chosen ones. He is the one we believe in.

Chapter Six

(1) Our statement on the prophets and the messengers:

(2) We affirm and believe all the prophets whom the books of old describe. (3) We confess that what they set forth is from God (blessed and exalted be He!), that they are his messengers (*rusul*) sent to his creatures and his servants, (4) and that all the laws of Torah and whatever is in it are the means by which creatures worship God century after century, and generation after generation, to the extent that all of it is good and beautiful. There is nothing in it that we disavow or deny. (5) (And we confess) that he spoke to Moses and the prophets. He is the good Creator (*al-Bāri*), the Munificent (*al-Jawād*), the Merciful (*al-Raḥīm*), the Beneficent (*al-Karīm*).¹⁰⁴ (6) It is not as the accursed Mani says, ‘The one who established the laws of Torah and the one who spoke to Moses and the prophets of Israel is Satan.’ May our Lord be greatly and highly exalted above Mani’s blasphemy. (7) Rather, we resolve, confess, and believe that everything the prophets of Israel set forth is the truth from God and that everything apart from him is vanity, falsehood, deceit, and slander. (8) (And we confess) that the Torah and the rest of the Scriptures that our teachers prescribed are the writings and speech of God, his laws and established traditions, his divine precepts and judgements.

(9) People did not cease devoting themselves to the service of these laws until the coming of Christ. (10) And indeed he renewed the laws and raised up what the people used to find shameful as (an expression of) his benevolence and generosity, and as a way of calling forth the significance and sublime character of these matters.¹⁰⁵ (11) He set forth divine precepts and traditions, in accordance with what was required of him (to fulfil) the conditions of those who are perfect and discerning. (12) I will continue to attack Mani, the accursed one, as well as Marcion, and Elian and Ibn Dayṣān (Bardesanes), and others of that ilk.

¹⁰⁴ Here Sāwīrus invokes three of the ninety-nine names or attributes of God celebrated by Muslims: *al-Bāri*?, *al-Raḥīm*, *al-Karīm*. Only *al-Jawād* is not included in traditional lists of the divine names.

¹⁰⁵ Lit. the significance of the matters (*al-umūr*) and the sublime character of the conditions (*al-aḥwāl*).

Chapter Seven

(1) Our statement on the eating and drinking of Christ, his fatigue and his crucifixion, and his death:

(2) We say that when he became incarnate, he became incarnate in a complete body possessing a soul and rational faculties—a complete and perfect incarnation. (3) In other words, he created the body, renewed the image, and became a complete human being, without a change of essence. He made it into a temple, a place of residence, and a veil (*ḥijāb*) for himself, (4) even as he united with it in a composite union (*ittihādān tarkībiyan*), just as I made clear in my book *On the Elucidation of the Union*.

(5) Since the condition (of the body) is what we described, we apply to it everything that we apply to all material bodies (*al-aṣām*) in their natural conditions. (6) Indeed, I mean by my statement, ‘their natural conditions’, eating and drinking, as well as fatigue and suffering. (7) For every material body (*jism*) needs food and drink in order to replace whatever it is discharged from it. (8) For the material body (*jism*), there is no dishonour or deficiency in this, and neither is there any for the One who took on a material body (*al-mutaḥassim*). (9) For he indeed took on both its process and its requirements, including weakness and susceptibility to influence. (10) The evidence for this is the word of the apostle, ‘He received what he received not from the angels, but from the seed of David.’¹⁰⁶ (11) Basil himself pointed to this idea in some of his books.

(12) The one who is in the habit of denying cannot deny that the material body (*al-jism*) is fed, that it grows tired and exhausted, and that it is susceptible to influence as long as it is a body similar to all other bodies that are in the world of existence and corruption. (13) Indeed, I have said, ‘the material bodies that are in the world of existence and corruption’, because we say that bodies, after they have been resurrected from their graves, are without need and compulsion, and are not susceptible to any influence. (14) For what has been built up is a physique that does not change and is not transformed, just as the apostle said, ‘This changeable thing will put on what does not change, and this mortal body will put on what does not perish.’¹⁰⁷ (15) Bodies after the resurrection are not susceptible to influence. They do not need food or drink. They do not become sick. They do not become decrepit. They do not decay, nor do they undergo change. (16) The same applies to our statement about the body of Christ after his resurrection: indeed, he does not have any need of food or drink. (17) As for the Gospel story about the fish and the honey,¹⁰⁸ Christ has already interpreted that and explained its purpose in the Gospel. (18) Now, with regards to his crucifixion and death, we have said already that the body that he took on was susceptible to everything to which changeable bodies in the world of existence and corruption are susceptible.

(19) However, his simple, eternal essence in itself is not affected by any influence or suffering, (20) since it does not derive from what is characterized by susceptibility to

¹⁰⁶ Hebrews 2: 16.

¹⁰⁷ 1 Corinthians 15: 53.

¹⁰⁸ Luke 24: 42–3. Some manuscripts of the Gospel contain an expanded reading of v. 42, which describes how the resurrected Christ not only ate fish but also honey from a honeycomb when he met with the gathered disciples in Jerusalem: for a discussion, see G. D. Kilpatrick, ‘Luke 24: 42–43’, *Novum Testamentum* 28/4 (1986), 306–8.

sufferings nor from what is brought about by change, and since it is not affected by corruption. (21) There is no possibility that suffering or imperfection could affect anything simple beyond the physical structure, since its nature and essence were intangible and imperceptible through the senses. (22) However, such influence applies (only) to what is tangible and perceptible through the senses, like composite bodies and things like them.

(23) Error befalls those who contradict us because they have thought that we associate with the eternal, creative essence what we associate with corrupt and changeable bodies. (24) This is a corrupt opinion. It is not correct, nor is it admissible.

(25) Christ is susceptible to suffering, contingency, influence, and death with respect to his humanity and his act of becoming human (*ta'annus*), (26) but with respect to his eternity and divinity, he is intangible and imperceptible. He does not suffer, nor does he die, (27) just like the material body to which all existence (i.e. the universe) is united, like the soul that is united to the body, or like the fire that is united to firewood. (28) The body is characterized by death, corruption, change, susceptibility to influence, division, separation, and the occupation of space; true being is not characterized by any of these things. (29) Thus, the soul may not be described as having been killed or as having died, nor does it hunger or thirst. Indeed, it has been united with the corruptible, mortal body, the body that hungers and thirsts. (30) (It is) like the fire which, even if the wood has turned to ashes and crumbles, is not characterized by death and dissolution. (31) The analogies to this are many.

(32) Whoever has slandered us (by claiming) that we say, 'God was killed and was crucified and died,' is ignorant of our words and unknowledgeable concerning our aim(s). (33) If only the people would consider prudence in their expression when an error falls upon the ear of the listener. (34) Nevertheless, metaphors and figurative expressions lead many of the people astray. (35) Now, Scripture has described and clarified this matter—I am referring to what the Jews did to Christ—and it is a matter that you (pl.) have already learned from the books of your forefathers. If that were not the case, then we would (need to) clarify and explain it.

(36) You are one of the people who say, 'The herbs have been planted, the date palm has grown tall, and the tree has borne fruit.' (37) But in reality, the herbs have not been planted, the date palm has not grown tall, and the tree has not borne fruit. Rather, God, the Exalted One, is the planter of the herbs, and he is the one who causes the date palms to grow tall and the tree to bear fruit. (38) Despite this, the figurative expressions in people's speech are many in number. As they say, 'The sword has killed him.' The intended meaning of that statement is 'God killed him and put him to death.' And they say, 'The food and drink is good.' By that they mean to say, 'God made its form and colour good.'

(39) Thus, whoever says, 'Christ ate and drank and died,' believes that the body that was united to him truly ate and truly drank and truly was killed. That body is Christ's body. (40) The attributes apply to the one who has taken on a material body (*al-mutajassim*) (in so far as he is) in the body. (41) I say, 'Socrates has become ill.' What I mean by this is that his body was changed as a result of his natural actions. However, the soul of Socrates did not become ill, nor did it change. The attributes always apply to the

bodily state of being (*al-dhāt al-mutajassim*). (42) In the same way, the attributes apply to every composite, union, or society of different things. Indeed, all states of being come to be characterized by the states of being with which they have become united, composed, or combined. (43) As we say, ‘Plato has come to know and to understand.’ We mean by this that it was through his soul that he came to know, and that it was his soul that possessed the knowledge, (44) because the body, on account of the fact that it is a body, is not capable of knowledge or understanding, nor is it (self-)animated. It is just like stone, wood, iron, and all other material bodies. (45) This is just like our statement, ‘Plato ate.’ When we say this we mean that his body received some food in place of what was discharged from it. (46) Indeed, the soul does not eat, nor is it characterized by the act of eating. However, the attributes always apply to the totality of Plato’s person in so far as they may be clarified¹⁰⁹ and explained.

(47) Thus, we say that Christ is the Creator (*al-Khāliq*), the Provider (*al-Rāziq*), the All-Living (*al-Hayy*), and the All-Knowing (*al-‘Ālim*), because he is God.¹¹⁰ And we say that Christ ate and drank, was killed and died, because he is human. (48) (These two attributes together apply to Christ just as they applied to Plato and Socrates.

2. Ps.-Sāwīrus ibn al-Muqaffa‘, *The Book of the Elucidation*, ch. 4 (excerpt), Par. ar. 170, fos. 76^v–78^v; ed. Murqus Girgis, *Kitāb al-durr al-thamīn fī’idāḥ al-dīn* (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Gadīdah, 1925; repr. 1971), 113–16. Trans. S. Davis.

(76^v) I will demonstrate to you how the bread becomes the flesh of Christ, (77^r) and how the mixture of water and wine becomes the blood of Christ, so that you will know his scope, his splendour, and his honour, and so that you will be convinced that Christ our God is present (with us) just as he was present with his disciples. That is, the disciples did not see him except in so far as he was incarnate in his body, because he is God, the Son of God, Light from Light, begotten of the Father before all times and ages, and he does not possess flesh and blood that is invisible, incomprehensible, intangible, or incapable of being touched. But when he took to himself flesh and blood from the Virgin Mary, and united with it, he became visible, tangible, and capable of being touched in that body.

The body that he took from the Virgin Mary came from bread, and from water and wine. Every day, yellow fever (cholera) prevails over the flesh of a human being and eats away at it so that he hungers, but if he eats bread, it becomes for him flesh that takes the place of (the flesh) of which he was deprived. So, the flesh of the human being comes from bread. And every day, yellow fever prevails over his blood and depletes it so that he thirsts, but if he drinks water, it becomes for him blood that takes

¹⁰⁹ The editor has misprinted the verb *tubayyan* as *tubayyar* (*sic*).

¹¹⁰ Here, Sāwīrus invokes three more of the 99 names of God recognized in Islam—*al-Khāliq*, *al-Hayy*, and *al-‘Ālim*—applying them to the divine person of Christ. The remaining term, *al-Rāziq*, is a cognate and synonym of another official divine name (*al-Razzaq*, ‘the Provider’).

the place of (the blood) of which he was deprived. So, his blood also comes from water. Out of bread and water, the flesh and blood of the human being are produced, (77^v) from the very moment of his creation.

The same is the case for the woman when she receives the seed. She eats bread, and God naturally causes part of that bread to flow to the seed, so that it becomes blood for it. By the power of God, nature continues to do this every day for the entire duration of her pregnancy. And when the woman gives birth, God causes the bread and water, out of which comes flesh and blood for the woman, to flow to her breasts, which nurse the child. It is milk before it coagulates into flesh and blood. Wondrous nature cooks it in the child through the power of the body's heat, and (the child) derives from it flesh and blood, so that he does not cease growing in this way until he becomes strong enough to eat bread and drink water, just like his parents, until the day of his death.

Now when the Virgin Mary was pregnant with our Lord Jesus Christ, she did not have a seed with which she became pregnant, because she was a virgin; but rather, (Christ) came to dwell in her through the Holy Spirit,¹¹¹ and he took to himself in one part the flesh that was produced for her from the bread, and in the other part the blood that was produced for her from the water and wine, and from this, he raised up for himself a body. (For the Virgin Mary did not drink unmixed water, nor does anyone (78^f) from all the peoples (on earth), apart from the Arabs, North Africans, and Sudanese, on account of the lack of wine in their countries. Indeed, no people in any age have spread a table without their being upon it a cup of wine mixed with water.) From the water and wine and from the bread, our Lord Jesus Christ took to himself a body in the womb of his mother, and when she had given birth to him, she nursed him with her milk, which was also from those things. Then his body grew just like our bodies grow. He ate bread and drank water mixed with wine,¹¹² and he was like us in everything apart from sin.

When he wanted to redeem us through himself and to raise us up to heaven, he established for us an economy (*dabbara lanā tadbīran*), so that he would remain with us forever, just as he was with his disciples. He commanded us to take the bread (from which comes our flesh as well as his flesh) and the water and wine (from which comes our blood as well as his blood), to raise them up on the holy altar, and to ask him in his name for what he taught us, so that he might descend upon them through his Holy Spirit, through whom he descended upon the flesh and blood of Mary, and so that he might transform them into his body and blood. (He did this) so that he might truly come to be with us in a visible, comprehensible, (78^v) and tangible way, just as he was with the apostles—so that he might die for our sakes, just as he died for the people at that time; that he might be twisted up by being torn and discarded on the plate, just as he was wrapped up in linen bands and discarded in the tomb, and that he might pour out his blood for our sake in the cup, just as he poured out his blood on Golgotha.

¹¹¹ Luke 1: 35.

¹¹² Luke 7: 34.

3. Būlus al-Būshī, *On the Incarnation*, ed. Samir Khalil Samir, *Traité de Paul de Būš sur l'unité et la trinité l'incarnation, et la vérité du christianisme (Maqālah fi al-tathlīth wa al-tajassud wa-ṣiḥḥat al-masīhiyah)*, Patrimoine Arabe Chrétien 4 (Zouk Mikhail: al-Turāth al-‘Arabī al-Masīhī, 1983), 187–227. Trans. S. Davis.

Chapter One: Introduction to the Study of the Incarnation

(1) In this way God made covenant with his creation through the law and the prophets, through his promise and his prohibitions. (2) When their disobedience grew more severe, he punished them with afflictions, misfortunes, rising costs, and forced migration, and arrogant kings disgraced and reviled them. (3) Through this, God did not intend their worship of humankind. (4) When they grew accustomed to evil, the disease intensified, the illness increased, and the sickness multiplied. (5) And when the sick became gravely ill, there was great need for a cure from the true Doctor, the Healer of souls and bodies, and the cure was the divine Incarnation, (6) for if the work becomes ruined, no one is able to fix it except its craftsman. (7) In this way, creatures, when they perish, need the promise of the Creator (to him be the glory!).

(8) With regard to this, on account of the Incarnation of the divine Word, he said [...]. (9) He then is the self-generating, eternal, and merciful Word, the source of compassion, perfection from perfection itself, (10) the power that is unvanquished, the form that does not change, (11) the image that is not transformed, the model that does not cease to exist, the property to which nothing bears likeness, (12) the all-holy who will not be stained,¹¹³ the eternal image that will not be corrupted, the ruler who will not be encompassed, (13) light-rays of eternal glory that will not be extinguished, sun of righteousness that will not set,¹¹⁴ the attribute which will not change, (14) ‘Light from Light, true God from true God.’¹¹⁵

(15) If the Father is called God, and the Son is called God, then on account of the singular substance of divinity, the Spirit should also be called God. (16) But we do not say ‘three gods’, because the divine nature cannot be divided. (17) Rather, the Word is ‘begotten, not made’. (18) He willed to become incarnate through the holy Virgin Mary, from the house of David, from the tribe of Judah, from the seed of Abraham, in order that the world might be able to witness him. (19) Since he was the God of creation, he perfected the things of the body, through which he revealed the honour and the glory of his divinity.

Chapter Two: How Does God Come to Dwell in the Woman Whom He Created?

(20) If they ask, ‘How does God come to dwell in the humanity that He created?’ (21) it is said to them: As far as when God spoke to Moses in the bush, by a blaze of fire, and it was not consumed by the fire and its colour did not change, what is the proof of this? (22) Why did he not speak to him in a tree bearing fruit, but instead entered a thorny bush

¹¹³ Colossians 1: 15.

¹¹⁴ Malachi 4: 2.

¹¹⁵ Nicene Creed.

without fruit? (23) He added another (divine) manifestation when he said to Moses, 'I am God, the God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob.'¹¹⁶ (24) Then God commanded him to go down to Egypt to save his people, and he aided him with signs. (25) He struck the Egyptians with ten plagues, and raised up the people with a powerful arm. (26) It was known at that time that the one who spoke to Moses in the bush was the true God since he had already revealed (himself) through his deeds. (27) In this way, we should also understand the condition of his incarnation, when he revealed the work suitable to the divine nature and fulfilled the word of the prophets through it. (28) At that time, it was known that God was the saviour of creation.

(29) If they ask, 'How is humanity like the bush?' (30) it is said to them: What do you consider more favoured and honoured—the trees, plants, and hills, and whatever else is like them, or humankind? (31) Was humankind created for the sake of the trees, or were all the trees created for the sake of humankind?¹¹⁷ (32) It is well known that they were created for the sake of humankind, (33) and it is certainly true that humankind is more honoured than all the trees. Indeed, what is of greater measure in the Creator's eyes! (34) This is especially the case if (human) souls are pure and unstained by the muddiness of sins: then indeed, God will dwell in them. (35) As it is written, 'I will dwell in them, and I will walk among them,' says the Lord, 'and I will be their God, and they will be my people.'¹¹⁸ (36) Is something like this mentioned concerning the trees? (37) Indeed, if God did not disdain to speak to Moses from the bush that was without fruit, (38) then how much more proper and fitting is it that he should speak to us from the holy body which he took from Mary, (39) with which he became united, and which he caused to become one with his divinity on account of the union, not on account of change and mixture.

Chapter Three: How Does the Incarnation Concern One Person (Hypostasis) of the Trinity Only?

(40) If they say, 'How is it possible that the Incarnation concerns one person of the Trinity without concerning the Father and the Holy Spirit, while at the same time you describe God as not being divided into parts?' (41) it is said to them: The clarification of our statement that God is not divided into parts is based on what is confirmed by the Incarnation of the Word, and on the fact that the Word is not divided from the Father and the Spirit. We do not regard him as a created being. (42) For this we have clear proof from the realm of created things. (43) Namely, that the sun consists of a round disc, heat, and light. (44) The disc is the source of the heat and the light, and (yet) none of these things precedes any of the others. (45) The sun did not become embodied materially in the trees, rocks, mountains, dust, and sand, (46) except for one of its attributes, its heat alone. And yet, it is not divided from the disc and the light. (47) Even if you veil the sun with something at noonday, you will find that the heat has already united with the earth, (48) and that after the setting of the sun in

¹¹⁶ Exodus 3: 6.

¹¹⁷ Mark 2: 27.

¹¹⁸ 2 Corinthians 6: 16; Ezekiel 37: 27.

summertime, its heat remains and abides until the time when the coolness of night is introduced, (the night) which God has ordained to be separate from the day.¹¹⁹

(49) If this is what some created beings do by means of what they were given by the authority of their Creator, (50) then how many thousand times greater is the activity of the Creator in the prerogative of his own essence. (51) Now the sun withdraws and is hidden because its existence is a created thing, (52) but as for God, no place is void of him, and nothing is able to hinder him, or else he would have been divided, as it was said. (53) Rather, he fills up everything and encompasses all things in their entirety through the simplicity of his divinity, and there is nothing that encompasses him. (54) For this reason, the Incarnation conferred distinction upon the eternal Word, and he was not differentiated from the Father and the Holy Spirit, as is befitting to him. (55) If the created sun is mindful of the One who endows it—(56) and there is no differentiating its heat from its disc and its light when it becomes embodied in its elements, (57) but rather it gives to them from itself power and growth to the plants and the trees which are in all the inhabited world, (58) and it dries out every putrid thing and rotten mire in such a way that it does not become polluted by anything—(59) then how much more is it true for God that he is established in whatever is particular to him. (60) (And what is particular to him is) that he sends his own simple Word, (61) who fills up everything immeasurably more than the light of the sun and its heat, on account of the superiority of the Creator over the creature. (62) He becomes materially embodied as he wills, and has not been differentiated (from the Godhead), because there is nothing that is able to gain control over him, as I said earlier. (63) And it is also (particular to him) to give power, salvation, and purification to humanity in such a way that he is still not compelled by anything, as is befitting to his divinity.

Chapter Four: Is the One Who Became Incarnate the Eternal Creator?

(64) If they say, ‘What is the proof that this Incarnate One is the creative power for all created beings?’ (65) it is said to them: ‘His actions, which befit him.’ (66) If he has already appeared incarnate in form, then it is already known that he is divine by the manifestation of his action. (67) Just as iron is cold to the touch, while the burning fire is hidden in it, (68) and (just as) by means of flint the substance of fire arises from it and is realized in actuality like we observe it, (69) and (just as) it has been ascertained by the mind, with no trace of doubt, that this iron, which is cold to the touch and in whose appearance no signs of fire are evident, (70) has within it a fire which burns every accidental property¹²⁰ and every material thing when it comes into contact with them, (71) so too Christ (to him be the glory!) revealed that he was God by his action and his appearance in the body, (72) by appropriate signs, by the greatness of his lordship, by the honour of his divinity, and by the timelessness of his eternity, (73) not through a request but through a decisive command, (74) just as he said, ‘If you do not believe in me, believe in my works.’¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Genesis 1: 14.

¹²⁰ Here, I suggest *al-ʿarīd* instead of *al-shiʿār* or the alternative reading, *al-shaʿ-ārā*.

¹²¹ John 1: 38.

(75) If they say, [...] ¹²² (76) it is said to them: Indeed the word ‘unity’ among the non-Arabs is a recent, transitory thing. (77) (According to them,) the universe already preceded the Word before he existed, (78) and then after that he became united with something that did not belong to him. (79) Now if we had said this about the eternal Word, you would have had an argument against us. (80) But we say that the Word has always existed eternally, without beginning or end. (81) He was begotten as light is begotten from the sun, without any separation, (82) because God is characterized by the fact that he is one who speaks and lives in the timelessness of his eternity. (83) Indeed, then, your argument regarding the word ‘unity’ has proven futile.

Chapter Five: What Was It That Obligated God to Become Incarnate?

(84) If they say, ‘What was it that compelled him to become incarnate?’ (85) it is said to them: So then, who is the one who compelled him to create Adam and his descendants? (86) And if they ask about that, it is said to them: It was his generosity and his favour!

(87) If they say, ‘Is it not known that he is generous and full of favour simply by virtue of his creation of Adam and his descendants?’ (88) It is said to them: He has never ceased being generous and full of favour in his essential substance, just as befits his goodness. (89) However, he demonstrated his favour through his action (in a special way) when he created creation. (90) He had no need for it, but demonstrated his favour towards it. (91) He brought it into existence out of nothing and prepared for it what it needed (92) because of his kindness and generosity, so that it might be known that he is generous and full of favour.

(93) In this way, he gave creation the promise of salvation, (94) not because he had any need for the Incarnation, but as a sign of his favour towards it with regard to whatever it lacked.

Chapter Six: Why Did God Not Send an Angel or a Prophet Apart from Himself for the Salvation of His People?

(95) If they say, ‘Why does God not send an angel apart from himself for the salvation of his people?’ (96) it is said to them: If an angel had been entrusted with the creation of the universe apart from himself, it would have been necessary for God to send him to save his creation. (97) But if God is the Creator and Designer, it is out of the perfection of his sympathy and his favour that he makes covenant with his creation and with the works of his hands for the sake of salvation.

(98) If they are not content with that answer and seek to elucidate the evidence for it (99) and to know what the trouble was that came from humanity, and what the illness was that made the Incarnation necessary for the human condition, (100) and (if) they wonder why God did not arrange what he willed simply by force, for he was able to do so, (101) and (why he did not simply) send a messenger and aid him in the salvation of his people, (102) and (if) they ask, ‘What evidence is there for his

Incarnation especially?’ (103) it is said to them that God (may he be greatly praised!) did not arrange anything without purpose¹²³ and that the circumstance of his Incarnation was not without purpose as they claim. (104) Indeed, this matter has far surpassed (the capacity of) your mind because you were not acquainted with it through your education, and you have not understood the sayings of the prophets and the apostles regarding it. (105) For if creation were not in dire need of his Incarnation, he would not have arranged any of this. (106) But rather, he arranged it in such a way that he was not in need of any of it, and (he did so) by virtue of his gracious favour, just as was mentioned earlier.

(107) That is, God, when he created our father Adam and placed him in paradise, (108) forbade him to eat from the branch of disobedience, saying, ‘On the day that you eat from it, you will die.’¹²⁴ (109) He did not die that day itself, but after nine hundred and thirty years.¹²⁵ (110) God’s statement is not false, (111) but rather, just as tangible death is the separation of the soul from the body—(112) for by the separation of the greater from the lesser, death is (made) real for the lesser—(113) so too we understand that intellectual death is the separation of the Spirit of God from the soul of the person. (114) This is the strongest and most horrible death. (115) As the Spirit of God [was with Adam in the beginning],¹²⁶ his Word was likewise with him at first in the endowments of the Spirit. (116) But when he ate from the tree, at that time, God extracted from him the Spirit of his holiness, and separated it from his soul. (117) (That Spirit) was the reason for his eternal life with God: it was connected with (his) non-bodily intellectual faculties, and lived eternally with God. (118) Adam truly died that day, (experiencing) an intellectual death, according to the trustworthy statement of God, ‘On the day that you eat from it, you will die.’¹²⁷ (119) Then, after that intellectual death, God sentenced him to a tangible death, (120) saying to him, ‘You will eat your bread by the sweat of your brow until you return to the dust from which you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you will return!’¹²⁸ (121) The hope of two lives was cut off from him completely—by this I mean eternal life with God and temporal life as well. (122) And he lived a life just like that of the beasts and was deprived of the glory and beauty that he had had in the beginning. (123) Then he died and returned to his dust, just as God had said. (124) In the same way, his descendants who come after him turn to dust just like him, following their father.

(125) As for everyone who came from his descendants—from the prophets and the righteous ones—none of them was able to convey to us eternal life, (126) for it was not in their essential nature; instead they remain under this singular affliction, just like all of humanity, (127) for the life that has no end belongs only to the one with no beginning, (128) because he exists outside the two ways—I mean to say, the beginning and the end. (129) There have been none like that except God the Word.

¹²³ Cf. *al-Qur’ān*, Surah 23: 115.

¹²⁴ Genesis 3: 3.

¹²⁵ Genesis 5: 5.

¹²⁶ There is a lacuna in the manuscript at this point, and my trans. is based on the editor’s reconstruction of the text: see Samir Khalil Samir, *Traité de Paul de Buis*, 212 n. 151.

¹²⁷ Genesis 3: 3.

¹²⁸ Genesis 3: 19.

Chapter Seven: God Has Provided Us with Eternal Life

(130) God has not provided us with (eternal life) by means of his divinity, because we are not from that eternal, creative substance, and we do not correspond to him in anything. (131) In his compassion he willed to become incarnate, and became united with the body in his divinity.¹²⁹ (132) He conferred eternal life upon that body through his union with it. (133) Then he conferred it upon us—that is, on all of those who believe in him, in relationship to that body that he took from us.¹³⁰

(134) For our sake and for our salvation, he accepted the sufferings due to us.¹³¹ (135) He suffered in the body, but did not suffer or die in his divinity, (136) because he transcends sufferings and gives life. (137) But the things that are difficult for us on account of our being too weak for them (are easy for him). (138) Indeed, when we are worried about something, we are not equal to it in our own capability; (139) but for him, everything is easy—everything is possible. (140) When he willed to accept these things, nothing hindered him, and it was not difficult for him, with the result that he finally reveals the victory. (141) In this way, he saved the souls who had been in prison since the beginning and whom Satan had overpowered by contravention, (142) and he saved them with justice, not by force.

(143) Then through his resurrection from the dead he conferred eternal life to the body united with him from humankind. (144) He also conferred that life to us in relation to our capacity, as well as to the body that he took from our race. (145) By means of what he had already proclaimed, he overcame death and corruption; (he did so) through his resurrection from the dead for the sake of uniting his creative power with all creatures. (146) Thus, he made firm the hope of life and resurrection for all humanity. (147) If the Lord raised the dead by his power—even though they died again a second time and turned to dust and remained in wait for the common resurrection belonging to all—(148) he was well prepared to be the executor of eternal life, just as Adam long ago became the executor of the dead and the first of those who were imprisoned (in Hades). (149) The Lord is the executor of the living because he is the giver of life. For this reason he arose by the power of his divinity, (150) and raised his body to the highest heaven, above the angels, principalities, and powers. (151) Nothing else was entirely suited for the resurrection apart from the body that the Lord brought into union with himself. (152) He became the executor of life¹³² and the downpayment¹³³ of the resurrection for us all—that is, all of us who believe in him.

(153) Just as the death and affliction that passed to us from Adam (154) was not alien to us—but rather we received it from him on the basis of our relation to him—

¹²⁹ There is something corrupted in the text here: it literally says, ‘with his divinity’.

¹³⁰ Lit. that was taken from us.

¹³¹ Nicene Creed.

¹³² Acts 3: 15. Throughout this section, Būlus al-Būshī uses the Arabic term *raʿīs* (‘leader, director,’ but which I translate here as ‘executor’) in the place where the original Greek text of Acts employed *ἀρχηγός* (founder, leader). This Greek word was rendered as *auctor* in Latin, and the NRSV follows this sense in translating the phrase, ‘the Author of Life’.

¹³³ Here I read ‘*arbūn* instead of ‘*arbūn*. My thanks to Ashraf Fawzi for proposing this alternative reading.

(155) so too, the righteousness of life, which passed to us from the Lord (to him be the glory!) was not alien to us, (156) but we had already truly received it on the basis of our relation to the body to which he became united along with a rational soul. (157) Thus he saved the like by its like.

Chapter Eight: God Granted Us Participation in the Body of Christ

(158) Then in his favour he added a confirmation. He willed to grant us participation in that holy body and a connection with it (160) by a most excellent spiritual kinship that transcends the bodily kinship, (161) to the extent that the eternal life which that body acquired becomes in us completely and rightly natural.

(162) God gave to us first the Holy Spirit through baptism, the Spirit that he had extracted from Adam the day that he ate from the branch of disobedience. (163) Through the Spirit he provided us with the second birth for our inheritance of the kingdom, (164) just as he said, 'Unless one has been born of the water and the spirit, he will not see the kingdom of God.'¹³⁴

(165) Then, afterwards, he gave us an additional (sign of his) favour, over and above the state Adam was in before his error: he gave us his life-giving body. (166) As he said, 'I am the life-giving bread, which came down from heaven. (167) Whoever eats of this bread will live forever!'¹³⁵ (168) Then he told us what the bread is when he said, 'The bread that I give is my body, which I offer up for the life of the world.'¹³⁶ (169) Indeed, he even added to that another announcement, when he said, 'If you have not eaten the body of the Son of Man, nor drunk his blood, there is no eternal life in you.'¹³⁷ (170) His statement, 'in you', means that it (eternal life) comes to existence in your essential nature. It is not external to you, nor is it alien to you. (171) He settled that matter and said, 'Because my body is true food, (172) and my blood is true drink, whoever has eaten my body and has drunk my blood remains in me, and I in him.'¹³⁸ (173) As for his statement, 'true food', he said that because his divinity is united with his body. He has been united with the holy bread and has transformed it into his body in truth and not merely in likeness. (174) Then he said the greatest thing, when he made the statement, 'Just as the living Father sent me, and I have life on account of the Father, so too whoever eats me lives on account of me.'¹³⁹ (175) He did not need to say in this instance, 'whoever eats my body', because he already had established that in the preceding statement. (176) He said first, 'the living bread',¹⁴⁰ and informed us that that bread was truly his body. (177) Then he said third, 'whoever eats me'.¹⁴¹ He means by this that he is God incarnate, and his divinity is not differentiated from his humanity. (178) Whoever partakes (of the eucharist) in a worthy manner and with faith, God will reside in him and give him the life that he gave to the body united to him. (179) The apostle said, 'He is ready to change the body of our weakness and transform it into something resembling the body of his glory, as the work of his powerful hand to which everything is devoted in service.'¹⁴² (180) As for his statement, 'the Father lives, and I live on account of the Father',¹⁴³ (its meaning is), just as was

¹³⁴ John 3: 3, 5.

¹³⁵ John 6: 51.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ John 6: 53.

¹³⁸ John 6: 55–6.

¹³⁹ John 6: 57.

¹⁴⁰ John 6: 51.

¹⁴¹ John 6: 57.

¹⁴² Philippians 3: 21.

¹⁴³ John 6: 57.

introduced earlier in the first part of this book, that he is perfection from perfection, (181) and 'light from light, life from life, (182) true God from true God, begotten not made, equal to the Father in essence'.¹⁴⁴

(183) Whoever does not have his share of faith in him, nor has received baptism, nor has participation in his living thrones, (184) also does not truly have a share in the inheritance of eternal life, but rather is completely alien to it altogether, (185) because 'flesh and blood' (as the Apostle Paul said) 'does not inherit the kingdom of God, and the changeable does not inherit what does not change'.¹⁴⁵ (186) Indeed, there does not reside in a human being anything that is more exalted than him—that which is more exalted is the Holy Spirit and the living thrones that belong to God the Word who is their master and creator. (187) Therefore, such a one has no share or inheritance in that eternal kingdom! (188) Now as for the ones who died first, he came and saved their souls through his own sacrifice on their behalf, since they relied on the hope of the promise. (189) As for the believers, he gave them his thrones on account of their (way of) life, (190) as he testified, saying, 'Whoever believes in me, if he dies, he will live. (191) And whoever lives and believes in me, will never suffer death'.¹⁴⁶ (192) In this statement, he gathered together the first and the last.

Chapter Nine: Conclusion of the Study of the Incarnation

(193) This is the reason for the Incarnation of God the Word. There was no necessity for him to do this (as we said earlier), but it was (an expression of) his favour for us. (194) Just as he brought us into existence out of nothingness, so too he became the reason for the existence that endures forever, as is fitting for his (own) eternal duration. To him be the glory forever! (195) We ought to know this and not be inclined toward human desire, (196) because whoever has rational understanding does not persist in error and injustice.

4. Al-Ṣafī ibn al-^cAssāl, *Brief Chapters on the Trinity and the Union*, chs. 7–11 ed. Khalil Samir, SJ, in *Patrologia Orientalis* 42.3, no. 192 (Brepols: Turnhout/Belgique, 1985). Trans. S. Davis.

Part Two: On the (Hypostatic) Union

Chapter Seven: The Nature of the (Hypostatic) Union

(1) The Incarnation of the Son (*ta'annus al-ibn*),¹⁴⁷ is his union (*ittiḥād*) with a human being, complete in his humanity (2) from the beginning of his existence, conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary at the moment of the annunciation and her reception (of the Spirit).¹⁴⁸ (3) It is like the union of the soul of a human being with its

¹⁴⁴ Nicene Creed.

¹⁴⁵ 1 Corinthians 15: 50.

¹⁴⁶ John 11: 25–6.

¹⁴⁷ Lit. the Son's act of becoming human. The term *al-ta'annus* often served as a synonym for *al-tajassud* (incarnation) among medieval Arabic Christian writers. Samir Khalil Samir notes two other words that were also used to convey the same meaning: *al-ittiḥād* and (less frequently) *al-tajassum*.

¹⁴⁸ Lit. at the moment it was announced and she received.

body (*bi-badanihi*);¹⁴⁹ (4) however, the union of his divinity with his humanity does not come to an end—(5) not at the moment of contact (*al-ittiṣāl*) between his body and the soul of his humanity, both before death and after the resurrection, (6) and not even at the moment of his death, the separation of the soul of his humanity from his body. (7) Indeed, his divinity remained united with his soul when it passed into paradise, just as the thief said,¹⁵⁰ and (it remained united) with his body when it was in the grave. (8) For this reason, ‘he did not see corruption’, just as the prophet David said.¹⁵¹

Chapter Eight: The Difference of Opinion among Christians in the Understanding of the (Hypostatic) Union Is Only With Regard to Philosophical Expressions

(1) Know that the Christians are in agreement regarding everything that is contained in the Gospels, Epistles, and the universal Creed; (2) regarding the fact that Christ is God incarnate (*ilāh muta’annis*); (3) regarding the description of him in terms of divinity and humanity, and the characteristics of both of these terms, just as is mentioned in the Gospel, and the Epistles, and the Creed; (4) and regarding the fact that he is one Lord, just as is contained in the Creed. (5) Beyond that, they (the Christians) have differed in (only their use of) philosophical terms.

(6) The Jacobites (i.e. non-Chalcedonians) have said that he is one in every aspect—in his substantiality (*al-jawhariyah*), in his hypostatic nature (*al-qunūmiyah*), and in his will—(7) because the Gospel, the Epistles, and the Creed have attributed to him the term of ‘unity’, not of duality, (8) and because the meaning of the union of the two is that the two become one. (9) It is for this reason that we have said, ‘He is one substance (*jawhar wāḥid*) from two substances, one hypostasis (*qunūm wāḥid*) from two hypostases. He possesses one will and one activity.’ (10) By ‘hypostasis’ we mean here his distinctive substance. (11) If he were not one substance constituted from two substances that both remain present in him, then it would not be correct to describe him by each one of the two substances, along with their characteristics. (12) Indeed, with regard to God and humankind, it is not correct to describe them (by saying) that they are both God, or that they are both human beings. (13) However, with regard to the incarnate God (*al-ilāh al-muta’annis*), it is correct to describe him (by saying) that he is God and that he is a human being. (14) Just as is the case in our (holy) books, it is correct to describe the whole in terms of its parts.

(15) The Melkites (i.e. Chalcedonians) have said, ‘He is two substances (*jawharān*)—God and human being. And he possesses two actions and two wills—divine and human. (16) He is one hypostasis (*qunūm wāḥid*), and that is the divine hypostasis, to the exclusion of the human.’ (17) Their ancients have said, ‘The union has taken place in the human being in a complete sense, and that complete sense is not a hypostasis.’ (18) Their moderns have said, ‘The hypostasis is that which exists in its

¹⁴⁹ Throughout these chapters, the author prefers to use the word *badan* when speaking about the human body.

¹⁵⁰ Here the author seems to be reading the thief’s request for Christ to be with him when he comes into his kingdom (along with Christ’s affirmative response) in Luke 23: 42–3 as evidence for the fact that his divinity remained united with his soul in paradise.

¹⁵¹ Psalm 15: 10.

own essence (*bi-dhātihi*), and the humanity was not present except in so far as it was united with the divinity.’ (19) These two statements are weak.

(20) The Nestorians have said, ‘He is one in Christhood and Sonship, in knowledge and in will, (21) but yet he is two substances (*jawharān*), two hypostases (*qunū-mān*)—God and human being. (22) Whoever has been a proponent of the (hypostatic) union, in its totality or in part, (23) has relied on the fact that it was reported thus in the Gospel, the Epistles, and the Creed, (24) and has based himself on the preservation of the union, since it is a fact that the many can become one. (25) Whoever has been a proponent of the duality in a partial sense only (26) has had the goal of preserving the natures in their (individual) realities, and has moved away from the accusation that a change took place between the two natures.

(27) The simplest and clearest means to proceed with regard to these two (latter) parties is to say the following. (28) The holy fathers and learned scholars agreed in comparing the union of the divinity of Christ with his humanity to the union of the soul of the human being with his body. (29) Indeed, this analogy is the closest and most easily understood example that they found. (30) The humanity of Christ, which is the sum of his soul and his body (which themselves are two substances) (31) is not devoid of existence, whether it is one substance, or two. (32) However, if his humanity were two substances, Christ would be three substances—the substance of his divinity, and the two substances of his humanity—(33) and no one says that he is three substances. (34) But, if (his humanity) were one substance (and this is the true and widely-accepted fact), (35) then it is possible that two substances should become one without change, and that one substance should be constituted from the two. (36) This is our statement about Christ.

Chapter Nine: Proof of the Truth of the Union of the Divinity with the Humanity of Christ

(1) The ways of demonstrating God’s Incarnation (*ta’annus al-ilāh*)—i.e. the union of the divinity with Christ’s humanity—are three in number.

(2) The first of them is that which was mentioned in the prophecies, in (their) message that God will appear to the people in the form of a human being (*muta’annisan*), and will do that to which the Gospel has borne witness, (3) just as it says: ‘Behold,¹⁵² a virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and his name will be called Emmanuel, which means, ‘God with us.’¹⁵³ (4) Regarding every detail, the provision of prophecies continued until the completion of his economy (*ila kamāl tadbirihi*). (5) It says, ‘Now, when he saw that he had fulfilled (*akmala*) everything, just as it is written in the prophets, he inclined his head and gave up the spirit.’¹⁵⁴ (6) The Gospel and the Epistles contain most of the prophecies that demonstrate this. (7) For this reason, Christ said: ‘Search the scriptures, and they will bear witness on my account.’¹⁵⁵

(8) The second is the way by which the philosophers have demonstrated the existence of the Creator, and the union of the soul with the body. (9) It is their means of

¹⁵² Lit. this one (*hadhihi*).

¹⁵³ Matthew 1: 23; cf. Isaiah 7: 14; 8: 8, 10.

¹⁵⁴ John 19: 28, 30

¹⁵⁵ Cf. John 5: 39.

demonstrating through the existence of special traces (*āthār*) the existence of their proper Cause (i.e. the proper Cause of those traces). (10) For this reason, Christ said, ‘Since you do not believe me, believe my works.’¹⁵⁶ (11) He performed wonders proper to God alone, by his will and by his authority, (12) and he linked them to his (goal of) attracting people to believe in his name. (13) This is the difference between him and the prophets, and it is like the difference between the apostles (*al-rusul*) and the friends of God (*al-awliyā*). (14) Indeed, the apostles lay claim to their message (*al-risālah*), but the friends of God refrain from having it attributed to them.

(15) The third is the fact that he sent his disciples to the entire world, that they might enjoin people to believe in his divinity. (16) He empowered them to work dazzling wonders. (17) They went to all kinds of people, and performed dazzling wonders among them. (18) They guided them to belief in his divinity. (19) The people believed, just as is testified by their presence and by the Gospel, the truthfulness of which is well established.

(20) There is yet another way (of demonstrating the Incarnation), which is not theoretical in nature: namely, the certainty that results from (spiritual) exercise and inner purification.¹⁵⁷ (21) The fathers, who along this path have arrived at the utmost end, have testified that the Christian faith alone is true. (22) The proof of this is their attainment of contact (*ittiṣāl*) with God to the extent that traces of him became manifest in them, (23) as well as their constancy in that faith and their devotion to it until they offered themselves up (in martyrdom) without separation from it and in obedience to it.

Chapter Ten: The Truth of Ascribing to Christ the Properties of Divinity and Humanity

(1) You should know that it is possible to describe anything by what exists in it. (2) Now since the divinity and humanity of Christ exist in him, it is possible to describe him by both of these aspects, and by their characteristics. (3) It is possible to describe him as God and as a human being—(4) (to describe him) both by the characteristics of divinity, with respect to the miraculous deeds that were particular to him, (5) and by characteristics of humanity, with respect to his actions and the passions that were attached to him.

(6) For this reason, we have said, ‘Christ is the Creator (*al-Khāliq*) and Provider (*al-Rāziq*),’¹⁵⁸ and ‘he is the one begotten from the Virgin Mary, the crucified one, the one who died.’ (7) However, the former attributes pertain to him in his divinity, while the latter attributes pertain to him in his humanity, (8) just as the apostles said, ‘He was born in the body,’¹⁵⁹ and ‘he was crucified in the weakness of his humanity,’¹⁶⁰ and ‘he died in the body.’¹⁶¹ (9) This is the case just as when we say about a human being, ‘He thinks, and he is tall.’ Now indeed, ‘he thinks’ by means of his soul, not by means of his body; and ‘he is tall’ in body, not in soul.

¹⁵⁶ John 10: 38. ¹⁵⁷ Lit. purification of the inner person.

¹⁵⁸ In underscoring Christ’s divinity, the author describes him by two of the ninety-nine names of God celebrated in Islam.

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Galatians 4: 4; 1 Timothy 3: 16; 1 John 4: 2; 2 John 1: 7.

¹⁶⁰ 2 Corinthians 13: 4.

¹⁶¹ Colossians 1: 22.

Chapter Eleven: The Reasons for the Union

(1) The learned scholars have mentioned many reasons for the union, and they fall into two categories.

(2) The first category concerns the Creator. (3) The property on account of which he brought us into existence (namely, his generosity) (4) was also that property on account of which he established contact (*ittaṣala*) with our nature, in order to perfect us—that is to say, (to bring us to) the perfection of his generosity. (5) The (first) proof regarding the necessity of the union is the fact that the Creator (may he be exalted!) is the most excellent of benefactors. (6) Now the most excellent of benefactors is the benefactor who bestows the most excellent of essences, (7) and the most excellent of essences is the essence of the Creator. (8) It necessarily follows then that the Creator has generously bestowed his essence upon us, and this took place in his contact (*ittiṣāl*) with us. (9) A second proof is the fact that his contact with us is possible, for the main objection to that contact is (the supposed) incompatibility (of the two uniting elements). (11) But the Creator is not in fact opposed to his creature, since one opposing party would destroy its opposite, not bring it into existence. (12) In the Torah, God said that he created humankind in his likeness (*bi-shibhihi*), and this likeness is close to the (idea of) contact (*al-ittiṣāl*). (13) If his contact with us is possible, and if we have the goal of honour(ing him), and if he possesses the perfection of generosity, (14) then there can be no objection to it, apart from (claims that God is guilty of) impotence or greed. (15) These two things are attributes of imperfection, and God is exalted above both of them. (16) Therefore, his contact with us is necessary.

(17) The second category pertains to us. (18) That is, when we fell short of attaining our human perfection, (19) and when the prophets fell short in helping even the smallest number of people attain the first principles of the aforementioned perfection, (20) God became incarnate¹⁶² so that he might cause the greatest number of people to attain the goal of human perfection and (true) existence. (21) The Scriptures give witness to the condition of Christians as compared to the condition of those who came before them, (22) as well to their movement away from the worship of false deities¹⁶³ to the worship of God, (23) and away from great licence to the goal of ascetic piety (*ghāyat al-tanassuk*).

5. Al-Mu'taman ibn al-ʿAssāl, *Summary of the Principles of Religion*, chs. 23 (excerpts), 25–6, ed. A. Wadīʿ, *Studia Orientalia Christiana Monographiae 6a–7a* (Cairo and Jerusalem: The Franciscan Centre of Christian Oriental Studies, 1998–9). Trans. S. Davis.

Chapter 23

Our statement on the necessity of the Incarnation (*al-ta'annus*) as well, and on the absurdity of denying it, according to what Yahyā ibn ʿAdī said in one treatise. This is a summary of it.

¹⁶² Lit. became a human being.

¹⁶³ Lit. that which is not God.

(3) If the Creator (may his name be exalted) is the cause of his creation's existence, then its corruption is not his responsibility, and from this it follows that he is not opposed to it. And if he is not opposed to it, then it is impossible that he not be present with it in one (particular) place. Its corruption is not his responsibility, since it was one of the two things to which he was opposed; so the corruption of what he was associated with was the responsibility of both of these two (other) things.

(4) It is one of the attributes of the Creator that he is generous with the most excellent things, and that he is the pure Good. And it is clear that contact (*ittiṣāl*) with the pure Good is itself a great good. For this reason, contact with the most excellent One is (itself) most excellent, and when the One who is generous comes together with the most excellent things it is a kind of contact. The Incarnation (*al-ta'annus*) is nothing other than the contact between the Creator (may his name be exalted!) and human nature, and his presence with it in one place. Now the necessity of the Incarnation (*al-ta'annus*) has been clarified as required.

(5) If a sceptic should express doubt and say, 'If the necessity of the Incarnation was in fact required, then why did it not take place at the very beginning of human nature's existence?' But such a sceptic contradicts himself (by proposing) that God could have brought the world into existence before it was brought into existence. Just as the latter (i.e. creation) is not manifest to us in such a way that we can express it in detail, neither is the former (i.e. the Incarnation).

(6) Let us supplement this idea in other words. If the union (*al-ittiḥād*)¹⁶⁴ did not in fact come to pass in accordance with the generosity of the Creator (may he be exalted!) and in accordance with his wisdom and his capacity for making it possible, why would it have been deprived of anything unless it were on account of stinginess. Yet stinginess is (the attribute) most radically at variance with the Creator (may he be exalted!), for it was the generosity of the Creator that made the union necessary.

(7) And if it is said, 'This generosity is granted to one person only, apart from the rest of humanity,' it is said in reply, 'Indeed, this person (to him be the glory!) willingly followed the way that leads to contact (*al-ittiṣāl*) with God (may he be exalted!), and it was pleasing (to God) that one person, who has that generosity by nature, might make clear to the rest how to reach the happiness of coming into contact (*al-ittiṣāl*) with him, according to their capability. The typical form of this question is that of the one who asks, Why did the prophecy not apply to all humankind? And if this applied to all of them, why was there a need for only one of them (to receive this generosity), while the rest remained like those who were compelled to virtue, not like those who were elected for it?'

The discourse on the union (*al-ittiḥād*) regarding the necessity of the Incarnation (*al-ta'annus*) from what Sheikh al-Ṣafī, brother of the author (may God have mercy on him), summarized from the treatise of Yahyā ibn 'Adī (may God have mercy on him).

(9) He said, 'The Creator (may he be exalted!) is the most generous, and the most generous is the one who is generous with the most excellent essence. And this

¹⁶⁴ The author uses the term *al-ittiḥād* (lit. the union), along with *al-ta'annus* (lit. the act of becoming human), to refer to the Incarnation.

statement is the result of the following two premises: first, that the Creator (may he be exalted!) is the one who is generous with the most excellent essence, and second—if a fundamental proposition is to be added to this—that the most excellent essence is that of the Creator. It necessarily follows that the Creator is generous in his essence.

(10) And if it is said (*fa 'in qīla*), 'If these deductions are true, then the analogous case is true, and we should discover what is analogous to it. The unthinkable follows however: if the Creator is the most excellent of agents,¹⁶⁵ and the most excellent agent is the one who acts on behalf of the most excellent essence, and the most excellent essence that of the Creator, then it would follow that the Creator is the one who acts on behalf of his own essence, and this is absurd, because (in that case) he must exist before he exists and he must exist on the condition of his being non-existent.'

(11) To this we say, 'Indeed, the difference between the two statements is that the action of something upon its own essence is impossible. For if one thing grants to another thing its essence, in the sense that it is generous to it in its contact (*ittiṣāl*) with it, it is not impossible for us to find many things that grant to other things their essences, just as in the case where fire is present in iron and is united (*tattaḥid*) with it, and the iron becomes alight through its union (*ittiḥād*) with the fire, and does what fire does in terms of heating and burning.

(12) In the same way, the four properties—heat and cold, moisture and dryness—give to material bodies (*aṣṣām*) their essences by coming into union (*ittiḥād*) with them and by attaching themselves to them, so that the property particular to them has its origin in the material bodies with which they are composed. And in the same way, the things facing mirrors give their images (*ṣuwar*) to them, and the mirrors are 'imaged' (*tataṣawwar*) by them. And those turning to the mirrors see the things facing them as images of these same things, and (they see) everything that happens to them with regard to movement and coming to rest.

(13) The uncertainty of this contradiction is revealed especially in our subject, by the fact that we are clarifying how the union (*ittiḥād*) of the Creator (may he be exalted!) with humankind is possible. And we say, 'Indeed, it is known that humankind comprehends (*ya'qil*) the Creator, and the meaning of his comprehension (*ta'aaqqul*) of him is that the mind of the human being is 'imaged' (*mutaṣawwar*) by the image of the Creator. The Creator is not disgusting and material, for his image is part of his essence—his image must (in fact) be his essence—and his essence is (identifiable with) the mind of the human being. For in reality the mind and that which is comprehended (by the mind) are actually one subject,¹⁶⁶ just as Aristotle made clear: it is necessary that the human being, when he comprehends the Creator, be united (*muttaḥidan*) with him . . .

[sects. 14–18 omitted]

(19) And because the human being comprehends his Creator, and the Creator's mind (comprehends) his, there is a union (*ittiḥād*) of his mind with the image (of the Creator)—the Creator (may he be exalted!) is an image and not a material thing—and

¹⁶⁵ I read here the conditional marker 'in (if) rather than the editor's 'inna (indeed). There would be no distinction between the two in the orthography of the manuscript.

¹⁶⁶ Lit. one in the subject (i.e. one in subjectivity).

if he has comprehended his Creator, the human being is united (*muttaḥīdan*) with him by the mediation of his mind. For the Creator has knowledge of the human being, and he (i.e. the human being) is also 'imaged' by the image of the Creator. Now the possibility of the Creator's union (may he be exalted!) with humankind has become clear. As for his action upon his own essence, it has been shown to be impossible. This is what we wanted to clarify.' The summary has been completed.

(20) Brother Ṣafī (may God have mercy on him) said, 'If it is said (*fa'in qīla*), 'If the meaning of the union (*al-ittiḥād*) is the human being's comprehension of his Creator, and the prophets and the 'friends (of God)' comprehended the Creator, then why have you singled out Christ apart from them by his union (*ittiḥād*)?'

(21) We have said in reply (*fa qulnā*), 'Indeed, we have not said that this is the meaning of Christ's union, for the union of the divinity and humanity in Christ was the first condition for the existence of that humanity, since the humanity was not "imaged" afterwards. This is like the union of the soul of the human being with its body (*badan*). The possibility that the Creator was generous towards humankind in his own essence means that he was united with humankind to the extent that the sayings and deeds that were particular to the Creator (may he be exalted!) came to be revealed only in him (i.e. Christ). This was in order to make manifest the difference between (on the one hand) the possibility of his being generous in his own essence as such, and (on the other hand) the idea that he acted upon his own essence. Let our analogies be completed and our opponent be refuted. Glory to God forever and ever.'

And he has an additional commentary on the aforementioned statement that the mind has become one with what it comprehends when it is 'imaged' by the image of what it comprehends.¹⁶⁷

(23) The condition of that which is comprehended in the mind (*al-ma'qūl*), is like the condition of that which is perceived (*al-maḥsūs*) in the act of sensory perception (*al-ḥass*). The condition of that which is perceived in the act of sensory perception is like the condition of things that face mirrors (as they are seen) in the mirrors themselves. And it is clear that before anything comes before the mirrors and faces them, the mirrors are devoid of the images of whatever it is that comes to face them. And if an object of whatever quality presents itself and faces the mirrors so that its image may be 'imaged' in them, the image (*ṣūrah*) of that which faces the mirrors is 'imaged' (*taṣawwarat*) in them. What used to have (only) the possibility of existing in the mirrors has actually come to exist in them. An imagined thing has become realized by means of the facing image. The image in the mirrors is its realization, in view of the fact that it is 'imaged' (*mutaṣawwarah*) in actuality, and the image of whatever is facing the mirrors is what has come to exist in them. They (the two images) have become one in subject. In the same way, the image of the mind and the image of that which is comprehended in the mind are one and the same thing.

¹⁶⁷ Lit. that which has been comprehended. I have rendered this phrase in the active voice in order to make the phrase flow more smoothly in English.

A choice extract from the ninth axiom of al-Ṣafī's book, 'The Truths', with a fine addition at the end.

(25) The means of proving the divinity of Christ and the union of his divinity with his humanity is threefold. The first is the witness of the aforementioned prophets concerning his appearance and his divinity. The second is the manifestation and issuance of divine actions from him. The third is the reception of whoever has believed in him from among the Greek sages and philosophers, who were perfect in their natural and perceptible understanding.

(26) The intellectual path—through which the existence of the divine essence (*al-dhāt al-ilāhīyah*) was established among the intelligent, along with the existence of the attributes (belonging to that divine essence), the existence of the rational soul in the human being which is united with his animal nature, and the existence of the natural and organic energy in plants and animals—is the same intellectual path through which the divinity of Christ¹⁶⁸ in union with his humanity was established among the learned and faithful philosophical sages. I am speaking about the fact that every agent not perceived by the senses is known from the existence of its traces.

(27) And when (the sages) discovered that plants drew in nutrients and got rid of waste, they said, 'There is a power that draws in and a power that rids.' And when they discovered that animals were distinguished from the plants by their perception of sensory things, they said, 'There is a sensory power,' not on the basis of the fact that they themselves perceived something of this power through of their senses. Thus, when they found that human beings were distinguished from the rest of the animal kingdom by the rational speech that originated from thought engendered in the mind, they said, 'He has a mind with which he thinks rationally.'¹⁶⁹

(28) In the same way, when they found that the world was made, and they saw that some of it was already set, like the stars and the planets, and that some of it was (still) developing, like individual plants and animals, they said, 'It is necessary for both the already established and the newly occurring to have a beginning.' And when they found that the things that were made by God were made with wisdom, they said, 'Indeed, he is wise and powerful.' It was from the traces that they inferred the existence of the one who left those traces, and it was from the attributes of those traces (that they inferred) his attributes; it was not because they (directly) perceived with their senses either the existence of the one who left the traces or his attributes.

(29) Thus, when they found that sayings and deeds particular to God issued from Christ in a manner visible to the senses—that is, from his humanity—they said, 'The divinity is united with it in a way analogous to our statement, "The soul of the human is united with his body (*badanihi*)."' This is due to the fact that traces particular to the soul issue from the body.

(30) An additional (final) means (of proving the divinity of Christ) is not theoretical: it is the certainty that comes from (spiritual) exercise and inner purification.¹⁷⁰ The holy, righteous, and pure Fathers, those who knew and with their entire being

¹⁶⁸ Lit. the presence of the divinity of Christ.

¹⁶⁹ Lit. with which he is a rational thinker.

¹⁷⁰ Lit. exercise and the purification of the interior (*al-riyādah wa taṣfiyat al-bāṭin*).

entered into the profession of holiness, those who contemplated the first truth, the ones who enlightened the enlighteners, those who resembled angelic beings,¹⁷¹ those who were filled with the gift of the Holy Spirit, those who resembled God in accordance with their ability, those who walked in this path to its utmost end by means of the correctness of their Christian faith and their attainment of contact (*al-ittiṣāl*) with God through it, those who participated with his angels in glorifying him and in hallowing him in common partnership, showed forth his (divine) traces by means of that faith—by their constancy in it and their devotion to it—until they offered themselves up (in martyrdom), without any separation from it and in obedience to it.

Chapter 25

On the proof regarding the statement, ‘God became man, and man became God’: what the most excellent leader, Sheikh al-Ṣafī, said in his treatise ‘The Response to al-Naṣhī’.

(3) The meaning of the Christian saying,¹⁷² ‘God became man, and man became God,’ is that God united with one person of human nature from the very beginning of the person’s existence who was united to him, not that one of these two realities changed from its own nature to the other, but rather that one (being), Christ, came into existence from the two, and he is God-become-man (*al-ilāh al-mutaʿannis*).

(4) And in meaning it is likened to the process by which matter assumes its own form (*ṣūrah*), when it is formed. It assumes its form in an essential way. However, it does not take on the very essence of the form, nor the very essence of the matter, according to this analogy. Rather, from the two, one species emerges whose sense is different than the sense of each one of the two things singly.

(5) And the word ‘became’ suggests two meanings. One of them is like when we say, ‘The food became flesh and blood.’ And the other is like when we say, ‘The writer became a doctor.’ In the latter case, the essence (of the person) remains. It has not changed; it has been renewed. It had a condition by virtue of power, but then it came to have one by virtue of action. By the word, ‘became’ here, we do not want (to imply) the meaning of change.

(6) Now then, one of the aspects—the one to which we have restricted ourselves here—is purely intellectual. From this aspect, Yahyā ibn ʿAdī drew certain conclusions in his treatise *On the Necessity of the Incarnation*. He said,

(7) ‘It is necessary that God is the most generous, and it is necessary that the most generous is the one who is generous with the most excellent essence, and the most excellent essence is his own. So it is necessary that God is the one who is generous in his essence, and that he is the one who is sought after. Therefore, the union (*al-ittiḥād*) has no meaning except as an expression of the Creator’s generosity in his essence toward human nature through his special contact (*al-ittiṣāl*) with it.’

(8) The second aspect is legal-intellectual, and it is the fact that God has established the truth of the Gospel, the prophets, and the apostles. Now as for the Gospel, it

¹⁷¹ Lit. angelic substantial entities (*al-jawāhir al-malāʾikīyah*).

¹⁷² Lit. saying of the Christians.

includes the verse, ‘The Word became a body, and dwelt among us, and we saw his glory.’¹⁷³ In the Gospel is found the statement of the Lord, ‘Before Abraham, I am.’¹⁷⁴ And in it is what John says concerning him, ‘This is the one about whom I said to you, “He comes after me, and he was before me, because he is older than me.”’¹⁷⁵ For he came before the two by virtue of the fact that he is God, not by virtue of the fact that he is man, because in the body he was born of Mary, after Abraham and John.

Chapter 26

On the proof regarding the meaning of the saying of the holy Gospel, ‘The Word became flesh (*lahman*),’ and in some languages, ‘He became a body (*jasadan*).’

(3) We say that the word ‘became’ implies two meanings. (4) One of them is like when we say, ‘The food became flesh and blood.’ Here the first has been changed into the second, and not vice versa. (5) The second meaning is like when we say, ‘The doctor became an astrologer, and the writer became a soldier.’ Here the essence remains. It has not changed; it has been renewed. It had a condition by virtue of power, and then it came to have one by virtue of action.

(6) This is the meaning that we desire—namely, that through the union (*al-ittiḥād*) God the Word came to have a condition that had not existed before. It is his contact (*ittiṣāl*) with a human being who possessed bodily and fleshly characteristics,¹⁷⁶ just like the contact (*ittiṣāl*) between the soul and the body. And yet, he remains eternal in his condition, without change.

(7) This statement is from the words of the philosophers among the Christians.

6. Patriarch Matthew IV, *A Refutation of the Calvinists*, Par. ar. 226 (unedited). Trans. S. Davis.

(1) In the name of God, the Merciful and Compassionate. Glory to the eternal God. Salvation belongs to the Lord, and by the Lord comes salvation. (This house loves God.)¹⁷⁷

(2) The peace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the grace of his living Holy Spirit who resided in his pure disciples and in his holy, righteous apostles on holy and revered Mount Zion, that divine peace and that blessing itself, may they reside always within our venerable and blessed Christian brothers. May the blessing of God be upon them all with all the heavenly blessings, Amen. We will teach them after the renewal of blessings upon them, and I will bestow spiritual peace upon them.

(3) It has come to our ears that the enemy speaks among you concerning the faith. We have already sent you a document especially concerning that.¹⁷⁸ We write to you this correspondence also. It is from me, Matthew the Poor, the servant of Jesus Christ by the grace of God, the one for whom it is inconceivable—he who is unworthy—to

¹⁷³ John 1: 14. ¹⁷⁴ John 8: 58. ¹⁷⁵ John 1: 15.

¹⁷⁶ Lit. a bodily, fleshly human being (*insān jasadānī laḥmī*).

¹⁷⁷ This sentence is the only part of the text written in Coptic.

¹⁷⁸ The author is referring to a statement of faith that he had earlier sent to the same recipients. For the text of this doctrinal summary, see Par. ar. 225.

be called Patriarch over the great city of Alexandria and its environs, along with the cities of the Copts in Egypt and the towns in Ethiopia, Nubia, Africa, and Nicaea. I have written this out of love for everyone who sees this letter and reads it.

(4) We already know that the heretics from among the Europeans oppose with special stubbornness the great mystery—the body of Christ—which is the holy eucharistic offering, and they deny its truth, saying that Jesus Christ is not present in it in his essence but only in his likeness. They also say about us that we do not believe in that holy mystery—that is, that we have not believed that the substance of the bread and wine is changed into the substance of the body and blood of Christ, nor that he is truly present on the holy altar in the eucharistic offering after the (words of) consecration. They also say that the holy eucharistic offering is not the true body of Jesus Christ under the species of the bread, which is called Christ's body on account of the power of the Holy Spirit that is present in it. And they say that the eucharistic offering, which we call the body of Christ, is not the same body that is in heaven. They say that Christ is only in heaven, and not on the earth in his essence: (according to them) the thing that we see is not the true body, but only bread. Thus, they say about us that we do not in fact bow down to the body of Jesus Christ in the eucharistic offering by a special act of worship devoted to God. They also say that the sinners who partake of the eucharistic offering have not partaken of the body of Christ. Because of these words that we have heard, we have requested forgiveness from God for their sake. However, we advise them with the following counsel.

(5) Why have they spoken about us with these inappropriate words? Indeed, it is not correct, but a lie and a falsehood. Why do they see the small piece of straw in our eye, while the large plank of wood is in their eyes?¹⁷⁹ For this reason, let us take away the doubt from people's hearts. We will now clarify for them our belief, and we will say to them and before all people that the Jacobite (i.e. non-Chalcedonian) communion of the Copts accepts and confesses this true faith. It was the body of Christ himself that rose to heaven and that is seated on the right hand of the Father on high. That body in its very essence and substance is present in the holy eucharistic offering. He is not visible on account of the presence of his very own body on the altar sanctified to him by an act of special worship devoted to God, just as the communion of the Latin church believes. And we are with them in this particular matter, but we are divided with them in another matter. These (Protestant) heretics lie about us, saying that after the consecration we do not worship nor bow down to it. We believe and we say that evil persons partake of the body of Christ with their mouths, just like good persons do. The former do so to their eternal damnation, but the latter do so for the sake of their salvation. We say and believe that the bread and the wine have been truly changed into the substance of Jesus Christ's body, and into the substance of his noble blood, so that after the consecration the substance of the bread and the substance of the wine do not remain, and (we also believe) that the holy mystery is given to the sick in order that they may die in the grace of God, in order that their provisions may be in the kingdom of heaven. Now, do we say that it is incredible and

¹⁷⁹ Matthew 7: 3–5; Luke 6: 41–2.

improper to accept (the idea) that one body can be in many places at one moment in time? For the one who created the world with a word is able to do this wondrous thing. He enacts his body by his Word when he says through the mouth of the priest, ‘This is my body,’ and he gave his body to his disciples in Emmaus, while being nowhere.¹⁸⁰ And just as his divinity was hidden in the womb of the Virgin Mary, in the same way it is hidden under the accidents of the bread and wine. The matter is the same, because this was necessary for God to put our fidelity to the test, so that we might (prove ourselves to) be (faithful). For when Jesus Christ enjoined us to ‘eat my body’, it was difficult for us.

(6) We also believe and firmly hold that this faith—which has continued from the command of Jesus Christ our Lord until today through the (faithful) transmission of our fathers, the chaste apostles and saints¹⁸¹—is the faith which we will preserve until our death. We have excommunicated all who have opposed the apostolic trust when they speak about this tenet regarding the holy eucharistic offering mentioned above, and (all who) have opposed the transformation of the substance of the bread into the substance of Christ. This we have demonstrated to everyone who has read this document, and to everyone who has opposed it, saying that we do not accept the transformation of the substance of the bread and wine into the substance of the body and precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Indeed, they speak falsely and they oppose the truth with respect to this holy mystery, because in this respect we hold fast to it along with the Latin church. We have clarified and taught it, and have put our seal on it. This (teaching) comes to your knowledge, so receive it in Christian love.

(7) I will bring this letter to a close. This poor one asks the One who possesses the treasures of mercy to illuminate your minds and to lead you to all things good and heavenly that please Him, so that you may be sons of the Orthodox Church whose reputation has spread to the remotest parts of the inhabited world by the blessings of the pure and chaste Lady, the Virgin Mary, the angels and archangels, all the martyrs and saints, and all who have pleased the Lord with their good works, now and always, until the end of the ages. Amen. Amen. Amen.

¹⁸⁰ i.e. while remaining incorporeal in his divinity.

¹⁸¹ Lit. our fathers the chaste disciple-apostles and our fathers the chaste saints.

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- *I Am Amazed*, ed. Tito Orlandi, in *Shenute contra Origenistas*. Unione Accademica Nazionale, Corpus dei Manoscritti Copti Letterari. Rome: CIM, 1985. Lines 200–61 in Orlandi's edn. do not properly belong to this work. An additional genuine fragment omitted from Orlandi's edition has been edited by É. Amélineau, *Œuvres de Shenoudi*, i, 332–5. Corrected and supplemented readings have been supplied by Janet Timbie, 'Reading and Re-reading Shenoute's *I Am Amazed*' (forthcoming). English trans. Michael Foat, 'I Myself Have Seen', 114–40. Selected excerpts trans. here in Appendix A.1.
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- *I Have Said Many Times*, unpublished fragment. Cairo, Institut français d'archéologie orientale, MS Copte 2, fos. 125^v–127^r.
- *Is It Not Written*, fragment ed. É. Amélineau, *Œuvres de Shenoudi*, i, 37–43.
- *The Lord Thundered*, fragments ed. E. Amélineau, *Œuvres de Shenoudi*, i, 365–87. Additional fragment ed. J. Leipoldt, CSCO 42, 84–6 (no. 25). Latin trans. H. Wiesmann, CSCO 96, 47–8. For a new English translation, see Janet A. Timbie and Jason R. Zaborowski, 'Shenoute's Sermon *The Lord Thundered*: An Introduction and Translation', *Oriens Christianus* 90 (2006), 93–125.
- *Only I Tell Everyone Who Dwells in This Village*, fragment ed. J. Leipoldt, CSCO 42, 86–90 (no. 26). Latin trans. H. Wiesmann, CSCO 96, 48–51.
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 3. W. E. Crum, *Catalogue of the Coptic Manuscripts in the Collection of the John Rylands Library*, no. 70, 34–5 (= GB-MR 70 fos.1–7).
 4. J. Leipoldt, CSCO 42, no. 18, 44–5 (= IT-NB IB4, fo. 13). Latin trans. H. Wiesmann, CSCO 96, 22–3.
 5. Émile Amélineau, *Œuvres de Schenoudi*, i. 335–7, 487 (= IT-NB IB4, fo. 13).
 6. Georg Zoega, *Catalogus codicum copticorum manuscriptorum*, 451–2 (= IT-NB IB4, fo. 13).
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