

## **Shenute and Theophilus's *Festal Letters*: The Use of Episcopal Documents in Defense of the Role of the Body within Prayer and Ascetic Practice\***

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The fact that a large portion of the final section of Shenute's *I am amazed* (ἰπμοῖρε) – known also as *Contra origenistas* –,<sup>1</sup> is occupied by the quotation of Theophilus' *Sixteenth Festal Letter* (=FL 16) of 401 raises a number of cultural and literary questions for the historians of the Christian culture of Egypt: why did Shenute give so prominent a role to this specific letter as a basis for his antiheretical discourse? was he using a copy preserved in his monastery? Was this copy already in Coptic translation, or did Shenute directly translate the letter from Greek into Coptic while composing his work?

Since recent scholarship has devoted sufficient space to the above mentioned issues,<sup>2</sup> we must not leave out more general questions of historical and institutional character: What kind of relationship does the quotation from FL 16 illustrate between the monastery and the institutional church, represented not only by the local bishop, but also by the bishop of Alexandria? What does it mean from the point of view of Shenute's religious discourse in its relationship to the ideology of the patriarchate?

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\* Since I was a MA student in the early 80ties of the last century, I had to confront myself, during the year before the discussion of my dissertation devoted to the *Festal Letters* of Athanasius of Alexandria, with *Contra Origenistas*, published the year before by Tito Orlandi, my supervisor (1985). It was easy for me to recognize in Shenute's work a quotation from Athanasius' 39<sup>th</sup> Festal Letter, which I could compare with the Coptic text. In recent years I discussed with Tito Orlandi more than once the birth of the edition of *Contra origenistas*: why did he publish this specific work? what was the state of the art before the publication? He told me that this work was one among the outputs of his project founded around 1970, devoted to the reconstruction of the Library of the White Monastery. The article published by ORLANDI, A Catechesis Against Apocryphal Texts by Shenute and the Gnostic Texts of Nag Hammadi, in: HThR 75 (1982) 85–95, gave great resonance to this text, also because Orlandi's contention was that Shenute was discussing religious sets of texts in which Gnostic tendencies of the kind of those found in Nag Hammadi codices were mingled with Origenistic ideas. In the following years the dichotomy Origenism / Asiatic culture became one of the main articulation of his history of Coptic literature, as will be illustrated in the notes of the present contribution.

The other main reference for my studies on Shenute and the Egyptian church is Stephen Emmel, whom I met for the first time in Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, when he was working on the photographs preserved within the "Corpus dei Manoscritti Copti Letterari" in 1981–1982: the scientific dialogue with him has continued for decades, thanks to the International Congresses of Coptic Studies (Washington, Muenster, Leiden, Paris, Cairo, Rome), to other minor initiatives, and recently to his participation in the life of the Accademia Ambrosiana, Milan, of which we are both members. It was a joy for me to be able to participate, thanks to the kind invitation of Alfons Fürst, to Steve's last official academic act before his retirement.

<sup>1</sup> The following editions and critical tools will be used in this contribution: *Shenute contra Origenistas*, testo con introduzione e traduzione a cura di Tito ORLANDI (Unione Accademica Nazionale, Corpus dei Manoscritti Copti Letterari), Roma 1985; new critical edition by Tito ORLANDI in <http://www.cmcl.it/~cmcl/testi/sheori/cc0637.html>; Hans-Joachim CRISTEA, Shenute: Contra origenistas. Edition des koptischen Textes mit annotierter Übersetzung des 16. Osterfestbriefs des Theophilus in der Fassung des Hieronymus (ep. 96) (STAC 60), Tübingen 2011.

On the codicological and bibliological situation of *I am amazed* see Stephen EMMEL, *Shenoute's Literary Corpus* (CSCO.Sub 111-112), Louvain 2004, vol. II, 646–648, a work which should be consulted also for all other writings attributed to the abbot.

Of course, Leipold's edition is still useful and necessary: Johannes LEIPOLDT (ed.), *Sinuthii Archimandritae Vita et Opera omnia*. Aduvante Walter E. CRUM I/III/IV (CSCO.C 1, 2, 5), Paris 1908/1913; Hermann WIESMANN (transl.), *Sinuthii Archimandritae Vita et Opera omnia III/IV* (CSCO.C 8, 12), Paris 1931/1936.

I will quote Shenute's works from the English translation by David BRAKKE/Andrew CRISLIP, *Selected Discourses of Shenoute the Great. Community, Theology, and Social Conflict in Late Antique Egypt*, Cambridge 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Some of these problems have been dealt with by CRISTEA, Shenute: *Contra origenistas* (as in n. 1), 70–75, 99–109.

The Origenistic crisis of the second half of the fourth century, which explains at least in part the background of Shenute's *I am amazed*, has a long tradition of study. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the attention paid to extraordinary Coptic texts such as the *Life of Aphu* and the works attributed to a certain Agathonicus of Tarsus,<sup>3</sup> has given new life to the scholarly debate around the events and religious phenomena of this crisis: suffice it to mention, among others, the names of Florovsky, Guillaumont, and with a new direction of studies and divergent solutions, Dechow, Clark, Golitzin, Bumazhnov, Orlandi, Prinzivalli, Patterson, Marksches.<sup>4</sup> The publication in 1985 of *Contra origenistas* by Tito Orlandi, followed by the codicological systematization by Stephen Emmel<sup>5</sup> and the re-editions by Cristea and the same Orlandi, has provided the critical debate with new data, in particular the already known anti-Origenistic initiative of Dioscorus of Alexandria,<sup>6</sup> and above all Shenute's adherence to it with a literary and intellectual initiative of great depth, characterized by a plurality of sources and originality of approach: this has been perceived as an unexpected trace of the Origenistic debate until the middle of the fifth century. A monographic section in *Adamantius* has been devoted in 2013 to the historic dimension of the crisis.<sup>7</sup>

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As said above, in the last decades there has been a radical change of interpretative models regarding that crisis. The traditional representation of "anthropomorphism" is changing in our studies and that of "Origenism" has become more and more complicated thanks to the increasingly refined perception of the diverse trends of thought and religious practice active in the context of the

<sup>3</sup> For the *Life of Aphu* see Francesco ROSSI, *I papiri copti del Museo Egizio di Torino*, Torino 1887/1892, vol. I, fasc. 3; new edition in Tito ORLANDI, *Vita Aphu*, <https://www.cmcl.it>. For the texts attributed to a certain Agathonicus of Tarsus, see Walter Ewig CRUM/Albert EHRHARD, *Der Papyruscodex Saec. VI-VII der Philipps-Bibliothek in Cheltenham*. Koptische theologische Schriften (SELWG 18), Strassburg 1915; new edition by Tito ORLANDI, *Agatonico di Tarso, Pistis Agathonikou, Sententiae Agathonikou, Contra Stratonikon, De incredulitate, Contra Iustinum Samaritanum*, <https://www.cmcl.it>.

<sup>4</sup> Étienne DRIOTON, La discussion d'une moine anthropomorphite audien avec le patriarche Théophile d'Alexandrie en l'année 399, in: ROC 10 (1915-1917) 92–100 (I), 113–128 (II); Georges FLOROVSKY, The anthropomorphite in the Egyptian desert, in: ID., *Aspects of Church History. Collected works*, vol. 4, Belmont (Mass.) 1975, 89–96 (originally published in 1958); ID., Theophilus of Alexandria and Apa Aphou of Pemdje, *ibid.*, 97–129 (originally published in 1965); Antoine GUILLAUMONT, Les "Képhalaia gnostica" d'Évagre le Pontique et l'histoire de l'origénisme chez les Grecs et chez les Syriens, Paris 1962; Jon F. DECHOW, Dogma and Mysticism in Early Christianity. Epiphanius of Cyprus and the Legacy of Origen (PatMS 13) Macon (GA) 1988; Elizabeth A. CLARK, *The Origenist Controversy: The Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate*, Princeton (NJ) 1992; Graham GOULD, The Image of God and the Anthropomorphite Controversy in Fourth Century Monasticism, in: Robert G. DALY (ed.), *Origeniana Quinta. Historica – Text and Method – Biblica – Philosophica – Theologica – Origenism and Later Developments*, Leuven 1992, 549–557; ID., The influence of Origen on Fourth-Century Monasticism. Some Further Remarks, in: Gilles DORIVAL/Alain LE BOULLUEC (eds.), *Origeniana Sexta. Origène et la Bible*, ed. G. Dorival - A. Le Boulluec, Leuven, Peeters, 1995, 549–557; Tito ORLANDI, Letteratura copta e cristianesimo nazionale egiziano, in Alberto CAMPLANI (ed.), *L'Egitto cristiano. Aspetti e problemi in età tardo-antica* (SEAug 51), Roma 1997, 39–120; Emanuela PRINZIVALLI, Magister ecclesiae: il dibattito su Origene fra III e IV secolo (SEAug 82), Roma 2002; Alexander GOLITZIN, The Vision of God and the Form of Glory: More Reflections on the Anthropomorphite Controversy of AD 399, in: JOHN BEHR/Andrew LOUTH/Dimitri CONOMOS (eds.), *Abba. The Tradition of Orthodoxy in the West. Festschrift for Bishop Kallistos (Ware) of Diokleia*, Crestwood (NY) 2003, 273–297; Dmitrij BUMAZHNOV, Der Mensch als Gottes Bild im christlichen Ägypten. Studien zu Gen 1,26 in zwei koptischen Quellen des 4.–5. Jahrhunderts (STAC 34), Tübingen 2006; ID., Visio mystica im Spannungsfeld frühchristlicher Überlieferungen. Die Lehre der sogenannten Antoniusbriefe von der Gottes- und Engelschau und das Problem unterschiedlicher spiritueller Traditionen im frühen ägyptischen Mönchtum (STAC 52), Tübingen 2009; Paul A. PATTERSON, Visions of Christ. The Anthropomorphite Controversy of 399 CE (STAC 68), Tübingen 2012; Christof MARKSCHIES, *Gottes Körper: Jüdische, christliche und pagane Gottesvorstellungen in der Antike*, Berlin 2016.

<sup>5</sup> EMMEL, Shenute's Literary Corpus (as in n. 1), 646–648.

<sup>6</sup> Herbert THOMPSON, Dioscorus and Shenoute, in: *Recueil d'études égyptologiques dédiées à la mémoire de Jean-François Champollion à l'occasion du centenaire de la Lettre à M. Dacier* (BEHE 234), Paris 1922, 367–376; see the German translation with codicological contextualization in CRISTEA, Shenute: *Contra origenistas* (as in n. 1), 45–48.

<sup>7</sup> Roberto ALCIATI/Federico FATTI (eds.), *La controversia origenista: un affare mediterraneo / The Origenist Controversy: a Mediterranean Affair*, in: *Adamantius* 19 (2013) 7–202.

Alexandrian Christian culture. In particular, it should be underlined that both labels have assumed in the eyes of scholars the status of heresiological constructions, devised either to pursue an ecclesiastical policy or to support the religious identity of certain monastic groups. In an even more recent phase, the anthropomorphic tendency has been recovered as a historical phenomenon having its own identity – therefore not only as the product of a polemical construction by Socrates or Cassian – especially by those who suggest that behind the accusations that some monks conceived of God in human form on the basis of Gen 1:26 or that in the act of prayer they formed in their mind God’s forms, there was an ancient pre-Nicene theological tradition based on Jewish and proto-Christian conceptions related to the glory of God and the corporeality of the Logos.<sup>8</sup>

As said, in a first phase of modern historiography, the traditional representation of the struggle between two divergent theological approaches, enriched by their unhappy interaction with the ecclesial policy of Theophilus, as represented by Socrates and Cassian,<sup>9</sup> has left space to a plurality of crises and debates conducted by different actors from time to time, whose deeper reason was not Origen’s legacy, but the affirmation of new actors in the Egyptian or Eastern religious system, on the one hand, and the competition between cultural models, on the other. This did not mean denying the presence of a real debate – or rather, a series of real debates –, but to emphasize how much the emulation among monastic groups, the changing position of patriarchate in the context of the monastic world, and its relationship with other patriarchates of the Eastern Roman Empire played a role in it: these elements pushed the controversy to extremes, creating enemies on both sides, leading in the same time to inextricable controversial constructions. It is as if, in the multiplicity of the topics discussed in the monastic groups and in the dioceses, the interventions of effective actors provoked crises with the purpose of recomposing the groups and their alliances in a way convenient to their ecclesial projects. According to Federico Fatti, for example, Epiphanius began his controversy against John of Jerusalem to defend the rights of the episcopal seat of Antioch against that of Jerusalem, an action which in turn had the result to favor the Church of Cyprus.<sup>10</sup>

This new interpretation was based on the fact that it was becoming clear how much Socrates’ and Cassian’s accounts, and other similar ones, were affected by the ideological position (Origenistic) of their authors. The events that most prompted scholars to review the reconstruction of the debate were the edition of a Coptic text, the anonymous *Life of Aphu*, and above all its analysis by Drioton<sup>11</sup>, who identified in it a fundamental testimony to the presence in Egyptian land of a doctrine of the glorious corporeity of God, connected in his view to the Syriac Audians. Two scholars participated in reforming the traditional approach, G. Florovsky and Antoine Guillaumont, who, while diverging about the identity of the doctrine of the protagonist of the text, caught in it, as well as in all the “anthropomorphic controversy”, a passionate and lively debate about prayer, its modalities, the mental representations that can accompany it, its function in anthropology. Guillaumont, while believing that the monk actually supports an anthropomorphic representation of the divinity, wondered if much of the controversy could not be explained as a debate on the monastic eucharistical practice, exacerbated by the position taken by Evagrius in his treatise *De oratione*. Florovsky too believed that the core of the controversy was prayer, about which the actors of the debate wondered if it can be centered on the memory of the historical Jesus, the one narrated by the Gospels, or if one should renounce every image. According to Florovsky, Aphu may have thought, in the manner of Irenaeus, that humanity was created in the image of God, identified with

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<sup>8</sup> The following is an abbreviated and updated history of the studies already presented in the contribution: Alberto CAMPLANI, Il dibattito sulla visione di Dio e sull’“uomo ad immagine” nel monachesimo egiziano: interpolazioni e riscritture nei testi copti attribuiti ad Agatonico di Tarso, in: Isabella ADINOLFI/Giancarlo GAETA/Andreina LAVAGETTO (eds.), *L’anti-Babele. Sulla mistica degli antichi e dei moderni*, Genova 2017, 149–183, especially 150–165.

<sup>9</sup> Cassianus, *Conlationes* X; Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* VI 7.

<sup>10</sup> Federico FATTI, Pontifex tantus. Giovanni, Epifanio e le origini della prima controversia origenista, in: *Adamantius* 19 (2013) 30–49.

<sup>11</sup> DRIOTON, La discussion d’une moine anthropomorphite (as in n. 4).

the proleptic image of the incarnate Logos, and that this concept was combined with the enhancement of the whole human compound in the prayer<sup>12</sup>. While Socrates and Cassian represented non-Origenistic monasticism as simplistic and naive in its theological expressions, Florovsky, far more than Guillaumont, insisted that the perspective revealed by the *Life of Aphu* is also theologically aware. It cannot be defined anthropomorphic, but is tied to a Christian culture different from that of the Origenist currents, provided with philosophical and anthropological foundations which are distant from Platonism and Evagrianism.

The following decades have seen a deepening of Florovsky's perspectives by historians of monasticism or the origins of controversy such as Graham Gould<sup>13</sup> and Elizabeth Clark,<sup>14</sup> who have placed the crisis of the year 399 in a much broader perspective, both cultural and historical, and the edition or analysis of Coptic texts by T. Orlandi.<sup>15</sup>

From 1998 a new tendency arose aimed at understanding the position of Aphu and other non-Origenist figures, of Egyptian or non-Egyptian background, on the basis of cultural antecedents different from those proposed up to then in the studies. Distinguishing the concrete mystique of Aphu from the interior mystique of Evagrius, both directed towards the vision of God, and re-evaluating the "anthropomorphic" ideology of the former, this trend proposed that one of the most important sources of the author of the *Life of Aphu* was not the culture of Irenaeus, materialistic and anthropologically unitary, but an ancient Christian and Judaic tradition concerning the body and glory of God. Golitzin surmised that the object of contemplation by anthropomorphic monks was the glorious divine body belonging to the Son before the incarnation, an idea that he considered traditional, even if marginalized in the Nicene era, deriving from Jewish speculations on the glory of God in the form of a man (Ezek 1,26-28). The closely related notions of image, divine glory, human form, would later have been reworked in early Christian literature<sup>16</sup>. This perspective has been further deepened and enriched by the book that Patterson dedicated the whole question of the vision of God during the anthropomorphic controversy. According to the scholar, in the context of a monastic world that unanimously affirmed the importance of prayer, of the vision of God, of its feasibility thanks to the figure of Christ, two opposite tendencies are highlighted: for "anthropomorphites", the vision was exclusively that of the Son (while the Father remains invisible), "concrete" (available to the eyes of the body), and of human form. For the Evagrians, the vision was that of the consubstantial Trinity (seen in the glorified Christ), interior (available only to the eyes of the mind or soul), and formless.<sup>17</sup>

Dmitrij Bumazhnov in 2006 contested Golitzin's vision, coming back to support, on a broad textual basis, a position similar to that of Florovsky:<sup>18</sup> Aphu is not anthropomorphic, exhibits an anthropology different from the Origenist or Alexandrian one, whose antecedents can be identified in Melito, *De anima et de corpore*, Irenaeus, whose circulation in Egypt is attested, and other well-known authors in the same context, writing either in Greek or in Coptic. In addition, Bumazhnov, in a volume of 2009,<sup>19</sup> offered an extensive research on the vision of God in the monastic literature linked to the name of Antony and Ammonas. The work offers new proposals about the letters of Antony, generally considered to be bearers of an anthropological and theological proposal of clear

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<sup>12</sup> FLOROVSKY, *The anthropomorphite in the Egyptian desert* (as in n. 4), 96: "This (=Irenaeus') emphasis encourages the use of 'visible' and 'somatic' images in theological thought and language, without committing Christians to any 'anthropomorphite' conception of Divinity. The 'image' is in the total structure of man; 'likeness' is confined to his spiritual sphere. The 'Anthropomorphite' monks stood in a venerable tradition. The conflict in the Desert was not just a clash between the 'ignorant' and the 'learned.' It was the conflict between the two traditions: Evangelical realism and 'Origenistic' symbolism".

<sup>13</sup> GOULD, *The Image of God and the Anthropomorphite Controversy* (as in n. 4).

<sup>14</sup> CLARK, *The Origenist Controversy* (as in n. 4), especially 11–84.

<sup>15</sup> ORLANDI, *Letteratura copta e cristianesimo nazionale egiziano* (as in n. 4), 49–68.

<sup>16</sup> GOLITZIN, *The Vision of God* (as in n. 4).

<sup>17</sup> PATTERSON, *Visions of Christ* (as in n. 4), 119, and 91–118.

<sup>18</sup> BUMAZHNOV, *Der Mensch als Gottes Bild* (as in n. 4).

<sup>19</sup> BUMAZHNOV, *Visio mystica* (as in n. 4), especially 88.

Origenian ancestry, which can be considered as the true antecedent of Evagrius; Ammonas too, traditionally judged as a prosecutor of Antony's spirituality, **is in** the object of a profound reinterpretation, which tends to distance him from the master's uniqueness. These are therefore important texts in order to define the starting conditions of the monastic debate that worsened in 399. Bumazhnov also questions what after Rubenson's work had become a majority consensus on the Antonian authenticity of the letters: *Letters II–VII*, with their negative attitude towards the body, house of demons and passions, the notion of image of God, the idea of salvation reserved to the *nous*, the doctrine of apocatastasis, would reflect a much more Origenist, and in any case divergent theological perspective compared to that expressed in Letter I: this difference could lead one to presume different authors.<sup>20</sup>

Markschies' work devoted to God's body (2016) takes into consideration a large amount of Jewish and Christian texts concerning the body and corporeity of God, widely touching the anthropomorphic and the origenist crisis, and moving along lines that do not coincide with the interpretative proposal by Stroumsa, Golitzin, Patterson. Of great importance is the enhancement of the non-anthropomorphic position of a text by Theophilus of Alexandria dedicated to the Vision of Isaiah, which, after the crisis, declares the impossibility of seeing God with the body, as well as of the polemical position against anthropomorphic tendencies in the monastic world assumed by Cyril of Alexandria on numerous occasions. There is more: a text such as *Fides Agathonici*, which has remained completely marginalized in the studies, is placed at the center of the critical attention as a document that thematised the connection between "man in the image of God" and the "pure prayer, without images" of Evagrian tradition.<sup>21</sup>

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It is precisely by looking at these issues that I will propose some notes on a single theme of *I am amazed*, that is, anthropology in its relationship with worship, not so much to deepen an analysis that has already been conducted in the past by more than one scholar, but to contextualize its results within a variety of Coptic texts and currents of the time of Shenute, with the aim to better understand the purposes his literary initiative.

My argument is structured as follows:

1. What type of episcopal documentation is Shenute familiar with? In addition to Dioscorus' famous letters which are likely on the backdrop of *I am amazed* and the quotations drawn from different works by Athanasius, Theophilus' FL 16 is one of the main sources of *I am amazed*. But to understand Shenute's work correctly, other festal letters and official documents should be mentioned, not only by Theophilus, but also by Cyril.

2. Which Christian identity does Shenute want to defend? Human body's dignity (also in its ascetic performance) in its strict unity with the soul, sensible prayer (vocal and sung), and Eucharistic realism (and therefore a distance from any symbolic conception), seem to be at the center of the Christian identity as proposed by the monk.

3. What kind of religious attitude can we detect by comparing *I am amazed* with what we know about Theophilus and Cyril? The documentation of the episcopate of Alexandria is central and gives a number of arguments to the abbot, but does not perfectly coincide with Shenute's own line of thought. There is an interesting dialectic between adherence to the patriarchal discourse and personal reworking of it according to the modalities of a Christian culture which he considers his own.

4. The dense layer of Shenutian rhetoric does not allow an immediate identification of the historical actors that he has in mind and the context in which the debate evolves: the multiplicity of ideas, interpretations, traditions, and theories he outlines and mingles in his anti-heretical discourse

<sup>20</sup> On Antony's letter the reference work remains Samuel RUBENSON, *The Letters of St. Antony. Monasticism and the Making of a Saint*, Minneapolis 1995.

<sup>21</sup> MARKSCHIES, *Gottes Körper* (as in n. 4), 356–361, 410–417.

coincides only in part, and in an inaccurate way, with the historical actors and the context that we can reconstruct for the first half of the fifth century.

### 1. Festal letters and other episcopal letters in Shenute

First of all we must recognize that Theophilus' LF 16 is important not only for the strategic position it occupies at the end of *I am amazed*, but also for the arguments it provides to the Shenutian polemical discourse. In general Shenute pays the greatest attention to the official documents sent by the patriarchs.

A very interesting witness of that attitude is the first of three letters addressed by Cyril to Shenute<sup>22</sup> in which the bishop of Alexandria informs him about the circulation of a copy of the festal letter of an undetermined year. He greets Shenute and announces the name of the letter carrier coming from Alexandria, in charge of spreading the copies of the festal letter:

ΞΙΤΗ ΔΙΔΥΜΩΝ ΠΡΑΚ ΝΑΝΑΓΝΩΣΤΗΣ, ΠΑΙ ΝΤΑΥΤΟΦΥ ΕΣΩΡ ΝΝΕΣΖΑΙ ΜΠΩΔ ΝΗΡΕΦΩΜΩΕΝΟΥΓΤΕ ΝΕΠΙΣΚΟΠΟΣ ΝΤΕΠΑΡΧΕΙΑ.<sup>23</sup>

through Didymon, the sober lector, appointed to spread the writings concerning the feast to the pious bishops of the eparchy.

The Coptic ΝΝΕΣΖΑΙ ΜΠΩΔ could correspond to ἑορταστικὰ γράμματα in the lost original Greek, one of the terms used in antiquity to designate festal letters. The term ἐπαρχία means probably a region: in Dioscorus' letter to Shenute, for instance, the expression λααγ ἱπολεις ντεπαρχεια ντεθηβαις ("in any other city of the *eparchia* of Thebais") means clearly "in no city of the region of Thebais."<sup>24</sup> What emerges in this quotation is the traditional custom of transmitting the copies of the festal letter, produced in the chancery of Alexandria, all over Egypt through clerics charged of this task.

The extraordinarily important role played by the episcopal chancery of Alexandria in the drafting, diffusion and archiving of the festal letters is evident from different witnesses. An *Index* to Athanasius' festal letters, written at the end of the fourth century, says about the regions reached by these letters carriers: "the Festal Letters of Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, which he sent year by year, to the several cities and all the provinces subject to him; that is, from Pentapolis and on to Libya, Ammoniaca, the greater and the lesser Oasis, Egypt, and Augustamnica, with the Heptanomis and the upper and middle Thebais."<sup>25</sup> We know that there were clerics who had the specific task to carry the copies, as is testified by Synesius of Cyrene, bishop of Ptolemais under Theophilus of Alexandria: "I have just sent you the carrier with the Paschal letters (διακομιστήν τῶν πανηγυρικῶν γραμμάτων), announcing the date of the holy festival as the nineteenth of Pharmuthi (14 April) so that the night which precedes the day in question may also be consecrated to the mystery of the Resurrection. Show the messenger every consideration both on his arrival and at his departure. Let him have a change of horses each time. This is only fair to him, for he runs the risk of falling into the hands of armed enemies in undertaking to traverse so hostile a country in order to save an old ancestral custom of the Church from disappearing."<sup>26</sup> Letter carriers are attested

<sup>22</sup> On the letters and their preservation in the codex MONB.ZD see EMMEL, Shenute's Literary Corpus (as in note 1), vol. I, 288, and table 74, 520. See also vol. II, 650.

<sup>23</sup> Ed. LEIPOLDT III (as in note 1), 225. The Latin translation is completely mistaken: "ut reverentiam tuam salutem per Didymonem, honestum lectorem, quem quidem constituerunt ad scripta religiosi antiquitatis digna episcopis divulganda", transl. WIESMANN III (as in note 1), 131.

<sup>24</sup> THOMSON, Dioscorus and Shenute (as in n. 6), 371 l. 22.

<sup>25</sup> Alberto CAMPLANI (ed.), Atanasio di Alessandria: *Lettere festali*. Anonimo: *Indice delle Lettere festali*. Introduzione, traduzione e note (LCPM 34), Milano 2003, 562–563.

<sup>26</sup> *Ep.* 13, to Peter the Elder, ed. Rudolf HERCHER.

also by real documents, such as papyri and ostraca, particularly in the Theban region between the end of the sixth and the first half of the seventh century CE.

John Cassian around 420 CE, exactly during Shenute's activity, writes in his *Collationes* that on the day of Epiphany letters are sent to alle the diocese of Egypt, not only in all the cities but also in all the monasteries<sup>27</sup>. Cassian's insistence on the letters being sent not only to bishops but also to monasteries is corroborated by both the *Lives of Pachomius*,<sup>28</sup> which show evidence of the arrival of Athanasius' festal letter 39, written for Easter 367 and containing the canons of the Scriptures, in the Pachomian monasteries, and by John Cassian himself, who speaks of the scandal raised in the monastic world by the reading aloud of a passage in the festal letter of Theophilus for the Easter of 399 on the topic of man in the image of God (*Collationes* 10,2,2-3). Although we should not rule out the possibility that some copies could be made locally, in the various dioceses, it is quite probable that a good part of them were drafted in the bishopric of Alexandria.

Some copies were preserved in the archives: according to an episode narrated in the Coptic *Life of Aphu*, who later became bishop of Oxyrhyncus under Theophilus, this monk went to the bishopric of Alexandria and asked to verify on the *hison* (authentic copy) preserved there the exact lesson (*lexis*) of the festal letter (*ta šeoēiṣ*) of that year. Since the text will be later at the center of our critical attention, let us quote the section devoted to the festal letter:

(...) Aphou chose a kind of life of this kind. He took off his clothes and put on his hips a skin, and remained with the buffalos in the desert, being for him the night and the day a time of liturgical celebration (συναξίς). His food was in proportion to their way of life, and he was conforming himself to them, he who carried the body of the weakness of men. When he had overcome the intemperance of the youth, he began this kind of life. And he met the brother whom we mentioned earlier and, once a year, (this one) informed him about the time of the holy announce (τα ὡοείω). He came to town dressed in a shabby tunic and listened to the Easter catechesis in the church of Pemje without anyone recognizing him, until he came back to his residence. (...).

While he was still abiding with the animals, it happened that he went out for the preaching of Holy Easter. And he heard an expression which was not in agreement with the knowledge of the Holy Spirit, so that he was very troubled by this thing. And, indeed, all those who heard it were afflicted and troubled. But the angel of the Lord ordered the blessed Aphu not to neglect the thing, saying to him: "You are ordered by the Lord to go to Alexandria to correct the word." And these words were as follows: the preacher, as if he was exalting the glory of God in his speech, recalled the inferiority of man and said: "It is not the image of God which we human beings bear (νῆται ἀν τε θικῶν μῆνοῦτε ται ἀνον ἐτηφορεῖ μμοσ ἀνον ἠρώμε)." (...).

The blessed Aphou replied: "I know of your soul's goodness and that you are a thoughtful man. That is the reason I came to your highness. I dare (to think) that you will not reject the word of piety, even though it comes from a poor man like me." And Theophilus, the archbishop, said to him: "Which irreligious man is he who shall be fiikush enough to reject God's word for any reason." Aphou replied: "Let my Lord bishop command that the original of the message (ἠρίσον ἠῖττα ὡοείω) be read to me, in which I heard the sentence that was not in agreement with the Scriptures inspired by God. I do not believe that it could have come from you, but I thought that a copyist was wrong in writing. Because of it many pious men got confused enough to the point of being greatly troubled."<sup>29</sup>

As is well known, *festal letters* (ἐπιστολαὶ ἑορταστικάι, rarely πανηγυρικὰ γράμματα or κηρύγματα, Coptic τα ὡοείω or κηργμα) were born from the necessity to announce to all the

<sup>27</sup> "In the country of Egypt this custom is observed by ancient tradition that, when Epiphany is past — which the priests of that province regard as the time both of the Lord's baptism and also of his birth in the flesh, and so celebrate either sacrament not on two separate days as in the Western provinces but on the only festival of this day — letters of the pontiff of Alexandria (*epistulae pontificis Alexandrini*) are sent to all the churches of Egypt, in which the beginning of Lent and the day of Easter (*initium Quadragesimae et dies Paschae*) are pointed out, not only in all the cities but also in all the monasteries" (10,2,1, CSEL 13, ed. Michael PETSCHENING).

<sup>28</sup> Bohairic Life § 189, CSCO 89, ed. Louis-Théophile LEFORT.

<sup>29</sup> Ed. Francesco ROSSI, *I papiri copti del Museo Egizio di Torino*, Torino 1887/1892, vol. I, fasc. 3; see also Tito ORLANDI, <https://www.cmcl.it>.

dioceses of Egypt and a number of episcopates of the Mediterranean the correct date of Easter.<sup>30</sup> The first explicit mention of this custom, which was to last for more than a millennium and to be considered as one of the most important official means of communication of patriarchate towards the Egyptian dioceses and monasteries, is found in the *Historia ecclesiastica* of Eusebius of Caesarea (7.2), in which it is said that bishop Dionysius (247–264), a member of the Alexandrian élite and a writer himself, composed all kinds of epistles, among which the festal letters stand out for their particularly solemn style. Over time, the original practical aim of announcing the date of Easter was enriched by reflections on the Christian life in the churches of Egypt, so that they became one of the main instruments used by the bishops of Alexandria to send popular messages to all the dioceses of Egypt and the monasteries, by which they tried to give unity and identity to the their church, to take position in the political and, above all, the theological problems of their time.<sup>31</sup> At the time of Theophilus and Cyril, festal letters consisted usually of four parts, with an optional appendix: a) the beginning, which mentioned the feast of Easter and its prophetic references; b) the central section, in which all kind of topics could be touched: anthropology, Christology, Trinity, exegesis of Scripture, generally treated in connection to the debates of the time, so that festal letters became a very interesting evidence of how religious debates and theological conflicts could be represented to a larger audience such as that of the believers of Egyptian dioceses and monks of different monastic organizations; c) a final section with the quotation of 1 Corinthians 5,7 (“Christ, our Passovers, has been sacrificed”), containing exhortations concerning the correct observance of Lenten and Easter, the brotherly love and the aid to the poor; d) the announcement of the dates of the Easter season, followed by a mention of Pentecost and a Trinitarian doxology: in particular, expressed sometimes only according to the Egyptian calendar, sometimes according to both the Egyptian and the Roman calendar, we find the dates of the beginning of Lent, the beginning of the Holy Week, the interruption of the fast on Saturday and the date of Easter; e) in some cases a postscript was added, which could touch details or events related to the time of sending, but usually recorded the names of deceased Egyptian bishops and of those who have been appointed (Athanasius’, Theophilus’ and Cyril’s festal letters).<sup>32</sup>

Festal letters have reached us thanks to various types of textual transmission: (1) literary codices containing collections of letters by the same author, as the Coptic version of Athanasius’ festal letters or the Greek collection of those written by Cyril; these materials derive from the archives of the episcopate of Alexandria, in which the letters were preserved and provided with the chronological elements that could favor their identification and use; (2) single letters quoted in literary works or homiliaries, as it is the case of Jerome’s Latin translations (in *ep.* 96, 98, 100) of three letters (respectively for Easter of 401, 402, 404) written by Theophilus against Origen and the Origenists, or Shenute’s translation of FL 16; (3) excerpts used as proof-texts in theological and liturgical works or florilegia; (4) official copies on papyrus rolls, transcribed after the composition of the letter and sent to dioceses and monasteries, or further copies made in the sigle dioceses.

This last (4) is the most fascinating aspect of the transmission of festal letters. Coming exactly from the period of Cyril’s episcopate and Shenute’s direction of the White Monastery we have two copies of festal letters, one produced in the chancery of Alexandria, the other, in Coptic translation, probably written in the bishopric of Panopolis or in nearby monasteries. They are part of a little number of preserved copies which appear to us as they were sent from the *scriptorium* of an

<sup>30</sup> Andreas KÜLZER, Die ‚Festbriefe‘ (ἐπιστολαὶ ἑορταστικαὶ) – Eine wenig beachtete Untergattung der byzantinistischen Briefliteratur, in: *ByZ* 91 (1998) 378–90; Alberto CAMPLANI, Festal Letters, to be published in a handbook of epistolography under the direction of Eve-Marie Becker.

<sup>31</sup> Pauline ALLEN, The Festal Letters of the Patriarchs of Alexandria: Evidence for Social History in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries, in: Doru COSTACHE/Philip KARIATLIS/Mario BAGHOS (eds.), *Alexandrian Legacy. A Critical Appraisal*, Cambridge 2015, 174–189.

<sup>32</sup> Alberto CAMPLANI/Annick MARTIN, Lettres festales et listes épiscopales dans l’Église d’Alexandrie et d’Égypte: à propos de la liste épiscopale accompagnant la première lettre festale de Cyrille d’Alexandrie conservée en copte, in: *JJP* 30 (2000) 7–20.

episcopal chancery either as soon as the bishop of Alexandria had finished editing them, or, later, for archival purposes of the different dioceses.<sup>33</sup>

The first one is a copy of Cyril's festal letter for the Easter of 421 (PSI XVI 1576).<sup>34</sup> Like other later copies, it is written on a papyrus roll, so that we can be sure that this use continued well beyond the time in which the roll fell into disuse for the transcription of literary works. This fact is to be interpreted in the sense that festal letters were conceived of as documents and normative texts, rather than literary works. The copy of Cyril's festal letter for 421 is made according to a traditional layout: the text is written along the fibres in many columns on the inside of roll, while the outside is blank. It is likely that this kind of layout was typical of copies produced in the Alexandrian chancery in the year of issue. Such is also the case of the beautiful Greek roll *P. berolin.* 10677, which is the copy sent by Patriarch Alexander II to Gennadios, abbot of the White Monastery (the same monastery of Shenute!) in 713.<sup>35</sup> But there are exceptions: the only surviving column of *P. Grenfell* II 112, datable to 577 is actually written across the fibres and there are good reasons to believe that it was a so-called *rotulus*, that is a roll written in a single column, *transversa charta*, to be interpreted as a local copy made for distribution of the festal letter within a specific diocese, once the copy from Alexandria had been officially read in the cathedral church.

The second example of a festal letter which could have been touched and seen by Shenute himself is *P. Vindob.* K 10157, a roll in which Cyril's first festal letter translated in Coptic, and in particular in its Achmimic variety, is written in columns along the fibres, as it happens in the most important Greek examples.<sup>36</sup> The *verso* is not blank, but a homiletic ascetic text has been copied across the fibres in one column, *transversa charta*. Although the dating of the script is not easy to determine, it cannot be excluded that the roll was copied shortly after the date of composition of the letter, i.e. 412-413 (or some years later). It is important from a textual point of view because it preserves the second part of Cyril's FL 1, which was omitted by the Greek manuscript tradition of Cyril's festal letters. It is to be remarked that the Coptic translations of single festal letters were probably made after the letter was distributed and read all over Egypt: a Coptic translation in some dioceses could be felt as a service for those believers who preferred to receive the annual message of the patriarch in a language closer to their own spoken language than Greek.

*P. Oxy.* LXXVI 5074 preserving Cyril's festal letter 28th, with conspicuous textual differences, could be explained as a later reworking of an older text, made to be used in a situation in which the vacancy of a patriarch in the two competing churches (Chalcedonian and anti-Chalcedonian) prevented the usual composition and sending of festal letters.<sup>37</sup>

Why festal letters are so important to Shenute? Because he perceives that these official epistles have an ideological purpose, as directions of theological and moral orthodoxy, and are one of the most important acts of communications between the patriarchate of Alexandria and the Egyptian dioceses and monasteries. From the point of view of a historian, it is easy to understand that the role of festal letters is dependent on the form the church hierarchy assumed in Egypt since the third century. We know that it was characterized by two facts: at the top of the institution there was the bishop of Alexandria, who had the right to elect and consecrate all bishops of Egypt and

<sup>33</sup> For a list, see Kurt ALAND/Hans-Udo ROSENBAUM, *Osterfestbrief*, in: *Repertorium der griechischen christlichen Papyri. 2 : Kirchenväter-Papyri. Teil 1: Beschreibungen* (PTS 42), Berlin/New York 1995, 523–541.

<sup>34</sup> See Guido BASTIANINI/Guglielmo CAVALLO, *Un nuovo frammento di lettera festale* (PSI inv. 3779), in: Guido BASTIANINI/Angelo CASANOVA, *I papiri letterari cristiani. Atti del convegno internazionale di studi in memoria di Mario Naldini* (Studi e Testi di Papirologia N.S. 13), Firenze 2011, 31–45.

<sup>35</sup> Carl SCHMIDT/Wilhelm SCHUBART, *Osterfestbrief des Alexander, Patriarch von Alexandrien*, in: *Berliner Klassikertexte*, VI, Berlin 1910, 55–109.

<sup>36</sup> Alberto CAMPLANI, *La prima lettera festale di Cirillo di Alessandria e la testimonianza di P. Vindob. K 10157*, Aug. 39 (1999) 129–38. On the significance of the local translation of Greek festal letters see Alberto CAMPLANI, *Sulla multifunzionalità del tradurre in copto: note sparse su frammenti copti tardoantichi, Cicerone e moderne ipotesi di ricerca*, in: Franco CREVATIN (ed.), *Egitto crocevia di traduzioni*, Trieste 2018, 101–144.

<sup>37</sup> Maria KONSTANTINIDOU, *Festal Letters: Fragments of a Genre*, in: Alberto NODAR/Sofía TORALLAS TOVAR (eds.), *Proceedings of the 28 Congress of Papyrology, Barcelona 1–6 August 2016*, Barcelona 2016, 144–153.

Libya; between the “patriarch” and the 70/80 bishops of Egypt and Libya there were no metropolitan bishops.<sup>38</sup> These two features gave the patriarch a central religious role, which was already commonly recognized at the beginning of the fourth century. The festal letters announced not only the date of Easter, but also the criteria of orthodoxy as elaborated in Alexandria. The list of episcopal successions we find at the end, in the post-scriptum, were intended to inform the believers about who the bishops were in communion with the patriarch of Alexandria. Moreover, it is important also to take into account their pastoral purpose, as Van Loon has recently underlined in relation to Cyril,<sup>39</sup> and their liturgical function.<sup>40</sup>

At a more general level, festal letters were a very flexible communication tool, sensitive to ecclesial crises and ongoing religious debates: on the one hand they popularized the terms of the controversies, obviously promoting the role of the Alexandrian patriarchate, on the other their public proclamation frequently became an occasion to open a crisis or to launch a polemical attack, as it was the case of both Theophilus’s LF 14 (against “anthropomorphites”) and LF 16 (against “Origenists”).

Therefore, Shenute’s quotation of Theophilus’ FL 16 is a part of a larger picture of his relationship with the institutional church: the attention paid to the official correspondence and official documents of the patriarchate and the sending of missives to the patriarchs<sup>41</sup> are a sign both of his ideological dependence on them and of the inclusion of the White Monastery in the complex life of the structure of the Egyptian church, with its Alexandrian summit.<sup>42</sup> Shenute not only uses FL 16 and other letters by Theophilus, but also Athanasius’ FL 39 for 367,<sup>43</sup> and, as has been demonstrated by Cristea, Athanasius’ *Letter to the bishops of Egypt and Libya*.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, parallels can be established with other letters from Cyril, as well as with the documentation on the Council of Ephesus preserved in the archives of the episcopate of Alexandria<sup>45</sup>. Finally, Dioscorus’ letters to Shenute show the proximity of Shenute to the patriarch, who asks his collaboration in extirpating the heresy from the Thebaid, together with the local bishops.

## 2. Notes on the Anthropology of *I Am Amazed*

The title *Contra origenistas* has been given by Tito Orlandi on the basis of the correct impression that theological questions connected with the Origenistic debate are central in the treatise, although not exclusive. In fact, the work proposes an often virulent controversy against a variety of different theological, Christological, liturgical ideas, and against a plethora of texts which we are familiar with or which we completely ignore. However, this plurality of polemical targets hides a certain consistency of cultural and pastoral concerns on the part of the author. My task is exactly to seek in this complex and often disordered literary development a correlation between anthropological reflection and cultic dimension – whether it is concretized in the act of prayer, or in

<sup>38</sup> Ewa WIPSZYCKA, *The Alexandrian Church. People and Institutions* (Supplements to Journal of Juristic Papyrology 25), Warsaw 2015.

<sup>39</sup> Hans VAN LOON, *Living in the Light of Christ. Mystagogy in Cyril of Alexandria’s Festal Letters* (Late Antique History and Religion 18), Leuven/Paris/Bristol (Ct) 2017.

<sup>40</sup> CAMPLANI, Atanasio. *Lettere festali* (as in n. 25), 156–177.

<sup>41</sup> We know of other letters by Shenute to Timothy and Dioscorus, preserved in MONB.HD, part of the eighth volume of Shenute’s *Discourses*: EMMEL, *Shenute’s Literary Corpus* (as in note 1), vol. I, 275–281, 286–288, see table 28 p. 488 and table 75 p. 521.

<sup>42</sup> Samuel MOAWAD, *The Relationship of St. Shenoute of Atripe with His Contemporary Patriarchs of Alexandria*, in: Gawdat GABRA/Hany N. TAKLA (eds.), *Christianity and Monasticism in Upper Egypt*, Cairo 2008, 107–120.

<sup>43</sup> Mark MOUSSA, *I Am Amazed: Shenoute of Atripe’s Endorsement of Alexandrian Theology in the White Monastery*, in: *Bulletin of St. Shenouda the Archimandrite Coptic Society* 5 (1998/1999) 19–40.

<sup>44</sup> As demonstrated by CRISTEA, *Shenute: Contra origenistas* (as in note 1), 77–80.

<sup>45</sup> CRISTEA, *Shenute: Contra origenistas* (as in note 1), 81–98.

the concept and practice of the Eucharist – which, once identified,<sup>46</sup> is to be compared not only with the patriarchal stances, with which it manifests an interesting dialectic of adhesion and selection / reworking,<sup>47</sup> but also with the complicated Egyptian landscape of religious currents that precisely on the themes of man in the image of God and imageless prayer manifested differences that were not always easily reconciled.

Shenute discusses the doctrine of the preexistence of souls and of the incorporation due to previous guilt, of clear Origenian brand (§§ 333 and following). It is one of Theophilus' main accusations against Origenism (proceedings of the Alexandrian synod, festal letters letters, etc.):

And others say that it is the souls that have sinned and been given unto bodies, or that have been returned to them. O these great outrages! Let those who say these things explain to us where they sinned and from what place they entered into bodies? Did they sin in haeven before entering the bodies? Do they commit adulteries and acts of violence and pollution in heaven along with the other impieties? Jesus will be angry with me for just saying these things. Did they sin in another world, and were then given unto the bodies of thoser who are in this [world], without there being any othjer [world] than this one? And does body exist witout soul and soul without body? And is it possible for a soul to sin without a body, or body without soul? And is the soul created at one time, and the body at another, and after a time it enters the body? Pray tell, does he not fashion the body and soul in the womb, as it is written, "It is you who took me from the womb"? (Ps 21:10 / 22:9). And, "He who fashioned the outside, is it not he who created the inside?" (Luke 11:40). I will furthermore ask them this additional one (question): regarding righteous people, are they sinless souls or are they sinful souls? If they are sinless, how could these commit sin among them when they have not yet entered bodies? And how will they escape sinning befere they have entered the body? And if all human nations since God created humanity on the earth and until the consummation are souls that have sinned – they are given unto the bodies of humans – how do some act piously and escape committing impieties? Because if they commit sins in some "places" according to your words, then how will they be faithful in the world that is filled with all wickedness?

(...) For the soul and the body exist together in the womb. The body does not precede the soul, and the soul does not exist before the body, but God fashioned it and the body together in the womb. And where [did sin occur], if the soul sinned and was given unto the body? I said previously, "Let those who speak these diabolic words explain to us the places in which they sinned, and how they sinned, and what sins they committed, and who committed them". Are there other worlds or other places whare a man fornicates with a woman, or a woman with a man? Is there anyone who mistreats his neighbor or does evil to his brother except in this world alone? (§§ 333–342).<sup>48</sup>

In § 412 Shenute asserts that if the body is the punishment of the soul, then there will be no judgement: this is another of his main concerns, as demonstrated by the work numbered A26 (titled as *De iudicio* by Heike Behlmer), where the final judgement and the certainty of punishment of sins

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<sup>46</sup> A detailed analysis of the role of the body has been proposed by Caroline T. SCHROEDER, *Monastic Bodies. Discipline and Salvation in Shenoute of Atripe*, Philadelphia 2007. A presentation of the strict connection between theological reflection influenced by the patriarchs and cultic praxis is to be found in Stephen J. DAVIS, *Coptic Christology in Practice. Incarnation and Divine Participation in Late Antique and Medieval Egypt* (O ECS), Oxford 2008. See especially 81–82: "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 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".

<sup>47</sup> SCHROEDER, *Monastic Bodies* (as in n. 47), 128: "For the most part, Shenoute conforms to the theological doctrines promoted by the bishop of Alexandria. His adherence to the Alexandrian 'orthodox' view of the body, however, stretched well beyond mere repetition of episcopal talking points. The centrality of the body in the ascetic theology Shenoute developed in the *Canons* finds expression in the more public sermons and treatises in the *Discourses* in the form of a theology of the resurrection that places belief in the resurrection of the body at the center of Shenoute's definition of the Christian faith. In the *Canons*, Shenoute insists that monks who failed to discipline their bodies and souls through proper *askesis* would suffer grievously in their afterlife. In the *Discourses*, Shenoute develops a more sophisticated theology of the resurrected body in the context of a far-reaching antiheretical and antipagan polemic. He does not limit his condemnations to Origenists alone". Again on p. 131: "Shenoute's critique of both groups contains an impassioned defense of the goodness and divine origin of the human body".

<sup>48</sup> Transl. BRAKKE/CRISLIP, *Selected Discourses* (as in note 1), 59–60.

play a central role.<sup>49</sup> Shenute later gives an example of an Origenistic exegesis of John the Baptist's words:

And they were still not satisfied with these blasphemies, but they spoke, blaspheming against Saint John that he for this reason said, "I am not worthy to untie the strap of his sandal" (Mark 1:7; Luke 3:16): because moreover his soul had actually sinned before he entered his body, while truly they are the ones filled with every evil. O this great transgression! Who is it that would speak evil against Gabriel or another angel and not be cursed? And how will they escape the curse, while cursing the one (John) like them (angels)? (§§ 430–431).<sup>50</sup>

To the heretics' objection "Was God an owner of a pottery workshop, so that he might create souls in every time? Rather, he created them all from the beginning, and he gathered them together in places and storehouses for this work, or, this birth". And (they say), "As for those who die, their souls leave them, and enter the bodies of those who are born" (§ 435), Shenute answers with a literal interpretation of Genesis:

But as he has brought them into existence, why would the order that he fashioned from the beginning, of a man and a woman, not remain? For as he caused creation to remain, that is, heaven and earth and those within them, so he caused procreation (*pe-jpo*) to remain, that is, (between) a man and a woman, until they become like sand across the whole earth through a man and a woman (cfr. Gen 13:16). And, again, it will last forever, as he said, blessing them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and lord over it" (Gen 1:28) (§§ 437–438).<sup>51</sup>

The different doctrines concerning the origin of the soul are really a threat to Christian identity, to the devotion of the simple believers, to their prayer, to their participation in the sacraments. The danger of unbelief is present also in the clergy, who has a terrible responsibility, especially when celebrating the sacrament of eucharist without believing in its reality:

Furthermore, some say that the bread and the cup is not the body of Christ and his blood is but only a symbol. (...) It is the Lord himself who says, "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood will live forever," (John 6:54) and also, "This is my body. This is my blood," (Matt 26:26.28) and these people still say, "It is not his body and his blood," how great is the woe unto them, and how great the woe unto those who receive their words! Who will curse the bread and the cup, and Jesus not curse him all the more because he himself has cursed the Holy Spirit, which God sends down upon them (the bread and the cup) so that they become the body of Christ and his blood? (...) Rather if he is a priest or a cleric according to his order in the priesthood and does not believe that God is capable of everything, of even more than this (the Eucharist), then let him shut his mouth when he prays and entreats him on high (§§ 348–354).<sup>52</sup>

From § 367 on, the attack against the symbolic interpretation of the bread and the wine continues,<sup>53</sup> until Shenute gives particular emphasis to the proclamation of the liturgical formula *σῶμα χριστοῦ αἷμα χριστοῦ* (§ 374), too often confessed by priests who do not believe in what they are saying. The insistence on this point is a sign of the central role it plays in Shenute's conception of man. Therefore, I allow myself to go beyond the borders of *I am amazed* in order to quote an important parallel that Shenute offers in *And it Happened One Day* between the creation of man and the eucharist:

<sup>49</sup> Heike BEHLER, Shenute von Atripe. De iudicio (Torino, Museo Egizio, Cat. 63000, Cod. IV) (Catalogo del Museo Egizio di Torino, Serie prima – Monumenti e testi 8), Turin 1996; transl. BRAKKE/ CRISLIP, Selected Discourses (as in note 1), 212–265.

<sup>50</sup> Transl. BRAKKE/CRISLIP, Selected Discourses (as in note 1), 71.

<sup>51</sup> Transl. BRAKKE/CRISLIP, Selected Discourses (as in note 1), 72.

<sup>52</sup> Transl. BRAKKE/CRISLIP, Selected Discourses (as in note 1), 60–61.

<sup>53</sup> Transl. BRAKKE/CRISLIP, Selected Discourses (as in note 1), 63: "But a new lawlessness has been revealed to us, that is to say, "Mary did not conceive the savior," and again also, "It is not his body and blood that we receive from him". See Hugo LUNDHAUG, Shenoute's Eucharistic Theology in Context, in: David HELLMOLM/Dieter SÄNGER (eds.), *The Eucharist – Its Origins and Contexts Sacred Meal, Communal Meal, Table Fellowship in Late Antiquity, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity*, Tübingen 2017, 1233–1252.

These words also vex the blasphemer who says, “How is the body and blood of the Lord bread and wine?” There are some among us who have said this while their hearts are wounded by the words of Origen. But I myself respond to their foolishness: Pray tell, Is he who made earth into a human unable also to make bread and wine into body and blood? And if he says “This is my body, this is my blood” then who are you (to question it)? who among those who read the scriptures weel does not know that the man who God created was set down alone, ordered all his limbs, but he was not motile at all? But when the Lord God almighty breathed into his face a living breath, he became a living soul (Gen 2:7). (...) In this way also the bread and wine are laid on the holy table of the Lord, and as they are resting on it, their names are “bread” and “wine”. But when the fearful Eucharistic prayer is upon them and the Lord God sends down upon them his Holy Spirit from heaven, it is neither bread nor wine from then on, but it is the body and blood of the Lord (...) But we believe that it is his body and his blood, and we will not disbelieve that it is the true bread that came from heaven (John 6:58). Bread and water is life for the bodies of humanity; but the body and the blood of the Lord is spiritual life for the bodies, for his body is true food and his blood is true drink (John 6:55-56).

Therefore, according to Shenute, the command of God and the descent of the Holy Spirit transform the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, on the line of Cyril’s eucharistic theology and in an explicit opposition to Origen. What is emphasized here is the role of the human body as an element capable of receiving the spiritual life deriving from the Eucharistic bread.

Again, the devaluation of the body practiced by Platonism and its heir, Origen, pushes Shenute to one of the most important declarations of the work about the importance of the body in the ascetical practice and the prayer:

Pray tell, did they not say perhaps that this body is a chastisement of the soul and its prison? I for one say that the body of the truly righteous is the joy and the relief of the soul. For if the soul of the impious is dark, it darkens the whole body and it becomes subject to Gehenna along with the body. If the soul of the pious illuminates, then it illuminates the whole body. And truly the soul that loves Christ is like those in heaven while it is in the body. It celebrates in the body the festivals of Christ, the blessings and the prayers, and all good things, through which each one struggles to glorify God, in the manner of those in heaven who celebrate the feast and with the Church of the first born children which are written in heaven (Heb 12:23) (§§ 409–411).<sup>54</sup>

The body is the means through which man worships God: liturgical actions, blessings, and prayers, have no other way of expressing themselves except through it. Strictly connected to this theme is that of the prayer to Jesus, that according to Theophilus and Shenute is denied by Origen and his heirs, because they consider only the prayer addressed to the Father as the proper one – a clear sign of his subordinationism and adhesion to Arianism<sup>55</sup>:

They have said, “It is not right to pray to Christ because he himself prays.” (§ 423).<sup>56</sup>

“For whoever wishes not to pray to the Son, let him shut his mouth, not to name the Father. Whence did they think of this other impiety? Have they heard this: “He kept a night vigil in prayer to God?” (Luke 6:12). But in this too their eyes are shut, because “He has been tested in all the things like us, yet without sin” (Heb 4:15). Then if it is also this which they think, namely, that they are listening to the holy apostles saying, “We have one to advocate on our behalf before the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John

<sup>54</sup> Transl. BRAKKE/ CRISLIP, Selected Discourses (as in note 1), 68.

<sup>55</sup> See DAVIS, Coptic Christology in Practice (as in note 46), 77: “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.”

<sup>56</sup> Transl. BRAKKE/ CRISLIP, Selected Discourses (as in note 1), 69.

2:1), and also, “that one who is at the right hand of God, and who intercedes on our benefit” (Rom 8:34). Pray tell, if the King, Christ, God and Son of God [*Lacuna of approximately three pages*] (§§ 655–656).<sup>57</sup>

[...] glory to you and your blessed Son through the heavens and all that are in the heavens. You are blessed, O God. Glory to you and your blessed Son through the world and all who are in it. You are blessed, O God. Glory to you through all your works, you and your blessed Son, as your works are his, and his are yours. You are blessed, O God, you and your blessed Son, whose names – your and his – become one in the mouth of whoever opposes those who speak this new impiety. This is his wealth and his hope when entering, “O God,” and in exiting, “O Jesus.” When going to sleep, “O God,” when rising, “O Jesus.” When blessing, “O God,” when praying, “O Jesus.” And lest I delay in these things, it is clear that when we say “Jesus,” we name the Trinity of a single nature (§§ 800–803).<sup>58</sup>

Seek the perfection of these words and you will find them in your mouth and the mouths of your children. As you celebrate and rejoice, “Jesus,” and as you sorrow and grieve, “Jesus.” As boys and girls laugh, “Jesus.” They who ford a body of water, “Jesus.” They who flee in the face of the barbarians, “Jesus.” They who see wild beasts and a terrifying event, “Jesus.” They who are in pains and illnesses, “Jesus.” They who are taken captive, “Jesus.” They whose justice is perverted and are treated violently, “Jesus.” In every circumstance it is the name of Jesus that is in their mouths and is their salvation and also their life with his Father (§ 821).<sup>59</sup>

This exhortation is not reserved to a monastic audience, since some situations of life alluded to are those of secular life: from the above quoted passages it emerges clearly that Shenute’s work is addressed to a vast and composite audience, that is larger than his congregation or the villages around his monastery, and likely includes Panopolis (Šmin) and its territory.

These texts have been commented upon by Grillmeier,<sup>60</sup> Dechow,<sup>61</sup> Clark,<sup>62</sup> among others; I devoted an article to them in 1997 in the context of the first meeting of the research Group “Gruppo italiano di ricerca su Origene e la tradizione alessandrina”.<sup>63</sup> Since then, new perspectives have been offered especially by Lorenzo Perrone who, in his book on prayer in Origen, discusses also the afterlife of *Orat* in the third and fourth centuries until the time of Evagrius and beyond, that is, the time in which Shenute takes up his controversy. It is to be observed that Shenute’s biblical quotations do not occur in the extant fragments by Theophilus, although it is likely that they did in the lost sections of his letters and documents. Actually Origen, in *Orat* XIII 1 quotes Luke 6:12, but also an allusion to 1 Jn 2:1 is detectable in *Orat* XV 4, as in Shenute.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Transl. BRAKKE/ CRISLIP, Selected Discourses (as in note 1), 78.

<sup>58</sup> Transl. BRAKKE/ CRISLIP, Selected Discourses (as in note 1), 79.

<sup>59</sup> Transl. BRAKKE/CRISLIP, Selected Discourses (as in note 1), 81.

<sup>60</sup> Alois GRILLMEIER, *Jesus der Christus im Glauben der Kirche, Band 2/4: Die Kirche von Alexandrien mit Nubien und Äthiopien nach 451, Unter Mitarbeit von Theresia Hainthaler, Freiburg u. a. 1990*; ID., *La «Peste d’Origène»*. Soucis du patriarche d’Alexandrie dus à l’apparition d’origénistes en Haute Égypte (444–451), in: AΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΙΝΑ. Hellenisme, judaïsme et christianisme à Alexandrie dus a l’apparition d’Origénistes. Mélanges offerts au P. Claude Mondésert, Paris 1987, 221–237.

<sup>61</sup> DECHOW, *Dogma an Mysticism* (as in n. 4).

<sup>62</sup> CLARK, *The Origenist Controversy* (as in n. 4).

<sup>63</sup> Alberto CAMPLANI, *Un episodio della ricezione del Περὶ εὐχῆς in Egitto: note di eresologia shenutiana*, in: Francesca COCCHINI (ed.), *Il dono e la sua ombra. Ricerche sul ΠΕΡΙ ΕΥΧΗΣ di Origene (SEAug 57)*, Roma 1997, 159–172.

<sup>64</sup> Lorenzo PERRONE, *La preghiera secondo Origene: l’impossibilità donata* (Letteratura cristiana antica 24), Brescia 2011, remarks that παράκλητος is to be understood as “intercessor” instead of “consoling” Spirit, more typical of John’s Gospel: see 463–466; 477; on Jesus as mediator 184–185. On the more general theme of the prayer during and after the Origenist controversy see Emmanuel Lanne, *La ‘Prière de Jésus’ dans la tradition égyptienne. Témoignage des psaltes et des inscriptions*, in: *Irénikon* 60 (1977) 163–203; Columba Stuart, *Imageless Prayer and the Theological Vision of Evagrius Ponticus*, in: *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9 (2001) 173–200.

### 3. *I Am Amazed* and its Episcopal References: Athanasius, Theophilus, and Cyril

It is clear that behind Shenute's words there are his patriarchal sources, i.e. the acts of the synods against Origen called by Theophilus, in which Origen's *On prayer* has been read and anathematized. At the same time, there emerges the issue of imageless prayer and silent oration, whose foundations do not meet Shenute's appreciation: he can be qualified as a representative of a more affective practice of prayer, and as a promoter of a unitary, non-divisive anthropology, which appears to be his personal contribution. Therefore, in his work we can perceive not only obedience and adaptation to the patriarchal line of thought, but also autonomous reworking, based on his religious and cultural traditions.

Which sources did Shenute use in writing *I am amazed*? Recent research has clarified in part this aspect of his literary activity. His anti-Arian polemic depends largely on Athanasius' *Letter to the Bishops of Egypt and Libya*,<sup>65</sup> while certain aspects of what he says against the use of apocryphal books is drawn from Athanasius' LF 39;<sup>66</sup> the long anti-Nestorian section is likely inspired by the *Acts of Ephesus*;<sup>67</sup> and some of the sources about heretic books are either unknown or come from a reading of the original documentation.<sup>68</sup>

Of course, the greatest part of Shenute's argumentation depends on Theophilus' LF 16.<sup>69</sup> Here the bishop reproaches Origen for thinking that the reign of the Son will finish, the devil will be saved, the souls are pre-existent, Christ will suffer for demons, a multiplicity of Passovers must be proclaimed, there is no resurrection, the prayer is to be addressed not to Christ but to the Father,<sup>70</sup>

<sup>65</sup> CRISTEA, Shenute von Atri, *Contra Origenistas* (as in note 1), 77–81.

<sup>66</sup> §§ 318-319 "So [it is with] those who trust in apocryphal books, gone mad after reading in them, contrary to the true scriptures and the 'fountain of life'. Therefore the exceptional teacher of the faith, Apa Athanasius, said in his writings, 'I wrote these things concerning the heresies, and especially the wretched Melitians who pride themselves in so-called Secret books'" transl. BRAKKE/CRISLIP, *Selected Discourses* (as in note 1), 57.

<sup>67</sup> Janet TIMBIE, *Reading and Rereading I Am Amazed*. More information on Nestorius and Others, in: James G. GOEHRING/Janet TIMBIE (eds.), *The World of Early Egyptian Christianity. Language, Literature, and Social Context. Essays in Honor of David W. Johnson*, Washington 2007, 61–71; CRISTEA, Shenute von Atri, *Contra Origenistas* (as in note 1), 81–99.

<sup>68</sup> See some interesting proposals by Hugo LUNDHAUG, *Mystery and authority in the writings of Shenoute*, in: Christian H. BULL/Liv I. LIED/John D. Turner (eds.), *Mystery and Secrecy in the Nag Hammadi Collection and Other Ancient Literature: Ideas and Practices: Studies for Einar Thomassen at Sixty* (NHMS 79), Leiden 2012, 259–285; ID., *Shenoute's Heresiological Polemics and its Context(s)*, in: David BRAKKE/Anders-Christian JACOBSEN/Jörg ULRICH (eds.), *Invention, Rewriting, Usurpation: Discursive Fights over Religious Traditions in Antiquity* (Early Christianity in the Context of Antiquity 11), Frankfurt 2011, 239–261; ID., *The Nag Hammadi Codices in the Complex World of 4th- and 5th-Cent. Egypt*, in: Luca ARCARI (ed.), *Beyond Conflicts: Cultural and Religious Cohabitations in Alexandria and Egypt between the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 6<sup>th</sup> Century CE* (STAC 103), Tübingen 2017, 339–358.

<sup>69</sup> On the rhetorical aspect of those letters in connection with the Origenist controversy see Krastu BANEV, *Theophilus of Alexandria and the First Origenist Controversy. Rhetoric and Power* (O ECS), Oxford 2015. What follows is based on the following editions and translations: Theophilus' writings (festal and other letters) in the Latin translation of Jerome are published in CSEL 55 (Isidorus HILBERG). The new Greek fragments has been published by Marcel RICHARD, *Nouveaux fragments de Theophile d'Alexandrie*, in: NAWG.PH 1975, 2, 57–65. The English translation is that by Norman RUSSELL, *Theophilus of Alexandria*, London/New York 2007.

<sup>70</sup> LF 16, 14: "When it has for amongst other things he (=Origen) dared to say that the Son is not to be prayed to, nor the Father with the Son. After many centuries he has reinstated Pharaoh's blasphemy, when he said: 'Who is he that I should heed his voice? I do not know the Lord, and I will not let Israel go' (Ex. 5:2 LXX). To say 'I do not know the Lord' is no different from Origen's statement: 'the Son is not to be prayed to', for Origen certainly acknowledges the Son as Lord. And although he breaks out in such open blasphemy, nevertheless the Son is to be prayed to. Of him the prophet testifies, saying: 'And they shall make obeisance to thee and make supplication to thee, because God is in thee, and there is no God besides thee' (Isa. 45:14 LXX), and again: 'Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved' (Joel 2:32; Rom. 10:13). And Paul argues: 'How are they to call upon him in whom they have not believed?' (Rom. 10:14). It is necessary first to believe that he is the Son of God, that he may be invoked correctly and logically. And if the proposition 'He who is not God is not to be prayed to' is true, how is it that the contrary is not also true, that he who is known to be God is to be adored? So it was that Stephen knelt down and prayed for those who were stoning him, saying to the Son: 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them' (Acts 7:60). Also, 'At the name of Jesus Christ every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth' (Phil. 2:10). When it says 'every knee should bow', that is an

magic and astrology are effective, marriage is to be condemned, body is a punishment for a previous sin, apocryphal books are not to be received. All these arguments are alluded to in *I am amazed* at different degrees of reworking, and connected to Arianism and Nestorianism, in line with Theophilus' style of controversy.

Are there additional sources beside FL 16? Not only Theophilus' FL 17 and FL 19<sup>71</sup> express anti-Origenian arguments which are used by Shenute, but also the synodal documentation is for the abbot a source of inspiration. In the first fragment of the *First Synodal Letter* the issue of the pre-existence of the souls is introduced as the first and central blasphemy by Origen, which explains the importance of the motif in *I am amazed*:

For what does this scheming madman say? The soul, he says, pre-existed in heaven before the body. And because it sinned there, he says, God shut it up in a prison. That is, God sent it down into the body for the purification and punishment, he says, of the sins previously committed by it in heaven. This is the starting-point from which that most impious of men directly invents his fables and seeks to fight against the truth<sup>72</sup>.

The same theme is carried out in the second fragment, in which the Biblical evidence is exhibited according to which the soul is formed within the body and does not pre-exist<sup>73</sup>.

In the *Second Synodal Letter to the Bishops of Palestine and Cyprus*<sup>74</sup> (translated in Latin by Jerome) there is a very effective summary of teachings attributed to Origen, with short quotations taken from his works. Theophilus mentions *Princ* just to prove how Origen supports the subordination of the Son to the Father, supposes the end of the reign of Christ, proclaims the salvation of the devil, while a quotation taken from *Orat* serves the purpose of demonstrating Origen's denial that the prayer should be addressed to the Son (§ 2), anticipating Arian subordinationism. The resurrection of the dead is denied, since "after the passage of many centuries our bodies will gradually be reduced to nothing and will dissolve into thin air". The whole range of the angels is the result of different lapses and falls, and "it was therefore because of earlier events that the angels were promoted or reduced in rank". Also astrology, according to Theophilus, has been given a function by Origen, as well as magic.<sup>75</sup> He furtherly claims (§ 4) that "he who in consummation of the ages and for the destruction of sin suffered once and for all, our Lord Jesus Christ, will also suffer crucifixion at some time in the future for the demons and evil spirits,"<sup>76</sup> a theme that Shenute shares (*I am amazed* §§ 312-316). Again Shenute certainly depends on Theophilus' confutation of Origen's exegesis of the Seraphims in Is. 6,2.<sup>77</sup> The same consonance between Theophilus and Shenute we find in what concerns the theme of the creation of human beings and the blessing for reproduction.<sup>78</sup>

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indication of anxious and most humble prayer. Accordingly, Origen does not believe the Son of God to be God, for he does not think he is to be adored and wounds him with insults. Although he flatters himself that he is familiar with the Scriptures and thinks he understands them, he does not hear Moses saying against him: 'Whoever curses God shall bear his sin, and whoever names the name of God shall be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him' (Lev. 24: 15-16 LXX). And who reproaches Christ with such great insults as someone who dares to say: 'He should not be prayed to', attributing to him the name of divinity so devoid of meaning?", transl. RUSSELL, Theophilus (as in n. 69), 111-112.

<sup>71</sup> LF 17,12; LF 19,12.

<sup>72</sup> Transl. RUSSELL, Theophilus (as in n. 69), 92.

<sup>73</sup> "If the soul had pre-existed in heaven and sinned there previously, as that madman and enemy of God, Origen, claimed, the most holy prophet would not have said: 'and forming the spirit of man within him' (cf. Zech. 12:1). He would have said instead: 'shutting in the spirit of man within him', or perhaps: 'sending down'", transl. RUSSELL, Theophilus (as in n. 68), 92.

<sup>74</sup> Jerome, *Ep.* 92, CSEL 55, 147-55.

<sup>75</sup> Transl. RUSSELL, Theophilus (as in n. 69), 94-95.

<sup>76</sup> Transl. RUSSELL, Theophilus (as in n. 69), 98.

<sup>77</sup> See the *Letter written at Constantinople* fr. 11, transl. RUSSELL, Theophilus (as in n. 69), 141, and the *Tractate on Isaiah* 6: 1-7, transl. RUSSELL, Theophilus (as in n. 69), 159-174.

<sup>78</sup> See the *Letter written at Constantinople* fr. 11, transl. RUSSELL, Theophilus (as in n. 69), 143: "(Origen) dared to say that the first human being would not have had a body if his mind had not fallen into sin and he had been sent into

Shenute's other great reference is Cyril of Alexandria, whom he knows through both personal correspondence and the reading of the official documents. In addition to Christology and anti-Nestorian polemics, the two meet on an unexpected terrain, that of eucharistic realism, to which they come by different paths: a liturgical Christology, Shenute; the reflection on the incarnation of the Logos, Cyril.<sup>79</sup> It is also impressive to see how many themes of Shenute's anti-Origenist polemic are contained in the first chapters of Cyril's *Commentary on the Gospel of John* (criticism of the pre-existence of souls, emphasis on the blessing of reproduction).<sup>80</sup>

On the other hand, we find in Theophilus and Cyril concerns which do not appear in Shenute's works. The so-called antiorigenist about-face of Theophilus did not force him to change his convictions about an anthropomorphic heresy, as demonstrated by the following two fragments drawn from the *Letter written at Constantinople*, fr. 7 and 8, dated to 403, when he had still a clear memory of his action against the anthropomorphites and did not repent about it, as showed by the expression ἐκκλησιαστικαὶ ἐπιστολαί, a transparent allusion to the festal letter of 399:

7. Οὐ μόνως τὰς Ὀριγένους αἱρέσεις ἀναθεματίσαμεν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἑτέραν ταράττειν ἐπιχειρήσασαν τὰ μοναστήρια μάλιστα. Ἐπεὶ περ ἀγροικότεροί τινες καὶ ἰδιῶται ἀνθρωπόμορφον τὸν θεὸν φρονεῖν ἐθρυλοῦντο ἀγκαῖον, οὐκ ἀπεσιωπήσαμεν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ταύτην τὴν αἴρεσιν, Χριστοῦ δεδωκότος νῆψιν, γραφικαῖς ἀποδείξεσιν ἐν ἐκκλησιαστικαῖς ἐπιστολαῖς ἀνετρέψαμεν.

8. (...) Ὡσπερ γὰρ τοὺς παχύτερα περὶ ἀναστάσεως φρονούντας ὡς ἀγροικότερους οὐκ ἀποδεχόμεθα, οὕτως οὐδὲ τοὺς τὰ ἀνόσια περὶ ἀναστάσεως Ὀριγένους δόγματα μετιόντας τολμῶμεν ἐπαινεῖν, ἐνέχυρον ἔχοντες τοῦ ὅπως ἀναστήσομεθα τὸν ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ἀποθανόντα καὶ ἐγερθέντα Χριστόν.<sup>81</sup>

7. We have not only anathematized Origen's heresies, but also another heresy that attempted to cause serious disturbance to the monasteries. Since certain people of the more rustic and uncultivated sort claimed that it was necessary to conceive of God in human form, we did not remain silent but also refuted this heresy, Christ having lent us vigilance, with written proofs in official ecclesiastical letters.

8. We reject as rustics those who hold the coarser ideas about the resurrection. Similarly, we refuse to praise those who subscribe to Origen's profane doctrines about the resurrection, for we have Christ, who died and rose again for our sake, as a pledge of how we are resurrected.<sup>82</sup>

Furthermore, there are clear signs of the fact that in Theophilus the vision of God cannot be reached within the body.<sup>83</sup>

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this world. For misinterpreting the text: 'God took dust from the ground and formed man' (cf. Gen. 2:7), Origen claimed that he had come into being when he fell from heaven because of sin. And he says that woman would not have been created, nor would there have been any need for childbearing, if souls had not gone astray in heaven and been sent down here. And how is it written of Adam and Eve: 'Male and female he created them, and blessed them and said: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth"' (Gen. 1:27-8)? For if souls had fallen from heaven through sin and had been combined with bodies, as he says, how was this written of Adam and Eve, through whom it was not the alleged motive of sins but the power of the blessing that bestowed on Adam and Eve the increase of childbearing? See also LF 19,12 (404). To this should be added the homily about eucharist attributed to Theophilus by Marcel RICHARD, *Une homélie de Theophile d'Alexandrie sur l'institution de l'Eucharistie*, RHE 33 (1937) 46-54.

<sup>79</sup> DAVIS, *Coptic Christology in Practice* (as in note 46), 81: "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 (σῶμα) ... it is those faithless ones alone who rightly and justly despise their own flesh.'" On Cyril's position on the eucharist there is a long debate: see, among others, Lawrence J. WELCH, *Christology and Eucharist in the Early Thought of Cyril of Alexandria*, San Francisco (CA) 1994.

<sup>80</sup> For this commentary, see the edition by Philip E. PUSEY, *Sancti Patris nostri Cyrilli archiepiscopi Alexandrini in D. Ioannis Evangelium. Accedunt fragmenta varia necnon tractatus ad Tiberium Diaconum duo*, Oxford 1872: see I, 9, 1.4.10.15.18.

<sup>81</sup> RICHARD, *Nouveaux fragments de Theophile d'Alexandrie* (as in n. 69), 63-64.

<sup>82</sup> Transl. RUSSELL, *Theophilus* (as in n. 69), 141-142.

<sup>83</sup> *Tractate on Isaiah*, transl. RUSSELL, *Theophilus* (as in n. 69), 164.

The same attitude we find in Cyril. In his famous *Letter to Calosirius*, a bishop of the Arsinoite nome (Fayyum), Cyril exhorts him to put a stop to anthropomorphic ideas spread in his diocese, explaining to him what is meant by “man in the image of God”:

Since (they say) divine Scripture says that man was created in God’s image we ought to believe that the Godhead has a human shape or form. Which is utterly witless and capable of making those who choose to think it incur the charge of most extreme blasphemy. Man is unquestionably in God’s image, but the likeness is not a bodily one for God is incorporeal. The Saviour himself will teach you this point, because he says ‘God is spirit.’ (John 4:24). He cannot therefore be embodied or exist in a bodily form, if he is spirit; because what is outside the category of body is outside configuration-deity is without dimensions or configuration. But if they think that God himself, who is above all, has a configuration like the nature of the human body, they must tell us if he also has feet to walk on, hands to work through and eyes to see with. So where does he walk? What places does he travel to and from, he who fills all things? For he said: “Do not I fill heaven and earth?” says the Lord. (Jer. 23:24) What are the hands he moves into action, he who creates by his living Word? If his eyes are set in his face like ours, he cannot see what is behind him. When he looks toward the East, is he unaware of what people in the West are doing? If he looks towards the West, cannot he see the people in the East? (...)

Man’s being made in God’s image has different meanings and implications. Man alone, in distinction from all other living inhabitants of the earth, is rational, compassionate and with an aptitude for all virtue, endowed with sovereignty over all the inhabitants of the earth in the likeness and image of God. In consequence he is said to have been made in God’s image, by virtue of his being a rational animal and of his having a love of virtue and a sovereignty over earth’s inhabitants.

These expressions have parallels in other works by Cyril.<sup>84</sup> We do not know how much in Cyril’s account is the result of a heresiological construction and how much corresponds to reality. What is important to stress is the fact that never Shenute is concerned with this kind of issue: in his criticism against adverse doctrines there is neither a mention of a literal conception of the man in the image of God, nor an allusion to the use of images in the prayer. If he takes a number of eucharistic motifs from Cyril, his insistence on the practice of sung and spoken prayer and on the importance of the body in eucharist and in the ascetic practice is much more pronounced than in Thophilus and Cyril. This is his original contribution to the anthropological debate.

#### **4. The Broader Egyptian Scenario of the Anthropological Debates of the Fourth and Fifth Centuries**

What is needed now is to reconstruct the ideological context in which Shenute’s literary initiative took place. It is no longer a question of looking for sources (although it is not excluded that some of the texts that will be quoted were known to Shenute), but of outlining the very lively religious confrontation in which his work acquires significance. We will avoid going in search of individual polemical objectives or ideas, which, in the manner of Epiphanius,<sup>85</sup> may have been placed by Shenute in the literary fabric of *I am amazed* more in order to outline by contrast the true Christian identity than , than to describe real Christian heretics of the Thebaid. Rather, my aim is to

<sup>84</sup> Cyril, *Adversus anthropomorphitas*, PG 76, 1065-1132, actually three different works. Cfr. *Answers to Tiberius*, and *Doctrinal Questions and Answers*, in Lionel R. WICKHAM, *Cyril of Alexandria: Select Letters*, Oxford 1983, 132–179, 181–213; see in particular *Responsiones*, 137–138; *Responsiones*, 164–167; *Quaestiones et responsiones*, 185–186. On Cyril’s anti-Origenism and anti-anthropomorphism see John A. McGuckin, *Cyril of Alexandria: Bishop and Pastor*, in: Thomas G. Weinandy, OFM, Cap/Daniel A. Keating (eds.), *The Theology of St Cyril of Alexandria: A Critical Appreciation*, London/New York 2003, 205–236; John O’Keefe, *Incorruption, Anti-Origenism, and Incarnation: Eschatology in the Thought of Cyril of Alexandria*, *ibid.*, 187–204. On the question of man in the image of God Norman RUSSELL, *Theophilus and Cyril of Alexandria on the Divine Image: A Consistent Episcopal Policy towards the Origenism of the Desert?*, in: L. Perrone (ed.), *Origeniana Octava*, Louvain 2003, 939–946.

<sup>85</sup> On Epiphanius’ heresiological method see Aline POURKIER, *L’hérésiologie chez Epiphane de Salamine* (CAnt 4), Paris 1992; Young Richard KIM, *Epiphanius of Cyprus. Imagining an Orthodox World*, Ann Arbor 2015.

understand if two visions of Christian anthropology are in the process of confrontation and mutual recognition.

It is clear that on the background of *I am amazed* a cultural identity emerges in which the values are represented by the role of the body in prayer, worship and asceticism, the significance of the material world, which is not devalued but is considered the beautiful result of the act of divine creation, the exemplary importance of the figures of the Old Testament, the fearful character but also the necessity of the final judgement, the reality of the resurrection: all these elements are composed with ideas coming from the patriarchal line of thought, such as the Logos Christology, the attention paid to the spiritual activity of human being, and the scriptural hermeneutic – ideas which in the fifth century are changing radically, loosing their Platonic flavor in direction of an emphasis on the reality of the incarnation, on a more unitarian anthropology, and on a scriptural exegesis that gives a role to the literal interpretation and fixes some limits to the traditional allegorical one.<sup>86</sup> In a sense we could say that the traditional cultural line of the patriarchate is approaching to other, originally opposite, cultural traditions.

Shenute, in other words, has in his cultural prehistory what has been called by Manlio Simonetti as “Asiatic” Christian culture or tradition.<sup>87</sup> A definition of this notion for the third and fourth centuries has been provided by Emanuela Prinzivalli, who has greatly contributed to its refinement:

Although it does not possess the ideological homogeneity of the Alexandrian tradition, it is the comparison with this very tradition that allows some of its peculiarities to emerge. The influence of Judaism and of Stoicism is strong; a unitary conception of reality therefore prevails in this culture over the Platonic recognition of a two-level reality. In theology a monarchian tendency exists side by side with expressions of *Logostheologie*, in Christology the tendency is to emphasize Christ’s humanity, the bodily element being anyway constantly stressed. A similar emphasis on corporeality can be found in anthropology, where body and soul are considered, following Aristotle’s thought, incomplete parts of a synthesis, and the soul itself is believed to be corporeal. This implies, in protology, the literal interpretation of the first three chapters of *Genesis*, as man made in God’s likeness (Gen 1,26), and man made out of mud (Gen 2,7) are the same being, while according to eschatology, millenarianism is a widespread doctrine where the conviction prevails that the universe where man lives will last for ever as a consequence of its glorious transformation.<sup>88</sup>

All Shenute’s statements seem to point towards a vision of the world, elaborated within this specific Christian tradition, characterized by features of concreteness rather distant from the Platonic-Christian spiritualism and its peculiar conception of a reality on several levels: the insistence on the remuneration, against the relativization proposed by Origen and other authors of the Alexandrian tradition regarding the last judgment, and against their insistence on the perennial providence of God who educates souls even after the death of the body; a monistic conception of reality, in contrast to the double level of reality proposed by Platonism; a unitary anthropology, different from spiritualism and the concentration on the *nous* of other philosophical-religious traditions; consequently a realistic conception of the resurrection, distant from the polysemicity that the notion assumes for example in Origen, Pierius, Ieracas.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> See Manlio SIMONETTI, Lettera e/o allegoria. Un contributo alla storia dell’esegesi patristica (SEAug 23), 216–226.

<sup>87</sup> Manlio SIMONETTI, Teologia alessandrina e teologia asiatica al concilio di Nicea, Aug 13 (1973) 369–398; ID., Modelli culturali nella cristianità orientale del II-III secolo, in: ID., Ortodossia ed eresia tra I e II secolo, Soveria Mannelli 1994, 315–331.

<sup>88</sup> Emanuela PRINZIVALLI, The Controversy About Origen Before Epiphanius, in: Wolfgang BIENERT/Uwe KÜHNEWEG (eds.) Origeniana septima: Origenes in den Auseinandersetzungen des 4. Jahrhunderts (BETH 137), Leuven 1999, 195–213, here 198.

<sup>89</sup> Emanuela PRINZIVALLI, Giudizio; Resurrezione, in: Adele MONACI CASTAGNO (ed.), Origene. Dizionario, Roma 2000, 208–209; 401–405. See also O. LEHTIPUU, Debates over the Resurrection of the Dead: Constructing Early Christian Identity (OECT), Oxford 2015.

In short, various indications suggest to place the Christian culture expressed by Shenute in the area of the Asian cultural setting, which Tito Orlandi has shown to be well represented in Egypt in the environments where Coptic literature was born.<sup>90</sup>

But when Shenute adopts this cultural tradition, this one has already taken on a different form from that it had in the second century. Bumazhnov has noted for instance that the Coptic translation of Melito's *De anima et de corpore* pays considerable attention to avoid expressions suggesting a crude anthropomorphic representation of the divinity, as was the case with the original text, and includes within the notion of "image" not only the human body but also the human soul, as the following passage demonstrates:

15. It was not enough for God to say, "Let us make man in our image and likeness," but he made the work follow to the word. 16. For God took the earth from the earth, and made of it a man in his image and likeness, and breathed in his face a breath of life (...).

17. But Adam became a prey of death because of his disobedience, and Adam's shape needed to be shaped again by God the demiurge, so that he might be saved. 18. For the man fell down, being buried in the earth, and the Spirit that God had breathed in his face and that had become the breath of life separated from him. 19. This was then placed in a dark place after he died, in the place called Amente. (...)

40. She (the soul) is in the Amente, crying and complaining about her good body, saying, "Where is my body in which I sang hymns? 41. Where is my body in which I prayed to God? (...)."<sup>91</sup>

No account of creation of man and no anthropology could be more distant from the Alexandrian one and closer to Shenute's perspective, also in the detail concerning the prayer to God and the singing of hymns having only the body as their means of expression. Soul and body are part of a unity called "man", who is in God's image; the one cannot subsist without the other and both are destined to salvation and resurrection.

A Coptic homily attributed to Basilus of Caesarea but surely created in contexts very far from the great theologian of the fourth century, which deals with the end of time, the symbolism of the Temple of Solomon, sin and death, is clearly to be inserted in the same tradition which emphasizes the material creation of the world thanks to a literal reading of Gen. 1 and the reality of the end of times, which are approaching because of the sins of men.<sup>92</sup>

A similar position is expressed in the *Vita Aphu*, as I have already anticipated, a text of the fifth / sixth century that has been quoted above also for its importance for the study of the role of festal letters in the Egyptian church. Bumazhnov has proposed to detect in the following passage an ideological orientation which does not coincide with "anthropomorphism" as represented by the sources (Socrates, Cassian, and also Theophilus and Cyril), but points to an unitary anthropology and a conception of creation (of man in the image of God) and eucharist based on the absolute and free character of the divine command, capable of transforming things in a way that is incomprehensible to the human being:<sup>93</sup>

Aphou said to him: "If you mention this too, one may say of the body of Christ that it is not what you say it is. For the Jews will claim: 'How do you take a bit of bread which the earth had so laboriously produced, and then believe and say that this is the body of the Lord?'" The Archbishop said to him: "That is not the case, for it is truly bread before we elevate it above the altar; only after we have elevated it above the altar and have invoked God upon them, does the bread become the body of Christ and the cup become the blood, according to what He said to His disciples: 'Take and eat, this is my body and my blood.' And then do we believe." Apa Aphou said to him: "Just as it is necessary to have faith in that, it is necessary to have faith that man has been created in the likeness (and) image (of) God. For He Who said,

<sup>90</sup> ORLANDI, Letteratura copta e cristianesimo nazionale egiziano (as in n. 4), 62–68.

<sup>91</sup> Tito ORLANDI (ed.), Omelia *De Anima et corpore*. Testo, traduzione, introduzione e nota, Roma 2003; BUMAZHNOV, Der Mensch als Gottes Bild (as in n. 4), 199–210.

<sup>92</sup> Ernst Alfred WALLIS BUDGE, *Coptic Homilies in the Dialect of Upper Egypt*, Oxford 1910, text n. 8.

<sup>93</sup> BUMAZHNOV, Der Mensch als Gottes Bild (as in n. 4), 138–218.

‘I am the bread which has come from heaven’ (John 6:51), is also He Who said, ‘whoever will shed human blood, his own will be shed in return, for man has been created in the image of God’ (Gen. 9:6).<sup>94</sup>

Even if the starting point of the reasoning is different – the eucharist for Shenute, the man in the image of God for the author of the *Life of Aphu* –, the parallelism between this passage and the one quoted above from *And it happened one day* is truly impressive: it is the divine command that connects things which in nature are completely dissimilar in a way that is mysterious for human beings. Noteworthy is also the reference to John 6 (the bread coming from heaven), which suggests a pre-existing common tradition.

I ask myself whether both passages were inspired by Epiphanius, *Ancoratus*, a work that was translated in Coptic quite early (fifth century?) and was preserved in the library of the White Monastery.<sup>95</sup>

57. (1) So all [people] have that which is according to his image, but not according to his nature. For not according to equality with God do men have that which is according to his image. For God is incomprehensible, inconceivable, being spirit (John 4:24), and Spirit over all spirits, and Light over all light. (2) What he gave, we do not despoil: for true is the one who gave with grace to man that which is according to his image. And it is possible to think from similar things: (3) for we see that the Savior took into his hands, as it has it in the Gospel, when he was reclining at supper and took these things and having given thanks said, “This is of me, these things,” and he gave to his disciples and said, “This is of me, these things.” (4) And we see that it is not an equal nor a similar thing to the incarnate image, nor to the invisible divinity, nor to the characteristics of the members [of the body].<sup>96</sup>

Since Epiphanius’ battle against Origenism was based on a comprehension of God, the creation of the world and man, the Bible, the sacraments, that was divergent from an Alexandrian and Platonic perspective, I deem it likely that his *Ancoratus* was used by some monastic environments, including the one directed by Shenute, against other “Origenistic” tendencies, as suggested by Dechow, myself and Jacobs.<sup>97</sup>

To broaden the comparative framework for future research, I offer two further examples of texts (more could be added) which appear to make reference to this anthropological tradition. I recently have observed that the Greek poems of the Bodmer papyri (among which the famous *Visio*

<sup>94</sup> Of course, the author makes reference to Gen 9:6 instead of Gen 1:26 because God’s words are pronounced after Adam’s fall: therefore, also after the sin Adam does not lose the image of God. The text continues in the following way: “As for the glory of the greatness of God, which it is impossible for anyone to see because of its incomprehensible light, and as for the weakness and imperfection of humans, according to the defects of the nature that we possess, we think in this way, that it is like a king who orders the making of an image. Everyone confesses that it is the image of the king. At the same time, however, everyone knows that it is only a piece of painted wood. For its nose is not like the king’s, nor are its ears like those on the king’s head, nor does it speak like him. But no one takes notice of any of these defects, because one fears for oneself in light of the statement of the king, who said, ‘This is my image.’ But rather, if anyone dares to deny that it is the image of the king, he is executed, because he has scorned it. Moreover, the authorities meet around it and admire the painted wood out of fear of the king. If it is thus with a spiritless and motionless image, which cannot notice anything, how much more must one recognize humans as the image of God, in whom is the Spirit of God, who act, and who are honoured above all the animals on the earth?” transl. PATTERSON, *Visions of Christ* (as in n. 4), 55.

<sup>95</sup> The two manuscripts in CMCL (<https://www.cmcl.it>) and PATHs projects (<https://atlas.paths-erc.eu/>) have the following sigla: MONB.CE and MONB.HA. The Vienna fragments published by Gardner attest to the spread of this work in the Coptic world: Iain GARDNER, *Coptic Theological Papyri II. Edition, Commentary, Translation* (MPSW.NS 21), Wien 1988. See also Alberto CAMPLANI, Epifanio (*Ancoratus*) e Gregorio di Nazianzo (*Epistulae*) in copto: identificazioni e *status quaestionis*, in: Aug. 35 (1995) 327–347.

<sup>96</sup> I already indicated a possibile dependence on Epiphanius, *Ancoratus* 87, in CAMPLANI, *Un episodio* (as in n. 63), 163.

<sup>97</sup> DECHOW, *Dogma and Mysticism* (as in n. 4); CAMPLANI, *Un episodio* (as in n. 63), 163–165; Andrew S. JACOBS, *Epiphanius of Cyprus: A Cultural Biography of Late Antiquity*, Oakland (CA) 2016, 213–220, with whose observations I agree, although I would add to his analysis that also the vision of man and God offered by Epiphanius is a cultural construction based on a long tradition, in which Melito, Irenaeus, Methodius and other 4th century authors have left their trace.

*Dorothei*) express a moral and eschatological vision which is distant from the one traditional in Alexandrian tradition and could be easily framed into in the cultural current we are discussing – the one which unites the Coptic version of Melito, Shenute and the author of the *Life of Aphu*.<sup>98</sup> The second example comes from an apocryphal text, i.e. the *Apocalypse of Paul*, preserved in different textual forms and in different languages, Coptic included,<sup>99</sup> whose composition could be dated to the fifth century and placed in a monastic context.<sup>100</sup> During the vision of hell, in § 41b, Paule the apostle is told that those who are punished in the depth of the fire pit are the Christians who did not believe that Christ became flesh, that the Virgin Mary really begot him, and that the bread of the eucharist and the cup of the benediction are Christ's body and blood. The sinners whose punishment is described in § 42a-b, instead, are those who objected to the resurrection of both Christ and the human flesh. As the reader can easily understand, it is the same series of beliefs that are equally condemned in Shenute's anti-Origenist polemic.<sup>101</sup> Furthermore, the certainty of the final judgment and the remunerative justice of God, including the eternal punishments, is central both in Shenute and in the apocalypse, as well as in Epiphanius' *Ancoratus*.<sup>102</sup>

On the other side of the Egyptian Christian world there is the plurality of trends supporting a different, more Platonic, anthropological vision. There are a lot of authors and texts that should be studied with the purpose to better understand Shenute's initiative. Here we will touch only a few of them, just to give an example of possibile itineraries for future research, paying due attention to the risk of an uncritical reading of the heresiological presentation.<sup>103</sup> As we have anticipated in the premise, what we find in Antony's *Letters 2-7* is an anthropology of the Platonic type enriched with elements about the history of salvation which are a reworking of some of Origen's doctrines. Despite this, not only Shenute alludes to Antony, but his successor Besa quotes twice from *Letter 6*.<sup>104</sup> Furthermore, it is interesting to note that the Coptic version of the *Letters* was preserved in the library of the White Monastery.<sup>105</sup>

As we have seen in the premise, it is Evagrius' reflection on Christian life and prayer that has sharpened the contrasts in the monastic world, in particular for his acceptance of the pre-existence of souls and his theory of the silent and imageless prayer.<sup>106</sup>

However, before Evagrius, likely in the last decades of the fourth century, we have the important witness of the anonymous *Apology* of Origen mentioned by Photius, *Bibliotheca* 117, recently studied by Dechow and Prinzivalli.<sup>107</sup> The former is inclined to attribute the work to the

<sup>98</sup> Alberto CAMPLANI, Per un profilo storico-religioso degli ambienti di produzione e fruizione dei Papyri Bodmer: contaminazione dei linguaggi e dialettica delle idee nel contesto del dibattito su dualismo e origenismo, in: *Adamantius* 21 (2015) 98–135.

<sup>99</sup> Siglum of the manuscript preserving the translation: [CMCL] MERC.AM / [PATHs] paths.manuscripts.190 (Edfu library).

<sup>100</sup> Pierluigi Piovanelli, Les origines de l'Apocalypse de Paul reconsidérées, in: *Apocrypha* 4 (1993) 25–64. See the recent articles by Emiliano FIORI, Death and Judgment in the Apocalypse of Paul: Old Imagery and Monastic Reinvention, in: *ZAC* 20 (2016) 92–108; ID., A Reactivation of the Apocalyptic Genre in Early Egyptian Monasticism: the Apocalypse of Paul, in: Eva CANCIK-KIRSCHBAUM/Anita TRANINGER (eds.), *Wissen in Bewegung Institution – Iteration – Transfer*, Wiesbaden 2015, 307–322, with a bibliographical updating.

<sup>101</sup> For the different forms of the text see Claude-Claire KAPPLER/René KAPPLER, *Apocalypse de Paul*, in: François BOVON/Pierre GEOLTRAIN (eds.), *Écrits apocryphes chrétiens. I*, Paris 1997, 777–826, in particular p. 816.

<sup>102</sup> See in particular *Ancoratus* 87, discussed by CAMPLANI, Un episodio (as in n. 63), 164.

<sup>103</sup> For a long-term story of the anti-Origenist controversy in the Coptic environment see David BRAKKE, *The Egyptian Afterlife of Origenism: Conflicts over Embodiment in Coptic Sermons*, in: *OCP* 66 (2000) 277–293.

<sup>104</sup> The only Shenutean quotation from a letter attributed to Antony derives from a text belonging to the larger and composite collection of letters. On the references to Antony in Shenute and Besa, see RUBENSON, *The Letters of Antony* (as in n. 20), 15–16.

<sup>105</sup> CMCL MONB.OR / paths.manuscripts.579.

<sup>106</sup> Brouria BITTON-ASHKELONY, *The Poetic Performance of the Prayer-Mind: Evagrius Ponticus' Theory of Prayer and its Legacy in Syriac Christianity*, in: Philippe HOFFMANN / Andrei TIMOTIN (eds.), *Théories et pratique de la prière à la fine de l'antiquité* (BEHE.R 187), Turnhout 2020, 327–344.

<sup>107</sup> Not to be confused with Pamphilus' *Apology*. See the text in René HENRY (ed.), *Photius. Bibliothèque. Tome II. Codices 84–185* (Collection byzantine), Paris 1960.

circle of Didymus the Blind, on the basis of the mixture of Trinitarian orthodoxy and Origenian ideas which Photius identifies in it. It is worth noting that, according to Photius, the author defends the doctrine of the pre-existence of the souls, considered by Epiphanius, Theophilus and Shenute one of the main blasphemies of Origen.<sup>108</sup> Prinziwalli has added new reasons for confirming this hypothesis especially concerning the role of saints in the history of salvation, and the argument already traditional in Athanasius that many of Origen's proposals have been advanced "for exercise" (γυμνασίας χάριν).<sup>109</sup> So, we have the opportunity to see which were the main points of the Origenian tradition which were criticized by the adversaries and which the author is ready to explain. Fifteen are the accusations against which the author proposes his defense:

φασιν αὐτὸν παραγγέλλειν μὴ προσεύχεσθαι τῷ Υἱῷ καὶ μὴ εἶναι αὐτὸν ἀπλῶς ἀγαθόν, καὶ μὴ γινώσκειν τὸν Πατέρα ὡς αὐτὸς ἑαυτὸν· καὶ τὰς λογικὰς φύσεις εἰς ἀλόγων εἰσκρίνεσθαι σώματα, καὶ εἶναι μετενσωμάτωσιν, καὶ ὅτι ἡ τοῦ Σωτῆρος Ψυχὴ ἢ τοῦ Ἀδάμ ἦν, καὶ ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν αἰώνιος κόλασις οὐδὲ σαρκὸς ἀνάστασις, καὶ ὅτι οὐ κακὸν ἡ μαγεία, καὶ ὅτι ποιητικὴ τῶν πραττομένων ἡ ἀστρονομία, καὶ ὅτι παύεται ὁ μονογενὴς τῆς βασιλείας, καὶ ὅτι ἐκ καταπτώσεως ἦλθον οἱ ἅγιοι εἰς τὸν κόσμον ἀλλ' οὐ δι' ἐτέρων θεραπείαν, καὶ ὅτι ὁ Πατὴρ τῷ Υἱῷ ἀράτος, καὶ ὅτι τὰ Χερουβὶμ ἐπίνοιοι τοῦ Υἱοῦ εἰσιν, καὶ ὅτι ἡ εἰκὼν τοῦ Θεοῦ ὡς πρὸς ἐκεῖνον οὐ ἔστιν εἰκὼν, καθὼς εἰκὼν, οὐκ ἔστιν ἀλήθεια.

They say that he has proclaimed that prayer should not be offered to the Son, and that he is not absolutely good; that he does not know the Father as himself; that the rational natures enter into the bodies of irrational beings; that there is the transmigration; that the soul of the Saviour was the the soul of Adam; that there is neither eternal punishment nor resurrection of the flesh; that magic is not an evil; that astronomy is the cause of events; that the Only Begotten ceases from the kingdom; that the saints came into the world by falling down, not to render service to others; that the Father is invisible by the Son; that the Cherubim are the *epinoiai* of the Son; that the image of God, in reference to him whose image it is, as image, is not truth.<sup>110</sup>

As Prinziwalli has rightly observed, the prayer is in first position. Since this motif is absent from Epiphanius' works, it is possible to suggest that the one about prayer was a typical Egyptian debate, of which Didymus is perfectly aware and on which he shows a defensive attitude, in the sense that he promotes a prayer which has no subordinationistic features and is directed to God.<sup>111</sup>

The second text is Agathonicus of Tarsus' work on the faith, edited by Crum and recently by Orlandi,<sup>112</sup> who has devoted some studies to it.<sup>113</sup> Here the attack against anthropomorphism, expressed in the same terms that we find in Theophilus and Cyril, is enriched with observations about the true prayer which seem to be central in the author's Christian vision.

And whoever forms the substance of the divinity in his heart, he has placed a form in his heart, saying, "God is in this form", slandering the deity: it is the chief of darkness who suggests these inferior substances in the heart of fools (*anoētos*), deceiving (with the belief) that divinity is of this form, while they, without knowing it, adore idols.<sup>114</sup>

It is allowed to me to reflect upon the body that Christ clothed in humility, but the divinity which joined the flesh is inexpressible. You can call the body "Christ"—for the meaning of Christ is "the one who was anointed"—but you cannot think of it (= the divinity) in any form in order not to be in error. For we believe that the Son is the Word of the Father and that the Holy Spirit is his breath. But the consubstantial Trinity is without body (*asōmatos*), without beginning or end. (Though there are) those who believe that God has the form of man because of the word of Genesis: "Let us make man according to our image and our likeness" (Gen 1:26), do not think He is in such inferiority.

<sup>108</sup> DECHOW, *Dogma and Mysticism* (as in n. 4), 255–264.

<sup>109</sup> PRINZIVALLI, *Magister ecclesiae* (as in n. 4), 207–214.

<sup>110</sup> Ed. HENRY, 88.

<sup>111</sup> PRINZIVALLI, *Magister ecclesiae* (as in n. 4), 210–211.

<sup>112</sup> CRUM/ EHRHARD, *Der Papyruscodex* (as in n. 3), 22–24; T. ORLANDI (as in n. 3) in <http://www.cmcl.it>.

<sup>113</sup> TITO ORLANDI, *Il dossier copto di Agatonico di Tarso*. *Studio letterario e storico*, in: ed. D.W. Young (ed.), *Studies presented to Hans Jacob Polotsky*, Beacon Hill 1981, 269–299; ID., *Coptic Texts Relating to the Church Canons. An Overview*, Roma 2016, 46–52, 55–57, 59.

<sup>114</sup> The underlined text is lacking from MONB.EF.

(...) Some set forth proofs drawn from Scripture about the eyes of God, his hands, and so on. O listener, if one would not speak to you in a language you know, you would not understand the sound. Whoever understands, this one is wise. So you are told, “the eyes of God” etc., so that you fully understand what you are listening to, since Paul said, “What the eye did not see, nor did ear hear, nor did it ascend to the heart of men, this He prepared for them that love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9). If the promises to his (Lord’s) righteous did not rise to the heart of men, the more the one who has promised!

(...) Understand those who believe in God in their heart, do not believe in those forms that Satan suggests to their heart, making them believe that God takes this form. He makes you see in your heart unseemly things in forms that he himself has placed in your heart, wanting you to throw stains on divinity. In fact, nobody knows the Father except the Son, that is, nobody knows the divinity if not itself. And how could anyone know divinity? Whoever sees this divinity and the divine form naturally becomes a corpse as he said to Moses: “No one should look at my face and remain alive” (Ex 33:20). Therefore let those whose hearts receive light at the moment of their prayers pray to the Son of God *{clothed in the body in which he purified humanity}*. In fact, the Father is in the Son and the Son in the Father with the Holy Spirit.

In a recent essay I have discussed this passage, which in the manuscript tradition has two forms: a longer one, preserved in a manuscript of Pachomian provenance,<sup>115</sup> while the shorter one is contained in a White Monastery manuscript.<sup>116</sup> The expressions which have been deleted from the latter are exactly those concerning the form of God which should not be imagined in the act of prayer. My further contention is that the expression in italic *{clothed in the body in which he purified humanity}* has been interpolated in both traditions: originally the text claimed that in the hour of prayer the Son of God is to be prayed and the light to be contemplated, but without a consideration of his incarnate form. It is likely that this assertion would have not received an appreciation by Shenute.

The passage, like other works of the corpus, can easily be brought back to Evagrian influence. This is detectable in the insistence on the absolute incorporeality of the Trinity, the main subject of the prayer and the vision, which implies an exclusion of the forms that our imagination suggests to us in relation to God. One should recall the fact that for Evagrius prayer is elevation of the intellect to God (*De oratione* 35: Προσευχή ἐστὶν ἀνάβασις νοῦ πρὸς Θεόν)<sup>117</sup>, free from representations and more or less corporeal forms with which he imagines the divine (§ 66: Μὴ σχηματίζης τὸ Θεῖον ἐν ἑαυτῷ προσευχόμενος, μηδὲ πρὸς μορφὴν τινα συγχωρήσης τυπωθῆναι σου τὸν νοῦν · ἀλλ ἄυλος τῷ ἄυλῳ πρόσιθι, καὶ συνίσσεις). The notion that these forms may be suggested by demonic forces is also inspired by Evagrius (§ 72); in §§ 114-116 Evagrius suggests not to seek the form of God in the course of prayer, not to try to see either angels or Christ in a sensitive way, not to circumscribe the divinity according to the ways of human imagination. This notion of prayer is far from the more affective practice of prayer promoted by Shenute.

At the end of this too short and too rapid excursus of texts witnessing to debates which could explain Shenute’s heresiological catalogue, we should notice that some of them became part of normal Coptic culture and of the library of the White Monastery<sup>118</sup>. Antony and Agathonicus are attested by manuscripts coming from that great institution of culture, and the same could be said about other works. In a sense, this library, likely founded by Shenute, attests to an attempt to correct texts in view of the reconciliation of adverse currents of thought.

In conclusion, we are able to offer some methodological suggestions for the future study of Shenute and the theological debates that have been preserved in Coptic:

1) the multiplicity of ideas and theories that are refuted by Shenute must not lead the scholar to imagine an Egyptian landscape populated by a huge number of dissenting groups: Shenute uses

<sup>115</sup> See Anne BOUD’HORS, Le P. Bodmer 58 comme témoin de la vie culturelle et religieuse dans la région thébaine au début du VII<sup>e</sup> siècle, in: Adamantius 24 (2018) 106-117.

<sup>116</sup> MONB.EF.

<sup>117</sup> Reference is made to the edition in PG 79, 1165A-1200C.

<sup>118</sup> Tito ORLANDI, The Library of the Monastery of Saint Shenute at Atripe, in: A. Egberts / Brian P. Muhs/Jacques van der Vliet, Perspectives on Panopolis. Acts from an International Symposium Held in Leiden 1998, Leiden 2002, 211–231.

the sources to construct a heresiological discourse whose fundamental purpose is the defense of a Christian and monastic identity; the search for a historical reality behind each element of the heresiological catalog is doomed to failure, precisely because some of these ideas are used by contrast to support opposing values;

2) this identity is inspired by a multiplicity of traditions: there exists the patriarchal one, with which Shenute agrees although with his own peculiar accents, but alongside this other traditions emerge characterized by a non-Platonic vision of God and man and an unitary anthropology, as attested by the Coptic version of Melito's *De anima et corpore* (corrected in its too materialistic expressions), Epiphanius's *Ancoratus*, and all those materials which were later reworked by the author of *The Life of Aphu*.