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The Apocalypse of Elijah in the Context of Coptic Apocrypha

نص سفر "الرؤية لايليا" في سياق النصوص القبطية غير المعتمدة،
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“After these events, Elijah and Enoch come down. They lay aside the flesh of this world and receive a spiritual flesh. They pursue the Son of Lawlessness and kill him, without him being able to speak. On that day he will melt before them like ice melting from fire.”¹ Thus concludes the reign of the Antichrist in the last days according to the *Apocalypse of Elijah*, an early Christian apocryphon attested in four early Coptic manuscripts, including one held in the papyrus collection of the Chester Beatty in Dublin.

The *Apocalypse of Elijah* begins with the prophet’s reception of the word of God, and exhortations to avoid attachment to the material world through fasting and prayer. References to the coming of Christ to save the righteous from captivity, and of the punishment of sinners, are also part of the beginning of the text. We are then given detailed information about the events leading up to and including the end times.² Most importantly,

we are told about the arrival of the Antichrist, called “the Son of Lawlessness,” and most of the second half of the text deals with his deeds and the actions and fate of those who oppose him, including Enoch and Elijah, the woman Tabitha, and sixty righteous men, before the second coming of Christ.³

As with most early Christian writings, scholarship on this intriguing work has for the most part been directed toward its hypothetical original composition, with questions of place, date, context, and background of its authorship and redaction taking centre stage. The work’s original religious identity, Jewish or Christian, has also been up for debate, with several scholars arguing that the text, as it has come down to us, is a Christian reworking of an original Jewish writing.⁴ While such discussions have a certain merit, the perspective of the present contribution will be different, focusing more on extant evidence and less on hypothetical texts. Turning the spotlight in the opposite direction and taking the extant manuscripts of the *Apocalypse of Elijah* as my point of departure, I will ask how the *Apocalypse of Elijah* fits into the broader picture of the production, transmission, and use of apocryphal literature in Coptic.⁵

1 The manuscripts

The material basis for our knowledge of the *Apocalypse of Elijah* consists of four Coptic manuscripts, three in the Sahidic dialect and one in Achmimic.⁶ In addition, there is a tiny Greek fragment that has also been identi-

1 *Apoc. Elijah*, Ach 42.10–43.2. Translation based on the Coptic text in Steindorff 1899, 104: $\mu\eta\iota\sigma\epsilon\sigma\epsilon\iota\ \varphi\eta\iota\eta\gamma\ \alpha\pi\alpha\rho\eta\iota\ \beta\epsilon\tau\eta\lambda\epsilon\iota\alpha\varsigma\ \mu\eta\eta\epsilon\omega\chi\ \sigma\epsilon\kappa\omicron\upsilon\gamma\ \alpha\pi\alpha\rho\eta\iota\ \eta\tau\varsigma\alpha\rho\zeta\ \mu\eta\mu\kappa\omicron\sigma\mu\omicron\varsigma\ \sigma\epsilon\chi\iota\ \eta\eta\omicron\upsilon\varsigma\alpha\rho\zeta\ \mu\eta\mu\eta\alpha\ \sigma\epsilon\pi\omega\tau\ \sigma\epsilon\pi\omega\eta\pi\epsilon\ \eta\tau\alpha\eta\omicron\mu\iota\alpha\ \sigma\epsilon\gamma\omega\tau\beta\epsilon\ \eta\mu\alpha\varphi\ \epsilon\mu\alpha\varphi\epsilon\omega\epsilon\ \epsilon\mu\phi\omicron\omicron\upsilon\epsilon\ \epsilon\tau\eta\mu\omicron\ \varphi\eta\alpha\beta\omega\lambda\ \alpha\beta\alpha\lambda\ \eta\pi\omicron\upsilon\gamma\eta\tau\omicron\ \alpha\beta\alpha\lambda\ \eta\tau\epsilon\ \eta\lbracket\omicron\gamma\kappa\upsilon\sigma\tau\alpha\lambda\lambda\omicron\varsigma\ \epsilon\alpha\varphi\omega\lambda\ \alpha\beta\alpha\lambda\ \epsilon\iota\tau\eta\omicron\gamma\kappa\omega\epsilon\tau$. All translations from Coptic are my own. I refer to the *Apocalypse of Elijah* using manuscript page and line numbers. For the manuscripts I use the abbreviations Ach, Sa¹, Sa², Sa³ (see Pietersma / Comstock / Attridge 1981, 1). On these four Coptic manuscripts, see below. This part of the work is only attested in Achmimic. In the CMCL database of Coptic literature, the *Apocalypse of Elijah* is designated as *clavis coptica* (cc) 0028. In the APOCRYPHA project’s database of Coptic apocrypha, it is work no. 6.

2 We are told, for instance, that there will appear in the north an unrighteous “king of Assyria” who will ravage Egypt. He will, however, be killed by a “king of peace” arising in the west, who will also bring destruction upon Egypt. One of his sons will kill him and bring even more destruction and oppression. Thereafter, three kings will arise in Persia, who will fight the kings of Assyria. Then yet another king, this time from “the city of the sun,” will arise and kill the Assyrian kings. Then follows the reign of the Antichrist, the final judgment and the second coming of Christ.

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3 For a brief overview of the text, see Pietersma / Comstock / Attridge 1981, 7–11.

4 See, e.g., Schrage 1980, 204; Rosensthiel 1982; Wintermute 1983, 721–22; Bumazhnov 2017, 15; Bauckham 1976. For a convincing argument against such theories of redaction in favour of Christian authorship, see Miroshnikov / Somov 2020.

5 By apocryphal literature I mean works that elaborate or expand upon characters or events of the biblical storyworld. This definition, which focuses on process and creativity rather than canonicity, is the working definition used by the APOCRYPHA research project.

6 I follow Pietersma / Comstock / Attridge 1981 in using the following sigla for these manuscripts: Sa¹: BnF Copte 135.26–33; Sa²: BL Or. 7594; Sa³: Chester Beatty Ac. 1493; Ach: BnF Copte 135.12–25 + P.Berol. 1862.1–8.

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fied as a witness to this work. None of the manuscripts contains all of the *Apocalypse of Elijah*, but together they cover the work more or less. It is a highly intriguing, and diverse, group of manuscripts. They have in common that they are all papyrus manuscripts, which may be dated relatively early, and there is no doubt that they were produced and used by Christians. But in other respects they are noticeably different from each other.

1.1 P.Chester Beatty 2018 = Ac. 1493 (Sa³)

Beginning with the Dublin based manuscript, Chester Beatty Ac. 1493 is a papyrus codex that was dated by A. F. Shore in 1958 to the end of the fourth or beginning of the fifth century on palaeographical grounds,⁷ and edited by Pietersma, Comstock, and Attridge in 1981 (Figure 1).⁸ It contains ten folios of continuous text belonging to a single quire. Although all folios are damaged, the manuscript covers a large portion of the text of the *Apocalypse of Elijah* already known from other witnesses, while filling in significant gaps at various points. From a material point of view, the manuscript is unique in several respects. Its system of punctuation, for example, finds no parallel in any other known Coptic manuscript, and the palaeography can only be described as idiosyncratic.⁹ The text is unevenly copied, with inconsistent letter forms, variable distance between the lines, a variable number of lines per page (19–24) and letters per line. There are also multiple mistakes and corrections throughout. Whether the scribe was inexperienced, or just sloppy or in a hurry, we do not know, but it is also worth noting the poor quality of the papyrus used.¹⁰ We also do not know who produced and used the manuscript. It has been linked to the so-called Dishna Papers, discovered at the Jabal Abu Mana in 1952. If it was part of this discovery there is a high probability that it derives from one of the nearby Pachomian monasteries.¹¹ But this provenance is tenuous for Ac. 1493, as it is

7 Pietersma / Comstock / Attridge 1981, 6. The dating was written on a note accompanying the manuscript (p. 1). Pietersma, Comstock, and Attridge hold this dating to be corroborated by the then most recent work on Coptic palaeography, namely Cramer 1964, but considering the more recent heavy criticism of the latter as a dating tool (Layton 1985, 152, even characterizes it as “useless for any purpose whatsoever”), this supposed corroboration should not carry much weight. On the problematic nature of dating Coptic manuscripts by means of palaeography, see Layton 1985 and Askeland 2018.

8 Pietersma / Comstock / Attridge 1981.

9 See Pietersma / Comstock / Attridge 1981, 2–5.

10 Pietersma / Comstock / Attridge 1981, 4 (citing again the opinion of A. F. Shore).

11 See Robinson 2011; Lundhaug 2018.

among the most uncertain of those manuscripts that have been linked to this discovery.

1.2 BnF Copte 135.12–25 + P.Berol. 1862.1–8 (Ach); BnF Copte 135.26–33 (Sa¹)

In addition to the Chester Beatty manuscript, the two most significant manuscripts in terms of textual volume is a Sahidic one kept at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris (Sa¹),¹² and an Achmimic manuscript dispersed between the Bibliothèque Nationale and the Papyrus collection in Berlin (Ach).¹³ The Paris leaves were first published by Urbain Bouriant in 1885,¹⁴ and later republished together with the Berlin leaves by Georg Steindorff in 1899.¹⁵ They can be assigned with reasonable confidence to the fourth or fifth centuries on palaeographical and codicological grounds,¹⁶ but I would hesitate to be more specific.¹⁷

Unlike the Chester Beatty manuscript (Sa³), which only contains the *Apocalypse of Elijah*, both the Sahidic (Sa¹) and Achmimic (Ach) manuscripts also contain the *Apocalypse of Zephaniah*, which in both cases precedes the *Apocalypse of Elijah*. There are no titles or other paratextual markers preserved that indicate the end of the former and the beginning of the latter, so there is nothing in these manuscripts to indicate that these were regarded as separate texts. Both manuscripts also contain text that

12 BnF Copte 135.26–33.

13 BnF Copte 135.12–25 + P.Berol. 1862.1–8.

14 Bouriant 1885.

15 Steindorff 1899. On the construction of these codices, see now Carlig 2020, as well as Nongbri 2020 on Ach in particular.

16 Sa¹ has been dated to the fourth, fourth/fifth, or fifth centuries, while Ach has been dated to the third/fourth (Pietersma / Comstock / Attridge 1981, 6). Steindorff 1899, 6, suggests that Sa¹ is slightly younger than Ach, but no later than the early fifth century. Considering the fact that no Coptic manuscript has been securely dated to before the fourth century, I would be hesitant to date Ach to the third. Turner 1977, 137–38, dates Sa¹ tentatively to the fifth, and Ach to the fourth or fifth centuries. A broad dating to the fourth or fifth centuries for both manuscripts seems safest in light of the available evidence. On the fundamental uncertainty of palaeography as a dating tool for Coptic manuscripts, see n.7 above.

17 Carlig 2020, 129 suggests the first half of the fourth century based on similarities with a group of manuscripts regarded as “standard Panopolite” manuscripts dated by Gascou 1989, 83, to between the end of the third and the middle of the fourth century. It is unclear, however, why the similarities between these two highly diverse codices (which differ from each other in dimensions, format, palaeography, quire structure, and dialect) and the so-called “standard Panopolite” manuscripts, should outweigh their differences and warrant such confidence regarding a close association of time and place of production as Carlig suggests.

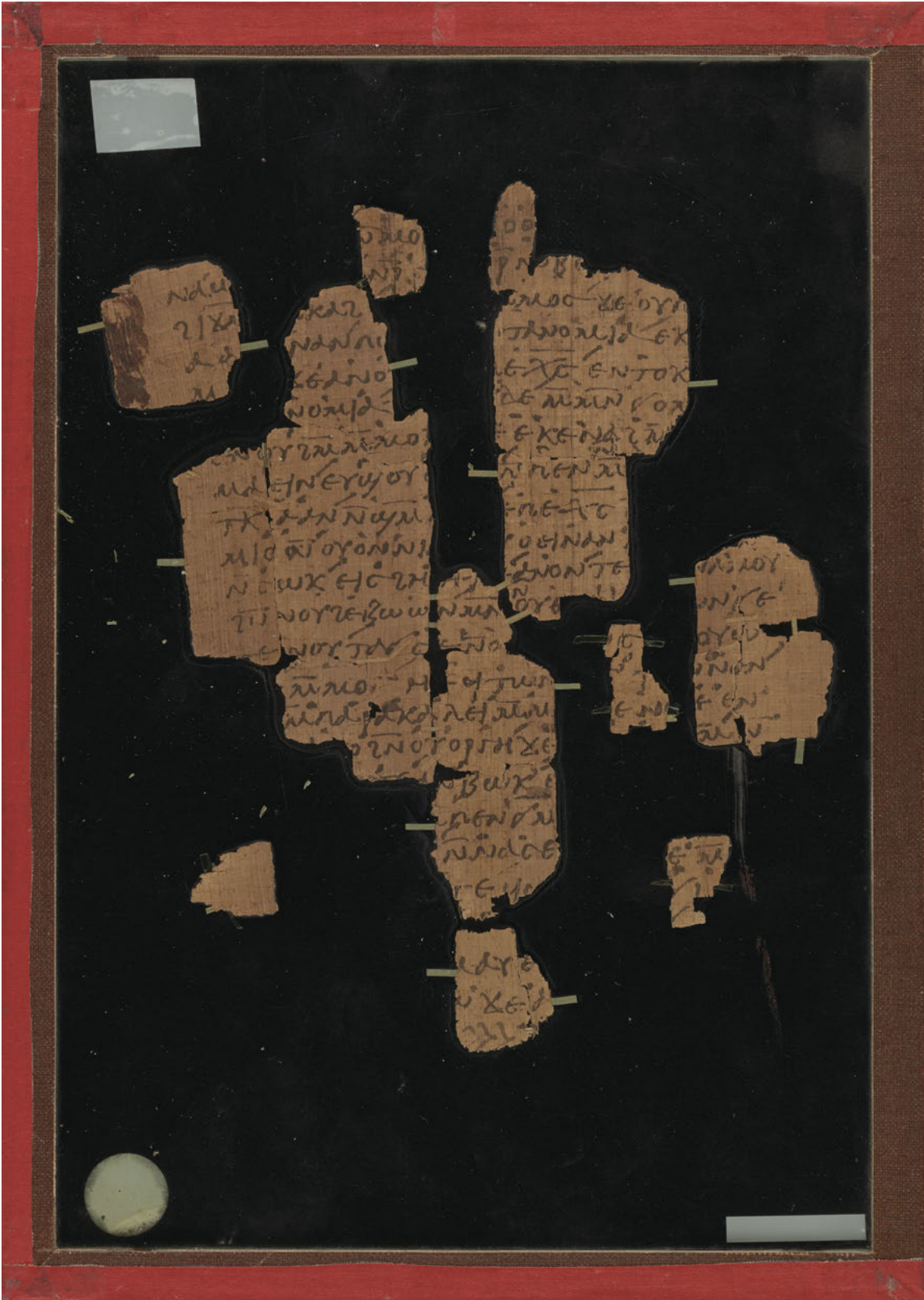


Figure 1: folio Ac. 1493 = CBL Cpt 2018 1r.

goes further than the Chester Beatty manuscript, although it is only Ach which includes the very end of the text.

According to some early reports, both manuscripts Sa¹ and Ach derive from the White Monastery near Atripe, the monastery of the famous archimandrite Shenoute,¹⁸ but although this provenance has also found support in some later scholarship,¹⁹ there is in fact no concrete evidence to connect these two manuscripts to the White Monastery,²⁰ and the connection in the early reports seem to be ultimately based on a confusion between the acquisition of a large group of leaves and fragments of much later parchment codices from the White Monastery by Gaston Maspero in 1883²¹ and a group of early Achmimic manuscripts, allegedly discovered by Maspero in an excavation of a cemetery in Achmim (Panopolis) around the same time.²²

In any case, if the dating of the manuscripts is correct, it would correspond to, or be very close to, the period when Shenoute was head of the White Monastery federation (from 385 to at least ca. 450 CE). Shenoute's opposition to the reading of apocrypha is well-known, and one would have to assume that if these manuscripts were present at the White Monastery during his reign, that would have had to have been without his knowledge, not to mention approval.²³ On the other hand, it seems clear from Shenoute's polemics against the use of apocrypha in *I Am Amazed*,²⁴ and the existence of a strict censorship regime for writings entering the White Monastery,²⁵ that

the circulation of such literature in his monasteries was regarded as a very real problem.²⁶

1.3 BL Or. 7594 (Sa2)

The final Coptic witness, British Library Or. 7594, commonly referred to as “Budge's Deuteronomy Codex,” is a highly interesting codex in which the *Apocalypse of Elijah* is found alongside the three canonical biblical texts Deuteronomy, Jonah, and the Acts of the Apostles, but appears to have been treated in a noticeably different way. The *Apocalypse of Elijah* is the last of the four texts in the codex, and in contrast to the other three texts, it has been copied in a cursive hand, and it breaks off after only two-and-a-half pages. On account of its short length and placement in the codex, as well as its appearance, the cursive text may at first sight have the appearance of a colophon. It was erroneously labelled as such by Budge, but properly identified by Carl Schmidt as the beginning of the *Apocalypse of Elijah* only a few years later.²⁷ The use of this kind of cursive script for a literary text in Coptic is nevertheless uncommon, and it is curious that such a script was used for the last text in a codex where the other three (canonical biblical) texts preceding it were copied in a more common literary hand. It was, however, the cursive script that was the basis for Kenyon's dating of the manuscript to around the middle of the fourth century, a conclusion he reached through palaeographical comparison with Greek documentary hands.²⁸

As mentioned above, only the beginning of the *Apocalypse of Elijah* has been preserved in this manuscript, and David Frankfurter has used this as a basis for his claim that the text did not only circulate in its entirety, but also as excerpts. That would indeed be the case if the final preserved page of Or. 7594 was also originally the last page of the codex. However, since we cannot exclude the possibility that the manuscript originally contained one or more additional quires,²⁹ it remains unclear whether the codex originally contained the entire *Apocalypse of Elijah*, or just its beginning.³⁰

18 E.g., Schmidt 1895, 705; Steindorff 1899, 1; Schmidt 1908, 9; Schmidt 1919, 4.

19 See, e.g., Orlandi 1983, 59; Orlandi 1997, 65; but with far more caution in Orlandi 2002, 221–23.

20 See Boud'hors 2012, 240 n.39. Cf. Miroshnikov / Somov 2020, 200, who argue on the basis of the dialect of Sa¹ (Sahidic with Achmimic influences) and Ach (Achmimic) that they were probably produced in “the Theban region.”

21 Maspero 1892, 1.

22 Bouriant 1885, 243 (Bouriant speaks of “les fouilles récentes d'Akhmim” and lists the leaves of six separate manuscripts); Carlig 2020, 115; cf. Schmidt 1908, 9. On the uncertainty and confusion surrounding the provenance of several Achmimic manuscripts discovered around this time, see Watson 2020, 18–22. Maspero, 1893, 214–19 briefly describes the Achmim excavation, but does not mention the discovery of Coptic codices.

23 On Shenoute's opposition to apocrypha, see Lundhaug 2012; Lundhaug / Jenott 2015, 170–75. His polemics against apocrypha is most prominently on display in the writing known as *I Am Amazed*. The best edition of this text is currently Cristea 2011.

24 Lundhaug 2012; Lundhaug / Jenott 2015, 170–75.

25 Shenoute, *You, God the Eternal*, XS 336; cf. Lundhaug / Jenott 2015, 174–75.

26 Lundhaug 2012; Lundhaug / Jenott 2015, 170–75.

27 Schmidt 1925. While a number of scholars have continued to refer to the *Apocalypse of Elijah* in this manuscript as a colophon text, e.g., Pietersma / Comstock / Attridge 1981; Frankfurter 1993, this is certainly incorrect, as has been firmly pointed out by Emmel 2003, 83 n.1: “this text is *not* a colophon” (his emphasis).

28 See Budge 1912, lxiii. Cf. Turner 1977, 137, who dates the codex to 330–350 CE.

29 See Emmel 2003, 89 n.18.

30 Hebbelynck once suggested that BL Or. 7594 could be the result

With regard to the question of provenance, however, we have more information on this codex than on the ones discussed above. According to Budge, it was discovered in a tomb near the modern city of el-Ashmunein (ancient Hermopolis Magna, Coptic Shmoun), wrapped in linen and located between the feet of a corpse, also wrapped in linen, in a wooden coffin. Budge states that it was found in 1911 by local Egyptians whom he had personally asked to open nearby graves in search of manuscripts.³¹ Budge states that he later visited the tomb in person, coming to the conclusion that the corpse, in whose coffin the book was found, must have been its owner, sometime in the late fourth or early fifth century. He also concluded that the owner, whom he speculated had been a revered anchorite, had probably copied the book “with his own hands,” and observed that the “writing and style of the page were different from anything of the kind” he had ever seen before.³² While the latter may well have been the case, the manuscript was certainly not simply the work of the monk with whom it was buried, as it seems to have been the work of at least three scribes. Moreover, while Budge may not have seen anything similar at the time, we can now observe that the manuscript is in several respects similar to other known Coptic manuscripts, such as the Nag Hammadi Codices, and in particular Nag Hammadi Codex II, a codex that may also be dated to the late fourth or early fifth century.

of a combination of two originally distinct codices (Hebbelynck / Thompson 1921, 73), but was convinced by Thompson that this was not the case (p. 80). More recently, Nagel 1994 has argued that the codex as it has been preserved is most likely the result of an extension of an originally smaller codex, but this has later been decisively refuted by Emmel 2003.

31 Budge 1920, 2.372–74. Budge states that “In 1909 and again in 1911 I revisited the sites from which I obtained the papyrus Psalter and the other Biblical texts, and urged the natives to search for more unopened graves in ancient Coptic cemeteries, and to try and find me more texts. In January, 1911, one of them discovered near Ashmūnēn a group of tombs which had escaped his notice in former years” (p. 372). The manuscript was supposedly found “At one end of the group of graves” in “a two-chambered tomb, part of which had been hewn in the lower slope of the hill” (p. 372). The Psalter Budge refers to is the British Library codex that is now known as BL Or. 5000. The connection with Hermopolis Magna is strengthened by several references to the city in Greek documents found reused as cartonnage in the book’s cover, dated by Bell 1912, xv–xvii to no later than 320 CE. Bell 1912, xvii also identified a Coptic fragment in the cartonnage with “literary uncials,” that he estimated to be from the fifth century.

32 Budge 1920, 2.373–74.

1.4 The Greek fragment

There is also a Greek fragment, but only a tiny one, measuring roughly 6x6 cm. It was identified as a witness to the *Apocalypse of Elijah* by Pistelli in 1912 on the basis of the fact that the text on the verso of the Greek fragment parallels a passage near the end of the Achmimic version of the *Apocalypse of Elijah*.³³ However, the text on the recto of the fragment does not correspond to the Coptic text at all, despite the fact that one would expect it to parallel either Ach or Sa¹. The mere existence of this Greek fragment has nevertheless been taken by scholars as proof of a Greek *original* for the *Apocalypse of Elijah*.³⁴ This conclusion is in large part based on the default assumption that most Coptic texts preserved in manuscripts of the fourth and fifth centuries are translations from Greek, and that the Greek text could not possibly be a translation from Coptic. It is important to note, however, that these are among those scholarly assumptions that do not rest on much secure evidence. Moreover, the problem of the missing parallel to the text on the recto of the Greek fragment certainly throws in doubt the extent of its similarity with the *Apocalypse of Elijah* as known from the Coptic manuscripts.³⁵ In any case, we must conclude that while the Greek fragment is an important witness to what seems to be a version of (at least part of) this work, it does *not* provide sufficient evidence to firmly conclude that the *Apocalypse of Elijah* must have been originally composed in Greek.³⁶

33 Pistelli 1912, 16–7.

34 Pietersma / Comstock / Attridge 1981, 91; cf. Kuhn 1982, 314; Buzmazhnov 2017, 15.

35 Miroshnikov / Somov 2020, 199, following Pistelli 1912, 17, argue that the recto was probably preceded by the verso and most likely preserve a different text.

36 It is interesting to note in this connection that there are several features that connect the *Apocalypse of Elijah* specifically to Egypt. First of all, Egypt is the setting for a significant part of the prophecy that takes place *before* the coming of the Antichrist and the shift in focus to Jerusalem. Egypt is the land that is alternately ruled by just and unjust kings and whose people suffer hardship as a consequence. Moreover, a part of the narrative dealing with Egypt seems to borrow from the Egyptian *Oracle of the Potter* (Wintermute 1983, 723–24), and, as David Frankfurter 1990 has argued, the part concerning the martyrdom of Tabitha can plausibly be connected to ancient Egyptian tradition as well (Frankfurter 1990 connects Tabitha to the Egyptian scorpion goddess Tabithet, and also argues for possible influence from the goddess Isis). Such direct connections to Egypt, which we also frequently find in other Coptic apocrypha, are certainly clues to the interests and context of those who copied and read these texts in Coptic. In later Coptic apocrypha we also frequently find that Egypt plays a crucial role. It may be the location for a pseudepigraphal sermon containing apocryphal materials, sometimes even embedded apostolic books, or Egyptian could be the language that such an embedded apostolic work is said to be written in, such as in the *Life of Mary Magdalene*, or texts



Figure 2: folio Ac. 1493 = CBL Cpt 2018 10v.

2 State of preservation and textual fluidity

While a complete text can be reconstructed from a combination of the surviving Coptic manuscripts, the *Apocalypse of Elijah* is not preserved in its entirety in any single manuscript.³⁷ Although the Coptic fragments show a reasonably stable text, for this type of work, across the four Coptic witnesses, there is a large number of minor variants, some of which may have the potential to produce, or be the product of, different interpretations.³⁸ For instance, when the narrator is addressed by “the Word of God” (ⲡⲠⲗⲁⲤⲉ ⲛⲓⲗⲟⲩⲉⲓ) in the opening lines of the text, which has been preserved in three of the manuscripts (Ach, Sa², and Sa³),³⁹ only in the Achmimic is he identified as “the Son of Man” (ⲡⲠⲛⲣⲉ ⲛⲓⲡⲣⲟⲙⲉ),⁴⁰ while the other two do not specify his identity.⁴¹ The differences are also of such a nature that it is impossible to say which one of the surviving witnesses preserves a text that is closest to the original.

While there are numerous minor variants across the manuscripts, what may be regarded as possibly the most significant textual variant is constituted by what seems to be the premature ending of the *Apocalypse of Elijah* in the Chester Beatty manuscript (Sa³). Both Sa¹ and especially Ach, which is the only manuscript to preserve the end of the work, extend the narrative significantly beyond the point where Sa³ ends. This situation could perhaps be because the Chester Beatty codex may originally have contained more pages. What we have preserved of the codex seems to be a complete quire of five bifolios, which may either have been the full extent of the original codex or just a part of a codex containing additional quires. Yet, while the possibility that the codex may originally have

could even mention specifically Egyptian concerns, such as the inundation of the Nile, which is mentioned in the *Mysteries of John* and pseudo-Timothy *On the Feast of the Archangel Michael*. None of this is particularly surprising, as the works we are talking about have been copied in Coptic and used in Egypt. Such features should, however, cause us to rethink our default-hypothesis of a Greek original for most Coptic texts, even when we are talking about early texts.

³⁷ For an overview of which parts of the work are preserved in which manuscript, see the table in Pietersma / Comstock / Attridge 1981, 7.

³⁸ Cf. Bryant’s definition of a fluid text as “any written work that exists in multiple material versions due to revisions (authorial, editorial, cultural) upon which we may construct an interpretation” (2007, 17).

³⁹ *Apoc. Elijah* Ach 19.1 (Steindorff 1899, 66); Sa² 262.1 (Schmidt 1925, 313); Sa³ 1.1 (Pietersma / Comstock / Attridge 1981, 20).

⁴⁰ *Apoc. Elijah* Ach 19.2 (Steindorff 1899, 66). This identification of the narrator, who may here be Elijah, as “Son of Man” may be based on an interpretation of Ioh. 3,13.

⁴¹ *Apoc. Elijah* Sa² 262.2 (Schmidt 1925, 313); Sa³ 1.2 (Pietersma / Comstock / Attridge 1981, 20).

consisted of one or more quires in addition to the one preserved, the presence of traces of decoration, below the last line of preserved text, of a type that is often used at the end of texts, indicates that it may originally have ended here in this manuscript (Figure 2).

But if this was the case, it begs the question why. The situation may be explained in at least two ways. (1) The exemplar used by the scribe may also have ended at this point, as Pietersma, Comstock, and Attridge suggest,⁴² but it could also be (2) because nobody bothered to add additional pages, or another quire, to the manuscript when the scribe reached the end of the existing quire. The relatively sloppy copying of the text in this manuscript seems to indicate that the scribe was inexperienced, which again heightens the likelihood that he may have miscalculated the number of pages needed to copy the whole text, and that he simply stopped copying when he ran out of pages, rather than add additional pages and continue copying until the end of the work.

3 Title and genre

The title by which we the work is known, the *Apocalypse of Elijah* (ⲧⲁⲡⲠⲠⲗⲁⲗⲏⲧⲓⲥ ⲛⲉⲛⲓⲗⲟⲩⲉⲓⲥ), is found only at the end of the Achmimic manuscript, which is also the only manuscript that preserves the end of the work. The other manuscripts either lack the final pages (Sa¹), or simply end earlier, as we have seen may have been the case with both the Chester Beatty manuscript (Sa³) and possibly also the short text at the end of BL Or. 7594, (Sa²). What is somewhat curious about the title is that although the narrator at the beginning of the text, who describes his reception of the Word of God in the first person singular, may plausibly be identified with Elijah,⁴³ such an identification is complicated by the fact that Elijah is referred to and discussed at length in the third person later in the text, together with Enoch.

As for the genre of the work, it has been noted that despite its title, “apocalypse” is perhaps not the most fitting genre designation. Orval Wintermute, for instance, comments that it is “a somewhat inadequate description,”⁴⁴ and wonders “why it is called an apocalypse”

⁴² Pietersma / Comstock / Attridge 1981, 3.

⁴³ Cf. Ioh. 3,13.

⁴⁴ Because, according to Wintermute, an apocalypse “usually contains the account of a secret revelation conveyed to a seer by an angelic messenger who directs that the revelation be written down for the benefit of those who will remain faithful in the last days” (Wintermute 1983, 721).

when “the document is not written in apocalyptic form.”⁴⁵ While Wintermute concludes that this discrepancy may be due to what he regards as the “composite nature” of the text,⁴⁶ it must be pointed out that the *Apocalypse of Elijah* is in good company among early Coptic texts designated as apocalypses in their manuscripts in not conforming well to modern scholarly notions of what an apocalypse *should* be.⁴⁷ The Nag Hammadi Codices, for instance, contain several texts titled as apocalypses in the manuscripts,⁴⁸ while scholars have debated whether or not they actually fit the genre-designation “apocalypse.”⁴⁹ So in this respect the *Apocalypse of Elijah* is not alone. Indeed, one may reasonably suggest that when ancient usage of the term “apocalypse” does not correspond to the modern scholarly category, the problem lies with the latter rather than the former. In any case, the *Apocalypse of Elijah* contains a prophecy of what will happen in Egypt and Jerusalem in the final years leading up to and including the conflict with the Antichrist and the second coming of Christ.

4 Content elements of the *Apocalypse of Elijah* in relation to other Coptic literature

The *Apocalypse of Elijah* tells a story of a sequence of righteous and wicked rulers of Egypt which culminates in the advent, rule, and destruction of the Antichrist, followed by the final judgment. Alongside this, the work focuses on asceticism, martyrdom, and a general call to escape from the material world.

The main antagonist in the *Apocalypse of Elijah*, to whom the lengthy narrative of kings and conflict leads, is a character who is referred to as “the Son of Lawlessness” (ⲡⲠⲬⲚⲢⲉ ⲛ̅ⲧⲁⲛⲟⲙⲓⲁ), “the Son of Perdition” (ⲡⲠⲬⲚⲢⲉ ⲛ̅ⲧⲣⲁⲕⲟ),

or “the Shameless One” (ⲡⲁⲗⲟⲩⲛⲉ).⁵⁰ He is a character that, just like Christ, performs many “signs and wonders,”⁵¹ but unlike Christ he is recognizable by his ugly appearance,⁵² and can also be clearly distinguished from the real Christ by his inability to raise the dead, as he lacks the power to give life.⁵³ This character is the Antichrist, an identification that is made explicit when the sinners address him, once they realize that they have been led astray, saying: “[What have you] done to us, Son of Lawlessness? You [say]: ‘I [am] Christ,’ while being [the Son of] Law[less]ness.”⁵⁴ The Antichrist is not only opposed by Enoch and Elijah, but also by a woman named Tabitha and sixty righteous men.⁵⁵ The conflict involves martyrdom, resurrection, and the final defeat of the Antichrist.

It is only in the part describing the conflict with the Antichrist that Elijah himself plays a role in the apocalypse bearing his name, and here he does not appear alone, but always together with Enoch. We hear how the two prophets descend from heaven to confront the Antichrist, whereupon they die as martyrs. Their corpses are left in the market square for several days, before they eventually come back to life and ascend back into heaven – only to descend a second time, when they finally kill the Antichrist. While this double descent of Elijah and Enoch is found in no other Coptic apocrypha,⁵⁶ the idea that they would one day have to descend in order to die a bodily death is attested elsewhere. Since both Elijah and Enoch were believed to have been taken up to heaven in the body, it is to be expected that some would argue that they would someday have to die like every other human being, especially since there were other biblical characters of even higher standing who were not admitted into heaven without dying. In the *Death of Joseph the Carpenter*,⁵⁷ for example, a Coptic apocryphon of much later date than the *Apocalypse of Elijah*, Christ tackles this topic after he has told his apostles about the life and especially death

⁴⁵ Wintermute 1983, 721.

⁴⁶ Wintermute 1983, 721.

⁴⁷ The classic modern definition is that of Collins 1979, 9: “Apocalypse is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.” But cf. now Collins 2014 and Collins 2016, where a less rigid approach is advocated.

⁴⁸ Nag Hammadi Codex V contains five texts, four of which are titled apocalypses: the *Apocalypse of Paul*, two different texts entitled the *Apocalypse of James*, and the *Apocalypse of Adam*. Codex VII includes a text entitled the *Apocalypse of Peter*.

⁴⁹ See, e.g., Hartenstein 2000, 189.

⁵⁰ The antichrist is not mentioned in the short Sa², which only contains the very beginning of the work.

⁵¹ *Apoc. Elijah*, Sa³ 12.21–13.16; Sa¹ 5.5–20; Ach 32.11–33.10.

⁵² *Apoc. Elijah*, Sa³ 13.20–14.9.

⁵³ *Apoc. Elijah*, Sa³ 18.8–10; Sa¹ 10.5–9; Ach 38.2–4.

⁵⁴ *Apoc. Elijah*, Sa³ 20.3–6 (Pietersma / Comstock / Attridge 1981, 58): οὐ [ⲉⲧⲁⲕ]ⲁⲁ[ϥ] ⲛⲁⲛ ⲡⲠⲬⲚⲢⲉ ⲛ̅ⲧⲁⲛⲟⲙⲓⲁ ⲉⲕ[ⲗⲟⲩ] ⲛ̅ⲧⲣⲁⲕⲟⲥ ⲗⲉⲁⲛⲟⲕ [ⲡⲉ] ⲡⲉⲗⲥⲉ ⲛ̅ⲧⲣⲁⲕⲟⲥ [ⲡⲠⲬⲚⲢⲉ ⲛ̅ⲧⲁⲛⲟⲙⲓⲁ; cf. Sa¹ 12.22–26.

⁵⁵ On Tabitha, see Frankfurter 1990.

⁵⁶ For a thorough analysis of the theme of the double descent of Enoch and Elijah, see Miroshnikov / Somov 2020.

⁵⁷ This work (cc37; CANT 60) is most commonly known as the *Life of Joseph the Carpenter*, or *History of Joseph the Carpenter*, but since the title used in the Coptic manuscript tradition is the *Death of Joseph the Carpenter*, I refer to it by that name.

of Joseph, his father “according to the flesh” (κατὰ σαρκῶς).⁵⁸ The apostles wonder why a man of Joseph’s standing had to suffer the anguish of dying, when both Enoch and Elijah were taken up to heaven in their material fleshly bodies without having to die. Christ then answers that everyone must die eventually, and that Enoch and Elijah actually wished that they had already died, since they will one day have to return and die in battle against the Antichrist, just like we see it described in the *Apocalypse of Elijah*.⁵⁹

While the figure of the Antichrist is relatively rare in Coptic apocrypha, he makes an appearance in later apocalypses, such as the *Apocalypse of Athanasius*,⁶⁰ and in several others which are preserved in Arabic, rather than Coptic,⁶¹ such as the *Apocalypse of Shenoute*, a part of an Arabic version of the *Life of Shenoute* that in fact seems to be dependent on the *Apocalypse of Elijah*,⁶² having the Antichrist being killed by Elijah and Enoch, just as described in the latter work.⁶³ While the Antichrist is not particularly prominent in early Coptic apocrypha, he does make an appearance there as well. In a work that does not show any dependence on the *Apocalypse of Elijah*, the *Concept of Our Great Power*, attested in Nag Hammadi Codex VI, we hear about a ruler arising in the west, “who will instruct men in his wickedness,” and who wants to destroy proper teaching. He functions as a forerunner of the Antichrist. Just like the Antichrist in the *Apocalypse of Elijah*, he is described as having an ugly appearance, although the focus here is on his dirty garments rather than on his body.⁶⁴ But there is also another Antichrist figure who appears later in the *Concept of Our Great*

Power, performing signs and wonders and leading people astray.⁶⁵

When Elijah and Enoch return to earth for the second time in the *Apocalypse of Elijah*, after having died as martyrs fighting the Antichrist, we read that “they lay aside the flesh of this world and receive a spiritual flesh.”⁶⁶ It is equipped with this spiritual flesh that they are able to hunt down and kill the Antichrist, who perishes before them like ice melting in the presence of fire.⁶⁷ Their substitution of spiritual for carnal flesh is foreshadowed earlier, when they tell the Antichrist, during their first return, that they will later “lay down the flesh [of] this [body] and [kill] you.”⁶⁸ The exchange of the material bodily nature pertaining to this world for the spiritual nature of the heavenly body is crucial, and directly connected with the work’s general emphasis on rejecting this material world. Already at the beginning of the text, we hear that the purpose of Christ’s incarnation was to save humanity from material existence, and that God “will send his Son to the world in order to save [us] from captivity.”⁶⁹ This captivity is further specified as the material flesh: “he changed [himself] into the likeness of a human being, [coming to us] so that he might save us [from the] flesh.”⁷⁰

While the concept of a “spiritual flesh,” may appear somewhat counter-intuitive, references to such immaterial flesh is also found elsewhere in early Christian literature, and based to a large extent on an interpretation of Paul, especially I Cor. 15.⁷¹ We see this reflected also in early

⁵⁸ *Death of Joseph the Carpenter*, MACA.DE 36.

⁵⁹ *Death of Joseph the Carpenter*, MACA.DE 36; *Apoc. Elijah*, Sa³ 15.8–16.5 = Sa¹ 7.4–32. Enoch and Elijah’s bodily assumption into heaven is an idea that also plays a role in pseudo-Chrysostom’s *On the Four Bodiless Living Creatures*, where Enoch, the “scribe of righteousness,” who works as a heavenly scribe writing down the sins of men, is placed next to the bodiless living creature with a human face, because he has a material body, being thus well-placed to intercede on behalf of humanity. We are told that this is why Enoch was chosen to replace the former heavenly scribe, an angel named Mefriel, because the latter was “bodiless” (pseudo-Chrysostom, *On the Four Bodiless Living Creatures*, MICH.AT f. 10r; Wansink 1991, 34).

⁶⁰ cc56, most recently edited by Witte 2002. Note that this text is not the same as the similarly titled cc442 (on which, see Lucchesi 1997).

⁶¹ Lent 1998, esp. 184.

⁶² Lent 2009, 182–83; Bauckham 1985, 69–76; Wintermute 1983, 13 n.31.

⁶³ Wintermute 1983, 13.

⁶⁴ *Great Pow.*, 44.13–31 (Williams 2001, 14–5). Williams 2001, 150–57, argues that the description of this figure may be intended as an allusion to Julian the apostate.

⁶⁵ *Great Pow.*, 44.31–45.27 (Williams 2001, 14–7). See Williams 2001, 158–67. Like in the *Apocalypse of Elijah*, we also hear in *Great Pow.* that there will be a conflagration of fire at the end of time. See *Great Pow.*, 46.19–33 (Williams 2001, 16–7).

⁶⁶ *Apoc. Elijah*, Ach 42.11–13 (Steindorff 1899, 104): σεκοῦ ἀρρηῖ ἡτσαρῶς ἡπικοςμος σεχι ἡνογσαρῶς ἡπῖα. This part of the text is only extant in Ach.

⁶⁷ *Apoc. Elijah*, Ach 42.13–43.2.

⁶⁸ *Apoc. Elijah*, Sa¹ 8.8–10 (Steindorff 1899, 128): τῆνακω ερραῖ ἡτσαρῶς ἡπικωνα τῆρωτῆ ἡμοκ. Cf. Sa³ 16.14–15. Ach (35.7–8) here has “we will lay aside the flesh of the spirit and kill you” (τῆνακοῦ ἀρρηῖ ἡτσαρῶς ἡπῖα τῆρωτῆ ἡνακ), but the entire passage where this occurs seems to be corrupt in this manuscript (cf. Steindorff 1899, 93, esp. nn.3 and 4).

⁶⁹ *Apoc. Elijah*, Sa³ 1.19–21 (Pietersma / Comstock / Attridge 1981, 20): φηατῆνοοῦ ἡπεφωῆρε ἐπικοςμος ἡεεφεναρῆῖ[ν] ἐβελ ῖηταῖρηαλωσια. Cf. Sa² 263.1–3; Ach 19.10–14. Both Sa² and Ach have “the captivity of this age.”

⁷⁰ *Apoc. Elijah*, Sa³ 1.21–2.1 (Pietersma / Comstock / Attridge 1981, 20, 22): ἀφωβῆ[ν] ἡε νογρ[ω]με εφ[ν]ηγ ωα]ρο[ν] ἡεεφεναρῆῖ ἐβελ ῖητς] ἀρῶ. Cf. Sa² 263.13–4; Ach 20.8–10, although in the latter two cases the word σαρῶς is unfortunately lost in a lacuna.

⁷¹ See Lundhaug 2017. For an argument that *Apoc. Elijah* depends on I Cor. 15, see Miroshnikov / Somov 2020.

Coptic literature.⁷² The *Treatise on the Resurrection*, only extant in Nag Hammadi Codex I, a text that is styled partly as a letter by a teacher to a person named Rheginos, speaks of a spiritual resurrection that swallows the carnal and the psychic elements of the body alike, and argues that since one receives (material) flesh upon entry into the world through natural birth, one will also receive flesh, albeit a spiritual one, when one is spiritually reborn and ascends into the aeon after the death of the material body.⁷³ Similarly, in the *Gospel of Philip*, from Nag Hammadi Codex II, the acquisition of a spiritual flesh, which is equated with Christ's flesh and attainable through the Eucharist, is described as being a requirement for resurrection.⁷⁴ When, in the *Apocalypse of Elijah*, Enoch and Elijah kill the Son of Lawlessness, they cause him to melt,⁷⁵ this can be regarded as the direct result of their spiritual flesh, considering the close connection between spirit and fire in philosophical and early Christian sources alike. The aforementioned *Gospel of Philip* takes this connection for granted,⁷⁶ as does the New Testament, when the Acts of the Apostles describes the reception of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost in terms of tongues of fire resting on top of the apostles' heads (Act. 2,3–4).

There are several themes and ideas touched upon in the *Apocalypse of Elijah* that become highly popular in later apocrypha. The nature and roles of angels and archangels, and the story of the Devil's fall from heaven, for example, are among the most prominent topics in the later Coptic apocrypha.⁷⁷ While the devil's fall from heaven is not dealt with at length in the *Apocalypse of Elijah*, it is alluded to in a passage that seems to blend the Antichrist character with that of the devil. When Elijah and Enoch accuse the Antichrist of being an enemy of all the heavenly,⁷⁸ they also call him "a devil"⁷⁹ and state that he has "fallen from heaven like the morning stars,"⁸⁰ echoing Is. 14,12.⁸¹ As for angels and archangels, we read in the *Apocalypse of Elijah* that the archangels Gabriel and Uriel will lead the righteous to the Tree of Life to eat and wear white

garments,⁸² and that Christ will send sixty-four thousand angels from heaven to bring people to trial, lifting them up on their wings. What is unusual in the way this is portrayed in the *Apocalypse of Elijah* in relation to other, especially later, Coptic apocrypha is the absence of the Archangel Michael in these proceedings. Indeed, based on those later texts, one would expect to see Michael and Gabriel, or just Michael, rather than Gabriel and Uriel, in this kind of scene.⁸³

An interesting detail in the description of the role of the archangels Gabriel and Uriel in the *Apocalypse of Elijah* is that the way they will lead the righteous to heaven is by making "a pillar of light" (οὐρανὸς ἰσχυρῶς) that goes before them.⁸⁴ First and foremost, this description echoes Ex. 13,21,⁸⁵ but there is also a possible allusion here to the mighty angel with feet like pillars of fire from Apoc. 10,1. Indeed, it has been suggested that this unnamed "mighty angel" from Apoc. 10,1 may be identified with the archangel Gabriel,⁸⁶ which may perhaps explain the appearance of this particular angel. As for Uriel, whose presence in the *Apocalypse of Elijah* may well derive from the way he is portrayed in *1 Enoch*,⁸⁷ he is mentioned as one of the premier archangels in later Coptic apocrypha,⁸⁸ but is not given as prominent a position as in the *Apocalypse of Elijah*.

The trial and punishment of sinners and apostates, and descriptions of heavenly rewards for the righteous, are also among the most common topics of the later Coptic apocrypha, for instance in such texts as the *Investiture of the Archangel Michael*, or pseudo-Timothy, *On the Feast of the Archangel Michael*, just to mention two examples among many. Similarly, martyrdom, a prominent theme in the *Apocalypse of Elijah*, is found all over Coptic literature, both in apocrypha and in many late martyrdom accounts.⁸⁹

72 For detailed examples, see Lundhaug 2017.

73 *Treat. Res.*, 474–8; Lundhaug 2009, 189–90.

74 *Gos. Phil.*, 571–19; Lundhaug 2010, 229–42.

75 *Apoc. Elijah*, Ach 42.15–43.2.

76 Lundhaug 2010, 175, 329 n.644.

77 See, e.g., pseudo-Timothy, *On Abbaton* (cc 405), the *Investiture of Michael* (cc 488); the *Investiture of Gabriel* (cc 378).

78 *Apoc. Elijah*, Sa¹ 7.13–18; Sa³ 15.13–16.

79 *Apoc. Elijah*, Sa¹ 7.23–24 (Steindorff 1899, 126): ἄνθρωπος ἄβυσσος ("you are a devil"); cf. Sa³ 15.20: ἄνθρωπος π[ῆ]λαβος ("you are the [devil]").

80 *Apoc. Elijah*, Sa¹ 7.18–19 (Steindorff 1899, 126): ἀκρῆ εὐολ ζῆντιε ἡὸε ἡἰσιὸν ἡτοογε; cf. Sa³ 15.16–17.

81 Cf. also Luc. 10,18; Apoc. 8,10; 9,1.

82 *Apoc. Elijah*, Sa³ 19.10–15; Sa¹ 11.24–12.2; Ach 39.7–12. A fascinating description of the righteous wearing garments of light while eating from the Tree of Life can be found in the *Investiture of the Archangel Michael*, M593.35; M614.26; IFAO 147r (translation of all three witnesses in Lundhaug 2020, 536).

83 See, e.g., pseudo-Timothy, *On the Feast of the Archangel Michael* (cc404), MERC.AM 139.

84 *Apoc. Elijah*, Sa¹ 11.25–29; Sa³ 19.10–12; Ach 39.7–10.

85 Cf. Wintermute 1983, 750.

86 See Charles 1920, 1.258–59; Reddish 2001, 192.

87 Another possibility is his portrayal in book 2 of the *Sibylline Oracles*.

88 For references, see Müller 1959, 54–8.

89 On the later Coptic martyrdom accounts, see esp. Baumeister 1972. On the Coptic church's understanding of itself as a "Church of the Martyrs," see Papaconstantinou 2006.

5 A monastic context?

While none of the four Coptic codices discussed here has a secure late antique provenance, it is worth keeping in mind that in all the cases where we do have secure provenances for Coptic manuscripts, they derive from a monastic context, and there are multiple additional cases where such a provenance is by far the most likely one.⁹⁰ It is thus reasonable to suggest that a monastic connection is likely also for the manuscripts discussed here,⁹¹ and that it is worth taking the time to consider the potential interest of the *Apocalypse of Elijah* for Egyptian monastics of the fourth and fifth centuries, the period when our surviving manuscripts were produced and used. Apart from the simple fact that apocryphal literature may have been of interest to many highly biblically literate readers or hearers, of which there seems to have been many among the early Egyptian monastics, judging from the writings associated with the early Pachomians as well as those of Shenoute.⁹² There is also little doubt that several of the topics dealt with in the *Apocalypse of Elijah* would potentially have been of special interest to a monastic readership, such as its specific warnings against demons and the passions of the flesh, emphasis on fasting and prayer, and reminders to embrace a spiritual life, topics that are found all over fourth- and fifth-century monastic texts. One needs to look no further than the writings of the early Pachomian leaders Pachomius, Theodore, and Horsiesios,⁹³ the highly prolific Shenoute,⁹⁴ or less well-known figures such as Paul of Tamma or Stephen of Thebes.⁹⁵

According to the *Apocalypse of Elijah*, escape from this world is indeed the main objective of the righteous, and we are told that one ought not to love the world nor what is in it, that worldly pride belongs to the devil, and that remembrance of the Lord's mercy is what may save the righteous from “the captivity of [this] age.”⁹⁶ There is no lack of references in other early Coptic apocrypha to the necessity of detachment from the material world. The *Book of Thomas*, in Nag Hammadi Codex II, which also refers to its readers

as “captives” (ἡδαίχηλαῶτος),⁹⁷ admonishes them: “Watch and pray that you will not remain in the flesh, but that you will leave the bond of the bitterness of life, and praying you will find rest.”⁹⁸ As is the case here in the *Book of Thomas*, the importance of prayer is stressed in the *Apocalypse of Elijah*, where it is also combined with an emphasis on fasting: “For the pure [fasting] forgives sin. [It] heals illnesses. It casts out demon[s]. It works/generates towards the [throne] of God a sweetness, a perfume forgiving sins with a holy prayer.”⁹⁹ This combination of fasting and prayer is also on display in literature associated with the early Egyptian monastics. In an ascetic sermon by Stephen of Thebes, preserved in Coptic in a manuscript from the White Monastery, we find the following instruction to the monk sitting in his cell: “Sitting in your cell, be diligent in your prayers and your fasts, and the struggle of your heart, so that you may persist in the works that purify the heart.”¹⁰⁰ Similarly, Pachomius talks about this in no uncertain terms, also connecting, like the *Apocalypse of Elijah*, the practice of fasting and prayer with the struggle against demons, stating that when he flees “to God weeping and humble with fasting and nightly vigils, the enemy grows weak before me with all his spirits.”¹⁰¹ Moreover, the *Apocalypse of Elijah*'s insistence on not being “in two minds” (ἄρετὴ σῆμα) when praying, because then the angels will not listen,¹⁰² is also found in the writings of Shenoute. In his sermon *As I Sat Upon the Mountain*, Shenoute admonishes his listeners not to be “in two minds” in their Christian faith and worship. According to Shenoute, being of two minds is especially problematic in relation to Christianity's most sacred and mysterious sacrament, the Eucharist, lamenting those who “receive from the Holy Mystery while being in two minds.”¹⁰³

⁹⁷ *Book Thom.*, 143.22 (Layton / Turner 1989, 198).

⁹⁸ *Book Thom.*, 145.8–11 (Layton / Turner 1989, 204): ροεῖς ετετῆσopic σεεετῆσopic αν ρῆτσαρζ αλλα δεεετῆσopic εβολ ρῆτῆρε ἵπριωε ἵτεπβιος αγω ετετῆσopic τετῆσopic ἵογῆτον.

⁹⁹ *Apoc. Elijah*, Sa³ 4.6–12 (Pietersma / Comstock / Attridge 1981, 26): τῆν[στια] γαρ εσογααβ φασκανοβε εβολ φ[α]σ[ε]ραπεγε ρενοφωνε φασνεχρ[εν]λαμονιον εβολ φασνεργι φαρ[ε]ρο]νος ἵπνογτε εγῆνε ευστῆνογ[ε] εγ[κ]ανοβε εβολ ρῆνογπροσεγχι ε[σ]ογααβ.

¹⁰⁰ Stephen of Thebes, *Ascetic Sermon* MONB.ON 2 (Suci 2018, 651): εκρῆμοσ ρῆτεκρῆ προσκαρτηρει ενεκαφληλ ἡνεκῆστια ἡπαγων ἡπεκρητ ταρεκσω ρῆναπῆββο ἡρητ.

¹⁰¹ Pachomius, *Instr.* 1.11 (Lefort 1956, 3): εωδῆπατ δε ερατῆ ἵπνογτε ρῆογῆνε ἡνογῆββιο ἡνογῆσῆα ἡρενογῆν ἡροεῖσ φαρειλαδε ρωβ ἡναρραῖ ἡνεφκεπνεγῆα τηρογ. As for the authorship of this work, it has been suggested that the final redaction was done by Pachomius' successor Horsiesios (see Joest 2007).

¹⁰² *Apoc. Elijah*, Sa³ 4.20–5.1 (Pietersma / Comstock / Attridge 1981, 26; 28).

¹⁰³ Shenoute, *As I sat on a Mountain*, MONB.HB 263 (Leipoldt 1908, 45): αἰ εβολ ρῆπῆστηριον ετογααβ ετετῆσopic ρῆτ σῆμα.

⁹⁰ For the Nag Hammadi Codices, see Lundhaug / Jenott 2015; for the Dishna papers, see Lundhaug 2018.

⁹¹ One of our four Coptic manuscripts (Sa²) does seem to have been discovered in a monastic burial if Budge is to be trusted (see n.32 above), while the suggested monastic connections of the other three lack supporting evidence.

⁹² See, e.g., Lundhaug 2014; Lundhaug / Jenott 2015, 165–77; 246–56.

⁹³ See, e.g., Veilleux 1980–1982.

⁹⁴ See Emmel 2004.

⁹⁵ Suci 2017; Suci 2018.

⁹⁶ *Apoc. Elijah*, Sa³ 1.6–12 (Pietersman / Comstock / Attridge 1981, 20): τεχῆλασια ἡ[π]δαίχια.

6 Conclusion

Both codicologically and palaeographically the manuscripts in which the *Apocalypse of Elijah* has been preserved constitute a highly diverse group. Not only do they sport different formats and scribal styles, but in two of the four Coptic codices, the Chester Beatty codex included, the copying of the *Apocalypse of Elijah* was done in a highly idiosyncratic manner. Does this tell us something about the status of the text among its copyists and intended users? Could it indicate that the work may have been considered to be of relatively low importance? Despite its relatively wide attestation in early manuscripts, being attested in four manuscripts that are all from the earliest phase of Coptic manuscript production,¹⁰⁴ the *Apocalypse of Elijah* seems to have fallen out of favour not long after, as there is no direct evidence that the work continued to circulate in this form in later centuries. On the other hand, there are works that are only attested in much later manuscripts, including the *Apocalypse of Shenoute* and the *Death of Joseph the Carpenter*, which seem to depend on certain traditions that are at the very least highly similar to what we find specifically in the *Apocalypse of Elijah*. These are texts that reflect similar ideas about the Antichrist and the role of Enoch and Elijah in defeating him, as well as traditions regarding the final judgement, the role of the angels, and discussions of fasting and martyrdom. In short, while the *Apocalypse of Elijah* seems to have circulated only in the earliest centuries of the Coptic tradition, many of the themes discussed in it continued to be debated for centuries. With regard to the time when its extant witnesses were produced, the *Apocalypse of Elijah's* treatment of fasting and prayer finds close parallels in contemporary

monastic writings, indicating at least some of the reasons why early Egyptian monastics may have been interested in this work.

The *Apocalypse of Elijah* is a good example of how dependent we are on the discovery and preservation of fragmentary remains of papyrus manuscripts from Egypt for our knowledge of ancient literature. Indeed, it is only by piecing together the remains of several manuscripts that this work, with its unique presentation of Christian eschatology, can be read and understood in its entirety. In addition, the extant papyri give us intriguing insights into the contexts in which such literature circulated in Egypt. The papyri discussed here show us, for instance, that the *Apocalypse of Elijah* may have circulated on its own (as indicated by Sa³), as well as together with other texts, both canonical (as in Sa²) or apocryphal (as in Sa¹ and Ach), and that it circulated in at least two Coptic dialects simultaneously. Finally, the codicological diversity of the extant manuscripts indicate that the format of the material objects constituted by the papyrus books was not determined by, and did not determine, their contents. Or, if the codicological differences indicate differences in use, then it also indicates that the *Apocalypse of Elijah* could be used in different contexts. Each material artefact attesting to the *Apocalypse of Elijah* thus adds to our knowledge of the work and its contexts of production and use, and provide us with a picture of great diversity, rather than uniformity, in its circulation. Indeed, none of the papyrus fragments containing the *Apocalypse of Elijah* are redundant, as they all provide different pieces of the jigsaw puzzle constituted by the circulation of early Christian literature in all its diversity, and in particular its production, use, and transmission in Egypt.

يفحص الكاتب في هذا المقال نص سفر الرؤيا لإيليا ، وهو نص مكتوب باللغة القبطية تمثل مخطوطاته جزء من مجموعة بيتي الشهيرة. ويخلص المؤلف في نهاية المقال إلى أنه على الرغم من أن الاهتمام بمثل هذا السفر يبدو أنه قد تلاشى في أواخر العصور القديمة، إلا أن الموضوعات التي يتناولها هذا السفر تظهر في وقت لاحق في الكثير من النصوص القبطية غير المعتمدة وعلى الرغم من تلاشى هذا النص وظهور موضوعاته في نصوص ثانوية إلا أن هذه المخطوطة تمثل عينة نموذجية لما يمكن لأوراق البردي المكتشفة في مصر في مطلع القرن العشرين من أن تخبرنا به عن تاريخ النصوص المقدسة القبطية وتؤكد على المقولة التي تتردد بين المتخصصين من أنه بدون البرديات كان من الممكن أن يضيع الكثير من تاريخ النصوص اليهودية والمسيحية المبكرة. المقال مهم لكل المتخصصين في الدراسات القبطية وغيرهم من المتخصصين في تاريخ النصوص غير المعتمدة.

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¹⁰⁴ Having as many as four fourth or fifth century copies of a work in Coptic is in fact quite extraordinary.

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