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## **Episcopal networks and authority in late antique Egypt : bishops of the Theban region at work**

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## Chapter 6: The nature of Abraham's authority

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the nature of Abraham's authority during various social events, and also takes into account the social, historical and practical conditions in which he worked.

The first section discusses the context in which Abraham worked, by recapitulating important observations made in earlier chapters with regard to his social background as a Theodosian monk-bishop, his position in the Theodosian network of the Theban region, and the organization and development of his diocese. Historical events during his episcopate that may have affected him or the Theban region in general should be considered briefly as well.

The next five sections examine the examples of spiritual, ascetic, episcopal, pragmatic and legal authority that can be recognized in Abraham's documents on the basis of themes or specific keywords that point to a particular type of authority (§1.3).

Finally, the weight of Abraham's episcopate is evaluated by checking whether he was actively involved in all or most spheres of episcopal activity. These include the organization of worship, mission, church administration, the care for the underprivileged, education and discipline, giving directions for daily life and intercession with civil authorities within the boundaries of his diocese. This approach will help to nuance Wipszycka's observation that Abraham did not experience the full weight of his office. While doing so, attention should also be paid to factors that made the episcopal office a heavy responsibility, such as Abraham's role as abbot of a major monastery and the disobedience of individuals.

### §6.1 THE CONTEXT IN WHICH ABRAHAM WORKED

Being a Theodosian monk-bishop, Abraham represented a relatively new church hierarchy, which competed with the official, Chalcedonian church, and he took up the task to organize a new or almost new Theodosian diocese of Hermonthis, probably alongside a Chalcedonian counterpart (§2.2). Abraham established his residence at the newly founded Monastery of St Phoibammon in Western Thebes, which was near the town of Jeme and the hermitage of Isaac I and John, which later became known as the *Topos* of Epiphanius (§3.2.1).

The Theodosian diocese was limited to the West Bank. It must have started small, but in the course of time, it included a large number of localities (§2.2.1, 4.5.1). Already at an early stage of his episcopate, Abraham successfully established ties with the Jemean magistrates and clergymen (§5.3.5, 5.4.2). This is likely to have been facilitated by the agreement between the Monastery of St Phoibammon and the Jemean authorities, according

to which the latter would recognize the right of the monks to choose their leader themselves, but expected him to take care of poor passers-by (§3.1.1). Bishop Abraham benefitted from the agreement, since the Jemeans recognized him at least as the abbot of the monastery, whereas they were no longer morally obliged to provide for the poor, but could send them to the monastery. In the 610s, Abraham supervised the clergymen of the Holy Church of Hermonthis and also maintained good relations with urban officials (§5.4.3).

At the episcopal residence, Abraham was assisted by the priest Victor, two anonymous secretaries and David (§3.2.4, 5.3.1, 5.3.3-4). The priest Patermoute was an important local agent, who probably worked at Jeme and occasionally acted as a scribe or messenger (§5.3.6).

A few hundred meters south of Abraham's monastery, at the *Topos* of Epiphanius, the hermit Epiphanius attained the reputation of a holy man, whose spiritual and ascetic authority was recognized by bishops, clergymen and civil officials alike. He even received letters from the patriarch of Alexandria and Constantine of Asyut, the patriarchal vicar before ca. 620, and was invited to attend a council (§3.2.1). Other hermits in the Theodosian network, such as Moses of TT 29, were called "anchorite" as well, on account of their ascetic authority, but Epiphanius' extraordinary spiritual authority was matched by that of Bishop Pesynthius only (§8.2). No direct ties between Abraham and Epiphanius are recorded, and the analysis of the Theban network reveals that they were members of different clusters (§4.2.3), but in view of the limited distance between them, they were undoubtedly acquainted. In 620, Epiphanius' reputation was at its peak, whereas Abraham's activity decreased (§3.1.1, 3.2.1). Having been bishop for about thirty years, he must have been an aged man at the time.<sup>811</sup>

While Abraham was in office, several important historical events took place in Egypt or in the Byzantine Empire in general, which are not mentioned in his documents, but are nevertheless significant for sketching his historical background. To start with, there were two violent military coups at the imperial capital, by Phocas in 602 and by Heraclius the Younger in 610.<sup>812</sup> In the Theban region the impact of these events may have been limited, but on a rock near TT 1151, next to TT 1152 (§3.2.5), archaeologists observed a Coptic graffito carved by Kame from Jeme, which is dated to the reign of Phocas. According to K.A. Worp, it is the only known Coptic inscription dated after a Byzantine emperor.<sup>813</sup> After the second coup, Heraclius' cousin and general Nicetas became governor at Alexandria and relieved taxes for

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<sup>811</sup> It was recommended that candidates to the episcopate were at least fifty, but younger candidates were also permitted after careful testing, provided that they were older than thirty; cf. Noethlichs 1973, 33-35, 55.

<sup>812</sup> Kaegi 2003, 37, 43-52.

<sup>813</sup> Winlock and Crum 1926, 11-12. Worp (1990, 141) observed that the dates recorded in the graffito are conflicting: Phocas' eighth year fell in 609-10 (regnal year) or 610 (consular year), but the twelfth indiction year corresponded to May 1, 608-April 30, 609. For TT 1151, see Górecki 2010.

three year, which made him popular in Egypt, according to the *Chronicle of John of Nikiu* (end of the seventh century).<sup>814</sup> If the comment in the *Chronicle* is historically correct, the Theban region should have profited from the tax relief measures in ca. 610-613, which are unfortunately not recorded by Theban documents.

Abraham must have been informed about the demise of two Theodosian patriarchs of Alexandria, namely Damian, who had ordained him, on June 12, 607, and Anastasius, who died on December 19 (or 18), 619. Andronicus probably succeeded him already in 619.<sup>815</sup> The Sahidic *Life of Aaron* indicates that bishops would go to Alexandria to pay homage to the new patriarch under normal circumstances.<sup>816</sup>

In May 614, the Persians conquered Jerusalem, slew a large number of its inhabitants, deported another large group to Persia, and caused an influx of Syrian refugees in Egypt, particularly at Alexandria. The Persians also took the relic of the Cross to the capital city of Ctesifon. The fall of Jerusalem, the Holy City of Christendom, was considered a disaster both for all Christians and for the Byzantine Empire.<sup>817</sup>

In ca. 615 the Nile did not flood, which caused serious famine, as is stated not only by the two versions of the *Life of John the Almsgiver*,<sup>818</sup> but also by the extensive Arabic version of the *Encomium* on Bishop Pesynthius.<sup>819</sup>

In the second half of 617, the patriarchs Anastasius of Alexandria and Athanasius of Antioch finally ended the separation between their Churches, which started on account of the Trinitarian dispute between Damian and Peter of Callinicus, patriarch of Antioch, in ca. 586. The reconciliation took place at Alexandria after the mediation of Nicetas.<sup>820</sup>

According to hagiographic traditions, the prospect of a Persian invasion of Egypt was horrific enough for Nicetas and the Chalcedonian Patriarch John the Almsgiver to flee to Cyprus,<sup>821</sup> and for Bishop Pesynthius to flee to Western Thebes (§3.1.2, 8.1). By contrast,

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<sup>814</sup> Chapter 109.17: ed./trans. Zotenberg 1883, 430; trans. Charles 1916, 175. The *Chronicle* is only preserved in a seventeenth-century Ethiopic manuscript. On Nicetas, see Martindale 1992, 942.

<sup>815</sup> Jülicher 1922, 14, 23.

<sup>816</sup> Ed. Dijkstra and Van der Vliet (forthcoming), ch. 83.

<sup>817</sup> Foss 2003, 152-53; Kaegi 2003, 78. On John the Almsgiver's grief on the fall of Jerusalem, see the *Life of John the Almsgiver* edited by Delehaye 1927, 14 and 23 (ch. 9); on the Syrian fugitives, including bishops and priests, see idem, 13 and 21 (ch. 6). See also the *Life of John the Almsgiver* attributed to Leontius of Neapolis: ed. Gelzer 1893, 13-15 (ch. 7); transl. Dawes and Baynes 1948, 213-14. John Moschus' reaction on the fall of Jerusalem is discussed in Booth 2014, 94-100.

<sup>818</sup> The *Life of John the Almsgiver* attributed to Leontius of Neapolis: ed. Gelzer 1893, 25, 62 (ch. 13, 30); transl. Dawes and Baynes 1948, 221, 241. See also the other *Life*: ed. Delehaye 1927, 14, 22 (ch. 7).

<sup>819</sup> A, O'Leary 1930, fol. 179b.

<sup>820</sup> Booth 2014, 104; cf. Olster 1985; Müller 1994. On the theological conflict, see Ebied 2016, 65-66.

<sup>821</sup> The *Life of John the Almsgiver* attributed to Leontius of Neapolis: ed. Gelzer 1893, 90-91 (ch. 44B).

Bishop Abraham remained at the Monastery of St Phoibammon,<sup>822</sup> perhaps because of his age. Although people in Western Thebes expressed their worries about the Persian presence and some of them faced financial problems on account of taxation, it appears that the area was relatively safe.<sup>823</sup> It was certainly safe enough for Theodosian bishops, hermits and clergymen to keep their common network strong (§4.3.3).

## §6.2 SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY

Abraham's spiritual authority was mainly based on his status as a bishop. He is called "holy father(hood)",<sup>824</sup> "most holy",<sup>825</sup> and "your fatherly holiness",<sup>826</sup> which are common titles for bishops (§1.3.1). Unlike Pesynthius, he was rarely addressed in the second person plural, but usually in the singular, which indicates that Pesynthius was more respected than Abraham, probably because he was regarded as a Spirit-bearer, and Abraham was not (§8.2).<sup>827</sup>

Nevertheless, Abraham's prayers and blessings were much appreciated by some. The abbot John requested him to bless loaves of bread, "in order that your blessing will come over them".<sup>828</sup> Abraham replied that he was unpleasantly surprised about the delivery of bread and could not use them. He returned the loaves, in order that the Lord would bless them and that the monks would eat them as a blessing. The editors of Abraham's reply observed that he did not refuse to bless the bread, but acted out of modesty, wanting to downplay John's hope for the effect of his blessing and to leave all praise to God.<sup>829</sup> Abraham received some requests for prayer, and was invoked as a spiritual intercessor after his death.<sup>830</sup>

Various documents refer to the consecration of clergymen,<sup>831</sup> but the administration of the other sacraments by Bishop Abraham himself are not explicitly recorded. Nevertheless, he must have come to Jeme for the baptismal ceremony, which happened thrice a year, in order to pass the gifts of the Holy Spirit by laying his hands on the heads of the baptized.<sup>832</sup>

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<sup>822</sup> Wipszycka 2015, 40.

<sup>823</sup> *SBKopt.* I 295; *P.Mon.Epiph.* 300, 433; *O.CrumVC* 67; cf. Wilfong 2002, 5; Wipszycka 2015, 40.

<sup>824</sup> **ΕΙΩΤ ΕΤΟΥΛΛΕ**, "holy father": *O.Crum* 29-30, 33-34, 45-47, 50-51, *Brit.Mus.Copt.* II 7, 9, 34, *O.MoscowCopt.* 45, O.Berlin, P. 12493; **ΗΝΤΕΙΩΤ ΕΤΟΥΛΛΕ**, "holy fatherhood": *O.Crum* 104, *BKU* III 316, *O.Lips.Copt.* 11, O.Berlin, P.12489; **ΧΘΕΙΣ ΝΕΙΩΤ ΕΤΟΥΛΛΕ**, "holy fatherly lord": *O.Crum* 31.

<sup>825</sup> **ΘΣΙΩΤΑΤΟΣ**: *P.Lond.* I 77, l. 83 in Garel, *Les testaments*, vol. 2, 17 (l. 82 in the edition); *Brit.Mus.Copt.* II 6.

<sup>826</sup> **ΤΕΚΑΓΙΩΣΥΝΗ ΝΕΙΩΤ**: *O.Crum* 90.

<sup>827</sup> The abbot John is the only one to use plural forms, in *O.Crum* 90: **ΤΕΤΝΗΝΤΕΙΩΤ, ΝΤΕΤΝΗΝΤΕΙΩΤ**.

<sup>828</sup> *O.Crum* 90.

<sup>829</sup> *O.Lips.Copt.* 9.

<sup>830</sup> During his life: *O.Crum* 104, *BKU* II 316; after his death: *BKU* II 258; O.Berlin, P.868.

<sup>831</sup> **Χ(Ε)ΠΡΟΔΟΝΕΙ**: *O.Crum* 29-36, *Brit.Mus.Copt.* II 7.

<sup>832</sup> O.Berlin, P.12501. On the bishop's role, see Wipszycka 2015, 328; cf. Krause, *Apa Abraham*, vol. 2, 149.

### §6.3 ASCETIC AUTHORITY

Abraham was recognized as the first abbot of the Monastery of St Phoibammon and as an “anchorite of the holy mountain of the Memnonia” (Jeme).<sup>833</sup> Thrice, he is called “who truly bears the Christ”, which indicates that he enjoyed considerable ascetic authority.<sup>834</sup>

Abraham’s documents create the impression that he was a conscientious bishop, who insisted on obedience, the observance of God’s commands and church regulations, and the prevention of negligence (§6.4.E).<sup>835</sup> He ordered candidates for ordination to observe a number of ascetic practices, such as memorizing one of the Gospels, fasting till the evening for forty days, reciting one hundred prayers daily, and “guarding” (var.: “not touching”) their beds both during these forty days and after their ordination, on the days when they perform liturgical services.<sup>836</sup> According to Crum, Schmelz and Wipszycka, the final instruction refers to sexual abstinence for married clergymen, but Krause and Moawad assumed that new clergymen had to keep vigil.<sup>837</sup> Since the verb used in the alternative phrase “to not touch the bed” usually has a negative meaning,<sup>838</sup> it probably signifies “to not defile the bed”. Nevertheless, it is not unlikely that new clergymen had to spend forty days in a church or monastery under the supervision of senior clergymen, while fasting, praying and reciting from the Scriptures during nightly vigils, as is still customary in the Coptic Orthodox Church.<sup>839</sup>

Although bishops with a non-monastic background could give similar instructions, it is probable that monk-bishops like Abraham were particularly motivated to educate clergymen (and laymen), since they were used to a disciplined lifestyle themselves.<sup>840</sup>

### §6.4 PROFESSIONAL AUTHORITY

#### A. Organization of worship

When Abraham was in office, the main sanctuary at the Monastery of St Phoibammon was still a chapel instead of a large church.<sup>841</sup> Therefore, it could not serve as the official episcopal church, but Abraham made an agreement with the clergymen of Jeme that special public ceremonies, including baptism, would take place in Jeme (§2.2.1 and below). On ordinary

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<sup>833</sup> *P.Lond.* I 77, l. 76 in Garel, *Les testaments*, vol. 2, 17; cf. §3.1.1.

<sup>834</sup> *O.Crum* 50, from the abbot John; *O.Frangé* 792, from a certain Mark; *P.Saint-Marc* 439 (sender unknown).

<sup>835</sup> Brown (2002, 66) was the first to call Abraham a “conscientious bishop”.

<sup>836</sup> **ροειϛ**: *O.Crum* 29-30, 34-35; **ζαρεϛ**: *O.Crum* 31, 33; **χωϛ**: O.Berlin, P.12489; cf. Wipszycka 2015, 316-18.

<sup>837</sup> *O.Crum*, p. 9, commentary to *O.Crum* 31: “to be pure (continent)”; Schmelz 2002, 56 and n. 121; Wipszycka 2015, 316-37; Krause, *Apa Abraham*, vol. 2, 51-52; Moawad 2013, 128.

<sup>838</sup> The basic meaning of **χωϛ ε-** is “to touch”, but the related noun can mean “contagion”; Crum 1939, 797a.

<sup>839</sup> Moawad 2013, 128. Wipszycka (2015, 317) refers to Moawad’s article to support her idea that “guarding the bed” refers to purity, even in modern practice, but Moawad rather describes a period of training at a monastery.

<sup>840</sup> Moawad (2013, 127-28) suspects that the habit to memorize a Gospel originates from a monastic context.

<sup>841</sup> **εὐκτήριον**: *P.Lond.* I 77, l. 34 in Garel, *Les testaments*, vol. 2, 15.

days, Abraham probably celebrated the Eucharist at the monastery with the brethren, since he was also their abbot, whereas the archpriests of the Parochial Church of Jeme and the Holy Church of Hermonthis represented him in their churches (§5.3.8-9).<sup>842</sup>

When someone wanted to be ordained priest or deacon of a specific church, he would send a request for ordination to the bishop, or other people would write on his behalf. If the bishop agreed, the candidate would promise to prepare himself for the office by fasting and “guarding his bed” for forty days, to memorize a Gospel and to perform his liturgical duties well (§6.3). Those who stood surety for him promised to report negligence on his part, or else, they would be held responsible.<sup>843</sup> Dataset 3 records the (upcoming) ordination of three priests and seventeen deacons, and the appointment of four readers to churches at various localities.<sup>844</sup> Two deacons were ordained at the request of the founder of a private church or monastery.<sup>845</sup> Twice, a clergyman guaranteed that his sons would serve the altar (as deacons?) and that he was responsible for their conduct.<sup>846</sup> When a priest fell ill, or when no priest was available to celebrate the Eucharist at a monastic community or shrine, the bishop sent one.<sup>847</sup>

Seven documents record the appointment of clergymen, often deacons, as overseers of particular churches or sanctuaries. Their duties were to prevent and report any negligence in the places of worship, to teach the faithful to be pious, and to exclude disobedient clergymen or laymen from the holy Communion, until they had been readmitted to the bishop.<sup>848</sup> The prevention of negligence implied that the overseers had to ensure that the liturgy was performed correctly, and that the altar lamps burned continually after the example of the lamp in the Tent of Meeting (Exodus 27:20-21).<sup>849</sup> In addition to the overseers, Abraham ordered an inspector to visit all the churches “from the hill to the valley”, to admonish clergymen who neglected the altar lamp and the liturgy, to instruct them about Lent and Easter, and to exclude

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<sup>842</sup> But see Wipszycka (2015, 338): “Abraham performed his liturgical duties in the churches of Jeme (Medinet Habu)”. Archpriests were authorized to replace the bishop, when he was absent; cf. Lampe 1961, 240.

<sup>843</sup> Krause, *Apa Abraham*, vol. 2, 37-57; Schmelz 2002, 48-58; Wipszycka 2015, 316-18.

<sup>844</sup> Priests: *O.Crum* 35- (the deacon Philotheus asks to be ordained [priest]), 36, *Ad.* 7; deacons: *O.Crum* 29 (three candidates), 30-34, 45, *O.MoscowCopt.* 45, *O.Brit.Mus.Copt.* II 7, O.Berlin, P.12489, and probably *O.Crum* 38 (two persons), *O.Crum Ad.* 9 (two persons) and O.Berlin, P.12493; readers: *O.Crum* 46; cf. Schmelz 2002, 48.

<sup>845</sup> Victor, the original founder (ΠΠΡΕΤΟΚΤΙΣΤΗΣ for πρωτοκτίστης) in O.Berlin, P.12489.

<sup>846</sup> *O.Crum* 38, *O.Lips.Copt.* 13 (= *O.Crum Ad.* 9).

<sup>847</sup> *O.Crum* 53 (Tmenke), 97 (hermitages), 105 (hermitage of Shenetom), *O.Brit.Mus.Copt.* II 22 (Patoubasten), *O.Mon.Epiph.* 154 (hermitage of Pheu); cf. Schmelz 2002, 79-80.

<sup>848</sup> ΤΟΥΩΣ ΜΗΟΚ ΕΧΝ, “I put you in charge of”: O.Berlin, P. 12488, 12500, 12507; *O.Crum* 57 (village church), 58, 63; *O.MoscowCopt.* 76. These clergymen are called “Titulare” in Krause, *Apa Abraham*, vol. 1, 55-57 and vol. 2, 94-100, and “Kirchenvorsteher” in Schmelz 2002, 141.

<sup>849</sup> *O.Crum* 41, 45; *SBKopt.* III 1379-80; cf. Wipszycka 1972, 99 and 2015, 348; Schmelz 2002, 39, 51.

disobedient clergymen from the clergy.<sup>850</sup> During an inspection, Zacharias and Constantine found a flask of wine stashed under the cupboard in the sanctuary.<sup>851</sup>

In late antique Egypt, liturgical services were held on Saturday and Sunday. Judging from literary texts relating to bishops living in the fifth century, it started with preaching on Saturday evening, praying and singing Psalms during the vigil on Sunday eve, and celebrating the Eucharist at night or early on Sunday morning.<sup>852</sup> Coptic Theban texts indeed confirm that priests were invited to come for mass already on Saturday.<sup>853</sup> The clergyman Hello promised Abraham that he or his father would sleep in the church, tend to the altar lamp from the evening till the morning, and perform liturgical services.<sup>854</sup> The priest Isaac reported that he went to his colleague Papnoute for the celebration of the Eucharist on Easter eve, but caught him eating before the end of the Lenten fast.<sup>855</sup> Another cleric was excluded from the clergy for having celebrated the Eucharist on Sunday evening, which was too late.<sup>856</sup>

Abraham taught communicants to not eat before receiving holy Communion, and clergymen to mix the wine for the Eucharist with water in the correct proportion.<sup>857</sup> The Eucharistic bread had to be fresh and warm, which implies that the loaves that the abbot John sent to Abraham could not be used for the Eucharist, since they were no longer warm. Krause thought that the bishop had to check them, but John only asked that he would bless them.<sup>858</sup>

Abraham and the clergymen of Jeme made an agreement that the latter would organize baptism ceremonies thrice a year “according to the custom of the village”, that the clergymen would pay for the costs, and that they would share the received donations with the bishop.<sup>859</sup> Easter eve was considered as the best occasion for baptism, since it linked the baptized to the death and resurrection of Christ, but from the fifth century on, it could also take place at other times, such as Pentecost.<sup>860</sup> Archaeologists did not find baptisteries at Jeme (§2.3.2), but a fragmentary text from the *Topos* of Epiphanius, *O.Mon.Epiph.* 157, mentions a baptismal font

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<sup>850</sup> *SBKopt.* III 1379-80.

<sup>851</sup> *BKU* I 68; cf. Schmelz 2002, 129.

<sup>852</sup> Moawad 2013, 125-26, 136.

<sup>853</sup> Schmelz 2002, 83-85.

<sup>854</sup> *O.Crum* 41.

<sup>855</sup> *O.Lips.Copt.* 14 (= *O.Crum Ad.* 10). **ΡΟΥΖΕ ΜΠΣΑΒΒΑΤΟΝ ΜΠΕΒΩΛ ΕΒΟΛ**, “the evening of the Saturday of the solution (of the Lenten fast)” is Easter eve; cf. *O.Crum*, p. 18, n. 1.

<sup>856</sup> *O.Crum* 75. Crum (*O.Crum*, p. 14, n. 2) translated **ΡΟΥΖΕ ΝΤΚΥΡΕΛΚΗ** as “the evening of Sunday”, but understood “Saturday evening”, as if the text reads “Sunday eve”; cf. Schmelz (2002, 84-85). However, “eve” is not listed as a translation of **ΡΟΥΖΕ** in Crum 1939, 310.

<sup>857</sup> *O.Crum* 74, 73 (end); cf. Schmelz 2002, 78-79, 145-47. For the mixing of wine, see Moawad 2013, 129-30.

<sup>858</sup> Krause, *Apa Abraham*, vol. 2, 106, based on *O.Crum* 90. Wipszycka (1972, 67) was the first to identify the loaves as *eulogiai*, blessed bread to be distributed after mass; cf. Schmelz 2002, 77.

<sup>859</sup> O.Berlin, P.12501; ed. Krause, *Apa Abraham*, vol. 2, 147-50; cf. Wipszycka 1972, 73 and 2015, 109-10, 327-28 and n. 30; cf. Schmelz 2002, 85-86.

<sup>860</sup> Wharton 1999, 332; cf. Rousseau 1999, 331.

“in the city” and “in the mountain of Jeme”, which was in use, without having been consecrated. The significance of this text is unclear, since there was no city in the mountain of Jeme, and Jeme was just a village. The editor doubted whether the text was part of a letter.<sup>861</sup>

Two clergymen were ordered to quickly administer the last rites to an old woman, who was apparently dying. The last rites must have included holy Communion and prayers.<sup>862</sup>

Bishop Abraham informed a correspondent that Patriarch Damian sent a Festal Letter, “confirming us in God’s faith”.<sup>863</sup> Perhaps, Abraham’s letter was a cover letter that was sent together with Damian’s letter, in order to be read in churches.

## **B. Mission**

When Abraham and some clergymen went to Timamen, on the East Bank of the Nile, the villagers stood against them. They destroyed a book on canon law that the bishop brought with him, threw the clergymen in the river, and shouted against the bishop.<sup>864</sup> It is likely that Abraham came to Timamen with ecclesiastical documents, in order to expand his jurisdiction to a place that actually belonged to the diocese of Thebes/Ape, since there was no Theodosian bishop of Ape at the time. Perhaps, he acted as the administrator of a vacant see (§2.1.1, 2.3.1). The violent rejection of Abraham’s authority may indicate that the villagers were Chalcedonian. The phrase “So far, I did not find anyone – neither a bishop nor a policeman – who sent them after me (for an apology)” suggests that there was a bishop, who should have sent the troublemakers, but did not do it, and who was not Theodosian.<sup>865</sup> Whatever the exact circumstances, Abraham exercised enough authority to warn his correspondent, a civil official, that he would arrange an interdict, if the villagers were not brought to justice.

A less explicit form of missionary activity is the promotion of the cult of a saint. As abbot of the Monastery of St Phoibammon, Abraham contributed to the cult of its patron saint, a soldier of Preht who was martyred at Asyut in the early fourth century and whose remains were first venerated at a shrine at Touho (Taha al-Amida), eleven km north of al-Minya.<sup>866</sup> He was commemorated on Pauni 1 (May 26). A Sahidic version of Phoibammon’s *Mighty deeds and miracles* dated between 822 and 913/934 associates the veneration of this saint with

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<sup>861</sup> *O.Mon.Epiph.* 157 n. 2; cf. Schmelz 2002, 86.

<sup>862</sup> *O.Crum* 66; Krause, *Apa Abraham*, vol. 2, 128-30; Schmelz 2002, 85 n. 50.

<sup>863</sup> *O.Crum Ad.* 59 (*O.Lips.Copt.* 10).

<sup>864</sup> O.Berlin, P.12491: ed. Krause, *Apa Abraham*, vol. 2, 271-76.

<sup>865</sup> Krause (*Apa Abraham*, vol. 2, 274) thought that the passage referred to Bishop Pesynthius.

<sup>866</sup> Winlock and Crum 1926, 109-10; Papaconstantinou 2001, 204-14. Phoibammon’s *Martyrdom* is preserved in Sahidic in *P.Lond.Copt. London.* I 999 (undated), *P.Lond.Copt. London.* II 138 and 167 (undated; cf. Winlock and Crum 1926, 205) and his *Mighty deeds and miracles* in Pierpont Morgan Library, M582; ed. Verrone 2002. For Touho, see Timm 1984-1992, vol. 6, 2454-60.

Patriarch Theodosius I,<sup>867</sup> which may explain why Theban Theodosians chose Phoibammon as their patron saint. According to Abraham's testament, Phoibammon "dwells in the above-mentioned holy mountain of Memnonia (Jeme)", which implies that the Monastery of St Phoibammon actually claimed to have one of his relics.<sup>868</sup> If this was indeed the case, the relic came from the *martyrium* at Touho. Perhaps, Constantine, the bishop of Asyut and patriarchal vicar of the Upper Thebaid, stimulated the spread of the saint's cult to the Theban region, in order to consolidate the Theodosian church in that area. Constantine indeed promoted the cult of several saints by dedicating homilies to them (§3.1.3). However, there is no record of direct contact between Constantine and Abraham to confirm this theory.

After his death, Abraham was remembered and invoked as an "orthodox bishop".<sup>869</sup>

### C. Church administration

Wipszycka observed that Abraham's documents do not mention the episcopal steward, who should co-manage church property together with the bishop.<sup>870</sup> Indeed, the priest Victor was never called thus, but he may have held that position during Abraham's episcopate, given his involvement in the administration of the Monastery of St Phoibammon and increasingly in ecclesiastical matters. Recently, Garel remarked that the priest Victor was called "monk and steward" after becoming abbot of the Monastery of St Phoibammon, and that "steward" was another designation for a monastic superior.<sup>871</sup> However, when Victor was called a "monk", he was identified as a priest first, and the absence of Victor's name and priestly title suggests that when he succeeded Abraham as abbot, someone else became steward (§2.3.4).

As for the few local stewards recorded in Dataset 3, one was appointed steward over the Holy *Topos*, Salom, the steward of the *topos* of Apa Phaustus, wrote and signed the declaration of a worker, and Eboneh was dismissed as steward of the Church of the Acacias.<sup>872</sup> Stewards were often appointed to churches or shrines dedicated to saints, which were mainly open on the commemoration days of these saints, or when private individuals request for special masses, but were not in use for worship on a regular basis and therefore

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<sup>867</sup> Theodosius I features in the first two miracles in Verrone 2002, 6.

<sup>868</sup> *P.Lond.* I 77, ll. 27-28 in Garel, *Les testaments*, vol. 2, 15, 20 and vol. 1, 113.

<sup>869</sup> *BKU* II 258; O.Berlin, P.868; cf. Winlock and Crum 1926, 169.

<sup>870</sup> Wipszycka 2007, 336 and 2015, 141, 199.

<sup>871</sup> Garel, *Les testaments*, vol. 1, 92, based on *O.Crum* 158 and 200.

<sup>872</sup> *O.Crum* 87, 51, 44. Crum identified Eboneh's church as "the church of the Three Oeconomi (?)", but the name is corrected in *O.Frangé* 25.

needed to be guarded. They were obliged to inspect the churches entrusted to them every Saturday and Sunday, and to check whether no liturgical vessel was missing.<sup>873</sup>

As regards church revenues, Dataset 3 does not explicitly record contributions for the sustenance of Bishop Abraham, but the corn that was stored at a temporary location possibly came from contributions, which the local churches drew from the offerings of the faithful.<sup>874</sup> When the bishop received an offering in exchange for funerary services for a deceased woman, he ordered Apa John to contact certain clergymen and the woman's children, in order that Abraham could make proper arrangements.<sup>875</sup>

Recorded expenses or supplies relate to the provisioning of wine to a monastery for the celebration of Easter, since the brethren apparently did not receive enough donations to arrange for the wine themselves; the payment of a worker employed by the church; the building of a church; and the purchase of funerary bandages and shrouds.<sup>876</sup> It is unclear whether the textiles were intended for the burial of deceased brethren of the Monastery of St Phoibammon or for the impoverished faithful, for whom the Church had to arrange a proper burial, if no-one else did.<sup>877</sup> Abraham also made provisions for his own burial, which implied the wrapping of his body, Eucharistic offerings for the rest of his soul, funerary meals and services on the days of his commemoration, in accordance with the local custom, Abraham's rank and reputation.<sup>878</sup>

#### **D. Care for the underprivileged**

Abraham regularly expressed his concern for the underprivileged. He asked the priest Elias request Patermoute to show charity to a widow.<sup>879</sup> After being informed that Psate mistreated people, making them poor and wretched, the bishop taught his flock that anyone who mistreated his neighbor would be excommunicated.<sup>880</sup> He sent multiple letters to an important man who had prevented the poor from fishing and did not accept the bishop's rebuke.<sup>881</sup> When people harassed a man in the Church of Apa George and pillaged the place, Abraham

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<sup>873</sup> Wipszycka 1972, 101 and 2015, 366-68. *O.Crum* 76 includes the episcopal order to exclude stewards from the clergy, if they do not check the "topos" on Saturday and Sunday.

<sup>874</sup> *O.Crum* 204.

<sup>875</sup> *O.MoscowCopt.* 77. The offering *post-mortem* is called "ΠΙΣΜΟΥ", as in *P.Pisentius* 22, l. 34: ΕΤΒΕ ΠΡΟΥΪ ΝΪΣΜΟΥ ΝΤΑΝ[ΧΙΤϚ], "about the small gift that we received"; cf. Van der Vliet 2015, 129.

<sup>876</sup> *O.Crum* 104, 51, *BKU* I 69 and *O.Crum* 68. On the bishop's duty to aid churches with insufficient means for the liturgy, see Wipszycka 2015, 111, 356.

<sup>877</sup> Wipszycka 1972, 115.

<sup>878</sup> *P.Lond.* I 77, ll. 58-60: ed. *Les testaments*, vol. 2, 16, 21; cf. Förster 2008, 170-71.

<sup>879</sup> *O.Crum* 67. For the examples listed here, see also Krause, *Apa Abraham*, vol. 1, 62-63.

<sup>880</sup> *O.Crum* 71; cf. Schmelz 2002, 132-33, 256; Brown 2002, 66, where Psate is called Psalis.

<sup>881</sup> *O.MoscowCopt.* 80, called *O.Gol.* 11 in Schmelz 2002, 133, 256-57.

excommunicated everyone who had entered the church and spoke in his defense, arguing that “that poor man” had already paid.<sup>882</sup> He was furious again when the *lashane* Pesente and his men unjustly detained a man who came to the bishop for charity.<sup>883</sup> He also corresponded with Lord Asper about a woman who was sued by a man from Tabennese (in the Hermonthite district) on account of a debt, since he intended to help her.<sup>884</sup>

*O.Brit.Mus.Copt.* II 4 and 5 were excluded from Dataset 3, since Abraham’s name and title do not appear, but the greeting formulae “Firstly, I greet your good sonship. May the Lord bless you” suggest that either he or the priest and abbot Victor was the sender (§5.1.2, n. 14). The first letter mentions a poor man, but is too damaged to reconstruct. The other letter requests the head of a charitable institution to allow a certain Abraham to stop working for this institution, for he was impoverished and his wife would ask for a divorce, if he continued.

By testamentary writing Abraham decided that Victor should continue to provide for the poor who would come to the Monastery of St Phoibammon. He had done so himself, not only because it was his duty as a bishop, but also because of the agreement between the monastery and the Jemean authorities (§3.1.1).<sup>885</sup>

## E. Education and discipline

Bishop Abraham instructed his flock on religious and moral matters through circular letters by listing the persons who had to be excluded from the holy Communion: men and women who repudiated their spouses for other reasons than adultery, clergymen who knew about their situation and yet administered the holy Communion to them, and anyone who wrote a letter of divorce;<sup>886</sup> men who had relationships with nieces or (step)sisters, or with two sisters at the same time, men who were hostile to a neighbor, fornicated with a woman, or were violent, and anyone who ate before receiving the holy Communion.<sup>887</sup> Close-kin relationships were forbidden by the Bible and imperial law, but still occurred in late antique Egypt (§8.7).<sup>888</sup> Abraham justified his preaching by adding that it were not his words, but “those of God” or of “the apostle” (§6.6.1),<sup>889</sup> and that he had the salvation of souls in mind.<sup>890</sup>

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<sup>882</sup> *O.CrumVC* 40.

<sup>883</sup> *O.Crum* 61.

<sup>884</sup> *Brit.Mus.Copt.* II 34.

<sup>885</sup> *P.Lond.* I 77, ll. 38-39; ed. *Les testaments*, vol. 2, 21, 41 and vol. 1, 81-83.

<sup>886</sup> *O.Crum* 72; cf. Schmelz 2002, 132. *O.Crum* 73 and *Ad.* 1 also list people who repudiate their spouse.

<sup>887</sup> *O.Crum* 73. *O.Crum* 484 is too fragmentary to understand why certain men and women are forbidden to go to a particular place. *O.Crum* 71 repeatedly lists that people who mistreat their neighbors are excommunicated.

<sup>888</sup> Leviticus 18:6-18, 20:17, Deuteronomy 27:22, Justinian’s *The Institutes*, book 1.10.2-3 (535): ed. Scott 1932, 29; cf. Wipszycka 2015, 323, on the Roman custom of marrying siblings, which persisted in late antiquity.

<sup>889</sup> “Those of God”: *O.Crum* 72, l. 20-21 and 73, l. 8-10; of the apostle: *O.Crum* 73, l. 13-14, and *Ad.* 1.

<sup>890</sup> *O.Crum* 72, *O.MoscowCopt.* 80, probably *O.Crum* 76.

When Abraham was informed about a problem, he sent clergymen to inquire what had happened. A priest had to ascertain why Panau appealed against Aaron, and the priest Michael was sent to establish who started the fight.<sup>891</sup> Abraham contacted Psan, asking him why he prevented Peter's son from serving the altar and why he handed him over to the *lashanes*.<sup>892</sup>

Abraham often warned that he would excommunicate people, in order to stimulate obedience. Clergymen faced exclusion from holy Communion, if they neglected the liturgy or the altar lamp (see §6.4.A); if they did not obey episcopal orders,<sup>893</sup> if they claimed a reward for their services, when they were actually supposed to keep vigil at the *Topos* of Apa John;<sup>894</sup> if they administered sacraments to individuals who were excommunicate;<sup>895</sup> or if they did not comply with the bishop's judgement during an episcopal hearing.<sup>896</sup> In practice, the sanction was imposed on clergymen for leaving the diocese without Abraham's permission, for allowing boys to get drunk (?), for speaking blasphemy, and for neglecting the altar lamp.<sup>897</sup> Laymen were excommunicate, after profaning a church or for mistreating the poor.<sup>898</sup> Several people requested the bishop to be readmitted to the holy Communion.<sup>899</sup>

Likewise, Abraham frequently warned to exclude clergymen from the clergy, if they did not obey his orders or report negligence.<sup>900</sup> He imposed the sanction quite often: Ashai and Joseph did not celebrate the Eucharist in the hermitages for Easter, Patermoute should go to law with two men first, and Moses should come to the bishop.<sup>901</sup>

Abraham imposed the interdict on an entire village, since the *lashane* Pesente and his men unjustly detained a man who came to see the bishop, and on a monastery, since the abbot John did not rebuke the monk Joseph for improper actions. The interdicts lasted, until Pesynte recompensed the man, and until Joseph came to the bishop. Abraham also warned an official at Timamen that he would arrange an interdict, if the official did not mediate between the

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<sup>891</sup> *O.Brit.Mus.Copt.* I (EA 24948); *O.Crum* 70.

<sup>892</sup> *O.Crum* 80. Krause (*Apa Abraham*, vol. 2, 215) and Schmelz (2002, 144-45) understood that Peter's son was arrested for not having celebrated the Eucharist, but the reason for his dismissal and arrest must have been more serious. If clergymen did not celebrate the Eucharist, Abraham excluded them from the clergy (*O.Crum* 60).

<sup>893</sup> Order to celebrate the Eucharist: *O.Crum* 53; to teach a priest how to celebrate the Eucharist: O.Berlin, P.12486; to establish a boundary: 62; to investigate a case: *O.Brit.Mus.Copt.* I (EA 24948), *O.Crum* 70.

<sup>894</sup> *O.Crum* 485; cf. Wipszycka 1972, 95.

<sup>895</sup> *O.Crum* 72; *O.Deir al-Bahari* 1.

<sup>896</sup> *O.Crum Ad.* 12 (= *O.Lips.Copt.* 15).

<sup>897</sup> *O.Crum* 40, 47, 81, *Ad.* 4; *Brit.Mus.Copt.* I 9. Clergymen were not permitted to leave their parish without written permission from the bishop; cf. Schmelz 2002, 44-45, 56-57.

<sup>898</sup> *O.Crum* 94; *O.CrumVC* 40; *O.MoscowCopt.* 80; cf. Schmelz 2002, 136.

<sup>899</sup> *O.Crum* 40, 47, 81, 94, *Ad.* 41; O.Berlin, P.12486.

<sup>900</sup> *O.Brit.Mus.Copt.* II 9; *O.Crum* 39, 56, 65, 76, 79, 81, 300, *Ad.* 41; *O.Mon.Epiph.* 154; *SBKopt.* III 1979-80; O.Berlin P 12486.

<sup>901</sup> *O.Crum* 60, 55, *Ad.* 8. See also *O.Brit.Mus.Copt.* I (EA 33134); *O.Crum* 75, verso, *Ad.* 40; *O.Deir el-Bahari* 1.

bishop and the villagers who had hooted him.<sup>902</sup> He did not impose the sanction directly, since Timamen officially did not belong to the diocese of Hermonthis, but he may have considered asking support from the patriarch, who could confirm Abraham's authority by a deed (§2.3.1).

Some clergymen declared that if they were negligent or disobedient, their ordination through the laying-on of hands would become invalid, or they would no longer hold a cross.<sup>903</sup> Abraham warned the priest Patermoute, who was already excluded from the clergy on account of making accusations, that if he did not come the next day and pay a fine, the bishop would carry out his degradation "in the city" (of Hermonthis; §5.3.6). Abraham had already prepared a document to degrade Patermoute, but gave him a last chance to make up for his mistakes.<sup>904</sup>

Abraham dismissed Eboneh from the Church of the Acacias and planned to dismiss Panau, if the latter sued Aaron for a particular reason that is not specified. A prominent person was expelled from the church, after neglecting the bishop's reproaches and having "erased your name from the number of the brethren yourself".<sup>905</sup>

Abraham did not always threaten with ecclesiastical sanctions to stimulate obedience, but also appealed to someone's conscience. When he ordered the priest Patermoute to deliver a sealed letter, he warned that Patermoute should not tell anyone that he was going, or he would get a bad conscience.<sup>906</sup> In another letter, Abraham exhorted the priest Isaac to come to terms with Pson, in order that Pson would not blame the bishop for failing to mediate, and that as a consequence, Isaac's heart would remain troubled.<sup>907</sup>

Abraham imposed a fine twice, to be paid in four or six jars of wine: to Patermoute, who had ignored an order, and to Pshinnou, whose transgression was serious enough to have him arrested by the headmen.<sup>908</sup> In another serious case, he warned the *lashane* Pesente that he would report him to magistrates "in the city", if he did not show respect for people.<sup>909</sup>

When Abraham agreed to arbitrate, the litigants provided a guarantee, promising that they would come and comply with the outcome. If not, they should pay a fine ranging in value

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<sup>902</sup> *O.Crum* 61; O.Berlin, P.12497; O.Berlin, P.12491.

<sup>903</sup> "There will be no hand on me": *O.Crum* 29, 40, *O.Brit.Mus.Copt.* II 9; for the hand cross: *O.Crum* 42.

<sup>904</sup> *O.Crum Ad.* 40. I do not agree with Schmelz (2002, 154-55, 158, 160) that Patermoute was already degraded, and that the sanction was temporary and easily uplifted by paying a fine.

<sup>905</sup> *O.Crum* 44; *O.Brit.Mus.Copt.* I (EA 24948); *O.MoscowCopt.* 80; cf. Schmelz 2002, 152.

<sup>906</sup> O.Berlin, P.12498.

<sup>907</sup> O.Berlin, P.12495. In ll. 8-9 Krause (*Apa Abraham*, vol. 2, 220) read  $\overline{\text{MNTQ}} \text{CTOQ} \text{EXWI}$ , which Schmelz (2002, 136) incorrectly reproduced as  $\overline{\text{MNTQ}} \text{CTOQ} \text{EXWI}$ . Both editors translated "Seine Reinheit ist auf mir", but Crum (1939, 167-68) proposed "delay not to agree with him  $\overline{\text{MNTQCTOQ}}$ ", with a subordinate clause starting with "that not, lest".  $\overline{\text{MNTQ}}(\tau)\text{CTOQ} \text{EXWI}$  is a subordinate clause preceded by an imperative (a seventh-century example of pattern A.1 in Boud'hors 2010b, 68-70) and means "that he will not turn on me".

<sup>908</sup> *O.Crum.Ad* 40 (six jars); *O.CrumVC* 37 (four jars); cf. Schmelz 2002, 160-61.

<sup>909</sup> *O.Crum* 61.

from one to six solidi.<sup>910</sup> Other promises were signed by guarantors on behalf of litigants, who declared themselves liable to a fine, if their protégés did not come.<sup>911</sup> When someone asked Abraham to solve a conflict among the husbandmen working for him, the bishop agreed to intervene, but warned that he would leave the case, if the husbandmen did not obey him.<sup>912</sup>

Abraham successfully reached an agreement between two priests, who had come to his residence, but could not reconcile the men sent by Paul and Taggeila, two military officers.<sup>913</sup> At least twice, arbitration was left to another high official. After a certain official examined a case, Abraham requested Lord Sarapion and his colleague to carry out the verdict. At another occasion, the priest Victor asked the clergymen of Jeme – at the bishop’s request – to solve a conflict between Menas and Stephen, since the *lashanes* did not have time for arbitration.<sup>914</sup>

One document records episcopal negotiation between a monastic community headed by Apa Victor and village officials, including a *lashane*. When Abraham requested the village officials to establish peace with the monks, they answered positively, after which he asked the Apa Victor to inform him about their terms for further communication.<sup>915</sup>

## F. Giving directions for daily life

In general, counseling is a hardly documented aspect of the episcopal office, since it usually took place during personal meetings and since the matters discussed were confidential.

Judging from *O.Crum* 282, Abraham sent a special blessing to certain people and their children, and invited them to come to him, but they did not reply.<sup>916</sup> It is unclear why the bishop wanted to meet and bless this particular family, which he contacted three times, but he probably wanted to help or instruct them personally. Although he rebuked them for not having listened, and particularly for not having responded after receiving the blessing, he did not warn to exclude them from the holy Communion on account of their disobedience, as he usually did (§6.4.E).

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<sup>910</sup> *O.Crum* 42-43, 48 (Abraham allowed Pesynte some time, until Epep 12), *Ad.* 12; cf. Schmelz 2002, 160.

<sup>911</sup> *O.Crum* 86 and 155 relate to the conflict between John and his uncle Hatre about a diner room; *SBKopt.* II 1378 also mentions a conflict between uncle and nephew; cf. Schmelz 2002, 140-41.

<sup>912</sup> *O.Crum* 293.

<sup>913</sup> *O.Crum* 313; *O.Brit.Mus.Copt.* II 31.

<sup>914</sup> Paris, Louvre inv.? (SN 156); *SBKopt.* II 906.

<sup>915</sup> *BKU* II 318. According to Schmelz (2014), the document records a case of episcopal arbitration, but at the time of writing, the two parties were not yet ready to meet before the bishop.

<sup>916</sup> Abraham wrote to his correspondents that he “sent God, while blessing you and your children the first time and the second”, but they “neither listened to God’s blessing nor to me” (ll. 2, 4-5, 8-9). The mention of God’s presence in the blessing seems to indicate the holy Communion, which was brought to the sick in case of need (as in *O.Crum* 66), but there is no mention of an illness or of clergymen who administered the sacrament. Krause (*Apa Abraham*, vol. 2, 332) suggested that Abraham probably referred to the blessing formula **ταρε πχοεις σμογ εροκ**, “that the Lord may bless you”.

## G. Intercession with state authorities

When Abraham contacted state officials or other individuals of high status, in order to protect the interests of the underprivileged in his diocese, it was usually to discipline them for their unjust actions.<sup>917</sup> Intercession in the sense of mediation with authorities for the sake of supplicants is probably implied by *O.Crum* 49: Soua and his associates asked the bishop which decision he and a *lashane* took concerning a matter that worried them, and whether he received a written agreement, which they would like to have.

When the bishop was informed that a man from Tabennese had come to Lord Asper, in order to plead his case against a woman who owed him money, Abraham asked Asper to allow him to protect the interests of the woman, who was probably a member of his flock.<sup>918</sup>

It cannot be established whether Abraham was involved in the appointment of Flavius Theophilus as public defender at Hermonthis, but as a bishop he may have been.<sup>919</sup>

### §6.5 PRAGMATIC AUTHORITY

Not only as bishop, but also as abbot of the Monastery of St Phoibammon Abraham was responsible for the care of the poor, on account of the agreement between the monastery and the Jemean authorities (§3.1.1). Abraham stipulated in his testament that his successor Victor should continue to provide for poor passers-by.<sup>920</sup> Victor is the first to explicitly mention a charitable fund (“table”) for the poor at the Monastery of St Phoibammon, which must have been founded by Bishop Abraham.<sup>921</sup> It still existed in the first half of the eight century.<sup>922</sup>

### §6.6 LEGAL AUTHORITY

Wipszycka already observed that Abraham developed the habit of putting important things in writing,<sup>923</sup> which is less evident (or less well recorded) in Pesynthius’ case. Dataset 3 provides many examples of written sources that Abraham created as instruments of authority, such as official deeds, episcopal orders, warrants, protocols, declarations, oaths, agreements and guarantees. Before we examine these documents, we will first discuss how the bishop referred to Biblical, canonical and legal sources and for what reasons.

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<sup>917</sup> *O.Crum* 61 (the *lashane* Pesynthius unjustly detained a man); *O.Crum* 71 (Psate mistreated the poor).

<sup>918</sup> *Brit.Mus.Copt.* II 34.

<sup>919</sup> *P.Lond.* I 77, l. 87: ed. Garel, *Les testaments*, vol. 2, 106.

<sup>920</sup> *P.Lond.* I 77, l. 38-39: ed. Garel, *Les testaments*, vol. 2, 21, 41.

<sup>921</sup> *P.KRU* 77 + P.Sorb.inv. 2680, ll. 90: ed. Garel, *Les testaments*, vol. 2, 77, 98; cf. Winlock and Crum 1926, 173.

<sup>922</sup> The latest known attestation is *P.KRU* 13, l. 36 (November 30, 733).

<sup>923</sup> On Abraham’s habit of having important decisions put into writing, see Wipszycka 2015, 318.

## A. Biblical sources

Bishop Abraham frequently cited, or referred to, the Bible, in order to confirm the authority of his teaching or commands, adding that it were not his words but those of the Apostle John, the Holy Spirit or God (the Son, Jesus).<sup>924</sup> He used the Scriptures to explain in his letters:

- why it is important to tell the truth (John 8:32 in *O.Crum* 73);
- who were excluded from the holy Communion: clergymen who did not keep vigil at the *Topos* of Apa John (2Thess. 3:10 in *O.Crum* 485); men and women who left their spouses, and men who lived with divorced women (Matt. 5:32, 19:9 and Luke 16:18 in *O.Crum* 72); anyone who ill-used his neighbor (comparisons with Biblical figures in *O.Crum* 71; see below); and violent people, for “anyone who uses violence, violates the Gospel” (1John 5:16-17, cited both in *O.Crum* 73 and O.Berlin, P.12491);
- why liturgical prescriptions should be followed (Psalm 43:2 in *O.Crum* 74);<sup>925</sup>
- why clergymen should heed the bishop’s words (James 1:25 in *O.Crum* 84);
- why the recipient of *O.MoscowCopt.* 80 was punished, after preventing people from fishing (Psalm 80:13-14).

Bishop Abraham modeled *O.MoscowCopt.* 80 after the example of an epistle that Paul wrote to the Corinthians “out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears” (2Cor. 2:4), to express his displeasure about the disobedience of his correspondent: “Were it possible to write down tears and groans upon papyrus, I would have filled this letter (with them) and send it to you”. To give more weight to his urgent plea, he added that suffering is the result of disobedience to God and listed persons from the Old Testament who were – in his view – punished for their disobedience, including Pharaoh, Gehazi and Saul.<sup>926</sup>

In *O.Crum* 71 Abraham compared people who mistreated others with evil-doers in the Old and New Testament, such as Judas, who betrayed Jesus; those who spat in Jesus’ face and struck him; Gehazi; Cain, who killed his brother; Zimri, who killed his king; Jerobeam, who caused Israel to sin; the accusers of Daniel and Susanna; the people who wanted Jesus to be crucified; and those who spread the story that the disciples would have stolen Jesus’ body.<sup>927</sup>

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<sup>924</sup> *O.Crum* 73 (“John, the Apostle”), *Ad.* 1 (“the holy Apostle”), 74 (“the Holy Spirit” in Psalm 43:2) and 72 (“God”, Jesus in Matt. 5:32, 19:19).

<sup>925</sup> According to the numbering in the Sahidic version of the Psalms: ed. Budge 1898, 47-48.

<sup>926</sup> Krause (*Apa Abraham*, vol. 2, 194) correctly observed that Gehazi was not punished for disobedience, but for greed and dishonesty. For this letter, “evidently an admired composition, since it is here copied from papyrus onto ostrakon”, see Winlock and Crum 1926, 172-73; cf. Schmelz 2002, 133.

<sup>927</sup> Krause (*Apa Abraham*, vol. 2, 186-87) drew attention to the fact that Bishop Abraham suggests that the soldier who guarded Jesus’ tomb came up with the story about the stolen body, whereas the chief priests and elders were in fact responsible for it (Matt. 28:12-13); cf. Brown 2002, 66; Schmelz 2002, 133.

After Abraham was violently opposed at Timamen, he vented his outrage, writing that “nobody can serve two masters” (Matt. 6:24). Since he continued by arguing that violence is an offence against the Gospel, he probably did not refer to particular persons, but implied that a good Christian, who accepts the Gospel, should renounce violence (O.Berlin, P.12491).

In short, most Biblical citations come from the New Testament, whereas bad examples were drawn from both the Old and New Testament. It is remarkable that two episcopal letters include phrases that are presented as Biblical passages, but could not be identified.<sup>928</sup>

## **B. Ecclesiastical canons**

Bishop Abraham had access to a compilation of ecclesiastical canons, on the basis of which he took decisions, and which candidates for ecclesiastical offices called “the(se) canons” or “all canons of the church”, but the exact contents and sources of which remain unspecified.<sup>929</sup> Transgressions against “the canons” include going to another diocese without the bishop’s permission (*O.Crum* 40), and marrying one’s niece or stepsister (*O.Crum* 73). The inhabitants of Timamen even “destroyed the canons in my hand” (O.Berlin, P.12491).

## **C. Imperial laws**

Bishop Abraham explained his choice to have his testament written in Greek by referring in a general way to “well and piously established” imperial laws.<sup>930</sup> It is likely that Peter, the notary of Hermonthis, who drew up his testament, informed him about regulations in the *Justinian Code*, which made it possible, but not obligatory, to testate in Greek.<sup>931</sup>

Both the testament and *P.KRU* 105, the Coptic deed signed by the Jemean authorities with regard to the ownership of the Monastery of St Phoibammon, include a penalty clause, stating that those who oppose the deeds should pay a fine of six gold ounces. This penalty was established by emperor Arcadius in 399 and confirmed by the *Justinian Code*.<sup>932</sup>

## **D. Official deeds**

Dataset 3 includes two deeds that were written on papyrus by professional scribes and signed by officials: *P.KRU* 105, from which Abraham benefitted as the first abbot of the Monastery

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<sup>928</sup> Krause, *Apa Abraham*, vol. 1, 27 and vol. 2, 199, 274: *BKU* II 318: “Who destroys war, establishes peace”; O.Berlin, P.12491, ll. 9-11: “What nobody did, they did to me”.

<sup>929</sup> *O.Crum* 29-31, 33, 34: “these commandments and [all] canons of the Church”; O.Berlin, P.12489: “these canons and these commandments that you gave us”; cf. Krause, *Apa Abraham*, vol. 1, 16-20.

<sup>930</sup> *P.Lond.* I 77, ll. 14-15: ed. Garel, *Les testaments*, vol. 2, 14, 20.

<sup>931</sup> Garel, *Les testaments*, vol. 1, 189-90 and vol. 2, 31-32.

<sup>932</sup> *P.KRU* 105, ll. 12-13 and *P.Lond.* I 77, ll. 55: ed. Garel, *Les testaments*, vol. 2, 21, 183, 185, and vol. 1, 190.

of St Phoibammon, and Abraham's testament, in which he appointed Victor as his heir and owner of the monastery.<sup>933</sup>

### E. Episcopal orders and warrants

Bishop Abraham sent various letters to clergymen, ordering them to administer sacraments,<sup>934</sup> to inspect the churches, exhort the clergy and punish negligence,<sup>935</sup> to deliver messages,<sup>936</sup> and to inquire about conflicts,<sup>937</sup> among other things. When he ordered Shenoute to inspect the churches, he also instructed him to bring the episcopal command with him, in order that Shenoute could prove that the bishop had sent him (*SBKopt.* III 1379).

A letter that is probably addressed to Abraham includes a request for a warrant, in order to force the deacon Sakau to come (*O.Crum Ad.* 11 = *O.Lips.Copt.* 11). Previously, the sender was instructed to summon Sakau and Apa Victor, but the former claimed that he did not have the opportunity to come.

### F. Protocols and declarations

When someone was accused of misconduct, the statements of the witnesses were recorded as accurately as possible, in order that Bishop Abraham had sufficient means to summon and punish the transgressor. Dataset 3 includes five such documents:

- The clergymen Zachariah and Constantine reported to the bishop that they found a flask stashed under the cupboard in the sanctuary. Zachariah first thought that it was filled with water, but discovered that it contained wine. When he inquired about it, he was told that the priest Jacob had put it there (*BKU* I 68).
- The priest Isaac declared to the priest Victor that he caught the priest Papnoute eating on Easter eve, before the end of the Lenten fast (*O.Lips.Copt.* 14).
- John and Kame declared that Bishop Abraham did not press Paham, the son of Pelish, on account of money, but asked him to promise by oath that he would return it by Sunday, and Paham agreed to make the promise by oath. They also declare that Paham later accused them of appealing against him, and that he did not keep his promise (*Brit.Mus.Copt.* II 2).

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<sup>933</sup> *P.KRU* 105, l. 15: **ΧΑΡΤΗΣ**; *P.Lond.* I 77, l. 48 *et passim*: διαθήκη.

<sup>934</sup> *Crum* 53, 66; *O.Brit.Mus.Copt.* II 22; *O.Mon.Epiph.* 154.

<sup>935</sup> *SBKopt.* III 1379-80.

<sup>936</sup> *O.Crum* 56; *O.Berlin*, P.12498.

<sup>937</sup> *O.Brit.Mus.Copt.* I (EA 24948); *O.Crum* 70, 184

- After George declared before Bishop Abraham, Joseph and Victor that Aaron told him that Papas uttered an incantation, Joseph, Victor and George himself confirmed that this declaration was made (*O.Brit.Mus.Copt.* II 3).
- Isaac, a monk of the *Topos* of Apa John, declared to Bishop Abraham and the monks Isaac and John (of the future *Topos* of Epiphanius), that Phoibammon and he often entered a place, where they ate and drank. Perhaps, they were having secret meals in the store room, while other people were absent. At any rate, after the others returned to the monastery, Phoibammon forced Isaac to speak to the monk Joseph and possibly tell lies. Crucial parts of the declaration are lost, but it is likely that Isaac accused Phoibammon of transgressions, after admitting his own complicity (*O.Crum* 310).

Three persons made declarations before Bishop Abraham with regard to their own affairs, while committing themselves not to take further action:

- Hello, who worked for the church, but wanted to leave, officially stated that the bishop fully paid his wage and owed him nothing (*O.Crum* 51).
- After having reached an agreement with Bishop Abraham for “the salvation of my soul”, the priest Papas declared that he would be excluded from the clergy, if he dared to involve the *actuarius* Peter in a financial problem, since it would weaken his case. The mention of district accountants and tax collectors indicates that Peter’s problem related to paying taxes (*O.Crum* 79).

### **G. Oaths**

Three documents mention promises made to Bishop Abraham. The monk Moses, who was accused of stealing from fellow brethren, swore an oath that he would leave the monastery, if the bishop found two or three reliable witnesses who confirmed his theft (*O.Brit.Mus.Copt.* 16). Pesynte, who was summoned on account of his conflict with Jacob and his heirs, could not come directly, but was allowed more time. He swore by God Almighty that he would not let the appointed time pass (*O.Crum* 48). Finally, Paham, the son of Pelish, promised in the presence of the bishop and (the relics of) St Phoibammon that he would return money by Sunday (*O.Brit.Mus.Copt.* II 2).

### **H. Agreements**

Two documents are explicitly called “agreements”. In the first one the deacon Ezekias declared that he would stop quarreling with his brother, Eboneh, now that Bishop Abraham

dismissed the latter as steward of a church. The second text is the declaration made by the monk Moses, who promised to leave the monastery, if two or three witnesses could confirm that he had stolen.<sup>938</sup> Other agreements in Dataset 3 concern the triannual administration of baptism in Jeme (O.Berlin, P.12501), the return of a loom part by the priest Moses or his successor (*O.Crum* 311), the timely coming of Pesynte (*O.Crum* 48), the cultivation of Misael's estates by Joseph and Pelish from Jeme (*O.Brit.Mus.Copt.* II 1), and the reconciliation between two clergymen by the bishop (*O.Crum* 313).

## I. Guarantees

Two documents are specified as “guarantees”, and a third one as a “document”.<sup>939</sup> Bishop Abraham required – and received – guarantees from clergymen who promised to serve the church without negligence (*O.Crum* 29-35, 41); from senior clergymen who were responsible for the correct observance of liturgical services by, and conduct of, younger colleagues (*O.Crum* 38, 45, *Ad.* 9, O.Berlin, P.12493); from clergymen who were reprimanded for neglecting the altar lamp (*O.Brit.Mus.Copt.* II 9) or allowing youths to get drunk (*O.Crum* 47), or clergymen who stood surety for colleagues who had been reprimanded (*O.Crum* 81, 300, *Ad.* 41); from litigants, who promised that they would comply with the outcome of episcopal arbitration (*O.Crum* 42-43, *Ad.* 12), or from those who stood surety for them (*O.Crum* 86 + 155).

Church institutions already created written documents in the first half of the fourth century,<sup>940</sup> but Abraham's dossier is extraordinary for the large number of preserved texts. Wipszycka wondered whether “a part of them would not have come into being if Abraham had not resided in a remote desert monastery, but in Hermonthis, which was easier to access”.<sup>941</sup> In the previous chapter, however, we observed that Abraham was remarkably close to his flock in terms of social ties. His residence at the Monastery of St Phoibammon was probably one of the very reasons for his accessibility. Apart from the fact that it lay close to the town of Jeme, it was the principal monastery in seventh-century Western Thebes, a *martyrium* that claimed to possess relics of St Phoibammon, and a charitable institution (§3.1.1, 6.4.B, 6.5).

Abraham may have developed the habit of creating written documents at the beginning of his episcopate, when he had just started to organize his diocese, and when his episcopal

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<sup>938</sup> *O.Crum* 44 and *O.Brit.Mus.Copt.* 16: **ΣΥΜΦΩΝΟΝ**, **Συμφώνον**.

<sup>939</sup> *O.Crum* 31: **ΑΣΦΑΛΙΑ**; *O.Crum* 45: **ΑΓΓΙΑ** for **ἔγγυθη**; *O.Crum* 48: **ΕΓΓΡΑΦΟΝ**.

<sup>940</sup> Wipszycka 2015, 310-11, 320.

<sup>941</sup> Wipszycka 2015, 36

authority was not yet fully recognized. His dossier indeed reveals that clergymen and laymen were not always conscientious or obedient (§6.4.E). By using written sources as instruments of authority Abraham taught his flock to be more cooperative and increased his own authority.

#### §6.7 THE WEIGHT OF THE EPISCOPAL OFFICE

The analysis of Bishop Abraham's exercise of authority helps to nuance Wipszycka's impression that he did not experience the "normal" weight of the episcopal office. Wipszycka explained that Abraham's activities concerned villages and monasteries, but not Hermonthis; that the episcopal steward, who usually assisted the bishop with the church administration, did not appear in the documents; and that the monastery where Abraham resided was not big.<sup>942</sup> I agree that the bishop started small, since he had to organize a new Theodosian diocese, but his work area expanded fast and in the 610s he also supervised clergymen at Hermonthis (§5.3.9). As for the episcopal steward, Victor was never called thus, but his assistance to the bishop in ecclesiastical matters suggests that he fulfilled this role (§6.4.C). Finally, the monastery may have been small, but in the seventh century it was the largest monastery in Western Thebes as well as a *martyrium* and a charitable institution, which probably attracted many pilgrims and poor passers-by (§6.4.B and D, 6.5). In his double position as bishop and abbot of a socially important monastic center Abraham bore an unusually heavy responsibility.

In this study the weight of the episcopal office is assessed by looking at Abraham's involvement in the various aspects of his office (§6.4). All seven aspects are represented, but there is a clear emphasis on education and discipline, and on the organization of worship. The bishop's care for the underprivileged is expressed both in circular and personal letters and in his testament. His role in the promotion of St Phoibammon's cult is not explicitly recorded, but likely, in view of his position as first abbot of a monastery that claimed the martyr's relics. It is logical that his role as a spiritual counselor is little documented, since discussions with individuals on private matters had to remain confidential. In short, the analysis reveals that Abraham fulfilled the various duties required by the episcopal office and was fully a bishop.

In addition, Abraham was an exceptionally zealous and conscientious bishop who tried to educate his flock for the sake of their spiritual wellbeing.<sup>943</sup> He did not accept negligence or disobedience from clergymen, but was relatively patient with laymen. To the man who was expelled from the church and to a couple with children he sent multiple letters, hoping that

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<sup>942</sup> Wipszycka 2015, 141-42.

<sup>943</sup> Wipszycka 2015, 335: "Or were Abraham and Pisentius exceptionally zealous bishops, dedicating all their free time to having an eye on their flock?"

they would finally obey and come to him.<sup>944</sup> In both cases, he expressed his displeasure about their lack of regard for the episcopal office by writing that, if he were a magistrate, they would have obeyed immediately. He complained that the expelled man was “shameless” and had “a heart of stone”, but tried hard to persuade him to repent by imitating the emotional style of one of Paul’s Epistles, and by listing Biblical persons who were punished for their disobedience (§6.6.1). As for the priest Patermoute, the bishop already prepared a document to degrade him, but offered him one last chance: if Patermoute did not pay a fine the next day, his degradation would become official (§6.4.E).

Abraham’s mission to Timamen was a disaster, since the villagers showed no respect for him, his clergymen or even the ecclesiastical canons (§6.4.B), but in other cases the bishop successfully cooperated with *lashanes* and military officials (§6.4.E).

## CONCLUSION

This chapter analyzed the nature of Abraham’s authority, while also considering the social, historical and practical conditions in which he worked. During his episcopate, two military coups took place in Constantinople, two Theodosian patriarchs of Alexandria died, there was a serious famine in ca. 615, since the Nile did not flood, and the Persians conquered Syria and Egypt, and pillaged Jerusalem. None of these events appear in Abraham’s documents, but he must at least have known about them, and the famine and the Persian presence in the Theban region undoubtedly affected the people in his diocese.

Abraham lived at the newly founded Monastery of St Phoibammon, which became an important religious and social center, since it claimed to possess the relics of St Phoibammon and provided for the poor, on account of an agreement with the town of Jeme. As abbot of this monastery and bishop of Hermonthis, Abraham bore a heavy responsibility, which he took seriously. During the Persian occupation, he did not leave his residence, but the coming of some of his colleagues to his diocese indicates that Western Thebes was a relatively safe area.

Abraham was engaged in all aspects associated with the episcopal office, and fulfilled his duties zealously, which is another confirmation that he was close to the clergymen and laymen in his diocese. He is best described as a conscientious teacher, who aimed to educate his flock for the sake of their souls, and who insisted on obedience, the observance of God’s commands and church regulations, and the prevention of negligence. He often explained his teachings and commands by citing from the New Testament, and added that it were not his

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<sup>944</sup> *O.Moscow.Copt.* 80; *O.Crum* 282.

words, but those of God or the Apostle John. By doing so, and by requiring protocols and guarantees, he used written sources as instruments of authority, in order to strengthen his professional authority. He regularly warned to impose ecclesiastical sanctions in case of transgressions, and excluded various clergymen from the holy Communion or the clergy, but seems to have been more patient with laymen. When a man was expelled from the church after repeatedly ignoring a rebuke, Abraham tried hard to convince him to obey and did not shun emotional rhetoric. Although it is usual for bishops to teach their flock, Abraham may have been particularly motivated to do so, on account of his disciplined lifestyle as a monk-bishop and as a leader of a prominent monastic community.

Abraham's professional authority increased in the course of time, but was sometimes ignored. Some of his correspondents did not respond to multiple messages, which caused him to write that they would have obeyed directly, if he were a magistrate. The (possibly Chalcedonian) inhabitants of Timamen even violently opposed his authority. Abraham did not always succeed in solving conflicts, and sometimes left arbitration to local clergymen or to civil or military officials, with most of whom he maintained good relations.

Abraham's prayers and blessings were much appreciated, but unlike Epiphanius and Pesynthius, he was not reputed for his spiritual authority. He did, however, enjoy considerable ascetic authority, judging from the fact that he was thrice called "who truly bears the Christ".

The care for the underprivileged was not just an episcopal duty, but also Abraham's task as abbot of the Monastery of St Phoibammon. Using his pragmatic authority as an abbot, he appointed the priest Victor as the future owner of the monastery (as a bishop he could not bequeath property) and stipulated that Victor should continue making provisions for the poor. The charitable fund that Abraham created still existed in the first half of the eighth century.