

## CHAPTER 6



# AN EGYPTIAN VIEW OF ABRAHAM

*John Gee*

**M**y association with Kent Brown has been longer than either of us would wish to admit. Under his tutelage, I had my first classes in Coptic and early Christian history. After I joined the faculty, I have benefited from being a colleague, serving on committees together and, most recently, from his being my department head. It is a pleasure to present this as a tribute to him, both because of my personal association and interests and because it gives me the chance to combine Coptic with Kent's Latter-day Saint interests.

For the second half of the twentieth century, Coptic studies have been dominated by interest in the Nag Hammadi Library, a collection of manuscripts in Lycopolitan and Sahidic dialects, whose contents can be characterized either as at least heretical or even bizarre. Their very strangeness draws interest. Before that time, the interest in Coptic literature focused on Coptic orthodoxy, whose texts at least make some modicum of sense. Unfortunately, orthodox Coptic literature has fallen on some hard times. The manuscripts are dispersed, largely unpublished, or published in some obscure place.

Extracanonical traditions about Abraham circulated in the ancient world from at least the third century BC on, and a number of

these have been gathered in a volume.<sup>1</sup> The volume, however, does not contain any Coptic material because it had not yet been located. One missed account comes from a Coptic encomium that is found in three manuscripts; notice of one was published with a brief Latin summary first by Georgio Zoega in 1810,<sup>2</sup> another was published by W. E. Crum.<sup>3</sup> E. O. Winstedt published a composite text of the two manuscripts along with an English translation in 1908.<sup>4</sup> Winstedt made certain assumptions in the presentation of his text that can at least be questioned. Given the wider range of extracanonical traditions about Abraham, this text can be more securely placed within those traditions than it could when Winstedt published it. It deserves to be known to a wider audience.

### Text

The text is fragmentary, but the story told about Abraham seems to be complete. I have kept Winstedt's punctuation but have omitted his superlinear marks as it is not clear to me that he has interpreted them correctly. Coptic manuscripts tend not to have spacing between words, and different editors have different preferences; I have used mine rather than Winstedt's. The text follows:

[...] CΩΟΥΣ ΜΝ ΠΝΟΥΤΕ ΝΑΒΡΑΣΑΜ :- ΑΣΡΑΘ ΘΕ ΑΒΡΑΣΑΜ ΕΚΧΩ  
 ΜΜΟC ΕΡΟΘ ΧΕ ΑΥCΩΟΥΣ ΜΝ ΠΝΟΥΤΕ ΝΑΒΡΑΣΑΜ :- ΟΥΚΟΥΝ  
 ΘΕ ΕΙΕ ΜΝ ΑΛΛΥ ΝΡΩΜΕ ΣΙΧΜ ΠΚΑΣ ΜΠΕΥΘΕΙΩ ΕΤΜΜΑΥ · ΝCΑ  
 ΑΒΡΑΣΑΜ ΜΑΥΑΑΥ · ΕΚΤΑΙΟ ΜΜΟΘ ΝΤΕΙΣΕ ΤΗΡC :-  
 CΕ ΠΕΧΑΥ ΝΘΙ ΠΕΠΡΟΦΗΤΗΣ ΔΑΥΕΙΔ · ΟΥΝ ΣΑΣ ΝΡΩΜΕ ΣΙΧΜ  
 ΠΚΑΣ ΜΠΕΥΘΕΙΩ ΝΑΒΡΑΣΑΜ ∴ ΑΛΛΑ ΜΠΕΛΛΑΥ ΜΜΑΥ CΟΥΕΝ

1. John A. Tvedtnes, Brian M. Hauglid, and John Gee, *Traditions about the Early Life of Abraham* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2001).

2. Georgio Zoega, *Catalogus Codicum Copticorum Manuscriptorum qui in Museo Borgiano velitris adservantur* (Rome: Typis Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide, 1810), 548.

3. Walter E. Crum, *Catalogue of the Coptic Manuscripts in the British Museum* (London: British Museum, 1905), 141, no. 318.

4. E. O. Winstedt, "Coptic Saints and Sinners," *Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archaeology* 30 (1908): 231-37, 276-83.

ΝΝΟΥΤΕ ΝΘΕ | ΝΑΒΡΑΣΑΜ · ΕΒΟΛ ΧΕ ΝΕΑΒΡΑΣΑΜ ΧΠΙΟ ΜΜΟΟΥ  
 ΜΝ ΝΕΥΕΙΔΩΛΟΝ · ΧΕ ΝΖΝΝΟΥΤΕ ΑΝ ΝΕ · ΑΥΩ ΜΠΕΡΛΟ  
 ΕΦΧΠΙΟ ΜΜΟΟΥ · ΦΑΝΤΟΥΔΩΝΤ ΕΡΟΦ ΝΣΕ† ΚΩΣΤ ΕΡΟΦ  
 ∴ ΝΤΕΡΟΥΝΟΥΧΕ ΔΕ ΝΑΒΡΑΣΑΜ ΕΣΟΥΝ ΕΠΚΩΣΤ · ∴ ΑΥΩ  
 ΑΠΑΓΓΕΛΟΣ ΜΠΧΘΕΙΣ ΕΙ ΦΑΡΟΦ ΝΤΕΥΝΟΥ · ΑΥΩ ΑΥΤΟΥΧΟΦ  
 ΖΝΠΚΩΣΤ · ΜΠΕΡΧΩΣ ΕΡΟΦ ΕΠΤΗΡΦ ∴ ΑΥΩ ΑΠΕΡΣΟΕΙΓ  
 ΕΙ ΕΒΟΛ ΖΜΠΚΑΣ ΤΗΡΦ ΝΤΜΕΣΟΠΟΤΑΜΙΑ · | ΧΕ ΑΠΕΡΝΟΥΤΕ  
 ΤΟΥΧΟΦ ΕΠΚΩΣΤ ΝΣΑΒΩΡ ΠΡΡΟ · ∴ ΝΤΕΡΕΠΡΡΟ ΔΕ ΣΩΤΜ  
 ΕΠΣΟΕΙΓ ΝΑΒΡΑΣΑΜ ΧΕ ΑΥΟΥΧΑΙ ΕΠΚΩΣΤ · ΑΥΩ ΑΥΦΠΕ  
 ΝΧΟΟΥ ΝΣΩΦ · ΧΕ ΝΤΟΦ ΠΕΝΤΑΥΤΡΕΥ† · ΠΚΩΣΤ ΕΡΟΦ ∴  
 ΝΤΕΥΝΟΥ ΔΕ ΑΠΡΡΟ ΣΩΟΥΣ ΜΜΝΤΣΝΟΟΥΣ ΝΑΡΧΩΝ ΝΤΕ  
 ΠΛΑΟΣ ΠΕΧΑΦ ΝΑΥ ΧΕ ΒΩΚ ΦΑ ΠΕΙΡΩΜΕ ΧΕ ΑΒΡΑΣΑΜ  
 ΝΤΕΤΝΕΙΜΕ ΕΤΜΕ ΖΝ ΖΩΒ ΝΙΜ · ΧΕ ΝΤΑΥΟΥΧΑΙ ΕΠΚΩΣΤ  
 ΝΑΦ ΝΣΕ · ΑΥΩ ΟΝ ΧΙ ΝΜΜΗΤΝ ΝΖΝΚΕΡΩΜΕ ΝΧΩΩΡΕ ΖΙ  
 ΤΕΣΗΝ · ΜΜΟΝ · ΔΙΣΩΤΜ ΧΕ ΑΝΣΕΘΝΟΣ ΚΩΤΕ ΕΡΟΦ · ΜΗΠΟΤΕ  
 ΝΣΕΤΟΡΠΦ ΝΤΟΟΤΤΗΥΤΝ · ΦΑΝΤΕΤΝΕΙΜΕ ΕΤΜΕ ΝΝΕΙΦΑΧΕ  
 ΤΗΡΟΥ.

ΑΥΩ ΝΤΕΥΝΟΥ ΑΠΜΝΤΣΝΟΟΥΣ ΝΑΡΧΩΝ · ΖΩΝ ΕΣΟΥΝ  
 ΕΡΟΦ · ΑΝΕΧΩΩΡΕ ΣΩΦΤ ΕΡΟΟΥ — ΑΥΩ ΑΥΝΑΥ ΕΝΕΛΑΟΣ  
 ΕΥΣΟΟΥΣ ΕΣΟΥΝ ΕΠΕΝΕΙΩΤ ΑΒΡΑΣΑΜ · ΠΕΧΕ ΝΑΡΧΩΝ ΝΑΥ ΧΕ  
 ΠΕΝΕΙΩΤ ΑΒΡΑΣΑΜ · ΕΦΤΩΝ ΠΕΚΝΟΥΤΕ · ΠΑΙ ΝΤΑΥΤΟΥΧΟΚ  
 ΖΜ ΠΚΩΣΤ ΤΝΝΑΥ ΕΡΟΦ | ΖΩΩΝ · ΤΝΟΥΩΦΤ ΝΑΥ ∴ ΑΥΩ  
 ΝΓΤΑΜΙΟ ΝΑΝ ΖΩΩΝ ΝΟΥΝΟΥΤΕ ΕΦΘΜΘΟΜ ΝΘΕ ΜΠΕΚΝΟΥΤΕ  
 · ΝΥΤΟΥΧΟΝ ΕΠΚΩΣΤ · ΝΘΕ ΝΤΑΥΤΟΥΧΟΚ ∴ ΑΥΩ ΝΤΕΥΝΟΥ  
 ΑΑΒΡΑΣΑΜ ΝΕΤΒ ΡΩΦ ΝΣΩΦΕ ∴ ΠΕΧΑΦ ΝΑΥ ΧΕ Ω ΝΕΡΩΜΕ  
 ΝΤΜΕΣΟΠΟΤΑΜΙΑ · ΜΗ ΤΑΣΥΝΗΘΙΑ ΠΕ ΤΑΜΙΟ ΝΟΥΤΕ · ΝΘΕ  
 ΝΝΕΤΝΝΟΥΤΕ · ΕΙΕ ΝΤΑΦΜΦΕ ΝΑΥ ΖΟΛΩΣ ∴ ΠΝΟΥΤΕ ΠΑΙ  
 ΝΤΑΥΤΟΥΧΟΙ ΕΠΚΩΣΤ · ΜΠΕΠΛΕΙΩΤ ΝΑΥ ΕΡΟΦ ΕΝΕΣ · ΟΥΔΕ  
 ΟΝ ΜΝΕΦΩΜΦΕ ΝΑΥ ∴—

ΠΕΧΕ ΝΑΡΧΩΝ ΝΑΥ ΧΕ ΠΕΝΧΘΕΙΣ ΑΒΡΑΣΑΜ · ΝΤΑΝΧΟΟΣ  
 ΕΡΟΚ ΧΕ ΕΡΕ ΠΕΚΝΟΥΤΕ ΤΑΕΙΝΥ ΝΣΟΥΟ ΕΠΩΝ · ΕΤΒΕ ΧΕ  
 ΑΥΤΟΥΧΟΚ ΕΠΚΩΣΤ ∴—

ΠΕΧΕ ΑΒΡΑΣΑΜ ΝΑΥ ΧΕ ΠΑΝΟΥΤΕ ΑΝΟΚ ΤΑΕΙΝΥ ΠΑΡΑ ΠΝΟΥΒ  
 · ΜΝ ΠΩΝΕ ΜΜΕ · ΜΝ ΝΚΑ ΝΙΜ ΝΤΕ ΠΕΙΚΟΣΜΟΣ ΑΛΛΑ ΕΩΧΕ  
 ΤΕΤΝΟΥΩΦ ΕΝΑΥ ΕΠΑΝΟΥΤΕ · ΑΥΩ ΝΤΕΤΝΕΙΜΕ ΧΕ ΦΤΑΕΙΝΥ  
 ΠΑΡΑ ΝΚΑ ΝΙΜ ΕΤΣΙΧΜ ΠΚΑΣ ∴ ΒΩΦΤ ΝΗΤΝ ΕΝΕΙ ΖΩΩΝ  
 ΝΤΑΠΑΝΟΥΤΕ ΤΑΜΙΟΥ ΖΝ ΤΠΕ · ΠΡΗ ΜΝ ΠΟΥΣ · ΜΝ ΝΕΣΙΟΥ  
 · ΜΝ ΝΕΚΛΟΟΛΕ ΝΑΗΡ ∴ ΤΑΡΕΤΕΤΝΕΙΜΕ ΧΕ ΟΥΝ ΒΟΜ ΜΜΟΦ  
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 ΕΥΧΩ ΜΜΟΣ ∴ ΧΕ ΠΕΝΕΙΩΤ ΑΒΡΑΣΑΜ ΜΠΑΤΕΚΡ ΖΜΕ ΠΡΟΜΠΕ  
 ΖΟΛΩΣ ΝΙΜ <sup>5</sup>ΠΕΝΤΑΧΤΑΜΟΚ ΕΠΕΙ ΦΑΧΕ ΠΑΙ ΑΚΧΟΟΦ ΕΡΟΝ  
 ∴ ΕΩΧΕ ΠΕΚΝΟΥΤΕ ΑΓΤΑΜΟΚ <sup>6</sup> ΕΠΕΙ ΜΥΣΤΗΡΙΟΝ ΠΑΙ ·  
 ΤΝΟΥΩΦ <sup>7</sup> ΖΩΩΝ ΕΝΑΥ ΕΥΜΥΣΤΗΡΙΟΝ ΝΤΑΧΤΑΡΕΝΠΙΣΤΕΥΕ  
 ΕΡΟΦ ΖΩΩΝ · ΑΥΩ ΝΤΕΥΝΟΥ ΑΑΒΡΑΣΑΜ ΣΑΚΦ <sup>8</sup> ΝΣΑ ΟΥΣΑ  
 ΖΜ ΠΟΥΕ ΑΠΩΦΩ ΝΝΕΦΒΙΧ ΕΒΟΛ ΑΦΩΛΗΛ ΕΣΡΑΙ ΕΠΝΟΥΤΕ  
 ∴ ΑΥΩ ΑΣΝΕΒΡΗΘΕ · ΜΝ ΖΝΣΡΟΥΒΑΙ ΦΑ ΖΝ ΤΠΕ <sup>9</sup> ∴ ΑΥΩ  
 ΝΤΕΥΝΟΥ ΑΠΝΟΥΤΕ ΦΑΧΕ ΜΝ <sup>10</sup> ΑΒΡΑΣΑΜ ΕΦΧΩ ΜΜΟΣ ∴  
 ΧΕ ΑΝΟΚ ΠΕ ΠΝΟΥΤΕ ΝΝΚΑ <sup>11</sup> ΝΙΜ ∴ ΑΥΩ ΝΤΕΥΝΟΥ ΑΠΣΟ <sup>12</sup>  
 ΝΑΒΡΑΣΑΜ ΕΡΟΥΘΕΙΝ ΝΘΕ ΜΠΣΟ ΝΟΥΑΓΤΕΛΟΣ ΝΤΕ ΠΝΟΥΤΕ <sup>13</sup> ·  
 ΕΤΒΕ ΠΕΘΟΥ ΜΠΝΟΥΤΕ ΝΤΑΦΩΑΧΕ ΝΜΜΑΦ · ΑΥΩ ΝΤΕΥΝΟΥ  
 ΑΜΜΗΩΦ ΖΕ ΕΣΡΑΙ ΕΧΜ ΠΚΑΣ · ΜΠΟΥΦΘΕΜΘΟΜ <sup>14</sup> ΕΒΩΦΤ ·  
 ΕΣΟΥΝ ΖΜ ΠΣΟ <sup>15</sup> ΝΑΒΡΑΣΑΜ · ΕΤΒΕ ΠΕΘΟΥ ΜΠΝΟΥΤΕ ΝΤΑΦΩΑ <sup>16</sup>  
 ΕΣΡΑΙ ΕΧΩΦ ∴ ΑΥΩ ΝΤΕΥΝΟΥ ΑΥΩΦ ΕΒΟΛ ΕΥΧΩ ΜΜΟΣ  
 ΖΝ <sup>17</sup> ΟΥΣΡΟΟΥ ΝΟΥΩΤ · ΧΕ ΑΒΡΑΣΑΜ ΠΕΦΒΗΡ ΜΠΝΟΥΤΕ

5. The British Museum fragment begins here with [ΠΕΝΤΑΧΤΑ]ΜΟΚ.

6. BM: ΑΓΤΑΜΑ[Μ]ΜΟΚ.

7. BM: ΤΕΝΟΥ [ΑΝΟΥΩ]Φ.

8. BM: [ΣΟ]ΚΦ.

9. BM: ΑΥΩ [Ν]ΤΕΥΝΟΥ [ΑΣΕΝ]ΕΦΡΗΘΕ [ΜΕΝ] ΖΕΝΣΡΟΥΒΑΙ ΜΕΝ ΖΕΝ[ΣΟΥ]ΜΠΕ ΦΑ  
 ΖΕΝ ΤΠΕ.

10. BM: ΜΕΝ.

11. BM: ΝΕΝΚΑ.

12. BM: ΖΑ.

13. BM: omits ΝΤΕ ΠΝΟΥΤΕ.

14. BM: ΜΠΟΥΦΘΕΜΘΟΜ.

15. BM: ΕΠΣΟ.

16. BM: ΝΤΑ[Φ...].

17. BM: ΖΕΝ.

ΣΟΠΣ ΜΠΕΚΝΟΥΤΕ ΕΤΒΗΗΤΗ<sup>18</sup> ΤΕΠΕΙΩΤΟΡΤΡ ΛΟ<sup>19</sup> ΜΜΦΥ  
 ΖΙΧΩΝ · ΤΑΡΕΝΩΘΕΜΘΟΜ<sup>20</sup> ΕΩΔΧΕ ΝΜΜΑΚ :- ΑΥΩ ΝΤΟΥΝΟΥ  
 ΑΠΝΟΥΤΕ ΣΜΟΥ ΕΠΕΝΕΙΩΤ ΑΒΡΑΣΑΜ ΑΦ† ΣΑ ΖΙ ΧΑΡΙΣ ΝΑΦ  
 ΜΠΜΤΟ ΕΒΟΛ ΝΟΥΟΝ ΝΙΜ ::- ΑΥΩ ΑΠΝΟΥΤΕ ΟΥΩΝΣ ΕΡΟΦ<sup>21</sup>  
 ΝΣΗΚΕΜΥΣΤΗΡΙΟΝ<sup>22</sup> ΕΝΑΦΩΟΥ ΝΑΙ<sup>23</sup> ΕΥΝΑΦΩΠΕ<sup>24</sup> ΜΜΟΦ ΝΣΑ  
 ΟΗ · ΑΥΩ ΝΤΕΥΝΟΥ ΑΦΣΟΠΦ ΕΡΟΦ ::-

ΝΤΕΥΝΟΥ ΔΕ ΑΑΒΡΑΣΑΜ ΩΦ ΕΒΟΛ ΕΦΧΩ ΜΜΟΣ ΝΟΥΟΝ<sup>25</sup>  
 ΝΙΜ · ΧΕ ΠΡΡΟ ΝΝΕΧΩΦΡΕ ΤΗΡΟΥ ΜΠΚΑΣ ΝΤΕΠΕΝΝΟΥΤΕ  
 · ΧΙΣΕ ΜΜΟΦ :- ΑΥΩ ΑΠΕΙ ΦΑΧΕ ΠΑΙ ΦΩΠΕ ΕΦ†<sup>26</sup> ΣΟΕΓΤ  
 ΕΤΒΕ ΑΒΡΑΣΑΜ ΧΕ ΑΝΑΡΧΩΝ ΜΗ<sup>27</sup> ΝΛΑΟΣ ΣΦΟΥΣ ΜΗ  
 ΠΠΟΥΤΕ<sup>28</sup> ΝΑΒΡΑΣΑΜ · ΧΕ ΠΡΡΟ ΝΝΕΧΩΦΡΕ ΤΗΡΟΥ ΜΠΚΑΣ  
 ΝΤΕΠΕΝΝΟΥΤΕ ΧΙΣΕ ΜΜΟΦ ::-

ΑΛΗΘΩΣ ΓΑΡ Ω ΠΕΠΡΟΦΗΤΗΣ ΕΤΟΥΑΛΒ ΠΕΝΕΙΩΤ<sup>29</sup> ΔΔΥΕΙΔ.  
 · ΠΚΑΛΩΣ ΓΑΡ ΤΟΟΜΕ ΕΡΟΚ ΝΝΑΥ ΝΙΜ · ΙΝΝΧΤΕΚΜΗΤΩΦΩΣ  
 ΜΜΑΝΕΣΟΟΥ · ΦΑΤΕΚΜΗΤΠΡΟΦΗΤΗΣ ::- ΕΒΟΛ ΧΕ ΟΥΑΣΟ  
 ΝΩΝΣ · ΠΕ ΠΕΚΑΣΟ Ω ΠΡΡΟ ΝΔΙΚΑΙΟΣ ΠΕΝΕΙΩΤ ΕΤΟΥΑΛΒ  
 ΔΔΥΕΙΔ. ::-

ΑΛΗΘΩΣ Ω ΝΕΝΕΙΟΤΕ ΕΤΟΥΑΛΒ ΝΑΠΟΣΤΟΛΟΣ · ΠΕΤΩΦΕ ΠΕ  
 ΝΤΕ ΛΑΣ ΝΙΜ · ΖΙ ΣΠΟΤΟΥ ΝΙΜ ΧΩ ΜΠΕΤΗΓΑΕΙΟ ::- ΕΒΟΛ ΧΕ  
 ΑΠΕΧΣ ΠΕΝΩΝΣ ΤΗΡΕΝ ΜΟΥΤΕ ΕΡΩΤΗ ΝΧΙΝΕΤΕΤΗΦΟΟΠ  
 ΖΙΧΜ ΠΚΑΣ · ΧΕ ΝΑΣΗΗΥ · ΑΥΩ ΝΑΦΒΗΡ ::- ΧΩΡΙΣ ΠΝΟΘ  
 ΝΕΟΟΥ ΝΤΑΦΧΑΡΙΖΕ ΜΜΟΦ ΝΗΤΗ ΜΠΜΤΟ ΕΒΟΛ ΜΠΕΦΕΙΩΤ  
 · ΜΝΝΕΦΑΓΓΕΛΟΣ ΕΤΟΥΑΛΒ · ΕΦΧΩ ΜΜΟΣ · ΧΕ ΠΑΕΙΩΤ

18. BM: ΕΤΒΗΗΤΕΝ.

19. BM: ΛΑ.

20. BM: ΤΑΡΕΝΩΘΕΜΘΟΜ.

21. BM: ΟΥΩΝΑΣ ΕΒΟΛ.

22. BM: ΝΣΗΚΕΜΥΣΤΗΡΙΟΝ.

23. Word omitted in BM.

24. BM: ΕΝΑ[...]Ε.

25. BM: ΕΟΥΟΝ.

26. BM: ΑΥΩ ΑΠΕ[Μ]ΠΑΦ†.

27. BM: ΜΕΝ.

28. BM: ΜΠΠΟΥΤΕ.

29. The British Museum fragment ends with ΠΕΝΕΙΩ[†].

†ΟΥΩΩ · ΧΕΚΑΣ ΠΜΑ ΑΝΟΚ Ε† ΜΜΟϢ ΜΑΡΕ ΝΕΤΝΟΥΙ  
 ΝΕ ΩΩΠΕ ΝΖΗΤϢ · ΧΕΚΑΣ ΕΥΕΝΑΥ ΕΠΕΟΟΥ ΝΤΑΚΧΑΡΙΖΕ  
 ΜΜΟϢ ΝΑΙ ΕΒΟΛ ΧΕ ΑΥΖΑΡΕΖ ΕΠΑΩΑΧΕ · ΝΘΕ ΖΩ ΝΤΑΙΖΑΡΕΖ  
 ΕΠΕΚΩΑΧΕ :- ΠΑΕΙΩΤ ΕΤΟΥΑΑΒ · ΠΟΥΝΟϢ ΜΠΕΚΩΑΧΕ ΠΕΤ  
 ΜΕ · ΑΥΩ ΑΝΟΚ ΜΝ ΝΑΠΟΣΤΟΛΟΣ · ΑΝΖΑΡΕΖ ΕΡΟϢ :- †ΤΒΒΟ  
 ΜΜΟΙ ΖΑΡΟΟΥ ΠΑΕΙΩΤ · ΧΕ ΑΥΩΩΠΕ ΕΥΤΒΒΗΥ ΖΝ ΤΜΕ :-  
 ΠΑΕΙΩΤ ΝΕΝΤΑΚΤΑΖΜΟΥ ΤΗΡΟΥ · ΔΙΣΑΚΟΥ ΩΑΡΟΙ ΖΜ ΠΩΑΧΕ  
 ΝΤΑΤΑΠΡΟ :- ΜΠΟΥΩΠΝΕ ΝΣΑ ΛΑΑΥ ΝΤΟΟΤ · ΕΙΜΗΤΕΙ ΠΕΚΡΑΝ  
 ΜΜΑΤΕ · ΕΤΡΕΚΖΑΡΕΖ ΕΡΟΟΥ ΧΕ ΝΝΕΛΑΑΥ ΤΑΚΟ ΕΒΟΛ ΝΖΗΤΟΥ  
 · ΕΙΜΗΤΕΙ ΠΩΗΡΕ ΜΠΤΑΚΟ · ΕΩΧΕ Ω ΝΕΝΕΙΟΤΕ ΕΤΟΥΑΑΒ  
 ΝΑΠΟΣΤΟΛΟΣ · ΑΠΩΗΡΕ ΜΠΝΟΥΤΕ ΣΥΝΖΙΣΤΑ ΜΜΩΤΝ ΜΠΜΤΟ  
 ΕΒΟΛ ΜΠΕΦΕΙΩΤ ΧΕ ΑΥΜΕΡΙΤ · ΠΕΤΩΩΕ ΕΡΟΝ ΖΩΩΝ ΠΕ  
 · ΕΤΡΕΝΜΕΡΕ ΤΗΥΤΝ ΕΠΕΖΟΥΟ :- ΖΟΤΑΝ ΔΕ ΕΚΩΑΝΜΕΡΕ  
 ΟΥΜΑΡΤΥΡΟС · ΕΙΕ ΟΥΔΙΚΑΙΟС · ΠΩϢ ΠΕСОΠС ΖΙΧΩК · ΕΒΟΛ  
 ΧΕ ΠΕΥСОΠС ΒΜΒΟМ ΜΜΑΤΕ ΜΠΜΤΟ ΕΒΟΛ ΝΟΥΟΝ ΝΙМ :-  
 ΕΚΩΑΝΡ ΟΥΜΗΓΤΝΑ ΖМ ΠΡΑΝ · ΝΝΕΙ ΑΠΟΣΤΟΛΟС ΕΤΟΥΑΑΒ ·  
 ΚΑΝ ΖΝ ΟΥΘΥСΙΑ ΕΚΝΑΤΑАС ΖМΠΕΥΡΑΝ · ΚΑΝ ΖΝ ΟΥΧΩΩΜΕ  
 ΕΚΝΑΤΑАϢ ΖМ ΠΕΥΡΑΝ · ΝΓΤΑАϢ ΕΖΟΥΝ ΕΤΕΚΚΛΗСΙΑ ·  
 ΕΤΡΕΥΩΩ ΝΖΗΤϢ · ΚΑΝ ΟΥΛΑΑΥ ΖΩΛΟС · ΕΚΝΑΤΑАϢ ΖМ  
 ΠΕΥΡΑΝ ΚΑΤΑ СМОТ ΝΙМ :- ΚΑΝ ΖΝ ΟΥΩΟПС ΕΥΝΑААС ΖМ  
 ΠΕΥΡΑΝ ΕΝΕΖΗКΕ · ΜΝ ΝΕΩММО · ΜΝ ΝΕΤΩΑΑТ · ΡΑΩΕ  
 ΝΑК ΖΩΩК Ω ΠΑΜΕΡΙТ · ΧΕ ΑΥΟΥΩ ΕΥСΖΑΙ ΜΠΕΚΡΑΝ  
 ΕΠΕΥΧΩΩΜΕ · ΕΒΟΛ ΧΕ ΖΝ ΡΕϢСОПС ΝΕ ΕΥΧΗК ΕΒΟΛ  
 :- ΝΕΔΙΚΑΙΟС ΔΕ ΜΝ ΝΕМАРТΥРОС · ΖΝ ΡΕϢСОПС ΖΩΟΥ  
 ΝΕ :- ΝΕΙΑΠΟΣΤΟΛΟС ΔΕ ΝΤООУ ΖΝ ΡΕϢ† ΖΑΠ ΝΕ · ΖМ  
 ΠΕΙΑ ΝΙΩСАϢАТ :- ΙΩΖΑΝΝΗС ΠΕΥΑΓΓΕΛΙСΤΗС ΕРΜΗΓΤРЕ  
 · ΕϢΧΩ ΜΜΟС · ΧΕ ΕРΩΑΝ ΠΩΗΡΕ ΕР ΤΗΥΤΝ ΝРМZE ·  
 ΟΝΤΩС ΤΕΤΝΝΑΩΩΠΕ ΝРМZE :- ΤΕΙΕΝΤΟΛΗ ΝΤΑΠΕΙΩТ  
 ΤΑАС ΜΠΕϢΜΕΡΙТ ΝΩΗΡΕ ΑΠΩΗΡΕ ΖΩΩϢ ΧΑΡΙΖΕ ΜΜΟС  
 ΝΝΕϢΑΠΟΣΤΟΛΟС ΕΤΟΥΑΑΒ :- ΕΤΒΕ ΠΑΙ ΠΕΤΕΡΕΝΑΠΟΣΤΟΛΟС  
 ΝΑААϢ ΝРМZE · ΠΩΗΡΕ ΜΠΝΟΥΤΕ ΝΑААϢ ΝРМZE ·  
 ΠΕΤΕΡΕΝΑΠΟΣΤΟΛΟС ΝΑКΩ ΝΑϢ ΕΒΟΛ · ΠΕΧС ΝΑКΩ ΝΑϢ  
 ΕΒΟΛ ΖΩΩϢ :- ΑΥΩ ΠΕΤΕΡΕΝΑΠΟΣΤΟΛΟС ΝΑ† ΚΛΗΡΟΝΟΜΙΑ

ΝΑΗ · ΑΠΩΗΡΕ ΜΠΝΟΥΤΕ † ΚΛΗΡΟΝΟΜΙΑ ΝΑΗ :- ΑΛΛΑ  
 ΤΕΤΝΣΟΟΥΝ Ω ΠΛΑΟΣ ΜΜΑΙ ΠΕΧΣ ΕΠΕΙ ΩΑΧΕ Ε†ΝΑΧΟΟΗ  
 · ΧΕ ΝΝΕΤΝ ΣΑΩΤ · ΟΥΔΕ ΝΝΕΤΝΒΑΒΩΩΤ · ΑΛΛΑ ΝΘΕ  
 ΝΟΥΑΓΤΕΛΟΣ ΝΤΕΠΝΟΥΤΕ · ΩΕΠ ΠΑΩΑΧΕ ΕΡΩΤΝ · ΕΥΝΟΒΡΕ  
 ΝΝΕΤΝ†ΥΧΗ · ΕΡΩΑΝ ΟΥΣΟΝ · Η ΟΥΣΩΝΕ ΝΖΗΤΤΗΥΤΝ  
 ΤΕΖΜ ΟΥΑ ΖΜ ΠΡΑΝ ΝΝΕΙ ΑΠΟΣΤΟΛΟΣ ΕΤΟΥΑΛΒ :- ΕΩΩΠΕ  
 ΠΕΤΡΟΣ ΠΕ ΜΠΡΠΟΡΧΗ ΕΑΝΔΡΕΑΣ ΠΕΧΟΝ :- ΕΚΩΑΝ†  
 ΝΟΥΑΓΑΠΗ ΖΜ ΠΡΑΝ ΝΙΩΖΑΝΝΗΣ · Μ[Π]ΕΚΠΟΡΧΗ ΕΙΑΚΩΒΟΣ  
 ΠΕΧΟΝ :- ΕΚΩΑΝΤΑΑΣ ΖΜ ΠΡΑΝ ΜΦΙΛΙΠΠΟΣ · ΜΠΕΚΠΟΡΧΗ  
 ΕΒΟΛ ΕΒΑΡΘΟΛΟΜΑΙΟΣ · ΕΒΟΛ ΧΕ ΟΥΤΩΖΜ ΝΟΥΩΤ ΠΕ  
 :- ΕΚΩΑΝΤΑΑΣ ΖΜ ΠΡΑΝ ΝΘΩΜΑΣ · ΜΠΕΚΠΟΡΧΗ ΕΒΟΛ  
 ΕΜΑΘΑΙΟΣ · ΕΒΟΛ ΧΕ ΟΥΚΟΙΝΩΝΙΑ ΝΟΥΩΤ ΤΕΤΖΝ ΤΕΥΜΗΤΕ  
 ΖΙ ΟΥΣΟΠ :- ΕΚΩΑΝΤΑΑΣ ΖΜ ΠΡΑΝ ΝΣΙΜΩΝ · ΜΠΕΚΠΟΡΧΗ  
 ΕΒΟΛ ΕΙΑΚΩΒΟΣ ΠΩΗΡΕ ΝΑΛΦΑΙΟΣ :- ΜΠΕΚΝΑΥ ΕΠΕΤΡΟΣ ΧΕ  
 ΠΝΟΘ ΠΕ ΖΝ ΝΑΠΟΣΤΟΛΟΣ · ΑΥΩ ΧΕ ΑΡΕ ΝΕΩΩΩΤ ΝΝΜΠΗΥΕ  
 ΝΤΟΟΤΗ · ΝΤΕΤΝΘΕΩΡΕΙ ΝΙΩΖΑΝΝΗΣ · ΧΕ ΕΡΖΝ ΤΜΠΤΑΓΜΟΥ  
 · ΝΤΕΤΝΚΑ ΠΚΕΣΕΕΠΕ ΝΝΕΙ ΑΠΟΣΤΟΛΟΣ ΝΣΩΤΝ · ΜΜΟΝ  
 ΟΥΜΕ ΝΟΥΩΤ ΠΕΤΕΡΕ ΠΕΥΧΟΕΙΣ ΜΕ ΜΜΟΟΥ ΝΖΗΤΗ :- ΑΥΩ  
 ΠΕΙΖΜΟΤ ΝΟΥΩΤ ΠΕ ΝΤΑΠΧΟΕΙΣ ΧΑΡΙΖΕ ΜΜΟΗ ΝΑΥ ΤΗΡΟΥ  
 ΕΡΧΩ ΜΜΟΣ ΝΑΥ · ΧΕ ΤΕΤΝΝΑΟΥΩΜ ΝΤΕΤΝΣΩ ΝΜΜΑΙ ΖΙΧΝ  
 ΤΕΤΡΑΠΕΖΑ ΝΤΑΜΝΤΕΡΟ :-

### Translation

My translation of the text follows:<sup>30</sup>

[. . .] “gathered with the God of Abraham” [Psalm 47:9].  
 And what is Abraham that you say of him that they gathered with the God of Abraham? And were there not any

30. I have settled on a compromise on the second-person singular pronouns which are translated as thou, thee, thy, and thine when referring to deity. While my personal preference would be to keep the distinction between singular and plural in the second person, these days preserving the distinction is considered unacceptable. However, the use of the plural English pronoun when addressing deity is too jarring to my sense of English—hence the compromise.

men on the earth at that time save Abraham alone since you praise him to all this extent?

Yea, said the prophet David, there were many men on the earth at the time of Abraham, but none of them knew God like Abraham because Abraham mocked them and their idols: They are not Gods, and he did not cease mocking them, until they became angry with him so that they might set fire to him. But when Abraham was thrown into the fire, the angel of the Lord came to him in that moment and saved him from the fire. It did not touch him at all. And his fame came forth in all the land of Mesopotamia because his God saved him from the fire of Sabor the Pharaoh. When Pharaoh heard the fame of Abraham that he was safe from the fire and<sup>31</sup> he was ashamed to speak with him because he was the one who had caused them to set fire to him.

Then Pharaoh collected twelve rulers of the people. He said to them: Go to this man Abraham to learn the truth of everything. How was he saved from the fire? And also take with you other strong men on the way (indeed, I have heard that the people surround him) lest they seize him from you, until you learn the truth of all these things.

And then the twelve rulers approached him; the strong men saw him, and they saw the people gathered to our father Abraham. The rulers said to him: Our father Abraham, where is your God, that one who saved you in the fire, so that we may see him ourselves, and may worship him, and you may teach us of a god who is powerful like your God, so that he may save us from the fire like you were saved. And then Abraham smiled. He said to them: O men of Mesopotamia, is it my custom to fashion gods like your

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31. Although the English here is awkward, the Coptic clearly has the unusual (for English) *and*.

gods? Then surely I would serve them completely. God is this one who saved me from the fire. My father never saw him; neither did he ever worship him.

The rulers said to him: Our lord, Abraham, didn't we tell you that your God is more honored than ours because he saved you from the fire?

Abraham said to them: But my God is more worthy of honor than gold and precious stones and anything of this world. But if you wish to see my God and to know that he is more worthy of honor than anything which is on the earth, look at the constellations that God created in the heaven; the sun and the moon and the stars and the clouds of the atmosphere let you know that he has power to save me from the fire. Immediately the crowds worshipped him, saying, Our father Abraham, you are not yet even forty years old. Who taught you this saying, this one you told us? If your God taught you this mystery, we ourselves wish to see a mystery so that he can make us believe him ourselves. And then Abraham withdrew himself to one side of the way and spread out his hands and prayed to God. And lightnings and thunders appeared in heaven and then God spoke with Abraham, saying, I am the God of everything. And then the face of Abraham shone like the face of an angel of God because of the glory of God who spoke with him. And immediately the crowd fell to the earth. They could not look in the face of Abraham because of the glory of God that appeared on him. And then they cried out, saying with one voice: Abraham, friend of God, entreat your god on our behalf so that this trouble over us might stop, that we might be allowed to speak with you. And immediately God blessed our father Abraham. He gave him beauty and grace in everyone's presence. And God revealed to him

many other mysteries, those which shall happen to him afterwards, and then he hid himself from him.

Then Abraham cried out, saying to everyone: O Pharaoh of all the strong men of the earth of our God, exalt him! And saying this was what became famous about Abraham, that “the rulers of the people met with the God of Abraham” [Psalm 47:9] so that the Pharaoh of all the strong men of the earth of God exalted him.

For truly, O holy prophet, our father David, the good is appropriate for you at all times, from your shepherding of sheep to your prophecy because your treasury was a treasury of life, O righteous king, our holy father, David.

Truly, O our holy fathers, the apostles, what is proper is that which every tongue and every lip say for your glory because the Christ, the life of all of us, calls you “my brethren and my friends” since you were on earth, without the great glory which he granted to you in the presence of his father and his holy angels, saying: “My father, I desire that the place where I am, that these which are mine might be so that they may see the glory that thou hast granted me because they have kept my word as I myself have kept thy word. O my holy father, the joy of thy word is that which is true and I and my apostles have kept it. I purify myself for their sake, my father, because they have become pure in the truth. O my father, all those whom thou hast called, I have drawn to me by the word of my mouth. They have not sought anything really from me save thy name so that thou mayest keep them so that none of them perish<sup>32</sup> save the son of destruction.”

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32. For an examination of this term in earlier phases of Egyptian, see John Gee, “Trial Marriage in Ancient Egypt? P. Louvre E. 7846 Reconsidered,” in *Res Severa Verum Gaudium: Festschrift für Karl-Theodor Zauzich*, ed. Friedhelm Hoffmann and Heinz-Josef Thissen (Leuven: Peeters, 2004), 224-30.

O our holy fathers, the apostles, if the Son of God commended you in the presence of his father because “they loved me,” it is appropriate for us to love you more. When you love a martyr or a just man, his is the prayer on you because their prayer has great effect in the presence of everyone.

If you do mercy in the name of these holy apostles, even if in an offering which you give in their name, even in a book which you give in their name, and you put it in the church, so that they can read in it, even anything of any sort at all which you give in their name, even in a banquet which will be made in their name for the hungry and the stranger and the needy, then rejoice for yourself, O my beloved, because they have already written your name in their book because they are those who pray perfectly. And the righteous and the martyrs are those who pray. But these apostles, they are judges in the valley of Jehoshaphat. John the Evangelist testifies, saying: If the son made you free, you will actually become free. This commandment which the father gave to his beloved son, the son, himself, granted to his holy apostles. Therefore, him whom the apostles will make free, the Son of God himself will make free. Him whom the apostles will forgive, Christ himself will forgive. And to him to whom the apostles shall give an inheritance, the son will also give an inheritance. But you recognize, O Christ-loving people, this saying which I will say: Do not obstruct me, neither despise me, but like an angel of God receive my saying for the good of your souls. If a brother or sister among you call one in the name of these holy apostles, if it is Peter, do not separate him from Andrew, his brother. If you give alms in the name of John, do not separate him from James, his brother. If you give it in the name of Philip, do not separate him from Bartholomew because it is only one convocation.

If you give it in the name of Thomas, do not separate it from Matthew because it is only one community and one occasion in their midst. If you give it in the name of Simon, do not separate him from James, the son of Alphaeus. You did not see Peter because he is the greatest among the apostles and because the keys of heaven are in his hands; nor did you look to John because he is among the immortal and leave out the rest of these apostles. No. It was only one love that their Lord loved them with, and this grace only is that which the Lord granted to all of them, telling them: You shall eat and drink with me at the table in my kingdom.

As is clear from the text, this story about Abraham is found inside a larger homily.

### Philological Notes

One of the first concerns we have is knowing whether the story about Abraham is originally in Coptic or Greek or in some other language.

A number of features of the story in the text are striking. There is a limited amount of Greek vocabulary in the story itself; only seventeen words are of Greek origin (ἀγγελος, ἀηρ, ἀλλὰ, ἀρχὼν, Δε, εἶδων, ζωὼν, κόσμος, λαός, μεσοποταμίᾱ, μυστήριον, πιστεύε, παρὰ, σὺνηθῶν, χάρις, θεὸς, ἰσχυρός). The text even uses the native word for king, ⲡⲣⲟ, which comes from *pr-ʿ3*, Pharaoh,<sup>33</sup> even though it is not clear that the Pharaoh in the text was king over Egypt. He has normally been equated with one of many Persian kings named Shapur.<sup>34</sup> If this is the case, the name has passed through Greek and not directly through Syriac as an intermediary, and the lack of Greek loan words is all the stranger. The other possibility for the name is as a corrupt version of the Fourteenth

33. Jaroslav Černý, *Coptic Etymological Dictionary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 138-39.

34. Winstedt, "Coptic Saints and Sinners," 233.

Dynasty ruler *Sh3b-r<sup>c</sup>*, about whom nothing is known other than his name.<sup>35</sup>

The story also contains only two sentences that use constructions with  $\bar{\text{N}}\bar{\text{G}}\bar{\text{I}}$ . The term  $\bar{\text{N}}\bar{\text{G}}\bar{\text{I}}$  derives from a native Egyptian term,<sup>36</sup> but it is used primarily for indicating the subject of a sentence, which is a nonnative use for this expression. It appears frequently in translation texts to preserve the syntax of the original Greek. Because of its use in translation texts, especially biblical texts, it passes into the Coptic language but is not used as frequently in native texts.

The vocabulary and syntax are signs that the story is not a translation but a retelling by native speakers that seems to come from an earlier period of Coptic.

### Homilies

The story about Abraham is part of a larger homily.

The text begins on its third page with a fragmentary quotation of Coptic Psalm 46:9 (Hebrew 47:10; KJV 47:9):  $\text{NAPXON NINAAOC AYCOY2 EZOYN MN PINOYTE NABPAAAM}$ . “The rulers of the people gathered with the God of Abraham.”<sup>37</sup> The story about Abraham is used to explain the wording in this particular Psalm. After the story about Abraham the homily shifts to extolling Jesus’s apostles and urges treating them as a group. After that, the homily, at least as we have it, ends.

The end of the preserved text, however, does not seem to be the end of the homily. Coptic homilies customarily end with an exhortation and benediction on the hearers, and a doxology, for example:

35. For the name, see Jürgen von Beckerath, *Handbuch der ägyptischen Königsnamen*, 2nd ed. (Mainz: von Zabern, 1999), 108–9; for what is known about this ruler, see Kim S. B. Ryholt, *The Political Situation in Egypt during the Second Intermediate Period* (Copenhagen: The Carsten Niebuhr Institute of Near Eastern Studies, 1997), 379.

36. Černý, *Coptic Etymological Dictionary*, 119.

37. E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Earliest Known Coptic Psalter* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1898), 51; William H. Worrell, *The Coptic Psalter in the Freer Collection* (New York: Macmillan, 1916), 99.

And we must produce fruit, and labour in the remembrance of His commandments; and we must make ourselves ready for His glorious rest, and then nothing whatsoever shall give us offence; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, to Whom be the glory, and with Him the Father, and the Holy Spirit, for all ages of ages. Amen.<sup>38</sup>

This example shows that the customary ending for a homily is absent in the text, and thus the end of the text is not the end of the original homily. So this homily is missing both its beginning and end.

### Traditions about Abraham

The text can also be seen in the light of other traditions about the biblical patriarch Abraham.

One of the more interesting features of the text is its mention that an angel saved Abraham from the fire. This is one of the unique and interesting features of the story, and it is missing from Zoega's notice. Zoega's entire notice reads as follows: "NUM. CCXII.\* Folium unum lacerum, paginae  $\bar{\Gamma}$ ,  $\bar{\Lambda}$ , characteres classis VI. De Abrahamo, ΠΕΝΕΙΩΤ ΛΒΡΑΖΑΜ, qui a Sapore rege Mesopotamiae in rogam coniectus salvus evasit, quo facto rex ad eum misit duodecim principes populi ut interrogarent, quis esset Deus ejus qui eum servaverat."<sup>39</sup> "Number 222\*. One torn folio, pages  $\bar{\Gamma}$  [3],  $\bar{\Lambda}$  [4], in class VI characters. About Abraham, ΠΕΝΕΙΩΤ ΛΒΡΑΖΑΜ, who escaped

38. Athanasius, *On Mercy and Judgment*, fol. 86a-b, in E. A. Wallis Budge, *Coptic Homilies in the Dialect of Upper Egypt* (New York: AMS 1977), 211. Cf. Athanasius, *Concerning the Soul and the Body*, fol. 162a, in Budge, *Coptic Homilies*, 274; Athanasius, *On the Labourers in the Vineyard*, fol. 115b-116a, in Budge, *Coptic Homilies*, 234; Theophilus, *On Repentance and Continence*, fol. 104b, in Budge, *Coptic Homilies*, 225; Proclus, *Installation Sermon*, fol. 122a-b, in Budge, *Coptic Homilies*, 240; Basil, *On the End of the World*, fol. 141b-142a, in Budge, *Coptic Homilies*, 257; Eusebius, *Concerning the Canaanitish Woman*, fol. 175a, in Budge, *Coptic Homilies*, 285; Flavianus, *Encomium on Demetrius*, fol. 45b, in E. A. Wallis Budge, *Coptic Martyrdoms* (London: British Museum, 1914), 408; Proclus, *Against the Dogma of Nestorius*, fol. 130a-b, in Budge, *Coptic Homilies*, 247; Timothy, *Discourse on the Abbaton*, fol. 32a-b, in Budge, *Coptic Martyrdoms*, 496; Apa John, *On Repentance and Continence*, fol. 60a-b, in Budge, *Coptic Homilies*, 191; Apa John, *Concerning Susanna*, fol. 76a-b, in Budge, *Coptic Homilies*, 203.

39. Zoega, *Catalogus Codicum Coptiorum Manuscriptorum*, 548.

alive after being thrown into a funeral pyre by Sapore, the king of Mesopotamia, because of which, the king sent twelve princes of the people to him to inquire who is that God who saved him.” The account’s description of Abraham being saved by an angel contrasts with the other noncanonical accounts of the involvement of the angels in the attempted sacrifice of Abraham, which are related.

The story of Abraham being delivered from the fire in Chaldea is known in Christian sources both in the East and in the West. In the West, it was preserved by Jerome and a few French clergy. In the East, it had a history of more vigorous retelling. But none of the Christian traditions outside this Coptic text preserve any account of the involvement of angels.

A version of the Abraham story attributed to Eliezer ben Jacob held that the angel Michael descended to rescue Abraham from the fiery furnace, but this is a minority version to the rabbis’ version that God himself rescued him.<sup>40</sup> Two rabbis named Eliezer ben Jacob are known. One is supposed to date from the first century and the other, a disciple of Akiba, from the second century. The recorded account dates somewhere between the fifth and tenth centuries.

The *Midrash Rabbah* Exodus claims that the angels Michael and Gabriel asked to save Abraham when he was cast into the furnace but that God himself decided to save him.<sup>41</sup> The recorded account may date as late as the twelfth century.

In the Babylonian Talmud, which dates between the fifth and eighth centuries, Gabriel alone asks God to save Abraham, but God himself intervenes.<sup>42</sup>

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40. *Midrash Rabbah*, Genesis 44:13, in Tvedtnes et al., *Traditions about the Early Life of Abraham*, 99; *Midrash Rabbah*, Song of Songs 1:12.1, in Tvedtnes et al., *Traditions about the Early Life of Abraham*, 116; *Midrash Rabbah*, Song of Songs 3:11.1, in Tvedtnes et al., *Traditions about the Early Life of Abraham*, 117.

41. *Midrash Rabbah*, Exodus 18:5, in Tvedtnes et al., *Traditions about the Early Life of Abraham*, 103.

42. Babylonian Talmud, *Pesahim* 118a, in Tvedtnes et al., *Traditions about the Early Life of Abraham*, 120.

The medieval Jewish *Chronicles of Jerahmeel*, attributed to the twelfth-century Jerahmeel ben Solomon, tells the version of the story from *Midrash Rabbah* Exodus, elaborating the angels' involvement by having the angels (in the plural) quarrel and naming Michael and Gabriel specifically,<sup>43</sup> but also adds the version from the Babylonian Talmud.<sup>44</sup>

Kaʿb al-Aḥbār, a seventh-century Yemenite Jew who converted to Islam, brought the Jewish accounts of the attempted sacrifice of Abraham into Islam. In Kaʿb al-Aḥbār's account, Gabriel asks Abraham while he is flying through the air after having been launched from a catapult if he needs anything. Abraham denies it saying that he will give his request to God alone. God then heard and saved him.<sup>45</sup> Kaʿb al-Aḥbār brings into Islam the tradition cited in the Babylonian Talmud that the angel Gabriel is involved and then God saved Abraham himself. This version of the story adds the picturesque element of the fire being so hot that Abraham must be delivered into the flames by a catapult.

The eighth-century Arabic author, Ibn Ishāq, whose grandfather had been a Jewish slave from Babylon who converted to Islam, compiled a tremendous number of Islamic traditions. He had hung around the *warraqs*, who sold Jewish and Christian scriptures, commentaries, and apocryphal works, as well as copies of the Qurʾan. In his version, it is not the angels who ask to be able to save Abraham but "heaven and earth and all the creatures in it except men and Jinn" who do so. But God himself steps in to save him and then sends the Angel of Shade to amuse Abraham in the fire.<sup>46</sup>

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43. *Chronicles of Jerahmeel* 34:13, in Tvedtnes et al., *Traditions about the Early Life of Abraham*, 133.

44. *Chronicles of Jerahmeel* 35:3, in Tvedtnes et al., *Traditions about the Early Life of Abraham*, 134.

45. Kaʿb al-Aḥbār 13-14, in Tvedtnes, et al., *Traditions about the Early Life of Abraham*, 301.

46. Extracts from Ibn Ishāq, *Kitab al-mubtadaʿ*, 13-14, in Tvedtnes et al., *Traditions about the Early Life of Abraham*, 307-8.

The eighth-century historian Ishāq ibn Bishr adds to the account of Ka‘b al-Aḥbār the detail that the angel Isrāfīl cooled the way before Abraham, and Gabriel and Isrāfīl brought Abraham clothing from paradise and kept him company the three days that he was in the fire.<sup>47</sup>

The tenth-century historian al-Ṭabarī repeats Ibn Ishāq’s story, ascribing it to him.<sup>48</sup> He says that the angel Gabriel quenched the fire by saying: “O fire! be coolness and peace for Abraham,” and also includes some other comments by Ibn ‘Abbās about how the cold that God commanded to quench the fire would have killed Abraham had it not been followed by peace.<sup>49</sup>

Other Arabic authors repeat the story in al-Ṭabarī with variations. The eleventh-century theologian al-Tha‘labī repeats al-Ṭabarī’s story, which he ascribes to Ibn Ishāq. The comments of Ibn ‘Abbās, he notes, are echoed in ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib.<sup>50</sup> The eleventh-century chronographer al-Ṭarafī reports the story as taken from al-Ṭabarī.<sup>51</sup> The eleventh-century theologian al-Zamakhsharī repeats a shortened version of al-Ṭabarī’s story.<sup>52</sup> The twelfth-century Imami scholar Rāwandī repeats the story from al-Ṭabarī but claims to have it from a very different chain of authority.<sup>53</sup> Other Arabic versions of the story occur later, but they need not concern us here.

An undated Hebrew text first published in the eighteenth century in Constantinople called *The Story of Abraham Our Father from*

47. Ishāq ibn Bishr, *Mubtada’ al-dunyā wa-qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā’*, folio 168B, in Tvedtnes et al., *Traditions about the Early Life of Abraham*, 323.

48. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-rusūl wa-al-mulūk*, 252-70 (30), in Tvedtnes et al., *Traditions about the Early Life of Abraham*, 340-41.

49. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-rusūl wa-al-mulūk*, 252-70 (30-34), in Tvedtnes et al., *Traditions about the Early Life of Abraham*, 341-42.

50. Al-Tha‘labī, *Kitāb ‘arā’is al-majālis fī qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā’*, 2:10, in Tvedtnes et al., *Traditions about the Early Life of Abraham*, 364-65.

51. Al-Ṭarafī, *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā’*, 93-96, in Tvedtnes et al., *Traditions about the Early Life of Abraham*, 378.

52. Al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf ḥaqā’iq al-tanzīl*, 2:578, in Tvedtnes et al., *Traditions about the Early Life of Abraham*, 412-13.

53. Rāwandī, *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā’*, 4, 6, in Tvedtnes et al., *Traditions about the Early Life of Abraham*, 415-16.

*What Happened to Him with Nimrod* preserves Ka‘b al-Aḥbār’s account of the angel Gabriel conversing with Abraham as he is lying on the catapult.<sup>54</sup> This shows interaction from Muslim sources and a willingness to borrow back details from them.

The undated Hebrew text *Midrash of Abraham Our Father* takes the Babylonian Talmud’s account and changes the angel from Gabriel to Michael, a slight return to the *Midrash Rabbah* versions attributed to Eliezar.<sup>55</sup>

Placing the Coptic account of the angel delivering Abraham from the fire into the other accounts of the angel’s involvement with the deliverance of Abraham shows a stark contrast with most Jewish and Muslim versions of the story. The Coptic version somehow preserves a detail otherwise only preserved by Eliezar ben Jacob and rejected by the majority of the rabbis.

### Martyrdoms

In our focus on this as an Abraham story, we should not forget that this story has some affinities with the rich tradition of Coptic martyrdoms. Coptic martyrdoms, as such accounts are called, take an almost sadistic pleasure in describing gruesome tortures inflicted on the martyrs. Burning the martyr is one of these tropes.

In the second martyrdom of Apa Victor, Victor is thrown into the furnace that heats the baths, and then “Michael the holy archangel came down from heaven and went into the furnace of the bath and spread under Apa Victor his holy cloak and caused the flame of the fire to become like the wind of the first hour. (ΛΥΒΩΚ ΕΒΣΟΥΝ ΕΠΙΜΤΩΚ ΝΤΣΙΟΟΥΝ. ΛΥΠΩΡΩ ΖΑΡΟϢ ΝΑΠΑ ΒΙΚΤΩΡ ΝΤΕϢΣΤΟΛΗ ΕΤΟΥΛΑΒ. ΛΥΩ ΛΥΤΡΕΠΩΛΣ ΜΠΚΩΣΤΩ ΩΩΠΕ ΝΘΕ ΝΟΥΤΗΥ ΜΠΝΑΥ ΝΩΩΡΠ.)”<sup>56</sup> Again in the fourth martyrdom of Apa Victor, Victor

54. *The Story of Abraham Our Father from What Happened to Him with Nimrod* 32, in Tvedtnes et al., *Traditions about the Early Life of Abraham*, 174.

55. *Midrash of Abraham Our Father* 4, in Tvedtnes et al., *Traditions about the Early Life of Abraham*, 179.

56. Second Martyrdom of Apa Victor, fol. 13b-14a, in Budge, *Coptic Martyrdoms*, 24-25, 276-77.

is thrown into a furnace that has been heated for four days, but he is not harmed.<sup>57</sup> He is finally beheaded. The manuscript for Apa Victor dates to AD 951. The detail about Michael coming down and making the fire like the morning breeze is shared with the Islamic accounts about the sacrifice of Abraham.

An exceptional example is the martyrdom of Eustathius. This martyrdom is exceptional in many ways. First, it takes place during the reigns of Trajan and Hadrian rather than of Diocletian, when most Coptic martyrdoms are set. Second, it is modeled on the recognitions genre. Third, there are no protracted tortures; the family is put to death inside a burning bull.<sup>58</sup> The miracle, like that of Njál and his wife in *Brennu-Njals Saga*, is that the bodies are preserved.<sup>59</sup>

The treatment of human sacrifice by burning in the Abraham homily differs from those in the martyrdoms because Abraham is not repeatedly tortured and then put to death. He is saved by an angel and that is the end of the attempts on his life. More verbiage is spent on the aftereffects of the attempted burning than describing the act itself, which seems to be of excessive interest in Coptic martyrdoms.

### Conclusion

The Coptic homily on Abraham interacts with various genres and types of stories available in Coptic and in the wider ancient world. Like most Egyptian stories about Abraham, it does not fit into the standard mold that we have come to expect from other Jewish, Christian, and Muslim accounts of Abraham's attempted sacrifice.

I am certain that Kent can think of other Egyptian accounts in which a king attempts to put Abraham to death only to have him

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57. Fourth Martyrdom of Apa Victor, fol. 21b-22a, in Budge, *Coptic Martyrdoms*, 37-38, 290.

58. The Life of Saints Eustathius and Theopiste, fol. 20b-22a, in Budge, *Coptic Martyrdoms*, 125-27, 378-79.

59. *Brennu-Njals Saga* 128, 131. Interestingly, Njál and Bergthora and their grandson Thord are covered with an ox hide.

delivered by an angel and also have Abraham afterwards attempting to teach the king and his court about the true God through the use of astronomy.

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