

## The Apocalypse of Elijah

English translation made from the text in Georg Steindorff *Die Apokalypse des Elias* (1899)<sup>1</sup>

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Twenty-two unpaginated folios of an Akhmimic text with fragments of a 23rd contain two separate texts: the first an anonymous apocalypse (pp.1-18), the second the *Apocalypse of Elijah* (pp.19-44), which, according to Steindorff, is a separate text that starts on a new page. In addition there are seven folios of a Sahidic text, containing fragments of an apocalypse of Sophonias and a parallel text of *Elijah*. All of these folios were part of a relatively small book in the collection of the library of the White Monastery at Sohag in Upper Egypt on the other side of the Nile from Akhmim, much of which has found its way piecemeal into European collections. The title 'Apocalypse of Elijah' can be supplied from another fragment in the Berlin Museum.

Almost twenty years after Steindorff's work had appeared, E.A. Wallis Budge published a series of Biblical texts in the British Museum *Coptic Biblical Texts* (1912). Codex 7594 contains texts of *Deuteronomy* (partial), *Jonah* (almost complete) and the *Acts of the Apostles* (partial). The texts in the binding, essential in dating the book, were studied by Idris Bell (p. xiv-xvii) : one vellum fragment of a passage of *Daniel* in Greek (dated 4th cent.) and fifteen documentary Greek texts

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<sup>1</sup> On the rare occasion where I differ from Steindorff I make this clear. I have also had the opportunity to use that essential work of reference not available to Steindorff: WE Crum *Coptic Dictionary* (=CD), first published in its entirety in 1939. I refer to Steindorff's work as *Elijah*.

(13 of them accounts and 2 contracts), palaeographically assignable to the 3rd-4th cent. At the end of *Acts* there is a colophon in a cursive hand (p. 270-271) dated by F. Kenyon to the 4th cent. and translated by Budge (p. lv).<sup>2</sup> The first sixteen lines are more or less complete. The Sahidic text is pretty well identical to the opening passage of *Elijah* and has no obvious connection with *Acts*.<sup>3</sup> I happened upon the colophon quite by accident before learning that Carl Schmidt had already identified the relationship between the two passages and published the BM text in *Sitzungsberichte der königlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin [phil.-hist. Klasse]* (1925) pp.312 ff.<sup>4</sup>

Steindorff's book can be downloaded at

[http://openlibrary.org/books/OL23387383M/Die\\_Apokalypse\\_des\\_Elias](http://openlibrary.org/books/OL23387383M/Die_Apokalypse_des_Elias). An extensive treatment of the Antichrist, an important figure in this text, can be found in Wilhelm Bousset *Der Antichrist* (tr. by A.H. Keane), also downloadable at

<http://archive.org/details/antichristlegendoobous>.

The translation that follows is not intended to be a work of original scholarship, merely a translation of the Coptic text presented by Steindorff. I have included most but not all of his Biblical references in the text.

p. 19

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<sup>2</sup> Wallis Budge was enormously prolific and published texts in many languages. The result is that the many errors in his work betray the haste in which it was done. The errors in Codex 7594 were subsequently identified and corrected by Sir H. Thompson in *New Biblical Papyrus* (1913)

<sup>3</sup> Budge gives several examples of Syriac and Ethiopic books containing a wide variety of texts written on blank pages of the book, presumably by an owner, that have are quite unrelated to the contents of the book.

<sup>4</sup> I am grateful to Alin Suciu for this reference.

The word of the Lord happened to me,<sup>5</sup> saying. "Son of man, say to this people: "Why do you add sins to your sins and give cause for wrath to the Lord God who made you.<sup>6</sup> Do not love the world or that which is in it,<sup>7</sup> for the pride of the world is that of the devil together with its dissolution. Remember that the Lord of glory who created everything has been merciful to you so that he might save us from the captivity of this age. For many times the devil has desired not to let the sun shine upon the earth and not to let the earth bear fruit, wishing to devour people like a roaring fire,

p. 20

wishing to devour them like water.<sup>8</sup> For this reason the God of glory has been merciful. He sent his son to the world so that he might save us from this captivity. He did not tell an angel who came to us, or archangel or any other power,<sup>9</sup> but he changed himself into human form, coming to us so that he might save us [... ]<sup>10</sup> Therefore be for him children [...]<sup>11</sup>, he being for you a father. Remember that he has prepared for you thrones and crowns <sup>12</sup>in heaven, for everyone who listens to me will receive the thrones and crowns among those belonging to me.<sup>13</sup>" The Lord said, 'I will write my name on their

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<sup>5</sup> A standard opening for prophetic books of the Old Testament (e.g. Micah, Hosea) and is also used in Christian apocryphal text known as the Apocalypse of Paul,<sup>3</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Similar wording in the Apocalypse of Paul, 3

<sup>7</sup> I .Jo. 2,15

<sup>8</sup> Perhaps in the sense of 'inundation'.

<sup>9</sup> The same idea can be found in c.7,2 of the *Ep. ad Diognetum*, a 2nd cent. text written in defence of Christianity.

<sup>10</sup> Not enough space for 'from this captivity'.

<sup>11</sup> Empty space may be due to a scribal deletion

<sup>12</sup> cf. Rev. 2,10 and 20,4

<sup>13</sup> This phrase, as Steindorff observes, has little meaning here and may have strayed in from somewhere else.

forehead and I will seal their

p. 21

right hand.<sup>14</sup> They will not be hungry, they will not be thirsty nor will the children of lawlessness have power over them nor will the thrones<sup>15</sup> prevent them, but they will walk with angels to my city. The sinners, however, will be shamed, and they will not pass beyond<sup>16</sup> the thrones, but the thrones of death<sup>17</sup> will seize and overpower them, for the angels do not agree with them and they have estranged themselves from his resting places. Hear, wise men of the earth, about the deceivers who will multiply at the end of the ages, for they will adopt for themselves teachings that are not of God, they will disbelieve the law of God, those

p. 22

whose god is their belly<sup>18</sup> saying. "There is no fasting and God has not created it", estranging themselves from the covenant<sup>19</sup> and depriving themselves of the glorious promises<sup>20</sup>. These are fixed for all ages in firm faith. Therefore, let not those deceive you. Remember that the Lord created all fasts when he created the heavens as a benefit for people because of passions and desires that assail you<sup>21</sup>, so that the evil one may not scorch you, but it is a holy fasting that I have created, said

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<sup>14</sup> cf. Rev. 3,12 (forehead), 7,3 (right hand) and 7,16 (thirst)

<sup>15</sup> Symbol of power, as in Col. 1,16

<sup>16</sup> The verb has to be emended: this is the meaning assigned to it in Crum *Coptic Dictionary* 497a

<sup>17</sup> Text has to be emended here

<sup>18</sup> Text makes no sense. The above translation is provided by the text in BM 7594.

<sup>19</sup> Scribal omission. BM 7594 reads 'of God'.

<sup>20</sup> cf. Amos 9, 6

<sup>21</sup> cf. Jas. 4,1

the Lord. He who fasts at all

p. 23

times will not sin, being zealous and fighting. Let the holy person fast. The impure one who fasts makes the Lord and the angels angry and he tortures his soul, gathering for himself anger against the day of anger.<sup>22</sup> Pure fasting is what I have created with a pure heart and pure hands. It forgives sins, it cures illnesses, it forces out demons, it is effective up to the throne of God. In addition to these things,<sup>23</sup> sins are forgiven with pure prayers. Who of you will go to the field proud of his skill without

p. 24

a tool in his hand, or who will go to war without wearing armour ? If he is found, will he not be killed because he has despised the office of the king ? In this way it is not possible for anyone to go to the holy place when he is doubtful . The one who is doubtful in his prayer, then [...] <sup>24</sup> and nor do the angels agree with him. Therefore be of one mind at all times in the Lord so that you will understand at every moment<sup>25</sup>. Because of the Assyrian kings and the dissolution of heaven and earth and what is below the earth, now therefore they will not prevail against

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<sup>22</sup> cf. Ro. 2,5

<sup>23</sup> Following Steindorff 's suggestion.

<sup>24</sup> 'the others are against him' is a possible translation.

<sup>25</sup> Sahidic reads 'so that you will understand everything'.

them, said the Lord, and they will not be afraid

p. 25

in war. When they see a king rising in the north, he will be called the Assyrian king. The king of injustice will multiply his wars against Egypt and its confusion<sup>26</sup>. The land will sigh together because your children will be seized. There are many who will wish for death in those days. But death will elude them. And a king will rise in the west, and he will be called the king of peace<sup>27</sup>. He will go across the sea like a lion roaring<sup>28</sup>, he will kill the king of injustice, he will avenge himself on Egypt in wars and much bloodshed.

p.26

It will happen in those days that he orders a peace from Egypt and an [empty]<sup>29</sup>gift. He will give peace to these [saints, saying], 'One is the name of God. He will give honours to the saints and a high place to the saints. He will give empty gifts to the house of God, he will guilefully turn from the cities of Egypt without their knowing it, he will count the holy places, he will measure the heathen idols, he will count their wealth, he will set up priests, he will order the wise men of the land and the most important people to be seized and they will be taken to

<sup>26</sup> See W. Bousset *The Antichrist Legend* (tr. A. H. Keane) p.81

<sup>27</sup> This passage seems to be a reference to the aggression of the Seleucid monarchs of the 2nd cent. BC, in particular Antiochus IV, who was told very firmly in 168 BC by the Roman legate Popilius Laenas near Alexandria that Syrian interference in Egypt's affairs did not coincide with Rome's wishes and that Antiochus should withdraw (Livy 45,12). This unconcealed display of power politics still resonates so much that the 'line in the sand' has become a well-established figure of speech in English. The incident was clearly a dim memory for the writer of this text.

<sup>28</sup> cf. I Pet. 5,8

<sup>29</sup> Supplied by the Sahidic and provided below in line 9 of the text.

the metropolis on the sea, they saying, 'A

p.27

child in robbery<sup>30</sup>. The cities of Egypt will all sigh in those days for they will not hear the voice of the one who sells and the one who buys<sup>31</sup>. The market places of the cities of Egypt will become dust. All who are in Egypt will weep. They will long for death. Death will flee and leave them<sup>32</sup>. In those days they will run to the rocks and jump off, saying, 'Fall on us'<sup>33</sup>, and they will still not die. A double tribulation<sup>34</sup> will increase over the whole land in those days. He will order kings to seize all women who are breast feeding to be brought to him bound and breast feed dragons

p.28

to bring up their blood from their breasts and give them to the poisoned arrows.<sup>35</sup> Because of the difficulties in the cities he will also order every small child, twelve years and younger, to be seized and to be taught<sup>36</sup> to throw arrows. The midwife who is upon earth will

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<sup>30</sup> Steindorff has no note on this passage, which is clearly corrupt. The Sahidic 4, 33ff. is quite different from the Akhmimic version.

<sup>31</sup> cf. Rev. 18, 11

<sup>32</sup> cf. Rev. 9, 6

<sup>33</sup> cf. Hos. 10,8; Lk 23, 30; Rev. 6, 16

<sup>34</sup> cf. Sap. 11, 13

<sup>35</sup> Based on CD 102b

<sup>36</sup> Steindorff is unable to make sense of this passage. I think it might be: **σετεογε ατ<σ>εβαγ** 'one should be appointed (lit. given) to teach them'. For 'throw arrows' cf. CD 404a, where **ρεφτικατε** is the equivalent of **τοξοτης**

mourn. The one who has given birth will look up to heaven, saying, 'Why did I sit<sup>37</sup> at brick to bear children to the earth.' The childless woman and the virgin will therefore rejoice, saying 'It is time for us to rejoice because we have no children on earth, but our children are in heaven.' In those days three

p.29

Persian kings will arise and they will take captive the Jews who are in Egypt and take them to Jerusalem to settle in it and live there. Then if you hear<sup>38</sup> that separation is what is in Jerusalem, tear up your garments, priests of the land, for it will not be long before he comes, the son of destruction. The lawless one will appear in those days in the holy places. The Persian kings in those days will escape to ....<sup>39</sup> with the Assyrian kings. Four kings will battle with three, they will fight for three years in that place until they take the wealth of the temple that is in that place. In those days

p.30

blood will flow from Qus<sup>40</sup> to Memphis. The river of Egypt will become blood<sup>41</sup>, it will not be possible to drink from it for three days. Woe to Egypt and those who live there. In those days a king will arise in the

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<sup>37</sup> Steindorff is unable to make sense of this passage. **ⲧⲟⲃⲉ** probably means 'brick' here and refers to the birth brick. The AE goddess of childbirth Meskhenet is sometimes depicted as a brick.

<sup>38</sup> The meaning is unclear, but I have used the conditional form in the absence of anything better.

<sup>39</sup> Crum *CD* gives this instance as the only one known to him. Perhaps place name? Does not look like a verb

<sup>40</sup> Always an important place because of its position as the starting point for travel to the Red Sea. The 14th cent. writer of a Coptic grammar, Athanasius, was a resident of the city.

<sup>41</sup> One of the best known passages from classical literature to use this image is the Sibyl's prophecy in *Aeneid* VI, 87: *et Thybrim multo spumantem sanguine cerno*.



city called the City of the Sun<sup>42</sup> and the entire land will be in a state of turmoil and will flee down<sup>43</sup> to Memphis. In the sixth year the Persian kings will ambush the Assyrian king in Memphis and kill him. The Persians will avenge themselves on the land and order all the heathens<sup>44</sup> and the lawless to be killed. They will order the holy temples to be built and redouble their gifts

p.31

to the house of God. They will say, 'One is the name of God'. The entire land will worship the Persians. The others, who have not died from the blows, will say, "It is a just king whom the Lord has sent to us that the land may not become waste. He will order that nothing be given to the king for three years and six months. The land will be full of good things in great welfare. The living will go before the dead, saying, "Arise and be with us in this rest." In the fourth year of that king, the king of lawlessness will appear, saying, 'I am Christ,' though he is not, do not believe him. Christ, when he comes, comes like

p. 32

a collecting place<sup>45</sup> of doves, a crown of doves surrounding him, walking on the clouds of heaven, the sign of the cross drawn around him. The entire world will see him like the sun that has shone from the

<sup>42</sup> Probably the one in Egypt.

<sup>43</sup> The text has to be emended slightly to make the verb possible. Steindorff writes 'up', but geography requires 'down' here.

<sup>44</sup> This is a standard translation of  $\zeta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon\omicron\varsigma$ , but it is difficult to understand quite what the writer means.

<sup>45</sup> The Coptic word  $\kappa\alpha\mu\iota\tau$  has the meaning of 'pool, tank'. *CD*, 339b suggests 'collecting place' for this passage.

east to the west. This is how he will come, all his angels surrounding him. The son of lawlessness will also throw out his hand to stand in the holy places. He will say<sup>46</sup> to the sun, 'Fall, and it falls', he will say 'Shine, and it shines', he will say 'Become dark, and it does', he will say to the moon, 'Become blood, and it does.' He will go with them from heaven, he will walk on the sea and

p.33

the rivers as on dry land. The lame will walk. He will cause the deaf to hear, he will cause the dumb to speak, he will cause the blind to see, he will purify the lepers and heal the sick. Those who have demons, he will drive them out. He will increase his signs and miracles before everyone. He will do things that Christ did, with the sole exception of raising the dead. Through this you will know him that he is the son of lawlessness, that he has no power over the soul<sup>47</sup>. I will tell you about his signs so that you will know him: he is a small [...] boy with thin legs, a spot of white hair on his forehead, [...],

p.34

[...] <sup>48</sup> his eyebrows coming to his ears, a [...] on his hands.<sup>49</sup> He will

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<sup>46</sup> cf. 2 Thess. 2, 4

<sup>47</sup> For this and later descriptions of the Antichrist cf. Bousset *Antichrist Legend* ch.12

<sup>48</sup> Word clearly readable but unknown. First part means 'cut', but the second part is unknown, but a suggested meaning is 'bald spot'.

<sup>49</sup> The dots indicate words that are unknown. The following is a translation of a Jewish Midrash cited by W. Bousset *Dera Antichrist* (1895) p. 102: 'he will be bald and have a small and a large eye; his right arm will be a handbreadth long, the left two and a half cubits; on his forehead will be a mark, his right ear is blocked up, but the other one open.' This is only one of many descriptions of the Antichrist, where the imagination tends to be relatively unconfined.

change before those who look after him. He will become a small child, he will become an old man, he will change in all his signs, but the sign of his forehead is unchangeable. In this you will know him that he is the son of lawlessness. The virgin, whose name is Tabitha,<sup>50</sup> will hear that the shameless one revealed himself in the holy places. She will clothe herself in garments of fine linen and pursue him to Judaea, reproving him, as far as Jerusalem, 'O shameless one, son of lawlessness, the one who has been an enemy to all the saints,

p. 35

shameless one,<sup>51</sup> child of lawlessness, are you not ashamed to do this, misleading the people of God before whom you have no shame? Do you not know that we live in the Lord, they saying the words they have overcome him they saying.<sup>52</sup> 'In addition to these things we will leave the flesh of the spirit. We will kill you, it not being possible for you to speak on that day, for we are strong at all times in the Lord. You are an enemy of the Lord at all times. The shameless one will listen, he will become angry, he will wage war on them, and the entire city will surround them. On that day they will cry jubilantly up to heaven, shining, the entire people seeing them and the whole world. He will not overcome them, the son of law-

p. 36

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<sup>50</sup> In the Arabic version of Joseph the Carpenter (32) Tabitha, Enoch and Elijah are killed in a confrontation with the Antichrist.

<sup>51</sup> Emended by Steindorff to provide this reading

<sup>52</sup> It looks as if the Akhmimic text may have been derailed here slightly and Steindorff recommends the Sahidic version as more intelligible: 'Do you not know that we live in the Lord to reprove you at all times, when you say, "I have prevailed over these things. We will leave the flesh of the body ..."'

lessness. He will go to the land and seek to sin against the people. He will pursue all the saints and they will be brought bound with the priests of the land and he will kill them and he will [... ..] and their eyes will be plucked out with iron picks. He will remove their skin and their heads. He will bring the priests one by one and order vinegar and a salt solution to be brought to their noses. Those unable to withstand the tortures of that king, they will take gold and flee on the ferry<sup>53</sup> to desert places. They will sleep like one asleep. The Lord will receive their spirit and their souls. Their

p. 37

bodies will become stones. Wild beasts will not eat them until the final day of the great judgement. They will arise and find a resting place, but they will not be in the kingdom of Christ like those who resisted. For the Lord said, 'I will give them (the opportunity) to sit at my<sup>54</sup> right hand. They will receive grace over the others. They will be kings over the son of lawlessness. They will see the dissolution of heaven and earth. They will receive thrones and the glory of crowns. The sixty just people will sit on the throne, these who are prepared for this hour. They will be armed with armour of God. They will hasten to Jerusalem and do battle with the shameless one, saying, 'Every power

p.38

which the prophets have given since the beginning, you have exercised

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<sup>53</sup> This translates the text as it is. Whether it needs to be emended is difficult to say.

<sup>54</sup> The pronoun in the text has to be emended to give this reading

them, but you have been unable to raise the dead, because you do not have the power over the soul. This is how we know that you are the son of lawlessness.' He will hear, be angry and order altars to be set alight, the just to be bound, to be put up and burned. On that day the heart of many will become hard against him<sup>55</sup>. They will flee from him, saying, 'This is not Christ. Christ does not kill the just. He does not persecute people when he seeks (them), but he persuades them with signs and wonders. In those days Christ will have mercy on those who are his. He will send his angels from heaven, they making sixty thousand and four hundred, each one with six

p.39

wings. The roar will move heaven and earth, as they praise and give glory. These on whose forehead is written the name of Christ, on whose hands the seal. The great and small will be taken up on their wings and removed from before his anger. Then Gabriel and Uriel will make a column of light<sup>56</sup>, preceding them to the holy earth, and they will be given to eat from the tree of life and they will wear [white] clothes [... ..]. The angels will watch over them. They will not thirst [nor will the son of lawlessness] prevail [against them. On that day] the earth [will tremble ...] *the next line is unreadable*

p.40

the birds will fall dead to the earth, the land will become dessicated, the waters of the sea will dry up, the sinners will groan upon the earth,

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<sup>55</sup> Pronoun in the text has to be emended.

<sup>56</sup> cf. Ex. 13, 21

saying, 'What have you done to us, son of lawlessness, saying that you were Christ, when in fact you are the devil ?<sup>57</sup> It is not possible for you to save yourself, and you want to save us. You have made signs before us until you estranged us from Christ who saved us. Woe to us, because we listened to you [... *most of the next two lines are missing ...*] famine [ ...] a just [person we will worship him] or where is [he, the one who teaches us that may ] call on him ..

p.41

[...] in a court of truth. On that day the hills and the earth will roar, the [ ...] <sup>58</sup> will say to each other, 'Have you heard today the voice of man walking without coming to the judgement of the Son of God ? The sins of each one will confront him in the place where they were committed, whether those of the day or those of the night. Those belonging to the just and the [...] will see the sinners being punished and those who pursued them and have betrayed them to death. The sinners then [...] or they will see the place of the just, and in this way there will be grace. In those, what the just

p.42

ask for, they will be given. On that day the Lord will judge heaven and earth. He will judge those who have transgressed in heaven and those who have done so on earth. He will judge the shepherds of the people.

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<sup>57</sup> I have changed the direct speech of the original to indirect speech to avoid using too many quotation marks

<sup>58</sup> Word is uncertain. Might be connected with the AE word for 'evil' *hw3* cf. J. Černý *Coptic Etymological Dictionary* (1975) p.

He will ask them about the flock of sheep. They will tell him without deceit. After these things Elijah and Enoch will come down and put aside the flesh of this world and put on their spiritual flesh. They will pursue the the son of lawlessness and kill him, he being unable to speak. On that day he will dissolve before them like

p.43

ice dissolved by fire. He will be destroyed by like a dragon in which there is no breath. They will say to him, 'Your time has [ ...]<sup>59</sup> to you. So now you will be destroyed together with those who believe in you. They will perish in the pit of the abyss, which will be closed<sup>60</sup> on them. On that day Christ will come from heaven, the king of all the saints. He will set fire to this earth. He will spend a thousand years on it, because the sinners have ruled on it. He will make a new heaven and a new earth. No devil [ ... ] is in them, as he goes up and down, they being with

p.44

the angels at all times and with Christ a thousand years.

## The apocalypse of Elijah

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<sup>59</sup> The meaning is clearly 'Your time is up', but it is not clear to me how the Coptic says this (pace CD 78a, which quotes this passage but does not offer a translation of it). Steindorff's translation is 'Deine Zeit ist dir herbeigeführt worden', which seems to me a fairly tortuous way of making an essentially transitive verb 'bring' into an intransitive one, without any attempt at passivization. At no point in his notes does Steindorff offer an emendation of the text, such as ⲓⲛⲉ to read 'your time has come to you'.

<sup>60</sup> This verb or form of a verb is attested in only one other instance : the Akhmimic text known as the *Epistula Apostolorum* cf. CD 743a.