

DOES GOD HAVE A BODY?

Some thoughts on a recent book:

**Dmitrij BUMAZHNOV, *Der Mensch als Gottes Bild im christlichen Ägypten* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006) (Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum, 34). X + 262 S.
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The author provides a comprehensive introduction to the whole problem of the “anthropomorphite” issue, in a way that his work should be referred to by everybody when dealing with both theological and ascetical teachings of fourth and early fifth century Egypt. His approach is basically a philological one. The monograph focuses on two sources and, therefore, is subdivided into two main parts, the first one dedicated to an ancient homily *De anima et corpore* (chapter I) and the second one dedicated to the *Life* of Apa Aphou of Oxyrynchus, or, in Coptic, Pemdje (chapter II). Both parts contain commented German translations of the corresponding sources.

The author thoroughly examines all the textual evidences of his sources that are preserved in a condition far from ideal, while their textual problems are of a rather different nature. The homily is preserved in several recensions and in different languages, and so, the problem is to figure out its original shape.¹ The *Life of Apa Aphou* is available only in Coptic but some reflections of its text are traceable in both Coptic and Greek monastic literature of Egypt.

The homily *De anima et corpore* became especially popular in patristic studies after 1972, when M. van Esbroeck extracted a treatise of Melito of Sardes from its Georgian version (cf. CPG 1093.13: *De anima et corpore* by Melito of Sardes). By the way, van Esbroeck restituted the homily to Athanasius of Alexandria, as it is subscribed in the Georgian version as well as in the Coptic one published by E. Wallis Budge in

(1) Here the author makes use of the unpublished thesis of Gregor WURST, *Die Homilie De anima et corpore, ein Werk des Meliton von Sardes? Einleitung, synoptische Edition, Übersetzung, Kommentar*, 2 vols. (Freiburg/Schweiz, 2000), accepting his reconstruction of the Greek *Vorlage* of the homily (and reproducing it as *Anhang II* to Chapter I (p. 125–134)) while not accepting the attribution to Melito of Sardes.

1910 (and translated here into German by Bumazhnov).² Bumazhnov renders justice to this attribution preserved in most of the manuscript tradition calling the homily Pseudo-Athanasian. However, the homily still continues to be referred to as a genuine work of Alexander of Alexandria in *CPG*, not only in volume 2 (1974) published long ago, but even in the *Supplementum* (1998) (see *CPG* 2004).³ In his conclusions Bumazhnov supports, although in his own way, Tito Orlandi's verdict that the homily is a monastic work of Egyptian origin, slightly differing with him in dating and localisation (Middle Egypt, fourth century, according to Orlandi, Middle or Upper Egypt, fourth or fifth century, but, most probably, the middle of the fifth century according to Bumazhnov; p. 108–109).

The main goal of Bumazhnov's analysis is, in the cases of both his main sources, the views on the mutual relations between the soul and the body and the notion of the image of God in man. For both sources, he admits that the sources share an anti-Origenist inspiration, without going so far as adopting an "anthropomorphite" heterodoxy. Here, in the main lines of his theological analysis, Bumazhnov seems to be quite persuasive.

Two points, however, need further discussion.⁴

First: the applicability of the Coptic theological treatise published by T. Orlandi (1985) under the title "*Shenute. Contra origenistas*" in establishing of the *immediate* context of the polemics against Origenism in the fourth and fifth century. The author of the present review proposed (in 1998) for this treatise as its *Sitz im Leben* the literary and theological circle of Damian, Coptic Patriarch of Alexandria (577/578–606/607). Bumazhnov rejects this attribution without discussion, limiting himself (p. 21, note 95) to the reference to the review of my book (2000) by A. Khosroev (2001). However, my book contained but a brief summing up of the argumentation, and my reviewer was writing without

(2) Now Tito Orlandi's edition has appeared (still unavailable to Bumazhnov when writing his monograph): T. ORLANDI, *Omelia De anima et corpore*. Testo, traduzione, introduzione e note (Roma, 2003), also in the electronic database of the *Corpus dei Manoscritti Copti Letterari* <http://cmcl.let.uniroma1.it> where are published also the other Coptic texts mentioned below.

(3) Continuous references to *CPG* could contribute to make Bumazhnov's monograph a bit more user-friendly.

(4) In the following I will use bibliographical references in an abbreviated form where the missing bibliographical data could be easily found in Bumazhnov's monograph.

first-hand knowledge of my main publications on the topics. This is why I would like to readdress the issue in the postscript to the present review. In any case, the impossibility of attributing to neither Shenute nor the epoch of Shenute does not affect the applicability of this work to the study of Origenism in Egypt, even if not exactly in such a way as Bumazhnov does.

The second point is more delicate. It concerns Apa Aphou's understanding of the image of God in man: does it mean that God, too, has, in some sense, a body? The previous researchers starting with E. Drioton (1915–1917) were unanimous in the basically affirmative answer to this question, while, of course, they have disagreed in further details. Drioton has recognized in Apa Aphou a representative of the condemned heresy of the anthropomorphites, some others (including G. Florovsky) have proposed more sophisticated decisions and, finally, Alexander Golitzin, in a series of recent publications,⁵ has interpreted Apa Aphou's argumentation in the lines of Jewish mysticism going back to Ezekiel through the Second Temple Jewish traditions like *Shi'ur Qomah* whose continuation in early Christianity is an established fact. This is the latter interpretation that is the main target of Bumazhnov's criticism, while Bumazhnov, together with Golitzin, seconds the scholarly consensus that the *Life of Apa Aphou* has been directed against some "Hellenizing" trends in Christianity.

The very *crux interpretatorum* is here paragraph 9,8 of the *Life* (Bumazhnov's translation): "Denn (γὰρ) Derjenige, Der sagte ‚Ich bin das Brot, das vom Himmel gekommen ist‘ [Jn 6:41], ist Derselbe, Der auch sagte: ‚Wer Menschenblut vergießt, dessen <Blut> wird dafür vergossen werden, weil der Mensch im Ebenbild (εἰκὼν) Gottes geschaffen wurde.‘ [Gen 9:6]."

Bumazhnov believes (rightly, I think) that "[d]ie Kenntnis des Kontextes der zitierten Bibelstelle wird vorausgesetzt" (p. 212). But this consideration is irrelevant. Yes, the literal context of both biblical quotes has nothing to do with any doctrine considering the flesh and the blood as the features that form the image of God in man. Nevertheless, the habitual manner to quote the Bible in Egyptian monasticism has never been restricted by such formalities. For instance, *Liber Orsiesii*, 87, does not hesitate to quote Is 5:26–28 (description of the people

(5) One of whom that is, probably, the most representative (A. GOLITZIN, «*The Demons Suggest an Illusion of God's Glory in a Form*»: *Controversy over the Divine Body and Vision of Glory in Some Late Fourth, Early Fifth Century Monastic Literature* [2002]), is now reprinted in *Scr* 3 (2007) 49–82.

of the enemies of Israel) applying to the people of (New) Israel, that is, changing its literal meaning to the exact opposite.

Therefore, the only relevant context of the quotes from the Bible is that of our source itself. Bumazhnov insists (again, rightly, I think) that Gen 9:6 is quoted here, at the end of an answer of Apa Aphou to his opponent, for its explicit mention of the image of God in man, being one of the rare biblical places where such a claim is formulated explicitly. Apa Aphou used every such biblical place, and, in the case of our citation from Gen 9:6, there is no specific interest in blood.⁶

Probably, I would have nothing to object to, if our source was a theological tractate whose language might be approached to the ideal of the “extensional language” of science by Rudolf Carnap. In fact, such an ideal is not so far from the language of the book of Bumazhnov himself, but it is hardly applicable to his source which is close to the hagiographical genre of panegyric. The language of panegyric is highly intensional. The intuition of the previous scholars was sensitive to this, and so, not one of them ignored the mention of blood in Apa Aphou’s discussion of the notion of the image of God. It seems *a priori* impossible that the mention of blood is here meaningless. And this seems especially impossible next to the citation from Jn 6:41, on the bread from Heaven, whose meaning as body is enforced by the whole previous discussion (in ch. 9 of the *Life*) of the real presence in the Eucharist. So, we have here, in paragraph 9,8, not only a mention of blood, but the complete pair of body and blood mentioned in the context of explanation of the image of God in man.

Of course, we still have no logical definition, such as “the image of God is this or that”, but such definitions in the panegyric would be rather an exception than a rule. A more poetical language, without detailed logical explanations, is much more natural. So, with due respect to the strictness of Bumazhnov’s logical formalism, I still prefer to read his source in a more poetical (intensional) way, as a flow of continuous explanation as to what the image of God in man is. Then, I see, in the words of Apa Aphou, that the very nature of body and blood is the image of God.

(6) Here I formulate Bumazhnov’s proposal in a more direct way than it is formulated in his book. I am grateful to Dmitrij for a fruitful discussion of all these topics during my staying in Tübingen in 2008.

...And, if so, God still does have body and blood, in the sense that it has been seen by Ezekiel on the river of Chobar and by Golitzin in the *Life of Apa Aphou*.

This disagreement with the author does not prevent me from applauding his study.

Postscript

«Shenute, *Contra Origenistas*»: Once More

In my 1998 article I proposed to establish the *Sitz im Leben* of the treatise by the date of its triadological polemics rather than judging from its anti-Origenist contents. The latter has no features than could be presently interpreted in precise connection with any known episode of Origenist quarrels. Moreover, the issue of Origenism continued to remain actual in Egypt, at least, until the end of the sixth century, if not until the Arab conquest (the very name of John Philoponus is a sufficient proof to this). Since 1998, as well as before this date, nobody has paid attention to the triadological polemics of the anonymous Coptic author.

The most interesting is the attitude of the author himself. The key phrase in his exposition contains some difficulty that passed unnoticed by Orlandi (the only translator of the whole text of the treatise and, especially, of this passage) and Khosroev (my not too meticulous reviewer) and, I must admit, not explained in a proper manner by myself (while, in my opinion, I managed to translate the text in the right sense). Now I am trying to fill up this lacuna. The following is Orlandi's translation (p. 54, § 0475) where I have left untranslated the passage containing a syntactical ambiguity: "...Perché il Figlio non è per nulla diverso dal Padre, nè il Padre è diverso [dal Figlio]. *oupn[eum]a on pe pšere*. Ed è Dio da Dio, e Figlio dal Padre che l'ha generato."

The syntactic ambiguity is caused by the indefinite article *ou-* that is used here as the marker of predicate in a nominal phrase, and so, does not inform us about the (in)definiteness of the noun *pneuma* ("spirit"). This phrase theoretically can be translated into Italian in three different ways: 1. "Il Figlio è anche uno spirito" (Orlandi's option, supported by Khosroev without specific argumentation), 2. "Il Figlio è anche S(s)pirito", 3. "Il Figlio è anche lo S(s)pirito".

Orlandi's translation is the most literal (because it renders an indefinite article with an indefinite article), but the most problematic. The existence of "uno spirito" within the Holy Trinity would presuppose some kind of diversity of "spirits" in God. It is hardly plausible that

this is the sense our author meant. Orlandi himself has left this passage without comments. Two other possibilities of translation presuppose, correspondingly, either an application to the Son of the Gospel saying “God is spirit” (Jn 4:24; in the Italian Bible: “Dio è spirito”⁷) or an equation of the Son to the person of the Holy Spirit.

However, in the larger context of the ambiguous phrase (the whole passage quoted above), it is absolutely clear that it is the person of the Holy Spirit that is meant. Indeed, the whole passage enumerates all the three persons of the Trinity insisting that they have no difference from each other. Namely, in the case of the Father and the Son, the author declares that there is no difference between them. Then, he proceeds to the Spirit declaring that the Spirit, in turn, is identical to the Son. Thus, the context of the ambiguous phrase is unambiguous. The third syntactically possible translation is the only one allowed by the context. The phrase does not deal with “spirit” as a common quality of three persons, but is quite precise in equating the person of the Son with the person of the Spirit. Such an interpretation of the passage would seem natural, unless one hesitates to acknowledge the triadological teaching that is not widely known among scholars (and hardly attributable to Shenute).

A triadological teaching denying any ontological difference between the three hypostases was proclaimed in Egypt by Patriarch Damian (in the 580s) in the course of polemics against the “tritheism” of John Philoponus, on the one hand, and against a more traditional triadology of monophysite Patriarch of Antioch Peter of Callinicum, on the other. In the seventh century, such a triadology was considered as an established mainstream in monophysite Egypt.⁸

The peculiar exact wording of our passage where the ontological identity of the three hypostases is explained through their equality to the person of the Holy Spirit is, however, unknown in other Egyptian documents in Coptic, Greek, and Arabic. No wonder, given a fragmentary and certainly not representative nature of our source base relating to the corresponding triadological doctrine. Notwithstanding, the same wording reappears in a homily of the Ethiopian theologian

(7) Probably, it is in this sense that the passage was understood by Orlandi and, certainly, by Khosroev (who explained his understanding). However, in modern Italian Bible translations, unlike the English ones, the use of the indefinite article before “spirit” in Jn 4:24 is uncommon.

(8) See B. LOURIÉ, Damian of Alexandria, in: *EA*, II, 77–78 (with further bibliography).

of the early fifteenth century, Giyorgis Saglāwi, who has continued this line of the Egyptian theology.⁹ Let us compare (I quote the Italian translation of the editor): “Nel Padre abbiamo trovato, pur essendo questi Spirito Santo secondo la sua personalità e nella sua sostanza, la denominazione di Padre; anche nel Figlio abbiamo trovato, pur essendo questi Spirito Santo secondo la sua personalità e consustanziale al Padre, la denominazione di Figlio; per il Paraclito, invece, non abbiamo trovato un padre per chiamarlo figlio; e, per chiamarlo padre, non gli abbiamo trovato un figlio; perciò Egli è perennemente chiamato Spirito Santo” (*Homily XXIX*).¹⁰ This passage explains to us why it is the person of the Spirit that has been chosen as the “common denominator” in this Unitarian, so to speak, triadology.

Our Coptic anonym belongs to an intellectual milieu responsible for shaping the ideology on a large scale, as it is clear from the contents of his work. Such a task is compatible with such a triadology in either the circle of Damian and his disciples (as I supposed in 1998) or a later patriarchal or monastic centre in Egypt. The *terminus post quem* are the 580s.

(9) See, in details, my В. ЛУРЬЕ, Авва Георгий из Саглы и история юлианизма в Эфиопии [B. LOURIÉ, Abbas Giyorgis from Saglā and the history of the Julianism in Ethiopia], *XB* 1 (7) (1999) 317–358, here p. 331–332, where I have revisited, among other parallels to Abbas Giyorgis, the Coptic text published by Orlandi. Cf. B. LOURIÉ, Julianism, in: *EA*, III, 308–310 (with further bibliography).

(10) Yaqob BEYENE, Giyorgis di Saglā, *Il Libro del Mistero* (Maṣḥafa Meṣṭir). Parte seconda (Lovanii, 1993) (CSCO 533 / Aeth 98) 149–150. Capitalisation of “S” in the two first occurrences of “Spirito Santo” is mine.