

## The Syriac *Life of Abba Bishoi*

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[24v] An account of the way of life of the ascetic and perfect solitary, our holy father Abba Bishoi, from the desert of Scetis. The venerable<sup>10</sup> priest Abba John the Little, who became his brother when he came to Scetis, wrote it after his departure. Both became obedient disciples to holy Abba Bemoi. It narrates the beginning of [Abba Bishoi's]<sup>11</sup> excellent deeds and angelic life, and his departure on the eighth of the month of Abib of the Copts, which is the second of the month of Tammuz of the Syrians.<sup>12</sup>

May mercy and grace be with those who come upon it and read it.

### Exordium

1. My brothers in Christ, beloved of the living God, hear from me what I shall begin to relay about the virtue, accomplishments, and way of life of the great holy man, our father Abba Bishoi, who was chosen by God. He abandoned everything in this world, conquered the passions, and perfectly fulfilled the monastic way of life. He was a true witness by his great labors and virtue, and he presented his soul and body as an acceptable oblation to God, as he dwelt in deserts, caves, and holes in the ground.<sup>13</sup> This is the one to whom [Christ]<sup>14</sup> appeared because of the purity of his body. He was a chosen [25r] disciple who observed the Lord's commandments; he preached his gospel, saved many souls, and brought them to the kingdom of heaven by his divine teaching. 2. For God is my witness,<sup>15</sup> I shall tell you the truth about him; what I have seen with my own eyes from him time and again.<sup>16</sup> I am writing this [account]<sup>17</sup> for the benefit of your souls, and the souls of those who, likewise, will come upon it in the future.

### Bishoi's birth and parentage

3. Now the parents of Abba Bishoi were just, righteous, God-fearing people, who loved the church and loved to give alms.<sup>18</sup> By race, they were from the region of Arabia that is in Egypt,<sup>19</sup> from a village called Basenshayā.<sup>20</sup> They were chaste people, pure in their bodies, and because God saw their admirable deeds, he gave them seven male children and blessed their possessions.

### The death of Bishoi's father; an angel appears to his mother

After some time, their father went to his rest from this temporal life. So their mother was left as a guide to bring them up in the complete fear of God. Now our father Abba Bishoi was the smallest of his brothers. One night, his mother saw a vision while her seven sons were with her;

the angel of God said to her, “The Lord has sent me to you, and he says to you, ‘Give me one of your sons that he might sanctify my name among people.’”

His mother said to the angel, “My lord, they all belong to God; [25v] may he take whomever he desires among them.” The angel stretched out his hand and gripped the hand of our father Abba Bishoi, and said, “This one will serve his Lord well”; that is to say, he will be useful to him.

His mother said to the angel, “Take one who is stronger than he, for this one is pitiful and weak.” The angel said to her, “He is the one who is suitable and apt for the Lord’s service; for the Lord’s power is perfected in weakness.”<sup>21</sup> [After] the angel said these things, he departed and was not seen by her.

### Bishoi goes to Scetis

4. When the holy Abba Bishoi grew strong in his body, he set his intentions on the fear of God,<sup>22</sup> and he desired and longed to attain the monastic life. When the Lord willed, and the time came to fulfill all he ordained for him, he led him forth as a pure spotless lamb and brought him to Shihēt,<sup>23</sup> the Balance of the Heart,<sup>24</sup> that is, the desert of Scetis. He handed him over to the shepherd and savior of souls, our holy father Abba Bemoi,<sup>25</sup> who became a spiritual father and a guide to me, and a savior of my life; I, the worthless John.

### Bishoi, as Bemoi’s disciple, advances spiritually

5. Our father received him joyfully, and clothed him in the holy monastic habit. And whatever [Abba Bemoi] commanded or determined<sup>26</sup> for him, he obeyed and completed in faith and with great humility.

He would closely observe the countenance<sup>27</sup> and deeds of holy individuals, [26r] marveling at their angelic lives and praising God. One day, our holy father said to him, “It is inappropriate for the brothers to stare at the faces of holy individuals, and not pay attention to anything else. Therefore, constantly cast your sight down, focus solely on your own steps, and fix your mind on God at every moment.”

6. When he heard this from our holy father, [Abba Bishoi] cast his sight down for three years, and did not gaze at the countenance of anyone at all, but rather meditated on the Holy Scriptures. Their remembrance was always in his heart, and he imbued<sup>28</sup> his soul with the living words of the Holy Spirit. In this way, the word of Scripture was perfected in him: “The wise of heart observes all commandments.”<sup>29</sup> Moreover, he prayed constantly, without rest and without interruption, just as the Apostle Paul commanded.<sup>30</sup> And he persisted in fasting and vigils. He loved the words of

God more than honey or the honeycomb.<sup>31</sup> Every day he advanced in virtue, and he increased and flourished like a tree planted by streams of water, which brings forth fruit, and its leaves do not wither.<sup>32</sup>

7. When he saw his virtuous and well-pleasing deeds, our holy father Abba Bemoi [26v] loved him and rejoiced with him spiritually, and he called him Abba Shī'a.<sup>33</sup> That is, "Sunrise," because of the light of his soul and the brightness of his virtue and progress in good things. And when God willed it, he reposed our holy father Abba Bemoi from this temporal life, and on account of his great love for him and his mercy upon him, he raised him up on high to the place he had longed for.

After Bemoi's death, John remains with Bishoi

8. I, the insignificant one, remained with my brother, Abba Bishoi.<sup>34</sup> I lived together with him in spiritual love in that place which the Lord willed, where I planted the tree as my father had commanded me, as our holy father Abba Bemoi had prophesied to [me].<sup>35</sup>

Bishoi's spiritual disciplines

9. And so, blessed Abba Bishoi persisted in fasting, and he did not taste anything except from one week to the next.<sup>36</sup> He recited many writings of the Holy Scriptures, and he constantly meditated on the prophecies of Jeremiah the prophet. So when he read him, the prophet would come to him, converse with him, and explain his writings to him. The prophet took delight in appearing to him, and revealed to him the spiritual meaning of his words. 10. Abba Bishoi advanced day after day, and added to his deeds. He would fast for two weeks, and when he tasted something after this, he ate [27r] dried bread and crushed salt. He worked secretly to perfect all of his activities, and he constantly sought stillness<sup>37</sup> and desired to dwell in the wilderness as a solitary.<sup>38</sup> God, therefore, called him because of these [traits] to be a safe harbor for the salvation<sup>39</sup> of many souls.

Bishoi and John separate

11. One day I said to him, "My brother, holy one of God, I see that you have a desire for the solitary life and stillness. I, also, desire this. Let us, then, keep watch tonight in constant prayer and supplication and, if it is the Lord's will, we trust that he will reveal what is beneficial for us." He said to me, "You have spoken well." And we stood up to pray.

12. At the end of the night, the angel of the Lord appeared to us and said to us with joy, "The Lord says to you, 'Let each of you dwell in solitude in his own place in order to fulfill the way of life<sup>40</sup> designated for you, for the salvation of many souls. You, then, John, dwell in this

place; and I will send you an abundant following,' says the Lord." Then he said to holy Abba Bishoi, "You, too, Bishoi, depart a short [distance] from the dwelling of your brother, and build for yourself a cave, and live in it. I will gather and bring to you a large following,' says the Lord. 'And there will be a monastery at that place; your name will be upon it, [27v] and they will sanctify my name in it as it is sanctified on high.' By this what was promised to the one who first dwelt in this wilderness, the blessed Macarius, will be fulfilled; namely, that the Lord would gather to him a chosen people." The angel said these things to us and disappeared from our sight.

As a result of this, holy Abba Bishoi separated from me, and trekked north from my cell. He made a cave for himself two miles from me, and he dwelt in it. The Lord was with him, and he prospered in all his activities, and he attained many virtues at that place.

His well-pleasing account was preached everywhere; and his virtue was lauded. Many came to him, beseeching him to clothe them in the monastic habit. He received them, instructed them, and tonsured them, and established them as powerful servants of the great king, Christ. He raised up from his disciples blessed branches, ascetics who love God and who love their brothers, who are mature in love and perfect, as is the example they saw from [Abba Bishoi's] way of life, labors, and holy words.

So I would go to him constantly to reveal my thoughts. Likewise, he, also, would come to me and make known his thoughts.

### The Savior appears to Bishoi

13. One day, while [Abba Bishoi] was sitting in his cave, [28r] our Lord Jesus Christ came to him and said to him, "Peace to you, my chosen Bishoi." And he got up in fear and worshiped him. Our Lord said to him, "Do you see this wilderness and the hills in it? From now on, I will multiply in them the monasteries in which they will sanctify my name."

The chosen Bishoi said to him, "My Lord, you will provide for them from this wilderness?" Our Lord said to him, "Truly I say to you, if I find love among them, and they observe my laws and commandments, and they believe in me, even if they do not toil much, I, myself, will provide for their necessities here, and will fill them with good things."

The holy Abba Bishoi said to him, "My Lord, will you save them from the temptations and the tribulations that will come upon them?" The Lord said to him, "If they will keep my commandments, I will deliver them from temptations, and I will make all who fear me heirs of the kingdom on high." Our Lord said this to our father, gave him the peace, and ascended to heaven with great glory.

A rich ruler, induced by the Devil, comes to Bishoi with money  
14. After this, our father continued steadily in guarding his soul, and he excelled in the worship<sup>41</sup> of his Lord. The angel of the Lord constantly visited him and conversed with him. However, Satan, the enemy of what is well-pleasing, constantly spread traps to capture him in his snares, [28v] but he was unable to overcome him. He schemed to trap him by the desire for honors and goods,<sup>42</sup> so that he might by this be deceived and his resolve weakened. He went to a certain rich ruler who was in Egypt. He appeared to him in the form of an angel and said to him, “There is a man in the desert of Scetis, a virtuous ascetic, who is granted whatever he asks of the Lord. Go to him, and offer him goods and honors, so that he might bless you.” The man said to him, “What is his name?” Satan said to him, “He is called Abba Bishoi.”

15. So the man rose up, loaded many goods upon camels, and took money with him and traveled to the desert. But the angel of the Lord, who looked after Abba Bishoi, came and said to him, “Satan has spread a trap for you so that you may desire goods and be overcome by receiving gifts. Now, one of the magistrates of Egypt is coming to you; he has set out carrying goods and money, which he is bringing to you.”

The holy elder got up and went out to walk in the desert. The ruler met him and said to him, “Do you know of a great elder who dwells in this desert who is called Abba Bishoi?” The chosen one said to him, “Why are you looking for him?” That ruler said, “I am looking for him to give him these gifts that are with me, as well as money, which he may share with the brothers, so that his blessing might come upon my household.”

Then that elder said to him, “There is no need of money in this desert. [29r] Those who live here will not receive anything from these goods that are with you. Do not seek to trouble yourself in this manner. God has already received your offering. Now turn back, go to the towns of Egypt, and distribute what is with you among the poor, the orphans, and the widows; and God will bless you and your household.” So that man returned to his home and fulfilled what the Lord’s holy one had instructed him.

Bishoi defeats the Devil and enjoys spiritual communion

16. When our holy father returned to his cell, Satan appeared to him and said to him, “You have tormented me, Bishoi!” God’s chosen one said to him, “Since your creation, you who hate what is good, your existence has been in vain.” Satan said to him, “I regard you as though you were never created.” The holy elder said to him, “May the Lord rebuke you, and destroy you!” Then [Satan] went away and disappeared, his deceitful traps having been shattered. And [Abba Bishoi] returned to his place in peace.

The Lord was with him in all his dealings, and he delivered him from all of his adversaries.

17. After this, he rose up and entered the inner desert. He remained there in solitude; he devoted himself to great toils, and he thrived tremendously. And the Lord commanded that his mind and heart be caught up into Paradise to see the good things there. He was taken to the church of the firstborn in heaven,<sup>43</sup> and he was given spiritual food, which he ate; thus, he overcame hunger and thirst. From then on, he fasted the whole week. On Saturday and Sunday, he partook of the body and blood of Christ; [29v] and he did not taste anything else. 18. He toiled with his body as though it were not his own. To the point, the Lord said in his gospel, “Whoever abides in me, I abide in him; and the works that I do, he also will do, and even greater than these.”<sup>44</sup> Concerning this, it is inappropriate that anyone should doubt what I will be saying. Recall Abimelech of Moriah who slept for seventy years, without eating or drinking.<sup>45</sup> Likewise, the seven youths at Ephesus who slept three hundred seventy-five years without food or drink, while their souls remained in their bodies. For it is written that those who are weak among humans are strong in God.<sup>46</sup>

#### Bishoi’s pastoral care

19. And so spiritual sons of our holy father congregated around him like bees encircling a honeycomb. He imbued their souls with spiritual wealth from the living words that flowed from his mouth. He constantly sanctified them to God. Indeed, he taught them to always love the stillness of the desert, to go far away from settled places, to give up worldly possessions, to become poor in the Spirit, and to persist in vigils with services,<sup>47</sup> supplications, and prayers without ceasing, and without interruption or negligence. [He also taught them] not to disregard their handiwork, nor to labor with their hands just enough to provide for their own needs, but [rather to also have enough] for welcoming [30r] strangers,<sup>48</sup> for having compassion [upon others], and to give alms from their labor. Moreover, [he taught them] that they should love estrangement and poverty, and that the perfection of all of these things is to abandon their own will and do the will of their brothers; this is the law and the prophets. These were the things that the Lord’s holy one commanded them.

#### The Savior appears to Bishoi

20. So when he saw a multitude of brothers gathered around him, he separated himself from them and entered the inner desert, far from them. He found a certain cave and lived in it three years, and he was not seen by anyone. His hair grew long on his body by a hand span. He persisted in prayer

before God and kept watch night and day, and he did not sleep because of his love of the Lord. [He was able to do so because] he had driven a stake into that cave and tied his hair to it, and he would stand in prayer before God.

21. When he had lived this way of life for three years, Christ came to him at that cave. When the elder saw him, he trembled in fear and fell on the ground, but our Savior caught him, stood him up, and said to him, "Peace to you, my chosen Bishoi. I have seen the labors you have undertaken, and I have accepted them. I have given you a grace<sup>49</sup> that whoever asks me in your name, pleading for his sins, I will absolve and guard him."

The holy one said to him, "My Lord, I beseech you to strengthen me, so that I will labor for the sake of your mighty and holy name. For while you were innocent and Lord of all, you suffered for the whole world; [30v] you died, were resurrected, and saved us.<sup>50</sup> How much more appropriate is it for us sinners to suffer for your name and praise you?" And our Lord blessed him and left him in peace, as he ascended in glory to heaven.

Bishoi intercedes with God on behalf of another's disciple<sup>51</sup>

22. There was a certain elder, who greatly feared<sup>52</sup> the Lord. He lived within proximity to the cell of our father, holy Abba Bishoi, since his youth. He would often go to learn from him. Now that elder had a spiritual son, that is, a disciple. Satan, who hates what is good, attacked this brother with evil thoughts and made him fall into sin; and he died in his sin, and he was taken to Gehenna. Now the elder prayed and entreated God day and night on behalf of his son, and he fasted forty days, as he mourned and grieved for him. Then a voice came to him, saying, "He will remain in Gehenna until the Lord comes upon the clouds." 23. Again, [the elder] fasted another forty days, as he pleaded with the Lord to raise him from Gehenna. However, he heard the same voice. Again, he fasted forty days, and prayed and pleaded with the Lord concerning [his son]. But the same message came to him, saying, "He will remain in Gehenna until the Lord comes upon the clouds." The elder rose up and came to the wilderness and inquired as to [the whereabouts] of the Lord's holy one, our father Abba Bishoi.

24. He arrived at the place where [Abba Bishoi] lived (the blessed one had learned this by the blessed spirit) and went to meet the elder. [The elder] bowed and greeted [Abba Bishoi] and they blessed [31r] one another. The blessed Bishoi said to him, "My holy father, why have you done such a difficult thing and have come to my insignificance?" The elder informed him about his son and those labors he had done for him, and those voices he had heard. Abba Bishoi said to him, "Our holy father, rise; let us pray, and may the will of the Lord be done." That elder said to him, "As the Lord lives,<sup>53</sup> I will not leave here, but I will throw myself before you, weeping and in anguish,

until you ask God to have mercy upon me and gladden my heart concerning this brother, and inform us[, both you and me,] if he has departed from Gehenna or not.” 25. Immediately, our father rose up and went into the inner desert, and prayed and said, “Lord, have mercy on your creation, and deliver your servant from torment.” 26. At that moment, Christ the Savior appeared to him and said, “My chosen Bishoi, what are you asking for?” 27. The holy one said to him, “My Lord, the son of this elder, I am asking concerning him that you might forgive his sins and raise him from Gehenna.” Our Savior said to him, “It has proceeded from my mouth that he will remain in Gehenna until I come upon the clouds.” 28. The holy one said to him, “My Lord, if you desire, summon a cloud, sit upon it, and save that soul.” 29. Our Savior commanded a luminous cloud to come and he ascended upon it. Likewise, he commanded, “Bring the soul of that youth, and give it to my chosen Bishoi.” And the holy man received it,<sup>54</sup> and he sent it to the elder. When the elder saw it, he was greatly amazed, and asked it about the suffering it endured in Gehenna. It said to him, “I suffered a great deal because of my sins, [31v] and even more so because of my disobedience to you, my father.” Then they brought the soul to a place of rest. [30 *lacking in this recension*]

31. The heart of the elder rejoiced, and he returned to our father Abba Bishoi and said to him, “I owe you a [great] favor, my father, for you have had compassion upon this brother, whom the Lord, because of your prayers, had compassion upon and spared. For it is written, ‘the Lord aids his saints and answers them.’<sup>55</sup> I ask you, my father, tell me, what did you do so that God graced you with these great gifts?” Our father said to the elder, “Forgive me, our father. Since the beginning, the will of the Lord has been to extend his mercy to everyone. In his compassion, he had mercy on this brother. It was not because of me, I the insignificant one, or because I deserved such a thing. [Nor] should you suppose, my father, that I labored until this took place. God forbid! Rather, it was because of what you did—fasting for forty days on three occasions, giving yourself to death on three occasions on account of your love of God, as you grieved in your heart for this brother, and offering yourself on his behalf—that God delivered his [soul] to you. For there is no greater love than this: that one should lay down his life for his friend.<sup>56</sup> For each one of the fathers is given such things according to the grace<sup>57</sup> Christ grants him.” And they gave thanks to the Lord, ate bread together, [32r] and each one returned to his cell in peace.

The Savior tells Bishoi to strengthen and teach the brothers

32. Our father, then, devoted himself to harsh and great ascetic practices. He wandered about in the empty wilderness where there was no one, concealing his activities so that they would not be known to anyone, and

continuing in fasting and prayer. When he ate, he did not eat anything other than dry bread, and he drank water.

33. Then the Lord, again, appeared to him and spoke with him and said that he should go out to the brothers in the wilderness and become their father, and teach them the canons and the standards of monasticism, and the commandments by which they should conduct their lives. However, our father pleaded with the Lord and said, “My Lord, I have no strength for this ministry, and I fear that the labors I have performed for the sake of your great and holy name will come to nothing.”

34. The Lord said to him, “Do not be afraid; I will, indeed, give you remuneration for your labors in the heavenly Jerusalem, and I will magnify your name.” Indeed, blessed is the one who keeps the Lord’s commandments!<sup>58</sup> For the sweet odor of the name of our holy father Abba Bishoi spread, and the whole desert of Nitria was filled with it. Multitudes visited him, and they came from everywhere to consult him. And they marveled at the greatness of his humility; he taught all of them the fear of the Lord, and he peacefully consoled each of them accordingly.

Emperor Constantine appears to Bishoi

35. One day, I, the insignificant John, went to [Abba Bishoi] to learn of his news. When I arrived at the door of his cave, I heard the voice of someone [32v] talking with the elder while weeping. I knocked on the door, and he came out and opened it for me, and I entered. We prayed and sat down, and I said to him, “My father, who was speaking with you just now?”

36. The holy one said to me, “In that you have heard him speaking, I will tell you that he was Constantine, the king of the Romans. He came to me from heaven, grieving in his heart, weeping, and saying, ‘I did not know that this honor was prepared for monks, because of their poverty on earth and living as strangers for God’s sake. Had I [known], I would have abandoned my kingship and become a monk.’ And I said to him, ‘Has not [God] given honor to your kingship in heaven?’ He said to me, ‘Yes. Nevertheless, I have not reached the honor of monks. 37. For I have seen how some among them, who have rested from the body, have grown wings and ascended as high as the walls of the heavenly Jerusalem, and they enter without being hindered by the gatekeepers there.’ [38 *omitted from this recension*]

39. “And I said to him, ‘Would it be appropriate that you, who had a wife, children, slaves, possessions, a kingdom, and the honor of your rank, be made equal with those who have left their homes and riches, have become poor, afflicted, and needy? They labor and keep vigils. They hunger and thirst, and lie on the ground. Those are the ones about whom Paul wrote: “People of whom the world was not worthy.”’<sup>59</sup> 40. I was saying

these things to him, when you knocked on the door, and he left.” When I heard this from the holy elder, I gained great strength, and I said, “Blessed be the Lord, who has revealed his wonders to his saints!”

### Bishoi defends the divinity of the Holy Spirit

41. There was a certain elder, a solitary, in the region called Basway.<sup>60</sup> [33r] Satan set a snare for him and put it into his heart to say that there is no Holy Spirit, but only the Father and the Son, and he proclaimed this error openly. Now God, the compassionate, did not want to bring the elder’s labors to nothing. He revealed his concern to our holy father Abba Bishoi and instructed him in a vision, “Get up and go to the region of Basway, in the Thebaid of Egypt. There you will find a certain solitary who says and proclaims that there is no Holy Spirit.”

Now the holy elder, Abba Bishoi, took up the wisdom of God in his heart in order to attend to the matter and to admonish the elder. He fashioned baskets, each of which had three handles, as an example<sup>61</sup> of the Holy Trinity, and he took them to Egypt and brought them to where that elder dwelt. He settled there as though he were a stranger.

This elder, our holy father Abba Bishoi, followed down the same paths as the chosen one, the great one, the wonderworker, the perfect spiritual one, our holy father, the blessed Abba Macarius, the persecutor of unclean spirits and slayer of demons by his humility, and performed great wonders and glorious signs, who healed souls and bodies, and recovered the lost. He, who being instructed, “Rise, go to Wasim, a town near Fustat, to a heretic who is called Harkel,<sup>62</sup> and return him, by the power of the Holy Trinity, to the orthodox faith—him and all his fellow heretics,” performed a great miracle there by the power of the Advocate,<sup>63</sup> who was with him. He raised a dead man, who had died in ancient times, and he brought him to the desert along with Harkel whom he turned from his error, and he instructed them and they remained with him until their death.<sup>64</sup> By this, our holy father Abba Bishoi came to resemble [Abba Macarius] and followed in his footsteps.

By the power of the Holy Trinity, he packed up and came to deliver that elder [33v] and raise him from his fall, and return him to the truth—he and all who followed his error. Now, after [Abba Bishoi] rested that night, when it was morning, many came to that solitary to be blessed by him. And they inspected the baskets of our father and saw that each had three handles. The solitary said to him, “What are these, our father?” The holy elder, our father Abba Bishoi, said to him, “These insignificant things are my handiwork; I want to sell them.” The solitary said to him, “Why do your baskets have three handles?”—as mockery increased among the crowd. Our father

said to him, while those who had gathered around the solitary were listening, “For my part, I worship a Holy Trinity in one Godhead. That is why I have made these handiworks as an example of the Holy Trinity.”

Those who had gathered said to him, “Our father, is there a Holy Spirit with the Father and the Son?” [Our father] opened his mouth<sup>65</sup> in the spirit and preached to them about the Holy Spirit and said, “The Holy Spirit exists essentially with the Father and the Son; an eternal Trinity, uncreated, and indivisible.”

He responded and said to that solitary, “Do you know some of the Holy Scriptures?” He said to him, “Yes.” The righteous father said to him, “Have you not heard Moses say in the book of Genesis: ‘In the beginning God created heaven and earth, and the earth was empty and chaotic, and darkness was over the face of the deep, and the Spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters?’<sup>66</sup> Also Isaiah the prophet said about the person of the Son of God: ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me and sent me to preach good news to the poor.’<sup>67</sup> Again, David said: ‘You send forth your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth.’<sup>68</sup> [34r] Also, Ezekiel said: ‘Thus the Lord said to me, “Cry to the Spirit that it may breathe on these bones, and many will rise up alive,”’<sup>69</sup> as a pledge<sup>70</sup> for what will take place in the resurrection. And John the Baptist, when he was proclaiming and preaching the good news about the Son of God, said: ‘I saw the Spirit rest and remain over him.’<sup>71</sup> Also, our teacher Paul said: ‘No one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.’<sup>72</sup> And Daniel, in ecstasy,<sup>73</sup> said, ‘I saw thrones that were set in place.’ He identifies the thrones with the three persons<sup>74</sup> [of the Trinity]. ‘And the Ancient of Days took his seat’:<sup>75</sup> with this he indicated the one Godhead in the Trinity.<sup>76</sup> Moreover, our Lord Jesus Christ commanded his holy apostles and said: ‘Go, make disciples and baptize all peoples in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.’<sup>77</sup> Are these testimonies we have taken from the Holy Scriptures enough for you now, so that we may proclaim that the Holy Spirit exists eternally with the Father and the Son, without being separated from them?”

42–43. When they heard from the mouth of our holy father Abba Bishoi these testimonies from the Scriptures concerning the Holy Spirit, that elder and those with him believed and benefited greatly. And many were greatly helped by his teaching, and he strengthened them in the orthodox faith in the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He established them in the true faith, and returned to his monastery praising God.

An angel assures Bishoi of God’s care

44. Then it happened when he was walking in the desert that a light poured out on his eyes, and he saw the desert filled with angels. In great amazement

he said, “What is this?” An angel answered and said to him, [34v] “We are the ones who watch over the saints in this desert.” He marveled and glorified God who takes such care of his servants at all times.

Paul and Bifimun come to visit Bishoi

45. Thus, he labored and dwelt in the wilderness, and he excelled in his works of virtue, and his fame spread everywhere. Abba Bifimun,<sup>78</sup> who was from Tamoqniqon,<sup>79</sup> heard of him and longed to see him and to receive his blessing. He rose up and went to Abba Paul, who was from Tamma.<sup>80</sup> For he had heard what he recounted about the holy Abba Bishoi’s deeds, because Abba Paul constantly went to our father and learned of his news. Abba Bifimun said to Abba Paul, “Would you do me a favor and take me with you to the Lord’s holy one, our father Abba Bishoi, that I might receive his blessing?”

Abba Paul said, “I fear bringing you to him since you are a youth.”<sup>81</sup> [Abba Bifimun] said to him, “Then let me go with you only up to the door of his cell, and I will sit at the door until you enter and greet him with a kiss, and when you come out, I will greet you, and I believe his blessing will come upon me [in this manner].”

46. Abba Paul said, “Let it be done”; and the two of them went together down to the desert of Nitria.<sup>82</sup> When they arrived at the cell of our holy father Abba Bishoi, Abba Paul entered and greeted him with a holy kiss; and they prayed, and sat down. Our father said to Abba Paul, “Why did you not bring this brother in with you, but left him outside?”

Abba Paul said to him, “Forgive me, my holy father, because I said he is a youth, it is inappropriate [35r] to bring him in to you.” Our holy father said to him, “Do not speak in this manner, ‘that he is a youth and little.’ For our Savior said that to those like them belongs the kingdom of heaven.<sup>83</sup> Indeed, I tell you that many will enter paradise at the hands of this youth, because the Lord’s hand is with him. For he is not little, but great and virtuous.”

And he instructed [Abba] Paul to bring [Abba Bifimun] in to him. He did, and [Abba Bishoi] embraced and blessed him. [Then, Abba Bishoi] prayed for them,<sup>84</sup> and they left him and returned to their places in peace, glorifying God.

The Savior visits Bishoi and teaches him about acceptable good work  
47. One time, when our holy father Abba Bishoi was fasting, on the twenty-first day of his fast, our Lord came to him. He comforted him and said to him, “My chosen Bishoi, you have exhausted yourself greatly.” Our father said to him, “My Lord, I trust in you to strengthen me, and because of this I am not weakened at all.”

Our Lord brought [Abba Bishoi] with him to a certain weak brother who had been fasting two days. Abba Bishoi saw him throwing himself on the ground, stumbling—turning to and fro—pleading for a reprieve and a release from the pains of the fast, though up to that time he had not yet completed the second day. Our father said to the Lord, “My Lord, what is the matter with this man that he throws himself down this way?” Our Lord said to him, “He is fasting for me.” Abba Bishoi said to him, “How many days has he been fasting that he is so weakened as to fall down?”

Our Lord said, “Since his creation, he has not endured a single day without eating, except for this night, and I allowed hunger and weakness to overpower him. When you had fasted twenty-one days, were you weakened like [35v] this [brother]?”

He said to him, “No, my Lord; but I beseech you, my Lord, tell me what you will do with this man, and what reward you will give him?” Our Lord said, “I have reckoned him a reward just like yours for these twenty-one days. Just like you, he will receive a reward because I have strengthened you for the fasting of these [days], and this man, according to the strength which I gave him, he [also] labored. Indeed, I will tell you just as I have said in the gospel, “Enter—both of you—into the joy of your Lord.”<sup>85</sup>

Christ again appears and teaches Bishoi about the nature of asceticism

48. From then on, our father Abba Bishoi devoted himself to great ascetic labors. He entreated God and said, “My Lord, I do not want to eat much bread.” The Lord said to him, “Do not ask about food; you do not eat much.”

Again, he asked him and said, “My Lord, whenever I leave the wilderness, I grieve greatly.”<sup>86</sup> The Lord said to him, “I will not subject you to anything beyond what you need, in proportion to your endurance,<sup>87</sup> and you will not be grieved when you go anywhere.”

Again, he asked him and said, “My Lord, I have often been overcome by anger.” Our Lord said to him, “Do not be irate with anyone or scold him. Do not expel anyone or rebuke him, and anger will not overcome you, and the Holy Spirit will dwell within you.” In such a manner, the Lord accompanied our father wherever he went, and he spoke with him as a man speaks with his friend.<sup>88</sup>

He asked the Lord and said, “My Lord, if there is someone who obeys your holy name and serves you, but does not interact with your creation, that is, the common people, would this be, indeed, a sin for him?” The Lord [36r] said to him, “Just as you pay the worker who works with you in your field without duplicity, likewise I will give those who work together with me their pay in the heavenly Jerusalem.”

49. Again, he asked him and said, “My Lord, if there is someone who knows how to get along with people, comes and goes with them, socializes with your creation, and is pleasing to them, but does not labor much for the sake of your name, what happens to him?” Our Savior said to him, “Such a disciple is a servant,<sup>89</sup> but if he labors considerably, he will become an heir.”<sup>90</sup>

Again, our holy father Abba Bishoi asked and said, “My Lord, if there is someone who has labored a great deal and has suffered for your name’s sake, and who knows how to interact with your creation, and socializes with [the common people], is pleasing to your image, has labored a great deal for your name’s sake, and is virtuous, what will he have?” The Lord said to him, “The one who has done these things is a son and an heir,<sup>91</sup> and his honor and reward will be great. He will be like one of the holy men, Anoup and Apollo,<sup>92</sup> and I will give him blessings and delight in the kingdom of heaven.” Our Lord said these things to [Abba Bishoi] and ascended with glory into heaven.

#### A Syrian monk visits Bishoi

50. Now, in the land of Syria there was a certain holy solitary.<sup>93</sup> He lived on one of the mountains there, worshiping the Lord by night and day. He excelled in all his activities, accomplishing mighty deeds,<sup>94</sup> and he greatly feared God. One night, as he was standing in prayer, he reflected and said in his heart, “Will I find favor before God like one of the saints?”

Immediately, a voice from heaven came to him, saying, “There is in Egypt, [36v] in the desert of Nitria, an elder who serves God and worships him constantly; he is called Bishoi. You have the same boldness<sup>95</sup> before God as he does.”

That solitary rose up in great joy, took a ship, sailed, and arrived at Alexandria. He traveled up south from Alexandria,<sup>96</sup> asking where the holy Abba Bishoi was living, and they informed him that he was in the desert of Nitria, and directed him toward it. When he arrived and met him, our holy father Abba Bishoi embraced him, and they greeted one another. Our father brought him into his cave, and they prayed and sat down. But that elder was speaking in Syriac, and our father Abba Bishoi did not understand what he was saying. 51. He groaned toward heaven and said, “I beseech you, my Lord, and I entreat your magnificence, let me understand what this elder is saying.”

Immediately, God enlightened his understanding with his glorious Spirit, and he understood the Syriac language. As they were speaking with each other about the greatness of God and of his compassion, [the elder]<sup>97</sup> asked our holy father about the virtues and way of life of the true Israelite in whom there is no deceit,<sup>98</sup> our holy father, the great Abba Macarius.

So the righteous and faithful Abba Bishoi said to him, “He was the first who started dwelling in the wilderness. He established laws and commandments, and showed the path of truth, in which he guided all who dwelt in this wilderness. And he was widely known on account of his godly deeds.” And [Abba Bishoi] relayed to him stories about the glorious wonders [37r] that God worked through his holy hands. The solitary was astonished and marveled at the things he heard. And [the elder] said, “How great and glorious was the power of the Almighty that dwelt in that holy and perfect man, the great Abba Macarius!”

So our father, the perfect and holy saint, Abba Bishoi, recognized the great virtue of the elder and said to the brothers, “Come! Receive a blessing from this great man. For I see that divine power is with him, and he is filled with grace.” All of the brothers came and were blessed by him.

[The elder] remained with our father for seven days. He saw his way of life and came to know our father’s virtue; he was strengthened in his heart, and profited by what he saw, and he praised God. He, then, said to our father, “Farewell, my lord; I wish to return to my own land.” They embraced one another, and [the elder] left him and traveled to his own land.

Coda: Bishoi sees the Syrian monk borne home on a cloud

52. [Later] that day, a certain brother came to visit our father. The brothers said to him, “If only you had come a little earlier, you would have received the blessing of the great and perfect man who came to our father from Syria. Nonetheless, if you hurry after him, you will catch up with him; for he has walked scarcely a mile.”<sup>99</sup> Our holy father answered and said to that brother, “My son, do not pursue him, you will not catch up to him. He has traveled more than eighteen miles<sup>100</sup> upon a cloud. When the brothers heard this, they were amazed and praised God who dwells in his saints.

Bishoi sees an angel watching over a brother

53A. One time, our holy father went to the cell of one of the brothers to learn of his news. He saw that as the brother slept, an angel at his head was watching over him. He said, “Truly the Lord watches over those who trust [37v] in him.”<sup>101</sup> And he went away glorifying God.

Bishoi’s disciple is deceived by a Jew

53B. A certain brother, a simpleton, went to Egypt to sell his handiwork. He met a Jew who argued with him about Christ. He said to him, “You Christians<sup>102</sup> say that he who was crucified was the Christ; however, he was not, rather it was another who resembled him.”<sup>103</sup>

That brother said to him in his simplicity, “You have spoken correctly.” As he declared thus, immediately the grace of baptism was taken from him, because of the statement he professed in his simplicity.

#### Bishoi rebukes and teaches the monk

54. [That monk] returned to the wilderness, but when our father saw that the grace of baptism had been taken from him, he remained silent for a long time. When the brother saw the elder turning his face away from him, he said to him, “My father, why are you avoiding me now?” The holy one of the Lord, Abba Bishoi, said to him, “Who are you?” He answered and said, “I am so-and-so.” The elder said to him, “You are not he; for the grace of holy baptism is not upon you.” The brother said to him, “Why has it gone from me, father?”

55. The blessed elder said to him, “Because of the words you spoke to the Jew in Egypt.” 56. And that brother bowed down and said, “Forgive me, holy father, for I have sinned; indeed, I said those words because of my simplicity.”

57. The holy one said to him, “Look, my son, from now on, do not accept strange statements about the faith; rather, we vigilantly cling to what we have received from our holy fathers.” And our holy father prayed over him, saying, “Lord God, there is no one who has not sinned except for you.<sup>104</sup> I beseech you, you who are plentiful in mercies, to forgive this brother the sin he committed in his simplicity.” By the elder’s prayer, God restored the grace of baptism to that brother.

#### Bishoi assists John the anchorite with his fasting

58. One time, [38r] a great elder called Abba John came to our father from Baqe. This [ascetic] would keep vigil for many nights and days, often fasting while he remained in the wilderness without food or drink, performing great labors. Now his spirit became exhausted from thirst and fatigue, and he said to himself, “Let me rise up and go to Abba Bishoi to learn of his news.” He rose and came to him and knocked on his door. Our holy father opened to him, embraced him, and brought him into his cell, and they prayed and sat down. Now as they were discussing the words of God, the Holy Spirit then revealed to Abba Bishoi that Abba John had been fasting for many days, and was consumed with thirst and exhaustion. Our father instructed his disciple to bring some water and bread in order to eat with Abba John, to strengthen his soul, which was overtaken by hunger and thirst. The disciple brought everything asked of him. [Our father] urged Abba John and said to him, “Come, eat a little bread and drink a little water. You have been walking in the heat and are exhausted.” But Abba John did not want to taste anything.

He said, "Forgive me for not eating; I am fasting for my sins." Abba Bishoi said to him, "Brother, drink a bit of water so you are not consumed by the heat. Abba John said to him, "Let me be on account of the fast."

When he saw that [Abba John] did not want to eat or drink, our holy father stood up, spread his hands, and prayed before God and said, "Come to me, my Lord Jesus Christ, answer me, and have compassion upon John your servant, who is frail and weakened by the fast." Immediately, as he prayed Abba John was taken up in the Spirit, and he saw one eating bread and drinking water until he was full—and, indeed, this is what happened to him. After he ate and drank and was full, he returned [38v] to his cell, and he increased his fasting, saying to himself, "Fast now, for you were taken to a banquet."

Bishoi helps a young anchorite to defeat the Devil

59. A certain seedling<sup>105</sup> was in the desert, who had recently joined the monastery. He was troubled by the demons that were stirred up against him. He got up and went to Abba Bishoi and said to him, "Blessed father, remember me in your holy prayers. For the demon has left everything and attacks and torments me." Our father said to him, "My son, the statement you made is suitable for those who have been perfected and strengthened by God, against whom Satan wages war by night and day, but Satan is not yet aware that you live in this desert. Now, go entreat God, and I trust that he will give you relief from this matter." The brother returned to his place, and our father prayed to God and entreated him to have compassion on that brother and give him relief. 60. Immediately, Satan appeared, enraged, in the form of a roaring lion,<sup>106</sup> and he responded, saying to our holy father, "Why do you trouble me?" The pious elder said to him, "Abandon that novice brother, and do not trouble him or disturb him." Satan said to him, "I swear to you that I was not yet aware that he lived in this desert, he who is now tempted by a weak spirit. However, starting today I will attack him with all my might." The elder said to him, "May God rebuke and reject you!" And [Satan] left him and disappeared.

Afterward, Satan waged war against [39r] that brother with many great battles until he fled and escaped from his cell naked<sup>107</sup> due to what the demons inflicted upon him. He returned to the elder and said to him, "Holy father, hear me and help me." The elder said to him, "What is your grievance,<sup>108</sup> my son?" The brother said to him, "Father, the demons chased me out of my cell, and threw me out of it exposed because of what I suffered." Our father took him by the hand and brought him to his cave, and left him to rest from his ordeal. And the holy elder stood up in prayer and lifted up his hands toward heaven and entreated God and said, "Lord

God, Almighty, who created everything by his wisdom. You brought into existence that which did not exist by the living word from your<sup>109</sup> mouth. You, Lord, are our guardian and our protector. Now to you, God of all and Lord, I supplicate and entreat your compassion to keep this brother from the attacks of the demons and to strengthen him so he can remain in this desert and fulfill your will. He will become a tree, offering good fruit to you all the days of his life. You, Lord, have said that you will fill this desert with monks who will sanctify<sup>110</sup> your holy name. We beseech you for this, that you may be our protector and guardian, and to be mindful of our weakness, because you are able to do anything; one God, Jesus Christ, forever and ever.”

61. When our righteous, virtuous, and distinguished holy father Abba Bishoi said “Amen” and concluded his prayer, an angel of the Lord appeared to him with Satan bound by him with chains; and he stood before him. Satan spoke, saying [39v] “Woe to you, Bishoi! For you have tormented me a great deal. As the Lord God before whom I tremble lives,<sup>111</sup> I will leave this desert to you and to those who dwell in it, and I will depart for other regions.”

The holy elder said to him, “You enemy of truth, do you not cease warring against the servants of God; those whom he has gathered in his holy name? What is your quarrel with this brother? Why do you fight against him in this manner?”

Satan said to him, “I wanted to weaken him and defeat him quickly. For if I ignore him<sup>112</sup> and let him mature, he will fight valiantly against me and increase my affliction.” The holy one said to him, “May the Lord rebuke you and destroy you.” Satan promised him and said, “If you release me at this time, I will not come back and humiliate the brother.” 62. Then our father said to the angel, “Release him, and send him away until the day the Lord exacts retribution and pays him back according to his evil deeds.” Right away, [the angel] set him free and sent him away.

Now our father went back to that brother and sealed him with the sign of the holy cross, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. He comforted him and strengthened him, and he sent him to his cell praising and glorifying God. And by the prayers of our holy father Abba Bishoi, the demons did not return to [that brother] from that day, nor did they attack him. He advanced day by day and excelled, glorifying God and praising him, thanking him, and receiving his grace and that of our father Abba Bishoi.

John tells about Bishoi’s insight

63. One time, while I<sup>113</sup> was sitting next to our father, some brothers came to him to learn of his news. They asked him to speak words of exhortation for the profit of their souls. He answered and said to them, “Strive to

observe the rules of monasticism: prayer, fasting, purity, humility, love of humanity,<sup>114</sup> and love of the brothers.” He advised them with many such things, and revealed to them the thoughts [40r] of their hearts, and they marveled greatly at him.

When they departed from the elder, those brothers said to me,<sup>115</sup> “Our father, this elder is holy indeed, for he revealed to us the thoughts of our hearts.” I, John, said to them, “On many occasions, I had performed some deed by myself, and although no one was aware of it, whenever I met him and was able to speak confidentially<sup>116</sup> with him, he would say to me, ‘Such and such a thing was done by you.’” The brothers glorified him all the more, and they praised God who dwells in his saints.

Bishoi intercedes with God on behalf of the apostate monk Isaac  
64. There was a certain brother who constantly followed his own will; he did not consult with the elders, nor did he obey them. He rose up and went to Pnita Datroway,<sup>117</sup> which is a bit south of Fustat, to dwell there as a solitary. One day, he entered the city of Fustat to sell his handiwork, and a Jewish woman, a sorceress, looked out of a<sup>118</sup> house and saw him. Satan filled her eyes with lust, and she fell greatly in love. She called to [that brother] and brought him into her house, as though she were buying his goods, and she captured him in her snares. She made him leave his monastic habit and remain with her. And she made him convert to the religion of the Jews, and he became a Jew like her. She let him sleep on her leg, and she took up a toothpick and collected what was between his teeth so that no fragments of the body of our Savior Christ would be left between them—as he reported to me afterward.

65. Then a trip called upon the brothers, the monks from the desert, to enter the city for some purpose. When they went there, Isaac, who had become a Jew, saw them; he asked them, “Are you from the desert?” They said to him, “Yes.” He said to them, “Do you know the holy Abba Bishoi?” They said to him, “He is our father.” He said to them, “I adjure you, [40v] when you go back, tell him Isaac the Jew says, ‘I adjure you, our holy father, to pray for me because I have fallen into the snare of Satan.’” They said, “We will inform<sup>119</sup> him about you.”

Now that Jewish woman heard him as he was speaking with the brothers, and she knew that our holy father was able to save him from her hands. She looked out of her house and said to the brothers, “Tell Bishoi the solitary, if I see you here, I will harm you.”

So when the brothers returned to the desert, they went to our father to be blessed by him, but they forgot and did not tell him anything about Isaac. Holy Abba Bishoi, the prophet—for he was indeed a prophet like Elijah and

Elisha—answered and said to the brothers, “No one in Egypt spoke with you about me?” They said to him, “No, our father,” because Satan had made them forget. The Lord’s holy one said to them, “Did not Isaac the Jew say something you were to relay to me?” They said to him, “Yes, our father. He earnestly asked about your well-being, and he adjures you to pray for him because he has fallen into the snare of Satan. And while he said this to us, his wife heard him speaking with us. She looked out of her house and said to us, ‘Tell Bishoi the solitary, “If I see you here, I will harm you.”’”

Now the holy one was seated, and when he heard this, he was shaken, brought his feet back toward himself, and shuffled back three times, shouting out and saying, “Our Lord Jesus Christ, help me!” The brothers were amazed and astonished, and they said to him, “Even you are disturbed, our father?”

The Lord’s holy one said to them, [41r] “Who can overcome Satan’s snares involving women, except for the one whom God is with and is in? A woman deceived our father, the first Adam, and made him depart from paradise.<sup>120</sup> Likewise, the righteous Joseph was incarcerated in prison because of a woman.<sup>121</sup> Elijah the prophet fled to the wilderness from fear of Jezebel.<sup>122</sup> Samson, the mighty man of valor, was shackled by a woman.<sup>123</sup> Again, because of a woman, twenty-three thousand of the sons of Israel were killed by the sword in one day.<sup>124</sup> John the Baptist was decapitated at the instigation of a woman.<sup>125</sup> Women led astray the heart of Solomon, the great sage, who prospered in his kingdom more than all the kings before him.<sup>126</sup> A woman caused Peter, the chief of the disciples, to deny his Lord.<sup>127</sup> Now, I certainly do not condemn the saints—God forbid! Indeed, I have already said that the Lord was with each one of them until he crossed the stormy sea of this passing age.”

When the brothers heard this, they marveled at the elder’s sharp mind, and they glorified God who dwells in his saints. Then the elder informed them that this Jewish woman was a sorceress, who entangled Isaac by her words and cunning in her snares, and seduced him [to do] her bidding.

From then on, our father entreated God, by praying night and day, to deliver Isaac from that Jewish woman. And the Lord heard the prayer of his holy one, Abba Bishoi, and he appeared to him, saying, “My chosen Bishoi, why do you lament like this for Isaac, who purposely followed his own will until he fell into the snares of Satan, and denied me and the baptism he had received?” Our holy father wept and said, “I will not rest from entreating [41v] and supplicating you to have mercy on him, to bring him back to us, and pardon him.”

66. The Lord said to him, “If I pardon him, I will take from your labors and give to him.” The elder said, “Lord, you, yourself, know what is in the heart of everyone. Therefore, just as I desire to be saved, I also plead for

all to be saved. For I cannot bear to see my brother oppressed and afflicted while I am at rest, since we are from the same dust and the work of your holy hands. Indeed, my Lord, have mercy on him and bring him back to your holy flock. For I will not cease weeping and entreating you every night and day for all the days of my life, until you bring him back.”

67. The Lord said to him, “You have done well, my chosen Bishoi. I know that you would have laid down your life for the sake of your friend, just as I commanded my disciples. Indeed, there is no greater love than this: that one should lay down his life for the sake of his friend.<sup>128</sup> Therefore, I will not take anything from your labors; rather, I will increase your remuneration and great reward because of the mercy you have shown to my creation. And for your sake, I will have mercy on Isaac, who sinned and denied me, and I will bring him back to you here.” And the Lord gave him the peace and ascended to heaven.

Now the Lord was angry with that Jewish woman. After a few days had passed, she died. Isaac rose up and went to the wilderness, to our holy father, and he became his disciple and returned to Christianity.<sup>129</sup> He became a perfect monk, who pleased God all the days of his life.

#### A lesson about theft

[α]. One day, as our father was walking in the wilderness, he found a certain hole on a hillside and he descended into it. [42r] He found in it someone who was long dead, wrapped with worn-out rags,<sup>130</sup> and a bowl set on the side. He prayed, sat down and wept, and said, “Man, [how] brief is your life in this passing age! You are [now] released from it and your lusts have ceased.” As he prepared to leave, he thought to himself and said, “I will take this bowl so that the brothers may eat from it and be reminded of this dead man.”<sup>131</sup>

He reached out his hand and took it, but as he was about to leave, a voice came to him from the wrappings of the dead man, saying, “Bishoi, put the bowl back in its place. It is unbecoming to have thieves in the wilderness.” Immediately, I<sup>132</sup> put the bowl back, and I glorified God. For God desires to tell us by these things, my beloved, that it is inappropriate for anyone to take anything that does not belong to him, whether small or great, and all the more anything from the deceased.

#### Instructions to monks on attending festivals and visiting shrines

[β]. Our father commanded the brothers, saying, “Do not go to the mill or bake much bread, but satisfy yourselves with what God bestows on you from the work of your hands. Do not go out to a vineyard so you do not lose yourselves. Moreover, do not go to the festivals of martyrs to see the crowds—as this is not a [proper] assembly.<sup>133</sup> Go to the shrines<sup>134</sup> of the

martyrs and saints, and pray and say, ‘Lord of the saints, forgive us our transgressions, and teach us to do your will at all times.’ And return to your cells glorifying God.”

#### Bishoi and John leave Scetis after a barbarian invasion

[γ]. Afterward, the barbarians started coming into the desert, killing the holy elders in it, and throwing us into confusion. One day, while I was sitting by our holy father, I said to him, “My beloved brother, I do not hide what has come to my heart from you. Since I saw the barbarians destroying the desert and killing [42v] the fathers, I considered leaving so the barbarians would not kill me and go to Gehenna on my account.” Then that holy one said to me, “If you leave, I will also leave with you.”

For this reason, both of us stood up and prayed, and we departed for Egypt. I went to Clysma, and from there to the monastery of the holy Abba Antony, [where] I found a cave and remained in stillness by myself, and I continued beseeching God on account of my sins. As for the holy Abba Bishoi, he went to Upper Egypt,<sup>135</sup> to the city of Antinoë, which is Ansina.<sup>136</sup> He went to the desert there, and dwelt in it as a solitary. He vigorously pursued his way of life, as he observed stillness.

#### Bishoi instructs on dogma, sacrament, and love

[δ]. Then God magnified his name there because of his angelic way of life. But when the brothers gathered around our holy father, the prophet of the Lord, he constantly taught them to persist in brotherly love<sup>137</sup> and the true faith of the Holy Trinity. That is, that there is one God without division, without confusion, and without alteration. The creator of everything, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who are equally one Godhead, uncreated, existing from eternity. Moreover, he taught them not to neglect going to church and to constantly assemble there, and to partake of the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which give life to everyone who partakes of them.

He also gave them commandments about love, saying, “Love the whole creation of God; for everyone who loves his brother, loves God. For whatever we do for our brothers, we do for God and for our souls.”

#### Bishoi tests the brothers; Isaac answers correctly

[ε]. On another occasion, while he was sitting with the brothers, speaking with them regarding the profit of their souls, he wanted to test them as to whether they were steadfast in the faith. He said to them, “[What if] Satan prompted me to make an inappropriate statement about the true faith; [something] that is not even appropriate to utter? Beyond that [43r],

[what if] I have instituted something not in accordance with the rule of the brothers? Would you, then, agree with me and follow my will?"

Some among them said to him, "You, our father, have not gone astray, but if—God forbid—you err, we would be patient with you." Others among the brothers said, "We will never stop obeying you in everything." And others said, "Whatever we see you do, we will also do." Finally, one of them answered and said, "For my part, I have come to you to know the path of God, but if you go astray from God, I will not follow you, nor remain with you."

Our father Abba Bishoi rose up and kissed his head, and said, "This one observes the Lord's commandments." Now this man was Isaac, who had become a Jew, but repented and become virtuous and perfect. He was renowned in the days of our holy father Abba Bishoi, and after his departure.

Bishoi prays on behalf of an impudent priest

68. Therefore, our holy father was a sign in the desert, a well-pleasing example, and a source of guidance. He constantly instructed the brothers and strengthened them for the salvation of their souls. Now a certain priest lived near our father, and whenever our father spoke with the brothers and admonished them, that priest would speak vulgar words. The brothers were at a loss. Moreover, all who came to our father heard the profane words of that priest and suffered loss because of him, and they complained about him.

When a certain elder came to visit our father Abba Bishoi, the brothers assembled and told that elder the deeds of the priest, saying,<sup>138</sup> "All of us are disturbed by the profane words that he has previously spoken to us; and when we go to our cells, the Adversary reminds us of his words and disturbs us."

The elder said to them, "Get up and let us go to our father, and when I have conversed with him [43v] for a little while, remind me, and I will urge him to restrain [that priest] so that you will not be disturbed by his words."

So they rose up and went to the elder. That priest came, as was his custom, and he was speaking before them in his foolish way, but Abba Bishoi did not admonish him. The elder beckoned our father and stood with him to the side. He informed him of the brothers' trials and their complaints about that priest. "The brothers," he said, "want to hear the word of God from you constantly, but this priest is the cause of offense to them because of his words."

Abba Bishoi said to them, "What do you suggest I do to him? Satan wants to destroy him, and you want me to banish him. However, the Lord would condemn me because of him, saying, 'I gave you one man, Bishoi, and you have not been patient with him.' For if I am irate with him and forbid him from speaking, as is his custom, he will [feel] persecuted and leave here, return to his land, become secular, and lose his soul. Instead, you must

be patient with me and with him in love. Hence, do not act [in this manner], and, in due course, your soul will be pleased with us.”

The brothers answered and said, “If he is prepared to change his ways and return to the monastic rule, we would be patient and carry him upon our heads<sup>139</sup> until he returns to the light.” After this, that priest recognized his faults and his foolishness, and ceased from his evil words. He offered repentance and attained a good end, and he was obedient to the elder all the days of his life.

### Bishoi washes Christ’s feet

69A. Now our holy father Abba Bishoi was sitting in a cave in the wilderness of the Thebaid in Upper Egypt,<sup>140</sup> when our Lord Jesus came to him with two angels, just as he appeared to our father Abraham [44r] under the oak of Mamre.<sup>141</sup> This is not such an astonishing thing, for just as Abraham sanctified God, so, too, our father was God’s servant who was constantly sanctifying [God’s] name. Christ said to him, “Peace to you, my precious chosen elder, Bishoi.” Quickly, the blessed elder stood up, bowed down, and worshiped him. He took water and brought a basin, asked permission, and washed [the Lord’s] feet. Then our Lord went up, away from him, in glory to heaven.

### Bishoi’s disciple learns about the fruits of disobedience and obedience

69B. Our father, indeed, drank from that water, and left the remainder in the basin for a brother<sup>142</sup> and covered it; thus, when his disciple would come from Egypt, he might drink from it to be blessed by Christ. In this manner, he fulfilled what is written, “Love your neighbor as yourself.”<sup>143</sup> Now when his disciple came from outside, he said, “My son, get up and drink a bit of the water in the basin.”

He said to him, “Yes, my father, I will go drink from it.” However, he was grieved in his heart and said, “Instead of telling me, ‘Drink cool water, my son,’ when I have come suffering from the heat and exhaustion, my father tells me to drink the water in the basin.” And he was unwilling to drink from it.

Again, the elder said to him, “Get up, my son; drink a bit of water from the basin.” He said, “Pray for me; I will do so.” But he did not, and he said in his heart, “If I want to drink water, I will drink cool [water] from the pitcher.” Again, our father said to him a third time, “I am telling you: get up, drink a bit of the water of the basin.” He replied, “I will drink”; but he did not go, and the elder ceased speaking to him.

70. The disciple saw that the face of our father was not cheerful toward him, as he had been before. Immediately he rose up, went to the basin, and

uncovered it, but he did not find water in it. So he turned back to our father and said to him, “You must be ridiculing me, my father. I have found no water in the basin.”

The new Elijah and the second Elisha, that is our holy father Abba Bishoi, answered and said to him, “Such water would not last on earth until now.” The disciple said to him, “What is this water?”

The true and righteous one said to him, [44v] “Believe me,<sup>144</sup> my son, Christ came to a God-loving brother in this wilderness, because he was worthy, and he blessed him. [The brother] asked [Christ] to give him his feet, and he washed them with this water, and he brought some of it to me. I drank a bit and left some for you, but when you would not obey me and drink from it, angels raised it from earth.”

When the disciple heard this, he fell on the ground at our father’s feet, and his soul deserted him for a long time. When he came back to himself, the holy elder and true prophet raised him up and said to him, “Now<sup>145</sup> because Adam did not obey his creator, he fell from the joy of paradise. You, too, because you did not obey me and transgressed my instruction to drink, a great benefit has been taken away from you.”

Bishoi sends his despondent disciple to a holy man

71. The disciple was then greatly struck in his heart, and he lamented and wept because of his disobedience. He was contrite over his transgression, and grieved on account of the gift of which he was not allowed to drink. Then the holy elder comforted and encouraged him, saying, “Now that you have repented, your sin<sup>146</sup> is abolished.” But he was unable to comfort his heart. So that disciple implored him and said, “My lord and my father, have pity on me and send me to a perfect man who is mighty in God, that I might question him about my transgression.” Our father then gave him a round loaf of bread and said to him, “Go to the city of Antinoë, which is Ansina.<sup>147</sup> South of the [city] wall, you will find a man sitting on a dunghill like a fool, with children throwing stones at him. Give him this round loaf in my name, and he will speak with you.”

72. [The disciple] rose up and went to the city just as his master had told him. He found a man sitting on a dunghill as children were encircling him and throwing stones at him. [45r] He drove away those children, and gave [the man] the loaf of bread in the name of Abba Bishoi. [The man] turned to him and said, “I greatly desire to hear of his news.” He also said to the disciple, “Why did you not obey your master, and failed to obey your father that such a great gift was taken away from you, and you become disturbed, and caused [yourself] all this turmoil? Get up now and return to your father. Obey him and know that whoever disobeys the holy

Abba Bishoi disobeys Christ.” The disciple returned to our father Abba Bishoi, and relayed everything that the prophet of God had said to him. And he remained with his father.

The disciple goes to see the holy man again

73. A few days later, he was [again] afflicted in his soul because of the grace he had lost. He wept constantly, saying, “Woe is me! I am dying due to the anxiety of my heart, for I did not drink the blessing of Christ’s washing!” Our holy father Abba Bishoi would comfort him, saying, “You have already demonstrated repentance. For you have grieved, and God had compassion on you and has forgiven your transgression.”

His heart was not at all comforted by these things, and once more he asked our Father to send him to that elder, “that holy man who consoled my passion.” The holy and spiritual Abba Bishoi said to him, “That prophet, the elder to whom you went, has gone to his rest. Nonetheless, go to the east of the city of Antinoë. You will find a mortuary chapel facing the desert with its door open. Enter and you will find three dead men reposed together. For this mortuary chapel is the burial place of those prophets who were well-pleasing to God in monasteries and cities. As the time came for each one of them to depart, he would go up to this place and entrust his soul into God’s hands. So enter there and put your hand on the one lying in the middle, and as he rises, he will speak with you.”

74. The disciple went and found [45v] the three sleepers, just as our father had told him. And he put his hand on the one in the middle and spoke to him in this manner, “Holy Abba Bishoi says to you, ‘Rise up,’ so I may speak with you.”

The dead prophet immediately rose up and said to the disciple, “Did I not already tell you to obey your master? Why are you lacking faith to such an extent? If, indeed, you had faith, I would tell you that whatever is accepted from Abba Bishoi, is accepted from Christ, and whoever does not obey that virtuous man, does not obey Christ, the Son of the living God. Get up now and go to your father, and obey him in everything he commands you, because he is the one who supplicates the Lord on your behalf.” [The prophet] said this and lay back in his place.

The disciple returned to our father Abba Bishoi and relayed everything the prophet had said to him, while he was amazed and contrite on account of what he had seen and heard. He remained in fear and trembling of the word of Abba Bishoi, and he obeyed him all the days of his life.

Therefore, let no one lose faith, or disbelieve these things, or deny them. For the Lord said with his mouth, “Whoever believes in me, the works that I do, he will also do; and [he will do] more than these.”<sup>148</sup>

Bishoi intervenes to absolve two young monks of false charges

75. Now two sibling monks heard of the virtue of Abba Bishoi. They rose up and went to him. They entreated him and said, "If you would,<sup>149</sup> our father, receive us so that we may be under the protection of your prayers. Guide our souls and advance them."

Our father joyfully received them because of his great love for humanity. And he allowed them [to stay] with him for many days, while he exhorted them and taught them how to please God. Afterward, our father wanted to retreat from among people, and to remain in solitude to fulfill his service [46r] to God in stillness, and to advance in his way of life. He said to those two brothers, "Rise; go enter this desert. Live in solitude and occupy yourselves with prayer and with reading the Scriptures."

They responded, "To whom will we go, our father? The words of life are with you, holy one of the Lord."<sup>150</sup> He said to them, "Indeed, go; for a monk is not perfected without stillness." They said to him, "Direct us, then, our father, to where we should go." He said to them, "Go to the desert of Tkow";<sup>151</sup> and he prayed over them. They received his blessing and departed for the desert of Tkow, and dwelt in it as he had commanded them.

One day, thieves came and entered the cell of one of the brothers and stole all of his possessions. Now there dwelt in that desert a certain elder who had been deceived by Satan. He was teaching that he could tell people about what they had lost, and he would say to them, "It was an angel who informed me about their [location]." And so the head of the monastery rose up, went to that elder, and said to him, "Our father, tell me who robbed the cell of that brother?"

The deceiving elder said to him, "Those two brothers who have come here recently, and have dwelt in the desert; they are the ones who took his [handi]works." All the brothers were convinced of this, and they rose up with the head of the monastery, and arrested those two brothers and imprisoned them as thieves.

Now our spiritual father, the Lord's prophet, Abba Bishoi, learned of this by the Spirit; [that is,] he was informed of the trial that came upon those brothers. He rose up and quickly traveled up south to the desert of Tkow. He found those brothers imprisoned, and said to the head of the monastery, "These men are not the thieves." The head of the monastery said to him, "An elder, a seer, told me about them." [46v] The elder [Abba Bishoi] said to him, "Assemble all the brothers for me." They assembled, and that elder was among them. When they saw our father, all of them bowed down to him and were blessed by him. Then the holy Abba Bishoi said to them, "What evil have these two foreigners done among you that

you have imprisoned them?” That elder said to him, “[It is] because they stole and took away the possessions of one of the brothers.”

Our father sighed in his heart and said to the elder, “If you would,<sup>152</sup> confess that you have been deceived by these revelations.” The elder said to him, “I have not been deceived; I have only spoken the truth.” Saint Abba Bishoi said to him, “If you would, confess that you were tempted, and disclose the truth [of the matter].”

The brothers, then, because they knew that Abba Bishoi was a true prophet and a spiritual man, put that elder to shame. And his heart shuddered as he said, “Indeed, demons have deceived me.” As he said this, a spirit of Satan came out of him in the form of a sow, with its tusks protruding from its mouth. It charged the elder to injure him, but our holy father Abba Bishoi rebuked it, and it immediately vanished. When all the brothers saw this, they knelt and bowed down before him—with that elder among them.

They said, “Absolve us, our holy father; indeed, God dwells in you.” Immediately, they released those two brothers who were imprisoned. And by the Holy Spirit who was in him, our father said to the head of the monastery, “Go to such and such a place, and you will find what was stolen from the brother.” But he did not reveal who committed the theft. Moreover, he bound him with an oath, “Do not tell anyone what I revealed to you about the location of the stolen items.” With this, he had driven vainglory out of himself. Right away the head of the monastery went and found [the items] just as our father had told him, and so they [47r] glorified God who dwells in his saints.

### Bishoi teaches about anger

[ζ]. So our father was mighty in his way of life and virtuous, patient, not given to anger, and serene. A certain brother accompanied by a youth<sup>153</sup> came to him, and he remained with the elder for a few days. But that youth went about here and there, and he greatly offended the brothers. Seeing him act in this manner, they entreated our father and said to him, “Admonish this [youth], father, because he offends us.” The brothers hoped that he would rebuke and punish him, but [Abba Bishoi] did not speak with him.

Again, the brothers said to him, “Reprimand this youth and whip him so that he may not offend us.” He responded to them, “No, my sons, it is not my place to reprimand him.” [Then] one of the brothers went to whip him, but the elder would not permit him. He said to them, “If I considered doing this, I would lose everything I have labored for all the days of my life.” The brothers said to him, “What would you lose?”

He said to them, “My willpower against giving in to anger. For if I spoke with this person in anger, I would lose all my labors. What, then, would I gain by reprimanding him if I should lose what I have?”

By this, our father taught us that we should not admonish a disciple who is not our own,<sup>154</sup> and should not be angry with him when he transgresses. As for a disciple who is our own, that is, a son, Scripture says, “Discipline your son with an iron rod; he will not die from a blow, and his soul will bless you.”<sup>155</sup> For if you do not discipline your sons, their souls will be lost.

### Bishoi as an abbot

[η]. Now, the Lord came to our father at all times and spoke with him because of his purity, chastity, and holiness. One time, the Lord said to him, “There will be a monastery for you in the desert of Scetis and many souls will congregate in it, offering the oblation<sup>156</sup> in your name. And you will be [47v] the father of many brothers forever. Amen.”

The holy one said to him, “Excuse me [from this duty], my Lord; I am an old man and I am unable to take on this service. Such a task belongs to holy men who keep your commandments, and I am a sinner.”

Nonetheless, the Lord gathered a multitude of brothers to dwell with him, and he clothed some of them with the monastic habit, and they dwelt in caves around him. He taught them to constantly fear the Lord and to read the Scriptures and the psalms. He used to say to them, “My sons, work with your hands so that you may live, and so that from your work you are able to give alms for your souls.”<sup>157</sup>

### Abba Bishoi teaches a disgruntled monk about work

[θ]. Now one of the brothers was sitting and listening to our father teaching the brothers, exhorting them to work with their hands; he reflected and said in his heart, “If only our father had worked with his hands, he would know the hardship of work, and would cease urging and pressuring us to work.”<sup>158</sup>

Our father perceived this in the Spirit and said to him, “My son, these things you are criticizing and grumbling against me about—teaching the brothers and exhorting them to persist in the work of their hands, reading Scripture and psalms, services and prayers—do you not know that I am anxious for your souls before God at all times?”

When the brother heard this, a braided cord<sup>159</sup> fell from his hands, and he bowed down before our father, venerated him, and said, “Forgive me, father.” Abba Bishoi said to him, “I, my son, even I work. Indeed, the Lord knows that since I came to this place I have not ceased working night and day while I completed my prayers. I labor with my hands, and weaken my body so that it may not overtake me and I be tormented there in Gehenna.”<sup>160</sup>

For whoever toils here with his body, and weakens it by fasting, prayer, vigils, reading, and manual labor, [48r] is freed from Gehenna, but whoever rests his body here, fornication will overwhelm him and conquer him, and he will inherit the eternal Gehenna.”

When the brothers heard this, they bowed down to him and said, “Forgive us, our holy father; for we cannot perform all these [labors]. For your soul rejoices greatly in spiritual works and is strengthened by them.”

Our father performed the multitude of his deeds privately, so they might remain unknown. Thus, it can be easily said many times that he is more honored than many other holy men whose virtues are known.

### The hierarchy of the four great monasteries

[t]. However, while many Scetians, that is, virtuous ascetics [from Scetis], lived in this desert, we know [only] the names of those who drew intimately<sup>161</sup> close to God and have labored, and their memory will last forever and ever. Some among these [ascetics], by the command of God, have had monasteries built after their names, and churches at those locations, and radiant altars that illuminate the world more than the sun, upon which heavenly oblations are offered daily, granting life to our souls and bodies. These, the chosen among God’s elect, he has revealed and rendered them a [safe] harbor for the whole world, to deliver the souls of whoever comes to them with upright hearts, like cities set apart as places of refuge. The first of these [monasteries] is that of the holy chosen one, the prophet and friend of God, the founder of the spiritual law, the great one, our father Abba Macarius, whose name became renowned throughout the whole earth. He became a guide,<sup>162</sup> a holy father, and the spiritual master to all who live in this desert. After him, I, the insignificant John, not to praise myself, not that, I have written [only] what the Lord willed, and what our holy father Abba Bemoi had foretold. Next [48v] is our holy father Abba Bishoi, whose excellent way of life we are narrating. After this are our holy fathers: the Roman fathers,<sup>163</sup> those whom our father Abba Macarius guided and taught the life of the holy monastic habit. These four holy [monasteries] shine in the desert of Scetis like precious stones, pearls sparkling in the darkness. They are like the four disciples who preached the gospel; those who evangelized the whole world.

### On the position of Bishoi’s monastery in Wadi al-Natrun

[κ]. Moreover, we find it written in the gospels that Christ chose seventy-two disciples and he sent them to preach everywhere.<sup>164</sup> Their names were not revealed to us, because earlier he chose twelve and called them disciples,<sup>165</sup> and told us their names and identified them to us. In like manner, then,

here also God has revealed the names of these four holy [places], who[se saints] are much greater than the rest of the other saints, as I have said previously. [The Lord] spread their fame throughout the whole world.

#### The healing well at Bishoi's monastery

[λ]. Moreover, God gave a great gift to the monastery of the holy Abba Bishoi in [the following way].<sup>166</sup> Barbarians had attacked forty-nine elder monks, near the great tower called Biamūn. They attacked and killed them all. Then, they changed direction to go to their country in the west. When they arrived at the water well at the monastery of Abba Bishoi, they rested along with their horses near the well. They took their swords, covered as they were with the blood of those monk-martyrs whom they had slain, and washed them in that well. [The water] from it became a cure for all diseases until this very day, for the praise of God, who is pleased by his saints.

#### Bishoi and Paul accept a disciple

[μ]. As our father aged, he struggled a great deal in the spirit, as if he were just beginning his monastic vocation,<sup>167</sup> and he loved stillness and excelled in his way of life. He rose up and went to Abba Paul of Tamma, who lived on a certain hill, and prayed before the Lord unceasingly, performing innumerable labors. He<sup>168</sup> had a son, Abba Sīraws, who came [49r] from the city of Ansina. He would faithfully go to Abba Paul and Abba Bishoi to receive their<sup>169</sup> blessing. In faith, he desired to touch their clothing to be blessed by them,<sup>170</sup> and to follow their ways. Many times, he would come to the wilderness and remain in stillness in it. And when he came to these holy men, they saw the divine blessing upon him, and they said to him, “Your body will not separate from our bodies in this world, nor will your soul separate from our souls in the world to come.” And they told him, “God will establish a monastery in your name.” Thus, he humbled himself to them all the days of his life.

#### The godly Bishoi and holy Paul

76. Now Abba Paul loved Abba Bishoi and even humbled himself to him. Our father Abba Bishoi would constantly go to Abba Paul and they would speak from the Holy Scriptures like Elijah and Elisha, the holy prophets. For it is written, “The spirit of the prophets is subject to prophets.”<sup>171</sup> Abba Bishoi said to Abba Paul, “Brother Paul, we must labor a little as long as we remain in the world, before we depart from it.” Abba Paul said to him, “Pray for me, my holy father, that I may implement<sup>172</sup> all you have instructed me, and not hide any of my private [thoughts] from you.” Abba Bishoi said to him, “Let us worship God with our whole heart, for he had mercy upon us and brought us to this most pleasant time. And [let us] work with the five

talents, which the Lord will increase for us, and not be disheartened like the one who had the one talent,<sup>173</sup> and anger the Lord against us that he should place our portion with the hypocrites. Rather may we stand before him with a pure heart that he might remember our labors and have mercy upon us.” Abba Paul said to him, “Pray for me, that I may struggle with all my might.”

77A. Thus, they became at that time like a [protective] brass wall to all the monks who came to be blessed by them, and they prayed especially for the deliverance and preservation of the world. We also ask them now to remember us before God Christ that he may have mercy upon us when we stand before him.

### Bishoi and Paul in the cave cell

78A. Now as the time of the departure of our father Abba Bishoi drew near, for his life was long and he became very old, he offered up his body as an acceptable offering to the Lord.

He said to me, “As many years as I have lived in the desert of Scetis, likewise I lived in the desert with the monastic fathers<sup>174</sup> in the south.<sup>175</sup> I went [49v] to them in faith, and I would consult with them, and praise God.” He also lived with Abba Paul in the desert for many years, as he sanctified the Lord. The divine and excellent deeds he performed [then] were innumerable.

### Sayings of Bishoi

77B. Abba Bishoi would say thus, “Of all the virtues, there is none like placing your word below the word of your friend, and placing what is his before what is yours.”

Again, he said, “Those years I have spent at the monastery before anyone knew of my way of life are the ones that I am confident I will receive a reward for, but those [years] since people knew of me, I am not relying on anything from them.”

They say about him that among all the deeds he performed, if anyone knew of it,<sup>176</sup> he would abandon it and take up another. Thus, at all times he would flee from vainglory. He said that as vainglory takes hold of an individual, it eats up all of his fruits; yet, many are those who love it, but this holy man fled from it. He had relied upon God since his youth, and [thus] he inherited the kingdom in heaven and attained the good eternal things.

### Death of Bishoi

78B. As [Abba Bishoi] became old and increased in his days, his body grew weak from advanced age, and the Lord wanted to give rest to his servant

and release him from the prison of this sorrowful world. He passed away on the eighth day of the Egyptian month of Abib, which is the second of Tammuz.<sup>177</sup> The Lord received his holy soul, and angels came out to meet him, rejoicing for him and accompanying him until they brought him into the kingdom on high with splendor and honor. Then the brothers who dwelt with him wrapped his holy body with great honor, and they buried him in Minyat Duwany,<sup>178</sup> while praising God and glorifying him.

Now, if someone implores and asks us about the years he spent in the desert, let him know that we do not know them. Indeed, we asked him on many occasions to tell us about them, but he did not [50r] want to, because he eschewed the honor of people. Nonetheless, we were told by trustworthy individuals that he lived sixty years in the desert, worshiping the Lord by night and day, praising his name. A portion of those years he dwelt in Upper Egypt,<sup>179</sup> that is, the Thebaid. He performed many [other] great wondrous deeds, which we have not written due to the deficiency of faith. God alone knows of [those deeds], and he rewarded him. Thus, we have written for you but a few of the many distinguished and virtuous deeds of the chosen and perfect one, our holy father Abba Bishoi. For the glory of his Lord, let us imitate his holy way of life, and follow in his steps.

#### Translation of relics

79. Now Abba Paul also departed on the seventh of Bābah, of the months of the Copts, which is the fourth of Teshrin I.<sup>180</sup> He died and was buried in a desert cave.<sup>181</sup> When Abba Sīraws learned of the passing of these saints, he immediately boarded a boat and came to Minyat Duwany. He took the body of the holy Abba Bishoi and placed it on the boat to bring him to Ansina, and place him in the monastery he had built. They sailed in the sea,<sup>182</sup> but when they reached the place where the body of Abba Paul was, the boat halted in the middle of the sea and would not proceed. They remained for two days in this manner. The sailors on the boat labored to make it sail, but it did not move from its spot.

Now there was a certain spiritual elder who lived in a cave at that location, called Abba Jeremiah. He rose up and went to the boat and said to the people in it, “Do you know why your boat is not moving?” They said to him, “No.” He said to them, “It is on account of the body of Abba Paul of Tamma, because he and Abba Bishoi promised [50v] each other, while they were alive, that their bodies would remain in the same place in this world, and their spirits in the house of God.” When the holy Abba Sīraws heard this, he took some people with him and went to the wilderness and brought the body of Abba Paul from where it was, and placed it with them on the boat. They sailed and arrived at Antinoë, that is

Ansina, and, immediately, he carried them to his monastery. He adorned them with great honor in expensive wrappings, and he kept them in befitting splendor.

People would come to be blessed by them and to embrace their holy bodies. And whoever had a disease, as he approached their bodies, would be cured. Faithful, honest people who came from the city of Ansina to the Monastery of the holy Abba Antony to pray had reported that to us;<sup>183</sup> it was they who informed me of these things.

### Conclusion and doxology

80. When I heard the news about the repose of the God-loving one, the holy Abba Bishoi, I mourned him greatly. However, my heart was comforted in that he attained the good things he longed for, and I thanked the Lord and praised his name. Immediately, I sought to quickly write to you, God-loving ones, a few of the words and deeds that my eyes have seen and my ears have heard, for the benefit of your souls and for the commemoration of our holy father Abba Bishoi, who, indeed, went on to the kingdom on high.

Let us all be worthy of the prayer of our father, and let us render glory and praise to our Lord Jesus Christ with his compassionate Father and his life-giving Holy Spirit, now and always, and forever.

Amen.<sup>184</sup>

### Notes

- 1 On this recension and the manuscripts, also see the general introduction, 15–16.
- 2 See the appendix in Monica Blanchard, “Beh Isho‘ Kamulaya’s Syriac Discourses on the Monastic Way of Life: Edition, English Translation, and Introduction” (PhD diss., Catholic University of America, 2001).
- 3 See the general introduction, 15–16, and the following paragraph. These paragraphs were likely in the Salomon manuscript as well.
- 4 Paul Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum*, vol. 3 (Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1892), 587. (Hereafter: Bedjan.)
- 5 V. Scheil, “Restitution de deux textes dans le récit syriaque de la vie de Mar Bischoi (ed. Bedjan),” *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und verwandte Gebiete* 15 (1900), 104–106.
- 6 The contents of the manuscript are listed at <http://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc101803w>; the manuscript is accessible at <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b53115223f>, accessed August 1, 2017.
- 7 See the general introduction, 2, 7, and 15.

- 8 For instance, Syr. 236 preserves an abbreviated version of ¶65; though relying on the Salomon manuscript, Bedjan provided the longer recension attested here.
- 9 This is a rough guide to the Bedjan edition (in italic) vis-à-vis BnF Syr. 236 and the Salomon Manuscript: p. 572/¶¶1–3, Syr. 236; 573/4, Syr. 236; 574/5–6, Syr. 236; 575/7–8, Syr. 236; 576/9–11, Syr. 236; 577/12, Syr. 236; 578/13, Syr. 236; 579/14, Syr. 236; 580/15, Syr. 236; 581/16–18, Syr. 236; 582/19–20, Syr. 236; 583/21, Syr. 236; 584/32–35, Syr. 236; 585/35 cont., Syr. 236; 586/41, Sal. MS; 587/41 cont., Sal. MS; 588/42–43, Sal. MS; 589/44–46, Sal. MS; 590/47, Syr. 236; 591/48, Syr. 236; 592/49, Sal. MS; 593/50, Sal. MS; 594/51, Sal. MS; 595/52 || end 60–61, Sal. MS; 596/62–63, Sal. MS; 597/53A–54, Syr. 236; 598/64, Syr. 236; 599/65, Syr. 236; 600/65 cont., Syr. 236; 601/65 cont., Syr. 236; 602/66–67, Syr. 236; 603/α, Sal. MS; 604/β, γ, Sal. MS; 605/δ, ε, Sal. MS; 606/68, Sal. MS; 607/68 cont., Sal. MS; 608/69A–B, Syr. 236; 609/70, Syr. 236; 610/71, Syr. 236; 611/72–73, Syr. 236; 612/74, Syr. 236; 613/75, Sal. MS; 614/75 cont., Sal. MS; 615/75 cont., Sal. MS; 616/ζ, Sal. MS; 617/η, Syr. 236; 618/θ, Sal. MS; 619/78B, Syr. 236; 620/80, Syr. 236.
- 10 Or “chaste.”
- 11 MS A reads “their,” but then switches to “his”; MS E retains the masculine singular, “his,” throughout.
- 12 That is, July 15.
- 13 Heb 11:38.
- 14 “Christ” is lacking in MS A, where there appears to be an incomplete correction made to the text. The correct reading is preserved in MS B.
- 15 Rom 1:9.
- 16 Lit. “from time to time.”
- 17 Lit. “these things.”
- 18 “Churches” and “alms” are plural in the text.
- 19 Perhaps Tarabia in the western Delta, as M. Blanchard has suggested; see S. Timm, *Das christlich-koptische Ägypten in arabischer Zeit* (Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 1984–92), 6:2522–30.
- 20 MS B reads “Besīnīshyā”; MS C reads “Basinbīyā.”
- 21 Cf. 2 Cor 12:9.
- 22 Lit. “set his face/himself on the fear/worship of God.”
- 23 That is, Scetis.
- 24 This is the literal Arabic translation (*mizān al-qulūb*) of the Coptic etymology: Scetis < Cop. Shihēt: *shi* “to weigh” or “measure,” and *hēt* “heart” or “mind.”
- 25 The name is not vocalized in MSS A or D, but it is in the others: MS B, “Bemoi”; MS C, “Bamawi”; MS E, “Bamwa”; MS F, “Bimuh” or

- “Bimuch”—the last letter is a *ḥēt*, a likely misreading of the *yod*, which is attested otherwise.
- 26 Or “forbade.”
- 27 Or “appearance”; “demeanor.”
- 28 Or “satiated”; lit. “watered.”
- 29 See Prov 10:8.
- 30 1 Thes 5:17.
- 31 Ps 119:103.
- 32 Ps 1:3.
- 33 This corrupted form is likely “Abā Bāshaya.” See the general introduction, 3.
- 34 Lit. “I, the insignificant one, remained with the one who is a brother to me, Abba Bishoi.” MS B adds “John” after “insignificant one.”
- 35 Although MSS A, C, E, F read “us,” MS B, fol. 114r, reads “to me,” which is the preferred reading here given that the tradition referenced involved only John the Little.
- 36 MS F (Bedjan, 576) adds: “On Sundays, he partook of the holy mysteries of the body and blood of Christ.”
- 37 Here and below, Syr. *shelya*, which is often synonymous with Gr. *hēsychía*, hesychia.
- 38 Or “hermit/monk.”
- 39 Or “deliverance”; “refuge.”
- 40 Gr. *katástasis*; Geoffrey W.H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1961), 720(B.5).
- 41 Lit. “fear.”
- 42 Syr. *iqāre*.
- 43 Heb 12:23.
- 44 See Jn 15:5; 14:12.
- 45 See n. 60 to the English translation of the Arabic recension (chapter five).
- 46 On this theme, see 1 Cor 1:25–31; 2 Cor 12:9.
- 47 “Ministry,” or “service,” includes monastic and liturgical offices.
- 48 I.e., hospitality.
- 49 Lit. “gift.”
- 50 MS C reads “saved me.”
- 51 ¶¶22–31 are in MS C, though Bedjan omits them from his edition; see the general introduction, 16–17.
- 52 Or “worshiped.”
- 53 This is an oath formula attested in the Old Testament; e.g., 1 Sam 14:45.
- 54 Lit. “her,” that is, the soul of the disciple.
- 55 See Ps 99:6.
- 56 Jn 15:13.

- 57 Lit. “gift.”
- 58 See Ps 119:2; 112:1. Lit. “man,” Syr. *gabra*.
- 59 Heb 11:38.
- 60 Vowels were added to the text here. Unfortunately, there is a smudge in the middle of the word in MS A. MS B reads “Būsuy,” and MS F reads “Basqi.” It is not clear what “Basway” refers to; shortly below, the text notes that it was in the Thebaid, in Middle Egypt. The Greek text vaguely states that the elder lived “in a village near the borders of Egypt.” MS E reads the word as the proper name of the solitary.
- 61 Gr. *túpos*.
- 62 Or “Hieracas”; lit. “Arqā.”
- 63 Lit. “Paraclete,” that is, the Holy Spirit; see Jn 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7.
- 64 The summary demonstrates knowledge of the *Life of Macarius*, ¶6 (Eng. trans. Tim Vivian, *St. Macarius the Spiritbearer* [Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2004]); cf. *Life of Paul of Tamma* (Ar. Long Rec.: Awad Wadi, “La recensione lunga della vita araba di Paolo di Tamma, presentazione, edizione e indice.” *SOCC* 38 [2005]: 115–78), ¶¶85–92.
- 65 Cf. Mt 5:2.
- 66 Gen 1:1–2.
- 67 Is 61:1.
- 68 Ps 104:30.
- 69 See Ezek 37:5.
- 70 From Gr. *arrabōn*.
- 71 Cf. Jn 1:32–34.
- 72 1 Cor 12:3.
- 73 Lit. “clothed with God.”
- 74 Reads *qnumi* (sg. *qnuma*): “hypostasis,” “person.”
- 75 Dan 7:9.
- 76 The proof depends upon the contrast to “thrones” in the plural and the fact that only one person takes his seat.
- 77 Mt 28:19. Here, they are identified, but “name” is singular.
- 78 Text reads Bīfīmūn; Greek reads Poemen.
- 79 MS B: Ṭamoneqon; MS F: Ṭemoniqon.
- 80 MS A: Ṭamaway; MS B: Ṭamoi; MS F: Ṭamios.
- 81 Here and below, MS E reads “child.”
- 82 Scetis and Nitria are often conflated as one region.
- 83 See Mt 18:2–4; Mk 10:13–16.
- 84 Here and in MS B, but MS F reads “him.”
- 85 Mt 25:21, 23.
- 86 Or “troubled,” “weary.”
- 87 Cf. 1 Cor 10:13.

- 88 Cf. Ex 33:11.
- 89 Or “in bondage/enslaved.”
- 90 Cf. Gal 4:1–7. These last few sentences are identical in MSS A and B, but they differ from MS E and the Ethiopic text.
- 91 Perhaps, “a true son”; lit. “a son-heir.”
- 92 This sentence is attested only in MS A, B, and E, and in no other recension. On Apollo and Anoup, see Tim Vivian, “Monks, Middle Egypt, and Metanoia: The *Life of Phib by Papohe the Steward* (Translation and Introduction),” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 7, no. 4 (1999): 547–71.
- 93 Only MS F, the Salomon Manuscript, adds “whose name was Ephrem.” See the general introduction, 14. On Ephrem in Coptic literature, see Monica J. Blanchard, “Saint Ephrem’s Coptic Friend, Apa Bishoi,” *The Harp* 16 (2003): 43–55; and her “The Coptic Heritage of St. Ephrem the Syrian,” in *Acts of the Fifth International Congress of Coptic Studies, Washington D.C., 12–15 August 1992*, ed. T. Orlandi and D.W. Johnson (Rome: C.I.M., 1993), 37–51.
- 94 MS F adds: “He was skilled in the knowledge and interpretation of Scripture and in the contemplation [*theoria*] of the Spirit.”
- 95 Lit. “show your face before.”
- 96 Since the Nile flows north, traveling south in Egypt is typically described as traveling “up.”
- 97 Lit. “he.” MS F reads “Ephrem.”
- 98 See Jn 1:47.
- 99 In recension *SA Syr2*, according to MS F (Bedjan, 595), the contiguous text reads: “for he has walked scarcely a mile. Our holy father replied and said, ‘Glory to your holy name’”—thus concealing a large gap from the end of ¶52 to the latter portion of ¶60. In that manuscript, the text should be read: “[¶52] for he has walked scarcely a mile . . . [¶60] . . . Our holy father replied.” MS B provides a slightly different, and likely earlier, form of *SA Syr2*. At the end of fol. 120r, it includes most of ¶52, concluding with “he has traveled more than eighteen miles,” and then (fol. 120v) jumps to the middle of ¶60: “naked due to what the demons inflicted upon him.” Some of the missing paragraphs (¶¶53A–57) are positioned elsewhere in Bedjan’s edition based on the Salomon Manuscript; see Bedjan, 597–98.
- 100 The gap that demarcates Recension *SA Syr2*, according to MS B, begins after these words.
- 101 Cf. Ps 33:18.
- 102 Syr. *krīstyono*.
- 103 On this anachronistic passage, see the general introduction, 12.
- 104 2 Cor 5:21; Heb 4:15; 7:26; 1 Pet 2:22; 1 Jn 3:5.
- 105 Meaning a young, inexperienced monk.
- 106 See 1 Pet 5:8.

- 107 It is here that *SA Syr2*, as represented in MS B, resumes; top of fl. 120v.
- 108 Lit. “story”; “account”; “matter.”
- 109 MS A and B read “his”; only MS E reads “your,” which is the preferable reading.
- 110 It is here that the gap in *SA Syr2*, as represented in MS F, comes to an end. The odd transition is somewhat mitigated by the insertion of the word “glory”: hence, “Our holy father answered and said, ‘Glory to your holy name.’”
- 111 See n. 53, above.
- 112 Lit. “turn away from him.”
- 113 MS F adds “John.”
- 114 Or “philanthropy.”
- 115 MS A reads “to him,” but MS B retains the preferred reading, “to me.”
- 116 Gr. *parrhesia*: “to speak confidently” or “candidly,” but also, “boldness,” “confidence,” or “assurance.”
- 117 MS B: “Pnita Datrowy”; MS F reads “Afaq Tarway.”
- 118 MSS B and F read “her.”
- 119 MSS B and E read “remind,” which is the original reading in MS A, but it is crossed out and “inform” is in the margin.
- 120 Cf. 1 Tim 2:14.
- 121 Gen 39:20.
- 122 1 Kgs 19:3–4.
- 123 Judges 16:21.
- 124 1 Cor 10:7–8; cf. Ex 32:6; Num 25:1–9.
- 125 Mt 14:1–12.
- 126 1 Kgs 11:1–8.
- 127 See Mt 26:69–75; see Maged S.A. Mikhail, *The Legacy of Demetrius of Alexandria: The Form and Function of Hagiography in Late Antique and Islamic Egypt* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 66–69.
- 128 Jn 15:12–14.
- 129 Lit. *krīṣṭonoutha*.
- 130 That is, in a burial shroud.
- 131 Or “remember [that is, pray for] that dead man.”
- 132 There is an abrupt switch in grammatical person here from third to first person.
- 133 Or “where there is no church.” “Assembly,” “gathering,” and “church” are all the same word here.
- 134 Or “churches.”
- 135 Syriac: M-r-i-s (Mārīs) < Coptic *marēs*. See Timm, *Das christlich-koptische Ägypten*, 4:1590–92.
- 136 “Antinoë, which is Ansina,” is also in MSS B and E.

- 137 Lit. “love of the brothers.”
- 138 Lit. “namely,” “that is.”
- 139 That is, they will cater to him, or treat him with the utmost respect.
- 140 See n. 135, above.
- 141 Gen 18.
- 142 MS A reads “brothers,” though, given the remainder of the account, the plural is likely a mistake. MSS B, C, and E lack the word altogether.
- 143 Mt 22:39.
- 144 While the Syriac text uses different words, the Gharshuni translator rendered this phrase with variations of the same verb: *fa-qāllā al-ṣiddīq al-ṣādiq, ṣaddiqnī ya ibnī*.
- 145 MSS E and F read “my son.”
- 146 Or “foolishness.”
- 147 The phrase is also in MSS B, C, and E.
- 148 See Jn 14:12.
- 149 Lit. “Do love/charity”; i.e., “please.” This expression, likely of Greek origin, is also common in Christian Arabic hagiography.
- 150 See Jn 6:68.
- 151 Here and below: Daqū.
- 152 See n. 149, above.
- 153 MS F reads “child”; cf. Gr. *paîs*.
- 154 Lit. “our son.”
- 155 See Prov 23:13–14.
- 156 Or “Eucharist.”
- 157 Tobit 12:9. In general, see Tobit 2; 12; Sirach 3:30; Mt 6:2–4; Acts 10:4, 31.
- 158 The second half of this sentence is lacking in MS B.
- 159 Syr. *sīro*; MS C reads “knife.”
- 160 See 1 Cor 9:27.
- 161 Lit. “greatly.”
- 162 Lit. “path.”
- 163 That is, Maximus and Domitius.
- 164 See Lk 10:1.
- 165 Mt 10:1–2; Mk 3:14.
- 166 Lit. “such as this.”
- 167 Lit. “his way of life.”
- 168 This is probably Paul, but the pronoun is ambiguous.
- 169 MS A reads “his”; MS B “their.”
- 170 See Mt 9:20–21.
- 171 1 Cor 14:32.
- 172 Lit. “receive.”
- 173 See Mt 25:14–30.

- 174 Lit. “fathers of the *iskīm*/monastic habit.”
- 175 See n. 135, above.
- 176 That is, a particular deed or ascetic practice.
- 177 That is, July 15.
- 178 MS B reads “Mūnya Dūnī.” “Munya” is the Arabic “Minya[t]” (< Gr. *monē*), but Duwany remains unknown.
- 179 See n. 135, above.
- 180 That is, October 17.
- 181 Gr. *antronikē*.
- 182 MS B “river.”
- 183 See the general introduction, 5, on the importance of this sentence.
- 184 Scribal note: “The account of our holy father Abba Bishoi has concluded by the prayers of the Mother of God Mary and all the saints. Christ, Son of the living and holy God, have mercy on the children of the holy church. Amen. Amen. It is completed. Lord, by the prayers of Abba Bishoi, help us. Amen.”