

## The mysteries of the Greek alphabet

## Part Four

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As if to say, that like a portent of light being in four forms, the light being the same light.<sup>1</sup> I mean now the rising places at the beginning of the day and the north and the south, these to which the light of half of the day corresponds in heat and cold. \* Most of the heat is in the south, whereas it is largely snow in the north.

And yet, the same light is in the four parts, even if in the western parts there is a difference concerning the course of the sun, which reaches them well in the fourth part of the day, that is from the ninth hour of the day.

After the ascension of Christ, he sent down the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, (Ϟ) and it illuminated the whole world completely by means of an announcement of the gospels. For this reason it clearly instructs us that it is with us until the completion of this aeon. It has put no separation, that is gap between the letters *chi* and *ô*.<sup>2</sup>

The form of this tells us of the completion of the world, so that the entire creation may know that faith in Christ will not diminish, (61) even to the completion of this aeon. No other faith will prevail against it. And there will be no element from the pagans or any living creature and there will be no gospel, as I have already said.

*Psi* has not been placed between *chi* and *ô* among these letters to which God has given form and written for us. But this mystery was not known nor did the uneducated Greek sophists find light in it. The *psi* was put between the *chi* and the final letter, I mean *ô*. \*

<sup>1</sup> This meaning that has to be extracted from the Coptic. The Arabic, as far I can read it, talks about abundant light with four directions.

<sup>2</sup> The letter *psi* is omitted

Ⲛ So <the> Lord said truthfully, the teacher, who is the teacher,<sup>3</sup> said: The form of this letter signifies the completion of the aeon and the beginning of the aeon to come through two circles, one perishing, the other without completion.

For this reason<sup>4</sup> the two circles around the letter are separated from each other and they do not cleave to each other, as if to say: The two circles make a single circle. For it is the final day of eternity that is now the first day of the aeon to come.

For this reason you will find it in the eighth number, that is the eighth hundred, which is *ô*, in which the completion of all the elements has been placed, because, after this seventh aeon of this life, is the eighth aeon, called the completion of the world in all the divine scriptures.

In the sixth Psalm and the thirty-seventh David the Prophet speaks about the punishment that will happen. He writes thus in the two, I mean the two Psalms we have named: the Psalm of David for the eighth.<sup>5</sup> From which Solomon said: Give a part to the seventh and a part to the eighth. Moreover, God did not deviate from the arrangement of the letters to create a thousand, but completed the eight hundred, that is the eight hundred.

For this reason we have a single sequence of letters among the Hebrews and Syrians. In their own names for the letters, the end of their letters is *ô*, which if interpreted in their language, means 'completion'. Nor is *ô* the only letter associated with completion in Hebrew and Syriac, as we have said. There is also the *pi* whose form is appropriate to that of the Church with its own name. Similarly, the *rô* also has a name that speaks the truth and represents the descent of the Divine Logos from heaven, as the *symma* represents the (63) world and the light in it. And this agreement of the two languages, Hebrew and Syriac, agrees well with the Greek letters, as we have already shown.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The Greek term is explained here in Coptic.

<sup>4</sup> Greek ὄθεν, used elsewhere.

<sup>5</sup> Several Psalms bear this designation. According to Hebbelynck, Theodoret says that it represents extratemporality. A more banal explanation is that it refers to the musical setting of the Psalm as an octave lower. <http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=9715>

<sup>6</sup> The writer knows that there is a relationship between the various alphabets and was clearly familiar with the Cadmus legend (see below). In Hebrew and Syriac *ô* is the 6th letter. In Hebrew it means 'nail'.

And the revelation in them and the comfort in them, which is the truth, we will put them down as we move forward, like the *tau*, the letter that comes after these, it preaches the cross of Christ in his name, which in Hebrew is *saddi* \* I mean *tau*, the interpretation of which is perhaps truth and sanctification, for it is from the cross of Christ our God that we have received purity and justification. Whence, the sheep that Abraham killed, bound by its horn to the tree called the sabek, was the the symbol of the cross of Christ, which when translated means forgiveness and truth.<sup>7</sup>

In a word, the letters of the dispensation of Christ our God and the great mystery in them, I mean the Greek, the letters (**64**) of these two languages achieve a single teaching in them and a single thought and a single interpretation.

### Third Part

Since the word of the middle<sup>8</sup> is not believed and it is opposed by Jews and barbarians and the opinion of deceitful brothers, I know that the deicide Jews are faithless and oppose the things that we say, those who have belonged to the Father of Envy since the beginning and worship him in great audacity. They will think of these mysteries that have been given by God in the letters of the alphabet, the godlywise, that what we say are old wives' tales. With the help of the energy of Christ, which is with us in all things, he is the one who revealed these things to us. Let us bring forth the ignorance of these things and shame their reasoning and put down all knowledge and thoughts that run counter to the knowledge of Christ, which says: I am the *alpha* and the *omega*, which means the beginning and the completion of the mysteries (**65**) in the representation of these letters.

Before everything was the language of the Syrians and their letters, which is the profound language of the Chaldeans. Letters were known in the generation of Enoch, as we have been told. It was found by a breath<sup>9</sup> of God in the blessed Enoch before he was removed. As the same scripture says: The sons of Adam were placed in the ...<sup>10</sup> and metal-working and singing with the lyre and cithara.

<sup>7</sup> Gen.22, 13. Various Hebrew and early Christian writers took this for a proper name, but it seems to refer to interwoven branches or thicket cf. F.W. Gesenius *Hebrew Dictionary* (1846) p. 577

<sup>8</sup> Ar. 'word of truth'.

<sup>9</sup> Ar. reads 'breath'

<sup>10</sup> There is no Arabic text to help with the meaning of this passage. **TMNT CGB NHT**: the first part is a prefix indicating a state, the second part associated perhaps with 'knowing, learning' and the third with 'loom' or 'grinding (ears of grain)'.

This Syrian language with 22 letters, of all people there were scholars under heaven from the Tower (of Babel) to the division of languages. So, these letters were not from men, but from the hand and thumb of God, who carved a tablet of stone like those of the Law with the characters of these letters.

And this tablet was found after the cataclysm by Cadmus the Greek philosopher. From it (66) the learning of Palestine and Phoenicia emerged for the first time. It was Herodotus the sophist of Phoenicia who first called them letters.<sup>11</sup> Because God gave form to them and no man or philosopher has been able to give this sort of form. Listen to my account which is faithful and true.

Moses the lawgiver of God first put down the description and revelation of the origin of the world, with the elements in it and how he brought the children of Israel out of Egypt while he was a young man. For the Holy Scripture says: Moses was educated in all Egyptian wisdom and he knew them and how they had been established through the letters of the alphabet, these letters which the Egyptians also wrote.

Which people on earth were able before Moses to know how to describe the creation of the world and that the spirit (67) of God came upon the water. From the beginning was the world; so that it might be stable, it gave representation to the letters according to the form we have already put down in the symbol of the alphabet in the following way.

**Α Β Γ**

Similarly the heaven is called the sphere by the Greek wise men. The writing of the wisdom of God shows what a creation the sphere is through the symbol that we have put down by means of *delta*.

**Δ**

According to the form of the *delta* the entire creation is on the earth \* below the abyss which is visible together with those things that are invisible, as we wrote in the first part where we put them in the *delta*.

That the ignorant philosophers of the godless Greeks before Moses did not know that the

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<sup>11</sup> This may be a garbled reference to the story told by Herodotus in Bk 2,2 about the experiment conducted by Psammetichus the Egyptian king to determine the earliest language.

hidden mystery is clear in the five characters which they have put down and represented. These characters rebuke them loudly, in which there is a sixth, ninety and nine hundred, which is nine hundred<sup>12</sup>. Not one of these brings forth an image or form (**68**) of any sort from the divine creation. Like the character and form of the unmeasured letters, which have no number, to which Ophriganos and Eunomimos<sup>13</sup> have given representation in the forms laid down by the Phrygians.

If these are deceitful, I will say these too. He was able to know before the writing of Moses: The world was hidden in darkness when God created it. And he said that there should be light, and there was. This is the meaning of *ei*.

The curved line of *ei* is the shape of the world. The line in the middle separates light from dark, as we indicated in the latter part. I will leave these things to one side and not address them individually.

What sort of human intelligence, without the Divine Scripture of Moses, was able to understand that on the first day a single work of God was made, that is the light? For this reason a single letter is the symbol and image of this light, *ei*. *Alpha* is the first letter, but does not represent the first day, because there was no day. The same is true of *bêta* and *gamma*, which represent the existing elements in the world before God made the creation. This means, in the first letter, *alpha*, the water and the spirit of the air of God that moves back and forth over them. In the second letter, *bêta*, the abyss and the darkness which are above the darkness. In the third letter, *the gamma*, the earth which was not visible and unprepared was covered by the water suspended on it, like one earth hanging on another.

And all these things are in the fourth letter, *the delta*, as we have already said in the First Part. The *delta* is the image of the upper heaven, the invisible, the heaven of heavens. The lower line of the letter is the image of the invisible earth below the abyss. The heaven of heavens, whose shape is indescribable, descends at its (70) points to the east and west to become lost in all the unspeakable depths, to become tied to the lower earth of the abyss, according to the elevated mystery, like the *delta* in its iconography.

<sup>12</sup> A fairly standard repetition involving different words from Coptic and Greek for the same thing.

<sup>13</sup> Possibly Eunomius of Cyzicus, whose views about the relationship between the Creator and created led him to modify the baptismal procedure from three immersions in the name of the Trinity to one immersion in the name of the death of Christ. Phrygianus seems to be unknown, and I wonder if it might be an indirect reference to Montanus the 2nd cent. 'Phrygian' prophet, who seems to have established a special relationship with the Paraclete.

After the *delta* comes the *ei* representing the first day, as we have explained, from the beginning.

[The ms. contains decorative versions of the letters that represent the works of creation from **Z** to **O**]

In the same way, the second day comprises two works accomplished on the order of God, the firmament (**71**) and the separation of the waters, symbolized by *zêta* and *êta*. Similarly, on the third day there were three works of God: the emergence of the earth, the germination of plants and the growth of fruit trees, represented by *thêta*, *iôta* and *kappa*. The same is true of the fourth day, represented by four letters with four works of God: the lights, the separation of day from night, the creation of the sun and the moon and their placement in the firmament, and these are *laula*, *me*, *ne* and *ou*.

Who therefore born of woman has been able to say these things without having been taught by God ? The number of days corresponding to the divine works accomplished, or rather that the entire creation was accomplished by God in six days.

None of the Greeks or the philosophers was able to represent these things in this way, before the existence of the divine scripture of Moses, although the symbols of letters belonging to us <exist> with the thumb of God himself.<sup>14</sup>

For this reason do not let the children of the Jews glory<sup>15</sup> in (**72**) having received the tablets written by God, which were later broken. It is a fact that before the law , for more than 2,000 years, God granted the Gentile community the indestructible tablet of theosophy in the letters which God wrote with his own hand. The mystery in them is a great 'theoseby'<sup>16</sup>, not discovered by any philosophers of this century. If they had known it, they would certainly have known that these letters announced a mystery to the world. But they are like the blind, these teachers with Greek learning. The letters that they have written after the symbol of these letters are different, as also are the things they teach with them, telling stories of their own invention. These, I mean the elements of (**73**) of the letters, were

<sup>14</sup> Something seems to have gone wrong with the Coptic. The Arabic text is equally uncertain.

<sup>15</sup> The Gk verb intended here a form of  $\varphi\alpha\nu\tau\alpha\sigma\iota\acute{o}\omega$ . Interestingly enough, the noun  $\varphi\alpha\nu\tau\alpha\sigma\acute{\iota}\alpha$  is used in Coptic texts to mean 'vainglory' and, by extension, 'pomp'.

<sup>16</sup> This of course is not a standard word in English, but is formed on the analogy of 'theosophy' and means 'reverence of God'..

fashioned by the demiurge.

Listen therefore attentively to learn of the ignorance of the Greeks. As we know, from the beginning, when God started the work of the entire creation, he made only two heavens, apart from the holy invisible heaven which cannot be drawn, which contains the Holy of Holies, and that from the beginning, before the work of creation. But the stories of the Greeks say that there were many heavens. Again, in this passage of the Holy Scriptures about these letters, we learn that there are two earths, while the Greeks claim that there is one single earth. Similarly, on the subject of the waters, they designate, as the sea, the place where the waters collect, of which God said: Let the lower waters of the heaven gather in one place and the dry land emerge. Now, this place of gathering, the ocean, (74) is what surrounds the whole world. It is what God has taught us by means of *thêta*, as we have already written.

⊖ Similarly, the heaven is called a sphere by the foolish Greek sages, while the Holy Scriptures represent it as a hemisphere, like the symbol we have set down for the *delta*. And again, they oppose us in the matter of day and night, light, fire, darkness, sun, moon and stars. They say what they should not say and hand on deceitful doctrines, alien to these letters of God.

Because I know that the impious Jews and the barbarians laugh at what we now say and they disagree with us that this mystery of Christ is revealed in the eight letters that follow the fourteen letters of the alphabet, as we have said, it is these very letters that we are about to utter.

[Letters π ρ Ϸ τ γ φ χ ω]

(75) I have the strength of Christ who has revealed these things to me in three or four arguments. They will be confused in their ignorance and contradiction. I will use them like a shield to combat them, fighting for Christ and the Church and confident in the spirit of overturning them by what I say, namely the following.

Jews, barbarians and Greeks, it is clear that we know without doubt, by the explanations of these letters, that the letters and their elements represent the elements of the world. And that they come equal to each other in the sequence of the six days of creation, and they

come as we have said.

Those who claim that the mystery of Christ is not described for us in these final eight letters of the alphabet, like the impious who claim that this creature or that element is represented by the form of the fifteen letters that precede them, what the *rô*, the *symma*, the *tau*, the *he*, the *phi*, the *chi*, the *ô* mean.<sup>17</sup> But it is quite impossible for them to show us one of the elements or creatures of God, whether in heaven or on earth or below the earth. How will they be able to explain to use the form of letters of this sort ? And how will they be able to establish with them order, number, sequence of the hexameron as we have written, and the letters in it with their elements, which represent equally the works of God ?<sup>18</sup>

And lest the Jews think that (77) I say this mistakenly,<sup>19</sup> it is incumbent upon us to take account of these things, the works of God and the letters of the hexameron from *alpha*. If we do this, we will shame them. For this reason this is the sequence of the account. The place where they wish, let them begin there. Even if they begin from *alpha* as they say, they will fall with their goal.<sup>20</sup>

That is, there are twenty-two of these letters. The six days of creation are not gathered<sup>21</sup> under the works accomplished by God above twenty-one, for God accomplished twenty-one works in these days: on the first day, a single work ( on the second two, and so on), and in total these make twenty-one. According to the sequence of the works accomplished on each (78) day, this is also the way of the letters.

And these of this sort, we established for them two difficult things and ...<sup>22</sup>Now, .....<sup>23</sup> set up a canon for us for of each of the letters. Or are they perhaps humiliated before us and say that the mystery of Christ is what reveals him. For this reason he said: I am the *alpha* and *ômega*. Indeed, he is also the remainder of the other letters. This one is introduced in many guises, as he will lay down this exposition.

<sup>17</sup> The translation is a simplified version of the text here.

<sup>18</sup> Hebbelynck observes here that Coptic has difficulty with long sentences.

<sup>19</sup> Lit. 'that I say this not with a good thought'.

<sup>20</sup> The ms. reads **ΚΟΠΟΣ** not **ΚΟΣΜΟΣ** (Hebbelynck). Arabic has nothing after the verb 'fall'.

<sup>21</sup> Ar. has no verb, but only the neg. particle 'not'

<sup>22</sup> Ar. 'unsatisfying'. The word is clearly **ΠΟΡΟΝ**, and I wonder if it may not be understood as the Greek word **ἄπορος**.

<sup>23</sup> One way of understanding of understanding the verb **ΜΕΝΟΥΤΑΖΟ** is 'let them not set up ...' Hebbelynck translates it into Latin.



For every thing has happened because of him and in him, above and below. His holy mystery reveals him to the whole of creation.

His is the glory and power forever. Amen.

This is clearly the end of the third section. It is followed by an Arabic text in handwriting that I cannot read.