

David Brakke, Andrew Crislip (eds.), *Selected Discourses of Shenoute the Great: Community, Theology, and Social Conflict in Late Antique Egypt*, Cambridge University Press, 2015, 326 p., ISBN 978-1-107-02256-0

David Brakke¹ and Andrew Crislip² are already well known and respected for their works of early Christian monasticism, and this recent book is another welcome study.

The volume begins with an Introduction (pp. 1–25) that provides background for reading the Shenoute's *Discourses*. In their well-documented introduction, David Brakke and Andrew Crislip briefly describe the theological and historical context of the Shenoute: life, times, and his *Discourses*.

The book consists of four parts, and every part is preceded by a useful and informative introduction.

The first part ("Heretics and Other Enemies of the Church") explores three discourses on the topic of Shenoute's apologetics (8, 1, 3). In these discourses ("And it happened one day", "As I sat on a mountain", and "I am amazed") Shenoute of Atripe appears as defender of orthodoxy against the heretics and pagans. Therefore, this part covers Shenoute's anti-pagan activity. The orthodoxy of Shenoute is defined by the Alexandrian Christology, because Shenoute's theology shows "a clear familiarity with the works of Cyril of Alexandria" (p. 29).

Central to the book is part two ("Shenoute as Pastor and Preacher")

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² Andrew Crislip is Associate Professor of History at Virginia Commonwealth University. He is the author of two books on healing and monasticism in late antiquity, *Thorns in the Flesh: Illness and Sanctity in Late Ancient Christianity*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012 and *From Monastery to Hospital: The Transformation of Health Care in Late Antiquity*, University of Michigan Press, 2005.

within the editors have chosen and translated thirteen *Discourses*. The main point here is the practice of spiritual and pastoral guidance in the Shenoute's discourses. Shenoute was a powerful spiritual guide, an ascetic who spoke with a "distinctive voice" in the local community from fourth and early fifth-century. As pastor and preacher, he responds to questions about spiritual and ascetic life. Shenoute played a significant role in the Egyptian monasticism from this period, so that "Shenoute's *Discourses* offer a unique perspective from Upper Egypt" (p. 85). As abbot of a great complex of monasteries, he was the spiritual father for his community and for Christians from local villages. As editors observed "Shenoute's presence and preaching was a special attraction for Christians from local villages and for visitors from farther afield. Clearly Shenoute drew many interested in accessing the spiritual power of this Apa. Many of these dealt with him in his position as preacher and pastor, roles that the *Discourses* represent" (p. 83).

Shenoute not only as spiritual father of the White Monastery. He also a holy man who fought with evil spirits. Thus, the section three ("The Christian's Struggle with Satan") covers the topic of the ascetic's struggle against the Satan. According to D. Brakke and A. Crislip, "ancient Christians understood their ethical life as a struggle not only against their own evil will and inclinations, but also against Satan and his demons" (p. 157). Briefly, the ascetic life is understood as a struggle against the demons. In this context, the role of spiritual discernment is crucial, so that this ability to identify the precise nature of an evil spirit "was a highly prized gift in Christian and especially monastic culture" (p. 159).

The final part, entitled "The Conflict with Gesios" is consecrated the conflict between Shenoute and a wealthy local landowner named Gesios. This conflict has led Shenoute to make Gesios "the focus of his campaign against paganism and economic oppression" (p. 194). Much of this section is devoted to the work of preach against paganism and the oppression of the poor. As editors remarked Shenoute of Atripe was the most known ascetic of late antiquity for "his vociferous and sometimes violent opposition to the local «pagans»" (p. 27). Briefly, this part covers Shenoute's anti-pagan activity, an activity within he excelled. And indeed, Shenoute has preached very much against paganism, and his letters from this final section exemplify this activity.

David Brakke, *Andrew Crislip (eds.), Selected Discourses...*

The book includes footnotes, a valuable bibliography, and a useful index of names, subjects, maps, and figures. Brakke and Crislip's book is a modern and accurate translation of Shenoute's *Discourses*, so that it is an important contribution in the spirituality of Shenoute and his form of monasticism.

Meticulously researched, this competent book provides a starting point for new investigations of the role of Shenoute in the history of Egyptian asceticism.

Undoubtedly, *Selected Discourses of Shenoute the Great* will become a significant landmark for researchers in the field.

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