An Encomium on John the Baptist

A new translation and introduction

by Philip L. Tite

The *Encomium on John the Baptist* (*Encom. Bapt.*; CANT 184; CPC 0170; CPG 5150.3) is a collation of traditions revolving around the figure of John the Baptist, extant in two Coptic manuscripts produced in monastic contexts in tenth-century Egypt. The homily on Matt 11:7 that begins *Encom. Bapt.* is attributed to John Chrysostom (1:1–3); however, this attribution is most likely erroneous, based perhaps on a similar homily addressing Matt 11:7 that comes from the hand of John Chrysostom (*Hom. Matt. 37*) or on a more general tendency to incorporate apostolic memoirs into Coptic pseudo-Chrysostom homilies. *Encom. Bapt.* has appeared also in scholarship as *On John the Baptist* by Pseudo-John Chrysostom. Care must be taken to distinguish the text from two works titled *Panegyricon on John the Baptist*, one attributed to Patriarch Theodosius of Alexandria (CANT 185; CPC 0513) and the other anonymous.¹

Contents

If the text is indeed composite, then there are at least four sets of redactional material that can be identified within it. There are two previously unknown texts brought together—a Homily on John the Baptist and the Apocalypse of the Third Heaven—connected via scribal and transitional material:

A. Scribal Preface (1:1–3): Introducing *Encom. Bapt.* and its key themes; includes the mistaken attribution to John Chrysostom.
B. Homily on John the Baptist (2–8, 21): A sermon in praise of John the Baptist, based on Matt 11:7.
C. Transitional Section of Miscellaneous Material (9–11): Traditions on the fate of Adam's bodily remains, the dead in Amente (the Underworld), the commissioning of the apostles, and the flight of the child John and his mother Elizabeth into the desert.
D. The Apocalypse of the Third Heaven (12–20): Following a post-resurrection appearance, the apostles are given a tour of the seven heavens, particularly the third heaven, which has been given to John the Baptist.

Several consistent themes tie these otherwise disparate and stylistically distinct texts together. In the scribal introduction, John is declared as greater than any "born of women"; he is also "above the holy ones" and even "excels the angels" (1:1–2). The scribe establishes a key theme for *Encom. Bapt.*: John the Baptist has been given honor and glory both on

¹. See the references to these works in the entry on *Life Bapt. Serap.* in this volume.
earth and in heaven that excels that given to anyone else. The closing of the *Encom. Bap*.t. (which either is the conclusion to the Homily or is a colophon added by the scribe) returns to this very theme: "Truly, my dear beloved, there is no one like John the Baptist in heaven and on earth, nor more exalted in glory" (21:13; cf. 21:5). This motif arises throughout the text (e.g., 7:3; 10:4; 13:2; 18:6). This heaven/earth distinction is effectively accomplished by reading the Homily and the Apocalypse of the Third Heaven beside each other: the latter demonstrating the glory given in heaven, while the former upon earth. Both the Homily and the Apocalypse of the Third Heaven closely connect John to Jesus through the affectionate and kinship relationship as well as John's role in Jesus' redemptive work. There are also strong cultic and ethical motifs in these two underlying texts. Those who are allowed into the third heaven are those who have given proper honor to John on earth (again evoking the earthly/heavenly distinction). In the Homily such cultic honoring is exemplified by Jesus. This cultic role extends to being compassionate and merciful, a motif that also arises in the transitional material at 10:1–3. Thus, the reader or congregation is exhorted to embody the charitable nature of both Jesus and John the Baptist.

These connective themes suggest that *Encom. Bap*.t. has a greater literary coherence than may be evident upon first reading. Such coherence could indicate that the final redactor (perhaps the scribe) did not randomly stitch traditions together. The overarching theme of honor given to John the Baptist in the scribe's preface (1:1–2) may have been a coherent theme that prompted the scribe to join these various sources. Alternatively, such coherence could also call into question source-critical arguments of *Encom. Bap*.t. The fact that both of the Coptic manuscripts of the text contain material from the Homily and the Apocalypse supports an argument in favor of literary integrity. However, the internal content and the stylistic features of the Homily and the Apocalypse suggest that we have two separate sources sharing certain thematic motifs.

**Manuscripts and Editions**

*Encom. Bap*.t. survives in two Sahidic Coptic manuscripts. The more complete of these manuscripts—London, British Library, Or. 7024 (fol. 1a–17b)—based on the colophon (fol. 49b), was produced in 987 CE by the scribe Theopistos (the son of Severus, an arch-presbyter of St. Mercurius in Snē) on behalf of one Michael of the city of Snē, and subsequently offered as a gift to the Monastery of St. Mercurius near Edfu. In a different hand a short note follows the colophon mentioning Abba Nicodemus, who perhaps was the one to receive the book on behalf of the monastery. The colophon states that the donation of the book was for "the salvation of his [Michael's] soul" and the edification of the monks (cf. *Encom. Bap*.t. 16:3). British Library, Or. 7024 also includes a second text, *The Instructions of Apa Pachomius the Archimandrite* (fol. 18a–49b). A transcription (and only other English translation to date) was published by E. A. W. Budge in 1913. The other manuscript—Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Copte 12918 fol. 116–20—also dated to the tenth century, survives in only four leaves from the White Monastery. E. O. Winstedt published an edition and English translation of the Paris fragments in 1907. The four leaves come from a larger codex that likely included a full version of *Encom. Bap*.t. The first three leaves contain material from the Homily—the feeding of the five thousand (6:1–7:1a) and

2. Budge, *Coptic Apocrypha*, 1-lvi (introduction), 128–45 (text), 335–51 (translation). Budge mistakenly dates the manuscript to 985 CE.

3. Winstedt, "Coptic Fragment."

218
Jesus' discussion of the reed flute (8:1-3)—followed by a portion of the Apocalypse of the Third Heaven (13:2-17:2). The fourth leaf comes from a later section of the codex and recounts a story of a demon-possessed police officer, exorcised through the power of the martyred Baptist. Winstedt suggests that the codex may have been a "book of the miracles of John." Other possible manuscript evidence includes three sixteenth-century manuscripts of an Arabic Homily of John Chrysostom on John the Baptist and Matthew 11:7 and an Ethiopic version. To my knowledge, the Arabic and Ethiopic versions have not been edited and translated.

The Paris fragments only offer stylistic variances to the better-preserved British Library, Or. 7024; however, its value lies in presenting us with an independent witness to the circulation of Encom. Baptist with both the Homily and the Apocalypse already together. Stylistic differences suggest that the two Coptic manuscripts are independent productions. The scribal note and transitional material are not extant in the remains of the Paris manuscript. Otherwise, identification of the underlying sources has to be based solely on internal evidence (i.e., content and style).

Encom. Baptist may have been known to Jacob of Voragine in the thirteenth century, either as a work attributed to John Chrysostom or, more likely, as a set of traditions now contained in Encom. Baptist. There are strong thematic (though not structural) ties between the Golden Legend 864 and Encom. Baptist, along with several references to Chrysostom's treatment of John the Baptist "as more than a prophet" (including at the meeting of Elizabeth and Mary, p. 330; cf. Encom. Baptist 7:2).

Encom. Baptist has been sorely neglected in previous scholarship. Along with Budge's and Winstedt's editions and translations, there is Walter Till's German translation (1958), which also identified the fragments published by Winstedt with the text translated by Budge,7 and Anne Boud'hors's French translation (1997). Both Boud'hors and Till offer several corrections to Budge's reading of the Coptic, and Till demonstrates the heavy presence of Greek loanwords in Encom. Baptist. As for the text's contents, Budge's introduction to his edition draws a close correlation between the Apocalypse and Egyptian myths of the afterlife. Beyond the English, German, and French translation projects, there has only been a smattering of references to Encom. Baptist in scholarship and no substantial analysis of the text. Occasionally, it has been suggested that the journey into the third heaven is a separate source. Winstedt made the unpersuasive suggestion that Encom. Baptist might be related to the Naasene Gnostics described by Hippolytus (Haer. 9).

Literary and Theological Significance
Given the possible underlying sources for Encom. Baptist, questions of genre and literary structure need to be addressed first for each section and then as a composite text.

A. The Homily on John the Baptist
The Homily is an encomium (a speech offered in praise of someone, usually within a funerary context), likely designed for a liturgical setting in honor of John the Baptist. Situ-

7. Till, "Johannes der Ta"ifer."
ating this text within the (especially Eastern) liturgical calendar, this sermon likely was delivered early in January (January 7 being the celebration of John the Baptist, following the marking of the baptism of Jesus during Epiphany; see “the eleventh day of the month of Tobe,” in 7:3). The material falls into two literary blocks: (1) the life and death of John the Baptist, ending with the funerary love-feast in his honor (chaps. 2–6); and (2) questions from John while in prison to Jesus, who is performing miracles with the crowd, closing with an interpretation of the “reed flute” in the desert (chaps. 7–8). The combination of these two blocks of material is peculiar. Not only is there a shift from John’s death, burial, and funeral/love-feast to an indirect exchange between John and Jesus (while John is in prison and Jesus is performing healings), but the preacher then uses this exchange to launch into an exposition of Matt 11:7. The exposition does not follow John Chrysostom’s exposition of the “reed flute” (Hom. Matt. 37.1). For John Chrysostom, the concern is whether John the Baptist, in posing his question to Jesus, was like a reed waveling in the wind (Matt. 11:3–7)—i.e., Chrysostom worries that readers could wonder if John the Baptist was losing his faith while in prison. For the preacher of the Homily, however, the focus falls on the reed flute in the desert, reading the flute not as something that should not be identified with John the Baptist, as Chrysostom reads it, but as something that should be read as a positive metaphor for John the Baptist. Likely the preacher has picked up on the lack of a follow-up statement to the reed flute, such as there is to those “in fine clothes” (a negative statement, as those people are “in royal palaces” rather than in the desert) and going to see “a prophet” (a positive statement, though elevating John beyond what was expected). The reed flute is taken as literally something that draws people out to the desert, just as the preaching of John the Baptist does for the crowds. Despite the awkward combination, both blocks of material work together to praise John the Baptist.

As an encomium, the Homily focuses on praising John the Baptist. Ancient education included training in the production of such speeches as part of epideictic rhetoric. Jerome Neyrey presents five standard conventions that are found in the progymnasmata exercises. Of the five conventions, only one is absent from the Homily—i.e., his second convention “Nurture and Training: Education (teachers, arts, skills, laws, mode of life).” Given the rustic background of John the Baptist and his divine appointment as Jesus’ forerunner, this absence is not surprising. The following four conventions from Neyrey’s list are present:

1. Origin: Geography and Generation (country, race, ancestors, parents); Birth (special phenomena at birth)

Encomia mention origins in order to highlight noble lineage (land and family) as well as supernatural indicators of the person’s specialness. In praising John the Baptist, the sermon places special emphasis on the family relationship between Jesus and John (21:53; 4:61, 21; 7:2). This familial bond opens the Homily by elevating John the Baptist beyond the bounds of human praise (21). The preacher’s modesty is reinforced by John being praised by such eminent figures as Athanasius, Theophilus, Cyril, and Innocent. Drawing upon the Lukan infancy narrative, John’s special relationship to Jesus and his function in being a witness to Jesus are reinforced at 7:2 where John leaps in his mother’s womb at the meeting of Elizabeth and Mary. The preacher even identifies Jesus as the cause of the miraculous


220
birth of John. Miracles attached to John's birth arise when the sermon identifies John as "a priest and son of a priest" (2:2), recounting Zechariah's ability to speak being taken from him until John's birth and naming (3:1). A strong affection connects Jesus to John (5:3), a familial bond that explains Jesus' funerary love-feast for his dear cousin (5:4; 6:1). Thus, John's genealogy and birth justifies the praise given to him both in the narrative (i.e., the love-feast) and in the liturgical calendar, as these elements of praise support the scriptural claim that "among those born of women, none greater has arisen than John the Baptist" (2:1; 8:1).

2. Accomplishments: Deeds of the Body (beauty, strength, agility, might, health); Deeds of the Soul (justice, wisdom, temperance, courage, piety); Deeds of Fortune (power, wealth, friends, fame, fortune)

The accomplishments of the person being praised demonstrate his or her virtues—whether physical features, virtues, or societal honors. In an honor/shame culture where the perception of one's society determines one's value, extolling such accomplishments is necessary in offering praise. In the Homily, John the Baptist's primary accomplishment is being the forerunner (2:1) and witness of Jesus (7:1-2) as well as the one deemed worthy enough to baptize Jesus (7:3). While the preacher claims that there are a "great number of his mighty deeds" (3:2) that could be recounted, the other significant deeds of John include fettering and opening his father's mouth (3:1) and being "a medicine and remedy that heals every sickness" (2:2). These accomplishments are directly connected to the name "John" (see 3:2, where the preacher declares: "the name 'John' is one that is worthy of being marveled at, for it is the lamp of the whole world"; cf. John 5:35), thereby directly tying the name to acts of (spiritual) benefaction. John's healing role is tied into such benefaction through the "name" and "the remembrance" of John. Even the narrative function of Zechariah is the naming of John (and the miracle attached to that naming). By stressing both John's role in Jesus' ministry and the benefits attached to his very name, the preacher sets up the benefaction offered by Jesus on behalf of John for the crowds (note, e.g., that Jesus also performs healings among the crowd; 7:2). A funerary feast in honor of John is a logical and appropriate extension of the accomplishments of the honoree.

3. Comparison

In encomia, comparison serves to elevate someone by setting side-by-side either states of equal honor (thus, assigning greatness to the honoree through comparison) or a greater and lesser contrast (with the honoree elevated through discussion of things worthy/unworthy or smaller/greater). In the Homily, the latter approach is used. Framing the entire sermon is the claim that "among those born of women, none greater has arisen than John the Baptist" (2:1; 8:1). The entire sermon is designed to demonstrate the validity of this claim. At 7:3, the preacher directly ties this honoring of John to his kinship relationship to Jesus. John is "most favored" and has "attained greatness above all those honored" because he was "deemed worthy" to baptize Jesus and, thereby, participate in Jesus' soteriological role (cf. John being the "lamp of the whole world"; 3:2; cf. John 5:35).

4. Noble Death and Posthumous Honors

Like other encomia, the Homily offers praise as a memorial for an important person now deceased. Encomia were designed to extol the noble death of the honoree. In antiquity, how one died was as important as one's life for determining the nobility of that person.
An Encomium on John the Baptist

This was particularly true in accounts of the philosopher's death and, by extension in early Christian circles, the martyr's death. While many such speeches were funeral orations, the Homily likely was designed for a feast day in honor of John the Baptist. Sermons of this sort were not uncommon in the cult of the saints. *Encom. Bapt.* has two major blocks of material commemorating the noble death of and posthumous honors given to John.

The first block of material, which comes immediately after the preacher declares the "great number of his mighty deeds" (3:2), recounts the death of John at the hands of Herod's executioner due to the ploy of Herodias and her dancing daughter (who remains unnamed in this account) (4). The arrest of John, the hesitation and remorse of Herod, and the accusations by John on the royal family's immorality are all absent from the narrative—the reader is assumed to already know the full story. John plays no active role as a character here, except as the victim of the actions of others. Those actions are presented as a chain of activity linking Herod to John via Herodias, her daughter, and the guard who beheads John (note in the Coptic the repeated use of "then" to link these characters and their actions). Although absent as an active character, John remains the central focus. His death is unjustified, does not follow a trial, and directly leads to both his burial by his disciples and a report to Jesus, and thus the funerary feast in his honor. John's death, therefore, is that of a martyr (see 2:2, where he is explicitly called a martyr). It is perhaps significant that John's death is tied to Herod's birthday, as it is common for a martyr's celebrated "birthday" to be his or her date of death. Note also Serapion's *Life of John the Baptist*, where John's mother, Elizabeth, dies on the same day as Herod (7:2). The contrast between a noble and ignoble death in Serapion's account may also underlie the death/birthday motif here in the Homily. John's death is a noble death.

The second block of material shifts from John's noble death to the posthumous honors bestowed upon John. From 5:3 to 6:2, we have the miraculous feeding of the crowd, understood in *Encom. Bapt.* as a funeral feast for John. Such feasts, according to the Homily, are common and appropriate cultural customs, justified here using the biblical example of Joseph offering such a feast for his deceased father Jacob/Israel (6:2). Thus, what Jesus does for his relative is not only culturally appropriate but is grounded within a biblical example of the founding of the nation of Israel. The feast is tied also to mourning. Upon hearing the news of John's death, Jesus is so moved that he withdraws from the public sphere to enter into private mourning (5:1). When the crowd follows him, they share in his grief (5:4). Furthermore, the feast extends John's noble deeds posthumously: Jesus' rebuke of the disciples intersects both the needs of the crowd ("If they are sent away in such hunger, they will faint along the way") and the ethics of commensality ("What sort of thanksgiving [*eucharist*] is being offered before my relative?" 6:1). Thus, just as John offered benefaction to the people during his life (e.g., 2:2), so also does his death offer benefit to the crowds. Thus, Jesus' compassion and mercy (6:1) mirrors John's noble character. Such posthumous benefaction nicely evokes the liturgical significance of the feast in honor of John ("the remembrance of you" at 2:2). As a sermon, this praise invites the congregation to join in the memorial feast, to be one of "the crowd" and thus to participate in the benefits offered by John the Baptist via Jesus (and now via the preacher/church). Such benefits are contingent on joining the preacher in praising the nobility of John here at the close of Epiphany.

9. Compare with *Golden Legend* 86, where John the Baptist is also called a martyr.
B. The Apocalypse of the Third Heaven

The Apocalypse of the Third Heaven demonstrates common apocalyptic literary motifs found elsewhere in early Christian apocalypses. Specifically, this apocalypse follows a spatial axis, where the visionary is swept up or ascends into the heavenly realms, receives special revelations about heavenly things, and descends back to earth with a divine commission. The text is comprised of five literary sections:

I. Discovery of a Secret Apostolic Book (12)
II. Post-Resurrection Scene and Ascent in a Luminous Cloud (13:1–14:1)
III. General Tour of the Totality of the Heavens (14:2–3a)
IV. Specific Tour of the Third Heaven (14:3b–19)
V. Conclusion: Descent to Earth (20)

The most developed section is the fourth one. The author's primary concern is with the honor given to John the Baptist in the heavens, specifically his function with regard to the fate of the dead and the wondrous or exotic nature of the third heaven. The other sections of material nicely frame this central presentation of the third heaven.

An apocalyptic vision is supposed to be a secret. Only those worthy to receive the revelation are allowed to be informed. Occasionally, the revelation is said to be written in a book where it is hidden away until the time when it can be read (e.g., Rev. 1:11; 22:7–10; *Herm. Vis.* 1.3:3; 5:5; *Ap. Jas.* 1.29–2.21; *Ap. John* 1.1–4; 31.32–32.5; 2 *Apoc. Jas.* 44.14–17; 63.30–32; *Zost.* 1.1–7; 130.1–5; the *Book of Elchasai* fragment 1 [= *Hippolytus, Haer.* 9.13.1–3]; and especially *Apoc. Paul* 1–2). The Apocalypse of the Third Heaven exhibits this secrecy theme in the first section. The author claims to have found an ancient book written by the apostles in Jerusalem while he or she was attending a religious festival. What follows is supposed to be a transcription of the book's contents. From a narrative perspective, the Apocalypse of the Third Heaven is characterized as a lost apostolic text with a secret revelation. Unlike the Homily in the *Encom. Bapt.*, the Apocalypse of the Third Heaven is not an exposition on sacred texts, it is sacred text. The antiquity, location, and apostolic authorship all serve, for the author, as literary devices to add credibility to the text.

The Apocalypse proper opens with section two, where we have a post-resurrection appearance of the Savior on the Mount of Olives. Like other texts (e.g., Matt 28:10–20; *Acts* 1:6–9; *Ep. Pet. Phil.* 132.16–133.8), the appearance occurs when the apostles have "gathered together" (13:1). This restoration of the apostles (though there is no reference to replacing Judas as in the New Testament book of Acts) immediately leads into a global missionary commission ("Go into the whole world, proclaiming to them the gospel of the kingdom"; 13:31). The apostolic commission seems to have no other function in the narrative beyond an excuse for the visionary experience. The text immediately shifts to the topic of John

---


the Baptist “and the honors that he (the Savior) bestowed on him in heaven,” specifically the third heaven (13:2). The apostles request more precise or in-depth knowledge about the third heaven. They identify this honor granted John the Baptist as payment for his martyrdom (and martyrdom motifs are not uncommon in apocalyptic works; e.g., Mark 13; Rev 6:9–11; 20:4–6; Apoc. El. 4; 1 Apoc. Jas. 27:14–21; 32:13–33:5). The apostles ask for three specific things, all of which are granted in the heavenly journey that follows: (1) to be shown the third heaven; (2) to be shown the “good things” in the third heaven; and (3) to be shown John. In response to their request, the Savior immediately brings a “cloud of light” down and together they ascend in the cloud. The cloud of light appears in other revelatory accounts (e.g., 1 En. 14:8; Gos. Judas 57:16–26; Allogenès 62:9–18; Apoc. Paul 51; Zost. 4.20–24; note also Life Baptist. Serap. 7:6–8, 20–21; cf. Acts Andr. Mth. 21).

The opening of the Apocalypse is balanced by the closing (section V). Once again the cloud functions as transportation, this time for the descent back to the Mount of Olives. The descent follows the completion of the revelation (“When the good Savior had said these things”; 20:1). Unlike with some texts, such as the Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles, Letter of Peter to Philip, and the Gospel of Matthew, the commissioning of the apostles is not openly stated once again, though given the location (Mount of Olives) and the earlier commissioning (13:1; cf. 16:4 where an explicit commission does occur) we can assume that the apostles were now ready for their missionary endeavors. Rather than a repeated commissioning, the Apocalypse of the Third Heaven closes with a worshipful tone as the Savior ascends. We have angelic hymns in worship of the Savior as well as a peace wish given to the apostles. The text closes, therefore, on a tone of reverence and awe.

The third section is a brief transition into the main section of the Apocalypse (section IV). Here the Savior gives the apostles a complete tour of the heavens, which, for this text, are comprised of seven heavens. The narrator does not indicate whether or not the apostles entered any of the heavens, but simply that they were shown “everything.” The emphasis, therefore, falls not on the content of the seven heavens but on the completeness of the tour. This emphasis serves two literary functions. First, it fits with other visionary tours, such as in the Book of the Watchers (1 En. 1–36), where the visionary is shown the totality of the universe. Thus, the revelation is complete and absolute. Nothing is missing. Second, by first seeing all the other heavens, the apostles, and thus the readers, are assured of the greater quality of the third heaven. There is no doubt in the comparison. John truly has been given greater “glory and honor” than any other in the heavens (13:2b).

The revelation of the third heaven breaks down into four subsections: an initial tour of the third heaven and then three discourses by the Savior. Once the apostles have entered (or reentered) the third heaven, they are immediately struck by its beauty, opulence, and magnificence (15:1). This wonder is mirrored in the presentation of John the Baptist and his parents, Zechariah and Elizabeth—all three dressed in magnificent clothing embellished with precious stones or gems. This opening subsection (15) technically fulfills all three of the apostles’ requests while adding John’s family (this is one of the few familial elements in the Apocalypse of the Third Heaven) and a hierarchal presentation of the apostles with Peter at the head and Matthias or Matthew at the end (15:1). An awkward shift occurs at 15:3, where James, the brother of the Lord, takes on the first-person narrative voice. The first-person intrusion of James has led some scholars to label this section of Encom. Bapt. as an Apocalypse of James (implicitly suggesting a separate source from the rest of Encom. Bapt.) or an Apocalypse of John (the latter due to a mistranslation by
Both before and after 15:3 the voice is first-person plural (the apostles). Furthermore, James plays no role in the rest of the text (indeed, it is Peter that stands at the head of the apostles in this text). Added to this awkward shift in voice is the unnecessary redundancy of the promise of good things to those “who remember him (John the Baptist) on earth” (15:3b; cf. 15:2b). It is possible that 15:3 is an interpolation intended to identify the visionary so as to grant a first-person oath to support the veracity of the revelation. It is also possible that 15:3 is designed to reinforce the earlier statement by means of redundancy (and thus is not an interpolation).

The main body of the Apocalypse of the Third Heaven is comprised of three discourses by the Savior. The first and third discourses focus on the fiery river through which the dead must pass and the golden boat that is given to John the Baptist to ferry the souls of the dead into the third heaven. The central discourse offers a description of the wonders of paradise in the third heaven. The first discourse opens by establishing the apostolic and angelic witnesses for the revelation (both according to a hierarchal ranking) (16:1–2). Just as they were witnesses to the Savior’s life on earth, so also now they are to function as witnesses to the heavenly honors bestowed upon John the Baptist. Furthermore, the explicit missionary commissioning is directly connected to “remembering” John the Baptist.

The discourses on the fiery river and the golden boat focus on the fate of those dead who have given honor to John the Baptist on earth. Emphasis on “remembrance” of John the Baptist dominates these discourses. Indeed, the explicit commission at 16:4 identifies the content of missionary preaching as calling people to such remembrance. The theme of remembrance carries cultic and ethical implications. The giving of offerings, love-feasts, charitable gifts, or preserving such remembrance in “the holy book” or precious fabrics “in (John’s) place” are all acts in support of the veneration of John the Baptist, specifically within the cult of the saints (16:5; 19:2; cf. Golden Legend 86). As in the Homily, these acts—and the subsequent benefits—are connected to John’s “name” (cf. 3:2). Ethical acts comprise feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, and clothing the naked (16:5; 17:2; cf. Luke 3:10–14; Apoc. Paul 40). Passage into the third heaven is directly linked to such reverence of John through the lampstands of the boat’s magical oars (“Any person who kindles a lamp at the place . . .”: 19:2). Thus, actions in life have an impact on the soul’s fate in the afterlife. As with the Homily, social ethics are directly linked to John

12. I have decided to name this apocalypse the Apocalypse of the Third Heaven, in part to distinguish it from other apocalypses attributed to James, to which the Apocalypse of the Third Heaven has no relationship, and partly due to the internal content of the apocalypse and the possible interpolation of 15:3.
13. The offering of “a holy book” at 16:5, especially with spiritual benefits, parallels the motivation for the production of British Library, Or. 7024 and its being given to the Monastery of St. Mercurius (as indicated in the colophon).
15. Budge (Coptic Apocrypha, ix, lvii; cf. lxxii) sees the oars and lampstands indicating a second boat in Encom. Bapt. 19. Given the symmetry between the first and third discourses to bracket the second discourse, as well as the lack of any indicators that a second boat is being introduced into the narrative, it is more likely that the boat of 19 is the same golden boat of 17.
16. The lampstands may also be metaphors in honor of John the Baptist, perhaps derived from John 5:35. Such an understanding arises in Golden Legend 86, where the celebration of John’s death both praises him and lowers him in relation to Christ: “Lighted torches are also carried around this bonfire, because John was a burning and shining torch, and a wheel is spun because the sun begins to be lower in its cycle. This signifies the decline of Saint John’s fame, by which he was thought to be Christ, as he himself testified when he said: ‘I must decrease, but he must increase’” (trans. Ryan, p. 336). Gregory of Tours, Glor. mart.
An Encomium on John the Baptist

the Baptist (cf. 2:2; 7:2): just as Jesus embodied the compassion of John, so also must those who wish to enter the third heaven.

These two discourses describe the role that John the Baptist plays in the afterlife. John is the ferryman of the dead and is given a golden boat for conveying these souls across the fiery river. At the end of the crossing, the Savior will baptize these souls in the river, where it will be like a hot bath (cf. 3 En. 36). The ferryman of the dead is a motif that is certainly at home in Egyptian mythology of the afterlife. As Egyptian cemeteries were commonly located on the west side of the Nile, the place of the dead was often referred to as “the West” and the dead themselves “Westerners” (with Osiris as “foremost of the West” or “foremost of the Westerners”). Thus, the term Amente (“the West”) could be used in reference to both the western side of the Nile, where the dead would be buried, and to the realm where the dead dwell. The term nicely taps into the journey of the sun in the transportation of the dead to this realm, where the sun sets in the west. In Egyptian views of the afterlife, the dead (or their ba) are often portrayed as being ferried on a celestial boat by the ferryman Anubis or Herkhaf. This boat can be portrayed as a solar boat (the bark or boat of Ra). For example, a very popular text regarding the afterlife from Roman Egypt reads:

Hail Osiris of the god’s father, god’s servant of Amun-Re king of the gods, god’s servant of Min-Amun, Osoeris, justified, son Spotous, justified. You will enter the underworld in great purity. The two truths will purify you in the great hall. Cleansing will be performed for you in the hall of Geb. Your body will be purified in the hall of sunlight. You see Re when he sets and Atum in the evening. Amun is with you, giving you breath. Pthf fashionyour body. You will enter the horizon together with Re. Your ba will be taken to the neshmet-bark in company with Osiris. Your ba will be divinized in the house of Geb. You are justified forever and ever.  

Here we find not only the use of a sun boat, but also a purification process for the dead to enter into the underworld. Similarly, P.Parma 183, a papyrus from the first century CE, states: “Your ba will soar skywards into the presence of Re.” P.Parma 183 further describes bodily rejuvenation as an act of purity and blessing. As in the Apocalypse of the Third Heaven, the dead must be purified. One of Osiris’s key functions was to judge the dead, allowing only the righteous access to the afterlife. Consequently, preparing the deceased

---

14. tells the tale of a young girl who, while lighting lamps with a candle in the oratory housing the relics of John the Baptist, miraculously receives a spark to light her candle so she could find her way. See also the healing miracle in Gars. mart. 15.
17. Budge (Coptic Apocrypha, lxi-lxxii, especially lxii-lxvi on Amente) makes a strong link between Egyptian mythology and the Coptic texts he translates, including Encom. Bapt. However, he does not identify any connections with Greco-Roman myth. See also Barry, “Magic Boat,” 195–98 for further parallels. Barry briefly mentions Encom. Bapt., following Budge’s connection of the ferryman motif to Egyptian myth.
20. Furthermore, Osiris served as moral exemplar for the dead. See Smith, Traversing Eternity. 6: “The god Osiris was not only the ruler of the realm of the dead and the chief of its tribunal. He was also a model for emulation by the deceased. . . . Subsequently, Osiris was revivified by her [Isis], with the help of other gods and goddesses, and justified in a tribunal against his murderer.”
The central discourse describes the wonders of paradise with agricultural images. Paradise is a place of great abundance, with fruits that are huge and satisfying (18:2-4) (cf. Apoc. Paul 21). The spices listed are exotic and expensive items, thereby reinforcing the image of a realm of splendor (18:2; cf. Apoc. Peter [Eth.] 16 where such a garden is also presented; in the parallel Greek fragment, the text adds the shining raiment worn by those living there, such as the “wings of light” at Encom. Bapt. 16:5). These are the “good things” that are promised to those who remember John the Baptist on earth. Again, there is a strong parallel with the Phaedo, where the true upper heaven or real earth is described, in good Platonic terms, as an uncorrupted realm of which the earth and lower heavens are “injured and corroded” reflections (110A). This upper world is filled with an abundance of precious stones as well as beautiful trees and fruits (110C-D). No disease exists in this upper realm (111B). And this is the realm where the dead can converse with the gods (111C). All these characteristics apply to the third heaven: John and his parents are clothed with precious stones and clothing (15:1); paradise is filled with exotic and abundant fruits, trees, and spices (18:2-4); the apostles stand in the presence of wondrous beings (John, his parents, the angels) (15:3; 16:1-3); and healing elements in the Homily may nicely parallel what arises in Socrates’ description of the upper world (direct references to healing do not arise in the Apocalypse of the Third Heaven, though satisfaction, plenty, and not being abandoned to Amence are key motifs). This description of paradise also fits within an Islamic context, where the Qur’an describes paradise as a garden through which rivers flow (e.g., 2:25, 3:15, 4:57, 85:11), sometimes with a direct reference to Eden (9:72, 18:31; cf. Gen 1:11), and as a place of plenty (43:68-73) and adornments for the righteous (gold and silver bracelets and silk clothing; 18:31 and 76:21; cf. Encom. Bapt. 15:1).

This discourse also presents the reason for John being worthy of such honor using Trinitarian language. According to the Apocalypse of the Third Heaven, when John baptized Jesus he became a witness to all three members of the Trinity (18:6). Not only does the description of the third heaven demonstrate the great honor given to John the Baptist (see 18:6a), but it is designed to motivate the reader to fulfill her or his ethical and cultic obligations within the veneration or remembrance of John (19:2).

C. Transitional Material: Miscellaneous Traditions

Between the Homily and the Apocalypse of the Third Heaven, the scribe or author has inserted a series of seemingly random traditions loosely related to John the Baptist. These traditions fall into three literary blocks. The first two blocks close with a transitional section that returns to the theme of honoring John the Baptist (9:2; 10:4).

The first block relates a tradition about the bodily remains of Adam (9). Adam’s body is transplanted and reburied in Jerusalem by the Noahic flood. Later the Savior stands on the head of Adam while teaching. Although the narrator does not explain this legend, nor how it relates to John the Baptist, it fits into a rich tradition about Adam’s bodily remains and especially his skull that was widespread in the Eastern Christian areas (e.g., Armenia, Ethiopia, Romania, Russia, and Bulgaria), but also can be found in Irish apocryphal legends and Italian Renaissance art. These traditions, which still persist today, may go back to at least the third century (as Origen is aware of an earlier version of this legend).23 In

23. Origen, Comm. Matt. 27:32 (PG 13:1777; Caten. Mss Graec). The attribution of this tradition to “the Hebrews” (either Jews or Jewish Christians) only appears in the Greek and not the later Latin version. John Chrysostom (Hom. Jo. 85.1) also knew of this tradition.
the Irish *Saltair na Rann*, it is also by means of the Noahic flood that Adam's remains are brought to Jerusalem. Artistic and literary imagery have Jesus' blood dripping onto the skull of Adam at the base of the cross, thus indicating the salvation of humanity through the crucifixion. In legends of the Holy Rood, which build on the *Life of Adam and Eve* and the *Apocalypse of Moses*, it is from seeds or a branch planted in the skull of Adam by his son Seth that a tree grows, the same tree used for Jesus' cross. In the tenth-century Bulgarian *Tale of the Tree of the Cross*, which is a compilation of Byzantine Greek legends, we find a well-developed tale of this legendary tree along with a reference to the head of Adam being found in the Jordan River by the child Jesus and later buried at Golgotha. These traditions suggest that the bodily parts of Adam are tied to salvation history, specifically the reversal of the fall of the first Adam by the second Adam (= Christ). Encom. *Bapt.* 9 intersects four temporal or spatial periods within such a salvation history along a temporal apocalyptic axis: (1) the body of Adam, (2) Noah's flood, (3) Jerusalem as the center or mother of Judaism and Israel, and finally (4) the coming of the Savior. All elements come together in the fourth period, bringing history to a soteriological climax.

The second block taps into traditions of Christ's descent into the underworld between his crucifixion and resurrection as well as offering another commissioning of the apostles (10). This block emphasizes the mercy and goodness of Christ and contains no direct reference to John the Baptist until the transitional section (10:4). Although the *Descensus ad inferos* is perhaps most well known from the *Acts of Pilate*, the motif of a liberating Christ figure is both widespread and enduring. Whereas the *Acts of Pilate* presents Jesus as extending redemption to biblical figures who had died before the coming of the messiah, *Encom. Bapt.* extends that temporal quality to an ethic of inclusivity. Christ "gathers all sinners," including those "who have been in Amente since the beginning" (10:2). The inclusive offering of redemption includes those who are of the lowest social strata—i.e., tax collectors and prostitutes (10:2–3). Four New Testament figures in particular are mentioned (though not identified by name): a "prostitute you made a virgin" (= either Mary Magdalene or the woman caught in adultery in John 8:2–11); "a bandit you brought into Paradise" (= the Lukian bandit crucified with Jesus who was saved); "a tax collector you made an Evangelist" (= Levi/Matthew); and "a persecutor you made an apostle" (= Paul). A strong restorative theology arises here with the phrases "all these abounding mercies you have gathered to you this day" and "you rounded up those who had been scattered" along with "I will give you rest" (10:2). This ingathering may evoke the diaspora and restorative motif of Acts 1–2. The commissioning of the apostles at 10:3 extends Christ's redemptive work to the activity of the apostles. Unlike other instances of apostolic commissioning in *Encom. Bapt.*, 10:3 does not relate the content of preaching to honoring John the Baptist. Rather, the apostles are to "proclaim . . . the redemption for the forgiveness of sin." Here sinfulness, and not the cult of the saints, is central.

The third block returns the reader to John the Baptist, specifically the Massacre of the Innocents in Matt 2:16–18 and the flight of Elizabeth and her child, John, into the desert. The narrative explains how John ended up in the desert before appearing at the Jordan

24. A similar motif appears in the *Cave of Treasures* 18:6, 23:17–18 (cf. 48:15–49:10), where Adam's body is placed on the ark and transported to Golgotha where it is buried.
26. Tite, "Body Parts Abound!" offers a more thorough discussion of these Adam traditions in connection to *Encom. Bapt.*
River. Divine providence is a central theme here, as is indicated not only in the saving of baby Jesus from Herod’s massacre, but in Elizabeth and John eluding Herod’s executioners, finding shelter miraculously in the rock (along with heating and air conditioning!), obtaining a supply of food and other necessities, and living amicably with wild animals. Beyond Matt 2, this material either draws upon or parallels traditions found in Prot. Jas. 22 and Life Bapt. Serap. 3.

Original Language, Date, and Provenance
As with many early Christian texts that survive only in Coptic, Encom. Bapt. could be interpreted as a translation of an earlier Greek version no longer extant. The prominence of Greek loanwords running throughout Encom. Bapt. would seem to lend weight to such a suggestion.27 If an earlier Greek version underlies the Coptic, then Encom. Bapt. could have originated outside of Egypt or it could have been produced within a Greek-speaking community within Egypt. However, as scholarship on Coptic manuscripts is increasingly recognizing, Greek words in Coptic texts need not indicate a translation from Greek into Coptic. Coptic texts often use Greek terms, especially within Christian liturgical contexts or when dealing with Christian traditions.28 The stylistic differences between the Paris and London manuscripts, however, could suggest independent translation from a Greek original. The internal evidence, however, is not strong enough to argue either way. External evidence offers a strong argument for Coptic as the original language of Encom. Bapt.; specifically that the Pseudo-Chrysostom encomia preserved in Coptic do not have a Greek manuscript tradition.29 Thus, the Encom. Bapt. seems to fall within a Coptic-Arabic-Ethiopic continuum with the Greek loanwords being Coptic lexemes rather than clues to an underlying Greek original.

If Encom. Bapt. originated in Greek, then the text could have circulated from outside of Egypt and thus may reflect non-Egyptian motifs. If the text circulated within Roman Egypt’s urban context, even if originally in Coptic, then Hellenistic ideas may have been picked up by the earliest readers. Such an implication is especially relevant with regard to concepts of the afterlife where Greco-Roman and Christian myths of the journey of the dead (in particular the ferryman motif) may have as much a bearing on the reading of the Apocalypse as would those Egyptian myths identified by Budge.

The terminus ante quem of Encom. Bapt. is established by the manuscript evidence as the tenth century. At the earliest, the text may go back to the latter half of the sixth century, given the reference to John with the title “Chrysostom” (“golden mouth”) (1:1), a title not attributed to him until over a century after his death. This reference, however, only offers a terminus post quem for the scribal note in the final version of Encom. Bapt. and not for the rest of the text (either as a complete text or as independent texts/traditions). Most likely the scribal note was written in the tenth century when the manuscript was produced. Encom. Bapt. does demonstrate knowledge of earlier Christian traditions, such as the fate of Adam’s body parts (suggesting a date of the third or fourth century), the flight of Elizabeth and John into the desert (e.g., in Prot. Jas. 22:3, end of the second century), the Descensus ad inferos traditions (from the second century onwards; e.g., in the Acts of Pilate and the Interpretation of Knowledge), and the apocalyptic traditions of Paul’s journey into the third heaven (see the

two independent Apocalypses of Paul; again, fourth century—though the influence could be 2 Cor 12:2–5). These parallels would suggest a date no earlier than the beginning of the fifth century, though some of these traditions may pre-date those parallel texts (e.g., Encom. Bapt. 11 or its material could pre-date Serapion). There is also an odd mention at 18:2 of an exotic spice. The Coptic is mouschatón, which Till (followed by Boud’hors) has suggested might be nutmeg (identifying this term with the Greek moschos, as an earlier variant of the modern Greek word moschokaruon for nutmeg). This translation is speculative, of course, and we should be careful not to put too much weight on such a reading, but if correct then it would suggest a date no earlier than the eighth century as nutmeg was not introduced into the Mediterranean world until that time.\^30 Comparing Encom. Bapt. to other Coptic memoirs of the apostles, furthermore, reinforces a dating of no earlier than the fifth century (though the christological polemics of such memoirs are not evident in the Encom. Bapt.).\^31 Consequently, Encom. Bapt. could be dated anytime from about the late fourth/early fifth century to the tenth century (though a date closer to the tenth century seems more plausible) and it could have originated either in Egypt (in Coptic or Greek) or, less likely, it could have circulated to Egypt where it was then translated into Coptic.

**Translation**

The following translation is the first English translation published since Budge's edition from over a century ago. This fresh translation is based on the critical edition prepared by Budge in consultation with the Paris manuscript edited by Winstedt. The chapter/verse system is offered in place of the recto/verso page numbering found in Budge, in order to highlight thematic blocks of material for the reader as well as to suggest editorial transitions between the sources. Quotations of Scripture, in most cases, have not been harmonized with the NRSV in an effort to best preserve the particular readings of the Coptic text.

**Bibliography**

**EDITIONS AND TRANSLATIONS**


**STUDIES**


30. See Andrew Dalby, Food in the Ancient World from A to Z (London/New York: Routledge, 2003), 89 and references listed.

An Encomium on John the Baptist

Kuhn, Karl H. A Panegyric on John the Baptist attributed to Theodosius Archbishop of Alexandria. CSCO 269, Copt. 34. Leuven: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1966.


Tite, Philip L. “Body Parts Abound! The Soteriological Significance of Adam’s Traveling Head in the Coptic Encomium of John the Baptist,” paper presented at the AAR/SBL Pacific Northwest Regional meeting, Seattle University, Seattle WA, 2013.
An Encomium on John the Baptist

Scribal preface
1 An encomium, which our holy father Saint Apa* John, archbishop of Constantinople—who was glorious in every respect—the holy Chrysostom, proclaimed to the glory and honor of the holy John the Baptist, the holy forerunner and relative of the Christ,

²Who, among those born of women, none greater has arisen;
Who, above the holy ones, God exalted in honor and glory;
Who, in purity, excels the angels.

³He proclaims this encomium in connection with the passage written in the Gospel of Matthew, explaining to us the meaning of the words which are written: "What did you go out into the desert to look at?" In God's peace may his holy blessing come upon us, so that we may all attain salvation. Amen.

HOMILY ON JOHN THE BAPTIST

The author's humility and the praiseworthiness of John
2 My beloved, I wish to proclaim to you some of the exalted words and right judgments of the Baptizer, who is pure, and the Forerunner, who is glorious—that is, the holy John, the relative of Christ. But I find myself in serious trouble, for my tongue falters, incapable of declaring his might and his honor in the manner that they deserve. Furthermore, our holy fathers, the God-fearing bishops who lived before our time—Athanasius, Theophilus, Cyril, and Innocent—declared many exalted words about you, O John the Baptist, who, among those born of women, none greater has arisen.

³Who of our forbearers has not uttered words of praise about you, O you priest and son of a priest, prophet and son of a prophet, virgin and martyr, equal of any angel, and, dear holy John the Baptist, the friend of the true bridegroom who is the Christ? Truly your name and the remembrance of you have become a medicine and remedy that heals every sickness.

a. "Apa" is a title of reverence.
b. That is, John Chrysostom.
c. Linking the name of John to these various titles serves a hagiographic function. Compare with a similar linking of titles to names in Golden Legend 86. Like Encom. Bapt., the birth of John the Baptist in The Golden Legend begins with a brief discussion of the name of John prior to the actual birth and naming narrative. See also Encom. Bapt. 7:3.
An Encomium on John the Baptist

The naming of John the Baptist
3 'I now speak about John, who fettered the tongue of his father through the act of his conception, and who again made the mouth of his father to be opened through his birth. For when Zechariah was asked, "What do you want him to be called?" he made a sign with his hand by which he asked for a writing tablet. He wrote these three letters that are wonder-worthy: namely, Iota and Omega and Alpha. In the very act of writing, his mouth suddenly opened, and, his tongue now set free, he spoke and he gained strength. He cried out with a loud voice, "John is his name!"

For in truth the name "John" is one that is worthy of being marveled at, for it is the lamp of the whole world. But my tongue falters greatly, and it will fail in recounting the great number of his mighty deeds; nevertheless, I desire to set out on my journey upon the sea of understanding.

The death of John the Baptist
4 'When the birthday of the accursed Herod arrived, the daughter of Herodias came forth and she danced, pleasing Herod and those dining with him. Then he promised to give her anything she asked for. She went to her mother to report this to her. (Herodias) said to her, "Ask for the head of John the Baptist, and have them present it upon a platter."

She returned to the king and said to him, "Give me at this very moment the head of John the Baptist upon a platter." The king ordered that it be given to her. He sent a guard to the prison with orders to fetch John's head. (The guard) brought it back on a platter. He gave it to the girl and she brought it to her mother. Then his disciples came and took his body and they buried it. And they conveyed the news to Jesus.

Jesus' reaction and the feeding of the crowds
5 'Upon hearing the news, Jesus withdrew into the desert, to a solitary location by himself. When the crowd heard of this, they followed after Jesus. When Jesus saw the crowd, he felt sorry for them. When evening came, his disciples came to him and said, "This is a desert place. Dismiss the crowd so that they may go buy food to eat in the nearby villages."

But Jesus said to them, "Do you have nothing to give to them to eat?" And they said to him, "We have nothing but five barley loaves and two fish." Then Jesus said, "Bring them here." Commanding the crowd to sit down upon the grass, he took the five barley loaves and two fish, and, looking up to heaven, he blessed, broke, and gave them to the disciples. The disciples then gave them to the crowd, and all were well fed. And the remnants that were collected filled five baskets. And the number fed were about five thousand, not counting women and children.

My beloved, I want to tell you about the honor given to John as well as what

a. Literally, "seated with" or "reclining with" him, which suggests a feasting context (which would be appropriate given the celebratory occasion).

b. That is, John's disciples. There is a shift from this point in the text from John's disciples to those of Jesus.
a love-feast (agapē) Christ held for him—oh, how he loved him, for he was his friend and relative. For with these five barley loaves and two fish he fed; the number of those fed being about 5,000, not counting women and children.

For the crowd had gathered together to weep for John, and Jesus wept and mourned for John. And he distributed the love-feast (agapē) for him, for he was his relative and his friend. For this reason, when the disciples had said to him, “Dismiss the crowd so that they may go and buy something to eat,” he refused, not wanting them to go away in such hunger.

6 Take note of the word here! To begin, when Jesus had received the news about John the Baptist, he withdrew and the crowd hurriedly followed after him. Furthermore, when the compassionate and merciful Jesus had seen them, he felt sorry for them, just as a good shepherd always does. And when the disciples requested of him to “Dismiss the crowd so that they may go and buy something to eat,” the Savior said to them, “No!” as he thought, “What sort of thanksgiving (eucharist) is being offered before my relative, if those who have come to me on his account are troubled in this way? If they are sent away in such hunger, they will faint along the way.”

2 Just as Joseph the patriarch distributed a love-feast (agapē) upon the death of his father Jacob, so also did Jesus. He distributed a love-feast (agapē) for his relative John. Furthermore, the custom of giving a love-feast (agapē) is preserved by all people, distributing a love-feast (agapē) in honor of their family members when they die.

Jesus responds to the questions from John’s disciples

7 Now I wish to tell you another noble and profound thought. The holy Evangelistb said: While he was in prison, John heard about the activities of the Christ. He called two of his disciples and sent them to the Lord to ask, “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?”

3 When they came before Jesus, they said to him, “John the Baptist sent us to you to ask, ‘Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?’” At that moment, he had been doing healings among the crowd. Then he said to the messengers from John, “Go and tell John what you have seen and what you have heard: that the blind see, the paralyzed walk, the dead are resurrected, to the poor the gospel is declared, and blessed is he who does not try to scandalize me. I am the one who graciously gave you your father Zechariah and Elizabeth your mother. I am he who came to you when you were in the womb of Elizabeth your mother and when I myself was in the womb of Mary my mother—I greeted you and there inside you jumped.

3I am also the one who came to you at the tenth hour of the night, on the eleventh day of the month of Tobe, to receive baptism from your holy hands.9

---

a. Budge connects pshaij (“the word”) with “Scripture,” which is certainly correct. The preacher is drawing the congregation’s attention back to the text in order to draw out the lesson of the passage. As the shift is somewhat abrupt, and transitions into a summary and explanation, I have marked it as emphatic (as does Till) and set it as a new paragraph.

b. The preacher refers here to the author of the Gospel of Matthew.

c. The baptism of Jesus on the eleventh day of the month of Tobe (December 27 to January 25) is part of the Coptic liturgical calendar for Epiphany and appears in other Coptic apocry-
Truly, dear John, whose name means 'grace,' you have attained greatness above all those honored, because you were deemed worthy to baptize me. I am the one who is to come and I have received baptism from you. I am the one who will take away the sin of the world.

"Dearest John, you are the one I have chosen; I along with my father who is in heaven as well as with the Holy Spirit. I have sent you forth as my forerunner and as the one to prepare the way for me. Thus, speak to the crowd, calling them to repent, for the kingdom of heaven draws near. People cannot contemplate it, for it has been declared, 'Behold, I will do a wondrous work in your days, and even if you hear of it, you will not believe it.'"

And Jesus said to the messengers sent from John, "Go and tell John what you have seen and what you have heard: that the blind see, the paralyzed walk, the dead are resurrected, to the poor the gospel is declared, and blessed is he who does not try to scandalize me."

Jesus' declaration regarding John and the preacher's exposition

8 After they had departed, he spoke to the crowd about John: "What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed blown about by the wind? But what did you go out to see? Someone in fine clothing? Behold, those in fine clothes are found in the houses of royalty. But did you go out to see a prophet? Yes, and I say to you, more than a prophet! For it is written concerning him: 'Behold, I will send my messenger before you to make straight your way.' Amen, I say to you that among those born of women, none greater has arisen than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is much lesser than him is far greater in the kingdom of heaven."

2It is now necessary to elucidate this passage for you. For there are many, not being proficient in the Scriptures, who think that it is a real reed blown about by the wind, as it is with all other plants upon the earth: the date-palm tree, the fig tree, the sycamore tree, the persea tree, or the thorn (acacia) tree, even the crops of the field; if they grow then they are blown back and forth by the wind—as is obvious to any weak-minded person, but even more to those who are learned. But what the Savior spoke of was the reed flute in an empty place where there is nobody; when it makes a loud sound, those who hear it from far away say, "What has happened? We hear this reed flute."

Immediately they gathered together to see what has happened, to discover that such-and-such a son has been victorious in a competition and, specifically, that such-and-such a son has been well schooled. That is the reason why the
reed flute was heard where the prophet was prophesying and all of them gathered together to receive instruction. This is why the Savior said, "What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed blown about by the wind? But what did you go out to see? Someone in fine clothing? Behold, those in fine clothes are found in the houses of royalty."

Therefore, my dear beloved ones, having clarified this matter, I shall, by the will of God, explain to you a further account.

TRANSITIONAL SECTION: MISCELLANEOUS TRADITIONS

The Noahic flood and the body of Adam
9 'When the great flood waters washed over the earth in the days of Noah, the surging waters raised the body of Adam; they carried him and placed him in the middle of Jerusalem. Washing over him, the waters of the earth covered him with mud. When the Savior came and walked in that area while teaching, he said, "If anyone will serve me, my father will honor that one. My father, save me from this hour!" At the moment the Savior said this, the heel of his right foot rested on Adam's head. 2 The narrative has come thus far. Surely this subject is of great value for us to discuss, but this is not the moment to look further into it, for the feast of the relative of the true bridegroom, Christ, is before us.

The dead in the "West" and the commissioning of the Apostles
10 'For if you are so disposed as to look, you will see a throng of people crying out to Christ in Amente: "Have mercy on us, Lord, have mercy on us!" Also you will hear many shouting, "Lord, awaken your power and save us," our good god and philanthropic Christ."

By your abounding mercies you have gathered all these to you this day. You have rescued those who have been in Amente since the beginning; you have

competition to being well schooled, a connection that relates back to the preacher's concern about being "proficient in the Scriptures" (the graphē at 8:2).

a. See the introduction pp. 228–29 for a discussion of Adam's body parts, including textual parallels and potential sources for this motif here in Encom. Bap.

b. Amente could also be translated as "the West" or "the underworld," but is left as a place name in the translation given the Egyptian ideas about the place of the dead. See introduction pp. 226–27.

c. There is a possible allusion here to Matt 8:25//Luke 8:24, given the "raising" (or "awakening") in this sentence in connection to the need for being saved. If such an allusion is being evoked, then the imperative pis ma tounec tekgom would better follow the translation "awaken your power" rather than the "raising up" translations found in Budge, Till, and Boud'hors. The basic idea is to prompt God to "stir up" or activate his "power" for the purpose of effecting deliverance or salvation from some danger. This is exactly the context in the Synoptic parallels to which this line may allude.

d. It is unclear if the text uses "god" as a title for Christ or is a separate entity "God" (i.e., the Father). Cf. 18:6 in support of the titular reading.

e. The dialogue shifts at this point from those in Amente to the voice of the preacher, who now directly addresses and praises the Lord for fulfilling the request of those in the realm of the dead. This praiseful section likely evokes the belief that Christ descended into the underworld between his crucifixion and his resurrection in order to rescue those righteous people in the underworld who had died prior to the resurrection.
gathered all sinners to you in life: A prostitute you made a virgin, you forgave her sins; a bandit you brought into Paradise; a tax collector you made an Evangelist; a persecutor you made an apostle. You rescued those who were captives. You lifted up those who had fallen. You rounded up those who had been scattered. With the mouth of God, you cried out to everyone: “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”

3 This is the very day when you commanded your holy apostles, saying to them: “Beginning from Jerusalem, you are to go to the ends of the world.” It is you who are witnesses about what the Jews/Judeans did to me. Go and proclaim to them redemption for the forgiveness of sin. Do not cast away the sinners from yourselves, but embrace them into repentance. Give repentance to the tax collectors. Forgive the sins of the prostitutes.” 4 My dearly beloved ones, you have now seen how Christ honored his relative, the forerunner who is the holy John the Baptist. (Christ) gave him honor in heaven. He gave him even greater honor upon the earth.

Elizabeth and the child John flee into the desert

11 And when the time came that our Lord Jesus was born on the earth at the inn in Bethlehem, the massacre of the little children by the wicked Herod occurred. So when the archangel Gabriel warned Joseph in a dream, (Joseph) took the child Jesus with his mother and they went down to Egypt. Furthermore, when Elizabeth was seized by fear, she took John and fled with him into the desert.

2 So when Herod's executioners chased after her and her son in order to kill them, she looked back and saw them closely approaching. Then when she and her son arrived at the rock of the mountain, she cried out, "Rock, receive me inside of you along with my son!" And at that very moment, the rock opened its mouth, split and accepted them into itself. It became for her a sequestered and restful place.

---

a. Or: "a divine mouth."

b. Or: "who are troubled/distressed" or "who are suffering from toil."

c. Or: dispensation/civilized world/inhabited world (oikoumena).

d. The text seems to suggest that those to whom the apostles are to preach are the very people who did harmful things to Jesus in the preceding sentence. Thus, the beginning of a worldwide apostolic commission is to begin in Jerusalem with the Jewish or Judean people who rejected Jesus and, subsequently, that mission is to extend to the "ends of the world." Cf. Acts 2, which this author may have had in mind.

e. Note the parallel with 10:2, where Jesus forgives the sin of the prostitute and transforms the tax collector into an Evangelist (i.e., a gospel writer). Here at 103, the author, now using Jesus' voice, extends that transformative acceptance of sinners to the work of the apostles and, by implication, the work of the universal church. This extension adds a further inclusion of those Jews/Judeans who rejected Jesus and either gentiles or apostates.

f. The honor given points back to the love-feast given to John by Jesus at 53-4. The "honor upon the earth" is certainly the funerary meal that Jesus gives on behalf of John in the Homily, while the "honor in heaven" refers back to the opening exaltation of John in the heavens at 21 and also foreshadows the contents of the Apocalypse. Thus, this section likely was composed by the scribe who wrote the preface as he or she attempts to interweave the various materials that comprise Encom. Baptist.

g. The Greek loanword, monasterion, literally means a solitary place, as in a monastic or cloistered place. While the narrative may be evoking an image of Christian monasticism, such a connection is not necessarily intended.

h. The Greek loanword, êsuchazein ("to rest" or "to be still"), carries the sense of not only
As the need arose, they went to the place of the rock, which would open up for them and then close up again, by means of the providence of God. It was an expansive place for their coming and going. And if they requested anything that they had need of, it was there; such as if they needed locusts or wild honey it came to them that way. And the door to the cave opened for them and closed for them by itself. During the summer days the air was rendered cool, so that the burning heat did not oppress them; whereas during the winter days the air was rendered warm, so that the cold did not give them any distress. This is also how they co-existed amicably with the wild animals up to the day that the holy John appeared at the Jordan.

THE APOCALYPSE OF THE THIRD HEAVEN

Transition into the apocalypse

Yet now let us return to speaking about some of the honors bestowed by God to his beloved John, according to what we found in the ancient books that our fathers, the apostles, wrote and placed in the library of the holy city, Jerusalem. Being myself there in Jerusalem, I resided in a church that an old godly presbyter managed, staying there so that I could celebrate the festival of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ along with the festival of the holy cross. Now I was looking through these books and to my great encouragement I found a small, ancient book that the apostles had written. This is what it said:

Post-resurrection appearance

It happened that when we apostles had gathered together with our Savior on the Mount of Olives after he had been raised from the dead, he spoke to us, entrusting us with this task: “Go out into the whole world, proclaiming to them the gospel of the kingdom.” He also spoke to us about John the Baptist and the honors that he bestowed on him in heaven. And we said to him, “Surely it is fitting for us to be well informed about your beloved relative, John, as you have attested: ‘I will bestow to him the third heaven, a gift along with the good things in it, in exchange for the blood that he shed for me.’ So now, our Lord, precisely inform us about him and show us the heaven that you have bestowed to your beloved John, along with the good things you have prepared for it. And show us John, about whom you have said, ‘Not one in the heavens matches him in the glory and honor bestowed to him by the Father.’

---

a place of rest but a quiet, still place. This term effectively contrasts the fleeing and chasing danger with the secure, safe place of rest or nonmotion.

a. See introduction p. 223 for a discussion of this motif.

b. Compare with 10:3, which parallels the more concise commissioning of the apostles here at 13:1. Note a few differences, such as (1) the apostles are commanded to go “to the ends of the (civilized) world” (oikoumena) (10:3), whereas here it is to “the whole world” (pkosmos teref; lit. “all the world”); (2) the concern over the Jews/Judeans in 10:3 is dropped at 13:1; (3) there is no concern at 13:1 over social relations, as we see at 10:3; and (4) the object of proclamation is a bit different—“the gospel of the kingdom” at 13:1 versus “the redemption for the forgiveness of sin” at 10:3.
An Encomium on John the Baptist

Ascent into the heavens
14 Right away, at our Savior's command, he brought down a cloud of light. He entered into it and directed us, the apostles, to enter with him into the cloud. He took us up to the first heaven, and then to the second. When he arrived at the third heaven, he would not let us enter but instead took us on to the fourth heaven, and to the fifth, and to the sixth, as well as to the seventh. And he would not let us enter. After he had shown us everything, he brought us back into the third heaven.

Tour of the third heaven
15 We marveled at its beauty, its opulence, and its magnificence. And we saw John the Baptist there along with his father Zechariah and his mother Elizabeth. They were dressed in such magnificence, wearing precious stones of scarlet and stones of every color. Our Savior had us stand before John and he placed John among us, with Zechariah on his right and his mother Elizabeth on his left. And we, the apostles, he placed according to our rank, from our father Peter down to Matthias (or Matthew).

a. The cosmology of the Apocalypse of the Third Heaven only includes seven heavens, unlike some other early Christian cosmologies that have an eighth or ninth (i.e., those that break beyond the earthly cosmos). The seven heavens in the Apocalypse of the Third Heaven evoke a common planetary motif in late antiquity of seven planetary bodies, comprising therefore the totality of the heavens. In other words, by showing the apostles the seven heavens, the Savior has shown them everything, and it is this totality that the third heaven excels (thus fulfilling the claim that John the Baptist is the most honored in heaven and on earth).

b. It is unclear if the apostles are not allowed to enter any of the seven heavens, or only those above the second heaven, or are barred entry only into the third heaven. Given the exact parallel "he would not let us enter" (mp efkaan e bok e hoyyn) at the end of the journey and when they arrived at the third heaven, it seems more likely that the apostles were not allowed to enter the third heaven during this tour of heaven. Such a reading also makes sense with the summary statement, "after he had shown us everything" (though this could mean simply that the Savior only showed them the heavens but did not let them enter them, especially the third, which becomes the focal point of the journey from this point on).

c. That is, they are wearing magnificent clothing that has been embellished with these precious stones or gems.

d. Till ("Johannes der Taüfer," 328 n. 5) correctly identifies the Greek loanword kokkos, best translated as "scarlet" in this context (contra Budge), which works well with the other precious stones that the three characters wear. The specification of scarlet likely evokes wealth and prestige, whereas the other stones may suggest an abundance of wealth. Thus, these three characters are as opulent as the third heaven itself.

e. The Coptic name could be rendered as Matthias (so Budge and Boud'hors) or Matthew, as Till suggests. In early Christian texts the two names are occasionally conflated or confused. Given the descent in order from Peter, if we follow the Matthias reading then we are likely seeing an allusion to Acts 1 (thus the order is set according to when someone became an apostle, with Matthias being the last of the twelve as he fills Judas's place). If we follow the Matthew reading, then we may be seeing the apostolic arrangement following the type of sinfulness from which the apostle was called (i.e., Matthew as a tax collector). The latter reading nicely picks up on the "tax collector you made an Evangelist" at 102 (and thus integrates the Apocalypse of the Third Heaven with the transitional material, thereby suggesting that the redactor identified the character with Matthew). The former reading fits nicely with the commissioning of the twelve apostles at 13:1 (when they had gathered together). Not uncommon is the reestablishment of the entire twelve in such commissioning accounts (e.g., Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles), a restoration motif that Matthias fulfills in the opening of Acts.
"Going on before us, our Savior revealed the entirety of the heaven." He revealed to us all the good and pleasurable things that had been prepared in advance for it. These things he granted as gifts to his beloved John, so that they may be granted to any who remember John while on earth, as (John) is his relative and his forerunner.\(^b\)

If James,\(^c\) the brother of the Lord, swear to you that I will not conceal any of the good things that were revealed to me, things which have been prepared in the third heaven; the things God has bestowed upon the holy John so that these may in turn be given to any who remember him on earth.\(^d\)

The Savior's first discourse on the golden boat and the fiery river

16 | Moreover, Paul and Luke, as well as Mark, were with us. Then the good Savior summoned the seven archangels, starting with Michael—the greatest archangel and chief military commander of the powers of heaven—down to Sedekiel.\(^e\) (The Savior) summoned us, the apostles, according to rank and according to name, starting with our father Peter—the greatest of the apostles—down to Mark the Evangelist.\(^f\)

prior to the coming of the Spirit that inaugurates the Lukan age of the church. Perhaps a shift occurs from Matthias to Matthew through the redactional incorporation of the Apocalypse with the Homily.

a. That is, of the third heaven. While the text could refer to heaven in its totality, the narrative journey motif clearly fits a reference to just the third heaven (as the Savior has already shown the apostles the other heavens at 14:2–3 and the narrative focuses on the third heaven).

b. This discussion of gifts is very rich in a liturgical or ritual sense. The Greek loanwords used here link the Savior's grace with the gifts, the latter of which is an offering of divine benefaction given to mortals. The remembrance on earth motif likely evokes ritual devotion granted to John the Baptist, such as we find in the cult of the saints. Budge has translated this motif in order to convey just such a sense ("who celebrated upon the earth the festival of the Commemoration of John ..." and again with "who kept the festival of his commemoration upon earth"). This translation perhaps overtranslates the Coptic, but the likely cultic motif is certainly alluded to in the text. Perhaps the "to remember" evokes a eucharistic motif, thus connecting the benefaction in heaven to motifs found in the Homily (e.g., 5:2–4 to 6:1–2) and especially in the transitional material (10:4). The symmetry between earthly benefaction ("remembering" John) and heavenly benefaction ("good and pleasurable things" in the third heaven) nicely parallels the earthly/heavenly honor granted John the Baptist at 10:4.

c. Budge mistranslates jakkobos as "James." The statement is an apocalyptic motif identifying the visionary, here identified as James, the brother of the Lord. This identification may be interlinking the family dynamics so prevalent in Encom. Bapt.

d. This line repeats the statement just before the shift to the declaration of James. This redundancy either adds emphasis to the earlier statement by reinforcing the claim by means of the first-person oath or, less likely, it indicates a redactional addition of a common apocalyptic formula. The latter suggestion is supported by James playing no other role in the Apocalypse. Indeed, without this oath statement, the Apocalypse would read as a revelation to all the apostles (see 14:3) and not a particular individual. Regardless, these two parallel statements set the stage for the soteriological role that John the Baptist will play later in the Apocalypse.

e. The cosmological landscape shifts here with the singular "heaven." Either this indicates a slip on the part of the author, an underlying source or influence (such as Revelation), or "heaven" is being used to encompass all seven heavens of the Apocalypse of the Third Heaven.

f. Note the parallel presentation of the archangels and the apostles along identical hierarchical lines, thus suggesting a heavenly and earthly balance in the Savior's forces. Furthermore, Mark's position at the lower end of the scale, while grouped together with Paul and Luke at 16:1, is set in contrast with Peter's higher status at 16:2 thereby suggesting a possible juxtaposing of

2 Cor 13:2; Apoc. Paul 20
An Encomium on John the Baptist

3. And (the Savior) said to us, "O my archangels and holy servants, as well as my apostles. You are witnesses of my birth, my suffering and my crucifixion. Therefore, I appoint you as witnesses once more. For behold I have given the third heaven as a gift to John the Baptist, my friend and my relative. Therefore, proclaim throughout the entire world that any person who keeps in remembrance the beloved John upon the earth—whether by means of an offering or by means of a love-feast (agape) or by means of a charitable gift that is given to the poor—either at his place in his name, or written down in the holy book as a remembrance of him and kept within the church, or by covering with precious fabrics the table in your place, you will lead them into the third heaven, which I have bestowed on you, and clothe them in heavenly garments.

3. I say to you, my dear beloved John—who was deemed worthy to baptize me with his holy hands—if anyone makes an offering of first fruits in your place in your name, or feeds one who is hungry in your name, or gives drink to one who is thirsty, or covers one who is naked in your name, I will not abandon them to Amente, rather, you will lead them into eternal life and I will let my angels clothe them in wings of light and I will bestow on them all the good things that

the gentle and Jewish missions. With the mention of John and Matthew/Matthias at 15:1, we have all four NT gospel writers presented, with the mention of Peter and Paul offering apostolic status to Luke and Mark.

a. As there are only two sets of beings (archangels and apostles) who have been summoned, I am taking the conjunction αὐτός as expository for the first set of beings (thus identifying the "holy servants" with the "archangels") with the conjunction μόνοι distinguishing and coordinating this first set of beings with the second set (i.e., the apostles).

b. "Suffering" here likely refers to Jesus’ Passion leading up to the crucifixion (so also Budge) rather than the Savior’s suffering in general. The three elements in this sentence (birth, suffering, crucifixion) encompass the basic plot progression in the New Testament gospels, especially the Synoptic Gospels. What is missing, of course, is a witness to the resurrection. Rather than finishing with the glorification of Jesus, the Apocalypse of the Third Heaven shifts that climactic glorification to John the Baptist in the third heaven.

c. Cf. 5:3–4 where John the Baptist is referred to as Jesus’ "friend and relative." Here at 16:3 we have this relationship stated overtly by Jesus rather than by the narrator.

d. The "place" (topos) mentioned twice here (see 16:5) likely refers to a sacred space dedicated to honoring John the Baptist, such as a martyr shrine, tomb, or specific space within a sanctuary or church.

e. The shift to the second-person singular (pek-) when one would expect a third-person singular or plural (pef- or pey-) does not refer to any of the apostles or archangels but to those who might keep remembrance on earth. Rather, the text transitions awkwardly into a direct address to John the Baptist in the next sentence. This identification is almost certain given that the person addressed has been given the third heaven, which, as we already know, was given to John the Baptist.

f. That is, John the Baptist.

g. The shift to third-person singular suggests that this is an aside comment directed to the reader/hearer of the Apocalypse by the narrator, rather than a part of the dialogue between the Savior and John the Baptist.

h. Or to "clothe" or "give covering" to one who is naked. The translation "to cover one who is naked" suggests a possible allusion to Gen 3:20–22, especially 23. Such a biblical allusion would shift the statement from ethical behavior (directed toward the less fortunate) to the soteriological or ontological (sinful) condition.

i. See 10:1–2.

j. Most likely alluding to Matt 25:34–46, where hunger, thirst, nakedness, and entering into either eternal punishment or eternal life are all present. Another possible allusion could be Matt 10:42. If there is a direct influence of Matt 10:42 here in the Apocalypse of the Third Heaven,
are in my kingdom. 6 My father will bless your right hand, which you placed upon my head. My tongue will bless your mouth and your tongue, with which you said: 'Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.'

7 'For I am in the truth. And any person who remembers you on earth, truly I say to you, my relative John, I will not abandon that one to Amente eternally nor to its punishments, even to the river of fire that every person must cross over whether righteous or a sinner. Behold, I bestow as a gift for the crossing of this river of fire a golden boat. Any who remembers you on earth will be carried over this river of fire by you.'

17 'Then we the apostles said to him, "Our Lord, what is the breadth and depth of this river of fire? Teach us so that we may teach people how terrifying it is." 8 Our Savior said to us, "I will let you know its dimensions and the dimensions of the golden boat that I have given to my beloved John. The depth of the river of fire is thirty wave lengths from shore to shore, and from crest to crest it is thirty stadia by wave. 9 But I have given the golden boat to my relative John for crossing over the river of fire, so that he may ferry over all who have remembered him on earth, even if just by a small piece of bread or a cup of cold water. 10 When they reach the final wave, there I baptize them in the river of fire. When they come to be baptized, for those who have kept the remembrance of John the river of fire will be like bath waters and the waters will be hot as when a person washes, such will be the river of fire. 11 Therefore, anyone who remembers you upon earth, dearest John, my friend and relative, whether through an offering, first fruits, or any gift given in remembrance of your holy name, I order you to ferry that one over the waters of the river of fire in the golden boat that I have bestowed to you, taking them into the third heaven so that they may enjoy all the eternal good things that have been prepared.'

The Savior's discourse on the paradise of the third heaven
18 1 And when our good Savior had told us all these things, we rejoiced over the great honors bestowed upon John the Baptist. 2 He then said to us, "Come, I will instruct you regarding everything in the paradise of the third heaven." And he had us wander in fields full of fruits each according to their own kind and exuding fragrant smells. And all the trees of the fields, according to season, produced fruit consistent with its own kind, from their roots to their heights: cinnamon, amomon, mastic, and nutmeg(?)—exuding fragrant smells, each one distinct.
An Encomium on John the Baptist

5 Thomas said to the Savior, "Lord, behold, you have instructed us about all the fragrant trees in Paradise, the seasons and the date-palms. Now instruct us as to how large is the yield of dates, how large is each piece of fruit per each tree's yield, how large is the cluster of each tree's yield."

4 The Savior said, "I will not withhold anything about which you (pl.) have asked. As to the yield, which you (pl.) inquired about, there are ten thousand fruit clusters on it, with each cluster overflowing with six measures. Now as to the date-palms of Paradise, their yield is ten thousand, each the length and measure of a person. So also with figs there are ten thousand per branch. If three people eat a single fig, they will be sated. A sole ear of wheat grain from Paradise has ten thousand clusters of grain and so also is the height of the citrus trees which bear ten thousand each. The apple and peach(?), trees are of the same height, each bearing ten thousand and if three people eat a single piece then they will be sated.

5 "These are the good things that I have prepared for anyone who remembers my beloved relative John on earth. Blessed are all those who are deemed worthy to inherit these good things, which the eye has not seen, nor the ear heard,

given the context, it is undoubtedly an exotic spice that, in Mediterranean cultures of late antiquity, would have been imported from the East. See introduction p. 231.

a. Or "fruits."

b. Literally, date-palm or its fruit (dates), which makes sense given the clusters of fruit that follow. As the date-palm has not been mentioned up to this point, the text could also be indicating simply the yield or product of the trees (i.e., their fruit) that have been mentioned. If the latter reading is correct, then this phrase could be translated: "the seasons and the yield" (i.e., of the fragrant trees). However, given the specific Coptic term used here (bîne), whereas the author uses the more general Greek term for "fruit" elsewhere (karpos), it is more likely that the date-palm and dates are meant. A parallel to date-palms in the garden of Paradise is found in the Qur'an 55:68.

c. The shift to the second-person plural indicates that the Savior responds to all of the apostles and not just Thomas.

d. The Greek is metrêtês, a liquid measurement. This suggests (so Budge, Till, and Boud'hors) that the fruit clusters are grapes hanging on vines for wine production. Cf. Babylonian 'Talmud, Ketubbot 111b. See discussion in Henk J. de Jonge, "BOTPYC BOHCEI: The Age of Kronos and the Millennium in Papias of Hierapolis," in Studies in Hellenistic Religions (ed. Maarten Jozef Vermaseren; Leiden: Brill, 1979), 37–49 at 38–41 for further parallels, including a reference to Encom. Bapt. The clearest parallel to 18:4 is Papias, Fragment 1: "The days are coming when vines will come forth, each with ten thousand boughs; and on a single bough will be ten thousand branches. And indeed, on a single branch will be ten thousand shoots and on every shoot ten thousand clusters; and in every cluster will be ten thousand grapes, and every grape, when pressed, will yield twenty-five measures of wine" (translation from Bart Ehrman, The Apostolic Fathers [2 vols.; LCL; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003], 2:93–95; see alternative translation with discussion in de Jonge, "BOTPYC BOHCEI," 40). If metrêtês is read in connection to wine production, then, like Papias, the author of the Apocalypse of the Third Heaven has used grapes to describe the abundance of the afterlife (though with Papias, this abundance is tied less to a spatial apocalyptic model than to a future apocalyptic period).

e. The Greek is kitrion and correctly translated by Till and Boud'hors as "citrons." Budge mistakenly translates this term as "cedars."

f. The Coptic is thourakion, the meaning of which is unknown. Boud'hors suggests a possible relation to the rare Greek term dorakion from the Latin duraculum (a type of peach). But the meaning remains uncertain.
nor instilled within the human heart. These things God has prepared for those who love him and love John, his friend and relative. It is not for us who have received the honor he attained in heaven and on earth. He was deemed worthy to baptize the Son of God with his holy hands and to look upon the holy Trinity: the Son he baptized with his hands; the voice of the Father he heard saying, 'You are my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am pleased,' and the Holy Spirit who came down from heaven, settling upon him like a dove.'

The Savior's second discourse on the golden boat and the fiery river
19 Peter said again to the Savior, "Our Lord and our God, let us know the purpose of these oars and these lampstands." The Savior said, "There is a lampstand for each oar and seven holes per lampstand burning brightly. Any person who kindles a lamp at the place of the holy John, even if before his image, will be ferried across the river of fire in the golden boat that I have bestowed to my beloved John. These lampstands will illuminate the way before them, shining forth until they have passed through the dark paths, carrying them into the third heaven, which I have given as a gift to my beloved John, where they will inherit for eternity the good things that are there."

The conclusion of the apocalypse and descent from the heavens
20 When the good Savior had said these things, he went up onto the cloud. He ordered us to go up with him. He brought us down and set us on the Mount of Olives. He stood praying with us and he said, "Peace be with you." When he said this, he went up to heaven in great glory where the angels sang hymns to him.

HOMILY ON JOHN THE BAPTIST: CONCLUSION

21 Truly, my dear beloved (pl.), there is no one like John the Baptist in heaven and on earth, nor more exalted in glory. According to the mouth of Christ, which cannot lie, "Among those born of women, no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist." Behold, you (pl.) now know the glory and honor that God has bestowed on John the Baptist. You should devote yourselves to the giving

---

g. That is, God.
h. The use of the pronoun υψογ ("his") rather than παρ ("my") relates "friend" and "relative" back to God rather than the Savior, which is an odd shift in the text that may prepare the reader for the Trinitarian theology vis-à-vis John the Baptist that follows.
i. More literally: "You are my son, my beloved, to whom my love/pleasure is directed."
j. Cf. 10:1 where we read "our good god and philanthropic Christ."
k. These are likely for candles or wicks.
l. Here the text returns to the Homily on John the Baptist, with the congregation being called "beloved."
m. It is unclear if Christ continues speaking here or if the voice shifts back to the preacher. The former is possible, as it fits with the Apocalypse that precedes this section. Most likely it is the preacher who now speaks with "Behold" rather than Christ given the exhortations that follow (and such a reading allows this closing section to remain as part of the Homily, with the Apocalypse of the Third Heaven remaining a separate source). Therefore, the plural "you" at this point refers directly to the congregation.
An Encomium on John the Baptist

of charitable gifts, love-feasts, and offerings in his holy name. My dear brethren, you know that the human life on earth is nothing.

3If you would be saved a and inherit eternal life, then hurry to redeem your sins by means of charitable gifts and your lawless acts by means of merciful acts for the poor and the needy, so that you may have enjoyment in the good things in the joyful place of rejoicing. Even if you have sinned, turn and repent and he will set you free from your sin, for God is compassionate and his mercy counteracts the wickedness of the person who turns to him.

4For he said regarding the prophet Ezekiel, “I do not wish the death of the impious, rather that that one turn back from his way, repent, and live.” Now again: “If the lawless turn back from their wickedness and do righteous deeds, I will not remember their lawlessness,” the Lord says, “but by doing righteousness they shall live.” And he says in another place, “Turn to me, children who have wandered off, and I will heal your fractures.” In yet another place, he says, b “I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance.”

5You know, my dear beloved (pl.), that charitable gifts are good and that love-feasts are splendid. Let none neglect in giving charitable gifts and love-feasts for the poor and needy, according to his power. c And you should also make offerings for the church in the name of the saints. d On account of all these things, let us give glory to God and his holy forerunner John the Baptist, the virgin, the martyr, and the relative of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the one who bestowed such great honors on (John), (and) who is due all glory and honor with his good Father and the Holy Spirit forever and forever. Amen.

---

a. Or: “made whole.”

b. The preacher most closely follows the Lukan saying where “repentance” is mentioned.

c. It is unclear if “according to his power” (kata tekhom) is best read as the giver’s ability (i.e., “according to his means”) or as an external force or power that enables the person to give (i.e., either the power of God or the power of John the Baptist). Both readings are possible and both would fit the context of the Homily.

d. It is unclear if these gifts (i.e., the charitable acts, love-feasts, and offerings) are the means by which glory is given to God and John the Baptist or are the reward for giving glory to God and John the Baptist. With the Apocalypse of the Third Heaven in mind, the latter option is possible (thus, the congregation is promised the blessings of the third heaven), but in the context of the Homily, especially the immediate context (of actively giving charitable gifts, love-feasts, and offerings), it is more likely the former. A third option is to read the sentence as “concerning these things.” Thus the glory given to God and John the Baptist is due to all the things preceding this sentence as a way to pull the sermon to a close.