The Mysteries of John
A translation and introduction

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The Mysteries of John (Myst. John; CANT 333; CPC 0041) is a Coptic text consisting of a post-resurrection revelation dialogue and heavenly journey. The text exists only in Coptic, and its complete title, in the only manuscript where it is preserved in its entirety, is the "Mysteries of John, the apostle and holy virgin."¹ It recounts a heavenly journey undertaken by the apostle John together with a cherub, and is primarily concerned with interpretation of the creation stories from Genesis, the arrangement of the natural world, and God's providence. It has affinities with other Coptic texts, such as Invest. Mich., Invest. Gab., and Invest. Abbat., as well as other Johannine apocalypses and several Old Testament pseudepigrapha.

Contents
As is often the case with Christian revelation dialogues, Myst. John starts out on the Mount of Olives after Jesus' resurrection. Jesus, with the help of a cloud, assembles all the apostles to sit beside him on the mount. The apostle John quickly takes center stage and takes advantage of his privileged position as the Beloved Disciple to ask Jesus to take him to heaven and reveal to him everything (1:1–4). Jesus responds by gathering together all the apostles in prayer, whereupon the heavens open and a frightening cherub appears. Jesus tells the cherub to take John up to heaven (1:5–11). The cherub obliges, transports John to heaven, and acts as an angelus interpres from this point in the narrative, which here ceases to be in the third person, but proceeds from the first-person perspective of John himself for the remainder of the text.

The conversation between John and the cherub (consistently spelled "cherubim" in the manuscript) consists of thirty-six questions posed by John and an equal number of answers from the cherub. These deal with the natural world (2:1–5:13; 8:1–9:8; 12:1–8), the first chapters of Genesis (6:1–7:8), the archangel Michael's role in the governance of the world (5:14–18), the healing of Hezekiah (7:9–16), God's providence (10:4–6), predestination vs. free will (10:1–3, 7–10), and the difference between humans and animals (11:1–7). Of most concern to John, by far, are questions concerning the natural world and the first chapters of Genesis. John is preoccupied with major questions of day-to-day existence such as the origins of agriculture, the watering of fields, the origins of famine, and the arrangement of the stars, but also questions arising from the

¹ In Ernest A. W. Budge's first edition of the text, the title is misleadingly given as "The Mysteries of Saint John and the Holy Virgin" (Coptic Apocrypha, 59). The virgin of the text's title refers of course to John, and not, as one might be led to believe, to the Virgin Mary, who does not make an appearance in this text.

481
story of the Fall, such as the reason why God allowed Adam to be tempted by Satan. Why was Adam held accountable after being tricked by Satan, if God himself allowed the devil to do so? And does God predestine who will be good and who will be evil?

In reaction to John's concerns, the cherub clearly and repeatedly states God's goodness and concern for humankind. Indeed, the Father is referred to as "the Father of Mercy" (3:10), and Christ as "the Son of Goodness" (3:7; 11) and the text emphasizes that those who follow God's will and perform good deeds will be rewarded. However, the Father displays little sympathy with humankind's failings, and there are multiple references to God's anger, sometimes mediated through the "Angel of Wrath," but counterbalanced by the cherub's repeated references to God's forbearance and the powerful efficacy of the archangel Michael's intercessions. The narrative ends with John's return to the Mount of Olives and the apostles' dispersal.

**Manuscripts and Manuscript Contexts**

*Myst. John* is attested in two Coptic manuscripts: one completely preserved codex in Sahidic from Upper Egypt, and a fragment of a Bohairic codex from Lower Egypt. The colophon at the end of the Sahidic manuscript (London, British Library, Or. 7026)\(^2\) reveals that it was produced in Esna and donated to the Monastery of Mercurius in Tbo (Edfu). It was copied in 1005 CE by Victor, son of Mercurius, in Latopolis (Esna) on the tenth of the month of Thout, and was donated to the Monastery of Mercurius by two of its monks: the "archdeacon and monk" Chael (a short form of the name Michael) and Zacharias, the "second deacon and monk." The colophon states that the two monks deposited the manuscript in their monastery for the "use and assurance to those who will listen," which would presumably be other monks as well as laypeople visiting the monastery. The colophon also includes a request for Jesus to bless Apa Abraham, abbot of the Mercurius monastery, and a wish for him to eventually join the heavenly ranks of the earliest leaders of the Pachomian federation: Pachomius, Petronius, Theodore, and Horsiesios, as well as Apa Palamon, the leader of the monastic group Pachomius joined when he first became a monk.

BL Or. 7026 is not the only manuscript deriving from the Monastery of Mercurius at Edfu. It was one of at least twenty-four manuscripts discovered in the early twentieth century in Upper Egypt (or possibly in northern Sudan) and acquired by Western institutions over a four-year period from 1907 to 1911.\(^3\) Of these manuscripts, seven-

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3. These twenty-four manuscripts are BL Add. 37534, Or. 6781–6784, Or. 6799–6805, Or. 7021, Or. 7022, Or. 7023+Or. 6806A, Or. 7024–7027, Or. 7028+6780+Washington, Smithsonian Freer Gallery of Art, 2 (162), Or. 7029+f. 21 (formerly Or. 6806B), Or. 7030, Or. 7597, and New York, Morgan Library and Museum, M633. See van der Vliet, "Nubian Voices from Edfu," 277; Layton, *Catalogue of Coptic Literary Manuscripts*, xxvii–xxx. On M633, see Leo Depuydt, *Catalogue of Coptic Manuscripts in the Pierpont Morgan Library* (3 vols.; Corpus of Illuminated Manuscripts 4–5, Oriental Series 1–2; Leuven: Peeters, 1993), xlv, 341–43. On the possibility of a Nubian provenance for (at least some of) these codices, see Bruce Williams, "Tenth and Eleventh Century Codices," in *The University of Chicago Oriental Institute Nubian Expedition (OINE), Volume XIII, Excavations at Serra East*, Part 9: Cerre
teen are either dated (by colophon) or datable to between 974 and 1053/1056. While it is debated how many of these manuscripts were actually discovered together, the colophons of several of them, commonly known as the "Esna-Edfu hoard," state explicitly where they were produced and deposited. Thirteen manuscripts appear to have been produced in Esna between 974 and 1005. Ten manuscripts were with certainty donated to Edfu, and at least eight of them to the Monastery of Mercurius. The scribe who copied BL Or. 7026, which contains Myst. John, also copied BL Or. 7021, in which the colophon states that it was donated to the "Place (i.e., shrine or monastery) of the holy archangel Michael in the district of Edfu."  

Myst. John is the first of two tractates in BL Or. 7026. Taking up thirty-nine manuscript pages, it is followed by the much longer hagiographical Life of Pisenthius, a seventh-century bishop and saint, comprising 125 pages. The entire manuscript was published along with an English translation by E. A. W. Budge in 1913. The two texts are notably different, with regard to contents as well as genre. While we may only speculate as to the possible reasons why they were brought together in this manuscript, the two texts do at least have in common an attribution to an author named John: "John the apostle and holy virgin" and "John the presbyter"; and they both make reference to heavenly ascent. While Myst. John describes the apostle John's journey to heaven and back, the Life of Pisenthius makes the rather curious argument that Paul's reference in 2 Cor 12:2-4 to a man who was taken up to the third heaven and told unspeakable mysteries, should not be understood as a reference to Paul, but to Pisenthius (pp. 41-42).  

In addition to the complete Sahidic version in BL Or. 7026, Myst. John is also attested in a small parchment fragment in the Bohairic dialect deriving from the Monastery of St. Macarius in Scetis (Wadi Natrun), in Lower Egypt, now kept in the

Matto, The Christian Period and Later Pottery, Glass, Small Objects, Texts, and Inscribed Objects (ed. Bruce Williams; Chicago: Oriental Institute, forthcoming); and Alexandros Tsakos, "On the Nubian Cluster of the Rustafjaell Lot in the British Library" (unpublished paper delivered at the Nordic Coptic Network meeting in Helsinki, Finland, June 2017). We would like to thank Williams and Tsakos for copies of these papers.

4. All of these colophons are published in van Lantschoot, Recueil des colophons. See also van der Vliet, "Nubian Voices from Edfu," 265; Layton, Catalogue of Coptic Literary Manuscripts, 89, 194-95. The manuscripts lacking dates are BL Add. 37534, Or. 6784, Or. 6803-6809, and Or. 7030. Among these, de Rustafjaell assigns Or. 6803 to "about the twelfth century" (Light of Egypt, 109), and Or. 6804 to the twelfth century (ibid., 110); Budge states with some hesitation that Or. 6805 "was probably written in the ninth or tenth century" (Ernest A. W. Budge, Texts Relating to Saint Menas of Egypt and Canons of Nicaea in Nubian Dialect: With Facsimile [London: British Museum, 1909], 14-15). Layton deduces on the basis of evidence from the cartonnage that Or. 7030 is from "594/5 or later" (Catalogue of Coptic Literary Manuscripts, xxvi).  

5. The manuscripts that were with certainty donated to the Monastery of Mercurius are BL Or. 6783, Or. 6801, Or. 7022, Or. 7024, Or. 7025, Or. 7026, Or. 7027, Or. 7028+6780+Washington Freer Gallery 2 (162), while BL Or. 7021 and 7029 were donated to Edfu, but not necessarily to the monastery of Mercurius. In addition to these, BL Or. 7023, Pierpont Morgan M633, and possibly BL Or. 7030, were also produced in Esna. See van Lantschoot, Recueil des colophons.  


8. Budge, Coptic Apocrypha, 59-74 (Myst. John text), 241-57 (trans.); 75-127 (Life of Pisenthius text), 258-330 (trans.).
The Mysteries of John

Coptic Museum in Cairo (Cairo, inv. no. 47). It was published by Hugh G. Evelyn White in 1926. Unfortunately, this small fragment is all that remains from this codex, and thus we do not know what other texts were once included in it.

Authorship and Origins

While we know a great deal about the producers and users of the principal manuscript in which it is preserved (BL Or. 7026), we cannot say anything with certainty regarding Myst. John's original authorship or date of composition. The attribution of the text to the apostle John is significant and as such it joins a notable group of Johannine apocalyptic attributed to this important figure. Tito Orlandi has assigned the text's composition, along with that of Invest. Mich. and Invest. Gab., to the sixth or seventh century, while Daniele Tripaldi, with reference to the opinion of Paola Buzi, has suggested the slightly later date range of the seventh to eighth century. John M. Court has suggested a date of composition close to the production of the Esna/Edfu manuscript.

Since we have no attestation for the existence of the text prior to the manuscript evidence, it must be pointed out that it is only with great uncertainty that one may speculate as to its original date of authorship. Furthermore, since we may assume on the basis of other texts of this sort that its transmission is likely to have been highly fluid, it is even more difficult to assign a date of origin, and highly uncertain to what extent the text in its extant form resembles the original composition—an uncertainty that only increases the farther back in time we hazard to date it.

What we do know is that the two extant manuscripts were used by Egyptian monks. The colophon of BL Or. 7026 clearly indicates that the text was not simply copied as a curiosity or for archival purposes, but that it was meant to be read for edification. While the Life of Piscethious would obviously be of interest to monks, it is not as obvious why they would be interested in Myst. John. One might speculate that its focus on good and bad years, agriculture, and famine, and its discussion of God's providential care, may have resonated well as a response to the actual state of affairs in Egypt close to the time when BL Or. 7026 was produced. Indeed, it has been suggested that Myst. John may have functioned as a response to the hardships caused by al-Ḥākim bin-Amr Allāh's (996–1021) persecution of Egyptian Christians, and this has even been offered, by Court, as a possible context for the text's composition. Some years earlier, in 963–969, approximately thirty-five years before the manuscript's production, Egypt experienced an especially severe

9. Evelyn White, Monasteries of the Wadi 'n Natrūn, 51. This undated fragment is probably roughly contemporary with BL Or. 7026.


12. See, e.g., the synoptic translation of Invest. Mich. in the present volume.

famine." Considering the contents of Myst. John, such hardships may have caused heightened interest in the themes it discusses, and may have provided incentives to copy and read it. As for its composition, although it may have been authored close to the time of the production of the preserved manuscripts, we cannot rule out the possibility of a significantly earlier date of composition.

**Literary Context**

*Myst. John* can be characterized as an apocalypse, as John is taken to heaven by a supernatural being, shown wonders, and told mysteries relating to protology, cosmology, heavenly worlds, and divine justice. As a revelation dialogue it shares a number of features with other Coptic texts, from the Nag Hammadi codices (e.g., *Apoc. Paul*, *Apoc. Adam*, *Wis. Jes. Chr.*, and *Ep. Pet. Phil.*) to a number of those later Coptic apocrypha that have recently been classified as "apostolic memoirs." It involves, for instance, a dialogue with Christ on the Mount of Olives (albeit only as an introduction) and an otherworldly journey. Moreover, like most of the texts that can be assigned to the so-called "apostolic memoirs," there is no evidence that *Myst. John* was composed, or ever existed, in a language other than Coptic. It has even been suggested that it betrays influence from ancient Egyptian ideas and traditions, such as what may conceivably be interpreted as references to the flooding of the Nile (*Myst. John* 2:8).

However, although Suciu includes *Myst. John* among the texts he classifies as "apostolic memoirs," it should be noted that it lacks a number of features common to this category. Therefore, it must be regarded as a relatively atypical member of this group if it is to be included under the moniker at all. *Myst. John* does not connect itself directly to, or explain the origins of, a liturgical feast; it does not refer to John himself writing down the revelation, or to the library of the apostles in Jerusalem; nor does it use the phrases "O my holy members" or "we the apostles" that are so common to this group of texts; and the narration is in the first person singular, rather than the first person plural. Also, like *Invest. Mich.* and *Invest. Gab.*, it lacks the customary homiletic frame narrative.
The Mysteries of John

While not making any direct references to specific dates or to a specific liturgical feast, Myst. John does bring liturgy (e.g., hymns, prayers, and the Eucharist) to mind in several passages. Of particular note is the way the text weaves eucharistic references into its story of the origin of agriculture, and how the Son created the first seed that was given to the starving Adam after the fall. This story is redolent not only of eucharistic theology, but also recalls the manner in which the proshoron is stamped prior to being baked.

Myst. John displays several parallels with Jewish texts and traditions. One such example is the curious idea that Adam and Eve were not in fact naked before the fall, but clothed in righteousness, of which they were stripped when God discovered that they had transgressed. The remains of this righteousness are the nails on humans' hands and feet. This motif is found, among other places, in Pirq. R. El. and Gen. Rab. Another idea found in Jewish literature as well as in Myst. John is that of Adam's exceptional size prior to the Fall (Apoc. Ab. 23:5; b. Hag. 12a; b. Sanh. 38b), an idea that occurs also in the Islamic tradition, although Adam's size there, at no less than sixty cubits (Shaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 4:55, 543), is significantly larger than the rather more modest numbers given in Myst. John, which states his size as twelve cubits tall, six cubits broad, and three cubits thick (6:25).

This parallel with the Islamic tradition raises the question of other possible relations with Islam. As life in Egypt at the time of the creation of the extant manuscripts was dominated by Islam politically and permeated by it culturally, there may certainly have been an audience receptive to the text's discussion of predestination. The seemingly paradoxical relationship between God's foreknowledge and omnipotence, on the one hand, and human free will, on the other, has been a subject of reflection and debate among Christians for ages, but this issue may have become an even more pressing concern among Christians interacting with Muslims and Islamic theology, as the question whether God himself was the cause of both good and evil, or only of good, was a point of contention between both rival schools of Islam and between Islam and Christianity.

Translation

The present translation is based on a reading of high-quality digital images and autotopic inspection of the Sahidic manuscript BL Or. 7026, thus correcting a number of mistakes in Budge's edition. We have also included the small Bohairic Coptic frag-

ment Cairo inv. no. 47, based on the Coptic text published by Evelyn White. We have added section numbering and verse divisions, and have included the manuscript page numbers in parentheses for ease of reference.21

Bibliography

EDITIONS AND TRANSLATIONS


STUDIES


21. We would like to thank Daniele Tripaldi for sharing with us his prepublication German translation of Myst. John, set to appear in the third volume of Christoph Markschies and Jens Schröter, eds., Antike christliche Apokryphen in deutscher Übersetzung.

487
The Mysteries of John


The Mysteries of John

Introduction
(1) These are the mysteries of John, the apostle and holy virgin, which he was taught in heaven. In peace of God. Amen.

On the Mount of Olives
1 It happened when our Savior rose from the dead, he came up on the Mount of Olives and he sat down. He caused a cloud to surround all the places where the apostles were, and it gathered them together beside the Savior upon the Mount of Olives. 2 John answered and said to the Savior, “My Lord, behold, you say to me: (2) ‘You are a beloved one to me, and you have found grace before me.' 3 So now, my Lord, I want you to take me to the heavens and tell me all things so that I may know them.”

4 The Savior answered and said to him, “John, you have asked me frankly, and I will not hide anything from you. Rise and let us pray to my blessed Father and he will hear us.”

The heavens open
5 Then the Savior stood up together with the apostles. He said this great blessed prayer, and when he had said “Amen” the heavens moved to this side and that and each one opened, as far as the seventh heaven. 6 Behold, a great cherub came out of heaven. The whole place shone and his entire body was full of eyes (3) and he cast forth bright lightning. 7 Then the apostles became like the dead and fell down on the ground in fear. The Savior took their hands and raised them up and took the fear out of them and their hearts were set in order. 8 John answered, “My Lord, tell me about this extremely frightening cherub.”

9 The Savior answered and said to John, “Listen to me and I will tell you everything. You see the cherub in whom the words of the Father are hidden from their beginning until their fulfillment. 10 Behold, I have made him come to you so that he may tell you everything, O my beloved John.”

11 And the Savior turned to the cherub and said to him, “I am telling you to take my beloved John to the heavens and tell him everything (4) he seeks to know.”

Dorm. Vir. John 12, 20
Invest. Abbat. 45;
Invest. Gab. 2:1; Invest. Mich. 2:1
Invest. Gab. 3:11
Ezek 1:18; 10:12; 2 En. 20:1; 21:1; Rev 4:6, 8
The Mysteries of John

The twelve rulers (John's heavenly journey begins)

2 1Immediately the cherub set John upon his shining wing and took him to the heavens. He reached the first gate. The gatekeepers opened for him with respect and fear. 2And I, John, saw great mysteries in the first heaven. I saw twelve men sitting on twelve thrones inside the great gate in great glory and trembling. 3I said to the cherub, "My Lord, who are those who are sitting with great dignity?"

"The cherub said to me, "You see these twelve men. They are the twelve rulers of these aeons of light, each one ruling over his year in turn, but (5) it is Michael who directs them so that the earth produces its fruit."

Good years and bad years

5"Why are there years when there is famine?"

6"The cherub answered and said to me, "Behold, I have told you what you have told me about it."

7I answered and said to the cherub, "My Lord, there are years when there is little water and the harvest is plentiful. There are also years when there is much water and there is famine."

8The cherub answered and said to me, "You have seen the water that is under the feet of the Father. When the Father lifts up his feet, the water rises up. 9But if there is a time when God is about to bring the water up and the people are sinning, he makes its fruit scarce because of the sins of men. 10And also there are times (6) when there is only a little water, and when people guard themselves and do not sin, the Father blesses it so that its fruit multiplies through the prayers of Michael. 11If people had known about the prayers of Michael at the time when the water is about to come upon the earth, they would not have sinned at all, for Michael takes one hundred and twenty thousand angels and they go in to the Father and bow down before him and do not get up at all until God brings the water down upon the world."

12I answered and said to the cherub, "I have heard it said that God made heaven and earth, and also that God made the water in the beginning." (7)

13The cherub said to me, "Listen, and I will tell you everything. Before God made heaven and earth the waters existed and no one knows the creation of the water except God alone. 14Therefore, he who will swear falsely in the name of the water will not be forgiven. And he who will swear by the seed of wheat, this single destiny applies to both of them."

The christological origins of agriculture

3 1I said to the cherub, "My Lord, I want you to tell me about the wheat, where was it found from the beginning until it was sown in the earth so that men would live on it?"

2The cherub said to me, "Listen, and I will tell you everything. It happened when God made Adam that he placed him in the Garden of Delight. 3He commanded him, (8) speaking in this way, 'From every tree in the garden you

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a. For references to similar ancient Egyptian traditions, see the introduction, p. 485.
may eat, but from the tree of knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat. But on the day when you will eat from it you will die. 4 But the devil envied him, for he saw the great glory that surrounded him, when the sun and the moon, the two great illuminators came every day to worship Adam before they rose over the earth. 5 The devil went and led Adam and his wife astray until they were thrown out of the garden and banished to the land of Eueilat and he became troubled.

6 And after all these things he became hungry and could not find food to eat like they used to eat every day in the garden. (9) He called up to the Lord, in grief and sorrow. 7 The Son of Goodness had pity on him, for it was he who was his guarantor. 8 He said to his good Father, the Lord of the angels and the spirits, 'Behold, the man we made according to our likeness and image has become hungry. 9 I have pitted him, O my Father, and if it is your will, do not let him die of hunger.'

10 And thus the Father of Mercy answered and said to his beloved Son, 'If you have taken pity on the man whom we have made, who has abandoned the commandment, go and give him your flesh that he may eat it, for it is you who became his guarantor.'

11 The Son of Goodness answered and said to his Father, 'Your word (10) is blessed. I will do what you have told me.' 12 The beloved Son left the presence of his good Father. He took a small piece from the right side of his divine flesh, rolled it up and brought it to his Holy Father.

13 His Father said to him, 'What is this?'

14 He said, 'This is my flesh, as you told me.'

15 His Father answered, 'Indeed, my Son, stop and I will give you from my invisible body.' 16 His Father also took (something and gave) to him from his (own) body and he made it into a grain of wheat and brought forth the luminous seal, and it was those aeons of light that he sealed within it. 17 He sealed the grain of wheat in its middle, and he said to his beloved Son: 'Take this and (11) give it to Michael the archangel so that he will give it to Adam and he will sow it so that he may live on it, together with his children, and he will teach him sowing and reaping.'

18 And Jesus called upon Michael and said to him, 'Take this and give it to Adam so that he may live on it with all his children.'

19 Michael came to Adam while he was by the Jordan. It was his eighth day. He had not eaten and was crying out to the Lord. 20 Michael said to him, 'Peace be with you! The Lord has heard your prayer and has sent you the seed for sowing.' 21 And when Adam heard these things from Michael, his body gained strength. He came down to the water and threw himself at the feet of Michael, and he gave him the sealed seed and taught him (12) sowing and reaping, and went up to the heavens in glory. 22 So the water and the wheat and the seed

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b. "Bu(e)ilat" is found in the LXX text where the Hebrew of the MT has "Havilah.

c. This could be seen as a possible reference to the stamp on the eucharistic bread.
and the throne of the Father are of this same fashion, and they are equal to the Son of God.”

**John is taken to the seventh heaven**

4 1And I, John, saw and rejoiced when I heard these things. 2And it happened after these things, that the cherub set me upon his shining wings and took me to the seventh heaven. 3I saw great wonders in that place. I saw all the ranks of the angels. “The first rank of seraphim who cover the Father, holding golden censers in their hands, are singing, “Hallelujah!” 5The second rank, with golden phials (13) in their hands filled with dew, are pouring them over the fields. Michael is the great one who is over them, appointing each one to his work.

6I saw another great wonder. When I, John, saw the angels assigned to all their ranks, I found the name of Michael written upon all their garments, and they were calling it out all the time. 7I answered and said to the cherub, “Why is the name of Michael written upon their garments and being announced?”

8The cherub answered and said to me, “Angels do not come upon the earth unless the name of Michael is written upon their garments, so that the devil might not lead them astray.”

**The spring of white water**

5 1And after these things I saw a spring, (14) great and white like snow, as it has been said, “its water is milk,” and an angel standing beside it with its wings submerged in the water. 2And the spring's surroundings were covered with trees laden with many kinds of fruit. This spring was like the sea and every tree beside it was all a single branch.

3I, John, saw another great wonder. I saw the root of the trees. It sent forth water to the spring. 4I said to the cherub, “Lord, tell me about the spring of water that is white like this, with this angel beside it.”

5The cherub said to me, “It is this (spring) that sends dew upon (15) the earth.”

6I said to him, “What about this angel beside it who has his wings submerged in it all the time?”

7He said to me, “You have seen this angel. This is his job: Every time the trumpet signals, he rises up and moves his wings filled with dew and throws them to the heavens and the heavens open one after the other, and the dew flows upon the earth.”

8I said to the cherub, “How do these seven heavens open one after the other so that the dew flows down upon the world?”

9The cherub answered, “Listen and I will tell you everything. There are seven trumpets appointed over the dew, which all signal before it comes down upon the earth. (16) When the first trumpet signals, and the second unto the seventh, the dew pursues the sound from heaven to heaven. 11The seventh trumpet is that of Michael. When Michael trumpets, the dew runs and all the rulers withdraw until it comes down upon the earth and all the fruits multiply.”
And while I was in awe I saw another angel coming from a distance in anger. He stood by the spring which was filled with dew. He wept and his eyes poured forth blood down into the spring which was filled with dew. For he was full of wrath towards all humankind. The entire place trembled (17) on account of his stature.

The archangel Michael

The heavens opened on this side and that, and I saw a great strong angel. He came out of the heavens, and his name was Michael, and he was wearing a golden girdle upon his loins. With a sponge in his hand he gathered all the tears of the Angel of Wrath and he pushed him away, saying, "Be gone from the spring, Angel of Wrath! Do you want to bring famine upon the earth?"

I said to the cherub, "My Lord, tell me about the Angel of Wrath whose eyes sent forth blood into the spring."

He said to me, "You see the Angel of Wrath. He is the angel of famine. (18) If Michael had ceased to wipe away his tears, and if he had let them go down into the spring and limit it, there would be no dew going down upon the ground, and there would be dust and red earth, and there would be famine on the earth."

He also said to me, "There are forty legions of ten thousand per legion. They were singing hymns before the dew until it came down upon the earth without blemish."

The land of Eden after the fall

After these things he brought me to the land of Eden. He set me upon his luminous wings and brought me to the place of the rising sun, beside the spring that provides water to the four rivers Phison and Tigris, Geon and the Euphrates. I saw the Garden of Delight filled with every tree laden with every kind of fruit. I said to the cherub, "My Lord, I want you to tell me about the tree from which Adam ate and became naked so that God was angry at him."

The cherub answered and said to me, "You have inquired about great mysteries. I myself will not hide anything from you. So now, rise and follow me, and I will tell you everything, and I will tell you about the tree from which Adam ate."

And I arose and followed him. I arose and followed him. I walked in the garden. I looked and I saw the tree in the middle of the garden being without fruit, growing with thorns while the tree dug very deep down. (20) I answered and said to the cherub, "Tell me about the condition of this tree without fruit, which grows thorns."

He said to me, "This is the tree from which Adam ate and became naked."

I said to him, "There is no fruit on it. Where did he find any to eat?"

He said to me, "What came into being was a type of fruit. It is not without fruit."

I said to him, "What is the condition of its fruit?"

a. The sentence is repeated with slight variation.
11 He said to me, “It is a type of apple.”
12 I said to the cherub, “Is it at all without fruit?”
13 He said to me, “This is the destiny God gave it from the beginning.”
14 And while I was marveling I saw Adam. Having come from a distance like a man (21) grieving, he spread out his robe and gathered (leaves) from under the tree. He dug in the soil and buried them. 15 I said to the cherub, “Why did Adam spread out his robe and place on it the dry leaves that were shed beneath the tree, and dig in the soil and bury them?”
16 The cherub said to me, “When the devil entered paradise he deceived Adam and his wife Eve, and the trees began to smell, and their leaves fell to the ground. 17 Adam was covering the leaves in order for them to become witnesses for him in the judgment of what he had done.”
18 But I said to the cherub, “My Lord, how did the devil enter paradise and deceive Adam? Had this arrangement not been from God he would not have been able to enter. Nothing (22) happens without God.”
19 The cherub said to me, “There are twenty-four angels appointed to paradise every day. Twelve enter daily and worship God. 20 But at the time when the devil entered paradise and deceived Adam there were no angels in paradise, but there was an agreement until Adam ate from the tree.”
21 I said to him, “If this was ordained by God, then Adam did not sin.”
22 He said, “Indeed, if Adam had been a little patient, then God would have said to him, ‘Eat from the tree.’ 23 God took away the righteousness that clothed you (sg.m), and he threw him out of (23) paradise so that those things he had said would be fulfilled and his Son sent to the world.”
24 I said to him, “My Lord, what is the righteousness that clothed him which was taken from him?”
25 He said to me, “On the day when God made Adam he was twelve cubits tall and six cubits broad and three cubits thick, being like an alabaster stone with no blemish. But when he ate from the tree, his body shrunk and he became small. 26 The righteousness that clothed him was lost except that on his fingers and toes, which were his nails. Was he not cold in the winter and was he not exhausted in the summer?”

The creation of Eve
7 1 And I answered and said to the cherub, (24) “My Lord, at the time when God created Adam, did he not also create Eve together with him? For I have heard that God made Adam and Eve in the beginning. 2 Moreover, I hear that God brought sleep over Adam and he slept, and he took a likeness from his ribs and made a woman. He filled the rib with flesh in its place. So, did the Creator make two bodies as a single body?”
3 The cherub answered and said to me, “Listen and I will tell you everything. At the time when God made Adam he also made Eve together with him as a single body. For at the time when the master worked on Adam he also (25) thought of Eve. Therefore, both bodies came into being from a single body.

a. On the Jewish and Islamic descriptions of the physical size of Adam and Eve, see the introduction, p. 486.
"But he did not separate them from each other immediately. At the time when he brought sleep upon him, he lay down and slept and he brought Eve out of him and she became a wife for him, for she was hidden in his left rib since the day when God created him. Pay heed to the sign that is on the children of Adam."

**Why humans have nails**

"I said to him, "O my Lord, what is the sign that is on the children of Adam?"

"The cherub said to me, "At the time when the frost will come upon the earth, it is the nails of man that will first become cold on his body. For at the time when God stripped Adam (26) of the righteousness that clothed him, it was his nails that first became cold. He cried up to the Lord, 'Woe unto me, my Lord, at the time when I kept God's commandments, before I ate from the tree, my entire body was white like my nail.' Therefore, every time Adam gazes upon his nails he weeps and mourns like Hezekiah, who was sick and looked at the wall and wept."

**Hezekiah and the writing on the wall**

"Why did he not rather look upon man and weep?"

The cherub said to me, "I will reveal everything to you, O faithful virgin. It happened in the time of Solomon the king. He compelled (27) all the demons to tell him about all kinds of medicines, and the kinds of herbs used to heal diseases. Solomon wrote them all on the wall of the house of God. Any person who is sick with any disease would enter the temple and look upon the wall and find the medicine that is written on the wall for his disease, and he would take it and go home praising God."

But it happened when Solomon the king died that Hezekiah smeared the walls of the temple with plaster and they were not found again. And Hezekiah the king, when he became sick, he languished and did not find the medicine to heal his sickness, since he had smeared with plaster the walls of the temple (28) where the medicines were written down. He could not find them again. He entered the house of the Lord and lay down and gazed at the wall and wept, saying, 'Lord, is what I did a sin? I smeared with plaster the walls on which the medicines were written, saying, "If they pray to God with hope, they will be healed." If not, I would have found medicine and be cured.'

The Lord heard and had mercy on him and sent Isaiah the prophet to him. He spoke with him, saying, "Take a cake of figs and smear it on yourself and you will be relieved." For now, O John, he who will do God's will is not abandoned."

**Dew and rain**

8 Again I said to the (29) cherub, "My Lord, I want you to tell me about the cherubim who make noise in heaven so that on earth humanity trembles."

The cherub said to me, "You see these great winds enclosed in their storehouses with the angels hovering above them? When the trumpet sounds within the veil, the gentle winds come forth and blow against the wings of the
angel by the spring of dew, and the angel moves his wings and the dew comes down upon the earth and the seeds in the earth grow: the trees and the fields

BL OR. 7026
the fruits. "If the trumpet does not call, a powerful sound comes out of heaven (30) and plentiful rainwater comes down upon the earth making the fruits multiply with the water of the rainwater and the thunders feared by men.

CAIRO INV. NO. 47
the] fruits [upon the earth and] they grow. "[If] the trumpet does not call, a sound comes and rainwater comes upon the earth, while the fruits grow and the rainwater causes [all of them] to multiply. The thunders [too, which is feared by men].

For it is the sound of the wings of the seraphim that guide the rainwater so that it comes down from the firmament and comes softly upon the earth, for it shall not come hard and make the land desolate like in the days of Noah. It did not thunder. Therefore the seraphim did not come down and guide the rainwater, because all the waters were

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above the heavens. Behold, I have revealed to you, I have revealed to you all the mysteries."

CAIRO INV. NO. 47
above [the] heavens. Behold, I have told [you] about all the mysteries of the heavens, [O John]."

Heaven and earth
7 I answered and said (31) to the cherub, "My Lord, I want you to tell me what it is that supports the sky so that it is suspended like this."
8 He said to me,

"It hangs by faith and the ordinance of God."
9 I also said to him, "What holds up the earth?"
10 He said to me, "It is four pillars, sealed with seven seals, that hold up the earth."
11 I said to him, "My Lord, do not be angry with me until I have asked you about this other thing: Tell me what is it that holds up the four pillars?"
12 He said to me, "It is he who made them who knows how they work."

The hymns of the heavenly creatures
9 I said to him, "My Lord, how are the hours of the night and the day arranged?"
2 He said to me, "Listen and I will tell you. God (32) placed twelve cherubim standing outside the veil. Without at all getting tired, they sing twelve

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a. The repetition here is present in the manuscript.
hymns daily. 3When the first one finishes his hymn, the first hour is finished. When the second one finishes his hymn, the second hour is finished—up until the twelfth. When the twelfth <hymn>a is finished, then the twelfth hour is finished."

4I said to him, "So, the twelve hours of the night, are the seraphim appointed to them too?"

5He said to me, "No, but the beasts are, together with the flying creatures and the (33) reptiles. 6When they give their prayer, the first hour finishes. When the second hour ends, the beasts lend their voices until the twelfth hour of the night. It is the creatures of God that delimit (the hours)."

7I said to the cherub, "How does the sun know that the twelve hours are completed, so that it may go to its place of setting, or so that it may rise?"

8He said to me, "When the angels who trumpet finish, Michael knows that the twelfth hymn is finished. He speaks with the angel of the sun and he goes and completes his service."

God knows the destiny of humans

10I answered and said to the cherub, "My Lord, is it God (34) who determines the life of a human beingb from the time when they are in the womb of their mother?"

2He said to me, "God knows how much mischief or how much good a human being does from their birth until their death, since God marks the righteous one before they are formed. For nothing can happen without God. 3But sin is foreign to God, for truly he made the human being without sin. It was by his own volition and by the desire of the devil that the human being sinned."

4I said to the cherub, "Is a human being born to suffering, as Job said, 'My mother bore me into suffering?""

5He said to me, "God is (35) merciful. He never abandons a human being, but he has mercy on them because they are his likeness and image, and the work of his hands. 6Now, then, O John, he does not abandon the one who will do the will of God. The one who will do good deeds will receive many times over in the house of God."

7I said to him, "My Lord, at the time when God makes a human being, does he label them a righteous one or a sinner?"

8He said to me, "Listen, and I will tell you. At the time when God is about to make a human being, before he gives them to the womb of their mother he calls upon all the angels and they come and stand before him. 9The Father blesses the soul and the angels answer, 'Amen!' (36) 10When the phrase comes out of his mouth, 'the soul will please me,' the angels answer, 'Amen!' 11When he says, 'the soul will do lawless acts,' the angels answer, 'Amen!' That which comes out of the mouth of the Father is what they are."

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a. The manuscript erroneously reads "hour."
b. In order to maintain the gender-inclusive function of the Coptic word ᴅʀᴏᴍalleries ("man/human being/humanity") in our English translation, we have pluralized some of the pronouns and verbs of which "human being" is the antecedent or subject; the Coptic verbs and pronouns are masculine singular.
The Mysteries of John

The difference between humans and animals
11 I said to him, “My Lord, is there one clay for the humans and one for the animals?”

12 He said to me, “Yes, when the humans die each one is taken to the place he deserves. But the animals, whether they die or live, their place is the earth.”

13 I said to him, “Do they have souls?”

14 He said to me, “Every creature has a soul. Now, then, the soul of every creature is its blood.”

15 I said to him, “Will they be punished? (37) Or will they be given rest?”

16 He said to me, “No! It will never happen that they receive rest or suffering, but it is rather man who suffers and rests.”

And it happened when I heard all these things that I marveled at the works that God does for humans.

The stars
12 I said to him, “Do not be angry with me, and I will ask you about this other matter. I want you to tell me about the stars that we see in the firmament.

13 When the sun rises we stop seeing them. I want you to tell me where they go until the hour of their service.”

14 He said to me, “There is rank upon rank of stars. There are stars that remain in the sky until midday, but they are not seen because of the light of the sun. (38) There are seven stars that come up in the north of the world, for they are always in the sky. 15 There are seven stars in the sky that are called goddesses. They are not permitted to leave their chambers, except when death comes upon the earth.”

16 I said to him, “My Lord, why are there stars that are different from other stars, and some that move away from their original locations?”

17 The cherub said to me, “Listen, and I will tell you everything. There are many ranks among the stars that move out from their original locations. Only God’s ordinance remains forever. 18 Behold, I have revealed everything to you, O beloved of God. Arise and go to the world and tell all the things that you have seen.” (39)

Return to the Mount of Olives
9 Immediately he brought me upon the Mount of Olives. I found the apostles gathered together. I told them what I had seen and we kissed each other.
10 Each one went to his land glorifying God. And they preached the name of Christ, from whom is glory to him and his good Father and the Holy Spirit forever. Amen!

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a. This may be a reference to the star cluster Pleiades, also known in Greek mythology as the “seven sisters.”