

The European Academy for Coptic Heritage  
(TEACH)

## Identifying the Correct Author and Time of the Canon's of Pope Athanasius Patriarch of Alexandria

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In the following research paper, I shall discuss the identity of the author of the *Canons of Pope Athanasius Patriarch of Alexandria* and the time during which these canons were written. I chose to do this in response to some of the patrologist's research on the same topic.

This research focuses on the following three points:

**First:** Refuting the canons as attributed to Pope Athanasius the Apostolic.

**Second:** The identity of the author of these canons.

**Third:** The time during which these canons were transcribed in Greek.

### **First: Refuting the Canons as Attributed to Pope Athanasius the Apostolic.**

#### **Manuscripts Attribute the Authorship of these Canons to the Apostolic Pope**

Many of the scribes who transcribed these canons, in different manuscripts and over successive centuries, lead us to believe that the author of these canons is Pope Athanasius the Apostolic (328 – 373 A.D.) the twentieth Pope of the Coptic Church.

In Ibn-Kabar's (1324 A.D.) introduction to his book, *The Lamp that Lights the Darkness in Clarifying the Service* he described these canons as, "The canons of Pope Athanasius the Apostolic the twentieth patriarch of Alexandria..." and its conclusion ibn Kabar writes, "The canons of Athanasius the Apostolic have been concluded."<sup>1</sup>

In the introduction of these canons in a manuscript present in the Berlin State Library (10181 Arabic), written in 1338 A.D., the author mentions the following statement, "The canons of Saint Athanasius the Apostolic, Patriarch of Alexandria, may his blessings be with us."<sup>2</sup> The author writes at the conclusion of the Berlin manuscript:

The canons written by the virtuous father the great St. Athanasius the Apostolic, Patriarch of Alexandria, have been concluded and they are one hundred and seven canons in the peace of the Lord Amen. On the eighth of the blessed Coptic month of Meshir of the year 1055 Anno Martyrum which corresponds to the twenty first of the

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<sup>1</sup> Ibn-Kabar, *The Lamp that Light the Darkness In Clarifying the Service*, Part 1, Page 182.

<sup>2</sup> Riedel, W. and Crum, W., *The Canons of Athanasius Patriarch of Alexandria*, London, 1904, p. xxvi.

blessed Islamic month Rajab of the year 739 Hijri, glory be to God forever. My God have compassion on your humble scribe who is drowning in a sea of sins and iniquities and grant him forgiveness when You come to judge<sup>3</sup> the world, Amen.

At the end of these canons, according to the Paris manuscript (251 Arabic) in Bibliothèque Nationale, which dates back to the year 1353 A.D., the author wrote, “The canons of Athanasius the **Apostolic** have been concluded, may the blessings of his prayers be with us amen.”

In 1540 A.D., the scribe of these canons, which are in the library of Saint Macarius' Monastery, wrote in his introduction to the manuscript (Canon 2):

We start, with God's help, to transcribe a collection of the holy canons according to the ability which God will grant us to complete in His peace, Amen. First, the canons of the virtuous Saint Athanasius the **Apostolic**, Patriarch of the City of Alexandria, may the blessings of his prayers be with us, amen.

The scribe then concludes with, “The canons of the virtuous father, Athanasius the **Apostolic** Pope of Alexandria, are concluded and they are one hundred and seven canons, with peace from the Lord, Amen.”

What is truly remarkable is that Bishop Mikhail of Tennis, who divided the canons into one hundred-seven canons and was the first to translate them from Coptic to Arabic in the eleventh century A.D., did not mention that these canons were attributed to Pope Athanasius the **Apostolic**. He sufficed to say “**by Saint Athanasius the great teacher of the Egyptians,**” hence causing confusion among the successive scribes who attributed these canons to Pope Athanasius the Apostolic, considering him to be “the great teacher of the Egyptians.” This is in addition to the few Coptic manuscript remnants of these canons, which did not mention a specific author.<sup>4</sup>

### **Most Researchers and Scholars have Drifted from what was Mentioned in the Manuscripts**

When most scribes attributed these canons to Pope Athanasius the **Apostolic**, repeating the word “Apostolic” after one another, they eradicated any attempt of inquiring about who the author is. Following that, most researchers and scholars drifted into this confusion, and attributed these canons to Pope Athanasius providing text-based evidence for their claim. The German scholar Father Georg Graf dated the canons to the first half of the fourth century A.D., therefore implying that these canons date back to the era of Pope Athanasius the Apostolic (328-373 A.D.). The French scholar Coquin also made the same conclusion. The English scholar W. Riedel wrote an extensive introduction in his book *The Canons of Athanasius Patriarch of Alexandria*, which was released in London in 1904 A.D., attempting to prove that these canons were authored by Pope Athanasius the Apostolic.

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<sup>3</sup> This Arabic word (المذانية -- almidhaniyat) was not clearly understood, but the scholar W. Riedel translated is as, “And forgive him at thy advent to this world Amen.”

<sup>4</sup> Cf. W. Riedel and W. Crum, *op. cit.*, p. xv.

### **The Scholar's Evidence to Attribute these Canons to Pope Athanasius the Apostolic**

The old view which prevailed for a long time, attributing these canons to Pope Athanasius the Apostolic (328-373 A.D.), was adopted by many scholars. The most prominent of these scholars are the three mentioned in the section above and they relied on three main points to prove their opinion:

1. The canons do not mention Christmas in the list of the feasts of the church of Alexandria, which was common practice during the first half of the fourth century A.D.

2. The canons mention that the Holy Forty Days are a separate entity from the Passover (Paschal) Week, which was the custom in the church of Alexandria before 330 A.D.,<sup>5</sup> until the Holy Forty Days of Lent and the Passover Week were combined by Pope Athanasius the Apostolic in 330 A.D. In his festal letter preceding this date, he only mentions the six day fast preceding the Passover, however starting from the festal letter written in 330 A.D., he started mentioning the Holy Forty Days including the Passover Week.<sup>6</sup>

3. The canons mention the Meletian sect twice, which was the cause of division in the Egyptian church in the first half of the fourth century AD.

According to these scholars, the evidence mentioned above indicate that these canons were placed in Egypt in the first half of the fourth century A.D., hence the author is inevitably Pope Athanasius the Apostolic (328-373 A.D.). Based on their conclusions they stated who else but Saint Athanasius the Apostolic was in Egypt during this era and was capable of composing such ecclesiastical and ritualistic canons.

### **Refuting the Old View which Attributes these Canons to Pope Athanasius the Apostolic**

Before I prove the previously mentioned evidence incorrect, one by one, I will refer back to the words of the scholar W. Riedel at the end of his extensive introduction about the canons, where he said "Finally, it is difficult for us to discover a close resemblance between the writing style of the canons and that of the Festal Letters of Pope Athanasius."<sup>7</sup>

To prove the invalidity of attributing these canons to Pope Athanasius the Apostolic, I will confine my discussion to the following three points.

#### **(A) Refuting Attribution of the Canons to the Apostolic Pope through its Text and Content**

While reading these canons and what we have of manuscripts by Pope Athanasius the Apostolic (328-373 A.D.), we will firstly discover the vast difference between the two styles of writing rendering the differences between the personality of Pope Athanasius the Apostolic

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<sup>5</sup> It is important to note here that recent patrology studies state the correct date as 334 A.D. and not 330 A.D. I explained this in detail in the second part of the book *The Fast of Nineveh and the Fast of Holy Lent* and also in the book *Bright Saturday*.

<sup>6</sup> This was the main evidence that the French scholar Coquin relied on, Cf. PO 31, p. 328. This is also what the English scholar Reidel mentioned, Cf. W. Riedel and W. Crum, *op. cit.*, p. xiii

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p. xxv.

and the author of these canons. Every author certainly has his own writing style expressing his personality and thoughts of his heart through carefully chosen words. Therefore, an avid reader of the canon's text and their essence will realize that they were not authored by Pope Athanasius the Apostolic, not only because of the writing style but also because of the topics that have or have not been discussed.

If the canons were indeed authored by Pope Athanasius the Apostolic, then it would be expected that Arianism would be discussed, directly or indirectly, given that it was at the peak of its precedence and enmity to Pope Athanasius the Apostolic and the Church of Alexandria at that time. The canons do however mention the Meletian sect twice. The canons are also void of any doctrinal conflicts. There was also no mention of the ecclesiastical councils nor a slight implication of the first ecumenical council of Nicaea. For example, when there is any mention of ecclesiastical ranks it does not reference any relevant canon from the many ecclesiastical councils which convened at the time.

The topics discussed in the canons do not go in accordance with the life of Pope Athanasius the Apostolic, which was largely dedicated to defending the Nicene faith. In addition, his life was marked by instability for several years as he was exiled from his papal seat five times, leading the scholar W. Riedel to conclude that these canons must have been written during the few intervals of peace that Pope Athanasius experienced during his papacy. This will be discussed further below.

These canons were directed at reviving the church from a state of spiritual weakness that appeared at the time these canons were written, which strongly contradicts the pressure of severe persecutions with steadfast faith the Church of Alexandria faced during the era of Pope Athanasius.

We read in the following canons for example:

"...for many in these times chose not the holy for the priesthood, by reason of their poverty, and (rather) they chose the rich that (live) without law, to entrust them with the Lord's flock, though they be not faithful unto themselves..." (Canon 4).

They addressed the priest(s) at the time saying, "Why lookest thou upon the altar and the incense with irreverent eye? ...no man that hath served the altar in impurity hath died a happy death... if ye cannot be humble, stand afar off, lest ye be burned..." (Canon 5).

The canons also say about priests:

"It is not right for the priest that he measure with two *oipe*-measures<sup>8</sup>... or taking usury and, when they reckon, laying the double upon the principal... O my beloved, let not the name of God be blasphemed by the reason of the feebleness of our discipline... Confound not with God's priesthood the affairs of idiols..." (Canon 9).

"A cleric that hath been found measuring with two *oipe* (-measures), a great and a small, him shall they put forth..." (Canon 55).

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<sup>8</sup> Giving with partiality or holding back in giving.

"None of the priests may concern himself with the matter of the land-tax. Nor may they use familiarity in the houses of the rich, but rather give themselves unto the service of the altar" (Canon 22).

"No priest shall sell in the market," adds Canon 38.

As for deacons, these canons say:

"If the deacons smite one another at the altar or speak mocking words or play or (tell) evil, vain tales, they must stand a month without<sup>9</sup> and for a week fast until even." (Canon 27)

"No deacon shall speak while the cup is in his hand," adds Canon 37.

We can see that these canons are addressing a state of spiritual weakness in the church that is in contrast to what is known about Pope Athanasius the Apostolic's era.

Additionally we see canons that address daily liturgies, though during the time of Pope Athanasius the Apostolic liturgies were held on Saturdays and Sundays. Canon 14 reads, "A bishop that, without being sick, shall on any day neglect the sacrament, the same shall die in sorrow."

The canons only emphasized specifically the importance of the Saturday and Sunday liturgy stating, "None of the priests or the Christians shall be neglectful of sacraments on the Sabbath and Sunday. After that they have let the congregation (lit. the liturgy) go, each of them may take thought for the work of his hands." (Canon 93)

## **(B) Evidence and Counterevidence Listed by Scholars**

If the evidence presented by the scholars to explain their point of view is examined, it will be realized that they made rash and inaccurate conclusions regarding the timing of the canons thus attributing it incorrectly to Athanasius the Apostolic.

### **1) Initiating the Celebration of Christmas in the Church of Alexandria**

Even though these canons did not mention anything about Christmas being celebrated separately from the Feast of Epiphany in the Church of Egypt, this is not proof that these canons were written during the first half of the 4<sup>th</sup> Century A.D. or their attribution to Pope Athanasius the Apostolic (328-373 A.D.). It is not true that the celebration of Christmas in the Church of Egypt was initiated during the first half of the 4<sup>th</sup> Century A.D., as claimed by those scholars.<sup>10</sup> There is not a single document describing this tradition before 431 A.D., which is mid 5<sup>th</sup> Century A.D., almost sixty years after the departure of Pope Athanasius the Apostolic, proving that Christmas in the Church of Alexandria was celebrated separately from the feast of Epiphany.

The first documented mention we have of this separation was in a sermon given by Bishop Paul of Homs, one of the Antiochian bishops of the Church of Alexandria, on the 29<sup>th</sup> of Kiahk

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<sup>9</sup> Service

<sup>10</sup> Christmas feast was celebrated by the Church of Antioch, and this was mentioned in the Books covering the Apostolic decrees with Antiochian traditions (book 5, chap. 13). This was also mentioned in the Arabic Didascalia (chap. 29), which is the Arabic translation of the Apostolic Decrees.

See: Dr. William Soliman, *Didascalia – The Didache*, Cairo, 1979 A.D., p. 323.

about “The Birth of the Savior.” This was when he came to Alexandria in 432 A.D. for the sake of the reconciliation between the church of Alexandria and Antioch,<sup>11</sup> giving his second sermon in the Church of Alexandria. Saint Cyril the Pillar of Faith (412-444 A.D.), responded to him through a sermon<sup>12</sup> he gave during the Feast of Circumcision on the 6<sup>th</sup> of Tobe, saying, “Some days ago we celebrated the birth of Emmanuel and today we celebrate His circumcision” hence differentiating between the two feasts.<sup>13</sup>

Was Christmas an independent and established feast in the Church of Alexandria during the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> Century A.D. as scholars claimed? It certainly was not because how can we interpret Pope Cyril the Great’s (412–444 A.D.) silence on the matter, which lasted for twenty years during his reign, from 412 to 432 A.D., not referring to this feast once, despite the abundance of his writings and books? Even though the Church of Antioch adopted the tradition of celebrating Christmas on a separate day to the Feast of Epiphany during Saint John Chrysostom’s era (347-407 A.D.), particularly starting 386 A.D.,<sup>14</sup> this Antiochian tradition was not adopted by the Church of Alexandria. This is known through the biography of Pope Theophilus the 23<sup>rd</sup> Pope of Alexandria (384–412 A.D.), who placed several Ecclesiastical canons pertaining to the Feast of Epiphany and Easter but not to the celebration of Christmas.

It is also worth mentioning that Saint Ephrem the Syrian (306-373 A.D.) did not know the celebration of Christmas as a separate feast from the Feast of the Epiphany, despite composing an abundance of homilies and beautiful melodies on the virginal birth of Christ.<sup>15</sup>

The Church of Alexandria was not the only Oriental Church that was late in celebrating Christmas and Epiphany as separate feasts. Till the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, the Church of Jerusalem also had not known Christmas as a separate feast to Epiphany, since it was not mentioned by the Spanish pilgrim *Egeria* in her memoir.<sup>16</sup> It is evident that she celebrated the two feasts separately for the first time at the end of the reign of Pope Jophinal (424–458 A.D.), i.e. mid 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D. We have no further documentation of this in the Church of Jerusalem after this date except in 634 AD, i.e. mid 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D.

It is interesting to mention that Cosmas, the discoverer of Cosmas Indicopleustes,<sup>17</sup> criticized the Church of Jerusalem for not celebrating Christmas till the middle of the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D., despite some of its churches adopting the tradition.<sup>18</sup> It is clear that introducing any new feast to any church, which changes its old and established traditions, takes decades to confirm. Not disregarding the strong relation between the rites of the Church of Alexandria

<sup>11</sup> CPG 6365 ; E. Schwartz, *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum (ACO)*, Berlin, 1914-1940 ; J. Straub, 1971, I, 1, p. 9-11.

<sup>12</sup> This was his third sermon about the Gospel of St. Luke.

<sup>13</sup> CPG 6366 ; ACO I, 1, 4, p. 11-14.

<sup>14</sup> Homily, Εἰς τὴν γενέθλιον ἡμέραν τοῦ Σωτῆρος, PG 49, 351-362.

<sup>15</sup> Of these Father Youhana Yashou, the Lebanese reporter, printed twenty melodies in a book, including the Syriac text along with its Arabic translation in 1994 A.D.

Cf. *Our Liturgical Life*, studies, 7<sup>th</sup> year, 1996-1997 A.D., Lebanon, 1997 A.D., p. 761.

<sup>16</sup> Fernand Cabrol (Le premier dom) & R. P. dom Henri Leclercq, *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie (DACL)*, Tome 12, Première partie, Paris, 1935, p. 922.

<sup>17</sup> Monk who lived in the desert of Sinai mid 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D.

<sup>18</sup> Fernand Cabrol (Le premier dom) & R. P. dom Henri Leclercq, *op. cit.*, p. 924, 925.

and the rites of the old Church of Jerusalem.<sup>19</sup>

However, further research is needed to for **the second** document referring to Christmas as a separate celebration in the church of Alexandria in addition to the aforementioned document written in 432 A.D. The silence and lack of reference to Christmas in the canons of Pope Athanasius the Apostolic leads us to believe that this feast had not yet been an established ecclesiastical feast in the Church of Alexandria throughout the 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D., following the tradition of the Church of Jerusalem.

## **2) The Holy Forty Days as A Separate Fast to the Pashcal (Passover) Week**

This point, used by scholars to prove that these canons were placed during the era of Pope Athanasius the Apostolic, especially before 330 A.D., before combining the Holy Forty Days to the Passover Week is considered very weak evidence. That is because when the author mentioned the Holy Forty Days in canon 31, he wanted to address a particular practice, which did not happen during the Passover Week, which was that of some Priests going to the public water closet, saying, "In the holy Quadragesima<sup>20</sup> shall none of the priests to go to a bath, neither upon the two fast days, Wednesday and Fridays." When he talked about the Pascha or the Passover Week in the canons (30, 57, and 60), he added various other rituals and instructions to match the holiness of this fast, because this was considered the oldest and most holy week in the year.

This is what is practiced in the Church today. Although the Holy Lent is combined with the Passover Week, the rituals practiced during lent are different from the rituals practiced during the Holy Pascha week.

We must note that this piece of evidence which occurred before the year 330 A.D., ignores important historical events that occurred around this time frame. Pope Athanasius was elected Pope of Alexandria in June 328 A.D. After being enthroned he did a grand tour around Egypt starting in the fall of 329 AD, where he reached the limits of Aswan, passing through Upper Egypt via the Nile river, to familiarize himself with the congregation of the church and their social status, attempting at the same time to bring the Meletians and Arians back into the church with love and persuasion.

Therefore, how was it possible for the Pope to find enough time to write these canons properly during that period? I am certain that whoever relied on this piece of evidence must not have read these canons carefully.

The weakness of this evidence can further be acknowledged through the research by scholar W. Riedel himself, who searched extensively through Pope Athanasius the Apostolic's biography for periods of peace in his life that would be convenient enough for these canons to be composed. Consequently, he found two periods. The first from years 346 to 356 A.D. and the second from 366 to 373 A.D., concluding that the second period was the more suitable

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<sup>19</sup> See Al Makary, Athanasius, *Documented and Liturgical Features of the Church of Alexandria in the First Three Centuries*, 2011.

<sup>20</sup>The Holy Forty Days

time for these canons to be written.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, the year 330 A.D. had passed, which was considered by the scholar Coquin as the cutoff date for these canon's composition.

### 3) On the Meletian Schism

One cannot take the canonical discussions on the Meletians,<sup>22</sup> that caused a schism in the Church, on their own or out of context as a means of determining the date of the canons. For these Meletians who disrupted the Coptic Church in the fourth century A.D., remained active as a powerful sect in the church until the middle of the fifth century A.D., according to the historians Socrates (380-450 A.D.) and Theodoret (393-466 A.D.).<sup>23</sup> This schism remained present in Egypt until the time of Saint Shenouda the Archimandrite (347-465 A.D.), albeit as a sect with no notable influence, and there is evidence that they lasted until the sixth century A.D. Moreover, their followers remained in the Church in Egypt until the eighth century A.D.<sup>24</sup>

On the other hand, the two occurrences of the canonical discussions on the Meletians can be taken as binding evidence that they were not written by Saint Athanasius the Apostolic.

In 327 A.D., the dissident bishops who followed Meletius of Lycopolis (Assiut) gathered in Alexandria and reconciled with the Church in the final year of the Pope Alexander I (312-328 A.D.). This was one of the results of the Council of Nicaea, which dealt with their cause amicably. With the beginning of the papacy of Athanasius the Apostolic, they maintained their submission to the Orthodox creed, laying dormant waiting for their next opportunity to antagonize the Church once again. As the Arian Heresy spread, began a fierce campaign of opposition against the Church. Particularly true after the death of Meletius and his succession by John Archaph, who was ordained by Meletius before he died in 330 A.D., becoming one of Pope Athanasius the Apostolic's most virulent detractors. Their opposition to the church began in the year 330 A.D. Thus they are mentioned in the canonical texts as "whose mouths ought to be stopped" (Canon 12) and as "enemies of the Church" (Canon 25). They established their own churches separate from the Mother Church, as we also read in Canon 25 "Whoso saith that Meletius hath a church, the same is accursed... And how can there be two churches, while the apostle Paul saith<sup>25</sup> that the church is one?" Thus, when they are mentioned in this manner, we can be certain that it was after 330 A.D., thereby denying the historian's hypotheses that these canons were introduced prior to this year.

A notable observation here is that the canonical mentions of the Meletians are separated from those of the Arians, which makes it unlikely that they are the writings of Athanasius the Apostolic, as when he mentioned them in his numerous writings, they were not separated.

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. W. Riedel and W. Crum, *op. cit.*, p. xiv.

<sup>22</sup> The Meletians were 35 bishops with prominent standing in Alexandria, as well as hundreds of priests and monks.

<sup>23</sup> Socrate, *Hist. Eccl.*, I.9 ; Theod., *Hist. Eccl.*, I.9

<sup>24</sup> Cf. W. Riedel and W. Crum, *op. cit.*, p. xviii, n. 2.

<sup>25</sup> Col. 1:24



The two sects constituted one party opposing and disrupting the peace of the Church.<sup>26</sup>

### **C) Modern Papal Studies Refuting the Attribution of the Canons to Athanasius the Apostolic**

Despite the many efforts made by the historian Wilhelm Riedel to prove that the canons were written by Pope Athanasius the Apostolic, he could not explain the utter lack of references to this text by Greek writers as one of Pope Athanasius' works and so sufficed with expressing his surprise over this.<sup>27</sup>

It is worth noting here that it was not the Greek writers alone who were silent about this. Pope Athanasius' biography, in *The History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria*,<sup>28</sup> which has been misattributed to Severus ibn al-Muqaffa', recounts a bibliography of books written by Athanasius the Apostolic from Coptic sources. Not one mention is made of these canons are part of Pope Athanasius' works.

Many scribes attempted to attribute numerous works to Athanasius the **Apostolic**, to try to increase their popularity and ensure that they were not forgotten by history. In his *Clavis Patrum Graecorum*, Maurice Geerard attributes a manuscript to Athanasius the Apostolic that was historically proven to be misattributed.<sup>29</sup> Among these are sixty-nine works referenced by Migne in his collection.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, Wilhelm Riedel himself said, "What is even more suspicious is that the canons of Pope Timothy II of Alexandria were listed in the Armenian church as the Canons of Athanasius, along with many other works that were attributed to him."<sup>31</sup>

This proves the inaccuracy of the attribution of these texts to Pope Athanasius the Apostolic (328-373 A.D.), the 20<sup>th</sup> Patriarch of the Church of Alexandria. Who, then, is the writer of the Canons?

### **Second: Who is the Author of the Canons?**

We must refer to the texts of the Canons themselves to deduce the identity of the writer.

#### **The Writer was A Monk and A Member of the Clergy**

We know from the context of the text that the writer was an ascetic hermit monk who spoke plentifully about the fundamentals of monastic life.

In canon 92:5, he says, "And he that would preserve his virginity, let him not fill his belly with bread, neither let him lie; for purity cannot be kept unless by perpetual fasting. And let

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Apol. *Cont. Ar.* 59, 71.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. W. Riedel and W. Crum, *op. cit.*, p. xiv.

<sup>28</sup> The biographer is Mina, who lived in the fifth century A.D. He is the first Coptic biographer mentioned in *The History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria*, in the 13th biography on Dioscorus I, the 25th Pope of Alexandria (444-458 A.D.).

He also recorded in Coptic the biographies of the following patriarchs: Peter I (17<sup>th</sup> Pope), Alexandrus I (19<sup>th</sup>), Athanasius I (20<sup>th</sup>), as well as four other patriarchs, from Theophilus (the 23<sup>rd</sup>) to Timothy II (26<sup>th</sup>). There are gaps in the Coptic text, which was published in Italian, in the following reference:

*Storia della Chiesa di Alessandria*, vol. I, II, Testo copto, traduzione e commento di Tito Orlandi, Milano-Varese, 1968.

<sup>29</sup> CPG 2230 - 2309.

<sup>30</sup> Limited to the parts between PG 26, 468-525 ; 28, 1637-1644.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. W. Riedel and W. Crum, *op. cit.*, p. xxxiii.

none of the virgins set aside for himself ought but some poor food and the prescribed raiment." In the same canon he speaks of hermitage and asceticism saying, "For greater is the honor of virginity and continence..." He clarifies in canon 105 that "For the fear of God and compassion toward the poor and virgin purity, these are perfect love and they do bring men unto God because they are the highest of God's honors."

He is also a **member of the clergy**, as he addresses them referring to them as his "brothers." He speaks repeatedly of the purity required of everyone, particularly the clergy.

### **The Writer is A Bishop Who Advises the Priests Who Answer to Him**

Moreover, he is a bishop who has taken a vow of celibacy, since he advises the priest of one of the fundamental monastic teachings saying, "wherefore keep thyself far from receiving and from presents, for thereby come sins" (Canon 2:4).<sup>32</sup> He continues elsewhere expressing, "Look not upon the face of a woman, O priest, for they have been entrusted unto thee that thou mightest guard thyself" (Canon 6:3). At the same time he does not turn away from a person who asks him whether he is rich or poor (Canon 61).

Moreover in Canon 67 he orders the priests that, "None among them shall talk while they eat, nor shall they, while they eat, raise their faces one toward another. And if the bishop speak God's word, they shall all give heed," clearly denoting monastic principles though the writer relays his teachings to the priests.

### **The Author has Authority over the Bishops**

The writer may be a bishop himself, but he also has **authority over the other bishops**, as he gives them instructions and orders.<sup>33</sup> As such, we can deduce that he was either a **metropolitan, archbishop**, or a **patriarch**.

The writer teaches the bishops who are under his leadership introducing the conditions required of them (as seen in Canons 5, 6, and 14). In Canon 14:3, he says, "None shall be set up as bishop except he observe the Gospel with a pure heart. If he does not observe it, he is without belief in the Holy Trinity." Furthermore in his canons he is acquainted with the Holy Bible as he regards the Books of Chronicles and Zechariah as sacred texted to him. Additionally, he refers to the bishops as "O, Bishop" (Canons 16 & 18).

The author states that the bishop must have one wife. In Canon 54 he orders the punishment of a bishop who does not raise his children well saying, "If one of the bishop's children be found in mortal sin, the bishop shall be put forth, because that he hath not trained up his children aright. He that hath not of power over his own children, how shall he take thought for God's church? But if he turn again and train up his child as is fitting, he shall again come in."

However, in canon 6 he goes back and says of the bishop, "And if he is able, let him be continent, for that is better... but be he not able, let him not for that cause be a burden unto

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<sup>32</sup> Canon 2, section 4.

<sup>33</sup> As evidenced in Canons: 14, 16, 18, 54, 61, 62, 66, 76, 82, and 104.

himself.” Therefore, only one with authority over the bishops would speak in such a manner.

Hereby it is clear on the one hand that the texts date back a long time and on the other hand the bishop’s motivation to choose a life of asceticism instead of marriage, if he was able to.

Moreover, the bishop orders that nothing be done without the advice of the guardian (in Canon 61). He also orders the bishop to eat with the priests of his diocese three times a year, and to wash their feet with his hands. Such orders require the bishop to be in the highest ranking, as only then is he authorized to order such canons.

In Canon 89 he addresses his orders to all the bishops speaking to them in plural form outside of the canons as well as in canons 5 and 68. Moreover, in Canon 10 the writer refers to the mannerisms expected by bishops, ordering the bishop not to disdain the six other rankings of the church addressing them saying, “Reject not these neither despise them, rather honor them for they are your fellows and ministers with you. For the head may not say unto the feet I need you not.” He also says that the bishops will provide answers about the readers, chanters, and doorkeepers. He then directs his speech to all seven ranks of the church saying, “And ye also, ye seven eyes of God, perform your service aright, each one according to his office, from the bishop to the doorkeeper.” In Canon 53 he says, “There shall be no accusation received against any man that is reckoned of the priesthood, from the bishop unto the doorkeeper, except it be with three witnesses.”

In Canons 14:1, 2 he says, “what is the bishop’s office if he visit not his people to learn their way of life?” He goes on to introduce the bishop as the father of poor and the orphaned, saying that he must know them by name as a father and advising him to visit the ill and those who are imprisoned etc...

Thus, in this section, and up to this point it is clear to us that the writer is an **archbishop** or a **patriarch of the church**. Thus, he has a high rank in the Church granting him the authority to advise and direct all the ranks in the church from the bishops to the doorkeepers.

### **The Author is Egyptian**

It is evident that the writer is Egyptian as the months are recorded in their Coptic names, such as *Tūbah* and *Baramhāt*. Moreover, only in Egypt is the Epistle to the Hebrews attributed to Saint Paul.<sup>34</sup> Throughout the canons there are multiple references to farming, cultivation, and production of vines, which was among the most important industries in Christian Egypt as many papyrus documents and literary texts point to.<sup>35</sup> Additionally, this serves as a major testament that these canons are of Egyptian origin.

### **The Author Lives in Alexandria**

It is thought that the **location of the author** is Alexandria since he was a patriarch and that the remaining Coptic translations of this text date back to the seventh century, thus it is necessary to search for their Greek origins within the sixth century, or slightly earlier. During

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. *the Festal Letter 39 of Saint Athanasius the Apostolic*.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. W. Riedel and W. Crum, *op. cit.*, p. xii.

this period the Greek language was widespread in Alexandria, contrary to the Coptic language being dominant in Upper Egypt. Furthermore, the writer repeatedly refers to paganism (canon 95) as Alexandria was still a hub for paganism at this time, albeit with far less influence than prior to this time as mentioned in the Arabic translations of the Canons.

To summarize thus far, **the writer of these canons was a patriarch of the Coptic Church residing in Alexandria, who gathered bishops under his leadership as well as the remaining church ranks.** Moreover, it is clear from the text of the canons that, with the help of the bishops, priests, and deacons, he was responsible for a **community that included all segments of people** – men and women, rich and poor, widows and orphans, monks and nuns, young and old.

If we determine the era in which the canons were written in their first iteration, we can deduce who wrote them with certainty.

### **Third: Timing of the Greek Composition of the Canons**

Determining the approximate era of time these canons were written will immediately reveal the identity of the author given he is the one of the Popes of Alexandria.

As previously discredited, there is one old theory dating these canons to the first half of the fourth century A.D.

Alternatively, I find that these canons are more correctly dated at the end of the fifth century A.D., due to the evidence present within the canons themselves. This same opinion is further held by the meticulous scholar Father Gregory Dix, without providing specific evidence or determining the identity of the author. The same theory has also been concluded by the latest studies on the church fathers, which were gathered by Dr. Maurice Geerard in his recent publication, *Clavis Patrum Graecorum (CPG)*, which is a series of six volumes, listing the names of the Church Fathers who wrote in Greek, published between the years of 1974-1998 A.D.

#### **Three Determining Points Dating these Canons to the Fifth Century A.D.**

The canons mention the Meletians and their threat to the unity of the church<sup>36</sup> at the time. It does not however talk about the presence of Arianism. This leaves us within a time frame when Arius' teachings were completely negligible and not a threat to the church, while at the same time when the Meletian teachings posed a threat.

There is also no mention of the debate over the single or dual nature of Jesus Christ, a problem which disrupted the church for a prolonged period of time, starting with the Council of Chalcedon in the year 451 AD. The canons in no way speak of or refer to the Chalcedonian teachings.

It is necessary to grasp the overview of these historical points to put the aforementioned

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<sup>36</sup> The Meletians were mentioned twice in the canons (canons 12 and 25). Regarding this Pope Cyril the Great (412-444 A.D.) said, "it is impossible for the followers of Orthodox faith to enter into union with the Meletians, so that we do not enter into union with their heresy. However, if the Meletians returned to Orthodoxy, while leaving behind their heresy, they should be accepted. No one shall be ignored, but no one shall be in union with them, unless they repent and change their ideology." Letter 83:9

into context. The debate over Arius and his teachings ended towards the end of Pope Theophilus' Papacy, who was the 23<sup>rd</sup> Pope of Alexandria, between 384-412 A.D. During his successor's era, Pope Cyril the First (412-444 A.D.), the church entered a new battle with Patriarch Nestorius of Constantinople who refused to acknowledge the Virgin Mary as the Mother of God. Nestorius was condemned by the church during the Council of Ephesus in the year 431 A.D. Following the papacies of Pope Cyril and Pope Dioscorus (444-455 A.D.), there was a rise of the debate over Jesus Christ's divine nature as single or dual, the paramount debate of the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D., tearing the church apart causing great suffering to the Coptic church for centuries to follow.

We therefore find ourselves within a time frame limited by three main boundaries:

1. The complete silence regarding the issue of Arianism in these canons
2. Mention of the Meletians who wanted to divide the church
3. The lack of acknowledgement of the Chalcedonian teachings or any mention of the debate over the divine and human nature of Christ.

The Meletian heresy appeared in the Coptic Church during the time of Pope Peter I of Alexandria (300-310 A.D.), lead by the Bishop Meletius of Lycopolis, who was later condemned by the church. Meletius opposed the rules placed by Pope Peter in 306 A.D. accepting Christians who had renounced their faith during the persecution under Diocletian back into the Church upon repentance, but Meletius claimed these rules to be lax. Pope Peter I, the Seal of the Martyrs, was martyred during the persecutions of Diocletian. During which Meletius was sent to exile to work in mines. Upon his return to Egypt, he established the Meletian Church undermining the authority of Pope Alexander (312-328 A.D.), by ordaining priests and bishops from his followers creating a division within the church.

The Council of Nicaea, 325 A.D. placed the 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> canon regarding the Meletians. The council decided that all the ecclesiastics ordained by Meletius were to be re-ordained by Pope Alexander and were to return each to their diocese after the death of its lawful bishop.

Meletius himself retained his episcopal title as it was decided that he should remain in the city of his birthplace, but without exercising any clerical authority as a bishop nor was he given a diocese of his own.

Meletius of Lycopolis and his followers failed to abide by the Council of Nicaea, broking the rules during the reign of Pope Athanasius of Alexandria (328-373 A.D.), when they joined Eusebius of Nicomedia, one of the worst enemies of Pope Athanasius and a powerful and influential leader of Arians.

The Meletians continued to oppose the church for a long period of time having John of Arkaph, the Bishop of Memphis, nominated as the successor of Meletius to lead the schism in 330 A.D. John of Arkaph was known for his animosity towards Pope Athanasius. **The followers of this heresy continued to live in Egypt after the death of their leader John, till they vanished in the fifth century A.D.** It was found, as evidenced by writings in papyrus papers in the British museum, that some Meletian monks continued to lead this schism, and even introduced Jewish and Samaritan fundamentals to their practices. They remained a weak

entity without an influence until their complete disappearance in the eighth century A.D.,<sup>37</sup> as mentioned previously.

Returning to the canons again, we read canon number 12 which states, “The singers shall not sing the writings of Meletius and of the ignorant that sing without wisdom, not as David and in the Holy Spirit, but like the songs of the heathen, whose mouths ought to be stopped. But if they sing not in the Holy Spirit, let them sing not (at all). It is written, Ye shall not add thereto neither take from it.” Additionally in the canon 25 it states, “And the doorkeepers shall keep the outer door, that they that enter in unto the church may have no community with the enemies of the church. Whoso saith that Meletius hath a church, the same is accursed. For if they had been of us, they would have continued with us and would not have set themselves against the Lord nor have separated them from His church. And how can there be two churches, while the apostle Paul saith that the church is one?”

Because of the focus on the treat of the Meletian heresy and the lack of discussion of the canons on Arianism and his teachings, then this leaves us in the fifth century A.D. If the canons were written after this time then the influence of the Meletians would have been negligible in the church in Egypt.

Despite all of this information, we are faced with one major problem, which is the silence of the canons pertaining to the single divine nature of Christ, which was the main source of opposition to the Coptic Church for many centuries, starting from mid-fifth century A.D., resulting in the presence of two Popes in Egypt, first a regional Pope to the country, and second, a Melekite Pope who followed the Patriarch of Constantinople, who was forcibly appointed to lead the people.

## **Pope Athanasius II (489-496 A.D.) as the Author of these Canons**

Returning to the historical facts, we will further look at the Coptic Popes who lived during the fifth century A.D., who did not have to deal with the opposition and disturbance of Chalcedonians.

We start with Pope Peter III (477-489 A.D.), the 27<sup>th</sup> Pope of Alexandria. We find that during his reign, there was tension caused by the Emperor because of the Council of Chalcedon.

Moving onto Pope Athanasius II (489-496 A.D.), we read:<sup>38</sup>

When Pope Peter III<sup>39</sup> passed away, he was succeeded by Pope Athanasius II of Alexandria, the 28<sup>th</sup> Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of St. Mark, during the reign of Emperor Zeno. He was elected unanimously by the people in the church and clergy to be ordained as Patriarch. **He was a priest in the church in Alexandria and was a steward of all its churches**, well known for his righteous faith and virtuousness. He received the label ‘Little Athanasius’ to differentiate him from Pope Athanasius the Apostolic, who was also known as Athanasius the Great. During his rule there was no other Pope in Alexandria, and all of the dioceses of Egypt followed

<sup>37</sup> *ODCC.*, (2<sup>nd</sup> edition), p. 900.

Cf. also Fr. Manassa Youhanna, *The History of the Coptic Orthodox Church*, (3<sup>rd</sup> edition), 1982, p. 240, 258, 298.

<sup>38</sup> Fr. Manassa Youhanna, *op. cit.*, p. 298, 299.

<sup>39</sup> This refers to Pope Peter III (477-489 A.D.)

him because all of the apostolic churches rejected the Council of Chalcedon's teachings as well as Leo's letter.

When he united with Emperor Anastasius to return peace to the East, particularly to Egypt, proving his importance. **When he saw that certain Bishops were inclined to argue and create tension he insisted to stop them and change them, so they do not disturb the harmony in the church once again. And through his reign, there was a spirit of peace that prevailed over the church in its entirety.**

**The Orthodox churches that joined the Coptic Church did not separate into smaller sects or show preference for one thought over another.** Even when Pope Acacius of Constantinople passed away and his successor Pope Fravitta followed his same school of thought embracing the 'Book of Unity' and rejecting the Council of Chalcedon.

Pope Athanasius II sat on the Episcopal throne for **almost seven years with a reign that was completely conflict free** while the church was spared any animosity or opposition during that time. He departed on the 20<sup>th</sup> of the Coptic month of Tout, in the year 497 A.D./229 A.M.<sup>40</sup>

Referring to the readings in the Synaxarium, on the 20<sup>th</sup> day of the blessed month of Tout, the Departure of Pope Athanasius II, the 28<sup>th</sup> Patriarch of the See of St. Mark, which says:

On this day also of the year 213 of the martyrs (496 A.D.),<sup>41</sup> the blessed father Anba Athanasius II, 28<sup>th</sup> Patriarch of the See of Saint Mark, departed. This father was the steward of the churches of Alexandria. When Pope Peter III, the 27<sup>th</sup> patriarch departed the bishops, elders and people agreed to consecrate this father patriarch for what was known of his orthodox faith and piety...He shepherded his people in purity and righteousness then departed in peace. He sat on the throne of St. Mark for seven<sup>42</sup> years. May his prayers be with us. Amen.

From what we just mentioned about Pope Athanasius II, we can reach the following important conclusions:

1. He was a monk-priest in Alexandria and a steward of all its churches.
2. He was a man full of faith, knowledge and the Holy Spirit.
3. There was no other pope ruling the church during his papacy.
4. All the dioceses and churches of Egypt followed his rule because all of the Eastern apostolic churches at that time rejected the Council of Chalcedon. The church was free from all opposition.
5. He was in harmony and unity with Emperor Anastasius, Pope Acacius of

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<sup>40</sup> This date is inaccurate, and the correct year is 213 Anno Martyrum

<sup>41</sup> The day cited in the Arabic Synaxarium is incorrect. The day of his departure is the 20<sup>th</sup> of Tout, in the year 213 Anno Martyrum / Tuesday the 17<sup>th</sup> of September 496 A.D., which is correct in the English translation of the Synaxarium.

<sup>42</sup> This is in correct, and the correct number is 6 years, 9 months and 20 days. The date of his commencement was either Monday, the 1<sup>st</sup> of Koiak or Tuesday the 2<sup>nd</sup> of Koiak, 206 Anno Martyrum / 27 or 28<sup>th</sup> November, 489 A.D.

Constantinople, as well as his successor Pope Fravitta (أفراويطاوس).

6. He spent his days preaching and teaching his people

It is evident in point one above that through his experience as steward of the churches of Alexandria, he clearly understood the conditions that it took to choose a steward for the church and its importance as supporter to the bishop.

It is astonishing to see the depth of details with which he speaks about this topic, which was unparalleled by any of his predecessors, to the point that I am almost certain that the writings on the steward of the church of Alexandria in *The Coptic Canons of Hippolytus* used directed quotations and terminology from the canons that we are discussing now.

The second and sixth points made above describe the author's great knowledge and ability to teach. When you read these canons, you will be astounded by this holy pope and the saint's spirituality seen though his level of knowledge, depth and understanding of the Holy Scripture, which he would refer to naturally, in his daily manner of speech, with ease and with a humble spirit obedient to the word of God and the commandments in the Holy Bible.

The third point mentioned above, which is very important to us in this matter, states that there was no other Pope present during his reign. This is a point that is worth noting, because his predecessors as popes dealt with rivalry from other popes, namely the Melekite Pope. That is why it is no surprise, that in his Synaxarium story, we see that the all the churches across Egypt submit to him. That is because at the time all of the apostolic churches rejected the Council of Chalcedon and its teachings as well as Leo's tome. The end result was that the church became free of all persecution.

The fifth point mentioned above is the result of the peace that prevailed over the church, because the emperor was in agreement with the Pope and archbishops, resulting in protection of the church.

**Therefore, all of the evidence mentioned above points to the final conclusion that the author of these canons is Pope Athanasius the Second (489-512 A.D.), the 28<sup>th</sup> Pope of the Coptic Church and not Pope Athanasius the Apostolic (328-373 A.D.), the 20<sup>th</sup> Pope. In this case, the canons did indeed carry the name of their author, but the transcribers of these canons added the word Apostolic following the name Athanasius, engraving in our minds the story of this apostolic Pope and his defense of the faith, until the phrase Athanasius the Apostolic became a term that we say naturally, without thinking till this day. This is even more so for Egypt's Copts who used to be and still are very proud of their Pope the holy saint, which through his struggle to keep the Holy faith, became the benchmark for proper Orthodox faith in the whole church.**

Bishop Mikhail of Tennis in the 11<sup>th</sup> century A.D. was correct when he attributed these canons to 'Saint Athanasius the Great Teacher for all Egyptians.' In reality however, he was referring to another Athanasius, who became worthy of the title 'Little Athanasius,' to differentiate him from Athanasius the Great, and at the time, it was admit that Little Athanasius deserved to be promoted in name to the Great, because he was a decent man



worthy of the utmost respect, as seen to the reader through the Canons, in parallel with the prominence of Athanasius the Great.

The author Gregory Dix<sup>43</sup> (1901-1952) was correct and more accurate when he traced the time these canons were written back to the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D.<sup>44</sup> The more recent church father studies were more accurate as well, which refused to attribute these canons to Saint Athanasius the Apostolic, considering it enough to decline the theory that these canons were written by him,<sup>45</sup> but without claiming its actual author.

Father Athanasius Al-Makary

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<sup>43</sup> He was a liturgical scholar who was Benedictine priest and monk. He was educated in Westminster School in England becoming an exhibitioner in Merton College, Oxford between 1924-1926 A.D. He was ordained priest in 1925 A.D., entering the monastery the year after. In 1946, he was chosen as a lecturer at the University of Cambridge becoming head of the priests in 1948. In his last years, he became one of the most prominent scholars in the Evangelical Church. His most famous works include *The Shape of the Liturgy*, which he wrote in 1945. Another important book he wrote is *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus of Rome*, alongside his other books. Cf. *ODCC.*, (2<sup>nd</sup> edition), p. 413.

<sup>44</sup> Gregory Dix, *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus of Rome*, London, 1968, p.1xxvii.

<sup>45</sup> *CPG* 2302