"Thy mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens; and thy righteousness reacheth unto the clouds"

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The aim of the present contribution is to examine the pseudo-Clementine work that contains the Apocalypse of Peter (ApPt) and investigate the relation of the ApPt to the rest of this work. Before entering the subject, it will perhaps not be superfluous to clarify the situation. As we know, the full text of the ApPt is left to us only in Ge'ez (old Ethiopic). We have two manuscripts: d'Abbadie 51 (BN Paris) and Tanasee 35 (catalogued by Hammerschmidt); the ApPt is embedded in a pseudo-Clementine work entitled *The Second Coming of Christ and the Resurrection of the Dead*, edited by Grébaut in *ROC*, 1910, 198-214, 307-23, 425-39, the ApPt occupies pp. 199-208, 307-09 (text) and 208-14, 316-17 (translation). This treatise is followed by another pseudo-Clementine writing, *The Mystery of the Judgement of Sinners* also edited by Grébaut in *ROC* 1907, pp. 139-51 and 1908, pp. 285-87. For his editions, Grébaut was able to use only one of the manuscripts: that of d'Abbadie 51. I deem it necessary to invoke these well-known facts, since none of the manuals (Altaner¹, Quasten², Vielhauer³), or the modern translations (Hennecke-Schneemelcher⁴, allegedly based on the Ethiopic) are reliable in their

¹ B. Altaner, *Patrologie* (Freiburg, 1951) 62.
⁴ NTA II, 620.
indication as to where the ApPt is to be found. They seem to be unaware of the fact that it is not identical with Grkbaut's whole text. For the ApPt we now possess a modern edition compiled by Buchholz on the basis of both manuscripts.\(^5\)

While the ApPt has received a good deal of attention, the pseudo-Clementine work that contains it has never been examined to the best of my knowledge. Cowley, however, in his brief note concerning the second manuscript of our text states that the two pseudo-Clementine works must be considered together as a whole and the ApPt as an integral part of them. According to him, 'if the potentially misleading title *Ethiopic Apocalypse of Peter* is used, it is better used' of the two works 'together'.

The second pseudo-Clementine work, published by Grkbaut in 1907 and 1908, will not be treated here, because, on the one hand, the limits of the present paper would not permit it, on the other hand, it seems to be only loosely connected to the first (though evidently connected). Thus my investigations are concerned with the treatise entitled *The Second Coming of Christ and the Resurrection of the Dead*, edited by Grkbaut in 1910.

First of all, I shall make a few remarks:

1. I consider this work as a rounded whole. Though we know that the ApPt ends in the middle of the text, we are not justified in cutting the work in two. In the Ethiopic text there is no division and it was read through and considered as a whole.

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\(^6\) At the *Colloquium Origenianum Octavum* held at Pisa (27-31 August 2001), G. Lusini in his lecture 'Tradition *origénienne* en Éthiopie' discussed the two Ethiopic pseudo-Clementine works: *The Second Coming of Christ and the Resurrection of the Dead* and *The Mystery of the Judgement of the Sinners*, considering them as containing Origenian traditions. Unfortunately I was not able to be present at this lecture. The text will appear in the Acts of the congress.

\(^7\) R.W. Cowley, 'The Ethiopian Work which is Believed to Contain the Material of the Ancient Greek Apocalypse of Peter', *JTS* 36 (1985) 151-53.
2. My studies are based strictly on the Ethiopic text as we have it. Buchholz in his book *Your Eyes Will Be Opened* reconstructs an Ethiopic version from the Greek fragments. I do not think it permissible to correct the Ethiopic text from the Greek: we cannot know what the underlying text of the Ethiopic translation was; we do not know whether or not it was directly translated from Greek or through the intermediary of other languages. Hence, this work was read in Ethiopic as it is, without taking account of the underlying original.

3. As to the second part of the text, I can rely only on Grébaut's edition, made from manuscript d'Abbadie 51. The other manuscript remains unknown to me.

As far as I know, the only work which treats even tangentially the relations of the ApPt to the pseudo-Clementine writing is the aforementioned book by Buchholz. According to him, 'the author of the Ps.-Cl. was not afraid to use ApPt creatively in his own work. He did not go back into the material of the apocalypse and harmonise it with his own later ideas. He had a text before him upon which he commented by taking ideas from it and changing them or expanding them as he saw fit. We may say, then, that the work as a whole (ApPt and Ps.-Cl.) is a midrash, for it attempts to make an older text relevant to its own age' (pp. 383-5). In his opinion 'the main theme [of the whole work] is God's mercy to sinners'. We shall reflect on these ideas after having examined the treatise.

In my opinion, the text consists of three major parts with a revelation of Christ at the center of each. The first part is our ApPt, the second extends from p. 309, l. 5 to p. 316 'end' in Grébaut's edition, the third from p. 425 to the end. I quote the ApPt according to the chapters used by the modern editors, the rest according to the pagination of the manuscript d'Abbadie 51. We shall now examine the parts one by one (the ApPt only briefly, because it is well-known to everybody), and finally we shall try to draw some conclusions concerning the main ideas and the structure of the whole work.

The first part contains a revelation of Jesus concerning 'his coming and the end of the world'. The revelation takes place on the Mount of Olives and is initiated by a question or remark from Peter: it were better for the sinners that they had not been created. Christ answers rebuking Peter: 'Thou resistest God. Thou wouldest not
have more compassion than he for his image...'. and promises Peter to show him the works of the sinners 'in which they have sinned against the Most High' (c. 3). There follows the description of the judgement, Christ being established judge by God: 'my Father will place a crown upon my head, that I may judge the living and the dead and recompense every man according to his work'. For the sinners there is eternal torture (in chapters 6 to 13 the idea of eternal punishment appears at least ten times), in accordance with their sins, while the righteous are introduced into a sort of Paradise. The message of this revelation is expressed by the tortured sinners themselves: 'Righteous is the judgment of God: for we have heard and perceived that his judgment is good, since we are punished according to our deeds'. The central notion of this part is God's justice, meaning retribution to everyone according to his own deeds. I would emphasise that the idea of mercy does not appear. I do not want to enter into the question whether or not it was present in the Greek; in any case it is totally absent from the Ethiopic.

This revelation is for everybody. All the apostles are present and ask Jesus questions in order that they can teach those coming after them (1). At the end of c. 14, Peter is charged to send out this story into all the world. The revelation itself ends with c. 14. Chapters 15-17 constitute a sort of closure to the Apocalypse: the transfiguration scene on the Holy Mountain connected with the ascension of our Lord. There the ApPt ends, but the text continues without interruption.

The second part begins with Peter speaking to Clement (137r b – 138v b) about the glory of God: everything was created for the glory of God, even the revolt of the devil could not diminish it. This passage can be considered as a transition between the preceding scene and the following revelation. On p. 139r begins the second revelation, which takes place on the Holy Mountain during the transfiguration scene. Thus, on the one hand, a connection with the closing chapters of the ApPt is created, on the other, a parallel is established between the first revelation on the Mount of Olives and this one. Further on, as the place and the situation are now holy to an increased extent, it is to be expected that the revelation will also be of a higher order. This is also suggested by the fact that while all the apostles
were present when the first revelation took place, this time only the chosen ones (Peter, John, and James) can hear the words of Jesus. This revelation, just as the first one, concerns the second coming of Christ, but the underlying ideas are not the same. 'The Father will judge nobody, but he will give the judgement to his Son (John 5.22) in order that he might give eternal life to those who believe in him.' The judgement aims no more at judging everyone according to their deeds but rather rewarding the believers (the believers, and not the righteous!). This second revelation again is initiated by Peter asking a question, and the question is the same: would it not have been better for the sinners if they had not been created at all. For this time, however, Peter adds, 'because they die a second death' – and this second death is Peter's main concern throughout the whole work. Peter's idea is that everybody has to die, which is the first death. Everybody will be condemned according to their sins, which is the first judgement, a righteous one. After the resurrection, however, comes the second judgement, which means a second death for sinners. Peter, a sinner himself, is greatly afraid of the second death.

Jesus replies as follows (140r a): 'Did you understand what I told you at first? It is permitted to you not to know in your heart what you have asked. It would not be useful to tell the sinners what you have heard so that they should not multiply their sins and evil deeds.' Hearing this, Peter falls to the feet of the Lord crying and imploring to him for a long time. At last Jesus has pity on him and answers his question, but his answer is an enigmatic one (140r b): "'for he maketh his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (Mt 5.45). Because the mercy of my Father is like this: as the sun rises and the rain falls in the same way, so shall we have mercy and compassion for all of our creatures.'

Peter does not understand the parable and asks for an explanation. Having admonished Peter once again not to tell sinners anything, Christ gives him a revelation, which is what I consider as the second revelation of the treatise (140v b – 141v b). Its content is the following: as the sun shines on everybody, so it is with God's mercy. Satan will be destroyed, but before the glorious coming of Christ the demons will reign on earth, making many martyrs. Christ will come in his glory with his saints. Righteous and sinners will be separated
and Christ will judge them, his throne standing in the middle of the river of fire. The sinners will be transfixed in a moment and to be tortured by angels who are without mercy. While being tortured, they will cry 'until death', which Grébaut understands ‘à en mourir’ – that is, those hearing it are nearly dying – but I think the meaning is 'until they die', because this is the second death Peter speaks about.

The sense of this revelation is not clear: though the beginning suggests that mercy is for everybody, the end presents a judgement scene in which the sinners are punished mercilessly. The second, longer part of the treaty ends here.

The third part begins again with Peter crying and imploring Jesus with the words: 'this is the second death which I am afraid of!' Jesus gives the same answer as at the beginning of the first revelation: 'you will have no more mercy on the sinners than I do' (141v b). Grébaut translates: 'ce n'est pas toi qui enseigne mieux les piqueurs...' In Ethiopic the verbs 'to teach' (mud) and 'to have mercy' (@Ad) differ only in their middle letter, which in both cases is an 'h', but a different one. There are three characters for 'h', different in writing but not in pronunciation, which often leads to confusion, as is the case with our manuscripts. Therefore, it seems evident to me that we should read 'to have mercy on the sinners', the more so because we have the parallel text in c. 3 of the ApPt, and the reading 'to teach the sinners' does not give a good sense in our context. Then Jesus adds, 'for I was crucified because of the sinners, in order to obtain mercy for them by my Father'.

Seven lines are lacking here in the manuscript, and then the third revelation begins (142r a). This one is only for Peter. The mystery Jesus now reveals to him is not known to anybody, except Jesus and the Father, not even to the angels, the righteous, the martyrs, or the prophets. Jesus admonishes Peter to hide it in a box and not to tell it to anybody, except the sages.

Then Jesus reveals that at the Last Judgement the sinners who believe in Christ will be pardoned, because Christ assumed their body and they ate his body and drank his blood. 'The Father will

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8 Cf. 136r b where @Ad means 'have mercy on us' and not 'teach us'.
grant to all of them life, glory and eternal kingdom, and his judgment will not be divided' (142r a). This is the mystery revealed to Peter: had he not cried and wept, Jesus would not have told him. Peter must not speak about this to the sinners: even when they hear about the punishment of the fire, they kill one another, so if they knew about the mercy, nobody would do what is right (142v b). Better to threaten them with fire.

The revelation continues: God created Adam for his glory; he surely does not want to destroy him. Jesus quotes here Psalms 36(35).6: 'Thy mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens; and thy righteousness reacheth unto the clouds' (143r b).

Adam sinned and was punished for it: he was expelled from Paradise and death came on him (common death, that is, the separation of the soul from the body). But God will not destroy by a second death that which he has created.

Only Satan and his demons will descend into Sheol, and those who did not believe in Christ. Those who believed in him will not see the judgement of fire. It is a mystery that those who partook of the body and blood of Jesus will not descend a second time into the underworld, into the faith of Satan and his demons (143r a-b).

After revealing all this, Jesus asks Peter whether he has any doubts left. Peter answers: 'Really, when I asked you concerning the sinners who are like me, you told me and explained to me very carefully the words of David, indicating that God's mercy is great. My heart was burning when I was thinking of it that after the resurrection of the dead there would be a second death for the sinners [which means] descending into the Sheol. Because of this you explained this word to me, and I am convinced and I have no more doubts' (143v b – 144r a).

Grébaut translates Peter's reply in the present or in the future: 'le coeur me brule [...] explique-moi cette parole. Je croirai et je n'aurai plus de doutes'. I think we should take Peter's words in the past tense: Peter had learnt what he wanted to know and he is now satisfied. This translation is absolutely justified. The verbs are in the perfect, the only problem is 'you have explained to me', the Ethiopic verb in the manuscript being an imperative: 'explain it to me' (አምስት-ታወታ), But the difference between the two forms is so slight ('you
have explained to me' should be ἡμιτιτλικοῦ, that in a manuscript like ours, not copied with due care, they can very easily become mixed up 9.

Thus the central question is settled, but Jesus continues to give some more indications concerning the final events. I translate the passage which seems the most important to me: 'The children of Adam who have been resuscitated into life will then receive the rank and the throne of the devil and all his (Adam's) children will become the armies of the angels instead of the armies of the devil. But as to the demons, God will enclose them into the terrible Gehenna together with their lord, the devil, and with everybody who had become a host for them, each one according to his inhabitant will be enclosed with them into the depths of the Sheol' (144v a). In these lines, I think, there are two ideas which escaped Grkbaut's attention. The first is that the resuscitated human beings will become the armies of the angels instead of the armies of the devil. Grkbaut completes: 'instead of being the armies of the devil', but probably this is not the point. According to several Christian writers, the thrones of the devil and his demons remained empty in the heavens after their fall, and these seats will be occupied by the blessed after the resurrection (consequently there are to be as many blessed as there had been fallen angels). Our text seems to allude to this concept. The other problem is the difficult phrase with the dwelling place of the demons, which sounds in Grébaut’s translation: 'avec tous les êtres qui sont dans leur propre demeure', which does not make much sense. In my opinion this phrase means that those human beings will be condemned forever, along with the demons who gave a place in themselves to a demon, that is, who became the prey of a demon. These souls will descend into the underworld, according to the demon that acted in them – an allusion probably to the demons of the sins.

The treatise ends with some indications concerning the religious feasts.

9 To mix up EDIATE and Ǝ is considered as a minor fault.
Conclusions

1. The structure of the work

The work is based on three revelations, which are strictly connected: their subject is the same, but the message contained in them is more 'esoteric' with each one. Thus they can be considered as three degrees in the acquisition of a secret knowledge, or three phases of initiation into a mystery. The description makes it clear how the revelations are based on one another: the setting is the same, but the details clearly indicate the progress in the knowledge communicated.

Each revelation is provoked by a question from Peter: 'Were it not better for the sinners, that they had not been created?' in the first revelation and 'Would it not have been better for the sinners if they had not been created at all, because they die a second death?' in the second one. The question remains the same, but the second time Peter's reason for asking is added: the question is about the second death, which is Peter's real problem. In the third case there remains only Peter's desperate cry: 'This is the second death I am afraid of!' Progress is also found in Jesus' answers. The first time, he rebukes Peter, 'Thou resistest God. Thou wouldest not have more compassion than he for his image'. Then Jesus shows Peter how the punishment of the sinners is in accordance with their sins – but this is no real answer to Peter's question, neither do we understand what it has to do with God's compassion. The second time, Christ gives no direct answer, only warns Peter of the dangers of higher knowledge. The real answer comes only on the third occasion, 'You will have no more mercy on the sinners than I do, for I was crucified because of the sinners, in order to obtain mercy for them by my Father'.

The progress in the work can also be measured by Peter's behaviour. In the first part he plays no special role. He is one of the apostles and asks a question which any of them could have asked. It is only in the second part that we learn why Peter is so interested in the fate of the sinners: it is because he himself is the greatest of the sinners. While the first revelation is given by Jesus quite willingly, Peter has to implore him for the second. The scene is presented as excessively as with oriental tales: Peter lying before Christ for long hours,
weeping, wetting with his tears the feet of Jesus and licking them with his tongue. Finally, Jesus has pity on him and grants him a second revelation which is, however, not quite clear. Peter weeps and cries again until he gets what he wants. 'Had you not cried [I would not have told you this]' (142 v b), says Jesus, and a little further he adds, 'You have wept and cried and molested me very much when you wetted my feet with your tears and you molested me greatly with your questions and supplications...' (144r a). The situation is very much like that of a child vexing his father till he gives in and lets him have his ways just to be left in peace. Jesus was reluctant to tell Peter the truth concerning divine mercy, but finally he gave in only to stop Peter crying and asking questions. This is similar to the parable in Lk 11.5-8, where prayer is compared to a man who is so persistent in asking his friend for help that in the end the other gives him what he wants, only to get rid of him.

The circle of those for whom the revelations are intended is also a clear indication of the way in which the ideas are getting increasingly mysterious. At the first revelation, all the apostles are present and they are sent out to tell the story all over the world. The second is only for the chosen, Peter, John and James, and they are admonished not to tell anything to the sinners, which means that it can be revealed only to the righteous. At the third revelation Peter alone is present. The mystery Jesus is about to reveal to him is hidden from everybody, except for Jesus and the Father. Peter is allowed to speak about it only to the sages - and these are not identical with the righteous.

Thus we can establish that the treatise is very carefully composed, the three parts being built logically one upon the other, and all the details arranged according to the progress of the ideas.

2. What is the real meaning of the work?

As we have seen, in Buchholz' opinion the main theme of the work is God's mercy to the sinners. This is undoubtedly true, but let us examine the question more closely. The real teaching of our treatise seems to be the following. There are two judgements, and the first one takes place directly after death. It is just: everybody is condemned according to his or her sins. Mercy has no place in it; it is
God's justice that prevails. Adam, too, when he sinned, was punished accordingly: death came upon him and he was expelled from Paradise. But as God created everything for his glory, it would not be logical for him to destroy it afterwards. (We now understand the reason of Peter's long discourse about God's glory at the beginning of the second part.) If something does not work as it should, God will reconstruct and not annihilate it. This means that sins are requited, but the sinners themselves will not be destroyed by a second death meaning eternal torture in the underworld. The notion comes from Rev 20.14-15, 'And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.' The second judgement takes place after the resurrection, and this time mercy will reign: in this judgement there will be no division, all believers in Christ will receive eternal life and enter God's kingdom.

Thus our treatise gives a perfectly clear definition of the respective places of justice and mercy in divine economy: in this world and as well as in the first judgment, justice reigns, but at the end of the world mercy will prevail. This is the very idea expressed by quotation from Psalms which I chose for the title of my paper: 'Thy mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens; and thy righteousness reacheth unto the clouds'. It is probably not by accident, that in the second half of the phrase the original word 'faithfulness' (Hebrew) or 'truthfulness' (Greek) was replaced by 'righteousness'.

It is not quite clear what it means that everybody who believes in Christ will be saved. Who are those who did not believe? The logical answer would be that they are the non-Christians, but this does not seem to be the idea of our treatise. Those who do not believe in Christ are Satan, his demons, and probably those human beings who hosted demons in themselves, if we correctly understand the phrase concerning the dwelling-places of the demons.

3. The relation of the ApPt to the whole treatise

Instead of describing the work as a midrash, I would rather consider it as a treatise consisting of three chapters. Its author used the ApPt as the first chapter but then he probably found the ideas expressed in it too cruel, so he wrote a continuation to it. In the light of
these additional parts, the meaning of the first part has also changed: what is contained in it is no more the final truth about divine judgement, but only a preparatory teaching meant for sinners to restrain them from more sinning. Thus for the writer of our Pseudo-Clementine work, the $\text{ApPr}$ was no more than an instrument of divine pedagogy.