

An Overview of Coptic Literature

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draft 15 April 2002

There is a vast amount of material written in Coptic: both literary and non-literary, Christian (orthodox and heterodox) and non-Christian (Manichaean and native Egyptian), native and translation. For those learning Coptic, it is important to read works that are not translations to get a feel for the real Coptic.

This survey of Coptic literature cannot be comprehensive at this point. Most of the documentary texts and graffiti are not included. Authors are listed without listing the numbers of their works so that individuals who wrote voluminously are listed the same as those who are known from only one work. The dating of many of the authors is problematic.

First Attempts

The oldest known attempt to write in Coptic, that is to write the Egyptian language in Greek characters was found at Abydos, a royal inscription of king Haronnophris, who rebelled against Ptolemy IV Philopater in 205 BC. Along with this inscriptions are many attempts, from Herodotus on down to record Egyptian names in Greek documents. These form of the language is sometimes called Pre-Old Coptic. The earliest dated Coptic inscription is:

Horron ophris Graffito from Abydos

Old Coptic Texts

An number of ancient Egyptian religious texts and formula rendered in Greek characters by bilingual native Egyptian priests are known. These texts are known as Old Coptic texts. These texts often preserve very archaic vocabulary and verbal forms. Additionally, many Egyptian phonemes are collapsed in an attempt to render the texts phonetically in Greek. Consequently they are extremely difficult to read even by specialists. It is known that a variety of dialects are represented under the rubric of Old Coptic, but it is not yet separated into dialects. There are several texts, the most important of which are:

P. BM 10808

P. Carlsberg 180 + P. Berlin 10465 + 14475 + PSI I 76

Schmidt Papyrus

PGM IV (portions)

The last Old Coptic texts date to the third century. It is usually thought that up to this point the Christianity that had been introduced into Egypt only in Greek form since the only evidence we have for Christianity in Egypt is Greek papyri from Egypt. But an Old Coptic text (*PGM* IV) shows that there was a Coptic version of Christianity functioning at Thebes as early as the third century.

Translations of the Bible

After Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire in the early fourth century, we begin to see clear signs of Coptic Christianity beginning with the translation of the Bible into Coptic. The translation of the Bible into Coptic is seen as occurring in three distinct

stages. In the first stage (4th century AD), independent translators rendered portions of the Bible into their native dialects. Most of our Coptic dialectical material comes from translations made at this stage. In the second stage (4th to 5th centuries AD), the Sahidic version was standardized. In the third stage (9th century AD) the Bohairic version was standardized.

Translations of Gnostic Texts

This group of texts known from Askew, Bruce, and Berlin Gnostic codices and the thirteen Nag Hammadi codices forms a discreet unit. While it is clear that the material is as fascinating in its sheer bizarreness to modern readers as it was to ancient monks, we should not imagine that it is representative either of mainstream Coptic thought or language. In any case, it is not native literature but only translation of largely Greek works into a largely Lycopolitan dialect. The works in the Nag Hammadi Library are as follows (Roman numerals refer to which codex or codices contain the work):

- The Prayer of the Apostle Paul* (I)
- The Apocryphon of James* (I)
- The Gospel of Truth* (I, XII)
- The Treatise on the Resurrection* (I)
- The Tripartite Tractate* (I)
- The Apocryphon of John* (II, III, IV, Berlin 8502)
- The Gospel of Thomas* (II)
- The Gospel of Philip* (II)
- The Hypostasis of the Archons* (II)
- On the Origin of the World* (II, XIII)
- The Expository Treatise on the Soul* (II)
- The Book of Thomas the Contender* (II)
- The Gospel of the Egyptians* (III, IV)
- Eugnostos the Blessed* (III, V)
- The Sophia of Jesus Christ* (III, Bruce Codex)
- The Dialogue of the Savior* (III)
- The Apocalypse of Paul* (V)
- The (First) Apocalypse of James* (V)
- The (Second) Apocalypse of James* (V)
- The Apocalypse of Adam* (V)
- The Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles* (VI)
- The Thunder: Perfect Mind* (VI)
- Authoritative Teaching* (VI)
- The Concept of Our Great Power* (VI)
- Plato, *Republic* 588A-589B (VI)
- The Prayer of Thanksgiving* (VI)
- Scribal Note* (VI)
- The Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth* (VI)
- Asclepius* 21-29 (VI)
- The Paraphrase of Shem* (VII)
- The Second Treatise of the Great Seth* (VII)
- Apocalypse of Peter* (VII)
- The Teachings of Silvanus* (VII)
- The Three Steles of Seth* (VII)
- Zostrianos* (VIII)
- The Letter of Peter to Philip* (VIII)

Melchizedek (IX)
The Thought of Norea (IX)
The Testimony of Truth (IX)
Marsanes (X)
The Interpretation of Knowledge (XI)
A Valentinian Exposition with
 On the Anointing (XI)
 On Baptism A and B (XI)
 On the Eucharist A and B (XI)
Allogenes (XI)
Hypsiphron (XI)
The Sentences of Sextus (XII)
Trimorphic Protonnoia (XIII)
Pistis Sophia (Askew Codex)
The Gospel of Mary (Berlin 8502)
The Act of Peter (Berlin 8502)
1 Jeu (Bruce Codex)
2 Jeu (Bruce Codex)
Untitled Text of the Bruce Codex (Bruce Codex)
Balaizah fragments

Translations of Manichaean Texts

Some of the material labeled as Gnostic (e.g. *The Gospel of Thomas*) may actually be Manichaean. Manichaean missionaries produced Coptic translations of their literature soon after their expansion into Egypt about AD 350. The translations were made largely from Syriac into the Lycopolitan dialect even though the material was found at Medinet Madi in the Fayyum. Some of the Manichaean material has not yet been published, but the most important Coptic Manichaean works are:

Kephalia
Manichaean Psalm Book
Kellis Manichaean Texts

Early Patristic Translations

Early translations of Patristic literature (those made in the 4th-5th centuries AD) enriched the Coptic Church with many important works of Greek authors and follow similar patterns to the Biblical translations.

Apocrypha

Two Old Testament apocryphal works are known (The Apocalypse of Elijah and the Vision of Isaiah) which were probably composed in Egypt. The New Testament apocryphal works were probably composed in Asia. They were also translated at the same general time as the (Sahidic) Bible. These works include:

The Acts of Andrew
The Acts of Pilate
The Acts of Peter and Paul
The Apocalypse of Elijah
The Apocalypse of Esra (IV Ezra)
The Apocalypse of Moses

The Apocalypse of Paul (not the same as the Nag Hammadi tractate)
The Apocalypse of Zephaniah
The Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles
The Apocryphon of Enoch
The Apocryphon of Jeremiah
The Ascension of Isaiah
The Book of Daniel
The Book of Enoch
The Epistle of the Apostles (Akhmimic)
The Gospel of Nicodemus
Historia Sacra
Paralipomena of Jeremia
The Prayer of Manasseh
The Protevangelium of James
The Translation of John
The Story of Joseph the Carpenter
The Story of Stephen the First Martyr
The Sleep of the Virgin
The Testament of Abraham
The Testament of Isaac
The Testament of Job
The Vision of Isaiah

Homilies

At least one of the homilies was translated very early (2nd or 3rd century AD):

Melito of Sardis, *De Pascha*,

and two others were probably translated at the same time:

Melito of Sardis, *De anima et corpore*

Pseudo-Basilus of Caesarea *De templo Salomonis*.

Melito was one of the greatest authorities of Asian theology whose work was rejected by the Alexandria school but nevertheless was popular in certain monastic centers in Egypt. Other documents produced by this circle include:

Life of Aphou of Oxyrhynchus

Life of Apollo (of Bawit)

Paul of Tamma

Early Native Patristic Texts

The earliest author to produce original Coptic (Christian) literature was Hierakas, but it is uncertain if any of his works survive. Pachomius (4th century) and his successors form the next group of authors. Their works center around Pachomian monasticism; while the rules are straightforward many of the other works are replete with biblical quotations and very obscure.

Authors of this circle are:

Pachomius

Horsiese

Apocalypse of Kjarur

Apothegmata Anthoni

Apothegmata Macarii Scetensis
Apothegmata Patrum
The Life of Hamo
The Life of Jacob the Monk
The Life of John Kame
The Life of Theodore the Archimandrite
The Translation of Macarius

Shenoute is perhaps the greatest of all Coptic patristic authors, his works are conserved exclusively in the White Monastery which he founded. His successor, Besa, was more widely known. Authors of this circle are:

Shenoute (5th century)
 Besa

Translations of the Classical Period

The Coptic translation of the Bible was systematized before the eighth century. A number of translations of homilies from important Greek patristic authors were made (the theological works were generally avoided):

Athanasius I
 Basil the Great
 Cyril of Alexandria
 Ephraem Syrus
 Epiphanius of Salamis
 Gregory of Nazianzus
 Gregory of Nyssa
 Jerome the Presbyter
 John Chrysostom
 Palladius
 Proclus of Constantinople
 Severian of Gabala
 Severus of Antioch
The Apostolic Canons
The Athanasian Canons
The Canons of Basil
The Canons of the Council of Nicea
The Canons of the Church
The Creed of the Council of Constantinople
The Decrees of the Council of Ephesus
Didache
Documents of the Council of Nicea I
Documents of the Council of Nicea II
Documents of the Minor Councils
The Epistle of Abgar
The Acts of Alexander / The History of Alexander
The Acts of Cambyzes / The History of Cambyzes
Mysteria Litterarum
Physiologus
Sentences of the Council of Nicea
Sentences of Menader

After the translation of these works, a number of homilies were composed in Coptic which imitated them.

Along with the homilies, a number of martyrdoms were translated into Coptic, followed by the composition of originals after the same pattern. Examples include:

The Forty Martyrs of Sebaste
The Martyrdom of Abraham the Persian
The Martyrdom of the Alexandrian Fathers
The Martyrdom of Amun
The Martyrdom of Christodorus
The Martyrdom of Colluthis
The Martyrdom of Cyprian
The Martyrdom of Cyricus and Julitta
The Martyrdom of Febronia
The Martyrdom of Gobidlaha
The Martyrdom of Herpaese and Julian
The Martyrdom of Ignatius of Antioch
The Martyrdom of John the Baptist
The Martyrdom of Isaac Tiphrensis
The Martyrdom of Olympius
The Martyrdom of Polycarp
The Martyrdom of Psotae
The Martyrdom of Stephen of Lenae
The Seven Sleepers of Antioch

There was a tendency to create cycles of related texts constructed around various prefects or groups of martyrs. Some of these are:

Cyrus and John
Excerptum de Mercurio
The Life of Pamin
The Martyrdom of Apollonius and Philemon
The Martyrdom of Arian
The Martyrdom of Ascla
The Martyrdom of Claudius
The Martyrdom of Coore
The Martyrdom of Cosmas and Damianus
The Martyrdom of Dios
The Martyrdom of Epimachus
The Martyrdom of Eusignius
The Martyrdom of George
The Martyrdom of Hera
The Martyrdom of James the Persian
The Martyrdom of Jude Cyriacus
The Martyrdom of Krajon and Amun
The Martyrdom of Lacaron
The Martyrdom of Leontus of Tripolis
The Martyrdom of Mena
The Martyrdom of Mercurius
The Martyrdom of Moui
The Martyrdom of Nilus
The Martyrdom of Pamun et Sarmatae

The Martyrdom of Panine et Paneu
The Martyrdom of Pantoleon
The Martyrdom of Paphnuthii
The Martyrdom of Peter of Alexandria
The Martyrdom of Peter, bishop of Alexandria
The Martyrdom of Phoebammon
The Martyrdom of Psote
The Martyrdom of Sarapamon
The Martyrdom of Theodore of Anatolia
The Martyrdom of Theodore the Duke
The Martyrdom of Victor
The Miracles of Colluthis
The Miracles of Gabriel
The Miracles of George
The Miracles of Leontius
The Miracles of Mena
The Miracles of Mercurius
The Miracles of Mercurius of Caesarea
The Miracles of Michael
The Miracles of Philotheos
The Miracles of Phoebammon
The Miracles of Theodore the Duke
The Story of Eustathius and Theopista
The Story of John of Calybita
The Story of Marina

Post Chalcedonian Literature

After the council of Chalcedon (AD 451), which caused the Egyptian church to separate from the Byzantine church, and before Justinian, Greek began to be seen as the language of the oppressors. The Egyptian church sensed a need to establish its own historical identity and a number of works were produced. Authors and works from this time period include:

Acacio of Constantinople
Acts of Ephesus
 Agathonicus of Tarsus
 Cyril of Alexandria (412-444)
 Dioscurus of Alexandria (444-454)
Historia ecclesiastica
Historia Eudoxiae
 Isaac of Qalamun
 John of Lycopolis
 John of Mayuma
Life of Athanasius
Life of Daniel the Archimandrite
Life of John of Lykopolis
Life of Longinus the Archimandrite
Life of Macarius the Archimandrite
Life of Martyrian the Anchorite
Life of Matthew the Poor
Life of Moses the Archimandrite
Life of Severus, bishop of Antioch

Life of Theodosius, bishop of Alexandria
Life of Zenobius the Archimandrite
 Macarius of Tkow
Memoriae Dioscori
 Moses the Archimandrite
 Moses of Tkou
 Pambo of Sketis
 Peter of Mongo
Plerophoriae
 Stephen of Hnes
 Theodosius of Alexandria (536-567)
 Theophilus of Alexandria (384-412)
 Timothy of Alexandria (378-384)
 Timothy II of Alexandria (457-477)

Between Justinian and bishop Damianus, the Coptic church was overcome by imperial supporters and works were directed to a monastic audience. These include:

Life of Apollo of Pbow
Life of Abraham of Farshut (also known as
Life of Matthew the Poor
Life of Moses of Balyana
Vita Zenobii

Damianus (AD 576-605) succeeded in restoring order to the Coptic Church. Literary works begin to become independent of the Greek rhetorical model. Authors include:

Constantine of Siut
 Damianus (576-605)
 Isaac of Antinoos
 John of Paralos
 John of Shmun
 John the Presbyter
The Life of Pistentius
 Moses of Qift
 Phoibammon of Panopolis
 Pistentius of Qift
 Rufus of Shotep

When the Arabs conquered Egypt, they seemed to show great respect for the local Christianity. There was a free production of literary texts until the end of the seventh century.

Agathon of Alexandria (662-680)
 Benjamin of Alexandria (623-662)
 Isaac of Kalamon
 John III of Alexandria (680-689)
 Mark III of Alexandria (1166-1189)
 Mena of Pshati
 Zacharias of Shkow

Non-literary Texts

After the Arab conquest of Egypt, since, at first, the Arabs did not care about the record

keeping, the Copts, perceiving the Greeks as foreign oppressors as they had taken a theological position opposed to most Coptic sentiments and enforced it, decided to keep their records once again in their own language. While there is some third century material in Coptic from the Dakhla oasis, the majority of non-literary texts, on both papyri and ostraca, belong to the sixth through the ninth centuries. There are some archives of trilingual Coptic, Greek and Arabic texts and some isolated Coptic texts exist from the ninth through eleventh centuries. No attempt to list the manifold editions of these texts will be given here.

Ancient Egyptian Religious Texts in Coptic

The Egyptian religion was not vanquished with the official Christianization of the Roman Empire, but endured a long, if inadequately documented demise. The temple of Serapis in Alexandria fell to the mob in AD 389, roughly contemporary with Shenute's attacks on the Egyptian temples at the same time. In AD 457, Egyptian priests were still recording inscriptions in Demotic and hieroglyphics at the temple of Philae (it was not closed until AD 540). In AD 462, the temple of Thooris at Oxyrhynchus was still functioning. The shrine of Isis at Menouthis was closed by a Christian raid in AD 484. A number of miscellaneous works in Coptic reflect preservation of the earlier (non-Christian) Egyptian religion, often mixed with Christian elements. The following is a list of the most important of these works (dated through paleography which for Coptic is notoriously unreliable):

- Prague 1 Wessely (about AD 300)
- Heidelberg G 1359 (3rd or 4th cent.)
- Hermitage (4th cent.)
- IFAO ? (4th cent.)
- Oxyrhynchus 924 (4th cent.)
- Aberdeen (4th to 5th cent.)
- Amsterdam 173 (4th or 5th cent.)
- Cairo 10263 (4th or 5th cent.)
- IFAO (4th to 5th cent.)
- Michigan 1523 (4th or 5th cent.)
- Oslo 1.5 (4th or 5th cent.)
- Papyrus Lichaev (4th or 5th cent.)
- Michigan 593 (4th to 6th cent.)
- Berlin 21911 (5th cent.)
- Michigan 1190 (5th cent.)
- Oxyrhynchus 1151 (5th cent.)
- Oxyrhynchus 1384 (5th cent.)
- Berlin 21230 (5th or 6th cent.)
- Florence Instituto Papirologico G. Vitelli 365 (5th or 6th cent.)
- Ianda 14 (5th or 6th cent.)
- Michigan 3565 (5th or 6th cent.)
- Oxyrhynchus 925 (5th or 6th cent.)
- University College London, Edward collection amulet (5th or 6th cent.)
- Berlin 13232 (Byzantine period)
- Köln 20826 (5th to 8th centuries)
- Ashmolean Museum 1981.940 (6th cent.)
- Berlin 954 (6th cent.)
- Cairo 67188 (6th cent.)
- Harris 54 (6th cent.)

Köln 10235 (6th cent.)
 Oxyrhynchus 1060 (6th cent.)
 Oxyrhynchus 1077 (6th cent.)
 Oxyrhynchus 1150 (6th cent.)
 Oxyrhynchus 1926 (6th cent.)
 Vienna G 337, Rainer 1 (6th cent.)
 Vienna G 19929 (6th cent.)
 Zereteli-Tiflis collection 24 (6th cent.)
 London Oriental Manuscript 6794 (about 600)
 London Oriental Manuscript 6795 (about 600)
 London Oriental Manuscript 6796 (about 600)
 Berlin 21269 (6th or 7th cent.)
 Köln T 10 (6th or 7th cent.)
 Liverpool Institute of Archaeology (6th to 7th cent.)
 London Hay 10122 (6th or 7th cent.)
 London Hay 10376 (6th or 7th cent.)
 London Hay 10414 (6th or 7th cent.)
 London Hay 10434 (6th or 7th cent.)
 Vienna K 8302 (6th or 7th cent.)
 Vienna, Rainer 5 [13b] (6th or 7th cent.)
 Yale CtYBR 882[A] (6th or 7th cent.)
 Yale CtYBR 1791 (6th or 7th cent.)
 Yale CtYBR 1792 (6th or 7th cent.)
 Yale CtYBR 1800 (6th or 7th cent.)
 Yale CtYBR 1791 (6th or 7th cent.)
 Coptic Museum 4960 (6th to 8th cent.)
 Cologne 851 (7th cent.)
 H. O. Lange collection (7th cent.)
 Munich Coptic Papyrus 5 (7th cent.)
 Pierpont Morgan Library M662B22 (7th cent.)
 Egger Ostrakon (7th or 8th cent.)
 Vatican Coptic Papyrus 1 (7th or 8th cent.)
 Berlin 8318 (8th cent.)
 Berlin 8319 (8th cent.)
 Berlin 8503 (8th cent.)
 London Oriental Manuscript 1013A (8th cent.)
 Berlin 11347 (8th or 9th cent.)
 Berlin 8325 (9th cent.)
 Freer fragment 10 (9th cent.)
 Berlin 10587 (10th cent.)
 Cairo bones A and B (10th cent.)
 Heidelberg Kopt. 681 (10th cent.)
 Heidelberg Kopt. 686 (10th cent.)
 Louvre E 14.250 (10th cent.)
 Vienna K 7093 (10th cent.)
 Vienna K 8638 (10th cent.)
 Würzburg 42 (10th cent.)
 Vienna K 70 (10th or 11th cent.)
 Vienna K 8304 (10th or 11th cent.)
 Heidelberg Kopt. 679 (11th cent.)
 Heidelberg Kopt. 684 (11th cent.)

Oxyrhynchus 39 5B.125/A (11th cent.)
 Vienna K 8303 (11th or 12th cent.)
 Berlin 5565 (undated)
 Berlin 8313 (undated)
 Berlin 8314 (undated)
 Berlin 8321 (undated)
 Berlin 8322 (undated)
 Berlin 8324 (undated)
 Berlin 9096 (undated)
 Berlin 11858 (undated)
 Cairo 45060 (undated)
 Cairo 49547 (undated)
 Coptic Museum 4959 (undated)
 Cambridge University Library T. S. 12,207 (undated)
 Chicago Oriental Institute 13767 (undated)
 Florence 5645 (undated)
 Heidelberg Kopt. 518 (undated)
 Heidelberg Kopt. 544 (undated)
 Heidelberg Kopt. 564 (undated)
 Heidelberg Kopt. 682 (undated)
 Leiden Anastasi 9 (undated)
 London Hay 10391 (undated)
 London Oriental Manuscript 4721 [5] (undated)
 London Oriental Manuscript 5525 (undated)
 London Oriental Manuscript 5899 [1] (undated)
 London Oriental Manuscript 5986 (undated)
 London Oriental Manuscript 5987 (undated)
 London Oriental Manuscript 6172 (undated)
 M. Robert Nahman amulet (undated)
 Michigan 136 (undated)
 Michigan 3023a (undated)
 Michigan 3472 (undated)
 Michigan 4932f (undated)
 Moen 3 (undated)
 Ostrakon Moen 34 (undated)
 Moen amulet (undated)
 Oxford Bodlean Coptic Manuscript C. [P] 4 (undated)
 Rylands 100 (undated)
 Rylands 103 (undated)
 Rylands 104 (undated)
 Schmidt 1 (undated)
 Schmidt 2 (undated)
 Strasbourg Coptic Manuscript 135 (undated)
 Turin Biblioteca Nazionale (undated)
 Yale CtYBR 2124 (undated)

Cycles

From the ninth through the twelfth centuries, a number of pseudonymous cycles were produced that reflected the political themes of the Copts now oppressed by the Muslims. These cycles center around the following historical or pseudo-historical individuals:

Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria (*Apocalypse of Athanasius*)
 Cyril of Alexandria
 Cyril of Jerusalem
 Demetrius, bishop of Antioch
 Eustathius, bishop of Thrace
 John Chrysostom
 Theophilus
In Colluthum
Mysteries of John the Evangelist
Life of Theognosta

At this time period, the last of the Coptic hagiographers produced their works, which included:

Basilides the General
 Julius of Kbehs
The Martyrdom of Anatolius the Perisian
The Martyrdom of Anub
The Martyrdom of Apaïule and Ptolemaeis
The Martyrdom of Apollo
The Martyrdom of Ares
The Martyrdom of Astratole
The Martyrdom of Barsanuphi
The Martyrdom of Barsauma
The Martyrdom of Basilides
The Martyrdom of Besamon
The Martyrdom of Camul
The Martyrdom of Didymus
The Martyrdom of Epima
The Martyrdom of Eusebius
The Martyrdom of Helia
The Martyrdom of Heraclides
The Martyrdom of Hetsneu
The Martyrdom of Hor
The Martyrdom of Isisdorus
The Martyrdom of John of Phanigioit
The Martyrdom of John of Psenhout
The Martyrdom of John and Simeon
The Martyrdom of Justus
The Martyrdom of Jiane
The Martyrdom of Macarius
The Martyrdom of Macrobius
The Martyrdom of Nabraha
The Martyrdom of Nahrou
The Martyrdom of Paese and Thecla
The Martyrdom of Panesneu
The Martyrdom of Paniskos
The Martyrdom of Parthenopes
The Martyrdom of Pekiosh
The Martyrdom of Philotheos
The Martyrdom of Phoca
The Martyrdom of Pirou and Athon
The Martyrdom of Pishate

The Martyrdom of Pisura
The Martyrdom of Pshoi
The Martyrdom of Ptolemy
The Martyrdom of Sarapion
The Martyrdom of Sergius and Bacchus
The Martyrdom of Shenufe
The Martyrdom of Souros
The Martyrdom of Ter and Ira
The Martyrdom of Theonoa
The Martyrdom of Thomas of Shentalet
The Martyrdom of Til
The Martyrdom of Timothy
The Martyrdom of Touin
The Prayer of Maria to Bartos
The Story of Gesius and Isidorus

Undated Authors and Works

The following are Coptic authors or works for which I currently have no date:

Pappoute of Sketis
 Papohe
 Pshoi of Sketis
 Psote of Psoi
 Serapion of Thmunis
Calendologia
De poenitentia
Dicta Philosophorum
Dicta Monochorum
Hermenia
The History of Dorothy
The Life of Besarion
The Life of Pijimi
The Life of Pimen
Scholastica

Synaxarical Systemazation

As Arabic slowly submerged Coptic during the Middle Ages, the only Coptic literature to be produced were texts to be read during the synaxeis. Earlier texts were reworked into homilies or lives of the saints. It is in part due to the literature of this period that Coptic perhaps owes its previously poor reputation.

The Beginnings of Arabic Coptic Literature

In AD 705 Arabic became the only language officially recognized in Egypt. Coptic ostraca and other non-literary texts disappear as they were no longer considered legally valid, which parallels the situation with Demotic in the first century AD. As Copts of necessity became more fluent in Arabic, the tendency grew to compose works in the language to which they were becoming more accustomed. As the Coptic literature began to stagnate, the trend was for original literary works to appear in Arabic rather than Coptic. We will only examine the beginnings of this literature through the twelfth century.

Sa`id ibn al-Bitriq (AD 877-940), also known as Eutychius, composed his chronology of the world, *Kitab al-Tawarikh*, in Arabic. The tenth century Christian author Sawirus ibn al-Muqaffa`, bishop of al-Ashmunein, complained that nobody understands Coptic any more and that Islamic thinking is invading the Christian community, therefore he decided to write all his works, including his *History of the Patriarchs* in Arabic. It is estimated that about half of all Christian Arabic literature derives from the Coptic Church.

Some Coptic authors are wrote in Coptic but are principally known from Arabic translations. Constantine of Siut, for example, is largely known from Arabic translations of his work.

During the late twelfth century, the caliph, al-`Adid (1160-1171), persecuted the Christians extensively and forced many to apostatize to Islam. One of these, al-As`ad ibn al-Muhadhhab ibn Zakariyya ibn Qudamah ibn Mina Abu al-Makarim ibn Sa`id Abu al-Mlih, known as ibn Mammati, wrote a compendium of the historical geography of Egypt called the *Kitab Qawanin al-Dawawin* in AD 1209. A contemporary who did not apostatize, Abu al-Makarim, wrote a similar work concentrating on churches and monasteries between 1174 and 1204.

The last native Coptic author whose name and date are known for certain was Mark III, patriarch of Alexandria (AD 1166-1189). After that time, Coptic Christian authors wrote only in Arabic and thus are no longer the subject of a study of the Coptic language.