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THE FUTURE OF COPTIC STUDIES

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THE FUTURE OF STUDIES IN COPTIC BIBLICAL AND ECCLESIASTICAL LITERATURE

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Although Coptic literature has been under study for over a century,¹ it is still a relatively new science. Its progress has been slow because a number of Coptic texts have not yet been edited and it is difficult to gather information on available manuscripts. Indeed, studies in Coptic literature are no further advanced today than classical philology was in the fifteenth century. With not one adequate history of Coptic literature in existence, we can well understand why the field is so sadly neglected by scholars. As Polotsky observed,² for some time Coptology has been vacillating between studies of the Egyptian language and the study of Christian theology, but little, if any, attention has been focused on the actual, individual character of the Coptic authors and their literary output as a separate study.

This state of affairs, however, is now changing. Recent discoveries in Egyptian literature and archaeology of late antiquity have drawn mounting attention to the people who inhabited the country in that period — whom we call “Copts”, an unfortunate appellation³ — and to various aspects of their civilization, with the result that scholars are making more intensive efforts to understand its very special nature. To me, this is encouraging, especially in the area of Coptic literature. But scholars are in danger of approaching the subject in misguided ways, therefore I hope that this contribution of mine will help them to avoid the pitfalls.

The study of Coptic literature today is the very limited province of a few specialists, who are well aware of the retarded state in which this discipline is languishing. While their opinions no doubt

¹ Before 1870 we may speak only of the prehistory of studies in Coptic literature; then we have the studies by P. de Lagarde (*Aegyptiaca*, Göttingen, 1883) and by E. Amélineau (1890-1914), O. Von Lemm (1890-1915), W.E. Crum (1900-1938), L.Th. Lefort (1910-1959), who are the main pioneers of such researches.

² H.J. Polotsky, in: *Current Trends in Linguistics*, vol. 6, The Hague-Paris 1970, p. 558. Cp. also S. Morenz, in: *Koptologische Studien in der DDR*, Halle/Witt. 1965, p. 260-261.

³ The words “Copt” and “Coptic” should be restored to their primitive form of “(Christian) Egyptian”, in order to avoid many confusions.

differ on many points, nevertheless they have no need of contributions like mine to determine which subjects are being studied and which are not. Therefore, I am addressing this work not to them but rather to those young students and newcomers to the field who are attracted by the very real scientific opportunities Coptology offers them. These neophytes are often insufficiently prepared to choose the study themes that will reap them the best rewards — themes that go beyond what has already been learned or that still remain unexplored, and which we can reasonably hope they will find unusually interesting. Meanwhile, scholars in closely-related disciplines may come upon problems concerning a text or group of texts particularly pertinent to their work, which they could study without any need to understand the problems that involve the whole range of Coptic literature. Coptic studies are arriving at a stage where a global knowledge of the entire field will no longer be necessary; without becoming an expert like Von Lemm, Crum or Lefort, one will be able to refer to manuals for the information required. But since no such manuals yet exist, contributions like this one will perhaps be found useful.

There is another factor to be considered. As it happens, scholars who deal with general and methodological problems, especially those concerning future developments, are themselves unable to carry out the actual research. I believe I am not in that category, since before this paper I produced a complete, if concise, history tracing the development of Coptic literature as I interpret it. The documentation I have used in this account can be fully examined if those who wish to do so will apply to me personally in Rome.

For the general problems on the history of Coptic literature, the outlines available⁴ are too short to be of any real value. Moreover, they omit a number of problems which have taken on considerable significance over the past few years with the discovery of important manuscripts. On the other hand, valid attempts have been made to solve various basic questions,⁵ but unfortunately they lack the documentation

⁴ J. Leipoldt, "Geschichte der koptischen Litteratur", in: *Geschichte der christlichen Litteraturen des Orients* (ed. C. Brockelmann), Leipzig 1909 (rep. Leipzig 1972) p. 131-182. A. Baumstark, *Die christlichen Litteraturen des Orients*, Leipzig 1911, vol. I, 1. S. Morenz, "Die koptische Literatur", in: *Handbuch der Orientalistik*, vol. I, 2, Leiden/Köln 1970, p. 239-250.

⁵ G. Steindorff, "Bemerkungen über die Anfänge der koptischen Sprache und Literatur", in: *Coptic Studies in Honor of W.E. Crum*, Boston 1950, p. 189-214. S. Morenz, "Zum Problem einer koptischen Literaturgeschichte", in: *Probleme der koptischen Literatur*, Halle/Witt. 1968, p. 11-16. J. Vergote, "La littérature copte et sa diffusion

required to insert them into the program of work now being conducted in Coptic literature. These questions are :

First : did a Coptic literature actually exist, if most of it consisted of translations? Morenz⁶ reminds us that even a translation is a literary work which can demonstrate literary skill. But in my opinion, this answer to the question is altogether inadequate. Coptic literature, in fact, abounds in original works, although in character and quality they are unlike what we normally expect from literature.

Second question : is it possible to trace the history of such a literature when we know almost nothing of its chronology? This, in my view, is a point I bring up not to confuse the issue but rather to exhort scholars to exert more determined efforts toward establishing the chronological order of Coptic texts.

Third question : can a literature conceived only for purely practical purposes become an appreciable one?⁷ In reply, we refute this assumption that the Coptic was merely a matter of pragmatics. When we examine certain literary genres of their creation, such as the homiletic, we should first of all ascertain whether or not the Copts regarded them in the same way we do.

Fourth question : how can we proceed with a literature which has no individual personalities we can identify? Here is another false assumption. The outlines I have mentioned were written by men who had no access to a number of texts, if they did not overlook them — texts, that is, which prove that such personalities did indeed exist. Even in cases of many anonymous and pseudonymous texts, it is altogether possible to reconstruct the chronology, the conditions under which they were produced and even the distinct personalities of their authors.

Fifth question : how can we determine the limits of a literature which evolved in a country where the population almost always spoke two languages? Was Coptic literature written only in the Coptic tongue or did it include all the literature produced by the Egyptian Christians, whether they were Copts, Greeks or Arabs? This problem was first brought up, to the best of my knowledge, by Vergote,⁸ who quite reasonably saw the answer in the larger frame. But as I have followed

en Orient", in : *L'Oriente cristiano nella Storia della Civiltà* (Accad. Naz. dei Lincei, Quad. 62) Roma, 1964, p. 103-116; R. Kasser, "Les origines du christianisme égyptien", *Rev. Théol. Philos.* 1 (1962) 11-28.

⁶ Morenz, *op. cit.* (note 5), p. 12-13.

⁷ Morenz, *op. cit.* (note 5), p. 12-13.

⁸ Vergote, *op. cit.* (note 5), p. 103-106.

the development of Coptic literature, I believe that we would be justified in limiting it to the Coptic language, although we must obviously examine carefully the parallel Egyptian achievements in the Greek and Arabic tongues.

Moving on from the methodological problems to the treatment of Coptic authors and their output, we shall soon realize the extremely poor quality of all the histories available to us. They barely characterize the translations from the Greek, whether Biblical or patristic. Except for Shenute's works, the poetry and so-called narratives, they fail to show us any original production. They avoid all problems relating to the particular kind of transmission of the Coptic texts, which were apparently altered to a great extent by the copyists, or perhaps by the ancient scholars who supervised them, yet the histories neglect to account for the many redactions of each text.

In my history, I have dwelled on these aspects of Coptic literature to give a fuller description of it. But, of course, there are many other issues to which scholars should be alerted, especially because the absence of solutions to them has given rise to numerous assumptions — taking the form of a sort of “conventional wisdom” — which have never been proven. Moreover, they can be erroneous on more than one count. I shall separate these problems into two categories: theoretical or general (not methodological), and practical. The first category concerns our appreciation of the different texts according to different points of view: content, characteristics, development, aesthetic and moral values, and so forth. The second concerns availability of the material, which is far from satisfactory in several respects.

Let us begin with the general problems. At a first glance, Coptic literature appears to be divided into three different classifications, which seem to have little in common; in any case, until now they have been treated separately by the specialists. First, there are the translations of the Bible; second, the gnostic and manichaean texts; and lastly, ecclesiastical literature. I shall not deal with the gnostic texts.⁹ The Biblical translations apparently marked the first Coptic attempt to insert the Egyptian language into the new process of ideas which began with the second century, and to put it on an equal basis with Greek to express the new spiritual trend in Egypt; as far as we know, the classical Egyptian language had never before ranked with Greek on this level. This situation carries both linguistic and

⁹ The liturgy is also a special kind of literature; it is treated in this Colloquium by H. Quecke.

ideological implications, which I shall not discuss, except to say that only Steindorff worked on the problem and concluded from his research that the Judeo-Egyptian culture may have made the major contribution to the rise of the Coptic language and literature.¹⁰ However, we must heed the more logical viewpoint of the scholars who have probed the strictly linguistic problems, that is, the origin, relative period, development and mutual relationships of the different dialects before the Sahidic became standardized as the classical Coptic language. They based their studies on the Biblical translations, which alone give evidence for this process.¹¹

In this context, obviously every codex written before the sixth century has its own value, inherent and comparative with its parallels. Therefore, we must examine the various editions — that is, practical problems — together with the interpretative studies. For the Bohairic dialect, a sound text is available in a fine edition,¹² but its origin is rather late. The exceptions, such as the Bodmer St. John and the St. James fragments,¹³ seem to have little to do with it. For the Sahidic New Testament, the situation is very complicated. Horner's edition is certainly a splendid accomplishment, but unfortunately Horner does not give us an authentic text from ancient times, only a *mélange* of different manuscripts, none of them complete.¹⁴ For the most part, he could only draw on fragments from manuscripts. Furthermore, he could not select from among them a group which is sufficiently uniform in terms of period and character to offer the best readings of a "real" redaction. Nevertheless, Horner's edition is based mainly on a group of consistent codices — or rather, fragments of them — taken from a single source, the ancient library of the White Monastery, and all of the same period, the eighth and ninth centuries.¹⁵ In general,

¹⁰ Cp. Steindorff, *op. cit.* (note 5).

¹¹ The first extensive treatment in P. E. Kahle, *Bala'izah*, London 1954, vol. I p. 193-290; the study of the language of the Nag Hammadi texts has now given new impulse to this research.

¹² G. Horner, *The Coptic Version of the New Testament in the Northern Dialect*, Oxford 1898-1905 (4 vols.; rep. Osnabrück 1969).

¹³ R. Kasser, *Papyrus Bodmer III* (C.S.C.O. 177-178), Louvain 1958. Id., *L'Évangile selon s. Jean et les versions coptes*, Neuchâtel 1966. H. Quecke, "Ein altes bohairisches Fragment des Jakobusbriefes", *Orientalia* 43 (1974) 382-392.

¹⁴ G. Horner, *The Coptic Version of the New Testament in the Southern Dialect*, Oxford 1911-1924 (6 vols.; rep. Osnabrück 1969). On its deficiencies, cp. Kahle, *op. cit.* (note 11) p. 14.

¹⁵ The fragments from the White Monastery, whose writing appears to belong to the VIth and even the Vth or IVth cent., are very rare, and may be considered as exceptions.

his work represents the standardized version of the classical Coptic age and milieu (Upper Egypt after the sixth century). It is highly useful, even though it is wanting in two respects, for which Horner cannot be blamed. For one thing, in his time (1900-1905), there was no complete codex for each book of the New Testament. The momentous discoveries of very old and other codices containing complete books only occurred after his work had been published. The relatively late codices found in Hamuli in 1910, now in the J. P. Morgan Library in New York,¹⁶ would have filled most of the lacunae he was obliged to leave. At about the same time, the complete text of the Acts as well as several books of the Old Testament were found in an excellent fourth-century codex, now in the British Museum.¹⁷ Twenty years later, several codices taken from the Monastery of Jeremiah at Saqqara, now in the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin, yielded a number of texts dating back to the sixth century.¹⁸ Later the Bodmer codices provided more complete texts written in the fourth century;¹⁹ to them have been added the Barcelona Gospels of Mark and Luke, both likewise of the fourth century.²⁰ Almost all of these codices have been edited; the codex edition of the Acts in the British Museum, however, leaves much to be desired, while those in the Chester Beatty Library have been edited only by means of an apparatus of variants.

Thus far, the study of these codices has not gone beyond a scrutiny of the language used in each text, while a comparison of the different texts in a new critical work is urgently needed.²¹ The philological problems, which cannot be met without the help of a critical edition, should be given priority if we want to establish the relative periods and history of the Biblical versions. To give a brief summary of the work accomplished thus far, we must review a number of closely interrelated problems and the various methods of solving them, which

¹⁶ Cp. H. Hyvernat, "The J. P. Morgan collection of Coptic Manuscripts", *Journ. of Bibl. Lit.* 31 (1912) 54-7; id., *A Checklist of Coptic Manuscripts in the P. Morgan Library*, New York 1919.

¹⁷ Ed. E. A. W. Budge, *Coptic Biblical Texts*, London 1912. Cp. H. Thompson, *The New Biblical Papyrus*, London (private) 1913; O. Von Lemm, *Koptische Miscellen*, repr. Leipzig 1972, p. 525-532.

¹⁸ Cp. T. Orlandi, "Les manuscrits coptes de Dublin, du British Museum et de Vienne", *Le Muséon* 86 (1976) 323-338.

¹⁹ Ed. R. Kasser, *Papyrus Bodmer XIX*, Cologne-Genève 1962, and cp. note 13.

²⁰ Ed. H. Quecke, *Das Markusevangelium saïdisch*, Barcelona 1972; the text of Luke in print.

²¹ A new edition is expected from the *équipe* working in Münster (Institut für ntl. Textforschung).

have never been clearly differentiated. I shall try to simplify this issue, although at the risk of being somewhat imprecise.

The problems thus far outlined are : the origin of the Coptic language as an instrument of literature; the evolution of the Coptic literary dialects and their interrelations; the origin of the Coptic versions of the Bible, unanimously recognized as the first examples of the Coptic literary language; and the relationships of the different versions in the different dialects. For the most part, two methods have been adopted toward clarifying these questions : one, linguistic research to determine the period of the dialects and/or the Biblical versions, and the interrelationships of the dialects; and two, philological research with approximately the same purpose, beginning with a comparison between the Greek and Coptic texts. The older studies, which followed mainly the philological approach, were so hindered by the lack of solid evidence that they retain little real value for us today.²² Within the recent past, the most valid efforts to arrive at a new solution on the basis of new material were put forth by Kasser,²³ whose controversial theories, which he often modified in subsequent essays, are the most interesting and important for us.

Other recent studies, especially those carried out by Koole and Jousens,²⁴ deal with two problems together, although they should be treated separately : the interrelation of the manuscripts and the versions in different dialects within the limits of the Coptic evidence; and the relationships between the many Coptic versions and the evidence in the Greek tradition.²⁵ This point has not yet been satisfactorily evaluated in the dispute that pitted Kasser against Weigandt and Mink. Kasser has attempted to solve the problem involving the connections between the Coptic versions and their history by taking a

²² The best statement in H. Von Soden, *Die Schriften des Neuen Testaments, Teil I*, Berlin 1902-1910 (done by J. Leiboldt), Abt. 1 p. 1478-1492; Abt. 3 p. 1674-1681; 1863-1867; 1955-1962. Cp. also G. Horner, *op. cit.* (note 14) vol. III p. 386-390; B. M. Metzger, "A Survey of Recent Research on the Ancient Versions of the New Testament", *New Test. Studies* 2 (1955-6) 1-25; B. M. Metzger, *The Early Versions of the NT*, Oxford 1977, 99-152.

²³ *Op. cit.* (note 13) p. 7-27; Id. "Les dialectes coptes et les versions coptes bibliques", *Biblica* 46 (1965) 287-310; Id., "Le Papyrus Bodmer III et les versions bibliques coptes", *Le Muséon* 74 (1961) 423-433.

²⁴ J. L. Koole, *Studien zum koptischen Bibeltext*, Berlin 1936. A. Jousens, *Die koptische Versionen der Apostelgeschichte*, Bonn 1969.

²⁵ On this distinction, cp. A. Böhlig, *Untersuchungen über die Koptischen Proverbientexte*, Stuttgart 1936, p. 35 (speaking about the Old Testament); Kahle, *op. cit.* (note 11) p. 13; Kasser, *op. cit.* (note 13) p. 14-15; G. Mink, "Die alten Uebersetzungen des Neuen Testaments", in : *Arbeiten zur neutestamentlichen Textforschung*, vol. V, Berlin-New York 1972, p. 160-299.

linguistic rather than philological standpoint and tracing statistical calculations — for example, words borrowed from the Greek. Convinced that his conclusions are correct, he has made specific statements on them, most recently in his last contributions on the Coptic dialects,²⁶ which Weigandt has rejected.²⁷ I shall not discuss the details of the argument except to say that it is probably the only attempt made so far to solve this sort of problem.

As for the philological approach, Mink deserves to be cited²⁸ rather than the contributors who preceded him, and we can only agree with his criticism of their work. But his own work is not entirely acceptable, in my opinion,²⁹ because it aims to ascertain the Greek substrata of the available Coptic reading. This presupposes, of course, that there is only one reading which derives directly from a Greek original chosen by the translator or translators. But at the present stage of research, we cannot verify this. Instead, we must remember that we have nothing more than a few readings which belong to some stage of the tradition but not the definitive Coptic version. Moreover, in that same stage, it is by no means certain that the reading is actually based on a Greek original. The Coptic version itself, in fact, appears to have a complex history, beginning with probably one Greek manuscript, perhaps more than one. In any event, this first translation was repeatedly revised, but whether from other Greek manuscripts or simply for purposes of style we do not know.³⁰ These revisions could have been made from some Coptic text without reference to other Greek manuscripts simply to improve the Coptic form without any intention of improving on the original Greek. Thus, the preliminary work in this field should trace, as far as possible, the history of the single Coptic versions, their comparative periods, their origin and interrelations. If we try to insert the Coptic version in general into the great tradition of the Greek families, we shall see that it can easily be identified with one of them. But at the same time, it is obvious that, at this point, the crucial problems concern single readings, which cannot be studied without that preliminary work. Therefore, the statements made in the

²⁶ Cp. note 23.

²⁷ P. Weigandt, "Zur Geschichte der koptischen Bibelübersetzungen", *Biblica* 50 (1960) 80-95.

²⁸ *Op. cit.* (note 25).

²⁹ Cp. also R. Kasser, "Réflexions sur quelques méthodes d'étude des versions coptes néotestamentaires", *Biblica* 55 (1974) 233-256.

³⁰ Cp. our review of Quecke (*cit. note 20*) in *Studia Papyrologica*, 12 (1973) 105-110.

past³¹ can still be considered reliable, but only if we do not go into details. Not a single Greek reading can be justified on the basis of a Coptic version; we can only say that one or another Greek family circulated in Egypt.

More discouraging is the present status of the Old Testament. The scholar cannot achieve a synthetic view of the extant manuscripts more recent than those on Vaschalde's (and Till's) list; therefore, a provisional edition with a complete text and a list of the manuscripts consulted is necessary, at least for the most important books available to us in the Sahidic tongue.³² The Bohairic text is in better shape, but it has far less importance because it is more recent. As for the philological problems, there are several interesting studies, such as Böhlig's work on the text of the Proverbs,³³ Grossouw's on the Minor Prophets³⁴ and one by Barthélemy.³⁵ These authors are highly aware of the principles to which we have alluded for the New Testament.³⁶ Nevertheless, we do not yet have any evaluation of some important codices, such as those of Deuteronomy.³⁷

Patristic literature presents no major problem if we define it as the literature produced by the great Church Fathers and exclude the original Coptic texts which appeared during and after the sixth century. Most Coptic patristic literature consisted of translations from the Greek, chiefly for the benefit of the monks. It was part of the "international" patristic movement of the fourth and fifth centuries, which originated in Alexandria and spread throughout Egypt.³⁸ The only exceptions are the works of Pachomius and his direct disciples, of which recently-discovered fragments are now under study.³⁹ The translations are

³¹ Cp. note 22.

³² An example of doubtful usefulness: W. Kosack, *Proverbia Salomonis (Vetus Testamentum copticum, Band I)*, Bonn 1973.

³³ Cp. note 25.

³⁴ W. Grossouw, *The Coptic Versions of the Minor Prophets*, Rome 1938.

³⁵ D. Barthélemy, *Les devanciers d'Aquila*, Leiden 1963 (= *Suppl. to Vetus Testamentum*, X), especially p. 228-238.

³⁶ Cp. Böhlig (*op. cit.*, note 25) p. 35; Grossouw (*op. cit.* note 34) p. 120.

³⁷ We have two codexes of the IVth cent. (BM Or. 7594, cp. note 17; and P. Bodmer XVIII, ed. Kasser, *Cologny-Genève* 1962) and a complete one of the IXth cent. (Morg. 566, photogr. ed. vol. I).

³⁸ For a list of coptic patristic texts, see T. Orlandi, *Elementi di Lingua e letteratura copta*, Milano 1970; Id., "Patristica greca e patristica copta", *Vetera Christianorum*, 10 (1973) 327-341; M. Geerard, *Clavis Patrum Graecorum*, vol. II, Tournhout 1974.

³⁹ L.Th. Lefort, *Oeuvres de S. Pachôme et de ses disciples*, Louvain 1965 (C.S.C.O. 159-160); H. Quecke, *Die Briefe Pachoms*, Regensburg 1975; the edition of new texts by Pachomius and Horsiesi is in preparation.

useful for investigating the diffusion in Egypt of the Greek Fathers' works, poorly documented from the contemporary remains of Greek works,⁴⁰ also for checking the Greek manuscript tradition. I cannot mention a single study, however, that aims to insert Coptic translations into the families of Greek manuscripts. This branch of research would indeed yield significant results, especially if it were carried out together with allied research into the other older Oriental traditions — Syrian, Armenian and Georgian.

The inherent value of this category of texts lies entirely within the "international" development of patristic literature. Unfortunately, for reasons deriving from the religious temperament of the Egyptian masses, we shall not find the great works of the Fathers translated into Coptic but only some of their less important homilies and spiritual treatises addressed to the monks.⁴¹

The one serious gap in our study of the Coptic patristic texts is their attribution. Literary forgeries were common to the literature of the entire ancient world,⁴² but they were especially prevalent in Coptic literature. Nowhere can we trust the indications assigned to the texts by the copyists; if any of them are accurate, it is only by good fortune. To tackle this problem, we must begin by taking into due consideration the unique evolution of the Coptic literary tradition which, in its final stage, sought to compile a complete collection of "homilies"⁴³ attributed to the most eminent Fathers, sometimes to fictitious "fathers". These homilies were read on appropriate occasions during the liturgical year. The Coptic redactors chose whatever text they thought most suitable for a given event, but seldom left it in its original form. They omitted passages, pieced together others and changed the author's identity, ascribing the final results to anyone they thought more worthy of the credit. Hence, we come upon a fairly consistent group of texts, apparently in good order and ready to be studied as they stand or else rejected *en bloc* as totally uninteresting, yet consisting of heterogeneous segments of literary works. This matter, I am afraid, has never been openly declared, even though scholars have generally distrusted the attributions marked in the titles of Coptic

⁴⁰ Cp. J. van Haelst, *Catalogue des Papyrus littéraires juifs et chrétiens*, Paris 1976 (especially n. 568-620, Apocr.; n. 621-701, Patrist.; n. 702-715, Hagiogr.).

⁴¹ Cp. T. Orlandi, "Patristica greca" etc., *op. cit.* (note 38).

⁴² Cp. W. Speyer, *Die literarische Fälschung im heidnischen und christlichen Altertum*, München 1971.

⁴³ The same may be said for the Acts of the Saints; cp. *infra*.

texts, yet have taken account of them, which, in my view, is a mistake,⁴⁴ except for codices pre-dating the eighth century and certain special cases.⁴⁵ Of all the homilies in the Hamulī codices, to give an example, only nine have been correctly attributed to the following: John III of Alexandria; Ephrem Syrus; Athanasius (Vita Antonii); John of Shmun; Stephen of Shmun; Basil of Oxyrhynchus; Severus of Antioch (much changed); and Constantine of Assiut.⁴⁶

No better than this situation in the Hamulī codices, if not worse, is the case of the library which was discovered practically intact in the ancient Nubian settlement near Edfu, now in the British Museum.

In view of this evidence, much of the editors' previous studies on the authenticity of the Coptic homilies must be revised on the basis of a new approach to the general problems of Coptic literary history and in accordance with the information we shall have from the study of the texts yet to be edited. Indeed, today our perspective of the Coptic patristic texts is undergoing profound transformations; and although we may not be able to identify the true authors of spurious homilies, we can now more nearly approximate the era in which they were forged — during the century following the Arab conquests or shortly thereafter. Thus, though we lose hopes that we shall discover a Coptic literature of the fourth and fifth centuries apart from the monastic,⁴⁷ and perhaps even translations of unknown Greek writings dating back to that period, we are beginning to draw an outline of Coptic literature in the seventh and eighth centuries which may prove to be more interesting, especially if it gives us illuminating information on the history of the Coptic people.

The final questions are these: First, is it possible that the great Egyptian Fathers — Peter, Athanasius, Theophilus, Cyril and Dioscorus — preached in the Coptic tongue, and that any Coptic texts attributed to them might tell us something about their "popular" activities?⁴⁸ I think not. Secondly, is it possible to find somewhere

⁴⁴ It happens that some doubts about the authenticity have been left, where the coptic indication had to be dismissed altogether; and this has passed into the Patrologies, generating some confusion.

⁴⁵ For instance, the Chrysostomic anthologies and the texts by Shenute.

⁴⁶ Some homilies attributed to Peter of Alexandria and Theophilus of Alexandria may be authentic only in part.

⁴⁷ The monastic works by Pachomius and his disciples and Shenute and Besa are generally known for a long time.

⁴⁸ Cp. the opinion of L. Th. Lefort, "S. Athanase écrivain copte", *Le Muséon* 46 (1933) 1-33.

in the Coptic texts, for which no Greek exemplar exists, some forgotten text by a Greek Father? Again, no move has been made in this direction,⁴⁹ and our research has turned up only one or two possibly authentic works for each of the great Fathers in a Coptic tradition we have thoroughly investigated — Basil, Athanasius, Theophilus, John Chrysostomus, Cyril, Dioscorus and Theodosius.

In the realm of hagiography, texts may be divided into three classifications, each easily distinguishable: the martyrdoms, the lives of the monks and the apocryphal acts of Christ's kin and disciples. All three are marked by problems very similar to those of patristic literature; however, for a number of reasons, these subjects have been studied longer and more extensively. Here, too, editions of many texts are sorely needed, as well as a complete catalogue of those available.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, the early publication of hagiographic collections, such as those of Hyvernat;⁵¹ the attention promptly given to the Arab Synaxary,⁵² which led to important studies, for example the one by Amélineau;⁵³ and the fact that the problems of Greek hagiography, studied much earlier by the Bollandists, were very similar — these three motivations have combined to advance this sector further than any other part of Coptic studies. The martyrdoms in particular have been the object of profound, if still incomplete, investigations, notably in the book by Delehaye (published in 1922, but still indispensable),⁵⁴ who studied both the historical value of the Coptic Passions and their literary characteristics. In Baumeister's recent volume,⁵⁵ the author examines specific literary figures more thoroughly. The path is clearly indicated; it only needs to be broadened and extended.⁵⁶

I am sure that we know fairly well how the texts were conceived and written by some unknown school of Egyptian writers;⁵⁷ however,

⁴⁹ Cp. however the important contribute by C. U. Crimi, "La paternità atanasiana di un testo ad virgines", *Le Muséon* 86 (1973) 521-524.

⁵⁰ We are preparing the *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Coptica* for the Bollandists' Series.

⁵¹ H. Hyvernat, *Les actes des martyrs de l'Égypte*, Paris 1886-7; G. Balestri-H. Hyvernat, *Acta Martyrum*, repr. Louvain 1955, 4 vols. (C.S.C.O. 43, 44, 86, 125).

⁵² The same Synaxary could give important notices also for the patristic texts, but it is generally neglected from this point of view.

⁵³ E. Amélineau, *Les actes des martyrs de l'Église copte*, Paris 1890.

⁵⁴ H. Delehaye, "Les martyrs d'Égypte", *Anal. Boll.* 40 (1922) 5-154 and 299-364.

⁵⁵ Th. Baumeister, *Martyr Invictus*, Münster 1972.

⁵⁶ Cp. also Amélineau (*op. cit.* note 53); H. Galtier, "Les actes de Victor fils de Romanos", *Bull. Inst. Franc. Arch. Or.* 4 (1905) 127-140; E. O. Winstedt, *Coptic Texts on Saint Theodore the General*, London-Oxford 1910; J. W. B. Barns - E. A. E. Reymond, *Four Martyrdoms from the P. Morgan Coptic Codices*, Oxford 1973, p. 3-4.

⁵⁷ Delehaye (*op. cit.* note 54, p. 149-154) was rather of the opinion that those writers were Alexandrian Greeks.

we must still find out when and why. The process may have been a long one, perhaps extending over several centuries. Be that as it may, we should give due consideration to the historical conditions that prevailed in Egypt during the entire evolution of Coptic literature from the fifth to the ninth centuries, not only in the period of Diocletian's persecutions and shortly thereafter. We know that the anonymous Coptic authors who wrote most of the hagiographic texts in the so called "epic" genre worked on the basis of a cyclical nature, much like their colleagues who wrote the homilies. We also know the most outstanding of them, described by Delehayé: the cycle of Arianus, the prefect; the cycle of Basilides, the great military general; the cycle of Julius of Aqfahs, foremost chronicler of the martyrs. These cycles are much more complicated than their homiletic counterparts and, since they are widely ramified, they are difficult to follow. For example, one text can be part of more than one cycle; characters from one may be carried over to others. Apparently the hagiographic cycles found greater favor with the public than the homiletic, and they were produced during a longer period. In any event, if we wish to acquire a sound knowledge of Coptic literature, we must determine the comparative periods of all the texts, single out those used as models — perhaps relatively old and written originally in Greek — and find out about their different redactional strata. Some cycles were, of course, older than others. The Arianus one may well have had its roots in the hagiographic production of the fifth and sixth centuries (in Greek), while the Basilides cycle was contemporary with the homiletic.

Apart from the cycles, we find translated accounts of early Greek martyrdoms, already studied both for the Greek manuscripts and history. Even if a Greek original is lost, in most cases it is not difficult to establish its existence and thereby salvage an item of Greek tradition, generally typically Egyptian in origin, such as the martyrdom of Coluthus.⁵⁸

Quite different are the lives of the monks, which usually refer to the era following the Chalcedonian rebellions. A few attempts have been put forth to evaluate the texts,⁵⁹ but the results are still provisional because of their dubious reconstruction. Here again, the question of editing them is a matter of paramount importance; and once this work is done, it is likely that a new and interesting portrait of monastic

⁵⁸ Barns-Reymond, *op. cit.* (note 56) p. 8-19.

⁵⁹ The most important by P. van Cauwenbergh, *Etude sur les moines d'Egypte depuis le concile de Chalcedoine (451) jusqu'à l'invasion arabe (640)*, Paris 1914 (repr. Milano 1973).

life in the Valley of the Nile during the fifth and sixth centuries will come to light. Moreover, it will refresh our memories of the careers — or rather the legends — of such monks as Achellides and John of the Golden Evangiles, whose literary traits must be discussed together with those of other Coptic novels, as well as the periods in which these men did their writing.

The numerous collections of *miracula* attributed to many saints — or rather to their relics and sanctuaries — generally include late compositions, which reveal many specific aspects of Coptic life in the eighth and ninth centuries; this sector, however, still remains to be explored. Like the patristic texts, the Apocryphal Acts are interesting mainly as philology, but we must distinguish them from the narratives woven into the homilies. They should be studied along with the homiletic texts and their problems.

As we have seen, in every literary genre we find a jumble of translations, original works and revisions. Fortunately, however, we possess a series of texts written beyond all doubt in Coptic, by Coptic writers for the Coptic people. These should, of course, provide the foundation on which to build the history of Coptic literature. But this study is only in its infancy, and there is much to be done, both editorially and critically. To begin with, we have the pachomian texts which, in the wake of various new discoveries, have assumed a leading role.⁶⁰ Hitherto, many of these texts, which Lefort collected for his edition,⁶¹ seemed of doubtful authenticity for various reasons; and while others appeared to be genuine, still scholars were unwilling to probe further than their contents. But now we have fragments of letters by Pachomius in the original Coptic, and no less than three almost complete letters by Horsiesi. These texts enable us to confirm the authenticity of the material we already know. They are the very first examples of literature written in the Coptic language; and, if they are not particularly interesting as literature, certainly they are extremely valuable for our research.

In addition, we have the works of Shenute, which have not yet a satisfactory edition. After some attempts done at the beginning of the century, they emerged briefly from oblivion with a theological contribution by Lefort and a few articles by Du Bourguet.⁶² Today,

⁶⁰ Cp. note 39.

⁶¹ *Op. cit.* (note 39).

⁶² L. Th. Lefort, "Catéchèse Christologique de Chenoute", *Zeitschr. für Aegypt. Sprache* 80 (1955) 40-45. P. Du Bourguet, "Entretien de Chenouté ...", *Bull. Inst.*

scholars have renewed their interest in them, but almost exclusively for their grammatical content, though a few unedited fragments have been published.⁶³ But who will take on the task of editing Shenute where Leipoldt, Crum and Amélineau left off?⁶⁴ Who will treat their stylistic qualities and historical value? Unfortunately, for the present there is no response to this call.

With Kuhn's edition of Besa's works, this disciple, heir and biographer of Shenute is better known to us.⁶⁵ However, he is a colorless personality by comparison with his predecessor, and the literary quality of his output has never aroused any interest. Contrarily, the rich store of texts written after Shenute in the Theodosian anti-Chalcedonian monastic circles is still in a state of confusion. These texts were probably written in Coptic rather than Greek, but we must await a complete edition of the fragments before we can arrive at a final judgment of them. Such an edition is now being prepared by dottoressa Campagnano.⁶⁶

From an examination of many studies and publications, it would seem fair to conclude that the time in which the patriarch Damianus lived was the truly classical age of Sahidic Coptic literature. Here, finally, we have a group of well-attested authors, whose lives and literary production we know, as well as the historical circumstances in which they worked.⁶⁷ Most prominent of them was Pistentius of

Franc. Arch. Or. 55(1956)65-109; Id., "Entretien de Chenouté ...", *ibid.*, 57 (1958) 99-142; Id., "Diatribes de Chenouté ...", *Bull. Soc. Arch. Copte* 16 (1961-2) 17-72.

⁶³ E. Lucchesi, *Etude du nom dans la langue copte de Shenoute*, (Mémoire présenté à la Faculté des Lettres de l'Univ. de Fribourg, Suisse, pour obtenir le titre de licencié ès Lettres) pro manuscripto, 1973; A. Shisha-Halevy, "Two New Shenoute-Texts", *Orientalia* 44 (1975) 149-185; Id., "Unpublished Shenoutiana", *Enchoria* 5 (1975) 53-108.

⁶⁴ The two main existing editions of Shenutean texts were begun about the same time, by Amélineau, who worked mainly on the fragments of the Borgia collection in Naples (*Oeuvres de Shenoudi*, Paris 1907-14, in six fascicules) and by Leipoldt, with the assiduous help of Crum, who worked mainly on the fragments in Paris (*Sinuthii Archimandritae vita et opera omnia*, repr. Louvain 1952-1960, C.S.C.O. 42, 73, 96 [by H. Wieseman], 108 [by H. Wieseman]). Both editions were not finished; Leipoldt's one is much more accurate, Amélineau's has more texts (the texts being different in the two editions). The common deficiency consists in the lack of a previous attempt to reconstruct the codexes, and therefore the fragmentary works preserved in them.

⁶⁵ *Letters and Sermons of Besa*, Louvain 1956, C.S.C.O. 157/158.

⁶⁶ The edition of the life of Abraham of Pbow in the Morgan collection is being prepared by K.H. Kuhn.

⁶⁷ G. Garitte, "Constantin, évêque d'Assiout", in: *Coptic Studies in Honor of W.E. Crum*, Boston 1950, p. 287-304; Id., "Panégyrique de s. Antoine par Jean, évêque d'Hermopolis", *Orient. Christ. Per.* 9 (1943), 100-131, 330-365; Id., "Rufus, évêque de Sotep", *Le Muséon* 59 (1956) 11-33; W.E. Crum (& Winlock), *The Monastery of*

Keft, whose ecclesiastical achievements were revealed to us from the discovery of his priceless archives near the Monastery of Epiphanius,⁶⁸ in the vicinity of Thebes. It is regrettable, however, that the documents have not yet been collected in a single publication, which would facilitate our study of them and enable us to make comparisons with the Coptic and Arab lives. Other literary documents give us information, but scantier, on Constantine of Assiut, John of Shmun, John of Paralos and Rufus of Shotep, from whom we have inherited significant works of varying character, almost all available in modern editions.⁶⁹ Only a critical study of them is wanting. Meanwhile, we can offer several pertinent general comments on them. In form and style, these writers were influenced by examples of classical Greek rhetoric, filtered through patristic literature. The literary genres they cultivated included the homily, the miracle collections and Biblical exegesis. They wrote in the purest Sahidic,⁷⁰ tempered by the Greek vocabulary, no doubt because they also spoke Greek. They followed closely the social and ecclesiastical problems of their time, which explains the choice of their subjects and the literary controversies they provoked. But we are still far from an exhaustive evaluation of their literary commitments.

Much the same can be said of later examples of Coptic literature, written by Benjamin of Alexandria, Isaac of Qalamun, Agathon and John III of Alexandria, Mena of Pshati, Zacharias of Shkow and Marc of Alexandria. Their works have been satisfactorily edited, but the literary study, especially comparative, is still in an early stage.

At the time of Damianus or shortly after, schools of writers devised fantastic legends around a number of saints and martyrs.⁷¹ I believe these to be the chief source of the vast amount of Coptic pseudepigrapha that has discouraged various scholars. A new approach to these texts should be adopted. It is futile to search them in the hope of finding witnesses to actual events that occurred in the fourth and

Epiphanius at Thebes, New York 1926, vol. I; T. Orlandi, *Elementi*, *op. cit.* (note 38) p. 97-106.

⁶⁸ Cp. W. E. Crum, *op. cit.* (note 67) p. 223-231.

⁶⁹ Only the fragments of Rufus, carefully listed by Garitte (*cit. note 67*) wait for an editor.

⁷⁰ The fayumisms that we find in the texts are introduced by the the fayumic scribes of our codexes.

⁷¹ We refer to the "cycles" of Athanasius, Basil of Caesarea in Lazica, Theophilus building temples, John Chrysostomus in Thracia; and the hagiographic ones of Basilides the general and Julius of Aqfahs.

fifth centuries, or references to contemporary texts forgotten in the Greek tradition. Rather, in studying this category of works, we should seek illumination on the nature of life in Egypt in the eighth and ninth centuries and the religious, political and social conditions that obtained in that era. Launching an investigation of the texts, we should set apart the indications marked in the texts but compare their contents to single out points of contact and some kind of genealogy. From the new evidence we should learn how the Coptic mind responded to the problems that existed during the eighth and ninth centuries. Such an approach to these texts is almost entirely new. Indeed, the studies I have developed until now along these lines indicate a promise of rich rewards in the future.⁷²

I have covered some of the methodological and general problems the scholar of Coptic literature must face; but in view of the retarded state of Coptology today, he will be obliged to function primarily as a Coptic editor for a very long time. He cannot shrug off this preliminary work because too many texts — although not as many as one might think — await publication. For this reason, he will be obliged to acquire general information on the manuscripts and the places where they are presently conserved. However humble and difficult he may find this work, it cannot be neglected. A growing knowledge of Coptic manuscript collections and the history of their discoveries has helped us and other scholars enormously in formulating a broader awareness and gaining new insights into Coptic literature in general.

Unfortunately, Coptic manuscript collections are not very well known; furthermore, they do not lend themselves to rapid evaluation. The major difficulty besetting this discipline is not the limited number of people interested in it, very few indeed, but the fact that sometimes those who are exclude their colleagues from their activities. A scholar inclines to believe that no one besides himself will care particularly about a collection he is working on, therefore he keeps it to himself and holds back publication of the material for a considerable length of time. At the same time, the material could be valuable to some other scholar who is totally unaware that it even exists. Also, specialists often fail to realize that excerpts from one collection should be studied together with companion excerpts from other collections; thus, valuable opportunities are lost, and progress is hampered. No one should under-

⁷² We should also mention the Coptic poetry which however has some problems of its own, not primarily literary, because it is generally very late; it is based on preceding prose texts; and it was meant for specific liturgical use.

take to edit a work without making the effort to find other manuscripts that offer parallels or additions to the text, or that are at least related to it, whether edited or not. Such a system, however, would require a general knowledge of the material contained in all other collections of Coptic manuscripts.

In this possible? The prospect is discouraging because for some collections no catalogues exist, not even hand-written lists in the libraries. Yet, the situation is not altogether hopeless. For a beginning, there are two lists of libraries that keep Coptic manuscripts. One list, by Père Simon, is somewhat old.⁷³ The other, by Pearson, is more recent, but it covers only Europe and America.⁷⁴ They are by no means complete but, at this point in our research, if some minor collections are overlooked, this is no serious matter. The Coptic editor might be content simply to enquire about the collections listed, but he will run into trouble if he needs information on them — unless, of course, he can go to one or another of the libraries. But again, the problem is not a desperate one. The bulk of many collections consists of sheets detached from the codices of the White Monastery Library; the scholar must find out what and where they are. I have discussed this matter in an article,⁷⁵ and through further work most of the fragments, except for the Biblical and liturgical, have been almost completely catalogued. Even if the catalogue is not yet available in print the scholar can still acquire the information he needs. Leaving now the White Monastery problem, I have counted 32 main libraries that hold Coptic literary manuscripts, and the material available in 25 of them is fairly, if not very, well known. Of the 25, 12 maintain good catalogues, namely :

Leipzig : J. Leiboldt, "Verzeichnis der koptischen Handschriften," in : *Katalog der Handschriften der Universitätsbibliothek zu Leipzig*, vol. 2, Leipzig 1906, pp. 383-427. Cp. also W. E. Crum, "Hagiographica from Leipzig Manuscripts," *Proc. Soc. Bibl. Arch.* 29 (1907) 289-96, 301-307; H. G. Evelyn-White, *New Coptic Texts from the Monastery of Saint Macarius [complementary to the Leipzig ones]*, New York 1926.

London, British Library (British Museum) : W. E. Crum, *Catalogue of the Coptic Manuscripts in the British Museum*, London 1905; T. Orlandi (cp. *supra*, note 18).

⁷³ J. Simon, "Répertoire des bibliothèques publiques et privées contenant des manuscrits coptes", *Le Muséon* 44 (1931) 137-151.

⁷⁴ J. D. Pearson, *Oriental Manuscripts in Europe and North America*, Zug 1971.

⁷⁵ T. Orlandi, "Un projet milanais [now in Rome!] concernant les manuscrits coptes du Monastère Blanc", *Le Muséon* 85 (1972) 403-413.

- Manchester** : W. E. Crum, *Catalogue of the Coptic Manuscripts in the Collection of the John Rylands Library*, Manchester 1909; Id., "New Coptic Manuscripts...", *Bull. J. Ryl. Library* 5 (1919-20) 497-503. W. C. Till, "Die nicht-katalogisierten Coptica der J.R.L.", *Das Antiquariat* 8 (1952) 13-18.
- Dublin** : T. Orlandi (cp. *supra*, note 18).
- Rome**, Vatican Library : G. Zoega, *Catalogus codicum copticorum...*, Roma 1810 (repr. Leipzig 1903; Hildesheim-New York 1972); J. M. Sauget, "Introduction historique et notes bibliographiques au catalogue de Zoega," *Le Muséon* 85 (1972) 25-63. A. Hebbelynck-A. van Lantschoot, *Codices coptici Vaticani Barberiniani Borgiani Rossiani*, Roma 1937 sqq.
- Naples**, Biblioteca Nazionale : the same catalogue by Zoega (cp. *supra*); A. van Lantschoot, "Cotation du fonds copte de Naples," *Le Muséon* 41 (1928) 217-24.
- Turin**, Museo Egizio : T. Orlandi, "Les papyrus coptes du Musée Egyptien de Turin," *Le Muséon* 87 (1974) 115-127.
- Leiden**, W. Pleyte - P. A. Boeser, *Manuscripts coptes du Musée d'Antiquités des Pays-Bas à Leide*, Leide 1897.
- Geneva**, Bibliotheca Bodmeriana : all the manuscripts are edited by R. Kasser, except some fragments from the Acta Pauli and one letter of Pachomius (cp. *supra* note 39).
- Leningrad**, State Library : A. I. Elanskaia, "Koptskie rukopisi Gosudarstvennoj Publichnoj Biblioteki imeni M. E. Saltykova-Ščedrina," *Palest. Sbornik* 20 (83), Leningrad 1969.
- Washington**, Freer Collection : W. H. Worrell, *The Coptic Manuscripts in the Freer Collection* [an introductory list by E. M. Husseiman], New York-London 1923, pp. ix-xiii.
- New York**, Pierpont Morgan Library : W. E. Crum, *Theological Texts from Coptic Papyri*, Oxford 1913 (Amherst collection). H. Hyvernat, *A Check List of Coptic Manuscripts in the P. Morgan Library*, New York 1919 (Hamuli codexes). One more codex in the Glazier collection (Matthew oxyrhynchite) and some White Monastery fragments.

Of other 4 libraries we have unsatisfactory catalogues or lists :

- Paris**, Bibliothèque Nationale : H. Hyvernat, E. Porcher, "Analyse des manuscrits coptes...", *Rev. d'Égyptologie* 1 (1933) 105-60, 231-78; 2 (1936) 65-123. J. B. Chabot, "Inventaire sommaire...", *Rev. des bibliothèques* 16 (1906) 351-67. L. J. Delaporte, "Catalogue sommaire...", *Rev. Orient Chrét.* II sér., 4-8 (1909-1913) *passim*.
- Vienna**, Oesterreichische Nationalbibliothek : T. Orlandi, cit. (note 18).
- Copenhagen** : L. Amundsen, "Papyri and papyrology in the Scandinavian Countries," *Chron. d'Eg.* 7 (1932) 324-331.
- Cairo**, Coptic Museum : W. E. Crum, *Coptic Monuments*, Cairo 1902. H. Munier, *Manuscripts coptes*, Cairo 1916. Moreover, the Nag Hammadi codexes.

Of other 4 libraries we personally know the content :

- Cambridge**, University Library; **Ann Arbor**, University of Michigan collection; **Barcelona**, private collection; **Mississippi** library collection.

Of other 3 libraries we have unsatisfactory notices : **Paris**, Louvre collection; **Berlin** collections, now also transported elsewhere; **Köln**, Institute of Papyrology collection.

Editors of Coptic texts will encounter still other problems. I shall dispose of one quickly, although it has been much debated in the past : the subdivision of words. This is only a technicality, which does not concern the interpretation of the text. It is superfluous to join nouns in *status nominalis* to the following noun, the verbal particles to the substantives or the prepositions to the words that follow them. The editor should endeavor to give clarity to the reading and simplify sentences for the sake of interpretation. If the transcription is not paleographic, the punctuation should be modified to conform to the system applied to modern editions of ancient Greek and Latin texts. Perhaps we should eliminate the comma and interrogation mark; the Coptic indicates a question with a syntactical device, like the second tempora or the interrogative particle. In the non-paleographic transcriptions, even the superlinear strokes can be omitted if we agree that they were used in the *scriptio continua* only to help the reader. Chapters and paragraphs should be subdivided as the Coptic translator or author intended, not according to the punctuation used in the manuscript. Of more serious import is the problem of whether a critical edition in terms of classical philology is advisable when a given text exists in two or more manuscripts. But in point of fact, the opposite is usually the case, and we find different redactions of a text which is only more or less the same. Certainly the editor should take into account all the manuscripts available to him, but without overloading the apparatus with so many variants that the reader will be unable to understand it. Either the editor can publish all the manuscripts or he can choose one for some specific purpose and give only information on the rest, thus helping other scholars to acquire a rough understanding of the main differences between the redactions in the area of language, style and content.

Another problem I wish to mention in this contribution involves the paleographic information to be given with the edition. According to customary procedure — an odd one, in my opinion — fragments published in paleographic transcriptions are accompanied by full descriptions of all the paleographic characters, whereas in the complete codices, the markings and dates, if available, appear to be sufficient,

except for Biblical manuscripts. The study of Coptic paleography is still — and will be for some time to come — the job of the editors, who should avoid the unfortunate example set by the classical scholars, who ordinarily do not consider a manuscript as a testimony worth studying individually, as a product of the culture of its time.