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The earliest known Coptic psalter

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Preface

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PREFACE.

ABOUT two years ago whilst certain Egyptian peasants were digging up and carrying away the light soil, which is so much valued for "top-dressing" by the farmers, from the ruins of an ancient Coptic church and monastery in Upper Egypt, their tools struck upon a rectangular slab of stone. An examination showed that this slab formed the cover of a stone box or coffer which had been firmly fastened in the ground, and when, after some difficulty, it was removed, a parcel of books, carefully wrapped in coarse linen cloth, was found lying beneath it. The books were two in number and, though written upon papyrus, they were found to be bound in stout leather covers, after the manner of European books in general. That these volumes had lain in the box for several hundreds of years there is no possibility of doubting, but there is no way of ascertaining the exact period when they were first placed in it. It is the opinion of some that the church and monastery which once stood upon the site where the books were found had been in ruins for some centuries, and the general appearance of the place supports this view. There is no reason for supposing that the books were buried along with the body of any ecclesiastical official or monk, for it is certain that they had been expressly written for use in the church of the monastery, and that they were not the private property of any member of it. It would seem that at some period

of trouble or persecution an official of the church carefully prepared the box in the event of its ever being necessary to hide books, and that when the need arose he wrapped these volumes in linen with the greatest care, and laid them in it. Their wonderful state of preservation testifies to the wisdom of the choice of a hiding place and the thoroughness with which he carried out the self-appointed task. That they were believed by him to be books of no ordinary kind is evident, and though it is early yet to pronounce a definite opinion upon the value of their contents, it seems clear that the discovery of a complete copy of the Psalter in the dialect of Upper Egypt, and of a volume containing ten complete Homilies by Fathers of the Monophysite Church—for such in fact are the contents of the book—bids fair to rank among the greatest of the great “finds” which have been made in Egypt during the last few years.

When the volumes first reached England the bindings were stiff in the backs, and they could only be opened with difficulty; the papyrus leaves were dry and brittle, and as they were turned particles of ink fell off them. Many leaves shewed signs of crumbling away, and to avoid any risk of losing these venerable texts which have so wonderfully survived the wreck of their ancient home, I copied both volumes throughout, and at once collated my copies with the originals. Though from many points of view, and especially from that of philology, the Book of Homilies in Coptic is of great interest, there is no doubt whatever that the complete text of the Psalter in the dialect of Upper Egypt is of greater importance to the theologian and student of Oriental versions of the Bible. With this fact in view it was decided to make the latter unique document available to all at the earliest opportunity, and Messrs. KEGAN PAUL undertook the present edition thereof. The text is printed page for page and line for line with the original, and divided words are given above the ends of the lines as in the papyrus; all “indented” lines are carefully marked, and the short lines and marks

above the letters are represented as closely as may be in type. I have, however, broken up the lines into words after the manner of PEYRON, LAGARDE, and CIASCA, and, though only in a few cases, have added (in brackets) a letter or letters, which the scribe omitted by accident. On the questions of the relation of the Coptic to a Greek text and points of comparative textual criticism I have not ventured to touch, for they can only be effectually dealt with by those who have studied Oriental versions with these objects specially in view. My aim has been to reproduce correctly the text of this venerable codex as far as possible, and to describe the book and the repairs which have been done to it, leaving all else to more competent hands.

The Coptic Psalter (Brit. Mus. MS. Oriental 5000) is a papyrus manuscript containing 156 leaves measuring $11\frac{3}{4}$ in. by $8\frac{1}{4}$ in.; at each end of the book are two blank leaves. The quires are twenty in number, and are signed with letters; each quire except the last contains eight leaves. All the pages were, originally, numbered with letters, but some were wrongly numbered; one column of text containing 31 or 32 lines (not including the titles of the Psalms which are in smaller letters) occupies each page. The handwriting is fine and bold but careful, and though the initial letter of each Psalm is accompanied by an ornamental scroll, the MS. is entirely without coloured ornament. The title of the book $\pi\chi\omega\omega\mu\epsilon\ \pi\eta\epsilon\psi\alpha\lambda\mu\omicron\varsigma$ is given at the end, but when the MS. was complete in its original form it may have stood at the beginning.

Not only the original binding of the Psalter but also several of its leaves seem to have been repaired more than once, and as far as may be gathered from its present state the history of the repairs of the MS. is as follows. The book having been expressly written for use in the church of the monastery, was much handled, a fact which is proved by the discolouration of the lower portions of the leaves. Thus several of the leaves became cracked and broken, and eventually some of these at the beginning and end of the volume came out of

the binding altogether. Later, eleven leaves were recopied, nine for the beginning of the book, and two for the end; these additions can easily be recognized by the gloss of the ink used in writing them. Several leaves were much turned or rubbed, for the ink has almost disappeared from them; these were "retouched", and others which were cracked were repaired by pasting pieces of new papyrus and pieces of leaves from old books athwart and along the cracks, and upon all such repairs the text was carefully recopied. These patches belong to two periods, and the older group has been laid on with considerable neatness. On p. $\rho\lambda\zeta$ (Plate I) is a patch which is probably contemporary with the writing of the book, for it seems that the scribe omitted two lines of the Psalm, and, in order to put them in their place, was obliged to copy eight lines in a smaller handwriting than that found on the rest of the page. Upon this patch is, however, another which belongs to the period of the first general repair of the book, as may be seen by the colour of the ink and the texture of the papyrus used. On Plate II are shewn a number of patches which belong to more than one period of patching. When the first general repair of the Psalter was contemplated it was found that the tops of all the leaves from p. $\rho\mu\Delta$ to the end had either been worn or eaten away, and with a view of strengthening these and of, at the same time, making them the same size as the earlier leaves of the book, pieces of stout papyrus were gummed upon them. At this time, too, it seems that leather "markers" were gummed upon the side edges of pp. $\rho\Delta$ and $\varsigma\varsigma$. The book, along with its old leather-covered papyrus covers, was put into new, stamped leather covers, which were provided with a limp leather flap to protect the edges of the leaves, and the back was stiffened by pieces of old vellum leaves of disused or worn out books; on the edges of the book the Coptic cross and various ornamental leaves were stamped in black. The book was prevented from opening too widely by means of a plaited leather strap fixed in

the top of each cover, and leather straps and iron holdfasts were added to keep the volume securely shut when not in use; portions of the straps and two of the iron holdfasts still remain in their places. The sides of the covers are stamped with three interlaced triangles, and annular ornaments, and floral designs, and figures of stags; within the triangles is a Coptic cross stamped in gold. The leather flap is stamped with circles having within them raised figures of the eagle, the stag or goat, the lamb, the dove, and the Coptic cross; on the back are stamped lined panels, and a diamond-shaped ornament, and annules, and circles enclosing raised figures of the dove and the eagle. On the cover, in black ink may still be traced the title of the volume:—ΠΣΩΩΜΕ ΝΝΕΨΑΛΜΟC.

The above facts will shew that this volume was considered to be a document of great importance, and that the pious person, who caused the repairs to be so carefully and at the same time so well done, estimated its value very highly. What the reason was cannot be said, but there is no doubt that its value to those interested in Coptic literature to-day is considerable, for it is, I believe, the only complete copy of the Psalter in the dialect of Upper Egypt which has come down to us. During the last hundred years, TUKI, ZOEGA, LAGARDE, PEYRON, SCHWARTZE, and MASPERO have given us portions of the Psalter in this dialect, and recently Signor CIASCA has collected and published a number of the Psalms, from the works of these scholars and elsewhere, in the second volume of his edition of the Sahidic-Coptic books of the Old Testament (*Sacrorum Bibliorum Fragmenta Copto-Sahidica Musei Borgiani*, Rome, 1889, Vol. II. pp. 69—151). But all the Psalms known from these sources do not give us a complete Psalter, and thus the present work contains the first complete text of the Sahidic-Coptic Psalter—including the apocryphal CL1st Psalm—published.

The matter of dating the Psalter is one of considerable difficulty, for we have no fixed points in Coptic palaeography to serve

for purposes of comparison. The shape and size and general appearance of the pages of the older portion in every respect suggest that the volume cannot have been written after the end of the VIIth century of our era, but it seems to me that the date when it was written lies nearer the beginning than the end of that century; it may, indeed, quite well be placed at the end of the VIth century. When the book had been in use some time it was put aside for some purpose, probably because of its defective condition, and it was not brought into use again until after it had been repaired and rebound; the style of the covers, I am informed, suggests the XIth or XIIth century as the period of the general repair of the book. The Book of Homilies which was found in the stone box along with the Psalter does not, in any way, help us to fix its date, for the papyrus, and the writing, and the binding thereof prove that the date at which it was copied is later than that of the copying of the Psalter.

As it is probable that some curiosity will be felt to know what the contents of the Book of Homilies are, I append a brief description of it; the complete texts will be published at the earliest possible opportunity.

The Book of Homilies (Brit. Mus. Oriental 5001) is a papyrus manuscript containing 173 leaves measuring $12\frac{3}{4}$ in., by $9\frac{1}{4}$ in. The quires are twenty-two in number, and are signed with letters; each quire, except the last, contains eight leaves. All the pages were, originally, numbered with letters, but most of these have been rubbed away; two columns of text, containing each from 23 to 25 lines, occupy each page. This volume formed, probably, the second part of a great collection of the writings of Fathers of the Monophysite Church, for the first page is numbered $\rho\pi\alpha$, *i. e.*, 281, so therefore at least fourteen quires of eight leaves preceded it. The handwriting is large, bold, and fine, and suggests that the Homilies were copied in the VIIIth century of our era. The stamped leather binding is, I believe, not contemporary work, for it seems rather to belong to

the period of the XIth or XIIth century. The Homilies are as follows:—

I. Homily of JOHN, Bishop of Constantinople. οὔλογος εἰς τὰς πόλιν ἀπὸ ἰωάννου ἀρχιεπισκόπου ἡκωνσταντινουπόλεως ἐστὶ μετάνοια μὴ τεκράτια. [p. pπα]

II. Exposition of JOHN, Bishop of Constantinople. ὁμοίως οὕτως ἡκωνσταντινουπόλεως ἐστὶ συγγραμμάτων τμημάτων..... [p. pια]

III. Discourse by ATHANASIUS, Archbishop of Alexandria. ἀθανάσιος ἀρχιεπίσκοπος ἡρακότε ἐκ τῆς πόλεως ἀλεξάνδρειας μὴ πρὸς. [p. cpmη]

IV. Discourse by Saint THEOPHILUS. οὔλογος ἡκωνσταντινουπόλεως ἐστὶ μετάνοια μὴ τεκράτια ἀλλὰ ὅτι ἐστὶν ἐν τῇ πόλει ἀμελεία ἐκ τῆς πόλεως ἐκ τῆς πόλεως. [p. κ]

V. Discourse by ATHANASIUS, Archbishop of Alexandria. οὔλογος εἰς τὰς πόλιν ἀπὸ ἀθανασίου ἀρχιεπισκόπου ἡρακότε ἐκ τῆς πόλεως ἀλεξάνδρειας ἐκ τῆς πόλεως ἐκ τῆς πόλεως. [p. α]

VI. Homily by PROCLUS, Bishop of Cyzicus. ὁμοίως ὁμοίως εἰς τὰς πόλιν ἀπὸ προκλίου ἐπισκόπου ἡκωνσταντινουπόλεως ἐκ τῆς πόλεως ἐκ τῆς πόλεως. [p. κγ]

VII. Homily by PROCLUS, Bishop of Cyzicus. ὁμοίως ὁμοίως εἰς τὰς πόλιν ἀπὸ προκλίου ἐπισκόπου ἡκωνσταντινουπόλεως ἐκ τῆς πόλεως ἐκ τῆς πόλεως. [p. λθ]

VIII. Homily by BASIL, Bishop of Cesaraea. ὁμοίως ὁμοίως εἰς τὰς πόλιν ἀπὸ βασιλείου ἐπισκόπου ἡκωνσταντινουπόλεως ἐκ τῆς πόλεως ἐκ τῆς πόλεως.

ΕΤΒΕ ΤΣΥΝΤΕΛΙΑ ΜΠΑΙΩΝ ΜΝ ΠΡΕ ΕΠΣΟΛΟΜΩΝ ΛΥΩ ΕΤΒΕ ΤΒΙΝΕΪ
ΕΒΟΛΖΝ ΣΩΜΑ. [p. wanting]

IX. Discourse by ATHANASIUS, Archbishop of Alexandria. ΟΥΛΟΓΟΣ
ΕΛΑΤΑΓΟΡ ΝΒΙ ΠΠΑΤΡΙΑΡΧΗΣ ΕΤΟΥΑΔΒ ΑΠΑ ΔΘΑΝΑΣΙΟΣ ΠΑΡΧΗ-
ΕΠΙΣΚΟΠΟΣ ΝΡΑΚΟΤΕ ΕΤΒΕ ΤΕΨΥΧΗ ΜΝ ΣΩΜΑ. [p. wanting]

Discourse by EUSEBIUS, Bishop of Cesaraea. ΟΥΛΟΓΟΣ ΝΤΕ ΑΠΑ
ΕΥΣΕΒΙΟΣ ΠΕΠΙΣΚΟΠΟΣ ΝΤΚΗΣΑΡΙΑ ΝΤΚΑΠΠΑΔΟΚΙΑ ΕΛΑΤΑΓΟΡ ΕΤΒΕ
ΤΕΣΖΙΜΕ ΝΧΑΝΑΝΑΙΑ. [p. wanting]

London, August 1st, 1897.

E. A. WALLIS BUDGE.

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