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The Transition from Coptic to Arabic

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- 1 The process in which the last stage of the Egyptian language, Coptic, was replaced by Arabic, has not yet received much attention from scholars. When the Arabs conquered Egypt in the middle of the seventh century, Coptic was the vernacular language of the bulk of the population, as well as the major literary language. In addition to Coptic, Greek was still used for administrative purposes as well as by those sections of the population that remained close to the Byzantine religious and secular centers, mainly in Alexandria and some of the Greek cities ¹. This situation was, however, only the recent result of a gradual language shift occurring during the two centuries before the Arab conquest. Under Ptolemaic rule, Greek had gradually gained a privileged position in Egypt as compared to the Egyptian language, and from the beginning of Roman rule until the early fourth century, Greek had with very few exceptions, been the sole written language of Egypt, and also to a large extent the spoken language, not only of the cities and the administration but also of commerce and religion.
- 2 With the eradication of paganism and the establishment of a Christian culture largely dominated by the monastic tradition, in the fourth and fifth centuries, the strength of classical Greek tradition was broken. Coptic monasteries gradually supplanted Greek gymnasiai as the most important educational and cultural centers.
- 3 The schism between the Coptic and Byzantine (*melkite*) Church caused by the Council of Chalcedon in 451 made the shift definite by turning the Egyptian Christians away from Greek Christian tradition.
- 4 It is thus significant, that although Egyptian in the form represented by the various Coptic dialects had been the *spoken* language of the population at large for many centuries, as a *literary* language it was a fairly recent innovation. It was only in the fourth century that translations of Greek texts became widely diffused and only in the fifth century that literary texts began to be written in Coptic ². The emergence of Coptic as a language of literature was, moreover, to a large extent linked to the emergence of a new religious and social culture manifested in the Manichaean, Gnostic and Christian

movements and crystallized in the rise of monasticism. Although originating in the Greek-speaking society, they soon began to use Coptic. The success of these new movements and their associated shift to Coptic greatly contributed to the decline of Greek. Coptic literature was thus originally and primarily a vehicle for new ideas born in late Hellenistic times, and to a great extent either based on Greek (or in a few cases, Syriac) texts, or more or less modeled upon these. Not only were content and form borrowed, but as much as 25% of the vocabulary was Greek. Not only technical terms but also particles and common verbs were borrowed³. As a literary language therefore, Coptic is as much part of the Greek Hellenistic legacy as of the ancient Egyptian.

- 5 After the Arab conquest of Egypt, Coptic continued to be used by the Christian population and remained the sole language of the Church for at least three centuries. During the first century of Arab rule, it seems as if the use of Arabic was mainly limited to the immigrants, and the internal affairs of the military ruling elite. It was only with the large-scale immigration of Arabs, the defeat of Coptic peasant resistance to the new rulers and the repressive taxation of the Copts with the subsequent conversion of large parts of the population to Islam in the later eighth and in the ninth century, that Arabic became the main spoken language. By the early ninth century, the use of Arabic among Christians had become widespread but was still regarded as contrary to their fidelity to the Christian heritage⁴. But during the tenth and eleventh centuries, this changed rapidly. Within a few generations Coptic died out as a spoken language, and by the end of the twelfth century, Arabic had become the main written language of the Church. As is evident from the linguistic works of the great Coptic scholars of the thirteenth century, Coptic was already a classical language known only by those who studied it from preserved texts⁵.
- 6 Compared with the transition from Syriac and Greek to Arabic among the Christians of Mesopotamia, Syria and Palestine, the developments in Egypt are strange. While the Christians in these other areas started to translate their heritage into Arabic within a century after the Arab conquest and soon even to write theological treatises in Arabic, the Copts seem to have resisted any use of Arabic for almost two hundred years⁶. But when the Copts gave in to Arabic, they did so much more thoroughly than any other Christians in the Middle East. Whereas Syriac, and to some extent Greek, at least as the spiritual language of the monasteries and the language of the liturgy, has continued to be widely used even till the present, Coptic died out almost completely. While there is a great literature in Syriac from the Middle Ages and while Syriac continues to be spoken today, there are no important Coptic authors after the tenth century and evidence that Coptic was no longer understood by the majority of Christians, by the end of the eleventh century. The two problems that arise from this comparison are: why there was initially a much greater reluctance, on the part of the Copts, to accept Arabic; and why Coptic was then so rapidly forsaken.
- 7 Any attempt to answer these questions has first to trace the linguistic developments in Egypt from the seventh to the twelfth century and place them in a socio-linguistic context. It is here essential to distinguish between different levels of transition from Coptic to Arabic. Firstly, Arabic was the language of the new religion, Islam, and was used by the Muslim conquerors and those Egyptians who submitted to Islam. Here the shift from Coptic to Arabic was part of the shift of religious tradition, which meant that there was a shift on the higher literary level of the language where the Qur'an

replaced the liturgical and biblical texts. Only afterwards was there a gradual shift in the vernacular of the islamized Christians.

- 8 Secondly, Arabic was the language of the new rulers who decided to make it the language of administration in the early eighth century. Thus the Christians responsible for the administration had to learn to use Arabic. Again, Arabic was primarily a language of writing, albeit as the papyri show, a written language different from the classical style of the Qur'an ⁷. Most probably, it was the Arabic to be seen in the papyri that contributed to the formation of the vernacular Arabic of the population. Due to the lack of firm historical data however, the process by which the Copts abandoned Coptic as their spoken language is difficult to follow. The differences between geographical areas as well as social strata must have been very great, and the simultaneous use of Coptic and Arabic in different areas of a person's life would have been a normal phenomenon. The meager results obtained from attempts to show a Coptic influence on the Arabic of Egypt preserved in papyri, as well as the literary texts of the Copts, clearly indicate that the languages were kept apart as belonging to different settings ⁸. There is little evidence that the poor quality of the Arabic of these texts, as compared with classical Arabic, has anything to do with a Coptic substratum.
- 9 Thirdly and finally, Arabic became the official language of the Church, used in historical, canonical, theological and liturgical contexts. Here the use of Arabic in writing was clearly a result of its having become widely spoken by the Christians. The Church had to adapt to the fact that the Christians were no longer able to read or understand Coptic. Many of the best known Christian Arabic authors of Egypt were, for at least part of their lives, scribes or government officials in the Muslim governments. Although the first two stages of the transition are of great interest, the lack of reliable resources, as well as the fact that I am an historian not a linguist, force me to concentrate on the third stage: the transition of the written language of the Coptic Church from Coptic to Arabic, since most of the texts we have are later copies of original documents from the centuries in question, I feel that it may be somewhat dangerous to base firm conclusions on them as to the development of the Arabic orthography and morphology of the Coptic writers ⁹. What we have are largely the results of a development, not a collection of the stages whereby it was achieved. Although there are differences in level of proficiency in Arabic between Copto-Arabic texts from different centuries, it is impossible to place a text in a century simply by its style. It is even sometimes difficult to be sure, whether a text was translated into Arabic or written in Arabic by a Coptic Writer. I think it is possible however, to discern three stages in the transition process which are relevant not only to the study of the texts but also to the general language development. At the end I will suggest some answers to the problems raised above. ¹

The transition from Coptic to Arabic in the literature of the Church

- 10 Before entering into a historical analysis, it is essential to note that the relatively rapid transition from Coptic to Arabic as the literary language of the Copts was a process of great importance in the history of the Coptic Church. Within a few centuries, a newly created literary language, Coptic, died; and during those same centuries, the Copts created the bulk of the Christian Arabic literature of the Middle Ages ¹⁰. Moreover, this

transition was responsible not only for the manner in which the early Copts came to know and keep their Christian heritage, it also governed the transmission of early Christian literature to Ethiopia, since most translations of the normative texts of the Church Fathers into Ethiopia are based on Christian Arabic translations from the Coptic tradition.

- 11 At this stage, a more comprehensive study of this transmission, its causes, development and rapid success would be premature, since most texts still have to be catalogued, edited and analyzed. A comprehensive study will probably remain impossible for some time yet. Firstly, our remaining Coptic literature is in a very poor state: complete codices of Coptic texts are relatively rare; most have to be patched together from leaves in various libraries; thousands of Coptic texts remain not only unedited but even unidentified and uncatalogued. Many of the texts that remain to us have come in single manuscripts, often of poor quality, and the original Coptic version of many patristic texts has been lost ¹¹. Secondly, the medieval Arabic translations are mostly preserved in later copies which are not without scribal errors, and in most cases remain unedited. The major reference work, Georg Grafs *Geschichte der Christlichen Arabischen Literatur*, is largely based on the catalogues of collections of Arabic manuscripts. These catalogues often misrepresent the contents of the manuscripts themselves and cover only the archives held in the West and the better-known archives in the Orient. The manuscripts of most of the churches and monasteries in Egypt are not included. Despite the fact that the first volume of Graf remains an enormous contribution to the study of the transition of Coptic to Arabic, only careful study and editing of the texts themselves, based on the collected evidence of the manuscripts, can give us a real basis for the assessment of this crucial historical development.
- 12 On the basis of the reports of the catalogues and editions published so far, I would, however, like to propose a periodisation of the process of translation from Coptic to Arabic into three distinct phases – obviously with some overlapping. The first covers the early translations up to the middle of the eleventh century, a period in which Coptic remained the major written language of the Coptic Church. The second starts with the translation of the large Coptic collections in the last half of the eleventh century and ends with the great revival of the Coptic Church in the early thirteenth century; covering the period in which Arabic became the major language but Coptic was still widely known, at least among the educated elite. The third covers the Golden Age of the Coptic Church with its great Arabic authors of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, a period in which Coptic was known only by specialists, and translators became increasingly dependent on grammars and vocabularies.

The first phase

- 13 Although one cannot exclude the possibility that some early translations into a colloquial Arabic were written down, the process of writing down translations seems to have started slowly in the tenth century, probably at the time when the first known Coptic writings were composed directly in Arabic by Sâwirus ibn al-Muqaffa and other Coptic scholars. There is every reason to believe that Sâwirus and other writers in Arabic translated Coptic texts *ad hoc* and then included them in their Arabic works ¹². Beside these cases, the earliest texts to be translated would have been parts of the Bible, especially lectionaries, and liturgical texts. There is, however, no study of the

making of the Arabic Bible of the Copts and the material in front of us is extremely confusing.

- 14 On the one hand, the Copts took advantage of earlier translations of the Bible made by the Melkites and Syrians as well as by Egyptian Jews ¹³. On the other, they made their own, probably often *ad hoc*, translations for bilingual liturgical and Biblical manuscripts. The earliest translations are no longer extant since they, in the process of copying, were revised against Greek and Coptic originals, as well as against other translations. Lacking studies of the numerous early bilingual codices, we do not know much about this process or its chronology apart from the fact that translations were made from Coptic as early as the tenth century and that the production of the more widely-used official versions belongs to the third period. As for the translation of liturgical material, the poor quality of the Arabic used, and the Coptic background, indicate that some liturgical texts were translated very early. Most probably liturgical translations started with the rubrics in order to help the congregation to follow the liturgy.
- 15 Apart from the Arabic versions made for inclusion in Coptic biblical and liturgical texts, the earliest texts translated seem to have been apocryphal, hagiographical and apocalyptic texts ¹⁴. A third category of material partly translated during this period are the collections of the canons of the Church. An example is the *Ġumlat al-qawânin* by Abû Sulh Yûnus which can be safely dated to before 1028. The lack of a comprehensive study of the Coptic Canon law precludes any definitive statement on the process of transmission of early texts or on the process of change from Coptic to Arabic as the original language of codification but it seems clear that the hierarchy would have needed to write in Arabic even in the late tenth century, not only because of the Arabic civil administration but also because of the decreasing knowledge of Coptic among Christians. Through the use in texts of the latter half of the eleventh century, we know that at least the Copto-Arabic *Didaskalia Apostolorum* was translated during this early phase ¹⁵. The larger Arabic collections of canons are, however, products of the second phase.
- 16 In this first period, we see a Church still apart from its Arabic society, preserving its Coptic heritage. The papyri also show that Coptic was still widely used for daily matters until the early eleventh century. There seems, however, to have been a growing need to explain the Coptic liturgy and the Biblical lessons to the people, a need to strengthen the community in the face of the growing Muslim population and the increasing need for canonical literature in Arabic. But Coptic remained the official language of the Church throughout most of the eleventh century as is evident from the *Lives* of the Patriarchs of the tenth and early eleventh centuries composed in Coptic by Mikhâ'il of Tinnis.

The second phase

- 17 With the second phase, translation on a larger scale began in the middle of the eleventh century, rapidly producing three major collections of translated material before the end of the century. The first is the large collection of canonical texts in Arabic assembled around the end of the eleventh century ¹⁶. The Arabic collection does not simply constitute translations of a previous Coptic collection, but is the cumulative result of a process of gathering, translating and reworking Coptic canon law; a process

in which new texts by the great patriarchs of the second half of the eleventh century were added. The impetus for this came from Christodulus, the Coptic Patriarch (1047-77) who based his own canonical writings in Arabic on Coptic sources ¹⁷. The making of this first larger official Arabic text of the Church indicates that by the middle of the eleventh century the Church hierarchy had realized and accepted that it was no longer possible for the Copts to rely entirely on Coptic documents for their own judicial administration.

- 18 The second major collection is the dogmatic anthology known as *al-l'tirâf al-Abâ, The Faith of the Fathers*¹⁸. The collection consists of 254 quotations from Patristic authors ranging in length from a few lines to ten folios. Although no Coptic version has been found, the Arabic collection is most probably based, at least for the major part, on a Coptic collection. But as in the case of the *History of the Patriarchs* and most likely the canonical collection, it is not impossible that the redactor used numerous different sources. The purpose of the collection was to support the Christological teaching of the Church and its rejection of the *Tome of Leo* and the Council of Chalcedon. The translation and organization in Arabic of this collection, essential for the later theological tradition, shows that by the eleventh century Arabic had become *the* language, even for the theology of the Church. Both in order to strengthen the faithful and to debate with other Christians, Arabic had become the only viable médium.
- 19 The third collection is the famous *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria*. As has been demonstrated by Johannes den Heijer, the lives of the first 62 patriarchs were translated by Mawhûb ibn Mansûr ibn Mufarrig and his assistant Habib Mikhâ'il ibn Budayr al-Damanhûri starting in 1088 ¹⁹. The translation was based on four different Coptic sources, some of which have been lost. Their work was not just a translation but also shaping a collection ; summarising some parts and adding extra information from various sources. From the margin notes in the manuscripts, we can even follow their work, as they searched for manuscripts in the monasteries and revised their translations as better texts became available. Mawhûb then continued the series by writing the lives of the last two patriarchs and left an unfinished version of the life of his contemporary behind him. There is no doubt that their work was a scholarly one, based on sources written in a language that Only a minority of educated monks and scribes could understand. Coptic was rapidly becoming a dead language.
- 20 In addition to the great collections, numerous other translations were no doubt made by unknown Coptic scholars of this period. Most probably, significant parts of the vast Copto-Arabic collections of apocryphal, apocalyptic and hagiographical texts, as well as works of the Church Fathers, were made during this second period since it can be demonstrated that these were used by later authors ²⁰. It is also quite possible that the geographical study of the monasteries of Egypt by Abû Makârim is based on Coptic sources which he himself (or someone else) translated for his use ²¹. Indications of a wider use of Arabic Bible translations are the first known Bible commentaries in Arabic by Copts : the commentaries by Murqus Ibn al-Qanbar and Simon Ibn Kalil Ibn Maqâra date to the last decades of the twelfth century ²². The first complete translation of the Coptic liturgy by Anbâ Gabriel Ibn Tank should also be mentioned.
- 21 For the transition from Coptic to Arabic, this second phase is, no doubt, the crucial one. While Coptic is well represented in the papyri until the mid-eleventh century, there is almost nothing in Coptic after the year 1200 ²³. Taking into account the fact that we have three major collections, one historiographic, one dogmatic and one canonical,

produced in Arabic on the basis of Coptic sources within the last three decades of the eleventh century, it is even possible to narrow down the most important period to these years. It seems Mawhûb and Habib Mikhâ'il were not alone searching the monasteries for manuscripts and translating and editing collections of remaining value. Their translations, as well as many others were, moreover, not made *ad hoc* and not on simple private initiative, but officially sanctioned by the Church. Except for the Synaxarium and the revised canonical collection by Macarius, belonging to the third phase, there were to be no more comparable works of translation. To a large extent it seems to have been the collectors, translators and editors of the time of Christodolus II (1047-1077) and Cyril II (1078-1092) who geared the transition from Coptic to Arabic. It seems, moreover, that these two patriarchs, who both belong to the most prominent in the history of the Coptic Church, played a major role in the linguistic shift.

The third phase

- 22 The third period is the one best known and best recorded in our manuscripts. By now, Coptic had ceased to be a living language, and thus translations had become restricted to a limited number of scholars and monks who were willing to study their old language ²⁴.
- 23 For this Coptic grammars and Coptic-Arabic vocabularies were necessary, and they became an important literary output of the period. With decreasing knowledge of Coptic there was also, however, an increasing command of Arabic and a dissatisfaction with older translations, which were accordingly revised. This is particularly the case with translations of the Bible to which many scholars of the Coptic language contributed, like Yuhanna al-Sammanûdi, Al-Wajih Yuhanna al-Qalyûbi and Al-As'ad Abû-l-Faraj Hibatullâh ibn al-'Assâl. Some of the growing numbers of commentators on the Bible, like Ibn Kâtib Qaysar and Al-Mu'taman Abu Ishâq al-'Assâl, had translators working with them ²⁵.
- 24 Perhaps the most significant translation was the Synaxarium. This vast Copto-Arabic collection of Lives of saints, reaching from Genesis to the Middle Ages, is connected with two bishops of Malij in the third quarter of the thirteenth century, Butrus Sâwirus al-Jamil and his successor Mikhâ'il. Although the sources were all Coptic, there is no evidence that the entire Synaxarium was translated from one source. Again, the translators had to collect and edit material from numerous sources. A second collection dating from this period is the canonical material edited by Macarius of St. John in Wadi Natrun. Since several of the most important parts of his collection are known to have been translated some decades earlier by Abû Ishâq ibn Fadlallah, he seems to have relied on Arabic sources as well ²⁶.
- 25 Besides these collections and the well known linguistic and exegetical endeavours of the great authors of the period, there must also have been a fair amount of translation of apocryphal and patristic material. Since many of these texts are not preserved in Coptic, these translations are of great significance. As-Safi Abû-l-Fadâ'il ibn al-'Assâl, probably the greatest of the thirteenth century authors, is credited with translations of numerous anthologies of patristic texts, especially with a collection of the homilies of St. John Chrysostom. Other authors of the period used numerous patristic texts in Arabic translation, supposedly made on their request ²⁷.

- 26 If we may characterize the first period of translation as more popular and provisional, the second as one geared by necessity, then the third is a period of more scholarly work on sources. With growing relations with other Christian Arabic literatures and an immense production of Arabic texts of their own, translations from Coptic are no longer central. Unlike in earlier periods, the sources are now not only Coptic but also Greek and Syriac. In addition older Arabic translations, often from other communities are used and in the case of collections, material already translated is combined with new translations ²⁸. Old translations are revised not only by using better sources and with a more competent analysis of them, but also in order to express the content in a better Arabic form.
- 27 Although I have very little material on which to base any conclusions, I nevertheless have the impression that there is also a development in the skills of translation. The first translations, including the *I'tirâf al-Abâ* are more literal and seem to have been made with a poorer knowledge of literary Arabic. This is also true for much early liturgical material, probably based on oral and *ad hoc* translations. The second period, including the *History of the Patriarchs*, gives the impression of much more careful work and a better command of Arabic. It is also from this period we have the first Christian Arabic authors in Egypt, and it is clear that the translators were able to write in Arabic, it can even be difficult to be sure if a text from this period is a translation or an Arabic original. The third phase is characterized by translators completely at home in the Arabic language, many of them also prominent Christian Arabic authors. Their translations are much more independent of the syntax of the Coptic original, often they even paraphrase the original in order to express the meaning in clear Arabic.

Conclusions

- 28 Although it is evident that there is much research to be done, not only on the Arabic manuscript tradition of the Copts, but also on the wider field of the sociolinguistic developments in Egypt in the period from the Arab conquest to the abandonment of Coptic in the twelfth century, I think that it is possible to suggest some tentative conclusions.
- 29 First, it is of great significance that Coptic was only recently introduced as the vehicle of the religious and historical tradition of Egypt when the Arab conquest took place. The amount of Coptic literature written from the end of the fourth until the early seventh century is not very large, and is, moreover, fairly restricted in genres and areas of life ²⁹. There was at the time of the Arab conquest no deeply rooted Coptic literary tradition, and, which is may be more significant very little secular use of Coptic as a written language. The prominence of Greek, established during the many centuries of Ptolemaic and Roman rule, was still there. It was thus natural that Arabic as the language of the rulers, replaced the other language of rule - Greek.
- 30 When Arabic had finally and by necessity, become a language acceptable to the Church, there was little to preserve Coptic. Once the process started in the late ninth century it took only a few generations before Arabic replaced Coptic as the most important language of the Christians.
- 31 Secondly, Coptic had in the sixth and early seventh centuries become a sign of opposition to the Melkite Church, that is the Imperial, Byzantine and Chalcedonian

Church, especially during the harsh oppression of the anti-Chalcedonians in the later sixth and early seventh centuries; It is not difficult to detect how the conflict between Christian martyrs and Greek pagans of the time of the great persecutions of Christians by pagan Roman emperors was now applied to the conflict between the faithful Coptic Christians and Greek "heretic" rulers ³⁰.

- 32 "Greek" had for so long, and maybe more forcefully in Egypt than elsewhere, been a word denoting pagan and thus anti-Christian, that it was natural to identify Coptic with orthodoxy. At the time of the Arab conquest, the Church and the Coptic Christian tradition was not ready for the kind of exchange between various languages so characteristic of the monasteries of Syria, Palestine and Sinai. Egyptian Christianity had become provincial and closed-up on itself. Thus it took much longer for a dialogue between Muslims and Christians to start in Egypt, than in Syria.
- 33 Thirdly, it seems as if the influence of Coptic on Arabic in Egypt was fairly limited. Although there are numerous Coptic loan-words in colloquial Egyptian Arabic, especially in Upper Egypt, the Copts did not develop an Arabic dialect of their own, neither in writing nor, as far as one can judge from contemporary evidence, in the vernacular ³¹. The linguistic peculiarities of the Arabic manuscripts of the Copts are no different from those of the manuscripts of the Christians of Palestine, Syria and Mesopotamia, and close to what can be found in medieval Muslim manuscripts as well. The greater deficiencies in the earlier translations into Arabic are primarily due to the fact that the Arabic translation, for instance in liturgical texts, aimed at being very literal, placed as it was beside the Coptic. It is essential to remember that although there was at least initially a lack of education in Arabic, the Christians in Egypt, as in Palestine and Syria, soon by necessity became an important part of the administration conducted in Arabic and became famous as scribes.
- 34 Fourthly, it is possible to suggest, at least as far as the literature is concerned, that the crucial decades for the transition from Coptic to Arabic are the last decades of the eleventh century. In this period of growing tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean on the brink of the Crusades, and at a time of unusual political influence for the Copts under Fatimid rule, the Coptic Church collected and edited its heritage in translations into the language of their society. If this should be seen as "the death of a culture" or as an "inculturation" is a question I do not intend to answer here and now.

NOTES

1. For the question of languages in Egypt in Late Antiquity, see Roger S. BAGNALL, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, Princeton, 1993, p. 230-260, and S. RUBENSON, *The Letters of St. Antony*, Minneapolis, 1995, p. 95-99 and 109-115 for sources and references.

2. For Coptic literature, see Martin KRAUSE, "Koptische Literatur", *Lexikon der Agyptologie*, III, Wiesbaden, 1980, p. 694-718, and Tito ORLANDI, *Elementi di lingua e letteratura copta*, Milan, 1970, and *idem*, "Coptic Literature", *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity* (éd. Birger A. Pearson and James E.

Goehring), Minneapolis, 1986, p. 51-81, and René G. COQUIN, "Langue et littérature copte", *Christianismes orientaux. Introduction à l'étude des langues et des littératures*. Paris, 1993, p. 169-217.

3. See L.-Th. LEFORT, "Gréco-Copte", *Coptic Studies in Honor of Walter Erwing Crum*, Boston, 1950, p. 65-71; P. NAGEL, "Die Einwirkung des Griechischen auf die Entstehung der koptischen Literatursprache", *Christentum am Roten Meer* (hrsg. F. Altheim und R. Stiehl), I., Berlin, 1971, p. 327-355.

4. This is clearly shown by the important passages in the so-called *Apocalypse of Samuel of Qalamun*, a Coptic text written late in the eighth century in Coptic but preserved only in its Arabic translation. See GCAL (Geschichte der christliche arabische Literatur) I, p. 280-282, and Paul VAN CAUWENBERG, *Études sur les moines d'Égypte depuis le Concile de Chalcédoine (451) jusqu'à l'invasion arabe*, Paris, 1914. The text is edited in an unsatisfactory édition by J. Ziadeh in *Revue de l'Orient chrétien*, 20 (1915-17), p. 374-404.

5. See the study of these Coptic scholars by Alexis MALLON, "Une école de savants égyptiens au Moyen-Âge", *Mélanges de la Faculté Orientale* 1 (1906), p. 109-131, and 2 (1907), p. 213-264; and the study of one of the most important of them by Gertrud BAUER, *Athanasius von Qus, Qiladat at-tahrir fi 'ilm at-tafsir: eine koptische Grammatik in arabischer Sprache aus dem 13/14. Jahrhundert*, Freiburg im Breisgau, 1971.

6. The first major Coptic writer in Arabic is Sâwirus ibn al-Muqaffa' in the later part of the tenth century, while already there are several famous Arabic-writing authors among the Christians in Syria and Mesopotamia in the ninth century. See GCAL II for the different Christian denominations.

7. For a detailed analysis, see Simon HOPKINS, *Studies in the Grammar of Early Arabic Based upon Papyri Datable to before 300 A.D.*, Oxford, 1984.

8. See Wilson B. BISHAI, "The Transition from Coptic to Arabic", *The Muslim World*, 53 (1963), p. 145-150. In spite of a too nationalistic tone, he rightly concludes that the limited influence of Coptic on Egyptian Arabic indicates a widespread bilingualism during the period of transition. For his linguistic analysis, see W. B. BISHAI, "Notes on the Coptic Substratum in Egyptian Arabic", *JAOS*, 80 (1960), p. 225-229.

9. The debate about a special "Christian Middle Arabic" has generated a literature of its own. For references and a summary see Bo HOLMBERG, "Christian Scribes in the Arabic Empire", *The Middle East - Unity and Diversity. Papers from the Second Nordic Conference on Middle Eastern Studies*, (Nordic Proceedings in Asian Studies 5), Copenhagen, 1993, p. 103-114. For an attempt in the context of Blau's terminology, to find a special Coptic Arabic, see also Samir KUSSAIM, "Contribution à l'étude du moyen arabe des coptes", *Le Muséon*, 80 (1967), p. 155-209 and 81 (1968), p. 55-77.

10. On the evidence for the decline of Coptic, see Leslie MacCOULL, "The Strange Death of Coptic Culture", in *Coptic Church Review*, vol. 10, n° 2, p. 35-45. For the Christian Arabic Literature of the Copts, see Georg GRAF, GCAL II, p. 294-475.

11. For Coptic texts lost in their original, and preserved in Arabic translations, see Khalil SAMIR, "Arabic Sources for Early Egyptian Christianity", *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity* (éd. Birger A. Pearson and James E. Goehring), Studies in Antiquity and Christianity, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1986, p. 82-97; and Samuel RUBENSON, "Arabic Sources for the Theology of the Early Monastic Movement in Egypt", *Parole de l'Orient* XVI (1990-1991), p. 33-47.

12. Examples of this are the quotations found in his *Kitab ad-Durr at-tamin*. See P. Maiberger, „Das Buch der Kostbaren Perle“ von Severus Ibn al-Muqaffa', Wiesbaden 1972.

13. For the translation of the Bible, see GCAL I, p. 85-195; Paul KAHLE, *Die arabischen Bibelübersetzungen*, Leipzig, 1904, and Jos. Francis RHODE, *The Arabic Version of the Pentateuch in the Church of Egypt*, St. Louis, 1921. More recent research is presented for the OT in Khalil SAMIR, "Old Testament, Arabic Versions" of *Coptic Encyclopaedia* VI, p. 1827-1836; and for the New Testament, B. M. METZGER, *The Early Versions of the New Testament. Their Origin, Transmission and Limitations*,

Oxford, 1977, which has a good chapter on the Arabic NT (p. 257-268). Comments on the specifically Copto-Arabic translation as found in the bilingual codices, can be found in HORNER, *The Coptic Version of the NT in the Northern Dialect*, I, Oxford, 1898. See also the comments in R.-G. COQUIN, "Langue et littérature arabes chrétiennes", *Christianismes Orientaux. Introduction à l'étude des langues et des littératures*, Paris, 1993, p. 52-53.

14. Here Arabic manuscripts of the tenth century give proof of very early translations. See GCAL, I, p. 265-267 with reference to two manuscripts : Strassb.or. 4224 and Hiersemann, *Katat*, 500, n° 14, and to Agnes SMITH LEWIS, *Acta Mythologica Apostolorum. Transcribed from an Arabic Ms. In the Convent of Deir-es-Suriani, Egypt, and from Mss. in the Convent of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai (=Horae Semiticae IV)*, London, 1904. Translated in *ibid.*, *The Mythological Acts of the Apostles, translated...*, London, 1904. Of great interest are the apocalyptic texts attributed to Samuel of Qalamun and Pisentius of Qift, See GCAL I, p. 279-282.

15. See RIEDEL, *Kirchenrechtsquellen*, Haneberg, Sitzungsberichten der k. Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu München, 1869/2, p. 33-37; Franz Xaver FUNK, *Die Apostolischen Konstitutionen*, Rottenburg, 1891, p. 215-242, *ibid.*, "Die Arabische Didaskalia und die Konstitutionen der Apostel", *Theol. Quartatschr.* 86 (1904), p. 233-248, The Coptic text is lost, but an Ethiopic translation is known and tr. by J. M. Harden, *The Ethiopic Didascalia translated*, Leiden, 1920. For the Arabic, see William Sulayman QILADA, *Ta'lim ar-Rusul, al-Dasqûliya*, Cairo, 1979, 2nd éd., 1989.

16. See GCAL, I, p. 563 and RIEDEL, *Kirchenrechtsquellen*, p. 129-134 referring to Berl. Ar. 10181, ff. 51-219, a ms. based on a copy made by Abû-l-Mukâram Yûhanna ibn Sâ'id al-Qulzûmi, the assistant and successor of Mawhûb ibn Mansûr, the author of the lives of Christodolus (1047-1077) and Cyril II (1078-1092). For both of them, see Johannes den HEIJER, *Mawhûb ibn Mansûr Ibn Mufarrig et l'historiographie copto-arabe* (CSCO 513, *Subsidia* 83), Louvain, 1989. There is also a codex dated 1204/05 with translations of various canonical writings, including the *Testament Domini*. See GCAL, I, p. 571.

17. See GCAL I, p. 560-563, for the collection of Macarius. The Arabic text, found in i.a. in Vat ar. 149, is not yet edited.

18. See Georg GRAF, "Zwei dogmatische Florilegien der Kopten", OCP3, p. 345-402. A new study of the sources based on research done on Coptic literature since then will most likely reveal much more about the work of the collector and translator. Neither the Arabic nor the Ethiopic version has been edited or translated in spite of its major influences in both churches.

19. See J. den HEIJER, *Mawhûb Ibn Mansûr*. Especially p. 95-111. His work, which refutes the attribution of the *History of the Patriarchs* to Sâwirus Ibn al-Muqaffa', is a model for research on the process of translation.

20. There was even a translation of St. Gregory Nazianzen based on Coptic material before 1078, See GRAF, "Zwei Florilegien", p. 351.

21. See GRAF, GCAL, II p. 338-340, who still attributes the work on the monasteries to Abu Sâlih al-Armâni.

22. See GRAF, GCAL, II p. 327-332 and 336 338.

23. For Coptic papyri, see Leslie MacCOULL, "Coptic Documentary Papyri as a Historical Source for Egyptian Christianity", *TheRootsof Egyptian Christianity*, p. 42-50.

24. Martin KRAUSE, in his "Koptische Literatur", *Lexikon der Ägyptologie III*, Wiesbaden, 1980, p. 694-727, calls Mark III, Patriarch 799-819, "the last Coptic author". Tilo ORLANDI who, in his *Elementi de lingua e letteratura copta*, agrees with KRAUSE, has modified this in his *Coptic Literature, the Roots of Egyptian Christianity*, p. 80, stating for the period from the beginning of the ninth century that : "Almost no original production can be detected".

25. For example, Ya'qûb al-Antûni on whose work Ibn Kâtib Qaysar based his discussion of the text.

26. See GCAL I, p. 569-586. The translation of the *Didascalia Apostolorum* as well as the *Testamentum Domini*, which is not preserved in Coptic, were made in 1295 by Abu Ishâq Ibn Fadlallâh. See A. BAUMSTARK, "Überlieferung und Bezeugung der *diatheke tou kuriou hemon lesou Xristou*", *Römische Quartalschrift* 14 (1900), p. 1-45. F. X. FUNK, *Das Testament unseres Herrn*, Mainz 1901. Other texts include the *Canones apostolici*, see GCAL I; p. 572-577 (the Coptic text edited by P. De Lagarde, *Aegyptiaca*, Göttingen, 1883, p. 209-238, with an English translation by G. Horner, *The Statues of the Apostles*, *ibid.*, p. 295-363), and the so-called *Sunna of the Apostles*, see GCAL I, p. 578 ff. Of the latter, a translation from Coptic to Arabic is attributed to Abu Ishâq Ibn Fadlallâh. Other texts are the *Octateuch of Ps.-Clemens*, see GCAL I, p. 581-584 and the *Canons from Nicea*, see GCAL I, p. 586-593. See also Félix HAASE, *Altchristliche Kirchengeschichte nach orientalischen Quellen*, Leipzig, 1925.
27. A translation of Ps.-Dionysius is used by al-Mu'taman Abu Ishâq al-'Assâl. See GCAL I, p. 370.
28. For an example of a Greek source, see the translation of Ps.-Macarius noted in GCAL I, p. 390 (Vat. Ar. 80, 13th C.).
29. See note 2 for references.
30. A good example of this use of concepts and *topoi* from earlier martyr legends in later sixth century is the *Life of Samuel of Oalamun* written by Isaac. See the edition by Anthony ALCOCK, *The life of Samuel of Kalamun by Isaac the Presbyter*, Westminster, 1983.
31. See W. B. BISHAI, "Coptic Lexical Influences on Egyptian Arabic", *JNES*, 23 (1964), p. 39 ff-, and Peter Behnstedt, "Weitere Koptischen Lehnwörter im Ägyptisch-Arabischen", *Die Welt des Orients*, 12 (1981), p. 81-98.

INDEX

Mots-clés : arabisation, copte (langue), arabe (langue), linguistique

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