

Coptic Congress 2016 - Report on Literature

Exordium

The categories into which we divide Coptic Studies are ours and not natural. At the Congress of 2008 in Cairo I spoke about studies of monasticism in the previous four years now in 2016 I am speaking about literature, but literature and monasticism are not two distinct worlds but one world of monks who wrote a variety of types of literature! Of course others also wrote many different things. That brings us to the next question: What constitutes literature? Everyone thinks they know, but extended reflection on the subject would reveal that the matter is not so simple. When did the notion of literature come into existence? Did these authors think that they were producing literature?

Another important consideration is the point of view of the modern person reading these texts. There are a great variety of these: The point of view: of monks, of scholars, of monks today!

What is ours? It determines our judgements. We do not all share the same values or interests.

Periodization: golden age, silver age, middle ages. Do they apply at all now?

We have learned not to talk about decline and fall, but about Late antiquity! Applies here.

The study of monasticism involves literature, theology, papyri, etc.

Important publications:

The past four years have seen the publication of many important contributions to the study of Coptic literature. Among these are the following:

Shenute, Anne Bouvarel-Boud'hors, and Institut français d'archéologie orientale du Caire. *Le Canon 8 de Chenoute : d'après le manuscrit Ifao Copte 2 et les fragments complémentaires*, 2013.

[Cristea, Hans-Joachim., Shenute, and Shenute. *Schenute von Atripe, Contra Origenistas : Edition des koptischen Textes mit annotierter Übersetzung und Indizes einschliesslich einer Übersetzung des 16. Osterfestbriefs des Theophilus in der Fassung des Hieronymus (ep. 96)*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011.]

Shenute, David Brakke, and Andrew T. Crislip. *Selected Discourses of Shenoute the Great : Community, Theology, and Social Conflict in Late Antique Egypt*, 2015.

Lopez, Ariel G. "Shenoute of Atripe and the Uses of Poverty Rural Patronage, Religious Conflict and Monasticism in Late Antique Egypt," 2013.

However, I would like to mention first of all an article by Tito Orlandi, who gave the report in 1992 in Washington. He mentioned for the first time my edition of the homilies of Rufus of Shotep, suggesting that there was a silver age of Coptic literature to which these homilies belonged. That of

course raises the theme of the periodization of history.

The past four years have seen the publication of many important contributions to the study of Coptic literature. Among these are the following:

Shenute, Anne Bouvarel-Boud'hors, and Institut francais d'archeologie orientale du Caire. *Le Canon 8 de Chenoute : d'apres le manuscrit Ifao Copte 2 et les fragments complementaires*, 2013.

Shenute, David Brakke, and Andrew T. Crislip. *Selected Discourses of Shenoute the Great : Community, Theology, and Social Conflict in Late Antique Egypt*, 2015.

Lopez, Ariel G. "Shenoute of Atripe and the Uses of Poverty Rural Patronage, Religious Conflict and Monasticism in Late Antique Egypt," 2013.

<http://public.ebib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=1104660>.

However, I would like to begin by citing a recent article by Tito Orlandi from the *Oxford Handbook of the Literatures of the Roman Empire* entitled *Coptic*. I cite it because it is an excellent description of the problem of the categories we have been using and I cannot improve on it.

Coptic literature was born together with the Coptic language in Roman Egypt, around the third century, inside the Christian Church. It developed following the exigencies of the Church, together with a parallel literature in Greek: after biblical translations, and Gnosticizing (and Manichaean) treatises, homilies, canons, historical, and monastic texts were produced. After the Chalcedonian crisis, Coptic texts acquired a new autonomy, replacing Greek texts and supporting the life of the anti-Chalcedonian Church.

Is Coptic literature the literature of the Copts? Well, yes and no: the answer is more complicated than it appears. We might say that Coptic literature is composed of literary texts written in Coptic; but we must bear in mind that some of the Egyptians were called Copts (with the related adjective Coptic) only after 641 CE, when the literature in what we call now Coptic had already existed for long time. On the other hand we cannot say that Coptic literature of previous centuries was written in Egyptian (was an Egyptian literature) without further qualification. The words Copts and Coptic came into existence when the Islamic Arabs came to Egypt.

When manuscripts that were not strictly liturgical arrived in Europe, they began to speak of a Coptic literature. Coptic literature is religious and Christian in character. Historically we can identify an international Egyptian Church in the first five centuries, a separate Egyptian Church after Chalcedon (451), a Church of the Copts after the Arab conquest. Linguistically, the Church(es) of Egypt spoke in Greek from the first century, and also in Coptic from the third century, and also in Arabic (extensively) from the tenth century. Ethnically the autochthonous Egyptians coexisted with Macedonians (Greeks) and Arabs. This shows how difficult it is to single out a properly Coptic cultural identity, and consequently the cultural identity of those who produced literature in the Coptic language.

Layton, Bentley. *The Canons of Our Fathers: Monastic Rules of Shenoute*, Oxford Early Christian Studies, Oxford: OUP, 2014. Pp. 359. £90

The bulk of this volume (Part 2, pp. 92-341), contains the Coptic text and English translation on

facing pages of 595 “rules”. These “rules” have been extracted from the entire corpus of the nine books of Shenoute's *Canons*. They have not been previously collected and many have not been previously published. They are citations by Shenoute in his *Canons*, a body of disciplinary and hortatory writings, addressed chiefly to monks and nuns under his direction. The order in which they are presented is the order in which they are found in the nine books of the *Canons*. Thus they do not have a thematic ordering. However, Layton does indicate major thematic areas in Part 1 of the book. These include matters of liturgy, hierarchical structure, moral problems, and economy among others.

Part 1 “The Nature of the Rules” also contains extensive treatment of the historical context of the rules, the nature of the rules, monastic life as seen in the rules and monastic experience.

Based upon a careful reading of the “Naples Fragment,” five leaves of what “seems to have been a chronicle,” as well as other statements by Shenoute, Layton offers a “tentative early history of the federation.” The Coptic text of this fragment is not included, but an English translation is given for the first time. On the eastern side of the Nile, opposite the sites of the “White” and “Red” monasteries in Upper Egypt, was located the ancient town of Panopolis-Shmin (modern Akhmim). There were already three or four cenobia near this town that belonged to the Pachomian federation. A monk of one of these named Pcol seems to have expanded and rewritten the Pachomian monastic rules. Then he founded a new cenobium on the western side of the Nile, of which he became the superior. This monastery came to be the central monastery of a new federation, not part of the existing Pachomian one. However, in the vicinity there was already an eremitical community led by a hermit name Pshoi. Layton concludes that Pshoi's “house” (mentioned in the Naples fragment) was located about where the remains of the “Red” monastery are found, two miles north of Pcol's cenobium. When Pshoi's eremitic group grew to about thirty, he persuaded his community to transform itself into a cenobitic monastery and they adopted the rules of Pcol. The two founders, Pcol and Pshoi linked their monasteries in a small local federation. At some point a women's community in Atripe, a nearby village, became part of the federation. Shenoute was a member of Pcol's monastery. When Pcol died, he was succeeded by a monk named Ebonh. Shenoute disagreed with the latter's policies and accused him of tolerating grave immorality. This quarrel led to Shenoute's departure to live as a hermit. From his new dwelling he sent the hortatory writings to monks and nuns, which were collected later in his *Canons*. When Ebonh ceased to be leader of the federation, Shenoute succeeded him, but not apparently as the superior of the central monastery. Shenoute also came to play a role in the local society and eventually (about 448) built a large church, the remains of which are still to be seen, which seems to have been paid for by the military governor named Caesarius. It may be useful to mention that Shenoute was born the year that

Pachomius died (347) and died 465.

Layton concludes that there must have existed a set of bound codexes, now lost, which contained collections of the rules from which Shenoute cited and to which he alludes. These rule books were chiefly for the superiors, but were apparently read out to the communities on certain occasions, at least four times a year. They seem to have been sent back and forth between the central monastery and the other communities. It is not possible to reconstruct their structure.

Many of the rules have the same form as those found in the Coptic rules attributed to Pachomius, that is, they apodictically prescribe what “shall” or “shall not” be done. They often include also a conditional clause (“if, when, whoever,” etc.). This form would have been known to Pcol and is the most frequent form found in the corpus. A large number of the rules are expressed in the form of curses, modeled on Deuteronomy 27:11-26, e.g., “Cursed be whoever steals from the things of the sanctuary.”

As regards content, Layton classifies the rules in terms of four categories (p. 45): 1. Constitutional rules, 2. Liturgical rules, 3. Self-authorizing rules, and 4. Specific commands (the largest group).

The authors of the rules attributed to “our fathers” or “our ancient fathers” appear to be chiefly Pcol and Shenoute himself, but in some cases Pachomius is quoted.

This book by a leading expert on the subject, offering as it does a wealth of new material, is an important contribution to the growing body of literature on the works of Shenoute and his form of monasticism. It offers a window into the daily life, the structure of the monasteries of this small federation, and the concerns of the superiors. The “rules” here assembled will undoubtedly become the object of further studies.

A subject index to Part 1 is included. An index of Greek and Coptic words, especially of technical terms, would have been welcome. Equally desirable would have been the Coptic text of the Naples fragment, since the translation offered is based upon a new collation of the text.

David Brakke, and Andrew T. Crislip. *Selected Discourses of Shenoute the Great: Community, Theology, and Social Conflict in Late Antique Egypt*, 2015.

The subtitle of this book is perhaps the key to understanding many things including the particular interests of the authors and the intended audience. I was unable to find a single word of Coptic in the book and, from my point of view, that is very frustrating. I cannot check the translation, although I have no doubt in the Prof. Brakke's mastery on both Sahidic Coptic and English.

However, I would like to be able to check technical terminology, of which there is a great quantity in Coptic, Greek, Latin and indeed in most literary languages.

The book is divided into four parts: I) Heretics and other enemies of the church, which contains the

translations of three discourses; II) Shenoute as pastor and preacher, which contains ten discourses; III) The Christian's struggle with Satan, which contains four discourses; and IV) The conflict with Gesios, which contains five discourses. There is also a very interesting Introduction, a valuable bibliography and indices of names, subjects, and biblical passages, maps, figures.

However, from my point of view, it is a very frustrating publication. I have no access to the text and I cannot study how Shenoute used rhetorical tropes. We know that he was also fluent in Greek and may very well have introduced Greek words into Coptic not found previously.

As already noted, but worth noting again, the Introduction is ample and informative, especially for the intended audience, obviously those who do not know Sahidic Coptic.

Lopez, Ariel G. "Shenoute of Atripe and the Uses of Poverty Rural Patronage, Religious Conflict and Monasticism in Late Antique Egypt," 2013.

This book is a revised version of a dissertation defended at Princeton in 2010. Once again the title reveals the interests of the author and also the interests of the moderator of his dissertation at Princeton, Peter Brown, whose interests as an historian are very broad indeed. To him we are indebted for abolishing the "decline and fall" introduced by Edward Gibbon with its very negative view of monks, whether Coptic or western, and indeed Christianity in general, and its substitution by the rich and fascinating category of Late Antiquity. As an aside it may be mentioned that one of Gibbon's chief sources was the much greater French historian, Sebastien Lenain de Tillemont, whose Memoires are still worth reading today because of his careful reading of the ancient texts. The book includes an Introduction "Rustic Audacity" and four chapters entitled 1. Loyal Opposition; 2 A miraculous Economy, #. Rural Patronage: Holy and Unholy, and 4. The Limits of Intolerance. There is also an appendix on the chronology of Shenoute's Life and Activities, and one on the Sources. The author does not provide us with the Coptic text of the numerous passages that he quotes from Shenoute, but assures us that he has read the original Coptic of every text that he quotes. Nevertheless one would like to be able to check the translations. This book is a valuable contribution to historical analysis.

Schenke, Gesa. *Das koptisch hagiographische Dossier des Heiligen Kolluthos, Arzt, Märtyrer und Wunderheiler*. Louvain: Peeters, 2013. CSCO 650. Subsidia 132. Pp. vii + 340.

This volume offers the Coptic (Sahidic) text and a German translation of various literary pieces relating to the cult of St. Colluthos, martyr, physician and miracle worker. The texts, originally from the libraries of the White Monastery (of Shenoute) in Upper Egypt near Sohag and the Monastery of St. Michael in the Fayum, are now found in various European and American libraries, those from

the White Monastery in Berlin, Paris, London, Vienna and Naples. The texts from the Monastery of St. Michael fortunately found their way intact to the Morgan Library in New York.

The texts belong to three literary genres: *Martyria*, *Encomia* and *Miracula*, according to Schenke. One of the encomia, that attributed to Bishop Isaac of Antinoe, from Morgan Library Codex M591, has been previously published in this series, CSCO 544-545, and has therefore not been included in this volume. The other texts, with the exception of the *Martyrium* from the same Morgan Library Codex M591, are all fragmentary and come from the library of the White Monastery, the dispersion of which to many libraries and collections occurred from the eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries. This latter *Martyrium*, though previously published (Reymond and Barns, *Four Martyrdoms from the Pierpont Coptic Codices*, Oxford 1973) has been reproduced here but happily in diplomatic format with a facing translation that respects better the literary and rhetorical indications of the manuscript. The same is true for the other texts in this volume. Two other fragments from the *Martyrium* complete the section of the volume dedicated to the *Martyria*.

In the literary genre of *encomion* there exist two dedicated to St. Colluthos, one ascribed to Isaac of Antinoe, from the Morgan manuscript mentioned above and two other fragments. Although the Morgan text has not been reproduced here, an extensive analysis of its form and rhetorical content has been included. The other encomion, for which there are two fragmentary witnesses (not from the same manuscript) is said in the title to be the second encomion of Bishop Phoibamon of Achmim (Panopolis). These works were evidently composed for celebrations of the saint's feast at the two principal shrines known to have existed in his honour at Antinoe and Achmim. In the form in which they have been preserved both of these encomia are very long (54 pages of the codex for Isaac). This leads Schenke to hypothesize that they may have originally been delivered on successive days of a celebration and only later assembled in one text. That could be the case, but the contents of the encomion by Isaac, as analyzed by Schenke do correspond to the "classic" sequence of topics for an encomion: proœmion, praise of the parents of the saint, narration of the childhood of the saint with citations from Scripture, life and miracles of the saint, martyrdom of the saint, miracles worked at his shrine. It is difficult to imagine the speaker breaking off in the middle of this sequence. On the other hand, it is not difficult to imagine that the written version contains more material than was actually delivered.

The "second" encomion of Phoibamon has an unusually long inscription or title of the kind described by Paola Buzi as "titoli a struttura complessa espansa," which she regarded as a sign of relatively late development. Unfortunately Schenke does not seem aware of this work (*Titoli e Autori nella Tradizione Copta*, Pisa 2005), which provides useful material for comparison. The encomion itself is only fragmentarily preserved (about seven pages), which make it difficult to

know to what extent it followed the traditional form of the encomion. Not all pieces designated in the titles of the manuscript tradition as an "encomion" are genuine encomia, that is, not all follow the traditional sequence of topics for this literary genre.

In the third category of *miracula* Schenke has gathered several fragments now distributed in the libraries of London, Paris, Naples and Berlin. This literary genre Schenke sees as related to the cult of the relics of the martyrs, placed in shrines that become places of pilgrimage (p. 193).

Although a number of the pieces assembled in this volume have been published previously, they are not easily accessible. We may be grateful to the author for bringing them together and publishing them in exemplary fashion in diplomatic form with facing translation and accompanied by extensive introductions and detailed commentaries. The greatest value of the volume is to be found in these detailed analyses. It would have been helpful to have included the sigla of the *Clavis Patrum Coptorum*, an ongoing project to reassemble and identify the various manuscripts now dispersed in so many different libraries. An appendix with excellent colour photographs of a number of the manuscript pages has been included.

Schenke notes that the manuscripts date from the ninth and tenth centuries while the events they purport to relate are from the time of Diocletian. The legends regarding the martyrs would have developed in the following centuries. The texts presuppose a fully developed cult of the martyr with shrines, for which there is archaeological evidence (pp. 4-5), and established feasts. The well developed encomion by Isaac suggests to this reviewer a period in which similar ones (by Constantine of Assiut, John of Shmun, Stephen of Hnēs) can be found such as that of the Patriarch Damian (end of the sixth century).

There are also several publications dealing with Pachomius:

Christoph, Joest, and Verein der Benediktiner zu Beuron - Beuroner Kunstverlag -. *Das Leben des hl. Pachom und seiner Nachfolger*, 2016.

Joest, Franziskus, Theodorus, and Orsiesius. *Theodoros von Tabennese und Horsiese von Seneset : Katechesen, Briefe und Fragmente der fruhen Pachomianer. Mit einem Anhang: Fragmente von Pachom*. Beuron: Beuroner Kunstverl., 2013.

Joest, Franziskus, and Pachomius. *Die Pachom-Briefe : Uebersetzung und Deutung*. Lovanii: Peeters, 2014.

and one dealing with the monastic origins of the Nag Hammadi Codices: Lundhaug, Hugo, and Lance Jenott. *The Monastic Origins of the Nag Hammadi Codices*, 2015.

I assume that Prof. Brakke will deal with these.

Last but not least, I would like to mention the volume of Adamantius: Buzi et al. in Adamantius

- Acts of last Congress in Rome 2012.

Much remains to be done in all fields of Coptic studies, especially in the areas of publishing new texts, discovering and cataloguing the manuscripts, which from the point of view of some are mundane tasks, but from the point of view of those doing it, there are often very exciting discoveries. The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. (Matt 9:7)

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Joest, Franziskus, Theodoros, and Orsiesius. *Theodoros von Tabennese und Horsiese von Seneset : Katechesen, Briefe und Fragmente der fruhen Pachomianer. Mit einem Anhang: Fragmente von Pachom*. Beuron: Beuronener Kunstverl., 2013.

Joest, Franziskus, and Pachomius. *Die Pachom-Briefe : Uebersetzung und Deutung*. Lovanii: Peeters, 2014.

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Orlandi, Tito. *Coptic*, The Oxford Handbook of the Literatures of the Roman Empire Edited by Daniel L. Selden and Phiroze Vasunia Subject: Classical Studies, Ancient Prose Literature Online Publication Date: Mar 2016 DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199699445.013.30 Oxford Handbooks

Buzi et al. in Adamantius