

PRELIMINARY REMARKS ON THE COPTIC TEXTS FROM SEASONS 1998 AND 1999

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The texts, which have come to light in site D, where excavations have now been brought to a provisional close, are characterized by their great variety.¹⁾ As for linguistic diversity, Arabic and, in a smaller degree, Greek are represented, next to Coptic. The Coptic texts, in their turn, are written in several different dialects, including Sahidic, Fayumic and Bohairic, as well as the particular brand of Sahidic with strong Fayumic coloring that appears to be predominant in the region during the later centuries of the first millennium and in the beginning of the second.

Also their variety in general nature is remarkable, which shows that the textual finds from site D can hardly be considered a coherent ensemble. At best, they represent the much disturbed debris of the monastery library and archives. Indeed, much of the material seems to have been recycled, perhaps – as has been suggested – in the process of book production.²⁾

Several of the Coptic texts from site D appear to be dated, including a fragmentary colophon from the 1998 season, written in AM 680, i.e., AD 963-64 (N.98032, a Sahidic ms. on paper). Other dates are AD 876-77 (N.93077, another

colophon) and 992 (N.93010, a receipt). Paleographical criteria, too, suggest a statistical peak in and around the 10th century. Obviously, the deposit as it was discovered must be dated some time later.

During the 1998 and 1999 seasons, over 25 Coptic texts were found, most of them very fragmentary. Unlike earlier finds from site D, these did not include homiletic or magical texts.³⁾ On the other hand, letters were quite numerous. Although mostly incomplete, they confirm the evidence of the Greek and Arabic texts in testifying to the wide range of interests and contacts which connected the monastery with the outside world. Particularly intriguing is a letter on papyrus, which appears to deal with a disciplinary problem, the author quoting biblical passages to convince his correspondent (N.98093). Only a few words remain of what must have been a long pastoral letter addressing the monks of Naqlun (Neklon; N.98062-63, on paper). Most other letters, predictably, concern "business" in the worldly sense (N.98005; N.98031, both on paper; N.99038, on papyrus).

Among literary texts, mention should be made of the badly ruined remains of a Sahidic parchment codex, which must

¹⁾ See earlier reports by K. Urbaniak-Walczak, in *JJP* 23 (1993), 157-162, and *PAM VIII, Reports 1997* (1996), 98-102.

²⁾ W. Godlewski, *PAM X, Reports 1997* (1998), 114-116.)

³⁾ It may be remarked here that the group of texts, which was provisionally classified as "literary" in *PAM VIII, Reports 1997*, op. cit., 102, contains both magical and liturgical material. I briefly reported on this ensemble during the ninth "Journée d'études coptes" in Montpellier, 3-4 June 1999; cf. my forthcoming study on change and continuity in Coptic magic, which deals with magical text N.93078.

have contained a collection of alphabetical acrostic hymns (N.98002-003-004-006).⁴⁾ The preserved fragments show a marked angelological bias. A papyrus leaf (N.98108), inscribed on one side only, bears extracts from the Psalms in Fayumic with the keyword $\epsilon\rho\rho\alpha$, "king", the first quote being Ps 44: 11b-12. This is evidently a text of the *hermeneia-type*,⁵⁾ a specimen of which had been found earlier on the same site.⁶⁾ However, its contents and appearance suggest that the present manuscript, rather than destined for liturgical use, may be a writing exercise, using the *hermeneiai* as a model.

Further research on these documents should not only concentrate on the texts themselves, some of which are important enough, but should try to situate them as well within the greater corpus of late antique and early medieval texts from the Fayum.⁷⁾ The Naqlun monastery was part of a Christian landscape, which comprised such major sources of written material as Hamouli, Tebtynis/Tutun and Deir al-Hammam. The texts from Naqlun, well documented as they are, can contribute significantly to the reconstruction of this landscape.

⁴⁾ Hamouli codex Pierpont Morgan M574 (Depuydt, no. 59), f. 76v ss., may provide an idea of such a collection.

⁵⁾ Again, (Sahidic) Hamouli codex Pierpont Morgan M574, f. 17r ss., could serve for comparison.

⁶⁾ Cf. *PAM VIII, Reports 1997*, op. cit., 101.

⁷⁾ Cf. my remarks in "A Naqlun monk brought home" (forthcoming in *BSAC* 39).