Remarks on a Coptic Sahidic Fragment of 3 Kingdoms, Previously Described as an Apocryphon of Solomon

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The subject of this article is a Sahidic manuscript fragment kept in the Coptic Museum in Cairo (inv. no. 9253), which was edited by Henri Munier as an unknown apocryphon about King Solomon. According to the *editio princeps*, the text would be based on 3 Kgdms 3:3–13. Munier's description of the content of the fragment led other scholars to mention it in their studies on the apocryphal literature related to King Solomon. A closer examination of the Cairo fragment, however, reveals that Munier was wrong in attributing the text to an unknown apocryphal writing. The authors of this article argue that it actually features portions of the Sahidic version of 3 Kgdms 3:4–6, 8–10. The Coptic biblical text is analyzed in relation with the parallel passage in the Septuagint.

In his catalog of the Sahidic manuscripts kept in the Coptic Museum in Cairo, Henri Munier offered the edition of a literary fragment that he entitled "Conte (?) sur le roi Salomon" ("Story [?] about king Solomon").[1] Munier's description influenced other scholars, who in their turn suggested that the Cairo fragment might belong to an apocryphal writing about Solomon. As we will show in this brief article, however, a more careful inspection reveals that the text edited by Munier is a fragmentary witness of the Sahidic version of 3 Kgdms 3:4–6, 8–10. Notably, this passage has not been attested in Coptic until now.

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[1] Henri Munier, *Manuscrits coptes,* CGAE 74, nos. 9201–9304 (Cairo: Imprimerie de l'IFAO, 1916), 67–68.

I. The Fragment Cairo, Coptic Museum 9253

The manuscript fragment treated here bears the inventory number Cairo, Coptic Museum, inv. no. 9253. It is a damaged parchment leaf tentatively dated by Munier to the twelfth century. According to the description provided in the *editio princeps*, in the current state of preservation the fragment measures ca. 17.5 × 12.5 cm. As we did not have access to the original manuscript, we give below a tentative reedition based on the text published by Munier.[2] In addition, we supply the parallel Greek text of the LXX in the second column.[3]

Cairo, Coptic Museum no. 9253 = 3 Kgdms 3:4–6, 8-10

Recto

3	4	]ⲛⲉⲥ[		3	⁴-ὅτι αὐτὴ
		ⲙⲛ̄]ⲛⲟ[ϭ ?			ὑψηλοτάτη καὶ μεγάλη.
		]ⲛ ⲛ̄ⲟⲗ[ⲓⲁ			χιλίαν ὁλοκαύτωσιν
		ⲥⲟ]ⲗⲟ[ⲙⲱⲛ ⲁϥ ?]			ἀνήνεγκεν Σαλωμων
5		ⲧⲁⲗⲟⲟⲩ ⲉϩⲣⲁⲓ ⲉⲭⲙ̄ⲡⲉⲑⲩ			ἐπὶ τὸ θυ-
		ⲥⲓⲁⲥⲧⲏⲣ̈ⲓⲟⲛ· ⲉⲧϩ̄ⲛⲅⲁⲃⲁⲱ(ⲛ):–			σιαστήριον ἐν Γαβαων.
		⁵ⲁⲩⲱ ⲡⲭⲟⲉⲓⲥ ⲁϥⲟⲩⲱⲛϩ̄ ⲉⲥⲟ			⁵καὶ ὤφθη κύριος τῷ Σα-
		ⲗⲟⲙⲱⲛ· ϩⲛ̄ⲟⲩⲣⲁⲥⲟⲩ ⲛⲧⲉⲩϣⲏ			λωμων ἐν ὕπνῳ τὴν νύκτα,
		ⲁⲩⲱ ⲡⲉⲭⲉ ⲡⲭⲟⲉⲓⲥ ⲛ̄ⲥⲟⲗⲟ			καὶ εἶπεν κύριος πρὸς Σαλω-
10		ⲙⲱⲛ· ϫⲉ ⲁⲓⲧⲉⲓ ⲛⲁⲕ ⲛⲟⲩ			μων Αἴτησαί τι
		ⲁⲓⲧⲏⲙⲁ ⲛⲧⲟⲟⲧ· ⁶ⲡⲉϫⲉ ⲥⲟⲗⲟ			αἴτημα σαυτῷ. ⁶καὶ εἶπεν Σαλω-
		ⲙⲱⲛ ⲙ̄ⲡϫⲟⲉⲓⲥ· ϫⲉ ⲛⲧⲟⲕ ⲁⲕⲉⲓ			μων Σὺ ἐποίη-
		ⲣⲉ ⲙⲛⲡⲉⲕϩⲙϩⲁⲗ· ⲉⲧⲉ ⲇⲁⲩⲉⲓⲇ ⲡⲉ			σας μετὰ τοῦ δούλου σου Δαυιδ
		ⲡⲁⲓⲱⲧ ⲛⲟⲩⲛⲟϭ ⲛⲛⲁ			τοῦ πατρός μου ἔλεος μέγα,

3 ⁴[…] [and] great […] burnt offerings […] [Solomon] offered them up on the altar which is in Gabaon. ⁵And the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream at night. And the Lord said to Solomon, "Ask for yourself a request from me." ⁶Solomon said to the Lord, "You did with your servant, which is David, my Father, great mercy […]"

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[2] Photographs of Cairo no. 9253 are not available in the main photographic archives of Coptic manuscripts (*Corpus dei manoscritti copti letterari* in Hamburg and *Digitale Gesamtedition und Übersetzung des koptisch-sahidischen Alten Testamentes* in Göttingen). Moreover, accessing manuscripts in the Coptic Museum is a notoriously difficult task.

[3] *Septuaginta: Id est Vetus Testamentum graece iuxta LXX interpretes; Editio altera,* ed. A. Rahlfs and R. Hanhart, 2nd ed., 2 vols. in 1 (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), 633.

Verso

[8][　　　　　ϩⲛ̄]	[8]-ἐν
[ⲧⲙⲏⲏ]ⲧⲉ ⲙ̄ⲡⲉ[ⲕⲗⲁⲟⲥ]	μέσῳ τοῦ λαοῦ σου,
[ⲛ̄ⲧⲁ]ⲕⲥⲟⲧⲡ[ϥ̄· ⲟⲩⲗⲁⲟⲥ ⲉⲛⲁ]	ὃν ἐξελέξω, λαὸν πολύν,
[ϣⲱϥ] ϩⲉⲛⲁ[ⲧⲏⲡⲉ· 9ⲉⲕϯ ⲟⲩ]	ὃς οὐκ ἀριθμηθήσεται. 9καὶ δώσεις
5　[ϩⲏⲧ] ⲙ̄ⲙⲟⲧ[ⲛ̄ ⲙ̄ⲡⲉ]ⲕ[ϩⲙϩⲁⲗ ⲉϥ]	τῷ δούλῳ σου καρδίαν
ⲛⲁⲟⲩ̄ⲥⲱⲧⲙ̄· ⲁⲩⲱ ⲉⲧⲉ[ⲣⲉϥ]	ἀκούειν καὶ
ϯϩⲁⲡ ⲉⲡⲉⲕⲗⲁⲟⲥ· ϩⲛ̄ⲟⲩⲇⲓ	διακρίνειν τὸν λαόν σου ἐν δι-
ⲕⲁⲓⲟⲥⲩⲛⲏ· ⲁⲩⲱ ⲉⲧⲣⲉϥⲛⲟⲉⲓ	καιοσύνῃ τοῦ συνίειν
ϩⲛ̄ⲧⲙⲏⲧⲉ ⲛ̄ⲧⲙⲓⲛⲉ· ⲛⲟⲩⲁ	ἀνὰ μέσον ἀ-
10　ⲅⲁⲑⲟⲛ ⲙⲛ̄ⲟⲩⲡⲉⲑⲟⲟⲩ	γαθοῦ καὶ κακοῦ.
ϫⲉ ⲛⲓⲙ ⲡⲉⲧⲛⲁⲟⲩ̄ϭⲙϭⲟⲙ ⲉ̄	ὅτι τίς δυνήσεται
ⲕⲣⲓⲛⲉ ⲙ̄ⲡⲉⲕⲗⲁⲟⲥ ⲡⲁⲓ ⲉⲧ	κρίνειν τὸν λαόν σου
ⲛⲁϣⲱϥ· 10ⲁⲩⲱ ⲥⲟⲗⲟⲙⲱⲛ·	τὸν βαρὺν τοῦτον; 10καὶ ἤρεσεν
	ἐνώπιον κυρίου ὅτι ᾐτήσατο
	Σαλωμων

[8][…] [in the midst] of [your people], [whom] you have chosen, [a numerous people, uncountable. 9You shall give a] sound [mind to] your [servant so that he] will be able to hear and to judge your people with righteousness and to discern between good and bad sort, for who will be able to judge your people, this which is great? 10And Solomon […]

Although the Sahidic translation is not literal throughout, it is generally very accurate, without any rephrasing or significant adaptations of the Greek. On the recto, in those places where the text is clearly readable and does not require the intervention of the editors, the only notable differences are the following:

1. lines 10–11 (= 3 Kgdms 3:5): ⲁⲓⲧⲉⲓ ⲛⲁⲕ ⲛⲟⲩⲁⲓⲧⲏⲙⲁ ⲛⲧⲟⲟⲧ, "Ask for your-self a request from me." This sentence renders well the LXX Αἴτησαί τι αἴτημα σαυτῷ, but the Sahidic adds "from me" (ⲛⲧⲟⲟⲧ) at the end. Additionally, it uses the indefinite article ⲟⲩ-, whereas the Greek employs the singular pronoun τι.

2. lines 11–12 (= 3 Kgdms 3:6): ⲡⲉϫⲉ ⲥⲟⲗⲟⲙⲱⲛ ⲙ̄ⲡϫⲟⲉⲓⲥ, "Solomon said to the Lord." The LXX has a different clause, καὶ εἶπεν Σαλωμων, which trans-lates the Hebrew ויאמר שלמה.[4] The Sahidic omits the conjunction καί and adds ⲙ̄ⲡϫⲟⲉⲓⲥ, "to the Lord," after ⲥⲟⲗⲟⲙⲱⲛ. This reading is not mentioned in the common editions that we checked.

According to Munier, the first four surviving lines of the recto preserve only some letters and strings of letters, which renders their reconstruction challenging. Nevertheless, at least the noun ϭⲗ[ⲓⲗ seems safe to restore in line 3 (3 Kgdms 3:4).

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[4]A. Jepsen, in *BHS,* 5th ed., 564.

This word usually translates the Greek ὁλοκαύτωμα. One would expect to have here ογϣο ⲛ̄ϭⲗⲓⲗ ("a thousand burnt offerings"), which would harmonize with the LXX χιλίαν ὁλοκαύτωσιν. This is unlikely, however, since Munier notes that ⲛ̄ϭ[ⲗⲓⲗ is preceded by the letter ⲛ. Finally, in line 4 Munier gives as certain two letters,]ⲇⲁ[, proposing the reconstruction]ⲇⲁ[ⲅⲉⲓⲁ ("David"). This disagrees with the text of 3 Kgdms 3:4, which does not mention David but rather his son, Solomon. Such a corruption would be notable indeed, as it is not supported by any ancient version. It is possible, however, that Munier's suggestion is based on a misreading of the manuscript. Consequently, we cautiously suggest the reading co]ⲗⲟ[ⲙⲱⲛ on recto, line 4. The examination of the visible traces of letters on the manuscript will help to check further the validity of this hypothesis.

On the verso of the fragment can be detected a few other variant readings compared to the Greek model. On lines 2–5 are preserved some strings of letters that are beyond a reasonable doubt the vestiges of 3:8. The reconstruction of the text, however, remains doubtful, as most of it is lost in the lacunae. Our proposal, ϩⲛ̄]‖[ⲧⲙⲏⲏ]ⲧⲉ ⲙ̄ⲡⲉ[ⲕⲗⲁⲟⲥ]‖ [ⲛ̄ⲧⲁ]ⲕⲥⲟⲧⲡ[ϥ̄· ογⲗⲁⲟⲥ ⲉⲛⲁ]‖[ϣⲱϥ] ϩⲉⲛⲁ[ⲧⲏⲡⲉ, is a literal translation of the Greek ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ λαοῦ σου, ὃν ἐξελέξω, λαὸν πολύν, ὃς οὐκ ἀριθμηθήσεται, being supported both by the surviving letters and by the estimated length of the lines in the manuscript.

The beginning of verse 3:9 (lines 4–5) is even more difficult to conjecture because Munier transcribed only a few letters from it, ⲙ̄ⲙⲟⲧ[   ]ⲕ[. The string of four letters is relevant, however, because it indicates that the Coptic text must be restored as [ογϩⲏⲧ] ⲙ̄ⲙⲟⲧ[ⲛ̄ ("sound mind"). This is congruent with a minority of Greek codices, which have at this point the lection καὶ δώσεις τῷ δούλῳ σου καρδίαν φρονίμην τοῦ ἀκούειν, instead of the more common καὶ δώσεις τῷ δούλῳ σου καρδίαν ἀκούειν.[5] The same reading appears in Theodoret of Cyrrhus's *Commentary on the Books of Kings and Chronicles* (*CPG*, 6201; PG 80:677). Similarly, the Vetus Latina version, as quoted by Ambrosius, *In Psalm. 118*, 18.47 (*CPL*, 141), has *cor prudens audire*.[6] Note also the morphological transformation of ἀκούειν, which in Sahidic uses the future tense and joins to the verbal auxiliary -ϣ-, "will be able to hear."

Leaving aside, therefore, the lacunose sections whose reconstruction is debatable and the normal amount of *variae lectiones*, the text edited by Munier represents a good translation of the LXX version of 3 Kgdms 3:4–10.

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[5] See Frederick Field, *Genesis–Esther,* vol. 1 of *Origenis Hexaplorum quae supersunt*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1875), 597. Field mentions that this reading occurs in codices 19, 82, 93, and 108.

[6] Michael Petschenig, *Expositio Psalmi CXVIII,* part 5 of *S. Ambrosii Opera,* CSEL 62 (Vienna: F. Tempsky, 1913), 421.

II. Provenance of the Fragment

As with the other Sahidic manuscript fragments catalogued by Munier, no. 9253 once belonged to the Monastery of Apa Shenoute, or the White Monastery, as it is usually called, situated in Upper Egypt near Sohag. Around the year 1000 CE, the library of the White Monastery held copies of most of the biblical, liturgical, and literary works extant in Sahidic, and it is our main source of documentation on Coptic literature. Unfortunately, virtually no White Monastery codex has survived intact. Beginning in the second half of the eighteenth century, the White Monastery manuscripts emerged from their cache as dismembered leaves and fragments that were spread in different repositories all over the world.

Because the source of the fragment is known, we tried to identify the manuscript to which it originally belonged. It should be stressed from the outset that our task could not be completed properly without the paleographic inspection of the fragment. Therefore, the conclusions below depend entirely on the short description of the fragment in Munier's catalog.

Study of the collections containing White Monastery fragments has brought to light vestiges of only one codex featuring the Sahidic version of 3 Kingdoms. This is "sa 182," a tenth- to eleventh-century parchment manuscript.[7] But the possibility that Cairo no. 9253 would belong to this codex is excluded from the outset because the text of our fragment is arranged in one column, whereas "sa 182" is a two-column manuscript. Princeton AM 11249 is an unpublished Sahidic fragment of 3 Kgdms 20:24–26, 21:1–3 of unknown provenance. Although written in a single column, supposedly like the Cairo fragment under scrutiny here, AM 11249 is a paper manuscript, not parchment.

Yet another possibility is that the fragment actually came from a lectionary. Portions of 3 Kgdms are attested in the White Monastery lectionaries "sa 108[L]," "sa 148[L]," and "sa 212[L]."[8] None of these texts, however, conforms to the paleographical description provided by Munier for the Cairo fragment of 3 Kingdoms, which are all written in two columns. In conclusion, the fragment edited by Munier does not seem to correspond to any of the aforementioned White Monastery codices, although the fact that we are not able to examine the manuscript leaves this question open.

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[7] Karlheinz Schüssler, *Biblia Coptica: Die koptischen Bibeltexte* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2012), 2.1:132–39.

[8] See "Sa 108[L]" in Schüssler, *Biblia Coptica,* 1.4: 49–69; "sa 148[L]" in Schüssler, *Biblia Coptica,* 2.1:79–81; "sa 212[L]" will be introduced in the next fascicle of *Biblia Coptica* (vol. 2.2).

III. An Apocryphon on Solomon?

Although the text can be identified with precision, Munier mistakenly asserted that it belonged to a "récit—inspiré du texte biblique (III *Rois* III, 3–15)—d'un songe du Salomon (ⲥⲟⲗⲟⲙⲱⲛ) pendant lequel le Seigneur apparaît et tient un long discours" ("story—based on the biblical text [3 Kgdms 3:3–13]—of a dream of Solomon during which the Lord appears and has a long discourse").[9] This description suggests that Munier neither read the Coptic text carefully nor compared it with the Greek version of 3 Kgdms 3:3–15. Had he done so, he would have realized that it is not God who speaks at length there but rather Solomon.

The wrong description of the text by Munier caused Albert-Marie Denis to refer repeatedly in his publications on Jewish pseudepigrapha to an apocryphon that actually never existed. Thus, in a list of apocryphal works on Solomon preserved in various ancient languages, Denis mentioned Cairo no. 9253.[10] Wolfgang Kosack was slightly more cautious, saying that the fragment is so short that the character of the work to which it belonged is hard to evaluate.[11] He wrote concerning this issue,

> Von der gleichen Kunst, eine Bibelstelle zu "umspielen," legt ein anderer Perga-mentschnipsel Zeugnis ab, der leider so klein ist, dass er keinen Zusammenhang mehr ergibt. Die dazugehörige Bibelstelle, von der die Erzählung ihren Ausgang nahm, ist vielleicht 2. Könige 3,3 f, doch der Textumfang ist zu winzig, um etwas Sicheres darüber zu sagen.[12]

Kosack even offered a German translation of the text based on Munier's edition, without noticing what he actually translated. As the comparison against the Greek text of the Septuagint clearly shows, the fragment edited by Munier provides an accurate translation into Sahidic of a portion of 3 Kingdoms.

The identification of this fragment warns us once again that the fragmentary state of most of the surviving Coptic manuscripts often aims to subvert our research. Therefore, care is to be taken lest we invent texts that have never existed.[13]

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[9] Munier, *Manuscrits coptes*, 67.

[10] Albert-Marie Denis, *Introduction aux pseudépigraphes grecs d'Ancien Testament,* SVTP 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 68–69 n. 41; Denis, *Introduction à la littérature religieuse judéo-hellénistique,* 2 vols. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), 1:542 n. 135.

[11] Wolfgang Kosack, "Märchen und Lieder um König Salomo," *Armant* 4 (1969): 225–64, here 228–29.

[12] Ibid., 228 ("2. Könige" may be a typo for "3. Könige.").

[13] Enzo Lucchesi has demonstrated in several studies that many Coptic fragments have been attributed in the past either to the wrong author or to writings that never existed. See, e.g., his articles "Une évangile apocryphe imaginaire," *OLP* 28 (1997): 167–78; "Fausses attributions en hagiographie copte," *Mus* 119 (2006): 243–54, http://dx.doi.org/10.2143/MUS.119.3.2017947; and "Identification de P. Vindob. K 4856: À propos de Démas et Kestas," *Or* 78 (2009): 421–22.