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Three Fragments from a Coptic Codex of the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles

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Abstract

The present article concerns three parchment fragments from the apocryphal Acts of the Apostles in Coptic. Although each of them is kept in a different location, paleographical inspection shows that they belong to the same codex.

The present article concerns three parchment fragments from the apocryphal Acts of the Apostles in Coptic. Although each of them is kept in a different location, paleographical inspection shows that they belong to the same codex. As the fragments are in small collections which are still uncatalogued or little studied, I present them here.

The first fragment is owned by the Norwegian collector Martin Schøyen, being MS 2007 in his collection of manuscripts. The text was copied in two columns, but the right-hand column of the recto (and the left-hand column of the verso) has survived only fragmentarily because of the damage of the parchment. According to the website of the Schøyen collection, the size of the fragment is 34 × 20 cm at its widest points.¹ MS 2007 contains the final part of the Acts of Philip (BHO 975-976; CANT 252) in the Sahidic dialect of Coptic. This apocryphal text is preserved fragmentarily in the Sahidic,² Fayyumic,³

¹ <http://www.schoyencollection.com/apocrypha.html#2007> (accessed July 2012).

² Some Sahidic fragments had been published in I. Guidi, "Frammenti copti II," *Atti della Reale Accademia dei Lincei. Rendiconti* ser. 4, vol. 3.2 (1887) 19-35 at 20-23; translated in Idem, "Gli Atti apocrifi degli Apostoli nei testi copti, arabi ed etiopici," *Giornale della Società Asiatica Italiana* 2 (1888) 1-66 at 27-29; W.E. Crum, *Catalogue of the Coptic Manuscripts in the British Museum* (London 1906) 128 (= no. 292), 137-138 (= no. 310); O. von Lemm, "Kleine koptische Studien I-IX," *Bulletin de l'Académie Impériale des Sciences de Saint-Petersbourg* n.s. 10.5 (1899) 403-434 at 433-434 (reprinted in his *Kleine koptische Studien I-LVIII* [Leipzig 1972] 1-32, at 31-32).

³ A fragmentary Fayyumic version, which is kept in the National Library of Russia in Saint-Petersburg, had been published in O. von Lemm, "Koptische apokryphe

and Bohairic⁴ dialects, and completely in Arabic⁵ and Ethiopic, the latter version being included in the collection of the “Combats of the Apostles” (*Gadla ḥawāryāt*).⁶ The Schøyen leaf narrates the episode of the man possessed by a devil and the conversion of the Phrygians by the apostles Peter and Philip.⁷

The fragment was bought by Martin Schøyen in June 1995 from the dealer Sam Fogg Rare Books in London. Before being sold by Sam Fogg, it had belonged to the American collector Laurence Witten. The library card of the item indicates, with a question mark, that the fragment could have been acquired by Witten from Erik von Scherling, the renowned Dutch book seller and collector of Swedish origin. Furthermore, the same source mentions that there may be a related fragment of the manuscript in question, which was also formerly in von Scherling’s possession.⁸ If so, can we find out the current whereabouts of the document related to the Schøyen fragment?

In order to answer this question, we have available a reliable source of information: the quarterly *Rotulus*, which was privately printed by von Scherling.

Apostelacten I,” *Bulletin de l’Académie Impériale des Sciences de Saint-Petersbourg* n.s. 1 (1890) 509-581 at 520-549.

⁴ Bohairic fragments published in H.G. Evelyn White, *The Monasteries of the Wadi ʾn Natrun* vol. 1: *New Coptic Texts from the Monastery of Saint Macarius* (New York 1926) 38-40.

⁵ Arabic text in A. Smith Lewis, *Acta mythologica apostolorum* (London 1904) 51-55; English translation in A. Smith Lewis, *The Mythological Acts of the Apostles* (London 1904) 60-65.

⁶ The Ethiopic collection of *Gadla ḥawāryāt* comes from Coptic via Arabic. On the description of this collection as a whole and its manuscript tradition, see A. Bausi, “Alcune osservazioni sul *Gadla ḥawāryāt*,” *Annali dell’Università degli studi di Napoli “L’Orientale*” 60-61 (2000-2001) 77-114. An English translation of the Ethiopic version of the Acts of Philip appeared for the first time in S.C. Malan, *The Conflicts of the Holy Apostles. An Apocryphal Book of the Early Eastern Churches* (London 1871) 66-76; republished by E.A. Wallis Budge, *The Contending of the Apostles* 2 vols. (London 1899-1901) 1:126-134 (Ethiopic text), 2:146-155 (English translation).

⁷ The text of the Schøyen fragment corresponds to the Arabic and Ethiopic versions of the text published in Smith Lewis, *Acta mythologica*, 55 (Arabic text); Smith Lewis, *Mythological Acts*, 64-65 (English translation from Arabic); Budge, *Contending of the Apostles*, 1:132-134 (Ethiopic text), 2:154-155 (English translation). A Sahidic parallel to the text of MS 2007 is provided by Paris BnF Copte 129¹⁸, ff. 104r-105r (unpublished). It should be pointed out that the text of the Schøyen fragment is shorter compared to the other surviving textual witnesses.

⁸ On von Scherling’s activity as a papyri dealer and on the dispersal of the collection after his death, see Klaas Worp’s contribution in M. Bakker, A. Bakkers, and K. Worp, “Back to Oegstgeest: The von Scherling Papyrus Collection. Some von Scherling Texts in Minnesota,” *BASP* 44 (2007) 41-73 at 41-47.

This magazine was meant to serve as a catalogue of the items that the antiquities dealer had for sale during the years when he was active. A note published in 1949 in *Rotulus* offers an interesting information for the purpose of this paper:

Acta Philippi et Petri. Acta Jacobi. Fragmenta sahidica membr. saec. VIII-IX.

(A) the leaf from a vellum codex, folio, now measuring 330: ab. 190 mM., double columns with 35 lines to the column, rather angular uncial script, black initial letters in the margins, the recto contains the end of *Acta Philippi* with consequently only 20 lines to the second column.

(B) Lower part from a leaf from the same codex, now measuring 150: 155 mM., with 14 more or less complete lines of the first column on verso and 15 faded lines from the second column on recto.

With complete transcriptions (Cm 11 a/b) and parallel texts of the Fayumic, Bohairic, Arabic & Ethiopic version.⁹

It is interesting to remark that fragment (A) in von Scherling's note corresponds precisely with Schøyen MS 2007 in terms of size, number of lines and content of the text (i.e., it is the last leaf of the Acts of Philip). Moreover, von Scherling mentioned the existence of complete transcriptions and parallels extracted from different other versions of the text, which must be the same as those deposited today in the Schøyen collection together with MS 2007. Another detail confirmed by the *Rotulus* note is that von Scherling owned two fragments codicologically related from the apocryphal Acts of the Apostles in Coptic, one with the Acts of Philip (now Schøyen MS 2007), whilst the second was to contain a portion from the Acts of James, the son of Zebedee (BHO 415-418; CANT 273).¹⁰

⁹ *Rotulus. A Bulletin for Manuscript Collectors* 5 (1949) 39 (= no. 2212). This issue of *Rotulus* is freely available on Prof. Jan Just Witkam's website: http://www.islamicmanuscripts.info/reference/old_books/Rotulus-5-1949.pdf. Other issues of the bulletin are available at <http://www.islamicmanuscripts.info/reference/>.

¹⁰ This text is preserved in Coptic (only fragmentarily), Arabic and Ethiopic. For the edition and translation of some of the Coptic fragments see I. Guidi, "Frammenti copti I," *Rendiconti delle sedute della Reale Accademia dei Lincei, Classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche* ser. 4, vol. 3.1 (1887) 47-63 at 53-69; Italian translation in Idem, "Gli Atti apocrifi," 15-18; O. von Lemm, "Bruchstück einer Petrusapokalypse," *Bulletin de l'Académie Impériale des Sciences de Saint-Petersbourg* (1908) 1323-1328 (reprinted in his *Koptische Miscellen I-CXLVIII* [Leipzig 1972] 107-112). Arabic text in Smith Lewis, *Acta mythologica*, 26-29; English translation of the Arabic in Smith Lewis, *Mythologi-*

As a matter of fact, the fragment from the apocryphal Acts of James has not vanished, but it is found today in the collection of Oriental manuscripts of the Leiden University Library as Cod. Or. 14.331.¹¹ The paleographical comparison of Schøyen MS 2007 to the Leiden fragment showed that the two parchment pieces come from the same codex.¹² The second fragment is badly damaged, less than 25% of the original leaf having been preserved. Its dimensions are 15 × 18 cm,¹³ which correspond *grosso modo* to the size mentioned by von Scherling for his second fragment. The item was purchased by Dr. Jan Just Witkam, the former curator of the Oriental collections in Leiden, in November 1975 from Laurence Witten.¹⁴ However, it is sure that before being in Witten's possession, the fragment had been owned by von Scherling. This is confirmed by Witten's catalogue no. 6 (1975), which says that the text "is accompanied by a transcription and comparative texts prepared by the former owner, E. von Scherling."¹⁵

The aforementioned details put beyond doubt the fact that we have stumbled upon the two Coptic fragments of the apocryphal Acts of the Apostles formerly owned by Erik von Scherling. Trying to trace back the modern trajectory of these apocryphal fragments, it emerged that from von Scherling's collection they had passed into the hands of Laurence Witten. It was the latter collector who sold in 1975 the fragment of the Acts of James to the Library of the University of Leiden. Exactly two decades later, in 1995, Laurence Witten died and his collection was partly donated, partly offered for sale by the family.

cal Acts, 30-34. An English translation from Ethiopic can be found in Malan, *Conflicts of the Holy Apostles*, 172-178; Budge, *Contendings of the Apostles*, 1:247-253 (Ethiopic text), 2:246-252 (English translation).

¹¹ The fragment is mentioned in N. Kruit and J.J. Witkam, *List of Coptic Manuscript Materials in the Papyrological Institute Leiden and in the Library of the University of Leiden* (Leiden 2000).

¹² The anonymous *BASP* reviewer of this paper pointed out that the kinship between the two fragments has been remarked, independently of me, by Renate Dekker in an article about the Coptic papyri in von Scherling collection, which is included in this issue of *BASP*.

¹³ The dimensions are supplied on the website of the Leiden collection: http://bc.ub.leidenuniv.nl/bc/tentoonstelling/Coptic_manuscript/object2a.htm.

¹⁴ Cf. J.J. Witkam, *Inventory of the Oriental Manuscripts of the Library of the University of Leiden* vol. 15: *Manuscripts Or. 14.001-Or. 15.000. Registered in Leiden University Library in the Period between August 1973 and June 1980* (Leiden 2007) 157-158 (available at <http://www.islamicmanuscripts.info/inventories/leiden/or15000.pdf>).

¹⁵ L. Witten, *Catalogue 6: One Hundred Important Books & Manuscripts. 6th to 19th Century* (Monroe 1975) 13-14 (= no. 12), with a photographic reproduction of the fragment's verso.

The verso (hair side) of the Leiden fragment contains the episode of the blind man cured and converted by the apostle James, while the same side of

¹⁹ Cf. von Lemm, "Petrusapokalypse," 1325-1326.

P.Monts. Roca 323 reads the consequences of this miracle, with the crowds accusing the apostles of witchcraft. As no Sahidic manuscript is known to preserve this episode, the continuity of the fragments' text on the verso sides has been established by the comparison with the Arabic and Ethiopic versions. Thus, the *incipit* τ[ΟΤΕ Ι]Δ[Κ]ΟΒΟC ΠΕΧ[Ε Μ]ΠΒΛ[Λ]Ε· ΧΕ (Leiden Cod. Or. 14.331v, col. 1, lines 2-4) corresponds to the Arabic *فنادى يعقوب الأعمى وقال له*, Ethiopic *ወጸዎ፡ ያዕቆብ፡ ለውእቱ፡ ዕውር፡ ወይቢሎ፡*, while the *explicit* ΔΝΟΝ ΝΕΖΜΖΔ[Λ] ΝΟΥΝΟΥΤ[Ε ΝΔΓΔ]ΘΟC· ΕΥΜ[ΟΥΤΕ Ε]ΡΟΥ [ΧΕ] Ι[Ε] (P.Monts. Roca 323v, col. 2, lines 17-21) parallels *نحن عبيد لرب صالح اسمه يسوع* in Arabic and *ንሕነ፡ አግብር ቲሁ፡ ለአምላክ፡ ኀር፡ ዘስሙ፡ ኢየሱስ፡* in Ethiopic.²⁰

A few words are in order concerning the provenance of the Montserrat fragment. This used to be in the possession of Father Ramón Roca-Puig, a monk of the Montserrat Abbey, who left his collection of manuscripts to the monastery after his death in 2001. It is not clear when or from where Father Roca-Puig acquired the Acts of James fragment. In her book concerning the Coptic Biblical fragments in the Montserrat Abbey, Sofia Torallas Tovar has written the following lines concerning the Roca Coptic manuscript fragments:

Roca-Puig created his collection personally, either with the financial support of Catalan influential families or by his own means. Apparently, he bought most of the papyri in Cairo in the 50s of last century, through the *Institut Copte* and the *Società delle missioni africane*, although we know that he also bought important pieces from an antiquary in Lugano (Switzerland).²¹

It is possible that Roca-Puig had bought the fragment from von Scherling. In fact, there is at least one more Coptic manuscript which was shared by the two collectors. Thus, a little parchment palimpsest fragment formerly in the possession of von Scherling, which is kept today in the collection of McGill University in Montreal as MS No. Coptic 2, came from a larger manuscript which belonged to Roca-Puig (P.Monts. Roca 2.4).²² However, if Roca-Puig purchased the Acts of James fragment from the Dutch dealer, why do von

²⁰ Smith Lewis, *Acta mythologica*, 27; Budge, *Contendings of the Apostles*, 1:249 (with modifications).

²¹ S. Torallas Tovar, *Biblia Coptica Montserratensia* (P. Monts. Roca II) (Barcelona 2007) 9.

²² The superior part of the manuscript contains a magical text, while the underlying text was identified as 2 Samuel. The Montreal fragment was published in B.C. Jones, "A New Coptic Fragment of 2 Samuel 10:13-14, 17-18: McGill MS NO Coptic 2," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 184 (2013) 126-130. For the Montserrat part of the manuscript, see Torallas Tovar, *Biblia Coptica Montserratensia*, 19-42. Torallas Tovar

Scherling's transcriptions not include this item as well? Therefore, although we do not possess enough information, I suggest that von Scherling and Roca-Puig might have purchased the three fragments from the same dealer, who remains unknown.

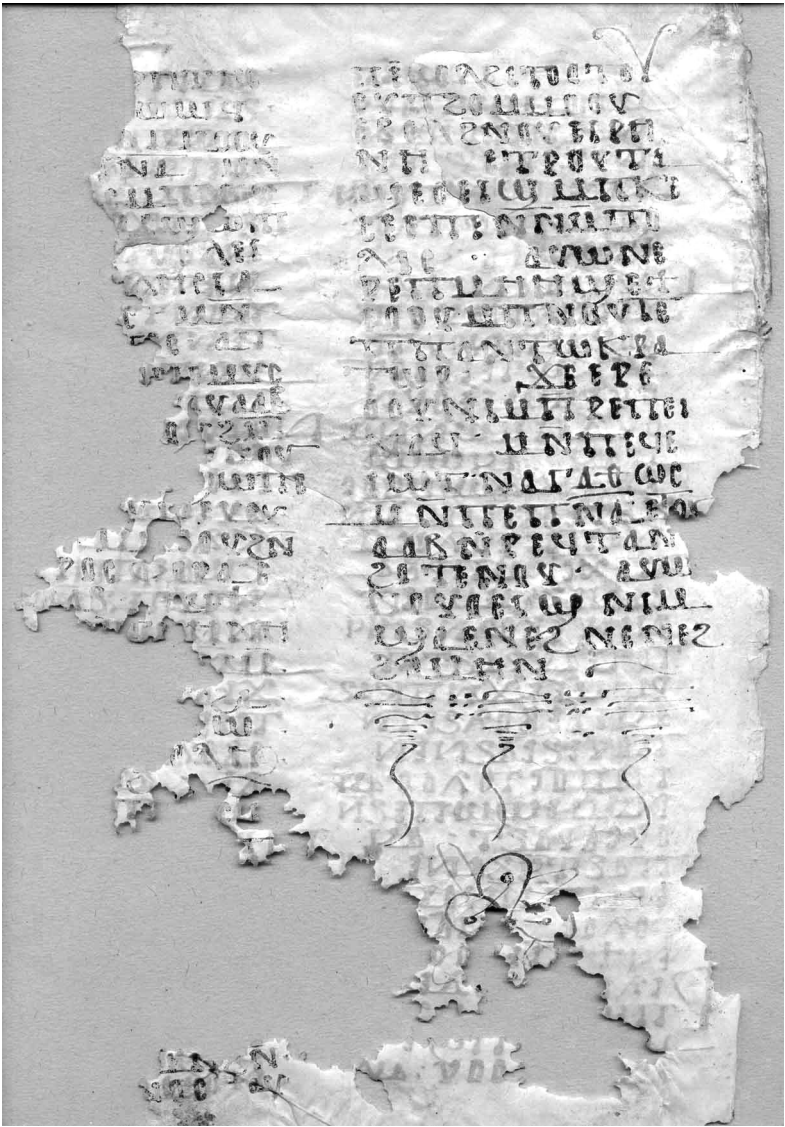
It is worth noting that there is no indication that the source of the fragments was the library of the White Monastery, whose codices, sold piecemeal, are scattered today all over the world. Although this provenance cannot be excluded from the outset, the main collections holding material which undoubtedly come from White Monastery do not seem to preserve other pieces from the same codex,²³ or at least copied in the same scribe's hand. In conclusion, unless further evidence surfaces, we cannot assume that the three fragments mentioned here do come from the White Monastery.

As to the age of the documents, keeping in mind the current unreliability of Coptic paleography,²⁴ a 10th century date seems possible.

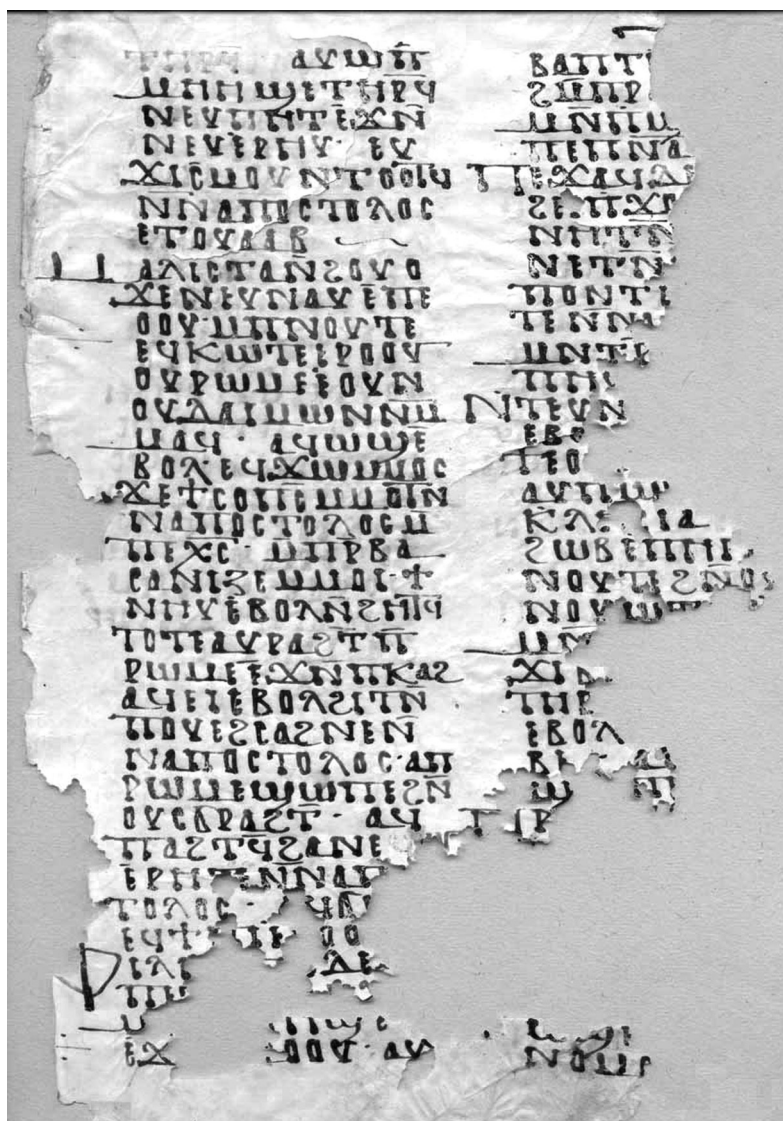
mentions that one of the Roca-Puig fragments of this manuscript was identified in the Palau Ribes collection in Barcelona.]

²³ For a directory of the surviving fragments of the White Monastery codices containing the apocryphal Acts of the Apostles, see E. Lucchesi, "Contribution codicologique," 4-24. Our fragments cannot be attributed on paleographical grounds to any of the codices mentioned there.

²⁴ B. Layton, "Towards a New Coptic Palaeography," in T. Orlandi and F. Wisse (eds.), *Acts of the Second International Congress of Coptic Studies* (Rome 1985) 149-158.



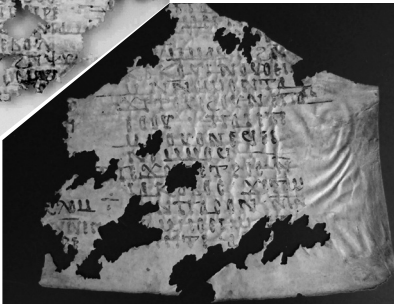
Schøyen MS 2007 recto



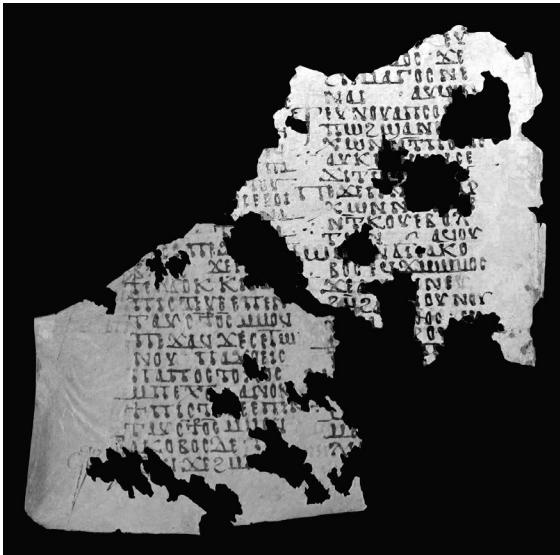
Schøyen MS 2007 verso



P.Monts. Roca 323 recto



Leiden Or. 14.331 recto



P.Monts. Roca 323 verso (top)
Leiden Or. 14.331 verso (bottom)

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