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## More Sahidic Fragments from the Life of Shenoute Attributed to Besa

**Abstract:** This article identifies a parchment leaf kept in the Pushkin Museum in Moscow as a fragment from the Sahidic version of the *Life of Shenoute* (Bibliotheca Hagiographia Orientalis 1074-1078; clavis coptica 0461), a hagiographical work about the archimandrite of the White Monastery attributed to his successor, Besa. The fragment offers a portion of the text which has survived only in the Arabic and Ethiopic versions. The paleographical inspection indicates that the dismembered leaf belonged to the White Monastery codex MONB.WV. Besides the Moscow fragment, this article adds two other paleographically related fragments to the White Monastery codex MONB.WV.

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In 1991, Alla I. Elanskaya edited a part of the fragmentary Coptic manuscripts in the Pushkin Museum in Moscow,<sup>1</sup> which previously belonged to the Russian Orientalist Vladimir Golenischev. It was only three years later that she finally published all the Coptic manuscripts in this collection.<sup>2</sup>

Among the unidentified fragments edited by Elanskaya, there is a parchment leaf which is kept under the call number I.1.b.654.<sup>3</sup> The folio is paginated 65-66, being written in two columns which comprise between 27-28 lines. According to the paleographical description of Elanskaya, the fragment has 33.2 cm length and 27 cm breadth.

The text, entitled by its editor a “homily on the frailty of human life,” is a *memento mori* in which the author exhorts his listeners to repentance. Although the tone of the text might point to a homiletic discourse, the fragment comes in fact from a hagiographic work. Thus, Moscow I.1.b.654 contains a portion from

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<sup>1</sup> Alla I. Elanskaya, *Coptic Literary Texts of the Pushkin State Fine Arts Museum in Moscow* (Studia Aegyptiaca 13; Budapest: Loránd Eötvös University, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> Alla I. Elanskaya, *The Literary Coptic Manuscripts in the A. S. Pushkin State Fine Arts Museum in Moscow* (VCS 18; Leiden: Brill, 1994).

<sup>3</sup> Elanskaya, *Coptic Literary Texts* (see note 1), 120-125; Elanskaya, *Literary Coptic Manuscripts* (see note 2), 356-361.

the *Life of Shenoute*,<sup>4</sup> attributed to Besa, Shenoute's immediate successor as archimandrite of the White Monastery. The *Life of Shenoute* circulated in different recensions in Sahidic,<sup>5</sup> Bohairic,<sup>6</sup> Arabic,<sup>7</sup> Ethiopic<sup>8</sup> and Syriac.<sup>9</sup>

The newly identified fragment belongs to a section of the *vita* which has been previously unattested in Coptic, being available only in the Arabic and Ethiopic versions. In this section, Shenoute recounts to Besa a long apocalyptic discourse which Christ revealed to him in the desert. It is likely that the discourse of Christ was a later addition to the text since it mentions the invasion of Egypt by the Arabs, who are called "the sons of Ishmael,"<sup>10</sup> and their persecution of the Christians.

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<sup>4</sup> See Paul Peeters, *Bibliotheca Hagiographica orientalis* (Subsidia hagiographica 10; Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1910), 1074-1078; *clavis coptica* 0461 (<http://cmcl.aai.uni-hamburg.de>, last access 15/01/2014).

<sup>5</sup> Different fragments of the *Vita Sinuthii sahidica* are published in: Émile Amélineau, ed., *Monuments pour servir à l'histoire de l'Égypte chrétienne au IVe et Ve siècle* 1 (Mémoires publiés par les membres de la Mission Archéologique Française au Caire 4,1; Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1888), 237-247, 633-649; Walter E. Crum, ed., *Catalogue of the Coptic Manuscripts in the British Museum* (London: British Museum, 1905), 164-165 (= no. 351); Henri Munier, ed., *Catalogue général des antiquités égyptiennes du Musée du Caire: N°s 9201-9304: Manuscrits coptes* (Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1916), 63-65; Arthur F. Shore, "Extracts of Besa's Life of Shenoute in Sahidic," *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 65 (1979): 134-139; Nina Lubomierski, *Die Vita Sinuthii: Form- und Überlieferungsgeschichte der hagiographischen Texte über Schenoute den Archimandriten* (STAC 45; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 246-257.

<sup>6</sup> *Vita Sinuthii bohairica* (ed. Amélineau, *Monuments* [see note 5], 1-99); the Bohairic version was published again in Johannes Leipoldt, ed., *Sinuthii Archimandritae Vita et Opera Omnia* 1 (CSCO 41; Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1906). An English translation of the Bohairic was published in David N. Bell, *Besa: The Life of Shenoute* (Cistercian Studies 73; Cistercian Publications: Kalamazoo, Mich., 1983). The *variae lectiones* of some Bohairic fragments are given in Hugh G. Evelyn-White, *The Monasteries of the Wadi 'n Natrun 1: New Coptic Texts from the Monastery of Saint Macarius* (Publications of the Metropolitan Museum of Art Egyptian Expedition 2; New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1926), 163.

<sup>7</sup> *Vita Sinuthii arabica* (ed. Amélineau, *Monuments* [see note 5], 289-478). Another Arabic fragment was published in Émile Galtier, "Fragments de la vie arabe de Schenoudi," *Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale* 4 (1905): 105-112.

<sup>8</sup> *Vita Sinuthii aethiopica* (CSCO 444-445, Colin).

<sup>9</sup> *Vita Sinuthii syriaca* (ed. Ignazio Guidi, "Le traduzioni dal copto," *Nachrichten von der Königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften und der Georg-August-Universität zu Göttingen* 3 [1889]: 49-56; ed. François Nau, *Une version syriaque inédite de la vie de Schenoudi* [Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1900]).

<sup>10</sup> Arabic بَنُو اسْمَاعِيلْ: የኢትዮጵያ: On this designation of the Arabs, cf. Israel Eph'al, "'Ishmael' and 'Arab(s)': A Transformation of Ethnological Terms," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 35 (1976): 225-235. A similar term is applied to the Arabs in the Coptic homily *De Arborum dominatione* (CPG 2209; *clavis coptica* 0056), attributed to Athanasius of Alexandria: ዓርባዎች, for the translation of the passage in question see Tito Orlandi, *Omelie copte* (Corona Patrum 7; Torino: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1981), 87. On the Arabic version of

Recently, the Sahidic fragments of the *Life of Shenoute* have been studied and organized according to their original codices by Nina Lubomierski.<sup>15</sup> She has established that the text is preserved in six fragmentary codices. At least four of these come from the White Monastery, in Upper Egypt: Monastero Bianco (MONB) FR, MONB.WU, MONB.WV and MONB.WX. Paleographical comparison with the other surviving fragments indicated that the new fragment in Moscow belongs to codex MONB.WV. Lubomierski has mentioned six other surviving folios of this codex, which are housed today in different collections in Paris, London, Vienna and Naples:

Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Copte 129<sup>12</sup>, fol. 75.

London, British Library, Or. 3581B, fol. 70.

Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, K 9471.

Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Copte 129<sup>13</sup>, fol. 91.

London, British Library, Or. 3581B, fol. 71.

Naples, Biblioteca Nazionale, IB.14, fol. 56.

this sermon, cf. Georg Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur* 1 (Studi e testi 118; Vatican: Biblioteca Apostolica, 1944), 276-279.

## 11 *Vita Sinuthii arabica* (348 A. [with modifications]).

## 12 *Vita Sinuthii aethiopica* (CSCO 444, 16 C.).

### 13 *Vita Sinuthii arabica* (349 A. [with modifications]).

<sup>14</sup> *Vita Sinuthii aethiopica* (CSCO 444, 17 C.). Cf. *Vita Sinuthii arabica* (348-349 A.).

<sup>15</sup> Lubomierski, *Die Vita Sinuthii* (see note 5). See also the report on her research on this text in eadem, "Towards a Better Understanding of the So-Called *Vita Sinuthii*," in *Actes du huitième Congrès international d'études coptes: Paris, 28 juin-3 juillet 2004* 2 (ed. Nathalie Bosson and Anne Boud'hors; *Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta* 163; Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 527-536; republished as "The Coptic Life of Shenoute," in *Christianity and Monasticism in Upper Egypt* 1: *Akhmim and Sohag* (ed. Gawdat Gabra and Hany N. Takla; Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2008), 91-98.

In addition to the aforementioned leaf published by Elanskaya, two other fragments should be added to codex MONB.WV. Thus, Louvre E 10066 belongs to § 111 of the *Life of Shenoute*,<sup>16</sup> whereas a fragment in Paris, namely Bibliothèque Nationale 161<sup>6</sup>, fol. 36, comes from §§ 152-156.

Hopefully, this brief codicological note will be of help to the future editors of the Sahidic version of the *Life of Shenoute*.

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**16** This parallel goes for the hair side of the fragment. The flesh side is too faded to allow a proper identification.