

NOTE ON THE DATING OF THE BRITISH LIBRARY SAHIDIC FRAGMENT OF PS.-CYRIACUS OF BEHNESA'S *LAMENT OF MARY*

BY ALIN SUCIU

In an article published recently in the journal *Aethiopica*, I identified a portion from the Sahidic version of the homily on the lament of Mary, attributed to Cyriacus of Behnesa (CANT 74).¹ The text is preserved on a manuscript fragment currently kept in the British Library. This parchment fragment was retrieved from the covers of a paper codex discovered together with other Sahidic manuscripts at the beginning of the 20th century, probably at the ruins of the Monastery of St. Mercurius, near Edfu in Upper Egypt. Although the codices once belonged to this monastery at Edfu, their colophons indicate that they were actually inscribed in the nearby scriptorium of Esna (Latopolis). The bulk of the St. Mercurius manuscripts were purchased by the British Museum in June 1909 from the Cairo-based antiquities dealer Maurice Nahman, and subsequently published by Ernest Alfred Wallis Budge.² They were moved later from the British Museum to the newly built British Library. Today the fragment of Ps.-Cyriacus of Behnesa's *Lament of Mary* is bound together with the codex from whose covers it was extracted as BL Or. 7027, fol. 75.³

As the manuscript from which it was retrieved is dated in a colophon Tobe 3, 721 Era of the Martyrs (= December 29, 1004 CE),⁴ this detail provides a *terminus ante quem* for the age of our fragment. In my article, I pointed out that its paleographical features are so similar to those of the other codices from the Monastery of St. Mercurius — which are dated to the late 10th and the early 11th century CE — that this fragment probably also came from the Esna scriptorium and can be dated around the same

¹ Alin Suciu, “A British Library Fragment from a Homily on the Lament of Mary and the So-Called Gospel of Gamaliel,” *Aethiopica* 15 (2012), 53–71.

² E. A. Wallis Budge, *Coptic Apocrypha in the Dialect of Upper Egypt*, London 1913; Idem, *Coptic Martyrdoms etc. in the Dialect of Upper Egypt*, London 1914; Idem, *Miscellaneous Coptic Texts in the Dialect of Upper Egypt*, London 1915.

³ Paleographical description of the fragment in Suciu, “A British Library Fragment” 63; Bentley Layton, *Catalogue of Coptic Literary Manuscripts in the British Library Acquired Since the Year 1906*, London 1987, 111–112 (= no. 100).

⁴ For this colophon see Arnold van Lantschoot, *Recueil des colophons des manuscrits chrétiens d’Égypte*, Bibliothèque du Muséon 1, Louvain 1929, 211–213 (= no. 119).

period.⁵ A more careful paleographical inspection of the Edfu-Esna manuscripts has in fact now revealed another codex copied by the scribe of the *Lament of Mary* fragment, which confirms the initial guess concerning its provenance and dating.

The same copyist inscribed a codex whose quires are currently dispersed between the Freer collection in Washington and the British Library:⁶

London, British Library Or. 7028 (quires 1-3)
 London, British Library Or. 6780 (quires 4, 6)
 Washington, Freer collection MS 2 (quire 5)

The manuscript is in Sahidic and contains two texts: an encomium on the Archangel Gabriel by Ps.-Celestinus of Rome (clavis coptica 0093) and a homily on the Assumption of the Virgin by Ps.-Theophilus of Alexandria (CPG 2625; clavis coptica 0396).⁷ According to one of the colophons, this codex was copied by the scribe John, son of Colluthus, probably in Esna.⁸ The manuscript is dated Paremhotep 4, 690 Era of the Martyrs, 363 Era of Hegira, which corresponds to February 28, 974 CE.⁹ Another colophon says that the codex was repaired on 705 Era of the Martyrs, 378 Era of Hegira (= 988-989 CE).¹⁰

On the basis of the identical handwriting, we may conclude that the scribe of the *Lament of Mary* fragment was the same John, son of Colluthus. Consequently, the colophon dated 974 CE helps us to ascertain that the British Library fragment of the *Lament of Mary* was inscribed in the second half of the 10th century CE.

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⁵ Suciu, “A British Library Fragment” 63.

⁶ Description and codicological reconstruction of the manuscript in Layton, *Catalogue* 194-196 (= no. 162); William H. Worrell, *The Coptic Manuscripts in the Freer Collection*, University of Michigan, Humanistic Series, 10, New York/London 1923, 115-126.

⁷ Both texts were edited and translated into English in Worrell, *Coptic Manuscripts*, 129-321 (Sahidic text), 327-379 (English translation).

⁸ The scriptorium is not indicated in the colophon, but all the paleographical features of the codex are akin to those of the other manuscripts inscribed in Esna.

⁹ Van Lantschoot, *Recueil des colophons*, 182-184 (= no. 107).

¹⁰ Van Lantschoot, *Recueil des colophons*, 96-97 (= no. 59).