

A BOHAIRIC FRAGMENT OF THE *ACTS OF MATTHEW IN
THE CITY OF THE PRIESTS* AND OTHER COPTIC FRAGMENTS
FROM THE GENIZAH OF THE Umayyad MOSQUE IN
DAMASCUS

1. *Introduction*

The Genizah of the Great Umayyad Mosque in Damascus stands as one of the most significant, albeit little known and poorly researched, manuscript finds of the 20th century. From this stash emerged a myriad of parchment and paper manuscripts, mostly Muslim literary and documentary texts in Arabic, from copies of the Qur'ān and theological works to pilgrimage certificates and legal civil contracts¹. However, among them there are also Jewish² and Christian writings in a large variety of languages, including Hebrew, Aramaic, Arabic, Syriac, Christian-Palestinian Aramaic, Armenian, Georgian, Coptic, Greek, Latin, and Old French. The present paper introduces a Bohairic Coptic fragment discovered in the Damascus Genizah, which contains portions of the *Acts of Matthew in the City of the Priests* (CANT 268; BHO 738-739), a text that belonged to the collection of apocryphal acts of the apostles used in the Egyptian non-Chalcedonian church. Apart from the fact that the fragment represents the first attestation of this apocryphal text in Coptic, its provenance from Damascus only adds to the significance. The fragment is one of the rare examples of Coptic manuscripts that have not been discovered on Egyptian soil, documenting thus the presence of Coptic enclaves abroad. I will first offer an overview of the circumstances in which the manuscripts from the Genizah of the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus were discovered. Then I will introduce four Coptic fragments found in this location. The article also includes a study and an edition with accompanying English translation of the Bohairic fragment of the *Acts of Matthew in the City of the Priests*.

¹ The Muslim documents, some of which have been transferred to the Turkish and Islamic Art Museum in Istanbul, are known especially thanks to the publications of Dominique Sourdel and Janine Sourdel-Thomine, see SOURDEL – SOURDEL-THOMINE, *Nouveaux documents*; EID., *À propos des documents*; EID., *Trois actes de vente*; EID., *Une collection médiévale*; EID., *Certificats de pèlerinage par procuration*; EID., *Certificats de pèlerinage*; EID., *Mariage et séparation*; EID., *Gouvernance et libéralités*.

² A couple of Jewish documents have been published in ASHUR, *A Marriage Contract*; BOHAK – MORGENSTERN, *Magical Booklet*.

2. *The Genizah of the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus*

The manuscripts were immured for centuries in the Bayt al-Māl or the Qubbat al-khazna (the “Treasury Dome”), a small octagonal pavilion decorated with Byzantine-style mosaics, located in the northwest part of the courtyard of the Great Umayyad Mosque³. As rumors concerning the existence of a Genizah in this mosque reached Germany at the end of the 19th century, the German scholar Bruno Violet was appointed in 1900 for an official research mission to Damascus to study the non-Muslim manuscripts⁴. Violet spent slightly more than a year there, during which time he analyzed and transcribed various fragments from the Genizah. In order to show the relevance of the discovery, he chose to edit one of the most intriguing fragments: a Greek-Arabic diglot parchment bifolio containing *Ps.* 77:20-31, 51-61 (*LXX*)⁵. The Greek text is accommodated on the left-hand column of the pages, while the Arabic translation is on the right-hand column. The oddity of this manuscript lies in the fact that the Arabic text is transliterated into Greek characters⁶. Before his departure from Syria in the summer of 1901, Violet received approval to photograph some of the fragments. This set of photographs is held today in the Brandenburg Academy in Berlin (call number BBAW/GCS, Akz.-Nr. 481).

Through diplomatic approaches from Germany to the Ottoman Empire, the batch of fragments studied by Violet, comprising 1558 items⁷, was sent in 1902 to Berlin to be studied by German scholars. The fragments were initially housed in the Royal Museums, from where they were later transferred to the State Library. The “Christmas gift of the Sultan,” as the fragments had been called, benefited from a couple of enthusiastic articles written by Hermann von Soden⁸. However, the publication of the material was slow-paced and, when at the end of the year 1908 the Ottoman Empire suddenly requested the fragments, most of them were still unedited. Consequently, remnants of 33 manuscripts were hastily photographed before the entire lot was sent back to the legal owner at the beginning of 1909⁹.

³ For the following discussion, I found particularly useful RADICIOTTI – D’OTTONE, *I frammenti*; BANDT – RATTMANN, *Damaskusreise*; D’OTTONE, *Manuscripts as Mirrors*; VOLLANDT, *Beyond Arabic*.

⁴ On the circumstances of Violet’s visit to Damascus, see BANDT – RATTMANN, *Damaskusreise*, p. 5-11.

⁵ VIOLET, *Psalmfragment*.

⁶ Known as the “Violet Fragment,” this manuscript has received some attention in scholarly literature, see, e.g., MACDONALD, *Literacy*, p. 100-103; CORRIENTE, *The Psalter Fragment*; MAVROUDI, *The Violet Fragment*; VOLLANDT, *Beyond Arabic*.

⁷ BANDT – RATTMANN, *Damaskusreise*, p. 12.

⁸ VON SODEN, *Weihnachtsgeschenk*; IDEM, *Bericht*.

⁹ I count here the total number of *different* manuscripts which were photographed. The number of the individual leaves and fragments is higher.

Little is known concerning the fate of the fragments after their return to the Ottoman Empire. Violet thought that they ended up in the Topkapı Museum in Istanbul, but this information can be rejected as speculation since it could not be verified. William Hatch, who made a research visit to the National Museum in Damascus in March 1929, furnishes more relevant testimony. According to Hatch's report, while searching through the collection of the museum in order to find the debris from the Qubbat al-khazna, he "saw many fragments of manuscripts in Greek, Syriac, Armenian, Coptic, and Arabic"¹⁰. It seems thus plausible to suppose that at least some of the Christian fragments were still kept at that time in the National Museum in Damascus. Unfortunately, due to the current unstable political situation in Syria, it cannot be confirmed if the fragments are still in the same location.

There is evidence that some manuscripts emerged from the cache many decades before Violet's mission to Damascus. Possibly, some such fragments had been scattered and sold abroad. For example, Kurt Treu was able to document that 23 parchment leaves from the Damascus Genizah, which contain Greek translations from the ascetical homilies of Isaac the Syrian, are *membra disjecta* from the codex to which *Paris, BnF Supplément grec 693* also belonged¹¹. The 78 leaves in the National Library of France were acquired in September 1867 in Paris from an unknown source. Nevertheless, their codicological connection with the folios photographed by Violet helps us to establish that they very likely came from the Qubbat al-khazna. However, other possible fragments from the same stash which may currently be housed in Western collections cannot be identified in the absence of proper acquisition records.

3. *Four Coptic Fragments from the Damascus Genizah. Description and Content*

As the current whereabouts of the fragments are unknown, the photographs taken by Violet during his stay in Damascus, together with those made in Berlin, remain to date our main sources of documentation. The photographs taken while the fragments were in Berlin are inserted in two folders, which have received the call numbers *Mss. simulata orientalia* 5 and 6. The first folder contains photographs of the vestiges of a parchment codex featuring the Syriac translation of Theodore of Mopsuestia's commentary on Ecclesiastes (*CPG* 3836)¹². The second includes photographic

¹⁰ HATCH, *An Uncial Fragment*, p. 151.

¹¹ TREU, *Remnants*.

¹² Edited in STROTHMANN, *Ecclesiastes-Kommentars*.

reproductions of fragments in various languages. The photographs were kept in the State Library in Berlin, but they disappeared in the turmoil of the Second World War and were considered lost. However, they were recovered in 1999 and are currently available in electronic format on the website of the library¹³.

Notably, the folder Mss. simulata orientalia 6 contains photographs of four Coptic fragments discovered in the Qubbat al-khazna. Thus, folio 27r accommodates photos of two fragments, while folio 28r has photographs of their reverse sides. Likewise, folio 29r includes photographs of two additional fragments. The opposite sides of these fragments feature on folio 30r. Below is a more detailed description of the fragments in question. Obviously, as they are not available for autoptic examination, the description cannot be exhaustive.

(1) Folios 27r, 28r, top fragment.

Description: incomplete leaf of a palimpsest manuscript.

Material: parchment.

Dating: ca. 6th-7th c. for the Coptic text/ca. 11th c. for the Arabic text.

Content: *Matth.* 27:29-46 in Fayyumic/Islamic text.

The manuscript is a Coptic-Arabic palimpsest, with the more recent Arabic script written upside down in relation to the Coptic. The recto and verso of the fragment were reversed when the photographs were taken, so that f. 28r = true recto and f. 27r = true verso. On one side of the Arabic fragment are mentioned ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ (the commander of the Muslim army that conquered Egypt in 641 CE), ‘Abdallāh al-Zubayr, and the Umayyad caliph Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam. In fact, the upper Arabic text seems to belong to the ninth-century Muslim historian al-Madā’inī. The story relates to the Umayyad governor al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf, who interrogates a Khārijite rebel¹⁴.

The *scriptio inferior* is in a relatively early, neat Fayyumic hand. The text is arranged as two columns. Enough is legible on the basis of the photos to recognize that the recto (hair side) features *Matth.* 27:29-38, while the verso (flesh side) gives *Matth.* 27:38-46 in dialect F5¹⁵. This portion of the Gospel of Matthew is not attested elsewhere in Fayyumic manuscripts.

¹³ Mss. simulata orientalia 5: http://digital.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/werkansicht?PPN=PPN730121836&PHYSID=PHYS_0005&DMDID=; Mss. simulata orientalia 6: http://digital.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/werkansicht?PPN=PPN685013049&PHYSID=PHYS_0002&DMDID= (retrieved: October 2017).

¹⁴ I am grateful to Sean Anthony (Ohio State University) for helping me to identify the content of the Arabic text.

¹⁵ VON SODEN, *Bericht*, p. 828, describes this fragment as, “ein Blatt eines neutestamentlichen Fajumpalimpsests.” For dialect F5, see KASSER, *System of Sigla*, p. 147.

- (2) Folios 27r, 28r, bottom fragment.

Description: complete leaf of a small-dimension codex.

Material: paper.

Dating: 12th c.?

Content: *Kataxioson* 1-10 in Bohairic.

The fragment partly preserves the prayer known as *Kataxioson*¹⁶. The surviving portion offers the beginning of the text, only a few of the opening words being lost. Since the Egyptian tradition has kept separately both the monastic and the cathedral offices, the *Kataxioson* is recited in the Coptic rite during the vesper (i.e. the 11th hour) raising of incense, but also during the compline (i.e. the 12th hour) of the *Horologion*. The Damascus fragment has some *variae lectiones* compared to the text of the *Kataxioson* published by Oswald Burmester¹⁷.

- (3) Folios 29r, 30r, top fragment.

Description: fragment from the superior part of a leaf.

Material: parchment.

Dating: 10th c.

Content: *Acts of Matthew in the City of the Priests*.

The script is the typical Bohairic uncial widely attested in the ninth- to early eleventh-century parchment codices from Wādī an-Naṭrūn. This fragment is thoroughly discussed below.

- (4) Folios 29r, 30r, bottom fragment.

Description: complete leaf of a medium-size codex.

Material: paper.

Dating: 12th c.?

Content: unidentified.

The text is in the Sahidic dialect of Coptic, but the orthography is very irregular. The fragment features a lament of Mary, the mother of Jesus, who cries for the death of her son. The author entreats the audience to listen to the sweet words that Mary pronounced, “while she was in the house of John,” presumably the apostle. No parallel to this text can presently be provided.

¹⁶ This must be the fragment analyzed and correctly identified by Stephen Emmel, Mary Farag, and Samuel Moawad in December 2009 upon Cordula Bandt’s request, as one can imply from BANDT – RATTMANN, *Damaskusreise*, p. 20.

¹⁷ KHS-BURMESTER, *Horologion*, p. 136-137 (Bohairic text), 237 (English translation), ٢٨ (Arabic text). Sahidic text in QUECKE, *Untersuchungen*, p. 418-419, 481-483 (Sahidic text and German translation).

Violet's personal notes, which are kept in the collection of the Berlin Academy, include also a list of the manuscripts that he checked in Damascus. This checklist mentions the existence of nine parchment and nine paper fragments written in Coptic. It is thus clear that the majority of Coptic fragments found in the Qubba were not photographed. We have no further information concerning the present location of these fragments.

4. *The Significance of the Coptic Fragments from the Damascus Genizah*

The Coptic fragments found in the Genizah of the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus have remained almost unnoticed by Coptologists. In his 1903 report concerning the transfer of the non-Muslim fragments from Damascus to Berlin, von Soden announced that the publication of the Coptic material had been entrusted to Carl Schmidt¹⁸. At that time, Schmidt was freshly appointed – largely through Harnack's intervention – in the Kirchenväterkommission of the Berlin Academy, and was thus the obvious choice to publish the Coptic fragments from the Qubbat al-khazna¹⁹. However, for reasons that remain unknown, Schmidt did not edit any of them, nor mention them in his publications. Consequently, the existence of the fragments was gradually forgotten, especially after the photographs deposited in the collection of the Staatsbibliothek were considered lost²⁰.

This state of affairs is regrettable given that the fragments are doubly remarkable. Firstly, as we have seen, at least two of them provide hitherto unknown texts. Thus, the Fayyumic palimpsest has a portion of the Gospel of Matthew that has no other witness in this dialect. Likewise, the *Acts of Matthew in the City of the Priests* has previously been thought to be extant only in Arabic and Ethiopic. The Damascus fragment reveals that a Coptic version also existed and that represents the *Vorlage* of the Arabic translation. Secondly, the Coptic fragments from the Qubbat al-khazna are among the few manuscripts in this language found outside the frontiers of Egypt. In order to properly understand their relevance, a condensed overview of the Coptic manuscripts of non-Egyptian provenance is warranted.

Major deposits of Coptic manuscripts written in the Sahidic dialect have been unearthed at Faras, Qasr el-Wizz, Qasr Ibrim, and elsewhere in Nubia. They feature a large variety of biblical, liturgical, literary, and legal texts. These manuscripts show that Coptic occupied a special place in Nubia, being used, alongside Greek and Old Nubian, for the literary

¹⁸ VON SODEN, *Bericht*, p. 828.

¹⁹ On this period of Carl Schmidt's life, see MARKSCHIES, *Carl Schmidt*, p. 15-17.

²⁰ As I have mentioned above, the photos were recovered only in 1999.

output of the local church²¹. Coptic was also employed as a language of the administration in Nubia, until it came to be gradually replaced by the vernacular idiom²². It should be emphasized that, while written in Sahidic, these manuscripts were produced and used exclusively by Nubian Christians. Therefore, although one cannot exclude that some of them could have been imported from Egypt, they should not be regarded as artifacts of Coptic provenance. Consequently, they are not germane to the present discussion.

Bohairic liturgical manuscripts were used, and some of them even produced, between the 13th and the 17th centuries in the Coptic diaspora in Cyprus. The origin of the Egyptian monastic community on the island of Cyprus goes back to the period of the Crusades. When Guy de Lusignan, the king of Jerusalem, became also Lord of Cyprus in 1192, he populated the island with Christians convened from Palestine and Syria²³. Among these settlers were Copts from Jerusalem, who received land in Nicosia for the building of churches and monasteries²⁴. A number of 16 Bohairic liturgical manuscripts were acquired by the German scholar and traveler Johann Michael Wansleben in 1671 in Nicosia and are now preserved in the National Library in Paris²⁵. The colophons of the manuscripts record that some of them were brought from Egypt, while others were inscribed in the local *scriptoria* by Coptic copyists.

A bilingual Bohairic-Arabic *Horologion* manuscript was found in the library of the Melkite Monastery of St. Catherine, situated in the Sinai Peninsula²⁶. Furthermore, in the same location were found two parchment leaves containing *Hebr.* 7:10-8:7 in the early variety of Bohairic, which are datable on paleographical grounds to the 6th c. CE. They were brought from Sinai by Nikodim P. Kondakov and are currently kept in the National Library of Russia in Saint Petersburg²⁷. The damage pattern of the leaves suggests that, at a certain point, they were recycled and reused as flyleaves in a younger manuscript. Likewise, folio 144v of the Sinaitic parchment manuscript *Georgian* 38 is a palimpsest whose *scriptio inferior* contains

²¹ An overview of the problem can be found in OCHAŁA, *Multilingualism*.

²² On the use of Coptic as a legal language in Nubian documents, see RUFFINI, *Medieval Nubia*, p. 144-151.

²³ EDBURY, *Kingdom of Cyprus*, p. 22.

²⁴ On the presence of Copts in Cyprus, see BURMESTER, *Copts in Cyprus*; HALKIN, *Monastère copte*. For the Coptic presence in Jerusalem, see MEINARDUS, *Copts in Jerusalem*.

²⁵ This collection is amply documented in BOUD'HORS, *Manuscrits coptes 'chypriotes'*.

²⁶ This is MS *Arabic* 389, a paper manuscript tentatively dated to the 13th c. CE, see CLARK, *Checklist*, p. 35; ATIYA, *Arabic Manuscripts*, p. 10.

²⁷ See MIROSHNIKOV, *Epistle to the Hebrews*.

a Bohairic private letter mentioning the monastic settlement of Scetis (ⲧⲉⲱⲓⲛⲧ)²⁸. As the Georgian codex dates to 979 CE, the Bohairic manuscript must be older.

Finally, a Bohairic parchment leaf has been found in the collection of the Syrian Orthodox Monastery of St. Mark in Jerusalem. The fragment was used as an endpaper in a Syriac liturgical manuscript (shelf mark no. 64)²⁹. The Bohairic leaf preserves a portion from the *Martyrdom of Macrobius* (clavis coptica 0286), a saint commemorated by Coptic Christians on Baramhāt 2³⁰. While the Syriac codex is datable to the 15th or 16th c., the paleographical features of the Bohairic fragment suggest that it is arguably older, probably not later than the 10th c. But how did this Coptic fragment end up in Jerusalem? A scribal note in Garšūnī written on f. 99r of the Syriac codex provides the answer to this question:

May the mercy of God be on the one who has donated this book to the monastery of our Lady the mother of God, the monastery of Scetis, and on the one who made effort again and returned it to the monastery of Scetis.

This indicates that, before coming into the possession of the Monastery of St. Mark in Jerusalem, the Syriac manuscript belonged to the Monastery of the Syrians in the Wādī an-Naṭrūn, situated in Egypt, to the West of the Nile delta. It is thereby confirmed that the ultimate provenance of the Bohairic fragment reused as endpaper in the Syriac codex now in Jerusalem must be one of the Coptic monasteries from Scetis. Notably, the only other known fragment from the Bohairic version of the *Martyrdom of Macrobius* was found pasted in yet another Syriac liturgical manuscript from Scetis. The fragment in question is preserved in the National Library in Paris as *BnF Copte* 151, f. 1 and was published by Paul Devos³¹. The paleographical inspection of the Paris fragment demonstrates beyond reasonable doubt that it belonged to the same Bohairic codex as the one found in Jerusalem.

As far as I am aware, these examples are the only known cases of Coptic manuscript finds made outside the Egyptian borders. Thus, as Egypt remains almost the only reservoir of manuscripts written in this language, the discovery of some additional fragments in Damascus is noteworthy.

²⁸ GARITTE, *Catalogue*, p. 146-147, 152.

²⁹ SUCIU, *Martyrdom of Macrobius*. Description and select photographs of the manuscript (including the Coptic endpaper) are available on the online database of the Hill Museum & Manuscript Library at <http://www.vhmdl.us/research2014/catalog/detail.asp?MSID=126817> (retrieved: August 2018). The description has been prepared by Adam McCollum.

³⁰ On Macrobius, see ORLANDI, *Macrobius*. The synaxary note on this saint can be found in BASSET, *Le synaxaire arabe* 4, p. 190 [832]-193 [835].

³¹ DEVOS, *Macrobe*.

The question that immediately arises is: how did these Coptic fragments end up in the Genizah of a mosque from Damascus? Answering this question proves to be difficult, not least because the contacts of Coptic Christians with Damascus are poorly documented. The early eighth-century Greek papyri from Aphrodito, which constitute some of the earliest sources mentioning the Umayyad mosque, attest that Egyptian artists and skilled workers contributed to its building under the caliph al-Walīd³². However, Damascus was the capital of the Umayyad Empire and it is unlikely that any Coptic church could be established there. Much later in the Ayyubid period – when the latest Coptic manuscripts from the Genizah were probably produced – al-Amjad, a wealthy Copt from the affluent al-ʿAssāl family, maintained a guest house in Damascus which served as a sort of research center for Copto-Arabic scholars from Egypt³³. It is in this house that the al-ʿAssāl brothers transcribed Arabic biblical and patristic manuscripts that were not available in their country.

The fact that the scholars of the al-ʿAssāl family had to make frequent visits to Damascus in search of manuscripts, and the foundation of the al-Amjad house there, suggest that no Coptic enclave existed in the city. This is hardly surprising considering that, while it is true that some Copts settled in Jerusalem (from where they spread westward to Cyprus when Guy de Lusignan became king of the island), the migration influx of Egyptians was inherently inferior compared to that of other Christians living within the eastern orbit. As Paul Peeters adroitly remarked a long time ago, “[l]’Égypte chrétienne ne possédait rien qui ressemblât à ces postes avancés que d’autres Églises orientales ont jetés en pays étranger et par où elles communiquaient avec le reste du monde”³⁴.

This lack of mobility is due to the different historical context in which the Copts evolved. Although Egypt had been at the forefront of opposition to the Christological definition promulgated at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 CE, and consequently faced the Byzantine heavy-handed policy toward anti-Chalcedonians, this region had not suffered the savage persecutions that we find in other parts of the empire, most notably in Syria and Palestine³⁵. After the failure of the policies of reconciliation between Chalcedonians and Miaphysites implemented by the emperors Zeno and Anastasius, those who repudiated the Council of Chalcedon in the East

³² BELL – CRUM, *The Aphrodito Papyri*, p. 12-13 (= no. 1341), 42-43 (= no. 1368), 40 (= no. 1441), 449-450 (= no. 1515); BELL, *Greek Aphrodito Papyri*, nos. 1315, 1341, 1368, 1433.

³³ DAVIS, *Coptic Christology*, p. 253.

³⁴ PEETERS, *Orient et Byzance*, p. 169.

³⁵ MASPERO, *Histoire des patriarches*, p. 178-181.

were heavily persecuted. For example, when Justin I accessed to power in 518 CE, he issued a series of edicts which expelled the anti-Chalcedonian bishops from their sees and closed the monasteries inhabited by monks who rejected the council³⁶. As a consequence of this policy, the Miaphysite bishops Severus of Antioch and Julian of Halicarnassus fled to Egypt, which was a safer place.

We encounter a different situation also in Armenia, where local communities were not only oppressed from the 6th century onwards – when they officially rejected the pronouncements of the Council of Chalcedon – but they were often dislocated from their lands and transplanted elsewhere in the Byzantine Empire³⁷. During Islamic rule, the heavy taxation policies imposed by the ʿAbbāsid caliphs caused some Armenian princely families to move to Byzantine territories³⁸. The progressive annexation of the Bagratid principalities by the Byzantines during the reigns of Basil II and Constantine IX Monomachos in the 10th-11th centuries triggered another massive exodus, this time in the opposite direction, many Armenians fleeing to Muslim lands. These voluntary and involuntary migrations led to the establishment of numerous Armenian churches and monasteries in Italy, the Balkans, Palestine, Syria, Iran, Egypt, and elsewhere. If the testimony of Anastas *vardapet* is admissible, at the end of the 6th century there were 70 Armenian churches and monasteries in Jerusalem and its surroundings alone³⁹. In their turn, Georgian Christians, especially after the acceptance of the Chalcedonian formula, founded monastic colonies throughout Palestine and also in Syria, Greece, and Sinai⁴⁰.

Wide dissemination of these populations throughout the Byzantine Empire, and later, Islamic territories, is something that the Egyptian Christians never experienced. Many Armenian and Georgian manuscripts that belonged to the diasporic enclaves attest to the fact that these communities were actively involved in the growth, preservation, and transmission

³⁶ On these edicts, and Justin's religious policy in general, see VASILIEV, *Justin the First*, p. 132-253.

³⁷ On the dissemination of Armenians in the Byzantine Empire, see e.g., CHARANIS, *Ethnic Changes*, p. 28-31; IDEM, *Armenians*, p. 12-16; THOMSON, *Origins*, p. 37-38; GARSOĪAN, *Armenian Integration*.

³⁸ LAURENT, *Entre Byzance et l'Islam*, p. 204, 216-217; TER-GHEWONDYAN, *Bagratid Armenia*, p. 32-33.

³⁹ The report of Anastas *vardapet*, an Armenian pilgrim in the Holy Land, has long been considered dubious, but its authenticity is defended by GARSOĪAN, *Anastas vardapet*. The text was published by ALISHAN, *Deux descriptions*. Although clearly exaggerated, the report at least indicates a significant presence of the Armenians in the Holy Land. On the Armenian pilgrimage to the Holy Land, see, e.g., STONE, *Holy Land Pilgrimage*.

⁴⁰ PERADZE, *Georgian Monks and Monasteries*; IDEM, *L'activité littéraire*; PEETERS, *Orient et Byzance*, p. 155-164, 202-207; THOMSON, *Origins*, p. 38-39.

of the literary heritage of their national churches. Seen against this background, it is not surprising that fragments of Armenian and Georgian manuscripts were discovered in the Damascus Genizah since the activity of these ethnic groups in the Holy Land and Syria is historically verified. One can equally find an explanation for the existence of fragments written in Syriac, Christian-Palestinian Aramaic, and Arabic. These languages were already in the early Islamic period widely used in the Christian monastic communities from Palestine and Syria⁴¹. However, as Coptic churches abroad are very rare and, in any case, no such church seems to have existed in Damascus, the presence of Coptic fragments in the Qubbat al-khazna is somewhat intriguing.

While cognizant that the evidence is sketchy, I would nevertheless like to point out that there are hints that the fragments have some connection with Christian communities from Jerusalem or, possibly, with the crusaders. As noted previously, Coptic churches and monasteries existed in the Holy City. Likewise, while, despite their constant attempts, the crusaders failed to conquer Damascus, the possibility that some fragments in the Genizah of the Umayyad mosque may derive from them is particularly attractive. For example, at least three fragmentary manuscripts written in Old French were discovered in the Qubbat al-khazna. They contain the *Fierabras* (an anonymous *chanson de geste*), a *vita* of St. Mary of Egypt, and a poem on the miraculous birth of Jesus⁴². It is reasonable to speculate that they belonged to a Western religious community, a pilgrim, or a crusader. Furthermore, there are a number of Latin manuscripts that can be connected with the crusaders, including a twelfth-century letter in which Baldwin III, the king of Jerusalem between 1143 and 1162, grants protection to a merchant from Tyre, whom he calls “Bohali, filium Ebenisten,” to sell his goods overseas to Egypt⁴³. Although only tersely stated

⁴¹ See especially GRIFFITH, *Greek into Arabic*; IDEM, *Monks of Palestine*; IDEM, *From Aramaic to Arabic*.

⁴² TOBLER, *Bruchstücke*; see also MINERVINI, *Frammenti epici*.

⁴³ Transcribed in VON SODEN, *Bericht*, p. 827; reedited on the basis of the photo available on the website of the State Library in Berlin by MINERVINI, *Frammenti epici*, p. 103. A very good survey of the Latin manuscripts from the Damascus Qubba can be found in AMMIRATI, *Latin Fragments*. As the king is identified in the letter as “Balduinus per gratiam Dei in sancta Iherusalem Latinorum rex quartus,” von Soden, Minervini, and Radiciotti – Ottone, wrongly infer that the document was issued by Baldwin IV. However, this opening formula was used by Baldwin III, who was indeed the fourth king of Jerusalem, being preceded by Baldwin I, Baldwin II, Fulk, and Queen Melisende. The formula is common in the seven letters of Baldwin III published in Migne’s *PL* 155, col. 1139-1153. The author of the letter of protection found in Damascus is correctly identified for the first time as Baldwin III in KEDAR, *Subjected Muslims*, p. 172 n. 99, followed by D’OTTONE, *Manuscripts as Mirrors*, p. 76. On this issue see, AMMIRATI, *Latin Fragments*, p. 103.

in previous research, the Hagiopolite origin of the Jewish and Christian (including Coptic) fragments from the Qubbat al-khazna constitutes, in my opinion, the most viable hypothesis⁴⁴. But how were the fragments transferred from Jerusalem to Damascus? Unfortunately, the answer to this vexing question is likely to remain elusive since we lack access not only to the actual fragments, but also to a detailed description of the cache before they were removed from it.

5. *The Bohairic Fragment of the Acts of Matthew in the City of the Priests*

Fragment 3 in the description above contains portions from the Bohairic version of the *Acts of Matthew in the City of the Priests*. The script of this fragment closely resembles that of the Bohairic manuscripts produced in the Coptic monasteries of Scetis (Wādī an-Naṭrūn), particularly during the 9th, 10th, and, less frequently, early 11th centuries⁴⁵. Consequently, the Qubbat al-khazna fragment can paleographically be dated to the same period.

While it is true that the fragment was found in Damascus, can anything be said about its ultimate provenance? As I have already anticipated, its distinct type of script is usually associated with the Bohairic manuscripts from the monasteries of Scetis⁴⁶. In addition to the fragment in question, the only similar manuscripts discovered outside Scetis are the aforementioned fragment of the *Martyrdom of Macrobius* kept in the Monastery of St. Mark in Jerusalem and a leaf of unidentified literary content unearthed during the archeological excavations at the Monastery of St. Antony at the Red Sea, whose dates can be fixed on paleographical grounds to the 10th century⁴⁷. However, as noted previously, it is certain that the fragment found in Jerusalem also ultimately derives from one of the Coptic

⁴⁴ See VON SODEN, *Bericht*, p. 826-827; D'OTTONE, *Manuscripts as Mirrors*, p. 76-77; MINERVINI, *Frammenti epici*, p. 102-103.

⁴⁵ I envisage here some of the dated parchment manuscripts brought by Giuseppe Simone Assemani in 1715 from Scetis, which are housed today in the Vatican Library as *Vat. Copt.* 58-69. These volumes are miscellanies formed of quires and leaves from different parchment codices. See the description of the manuscripts in HEBBELYNCK – VAN LANTSCHOOT, *Codices Coptici Vaticani* 1, p. 385-523. For the colophons of these manuscripts, many of which are dated, see LUISIER, *Les colophons*.

⁴⁶ Although the Bohairic manuscripts discovered at the monasteries of St. Macarius and St. Bishoy are routinely called “Nitrian” in academic parlance, this designation is fallacious. This label is based on the topographical confusion between ancient Nitria and Wādī an-Naṭrūn (Scetis), see EVELYN WHITE, *Monasteries of the Wādī 'n Naṭrūn* 2, p. 17-36.

⁴⁷ This fragment was published by Hugo Lundhaug in BLID *et al.*, *Excavations*, p. 194-196.

monasteries in Scetis. Can we thus infer a common origin for the other two? Unfortunately, the dearth of information concerning the production of Bohairic manuscripts in the first millennium deters a conclusion in this regard. As all similar Bohairic manuscripts datable between the 9th and early 11th centuries come almost exclusively from the Coptic monasteries of Scetis, it remains largely obscure if this type of script was exclusively used in the Scetiotite *scriptoria* or if the association is simply a misrepresentation due to an accident of preservation. In conclusion, while the Qubbāt al-khazna fragment may theoretically derive from Scetis, from where it was later transferred to Damascus, the question remains open.

Until now, the *Acts of Matthew in the City of the Priests* has been known only in Arabic and Ethiopic. Agnes Smith Lewis published the Arabic text after a single manuscript from the Monastery of the Syrians in the Wādī an-Naṭrūn⁴⁸. It is likely that the Arabic translation was made from Bohairic. The *terminus ante quem* for the rendering into Arabic is provided by the quotations from our text in Ibn Kātib Qayṣar's commentary on the Apocalypse of John, which dates to 1266/1267 CE⁴⁹. In 1899, Ernest Wallis Budge edited the Ethiopic (Gə'əz) version⁵⁰. The Ethiopic text belongs to the ገደለ : ሐዋርያት : , the *Combat of the Apostles*, which is a translation of the Copto-Arabic collection of apocryphal acts, probably made in the 13th or 14th century, and later augmented with several other texts related to the apostles⁵¹. In the Arabic and Ethiopic versions, the *Acts of Matthew in the City of the Priests* is followed by the *Martyrdom of Matthew* (CANT 269; BHO 722-724), which has survived also in Sahidic, but only in an abridged recension⁵².

The text belongs to the Copto-Arabic collection of the apocryphal acts of the apostles used in the Egyptian non-Chalcedonian Church⁵³. The entire collection was translated into Arabic from Bohairic, probably

⁴⁸ Arabic text in SMITH LEWIS, *Acta Mythologica*, p. 83-91; English translation in EADEM, *Mythological Acts*, p. 100-109.

⁴⁹ GRAF, *GCAL* 1, p. 259 n. 1. On Ibn Kātib Qayṣar's commentary on the Apocalypse, see DAVIS, *Ibn Kātib Qayṣar*.

⁵⁰ BUDGE, *Contendings* 1, p. 94, 101-113 (Ethiopic text), 2, p. 111-129 (English translation). Another English translation, based on a different manuscript, is available in MALAN, *Conflicts*, p. 43-56. The Ethiopic text published by Budge was translated into French in PÉRÈS, *Actes de Matthieu*.

⁵¹ BAUSI, *Gadla ḥawāryāt*.

⁵² A Sahidic fragment in the British Library was published by CRUM, *Catalogue British Museum*, p. 130-131 (= no. 297).

⁵³ On this collection, see GRAF, *GCAL* 1, p. 258-262. The first who remarked that this must be the collection of the non-Chalcedonian Patriarchate of Alexandria was GUIDI, *Gli Atti apocrifi*, p. 2.

in the 12th century. The Bohairic versions of the apocryphal acts are in their turn based on earlier Sahidic models. Georg Graf, seconded by Alessandro Bausi, judiciously remarked that the Arabic collection, which was subsequently translated into Gəʿəz, originally contained 28 texts, albeit the surviving manuscripts often contain additional pieces⁵⁴. The original collection featured: *Preaching of Peter* (CANT 204), *Martyrdom of Peter* (CANT 190.IV), *Martyrdom of Paul* (CANT 211.V), *Acts of Andrew and Philemon* (CANT 240), *Acts of Andrew and Bartholomew* (CANT 238), *Martyrdom of Andrew* (CANT 235), *Preaching of James, son of Zebedee* (CANT 273.1), *Martyrdom of James, son of Zebedee* (CANT 273.2), *Acts of John* by Ps.-Prochorus (CANT 218), *Dormition of John* (CANT 215.II), *Acts of Philip and Peter* (CANT 252.1), *Martyrdom of Philip* (CANT 252.2), *Preaching of Bartholomew in the Oasis* (CANT 261), *Martyrdom of Bartholomew* (CANT 260), *Acts of Thomas* (CANT 245.II), *Martyrdom of Thomas* (CANT 245.II), *Acts of Matthew in the City of the Priests*, *Martyrdom of Matthew*, *Martyrdom of James, son of Alpheus* (BHO 390-391), *Preaching of Simon the Canaanite* (CANT 282.1), *Martyrdom of Simon the Canaanite* (CANT 282.2), *Acts of Peter and Thaddeus* (CANT 299), *Acts of Andrew and Matthias in the City of the Cannibals* (CANT 236), *Martyrdom of Matthias* (CANT 280.2), *Preaching of James, brother of the Lord* (CANT 276.1), *Martyrdom of James, brother of the Lord* (CANT 276.2), *Martyrdom of Mark* (CANT 287), *Martyrdom of Luke* (CANT 292-294).

Most of these texts do not have a correspondent in Greek and it is likely that they were originally composed in Coptic. Both the Sahidic and Bohairic collections of the apocryphal acts of the apostles are only fragmentarily preserved. With the exception of the *Acts of Matthew in the City of the Priests* and the *Martyrdom of Luke*, all 28 aforementioned writings exist in Sahidic⁵⁵. However, the *Martyrdom of Luke* is extant in two Bohairic manuscripts⁵⁶. Thus, the only text that has not been attested until now in

⁵⁴ GRAF, *GCAL* 1, p. 258-260; BAUSI, *Gadla ḥawāryāt*, p. 87-88.

⁵⁵ The most complete inventory of the Sahidic manuscripts containing the apocryphal acts of the apostles can be found in LUCCHESI, *Contribution codicologique*.

⁵⁶ The *Martyrdom of Luke* is preserved in two Bohairic manuscripts from the Monastery of St. Macarius in Scetis. The complete text is extant in *Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica, Vat. Copt.* 68, ff. 16-21 (ca. 10th c. CE); description in HEBBELYNCK – VAN LANTSCHOOT, *Codices Coptici Vaticani* 1, p. 500-501, published by BALESTRI, *Il martirio*, republished by BALESTRI – HYVERNAT, *Acta martyrum II*, p. 1-8. Fragments of a dismembered paper codex containing the same text are currently kept in Cairo and Cambridge, see GASELEE, *Martyrdom of St. Luke*; EVELYN WHITE, *Monasteries of the Wādī 'n Natrûn* 1, p. 27-50. Three additional folios of the same manuscript were once in the possession of

any Coptic dialect is the *Acts of Matthew in the City of the Priests*. The Bohairic fragment discovered in Damascus helps us establish with certainty that the last piece of the 28-texts collection existed also in the vernacular language of Egypt.

The location of Matthew's preaching in our text raises some problems. The Arabic version mentions that the apostle proclaimed the gospel "in the city (country) of the priests" (في بلاد الكهنة)⁵⁷. The Ethiopic simply renders the Arabic, ብሔረ ፡ ካህናት ፡ ("the city [country] of the priests")⁵⁸. As modern translators inadequately preferred to transliterate the Arabic and the Ethiopic term *الكهنة/ካህናት* ፡, the text is largely known today as the *Acts of Matthew in the City (or Country) of Kahenat*. Nevertheless, the tradition according to which the apostle Matthew would have preached in the city of the priests (Kahenat) is not attested elsewhere except in Arabic and Ethiopic sources depending on our text⁵⁹. Given that only a small fragment is preserved from the Bohairic version, it cannot be ascertained that the same location was registered in Coptic as well.

Notably, the *Encomium on the Twelve Apostles* attributed to Severian of Gabala (CPG 4281; *clavis coptica* 0331), which is extant in two different recensions⁶⁰, furnishes a list of the missionary journeys of the apostles. As this text was most likely originally composed in Coptic, it proves to be something of a touchstone for the Egyptian traditions concerning the apostles. According to one of the recensions of the encomium, which has survived only in Sahidic, Matthew preached the gospel in Lycaonia, region situated in Asia Minor. Sever J. Voicu perceptively suggested that, in the Arabic version of the *Acts of Matthew in the City of the Priests*, the reading *الكهنة* ("priests") represents a transcription mistake of the toponym *لوقنية* (Lycaonia)⁶¹. This hypothesis is palatable and, if it is correct, the corruption

William Hatch, but their current location is unknown to me, see HATCH, *Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha*.

⁵⁷ SMITH LEWIS, *Acta Mythologica*, p. ٨٣.

⁵⁸ BUDGE, *Contendings* 1, p. 101.

⁵⁹ See, e.g., the Copto-Arabic synaxary (Babeh 12), which resumes at this point the *Acts of Matthew*, BASSET, *Le synaxaire arabe* 1, p. 330 [116]-332 [118].

⁶⁰ One recension is preserved only in Sahidic, while the other is attested in Sahidic, Bohairic, and Arabic. Sahidic text of the first recension in DEPUYDT, *Encomiastica* [T.], p. 85-130 (Coptic text), [V.], p. 65-101 (English translation); reedition in RIGHI, *Severiano di Gabala* 1, p. 118-213 (Sahidic text and Italian translation). Only the Arabic text of the second recension has been edited until now in RIGHI, *Severiano di Gabala* 2, p. 262-407.

⁶¹ VOICU, *Encomium in XII Apostolos*, p. 231-232. The toponym "Lycaonia" is attested in *Act. 14:6*. In a ninth-century Arabic manuscript of the Acts from Sinai (Ar. 154), Lycaonia is spelled *لوقنية*, see DUNLOP GIBSON, *An Arabic Version of the Acts*, p. ١٢.

must have occurred quite early because the “country of the priests” (بلاد الكهنة) appears already in the oldest known Arabic manuscript, *Sinai, Arabic* 539, which has tentatively been dated to the 12th c. CE⁶².

In the beginning of the text, the apostles Peter and Andrew meet Matthew upon their return from the Country of the Barbarians (بلاد البربر), where they accomplished their missionary journey⁶³. Matthew tells them that he travelled to the Country of the Blessed (بلاد المغبوطين)⁶⁴. According to Matthew’s account, this place is inhabited by the nine and a half tribes to whom God gave the Promised Land. The text probably relies here upon a tradition stemming from *IV Esdr.* 13:39-49, which mentions that the nine and a half Jewish tribes settled in a paradisiac distant land called Arzareth, situated somewhere beyond the river Euphrates⁶⁵. The text continues by describing the daily life of the inhabitants of this country. The author employs a common literary topos that combines the Greco-Roman myth of the Golden Age and the biblical theme of the earthly Paradise⁶⁶. Thus, Jesus Christ visits the citizens of the Country of the Blessed every day and preaches in their church; the inhabitants of the land do not care about riches; they do neither eat meat nor drink wine, but rather honey and dew; they do not feel sexual desire; they wear clothes made from the leaves of trees; they do not lie; the children do not die before their parents; there is no dry season or cold weather in their country, but only pleasant mild winds.

After the account of Matthew’s sojourn in the Country of the Blessed, Jesus appears to the three apostles and assigns them the places of their next missionary journeys: Peter is sent to Rome, Andrew to Mysia, and Matthew to the City of the Priests. Matthew prays and he is taken upon a

⁶² *Sinai, Arabic* 539, f. 158v. See the photograph of the title page at <https://www.loc.gov/resource/amedmonastery.00279390416-ms/?sp=161> (retrieved: August 2018). For the content of this manuscript see VAN ESBROECK, *Une collection*, p. 196-197. A twelfth-century date is suggested by ATIYA, *Arabic Manuscripts*, p. 21; see also KAMIL, *Catalogue*, p. 47. SMITH LEWIS, *Mythological Acts*, p. xx, dated the manuscript to the 16th c. CE, but this is certainly too late.

⁶³ The Ethiopic has, “Greece” (ጽርእ :), BUDGE, *Contendings* 1, p. 101.

⁶⁴ The Ethiopic has, “Ferakomnos, which means, ‘of the Happy Ones’” (ፍራኮሞኖስ : እለ : በጉርጓሜሁ : ፍራኮኑን :), BUDGE, *Contendings* 1, p. 101.

⁶⁵ See the English translation of the relevant passage in STONE, *Fourth Ezra*, p. 393-394. Given that the *Acts of Matthew in the City of the Priests* was probably composed directly in Coptic, it is worth mentioning that 4 Ezra circulated in this language and could theoretically be available to the author of the text; on 4 Ezra in Coptic, see SUCIU, 4 Ezra. The nine and a half tribes feature also in 2 Baruch 77:17-78:1 and in a poem by Commodian, see LIED, *The Other Lands*, p. 171-174; BAUCKHAM, *The Nine and a Half Tribes*.

⁶⁶ DELUMEAU, *Une histoire du paradis* 1.

cloud near his destination. Searching for the road into the city, the apostle meets a young shepherd who explains to him that it may be dangerous to enter unless he dresses like the inhabitants, shaves his hair and beard, and holds a palm branch in his hand. The young shepherd who conversed with Matthew turns out to be Christ. Entering the city, the apostle introduces himself to the citizens as an Egyptian. The first person converted by Matthew is Armis, the priest of the temple of Apollo, who is revered as supreme god by the locals. Then, they lock the temple and convert the members of Armis' household. The next morning, the king wants to enter the temple, but he finds the door closed. Consequently, he orders that Matthew and Armis are arrested, tortured, and executed. However, some of the citizens, having already been persuaded that Matthew's God is mightier than Apollo, try to hinder the execution. While the apostle is about to be burned by the soldiers, the news of the death of the king's son reaches the palace. The king promises Matthew that if he resurrects his son, he will become a Christian. The apostle makes a prayer and the boy comes back to life. Thus, the king converts together with all the citizens. The text ends with the account of the building of a church in the city and Matthew's ordination of Armis as the first bishop of the place.

The new Bohairic fragment features portions from Matthew's report concerning the Country of the Blessed inhabited by the nine and a half tribes. Below are the beginning and the end of the fragment together with the Arabic and Ethiopic parallels.

Incipit:

ἐΝΙΦ[ΗΟΥΙ] ἄΝΟΚ ΔΕ ΠΕΧΗΙ ΝΝ[Η ΕΤΕΜΜΑΥ] ΧΕ
ΕΤΑΡΕΤΕΝΧΕΜΠ[ΤΑΙΟ ΘΩΝ] ΝΘΩΤΕΝ ΝΤΑΙΜΑΙΗ

[...] to [heaven]. And I said to [those] [...], "[How] have you found such [honor]?"

الى السما بمجد عظيم. ثم قلت لهم كيف اسحققتم هذه الكرامة

...to heaven with great glory. Then I said to them, "How have you become worthy of this honor?"

ውስተ : ሰማይ : በዐቢይ : ስብሐት ፡ ወእቢሎም : በአይቲኑ : ድልዋን :
ኮንክሙ : ለዝንቱ : ዕባየ : ክብር :

...to heaven with great glory. I said to them, "How have you become worthy of this great honor?"⁶⁷

⁶⁷ SMITH LEWIS, *Acta Mythologica*, p. 84; BUDGE, *Contendings* 1, p. 102.

Desinit:

ἸΠΑ[ΡΕΝΙΚΟΥ]ΧΙ ÇΑΧΙ ΕΒΟΥΝ ΕΧΕΝΝΙΩ[† ΗΕΝ]ΠΕΝΚΑΖΙ ΑΝΘΝ
ΕΝΕΖ ΝΙΜΟΥΙ ΨΟΠ ΗΕΝ[Τ]ΕΝ[ΜΗ†] [...]

[The young] do not ever speak in place of the elders [in] our country. The lions are in our midst [...]

والا يتكلم الصغير بين يدي الكبير. السباع ساكنة

The young does not speak before the elder. The lions are sitting...

ወኢይትናገር : ንኡስ : ቅድመ : ልሂቅ : ወኣናብስት : ይነብሩ :

The young does not speak before the elder. The lions are dwelling...⁶⁸

While the Bohairic omits and adds some words, overall the text agrees quite well with the Arabic and Ethiopic versions. However, there is one instance in which the Bohairic is manifestly divergent: in the Arabic and Ethiopic, the inhabitants of the Country of the Blessed explain to Matthew that their clothes are made “from the leaves of trees” (من اوراق الاشجار/ **እምቁጽላ : ዕፀው :**)⁶⁹. The Bohairic has a different reading here, “[but we] wrap ourselves with the [...] of the sea ([**ἀλλὰ ψαν**])**χολτεν ἐβολ** **ἡεννι**[. . .] . **ω† ἡτεφι**ομ). Nevertheless, given that the Arabic and Ethiopic *Acts of Matthew in the City of the Priests* have not been critically edited, one should not exclude the possible textual diversity of these versions in the manuscript tradition.

Although the Bohairic fragment discovered in the Qubbat al-khazna preserves only a minuscule portion of the *Acts of Matthew*, its significance is not reducible to its few variant readings. The fragment features a hitherto unknown text in Coptic, adding to our knowledge of the vernacular literature of Christian Egypt. Furthermore, the *Acts of Matthew in the City of the Priests* has until now been the only treatise of the original Egyptian Arabic collection of 28 apocryphal acts of the apostles without a known Coptic model. Its identification thus puts the last piece in the puzzle, helping us to establish with certainty that the text circulated also in Coptic. Last but not least, this and the other Coptic fragments from the Qubbat al-khazna document a poorly attested phenomenon: diasporic Egyptian communities.

⁶⁸ SMITH LEWIS, *Acta Mythologica*, p. 84; BUDGE, *Contendings* 1, p. 102-103.

⁶⁹ SMITH LEWIS, *Acta Mythologica*, p. 84; BUDGE, *Contendings* 1, p. 102.

6. Text and translation⁷⁰

Recto (hair side):

-] . [
] . . [
] . ἔνιφ[hoγi]
 ἄνοκ δε πεχνη ἡν[η ἔτεμμαγ]
 5 χε ἔταρετενχεμπι[ταιο ὅων]
 ἡῶτεν ἡταίμαῖν χ[ε πενσ]
 ερωαι νεμωτεν
 ἡῶου δε πεχωου ηἡ χε ἡπεκ
 σωτεν ἡοκ εἶβε τῷ οὐχο
 10 ἡφγλη ἔταρόλογ ἔῃογν ἔ
 [π]ικαζι ἡαγαθον ἄνον νε η ἔ
 [τεμ]μαγ
 [εωωπ] φναγ ἡαναμερι ωωπι
 [ωαφι ἡ]χεγαβριηλ πιαρχαγε
 15 [λос ἡτε]φτ εἰογεζ ἡσωφ ἡ
 [χε πιρμα ἡωο ναλο]γ ναι ἔτε μ
 [

[...] to heaven. And I said to
 [those], “[How] have you
 found such [honor], that [our
 Lord] is celebrating with
 you?” And they said to me,
 “Have you not heard of the
 nine (and) a half tribes that
 he brought into the Good
 Land⁷¹? We are they. [When]
 the hour of midday comes,
 Gabriel the Archangel [of]
 God [comes, the 144 000 chil-
 dren] following him, the ones
 that [...]

Verso (flesh side):

-] η . [
] vacat . [
] vacat . . [
 [ἡπανχελζαν]ζβος ἄνον ἔνεζ ἔ
 5 [βολ ἡεννη εἶ]μογνκ ἡχιχ ἡρωμι
 [αλλα ωαν]χολτεν ἔβολ ἡεννι
 [. .] . ωτ ἡτεφιом
 ἡπανχемеθνογχ ἄνον ἔνεζ ογ
 δε ἡпанδiсzιm! cноγт ἄνον
 10 ἡенпенкаζ<ι> ἔνεζ ογδε ἡπαρε
 ωηρι μογ ἡαχενноγiот ἡен
 пенкаζи ἔνεζ ογδε ἡπα[ρεкоγ]
 χι цаχ! ἔῃογн ἔχενниω[т ἡен]
 пенкаζи! ἄνον ἔ
 15 नेζ
 निमोγi ωоп ἡен[т]ен[μηт]
 [

[...]
 [We do not] ever [wrap]
 ourselves with clothes [from
 those that are] made by
 human hand, [but we] wrap
 ourselves with the [...] of the
 sea. We do not ever lie, nor
 we ever take two wives in
 our country, nor do children
 ever die before their parents
 in our country, nor do [the
 young] ever speak in place
 of the elders [in] our coun-
 try. The lions are in our
 [midst] [...]

⁷⁰ I am grateful to Matthias Müller (University of Basel) for suggesting a couple of restorations of the lacunae.

⁷¹ The Arabic has “the Promised Land” (ارض الميعاد), while the Ethiopic reads “the Land of Inheritance” (ምድረ : ርስት :) instead of “the Good Land” (ἡκαζи ἡαγαθον).

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Abstract — At the beginning of the 20th c., numerous fragments of Jewish and Christian manuscripts in different languages were discovered in the Treasury Dome (Qubbat al-khazna) of the Great Umayyad Mosque in Damascus. According to the notes of Bruno Violet, who studied and partly photographed the manuscripts during a research mission to Damascus, among them there were also 18 Coptic

fragments. Four of them were photographed while the manuscripts were in Berlin in 1908. The photographs of the Coptic fragments from the Damascus Qubba are currently kept in the State Library in Berlin. The present article introduces these four fragments and discusses their content and their relevance for Coptic studies. Special attention is given to one of them, a tenth-century Bohairic fragment of the *Acts of Matthew in the City of the Priests*, which represents the first attestation of this apocryphal text in Coptic.