

# SOME UNPUBLISHED COPTIC LITURGICAL MANUSCRIPTS IN THE JOHN RYLANDS LIBRARY<sup>1</sup>

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IT is only in recent years that the Coptic liturgy has been counted as part of Coptic literature. In December 1966, at the meeting of German and foreign Coptic scholars in Halle/Saale, it was listed in the series of lectures that might be delivered at the Conference under the general title "Koptische Literatur".<sup>2</sup> As interest in the Coptic liturgy as a branch of Coptic literature seems likely to grow,<sup>3</sup> there may well be some justification for writing a short article about certain uncatalogued Coptic liturgical manuscripts which have been preserved in the Rylands Library since 1923, in which year they were acquired by the Library from Dr. Rendel Harris, who had purchased them in Egypt.

The Coptic liturgy belongs essentially to the Greek and Byzantine rite. When, however, in the year A.D. 451, after the Council of Chalcedon, the Copts separated from the universal church, they developed to some degree a liturgy of their own, which to this day uses three languages: Coptic as a descendant of Old Egyptian, Greek, and Arabic. The living liturgy of today, in its various forms, is preserved in hundreds of manuscripts scattered throughout the larger libraries of the Western and Eastern world.

There are many kinds of Coptic rites preserved in these manuscripts. The Euchologion, for example, the texts of the mass according to St. Basil, St. Gregory Nazianzen, and St.

<sup>1</sup> I wish to thank Mr. R. Hall, Librarian of the Rylands Library, and Dr. F. Taylor, Head of the Department of Manuscripts in the same Library, for permission to study these unpublished liturgical manuscripts. I am also grateful to Dr. A. F. Shore of the British Museum for revising these pages. Finally, I am grateful to the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft for a grant to cover my stay at Manchester in summer 1966 and spring 1967 to study the manuscripts.

<sup>2</sup> The lectures will be published in East Germany by the Institut für Byzantinistik der Universität Halle/Saale under the title *Koptologische Studien in der DDR, II, Halle/Saale*.

<sup>3</sup> While working on this article, there was published in Cairo O.H.E. KHS Burmester's, *The Egyptian or Coptic Church. A detailed description of her liturgical services and the rites and ceremonies observed in the administration of her sacraments*, Publication de la Société d'Archéologie Copte. Textes et Documents. Le Caire, 1967, 419 pages, 21 plates.

Mark or St. Cyril the Archbishop ; the " Theotokias ", written in honour of Our Lady, the Mother of Christ, perhaps the most common of all surviving Coptic liturgical manuscripts ; and the collections of hymns and chants contained in the " Difnar " or " Antiphonarium " and in the Doxologies praising Christ, the Archangels, St. Mary, St. John the Baptist, Archbishops, Bishops, Synods, Monks and Monasteries, male and female Martyrs and especially popular Saints such as St. Mercurios, St. Theodore and St. George. In addition, there have also survived manuscripts containing the rites for the ordinations of archbishops, bishops, priests, and deacons, for the consecration of churches and altars, and for the rites of marriage, baptism and burial. Manuscript copies of these liturgical books continued to be written up to the end of last century and are perhaps still being written today.<sup>1</sup> As regards printed liturgical books, one should mention the splendid work which Claudios Labib did at the beginning of this century. He and his followers arranged, printed and edited the old rites still alive in the Coptic Church today. The dialect of all Coptic liturgical manuscripts is almost without exception Bohairic. Among the Coptic manuscripts in the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York is a Sahidic " Difnar " dated A.D. 893, which is considered to be the oldest preserved " Antiphonarium " of the Coptic rite. Some Coptic priests do not know Coptic ; they only read it. Ever since the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries parallel Arabic translations have accompanied the Coptic texts and most printed books contain this parallel Arabic.

The Copts have books and manuscripts containing the rites for the feasts of all seasons. The ecclesiastical year opens at the beginning of the month of Tut (September). The great feast to come is that of Our Lord's Birth and from about the tenth of Kiahk (December) till the ninth of January the " Theotokia " is sung in praise of Our Lady. The next rite in use is that of the Great Fast (Lent), beginning eight weeks (Holy Week included)

<sup>1</sup> Otto Meinardus, *Monks and Monasteries of the Egyptian Deserts* (Cairo, 1961), p. 279, mentions that Abuna Antunius of Dēr es-Surjān in the Wādī Natrūn, south of Alexandria, is writing a Coptic-Arabic Dictionary and copying manuscripts in his cave, where he lives as an anchorite not far from the monastery.

before Easter Sunday. A fortnight before Lent the Fast of Nineveh, in memory of the Prophet Jonas, takes place and lasts four days. There are three more fasts, that of the Apostles before the fifth of July (St. Peter and St. Paul), the Fast of the Mother of God before the sixteenth of August, and the Little Fast (Advent).<sup>1</sup> Fasting is important to the devout Copt. Under the influence of the Muslim Fast of Ramadan complete abstinence from any food between sunrise and sunset is demanded. Delicate persons received dispensations and modern times have naturally occasioned many changes in the ancient practices.

As regards the present article, only the Fast of Nineveh and the Great Fast (Lent) before Easter Sunday are relevant. Rylands Coptic MS. 472 contains fragments of two different manuscripts. Fols. 2 and 3, half-leaves only, apparently belong to a Lent-Book, according to the fragmentary rubricated heading in Arabic on fol. 2<sup>r</sup> (last line), which reads "on the third day of the Forty Holy Days of Nineveh". Only twenty folios, measuring 18 × 29 cm., remain of this manuscript, the original Coptic number of the last folio being "217". Fol. 1<sup>r</sup> is a half-leaf showing the remains of a coloured cross of interlaced strap-work, and fol. 1<sup>v</sup> the remains of a roughly-drawn human figure. The remaining folios are apparently part of a Lectionary containing the Gospel readings without the hymns which are brought together in the "Difnar". These additional folios, with verses from the Psalms and Gospel readings, were written in honour of St. Mercurios, St. Peter, St. Paul and the Four Holy Beings without Body.

<sup>1</sup> Burmester (*The Egyptian Church*, p. 13), describes seven fasts, including the "Fast of Heraclius" and the Wednesday and Friday Fast throughout the year. "The Fast of Heraclius lasts for one week. It begins on the Monday of the week following Carnival Sunday of the Greek Church which corresponds to Sexagesima Sunday of the Latin Church. This Fast the Christians of Jerusalem undertook to observe in perpetuity for God's forgiveness of the Emperor Heraclius who recovered the Holy City from the Persians in A.D. 628, when he visited it in the following year, if he permitted the massacre of the whole Jewish population of Jerusalem, which he accordingly did." The details of Coptic Fasts in the Middle Ages are described by Abu'l Barakat in his Arabic study (later translated into French) "La Lampe des ténèbres", chapters 16-19. The full title is "Les observances liturgiques et la discipline du jeûne dans l'Église Copte", in *Le Muséon*, xxvi (1923), 249-92; xxxvii (1924), 209-80; and xxxviii (1925), 261-320. This latter part deals with the fasts.

Ryl. Coptic MS. 473 is a portion of a fine Lent manuscript, in spite of its fragmentary state of preservation. The last folio bears the Coptic number " 395 " and three hundred and forty-four folios have survived, the size of the leaves being  $33 \times 20$  cm. The margins are ornamented with rather roughly-painted paragraph marks<sup>1</sup> and birds. Judging from the script the manuscript belongs to the end of the sixteenth century but the ornamentations appear to be later in date. Perhaps they have been added subsequently, as sometimes occurs with other manuscripts.

Following the normal practice of Lent-Books, Coptic MS. 473 begins with Verses of the Psalms and Bible readings for the Fast of Nineveh, lasting four days. At the bottom of fol. 1<sup>r</sup> is written, in Arabic, " this ends what is read on the fourth day [Wednesday, Feria IV] of the Fast of Nineveh ". There are several lacunae. Thus, the text for the Monday beginning the Great Fast (Lent) is imperfect. Continuity only begins with fol. 11<sup>v</sup>, " the third day [Tuesday] of the first week of the Forty Holy Days " : in the morning, the Verse of the Psalm, the Gospel (Matt.), Epistle to the Romans, Catholic Epistles (Peter), Acts, and the Gospel (Luke).<sup>2</sup> With fol. 19<sup>v</sup> begins the fourth day [Wednesday] of the Forty Holy Days : in the morning, the Verse of the Psalm, the Gospel (Matt.), Epistle to the Romans, Catholic Epistles (Peter), Acts, the Verse of the Psalm, and the Gospel (Luke). This form continues for Thursday, Friday and the Sabbath, and with fol. 51<sup>v</sup> the service for the " first Sunday of the Forty Holy Days " begins : in the evening, the Verse of the Psalm, the Gospel (Matt.) ; in the morning, the Verse of the Psalm, the Gospel (Matt.), Epistle to the Romans, Catholic Epistles (James),

<sup>1</sup> Th. Petersen, " The Paragraph Mark in Coptic Illuminated Ornament ", *Studies in Art and Literature for Belle da Costa Green* (Princeton, 1954), pp. 149-87 ; M. Cramer, *Koptische Buchmalerei* (Recklinghausen, 1964), pp. 18-26, *Das Paragraphenzeichen*.

<sup>2</sup> For details of the Verses from the Psalms and Gospel Chapters one may refer to Codex Vaticanus Copticus (Vat. Copt.) No. 30 for Sundays and to Vat. Copt. No. 100 for weekdays. There are some differences, due to the freedom which the Coptic Church allows her Priests in performing the liturgy. For Codices no. 30 and no. 100 see A. Hebbelynck and A. van Lantschoot, *Codices Coptici Vaticani*, vol. I (Rome, 1937). A third Lent manuscript in the Vatican Library has been published by A. van Lantschoot in *Codices Coptici Vaticani Borgiani*, vol. II (Rome, 1947), Vat. Copt. Borgia no. 30.

Acts, the Verse of the Psalm, the Gospel (Matt.). Then considerable lacunae occur, continuity not beginning again until fol. 71<sup>r</sup> (Friday of the second week of the Forty Holy Days, etc.). Including several lacunae, the structure of this Lent manuscript remains the same for the seven weeks until Palm Sunday (fol. 318<sup>v</sup>): the Verse of the Psalm, the Gospel (John), the Verse of the Psalm, the Gospel (Luke), Epistle to the Hebrews, Catholic Epistles (Peter), Acts, the Verse of the Psalm, the Gospel (Matt.), the Gospel (Mark), the Gospel (Luke), the Verse of the Psalm, the Gospel (John), Isaias, the Letters to the Corinthians, the Verse of the Psalm, the Gospel (John). Palm Sunday is incomplete and the readings for the whole of Holy Week are missing. There exist special manuscripts and books containing only the rite for Holy Week. Books and manuscripts with Verses from the Psalms and Gospel readings are named Lectionaries of the Holy Week or "Passah"-Books<sup>1</sup>; those containing only the hymns for Holy Week are named "Ṭuruḥat"-Books. The Arabic word "ṭarḥ" (sg.), "ṭuruḥat" or "ṭuruh" (pl.), is derived from the verb "ṭaraḥa", which in its third form means "singing alternately", two choirs facing each other.

Special manuscripts and books with hymns for Lent were compiled for use with Lent Lectionaries in the same way as "ṭuruḥat" manuscripts or books complement the lectionaries for Holy Week ("Passah"-Books). Lent hymns are preserved in several of the British Museum manuscripts described by Crum in his *Catalogue of the Coptic Manuscripts in the British Museum* (London, 1905). These are songs consisting of many stanzas with four verses, most of them acrostically arranged. Every stanza begins with one letter of the Greek alphabet, A-Ω; the seven Coptic letters are excluded. The oldest known Coptic hymn for Lent is preserved in the above-mentioned Pierpont Morgan MS. M 575, fols. 49<sup>r</sup>-52<sup>v</sup>. Portions of the stanzas are similar to those in the rather late manuscripts in the British Museum.

<sup>1</sup> M. Cramer, "Studien zu koptischen Pascha-Büchern. Der Ritus der Karwoche in der Koptischen Kirche, bearbeitet nach koptischen und koptisch-arabischen Manuskripten und Drucken", in *Oriens Christianus*, xlvii (1963), 118-28; xlix (1965), 90-115; and l (1966), 72-130.

The unpublished Coptic liturgical manuscripts 474-478 in the Rylands Library are all connected with the "Rite of the Theotokia" or "Psalmody" of the Month of Kiahk (December).<sup>1</sup> The original basis of this rite was seven hymns in praise of the Virgin, one for each day of the week. They were intended for regular use throughout the year, although today the practice seems to be observed only in the monasteries. By the clergy they are apparently only sung during the Month of Kiahk, December the tenth to January the ninth. These seven main hymns, the origin of which is doubtful,<sup>2</sup> are accompanied by four Odes, the first for the Monday-hymn and Tuesday-hymn, the second for the hymns for Wednesday and Thursday, the third for those for Friday and Saturday, and the fourth for the Sunday-hymn. In addition, other songs belong to the seven "Theotokias", such as doxologies, "ṭuruḥat", "absaliḡā" and "lōbesh", or roof songs, to complete the cycle. The reciting occurs in the ḡχoc ("HXOC"), tune or mode, "Adam" first and "Batos" second. These are the opening words of the second and fifth "Theotokia". There is a certain established order for the use of the seven main hymns and the songs attached to them, but a strictly prescribed arrangement of the texts, as, for instance, in the rite of the Roman Catholic Church, does not exist. There is much more freedom in the Eastern Churches in the regulation of the service. In consequence, manuscripts of "Theotokias" or "Psalmody" of the Month of Kiahk exhibit puzzling differences. The main Sunday hymn and the songs belonging to it may be written at the beginning or the end of the manuscript but it is always the first "Theotokia". Consequently the Monday hymn is the second, and the Saturday song the seventh "Theotokia". Ryl. Coptic MS. 475 begins with the midnight song during the Month of Kiahk, followed by a song in praise of the Resurrection of Our Lord, continued by the first, second

<sup>1</sup> Claudios Labib, *The Coptic Theotokia or the Psalmody of the Month of Kiahk*, Cairo, 1911, 2 vols. (Coptic-Arabic); De Lacy O'Leary, *The Coptic Theotokia*, London, 1923 (Coptic texts without translations).

<sup>2</sup> De Lacy O'Leary in *Coptic Studies in Honor of W. E. Crum* (Washington, 1950), pp. 417-20, has doubts concerning the legend that "a potter who became a monk in Scetis composed the seven basic Theotokias in course of a single week, expanding in them topics already suggested by Athanasius".

and third Ode (Exod. xv, Dan. iii, xxiv, etc., and verses of Ps. cxlvii). Then follow prayers to the Saints, a kind of litany, at the end of which follows the fourth Ode (verses of Ps. cxlix and cl). After this there is no break between the first or Sunday "Theotokia" and the seventh or Sabbath "Theotokia". "Xere" (χαῖρε)-texts in praise of the Virgin and other songs belonging to the "Theotokia" in general fill the next folios. Fols. 218<sup>r</sup> to 221<sup>v</sup> are illegible, because paint, apparently, has been spilt over the pages. The arrangement of this "Theotokia", with the Odes and Songs belonging to the Month of Kiahk, is unusual as compared with earlier and later "Theotokias". Normally the seven main hymns do not follow one after the other but are interrupted by the four Odes and the other songs. Generally the first or Sunday "Theotokia" is given at the end of the manuscript or book.

The size of the folios of Ryl. Coptic MS. 475 is 15 × 11 cm. Fol. 1<sup>v</sup>, the fly-leaf, exhibits the picture of a roughly painted cross of interlaced strap-work. The inscription is "Jesus Christ, Son of God". Some parts of the original binding and the loops and knots for closing the book are preserved. This manuscript may have been written in the eighteenth or nineteenth century.

The same may be said of Ryl. Coptic MS. 474 which, in contrast to 475, is not a complete "Theotokia" but a fragmentary one. Seventy-four folios are preserved, measuring 22 × 18 cm. Some are numbered by an earlier Arabic hand, some by a modern hand, and the rest not at all. At least ten folios are illegible, as they are badly soiled. The whole is rather confused but the leaves certainly belong to a "Theotokia". On some, part of the beginning of the fifth "Theotokia" has survived; others show the text of a litany to the Virgin and the Saints, always beginning with the word *tōbeh*, to appeal to somebody. There remain also some folios of "χερε"-texts in praise of the Mother of God and the Saints, folios of the third Ode (Dan. iii, xxiv, etc.), of a so-called "lōbesh"-text, of an "absalijā" ("Psalli"-text), and some fragments of an acrostic hymn. Portions of the original binding have survived but unfortunately in a bad state of preservation.

Another fragmentary "Theotokia" is Ryl. Coptic MS. 476, of

which one hundred and forty-five folios have survived, the size of leaf being  $22 \times 16$  cm. There are remains of the original binding. On the front and back cover the loops for closing the codex are preserved. As the size of the folios is the same throughout, they were probably at an earlier period bound together, but subsequently have become separated and torn. They are decorated with small interlaced strap-work painting at the top and with paragraph marks in the margins. Some are only drawn, some coloured. Five hands have been concerned in writing these fragments. The first wrote part of the midnight song of the Month of Kiahk, the second the acrostic hymns, and the third part of the Monday and Friday "Theotokias" with parallel Arabic. The fourth hand is responsible for "ⲭⲉⲣⲉ"-texts and an "absalijā" hymn. One further acrostic hymn may be attributed to a fifth hand. The folios containing the Monday and Friday "Theotokias" (fols. 89<sup>r</sup>-132<sup>v</sup>) may perhaps be dated sixteenth century; the others seem to be later.

Thirty-two folios of a "Euchologion", an "Anaphora" of St. Basil, with considerable lacunae, have survived in Ryl. Coptic MS. 477. The last folio with a Coptic number is 92. The three Eucharistic liturgies have already been referred to above. They are those for St. Basil, St. Gregory and St. Mark or St. Cyril. The "Anaphora" of St. Mark is historically the most important. It is the old Alexandrian "Anaphora" in its Coptic form, but is now rarely used. The two foreign "Anaphoras" are ascribed to St. Gregory Nazianzen and to St. Basil. The latter is a shortened form of the Byzantine St. Basil Liturgy. Both were originally used in their Greek form, but later were translated into Coptic, although not literally. The rite of St. Gregory is used three times a year, that of St. Mark and St. Cyril in theory during Advent and Lent. The usual Coptic practice is the "Anaphora" of St. Basil, to which these thirty-two folios belong. There are further in Ryl. Coptic MS. 477 nine folios of a "Theotokia" preserved; only two have retained their Coptic numbers, fols. 127 and 147. Fols. 3<sup>r</sup> to 5<sup>v</sup> are remains of "ⲭⲉⲣⲉ"-texts in praise of the Virgin. Some other single folios have survived, one with so-called "tōbeh"-texts, prayers to the Saints. The few remaining folios, only single ones,



may also belong to a "Theotokia", but they cannot be arranged into a separate manuscript. The last part of this manuscript contains a hymn to be recited during the night before Palm Sunday. Four of the folios are numbered in Coptic  $\overline{B}$ ,  $\overline{\Gamma}$ ,  $\overline{\Delta}$ ,  $\overline{E}$ , that is, 2, 3, 4, 5.

More than a hundred single folios with texts written by several hands constitute Ryl. Coptic MS. 478. All the folios are of the same size. They were apparently unbound and then put together out of order. They may be dated rather late, perhaps to the last century. One folio shows a roughly drawn cross of coloured, interlaced strap-work with the inscription "Jesus Christ, Son of God". Some folios deal with the Sunday, Monday and Tuesday "Theotokia", all in fragments. There are also fragments of hymns belonging to the Tuesday and Wednesday "Theotokia", and a fragmentary Ode and a "Ṭarḥ"-Song associated with the Saturday "Theotokia". Fols. 23<sup>r</sup> to 35<sup>v</sup> seem to be part of the rite of baptism. One folio contains in Coptic the words "I christen you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit", followed by chapters of the Gospel and hymns to the Archangels. Finally, there are fragments of acrostical hymns, doxologies, "absaliḡā", and acclamations to the Saints, mostly single folios in different hands.

One value of these fragmentary manuscripts probably lies in the fact that it seems doubtful whether any liturgical manuscripts will ever come out of Egypt again. The Lent-Book is of value to scholars interested in this subject because it is a rather large fragment and probably sixteenth-century. In the British Museum are preserved, besides the hymns already mentioned, some single folios of five "Lectionaries" of Lent manuscripts, listed in Crum's *Catalogue*. No. 31, a single leaf, is written in the Sahidic dialect and may be dated to the ninth or tenth century.