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The Ninth-Century Coptic ‘Book Revolution’ and the Emergence of Multiple-Text Manuscripts

Abstract: In this article, I am going to analyse how the typology of Coptic multiple-text manuscripts (MTMs) evolved in relation to their content and regional provenance, showing how Coptic literature and Coptic book production underwent a revolutionary transformation that started in the ninth century, becoming something completely different from what it was before.

Summarizing the studies on the development of Coptic literature carried out by Tito Orlandi, Martin Krause and others, Siegfried Richter writes:

[...] much of our modern knowledge about the history of Coptic literature is based on manuscripts from the ninth century and later, which are often copies, revisions, or summaries of older works. In many cases, the works of earlier Coptic literature were transmitted finally only for liturgical purposes and so were put into such codices.¹

This assertion is certainly correct: what we have is mainly transmitted by codices that date back to between the ninth and the eleventh centuries and consists of a targeted selection of contents that do not fully correspond to the primeval nature of Coptic literature.

Even though the reasons for this drastic selection and rearrangement of Coptic literary heritage are quite well known, it seems that nobody has systematically analysed the nature of the Coptic works that have survived over the centuries—by chance or more often thanks to accurate selection—in strict relation to the typology of the multiple-text codices (MTMs) that transmit them.

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¹ Richter 2009, 47

1 Before the sixth century: the unstable and evolving nature of Christian Egyptian manuscripts and literature

It has been stated that, at least as far as the Mediterranean book is concerned, miscellanies or MTMs were an invention of the Egyptian schools.² This is certainly plausible, but our opinion may be influenced, and perhaps even distorted, by the fact that no other Mediterranean regions have preserved so many ancient books.

Furthermore, it is a matter of fact that some of the earliest Christian Egyptian libraries known to us—I use the term library *lato sensu*—are also composed of MTMs.

This is the case for the well-known Nag Hammadi codices (third-fourth centuries), containing two to seven works (with the exception of Codex X that transmits only one work). In particular, it also applies to the Bodmer Papyri (fourth-fifth/sixth centuries) with their combination of Greek, Coptic and Latin languages, and their co-presence of biblical, homiletic and classical texts³ as translations or in the original language, which are generally evaluated by scholars as an eccentric bibliological and textual phenomenon compared to the *normal* book production of late antique Christian Egypt.

As far as the Bodmer Papyri are concerned, my personal opinion is that it is plausible to reverse the perspective of the analysis and to speculate that other Christian Egyptian book collections of Late Antiquity might also have had approximately the same combination of languages, works and genres, which was even possible in more traditional and structured monasteries of the same period, i.e. coenobitic communities where life was regulated by written or unwritten rules.

The presence of Latin in the works transmitted by the Bodmer Papyri shows us that the use of this language—and consequently of its cultural background—should not be

² Petrucci 2005, 5–25.

³ It is interesting to note that, despite the fact that numerous manuscripts of classical works have survived from Late Antiquity, they never appear in booklists. For a census of pagan books found in late antique Egypt see Maehler 1997, 125–128. Despite the extreme interest of the observations made by Chrysi Kotsifou on Egyptian book production, I do not agree with the statements that '[t]he lack of evidence for pagan scriptoria in Byzantine Egypt also suggests that a large number of the six hundred copies of pagan books that have survived from that period were copied by monks' and '[i]n late antiquity, centers of book production were primarily if not exclusively in monasteries' (Kotsifou 2007, 50, 55), since our knowledge of monastic settlements is much better than that of urban settlements; the latter, much more than monasteries, have undergone numerous transformation and stratifications over time, to the point of making specific typologies of buildings and often even the general topography of a site unrecognizable.

regarded as a linguistic phenomenon, which mainly (but not exclusively) concerned the law and army milieus.⁴ It is clear that in the fifth century there were still groups of educated people capable of using Latin in order to read (and copy) Latin works.

In particular, this is clearly demonstrated by the late Latin poem *Alcestis*, of originally at least 124 hexameters (122 of which have survived), which is preserved in the famous *codex miscellaneus Barcinonensis* (now, in the Abbey of Montserrat)⁵ and deals with the heroic death of Alcestis while saving the life of her husband Admetus.⁶ Most of the specialists who have studied the *Alcestis* agree in affirming that the scribe who copied the text did not fully understand it. He probably knew oral Latin, but was much less adept in its written form; nevertheless, he was not always averse to taking on the role of *redactor*; i.e. to correct and integrate the text. At the end of the fourth century, this anonymous Latin poem was circulated in a community that also produced and read biblical works in Coptic, and original Christian works in Greek (mostly poems). The *Alcestis* itself is part of a codex that also includes Christian texts, and it was probably perceived as a moral example perfectly compliant with Christian values.

At first glance, the so-called *codex miscellaneus* appears extremely surprising, since it includes an apparently heterogeneous and incompatible series of texts⁷:

- Cicero, *In Catilinam*, I 6–9, 13–33, II (in Latin)
- the so-called *Psalmus responsorius* (in Latin)
- a drawing of a mythological subject (Hercules or Perseus)
- a series of prayers (in Greek)
- the above-mentioned *Alcestis* (in Latin)
- a composition modernly defined as *Hadrianus* (in Latin)
- a list of words probably taken from a stenographic manual (in Greek).

⁴ On the use and role of Latin in late antique and Christian Egypt see the following selected references: Cavenaille 1949; Dummer 1969–1970, 43–52; Wipszycka 1984, 279–296; Cavenaille 1987, 103–110; Wouters 1988; Crihiore 2003–2004, 111–118; Fournet 2009, 418–451; Papaconstantinou 2010. For the school context see Carlig 2013, 55–98.

⁵ For a description of the codex see Torallas Tovar / Worp 2013, 139–167.

⁶ Roca-Puig 1982; Lebek 1983, 1–29; Parsons / Nisbet / Hutchinson 1983, 31–36; Schwartz 1983, 37–39; Marcovich 1984, 111–134; Tandoi 1984a, 233–245; Tandoi 1984b, 3–11; Schäublin 1984, 174–181; Harrison / Obbink 1986, 75–81; Marcovich 1986, 39–57; Lebek 1987, 39–48; Marcovich 1988; Horsfall 1989, 25–26; Lebek 1989, 19–26; Nosarti 1992; Mantzilas 2011, 61–90; Nocchi Macedo 2010; Nocchi Macedo 2014.

⁷ For a detailed and commented list of the works contained in the *codex miscellaneus Barcinonensis* see Nocchi Macedo 2013, 143–156.

Consequently, we are dealing with a multiple-text and a multilingual codex, probably destined for personal use or use by a restricted group, ‘à la croisée de la tradition profane gréco-romaine et du christianisme, ou se côtoyaient, sans pourtant avoir le même statut, le grec, le latin et le copte’.⁸

Clearly, the owners—whether they were members of a more or less organized monastic community, or of a Christian school or of a philosophical-religious circle⁹—considered all the texts included in the manuscript appropriate for their readings and training. Even the list of words at the end of the codex, which also includes names of classical Greek authors (Homer, Hesiod, Thucydides) and the titles of fifteen comedies of Menander,¹⁰ is coherent with the rest, most likely representing an aid to learning the stenographic technique and constitutes a choice which was compatible with the writing activities of a monastic community.¹¹

In brief, the multiple-text codices of the Bodmer collection appear like one-volume libraries—to borrow an effective term from the conference that was organized in Hamburg in 2010¹²—that is a compendium of the interests and the tastes of the community that owned them. The private use of these codices is revealed by the codicological features and by the occasional nature in which the texts were combined.

However, as previously stated, we should not forget that the Bodmer Papyri include several biblical, mostly apparently single-text, codices in Coptic: P.Bodmer VI (*Proverbs*); P.Bodmer XVI (*Exodus*); P.Bodmer XXII + Mississippi Coptic Codex II (*Jeremiah, Lamentations of Jeremiah, Epistles of Jeremiah, Baruch*); Bodmer XIX (*Gospel of Matthew*); P.Palau Ribes 181–183 (*Gospels of Luke, John and Mark*), to which one should probably add Codex Glazier (*Acts*), preserved in the Pierpont Morgan Library,¹³ and Codex Scheide MS 144 (*Gospel of Matthew*), preserved in the Princeton University Library. These codices are additional to the *codex miscellaneus* and the so-called *codex visionum*, which contain the most interesting and simultaneously challenging works of this group of manuscripts, and consist of original Greek poems on Christian subjects.¹⁴

⁸ Nocchi Macedo 2013, 139.

⁹ See Camplani 2015b, 98–135.

¹⁰ On Menander in Late Antiquity see van Minnen 1992, 87–98.

¹¹ Nocchi Macedo 2013, 156, 162.

¹² Friedrich / Schwarke 2016.

¹³ Sharpe 1999, 381–400. See also <https://alinsuciu.com/2014/04/06/radiocarbon-dating-of-codex-glazier/> (last accessed 21 October 2017).

¹⁴ See now above all Agosti 2015, 86–97, where a wide bibliography on the subject is listed.

All together, these manuscripts belong to the oldest translations of the Bible from Greek into Coptic and represent types of books that, if they were to be found in any monastic library, including a more traditional and structured library, it would come as no surprise.

It is precisely this combination of languages, cultures and bibliological choices that makes the Bodmer Papyri an extremely interesting case. Did they reflect a wide cultural-linguistic situation in late antique Egypt? Is it possible to think that other libraries also had a similar combination of works and languages? And, what's more importantly here, was the single-text codex originally reserved for biblical works only?

In the case of the Nag Hammadi library and also the Bodmer Papyri, the owners' identities remain unclear. Despite the fact that Hugo Lundhaug and Lance Jenott recently spoke strongly in favor of a monastic origin,¹⁵ not all scholars agree that they belonged to a monastic community.¹⁶ Moreover, it is a fact that Egyptian book owners between the third and the fifth centuries must have largely had similar cultural training and attended the same 'schools' because the monastic identity of organized communities was a later achievement, as we know from the majority of Coptic works, but also from documentary sources.

It was only in the sixth century that monasteries became the main—and progressively almost exclusive—cultural centres of Christian Egypt, and at that point their religious and cultural choices influenced all subsequent literature. This happened as a reaction to the post-Chalcedonian controversies and the consequent co-presence in Egypt of two *episkopoi*: (1) melkite, i.e. depending on Constantinople, and (2) 'monophysite', i.e. local and Coptic.

Previously, however, the influence that schools located in *towns* – or rather in the largest villages—exerted on a monk's education must still have been strong.¹⁷

There are tenuous, but not negligible, traces that lead in this direction. This is the case of the well-known, although probably unwitting, quotation of *The Birds* of Aristophanes by the abbot Shenoute, which is clearly the product of a residual *classical* education that the archimandrite of the White Monastery had gained in the Panopoli-

¹⁵ Lundhaug / Jenott 2015

¹⁶ See for instance, Buzi 2016, 95–100 and, above all, Wipszycka / Piwowarczyk 2017, 432–457.

¹⁷ This is also the opinion of Claudia Rapp, who, dealing with the scribal training, states that 'there is no indication in the sources to suggest that it was provided within the monasteries' (Rapp 1991, 134).

tan milieu.¹⁸ Moreover, it is now a consolidated and shared opinion that 'Shenoute had an excellent education, particularly in rhetoric'.¹⁹

The fluid cultural interaction between Panopolis and the environment of the White Monastery was effectively described by Gianfranco Agosti, who, during a conference held in Warsaw,²⁰ formulated the hypothesis that the rhetoric of Nonnus of Panopolis, a fourth-century Greek-Egyptian poet, was influenced by the style and the themes of the sermons and hagiographies of the Shenoutean milieu. Agosti observes that, being a Christian born in Panopolis, Nonnus must have had the opportunity since his childhood to be in contact with members of the monastic movement, and particularly with Shenoute and his disciples. Their works were inspired by a continuous struggle against any religious opponents by means of a vehement literary production.

In short, the Christian Egyptian book before the sixth century had an evolving and unstable nature: first, in terms of content, which did not exclude the preservation of classical works and sometimes even the creation of new works inspired by classical literature; second, in terms of language, there was still even space for Latin, and bilingual bibliological products in Greek and Coptic were not rare; third, in terms of codicological features and graphic devices, since books belonging to the same collection may differ significantly in the use of titles, in the layout, in the choice of the writing support (papyrus or parchment, with a predominance of the first material) and in the dimensions of the codices.

As for this last aspect, two main types are recognisable. The first is a more or less square form, represented, for instance, by Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Ms. or. oct. 987, a papyrus codex in Akhmimic dialect that contains the *Proverbia Salomonis*. It is a single-quire papyrus codex now bound with modern leather binding. It measures about 135/140 × 125 mm and is made up of 43 bifolia, apparently each taken from the remainder of the three different rolls, plus three single leaves. The outer sheets are wider than the inner ones. Oslo, MS Schøyen Codex 2650, which contains a unique version of the *Gospel of Matthew*, also corresponds to this format. It is a papyrus codex, in Mesochemic or Oxyrhynchite dialect, measuring 200 × 230 mm. Another example of the same little format, but with slightly different proportions, is represented by the so-called el-Mudil Psal-

18 Tito Orlandi is convinced of the existence of a 'school of high level at the White Monastery', which is highly probable (Orlandi 2002, 224). However, this does not exclude that some of the monks and Shenoute himself could have been in contact with the 'schools' of Panopolis.

19 Bagnall 2008, 29.

20 G. Agosti, 'Nonnus and Coptic literature' at 'Nonnus of Panopolis in Context III: Old questions and new perspectives', Institute of Classical Philology and Culture Studies Faculty of Humanities Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw, 15–17 September 2015.

ter,²¹ a parchment codex in Oxyrhynchite dialect, discovered in an Egyptian tomb. It was found in the large cemetery of el-Mudil, about 45 kilometres north-east of Oxyrhynchos, under the head of a female mummy. It measures 167 × 122 mm, consists of 249 leaves, most of which are still legible, and is to be dated to the late fourth or early fifth century.

The other type is well represented by the Nag Hammadi codices and by the codex which transmits the *Gospel of Judas*, the *First Apocalypse of James*, the *Letter of Peter to Philip*, and a fragment of the *Book of Allogenes*. They are longer than wide rectangular papyrus codices, with external leaves that are larger and longer than the internal ones. 'Measured at the outside of the quires, the dimensions of the leaves of the codices vary from 242 × 147 (NHC VIII) to 302 × 140 (NHC 1, quire 1) and from 260 × 122 (NHC X) to 292 × 175 mm (NHC VII), with proportions varying between 0.46 and 0.62'.²²

It is important to stress that, while the first type normally corresponds to single-text codices—with few exceptions—²³ and usually transmits 'orthodox' biblical texts, the second often corresponds to MTMs and contains *apocrypha* and/or different literary genres, some of which are soon destined to disappear from the literary panorama of Byzantine Egypt.

In all these codices, titles are mostly located at the end of the works, and even where a title precedes the work (*inscriptio*), it is less important than the final title (*subscriptio*).

In brief, the systematic analysis of the most ancient witnesses of Coptic books shows that single-text codices normally contain Biblical works, while MTMs mostly contain apocryphal works, homiletic and/or classical works, which had been reinterpreted from a Christian perspective.

Moreover, from a codicological point of view, the typology of Coptic MTM is still evolving, exactly like the identity of the book owners.

²¹ Emmenegger 2007.

²² Buzi / Emmel 2015, 145.

²³ See for instance, Oslo, MS Crosby Schøyen Codex 193 + Dublin, Chester Beatty Library 2026 that contains Melito of Sardes, *De Pascha*; 2 *Macchabaei* 5,27–7,41; *Epistula 1 Petri* 1,1–5,14; *Jonas* 1,1–4,11; *Homily on Easter*. Goehring 1990.

2 After the sixth century: the slow emergence of the Coptic MTM

Unfortunately, the history of Coptic manuscript tradition is full of gaps. Thus, we cannot always follow the gradual evolution of the technical features, the tastes and the practical aspects that brought the Coptic book to change over the centuries in detail. However, it is certain that the dramatic events after the Council of Chalcedon (451) had a strong influence on Coptic literature, and therefore also on Coptic codices.

It only became possible to talk of a real and institutionalized Coptic Church, which was independent from the so-called Great Church, after Chalcedon and the dogmatic disputes it raised; however, only one century later, the emperor and the Church of Constantinople made strenuous attempts to bring the Church of Alexandria back to what they considered orthodoxy.

Thus, the 'Chalcedonian church had been actively backed by the imperial power structure for over a century, often forcing the non-Chalcedonian hierarchy to leave the city centres and retreat to monasteries where they were managing their communities' by the end of the sixth century.²⁴ Two archbishops or patriarchs were present in Egypt, one Chalcedonian and the other anti-Chalcedonian, giving rise to a complex and dramatic situation, in which the Copts were occasionally victims of systematic persecution.

This state of affairs had an effect on Coptic manuscript tradition and literature, where, on the one hand, we witness the emergence of monastic cultural centres and *scriptoria* and, on the other, the flourishing of hagiography, a literary genre in which monks and local martyrs became the new heroes of the narrations. Often, hagiographic texts were linked to one another, forming the so-called cycles.

The MTM became the perfect container for these narratives, in which the enterprises of one character were developed in more than one work, in a sort of serialized novel. But homilies dedicated to similar subjects were also often collected together in order to create a thematic volume. Again, the multiple-text codex appeared as a perfect instrument of transmission.

Unfortunately, we do not have many examples which are datable to the sixth/seventh century with certainty, since manuscripts are often sourced from the antiquities market, not from a secure archaeological context. However, we do have an important library, probably datable to the end of the seventh/beginning

²⁴ Papaconstantinou 2009, 448.

of the eighth centuries, that gives us the opportunity to appreciate the difference in Coptic books before and after the Council of Chalcedon. This library is made up of a group of at least 17 papyrus codices.²⁵ It is most likely that they originally belonged to the main church of This (or Thinis), which is located near Abydos, and is now preserved in the Egyptian Museum, Turin.²⁶

It is interesting to note that only four codices seem to be single-text manuscripts. More importantly, these single-text manuscripts no longer transmitted biblical works, as they did in the past, but other literary genres. This is the case for the *Life of Epiphanius of Salamis* and, surprisingly, for a text by Shenoute (*De iudicio supremo*), the latter is a rare example of a work by the famous archimandrite transmitted outside the Shenoutean federation.

All the other manuscripts are MTMs that contain two to nine works.²⁷ They already present most of the physical elements that will characterize the last and more well-known phase of Coptic books.

With few exceptions, the layout is in two columns.²⁸ The titles are always located before the works they refer to, but only seldom mention a date. Sometimes, *subscriptions* survive, but they no longer represent the main titles.

However, from the point of view of content, the MTMs of Turin show that the nature of Coptic literature was still evolving. They combined fifth-century translations from Greek, some *apocrypha*, texts that testified to the theological controversies of the late fourth century, some original texts of the sixth century, a few pseudepigraphal works and a selection of normative texts. Pagan works, however, even when re-read from a Christian perspective, were no longer included.

Whereas the reason for the combination of some texts in the same manuscript is clear in many cases, such as in Codex II (GIOV.AB) where the *Acta Pilati* or *Evangelium Nicodemi* is combined with the *In Crucem* of Theophilus of Alexandria as both works are related to the Passion of Christ, there are other cases where the grounds for the choice have remained completely unknown.

²⁵ Recent autoptic surveys of this ancient library have demonstrated that it was originally composed of at least 20 codices.

²⁶ On the papyrus codices from This, see Orlandi 1974, 139–151 and Orlandi 2013, 501–530. On the scientific activities carried out on these codices by the project 'PATHs – codicological description, cataloguing, archaeometric analysis of the inks' – see Buzi 2015/2016, 57–67; Buzi / Bogdani / Carlig / Giorda / Soldati 2017; Buzi 2018a, 39–57.

²⁷ Any assessment of the contents, however, should be very cautious until a complete cataloguing of the manuscripts has been completed. Therefore, the codicological data provided here is provisional.

²⁸ Codices VIII (GIOV.AH), IX (GIOV.AI), XI (GIOV.AK) have a one-column layout.

Even though there are several exceptions, the codices that can be reconstructed with certainty are normally composed of quires of four bifolia, of which the first four pages are usually blank. The disposition of the fibres is not rarely mixed and the papyrus is often of very rough quality.

The pagination, when regular, is on each page, but there are interesting cases which combine pagination and foliation (Codex I), or different forms of irregularity.

The thickest Turin codex consists of 192 pages (Codex VI), i.e. 48 bifolia, while most of the others have between 100 and 150 pages.

In brief, the library of Thinis (This) represents a transitional moment in the history of Coptic books, witnessing, on the one hand, the creation of new codicological and palaeographical features and, on the other, the progressive emergence of multiple-text codices.

3 The definitive affirmation of MTMs (ninth-eleventh centuries)

However, it is the ninth century that represents a real revolution for the history of the Coptic book. Parchment became the almost exclusive writing support, with papyrus slowly falling into disuse and paper being systematically used at a later date. The dimensions, proportion and general features of Coptic codices appear to be more or less the same all over Egypt and, more importantly, they transmit a literature that is clearly the result of a targeted selection and totally excludes the monastic figures of the origins (Aphou, Paul of Tamma, Apollo of Bawit, etc.), the apocryphal writings and, of course, any reference to classical tradition. Moreover, titles always mention the date, and this is not fortuity, since works are now used for liturgical purposes.

Unfortunately, one of the cultural centres that was responsible for this selection has only partially been explored, namely the Wādī al-Naṭrūn valley. It is better known in Christian sources as Scetis or Σκήτις or Σκέτη. Scetis is one of the three early Christian monastic centres located in the desert of the northwestern Nile Delta; the other two are Nitria and Kellia. The region precociously became one of Christianity's most sacred areas. It was inhabited by Desert Fathers, whose famous representative was Macarius.

Macarius settled in Scetis in approximately 330, establishing a solitary monastic site. His reputation, however, soon attracted a great number of anchorites, who began to live nearby in individual cells. Many of them came from Nitria and Kellia, where they had previously experienced a solitary desert living.

By the end of the fourth century, four distinct stable communities had developed. These are the monasteries of Baramus, Macarius, Bishoi and John Kolobos.

It is a shared opinion that the four monasteries did not originally have a real library. Rather, books constituted the personal property of individual monks. In any case, the monasteries of Scetis were destroyed three times in the fifth century and again in the sixth and the ninth centuries, so it is reasonable to imagine that ancient codices from this region are unlikely to have survived, and that what remains originated long after these events.

Moreover, the codices from the monasteries of the Wādī al-Naṭrūn, most of which date from the ninth/tenth century, underwent the same fate as those belonging to the White Monastery (Dayr al-Abyaḍ), which were dismembered, sold to European travelers and scholars, and were thus scattered across different European, Egyptian and North American collections.²⁹

However, we have enough information to reconstruct the stimulating and multicultural life of the local monasteries and the relationship with other Oriental Churches that, unlike those in other Egyptian regions, continued well beyond the eleventh century. A meaningful example is represented by the well-known 'Pentaglotto Barberini', which can be dated to the thirteenth to fourteenth century and was rebound in 1625. It is a codex that contains the Psalms in Coptic, Arabic, Ethiopic, Armenian and Syriac. It is very likely that it was not imagined for practical use, but rather conceived as a symbol of the anti-Calcedonian faith, collecting the languages of all the non-Melkite Churches, exactly like two other multiple-language codices, which were produced in the same milieu and are now preserved in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan.

Moreover, we know that the sources used to write the History of the Patriarchs, the last historical account of the Coptic Orthodox Church, came from the Wādī al-Naṭrūn.

The most important library of the valley was certainly that of the monastery of Macarius (Dayr al-Anbā Maqār). As already said, the codices from this library still need to be studied carefully, but on the basis of available knowledge. With the exclusion of biblical and liturgical manuscripts, there are very few single-text codices. At the moment, an accurate analysis—in terms of literary choices, codicological aspects and paratextual elements—of the codices from the Monastery of Macarius,

²⁹ Concerning the dispersion of the libraries of Scetis, see Richter 2004, 43–62: 47–58 and Emmel 1990, 145–184. See also Evelyn White 1932, xxi–xlviii and for the reports of different travelers and explorers, Störk 1995, 45–98.

which are preserved in the Apostolic Vatican Library, is being carried out within the scientific activities of the PATHs project³⁰.

In the paper presented at a recent conference in Rome,³¹ Tito Orlandi compared the early medieval bibliological choices of the libraries of the Monastery of Shenoute and of the Monastery of Macarius. Orlandi observed that if the first still preserved the richness and variety of the original late antique library, what we know about the second reveals a clearer practical function and stronger connection with liturgical use. Consequently, it appears that the Monastery of Shenoute maintained its role as the main cultural centre of Coptic Egypt, at least until the time of the three Awlād al-‘Assāl (thirteenth century), while the Monastery of Macarius inherited this role only after the decline of Dayr al-Abyad, yet producing and spreading a (literary) culture that was now completely Copto-Arabic.

At the previously mentioned conference “‘One-Volume Libraries’: Composite Manuscripts and Multiple Text Manuscripts’, I presented a quantitative exploration of the other two late Coptic libraries whose extant manuscripts date back to after the end of the eighth century: the so-called Hamūli manuscripts, found in the Fayyūm region, and those of the White Monastery of Shenoute, in Upper Egypt. Here, I am going to briefly deal with the codicological aspects rather than the numerical ones, focusing particularly on the Hamūli manuscripts, while excluding the purely liturgical codices and those containing biblical works. I will take into consideration only codices that transmit monastic, hagiographic, homiletic and normative works.

Hamūli is the modern name of the village which stands on the site of the ancient Monastery of the Archangel Michael, located in the south-western area of the fertile region of the Fayyūm, about 100 km south-west of Cairo. In 1911, several well-preserved codices (ninth–eleventh centuries) were found there and are now preserved for the most part in the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York.³² At the time of their discovery, several of them still had their original bindings.

The multiple-text codices represent an important part of this library, but not the majority. Those containing the largest number of works are devoted to Eastertide, the Virgin Mary and, rather unsurprisingly, the Archangel Michael, who is the patron of the monastery. They are all to be considered high-quality codi-

³⁰ Buzi / Berno / Soldati / Valerio 2018, 161–193, [atlas.paths-erc.eu].

³¹ The conference—the first organized by the PATHs project—was entitled ‘The Coptic book between the 6th and the 8th centuries’ and was held in Rome (21–22 September 2017, Sapienza University of Rome and Academia Belgica). Orlandi 2018, 58–65.

³² See, in particular, Depuydt 1993, I, xlv–liii. Cf. also Emmel 2005, 63–70 and Nakano 2006, 147–159.

cological products, at least by Coptic standards. They usually show clear and well-crafted parchment, accurate *mise en page*, two-column layout, large margins, regular handwriting and pagination, and bimodular script. As for the dimensions, they range from 328 × 251 mm to 377 × 288 mm, which excludes personal use and suggests communitarian, liturgical use.

The Hamūli multiple-text codices contain two to ten works (cf. Tab. 1), all of which are introduced by a long—sometimes very long—title that always mentions a date corresponding to the death of a martyr, the miracle of a saint or the construction of a sanctuary. It is important to stress that these dates are always identical to those related to the same characters whose lives are collected, in a summarized form, in the *Synaxarium Alexandrinum*, which is a collection of saints' lives and religious events arranged according to the liturgical calendar of the Coptic Church. We do not know which institution decided to compile the *Synaxarium* (the Patriarchate?) or who was responsible for its final arrangement, but the correspondence of the dates and the narratives mentioned in the titles of the ninth–eleventh-century MTMs—not only from Hamūli—with those of the *Synaxarium* cannot be a mere coincidence.

It is clear that these codices represent a targeted selection of the texts that were considered representative of post-eighth-century Coptic culture, i.e. the religious and cultural identity of an Egypt which, at that time, had already been speaking Arabic for two centuries. As already observed, there is no trace of classical literature in these multiple-text codices. Moreover, even the monastic and homiletic works of the first phase of Coptic literature, that is the texts related to the dogmatic and theological controversies, most of the historiographic works and the works related to monks of the specific Middle-Egyptian milieu are missing.

From a material point of view, these books are large 'containers' or 'corpus-organizers', according to the terminology proposed by Alessandro Bausi,³³ consisting of at least 300 and sometimes even 200 leaves. The script, a bimodular handwriting very likely conceived and elaborated in the Fayyūm itself, is particularly suitable for long texts, since it is easily compressible. It is evident that these codices were used for the storage of selected *traditional* texts and not for hosting new literary creations. In this phase, there was no space for original works.

In brief, the late Coptic parchment codex, and, in particular, the multiple-text parchment codex is an item that completely differs from the oldest examples of the Egyptian MTMs: the technical features are different, as are the size and the texts and, above all, the finalities. Clearly, such a complex cultural and—I would say—

33 Bausi 2010, 34–36.

also technological operation, must have been guided and driven in a targeted manner by a group of intellectuals.

Identifying the cultural circle(s) responsible for such an operation and the region, or even the precise place where it took shape, is, in my opinion, one of the most important challenges that a specialist of Coptic studies could, and indeed should, face.

Tab. 1: The Hamūli multiple-text codices preserved in the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, contain two to ten works.

Call number of the Hamūli MSS	Depuydt's catalogue no.	Dimensions (mm)	Date	Number of works
M597	107	351 × 268	913/914	2
M593	111	352 × 266	892/893	2
M602	116	365 × 282	822/823–913/914	7
M592	117	377 × 288	822/823–913/914	8
M587	121	341 × 262	897–901	4
M590	125	338 × 258	before 893	3
M588	126	344 × 285	March 8, 842	3
M589	127	328 × 251	822/823–913/914	2
M582	136	342 × 259	822/823–913/914	2
M591	157	326 × 254	before Feb. 15, 861	7
M596	158	375 × 289	871/872	3
M598	159	332 × 270	822/823–913/914	2
M600	160	353 × 274	before Aug. 29, 906	2
M579	162	368 × 285	Before Aug. 30, 823	8
M580	163	357 × 275	889/890	2
M583	164	338 × 281	Feb. 8, 848	9
M584	165	343 × 267	822/823–913/914	2

Call number of the Hamūli MSS	Depuydt’s catalogue no.	Dimensions (mm)	Date	Number of works
M585	166	338 × 228	822/823–913/914	3
M609	167	349 × 261	822/823–913/914	3
M633	168	322 × 243	before Aug., 994	2
M595	170	342 × 277	before Apr. 4, 855	10
M611	171	334 × 260	891–893	2
M577	172	337 × 259	before Aug. 30, 895	4
M578	173	338 × 255	between 891 and 893	3
M586	174	359 × 269	Oct. 10, 844	3

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