Paola Buzi

From Single-Text to Multiple-Text Manuscripts: Transmission Changes in the Coptic Literary Tradition. Some Case-Studies from the White Monastery Library

1 Introduction

Before analysing the Christian Egyptian literary tradition, its phenomena and its codicological products, it is necessary to make some preliminary remarks.

Firstly, although this article will deal with Coptic manuscripts, it should not be forgotten that from the 4th to the 10th century, which is the period considered in this article, the Greek language was never completely replaced by Coptic. Rather, both languages coexisted, producing a strong and widespread bilingualism. In contrast, Latin remained confined to a very specific *milieu*: i.e. the Roman army, administration and jurisprudence.[1]

Secondly, the climatic conditions of the Nile Valley enabled Egypt to retain an impressive amount of manuscript material, much of which dates back to the very early stages of the spread of Christianity into Egypt. This exceptional situation attracted many systematic excavations. In particular, these took place in the late 18th century and specifically pursued the aim of finding manuscripts. The fact that no attention was paid to the archaeological context gave rise to predictable circumstances. Most of the texts have completely lost their link with the original historical background. Moreover, when local people realized the keen interest of Europeans in the early documents pertaining to Christianity, they did not hesitate to dismember Coptic codices in order to sell single leaves of them to the highest bidder. This particular aspect remains to exert a strong influence on the study of Coptic manuscript material because leaves which originally belonged to the same

1 Buzi 2005a.

codex are often preserved in several separate European and non-European collections.

Lastly, notwithstanding increased attention to codicological aspects of the Coptic manuscript culture over the last two decades, it is clear that much remains to be done; in particular, if we regard the remarkable progress made in the analogous studies of Greek and Latin manuscripts.[2] In brief, a 'Coptic codicology' has still to be established, and Coptic studies so far continue to depend basically on the codicological terminology used in Greek manuscript studies, despite the fact Coptic manuscript tradition presents very specific phenomena. This situation needs to be remedied as soon as possible because, as Stephen Emmel put it in 1993, 'the development and proper application of codicology as a science also depends on the reconstruction of Coptic literature'.[3]

2 Coptic multiple-text manuscripts

This article will specifically deal with the category of Coptic 'multiple-text manuscripts' (MTMs). It omits 'composite manuscripts'– i.e. volumes created by combining independent codicological units, sometimes of different origin and period – both because specific studies about this second category are still completely lacking, and because the above-mentioned dispersion of the leaves of Coptic manuscripts and their fragmentary status do not facilitate such a research, at least if we remain in the field of literary manuscripts. In fact, not much has been written about MTMs either. The manner in which they represent a characteristic of Christian Egypt, albeit not an exclusive one, and how the quantity of their use became substantial from a certain period onward, are aspects which have not yet elicited the appropriate attention.[4]

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2 For a bibliography of Greek and Latin codicological studies see Maniaci 2002, 186–189, 191–193, 195, 201–206, 221–233. See also Géhin 2005 and Klingshirn / Safran 2007. For Egypt in particular, see Bagnall 2009. For the recent studies concerning MTMs see Ronconi 2007. As for the problems related to the cataloguing of MTMs see above all Andrist 2006, 299–356 and Andrist / Canart / Maniaci 2013. See also Shailor 1996, 153–167 and Gumbert 2004, 17–42.

3 Emmel 1993, 40. See now Buzi / Emmel 2015, 137–153.

4 For a quantitative analysis of MTMs in Greek and Latin late-antique and early mediaeval period see Maniaci 2004, 95–105 and Muzerelle / Ornato 2004, 43–74, respectively. Concerning the structural aspects of the Greek MTM see also Gumbert 2004, 17–42; Crisci 2004, 109–144 and Ronconi 2004, 145–182.

Armando Petrucci, listing the first MTMs of Oriental Christianity, suggests that it is very likely that the miscellaneous codex is an Egyptian creation,[5] possibly originating from schools.[6] In this respect, it is undeniable that Christian Egypt has provided several examples of MTMs since the birth of the codex.

Most of these first examples, however, are to be attributed to a context of cultural contiguity between Greek and Coptic *milieux*, as seems to be confirmed by the codicological characteristics and the continuous exchanges between the two languages.[7]

This is the case for P. Hamb.bil. 1,[8] a bilingual papyrus codex composed of four irregular quires, which contains: the *Acta Pauli* (in Greek), the *Canticum Canticorum* (in Coptic), the *Lamentations of Jeremiah* (in Coptic), and the *Ecclesiastes* (in Greek and Coptic).[9] The leaves measure 260 × 200 mm, the writing is arranged in a single column, the margins are narrow and the number of lines changes from page to page. The codex is decorated with very rough ornamental elements and has been written in at least two different hands, which command both Greek and Coptic but are more proficient in the first language. The manuscript is datable to the end of the 3rd or to the beginning of the 4th century at the latest.

The same graphic and codicological coarseness is shared by another early MTM, datable to the end of the 3rd century: P. Crosby-Schøyen MS 193, which is a one-quire codex, originally composed of 35 double leaves and characterized by unusual dimensions (147 mm × 159 mm so that the width of the volume exceeds the height). The pagination has at least two repeated beginnings, the number of lines changing from a minimum of 11 to a maximum of 18, even on the same page.

It contains five Sahidic Coptic[10] texts: the *De Pascha* of Melito of Sardis, a passage of *Maccabees* (II, 5, 27–7, 41), the *Epistula Petri*, the *Book of Jonas* and a homiletic text probably concerning Easter morning.

Also 12 of the 13 renowned Nag Hammadi codices are one-quire volumes, but to describe these in detail here would exceed the scope of this article. We will

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5 Petrucci 2005, 5–25; see also Crisci 2004, 145–182.

6 Petrucci 1986, 180 and Del Corso / Pecere 2009.

7 Crisci 2004, 111.

8 Diebner / Kasser 1989; Störk 2002, 101–104.

9 For an analysis of the Coptic dialect varieties used in the codex see Diebner / Kasser 1989, 50–140.

10 Sahidic was originally the dialect spoken in the Theban region; after the 5th century, however, it became the standard Coptic of all of Upper Egypt. From the 11th century, this role was taken by Bohairic, a dialect originally spoken in the western part of Lower Egypt, but also in the cities of Alexandria and Memphis.

therefore just mention them briefly, specifying that they share with P. Hamb.bil. 1 and with P. Crosby-Schøyen the in parts rough handwriting, the unruly *mise en page*, the frequent changing of scribes, and many other peculiarities of this early stage of the Coptic MTMs.

Of course, these are merely some examples, but it is important to stress that almost all of the first-phase MTMs are of a biblical or apocryphal subject.

If at the beginning of the Coptic tradition the MTM appears to be a codicological article of inferior quality, things change very quickly in Egypt to the point that the MTMs soon attain the same graphical and material standard as the single-text codices and also become numerically substantial.

To give a precise idea of this phenomenon, a quantitative exploration of two important discoveries of Coptic manuscripts is presented here: the findings of the so-called Hamuli manuscripts, found in the Fayyum region,[11] and those of the White Monastery, in Upper Egypt. Both groups of manuscripts generally date from the 8th/9th–10th/11th centuries.

Hamuli 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 Fayyum, about 100 km south-west of Cairo. In 1911 several well-preserved codices were found there and are now preserved for the most part in the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York.

At the time of their discovery, several of them still had their original bindings, which is rather uncommon for Coptic Studies. They are all to be considered high-quality codicological products, at least by Coptic standards which are, in general, not very high compared to other Oriental manuscript cultures. They have clear and usually well worked parchment, accurate *mise en page*, two-column layout, large margins, regular handwriting and pagination.

It is interesting to learn that, if we exclude the biblical texts, the antiphonaries, the lectionaries, the magic spells and the documentary texts, 26 items out of the remaining 113 are MTMs, containing from 2 to 10 works attributed to different authors, the choice behind the combination of which is not always clear. I would like to point out that in this article I only consider books as MTMs if they contain at least two works by different authors and these are devoted to different and apparently unrelated subjects. If this was not the case, their number would be even larger.

The situation of the Hamuli MTMs can be summarized as follows:

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11 See, particularly, Depuydt 1993, I, xlv–liii. See also Emmel 2005, 63–70 and Nakano 2006, 147–159.

9 codices contain 2 works
8 codices contain 3 works
2 codices contain 4 works
2 codices contain 7 works
2 codices contain 8 works
1 codex contains 9 works
1 codex contains 10 works

The miscellaneous codices (MTMs) which contain the largest number of works are those devoted to Eastertide, to the Virgin Mary and, not surprisingly, to the Archangel Michael, patron of the monastery.

If we also include the biblical and apocryphal codices in our calculation, we discover that these are an insignificant minority in Hamuli, while, as we have seen, in the 4th century they represented almost the entire findings.

These data are comparable with those of the manuscripts found at the White Monastery, which are numerically even more significant.

It is a well known fact that under the active and strenuous leadership of Shenoute (approximately 350 – 465/66)[12] the confederation of monasteries coordinated by the White Monastery became one of the most important centres of Coptic literary production. This included extensive efforts invested in the translation of Greek patristic texts. Shenoute himself was probably the greatest Coptic writer ever.

However, as already mentioned, the surviving fragmentary manuscripts of the White Monastery, which are now preserved in several collections all over the world, date back to a much later period (9th–11th century,). Thus, they represent the latest stage of the history of the White Monastery library.

The White Monastery manuscripts considered here are not complete or semi-complete codices, such as those of Hamuli. In this case – but many other manuscript finds have met the same end – it is only possible to analyse a virtual reconstruction of their original codicological unity.

This reconstruction is far from complete and must therefore be considered a work in progress. It is the result of the research performed by many scholars, starting with Walter Ewing Crum who tried to identify the related fragments, while cataloguing the fragments belonging to the British Library collection. Now, it is the main task of the *Corpus dei Manoscritti Copti Letterari*. The project, which was initially founded by Tito Orlandi in 1970 in Milan and later transferred to Rome, is one of the projects hosted in the Hiob Ludolf Zentrum of Hamburg University.

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12 Coptic sources attribute to this famous abbot a lifetime of more than a hundred years.

Again, if we exclude the biblical and the apocryphal texts and the manuscripts only containing works of Shenoute, 47 out of the 171 reconstructed codices are MTMs, which contain 2 to 17 works from different authors.

Once more, in this research in order to be considered miscellanies books must contain at least two works of different authors which are dedicated to different and apparently unrelated subjects. Otherwise, as in the case of Hamuli manuscripts, the amount of the MTMs would be even more numerous.

Moreover, it must be taken into consideration that the reconstruction of the White Monastery manuscripts is still *in fieri*, and the number of MTMs is probably destined to increase.

Currently, the situation of the White Monastery MTMs can be summarized as follows:

20 codices contain 2 works
8 codices contain 4 works
6 codices contain 3 works
3 codices contain 5 works
3 codices contain 3 works
2 codices contain 7 works
1 codex contains 8 works
1 codex contains 9 works
1 codex contains 10 works
1 codex contains 15 works
1 codex contains 17 works

Since the libraries of Hamuli and of the White Monastery were probably among the best supplied in Egypt, at least during the period in question, they represent to the best advantage the trends and the cultural choices of early medieval Egypt, trends that are also confirmed by more sporadic groups of manuscripts, dating back to the 6th–8th centuries.

The fact that the MTMs make up about one fourth of the total – even more in the case of the White Monastery – is probably not entirely coincidental.

But the Hamuli MTMs and those of the White Monastery have something else in common: their works are frequently introduced by long – if not extremely long – titles.

Coptic titles have developed several peculiarities during the textual transmission and have undergone profound changes over the ages. For example, they take up different positions in the manuscript (either at the beginning or at the end). Additionally, they vary in length and extension, as well as in the degree that the contents are detailed. Furthermore, they have grown in complexity, variety and heterogeneousness.

From the 8ᵗʰ to the end of the 10ᵗʰ century, titles have become progressively longer and they often do not fully correspond to the contents of the works they are attributed to or reveal a deep textual rearrangement of them (i.e. of the works).[13]

A meaningful example is represented by the title of the *Passione et Resurrectione* by Evodius of Rome, a fictitious author probably created in the 9ᵗʰ century:

> A homily by the holy father Evodius patriarch and archbishop of the great city of Rome, the second after the apostle Peter. He delivered it on the feast of Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. He delivered it on the day on which he baptized Didymus the Jew, the leader of a synagogue, after he had instructed him from the holy scriptures. He delivered many testimonies through the holy gospels under the consulate of Claudius the emperor. He ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. As for Didymus, since he had many possessions and because of his riches, he was spared. They did not throw him out with the Jews, because he was a teacher of the law, who had studied the holy scriptures and knew their power a little. He went to the church especially so that it might become his guardian. In God's peace, amen.[14]

The comparison between the content of the title and the content of the homily is very revealing. The title extensively deals with Didymus and the expulsion of the Jews from Rome whereas in the text this aspect only appears as a minor story with occasional mention in the homily, which is otherwise exclusively dedicated to the story of the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ and to the credibility of Evodius's narration.

The title was added to the work at a later date. It was created with the specific purpose of stressing the religious identity of the Copts and criticising any resistance against orthodoxy and using the Jewish community – at that time numerically irrelevant – as a the model of heterodoxy *par excellence*[15] .

A different phenomenon, but no less interesting, is the *In Demetrium et Petrum episcopos* attributed to Flavianus of Ephesus.[16] The homily is in fact the result of a collage of two different works: the first part is an encomium dedicated to the theme of the possibility for a bishop to get married, as Peter did. The second part, in contrast, is a sort of romance about a woman from Antioch, named Martyria. She wanted to reach Alexandria so patriarch Peter could baptize her sons. It is difficult to comprehend why such different works should have been bound

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13 Buzi 2005b.
14 Depuydt 1993, 346.
15 On this matter see Buzi 2014, 31–45.
16 Budge 1914, 137.

together, but the title is certainly a perfect reflection of this evolution of the destiny of the two works:

> An encomium which our saint father Flavianus, bishop of Ephesus, delivered on saint Demetrius, archbishop of Rakote, on the day of his holy commemoration on the 20th of the month of Thot. In this encomium he also spoke about the miracles which God by his hand wrought and about the saint and martyr and virgin Apa Peter, the archbishop of Rakote. Furthermore, he spoke also of the holy woman, who was a native of the city of Antioch and a martyr, and her two sons Philopator and Eutropius. He also spoke of the passage from the book of Jeremiah which says: In that day I will establish sunrise in the house of David. In God's peace, amen.[17]

It would be no surprise if the authors of the title and of the combination of the two original works were the same person. These titles clearly illustrate the different function and purpose from earlier or shorter ones. They go far beyond being a simple indication of the work's contents and guide the reader's (or the listener's) attention towards a new interpretation of old texts.

There are indications that the authors responsible for the creation of this very specific and targeted type of title were also those who rearranged older works in new combinations, which then comprised MTMs and may be considered a school in their own right.

This phase constitutes the last original, creative and constructive activity of the Coptic literary production.

3 A special case: the MTMs containing *excerpta*

After this general overview of the Coptic MTMs, I would like to focus on a very specific typology: codices containing *excerpta*, *i.e.* abstracts or summaries of different works and different authors. The reasons for their selection and combination are not always immediately clear.

These codices represent a minority in the 'family' of Coptic MTMs. Personally I know of only a few cases, all of which come from the White Monastery Library. Three of them will be analysed shortly.

Although the codices in question cannot be defined as luxury items, neither are they characterized by the typical peculiarities of a Coptic private book, that is a one-quire volume, of small to medium size, with informal handwriting, one-

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17 Budge 1914, 137, 390.

column layout with irregular and narrow margins. The layout, in particular, is painstaking, and the script is homogeneous and well designed.

These collections of excerpts are the product of the well-established aesthetical and graphical style of the White Monastery, which stems from a long, traditional and consolidated writing *praxis*, displaying only few uncertainties and irregularities.

Each one is written by a single hand and can thus, according to the classification of Marilena Maniaci, be defined as 'unitari monoblocco pluritestuali',[18] that is, to quote Peter Gumbert, 'single-block uniform monomerous multiple-text' codex.[19]

The first of these codices is denominated MONB.DV. (The abbreviation 'MONB' stands for 'Monastero Bianco' (White Monastery), and the other two letters identify the reconstructed codicological units realized within the afore-mentioned *Corpus dei Manoscritti Copti Letterari* project.

The codex contains *excerpta* of several works – indentified or not – attributed to Cyril of Alexandria, Helias of Psoi, Theodoros the Pachomian, Isaiah of Sceti, Athanasius of Alexandria, Basilius of Cesarea and others.

To better understand the purpose of such a codex, it is of primary importance to analyse its *inscriptiones* and *subscriptiones*, i.e. the titles which introduce and close each abstract.[20]

If we take into consideration, for instance, the fragment LR.098r we immediately realize that each title is in fact a double title: the first (the *subscriptio*) refers to the previous work, while the second (the *inscriptio*) to the following work. Both are extremely brief:

ⲀⲠⲀ ⲔⲨⲢⲒⲀⲀⲞⳞ ⲠⲀⲢⲬⲎ
ⲈⲠⲒⳞⲔⲞⲠⲞⳞ ⲚⲢⲀⲔⲞⲧ

[Ⲟ]ⲘⲀⲒⲞⳞ ⲦⲞⲨ ⲀⲨⲦⲞⲨ

Apa Cyril archbishop of Alexandria
By the same author

The following title (BL.OR.03581B.54v) is very similar both as regards the position and the structure:

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18 Maniaci 2004, 87–88.
19 Gumbert 2004, 26, 29, 40.
20 For a complete analysis of the titles of the codices taken into consideration here, see Buzi 2011.

ⲓⲉ̅ ⲁⲡⲁ ⲍⲏⲁⲓⲁⲥ ⲡⲉⲡⲓⲥ
ⲕⲟⲡⲟⲥ ⲛ̅ⲧⲡⲟⲗⲓⲥ ⲯ̅ⲥⲟⲓ

ⲓⲋ̅ ⲟⲙⲁⲓⲟⲥ ⲉⲝⲛ ⲛⲍⲁⲅⲓⲟⲥ ⲛ
ⲥⲩⲣⲟⲥ ⲗⲟⲩⲅⲓⲟⲥ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲍⲁⲣⲥⲉⲛⲓⲟⲥ

15. Apa Helias, bishop of the city of Psoi
16. By the same author, about the Syrian Lucius and Arsenius

The two titles are not separated from the text by any caesura, but are identified only by slightly smaller glyphs, sometimes right-sloping, and because they are introduced by a double-hatched and dotted line, very likely designed by the same hand that is responsible for the text.

Normally in this codex the *subscriptio* mentions briefly to whom the work is attributed (in this case Helias, bishop of Psoi, an author documented only in this codex), while the following *inscriptio* often includes the formula 'by the same author' (ⲟⲙⲁⲓⲟⲥ or ⲧⲟⲩ ⲁⲩⲧⲟⲩ), sometimes followed by a condensed description of the subject (in this case 'about the Syrian Lucius and Arsenius').

It is clear that what we call here 'titles' – in the absence of a more appropriate term –, that is the brief notes which introduce and close the *excerpta*, are simply indications instrumental to the identification of the textual units rather than real titles.

Sometimes, however, these short notes take the aspect and the function of a paratextual element, mentioning just a date or adding it to the other above-mentioned elements. In the fragment IB.11.078r, for instance, we read:

ⲉⲝⲛ ⲥⲟⲩⲍ̅ⲙ̅ⲫⲁⲣⲙⲟⲩⲧⲉ

For the 7th day (of the month) of Parmoute

To summarize, the codex MONB.DV only makes use of double titles or – if we prefer – notes.

But it cannot pass unnoticed that, when our codex was produced (between the 9th and 11th century), the *subscriptiones* – which are a remnant of the manuscript tradition related to the scrolls, where titles were normally located at the end of the works they refer to – were no longer in use any. Additionally, the titles had become much longer, as we have already seen.[21]

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21 Buzi 2005b, 109–126 ('titoli a struttura complessa' and 'titoli a struttura complessa espansa').

If, for instance, we compare the title attributed in our codex to the *Allocutio ad monachos* of Athanasius of Alexandria (a laconic ⲁⲡⲁ ⲁⲑⲁⲛⲁⲥⲓⲟⲥ ⲡⲁⲣⲭⲏⲉ-ⲡⲓ̈ⲥⲕⲟⲡⲟⲥ ⲛ̄ⲣⲁⲕⲟⲧⲉ 'Apa Athanasius archbishop of Alexandria') with the title attributed to the same work in another codex of the same period – a single-text codex – we are able to appreciate the difference (BL.OR.07029, f. 61v):[22]

ⲡⲉϣⲗⲏⲗ ⲙⲡⲉⲁⲅⲓⲟⲥ ⲁⲑⲁⲛⲁⲥⲓⲟⲥ ⲛ̄ⲧⲁϥⲧⲁⲩⲟϥ ⲙⲡⲙⲁⲩ ⲉⲧⲉϥⲛⲁⲕⲁ ⲥⲱⲙⲁ ⲉⲑⲣⲁⲓ ⲛ̄ϩⲏⲧϥ ⲉⲧⲉ ⲡⲟⲟⲩ ⲛ̄ⲥⲟⲟⲩ ⲡⲉ ⲍⲛ ⲥⲟⲩⲥⲁϣϥ ⲙⲡⲉⲃⲟⲧ ⲡⲁϣⲟⲛⲥ ⲍⲛ ⲟⲩⲉⲓⲣⲏⲛⲏ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉ ⲡⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲥⲙⲟⲩ ⲉⲣⲟⲛ ϩⲁⲙⲏⲛ

The prayer that saint Athanasius pronounced at the moment when he was about to lay down the body, that is on the 7th day of the month of Pashons. In the peace of God, bless us, amen.

Since it is clear that the works contained in our unusual MTM were also – and we may add normally – in circulation with longer and more complex titles, we can deduce that both the old-fashioned use of the *subscriptio*, and the extreme brevity of the titles used in the manuscript in question are the result of a targeted choice, which must have a connection with the purpose of such a codex, as we will see later.

The structure of codex MONB.LY is very similar to that of MONB.DV. Once again, the reconstruction of the codex is only provisional.

Again, the *exerpta* contained in the codex are attributed to several authors, such as Severus of Antioch, Proclus of Constantinople, Athanasius of Alexandria, John of Shmoun and Horsiesis.

As in the case of MONB.DV, the titles all have the same structure, combining a *subscriptio* and an *inscriptio*, as in the following example:

[ⲁⲡⲁ] ⲁⲑⲁⲛⲁⲥⲓⲟⲥ ⲡⲁⲣⲭⲏ
ⲉⲡⲓ̈ⲥⲕⲟⲡⲟⲥ ⲛ̄ⲣⲁⲕⲟⲧⲉ

ⲟⲙⲁⲓ̈ⲟⲥ ⲉϫⲙ ⲡⲉⲓ̈ⲱⲧ ⲛ̄ⲡ
ⲛⲟϭ ⲁⲛⲧⲱⲛⲓⲟⲥ ⲡⲁⲛⲁ
ⲭⲱⲣⲓⲧⲏⲥ

(Apa) Athanasius, archbishop of Alexandria
By the same author, about the great father Antonius the anchorite

The *inscriptio* of this double title clearly refers to the *Vita Antonii* of Athanasius of Alexandria, the complete and normal title of which is transmitted in manuscript

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22 Budge 1915, 503.

M 579 of the Pierpont Morgan Library. It is a MTM datable, thanks to the presence of a colophon, to August 823. Therefore, the New York codex is probably more than one century older than that of the White Monastery considered here:

ⲡⲃⲓⲟⲥ ⲛⲡⲉⲛⲉⲓⲱⲧ ⲉⲧⲟⲩⲁⲁⲃ ⲁⲡⲁ ⲁⲛⲧⲱⲛⲓⲟⲥ ⲡⲁⲛⲁⲭⲱⲣⲓⲧⲏⲥ ⲉⲁϥϩⲓⲥⲧⲟⲣⲓⲍⲉ ⲙⲙⲟϥ ⲛⲁⲛ ⲛϭⲓ
ⲁⲡⲁ ⲁⲑⲁⲛⲁⲥⲓⲟⲥ ⲡⲁⲣⲭⲓⲉⲡⲓⲥⲕⲟⲡⲟⲥ ⲛⲣⲁⲕⲟⲧⲉ ϩⲓⲧⲛ ⲟⲩⲉⲡⲓⲥⲧⲟⲗⲏ ⲉⲁϥⲥⲁϩⲥ ϣⲁ ⲛⲉⲥⲛⲏⲩ
ⲉⲧϩⲛ ⲧⲉϫⲏⲙⲉ ⲛⲧⲁϥⲙⲧⲟⲛ ⲙⲙⲟϥ ⲛⲥⲟⲩⲕ̅ⲃ̅ ⲙⲡⲉⲃⲟⲧ ⲧⲱⲃⲉ

The life of our holy father Apa Antony the anchorite which Apa Athanasius archbishop of Alexandria narrated for us in a letter that he wrote to brothers abroad. He died on the 22nd day of month of Tobe

A comparison of the 'title' attributed to the *excerptum* of the *Vita Antoni* contained in codex MONB.LY and that transmitted by M 579 once again betrays the eccentricity – if you will – of our codex.

The last manuscript which will be analysed here is MONB.BE. As it currently stands, its content includes *excerpta* of works attributed to Horsiesis, Basilius of Caesarea, Ruphus of Shotep, Carur, Constantine of Siout, Athanasius of Alexandria, Demetrius of Antioch and Archelaos of Neapolis.

The structure of MONB.BE differs somewhat from that of the two codices already analysed. All its titles are *inscriptiones*, and they were all written in the same distinctive, thin, right-sloping handwriting. Furthermore, they were delimited by broken lines or inserted in a sort of rectangle.

It is reasonable to suppose that the copyist who wrote the MTM made use of one or more models which were older than the ones used by the copyist of MONB.DV and MONB.LY. He was therefore not bound to create *ad hoc* short titles to separate the *excerpta* and could instead simply re-use the originals.

However, despite this difference and in the same way as the two other *florilegia*, the titles contained in MONB.BE are very different, in length and complexity, from those normally in circulation between the 9th and 11th century. And once more this stresses the anomaly of the MTMs which are taken into consideration here.

This is clear if we compare, for instance, the title of the *In Matthaeum* of Rufus contained in MONB.BE (WK.09644r):[23]

[ⲟ]ⲩ ⲕⲁⲑⲏⲕⲏⲥⲓ̈ⲥ ⲛⲧⲉ ⲁⲡⲁ ϩⲣⲟⲩⲫⲟⲥ ⲡⲉⲡⲓⲥⲕⲟⲡⲟⲥ
[ⲛ]ϣⲱⲧⲡ ⲉⲩϩⲏⲩ ⲛⲟⲩⲟⲛ ⲛⲓ̈ⲙ ⲉⲧⲛⲁⲥⲱⲧⲙ ⲛⲥⲉϩⲁⲣ̅ϩ̅

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23 Sheridan 1998, 125.

A catechesis of Apa Rufus, the bishop of Shotep, for the profit of everyone who will listen and take heed

with those transmitted by MONB.BN, which is a single-text codex:

ⲡⲙⲉϩⲯⲓⲥ ⲛ̄ⲗⲟⲅⲟⲥ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉ ⲡⲉⲓⲥⲟⲫⲟⲥ ⲛ̄ⲟⲩⲱⲧ ⲁⲡⲁ ϩⲣⲟⲩⲫⲟⲥ ⲡⲉⲡⲓⲥⲕⲟⲡⲟⲥ ⲛ̄ϣⲱⲧⲡ ⲧⲡⲟⲗⲓⲥ ⲉⲡⲉⲩⲁⲅⲅⲉⲗⲓⲟⲛ ⲛⲕⲁⲧⲁ ⲙⲁⲑⲁⲓⲟⲥ ⲉⲡⲉϩⲣⲏⲧⲟⲛ ⲇⲉ ⲡⲉ ⲡⲁⲓ ⲁϥⲥⲱⲧⲙ ⲇⲉ ϫⲉ ⲁⲩⲡⲣⲁⲇⲓⲇⲟⲩ ⲛ̄ⲓ̈ⲱϩⲁⲛⲛⲏⲛ ⲁϥⲃⲱⲕ ⲉϩⲣⲁⲓ̈ ⲉⲧⲅⲁⲗⲓⲗⲁⲓⲁ ⲁϥⲕⲱ ⲛ̄ⲥⲱϥ ⲛ̄ⲛⲁⲍⲁⲣⲉⲑ ⲙⲛ̄ⲛⲉⲧⲛⲏⲩ ⲙⲛ̄ⲛⲥⲁ ⲛⲁⲓ (IB.12.33v).[24]

The ninth homily of this wise one, Apa Rufus, the bishop of the city of Shotep on the Gospel according to Matthew, the text being this: 'But he heard that John had been handed over and he went to Galilee. He left Nazareth'.

ⲡⲙⲉϩⲙⲏⲧ ⲛ̄ⲗⲟⲅⲟⲥ ⲉⲁϥⲧⲁⲩⲟϥ ⲛ̄ϭⲓ ⲡⲉⲓⲥⲟⲫⲟⲥ ⲡⲡⲉⲧⲟⲩⲁⲁⲃ (sic) ⲁⲡⲁ ϩⲣⲟⲩⲫⲟⲥ ⲡⲉⲡⲓⲥⲕⲟⲡⲟⲥ ⲛ̄ϣⲱⲧ (sic) ⲧⲡⲟⲗⲓⲥ ⲉⲡⲉⲩⲁⲅⲅⲉⲗⲓⲟⲛ ⲛⲕⲁⲧⲁ ⲙⲁⲑⲁⲓⲟⲥ ⲉⲡⲉϩⲣⲏⲧⲟⲛ ⲇⲉ ⲡⲉ ⲡⲁⲓ ϫⲓⲛ ⲡⲉⲩⲟⲉⲓⲱ ⲉⲧⲙⲙⲁⲩ ⲁϥⲁⲣⲭⲉⲓ ⲛ̄ϭⲓ ⲓ̄ⲥ̄ ⲉⲧⲁϣⲉⲟⲉⲓϣ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲉϫⲟⲟⲥ ϫⲉ ⲙⲉⲧⲁⲛⲟⲓ̈ ⲁⲥϩⲱⲛ ⲅⲁⲣ ⲉϩⲟⲩⲛ ⲛ̄ϭⲓ ⲧⲙⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲣⲟ ⲛⲙⲡⲏⲩⲉ ⲙⲛ̄ⲛⲉⲧⲛⲏⲩ ⲙⲛ̄ⲛⲥⲁ ⲛⲁⲓ (IB.12.35v). [25]

The tenth homily that his wise one, the holy Apa Rufus, the bishop of the city of Shotep, gave on the Gospel according to Matthew, the text being this: 'From that time on Jesus began to preach and to say: Repent for the kingdom of heaven has drawn near'.

Although this sort of survey has to be considered as preliminary, it is possible to sketch some provisional considerations.

The collections of excerpts which have been analysed, with a selection of meaningful passages from different works, take on the form of anthologies, *i.e.* collections of selected pieces, without significant interventions on their original content.

The frequent mention of a date suggests that they were probably read on special occasions according to the liturgical calendar of the White Monastery. As a matter of fact, it is well known that the White Monastery, in addition to the normal liturgy, used selected passages of the works of Shenoute. Therefore, it would not be surprising to learn that other works were also used for the same purpose. On the other hand, the most similar example to our manuscripts, as far as the structure is concerned, is the so called *Florilegium Sinuthianum* (MONB.XL) which contains *excerpta* of the nine *Canons* of Shenute, connected by means of brief annotations in red ink, predominantly *subscriptiones*, consisting of a simple ⲧⲟⲩ ⲁⲩⲧⲟⲩ, 'by the same author'. And this cannot be a mere coincidence.

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24 Sheridan 1998, 98.
25 Sheridan 1998, 103.

Moreover, the three *florilegia* which have been analysed are all drawn up by the same hand and are characterized by a certain graphic regularity, which excludes their private use (private books are usually much less accurate artefacts).

As we have already stressed, the *inscriptiones* and *subscriptiones* utilized in the *florilegia* codices, rather than titles, must be considered as notes useful to the immediate identification of the selected texts, which is confirmed by the fact that these titles also circulated in a larger version.

As for the slightly different structure of MONB.BE, it seems to demonstrate that this kind of codex was not subject to specific and univocal rules, although it is not substantially different from other multiple-text White Monastery codices (MTMs), as far as the handwriting typology, the *mise en page* and the choice of the parchment, are concerned.

What we still do not know about the *scriptoria* of Christian Egypt and in particular about the choices and the literary activities of the White Monastery is obstructing our efforts to sketch the profile of the groups responsible for such a work of selection, extrapolation and combination of texts more precisely.

We do not know, for instance, if our codices are *miscellanea primaria* or *miscellanea secundaria*, that is if they are created at the same time as the codices which transmit them or if they are pre-existent, and therefore simply reproduced by the copyist from an older model.

The fact that to date we have only very few examples of such a specific type of MTMs precludes our understanding of their diffusion. Are they codicological items peculiar to the White Monastery? Or is it just because of accidental circumstances that they are not attested elsewhere?

In any case, we are inclined to believe that the scribe (either if we consider them as *miscellanea primaria* or as *miscellanea secundaria*) has not acted for his personal use, but rather that such *corpora* were created for the entire monastic community, and with a liturgical purpose.

It is not possible to say more for the moment, but clearly this is another example – although a very peculiar one – of the important role of MTMs in Egypt from the 8th century onward.

Much remains to be done and many other questions still need to be answered. Personally, I am convinced that late MTMs are one of the clues to a better comprehension of the evolution of Coptic culture and, even more important, to identifying the groups of people responsible for the choices and the aims of late Coptic literature, which, at that time, had the delicate task of protecting the Christian Egyptian identity in a country where the spoken and written language was progressively moving towards that of the new Arab rulers.

Abbreviations

Sigla of the collections of manuscripts mentioned in this article (the abbreviations in brackets refer to Emmel 1990):[26]

BL. (= GB-BL):	London, British Library
CC./CC.inv.(= EG-C):	Berlin, Königliche Bibliothek (now Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Preussischer Kulturbesitz – Orientabteilung)
IB. (= IT-NB):	Napoli, Biblioteca Nazionale Vittorio Emanuele III
LR. (= NL-LR):	Leiden, Rijksmuseum van Oudheden
WK. (= AT-NB):	Wien, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Papyrussammlung

Moreover the following abbreviations are used:

CMCL	Corpus dei Manoscritti Copti Letterari (Rome–Hamburg)
CSCO	Corpus Scriptorium Christianorum Orientalium

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26 The abbreviations in brackets refer to Emmel 1990.

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