

No Literary Manuscripts from Elephantine?

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Abstract

Working on the Coptic textual and manuscript material from the Elephantine and Aswan region, one sees a relatively large number of extant documentary texts, but very few literary ones. A process is underway of gathering what can be found in collections throughout the world and investigating the issue of texts from Elephantine within the ERC 'Elephantine' project of the Berlin Egyptian Museum and Papyrus Collection. This draws attention once again to the importance of 'museum archaeology' and provenance research, as well as analyses on materiality of manuscripts.

Keywords

online catalogues, Coptic literary manuscripts, Berlin, Elephantine, provenance of manuscripts, museum archaeology.

As is now well known, the 'PATHs' project is working on Coptic literary manuscripts with a geographical focus, which definitely fills a gap in Coptology. The *Katalogisierung der Orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland (KOHD)* project,¹ of the Göttingen Academy, is also currently preparing an online database of the Coptic literary manuscripts in the Berlin Papyrus Collection.² Another Berlin-based project that I am a member of is the ERC 'Elephantine' project³ of the Egyptian Museum and Papyrus Collection, Berlin. It is producing an online database of Elephantine material in all languages and scripts (hieratic, demotic, Coptic, Aramaic, Greek, Latin), which will also include the texts with their translations.

The difference in the concept of these two databases is that *KOHD* includes only literary manuscript fragments⁴ without restriction on the place of origin if they are in a German collection, while the 'Elephantine' database includes all text types but only those found in the Elephantine/Syene region, as that is the focus of the project, not restricting the present location of the objects to Germany.

In both projects, I work mainly on collection material, although there is some excavation material in both. There is a considerable difference between working on an excavation and working in a collection.

When processing the written material, which comes from the excavation itself, the provenance is given and the texts are more or less in context. When processing the material from a collection, however, one works with manuscripts which have been housed there and come into the collection from a very wide variety of sources: as a gift, as a result of a purchase, from excavations not properly documented, to mention only the most frequent cases. Many are not even documented or the documentation has been lost over time. That means that the provenance in many cases is not known, or not specific, which in turn makes it extremely difficult to put the given fragments into context and to connect them with other fragmen-

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2 <https://coptica.kohd.adw-goe.de/content/start.xml>.

3 "Localizing 4000 Years of Cultural History. Texts and Scripts from Elephantine Island in Egypt" PI: Prof. Dr. Verena Lepper; <https://www.smb.museum/museen-und-einrichtungen/aegyptisches-museum-und-papyrussammlung/sammeln-forschen/forschung/erc-projekt-elephantine-lokalisierung-von-4000-jahren-kulturgeschichte-texte-und-schriften-der-insel-elephantine-in-aegypten.html>

4 However, now we are inserting, with shorter descriptions, hitherto unidentified and lesser known documentary fragments that we process in our work, in order to create a more comprehensive overview of the material.

ts that belonged to the same manuscript or collection. We are all painfully aware of this problem. It takes a considerable amount of effort to find and determine possible provenances for the fragments scattered all over the world. Even if one commits oneself to such an enterprise, the focus is mostly on the text, palaeography and physical features of the manuscript, while its geographical background tends to be neglected. And that is exactly why 'PATHs' is such a good initiative. It makes our manuscripts and texts more tangible in the ancient landscape of Egypt, places them in a geographical context, putting them on the map, which subsequently will help us to guess more connections and hopefully to draw more conclusions concerning manuscript production, scribal centres, literacy, dialects used, decorations and material applied in the different regions, and maybe to understand the spread and development of manuscript culture.

Working on a database like 'PATHs' obviously forces the researcher to dig deeper and investigate more thoroughly the background and possible origins of a manuscript.

1. *The manuscripts of the Berlin Papyrus Collection: what can one say about their provenance?*

One group of manuscripts, whose provenance is well known, is represented by the so-called Hamuli manuscripts. They come from present day Hamuli, in the Fayyum, from the Monastery of Saint Michael, a once pre-eminent monastic and scribal centre.⁵ In the Berlin collection these are:

P. 11967: two leaves of an Antiphony, which belong to M 575;⁶

P. 11966: a bifolio of an Isaiah-Codex, which belongs to M 568;⁷

P. 11965: *Encomium on the Four Bodiless Beasts*, which belongs to M 612.⁸

There are also manuscript fragments from the White Monastery, and, interestingly enough, in none of these cases does the inventory of the Berlin collection give any information about their provenance, since all were purchased from the antiquities market. So it is thanks to modern research that we know this.⁹

Several White Monastery fragments, preserved in certain collections, including that of Berlin, have found their other halves in other collections. The following pieces may be mentioned from the White Monastery:¹⁰

P. 8772: *Metastasis Ioannou*, MONB.MQ;¹¹

P. 8776: *Legend of Gesios and Isidoros*;¹²

P. 8778:¹³ *Gospel of Matthew*, MONB.KU;¹⁴

5 DEPUYDT 1993, esp. lv–lxxxix.

6 BELTZ 1978, 110; DEPUYDT 1993, no. 58. In the colophon, no name survives of the scribe, but it was donated to the Monastery of Saint Michael.

7 BELTZ 1978, 111; DEPUYDT 1993, no. 12. Also found at the site of Hamuli, but there is no colophon.

8 BELTZ 1978, 111; DEPUYDT 1993, no. 96. The scribe is Isaac, i.e. Isac, residing in Ptepuhar. He was trained in Touton *scriptorium* or at least was a good imitator of the Touton style (DEPUYDT 1993, 187).

9 Another interesting and sometimes challenging question would be to see where a manuscript was housed and used, and where it was copied, as the two aspects do not always coincide. See DEPUYDT 1993, esp. lxxi. Whenever possible, in the 'PATHs' database each manuscript is connected to three places: 'place of production', 'place of storage', and 'place of discovery'.

10 Most of them probably made in Touton.

11 BELTZ 1978, 110. Further fragments of the same manuscript: Paris, Louvre E 10015 + Paris, Louvre E 10094 + Bolaffi no. 4 See SUCIU 2011, who adds the fragments mentioned here to the list those related this manuscripts that were known before: <https://alinsuciu.com/2011/09/22/a-further-fragment-from-the-apocryphal-acts-of-john-in-coptic-once-again-concerning-the-sotheby-bolaffi-fragments/>.

12 BELTZ 1978, 110. Further fragment that belongs to the same manuscript is Cairo, IFAO no. 163 (SUCIU - THOMASSEN 2011, 480/fn.14).

13 BKU I, no. 169; BELTZ 1978, 113; SCHÜSSLER 2011, sa 754.13. Further fragments that belong to the same manuscript are: Ann Arbor, UML, inv. 4969.34; Berlin, SBB, Ms. or. 1605, fol.5; Cairo, Coptic Museum, G 435; Cairo, Patriarchate no. 35; Leiden, RMO, Ms.Copte 52; London, BL, Or. 3579 B.10, ff. 16-17, Or. 3579 B.10, ff. 18, Or. 3579 B.22, f. 39, Oxford, BL, Copt.g. 98 (P); Paris, BnF, Copte 129(4) f. 1, Copte 129(4) f. 7, Copte 129(4) f. 8, Copte 129(4) f. 9, Copte 129(5) f. 94, Copte 129(5) f. 95, Copte 129(6) f. 2, Copte 129(6) f. 5, Copte 129(6) f. 26-29, Copte 129(9) f. 75, Copte 129(9) ff. 80-85, Copte 129(10) f. 112, Copte 129(10) f. 163, Copte 129(10) f. 192, Copte 132(2) f. 134, Copte 132(2) f. 135, Copte 132(3) f. 195, Copte 132(3) f. 226, Copte 133(1) f. 34, Copte 133(1) f. 44a, Copte 133(1) f. 74d, Copte 133(1) f. 128a, Copte 133(19) f. 138, Copte 161(1) f. 15, Copte 161(1) f. 15a, Copte 161(1) f. 15c, Copte 161(1) f. 15e; Paris, BnF, ? (previously: Paris, Sammlung Weill); Rome, BAV, *Borg. copt.* 109, cass. XVIII, fasc. 67, f. 1-3; Wien, ÖNB, K 2619, K 2622; K 2683, K 9005, K 9041, K 9052, K 9096, K 9097, K 9350.

14 BUZI 2014, 107.

- P. 8780:¹⁵ *Gospel of Luke*, MONB.LB;
 P. 8764:¹⁶ *Life of Pachomius*, MONB.AG;
 P. 8771:¹⁷ Greek-Coptic liturgical codex (in Sahidic), MONB.NP;
 P. 8777: Severianos of Gabala, *On the Archangel Michael*, MONB.DV,¹⁸
 P. 8775:¹⁹ *Gospel of John*, MONB.LA;
 P. 10513: Shenoute, *Canon 7*, MONB.GN²⁰
 P. 10514: Literary text.²¹

The very famous Mani-codices fragments were purchased in Cairo in 1931 by Carl Schmidt, and given to the Museum in 1933 by August Pfeffer.²² But in this particular instance, we are lucky enough to know the place of origin: Carl Schmidt managed to discover the provenance of the manuscripts thanks to his connections in the antiquities market: Medinet Madi in the Fayyum, in the cellar of a ruined house.²³

P. 15996 contains the *Kephalaia*.²⁴ Most of the codex is in Berlin, whereas some pages are in Warsaw.²⁵

In the Berlin Papyrus Collection there are numerous manuscripts fragments whose provenance is unknown for the time being, since they come from the “Antikenhandel”, or are “Alter Bestand”, according to the inventory: for example, the well-known and important P. 15926, that contains the *Acts* and was edited by Hintze-Schenke,²⁶ is of unknown provenance; similarly, P. 3259 (S), that transmits the *Psalms* and was edited by Rahlfs,²⁷ although in this case we have information about the purchase itself: in 1889, in Thebes, from an antiquities dealer; lastly, P. 11946 (S), containing John and Psalms, edited by Luft,²⁸ was purchased by Carl Schmidt in Cairo in 1914.

There are pieces in the Berlin Collection, which come from excavations: the Rubensohn-Zucker excavations (1906-9) yielded many ostraca and papyri mainly from Ashmunein and Elephantine. Also in Ashmunein some literary fragments were found, or pages of codices. For example:

- P. 10585 A+B: literary text with biblical quotes;²⁹
 P. 10586: A+B+C+D: Old Testament, Sapiential Books;³⁰

15 BELTZ 1978, 113; SCHÜSSLER 3.2, sa 525.11.1. Paris, BnF, Copte 132(4) f. 315 belongs to the same folio. The following leaves belong to the same codex (based on SCHÜSSLER 3.2): Cairo, Coptic Museum, Nr. 3874; Leiden, RMO, Ms. Copte 53; London, BL, Or.3579 B.24; Oxford, BL, Clarendon Press b.2; Paris, BnF, Copte 129(7) f. 26, Copte 129(7) f. 27, Copte 129(9) f. 90, Copte 129(9) f. 94, Copte 129(9) f. 98, 101, Copte 129(10) f. 103, Copte 129(10) ff. 132-137, Copte 129(10) f. 183, Copte 129(10) f. 199, Copte 132(2) f.126, Copte 132(3) f. 233, Copte 133(1) f. 44, Copte 133(1) f. 124, Copte 133(1) f. 126, Copte 133(1) f. 215; Paris, Louvre, AF 12415; Roma, BAV, *Borg. copt.* 109 cass. XIX, fasc. 74, ff. 1-2, cass. XIX, fasc. 74, fol.3-4; cass. XIX, fasc. 74, fol.5; Strasbourg, BNU, Copte 29; Wien, ÖNB, K 2587, K 2623, K 2629, K 2686, K 2687, K 9092, K 9093, K 9094.

16 BKU I, no. 191; BELTZ 1978, 110. Further fragments of the same manuscript aLondon, BL, Or. 3581 B (79); London, BL, Or. 6954 (34); London, BL, Or. 6954 (39); Napoli, Biblioteca Nazionale, IB.01.1 (31-34); Napoli, Biblioteca Nazionale, IB.01.1 (35-37); Paris, BnF, Copte 129(12) f.61; Paris, BnF, Copte 131(7) f.50; Wien, ÖNB, K9560; Wien, ÖNB K9441.

17 BKU I, no. 173; LEIPOLDT 1903; HENNER 2000, 92-128. It belonged to manuscript Z 108,3 with: Roma, BAV, *Borg. copt.* 109/108, 3, *Borg. copt.* 109/97,1; Paris, BnF, Copte 129(19) f. 73, Copte 129(20), f. 151; Copte 129(20), f. 153; Wien, ÖNB, *P.Vindob.* G. 39789; London, BL, Or. 3580A (15), Or. 6954 (22), Or. 6954 (24), Or. 6954 (28).

18 BKU I, No. 190; BELTZ 1978, 110. The addition of this Berlin fragment to codex MONB.DV is based on a personal communication with Alin Suciu (2018) who made this identification.

19 BKU I, No. 174; BELTZ 1978, 113; SCHÜSSLER sa 532.2; further fragments of the same manuscript are based on Schüssler 3.2: Leiden, RMO, Ms. Copte 60; London, BL, Or. 3579 B38, Or. 3579 B.45; Paris, BnF, Copte 129(9) f. 51, Copte 129(9) f. 52, Copte 129(10) f. 150, Copte 129(10) f. 200, Copte 133,2 f. 86; Roma, BAV, *Borg. copt.* 109, cass. XIX, fasc. 72; Wien, ÖNB, K 9112bis.

20 BELTZ 1978, 113.

21 BELTZ 1978, 112.

22 P. 15995, P. 15996, P. 15997, P. 15998 (BELTZ 1978, 97-98).

23 POLOTSKY 1935-1940, IV. Although some scholars have doubts about this information.

24 Edition by POLOTSKY - BÖHLIG 1935-1940.

25 BELTZ 1978, 98.

26 HINTZE-SCHENKE 1970; BELTZ 1978, 96.

27 RAHLFS 1901; BELTZ 1978, 111; SCHÜSSLER 2011, sa 35.

28 LUFT 1976; BELTZ 1978, 114; SCHÜSSLER 2011, sa 610.

29 Luke 9:61; Matthew 13:48; Romans 16:19; cf. Jeremiah 4:22; BELTZ 1978, 115 (unidentified).

30 BELTZ 1978, 112; FEDER 2002; SCHÜSSLER 2011, sa 125.

P. 11945: unidentified text;³¹

P. 11948: Epistle by Athanasius;³²

P. 11950: *Gospel of John*;³³

P. 22146: *Letter of James*;³⁴

P. 22149 (*Gospel of Matthew*);³⁵ also noteworthy are Greek literary fragments: one example is P.13272 parchment fragment with *Pastor Hermae* from the late fourth century.³⁶

What adds to the difficulties in the interpretation of these manuscripts is the fact that, even if there was an official excavation, there still seem to be pieces, which were acquired (“erworben”, “gekauft”) at the time of it, but do not come from the excavation proper, like for example P.11949 (*Gospel of John*).³⁷

2. No literary works from Elephantine?

Working first on the Rubensohn Bibliothek some years ago, I collected and processed the Coptic pieces in the Berlin Papyrus Collection which came from the Elephantine excavations, or had been inventarised by Hintze³⁸ as coming from them, based on content and other features, and noted that there is not a single piece containing literary texts. With the onset of my work in the ERC Elephantine project, I started entering into the database all the Elephantine manuscripts and numerous Coptic pieces from Aswan known so far, belonging to twenty-one collections worldwide. It should be noted that many are probably still hidden in several collections, uninventarised, while others might be falsely labelled ‘Elephantine’, due to the fact that most of that material is not ‘direct excavation’ material, but came into these collections from the most varied sources, with different levels of documentation, etc. But, getting back to the point, even in that larger assortment of some 400 pieces (most of which are debt acknowledgements, letters, accounts, lists and tombstones), there are only eight literary pieces:

- 1) two of them are from the Monneret de Villard excavation at Deir Anba Hadra, and are now preserved in Cairo:
 - *Life of Pachomius*, fragment, papyrus;³⁹
 - *Apocalypse* 1.1 – 1.15, 4.9 – 5.13, fragment, in Sahidic, parchment;⁴⁰
- 2) five parchment and one paper fragments were found by Munier in an envelope with ‘Assouan, 1909’ written on it, preserved in the Cairo Museum. Munier suspected that they all come from Anba Hadra:⁴¹
 - *Journal d'entrée* no. 48083: *Psalms* 137:3 – 138:23: a little cahier, four parchment leaves;
 - *Journal d'entrée* no. 48084: *Epistle to the Hebrews* 13:12-to the end, and *Epistle to the Galatians* 1:1-2; 4:12-29: two parchment leaves bound together;
 - *Journal d'entrée* no. 48085: ‘*Book of Enoch* (?)’ according to Munier’s publication, in fact the text is Ps.-Chrysostom’s *Encomium on the Four Bodiless Creatures*;
 - *Journal d'entrée* no. 48086: *Martyrdom of Cosmas and Damian*, two very fragmentary parchment leaves;
 - *Journal d'entrée* no. 48087: *Miracles of Saints Cosmas and Damian*: two large parchment leaves, very regular script;

31 BELTZ 1978, 118.

32 BELTZ 1978, 111; CAMPLANI 1998, 191-246; PIEPER 1938.

33 BELTZ 1978, 114; SCHÜSSLER 2011, sa 696.

34 BKU III, 379.

35 BKU III, 377.

36 STEGMÜLLER 1937, 456-459.

37 BELTZ 1978, 114; SCHÜSSLER 2011, sa 727.

38 HINTZE 1977.

39 LEFORT 1941b, 135-138; LEFORT 1943.

40 LEFORT 1941a, 107-110. According to LEFORT 1941, 107/n. 4, the orthography and other features suggest that the codex was written in Lower Egypt (the leaves were discovered together with a group of fragments in Bohairic dialect written in Nitriote majuscule). The manuscript was transferred to the Egyptian Museum in Cairo in 1925.

41 MUNIER 1923; they have the *Journal d'entrée* number but nothing else. See also PEARSON 2002, 375-383.

give somebody else six bundles of reed/alfa grass (COOY NEMTAN NKEM). The material mentioned is used for mats. Weaving mats is a very typical activity of the monks in Egypt, and *oikonomos* is an administrator (financial official?) of monasteries (or, admittedly, of other organisations), which make it very possible that we see the functioning of a monastery in these letters. And where is the library of this monastery? Hopefully it will surface in the near future.

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