

# Coptic Literature in Context (4th-13th cent.)

## Cultural Landscape, Literary Production, and Manuscript Archaeology

edited by  
Paola Buzi



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Cultural Landscape, Literary Production, and Manuscript Archaeology

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# For a Periodisation of Coptic Literature: Methodological Issues, Manuscript Evidence, Open Questions\*

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## Abstract

The article aims to provide an overview periodisation system of Coptic Literature elaborated and proposed within the 'PATHs' project, covering the period between the third and the fourteenth century. Such periodisation is based on manuscript evidence. The first section addresses, from a highly selective perspective, some of the most relevant methodological issues related to the study of Coptic literary and manuscript tradition, with special attention being given to the relationship between the notions of 'original work' and 'translation', and to the Greek-Coptic *diglossia*. A second part examines some important textual issues raised by the late homiletic corpora, by proposing the analysis of two case studies, the former addressing the redrafting process of a known Greek composition (Gregory of Nyssa's *De deitate Filii et Spiritus Sancti*), the latter revealing equally complex rewriting phenomena related to an allegedly Coptic original text (Ps.-Athanasius' *De homicidiis*).

## Keywords

Coptic literature, periodisation, authors, works, re-writing processes.

## 1. Introduction and preliminary remarks

Among the most pressing needs of an *Atlas* of Coptic literature is the definition of a chronological grid reference in which to insert, study, and evaluate extant literary production as conveyed by Coptic manuscripts. However, the difficult task of providing a systematic, capillary, and extensive investigation into the entire paths of Coptic literature – hereafter narrowly interpreted, by the exclusion of semi-literary compositions and documentary materials – remains one of the most urgent *desiderata* of Coptic Studies, although a number of remarkable contributions has laid firm foundations for further research.<sup>1</sup>

The long-standing and serious challenges associated with a comprehensive periodisation of Coptic literature are well known. Suffice it to recall that several texts transmitted in the Coptic language have still to be identified, studied, edited, and that the virtual reconstruction of entire ancient codicological units is currently still in progress; not to mention the arduous difficulties inherent in the specific features of the extant Coptic manuscripts and the 'optical distortions' they show to the modern scholar. On these pivotal phenomena we will come back on several occasions in the present contribution.

Moreover, numerous aspects concerning the analysis of single textual traditions or strings of traditions are still far from having been definitively achieved. On this respect, just think about some very peculiar fluid works, which appear as actual laboratories of selection, interpretation, and transmission of always different combinations made up of originally independent textual units. I am hinting not only at the gnomic collections known as *Dicta philosophorum*, *Menandri Sententiae*, *Sexti Sentences*<sup>2</sup> – for which

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1 I am hinting, for instance, at the quadriennial reports on the studies on Coptic Literature: ORLANDI 1978; ORLANDI 1992; ORLANDI 1993; ORLANDI 1999; EMMEL 2006; BEHLMER 2016a; BEHLMER 2016b. See also the valuable *status quaestionis* provided in MOAWAD 2018.

2 See BUZI 2017.



Coptic merely magnifies literary phenomena already occurring in previous linguistic traditions –,<sup>3</sup> but also, and more importantly, at the late homiletic corpora. In such vexed manuscript evidence, different textual units are freely rearranged, recombined, redrafted, by often intertwining portions of translated Greek models and original insertions. Nevertheless, it is worth observing that totally analogous considerations could be extended to the entirety of Coptic production, in order to highlight the remarkable degree of textual fluidity displayed by virtually each textual witness, as far as can be concluded from the poor condition of Coptic manuscript remnants.

It follows, *inter alia*, that only an analysis built on a relational system – that is, a system in which every aspect involved in Coptic cultural production (the identification of a ‘textual unit’, the study of the manuscript evidences, the archaeological context, the geographical perception of ancient Egypt, and so on) is closely connected to each other – might hope to conveniently address such a maze of redactions, versions, and continuously rewritten texts.<sup>4</sup>

As a result, two fundamental methodological boundaries underlying the following pages are to be preliminarily declared. Firstly, the impossibility to univocally isolating and distinguishing the literary tradition extant in Coptic from the coeval and never ceased literary production in Greek, in the light of the Late-Antique Egyptian *diglossia*. Indeed, Coptic literacy should be seen as an emerging phenomenon, resulting from claims and needs that went far beyond the mere necessity to transfer the theological production circulating in Greek into a more widely understandable language.<sup>5</sup> Such a lasting linguistic ‘competition’ and cohabitation between (at least)<sup>6</sup> Greek and Coptic will acquire, after Chalcedon, a further specific symbolic value, by marking the caesura between ‘Imperial’ Church’s and Miaphysite Church’s more proper language, resulting in an intentionally increasing gap between the two linguistic traditions.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, the targeted use of the two languages has to be taken into consideration in the analysis of the Coptic criteria for selecting whether a Greek work had to be translated or not. In particular, it does not seem appropriate to detach such a problematic cohabitation from the evidence that the vast majority of the official production of the Alexandrian See (as well as the other major archiepiscopal sees) continued to be composed, read and transmitted in Greek, deeply influencing Coptic literature without any need for a direct passage through Coptic.

Secondly, it is worth stressing the ambiguity of the notions of ‘original work’ and ‘originality’ themselves, categories massively employed in any systematic access to the Coptic literature, which the aforementioned Egyptian bilingualism leads nevertheless to disambiguate, by discerning a narrow from a broader sense.

The former intercepts the well-known *querelle* on the postulation of an (eventually lost) Greek model behind any Coptic work,<sup>8</sup> unless there is a clear proof to the contrary.<sup>9</sup> Although fully aware of the difficulties in solving such a founding dispute on linguistic, philological, historical grounds, ‘PATHs’ stance is programmatically resolute, by maintaining that, from the time of Shenoute onward, it is possible to recognise the existence of Coptic compositions disclosing no direct dependence on Greek previous texts.

The latter, instead, introduces an even more refined and significant issue, by pointing out that translation can represent a form of original composition, provided that it exhibits the agency of the final redactor in selecting, cutting and recomposing materials maintaining no original mutual connection.

3 Cf. CARLINI 2004.

4 Cf. ORLANDI 2018a. As for the ‘PATHs’ methodological options, see BUZI - BOGDANI - BERNO 2018.

5 On the vexed questions regarding Coptic as target language, cf. Camplani 2015b, and Camplani 2018. On the more general issue related to the relationship between Greek and Coptic, see RICHTER 2009; BAGNALL 2005; KRAUSE 1991. As for the relevant issue of the role played by Greek in Coptic liturgy, see MIHÁLIKÓ 2019.

6 Cf. FOURNET 2009.

7 This could not fail to have an influence on Coptic attitude toward pagan antiquity. See FOURNET 2011. A more nuanced conclusion in WIPSZYCKA 1992.

8 By ‘work’ I mean here what ORLANDI 2013a defines ‘textual unit’, that is, what is ‘identified in modern scholarship by means of author and title [...], but also specifying the literary genre’ (91); thus, a work can be preserved by different ‘codicological units’. Instead, I use ‘text’ – which is an intrinsically wider and vaguer term – to refer to the concrete and unique dictate of a work, that is, the combination of words, grammatical structures, and sentence patterns attested in a specific manuscript.

9 See LUCCHESI 2000, 87. See also LUCCHESI 1988. The distinction between ‘work’, ‘text’, and ‘document’ is the topic of a quite large scholarly literature, on which I cannot focus here. I refer, for instance, to MARTENS 1991 and ROBINSON 2013.

Consequently, the distinction between translation and original literature is undefined and uncertain, not only for practical reasons (i.e., our *subjective* difficulty in distinguishing a 'genuine' Coptic production), but also on a methodological basis (i.e., the *objective* difficulty in detecting this partition in the ancient sources).<sup>10</sup>

Such scholarly division of the ancient literary production – heir of the traditional classification in *genuina/dubia/spuria* – is however connected with another, far more significant phenomenon, that is, the pseudonymous attribution of a work to an author of an earlier period.<sup>11</sup>

Indeed, pseudoepigraphy, that is, the attempt to connect a late literary production (not unlikely composed in Coptic) with a far earlier Church Father, appears as a fundamental element of classification for Coptic literature. It allows, indeed, to address and evaluate not only the theological evolution undergone by a textual tradition connected to a prominent proto-Christian leading figure, but also its degree of textual fluidity and doctrinal flexibility. How and to what extent do the production reliably attributed to an author and its 'apocryphal extension' relate to each other? Which degree of variation does such a phenomenon testify in the Coptic tradition?<sup>12</sup>

Therefore, a systematic history of Coptic literature must strive to overcome an excessively schematic and firm distinction between original works and translations,<sup>13</sup> as well as an equally artificial taxonomy according to its content,<sup>14</sup> since the identification of a coherent and consistent Coptic codification of the literary genre is equally a difficult (not to say, impossible) task. Homily, sermon, martyrdom, hagiographical work, *logos, et similia*, are in most cases just bare labels ascribed by late *inscriptions*, whose unreliable nature, in this respect, has been conclusively demonstrated by Paola Buzi's investigations, with special reference to the late periods of the manuscript transmission.<sup>15</sup> For his part, Tito Orlandi had underlined a process of 'homogenisation' of the Coptic genres,<sup>16</sup> that is, a rearrangement and a 'melting pot' of different literary features and motifs. In short, no uniform genre-system can be recognised in the (extant) Coptic manuscript tradition.

Undoubtedly, such an extremely complex state of affairs has limited the attempts to provide a general evaluation of the history of Coptic literature and its long-term characterising phenomena. There is no need to remind here, as a notable exception, the foundational contributions by Tito Orlandi, on which our reflection, its underlying methodological options, and the resulting proposal are structurally dependent.<sup>17</sup>

Nonetheless, a thorough and comprehensive inquiry appears ever more pressing at this juncture, when, thanks to the above mentioned and other, numerous essays – devoted to historical, literary, codicological issues, both from specific and wider perspectives –,<sup>18</sup> we can benefit from a clearer picture of some important constants and trends of Coptic literacy and writing activity.

This includes a deeper perception of the role played by the theological and political crises that Coptic religious life had to experience as consistent turning and dividing points. As a matter of fact, Coptic literature cannot be set apart from the events leading to and resulting from the Melitian and Chalcedonian schisms, the Arab conquest, and from their *pendant* in terms of theological controversy, such as the Arian doctrine, the Miaphysite debate, the Nestorian condemnation in Ephesus' canons. Indeed, along with such historical circumstances, the accentuated variety of doctrinal orientation working at the beginning of Coptic literacy has recently received its much-deserved attention.<sup>19</sup>

In addition, another set of concerns has emerged, in recent years, regarding prime issues in the study of the 'Coptic period', such as the intrinsic diversity and plurality of the monastic phenomenon,<sup>20</sup> as well

<sup>10</sup> *Mutatis mutandis*, that is, by shifting the critical perspective from 'textual' into 'redactional' phenomenon, the observations offered in EPP 1999 may be highly beneficial for a more proper understanding of Coptic textual fluidity.

<sup>11</sup> See SHERIDAN 2016b.

<sup>12</sup> A theoretical framework is provided by FREY 2019.

<sup>13</sup> COQUIN 1993.

<sup>14</sup> TAKLA 2014.

<sup>15</sup> See especially BUZI 2004 and BUZI 2005.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. ORLANDI 2013a, 92. See also ORLANDI 2008.

<sup>17</sup> See at least ORLANDI 1984, ORLANDI 1986; ORLANDI 1991a; ORLANDI 1997; ORLANDI 1998; ORLANDI 2006.

<sup>18</sup> By restricting myself to mentioning the recent contributions addressing more general issues, with which the implicit debate will be more intense, see LUCCHESI 2011; BOUD'HORS 2012; EMMEL 2007; BUZI 2018.

<sup>19</sup> See, as a paradigmatic instance, CAMPLANI 2015a.

<sup>20</sup> For a *status quaestionis*, see SHERIDAN 2016a.

as the convenience of a regional and dialectal-oriented analysis,<sup>21</sup> and the repercussions that the specific organization of the major monastic repositories have had on the modern evaluation of Coptic literature's nature and development.<sup>22</sup>

When considered as a whole, all these elements place the scholar in an ambiguous position, both privileged – since enormous amounts of (not infrequently, mutually conflicting) information, texts, working hypothesis are now available – and awkward – since they require a critical evaluation and a drastic, always difficult selection.

What follows strives to offer a contribution along these lines, with the correlative aim of avoiding any risk of insularity, by giving the opportunity to scholars engaged in other, related research fields (e.g., historians of Christianity, religionists, specialists in apocryphal literature, classical philologists) to come into contact, in a guided way, with a religious and textual environment often preserving otherwise unattested redactions, and relevant variants, along with a significant original production.

## 2. The 'PATHs' periodisation system: An overview and some methodological remarks

As a result of a long and still ongoing debate within the 'PATHs' team and with external scholars, we would like to propose and bring to the critical attention the following periodisation system for the entire Coptic literary production, based on internal elements and of course on manuscript tradition.

It aims at covering all the phases development of Coptic literature, from its beginning as a written linguistic medium to translate a substantial corpus of authoritative Greek texts, mediating them into a different religious and cultural identity, by converting an entire literary world into a new and still unsteady language, until its mature and – so to speak – 'senile' outcomes; namely, since the times of the first steps of the Greek-Coptic bilingualism in Late Antique Egypt, until the Copto-Arabic bilingualism of the early Middle Age, when Coptic literature, also due to the increasing Islamisation of Egypt, finally lost its own linguistic autonomy, leading to the phenomenon of culturally Coptic (i.e. Christian Egyptian) authors who sensed the need to write in Arabic.<sup>23</sup>

A list is provided below of the chronological 'categories' which are currently being used in each 'PATHs' record, under the label 'literary period'. They are applied to more than a thousand Coptic works – transmitted by more than 6,100 codicological units – that are firmly identified by a *Clavis Coptica* entry, whose number is steadily growing. It has to be noted that, also due to the relational nature of 'PATHs' database, this reconstruction should be intended as a provisional working hypothesis, open to criticism and proposed amendments.

Due to the purposes for which it has been elaborated, that necessarily imply a high level of synthesis, the periodisation that we propose appears extremely schematic and requires some preliminary knowledge of the main problems and trends of Coptic literature in order to be fully understood.<sup>24</sup>

1. Translation of biblical works into Sahidic – first phase (third-fourth centuries)
2. Translation of biblical works into Bohairic – first phase (fourth century)
3. Translation of biblical works into, Akhmimic, Lykopolitan, Oxyrhynchite, Fayyumic, etc (that is, the other, less attested dialects) (fourth century)
4. Translation of apocryphal works – first phase (fourth century)
5. Translation and (eventual) re-elaboration of a 'Gnostic' corpus (third-fourth centuries)
6. Translation and (eventual) re-elaboration of a Manichaean corpus (third-fifth centuries)
7. Translation of patristic works – first phase (third-fifth centuries)

21 As regards recent and significant inquiries, I will simply allude to BOUD'HORS 2016 and LUISIER 2018.

22 Cf. ORLANDI 2018b.

23 On this late, critical phase of Coptic literacy and culture, and on the resulting 'Coptic' literature in Arabic, see SIDARUS 2013 and SIDARUS 2008. See also PAPAConstantinou 2007.

24 For a firm and concise reference point, see ORLANDI 1997. See also *supra*, n. 18.

8. Pachomius and the early Pachomian milieu (fourth-fifth centuries)
9. Early original literary production: Shenoute and the Shenoutean milieu (third-fifth centuries)
10. 'Standard' translations of biblical works into Sahidic (fifth century)
11. Translation of apocryphal texts – second phase (fourth-fifth centuries)
12. Translation of hagiographical works – first phase (fourth-sixth centuries)
13. 'Classical' translations - homilies (fourth-sixth centuries)
14. 'Classical' translations – *historiae monachorum* (end of fourth-sixth centuries)
15. 'Classical' translations – acts of councils (end of fourth-sixth centuries)
16. 'Classical' translations – monastic works (end of fourth-sixth centuries)
17. Post-Chalcedonian opposition literature: the 'plerophories' and other works (fifth-sixth centuries)
18. Historiographical production (sixth century)
19. Original literature: Formation of the earlier hagiographic cycles (sixth century)<sup>25</sup>
20. Original literature: The period of Damian and his cultural circle (sixth-seventh centuries): Hagiographies
21. Original literature: The period of Damian and his cultural circle (sixth-seventh centuries): Homilies
22. Poetic production (seventh-eighth centuries)
23. Original literature: Homilies with apocryphal insertions (sixth-seventh centuries)
24. Original literature: Literary production of the early Islamic period (seventh century)
25. 'Standard' translations of biblical works into Bohairic (seventh-eighth centuries)
26. Original literature: Formation of the later (pseudo-epigraphical) hagiographic cycles and re-arrangement of homiletic production (seventh-eighth centuries)
27. Synaxarial arrangement (ninth century)
28. Late liturgical production (tenth-fourteenth centuries)

A very cursory overview is in order. A first section is collectively devoted to the translation(s) of biblical Scriptures, followed by an analogous second section dedicated to the reception and the rewriting processes undergone by Gnostic, Manichaean and other apocryphal corpora. There follow Pachomius and the first category specifically and explicitly indicating an original production – in the 'layered' significance of the term we have seen above –, attributable to Shenoute and his environment. Then, after a couple of labels pointing to a second phase of translation of non-canonical materials and the first reception of hagiographical production, one meets a number of other labels concerning the so-called 'classical translation'. By such an expression we identify, following the *Corpus dei Manoscritti Copti Letterari's* legacy, the first attempt of the Coptic Church (not improbably in connection with the activity of Shenoute)<sup>26</sup> to provide itself with reliable translations of a set of Greek foundational texts, in order to build a textual corpus able to meet emerging theological, liturgical, even political demands. It goes without saying that such a massive (albeit highly selective) insertion of textual material – probably achieved by different episcopal and monastic centres, under the more or less close doctrinal control of the Alexandrian See – marks a key moment in the development of Coptic literature, by providing it with the basis for establishing new and innovative compositions. Hereafter, varying categories of original literature begin, spanning from the period of the Chalcedonian debate, which provoked an actual turning point in Coptic literacy, to the very late liturgical – *lato sensu* – production, the *Triadon* being the most prominent and, at the same time, enig-

<sup>25</sup> On the notion of 'literary cycle', see ORLANDI 1991b. Cf. also SAWEROS 2017a.

<sup>26</sup> See the pioneering Leipoldt 1909, 154, and ORLANDI 2002, 224.

matic example, through the transitional moment of Damian's episcopate and the 'Arabization' of Egyptian culture. In the last paragraph of the present essays, we will deal with the methodological aporias such a 'terminal' phase of Coptic literary production offers to the researcher.

Having reached this point, a few comments are required. Presumably, the most relevant remark concerns what this list *is not*, namely the hypothetical index of a history of Coptic *manuscript* tradition. Rather, it could perhaps become the summary of a future history of Coptic *literary* tradition. This difference is meaningful, being especially relevant in our field of interest, since it is due to an actual filter that leads the modern scholar away from a proper knowledge of the development of Coptic literature and its textual witnesses.

Such a distortive filter is mainly represented by the processes of emendation and rearrangement (also from a dialect-oriented point of view) we can detect in the main Coptic manuscript funds, the White Monastery being just the most iconic example. As is well known, most of the codices transmitted by these ancient repositories can be confidently dated between the end of the ninth and the first half of the eleventh century,<sup>27</sup> and this appears consistent with a deep transformation of the manuscript transmission, resulting from a number of factors, including the changing liturgical needs, the Arab conquest, the increasing monasticisation of Coptic literature.

However, this does not mean at all that the texts preserved in these late witnesses were originally composed or translated for the first time in that period. As far as we can see, these are just the 'selected' ones, which the monastic redactors regarded, after a process of (presumably drastic) selection, as worthy of preservation, being able to meet the evolving political and religious demands.<sup>28</sup>

Consequently, although the manuscript evidences cannot but remain our indispensable starting point, and although the classification we are proposing can be achieved only after a complete (or as complete as possible) inventory of all extant Coptic ancient codicological units, nevertheless it has to be complemented with an historical survey, which takes into account all sorts of sources currently available – historiographical treatises (not only in Coptic, obviously), meta-textual and archaeological data ('titles', colophons, places of production, discovery, and storage of each manuscript units), a serious analysis of the reasons and the consequences of Coptic pseudoepigraphy, a comparison between different translations of the same Greek text in different centuries, as well as of different redactions of the same Coptic work, by evaluating their evolution and their eventual mutual relationship, by being limited only to the most significant phenomena – in order to fill the gaps due to the very peculiar situation of Coptic manuscript remnants.

Moreover, specific attention should be devoted to the dialectal 'evolution' of the Coptic language and the gradual marginalisation of what can be defined, *ex post*, as minor (i.e. less attested) dialects. They bear witness to the very first phases of Coptic literacy and its building blocks, by showing the circulation of biblical translations, the first reception of a selected number of apocryphal compositions, and a substantial heterodox production (mainly Gnostic and Manichaean texts).<sup>29</sup> Lycopolitan's sharp decline between the fifth and the beginning of the sixth century, along with the similar fate of the Akhmimic dialect, throws light not only on a gradual 'linguistic unification' under the sign of the Sahidic, but also on an active theological policy, aimed at limiting the circulation of works perceived as inconsistent with a clear demarcation of orthodoxy.<sup>30</sup>

### 3. *Dialectal variants and biblical manuscripts*

It is reasonable to stress that a further major feature of the 'PATHs' periodisation is the combination of merely chronological indications and content-oriented (or, at least, literary-oriented) remarks.

27 See, for instance, RICHTER 2009, especially 47.

28 Actually, the few extant manuscript collections preceding the synaxarial selection seem to attest ideological options, 'literary tastes', modalities of textual arrangement – as well as actual textual units – that are no longer preserved in later funds. This is clearly highlighted, with specific reference to the revealing case of the Thin Library, in ORLANDI 2013b. Cf. also CAMPLANI 2020.

29 An interesting phenomenon is the possible Subakhmimic anti-Manichaean production, which would be witnessed by CLM 1027 and 1171. See SIMON 1946, 506. CLM stands for Coptic Literary Manuscript and is the stable ID attributed by 'PATHs' to each codicological unit.

30 Cf. LAYTON 1977, 66. See also KASSER 2002.

Thus, as an example, the reader shall note that the foundational period of the early translations of biblical Scriptures is split according to their dialect, or that the ‘classical translations’ are classified by tracking what could be defined as a modern perception of their literary genre, with (in most cases) a complete or near-complete overlapping of their dating ranges.

Although, as we have seen, the genres declared by the ancient *inscriptiones* cannot be taken as reliable indications, through this partition we are able to suggest the idea of successive moments in the Coptic reception of a specific kind of Greek literary production, giving for each one an even relative dating. Since our choices went in the direction of a development model of Coptic literature, built by connecting manuscript, historical, and archaeological data, the eventual evolution of Coptic ‘literary taste’ – by consisting with and depending on ecclesiastical and religious demands – has an undeniable impact on our perception of its path.

Even though we do think that, at the current stage of the research, this is the most reasonable model that it is possible to propose, we are fully aware that it could generate, at least apparently, some aporetic conclusions.

The most obvious one lies in the cases of continuously translated and re-translated texts, typically affecting the canonised Scriptures and, in particular, the Scriptures of which the Christian Bible is composed, which have undergone unbroken reception and revision processes over the centuries. Analogous observations, however, could be extended to some hagiographical and liturgical compositions. They are timeless works.

As far as the periodisation proposal is concerned, the questions they induce are made even more complicated by the purely artificial nature of the distinction between ‘biblical translation’ and ‘literary production’, the latter being grounded in a ceaselessly transmitted inter-textual framework of biblical quotations and allusions, both from canonical and apocryphal sources.<sup>31</sup> It is not an overstatement to affirm that the Coptic literature – largely, if not entirely Christian in nature – can be seen as a sophisticated form of *parascripture*, by complying with all the main textual and redaction features (the so-called ‘apocryphication techniques’) such expression involves.<sup>32</sup>

By restricting ourselves to a single, problematic instance, there is no ‘material’ evidence of such an early Bohairic versions of the Johannine corpus, taken as a whole, but we do indeed have a *clavis* entry dedicated to the Gospel of John, which is linked to different codicological units (about 160) dated between the third and the eleventh century, in several dialects. The reasons which lead me to mention this instance are fairly obvious: we know early Sahidic and Lykopolitan versions of the Fourth Gospel, quite different from the Bodmer fourth century Bohairic translation, which, in its turn, differs significantly from the ‘standard’ later Bohairic version.<sup>33</sup> However, they all are subsumed under the same *clavis* entry.

This is just an eye-catching instance, but it seems to suggest a generalisable model, namely the translation, in an early period, of both Old Testament and New Testament books – individually or collectively – into all the regional variants of the Coptic language, to be reasonably seen, in some cases, as re-translations from a Coptic dialect to another.

The progressive but increasing emergence of the Sahidic dialect entailed the marginalisation of the other versions and the gradual affirmation of the ‘standard’ Sahidic one. Between the eighth and the ninth century, the decline of the Sahidic and the corresponding rise of the Bohairic language underlined the need to produce a new ‘official’ corpus, by retranslating into the emerging language the entirety of the Canon.<sup>34</sup>

A relational system founded on *clavis* entries pointing to a number of pieces of manuscript evidences faces great difficulties in accounting for the chronological layers undergone by a work, if they are numerous. As for ancient evidence, a foundational work, such as the *Gospel of Matthew*, is attested by a large number of manuscripts spanning from the fourth and the twelfth century (by limiting the scope to the chronological range covered by ‘PATHs’ database). Consequently, ‘PATHs’ record dedicated to this work

31 See the embraceable observations in RICHTER 2005. On the fluidity of such process, see TIMBIE 2007.

32 On the notion of *parascripture* and its impacts, see BURNS 2016. On the features and techniques of ‘apocryphication’, see FREY 2019.

33 Cf. ASKELAND 2012, 168-174; BOUD’HORS 2015.

34 See BOUD’HORS 2006. Cf. also HUSSELMAN 1947, and KASSER - QUECKE - BOSSON 1992. As for the independence of the early Bohairic witnesses from the Sahidic corpus, see Luisier 1998, 268. An updated *status quaestionis* on the Bohairic version(s) of the Holy Scriptures is provided by SHERIDAN 2019.

should be linked to all the chronological categories that refer to a biblical translation (nos. 1, 2, 3, 10, and 25 in the list given above). However, the proposed classification has the prime aim of offering an overview on the paths of Coptic literature, also beyond its immediate usage in 'PATHs' database, which is obviously influenced by reasons of synthesis and coherence. Thus, we have avoided inserting multiple categories, preferring instead to state, whenever possible, when that specific text joined the interest of the Coptic readers, beginning to be translated and re-translated in different 'dialects'.<sup>35</sup>

Therefore, it is fundamental to reiterate that what these pages are proposing is a model of development of Coptic literature, and not merely a tool for a digital database.

Moreover, biblical texts and biblical manuscripts are rather a special class, and our analysis is inevitably partial from both perspectives, also in view of the activity of other international projects specifically devoted to this topic.

#### 4. *Rewritten narratives and textual fluidity: The case of late Coptic homilies*

A final, even more urgent methodological question relates to a very specific Coptic textual phenomenon, that is, the previously mentioned late rearrangement of the homiletic production, in which either highly redrafted versions of Greek sermons and original apocryphal traditions are bound together or different originally independent Greek homilies are recombined and fused together, giving rise to actual new compositions.

As I have tried to stress elsewhere by analysing both homiletic series and single sermons<sup>36</sup> – and as is widely acknowledged –, such late phases of Coptic literature reveal a pronounced freedom of composition. By generalising, one could affirm that the vast majority of Coptic homilies is structurally shaped by phenomena of textual fluidity, cultural appropriation, rearrangement according to the cultural use<sup>37</sup>. Such multiple-text manuscripts are, not infrequently, our only evidence for partial translations of Greek sermons<sup>38</sup>.

How to consider these deeply amended and reworked textual units? Strictly speaking, they are Coptic compositions, since they show an undeniable literary agency reached by the late redactor. Nevertheless, they rely on, and are made up of, translations from still recognisable Greek models, which – and this is the most enigmatic aspect – appear fully consistent with what we know of the intent, the theological attitude, and the methodological boundaries that have led to the first known Coptic translations of Greek works (the so-called 'classical translations').

In this respect, Gregory of Nyssa's homily *De deitate Filii et Spiritus Sancti* (CPG 3192) can be taken as a highly revealing example of the aporias entailed by such late rewritings of known Greek models.

Preserved by a single Bohairic witness under the name of Gregory of Nazianzus (CC 0196),<sup>39</sup> it discloses not only a continuous rearrangement of the original text, but also significant textual insertions, namely variations on the theme, which cannot be found in its Greek counterpart. As is customary, the entire first section of the Greek homily (PG 46, 553, 21 – 565, 25) has been omitted by the Coptic translator, whose concerns are mainly focused on the Greek *ethikon*, by leaving aside the exegetical portion opening the Greek sermon.<sup>40</sup>

Thus, after the addition represented by the *inscriptio* and by a linking passage, the Coptic text parallels the Greek between f. 185r l. 20 and f. 187r l. 30 (PG 46, 564, 25 – 568, 10).<sup>41</sup> However, countless evidences

35 Therefore, we adopt a slightly simplified form of the model developed in KASSER 1966 and KASSER 1958.

36 Cfr. BERNO 2018; BUZI - BERNO - SOLDATI - VALERIO 2018, especially 162-193; BERNO 2019, 29-46.

37 ORLANDI 2012.

38 On the typology of Coptic multiple-text manuscripts and its evolution, see BUZI 2018 and BUZI 2019.

39 *Vat. copt.* 61, ff. 185r-193v (MACA.BI; CLM 100). The Coptic text has been edited in CHAINE 1912-1913. See also HEBBELYNCK - VAN LANTSCHOOT 1937, 426-428.

40 This is a fairly typical Coptic device, attested by both Sahidic (e.g., MONB.CR; CLM 325) and Bohairic (e.g., MACA.AC; CLM 72) codices, which can be taken as collections of *ethika*, even if the extent of the Coptic ethical conclusions only rarely coincides with that of the corresponding Greek sermon. See VOICU 2011 and BELLET 1954, 202. Unlike the codices transmitting *typika* (as for which, see ATANASSOVA 2010), such collections do not seem to be intended as homilies for liturgical services, that is as lectionaries. Instead, they appear to have been conceived as handbooks of uplifting readings, taken from the most influential, revered and popular Early Church Fathers.

41 However, as for the last lines, the match is increasingly loose.

of redrafting<sup>42</sup> and shortening<sup>43</sup> is dotted throughout the Coptic rendering of the Greek text. Moreover and even more importantly, at f. 187r l. 31 a long section begins, maintaining only a thematic connection with its Greek *Vorlage*, by the addition of a paraenetical piece on Gen 22, 1.<sup>44</sup> From the end of this insertion – whose boundaries, in their turn, are far from being well-defined –, Coptic adheres to the Greek homily, by continuing to reveal examples of reiterate rewriting processes.

Hence the conclusion that the overall structure of the Coptic sermon significantly differs from its Greek counterpart, showing an autonomous argumentative path and independent textual solutions. In short, it is *something radically different* from the inter-text on which it relies.

Moreover, these issues cannot but call into question the notion itself of textual identity, that is, the possibility of identifying continuity and mutual relationship between manuscripts preserving textual units which appear ‘thematically’ related, despite the diversity of their texts. Consequently, they should be interpreted as ‘sibling’ groups of literary texts, that is, as texts linked by gemming from the same *Vorlage* but attesting different redactional stages in the path from their Greek model to their terminal Coptic rewriting.

If we shift the focus of our analysis from translations of Greek sermons preserved in a single copy to the lucky cases of multiple attestation, the landscape does not differ.

The homily *De homicidis*, pseudoepigraphically attributed to Athanasius (CC 0048), survive in at least two parchment codices, once belonging to the repositories of the monastery of St. Michael (whose latest dated colophon traces back to the year 914) and the White Monastery.<sup>45</sup>

It is worth noticing that, when the two witnesses preserve parallel texts, considerable differences emerge even on a cursory reading. Despite focusing solely on the most relevant mismatches, numerous instances may be quoted. In introducing Christ’s speech against those who do not fear the judgments of God (§ 7), the White Monastery’s codex proposes the following passage:  $\varphi\eta\lambda\chi\theta\omicron\sigma\ \nu\alpha\kappa\ \nu\epsilon\iota\ \mu\epsilon\chi(\rho\iota\sigma\tau\omicron)\varsigma\ \chi\epsilon\ \nu\theta\epsilon\ \nu\tau\alpha\kappa\mu\alpha\rho\alpha\upsilon\alpha\ \mu\mu\omicron\iota\ \mu\pi\epsilon\kappa\eta\upsilon\alpha\gamma\ \epsilon\mu\alpha\sigma\tau\iota\gamma\zeta\ [z]\iota\omega\delta\kappa\ \mu\pi[\epsilon]\kappa\omicron\gamma\omega\mu\eta\ \nu\omicron\gamma\epsilon\omega\langle c\rangle\ \nu\alpha\varsigma\ \epsilon\tau\upsilon\epsilon\ \mu\alpha\rho\alpha\mu,\ \alpha\kappa\alpha\rho\eta\alpha\ \mu\mu\omicron\iota.\ \mu\tau\omicron\mu\ \mu\mu\omicron\kappa\ \tau\epsilon\mu\omicron\gamma\ \zeta\eta\mu\kappa\omicron\lambda\alpha\varsigma\ \epsilon\pi\mu\alpha\ \mu\eta\mu\omicron\upsilon\epsilon\ \nu\tau\alpha\kappa\alpha\lambda\gamma\ \alpha\kappa\tau\ \nu\omicron\gamma\omicron\varsigma\ \nu\alpha\iota\ \nu\eta\tau\omicron\gamma.$ <sup>46</sup>

On the contrary, the Hamuli’s witness opts for a more elaborated version:  $\varphi\eta\lambda\chi\theta\omicron\sigma\ \gamma\alpha\rho\ \nu\alpha\kappa\ \nu\epsilon\iota\ \mu\pi\omicron\gamma\tau\epsilon\ \chi\epsilon\ \epsilon\iota\varsigma\ \zeta\eta\eta\tau\epsilon\ \alpha\kappa\alpha\rho\eta\alpha\ \mu\mu\omicron\iota\ \mu\pi\epsilon\kappa\eta\upsilon\alpha\gamma\ \epsilon\mu\alpha\sigma\tau\iota\gamma\zeta\ \zeta\iota\chi\omega\kappa\ \omicron\gamma\lambda\epsilon\ \mu\pi\epsilon\kappa\omicron\gamma\omega\mu\eta\ \nu\omicron\gamma\omega\varsigma\ \nu\alpha\alpha\varsigma\ \epsilon\tau\upsilon\epsilon\ \mu\alpha\rho\alpha(\nu)\ \lambda\gamma\omega\ \alpha\kappa\alpha\rho\eta\alpha\ \mu\mu\omicron\iota\ \epsilon\tau\upsilon\epsilon\ \omicron\gamma\omega\upsilon\beta\ \mu\omega\lambda\omicron\gamma\ \tau\epsilon\mu\omicron\gamma\ \lambda\epsilon\ \tau\eta\mu\alpha\rho\eta\alpha\ \mu\mu\omicron\kappa\ \zeta\omega\delta\kappa\ \mu\tau\omicron\mu\ \mu\mu\omicron\kappa\ \tau\epsilon\mu\omicron\gamma\ \zeta\eta\mu\kappa\omicron\lambda\alpha\varsigma\ \epsilon\pi\mu\alpha\ \mu\eta\mu\omicron\upsilon\epsilon\ \nu\tau\alpha\kappa\alpha\lambda\gamma\ \epsilon\alpha\kappa\tau\ \omicron\omega\mu\tau\ \nu\alpha\ \nu\eta\tau\omicron\gamma\ \zeta\mu\pi\epsilon\iota\kappa\omicron\varsigma\mu\omicron\varsigma.$ <sup>47</sup>

A quite revers situation is presented by the section addressing the topic of all kinds of sins’ forgiveness, through contrition and penitence, with the sole exception of the murderers (§ 10). In MICH. AZ, a very cursory statement occurs, merely ennobled by the reference to the Prophet:  $\nu\epsilon\tau\eta\alpha\zeta\omega\tau\upsilon\beta\ \lambda\epsilon$

42 See for instance f. 185v l. 26-186r l. 9:  $\lambda\omicron\gamma\eta\omega\tau\ \lambda\epsilon\ \nu\sigma\eta\gamma\ \varsigma\iota\mu\iota\ \mu\eta\mu\epsilon\tau\ \varphi\gamma\varsigma\ \epsilon\pi\epsilon\eta\epsilon\pi\eta\gamma\iota\mu\ \mu\eta\gamma\alpha\iota\ \alpha\lambda\lambda\alpha\ \nu\alpha\varsigma\omicron\gamma\iota\ \mu\epsilon\ \beta\epsilon\mu\ \nu\epsilon\tau\epsilon\mu\omicron\gamma\varsigma\ \epsilon\mu\epsilon\alpha\tau\gamma\lambda\eta\kappa\iota\delta\ \mu\eta\mu\omega\mu\iota\ \rho\iota\kappa\iota\ \mu\epsilon\ \epsilon\tau\eta\mu\epsilon\tau\beta\epsilon\lambda\lambda\omicron\ \omicron\gamma\omicron\gamma\ \nu\alpha\gamma\omega\alpha\lambda\kappa\ \epsilon\beta\omicron\lambda\ \mu\eta\tau\epsilon\lambda\mu\iota\varsigma\ \mu\eta\mu\eta\tau\epsilon\varphi\chi\omicron\gamma\omega\tau\ \epsilon\beta\omicron\lambda\beta\alpha\chi\omega\gamma\ \mu\lambda\eta\mu\ \alpha\mu\omega\omega\omega\omega\mu\iota\ \nu\alpha\varphi\ \beta\epsilon\mu\ \tau\epsilon\varphi\mu\epsilon\tau\beta\epsilon\lambda\lambda\omicron\ \mu\epsilon\mu\tau\epsilon\varphi\varsigma\eta\mu\iota\ \epsilon\iota\varsigma\alpha\chi\iota\ \epsilon\tau\chi\omicron\mu\ \mu\eta\tau\epsilon\mu\epsilon\tau\epsilon\chi\varphi\epsilon\ \varphi\eta\mu\iota\ \omicron\gamma\omicron\gamma\ \tau\iota\sigma\tau\omicron\gamma\iota\delta\ \tau\alpha\mu\omicron\ \mu\mu\omicron\iota\ \epsilon\varphi\alpha\iota\ \alpha\tau\omicron\mu\epsilon\ \omega\mu\iota\ \epsilon\varsigma\chi\omega\ \mu\eta\mu\omicron\varsigma\ \chi\epsilon...$  (// PG 46, 565, 39-45: Χρόνος διέβη πολὺς, καὶ ἡ φύσις τὸ ἴδιον ἔπασχεν, ἤδη πρὸς τὸ γηραιὸν, αὐτῷ τῆς ἡλικίας ἐπικλιθείσης, καὶ ἔτι ἡ ἐλπὶς παρετεινέτο· ἀπέσβη κατὰ τὸ εἶκος ἐν τῷ γηραιῷ τῆς ἡλικίας αὐτῷ τε καὶ τῇ ὁμοζύγῳ ἢ πρὸς παιδοποιίαν ἰσχύς. Καὶ τοῦτο ἀνεπαισχύντως ἡ ἱστορία παρασημαίνεται...).

43 See for instance f. 186v ll. 1-15:  $\epsilon\alpha\tau\omicron\gamma\mu\epsilon\tau\beta\epsilon\lambda\lambda\omicron\ \epsilon\pi\epsilon\upsilon\epsilon\tau\iota\ \epsilon\pi\omega\gamma\ \zeta\iota\tau\epsilon\mu\pi\omicron\lambda\sigma\epsilon\lambda\ \mu\eta\mu\omega\mu\iota\ \epsilon\tau\alpha\gamma\chi\varphi\omicron\gamma\ \epsilon\delta\zeta\alpha\mu\eta\mu\omicron\gamma\iota\ \mu\epsilon\tau\omega\tau\ \beta\alpha\tau\ \epsilon\beta\omicron\lambda\ \beta\epsilon\mu\ \theta\eta\epsilon\tau\alpha\varsigma\epsilon\pi\beta\epsilon\lambda\lambda\omicron\ \epsilon\gamma\epsilon\chi\omicron\rho\iota\gamma\iota\mu\ \mu\eta\tau\chi\eta\delta\ \mu\eta\mu\eta\tau\alpha\gamma\chi\varphi\omicron\gamma\ \zeta\iota\tau\epsilon\mu\eta\theta\epsilon\tau\alpha\varsigma\epsilon\pi\beta\epsilon\lambda\lambda\omicron\ \mu\eta\tau\eta\mu\alpha\kappa\eta\mu\ \gamma\alpha\rho\ \alpha\mu\ \epsilon\iota\mu\omicron\gamma\tau\ \epsilon\pi\omicron\varsigma\ \mu\eta\mu\alpha\iota\pi\alpha\mu\ \epsilon\gamma\omega\gamma\ \mu\eta\varphi\tau\ \alpha\varsigma\delta\alpha\mu\omicron\mu\iota\ \mu\eta\mu\epsilon\tau\eta\mu\omicron\tau\ \mu\eta\mu\iota\ \mu\eta\mu\omicron\varsigma\ \alpha\varsigma\varsigma\omega\omega\gamma\tau\epsilon\mu\ \mu\eta\mu\omicron\gamma\ \epsilon\beta\omicron\gamma\iota\ \epsilon\pi\omega\gamma\ \mu\eta\mu\alpha\lambda\lambda\omicron\gamma\ \epsilon\varphi\beta\alpha\tau\ \epsilon\beta\omicron\lambda\beta\alpha\ \mu\epsilon\tau\omega\tau\ (// PG 46, 565, 51 – 568, 6: ...ὡς εἶκος, τῇ τοῦ Θεοῦ δωρεᾷ, ἀνήβησεν αὐτοῖς διὰ τοῦ παιδὸς πάλιν ἡ πολιὰ, δασιλεῖς αἱ τοῦ γάλακτος πηγαὶ τῇ παρήλικι πρὸς τὴν χρεῖαν ἐπιρρέουσαι· ἐπεῖχεν ἡ γεγηρακυῖα τῷ παιδί τὴν θηλὴν πλημμυροῦσαν. Ἐπηγάλλετο τῷ παρὰ φύσιν θαύματι λέγουσα· Τίς εἶπη τῷ Ἀβραάμ ὅτι θηλάζει τέκνον ἢ Σάρρα; Εἶτα ἠδρύνετο τὸ νήπιον κατ’ ὀλίγον, καὶ εἰς τὴν τῶν μαιρακίων ἡλικίαν ἔτρεχεν, καὶ ἡδη παῖς ἦν ἐν ἀνθει τῆς ἡλικίας, ἐν ἀκμῇ τῆς ὥρας, γλυκὺ θέσμα τοῖς γεννησαμένοις, εἰς ὥραν ἐπιδιδούς, εἰς ἀκμὴν προΐων, τὰς τῆς ψυχῆς ἀρετὰς συναύξων τῷ κάλλει τοῦ σώματος).$

44 Inc.:  $\tau\eta\eta\tau\omicron\gamma\ \nu\alpha\varsigma\eta\mu\omicron\gamma\ \beta\epsilon\mu\ \theta\eta\eta\tau\ \mu\eta\mu\alpha\lambda\lambda\eta\gamma\eta\mu\alpha\ \epsilon\mu\alpha\gamma\ \epsilon\pi\omega\gamma\tau\ \epsilon\beta\omicron\lambda\ \mu\eta\mu\pi\alpha\varsigma\mu\omicron\varsigma\ \epsilon\tau\alpha\varphi\tau\ \epsilon\pi\mu\pi\alpha\varsigma\mu\iota\ \mu\eta\mu\omicron\gamma\ \mu\eta\eta\tau\ \epsilon\lambda\varphi\omicron\gamma\alpha\varsigma\alpha\eta\mu\ \epsilon\varphi\chi\omega\ \mu\eta\mu\omicron\varsigma\ \chi\epsilon\ \alpha\upsilon\beta\alpha\alpha\mu\ \alpha\upsilon\beta\alpha\alpha\mu.$

45 Respectively signed, according to the CMCL, as MICH.AZ (= CLM 225) and MONB.FQ (= CLM 390). The text has been recently edited and translated in SAWEROS 2019, 13-32. Relevant remarks in SAWEROS 2017b.

46 ‘Christ will tell you: “Just as you have violated me, without having seen a whip over you and without having been beaten for the sake of my name, and denied me. Now find rest in the punishments, in return for the sins which you did and by which you have made me wroth”’.

47 ‘For God will say to you: “Look, you have denied me, without having seen a whip over you and without having been beaten for the sake of my name, yet you denied me because of something shameful. Now I will deny you too. Now find rest in the punishments, in return for the sins which you did and by which you have made me angry in this world”’.



ΚΑΝ ΕΥΘΑΝΣΕΚΚΟΟΥ ΝΘΕ ΜΗΩΥΧΗΣ ΜΗΤΟΥ ΚΩ ΕΒΟΛ ΜΗΔΥ.<sup>48</sup> In MONB.FQ, instead, one can read more elaborate expressions: ΚΑΝ ΕΡΩΔΑΝ ΕΝΡΕΦΩΤΒ ΔΩΤΟΥ ΕΡΡΑΙ ΠΣΑ ΠΦΩ ΝΤΕΥΑΠΕ ΜΗ ΝΒΟΥΖΕ ΝΝΕΥΒΑΛ ΜΕΡΕΠΝΟΥΤΕ ΚΩ ΝΑΥ ΕΒΟΛ ΕΙΜΗΤΕΙ ΝΣΕ† ΝΟΥΥΥΧΗ ΖΑ ΟΥΥΥΧΗ.<sup>49</sup>

A last and even more significant passage – leaving aside the ubiquitous misalignments – should be recalled, namely the pivotal textual *locus* occurring towards the end of the homily, when the vision of a οΥΖΛΛΟ ΝΑΣΚΗΤΗΣ is reported. The object of the revelation lies in the definition of ‘pagans’, explicitly identified with the Christian people who, although baptized, transgressed the law of God. The old man saw a multitude of souls being punished in a great heat, while his *angelus interpretis* was explaining the nature of such tormented souls. According to the Hamuli’s version, this vision exhausted the revelation of the old monk – who is immediately identified as Pachomius by Athanasius – and the message he had to reveal to his fatherhood (ΕΤΕΚΜΗΤΕΙΩΤ). Instead, according to the White Monastery’s account, the *visio damnationis* represents only one half of the apocalypse, since the old monk keeps speaking,<sup>50</sup> by revealing a second vision (defectively preserved), in which he stood in front of a beautiful tree growing in heaven, surrounded by angelic hosts.<sup>51</sup>

All these elements cause us to lean towards the mutual independence of the literary traditions transmitted by these two sources, by gemming from reciprocally unconnected evolutions of a common textual matrix in two different regional and cultural environments. Once again, their relationship seems to be based on their dependence on a common and independently reworked *Urtext*.

The two case studies put forward – the former addressing the redrafting process of a known Greek composition; the latter revealing equally complex rewriting phenomena related to an allegedly Coptic original text – cannot be considered isolated instances.<sup>52</sup> On the contrary, they seem to represent the rule in this late phase of Coptic manuscript transmission, by disclosing two pervasive and interrelated trends, notably an inclination toward *thematic selection* and *textual accretion*.

As a consequence of these remarks and by building on the lucky cases of multiple attestation<sup>53</sup> and on a historical reconstruction of the paths of Coptic literature, it may be supposed that the Greek homiletic tradition went through a double phase of reception, translation and transmission in Coptic, the first one coinciding with the ‘period of the classical translations’, the second with the liturgical rearrangement probably suffered by the entirety of Coptic production. While the former would provide a (relatively) reliable and accurate translation of a selected corpus of Greek textual material, the latter would redraft such a corpus, by showing increasingly identifiable processes of religious adaptation and textual rewriting.

At the current state of research, this is just a working hypothesis. As such, it needs to formalise and codify historical circumstances that must have been far more fluid, but it accounts for the high and increasing degree of interpolatory activity shown by the last periods of Coptic literature and, at the same time, for the wide availability of textual material to be re-used.

As a result, a great deal of Greek homilies is placed in ‘PATHs’ database under the categories ‘Original Literature: Homilies with apocryphal insertions (6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> c.)’, ‘Original Literature: Formation of the later (pseudo-epigraphical) hagiographic cycles and re-arrangement of homiletic production (7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> c.)’, ‘Synaxarial arrangement (9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> c.)’, depending on each individual case, but with the explicitly declared statement 1) that such decision is the mere result of an ‘accidental’ over-representation of this phase of Coptic literature, and 2) that a lost previous circulation of this production can be reasonably assumed, at least in several, significant instances.

Without claiming to exhaust the matter, the present contribution aimed at providing a comprehensive overview on the ‘PATHs’ classification of Coptic literature, based on the extant codicological units and an

48 ‘Whoever will kill, even if they fast for six days like Moses, there is no forgiveness for them’.

49 ‘Even if murderers hang themselves from the hair of their heads and their eyebrows, God will not forgive them unless they pay a soul for a soul’.

50 The addition of the quotation from Mk 4, 48 should also be noted.

51 Inc.: ΔΥΧΘΟΣ ΟΝ ΝΘΙ ΠΖΛΛΟ ΕΤΗΜΔΥ ΖΕ.

52 Analogous conclusions should be drawn by a careful analysis of the manuscript evidences preserving the homily *In Crucem*, ascribed to Theophilus of Alexandria (CC 0395); analysis which is greatly helped by the critical *apparatus* provided in SUCIU 2012.

53 Other desirable case studies include, *inter alia*, Athanasius’ *Homily against Arius* (CC 0050; GIOV.AF / MONB.BH), Theophilus’ *Homily on the Cross* (CC 0395; GIOV.AB / MICH.BR / MONB.PG / SIUD.AB), Severian of Gabala’s *Homily on the Nativity* (CC 0329; GIOV.AK / MONB.EC / MONB.CV / MONB.BS).

in-depth historical survey, by addressing (from a highly selective perspective) some of the most pressing questions exposed by the complex state of the research on the Coptic literary and manuscript tradition.

Therefore, this article is intended to be the starting point for more specific investigations, which reject or confirm what is presented here as a working assumption and suggestion for further research.

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