

RBL 03/2012



Schüssler, Karlheinz, ed.

Biblia Coptica: Die koptischen Bibeltex-te. Vollständiges Verzeichnis mit Standorten [Band 4, Lfg 3]

Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010. Pp. vii + 192 + 12. Paper. €72.00. ISBN 9783447064170.

Stephan Witetschek
Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München
Munich, Germany

Biblical scholars starting to learn Coptic may be in search of a Coptic (Sahidic) Bible. However, the work under review is hardly what they are looking for! To be sure, there is an edition of the Sahidic New Testament (nothing comparable for the Old Testament): G. W. Horner, *Coptic Version of the New Testament in the Southern Dialect Otherwise Called Sahidic and Thebaic* (7 vols.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1911–1924). But this edition, apart from being almost a century old, is based only on a limited number of manuscripts, and its critical qualities, too, are not undisputed, to say the least. An up-to-date critical edition remains a desideratum. This is where Karlheinz Schüssler's newly pioneering work enters.

Schüssler's project *Biblia Coptica* aims at nothing less than a catalogue of all available Coptic manuscripts of the Old and New Testaments—the necessary prerequisite for establishing a truly critical edition of the Coptic Bible (first in Sahidic). The basic idea (and main criticism of Horner's edition) is that the critical value of the individual manuscripts can only be assessed when they are (re)contextualized in the codices to which they originally belonged. This allows a more reasoned judgment of the date and (implicitly) the value of each codex. In many cases, indeed, Schüssler had to reconstruct the remains of individual codices, leaves of which have made their ways into quite

different collections and libraries in Egypt, Europe, and North America (more on this below). This project has been going on for years, and some fascicles have already been reviewed in *RBL*: 1/3 by Melvin K.H. Peters (http://bookreviews.org/pdf/495_283.pdf), 3/1 by Elizabeth Penland (http://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/2022_2768.pdf), and 3/2 by Robert Paul Seesengood (http://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/3830_3787.pdf). I may also refer to Sarah Clackson's review of vol. 1/1 in *BASP* 35 (1998): 229–33.

Meanwhile, the project has advanced considerably; some results are already publicly accessible. An outline of the project (in German) can be found at <http://www.k-schuessler.com/bibcop.php>. Some New Testament manuscripts have been reestablished and can be consulted electronically at <http://www.biblia-coptica.com/>: sa (= Sahidic) 505, sa 506, sa 507, sa 508 (all described in 3/1), sa 561 (described in 3/4). These manuscripts (among others) form the basis for the most advanced part of the project, a critical reconstruction of the Gospel of John in Sahidic (see <http://www.k-schuessler.com/john.php>). Thus, text-critical work with the Sahidic New Testament is already greatly facilitated.

The fascicle under review comprises forty-eight Sahidic manuscripts from the fourth–thirteenth centuries, mostly with New Testament texts. There are only three lectionaries that include Old Testament passages, namely, from Psalms (sa 694^L, sa 719^L) and from Ezekiel (sa 702^L). Most of the manuscripts are on parchment, only six (sa 687, sa 692, sa 701, sa 703, sa 704, sa 708) on papyrus.

One particularly instructive example (108–20) is sa 699, a fairly large (max. 31.5 x 26.5 cm) and artfully written and decorated parchment codex from the White Monastery (sixth/seventh century) that contains the Gospels of Matthew and John. Twenty-six sheets from nine quires are preserved. These sheets are partly preserved as entire pages, partly as fragments, partly only as scraps (“Schnipsel”). They are scattered over a half-dozen libraries and museums: The British Library (London), the Bodleian Library (Oxford), the Bibliothèque Nationale (Paris), the Louvre (Paris), the Biblioteca Vaticana (Rome), and the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek (Vienna). Based partly on the extant pagination, partly on calculation, the sheets are assigned to their respective places in the (partly numbered) quires. From the survey (109–10) one gets a good idea of what the codex must have looked like before it was torn apart—and one gets an even better idea of how much is missing. The first preserved sheet, sa 699.1 (pp. 33/34, containing Matt 9:9–23), has been brought together from two fragments, sa 699.1.1 from the Bodleian Library, MS Copt. D.271 (P), and sa 699.1.2 from the Louvre, E 10092.j. Another sheet, sa 699.24 (pp. 189/190, containing John 10:12²–29), consists of three fragments that are already catalogued in the Bibliothèque Nationale as parts of one and the same manuscript (Copte 129¹⁰ fol. 129, 130, 143). On the other hand, the fifteen sheets of sa 699 that are owned by

the Bibliothèque Nationale appear under four different catalog numbers. An impression of the writing is given on table 7, where the fragment sa 699.21 is reproduced. With Schüssler's work at hand, it has become much easier to assess the significance of those many fragments and scraps for reconstructing "the" Sahidic translation of the New Testament—and it is an attempt to undo (as far as this is at all possible) the gold-rush-like treatment that many Coptic manuscripts suffered from their excavators and traders.

The main part of this volume with its detailed descriptions of the forty-eight manuscripts is followed by several indices (173–92); noteworthy are the concordances with other editions of the manuscripts presented in the fascicle (186–91). Appended are twelve tables with pictures of selected manuscript pages. Unfortunately, these are printed on ordinary paper and downsized to a measure of 7.5 x 11.5 cm each. Thus, they can convey only an impression of the different types of writing. Some are close to being illegible.

This minor disappointment notwithstanding, Schüssler has once again done an admirable job, one more step toward a critical edition of the Sahidic translation of the New Testament. The meticulous work takes its time, but there is some hope that, in the not so distant future, there may be a handy and reliable reference for the occasional "sa" in the critical apparatus of the *Nestle-Aland/Novum Testamentum Graece*.