

SOME OLD NUBIAN CHRISTIAN TEXTS.

In the summer of 1906 Dr Carl Schmidt purchased in Cairo for the Royal Library at Berlin, two series of fragments on vellum from Upper Egypt, written in an unknown language. Greek words, proper names and rubrics shewed that they were Christian. Schmidt rightly conjectured that they must be Nubian and soon confirmed his conjecture by recognizing the phrase 'Herod the King', expressed with the Nubian word *uru* for 'king'. By November of the same year Professor Heinrich Schäfer of the Berlin Museum was able to give an account of the script and language, with extracts and descriptions of both texts, and to establish the fact that a form of Nubian was the language of all those rare inscriptions in the Greek character of Christian date, but hitherto unread, which had been found both in Lower Nubia and in the extreme south on the Blue Nile.

The alphabet used in these MSS and the inscriptions is the Greek with five additional characters, one of which (*sh*) occurs in Coptic, while two others (*h* and *j*) must be derived from Coptic characters, and two (*ñ* and a nasal *ñ*) are peculiar. The language is a strongly marked variety or rather prototype of the Mahass dialect of Nubian, spoken in the centre of the Barabra country between the Second and the Third Cataracts. The Barabra have been Muhammedans since the thirteenth century. The modern language is full of Arabic loan-words from which the Christian texts are free; but most of the old roots survive to this day and are to be found in the Nubian vocabularies of Reinisch and Lepsius. Although the grammatical forms are now greatly changed, the language remains fundamentally the same as in the Christian period, genderless, agglutinative, working by means of suffixes. Of the Berlin MSS one series of pages, numbered 100-115, contains a Lectionary for Christmastide, and Greek rubrics indicate vaguely the places from which the texts are derived. So far as these fragmentary Biblical texts go they furnish a first-rate key to the language.¹

In the following spring Schäfer and Schmidt gave a further account of the two texts, the second of which was shewn to be a conversation of Christ with the Apostles in the days before the Ascension: a portion of it is a hymn in praise of the Cross, to which a partial parallel is found in a sermon of pseudo-Chrysostom (Migne *P. G.* l. c. 819).²

¹ Heinrich Schäfer u. Karl Schmidt *Die ersten Bruchstücke christlicher Literatur in altnubischer Sprache*, in *Sitzungsb. d. k. pr. Ak. d. Wissenschaften*, 8 Nov. 1906, pp. 774 sqq.

² *Die altnubischen christlichen Handschriften der Königlichen Bibliothek zu Berlin* in *Sitab.* 20 June 1907, pp. 602 sqq.

A date of about the eighth century was suggested in the first paper, but this is corrected to the tenth–eleventh in the second.

In the autumn of 1907 Mr de Rustafjaell kindly lent me for examination a small but complete Nubian MS which he had obtained in Egypt along with a number of Coptic texts.¹ From various indications it was believed to contain a life of St Menas and some Nicene canons. Happily Dr Schäfer's extracts from the Berlin MSS contained many words and expressions found in the Rustafjaell texts, and I was soon in a position to state that the Menas text related a miracle, similar to but different from those to which Mr Crum had kindly drawn my attention, given in Latin in Surius (Lipomanni), *Vitae Sanctorum* 10 Nov. and in Greek in J. Pomialowski *Žitiš prepod. Páisie Velikago*, Petersburg, 1900. Meanwhile the MS itself was purchased for the British Museum and it was understood that Dr Budge had undertaken to publish it for the Trustees. Professor Schäfer proposed to Dr Budge an exchange, offering the copies of his fragmentary material, including his precious bilingual key, in exchange for a copy of the complete text in the Rustafjaell MS. But the authorities of the Museum found it impossible to accede to his request. Hearing that I was interested in it, Dr Schäfer most generously lent me photographs, and subsequently his own annotated copies, of the Berlin fragments, shewing the astonishing progress which he had made in identifying mere morsels of a few words each, though much remained obscure. With this aid a renewed attack on the Rustafjaell texts gave a fairly complete decipherment of the Menas miracle, which proceeds in a continuous narrative, while the less simple Canon text still offers a stout resistance.

Dr Budge has now published the MS, with an introduction and other texts bearing on St Menas.² His work is in nine chapters, of which the first gives a brief account of the little that is known of the history of Christianity in Nubia, of the literary evidence as to the language of the Christian Nubians, and of the chief works on the modern dialects of Nubian. The second describes the Rustafjaell MS (which now bears the press-mark *Or.* 6805 in the British Museum), with the alphabet, &c. For its date Dr Budge suggests the tenth century. The third chapter deals with the contents of the MS and enumerates some Greek and Hebrew words met with in the text. The fourth chapter (*à propos* of the first text in the MS) gives the history of St Menas, his

¹ Apparently from the ruins of a Coptic monastery near Edfu. See the account of the whole find by Mr S. de Ricci in *Comptes Rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions*, 1909, p. 162.

² *Texts relating to Saint Mena of Egypt and Canons of Nicaea in a Nubian dialect with facsimile*: edited by E. A. Wallis Budge. (Printed by order of the Trustees of the British Museum, London, 1909.)

church near Alexandria, recently excavated by Herr Kauffmann, and the stamped terra-cotta flasks of healing water or holy oil which were sold there. The remaining chapters 5-9 give the Ethiopic text and the translation of two interesting martyrdoms of St Menas—suggestive as to the purpose of these ampullas and the meaning of the camels so often figured on them—and the Ethiopic text of an antiphon of the same saint. The photographic plates represent three Menas ampullas in the collection of the British Museum, and finally the eighteen folios of the MS in very serviceable facsimile.

Although Dr Budge refers to the above-mentioned papers of Schäfer and Schmidt and states that the language of the MS is the same as that of the Berlin texts, he curiously enough describes the language as being at present unknown.

The following translation of the first text must be taken as only approximate. The grammar of the Old Nubian language is still highly obscure to me, and many words are unknown. But the narrative is clear and the text complete: it is thus an ideal text for decipherment, and the occasional Greek words and proper names act as sign-posts. Schäfer's conclusions and readings are for the most part confirmed by this excellent text. It may be noted that the horizontal line drawn over letters represents an ι : e.g. $\alpha\bar{\iota}\pi\pi\sigma\gamma$ - varies with $\alpha\iota\pi\pi\sigma\gamma$ - 'village' M. *dīffī*, $\alpha\lambda\epsilon\sigma\bar{\iota}$ 'verily', 'if' with $\alpha\lambda\epsilon\sigma\iota\tau$.¹

(f. 1 b) Miracle done by the martyr of Christ the saint Mena: in the grace of God, Amen.

Beloved. A woman lived in a village in the *confines* of Alexandria. And she was barren and never bore son or daughter; *while she served the poor and possessed wealth* she had no heir; (f. 2 a) *for this reason she was troubled* in her heart. And moreover all who were in her house were childless, *women of the family* and cattle down to the fowls. And one day the woman heard the *teachers* of the Christians telling the wonders which the holy Mena was doing in the Church of Mariût. (f. 2 b) She said: 'If the God of S. Mena *make* one of my fowls lay, I will then dedicate the *first* egg it shall produce in his church.' When a long time was spent one of the fowls was impregnated and laid an egg: and the woman took the egg, and *came down to the water* (f. 3 a) *with a woman of the family* to find a *boat* and take the egg to the church of S. Mena placed in Mariût; and finding a *boat starting* for Philoxenite,² the woman said to the *sailor*, 'Hail father *sailor*!' and he said, 'Hail also thou.' And the woman said, 'Verily whither goest thou forth?' The *sailor* said, (f. 3 b) 'Verily if the Lord will *protect* me I shall depart to

¹ Italic type is used throughout the translation to mark the obscurest words and passages.

² Mr Crum points out to me the corresponding $\Lambda\sigma\phi\sigma\nu\eta\tau\alpha$ in the Greek miracles.

Philoxenite'. And the woman said, '*Fear not, make a plan with me and take me with thee to Philoxenite.*' The *sailor* said, 'What dost thou desire there?' The woman said, 'I will go to the church of S. Mena.' The *sailor* said, 'But thou art pagan; (f. 4 a) *being so* what wilt thou do in a church?' The woman said, 'I shall dedicate this egg in that church, in order that the God of S. Mena may give me seed of *conception*: if I shall have progeny I will become Christian.' The *sailor* said, 'Woman, thou art *courageous*; but *fear not*, give me thy egg, for I will dedicate it. (f. 4 b) And do thou *return* to thy *house* that thy husband may not *be anxious*.' And the woman, believing (πνευμα) put the egg in his hand; and she returned to her house with her *woman of the household*. And the *sailor* took the egg and put it in the *hold* (lit. belly of water?) and *laid it in the food*, until he came to Philoxenite. And when many *days* had passed, (f. 5 a) he came to the shore of Philoxenite; and the man *forgot* the egg and returned to the *starting-point*. And on one of the days the *sailor* saw that egg lying in the *boat's hold* in the *food*—that *which he had laid down and forgotten*: he said to his son, 'Boy, *whence* is this egg?' And he said, 'Father, dost thou not remember this, (f. 5 b) which a woman gave us that we might put them (*sic*) in the church of S. Mena?' And the father said to the boy, '*Is it true?* cook it for me, that I may have food.' And his son cooked and *prepared it* and set food. And when the days of . . . had been spent, they came to a certain village and *moored the boat* to the bank of that village. (f. 6 a) And as it was Sunday the *sailor* came into the village to receive the sacrament. And in that village a church of the Holy Virgin Mary was built, and he entered therein to receive the sacrament, at the *arrival* of the Trisagion when all the people *collected in the midst*, that they might *drink the waters of the Holy one*: and the eye of the *sailor* was opened: he saw S. Mena plainly, coming mounted on a white horse (f. 6 b) and *aiming a spear of flame* at him. And when he saw, he came *running* to the image of the God-bearing Mary and cried, saying, 'Thou Mary who didst bear God wilt save me from the sins I have committed.' And S. Mena standing *again*, said to him, 'What shall I do with thee to-day . . .' And the Saint took that man (f. 7 a) and trod him upon the head. And the egg which he had *eaten* and stolen became alive as a fowl and descended beneath him and came forth and stood . . . and S. Mena sitting on the horse seized the fowl by one of its wings, took *it* and said, '*Go hither: be thus.*' And S. Mena departed and came to the house of that woman, *knocked at the door and called*. And that woman (f. 7 b) *quickly* opened the door, and the Saint said to her, 'Woman, take this fowl, *eat of thy fowls* that they may make thee fruitful. And thou also, O woman, the son that thou shalt bear, call his name Mena. And the *women* of thy household also shall thus be fruitful and thy cattle.

And do thou, O woman, receive *baptism* for the remission of thy sins.' (f. 8 a) And having *finished* saying this, *immediately* the saint *vanished*. And the woman took the fowl and *put it with* her fowls and *immediately* they became fruitful, the *women* of the *household*, and the cattle. And she, the woman, likewise conceived, and bore a male babe, and called his name Mena, as the Saint had said to her. And the *women* of her *family* (f. 8 b) as they conceived brought forth son and daughter. And that woman when the days of her solitude were completed came out to the church of S. Mena, to Mariût : and when she came to the holy church she enquired for the *priest* that he might *baptize* them. And the *priest* took them and *laid his hands* on them, and *baptized* her and her husband and her son and her *relations* in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. (f. 9 a) And thus they continued every day of their life as Christians . . . , they continued as . . . of the church of S. Mena, offering their *firstfruits* to the church, until they died. And all seeing and hearing of this great miracle glorified God and S. Mena. Whose is glory (f. 9 b) and might now and for all time unto eternity of ages. Amen.

On the next page (f. 10 a) is drawn a figure of S. Mena as he appeared to the sailor (?) armed with a spear and riding on a horse. The sailor below appears to be naked : over his left arm is a cloth, and his right hand grasps one of the horse's hoofs. The feet of the man are cut away by an injury to the leaf, but between the legs remains the head of a cock which must have been drawn standing on the ground.

Of the second text, somewhat shorter but far more difficult, I give a few key-passages which seem more or less intelligible and may help to the discovery of parallels in other languages.

These *are* the canons of the churches which the holy popes *assembled* in Nicaea . . . *wrote* and established . . . 85 . . .¹

(f. 10 b) Beloved : *one* said . . . 'this holy feast which is on the table bread . . . and *wine* . . . : *in* the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost it comes forth from the church : in the time of . . . and season of . . . it comes. If a man dedicate a . . . in the church (f. 11 a) either . . . or . . . and if the priest do not give one *by exchange* : speaking in his heart with the priest shall not . . . , shall not . . . : from heaven out of Jerusalem . . . he shall not have . . .

loving that which is of earth, hating that which is of heaven.

If a *monk* having said, shall have eaten . . . offered in the church

¹ The Arabic Nicene Canons reach the numbers 80 and 84 in the two collections (Mansi, ii pp. 947 and 982). They are not related to the present document.

(f. 11 *b*) with the sons of the church, *by* the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost he is out of the church.

If a *man* turn in his heart and offer a . . . in the church or *wheat* or seed of . . . and he, the Lord *learning* (it) shall receive *through* his holy angel. Have ye not heard that which is written (f. 12 *a*) . . .

All men who work in the name of God they will not find one. And now, O man, those who do them in the name of God . . .

Let us seek peace and *ensue* it.

(f. 12 *b*) without *ceasing* pray to God that he may give us remission of our sins.

(f. 13 *a*) If a *λαϊκός* . . . the church . . . priest . . .

(f. 14 *b*) When thou hast taken the sacrament, remain in the church until the *dismissal*. Remember what was done to Judas *the traitor*: having taken the sacrament he went out of the church not being *dismissed*, and Satan *entered* his heart and he *hastened to the betrayal*. And if thou *departest from* church which has not been dismissed . . .

Now with Judas . . .¹

(f. 15 *a*) I see multitudes having taken the sacrament in church . . . in their hearts.

(f. 15 *b*) If one having eaten, having taken the sacrament, the dead body . . .

One who not having heard epistle or gospel hath taken the sacrament hath not taken it. One who hath not sung alleluia with psalms is a *mock*er of God his Maker.

ἄΛΛΟΓΙΑ ΕΙΠΠΑ ΘΕΛΚΑΘ ΜΑΡΙΜΑΘ *which is being interpreted*
(f. 16 *a*) let us glorify him that *is above* all gods.²

Woe to a man speaking in the church when the sacrament comes.

These are Jews who hanged the Saviour on the Cross . . .

(f. 16 *b*) Its name Jerusalem . . .

The priest on Sunday . . .

(f. 17 *a*) female 12 years . . . male 13 years . . .

(f. 17 *b*) and God shall *try* his heart in hell (εμεντε)³
and the priest on Sunday night

with our Lord Jesus Christ resurrection and *grace* . . .⁴

Professor Schäfer and I hope to make a complete edition of the known writings in Old Nubian in the near future. My colleague's

¹ For this rather clear passage Mr Brightman has shewn me a parallel in 'Eusebius of Alexandria' *Hom.* xvi 2 (Migne P.G. lxxxvi 416 D : cp. *Rev. de l'Orient Chrétien*, 1908, p. 416).

² Mr Crum points out to me the parallel with the gibberish words in a Coptic text, Lacau *Mém. Inst. Fr. Caire* ix. 49.

³ Coptic influenced the language of religion, but apparently less than Greek.

⁴ The Doxology follows (f. 18 *a*) in the same form as after the Menas miracle.

wonderful success in reading the Berlin fragments justifies the hope that he will carry the interpretation of the British Museum volume far beyond the point here reached. It need hardly be said that any hints—whether from theologians or from students of modern Nubian—towards the better understanding of these curious relics of an extinct church will be exceedingly welcome to us.

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