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A COPTIC TRANSCRIPTION OF AN ARABIC TEXT.

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Some years ago, when I was living at Cambridge, Mr. Bradshaw, the late excellent Librarian of the University, showed me a quantity of fragments of Coptic manuscripts, which, if I rightly understood him, had formerly belonged to Tischendorf. My duties in connection with the Education Department prevented me from giving them all the attention they deserved, but I have no doubt that they would repay a careful examination.

One set of these fragments specially attracted my attention. The writing was Coptic, but not so the language. The words \( \chi_0 \lambda \rho\tau\epsilon\epsilon\rho \), "every day," at once showed the language to be Semitic, and all the neighbouring words were evidently Arabic. Arabic letters in small character were written over a certain number of the Coptic letters by which they were transcribed.

The fragments evidently belong to some monastic biography, but though many of the sentences are perfectly intelligible, the want of context arising from the torn condition of the manuscript renders a complete translation impossible. The pronoun \( \lambda \epsilon\gamma\epsilon \) in the third fragment implies a female no where else mentioned. Nor is it always possible to make out who is the person spoken of in the sentence. There are also impossible words or groups on my copy, some of which may be owing to the writer of the manuscript, whilst others are no doubt to be ascribed to blunders of my own.

I quoted this text in the last number of our Proceedings as a warning against incautious inferences from the transcription of one language in the alphabet of another, and in so doing I myself committed an oversight which I shall presently mention, and which may add force to the warning. The short extract which I gave has excited some curiosity, and I have been asked to publish the fragments. I do so now as far as my notes permit. They give all the lines which are complete or nearly so. In the torn passages isolated words occur, but the only one which is not found in the rest of the
text is the important word बेग्ला। It comes in the line which followed at the end of the fourth fragment.

The Arabic letter  is written several times over the Coptic X. The qâf  is written over the Coptic K and  over the second θ in अक्लक्षम. The Coptic  does duty for the  and for Hamza at the beginning of words, but also for  and ।

It was through an oversight that I said, that the Arabic particle  was represented by ए and ए. The Coptic  here regularly stands for । बेग्ला is हद, ्वाहिद, ‘one’; रेव्य बेग्ला is वोट वॅटैजिम, ‘a considerable time,’ and बेकेटोज is वोट वॅट ऑ, ‘he found him.’ We should therefore read बेजेन, बेलेजेन, बेऎलेकोज, as वेकुन, वेलेमु, वे-येथला-ओह respectively. Both particles  and  occur constantly throughout these texts as they do in all Arabic narratives.

The chief phonetic peculiarities of these fragments besides the use of  for , and that in a way not recognised by the Coptic grammarians, are the use of Π for the Arabic  and of  for  as in ए Π = या एब-ए, ‘oh my father!’ Π ए Π Μ Ώ ए Τ έ ά े 'ल क ल क = हज़ाकट एकलहम एल गालिल ‘whilst they ate their small meal.’ It is impossible to fix the dates implied in these transcriptions.

The various sounds of  (ā, a, ā) for  are generally considered modern, but I am not aware that any proof of this supposition has been given, or is attainable from existing evidence.

That the present Copts pronounce Π as  simply arises from the fact that for centuries they have spoken no other language than the Arabic, in which the  sound exists but not the φ.

These observations are made for their own sake, and not for the purpose of upholding the antiquity of my texts. The fact of their being transcribed from the vulgar dialect of Arabic proves them not to be ancient. But there is no knowing what exact date is necessarily implied by the pronunciation which they betoken. It is certainly some hundred years old; perhaps a thousand.

I translated एग्जेवेज by ‘the Saint,’ because the story is evidently that of some holy personage, and because in other monastic

* Perhaps ग्ल occurs at the very end, but of this I cannot be sure. Almost the entire line has been destroyed.
biographies of the Copts the Saint is called *πακελλο* in his own language and مَرْكَبُ in Arabic. But the word might equally apply to an aged person whose history occurs in that of a saint.

I now give the four fragments, with a few notes identifying a sufficient number of words, so as to furnish a clue to the general meaning.

*Βεχενευος* ἐγκεφυσεν ἐμπρός του ιεραρχού 2 ἀριστερά ἐντολήν 3 ἔπειρας ἔσεσθαι 4 ξένης ἐκκλησίας 5 ἔκτασιν 6 λαοῦ 7 διακόνων 8 ἔκκλησιών 9 ἀρχηγόν 10 ἔκκλησιών 11 καπέρ 12 ἑττας ἡμερών 13 ἔμπρος τας ἐκκλησιών 14 διακονιών 15 ἐκκλησίας 16 καλεῖν 17 ἐντεχνίας 18 ἐκκλησίας 19 ἐκκλησίας 20 ἐκκλησίας 21 καπέρ 22 ἐκκλησίας 23 ἐκκλησίας 24 ἐκκλησίας 25 ἐκκλησίας 26 ἐκκλησίας ...
He said the prayer, and he dismissed him. He rested little the evening, went round the brother. Till the old man should get up and bless him according to his wont. And when the old man remained sleeping a considerable time, cried out. Still, thought, reflection, memory. I do not remember any meaning of the verb in this connexion. Has overcome me, from go away. A corrupt passage. When night approached. Awoke. That not. To rest from. And he slept a little: and the old man was still sitting on his cushion, wearying his soul until the morrow."