

Report Alin Suciu

Recently I participated at the Tenth International Congress of Coptic studies, which took place September 17-22 in Rome. My participation at the congress was possible with the gracious support of the European Science Foundation (Short Visit Grant).

During the congress I presented two papers. The first paper was delivered on Tuesday, September 18, between 12.30-13.00. The title of the presentation was “Newly identified fragments from the Fayyumic and Sahidic versions of the Bible.” I talked about a series of Coptic Biblical fragments which I identified in the past year in different collections of manuscripts. The bulk of the fragments investigated are kept in the Trinity College in Dublin (call numbers: 11062/1-8). They contain the following portions of Biblical books:

fragments 11062/1-2: Psalms 31:7-10, 32:5-9

fragment 11062/5: 2 Peter 2:1-2, 5-7

fragment 11062/6: John 11:44-46

fragment 11062/7: Ecclesiastes 1:9-11

fragment 11062/8: Mark 1:24-26

I edited the Trinity College fragments in an article which is due to appear in December 2012 (A. Suciu, “Coptic Biblical Fragments in the Possession of the Trinity College in Dublin,” [*Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*](#) 183 [2012] 101-107).

The other manuscript fragments presented were three Gospel fragments in the Fayyumic dialect of Coptic. There had been some positive reactions concerning these fragments in the discussions which followed my presentation. This was, perhaps, largely due to the fact that the Fayyumic version of the Bible is of special interest and the manuscript testimonies in this dialect are quite rare.

The second paper I delivered together with Prof. Tito Orlandi (Rome). Our communication was titled “The End of the Library of the Monastery of Atripe,” and it was presented on Tuesday, September 18, between 17.00-17.30. Tito Orlandi started the presentation with a general introduction on the library of the White Monastery, situated in Upper Egypt, near Sohag. The codices of this library survived only fragmentary and dismembered, with the leaves scattered all over the world. The virtual reconstruction of this library out of torn fragments is of central importance to the study of Coptic literature, because the White Monastery possessed around the year 1 000 CE the richest Christian library in Egypt. According to our estimations, the library of the White Monastery contained in that period about 1 000 codices. Although very much is lost,

when properly reconstructed by digital means, the library gives us a glimpse of the richness of Coptic literature.

Professor Orlandi remarked that it is time to try to advance in the study of the library by making comparative observations derived from the extant data. This is what I tried to do in my intervention, which was focused on the examination of the “damage pattern” of some of the surviving fragments of the White Monastery codices. The study of the fragments from the White Monastery allowed me to propose a new perspective on the end of the library.

The current theory, which is quite old and unsatisfactory, is that the library fell into decay when Coptic language started to be forgotten by the monks. According to this hypothesis, when Arabic became the lingua franca of the Copts, the old parchment codices were abandoned somewhere in a remote corner of the monastery where they gradually decayed. Beginning with the second half of the 18th century, the monks sold piecemeal the manuscripts to various European travelers, breaking them into pieces in order to obtain a higher price. In this way, the leaves of the manuscripts were scattered throughout the world. However, a multitude of White Monastery fragments, which join perfectly and do not exhibit signs of a natural form of decay, suggest that the codices were destroyed systematically and deliberately by someone.

My contribution to the paper was to show that many White Monastery parchment fragments actually bear signs of trauma and mutilation done by human hand. I documented this hypothesis with the aid of digitally reconstructed folios.

We will further elaborate the theory of the deliberate destruction of the library in a paper which we shall offer for publication in the proceedings of the Congress. In case our paper will be accepted, I will mention the Short Visit Grant which was kindly offered to me by the European Science Foundation.

With many thanks for accepting my grant application, please receive my best wishes.

ALIN SUCIU