

NAQLUN

EGYPT

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS ON THE COPTIC TEXTS FOUND DURING SEASONS 2003 AND 2004

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The Coptic texts discovered in 2003 and 2004 inside Building G in the monastery at Naqlun, about 20 items, are primarily documentary texts. Although none of them can be exactly dated, they can be assigned to approximately the 10th-11th century on the basis of their characteristic late handwriting. Together with numerous other documents of the same nature and age that have been found during earlier seasons, they may therefore be able to shed light upon the life and affairs of the monastery during its last flourishing period prior to its modern revival. The 11th century was the time when the church of the monastery was splendidly refurbished and redecorated under the Archimandrite Papnoute. This same general period also saw the decline of Coptic as a living written language and its gradual replacement with Arabic. Therefore, the Naqlun documents are also interesting for the information they provide about the language and vocabulary of the late documentary Coptic as it was used in the Fayum. The following observations are merely meant to give a general impression of the texts, which are still under study (a number of similar late documents from Hermitage 25 were published by our late colleague K. Urbaniak-Walczak;¹ others are being prepared for publication by the present author).

Most of the texts are of modest size and written on paper. Certainly in their present, rather damaged condition, they convey an informal, everyday impression. Only a few are palimpsests on parchment, reused scraps of earlier (around 9th century) Coptic literary texts (e.g. Nd.04.187). Other documents were re-used at some stage for letters or notes in Arabic, a phenomenon that occurs quite frequently. The language of the Coptic documents is always "Fayumi-Sahidic", the local form of Sahidic that was normally employed in the Fayum around the turn of the first millennium. In spite of the usually very clear handwriting, the many rare words and the frequent loans from Arabic sometimes obscure their interpretation. In fact, the Arabic loan words bear witness to a high degree of language contact, and include both juridical terms and profession names. In addition, Arabic proper names are not uncommon.

Some of the texts are private letters. One of these, unfortunately very incomplete, is addressed to a bishop whose name is lost (Nd.04.175). This raises the interesting question of whether bishops may have counted, temporarily or permanently, among the residents of the monastery. Richer in information are the documents that relate to the current administrative

1 K. Urbaniak-Walczak, "Deir el-Naqlun: Die koptischen Texte aus der Ermitage Nr. 25", *JJP* 39, 1999, 93-136