

Oral-Formulaic Approaches to Coptic Hymnography

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*Shomt n-rôme auei
sha peneiôt Abraam
m-p-nau n-hanameri
ef-hen ti-skênê*

3 men came
to our father Abraham
at the time of noon
when he was in his tent:

*Gabriêl pi-nishti
n-archangelos
nem Michaêl
ere p-Joeis hen toumêti*

Gabriel the great
archangel
with Michael
with the Lord in their midst.

*Shomt n-ran enchosi
hen t-phe nem p-kahi
asjôlh mmôou ebol
nje tisabe m-Parthenos*

3 names are exalted
in heaven and earth:
there clothed herself in them
the wise Virgin.

*Ge gar as-ti-mêini
m-pi-batos ethouaab
ere pi-chrôm nhêts
ouoh mpes-rôkh*

For she gave the sign
of the holy bush
with the fire in it
and it was not burned.¹

From the first Coptic hymn for the twenty-first of the month of Hathyr (30 November), the feast of St. Gregory Thaumaturgus, the first person recorded as having had a vision of the Virgin Mary (MacCoull 1999). It is sung to the tune called “Adam,” a simple melody for three-stress quatrains (the other principal melody being called “The Burning Bush,” already alluded to in this hymn’s imagery). What a creative way to elaborate the Old Testament theophany image of what is termed the

¹ O’Leary 1926-29:i, 66. All translations are my own except where noted.

“Philoxenia of Abraham,”² with, as the hymnographer will proceed to do, New Testament imagery (Paul caught up to the “third heaven”) and patristic testimonia. Every strophe begins with the letter gamma, which is the Greek and Coptic numeral 3. Exegetical, narrative, and, as I will show, folk elements are combined into a simple work that everyone could understand.

Coptic, as usually defined, is the last stage of the Egyptian language, written in the Greek alphabet with the addition of signs taken from Demotic to represent phonemes for which Greek signs did not exist.³ Existing in several dialects and two main supraregional forms, southern and northern, it was created beginning in about the third century CE in a learned bilingual milieu of elite users who were vividly aware of the powerful utility of visually representing the vernacular by means of a Greek graphic system.⁴ By the third and fourth centuries Coptic was used for biblical texts, by the fifth for letters and sermons, and by the sixth for legal documents (alongside Greek) and historiography. Seasoned throughout with Greek loanwords, it took its place alongside Syriac, Armenian, and Ethiopic (Ge‘ez) as a culture-carrying language of the Monophysite commonwealth of ethnic groups in and near Byzantium who did not accept the Council of Chalcedon.⁵ It continued as a vehicle for scripture, church liturgy, preaching, literature, documentation and correspondence until about the late tenth century.

After about 1000 CE the pressure of Arabic, the language of Egypt’s political rulers and of the marketplace, began to replace Coptic in both the literary and the everyday realm for Christian Egyptian users. Only in the liturgies of the Eucharist and the monastic hours did Coptic persist in some degree; by the thirteenth century it had ceased to be understood. Unlike speakers of Armenian or Syriac, who also lived under Arabophone Moslem rule, Copts abandoned their ancestral language except for a few religious fossilizations. Manuscripts in Coptic continued to be copied after a fashion, however, eventually providing a clue to the decipherment of hieroglyphics.

² Note that it is the Eastern understanding of the Philoxenia, Christ with two archangels, not the Western one of the Three Persons of the Trinity. Miller 1984: 43-95; see also O’Leary 1926-29:iii, 49.

³ The whole special linguistics appendix (*CE* viii:13-227) of this volume of the *CE* is by far the best guide to the whole subject. On alphabet(s), see *CE* viii:30-45.

⁴ See Bagnall 1993:253, 256-57.

⁵ Syriac and Ethiopic, both Semitic languages, took their writing systems from Semitic sources; Armenian, an Indo-European language of the Caucasus, created its own by the fifth century.

The surviving body of Coptic writing comprises examples of every genre one would expect to find in the cultural practice of any religiously defined socioethnic group, including hymns.

Every Christian tradition from the earliest records has a hymn tradition. More than sixty years ago Oswald Burmester wrote, “Coptic hymnography is a vast virgin forest, beyond whose confines no Coptic or liturgical scholar has as yet penetrated.”⁶ That remains the case today. This rich repertoire remains unknown to scholarship and has on only a very few occasions become an object of curiosity for the pious Westerner rummaging around in Eastern liturgies in search of “spiritual gems,”⁷ or for that matter the pious Easterner seeking to demonstrate the glories of his or her tradition. Questions of matters so basic as dating, attribution, and authorship remain unasked. No investigator has ever even begun to sift through the (admittedly vast) amount of preserved material to ask questions such as: what is early? What is late? Who wrote these texts? What, if any, models did the composers have?⁸ Who was their audience? In addition, most of the extant material has been transmitted in very late manuscripts (even of Ottoman date), so one must ask what changes took place when material in the earlier, Sahidic (southern) dialect of Coptic was paraphrased or reworked into the later, Bohairic (northern) dialect. In my previous work I have termed Coptic hymnody “the authentic singing voice of a people.”⁹ I have now begun to use the methodological toolkit of oral-formulaic theory to hack a path into the virgin forest. It has been stated that the Parry-Lord hypothesis has now been applied to over a hundred language traditions: Coptic is not yet one of them.¹⁰

There are three main parts of the repertoire of Coptic hymnody. The first is the “Psalmody of the Year,”¹¹ arranged according to the days of the

⁶ 1938:141, quoted in Borsari 1971:74.

⁷ An example is Cramer 1969; see MacCoull 2000 for a comparable Coptic effort to reappropriate the past.

⁸ On Coptic *troparia* and the possible role of the Jerusalem liturgy as a model, see Quecke 1978:182-83, 186.

⁹ MacCoull 1989:41; cf. MacCoull 1984:4.

¹⁰ See Foley 1985:681-85; see also Foley 1988:1, 57, 108. Coptic does not fit under either “Byzantine Greek” or “Egyptian” (the latter meaning Ancient Egyptian), in these sources.

¹¹ See Brogi 1962.

week and including moveable feast seasons: a subset of this category is the hymns for Advent, the month of Choiak (December) leading up to Christmas. The second is the *Theotokia* or corpus of hymns to the Virgin Mary (the *Theotokos*, “Mother of God”),¹² also arranged by days of the week. The third is the so-called *Antiphonarium*, or in Arabized-apocopated form *Difnar*,¹³ hymns for fixed saints’ feast days of the twelve months (an “antiphon” being conceived of as what is termed “proper,” a function of the calendar day or assigned to that day). I have begun working with the third category, the hymns for saints’ days, often referred to as “versified hagiography” (cf. Mossay 1996) and thought of as just renderings into simple, mnemonic verse of the stories in the late Copto-Arabic *Synaxarion* (compiled as late as the 1240s).¹⁴ However, it appears after scrutiny that this judgment is only partly true: quite often *Synaxarion* material is left out and new material inserted in its place. Again, we must ask the basic questions about dating, about what is earlier and what is later.

There are occasional dating clues in the material as it stands. Obviously, if the story being related is that of a neomartyr put to death by the Arabs or of a patriarch of the tenth century, or of an ascetic of the fourteenth, like Barsauma the Naked,¹⁵ the composition cannot predate the event. If linguistic clues such as a misunderstanding owing to Arabic language forms appear, the hymn comes from a time when Arabic had replaced Coptic as the language understood by Egyptian Christians (for example, Aristobulus from the book of Acts becomes “Aristo of Boulos,” Paul, Boulos being the Arabic form of Paul¹⁶). On the other hand, memories of events from the early classic period of Coptic church history are well preserved, for example the eclipse of the sun during the patriarchate of Cyril in the fifth century,¹⁷ or the building of a church to

¹² See O’Leary 1923.

¹³ See O’Leary 1926-29.

¹⁴ See Suter and Suter 1994.

¹⁵ O’Leary 1926-29:iii, 51-52.

¹⁶ O’Leary 1926-29:ii, 77-78.

¹⁷ O’Leary 1926-29:i, 32. The date, however, given by the hymn as 10 Phaophi (7 October), is a bit off; see Schove 1984:72-73, who gives the historically correct date of 19 July 418 CE.

the Forty-Nine Martyrs of Sketis during that of Theodosius in the sixth century.¹⁸

The *Antiphonarium* as we have it, from the first month, Thoth (September), through the twelfth, Mesore (August), including the five intercalary days at the end of the year, Nesi, is preserved complete only in very late Ottoman-era manuscripts in the Vatican Library and the John Rylands University Library at Manchester, manuscripts that have Arabic-language headings for each day (while the hymn texts are in Bohairic Coptic).¹⁹ Earlier partial Antiphoners are scarce. Pierpont Morgan Library MSS M575 (dated 893/94 CE)²⁰ and M574 (dated 897/98 CE)²¹ contain Sahidic hymns for feast days: commemorations of angels, apostles, martyrs, bishops and patriarchs, military saints, monastic founders, even church councils. Both these manuscripts were written for the famous Fayum monastery of St Michael the Archangel at Hamouli. Often the hymns are in the form of alphabetic acrostics,²² in which each strophe begins with a successive letter of the Greek-Coptic alphabet. Already in this late ninth-century material we are encountering what is clearly a fully developed form with a long life behind it. Two thirteenth- to fourteenth-century partial Bohairic antiphoners written in the Wadi Natrun monastery of St. Macarius are known in the collection of the Hamburg State and University Library.²³ MS. 165 (Hymn. 2) omits the months of Phamenoth and Pharmouthi (March and April) since they are largely taken up with Lent and Eastertide. (The other, MS 194 [Hymn. 31], is not really an antiphoner since eight of its eleven leaves have hymns to Christ not pegged to any calendar dates). In addition, a fourteenth-century antiphoner (dated to 1385 CE) written at the Red Sea monastery of St. Antony has begun to be studied in part, revealing that its text has both similarities to and differences from that preserved in

¹⁸ O’Leary 1926-29:ii, 27.

¹⁹ O’Leary 1926-29:i, i.

²⁰ So Depuydt (1993:107-12), who gives a date before 29 August 893 CE, and calls the hymns “antiphons;” cf. Cramer 1968:207.

²¹ So Depuydt 1993:113-21; cf. Kuhn and Tait 1996:1-2.

²² See Kuhn and Tait 1996:10-11.

²³ Störk 1995:335-40, 402-4.

the late Ottoman copies, a fact that perhaps points to a remote common ancestor.²⁴

From all this it is apparent that the corpus of Coptic hymns for fixed saints' days comes from a monastic context. The hymns would have been sung at a morning and an evening canonical hour in the auditory space of a monastic church.²⁵ The hymns would have been experienced as texts, as recitations, and as material for meditative listening. They actively integrated devotional life and sacred musical practice both for the monks of the community and for any village laypeople who might have been present. For each day we have, in the later whole-year collection, two hymns, either both on the same saint or, more often, the second celebrating another saint commemorated on the same day as the calendar grew more crowded. Both hymns are in four-line strophes, the form universally employed for these compositions. The first hymn text of each pair is in the shorter quatrain-strophic meter known as "Adam" (from the first word of the first line of the pattern, "Adam was sad" [*Adam eti efoi*]); there are three stresses per line. The second of each pair is in the longer quatrain-strophic meter known as "Batos" (meaning "bush," from the pattern "The bush that Moses saw" [*pi-Batos eta-Môusês nau erof*]); there are four stresses per line.²⁶ In nearly all cases each hymn text closes with a standard final strophe: for the shorter meter it is "By the prayers / of the holy N. / may the Lord have mercy on us / and forgive our sins"; for the longer it is "Entreat the Lord for us, / O holy N. the [martyr, monk, bishop, virgin, etc.], / that he may have mercy on us / and forgive us our sins." In addition, a very few special closing strophes are found.

As is the case in various areas of the late antique and medieval graphic worlds, Coptic hymnographic manuscripts use various types of minimal visual cues to inform the reader that the material being written down is poetry, in fact strophic poetry.²⁷ Most of the time only strophes, not individual lines, manifest a separation marked by more than a simple point. In the alphabetic-acrostic Antiphoner poems recorded in the late

²⁴ Cramer 1968:210; see Krause 1998:158.

²⁵ Taft 1986:249-59. In addition, it might be possible, had we more evidence, to make a connection between a day's hymn and the decoration of the liturgical space, emphasizing continuity with the rituals of an earlier age, as has been done for the Hebrew *piyyutim* in late antiquity by Laderman (1997:5-6, 8, 12).

²⁶ Adapted from Borsai 1980:25, 41. See Appendix: Examples 1.1 and 1.2.

²⁷ Cf. O'Brien O'Keefe 1990:3-6, 21-23, 25-26.

ninth-century Fayum manuscripts, which use a broad single-column format, the first letter of each strophe, important for the acrostic, is usually enlarged and decorated.²⁸ Line division is marked within each strophe by a raised dot, strophe-end by a double stroke. By the time of the very late copies in two-column format, copies that manifest a lack of comprehension of the Coptic language itself, often the attempted pointing of line division is erroneous. Readers/reciters would have had to bring a great deal of knowledge with them to the decoding of the text, including expectations engendered by the formulaic qualities, in order to perform the hymn aloud.

The Coptic language operates with a strong stress-accent,²⁹ and, so far as the matter has been studied at all,³⁰ only the number of stresses per line was counted, not the number of syllables. This is what is termed tonic versification.³¹ Yet it is not exactly the same as what we encounter in Anglo-Saxon verse, inasmuch as the latter counts stresses in employing a half-line structure that comes to engender its own pattern-based alliterative phraseology.³² Thus in Coptic the noun will bear a stress, but usually not the preposition and article preceding it: for example, *róme* (“man”) has one stress in two syllables, but *hitn-p-róme* (“from the man”) still has only one stress in five syllables. When the Coptic language adopted the Greek alphabet it took on long and short vowels (represented by ϵ/η , o/ω), yet we find no attempts at achieving “quantitative”-style versification as are found in Hebrew, Arabic, and Syriac.

Four-line strophic form is as old as Judeo-Christian hymnody in the Mediterranean. It is inconceivable that the impulse to compose this type of text did not take root in Coptic-speaking Christian Egypt as well, probably as early as the fourth century, the heyday of the classic quatrain or “Ambrosian stanza,” which itself had eastern roots in both its quantitative and its accentual form. Later, Coptic hymns come to exhibit all the features

²⁸ Kuhn and Tait 1996:viii-ix.

²⁹ Lambdin 1983:xv-xvi; see also Kasser 1995.

³⁰ Junker 1908-11 and Säve-Söderbergh 1949 are the only attempts to explicate Coptic meter: in the first case as strophic poetry, in the second as Manichaean psalms.

³¹ Gasparov 1996:92-96.

³² Cf. Foley 1990:106-7, 116-19, 201-4. Furthermore, in Coptic hymns enjambement occurs only rarely; the single line is almost always the unit.

typical of the other language groups: acrostics³³ (found in Greek, Syriac, and Hebrew), refrains, and simple or elaborate rhymes. No one has yet sought out this putative early stratum of the Coptic repertoire, but in all of these early and classical-era (fourth- through early seventh-century) compositions the writer's goal was a didactic one—to be easily understood by the congregation and to transmit doctrinal content.³⁴ The composers combined learned and folklore elements into texts that reflected their religious thought-world and their own culture. Egypt too should be included in this realm.

I proceed now to Coptic hymns and what I perceive to be the oral-formulaic traits of their composition. It must be remembered that every ballad, as it were, tells a story.

Since Coptic hymnographic compositions are transmitted in writing, they manifest the secondary stage of oral-formulaic composition, the stage in which the texts are written down. This amounts to an embodiment of what has been termed “residual orality.”³⁵ Elements are selected from memory according to criteria of appropriateness and then assembled on the written page. What provided the clue that I was dealing with a body of oral-formulaic compositions was the recurrence of stock openings and stock opening strophes, often subject to variation according to the meter (A[dam] or B[atos]) (Appendix: Examples 1.1 and 1.2, 2 A and B). Since earlier investigators had simply looked up one or two individual texts, they did not notice the repetitions and recurrences. In addition, the few musicologists in the field (mostly women), employing an ethnographic approach, concentrated on recording items as they existed in churches in the 1960s, and did not ask any historical questions about the development of the observed material. (Gender may also play a role: since the culture of the Coptic Orthodox Church is totally male, female field investigators may well have been handicapped in their data collection.) As will be seen, in the

³³ In one doubtful Greco-Coptic case, there is thought to be an acrostic spelling out the author's name: see Borsari 1971:75-76, n.14. Again no attempt to date the compositions was made by the early native investigator. See also Youssef 1998.

³⁴ Beck 1959:263; Martin 1996:695-96; and cf. Weinberger 1998:28-40.

³⁵ See, for example, O'Brien O'Keefe 1990:x.

Coptic realm we must address the interface between orality and textuality in a whole new way.³⁶

Opening formulas

Unlike reference works for the Latin West or Greek-speaking Byzantium (such as Follieri's *Initia Hymnorum*), until 1995 there was no listing of first lines for any collection of Coptic hymns, however restricted. In Störk's 1995 edition, however, we have a precious *Incipitsverzeichnis* (650-63) that makes this phenomenon of stock recurrence very easy to see. So too for the hymns of the Antiphoner. Very often recurring in the A meter are:

<i>Amôini têrou mphoou</i>	Come all today
or	
<i>Amôini mphoou têrou</i>	Come today all

—followed by “O orthodox people,” “O Christian flock,” “O believing ones,” or “and praise the glory / of Saint (name).”³⁷ Alternatively, “Come” in the singular can introduce *Amou sharon mphoou* (“Come to us today”) or its doublet *Amou mphoou sharon* (“Come today to us”), followed by a vocative, “O psalmist David,” “O evangelist (name),” or “O prophet (name),” and the conclusion “and inform us / about the honor / of Saint (name).”³⁸ Another plural “Come!” opening is Trinitarian (and doxological):

<i>Amôini marenhôs</i>	Come let us sing
<i>e-p-Christos Iêsous</i>	to Christ Jesus
<i>nem pef-Iôt n-agathos</i>	and his good Father
<i>nem pi-Pneuma ethouaab</i>	and the Holy Spirit.

³⁶ On the “transtemporal” recreative process in Coptic hymns and how formulaic material can undergo change, substitution, condensation/expansion, displacement, and contamination, I have learned much from Goldberg 1999:e.g., x-xi.

³⁷ O’Leary 1926-29:i, 1; i, 69 and elsewhere. The variant order *mphoou têrou* is much less frequent than the preferred order *têrou mphoou*, indicating that it is the latter that became a fixed formula (cf. Störk 1995:652).

³⁸ O’Leary 1926-29:i, 2; i, 7; i, 39. Again *mphoou* is found most often in final position in the line.

It continues, “And let us tell / of the glory and honor / of Saint (name), / the holy [martyr, monk, bishop, virgin etc.]” Of course, the “Come let us...” opening is extremely generative with vocatives: “O come, orthodox ones / Christians / believers” (similar to above) and with verbs: “Come let us worship / tell of / praise /...”³⁹

Besides *Amôini*, another first element also beginning with the letter A and handy if an alphabetic acrostic is being constructed is *Alêthôs*, “Truly”:

<i>Alêthôs ekmpsha</i>	Truly you are worthy
<i>nhannishti n-taio</i>	of great honor,
<i>O ...</i>	O holy (name) / the (adjective+noun)

([adjective+noun] can be phrases such as “the brave martyr” or “the good shepherd,” etc.); or “Truly great / is your honor” (*Alêthôs nnishti / epeptaio*)....⁴⁰ Also frequent is an initial verb in the first person singular future:

<i>Ainaerhêts pi-atmpsha</i>	I shall undertake, though unworthy,
or	
<i>Ainaerhêts n-ou-chishshôou</i>	I shall undertake with desire
<i>esaji e-pi-taio ...</i>	to speak of the honor
	(of the holy (name)/ the [adjective+noun]). ⁴¹

At the other end of the alphabet, as one might expect, “O” (ω) is a productive opening ploy, generating the beginnings of various stock strophes. Two favorites are:

<i>Ô uniatk nthok</i>	O blessed are you,
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continuing “O holy (name), / for you ... / and ...”: “for you fought for Christ / and won the crown”; “for you left behind / the things of this world,” etc.; and (another favorite beginning with “O”):

<i>Ô nim pethnash saji</i>	O who will be able to speak
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—“of the honor and glory / of the holy (name) / the (adjective+noun)?”

³⁹ O’Leary 1926-29:i, 5; i, 9; i, 16; i, 20; i, 40.

⁴⁰ O’Leary 1926-29: i, 14; i, 25.

⁴¹ O’Leary 1926-29:ii, 8; i, 40; i, 75; i, 91.

For the longer B(atos) meter too there is a recognizable and recurring inventory of stock opening strophes. In this case we again find the letter-A beginnings:

Alêthôs afshai nan mphoou Truly it is a feast for us today,⁴²

—leading into or followed by “your honored commemoration, / O holy (name), / the (adjective+noun).” Also frequent with *alêthôs* is:

Alêthôs ttoi nshphêri Truly I marvel,

—continuing “and my mind is amazed, / in speaking of your honor, / O holy (name).” Other favorite openings in A are *Ash las nrem nsarx* (“What tongue of a man of flesh,” introducing “will be able to praise you / and sing [/tell] of your honor, / O holy (name) the [noun]?”),⁴³ and *Aina ouôn nrôî esaji* (“I shall open my mouth to speak,” continuing “I, the unworthy [/the sinner], / of the honor and glory / of the holy N.”). Also beginning with A and with its length fitting most comfortably in the B meter we have the “Once upon a time” opening line: *Afshôpi hen pai ehoou etouaab* (“It happened on this holy day”)⁴⁴ or *Afshôpi hen niehoou etmmau* (“It came to pass in those days”),⁴⁵ the latter taken from the liturgical introduction to the reading of a Gospel pericope.⁴⁶

⁴² O’Leary 1926-29:i, 74; ii, 62; cf. i, 28. This very line is also found as the opening of prose encomiastic homilies, e.g. an instance at Worrell 1923:251, a homily on the Virgin that begins (in Sahidic) *Alêthôs afsha nan mpoou*. This correspondence raises the interesting chicken-and-egg question of whether the homilist was using a catchy hymn-opening known to him and his audience or else the hymn writer was using a device known from oratory. More likely it was the former: see Allen 1996:165 and Cunningham 1996:180, 182-83.

⁴³ O’Leary 1926-29:i, 36. This opening is also found in prose encomia, e.g. Worrell 1923:137, a homily on the archangel Gabriel that begins with the rhetorical question *Ash ñlas ñsarx ê tapro ñrôme petnashjô mpektaiô* (“What tongue of flesh or mouth of man will be able to speak of your honor?”). For that matter, it is also found in some Synaxarion entries: see Suter and Suter 1994:402, 410, 473.

⁴⁴ O’Leary 1926-29:i, 4, *Thoth* 4 (1 Sept.), St. Macarius.

⁴⁵ O’Leary 1926-29:i, 49, *Hathyr* 1 (28 Oct.), St. Cleophas.

⁴⁶ For a delightful example of a hagiographical folktale hymn with this sort of opening, see Example 3 (Appendix).

The longer B meter also often employs the hortatory and/or doxological stock opening:

<i>Marenhôs nteniôou</i>	Let us sing and glorify
<i>n-pen-Joeis Iêsous p-Christos</i>	our Lord Jesus Christ
<i>nem pef-Iôt n-agathos</i>	and his good Father
<i>nem pi-Pneuma ethouaab</i>	and the Holy Spirit.

Indeed, this pattern becomes widely manipulable, and many other items can be inserted into the appropriate slots: “Let us worship / sing to / glorify // [divine figure (name)], // and let us honor / praise / tell the deeds of // [Saint (name) the (noun)].”⁴⁷ There are also many variations on the Trinitarian doxological opening strophe in B meter:

<i>Tenouôshst m-p-Iôt n-agathos</i>	We worship the good Father
<i>nem pef-Shêri Iêsous p-Christos</i>	and his Son Jesus Christ
<i>nem pi-Pneuma pi-Paraklêton</i>	and the Spirit, the Paraclete,
<i>ti-Trias ethouaab n-homoousios</i>	the holy, consubstantial Trinity.

—often introducing a next strophe that goes, “And we venerate the holy (name), / the ...(adjective+noun)..., / who ...(did this)... / and ...(did that)....” *Tenouôshst* (“We worship”) is the opening word of a hymn found as part of the eucharistic liturgy.⁴⁸ Also found is “We worship the Father without beginning / and his incomprehensible Son / and the life-giving Spirit, / one Godhead (one sole and only),”⁴⁹ showing that a great deal of sophisticated theological content can be fit into this small space. This formula can also be found in a form ending “For this is our God, us, the Christians,” a phrase also found in medieval Coptic manuscript colophons that have a Trinitarian invocation clause.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Compare also the longer, two-strophe variable form seen in O’Leary 1926-29:ii, 101, Amôini nteniôou / m-pen-ch(oei)s Iê(sou)s / penouro pe-Ch(risto)s / pi-mairômi n-agathos // ouoh nentaio / nnefmartyros / ete Abba Iesson / nem Abba Iôsêph // (“Come let us glorify / our Lord Jesus / our King, Christ, / who loves humankind and is good // and let us honor / his martyrs / Abba Iesson / and Abba Joseph//”) with ii,106, in which the same first strophe is followed by Ouoh nentaio / mpai-martyros / pi-hagios ymeôn / pi-episkopos (“and let us honor / this martyr / the holy Symeon / the bishop”)

⁴⁸ Robertson 1985:83-84 n.4.

⁴⁹ O’Leary 1926-29:i, 9.

⁵⁰ An example is the thirteenth-century MS Coptic Museum Lit. 309: see Hunt and MacCoull forthcoming.

There are many other stock openings to be listed in an eventual *Initia Hymnorum Coptorum*; I will mention just two more: *Rashe shôpe mphoou (nan)* (“Joy happens today (for us,) / (introducing) in heaven and on earth, / because of the holy commemoration / of Saint (name) the [adjective+noun]”); and *Tinaerhêts hn-ou-shishoou* (“I shall undertake with desire / (introducing) to speak of your honor, / O holy (name) / the [adjective+noun]”) (cf. above). There is a delightful, though sad, example of the latter in Example 4 (Appendix), an abridged version of the “Ballad of Archellites,” dated to the tenth century but surely preserving monastic legend from an early period.⁵¹ The topos is that of a male saint who vows never to see a woman’s face, even if the woman should be his mother.

Many other stock items are instantly discernible in perusing the hymns collected in the Antiphoner. Saints are praised in stock strophes beginning “O this is the one who was worthy”: “to receive the crown / to guard the flock / to dwell with the angels,” and so on. There are stock strophes to describe the end of the saint’s life and how he or she goes to heaven: “He received the unfading crown / of martyrdom, / he kept feast with Christ / in his kingdom [or: in the land of the living]”; “He heard the voice / full of joy, / ‘Well done, thou good / and faithful servant’” (the last also a trope used in manuscript colophons). Holy persons and things are called by stock epithets just like their Homeric counterparts. For example, St. Cyril of Alexandria is always called “the lion-cub,” for which I find no parallel in Greek hagiography;⁵² and the Scriptures (taught and commented on by bishop and patriarch saints) are always *nnifi ntephnouti* “of the breath of God,” a direct calque of θεόπνευστος.⁵³ John the Baptist is always “kinsman of the Lord.”⁵⁴ The expectedly plentiful Bible allusions are introduced by stock couplets: “As it is said / in the holy Gospel,” “As David sang / in his holy Psalter,” or “As [prophet’s name] said / in his prophecy.” The task of collecting the repertoire of these stock descriptive elements has only just begun.

⁵¹ Kuhn 1991:1985; Junker 1908-11.

⁵² O’Leary 1926-29:i, 11; i, 21.

⁵³ O’Leary 1926-29: ii, 42.

⁵⁴ O’Leary 1926-29: i, 2; ii, 59.

Types of saints and their hymns

Saints of the calendar fall, of course, into categories: martyrs, bishops, patriarchs, monks and hermits, holy women (ascetics or mothers), apostles, as well as Old Testament figures, celestial archangels, and so on. Delehayé showed long ago that the most formulaic of all stories in hagiography are the martyr passions, which he termed an epic genre.⁵⁵ Martyr hymns are also the most formulaically composed, whether they narrate the sufferings of a martyr of the Diocletianic persecution or of a neomartyr under Islamic rule. Indeed, the later martyrs are presented in the guise of, or really as being just like, the earlier ones. Example 5 (Appendix) is the story of three martyrs probably put to death by the caliph al-Hakim around 1000 CE, but presented as though they were early Christians in the arena. The “hegemons” might as well be Roman governors and the “tyrant” Diocletian; the martyrs proclaim that Christ is their God and they will not serve demons, just like Sts. Theodore or Victor. The final phrase, “to our last breath,” is a quotation from the eucharistic acclamation introduced after the consecration by Patriarch Gabriel III in the twelfth century (hence helping to date this version of the hymn): “I believe, I believe, I believe and I confess to my last breath that this is truly His body that He took from the Virgin, and that it was united to His Divinity and not separated from it for even the twinkling of an eye.”⁵⁶

For another neomartyr story consider Example 6 (Appendix), the story of an apostate who abandoned the Christian faith of his birth to pursue Islamic state service but was shamed by his sister into returning, a return for which he paid with his life.⁵⁷ It is notable that *narion*, the word for a kind of belt put on by the hero, must mean one of the items of distinctive clothing required for Christians by medieval Islamic legislation. “He confessed and did not deny” is from the words of John the Baptist: thus the neomartyr is a new John, proclaiming that though he must decrease, Christ must increase (John 1:20, 3:30). The popularity of martyr stories has never waned even up to the present:⁵⁸ the reason usually given is that these stories

⁵⁵ Delehayé 1921; see most recently Clarysse 1995.

⁵⁶ *Liturgy* 1964:13 (giving a translation different from the present one [which is my own]).

⁵⁷ See Suter and Suter 1994:248-49. Note that the saint is a homonym of Dioscorus, the arch-defender of the Coptic separation from Chalcedon in the fifth century.

⁵⁸ See Mayeur-Jaouen 1997; MacCoull forthcoming

of joyfully sought heroic death served to strengthen a persecuted community whose members might find themselves facing execution at any time. They also, I believe, served to warn them of corruption in high places and to keep alive the primal Mediterranean drive for revenge in a culture in which the satisfaction of payback might well be slow in coming. Coptic culture was haunted by the past, and in the endlessly repeated, formulaically composed martyr hymns we see Copts expressing their need to redefine the past, which itself was signposted with dates computed according to the “Era of the Martyrs.”⁵⁹

The other categories of saint, besides martyrs, also have their stock epithets, lines, and strophes. A martyr is greeted with the following kind of salutation:

Hail to you, fair fighter,
noble gladiator,
brave combatant
for the name of Christ:

You received the imperishable crown
of martyrdom,
you kept feast with Christ
and all his holy ones,⁶⁰

with variants slotted in. Correspondingly, a monastic ascetic is apostrophized in formulaic addresses such as this:

What tongue of man can express
the pains you underwent

⁵⁹ Youssef (1996:75-76) mistakenly thought the subject of verses found in a late nineteenth- early twentieth-century MS in the diocesan museum of Beni Suef might have been a neomartyr personally known to the copyist (in fact he is an early Alexandrian saint attested in Delehay 1923:74). But the strophes were clearly put together in oral-formulaic fashion by a Copt struggling with the language. Each stock line is juxtaposed with the next, with no factual content about the martyr’s life, just the usual “We praise you, / O perfect man, / O holy (name), / beloved of Christ” and so on. There is even an abbreviated cue for an expected doxology at the end. Youssef (a local amateur) is creating a neomartyr out of a felt need. Cf. Mayeur-Jaouen (1998:156, 183), who surprisingly downplays the neomartyrs.

⁶⁰ Cf., e.g., O’Leary 1926-29:ii, 20: Ô ni-athlitês n-genneos / ouoh nirefmishi nkalôs ... (“O noble athletes / and fair fighters”), and i, 24: Ethbe phai <a>p-Ch(risto)s / pinouti n-alêthinos / ti ehrêi ejôk / m-pi-khlom nte p-ôou... (“Because of this Christ / the true God / put upon you / the crown of glory”).

subduing your body
in the angelic life?

You forsook
all the transitory glory
and the possessions
of this world.⁶¹

A bishop or patriarch is celebrated with strophes like the following:

He sat on his throne
by the will of God;
he illuminated the Church
with his holy teachings.

As a good shepherd
he did works of mercy
for the poor and needy,
for the widows and orphans.

He fulfilled [x] years
in the high-priestship;
he yielded up his spirit,
he went to his rest.⁶²

Hymns on apostles tell the story of Christ's calling them, quoting variants of Psalm 19:4, "Their sound is gone out into all lands, and their words to the ends of the earth";⁶³ while those on holy women employ their own formula sets praising typically either their virginity or their care for

⁶¹ Cf., e.g., O'Leary 1926-29:i, 88-89: *Af-er-kataphronin / m-p-ôou nte pai-kosmos / nem tef-metouro / ethbe p-Ch(risto)s Iê(sou)s* ("He despised / the glory of this world / and its kingdom / because of Jesus Christ"); see also ii, 85-86.

⁶² Cf., e.g., O'Leary 1926-29:ii, 58: *Afshôpi hi p-thronos / n-han-mêsh n-rompi / nem ounishti n-sêou / shantef-er-hello* ("He was on the throne / many years / for a long time / until he grew old"); ii, 75: *Akamoni m-pi-ohi / n-logikon ethou(aab) / nte Iê(sou)s p-Ch(risto)s / hen pitoubo [m]pek-hêt* ("You governed the flock, / the holy, rational one, / of Jesus Christ, / in the purity of your heart").

⁶³ O'Leary 1926-29:iii, 7: *...phê eta pefseji phoh / sha syrêjs ntioikomanê [l. oikoumênê]* ("whose words have gone out / to the ends of the inhabited world").

children or aged parents.⁶⁴ There are even stock hymns where the name of the saint is simply left to be filled in. An example of this last type is:

Truly great
is the glory and the honor
of our blessed father
Abba N. (*nim*)

Everyone wishing
to serve God
will be zealous for his life (*bios*)
and his way of life (*politeia*).

And truly
he despised
the glory of this world
that will pass away.

Truly justly
he followed God
with his whole heart
since he was little.⁶⁵

As time went on, more saints came to be added to the calendar, and so when a hymn was needed to be composed honoring and recounting the life of a twelfth-century patriarch or a thirteenth-century neomartyr, stock material was drawn on. Monasteries were the centers where Coptic learning was preserved. A monastic hymn composer, like an African praise-singer, could carry in his head a stock repertoire of epithets, lines, couplets, and strophes corresponding to the category of saint, and could deploy them according to the requirements of subject and form—a form by now deeply traditional and second nature. Clues reside in the variants so often found. For example, there are three words for “blessed,” a commonly used epithet: *smarôout* / *smamaat*, *naiat*- + suffix, and the Greek loanword *makarios*. The composer would want to slot in the one that fit best in a certain position in the line, or for variety. So too there are three words for “rejoice”: *rashi*, *ounof*, and *thelêl*. For storytelling purposes there are two

⁶⁴ For example, the family virtues of St. Sarah, “the daughter / of Christian parents / in Upper Egypt / pleasing to God” (*ousheri de n-han-rômi / n-Chrêstianos / hen-ph-marês n-Khêmi / eurenaf m-Ph(nou)ti*): O’Leary 1926-29:ii, 74.

⁶⁵ O’Leary 1926-29:iii, 25.

names for the city of Alexandria: *Alexandria* and the native *Rhakote*: sometimes both words are found in the same poem. A close analysis of the ways in which these variants are employed should throw light on how composers stitched a whole structure together by employing a specialized register of speech, the varying requirements of which determined the usages.⁶⁶

We associate oral-formulaic composition with folk poetry, and indeed folkloric motifs are plentifully interwoven in Coptic hymn texts. Example 7 (Appendix) is from the versified legend of John Khame, who died in 859 CE. What we find is a version of the love motif of “Out of her grave grew a red rose, and out of his grew a briar,” reworked and transposed into the realm of the asexual love of John and his female ascetic companion, with the twining grapevine (symbolizing the eucharist) growing over them. Example 8 (Appendix), for its part, is the Ballad of Apa Victor, one of the most popular martyrs of the Great Persecution and a powerful patron saint. The repetitions are pure folksong: “I left my father, I left my mother”: “My Father will be your father, My Mother will be your mother.” Equally to be found in the index of folk motifs⁶⁷ is the story of Peter the tax collector, told as a hymn for his feast on 25 Tybi (20 January)⁶⁸:

Peter was a tax collector, hard-hearted and merciless. A poor man came to seek bread. He (P.) took bread in great anger and threw it at the poor man. Then he saw in a dream both good men and sinners, with a great balance scale in the middle. They took the bread and put it in the balance: by God’s mercy it came down on the side of salvation. At this he awoke in great trembling; he distributed all his goods and gave them to the poor, ending his life as a monk in Sketis.

This story, known from Anastasius Bibliothecarius (PL 73:357-58), was told all over the Mediterranean and is here transposed from Constantinople to Egypt, as are many others.⁶⁹

Pilgrimage too was a great motivation for Coptic hymn composition,⁷⁰ and many are the hymns to monastic founders describing

⁶⁶ See Foley 1995:49-53, 82-92, 150-75.

⁶⁷ Goldberg 1997:137.

⁶⁸ O’Leary 1926-29:ii, 25-26.

⁶⁹ Wilfong 1996:352, 356.

⁷⁰ See Frankfurter 1998.

how “people come from all over the *oikoumênê* to make offerings to your holy *topos* [place].”⁷¹ Hymns describing the finding or translation of relics were clearly intended to promote local cults and generate pilgrim traffic. Example 9 (Appendix) is the hymn for the (re-)consecration of the monastery church of St. Antony near the Red Sea.⁷² Probably composed as late as the thirteenth century, it borrows elements from the chants of the liturgical service for the dedication of a church: the gate of heaven, Jacob’s ladder, the tabernacle with the Ark, and so on.

The fixed cycle of dates in the calendar year (as against the movable cycle dependent on the date of Easter) includes numerous feasts of Christ with fixed dates, such as the Nativity, Epiphany/Baptism, Transfiguration, and so on, as well as fixed feasts of the Virgin such as the Annunciation, Presentation, Dormition, and Assumption (these last two being separate in the Coptic tradition). In addition, the twenty-first of each month is a special Marian commemoration, and Example 10 (Appendix) is a hymn for such a day, that for 21 Mecheir (15 February), with strophes beginning with Ζ, zeta. It is in alphabetical series with the hymn quoted at the opening of his article, the one from the third month, Hathyr, in which the strophes begin with Γ, three. For the last two months of the calendar, Epeiph (July) and Mesore (August), the strophes begin with the first two of the additional letters added to the Greek alphabet to write Coptic: shai (Ϡ = sh) and fai (Ϣ = f). Clearly this is an intra-Coptic development upon which the hymn composers expended lavish amounts of theological and doctrinal embellishment. Investigation of how these fixed Marian hymns from the Antiphoner are related to those in the *Theotokia* has not yet been undertaken.

Theological content

Doctrines, indeed particularly doctrines peculiar to the Coptic church, are formulations for which Coptic hymnography is often the vehicle. Example 11.1 (Appendix) on the Incredulity of Thomas incorporates the folk exegesis of how Thomas’s hand was burned as a result of its having been thrust into Christ’s wounds. Development of popular doctrine is also seen in many hymns that go beyond their prose prototypes in the *Synaxarion*. A story is told of a Christian woman in fourth-century Antioch

⁷¹ Kuhn and Tait 1996:142-43.

⁷² See Coquin and Martin 1991:722.

married to a pagan who wanted to bring her children to Patriarch Peter of Alexandria (martyred in 313 CE) for baptism; the story is told as evidence for the practice of mass baptisms at Easter Vigil.⁷³ In the Antiphoner hymn for 25 Pharmouthi (20 April) we find the following version of the story⁷⁴:

There arose a great
storm in the sea;
the boat came near
to being destroyed.

The believing woman
feared for her children
lest they should die
before receiving baptism.

She pricked her breast,
she took from her blood,
she sealed (σφραγίζειν)
her children with it.

She baptized them
with her holy hands
in the name of the holy,
consubstantial Trinity.

She got to Rhakote,
to Abba Peter,
that he might baptize them
with water.

Our holy father
reassured her
that God had baptized them
at that time.

This story of female courage must have given hope to a persecuted medieval community for whom having children baptized was often problematic, owing to the scarcity of ingredients for the required chrism

⁷³ See Hassab Alla 1985:46-49, including reference to the *Synaxarion* version; the story is attributed by the late writer Ibn Kabar to the time of Patriarch Theophilus (385-412 CE): *idem*:49.

⁷⁴ O'Leary 1926-29:ii, 112-13.

(deliberately engineered by the Islamic state), and who feared that those children might indeed undergo the “baptism of blood” at any time. Casting the story into versified form illustrates the composer’s facility at construing his tale in line-units that maintain the suspense for the listeners conscious of the emotional effect.

Most of all, the Coptic church defined itself over against and in opposition to the Chalcedonian, Dyophysite confessions. Explicit and strong Monophysite convictions are sung out in Example 11.2 (Appendix), where the miracle at Cana manifests the power of Christ’s single nature and refutes the Chalcedonians, and in Example 11.3 (Appendix), which exalts the great Monophysite culture hero Severus of Antioch, whose burial place at the Enaton monastery outside Alexandria was a pilgrimage goal for Monophysite believers from Armenia to Ethiopia. Singing this material must have felt like singing “Joe Hill” or “We Shall Overcome” for partisans of the cause.⁷⁵

In the late period we find elaboration of rhyme schemes and metrical patterns. Often Greek loanwords provide the rhymes. In what appears to be a very late manuscript⁷⁶ we find some half-dozen hymns with an elaborate form of tercets with a rhyming refrain: aaa+ref., bbb+ref., ccc+ref. Twice in this group the writer actually records his name, Nicodemus,⁷⁷ in the last strophe (Appendix: Example 12.1). The following example reveals a transformation from orality to textuality. In a reverse alphabetic acrostic working back to the letter alpha he writes (in the last three strophes of Example 12.2 [Appendix]):

<i>Ge p-sepi n-ni-klêros</i>	And the rest of the clergy,
<i>ni-presbyteros nem diakonos</i>	the priests and deacons,
<i>aritou nshphêr hen tek-klêronomos:</i>	make them sharers in your inheritance:
<i>khô nêi.</i>	Forgive me.
<i>Bon niben nte nipistos</i>	All of the faithful

⁷⁵ Cf. Harrison 1999:111, 124: “a strongly oppositional identity, an identity founded on suffering and resistance” that used “a performed discourse of empowerment.” Coptic identity too was and is founded on suffering and opposition.

⁷⁶ O’Leary 1926-29:iii, ii. The manuscript was acquired by an Anglican cleric visiting the Red Monastery in Sohag in 1886 and given by him to the Bristol Museum.

⁷⁷ This writer is dated to the second half of the eighteenth century by Youssef 1994, and redated to the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century by Youssef 1998. Of course, encoding one’s own name acrostically was a late antique and medieval authorial practice from Romanos Melodes to Cynewulf.

<i>nilaos n-ni-Christianos</i> <i>opou ro nem nek-martyros:</i> <i>khô nêi.</i>	Christian people, number them with your martyrs/witnesses: Forgive me.
<i>Ari-pen-meeui p-Joeis pennouti</i> <i>hen pi-nai nem pi-sôti</i> <i>hen pi-ehoou etoi n-hoti:</i> <i>khô nêi.</i>	Remember us, O Lord our God, in mercy and salvation, on that day that is fearful: Forgive me.

With this sequence we have moved from orality to textuality and back again. The hymn writer at this late date has plucked phrases from his remembered knowledge of the Bible and the liturgy, and set them down on the page in a composition that deliberately highlights the rhyming homoioteleuton and sets off the refrain, which in its turn would be repeated by the congregation who heard it from the mouth of a reader.

Composition and language comprehension

Who composed these hymns? Who were their audience? How were they put together, and how did they bridge the gap between oral composition and being recorded in writing (and in what kind of writing)? How, in a language barely understood and in which there was virtually no active competence after about 1100 CE, could these texts be generated? To ask these questions and to attempt for the first time to answer them is to venture into the areas of language contact, language death, and even, in the very last phase, into the field of neurophysiology, the brain-hand connection.⁷⁸

As said above, it would be hard to believe that Christian Egypt did not feel the effects of the wave of religious quatrain composition that covered all the shores of the Mediterranean beginning in the fourth century. The writers of what must have been the earliest stratum of Coptic-language hymnography took that language, in which the Bible—Old and New Testaments and especially liturgical pericopes and the Psalter—previously existed, and also took up the tonic principle of verse-making that had already been manipulated by the writers/adapters of the Manichaean psalms and hymns known since the fourth century.⁷⁹ They would have composed hymns for the daily office, for the great universal feasts of the year, and for

⁷⁸ On this last area, cf. Davis 1989.

⁷⁹ For the most recent sources from Kellis, see Gardner 1996.

early saints already widely known, such as apostles and evangelists, as well as for revered patriarchs of their own region like Athanasius and beloved local patronal heroes like martyrs of the Great Persecution and early ascetics. To such early writers we may ascribe a doctrinal motivation like that impelling their counterparts in the Latin West and in Byzantium. The fact that these have not survived in early manuscript copies can be ascribed to the thoroughness of later destruction, both by Moslem policy and through excavators' preference for Pharaonic remains. We do know that by the sixth century Greek acrostic hymns composed in accentual couplets were liturgically employed at Monophysite Coptic monasteries in Upper Egypt.⁸⁰ The step from couplets to joining a pair of couplets into a quatrain is an easy one. An early version of this kind of combination might have been the model for the Coptic "Ambrosian stanza" that has not survived as such.

Between the first third of the eighth century and about the beginning of the eleventh century CE we move into a world of diglossia, even more thoroughgoing than that described in the classic studies on the medieval Latin West.⁸¹ It was a situation in which Egypt's Christians learned one language, Arabic, for the world of work while using another, Coptic, for family speech at home.⁸² In time even the latter was phased out, as children picked up Arabic from the other children around them and mothers stopped speaking Coptic to their children. Only in the church context and the ecclesiastical register was there continued use of the old liturgical language, now of course "sanctified" by its long association with the identification of religion and community identity.⁸³ By the early tenth century, as can be seen from some of the Pierpont Morgan Library Coptic manuscripts, at least in monasteries Coptic hymns and other texts (such as sermons and saints' lives) were still being copied and even composed by people who could control, command, and even generate the language, the *ductus* (the accustomed flow or manner of execution) of whose hands shows

⁸⁰ Crum, White, and Winlock 1926:ii, 127-30, 132-33, 309-14, 316-17; nos. 592-94, 598-605.

⁸¹ Cf. Irvine 1994:68-74 on how the "high" language was handled; for examples from the society of Anglo-Saxon England, 420-24.

⁸² See MacCough 1989; Wilfong 1998:184-86.

⁸³ As Foley asserts, "[a specialized register is] differently configured because it has a particular history and social function" (1996:25-27).

that they could understand what they were representing.⁸⁴ To use and a *fortiori* to generate a Coptic saint's hymn was a powerful cultural locator.

By the thirteenth century Coptic was a dead language, and, in order to educate priests and monks in how to perform the liturgy, Arabophone writers were producing "Introductions" and so-called "Ladders" (*scalae*), skeleton grammars with long vocabulary lists to equip professional religious people to recite the lections and other liturgical items. This was material one simply had to learn, rather like the way medieval Western churchmen had to internalize at least some elementary Latin. Now began the situation that held sway until the present, that of the church lector who has been taught to move his eyes left-to-right (instead of the right-to-left Arabic he uses in daily life) and orally produce sounds corresponding to marks on the page, but who has no comprehension of the meaning of these marks and cannot construe them.⁸⁵ In a situation like this, oral-formulaic technique coupled with memory would have constituted a strategy to generate new texts. Similarly, hymn manuscripts are known from as late as the nineteenth (and even the twentieth!) century,⁸⁶ the *ductus* of which shows that the writer was just painfully drawing shapes from his exemplar but did not comprehend, command, or feel comfortable with the process.⁸⁷ And yet these writers could produce formulaic Coptic-language manuscript colophons by stitching together words they managed to know how to put down.⁸⁸ Texts were copied as *aides-mémoire* that were thought worthy of preservation.

⁸⁴ Cf. Sirat 1994.

⁸⁵ A parallel case in the medieval Latin West is brilliantly described in Clanchy (1997:60): "Emphasis was put on the correct pronunciation of each letter because the next stage was to form syllables and then apply these rote-learned phonetic rules to reading Latin aloud. Accurate readers of Latin were produced by this method without their having to understand a word of the texts they voiced."

⁸⁶ An example is Störk 1996:illustration on p. 120 (MS. Hamburg 276, Hymn. 113, from the St. Macarius Monastery).

⁸⁷ Cf. note 78 above.

⁸⁸ An example is the bilingual "Ghali Gospels," dated 1801 CE, for which the colophon writer can put down in Coptic "Remember, O Lord, your servant, the poor writer ... the deacon John": see Bacot 1997, and letter from Bacot to the present writer dated February 2, 1998.

Conclusion

What monastic composers did for a monastic audience in the world of the Coptic church was to evolve a traditional and artificial diction that performed the function of keeping Coptic religious and cognitive culture alive.⁸⁹ Comparable to what happened in other language traditions, they encapsulated their inherent heritage in a repertoire of conventions. With pens in hand they drew on an internalized hoard of formulas in a language they still regarded as “sacred” and “special” to tell and preserve stories basic to who they were,⁹⁰ stories that were told and retold in the daily rhythms of church services. Like Balkan bards or reciters of Japanese war epics, but using an even more remote instrument, the as yet unknown Coptic hymn composers, monastic writers or traveling reciters,⁹¹ continued to create means for shaping identity and reality,⁹² “collective enactments of devotion.”⁹³ When the saints’ hymns were recited, they created a *pro tempore* world, a Christendom, that was “shaped more nearly to the heart’s

⁸⁹ Cf. Foley 1988:8, 21, 70; Foley 1996:25-27. A striking feature of the Coptic hymns is the number and variety of archaic Greek words they contain; this must have given a very special flavor to the works in the ears of their hearers.

⁹⁰ For an application to earlier Coptic works, see King 1997. Crossan (1998:535): “[I]f one has some written records of a tradition, there may be sufficient evidence to prove oral multiforms at base...When we *read* such poetry today in *books*, we recognize another world staring us in the face from behind the written page.”

⁹¹ See Mayeur-Jaouen (1997:223): “Were there ever itinerant Christian singers? ... It is probable that they did once exist, and have disappeared; for who else would have composed and transmitted the numerous traditional ballads that relate the legends of the saints?...which captivated their audience with their miraculous contents. They were very popular, especially in their musical expression and their use of the dialect.” Mayeur-Jaouen is speaking of Arabic-language forms, but this picture fits the Coptic-language situation of earlier times too. For Arabic-language quatrains orally composed (complete with a refrain consisting of the saint’s name) about a saint who died in 1963, see Mayeur-Jaouen 1998:152. The Coptic equivalents of its elements are found all over the *Antiphonarium*: e.g., “The paralyzed, you healed them; / the demons, you expelled them; / the dead, you raised them, / Holy St. (name).”

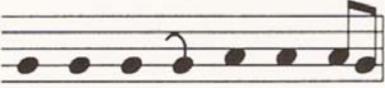
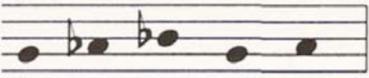
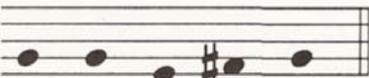
⁹² Crossan (1998:531), quoting Peter Levi’s *The Lamentation of the Dead*: “With this poem a world ended: we had not known that it had lived so long.”

⁹³ The expression is taken from Winston-Allen 1997:151.

desire” of composers and reciters.⁹⁴ In a complicated web of orality and textuality, the composers deployed “...the language in which [their] identity was created over many generations...which preserve[d] all the codes of [their] past...”⁹⁵

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Appendix

Example 1.1 (“Adam”)	Example 1.2 (“Batos”)
	
	
	
	

⁹⁴ Small (1998:105): “in acting, creating, and displaying we are bringing into existence for the duration of the ritual a society in which we ourselves are empowered to act, to create and to display.” See also Mayeur-Jaouen 1998:183, 185-86 on the creation of an “island” of Copticdom.

⁹⁵ *The New Yorker*, February 20, 1998, p. 58. In loving memory of Mirrit Boutros Ghali (1908-92): *Akmtou mmok / hen-ou-methello enanes / akounof mmok / nem nê-ethouab têrou* (“You went to your rest / in a good old age; / you rejoiced / with all the saints”). I am grateful to Professor John Miles Foley for his kind reception and helpful comments; to Kent Rigsby, who will remember York Towers, New Haven, thirty-four years ago; to Mary Parry and the Reference Department of Hayden Library, Arizona State University, as well as the indispensable Interlibrary Loan Service, for help with references; and to Marilyn Strubel, formerly of the Computing Commons, for her computer expertise.

Example 2

Coptic A:

*Thôouti nemêi mphoou
 Ô naioti nem nasnêou
 hen p-erphmeui etsôtap
 nte pi-archiereus*

Gather with me today,
 O my fathers and my brothers,
 in the chosen commemoration
 of the high priest.

Coptic B:

*Thôouti têrou neman mphoou
 ha nilaos nte p-Christos
 ntenthelêl hen pi-erphmeui
 nte pinishti m-manesôou*

Gather all with us today,
 to the peoples of Christ,
 and let us rejoice in this
 commemoration
 of the great shepherd.

Example 3

*Asshôpi hen niehoou
 nte peniôt ethu(aab)
 Abba Basilios
 pi-episkopos*

*nte t-Kesaria
 ti-Kappatokia
 pi-nishti m-phôstêr
 ete-r-ouôini emashô*

*a ou-energeia shôpi
 hen pi-diabolos
 as-er-hôb hen ou-helshiri
 hen ni-Chrêstianos*

*Af-er-epithymin
 t-sheri m-pef-ch(oei)s
 ethrefshôpi nemas
 hen ou-ponêria*

*Afshenaf sha-ouai
 n-ni-pharmagos
 afrôkh mpeshêt
 hen tef-epithymia*

*Menensa etafshai
 m-pi-diabolos
 nhrêi hen tefjij
 je afjol m-p-Ch(risto)s*

It happened in the days
 of our holy father
 Abba Basil
 the bishop

of Caesarea
 in Cappadocia,
 the great illuminator
 who greatly gave light,

that an *energeia* happened
 from the devil:
 it operated in a young man
 of the Christians.

He desired
 the daughter of his lord,
 to be with her
 in wickedness.

He went up to one
 of the magicians;
 he burned in his heart
 in his desire.

After this he wrote
 to the devil
 with his hand
 that he denied Christ;

*ouoh afer-(h)omologin
m-pi-Antich(risto)s
afouôsh̄t mmof
afshôpi hen peftoi*

and he confessed
the Antichrist,
he worshipped him,
he became his portion.

*Ouoh a ti-alou
saji nem pes-iôt
je eketi mmoi
epe n-alou phai
...je naferhoti pe
...ebol ntes-psychê...
fmouti ebol hen rôf
m-ph-ran m-p-Christos*

And the girl
said to her father,
“Give me
this young man.”
...He was afraid
...from his soul...
he called from his mouth
upon the name of Christ.

*Asmkah emashô
ouoh asshenas
sha peniôt ethu(aab)
Abba Basilios*

She was greatly troubled
and sought out
our holy father
Abba Basil.

*Astamof n-hôb niben
etaushôpi mmos
afshlêl ejôou
afnohem mmôou*

She informed him of everything
that had happened to her:
he prayed for them,
he saved them.

*A p-Satanas ini
m-pi-sêh n-jij
afchitf nje peniôt
ouoh afphôh mmof*

Satan went
to get the manuscript:
our father took it
and tore it up.

(O’Leary 1926-29:i.11-12)

Example 4

*Ainaerhêts hen ou-chishshôou
ethrisaji e-pek-taio
Ô phê ethouab n-askitês
pi-agios Archillitês*

I shall undertake with longing
to speak of your honor,
O holy ascetic man,
Saint Archellites.

*Pek-iôt Iôannês nem tek-mau
Synklêtikê etsmarôout
nou-hbêoui têrou nauranaf
m-Ph(nou)ti Phiôt pi-Pantokratôr*

Your father John and your mother
Synkletike the blessed
performed all their actions
for God, the Father Almighty.

*Synklêtikê tek-mau
akôt n-ou-pantochion
etas-emi e-pek-shini
hiten pi-rômi n-eshôt*

Synkletike your mother
built a hostel
so she might know your news
from the merchant man.

*Tote astôns asi sharok
sha pi-monastêrion ethu(aab)
nte pen-iôt Abba Rômanos
astame mmok hiten p-emnout*

Then she arose, she went to you
to the holy monastery
of our father Abba Romanos;
she found out about you from the
porter.

*Yppe, pejas, Ô pashêri,
aîi sharok ntau erok
ethbe nenshônî nte pahêt
hina ntekerphahri erôou*

“Look,” she said, “O my son,
I have come to you to see you
because of the sicknesses in my heart,
so you can give them medicine.”

*Satokt aktôbh m-p-Ch(risto)s
hina ntefchi ntek-psychê
ehote ntekjôl m-pi-saji
etak-semnêtf nem p-Ch(risto)s*

Then you entreated Christ
to receive your soul
rather than that you deny the word
that you pledged to Christ.

*Chere nak phê etefareh
ntef-diathêkê sha ebol
je mpe-k-nau e-p-ho n-ou-shimi
shate p-ho nte tek-mau*

Hail to you who kept
your covenant all the way,
not to see the face of a woman,
even the face of your mother.

*Psôma ethu(aab) nte tek-mau
auchaf nem pek-lympsanon
kata phrêti etakhonhen nôou
manensa threkti m-pi-pn(eum)a*

The holy body of your mother,
they laid it beside your body
as you had bidden them
when you gave up the ghost.

(O’Leary 1926-29:2.15)

Example 5

*Amôini ntenouôsh
n-Iê(sou)s p-Ch(risto)s
ouoh nteniôou
nnai martyros*

Come and let us worship
Jesus Christ
and let us glorify
these martyrs,

*pi-agios Simeôn
nem Apa Hora
nem Apa Mêna
pi-hello etsmarôout*

the holy Simeon
and Apa Hora
and Apa Mena
the blessed elder.

*Nai etauôsh ebol
mpemtho n-niourôou
nem ni-hêgemôn
hen ou-ônh ebol*

These cried out
before the kings
and the hegemonas,
proclaiming,

je Tennahti anon

“We, we believe

*e-Iê(sou)s p-Ch(risto)s
p-shêri m-Ph(nou)ti etônh
p-sôtêr m-pi-kosmos*

in Jesus Christ,
the Son of the living God,
the Savior of the world.

*Tenouôsht mmof
ouoh tentiôou naf
nem pef-iôt n-agathos
nem pi-pn(euma) ethu(aab)*

“We worship him
and we glorify him
with his good Father
and the Holy Spirit.

*Nthô tenou
Ô ni-thêrion et-hôou
tetenneshemshi [an]
n-han-demôn eusôf*

“And now,
O evil beasts,
we will not serve
some defiled demons.”

*Etausôtem enai
nje ni-dyrannos (sic)
aujônt emashô
ejen nai-agios*

There heard them
the tyrants,
they were very angry
against these holy ones.

*Auer-timorin
nnai-m(a)r(tyros)
n-ou-nishti n-sêou
ejen ph-ran m-p-Ch(risto)s*

They tormented
these martyrs
a long time
for the name of Christ.

*Ouoh menensa nai
aufi n-nou-aphêoui
hen rôs n-ti-sêfi
hen sou-ιδ n-Chouiak*

And after these things
they took their heads
with the edge of the sword
on the fourteenth of Choiak.

*Auer-phorin m-pi-chlom
nte ti-met-m(a)r(tyros)
ershai nem p-Ch(risto)s
hen tef-metouro*

They bore the crown
of martyrdom,
they kept feast with Christ
in his kingdom.

*Hiten nou-euchê
Ph(nou)ti matajron
hen pi-nahti ethu(aab)
sha pi-nifi n-hae*

By their prayers,
O God, strengthen us
in the holy faith
“until the last breath.”

(O’Leary 1926-29:i,85)

Example 6

*Ainaouôn n-rôï
hen ou-parrêsia
eiertharin hen p-Ch(risto)s
n-ou-boêthia*

I shall open my mouth
in freedom of speech
and ask of Christ
some help,

*ethrijô n-ou-meros
hen pi-agôn ethu(aab)
nte pai martyros
Dioskoros pi-thmêi*

so I may speak a part
of the holy struggle
of this martyr,
Dioscorus the true.

*Ne ou ebol pe
hen Rakoti ti-baki
neouontaf n-ou-sôni
euoi n-Chrêstianos*

He came from
Rhakote the city;
he had a sister
who was a Christian.

*Asshôpi naf n-ou-lôiji
hen pi-diabolos
afi ebol hen pefshemshi
afshôpi nem n-Ismailitês*

There came upon him an occasion
from the devil:
he went out into their service,
he was with the Ishmaelites.

*A tefsôni rimi
ouoh as-er-mkah
m-ph-nau etassôtem
m-phê etafshôpi mmof*

His sister wept
and was distressed
at the time when she heard
that this had happened to him.

*Ouoh as[s]hai naf
n-ou-epistolê
essohi mmos
je Hara akmou*

And she wrote him
a letter,
a reproachful one:
“I had rather you died

*ehote ntekjôl
m-p-Ch(risto)s ebol
p-ouro n-phe nem p-kahi
ntisôoun mmok an*

“than that you deny
Christ,
the king of heaven and earth.
I do not know you.”

*Etafsôtem enai
nje pai-martyros
afmorf e-ou-narion
afmoshi hen ti-baki*

When there heard these things
this martyr,
he tied on a *narion* (belt),
he walked in the city.

*Auamoni mmof
auenf e-pi-komis
af-er-(h)omologin
ouoh mpef-jôl ebol*

They seized him,
they brought him to the *comes* (count) (!)
he confessed
and did not deny.

*Afôsh ebol m-pai-rêti
mpetho n-ouon niben
je aumasti n-Chrêstianos
tinamou m-pai-rêti*

He cried out thus
before everyone
that he was born Christian:
“I shall die thus.”

Afer-keleuin

There ordered

*nje pi-(h)êgemôn
ethrou-rôkh m-pef-sôma
hen pi-chrôm efônh*

the hegemon
that they burn his body
in the fire alive.

*Afti m-pef-pn(eum)a
hen ou-hypomonê
ouoh afchi m-pi-chlom
nti-met-martyros*

He gave up his spirit
in patience
and received the crown
of martyrdom.

(O'Leary 1926-29:ii,65)

Example 7

*Nim ethnaersphêri an
ejen paihôm mberi
ets-aphshôï e-t-physis
nte ti-metrômi*

Who would not wonder
at this new thing
higher than the nature
of humanity?

*ouhôtout nem-oushimi
hen tou-parthenia
euenkot nem nouerêou
hen ou-chloj nouôt*

A man and a woman
in their virginity
sleeping with each other
in sweet unity.

*Hiten poutoubo
afthôsh nje p-Ch(oeis)
n-ou-angelos e-erhêibi
ejen pou-ma-n-enkot*

In their purity
the Lord appointed (them)
an angel to watch
over their sleeping-place.

*Nem oubô n-aloli
e-asrôt e-pshôï
ejen pou-ma-n-shelet
e-ou-mêini e-pou-toubo*

And a grapevine
grew up
over their bridal chamber
as a sign of their purity.

*Afchishshôou nje pi-thmêï
m-pi-bios ethu(aab)
n-angelikon
nte ti-monachos*

He desired, did the true man,
the holy,
angelic life
of monasticism.

*Pairêti nthos hôs
ete tef-shelet
asshôpi hen ou-topos
nem han-mêsh m-parthenos*

So she too
as his bride
was in a *topos* (holy place, convent)
with a band of virgins.

(O'Leary 1926-29:i,95)

Example 8

*Auen Apa Biktôr
hen Antiochia
e-Rakoti ti-baki
sha Armenios*

There went Apa Victor
of Antioch
to Rhakote the city,
to Armenios.

*Etauôshti mmof
nje ni-matoi
auhitf e-pi-ma n-thôk
nte ti-siôouni*

There dragged him
the soldiers,
they put him in the strong place
of the baths.⁹⁶

*Afti n-ou-proseuchê
nje Apa Biktôr
hen thmêti n-ti-hrô
ouoh nafjô mmos*

There gave forth a prayer
Apa Victor
in the midst of the furnace,
and he said,

*je, pa-Ch(oei)s Iê(sou)s
ari-boêthi eroi
hen pi-ma n-shemmo
e-tisôoun mmof an*

“My Lord Jesus,
help me
in the place of strangers
that I do not know.

*Aichô m-pa-iôt
hen An{o}tiochia t-[b]ake
[ta-]mau ai-chas
hen pi-pallation*

“I left my father
in Antioch city,
my mother I left her
in the palace.

*Nabôk nem nabôki
auchau nsôî têrou
ethbe pek-ran ethu(aab)
Ô pa-Ch(oei)s Iê(sou)s*

“My servants and handmaids,
I have left them all,
because of your holy name,
O my Lord Jesus.”

*Eti efjô nnai
nje Apa Biktôr
afsôtem e-ti-smê nte p-Ch(oei)s
esjô mmos*

When there had said these things
Apa Victor,
he heard the voice of the Lord
saying,

*je, Jemnomti, jemnomti,
pa-sôtp Apa Biktôr
ethrek-mton mmok
hen ta-metouro*

“Be strong, be strong,
my chosen Apa Victor:
you will rest
in my kingdom.

*Isje akchô m-pek-iôt
hen Antiochia*

“Since you left your father
in Antioch,

⁹⁶ A fortified place or prison built in a bathhouse.

*is pa-Iôt n-agathos
efe-shôpi nak n-iôt*

see, my good Father
will be a father to you.

*Isje akchô n-tek-mau
hen tes-pallation
is ta-Mau m-parthenos
s-na-shôpi nak m-mau.*

“Since you left your mother
in her palace,
see, my Mother the Virgin
will be a mother to you.

*Isje akchô n-nek-bôk
nem nek-bôki nsôk
is na-angelos
na-shemshi mmok*

“Since you left your servants
and handmaids behind you,
see, my angels
will serve you.

*N-t-shebiô m-pek-êi
etaukotf hijen p-kahi
ti-na-sobti nak n-ou-êi
hen ta-metouro*

“In place of your house
built upon earth
I shall prepare you a house
in my kingdom.”

(O’Leary 1926-29:ii,114-115)

Example 9

*Ph(nou)ti phê etafshôpi
nem nenshôrp n-ioti
Abraam, Isaak,
Iakôb nem Môusês*

God, the one who was
with our first fathers,
Abraham, Isaac,
Jacob, and Moses,

*ekshôpi mphoou
nem nek-ebiaik
ni-etohi eratou
m-pek-mthou ebol*

be present today
with your servants
whom you have made to stand
in your presence.

*Sôtêm e-pou-tôbh
toubou m-pai-t{ô}pos
phai etaukotf ebol
hen ph-ran n-Abba Antôni*

Hear their supplication,
purify this *topos* (holy place)
that is built
in the name of Abba Antony.

*Eke-ouôrp ejôf
m-pek-Pn(euma) ethu(aab)
ntek-toubon hen ph-ran
m-pek-shêri m-menrit*

And send upon it
your Holy Spirit,
and purify us in the name
of your beloved Son.

*Ekshôpi nhêtf
ekiri m-pi-talcho
n-ni-psychê nem ni-sôma
nte nek-ebiaik*

Be present in it
and work the healing
of the souls and bodies
of your servants.

*Thai te ti-ekklêsia eteumouti
m-ph-ran m-p-Ch(oei)s ehrêi ejôs
thai te ti-pylê nte t-phe
ere nê ethouab shôpi nhêts*

This is the church that is called
with the name of the Lord on it,
this is the gate of heaven
with the saints present in it.

*Thai te ti-mouki etefnau eros
nje Iakôb pi-p[a]triarchês
e-p-Ch(oei)s m-pi-eptêrf
tejrêout ehrêi ejen tesaphe*

This is the ladder that there saw
Jacob the patriarch
with the Lord of the universe
established at its head.

*Thai te ti-skynê nte p-Ch(oei)s
ere ti-kibôtôs nhêts
esjolph m-pi-ôou nte p-Ch(oei)s
ere nim etmethre nhêts*

This is the tabernacle of the Lord
with the Ark (of the Covenant) in it,
sweet with the glory of the Lord,
with everyone witnessing to it.

*Phai pe pini nte Ph(nou)ti
ere ni-throunos ouêh (n)hêtf
eri ni-angelos ethouab
shemshi she mmof hen ou-metathmonk*

This is the presence of God,
with thrones placed in it,
with holy angels
serving him in ceaselessness.

(O'Leary 1926-29:iii,39)

Example 10

*Z n-salpiggos
euer-salpizin
aushôpi n-han-mêini
nam han-nishti n-shphêri*

7 trumpets
trumpeting
became signs
and great wonders.

*Z n-harabai
auti n-tou-smê
afsôtem nje Iôannês
je Mpershai n-nai*

7 thunders
gave forth their voice:
he heard it, did John:
“Do not write these things.”

*Z n-sphragis
euhen oujôm eftob
mpousha ouôn mmof
nje ni-tagma têrou*

7 seals
upon a book sealed:
there could not open it
all the (heavenly) ranks.

*Zeshop hen ou-stherter
nje ni-angelos
je mpou-sh-jemjom
e-a-ouôn m-pi-jôm*

There were in an uproar
the angels
because they could not
open the book.

*Zôtem e-Iôannês
pejaf je etafi
nje pi-hiêb*

Listen to John
who says, “He came,
did the Lamb,

afouôn n-ni-tebs

he opened the seals.”

*Zografîn gar nôten
m-p-taio m-pai-jôm
je fnêou ejen Maria
t-sheri n-Iôakim*

Depict for us
the honor of this book
that came upon Mary
the daughter of Joachim.

*Zetenthôn ni-tebs
nte pi-jôm ethu(aab)
ehrêi ejen p-toubo
n-tes-parthenia*

She resembled the seals
of the holy book
because of the purity
of her virginity.

*Z n-shai et-chê
hen ph-ran n-Emmanouêl
nthof pe pi-hiêb
etafshôpi hen Maria*

7 writings are
in the name of Emmanuel:
He is the Lamb
that was in Mary.

*Z gar n-tagma
hen ti-ekklêsia
etaukots hijen pikahi
hen ph-ran m-Maria*

For 7 ranks (are)
in the church
that surrounds the earth
in the name of Mary.

*Z gar n-tebs
et-chê hen ti-pylê
etafnau eros
nje Iezekiêl*

For 7 seals
are upon the gate
that there saw
Ezekiel.

*Z n-lychnia n-noub
eterouôini hen t-phe
ere pi-ζ n-hêbs
erouôini ejôou*

7 lampstands of gold
giving light in heaven
with the 7 lamps
giving light upon them.

*Zôtem e-Iôannês
pi-euaggelistês
efsaji m-p-taio
m-Maria ti-parthenos*

Listen to John
the Evangelist
speaking of the honor
of Mary the Virgin.

(O’Leary 1926-29:ii,50-51)

Example 11.1

*Hen pai-ehoou ethu(aab)
a p-Ch(risto)s Iê(sou)s ouônh e-Thômas
hen pi-ehoou m-mah-H
menensa tej-anastasis*

On this holy day
Christ Jesus appeared to Thomas
on the day, the 8th (one),
after his resurrection.

Aftamof e-ni-shenift

He told him of the nail prints

*nem ph-mêini n-ti-she n-lonchê
afôsh ebol nje Thômas
je Pa-Ch(oei)s ouoh pa-Nouti*

and the sign of the shaft of the spear:
there cried out Thomas,
“My Lord and my God.”

*Afjos naf nje pen-Sôtêr
je Aknahti taknau eroi
Ô ouniatou nnê etaunahti
mpounau eroi eptêrf*

There said to him our Savior;
“You believed having seen me;
O blessed are they who believe
without having seen me at all.”

*Etafcha tef-jij nje Thômas
hen pi-sphir m-pen-Sôtêr
asrôkh hen pi-chrom nte ti-methnouti
afnahti ouoh afoujai*

He put his hand, did Thomas,
in the side of our Savior:
it was burnt in the fire of the Divinity:
he believed and was saved/healed.

(O’Leary 1926-29:2.95)

Example 11.2

*Nhrêi hen pi-ehouu m-mah-I
afshôpi nje ounishti n-hop
hen t-Kana nte ti-Galilea
nare th-mau n-Iê(sou)s mmau pe*

On the day, the 3rd (one),
there took place a great wedding feast
in Cana of Galilee,
and the mother of Jesus was there.

*Authôhem de hôf pke Iê(sou)s
nthof nem nef-mathêtês
je hina ntefouonh ebol
m-p-ôou nte tef-methnouti*

And they also invited Jesus too,
him and his disciples,
so he might manifest
the glory of his divinity.

*Marouchi-shipi nse-chi-shôsh
nje ni-atnahti n-heretikos
nai et-phôrj m-p-Ch(risto)s ebol
eu-iri mmof m-physis B*

May they be put to shame and refuted,
the faithless heretics,
who divide Christ up,
making him 2 natures.

*Maroui tinou nsenau erof
efrôteb hen pi-dipnon
hen t-Kana n-ti-Galilea
efouôm efsô hôs rômi*

They should come now and see him,
reclining at the feast
in Cana of Galilee,
eating, drinking as a man.

*Etauthahmef gar hos [sic] rômi
ouoh naf ouômef sô pe
etafmonk nje pi-êrp
afsmou e-ni-môou afaitou n-êrp*

For they invited him as a man,
and eating and drinking were his;
it ran out, the wine did:
he blessed the waters, he made them
wine.

Aunahti erof nje nef-mathêtês

They believed in him, did his disciples,

je mpe-ti-methnouti e-r-oujom

*atchne t-koinonia n-ti-sarx
euhén oumetouai n-atphôrj*

(O'Leary 1926-29:2.14)

that the divinity did not exercise
power
without the sharing of the flesh
in a unity indivisible.

Example 11.3

*Dikaios name alêthôs
akshôpe nouref-shorsher
e-ne-hretikos ethoou
hitn-nek-dogma etsoutôn*

Justly, truly, verily,
you [Severus] became a destroyer
of the wicked heretics
through your upright dogmas.

*Êtiôs akshôpe nouref-shorsher
nne-hretikos ethoou
Akthbbioou shapesêt e-Amnte
hitn-nek-dogma etsoutôn*

With cause you became a destroyer
of the wicked heretics.
You brought them low, down to hell,
through your upright dogmas.

*Ne-episkopos n-Chalchêdôn
auji-shipe hn-ou-chepê
je a Pnoute tnoou n-Seuêros
afshershôr neu-ekklêsia*

The bishops of Chalcedon
were put to shame in a hurry,
for God sent Severus;
he destroyed their churches.

*Ou-petshoueit pe p-shmshe têrf
n-ne-episkopos n-Chalchêdôn
je a nedôgma n-Seuêros
shershôrou hn-ou-chepê*

A vain thing is all the worship
of the bishops of Chalcedon,
for the dogmas of Severus
destroyed them in a hurry.

*T-mnt-semnos nanous, nasnêu,
thypomonê ou-atshaje eros te
sha tenou nedogma n-Seuêros
shorsher e-ne-hretikos*

Piety is good, my brethren,
patience is an ineffable thing.
Up to now the dogmas of Severus
destroy the heretics.

*Xenôs [sic] nim nte-nepistos
kô nêtn m-p-rpmeeue n-Seuêros
je fna-sh-chmchom erôtn an
nchi p-jaje n-apostatês*

All you friends of the faithful
keep the memory of Severus,
that he may have no power over you,
the apostate enemy.

*Psaoun m-Pnoute holch emate
ef-kaliôpize hn Seuêros
je a nefdogma etsoutôn
shorshr e-ne-hretikos*

The knowledge of God is very sweet,
making a fine display in Severus,
for his upright dogmas
have destroyed the heretics.

*Ô Seuêros pa-p-ran et-holch
pi-sôtêr mnnsa-p-Sô(tê)r
sops e-p-Ch(oei)s ehrai ejôn*

O Severus of the sweet name,
savior after the Savior,
entreat the Lord for us,

nf-ka nen-nobe [nan ebol]

that he may forgive our sins.

(Adapted from Kuhn and Tait 1996:66-75)

Example 12.1

*Chere Theodokos (sic)
thmau n-Iê(sou)s p-Ch(risto)s
chere pi-Prodromos
Iôa(nnês) pi-ref-ti-ôm*

Hail, Mother of God,
mother of Jesus Christ;
hail, the Forerunner,
John the Baptist.

*Psychê n-nen-ioti
moi nôou n-ou-chbob
he(n) kenf n-nen-ioti
Abraam Isaak Iakôb*

(The) souls of our fathers,
give them refreshment
in the bosom of our fathers
Abraham, Isaac, Jacob.

*Ô pen-Sôth(ê)r ari-phmeui
m-pek-bôk Nikodimos
ouchô nan n-na-nobi
nem p-sepi n-ni-pistos*

O our Savior, remember me,
your servant Nicodemus;
forgiveness for us of sins
with the rest of the faithful.

(O'Leary 1926-29:3.55)

Example 12.2

*Xôoun n-th-mat-asthenês n-rômi
hôs agathos ouoh m-mai-rômi
aier-nobi nte †tametem†
Khô nêi*

You know the weakness of man,
as good and loving mankind:
I have sinned in your sight (?):
Forgive me.

*Nohem m-pek-laos
ni-kliros nem ni-laikos
ntouereh e-pek-nomos
Khô nêi*

Save your people,
the clerics and the laity,
that they may keep your law:
Forgive me.

*Matalchôou n-nen-shôni
hen pek-nai je mpoushini
Ô phê etafchi m-pen-ini
Khô nêi*

Heal them from our diseases [*sic*]
in your mercy, as we ask,
O the one who took our form (upon
you):
Forgive me.

*Loipon ereh ouon niben
etabshebshe mmo hen mau niben
eke-tastho hen t-hirênê {ni}ben
Khô nêi*

For the rest, watch over everyone
that you shield in every place,
and make them to stand in all peace:
Forgive me.

Karpos niben nte p-kahi

Every fruit of the earth,

*smou erôou hen pek-emahi
nem naioutah nte nnoê
Khô nêi*

bless them in your governance,
and their intellectual fruits too:
Forgive me.

*Iê(sou)s p-Ch(risto)s p-ouro nte p-ôou
tentiho erok ethbe ni-ourôou
n-orthodoxos areh erôou
Khô nêi*

Jesus Christ, the King of Glory,
we beseech you for the kings,
the orthodox ones: watch over them:
Forgive me.

*Thôk tentiho pi-Nouti etenhot
ethbe nen-ioti etau-nkot
ma-mtoun {n}ôou he(n) pekma m-phôt
Khô nêi*

You we beseech, the faithful God,
for our fathers fallen asleep,
resting themselves in your place of
refuge:
Forgive me.

*Êppe ni-abiaik ntak nê (sic)
etau-er-prospheurini (sic) nak
shôpou erok kata petra nak
Khô nêi*

Look, your servants come to you
to make offering to you:
establish them on the rock for you:
Forgive me.

*Zôon n-logikon nek-esôou
ni-katêchômenos (sic) nai nôou
ntouer-p-empsha nchi-ôms nôou
Khô nêi*

The rational living beings, your
sheep,
the catechumens, have mercy
on them,
and make them worthy to receive
baptism:
Forgive me.

*Ekrôis e-pek-ouêb loipon
ni-et-shemshi m-mystêrion
nte nen-ioti m-patriêkon (sic)
Khô nêi*

Watch over your priests too
who serve the mysteries
of our fathers the patriarchs (?):
Forgive me.

*Daspouta (sic) Iê(sou)s p-Ch(risto)s
ari-phmeui n-ni-episkopos
n-orthodoxos n-hygoumenos
Khô nêi*

Master, Jesus Christ,
remember the bishops,
(and) the orthodox hegumens:
Forgive me.

*Ge p-sepi n-ni-klêros
ni-presbyteros nem diakonos
aritou n-shphêr hen tek-klêronomos
Khô nêi*

And the rest of the clergy,
the priests and deacons,
make them sharers in your
inheritance:
Forgive me.

*Bon niben nte ni-pistos
ni-laos n-ni-Chrestianos
opou <ro> nem nek-m(a)r(tyros)*

All of the faithful
Christian people,
number them with your martyrs/

Khô nêi

*Ari pen-meui p-Ch(oei)s pen-Nouti
hen pi-nai nem pi-sôti
hen pi-ehoou etoi n-hoti
Khô nêi*

(O'Leary 1926-29:iii,57-58)

witnesses:
Forgive me.

Remember us, O Lord our God,
in mercy and salvation
on that day that is fearful:
Forgive me.

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