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CHARLES HOPE AND IAN MACLEAN

THE COPTS AND THE WEST 1439–1822

THE EUROPEAN DISCOVERY
OF THE EGYPTIAN CHURCH

ALASTAIR HAMILTON

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General Editors

CHARLES HOPE *and* IAN MACLEAN



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The Copts and the West, 1439–1822

*The European Discovery of the
Egyptian Church*

ALASTAIR HAMILTON

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For Fred Bachrach

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Abbreviations

APF, SR	Archivio della Sacra Congregazione di Propaganda Fide, Rome, Scritture Riferite nei Congressi—Egitto—Copti
APUG	Archivio Pontificia Università Gregoriana, Rome
BAV	Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vatican City
BL	British Library, London
BNF	Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris
Bodl.	Bodleian Library, Oxford
CCV	A. Hebbelynck and A. van Lantschoot, <i>Codices Coptici Vaticani Barberiniani Borgiani Rossigni</i> , 2 vols. (Vatican City, 1937–47)
CE	<i>Coptic Encyclopedia</i> , ed. Aziz S. Atiya, 8 vols. (New York, 1991)
CMA	Gérard Troupeau, <i>Catalogue des manuscrits arabes: Première partie. Manuscrits chrétiens</i> , 2 vols. (Paris, 1972–4)
DBI	<i>Dizionario biografico degli italiani</i> (Rome, 1960–)
DBL	<i>Dansk Biografisk Leksikon</i> , 16 vols. (Copenhagen, 1979–84)
GCAL	Georg Graf, <i>Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur</i> , 5 vols. (Studi e testi, 118, 133, 146, 147, 172; Vatican City, 1944–53)
MPO 1	Monumenta Proximi-Orientis, 1: Sami Kuri, SJ, <i>Palestine—Liban—Syrie—Mésopotamie (1523–1583)</i> (Monumenta Historica Societatis Iesu, 136; Rome, 1989)
MPO 2	Monumenta Proximi-Orientis, 2: Charles Libois, SJ, <i>Egypte (1547–1563)</i> (Monumenta Historica Societatis Iesu, 145; Rome 1993)
MPO 4	Monumenta Proximi-Orientis, 4: Charles Libois, SJ, <i>Egypte (1565–1591)</i> (Monumenta Historica Societatis Iesu, 150; Rome, 1996)
MPO 5	Monumenta Proximi-Orientis, 5: Charles Libois, SJ, <i>Egypte (1591–1699)</i> (Monumenta Historica Societatis Iesu, 152; Rome, 2002)

MPO 6	Monumenta Proximi-Orientis, 6: Charles Libois, SJ, <i>Egypte (1700–1773)</i> (Monumenta Historica Societatis Iesu, 155; Rome, 2003)
<i>Nascita</i>	Angelo Colombo, <i>La nascita della Chiesa Copto-Cattolica nella prima metà del 1700</i> (Rome, 1996)
ODNB	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i> , 60 vols. (Oxford, 2004)
<i>Origini</i>	Angelo Colombo, <i>Le origini della gerarchia della Chiesa Copta Cattolica nel secolo XVIII</i> (Rome, 1953)
PG	Jacques-Paul Migne (ed.), <i>Patrologia Graeca</i> , 162 vols. (Paris, 1857–66)
PL	Jacques-Paul Migne (ed.), <i>Patrologia Latina</i> , 221 vols. (Paris, 1844–64)

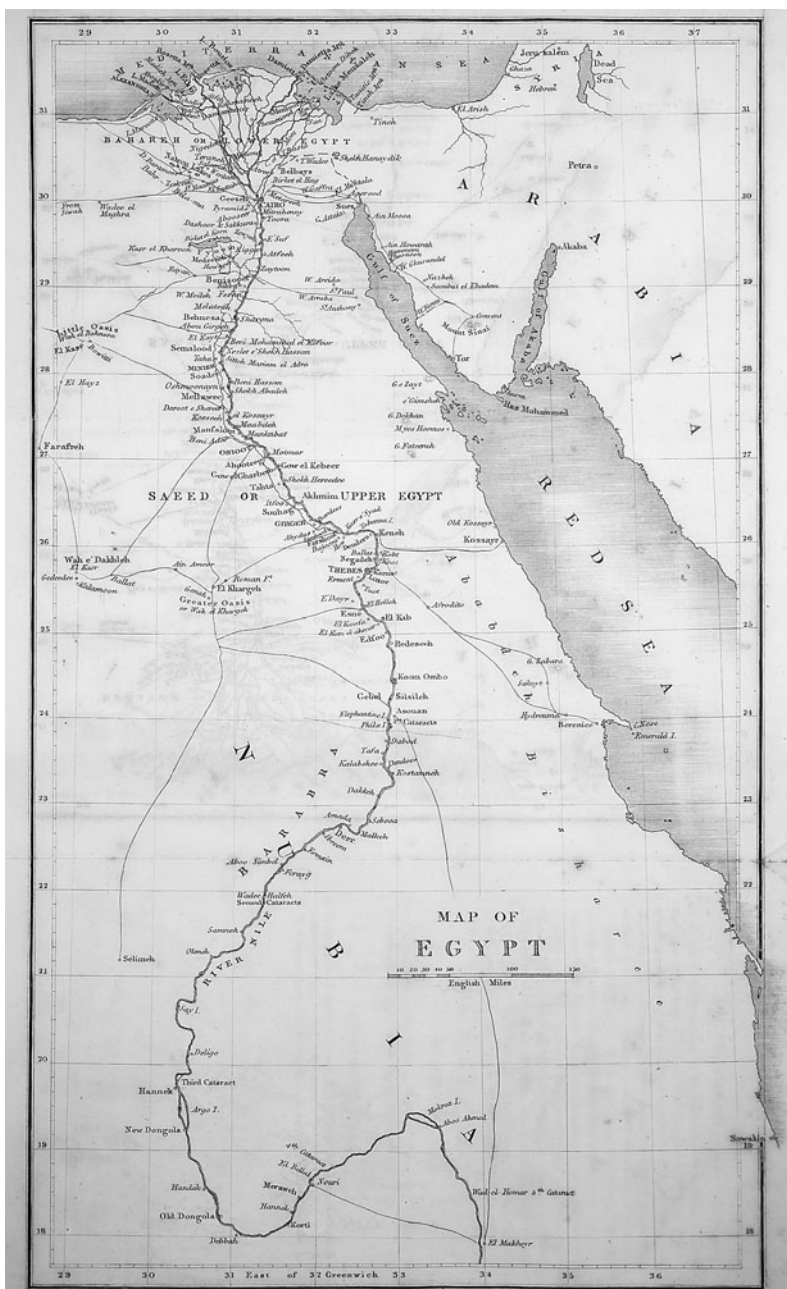
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List of Maps

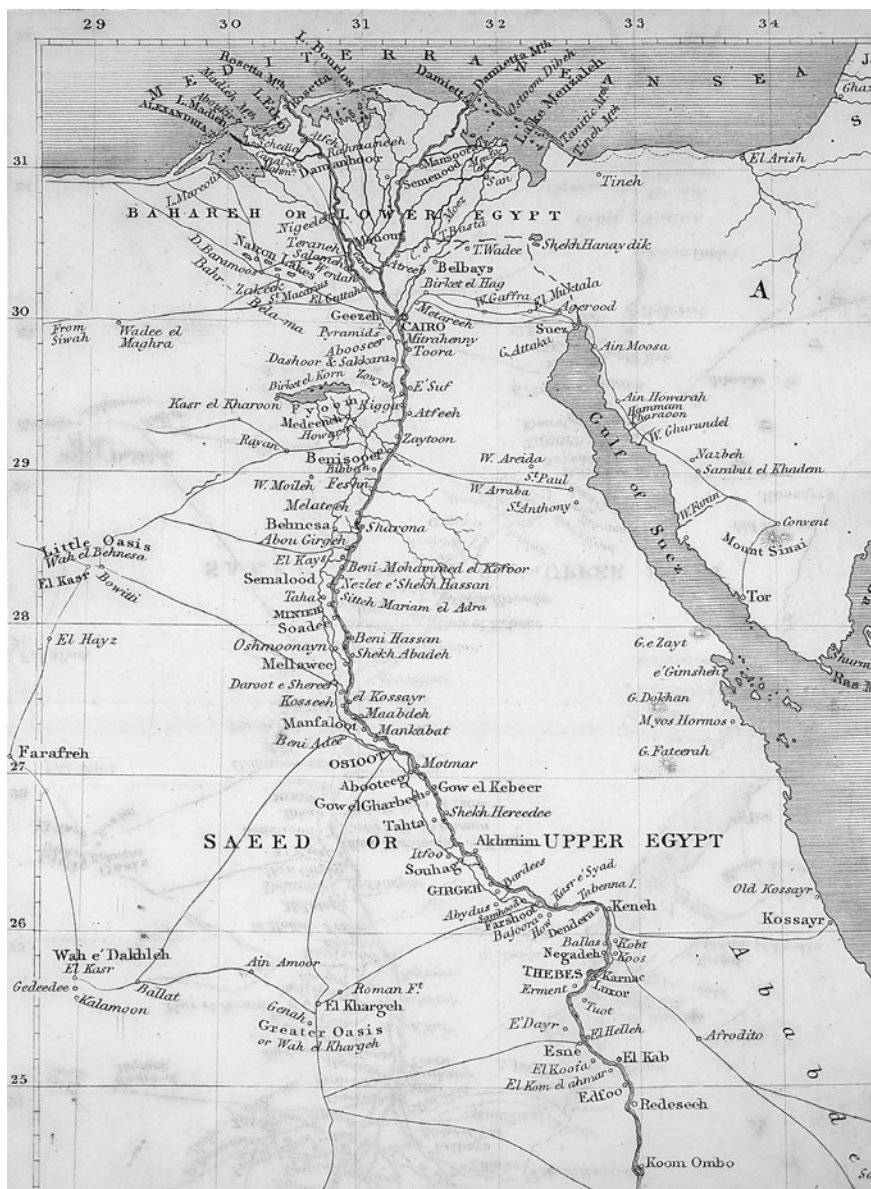
From Sir John Gardener Wilkinson, *Modern Egypt and Thebes: Being a Description of Egypt, Including the Information Required for Travellers in that Country* (London: John Murray, 1843). Reproduced by courtesy of the Arcadian Library, London.

MAP 1. Egypt in the Early Modern Period

MAP 2. Egypt, showing the main Coptic sites



MAP 1. Egypt in the Early Modern Period



MAP 2. Egypt, showing the main Coptic sites

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INTRODUCTION

The Copts once formed a vast Christian community which stretched up the Nile deep into Nubia, with churches in the Egyptian towns and monasteries in the Nile Delta, along the great river and in the Eastern and Western Deserts. Part of the far broader movement of 'Monophysites', consisting of Armenians and Syrian Jacobites in the north and Ethiopians, in communion with the Egyptians, in the south, the Church of Alexandria broke away from the main Christian Church after the Council of Chalcedon in 451. Even if the Copts became a minority at some time after the Muslim occupation of Egypt in the seventh century, they have always been an integral part of the Egyptian world.

From the Middle Ages to the early nineteenth century Egypt exerted an increasing fascination in Europe. The setting of substantial parts of the Old Testament and of important passages in the New, it was itself an object of pilgrimage, besides being on one of the main pilgrim routes from Europe to Jerusalem. As antiquarianism developed in the Renaissance the interest in biblical Egypt was supplemented by an eagerness to explore its Greek and Roman past, and, in more esoteric circles, to uncover a mysterious tradition of wisdom and a pristine religion. For Egypt was believed to be the home of a wisdom even older than that of the Greeks and a religion of equal antiquity. Plato had studied there and the mythical figure of Hermes Trismegistus, identified by the Greeks with the Egyptian deity Thoth, the scribe of the gods, was supposed by some to have preceded Moses. There was a growing conviction in the course of the Renaissance that the divine wisdom he had formulated was concealed beneath the hieroglyphs of the ancient Egyptians. Efforts to interpret them multiplied from the fifteenth century on, and Egyptian objects, testimonials of the great culture, were sought after by collectors.

By the sixteenth century, as the Ottoman Empire became more accessible, Egypt took its place among the areas to be explored by

naturalists, zoologists, botanists, and geologists. On a more material level it had always been an attractive commercial market. Between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea, at the end of caravan routes from Central Africa, it was a source of commodities in high demand in Europe. Merchants from the West, protected by consuls in the coastal cities, had travelled there since the Middle Ages, and they continued to do so in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries after the great powers—France, followed by England and Holland—established embassies in the Ottoman capital.

Stories about the country were circulated in the reports of pilgrims and traders, and were read avidly in the West. Where the early reports were disappointing, however, was in their description of the Egyptians, and most particularly of the Copts. Western travellers were understandably bewildered by the number of Christian Churches they encountered in the East. They rarely had the time, or perhaps even the capacity, to distinguish the one from the other. The Copts were the object of more terminological confusion than most of the other eastern Churches, and their origins were sought anywhere but in Egypt. Yet they were there, and this book is about their gradual discovery by the West, amid illusions, misconceptions, and prejudices.

My starting point is 1439, when the decision was taken at the Council of Florence, held between 1438 and 1445, to invite the first official Coptic delegation to Europe. It was then that Coptic and Coptic-Arabic manuscripts started to enter European libraries, and that, in Roman ecclesiastical circles, a determination developed to persuade the Copts to submit to the papacy. I end in the early nineteenth century, with the arbitrary date of 1822. Although there is no neat division, by that time a substantial amount of reliable information about the habits and customs of the Copts had been assembled. Where the Coptic language was concerned, the three main dialects had been discovered. In 1808 Étienne de Quatremère could publish his *Recherches critiques et historiques sur la langue et la littérature de l'Égypte*, not the first, but still one of the most useful, surveys of the study of Coptic in the early modern period. When Champollion had made a true advance in his efforts to decipher the hieroglyphs in 1822, moreover, Coptic, which had been so essential to him, had served one of its principal purposes. This does not mean that the European discovery of the Copts had been completed. It continues to this day, as further texts come to light, as an ever greater acquaintance is made with the Coptic language, and as archaeological excavations add new material to the early history of the Church of Alexandria.

Nevertheless, in the 1820s the European discovery of the Copts entered a new phase.

In the early modern period the European encounter with different cultures tended to be accompanied by a degree of intellectual violence. Inclined to fall back on familiar patterns, the Europeans frequently forced what they did not understand into categories which they knew. Language is an example. Convinced that all tongues descended from Hebrew, students sought Hebrew etymologies. Accustomed to Latin and Greek grammars, they thrust different grammatical structures into the familiar paradigms studied in European schools. Different religions suffered a similar fate. Ancient catalogues of heresies would be revived and non-Christian faiths were treated as though they had points of community with beliefs which had once been condemned in Europe. In the case of Christian Churches independent of Rome this was even more marked. They were indeed generally considered to be heretical, and as such they were approached.

The European discovery of the Copts tells us much more about the Europeans than about the Copts, and my book is fundamentally Eurocentric. Nevertheless, in the first part, on the Copts in Egypt, I have tried to give some idea of who the Copts were and what their place was in Egyptian society. Only very recently has work been done on the Copts in the Ottoman period. As late as 1994 the idea existed that 'from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century the Coptic Church went through a long dark tunnel about which we know rather little'.¹ There was a general inclination among Western historians to accept at their face value the tales of woe and persecution circulated both by Western missionaries and by the Copts themselves. Now, however, scholars in Egypt have uncovered documents which tell a different story. It is on their work that I have drawn in an endeavour to supply a more objective vision of Coptic society.

My second part is on the Roman Catholic missionaries, from the Council of Florence to the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt in 1798—Western visitors to Egypt who, despite their initial mistakes, ended up by having a better knowledge of the Copts, gained from direct experience, than most other travellers. Their reports were among the most important sources of information in Europe about the Copts, and were drawn on by Catholics and Protestants alike. The missionaries set out with prejudices, but the more enlightened of them modified these

¹ Adrian Hastings, *The Church in Africa 1450–1950* (Oxford, 1994), 67.

prejudices, and tried to display more understanding when confronted by the reality of the Coptic communities. In the end their lack of success was probably due more to the intransigence on the part of the organizers of the missionary movement in Rome than to any shortcomings of their own.

The third part is about the gradual accumulation of knowledge about the Copts in Europe. Missionaries may have supplied the most reliable reports, but travellers added information of their own. European scholars and ecclesiastics used what information they could glean to suit their own purposes of religious research or confessional polemic. I have consequently observed a division between Catholic and Protestant scholars. Although this is by no means always valid, and although some knowledge of the Coptic language and an interest in Coptic beliefs and habits became a desirable acquisition for many of the citizens of the aconfessional Republic of Letters in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it is possible to detect a confessional rivalry in the process of discovery which warrants a distinction and which had surprising effects on historiography.

In the last part I discuss the discovery of the Coptic language, the early quest for the language of the ancient Egyptians, the dangers of underestimating its evolution and changes over the centuries, and the gradual awareness, which accelerated as new texts entered Europe, that Coptic was composed of more than one dialect. The result was that all the publications on Coptic which appeared in this period were premature. The study of Coptic, moreover, is yet another illustration of the somewhat limited approach to new languages in early modern Europe. Although it was not a Semitic language, it was often treated as though it was, and there was a tendency to associate it with Hebrew. Efforts were also made to stress its affinities with Greek, while many of those who admitted that Coptic was indeed a late form of the language of the Pharaohs incorporated it into theories about the origins and the spread of languages and alphabets in general. I then turn to the manner in which Coptic and Coptic-Arabic texts entered Europe, to how manuscripts were collected and, finally, to the purposes to which they were put by scholars mainly concerned with biblical research.

One of the chief problems in a study of this sort is to know by what criteria the scholars under scrutiny should be judged. Nowadays our knowledge of the beliefs, the customs, and the early language of the Copts is far superior to what it was in the seventeenth or early eighteenth century. We can now marvel at those travellers who believed that the

Copts were baptized by branding and those scholars who thought there was a single Coptic dialect. I have consequently tried to quote contemporary judgements of their achievements. These were sometimes affected by confessional allegiance, personal jealousy, and other emotions, but they do, I believe, help us to reach some conclusion about the importance of the various contributions to what, at the time, was an altogether novel field of investigation.

Hardly anything has been written about the European discovery of the Copts as a whole. Quatremère, Schwartze, and others have studied the discovery of the Coptic language. The Catholic missionaries to the Church of Alexandria have been investigated intensively (and most of the relevant documents published by Charles Libois), and the same is true of the reports of European pilgrims and travellers. Volkoff devoted a book to early collectors of manuscripts in Egypt; and numerous other aspects of the phenomenon have been discussed. A general survey, however, does not exist, and what follows is an attempt to fill this lacuna.

A word, finally, about my transcriptions of Arabic. I have used a minimal transliteration for proper names and a full one for other Arabic words, using macrons and subscript dots according to the normal conventions. Since this book is largely about Egypt I have transcribed the Arabic *jīm* (ج) with a hard *g*.

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PART I

THE COPTS IN EGYPT

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1

An Ancient Church

THE CHURCH OF ALEXANDRIA

The legends surrounding the foundation and the early years of Egyptian Christianity have been a source of both contention and fascination for the Christians of the West. The Church of Alexandria was allegedly established by Mark the Evangelist on one of his visits to the Roman province of Egypt. St Mark thus became the first patriarch in an uninterrupted line of apostolic succession proudly recorded by the Coptic chronologists. Based largely on the authority of Eusebius of Caesarea in the early fourth century, and of the slightly later apocryphal Acts of Mark, the legend of the founder-evangelist became a hallowed part of Coptic tradition.¹

Even if there is some disagreement about its nature, there is more tangible proof that Christianity had entered Egypt well before the end of the first century. In its very first phase, transmitted from Jerusalem, it was probably limited to certain members of the Jewish community of the cosmopolitan city of Alexandria, but, after 117, when Hadrian was elected emperor, it spread to the Greeks. A fragment of the Gospel of St John in Greek, discovered in 1920, can be dated before the mid-second century and points to an early circulation of parts of the New Testament.²

The first true evidence of an organized Church of Alexandria comes from a later time, the second half of the second century, with the foundation of the Didascaloi, the cathetical school associated above all with

¹ The legend is discussed in detail by Stephen J. Davis, *The Early Coptic Papacy: The Egyptian Church and its Leadership in Late Antiquity* (= *The Popes of Egypt: A History of the Coptic Church and its Patriarchs from Saint Mark to Pope Shenouda III*, ed. Stephen J. Davis and Gawdat Gabra, vol. i) (Cairo and New York, 2004), 2–14.

² C. Wilfred Griggs, *Early Egyptian Christianity from its Origins to 451 CE* (Leiden, 2000), 24–6.

Origen. This was the period in which the syncretistic movement known as Gnosticism, with its combination of Christian, Jewish, and pagan teachings, reached its height, but the once widespread belief that it was particularly influential in Egypt has been questioned.³ There is no doubt of the Gnostic nature of certain early apocryphal works read in Egypt in the first centuries of the Christian era—the Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Mary, the Wisdom of Jesus Christ, and a couple of other texts which have come to light in Coptic translation—but these are far outnumbered by Christian works which have nothing to do with Gnosticism.

It was also between the first and the third century that an important linguistic development occurred—the abandonment of the hieroglyphs of the Pharaonic period, which had all but entirely fallen into disuse, and the adoption of the Greek alphabet, together with a few simplified signs derived from the modified version of the hieroglyphs known as Demotic. Starting with mainly pagan texts, the new system can be said to have come into its own in the course of the third century in a translation of the Bible from Greek into Egyptian.⁴ The latest form of Egyptian, which, in contrast to earlier forms, contained a high proportion of Greek words and was written from left to right, is now known as Coptic. Greek, which had spread with the conquest of Egypt by Alexander the Great in 332 BC and with the Roman occupation three centuries later, remained the language of the government and the administration, and was widely spoken in the major cities. By the fourth century Latin, too, was used, albeit to a far lesser extent and mainly in military circles. Coptic, in its various dialects, was the principal (but by no means exclusive) language of daily life elsewhere in Egypt, spoken in the countryside, the villages, the smaller towns, as well as by a number of inhabitants of Alexandria.⁵

The existence of a more organized Church led to efforts to impose some form of doctrinal unity and ecclesiastical authority on the Christians of Egypt, based on a Western, Roman model. These were evident in Alexandria by the mid-third century. Yet local traditions remained strong and were fuelled by the arrival of new doctrines from the East, such as Manichaeism. Christianity, however, continued to expand,

³ Colin H. Roberts, *Manuscript, Society and Belief in Early Christian Egypt* (London, 1979), 49–73.

⁴ Tito Orlandi, 'Coptic Literature', in Birger A. Pearson and James E. Goehring (eds.), *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity* (Philadelphia, 1986), 51–81, esp. 52–5; Nathalie Bosson, '“Langue copte”, une réalité à visages multiples', in Nathalie Bosson and Sydney H. Aufrère (eds.), *Égyptes... L'Égyptien et le copte* (Lattes, 1999), 69–87.

⁵ Roger S. Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, 1993), 238–40, 251–60.

albeit irregularly and unevenly.⁶ In the second century it penetrated the Fayyum and arrived in Middle Egypt. Especially during the persecutions under Decius, Valerian, and Diocletian in the second half of the third century, it extended south, into Upper Egypt, and over the desert.

The persecutions yielded martyrs. The number may never be established with any certainty, but martyrdom became an essential part of Coptic tradition. The Church of Alexandria would be known as the Church of the Martyrs, and its calendar starts in the 'Year of the Martyrs', AD 284, when Diocletian rose to power.⁷ The rhetoric of martyrdom became—and remained—an important element in the historiography of the Egyptian Church, and one which could be strongly misleading.

By the beginning of the fourth century the martyrs were followed by monks, the founders of a system which would gradually spread throughout Christendom. The habit of retiring into the desert to lead a life of solitude and penance was already in existence by the middle of the third century, but it was only in the mid-fourth century, with St Paul of Thebes and St Anthony the Great, the rigour of whose lives captured the Western imagination thanks to the biographies of Anthony by Athanasius (357) and of Paul by Jerome (375), that these individual endeavours to flee from the world were shaped into a system. Their example galvanized a substantial part of the Egyptian Church. Within five or six years of the death of Anthony in 356, a monastery was built at the foot of Mount Qulzum in the Wadi 'Araba, in the Eastern Desert some twenty miles from the Red Sea coast, where he spent forty years of his life.⁸ Some time afterwards, by the nearby mountain of the South Galala, another monastery was erected in commemoration of Paul. These early foundations, either centred round a holy man or round his memory, seem to have consisted mainly of gatekeepers guarding the approach to the shrine.

There was no single form of monastic organization in Egypt, and the anchoritic way of life practised in the Eastern Desert was soon accompanied by a semi-anchoritic system elsewhere, notably in the Nitrian desert (the Wadi al-Natrun south of Alexandria) and the Western Delta. There men such as Amun and Macarius introduced a system of monastic

⁶ Its uneven progress from the 4th to the 6th c. is studied by Ewa Wipszycka, *Études sur le christianisme dans l'Égypte de l'antiquité tardive* (Rome, 1996), 63–105.

⁷ For a discussion of the myth, its importance, and its roots see Davis, *Early Coptic Papacy*, 28–42, 91, 118.

⁸ On St Anthony and the expansion of monasticism see Tim Vivian, 'St. Antony the Great and the Monastery of St. Antony at the Red Sea, ca. A.D. 251 to 1232/1233', in Elizabeth S. Bolman (ed.), *Monastic Visions: Wall Paintings in the Monastery of St. Antony at the Red Sea* (Cairo, New Haven, and London, 2002), 3–17.

cells spread over a wide area, whose inmates formed a loosely knit community, assembling once or twice a week for a common meal and divine service. At the same time yet another form of monastic settlement developed, the coenobitic system, of which St Pachomius is hailed as the pioneer. The convents contained a community of monks or nuns. Surrounded by an enclosing wall, with a gatehouse, a guest house, an assembly hall for communal worship, a refectory, and a hospital, they were set up in cultivated areas in the Nile valley. The coenobitic way of life was less rigorous than that of the followers of the early anchorites, and was consequently more accessible to larger groups of the devout.⁹ The different forms of organization would ultimately lead to the frequently mixed system which has survived over the centuries.

The birth of monasticism in Egypt coincided with the intensification of the great Christological debates which concentrated the minds of the theologians of the East for so long and left a further mark on the local Christians. The conflicts which determined the future of what would become the Coptic Church were to a large extent the result of two different traditions concerning the Incarnation. On the one hand there was the tradition of Antioch, which tended to stress the humanity of Christ and to conceive of some distinction between his human and his divine nature. On the other there was the Alexandrian school, of Origen, Clement, and Athanasius, which held that the two natures were perfectly united, bridged by the Word or Logos. The Logos was the creative force of God, but shared the nature of His transcendence, and, however perfect the union, the Alexandrians sometimes stressed the divinity, more than the humanity, of the incarnated God.

In about 318 Arius, a priest from Alexandria probably of Libyan origin, but a disciple of Lucian the presbyter, a leading member of the Antiochene school of theology, was charged with maintaining the absolute superiority of the Father over the Son and with denying the full divinity of Christ. Christ was presented as a human being, albeit as a superior one, freely created by the Father to serve as His instrument in the creation of other beings. Such views spread rapidly in the following years. Vigorously combated by the patriarch of Alexandria, Alexander I, and by his secretary (and successor) Athanasius, supported in their turn

⁹ Derwas J. Chitty, *In the Desert a City: An Introduction to the Study of Egyptian and Palestinian Monasticism under the Christian Empire* (Crestwood, NY, 1995), 20–45; Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 293–303; Wipszycka, *Études sur le christianisme*, 281–336. For a general survey with an extensive bibliography see also Alberto Elli, *Storia della chiesa copta*, 3 vols. (Cairo and Jerusalem, 2003), i. 189–266.

by the monks, the ideas attributed to Arius were condemned, but by no means extinguished, at the first of the ecumenical councils of the Church, the Council of Nicaea in 325.

This was the time of the greatest glory of the Church of Alexandria. It had some of the most eminent theologians in Christendom. Its authority was regarded as second only to that of Rome, the see of St Peter to whose primacy Alexandria now aspired, and far superior to that of Constantinople or Antioch. In 328 Alexander I was succeeded as patriarch by the ascetic and dynamic Athanasius. During his long patriarchate, constantly interrupted by his Arian enemies (sometimes supported by the Byzantine emperor in Constantinople) and by periods of exile, he consecrated Frumentius bishop of Axum in about 346 and dispatched him to Ethiopia. He thus laid the foundations of the Church of Ethiopia, which would remain in communion with Egypt until the twentieth century and whose bishop or metropolitan would be consecrated officially in Alexandria. A venerator of St Anthony, whose biography, larded with anti-Arian statements, he was supposed to have written,¹⁰ Athanasius gave a strong impetus to the monastic movement, and the monks were to be his most loyal supporters. He defined the canons of the New Testament and the Old; he condemned the reading of apocryphal works; and his own asceticism left a deep mark on his Church.

Athanasius died in 373. The movements against which he had fought, such as Arianism, survived, and the doctrinal harmony which he seemed to have imposed on his Church was again disrupted. From the point of view of Alexandria, moreover, an alarming development occurred when the new Roman emperor, Theodosius I, convened a second ecumenical council at Constantinople in 381. Although the Council of Constantinople sealed the official condemnation of Arianism and other unorthodox movements such as the monophysitism, the belief in a single nature in Christ,¹¹ associated with Apollinarius the Younger and known as Apollinarianism, and although it imposed the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, with its insistence on the place of the Holy

¹⁰ For the various discussions about the authorship see Gerard Bartelink, 'Die Vita Antonii des Athanasius' in H. W. Pleket and A. M. F. W. Verhoogt (eds.), *Aspects of the Fourth Century* (Leiden, 1997), 1–21.

¹¹ For a discussion of the term and its limitations, see Davis, *The Early Coptic Papacy*, 87, 217, and David W. Johnson, SJ, 'Anti-Chalcedonian Polemics in Coptic Texts, 451–641', in Pearson and Goehring (eds.), *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity*, 216–34, esp. 218–19.

Ghost, it revoked the primacy of the see of Alexandria and replaced it by that of Constantinople.¹²

The disputes about the natures in Christ persisted. The paradoxical Alexandrian conception of the Logos as an image, albeit an image of the invisible, with the characteristics of the divine but manifested in man, gave rise to disagreements and criticisms. Although both Alexandrians and Antiochenes agreed that Christ was truly God and truly man, the Antiochenes would have conceded that Christ was 'also a man', while the Alexandrians would have objected that their teaching implied that Christ was 'only a man'.¹³ The conflict between the traditions led to the next great theological debate.

Nestorius, the main protagonist, was a monk from Antioch who was elected patriarch of Constantinople in 428. Few of the Eastern patriarchs proclaimed their hatred of heresy as much as Nestorius himself, and at the beginning of his career he found himself in full agreement with the new patriarch of Alexandria, Cyril, the successor of his uncle Theophilus and a venerator of Athanasius. Nestorius, however, wished for some terminological clarity in the definition of the natures in Christ, and refused to accept what he regarded as the 'absorptive' theory of the Alexandrians. He wished to posit some form of separation between the divine element and the human element in Christ, and one of the consequences of his teaching was the denial to the Virgin Mary—the object of particular reverence in the Church of Alexandria—of the title *θεοτόκος*, *theotokos*, 'mother of God'. For Nestorius she remained the mother of Christ the man.

Cyril of Alexandria was acknowledged as the greatest representative of the Alexandrian tradition by all the Churches well after the schisms of the fifth century. One of his achievements as a theologian was to rescue the Alexandrian teaching on the nature in Christ from the distortion to which it had been subjected by Apollinarius, whose efforts to sort out the paradox of the Logos system had led him to deny that Christ had a soul or an intellect. His humanity thus emerged as incomplete. It was Cyril's insistence on a divine exchange of properties between humanity and divinity that enabled him to argue the existence of a perfect humanity in Christ which included a soul and an intellect, but lacked the human

¹² The dangers of overrating the nationalist components of the various rifts, however, are rightly emphasized by Wipszycka, *Études sur le christianisme*, 9–61.

¹³ John A. McGuckin, *St. Cyril of Alexandria: The Christological Controversy. Its History, Theology, and Texts* (Leiden, 1994), 136–7, 177–8.

element of sin. He quoted Romans 8: 3 to support the teaching that Christ had no more than 'the likeness of sinful flesh.'

In Nestorius Cyril discovered an opponent who would oblige him to define his views on the Incarnation. But while he was consistent in combating Nestorius' refusal to call the Virgin Mary the mother of God—he wrote eloquently in favour of the formula of *theotokos* in his *Letter to the Monks* of 429—Cyril had difficulty in describing the perfect union of divinity and humanity to be found in Christ with any consistency. The debate was often bedevilled by terminology, Cyril, with no great consistency, giving a subtly different interpretation to certain words from that given by the school of Antioch. Cyril conceived of two phases in the existence of the Logos, one before and one after the Incarnation. The Person of the Logos remained the same, but He who had once existed outside the flesh was, in the second stage, enfleshed or embodied. While for the school of Antioch the term *φύσις*, *physis* or nature, indicated the humanity or divinity seen as a concrete collection of attributes and the union was a conjunction based on a harmony of wills, for Cyril *physis* normally implied a concrete individual or independent existence, close to, not to say identical with, the word *ὑπόστασις*, *hypostasis* or individuality. His favourite formula for expressing the one nature conceived as the incarnation of the divine Word was *μία φύσις τοῦ Θεοῦ Λόγου σεσαρκωμένη* (*mia physis tou Theou Logou sesarkomene*).¹⁴

In his second and third letters to Nestorius, both written in 430, Cyril referred to a union (*ένώσις*, *henosis*) according to the *hypostasis*.¹⁵ To explain how this occurred he resorted to a number of different images and terms. In his scholia on the Incarnation written shortly after 431 he compared the exchange between divinity and humanity to a burning coal (Isaiah 6: 6–7). 'It is', he wrote,

like fire that gains a hold on wood, penetrates, and consumes it. Although the wood does not cease to be wood, yet it is changed into the appearance and vigour of fire, and is itself reckoned as one with it. This is how you should consider it was in the case of Christ. We say that God was united to manhood in an ineffable way but preserved the manhood as it was. And he himself remained what he was; but being united once and for all he is reckoned as one with the manhood and he appropriates all that belongs to it while introducing to it the power of his own nature.¹⁶

¹⁴ J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (5th edn., London, 1977), 317–23.

¹⁵ PG 77, col. 45.

¹⁶ McGuckin, *St Cyril of Alexandria*, 301–2. For a full discussion of Cyril's teaching see pp. 175–226.

In his later work, *Why Christ is One*, Cyril referred to the self-annihilation of the divine Logos which preceded the assumption of a human aspect in a process which was, he admitted, incomprehensible. By then he had abandoned the term *hypostasis*. Such changes and terminological ambiguities allowed future generations to interpret his teaching in different manners.

In his conflict with Nestorius Cyril of Alexandria had the backing of the pope, Celestine I. The emperor, Theodosius II, convened a council at Ephesus in 431. Cyril, who was authorized to represent the pope, obtained the condemnation and deposition of Nestorius and the official approval of the title of *theotokos* for the Virgin Mary. Yet, even if he presented the council as a triumph, it was very far from marking the full acceptance of his teaching.¹⁷ Subsequently, in order to heal the rifts incurred at Ephesus and in a spirit of ecumenicity, Cyril was ready to make concessions to Antioch, and in 433 accepted a formula of union designed to satisfy the theologians of both Antioch and Alexandria: Christ was defined as composed of two natures in a perfect union, 'consubstantial with the Father as touching his divinity, and with us as touching his humanity'. The concept, dear to Cyril, of a single *physis* was omitted, and *πρόσωπον* (*prosopon* or personality), preferred by the theologians of Antioch, was inserted. There was no mention of a hypostatic union.¹⁸

At his death in 444 Cyril of Alexandria was succeeded as patriarch by Dioscorus, who had attended the Council of Ephesus and was as determined as his predecessor to check the prestige of Constantinople. He was consequently eager to preserve good relations with the pope, Leo I. Dioscorus was totally loyal to the teaching of Cyril (or what he regarded as such), but, in contrast to Cyril, he was not prepared to make any concession to the Antiochene tradition. This rigidity, which led him to refuse the formula of 433, was to have grave consequences. When answering the condemned views of Nestorius, Dioscorus was ready to support the ideas of Eutyches, a monk, and later an archimandrite, or superior, of the monastery of Job near Constantinople, who proclaimed his agreement with Cyril and the Council of Ephesus, but went still further in his hostility to Nestorius, and came close to Apollinarius, by stating that the two persons in Christ were so united as to form a single

¹⁷ Norman Russell, *Cyril of Alexandria* (London, 2000), 46–56.

¹⁸ W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement: Chapters in the History of the Church in the Fifth and Sixth Centuries* (Cambridge, 1972), 16–23, 120–6.

nature in which the human element was absorbed by the divine. He thereby denied Christ's consubstantiality with man.

At first this teaching, subsequently defined by its opponents as an extreme form of monophysitism, had the support not only of many of Eutyches' fellow monks who venerated him as their leader, but also of the emperor Theodosius and his court. Nevertheless, the opposition of Flavian, the patriarch of Constantinople, and of Eusebius of Dorylaeum, bishop of Sardis, who accused Eutyches of heresy, brought about the convocation of a second Council of Ephesus in 449. On this occasion Leo I submitted a letter stating what he considered to be the orthodox belief in Christ as having the coexistence, immutable, distinct and indivisible, of a single person and two natures, divine and human. At the new council of Ephesus, which Leo would later call a 'latrocinium' or 'robbery', Dioscorus prevented his letter from being read and engineered the deposition of Flavian and many of his bishops. Eutyches was fully absolved of the charge of heresy and rehabilitated.¹⁹

The success of Dioscorus was resented not only in Rome but also in Constantinople, where the emperor's sister Pulcheria expressed her displeasure. Theodosius was killed in a hunting accident and Pulcheria succeeded to the imperial throne. She took as her husband the Thracian senator and general Marcian, who acted as emperor. The bishops exiled by Dioscorus were recalled, and a further council was convened, this time at Chalcedon opposite the capital, in 451.²⁰ Flavian and Eusebius of Dorylaeum were formally rehabilitated. Leo's letter to the second Council of Ephesus was read, and Dioscorus was condemned as contumacious for suppressing it. Even his bishops agreed to anathematize the teaching of Eutyches, but they hesitated to accept the doctrine contained in the letter of Leo. They still insisted that Christ was *of* or *from* two natures (*ἐκ δύο φύσεων*, *ek dio physeon*) before the hypostatic union, but did not subsist *in* two natures (*ἐν δύο φύσεσι*, *en dio physeōi*) after it. In him, rather, was a single nature or composed hypostasis.²¹

¹⁹ Ibid. 29–45.

²⁰ Monald Goemans, OFM, 'Chalkedon als "Allgemeines Konzil"', in Aloys Grillmeier, SJ and Heinrich Bacht, SJ, *Das Konzil von Chalkedon: Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 3 vols. (Würzburg, 1951–4), i. 251–89.

²¹ For the formula of Chalcedon see Ignacio Ortiz de Urbina, SJ, 'Das Symbol von Chalkedon: Sein Text, sein Werden, seine dogmatische Bedeutung', in Grillmeier and Bacht (eds.), *Das Konzil von Chalkedon*, i. 389–418. For a discussion from a modern perspective see Johannes N. Karmiris, 'The Problem of the Unification of the Non-Chalcedonian Churches of the East with the Orthodox on the Basis of Cyril's Formula "Mia physis tou Theou Logou sesarkomene"' in: Paulos Gregorios,

The orthodox view imposed by the Council was close to that of Leo, but closer still to that of Cyril: Christ, complete in both his humanity and his divinity, one and the same, was *made known* in two natures without any confusion, change, division, or separation, each nature concurring in one person and one hypostasis. From the Alexandrian point of view there remained an obstacle: the inclusion of the phrase 'in two natures'. Cyril himself might have accepted the formula, particularly the qualification implied in the words 'made known', but the followers of Dioscorus did not.²² Dioscorus was exiled to the Black Sea, where he died in 454, and was replaced by an orthodox patriarch, Proterius. Eutyches, too, was exiled and excommunicated.²³

At the Council of Chalcedon Dioscorus, who was never condemned for heresy, had pronounced himself ready to reject the teaching of Eutyches and continued to appeal to the doctrine of Cyril of Alexandria. Nevertheless Leo I, in his anger at the patriarch's behaviour at Ephesus, declared that he, and all those who so much as questioned his own formula concerning the natures in Christ, were 'Eutychians'. He thus added a new heresy to the existing lists, and we shall see that his inaccurate generalization would be applied to the Church of Alexandria for well over a millennium. In fact, even in Egypt, the supporters of Eutyches were in a small minority. A clear majority supported Dioscorus and opposed the decisions of Chalcedon, but rejected the views of Eutyches, just as they did those of Nestorius and Leo I.²⁴

In Egypt it was only after the death of the emperor Marcian in 457 that Dioscorus' supporters, who had never ceased to regard him as the rightful patriarch of Alexandria, appointed Timothy Aelurus as his successor. There were thus two patriarchs of Alexandria. One was appointed by the anti-Chalcedonians, the other by the Chalcedonian Church of Constantinople, which came to be known in the Levant as the Melkite (or royal) Church, a term first used in Syriac. If we except two long intervals, the first between 482 and 538 and the second of some ninety years after 652, shortly after the Arab conquest of Egypt, in which the Constantinopolitan patriarchate of Alexandria remained vacant,

William H. Lazareth, and Nikos A. Nissotis (eds.), *Does Chalcedon Divide or Unite? Towards a Convergence in Orthodox Christology* (Geneva, 1981), 29–42, esp. 31.

²² McGuckin, *St Cyril of Alexandria*, 237–40; John Meyendorff, *Imperial Unity and Christian Divisions: The Church 450–680 A.D.* (Crestwood, NY, 1989), 165–78, 187–94.

²³ Frend, *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement*, 46–9.

²⁴ *Ibid.* 144–5.

Alexandria had two patriarchs, and in 1219, as the result of the Crusades, the Western Church added a third Latin one, albeit titular and non-resident.²⁵

Despite the apparent autonomy implied by the existence of an anti-Chalcedonian patriarch, almost a century elapsed before the new anti-Chalcedonian Churches acquired an identity of their own, and it was still longer before there was a definitive break between them and the Church of Constantinople. Belief in the spiritual leadership of the emperor continued to prevail in the East, even if doubts persisted in Egypt.²⁶ The Church of Alexandria, moreover, had been traditionally cosmopolitan. Its greatest theologians were Greek or of Greek origin. Not only was Eutyches himself no Egyptian, but Egypt was no more united in his support than was Constantinople in opposing him. We have seen that the emperor, Theodosius II, as well as most of the Byzantine monastic community, initially favoured Eutyches, and, high-handed though the behaviour of Dioscorus may have been at the second council of Ephesus, he could scarcely have obtained the rehabilitation of Eutyches single-handed. Far from being an Egyptian prerogative, monophysitism had adherents throughout the East and received massive support in the area of Syria and among the Armenians (who had not, however, attended the Council of Chalcedon).

The monophysitism that would triumph was not that of Eutyches. The idea that the human nature in Christ should have been absorbed by his divine nature was entirely alien to the teaching of the most influential figure in the spread of monophysitism after Chalcedon, Severus, originally from Pisidia in Turkey, who was appointed patriarch of Antioch by the emperor in 512. In 518 he was deposed and exiled to Egypt, where he managed to propagate his views. Severus, who claimed to be a follower of Cyril of Alexandria, taught what is now known as 'verbal monophysitism', as opposed to the 'real monophysitism' of Eutyches. For Severus the words *physis*, *prosopon*, and *hypostasis* were synonymous. He acknowledged the divinity and the humanity of Christ, without mixture, confusion, or change, but, determined to avoid any association with the teaching of Nestorius, he refused to refer to two natures.²⁷

²⁵ A full list is contained in J. Faivre, 'Alexandrie', in Alfred Baudrillart et al. (eds.), *Dictionnaire d'histoire et de géographie ecclésiastique*, ii (Paris, 1914), cols. 365–7; and, of the Coptic and Melkite patriarchs, in Elli, *Storia della chiesa copta*, iii, 55–62.

²⁶ A point emphasized by Frend, *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement*, 50–103.

²⁷ This is stressed by M. Jugie, 'Monophysisme', in A. Vacant et al. (eds.), *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, x (Paris, 1929), cols. 2216–51. For Severus' teaching see

The Council of Chalcedon was followed by repeated attempts to heal the breach with the anti-Chalcedonians and to reunite the two parties in a single Church. This was the object of the *Henotikon* or letter of unity written to the Egyptian Church by the Emperor Zeno in 482, accompanied by the suspension of the appointment of a Chalcedonian patriarch of Alexandria and the acceptance of the anti-Chalcedonian Peter Mongus. Compromise would even be approved by some of the greatest anti-Chalcedonian leaders, such as Jacobus Baradaeus. But the failure of all conciliatory efforts led to attempts to enforce orthodoxy. Justin I, who deposed Severus, expelled his supporters in Syria and Mesopotamia between 518 and 523. Egypt was spared, and the Monophysite teaching both of Severus and Julian of Halicarnassus (particularly popular among the monks and rural population) had spread. It spread still further thanks to the support of Severus by Theodora, the wife of Justin's nephew and successor Justinian, and to the conciliatory policy which Justinian pursued in the early part of his long reign (527–65).²⁸ When Justinian too became aware of the impossibility of reconciling the rival parties, he resorted to the line of his predecessor. He condemned Severus, had all the anti-Chalcedonian churches in Alexandria closed, and reinstated a Melkite patriarch in 538—one of the moments which has been said to mark the birth of the true Coptic Church.²⁹ When the anti-Chalcedonians built new churches the emperor gave the ones that had been closed to the Chalcedonians. In 541 he had the Monophysites officially declared heretics. Their cult was prohibited, they were forbidden to build churches or to own or rent land, and their women forfeited all privileges of dowry.

In the meantime the anti-Chalcedonian patriarch of Alexandria, Theodosius I, who had been exiled to Constantinople, managed to reinvigorate the monophysitism which Justinian was endeavouring to extinguish. In 543, with the support of the empress Theodora, he organized missions up the Nile, and succeeded in converting much of ancient Nubia. Also in 543 he consecrated as bishop of Edessa a monk of Syrian origin called Jacobus Baradaeus, who had been living in Constantinople since 527. It was as Theodosius' vicar, with jurisdiction over

Joseph Lebon, 'La Christologie du monophysisme syrien', in Grillmeier and Bacht (eds.), *Das Konzil von Chalkedon*, i. 425–580; Frend, *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement*, 201–20; V. C. Samuel, 'One Incarnate Nature of God the Word', in Gregorios, Lazareth, and Nissotis (eds.), *Does Chalcedon Divide or Unite?*, 76–90.

²⁸ Frend, *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement*, 143–83, 255–95.

²⁹ Elli, *Storia della chiesa copta*, i. 308.

Asia Minor and Syria, that Baradaeus set about forming a resistance to the Chalcedonian policy of the emperor and reviving the Monophysite communities of the Near East. Travelling mainly on foot, he ordained priests in an area stretching from Persia to the Aegean, going to Armenia, Syria, Cappadocia, Cilicia, Isauria, and Pamphylia, and visiting the islands of Rhodes, Cyprus, Chios, and Mitylene.³⁰ As a result of his extraordinary talents as a proselytizer, the anti-Chalcedonian Church of Syria was named after him and called Jacobite, and in many sources the same term was applied to anti-Chalcedonianism in general. At his death in 578, despite the numerous sects into which it had split and the very real threat to its existence posed by the policy of Justinian, the anti-Chalcedonian movement had regained its impetus.

Nevertheless, splits continued among the anti-Chalcedonians. Relations between the Egyptians and the Syrians were by no means always good and a national individuality of the various Churches began to emerge. The Persian invasion of Egypt in 619 gave the Egyptian Church a taste of independence from Byzantium and of religious freedom. After the Persian retreat in 629 the Melkite patriarch of Alexandria, Cyrus, stimulated opposition still further. Disappointed at the failure of his efforts to win back the Monophysites with the doctrine of monenergism, according to which the two natures in Christ corresponded to a single operative faculty, and of those of his colleague Sergius to impose monothelitism, or the belief in a single will in Christ, he launched a massive campaign to enforce conformity.

By 639 the Church of Alexandria had passed through what Westerners could regard as two more or less distinct phases. The first was the pre-Chalcedonian phase, when the Egyptian Church produced theologians of unquestioned orthodoxy, such as Athanasius and Cyril of Alexandria, venerated in the West through the ages. But did they represent the true Church of Alexandria? For the second phase started with the monophysitism of Dioscorus and his condemnation at Chalcedon. He stood for disobedience to Rome and to Constantinople, but although the Western Church regarded him as a heretic, he had not been condemned as such in the East, and he continued to appeal, not to the teaching of Eutyches, as the Church of Rome might claim, but to that of Athanasius and Cyril. The monophysitism of which he was accused was turned into a more refined doctrine by Severus of Antioch, and when Justinian's conciliatory policy towards the anti-Chalcedonians failed,

³⁰ Frend, *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement*, 285–7.

Severus was banned from the capital; his writings were ordered to be burnt; he was accused of uttering blasphemies as bad as those of Arius and Apollinarius; and he was implicitly equated with Nestorius and Porphyry. This was indeed tantamount to the charge of heresy.³¹ When the third phase got underway after the Arab conquest of Egypt, the Copts looked back with veneration on Dioscorus and Severus and placed them on a par with Athanasius and Cyril. They also started to acquire an Egyptian identity which was in contrast to their cosmopolitan origins.³² This was the Church the Europeans would set out to discover in the Renaissance.

³¹ Ibid. 273–6.

³² Wipszycka, *Études sur le christianisme*, 9–61.

2

Muslim Domination

ARAB EGYPT

There is some disagreement among historians about the reactions of the Egyptian anti-Chalcedonians to the Arab invasion of their country in 639. It was long assumed that they welcomed the invaders, who freed them from the oppression of the Byzantine Church, but it now seems that their reactions varied. Some opposed the Arabs and were quick to classify them as yet another group of persecutors. Others were ready to collaborate and to assist the invaders. A few probably benefited from their arrival, and initially gained more from it than the Melkites, whose patriarchate of Alexandria was again suspended in 652, for some ninety years.¹ Yet we have no statistics for any of the Churches. The extent of the hostility between the Melkites and anti-Chalcedonians in this period remains obscure. Then, as later, there must have been moments of reciprocal intolerance, but, by and large, there appears to have been a more or less peaceful state of coexistence.

Although various moments in the history of the Church of Alexandria have been hailed as decisive in the formation of what was later known as the Coptic Church—the allegedly increasing recruitment of Egyptians on the part of the patriarch Athanasius in the fourth century; the existence of two patriarchs of Alexandria, one Melkite and one Monophysite, after the Council of Chalcedon in the middle of the fifth century; the decision by the emperor Justinian to reinstall the Chalcedonian patriarchate of Alexandria in the sixth century—the Egyptian Church which the Europeans tried to explore assumed its various characteristics

¹ For a recent discussion of the attitude of the Copts to the Arab invaders see Davis, *The Early Coptic Papacy*, 122–7; for a survey of the Copts between the Arab and the Turkish conquests see Terry G. Wilfong, 'The Non-Muslim Communities: Christian Communities', in *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, i: *Islamic Egypt, 640–1517*, ed. Carl F. Petry (Cambridge, 1998), 175–97.

only after the Arab conquest. Before then the somewhat anarchic state of the anti-Chalcedonian movements in the Near East and the variations of monophysitism offered by different individuals and sects make it hard to provide any generalization. After the Muslim conquest, however, we begin to see a Church with a teaching, rites, and customs which appear to have changed relatively little over the centuries.

Although various etymologies of the word 'Copt' have been advanced—that it was derived from the town of Qift near Luxor, from the Greek κόπτω (*kopto*, 'to cut'), an allusion to the Coptic practice of circumcision, or from Noah's great-grandson Caphtorim, also known as the king Copt or Coptos who defeated three of his brothers, or even from the last syllables of the word 'Jacobite'—it is now generally agreed to be taken from a corruption of the Greek [Αἰ]γύπτ[ιος], [ai]gupti[os] or Egyptian, and the word *qibtīyīn*, referring to Egyptian [Christians] was used by the Arabs at an early stage.² We shall see, however, that terminology was one of the main obstacles impeding the discovery of the Copts by Western visitors. This was partly because the term Copt was only introduced very gradually. There was a more general tendency, already perceptible among the Greek chroniclers of the Council of Chalcedon, to refer to all the Monophysites as 'Jacobites'.

The terminological confusion which baffled the Europeans was further increased by the fact that the Muslims made little distinction between non-Muslims—little between Jews and Christians, and even less between the various Christian Churches. And the Copts were by no means the only Christians in Egypt. Even if the majority of Egyptian Christians were members of the Coptic Church, a number remained Melkites.³ In the centuries following the Arab conquest other Eastern Christian communities came to Egypt—Ethiopians (in communion

² For a survey of the various etymologies given in the early modern period see Dietrich Reimbold, *De Coptorum sacramentis baptismi atque eucharistiae* (Leipzig, 1736), 4–6. More recent discussions are to be found in Nathalie Bosson, '“Copte”: De l'ambiguïté à une réalité sociale et linguistique', in Bosson and Aufrère (eds.), *Égyptes... L'Égyptien et le copte* 23–5, esp. 24; Sydney H. Aufrère and Nathalie Bosson, 'Un dictionnaire des curiosités égyptiennes... une approche sémantique historique', *Études coptes*, 7 (2000), 1–15; and Okasha el-Daly, *Egyptology: The Missing Millennium. Ancient Egypt in Medieval Arabic Writings* (London, 2005), 21–2. For an early Arabic use see al-Tabari, *Annales*, ed. M. J. de Goeje, 15 vols. (1879–1901), v. 2585.

³ On the Copts and the Melkites see Jacques Tagher, *Christians in Muslim Egypt: An Historical Study of the Relations between the Copts and Muslims from 640 to 1922* (Altenberge, 1998), 238–42. By the time of the Ottoman conquest of Egypt the Melkite community seems to have been very small indeed—about twenty in Cairo, 100 in Alexandria, and a few in Rosetta, Damietta, and Suez.

with Alexandria), Armenians,⁴ Syrian Jacobites, Nestorians, Georgians (in communion with Constantinople), Maronites (in communion with Rome), and, in the eighteenth century, Syrian or Greek Catholics, besides a small community of resident Western Christians, known as Franks or Latins.

The presence of so many confessions is reflected in the fate of the churches and monasteries. At one point the Copts appear to have shared their church of St Menas in Cairo with the Armenians and the Syrian Jacobites. The Copts allowed the Franciscans to say mass in the church of St Sergius and seem to have granted the same privilege to the Melkites and the Armenians. The Coptic church of the Virgin Mary, Qasriyyat al-Rihan, was occupied briefly by the Melkites at the beginning of the eleventh century, and the Copts, in their turn, occupied the Melkite church of St George in the fifteenth century.⁵ The monasteries of St Anthony and St Paul were wrested from the Melkites in the eighth century and St Anthony's was occupied by Syrian Jacobites before being taken over by the Copts early in the thirteenth century.⁶ One of the principal monasteries in the Wadi al-Natrun, Dayr al-Suryan, was in the hands of the Syrians, and much frequented by Ethiopians, until the Copts prevailed in the late seventeenth century.⁷ Other churches and monasteries were occasionally given over to the Armenians (who, like many Syrians, entered Egypt as part of the royal guard)—they were said to dispose of thirty-five ecclesiastical buildings in about 1200—and, subsequently, returned to the Copts. Concessions were even made to the Nestorians, who were permitted to occupy a monastery outside Cairo late in the twelfth century.⁸

But if the Copts were by no means the only Christians in Egypt, they were also far from being restricted to Egypt themselves. By the ninth century they had a church in Jerusalem, and would subsequently have

⁴ There was a particularly massive immigration of Armenians in the 12th c. Tagher, *Christians in Muslim Egypt*, 117–18.

⁵ Charalambia Coquin, *Les Édifices chrétiens du Vieux-Caire*, i: *Bibliographie et topographie historiques* (Cairo, 1974), 7, 100–2, 141, 157.

⁶ Tim Vivian, 'St. Antony the Great', 14. For the presence in the monastery of Syrians, Ethiopians, and Armenians see Gawdat Gabra, 'Perspectives on the Monastery of St. Antony: Medieval and Later Inhabitants and Visitors', in Bolman (ed.), *Monastic Visions*, 173–83, esp. 175–8.

⁷ Massimo Capuani, *L'Égypte copte* (Paris, 1999), 70–2; Johannes den Heijer, 'Relations between Copts and Syrians in the Light of Recent Discoveries at Dayr as-Suryān', in Mat Immerzeel and Jacques van der Vliet (eds.), *Coptic Studies on the Threshold of a New Millennium*, 2 vols. (Leuven, 2004), ii. 923–38.

⁸ Eusèbe Renaudot, *Historia Patriarcharum Alexandrinorum Jacobitarum a D. Marco usque ad finem saeculi XIII* (Paris, 1713), 553.

the use of a monastery. Admittedly, they often had to share it with the Syrian Jacobites and, at the time of the Crusades, had to yield it to the Franks. In the thirteenth century, however, they had their own archbishop of Jerusalem, and by the early sixteenth century they owned the chapel in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which is theirs to this day.⁹ Perhaps as early as the twelfth century they also had ecclesiastical establishments in Cyprus. From the fifteenth century on they appear to have been in possession of a church of St Anthony in Nicosia, and of a monastery, Dayr Maqar, in the Kerynia range north-west of Nicosia.¹⁰

Under the Arabs the Copts were given the particular Muslim juridical status of *ahl al-dhimma*, reserved for the non-Muslim religious minorities, notably Jews and Christians. As such they were subjected to special taxes. There were two main ones. The first was the *gizya*, a poll tax sometimes said to compensate for the fact that Jews and Christians were not allowed to fight in the Muslim armies, and normally levied on able-bodied men. Women, children, the old, and the infirm tended to be exempt, and so, in the case of the Copts, were monks. The *gizya* thus remained an incentive among the poorer Copts to join a monastic community.¹¹ Besides the *gizya* there was a property tax, the *kharāg*, usually raised on villages, districts, and landowners.¹²

However good the relations between the Copts and the Muslims immediately after the Arab conquest under the Omayyad dynasty, pressure was soon exerted on the Christians to convert. The absence of statistics means that we can only speculate on the process. It is estimated that over half the Coptic population converted within forty years of the establishment of the new state treasury in 641.¹³ But it has also been suggested that the Christians remained a majority until the second half of the tenth century. In all probability the situation differed greatly from one region to another, the Copts continuing to be numerous in Upper Egypt until the twelfth century.¹⁴ They were strong enough, certainly,

⁹ Otto F. A. Meinardus, *The Copts in Jerusalem* (Cairo, 1960), 11; id., 'The Copts in Jerusalem and the Question of the Holy Places', in Anthony O'Mahony et al. (eds.), *The Christian Heritage in the Holy Land* (London, 1995), 112–28, esp. 112–20.

¹⁰ George Francis Hill, *A History of Cyprus*, 4 vols. (Cambridge, 1940–52), iii. 810.

¹¹ The *gizya* is discussed by Muhammad 'Afīf, *Al-Aqbāt fī Miṣr fī al-ʿaṣr al-uthmānī* (Cairo, 1992), 30–41. See also Bernard Lewis, *The Jews of Islam* (London, 1984), 14–16.

¹² Elli, *Storia della chiesa copta*, ii. 7.

¹³ Youssef Courbage and Philippe Fargues, *Chrétiens et juifs dans l'Islam arabe et turc* (Paris, 1997), 36–8.

¹⁴ Christian Cannuyer, *L'Égypte copte: Les chrétiens du Nil* (Paris, 2000), 64; id., *Les Coptes* (Turnhout, 1990), 39–41.

to express their discontent, and high fiscal demands led, in the eighth and the ninth centuries, to violent revolts. What active pressure there was appears to have been intermittent. In the mid-ninth century the Abbasid caliph al-Mutawakkil raised taxes, dismissed his Coptic civil servants, and took discriminatory measures, such as the imposition of a distinctive form of dress or the prohibition to ring bells or to build churches. The most violent bout of persecution of all occurred under the Fatimid sultan al-Hakim in the early years of the eleventh century, but there were also other moments in which the authorities acted against the religious minorities—under Salah al-Din in the second half of the twelfth century, under the Mamluk sultan Baybars between 1265 and 1274, and on various occasions between 1293 and 1354.¹⁵ Yet the discriminatory measures which these bouts frequently entailed were often evaded and soon revoked, and should not blind us to the genuine admiration which existed for the Copts and their learning among certain Muslim scholars.¹⁶

Still more effective than persecution, discrimination, or taxation in determining conversion to Islam were the rewards attending it. A recent study of Coptic converts shows that, as soon as they became Muslims, their careers advanced with an unprecedented rapidity. As long as they remained Christians they could count on employment in certain fields—as civil servants, secretaries, scribes, or accountants—but on their conversion they sped to the heights of government administration, to which only very few Copts might aspire.¹⁷

The conversions to Islam under Muslim rule were accompanied by the 'Arabization' of Egypt. In 706 Arabic became the language of all official documents and soon penetrated to every level of society. The Coptic language started to decline. By the time Sahidic, the dialect of the South, had been replaced by Bohairic, the dialect of the North, as the official tongue in the eleventh century, the Copts were all Arabic-speaking and by the thirteenth century their texts were usually bilingual, in Coptic and Arabic.

But the stories of persecution on which the Coptic chroniclers insist, and which have been faithfully recorded by later historians in the West, show only one side of a far more complex situation. Although there were conversions to Islam which gradually reduced them to a minority, whose early privileges were to be threatened by the arrival of other

¹⁵ Elli, *Storia della chiesa copta*, ii. 50–5, 86–99, 134–6, 194–5, 206–25.

¹⁶ el-Daly, *Egyptology*, 22, 25–6, 62.

¹⁷ See the survey by Carl F. Petry, 'Copts in Late Medieval Egypt', *CE* ii. 618–35.

Arabic-speaking Christians favoured by the Muslim rulers, there were still cases of distinguished converts to the Church of Alexandria: in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries the conversions occurred of the Muslim al-Wadih ibn Raga, who made his name as a theologian and concealed his Muslim past by entering a monastery and taking the name of Paul, and of the Jew 'Abd al-Masih al-Isra'ili, who wrote three works intended to convert the Jews to Christianity.¹⁸

Above all, the Copts could count on powerful Muslim protectors. Despite the outburst of hostility under al-Hakim, they were protected by various members of the Fatimid dynasty, which ruled from 969 to 1171. Under their overlordship the Copts assumed something of a monopoly on Egyptian finances, which they retained, with interruptions, until the nineteenth century,¹⁹ and they came to occupy other posts in the government.²⁰ It is probably this, more than anything else, that accounts for the great cultural renaissance of the Copts, unequalled in any of the other Eastern Churches, which reached its height in the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries. The causes of this extraordinary phenomenon have yet to be ascertained, but, as Georg Graf suggests, at least a part of it can be attributed to patronage among the Muslims.²¹

The surviving literary output in Sahidic Coptic includes fragments of Hermetic texts, lives of the early Fathers, a number of apocryphal works of the New Testament, parts of the great Bible translation, homilies, liturgical works, hagiographical and historical writings, texts on magic, and even romances. The heyday of Sahidic literature was between the fourth and the mid-seventh century (the time of the Arab conquest), but the long poetic work known as the *Triadon* dates from the fourteenth century.²² These texts were largely unknown to the early European collectors of Coptic manuscripts, who, as we shall see, were still asking one another in the late seventeenth century whether there was any literary evidence of Sahidic in existence. The situation changed with the triumph of Bohairic, and it is in the eleventh and twelfth centuries that

¹⁸ *GCAL* ii. 318–20.

¹⁹ Courbage and Fargues, *Chrétiens et juifs*, 40.

²⁰ Cf. Louis Cheikh, *Les Vizirs et secrétaires arabes chrétiens en Islam 622–1517*, ed. Camille Hechaïmé, SJ (Jounieh and Rome, 1987), pp. xv ff., xx–xxi, xxvi, 115, 152, 180, 189, 199–2, 204–5, 223–6. See also André Ferré, 'Fatimids and Coptes', *CE* iv. 1097–1100.

²¹ *GCAL* ii. 295.

²² For a survey see Tito Orlandi, *Elementi di lingua e letteratura copta* (Milan, 1970), 67–154; id., 'The Future of Studies in Coptic Biblical and Ecclesiastical Literature', in R. McL. Wilson (ed.), *The Future of Coptic Studies* (Leiden, 1978), 143–63.

the magnificent illuminated manuscripts of the Gospels were copied, in Arabic and Coptic, which formed the pride of so many European libraries. Yet, even if the *Triadon* was composed in the fourteenth century, even if a number of church documents—marriage contracts and letters of ordination—date from the same period, they were usually accompanied by parallel versions in Arabic.²³ By this time Coptic was unknown to many Copts, and the language of the great cultural renaissance was Arabic.

Starting with the history of the patriarchs of Alexandria by Severus ibn al-Muqaffa' in the middle of the tenth century, the Copts began to display an astonishing versatility, exemplified by the works of the three al-ʿAssal brothers some two hundred years later. Dogmatic works abounded, by al-Rashid Abu 'l-Khayr ibn al-Tayyib and others, in which monophysitism was defended against the other Christian Churches of the East and the West, Judaism and Islam were confuted, and certain points, such as auricular confession and the benefits of frequent communion, predestination, and the nature of Christ and the Trinity, were debated. A theologian such as Ibn Katib Qaysar, from a line of distinguished civil servants, displayed an approach to the Scriptures in which the investigation of similar terms in Coptic, Greek, and Syriac points towards the philological achievements of the Western humanists.²⁴ There were lexicographers and grammarians whose works, in Arabic, on the Coptic language would stand European students of Coptic in the seventeenth century in good stead. Shams al-Riyasa Abu 'l-Barakat ibn Kabar, who, besides being a priest was also secretary to the Mamluk officer and amir Ruqn al-Din Baybars al-Mansuri, produced a Bohairic–Arabic dictionary and a theological encyclopaedia which would be invaluable to European students of the Eastern Churches. And there were chronologists, chroniclers, and historians who left a profound mark on Arabic literature. The most celebrated of these was Girgis al-Makin, and his influence in Europe, as we shall see, was considerable.

But the Coptic renaissance petered out as suddenly as it had started. By the fourteenth century there was little trace of it, even if Coptic copyists were still producing manuscripts, and continued to do so until the nineteenth century.²⁵ Outbursts of plague, famine, and still more

²³ Wilfong, 'The Non-Muslim Communities', 185–6.

²⁴ For a survey of the theological development of the Copts see Otto F. A. Meinardus, *Two Thousand Years of Coptic Christianity* (Cairo, 1999), 52–61.

²⁵ Anne Boud'hors (ed.), *Pages chrétiennes d'Égypte: Les manuscrits des Coptes* (Paris, 2004), 56.

conversions to Islam under the Mamluks all took their toll on a community which may have amounted to some 7 per cent of the Egyptian population at the time of the Ottoman conquest, the level at which it has remained to this day.²⁶

UNDER OTTOMAN RULE

In 1516, in Syria, the forces of the Ottoman sultan Selim, the ruler of a fast expanding empire, defeated the Mamluk army commanded by the sultan al-Ghawri (who died in battle). Al-Ghawri's nephew and successor, al-Ashraf Tumanbay, tried to continue resisting the Ottomans, but Egypt was invaded and Cairo occupied in January 1517. Tumanbay was captured and killed, his head exposed on the great city gate, Bab Zuwayla.

The Ottoman sultans ruled Egypt from distant Istanbul, where some of the various religious faiths were divided into *millets* or nations, each represented by a religious leader. Of these, however, there were only four—the Muslims, the Jews, the Church of Constantinople, and the Armenians. The Armenian patriarch could indeed be said to represent the other Monophysite Churches, but in fact neither these, nor the other Christian communities present in the Ottoman Empire such as the Nestorians and the Maronites, had a spokesman of their own in the Ottoman capital. The Copts did not form a *millet* and were subjected to the Ottoman viceroy in Cairo.

Nevertheless the Ottoman occupation of Egypt entailed radical changes. Under the Mamluks taxation of the *dhimmis* had risen, especially towards the end of the dynasty. With the Turks this altered. Lower taxation in general, not only of the *dhimmis* but also of the Muslims, soon led to a growing prosperity, which reached its climax in the eighteenth century. Egyptian trade flourished as demand increased for goods produced locally in Egypt, such as sugar and textiles, as well as for goods like coffee, which were controlled by Cairene merchants. The Ottomans, moreover, rejected the policy of state intervention

²⁶ However unreliable the statistics, it is estimated that, when Napoleon arrived in Egypt in 1798, the local Christians amounted to about 170,000, 160,000 of whom were Copts and the others Greeks (5,000), Syrians (3,000–4,000), and Armenians (2,000). Courbage and Fargues, *Chrétiens et juifs*, 154–5.

in international trade and the trade monopolies cherished by the Mamluks.²⁷

The Turks were more tolerant of their religious minorities than the Mamluks or some of their predecessors, and there would be no further official campaigns of persecution. Indeed, at the beginning of Ottoman rule in Egypt a certain preference was shown for *dhimmis*, both Christians and Jews, as civil servants—a feature which increased the unpopularity of the emerging Ottoman regime in some Muslim circles.²⁸ Certainly there were still periods in which taxes were raised and distinguishing features and disabilities imposed on the minorities. These—generally inflicted on men rather than on women—were nearly all familiar to the Copts from earlier periods of Muslim rule. They included the obligation to wear clothes, or turbans, of a particular colour (usually blue or black—bright colours were forbidden); the prohibition to ride horses in towns, the obligation to ride side-saddle on mules or donkeys and to dismount before certain mosques, government buildings, and houses of Ottoman dignitaries, and sometimes even the prohibition to ride at all; the obligation to wear a bell round the neck when entering a public bath (Jews were supposed to wear two), restrictions on the ability to purchase slaves and servants; and the prohibition to employ Muslims.²⁹ As in the past, however, these measures were imposed briefly, often locally, and were frequently evaded, while, despite the traditional Muslim exclusion of Christians and Jews from the armed forces, there were even times when the Copts actually fought in the Egyptian army.³⁰

There was, however, one type of restriction which aroused particular resentment in the Coptic community and sometimes led to grave clashes

²⁷ Michael Winter, 'Ottoman Egypt, 1525–1609', in *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, ii: *Modern Egypt from 1517 to the End of the Twentieth Century*, ed. M. W. Daly (Cambridge, 1998), 1–33, esp. 9; Daniel Crecelius, 'Egypt in the Eighteenth Century', *ibid.* 59–86, esp. 76–8; Nelly Hanna, *In Praise of Books: A Cultural History of Cairo's Middle Class, Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (Cairo, 2003), 26–49.

²⁸ Michael Winter, *Egyptian Society under Ottoman Rule 1517–1798* (London, 1992), 13, 200–1.

²⁹ 'Afifi, *Al-Aqbāṭ*, 52–64.

³⁰ Winter, *Egyptian Society*, 56, reports an incident in 1646 when the Chavush regiment petitioned for the expulsion from their midst of 'those who are Copts, Damascenes, and natives of Aleppo'. Mu'allim Ya'qub, who not only organized the financial side of the expedition of General Desaix to Upper Egypt and provided the French with essential information about the Mamluks after the Napoleonic invasion in 1798, but would also himself serve as a general in the French army, had already fought with his employer Suleyman Bey against the Ottoman forces in 1786. Tagher, *Christians in Muslim Egypt*, 189–90; Henry Laurens, *L'Expédition d'Égypte 1798–1801* (Paris, 1989), 156–7.

with the Muslims—the building and restoration of churches and church buildings. There were various traditional rulings on the matter. To build a new church was usually prohibited, although it was sometimes possible, albeit difficult, to build a church on the site of an old one. When it came to restoring churches there was an injunction according to which this could only be done by using the existing rubble. There were numerous occasions between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries when Copts tried to infringe restrictions, and they often succeeded. What might happen, on the other hand, was that their Muslim neighbours would inform the religious authorities, who, in their turn, would insist on the Ottoman government taking action. The official measures varied. They could simply be a fine—which the religious authorities resented since they regarded it as a bribe—or they could extend to the closing of churches, and sometimes even to their demolition.³¹ The description of the church built by the Franciscan Custodians of the Holy Land in Cairo provided by the English traveller Richard Pococke, who visited Egypt in 1737, gives some idea of the possibilities and dangers affecting Christian ecclesiastical buildings. He referred to ‘a large new-built monastery, which was pull’d down once or twice by the mob, whilst they were building it, before they could satisfie the great people, who wanted presents; and it cost them great sums of money, not only for the building, but to make all the great men their friends’.³²

There were numerous isolated incidents of religious intolerance on the part of the Muslim majority. Many of them can be attributed to a political crisis, military revolts, or outbursts of anarchy, and to the inability of the government to prevent them, but there were also occasions on which the Copts abandoned their customary discretion and stood out as a target for the more extreme Muslims. This could be the case with the building of churches, but there were also other episodes. One, which occurred in about 1753, is described by the Egyptian chronicler of the early nineteenth century, ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Gabarti. The Copts had paid a considerable sum of money—1,000 dinars—for an official permission to make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem. ‘They departed’, wrote al-Gabarti, who had little sympathy with the minorities, with great pomp, with immense baggage and provisions, with litters in which their women and children were carried, and with drums and pipes... They

³¹ ‘Afifi, *Al-Aqbāt*, 76–88. Cf. also Winter, *Egyptian Society*, 220–1.

³² Richard Pococke, *A Description of the East, and Some other Countries. Volume the First. Observations on Egypt* (London, 1743), 38.

employed beduins to march with them as guards, and they gave them money, clothes, and other gifts. This display became known throughout the city, and people disapproved of it.

A Muslim living close by accused the *shaykh al-Islam*, the head mufti, of accepting a bribe and creating a precedent. Soon, he said, the Christian pilgrimage to Jerusalem would rival the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca. 'It will become a custom guilt for which will lie upon you until the Day of Resurrection', the *shaykh al-Islam* was told. 'So the shaykh got up', al-Gabarti continues,

left in a rage, and permitted the common people to attack the Christians and plunder their possessions. Also among those who went out was a group of students from al-Azhar who banded together against the Christians, stoned them, beat them with sticks and clubs, plundered their possessions, and humiliated them . . . The Christians' fortunes suffered a great reversal in the incident; everything they had spent was lost and scattered.³³

If we except episodes of this sort, the Copts emerge as an integrated part of Egyptian society. Their relations with the authorities and with the Muslim population were generally good, and with the Muslims they shared the sufferings and hardships that afflicted the entire country in the early modern period. In the countryside, in the Delta and the Nile valley, the Copts and the Muslims carried on the same activities as farmers. Although there was a tendency among the Copts and the other *dhimmis* to live together in particular areas in the cities, there was no question of a closed ghetto system, and Copts might well have Muslim, or even Jewish, neighbours. This applied still more to the Copts working in the *sūq*. The professions most common in the Coptic community were those of goldsmiths, tailors, candlemakers, and carpenters, with a slightly lower number of masons and builders, weavers, drapers, and perfumers.³⁴ Neither in the *sūq* nor in the guilds was there much religious distinction.³⁵

There is little evidence between the Ottoman occupation of Egypt and the arrival of the French in 1798 of anything comparable to the great cultural achievements of the Copts in the thirteenth century, yet we now know that, by the eighteenth century, many Copts had succeeded in

³³ 'Abd al-Rahman al-Gabarti, *History of Egypt*, ed. Thomas Philipp and Moshe Perlmann (Stuttgart, 1994), Text vol. i. 308.

³⁴ André Raymond, *Artisans et commerçants au Caire au XVIIIe siècle*, 2 vols. (Damascus, 1973), i. 228; ii. 456–7.

³⁵ 'Afifi, *Al-Aqbāt*, 151–89, 217–24; Raymond, *Artisans et commerçants*, ii. 458–9, 524–6.

amassing sizeable fortunes and in acquiring an economic and political influence which would prepare the way for the second renaissance in the nineteenth century. The standard of living of the entire Coptic community was, on the whole, higher than that of the Muslims.³⁶ The phenomenon can be observed above all among the Coptic grandees, known as the *mubāshirīn* (sing. *mubāshir*) or *arākhina* (sing. *arakhin*). These formed an educated upper class which had long been in government service, its members acting as tax gatherers, customs officials, scribes, chancellors, and secretaries to the Muslim authorities. However much they respected their Church, however, they had a considerable contempt, as the prefect of the Reformed Franciscan missionaries was to stress in 1737, for the priesthood.³⁷ Under Ottoman rule the *arākhina* obtained a power and influence altogether unprecedented. They found themselves in charge of most of the financial administration of Egypt. They also played a decisive role in Coptic society and in the Church, taking part (and gradually replacing the bishops) in the election of the patriarch, and acting as intermediaries between their fellow Copts and the government. The riches they obtained enabled them to perform philanthropic offices. Their good relations with the Muslim authorities made it possible for them to undertake the restoration of ecclesiastical buildings.³⁸ In Cairo itself most of the patriarchal church of the Virgin in Harit Zuwayla as it now stands was built in the eighteenth century, while the church of St Mercurius was added to the main block in 1773 by Ibrahim al-Gawhari. The church of the Virgin, known as al-Damshiriya, in the monastery of St Mercurius in Old Cairo, was entirely rebuilt at about the same time, as was the nearby church of the Virgin or Qasriyyat al-Rihan. A new church of the Virgin was built in Ma'adi. The desert monasteries, too, profited from the advantageous circumstances. The monastery of St Paul, which had been abandoned for over two hundred years, was inhabited once more after 1701. The ancient church of St Paul was repainted and the new little church of St Mercurius was added to it at the end of the century. By 1777 the far

³⁶ Winter, *Egyptian Society*, 221.

³⁷ *Nascita*, 262: 'il sacerdozio è universalmente aborrito quasi cosa vile dalle Persone Nobile e Civili ...'.

³⁸ 'Afifi, *Al-Aqbāt*, 105–48. For the economic rise of the Copts see also 184–9. Still more details are given by Magdi Girgis, 'Athar al-arākhina 'alā awḡdā' al-qibṭ fī al-qarn al-thāmin 'ashar', *Annales islamologiques*, 34 (2000), 23–44; id., 'Ibrāhīm al-Nāsih et la culture copte au XVIII^e siècle', in Immerzeel and van der Vliet (eds.), *Coptic Studies on the Threshold of a New Millennium*, ii, 939–52; Hanna, *In Praise of Books*, 107–8.

larger church of St Michael the Archangel had been completed. As for St Anthony's, it was never abandoned, but it was heavily restored in the eighteenth century. The church of the Apostles was rebuilt in 1733, and the church of St Mark in 1766.³⁹

Although European travellers were usually reluctant to admit the existence of a prosperous class of Copts who stood in such contrast to the persecuted, indigent, and ignorant minority dear to the Western imagination, even Richard Pococke had to admit that

the Christian religion would be at a very low ebb, if the people did not find it convenient to have Coptic stewards of their estates, who are well acquainted with all affairs, are very dextrous at keeping accounts, which they do in a sort of Coptic characters understood by no body else; and one reason why they make use of them may be, that these people are more under their command, and that they may have them more in their power, in case of any breach of trust. Their stewards, in every village, are a sort of lords, and are protectors of the Christians in it.⁴⁰

There are numerous examples of this thriving class. Lutfalla Abu Yusuf, who was employed until his death in 1720 by the amir Muhammad Kadak Katkhuda Mustahfazan, was reputed to be the richest man in the country. But little is so indicative of the relationship between the Copts and their Muslim rulers as the behaviour of the two Qazdughli amirs who governed Egypt between 1760 and 1775.

'Ali Bey al-Kabir, the first of the two, is now recognized as the first modernizer of Egypt in his efforts to break free of the central government in Istanbul and to extend his own power. As soon as he was in a position to do so he raised the taxes both on *dhimmis* and resident foreigners, and added new and altogether arbitrary ones. In 1767, however, when he had further consolidated his hold on the country, he assured the *dhimmis* of his protection and proved exceptional in his benevolence to Christians—to Europeans, to the enterprising Greek Catholic community from Syria, which had sought refuge in Egypt and which, under his wing, managed to wrest the monopoly of the Egyptian customs from the Jews, and to the Copts. He was devoted to his Coptic secretary, Mu'allim Rizq, and Rizq, in his turn, became his most influential adviser, receiving substantial bribes from anyone obliged to use his services.⁴¹

³⁹ Capuani, *L'Égypte copte*, 106, 108–9, 140–1, 144–5.

⁴⁰ Pococke, *A Description of the East*, i. 176.

⁴¹ Daniel Crecelius, *The Roots of Modern Egypt: A Study of the Regimes of 'Ali Bey al-Kabir and Muhammad Bey Abu al-Dhahab, 1760–1775* (Minneapolis and Chicago, 1981), 39, 66–8. As James Bruce prepared his voyage of exploration up the Nile he was

‘Ali Bey’s rival, brother-in-law, and successor, Muhammad Bey Abu al-Dhahab, was a Muslim of extreme piety and owed much of his popularity to his attacks on ‘Ali Bey for surrounding himself with Christians. When he invaded Palestine in 1775 he was merciless in his destruction of Christian buildings and in his tax demands. Yet he had as his secretary one of the richest and most influential Copts in Egypt, Ibrahim al-Gawhari, who, under his protection, embarked on his programme of restoring church buildings and establishing Coptic *awqāf* or trusts.⁴² When Ibrahim al-Gawhari died al-Gabarti honoured him with a stirring obituary, describing him as ‘one of the important personalities of the world and one of the shrewdest, not a thing escaped his mind—not even the slightest detail. He treated every person with the courtesy he deserved, and he was obliging, and exchanged gifts, and was charitable and did what was required to captivate hearts and love’.⁴³ Some years later, in 1810, al-Gabarti did the same for Ibrahim’s brother Girgis, who served as chief of the Coptic scribes under the amirs, under the French between 1798 and 1801, and then again under the Ottoman governors. ‘He was greatly respected and his words carried great influence’, wrote al-Gabarti. The Ottoman pashas ‘showed respect for him and took his advice on matters’.⁴⁴

Thanks to their employment as tax gatherers the *arākhina* seem to have been in a position to survive the various financial crises of the period before the French invasion. To begin with, when taxes were still low, they, like the other members of their community and the Muslims, could benefit from the situation and save their profits from trade and agriculture. When taxes increased sharply, particularly after 1775,⁴⁵ it was they who collected them and who were again in an ideal situation to profit from them. This, too, had consequences for the entire Coptic community.⁴⁶ Indeed, the unprecedented importance of the *arākhina*

struck by the immense influence of Rizq, whose help he managed to enlist owing to Rizq’s passion for astrology and his conviction that Bruce’s scientific instruments served an astrological purpose. See James Bruce, *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile in the Years 1768, 1769, 1770, 1771, 1772, and 1773*, 5 vols. (Edinburgh, 1790), i. 30–40. For a survey of other successful Copts in the late 18th c. see Meinardus, *Two Thousand Years of Coptic Christianity*, 60–1, 66–8.

⁴² Crecelius, *The Roots of Modern Egypt*, 141, 161–4. The restoration of Coptic church buildings is discussed by Girgis, ‘Athar al-arākhina’, 31–5.

⁴³ al-Gabarti, *History of Egypt*, Text vol. ii. 437.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, Text vol. iv. 177–8.

⁴⁵ Crecelius, ‘Egypt in the Eighteenth Century’, 82–6.

⁴⁶ Although she was writing in the late 19th c., the observation by Edith Butcher can almost certainly be applied to earlier periods. E. L. Butcher, *The Story of the Church of*

had an immense effect on every level of Coptic society. The restoration of the churches and monasteries was attended by a cultural activity which the Copts shared with their Muslim neighbours.⁴⁷ Besides the redecoration and painting of the interiors of the ecclesiastical buildings there was a revival in copying manuscripts (many of which were made for men such as Ibrahim al-Gawhari), in translating texts from Greek, Ethiopic, and Syriac, and, as we shall see in the case of Yusab, the bishop of Akhmim and Girga, in theology.⁴⁸

EDUCATION

Such a cultural revival raises the question of the education of the Copts—a subject on which we have sadly little information. Missionaries—the Jesuit Guillaume Dubernat, for example—were shocked to find that Coptic children did not study any form of catechism and concluded that Coptic society was in a state of irremediable ignorance.⁴⁹ Josephus Abudacnus, himself a Copt and to whom we shall return, said in a letter to the great scholar Joseph Justus Scaliger in Leiden that all he had learnt in the elementary schools of the Copts in the late sixteenth century was to read and to write, but that even his knowledge of Arabic remained imperfect.⁵⁰ In his history of the Copts, on the other hand, he claimed that Coptic children learnt to read and write first Arabic and then Coptic. This claim is all the more remarkable since he himself appears to have had no knowledge of Coptic whatsoever. They learnt, he wrote, the Psalms and the Pauline Epistles off by heart, and many of them studied arithmetic and geometry, invaluable for their later careers.

Egypt; being an Outline of the History of the Egyptians under their Successive Masters from the Roman Conquest until Now, 2 vols. (London, 1897), ii. 427: 'Though there is much poverty, there is little real want or beggary among the Copts, as the well-to-do do not ignore their poorer neighbours, and those who are earning money consider it a matter of course that they should help to support those relatives who are out of work.'

⁴⁷ For the Coptic acquisition of manuscripts from the 16th c. onwards see Febe Y. Armanios, 'Coptic Christians in Ottoman Egypt: Religious Worldview and Communal Beliefs' (Ph.D. diss., Ohio State University, 2003), 86–90.

⁴⁸ Girgis, 'Athar al-arākhina', 35–40. For the contemporary Muslim cultural interest, which also led to a growing number of manuscripts being copied, see Hanna, *In Praise of Books*, 79–103.

⁴⁹ See below, p. 161.

⁵⁰ Alastair Hamilton, 'An Egyptian Traveller in the Republic of Letters: Josephus Barbatous or Abudacnus the Copt', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 57 (1994), 123–50, esp. 124.

The better-educated Copts, he went on, were then employed by the Turks as secretaries, accountants, tax collectors, and land surveyors, while the poorer classes worked as goldsmiths, jewellers, cobblers, carpenters, tailors, stone cutters, sculptors, and architects. They might also work as servants in Turkish, Jewish, or Christian families.⁵¹

This rare testimony on the part of a Coptic contemporary has been confirmed by more recent research.⁵² Egyptian children between the ages of 7 and 12 received elementary instruction from the *kuttāb*, schools connected with an ecclesiastical institution whether Islamic or Christian, where they learnt to read and write Arabic, and studied geography and arithmetic. Where the alleged teaching of Coptic was concerned, this is unlikely to have gone far beyond the alphabet and the pronunciation, in order to follow those parts of the liturgy which remained in Coptic.⁵³ Then, particularly if they were from a family of *arākhina* or if they aspired to a post in the government administration, the young Copts were apprenticed to some government official until they could assume an office themselves. The training they received was obviously of an essentially practical nature, with a strong emphasis on accountancy and auditing, and the reputation they acquired of keeping their accounts in a cryptic language suggests that they—like the Jews who used the Hebrew script—were using the Coptic numerals for the purposes of book-keeping.⁵⁴

We have even less information about the education of the clergy, and what we have comes almost entirely from the prejudiced pens of the Roman Catholic missionaries.⁵⁵ If we judge from the theologians produced by the Copts in the Ottoman period, the existence of someone like Yusab suggests that it was possible for a man of the Church to obtain a good theological training. Very few, on the other hand, seem to have done so. The priests probably had an elementary theological education, but since they usually combined their service to the Church with some trade or craft, they seldom cultivated their learning. The monks did indeed have libraries at their disposal, but the emphasis of the monastic

⁵¹ Josephus Abudacnus, *Historia Jacobitarum, seu Coptorum* (Oxford, 1675), 29–30.

⁵² Afifi, *Al-Aqbāt*, 111–12, 241–7. For a survey of education in Egypt in general in this period see Hanna, *In Praise of Books*, 50–61; Wolfram Reiss, *Erneuerung in der Koptisch-Orthodoxen Kirche: Die Geschichte der koptisch-orthodoxen Sonntagsschulbewegung und die Aufnahme ihrer Reformansätze in den Erneuerungsbewegungen der Koptisch-Orthodoxen Kirche der Gegenwart* (Hamburg, 1998), 14–17.

⁵³ Tagher, *Christians in Muslim Egypt*, 267.

⁵⁴ Winter, *Egyptian Society*, 203.

⁵⁵ See the comments in Afifi, *Al-Aqbāt*, 265–8.

community was on an ascetic way of life, and the favourite reading matter in the monasteries were books such as the *Bustān al-rūhbān*, *The Garden of the Monks*, composed largely of apophthegmata, instructive maxims, and episodes taken from the lives and hagiographies of the great founders of the monastic system, Anthony, Paul of Thebes, Pachomius, and Macarius.⁵⁶ The patriarchs, finally, were chosen from the monks. Scholarly achievements were never a requirement, even if some of them did happen to be scholars. Once appointed the patriarch found himself at the head of Coptic society, answerable to the government for the behaviour of his co-religionists and often for their payment of taxes. Admittedly, in the Ottoman period, his role was filled increasingly by the *arākhina*, but even then it remains evident that the primary concerns of the patriarch were pastoral rather than theological.

BELIEFS AND CUSTOMS

But what were the beliefs and customs of the Coptic Church which the Europeans encountered? According to the reports by the Jesuit missionaries of the sixteenth century, the Copts knew little about monophysitism and nothing of the Council of Chalcedon. They accepted the terminological definition of the nature and person in Christ in accordance with 'verbal monophysitism', but they seldom regarded this as an important point in their faith. Yet we may well wonder how true such a version is. For there is plenty of evidence, particularly from the Franciscan missionaries in the eighteenth century, that the Copts would argue passionately in defence of monophysitism.⁵⁷ This is fully confirmed by the works of the bishop Yusab.

The Copts were deeply attached to their traditions, and by the time of the Ottoman conquest these were numerous and diverse. The Copts were spread over an immense area, stretching from the Mediterranean deep into Nubia and from the borders of Libya to the Red Sea coast.

⁵⁶ Pierre Du Bourguet, *Les Coptes* (Paris, 1988), 63, refers to 'la défiance à l'égard de la science, même théologique, très largement répandue jusqu'il y a peu dans les monastères coptes. On peut y voir une conséquence du renoncement au monde et peut-être est-il dû en partie au large recrutement des moines dans le milieu des fellahs. Mais il se rattache plus probablement à la méfiance de saint Antoine, surtout après un séjour à Alexandrie, en proie au vent de contestation arienne, contre les dangers du savoir et de la controverse pour l'ascétisme.'

⁵⁷ See e.g. Ildefonso da Palermo, *Cronaca della missione francescana dell'Alto Egitto: 1719-1739*, ed. Gabriele Giamberardini, OFM (Cairo, 1962), 55-6.

They prided themselves on being the true Egyptians and on alone having perpetuated the ancient Egyptian language. In the magic texts, the belief in which shocked missionaries such as Claude Sicard, we find the survival of Pharaonic, and sometimes even Gnostic, elements.⁵⁸ Although the early Egyptian Church seems to have distinguished itself by a rejection of pagan traditions, such a rejection was not as complete as was sometimes claimed.⁵⁹ A number of pre-Christian customs, particularly in the Coptic funerary rites, can be detected to this day—the habit of placing personal possessions of the deceased in the coffin, of performing sacrifices after death, of bringing offerings to the cemetery, and perhaps even the belief in the peregrinations of the soul between death and the last judgement.⁶⁰ Then there were essentially local traditions, which varied from place to place—the periods of fasting differed considerably in Lower and Upper Egypt⁶¹—and finally there was the effect of a millennium of cohabitation with the Muslims.⁶² The Copts and the Muslims venerated many of the same saints, often performed the same pilgrimages and feasts, and shared certain customs, such as the removal of shoes before entering a sacred area, the veiling of women, and circumcision.

The mere survival of the Coptic Church over so many centuries could be regarded as evidence of heroism and integrity and was looked upon with pride. The first proponents of monophysitism, Dioscorus and Severus of Antioch, whose portraits can still be seen on the walls of the monastery of St Anthony together with those of Anthony himself and of Paul of Thebes,⁶³ and on the walls of the Dayr al-Suryan and the Dayr Maqar in the Wadi al-Natrun⁶⁴, remained an essential part of Coptic identity and tradition which nothing would induce the Copts to

⁵⁸ The standard discussion of these elements remains Angelicus M. Kropp, OP, *Ausgewählte koptische Zaubertexte*, 3 vols. (Brussels, 1930–1), iii. 5–39, but see now Marvin Meyer and Richard Smith (eds.), *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power* (New York, 1994).

⁵⁹ A survey is provided by Elli, *Storia della chiesa copta*, iii. 23–34.

⁶⁰ Gabriele Giamberardini, OFM, *La sorte dei defunti nella tradizione copta* (Cairo, 1965), 23–85; Cérés Wissa Wassef, *Pratiques rituelles et alimentaires des Coptes* (Cairo, 1971), 173–86.

⁶¹ Armanios, 'Coptic Christians in Ottoman Egypt', 226–30.

⁶² Tagher, *Christians in Muslim Egypt*, 230–6; Doris Behrens-Abouseif, *Die Kopten in der ägyptischen Gesellschaft von der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts bis 1923* (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1972), 12–14.

⁶³ Elizabeth S. Bolman, 'Theodore, "The Writer of Life", and the Program of 1232–1233', in ead. (ed.), *Monastic Visions*, 37–76, esp. 71; William Lyster, 'Reflections of the Temporal World: Secular Elements in Theodore's Program', *ibid.* 103–25, esp. 112.

⁶⁴ Davis, *The Early Coptic Papacy*, 127 and *illus.* 6.

renounce. Dioscorus was invoked in the Coptic Antiphonary in terms not even used for Athanasius or Cyril, and was compared to Elias, Moses, David, and St Paul. Although not mentioned in the liturgies of St Gregory and St Cyril, he was indeed remembered in the most popular Coptic liturgy of all, that of St Basil, and was named together with Severus of Antioch, St Mark, Athanasius, Cyril, and other Fathers of the Church.⁶⁵ So while the Copts recognized the first four ecumenical Church councils—Nicaea, Constantinople, the first and the second Council of Ephesus, which witnessed the triumph of Dioscorus—they rejected the Council of Chalcedon at which monophysitism was condemned, as well as all subsequent councils. Since they accepted the first four they acknowledged the primacy of the see of Rome over the other sees, but they believed that at Chalcedon the papacy had lapsed into heresy and had never recovered.

At the head of the Church of Alexandria was the patriarch. For much of the Ottoman period he had under him some ten bishops obliged to reside in their sees and to whom translation from one see to another was virtually unknown. The election of the patriarch was normally performed by the bishops with a council consisting of secular and regular clergy and the *arākhina* representing the laity. The appointment of the patriarch was supposed to have the approval of the Ottoman authorities, who could have undesirable candidates deposed. In the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as we saw, the role of the *arākhina* increased. It was the patriarch, in his turn, who could select and consecrate the bishops. Below the bishop were six orders: the lowest was that of chanter, followed by those of reader, subdeacon, deacon, priest or presbyter, and archpriest or *qummuṣ*. Monks were usually ordained after three years of novitiate.⁶⁶

The Church of Alexandria is generally acknowledged to have the same seven sacraments as the Church of Rome, but in fact there seems to have been no equivalent definition among the Copts—of a sacrament as an outward sign of inward grace—and the manner in which they were conferred left room for doubt about their true nature.⁶⁷ Confirmation, for example, follows immediately after baptism, and is thus part of the

⁶⁵ For a discussion of the cult of Dioscorus see Wadi Abullif, 'Dioscoro, patriarca di Alessandria, sec. V Ch. copta', in *Enciclopedia dei santi: Le chiese orientali*, i (A—Gio) (Rome, 1998–9), cols. 702–11, esp. col. 708.

⁶⁶ Wissa Wassef, *Pratiques rituelles*, 126–33.

⁶⁷ For a balanced description of the Coptic ceremonies from a Catholic point of view see M. Jugie, 'Monophysite (Église Copte)', *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, x, cols. 2251–306.

same rite.⁶⁸ The Copts made little distinction between the two, a feature which allowed Protestant scholars (as well as certain Catholic missionaries) to deny the existence of confirmation as an independent sacrament. Penance, imposed in early times with such severity, was relatively neglected by the Copts. Attempts were made in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries to abolish sacramental confession and to replace it by confession to God alone, but the habit of sacramental confession prevailed, even if it was seldom used. Extreme unction was practised, albeit in a different way from that of Rome: it was also given to those in good health as a supplement to penance and a preparation for the eucharist. To the Coptic definition of the eucharist we shall be returning. Matrimony was regarded as only valid if blessed by the Church.

One of the questions that was constantly being raised by Western visitors to the Copts was whether they could be said to believe in purgatory, a place where sins were expurgated between death and the last judgement. The teaching of purgatory itself was a recent Western doctrine, first formulated officially at the Council of Lyons in 1274.⁶⁹ Certainly the Copts, even if they did say prayers for the dead for forty days after death, had no belief which was that precise. They drew, rather, on a number of different traditions, and had a variety of views about the fate of the soul.⁷⁰ On the whole they seem to have preferred the idea of a separation of the soul from the body—opinions varied on when that actually took place—and then of the soul wandering along a series of paths to its final destination.⁷¹

Some Coptic customs horrified the Western missionaries, and their significance was frequently misunderstood. The most obvious was circumcision, performed before baptism and often interpreted, particularly by the early missionaries of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as a compromise with Islam. In fact it was almost certainly a hygienic measure, probably inherited from the early Egyptians, and, however general it might have been, it was never imposed by the Church or universally practised, and was not accompanied by any religious rite. Indeed, the readiness with which the Coptic authorities told the missionaries of the sixteenth century that it was being abandoned indicates how unimportant they thought it was.

⁶⁸ Archbishop Basilius, 'Confirmation', *CE* ii. 585–6.

⁶⁹ Jacques Le Goff, *La Naissance du Purgatoire* (Paris, 1981), 320.

⁷⁰ Cf. Giamberardini, *La sorte dei defunti*, 4: 'Da una fonte comune, alimentata da ruscelli vari, ogni Copto attinge ciò che più gli aggrada o corrisponde meglio alle tradizioni della propria regione.'

⁷¹ *Ibid.* 9–68.

The celebration of the eucharist was also attended by customs unknown in the West. Those who took communion were not only supposed to fast since the previous day, but were not to come into contact with Muslims, to spit on the ground, or to smoke on the day on which communion was taken. Communion was administered in both kinds. The *qurbān* or bread, which was moistened with wine, was unleavened. The consecration, moreover, was celebrated in a manner different from the West. We shall see that there was some argument between the Roman Catholics and the Protestants about whether the Copts practised the elevation of the eucharist. Since the ceremony was performed behind the screen separating the *haykal* or sanctuary from the rest of the church, it was difficult for a spectator to establish exactly what took place, but the Copts had no exact equivalent to the Catholic raising of the host and the chalice for worship by the faithful.⁷² Baptism was performed with three immersions.⁷³ Clerical marriage was permitted if it had occurred before ordination, but priests could not marry after being ordained, or marry twice, whereas deacons could. Deacons, however, were ordained at a very early age. Marriage, finally, was permitted between first cousins.

Other usages which disconcerted Westerners included the sign of the cross made with one finger, shoes being removed on entering a church, and standing in church leaning on a T-shaped stick. Periods of fasting and abstinence were (and still are) a frequent feature of Coptic life, and the missionaries noted that their extent and severity led the Copts to despise the Church of Rome. Abstinence was practised for forty-three days in Advent and fifty-five days in Lent, and fasting was prescribed from fifty days after Easter for a period between fifteen and forty-nine days and for fifteen days to commemorate the Assumption of the Virgin Mary in August.⁷⁴ When the Roman Catholic missionaries first approached the Copts one of the customs to which they raised the greatest objections was the refusal of the Copts to eat animals that had not been slaughtered in accordance with the law of the Old Testament, while the Church of Rome, resting on Matthew 15: 11, 'Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man', allowed all food.

⁷² Archbishop Basilius, 'Mass of the Faithful', *CE* v. 1565–8.

⁷³ Archbishop Basilius, 'Baptism, Liturgy of', *CE* ii. 339–42.

⁷⁴ For a list of these and of the Coptic feast days see Wissa Wassef, *Pratiques rituelles*, 136–225.

There were also certain liturgical elements to which the Roman missionaries objected. These included the 'heresy' of the Trisagion, a hymn, recited during the canonical hours and before the prayer of the Gospel, containing the formula 'Holy God, Holy Mighty One, Holy Immortal One', based on Isaiah 6: 3 and repeated three times. It was traditionally addressed to the Trinity, but Western critics found unacceptable the Coptic addition of a reference to Christ's death on the cross and the Christological interpretation given by the Church of Alexandria.⁷⁵ Then there was the question of the procession of the Holy Ghost, the so-called *Filioque*. The *Filioque* was an addition to the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed which had been sanctioned in the West by the sixth century and which meant that the Holy Ghost proceeded from both the Father and the Son. This, which was to be one of the main points of conflict between the Churches of Rome and Constantinople, was universally rejected by the Eastern Churches. The Copts, like the Greeks, maintained that the Holy Ghost proceeded solely from the Father.⁷⁶

The Copts were also accused in the West of practising polygamy. In fact polygamy was combated constantly by the Coptic clergy, and, in the early Ottoman period, it seems to have been the principal preoccupation of the patriarch.⁷⁷ There is no doubt that it occurred frequently, partly through the example of the Muslims, and partly because of the facility of acquiring female slaves and servants. This very facility, in its turn, was one of the reasons why the Coptic patriarchy agreed with the Islamic authorities in imposing restrictions. Another feature Westerners deplored was what they thought was the ease with which divorce was granted. Yet the Coptic clergy laid down a large number of conditions for granting divorce. They may not have been as arduous as in the West, but they nevertheless made it far from easy. The Muslim authorities, on the other hand, were much readier to grant Copts a divorce, and it was to them that the Copts might resort.⁷⁸ 'And if their own clergy will not marry them to another', wrote Richard Pococke, 'they have recourse to the Cadi, who will do both; and this is practised by the Christians all over Turkey.'⁷⁹

Despite their rivalry, and occasional disagreements, with the Syrians and the Armenians, and their sometimes difficult relations with the

⁷⁵ Émile Maher Ishaq, 'Trisagion', *CE* vii. 2278–9.

⁷⁶ Marilyn Dunn, 'Filioque', *CE* iv. 1112–16.

⁷⁷ 'Afifi, *Al-Aqbāt*, 239–41.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 230–9.

⁷⁹ Pococke, *A Description of the East*, i. 246.

Ethiopians, the Copts seem to have retained some feeling of solidarity with the other Monophysites, and to have felt part of a movement which stretched to the extreme north of the Arab world and south into Africa. With a convent in Jerusalem and communities in Cyprus, the monks were often obliged to frequent representatives of the other Eastern Churches. This made of Egypt something of a cultural crossroads between Africa and Asia.

But even if there was a certain mobility among the Coptic monks in the East, and even if there are numerous indications that the Copts were always ready to supply Western visitors with information—John Greaves, who visited Egypt in the 1630s, is one of many examples of European scholars who applied to Copts in his research on chronology and metrology⁸⁰—the Copts, on the whole, were highly reluctant to travel to Europe, or, indeed, to travel at all. This is a further point which argues against the myth of the persecuted minority suffering under the Muslims. A few Copts, certainly, went to Italy. We know of Coptic merchants in Italy and of the various delegations from the patriarchs of Alexandria sent to confer with the pope. We also know of monks who landed on the Italian coast and endeavoured to collect alms for their monasteries, and we know that Athanasius Kircher met two Copts in Rome in the 1630s.⁸¹ But hardly any of the delegates went further than Rome, and most of them returned to Egypt as soon as they could. The Jesuit Guillaume Dubernat referred in 1706 to the ‘bad habit’ the Copts had acquired of never leaving their country and preventing their children from travelling to France.⁸² The French consul in Cairo, Benoît de Maillet, had encountered the same problem seven years earlier. Quite apart from the richer families, he wrote, not even the poorest Copts would let their children go abroad, and if they were given sums of money to do so, they would refund them. For this, said Maillet, there were various reasons. It was yet another indication of the profound sense of family feeling—he referred to it as ‘tendresse excessive’—which characterized Egyptian society. There was also the hope on the part of the parents that their children would look after them in their old age. But there were other causes: the ease of bringing up children in Egypt, the

⁸⁰ Zur Shalev, ‘The Travel Notebooks of John Greaves’, in Alastair Hamilton, Maurits van den Boogert, and Bart Westerweel (eds.), *The Republic of Letters and the Levant* (Leiden, 2005), 77–102, esp. 91–3.

⁸¹ Athanasius Kircher, *Lingua Aegyptiaca restituta* (Rome, 1643), 527.

⁸² *MPO* 6, 269.

age-old reluctance to allow children to cross the sea, and, above all, their profound—and quite understandable—love of their country.⁸³ It was thus only by going to Egypt that Europeans could explore the Church of Alexandria and meet its members.

⁸³ Benoît de Maillet, *Description de l'Égypte, contenant plusieurs remarques curieuses sur la Géographie ancienne et moderne de ce País* (Paris, 1735), 135*–136*: 'Rien n'est dans leur esprit comparable à l'Égypte, et ils n'ont pas absolument tort. Pourroit-on les blâmer d'aimer un pays, qui, comme je l'ai dit ailleurs, passe même chez les étrangers pour le paradis de ce monde?'

PART II

THE MISSIONS

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3

The Council of Florence

FIRST CONTACTS

Relations between the Western Church and the Copts were never altogether interrupted after the Council of Chalcedon, but when the Copts looked back on their experiences of Western Christians, they had little reason to like them. At the time of the Crusades the Copts, even more than the other Christian inhabitants of the Holy Land, had a taste of Western Christianity which left them with a deep distrust of the Church of Rome. In 1099 Arnulf Malcorne, the newly elected patriarch of the Frankish kingdom of Jerusalem, had ejected the Eastern Christians from the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. His successor Daimbert of Pisa went even further, banishing all the Eastern communities (including the Greeks) from Jerusalem. The Copts were forbidden to make the pilgrimage—an event which gave rise to a theological campaign against the Church of the West.¹ Under King Baldwin I, however, a more tolerant policy was adopted, even by Arnulf, who had again been appointed patriarch in 1108. The Eastern Christians were readmitted to Jerusalem, and, although the higher clergy consisted of Franks and was resented accordingly, it seemed that peace had been established with the Western conquerors.

For the Copts this situation persisted for some sixty years. In 1168, however, Amalric I, crowned king of Jerusalem in 1162, invaded Egypt. At first the Copts would seem to have supported him, but countless Copts were massacred during Amalric's attack on Bilbays and the Frankish attack on Tanis in the Eastern Nile Delta. This was reason enough to oppose Western intervention, but the long-term consequences were still graver. The traditional tolerance by the Muslims was severely

¹ Renaudot, *Historia Patriarcharum*, 479–80; Steven Runciman, *A History of the Crusades*, 3 vols. (Harmondsworth, 1984), iii. 294–5.

strained. The Christians in the entire area were regarded as potential traitors. Discriminatory measures were taken; taxes were raised; churches were shut down and looted.² Worse was still to come. Over two hundred years later, when toleration seemed to have returned, Peter I, the king of Cyprus and (nominally) of Jerusalem, decided to launch what is often regarded as the last crusade. In October 1365 his army sacked Alexandria. After the attack the Copts suffered as much as the Muslims and the Jews. Their churches were pillaged, their property was stolen, they themselves were slaughtered. Once again the trust of the Muslim rulers was forfeited, and a new period of persecution in Egypt was attended by the closure to the Eastern Christians of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem for another three years.³

But the often disastrous impression made by the intervention in the Near East by a European power was also attended by individual contacts between the Copts and European churchmen which were more peaceable. Western pilgrims had constantly passed through Egypt and had encountered Copts there and in Jerusalem. In Egypt there was an occasional Franciscan presence from the thirteenth century on. St Francis himself is said to have met the sultan al-Malik al-Kamil in Damietta in 1219 and to have obtained permission for his followers to cater for the religious needs of foreign merchants. And, in view of the rigorous prohibition against trying to convert the Muslims, it was on the resident Christians, and most particularly on the Western slaves, pilgrims, and merchants, that the Franciscans were to concentrate increasingly.⁴ They opened a convent in Damietta in 1220, but abandoned it when the city fell to the Muslim forces in the following year. Nevertheless they returned periodically. In 1231 they brought a letter from the pope, Gregory IX, to al-Malik al-Kamil; they were back in Damietta in 1249, when the city was taken by Louis IX of France, albeit for less than a year. We hear of them in Egypt in 1287; in 1303 a mission arrived to minister to the Christian slaves, and the friars were joined by a second mission in 1305. A small group tried to settle in Cairo in 1307 and in Alexandria in 1320, where they tended the foreign merchants and pilgrims. Their presence is recorded in Alexandria and Cairo in 1323 and 1324, and at later dates.

² Runciman, *ibid.* 170.

³ *Ibid.* 444–9; Aziz Suryal Atiya, *Crusade in the Later Middle Ages* (London, 1938), 345–69; Hill, *History of Cyprus*, ii. 331–4.

⁴ On the dangers of converting Muslims see Benjamin Z. Kedar, *Crusade and Mission: European Approaches towards the Muslims* (Princeton, 1984), 9–14.

Besides a growing number of chance encounters between the Western clergy and the Copts there are also early signs of efforts to discuss the possibility of their union with Rome. In 1237, for example, the prior of the Dominicans of the Holy Land had dispatched a group of his fellow friars to review the matter with the patriarch Cyril III, and had expressed his optimism about the results.⁵ Yet it was not until the mid-fifteenth century that any true endeavour was made by the Church of the West to effect a union with the Church of Alexandria.

THE COUNCIL OF FLORENCE

The occasion of the first important attempt to achieve the union of the Churches was the Council of Florence organized by Pope Eugenius IV and held from 1438 to 1445. The principal protagonist of the early conciliar activities, first in Ferrara, where they had started, and then in Florence, was the Greek Church of Constantinople, whose members were under increasing threat from the Turks. On 6 July 1439 a bull was promulgated proclaiming union between the Churches of Rome and Constantinople.⁶ It was this apparent triumph that prompted the pope to turn to the other Churches of the East, to the Armenians, the Jacobites, the Maronites (who were officially already in communion with Rome), and the Copts and Ethiopians. The next day Eugenius wrote a letter to the Coptic patriarch, John XI, inviting him to the Council. He lamented the centuries of schism which had split the Church of Christ. He enclosed the bull of union with the Greeks, announced the imminent union with the Armenians, and predicted the unencumbered spread of Christianity throughout the world. Otherwise, although he stressed that the Greeks had accepted papal authority, Eugenius IV left the conditions expected of the Copts unspecified.⁷ On 22 August he appointed an apostolic commissioner to act as ambassador.

The pope chose as his ambassador the Franciscan Alberto da Santeano, a former pupil of the humanist Guarino Veronese and a close friend of

⁵ Basilio Cattani, 'La chiesa copta nel secolo XVII: Documenti inediti', *Bessarione*, 34 (1918), 133–61, esp. 136.

⁶ Joseph Gill, SJ, *The Council of Florence* (Cambridge, 1959), 270–84.

⁷ The letter is reproduced in *Documenta Concilii Florentini de unione orientalium. III. De unione Coptorum, Syrorum, Chaldaeorum, Maronitarumque Cypri 4 Febr. 1442–7 Aug. 1445*, ed. G. Hofmann, SJ (Textus et Documenta, Series Theologica, 22; Rome, 1936), 9–11.

his fellow Franciscans Bernardino da Siena, Giovanni da Capistrano, and Giacomo della Marca.⁸ He had already been in the East and was accustomed to dealing both with secular princes and with bishops. Late in 1439 he set sail with some companions from Venice for the Holy Land. When he was in Jerusalem he made arrangements for a delegate of the Ethiopian abbot of the convent to attend the Council, and then went on to Egypt, accompanied, it would seem, by the superior of the Franciscans in Beirut, Petrus Catelanus, who was to act as Arabic interpreter.⁹ In Cairo he had numerous conversations with John XI. The pope's letter to the patriarch and the bull of union with the Greeks, *Laetentur caeli*, were translated into Arabic, apparently by Venetian merchants residing in Cairo. They were read out to the Coptic community at the patriarchal church of the Virgin in the Harit Zuwayla and, despite the numerous obscurities in the translation, were reportedly received with exultation. A local synod was held on 12 September 1440, and the patriarch decided to dispatch Andreas, the abbot of the monasteries of St Anthony and St Paul, as his legate, entrusting him with a letter to the pope.¹⁰

The voyage back to Europe was carefully organized by Alberto da Santeano but was complicated by the fear of arousing the suspicion of the Mamluk sultan of Egypt. The twelve monks, Egyptian and Ethiopian, were divided into three groups and instructed to take different routes. The first, consisting of six Ethiopians, was to travel from Cairo to Jerusalem, where they were to pick up the delegate of the Ethiopian abbot. Alberto da Santeano himself followed a little later in the company of Andreas, setting out from Damietta for Rhodes. The third group, consisting of Copts, was to sail to Cyprus, and all three groups were to reassemble in Rhodes and continue the voyage together. When he reached Rhodes in October 1440, however, Alberto da Santeano heard that the first group had been blown off the coast by contrary winds and had disembarked in Crete. The third group of Egyptians was heavily delayed, and it was not until the beginning of 1441 that the three at last met and set out for Ancona.

⁸ The embassy and the subsequent events are described in G. Hofmann, SJ, 'La "Chiesa" copta ed etiopica nel Concilio di Firenze', *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 93/2 (1942), 141–6, 228–35.

⁹ G. Hofmann, SJ, 'Le Concile de Florence et la langue arabe', *Proche-Orient Chrétien*, 2 (1952), 142–50, esp. 143.

¹⁰ Philippe Luisier, SJ, 'La Lettre du Patriarche copte Jean XI au Pape Eugène IV: Nouvelle édition', *Orientalia christiana periodica*, 60 (1994), 87–129.

The passage of the oriental delegation through Italy was found by the Italians to be exotic and colourful, but the most significant moment for Alberto da Santeano was when he encountered Bernardino da Siena in Cortona. Alberto, like the rest of the delegation, was splendidly mounted. Fra Bernardino rode up to him on a donkey, warning him against the worldly honours which were being showered on the delegation. On hearing his words Fra Alberto leapt off his horse and offered to exchange it for Fra Bernardino's donkey, but Bernardino da Siena refused.

The delegation reached Florence on 26 August. Five days later the abbot of St Anthony's read out the patriarch's letter to the pope in Arabic. This was followed by the Latin translation of the letter being pronounced by the pontifical secretary Flavio Biondo. The Ethiopian delegate followed suit on 2 September. The delegation then set off for Rome to inspect the holy sites, and was welcomed magnificently in Piazza del Popolo on 9 October before going on to St Peter's. The delegates arrived with gifts. These included manuscripts—Ethiopic, Coptic, Coptic-Arabic, and Islamic Arabic—which made of the papal library, and thus of the Vatican library which would open thirty-five years later, one of the richest oriental collections in Europe.¹¹

On 13 October the Coptic delegation went back to Florence. The next three and a half months were devoted to discussing, and eliminating, the obstacles facing ecclesiastical union. The Copts themselves also appear to have received instruction in the Catholic faith. But we may well wonder how this proceeded. Despite the delight of the Italians at receiving the exotic delegation, and the delegates' own delight at Italian hospitality, Flavio Biondo, the man who had most to do with the Copts, observed that communication with the Eastern visitors was extremely difficult. Interpreters, however, were sometimes at hand—the principal one was a scholar from Siena, Beltramo de Mignanellis, and there were others whose identity is not always clear.

On 4 February 1442, at the church of Santa Maria Novella in Florence, mass was celebrated by the pope surrounded by eighteen cardinals, thirty-two bishops, eight abbots, and numerous other prelates, theologians, and oriental monks. After that the Latin text of the bull of union with the Copts was read out, the *Cantate Domino*, to which were added the texts of *Laetentur caeli*, the bull of union with the Greeks, and *Exultate Dei*, the bull of union with the Armenians, followed by an

¹¹ See below, pp. 178, 206, 249.

Arabic translation.¹² The Arabic was then signed by the abbot of St Anthony's. In the bull anathemas were cast both on Euthyches and Dioscorus. The Council of Chalcedon was fully accepted together with all later councils. There was rejoicing throughout Italy and, in April, after dazzling the inhabitants of Perugia, Forlì, and other central Italian cities with their passage, the Eastern delegates set sail from Venice for the Holy Land.

The immediate results of the Council of Florence were miserably disappointing, and the fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453 put paid to any hope of fulfilling the union with the Greek Church which had been celebrated so lavishly. The other Eastern Churches gave even less satisfaction. The Coptic patriarch John XI wrote a letter to the pope, Nicholas V, dated 1450, sending his condolences on the death of Eugenius IV, and his congratulations on Nicholas's election. He gave the assent of the emperor of Ethiopia to the union of the Churches, and requested a house in Rome for his legate and for Coptic pilgrims.¹³ Yet no patriarch in fact ratified the union signed by his delegate, and Edward Gibbon's quip that the delegates were unknown in the countries they presumed to represent received substance.¹⁴ The Council of Florence—or rather, the failure of the Council of Florence—gave rise to those many missionary expeditions to the East whose object was to achieve a union of the Churches.

But what about the Arabic text of the bull *Cantate Domino* (and of *Laetentur caeli* and *Exultate Dei*) signed by Andreas, the head of the Coptic delegation? The translator seems to have been Beltramo de Mignanellis. With a sound education in mathematics, philology, history, and rhetoric, he had travelled in the East in the years before the Council of Florence, and had written one book on Tamberlaine's second expedition to Syria and one on the sultan of Egypt.¹⁵ He acted as an Arabic interpreter to the Coptic delegates throughout the Council and provided

¹² The Latin text of *Cantate Domino* is contained in *Documenta Concilii Florentini de unione Orientalium. III*, ed. Hofmann, 30–41; the Latin (and Greek) texts of *Laetentur caeli* are in *Documenta Concilii Florentini de unione Orientalium. I. De unione Graecorum 6 Iulio 1439*, ed. G. Hofmann (Rome, 1935), 9–17; and the Latin text of *Exultate Deo* is in *Documenta Concilii Florentini de unione Orientalium. II. De unione Armenorum 22 Novembris 1439*, ed. G. Hofmann (Rome, 1935), 21–44.

¹³ Lucas P. Desager, 'Lettre inédite du Patriarche copte Jean XI au Pape Nicolas V (1450)', *Mélanges Eugène Tisserant*, ii (Vatican City, 1964), 41–53.

¹⁴ Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. David Womersley, iii (London, 1994), 893.

¹⁵ Hofmann, 'Le Concile de Florence et la langue arabe', 146.

the pope with a report on the Near East. How good his Arabic was we do not know. He could undoubtedly speak it, but the translation of the bull contains numerous inaccuracies and mistakes. For the most misleading part of the text, however, Beltramo de Mignanellis may not have been responsible: this is the description of purgatory taken from the bull of union with the Greeks, *Laetentur caeli*, and probably translated into Arabic by Venetian merchants.¹⁶

Belief in purgatory, as we saw, had become an important tenet for the Church of Rome.¹⁷ Generations of missionaries would try to establish not only whether the Eastern Christians believed in it, but also whether the Muslims did, and since neither the Eastern Christians nor the Muslims had the slightest idea of what purgatory was, we find some Western writers arguing with conviction that they did, and others that they did not, believe in it. If we look at the translation of the passage on purgatory to which the Copts were asked to subscribe at the Council of Florence we get some idea of why they were so mystified by it.¹⁸ For not only is the passage totally ungrammatical, but from what little sense it does make the process of purgation is described as taking place in death rather than in purgatory, and occurring in God's presence ('in heaven and within sight of God'), rather than in what was conceived as a separate place in which God would be invisible to the sinner.¹⁹ The translator seems to have confused the passage on purgatory with the passage on limbo which followed.

Errors in the translation show how perennial was the misunderstanding between the Church of the West and the Churches of the East, but the question still remains why the Coptic patriarch agreed to

¹⁶ The Arabic text is reproduced in a separate appendix to Eugenio Cecconi, *Studi storici sul Concilio di Firenze. Parte prima. Sezione seconda* (Florence, 1869), 5–64.

¹⁷ See Le Goff, *La Naissance du Purgatoire*, 376–9, 384–6 for discussions about purgatory with the Greeks in the 13th c.

¹⁸ Cecconi, *Studi storici*, 32.

¹⁹ The original runs: 'Si vere poenitentes in dei caritate decesserint, antequam dignis poenitentiae fructibus de commissis satisfecerint et omissis, eorum animas poenis purgatorii post mortem purgari, et, ut a poenis huiusmodi releventur, prodesse eis fidelium vivorum suffragia, missarum scilicet sacrificia, orationes et elemosinas, et alia pietatis officia, quae a fidelibus pro aliis fidelibus fieri consueverunt, secundum ecclesiae instituta. Illorumque animas, qui post baptismum susceptum nullam omnino peccati maculam incurrerunt; illas etiam, quae post contractam peccati maculam, vel in suis corporibus, vel eisdem exutae corporibus, prout superius dictum est, sunt purgatae, in coelum mox recipi, et intueri clare ipsum deum trinum et unum sicuti est, pro meritorum tamen diversitate alium alio perfectius.' *Documenta Concilii Florentini de unione Orientalium*. I, ed. Hofmann, 15–16. The essential 'mox' is one of the words that has been omitted in the Arabic translation.

participate in the Council of Florence with such enthusiasm in 1440 and then failed to ratify the bull of union two years later. We may never know the precise answer. A modern Coptic historian claims that the pope simply proved excessive in his demands.²⁰ What is almost certainly true is that neither the Copts nor the other Eastern patriarchs can have realized exactly what union with Rome entailed. Submission to papal authority may have seemed a somewhat vague concept, but to anathematize a millennium of traditions was more concrete. Dioscorus was held sacred among the Copts. The rejection of all ecumenical councils from Chalcedon on was also an essential part of Coptic tradition and, as we shall see, the monks would recoil in horror whenever Western missionaries suggested they should accept the Council of Chalcedon. Dogma seems to have played little to no part in the debate, but tradition was all important. And it was very probably these same monks who, as they would in the future, prohibited their patriarch, clearly tempted by the prospect of union, from subscribing to Roman demands.

At first the dramatic fall of Constantinople to the Turks impeded any Western effort to pursue the evasive delegates who had come to Florence. For over fifty years the uncertainty of the political and military situation in the Levant, and the Ottoman advance north, east, west, and south, discouraged the papacy from dispatching missions. By 1517, however, the Ottoman government was in control of Egypt and the Levant—Syria and Palestine—and soon Western governments, first the Venetians and the Genoese, and then the French, were obtaining trading privileges from the sultan and were establishing embassies and consulates in the new empire. This meant that missions could at last be organized and use the premises of the Western diplomatic representatives as a base. The ideals of Eugenius IV were again revived, and the pattern set by the Council of Florence—apparent consent to union, followed by rejection—was to become the norm for over two hundred years.

A series of popes tried to re-establish links with the Church of Alexandria. Leo X wrote a letter to the patriarch Mark in September 1521, but there was no patriarch called Mark at the time.²¹ Over the years various branches of the Franciscan Order settled in Egypt—Recollects, Custodians of the Holy Land, Reformed Franciscans, and Capuchins. One of the first recorded contacts between the Church of

²⁰ Kamil Salih Nakhla al-Iskandari, *Silsilat ta'riḫh al-bābāwāt baṭārikat al-kursī al-iskandari. Al-ḥalqa al-rābi'a. Min al-baṭriyark 88 ilā al-baṭriyark 103 (1409–1718)* (2nd edn., Dayr al-Suryan, 2001) iv. 13.

²¹ *MPO* 2, 104*.

Rome and the Copts after the Council of Florence occurred in 1554. The Council of Trent had opened nine years earlier, and the pope, Pius IV, was eager to involve the Eastern Churches in a plan of union which was aimed primarily at the Protestants in Europe. The Western delegate was a Maltese Dominican, Ambrosius Buttigeg, who was bishop *in partibus infidelium* of Auria (Charae) in Mesopotamia and who set out as papal emissary to his diocese in 1553 after many years spent in Palermo. In the summer of 1554 he and another Maltese Dominican, Antonino Zahara, were in Egypt, guests of the French consul in Alexandria, and Buttigeg went to Cairo to confer with the Coptic patriarch Gabriel VII.²²

Gabriel VII seemed amenable to submission to the papacy. He wrote a long, but somewhat vague, letter to the pope, Paul IV, on 17 October 1555.²³ The letter was brought to Rome a couple of years later, towards the end of Paul IV's pontificate, by a Coptic deacon, Abram al-Suryani. The mystery of Abram's credentials has never been completely solved. He was later described in a letter supposedly written by the patriarch of Alexandria to the Coptic bishop of Cyprus, but quite possibly written by Abram himself, as 'il doctor, il philosopho, Abram, cognominato Suriano'.²⁴ His treatment and his behaviour in Rome were symptomatic of the relations between the two Churches. Abram's arrival aroused suspicion. The pope himself had reservations, and Cardinal Michele Ghislieri, the future Pius V, made enquiries in Egypt by way of the Venetian consul. Abram, however, is said to have caught wind of the manoeuvre and instructed a man in his own confidence to tell the patriarch what to reply and thus to confirm his authority. He was consequently regarded as the patriarch's emissary and was thought to be presenting his submission to Rome. Yet there remained the problem, already so apparent at the Council of Florence, of communication. Abram hardly knew any Italian. He communicated with the Catholic authorities through an Ethiopian monk whose knowledge of Arabic was most imperfect. Such was the background to the first great Roman Catholic mission to the Copts.

²² The visit is described by Giuseppe Beltrami, *La chiesa caldea nel secolo dell'unione* (Rome, 1933), 27–34 and by J. Wicki, SJ, 'Zur Orientreise des päpstlichen Nuntius Ambrosius Buttigeg, O.P. (1553–66)', *Orientalia christiana periodica*, 19 (1953), 350–71.

²³ The text is published by Beltrami, *La chiesa caldea*, 151–80.

²⁴ *MPO* 2, 208.

4

The First Jesuit Mission

PREPARATIONS

It was on the occasion of the first major mission to Egypt that the relatively young Society of Jesus started to play a leading part in the papal policy towards the Copts. Approved by the papacy in 1540, it was a society of clerks regular who took vows of poverty and chastity. Obedient to the papacy, they devoted themselves to works of charity, to education, and to the propagation of Catholicism throughout the world. The founder of the Society, Ignatius Loyola, had first wished to settle in Jerusalem and to dedicate himself to the service of the Church in the Holy Land. In 1523 he made the pilgrimage, but was told by a Franciscan Custodian of the Holy Land to return to Europe. An attempt to go back to Palestine with his nine companions in 1536 failed, since there were no ships sailing from Venice, and Loyola and his disciples made for Rome instead. They had formulated their missionary ideals, but by 1540 it was evident that the people most in need of conversion to Catholicism were the European Protestants. The Jesuits would thus be particularly active in Central Europe, and would then concentrate on what they regarded as the pagan inhabitants of the American continent and the Far East. Nevertheless, they also set out for the Levant, where, aware of the difficulty and danger of trying to convert Muslims, they addressed the Eastern Christians.

Having overcome his original reservations about the Egyptian envoy Abram, the general of the Jesuits, Diego Laínez, with the support of the new pope Pius IV (who had succeeded Paul IV in 1559), decided to have the mission to the Copts entrusted to the Society. In retrospect the choice of missionaries looks unfortunate, but at the time it seemed obvious. The mission was to be headed by Cristóforo Rodríguez. Rodríguez had once taught theology at Sigüenza before being admitted to the Society in Alcalá by the saintly Francisco Borja. He had

subsequently taught in Borja's home town of Gandía and had been appointed rector of the Jesuit seminary. Between 1557 and 1559 he was rector of the seminary in Valladolid and vice-provincial of the Society in Castile. After a brief embassy to the imperial court in Vienna, he arrived in Rome to discuss certain matters connected with the province, and was promptly proclaimed the ideal leader of the expedition to Egypt.¹ Yet Rodríguez knew no Arabic and had little experience of travel. He was above all a schoolmaster and a dogmatist—a combination which would prove ill suited to a mission of such delicacy.

The mission clearly required an Arabic-speaker, and the man selected was Giovanni Battista Eliano. On the face of it this was a good—not to say the only—choice. Eliano was a convert from Judaism. He was born in Rome to a distinguished Jewish family. The great scholar Elias Levita was his maternal grandfather, and had seen to his education, first in Venice and then in Germany. When he was about 15 his father took him to Cairo, where he had business interests. Eliano seems to have paid two visits to Egypt. Although he spent most of his time within the Jewish community, he picked up a little spoken Arabic. He then returned to Venice where, following in the footsteps of his brother, he was christened in September 1551 at the age of 21. Three months later he took his first vows as a Jesuit, proceeded to Rome, where he taught Hebrew at the Collegio Romano, and was ordained priest on 1 March 1561. In the meantime he had given full proof of his religious commitment. He had stressed his break with Judaism by burning some Talmudic books in the Campo dei Fiori in 1553, and when he was appointed to accompany Rodríguez to Egypt he departed with the enthusiasm of the neophyte.

Rodríguez and Eliano, together with the coadjutor Alfonso Bravo (who played little to no part in the negotiations) and Abram al-Suryani, set out from Rome on 2 July 1561. They made first for Ancona, and then sailed to Venice. There they waited ten weeks for a boat. In that time Eliano had to stay in hiding for fear that the local Jews might discover him. Rodríguez and Bravo, on the other hand, tried to inform themselves about the Eastern Christians, ordered a gift of jewellery to be presented on behalf of the pope to the Coptic patriarch, acquired passports, and bought suitable clothing. Only when the ship actually set sail did the three Jesuits seem to have turned to the study of Arabic. For this they cannot have had much time. Besides their own religious duties,

¹ Mario Scaduto, SJ, 'La missione di Cristoforo Rodríguez al Cairo (1561–1563)', *Archivum historicum Societatis Iesu*, 27 (1958), 233–78. The documents published at the end are included in *MPO* 2.

they ministered to the needs of the other passengers—needs which were particularly acute during storms and the threat of corsairs—and worked at the conversion of Jewish, Greek Orthodox, and Lutheran travellers, besides the more dissolute members of the crew.² We have no details about how they actually studied Arabic. It is clear from a letter which Rodríguez wrote to Láinez from Cairo in January of the following year that they possessed neither a grammar nor a dictionary.³ Rodríguez's request that they be sent some linguistic aid from Valencia suggests that he was thinking of the two works of Pedro de Alcalá, the grammar and the glossary published in Granada in 1505. The glossary, however, which was based entirely on the Arabic spoken in southern Spain, would have been of little use in Egypt, and the Jesuits show no sign of having known about the only good Arabic grammar in existence, the one compiled by Guillaume Postel and published in Paris in 1538. Although Eliano had picked up some spoken Arabic in Cairo, he could neither read it nor write it. It is quite possible that Abram gave them some instruction between the storms and the encounters with corsairs, but it was hardly adequate. When they reached Alexandria on 4 November, after stopping in Ragusa and Zante, the missionaries knew very little Arabic indeed, and this would be one of their main problems throughout their stay in Egypt.

In Alexandria they were welcomed and entertained by the European merchants staying in the *fondaco* or hostel of the Franks. Eliano left almost immediately for Cairo. He arrived on 10 November and was joined by the others over two weeks later. They stayed in premises provided by Leonardo Emo, the Venetian consul, almost within sight of the Coptic patriarchate in Harit Zuwayla. Yet, as Eliano discovered on his arrival, the patriarch, after so many protestations of devotion to Rome, was in no hurry to receive the papal emissaries. His main object was to keep the papal mission as secret as possible for fear both of the Ottoman authorities and of the resentment of his fellow Copts. He did indeed have a meeting with Abram, but it was not until 1 December that he allowed Eliano and Rodríguez to call on him.

On that day they were received in state. Despite the patriarch's initial desire to organize a quiet meeting at the Venetian consulate, they were escorted by the deacons into the patriarchal Church of the Virgin with music and chanting, and were welcomed cordially by Gabriel VII.

² *MPO* 2, 96–102.

³ *Ibid.* 130.

Rodríguez handed the patriarch a papal brief in which the pope expressed his delight at the patriarch's desire for union and his readiness to submit to Rome and recognize papal authority. He also invited the patriarch to dispatch to Rome some virtuous boys, 'adolescentes ingenii docilis et bonae ad virtutem ac pietatem indolis', so that they could be taught Latin and trained in the Roman Catholic faith.⁴

The ceremony was followed by a meal, and the delegates received the most favourable impression of the patriarch. He offered them gifts. The delegates declined. They then presented him with the jewels they had assembled in Venice, but the patriarch preferred them to be kept at the Venetian consulate rather than at the patriarchate. At this point the talks between Gabriel VII and the papal emissaries began in earnest, and Abram, together with a Coptic priest named Girgis, served as interpreters. Rodríguez's first concern was to persuade the patriarch to sign an act of submission to the pope. The patriarch agreed in principle, but when faced with the two copies insistently presented to him by Rodríguez he procrastinated. He did the same when he received the invitation to participate in the Council of Trent. He thought, he said, of sending the Coptic bishop of Cyprus, but he made no further efforts to do so, any more than he did to dispatch the 'virtuous boys' to Rome for training by the Catholic clergy. He said he might, but not immediately, for fear of the authorities.

In the course of the many meetings which now took place between the Jesuits and the Copts, other points were also raised.⁵ The Jesuits were obviously in possession of instructions which contained the Coptic beliefs unacceptable to the West. Exactly what the sources of these instructions were is not altogether clear, but one was probably the *Catalogus haereticorum*, first published by the Dominican Bernard of Luxemburg in 1524 and itself based on descriptions by earlier pilgrims and those few churchmen, such as Jacques de Vitry, who had lived in the Middle East.⁶

One of the points discussed by the missionaries concerned diet and the traditional Coptic prohibition of the meat of any animal that had not been slaughtered in accordance with the Mosaic law. A further point was the repudiation of a wife and marriage to another woman while the first

⁴ Ibid. 38–9.

⁵ Rodríguez reported on them in a letter to Laínez dated 7 Apr. *MPO* 2, 162–70. See also the detailed account of the emissaries' talks with the Copts in the diary of the mission, *ibid.* 272–99.

⁶ See below, p. 110–11.

wife was still alive. Then there was the habit of marrying relations in the second degree of consanguinity, the ordination of deacons at the age of 5 or 6, circumcision before baptism (which, the missionaries were assured, was being abandoned), baptism with three immersions, and the rejection of all councils after Ephesus. There is no doubt that a major impediment in all these talks was the understanding of terminology. The delegates had no time for the slightest doubts about the meaning of terms which were perfectly clear to a Roman Catholic theologian with a scholastic training, but which might not be so clear to an Eastern Christian. One example is the term 'sacrament'. When the Jesuits asked the Copts how many sacraments they had, they received the orthodox reply that they had seven. When they asked what these were, however, the answer was: the priesthood (ordination), baptism, the eucharist, confession, faith, fasting, and prayer. The delegates concluded that the Copts did not have the same sacraments as the Church of Rome and that they denied a sacramental value to confirmation and matrimony and had no knowledge of extreme unction.⁷

The talks led nowhere. Despite the charm and the promises of the patriarch, no decision was taken. If anything, as Rodríguez would later reveal, an immense obstacle had emerged. Through the intermediary of Abram, the patriarch asked Rodríguez exactly what the pope meant by obedience. Rodríguez replied that just as St Peter was the vicar of Christ and the head of the Catholic Church with all Christians in his care, so the pope was his successor, and just as the Copts were submitted to the patriarch, so the Christians were to the pope, whom they must obey as their head. To this Abram said that the Copts had never understood obedience in that sense. They understood it as an act of charity and humility, as might be expected from one prelate to another, but not as the admission of 'subjection or inferiority'. The pope counted for nothing in their part of the world, and they had no dealings with him. After the division of the patriarchs, each one was supreme in his own Church.⁸ Rodríguez took this as a change of face, a sign of criminal duplicity, which, he was beginning to believe, was characteristic of the Copts.

⁷ *MPO* 2, 286.

⁸ *Ibid.* 147: 'Al che ha risposto, insieme con li altri, che non intendono cusì l'obedientia, né anco l'intendeva cusì nele lettere mandate a Sua Santità, né dir capo et pastor, né lui quando l'ha dato in Roma; ma solo li diceva per charità et humiltà, come è modo di dir a ogni prelado ad altro. Ma che non confessavano subjectione over inferiorità, per che in quella parte non hanno che far con Sua Santità, imperoché dopo dela divisione delli patriarchi, ciascheduno è supremo nela sua Chiesa.'

Rodríguez became ever more pressing in his demands. At the beginning of Lent Gabriel VII decided to set off for the monastery of St Anthony and the emissaries insisted on accompanying him, although, the patriarch warned the delegates with urbanity, the monks were notoriously ignorant. Abram al-Suryani, moreover, remained in Cairo. He promised to join them, but never did, and they were consequently without an interpreter. On 2 March they left for the Red Sea coast, sailing up the Nile to Beni Suef, and then proceeded across the desert by camel. They reached the monastery after a journey of five days. Once at St Anthony's Rodríguez, who was unaccustomed to eastern cities and to travel by camel, was ever more short-tempered. He impatiently urged the patriarch to sign both the submission to the papacy and the proceedings of their discussions in Cairo. The patriarch refused to do so without the consent of a young inmate of the monastery whose name was Ghubriyal. This was one of the 'ignorant' monks against whom he had warned the delegates, but who now seemed to have absolute authority over him. Ghubriyal said the patriarch should sign nothing. He then stated the Coptic position on the nature of Christ in terms which baffled and horrified the delegates, although we might well wonder just what they understood. It was a caricature of Eutychianism larded with Gnosticism. With the Incarnation, Ghubriyal maintained according to the delegates, the humanity of God was turned into divinity and Christ became equal to God. He supported this view with an appeal to Athanasius, and went on to say that Christ was not man, that he had no body, that he was not a creature but a creator, and, finally, that he was one person from two persons, and one nature from two natures.⁹

The atmosphere of hostility which the delegates encountered at St Anthony's was aggravated by the absence of their main interpreter. Nor does the delegates' knowledge of Arabic seem to have made any great improvement. With instructions from Rome to discover as much as possible about the Coptic liturgy, they had found at the patriarchate in Cairo a copy of the eighty-four canons of Nicaea, revered by the Church of Alexandria. Eliano, however, had proved quite incapable of translating the relatively simple Arabic text into Italian. In order to exchange ideas with their hosts at St Anthony's, the papal delegates would have required a far deeper knowledge of Arabic than the little Eliano had picked up in the streets of Cairo in his youth. Talks would have been held partly in the Egyptian dialect and partly—especially

⁹ Ibid. 287.

when discussing the more abstruse points of a heresy which, as even Eliano would conclude, was largely nominal—in classical Arabic intermingled with specifically Christian terms. To know Arabic well enough to do this would have required a stay in Egypt of years rather than months. So, when left on their own with the patriarch and the monks of St Anthony's, the delegates and their hosts simply talked at cross-purposes. Gabriel VII later wrote to Pius IV about Rodríguez, saying that the Copts were quite unable to understand him and that he could not understand them.¹⁰

The papal emissaries spent nineteen days at St Anthony's. During that time they assembled documents about the Copts. Rodríguez acquired an irreversible detestation of them. He believed, probably in good faith, that the patriarch had undertaken to sign an act of submission to Rome. Gabriel VII now seemed to have changed his mind, and declared that anything written in Western sources against Dioscorus and his position at the Council of Chalcedon was a lie. When Rodríguez said that his ambassador to Rome, Abram, had undertaken to have a declaration of obedience signed, Gabriel VII denied that Abram had ever been his ambassador. Abram, he said, went to Rome to deal with affairs of his own, and the patriarch had simply given him a letter of recommendation to the pope.

The emissaries decided to return to Cairo. After the desert journey clouded by fear of brigands, they arrived to find an outbreak of plague, some two thousand people dying daily, and the consul and merchants barricaded in their lodgings. Despite their misgivings about the self-styled Coptic ambassador, they sought out Abram al-Suryani and Girgis and again embarked on discussions, calling on the Copts day after day, bombarding them with the most refined scholastic arguments. It is hard to decide who was more admirable—the missionaries for their tenacity or the Copts for their patience in listening to arguments which they could clearly not understand. At last, after three months of inconclusive talks, the Jesuits persuaded Girgis—Abram el-Suryani refused—to accompany them to St Anthony's and, in the heat of mid-July, they set out again through the desert. This time, however, even the patriarch became overtly hostile as soon as he saw the missionaries at the gate. He admitted them into the monastery simply to tell them that he would never accept the Roman view of the nature in Christ or recognize the

¹⁰ Ibid. 205: 'Ha anco parlato con noi et trattato de molte cose, dal qual ultimamente non havemo inteso il significato dalle sue parole, né lui ha inteso il nostro.'

Council of Chalcedon. As for submitting to the pope, the pope was only the head of the Franks, just as the patriarch of Constantinople was the head of the Greeks and he himself was the head of the Copts. After that he turned the delegates out into the desert.

Back in Cairo in August the Jesuits, after telling him about their recent experience, made a last attempt to persuade Abram al-Suryani to accompany them on yet another visit to St Anthony's. Abram's reaction was worthy of Erasmus. To the indignation of the delegates he smiled at the idea that anyone might go to hell for not saying 'two natures'. The delegates, he said, must be mad. Would it not have been more sensible to compromise with some of the 'errors' of the Copts and to agree that, in order to obtain salvation, all that was necessary was to believe in Christ, rather than to quibble about terms?¹¹

The papal delegates decided that the time had come to return to Rome and, in October, went to Alexandria to prepare for their departure. Here they met with an altogether unexpected difficulty. Ever since his arrival in Venice Eliano had tried to hide from the members of the Jewish community. He continued to conceal his identity from the Jews sailing to Alexandria, but some of them recognized him. His was a well-known family and his mother still lived in Cairo. His conversion to Christianity had not been forgotten, and in Egypt apostasy, unless it was conversion to Islam, was punishable by death. Admittedly the Ottoman authorities tended to be indifferent to what went on in the Jewish and Christian communities, but, soon after his arrival in Cairo in January 1562, some former acquaintances decided to charge him with an old debt. Unable to pay, Eliano hoped to remain in hiding until the end of his mission. When he was in Alexandria preparing to leave, however, he was arrested by a group of Jews and Muslims, and brought before the Islamic court to be judged by the *qāḍī*. Allowed out on bail put up by the Venetian consul and other Christian merchants, he escaped, in disguise, on a ship bound for Venice, on 26 November.

Eliano's journey home was almost as adventurous as his time in Egypt. After sailing for three days his ship ran into a storm and was struck by lightning. More bad weather followed. The crew dropped anchor off the coast of Cyprus, but the wind was so strong that the ship broke loose and was wrecked. Many of the passengers were drowned. Eliano lost his

¹¹ Ibid. 298: 'Sono tanto ostinati come per il passato, dicendo Abram subridendo che per non dir due nature andariano al inferno, et che eramo pazzi, et che fosse stato meglio haver trattato con lo condescendendo alli loro errori, et che per salvarsi bastava creder in Christo senza dir una natura o due nature.'

baggage, including the notes he had taken in Egypt, and most of his clothes, but managed, partly on a plank and partly by swimming, to reach the southern shore, and, with the help of a Venetian gentleman, made his way to Paphos.¹² There Eliano decided to make a final effort to rescue a mission which was otherwise a complete failure. Remembering Gabriel VII's agreement to ask the bishop of Cyprus to represent the Coptic Church at the Council of Trent, and having heard from the Venetian consul that the patriarch had actually written to him, Eliano set off on the three-day journey from Paphos to Nicosia to confer with the bishop, Izhaq, himself. At first the prospects seemed dim. Izhaq told Eliano that he had received no letter from the patriarch, and that even if he were to he was far too old to accept the invitation to Trent. A few days later, however, the letter arrived. Eliano saw and copied it, but suspected that the patriarch had not written it himself but had had it compiled by Abram al-Suryani and dispatched it without so much as reading it.¹³ The patriarch, Eliano assured Láinez, was in the habit of allowing his friends to write letters which he would then sign, as the original embassy of Abram al-Suryani proved. At all events, Eliano reported on his dealings with the Coptic bishop of Cyprus on 18 March 1563 and asked Láinez for enough money to enable him to bring the bishop and two acolytes back to Italy. Shortly afterwards Eliano set sail for Venice, where he arrived in June and found both Rodríguez and Bravo, who had stayed on in Egypt. Despite his assurances that he would be accompanied by the Coptic bishop and some twenty 'virtuous boys' selected from the communities of Eastern Christians, Eliano brought no Copts with him when he went to Trent to call on Láinez before proceeding to Rome.¹⁴

Our knowledge of this papal mission to the Copts rests entirely on reports drawn up by the Jesuits themselves. The account is necessarily one-sided, and the reports, duly dispatched to their superiors in Italy, received considerable publicity, and either created, or confirmed, a strong prejudice against the Copts. We have no record of the Coptic reactions to the events, but there is enough evidence to suspect that the Western view was highly subjective. One episode in particular suggests this. In February 1563 the Jesuit Pedro de Ribadeneira wrote from Palermo to Francisco Borja in Rome to say that two Coptic monks from

¹² He described his voyage to Láinez, *ibid.* 233–7.

¹³ *Ibid.* 262.

¹⁴ For the Copts—or rather the absence of the Copts—at the Council of Trent see G. Hofmann, SJ, 'L'Oriente nel Concilio di Trento', *Studia missionalia*, 2 (1946), 34–53, esp. 41–2.

Dayr Maqar in the Wadi al-Natrun, Mikha'il and Yusuf, had just disembarked in Sicily with a number of letters of recommendation from Spain, requesting some three or four hundred ducats to be used for restoring their monastery.¹⁵ They were, however, companions of Abram al-Suryani, whom Ribadeneira knew from Rodríguez's letters to be deeply treacherous. Although he described the Coptic visitors as 'gente civil' he was suspicious of their association with Abram and asked Borja for instructions. Some time later the pope received a wounded letter from the Coptic patriarch, complaining about how the monks had been received, and blaming their cold reception on the misleading reports sent by Rodríguez.¹⁶ The papal envoys, he said, had been welcomed by him in Egypt and treated with courtesy, and had then left without alerting him while he was in the monastery of St Anthony to escape persecution by the Muslims.

This letter implies that the patriarch had no idea that the mission could have affected his relations with the pope, and that he blamed the misunderstanding on the personalities of the missionaries. And then there is the figure of Abram al-Suryani. Despite the anger of the missionaries and their conviction that the patriarch had disowned him and that he was acting in bad faith, it was on him that Eliano and Rodríguez called in Cairo on their return from St Anthony's, and with him that they continued what were supposed to be their official talks with the Copts. It may also have been Abram who, albeit with the approval of the patriarch, wrote the letter instructing the bishop of Cyprus to go to Trent—a fact which argues against the patriarch's decision to disown him and again raises the question of how much of what the patriarch said the missionaries had actually understood.

However that may be, Eliano and Rodríguez returned to Rome empty-handed. They were welcomed as heroes. Rodríguez was hailed as the greatest living expert on the Church of Alexandria. The report he wrote on the errors of the Copts was based on a series of misunderstandings and written with an altogether inadequate knowledge of Arabic or of Coptic sources. Nevertheless it had a decisive influence on many later missionaries and on it was based the description of the mission in Francesco Sacchini's volume of the history of the Jesuits issued in Antwerp in 1620.¹⁷ If we except his presence as naval chaplain

¹⁵ MPO 2, 249–50.

¹⁶ Ibid. 312–15. Cf. Libois's observations, 130*–131*.

¹⁷ Francesco Sacchini, *Historiae Societatis Iesu pars secunda sive Lainius* (Antwerp, 1620), 248–57. See below, p. 118–19.

at the battle of Lepanto in 1571, Rodríguez never again returned to the Levant. Indeed, apart from a year spent as a missionary in Flanders in 1574–5, Rodríguez hardly ever left Italy, preaching to the Waldensians in the Apulia, working and teaching in Tuscany, Calabria, and Sicily, and ending his life in Naples in 1581.

Eliano, on the other hand, was to become a key figure in the missions to the Christians of the East. On his return to Italy in 1563 he was considered such an outstanding orientalist that he was offered a chair in Paris. This he refused, but he accepted a chair of oriental languages in Rome. His Arabic, certainly, albeit never perfect, had improved, and he had continued to study it in Cyprus. There he had also started to learn Syriac,¹⁸ yet the limitations of his knowledge of that language emerged when he was dispatched to accompany Tommaso Raggio to Mount Lebanon for talks with the Maronite patriarch in 1578. He was supposed to report on the beliefs of the Maronites. In his eagerness to spot errors he embarked with enthusiasm on the inspection of manuscripts in the Maronite convents and on the destruction of those he considered heterodox. Quite apart from an uncritical attitude to the texts he read, which prevented him from distinguishing personal views from generally accepted statements of belief, and his frequent inability to tell the difference between what was Maronite and what was Jacobite, he knew far too little Syriac to appreciate, and understand, the liturgical works he consulted. He thus came to the erroneous conclusion that the Maronites knew nothing of the sacrament of extreme unction.¹⁹

Eliano went again to Mount Lebanon in 1580, this time as the head of the mission whose object was not only to continue talks with the Maronites, but also to engage in a dialogue with the Jacobite patriarch of Antioch Dawud and bring him, too, into union with Rome. While he was welcomed, and apparently liked, by the amenable Maronites, who were amused by his broken Arabic and impressed by his dynamism, and who promptly accepted the new Roman calendar propagated by Gregory XIII, Eliano was strongly disliked by the Jacobites. This had consequences for his second mission to the Copts.

Dealings with the Church of Antioch were complicated by the arrival in Rome late in 1578 or early in 1579 of Ignatius Na'matallah, the former patriarch of Antioch. Although this intelligent and educated man, who delighted Joseph Scaliger and charmed Montaigne, was probably

¹⁸ *MPO* 2, 263.

¹⁹ For an assessment of Eliano's achievements and mistakes during his first mission to the Maronites, see the comments by Sami Kuri, SJ, *MPO* 1, 113*–118*.

sincere in his desire for the union of the Churches, one of the reasons for his arrival in Rome was to obtain forgiveness for his forcible conversion to Islam by the Ottoman authorities. This had led to his deposition in Syria, and to the hostility of his co-religionists. Once in Rome, with the ear of the pope, he tried to direct and coordinate the papal missions to the Levant, but, as the papal emissaries discovered to their cost, the recommendation of Na'matallah carried little weight in Syria. Eliano tried to meet his successor Dawud, but the new patriarch avoided him. The two corresponded, but the correspondence ended in recriminations, and Dawud complained of Eliano's behaviour not only to the pope but also to his brother Monophysite, the patriarch of Alexandria.

In September 1582 Eliano set off on a second and final mission to Egypt in order to negotiate with the new Coptic patriarch John XIV. He reached Cairo early in October. In some respects this mission was just as disastrous as the first. Quite apart from his own shortcomings, his obstinacy, his fanaticism, and his impatience, Eliano had as one of his companions a Neapolitan Jesuit, Francesco Sasso, who was as rigid a dogmatist as Rodríguez, knew no Arabic, and spent his time in Egypt writing an attack on the Copts. And another element which contributed, if not to the failure, certainly to the difficulty of the mission, was that Eliano no longer had the confidence of the pope.

The complaints from the Jacobite patriarch had reached Gregory XIII, and although the pope esteemed Eliano and allowed him to collaborate in the foundation of the Maronite College in Rome and in setting up a library of Maronite liturgical works, he had begun to doubt whether Eliano was the right man to lead a mission. These doubts were fomented by Na'matallah. The principal architect of the missionary movement in Rome was Cardinal Giulio Antonio Santoro, archbishop of Santa Severina, and a rivalry was fast developing between him and the former patriarch. Na'matallah, in correspondence with the Copts (whom he warned against the Jesuits), was permitted by the pope to send a mission of his own consisting of a layman, the Florentine merchant Giovanni Battista Vecchietti, and an Ethiopian priest, Keffa Maryam, known as Giovanni Maria Abissino. This second mission, which arrived in July 1584 and was profoundly critical of the Jesuits, was in fact no more fortunate, but it did succeed in weakening the efforts of Eliano and his companion, and in bewildering the Copts about papal policy.

The patriarch of Antioch Dawud, moreover, was pursuing a policy of his own. By no means totally opposed to union with Rome, he believed that this could only be with a strong united Monophysite Church in

which Jacobites and Copts would act together. The Copts and the Jacobites consequently exchanged information, and this information was greatly to the disadvantage of Eliano, regarded as tactless, stubborn, and overbearing.²⁰

Staying, this time, with the French consul in Egypt, Paolo Mariani of Venetian origin, Eliano was pessimistic about the chances of success of the new Egyptian mission, and many of his letters from Cairo contain requests to be relieved of it and to be allowed to return to Rome. As in the past, he set out with a list of Coptic errors.²¹ The new patriarch and his theologians were intractable on major points such as the two natures in Christ, and told Eliano they had no intention of accepting the Gregorian calendar.²² Gradually, however, Eliano himself began to conceive of a different approach to the Copts, which revealed an uncharacteristic flexibility and an equally uncharacteristic ecumenical attitude. Already in December he wrote to the Jesuit general in Rome, the Neapolitan Claudio Acquaviva, saying that the Coptic refusal to talk of two natures in Christ was solely due to their fear of the Nestorian heresy. In fact they believed in the combined humanity and divinity of Christ, so the matter was purely 'nominal'. Might allowances not be made, and the Copts permitted to use their own terminology or some circumlocution acceptable to both parties?²³ Otherwise Eliano listed what were regarded as the traditional heresies of the Copts—including their belief that the dead would not be sentenced until the last judgement—and continued to maintain that they had no knowledge of the sacraments of confirmation or extreme unction, even if he admitted that they practised them both but saw them as ceremonies and not as sacraments.²⁴

In May 1583 Eliano seems to have become even more conciliatory. He again requested that the Copts be allowed to use their own traditional formulas or some circumlocution about the natures in Christ.²⁵ But above all he had changed his entire approach. He had now read texts by Athanasius, Cyril of Alexandria, and John Chrysostom, and there discovered many 'Catholic truths and propositions' of which the Copts themselves seemed entirely unaware. If these 'truths' were assembled, published, and circulated among the Copts, they would surely be

²⁰ Giorgio Levi della Vida, *Documenti intorno alle relazioni delle chiese orientali con la S. Sede durante il pontificato di Gregorio XIII* (Studi e testi, 143; Vatican City, 1948), 36, 126.

²¹ *MPO* 4, 42–8.

²² *Ibid.* 26–7.

²³ *Ibid.* 43: 'sendo che questa questione più presto par esser de nomine ...'.

²⁴ *Ibid.* 44.

²⁵ *Ibid.* 106.

persuasive.²⁶ This time the intransigence came from Rome. When it came to allowing the Copts to use their own formula about the natures in Christ it was Acquaviva who put his foot down. The Copts, he said, 'must understand their errors and know the truth'.²⁷

The missionaries at last succeeded in persuading the patriarch to convene a synod, the Synod of Memphis, in December 1583. At the proposal of the Jesuits that they accept the teaching of the Council of Chalcedon on the two natures in Christ and that they reject the doctrine of Dioscorus, the Copts were outraged. The patriarch declared that he would rather lose his own head than profess such a heresy as two natures.²⁸ At a second meeting the patriarch refused to accept the 'new' teaching. At a third the Jesuits had managed to persuade a number of Copts, including the bishop Dioscorus, to accept in principle (*secundum rem* rather than *secundum verbum*) the Christology of Rome,²⁹ but the document drawn up was never signed by the patriarch and was never approved by the pope.

Eliano returned to Rome in the summer of 1585 with no more to show for his second mission than for his first. He had indeed elicited a letter from the patriarch to the pope, but the letter, courteous, respectful, and affectionate, is in fact a statement of the Monophysite position and certainly no act of submission or recognition of papal authority in matters of faith.³⁰ The pattern that emerges from the Jesuit missions of the sixteenth century was to persist. Before advancing to the end of the century and beyond, we should therefore enquire as to what it was that went wrong in the relations between the two Churches.

First of all, there were the general political conditions of the moment. The first patriarch of Alexandria the missionaries dealt with was Gabriel VII, and Gabriel VII, in the early 1560s, was clearly uneasy about Ottoman reactions to any dealings or agreement with the papacy. In fact, as they would show again and again in the course of our period, the Ottoman authorities had relatively little interest in what the Christians did and when, in the early eighteenth century, a considerable number of Copts converted to Catholicism, it was not the Ottoman authorities who objected so much as the Copts loyal to the patriarch of Alexandria. Yet Ottoman policy to the Christians was notoriously unpredictable and there were numerous incidents of attempts to reach countries outside the

²⁶ Ibid. 105.

²⁷ Ibid. 131.

²⁸ Ibid. 177.

²⁹ Ibid. 194.

³⁰ The letter is published and analysed in Levi della Vida, *Documenti*, 114–67.

empire being prevented, and of accusations of sedition and espionage being made against Christians and Jews suspected of collusion with the West. Western Europe was largely hostile to the Ottoman empire, and the pope was the spiritual leader of the enemies of Islam.

If Ottoman disapproval was a reason for rejecting any advances from Rome, Rome itself provided few incentives to accept them. In the sixteenth, and most of the seventeenth, century Rome could do nothing to help the Christians of the East. The West might provide missionaries, and the missionaries might provide education, but they could offer little to no diplomatic protection to Ottoman subjects. And besides, who, in Egyptian eyes, was the pope? Gabriel VII said that the pope had no jurisdiction in Egypt, and a number of Western visitors to the Coptic monasteries discovered that many of the monks had no more than a nebulous idea of who or what the pope actually was.

The many misunderstandings which emerged from the meetings between the Western missionaries and the Copts included the position of the patriarch. The patriarch of Alexandria was in fact far less powerful than the bishop of Rome. Individual patriarchs might be attracted by the idea of union but, quite apart from the interpretation of the word 'union', this attraction was never shared by the majority of the Copts. That the efforts of the early missionaries, which occupy so important a place in Western works on the history of the Church, are hardly so much as mentioned in Coptic sources, shows how unimportant they were thought to be in Egypt. The Church of Alexandria might look east and north to fellow Monophysites, to the Jacobites and the Armenians. It certainly looked south to the Ethiopians, who were in communion with the patriarch of Alexandria. But, in contrast to the Maronites, it did not, on the whole, look west.

The patriarchs' dependence on the approval of their co-religionists meant that they could appear weak and undecided to the West. But there was also their own education. Learning was never a condition for election. Gabriel VII's habit of allowing his friends to write letters which he would sign without reading raises doubts not only about his energy, but also about his literacy, and could explain why he was easily influenced by more learned theologians at St Anthony's.

In the case of the Jesuit missions, part of the blame must also be placed on the missionaries themselves. Rodríguez was an intractable dogmatist, whose behaviour and convictions were incomprehensible to the Copts, for whom dogma was so much less important than it was in the West. Abram al-Suryani laughed in his face at his insistence on apparently

vacuous terminology justified by incomprehensible scholastic niceties. Nor was the approach of a man who arrived in search of doctrinal errors particularly endearing. Once he had become head of the missions to Egypt Eliano appeared to be still worse. He was clearly a difficult man, and even his Jesuit companions in Mount Lebanon tended to quarrel with him. The fanatical neophyte who had burnt Jewish books in Rome and then went on to destroy important Maronite manuscripts, the content of which he had not even properly understood, was tactless and brutal and insensitive to any internal problems of the Copts. He and Rodríguez, interfering, inflexible, and inquisitorial, were a fatal advertisement for Roman Catholicism.

But if much blame must be placed on the Jesuits, some must also be placed on the Coptic patriarchs. Over the centuries certain patriarchs proved oddly flirtatious with the Church of Rome. An individual patriarch could frequently be persuaded by an affable and intelligent missionary to agree verbally to union. Exactly how genuine this apparent liking for the papacy was may for ever remain a mystery. Certainly many Eastern Christians were drawn to Rome for purely personal reasons. Na'matallah may have been seeking absolution for his conversion to Islam, but he was certainly eager to leave Syria, which had become dangerous for him, and the pope offered a hospitable haven. By Eastern Christian standards, moreover, the pope was immensely rich. If he could afford to send missionaries on apparently idle assignments, he could surely provide lavishly not only for visitors to Rome but also for Eastern Churches which approached him with the lure of union. But quite apart from opportunistic reasons for flirting with Rome, it would seem that some patriarchs genuinely believed in the advantages of a united Christian Church, and one of the main benefits was that announced in Eugenius IV's brief summoning them to the Council of Florence: the ultimate defeat of Islam. In practice the Eastern Christians undoubtedly felt closer to the Muslims than to the Christians of the West, and many of the Christians inhabiting the Greek Archipelago who had savoured both Turkish and Venetian occupation realized that they were far freer under Islam. Yet the myth remained. The odd waves of persecution, violent and unpredictable, could indeed lead a patriarch to dream of a united Christian army advancing through the East, eliminating the Muslims in its passage.³¹

³¹ For a general discussion see 'Afifi, *Al-Aqbāt*, 288–96.

5

New Approaches

ILLUSIONS OF UNION

Eliano's was the last Jesuit mission to the Copts for some time to come. Other missions continued, however, and in the final decade of the sixteenth century it seemed that the Coptic patriarch Gabriel VIII had agreed to union with the pope, Clement VIII, and that the ambitions of so many pontiffs had at last been fulfilled.¹ In March 1592 the pope dispatched Giovanni Battista Vecchiotti, a man with a considerable knowledge and experience of the East. He was to approach the patriarch and two other dignitaries, and arrange for a legation to be sent to Rome. The patriarch agreed, and in June 1594 three delegates, two priests, Yusuf and 'Abd al-Masih, and Barsum, deacon of the church of St Mark in Alexandria, arrived, with letters expressing the patriarch's desire for union.² Clement allowed them to present their confessions of faith.³ Their submission to Rome was total. They acknowledged two perfect natures in the single person of Christ; they stated their belief in purgatory; they accepted the decisions of all the Church councils including Trent; they condemned the teachings of Arius and Nestorius, 'and above

¹ Vincenzo Buri, SJ, *L'unione della chiesa copta con Roma sotto Clemente VIII* (Orientalia christiana, 23; Rome, 1931), 108–25.

² Cesare Baronio, *Annales ecclesiastici*, vi (Antwerp, 1603), 699: 'Deum altissimum rogamus, ut Ecclesia sit una Catholica et Apostolica sine divisione, et sine separatione, ut efficiamur Christi membra dilectionis et charitatis ligamine colligati sine schismate...'. The prior or *qummus* of Alexandria added (pp. 701–2): 'Voluntas autem in eo est, ut sint simul concordēs in charitate spirituali, et sit Ecclesia una Romana, et alexandrina, neque sit inter nos differentia ulla in quacumque re... Discipulus [sc. the Coptic patriarch] autem stat pedibus suis ad obediendum mandatis sanctitatis Patris: quoniam omnes sumus auscultantes, obediētes, atque erecti ad omnia quae nobis praeceperit, et ad implendum negotium, Deo volente; quia sumus sub obedientia: nam Pater est summus Patriarcharum, et caput capitum, et successor sancti Petri Apostoli; et quod ligaverit, erit ligatum; et quod solverit, erit solutum...'.
³ Ibid. 704–7.

all the impious heresy of Eutyches and Dioscorus of Alexandria'; and they recognized the absolute primacy of the pope, the successor of St Peter, true vicar of Christ, and 'the head of the whole Church and all Christians'. Such a declaration was without precedent, and it is no wonder that the Oratorian Cesare Baronio should have added their confession of faith to the sixth volume of his *Annales ecclesiastici* in 1595, the official Catholic answer to the first great Protestant history of the Church, the *Centuries of Magdeburg*. If the Church had been subjected to schisms in the North, Baronio exulted, repentant members were returning to the fold in the East.⁴ And better was still to come. The pope requested that the confession of faith be ratified. The delegates went back to Egypt, and Giovanni Battista Vecchietti's brother Girolamo called on the patriarch. The result was the dispatch of two new delegates, Ghubriyal, the prior of Alexandria and leader of the embassy, a priest, also called Ghubriyal, and again Barsum. On 25 June, at the palace of the Quirinale in Rome, their professions of faith were officially accepted by the pope and union was acknowledged.

Plans were made to found a Coptic college in Rome, where adolescents, of good character and honest parentage, would receive a Catholic education, and then, in their turn, serve the Church as missionaries. In October of 1602 Clement told the Coptic patriarch and the *qummuṣ* of Alexandria that the foundation had taken place and that he awaited students.⁵ But how sincere was this union on the Egyptian side? In April 1599 Giovanni Battista Vecchietti wrote from Alexandria to his brother. The patriarch had informed him that the profession of faith had been read out and approved in Cairo and in the desert monasteries, and that he and his followers had clearly acknowledged Eutyches and Dioscorus to be excommunicated heretics.⁶ But what was really going on in Egypt? There is little reason to assume that the Copts were converted from one day to the next. While the patriarch himself may have been largely in good faith—in a letter written to Clement in May 1601, he referred to the Catholics and the Copts as forming 'a single fold and a single faith'⁷—his motives were not entirely disinterested, and in the year of the union, 1597, he was already asking the pope for money (as well as for

⁴ Ibid. 697–8.

⁵ Buri, *L'unione della chiesa copta con Roma*, 160. Cf. 164, with more details addressed to the *qummuṣ* of Alexandria.

⁶ Ibid. 204. The patriarch assured him that 'egli e tutti i suoi sono fermissimi in questa santa unione e sono per essere sempre, avendo conosciuto chiaramente Dioscoro e Eutiche essere eretici e scomunicati e per tali tenendoli'.

⁷ Ibid. 257: 'Noi siamo una sola greggia e una sola fede nel Signore Messia.'

edifying books translated into Arabic).⁸ Indeed, many of the letters written to the pope from Egypt laid particular emphasis on the persecutions visited on the Copts and on their financial needs, and the patriarch and his circle may well have seen union with Rome as a possible solution to these problems.

Soon, however, it again emerged that agreements with the Copts were subject to intrigues, personal quarrels, and misunderstandings. Barsum stayed on in Rome and seems to have had a strong influence on the pope, who showered him with honours.⁹ The leader of the delegates, Ghubriyal, was so incensed by this that he returned to Egypt in a fury in 1600 and there did his best to sabotage the union. In 1603 Gabriel VIII was succeeded as patriarch by Mark V. At first Mark too seemed to be in favour of union with Rome. Shortly after his election he told the pope of his desire for the continuation of concord 'in the union of the Roman Church with the Church of Alexandria'.¹⁰ But by 1605 he had lost all enthusiasm. A couple of years later the Venetian consul said that there was no longer any talk of union and that the patriarch had reverted to the ancient custom of the Copts, invoking the names of Severus, Dioscorus, and Eutyches.¹¹ Pope Paul V, who succeeded Clement VIII in 1605, allowed the agreement to dissolve. This did not mean the end of any form of correspondence between Rome and the patriarchate of Alexandria. In 1607 Mark V sent a confession of faith to François Savary de Brèves, the former French ambassador in Istanbul, by way of his vice-consul in Cairo Gabriel Fernoulx, but there was no question of submission to the papacy.¹²

FRANCISCANS AND CAPUCHINS

Despite the failure of the early missions, Egypt remained important as a base for the various branches of the Franciscans. Each feared, and often hated, the others, and benefited from the protection of rival consuls, the French or the Venetians. The Franciscans of the Custody of the Holy Land, for example, had managed to open a hospice in Old Cairo in the

⁸ Ibid. 196.

⁹ Ibid. 236.

¹⁰ Ibid. 214: 'la perdurazione della dilezione e concordia nella unione della Chiesa Romana con la Chiesa Alessandrina...'.
¹¹ Ibid. 247.

¹² Cattani, 'La chiesa copta nel secolo XVII', has translated and published the document, pp. 149–53, 156–61.

sixteenth century and had obtained permission to hold religious services in the Coptic church of St Sergius.¹³ They were most jealous of the position as consular chaplains they had obtained in 1571,¹⁴ and were to resent the arrival of the Reformed Franciscans. They were also eager to block the Capuchin advance, and the Capuchins, who would establish a mission in Cairo in 1630,¹⁵ had regarded with some apprehension the development of a new organization, the Congregation of Propaganda Fide in Rome.

Created by Pope Gregory XV in 1622, the object of the Congregation of Propaganda Fide was to coordinate, and bring under the control of the curia, the various missions. In 1623 Gregory XV was succeeded by Urban VIII, and it was the Barberini pope who had a profession of faith drawn up to which all Eastern patriarchs ready to unite with Rome were required to subscribe. Translated into Greek, Arabic, Syriac, Ethiopic, and Armenian, it would remain the standard statement of belief acceptable to the Catholic Church.¹⁶ It demanded the acknowledgement of the decrees of all the Church councils from the first Council of Nicaea to the Council of Trent. Where the Monophysites were concerned this entailed the acceptance of the teaching of two natures in Christ, the rejection of the Trisagion, the acceptance of the procession of the Holy Ghost from the Son, the use of leavened bread, and a belief in purgatory (with the consequent alms, prayers, and masses for the dead), which, both in the Latin original and in the Arabic translation, received a definition far clearer than the one issued at the Council of Florence. Recognition of the supremacy of the pope, and obedience to Rome, were necessary, and regulations of diet were to be based on the abrogation of the injunctions of the Old Testament by the New. The Catholic teaching of transubstantiation was to be accepted. Baptism in case of danger of death was to be administered by anyone, not only by a priest. Matrimony was proclaimed indissoluble: adultery, heresy, and other obstacles could lead to separation, but never to new marriages. The doctrine of indulgences was imposed, as was the Tridentine definition of

¹³ Coquin, *Les Édifices chrétiens du Vieux-Caire*, 100–2, 171–2.

¹⁴ Maurizio Bellenzier, OFM, *Cronaca della missione, chiesa, convento e parrocchia di S. Caterina di Alessandria di Egitto (dagli inizi all'anno 1956)*, ed. Libero Cruciani, OFM (Cairo, 1996), 49–51, 503–8; Elli, *Storia della chiesa copta*, iii. 36–8.

¹⁵ M. de Vaumas, *L'Eveil missionnaire de la France (d'Henri IV à la fondation du Séminaire des Missions Etrangères)* (Lyons, 1942), 94–137.

¹⁶ For the Greek and Latin text see Raphael de Martinis, *Iuris pontificii de propaganda fide*, i (Rome, 1888), 227–32; for the Arabic and other oriental translations see vol. vii (Rome, 1897), 264–75.

justification. Urban's profession of faith was a rigorous document which missionaries would often be inclined to overlook, just as they tended to overlook the injunction forbidding Catholics to associate with heretics, but its acceptance in Rome throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries meant that none of the compromises which the more flexible fathers in Egypt might desire could be regarded as remotely admissible.

In 1623 the Franciscans were instructed to work towards the union of the patriarchs of Constantinople and Alexandria with Rome. For this purpose a few Observant Franciscans were detached from the Custody of the Holy Land in 1624 and established a hospice in Cairo. They were followed by the Capuchins, and although Egypt was never to be of primary interest to the order but was regarded as a stepping stone to Ethiopia, the Capuchins were active throughout most of the decade.

In 1633 Agathange de Vendôme, one of the more learned Capuchins, stopped on his way to Ethiopia and managed to engage the sympathy of the patriarch of Alexandria, Matthew III.¹⁷ Largely in the hope of converting the Copts to Catholicism, but also in search of manuscripts for the French scholar Nicolas Fabri de Peiresc, Agathange de Vendôme and his fellow Capuchin Cassien de Nantes toured the Egyptian convents. In 1636 they were joined by another member of their order, Gilles de Loches, who was also buying for Peiresc, but was recalled soon after his arrival.¹⁸ Agathange de Vendôme accompanied the former cavalry officer and future French consul in Damietta, Jean Coppin,¹⁹ to the monasteries of St Anthony and St Paul in 1638 in an endeavour to convert the inmates. His success was greatly exaggerated by his hagiographers, and it seems most unlikely that more than a couple of the monks of St Anthony's were so much as interested in his arguments. According to Coppin he made no converts whatsoever.²⁰ Yet Agathange de Vendôme was an intelligent and enlightened missionary, in many respects a precursor of the Jesuit Claude Sicard. Like Sicard and Dubernat he refused to accept the 'Communicatio in divinis' issued by the Propaganda Fide, forbidding Catholics to consort with heretics. He wrote to the prefect of the Congregation, Cardinal Antonio Barberini, in

¹⁷ He described him as 'un uomo molto inconstante' who might welcome a bribe. Ignazio da Seggiano, 'Documenti inediti sull'apostolato dei Minori Cappuccini nel Vicino Oriente (1623-1683)', *Collectanea Franciscana*, 18 (1948), 143-6, esp. 145.

¹⁸ Oleg V. Volkoff, *A la recherche de manuscrits en Égypte* (Cairo, 1970), 36-45.

¹⁹ See below, p. 151.

²⁰ Ladislav de Vannes, *Deux martyrs Capucins: Les Bienheureux Agathange de Vendôme et Cassien de Nantes* (Paris and Couvin, 1905), 188-98; Jean Coppin, *Voyages en Égypte de Jean Coppin 1638-1639, 1643-1646*, ed. Serge Sauneron (Cairo, 1971), 244.

July 1637, relating his encounters with the monks at St Anthony's and stressing the impossibility for converts to leave their former co-religionists.²¹ As for the heresy of the Copts, Agathange too had his doubts, since the only thing he could find wrong with their beliefs was the invocation of Dioscorus and Severus of Antioch.²²

It was while he was touring the monasteries of the Wadi al-Natrun that Agathange de Vendôme came across the German Lutheran missionary Peter Heyling. We shall be returning to Heyling later. Here, however, it should be pointed out that Agathange de Vendôme strongly suspected him of trying to convert the Copts to Protestantism and seems to have arranged for his eviction from Dayr Maqar. Heyling, however, managed to befriend the Ethiopian monk Ariminios, whom the patriarch of Alexandria had appointed metropolitan of Ethiopia and who accordingly took the name of Mark. Mark, who had once been close to Agathange de Vendôme, agreed to allow Heyling, who now claimed to be a Copt himself, to accompany him south, and revised his previously high opinion of the Capuchins. When Agathange de Vendôme and Cassien de Nantes, themselves dressed as Copts, finally arrived in Ethiopia in 1638 they met with an antagonistic reception. The new metropolitan accused them not only of wishing to unite the Ethiopian Church with Rome, but also of wanting to replace him as its bishop. According to Catholic sources it was Heyling who came up with the ingenious idea of offering the Capuchins the choice between death or conversion to the Church of Alexandria. They chose the former and were hanged in Gondar by their girdles when the Ethiopians discovered there were no other ropes at hand.²³

A little later the Observant Franciscans of the Custody of the Holy Land were joined in Egypt by Reformed Observant Franciscans, who had had better training as missionaries than the Observants and who were consequently going to play the more important part in relations with the Copts, even if their original aim, too, was to proceed to Ethiopia. But these two branches engaged in quarrels about jurisdiction which did little to assist their cause or their efficiency. There were frequent changes

²¹ Ignazio da Seggiano, 'Documenti inediti', 144. Cf. also Ladislav de Vannes, *Deux martyrs*, 165–70.

²² Ignazio da Seggiano, 'Documenti inediti', 145. Cf. also Ladislav de Vannes, *Deux martyrs*, 195.

²³ Catholic sources consequently hold Heyling responsible for the martyrdom of the two Capuchins, who were subsequently beatified. See Ladislav de Vannes, *Deux martyrs*, 241–2, 251–3, 292–301, and Otto F. A. Meinardus, 'Peter Heyling in the Light of Catholic Historiography', *Ostkirchliche Studien*, 18 (1969), 16–22.

of authority. At first the Cairo mission was submitted to the Custody of the Holy Land. In 1663 control was taken over by the Reformed Franciscans, but from 1680 to 1697 it returned to the Custody of the Holy Land, before again being resumed by the Reformed.²⁴ The disputes between the two persisted throughout the eighteenth century.

By the late seventeenth century certain Catholic visitors to Egypt were fully convinced that union between the Churches of Rome and Alexandria was as remote as it had ever been. The Franciscan Recollect from the Southern Netherlands, Anthonius Gonzales, was in Egypt, serving as chaplain to the French consul in Cairo, in 1665 and 1666. After observing the Copts with considerable misgivings, and after describing their manner of praying, which was in many ways so similar to that of the Muslims, he denied any points of community between the Church of Alexandria and the Church of Rome. Far from there being an imminent union, he wrote, there was a still greater difference between the Copts and the Roman Catholics than between the Catholics and the Protestants.²⁵ Some years later, in about 1691, a Spanish Franciscan came to very similar conclusions. He recommended that the hospices in Old Cairo and the Fayyum should be abandoned since the Copts, 'like Pharaoh (from whom they are descended)', were so obstinate in their errors that their priests advised conversion to Islam or Judaism rather than to Catholicism.²⁶ Such scepticism was also shared by a Jesuit such as Louis Grenier, writing from Cairo in 1700. The missionaries, he said, would need patience, since the Copts were still 'at an inconceivable distance'. They only approached the missionaries if they could count on being given alms, and as soon as the alms were no longer provided they would leave.²⁷ Six years later Guillaume Dubernat came to the same conclusions.²⁸

²⁴ Gaudenzio Manfredi, OFM, *La figura del 'Praefectus Missionum' nelle Prefetture d'Egitto-Etiopia dell'Alto Egitto-Etiopia affidate ai Frati Minori (1630-1792)* (Cairo, 1958), 49-115.

²⁵ Antonius Gonzales, *Hierusalemsche Reyse* (Antwerp, 1673), 157. On Gonzales see the introduction by Charles Libois, SJ, to his edition and translation of Gonzales's text, *Voyage en Égypte du Père Antonius Gonzales 1665-1666* (Cairo, 1977), esp. pp. x-xii.

²⁶ Ramón Lourdo Díaz, OFM, 'El conocimiento del árabe entre los Franciscanos españoles de Tierra Santa (según una "Relación" de finales del s. XVII)', *Archivum Franciscanum historicum*, 94 (2001), 147-86, esp. 179.

²⁷ MPO 6, 25.

²⁸ Ibid. 265: 'Si vous exceptez quelques pauvres Coptes en tres petit nombre encore, que les aumones auxquelles on les a accoutumés retiennent peut etre parmi les francs (c'est ainsi qu'on appelle les catholiques) ie ne vois point de catholique parmi les Coptes, qui fassent du moins profession de leur catholicité de la manière qu'il faudroit.'

Nevertheless relations between the Franciscan missionaries and the Copts were by no means always hostile. With the authorization of the Coptic patriarch, some of the missionaries who arrived in Egypt on their way to Ethiopia in the 1630s stayed at the monastery of St Anthony and at Dayr Maqar in order to improve their Arabic. We know that Fra Gerardo da Milano was at St Anthony's in 1639, and it was suggested that the Propaganda Fide pay the monastery an annual sum of 40 scudi for two or three Franciscans to reside there. It was hoped they would learn Arabic in seven or eight months. The prefect of the mission, on the other hand, the Observant Franciscan Francesco da Como, withdrew to Dayr Maqar in about 1638 for an extended retreat, and subsequently taught Arabic in Jerusalem before becoming Custodian of the Holy Land.²⁹

Only after the election to the papacy of Innocent XI and to the patriarchate of Alexandria of John XVI in 1676 did the Franciscans again manage to open negotiations with the Coptic patriarch. Three Reformed Franciscans called on him in Cairo in 1680 and, after a number of visits, suggested that the patriarch write to the pope. Despite numerous obstacles, which included the suppression of their own mission, and thanks to the insistence of François de Salem, the prefect of the mission who was prepared to follow the patriarch round Egypt, the Franciscans managed to persuade John XVI to submit a profession of faith in 1684.³⁰ At first sight this seemed an attestation of orthodoxy on the part of the Copts and of submission to the papacy. Certainly the statements about the natures in Christ seemed acceptable. At a time when more and more Catholics had come to agree that the disagreement was solely nominal and that the Copts were proving more malleable in their formulation of the teaching, however, the Christological issue was becoming of less importance to the Propaganda Fide. What now mattered was the acceptance of all the Church councils. John XVI piously expressed his veneration for the decisions taken at Nicaea, Constantinople, and Ephesus, but he made no mention of Chalcedon or subsequent councils. Consequently the profession of faith was rejected in Rome.³¹

²⁹ Otto F. A. Meinardus, 'The Capuchin Missionary Efforts in the Coptic Monasteries 1625–1650', *Studia Orientalia Christiana. Collectanea*, 20 (1987), 189–202, esp. 195–7, 200–1; id., *Monks and Monasteries of the Egyptian Deserts* (rev. edn., Cairo, 1999), 15, 88.

³⁰ For the text see Jean-Marie Détré, 'Contribution à l'étude des relations du Patriarche Copte Jean XVII avec Rome de 1735 à 1738', *Collectanea*, 5 (1960), 123–69, esp. 158–69.

³¹ Jean-Pierre Trossen, *Les Relations du Patriarche copte Jean XVI avec Rome (1676–1718)* (Luxemburg, 1948), 16–43; *Nascita*, 161–76.

Gradually, however, the Franciscan missionaries began to make individual conversions of Copts to Catholicism. In 1683, in Cairo, they converted four men and eight women, and in 1684 four more women.³² The numbers were few, but it marked the beginning of what was to be a campaign that was surprisingly successful, partly because of the readiness of the missionaries to concentrate on personal conversions rather than on union between the Churches and partly because of a change in the political situation.

³² *Nascita*, 12.

6

Towards a Coptic Catholic Church

INDIVIDUAL CONVERSIONS

In 1683 the Turks suffered a major military defeat from the combined Austrian and Polish armies at the gates of Vienna. Despite the momentary setback at Lepanto in 1571, the Turks had been regarded as invincible and their empire as an area where their enemies were powerless. The French might have some influence thanks to their early alliances with the sultan, and the Dutch and the English might have a certain local importance because of their aptitude for trade. The Habsburg empire and Poland, on the other hand, were regarded with boundless contempt. The emperor was known as the 'king of Vienna', and his ambassadors came to Istanbul to plead for favours rather than to impose conditions. In 1683 this changed. The Habsburgs could now begin to dictate conditions to the sultan. The Ottoman armies gradually started to retreat. The religious minorities soon realized that the central government of the Ottoman empire was weakened. If furnished with enough local protection, it was felt, a group of Christians might act with unprecedented independence. Europe, moreover, had emerged as an important trading partner. Those Christians engaged in trade, as we see from the case of some of the Melkites in Syria and Lebanon, found that the education offered by the missionaries and the knowledge of European languages (rejected by the Muslims) which this education provided gave them immense advantages.¹

In Egypt the situation was different, but some of the same ingredients were present and from these the missionaries benefited. Thanks on the one hand to the benevolent attitude towards Rome of the Coptic patriarch John XVI, and on the other to the dynamism of François de Salem, the representatives of the Propaganda Fide in Egypt started to expand their

¹ Thomas Philipp, *The Syrians in Egypt 1725–1975* (Stuttgart, 1985), 16–18.

activity. In 1687 the Reformed Franciscans opened a hospice in Old Cairo and one in the Fayyum.² These were followed by a school in Old Cairo where education was provided for some twenty boys, and further hospices in Rosetta and Damietta. But more important still were the expeditions undertaken by the missionaries, and sanctioned by the patriarch, to Upper Egypt, particularly to the town of Akhmim and the surrounding area, which included the villages of Farshut and Girga. The Franciscans there encountered the ideal circumstances for their success.

The area of Upper Egypt, from Asyut in the north to Aswan in the south, was ruled by a Beduin tribe, the Hawwara. Originally from Tunisia, the Hawwara, who had settled in Egypt in the sixteenth century, were tributaries of the Turks, whom they provided with grain. But they enjoyed a considerable independence and were frequently dissatisfied with their overlords.³ The tribal chiefs were served by a bureaucracy which consisted almost entirely of Copts.⁴

With a rudimentary training in medicine, the missionaries called on the local ruler, the Hawwara prince Muhammad Qasim, and were immediately consulted by him as doctors. He became most attached to them, and when the quarrels between the rival orders led to the missionaries' recall to Cairo in 1692 and the suspension of the mission in the following year, in a letter written by his Coptic secretaries he pleaded with their superiors to allow them to return.

Four years later, in 1697, the Reformed Franciscans at last came back to Egypt now independent of the Custody of the Holy Land and with a mission of their own, the mission of Akhmim, Fungi, and Ethiopia, which allowed them far greater freedom of movement.⁵ Muhammad Qasim, who was in Cairo on business, seemed at first to have forgotten about them, but he fell ill, and one of them, Giuseppe da Gerusalemme, managed to cure him. His memory of them returned together with his former affection. Again the missionaries made for Akhmim, but again, after various local feuds and rebellions, they had to abandon their venture, and were not to return in force until 1720. By then, however, they found a still warmer reception, especially among the Copts, since they had been preceded by one of the most remarkable and intelligent men to be associated with the missions in Egypt, the Jesuit Claude Sicard.

² *Nascita*, 13.

³ On the Hawwara see Crecelius, 'Egypt in the Eighteenth Century', 67; Winter, *Egyptian Society*, 26, 104–5.

⁴ *Nascita*, 11–17.

⁵ *Ibid.* 18–20.

After the failure of their first mission to the Copts the Jesuits had shifted their attention to Ethiopia. In the course of the sixteenth century a few Jesuits had indeed entered what had become known as the Kingdom of Prester John. A mission was established in the north of the country, and Pedro Páez Jaromilla had actually managed to convert two emperors to Catholicism, first, in 1603, Za Dengel and then, many years later in 1620, Susneyos. Success was short-lived, and Susneyos, in an effort to redeem the popularity he had forfeited by his conversion, abandoned the Jesuits, who were expelled by his son and successor Fasilidas in 1633.⁶ Nevertheless the idea that other emperors might be converted persisted. Because of the difficulties of an overland journey, the Ethiopian mission had been based in Goa. Ethiopia was thus approached by sea from the east, after a perilous voyage which sometimes took years. By the end of the sixteenth century it became apparent that Egypt might be a better starting point. Ethiopia could still be reached by boat, from an Egyptian or Nubian port, but a voyage up the Nile, with relatively short treks across the desert, was also possible. The first Jesuit expedition reached Cairo in the summer of 1627 and set off with the highest hopes in December, but got no further than Girga. There an enemy of Gabriel Fernoulx, the French consul who protected the missionaries, denounced them as spies. Brought back to Cairo in chains and promptly imprisoned, they had to be bailed out by Fernoulx himself. In 1694 Jean Verzeau, the newly appointed deputy provincial residing in Syria, laid plans for founding a permanent Jesuit residence in Cairo from which to set out for Ethiopia, and finally succeeded in doing so in 1697.⁷ This was the mission of which Sicard was appointed superior in 1712.

Claude Sicard, born close to Marseilles, had had a sound humanist education and started on his career as a missionary in Syria in 1706. First in Tripoli, then in Aleppo (where he was nominated superior of the Jesuit residence in 1711), he learned excellent Arabic.⁸ An avid antiquarian, he spent much of his time in Egypt searching for traces of Egyptian antiquity. The result was a contribution of unprecedented importance to the topography of the country. By 1722 he had produced the best map in existence and, when he died in 1726, he left his unpublished *Parallèle géographique de l'ancienne Égypte et de l'Égypte*

⁶ Richard Pankhurst, *An Introduction to the Economic History of Ethiopia from Early Times to 1800* (London, 1961), 81–6.

⁷ See Charles Libois's introduction to *MPO* 5, pp. xli–lxii.

⁸ For a survey of Sicard's life see Maurice Martin's introduction to Claude Sicard, *Oeuvres*, i: *Lettres et relations inédites*, ed. Maurice Martin (Cairo, 1982), pp. v–vii.

moderne, which, together with his letters and reports, remains of the utmost interest to students of the area.⁹ Sicard was also determined to immerse himself in the study of the Copts and their traditions. In December 1712 he visited the monasteries of the Wadi al-Natrun. In May 1714 he attended the *mawlid* or feast at the monastery of St Damyana in the Delta, and in 1716 he visited the Red Sea monasteries. But he approached the Copts as a missionary, with a contempt for their Church and their beliefs. His attitude is illustrated in his description of his visit to St Paul's in 1716, for we find the same sort of terminological misunderstanding which had characterized the mission of Rodríguez over 150 years earlier. The monks were mystified by Sicard's question of what they understood by 'the Church'. In this case the problem can hardly have been purely linguistic for, not only did Sicard himself speak good Arabic, but he was accompanied by the Maronite Yusuf ibn Shim'un al-Sim'ani, known in Italy as Giuseppe Simonio Assemani.¹⁰ What seems to have puzzled the Copts was the way in which the question was put. Their answers varied. Some said it was the Holy Virgin, others the heavenly Jerusalem, while still others gave answers ranging from baptism, the eucharist, or the elect to their own bishops and doctors.¹¹ This, wrote Sicard, did not surprise him. These were the answers he had received in Cairo, and the question itself was a 'coup de massue' for all schismatics.

It was on his fifth visit to Upper Egypt in 1718 that, after preaching in Akhmim, Sicard started to make a substantial number of Coptic converts to Catholicism. He had already made a few conversions in Cairo, but he was far more successful in the Hawwara territory. This group of some twenty converts, who included a secretary of the Hawwara prince and his family, and the brilliant young Raphael Tuki to whom we shall be returning, were to mark the beginning of the Coptic Catholic Church.¹² Sicard, however, knew the territory well enough to be cautious in his optimism, for how firm, he wondered, was their faith?¹³

⁹ For its importance see the introduction to Sicard, *Oeuvres*, iii: *Parallèle géographique de l'ancienne Égypte et de l'Égypte moderne*, ed. Serge Sauneron and Maurice Martin (Cairo, 1982), pp. v–xv.

¹⁰ See below, p. 91–2.

¹¹ Sicard, *Oeuvres*, i. 41.

¹² Elli, *Storia della chiesa copta*, iii. 36–54.

¹³ Sicard, *Oeuvres*, i. 60: 'Depuis 2 mois que je suis ici, il s'est converti 15 ou 20 personnes parmi lesquelles sont 2 prêtres. 15 ou 20 Coptes réduits à l'unité de la foi, supposé qu'ils demeurent fermes, font 15 ou 20 miracles de la grâce, ou pour le moins 15 ou 20 paradoxes, pour ceux qui connaissent le génie de cette nation.'

Some of the converts did remain firm and were to be of invaluable assistance to the Reformed Franciscans when, protected by Muhammad Qasim's son and successor Muhammad Kamali, they again established themselves in Akhmim and Girga, and later in Farshut. The converts now included members of the Coptic clergy and some of the more important laymen, Coptic bureaucrats in the service of the Hawwara rulers. The heads of families were particularly important acquisitions, for, as Sicard had foreseen, numerous relatives followed suit.

The technique of the missionaries seems to have varied. Sicard delighted the monks of Dayr al-Suryan by saying that he too was a Copt, still more of a Copt than they were since he was a true follower of Athanasius and Cyril of Alexandria.¹⁴ He then proceeded to defend the orthodox teaching of the Catholic Church on the basis of patristic manuscripts kept by the Copts. On occasion, however, the missionaries could be destructive. Throughout our period there was a policy, imposed, as we saw, not only in Egypt but also in Mount Lebanon and elsewhere in the Near East, to destroy manuscripts which were judged doctrinally unsound. Where Egypt is concerned we have the testimony of one of the Reformed Franciscans, Michelangelo da Vestign , who, in the mid-1730s, prided himself on the destruction of Coptic manuscripts which included texts on magic, New Testament apocrypha, and theology regarded as insulting to Rome.¹⁵

Just as they had done in Cairo, the missionaries tried to set up schools and provide religious instruction. The number of converts increased, soon amounting, according to the missionaries, to well over a hundred a

¹⁴ Ibid. 19.

¹⁵ *Nascita*, 254: 'Non si sono mai abbruciati libri de Gophti p/ solo motivo, che contenessero alcune eresie, purch e ci  non ostante, si trovano in essi libri con le eresie loro, argomenti bastanti a convincere la loro perfidia, a fargli conoscere la verit  infallibile della Cattolica fede: sicche quei libri, quali sono stati abbruciati, contenevano malefizi, Magie, Superstizioni, finti miracoli, false visioni, Libri apocrifi pieni di bestemmie: come sarebbe uno che da loro chiamavasi il quinto evangelio. Un altro che contiene una visione contra S. Leone Papa, e S. Pulcheria Vergine, che dice averli la terra inghiotiti. Altro intitolato l'Istoria del Gallo risuscitato da Christo da morte a vita, p/ ispiare gl'andamenti di Giuda, e p/ ricompensa delle sue belle risposte, mandato da Christo in Paradiso per mille anni. altro intitolato l'orazione di Maria Vergine, insegnata da Christo alla med.a sopra la croce, da nessuno imparata, ne conosciuta, ne meno dagli Cherubini, e Serafini, piena di superstizioni, e nomi di falsi Angioli, con molte bestemie. Ed altri libri, che solo generano odio contro la Chiesa cattolica, Colleggio Apostolico, e contro li successori di Pietro, libri proibiti, che sono stati coppiati, e tradotti in lingua araba. E se si volessero bruciare tutti qu  libri de Gophti, che sono mescolati con errori, pochissimi, o nessuno vi resterebbe, perche tutti adulterati dagli eretici . . . '.

year in Akhmim and Girga. Richard Pococke, in Girga in 1737, estimated the number of converts at about 150.¹⁶ Yet these conversions, on which the missionaries could report so proudly to Rome, remained a very small minority of the Coptic community. By 1750 there cannot have been more than about 1,300 Coptic converts to Catholicism in the whole of Egypt—Cairo, Alexandria, the Nile Delta, the Fayyum, and Upper Egypt. There might have been a Coptic Catholic majority in Girga, but this was a minute, not to say negligible, proportion of the Coptic population as a whole.¹⁷ Nor did it compare favourably with the other Catholic communities in Egypt. In 1761, for example, 2,600 Greek Catholics were believed to be living in Cairo alone.¹⁸ Judging from the reports to the Propaganda Fide the numbers increased over the years. On 15 August 1765 we are given a figure of 2,037 Catholic Copts for the whole of Egypt,¹⁹ and in 1773 about 2,100 in Upper Egypt.²⁰ But even these figures, which are not necessarily reliable, remain comparatively low.

Conversion to Catholicism entailed problems. Conversion of individuals never meant a union between the Churches of Alexandria and Rome, and a striking element in the correspondence of the missionaries is a growing hostility to the so-called ‘cofiti eretici’, ‘the heretical Copts’ or the orthodox majority. This was an attitude which did little to endear the missions to those who became known as the Orthodox Copts and aggravated relations still further. It soon became apparent that the true enemies of the missionaries were the Orthodox Copts, and certainly not the local Muslims.²¹ Hostility was increased, moreover, by events in Istanbul. In September 1722, for the first time, the sultan Ahmet III issued a *berat* or decree forbidding Ottoman Christians to convert to Roman Catholicism. The *berat* was the result of pressure exerted on the ruler by the Greek Orthodox patriarch of Constantinople, Jeremiah, and by the Greek or Melkite patriarch of Antioch, Athanasius, who were alarmed at the growing phenomenon of Greek Catholicism, the rich Syrian families who were converting from Greek Orthodoxy to the faith

¹⁶ Pococke, *A Description of the East*, i. 82–3.

¹⁷ *Nascita*, 95–9; cf. also the list of converts in Gabriele Giamberardini, OFM, *I primi copti cattolici* (Cairo, 1958), 14–259.

¹⁸ APF, SR, vol. 6, fo. 190^v.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. 7, fo. 524^r.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. 8, fo. 288^r.

²¹ In a missionary report from Akhmim in 1737 we read: ‘Ivi i Turchi non impediscono il nostro rito, anzi lo lodano, e molti giurano, che non vi è altra Fede, che quella de’ Franchi’ (*Nascita*, 259).

of Rome.²² The Coptic patriarch Peter VI, who had succeeded John XVI in 1718, was himself strongly anti-Catholic, as were his bishops and most of his clergy.

One of the main problems confronting the new Coptic Catholics concerned places of worship. This affected nearly all the converts to Catholicism in the Middle East in the same period, as we know from the far more complex course of events in Syria.²³ The Orthodox Copts were hardly prepared for Catholic services to be held in their own churches, and, as we saw, there were strict Islamic rulings against the building of new Christian churches without the consent of the sultan. Services could thus only be held in private houses or in chapels hidden in the hospices belonging to the missions. To start with, mass was celebrated in Akhmim, and the inhabitants of Girga had to go there in order to receive the sacraments. Nevertheless, by 1729 a chapel had also been built in the hospice at Girga, and within the next ten years in Farshut.

And there were other difficulties. We have already seen that Agathange de Vendôme objected strongly to the injunctions issued by the Propaganda Fide according to which converts to Catholicism should separate themselves from heretics. This involved abandoning—and being abandoned by—an entire community, with no possibility of repairing elsewhere. It was above all the Capuchins and the Jesuits who pointed out the impossibility of observing such an order. In 1725, some ninety years after Agathange de Vendôme, Sicard too joined the discussion. He drew up a long memorial in which he pointed out not so much the practical obstacles as the moral ones. Compassion, charity, humility, and prudence were all reasons for continuing to frequent heretics, not to mention ‘for the imitation of Jesus Christ who was incarnated principally for the sake of sinners’.²⁴

In the meantime relations with the Orthodox Coptic Church remained as they had always been, moments of optimistic belief in an imminent union being followed by despondency and disappointment. Certainly, more and more missionaries were reaching the conclusion that monophysitism, the main heresy of which the Copts were accused, was no more than nominal, and that the Copts were in fact schismatics rather than heretics. Even the Reformed Franciscan prefect of the mission,

²² Ibid. 63.

²³ Bernard Heyberger, *Les Chrétiens du Proche-Orient au temps de la réforme catholique (Syrie, Liban, Palestine, XVIIe–XVIIIe siècles)* (Rome, 1994), 385–403.

²⁴ *Sacrorum Conciliorum nova, et amplissima collectio*, ed. G. D. Mansi (Florence, etc., 1759–1962), xlv, cols. 170–6, esp. col. 171. Cf. Sicard, *Oeuvres*, i, p.xxv.

François de Salem, showed, in a letter to the Propaganda Fide written in October 1699, that he agreed on this point.²⁵ In 1735 the missionaries thought that the Coptic patriarch John XVII had converted to Catholicism, but his confession of faith made it clear that he only recognized the pope as having absolute authority within his own Church. It was rejected in Rome.²⁶ In 1739 Athanasius, the Coptic bishop of Jerusalem, had been coaxed into conversion by Raphael Tuki and had raised hopes, but he would revert to his original Church a few years later. Unknown to most of the Copts (from whom he kept it hidden), his profession of faith was at first accepted, but subsequently rejected, in Rome, and the apparent inconsistency of his behaviour only ended with his death in 1750.²⁷ Yet the missionaries could boast of one distinguished convert to offset their failures: the bishop of Girga and Akhmim, Antuniyus Fulayfil, who was won over to Catholicism in 1758. In 1761 he was appointed apostolic vicar for the Copts, but, imprisoned by the Coptic patriarch Mark VII, he sought refuge in Rome on his release and lived in the Maronite convent until his death in 1807.²⁸

The question, of course, remains of how thorough the conversions to Catholicism in fact were. It is clear from the reports sent by the missionaries to Rome that the Copts clung to a number of their traditions despite their conversion. Richard Pococke attended mass at the Franciscan hospice in Girga on Christmas Day 1737 and was struck by the number of traditional Coptic elements in the service—the use of Coptic in the liturgy, for example, the separation of men from women, and the eucharist in both kinds.²⁹ Some thirty years later, in 1766, a number of converts were still said to be practising circumcision, and the missionaries were still trying to prohibit traditional manifestations of grief at Coptic Catholic funerals.³⁰

²⁵ *Etiopia francescana nei documenti dei secoli XVII e XVIII*, ii: 1691–1703, ed. Giovanni Maria Montano, OFM (Bologna, 1948), 443–4: ‘Ne’ loro libri però, si trovano moltissime autorità de SS. Orientali, e Patriarchi Alessandrini quali apertamente dimostrano queste due Nature in Christo, unite nella Persona del Verbo. Si che la differenza, che hoggi diverte frà la Chiesa Alessandrina e la Romana, circa la detta professione, consiste solamente nella pronuncia, perchè nell’autorità predette delle due Nature, non vi fanno concetto alcuno, ma solo si fermano nella contradizione, cioè una Natura, e questa sola tengono per vera, et aboriscono quella delle due, per le cause sudette.’

²⁶ *MPO* 6, 453–60, 471–80; *Nascita*, 276–9.

²⁷ *Origini*, 21–117, 158–242.

²⁸ Elli, *Storia della chiesa copta*, iii. 45–6.

²⁹ Pococke, *A Description of the East*, i. 247–9.

³⁰ APF, SR, vol. 7, fos. 537^v, 540^r.

Despite the work of men such as Sicard the Jesuit mission in Cairo had a dismal future. The Franciscans had always been jealous of the Society and suspicious of the Jesuits' conciliatory approach to the Copts. The Jesuits, for their part, had also been outspoken in their criticisms of the tactlessness and rigidity of the Franciscans. One of the most enlightened Jesuits, Guillaume Dubernat, wrote to Rome in 1704 deploring their attempts to convert the patriarch and lamenting their obstinacy, which did more harm than good.³¹ In his own report the Franciscan Giacomo d'Albano made no secret of his own misgivings about the 'Jesuit Fathers who have proved so anxious to introduce themselves into those areas'.³² Sicard himself was criticized both by the Franciscans and by the authorities at the Propaganda Fide in Rome for the latitude and flexibility of his views on the Copts.³³ He defended himself vigorously, but he was accused of preaching 'la strada larga', the broad path, and allowing the Copts to attend religious services at their own churches.³⁴ In 1726 Sicard, like so many of his colleagues, died of the plague, and it was by the plague that the remaining inmates of the convent in Cairo were killed in 1744. Their successors continued to suffer from the rivalry with the Franciscans,³⁵ and the entire mission came to an end with the dissolution of the Society of Jesus in 1773. It was over a century before it was revived.

While the Church of Rome had been fortunate in the choice of some of its missionaries—especially of the Jesuits Sicard and Dubernat—there was also an aspect of its policy which was to prove less felicitous. This was the dispatch of Maronites to Egypt. Besides the Jesuit Elia Aleppino (or de Giorgi), there were the various members of the Assemani family, the relatives of Giuseppe Simonio, who had come to Rome as children to be educated at the Maronite College founded in 1584. In Rome they were clearly regarded as desirable missionaries on account of their intelligence, their knowledge of Arabic, and their loyalty to the papacy. But the organizers of the missionary movement also seem to have been oblivious to the hatred, envy, and rivalry which sometimes divided the Churches of the East and which occasionally led to a stronger

³¹ MPO 6, 242–9.

³² Giacomo d'Albano, *'Historia' della missione francescana in Alto Egitto-Fungi-Etiopia, 1686–1720*, ed. Gabriele Giamberardini, OFM (Cairo, 1961), 96.

³³ MPO 6, 353–4, 361–2, 368–70, 381–2, 387–8.

³⁴ Ibid. 391–3, 397–8.

³⁵ See e.g. the letter from Emmanuel Buman, who retained the enlightened principles of Dubernat and Sicard, to the Propaganda Fide in 1756. MPO 6, 535–44.

resentment, and above all distrust, between the Eastern Churches themselves than between the Eastern Churches and Rome. Such sentiments were made manifest by two Coptic students in Rome in the early 1730s, Raphael Tuki and Yustus al-Maraghi, when they expressed their desire to be completely independent of the Maronites to whom they had been entrusted,³⁶ and resisted attempts to introduce Maronite monks into the hospice of S. Stefano dei Mori when it was reserved for the Copts.³⁷

We saw that Giuseppe Simonio Assemani had already visited Egypt in the company of Sicard in the first decades of the eighteenth century. He had antagonized the Copts both by his arrogance and his aggressive hunt for manuscripts in the Coptic monasteries. While Elia Aleppino, with the assistance of a Greek Catholic also from Aleppo, Giovanni Costantini, made approaches to the Coptic patriarch, John XVII, which were not altogether unsuccessful,³⁸ Stefano Evodio Assemani (Istifan 'Auwad al-Sim'ani), Giuseppe Simonio's nephew, decided to follow up their initiative and wrest a convincing profession of faith from the patriarch in 1735—a step which contributed to the failure of the entire enterprise. But not only was Stefano Evodio Assemani disliked by Tuki, he was also distrusted by the other missionaries.³⁹ The conversion of the patriarch led to a severe quarrel among the Copts and the Maronites, and Tuki and al-Maraghi wrote an indignant letter to Cardinal Luigi Bel-luga, the secretary of the Propaganda Fide.⁴⁰

Finally, there was a further flaw in Roman policy. The missionaries approached the Copts as though they were recalcitrant schoolchildren whose misdemeanours had accumulated over the centuries. Even if the attitude of the emissaries of Rome may have improved as time went by, it is still true to say, as Bernard Heyberger observed, that however much research the Church of Rome may have dedicated to Eastern Christianity, this was almost invariably in order to reinforce its own doctrine in the face of heresy, and certainly not with the object of understanding the Eastern Churches on their own terms.⁴¹

³⁶ *Nascita*, 116.

³⁷ APF, SR, vol. 3, fos. 384^r–385^r.

³⁸ *Nascita*, 158–63.

³⁹ *Ibid.* 163–5.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 252.

⁴¹ Heyberger, *Les Chrétiens du Proche-Orient*, 553: 'L'effort certain du centre de l'Église romaine en faveur de la recherche de documents et de la connaissance historique du christianisme oriental ne visait pas vraiment la compréhension de l'Orient en soi. Il s'agissait surtout de renforcer la doctrine officielle face à l'"hérésie moderne".'

One of the clearest indications of the highly limited success which the Roman Catholic missionaries achieved with the Copts is the career of those very few Egyptian students who actually came to Rome. We already saw in Chapter 2 that the Copts were reluctant to travel to Europe. For the Roman Catholic missionary movement this was a source of infinite disappointment. The very first missionaries in the sixteenth century departed for Egypt with instructions which included the need to invite young Copts to study in Rome, and provisions for their reception were made accordingly. This particular point was repeated throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Invitations were also extended by the French king, but they were hardly ever accepted. In Rome in the early eighteenth century the pope, Clement XI, observed that 'every nation is represented in this city, except for the Copts'.⁴²

The contrast with some of the other Eastern Christians is particularly striking. For many years after the Council of Florence there had been a couple of Ethiopians at the convent of S. Stefano dei Mori behind St Peter's. When the short-lived Armenian College was dissolved in the summer of 1585, Cardinal Giulio Antonio Santoro suddenly found himself having to support twelve Armenian boys,⁴³ and Armenians continued to come to the Collegio Urbano founded by Urban VIII in 1627.

In 1577 Gregory XIII had set up a Greek College. By the time the institution was truly under way students arrived in astonishingly large numbers. In 1585 there were forty-two, in 1592 thirty-five, in 1593 forty-three, in 1594 forty-eight, and in 1595 fifty. When the numbers dropped in the seventeenth century this was largely because the college could no longer cope with so many and had to limit them to about eighteen.⁴⁴ The Maronite College was just as successful. In the first year there were twenty-four students, and for the next century and a half there would seem to have been an average of about ten a year.⁴⁵ Some aged little more than 8 or 9, they studied with the Jesuits and either returned

⁴² Ildefonso da Palermo, *Cronaca della missione francescana*, 64.

⁴³ John Krajcar, SJ (ed.), *Cardinal Giulio Antonio Santoro and the Christian East: Santoro's Audiences and Consistorial Acts* (Rome, 1966), 86.

⁴⁴ Raymond Netzhammer, OSB, *Das griechische Kolleg in Rom* (Salzburg, 1905), 35–7; Placide de Meester, OSB, *Le Collège pontifical grec de Rome* (Rome, 1910), 17, 19, 21–4.

⁴⁵ Heyberger, *Les Chrétiens du Proche-Orient*, 408–16, and Nasser Gemayel, *Les Échanges culturels entre les Maronites et l'Europe: Du Collège Maronite de Rome (1584) au Collège de 'Ayn-Warqa (1789)*, 2 vols. (Beirut, 1984), i. 95–137.

to Mount Lebanon to act as missionaries themselves or remained in Europe. In the early and mid-seventeenth century it was the Maronites who supplied most of the teachers of Arabic at the Collège Royal in Paris,⁴⁶ while others, notably the various members of the Assemani family, who came to Italy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, had splendid careers as scholars and librarians, working not only in Rome but elsewhere in Italy, in Florence and Venice, and even beyond the Italian borders.⁴⁷

Ethiopians, Maronites from Mount Lebanon, Jacobites from Syria, Greeks from the Archipelago all made some contribution to the knowledge which was being accumulated in Rome. The record of the Copts is less glorious. By the time a school had been properly organized for them in the early eighteenth century, those very few pupils who attended it did not, on the whole, do well. Of the eleven monks, converts to Catholicism, who came to the convent of S. Stefano dei Mori in Rome between 1721 and 1751, one went mad and four disgraced themselves.⁴⁸ Of the sixteen students attending the school between 1724 and 1762 five were either expelled or left under a cloud.⁴⁹

Certainly each of the colleges founded for the Eastern Christians sooner or later had problems with its inmates. In the second half of the seventeenth century the secretary of the Propaganda Fide, Urbano Cerri, said that the Greek college had become a centre of anti-Catholicism. The students were horrified by what they saw of the weaknesses and corruption of the ecclesiastical administration and wrote home about their experiences. Rumours consequently abounded in the East that it should close down for good.⁵⁰ The Maronites, too, could prove difficult. There were a number of expulsions, particularly between 1638 and 1670,⁵¹ and one student was expelled in 1746 when he was found to be in possession of an English and a Dutch treatise attacking the Church of Rome.⁵² Nevertheless, out of a vast number of students the Greek and Maronite

⁴⁶ Ibid., i. 241–9.

⁴⁷ *GCAL* 3, 444–59.

⁴⁸ *Nascita*, 116–18.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 126–9. Admittedly the rate of expulsion from their college was also high among the Maronites, amounting to some 10 per cent, while about 28 per cent of the oriental students failed to complete their studies at the Collegio Urbano. Since the other students far outnumbered the Copts, however, the organizers of the colleges could still lay claim to a considerable success. For the statistics see Heyberger, *Les Chrétiens du Proche-Orient*, 413.

⁵⁰ Netzhammer, *Das griechische Kolleg*, 48.

⁵¹ Gemayel, *Les Échanges culturels*, 104–10.

⁵² Heyberger, *Les Chrétiens du Proche-Orient*, 411.

colleges could point to many successes. In the case of the Copts it is the failures that stand out.

Yet there were exceptions. One was Rome's most distinguished convert in the early eighteenth century, Raphael Tuki. He combined with his immense intellectual achievements in Rome a vision of a Coptic Catholic Church which, although never accomplished to anyone's full satisfaction, has persisted over the years.

RAPHAEL TUKI

From a Coptic family, Rufa'il Tukhi, or Raphael Tuki as he is now known in the West, was born in Girga in about 1703.⁵³ There he fell under the spell of Claude Sicard, who showed him the writings of the Fathers of the Church and persuaded him that monophysitism was extraneous to the true tradition of the Church of Alexandria.⁵⁴ Tuki followed him back to Cairo, and, in 1719, converted to Roman Catholicism.⁵⁵ Sicard gave him a copy of the Arabic translation of Bellarmine's *Doctrina christiana* and a brief compendium of the Council of Chalcedon. Furnished with these books Tuki returned to Girga. The rumour of his conversion, however, spread quickly, and the *qummuṣ* 'Abd al-Qaddis, who would later be appointed bishop of Girga, called on him in a fury, ordered him to burn his books, broke his crucifix with his own hands, and forced him to recant.⁵⁶ Tuki did so, but again confirmed his conversion to Rome at the first opportunity—in 1722 when the Reformed Franciscan missionary Ildefonso da Palermo was in Girga.⁵⁷

Ildefonso da Palermo described Tuki, whom he first met with a group of Copts in 1720, as 'the most intelligent of all the others'. But he also found him argumentative, provocative, and opinionated, and was shocked when Tuki began to argue against the infallibility of the pope.⁵⁸

⁵³ *Nascita*, 36–7.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 255.

⁵⁵ Giamberardini, *I primi copti cattolici*, 15.

⁵⁶ The episode is recounted twice by Ildefonso da Palermo, *Cronaca*, 13, 39. Cf. *Nascita*, 34–5.

⁵⁷ Giamberardini, *I primi copti cattolici*, 16.

⁵⁸ Ildefonso da Palermo, *Cronaca*, 13: 'Un altro giorno fù fatta una sessione nella Casa vicina alla nostra, chiamata Casa del Mesrai, nella quale fu presente un tal Rafael El Tuki qual era Maestro de' figlioli, ed era il più intelligente dell'altri... Questo Rafael principiò ad impugnare al Padre l'infallibilità del Sommo Pontefice: (puol esser: *argumentandi gratia*) e doppo molte dispute si finì.'

A young man with such a good mind, however, was clearly a desirable acquisition for the nascent Coptic Catholic Church. Soon after his profession, and in order to avoid any further encounters with 'Abd al-Qaddis, Tuki again went to Cairo, where Benedetto da Teano, the prefect of the Franciscan mission, gave some instruction in Italian to him and another convert, the 11-year-old Yustus al-Maraghi from Akhmim, and arranged for them to travel to Rome to study at the Collegio Urbano.⁵⁹ They arrived in April 1724 and, in September, were sent to the grammar school of the Collegio.⁶⁰

The two students soon took an active part in representing the Copts in Rome. Above all Tuki, who sent reports back to the missionaries in Egypt, requested from the Propaganda Fide dispositions regarding the fasts of the Copts, and, in 1733, participated in the discussions about having the church of S. Stefano dei Mori, originally intended for the Ethiopians, adapted to the uses of the Copts. But at the same time Tuki proved as argumentative, provocative, and opinionated as ever. He regaled his friends in Egypt with irreverent anecdotes about the cardinals and the pope, and remained in touch with Coptic friends who had not converted to Catholicism.⁶¹ These, however, may well have included Athanasius, the Coptic bishop of Jerusalem, who was already planning to convert and whom Tuki and al-Maraghi were encouraging.⁶² Nor, as we saw, did Tuki make any secret of his discontent at the preponderant role played by the Maronites among the Eastern Christians in Rome.

Tuki was particularly incensed by the behaviour of the various members of the Assemani family. Giuseppe Simonio Assemani, he complained in a letter to the Propaganda Fide in 1734, had made no attempt to satisfy the request of the Coptic converts in Egypt who needed Arabic translations and explanations of certain basic Catholic texts, such as the Roman martyrology, an extract from the canons of the general councils, and the sentences of the Fathers of the Church. The request had originally been made in 1723. It was repeated in 1725. When Tuki asked Assemani for permission to use the Vatican Library to copy out certain Coptic and Arabic texts for the benefit of his compatriots, Assemani did nothing about providing an authorization. It was only long afterwards, thanks to

⁵⁹ Ibid. 59.

⁶⁰ *Nascita*, 36, 124. Anba Istifanus II, *Al-Anbā' Rufā' il Tūkhī 1703–1787. Ḥayātuhu wa-mu'allaḥātuhu* (Cairo, 1987), 11–13.

⁶¹ *Nascita*, 124–5.

⁶² *Origini*, 25.

Cardinal Belluga, that Tuki was allowed access to some (but not all) of the texts he needed. But Tuki was even more annoyed at Assemani's plan to send his nephew, Stefano Evodio, to Egypt in the endeavour to convert the Coptic patriarch John XVII. The Maronites, he reminded the Congregation, were thoroughly disliked by the Copts and 'other eastern nations', and nobody was less suitable for the mission than Stefano Evodio, too young, too unattractive, and too inexperienced, and whose only talent seemed to be to spread gossip and calumny.⁶³

All that we know about Tuki makes it very likely that he was also connected with a letter written from 'the Catholic Copts' to the Propaganda Fide in August 1734, lamenting in strong terms the habit of the missionaries of removing Coptic manuscripts from Egypt and taking them back to Europe. This, the author of the letter observes, can only be to the detriment of any effort to convert the Copts, since these manuscripts, written by the acknowledged Fathers of the Church and revered by the Copts over the centuries, contain the most unadulterated proof of the errors of monophysitism and the best expression of true Catholic teaching. And what better way was there to convert the Copts than to base all arguments on texts in their own possession?⁶⁴

The letter was passed on to the man supervising the missionaries, Stefano Evodio Assemani. Not only was he Tuki's particular enemy, but, as Tuki was undoubtedly aware, it was members of his own family who had been among the worst offenders in removing manuscripts from Egypt. His cousin Elias Assemani bought thirty-nine Syriac manuscripts and one Arabic one from Dayr al-Suryan in 1707, and his uncle, Giuseppe Simonio, first managed to acquire a few codices at Dayr al-Suryan in 1715 and then no less than 3,000 leaves at Dayr Maqar. The following year he purchased three or four manuscripts from St Antony's.⁶⁵ Regardless of this Stefano Evodio simply observed that all necessary measures would be taken, but that it was hardly ever the missionaries who obtained manuscripts. If anything the blame should be placed on the Copts themselves, who were only too ready to sell their codices to the English and the Dutch.⁶⁶

Tuki was ordained on 5 June 1735 and al-Maraghi on 15 April 1736. Even on the occasion of his ordination Tuki proved difficult, asking to

⁶³ For the letter signed by Tuki and al-Maraghi (*Nascita*, 249–53) see above, p. 92. For the ineffective attempts to convert John XVII see *Nascita*, 162–76.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 253.

⁶⁵ Volkoff, *A la recherche de manuscrits*, 86–99.

⁶⁶ *Nascita*, 253–4.

be ordained according to the Coptic rite not by an oriental bishop—a Greek or a Maronite—but by a Latin one.⁶⁷ Despite his own objections to his treatment, however, Tuki had evidently gained the esteem of the Propaganda Fide. The committee in charge of correcting ecclesiastical texts consulted him even before his ordination, and, before he went back to Alexandria, he completed his edition of a Missal in Coptic for use by his fellow converts to Catholicism and by the missionaries in Egypt. It was published in 1736 at Belluga's expense.⁶⁸

At the end of the year Tuki and al-Maraghi left Italy for Egypt, arriving in Alexandria early in January 1737 and in Cairo in February.⁶⁹ Here, where they first stayed at the hostel of the Reformed Franciscans, Tuki acted as the superior of the Coptic Catholic priests, of whom there were seven on his arrival.⁷⁰ It was not long before he started writing letters of complaint to Rome. The financial situation of the priests in his care, he wrote in May, was pitiful.⁷¹ When the Propaganda Fide suggested that he direct one of the schools they were so keen to found at a salary of 50 scudi a year, Tuki replied that half that sum would not have been enough to rent the necessary building, and that he would have been unable to survive on the other half. He preferred, rather, to pursue his studies.⁷² Tuki and al-Maraghi, moreover, soon quarrelled with the prefect of the Reformed Franciscan missionaries, Francesco Antonio da Rivarolo. The two men had been ordained in Rome and depended on the Propaganda Fide, but their status in Egypt raised the questions of whether they were under the authority of the Reformed Franciscan mission and whether they could dispense the sacraments to the other converts to Catholicism. After some arguments they left the Reformed Franciscans. Al-Maraghi departed for Akhmim (where his father, who had declared that if he did not return from Rome he would send a body of Turks to fetch him, awaited him eagerly)⁷³ and Tuki, who, by 1738, had lodgings of his own in Cairo,⁷⁴ found a far warmer reception among the Jesuits than among the Franciscans.

⁶⁷ Ibid. 125.

⁶⁸ Hanna Malak, 'Les Livres liturgiques de l'église copte' in *Mélanges Eugène Tisserant*, iii/2 (Studi e testi, 233; Vatican City, 1964), 1–35, esp. 1–2, 6.

⁶⁹ For their instructions see *Nascita*, 256–9.

⁷⁰ *Origini*, 57–8.

⁷¹ Ibid. 87.

⁷² *Nascita*, 104.

⁷³ Ibid. 126.

⁷⁴ *Origini*, 92.

The situation in Cairo remained uncertain until the arrival in December of the Bohemian Franciscan Rzimarz of Kremsir, whose name was Italianized as Giacomo da Cremsirio and who replaced Francesco Antonio da Rivarolo as prefect of the mission. The new prefect was more diplomatic, and managed to guarantee the rights of the missionaries on the one hand and of the ordained Coptic converts to Catholicism on the other, entitling both of them to dispense the sacraments. What the Propaganda Fide continued to deny to the Coptic Catholic clergy was the right to bestow the sacrament of confirmation on adults—something which the Eastern priests were inclined to do. They were to limit themselves to the baptism of infants, and the ministration of the other sacraments.⁷⁵

On the whole Tuki accepted the rulings of the missionaries in Egypt and the Propaganda Fide in Rome, aligning himself, for example, against the acknowledgement of the validity of the diaconate bestowed on young Copts by the Church of Alexandria.⁷⁶ He and al-Maraghi also pronounced themselves against the suggestion of the Propaganda Fide that there be a clear division between the converted Coptic clergy with their Coptic Catholic flock and the missions.⁷⁷ The Coptic Catholic Church in Egypt was so exiguous, they realized, that such a division would have been self-defeating and would have had little future. What Tuki regarded as his greatest triumph in Cairo was the profession of Catholicism made by the bishop of Jerusalem, Athanasius. This was partly the result of the example which Tuki and al-Maraghi themselves had set,⁷⁸ and the profession was made in their presence in August 1739. It was entrusted to Tuki.⁷⁹

In July 1738 Tuki had accompanied Giacomo da Cremsirio to Akhmim in order to observe the progress of the mission.⁸⁰ By then, however, Tuki, who had always suffered from weak health, was toying with the idea of leaving Egypt for good and returning to Rome. He started on his journey in September 1739, but fell ill in Alexandria and only set sail in January of the following year.⁸¹ In Egypt he was succeeded by al-Maraghi, who would die in 1748. One of Tuki's first concerns in Rome was to give the pope the profession made by Athanasius and have

⁷⁵ *Nascita*, 149–50.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* 155, 261–2.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 153, 263–4.

⁷⁸ *Origini*, 34, 70.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 21, 26, 38.

⁸⁰ Ildefonso da Palermo, *Cronaca*, 177.

⁸¹ *Origini*, 39.

the bishop of Jerusalem declared head of the Coptic Catholic Church in Egypt.⁸² A Coptic Catholic Church, led by a former member of the Coptic ecclesiastical hierarchy, he believed, would have far more chance of success than a Church run by Roman missionaries. Athanasius' tergiversations, however, followed by his death in 1750, thwarted one of Tuki's most cherished plans.

In Rome Tuki had various duties. Besides defending the interests of the Coptic Catholic Church, from 1740 to 1751 and from 1764 to 1787 he directed and trained the Coptic converts who agreed to serve as monks at S. Stefano dei Mori, and from 1748 he provided for the instruction in Coptic of the Coptic students at the Collegio Urbano.⁸³ The monks and the students, however, were few,⁸⁴ and he had time to devote himself to his studies. Granted the access to the various Roman libraries which had been denied him as a student, he worked, as we shall see in Chapter 13, on the Coptic language, and edited (and copied) numerous texts which he believed would be of use to the converts in Egypt.⁸⁵ The Propaganda Fide had him edit a Psalter in 1744, and this was the first of a long series of liturgical editions.⁸⁶ As an editor Tuki was notoriously careless, and he was also unscrupulous about changing and improving the texts he published. One of the most interesting examples of this is his version of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed at the end of his Psalter. Aware of the Coptic failure to include the *Filioque* in the passage about the procession of the Holy Ghost, he added it himself (ⲛⲉⲙ ⲡⲱⲏⲣⲓ, *nem pshiri*).⁸⁷ Nevertheless Tuki's work on the liturgy is still consulted as a reliable source.⁸⁸ On 27 September 1761 his energy and efforts, both scholarly and pastoral, were rewarded with an appointment as titular bishop of Arsinoe.

⁸² Ibid. 42–5, 90–3, 169–73. For the text of Athanasius' letter to the pope see 158–61.

⁸³ *Origini*, 42. Istifanus II, *Al-Anbā' Rūfā'īl Ṭūkhī*, 29.

⁸⁴ Ibid. 25. The monks, who were both Egyptian and Ethiopian, rarely exceed the number of four.

⁸⁵ Some idea of his diligence can be obtained from the immense amount of manuscripts he consulted, most of which subsequently entered the Borgia library and then the Vatican. See CCV ii. 29–406.

⁸⁶ *GCAL* 4, 160–4; Georges Macaire, *Histoire de l'église d'Alexandrie depuis Saint Marc jusqu'à nos jours* (Cairo, 1894), 347–52. For Tuki's liturgical works see Malak, 'Les Livres liturgiques', 2, 6, 11, 17–18, 19–21, 23, 25.

⁸⁷ Rafael Tuki, ⲡⲓ ⲭⲱⲙ ⲛⲧⲉ ⲡⲓ ⲫⲁⲗⲧⲏⲣⲓⲟⲛ ⲛⲧⲉ ⲉⲁⲩⲓⲁ (Rome, 1744), 501. This is pointed out in CCV i. 13.

⁸⁸ See e.g. O. H. E. KHS-Burmester, *The Egyptian or Coptic Church: A Detailed Description of her Liturgical Services and the Rites and Ceremonies Observed in the Administration of her Sacraments* (Cairo, 1967), 183, where Tuki, who is quoted throughout, is also taken to task for his errors.

Tuki was also indefatigable as a translator. In 1752 he published an Arabic translation of the Vulgate version of the Old Testament up to the Book of Tobias. His other translations remained in manuscript.⁸⁹ His uncompleted Bohairic–Arabic dictionary also remained in manuscript, but his most important work, the *Rudimenta linguae coptae sive aegyptiacae*, which will be discussed below, was published in 1778. Here too his insistence on producing a grammar of his own, rather than editing Guillaume Bonjour's grammar as he had been instructed to do by the Propaganda Fide, is an example of an attitude that could be headstrong and stubborn. Despite his weak health he lived until 16 October 1787, dying at the age of 84.

What we know about Tuki's behaviour—his critical attitude towards his superiors in Rome, his quarrels with the Maronites, his disagreements with the Franciscan missionaries in Cairo, his passionate support of Athanasius, whom he hoped would become the head of the Coptic Catholic Church, his dedication to the study of Coptic and to editing texts for the benefit of his fellow Egyptians—all suggests a clear vision which seems to have accompanied him for most of his life. He did indeed agree to become a Roman Catholic, to recognize the authority of the pope, and to accept the requirements of the Propaganda Fide such as disowning the Monophysite tradition of the Church of Alexandria, separating himself from its patriarch and acknowledging the Council of Chalcedon, but at the same time he remained profoundly attached to much of the Coptic liturgy and to a Coptic tradition compatible with Rome but independent of it.

PROTESTANT RIVALS AND COPTIC REACTIONS

The increasingly anarchic state into which Egypt had lapsed in the late eighteenth century was far from favourable to the missionaries. They received some assistance in the early 1780s from the powerful Greek Catholic from Syria in charge of the customs of the port of Alexandria,

⁸⁹ In 1763 he translated the *Martyrologium Romanum* commissioned by Benedict XIV; in 1763 and 1764 the commentaries and homilies of Gregory of Nyssa; between 1766 and 1772 a selection of biblical commentaries by Cornelius a Lapide; in 1767 and 1768 the acts of the fifth, sixth, and seventh general councils; between 1770 and 1780 the sermons of St Augustine; in 1775 Louis Abelly's *Les Vérités principales et plus importantes de la foy et de la justice chrétienne* and Pietro Menniti's *Didatterio basiliano*, as well as Pietro Gisolfo's *Istruzione per ben missionare*, selected works of Leo the Great, and biographies of Cyril of Alexandria and Athanasius. For a full bibliography see Istifanus II, *Al-Anbā' Rufā'il Ṭukhī*, 38–51.

Antun Qassis Fir'aun, but Fir'aun emigrated to Italy in 1784. Not only were the missions in decline but, for the first time, they had competitors in other confessions. The arrival of the German Lutheran Heyling in the seventeenth century had been an isolated incident, but by the mid-eighteenth century there was a more concerted effort to dispatch missionaries, inspired by Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf, himself a Lutheran, once strongly drawn by Pietism, and the leader of the Herrnhutters or Moravian Brethren, named after the town of Herrnhut in Moravia, which Zinzendorf had chosen as his base. The missionaries first came to Egypt in 1752, and continued until the end of the century. Many of them, admittedly, were on their way to Ethiopia, but some stayed. Their instructions were markedly different from those of the Catholics. They were ordered 'not to interfere with ecclesiastical relations of the native Christians, nor to enter into discussion of polemical subjects; but in all their intercourse to endeavour to direct attention to the essence of Christianity, and to impart advice to such as listened to them according to the Scriptures and their own experience; and teach them how, by means of Jesus' merits, they might obtain rest for their souls, true holiness of life, and evangelical liberty, which leave the conscience unfettered by human tradition'.⁹⁰ Their success appears to have been negligible. When J. Henry Danke visited Girga in 1769 'he found the hearts of the Copts like stone', even if he was welcomed in the villages between Beni Suef and al-Minya. Nevertheless the Herrnhutters were the precursors of the far more successful Protestant missions of the nineteenth century, who became redoubtable rivals of the Catholics.

Despite their decline, moreover, the Catholic missionaries of the late eighteenth century had succeeded in alarming the Orthodox Copts and in provoking an unprecedented written reaction. The author, from Abu Tig south of Asyut, was a former monk at the monastery of St Anthony who assumed the name of Yusab when he was appointed bishop of Girga and Akhmim in 1791. Close to the patriarch John XVIII, and enjoying the full approval of Coptic grandees such as Ibrahim al-Gawhari, he emerged as a reformer of the Coptic Church.⁹¹ His reactions to the teaching of Rome were largely prompted by the conversion to Catholicism in 1758 of his predecessor in the see of Girga and Akhmim,

⁹⁰ Andrew Watson, *The American Mission in Egypt: 1854 to 1896* (Pittsburgh, 1898), 30–1.

⁹¹ For Yusab's biography and the text of some of his writings see Zakhariyas al-Antuni, *Yūsābiyāt, wa-hiya maqālāt al-usquf al-qiddis al-Anbā' Yūsāb al-Abahh usquf Girgā wa-Akhmīm* (Cairo, 2001), i. 45–66; and for his teaching *GCAL* iv. 140; S. Khalil Samir, 'Yūsāb', *CE* vii. 2360–2.

Antuniyus Fulayfil,⁹² and by the need of the patriarch to reply to a letter from the pope urging him to remove the name of Dioscorus from the liturgy and submit to the Vatican. Although somewhat repetitive and with little stylistic elegance, Yusab's writings reveal the learning he had acquired in monastic and other libraries. On the whole they are a restatement of the anti-Chalcedonian position, with a constant emphasis on the single nature in Christ and a clear rejection of 'heretical' views. These included those of Simon Magus, the alleged founder of Gnosticism, of Nestorius, and of the pope, but the term 'heretical' was also extended to an early member of the Church of Alexandria, Origen, once widely revered but formally condemned for his views on universal salvation in 399.⁹³ There are also numerous quotations from Cyril of Alexandria.⁹⁴ In the treatise Yusab devoted to the apostasy of his former co-religionists theological arguments are accompanied by an emotional appeal to the converts to Catholicism not to relinquish the Church of their parents in which they had been brought up and not to reject the sacraments they had received as children in favour of new ones dispensed by excommunicated priests. Such behaviour would lead, he warned, to a loss of their identity. He refers to them as *sūsānīyūn*, 'the worm-eaten', who ended up by being neither Franks nor Copts and who had denied all nations as well as Jesus Christ.⁹⁵

Yusab is an exception. He was one of the few theologians to be produced by the Church of Alexandria in the Ottoman period, and one of the very few to launch a polemical attack on the Church of Rome. It is difficult to tell whether his views were shared by a larger group of Copts, but there can be little doubt that his outspoken defence of the anti-Chalcedonian tradition, his rejection of all the Roman rites, and his exclusion of any form of dialogue put paid to the hopes of those missionaries who believed that the differences between the Churches of Rome and Alexandria were minimal and that the only obstacle to union was one of terminology. Certainly, the bitterness of Yusab's attacks owed much to the advance of the missionaries and the awareness that they posed a true threat. From the Roman Catholic point of view they could be regarded as a sign of success, but the hardening of the hostility to Chalcedon was also something for which the missionaries bore a responsibility.

⁹² Elli, *Storia della chiesa copta*, iii. 45–6.

⁹³ al-Antuni, *Yūsābiyāt*, 142.

⁹⁴ Ibid. 110, 118.

⁹⁵ BNF, MS Arabe 4711, fos. 28^v–32^r.

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PART III

KNOWLEDGE OF THE COPTS

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The First Steps

FROM PILGRIMS TO MISSIONARIES

The accumulation of knowledge of the Copts was a slow and irregular process, despite the large number of Western visitors to Egypt through the ages. From the fourth century onwards Egypt was a popular stage for pilgrims travelling from Europe to Jerusalem and many of these visited the Egyptian monasteries and churches. The pseudo-Antonino da Piacenza, an anonymous Italian traveller who seems to have been in Egypt and the Holy Land between 560 and 570, referred to the number of monks at the monastery of St Catherine in the Sinai peninsula who knew Coptic (which he calls Egyptian) and Ethiopic. Numerous other Western travellers followed in the early Middle Ages. Even if the Muslim reconquest of Jerusalem in 1187 led to a temporary diminution of pilgrims to the Holy Land, the Mamluk defeat of the Mongols in 1260 and the ensuing union between Syria and Egypt meant that, by the first years of the fourteenth century, the traffic had resumed on a grand scale and that Egypt became an ever more frequent part of the route to Jerusalem from the West.¹

Although the pilgrims' favourite objective in Egypt remained Mount Sinai, an incentive to go to the churches of Cairo was provided by the granting of indulgences, the temporal remission of the atonement for sin which had been gaining in prominence since the twelfth century, for visitors to places of special holiness. We know from the account of Niccolò da Poggibonsi, who was in Egypt on his way to the Holy Land in 1346, that a visit to the church in Old Cairo now called al-Mu'allāqa and then known as Santa Maria della Scala, earned an indulgence of seven

¹ For a general survey of pilgrims in the 14th and 15th cc. see Atiya, *The Crusades in the Later Middle Ages*, 155–230. For German pilgrims between 1300 and 1700 see Reinhold Röhrich, *Deutsche Pilgerreisen nach dem heiligen Lande* (Innsbruck, 1900), 85–307.

years and seven days, while one to the nearby church of St Barbara earned a remission of seven years.²

The pilgrims, however, showed little interest in the Copts. The Copts were no more than the guardians of holy places, and it was the associative value of the places that drew the visitors. The churches in Cairo and elsewhere were connected with the flight into Egypt and the alleged peregrinations of the Holy Family. The church of St Sergius in Old Cairo (Santa Maria della Cava for Niccolò da Poggibonsi and other pilgrims) was supposed to contain a painting of the Virgin Mary by St Luke and the cave where the Holy Family sought refuge for seven years, while al-Mu'allāqa reputedly had a column which had been embraced by the Virgin Mary and turned white where she had touched it.

Nowhere, however, was the power of mythology as evident through the centuries as it was in the Western idea of the desert monasteries. Athanasius' life of St Anthony and Jerome's life of Paul have continued to fascinate travellers to this day. In earlier times, in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the works had a still stronger appeal. Athanasius' life of Anthony tells of the miracles he performed, and above all of the excesses of his asceticism.³ It was read eagerly as the spirit of monasticism gained a hold on much of western Europe and as the idea that the Irish were first converted to Christianity by Egyptian monks found ever wider acceptance.⁴ Jerome's life of Paul was even more suggestive.⁵ The East was regarded as an area where every type of beast, mythological or otherwise, might be encountered.⁶ One of the earliest printed accounts of the pilgrimage to Jerusalem was by Bernhard von Breydenbach. First published in Mainz in 1486, his *Peregrinationes* was immensely popular. It was translated into numerous European languages and had run through twelve editions by 1522. At the end we find a woodcut representing the various animals the author came across in the course of his travels in the Levant. These include a unicorn. Some seventy years later, in his work on the Ottoman empire which first appeared in 1555, the highly observant French botanist Pierre Belon described and depicted a 'serpent ailé', an immense dragon which frequented the Arabian

² Antonio Lanza and Marcellina Troncarelli (eds.), *Pellegrini scrittori: Viaggiatori toscani del Trecento in Terrasanta* (Florence, 1990), 120–2.

³ *PG* 26, cols. 835–978.

⁴ See J. F. T. Kelly, 'British Isles, Coptic Influences in the', *CE* ii. 416–19, for a sober assessment of a subject which continues to generate myths in Coptic circles.

⁵ *PL* 23, cols. 17–28.

⁶ Jean Delumeau, *La Peur en Occident (XIVe–XVIIIe siècles)* (Paris, 1978), 64.

peninsula.⁷ Jerome's description of a centaur who pointed the way to St Paul and of the satyr who offered him dates and testified to his knowledge of God was found just as plausible as his account of Anthony being led to St Paul by a wolf and of their both being provided with bread by a crow. Inspired by the biographies, stimulated by the many representations of the saints in Western iconography and by the popularization of their lives in the much translated *Legenda aurea* compiled by Jacob of Voragine in the thirteenth century,⁸ the European visitors set out to tread the ground which had once been trodden by the early hermits.

The reverence inspired by the memory of Anthony and Paul is particularly evident in the account of a French nobleman from Champagne, Ogier VIII, Seigneur d'Anglure, who visited Egypt and the Holy Land in 1395–6. One of the few early pilgrims to inspect what is sometimes known as the Monastery of the Sycamore, but more commonly as St Anthony on the Nile or the Little St Anthony, north of Beni Suef, he turned eastwards to the monasteries of St Anthony and St Paul. Much of his account is taken up with episodes from the life of Anthony, particularly with his quest for Paul, but there are also relatively extensive descriptions of the two monasteries. St Anthony's, which he found inhabited by over a hundred monks, and St Paul's, which contained over sixty, made the very best impression on him. He was entertained with the utmost hospitality and received excellent food. He also gave a brief description of the monks, 'Jacobites', who were different both from the Greeks and from their brethren in the West, circumcised before they were baptized, with a liturgy in a language of their own, and making the sign of the cross with the index finger of their right hand alone.⁹ The Burgundian diplomat and soldier Ghillebert de Lannoy went to Egypt in 1422. He too made the five-day journey from Cairo to the Red Sea monasteries, and, although his description of the Copts or Jacobites is cursory, he too drew attention to the 'circumcised Christians' occupying the sacred sites.¹⁰

What little information the Western visitors did provide about the Copts is the reflection on the one hand of certain medieval legends, and,

⁷ Pierre Belon, *Les Observations de plusieurs singularitez et choses memorables trouvées en Grèce, Asie, Judée, Égypte, Arabie, & autres pays estranges* (Paris, 1554), fo. 133^{r-v}.

⁸ For St Anthony and his iconography see Heinrich Trebbin, *Sankt Antonius: Geschichte, Kult und Kunst* (Frankfurt am Main, 1994), 9–97.

⁹ Ogier d'Anglure, *Le Saint Voyage de Jherusalem du Seigneur d'Anglure*, ed. François Bonnardot and Auguste Longnon (Paris, 1878), 70–1.

¹⁰ Ghillebert de Lannoy, *Cœuvres de Ghillebert de Lannoy, voyageur, diplomate et moraliste*, ed. Ch. Potvin and J.-C. Houzeau (Louvain, 1878), 70.

on the other, of a great terminological confusion. Few travellers or scholars, for example, use the word 'Copt' before the mid-sixteenth century. The German pilgrim John of Würzburg, who visited the Holy Sepulchre in about 1170, is an exception.¹¹

A striking feature of these early descriptions is the connection of the Copts with India. This can be explained by one of the most successful and influential literary hoaxes of the twelfth century, the so-called letter of Prester John.¹² The letter was probably written by a German cleric, but it purported to be addressed to the Byzantine emperor Manuel I. It proposed an alliance which might lead to the defeat of Islam, and came from the Christian ruler of an immense territory stretching from Mesopotamia to Mongolia, containing every mineral, plant, animal, monster, and marvel (from the fountain of eternal youth to the Garden of Eden), colossal riches and resources, and inhabitants who practised every virtue and who held their property in common. Prester John, the signatory of the letter, described himself as the ruler of the 'three Indias'. These were the present-day subcontinent of India, the East Indies, and the area of Ethiopia which was conceived in contemporary maps as stretching eastwards from Africa parallel to Mesopotamia and Persia. For almost two hundred years Prester John was thought to have been a Nestorian, an enemy or an ally of Genghis Khan, but in the course of the fourteenth century cartographers allowed Ethiopia to drop south into its present position in eastern Africa, and Prester John became the name conferred on the emperor of Ethiopia.¹³ His subjects were known to be Christians and to venerate the patriarch of Alexandria.

The location of the Copts in the vicinity of India and their association with Prester John is recurrent. In Breydenbach's account of the pilgrimage to Jerusalem, the Copts (or Jacobites, as Breydenbach calls them) are placed in Nubia, Ethiopia, and an area extending as far as India, but not in Egypt. Bernard of Luxemburg too, in his *Catalogus haereticorum* of 1524, described the Copts as 'Christians, but heretics, who live in parts of India',¹⁴ and some years later, in 1569, the French theologian Gabriel du Préau (Prateolus) repeated Bernard's description,

¹¹ *Descriptiones Terrae Sanctae ex saeculo viii, ix, xii, et xv*, ed. Titus Tobler (Leipzig, 1874; repr. Hildesheim, 1974), 190, where the Christians John of Würzburg lists in Jerusalem include 'indi, aegyptii, copti, capheturici, maroni et alii.'

¹² For the text (in Latin, Anglo-Norman, and Old French) see Gioia Zaganelli (ed.), *La lettera del Prete Gianni* (Parma, 1990). The date and authorship are discussed at 1–16.

¹³ *Ibid.* 26–32.

¹⁴ Bernard of Luxemburg, *Catalogus haereticorum omnium qui ad haec usque tempora passim literarum monumentis proditi sunt*... (1524; Cologne, 1587), sig. H1^{r-v}.

adding that there were a great many Christian sects said to be living in India.¹⁵ The connection with India, moreover, could lead, as it did in the case of Leonardo Frescobaldi and his travelling companion Giorgio Gucci, both in Egypt in 1384, to the identification of the Copts with the Christians of St Thomas or the 'Malabar Christians', who in fact were not originally Monophysite but derived their teaching from the Nestorians.¹⁶

The monophysitism of the Copts suggested an association with the other great Monophysite Church, that of the Syrian Jacobites, and so the name Jacobite, derived, as we saw, from Jacobus Baradaeus, was applied to both the Egyptian and the Ethiopian members of the Church of Alexandria. These associations and terminological misuses are especially prominent in the work of a man who was very well acquainted with Egypt, the Cretan merchant of Venetian origin Emmanuel Piloti. Piloti spent much of the period between about 1396 and 1438 in Egypt, and in 1420 he drew up a report recommending the invasion of Alexandria to the pope and providing detailed information about the country, its trade, its military defences, and its inhabitants. He referred to the Copts and listed some of their churches, but always called them Jacobites, whose patriarch 'is the patriarch of the country of Prester John, the lord of India'.¹⁷ In order to attract the pope he also added that Prester John was a good Christian who believed in nearly all the Catholic sacraments, and who would consequently applaud and assist the Latin conquest of Alexandria.¹⁸

The identification of the Copts with the Jacobites and with the Ethiopians meant that certain customs which appear to have been restricted to the Ethiopians were attributed both to the Copts of Egypt and to the Jacobites of Syria. One is the custom of baptism by fire, in other words of branding on the forehead or the temples, a feature remarked on by one traveller after another. Although this assertion was often based solely on hearsay, it is confirmed by two more reliable sources of the sixteenth century, the description of Cyprus written by Étienne de Lusignan, who was himself from Cyprus,¹⁹ and the description of Jerusalem by Pierre Belon.²⁰ Belon makes the somewhat

¹⁵ Gabriel Prateolus, *De vitis, sectis, et dogmatibus omnium haeticorum*... (Cologne, 1569), 135–6.

¹⁶ *Scrittori pellegrini*, 182–3, 266.

¹⁷ *Traité d'Emmanuel Piloti sur le passage en Terre Sainte (1420)*, ed. Pierre-Herman Dopp (Louvain, 1958), 79–80, 211. Cf. also p. 84.

¹⁸ Ibid. 130. The readiness of the Ethiopians to unite with the Roman Catholics had already been emphasized by Niccolò da Poggibonsi, *Pellegrini scrittori*, 150.

¹⁹ Étienne de Lusignan, *Description de toute l'Isle de Cypre*... (Paris, 1580), fo. 74^v.

²⁰ Belon, *Observations*, fo. 143^r.

surprising distinction between the Abyssinians (who were branded) and the Ethiopians, the latter being blacker than the former. The combination of these various elements is still to be found in the account of the Levant by the German botanist Leonhard Rauwolff, who crossed the Holy Land, Syria, and Mesopotamia on his way to the Persian Gulf in 1573. His *Aigentliche beschreibung der Raiss* was published ten years later and would remain a standard source for German students of the Copts until well into the eighteenth century. Besides the assertion that the 'Gofty' (whom he correctly situates in Egypt, even if he encountered them in Jerusalem) were converted to Christianity by St Matthew, we find the familiar theme of baptism by fire.²¹

And then there was the term 'Christians of the girdle'. Both a sensible Irish friar, Simon Fitzsimons, who passed through Egypt on his way to Jerusalem in 1322,²² and John Mandeville, describing the Levant in the same year,²³ rightly attributed the term to the silk or linen belt sometimes imposed on Christians as a distinguishing mark by the Muslim rulers.²⁴ This, however, applied as much to the other Christians in Muslim territory as it did to the Copts. Nevertheless a number of travellers, such as the Spaniard Pero Tafur, who visited Egypt in 1436,²⁵ used it to indicate either a separate sect, or the Copts in particular. The fanciful Italian pilgrims Frescobaldi and Gucci added to the other misconceptions the theory that the 'Christians of the girdle' were originally converted by St Thomas and owed their name to the girdle which the Virgin Mary gave the saint on his arrival in heaven.²⁶

Another source of confusion was the sheer number and variety of Christian faiths found first in Egypt and then in Jerusalem by Western pilgrims accustomed to a single Church. Niccolò da Poggibonsi, Leonardo

²¹ Leonhard Rauwolff, *Aigentliche beschreibung der Raiss, so er vor dieser Zeit gegen Auffgang inn die Morgenländer . . . volbracht* (Cologne, 1583), 421–2.

²² *Itinerarium Symonis Semeonis ab Hybernia ad Terram Sanctam*, ed. Mario Esposito (Dublin, 1960), 58. Cf. Eugene Hoade, OFM (ed.), *Western Pilgrims* (Jerusalem, 1970), 18.

²³ John Mandeville, *Mandeville's Travels*, ed. Malcolm Letts, ii (London, 1953), 294.

²⁴ For the girdle see Otto F. A. Meinardus, *The Copts in Jerusalem* (Cairo, 1960), 19; id., 'The Copts in Jerusalem and the Question of the Holy Places', 117.

²⁵ *Andanças e viajes de Pero Tafur por diversas partes del mundo avidos (1435–1439)*, 2 vols. (Madrid, 1874), i, 54, where the Christians at the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem are said to include 'los Griegos, e los Jacobitas, e los Armeniois, e los de la Çintura, e los de India, e los Zingaros'. The English translation of 'los Zingaros' as 'Copts' (Pero Tafur, *Travels and Adventures 1435–1439*, tr. and ed. Malcolm Letts (London, 1926), 56) remains questionable, even if 'gypsies' are unlikely to have been presented as a separate Christian sect.

²⁶ *Pellegrini scrittori*, 182–3. For Gucci's description see p. 266.

Frescobaldi, and others write about Latins (or Franks), Greeks, Nubians, Georgians, Ethiopians, Armenians, and Jacobites in Egypt. It is thus hardly surprising that they should confuse the various beliefs and the different origins of the believers. We shall see that Guillaume Postel in the sixteenth century would call the Coptic alphabet the alphabet of the Georgians. Pierre Belon, writing at the same time as Postel, proved unable, as long as he was in Egypt, to distinguish between the Copts, Greeks, Armenians, and Maronites, describing them as members of a single Church who inhabited all the Egyptian monasteries—that of St Catherine as well as those of St Anthony and Dayr Maqar.²⁷ Yet all these mistakes, and a number of details such as the failure of any of the early travellers to associate St Mark with the Coptic Church, suggest that the travellers, and even the residents such as Piloti, either had very little direct experience of the Copts, or had no curiosity about them. So a quite remarkable ignorance about the Copts prevailed throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance—an incapacity to associate them with the right country, alphabet, or even faith.

Matters were complicated even more by the question of where the Copts actually were. Although they were mainly in Egypt and although they are mainly described by travellers to Egypt, there was, as we saw, also a Coptic presence in Jerusalem and in Cyprus, and there are a number of cases of travellers apparently unaware of the Copts while they were in Egypt but discovering them and describing them in Jerusalem. This is what we find with the scholars who accompanied or joined the French ambassador to the Porte, Gabriel d'Aramon. André Thevet, the future cosmographer royal, arrived in the Levant in 1549. In his *Cosmographie de Levant*, which appeared in 1556, there is a description of Egypt in which no mention is made of the Copts, and a description of Jerusalem. He there refers to Greeks, Armenians, Syrians, Nestorians, Indians, and Ethiopians, and he dwells on the 'Jacobites', 'blinded by, and enveloped in the darkness of error and ignorance' and believing the doctrine of their patriarch, a 'false seducer' in Alexandria in Egypt. The sect, he goes on, extends as far as Ethiopia and the East Indies. Its members take communion in both kinds and owe their origin to Eutyches, who was condemned at the Council of Chalcedon.²⁸ Pierre Belon, on the other hand, so keen, meticulous, and original an observer of plants, animals, and local customs, seems to have had relatively little

²⁷ Belon, *Observations*, fos. 126^v–127^r, 128^r.

²⁸ André Thevet, *Cosmographie de Levant*, ed. Frank Lestringant (Geneva, 1985), 174.

interest in the Christians of the East. We saw that, as long as he was in Egypt, he lumped together the Greeks, the Copts (albeit without naming them), the Armenians, and the Maronites in a single Church. Only when he visited Jerusalem did Belon mention the Copts, a nickname, he says, given to the Christians of the Girdle who were converted to Christianity by St Thomas.²⁹ A far more detailed and reliable account of the Copts, finally, is given by Étienne de Lusignan in 1580, but he refers to the Copts in Cyprus. Impressed by the austerity of the monks in Dayr Maqar, Lusignan described their diet during periods of fasting and made a clear distinction between the Copts, the Jacobites, and the 'Indians or Ethiopians' submitted to Prester John.³⁰

Besides the various theological errors for which the Copts were blamed over the centuries there was a further misdemeanour of which they were accused—a taste for the apocrypha of the New Testament, regarded in the West as an indication of the darkest ignorance and superstition.³¹ Bernard of Luxemburg wrote that 'in their churches, [the Copts] use a certain book of fables known as the Secrets of Peter, and at mass read the Gospel of Nicodemus'.³² This statement accounts for a somewhat surprising inclusion in the Italian indexes of prohibited books. The Venetian Index of 1554 has the entry 'Coptis christianus', without any further qualification, and the entry would be repeated in the Roman Indexes of 1559 and 1564.³³ What was meant was almost certainly the Apocalypse of Peter (the Secrets of Peter, also known as the Apocalypse of Clement) and the Acts of Pilate, also known as the Gospel of Nicodemus. And the association with some of the more outrageous apocrypha clung to the Copts. Jean de Thévenot was in Egypt in 1655 and repeated many of the standard preconceptions about the Church of Alexandria in his reports, but above all he stressed the ignorance and coarseness of the Copts, 'gens fort ignorans, et grossiers'. To prove this he referred to their use of apocryphal books whose legends about the life of Christ (such as the cock which spies on Judas) were accepted with a doltish and unquestioning credulity.³⁴

²⁹ Belon, *Observations*, fo. 143^r. Cf. also fo. 181^v.

³⁰ Lusignan, *Description de . . . Cypre*, fos. 73^v–74^r.

³¹ For the Coptic use of the Apocrypha see below, Ch. 15.

³² Bernard of Luxemburg, *Catalogus haeticorum omnium*, sig. H1^{r-v}: 'Copti sunt Christiani, sed haeretici, in partibus Indiae hinc inde habitantes, et utuntur in ecclesiis quodam libro fabuloso, qui dicitur secreta Petri: et in missis legunt evangelium Nicodemii.'

³³ J. M. De Bujanda (ed.), *Index des livres interdits*, iii: *Index de Venise 1549, Venise et Milan 1554* (Geneva and Sherbrooke, 1987), 254; viii: *Index de Rome 1557, 1559, 1564* (Geneva and Sherbrooke, 1990), 423.

³⁴ Jean de Thévenot, *Relation d'un voyage fait au Levant* (Paris, 1674), 501–2.

But despite such a precise accusation there was still a great vagueness about the theological category into which the Copts should be fitted. In his *Catalogus haereticorum* Bernard of Luxemburg has entries for the Armenians, the Jacobites, and the Copts, but none for the Monophysites. Prateolus, on the other hand, has an entry for the Monophysites, as well as for the Armenians and the Jacobites (in which he refers to the founders of monophysitism, Euthyches, Dioscorus, and Severus).³⁵ But although he detected traces of monophysitism in contemporary heresies—notably among the followers of the dissident Protestant Caspar Schwenckfeldt and the former Anabaptist Menno Simons—he made no connection between the Monophysites and the Copts.³⁶

PROGRESS

Even if earlier myths persisted it is at last possible, in the course of the sixteenth century, to detect a certain progress in the available information about the Copts. This is due in part to a type of source which grew in popularity—descriptions of the early councils, in ever wider circulation from the 1520s on. In 1544 a Greek edition of the Church history by the Syrian scholar Evagrius Scholasticus was published, covering the period from the Council of Ephesus in 431 to 594, four years before the author's death. Evagrius was an important and much consulted source for the events at Chalcedon and himself drew on the Monophysite Zacharias of Mitylene, a contemporary of the council. Evagrius' history (together with those of earlier Eastern historians, such as Eusebius, Sozomen, and Theodoret) was translated into Latin by John Christopherson, chaplain and confessor to Queen Mary and bishop of Chichester, in 1569.³⁷ The even more popular ecclesiastical history by Nicephorus Callistus Xanthopoulos, a Byzantine scholar writing in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century who provided a convenient compendium based on far earlier Greek historians such as Evagrius, appeared in a Latin translation by Johann Lange in 1555. The description of the Council of Chalcedon and the Monophysite split was detailed, and ended with a survey of its consequences. In the Chalcedonian tradition common to Rome and Constantinople, Nicephorus

³⁵ Prateolus, *De vitis*, 215–16.

³⁶ *Ibid.* 333–5.

³⁷ For the fortunes of Evagrius see *The Ecclesiastical History of Evagrius Scholasticus*, ed. Michael Whitby (Liverpool, 2000), p. lxi.

attributed the paternity of monophysitism to Eutyches as well as to Dioscorus, who was presented as his follower, and thus perpetuated the somewhat distorted view of the proceedings which had prevailed in the West. Monophysitism, he declared, was the origin of 'many thousands of heresies'³⁸—and the birth of the Jacobite Church. He does not mention the Copts by name, but he writes about the Jacobites of Syria and the Armenians, and describes certain Jacobite beliefs and customs (including the Trisagion). Evagrius (in Christopherson's translation) and Nicephorus (in the Latin of Johann Lange) were among the principal sources for Baronio's section on the Council of Chalcedon in the sixth volume of his *Annales ecclesiastici*.³⁹

Towards the end of the sixteenth century the reports by the Jesuit missionaries also started to receive some publicity. We see this in Giovanni Botero's *Relationi universali*, published in Venice in 1595. He devoted a few lines to the Copts in the first part,⁴⁰ and a few pages in the third.⁴¹ His description of the Copts themselves was perfunctory: Monophysites, 'Christians of the Girdle', circumcised 'like Jews, so that their faith does not appear to extend below their belt',⁴² using unleavened bread for the eucharist, the youngest member of the clergy giving his hand to all participants of the mass after the *Pax vobis*, celebrating the mass in 'Chaldean', reading the Gospel first in 'Chaldean' and then in Arabic, and numbering about 50,000 in Egypt. Botero was more expansive in his survey of the missions. He had long been close to the Jesuits. He had been educated by them in Palermo in the late 1550s and in Rome, at the Collegio Romano, in the 1560s, and had planned to join the Society himself. Subsequently he became the secretary of the saintly Carlo Borromeo, accompanying him on his visits to Rome, where he may well have had access to the reports. His is thus the first description of the early expeditions, telling of the Jesuits dispatched by Pius IV in 1563, of the services of the French consul Paolo Mariani, of the return to Egypt of the missionaries in 1582, and the ensuing Synod of Memphis.

The next book to contain a survey of the missions gave an account of the beliefs and habits of the Copts in even greater detail and became

³⁸ Nicephorus Callistus, *Ecclesiasticae historiae libri decem et octo* (Basel, 1561), 942, 949–50.

³⁹ Cesare Baronio, *Annales ecclesiastici*, vi. 140–65, 697–707.

⁴⁰ Giovanni Botero, *Le relationi universali* (Venice, 1595), pt. 1, pp. 160–1.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pt. 3, pp. 161–6.

⁴² *Ibid.* 162: 'si circoncidono però come Giudei: sì che non par che la loro fede passi più a basso della cintola'.

immensely influential in both Catholic and Protestant Europe. This was the *De procuranda salute omnium gentium schismatorum, haereticorum, Iudaeorum, Saracenorum, caeterorumque Infidelium libri XII*, a work mainly devoted to the heresies of the Eastern Christians by the prior of the Discalced Carmelite convent in Brussels, Díaz Sánchez Dávila y Herrera or Thomas a Jesu, and published in Antwerp in 1613.⁴³ Thomas a Jesu described the condemnation of the Copts at Chalcedon and then turned to their other errors, their practice of circumcision, their pronouncement of the Trisagion, and particularly their attitude to baptism. It generally occurred, he pointed out, forty days after birth and there were no provisions for its being administered by anyone other than a priest in case of danger of death. It was accompanied by a mass celebrated by deacons and subdeacons but without the consecration of the eucharist, and was carried out with total immersion as in the Greek rite, but with the pronouncement of formulas resembling the Latin ones.

The deacons and subdeacons, Thomas a Jesu continued, also took communion with the priests, whereas the laity only usually took it on feast days. Ordained ministers of the Church never went to confession before they were aged about 20, even if they took communion. Holy orders, other than that of presbyter, could be conferred at any age, in some cases immediately after baptism, accompanied by the tonsure and vows of chastity and abstinence. Extreme unction was unknown since neither the holy oil nor the eucharist were administered to the dying, and the Gospel of Nicodemus was read at mass. Marriage was celebrated before a priest in what resembled the Roman manner, but it could also be dissolved if either the husband or the wife chose another partner. The once widespread habit of circumcision, however, was now receding, he agreed, and was hardly ever practised in Cairo or Alexandria.

From the Copts of Egypt Thomas a Jesu passed on to the members of the Ethiopian Church. One of the reasons for the success of his account is that he added to it a document long regarded as a primary source for the beliefs of a Church found more and more intriguing in the West. This was a 'declaration'—in fact an interrogation with answers—of an Ethiopian priest converted to Catholicism, Tecla Maria, who appeared before Cardinal Santoro in Rome in 1594.⁴⁴

⁴³ Thomas a Jesu, *De procuranda salute omnium gentium schismatorum, haereticorum, Iudaeorum, Saracenorum, caeterorumque Infidelium libri XII* (Antwerp, 1613), 359–62.

⁴⁴ Ibid. 379–85.

Tecla Maria's answers to the cardinal's questions are dominated by his eagerness to prove his own orthodoxy, but he does provide some interesting items of information about the Ethiopian Church. When asked about baptism by branding, for example, he says that the Ethiopians never actually used branding as part of baptism, but that, in certain outlying regions of the country, it was customary to make an incision on the forehead either, he suggested, for sanitary reasons, or because some Ethiopian ruler had once imposed it on his subjects to distinguish them from the Muslims. But Tecla Maria also spoke about the Egyptians and the differences between the two Churches. Where he derived his information is not clear, but he made two points, eagerly taken up by later students of the Copts. The first is that the Egyptians only celebrated Sundays and feast days in the towns (and not in the country or the villages), and the second is that they did not elevate the eucharist at mass. Tecla Maria added that the Ethiopians followed neither custom.

In 1620 another Antwerp publication, the second part of the *Historiae Societatis Iesu* by Francesco Sacchini, appeared, with a section on the Copts based on the reports sent from Egypt by Cristóforo Rodríguez. With its information by a man who, as we saw, had never liked nor truly understood the Copts, it was due to remain a standard work of reference, particularly in Catholic circles, until the early eighteenth century, and was a successful vehicle in the transmission of prejudice. The beliefs of the Copts were reduced to a list of points, described so succinctly as to warrant the most hostile interpretations, despite the distinction made between ignorance and evil customs and the statement that the Copts themselves were ready to admit their own errors and only practised circumcision for fear of the Turks.⁴⁵ The first point, concerning the facility with which the Copts could marry more than once, implied that they were generally prone to polygamy. The inclusion of circumcision and a diet following the Mosaic law amongst the heretical practices suggested that these were far more than age-old customs, but had some sort of sacramental value. And when it came to the sacraments the Copts were charged with believing in three which differed from the Catholic ones, namely in faith, fasting, and prayer (besides baptism, the eucharist, confession, and ordination), and thus with excluding confirmation,

⁴⁵ Sacchini, *Historiae Societatis Iesu pars secunda*, 249: 'Horum errorum quidam ex inscitia tantum oriebantur, alii ex pravo usu: et ipsimet facile in repudiis, circumcissione, puerorum consecratione, abstinencia a suffocato et sanguine fatebantur errare se; eaque facere, quod ita invahisset usus: adhaec circumcissionem Turcarum metu retinere.'

matrimony, and extreme unction.⁴⁶ We shall see that the report would please the Protestants eager to argue that the only two sacraments truly celebrated by the Copts were baptism and the eucharist.

Sixteen years later, in 1636, there appeared a book which made an unprecedented contribution to the study not only of the Coptic language, but also of Coptic culture in general, the *Prodromus Coptus sive Aegyptiacus* by the German Jesuit Athanasius Kircher, and in 1643 it was followed by his equally important *Lingua Aegyptiaca restituta*. I shall be discussing the works and its author in detail in the fourth part of this book, in connection with the discovery of Coptic as a language, but his writings also served to stimulate the discovery of Coptic literature and the investigation of the Coptic Church.

Kircher had never been to Egypt and relied partly on reports written by those who had and partly on the few Copts and the considerable number of Coptic manuscripts he came across in Rome. The undeniable originality with which he approached the entire subject led him to reach conclusions which differed in certain respects from those of his contemporaries. In one of the appendices of the *Lingua Aegyptiaca restituta* Kircher gave a brief survey of the errors and beliefs of the Copts. By and large this was predictable and corresponded to what was to be found in the writings of Thomas a Jesu and others. Kircher, however, was particularly worried by the Trisagion and the reference to the crucifixion in a prayer which should be devoted solely to the Trinity. He also stated that the errors of Dioscorus were ultimately derived from Arius and Origen, to whom he attributed the belief that the body of Christ was coessential with God, but that he did not have a soul and did not partake of the flesh of the Virgin Mary.⁴⁷ In his *Prodromus*, on the other hand, Kircher laid a particular emphasis on the original fervour and purity of the Church of Alexandria,⁴⁸ and then marshalled the Coptic liturgy to argue that the Copts were schismatics, but that

⁴⁶ Ibid. 248: 'Christophorus interim Cophthorum placitis moribusque noscendis insistsens, manifestis haeresibus involutos reperit. Repudiare apud illos, et vivis prioribus, alias superducere uxores in more esse: ante baptismum parvulos circumcidere: Sacramenta septem quidem numerare, verum praeter Baptismum, Eucharistiam, Confessionem, Sacerdotium, caetera longe ab veris diversa, fidem, ieiunium, orationem.'

⁴⁷ Kircher, *Lingua Aegyptiaca restituta*, 514–15.

⁴⁸ Athanasius Kircher, *Prodromus Coptus sive Aegyptiacus* (Rome, 1636), 19: 'Porro e sacris historiis lingua Copta scriptis apparet, innocentissimae vitae homines fuisse Coptitas, atque adeo ferventes Christianae vitae cultores, ut nullis unquam suppliciorum generibus a suscepta semel fide, vitae abduci potuerint.'

they were not heretics.⁴⁹ Indeed, one of the reasons for which he delighted in the discovery of their liturgical texts was that they conformed to the Roman Catholic ones and thereby proved the antiquity of Catholic orthodoxy.⁵⁰

The idea that the Copts were guilty of schism rather than of heresy and of the fundamental proximity between the Churches of Alexandria and Rome, which had in fact already been hinted at by Eliano after his last visit to Egypt, was to determine a more positive approach to the Egyptian Church on the part of certain missionaries and Catholic scholars. Rather than presenting Coptic beliefs and practices in terms of errors, they would emphasize their points of community with Roman Catholicism. This, too, was a form of prejudice, but it was arguably less destructive than earlier ones.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 36–7.

⁵⁰ Ibid. 43–4.

8

Confessional Clashes I

EARLY PROTESTANT APPROACHES

While the Roman Catholic Church combined a condemnatory attitude with increasing overtures to the Eastern Christians, the Protestants were gradually developing an approach of their own. The Lutherans had been glancing longingly at the Levant ever since Luther, in his disputation with Johann von Eck of 1519, had expressed his admiration for the Church of Constantinople, far closer to the primitive Church than the Church of Rome.¹ Subsequently Lutherans were also prepared to take an interest in the other Eastern Churches. An early sign of this was the appearance in Wittenberg in 1575 of the *Oratio de statu ecclesiarum hoc tempore in Graecia, Asia, Boëmia etc.* The author, the Swabian David Chytraeus, a follower and friend of Melancthon, was one of the most esteemed (and most orthodox) Lutheran theologians and historians in Germany. His *Oratio* was influential, and the objective which Chytraeus announced would be repeated by Anglican writers of a slightly later generation. He wished, he stated, to prove that the world was full of Christian Churches which had never submitted to the pope.² Of these he provided a brief survey in which he expended praise on the Greek Church, and referred briefly to the Armenians, the Jacobites, and the Christians of Egypt and Ethiopia.

In the years that followed, the Protestants became alarmed by the Roman advances, and most particularly by the second synod of Brest-Litovsk of 1596, at which union was concluded with the Ruthenian Churches and seemed to threaten the other Churches of the East. By the same token they approved of many of the points in the Eastern confessions which the Catholics condemned. They applauded what the

¹ Martin Luther, *Werke*, ii (Weimar, 1884), 272–90.

² David Chytraeus, *Oratio de statu ecclesiarum hoc tempore in Graecia, Asia, Boëmia etc.* (Wittenberg, 1575), sig. A2^v.

Catholics took to be the rejection of the teaching of purgatory, of auricular confession, and of extreme unction. They were in full agreement with the ministration of the eucharist in both kinds, and, more generally, with the marriage of the clergy and the tendency of the Eastern Churches to have a more or less national identity with sections of their liturgy in the vernacular; and they admired what they regarded as a heroic resistance to the incursions of Rome and an age-old independence of the papacy.

So could the Eastern Churches not be taken as models for those Western ones that emerged after the Reformation? The Protestants most attracted by such an idea were the Anglicans and the Lutherans, for whom the ancient hierarchy of the apparently national Eastern Churches had a particular appeal. And while the Roman Catholics approached the Christians of the East as heretics who needed to be converted, or, at best, as schismatics who had to be won back to the fold, the Protestants made little attempt to convert them to Protestantism, but dreamt of a loose union of independent Churches hostile to Rome.

Yet there were two important reservations among the Protestants which were destined to increase over the years. First, like the Catholics, the Protestant Churches fully accepted the Council of Chalcedon. Many Protestants regarded it as the last general council to have taken valid doctrinal decisions in accordance with the precepts of the New Testament.³ It was of decisive importance for the definition of the natures in Christ, and the Protestants were no more disposed to look benignly on those who rejected it than the Catholics. We shall see that the Protestants were strongly attracted by the Ethiopians, but that was largely because, remote and mysterious as they were, it was possible to attribute to them a number of affinities with the primitive Church as well as tenets which savoured of Protestantism. In the case of the Copts—and this is the second reservation which would gradually appear in the writings of Protestant scholars—it was soon proved convincingly, above all by the missionaries whose direct experience could hardly be overlooked, that, even if they too had certain points in common with the Protestants, their

³ Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Reformation: Europe's House Divided 1490–1700* (London, 2003), 185, 250. For a more detailed discussion see Yves M.-J. Congar, OP, 'Regards et réflexions sur la christologie de Luther', in Grillmeier and Bacht (eds.), *Das Konzil von Chalkedon*, iii, 457–86, and Johannes L. Witte, SJ, 'Die Christologie Calvins', *ibid.* 487–529. A general survey is given by Joseph Ternus, SJ, 'Chalkedon und die Entwicklung der protestantischen Theologie: Ein Durchblick von der Reformation bis zur Gegenwart', *ibid.* 531–611.

Church and their beliefs were in fact closer to those of Rome. However nebulous their concept of the sacraments, there was no doubt that they accepted far more of them than the Lutherans, and the question of whether or not they believed in the real presence in the eucharist was never answered to the entire satisfaction of the Protestants.

THE ENGLISH

Chytraeus was drawn by the idea of a union with the Church of Constantinople, and it was not long before the English followed suit.⁴ In 1594 George Cranmer and Edwin Sandys, two disciples of the great ideologist of Anglicanism, Richard Hooker, set off on a journey to gain information about the other Christian Churches, in the hope of forming a union with their more moderate representatives under the presidency of the Church of England. They had hoped to inspect the Churches of the East, but in fact they remained in the West. Only at the very end of his *Relation of the State of Religion: and with what Hopes and Pollicies it hath been framed, and is maintained in the severall states of these westerne parts of the world*, completed in 1599 and published in 1605, did Edwin Sandys devote a few pages to the Greeks, 'inthrall'd . . . under Turkish tyrannie',⁵ describing them as occupying a theological position halfway between Protestantism and Catholicism, and discussing their points of divergence and community, before proceeding to a still shorter survey of the Russians.

The journey undertaken by Sandys was followed by the publication of Baronio's *Annales ecclesiastici*, with its confident announcement of the imminent union between the Churches of Rome and Alexandria. Baronio's claims were received with derision in the Protestant world. In 1599 the young Dutch traveller in Turkey Georgius Dousa described the documents in the *Annales ecclesiastici* as 'fables', the result either of Eastern impostors in need of money or of the lies of the Jesuits.⁶ Some years later, when it had appeared that the union had never really taken

⁴ Hugh Trevor-Roper, *From Counter-Reformation to Glorious Revolution* (London, 1992), 83–111 ('The Church of England and the Greek Church in the time of Charles I').

⁵ Sir Edwin Sandys, *A Relation of the State of Religion: and with what Hopes and Pollicies it hath been framed, and is maintained in the severall states of these westerne parts of the world* (London, 1605), sig. Y3^r.

⁶ Georgius Dousa, *De itinere suo constantinopolitano epistola* (Antwerp, 1599), 42.

place, Edward Brerewood wrote that 'the matter being after examined was found to be but a trick of imposture'.⁷ Although Baronio provided no new information about the Copts, his statements, made in a work intended largely as anti-Protestant propaganda, stimulated the Protestants to study the Copts for themselves.

The journey which Edwin Sandys failed to complete was pursued further by his younger brother George, and the result was *A Relation of a Journey begun An. Dom. 1610*. George Sandys was shocked by the monophysitism of the Copts, 'infected with that heresie of one nature in Christ'. He can hardly be regarded as a sympathetic observer, since he saw the Copts as 'ignorant . . . in the excellencies of their ancestors, but retaining their vices'. Yet, even if some of them smack of traditional prejudices, he did supply details about their practices which were of interest: their refusal to sit or kneel at divine service; their priests being 'veiled and vested in linne'. He referred to their preference for the Gospel of 'Nicomedes' and their use in the liturgy of 'the Coptike language, understood but by few' as well as 'the Moresco'. He was struck by the priest elevating a red cloth 'under which, I suppose, is the Sacrament', and the pictures of Christ and the Virgin Mary in their churches 'but not over their Altars'. 'Extreme-unction, Prayer for the dead and Purgatory', he continues, 'they admit not of.'⁸

Shortly before the publication of Sandys's *Relation*, another English work had appeared with a section on the Copts, Edward Brerewood's *Enquiries touching the Diversity of Languages and Religions, through the chiefe parts of the World*. Brerewood, a mathematician with antiquarian interests and the first professor of astronomy at Gresham College in London, must have completed the work just before his death in 1613. It was published posthumously by his nephew Robert in 1614 and was reprinted regularly until 1674. Intended partly as a response to Baronio, it was clearly also influenced by Chytraeus. By discussing the many Churches independent of Rome, Brerewood hoped to show 'their differences from the Romane Church, that it might more manifestlie appeare, how idle are the common vaunts amongst the ignorant, of her amplitude, as though all the Christian world save a few Protestantes shut up in some obscure corner of Europe, professeth the same faith shee

⁷ Edward Brerewood, *Enquiries Touching the Diversity of Languages, and Religions, through the Chiefe Parts of the World* (London, 1622), 159.

⁸ George Sandys, *A Relation of a Journey begun An.Dom. 1610*, 6th edn. (London, 1658), 86.

embraceth and were within the territories of her Iurisdiction'.⁹ But despite this manifestly anti-Catholic approach and his ideal of 'a most sacred harmony betweene them [sc. the non-Roman Churches] in the more substantiall points of Christian Religion necessary to salvation', Brerewood disapproved of the Eastern faiths or 'heresies'. While his account of the Council of Chalcedon was based on the currently available translations of Evagrius and Nicephorus, his description of the beliefs of the Copts was drawn almost entirely from Thomas a Jesu, with single references to Prateolus's catalogue of heresies and to Thevet's *Cosmographie*, and a couple to Botero. It was from Tecla Maria's declaration published by Thomas a Jesu that Brerewood took the idea that the Copts only observed the Lord's day and other feasts in the cities and did not elevate the eucharist.

Brerewood's report on the Copts was based on secondary sources, but in 1617, two years after the publication of George Sandys's *Relation*, there appeared another work which contained direct information: the first, heavily abridged, version of the report by one of the most popular travellers of the time, William Lithgow. This is a step backwards where the description of the Copts is concerned. For William Lithgow, who was in Egypt two years after Sandys, the Copts were still part of an amorphous oriental Christendom. He did indeed admit that they were circumcised 'after the Judaicall manner, but not after the eight day, but the eight yeare', but he confused the Council of Ephesus with that of Chalcedon and maintained that the Copts 'have their Religion from Prester Jehan'. His statement that 'they will not suffer any Images, nor Pictures to bee in their Churches' suggests either that he never visited their churches or that he was astonishingly unobservant when he did, and he seems to have used the standard Western sources when he said that they believed in transubstantiation, practised auricular confession, but denied purgatory, the invocation of the saints, and prayers for the dead. 'So do the Greekes in all these poynts the like', he concluded, 'and all the people Orientall'.¹⁰

⁹ Brerewood, *Enquiries*, sig. **2^r. Cf. Alastair Hamilton, 'The English Interest in the Arabic-Speaking Christians', in G. A. Russell (ed.), *The 'Arabick' Interest of the Natural Philosophers in Seventeenth-Century England* (Leiden, 1994), 30–53, esp. 36–8.

¹⁰ William Lithgow, *The Totall Discourse, of the rare Adventures, and painefull Peregrinations of long nineteene yeares Travailles from Scotland, to the most famous Kingdomes in Europe, Asia, and Affrica* (London, 1640), 308–9. In an earlier and shorter version of his book, *Discourse of a Peregrination in Europe, Asia and Affricke* (London, 1614), Lithgow, horrified by the behaviour of Armenian pilgrims he met in Nazareth,

The works of Brerewood and Sandys prepared the way for a growing interest in England in the Church of Alexandria, and for the outspoken defence of the Eastern Christians published by Ephraim Pagitt in 1635, *Christianographie, or the Description of the multitude and sundry sorte of Christians in the World not subject to the Pope. With their Unitie, and how they agree with us in the principall points of Difference betweene us and the Church of Rome*. Pagitt would later convert to Presbyterianism, but when he wrote *Christianographie* he was still a protégé of the great champion of conservative Anglicanism William Laud. The purpose of his book was to show, as Chytraeus had done, that, contrary to what the Church of Rome maintained, the world was full of Christians who had always refused to bow to the papacy. These Churches, he argued, had many points in common with the Protestant Church of England. When he came to the Copts he based himself on the relevant section in Thomas a Jesu to list those commendable traditions abhorred by Rome and which ended with the admirable belief that Roman Catholics were heretics and should be shunned accordingly. They held, he said, the orthodox view that Christ was ‘true God and man’.¹¹ His conclusion—‘I find that these Churches are not hereticall but Orthodox for the maine’¹²—could be applied above all to the Copts, tricked into adopting a formula at the Council of Chalcedon for which they had been condemned ever since. Pagitt’s knowledge of the Copts, however, was far from accurate. He devoted a sizeable section to their liturgy, but maintained that it was in Syriac (‘which is composed of the Hebrew, Calde, Arabique, and Greeke tongues’) and he derived the text from Guy Le Fèvre de la Boderie’s edition of the Syriac baptismal service in use by the Jacobites.¹³

These and other works, such as Alexander Ross’s popular *Πανσεβεια: Or, A View of all Religions in the World* (1653), showed that, with the exception of those few travellers who called briefly on the Copts, Protestant scholars were dependent on Roman Catholic sources for their knowledge of them until the second half of the seventeenth century. This

exclaimed (sig. N1^v): ‘Such is the villany of these Orientall Christian-slaves, under the Turkes, that not onely by conversing with them, learne some of their damnable Ethnicke customes, but also going beyond them, in beastly sensuality, become worse than bruit beasts ...’.

¹¹ Ephraim Pagitt, *Christianographie, or the Description of the multitude and sundry sorte of Christians in the World not subject to the Pope. With their Unitie, and how they agree with us in the principall points of Difference betweene us and the Church of Rome* (London, 1635), 102–3.

¹² Ibid. 119.

¹³ Ibid. 103.

helps to explain the success in the Protestant world of the short history of the Copts by Josephus Abudacnus. Before examining his work, however, we should look more closely at the man. His remarkable career, unusual because he was one of the very few Copts to travel in Europe, is an additional illustration of contemporary Western attitudes to Eastern Christians.

ABUDACNUS

Yusuf ibn Abu Dhaqn, whose name was Latinized as Josephus Barbatus or Abudacnus, was born in Cairo, probably in the late 1570s.¹⁴ We have no information about his background. That he knew Turkish suggests that his family had some link with the Ottoman administration and that he knew Greek could imply some contact with the Greek patriarchate of Mount Sinai in Cairo or with Greek merchants. Judging from a letter he wrote to Joseph Justus Scaliger in 1608, he received only the most elementary education in Egypt.¹⁵ He may have planned to become a monk for, by the early 1590s, he was close to Ya'qub, the *qummuṣ* of the monastery of St Anthony. He was also known to the patriarch of Alexandria, Gabriel VII, who, in the spring of 1595, gave him a letter of recommendation for the pope, Clement VIII.¹⁶ Abudacnus was thus one of the very few examples of a young Copt being dispatched to Rome at the time.

In May 1595 Abudacnus asked to be admitted to the College of Neophytes which had been founded by Gregory XIII in 1577, above all for converts from Islam and Judaism. His request was granted and he was promised a subsidy of 9 or 10 scudi.¹⁷ He converted to Catholicism and, under the tuition of the Jesuit teachers, he learned some of the many languages he later claimed to know. He may have studied Arabic on a more advanced level than he had in Egypt; he certainly studied Latin, ancient Greek, Hebrew, Syriac, Aramaic, and, above all, Italian, the language in which he seems to have been most fluent. By 1605 he had joined the Discalced Carmelites under the name of Fra Macario, as the

¹⁴ On Abudacnus see Alastair Hamilton, 'An Egyptian Traveller', and, more recently, Wadi Abullif, 'Yūsuf bin abī Dhaqn wa-ta'rikhuḥu 'an al-Aqbāṭ', *Ṣaḍīq al-kāhin*, 43 (2003), 90–4, 169–77; 44 (2004), 8–16, 90–7.

¹⁵ Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek, Cod. Or. 1365 (4). The text is reproduced in Hamilton, 'An Egyptian Traveller', 127.

¹⁶ H. de Vocht, 'Oriental Languages in Louvain in the XVIIth Century: Abudacnus and le Wyt de Luysant', *Le Muséon*, 59 (1946), 671–88, esp. 687.

¹⁷ Krajcar (ed.), *Cardinal Giulio Antonio Santoro*, 126.

prior, Pedro de la Madre de Dios, informed the *qummuṣ* Ya'qub in October.¹⁸ But Abudacnus never seems to have been fully ordained, and a couple of years later he had left Rome, and the Discalced Carmelites, for Paris, where he was employed as interpreter royal and gave occasional lessons in Arabic.

The details of Abudacnus's departure from Italy and arrival in France remain obscure. He never mentioned his stay with the Carmelites in his later correspondence, and he tends to date the start of his surprisingly successful career in the years when he was sought out as a teacher of Arabic and consorted with some of the greatest scholars in France. In Paris he met the professors of Arabic at the Collège Royal, Etienne Hubert, Arnoult de l'Isle, and Jean Martin, and he cultivated the friendship of Isaac Casaubon, the Protestant historian and classical scholar who was working on the early Church and was consequently interested in the Eastern languages. Through Casaubon Abudacnus made his way into the Republic of Letters. In September 1608 he wrote a letter to Scaliger in Leiden, listing the languages he knew, stressing his intellectual curiosity, and asking whether he could visit him or enter his service. Scaliger, who died some four months later, does not appear to have replied, but one of his most brilliant pupils, the Dutchman Thomas Erpenius, called on Abudacnus when he arrived in Paris from England in 1609, and asked him to give him Arabic lessons.

Erpenius had already studied some Arabic in England with the greatest expert on the language in the country, William Bedwell. He was disappointed by Abudacnus, he told Bedwell. All Abudacnus could teach him was 'the corrupt language' spoken 'by Egyptians and others', so even if he did indeed learn 'many Arabic words' from him, he made little progress in the classical language.¹⁹ Yet even after he had become professor of Arabic in Leiden and was regarded as the best Arabist of his day, Erpenius remained fond of Abudacnus and grateful for what he had taught him. He gave Abudacnus a letter of recommendation for Bedwell in London. With that, and other letters from his friends in France, Abudacnus set out for England in the summer of 1610.

¹⁸ Buri, *L'unione della chiesa copta*, 136: 'Dal nostro figliuolo diletteissimo Fra Macario, monaco nostro, che al secolo si chiamava Joseph Barbato, di nazione Copta, ho inteso queste cose con altre eccellenze che il Signore ha donato a V.P. molto reverenda.'

¹⁹ M. T. Houtsma, 'Uit de oostersche correspondentie van Th. Erpenius, Jac. Golius en Lev. Warner: Eene bijdrage tot de geschiedenis van de beoefening der oostersche letteren in Nederland', *Verhandelingen der Koninklijke Academie van Wetenschappen, Afd. Letterkunde*, 17/3 (1887), 6.

Bedwell, who held the modest position of vicar of Tottenham High Cross, was highly esteemed both in England and abroad for his skills as a mathematician, an antiquarian, and an orientalist. He was protected by Lancelot Andrewes, bishop of Chichester, Ely, and finally of Winchester, and he could be an influential friend. It may have been through him that Abudacnus received a letter for Richard Bancroft, archbishop of Canterbury, who, in his turn, recommended him to John King, bishop of London and vice-chancellor of Oxford University.²⁰ He also received a letter from Thomas Bodley for his librarian Thomas James.²¹ Bodley expressed his enthusiasm about Abudacnus who 'speaketh French and Italian very readily; also Latin well enough, to explicat his minde: being likewise, as I ghesse, of a kind and honest disposition', and stressed the importance of having him employed at Oxford before Cambridge found out about him. Abudacnus consequently arrived in Oxford in August 1610 and took up residence in St Mary Hall (later incorporated into Oriel College).

At Oxford Abudacnus gave some tuition in Arabic and displayed his versatility as a linguist by contributing a couplet in Aramaic, Syriac, Arabic, and Turkish to *Eidyllia in obitum fulgentissimi Henrici Walliae Principis*, a volume lamenting the death of James I's elder son. Otherwise he seems to have spent much of his time in London, where he frequented Bedwell.²² There was, however, some misunderstanding between them about an Arabic version of the Epistle to Titus which Abudacnus copied out of a manuscript of the Epistles Bedwell was hoping to publish. Back in Oxford Abudacnus seems to have given his copy to the Hebraist Matthew Slade, who took it with him to Holland and had it published by the lecturer in Arabic at Leiden, Johannes Antonides. Bedwell was to regard this as an unforgivable act of betrayal. Yet in the meantime he introduced Abudacnus to Lancelot Andrewes and may well have been instrumental in arranging for him to give Arabic lessons to 'a few gentlemen' in London, who probably included Miles Smith, the future bishop of Gloucester. Abudacnus again saw Casaubon, who had settled in England, and he met Erpenius's sister Maria.²³ It was in London, too,

²⁰ Anthony à Wood, *Fasti oxonienses*, i (London, 1721), col. 790.

²¹ *Letters of Sir Thomas Bodley to Thomas James, First Keeper of the Bodleian Library*, ed. G. W. Wheeler (Oxford, 1926), 193–4.

²² Alastair Hamilton, *William Bedwell the Arabist, 1563–1632* (Leiden, 1985), 34–7, 136.

²³ See his letter to Bedwell dated 28 Aug. 1610, *ibid.* 99–100 and Houtsma, 'Uit de oostersche correspondentie', 13–16.

that he encountered Fernand de Boisschot, the ambassador of the archdukes of the Southern Netherlands, Albert and Isabella, and, in the autumn of 1613, he set sail for Antwerp.

Abudacnus was welcomed by the magistrates of Antwerp to whom Boisschot had recommended him, and was employed to teach what he called 'all oriental languages', but which he defined more closely as Hebrew, Syriac, Aramaic, and Arabic, to missionaries from the mendicant orders and other members of the clergy and the laity. He claimed that their progress was swift and astonishing, but, now that he regarded himself as the former professor of Arabic at Oxford, he looked for a grander position.²⁴ This became possible early in 1614 when he was called on to act as interpreter to the Ottoman admiral-in-chief, Khalil Pasha, who had been intercepted and imprisoned on his way to confer with the States General in The Hague. Abudacnus accompanied Khalil Pasha to Holland, where he was richly rewarded by the States General and tried, but failed, to obtain an appointment at Leiden.²⁵ He also made the acquaintance of the ruler of the Southern Netherlands, Archduke Albert.

Albert became one of Abudacnus's firmest supporters. He arranged for him to obtain employment at the university of Louvain, an appointment represented as being all the more pressing since Abudacnus threatened to accept the invitation of his numerous friends in France and return to Paris.²⁶ Welcomed by the historian Erycius Puteanus, Abudacnus was installed at the university in October 1615 with a salary paid by the States of Brabant. Not all his colleagues, however, were pleased with the appointment. Abudacnus, attached to the faculty of divinity and employed to teach 'oriental languages', decided to concentrate on Hebrew, to the annoyance of the occupant of the chair, Valerius Andreas. This led to a series of protests and attempts to prevent him from lecturing which were only quelled by the intervention of the

²⁴ L. van der Essen, 'Joseph Abudacnus ou Barbatus, Arabe né au Caire, professeur de langues orientales à l'Université de Louvain (1615–1617)', *Le Muséon*, 37 (1924), 1–17.

²⁵ A. H. de Groot, *The Ottoman Empire and the Dutch Republic: A History of the Earliest Diplomatic Relations, 1610–1630* (Leiden and Istanbul, 1978), 125–9, 305; *Resolutiën der Staten-Generaal. N.R. Tweede Deel 1613–1616*, ed. A. T. van Deursen (The Hague, 1984), 207, 270.

²⁶ F. Nève, 'Nouveaux Renseignements sur la résidence de Joseph Barbatus en Belgique et sur les circonstances de son départ', *Annuaire de l'Université Catholique de Louvain*, 29 (1865) 350–9; T.-A. Druart, 'Arabic Philosophy and the Université Catholique de Louvain', in C. E. Butterworth and B. A. Kessel (eds.), *The Introduction of Arabic Philosophy into Europe* (Leiden, 1993), 83–97, esp. 88–92.

archduke. In order to prove his competence Abudacnus published a brief work on Hebrew grammar, the *Speculum hebraicum* (Louvain, 1615), which consisted of tables designed to teach students the system of radicals peculiar to Semitic languages. But the work was hardly original. It was based very largely on the *Cubus alphabeticus sanctae ebraeae linguae* published by Elias Hutter in 1587.²⁷ He also prepared an Arabic grammar, *Grammaticae arabicae compendium*, but this remained in manuscript,²⁸ and he informed the archduke of his plans to publish an Arabic translation of Thomas a Jesu's *De procuranda omnium gentium salute* and of an unspecified book on mathematics, and to produce an Arabic dictionary and a polyglot Psalter.²⁹ The archduke promised him a generous subsidy, but the plans came to nothing.

In the meantime matters in Louvain went from bad to worse. Abudacnus was discovered to be living with a concubine. He confessed to the rector, and was absolved, but the orthodoxy of his Catholicism was called in doubt, particularly since he insisted on commenting on the Scriptures during his lectures. Despite the backing he continued to receive from the archduke and from colleagues such as the highly respected Puteanus, Abudacnus was persuaded to resign. Albert, however, continued in his generosity, giving him a letter for the emperor in Prague, Matthias I, in which the archduke listed the languages Abudacnus knew—they now included Spanish, English, and French—and asked the emperor either to have him employed at a university or to arrange for him to travel to Istanbul and ultimately to return to Egypt. He also granted him 500 florins for his travel expenses.³⁰ Abudacnus himself wrote to Johann Gottfried von Aschhausen, the bishop of Würzburg and Bamberg, asking for a recommendation for the duke of Bavaria, Maximilian I, and emphasizing his immense success as a teacher of Hebrew.³¹

Abudacnus set out for the Bavarian court in the late summer of 1618. He stopped briefly in Altdorf, where he matriculated at the academy,³²

²⁷ F. Nève, 'Note sur un lexique hébreu, qu'a publié à Louvain, en 1615, Joseph Abudacnus, dit Barbatus, Chrétien d'Égypte', *Annuaire de l'Université Catholique de Louvain*, 16 (1852), 234–50; id., *Mémoire historique et littéraire sur le Collège des Trois-Langues à l'université de Louvain* (Brussels, 1856), 355.

²⁸ Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, MS 15161. For a further discussion see Hamilton, 'An Egyptian Traveller', 134–5.

²⁹ Nève, 'Nouveaux Renseignements', 352.

³⁰ Ibid. 354–7; De Vocht, 'Oriental Languages in Louvain', 681–7.

³¹ L. Scherman, 'Abudacnus (Barbatus), ein koptischer Orientalist aus dem siebzehnten Jahrhundert, und seine Beziehungen zu München', *Jahrbuch für Münchener Geschichte*, 2 (1888), 341–54, esp. 353.

³² G. A. Will, *Geschichte und Beschreibung der Nürnbergischen Universität Altdorf* (Altdorf, 1795), 141.

and then went on to Munich. In Munich he found employment at the ducal library. This may have been due in part to the influence of Johann Georg Herwarth zu Hohenburg, the former director and superintendant, whose book on hieroglyphs, as we shall see, was to have a deep effect on Athanasius Kircher, and who would have been particularly interested in a visitor from Egypt. Abudacnus was thus appointed to assist the librarian, Esaias Leuker, in cataloguing the large collection of oriental manuscripts, some of which had been left by the Syriac scholar Johann Albrecht Widmanstetter, and others of which had been donated by Johann Jakob Fugger (with whose descendants Abudacnus went to stay in 1620).³³

The outbreak of what was to be known as the Thirty Years War in 1618 prevented Abudacnus from carrying out some of his original plans. He gave up the idea of going to Prague to call on Matthias I. He also abandoned the hope of visiting the Polish king, Sigismund III, in Warsaw, for whom the duke of Bavaria had given him a letter.³⁴ In May 1622, however, he was on his way to Vienna and called on one of Herwarth zu Hohenburg's most distinguished friends, the astronomer Johann Kepler, in Linz. Like Thomas Bodley, Kepler was charmed by Abudacnus. He wrote a touching letter to the imperial librarian in Vienna, the Dutchman Sebastian Tengenagel, urging him to be kind to a man of such academic distinction, such moral integrity, with such an engaging manner, and who was so far from his home.³⁵

Abudacnus arrived in Vienna with Archduke Albert's letter for the emperor (who was no longer Matthias in Prague, to whom the letter had been addressed, but Ferdinand II), and with Kepler's letter to Tengenagel. Although Abudacnus was not to stay long in Austria, he made a number of important acquaintances. The Jesuit Kasper Bichler gave him spiritual instruction in the hope of improving his orthodoxy; he met some of the leading figures in imperial politics such as the future

³³ G. Lilli, 'Das WillkommBuch des Grafen Markus Fugger d. J. zu Kirchheim', in *Festgabe Hermann Grauert zur Vollendung des 60. Lebensjahres gewidmet von seiner Schülern* (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1910), 260–83, esp. 266.

³⁴ Scherman, 'Abudacnus', 347, 353.

³⁵ Johann Kepler, *Gesammelte Werke*, xviii (Munich, 1959), 88: 'praesens tamen Aegyptius, Joseph Abudakan, professionibus Arabicae et Hebraeae linguae per Academiae Europae obitus clarus factus, a me literulas ad te commendatitias impetravit. Dignus equidem videtur, cui si quid potes, impertiaris, humanitatisque officijs eum adjuves. Nam et patria longe dissita nos hospitalitatis admonet, et morum suavitas, vitaeque integritas omnium favorem meretur: et communis utrique vestrum professio Linguae Arabicae notitiam inter vos mutuam suadere videtur. Plura amoris argumenta invenies ipse, ubi propius hominem cognoveris.'

vice-president of the war council Gerard von Questenberg, the vice-chancellor Otto von Nostiz, and the first imperial chancellor Johann Baptista Verda von Werdenberg.³⁶ Above all Abudacnus made the acquaintance, through Tengnagel, of Michel d'Asquier, the imperial dragoman or interpreter. D'Asquier, from Marseilles, was a linguist of genius, a keen bibliophile, and a man whose intellectual aspirations and curiosity would lead him to correspond with Athanasius Kircher in Rome in 1655.³⁷ His functions at the imperial court included interpreting for delegates from the sultan, translating correspondence from Turkish and Hungarian, turning German texts into Latin, Spanish, and Italian, and both receiving and providing reports from the Ottoman Empire. It was he who found Abudacnus employment as a dragoman by the imperial war council.

Already in 1623 Abudacnus left Vienna for Istanbul as interpreter to the imperial ambassador to the sultan, Johann Jakob Kurz von Senftenau.³⁸ To begin with he assisted both Tengnagel and D'Asquier in their quest for Eastern manuscripts. In 1624, after Kurz von Senftenau's brief embassy was over, Abudacnus entered the service of the imperial resident in Istanbul, Sebastian Lustrier von Liebenstein. He wrote heartbroken letters to Tengnagel complaining of his shortage of money and his ill treatment at the hands of both the Turks and Lustrier.³⁹ In 1629, however, Lustrier was recalled, to be replaced by a man whom Abudacnus found far more congenial, Johann Rudolf Schmid, who, after his return to Vienna in 1643, would be created Freiherr von Schwarzenhorn.

In serving Schmid Abudacnus would have been involved in some of the main Western intrigues taking place in the Ottoman capital. Schmid was active in his opposition to the patriarch of Constantinople, Cyril Lucaris, known for his Calvinist sympathies.⁴⁰ He endeavoured, with the support of the Swedes, to prevent further Ottoman intervention in Europe, and above all to stop the Turks from invading Poland by urging them to continue fighting Persia.⁴¹ Abudacnus lived at Schmid's house

³⁶ For Abudacnus's stay in Vienna see Hamilton, 'An Egyptian Traveller', 139–40.

³⁷ APUG, MS 555, fo. 207.

³⁸ On Abudacnus in Istanbul see Hamilton, 'An Egyptian Traveller', 140–5.

³⁹ Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, MS 9737.t, fos. 1^r–2^v, 152^r, 263^r–264^v.

⁴⁰ See below, p. 179–81.

⁴¹ P. Meienberger, *Johann Rudolf Schmid zum Schwarzenhorn als kaiserlicher Resident in Konstantinopel in den Jahren 1629–1643: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der diplomatischen Beziehungen zwischen Österreich und der Türkei in der ersten Hälfte des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Berne and Frankfurt, 1973), 9–99.

in the Greek quarter of Phanar, on the southern side of the Golden Horn, and, in the summers of 1633 and 1640, lost all his property in fires. On the whole, however, Abudacnus's position improved, and D'Asquier saw to the payment, however irregular, of his salary. In 1643 Rudolf Schmid was recalled to Vienna. He was replaced by Alexander Greiffenklau von Vollrats. The two men disliked each other and Abudacnus, associated so closely with Schmid, was dismissed. This is the last we hear of him.

The demands on Abudacnus's time cannot have been excessive, and it may well have been in Istanbul that he wrote the *Historia Jacobitarum, seu Coptorum*, which was to have such a success in Protestant Europe.⁴² Although the chronology of the work, and the manner in which it made its way to Oxford, are still mysterious, there is no evidence that he wrote it in Europe, where he proudly listed his writings, both published and planned, in his letters to the archduke of the Southern Netherlands and other potential patrons, but made no mention of his history of the Copts. In Istanbul, on the other hand, Abudacnus could have encountered a number of European orientalists who would have been interested in such a history. Jacobus Golius, the pupil and successor of his friend Erpenius, spent most of 1628 in Istanbul at the Dutch embassy. From 1637 to 1640 Edward Pococke was chaplain at the English embassy. A pupil and close friend of William Bedwell, Pococke had been appointed professor of Arabic in Oxford by William Laud in 1636. At the beginning of his stay in Istanbul he was accompanied by the mathematician and astronomer John Greaves. In 1640 two of Golius's pupils, Georgius Gentius and Christian Ravius, were in Istanbul in search of manuscripts. Any of these, or other orientalists passing through Turkey, could have taken Abudacnus's manuscript back to Europe and transmitted it either to Thomas Marshall, its probable editor, in the Netherlands, or to someone in Oxford, where it would appear in 1675.

Abudacnus has frequently been criticized, both in his lifetime and later. He was criticized by pupils and colleagues for the quality of his teaching and his often limited knowledge of the languages he claimed to master. He was also criticized for usurping professorships—he did, after all, claim to have been a professor at Oxford and at Louvain at a time when no professorship of Arabic had yet been founded at Oxford and the chair of Hebrew was occupied by someone else at Louvain. Yet he was welcomed all over Europe by princes, bishops, aristocrats, and scholars,

⁴² Hamilton, 'An Egyptian Traveller', 146.

and even when he was in England he was already regarded by foreign visitors, such as Abraham Scultetus, the chaplain of Ferdinand V or the 'Winter King', who came to London for the marriage of his employer to the daughter of James I, as a scholar of distinction.⁴³ He was, certainly, a curio, and the growing interest on the one hand in Arabic studies and on the other in Egypt ensured a warm reception for an Egyptian who clearly had considerable personal charm. He was also most unusual by Coptic standards. Impelled by intellectual ambition and curiosity, he was prepared to leave Egypt and travel across Europe without any certainty of what he might find. His publications can be faulted, but not only did his history of the Copts have qualities which make it unique at the time, but he was by far the most prolific Coptic author to have lived between 1500 and 1700.⁴⁴

The *Historia Jacobitarum* is a short work, covering some thirty pages of the small quarto first edition. Despite the scorn with which it was received in some circles, it unquestionably provided a certain amount of correct information by a man who may have been a member of the Coptic clergy before going to Rome when he was still young. The Coptic liturgy, the consecration of the higher clergy, and the vestments are all treated in unprecedented detail, and there is a far better chapter on the structure of the Coptic church buildings than anything that had previously appeared.⁴⁵ The book was written for a Western readership, and the term sacrament was used and understood in the Western sense.⁴⁶ Abudacnus acknowledged that the Copts had the seven traditional Catholic ones, but he also admitted that auricular confession and extreme unction were seldom practised. The Coptic attitude to penance, as he described it, was in fact reminiscent of that of the early Church. No distinction was made between venial and mortal sin, and on the few occasions on which penance was imposed it was of extreme severity, often lasting as long as six months, in which period the penitent was not allowed to take the eucharist or in some cases even to frequent a church. He was to abstain from food two or three times a week, to observe a diet of bread and water, and to spend some nights bowing to the ground fifty or a hundred times, in an easterly direction. Abudacnus implied that circumcision was still in regular use and, as we saw in Chapter 2, he provided interesting details about Coptic education.

⁴³ *De curriculo vitae... Abrahami Sculteti* (Emden, 1625), 58–9.

⁴⁴ *GCAL* iv. 114–68. For Abudacnus see 131–3.

⁴⁵ Abudacnus, *Historia Jacobitarum*, 9–10, 12–13.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 14–22.

On some points Abudacnus contradicted accepted views. He claimed, for example, that the name Jacobite was derived from Jacob the Jewish patriarch rather than from the sixth-century Monophysite Jacobus Baradaeus.⁴⁷ This enabled him to attribute an immense antiquity to the Copts, converted to Christianity, he added, by St Mark. He also maintained that the term ‘Cristiani della cintura’, ‘Christians of the girdle’, was derived from the Coptic custom whereby the priest would put a belt around the waist of those who received the sacraments.⁴⁸ But perhaps the most striking feature of Abudacnus’s little ‘history’ was what he omitted. Nowhere did he mention monophysitism or the Council of Chalcedon. He stressed the Coptic devotion to saints—notably to the Virgin Mary, St George, St Theodore, St Anthony, and St Mark,⁴⁹ but he never named the great heroes of Coptic tradition, Severus of Antioch and Dioscorus. Indeed, he said hardly anything about what the Copts actually believed.

COPTIC HISTORIANS AND HISTORIES OF THE CHURCH OF ALEXANDRIA

At the time of Abudacnus’s peregrinations other contributions were being made in northern Europe to the study of the patriarchate of the early Church of Alexandria. The first was the discovery and publication of a part of the chronicle of world history by the greatest of the Coptic historians, Girgis al-Makin, who was born in Cairo but spent much of his life in Syria in government service. Between 1262 and 1268 he wrote his *al-Magmu’ al-mubarak*, a history of the world, the first part from the creation to the eleventh year of the reign of emperor Heraclius, the second from the time of the Prophet Muhammad to 1260. This was based largely on the historical work of the Persian al-Tabari (838–923), as well as on the *Annals* of Eutychius, the Melkite patriarch of Alexandria from 933 to 940.⁵⁰ Although by far the largest part of the chronicle is about Islamic history, it contains brief passages about the Coptic patriarchs.

⁴⁷ Ibid. 1–2.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 2.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 23.

⁵⁰ GCAL ii. 348–51; Johannes den Heijer, ‘Coptic Historiography in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Early Mamluk Periods’, *Medieval Encounters*, 2 (1996), 67–98, esp. 88–95.

When the French orientalist Guillaume Postel was in the Middle East he purchased a manuscript of part of al-Makin's chronicle, and this was among the codices which he later deposited at the library of the Elector Palatine, Ottheinrich, in Heidelberg.⁵¹ In 1613, on his tour of the European libraries in search of Arabic material, Thomas Erpenius found the manuscript and was given permission to take it back to Leiden on loan. He would never return it, probably because of the Thirty Years War and the removal of the Heidelberg collection to the Vatican. On his death it went to the Bodleian Library in Oxford, where it has remained, MS Marsh 309.

Erpenius decided to publish both the Arabic text, starting with the period of the Prophet, and a Latin translation. Because of his own premature death in 1625 it ended in 1118. In the year after Erpenius's edition an English translation appeared in Samuel Purchas's *Pilgrimage*, and in 1657 Pierre Vattier published a French version.⁵² When the text first appeared in 1625 it was a turning point in historiography. Until then all accounts of the Muslim conquests published in Europe had been either by, or based on, the work of Byzantine historians, and were prejudiced accordingly. Al-Makin, on the other hand, although a Christian, was writing for a largely Muslim readership and gave what can be considered the Muslim point of view, always referring to the Prophet in terms of the greatest courtesy. The work was the first to redress the balance, and the first of a series of publications based on the writings of the Arab historians.

Another contribution to the history of the Church of Alexandria was that of the jurist and orientalist John Selden. In 1642 he published a brief extract in Arabic from the chronicle of the same Eutychius whom al-Makin had used as a source.⁵³ In doing so Selden hoped to prove that the founder of the Church of Alexandria, St Mark, had appointed twelve presbyters, who elected one of their group to act as patriarch and

⁵¹ Giorgio Levi della Vida, *Ricerche sulla formazione del più antico fondo dei manoscritti orientali della Biblioteca Vaticana* (Studi e testi, 92; Vatican City, 1939), 295–6.

⁵² The work continued to fascinate Arabists. For the Oxford professor of Arabic Jean Gagnier, who transcribed and translated it in the late 18th c., and his translation, which remained in manuscript and was consulted by Patrick Russell, formerly physician to the merchants of the Levant Company in Aleppo and his brother's collaborator on the celebrated *Natural History of Aleppo*, see Maurits H. van den Boogert, 'Patrick Russell and the Republic of Letters in Aleppo', in Hamilton, Van den Boogert, and Westerweel (eds.), *The Republic of Letters and the Levant*, 223–64, esp. 243–4. Gagnier's translation is Bodl. MS Hunt 16.

⁵³ John Selden, *Eutychii Aegyptii, Patriarchae Orthodoxorum Alexandrini, ecclesiae suae origines* (London, 1642).

consecrated him with the imposition of hands. This custom continued until the patriarchate of Alexander I in the second decade of the fourth century, after which election of the patriarch was entrusted to the bishops. As for the bishops, Selden again used Eutychius to argue that the office did not even exist until the patriarchate of Demetrius in the late second and early third centuries. Writing at the time of the outbreak of the Civil War and sympathizing with Puritan opposition to episcopacy, Selden was deliberately polemical and aroused violent reactions. He was attacked in 1661 in *Eutychius patriarcha alexandrinus vindicatus* by the Maronite Abraham Ecchellensis (Ibrahim al-Haqilani).

A former student at the Maronite College and a loyal mouthpiece of the Church of Rome, professor of oriental languages first at the Propaganda Fide and then at the Collège Royal in Paris, where he collaborated with the editors of the Polyglot Bible, Ecchellensis was widely respected. He confuted Selden's claim that episcopacy was a late institution, and some years later Eusèbe Renaudot, to whom we shall return, followed suit. Ecchellensis too, however, had concerned himself more directly with the history of the Church of Alexandria. In 1651 he had edited the *Chronicon orientale*, generally attributed to al-Makin's contemporary Abu Shakir ibn Butrus al-Rahib.⁵⁴ The section on the patriarchs was far more substantial than what was to be found in al-Makin. It traces their history from St Mark to Athanasius III, patriarch from 1250 to 1261,⁵⁵ and, although the facts supplied about each patriarch were hardly plentiful, the work, with its emphasis on martyrdom, provided a Western readership with its first direct taste of Coptic historiography. It prepared the way for the important history of the patriarchs of the Church of Alexandria published by Renaudot in 1713,⁵⁶ and would be edited again by Giuseppe Simonio Assemani, who made a number of emendations on the basis of Ecchellensis' notes and a manuscript in the Vatican. He also gave more information about the author and brought the list of patriarchs up to his own day.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Petrus Rahib, *Chronicon orientale*, ed. P. L. Cheikho, SJ (Beirut, 1903), pp. v–vi. *GCAL* ii. 434–5.

⁵⁵ *Chronicon orientale*, trans. Abraham Ecchellensis (Paris, 1651), 109–40.

⁵⁶ See below, p. 156–7.

⁵⁷ *Chronicon orientale Petri Rabebi Aegyptii*, ed. Giuseppe Simonio Assemani (Venice, 1729), 120–59.

9

Confessional Clashes II

THE GERMANS

As the seventeenth century drew on the German Lutherans displayed a growing curiosity about the Church of Ethiopia. Its apparent isolation and inaccessibility over the centuries conjured up the image of a Church close to that of the Apostles, and the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1633 raised hopes of an amicable relationship with the Protestants. Like the Catholic missionaries the Lutherans regarded Egypt as a convenient stepping stone, and we saw that one of the very few men who could be considered a Protestant missionary in this period, Peter Heyling, stopped there.¹

Influenced by the new Pietist movement, and a friend of the Dutch scholar Hugo Grotius (whom he had met in Paris), Heyling set out for the East in 1632. The Copts he met in Alexandria offered him the opportunity to improve his knowledge of oriental languages. Availing himself of the protection of Laurent de La Croix, a Flemish doctor from Brussels who had settled in Cairo, and of the Venetian Santo Seghezzi, who acted as French vice-consul in Cairo—two men, according to the Capuchin missionaries, whose dissolute and scandalous behaviour testified to their indifference in religious matters²—he managed to spend some three months at Dayr Maqar in the Wadi al-Natrun studying Arabic, and another two in Dayr al-Suryan studying Arabic and Syriac. Evicted by the Capuchin Agathange de Vendôme, he interrupted his stay in Egypt by a visit to Jerusalem, where he lodged with the Copts in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre before returning to Cairo and

¹ Otto F. A. Meinardus, 'Peter Heyling, History and Legend', *Ostkirchliche Studien*, 14 (1965), 305–26, esp. 305–16. See also E. van Donzel, *Foreign Relations of Ethiopia 1642–1700: Documents Relating to the Journeys of Khodja Murād* (Istanbul, 1979), 1–2, 74, 187, 216.

² Ladislav de Vannes, *Deux martyrs*, 143–4, 239–40.

setting off for Ethiopia himself disguised as a Copt.³ Although Heyling's presence in the Coptic monasteries alarmed the Catholic missionaries, he does not seem to have made any attempt to proselytize, and the letters he wrote to Grotius from Egypt contain little new information about the Copts. His mission to Ethiopia, on the other hand, seems to have been relatively successful until he became involved in theological disputes.⁴ He was then banished, and died in mysterious circumstances in Suakin, on his way back to Egypt, in about 1652.

Heyling's visit to Egypt and his subsequent journey to Ethiopia mark the true beginning of the active Lutheran interest in the Church of Alexandria. It was above all the Saxon scholar Hiob Ludolf who stimulated investigation into the subject. Born in 1624 in Erfurt, where he studied medicine and law at the university, Ludolf was a remarkable linguist.⁵ After learning Greek, Hebrew, Aramaic, Samaritan, Syriac, and Arabic, he started to study Ethiopic (Ge'ez) with the few available texts, but only made proper progress after matriculating in Leiden in 1645. In Leiden he could consult the Ethiopic manuscripts left to the university by Scaliger, and, thanks to the staff of orientalists—to Golius, to the Hebraist Constantin L'Empereur, and to Louis de Dieu, who had completed the first Persian grammar—he made immense advances in the other languages he had first studied in Erfurt. He was subsequently summoned to Paris by his brother to become tutor to the sons of the Swedish envoy, Baron Rosenhane, and, thanks to Rosenhane, he took part in a Swedish embassy to Rome in 1649. In Rome he encountered the Ethiopian monk Abba Gregorius, whom Heyling had met in Ethiopia in 1647.⁶ The two men became close friends and, under

³ Hiob Ludolf, *Sonderbarer Lebens-Lauff Herrn Peter Heylings, aus Lübec, Und dessen Reise nach Ethiopien*, ed. Johann Heinrich Michaelis (Halle, 1724), 100–73. Ludolf venerated the memory of Heyling throughout his life and collected all the available material concerning his journey to Ethiopia. The notes he had made were assembled after his death and published by his friend and pupil Johann Heinrich Michaelis.

⁴ For evidence of the devotion he inspired among certain Ethiopians see E. G. E. van der Wall, *De mystieke chiliast Petrus Serrarius (1600–1669) en zijn wereld* (Leiden, 1987), 300–1.

⁵ J. Flemming, 'Hiob Ludolf: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der orientalischen Philologie', *Beiträge zur Assyriologie und vergleichenden semitischen Sprachwissenschaft*, 1 (1890), 536–82; 2 (1894), 62–110 (the second part contains Ludolf's correspondence with Gregorius, his teacher of Ethiopic); and, more recently, Jürgen Tubach, 'Hiob Ludolf und die Anfänge der Äthiopistik in Deutschland', in Piotr O. Scholz (ed.), *Von Hiob Ludolf bis Enrico Cerulli. Halle/S. 3.–5. Oktober 1996. Akten der 2. Tagung der Orbis-Aethiopicus-Gesellschaft zur Erhaltung und Förderung der äthiopischen Kultur* (Warsaw and Wiesbaden, 2001), 1–47, esp. 15–25.

⁶ Van Donzel, *Foreign Relations of Ethiopia*, 2.

the tuition of Gregorius, Ludolf turned into the greatest expert on Ethiopic in Europe.

In 1651 Ludolf returned to Germany, going first to Erfurt and then to Gotha, where he entered the service of the duke of Saxe-Gotha, Ernest, known as 'the Pious'. The duke too had an interest in Ethiopia. He invited Gregorius from Rome in the hope of collecting information about the Kingdom of Prester John, and it was again under Gregorius's supervision that Ludolf progressed with his Ethiopic dictionary, which would be the first of its kind. Gregorius, however, left Gotha in September 1652 in a long and unsuccessful attempt to return to his own country.

In Germany Ludolf encouraged research into all aspects of the Church of Alexandria. Even if he remained particularly interested in Ethiopia, he was curious about Egypt, and prompted his friend at the university of Jena, Johann Ernst Gerhard (the son of the theologian Johann), to turn his attention to the Copts.⁷ On a visit to Paris Gerhard met Gilbert Gaulmin de Montgeorges, a lawyer, Hebraist, and manuscript collector, and Gaulmin proudly showed him five Coptic manuscripts of the Scriptures in his library.⁸ Gerhard returned to Germany determined to promote further investigation into the Copts, and under his supervision a young man from Westphalia, Franz Wilhelm von Ramshausen, wrote a dissertation entitled **ⲧⲉⲕⲕⲗⲏⲥⲓⲁ ⲛⲕⲉⲓⲧ** *sive Exercitatio theologica Ecclesiae Copticae, hoc est Christianorum Aegyptiacae ortum, progressum, praecipuae doctrinae capita*, which he defended on 30 June 1666. It was one of the very first studies to be devoted entirely to the Church of Egypt.⁹

Ramshausen based his work on secondary sources, and these were necessarily almost all Catholic, even if he gave as one of the main reasons for writing his dissertation his determination to contradict Baronio. With the exception of a few Lutheran travellers such as Salomon Schweigger, and Anglican scholars such as Brerewood and Alexander Ross, he derived his information from Athanasius Kircher (whom he also followed in his attempt to interpret the hieroglyphs)¹⁰ and from the

⁷ Karl Heinrich Trommler, *Bibliothecae Copto-Iacobitae specimen* (Leipzig, 1767), 62.

⁸ Franz Wilhelm von Ramshausen, **ⲧⲉⲕⲕⲗⲏⲥⲓⲁ ⲛⲕⲉⲓⲧ** *sive Exercitatio theologica, Ecclesiae Copticae, hoc est Christianorum Aegyptiacae ortum, progressum, praecipuae doctrinae capita repraesentans* (Jena, 1666), sig. C3^r.

⁹ J. Helderman, 'Franciscus Wilhelmus von Ramshausen—Rediscovered I. Some new Material for the History of Coptology', *Jaarbericht ex Oriente Lux*, 22 (1971–2), 318–34.

¹⁰ Ramshausen's efforts are discussed by J. Helderman, 'The Hermetic NOYΣ in the Oldest European Work on the Coptic Church', in Alois van Tongerloo (ed.), *The*

Carmelites Thomas a Jesu and Esprit Julien or Philippe de la Trinité (who encountered a group of Copts and Ethiopians in Bassora in the Persian Gulf).¹¹ Of his sources Ramshausen made a highly eclectic, and frequently erroneous, use.

From Leonhard Rauwolff and German pilgrims to Jerusalem such as Johann von Solms (who had travelled with Breydenbach) Ramshausen took the accounts of circumcision and baptism by branding. Like his Catholic sources Ramshausen presented the Copts primarily in terms of theological 'errors', but he followed Brerewood in his use of the Ethiopian Tecla Maria. He too attributed to the Copts the failure to celebrate the Lord's day and other feast days outside the cities and the refusal to elevate the eucharist. Although he fully approved the second of these points, he deplored the first. He condemned as excessive the alleged rejection of confession to a priest. Nor could he approve of the ordination of children, marriage to relatives in the second degree, the rejection of the procession of the Holy Ghost from the Son, or, of course, the teaching on monophysitism. Nevertheless he detected various points of community between the Church of Alexandria and the Lutherans. He insisted, for example, that the Copts only believed in two sacraments, baptism and the eucharist. When discussing their views on the eucharist he repeated the Lutheran position of consubstantiation (the belief that the elements of the eucharist, the bread and the wine, coexisted with the divine presence) and attacked both the Catholic teaching and the Calvinist one. He also stressed the Copts' rejection of the later Church councils, and ended in the style of Ephraim Pagitt with a laudatory list of Coptic tenets condemned by Rome but approved by Wittenberg.

As Ludolf pursued his research on Ethiopia, he encountered a scholar who was going to make the first truly great contribution to the study of the Copts. Johann Michael Wansleben, who was born in Sommerda near Erfurt in 1635, was the son of a Lutheran pastor. He had shown signs of restlessness soon after completing his studies, first at Erfurt and then at Königsberg, and embarked on what was to be a chequered career. He had been tutor to a noble Prussian family and enlisted in the Prussian army to take part in the campaign against the Poles in 1657. Apparently attracted by a career as a merchant, he had left the army and travelled

Manichaeism NOYΣ: Proceedings of the International Symposium organized in Louvain from 31 July to 3 August 1991 (Leuven, 1995), 145–66.

¹¹ Philippe de la Trinité, *Itinerarium orientale* (Lyons, 1649), 249.

from Schleswig to Amsterdam, finally returning to Erfurt, where he met Ludolf.¹²

Wansleben, like Ludolf, was a versatile linguist, and from Ludolf he learnt Ethiopic. So pleased was Ludolf with his progress that he engaged him as an assistant in his work on his dictionary and sent him to London to supervise the publication of the manuscript by the English orientalist Edmund Castell, engaged in work on the London Polyglot Bible. As he did so Wansleben took a number of initiatives of his own without consulting the author. Besides a Latin index at the end (which made it possible to look up Latin words in Ethiopic), he added an appendix with additions and emendations to Ludolf's lexicon, and added to Ludolf's grammar the Ethiopic text and a Latin translation of the liturgy of Dioscorus from a manuscript belonging to Edward Pococke. The work appeared in 1661, preceded by a courteous epistle from Ludolf to Wansleben, praising his great mastery of Ethiopic.¹³ Nevertheless, Ludolf was displeased.

For the time being Wansleben remained in England, collaborating with Castell, who was now working on his own *Lexicon Heptaglotton*, which would come out in 1669. Despite his irritation at the treatment of his dictionary and his awareness of mistakes in Wansleben's appendix, Ludolf retained an interest in him, and when Wansleben returned to Erfurt Ludolf persuaded the duke of Saxe-Gotha to send him to Ethiopia by way of Egypt. The object of the journey was to establish relations with the Ethiopian king, to inform the Ethiopians about the Lutheran Church, to gain knowledge about the kingdom of Ethiopia, its inhabitants, government, and policy, and to persuade some Ethiopian scholars to come to Germany in order to study the state of the Protestant Churches.¹⁴

Wansleben left Germany in June 1663, and in January of the following year he was in Cairo. During the year he spent in Egypt he embarked on the study of the Church of Alexandria. He also managed to copy a number of Ethiopic manuscripts which he found in the Coptic libraries. But when it came to undertaking the highly perilous journey to Ethiopia Wansleben hesitated. He had formed a close friendship with the Coptic patriarch

¹² A. Pougeois, *Vie et voyages de Vansleb savant orientaliste et voyageur* (Paris, 1869), 5–15. For a more recent survey with a bibliography see Gilbert-Robert Delahaye, 'Johann Michael Vansleb (1635–1679): Voyageur en Égypte et en Orient pour le compte de la Bibliothèque royale', *Le Monde copte*, 33 (2003), 113–22.

¹³ Hiob Ludolf, *Lexicon Aethiopico-Latinum*, ed. J. M. Wansleben (London, 1661), sig. A3^v: 'egregiam tuam in hac lingua peritiam ...'.

¹⁴ Flemming, 'Hiob Ludolf', 548–9.

of Alexandria, Matthew IV. The patriarch told him that the journey to Ethiopia was impossible, and wrote a letter to the duke of Saxe-Gotha to the same effect. Matthew, moreover, appears to have expressed the utmost scepticism about the teaching of Luther. Partly under his influence, Wansleben decided to convert to Roman Catholicism.

Early in 1665 Wansleben left Egypt for Italy. Landing in Livorno he made his way, via Florence, to Rome, and there abjured Protestantism. In the following year he joined the Dominican Order and entered the convent of Santa Maria sopra Minerva, remaining there for four years. The duke of Saxe-Gotha, and above all Ludolf, found Wansleben's behaviour inexcusable. He had benefited from their friendship, protection, and subsidies. Not only had he failed to go to Ethiopia, but he had abandoned their faith. This would lead to a campaign of defamation which had far-reaching consequences.

Wansleben's change of religion emerges from his accounts of his experiences in Egypt. He drew up two reports. The first, which was in German, was compiled before his conversion for Ernest the Pious, and was sent to Ludolf. The manuscript remained in the Gotha library and was not published in its entirety until 1794.¹⁵ The second, compiled after his conversion, was in Italian, and, dedicated to the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Cosimo de' Medici, was published in Paris in 1671, entitled *Relazione dello stato presente dell'Egitto*. The two accounts are in fact very close to one another, the German one being a little more detailed and containing more names. The most striking divergence, however, is in the chapter on the beliefs of the Copts. Not only is the order of the points discussed different, but the Italian version gives a polite account of the Coptic refusal to recognize the pope as the head of the Church, tempered by the assurance that the Copts did indeed acknowledge the primacy of the 'Roman patriarch' in the early councils, the decrees of which they continued to accept.¹⁶ In the German version Wansleben says that the Copts recognize only the patriarch of Alexandria as their head, and that most of them have not even heard of the pope.¹⁷ While the Coptic practice of taking communion in both kinds is mentioned briefly in the Italian account, it is discussed at slightly more length in the German one.¹⁸ The

¹⁵ All that was published before that date were a few lines in 1723 which included Wansleben's statement about the Copts knowing nothing of the pope. *Compendium Historiae Ecclesiasticae... in usum Gymnasii Gothani*, 3 vols. (Gotha, 1723), iii. 12.

¹⁶ J. M. Wansleben, *Relazione dello stato presente dell'Egitto* (Paris, 1671), 152.

¹⁷ 'Wansleben's Beschreibung Aegyptens im Jahr 1664', in *Sammlung der merkwürdigsten Reisen in der Orient*, ed. H. E. G. Paulus, iii (Jena, 1794), 10–122, esp. 87.

¹⁸ Wansleben, *Relazione*, 157; 'Wansleben's Beschreibung', 77–8.

Italian version, in contrast to the German, stresses the Coptic (and Ethiopian) belief in transubstantiation.¹⁹

In 1670 Wansleben was invited to France and was presented by the bishop of Montpellier, François de Bosquet, to the most powerful man in the kingdom, Louis XIV's minister Colbert. Believing he could succeed where the duke of Saxe-Gotha had failed, Colbert decided to dispatch Wansleben to Ethiopia. About this impossible assignment, however, there seems to have been some disagreement between Colbert and his assistants. Detailed instructions for Wansleben were drawn up by Pierre Carcavy, formerly Colbert's private librarian, and at the time custodian of the royal library. The tasks Wansleben was supposed to accomplish were indeed formidable. He was to acquire, on his travels, any manuscripts or medallions of significance and copy all ancient inscriptions. He was to make plans and take views of every building of interest, whether ancient or modern. He was to excavate single-handed the ancient sites of Nicaea, Ephesus, and Baalbek, collecting statues and reliefs as he did so. He was to describe all machines, tools, and articles of clothing unknown in the West, and note down any unusual dish or recipe. He was to observe the local animals, minerals, plants, and fruit, and bring as many as possible back to Europe, the animals preferably alive but otherwise stuffed. When Colbert saw these instructions, however, he observed somewhat cavalierly that he saw no reason why Wansleben should do what the French ambassador in Istanbul could have done equally well, and that he only wanted Wansleben to go to Ethiopia.²⁰

Wansleben set off from Marseilles on 20 May 1671. He sailed via Malta and Cyprus. In Cyprus, where he spent nine days in Larnaca in June, he paid a visit to Nicosia. There he acquired forty-seven codices, six Greek, sixteen Arabic, eight Syriac, one Ethiopic, one Armenian, and sixteen Coptic—an entire library of mainly liturgical material which the inmates of Dayr Maqar in the Kerynia range had been willing to sell.²¹ Wansleben says little about this episode, which would appear to be part of the swansong of

¹⁹ Ibid. 153–4.

²⁰ Pougeois, *Vie et voyages de Vansleb*, 20–7. See also Henri Omont, *Missions archéologiques françaises en Orient aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1902), i. 58–63. 'Je n'entends pas cette Instruction', wrote Colbert (p. 63), 'd'autant que vous m'avez proposé le sieur Vanslebe pour aller en Ethiopie, et cette Instruction n'en dit pas un mot; et parceque tout ce qui est contenu en cette Instruction peut estre fait par l'ambassadeur de France à Constantinople, ou par ses ordres.'

²¹ The mark of the *waqf* of Dayr Maqar in BNF MS Arabe 113, a collection of pericopes and homilies acquired in Nicosia, suggests that was indeed the monastery which was selling. Cf. *CMA*, i. 85.

the Coptic presence on the island, and the readiness of the monks to dispose of their books suggests that the monastery was on the verge of closing for good. Wansleben entrusted the manuscripts to the French consul in Larnaca, Balthasar Sauvan, who dispatched them to France.²²

In September Wansleben was in Aleppo, in December in Damascus, and on 18 March 1672 he disembarked in Damietta. On this, his second visit to Egypt, Wansleben stayed in the country for almost two years. His knowledge of Arabic had improved to such an extent that he could converse with the Egyptians, read the Arabic texts he encountered, and transcribe Arabic words with greater accuracy than before.²³ He travelled widely, visiting a large number of Coptic sites and monasteries and ultimately providing the first detailed description of Coptic Egypt. In June 1672 he was refused permission to visit Dayr Maqar in the Wadi Natrun despite letters from his friend the patriarch.²⁴ Nevertheless he succeeded in acquiring the two Coptic–Arabic manuscripts on which his most important work, the *Histoire de l'Église d'Alexandrie* (which he started writing on his return from Cairo), would be based—Abu 'l-Barakat ibn Kabar's *Miṣbāḥ al-zulma* and Yuhanna ibn Abi Zakariyya ibn Siba's *al-Gawhara al-naḥḥa fi 'ulūm al-kanīsa*.²⁵ He visited the Coptic monasteries in the Fayyum in August, and in October he stayed at the monastery of St Anthony. He inspected the library,²⁶ where he was shown a liturgical manuscript and a manuscript of the lexical material edited by Kircher, valued by the monks, he said, at 30 scudi. Seemingly oblivious of its publication by Kircher, he claimed that it would enable a scholar to re-establish the Coptic language.²⁷ In February 1673 he set out for Upper Egypt. He went to the monasteries near Monfalut and Malawi, and saw the Red and White monasteries near Sohag. On each occasion he drew up a description of interest to archaeologists to this day. By the time he left Egypt in October 1673, he had made a formidable collection of manuscripts, sending some 334 back to France,²⁸ but he also had to inform Colbert in June that he was unable to proceed to Ethiopia.²⁹

²² Omont, *Missions*, i. 76–8. The manuscripts are listed ii. 879–80.

²³ Johann Michael Wansleben, *Nouvelle relation en forme de Journal, d'un voyage fait en Égypte... en 1672 et 1673* (Paris, 1677), sig. a5^v.

²⁴ Ibid. 220–2.

²⁵ Both manuscripts, BNF MSS Arabes 203 and 207, date from the 14th c. Cf. *CMA*, i. 171–2, 178.

²⁶ Ibid. 299–321.

²⁷ Ibid. 312; Omont, *Missions*, i. 100–9.

²⁸ Omont, *ibid.* ii. 879–951.

²⁹ Ibid. i. 122.

Important though Wansleben's contribution to the understanding of the Church of Egypt was to be, he never seems to have liked the Copts. Certainly he had close friends among them, such as the patriarch and the priest Abu 'l-Mina, who made drawings and copied manuscripts for him. By and large, however, he attributed to the Copts the defects which he believed were characteristic of the Egyptians—idleness, cowardice, ignorance, vainglory, and superstition.³⁰

After leaving Egypt Wansleben remained for some time in the Levant. He was in the Greek Archipelago, in Izmir, and above all in Istanbul, but he made no attempt to face the suicidal trip to Ethiopia. In order to pacify Colbert he sent him a draft, through the intermediary of Carcavy, of his *Histoire de l'Église d'Alexandrie* in August 1674, and then added a first version of his journal, in Italian and including interesting illustrations of antiquities.³¹ In comparison with the version which would later be published in French, the *Nouvelle Relation en forme de Journal, d'un voyage fait en Égypte en 1672 et 1673*, this first draft contains detailed, and frequently abusive, accounts of his dealings with French and other officials, whom he names. De Tiger, for example, the French consul in Cairo, is portrayed as being particularly odious.³² Colbert, however, was just as dissatisfied with Wansleben as the duke of Saxe-Gotha had been. In the summer of 1675 Wansleben, still in Turkey, received a letter from Carcavy expressing Colbert's indignation. The minister said that Wansleben, quite apart from not following his instructions, had not so much as read them. As for his journal, it was no more than gossip about his friends and the French consuls. Rather than intrigue against French officials he would have been better advised to do what he had been

³⁰ Ibid. i. 41–2, 57, 159–62. Possibly in order to justify his departure Wansleben was even more abusive about Cairo. BNF, MS Italien 435, fo. 135^r: 'Oltre a questo è il Cairo in se stesso un luogo, il quale per un franco non solamente è pericolosissimo, ma del quale anche egli si infastidisce subito. E chi non si annojarebbe subito in un luogo, nel quale uno ad ogni hora, e momento è sottoposto a cattivi trattamenti, ad ingiurie, e dispreggi di una plebaccia vile; a tirannia, et ingiustitie: ove di più è privo di ogni conversatione, riguardando si li francesi fra di loro, come li gatti sogliono riguardare li cani, e li mastini li orsi. O vero come havrebbe uno gusto, di stare lungo tempo in un luogo, nel quale si trova pessimamente alloggiato, in case vecchie e mal commode, in una strada poi che non solamente è stretta, e di nessun passaggio, (come à quella delli francesi;) ma è anche in un sito il più mal commodo di tutta la città, per causa dell'acqua morta, e puzzolente, che per otto mesi intieri dell'anno resta . . . '.

³¹ The manuscript survives, BNF, MS Italien 435. For a discussion of the differences between this and the printed version see Maurice Martin, 'Le Journal de Wansleben en Égypte', *Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale*, 97 (1997), 181–91.

³² BNF, MS Italien 435, fo. 98^r. Cf. Wansleben, *Nouvelle Relation*, 344, where no names are given and the account is much modified.

told.³³ Shortly after, on 4 July 1675, Colbert himself wrote to Wansleben, instructing him to return to Egypt and go on to Ethiopia. He dismissed the *Histoire de l'Église d'Alexandrie* as a sheer waste of time. Wansleben should simply have gathered the material and then written the book on his return to France.³⁴ Three months later, however, Colbert changed his mind about Wansleben's Ethiopian expedition and curtly recalled him to Paris.

When Wansleben finally returned to Paris, in February 1676, Colbert received him coldly. The minister refused to pay anything towards his expenses, even if he admitted that he had acquired a few good manuscripts. Wansleben tried vainly to defend himself. He complained about his constant lack of funds and the ambiguity of his instructions. He justified his book on the Copts, stressing its novelty and its importance.³⁵ Broken by Colbert's ingratitude, Wansleben, after staying with the Dominicans in the Rue St Jacques in Paris, moved first to Athis, then to Bois-le-Roy in the vicinity of Melun, and died at the age of 43, bankrupt and embittered, at Bourron near Fontainebleau in June 1679.

Even if the book which Wansleben wrote on the Copts is not above criticism in all points, it was unquestionably the best work on the subject to date. The *Histoire de l'Église d'Alexandrie*, a study rather than a history, was the first work on the Copts to be based almost entirely on Coptic sources. Certainly, Wansleben was writing as a Dominican in the service of a Catholic power. He declared in his epistle dedicatory that his first purpose in publishing the book was to bring the Church of Alexandria back to obedience to the papacy.³⁶ He maintained that the Copts believed in the seven sacraments and in transubstantiation, that they held St Peter to be the head of the Church and regarded the popes as his successors. But he also said they had ceased to regard the pope as the head of the Church since he had lapsed into heresy at Chalcedon. He was honest about their attitude to purgatory, observing that they did not believe in it as such, even if they said masses for the dead and did indeed believe that the souls of the dead suffered before the last judgement when the devils asked them to account for their sins. This, however, was a brief procedure, since the souls were judged and sentenced individually forty

³³ Omont, *Missions*, i. 158.

³⁴ Ibid. 161.

³⁵ Ibid. 171–2.

³⁶ Johann Michael Wansleben, *Histoire de l'Église d'Alexandrie, fondée par S. Marc, que nous appelons des Jacobites-Coptes d'Égypte* (Paris, 1677), sig. a3^v: 'le premier dessein que j'ai eu en donnant cette Histoire au public, est de contribuer à ce que cette Eglise, qui est une des premières du monde, revienne à l'obéissance du saint Siège ...'.

days after death or on the first day of the year following. He also stressed the fact that circumcision was not imposed by any precept (and was consequently voluntary), but added that it was an ancient custom derived from the Ishmaelites.

By and large, Wansleben managed to remain objective, neither stressing unduly the points of community between the Church of Alexandria and the Church of Rome nor exaggerating their differences. He could be perceptive, stating, for example, that the patriarch 'has no authority to change the matters of the Church or to introduce new ceremonies'³⁷—a fact which the early missionaries never seem to have understood. He also reminded his readers that it was often impossible to tie the Copts down to a single opinion. Like the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of Alexandria had produced theologians who might make different pronouncements about the same matter, and when it came to discussing penance Wansleben admitted that Coptic theologians disagreed about the confession of sins, some thinking it was necessary and others not.

Wansleben was by no means always right. Like a number of contemporary and slightly later travellers, such as Ellis Veryard, who was in Egypt in 1686,³⁸ and Charles Perry in the early 1740s,³⁹ he attributes the origin of the word 'Copt' to Caphtorim, Noah's great grandson. He also claims that the word Jacobite comes from Jacob, the name of Dioscorus before he was made patriarch, even if he allows for the possibility that, as 'some other of their authors claim', it might be derived from Jacobus Baradaeus.⁴⁰ When discussing the illumination of the churches, moreover, he refers to the custom of having the so-called 'eastern lamp' flanked by two ostrich eggs as a token of perpetual vigilance. This, he said, was derived from the legend according to which ostriches hatched their eggs by staring at them uninterruptedly.

With his *Nouvelle Relation* Wansleben can also be hailed as one of the founders of Coptic archaeology.⁴¹ Even if he failed to visit the monastery

³⁷ Ibid. 8.

³⁸ Ellis Veryard, *An Account of divers Choice Remarks Taken in a Journey through the Low-Countries, France, Italy, and Part of Spain, with the Isles of Sicily and Malta. As also a Voyage to the Levant* (London, 1701), 308.

³⁹ Charles Perry, *A View of the Levant: Particularly of Constantinople, Syria, Egypt, and Greece. In which their Antiquities, Government, Politics, Maxims, Manners, and Customs (which many other Circumstances and Contingencies) are attempted to be Described and Treated* (London, 1743), 239.

⁴⁰ Wansleben, *Histoire de l'Église d'Alexandrie*, sigs. a7^{r-v}, e1^v–e2^r.

⁴¹ For a survey see Cédric Meurice, 'Les Débuts de l'archéologie copte: Vision des voyageurs avant le XIX^e siècle', in Bosson and Aufrère (eds.), *Égyptes... L'Égyptien et le copte*, 133–9.

of St Paul and had little to say about the monasteries of the Wadi al-Natrun, his account of St Anthony's was particularly thorough. He described the library, the gardens, the water supplies, the four churches, and numerous architectural details, as well as wall paintings so darkened by the smoke of incense as to be all but invisible. He also claimed to have seen there the only bell in Egypt, used to summon the monks to divine office and their daily tasks. Although he did not say how many monks there were, he wrote about their dress, their church services, their diet, and their occupations, and insisted on the dangers of the Beduin tribes, of which he had some experience himself.⁴² But what was truly original about Wansleben's account was the relation of his discoveries in the rest of the country. In May 1672, accompanied by his frequent travelling companion Leonardo, a Frenchman in the service of the French consul, he visited St Damyana north-west of al-Mansura in the Nile Delta on the occasion of the *maulid* or feast in the honour of the saint. He made a detailed description both of the church and of the *maulid*, and had Leonardo make a drawing of the ecclesiastical buildings.⁴³ He left an account of Monfalut and a list of Coptic buildings in the vicinity.⁴⁴ Not only did he describe the White and Red monasteries, but he copied an inscription and provided a detailed, albeit not entirely accurate, illustration of the White Monastery.⁴⁵ He then proceeded to the vast Coptic site of Dayr Abu Hinnis, just north of Mallawi. Here he copied the inscriptions and a Copto-Greek stele, and had a drawing made of the rock tombs of al-Barsha and the nearby monuments. It shows that Dayr Abu Hinnis and Dayr Anba Bishoi were entirely enclosed by the monastic walls and that the now ruined Dayr Anba Bishoi was still standing at the time.⁴⁶

An additional advantage of Wansleben's studies on the Church of Alexandria, published when they were, was that they could draw the poison from a work which appeared in 1686, but which was based on

⁴² BNF, MS Italien 435, fos. 78^r–86^r. Cf. Wansleben, *Nouvelle Relation*, 299–305. Cf. Meinardus, *Monks and Monasteries*, 15–17.

⁴³ BNF, MS Italien 435, fos. 42^r–46^r. Cf. Wansleben, *Nouvelle Relation*, 158–66. The drawing, in the Italian manuscript, is discussed and reproduced by Martin, 'Le Journal de Vansleb', 183–4, 187.

⁴⁴ BNF, MS Italien 435, fos. 111^r–113^r. Cf. Wansleben, *Nouvelle Relation*, 359–65.

⁴⁵ BNF, MS Italien 435, fos. 115^r–118^r. Cf. Wansleben, *Nouvelle Relation*, 372–80. The drawing of the White Monastery, in the Italian manuscript, is discussed and reproduced by Martin, 'Le Journal de Vansleb', 183, 185, 190.

⁴⁶ BNF, MS Italien 435, fos. 121^r–128^r. Cf. Wansleben, *Nouvelle Relation*, 384–401. The drawings in the Italian manuscript are reproduced by Martin, 'Le Journal de Vansleb', 183, 185, 190–1.

observations and experiences of nearly half a century earlier. This was by Jean Coppin, one of the first travellers to provide a relatively detailed description of the monasteries of St Anthony and St Paul, which he visited with Agathange de Vendôme.⁴⁷ Coppin first went to Egypt in 1638, remaining for almost two years, and then returned in 1643 as consul of France and England in Damietta.⁴⁸ When he was at last back in France he entered a monastic order near Le Puy. He there completed the account of his travels, *Le Bouclier de l'Europe, ou la Guerre Sainte, contenant des avis politiques et Chrétiens, qui peuvent servir de lumière aux Rois et aux Souverains de la Chrétienté, pour garantir leurs Etats des incursions des Turcs, et reprendre ceux qu'ils ont usurpé sur eux. Avec une relation de Voyages faits dans la Turquie, la Thébäide et la Barbarie*, published in Lyons in 1686 after he had visited the pope in Rome in an attempt to persuade him to launch a new crusade.

Despite his useful accounts of Coptic monuments—St Anthony's, St Paul's, the monasteries of the Wadi al-Natrun, and the churches of Old Cairo—Coppin's description of Egypt was highly prejudiced. He made long visits to the Copts and clearly liked many of them personally, but by the time he had entered his monastery near Le Puy he detested their religion, 'the coarsest and most absurd of all those of Christians separated from the Church of Rome who live under the rule of the Turks'.⁴⁹ He added that the Copts retained many Judaic ceremonies, that they were the followers of Dioscorus and Eutyches, and that they shared their faith with the 'subjects of Prester John', whose patriarch resided in Abyssinia.

It was misconceptions such as those perpetuated by Coppin that Wansleben's study served to modify. It stood the test of time. As a description of the beliefs, customs, ceremonies, and liturgies of the Copts it was still quoted as a standard source by Martin Jugie, the author of important work on monophysitism in the 1920s, and has remained in the essential bibliography on the Copts in many theological encyclopaedias. But we shall see that Wansleben, even after his death, paid a high price for his conversion to Rome in the Protestant world.

⁴⁷ See above, p. 78.

⁴⁸ Meinardus, *Monks and Monasteries*, 14, 37, 59, 87, 109, 127.

⁴⁹ Jean Coppin, *Le Bouclier de l'Europe, ou la Guerre Sainte, contenant des avis politiques et Chrétiens, qui peuvent servir de lumière aux Rois et aux Souverains de la Chrétienté, pour garantir leurs Etats des incursions des Turcs, et reprendre ceux qu'ils ont usurpé sur eux. Avec une relation de Voyages faits dans la Turquie, la Thébäide et la Barbarie* (Lyons, 1686), 307.

Jansenists and Jesuits

JANSENISTS

Thanks to the manuscripts Wansleben collected, from the 1670s onwards France, of all countries north of the Alps, was at a unique advantage for research into the Church of Alexandria. When one of the greatest French orientalist of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Eusèbe Renaudot, produced by far the most important work on the early history of the Egyptian Church, an invaluable supplement to Wansleben's study of Coptic practices, he denied any debt to Wansleben's study, but admitted depending on the manuscripts which Wansleben sent back to France and which he consulted as soon as they arrived in Paris.¹

The grandson of the originally Protestant physician Théophraste Renaudot, Eusèbe, once a member of the Oratory and a friend of Boileau, Racine, La Bruyère, and, above all, of Bossuet, was strongly drawn by Jansenism, the movement which, with its emphasis on the arbitrary conferment of irresistible divine grace, entered into conflict with Roman Catholic orthodoxy (and most particularly with the Jesuits), but remained firmly rooted in the Catholic Church. Renaudot's commitment to a cause which met with increasing official hostility cost him the appointment as custodian of the royal library.² Known as an Arabist, he was called upon by the two leading Jansenists, Antoine Arnauld and Pierre Nicole, to translate the oriental texts which they marshalled in defence of their *Perpétuité de la foy de l'église catholique touchant l'Eucharistie*, an attack on the Calvinist critics of the doctrine of transubstantiation, or the real presence of the body and blood of Christ

¹ Renaudot, *Historia Patriarcharum* sig. u2^v.

² Antoine Villien, *L'Abbé Eusèbe Renaudot: Essai sur sa vie et sur son oeuvre liturgique* (Paris, 1904), 29–33. Renaudot was described by Sainte-Beuve as part of 'un groupe de Jansénistes honnêtes gens, de la fin—entre Bossuet et M. de Noailles'. C.-A. Sainte-Beuve, *Port-Royal*, 7 vols. (Paris, 1888), v. 509.

in the eucharist, led by the Huguenot minister of Charenton Jean Claude.³ Renaudot thus found himself involved in one of the main religious debates of the moment.

In its early stages the eucharistic controversy had little to do with the Eastern Churches. Its origins are in publications produced in the late 1620s and early 1630s, by various Huguenot ministers such as Edme Aubertin, defending the Calvinist teaching on the eucharist, which denied any alteration in the bread and the wine, with reference to the Scriptures and the Church Fathers. In 1664 Arnauld and Nicole replied in what was originally intended as a brief preface to the eucharistic liturgy for use by the nuns of the Jansenist convent of Port-Royal, *La Perpétuité de la foy*. The purpose of the tract was to demonstrate that the Catholic teaching had undergone no changes since the days of the Apostles and thus to bring the Calvinists back to the Church of Rome. This, in its turn, elicited a response from Jean Claude, who claimed that the Catholic teaching of transubstantiation had in fact changed over the years, and that the present doctrine could not be traced before the tenth and eleventh centuries, 'the darkest and most polluted centuries, the most lacking in men of piety and learning, which Christianity has ever seen'.⁴

At this point the brief tract of 1664 turned into a book of three volumes, mainly the work of Nicole and with what seems to have been no more than a single chapter by Arnauld. The fundamental difference in view between Jansenists and Calvinists was the Jansenist conviction that human nature was unchanging and that the true Christian faith had always remained the same as long as it was consonant with common sense. The changes the Calvinists claimed to detect were illusory. Language and terminology might indeed vary over the years, but basic beliefs, such as transubstantiation, even if formulated in different ways, were what they always had been. In order to prove this the authors of *La Perpétuité de la foy* turned to the Eastern Churches, picking out statements, mainly from Greek theologians but also from confessions of faith submitted by the other Churches, which showed that they too shared in this one fundamental and constant belief of the ancient Christians, and that they had done so consistently from their origins to their own day.⁵

³ Ibid. iv. 453–4.

⁴ Jean Claude, *Réponse aux deux traités intitulés la Perpétuité de la foy de l'Église Catholique touchant l'Eucharistie* (7th edn., Paris, 1668), 9.

⁵ The controversy is analysed in Jean-Louis Quantin, *Le Catholicisme classique et les Pères de l'Église: Un retour aux sources (1669–1713)* (Paris, 1999), 321–56.

For all their learning the Jansenists were in a weak position because of the reluctance of the ecclesiastical authorities to agree that they were entitled to speak in the name of the Church of Rome. This their Calvinist opponents knew well, and exploited to the full in their replies. Yet where the Jansenists could claim a far superior knowledge and competence to both their Catholic rivals and their Huguenot enemies was in their command of the Eastern sources. And it was here that Renaudot played such an important part, single-handedly almost doubling in length the three-volume edition of *La Perpétuité de la foy* of 1674, and adding to it an impressive disquisition on the Copts.

The eucharistic controversy which erupted in the 1660s prompted Renaudot to study the Eastern liturgies in order to prove that they all displayed a belief in transubstantiation. It also gave an impulse to oriental studies in general. Charles Ollier de Nointel set off as French ambassador to the Porte in 1671 in the hope of assembling further documentation to support the Catholic view, and he was assisted by the young Antoine Galland, who would later make his name as the discoverer and translator of *The Arabian Nights* before being appointed professor of Arabic at the Collège Royal in Paris. With the assistance of Galland Nointel managed to wrest two confessions of faith from the patriarch of Alexandria which attested the belief of the Copts in transubstantiation.⁶

Nearly all the Roman Catholic scholars studying the Coptic Church at the time had something to say about Coptic beliefs in transubstantiation. And the debate had almost as strong an effect on Protestants. It had an immediate impact in England, and prompted a series of publications about the Greek Church by travelling scholars such as Sir George Wheeler, whose *Journey into Greece* appeared in 1682. They were joined by learned chaplains at the English embassy in Istanbul—Thomas Smith, the author of *An Account of the Greek Church*, first published in Latin in 1676 and in English in 1680, and his successor John Covel, whose *Some Account of the Present Greek Church* came out in 1722. Paul Rycaut, secretary at the embassy in Istanbul and later consul in Izmir, added his *Present State of the Greek and Armenian Churches Anno Christi 1678* to the discussion in 1679.⁷ The conclusions of such

⁶ [Pierre Nicole and Antoine Arnauld], *La Perpétuité de la foy de l'Église Catholique touchant l'Eucharistie deffendue contre le livre du Sieur Claude, ministre de Charenton*, iii (Paris, 1674), 765, 767–8.

⁷ For a survey see Steven Runciman, *The Great Church in Captivity: A Study of the Patriarchate of Constantinople from the Eve of the Turkish Conquest to the Greek War of Independence* (Cambridge, 1968), 305–10.

men about the Greek doctrine on the eucharist were understandably inconclusive in view of the vagueness of the teaching itself, and the same applied to the growing number of studies on the other Eastern Churches, even if their polemical background drove their authors into positions of apparent certainty. This was especially true of the studies on the Church of Ethiopia, written by men who never set foot in the country. Hiob Ludolf, whose *Historia Aethiopica* appeared in 1681, was inclined to regard the Ethiopians as the Protestants of the East. In this he was followed by Michael Geddes, chaplain to the English merchants in Lisbon in the 1680s. Basing himself largely on Portuguese sources, he composed his *Church-History of Ethiopia* (1696)—‘the History’, he said, ‘of a Church that was never at any time under the Papal Yoke’⁸—to discredit the Jesuit missions and to conclude that the Ethiopians rejected transubstantiation as well as the teaching of purgatory and the sacraments of confirmation and extreme unction, and that there was a total condemnation of images.⁹

Renaudot’s additional volumes of *La Perpetuité de la foy* started to appear in 1711, dedicated to Clement XI, the pope who, ironically enough, would issue the bull *Unigenitus* in 1713 which sealed the condemnation of the Jansenist movement. This was the beginning of a decade in which Renaudot was particularly productive. In the new work he concentrated much of his vast knowledge of the Church of Alexandria. Even if his primary concern was to disprove Protestant claims that the Eastern Christians had changed their views on the eucharist over the centuries and that the idea of transubstantiation had first been introduced by Western missionaries at the time of the Crusades, Renaudot was far from limiting himself to a discussion of transubstantiation. He dealt in detail with the Coptic approach to each of the seven sacraments.

Always prepared to criticize his fellow scholars, Renaudot vented his harshness in the new volumes. He attacked the greatest Arabists of the seventeenth century—Thomas Erpenius and Jacobus Golius of Leiden and Edward Pococke of Oxford—for their ignorance about the Church of Alexandria. He poured scorn on Johann Heinrich Hottinger’s statements about the Eastern Christians. He was damning in his account of Athanasius Kircher’s edition of the Coptic ordination rites, translated,

⁸ Michael Geddes, *The Church-History of Ethiopia. Wherein, Among other things, the Two Great Splendid Roman Missions into that Empire are placed in their true Light* (London, 1696), sig. A2’.

⁹ Ibid. 33–5.

he wrote, by Kircher himself 'or rather by some ignorant Maronite, on the basis of manuscripts in the Vatican, but so badly and so unintelligibly that the translation frequently gave a meaning entirely contrary to the original'.¹⁰

Besides his dismissal of Brerewood and those Protestants who based themselves entirely on information provided by the Catholic missionaries, Renaudot deplored the missionaries themselves as sources. In 1711 he described the standard descriptions of the Copts by Thomas a Jesu and others as being 'so full of falsities and contradictions' as to be completely useless.¹¹ Two years later he went further still by castigating the travellers, the compilers of catalogues of heresies and instructions for missionaries, and the missionaries who 'examine everything according to the Theology they studied in the Schools' and who pushed 'their conjectures and their censures beyond the pale'.¹² Nobody was spared. Even Wansleben, 'un tres-mediocre Theologien', was chided for maintaining that unbaptized Coptic children could be anointed with oil in case of necessity and that the unction of catechumens replaces baptism.¹³ Renaudot denied the current theory that the Church of Alexandria, in contrast to the Church of Rome, only admitted baptism by a priest even in the case of an unbaptized infant being in danger of death. To disprove this idea he recounted an episode described in the history of the patriarchs of Alexandria of a woman on a ship captured by pirates and threatened, together with her children, with death. She leapt with her offspring into the sea so that they should receive baptism by water before they drowned.¹⁴

In 1713 Renaudot also published his great *Historia Patriarcharum Alexandrinorum Jacobitarum a D. Marco usque ad finem saeculi XIII*, using all the available Arabic sources (of which he was highly critical). Of the printed sources he used al-Makin and the Melkite patriarch Eutychius (of whose authority he was sceptical). He would seem to be one of the very first European orientalists to consult manuscripts by the early fifteenth-century Egyptian al-Maqrizi,¹⁵ but he based himself chiefly on the work

¹⁰ *La Perpetuité de la foy*, iv (Paris, 1711), 153. Cf. also vol. 5 (Paris, 1713), 370, where Renaudot lists Kircher's mistakes.

¹¹ *Ibid.* iv. 9.

¹² *Ibid.* v, sig. a2^r. Cf. also p. 16, where we read that the later missionaries 'examinèrent tout selon la Theologie qu'ils avoient apprise dans l'Escole, ils ont souvent poussé leurs conjectures et leurs censures au-delà des bornes'.

¹³ *Ibid.* 97, 107.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 98.

¹⁵ For the available manuscripts of al-Maqrizi at the time see Baron de Slane, *Catalogue des manuscrits arabes* (Paris, 1883-95), 320-3.

of a Coptic historian and theologian writing towards the end of the tenth century, Severus ibn al-Muqaffa³, and the supplements to it added by later writers.¹⁶ Renaudot seems to have had various manuscripts at his disposal. One, an early seventeenth-century codex containing fragments of this and other texts, came from the library collected by Louis XIII's chancellor, Pierre Séguier. A far better manuscript, dating from the fourteenth century, had been acquired by Wansleben in Cyprus and was in the royal library, while a third, in two volumes, had once belonged to Gaulmin.¹⁷ Even if he hoped to make an outstanding contribution to historiography, Renaudot's purpose remained partly polemical. He again stressed the proximity of Coptic practices and beliefs to those of Rome.¹⁸ He was determined to contradict the assertions made by John Selden in his edition of Eutychius, and maintained that even if the early patriarchs were elected by the presbyters and the people, they were only actually ordained, with the imposition of hands, by the bishops,¹⁹ and he countered the claims of Hiob Ludolf, who implied that the Church of Ethiopia was close to the Lutheran one.

In 1716 there appeared the first volume of Renaudot's work on Eastern liturgy, the *Liturgiarum orientalium collectio*, a study whose presentation of the Coptic liturgy or anaphora of St Basil and St Gregory has remained standard.²⁰ Again he stressed his debt to Wansleben, whose collection of so many liturgical manuscripts made it possible to provide a far superior version of the liturgies of the Church of Alexandria than had hitherto existed in the West. It also, he said, made it possible to combat the Protestant claims that many parts of the traditional Roman liturgy were taken from texts which had been misattributed and from late accretions.²¹

When writing about transubstantiation Renaudot was working in the context of a recent polemic, but in his work on the Eastern liturgies he was pursuing a far earlier tradition. The Church of Rome had long shown an interest in the rites of the Eastern Churches. Greek liturgical works had been published in Venice ever since the late 1480s. The

¹⁶ BNF MS Ar. 302. On Severus' historical works see *GCAL* ii. 300–6.

¹⁷ Renaudot, *Historia Patriarcharum*, sig. i2^{r-v}. The manuscripts, described in *CMA* i. 265–9, are now BNF MSS Arabes 301, 302, 303, 305.

¹⁸ Renaudot, *Historia Patriarcharum*, sig. i3^v–4^r.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 7–12.

²⁰ Hans Quecke, 'Zukunftschancen bei der Erforschung der koptischen Liturgie', in Wilson (ed.), *The Future of Coptic Studies* 164–96, esp. 170–1.

²¹ Eusèbe Renaudot, *Liturgiarum orientalium collectio*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1716), i, sigs. e1^r–i2^r.

Ethiopic missal had appeared in Rome in 1548 and was followed, in the next year, by the baptismal rite, reprinted in Louvain and Brussels in 1550. The attacks by Luther and other Reformers on the Roman liturgy, together with their efforts to establish a suitable liturgy of their own, provoked replies from Catholic theologians—Johannes Cochlaeus, Claude de Saintes, Jacobus Pamelius, and others—who were all eager to prove that the Roman liturgy, rather than being the corrupt collection of late additions and apocryphal texts which the Reformers believed it to be, was in fact instituted by Christ and the Apostles and had only a few additions made in the first six centuries of the Church.²² In 1562, at the Council of Trent, a commission for the reform of the Roman missal and breviary was appointed.²³ The idea behind the commission, together with the Congregation of Rites established in 1588, instigated a far more intensive study of all the early Christian liturgies which would continue for the best part of two hundred years.

Guy Le Fèvre de la Boderie had published what he thought was a reliable version of the liturgy of St Basil in Syriac in 1572 in order to prove the fidelity of the Roman Catholic rite to that of the early Church.²⁴ He was followed by numerous scholars in the seventeenth century, especially after the French Dominican Jacques Goar had published his splendid work on the Greek liturgy in 1647. Where the Coptic liturgy was concerned, Athanasius Kircher had printed excerpts from certain rites in his *Prodromus* of 1636, and, in 1647, had prepared a Latin translation from the Arabic of the Coptic ordination rite. This was published in 1653 by Leone Allacci in his *Συμμικτα, sive opusculorum, Graecorum et Latinorum, vetustiorum ac recentiorum libri duo*. Two years later Jean Morin, who edited the Samaritan texts for the Paris Polyglot Bible, reprinted an abridged version of Kircher's translation in his own *Commentarius de sacris ecclesiae ordinationibus*.

The Protestants lagged behind. Scaliger had discovered a manuscript containing the Coptic liturgies of Basil, Gregory, and Cyril, and had sent it to Marcus Welser in Germany. Welser, in his turn, dispatched it to the Maronite Victor Scialac in Rome to have it translated from Arabic into Latin, and published it in Augsburg in 1603.²⁵ The result was far from

²² Jacobus Pamelius, *Liturgia Latinorum* . . . , 2 vols. (Cologne, 1571), i, sig. *A2^v.

²³ For a survey see Archdale A. King, *Liturgy of the Roman Church* (London, 1957), 42–5.

²⁴ Guy Le Fèvre de la Boderie, *Divi Severi Alexandrini quondam Patriarchae de ritibus baptismi, et sacrae synaxis apud Syros Christianos receptis, liber* (Antwerp, 1572), 4.

²⁵ Cf. Stephen Emmel, 'Coptic Studies before Kircher', in Immerzeel and Van der Vliet (eds.), *Coptic Studies on the Threshold of a New Millennium*, i. 1–11, esp. 1–3.

satisfactory. And little good was done to the Reformed cause by the French theologian André Rivet, who, in his *Critici sacri specimen* of 1612, attacked the Catholic defenders of the Roman liturgy such as De Saintes and Pamelius for editing texts—particularly the liturgies attributed to the apostles James, Peter, Matthew, and Mark—which were spurious. He then went on to attack the liturgies of St Basil and John Chrysostom. Rivet, however, was so inaccurate that Renaudot had little difficulty in demolishing his thesis.

JESUITS, MARONITES, AND CONSULS

While Renaudot was working in Paris certain Jesuit missionaries in Egypt were assembling observations and information on the Copts based on their direct experience. One of these, as we saw, was Claude Sicard, a gifted writer whose reports on Egypt were published by another Jesuit, Charles Fleuriau, in the second and the fifth volume of the *Nouveaux Mémoires des missions de la Compagnie de Jésus dans le Levant* in 1717 and 1725 respectively.²⁶ Thanks to his style, his curiosity, and his wide knowledge of botany, zoology, and geology, as well as of archaeology, history, and geography, Sicard managed to convey with unprecedented skill and elegance not only the practices of the Copts but also the splendour of the desert landscapes and the excitement of discovering the Coptic monasteries.

For the reassessment of the Copts Sicard's fellow Jesuit Guillaume Dubernat was perhaps even more important. He first arrived in Cairo in 1702 at the age of 25. Like many of his companions his intention was to proceed to Ethiopia, but he failed to do so in 1704, and, like Sicard, decided to devote himself to the conversion, education, and study of the Copts. Dubernat drew up various reports. The first was a reply to a set of questions from Jean-Baptiste Du Sollier (Sollerius), sent off in January 1704. Sollerius, a Bollandist (one of the Jesuit editors of the *Acta Sanctorum*), received Dubernat's answers at the beginning of 1707 and edited and published them in Antwerp in the following year.²⁷ Sollerius was shocked by the misinformation circulated about the Copts, and the persistence of medieval beliefs which he had found in a biblical lexicon

²⁶ They are now in Sicard, *Oeuvres*, i. 16–47 (Red Sea monasteries); ii. 10–30 (Wadi al-Natrun), 31–44 (St Damiyana). Cf. Meinardus, *Monks and Monasteries*, 17–18, 38, 59–60, 89–90, 111, 128.

²⁷ *MPO* 6, 263.

published in Lyons as recently as 1703. It included the idea that circumcision was part of Coptic baptism, and that another part of it was branding on the brow. He was equally determined to refute Cristóforo Rodríguez's report used in Sacchini's history of the Society in 1620. Dubernat's findings, as well as those of Wansleben on whom he also drew heavily, enabled Sollierius to do this. He argued against the various points made by Rodríguez, sometimes contradicting them, sometimes defending the Coptic position. The implication that the Copts practised polygamy, wrote Sollierius, was thoroughly misleading, and he gave a detailed account of the Coptic strictures on matrimony to show how superficial Rodríguez's statement was. What Rodríguez took to be a threefold immersion in baptism was in fact, he continued, an immersion of three different parts of the body. Sollierius pointed out that the absence of the *Filioque* clause in the Coptic liturgy did not actually mean that the Copts specifically denied the procession of the Holy Ghost from the Son. They simply did not state it. Where marriage to relatives of the second degree was concerned he said that it was a custom the Copts had adopted from necessity, in order to prevent their unmarried women being abducted by the Turks, while the Coptic rulings on diet, which were not prescribed in any statement of dogma, were shared with most of the other Eastern Churches. Above all Sollierius stressed the dangers of regarding age-old customs as dogmatic errors and signs of obdurate heresy. The adoption of circumcision, for example, was, he maintained, taken over from the Muslims in order to conform to their society.

Sollierius quoted John 14: 2 'In my Father's house are many mansions' in order to justify the ways in which the Church of Alexandria differed from that of Rome. Although he roundly contradicted Rodríguez's view that the Copts did not have the same sacraments as the Church of the West, he made no secret of the difficulty of understanding exactly how the Copts conceived of the sacraments. When dealing with the question of the Coptic understanding of the eucharist, for example, Sollierius quoted the words of consecration in the Coptic liturgy, but admitted that it was impossible to establish what the Copts regarded as essential.²⁸

²⁸ Joannes Baptista Sollierius, SJ, *Tractatus historico-chronologicus de patriarchis Alexandrinis... subjungitur Appendix de initiis, erroribus, et institutis copto-jacobitis* (Antwerp, 1708), 142–3: 'Quid in hac formula Copti essentielle existiment, in ordine ad Consecrationem aut Transubstantionem panis et vini in Corpus et Sanguinem Domini, frustra ex ipsis quaesieris; quos certum est, talium quaestionum nec apices intelligere, et bona fide recitare quae a majoribus suis tradita acceperunt, non soliti ad normam scholasticam dogmata sua extendere.'

He also stressed the ambivalence of their views on purgatory and of their approach to penance.²⁹ But then what could be expected of the members of a Church with no parish priests or catechisms to explain the Christian doctrine?³⁰

Dubernat repeated much of what he told Sollierius in a letter written to Fleuriau in Brussels in July 1711 and published in the second volume of the *Nouveaux Mémoires* in 1717. Dubernat, after almost ten years in Egypt, could justly claim to know the religion of the Copts as well as he knew his own.³¹ He had few illusions. He was aware of the obstacles preventing the conversion of the Copts to Catholicism. He stressed the fear of the Turks and an ignorance which made them particularly resistant to change, and he alluded to the somewhat mercenary quality of those Copts seemingly drawn to Rome. As long as they were provided with alms, he wrote, they were docile and compliant, but as soon as the alms ceased they disappeared.³² He was also aware of the difficulties of conveying Western terminology to the Copts. If they were asked about the sacraments they seldom answered that there were seven and were unable to understand the question of whether the sacraments were divinely instituted. When interrogated about each sacrament, on the other hand, they would agree about it with their interlocutor. This, said Dubernat, was the most that could be expected of them, and it would be wrong to impose on them ideas which they could not understand. If only, he concluded, those authors who wrote about Coptic beliefs had actually been to Egypt and conversed with the Copts themselves.³³

Dubernat's letter is almost entirely about the Coptic Church, and when he talks of ignorance he refers either to the clergy or to the ideas of the churchgoers about religion. One of its most interesting aspects, however, is the brief glimpse, already contained in Sollierius's publication, which it provides of the educated laity, headed by a dozen grandees or *mubāshirīn*, who constituted an enlightened and prosperous upper class of businessmen, tax gatherers, secretaries, and bailiffs, but who, Dubernat added, had hardly any knowledge of, or interest in, religion,

²⁹ Ibid. 139, 144.

³⁰ Ibid. 131. Sollierius says that Dubernat 'observat nullos illis Parochias reperiri, Parochos nullos, nullam doctrinae Christianae per catechismos explicationem

³¹ Guillaume Dubernat, 'Lettre d'un missionnaire en Égypte, à Son Altesse Sérénissime Monseigneur le Comte de Toulouse', in *Nouveaux Mémoires des missions de la Compagnie de Jésus dans le Levant*, ii (Paris, 1717), 1–125, esp. 2.

³² Ibid. 31–2.

³³ Ibid. 43–5.

and sometimes went for years without attending mass or taking the sacraments.³⁴

In the meantime the Maronite scholars in Rome, particularly the many members of the Assemani family, but also others, such as the professor of oriental languages at the Collegio della Sapienza Faustus Naironus, were contributing to research into the Eastern liturgies and into the phenomenon of monophysitism as a whole. Their interest, admittedly, tended to centre on the Syrian Jacobites, and their knowledge of Syriac added to their credentials to do so. It was thus the Jacobites who played a prominent part in Faustus Naironus's *Euoplia fidei Catholicae Romanae historico-dogmata*, published by the Propaganda Fide in 1694.³⁵ But any study of the Jacobites entailed at least a passing mention of the Copts. Naironus said little about them, but Giuseppe Simonio Assemani devoted more attention to them. His *De Syris monophysitis dissertatio* had first been published as part of his great catalogue of the oriental holdings of the Vatican library, where he worked. It appeared in the second volume printed in 1721.³⁶ He then issued it as an independent book in 1730.

Assemani's subject was Syrian monophysitism, but what he had to say about the Copts carried weight. At the start of his dissertation he adopted the traditional Roman position and regarded all Monophysites as the followers of Eutyches.³⁷ But he went on to erode the authority of writers such as Thomas a Jesu and the earlier compilers of *catalogi haereticorum*. In the tradition of Athanasius Kircher he was in fact arguing for a far greater proximity between the Monophysites and the Roman Catholics. He berated Thomas a Jesu for explicitly denying that they knew of the sacrament of extreme unction and implicitly denying that they believed in the sacrament of confirmation.³⁸ At even greater length he argued for the Monophysite belief in purgatory.³⁹ But he also refuted the statements of early travellers who thought that branding was a part of Monophysite baptism. It may have been practised in Ethiopia, he wrote, but not in Egypt, where circumcision was indeed customary, and certainly not in Syria.⁴⁰ While he used Renaudot as a source for his knowledge of monophysitism, however, and although he even

³⁴ Ibid. 24–5, 32–3.

³⁵ *GCAL* iii. 359–61.

³⁶ Giuseppe Simonio Assemani, *Bibliotheca orientalis clementino-vaticana. Tomus secundus. De scriptoribus syris monophysitis* (Rome, 1721), sigs. c1^r–x4^v.

³⁷ Giuseppe Simonio Assemani, *De Syris monophysitis dissertatio* (Rome, 1730), 2.

³⁸ Ibid. 18.

³⁹ Ibid. 20–4.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 18.

mentioned Abudacnus in order to contradict his derivation of the term 'Jacobite',⁴¹ he never refers to Wansleben.

Assemani, as we saw, had joined Sicard in Cairo in 1715 and toured the Coptic monasteries, acquiring, as he did so, Coptic and Syriac manuscripts. It was long after his return to Rome, however, that he wrote his little dissertation on the Coptic rites, *Della nazione dei Copti e della validità del sacramento dell'ordine presso loro*. The work, composed in 1733 but not published until almost a hundred years later,⁴² was written after two Coptic monks, Antun and Maqar, who had been ordained as deacons in Egypt, had come to Rome with the intention of converting to Catholicism. The question was whether their original ordination was valid, and this led Assemani to make a comparison between the various rites of ordination practised in the East (particularly the Greek ones published by Jacques Goar) and the Latin ones. Assemani pointed out that Western views on ordination had never been uniform. For the more rigorous, priestly ordination was only valid if the threefold imposition of hands by the bishop was followed by the vestiture of the candidate with the stole and the placing in his hands of a copy of the Gospels. More flexible theologians—and these included Jean Morin in France—did not regard the handing over of the Gospels as essential, and since this did not form part of the Coptic rite, Assemani ended his dissertation by agreeing with Morin and concluding that the Coptic rite was in fact acceptable and the ordination of the two monks valid.

With the writings of Wansleben, Sicard, Dubernat, Sollerius, Renaudot, and Assemani, the Roman Catholics reached a point of unquestioned supremacy in research into the Church of Alexandria. This was sealed by the extensive description of the Copts by Benoît de Maillet, the longest-serving French consul in Cairo (from 1692 to 1715), whose *Description de l'Égypte* appeared in 1735. Although he—or rather his editor, Le Mascrier—drew on the traveller Paul Lucas for his description of Upper Egypt,⁴³ Maillet had an exceptional knowledge of Cairo, Alexandria, and the Nile Delta. He attributed what he too regarded as the tragic decline of the once flourishing Church of

⁴¹ Ibid. 4.

⁴² Giuseppe Simonio Assemani, 'Della nazione dei Copti e della validità del sacramento dell'ordine presso loro. Dissertazione . . . composta nell'anno 1733 e conservata in un codice vaticano', in *Catalogus codicum Bibliothecae Vaticanae Arabicorum, Persicorum, Turcicorum, Aethiopicorum, Copticorum, Armeniacorum, Ibericorum, Slavicorum, Indicorum, Sinensium . . .*, ed. Angelo Mai (Rome, 1831), pt. 2, 171–238.

⁴³ Jean-Marie Carré, *Voyageurs et écrivains français en Égypte, i: Des pèlerins du Moyen Âge à Méhémet-Ali* (2nd edn., Cairo, 1988), 56–63.

Alexandria to Muslim persecution, but he also saw among the Copts the survival of certain Pharaonic practices, such as processions and pilgrimages. He stressed the many customs which the Copts, whose number he estimated at about 30,000, now shared with the Muslims—ablutions, vows for the convalescence of their children, the sacrifice of animals in thanksgiving which would then be given to the poor, the habit of offering to the tombs of holy men and of shaving children when they first go to church, circumcision, and burial rites. He admitted the importance of the Copts as scribes, 'dépositaires des régistres de toutes les terres labourables'. Otherwise, however, he could but deplore their ignorance and described them as 'les peuples les plus grossiers et plus obstinés dans leurs erreurs, qu'on puisse voir au monde'.⁴⁴ They were entirely dominated by the opinions of their priests and bishops, rejected all books or discussions, had confused ideas about sin, and were obdurate in their hatred of Europeans. Although he praised the zeal and the kindness of the missionaries, Maillet was pessimistic about their success, attributing those few conversions which they made to their readiness to give alms.⁴⁵

Maillet also supplied information about Coptic customs which supplemented what was found in other works, such as the procession of children held by the midwife on the seventh day after baptism when grains of fruit were distributed, and the fact that a husband was not allowed to see his wife for five days after marriage or the wife to talk other than in a whisper to her parents or her husband.⁴⁶ Maillet's work, with its fascinating and entertaining details, soon took its place as a standard source on the Copts, quoted by Catholics and Protestants alike.

THE SCEPTICISM OF JEAN HARDOUIN

In spite of the ever greater reliability of information about the Copts assembled in the early eighteenth century the debate about the Eastern Christians was joined by a man who denied them any antiquity and saw them as part of a relatively recent conspiracy. This was the French Jesuit Jean Hardouin, a scholar whose edition of Pliny the Elder's *Historia naturalis* and whose work on numismatics, patristics, and chronology, as well as his immense history of the Church councils, earned him a high

⁴⁴ Benoît de Maillet, *Description de l'Égypte*, 64*.

⁴⁵ Ibid. 65*–66*.

⁴⁶ Ibid. 88*–90*.

reputation and a firm place in the Republic of Letters. In 1693, when he was 47, however, Hardouin first announced what was to become his most polemical theory, one that would elicit reactions throughout the world of learning. Almost the whole of Western culture, he said, with the exception of Virgil's *Georgics*, the *Satires* and *Epistles* of Horace, and the works of Cicero and Pliny, had been forged by a sinister group of men operating in the Middle Ages. The forgeries included not only the greater part of the classical literary tradition, but the writings of Fathers of the Church such as Augustine and of scholastics such as Thomas Aquinas and Thomas Bradwardine.⁴⁷ And they included most of the different forms of Eastern Christianity.

Eastern Christianity was incidental, rather than central, to Hardouin's interests, but the fact that he should have written a longer treatise on the Copts than on any of the other Eastern Churches, shows that, even if this work remained in manuscript, the Church of Alexandria had a considerable importance in his eyes. Hardouin's theory about the Copts is little more than a reflection of his more general theory, but it is also indicative of his method. The Copts, he maintained, had not so much as existed before the fourteenth century. There was no archaeological evidence for their presence—and this was the only evidence Hardouin was prepared to recognize—and visitors to Egypt, such as Sicard, had been unable to unearth any convincing inscription before this period. The manuscripts—he provided a list of those in the royal library in Paris—were all of a late date. The alphabet was manifestly composed of Greek letters, with occasional additions of Hebrew origin (such as the Coptic *shai*) and characters which had simply been made up. The characters taken from Egyptian hieroglyphs—*fai*, *chai*, *horeh*, *djandja*—were dismissed as 'ficta', inventions. Most of the Coptic words which did not have a Greek origin, he continued, were clearly derived from Hebrew roots, and he proceeded to provide a list of examples.

The course of events, according to Hardouin, had been perfectly obvious. The Egyptian once spoken by the Pharaohs had been entirely replaced by Greek under the Ptolomys. Greek had remained the language of Egypt until the Arab invasion, and had then been replaced by Arabic. There had been no Christians in Egypt before the Crusades, but about the fourteenth century the Melkites had arrived with their liturgy in Greek. These, at least, were true Christians who never

⁴⁷ Hardouin is discussed by Anthony Grafton, 'Jean Hardouin: The Antiquary as Pariah', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 62 (1999), 241–67.

practised circumcision. They were subsequently joined by the Copts, but the Melkites remained a majority. The Coptic habit of circumcision showed that they submitted themselves to the Muslims and lived in a state of servitude. Their name was derived not, as the forgers would have it, from the town of Qift, but from the Hebrew כָּפָה (*kafā*), meaning to 'turn aside'.

The Copts, who came from the West together with their fake language, were few, as the current number of inhabitants of their monasteries proved. They were led to believe that they should restore Christianity in Egypt, and thus elected their own patriarch (whom they thought was equal to the pope), and created their own hierarchy. This, of course, was entirely spurious, and there was consequently no point in trying to unite the Coptic Church with Rome. The only hope was to convert the Copts to Catholicism—a plan which, however difficult, might be accomplished thanks to the docility of their nature.⁴⁸

In arguing for the recent origin of the term 'Copt', Hardouin pointed out that it was not used before the sixteenth century. In order to document the pitifully recent state of the language, he quoted the passage by David Wilkins in the introduction to the Coptic New Testament, where Wilkins describes Sahidic, which he did not understand, as a semi-literate and agrammatical form of Bohairic. As for the doctrine of the so-called Monophysites, that, Hardouin argued, was in every way as bad as the teaching of the Jansenists and Malebranche. It was a form of atheism which denied the merits of Christ.⁴⁹

We may wonder how anybody could take Hardouin's theories seriously enough to bother to argue against them. Yet not only was Hardouin respected as a scholar but, even when expressing his most preposterous views, he marshalled some apparently convincing authorities. In the case of the Copts his sources included Sicard and the reputable Dutch scholar Isaac Vossius. His disquisition remained, as we saw, in manuscript, but he nevertheless expressed his belief that the Coptic language had nothing to do with ancient Egyptian and was concocted from Greek and Hebrew in his *Chronologia Veteris Testamenti*, which came out in 1700.⁵⁰ It was this passage that would provoke the reactions of Mathurin Veyssi re de La Croze.

⁴⁸ BNF MS latin 3647, pp. 343–4.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 345.

⁵⁰ Jean Hardouin, *Chronologia Veteris Testamenti ad Vulgatam versionem exacta, et nummis antiquis illustrata* (Paris, 1700), 34: 'Considerandum etiam amplius, an Coptica ipsa lingua, quae nec in usu uspiam terrarum est ab annis saltem, ut in confesso est,

Just over thirty years after the publication of Hardouin's *Chronologia* there was a pause in Catholic studies devoted to the Church of Alexandria. The second volume of *Oriens Christianus* by the Dominican Michel Le Quien, which came out posthumously in 1740, contained a long section on the patriarchate of Alexandria, and a list of all the patriarchs, both Melkite and Coptic, but otherwise systematic studies of the history and habits of the Copts had come to a provisional end in the Catholic world. The emphasis, as we shall see in the last part of this book, came to fall instead on the Coptic language and on the Coptic versions of the Bible.

amplius quingentis: nec in libris quidem existit, nisi recentioribus, et admodum dubiae vetustatis, ac foede corruptis; (quales sunt interpretationes Veteris Novique Testamenti ex Graeco in linguas peregrinas:) et habet praeterea voces plerasque omnes ex Graeco Hebraeoque deductas; deliberandum, inquam, an ficta in otio censenda sit. Nam Aegyptiacae veteris linguae, saltem pauca quidem, eaque certissima manent vestigia, in Hebraicis veteris Testamenti libris: in quibus et Josephi Patriarchae cognomen, et regum subinde nomina, et nomina deinde mensium in libro secundo Regum, Aegyptiaca sunt.'

Protestants and the Enlightenment

THE FALL OF WANSLEBEN AND THE RISE OF ABUDACNUS

However rich the Coptic holdings of the Bodleian Library at Oxford, they could not compete with the vast collections in Paris and Rome. Protestant Europe was at a disadvantage, and little is so indicative of the sorry state of Protestant research into the Copts as the success of the little work by Abudacnus published in 1675. For Abudacnus's *Historia Jacobitarum* came to be regarded as the direct testimony of a pious Copt who was intrinsically trustworthy. Few Protestants doubted Abudacnus's integrity—in this respect Johann Lorenz Mosheim was an exception when he deplored Abudacnus's habit of laying claim to professorships (namely at Oxford and at Louvain) which he had never held.¹ Abudacnus's book was generally considered far more reliable than Catholic reports based on hearsay, and certainly worthier of credit than anything produced by Wansleben. If Wansleben had had the duplicity to cheat his first patron, Ludolf, by his incompetent treatment of his Ethiopic dictionary, and if he had been capable of such treachery to his next patron, the duke of Saxe-Gotha, whose money he spent and whose trust he rewarded by converting to Catholicism, how could he possibly be seen as a reliable source when it came to describing the Copts?

Although Hiob Ludolf had at first continued to treat his younger disciple with forbearance after the publication of his Ethiopic dictionary and grammar in London, he turned against him irrevocably after his apostasy and his abandonment of his duke. And Ludolf was by no means alone in bewailing Wansleben's conversion. It soon became the subject of a correspondence between Robert Huntington, chaplain to the

¹ Johann Lorenz Mosheim, *Dissertationes ad historiam ecclesiasticam pertinentes*, ii (Altona and Flensburg 1743), 225–8.

merchants of the English Levant Company in Aleppo from 1670 to 1681, and John Covell, chaplain at the English embassy in Istanbul. It is evident from Covell's own journal and from what survives of their letters between the autumn of 1674 and the summer of 1675 that they regarded Wansleben either as a thoroughly foolish man or as a thoroughly mendacious one, from whom little good could be expected.

On 25 February 1674, in the presence of a number of Europeans in Izmir who included the English ambassador, Sir John Finch (whom Wansleben would accompany back to Istanbul), and the English consul, Paul Rycart, and then in March in the presence of Covell himself, Wansleben, with complete conviction, described seeing an enchanted crocodile, kept in a pond on the Muqattam heights dominating Cairo and guarding a great treasure which had belonged to the ruler 'Hashem Bey Amrillah', a celebrated magus. Only Copts or Muslims could pass the crocodile, and Wansleben assured his listeners that he had been taken in secret to the treasure by a Copt. He then went on to tell of a petrified orchard six days' ride west of Cairo, in the middle a stone statue that spat fire and smoke and guarded the fruit, which was made of solid gold, from intruders.²

These ludicrous tales were taken as a token of idiocy to which Huntington, a good-natured and tolerant Anglican who had as many Catholics as Protestants among his scholarly correspondents in Europe and the Middle East, referred derisively.³ But they also served to divest Wansleben of his scholarly credentials and authority. Nevertheless Huntington, who was a rival collector of manuscripts, followed Wansleben's progress with interest. Covell had mentioned Wansleben's extraordinary command of Arabic.⁴ 'I doubt not but Sigr Wanslebius has made great proficiency in these easterne dialects, enough to furnish other men with advantagious helpe', Huntington wrote to him in June 1675, but again recalled the absurd story about the crocodile.⁵

In the last years of the seventeenth century, after he had left the service of the dukes of Saxe-Gotha and had settled in Frankfurt, Ludolf, by then regarded as one of the very greatest orientalisists in Europe, rarely missed a chance of attacking Wansleben. In his *Commentarius* of 1691, a long commentary on his original history of Ethiopia, he heaped scorn on the passage on Peter Heyling published in *A Brief Account of the Rebellion*

² BL, Add. MS 22912, fo. 156^{r-v}.

³ BL, Add. MS 22910, fo. 79^r.

⁴ BL, Add. MS 22912, fo. 156^r.

⁵ BL, Add. MS 22910, fo. 99^r.

and Bloudshed occasioned by the Anti-Christian Practices of the Jesuits and other Papish Emissaries in the Empire of Ethiopia, an English pamphlet taken from 'a Manuscript History Written in Latin' by Wansleben, 'a Learned Papist'. Ludolf himself left an unfinished biography of Heyling at his death and regarded the claims attributed to Wansleben as implausible—the claim that Heyling had had himself circumcised to please the Copts, that he openly attacked the Ethiopian cult of the saints, that he taught the young Ethiopians Greek and Hebrew, and that he encouraged the ruler to prevent other Europeans from entering the country. He concluded that the report contained far more falsities than truths.⁶ In the following year Ludolf went still further. In a letter to the antiquarian Johannes Moller from Flensburg, he accused Wansleben of having misappropriated in London some of the Ethiopic manuscripts belonging to the Danish orientalist Theodor Petraeus.⁷ Petraeus, he told Moller, had to retrieve them by force.

Ludolf's most violent assault on Wansleben, however, was in the preface to the second edition of his Ethiopic lexicon, which came out in 1699. Here he expressed his resentment of Wansleben's interferences with the first edition and of his ignorance of Ethiopic, only too apparent in his appendix. He also added a footnote recounting Wansleben's conversion to Catholicism and his betrayal of Ernest the Pious and referring to the opportunistic differences in his two accounts of Egypt, the German one and the Italian one.⁸

The German Lutherans were not allowed to forget Wansleben's behaviour. In 1710 Christian Juncker published his hagiographical account of Ludolf's life and mentioned the 'multa inepta et mendosa' which Wansleben had introduced into the great scholar's lexicon.⁹ The greatest of the Lutheran church historians, Mosheim, scrupulously repeated the details of Wansleben's apostasy in his widely read *Institutiones historiae Christianae recentioris* of 1741, reminding his readers that the main reason for Wansleben's conversion was his reluctance to give

⁶ Hiob Ludolf, *Ad suam historiam Aethiopicam antehac editam commentarius* (Frankfurt am Main, 1691), 551–4, esp. 552.

⁷ Johannes Moller, *Cimbria Literata, sive Scriptorum Ducatus utriusque Slesvicensi et Holsatici, quibus et alii vicini quidam accensetur, historia literaria*, 3 vols. (Copenhagen, 1744), i. 491. But see also Alfred Rahlfs, 'Nissel und Petraeus, ihre äthiopischen Textausgaben und Typen', in *Nachrichten Kgl. Ges. d. Wiss., Göttingen, Phil.-hist. Klasse* 1917, Heft 2, pp. 268–348, esp. 301–2.

⁸ Hiob Ludolf, *Lexicon Aethiopico-Latinum* (2nd edn., Frankfurt am Main, 1699), sig. 90(4^r).

⁹ Christian Juncker, *Commentarius de vita, scriptisque ac meritis illustris viri Iobi Ludolfi* (Leipzig and Frankfurt am Main, 1710), 117.

the duke of Saxe-Gotha an honest account of how he had spent his money, and Wansleben was attacked in almost identical terms in the biographical dictionaries of the time, Zedler's *Universal-Lexicon* and Jöcher's *Allgemeines Gelehrten-Lexicon*.¹⁰ Such behaviour was in stark contrast to the courtesy and decency expected of a citizen of the invisible Republic of Letters.¹¹ Wansleben was also seen as the cause of a still greater ill. Owing to his treachery the Saxon libraries were entirely bereft of Coptic material, as the numismatist Christian Sigismund Liebe complained in 1723. Had he remained loyal the German collections might have vied with those of the South.¹²

How great was the difference with Abudacnus! Altogether unaware of his own apostasy and the opportunism he displayed during his journey through Europe, generations of German Lutherans were profoundly touched by the brief description of the man in the preface to the Oxford edition of his *Historia*, 'vir quidem parvus literatus, sed inculpatis moribus, et rerum in patria sua gestarum testis locuples'.¹³ Certainly not all Protestant orientalists were so impressed. Humphrey Prideaux, then a student of Christ Church, Oxford, wrote to John Ellis in 1675 describing Abudacnus's work as one of the 'pidleing things printeing here'.¹⁴ Yet the book soon went through a number of editions. A 'pirate' edition in a far smaller format (16°) than the first appeared in Amsterdam giving the same year of publication (and publisher) as the original, an indication that some commercial success was expected. In 1692 the work was translated from Latin into English by Sir Edwin Sadleir, a baronet from Temple Dinsley in Hertfordshire. Sadleir was no scholar, but he was intrigued by the word 'Jacobite', which reminded him of the Jacobites in contemporary England. In the

¹⁰ Johann Lorenz Mosheim, *Institutiones historiae Christianae recentioris* (Helmstedt, 1741), 539–40; *Grosses vollständiges Universal-Lexikon*, 64 vols. (Leipzig and Halle, 1732–50), lii (1747), col. 2002; Christian Gottlieb Jöcher, *Allgemeines Gelehrten-Lexicon*, 4 vols. (Leipzig, 1750–1), iv, cols. 1812–13.

¹¹ The behaviour expected of citizens of the Republic of Letters is discussed by Anne Goldgar, *Impolite Learning: Conduct and Community in the Republic of Letters 1680–1750* (New Haven and London, 1995), 174–218.

¹² Veyssière de La Croze, *Thesaurus epistolicus Lacrozianus*, i (Leipzig, 1742) 248: 'Monumenta nulla coptica in bibliotheca nostra reperiuntur. A Vanslebio, nostrate, illa comparari potuissent eique inferri, sed ingratus homo nunquam in patriam rediit, quod de ratione reddenda sibi nimis metueret.'

¹³ Abudacnus, *Historia Jacobitarum*, sig. a2^v.

¹⁴ F. Madan, *Oxford Books: A Bibliography of Printed Books Relating to the University and City of Oxford or Printed or Published There*, iii: *Oxford Literature 1651–1680* (Oxford, 1931), 309.

following year he had a second edition printed in which he corrected the mistakes in the first.¹⁵

From the late seventeenth century on, well after the publication of Wansleben's infinitely superior *Histoire de l'Église d'Alexandrie*, numerous Germans consulted Abudacnus as the main source for all knowledge of both the Copts and the Jacobites, and it may well have been Abudacnus's popularity in Protestant circles that led to his work being placed on the Roman Index of prohibited books in 1765.¹⁶ One of the first signs of Abudacnus's immense influence was a dissertation on the Jacobites by Johann Balthasar Jacobi, who had studied at Wittenberg before proceeding to Leipzig, where he defended his *Dissertatio historica de secta Jacobitarum* in 1685. At first Jacobi was prepared to be critical of Abudacnus, lamenting his attribution of the foundation of the Jacobites to Jacob the patriarch and stressing his lack of learning mentioned in the Oxford preface.¹⁷ When he came to the Jacobites' teaching on the sacraments and their attitude to the saints and images, however, Jacobi used Abudacnus as his main source. What is especially striking about his dissertation is his refusal to mention Wansleben. He quotes sixteenth-century German travellers such as Christoph Fürer von Haimendorff and Leonhard Rauwolff; he quotes Catholics such as Kircher, Lutherans such as Ludolf, Calvinists such as Hottinger, and Anglican compilers such as Brerewood and Ross; he quotes the authors of catalogues of heresies—Prateolus and Bernard of Luxemburg; and he even quotes Catholic missionaries such as Thomas a Jesu; but he carefully avoids so much as an allusion to what was by far the most reliable work on the Copts in print, Wansleben's *Histoire de l'Église d'Alexandrie*.

The next Lutheran scholar to take an interest in the work of Abudacnus was a man of far greater distinction than Jacobi—Johannes Nicolai, professor of classical studies at the university of Tübingen. At some time before his death in 1708 Nicolai started to compile his notes to Abudacnus's *Historia*, which he left unfinished and which would be published many years later in 1740. He in fact only covered twelve of Abudacnus's twenty-three chapters, but what he achieved gives a good idea of his aims and capacities. The notes testify to a vast erudition and contain interesting digressions—the mention of 'ascetica disciplina' in the preface to the Oxford edition of the work, for example, leads Nicolai

¹⁵ Hamilton, 'An Egyptian Traveller', 147–50.

¹⁶ J. M. De Bujanda (ed.), *Index des livres interdits*, xi: *Index librorum prohibitorum 1600–1966* (Montreal and Geneva, 2002) 49.

¹⁷ Johann Balthasar Jacobi, *Dissertatio historica de secta Jacobitarum* (Leipzig, 1685), 8.

to a disquisition on the history of the Sufis.¹⁸ Besides a more general interest in the early history of Alexandria which we might expect from a classical scholar, his purpose was to compare the Copts with the primitive Christians and to document those customs, ceremonies, and beliefs which reflected the origins of the Egyptian Church. This inevitably produced arguments against the Roman Catholic position, and above all against the Catholic interpretation of the Coptic sacraments.

Nicolai seems to have been aware of the terminological problems in defining the concept of the seven sacraments which, he pointed out, was anyhow a relatively late doctrine, first properly elaborated by Peter Lombard in the twelfth century. Although he was prepared to accept Abudacnus's statement that the Church of Alexandria shared the Roman (and Greek) belief in the seven sacraments, he observed that the Coptic treatment of some of them was very different from the Roman Catholic one.¹⁹ When it came to the doctrine of transubstantiation, Nicolai quoted Hiob Ludolf's statement that the Catholic idea of transubstantiation was unknown to the Ethiopians and expressed his doubts about the extent to which it was shared by the Copts.²⁰ Nor did he agree that the veneration of the eucharist practised by the Copts was any proof of a belief that the elements were actually transformed into the body and blood of Christ.²¹

Nicolai was even more doubtful about the equivalence between the Coptic and the Catholic significance of confirmation. The Copts, after all, confirmed their children immediately after baptism; confirmation was part of the same rite as baptism; it could be performed by a priest as well as by a bishop; and it should really be considered as a part of the same baptismal ceremony. This, too, Nicolai showed, was consonant with the primitive Church, whereas confirmation as an independent rite was only introduced by Pope Sylvester in the fourth century.²² Nicolai's last note is to Abudacnus's chapter on auricular confession, and here Nicolai could point out that, for the Church of Alexandria, auricular confession was by no means an essential part of the sacrament of penance as it was in the Church of Rome.²³

¹⁸ Josephus Abudacnus, *Historia Jacobitarum, seu Coptorum, cum annotationibus Joannis Nicolai*, ed. S. Havercamp (Leiden, 1740), 12–14.

¹⁹ Ibid. 157.

²⁰ Ibid. 136–7.

²¹ Ibid. 138.

²² Ibid. 179–85.

²³ Ibid. 186–7.

There is a clear preference in Nicolai's work for Protestant sources. John Selden's edition of Eutychius is quoted on the election of Coptic patriarchs and bishops. Hiob Ludolf is drawn on repeatedly, and there are references to the church historical studies of Basnage and Hottinger. The standard but derivative works of Brerewood and Ross are mentioned, but Nicolai also uses the work of Jean Morin on the Coptic liturgy and even has a good word for Athanasius Kircher, 'Jesuita fide digni', who admitted in his *Prodromus* that the Copts regarded the patriarch of Alexandria as the head of their Church rather than the pope.²⁴ Wansleben's *Histoire de l'Église d'Alexandrie*, on the other hand, is only mentioned on a single occasion (in connection with the eucharist being given to infants).²⁵ The neglect of Wansleben is all the more striking since Nicolai doubts Abudacnus's statement that the Copts only celebrated Prime, Terce, and None. The primitive Church, he pointed out, celebrated Terce, Sext, and None, so was it not likely that the Copts did so too?²⁶ Had Nicolai consulted Wansleben's study he would have found an exhaustive discussion of the canonical hours leading to entirely different conclusions. According to some, such as Abu 'l-Barakat ibn Kabar, says Wansleben, there was only an obligation to observe Vespers, Lauds, and Terce, whereas other authorities advise the observation of all seven canonical hours, Vespers, Matins, Lauds, Terce, Sext, None, and Compline.²⁷

Incomplete though his notes to Abudacnus are, the distinction of some of Nicolai's arguments is such that his work towers above later efforts to edit or use the brief *Historia Jacobitarum*. In 1733 Johann von Seelen, a Lutheran theologian, antiquarian, and Hebraist who was rector of the grammar school in Lübeck, produced a new edition of Abudacnus's *Historia* with a long introduction and notes, dedicated to the bibliophile Conrad von Uffenbach. His introduction is of bibliographical interest since it gives a survey of all the many scholars who mentioned Abudacnus, together with a list, albeit incomplete, of earlier studies on the Copts and the Jacobites, ending with Giuseppe Simonio Assemani. He then provides the text of Assemani's description of the life of Jacobus Baradaeus, published in the second volume of the *Bibliotheca orientalis*. Less learned than Nicolai, Seelen approached Abudacnus above all as an antiquarian. He clearly regarded the *Historia Jacobitarum*

²⁴ Ibid. 82.

²⁵ Ibid. 160.

²⁶ Ibid. 130.

²⁷ Wansleben, *Histoire*, 65–8. Wansleben's conclusions are confirmed by KHS-Burmester, *The Egyptian or Coptic Church*, 31–2, 96–107.

as a rarity and a bibliographical curiosity worth presenting to his patron. His brief explanatory notes made use of some of the more recent publications on the subject—of Ramshausen, Jacobi, Ludolf, Morin, Renaudot, Sollerius, and above all Assemani (whose anti-Protestant bias, however, he regretted),²⁸ but we are again struck by the reluctance to use Wansleben. Like Nicolai he only quotes him once, and then not even his *Histoire de l'Église d'Alexandrie* but his *Voyage en Égypte* as testimony of the persecution visited on the Copts by the Ottoman rulers of Egypt.²⁹

In 1740, seven years after the publication of Seelen's edition of Abudacnus, Sigebert Havercamp, professor of Greek, history, and rhetoric at the university of Leiden, republished Abudacnus's text together with Nicolai's notes and dedicated the edition to Albert Schultens, the Leiden professor of Arabic who all but dominated oriental studies in northern Europe. The appearance of this edition—the editor seems to have been unaware of the existence of Seelen's book and again insisted on the rarity of Abudacnus's text, 'known by few and possessed by still fewer'³⁰—prepared the way for the final apotheosis of the itinerant Copt, the *Abbildung der Jacobitischen oder Coptischen Kirche* by Karl Heinrich Trommler, published in Jena in 1749.

Trommler, a future Lutheran pastor, was 24 years old and would retain an interest in the Eastern Churches for the rest of his life. His *Abbildung* was preceded by a preface by the orientalist Johann Georg Walch, who set out by praising the young man's command of all the latest sources except for Sollerius and Le Quien. Walch, however, stressed the errors, the ignorance, and the superstition of the Eastern Christians, and most particularly of the Copts, so deeply attached to outer works, prescribed ceremonies, and above all to tradition, more important to them than their very lives. In fact they bore a striking—and regrettable—resemblance to the Roman Catholics, even if they caught occasional glimpses of the 'true Christian teaching'.³¹ Walch did, however, have words of commendation for Trommler's principal source, Abudacnus (in Havercamp's edition with Nicolai's notes).³²

²⁸ Josephus Abudacnus, *Historia Iacobitarum seu Coptorum*, ed. L. H. von Seelen (Lübeck, 1733), p. xxv.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, sig. D6^r.

³⁰ Abudacnus, *Historia Iacobitarum*, ed. Havercamp, sig. *4^r.

³¹ Karl Heinrich Trommler, *Abbildung der Jacobitischen oder Coptischen Kirche. Mit wahrhaften Urkunden erläutert und bewiesen, nebst einem kurtzen Anhang von der gesuchten Vereinigung der päpstlichen Kirche mit der Coptischen, und einer Vorrede Jo. Georg Walchs* (Jena 1749), sigs. a6^r–7^r.

³² *Ibid.*, sig. a3^r: 'Den Ausatz, den Joseph Abudacnus davon hinterlassen, hat er gantz; jedoch ein jedes Stück an seinen Ort eingerücket, weil demselben, da er selbst ein

Aware of the shortage of texts on the Copts, of the absence of reliable confessions of faith and the unreliability of reports by travellers and missionaries, Trommler turned to Abudacnus with unconfined admiration. He had, of course, used many other sources, even Athanasius Kircher, useful despite his 'credulousness' and 'the love of his own religion',³³ but nobody, Trommler believed, could compete with Abudacnus for honesty, integrity, and knowledge of his own Church.³⁴ It was thus almost entirely on Abudacnus that Trommler's book was based. Certainly he cited more recent authors—Renaudot, Sicard, Dubernat, the various Lutheran (and other) writers who had studied the Greek Church—and he was even prepared to mention Wansleben and to trust some of the things he wrote.³⁵ When it came to Wansleben, however, he reported the story of his dealings with Ludolf and his conversion to Catholicism. Although he derived the tale from Mosheim, Trommler made it slightly worse in Protestant eyes by claiming that the Jesuits, rather than the Dominicans, were responsible for his apostasy.³⁶

With Abudacnus as his main source Trommler in fact added little to the knowledge of the Copts. Yet his approach, his awareness of the dearth of sources and the general unreliability of those that existed, were commendable and his final pages were perceptive. They were on the prospects of a Coptic union with Rome which, he maintained, could only be achieved by massive compromises on the part of the pope and the forfeiture of any power or influence on the part of the patriarch of Alexandria.³⁷

Not every Lutheran scholar, however, joined what seems to have been a conspiracy of silence directed against Wansleben. One exception was Dietrich Reimbold from Hamburg, who would later become the pastor of Kirchwerder, close to his birthplace. Reimbold studied at the university of Leipzig together with Johann Dietrich Winckler (whose father, Johann Friedrich, had been a friend of Hiob Ludolf and was an orientalist of some

Copte gewesen und in seiner Erzählung ein aufrichtiges Gemüth zu erkennen gegeben, am meisten zu treuen ist...'.
³³ Ibid., sig. b2^r.

³⁴ Ibid., sigs. b3^v–4^r. Abudacnus is described as 'ein guter, ehrlicher und aufrichtiger Mann... Von so einem Mann, der den Zustand seiner Kirche, in der er erzogen und gebohren ist, kennet, kann man nicht so leichte Unwahrheiten erwarten. Wir müssen auf alle Blätter sehen, so leuchtet überall eine ungemeine Redlichkeit hervor, und wir vertrauen uns in seinem ganzen Aufsatz keine Ausnahme zu machen.'
³⁵ Ibid. 26.

³⁶ Ibid. 121–2.

³⁷ Ibid. 122–4.

distinction). In 1736, at the age of 23, Reimbold defended a dissertation on the Coptic sacraments of baptism and the eucharist (which he dedicated to Winckler and another student). On the face of it Reimbold's little thesis was a model of objectivity. He quoted all the relevant sources, from Nicephorus Callistus and the medieval *catalogi haereticorum* to Rodríguez and Athanasius Kircher, the Maronites Assemani and Naironus, and the standard recent Catholic scholars such as Dubernat, Sollerius, Renaudot, Richard Simon, and Le Quien, and he gave as much space to Wansleben as he did to Abudacnus. But while his detailed accounts of the Coptic celebration of the two sacraments were admirably documented, his use of his sources was sometimes dangerously tendentious.

Reimbold justified his decision to concentrate on baptism and the eucharist by saying that there was so much disagreement among experts as to how many sacraments the Copts actually observed, and which they were, that he had selected the only two about which there was no doubt whatsoever. Yet the reduction of the Coptic sacraments to the two they shared with the Protestant Churches would not have escaped any of his readers. It was a clear echo of the earlier suggestions about the proximity between the Church of Alexandria and the non-Catholic Churches of the West. At the same time Reimbold was unscrupulous in misquoting authors who did indeed state that the Copts observed the seven sacraments of the Church of Rome. He seized on any statement implying that the Copts had a less than orthodox approach, such as the conferment of confirmation immediately after baptism and the somewhat lax attitude to penance, in order to suggest that they did not exist as sacraments. His tendency to distort his sources is especially evident in a footnote about transubstantiation. He here writes that Wansleben denied that the Copts believed in it and stated that they always held that the bread was bread and the wine wine. But in fact Wansleben devotes a long passage to support the claim that the Copts did indeed believe in transubstantiation, even if he later added that they did not identify the bread with Christ's body and the wine with his blood *before* the consecration.³⁸

The lack of progress made in the Lutheran world in expanding knowledge of the Copts is all the more striking if we compare it with the quite remarkable progress made by northern European Protestants in the study of the Coptic language and the editing of Coptic biblical texts. Such progress depended to a large extent on the ability of Lutheran

³⁸ Reimbold, *De Coptorum Sacramentis*, 25. Cf. Wansleben, *Histoire de l'Église d'Alexandrie*, 123–9 (on the Coptic belief in transubstantiation) and 131–3 for the passage referred to by Reimbold.

scholars to consult Catholic libraries in France or, better still, in Italy. Of this they were perfectly aware. In 1730 Paul Ernst Jablonski wrote to Veyssière de La Croze of the incalculable benefits to be derived from six months in Rome,³⁹ and many years later, in 1767, Trommler, in one of the very first bibliographies of Coptic material, referred to the extraordinary collections in the Roman libraries.⁴⁰

The pitifully short supply of manuscripts in northern Europe, particularly of Coptic-Arabic manuscripts concerning the history of the Egyptian Church, is borne out by three brief publications printed in Leipzig in 1758 by Johann Friedrich Rehkopf. Rehkopf had been a pupil of Johann Jakob Reiske, one of the very greatest Arabists of the eighteenth century. And it was thanks to Reiske that he could copy out part of the text of a manuscript which Reiske had received from the friend of Veyssière de La Croze and professor of Arabic at Leipzig, Johann Christian Clodius, who, in his turn, had transcribed it from a manuscript belonging to Conrad von Uffenbach. The original text was the history of the patriarchs of Alexandria by Severus ibn al-Muqaffa', the very same work on which Renaudot had based his *Historia Patriarcharum*. Although Rehkopf knew Renaudot's work (and claimed that Clodius did so too), he did not believe that the existence of the French edition in any way invalidated his own efforts. In the first two of his little pamphlets, *Vitae Patriarcharum Alexandrinorum quinque. Specimen primum* and *Vitae Patriarcharum Alexandrinorum quinque. Specimen secundum*, he reproduced the Arabic text, accompanied by a Latin translation and notes which were largely concerned with the Arabic terminology, but in the third, *Animadversiones historico criticae ad vitas Patriarcharum Alexandrinorum saeculi primi et secundi. Specimen tertium*, which he presented as a thesis together with Johann Jakob Ebert, Rehkopf returned to the debate inaugurated over a century earlier by John Selden about the early Christian hierarchy. Against Renaudot, and above all against the attack on Selden by Ecchellensis, Rehkopf and Ebert argued not only that the term 'patriarch' did not come into use until the late fourth, if not the fifth, century, but that, in the early years of the Church of Alexandria, no distinction was made between bishops and presbyters.⁴¹ Based on the transcription of a transcription of a single

³⁹ La Croze, *Thesaurus epistolicus*, i. 189.

⁴⁰ Trommler, *Bibliothecae Copto-Iacobiticae specimen*, 21.

⁴¹ Johann Friedrich Rehkopf and Johann Jakob Ebert, *Animadversiones historico criticae ad vitas Patriarcharum Alexandrinorum saeculi primi et secundi. Specimen tertium* (Leipzig, 1758), pp. xxix–xxxiii.

original manuscript, Rehkopf's works testify on the one hand to the continuing interest in the Church of Alexandria in the Lutheran world, but on the other to the practical obstacles impeding any advance.

PROTESTANT AMBIVALENCE

From a Protestant point of view a Church that turned out to have so much in common with Rome as the Church of Alexandria was obviously less attractive than it might first have appeared to be. Certainly the refusal to recognize papal supremacy remained a feature which Protestants continued to praise. Yet the view spread that the Copts were deeply hostile to all Europeans, a fact which Richard Pococke attributed partly to the contemporary missionaries and partly to the persecution visited on the Monophysites by the Chalcedonian emperors.⁴² Those Protestant travellers in Egypt prepared to regard the Copts with sympathy were in a minority. One exception was the English merchant Edward Brown, who was in Egypt in 1673 and 1674. Brown felt sorry for the Copts, 'among the most dejected and distressed Nations in the Universe', regarded as infidels by the Turks and heretics by the Roman Catholics, and despised for their poverty by the West. He, however, found that they had considerable qualities. Not only did 'they have very just Notions of the Causes and Consequences of Christ's Coming', but the monks were most charitable in helping the Arabs in the desert. 'They are', he observed, 'wonderfully sincere in all their Acts of Devotion', and Europeans who were prepared to abandon their prejudices 'cannot but receive much Edification from the Purity of their Lives, and the Humility of their Deportment'. He was impressed, moreover, by their work, 'industrious Mechanics, laborious Peasants, or Stewards to Turkish Lords, who make Choice of them for their remarkable Fidelity'.⁴³

In the course of the seventeenth century the distaste with which most Protestants regarded the Copts was fuelled by the statements of a man, Cyril Lucaris, widely considered the spokesman of the one Eastern Church the Protestants continued to admire, the Church of Constantinople. Protestants travelled to the Ottoman Empire in order to enquire into it, and a growing number of itinerant Greeks were welcomed in Protestant Europe. We find them in Germany and Holland;

⁴² Pococke, *A Description of the East*, i. 177, 244.

⁴³ Edward Brown, *Travels and Adventures* (London, 1739), 320–3.

Greek students were invited to the English universities; and in 1677 a Greek church was founded in London.⁴⁴ The Calvinist or Reformed Church initially took less interest than the Lutherans and Anglicans in Churches whose hierarchy and observance of the sacraments were uncomfortably reminiscent of Catholicism, yet all the Protestants were alarmed at the Catholic advances among the Eastern Christians and most particularly by the foundation of the Uniate Orthodox Church at the synod of Brest-Litovsk in Poland in 1595.

The apparent danger of a large part of the Greek Orthodox community submitting to the papacy aroused protests among the Greeks and led to a young Greek priest, Cyril Lucaris, being sent to Poland as the deputy of the patriarch of Constantinople. In 1601, Lucaris was appointed to succeed his cousin as Melkite patriarch of Alexandria, and it was in Alexandria, and in Cairo where he moved the seat of the patriarchate, that Lucaris had his experience of the Copts.

During his visits to Istanbul Lucaris sealed his friendship with the ambassador of the States General of the Netherlands, Cornelis Haga, and started to correspond with the Dutch theologian Jan Uytenbogaert, about to become one of the main representatives of the more moderate Calvinist school associated with Jacobus Arminius. Thanks to his friendship with the Dutch, but also thanks to his strong aversion to Catholicism, Lucaris became increasingly attracted by Calvinism and wrote sympathetic letters to Uytenbogaert, and other acquaintances in Holland, in which he implied that there was a profound agreement between the Greeks and the Reformed Church. In 1618 he also began to correspond with George Abbot, the archbishop of Canterbury. Two years later he became patriarch of Constantinople and head of the Greek Church.

Lucaris's career as patriarch of Constantinople was far from smooth; he was repeatedly deposed, and reinstalled, but he was well on the way to becoming an undisputed Protestant hero, particularly after his confession of faith, mainly the work of a Huguenot from Savoy, Antoine Léger, was published in Geneva in 1629. In 1635 he was again deposed only to be re-elected patriarch two years later. In 1638, however, he was charged with treason and executed on the sultan's orders.

For the Protestants Lucaris became something of a myth, with the attributes of sanctity and martyrdom. The content of his letters to his

⁴⁴ For a survey of Protestant relations with the Church of Constantinople see Runciman, *The Great Church in Captivity*, 238–319.

Protestant friends, as well as his confession of faith, were presented as normative of Greek Orthodox beliefs, and his claim that his Church did not believe in transubstantiation was advanced during the great eucharistic controversy as decisive proof. The Catholics had little difficulty in showing that Lucaris's views were far from being widely shared in the Greek Church, but his statements remained influential among Protestant readers and these included comments on the Copts which were of quite exceptional ferocity. It was above all in a letter he wrote to Uytenbogaert in the autumn of 1613 that he covered the Church of Alexandria with ridicule, expressing the scorn that might well be expected of a representative of Greek Orthodoxy when describing a Church to which it had been traditionally hostile and whose presence in the East it regarded as a constant threat.

There were four main heretical sects in the Levant, Lucaris told Uytenbogaert, the Armenians, the Copts, the Maronites, and the Jacobites, their doctrines 'deformed', their customs and ceremonies hardly differing from those of beasts, blinded by errors, ignorance, and superstition. Any direct contact with them fully confirmed the Greek prejudices. In his capacity as Greek patriarch of Alexandria Lucaris had to receive the Coptic patriarch. The patriarch, he said, would call on him in the company of his acolytes and refuse to open his mouth—'quoties venit, mutus venit, mutus abiit'. His followers would speak for him and the patriarch would nod or shake his head. Lucaris, lively and talkative by nature, accustomed to the society of voluble intellectuals, found such behaviour insufferable. It was yet another indication of Coptic barbarity—one of the many plagues, he wrote, which he had to put up with in Egypt.⁴⁵

Although he was prejudiced and poorly informed about Coptic teaching, Lucaris was regarded as a direct witness of the other Eastern Churches in the Protestant world. His words were consequently taken seriously. His letter to Uytenbogaert was quoted in the preface to the 1675 Oxford edition of Abudacnus's *Historia Jacobitarum*, and his correspondence was reprinted in 1708 by the Huguenot pastor Jean Aymon in one of the replies to the Jansenist *Perpétuité de la foy catholique*. Such a description was hardly designed to endear the Monophysite Churches to Protestants.

⁴⁵ J. Aymon, *Monumens authentiques de la religion des Grecs, et de la fausseté de plusieurs confessions de foi des chrétiens orientaux* (The Hague, 1708), 154–9.

THE PURITY OF THE EARLY CHURCH

Despite so many hostile testimonies about the Egyptian Church a movement was afoot which encouraged a positive interest in the Churches of the East independent of Rome and Constantinople—for example, in the Nestorians, as well as in the early heresies of the Christian Church, such as Arianism. This movement owed much to the feeling that the religious disputes of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, which had produced hostility, persecution, and even war, had—or at least should have—run their course, and that the time had come for scholars to unite in the quest for an early form of Christianity untainted by dogmatic developments. The orthodoxy which emerged from the early Church councils appeared increasingly dubious in the light of research based on the statements of the participants and contemporary theologians. The brutal condemnations of Nestorianism and monophysitism seemed to have been dictated more by politics than by faith, and the so-called heresies appeared to rest on an inability to agree about a simple formula, and to conceal a type of faith more rational than that fostered by the ruling Church. Doubts accumulated about the doctrine of the Trinity and many of the doubters, attracted by the teaching of Lelio and Fausto Sozzini and their disciples, were drawn to Arianism and its insistence on the exclusively human nature of Christ. In England these would include men such as Isaac Newton, William Whiston, Samuel Clarke, and John Locke, convinced that elements alien to the original Christian teaching had been introduced in the fourth century and that those Christians accused at the time of Arianism had refused to accept them.⁴⁶ Opposition to the doctrine of the Trinity, moreover, seen as a relatively late elucubration which had no justification in Scripture, was sometimes attended by attacks on one of the most revered theologians of the Church of Alexandria, Athanasius. William Whiston's interest in the early Church had led him to study Armenian and, together with his sons William and George (who was supposed to have compiled a Coptic dictionary),⁴⁷ he would correspond with La Croze about Coptic. Yet for the Church of the Copts he had nothing but contempt, and attributed the current doctrine of the Trinity to outright

⁴⁶ Maurice Wiles, *Archetypal Heresy: Arianism through the Centuries* (Oxford, 1996), 77–134.

⁴⁷ Trommler, *Bibliothecae Copto-Iacobiticae specimen*, 34, 40, 44.

forgeries by Athanasius.⁴⁸ Conyers Middleton, writing in the 1740s, extended his attacks on Athanasius to the monks who supported him.⁴⁹ However cautious the so-called Anti-Trinitarians were in propounding them, some of their ideas met with wide consent in the Republic of Letters.

Such was the climate in which Mathurin Veyssière de La Croze came to play a major part in the study of Coptic and the Copts. La Croze, from Nantes, had joined the Benedictine Order, and in 1693 had entered the monastery of Saint-Germain-des-Prés in Paris, which belonged to the reformed Benedictines known as Maurists. With one of the finest libraries in France, Saint-Germain had become a centre of scholarship. Its distinguished representatives included the antiquarian Jean Mabillon and, more important still for Coptic studies, Bernard de Montfaucon, the editor of the works of Athanasius and the author of *L'Antiquité expliquée et représentée en figures*, the supplement to which, published in 1724, contained a study of the representations of the Egyptian deities unearthed in Rome and some important observations about Coptic and its relationship with the language of the early Egyptians.⁵⁰ La Croze too was supposed to contribute to the intellectual activities of the abbey. He had been selected to succeed Jacques Dufriche in completing the edition of the works of Gregory Nazianzen, and was also appointed librarian.

The library of Saint-Germain was rich in oriental manuscripts, and La Croze formed part of a circle of scholars such as Louis Dufour de Longuerue, Louis Picques, and the Huguenot Jean Gagnier, who were all engaged in the study of Eastern languages. La Croze also participated in the sense of disquiet caused by the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 and the obligation for all Huguenots who chose to remain in France to convert to Catholicism. Like many French scholars, he read Protestant works with interest, particularly those by one of the victims of the revocation of the edict, Pierre Jurieu. He developed an increasingly critical attitude to the religious policy of his country, aggravated by the conflict between the Jansenists and the Jesuits. One sign of his sentiments was his decision to translate a tract against transubstantiation by the Anglican divine Edward Stillingfleet.⁵¹

⁴⁸ James E. Force, *William Whiston, Honest Newtonian* (Cambridge, 1985) 16, 108–9; Wiles, *Archetypal Heresy*, 93–110.

⁴⁹ Discussed by David Womersley, *Gibbon and the 'Watchmen of the Holy City': The Historian and his Reputation, 1776–1815* (Oxford, 2002), 119–26.

⁵⁰ Montfaucon is discussed in Erik Iversen, *The Myth of Egypt and its Hieroglyphs in European Tradition* (Princeton, 1961), 100–1.

⁵¹ C. E. Jordan, *Histoire de la vie et des ouvrages de Mr La Croze* (Amsterdam, 1741), 12.

The discovery by his superiors that he was working on Stillingfleet and his resentment at the increasingly strict rule of the prior of Saint-Germain were among the considerations that induced La Croze to escape. Possibly with the help of the Danish embassy in Paris and with the encouragement of Ezechiel Spanheim, the learned antiquarian who had led the embassy of Brandenburg to France and who had a strong interest in numismatics and oriental languages, he left Paris in disguise in May 1696 and made his way to Basle. There he abjured Catholicism and became a member of the Reformed Church. From Basle he went to Berlin, the 'Refuge' or haven of Protestant refugees from France, where the Calvinist electors of Brandenburg, the Hohenzollerns, ruled over an almost entirely Lutheran population and where La Croze would always refuse to convert to Lutheranism. Thanks to Spanheim, La Croze was appointed royal librarian.⁵²

La Croze was to occupy a pivotal position in the Republic of Letters, corresponding with scholars throughout Europe, and it was partly owing to his immense reputation that Berlin, the capital of the new Kingdom of Prussia after Frederick III's coronation as Frederick I early in 1701, became a centre of Eastern Christian and Coptic studies. La Croze, now a determined enemy of Roman Catholicism and a defender of religious toleration, was ever more intrigued by the Churches of the East, as he searched for an unsullied reflection of the early Church.⁵³ Joining in the debate about transubstantiation—he was vociferous in his support of Hiob Ludolf against the objections of Renaudot—he repeatedly affirmed that the Eastern Churches denied it, even if he conceded that the teaching probably originated in Egypt as a result of the Monophysite schism.⁵⁴ His own preference among the Churches of the East was for the Nestorians. His first important study of Eastern Christianity, the *Histoire du christianisme des Indes*, which appeared in 1724 and was based on the reports by the Lutheran missionaries dispatched to the Danish possession on the Malabar coast, Trankebar, was on the Malabar Christians, whose age-old isolation not only from Rome but also from the Greeks and the Monophysite Churches of Antioch and Alexandria had allowed them to retain a pure doctrine close to that of the Protestants and in contrast to what the Roman missionaries were

⁵² Martin Mulsow, *Die drei Ringe: Toleranz und clandestine Gelehrsamkeit bei Mathurin Veyssière La Croze (1661–1739)* (Tübingen, 2001), 10–35.

⁵³ M. Veyssière de La Croze, *Histoire du christianisme d'Ethiopie et d'Armenie* (The Hague, 1739), 363.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 365.

endeavouring to foist on them.⁵⁵ He came to the conclusion that the great disputes which had disrupted the Christian Church in the past were no more than arguments about words.⁵⁶

In his *Histoire du christianisme d'Ethiopie et d'Armenie* of 1739 (which was much indebted to Geddes's *Church-History of Ethiopia*) La Croze condemned the dogma of the Incarnation, born, he said, 'of the ambition of prelates and personal hatreds'.⁵⁷ This, he continued, had brought about both the Nestorian and the Monophysite schisms. Dismissing the scepticism of Hardouin, who denied any historical value to the early councils, he held that the Council of Chalcedon was in fact a series of near misses and was certainly no reason for continuing to vilify Churches which might well have been readmitted to the main Christian fold had chance not been against them.⁵⁸ The message of the Gospel, he concluded, was simple—he quoted John 17: 3 ('And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent')—and the only obstacle to the union of the Churches was dogma.⁵⁹ He deplored the efforts of the Roman Catholic missionaries but, aware of the impossibility of transmitting Western concepts to the Eastern Christians,⁶⁰ he found some consolation in the prospect of their failure.

When it came to judging the Monophysites, however, La Croze displayed the ambivalence which characterized the Protestant approach. He had been shocked by Hardouin's refusal to accept the antiquity of the Coptic language and took him to task in his attack of 1708.⁶¹ But this did not mean an unconditional admiration for the Church of Alexandria. La Croze's sympathy for Nestorius in fact precluded such a thing. In his *Histoire du christianisme d'Ethiopie et d'Armenie* he reconstructed the events surrounding the Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon, and the Monophysites emerge as the villains. He claimed that the texts

⁵⁵ M. Veyssière de la Croze, *Histoire du christianisme des Indes* (The Hague, 1724), sig. *4^{r-v}. The work is studied by Sylvia Murr, 'Indianisme et militantisme protestant: Veyssière de La Croze et son *Histoire du Christianisme des Indes*', *Dix-Huitième Siècle*, 18 (1986), 303–23.

⁵⁶ La Croze, *Histoire du christianisme d'Ethiopie et d'Armenie*, 2–3: 'J'ai fait voir assez évidemment, que les chicanes nées à cette occasion n'étoient fondées que sur des disputes de mots, fomentées par des haines personnelles, et par l'Ambition des Auteurs de ces disputations.'

⁵⁷ Ibid. 2.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 32.

⁵⁹ Ibid. 391–2.

⁶⁰ Jablonski, *Exercitatio*, 383.

⁶¹ Mathurin Veyssière de La Croze, *Vindiciae veterum scriptorum contra J. Harduinum S.J.P.* (Rotterdam, 1708), 85–6. Cf. Also La Croze's letter to the chronologist Alphonse Des Vignoles, in La Croze, *Thesaurus epistolicus*, iii. 233–5.

on which the Monophysite position was based were largely forgeries, made by Synesius, the bishop of Ptolemais, a close friend of the patriarch of Alexandria Theophilus and also the author of the works ascribed to Dionysius the Areopagite. Theophilus thus knew about (and approved) the forgeries. Cyril of Alexandria, whom La Croze believed to be particularly mischievous and largely responsible for the unjust condemnation of Nestorius, also cited works that were manifestly spurious and which he attributed to Athanasius, but his main slogan, 'a single nature conceived as the incarnation of the divine Word', was in fact taken from the highly heretical Apollinarius. The whole plan, La Croze concluded, savoured of premeditated malice.⁶²

The condemnation of Nestorius, therefore, was a ploy by the Alexandrians. Denying the qualities traditionally attributed to Cyril of Alexandria, but admitting that the Syrian Monophysites had indeed produced certain great thinkers such as Bar Hebraeus, La Croze in fact made little distinction between the Monophysites and the other Churches whose dogmatic insistence had led to intolerance and schisms. Rather than trying to introduce peace and union, the Monophysites had concentrated on fasting, a practice which only served to increase their fanaticism.⁶³

La Croze's most devoted disciple was Paul Ernst Jablonski, also a Calvinist, who was appointed court preacher in Berlin. The son of Daniel Ernst Jablonski, who had started out as a Unitarian before he too converted to Calvinism and was appointed court preacher in Berlin, Paul Ernst learnt Coptic from La Croze and, between 1717 and 1720, travelled in Europe, inspecting Coptic manuscripts in England and France and visiting Holland. On his return he was appointed professor of philology in Frankfurt an der Oder, and, despite the attacks to which his defence of Nestorianism exposed him,⁶⁴ in 1727 professor of theology. In 1741 he relinquished his career as a preacher and, elected to the Berlin academy, concentrated on his studies. Like La Croze Jablonski, interested in Eastern Christianity, chose to focus on Nestorianism.

⁶² La Croze, *Histoire du christianisme d'Ethiopie et d'Armenie*, 25: 'Je ne puis me dispenser d'y reconnoître un dessein formé, et une malice cachée.'

⁶³ Ibid. 64–5.

⁶⁴ The attacks from fellow Protestants such as O. G. Hoffmann, Paul Berger, and Johannes Wesselius are discussed (and the replies published) by Jablonski's editor, the Leiden professor of church history Jona Willem te Water, in the posthumous Paul Ernst Jablonski, *Opuscula, quibus lingua et antiquitas Aegyptiorum, difficilia librorum sacrorum loca, et historiae ecclesiasticae capita illustrantur*, iv (Leiden, 1813), pp. v–xxiv.

He set out to prove that the views of the man condemned at Ephesus were in fact perfectly orthodox, Nestorius having accepted the idea of hypostatic union but refusing to use the term.⁶⁵ The lesson to be learnt from his condemnation, Jablonski concluded, was the danger of human erudition: vanity, hypocrisy, and ambition.⁶⁶

For La Croze and Jablonski the Church of Alexandria was ultimately too close to the Churches of Rome and Constantinople. The Christianity it represented had been corrupted, and both scholars searched for the pure roots of Christian belief in Churches further afield. Nevertheless, as biblical scholars, linguists with an interest in the origins of language, and Egyptologists endeavouring to establish an etymology for the names of the Egyptian deities, they were passionate, as we shall see, in studying the Coptic language.

ENLIGHTENED ANTICLERICALISM

As the eighteenth century progressed the flow of European travellers to Egypt increased. Nearly all of them, like the diplomatic residents, had something to say about the Copts. Their attitude was by no means always sympathetic. If there was a general agreement with Paul Lucas, who visited Egypt in 1714, that the Copts alone were indigenous to the country,⁶⁷ there was also a widespread feeling that they had degenerated and were, as the zoologist Charles Sonnini de Manoncourt put it over seventy years later, 'cette descendance dégénérée des anciens Égyptiens'.⁶⁸

The growing interest in Coptic monuments was usually accompanied by an indignation over the decrepit state to which they had been reduced. In Wadi al-Natrun Sicard was astonished by the sight of over fifty monasteries nearly all in ruins. He found that Dayr Maqar and Dayr Anba Bishoi were almost deserted, each containing no more than four inmates, even if Dayr al-Suryan ('the finest of the four') and Dayr al-Baramus seemed more prosperous, housing between twelve and fifteen.⁶⁹ Although he witnessed the revival of the monastery of St Paul,

⁶⁵ Paul Ernst Jablonski, *Exercitatio historico-theologica de Nestorianismo, et illa imprimis Nestorianorum phrasi, qua humanam Christi naturam, templum divinitatis vocare solebant* (Berlin, 1724), 97–8 Cf. Mulsow, *Die drei Ringe*, 54.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 98.

⁶⁷ Paul Lucas, *Troisième Voyage... fait en M.DCCXIV...* (Rome, 1719), 226.

⁶⁸ C. S. Sonnini, *Voyage dans la haute et basse Égypte* (Paris, 1799), i. 268.

⁶⁹ Sicard, *Oeuvres*, ii. 13.

which had been deserted since the late fifteenth century, he was repelled by the new wall paintings in the ancient chapel, 'sacred stories coarsely painted'.⁷⁰ He was informed that the artist (possibly the future Coptic patriarch John XVII, who was indeed in the monastery at the time) had never learnt to paint—a fact, Sicard added, which was all too obvious from his work.

Sicard's descriptions of Egypt would stand future travellers in good stead, as we see in the case of Claude Tourtehot from Dijon, who wrote under the name of Claude Granger. Originally a naval surgeon and later a zoologist and botanist, he was dispatched to explore Egypt in 1730 by the secretary of state at the Admiralty, Jean-Frédéric Phélypeaux, Comte de Maurepas, and his cousin Jean-Paul Bignon, the royal librarian.⁷¹ In the course of his expedition Granger made a systematic visit of the Coptic monasteries. Before doing so, however, he and his companion, the French consul Pierre-Jean Pignon, had consulted the writings of Sicard, and Granger's descriptions would include sizeable, and unacknowledged, excerpts from them.⁷² Granger, however, was even more shocked by what he found. He described the White Monastery as the 'least ugly' he had seen in Upper Egypt after St Anthony and St Paul,⁷³ but the customs of the inmates appalled him. Most of the monks at St Anthony's were engaged in some kind of magical practice.⁷⁴ To the monks at St Paul's he took a strong dislike.⁷⁵ At Dayr Abu Hinnis, formerly visited by Wansleben, he found three old monks who could 'hardly talk'.⁷⁶ He was not impressed by the monasteries at Wadi al-Natrun. Dayr al-Baramus, he said, was not worth mentioning; he found the monks at Dayr Maqar poor, ignorant, and ill lodged; and he was particularly annoyed by their refusal, and that of the inmates of Dayr al-Suryan, to allow him into their library or to sell any of their manuscripts.⁷⁷

⁷⁰ Ibid. i. 41.

⁷¹ Alain Riottot, 'Claude Granger: Voyageur-naturaliste (1730–1737)' (Thèse d'état, Université de Paris 7, 2002), 25, 41.

⁷² See Maurice Martin, 'Granger est-il le rédacteur de son voyage en Égypte?', *Annales islamologiques*, 19 (1983), 53–8; id., 'Sicard et Granger (suite et fin)', *ibid.* 22 (1986), 175–80.

⁷³ Claude Granger, *Relation du voyage fait en Égypte, par le Sieur Granger, en l'année 1730. Où l'on voit ce qu'il y a de plus remarquable, particulièrement sur l'histoire naturelle* (Paris, 1745), 93.

⁷⁴ Ibid. 106–15.

⁷⁵ Ibid. 117–20.

⁷⁶ Ibid. 128–9.

⁷⁷ Ibid. 179–80.

Protestant travellers too were recording their visits of Coptic sites and came to similar conclusions. Although he was saddened by the state of decay of Dayr Maqar and Dayr al-Baramus in the Wadi al-Natrun, Robert Huntington, in Egypt in 1679 and 1681, was impressed by what he found in the libraries,⁷⁸ but Richard Pococke's final judgement of the Copts was manifestly more hostile:⁷⁹

The Copts, of all the Easterns, seem to be the most irreverent and careless in their devotions. The night before sundays and festivals, they spend in their churches, and the holy days in sauntering about, and sitting under their walls in winter, and under shady trees in summer. They seem to think that their whole religion consists in repeating their long services, tho' without the least devotion, and in strictly observing their numerous fasts... They are all exceedingly ignorant, both priests and people...⁸⁰

The doctor Charles Perry, in Egypt in the early 1740s and following in the footsteps of Wansleben and Sicard, was hardly better pleased. His interest in the Copts does indeed seem to have increased as he travelled south. In Cairo he dismissed 'some antient Coptic Churches, which we don't think worth our Pains to describe',⁸¹ but he was impressed by the White Monastery. He commented on the stones taken from Egyptian temples, and seems to have been the first traveller to draw attention to its immense collection of manuscripts which would change the face of Coptic studies when they were brought over to Europe.⁸² 'We yet found in it', he wrote, 'many Manuscripts, wrote on Parchment, in the old Coptic Character.'⁸³ He admitted that 'the Copts are the natural hereditary Christians of the Country, as the Coptic Language is its natural hereditary Language, and the Copts the original People of it, deriving and naming themselves from Copt, their antient King. But, alas! the Number, Power and Figure of the Copts, at this day, are very small'.⁸⁴

Praise of the Copts and their monuments was, at best, qualified. The hostility of someone like Claude Granger, a scientist protected by men suspected of being freethinkers, may already be seen as a result of the

⁷⁸ Robert Huntington, *Epistolae*, ed. Thomas Smith (London, 1704), 61–74, esp. 68–70.

⁷⁹ Pococke, *A Description of the East*, i. 70, 78–9.

⁸⁰ Ibid. 176.

⁸¹ Perry, *A View of the Levant*, 230.

⁸² This was pointed out by W. E. Crum, *Catalogue of the Coptic Manuscripts in the British Museum* (London, 1905), p. ix.

⁸³ Perry, *A View of the Levant*, 370.

⁸⁴ Ibid. 239.

Enlightenment, and the influence of the movement, attended by an ever more sympathetic approach to Islam, would become increasingly evident in the course of the eighteenth century. Even Claude-Étienne Savary, so enthusiastic about Egypt after his three-year stay from 1776 to 1779, had reservations about the Copts. He bewailed the misery and ignorance of the monks and claimed that their teaching had been corrupted by monophysitism (which he confused with monothelitism).⁸⁵ One day, no doubt, he concluded, the Copts, whose language and whose customs were so similar to those of the ancient Egyptians, would help Europeans decipher the hieroglyphs,⁸⁶ but for the time being they were a far cry from their forefathers. Constantin-François de Volney was in Egypt in 1783 and his *Voyage en Syrie et en Égypte pendant les années 1783, 1784 et 1785*, which appeared in 1787, was found particularly useful by the organizers of Napoleon's Egyptian campaign. He had little liking for the Copts, whose barbarity and ignorance stood in such contrast to the culture of the ancient Egyptians.⁸⁷ Nevertheless, like Savary, Volney credited the Copts with a very considerable administrative ability, and his remarks on this point would be kept in mind by the French authorities.⁸⁸

One of the best expressions of the ideas of the Enlightenment applied to the Copts is in the work of the historian Edward Gibbon. The first volume of his *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* appeared in 1776, and the next two in 1781. The last three came out in 1788, and included Gibbon's celebrated section on Islam in which, despite his reservations about fanaticism, he presented the Prophet Muhammad and his followers in a remarkably positive light. With the publication of his first volume Gibbon's attitude to Christianity, whose rise he attributed to human causes, had earned him the enmity of the custodians of Anglican orthodoxy. He was strongly suspected of Deism and worse. In his subsequent volumes he was more cautious, and was particularly moderate in his account of the great theologians of the Church of Alexandria, Athanasius and Cyril. Athanasius was presented as an effective opponent of Roman absolutism,⁸⁹ and Cyril, however unprepossessing and

⁸⁵ Claude-Étienne Savary, *Lettres sur l'Égypte*, 3 vols. (2nd edn., Paris, 1786), ii. 58. Cf. iii. 21.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* iii. 19.

⁸⁷ Constantin-François de Volney, *Voyage en Syrie et en Égypte pendant les années 1783, 1784 et 1785* (Paris 1787), i. 76: 'Quel sujet de méditation, de voir la barbarie et l'ignorance actuelles des Coptes, issues de l'alliance du génie profond des Égyptiens et de l'esprit brillant des Grecs...'.
⁸⁸ *Ibid.* 73.

⁸⁹ Womersley, *Gibbon and the 'Watchmen of the Holy City'*, 134.

fanatical, and whose alleged involvement in the murder of the pagan philosopher Hypatia 'has imprinted an indelible stain on [his] character and religion',⁹⁰ was given credit for his powers of organization. When he came to discussing the later followers of the two great patriarchs, however, Gibbon, with little to fear from his orthodox critics, abandoned his moderation and courtesy and gave full vent to his anticlericalism.

Using the term 'Jacobite' to embrace the Monophysites as a whole, Gibbon wrote that their sect appeared 'to sink below the level of their Nestorian brethren. The superstition of the Jacobites is more abject, their fasts more rigid, their intestine divisions are more numerous, and their doctors (as far as I can measure the degrees of nonsense) are more remote from the precincts of reason.'⁹¹ 'I shall step over the interval of eleven centuries', he later added,

to observe the present misery of the Jacobites of Egypt. The populous city of Cairo affords a residence, or rather a shelter, for their indigent patriarch and a remnant of ten bishops; forty monasteries have survived the inroads of the Arabs; and the progress of servitude and apostacy has reduced the Coptic nation to the despicable number of twenty-five or thirty thousand families; a race of illiterate beggars, whose only consolation is derived from the superior wretchedness of the Greek patriarch and his diminutive congregation.⁹²

For his information about the Monophysites Gibbon drew principally on the work of Giuseppe Simonio Assemani, for whom he had high praise. 'Though a dependent of Rome', he wrote, 'he wishes to be moderate and candid.'⁹³ He was more critical of his other main source, 'the Abbé Renaudot's motley work, neither a translation nor an original', and he dismissed Abudacnus's little history as 'slight'.⁹⁴

Between 1777 and 1780, while Gibbon was still writing his history, Charles Sonnini de Manoncourt was in Egypt with the progressive views of a Western scientist. An ardent advocate of female circumcision, which he justified by claiming that Egyptian women had an excrescence on their clitoris that had to be removed, he even insisted on attending the operation.⁹⁵ So it was not the custom of circumcision that he held against the Copts: it was, rather, their laziness, ignorance, cunning, cupidity, and dishonesty, typical of priestcraft whether Eastern or Western, so different

⁹⁰ Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ii. 946.

⁹¹ Ibid. 989.

⁹² Ibid. 996–7.

⁹³ Ibid. 979.

⁹⁴ Ibid. 997.

⁹⁵ Sonnini, *Voyage dans la haute et basse Égypte*, ii. 33–40.

from the decency and inherent nobility of the Muslim Beduin.⁹⁶ Sonnini visited Dayr al-Baramus in the Wadi al-Natrun and was appalled by how he was treated and what he saw. He was particularly irked by the monks' refusal to sell any of their manuscripts, all the more inexplicable, he wrote (echoing Claude Granger thirty years earlier), since they never read anything and left their codices lying on the ground to be eaten by insects and ruined by dust.⁹⁷ A visit to Dayr al-Suryan confirmed his disgust, so he refused to enter Dayr Anba Bishoi despite the insistence of the monks.⁹⁸ He regarded it as his duty to warn his compatriots about the perfidiousness of Coptic monkery and the danger it presented to European travellers.⁹⁹ Such was the ambivalent attitude to the Church of Alexandria which would accompany Napoleon's Egyptian campaign, and which was hardly revised in the course of the nineteenth century.

⁹⁶ Ibid. ii. 204. Sonnini's views on the Western clergy emerge from his comments on the Franciscan missionaries, iii. 136–7, whom he describes as 'ces moines Italiens, de l'un des ordres que la fainéantise et l'ignorance caractérisent, et dont la règle la mieux observée est de nager dans l'abondance aux dépens d'autrui...'.
⁹⁷ Ibid. ii. 188.

⁹⁸ Ibid. 214–15.

⁹⁹ Ibid. 206.

PART IV

THE COPTIC LANGUAGE

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Athanasius Kircher and his Shadow

DISCOVERY

Coptic occupied an unusual, not to say unique, position among the various Eastern languages that were discovered, or revived, in the West in the early modern period. The normal pattern emerged with the study of Greek in the late fifteenth century: a native speaker of the language would come to Europe and provide instruction. This is what happened in the case of Ethiopic and Syriac, and the native speakers were priests who had been lured to Rome after the Council of Florence. Where Syriac and Ethiopic are concerned, moreover, the fact that they belonged to a discernible Semitic group and that a number of European theologians had some grounding in Hebrew made their study all the easier. Coptic was a very different matter. It belonged to no linguistic group with which Western scholars were familiar. Worse still, there was nobody who could truly be regarded as a native speaker. The language, as we saw, had started to die out in Egypt in the twelfth century, and was never truly revived. By the sixteenth century only few monks would have been able to read it, in order to copy manuscripts and to understand certain parts of the liturgy, but none of these monks seems to have travelled and there is no evidence of their ever having instructed a Western scholar. Coptic, therefore, was an obsolete language, yet it had one feature which made it oddly, and misleadingly, familiar: its use of the Greek alphabet and the presence of a large number of Greek words. It was obvious to associate it with Greek, and this nearly all early students of the language did.

Only very gradually did one of the main difficulties associated with Coptic become clear. This was the existence of different dialects, according to the period and the area. Although Coptic can now be divided into some ten dialects and subdialects,¹ for many years European

¹ The number is still a matter of debate. See Rudolphe Kasser, 'Dialects, Grouping and Major Groups of', *CE* viii. 97–101.

scholars only knew one of them—Bohairic, known in the West in the early modern period as Memphitic. Spoken and written originally in Lower Egypt, in the Western Nile Delta and the area around Alexandria, it was the last and most widely used of the various forms of Coptic and was adopted as the official language of the Coptic Church in the eleventh century.² The Coptic manuscripts which first made their way to Europe were consequently nearly all in Bohairic. Yet there was what long appeared to be an earlier form of Coptic, Sahidic (known in the West as Thebaidic), which was spoken in Upper Egypt, and which had become the standard dialect by the ninth century.³ Manuscripts in Sahidic, however, were initially of some rarity. Giovanni Battista Raimondi did indeed possess a Sahidic dictionary and grammar by al-Samannudi, acquired in Egypt by Girolamo Vecchietti in 1594,⁴ but it was only in the late seventeenth century that a more substantial number entered European libraries and that a very few perceptive scholars realized their linguistic importance. Rarer still were literary attestations of Fayyumic (or Bashmuric), the dialect spoken in the oasis south-west of Cairo until about the eleventh century.⁵

The European discovery of Coptic occurred comparatively late.⁶ Half a dozen Coptic manuscripts—probably the gift of the delegates to the Council of Florence—seem to have entered the papal library by the mid-fifteenth century, and cataloguers at the Vatican, both at the time and under Julius II in the first decade of the sixteenth century, identified Coptic as the language of the Egyptians.⁷ These cataloguers may well have been the versatile convert from Judaism Flavius Mithridates (who taught Hebrew to Pico della Mirandola) in the late fifteenth century, and, in the early sixteenth century, the poet Fabio Vigile.⁸ Before 1600 sporadic attempts were also made to present the Coptic alphabet and to analyse the language; there was, as we have seen, an interest in Coptic liturgy in the circle of Joseph Justus Scaliger in Leiden; and Scaliger himself was curious about Coptic in connection with his work on chronology. But there was nothing resembling the intensive study of Coptic which we encounter after the mid-seventeenth century.

² Ariel Shisha-Halevy, 'Bohairic', *CE* viii. 53–60.

³ Shisha-Halevy, 'Sahidic', *ibid.* 194–202.

⁴ MS Vat. Copt. 75. See *CCV* i. 550–2.

⁵ Rudolphe Kasser, 'Fayyumic', *CE* viii. 124–31.

⁶ For a survey see Sydney H. Aufrère, 'Chronologie de la redécouverte de la langue copte en Europe', in Bosson and Aufrère, *Égyptes... L'Égyptien et le copte*, 121–9.

⁷ *CCV*, i, pp. xi–xiii, 221.

⁸ Emmel, 'Coptic Studies before Kircher', 8–9.

The Coptic alphabet was reproduced in a woodcut form, with the characters correctly defined, in Bernhard von Breydenbach's account of the pilgrimage to Jerusalem printed in 1486.⁹ Breydenbach had probably learnt the alphabet from inmates of the Coptic convent in Jerusalem, but he called it the Jacobite alphabet and added it to his description of the Jacobites (whom he located, as we saw, in Nubia, Ethiopia, and an area extending as far as India, but not in Egypt). He never mentioned the Copts.

The first two European scholars of distinction to take a deeper interest in Coptic in the sixteenth century were remarkable linguists. One, Teseo Ambrogio degli Albonesi, a priest from Pavia, has rightly gone down in history as the founder of Syriac studies in the West. The other was his friend Guillaume Postel, a Frenchman of amazing versatility who twice visited the Levant and formed an important collection of manuscripts. In 1538 he was appointed a reader at the Collège Royal in Paris, and two years later he published the first Arabic grammar of any value to appear in Europe. Postel's interest in Coptic seems to date from his journey to the Levant in 1535 in the train of the first French ambassador to the sultan, Jean de la Forest. The ambassador and his attendants stopped in Egypt on their way to Istanbul, but Postel actually claimed to have received his information on the Coptic alphabet from a delegate in the Ottoman capital.¹⁰ At about the same time, however, Teseo Ambrogio too received a couple of versions of the Coptic alphabet and, in the summer of 1537, transmitted them to Postel. The two men both had the same accurate knowledge of the Coptic letters and their names and phonetic value, but very different ideas about where the alphabet was actually used.

In 1538 Postel published his *Linguarum duodecim characteribus differentium alphabetum, introductio*. One of the alphabets included was Coptic. Postel, however, never used the term. He described the alphabet as 'Georgian or Jacobite' ('Georgiana, Iacobitanave'), and, with the fanciful claim that it was still used by the Georgians, placed it in a vague monophysite area extending from Egypt to Central Asia.¹¹ In the

⁹ Bernhard von Breydenbach, *Sanctarum peregrinationum in montem Syon ad ven. Christi sepulchrum in Hierusalem atque in montem Synai opusculum* (Mainz, 1486), sig. b7^r.

¹⁰ Guillaume Postel, *Linguarum duodecim characteribus differentium alphabetum, introductio, ac legendi modus longe facilimus* (Paris, 1538), sig. G3^v: 'Horum characteres ab legato suo apud Turcham Constantinopoli habui . . .'. For a discussion of the work see Hartmut Bobzin, *Der Koran im Zeitalter der Reformation: Studien zur Frühgeschichte der Arabistik in Europa* (Beirut, 1995), 404–23.

¹¹ Postel, *Linguarum duodecim*, sig. G^v.

following year, 1539, Teseo Ambrogio referred to Coptic by name in his *Introductio in Chaldaicam linguam, Syriacam, atque Armenicam, et decem alias linguas*. First he described the Coptic vowels, and then the consonants, and, at the end, reproduced his letter to Postel containing two almost identical versions of the alphabet.¹² In contrast to Postel he referred to ‘the Jacobites, and Copts’ (‘Iacobitae, et Cophtitae’), who ‘inhabit the Egyptian area’, but he also reproduced two other ‘Egyptian’ alphabets which had nothing to do with Coptic.¹³

The next scholar to tackle the language did not do nearly as well. This was Pierre-Victor Palma Cayet, notorious for his confessional shifts. Converted from Catholicism to Protestantism by the philosopher Petrus Ramus, he was later employed at the court of Navarre and reverted to Catholicism with the new king, Henri IV, joining the priesthood in 1599 at the age of 75. Henri IV, who seems to have shared Calvin’s low opinion of him, nevertheless rewarded his services with a chair in oriental languages. In 1596, the year after his return to Catholicism, he published his *Paradigmata de quatuor linguis orientalibus*, which was mainly on Arabic, Armenian, Syriac, and Ethiopic, but which also contains, at the beginning, woodcut verses in Persian and Turkish.

Towards the end of the book Palma Cayet overreached himself with the claim that he knew Coptic. He had managed to obtain a Coptic version of a verse (1: 17) from the first Epistle to Timothy, ‘Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.’ He reproduced in woodcut the Coptic original, and accompanied it with a transcription. He then proceeded first to translate it and then to extrapolate the rules of Coptic grammar. It was already evident from his transcription, however, that, in contrast to Postel and Teseo Ambrogio, he did not even know the Coptic alphabet. He was unable to transcribe any of the letters derived from the hieroglyphs or to separate any of the words correctly. He transcribed the *horeh* ⲭ (pronounced *h*) as a *z*, and the *shai* ⲱ (pronounced *sh*) as an *m*. This made nonsense of the text. He then attempted to derive the various Coptic words from Hebrew or Greek. This led to a series of further errors—he thought that Coptic ⲧⲁⲓⲟ (*taio*), meaning ‘honour’, meant ‘god’ because of its similarity to *θεός* (*theos*), and that ⲉⲛⲉⲛⲧ (*eneh*), ‘for ever’ (which he transcribed as *enezn*, mistakenly joining to it the first

¹² Teseo Ambrogio degli Albonesi, *Introductio in Chaldaicam linguam, Syriacam, atque Armenicam, et decem alias linguas* (Pavia, 1539), fos. 11^v, 48^v–51^r, 193^v–194^r.

¹³ *Ibid.*, fo. 205^r.

letter of the next word) was derived from the Hebrew נשא (*nsa*) and meant 'his glory'. When it came to grammar he announced that the Coptic ⲓ (*iauda* or *i*) was a prefix of negation, whereas in fact in this case it is the second letter of the Bohairic definite article.¹⁴

By the time Palma Cayet tackled Coptic, travellers in Egypt had already commented on the alphabet. The Italian diplomat Filippo Pigafetta, for example, who was in Egypt in 1576 and 1577, attributed to it thirty-four characters (three more than it should have) and claimed that it was derived from the 'Chaldeans', in whose language the Copts celebrated mass.¹⁵ Pigafetta thereby added yet another significance to a term which had been applied to Ethiopic by the German scholar Johannes Potken in the Psalter he published in 1513, but which, by the middle of the sixteenth century, was applied more usually, and more correctly, to Aramaic. Pigafetta was imitated by Giovanni Botero in his *Relationi universali* of 1595.¹⁶ In 1598 Scaliger, with customary discernment, had identified Coptic as the language of the ancient Egyptians (as well as correctly deriving the term from the Greek for Egyptian) and as entirely different from any other oriental language.¹⁷ In his posthumous *Enquiries touching the diversity of Languages and Religions, through the chiefe parts of the World*, however, Edward Brereton still seems to have been unaware that the Copts had a language of their own, and assumed their liturgy was in Syriac.¹⁸

EARLY APPROACHES

In 1614 Pietro Della Valle, a rich young Roman patrician, set out on a voyage which would last for twelve years, some seven of which he would

¹⁴ Pierre-Victor Palma Cayet, *Paradigmata de quatuor linguis orientalibus* (Paris, 1596), 177–83.

¹⁵ Filippo Pigafetta, *Viaggio da Creta in Egitto ed al Sinai 1576–1577*, ed. Alvise da Schio (Vicenza, 1984), 84.

¹⁶ Botero, *Relationi universali*, 161: 'Dicono la Messa in lingua Caldea. leggono l'Evangelio prima in Caldeo, e poi in Arabico.'

¹⁷ Joseph Justus Scaliger, *De emendatione temporum* (Leiden, 1598), 661–2: 'Putavimus aliquando nomen KVPTI aut KOPTI ab urbe Copto deductum: sed perperam. Nam decurtatum est ex ultima parte vocis ΑΙΓΥΠΤΟΣ. GUPTI igitur pro Aegyptiis dicti . . . Utuntur autem illi Christiani vetustissima Aegyptiaca lingua in sacris, qua tres liturgias conscriptas penes nos habemus, Gregorii, Cyrilli, & Ignatii, cum interpretatione Arabica. Nihil habet commune cum reliquis Orientalibus ille sermo, praeter characteres, quorum maxima pars Graeci sunt.'

¹⁸ Brerewood, *Enquiries*, 195.

spend in Persia and almost two exploring India. Allegedly driven from Rome in 1609 by a disappointment in love, he spent five years in Naples where, in the society of the merchant diplomat Giovanni Battista Vecchietti, of the botanist Fabio Colonna, and above all of his friend the physician Mario Schipano, he planned his journey. Attracted by the challenges it posed, hoping to acquire fame in the East, he was to learn Turkish and Persian, acquire an all but unprecedented knowledge of the areas he visited, and, thanks to the manuscripts he collected and the letters he wrote, make a name for himself in the West. Yet, although Della Valle had an immense curiosity in a variety of domains, he had had relatively little education—his Latin was adequate, but his Greek was poor—and he was no scholar in the generally accepted sense of the term.¹⁹

Between November 1615 and March 1616 Della Valle was in Egypt. On 25 January 1616 he wrote a long letter to Schipano from Cairo. Although he was right about the derivation of the term ‘Copt’, he was apparently unaware of the existence of Coptic manuscripts in the Vatican library or of the work by Postel, Teseo Ambrogio, and Palma Cayet. He thus expressed his excitement at having discovered a language ‘in a script the characters of which, both in shape and in name, are all Greek except for eight . . .’.²⁰ Struck by the common alphabet and the number of Greek words so prominent in Coptic texts, he concluded that, however different the two languages, either the Copts had derived their script from the Greeks, or the Greeks theirs from the Copts.²¹ There were, however, certain features of Coptic which made him incline towards the second theory. When it came to writing numerals and applying a numerical value to the letters of the alphabet, for example, he was puzzled to note that the Greeks used what he thought was a *sigma* combined with a *tau* for the number 6, whereas the Copts had a letter of their own which they called *so*. *So*, or rather **COOY** (*soou*) means *six* in Coptic, but in fact the Greek letter was the obsolete digamma, as was the Coptic character, even if it looked slightly different.²² Della Valle concluded that the Greeks had too few letters in their alphabet, and that an original one was missing which was only to be found in Coptic. He had also discovered a mummy on which he found an inscription in

¹⁹ Peter G. Bietenholz, *Pietro Della Valle (1586–1652): Studien zur Geschichte der Orientkenntnis und des Orientbildes im Abendlande* (Basle and Stuttgart, 1962), 57–67. Bietenholz refers (p. 66) to ‘seine beneidenswerte Vielseitigkeit und liebenswürdige Oberflächlichkeit’.

²⁰ Pietro della Valle, *Viaggi di Pietro della Valle il pellegrino* (Rome, 1650), 391.

²¹ Ibid. 392.

²² W. E. Crum, *A Coptic Dictionary* (Oxford, 1939), 65.

Coptic characters as well as an inscription in hieroglyphs. This proved to him that the Coptic alphabet was just as old as the hieroglyphs. Finally, the statement, first made by Herodotus and repeated by Diodorus Siculus, that the ancient Egyptians had two scripts, a popular one and a sacred one, led him to conclude that the hieroglyphs were the sacred script and Coptic (rather than demotic) the popular one. Although Della Valle's letter was not to be published until 1650, we shall see that Athanasius Kircher, who evidently read it well before publication and who quoted substantial excerpts from it in the third volume of his *Oedipus Aegyptiacus* of 1654, would adopt a number of Della Valle's ideas.

During his brief stay in Egypt Della Valle collected four Coptic manuscripts: a Psalter, St John's Gospel, and two codices containing lexical and grammatical works dating from the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. They would become part of the Vatican library in 1718. The actual text of the Coptic grammars was in Arabic and the dictionaries were Coptic–Arabic. The works were by distinguished representatives of the most glorious phase of Coptic scholarship and culture in the Middle Ages. In the larger and more important of the two codices, Vat. Copt. 71, the first of the grammars was compiled by Yuhanna al-Samannudi, who played a significant part in the administration of his Church after his consecration as bishop of Samannud in 1235. The second was by Ibn Katib Qaysar, a respected author, as we saw, of important commentaries on the New Testament. The third was by one of the Awlad al-ʿAssal, brothers from a rich and influential family of Coptic bureaucrats—al-Asʿad Abu al-Farag Hibtallah Ibn al-ʿAssal, who was also known as a jurist and chronologist. The author of the fourth grammar was al-Wagih Yuhanna al-Qalyubi, close to the al-ʿAssal brothers and likewise the compiler of New Testament commentaries, homilies, and a work on jurisprudence, and the fifth was by al-Tiqa ibn al-Duhayri.

One of the dictionaries was by al-Muʿtaman Abu Ishaq Ibrahim ibn al-ʿAssal, the youngest, and the most versatile and productive, of the al-ʿAssal brothers, and the other by Shams al-Riyasa Abu ʿl-Barakat ibn Kabar. Famous above all for his immense theological encyclopaedia, his Coptic–Arabic dictionary, known as the *Scala magna*, was hailed at the time as the best in existence.²³ In Della Valle's second manuscript, Vat. Copt. 72, we have al-Samannudi's Bohairic grammar and dictionary (mainly of biblical terms), and part of the grammar by Abu ʿl-Barakat ibn Kabar.

²³ On these scholars see *GCAL* ii. 371–87, 403–14, 438–45.

On his return to Rome in March 1626 Della Valle publicized his acquisitions and looked for a scholar who might edit the texts. He also set into motion what was to be something of a typographical revolution. He had Coptic characters cast which would first be used by the printing house of the Propaganda Fide in their *Alphabetum Copticum* of 1630, and later in the works of Athanasius Kircher.²⁴ Della Valle's first choice as editor of his Coptic grammars and dictionaries was the Franciscan Tommaso Obicini. Having spent almost ten years in the Middle East—mainly in Aleppo, but also in Jerusalem—Obicini was a competent Arabist, and he set to work on Della Valle's manuscripts, adding an Italian and a Latin translation to the Coptic and Arabic. He died, however, in November 1632, having got no further than the first grammatical section. This is unfortunate since the surviving manuscript shows him to be a meticulous and accurate translator, whose knowledge of Arabic, at least, was far superior to that of Kircher.²⁵

In the meantime other of Della Valle's acquaintances and scholarly correspondents had become interested in his Coptic material. In France, by 1628, Jean Morin, who was particularly intrigued by the Samaritan Pentateuch Della Valle had brought back and who would edit it in the Paris Polyglot Bible in 1645, had stimulated the interest of Nicolas Fabri de Peiresc, the antiquarian living in Aix-en-Provence. Peiresc was interested in languages. If, as the discovery of the Samaritan Pentateuch had shown, there still existed Samaritan-speaking communities, there might well have been areas which still contained some residue of Egyptian—and Peiresc had long been curious about Egyptian because of the inscriptions on the magical gems from late Antiquity which he had collected. In 1629 he was already trying to obtain Coptic material from Della Valle and started to assemble a team of scholars who would be able to edit and translate it. The first was the orientalist Samuel Petit in Nîmes. Another was his friend the philologist Claude Saumaise in

²⁴ Rijk Smitskamp, *Philologia Orientalis: A Description of Books Illustrating the Study and Printing of Oriental Languages in 16th- and 17th-Century Europe* (Leiden, 1992), 172. Cf. also the survey of Coptic typography by Geoffrey Roper and John Tait, 'Coptic Typography: A Brief Sketch', in Eva Hanebutt-Benz, Dagmar Glass, and Geoffrey Roper (eds.), *Sprachen des Nahen Ostens und die Druckrevolution: Eine interkulturelle Begegnung* (Westhofen, 2002), 117–21, esp. 118.

²⁵ The manuscript was published by A. van Lantschoot, *Un précurseur d'Athanasius Kircher: Thomas Obicini et la Scala Vat. Copte 71* (Louvain, 1948). On Obicini's life see Giovanni-Claudio Bottini, OFM, 'Tommaso Obicini (1548–1632), Custos of the Holy Land and Orientalist', in Anthony O'Mahony et al. (eds.), *The Christian Heritage in the Holy Land* (London, 1995), 97–101.

Leiden, who had himself started to study Coptic on the basis of a manuscript brought back from the East by François-Auguste de Thou.²⁶ And by May 1632 Peiresc had heard about yet another possible recruit, a German Jesuit, Athanasius Kircher from Geisa near Fulda.²⁷ To the disappointment of Saumaise Peiresc informed Della Valle about him and said he would be the best man to take over Obicini's task.

ATHANASIUS KIRCHER

Born in 1602, educated at the Jesuit colleges of Paderborn and Fulda, Kircher, who himself joined the Society of Jesus in 1618, had to flee before the Protestant advance attending the Thirty Years War in 1622 and sought refuge in Cologne.²⁸ In 1623 he was teaching Greek in Koblenz, and in 1625 Hebrew, Syriac, and mathematics in Heiligenstadt. He then went to Mainz, was ordained in 1628, and, hoping to become a missionary, continued his studies in Speyer. There, in the Jesuit library, he saw a copy of the *Thesaurus hieroglyphicorum* published by the German antiquarian and chancellor of Bavaria Johann Georg Herwart von Hohenburg in 1610.²⁹ This was the beginning of an interest in hieroglyphs and in Egypt which he would retain until his death.³⁰ From Speyer Kircher went to Würzburg and was created professor of moral philosophy, Hebrew, Syriac, and mathematics at the Jesuit college in 1630. Two years later he fled again from the Protestant forces and proceeded to Avignon, to teach mathematics and oriental languages at the Jesuit college. By then he had acquired a reputation not

²⁶ In a letter to Saumaise dated 14 Nov. 1633 Peiresc explains his interest in Coptic and his early dealings with Kircher. Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc, *Lettres à Claude Saumaise et à son entourage (1620–1637)*, ed. Agnès Bresson (Florence, 1992), 227–39.

²⁷ Cf. Agnès Bresson, 'Peiresc et les études coptes: Prolégomènes au déchiffrement des hiéroglyphes', *XVIIe siècle*, 158 (1988), 41–50.

²⁸ Kircher's life and personality are surveyed by John Fletcher, 'Athanasius Kircher: A Man under Pressure', in id., *Athanasius Kircher und seine Beziehungen zum gelehrten Europa seiner Zeit* (Wiesbaden, 1988), 1–15, and, above all, by Paula Findlen, 'The Last Man who Knew Everything . . . or Did He?: Athanasius Kircher, S.J. (1602–80) and his World', in ead. (ed.), *Athanasius Kircher: The Last Man who Knew Everything* (London, 2004), 1–48.

²⁹ Caterina Marrone, *I geroglifici fantastici di Athanasius Kircher* (Viterbo, 2002), 39.

³⁰ Daniel Stolzenberg, 'Kircher's Egypt', in id. (ed.), *The Great Art of Knowing: The Baroque Encyclopedia of Athanasius Kircher* (Fiesole, 2001), 115–25.

only as a linguist, but also as a scientist who had invented a sunflower clock (which, it was believed, might confirm the heliocentric theories of Galileo Galilei), and as the possessor of a mysterious manuscript attributed to the Babylonian rabbi Barachias Nephi, which might hold the key to ancient Egyptian.

Peiresc was particularly intrigued by Kircher. He attended his demonstration of the sunflower clock in Avignon, and urged him to visit him. Kircher arrived in May 1633 and spent a few days with Peiresc, but without the Barachias manuscript.³¹ He then left, promising to return with it. He came back on 3 September 1633, and it seems to have been then that Peiresc started to have doubts about him. The sunflower clock, he concluded, was in fact a magnet, and he was most suspicious of the Barachias manuscript.

Kircher left Provence for Rome, not even bothering to take with him the letters Peiresc had prepared for him to the pope's nephew, Cardinal Francesco Barberini, his secretary Cassiano del Pozzo, and Della Valle. Nevertheless, Peiresc, who still thought Kircher had his uses, forwarded the letters separately, and Kircher agreed to Della Valle's proposal that he translate and edit his Coptic codices.

Kircher was soon famed for his many talents. He was given a chair of mathematics at the Collegio Romano in 1638 and taught the subject for eight years. He published on a huge variety of domains including music, medicine, history, astronomy, mechanics and physics, vulcanology, mineralogy, magnetism, alchemy, and cabbalism. In 1651 he set up his *Wunderkammer* in the Collegio Romano, a remarkable collection of scientific instruments, curios, and antiquities from all over the world which would draw learned and aristocratic visitors from the whole of Europe.³² He taught the rules of perspective to Nicolas Poussin and the principles of catoptrics to Diego Velázquez. His inventions and discoveries have gathered praise over the centuries. His 'Laterna Magica' has been seen as a precursor of the modern slide projector and his 'Organum Mathematicum' as the precursor of the computer, and he has been acclaimed as the first scholar to examine blood under a microscope,

³¹ Peter N. Miller, 'Copts and Scholars: Athanasius Kircher in Peiresc's Republic of Letters', in Findlen (ed.), *Athanasius Kircher*, 133–48. Cf. also Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc, *Lettres de Peiresc aux frères Dupuy*, ed. Philippe Tamizey de Larroque, 7 vols. (Paris, 1889–98), ii. 488–9, 521, 528–9.

³² Paula Findlen, 'Un incontro con Kircher a Roma', in Eugenio Lo Sardo (ed.), *Athanasius Kircher: Il museo del mondo* (Rome, 2001), 39–47; ead., 'Science, History, and Erudition: Athanasius Kircher's Museum at the Collegio Romano', in Stolzenberg (ed.), *The Great Art of Knowing*, 17–26.

the author of the first printed chart of the main oceanic currents, and the author of one of the first maps of the moon.³³ But Kircher was particularly proud of his capacities as a linguist. When a Coptic priest visited Rome he met Kircher, took him as his confessor, and, astonished at the fluency of his Arabic, asked him where he had learnt it. Kircher simply replied that he knew twenty-four other languages, and one of these was Coptic.³⁴ Besides the European languages they included Hebrew, Syriac, Aramaic, Samaritan, Ethiopic, and Armenian, which he would quote extensively in his works, and he had an enduring interest in Chinese and other languages of the Far East.³⁵

Kircher's work on Coptic was unquestionably connected with his piety and his desire to serve the missionary movement, as we see from one of the letters he wrote to the Propaganda Fide in about 1640. He hoped, he said, to show that the Church of Alexandria, despite the schism at Chalcedon, had always shared the traditional rites and the approach to the Bible of Rome, and that such a demonstration would bring the Copts into union.³⁶ But Kircher's work on Coptic was linked above all to his far broader concerns. His early interest in Egyptology was largely due to his desire to uncover the mysteries contained in the so-called 'arcana' or 'prisca theologia', the single religion, of remote antiquity, from which he believed that all other monotheistic faiths were descended, and which had in fact been an adumbration of Christianity, and in the pristine philosophy which had inspired Plato and Pythagoras.³⁷ Kircher thought that one of the main propagators of this early faith, Hermes Trismegistus, had written in the language of the

³³ Rita Haub, 'Preface' to Wiktor Gramatowski, SJ and Marian Rebernik, *Epistolae Kircherianae: Index Alphabeticus. Index Geographicus* (Rome, 2001), p. xiv.

³⁴ APUG MS 559, fo. 175^r. The letter is undated but is bound together with correspondence from 1669 and 1670.

³⁵ Aldo Mastroianni, 'Kircher e l'Oriente nel Museo del Collegio Romano', in Lo Sardo (ed.), *Athanasius Kircher*, 65–75.

³⁶ APUG MS 561, fo. 62^r: 'Et di più chiarita l'antica conformità della chiesa christiana nel Egitto, quale di questa lingua si usasse nello scrivere, l'un e l'altro testamento, li quattro primi Concilii, et infinite altre historie, e riti appartenenti alla Santa Sede, che non solo sono efficacissimi argomenti a contenere l'heresie di questi tempi, ma ancora a ridurre all'unione della Chiesa Romana li stessi Cophti o Alessandrini, essendo che la Chiesa d'Egitto benche altrimenti da mille et ducenti anni in qua sotto diversi patriarchi d'Alessandria per diversi schismi si sia separata dalla detta Chiesa Romana, non mai però si è discostata nei sacri riti ne tampoco nell'intendere e ricevere i libri sacri...'. Kircher's piety is emphasized by P. Marestaing, 'Un égyptologue du xvii^e siècle: Le Père Kircher', *Recueil de travaux relatifs à la philologie et à l'archéologie égyptiennes et assyriennes*, 30 (1908), 22–36.

³⁷ Cf. D. P. Walker, *The Ancient Theology: Studies in Christian Platonism from the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1972), 1–21.

Egyptians. If the hieroglyphs, with their symbolic significance, could be read, the entire system, religious, philosophical, and even scientific, would be revealed.³⁸ Since Coptic was clearly the language of the Egyptians, albeit in a late form, it should ultimately enable scholars to understand the hieroglyphs.

Kircher's Egyptological studies had been advancing steadily ever since his arrival in Rome. He was particularly fascinated by what is now known as the Pamphili obelisk standing on Bernini's fountain of the four rivers in Piazza Navona. He set out to decipher the hieroglyphs on it, and he would later study the recently excavated 'Alexandrian obelisk' now set on Bernini's elephant opposite the Dominican church of Santa Maria sopra Minerva.³⁹ According to Eusèbe Renaudot, who was in Rome in 1700 and collected as many anecdotes as he could about Kircher, Kircher's obsession with hieroglyphs and obelisks gave him a nocturnal quality and earned him the nickname 'il padre delle civette', the father of the owls.⁴⁰

Della Valle's decision to entrust Kircher with his Coptic material would lead to the publication of Kircher's first great book on Coptic, the *Prodromus Coptus sive Aegyptiacus*, in 1636 (including the 'Primitiae Linguae Coptae', Kircher's own Coptic grammar based on the information in Della Valle's manuscript), and to the appearance of his *Lingua Aegyptiaca restituta* (containing the contents of Della Valle's manuscript) in 1643. But Della Valle's were by no means the only Coptic manuscripts Kircher consulted in Rome. The Vatican Library contained the manuscripts probably presented by the delegates to the Council of Florence and which were mainly liturgical, four other liturgical manuscripts which entered the library under the pontificate of Julius II, and the sixteen codices owned by Giovanni Battista Raimondi, the director of the oriental printing press known as the *Typographia Medicea*, which had arrived after Raimondi's death in 1614 and were biblical, liturgical, and lexicographical.

In order to pursue his Coptic studies Kircher obviously needed a knowledge of Arabic since that was the language in which the Coptic dictionaries and grammars were written. In this he seems to have depended largely on John Selden's critic, Abraham Ecchellensis. As a

³⁸ Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (New York, 1969), 416–23; Iversen, *the Myth of Egypt*, 92–9.

³⁹ Cf. Sergio Donadoni, 'I geroglifici di Athanasius Kircher', in Lo Sardo (ed.), *Athanasius Kircher*, 101–10.

⁴⁰ BNF MS n. acq. fr. 7471, fo. 69^r.

scholar Ecchellensis was greatly esteemed. But how good an adviser he was is open to doubt. He met Kircher when he was appointed by the pope to teach at the Propaganda Fide in 1635, but his stay in Rome was interrupted by lengthy absences in Paris.⁴¹ Although we should not believe the malicious Renaudot, who claimed that Ecchellensis had had hardly any education, that he knew no Greek, and that his knowledge of classical Arabic was severely limited,⁴² we may well wonder how much time he spent on helping Kircher, and what Kircher did when he was away.

Nearly all Kircher's ideas about Coptic are contained in his *Prodromus coptus*. He there identified it as the language hidden behind the hieroglyphs of the ancient Egyptians and developed his theory that Chinese, however different, was originally descended from the writing of the Egyptians and that Monophysite missionaries—Syrians, Egyptians, and Ethiopians—had propagated Christianity in China. He also, as we shall see, revived the debate about the name Pharaoh conferred on Joseph (Genesis 41: 45) and its connection with Egyptian.⁴³ He followed the passage in Pietro Della Valle's letter to argue that Greek was derived from Coptic—had Cadmus not transmitted Egyptian to the Greeks and did the Egyptians not found a colony in Greece?⁴⁴—and he referred to the digamma representing the number 6. Unlike Della Valle, on the other hand, he did not date Coptic quite as early as the hieroglyphs, but regarded it as a corrupt form of the pristine language.⁴⁵

Subsequently Kircher modified some of his claims. In an appendix to his *Lingua Aegyptiaca restituta* of 1643, the 'Prodromi et lexici Copti supplementum,' he qualified his views on the descent of Greek from

⁴¹ GCAL iii. 354–6; Peter J. A. N. Rietbergen, 'A Maronite Mediator between Seventeenth-Century Mediterranean Cultures: Ibrāhīm al-Hākīlānī, or Abraham Ecchellense (1605–1664) between Christendom and Islam', *Lias*, 16 (1989), 13–41.

⁴² BNF MS n. acq. fr. 7471, fo. 67^v.

⁴³ Kircher, *Prodromus Coptus sive Aegyptiacus*, 125–31.

⁴⁴ Ibid. 171: 'Propinquitas quum Copta seu antiqua Aegyptia ad linguam Graecam obtinet, ea est; ut num haec ab illa, an ab hac illa profluxerit, dispici vix possit. Unde non male eam antiquissimam Graecam dicere possemus. Verisimile enim est, Aegyptiacum unam cum literis a Cadmo et Phoenice post Deucalionis diluvium, si Plinio et Eusebio credimus, in Graeciam primum transportatam, ibidem filiam, nempe linguam Graecam peperisse.'

⁴⁵ Ibid. 150–1: 'Cum itaque (ut ex dictis patet) nulla lingua antiquae Aegyptiacae Copta similior sit, certe indubitatum relinquitur, eam veram esse et germanam antiquae Aegyptiacae linguae filiam: non puram quidem, qualis ab initio, videlicet florecentis Aegyptiorum Imperii, tempore Patriarcharum vigeat; sed e varia hominum, linguarumque commixtione statusque Aegyptiaci frequenti mutatione, succedentibus saeculis corruptam.'

Coptic, maintaining above all that Cadmus had only transmitted Egyptian letters (rather than words) to Greece. When it came to the two languages he was more hesitant. He admitted that their structure was entirely different and denied that Greek was directly derived from Egyptian in the way that Aramaic was derived from Hebrew or Italian from Latin.⁴⁶ He repeated these views in the third volume of his vast work on hieroglyphs and Egyptian history, the *Oedipus Aegyptiacus* which came out between 1652 and 1654.⁴⁷

In the *Oedipus Aegyptiacus* Kircher also returned to his theory about the similarity between the Egyptian hieroglyphs and Chinese. He argued that Noah's son Ham had taken colonies east of Egypt, going to Persia, Bactria, and finally to China, and that this had facilitated the transmission of the hieroglyph.⁴⁸ On this particular idea he continued to elaborate in his *China monumentis* which was published in 1667, also insisting, however, on the great differences between the Egyptian hieroglyph and the Chinese character, the former an essentially secret script expressing mysteries reserved for the few and representing concepts rather than words or names, while Chinese was in no way mysterious and the characters represented words and names.⁴⁹

If Kircher's ideas about what Coptic actually was, and what the effect of the Egyptian language might have been elsewhere in the world, could continue to be discussed, rejected, or accepted without any conclusive evidence being provided on either side, his knowledge of the Coptic language, as it emerged from his translation of Coptic words and texts, was more open to criticism.

KIRCHER'S METHOD

The *Prodromus* already gives us a taste of Kircher's method. At first sight the many quotations in Eastern languages are impressive and must certainly have stretched the inventory of the printers, the Propaganda

⁴⁶ Kircher, *Lingua Aegyptiaca restituta*, 507.

⁴⁷ Kircher, *Oedipus Aegyptiacus* (Rome, 1652–4), iii. 55–60.

⁴⁸ Ibid. i. 84; iii. 13. For an analysis of *Oedipus Aegyptiacus* see R. J. W. Evans, *The Making of the Habsburg Monarchy 1550–1700: An Interpretation* (Oxford, 1979), 433–42.

⁴⁹ Athanasius Kircher, *China Monumentis* (Amsterdam, 1667), 226–33. For Kircher and Chinese (for the understanding of which he was entirely reliant on a translator) see Timothy Billings, 'Jesuit Fish in Chinese Nets: Athanasius Kircher and the Translation of the Nestorian Tablet', *Representations*, 87 (2004), 1–42.

Fide, to the utmost. Passages are given in Arabic, Syriac, Armenian, Samaritan, and Ethiopic, and, of course, in Coptic, and, to assist his more ignorant readers, Kircher follows them with Latin translations (and in the case of Arabic, Armenian, Samaritan, and Ethiopic, but not of Coptic, with literal transcriptions in the Roman alphabet). In doing so, however, he was rash. The repeated misprints in the Arabic, such as ثاريخ (*tha'rikh*) rather than تاريخ (*ta'rikh*) for 'date',⁵⁰ and his mis-translation of dates⁵¹ might be forgiven, but it soon becomes clear that his understanding of Arabic is limited. When translating his Arabic quotations he is liable to skip the first line, but nowhere is his technique so evident as when he translates from the Coptic.

In discussing Joseph's name, and the rewards conferred on him by the Egyptian ruler, Kircher gives a lengthy quotation from Genesis 41 (42–3). In the Authorized Version of the Bible, translated from the Hebrew, the passage runs as follows: 'And Pharaoh took off his ring from his hand, and put it upon Joseph's hand, and arrayed him in vestures of fine linen, and put a gold chain about his neck; And he made him to ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried before him, Bow the knee: and he made him ruler over all the land of Egypt.'

Not only is there a grave misprint in the first line of Kircher's Coptic (the **Ω** (*omega*) should be a **ϣ** (*shai*)), but many of the divisions of words, particularly at the end of the line, are wrong.⁵² The first sentence of the Latin translation which Kircher appends corresponds to verse 41 and is missing in the Coptic. The Latin, moreover, is simply the Vulgate version. Even where the verses correspond the Latin is very far from giving an idea of the literal meaning of the Coptic. This differs considerably from the Vulgate since it is taken from the Greek Septuagint, the translation of the Bible made for the benefit of the Jews of Alexandria between the third and the first centuries BC. There is, for example, no mention of bending the knee in the Coptic and the literal meaning is as follows: 'And Pharaoh took his ring and put it on Joseph's hand and gave him a garment and a golden chain, and mounted him on his next chariot and the preacher cried before him and he placed him over the whole land of Egypt.'

There was an interval of seven years between the publication of Kircher's *Prodromus* and his *Lingua Aegyptiaca restituta*. In 1638 Kircher

⁵⁰ e.g. Kircher, *Prodromus*, 25.

⁵¹ e.g. *ibid.* 191–2.

⁵² Cf. BAV MS Copt. 2, fo. 69^r.

had been appointed confessor to the Landgrave Frederick of Hesse, who had converted from Protestantism to Catholicism and came to Rome to meet the pope and Francesco Barberini. The Landgrave then toured Calabria, Sicily, and finally Malta, accompanied by Kircher. But, as Kircher said in his letter to the Propaganda Fide of about 1640, despite his distractions he never lost sight of his objective of publishing the text of Della Valle's manuscripts and was greatly encouraged by the reactions to his *Prodromus*, most particularly by the enthusiasm of the Flemish Jesuit Cornelius a Lapide, professor of philosophy and Hebrew at Louvain.⁵³ Yet there were scholars who did not share A Lapide's admiration. Peiresc had always been sceptical about Kircher's methods, and above all about his haste and his carelessness, and had recommended more thoroughness in his research and caution in formulating his theories. Peiresc was clearly disappointed by the *Prodromus*, 'this poor book', and his reservations were the same as those of Saumaise, who supplied a list of corrections.⁵⁴

The *Lingua Aegyptiaca restituta* contains Kircher's edition, together with a Latin translation, of four of the texts in Vat. Copt. 71, the grammars of al-Sammanudi and Ibn Katib Qaysar, and the dictionaries of Abu 'l-Barakat ibn Kabar and Abu Ishaq ibn al-ʿAssal. There were a number of misprints in the Arabic and mistranslations of the Arabic. Kircher translates, for example, the Arabic *Ghibriyāl ibn al-Rashīd* 'urifā bi-kātib qatūlik, 'Gabriel ibn al-Rashīd known as a Catholic scribe', as 'Gabriel filius Arreschid, notus in libro قطليک Kadelika', 'Gabriel ibn al-Rashīd known in the book Kadelika',⁵⁵ thus proving incapable of distinguishing between كتاب (*kitāb*), 'book', and كاتب (*kātib*), 'scribe'. And there were errors which were both major and elementary, suggesting that Kircher had no idea of some of the basic rules of Coptic grammar. As the German orientalist August Pfeiffer would point out in the 1670s, he confused adjectives with adjectival nouns. He seemed unaware of the fact that **NA** (*na*) was a prefix denoting the future tense, and translated it as an imperative. He regularly mistook the pronominal subject markers, giving the third, instead of the second, person plural and the third rather than the first or second person singular, and in many cases he simply got the meaning entirely wrong. Yet not only had Kircher translated some of

⁵³ APUG MS 561, fo. 62^r.

⁵⁴ Miller, 'Copts and Scholars', 139–44.

⁵⁵ Kircher, *Prodromus*, 27–8.

the grammatical material in Della Valle's manuscript, but he had also added a grammar of his own to his *Prodromus*, thus showing that he was familiar with the rules he violated in his translation of Ibn al-ʿAssal's dictionary. So what had happened?

First of all we must keep in mind Kircher's notorious carelessness, and his lofty indifference not only to criticism but also to his own mistakes.⁵⁶ He seems to have been equally cavalier in his attitude to proof correction. But another part of the answer is to be sought in his handling of Ibn al-ʿAssal's Arabic and in the defects and ambiguities of the original manuscript.⁵⁷ For nearly all Kircher's mistakes show that he was basing himself exclusively on what he thought was the Arabic translation of the Coptic word and that he took no notice of the Coptic word itself. To someone who clearly knew relatively little Arabic the manuscript presents certain problems. The Arabic is sometimes unvocalized. This means that an isolated word, with no context in which to place it, can frequently have a number of different meanings. In the case of a verb the same unvocalized radicals could be the first person singular, the second feminine person singular, or the third feminine person singular of both the active and the passive of the past tense. In other cases the same radicals could be an imperative or the first person singular of the present tense, or indeed a noun, singular or plural, or the third masculine person singular of the past tense of a verb. Had Kircher bothered to compare the Coptic with the Arabic and to apply those rules of Coptic grammar on which he had written, he might have gathered the correct meaning. But, perhaps because he was working in great haste, or, more probably, because his Coptic and Arabic were simply not good enough, he did not do so.

⁵⁶ Harald Siebert, 'Kircher and his Critics: Censorial Practice and Pragmatic Disregard in the Society of Jesus', in Findlen (ed.), *Athanasius Kircher*, 79–104.

⁵⁷ That this was one of the main reasons for Kircher's mistakes was already suspected by Thomas Edwards (Bodl. MS Bodl. Or. 344, fo. 2^v), and, many years later, by Karl Gottfried Woide, who saw Marshall's corrections of Kircher in the Bodleian Library. In 1773 he wrote to Johann David Michaelis in Göttingen: 'Kircher hat freylich gefehlt; aber wer weiss, was auch in seinem Exemplare für Fehler gewesen seyn mögen. Die dergleichen Glossaria schrieben, verstunden das Koptische nicht sonderlich, und konnten sich leicht irren, und die Koptischen Wörter entweder fehlerhaft schreiben, oder ihnen eine unrichtige Bedeutung im Arabischen beysetzen, und das folgende Arabische Wort mit dem vorhergehenden verwechseln. Die Arabischen Wörter bedeuten auch öfters so vielerley, dass man ohne andere Hülfsmittel nicht weiss, welche Bedeutung man wählen soll. Und sind noch dazu die *puncta diacritica* ausgelassen, so ist man sehr übel daran.' (*Literarischer Briefwechsel von Johann David Michaelis*, ed. Johann Gottlieb Buhle, 3 vols. (Leipzig, 1794–6), iii. 59).

Sometimes, admittedly, Ibn al-ʿAssal gave a wrong translation of the Coptic. But in most cases it is obvious that Kircher misread the Arabic. He thus took the Coptic **†ⲛⲁⲩⲱⲣⲓ** (*tinashari*), meaning ‘I shall strike’, and translated in Arabic as **اضرب** *adribu*, with a *ḍamma* (or *u*) on the last radical, to mean ‘strike’ (imperative), which would be *udrib* in Arabic.⁵⁸ He took the Coptic **ⲁⲕⲁⲣⲉⲛ** (*akareh*), ‘thou guardedst’, to mean ‘I guarded’, because of the insufficiently vocalized Arabic, **حفظت** *hafaztu*, with only a *kasra* (or *i*) on the first radical.⁵⁹ One of the worst mistakes of all is his translation of the Coptic **ⲛⲉⲩⲉⲩⲧⲩⲗⲗⲟⲥ** (*neftstullos*). If Kircher had given the word any thought he would have known that it came from the Greek **στύλος**, meaning ‘column’. The Coptic means ‘his columns’. The Arabic **عمده** is mysteriously (and wrongly) vocalized as ‘*umidha*’ (while it should be ‘*umuduhu*’). Yet, despite the *ḍamma*, Kircher read it as ‘*amadahu*’, ‘he baptized him’.⁶⁰

But Kircher also showed that he was often unable to understand even words which were correctly vocalized or sufficiently clear. The Arabic **شهدت** *shahidtu*, the translation of **ⲁⲓⲙⲉⲩⲙⲉⲩⲣⲉ** *aimetmethre* [*sic*], ‘I witnessed’, is entirely unvocalized, but could never mean ‘he witnessed’, which is how Kircher translated it (and which would be **شهد** *shahida* in Arabic).⁶¹ Kircher also mistook the Coptic **ⲁⲕⲩⲟⲡ** (*akshop*), ‘thou art’, and translated it as ‘he is’ or ‘he will be’, despite the clear Arabic **تكون** *takūn*.⁶² Although the Arabic translation of **ⲁⲓⲒⲕⲟ** (*aikhko*), ‘I was hungry’, is perfectly clear and vocalized, **جعت** (*guʿtu*), Kircher translated it ‘he was hungry’.⁶³ Similarly the Coptic **ⲁⲓⲣⲟ** *aichro*, ‘I won’, is translated into Arabic with a clearly visible *ḍamma* on the last letter of **غلبت** *ghalabtu*, but Kircher nevertheless gave it as ‘thou wonnest’.⁶⁴

On occasion, certainly, there are imperfections in the manuscript, yet even these hardly excuse Kircher’s mistranslations. In the case of the Coptic **ⲧⲉⲧⲉⲛⲛⲁⲩⲉⲣⲉⲃⲟⲗ** (*tetennasherebol*), ‘you can escape’, the original Arabic, **تقدرون تفلتون** *taqdirūna taflitūna*, lacks the diacritical points on the *ta* of the second word, so Kircher transcribed it as **يقدرتون** (*yaqdirūna yaflitūna*) and translated it as ‘they can escape’.⁶⁵ In the case of the Coptic **ⲧⲉⲧⲉⲛⲥⲉⲗⲥⲉⲗ** (*tetenselsel*), ‘you are adorned’, on

⁵⁸ BAV MS Vat. Copt. 71, fo. 123^f. Cf. Kircher, *Lingua Aegyptiaca*, 348.

⁵⁹ BAV MS Vat. Copt. 71, fo. 164^f. Cf. Kircher, *Lingua Aegyptiaca*, 480.

⁶⁰ BAV MS Vat. Copt. 71, fo. 143^v. Cf. Kircher, *Lingua Aegyptiaca*, 410.

⁶¹ BAV MS Vat. Copt. 71, fo. 108r. Cf. Kircher, *Lingua Aegyptiaca*, 295.

⁶² BAV MS Vat. Copt. 71, fo. 138^f. Cf. Kircher, *Lingua Aegyptiaca*, 397.

⁶³ BAV MS Vat. Copt. 71, fo. 136^v. Cf. Kircher, *Lingua Aegyptiaca*, 392.

⁶⁴ BAV MS Vat. Copt. 71, fo. 136^f. Cf. Kircher, *Lingua Aegyptiaca*, 392.

⁶⁵ BAV MS Vat. Copt. 71, fo. 126^v. Cf. Kircher, *Lingua Aegyptiaca*, 360.

the other hand, the Arabic *تزينون* *tuzayyanūna* is perfectly clear, but Kircher gives 'they are adorned'.⁶⁶ The Coptic **ⲧⲙⲉⲧⲃⲁⲗⲉ** (*timetchale*), meaning 'lameness' (العرج), is incorrectly vocalized in Arabic as *al-'arag*, yet the presence of the article shows that it is a noun, whereas Kircher translates it as an adjective.⁶⁷

Some of Kircher's mistakes can be attributed to carelessness. When translating the glossary at the end of al-Samannudi's grammar he gives the Coptic **ⲁⲛⲟⲕ** (*anok*), the first person singular, and **ⲁⲛⲟⲛ** (*anon*), the first person plural, and in each case says the word can mean both 'I' and 'we'. This is one of the few passages which can be compared with the work of Tommaso Obicini, and Obicini (whom Kircher never acknowledged) always gives the correct translation. Yet there is one case in particular which cannot be attributed to carelessness, to sloppy proof correcting, or a hurried reading of the original text. This is Kircher's treatment of 'the name of Joseph'.

THE NAME OF JOSEPH

In the Authorized Version of the Bible the passage in question, Genesis 41: 45, runs: 'And Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphnath paaneah'. The meaning, or indeed the derivation, of 'Zaphnath paaneah', **פַּנְתָּא פַּעֲנָה** in the Hebrew or *Ψονθομφανηχ*, as it is written in the Septuagint, is debated to this day. From the late nineteenth century on the most popular theory was that the words were derived from the Egyptian 'de-pnute-ef-onkh' and meant 'the god has said he lives', but other hypotheses have also been put forward.⁶⁸

Although alternative views have abounded through the ages, in Kircher's day there were two main interpretations.⁶⁹ One, sustained by Josephus, Philo, Theodoret, John Chrysostom, and many later commentators, was based on the assumption that the words were a distortion of the Hebrew, **צִפְנִי**, *tsafan*, 'to conceal', and meant 'the revealer of secrets'. This translation also found support in certain versions of the Septuagint. In an eleventh-century manuscript which belonged to

⁶⁶ BAV MS Vat. Copt. 71, fo. 126^v. Cf. Kircher, *Lingua Aegyptiaca*, 360.

⁶⁷ Ibid., fo. 110^v. Cf. Kircher, *Lingua Aegyptiaca*, 303.

⁶⁸ See e.g. John Skinner, *A Critical Exegetical Commentary of Genesis* (Edinburgh, 1910), 470, and, for a survey of more recent suggestions, J. de Fraine, SJ, *Genesis* (Roermond and Maaseik, 1963), 288.

⁶⁹ A survey is given by Cornelius a Lapide, *Commentaria in Scripturam Sacram*, i (Lyons and Paris, 1865), 300.

Queen Christina of Sweden and entered the Vatican library in 1690, Reg. Gr. 10, the statement is added that this was the meaning of the words in Egyptian.⁷⁰ The other view, which was that of Jerome and which found more general acceptance, took the words to be Hebrew distortions of Egyptian, and to mean 'the saviour of the world'.⁷¹ Since the Egyptian language was entirely unknown in the West, no etymological explanation was provided. Jerome's translation had to be accepted on the trust founded on the veneration in which he was held and on the recognition of the Latin translation attributed to him, the Vulgate, as the only orthodox version of the Bible.

With characteristic ingenuity Kircher gave a new twist to the debate. He seems to have based his own theory on the Arabic translation accompanying the Coptic version of Genesis in MS Vat. Copt. 2. In the Arabic Pharaoh's name of Joseph is translated as موضح الخفيات (*mudih al-khafiāt*), 'the clarifier of secrets'. The Arabic translation, however, is also accompanied by a marginal note in Arabic which implies that **ΨΟΝΘΟΝ ΦΑΝΗΧ** (*psonthon phanikh*) is indeed Coptic.⁷² Kircher was clearly delighted by what he took to be the definitive solution to the age-old problem. He thus denied that the words were derived from Hebrew, as Philo held, and maintained, with Jerome, that they were Egyptian. They were, he said, perfectly recognizable in Coptic. The Septuagint itself was composed in Egypt for the benefit of Egyptians, and the words were consequently left as they were in the knowledge that any Egyptian would understand them.⁷³ But Kircher also went further. In his *Prodromus* he claimed that **ΠΑΝΙΚ** or **ΦΑΝΗΧ** (*panik* or *phanikh*) meant 'prophet' or 'augur' and **ΨΟΝΘΟΝ** (*psonthon*) meant 'future',⁷⁴ while in fact neither word exists in Coptic. In his edition of Ibn al-ʿAssal's lexicon, we find the non-existent Coptic word **ΠΙΣΤΟΝΠΑΝΙΧΑ** (*pihtonpanikha*). It is translated as المنظر (*al-manẓar*) in Kircher's Arabic and as *augur* in Kircher's Latin.⁷⁵ But there is no sign of such a Coptic word in the original manuscript, Vat. Copt. 71, or in any other manuscript of the same text.⁷⁶ Kircher had clearly made up the

⁷⁰ Cf. *Septuaginta Vetus Testamentum Graecum, Genesis*, ed. John William Wevers (Göttingen, 1974), 392.

⁷¹ *PL* xxviii, col. 252: 'Veritque nomen illius, et vocavit eum lingua Aegyptiaca, Salvatore mundi.'

⁷² BAV MS Vat. Copt. 2, fo. 69^r.

⁷³ Kircher, *Prodromus*, 125–31.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 125.

⁷⁵ Kircher, *Lingua Aegyptiaca restituta*, 283.

⁷⁶ BAV MS Vat. Copt. 71, fo. 104^v is where it would be if it existed.

whole thing and had inserted it, perhaps as one of the jokes which delighted contemporary forgers.⁷⁷

KIRCHER AND HIS CRITICS

Kircher, his knowledge of Coptic, and his various theories were criticized strongly in all quarters, not only by Lutherans eager to attack the Catholic Church in the shape of one of its most revered representatives, but also by Catholics. At first there were not many scholars who were in a position to find fault with Kircher with any measure of expertise. Nevertheless, in November 1658, a Jesuit missionary, Adrien de Parvilliers, wrote a courteous letter from Aleppo to the man known as 'l'oracle du monde' and whom he addressed in the third person singular. In it he attributed the numerous errors in the grammar attached to his *Prodromus* to the carelessness of the printer. The mistakes had been pointed out to him, he said, by an elderly Copt he had met in Cairo.⁷⁸ Later Catholic attacks were less polite. Louis Picques in Paris was particularly indignant about Kircher's having made up the word *pihtonpanikha*. In a letter to Isaac Jacquelot written in the summer of 1697, he maintained that, according to two or three of his acquaintances in Rome, Kircher was 'un hardi imposteur' who knew no languages other than German and a little Latin.⁷⁹ The Augustinian Guillaume Bonjour was less extreme in the Coptic grammar which he completed in 1698, but Eusèbe Renaudot, both in his *De lingua coptica*, which remained in manuscript, and in his dissertation with the same title in his work on Coptic liturgy, resumed the attacks. Renaudot had his doubts about the importance of Coptic in the domains which Kircher claimed for it.⁸⁰ He dismissed Kircher's theory about the Copts spreading Christianity to China and India as a 'ridiculous and inane paradox',⁸¹ questioned his knowledge of Samaritan and Ethiopic,⁸² and pointed out further

⁷⁷ Cf. Anthony Grafton, *Forgers and Critics: Creativity and Duplicity in Western Scholarship* (London, 1990), 44–9.

⁷⁸ *MPO* 5, 176–8, esp. 177.

⁷⁹ Jordan, *Histoire de la vie et des ouvrages de Mr La Croze*, 291–2: 'Je suis persuadé que Kircher, outre sa Langue ne savoit qu'un peu de Latin et presque point de Grec, et je ne suis pas seul de ce sentiment, deux ou trois personnes qui l'ont fréquenté à Rome me l'ont avoué.'

⁸⁰ BNF MS n. acq. fr. 7471, fo. 62^r.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, fo. 65^v.

⁸² *Ibid.*, fo. 68^v.

mistakes in his work which detracted from the value of his statements about the Coptic liturgy. His Coptic grammatical works, Renaudot concluded, were of little use for the study of the language, but they were indeed the first of their kind.⁸³

In the Protestant camp one of the first scholars to criticize Kircher seems to have been Thomas Marshall.⁸⁴ Close to the team producing the London Polyglot Bible, himself eager to acquire further languages which might contribute to his study of the Scriptures, Marshall appears to have embarked on his Coptic studies in the 1660s, when he was living in Holland, where he had moved after Oxford had fallen to the parliamentary troops in 1646. Appointed preacher to the Merchant Adventurers in 1650, he was first in Rotterdam and then in Dordrecht, only returning to England for good in 1672 when he was appointed rector of Lincoln College, Oxford. In the shop of the Amsterdam bookseller Theodore Hillingsberg, in the 1660s, Marshall had consulted, and later acquired, a manuscript containing the same grammatical and lexicographical works which Kircher had published. Marshall's copy, however, was more complete than the one bought by Della Valle.⁸⁵ A better Arabist than Kircher, Marshall spotted most of Kircher's mistakes. He noted them in the margins of his copy, but never published his discoveries,⁸⁶ and the Welsh orientalist Thomas Edwards, who had been summoned to Oxford in 1685 to assist him, and who had access to all his material, was equally critical in the manuscript of his own Coptic dictionary completed in 1711.⁸⁷

The Lutherans, on the other hand, published their criticisms. The Dane Erasmus Vinding and the German Johann Stephan Rittangel, to both of whom we shall return, were among Kircher's first detractors in print, but the most damaging criticisms came from August Pfeiffer. How good Pfeiffer's Coptic was remains open to doubt. The malicious Veyssière de La Croze maintained that he hardly knew it any better than Kircher,⁸⁸ but he was nevertheless able to list numerous mistakes in

⁸³ Ibid., fo. 66^r.

⁸⁴ For Marshall's movements and the development of his interest see K. Dekker, 'Marshall, Thomas', *ODNB* xxxvi. 870–1.

⁸⁵ Bodl., MS Marshall Or. 17.

⁸⁶ Marshall's copy of Kircher is now at the Bodl., MS Marshall Or. 38.

⁸⁷ Bodl., MS Bodl. Or. 344, fo. 2^v.

⁸⁸ La Croze, *Thesaurus epistolicus*, iii. 96. 'Ceteros quosque Kircherum, Pfeifferum, cet. Cave putes in illa lingua quidquam intellexisse', he wrote to Clodius in 1718. Clodius clearly agreed (ibid. i. 82): 'Pfeifferi ac Blumbergii castigationes nihil curo, quorum alter parum in illa lingua vidit, alter ne errores quidem ab ipso Kirchero correctos evitavit', he replied in 1720.

Kircher's work and, with a high standing in the Lutheran Church, he spoke with authority. His criticisms of Kircher are contained mainly in one of his *Exercitationes* (which started to appear in 1670) on the name of Joseph, and in his *Dubia vexata S. Scripturae* published in 1679. Less savage but more informed than Rittangel, Pfeiffer remarked on Kircher's tendency to mistranslate and to quote passages of the Vulgate which did not correspond to the text reproduced.⁸⁹ When it came to the name of Joseph, however, Pfeiffer at first rejected Kircher's interpretation, saying that he never provided lexicographical evidence that *psonthon* meant 'future' and *phanikh* 'augur'. Nevertheless he was taken in by Kircher, and finally agreed with his translation because of the presence of the word *pihtonpanikha* in his lexicon.⁹⁰ In 1716 the Prussian orientalist David Wilkins poured the most malignant scorn on Kircher in the introduction to his edition of the Coptic New Testament, and pointed out some weighted ideological errors in Kircher's translation of excerpts from the Coptic liturgy in his *Prodromus*: he translated, for example, the words of consecration as 'the living body of the Son' whereas they really meant 'vivifying flesh'.⁹¹

Such objections, however, should not blind us to the immense influence which Kircher had. For many years one scholar after another appealed exclusively to Kircher when discussing Coptic. Brian Walton, the editor of the London Polyglot Bible, never actually included a Coptic version of the Scriptures, but he did describe the language, both in his *Introductio ad lectionem linguarum orientalium* of 1655 and in his *Dissertatio . . . de linguis orientalibus* of 1658. On both occasions he drew on Kircher. The same applies to the work of the physician Olfert Dapper, writing and publishing in Amsterdam. His description of Africa, which appeared in 1676 and was indebted to the advice of Isaac

⁸⁹ August Pfeiffer, *Opera omnia quae extant philologica*, 2 vols. (Utrecht, 1704), i. 99, 569.

⁹⁰ For Pfeiffer's arguments see his *Dubia vexata S. Scripturae exercitationes* (*Opera omnia*, i. 564–74).

⁹¹ David Wilkins, 'Dissertatio de lingua Coptica', in *Dissertationes ex occasione sylloges Orationum Dominicarum scriptae ad Joannem Chamberlaynium* (Amsterdam, 1715), 76–94, esp. 91. Cf. Kircher, *Prodromus*, 34. Wilkins's most damning indictment of Kircher, however, was in the preface to his edition of the Coptic New Testament, *Novum Testamentum Aegypticum vulgo Copticum* (Oxford, 1716), p. iii: 'Athanasius Kircherus primus, quod sciam, fuit, qui vanae gloriae cupidus cognitionem litterarum Aegyptiarum ostentavit. Sed ubique nugas vendit homo fallax, ac licet oraculi instar omnia ex tripode dixisse videatur, nihil tamen minus quam linguam hanc novit, cujus rudimenta non ex cerebro proprio hausit, aut assidua sedulitate conquisivit, sed verbotenus (exceptis erroribus) ex MSS. Vaticanis descripsit, quod ego Romae cum agerem, facillime detexi.'

Vossius, contained a long passage on the Copts which was subsequently used as a first-hand source.⁹² Much of Dapper's disquisition on Coptic, and the whole of his passage on the hieroglyphs, is based on Kircher.

From the second half of the eighteenth century on, Kircher met with greater indulgence from his critics. In a brief survey of Coptic studies published in 1772 the professor of oriental languages at Parma, Giovanni Bernardo De Rossi, could again refer to 'il padre Kircher, il più dotto e senza controversia il principe di questa letteratura'.⁹³ Later students of Coptic, including the great Jean-François Champollion,⁹⁴ never expended much praise on Kircher, but they all used his edition of the Coptic grammatical and lexicographical texts.

THE IDENTITY OF COPTIC

Kircher's theories about Coptic, about its nature and its origins, were soon being debated all over Europe. Coptic was thus inserted into some of the principal discussions of the time. What languages were spoken in the biblical area in late Antiquity? Had the ancient tongues survived, or had they been completely replaced by Greek? Assuming, as most scholars did, that the first language was Hebrew, how did later languages descend from it, and what was the place of Coptic in this scheme? Or, in view of its great antiquity, might it not point the way to a primitive and universal language, long since disappeared but which preceded all others and expressed the essence of things with perfect exactitude?⁹⁵ And what was

⁹² Olfert Dapper, *Naukeurige Beschrijvinge der Afrikaensche Gewesten van Egypten, Barbaryen, Lybien, Biledulgerid, Negrosiant, Guinea, Ethiopiën, Abyssinie* (Amsterdam, 1676), 161–89.

⁹³ Giovanni Bernardo De Rossi, *Della lingua propria di Cristo* (Parma, 1772), 46.

⁹⁴ Champollion's praise was grudging indeed. For an early assessment of Kircher see his *L'Égypte sous les Pharaons*, i (Paris, 1814), 11–16. See also his *Grammaire égyptienne ou principes généraux de l'écriture sacrée égyptienne appliquée à la représentation de la langue parlée* (Paris, 1836), p. ix: 'Par une singularité bien digne de remarque, ce fut le P. Kircher lui-même qui donna, en 1643, sous le titre de *Lingua aegyptiaca restituta*, le texte et la traduction de manuscrits arabes recueillis en Orient par Pietro della Valle, et contenant des grammaires de la langue copte; plus, un vocabulaire copte-arabe. Dans cet ouvrage, qui, malgré ses innombrables imperfections, a beaucoup contribué à répandre l'étude de la langue copte, Kircher ne put se défaire de son charlatanisme habituel: incapable de tirer aucune sorte de profit réel, pour ses travaux relatifs aux hiéroglyphes, du recueil étendu de mots égyptiens qu'il venait de publier, il osa introduire dans ce lexique, et donner comme coptes, plusieurs mots dont il avait besoin pour appuyer ses explications imaginaires.'

⁹⁵ For a discussion of the various theories on language at the time see Arno Borst, *Der Turmbau von Babel: Geschichte der Meinungen über Ursprung und Vielfalt der Sprachen und Völker*, 4 vols. (Stuttgart, 1957–63), iii/2, 1395–1520.

the relationship between Coptic, the language of the hieroglyphs, and Chinese?

One of the first scholars to seek an answer to some of these questions in conjunction with Kircher's theories on Coptic was a Protestant, the German Johann Stephan Rittangel, generally admitted to be an exceptionally fine Hebraist.⁹⁶ It was in Königsberg, where he was professor of oriental languages and died in 1652, in his posthumously published *Hochfeyerliche Solenniteten*, that Rittangel attacked Kircher with sarcasm and savagery. He accused Kircher of misunderstanding most of the languages from which he quoted—Greek, Syriac, Aramaic, Samaritan—and he claimed that all the evidence pointed to Cadmus's having introduced Phoenician letters, rather than Egyptian ones, into Greece. He then went on to present a theory which was even more erroneous than that of Kircher. Arguing that all oriental languages were written from right to left, he maintained that Coptic was not the language of the ancient Egyptians but a corrupt vernacular, containing Egyptian words, spoken by the Greek colony in Egypt.⁹⁷

In 1660 Erasmus Vinding, professor of history and Greek in Copenhagen, published his *De linguae Graecae et Aegyptiacae affinitate dissertatio*. Like Rittangel Vinding dismissed Kircher's idea that Cadmus had brought Egyptian letters to Greece since Cadmus was known to have lived not in Egypt but in Phoenicia. He agreed that more recent Egyptians were familiar with Greek; but he denied any connection between Greek and Coptic.⁹⁸ He detected, rather, marked similarities between Egyptian and the first language spoken on earth, Hebrew.

⁹⁶ P. T. van Rooden and J. W. Wesselius, 'J. S. Rittangel in Amsterdam', *Nederlands Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis*, 65 (1985), 131–52; E. G. E. van der Wall, 'Johann Stephan Rittangel's Stay in the Dutch Republic (1641–1642)', in J. van den Berg and E. G. E. van der Wall (eds.), *Jewish-Christian Relations in the Seventeenth Century: Studies and Documents* (Dordrecht, 1988), 119–34.

⁹⁷ Johann Stephan Rittangel, *Hochfeyerliche Solenniteten, Gebehte und Collecten, an statt der Opfer, nebenst andern Ceremonien, so von der Jüdischen Kirchen am ersten Neuen-Jahrs-Tag, vor Mittag, in ihren Synagogen hochfeyerlich gebetet und abgehandelt werden müssen*... (Königsberg, 1662), (Vorrede), sig. H2^r: 'Es ist unserer in Egypten zerstreuten Griechen Sprach und Schrift. Dann sie nach länge der Zeit täglicher Übung und Gebrauch der Egyptischen Sprach, ihre selbst eigene Mutter-Sprach sehr corrupt reden, oder schier gar halb vergessen haben, (sonderlichen der gemeine Mann, so daselbst gebohren und erzogen ist.) Derhalben sie das Egyptische mit ihrer Griechischen Sprach vermengen reden und mit Griechischen Buchstaben schreiben. Solte aber ein solches unechtes Misch-masch die reine Egyptische Pharaonische Sprach und Schrift seyn? Oder auch sich die Egyptice eines solchen unechten Misch-masches gebraucht haben? Das ist weit gefehlet...'

⁹⁸ Erasmus Vinding, *De linguae Graecae et Aegyptiacae affinitate dissertatio* (Copenhagen, 1660), 21, 24.

Rittangel's theory found little acceptance, but the relationship of Coptic with Greek continued to puzzle scholars. Isaac Vossius in Holland, once librarian to the queen of Sweden, was known for his paradoxical views, his vindication of the antiquity of the Sybilline Oracles at the very time when their recent and spurious nature was being proved to the satisfaction of most experts, and his claim that the Septuagint was a more faithful rendering of the texts of the Bible than the surviving Hebrew version.⁹⁹ The owner of a Coptic manuscript which passed into the hands of Thomas Marshall, Vossius had already maintained in his work on the Septuagint that the Egyptian language had disappeared entirely with the advent of Christianity.¹⁰⁰ The Oratorian Richard Simon, one of the greatest biblical critics of his day, had held that Coptic was indeed spoken in Egypt together with Greek in the first centuries AD. In his reply to him Vossius declared that it was a late language, derived from Greek and Arabic, and only spoken after the Arab invasion.¹⁰¹ Vossius's views, dismissed by most scholars, nevertheless had a certain influence. He was one of the sources eagerly seized upon by the eccentric Jean Hardouin.¹⁰² Even Claude Sicard stated that Coptic, which he was studying, originated from Greek,¹⁰³ and Vossius's theory was revived enthusiastically by the Neapolitan scholar Domenico Diodati, who argued in his *De Christo Graece loquente exercitatio* of 1767 that Christ spoke Greek rather than Syriac or Aramaic¹⁰⁴—a view which, despite the support of the Sorbonne and of the German antiquarian Johann Joachim Winckelmann, was attacked by Giovanni Bernardo De Rossi.

⁹⁹ For Vossius's ideas on the Bible see J. C. H. Lebram, 'Ein Streit um die hebräische Bibel und die Septuaginta', in Th. H. Lunsingh Scheurleer and G. H. M. Posthumus Meyjes (eds.), *Leiden University in the Seventeenth Century: An Exchange of Learning* (Leiden, 1975), 21–63.

¹⁰⁰ Isaac Vossius, *Appendix ad librum de LXX interpretibus* (The Hague, 1643), 71.

¹⁰¹ Isaac Vossius, 'Ad iteratas P. Simonii objectiones responsio', in *Appendix in qua continentur M. de Veil, S.T.D. E. Spanhemii & I. Vossii scripta adversus Historiam Criticam* (Amsterdam, 1681), 166. For Simon's objections to Vossius's criticisms see Richard Simon, *Opuscula critica adversus Isaacum Vossium* (Edinburgh, 1685), 70. Simon's attitude to Coptic versions of the Old Testament will be discussed below.

¹⁰² Hardouin quotes Vossius in his *De Coptis disquisitio*, BNF MS Latin 3647, p. 333.

¹⁰³ Sicard, *Oeuvres*, ii. 21.

¹⁰⁴ Domenico Diodati, *De Christo Graece loquente exercitatio* (Naples, 1767), 12, 15: 'Ac primo animadvertendum est, Copticum idioma nihil aliud esse, quam Graecum corruptum, atque Arabo mixtum . . . His animadversis, colligere licet Copticum idioma non aliunde, quam a Graeca lingua, idque non prius, nisi post Arabum irruptionem, proffluxisse. Graeca enim lingua, ac litterae, quae in Aegypto profundas egerunt radices sub Ptolemaeis, vigerunt ad septimum usque saeculum. At cum Arabes Aegyptum invaserunt, ejus regionis lingua adeo corruperunt, atque deformarunt, ut novum quasi loquendi genus inde exstiterit.'

In 1694 the German orientalist Andreas Acoluthus, professor at the St Elisabeth gymnasium in Breslau, announced that Kircher was wrong about the descent of Greek from Coptic, but that the language of the ancient Egyptians was in fact Armenian.¹⁰⁵ Acoluthus's hypothesis, elaborated in a dissertation that was never to be published, was reported to Leibniz by Wilhelm Ernst Tenzel late in 1694,¹⁰⁶ and Leibniz, interested in the universality of language and in the quest for the vanished 'tongue of Adam', the *lingua Adamica*, was intrigued.¹⁰⁷ If such a theory could be proved, he replied to Tenzel, the world of letters would be indebted to Acoluthus.¹⁰⁸ He himself found the idea plausible.¹⁰⁹ He asked other friends about it—Hiob Ludolf, Hermann von der Hardt, and Gerhard Walter Molanus. After writing himself to Molanus,¹¹⁰ Acoluthus approached Leibniz directly.¹¹¹ Leibniz said he found the proposal attractive,¹¹² but he was clearly no longer entirely convinced by it and advised caution. It was all too easy, he observed, to find two languages sharing common words, but that did not necessarily prove a connection. In the case of Armenian and Egyptian he thought it more likely that the Armenians had dispatched a colony to Egypt than the other way round,¹¹³ and in 1709 he told La Croze that Acoluthus was wrong.¹¹⁴ In 1717, Johann Hager, writing in Wittenberg, joined the

¹⁰⁵ On Acoluthus see K. Tautz, *Die Bibliothekare der churfürstlichen Bibliothek zu Cölln an der Spree im siebzehnten Jahrhundert* (Leipzig, 1925), 215–24; Alastair Hamilton, 'A Lutheran Translator for the Quran: A Late Seventeenth-Century Quest', in Hamilton, van den Boogert, and Westerweel (eds.), *The Republic of Letters and the Levant*, 197–221, esp. 208–15.

¹⁰⁶ Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Allgemeiner politischer und historischer Briefwechsel*, x: 1694 (Berlin, 1979), 616–17.

¹⁰⁷ For Leibniz and language see Borst, *Der Turmbau von Babel*, iii/2, 1475–8; Hans Aarsleff, 'The Study and Use of Etymology in Leibniz', in *Akten des internationalen Leibniz-Kongresses Hannover, 14.–19. November 1966*, iii (Wiesbaden, 1969), 173–88; Martin F. J. Baasten, 'A Note on the History of "Semitic"', in M. F. J. Baasten and W. Th. van Peursen, *Hamlet on a Hill: Semitic and Greek Studies Presented to Professor T. Muraoka on the Occasion of the Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (Leuven, 2003), 57–71, esp. 57–63.

¹⁰⁸ Leibniz, *Briefwechsel*, xi: Januar–Oktober 1695 (Berlin, 1982), 125.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. 219.

¹¹⁰ Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Collectanea etymologica* (Hannover, 1717), 159–60.

¹¹¹ Leibniz, *Briefwechsel*, xi. 636–9.

¹¹² Ibid. 724.

¹¹³ Ibid. 175–6. A couple of years later, in July 1697, Leibniz repeated his doubts in a letter to Ezechiel Spanheim (*Allgemeiner politischer und historischer Briefwechsel*, xiv. 326–7).

¹¹⁴ G. W. Leibniz, *Epistolae ad diversos*, ed. Christian Kortholt, 4 vols. (Leipzig, 1734–42), i. 406–7.

debate to deny any connection between Coptic and Armenian and to point out the inadequacy of Acoluthus's knowledge of Armenian and the immense difference in structure between the two languages.¹¹⁵ By then, moreover, another scholar had also approached Leibniz with an even less likely theory. The disreputable John Toland had suggested that Coptic was in fact almost identical to Arabic and Phoenician, but Leibniz dismissed the suggestion tartly.¹¹⁶

While Kircher's idea about the derivation of Greek from Coptic was being temporarily abandoned, another of his hypotheses obtained increasing currency in the course of the eighteenth century: the affinity between Coptic and Chinese.¹¹⁷ In 1712 La Croze had believed that Coptic was the key to Chinese, even if he later changed his mind. The same theory was fuelled by a history of trade and navigation by the historian Pierre-Daniel Huet, bishop of Avranches, the *Histoire du commerce et de la navigation des anciens*, which came out in 1716.¹¹⁸ Examining the spread of commerce across the world, relating the myth according to which trade and navigation were started by the Egyptian deity Thoth and buying and selling instituted by the god Osiris, Huet argued that many of the Indians and Chinese actually descended from the Egyptians.¹¹⁹ He proved this by stressing the numerous points of community between the Egyptians and the Chinese. Like Kircher he referred to a similar use of hieroglyphs as well as a profane alphabet, and to this he added a linguistic affinity, the teaching of metempsychosis, the cult of the cow, and a curious reluctance (which Strabo attributed to the ancient Egyptians) to allow foreign traders into their country.¹²⁰

Huet's work was one of the sources used some forty years later by Joseph de Guignes, himself professor of Syriac at the Collège Royal and a member of the Royal Society, as well as having been a pupil of one of the first French Sinologists, Étienne Fourmont. On 12 April 1758 he delivered an address entitled 'Mémoire dans lequel on prouve que les Chinois

¹¹⁵ Johann Hager, *Commentatio philologica de lingua Aegyptiaca* (Wittenberg, 1717), 374: 'Constat praeterea hodiernam linguam Aegyptiacam voces quidem Graecas immixtas habere', he concluded, 'sed formationem ex antiqua retinuisse, quae ab Armenica plane recedit.'

¹¹⁶ Trommler, *Bibliotheca Copto-Iacobita*, 17.

¹¹⁷ For discussions about Chinese in Leibniz's circle see David Porter, *Ideographia: The Chinese Cipher in Early Modern Europe* (Stanford, 2001), 49–64.

¹¹⁸ For Huet see Walker, *The Ancient Theology*, 214–20.

¹¹⁹ Pierre-Daniel Huet, *Histoire du commerce et de la navigation des anciens* (Paris, 1716), 37–8.

¹²⁰ Ibid. 40–1.

sont une colonie égyptienne' in which he elaborated on his idea that Chinese characters are monograms formed by three Phoenician letters and that an Egyptian colony had settled in China in about 1122 BC and had introduced the hieroglyphs. The result, he suggested with some hesitation, was that Chinese and ancient Egyptian were the same language,¹²¹ and Guignes referred to a number of common expressions to prove it.

Although Guignes's view was promptly attacked by Michel-Ange-André Le Roux Deshautesrayes, a fellow pupil of Fourmont, who denied any trace of the Egyptian language in Chinese,¹²² Guignes had distinguished supporters. Some fifty years later his ideas fascinated the 18-year-old Jean-François Champollion,¹²³ but already in 1732 the mathematician Jean-Jacques Dortous de Mairan had listed the features shared by the Egyptians and the Chinese—the use of hieroglyphs, the system of castes, the respect for the old, and the love of science (especially of astronomy).¹²⁴ He now pronounced himself in full agreement with Guignes.¹²⁵ Even more authority was given to Guignes by the antiquarian Jean-Jacques Barthélemy, whose *Réflexions générales sur les rapports des langues égyptienne, phénicienne et grecque* appeared in 1763. Barthélemy had established his reputation by deciphering a Phoenician inscription, and he saw the Phoenicians as the transmitters of the Egyptian monogram to China. But by the same token he was also ready to rehabilitate Kircher's idea about the Egyptian origin of Greek.¹²⁶ In the meantime, moreover, the German antiquarian Friedrich Samuel von Schmidt argued for clear signs of an Egyptian presence in India. Besides what he regarded as striking cultural points of community—the use of the circle as a mark of divinity, the dedication of trees and plants to deities, the cult of animals and abstinence from their flesh, the asceticism of the Indian fakirs and the Egyptian hermits, and a common horror of

¹²¹ Joseph de Guignes, *Mémoire dans lequel on prouve, que les Chinois sont une colonie égyptienne* (Paris, 1760), 78.

¹²² Michel-Ange-André Le Roux Deshautesrayes, *Doutes sur la dissertation de M. de Guignes* (Paris, 1759), 18.

¹²³ Alain Faure, *Champollion: Le savant déchiriffré* (Paris, 2004), 124.

¹²⁴ *Lettre de M. de Mairan au R.P. Parrenin, missionnaire de la Compagnie de Jesus, à Pékin. Contenant diverses Questions sur la Chine* (Paris, 1759), 80.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. iv–v.

¹²⁶ Jean-Jacques Barthélemy, *Réflexions générales sur les rapports des langues égyptienne, phénicienne et grecque*, in *Œuvres*, iv/1 (Paris, 1821), 14: 'Il est impossible que, dans ce commerce d'esprit et de besoins, la langue égyptienne n'ait pas concouru à la formation de la langue grecque, ou du moins qu'il ne se soit pas glissé, de la première dans la seconde, une foule d'expressions...'. He concluded (p. 18), that Coptic 'a les plus grands rapports avec la phénicienne' and 'que la langue grecque conserve encore plusieurs mots égyptiens d'origine'.

wine—he also posited an Egyptian etymology for certain Indian proper names. He had no doubt that the town he called Anubingara in Ceylon came from Anubis, and the name of the Indian prince Porus from Pharaoh.¹²⁷

Throughout this period we have cases of scholars who spotted similarities between Coptic and more familiar languages. The most obvious, as we saw, was Hebrew, and we still find the proximity being stressed in the eighteenth century.¹²⁸ The convention of Coptic prefixes had led Olfert Dapper to compare Coptic to Dutch.¹²⁹ An even more eccentric use of Coptic was made by a Hungarian scholar teaching at the university of Wittenberg, János Gottfried Oertels. Oertels's interest in Coptic seems to have been stimulated by his concern with the Church of Ethiopia and the studies of Hiob Ludolf. In his *Theologia Aethiopum*, published in 1746, he followed Ludolph in pointing to the purity of the faith of the Ethiopians, so admirably loyal to the precepts of the New Testament and so close to the beliefs of Luther.¹³⁰ He ended his study on Ethiopia with the Lord's Prayer in ten languages, which included Chinese, Malagassy, and Coptic. The preface to his *Harmonia LL. Orientis et Occidentis speciatimque Hungaricae cum Hebraea*, which also appeared in 1746, was addressed to Leibniz and two members of his circle, his assistant the historian Johann Georg von Eckhardt and the Sinologist Gottlieb Siegfried Beyer (who had learnt Coptic from La Croze). In order to defend the traditional view of the descent of all languages from Hebrew, Oertels argued for affinities between Hungarian and other tongues, above all of the East but also of the West. These were Latin, Greek, German, Slavonic, Ethiopic, Arabic, Samaritan, Syriac, Aramaic, and Coptic. His comparison between Coptic words and Hungarian ones is a good example of the arbitrary manner in which etymology was still being approached—the Coptic **ⲑⲁⲗ** (*thal*), 'heap', was compared to the Hungarian 'tél', 'winter', the Coptic **ⲁⲗⲟⲗⲓ** (*aloli*),

¹²⁷ Freidrich Samuel von Schmidt, *Dissertation sur une colonie égyptienne établie aux Indes* (Berne, 1759), 9–51.

¹²⁸ For example by Gottfried Hensel, *Synopsis universae philologiae, in qua: miranda unitas et harmonia linguarum totius orbis terrarum* (Nuremberg, 1741), 389–95.

¹²⁹ Dapper, *Naukeurige Beschrijvinge*, 163.

¹³⁰ J. G. Oertels, *Theologia Aethiopum ex liturgiis fidei confessionibus aliisque ipsorum pariter ac rerum Habessynicarum peritissimorum europaeorum scriptis congesta et cura necessariis indicibus instructa* (Wittenberg, 1746), pp. v–vi. Oertels expanded on Ethiopian views of justification (pp. 82–5), sanctification (pp. 85–91), the sacraments (pp. 110–12, 125, 146), and discussed the rejection of purgatory (p. 208).

‘grapes’, to the Hungarian ‘aszalt szőlő’, ‘raisins’, and so on.¹³¹ Despite his great respect for the Swiss orientalist Johann Heinrich Hottinger, Oertels could not accept the statement in his work on the Samaritan Pentateuch that there were no more than two or three words in Coptic which had an affinity with Hebrew.¹³² For Oertels the number was infinitely larger, at least thirty if not more, and proved decisively the original unity of all tongues.¹³³

EGYPTIAN NAMES

Coptic, Kircher claimed, had numerous uses. As a key to the rich literature of the Egyptians, it would be of assistance to doctors, astronomers, mineralogists, mathematicians, and antiquarians, while the many early Coptic versions of the Scriptures would be invaluable to the Church.¹³⁴ Sure enough, in the course of the late seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, scholars with an interest in subjects such as chronology, astronomy, geography, and philology, as well as in biblical studies, would make some effort to learn Coptic. Chronologists were curious about the Coptic calendar and the names of the Coptic months. Johann Heinrich Hottinger¹³⁵ and Friedrich Samuel von Schmidt¹³⁶ studied the Coptic terms for the signs of the zodiac, while Bernard de Montfaucon published an Egyptian calendar in 1724.¹³⁷ The mineralogist and explorer Johann Reinhold Forster¹³⁸ and the philologist Christianus Muller¹³⁹ scoured Coptic vocabularies to establish the etymology of Egyptian place names. Kircher too touched on all these subjects, but the topics on which

¹³¹ J. G. Oertels, *Harmonia LL. Orientis et Occidentis speciatimque Hungaricae cum Hebraea* (Wittenberg, 1746), 60–4.

¹³² Cf. Johann Heinrich Hottinger, *Exercitationes anti-morinianae: De Pentateucho Samaritano* . . . (Zurich, 1644), 48: ‘vix duo tria extant verba pure Aegyptiaca, quae vel aliqua ratione cum Hebraeis conveniant’.

¹³³ Oertels, *Harmonia*, 63–4.

¹³⁴ Kircher, *Prodromus*, 197.

¹³⁵ Hottinger, *Exercitationes*, 57–8.

¹³⁶ See e.g. the first dissertation in Friedrich Samuel von Schmidt, *Opuscula quibus res antiquae praecipue Aegyptiacae explanantur* (Karlsruhe, 1765), 12–61.

¹³⁷ Bernard de Montfaucon, *Supplément au livre de l'Antiquité expliquée et représentée en figures* (Paris, 1724), ii. 201.

¹³⁸ Johann Reinhold Forster, *Epistolae ad Ioannem Davidem Michaelis huius Spicilegium Geographiae Hebraeorum Exterae iam confirmantes iam castigantes* (Göttingen, 1772), 9–10.

¹³⁹ Christianus Muller, *Satura observationum philologicarum maximam partem sacrarum* (Leiden, 1752), 3.

he concentrated most were connected with biblical and religious studies. There were certain long-debated matters in these fields to which he believed he could provide a solution.

One, we have seen, was the name of Joseph. Since it was on his work that his early enemies depended for their knowledge of Coptic, his first opponents, such as Pfeiffer, had some difficulty in proving him wrong. Others, however, rightly observed that *pihtonpanikha* was not a Coptic word. Louis Picques proposed a different etymology, albeit a Coptic one, $\pi\text{COT } \mathbf{M} \text{ } \pi\text{ENE}\mathbf{2}$ (*psot m peneh*), 'salvator saeculi'.¹⁴⁰ Guillaume Bonjour, to whom we shall be returning, defended the Vulgate translation but argued for a Semitic origin of the words, the Hebrew צפן (*tsafan*) also meaning 'to preserve' or 'to save', and *phaneakh* very probably being a corruption of the Greek $\pi\alpha\nu\acute{\alpha}$ meaning 'world'.¹⁴¹ The Dutch scholar Campegius Vitringa propended towards a Semitic origin, while Edward Bernard¹⁴² and Paul Ernst Jablonski¹⁴³ agreed with Jerome's translation. By modern standards all the hypotheses advanced were incorrect, even if credit must be given to those scholars who managed to find Egyptian elements in the mysterious words. What cannot be denied is the impulse the debate gave to Coptic studies in general. Nearly every leading biblical scholar had something to say about the problem—Samuel Bochart, who discussed it briefly in his *Geographia sacra*,¹⁴⁴ was one of many—and this always required some acquaintance with the language which Kircher had introduced to the West.

The other debate to which Kircher made a marked contribution and which, however questionable his own affiliation with the Republic of Letters,¹⁴⁵ enabled him to make Coptic a fashionable acquisition for so many of its citizens, was the origin of the names of the Egyptian deities. This, like the meaning of the name bestowed by Pharaoh on Joseph, was a matter in which scholars had long taken an interest, and the appearance of John Selden's *De diis Syris* in 1617 had prompted them to extend their field of research.¹⁴⁶ Kircher's publications on Coptic obviously opened

¹⁴⁰ Jordan, *Histoire de la vie et des ouvrages de Mr La Croze*, 291.

¹⁴¹ Guillaume Bonjour, *Dissertatio de nomine Patriarchae Josephi* (Rome, 1696), 4.

¹⁴² Flavius Josephus, *Opera omnia*, ed. Edward Bernard et al., 2 vols. (Leiden, 1726), i. 79–80.

¹⁴³ Jablonski, *Opuscula*, i. 207–16.

¹⁴⁴ Samuel Bochart, *Geographia sacra. Pars prima. Phaleg* (Frankfurt am Main, 1681), 67.

¹⁴⁵ Noel Malcolm, 'Private and Public Knowledge: Kircher, Esotericism, and the Republic of Letters', in Findlen (ed.), *Athanasius Kircher*, 297–308, esp. 297–300.

¹⁴⁶ John Selden, *De diis Syris* (Leipzig, 1672), sig. A7^v.

new horizons. Ever further investigations could be made into that early theology which preceded Christianity, the *prisca theologia* which Kircher himself was particularly keen to promote, and into Egypt, where it might well have originated. Kircher's own ideas about the names of the Egyptian gods, prompted by his desire to vindicate the ancient identification of the Egyptian deities with the Greek ones, were highly ingenious, but by no means always persuasive. Let us take his treatment of the name of Thoth, important to him because of the alleged association with Vulcan and with Mercury. Kircher identified the god with Phtah. The original name, he argued, was $\Phi\text{†}$ (*phṭi*). This is in fact the Bohairic abbreviation for $\Phi\text{NOY}\text{†}$, *phnouti*, 'the god' or 'God'. Kircher, however, who knew that 'some' said it was an abbreviation, was reluctant to accept it as such. He was fascinated by the Coptic † , *ti*, which he associated with the cross. Actually derived from the demotic form of the infinitive of the verb 'to give', the character had been discussed by the fourth-century historian Rufinus,¹⁴⁷ and it was with Rufinus in mind that Kircher claimed it would have reminded the Copts of the mysteries leading back into remote antiquity.¹⁴⁸

Few scholars followed Kircher along this particular path, but a great many followed his example in analysing the names of the deities of Egypt. One of the most distinguished of the Dutch orientalists, Adriaan Reland, exhibited his knowledge of Coptic in a brief dissertation written in 1714. He proposed a number of etymological derivations, such as that of Horus coming either from the Bohairic PH (*ri*), meaning 'sun', or from OYPO (*ouro*), 'king'.¹⁴⁹ The Swiss scholar Jacob Kocher wrote about the etymology of the name Kneph (now generally identified with Khnum) in 1741, and, after heaping contempt on Kircher's treatment of Phtah, derived it from the Bohairic CAH NOYQI (*sakh noufi*), which he translated as 'the scribe of the good'.¹⁵⁰

Paul Ernst Jablonski devoted his main work, *Pantheon Aegyptiorum, sive de diis eorum commentarius* of 1750, to the same subject and to the analysis of what he too regarded as one of the very first religions.

¹⁴⁷ *PL* xxii, col. 537 (Rufinus, *Historia ecclesiastica*, bk. 2, ch. 26).

¹⁴⁸ Kircher, *Prodromus*, 152–70.

¹⁴⁹ Adriaan Reland, 'Dissertatio de lingua coptica', in *Dissertationes ex occasione Orationum Dominicarum scriptae ad Joannem Chamberlaynium* (Amsterdam, 1715), 94–124, esp. 103.

¹⁵⁰ Jacob Kocher, 'De etymo nominum Cnuphis, aliorumque adfinium, ex Aegypto repetendo', in *Miscellaneae observationes criticae novae in auctores veteres et recentiores in Belgio collectae et proditae in annum 1741*, ii (Amsterdam, 1741), 129–48.

Jablonski was confident that his (and La Croze's) knowledge of Coptic was sufficient to decipher the significance of all the relevant divine names. He expressed his admiration for Kocher, but preferred the derivation of Kneph to be **ϣϥϥⲛⲟⲩϣⲓ** (*shechnoufi*), 'the worshipper of the good demon', a contraction of **ϣϥ** – **ⲓⲭ** – **ⲛⲟⲩϣⲓ**, *she-ikh-noufi*.¹⁵¹ He derived the name of Osiris from **ⲟⲩⲟⲩⲉⲓⲱⲓⲣⲓ**, a somewhat unusual combination of the Sahidic **ⲟⲩⲟⲩⲉⲓⲱ** (*ouoeish*, meaning 'time'), and the Bohairic **ⲓⲣⲓ** (Sahidic **ⲉⲓⲣⲉ** (*eire*), 'make'), and he took it to mean 'he who is the cause of time'.¹⁵² The name Anubis, he said, came from **ⲛⲟⲩⲃ** (*noub*, 'gold'),¹⁵³ and Apis from **ⲏⲡⲓ**, *ipi*, Bohairic for 'number'.¹⁵⁴ The name of the deity Amun, he claimed, could be traced back to the Sahidic words **ⲟⲩⲟⲩⲉⲓⲛ** (*ouoein* meaning 'light') and **ⲁⲙⲟⲩ** (*amou*), the imperative 'come!', and meant 'producing light'.¹⁵⁵ When he came to Thoth he associated him solely with Mercury and distinguished him from Phtah, whom he identified with Vulcan. He quoted La Croze who had derived Phtah, whom he called Phthas, from **ⲑⲱⲩ** (*thosh*), and said the name meant 'the regulator or arranger of things'.¹⁵⁶ Jablonski saw the origin of Thoth in the Bohairic **ⲑⲱⲟⲩⲧ** (*thoouti*), 'to gather' or 'to assemble' (to which he also attributed the meaning of 'column').¹⁵⁷

The fantasy of scholars was exercised to the full. But they were nearly all equally far from the mark, and this brings us to one of the dangers menacing early students of Coptic. Although even Kircher had admitted that Coptic was a late, and consequently corrupt, form of Egyptian, there was a general tendency to assume that it was far closer to the early language than it in fact was. The names of the deities which scholars tried to decipher in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had often been distorted by transcription into Greek and Latin, and too little account was taken of the immense linguistic evolution which had occurred over thousands of years. It was this that Champollion's successors would bring to light.

¹⁵¹ Paul Ernst Jablonski, *Pantheon Aegyptiorum, sive de diis eorum commentarius* (Frankfurt an der Oder, 1750), i. 81–102.

¹⁵² Ibid. i. 151.

¹⁵³ Ibid. iii. 19.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. ii. 229–30.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. i. 182.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. 50–1. Cf. La Croze, *Thesaurus epistolicus*, iii. 155.

¹⁵⁷ Jablonski, *Pantheon*, iii. 180.

Grammars, Dictionaries, and Dialects

GRAMMARS

It was one thing to criticize Kircher, but another to do better. One of the first true advances on Kircher's linguistic publications was the work of Guillaume Bonjour. An Augustinian hermit from Toulouse, Bonjour had been summoned to Rome at the age of 25 in 1695 by Cardinal Enrico Noris, who had just been appointed custodian of the Vatican Library by the pope, Innocent XII, and, in 1701, would become the prefect.¹ Bonjour remained in Rome for twelve years. His publication on the name of Joseph, *Dissertatio de nomine Patriarchae Josephi a Pharaone imposito. In defensionem Vulgatae Editionis, et Patrum qui Josephum in Serapide adumbratum tradiderunt*, which appeared in 1696, a defence of the Vulgate translation as 'salvator mundi', drew the attention of Leibniz and Ezechiel Spanheim,² and his *In monumenta coptica seu Aegyptiaca Bibliothecae Vaticanae brevis exercitatio* of 1699 was regarded as a most useful list of Coptic holdings in Rome. Having decided to serve the missionary movement in China, Bonjour and the fellow members of his expedition left Rome in July 1707 intending to set sail for Macao from Plymouth. On his way to England Bonjour stopped off in the Netherlands to confer with some of the citizens of the Republic of Letters with whom he had remained in correspondence. And his reputation in the invisible Republic was high.

The veneration in which Bonjour was held emerges clearly from his correspondence. Lodovico Antonio Muratori, one of the greatest historians of his day, was devoted to him, even if his devotion stopped short of following Bonjour's call to study Arabic, Syriac, and Coptic. 'Those

¹ For Bonjour's life see the introduction to Guillaume Bonjour, *Elementa linguae Copticae: Grammaire inédite du XVIIe siècle*, ed. Sydney H. Aufrère and Nathalie Bosson (Geneva, 2006), pp. xl–xxxvii.

² Leibniz, *Allgemeiner politischer und historischer Briefwechsel*, xiii. 159.

barbarous characters and the exotic sense of those languages', he replied, were as remote from the nature of the Italians as Egypt, and the still more distant Arabia, were from Italy.³ And not only was Bonjour admired by the mayor of Deventer, the historian Gijsbertus Cuperus,⁴ but his studies were esteemed by another central figure of the Republic of Letters, Jean Le Clerc. In December 1707 Bonjour called on Le Clerc in Amsterdam,⁵ and then spent three or four days with Cuperus in Deventer.⁶ He reached Macao in January 1710 and died in China four years later.⁷

We know little about Bonjour's confessional sympathies, but he may well have been closer to the Jansenists than common citizenship of the Republic of Letters might imply. A number of his Italian friends, such as Noris and Muratori,⁸ had many Jansenist acquaintances and correspondents, even if Muratori contributed to an attack on Jansenism, which he actually sent to Bonjour. Bonjour himself, like the Jansenists, and above all like Renaudot who called on him in Rome, was always eager to prove that the Copts subscribed to the doctrine of transubstantiation,⁹ and it has been suggested that his linguistic studies may have been influenced by the pedagogical methods of the Jansenist centre of Port-Royal.¹⁰

Sadly for Coptic studies, Bonjour's grammar, the *Elementa linguae Copticae seu Aegypticae*, completed in 1698, remained unpublished for over 300 years. The original version was compiled with the encouragement of Cardinal Girolamo Casanate, the prefect of the Vatican Library, who had been of particular assistance to Bonjour in enabling him to consult the Coptic manuscripts in the Roman collections.¹¹ The

³ *Epistolario di L. A. Muratori*, ed. Matteo Casmpori (Modena, 1901–), i. 322–3.

⁴ Cuperus's letters to Bonjour are printed in *Lettres inédites de Gisbert Cuyper (Cuper) à P. Daniel Huet et à divers correspondants (1683–1716)*, ed. Léon-G. Pélissier (Caen, 1903), 219–308. In Apr. 1699 Cuperus expressed his enthusiastic approval of Bonjour's Coptic studies (p. 236).

⁵ Jean Le Clerc, *Epistolario*, ed. Maria Grazia and Mario Sina, 4 vols. (Florence, 1987–97), iii. 117–19.

⁶ *Lettres inédites*, ed. Pélissier, 145.

⁷ Sydney Aufrère and Nathalie Bosson, 'Le Père Guillaume Bonjour (1670–1714): Un orientaliste méconnu porté sur l'étude du copte et le déchiffrement de l'égyptien', *Orientalia*, 67 (1998), 497–506; Le Clerc, *Epistolario*, iii. 119.

⁸ *Epistolario di Muratori*, ii. 536; Rome, Biblioteca Angelica, MS 49, fo. 382^r. On Noris and Muratori and their Jansenist sympathies see Enrico Dammig, MI, *Il movimento giansenista a Roma nella seconda metà del secolo XVIII* (Vatican City, 1945), 47.

⁹ Guillaume Bonjour, *In monumenta Coptica seu Aegyptiaca Bibliothecae Vaticanae brevis exercitatio* (Rome, 1699), 5.

¹⁰ Bonjour, *Elementa*, ed. Aufrère and Bosson, p. xix.

¹¹ Bonjour expressed his gratitude in his *In monumenta Coptica*, 1.

title page dedicating the work to Casanate, however, was replaced in 1700 by one dedicating it to the newly elected pope, Clement XI.¹²

One of Bonjour's main objections to Kircher's grammar was its excessive brevity and consequent neglect of numerous conjugations and grammatical rules. But his criticisms also went further. He was aware of Kircher's many mistakes, his crass mistranslations of Coptic (and Arabic) words, his misunderstanding of the various standard Coptic abbreviations, his ignorance of the Coptic principles of consonantal assimilation, and his neglect of numerous basic grammatical rules.¹³ Nor did Bonjour content himself with criticisms of Kircher. Thanks to Cuperus in Deventer¹⁴ he was informed of the various statements about Coptic made by scholars in northern Europe—by Bartholomeus Mayer, Campegius Vitringa (who doubted whether the ancient Egyptians used the definite article), Étienne Le Moine, and Andreas Müller—and argued with them accordingly.¹⁵

Unlike Kircher's work, Bonjour's grammar, a manuscript of some 350 pages, was remarkably complete and rich in examples taken (in contrast, as we shall see, to his dictionary) from the whole of the Bible. Although Bonjour based it on the familiar Latin (or Greek) models, he was far more precise in his differentiation between the verbal forms than his immediate successors, and it was not until the nineteenth century that his work was surpassed.¹⁶ Bonjour, moreover, inaugurated a tradition of Coptic studies in the Augustinian order. Augustinian scholars, from Giorgi and Carabelloni in the eighteenth century to Agostino Ciasca and Giuseppe Balestri in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, were all to make fundamental contributions to the editing of Coptic biblical texts.

In September 1698, shortly after Bonjour's grammar had been completed, Bernard de Montfaucon visited the Biblioteca Angelica and looked forward to its imminent publication.¹⁷ Eusèbe Renaudot, who

¹² Bonjour, *Elementa*, ed. Aufrère and Bosson, pp. lii, ciii.

¹³ Sydney H. Aufrère and Nathalie Bosson, 'De Copticae Guillelmi Bonjourni grammaticae criticis contra Athanasium Kircherum: La naissance de la critique de l'*Opera Kircheriana Coptica*', *Études coptes*, 8 (2003), 5–18.

¹⁴ *Lettres inédites*, ed. Péliissier, 261; Le Clerc, *Epistolario*, iii. 52–4, 117–19, 123–4.

¹⁵ Bonjour, *Elementa*, ed. Aufrère and Bosson, 13–14, 36.

¹⁶ Nathalie Bosson, 'Guillaume Bonjour, *Elementa Linguae Copticae seu Aegyptiacae*: Première grammaire scientifique de la langue copte', in Immerzeel and Van der Vliet (eds.), *Coptic Studies on the Threshold of a New Millennium*, i. 39–57.

¹⁷ Bernard de Montfaucon, *Diarium Italicum. Sive monumentorum veterum, bibliothecarum, musaeorum, etc. notitiae singulares in itinerrario Italico collectae* (Paris, 1702), 249.

was in Rome with Cardinal de Noailles for the election of Clement XI, was shown the manuscript by the new pope on 3 September 1701 and composed an attestation, which is still attached to the end of the grammar.¹⁸ He first stressed the importance of the study of Coptic to consult the earliest texts on Christian rites and to vanquish the enemies of Catholicism by showing how the Copts undoubtedly believed in transubstantiation, and he then praised the extraordinary achievement of Bonjour.

Bonjour's manuscript remained an object of pilgrimage, consulted by most students of Coptic who stopped in Rome. In the early eighteenth century, for example, David Wilkins looked at it, albeit somewhat superficially.¹⁹ Later in the century Raphael Tuki was instructed to publish it by the Propaganda Fide but, after keeping it in his possession for many years, decided to publish a grammar of his own instead.

The next Coptic grammar actually to be printed after Kircher's was the *Fundamenta linguae Copticae* by Christian Gotthilf Blumberg, the superintendent of the Lutheran Church in Zwickau, published in Leipzig in 1716. The grammar, arguably more functional than anything produced by Kircher, nevertheless fell far behind the work of Bonjour. It was too short, and with too few examples, to be of much practical use. Although Blumberg repeated Pfeiffer's objections to Kircher, he himself mistakenly suggested a Hebrew etymology of certain Coptic words. The grammar was promptly criticized by Veyssi re de La Croze in a letter to Johann Christian Clodius.²⁰ It would later be censured by other students of Coptic such as Paul Ernst Jablonski²¹ and Jablonski's brother-in-law Christian Scholtz from Dresden, who complained of Blumberg's failure to provide enough examples of grammatical usage due to his lack of sources, either printed or in manuscript. He also referred to mistakes on nearly every page so great that they could hardly be regarded as misprints.²² But the criticisms of Blumberg's grammar by better-informed contemporaries raises the question of how Coptic was studied in the first place.

¹⁸ Bonjour, *Elementa*, ed. Aufr re and Bosson, 167.

¹⁹ David Wilkins, 'Dissertatio de lingua Coptica', 92–3. Cf. Bonjour, *Elementa*, ed. Aufr re and Bosson, pp. xxviii–xxxii.

²⁰ La Croze, *Thesaurus epistolicus*, iii. 97. On 13 June 1718 La Croze wrote to Clodius: 'Linguam Aegyptiacam nemo inde legere et intelligere discet, ne ipse quidem Blumbergius, quem illius omnino esse imperitum mihi constat.'

²¹ *Literarischer Briefwechsel von Johann David Michaelis*, ed. Johann Gottlieb Buhle, 3 vols. (Leipzig, 1794–6), i. 30.

²² *Ibid.* 241.

Both La Croze and Jablonski treated Coptic grammar with a certain contempt. In February 1752 Jablonski wrote to Johann David Michaelis, the professor of oriental languages at Göttingen, and confided to him that, when studying the language, neither he, nor his master La Croze, had ever so much as consulted a Coptic grammar. La Croze had said as much in the preface to his Coptic dictionary.²³ Jablonski himself learnt Coptic from La Croze simply by reading St Mark's Gospel, the first two chapters of 1 Corinthians, and a couple of psalms. By doing this he picked up Coptic with remarkable rapidity, but he was quite unable to answer any question about grammar, and was convinced that La Croze would not have been able to do so either.²⁴ Christian Scholtz, like Jablonski court preacher in Berlin, had learnt Coptic at the age of 48 in emulation of Jablonski and was himself engaged in compiling a Coptic grammar. Almost six years after Jablonski's letter, in December 1757, he too wrote to Michaelis and described in detail how he had set about learning the language.²⁵ His approach had been far more traditional. He had consulted Blumberg's grammar but had derived little benefit from it. He then turned to Kircher but with equally little profit. He was subsequently granted permission to borrow all the Coptic material in the royal library in Berlin which, besides transcriptions of biblical texts by the Danish orientalist Theodor Petraeus, included Petraeus's transcription of a manuscript containing the same lexicographical works published by Kircher.²⁶ After copying most of this and other material himself, Scholtz was able to obtain a transcription of the manuscript of La Croze's dictionary in the Leiden library. He continued to copy out Coptic texts, extrapolating grammatical rules as he did so, and collected the results in his own Coptic grammar, which would subsequently be published by his pupil Karl Gottfried Woide.

²³ Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek, Cod. Or. 431B, pp. iii–iv: 'Interim tamen, si quid mihi humanitus acciderit, autem quam id quod molior effecero, nihil inde Lexico meo jacturae accidet, ita videlicet comparato, ut etiam sine ullo praeceptorum Grammaticorum usu, lectorem sedulum non contemnenda illius linguae cognitione imbuiere possit . . . Jam, quando ut supra monui quicquid attinet ad linguae illius utilitatem ad Grammaticam Aegyptiacam rejecerim, ubi commodus erit ea de re disputandi locus, nihil mihi videtur modo superesse, nisi ut paucis agam de iis quae in hoc opere meo continentur.'

²⁴ *Literarischer Briefwechsel von Johann David Michaelis*, i. 27–9.

²⁵ *Ibid.* 240–65.

²⁶ See below, p.253.

DICTIONARIES AND DIALECTS

That La Croze could dismiss Coptic grammar but nevertheless compile a Coptic dictionary suggests that dictionaries could be tackled more lightly than grammars. To begin with this may well have been so. The Coptic texts in Europe were relatively few and mainly biblical (or liturgical). They were, moreover, usually accompanied by Arabic translations. Certainly, the separation of the roots of the verbs from the various prefixes and suffixes required some knowledge of grammar, but it was only gradually that the European lexicographers started to do something which the Coptic lexicographers of the Middle Ages had left undone. Kircher published the medieval dictionaries as he found them, with words frequently preceded by the definite or indefinite article, verbal markers, and pronominal suffixes. While the dictionary by Ibn al-ʿAssal was, like so many monolingual Arabic dictionaries of the time, ordered according to the final letter of each word, the *Scala magna* was arranged, also like a number of Arabic dictionaries, according to subject: the names of God and the angels, words applying to man (vices, virtues, utensils, and so on), the names of animals, the names of plants, fruit, and vegetables, the names of minerals, geographical terms, ecclesiastical terms, the names of figures in the Bible. Within the sections the words are not ordered alphabetically but, according to the old Egyptian custom, hierarchically (the sun, the moon, Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Venus, the animals starting with the lion and the birds with the eagle). That this was an unsatisfactory means of arranging a dictionary was fully apparent to Thomas Marshall.

Not only did Marshall acquire a copy of Kircher's *Lingua Aegyptiaca restituta* but, as we saw, when he was in Holland Theodore Hillingsberg allowed him first to consult, and subsequently to buy, his own manuscript of the original text.²⁷ Hillingsberg's manuscript was more extensive than Pietro Della Valle's, and it enabled Marshall to add a number of extra words, both on the flyleaves and in the text of his copy of Kircher. He further made a meticulous collation of the printed text and the manuscript, and, after Marshall's death in 1685, his task was taken over by his far younger assistant Thomas Edwards, who had been called to Oxford by the vice-chancellor John Fell to help Marshall prepare an edition of the Coptic New Testament.

²⁷ Bodl., MS Marsh. Or. 17.

Edwards's own Coptic–Latin dictionary, which he completed in 1711, long after he had left Oxford in 1690 and had withdrawn to a parish in Northamptonshire, was based on Marshall's copy of Kircher's *Lingua Aegyptiaca restituta* (which contained Marshall's corrections) as well as on Marshall's manuscript.²⁸ Edwards ordered the words alphabetically and removed the prefixes and suffixes in an attempt to give the roots.²⁹ He did, however, have to sacrifice his scholarly activities to his relatively heavy pastoral duties, and was never able to improve and enrich his dictionary with the help of the more recent Coptic acquisitions of the Bodleian. Having abandoned it once when he left Oxford, he returned to it with the encouragement of Pierre Allix, but, aware of his own intellectual isolation and the limitations of his work, he did not try to have it published.³⁰

While Edwards was still working on his dictionary *Bonjour* in Rome was engaged in a similar project.³¹ His approach, however, was very different. Marshall and Edwards were trying to provide an improved version of the dictionaries published by Kircher. *Bonjour* was working independently of Kircher, basing himself exclusively on the vocabulary to be found in eight of the Minor Prophets and the first thirty-three psalms. This already meant that the number of words was limited. He was thus able not only to list the words with their meanings free of the grammatical prefixes, but also to list them under the grammatical prefixes with cross references to the roots—a process which would have been far too laborious had he used a larger number of texts (as he did in his grammar), but which would have facilitated the study of the language, especially if his lexicon were consulted in conjunction with his grammar.

By the time Edwards and *Bonjour* had completed their dictionaries a discovery had been made which meant that, with the exception of *Bonjour*'s grammar, most earlier work on Coptic grammar and vocabulary seemed so limited as to be out of date. This was the existence of Sahidic. That other Coptic dialects existed besides Bohairic was stated in a work on Bohairic grammar written by Athanasius, bishop of Qus, in the fourteenth century,³² and contained in the collection of manuscripts

²⁸ Bodl., MS Marsh. Or. 38.

²⁹ Bodl., MS Bodl. Or. 344.

³⁰ On Edwards see Alastair Hamilton, 'Edwards, Thomas', *ODNB*, xxvii. 968–9.

³¹ Rome, Biblioteca Angelica, MSS 46, 47, 48. The work has now been studied, with interesting observations on *Bonjour*'s ordering of the Coptic alphabet, by Sydney Aufrère and Nathalie Bosson, 'Remarques au sujet du *Lexicon Aegyptio-Latinum* F. Guillelmi Bonjour Tolosani Augustinianus', *Études coptes*, 9 (2006), 17–31.

³² On Athanasius of Qus see *GCAL* ii. 445.

owned by Gilbert Gaulmin de Montgeorges in Paris.³³ Athanasius said that the Coptic language was divided into three dialects—Sahidic, or what he called *al-qibṭī al-miṣrī*, Bohairic, *al-qibṭī al-baḥrī*, and Bashmuric, used in the lands of Bashmur, *bilād al-Bashmūr*. At the time he was writing, he added, the only two in use were Sahidic and Bohairic, both of which had the same origin.³⁴

The first scholar to notice this passage was Louis Picques.³⁵ Together with Johann Wilhelm Hilliger, who had also written a dissertation on Coptic, he would advise Blumberg to embark on his grammar, and in 1695 Picques, who had discovered a Psalter in Sahidic, wrote a letter to Thomas Edwards enquiring about the three dialects.³⁶ At the time the Bodleian Library probably had the largest collection of Sahidic manuscripts in Europe. These—five in all³⁷—were among the Coptic codices collected by Robert Huntington and acquired by the library in 1693. Yet there is no evidence that any of the scholars based in Oxford were aware of their importance. Thomas Edwards told Picques that, to his knowledge, nothing written in Sahidic survived. As for Bashmuric, no literary attestation of it was known in Europe. Pierre Allix transmitted Picques's same question to Huntington. Despite the fact that he had actually purchased the Sahidic manuscripts himself, Huntington, who knew no Coptic, assured Allix that, of the three dialects to which Picques referred, the first was the Egyptian language or Coptic, spoken mainly in Upper Egypt, known by the Arabs as 'Saïd'. The second was Greek, spoken in Alexandria and Lower Egypt, and the third was Ethiopic.³⁸

But what could Bashmuric possibly mean? Could it be Libyan or the language of the oases, Oasitic? Could it, as Huntington implied, be the language of the Abyssinians, or that of the Syrians, or even that of the Greeks? Or was Picques's colleague Dufour de Longuerue right in taking it

³³ On Gaulmin see Alastair Hamilton and Francis Richard, *André Du Ryer and Oriental Studies in Seventeenth-Century France* (London and Oxford, 2004), 44–5, 167–8.

³⁴ BNF, MS Copte 44, fo. 154^r.

³⁵ On Picques see Francis Richard, 'Un érudit à la recherche de textes religieux venus d'Orient, le docteur Louis Picques (1637–1699)', in Emmanuel Bury and Bernard Meunier (eds.), *Les Pères de l'Église au XVII^e siècle* (Paris, 1993), 253–75. His discovery was observed by M. G. Schwartz, *Koptische Grammatik*, ed. H. Steinthal (Berlin, 1850), 18.

³⁶ Johannes Dietrich Winckler, *Sylloge Anecdotorum varios virorum quondam celeberrimorum labores . . . complexa* (Leipzig, 1750), 284.

³⁷ Now Bodl., MSS Hunt. 3, 4, 5, 393, and 394.

³⁸ Huntington, *Epistolae*, 73.

to be the language of the Nubians?³⁹ So many sceptical reactions to the very existence of Bashmuric meant that Picques's suggestion was forgotten for just under a century, but Sahidic was indeed about to come into its own.

The gradual discovery of the Coptic dialects would bedevil Coptic studies for much of the eighteenth century and was reflected in the fate of the Coptic dictionaries. To start with, Sahidic continued to mystify. When David Wilkins was working in the Bodleian in 1707 on his edition of the Coptic New Testament, he consulted two of Huntington's Sahidic manuscripts, MS Hunt. 4 containing parts of John's Gospel, and Hunt. 394 with Acts, the Epistles of Peter and Jude, and the first three chapters of John. He realized that they were written in a different form of Coptic, but he assumed that they were simply in bad Bohairic.⁴⁰ Yet it was above all on the basis of these manuscripts that Jablonski, who visited the English and French libraries between 1717 and 1720, made his own discoveries concerning Sahidic and that La Croze could add them to his Coptic dictionary. Jablonski concluded that Sahidic was an earlier dialect than Bohairic.⁴¹

Veyssière de La Croze's *Lexicon Aegyptiaco-Latinum* was completed in 1721, nine years after his Armenian dictionary and twelve years after his Slavonic one. In the same year his friend Johann Arnold Nolten transmitted a copy of the preface to Theodor Hase, the professor of Hebrew in Bremen, who included it in his journal, the *Bibliotheca Historico-Philologico-Theologica*. The only section that was omitted was the paragraph attacking David Wilkins.⁴² Although manuscript copies of La Croze's dictionary were in circulation in the relatively restricted world of Coptic scholars—one such copy is at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France⁴³—this was the closest the dictionary came to publication in La

³⁹ Winckler, *Sylloge*, 312–13. According to Longuerue Bashmuric 'qui n'a quasi rien du Copte, ou du moins des deux premières dialectes, est celle des Rois de Nubie, qui étoient Chrétiens'.

⁴⁰ Wilkins, *Novum Testamentum Aegyptium vulgo Copticum*, pp. vii–viii, where he describes Bodl. MS Hunt. 394 as in 'lingua plane a reliquis MSS. Copticis, quae unquam vidi, diversa', and 'ab indocto manuque rudi contra Regulas Grammaticales ipsorum Aegyptiorum Ibn Asamanudi et Ibn Katib Qasir atque aliorum sit consarcinata, nec ullo modo cum reliquis linguae Copticae Manuscriptis conciliari aut conferri potest.'

⁴¹ Jablonski, *Pantheon*, 137: 'in dialecto Thebaidis, vel superioris Aegypti, quae vulgari dialecto antiquior est ...'.

⁴² *Bibliotheca Historico-Philologico-Theologica*, Classis Quintas. Fasciculo Quartus (Bremen, 1721), 744–53. Cf. Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek, Cod. Or. 431B, pp. v–vi for the criticism of Wilkins. See also below, p. 264.

⁴³ BNF, MS Copte 80 (L. Delaporte, *Catalogue sommaire des manuscrits coptes de la Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris. Première partie. Manuscrits bohairiques* (Paris, 1912),

Croze's lifetime. By 1730, nine years before his death, La Croze was pessimistic about the chances of his lexicographical works ever being printed. In a letter to Prosper Marchand in Leiden he lamented the lack of interest in 'oriental antiquities'.⁴⁴ After his death in 1739 the original manuscripts were left to his pupil and biographer Charles-Étienne Jordan, and when Jordan himself died in 1745 his heirs sold them to Leiden University.⁴⁵ While the Slavonic and Armenian dictionaries have remained in manuscript to this day, La Croze's followers saw to the posthumous publication of the Coptic one, and it was issued by the Clarendon Press at Oxford in 1775, edited by Christian Scholtz and by Scholtz's pupil, Karl Gottfried Woide.

Woide, who was born in Poland, was brought up in Berlin and studied at Frankfurt an der Oder and Leiden (where he matriculated in September 1747 and was taught by Scholtz, who had also matriculated at the university three years earlier).⁴⁶ After acting as Unitarian preacher in Lissa in Poland he emigrated to London, where he was appointed preacher first at the Dutch chapel royal in St James's Palace in 1770, and then at the Reformed Protestant Church in the Savoy. In 1782 he became assistant librarian at the British Museum and was subsequently placed in charge of the Hebrew and Arabic manuscripts. He and Scholtz took considerable liberties with Veyssière de La Croze's manuscript. They removed La Croze's preface. Although all the Coptic words listed by La Croze were retained, many of the references and examples were also removed. The various references to Armenian, for example, were suppressed, and some of the Latin translations were altered. While La Croze had collected all the Sahidic words at the end of each letter of the alphabet, his editors transferred them to an appendix printed, with certain corrections, at the end of the dictionary.⁴⁷

When it appeared, La Croze's lexicon, with its appendix on Sahidic, had the distinction of being the first work of its kind in print. Like

101–2). The manuscript, discussed by Nathalie Bosson in Anne Boud'hors, *Pages chrétiennes d'Égypte*, 73–4, differs from the one in Leiden. The preface, for example, is considerably shorter and corresponds to the version published by Hase.

⁴⁴ Christiane Berkvens-Stevelinck, 'Une aventure mouvementée: Les dictionnaires slave, copte et égyptien de Mathurin Veyssière de la Croze', *Lias*, 11 (1984), 137–45, esp. 137.

⁴⁵ The events are reconstructed by Berkvens-Stevelinck, *ibid.* 139–44.

⁴⁶ *Album Studiosorum Academiae Lugduno Batavae MDLXXV–MDCCCLXXV*, ed. G. Du Rieu (The Hague, 1875), cols. 1004, 1017.

⁴⁷ The alterations are discussed by J. Janssen, 'Over het koptische woordenboek van Veyssière La Croze', in *Orientalia Neerlandica: A Volume of Oriental Studies* (Leiden, 1948), 71–4.

Bonjour and Edwards, La Croze had removed the grammatical prefixes and suffixes and ordered the words alphabetically, but he had not, as later lexicographers would do, arranged them by radicals. Nevertheless the work was also criticized. Giovanni Luigi Mingarelli, cataloguing the Sahidic manuscripts in Venice, found he could not use it. He had been given a copy by Cardinal Stefano Borgia, but he pointed out that it was altogether inadequate for Sahidic, and thus stressed yet again the rapid advances made in Coptic studies with every new arrival of manuscripts from Egypt.⁴⁸ Later still Champollion observed that the meaning of the words La Croze gave was by no means always accurate and that he was frequently unable to identify the true root.⁴⁹ This may well be the result of La Croze's condescending attitude to Coptic grammar. He appears, for example, to have been unaware that the **ϣ** (*shai*) can be an auxiliary verb, and consequently lists certain words under *shai* which should have been listed under the following letter.⁵⁰

However inadequate the list of Sahidic words in La Croze's lexicon, Sahidic had at last been recognized. Three years after La Croze's dictionary was published, in 1778, two works on Coptic grammar appeared which bear this out. One was by Scholtz, the *Grammatica Aegyptiaca utriusque dialecti*, a much abridged version of the immense grammar he had compiled, edited again by Woide. The original had been criticized by Johann Reinhold Forster, who suggested that it would be far better if Woide, who had been instructed to abridge it for publication, actually

⁴⁸ Giovanni Aloysio Mingarelli, *Aegyptiorum codicum reliquiae Venetiis in Bibliotheca Naniana asservatae*, 2 vols. (Bologna, 1785), i, p. iii.

⁴⁹ Jean-François Champollion, *Observations sur les fragmens coptes (en dialecte bashmourique) de l'Ancien et du Nouveau Testament, publiés par M. W. F. Engelbreth à Copenhague* (Paris, 1818), 10: 'Le court *Lexique Memphitique* de Lacroze, le seul dictionnaire égyptien publié jusqu'ici, ne donne fort souvent la valeur des mots que par approximation; et celle qu'il assigne à la plupart des racines composées qu'il a prises assez fréquemment pour des racines primitives, est rarement d'une grande exactitude.' La Croze's dictionary was also criticized some years later by Amadeo Peyron, *Lexicon linguae Copticae* (Turin, 1835), pp. viii-ix: 'In eo Basmurica dialectus omnino desideratur; sexdecim pagellis concluditur quidquid est dialecti Sahidicae; Memphitica vero pars solas refert voces, neque tamen omnes, quae in Pentateucho, in Psalmis, atque in Novo Testamento occurrunt, quibus accedunt nonnulla vocabula ex libris liturgicis decerpta.' He admitted it was the first of its kind, but lamented the lack of any discussion of philology or etymology.

⁵⁰ Even here, however, La Croze's critics were not always right. He was taxed with giving **ϣⲭⲉⲙⲭⲟⲙ** (*shdjendjom*) and **ϣⲭⲟⲙ** (*shdjom*) (meaning 'to be strong' and 'power') under *shai* rather than *djendja*, but Alexis Mallon, *Grammaire copte* (Beirut, 1956), 126-7, points out that both are potential infinitives and admissible as such. La Croze's listing of **ϣⲫⲟⲛⲛ** (*shphonh*) under *shai*, on the other hand, is incorrect.

compiled a new one.⁵¹ As it stood, the grammar was a competent exposition of the two main Coptic dialects,⁵² but, in the introduction, Woide also stated somewhat dogmatically that Coptic consisted of two dialects alone and, in flagrant contradiction of the statement by Athanasius of Qus, implied that Sahidic was in fact a dialect of Bohairic, to which the name of Coptic is given.⁵³ Although a grammar which gave the rules of both Bohairic and Sahidic could only be welcomed, and although Woide himself had added a number of examples of Sahidic to Scholtz's text, the authors had limited themselves to consulting manuscripts in Oxford, Paris, and London, and had not had access to the collections in Italy.

The other grammar published in the same year was the *Rudimenta linguae Coptae sive Aegyptiacae ad usum Collegii Urbani de Propaganda Fide* by Rafael Tuki. At first, as we saw, there was a call by the Propaganda Fide to publish the manuscript left by Bonjour. The manuscript was consequently given to Tuki with instructions to edit it and add the rules of Sahidic. Tuki proceeded to compile a grammar of his own, and when it was completed he pointed out that, however great the value of Bonjour's work for scholars, his own would be far more useful to students.⁵⁴ His is an impressive work of over 670 pages. As the Arabic subtitle clarified, it gave the rules both of Bohairic and of Sahidic. It ended with a 'Brevis manductio linguae Coptae sive Aegyptiae', all of which, with the exception of the final section on diphthongs applying mainly to Sahidic, was copied directly from al-Samannudi's grammar in Kircher's *Lingua Aegyptiaca restituta*.⁵⁵ Because of the vast number of examples of Coptic usage in the two dialects, Tuki's grammar was arguably of greater use to scholars than Scholtz's. Yet, despite its apparent thoroughness and its

⁵¹ *Literarischer Briefwechsel von Johann David Michaelis*, iii. 367–8.

⁵² Amadeo Peyron, *Grammatica linguae Copticae* (Turin, 1841), p. xii, praised it highly: 'quem librum satis laudavero si dicam, vel nostra aetate a nemine fuisse superatum, ac primas merito tenere'.

⁵³ Christian Scholtz, *Grammatica Aegyptiaca utriusque dialecti: quam brevaviit, illustravit, edidit, Carolus Godofredus Woide* (Oxford, 1778), p. viii: 'Duplex autem est linguae Aegyptiacae Dialectus: Inferioris Aegypti, quae Coptica plerumque appellatur, sed potius Memphitica appellanda est; et Superioris Aegypti, quae Dialectus Sahidica, vel Thebaidica, sive Thebennitica, vocatur.'

⁵⁴ The episode is recounted by Tommaso Valperga di Caluso (Didymus Taurinensis), *Litteraturae Copticae rudimentum* (Parma, 1783), 28; Agostino Antonio Giorgi, *Fragmentum Evangelii S. Iohannis Graeco-Copto-Thebaicum* . . . (Rome, 1789), pp. vi–vii; and above all by Étienne Quatremère, *Recherches critiques et historiques sur la langue et la littérature de l'Égypte* (Paris, 1808), 92.

⁵⁵ Rafael Tuki, *Rudimenta linguae Coptae sive Aegyptiacae ad usum Collegii Urbani de Propaganda Fide* (Rome, 1778), 618–65. The section on diphthongs is pp. 665–8. The debt to Samannudi was pointed out by Arnold van Lantschoot in *CCV* ii. 171.

length, it was by no means entirely satisfactory. It was intended for Tuki's own students at the Collegio Urbano. Of these there were very few indeed. Written for the exclusive use of Copts from Egypt, the explanatory text was in Latin and Arabic, and it assumed that those who consulted it could read both languages, but most particularly Arabic. There were a number of passages in Arabic that were not translated into Latin, as well as certain shorter passages in Latin that were not translated into Arabic. Aimed at a small readership, Tuki's *Rudimenta* would have been hard to use without the supervision of the author himself largely because the mass of examples provided were seldom accompanied by clear elucidations and gave the impression of a lack of order.

The inaccuracy of Tuki's grammar, his ignorance of grammatical terminology, his erroneous paradigms, and his frequent incapacity to distinguish properly between Sahidic and Bohairic have been pointed out ever since. In 1783, writing under the pseudonym Didymus Taurinensis, the Italian scholar Tommaso Valperga di Caluso admitted the utility of so many quotations from the Bible in two dialects, but was shocked by the disorder of Tuki's approach.⁵⁶ He also observed a series of mistakes, omissions, and above all passages in which the Latin translation does not correspond to the Coptic.⁵⁷ Nor was the provenance of Tuki's examples always clear. Valperga's judgement would be echoed by others. Frederik Münter questioned the reliability of Tuki's sources and lamented the vast number of misprints, which often made the examples incomprehensible.⁵⁸ If some may have been taken from manuscripts available in Rome, others were simply copied from earlier Coptic grammars in Arabic. Étienne Quatremère, writing in 1808, was equally severe,⁵⁹ as were later scholars.⁶⁰ Yet Quatremère obviously thought Tuki's grammar good enough to be worth translating into

⁵⁶ Valperga, *Litteraturae Copticae rudimenta*, 27. Cf. p. 54: 'adeo multa comperiet inordinate, perplexe, perverse tradita, commutata invicem, manca, repetita, perturbata, atque edita mendose ...'.

⁵⁷ Ibid. 28–32.

⁵⁸ Frederik Münter, *Commentatio de indole versionis Novi Testamenti Sahidicae, adcedunt fragmenta epistolarum Paulli ad Timotheum ex membranis Sahidicis Musaei Borgiani Velitris* (Copenhagen, 1789), 4.

⁵⁹ Quatremère, *Recherches*, 93: 'Cet ouvrage, qui, comme tous ceux des Orientaux sur la grammaire, est dépourvu de critique et de méthode, ne laisseroit pas, à raison du grand nombre de textes Memphitiques et Saïdiques qui s'y trouvent cités, d'être d'un grand secours aux amateurs de la langue Copte, si l'auteur n'y avoit pas laissé subsister une foule de fautes typographiques ...'.

⁶⁰ Schwartz, *Koptische Grammatik*, 22: 'Tuki besass eine empirisch ausgebreitete Kenntnis der Koptischen Sprache, hatte jedoch keinen Sinn für eine wissenschaftliche Behandlung derselben. Zugleich sind seine Arbeiten meist sehr uncorrect, ja manche der

French,⁶¹ and Tuki, who had also started to work on a Bohairic–Arabic dictionary intended for students of the Bible,⁶² had a great admirer in the Augustinian hermit Agostino Antonio Giorgi.

ROME AND THE BORGIA CIRCLE

Giorgi brings us to the final stage of Coptic studies in the early modern period, a stage set in Rome and dominated by Stefano Borgia. Born in Velletri, brought up by his uncle, the archbishop of Fermo, Borgia had taken a degree in philosophy, trained to be a historian, and developed a wide curiosity about the cultures and languages of the world. In 1770 he was appointed secretary of the Propaganda Fide; in 1789 he was created cardinal, and, partly as a reward for his ill-treatment by the French, who imprisoned him in 1798, he was appointed prefect of the Propaganda Fide in 1802. He died in Lyons in 1804, on his way to the coronation of Napoleon as emperor.⁶³

Borgia was in touch with many of the leading European scholars of his day—Anquetil Duperron, Silvestre de Sacy, Jan Potocki, and countless others. His position as secretary of the Propaganda Fide enabled him to assemble one of the most remarkable libraries in Europe, with manuscripts from an almost unprecedented variety of provenances. Besides Irish, Icelandic, and Slavonic codices, he had a rare Mexican manuscript, codices from all over the East—in Chinese, Malay, Nepalese, Sanscrit, Urdu, Siamese, and Cambodian—and a vast collection of documents and texts in Hebrew, Syriac, Ethiopic, Armenian, Georgian, Turkish, Persian, and Coptic.⁶⁴

It was under Borgia's patronage that Giorgi could devote himself to the study of Coptic. Giorgi had joined the Augustinians in Bologna in 1727 and gained a high reputation within a very few years.⁶⁵ In the early 1730s the young Giacomo Casanova came to Rome with a letter of

von ihm herausgegebenen Schriften sind voll von Verstößen gegen Grammatik und Sprachgebrauch.' See also Bosson, 'Guillaume Bonjour, *Elementa Linguae Copticae seu Aegyptiacae*', 50.

⁶¹ The translation remained in manuscript. Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod. Copt.11 Quatr.

⁶² *GCAL* iv. 164.

⁶³ On Borgia's life see H. Enzensberger, 'Borgia Stefano', *DBI* xii. 739–42, and, more recently, Paola Orsatti, *Il fondo Borgia della Biblioteca Vaticana e gli studi orientali a Roma tra Sette e Ottocento* (Studi e testi, 376; Vatican City, 1996), 4–31.

⁶⁴ For the Coptic collection see Orsatti, *Il fondo Borgia*, 106–15.

⁶⁵ For Giorgi see G. G. Fagioli Vercellone, 'Giorgi, Agostino Antonio', *DBI* lv. 300–4.

recommendation for him from Lelio Caraffa in Naples, and recalled in his memoirs the learned Augustinian, kind and understanding, already renowned for his dislike of the Jesuits and esteemed by all who knew him, including the pope. Casanova regarded him as his mentor.⁶⁶ Suspected of Jansenist sympathies, Giorgi defended with brilliance (and with the support of the pope, Benedict XIV) the *Historia Pelagiana* of Cardinal Enrico Noris when it was condemned by the Spanish Inquisition.⁶⁷ His learning and linguistic gifts had brought him to the attention of the Propaganda Fide, for whose sake he had learned Tibetan, and in 1752 he was appointed director of the Augustinian Biblioteca Angelica.

Giorgi consulted Borgia's collection of Coptic manuscripts at Velletri. He edited a part of the Sahidic material, notably the fragment concerning the miracles of St Coluthus, the *Fragmentum Copticum ex actis S. Coluthi martyris erutum, ex membranis vetustissimis saeculi V* (1781), from a manuscript discovered in Upper Egypt in 1778, and the even earlier fragment of the Gospel of St John, *Fragmentum Evangelii S. Iohannis Graeco-Copto-Thebaicum saeculi IV*, which came out in 1789, and in which he lavished praise on Tuki.⁶⁸ Giorgi's devotion to Tuki and his reliance on his transcriptions, however, accounted for a number of mistakes in his own Coptic.⁶⁹

As one of the last representatives of the Republic of Letters, Borgia welcomed scholars of all religious denominations, but he was particularly generous to the Danes, and some of his Danish friends would later express their gratitude by helping him financially in the difficult year of 1798.⁷⁰ The Danish presence in Rome, which exemplified Borgia's hospitality towards Protestant scholars, was the result of the encouragement given by the Danish Crown to oriental studies. This was initially connected with the quest for missionaries to work in the Danish possession of Trankebar on the south-eastern coast of India and the desire to form a Protestant empire. The first signs of this ambition had begun to emerge in the early decades of the eighteenth century under Frederick IV, and he had turned to the Pietist university of Halle as a training ground.⁷¹ But it was above all

⁶⁶ Giacomo Casanova de Seingalt, *Histoire de ma vie*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1993), i. 171, 179–81, 185, 188, 198, 223; ii. 599.

⁶⁷ Dammig, *Il movimento giansenista*, 155–9.

⁶⁸ Giorgi, *Fragmentum Evangelii S. Iohannis*, pp. xi–xiv.

⁶⁹ This was pointed out by Schwartz, *Koptische Grammatik*, 26.

⁷⁰ Friedrich Gottlieb Welcker, *Zoëga's Leben: Sammlung seiner Briefe und Beurtheilung seiner Werke*, 2 vols. (Stuttgart and Tübingen, 1819), ii. 200–13.

⁷¹ Jean B. Neveux, *Vie spirituelle et vie sociale entre Rhin et Baltique au XVII^e siècle de J. Arndt à P. J. Spener* (Paris, 1967), 651–2, and above all Gérard Duverdier, 'Portugais

under Frederick V that a broader Danish interest in the East developed, and in this process it was no longer the university of Halle, but the more recently founded university of Göttingen that played a decisive part. Göttingen soon became the most popular German university among Danish students. They flocked to the lectures of the classical philologist Christian Gottlob Heyne; they were taught church history by Johann Lorenz Mosheim and Christian Wilhelm Franz Walch; and they were made particularly welcome by the biblical scholar and orientalist Johann David Michaelis.⁷² Although Michaelis would be damagingly maligned in the memoirs of Johann Jakob Reiske,⁷³ he was not only a central figure in the world of orientalists, but he could be generous with his time and information. He also had some knowledge of Coptic.⁷⁴ Contemporary students of the language would ask him questions and send him information about it, and he encouraged others to study it.

Largely thanks to Michaelis Frederick V and his minister Count Bernstorff managed to organize the great expedition to the Yemen in 1761, named after its sole survivor, the surveyor Carsten Niebuhr. To begin with this expedition, too, was regarded, at least in part, as a missionary project, and the first plans were to dispatch it directly to Trankebar, so that it might proceed from there to the Persian Gulf, rather than approach the Yemen from the west, as it finally did.⁷⁵ The members of the Niebuhr expedition set out with a list of 'questions', philological, scientific, and historical, which had been prepared by Michaelis and which were of immediate relevance to his work on the Old Testament and his interest in the connection between Arabic and Hebrew. And it was also to satisfy Michaelis's curiosity about Eastern versions of the Scriptures that so many of his Danish students at Göttingen were to make their way to Rome by way of Vienna in the last two decades of the eighteenth century.⁷⁶

The first of the Danish students to be welcomed in Rome by Stefano Borgia was Andreas Christian Hviid, who would work mainly on the Samaritan Pentateuch in the Barberini collection and who arrived in

ou Indo-Portugais, le choix des missionnaires de Tranquebar', *Arquivos do Centro Cultural Português*, 22 (1986), 115–44.

⁷² For the importance of the university of Göttingen see Vello Helk, *Dansk Norske Studierejser 1661–1813*, 2 vols. (Odense, 1991), i. 96–103.

⁷³ Johann Jakob Reiske, *Lebensbeschreibung* (Leipzig, 1783), 127. Reiske's remarks led to the savage description of Michaelis in Johann Fück, *Die arabischen Studien in Europa* (Leipzig, 1955), 119–20.

⁷⁴ In his preface to Forster, *Epistolae ad Ioannem Davidem Michaelis*, sig. 2^v, he refers to 'linguam ... Copticam—cujus sum expertus'.

⁷⁵ *Literarischer Briefwechsel von Johann David Michaelis*, i. 298–301, 316–17.

⁷⁶ For Borgia's Danish friends see Helk, *Dansk Norske Studierejser*, i. 132–3, 155, 177–8.

1779.⁷⁷ A year later he was joined by the biblical scholar Jakob Georg Christian Adler, the only Danish visitor who had not studied in Göttingen but had attended the universities of Rostock and Kiel. In Italy between 1780 and 1782, Adler spent five months in Rome.⁷⁸ In addition to publishing a catalogue of Borgia's Arabic manuscripts in Cufic and describing his important Druse material (thereby giving a new impulse to the study of the Druses), he wrote about Borgia's Coptic collection in his account of his Italian journey.⁷⁹ On his return to Denmark he was appointed professor of Syriac in Copenhagen. In 1781 Andreas Birch arrived from Göttingen and Vienna. Besides Borgia's collections he explored the Vatican, the Biblioteca Angelica, and the libraries of Naples, Florence, and Venice in search of Greek manuscripts and, when he was again in Copenhagen, published a series of works on the New Testament, both canonical and apocryphal, as well as an edition of the Gospels in Greek, before ending his career as bishop of Århus. In 1783 it was Georg Zoëga who made his first visit to Rome, again via Göttingen and Vienna. He would subsequently settle in Rome and, despite his conversion to Catholicism, act as the main counsellor, and sometimes as the teacher, of his compatriots until his death in 1809.⁸⁰ Shortly afterwards, in 1784, Frederik Münter arrived. Born in Gotha, he had frequented some of the leaders of the German Romantic movement in Weimar—Goethe, Herder, and Wieland. He studied at Göttingen, and knew Niebuhr.⁸¹ He would later be appointed professor of theology in Copenhagen and bishop of Zealand. In 1787 Niels Iversen Schow visited Rome and would display his knowledge of Coptic in his edition of Borgia's papyrus fragments in Greek discovered in Giza in 1778.⁸² His studies in Italy from 1787 to 1791 enabled him to obtain the chair of archaeology in Copenhagen. Finally, in 1793, Wolf Frederik Engelbreth came to Rome for two years, and, under Zoëga's supervision, progressed with astonishing speed in the knowledge of Coptic.⁸³

⁷⁷ Andreas Christian Hviid, *Specimen ineditae versionis Arabico-Samaritanae Pentateuchi e codice manuscripto Bibliothecae Barberinae* (Rome, 1780).

⁷⁸ Fr. de Fontenay, 'Adler, Jacob Georg Christian', *DBL* i. 59–61.

⁷⁹ J. G. C. Adler, *Kurze Uebersicht seiner biblischkritischen Reise nach Rom* (Altona, 1783), 184–93.

⁸⁰ Jørgen Steen Jensen, 'Zoëga, Georg', *DBL* xvi. 160–3.

⁸¹ Bjørn Kornerup, 'Münter, Friederich', *DBL* x. 199–201.

⁸² Nicolas Schow, *Charta papyracea Graece scripta Musei Borgiani Velitris qua series incolarum Ptolemaidis Arsinoiticae in aggeribus et fossis operantium exhibetur* (Rome, 1788).

⁸³ Bjørn Kornerup, 'Engelbreth, Wolf Frederik', *DBL* iv. 184–5.

By the time the Danes arrived Sahidic was being studied on a grand scale. It was not only the Borgia collection that provided material. In 1785 in Bologna Mingarelli published his *Aegyptiorum codicum reliquiae in Bibliotheca Naniana asservatae*, a catalogue of the seventeen Sahidic fragments in the library collected by the Venetian soldier and statesman Giacomo Nani.⁸⁴ Mingarelli did not discuss the dialect, but Giorgi expounded his views on the different forms of Coptic at length. In his edition of the fragment of St John, however, he also drew attention to fragments in a third dialect, Bashmuric, or what is now known as Fayyumic. These had recently arrived in the Borgia collection thanks to the missionaries in Egypt who had started to obtain manuscripts from the White Monastery near Sohag as well as from other areas. The linguistic difference with the other manuscripts had been noticed by Münter, and Giorgi speculated on when and where the new dialect was spoken, and what its relationship with the other dialects was. Louis Picques, as we saw, had already suspected the existence of at least three dialects, but his suggestion had been abandoned, and Scholz had claimed that there were only two and of these Memphitic or Bohairic was the oldest. Giorgi (like Münter) still agreed that Bohairic was older than Sahidic, and supported his view by pointing to the larger number of Greek words in Sahidic. When it came to Bashmuric, Giorgi concluded that it must have been a dialect spoken in the Western Desert and its oases, stretching over an area from Libya in the north to Nubia and Ethiopia in the south.⁸⁵ He published one of the fragments from the first Epistle to the Corinthians. Münter, on the other hand, who published the Sahidic fragments of the first Epistle to Timothy and 1 Corinthians 9: 10–16 in both Sahidic and Bashmuric, regarded Bashmuric (or Ammoniac, as he called it, thereby associating it with the outer oasis of Siwa) as too close to Sahidic to rank as a dialect of its own,⁸⁶ while Tuki seems to have considered it simply another form of Memphitic, ‘Memphiticus alter’.⁸⁷ Building on Giorgi’s statements, another Augustinian, Giovanni Agostino Carabelloni, announced in 1797 that there were four Egyptian dialects, which he

⁸⁴ On Nani’s collection, most of which is now in the Biblioteca Marciana in Venice, see Marino Zorzi, *La libreria di San Marco: Libri, lettori, società nella Venezia dei Dogi* (Milan, 1987), 309–15, 510.

⁸⁵ Giorgi, *Fragmentum Evangelii S. Iohannis*, pp. lv–lxxxviii.

⁸⁶ Münter, *Commentatio*, 75–8. ‘Nullus autem dubito’, he concludes (pp. 77–8), ‘quin mecum in probanda conveniat sententia: membranas ammoniacas versionem exhibere sahidicae adeo consentientem, ut pro eadem, in singulis modo lectionibus diversa haberi debeat.’

⁸⁷ Ludwig Stern, *Koptische Grammatik* (Leipzig, 1880), 14.

listed in chronological order: Memphitic (Bohairic), Thebaidic (Sahidic), Psammiric or Bashmuric (Fayyumic), and, most recently, Ammoniac, a mixture of Bohairic and Sahidic.⁸⁸

Entrusted with drawing up a catalogue of Borgia's Coptic manuscripts, Zoëga made immense advances in the approach both to the language and to the culture of the Copts. His *Catalogus codicum Copticorum manuscriptorum qui in Museo Borgiano Velitris adservantur* appeared in 1810, one year after his death.⁸⁹ He there published the Bashmuric fragments (as well as many Bohairic and Sahidic excerpts) from numerous different texts. In 1808 Étienne Quatremère had published his *Recherches critiques et historiques sur la langue et la littérature de l'Égypte*, and, having inspected the Coptic manuscripts in the Vatican Library which had been brought to Paris by the French army, he had already listed a considerable number of works in Coptic.⁹⁰ Yet it was Zoëga who first gave a true idea of the variety of Coptic literature, and most particularly of the many apocryphal texts of the New Testament which survived in Coptic. To these we shall return in the last chapter. The results of Zoëga's research are of value to this day. Even the sceptical Moritz Gottlob Schwartz would regard him as by far the best Coptologist to date.⁹¹ Zoëga also discussed the three dialects.⁹² In contrast to his predecessors, he came to the conclusion that Sahidic and Bashmuric were older than Memphitic or Bohairic. Bashmuric, he argued, had been spoken in the Nile Delta and in the more remote regions east of the Nile, while Sahidic had been spoken in the south. They were then superseded at an unspecified date by Bohairic, which became the common dialect of the entire country and was not confined to any particular region.

⁸⁸ G. A. Carabelloni, *De agiographia primigenia et translatitia adjectis ex Hebraeo textu divinis testimoniis ab Apostolis et Evangelistis e Veteri Testamento in Novum adscitis revocatisque ad fontes nonnullis Coptico-sacris fragmentis* (Rome, 1797), 124: 'facile annuimus Christifideles Aegyptios, dialectis inter se diversis usos fuisse, Memphitica nimirum, Thebaidensi, quae et Sahidica dicitur, Psammirica, seu Basmurica, Ammoniaca, ac demum conflata ex Thebaica, et Memphitica, quas, si respectu temporis, quo recentissimis litteratis Europaeis innotuerunt, primam dixerimus, secundam, tertiam, et quartam, nihil est quod erroris periculum vereamur.'

⁸⁹ The vicissitudes of the publication are discussed by Joseph-Marie Sauget in his introductory study to the most recent anastatic edition of Georgius Zoëga, *Catalogus codicum Copticorum manu scriptorum qui in Musaeo Borgiano Velitris adservantur* (Hildesheim, 1973), pp. v*-vii*.

⁹⁰ Quatremère, *Recherches*, 118-34.

⁹¹ Schwartz, *Koptische Grammatik*, 27: 'Zoëga übertraf seine Vorgänger an ausgehnter Kenntnis der Koptischer Sprache.'

⁹² Zoëga, *Catalogus*, 139-44.

In his *Recherches* Quatremère, too, had written about Bashmurić and had come to a similar conclusion about its having been spoken in the Nile Delta. Nevertheless he disagreed on another point: he claimed that the dialect of the texts published by Giorgi and Münter was not Bashmurić. It was, rather, a dialect which was indeed spoken in the oases of the Western Desert, in an area stretching from the level of Aswan in the south to the Fayyum in the north.⁹³ He preferred to call it Oasitic, and proceeded to publish the fragment of the book of Jeremiah in the Borgia collection.

A step further in the study of Bashmurić or Fayyumic was taken by Wolf Frederik Engelbreth, the last of the Danish students of Coptic to be protected by Borgia. His critical edition of the Bashmurić fragments owned by Borgia, the *Fragmenta Basmurico-Coptica Veteris et Novi Testamenti, quae in Museo Borgiano Velitris asservantur* came out in Copenhagen in 1811. In his disquisition on Bashmurić, however, Engelbreth still shared Zoëga's belief that the dialect was spoken in the Nile Delta. When he reviewed the book in 1818 Champollion had certain criticisms, but claimed that Engelbreth had improved on Zoëga's transcriptions of the Bashmurić texts by providing a proper separation of the words and verses.⁹⁴ More recent research, however, has revealed substantial errors in Engelbreth's amendments and confirmed the merits of Zoëga.⁹⁵

By the early nineteenth century the various advances in Coptic studies were accompanied by ever more strenuous efforts to reach the hieroglyphs through a knowledge of the Egyptian language in its later form. Although he made hardly any headway in deciphering the hieroglyphs,⁹⁶ Zoëga exemplified the importance that Coptic had for the various scholars who would tackle the Rosetta Stone. The monument, containing the text of a decree issued in 196 BC in hieroglyphs and the Demotic or vulgar script as well as in Greek, was excavated by the French during the Napoleonic campaign. It was copied and reproduced on Napoleon's orders, but brought to London in 1802 after the capitulation of the French to the English. One of the most brilliant of the scholars working on it, the Swede Johan David Åkerblad, who had also learnt his Coptic from Zoëga,⁹⁷ described Coptic as the 'langue qui m'a

⁹³ Quatremère, *Recherches*, 214–28.

⁹⁴ Champollion, *Observations sur les fragmens coptes (en dialecte bashmourique)*, 6–7, 10–11.

⁹⁵ Anne Boud'hors, 'Réflexions supplémentaires sur les principaux témoins fayoumiques de la Bible', in L. Painchard and P.-H. Poirier, *Coptica, Gnostica, Manichaia: Festschrift Wolf-Peter Funk* (Leuven and Laval, 2005), 63–90, esp. 68–9.

⁹⁶ Iversen, *The Myth of Egypt*, 117–21.

⁹⁷ Welcker, *Zoëga's Leben*, ii. 300.

servi de flambeau dans toutes ces recherches'.⁹⁸ And Coptic was essential to Jean-François Champollion.⁹⁹ He had started to study it in Paris, in 1809 at the age of 19, under the tuition of a Coptic monk, Rufa'il, who had come to France with the French troops and had first met (and taught) Champollion in Grenoble in 1805.¹⁰⁰ In a review of Zoëga's catalogue, written in 1811, some ten years before he succeeded in deciphering the hieroglyphs, he announced his conclusions about the language.¹⁰¹ Old though it was, he wrote, Bohairic was far more recent than Sahidic. Bashmuric, on the other hand, was the dialect of the Fayyum. The great antiquity of Sahidic, Champollion concluded, and its consequently greater proximity to the language of the Pharaohs, made it of vital importance for anyone investigating ancient Egypt.¹⁰² From Coptic Champollion himself obtained both an idea of the structure of the language of the Egyptians and a vocabulary, which played a central part in his understanding of the hieroglyphs. At the same time, however, Coptic sometimes misled him just as it had done his predecessors. His assumption that the words of the ancient texts could be identified with, and directly transcribed into, the language in its later form, was the cause of errors which future Egyptologists would have to correct.¹⁰³

⁹⁸ Johan David Åkerblad, *Lettre au Citoyen Silvestre de Sacy au sujet de l'inscription égyptienne du monument de Rosette* (Paris, 1802), 2. Åkerblad put his knowledge of Coptic to good use in his 'Sur les noms coptes de quelques villes et villages d'Égypte', which he completed in 1810 and which was published at the request of Silvestre de Sacy in *Journal asiatique*, 13 (1834), 337–77, 385–435. For Åkerblad's achievements see Iversen, *The Myth of Egypt*, 129–30.

⁹⁹ Cf. Champollion, *L'Égypte sous les Pharaons*, i, pp. xii–xvi; id., *Grammaire égyptienne*, pp. ix–xix. For Champollion's progress see H. Hartleben, *Champollion: Sein Leben und sein Werk*, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1906), i. 374–87, 421–97.

¹⁰⁰ Faure, *Champollion*, 135–6; Hartleben, *Champollion*, 50, 58–60, 82–3.

¹⁰¹ Jean-François Champollion, *Observations sur le catalogue des manuscrits coptes du Musée Borgia à Velletri, ouvrage posthume de George Zoega* (Paris, 1811), 5–6. On Champollion's use of Coptic, and the particular benefits of Sahidic, see Hartleben, *Champollion*, i. 52, 79–82, 122–3, 156, 198, 200; ii. 377–80, 383.

¹⁰² Champollion, *Observations sur le catalogue*, 27.

¹⁰³ Iversen, *The Myth of Egypt*, 144.

14

Manuscript Collecting

IN EUROPE

Progress both in the Coptic language and in the knowledge of the Church of Alexandria depended to a large extent on the available Coptic material. So how was this collected? The channels, as we have already seen, were numerous. Visitors from the East might arrive with gifts. Scholars in Europe managed to pick up Coptic manuscripts which had been acquired by travellers and then sold. Agents in Egypt could be relied on to scour the libraries and the bookshops, and European travellers did the same. And then there were copyists—professionals in Egypt, usually members of the clergy, and Europeans for whom it was the only way of acquiring a text.

To begin with, there were the Eastern visitors to Europe. The first Coptic and Coptic–Arabic manuscripts to enter the Vatican Library were probably presented to the pope, Eugenius IV, by the Coptic delegation to the Council of Florence in 1441. These were some fifty codices, mainly Arabic but about half a dozen in Coptic.¹ Besides a treatise on ophthalmology by the Christian physician ʿIsa ibn ʿAli and a work by the great Muslim philosopher al-Ghazali, the Arabic material included a tenth-century Egyptian manuscript with a translation from the Coptic of the Gospel of Luke, one of the earliest known Arabic versions of a part of the New Testament. The Coptic works, on the other hand, were mainly liturgical.

That it was possible, on occasion, to buy Coptic manuscripts in Europe emerges from the *Diarium Italicum* by Bernard de Montfaucon, who managed to purchase five volumes of biblical texts at a bookshop in Venice in August 1698 (now BNF MSS Coptes 56, 58, 60, 63, and 65).²

¹ These probably correspond to BAV, MSS Vat. Copt. 17, 20, 21, 42, 43, 54. Levi della Vida, *Ricerche sulla formazione del più antico fondo*, 29–108; CCV i, pp. xi–xiv, 58–63, 71–8, 218–26, 355–59.

² Montfaucon, *Diarium Italicum*, 69. See also Delaporte, *Catalogue sommaire*, 2, 8–9, 16–17, 20–1, 23–4.

But a still more remarkable case of a scholar who acquired all his Coptic material in Europe is that of Thomas Marshall.

Marshall, we saw, began to assemble his collection of Coptic codices in the 1660s. His interest in Coptic on account of his biblical studies extended to a more general interest in the Church of Alexandria,³ and he started transcribing what Coptic material he could find. One of the first manuscripts he consulted was a splendid edition of the four Gospels owned by his friend Isaac Vossius. Dedicated to the church of St Michael in Alexandria in 1497 (Year of the Martyrs 1214), it has a feature which is somewhat unusual for a manuscript of so late a date: it is solely in Coptic, with only the colophon and occasional marginal jottings in Arabic. When and how Vossius acquired it is uncertain. We cannot exclude the possibility that he got it from Gaulmin in Paris, but it bears none of the seals or notes characteristic of Gaulmin's manuscripts. Marshall, at all events, copied out the entire manuscript.⁴ A number of collectors were eager to purchase it. Melchisédec Thévenot hoped to obtain it, and so did Theodor Petraeus.⁵ In the end, however, it was Marshall himself who succeeded, and it is now in the Bodleian Library, MS Marshall Or. 5.⁶

Shortly before his return to England Marshall spent some time in Amsterdam copying out two manuscripts belonging to the bookseller Theodore Hillingsberg. One was a Coptic Psalter and the other contained the lexicographical works which had been edited by Kircher. Again Marshall succeeded in purchasing the originals. The lexicographical manuscript is now MS Marshall Or. 17 and the Psalter MS Marshall Or. 100. In August 1670, finally, Marshall copied out a liturgical manuscript in the Leiden library which had arrived in the collection formed by Levinus Warner, the Dutch diplomatic representative in Istanbul, and he collated it with material belonging to Golius.⁷ When Marshall

³ In a letter to Edward Bernard dated Dordrecht, 3 Dec. 1669 (Bodl., MS Smith 45, fo. 109a) Marshall writes: 'the first attempt in this obsolete literature must be a small wedge to make way for greater; I mean the rest of the Aegyptian Christian Monuments which are found in Italy or elsewhere. Nay, I think it may be used for a small bait to fish in the Nile withall for other the like Coptick MSS; I mean in Aegypt itself, where ther is little hopes of dispersing those great Bibles...'

⁴ His transcription, in two volumes, is now Bodl., MSS Marshall Or. 52 and 53.

⁵ BL Add. MS 22905, fo. 90. Marshall also mentions Thévenot in his other letters to Samuel Clarke. Cf. fos. 85, 88. Cf. Franciscus Junius's comments in Sophie van Romburgh, *For My Worthy Freind Mr Franciscus Junius: An Edition of the Correspondence of Francis Junius F.F. (1591–1677)* (Leiden, 2004), 1036.

⁶ Ibid. 1037.

⁷ The manuscript Marshall copied is now Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek, MS Hebr. 121. Marshall's copy is Bodl., MS Marshall Or. 93. On the verso of the frontispiece he

abandoned Holland for England he left few Coptic codices behind him. If we look at the Leiden collection, we find that there are now only two from the seventeenth-century collections—one, a lectionary which had been given to Scaliger by Daniel Chamier, and the other the manuscript bought by Warner in Istanbul.⁸ Marshall arrived in Oxford with sixteen original Coptic manuscripts, some of which were of the highest quality. These were the first to enter England and, within four years of Marshall's death in 1685, his manuscripts were in the Bodleian Library.

To copy manuscripts as Marshall did was a common way of procuring Coptic texts at the time. When Montfaucon called on him in Rome, Bonjour copied out the manuscript containing the Coptic version of the twelve Minor Prophets and the book of Daniel which Montfaucon had bought in Venice.⁹ Christian Scholtz told Michaelis that it was by copying out manuscripts that he had learnt Coptic. But one of the most ardent copyists was Theodor Petraeus from Flensburg.

Petraeus had gone to study Eastern languages at Leiden University in about 1650. His primary interest had been Ethiopic.¹⁰ Together with Johannes Georgius Nisselius from the Palatinate, and with the support of Golius, he was involved in a publishing firm of Ethiopic texts, which issued some half dozen publications between 1656 and 1662. In the meantime, however, Petraeus had been commissioned by Frederick III of Denmark, who hoped to give him a chair of oriental languages at the university of Copenhagen, to collect antiquities in the East. On his way he stopped in Rome and learnt the rudiments of Coptic with Kircher. He then proceeded via Greece and Turkey to Syria, Palestine, and above all, Egypt, where he improved his knowledge of Coptic, and returned to Europe in 1659 carrying with him a collection of Coptic and Ethiopic manuscripts. Nisselius died at the end of 1662, and some years later, after moving from Leiden to Amsterdam, Petraeus found himself faced with heavy debts incurred by the publishing firm. Although he turned

wrote: 'Usui meo obtigerunt duo Liturgicorum Copt-arabicarum codices mss uterque mutilus, quorum alterum suppeditavit bibliotheca Cl. Jacob. Golii p.m. e quo primum descripsimus Coptica Levini Warneri bibliotheca, quae Leidae est. orientalis asseverat alterum, cujus variantes a cod. Goliano lectiones passim notavimus.'

⁸ Nico Kruit and Jan Just Witkam, *A List of Coptic Manuscript Materials in the Papyrological Institute Leiden and in the Library of the University of Leiden* (Leiden, 2000), 8–10.

⁹ Rome, Biblioteca Angelica, MS 67. Bonjour wrote in a prologue to his transcription that he copied this particular manuscript since the text was not in the Vatican library. Superior versions of the other four manuscripts Montfaucon had bought, however, could be found in Rome (pp. v–vi). Montfaucon's manuscript is BNF MS Copte 58.

¹⁰ For Petraeus' career, see Rahlfs, 'Nissel und Petraeus', 290–318.

down various professorships offered to him—one, at the university of Königsberg, was proposed by Frederick William, the elector of Brandenburg known as ‘the Great Elector’, while another was at the university of Copenhagen—he decided to pawn most of his Coptic manuscripts and his Ethiopic types with acquaintances in Amsterdam. Before doing so, however, he copied the manuscripts out. Petraeus subsequently returned to Copenhagen, where he died in 1672. Five years later his widow went to Berlin and offered to sell Petraeus’ books and manuscripts to the Great Elector. The sale was protracted over the years, but by the early 1680s the material had entered the electoral library. With the exception of two original codices (a Psalter and a collection of Pauline Epistles), the Coptic manuscripts, eleven in all, were copies made by Petraeus, and it was these which formed the basis of the Coptic collection at the electoral (and later the royal) library in Berlin.¹¹

Of the original manuscripts which Petraeus had bought one had a particularly curious fate. Another copy of the texts published by Kircher, heavily annotated and interleaved by Petraeus himself, it was one of the few Coptic manuscripts in Holland that Marshall never managed to buy. Petraeus had pawned it with Marshall’s friend, Theodore Hillingsberg in Amsterdam, and Hillingsberg had bequeathed it to the burgomaster of the town, Nicolaas Witsen. When the English Arabist and mathematician Edward Bernard was in Holland in 1683 for the sale of Nicolaus Heinsius’s library,¹² Witsen presented him with the manuscript in The Hague, and that too is now at the Bodleian (MS Bodl. Or. 325).¹³

A less time-consuming and more satisfactory means of acquiring Coptic texts was through agents in the East. Stefano Borgia owed most of his priceless Coptic collection to missionaries in Egypt. Almost two centuries earlier Giovanni Battista Raimondi, the manager of the *Typographia Medicea* in Rome, relied on the Florentine merchant Girolamo Vecchietti, whose brother, Giovanni Battista, was dispatched as the papal emissary to the Coptic patriarch. Girolamo Vecchietti visited Egypt three times, in 1591, 1594, and 1597, and managed to bring sixteen Coptic manuscripts back to Italy. Besides liturgical and lexicographical material, there were eleven scriptural manuscripts, which

¹¹ *Psalterium in dialectum Copticae linguae Memphiticam translatum...*, ed. M. G. Schwartz (Leipzig, 1943), pp. v–vi.

¹² On Bernard’s visit see G. J. Toomer, *Eastern Wisdom and Learning: The Study of Arabic in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford, 1996), 301.

¹³ The itinerary of the manuscript is recounted in various hands (including that of Witsen) on fo. 1^r.

included a spectacular Bohairic codex of the Gospels with magnificent illumination, now MS Vat. Copt. 9. Originally copied in Cairo in 1205, it was acquired by the monastery of St Anthony. In about 1506 it was taken back to Cairo and then transferred, apparently by the patriarch Gabriel VII, to the church of St Sergius and Bacchus in Alexandria where Vecchietti bought it in 1594.¹⁴

Another collector who benefited from agents in Egypt was the antiquarian Peiresc. He had a team of men in Cairo—Armenians, resident French merchants, and missionaries. The last included the Capuchins Agathange de Vendôme, Cassien de Nantes, and Gilles de Loches. In 1634 Agathange de Vendôme sent him half a dozen important Egyptian manuscripts, some Coptic and the others Coptic-Arabic, and he dispatched Cassien de Nantes to the Wadi al-Natrun monasteries to search their holdings, but the monks refused to sell.¹⁵ Peiresc's methods of payment varied. In the case of a hexaglot Psalter (in Coptic, Arabic, Greek, Armenian, Ethiopic, and Syriac) at Dayr Maqar, he had instructed Agathange de Vendôme in 1634 to organize an exchange. Peiresc offered a silver chalice and paten. The chalice and the paten arrived, but the manuscript, entrusted to a merchant vessel, was stolen by pirates and taken to Tripoli. Despite Peiresc's efforts to redeem it from the pasha, it was subsequently transferred to Malta and finally sent by the Knights to Cardinal Barberini in Rome.¹⁶ It was there, at the Barberini library, that Bonjour would study it and collate it with other versions of the Psalms.¹⁷

Peiresc's agents in Egypt, notably the two French merchants in Cairo, Jean Magy and François Daniel, were also active in providing a number of other French collectors with Coptic material. One of these was Gilbert Gaulmin de Montgeorges.¹⁸ Of his Coptic collection at least

¹⁴ The manuscript is described in CCV i, 23–34. See also Jules Leroy, *Les Manuscrits coptes et coptes-arabes illustrés* (Paris, 1974), 148–53. For the other manuscripts, corresponding to BAV MSS Vat. Copt. 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 10, 12, 13, 14, 16, 22, 24, 74, 75, 76, see CCV i, 7–12, 17–23, 34–6, 37–53, 54–7, 78–80, 82–5, 546–61. For a recent discussion of the Vecchietti brothers as manuscript collectors see Francis Richard, 'Les Frères Vecchietti, diplomates, érudits et aventuriers', in Hamilton, Van den Boogert, and Westerweel (eds.), *The Republic of Letters and the Levant*, 11–26.

¹⁵ Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc, *Correspondance de Peiresc avec plusieurs missionnaires et religieux de l'Ordre des Capucins 1631–1637*, ed. Apollinaire de Valence (Paris, 1891), 24, 160; Volkoff, *A la recherche de manuscrits*, 33–45.

¹⁶ The manuscript is now BAV, MS Barberini Or. 2 (CCV ii, 1–4). For an account of the events see Volkoff, *A la recherche de manuscrits*, 38–42.

¹⁷ Rome, Biblioteca Angelica, MS 45, pp. 624–38.

¹⁸ On Gaulmin as a collector see François Secret, 'Gilbert Gaulmin et l'histoire comparée des religions', *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, 117 (1970), 35–63, esp. 51–5 for

eight manuscripts were acquired for him by Daniel and over a dozen Arabic ones (a number of which were Coptic-Arabic) by Magy. A further keen bibliophile with an interest in the East, the chancellor Pierre Séguier, owed almost forty-five of his Eastern manuscripts to Daniel. Seven of these were Coptic, two Syriac, and the rest Arabic.¹⁹

IN EGYPT

The best way of collecting Coptic manuscripts was to buy them directly in the East, and this is what many collectors did. Where their behaviour in Egypt is concerned, however, we should be wary of the accusations, especially by later Coptic scholars, which imply that the Europeans looted the monastic libraries indiscriminately even in the early modern period.²⁰ Wansleben bought the majority of his Coptic manuscripts in Cyprus from a monastery that was closing, but in Egypt the Europeans—and these include Wansleben—had less luck. Reports, certainly, are contradictory. Some travellers—Stefano Evodio Assemani was one of them—describe the monks as highly venal and eager to sell everything on which they could lay their hands. Others stress their extreme reluctance even to admit Europeans into their libraries. Cassien de Nantes could get nothing out of the Wadi al-Natrun monasteries. Jean de Thévenot never visited the Wadi al-Natrun himself but assured his readers, on good authority, that the inmates of Dayr Maqar would never dare sell a manuscript for fear of being anathematized,²¹ and Wansleben was told the same thing at the monastery of St Anthony.²² In 1730 Claude Granger was not admitted to the library either of Dayr al-Suryan or of Dayr Maqar,²³ and we saw that

the Coptic manuscripts; Francis Richard, *Catalogue des manuscrits persans de la Bibliothèque nationale*, i: *Ancien fonds* (Paris, 1989), 3–6; Hamilton and Richard, *André Du Ryer*, 44–5, 167–8; for his Coptic manuscripts now at the BNF see Delaporte, *Catalogue*, 1–2, 6–7, 13–14, 18–19, 21–2, 58–60, 64–5, 67, 84–5, 91–2, 94–6, 99.

¹⁹ Anne Boud'hors, 'François Daniel: Un marchand "marchant d'Egypte" provençal au service des premiers orientalistes français', in *Hommages à Jean Leclant*, iv (Cairo, 1994), 19–27. Séguier's Coptic manuscripts included BNF, MSS Coptes 59, 66, 70. Cf. Delaporte, *Catalogue*, 15–16, 22–3, 36–7.

²⁰ See e.g. Matta 'l-Miskin, *Al-rahbanāt al-qibīyā fī 'asr al-qadīs Anbā Maqār* (2nd edn., Cairo, 1984), 563, where the author, a scholar and thinker of distinction, refers to the European manuscript collectors of the past as 'al-luṣūṣ al-afādil', 'learned thieves'.

²¹ Thévenot, *Relation d'un voyage*, 484.

²² Omont, *Missions*, 105.

²³ Granger, *Relation*, 179–80. Cf. also Volkoff, *A la recherche*, 61–135.

Sonnni de Manoncourt could not buy a single manuscript at Dayr al-Baramus. In 1792, the English traveller W. G. Browne visited Dayr al-Suryan and saw 'several books in the Coptic, Syriac, and Arabic languages'. 'The superior', he continued, 'told me that they had near eight hundred volumes; but positively refused to part with any of them ...'.²⁴ Even if Elias Assemani was more fortunate, he only managed to buy a single Arabic manuscript and thirty-nine Syriac ones, which was well below his expectations. His cousin Giuseppe Simonio picked out some two hundred manuscripts, also at Dayr al-Suryan, but was allowed to buy no more than 'a few' (although he succeeded in acquiring some three thousand leaves at Dayr Maqar). The three or four manuscripts he bought from the abbot of St Anthony's, on the other hand, can hardly be regarded as a triumph.

Nevertheless Coptic manuscripts of value and interest were indeed brought back to Europe by Western residents in the East. One of the most active collectors was Robert Huntington, who served as chaplain of the Levant Company in Aleppo for eleven years, from 1670 to 1681.²⁵ With a good command of Arabic and Turkish (and the necessary European languages), he established a network in the Levant formed of Jesuits in Mardin, Discalced Carmelites in Bassora, Capuchins in Rosetta, and Franciscans in Damascus, as well as of Maronites in the Lebanon, primates of the Greek Church, and Copts. While he was in the East he collected over 600 manuscripts, mainly Arabic and Hebrew, but also Turkish, Persian, Syriac, Samaritan, and Coptic.

Before he actually went to Egypt Huntington thought it might be possible to acquire material from rival collectors, notably from Wansleben, and in June 1675 he wrote to John Covel in Istanbul urging him to buy what he could from him. 'In his universall plunder of Coptick MSS.', he wrote, 'tis possible he may have taken some which he will suffer to be redeem'd: for love's sake try whether he be good natur'd, whether he will let you purchase any Pieces of the H. Scriptures, Canons or Liturgies in that Language, and if you buy them for me at any price; and if you have a Ship in Port, send them forthwith to England ...'.²⁶ Here Huntington seems to have been unsuccessful, even if one of his Coptic-Arabic manuscripts, Bodl. MS Hunt. 280, was copied in 1675 by Abu 'l-Mina, possibly the same Coptic priest who transcribed texts and made drawings for Wansleben. He realized that he should go to

²⁴ W. G. Browne, *Travels in Africa, Egypt, and Syria from the Year 1792 to 1798* (London, 1799), 43.

²⁵ On Huntington see Alastair Hamilton, 'Huntington, Robert', *ODNB*, xxviii. 938–40.

²⁶ BL Add. MS 22910, fo. 99.

Egypt in person, but he nevertheless acquired the finest of all his Coptic manuscripts, the Gospels copied in 1173 with magnificent illustrations of the evangelists, in Jerusalem (Bodl. MS Hunt. 17).

Although Huntington was disappointed by his first experience of Egypt in 1679—‘What a slender account I shall be able to give to God and my Country for th’expens of so much time & money as I have wasted in Egypt’, he wrote to John Fell in November 1680, ‘your Lordship will more impartially determin than I can my self’²⁷—he was luckier on his second visit, made as he was leaving the Levant in 1681. When he was in Egypt, he stayed mainly with the French diplomatic representatives, the vice-consul in Rosetta,²⁸ and, above all, the consul in Cairo, Louis de Ségla.²⁹ He benefited from the assistance of the Capuchin missionaries, and managed to persuade a Coptic priest to transcribe certain Coptic–Arabic texts. The transcription of two volumes of Councils, copied in 1680, survives (Bodl. MSS Hunt. 31 and 32), but I have been unable to trace the last three books of the Pentateuch, which he also said he had copied.³⁰

Exactly how Huntington proceeded in his purchase of Coptic material is not entirely clear. In his biographical sketch Thomas Smith laid great emphasis on his integrity, his decision only to buy from private sellers and never to deprive monasteries of their treasures.³¹ How rigorously he stuck to this principle we shall never know. Certainly, judging from the relatively few colophons in his collection, only a small number of the manuscripts had at one point come from the monasteries.³²

²⁷ BL Add. MS 23206, fo. 39.

²⁸ Huntington, *Epistolae*, 29.

²⁹ On Ségla, who was consul from 1679 to 1683, see Raoul Clément, *Les Français d’Égypte au XVIe et XVIIIe siècles* (Cairo, 1960), 72.

³⁰ *Epistolae*, ed. Smith, pp. xvi–xix.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. xviii: ‘Solos enim privatos, qui libros quoscunque, tanquam merces pecuniis comparandas, in peculio habuere, aggredi solitus, sacros Codices, publicis Ecclesiarum aut Communitatis Religiosae usibus destinatos, cum id fas jusque, ut ante innuebam, plane vetuerint, ne quidem licitari voluit.’

³² The attractively illuminated MS Hunt. 121, containing Psalms and canticles, had belonged to Ibn Yusuf at Dayr al-Baramus in 1624 and MS Hunt. 262, a New Testament copied in 1575, had belonged to Abu Musa, a monk at the same monastery; the liturgical MS Hunt. 403 had been copied at Dayr Maqar in 1405. Others come from Cairo (MS Hunt. 26, copied in 1361, and MS Hunt. 181, copied in 1234); or ‘Old Cairo’ (MS Hunt. 240, a lectionary copied in 1549, and MS Hunt. 280). For Huntington’s Coptic and Coptic–Arabic manuscripts see Joannes Uri, *Bibliothecae Bodleianae Codicum Manuscriptorum Orientalium Pars Prima* (Oxford, 1787), 30–46, 318–27.

At all events Huntington assembled by far the finest and most interesting collection of Coptic and Coptic–Arabic manuscripts in England, far surpassing that of Thomas Marshall. They included, as we saw, some of the first Sahidic texts to enter Europe. Quite apart from the antiquity and beauty of many of them, there was also an interesting Gnostic manuscript (MS Hunt. 393), copied in 1393. Huntington had dispatched his material to Oxford in various instalments, and after 1692 it could all be consulted at the Bodleian.

In comparison with the mass of Coptic material which would find its way to Europe in the nineteenth century the number of codices collected in the early modern period was small and the process of collecting it laborious. Later collectors could profit either from European occupation of Egypt or from a pro-European policy of the Egyptian rulers, and they did indeed divest the country of a substantial number of its treasures. To do so was never altogether easy, but the monks seem to have been readier to sell than in the past and few of the later manuscript hunters were as scrupulous as Robert Huntington.

Biblical Studies

COPTIC

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were the time of the triumph of the polyglot Bible. What had become the current Latin translation of the Bible sanctioned by the Church of Rome, the Vulgate attributed to Jerome, had come under increasing criticism as the humanists discovered Greek versions of the New Testament which differed substantially from the accepted Latin rendering.¹ As the study of Eastern languages started to spread in scholarly circles the whole of the Bible was subjected to a closer inspection, which raised doubts about the reliability of the Vulgate. Apart from the biblical languages, Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, languages such as Arabic and Syriac were also used in the hope that versions of the Scriptures in those tongues might reflect a purer original than that available to Jerome and other early translators into Latin. In Alcalá de Henares, under the aegis of the founder of the university and the archbishop of Toledo, Cardinal Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros, the first polyglot Bible was produced between 1514 and 1517 and published in 1522. Here the Vulgate version of the Old Testament was printed beside the Hebrew, the Greek of the Septuagint, and the Aramaic paraphrases of the Pentateuch, while the Latin New Testament was printed next to the Greek.

In 1513 Johannes Potken published a version of the Psalms in Ethiopic in Rome. As early as 1516 Agostino Giustiniani, bishop of Nebbio in Corsica, produced a Psalter containing, besides the Latin text of the Psalms, versions in Greek, Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic. In Antwerp, between 1568 and 1575, the printer Christophe Plantin, assisted by a team of scholars, tried to surpass the Spanish (or

¹ For a survey see Alastair Hamilton, 'Humanists and the Bible', in Jill Kraye (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism* (Cambridge, 1996), 100–17.

Complutensian) Polyglot by adding the Peshitta, the Syriac version of the New Testament. By 1645 France, too, had joined the race, and Guy-Michel Le Jay in Paris issued a polyglot Bible which added to the versions in Plantin's publication the Pentateuch in Samaritan, the Old Testament in Syriac, and both the Old and the New Testament in Arabic.² This, in its turn, was capped by the polyglot Bible published by Brian Walton in London between 1654 and 1657, which also included a Persian version of the Pentateuch.

The published polyglot Bibles, however, are no more than an indication of an interest which pervaded the world of biblical scholarship. Nearly every orientalist hoped to make a contribution of his own to the study of the steadily growing number of Eastern versions of the Scriptures. The new grammars of oriental languages usually provided extracts from the Bible as linguistic exercises, and the authors often intended to publish these texts independently as an exercise in biblical criticism.³ One of the most ambitious plans to expand the polyglot Bible was that of Giovanni Battista Raimondi, whose *Typographia Medicea* in Rome produced a series of elegant publications in Arabic and Syriac between 1590 and 1610.⁴ Raimondi himself was an excellent linguist and, in 1593, he announced his intention of producing a Bible which, besides texts in Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, and Latin, would include Arabic, Persian, Ethiopic, Armenian, Slavonic, and Coptic.⁵

Raimondi seems to have been the first European orientalist to conceive the idea of publishing a Coptic version of the Bible. He did so well before the language had been studied systematically by Athanasius Kircher but at a time when, as we saw, a number of Coptic manuscripts had already entered the Vatican. Thanks to Girolamo Vecchietti, Raimondi assembled a collection of his own, but he was never to use his Coptic codices. After his death they too became part of the Vatican library, and would prove invaluable to other students, to Athanasius

² Peter N. Miller, 'Making the Paris Polyglot Bible: Humanism and Orientalism in the Early Seventeenth Century', in *Die Europäische Gelehrtenrepublik im Zeitalter des Konfessionalismus* (Wolfenbüttel, 2001), 59–85.

³ The uses of the Bible in Arabic are discussed in Hamilton, *William Bedwell*, 80–3.

⁴ Alberto Tinto, *La tipografia Medicea orientale* (Lucca, 1987), 56–89; Robert Jones, 'The Medici Oriental Press (Rome 1584–1614) and the Impact of its Arabic Publications on Northern Europe', in Russell (ed.), *The 'Arabick' Interest of the Natural Philosophers*, 88–108.

⁵ G. E. Saltini, 'La Bibbia poliglotta medicea secondo il disegno e gli apparecchi di Gio. Battista Raimondi', *Bollettino italiano degli studii orientali*, ns 22–4 (1882), 490–5.

Kircher in the seventeenth century, to David Wilkins in the eighteenth, and to much later editors of the Bohairic New Testament.

From a modern perspective the Coptic versions of the Bible collected by Europeans in the early modern period are of relatively little interest. They are nearly all late recensions in Bohairic, and even those fragments which arrived in Sahidic and Fayyumic are disappointingly recent when compared with the texts that have come to light in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Most of the Coptic dialects, not only Sahidic, Fayyumic, and Bohairic, but also the more recently discovered Akhmimic, Sub-Akhmimic, and Middle Egyptian, have yielded fragments which can now be ascribed to about the fourth century and in some cases to the third.⁶

The Copts tended to see the Old Testament and the New as a single unity, and they were accordingly often translated together in the various dialects. Where the Old Testament is concerned the translation is based not on the Hebrew but on Greek models which follow the Septuagint, even if there are cases of deviation and the Sahidic version of the Minor Prophets sometimes bears a closer relationship to the Hebrew than to the Greek. While little work has been done on the Fayyumic versions, the Sahidic and the Bohairic, although both made from the Greek, are in fact entirely separate translations independent of one another.⁷

For the less critical European scholars in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the Coptic Scriptures, however late the manuscripts, had a considerable fascination. The Egyptians, after all, were the people for whom the Septuagint was intended, and, as Isaac Vossius and other scholars claimed, the work performed on the Bible in Alexandria might well have revealed a more reliable text of the Old Testament than existed in the relatively late Hebrew recensions. The early attestations of Christianity in Egypt also suggested that the members of the Church of Alexandria might have produced an illuminating translation of the New Testament. The first objective, consequently, was to assemble a collection of these texts, and this is what generations of manuscript collectors did. The collectors, as we have seen, usually had some connection with the polyglot Bibles. In France scholars such as Peiresc and Gaulmin were keen and close observers of the work conducted under the supervision of

⁶ Bruce M. Metzger, *The Early Versions of the New Testament: Their Origin, Transmission, and Limitations* (Oxford, 1977), 108–25.

⁷ A clear survey is provided by Peter Nagel, 'Old Testament, Coptic Translations of', *CE* vi. 1836–40.

Guy-Michel Le Jay and in England Thomas Marshall had been a member of the circle of Brian Walton.

In 1659 English scholars welcomed in London Theodor Petraeus, who was planning to publish a trilingual version of the first psalm in Latin, Arabic, and Coptic (in Greek characters) based on one of the manuscripts he had brought back from Egypt. The book appeared in Leiden in 1663, but it was preceded by an *approbatio* signed by Brian Walton, Edmund Castell, and Edward Pococke (all three were engaged in the London Polyglot); Isaac Basire, of French origin and former chaplain to Charles I; Thomas Barlow, former librarian of the Bodleian and future bishop of Lincoln; and a Dutch scholar resident in England, Theodore Haak. Petraeus then went back to Leiden and published a further Coptic specimen in the firm which he had inherited from Nisselius.⁸

Thomas Marshall was far more important as a biblical scholar than Petraeus. His only publication in the domain of biblical studies, in collaboration with the younger Franciscus Junius, was the edition of the Gospels in Gothic and Anglo-Saxon. The *Quatuor . . . Evangeliorum Versiones . . . duae Gothica scil. et Anglo-Saxonica* appeared in Dordrecht in 1665. The bulk of the work was by Junius, who had transcribed the Codex Argenteus containing the Gospels in Gothic, a manuscript which had once belonged to the queen of Sweden, had then been acquired by Isaac Vossius, and was finally again purchased by the Swedes. The last two hundred pages of the work, on the other hand, consisted of Marshall's *Observationes*. These remain a monument of learning. Marshall's command of the Nordic languages, his knowledge of the Semitic tongues, and his acquaintance with Coptic are exhibited to the full. He quotes extensively from Arabic sources and, albeit less, from Samaritan, Ethiopic, and Icelandic versions of the Gospels.

Marshall supplied a substantial number of variant readings found in his Bohairic version of the Gospels—Matthew 5: 46, 6: 1, 6: 14, 10: 29, 11: 16, 27: 15; Mark 1: 2, 15: 8; Luke 1: 5, 9 and so on—but his treatment of the Coptic Gospels has one great drawback. He relied on a single manuscript, the fifteenth-century codex belonging to Vossius.⁹ It was only later that he had access to other Coptic manuscripts of the New Testament, and only after his return to Oxford that he started collating them systematically with material from the far richer collection assembled by Huntington, consulting above all MS Hunt. 17, the splendid codex

⁸ Rahlfs, 'Nissel und Petraeus', 290–347.

⁹ Franciscus Junius and Thomas Marshall, *Quatuor D. N. Jesu Christi Evangeliorum versiones perantiquae duae, Gothica scil. et Anglo-Saxonica* (Dordrecht, 1665), 484.

bought in Jerusalem, MS Hunt. 118, copied in 1259, and probably the thirteenth-century MS Hunt. 20.¹⁰ Marshall hoped to publish the entire New Testament in Coptic. He had already expressed such a wish in the *Observationes*,¹¹ and, on his return to England, he was assisted briefly by Thomas Edwards. But Edwards left Oxford shortly after Marshall's death, and Marshall's plan was carried out only by David Wilkins.

In the meantime Bonjour too was collating the Coptic and other versions of certain books of the Bible, notably the first two chapters of Matthew and the Psalms, and the Coptic–Arabic Pentateuch of which he was planning to produce an edition.¹² He was aware of the fact that the Bohairic Old Testament was not entirely faithful to the Septuagint,¹³ just as he observed slight variants between the Coptic version of Matthew 1 and 2 and the Arabic translation, but his plans went no further than manuscript copies and notes.

Although Wilkins, from Memel, would become completely Anglicized, he takes us back to the circle of German orientalists he frequented in his youth, to Ezechiel Spanheim in Berlin, who seems to have inspired him to study Coptic,¹⁴ and Veyssière de La Croze, with whom he sustained a correspondence. He was in England, working at the Bodleian Library, by 1707, and two years later he returned to the European continent to inspect Coptic manuscripts in Vienna, Paris, and Rome, in preparation of his *Novum Testamentum Aegyptium*, which would appear in 1716. In fact the edition is based largely on material in Oxford, the manuscripts collected by Marshall (MSS Marshall Or. 5, 6, 52, 53, and 99) and by Huntington (MSS Hunt. 4, 17, 20, 43, 122, 203, and 394). These were collated in Rome with a number of the codices obtained by Vecchiotti for Raimondi, the great MS Vat. Copt. 9 dating from the early thirteenth century, the later Vat. Copt. 8 and 10, both containing the Gospels, and Vat. Copt. 12 and 14 with the Epistles. In Paris Wilkins collated his material with two manuscripts at the royal library and one in the Coislin collection which had once belonged to Séguier and was held in the library of Saint-Germain-des-Prés.

The edition itself of the Coptic New Testament has many defects.¹⁵ Wilkins gives no indication as to which of the various manuscripts of the

¹⁰ Cf. Bodl., MS Marshall Or. 52, fo. 1^r.

¹¹ Junius and Marshall, *Quatuor . . . Evangelia*, 386.

¹² Bonjour, *Elementa*, ed. Aufrère and Bosson, pp. lxxvii–lxxix.

¹³ Rome, Biblioteca Angelica, MS 45, pp. 624–38.

¹⁴ Wilkins, *Dissertatio de lingua Coptica*, 92, where he describes Spanheim as 'studiorum meorum quondam Parentis ac Directoris huic linguae addiscendae . . . '.

¹⁵ Metzger, *The Early Versions of the New Testament*, 122.

Bohairic New Testament he is actually using, and his version, albeit the *editio princeps*, is consequently a somewhat arbitrary collation of different codices. Then, as Jablonski would point out and emphasize in his marginalia to the copy which Wilkins had presented to him and which is now at the Bodleian, Wilkins's Coptic was not as good as it might have been.¹⁶ Many of Jablonski's criticisms are pedantic and more a matter of opinion than of true error. He objects repeatedly to Wilkins's translation of the Coptic **πιαλογ** (*pialou*) as 'infans' rather than 'puer', and, as Woide would observe, he was unaware of the fact that alternative readings might exist which were of equal value to one another. Other mistakes, however, are more serious. Wilkins was frequently incapable of distinguishing an imperative. He often relied on the Greek rather than the Coptic. One example is Revelation 1: 11. The Greek runs 'What thou seest, write in a book', and so Wilkins translates it.¹⁷ The Coptic, however, has **NH ETEKNA COΘMOY** (*ni eteknasothmou*), 'what thou shalt hear'. In view of the importance of numerology in the Book of Revelation, Wilkins's mistranslation of Revelation 12: 6 about the length of time the woman 'clothed with the sun' spent in the desert, is equally serious. The Greek gives 1,260 days; the Coptic gives 1,890, but Wilkins translates it as 1,790.¹⁸ The judgement of Veyssi re de La Croze, in the preface to his Coptic dictionary, was consequently devastating.¹⁹

It was not until Woide's notes on the Coptic Bible were published in German in 1778 that a more balanced judgement of Wilkins's New Testament was provided. Woide had read the comments of La Croze and Jablonski. Indeed, while he was in Oxford he had worked through the marginalia to Jablonski's copies of Wilkins's two biblical translations. He frequently agreed with La Croze and Jablonski, and he added critical comments of his own, pointing out Wilkins's occasional incorrect division of words and other errors. But he also dismissed a great many of the earlier criticisms as excessive in their severity. Wilkins, he thought, should be given credit for what he had done. He was a precursor, and allowances should be made for the lack of any dictionary

¹⁶ Bodl., shelf-mark Radcl.d.55. Wilkins seems to have confused Jablonski with his father, Daniel Ernst, to whom this, and the copy of the Pentateuch, are both dedicated.

¹⁷ *Novum Testamentum Aegyptium vulgo Copticum*, ed. Wilkins, 634.

¹⁸ Ibid. 655.

¹⁹ Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek, Cod. Or. 431B, p. vi: 'Ut interpretationem eius Latinam taceam cuius supinitas et barbaries omnem fidem superare videtur, in rebus ipsis et vocibus Aegyptiacis adeo foede lapsus est ut mihi plane constet ne viam quidem eum vidisse qua ad prima illius linguae elementa aditus aperiuntur.' For the published version see above p. 237.

or grammar that could help him. After all, La Croze too made mistakes in his dictionary, which posterity would rectify.²⁰ In 1785 Mingarelli in Bologna also came to Wilkins's defence.²¹ Later still, however, in 1846, the next editor of the Bohairic New Testament, Moritz Gotthilf Schwartz, was almost as insulting about Wilkins as La Croze.²²

In 1731 Wilkins published his edition of the Coptic Pentateuch. For this he had used three manuscripts, a fourteenth-century codex in Paris, an eleventh-century codex in Rome, and MS Hunt. 33 at the Bodleian, copied in 1674. As an edition it was generally admitted to be better than his New Testament. Nevertheless, when he received a copy from Wilkins, Jablonski, who had initially expressed his approval to La Croze,²³ again noted numerous errors, often due to Wilkins's tendency to follow the Greek of the Septuagint even when the Coptic text differed from it.²⁴ Genesis 4: 13 is translated by Wilkins as 'my sin is greater than can be remitted', while the Coptic runs 'My sin is great: remit it'. Schwartz, too, would be critical, pointing out Wilkins's repeated failure to divide Coptic words correctly and his frequent ignorance of Coptic grammar.²⁵

The book of Psalms too attracted editors. As in nearly all the other cases a great deal of work was performed in the nineteenth century, but, as we saw, Petraeus published the first psalm in 1663 and Rafael Tuki produced his own edition of the Psalter in Bohairic and Arabic in 1744. It was based on a thirteenth-century manuscript at the Vatican purchased by Giuseppe Simonio Assemani in Egypt (MS Vat. Copt.

²⁰ C. G. Woide, 'Von der Egyptischen Uebersetzung der Bibel', in Johann Andreas Cramer (ed.), *Beyträge zur Beförderung theologischer und andrer wichtigen Kenntnisse von Kielschen und auswärtigen Gelehrten. Dritter Teil* (Kiel and Hamburg, 1778), 38–40. The Latin version of Woide's remarks on the Coptic Bible was included by Henry Ford in the introduction to his posthumous *Appendix ad editionem Novi Testamenti Graeci e codice MS. Alexandrino . . . in qua continentur fragmenta Novi Testamenti juxta interpretationem dialecti Superiori Aegypti quae Thebaïdica vel Sabidica appellatur . . .* (Oxford, 1799). For his comments on Wilkins see p. 12.

²¹ Mingarelli, *Aegyptiorum codicum reliquiae*, ii. 4, refers to 'ille ipse Wilkinsius, qui tam bene de aegyptiis literis, de memphitica dialecto, de Europea litteratorum republica meritis est, quemque illa aetate tantum potuisse demiror, ut adeo pulchram atque elegantem Novi Testamenti primum, deinde Pentateuchi aegyptiaci editionem insperanti offerret Europae . . . '.

²² *Novum Testamentum Coptice. Pars Prima. Quatuor Evangelia in dialecto linguae Copticae Memphitica*, ed. M. G. Schwartz (Leipzig, 1846), pp. xxii–xxx, for Wilkins's mistakes in the New Testament, 'peccata partim ex inscitia, partim ex prava negligentia genita'.

²³ La Croze, *Thesaurus epistolicus*, i. 204.

²⁴ Bodl., shelf-mark: Radcl.d.74.

²⁵ *Novum Testamente Coptice*, ed. Schwartz, pp. ii–v, for Wilkins's mistakes in his translation of the Pentateuch.

5),²⁶ but the edition had an extraordinary number of mistranscriptions and omissions. It has been judged severely by later scholars. Schwartz, who produced a version taken mainly from manuscripts in Berlin a hundred years later, deplored Tuki's grammatical and lexicographical errors,²⁷ and his view has been justified more recently.²⁸

With the discovery of biblical fragments first in Sahidic and then in Fayyumic the approach to the Bible in Coptic changed. The various dialects were treated as separate languages, and efforts came to be concentrated on the preparation of a reliable edition in each one. Attempts were made to publish the fragments as soon as they came to light. Mingarelli tackled the holdings of the Biblioteca Naniana in Venice. Giorgi, and then the Danes, took on the Borgia collection in Rome and Velletri. And Woide relied mainly on manuscripts in England to produce the first edition of the Coptic New Testament in Sahidic. He drew chiefly on the Huntington manuscripts at the Bodleian, MSS Hunt. 3, 4, 5, 393, and 394, but he also went to Paris in September 1773 and scoured the libraries of Sainte Geneviève and Saint-Germain-des-Prés, where he consulted the Séguier–Coislin collection.²⁹ Besides a Sahidic vocabulary, he found various excerpts from the Bible. He made a thorough use of two Sahidic Gnostic codices lent him by friends in England. One, the *Pistis Sophia*, belonged to the physician and classical scholar Anthony Askew, who had himself bought it from a bookseller in England. It is now at the British Library, Add. MS 5114.³⁰ The other, a codex of exceptional rarity containing the so-called Books of Jeu, was purchased at Madinat Habu in about 1769 by the explorer James Bruce, who returned to England after his search for the sources of the Blue Nile in 1774. Bruce sent Woide the manuscript from Scotland. Just as he had done with the Askew manuscript, Woide transcribed the entire text and thus proved of great assistance to later scholars, who found much of the codex so faded as to be illegible.³¹ Both manuscripts contained excerpts

²⁶ CCV i. 12–14.

²⁷ *Psalterium*, ed. Schwartz, p. iii: 'et adversus leges grammaticas et adversus verborum sensum et contextum peccatum est...'.
²⁸ Nathalie Bosson and Anne Boud'hors, 'Psaume 21 (22): Son attestation dans les diverses versions dialectales coptes', in Gilles Dorival (ed.), *David, Jésus et la reine Esther: Recherches sur le psaume 21 (22 TM)* (Leuven, 2002), 43–100, esp. 47.

²⁹ Woide describes his visit to Paris in some detail in his diary, BL Add. MS 48702, fos. 111^r–142^r.
³⁰ Crum, *Catalogue of the Coptic Manuscripts*, 173 (no. 367). Cf. *Pistis Sophia*, ed. Carl Schmidt, trans. and notes by Violet MacDermot (Leiden, 1978), p. xi.

³¹ The original manuscript is now Bodl., MS Bruce 96. See *Gnostische Schriften in Koptischer Sprache aus dem Codex Bruce*, ed. Carl Schmidt (Leipzig, 1892), 6–7; Charlotte

from the Scriptures. These Woide collated with a number of fragments of his own which he had bought from George Baldwin, a frequent visitor to Egypt and British consul general in Cairo from 1786 to 1798.³² In 1790 Woide died. Nine years later, in 1799, at the Clarendon Press in Oxford, Henry Ford, the president of Magdalen College and Lord Almoner's Praelector of Arabic, brought out a Latin version of Woide's notes together with his edition of the text.

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the publication of parts of the Coptic Bible gathered speed.³³ In 1785 Mingarelli published seventeen Sahidic fragments in the Nani collection. These included parts of the Gospels (Matthew 18: 27–21: 15 and John 9: 17–13: 1), Jeremiah 13: 14–14: 19; as well as fragments of homilies, monastic decrees, lives of the saints, and the apocryphal Assumption of John the Apostle. In the case of the scriptural texts Mingarelli gave no literal translation but, in his notes, compared them with the Greek version, the Vulgate, and the text in Bohairic.

Still further progress was made by Frederik Münter when he published a Sahidic and Bohairic translation of Daniel 9 in 1786. This was the reflection of an interest in the Septuagint version of the book of Daniel contained in the Chigi collection at the Vatican library and first published in Rome in 1772. Michaelis, in Göttingen, was so excited by the discovery that he republished the Greek text in the following year,³⁴ and probably suggested that his former pupil should investigate the book further. By comparing the Bohairic and the Sahidic contained in the Borgia library Münter rightly realized that the two versions were based on different recensions,³⁵ thereby inaugurating a far more subtle approach to the Coptic Bible.

Three years later Giorgi published the Sahidic fragment of the Gospel of St John in the Borgia collection, John 6: 21–58, 7: 1–52, and 8: 12–23, comparing it with the Bohairic and the Greek. Less cautious than many of

A. Baynes, *A Coptic Gnostic Treatise contained in the Codex Brucianus [Bruce MS. 96, Bod. Lib. Oxford]* (Cambridge, 1933), p. xiii; *The Books of Jeu and the Untitled Text in the Bruce Codex*, ed. Carl Schmidt, trans. Violet MacDermot (Leiden, 1978), p. ix.

³² *Coptic Version of the New Testament in the Southern Dialect*, ed. George W. Horner, 6 vols. (Oxford, 1911–22), i, p. vii.

³³ An idea can be obtained from Winifred Kammerer, *A Coptic Bibliography* (Ann Arbor, 1950; repr. New York, 1969), 36–58.

³⁴ *Daniel secundum Septuaginta ex Tetraplis Origenis, Romae anno 1772. ex Chisiano codice primum editus*, ed. J. D. Michaelis (Göttingen, 1773).

³⁵ Frederik Münter, *Specimen versionum Danielis Copticarum novum ejus caput Memphitice et Sahidice exhibens* (Rome, 1786), 17.

his contemporaries, Giorgi even took the risk of dating the manuscript to the fourth century and of attributing the Fayyumic fragments to the fifth or sixth century. This was a dangerous thing to do since Coptic palaeography was in its infancy, and Giorgi did not have a sufficient number of other codices at his disposal to be able to reach any truly scientific conclusions. Nevertheless, he proceeded in a scholarly manner, endeavouring to compare the script with Greek manuscripts of the same (and later) periods.³⁶

In 1797 it was Carabelloni's turn to edit a number of other fragments in Sahidic (Luke 1: 29–38; Hebrews 9: 2–10; John 7 and 8; and Psalm 48) with a parallel Greek version and, at the foot of the page, a Latin translation.³⁷ But a far more important step was taken by Zoëga in his catalogue of the Borgia manuscripts. Here he published still more material, in Fayyumic and in Sahidic as well as in Bohairic, while his pupil Engelbreth embarked on a critical edition of the same fragments and compared the texts with Griesbach's Greek and the Roman edition of the Septuagint in his *Fragmenta Basmurico-Coptica Veteris et Novi Testamenti, quae in Museo Borgiano Velitris asservantur* of 1811. Advances would indeed be made with nineteenth-century editions of the Coptic Bible in Sahidic and Bohairic, but Engelbreth, and above all Zoëga, carried the study of Fayyumic to a point which was not surpassed for many years.

Zoëga had a further merit. The Copts had long been suspected of a particular devotion to the apocryphal books of the New Testament. In fact the Church of Alexandria was no better disposed to the apocrypha than the Churches of Rome or Constantinople. A great many of the non-canonical texts of the New Testament can be traced back to an original in Greek, Syriac, or even Latin, and the interest of the Copts in the apocrypha is unlikely to have been any greater than that of other inhabitants of the Byzantine empire. Nevertheless, a relatively high proportion of the New Testament apocrypha was probably of Egyptian origin. Numerous apocryphal texts have either been discovered in Egypt, or have survived in Coptic or thanks to Coptic scribes writing in Arabic.³⁸

In such texts Western scholars had been taking an increasing interest. Western curiosity about the apocrypha has a long history, but it had intensified with the new biblical criticism of the second half of the seventeenth century and continued as more and more works came to

³⁶ Giorgi, *Fragmentum Evangelii S. Iohannis*, pp. xcii, cxiii–cliv. Giorgi's dating was criticized by Schwartze, in *Novum Testamentum Coptice*, p. xviii.

³⁷ Carabelloni, *De agiographia primigenia et translatis*, 135 ff.

³⁸ Orlandi, *Elementi di lingua e letteratura copta*, 141–5, 147–52.

light.³⁹ In 1703 Johann Albert Fabricius in Hamburg published his two-volume *Codex apocryphus Novi Testamenti*, and the scholarly interest received a further impulse. The apocryphal books edited by Fabricius, and those discovered later, were due to play an important part in the reconstruction of the early Christian world.⁴⁰

Some of these works, usually in fragments, were to be found in the Borgia collection, and Zoëga described them in his catalogue, sometimes quoting from them at length. One is the book of the Resurrection of Christ by Bartholomew the Apostle, a text that exists solely in Coptic and can probably be dated to the fifth or sixth century.⁴¹ It would be published in its entirety by the French scholar Édouard Dulaurier in 1835.⁴² Another is the History of Joseph the Carpenter, or the Death of Joseph, a book almost certainly composed a little later than Bartholomew's Resurrection of Christ, possibly in the seventh century. Long thought to have been derived from a Greek original, it would now appear to have first been written in Coptic.⁴³

The History of Joseph was a work that had intrigued Western scholars for a number of years. Revered in the East, it contradicted the Western belief, held by Jerome and defended by Aquinas, that Joseph was a virgin. An account allegedly addressed by Christ to his disciples, it described the carpenter as the father of six children, four sons and two daughters, by a first marriage. In 1722 the Swedish orientalist Georg Wallin had published his transcription of an Arabic version taken from a manuscript in the royal library in Paris dating from the fourteenth century and bought in Cairo by Wansleben.⁴⁴ Although the other texts in the same manuscript pointed to an Egyptian origin, Wallin, who claimed that the work was originally written in Hebrew, was hesitant

³⁹ Alastair Hamilton, *The Apocryphal Apocalypse: The Reception of the Second Book of Esdras (4 Ezra) from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment* (Oxford, 1999), 227–8.

⁴⁰ Montague Rhodes James, *The Apocryphal New Testament, being the Apocryphal Gospels, Acts, Epistles, and Apocalypses* (Oxford, 1924), p. xiii.

⁴¹ For the dating see the comments by Jean-Daniel Kaestli and Pierre Cherix in *Écrits apocryphes chrétiens*, ed. François Bovon, Pierre Geoltrain, and Jean-Daniel Kaestli, 2 vols. (Paris, 1997–2005), i. 302. Cf. Zoëga, *Catalogus*, 230–7.

⁴² It is disappointing, however, to find that one of the greatest authorities on Coptic New Testament apocrypha, E. A. Wallis Budge, should overlook Zoëga and write that 'the first to publish any part of the Coptic version of the Book of the Resurrection was Dulaurier'. *Coptic Apocrypha in the Dialect of Upper Egypt*, ed. E. A. Wallis Budge (London, 1913), p. xvi.

⁴³ Anne Boud'hors, 'Histoire de Joseph le Charpentier', in *Écrits apocryphes chrétiens*, ii. 25–59, esp. 27–8.

⁴⁴ Now BNF MS Arabe 177. Cf. *CMA*, 152–3.

about placing it. He quoted a letter from La Croze,⁴⁵ according to whom the work probably originated in Spain in the Mozarabic community, for Joseph was a figure who was particularly venerated in the Iberian peninsula. But, added La Croze with some satisfaction, the book, with its emphasis on the human nature of Christ, may also have had a Nestorian connection.⁴⁶ Zoëga describes both a Bohairic and a Sahidic version,⁴⁷ and thus placed the book in an Egyptian setting. Dulaurier would publish a translation of the Sahidic fragment,⁴⁸ as well as Zoëga's transcription of part of the Dormition of the Virgin,⁴⁹ and Zoëga came to occupy an important position in a scholarly movement which, in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, would devote increasing attention to the New Testament apocrypha associated with the Copts.

COPTIC-ARABIC

If the actual value of the available Coptic manuscripts of the canon of the Bible is now open to doubt, there was another area in which the Copts can still be said to have made an immense contribution. This was as copyists of Arabic manuscripts of books of the Bible. We have seen that one of the very first Eastern manuscripts to have entered what would later be the Vatican Library was a manuscript of the Gospel of St Luke. It was translated from Coptic into Arabic, dates from the late tenth century and is one of the earliest known Arabic versions of any part of the New Testament. It was copied by a Coptic scribe.⁵⁰ On his return from his second journey to the Levant in 1551, Guillaume Postel had with him an Arabic manuscript, obtained in Syria, of the Epistles and the Acts of the Apostles which dated from the second half of the thirteenth century. The manuscript had been copied in Egypt by Copts. From a modern perspective Arabic may be of little use for criticism of the canon of the New

⁴⁵ *Historia Josephi fabri lignarii. Liber apocryphus ex codice manuscripto Regiae Bibliothecae Parisiensis*, ed. Georg Wallin (Leipzig, 1722), sigs.)((3^v-4^r.

⁴⁶ La Croze, *Thesaurus epistolicus*, iii. 235-6.

⁴⁷ Zoëga, *Catalogus*, 33, 225-7.

⁴⁸ Edouard Dulaurier, *Fragment des révélations apocryphes de Saint Barthélemy* (Paris, 1835), 23-9.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 20-2; Zoëga, *Catalogus*, 223-5.

⁵⁰ Alastair Hamilton, 'Eastern Churches and Western Scholarship', in Anthony Grafton (ed.), *Rome Reborn: The Vatican Library and Renaissance Culture* (Washington, DC, New Haven, and Rome, 1993), 225-49, esp. 232.

Testament,⁵¹ but it was thought to be of importance in the sixteenth century and later, and in 1578 the elder Franciscus Junius, the librarian of the princely collection in Heidelberg where the penurious Postel had deposited fifteen of his manuscripts against a financial loan, published a literal Latin translation of the Arabic Acts and the Epistles to the Corinthians, with a discussion of the variants between the Arabic and the Greek versions. This was the first serious attempt to use Arabic for the purpose of New Testament criticism and it established a precedent which would be followed all over Europe.

Not only were the earliest Arabic versions of the book of Revelation of Coptic origin, but, like Coptic, Arabic was the only language in which certain apocryphal texts of the first centuries of our era survived, or the first in which they came to light. Three of the most important apocryphal books in Arabic to be edited in this period were closely associated with the Copts. One of these has already been discussed—the History of Joseph published by Wallin in 1722. Another appeared far earlier, the so-called Infancy Gospel dating from the fifth or sixth century. Originally in Syriac,⁵² it was known in Europe through a copy made by a Coptic scribe and acquired in Egypt by Jacobus Golius. The young German scholar Heinrich Sike from Bremen bought the manuscript in Leiden⁵³ and published the *Evangelium Infantiae vel Liber Apocryphus de Infantia Servatoris* in Utrecht, where he arrived in 1697. His edition was widely acclaimed as a scholarly achievement, and the late date of the text stimulated him to examine its traces in early Islamic writings.⁵⁴ This, in its turn, prompted him to plan an edition of the ‘pre-Islamic’ poets of the seventh century—a revolutionary project, which was interrupted by Sike’s death and which would be carried out by Johann Jakob Reiske later in the eighteenth century. Sike’s edition of the Infancy Gospel was reprinted in Fabricius’s *Codex apocryphus Novi Testamenti*.

The third apocryphal work has an altogether more complicated history. The book known as both 2 Esdras and 4 Ezra was—and still is—officially considered part of the Old Testament apocrypha. In fact it was compiled well into the Christian era. A series of visions expressing the woes of Israel and prophesying the end of the world, the main part of the book (chs. 3 to 14) was almost certainly written in Hebrew, by a Jew

⁵¹ Metzger, *Early Versions of the New Testament*, 257–68.

⁵² Sever J. Voicu (ed.), ‘Histoire de l’Enfance de Jésus’, in *Écrits apocryphes chrétiens*, i. 205–38, esp. 207–8.

⁵³ The manuscript is now Bodl., MS Bodl. Or. 350.

⁵⁴ For Sike see Alastair Hamilton, ‘Sike, Henry’, *ODNB*, l. 597–8.

probably in Palestine, in the last decade of the first century AD. Soon after its composition, however, it fell into Christian hands, and substantial additions were made, possibly in Greek. The first two chapters were probably written towards the mid-second century, and the last two in the second half of the third, while various interpolations were inserted into the main text at an unknown date. These included a specific prophecy of the advent of Christ. The main part of the text, however, was translated into Latin from a Greek version and included in the Vulgate as part of the Old Testament apocrypha. In the course of the Middle Ages the various parts of the book were joined together, and the book adopted the appearance it has retained ever since. Despite Jerome's statement that it was apocryphal, there was no lack of distinguished thinkers through the ages who believed that it was both ancient and canonical.⁵⁵

Serious biblical scholars, especially in the second half of the seventeenth century, made increasing efforts to date the work, to establish its authorship, and to disentangle the various additions and interpolations from the original text. This was not easy to do with material in the West. The East, on the other hand, was thought to hold the evidence. For, although the Church of Constantinople rejected the book from the biblical canon, it was regarded as canonical by the Ethiopians and was highly esteemed by the Copts.

The key to the problem turned out to be an Arabic version of the book.⁵⁶ It was copied in 1354 in Cairo, by a Coptic scribe at the church of Michael the Archangel. It may well have been taken to Dayr al-Suryan, and some jottings in Ethiopic point to its use by Ethiopian monks, who frequently lodged in the monastery. From Dayr al-Suryan it seems to have been brought to Jerusalem (where one of the notes in the manuscript was written in 1555). And from Jerusalem it made its way, possibly in the second half of the sixteenth century, to one of the Melkite convents in Aleppo. There it was seen in the 1580s by Leonardo Abel, the Maltese priest who led a Roman delegation to the Levant in 1583 in the hope of uniting the Eastern Churches. Abel had a copy made of it which he took back to Rome and which entered the Vatican Library some years after his death in 1605. In about 1610, however, the original manuscript was bought by Paul Pindar, the future English ambassador to Istanbul who was then consul in Aleppo. He brought it to England in 1611 and presented it to Thomas Bodley.⁵⁷ After numerous vicissitudes

⁵⁵ Hamilton, *The Apocryphal Apocalypse*, 13–194.

⁵⁶ Ibid. 249–84.

⁵⁷ Bodl., MS Bodl. Or. 251.

it was translated into English by Simon Ockley, who would be appointed to the Cambridge chair of Arabic in 1711, at the behest of William Whiston. In 1711 Whiston published Ockley's English translation in the fourth volume of his *Primitive Christianity Reviv'd*. This was a turning point in Western attitudes to the apocryphal book, since the Arabic version reflected the original text, free of the later Christian additions and interpolations. Although opinions about the book continued to be divided, it was at last possible not only to date it more or less correctly, but also to place it in the context of contemporary Jewish and Christian writings and to appreciate it as a testimony of the time in which it was written.

In retrospect such a harvest may seem meagre, but it marks the beginning of an increasing use of Coptic and of Coptic-Arabic texts. In the domain of historiography, as we saw, the manuscripts brought back by Wansleben enabled Renaudot to compile his history of the patriarchs of Alexandria, which would be invaluable to historians of the early Church. The same was true of the liturgical manuscripts which entered Europe in ever greater quantities. But the process was lengthy, and it was only with the collections of Coptic material made in the course of the nineteenth century that true advances could be made.

Epilogue

Champollion's extraordinary feat of finding the key to the Egyptian hieroglyphs was a landmark. Coptic could then be said to have served what, from the point of view of its early students, was one of its main purposes. From the studies of Wansleben, Sollerius, Dubernat, and Renaudot, moreover, a fair idea could be obtained of Coptic beliefs and practices. The European discovery of the Church of Alexandria had, at least temporarily, come to an end. Yet discovery is one thing and more detailed study another, and, by the standards of today, Coptic studies were still in their infancy in 1820. Little was known about the early centuries of Coptic history, and no systematic research had been undertaken on the evolution of Coptic society in the long period of Muslim rule. The number, and above all the variety, of Coptic texts in European libraries in the early nineteenth century was still relatively limited, and of these texts few had been published.

By 1900 the situation was very different. Acquisitions of Coptic manuscripts had proceeded for much of the nineteenth century thanks to collectors and scholars such as Lord Prudhoe, Robert Curzon, and Henry Tattam. Western visitors had been able to benefit from the pro-European policy of Muhammad 'Ali, who ruled between 1805 and 1848, from that of his descendants, and, after 1882, from the British occupation of Egypt. However great their difficulties, they were far more successful in stripping the Coptic monasteries of their manuscripts than their predecessors of earlier centuries.¹ The great discoveries were made in the south. Although the White Monastery was already known to contain interesting manuscripts by the second half of the eighteenth century—the English traveller Charles Perry had caught a glimpse of its treasures in the early 1740s, and it was from there that the missionaries supplied Cardinal Borgia with some of his most prized Coptic acquisitions—it was not until the winter of 1882–3 that the French Egyptologist Gaston Maspero heard about the vast collection hidden in one of the towers from a French resident in Egypt, Auguste Frénay.² After many vicissitudes, some of the worst of which were due to Maspero's compatriot and rival Émile Amélineau, who

¹ For a survey see Volkoff, *A la recherche de manuscrits*, 137–95.

² Catherine Louis, 'La "Cachette" du monastère Blanc ou "l'affaire des papyrus d'Akhmīm"', in Boud'hors (ed.), *Pages chrétiennes d'Égypte*, 20–1.

was determined to obtain the codices himself, Frénay finally persuaded the superior of the White Monastery to sell him most of the manuscripts, and, by the end of 1887, the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris had received almost 3,500 leaves and fragments. Other important acquisitions were made from the 1890s on by E. A. Wallis Budge, assistant keeper and then, in 1895, keeper of Egyptian and Assyrian antiquities at the British Museum.³ In 1895 he discovered still more material at the White Monastery, but his greatest finds took place in Dayr al-Bahari, close to Luxor, and, in 1911, in al-Ashmunayn near al-Minya.

Throughout the nineteenth century Coptologists had been publishing an increasing amount of scriptural material in the two main Coptic dialects, Sahidic and Bohairic, and the efforts of Moritz Gotthilf Schwartz were rewarded by his appointment to the newly founded extraordinary professorship of Coptic language and literature at the university of Berlin in 1845, the first of its kind.⁴ Coptic lexicography and philology also made advances, especially with the publication of a Coptic dictionary in 1835 and a grammar in 1841 by Amadeo Peyron, a Piedmontese orientalist who had studied under, and then succeeded, Valperga di Caluso as professor of oriental languages in Turin, and had profited from the rich material in the local Egyptological museum. Peyron, more than anyone else, inaugurated the system of ordering Coptic words according to their radicals (rather than alphabetically), which would be followed by Crum in the twentieth century.⁵

The material collected by Maspero and Budge, in addition to contemporary and later discoveries, such as the papyri unearthed at Oxyrhynchus near the Fayyum from the late 1890s onwards and the Nag Hammadi manuscripts found in 1945, revealed the existence not only of other dialects, but also of a rich store of apocryphal and magical texts. And it was on the basis of these that the knowledge of the Coptic language could progress, and that it became ever more possible to study the history of the early Church in Egypt.

As the collection of Coptic manuscripts grew an interest developed, particularly in the nineteenth century, in other aspects of Coptic culture, such as Coptic art.⁶ The growing awareness of the value of Coptic

³ Volkoff, *A la recherche de manuscrits*, 249–64.

⁴ Martin Krause, 'Coptological Studies', *CE* ii. 613–16, esp. 614.

⁵ Orlandi, *Elementi di lingua e letteratura copta*, 60, describes Peyron's dictionary as 'il primo dizionario scientifico apparso in Europa' and his grammar as 'la prima grammatica scientifica della lingua copta'.

⁶ Du Bourguet, *Les Coptes*, 75–91.

textiles, and their inclusion in museums in Turin, Paris, London, Vienna, and Strasbourg, led to their being exhibited at the Exposition Universelle held in Paris in 1900. In the first years of the twentieth century the interest extended to other artistic products, to Coptic architecture, sculpture, and painting. Archaeological expeditions led by European and American Byzantinologists of international fame set out to investigate the wall paintings and the various antiquities of the Coptic churches and monasteries, and one of the first results of this new field of research was the foundation of the Coptic Museum in the fortress in Old Cairo by Marcos H. Simaika in 1902.

The political climate which facilitated the European exploration of Coptic culture had an altogether revolutionary effect on Coptic society itself. Al-Gabarti commented gloomily on the fortunes of the minorities after Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798. 'Another development', he wrote, 'was the elevation of the lowliest Copts, Syrian and Greek Orthodox Christians, and Jews. They rode horses and adorned themselves with swords because of their service to the French; they strutted around haughtily, openly expressed obscenities, and derided the Muslims.'⁷ He deplored the brutality of the Coptic money dealers who had been appointed by the French to levy taxes in the villages and who 'descended upon the country like despots, with arrests, beatings and extreme demands'.⁸

Under Muhammad 'Ali and his successors, whom they served loyally, the Copts were officially relieved of nearly all the disabilities to which they had been subjected since the Arab invasion of Egypt. In 1817 permits were granted for the restoration of old churches and the building of new ones, and for the ringing of church bells. Restrictions on clothing were suspended, but in the following year al-Gabarti observed that

it was proclaimed that Copts and Greek Christians should wear only the prescribed blue and black clothing and were not to wear white turbans. This was because in violation of all the rules they were wearing expensive turbans made of coloured cashmere and were riding horses and mules preceded and followed by servants bearing sticks to drive people from their path, so that they were thought to be government notables. Some bore arms and went out to the open country for target practice with rifles and the like. How fine it would have been if these prohibitions had lasted!⁹

Subsequently all regulations about distinctive dress would be revoked.

⁷ Al-Gabarti, *History of Egypt*, Text vol. 3, 69.

⁸ Ibid. 26. Cf. also 175–6.

⁹ Ibid., Text vol. 4, 406.

In 1855, under Muhammad 'Ali's youngest son Muhammad Said, the *gizya*, which had in fact not been paid since 1815, was abolished, and in 1856 the Copts, who had already been recruited by the French in 1800,¹⁰ were admitted to military service. This, however, was a privilege they often preferred to forgo.¹¹

The increasing participation of the Copts in the political and economic life of their country was attended by ecclesiastical and educational reforms, which produced competent theologians as well as highly instructed members of the laity.¹² The greatest architect of reform, which affected both the Coptic Church and the education of its members, was the ecumenical patriarch Cyril IV, in office from 1854 to 1861. He set up the first Coptic schools based on a European model, with a strong emphasis on the study of modern languages.¹³ Coptic was taught and one of the many results of the so-called Coptic Renaissance was the attempt, led primarily by the Coptic philologist Klaudios Labib in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, to resuscitate Bohairic as a written and spoken language.¹⁴

As Egyptian citizens the Copts can be said to have obtained full equality. A prosperous and well-educated community, their relations with the Muslims did not always run as smoothly as they might have wished, but their contribution to Egyptian politics and culture and to the cause of Arab nationalism was immense.¹⁵ But at the same time another phenomenon became increasingly evident. Cyril IV's successors were far less open to any form of dialogue with other Churches and cultures than he was. One of the consequences was an ever deeper rift between the educated Coptic laity, who had supported Cyril IV, and the conservative Coptic clergy.¹⁶

It was not only the Orthodox Copts who benefited from the political changes. The future of the Catholic Copts, too, lay in the nineteenth century. In Istanbul the sultan, Mohammed II, freed the Uniate

¹⁰ Ibid., Text vol. 3, 180.

¹¹ Elli, *Storia della chiesa copta*, ii. 323–45.

¹² Meinardus, *Two Thousand Years of Coptic Christianity*, 61–95; Wolfram Reiss, *Erneuerung*, 14–75.

¹³ Behrens-Abouseif, *Die Kopten in der ägyptischen Gesellschaft*, 96–105.

¹⁴ Cf. Roper and Tait, 'Coptic Typography', 120; Munir Basta, 'Iqlādiyūs Labīb', *CE* iv. 1302.

¹⁵ Donald Malcolm Reid, 'The 'Urabi Revolution and the British Conquest, 1879–1882', in *The Cambridge History of Modern Egypt*, ii. 217–38, esp. 223, 235–6.

¹⁶ Reiss, *Erneuerung*, 7–12, 41–3.

Christians of their juridical dependence on the Orthodox patriarchs and consequently allowed them to build their own churches in 1829. The Catholic Copts, under the diplomatic protection of the Habsburgs, were recognized by the Egyptian government in 1866.¹⁷ After 1893 they were at last officially separated from the Reformed Franciscan missionaries and in 1895, when their number was estimated at about 5,000, the pope, Leo XIII, nominated a Coptic Catholic patriarch, Girgis Maqar, who took the name of Cyril II.¹⁸ Certainly, even with this nomination, some of the problems with which we are familiar reappeared—the doubts about papal supremacy, and the objections to the excessively authoritarian policy of the papacy. These, as we saw, had also characterized the relationship with Rome of Rafael Tuki, for whom Cyril II had a particular admiration. Nevertheless, the number of Catholic Copts grew, reaching over 107,000 in 1975.¹⁹

In the nineteenth century the amount of missionary organizations increased vastly, and, however successful the Church of Rome could claim to be with the Catholic Copts, by the second half of the century, for the first time in their history, the Catholic missionaries in Egypt had redoubtable rivals. There were the Episcopalians or Anglicans dispatched by the Church Missionary Society from 1815 onwards. Between 1824 and 1862 missions, run mainly by Lutherans from Basle, were set up all over the country,²⁰ and they would be accompanied by schools and a theological seminary. The Anglican Church in Egypt, the smallest of the Churches introduced from the West, would obtain about a thousand members.²¹ The Presbyterians serving the United Presbyterian Church of North America, who first arrived in Egypt in 1854, were more successful, and their expansion was swift. They set up their first seminary in 1863, and by 1878, with their base in the area of Asyut, they had over thirty-five schools, and the Community of Evangelical Churches was officially recognized by the government.²² The American Presbyterian Synod of the Nile was

¹⁷ Dorothea McEwan, *Habsburg als Schutzmacht der Katholiken in Ägypten: Kurzfassung der Studie über das österreichische Kirchenprotektorat von seinen Anfängen bis zu seiner Abschaffung im Jahre 1914* (Cairo, 1982), 72.

¹⁸ Emad Halim Habib, *Diritti e doveri del patriarca copto cattolico dal 1895 al 1921: La Chiesa Patriarcale Copto-Cattolico ed il primo Sinodo Alessandrino* (Rome, 1998), 32–91.

¹⁹ Statistics are given by Petro B. T. Bilaniuk, 'Coptic Catholic Church', *CE* ii. 601–2.

²⁰ Reiss, *Erneuerung*, 19–21.

²¹ Hilary Weir, 'Anglican Church in Egypt', *CE* i. 133.

²² Reiss, *Erneuerung*, 23–33.

formed in 1899 and, in 1926, it was recognized as the Evangelical Coptic Church. It now has some 250,000 adherents.²³

The presence of rival missionary organizations was particularly beneficial for education. Where the Catholics were concerned it was above all the Jesuits who made a major contribution. The Society returned to Cairo in 1879 and founded the Collège de la Sainte Famille. And, with the establishment in 1908 of the American University in Cairo, the Presbyterians set up what was to remain one of the best centres of advanced education in the entire area of the Middle East.

A further result of the ever greater opening of Egypt to the West was that the study of the Copts was no longer the prerogative of Roman Catholics. Ever more Protestants, with ever greater ease, could now study the Church of Alexandria at first hand. It is thus all the more surprising to establish how little the Western attitude to the Copts actually changed, and how little Western visitors, or indeed residents, in Egypt, however well disposed they were to the country and the people, appreciated the Coptic contribution to Egyptian politics and society. We find the same accusations of ignorance and superstition running from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century. One reason for this can be attributed to the high expectations which the Copts often aroused at a distance—that they might convert to Catholicism, that they might form part of an anti-Catholic block loosely united with the Protestants, or that their Church was the closest of all existing Churches to primitive Christianity. Each of these expectations was, or seemed to be, disappointed, and resentment ensued. Yet this is only one side of a far more complex relationship. The dislike which emerges from so many sources was directed somewhat indiscriminately at the Coptic Church and its clergy. In practice there were plenty of exceptions, monks or priests who distinguished themselves by their kindness and their broadness of mind. And above all there was the laity, that vast majority of Copts scattered over Egypt but concentrated in parts of Upper Egypt which few foreigners visited.

One of the harshest verdicts on the Copts was that of the Jesuit Michel Jullien, who arrived in Egypt in 1881 and bought the land where the Collège de la Sainte Famille still stands. Jullien's model was Sicard, but his severity towards the schismatic Christians of the East was greater. They had no idea of mental prayer, he wrote, hardly ever took communion, and were deaf to the exhortations of the missionaries. Their

²³ Elli, *Storia della chiesa copta*, iii. 52–4; Samuel Habib, 'Coptic Evangelical Church', *CE* ii. 603–4.

hearts were as empty, cold, and dilapidated as their churches. But such was the result of schism.²⁴

Jullien implied that salvation could only come from outside, namely from Rome. That the Copts should look West for their salvation, however, was an old idea,²⁵ and had been expressed in an influential book on Egypt by the eminent Egyptologist John Gardner Wilkinson in 1843. Wilkinson, who spent some twenty years in the country, in fact had hardly any interest in the Copts, a feature clearly reflected in his *Hand-book for Travellers in Egypt*, first published in 1847 and later known as 'Murray's Guide'. In a first version of the future *Hand-book*, he expressed his condescending contempt. 'Much indeed', he wrote,

might be done for the instruction and benefit of that remote race:—not however by introducing the controversies of different sects, and sowing the seeds of religious discord, from which their parent church, the Copts or Jacobites of Egypt, suffered so much in former times; and it is to be hoped that Europeans who undertake the laudable office of visiting and instructing them, will avoid all controverted points, and confine themselves to those useful subjects, which an increase of knowledge may enable them to comprehend.²⁶

The learned English twin sisters, Agnes Smith Lewis and Margaret Dunlop Gibson, were committed Presbyterians. Frequent visitors to Egypt, they believed, like Jullien, that the Copts, in whom they had a strong interest, must be helped by a Western Church. 'The Coptic Church', wrote Agnes Lewis in 1904,

is now in a very critical position. To those who, like myself, have cherished the hope that she would rouse herself to feel the need of an educated ministry, well grounded in the Scriptures, and apt to teach, thus assimilating herself perhaps to the Protestant Church of England, it is a staggering reflection, and well-nigh a shattering of hope, to learn that all her bishops must be chosen from four of the monasteries which we visited . . .²⁷

²⁴ Michel Jullien, SJ, *L'Égypte: Souvenirs bibliques et chrétiens* (Lille, 1889), 54. Cf. Catherine Mayeur-Jaouen, 'Un jésuite français en Égypte: Le père Jullien', in Christian Décobert (ed.), *Itinéraires d'Égypte: Mélanges offerts au père Maurice Martin S.J.* (Cairo, 1992), 213–47, esp. 234.

²⁵ For a more general discussion of the view as it emerged in the 19th c. see Claudine Grossir, *L'Islam des Romantiques, i: 1811–1840. Du refus à la tentation* (Paris, 1984), 153–8.

²⁶ John Gardner Wilkinson, *Modern Egypt and Thebes: Being a Description of Egypt; including the Information Required for Travellers in that Country*, 2 vols. (London, 1843), i. 395.

²⁷ Agnes Smith Lewis, 'Hidden Egypt: The First Visit by Women to the Coptic Monasteries of Egypt and Nitria, with an Account of the Condition and Reasons for the Decadence of an Ancient Church', *Century Magazine*, 68 (1904), 745–58, esp. 756.

Agnes Lewis felt that the experience of the prospective patriarchs, recruited in the monasteries, was far too limited to assist the Church in any development, but she also believed that the Copts themselves, whom she described as self-indulgent, lazy, and excessively corpulent, were ill-equipped to guide it. 'A change is impending', she concluded. 'Whether it will be in the direction of the Coptic Church embracing in its own bosom the ideas of modern progress and assimilating itself more nearly to the pattern of the infant church which existed in the days of St. Mark, or whether it will become a mere empty shell of officialism and traditional ritual, the influences which affect it in the twentieth century will irrevocably decide.'²⁸

All too frequently, however, the pitying contempt which pious Western Christians had for the Church of Alexandria extended to Coptic society in general. We have already seen that the French scientist Sonnini de Manoncourt emphasized the contrast between the Muslims, and particularly between the dashing and honest Beduin, and the grasping, petty-minded monks he encountered in the Wadi al-Natrun. As a romantic admiration of the Muslims increased in the nineteenth century, the contrast persisted.

An example is in a work containing a highly sympathetic description of Egypt, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* by Edward William Lane. Lane spent some twelve years in Egypt and probably knew the country better than any of his Western contemporaries. His description of Muslim society and of Egyptian customs is one of the best in existence. The book, first published in 1836, and based on his experiences between 1833 and 1835, contains a supplementary section devoted to the Copts. From the outset Lane presents the Coptic community as curiously closed to any approach from Europeans:

So great is the aversion with which, like their illustrious ancestors, they regard all persons who are not of their own race, and so reluctant are they to admit such persons to any familiar intercourse with them, that I had almost despaired of gaining an insight into their religious, moral, and social state. At length, however, I had the good fortune to become acquainted with a character of which I had doubted the existence—a Copt of a liberal as well as an intelligent mind; and to his kindness I am indebted for the knowledge of most of the facts related in the following brief memoir.²⁹

It was to his Coptic friend that Lane attributed the venomous observations about the Coptic 'character' with which he ends what is

²⁸ Ibid. 758.

²⁹ Edward William Lane, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians. Written in Egypt during the Years 1833–1835* (London, 1986), 533.

otherwise a fair description of Coptic practices. 'One of the most remarkable traits in the character of the Copts is their bigotry', he writes:

They bear a bitter hatred to all other Christians; even exceeding that with which the Muslims regard the unbelievers in El-Islam ... They are, generally speaking, of a sullen temper, extremely avaricious, and abominable dissemblers; cringing or domineering according to circumstances. The respectable Copt, to whom I have already acknowledged myself chiefly indebted for the notions which I have obtained respecting the customs of this nation, gives me a most unfavourable account of their character. He avows them to be generally ignorant, deceitful, faithless, and abandoned to the pursuit of worldly gain, and to indulgence in sensual pleasures ...³⁰

Another man who spent many years in Egypt, albeit at a later period, was the German explorer and naturalist Georg August Schweinfurth, the founder of the Egyptian Geographical Society in Cairo, where he had settled in 1875 and would stay intermittently until 1889. He visited a number of the Coptic sites, and left memorable descriptions of the Red Sea monasteries. But he was pessimistic about the future of the Coptic Church. It had long ceased to have either a political or a religious significance, he wrote, and remained isolated from the rest of the world. He saw the Copts as the victims of the same state of torpor which had characterized spiritual matters in Egypt for many centuries.³¹

An even more extreme attitude was adopted by Lucie Duff Gordon, who spent the last years of her life, from 1862 to 1869, in Upper Egypt in the hope of recovering her health. Although she had at first liked the Copts, she gradually came to prefer the Muslims, whom she identified with the true Egypt. At that point the social advance of the Copts and other Christians filled her with indignation. 'I wonder when Europe will drop the absurd delusion about Christians being persecuted by Muslims', she wrote to her husband in September 1867. 'It is absolutely the other way,—here at all events. The Christians know that they will always get backed by some Consul or other, and it is the Muslims who go to the wall invariably.'³²

Cases of a more balanced attitude are rare. Credit, however, must be given to Evelyn Baring, the first Earl of Cromer, who was consul-general in Egypt from the beginning of the British occupation in 1883 until

³⁰ Ibid. 551.

³¹ Georg Schweinfurth, *Auf unbetretenen Wegen in Aegypten* (Hamburg and Berlin, 1922), 209.

³² Lucie Duff Gordon, *Letters from Egypt* (London, 1983), 365. See also Katherine Frank, *Lucie Duff Gordon: A Passage to Egypt* (London, 1994), 250–1.

1907. His book *Modern Egypt* appeared in 1908. Cromer had no particular liking for the Copts, but he was irritated by Lane's idealization of the Muslims at their expense. He shared Schweinfurth's views about the immobility of the East, in which the Church of Alexandria shared:

It is true that the Coptic Christian has remained stagnant, but there is this notable difference between the stagnation of the Moslem and that of the Copt. The Moslem stands in everything on the ancient ways because he is a Moslem, because the customs which are interwoven with his religion, forbid him to change . . . The Copt, on the other hand, has remained immutable, or nearly so, not because he is a Copt, but because he is an Oriental, and because his religion, which admits of progress, has been surrounded by associations antagonistic to progress.³³

The point that Cromer stressed was that, after centuries of cohabitation with the Muslims, the Copts were as much a part of Egyptian society as they were. The various defects which Lane attributed to them were, according to Cromer, also defects of the Egyptian Muslims. 'The only difference between the Copt and the Moslem', he concluded, 'is that the former is an Egyptian who worships in a Christian church, whilst the latter is an Egyptian who worships in a Mohammedan mosque.'³⁴

One of the very few exceptions in the chorus of disapproval of the Copts was John Bowring, who was in Egypt in 1837 and 1838 and, in 1840, produced a report on the state of the country. Bowring, an acquaintance of Lord Byron, had been committed to the cause of Greek independence. He had consequently developed a strong dislike of the Turks and a sympathy for the Eastern Christians. Cromer quoted him as a pendant to Lane, but had as little time for his idealization of the Christians at the expense of the Muslims as he had for the reverse position held by Lane. The Turks, Bowring had written, had always regarded the Copts as 'the pariahs of the Egyptian people, yet they are an amiable, pacific, and intelligent race, whose worst vices have grown out of their seeking shelter from wrong and robbery'.³⁵

Despite certain exceptions and modifications, therefore, prejudice against the Copts was extraordinarily persistent. It lasted well beyond the theological debates which had affected Western attitudes to the Church of Alexandria for hundreds of years. In order to find true signs of change we have to wait until the second half of the twentieth century. Only then

³³ The Earl of Cromer, *Modern Egypt*, 2 vols. (London, 1908), ii. 202.

³⁴ Ibid. 205-6.

³⁵ Ibid. 205.

do works start to appear which contain a dispassionate appreciation of the Copts as integrated members of the Egyptian nation, with an identity in the Arab world and in the larger Christian world. But even here a certain caution is necessary. In the historiography of the Copts themselves there is a tendency to emphasize the persecution to which the Church of the Martyrs was subjected through the ages. This emphasis has been taken up by Western scholars, affected all too often by the situation of the moment, in an implicitly, or sometimes explicitly, anti-Islamic tone. The result is to present the Copts as a persecuted and isolated minority—a monolithic image, extended over the centuries, which hardly does justice to the complexities and changes of one of the principal Churches and societies in the Middle East.

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