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The Giessen Coptic Texts

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THE GIESSEN COPTIC TEXTS

An excellent outline of the history of the gradual acquisition of the Coptic material belonging to the University Library at Giessen has been provided by Dr. H.G.GUNDEL in a previous number of this publication¹⁾. The collection includes papyri and ostraca together with two leaves of parchment, and was built up from four originally independent collections.

The first was begun in 1902 by Dr. E.KORNEMANN, an ancient historian at Giessen, who established a collection of papyri in the Museum of the Oberhessischer Geschichtsverein. These are now known as P a p y r i G i s s e n s e s (P.Giss.)²⁾. The collection was enlarged by a number of purchases made through the German Papyruskartell between the years 1907 and 1913, and was subsequently deposited in the University Library in 1935.

In 1905 the eminent classicist Dr. K.KALBFLEISCH instituted a private collection at Marburg, designated as P a p y r i I a n d a n a e (P.Iand.)³⁾. This was acquired by purchases from the Papyruskartell made between 1905 and 1913, and was further enriched by papyri obtained in 1926-27 by Dr.C.SCHMIDT of Berlin. Since KALBFLEISCH'S call to the chair at Giessen in 1913 the collection has been located in the University Library at Giessen, to which it was bequeathed on his death in 1946. Fifteen or sixteen of the Coptic papyri in this collection were loaned to Dr. F.BILABEL for study at Heidelberg, but after his death in 1945 all his notes were lost.

A third collection known as P a p y r i b i b l i o t h e - c a e u n i v e r s i t a t i s G i s s e n s i s (P.b.u.G.) was founded for the Giessen University Library by the classicists Dr. O.IMMISCH and Dr. A.KÖRTE with purchases from the Papyruskartell made between 1908 and 1914, and further additions in 1928 obtained through the agency of Dr. C. SCHMIDT⁴⁾. A number of the Coptic texts were studied by BILABEL, but his

notes on these also disappeared in 1945.

Finally, a collection of ostraca, known as Ostraca Giessensia (O.Giss.), was made by Dr. E.KORNEMANN⁵⁾. The greater part of the collection was obtained in 1903, to be supplemented by further purchases made during the years before 1912. A much smaller collection (Ostraca Iandana), which had been formed by KALBFLEISCH, has now completely disappeared, and was probably destroyed in the bombing of his home in 1944.

During the Second World War the Papyri Giessenses, Papyri Iandanae and Ostraca Giessensia were removed to the basement of the University Library for safety, while the Papyri Bibliothecae Universitatis Giessensis were deposited in the vault of the Dresden Bank in Giessen. Somewhat later the Papyri Giessenses were transferred to the Dresden Bank vault. In the severe bombing of Giessen in December of 1944 and February of 1945 the precious collections miraculously escaped destruction. However, during the subsequent months many of the papyri suffered grievous damage from the effects of water seepage and some texts, especially those on parchment, were irreparably damaged.

It was fortunate indeed that the papyri of these collections were almost all prepared and in many cases mounted between glass by Dr. H.IBSCHER of Berlin before his death in 1943. His skill in dealing with fragmentary papyri was truly phenomenal. In 1951-52 the texts other than the ostraca were expertly photographed by the firm of Leitz in Wetzlar. Special photographs, in several cases infra-red, were also made by the Director of the University Library Dr. J.SCHAWWE.

Dr. GUNDEL has already described how the joint Giessen-Toronto project was inaugurated in 1951 through the good offices of Dr. F.M.HEICHELHEIM⁶⁾. As a result I was invited

to undertake the publication of all the Coptic texts but one. The latter (P.Iand. 9A-B), a most interesting magical text, was properly entrusted to Dr. A.KROPP, the acknowledged master of this genre of texts, who has now produced an excellent edition of the work⁷⁾.

Grants from the research funds of the University of Toronto made it possible for me to study the original texts in the University Library in 1953, and after further work on the basis of the photographs to collate them again in 1957. I would be remiss were I not to acknowledge here the great courtesy and hospitality extended to me by Dr. SCHAWWE and Dr. GUNDEL during these brief visits to Giessen. Both scholars afforded me all possible assistance while there, and were of inestimable help to me in subsequent correspondence. I should also like to express my indebtedness to the late Dr. P.E.KAHLE Jr. and to Dr. J.W.B.BARNS who gave generously of their time and expert knowledge to aid in the decipherment of some of the more recalcitrant texts. I was also fortunate in being able to discuss some of the problems with Dr. H.J.POLOTSKY and M.M.MALININE to my great profit.

Of the 75 Coptic texts, two are on parchment, twelve on ostraca, one on paper, and the remainder on papyrus. In five cases two texts occupy the recto and verso of the same papyrus, and in one the same text extends to two papyri, hence 56 papyri are represented. The following is a listing of the texts studied, cited by their inventory numbers:

P. Iand. 19, 38, 39, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 124, 159, 160, 226, 345, 580, 675, 683, 685, 686, 687, 688, 689, 690, 691, 692, 914 A-d, 995, 996, 997, 998, 999, 1000, 1001, 1002.

P. Giss. 101, 102, 103, 104, 109, 110, 111, 112, 113, 114, 116, 117, 214, 930.

P.b.u.G. 1, 10, 11, 96, 335, 336, 367, 368, 369, 370, 485, 552.

O. Giss. 127, 252, 510, 512, 530, 533, 534, 535, 536, 538, 541, 542.

L I T E R A R Y T E X T S

Only four of these texts are literary in character. A leaf of a parchment codex (P.b.u.G.1) which originally contained about 24 lines is now, alas, so damaged by the action of water that it is quite illegible save for a few letters. These suggest a date in the fifth century. BILABEL worked on this text in 1937-41 and intended to publish it, but no notes have survived.

A brief résumé of the other three texts has been given by Dr. GUNDEL⁸⁾. A fragmentary leaf from a second parchment codex (P.b.u.G.336) has also suffered from water damage. It may be dated to the early sixth century, and appears to contain a passage from an unknown apocryphal gospel. Part of the verso reads:

If you bear all my sufferings and endure my perils, I will adorn you with every ornament of my glory. But first I will make you a companion to the angels; I will cause your hymn to be fragrant.

A leaf of a papyrus codex (P.Giss.114) of the sixth or seventh century, written in double columns, contains an anecdote which perhaps formed part of a homily. It tells of a dishonest man who with his foot manipulated the scales in which gold was weighed. Apparently as a punishment for this conduct he developed an incurable sore on his foot, the stench of which rendered him unapproachable.

Probably the most important of these texts is P.Iand.160, to which belong the fragments P.Iand.914 A-D. This is a copy on papyrus of a letter written to the bishops of Libya by Apa Athanasius, archbishop of Alexandria (A.D. 328-373), together with Liberius, archbishop of Rome (A.D. 352-366) and Dionysius, archbishop of Africa. The latter, to my knowledge, is

hitherto unrecorded as a bishop at Carthage. The epistle is in the Fayyumic dialect, written in a single column on the recto, but double columns on the verso. The papyrus is very fragmentary, and the ink badly faded. P.Iand.160 is not a palimpsest, as was earlier thought, but on the verso the action of the water seepage has transferred some of the ink from a second papyrus fragment so that it appears in reverse as "mirror writing". Included in P.Iand. 914 A-D are sixteen papyrus fragments and two pieces of heavy paper between which the papyri had been laid in modern times. Four of these papyrus fragments bear a reversed impression of portions of the verso of P.Iand.160. Scraps of papyrus still adhere to the two pieces of paper, together with some of the ink of the earlier text in reverse. One bears a text which duplicates a part of the recto of P.Iand.160, but is not an exact copy, while the other preserves remnants of two columns of text. Of the rest, one papyrus fragment has the beginnings of seven lines, and the remainder are too fragmentary for use, in some cases bearing only a few letters. The body of the epistle is thus far too damaged for continuous translation. It does, however, make mention of the fact that "the hunters of lawlessness hide their snares", which may be an allusion to the Arian controversy.

L E T T E R S

Probably 35 texts are to be classified as letters. Of these 29 are on papyrus, one on a rag paper (P.Iand.995), and five on ostraca. The following are the inventory numbers:

P. Iand. 38, 124 r^o, 124 v^o, 159, 226 v^o, 683 r^o, 683 v^o, 685 r^o, 685 v^o, 686 r^o and v^o, 687, 688, 689, 690, 692, 995 r^o and v^o, 1000 r^o and v^o, 1001 r^o and v^o, 1002

P. Giss. 101 r^o and v^o, 103, 109 r^o and v^o, 110, 116 r^o and v^o, 214 r^o and v^o, 930

P.b.u.G. 10 r^o, 11 r^o and v^o, 96 r^o and v^o, 370

O. Giss. 252, 510, 534, 538, 542

Two are accompanied by Greek texts, one on the recto (P.Iand. 226) and the other on the verso (P.b.u.G.10). One seems to have been used later as a writing exercise (P.b.u.G.11), and another was a simple exercise in epistolary formulae (O.Giss. 538).

Only three of these letters have been preserved intact, except for a few words (P.Giss.109, 214, P.b.u.G.370). A translation of the first two might be of some interest:

[I rejoiced] very greatly when I saw my brother Severus yesterday, whom you desired not a little. The joy which accrued to me ... of joy because of another matter. See, I have sent you the three l a k o o t e - measures by Taēse, but I adjure you by the almighty God that you come out to me on the Sunday that I may spend my birthday with you, and that you bring out this little l a k o n - measure that I may fill it for you with radish oil. And do not delay to come, whatever may happen! Farewell in the Lord.

In the name of God. Shenoute and Basil are writing to their dear brother Apa Shenoute. Peace be to you from God! Now we are informing you that we have brought some wines from the estate of Master Apa Heu. Further, we have required some camels that we might load them (i.e. the wines) on [them]. Further, may your brotherhood be so kind as to give us two camels that we may load them, and we shall be grateful to you for this matter. And do not withhold them from us. Peace be to you!

One letter is of special interest since it sends greetings from a woman who is described as the village scribe (P.b.u.G. 96).

Although most of the letters are written in Sahidic, three are in Fayyumic (P.Iand.687, 688, P.b.u.G.370) and two in Subakhmimic (P.Iand.159, 226). Most interesting, however, is one in what appears to be the rare dialect to which KAHLE has given the name of Middle Egyptian (P.Iand.38)⁹).

B U S I N E S S D O C U M E N T S

The remainder of the collection, consisting of 29 texts on papyrus and 7 on ostraca, are business documents. They may be further subdivided as follows:

2 acknowledgements of debt: P.Iand.104, O.Giss.512;

6 agreements: P.Iand.106, P.Giss.102, 104, 112, 113, P.b.u.G.369;

1 guarantee for a woman: P.Iand.345 r^o and v^o;

5 receipts: P.Iand.19, 39, 108, P.b.u.G.367, 368;

5 lists: P.Iand.675 v^o, P.Giss.111 r^o and v^o, P.b.u.G. 335 v^o, 552 r^o, 552 v^o;

17 miscellaneous (most too fragmentary for positive identification): P.Iand.105, 107, 580, 691, 996 r^o and v^o, 997, 998 r^o and v^o, 999, P.Giss.117, P.b.u.G.485 r^o, 485 v^o, O.Giss.127, 530, 533, 535, 536, 541.

All are in the Sahidic dialect but one (P.Iand.345), which is in Subakhmimic. One document is accompanied by a Greek text on the recto (P.Iand.675), and another by an Arabic text also on the recto (P.b.u.G.335)¹⁰). The latter Coptic document is a Muslim gardeners' account, and is headed by the formula in Arabic: "In the name of God the Compassionate, the Merciful". Of exceptional interest is P.Giss.111 which begins with the same formula, but this time translated into Coptic, a feature which to my knowledge is unique. Another text (P.Giss.104) bears traces of Arabic writing at the end.

One further feature deserving of mention is the appearance in P.Iand.104 of a rare oath formula discussed by KAHLE¹¹).

The text may be restored as follows: "I swearing, as a security for you, by [God and the prayers of the Catholic] Church and [the health of those who rule over us]".

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N O T E S

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- 11) Op. cit. Vol. I, pp. 46 f.