RECONSTRUCTING AND EDITING THE COPTIC BIBLE. THE MÜNSTER-GÖTTINGEN COLLABORATION FOR A COMPLETE RECONSTRUCTION AND EDITION OF THE COPTIC SAHIDIC BIBLE

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1. Introduction

When the academy project *Editio Critica Maior* of the Greek New Testament[1] began its work at the *Institut für Neutestamentliche Textforschung* (INTF) in Münster (Germany) in 2007 the inclusion of the Coptic New Testament as one of the oldest and most important versions has been planned from the outset of the project. The numbering system of the Coptic New Testament manuscripts went also online in 2010. Based on the printed lists by Schmitz and Mink[2] the Schmitz-Mink-Richter (SMR) database[3] is since the relevant and annually updated reference list for the Coptic NT manuscripts. About the same time, a new tool for digital cataloguing, transcribing, and edition of ancient manuscripts was launched at the INTF, the *Virtual Manuscript Room* (VMR)[4] developed and designed by Troy Griffitts and Ulrich B. Schmid. The VMR is a modern online based manuscript repository, and a database for the administration of all metadata describing the manuscripts at the same time. It offers also a XML-based Online Transcription Editor (OTE) for the diplomatic edition of single manuscripts and the critical edition of, in the actual case, biblical books based on the entire manuscript record available. A manuscript page is represented by a digital image, ideally color and high resolution, faced by the

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[1] http://egora.uni-muenster.de/intf/index_en.shtml, accessed 2019-10-22.
[2] Franz-Jürgen Schmitz and Gerd Mink, *Liste der Handschriften des Neuen Testaments, I. Die sahidischen Handschriften der Evangelien* (1. Teil), ANTF 8 (Berlin/New York 1986); (2. Teil, 1. Halbband) ANTF 13 (Berlin/ New York 1989); (2. Teil, 2. Halbband) ANTF 15 (Berlin/New York, 1991).
[3] http://intf.uni-muenster.de/smr, accessed 2019-10-22.
[4] http://ntvmr.uni-muenster.de, accessed 2019-10-22.

transcription of its text. The VMR enables a virtual reconstruction of today extremely dispersed manuscripts what is, unfortunately, the 'normal' situation with the Coptic transmission.

In 2015, a new long term project dedicated to the Coptic Bible could begin at the Göttingen Academy of Sciences and Humanities: The *Complete Digital Edition and Translation of the Coptic-Sahidic Old Testament*.[5] From the beginning and for obvious reasons a close coordination and cooperation of the two projects dedicated to the Coptic Bible became necessary. Moreover, the Coptic Old Testament project in Göttingen was able, thanks to the generosity of the responsible persons and institutions, to gather the images (mostly microfilms and black and white copies) and the archive material of the project *Koptische Septuaginta* (1994-2000 at the University of Halle-Wittenberg), of the cataloguing project *Biblia Coptica*[6] of the late Karlheinz Schüssler, and of the *Corpus dei Manoscritti Copti Letterari* (CMCL)[7] founded by Tito Orlandi. Together, the INTF and the Coptic Old Testament Project in Göttingen constitute the largest archive of reproductions and documentations of Coptic biblical and literary manuscripts in the world. And the archive grows annually by new images and documentation acquired from the collections or photographed and copied by the collaborators of the projects.

2. A common manuscript numbering system for Coptic Biblical Manuscripts and the new List of Coptic Biblical Manuscripts (LCBM)

Karlheinz Schüssler's manuscript catalogue *Biblia Coptica* (BC) aimed at a complete manuscript recording of the Coptic Sahidic biblical manuscripts. While for the OT *Biblia Coptica* was the most comprehensive and most recent reference tool available, Schüssler largely duplicated the information given in the lists by Schmitz and Mink for the NT.[8] Moreover,

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[5] http://coptot.manuscriptroom.com, accessed 2019-10-22.

[6] Karlheinz Schüssler, *Biblia Coptica. Die koptischen Bibeltexte. Das Sahidische Alte und Neue Testament*, Band 1, Lieferung 1-4 (sa 1–120 OT; Wiesbaden 1995–2000); Band 2, Lieferung 1–2 (sa 120–260 OT; Wiesbaden 2012–2015); Band 3, Lieferung 1–4 (sa 500–585 NT; Wiesbaden 2001–2006); Band 4, Lieferung 1–4 (sa 586–780 NT; Wiesbaden 2007–2011).

[7] <http://www.cmcl.it>, accessed 2019-10-22.

[8] Cf. Frank Feder, Review of K. Schüssler *Biblia Coptica*, Band 4, Lieferung 3–4 (sa 623–780 NT; Wiesbaden 2010–2011), *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung* 111.4–5 (2016), 310–314.

Schüssler's plan to publish every year a new fascicle of his catalogue lead sometimes to a hasty and unsystematic presentation of the items including also ostraca and other material. This increased the number of *Addenda* and *Corrigenda* in each fascicle and caused further confusion, besides the duplication of sigla because Schmitz and Mink also used sa + number for the manuscripts. In the years before his demise in 2013 Schüssler was more open-minded to the advices from colleagues and reviewers and understood the advantages of storing the manuscript data in a database and of creating an online catalogue. He was willing to cooperate and offered generously an exchange of material of his archive and know-how to the INTF and likewise to the then planned new project for the Coptic Old Testament in Göttingen.

The new digital approach and the obvious need for a common system of sigla for the Coptic Old and New Testament manuscripts made an agreement between the two main initiatives in Münster and Göttingen unavoidable. Already in 2015 Siegfried Richter (INTF) and Frank Feder (Coptic Old Testament) developed a new, comprehensive and inclusive numbering system for Coptic Biblical manuscripts, first, of course, for the Sahidic manuscripts:

sa 1 – sa 1999 are reserved for the NT and liturgical or miscellany manuscripts containing NT and OT texts
sa 2000 – for the OT

This system allows to maintain all NT numbers of the INTF/SMR-database already in use and reserves enough space for new discoveries and, in the same way, guaranties an inclusive numbering for the OT. It avoids the possible confusion a maintaining of the *Biblia Coptica* (BC) sigla would have entailed. So, for example, ms London, BL 7594 — a Sahidic miscellany manuscript with Deut, Jonah, Acts, and Apoc. El. (4th century) — retains its SMR number sa 17 in Münster and Göttingen. Schüssler's *Biblia Coptica* number sa 15 serves only as a reference number referring to its treatment in BC.

In many cases intensive research, the new tools, and above all new high resolution images have improved the codicological reconstruction of the often heavily dispersed and fragmented manuscripts particularly from the White Monastery. For example, the BC numbers sa 12 and sa 13[9] belong

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[9] Schüssler, *Biblia Coptica*, Band 1, Lieferung 1 (sa 1–20; Wiesbaden, 1995), 73–82.

actually to a single manuscript which contained Lev and Num, they are now referred to as sa 2047.[10]

In this way, the OT manuscripts are immediately recognizable and distinguishable. Meanwhile, almost all of the 260 OT manuscripts catalogued and published in BC[11] are included in LCBM. However, this number has been considerably reduced because ostraca, amulets, writing boards etc., which Schüssler included in BC, will receive their own numbers in separate lists, and a large number of isolated fragments and single leaves, to which Schüssler gave separate sigla numbers, could already be re-attributed or joined to manuscripts, or has been preliminarily singled out for further investigation.

It is unavoidable for the reconstruction of the Coptic OT and NT that also the manuscripts of the other dialects have to be taken into account. However, this will have to be limited in case of the *Bohairic* version to the manuscripts written *before* the 13th century because the complete edition of the Bohairic OT and NT would definitely require a project of its own. Nevertheless, the numbering system of LCBM already takes into account a future complete edition also of the Bohairic bible. The LCBM numbering system for the dialects will be as follows:

Bible	Numbering	Particular Subdialects
Bohairic		
NT + Liturgica	bo 1–3999	pbo (Palaeo-Bohairic) pBodmer III
OT	bo 4000 –	pbo (Palaeo-Bohairic) pBodmer III; pVatican Copto 9
Fayyumic		
NT	fa 1–199	v (pMich 3520)
OT	fa 200 –	v (pMich 3520; 6868a)
		w (pMich 3521)

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[10] We owe this discovery to Mother Antonia St. Demiana who prepares an edition of the Sahidic Leviticus.
[11] Schüssler, *Biblia Coptica*, Band 1, Lieferung 1–4 (sa 1–120; Wiesbaden, 1995–2000); Band 2, Lieferung 1–2 (sa 120–260; Wiesbaden, 2012–2015).

Bible	Numbering	Particular Subdialects
Mesokemic		
NT	mae 1–199	
OT	mae 200 –	
Akhmimic		
NT	ac 1–199	
OT	ac 200 –	
Lyco-Diospolitan		
NT	ly 1–199	
OT	ly 200 –	

As for the particular subdialects, it is quite obvious that the linguistically relatively clear distinction of the dialects (especially in case of *V* and *W*) does not necessarily correspond to a separate biblical version of the corresponding dialect. So, for good and practical reasons, in the actual numbering system they are subsumed under the major dialectal group to which they belong.[12]

3. A common repository for Coptic Biblical and Literary Manuscripts

In January 2016, the INTF and the Göttingen Academy project Digital Edition of the Coptic OT agreed that the Göttingen *Virtual Manuscript Room* (http://coptot.manuscriptroom.com) will be the repository for Coptic Biblical manuscripts of the Old *and* New Testament while at the New Testament Virtual Manuscript Room in Münster (http://ntvmr.uni-muenster.de) only New Testament manuscripts will be displayed.

As for the Coptic Old Testament, in a first stage, the production of diplomatic editions of the manuscripts containing the books of the Pentateuch, the Major and Minor Prophets will have priority. A digital diplomatic edition in the VMR consists of a manuscript surrogate and its transcription (in Unicode automatically tagged in XML) accompanied by all relevant metadata to this

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[12] Rodolphe Kasser, "Dialects, Grouping and Major Groups of." In: *CoptEnc* 8, 97–101.

manuscript stored in a database. All manuscript data can be systematically searched and compared with each other via the database search.

Based on the transcription and annotation of the individual manuscripts of a biblical book a collation engine will create a preliminary edition text which can be revised and completed by the editor.

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