A COPTIC FRAGMENT FROM THE HISTORY OF JOSEPH THE CARPENTER IN THE COLLECTION OF DUKE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

The History of Joseph the Carpenter (BHO 532–533; CANT 60; clavis coptica 0037)\(^1\) is readily accessible in many collections of New Testament Apocrypha.\(^2\) The text is fully preserved in Arabic and Bohairic, which was the regional dialect of Lower Egypt, and fragmentarily in Sahidic (i.e. the dialect of Upper Egypt). The present paper introduces P. Duk. inv. 239, a previously unidentified Sahidic fragment of this writing, which surfaced recently among the manuscripts in the Special Collections Library of Duke University. The new textual witness supplies us with a portion of the History of Joseph the Carpenter previously unattested in Sahidic. Moreover, the Duke fragment displays at least one interesting variant reading, unrecorded in the Bohairic and Arabic versions of the text.

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\(^1\) The following conventional abbreviations are used for the claves cited in this article:  
CAVT = Jean-Claude Haelewyck, *Clavis Apocryphorum Veteris Testamenti* (Corpus Christianorum; Turnhout: Brepols, 1998)  
CANT = Maurice Geerard, *Clavis Apocryphorum Novi Testamenti* (Corpus Christianorum; Turnhout: Brepols, 1992);  
BHO = Paul Peeters, *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Orientalis* (Subsidia Hagiographica 10; Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1910).  
The clavis coptica is available online at http://cmcl.aai.uni-hamburg.del.  
From a literary point of view, the *History of Joseph* belongs to a group of works, which Joost Hagen has called the “apostolic diaries.” The principal characteristic of all these texts is their claim to be apostolic books or diaries that record some of the original sayings of Jesus. They appear in the form of revelation dialogues between Christ and the apostles, usually placed on the Mount of Olives. Jesus typically refers in his revelatory discourses to different topics (e.g., angelic beings, his birth, passion, and resurrection, saintly figures or places), which all happen to coincide with certain events in the Coptic calendar. The apostles record the revelation and deposit the book, most often, in the library of Jerusalem for the benefit of future generations.

As an “apostolic book,” the *History of Joseph* purports to be a revelation of Jesus Christ to his disciples on the Mount of Olives concerning the death of his earthly father on Epep 26 (July 20) at the age of 111. The first part of the text draws heavily upon the *Protevangelium of James* and other apocryphal infancy narratives. Joseph is introduced as an old carpenter having children from a previous marriage (2.1–6). On the other hand, Mary is a young virgin who spent the last nine years of her life serving in the Temple. When she reaches the age of twelve, the priests decide to find her a husband (3.1–2). They cast lots and Mary is given as a wife to Joseph (4.1–6). Two years later, Mary conceives by the Holy Spirit and, unaware of the miracle, Joseph wants to send her away in secret. The Archangel Gabriel appears to Joseph in a dream and

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reveals to him that Mary will give birth to the Savior, whose name will be Jesus (5.1–6.3). Joseph takes Mary and they go to Bethlehem in order to register for the census. On the way Jesus Christ is born, fulfilling the prophecy that the Messiah must come from Bethlehem (7.1–3). The episode of the flight to Egypt and the massacre of the innocents are mentioned at 8.1–3. The narrative concerning the childhood of Jesus ends with the return of the holy family to Nazareth (9.1). Chapters 10–29 represent a long section which focuses on the death and burial of Joseph. It is interesting to remark that the details concerning the preparations of the body for burial follow closely the funerary rituals described in the Book of the Dead, this being one of the elements which suggest an Egyptian provenance of the document.\(^6\) The section ends with the burial of Joseph in the tomb of the patriarch Jacob. Finally, in chapters 30–32 we find out that although Jesus Christ did not grant immortality to Joseph, he protected his body from decay and transferred his soul to heaven.

Various influences have been detected in the text: from the Protevangelium of James (which had an impact on the chapters concerning the childhood of Christ) and the Testaments of Abraham, Jacob, and Isaac (CAVT 88, 98, 99), to ancient Egyptian mythology and Gnosticism. I should like to note here, however briefly, a few points of contact between the History of Joseph and the narratives regarding the death (i.e. Dormition) and assumption of the Virgin Mary. Like many texts concerning the Dormition of the Virgin, the History recounts only briefly the major moments of Joseph’s life,\(^7\) dedicating a more extensive section to the events surrounding his death. Moreover, another feature which the History of Joseph shares with the Dormition stories

\(^6\) On the comparison between Hist. Jos. Carp. 26 and the Egyptian mummification rituals, see Siegfried Morenz, Die Geschichte von Joseph dem Zimmermann (TU 56; Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1951). The Egyptian provenance of the Hist. Jos. Carp. has been accepted by the majority of scholars who have studied the text. For his part, Bellarmino Bagatti postulated a Palestinian origin, but his arguments are not convincing. See his “Il culto di S. Giuseppe in Palestina,” in Cahiers de Joséphologie 19 (1971) 564–75.

\(^7\) As I already said above, these details are in fact common themes taken from the Protevangelium of James and other similar infancy narratives.
is an obvious tendency to see Christ as divine and human at the same time. If in the Dormition narratives Mary is portrayed as Theotokos, who gave birth to God and man in a real sense, but had kept her virginity untouched, our text calls Joseph “Christ’s father according to the flesh.” As unusual as it may sound, this formula aims to defend the idea that, although Jesus is divine, he was also a descendant of David, being thus a human being. The human and divine condition of Christ is expressed by the author(s) of the text through Joseph: “You are Jesus Christ, truly Son of God and son of man at the same time” (Hist. Joseph 17.17).

According to the hypothesis of Louis-Théophile Lefort, the History of Joseph was originally composed in the Sahidic dialect of Coptic. This is ascertained by the numerous biblical quotations which follow closely the Sahidic version of the Bible. As for the Bohairic version, this contains linguistic features which indicate it was translated from Sahidic. Finally, the Arabic translation of the History of Joseph was made from Bohairic. A comparison between the various manuscripts of the Arabic and Coptic recensions shows that the text suffered some redactional changes during the transmission process. It is likely that some modifications had been made already during the transmission of the Sahidic manuscripts. Indeed, those parts of the text where the Sahidic manuscripts overlap exhibit some manifest divergences, which indicate that the original writing has been revised several times.

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The *History of Joseph the Carpenter* became widely known in 1722 through Georg August Wallin’s Latin translation after an Arabic manuscript in the Royal Library in Paris.\(^{10}\) Ever since, Wallin’s Arabic text and Latin translation have been reprinted, with or without emendations, on several occasions.\(^{11}\) Antonio Battista and Bellarmino Bagatti published in 1975 the current standard edition of the Arabic version, based on numerous manuscripts of Egyptian provenance.\(^{12}\)

As early as 1808, Étienne Quatremère discovered the Bohairic version of the *History of Joseph the Carpenter* in the manuscript Borg. Copt. 66.\(^{13}\) The army of Napoleon confiscated this manuscript together with others from the collection of Stefano Borgia, housing it between 1797 and 1815 in the Royal Library in Paris.\(^{14}\) What they left in the Vatican was only a copy of the Bohairic *History of Joseph*, which was carelessly transcribed after the original by the Coptic Roman Catholic priest Raffaele Tuki at the end of the 18\(^{th}\) century. This modern copy is to be

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\(^{13}\) Borg. cpr. 66 belongs to the lot of Bohairic manuscripts acquired by Joseph Assemani from the monasteries of Scetis for the cardinal Stefano Borgia. Description of the manuscript in Adolphe Hebbelynck and Arnold van Lantschoot, *Codices coptici Vaticani* (vol. 1 of *Codices coptici Vaticani, Barberiniani, Borgiani, Rossiani*; Rome: Bibliotheca Vaticana, 1937) 487–8. As it stands now, Borg. cpr. 66 brings together various Bohairic parchment leaves taken from different codices, which belonged to the Monastery of St. Macarius in Scetis. They were bound together at the end of the eighteenth century, after they arrived in the Borgia collection. The *Hist. Jos. Carp.* is the eleventh piece of this miscellany and it is dated A.M. 783 (= 1065 C.E.).

found in the paper manuscript Borg. Copt. 25. Because of the temporary removal of the original document from Rome, Georg Zoega was able to mention in his catalogue of the Coptic manuscripts in the Borgian collection only Tuki’s copy of the Bohairic History of Joseph.\textsuperscript{15} Moreover, this faulty transcription served as a basis for Eugène Revillout’s lithographed 1876 edition.\textsuperscript{16} Forbes Robinson has the merit to have been the first to draw attention to two Bohairic fragments in the John Rylands Library in Manchester (Crawford no. 39), which came from a second witness of our text in this dialect.\textsuperscript{17}

In 1883, the text of Borg. Copt. 66 was finally published by Paul de Lagarde.\textsuperscript{18} No other edition of the Bohairic text has been made ever since, but we should remark that Forbes Robinson’s English translation from 1896 was based on an autoptic examination of the manuscript in the Vatican and his notes to the translation contain useful improvements to de Lagarde’s edition.\textsuperscript{19} Similarly, Bart D. Erhman and Zlatko Pleše’s publication of the History of Joseph in a more recent collection of apocryphal writings is said to be based on de Lagarde’s text, but “with occasional changes based on the collation against the manuscript photographs.”\textsuperscript{20}

As to the Sahidic version, this is attested by several dismembered manuscripts scattered all over the world. Georg Zoega first reported on the existence of eight leaves in the Borgian

\textsuperscript{15} Georg Zoega, Catalogus codicum Coptorum manu scriptorium qui in museo Borgiano Velitris adservantur (Rome, 1810; repr., Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1973) 33 (= no. 25).


\textsuperscript{17} Forbes Robinson, Coptic Apocryphal Gospels (TS 4; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1896) xxviii; see also Walter Ewing Crum, Catalogue of the Coptic Manuscripts in the Collection of the John Rylands Library, Manchester (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1909) 219 (= no. 440).


\textsuperscript{19} Robinson, Coptic Apocryphal Gospels, 130–47, and the notes on 220–9.

\textsuperscript{20} Ehrman and Pleše, Apocryphal Gospels, 159.
Some two decades later, Johann Karl Thilo had recognized that Zoega no. 116, which is a single leaf paginated 87–88, might also belong to the History of Joseph. Although Thilo’s identification proved to be correct, the German scholar was wrong in suspecting that this fragment would belong to the same codex as Zoega no. 121:


In addition to these, Forbes Robinson identified a Sahidic fragment in the British Museum (transferred later to the British Library), which belongs to yet another manuscript of the History of Joseph. In a seminal article published in Le Muséon in 1953, Louis-Théophile Lefort added to the Sahidic codex first identified by Zoega five consecutive folios from the miscellaneous volume Copte 12917 of the National Library in Paris (BNF, Copte 12917, foll. 12–16). Lefort was the one who organized codicologically the surviving Sahidic vestiges of the History of Joseph in four separate codices, which he designated with the letters A–D. Finally, in 2009 I edited in the same journal two small fragments in the National Library in Paris, which join together to form the bottom of a leaf (BNF, Copte 1318, fol. 148 + 1322, fol. 40). They belong

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22 Thilo, Codex apocryphus, xxvi, referring to Zoega, Catalogus, 223 (= no. 116); see also Tischendorf, Evangelia apocrypha, xxxvii n. 1. The fragment was published for the first time by Revillout, Apocrypha coptes, 28–9 and reedited by Robinson, Coptic Apocryphal Gospels, 146–9.

23 Robinson, Coptic Apocryphal Gospels, 148–51 (only the English translation, without the Coptic text). Description of the fragment in Walter Ewing Crum, Catalogue of the Coptic Manuscripts in the British Museum (London: British Museum, 1905) 130 (= no. 296). The fragment’s call number used to be Or. 3581B(11), but after the reorganization of the Sahidic fragments in the British Library, it became Or. 3581B, fol. 14.

24 Lefort, “L’Histoire de Joseph,” BnF Copte 12917, foll. 13–16 belong to Codex A according to Lefort’s classification, whereas BnF Copte 12917, fol. 12 is the only known fragment of Lefort’s Codex B. See infra.

to Lefort’s Codex A, the best preserved Sahidic copy of the text. All the fragments of the *History of Joseph* in this dialect are written on parchment and come from the library of the White Monastery in Upper Egypt:26


Vatican, Zoega 116 (*Hist. Joseph* 4.6–8.1)


**Codex B:** Paris, BNF, Copte 12917, fol. 12 (*Hist. Joseph* 7.1–9.1)

**Codex C:** London, British Library, Or. 3581B, fol. 14 (*Hist. Joseph* 13.6–15.2)

**Codex D:** Vatican, Zoega 121 (*Hist. Joseph*. 14.1–24.1)

Now, to these manuscript witnesses should be added a heretofore unidentified Sahidic fragment from the Duke Coptic manuscripts available in the online catalogue.28 P. Duk. inv. 239 (*olim* Coptic MS. 12) is a fragment from a parchment codex which was acquired by purchase in 1970. Nothing is known concerning the provenance of the item. A paleographical comparison with the vestiges of the other four Sahidic codices of the *History of Joseph* indicated that the


27 This codex can be dated with some accuracy since we have another manuscript copied in the same scribe’s hand and dated 962 C.E. See Suciu, “New Fragments from *Historia Josephi*,” 282–4. This is the only codex from those mentioned above that has received a siglum (i.e. MONB.DI) in the *Corpus dei manoscritti copti letterari* (= CMCL) database. CMCL is a project led by Tito Orlandi (Rome/Hamburg), whose main purpose is the reconstruction of the dismembered White Monastery codices (http://cmcl.aai.uni-hamburg.de/). To each reconstructed manuscript are ascribed two letters of the Latin alphabet, which are preceded by the abbreviation MONB (= “Monastero Bianco”).

Duke fragment had not belonged to any of them. Thus, P. Duk. inv. 239 must be attributed to a fifth Sahidic manuscript of the *History of Joseph*, of which it is the only witness presently known.

The fragment measures 16 × 27 cm and was written in two columns. However, much of the second column of the recto and, consequently, the first of the verso, have disappeared, only a few letters being preserved. On the bottom of the recto, which is the hair side of the skin, there is the figure of a bird drawn with the wings stretched. There are no traces of pagination or quire signature. The fragment can be perhaps dated paleographically to the eleventh century C.E.

The text of P. Duk. inv. 239 corresponds to chapters 26.5–28.2 of the *History of Joseph the Carpenter*. As I already said, this portion of the text was previously unattested in Sahidic. In chapter 26, Jesus Christ blesses those who will give alms in the name of his earthly father and will commemorate him. Among the blessed are also the scribes who will copy the *History of Joseph*. The Duke fragment starts at this point of the narrative. Its incipit says that after the death of the scribes, Christ will remove their sins from the ledger (χειρόγραφον) and they shall escape the torments of the afterlife. For the poor persons who do not have the means to give alms to honor the saint, it is enough if they shall give the name of Joseph to one of their children. After the long lacuna, which encompasses most of the right-hand column on the recto and the left-hand column on the verso, the text continues on the verso with the lament of Jesus over the remnants (λείψανον) of his father Joseph. Christ exhorts the reader not to blame death as Adam and Eve had done because it was established by God. The text breaks off at this point, perhaps no more than three folios before the end of the text.

The new fragment in the Duke papyrus contains a few variant readings, most of them minor, which are not attested in any of the surviving versions of the text. One *lectio* is especially
interesting: the reading “I will grant (χαρϊζεσθαί) him to you as son in my kingdom” (recto, col. 1, lines 4–7 = 26.5) has not been recorded until now. Curiously enough, the same expression occurs in the Sahidic Testament of Isaac (CAVT 98), a text with which the History of Joseph has some literary connections. The context and the argument are similar in both writings: those that shall honor Joseph and Isaac will gain the privilege of becoming their “sons” in the kingdom of God:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>History of Joseph</th>
<th>Testament of Isaac (Kuhn)³⁰</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ταχαρίζειε ἦνοι ἦν καὶ ἦν ἐκ τῆς γῆς τῆς ἡμέρας.</td>
<td>ἦναχαρίζειε ἦνοι ἦν ἦν ἐκ τῆς γῆς τῆς ἡμέρας.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I will grant him to you (sg.) as son in my kingdom”</td>
<td>“I will grant them to you (pl.) as sons in my kingdom”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following pages contain the editio princeps of P. Duk. inv. 239. As the new fragment offers from time to time variant readings, which are not attested in the Bohairic and Arabic versions, I tried not to fill the lacunae except in the cases where the surviving letters allowed reconstruction with some degree of probability.

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[ ] [єναξοογ]

†ηαισ[ε ῥπ]

חֶרֶה פְּרָחָן
eπευνοβε ταχα

[πίζε ῥ[νοχ νακ 5 χε [ασחφ εφ]

[ν(α)]ήρε γίτα
eν[τ]ρρο-

дают ῥιψκι πι

ρα ἱλλαγ ῥβα

ζανος:= ειεην 10 [ετυηαγ]

† ταναγτή ῥ

πνογ:= η[θοτ[ε]

[νπρρο ῥκω

γτ ετυπήτο ε

[βο] vacat λ ἐπακωτ 15 [ε]

[ ] vacat ἰ πβή

[να] ιεθ[ε] ἰμ

[ ] ιεθκα

[θαριζε ῥ[θαργ]

[ν]ιη:= ἄω 20 [ε]

[ο]ν εογαπε ου

ρωνε νρκε

πε εινίταιοι

νεγπορε νι

ναγ εειρε νιν 25 ογαθε[ε]
P. Duk. inv. 239 verso (Flesh side)

[ ] [±4]ωκ ἓρ...
[ ] еτβινητ:= αὐω
[ ] αἱρὴν <ἐ>ρον ἕν
[ἀγολο]βς ψύ  ἕ
[ ] πολιβά[ο]η
[ ] ἐττανυ= δὶρι
[ ] ὑ <ἐ>ρον εἰκὼ ῃ
[ ] ὄς.= χε ὡ
[ ] 10 πνοῃ πρὸγω
[ ] σῇ ἐτεχὴν νη:=
[ ] Θ] πνοῃ πρῆ
[ ] τοῦνος νῇ
[ ] πὴν νῃ vacat[σεν]
[ ] 15 ληπει vacat[ἐγ]]
[ ] ὁγ νῆ[ογ]
[ ] ἀλ[ά] πετρὰν
[ ] ὄγον [νη] ἵ[ἐν]
[ ] ταυτοφῃ tε]
[ ] 20 οἰκονομία ν
[ ] ἄπηρ ἵ[π]
[Μοοφε νη]να[
[ερδὶ]ε]κυνε
[νῆν]νος νη]μτορ
[τρ ἵτακαρονο]πυ ῃ 25 Μὴρ[ικο]κε λη

Μηνικε ἐλξ

Πνοῃ ν.<<> ἡ

Δὴν <ν>ῆτεφ
TRANSLATION:

(recto col. 1) [26.5.] [...] I will tear the ledger (χειρόγραφον) of their sins and I will grant (χαρίζω) him to you as son in my kingdom. And he shall not experience (πείρα) any torment (βάσανος) except (εἰ μὴ) the necessity (ἀνάγκη) of death and the fear of the river of fire which is in front of my Father [...] his tribunal (βῆμα) [...] that purifies (καθαρίζω) all flesh (σάρξ). [6.] And again, if he is a poor man who does not have provisions (εὐπρομένη) to do (col. 2) [those that I have said, if he begets a son and] calls [his name] J[oseph], glorifying [your name], no [famine nor (οὐδὲ) plague (λοιμῶς) shall be in that house]. [...] (verso col. 1) [27.2.] [...] just as if (ὡς) [it was entangled] with iron [nails] [...] [4.] [...] [he went with] me [to] Egypt [and the great] troubles [that he endured] [...] (col. 2) because of me. And I wept for him for a long time. I spread over his honored remains (λείψανον) (and) I wept for him saying: [28.1.] ‘O death, the destroyer of all craftsmanship (τέχνη), O death, the raiser of much weeping and sadness (λυπεῖν), but (ὁλλά) the one who is over everyone has appointed for you the amazing plan (οἰκονομία) of this sort. [2.] Do not blame death like Adam and his [wife have done] [...]