

## **COPTIC LEGAL [SOURCES](#)**

The [sources](#) for Coptic law are legal documents in Greek, Coptic, and Arabic. The reason for this is that several languages were in use in Egypt in this period, as is shown also by the fact that the Egyptian [civil](#) lawyers drafted Greek and Coptic documents at the same time, while Copts who demonstrably did not understand Greek nevertheless had a Greek will drawn up (Kenyon and Bell, I, 77). The Greek and Coptic formularies, however, also lived on in the Arabic documents drawn up for former Christians converted to Islam. This has been shown for the sale of immovable and residential [property](#) through investigations undertaken by Frantz-Murphy. Further comparison of documents will enlarge this picture.

The nature of the [sources](#) requires that the Coptic legal historian know the three languages mentioned or—if he or she is concerned only with the period before the Arab conquest—Greek and Coptic only. This requirement was met by the two legal historians who have left fundamental works on Coptic law: A. A. SCHILLER, who also edited Coptic legal documents, and A. STEINWENTER. To date no legal historians have been able to continue their work in the field of Coptic law. It is therefore important to follow the path begun by Till and to translate Coptic documents that belong together into modern [language](#) groups and so make them accessible to legal historians who have either an inadequate knowledge of Coptic or none at all.

Till translated the Coptic contracts, security documents, marriage contracts (cf. also his essay on alimony claims), and letters of safe-conduct. The legal historian Liebesny has contributed an essay on the last group of documents. Till concerned himself with the Coptic [parallel](#) documents and expressed his views on the oath in Coptic legal documents and on the Coptic stipulation clause. Following the pattern of Kreller's investigations into marriage law in the Greco-Egyptian [papyrus](#) documents, Till examined the statements of the Coptic documents on

marriage law and presented all the published legal documents from Thebes to the legal historians for evaluation in a German translation. Schiller and Steinwenter assessed the material thus made available (cf. the literature mentioned in LAW, COPTIC). Till's services are not diminished by the fact that since the appearance of his work, further documents of this group have become known and have enriched our knowledge. As an example we may refer to the group of marriage documents: the document called no. 3 by Till has since been edited afresh by Kahle (Vol. 2, pp. 566-71) as no. 152.

Two further Coptic marriage documents from al-Ashmunayn were edited in 1953 by Balogh and [Kahle](#) along with a document of divorce, and another in 1979 by MacCoull. Montevecchipt together the Greek marriage and divorce documents in 1936, and they were treated afresh in 1955 by Taubenschlag. Till's 1948 work overlooked that published by Abbott (1941) on Arabic marriage contracts among the Copts, which included two tenth-century marriage documents of Copts who "belong to the lower clergy-families."

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