

[COPTIC LITERATURE](#)

Comparatively little Coptic literature, which is almost entirely religious, has survived. [Coptic literature](#) flourished from the fourth to the ninth century. The 10th and the 11th centuries did not witness new literary works; literary activity was limited to editing and compiling older works. Most of the Coptic literature is written in codices, the pages of which are made of papyrus or parchment, and a small part is written on scrolls or *ostraca* (chips of limestone or pieces of broken pottery with inscriptions).

A small part of this literature is written on paper. Many lists of manuscripts reflect the richness of the libraries of ancient monasteries in significant literary works that have been lost. The provenance of the vast majority of the [Coptic manuscripts](#) is unknown; most of the relatively few manuscripts of known origin came from the monasteries of **Wadi al-Natrun**, the **White Monastery**, and the Monastery of the Archangel Michael at Phantoou in the region of Fayoum. Many [Coptic manuscripts](#) are still unpublished.

[Coptic literature](#) is written in the [Coptic language](#). However, a significant proportion of this literature is preserved only in Arabic translation. A considerable part of the [Coptic literature](#) consists of translations from the Greek of the Holy Bible, the Apocrypha, **Gnostic** works, and Manichaean scriptures, as well as some paragraphs from the writings of Clement of **Alexandria** and Hippolytus, and of another 35 Church Fathers; of the latter, a few texts had been translated from the Syriac. The surviving few works of **Pachomius** are the oldest Coptic texts of the original Coptic literature.

Numerous literary works have been attributed to dozens of **patriarchs**, **bishops**, famous monks, and great personalities of the Coptic Church, the last of them being Patriarch Mark III (799-819). St. **Shenute** is the most significant Coptic writer, whose numerous sermons and letters greatly enriched the Coptic literature. Among the important original works that

survived in this literature are the lives of **saints**, canons, homilies, liturgical texts, monastic rules, and Church history. Poetry and medical, arithmetical, alchemical, and magical texts are also represented in Coptic literature.

GAWDAT GABRA

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