

ECCLESIASTICAL CANONS

The name given by P. de Lagarde (1883, p. 239, n. a) to distinguish these canons from the seventy-one APOSTOLIC CANONS. In the Arabic version of the Coptic, it is the first book of the 127 Canons of the Apostles. Their superscription in Sahidic is: “These are the canons of our holy fathers the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ, which they established in the Church” (Lagarde, 1883, p. 239), and in Arabic: “These are the canons of our fathers the apostles which they prepared for the establishment of the Church through the medium of Clement” (Périer and Périer, 1912, p. 573).

This number varies to some extent: seventy-eight in Coptic and seventy-one in Arabic, with a distribution varying according to the manuscripts in Ethiopic. The final subscription in the Arabic should be noted: “Their number in the Greek is 81 canons” (Périer and Périer, 1912, p. 663), which is not what the Coptic version says. This indicates that there was at first a Greek collection in Egypt. It is further entirely remarkable that this collection of seventy-eight (or in Arabic seventy-one) ecclesiastical canons was preserved only in Egypt, and indirectly in Ethiopia.

We have at our disposal two Coptic recensions (Sahidic and Bohairic) and several in Arabic.

Sahidic Text

This has come down in three almost complete manuscripts, of which the two later ones are copies of the first, and some fragments. The manuscripts date from the early eleventh century (A.M. 722; A.D. 1005-1006) (British Library, Or. 1320, Crum, 1905, no. 162); a nineteenth-century manuscript (British Library, Or. 440, Crum, no. 163); and a manuscript from the eighteenth or nineteenth century (Coptic Patriarchate, Cairo, unnumbered).

For the fragments from the White Monastery (Dayr anba Shinudah), see L. T. Lefort (1954). There are editions by Lagarde (1883, pp. 239-91, of British Library, Or. 1320), U. Bouriant (1884 and 1885), and G. W. Horner (1904, pp. 295-363; translation only from Lagarde's text; and pp. 459-73, Sahidic fragments edited). For Canons 31 to 62, see W. Till and J. Leipoldt (1954).

Bohairic Text

This version, based on a Sahidic recension as the colophon indicates, is sometimes called the Bohairic Octateuch or Heptateuch. It is not divided into canons, like the Sahidic and the Arabic, but into seven books with a second numbering corresponding to a division into eight books, and would resemble the Syriac Clementine Octateuch (Nau, 1913; reedited by Ciprotti, 1967). In fact, it is visibly the same text as that of the Sahidic manuscripts.

Three manuscripts are known, one in Berlin (Or. quarto 519, A.M. 1520/A.D. 1803-1804); one in Cairo (Coptic Patriarchate, Canon 9 and Canon 10; Simaykah and 'Abd al-Masih, 1942, Vol. 2, nos. 577 and 581, dating from 1803-1804), and one dating from A.D. 1854. There is an edition by H. Tattam (1848). The collation with the Sahidic was done by Horner (1904, pp. 445-57) and by Till and Leipoldt (1954; see also the introduction, pp. 15-19; see also Graf, 1944-1953, Vol. 1, pp. 582-83).

Arabic Version

The manuscripts are numerous, and have been reviewed by J. and A. Perier (1912, pp. 565-71) and by G. Graf (1944, Vol. 1, pp. 576 and 584). There are two recensions, one deriving from the Coptic and another made from the Clementine Octateuch, on the basis of the Syriac or the Greek; the Bohairic manuscripts noted above are provided with a parallel Arabic version (unpublished; see, however, the remarks of G. Goeseke, in Till and Leipoldt, 1954, pp. 47-63).

There are editions by Horner (1904, pp. 89-125 and 233-93) and J. and A. Périer (1912, pp. 573-663) (the Périer brothers used eight manuscripts, Horner only three). The version derived from the Octateuch is unpublished, except for two canons published by J. and A. Périer (1912, p. 560). The parallelism between the 127 Canons of the Apostles and the Clementine Octateuch was well known to Coptic authors, such as Abu al-Barakat, in his *Misbah al-Zulmah* (“Lamp of Darkness”) (see Riedel, 1900, pp. 69-73).

Sources

These Coptic and Arabic ecclesiastical canons may be divided into three sections according to the three documents from which they derive. Canons 1-30 (Arabic 1-20) come from a document called the *Apostolic Church Order* because it was placed under different names of apostles; the canons correspond to a book entitled Af diatagai af diē kl»mentoj ka[^] kanĐnenoj[™] kklhsiaſtikoi twn igiwn ċpostŌlwn (“The orders established by [Clement](#) and the Ecclesiastical canons of the Holy Apostles”). It has been published several times, but reference is usually made to F. X. Funk (1887, pp. 50-73).

This is a reworking of the *Didache*, and like it consists of two parts: an ethical discourse taking up the theme of the “way of life” from the *Didache*, but omitting the “way of death” (Canons 1-14; Arabic 1-12), then a series of canonical and liturgical prescriptions: the number and selection, the functions and duties of the bishop, the priests, readers, deacons, widows, deacons again, the laity, deaconesses, almsgiving (Canons 15-30; Arabic 13-20). The country of origin of this document—whether Egypt or Syria—cannot be determined with any certainty. It probably dates from the beginning of the fourth century.

Canons 31-62 (Arabic 21-47) were formerly called the *Egyptian Church Order*. This section, of which the Greek is lost except for a few fragments, has been identified with the *Apostolic Tradition* of [Hippolytus of Rome](#)

since 1910 (E. Schwartz, R. H. Connolly, G. Dix, B. Botte). For the state of the question, see H. Chadwick in Dix (1968, pp. a-p). J. Magne (1975) has suggested that the *Egyptian Church Order* is not the work of Hippolytus but the *Diataxeis of the Holy Apostles* by an anonymous author. Botte (1963) has attempted to restore the original text.

This section of the Ecclesiastical Canons includes an ordination ritual from the bishop down to the healer (Canons 31-39; Arabic 21-26), then a [calendar](#) of [Christian](#) initiation (Canons 40-46; Arabic 27-34), and finally various prescriptions on the liturgical or disciplinary observances of the community such as fasting, the agape, offerings, and prayer (Canons 47-62; Arabic 35- 47).

This part is parallel to two other documents preserved, in Arabic only, in the canonical collections of the Copts, the *Testamentum Domini* (of Syrian origin) and the *Canons of Hippolytus* (certainly of Egyptian origin, for these two texts are recastings of the original document). For Botte, this section or at least its source, the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus, was composed in Rome; for J. M. Hanssens (1965), it would derive from Alexandria. Those who hold Hippolytus for its author place the composition of the work at the beginning of the third century. Canons 63-78 (Arabic 48-71) have been called the *Apostolic Rule*.

This part is parallel to book 8 of the *Apostolic Constitutions*, a compilation preserved in Greek that is dated to the end of the fourth century or the beginning of the fifth and is very probably of Syrian provenance (Funk, 1905). The concordance between our Coptic and Arabic Ecclesiastical Canons and the Greek of the *Apostolic Constitutions* will be found in Hanssens (1965, pp. 96-97) or in P. de Lagarde (1856, pp. XIII-XVI).

After a statement about the charismata and a transition (Canon 63; Arabic 48-51), it contains an ordination ritual (Canons 64-73; Arabic 52-60) with additions relating to the first fruits and to tithes, then a [calendar](#) of [Christian](#) initiation (Canons 74-75; Arabic 61-63) and some

prescriptions concerning the Christian life (Canons 75-78; Arabic 64-71).

In the Bohairic recension edited by Tattam, as in the Arabic version of the Clementine Octateuch, we may note a change of order. The [calendar](#) of [Christian](#) initiation is placed at the end. It is difficult to state precisely what is the immediate source of this third section of the Ecclesiastical Canons.

E. Lanne (1960) has advanced the hypothesis that the Sahidic version of these canons derives from an Alexandrian Greek text of the *Apostolic Constitutions*, shorter than the one we know and differing also from the *Epitome of the Apostolic Constitutions* (ed. Funk, 1905, Vol. 2, pp. 72-96). Originally this Alexandrian recension also included the prayers that subsequently were omitted in the Sahidic translation of the Ecclesiastical Canons because they were already to be found in the *euchologia*.

This series of Ecclesiastical Canons (seventy-one canons), under the form and title of *First Book of the Canons of the Apostles*, was preserved in the medieval canonical collections of the Coptic church (see Riedel, 1900, pp. 121-38, collection of Macarius, anonymous of Berlin, Jacobite anonymous; and Graf, 1944-1955, Vol. 1, pp. 560- 63). It was also widely used by the authors of nomocanons, or systematic collections arranged by themes: the [Patriarch GABRIEL II](#) ibn Turayk (1131-1145), Michael of Damietta (composed in 1188), and al-Safi ibn al-'Assal (in 1238) (Graf, 1944-1953, Vol. 2, 1. 324-27; 333-35; 398-403).

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