

COPTIC TESTAMENT OF [ISAAC](#)

A pseudepigraphical book possibly dating from the fourth or fifth century. Two Coptic versions of the second- or third-century *Testament of Isaac* have survived: the Sahidic, edited by K. H. Kuhn (1957), and the Bohairic, edited by I. Guidi (1900). The former has been translated into English by its editor (Kuhn, 1967), the latter, by S. Gaselee in an appendix to *The Testament of Abraham* (Box, 1927). M. R. James mentions also an Arabic and an Ethiopic version of this work (James, 1892). The Sahidic is, no doubt, the earlier of the extant versions; the Bohairic was translated from Sahidic, although it does not always agree with it.

This relationship is suggested not only by a number of Sahidicisms in the Bohairic version but also by the general development of Coptic literature (see LITERATURE, COPTIC). Guidi rightly observes that the *Testament of Isaac* and the *Testament of Jacob* are imitative of the *Testament of Abraham*, although the *Testament of Isaac* introduces a new element—the moral and religious teaching attributed to Isaac (Guidi, 1900, p. 223). Guidi is on less safe ground when he goes on to argue that they were composed originally in Coptic.

Although the philological evidence is inconclusive, the possibility of a Greek original of the *Testament of Isaac* must be considered, even if no Greek version has been preserved. P. Nagel (1963) is certain that the Sahidic *Testament of Isaac* was translated from the Greek and that the work can be dated between 380 and 410.

There is, however, too little evidence on the genesis of the work to permit its dating except in a most tentative way. In its present form, the *Testament of Isaac* is certainly Christian, but it contains Jewish legendary material. The explicitly Christian elements may have been superimposed, for they appear to be easily detachable.

A brief summary of the contents of the work follows. As an old man, [Isaac](#)

is visited by the angel who attends his father, Abraham, in [heaven](#) and is told of his own impending death. Isaac expresses concern for his son Jacob but is reassured by the angel and instructed to pass on the teaching that he himself has received. Jacob then arrives, and Isaac comforts his grieving son, speaking to him of the inevitability of death, which is confirmed by the experience of [Old Testament](#) characters, except for Enoch.

A short prophetic passage describes the life of Jesus and refers to the Eucharist. Isaac's household assembles around him, but his [death](#) is delayed and he continues to live an ascetic life. He pronounces a series of ethical [exhortations](#) addressed to priests, monks, and laymen. The angel reappears and takes him to heaven, whence he looks down on the terrible fate that is in store for sinners. Tormentors, whose chief is Abdemerouchos, mete out a variety of cruel punishments to all those who have sinned.

[Isaac](#) is then led to his father, Abraham, and through him is instructed by the Lord on the conditions necessary for entry into the [kingdom](#) of God. After the Lord commands the archangel Michael to assemble the angels and all the saints, they repair to the deathbed of Isaac, who takes leave of Jacob and intercedes for him with God. Then Isaac's own soul, white as snow, is taken to [heaven](#) upon the chariot of the Lord.

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