VOL. CXXXVIII 2024/4

EPHEMERIDES LITURGICAE

CENTRO LITURGICO VINCENZIANO
EDIZIONI LITURGICHE

EPHEMERIDES LITURGICAE

COMMENTARIUM TRIMESTRE DE RE LITURGICA

A PEER REVIEWED JOURNAL

anno 138 – fascicolo n. 4 – ottobre-dicembre 2024

ISSN: 0013-9505

DIRECTOR
Giuseppe GUERRA, C.M.

EDITORIAL BOARD
Editor: Giuseppe BUSANI *(Piacenza)*
Emanuele BORSOTTI *(Roma)*; Anthony R. LUSVARDI S.J. *(Roma)*; Franco MAGNANI *(Mantova)*; Stefano PARENTI *(Roma)*; Juan REGO *(Roma)*; Markus TYMISTER *(Roma)*

SCIENTIFIC ADVISORY BOARD
Nicola ALBANESI C.M. *(Piacenza)*; Giorgio BONACCORSO, O.S.B. *(Padova)*; Hélène BRICOUT *(Paris)*; Sebastian BROCK *(Oxford)*; Harald BUCHINGER *(Regensburg)*; Ângelo CARDITA *(Québec)*; Giovanni DI NAPOLI *(Napoli)*; Gilles DROUIN *(Paris)*; Maurizio GIROLAMI *(Padova)*; Angelo LAMERI *(Roma)*; André LOSSKY *(Paris)*; Antonella MENEGHETTI F.M.A. *(Roma)*; Przemysław NOWAKOWSKI C.M. *(Kraków)*; Carmel PILCHER R.S.J. *(Sidney)*; Juan Manuel SIERRA LOPEZ *(Toledo)*; Creômenes TENÓRIO MACIEL S.J. *(Recife)*; Paolo TOMATIS *(Torino)*; Norberto VALLI *(Milano)*; Anthony WARD S.M. *(Hull)*

ADMINISTRATION
Mario DI CARLO (Director CLV)
CENTRO LITURGICO VINCENZIANO
Via Pompeo Magno, 21 – I 00192 Roma
Fax +39 063221078
clv@cmroma.it – http://www.clvedizioni.it

Autorizzazione del Tribunale di Roma, Decr. N. 18217 del 1° agosto 1980
Giammarioli Stampa srl – Via delle Cisternole, 24 – Frascati (RM)

© PROPRIETAS LITTERARIA

The content and opinions expressed in signed articles, notes, reviews, and reports are those of the authors and not necessarily of the Editorial Board. Unsigned contributions are to be attributed to the Editorial Board.

Ephemerides Liturgicae 138 (2024) 409-425

THE PASCHAL PRAISE CONTROVERSY: A HOLY SALVATION?

In the Coptic Orthodox Pascha rite[1], during the Holy Week, the Copt worshipers chant a special Coptic praise between the readings of the prophecies and the reading of the Gospel of every (first, third, sixth, etc.) hour. This praise, a doxology, is said twelve times, namely eleven times in Coptic and a last time in Arabic (in Egypt). This doxological praise, showed by the current liturgical books of the Church, seems however not to appear in most of ancient liturgical books.

The end of this well-known Coptic Paschal hymn (entitled and beginning with ⲑⲱⲕ ⲧⲉ ϯϫⲟⲙ) says, on Holy Friday:

> ⲧⲁϫⲟⲙ ⲛⲉⲙ ⲡⲁⲥ̀ⲙⲟⲩ ⲡⲉ Ⲡⲥⲟⲓⲥ
> ⲁⲫⲯⲱⲡⲓ ⲛⲏⲓ ⲉⲩⲥⲱⲧⲏⲣⲓⲁ ⲉⲫⲟⲩⲁⲃ

It is usually translated thus:

> The Lord is my strength and my praise,
> He has become to me a sacred salvation[2].

Our goal here is to reassess the usual grammatical analysis and therefore the translation of the last two words which are under controversy, and to propose a new analysis and translation based on:
— biblical sources and comparative examples (Greek and Coptic);
— grammatical structure;
— theological meaning.

---

[1] There are in fact only quite scarce studies on the Coptic Pascha (used here instead of Easter), although the Coptic Holy Week is so significant. We can refer, so far, only to two main references: A. SIDAROUS, « La Semaine Sainte à Daîr as-Suryân », in *Bulletin de la Société d'Archéologie copte* XX (1971) 5-32, and O.H.E. BURMESTER, *The Egyptian or Coptic Church. A detailed description of her liturgical services and the rites or ceremonies observed in the administration of her sacraments, Printing Office of the French institute of Oriental Archaeology,* Cairo 1967.

[2] Cf. *Coptic reader* (here: *Special* > *Pascha* > *Friday* > *First Hour* > *Paschal Praise*), a well-known application of liturgical texts in English, Coptic and Arabic, developed by M.D. MAKAR, St Shenouda the Archimandrite Coptic Society, Coptic orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States, 2021 [accessed: 9 November 2024].

The first point to start from is that ⲥⲱⲧⲏⲣⲓⲁ is a Greek feminine word, whereas ⲉϥⲟⲩⲁⲃ wears a masculine mark: ⲉⲩⲥⲱⲧⲏⲣⲓⲁ ⲉϥⲟⲩⲁⲃ understood as « a holy salvation » poses then a problem. Indeed, every scriptural use of the Greek noun ⲥⲱⲧⲏⲣⲓⲁ in the Coptic Bible has a feminine gender (for example: *2 Sam* 19, 2 ss.; *Ps* 37, 22; *Job* 30, 15). By the way, the fact that it is a very well-known Paschal praise sung in the Church at every Pascha can suggest to us that ⲉϥⲟⲩⲁⲃ has here no variant (at least known till now).

The passage that we are studying here stems from the verse of the *Psalm* 117, 13 (LXX 117, 14) and from *Exodus* 15, 2 (well-known in the Coptic Church as chanted in the Tasbeha or Midnight Praise, at the first ϩⲱⲥ or *hymn*). The text of the Midnight Praise here contains a variant (ⲛ̀ⲟⲩⲥⲱⲧⲏⲣⲓⲁ) compared to the corresponding Bohairic biblical text (ⲉⲩⲥⲱⲧⲏⲉⲣⲓⲁ). It seems then, as we shall see further on, that the Pascal praise is based on the Coptic standard biblical text.

M. Abdelmalak and M. Y. Henein have published an article on the subject[3]. But this article, very brief and containing almost no coherent in-depth grammatical and biblical study, must obviously be revised. We will begin by refuting this article for some intrinsic scientific inconsistencies, to then propose our own analysis leading us to a revision of the translation of the hymn, provided that it is not the Arabic text that is law in the Church, but above all the Coptic text of the liturgies.

After a short introduction of the Paschal hymn, the authors claim that « on Good Friday, a third verse is added to the hymn, ⲧⲁϫⲟⲙ ⲛⲉⲙ ⲡⲁϣ̀ⲙⲟⲩ ⲡⲉ Ⲡⲥⲟⲓⲥ ⲁϥ̣ⲱⲡⲓ ⲛⲏⲓ ⲛ̀ⲟⲩⲥⲱⲧⲏⲣⲓⲁ – My strength and my praise are the Lord who became to me a salvation »[4]. As a matter of fact, this is inaccurate, considering that the verse used today in the whole Coptic Church, since a long time, as known by the oldest deacons living until today, is ⲧⲁϫⲟⲙ

[3] M. ABDELMALAK – M.Y. HENEIN, « Controversial addition in the Paschal praise ⲑⲱⲕ ⲧⲉ ϯϫⲟⲙ according to the Coptic rite », in *TEACH – Journal of Christian Studies* 3 (2024) 1-6. URL: https://jcs.teach.eu.com/index.php/teach/article/view/1 [accessed: 3 October 2024].

[4] *Ibid.*, 2. The authors repeat their assertion *infra,* 3: « To accurately discuss the meaning of the third verse, ⲧⲁϫⲟⲙ ⲛⲉⲙ ⲡⲁϣ̀ⲙⲟⲩ ⲡⲉ Ⲡⲥⲟⲓⲥ ⲁϥ̣ⲱⲡⲓ ⲛⲏⲓ ⲛ̀ⲥⲟⲩⲥⲱⲧⲏⲣⲓⲁ, in order to determine its origin », asserting wrongly that it would be the verse used today in the Liturgy.

ⲛⲉⲙ ⲡⲁⲥⲥⲙⲟⲩ ⲡⲉ Ⲡⲃⲟⲓⲥ ⲁⲫⲯⲱⲡⲓ ⲛⲛⲓ ⲉⲩⲥⲱⲧⲏⲣⲓⲁ ⲉⲫⲟⲩⲁⲃ. We will discuss this point further.

Secondly, the authors spend one page and a half for biblical quotations in Greek, Hebrew, Arabic, English and, at last, Coptic. The English translation, based on the Masoretic text, showed by the authors, has no real link with the Coptic text which is under study, the Hebrew text being moreover irrelevant to the Coptic Bible, based in fact on the *Septuaginta*, whose text is more ancient and more accurate, for Orthodox Christians, than the Hebrew Pharisaical-Masoretic medieval text. In short, theses 5-languages quotations are hardly useful for the present subject. We can also note that a part of these quotations are not directly related – on a precise grammatical point of view – to the formula used in the paschal verse, in fact, the authors do not comment nor analyze these quotations.

Thirdly, the authors report that the verse did not exist in the liturgical Pascha books, especially they mention a first book dated 1920 and a second one dated 1971. A third one is reported to be the first to show « in the early 1970s » the verse ⲧⲁϫⲟⲙ ⲛⲉⲙ ⲡⲁϣⲙⲟⲩ ⲡⲉ Ⲡⲃⲟⲓⲥ ⲁⲫⲯⲱⲡⲓ ⲛⲛⲓ ⲛ̀ⲟⲩⲥⲱⲧⲏⲣⲓⲁ, an « Euchologion published by El-Mahaba Coptic Orthodox Society »[5]. Then the authors sum up some interviews of Church cantors about the origin of this verse, which would have a Cairo late origin, then imposed to the rest of the Church. The question of the geographical origin of the verse, nevertheless, does not justify the grammatical affirmations here.

Indeed, the Paschal praise as itself, as noted by M. Abdelmalak and M. Y. Henein, hardly appears in the liturgical books, whether they are old or even quite recent[6]; it must have been considered a purely oral practice, and the text being repeated must have been known by heart by all the people, hardly relevant to transcribe. This may also explain why some rare (modern) transcriptions are partial, since the (oral) practice might have varied according to the

[5] *Ibid.*, 5 (without date nor place of edition).

[6] We consulted an unpublished manuscript (without ranking number) of a Pascha Book dated 15th century from Deir El-Batul, Mallawi, showing systematically a blank (sometimes a simple line) between the prophecy and the psalm of every hour, where the *Thok te tigom* is chanted. Likewise, a yet recent Holy-Week liturgical Egyptian book (ⲡ̀ⲥϫⲱⲙ ⲛ̀ⲧⲉ ⲡⲓⲡⲁⲥⲭⲁ ⲉⲑⲟⲩⲁⲃ), published approximately in the 90's (but, alas, without date neither place of edition, though official), does not transcribe the *Thok te tigom* either.