THE PROVENANCE OF THE CODEX ALEXANDRINUS

In *JTS* xi (1909–10), pp. 603–6, Professor F. C. Burkitt challenged the generally held view that the Codex Alexandrinus came from Alexandria. Discussing the well-known Arabic note signed ‘Athanasius the humble’, and attaching the manuscript to the Patriarchal Library,¹ he objected to the ruling identification of the writer with Athanasius II,² Patriarch of Alexandria from 1276 to 1316, on the grounds that (a) a Patriarch would not fail to style himself as such, and (b) that palaeography was not able to determine the date of the note. He then adduced the reported statement by Matthaeus Muttis, a deacon of Cyril Lucar, to the effect that the manuscript had been found on Mount Athos; and he suggested that, if this report be accepted, the manuscript might have been taken to Egypt by Cyril in 1616, when he returned to that country after a sojourn in Constantinople, and that all the Arabic writing in the manuscript could have been inserted between that date and 1621, when Cyril was elected Oecumenical Patriarch. On this supposition ‘Athanasius the humble’ might, he argued, have been ‘some person of Cyril’s staff who had charge of his library’. Burkitt’s hypothesis is of more than mere bibliographical interest, since he went on to suggest that, if the manuscript was found on Athos, it probably came originally from Constantinople, and represents a Constantinopolitan text. ‘All this’, Burkitt concluded, ‘is quite inconclusive’; but this has not prevented his theory from being quoted favourably in such a work as Mrs. Lake’s *Family II and the Codex Alexandrinus*, 1937, p. 9.

Sir Frederic Kenyon, in his introduction to the first Old Testament volume of the reduced facsimile of the Codex Alexandrinus (1915), referred to Burkitt’s article, and had no difficulty in showing that

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¹ The note, as translated by Burkitt, reads: ‘Bound to the Patriarchal Cell in the Fortress of Alexandria. He that lets it go out shall be cursed and ruined. The humble Athanasius wrote (this).’
² Usually called Athanasius III in English textbooks, following Le Quien’s *Oriens Christianus*, but the Athanasius II implied by that numeration was Monophysite and therefore not recognized by the Orthodox Church.
whatever his reasons, and whatever the date of the note by ‘Athanasius the humble’, Cyril himself firmly believed in the Egyptian origin of the manuscript, and the statement of Muttis must therefore be rejected. The matter was carried a stage farther in 1938 when, in connexion with a popular booklet on the manuscript then being prepared in the British Museum, Dr. A. S. Fulton, then Keeper of the Department of Oriental Printed Books and Manuscripts, whose reputation as an Arabic scholar needs no emphasis, re-examined the Athanasius note, and gave it as his opinion that on palaeographical grounds it could be dated thirteenth to fourteenth century and that the seventeenth century was excluded. The former identification of Athanasius with the Patriarch of that period thus again became plausible. The final proof—or what can reasonably be claimed as equivalent to proof—came in 1945, when T. D. Moschonas published a catalogue of the library of the Patriarchs of Alexandria.\(^3\) In this he printed two notes, both in tenth-century manuscripts of St. John Chrysostom, and reading as follows:\(^4\)

There can be no possible doubt that the above notes were inserted in the manuscripts by the Patriarch Athanasius II; and that both came from Constantinople is readily explained by the fact that for nearly three-quarters of his forty years’ patriarchate Athanasius in fact resided in the capital, and did not finally return to Egypt until about 1308. The two notes must therefore have been written between 1308 and the year of his death, 1316.

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\(^3\) Κατάλογοι τῆς Πατριαρχικῆς βιβλιοθήκης, Τόμος Α’, Χειρόγραφα (Alexandria, 1945).

\(^4\) I have made some minor corrections on the basis of photographs kindly supplied by Mr. Moschonas.