NOTES ET DOCUMENTS

A NOTE ON THE CAREER OF GABRIEL III,
SCRIBE AND PATRIARCH OF ALEXANDRIA

BY

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A group of Copto-Arabic manuscripts of the thirteenth century all bear colophons signed by a scribe named Gabriel. They range in date from A.D. 1249/50 through 1257 to 1265. In the Gospel MS. Paris Institut Catholique 1, fol. 225, the Bohairic subscription reads “The poor Gabriel, unworthy to be called monk and priest . . . year of the Martyrs 966.” In its counterpart, forming the other half of a complete Bohairic New Testament, the Epistles-Acts MS. Coptic Museum Bibli. 94, the Arabic subscriptions on fols. 130r (Choiak 10, Martyrs 966) and 217v-218r (Tybi 26, Martyrs 966) also name the priest and monk Gabriel. Also in the Coptic Museum, the Gospel MS. Bibli. 93 (Bohairic/Arabic) on fol. 165r has a Bohairic cryptogram deciphered as “For God’s sake remember your servant Gabriel who wrote this Gospel.” On fol. 345r of this MS. is a dated Bohairic colophon written by “the poor monk, unworthy of priesthood, Gabriel . . . Martyrs 973, Saracen 655.” This is followed on fols. 346v-347r by an Arabic colophon also signed by “Gabriel the monk . . . Payni, Martyrs 973, year [Hijra designation unspecified here] 655.”

Two things about this Gabriel have been noticed by earlier scholars. The first is that he wrote his MSS. under the patronage of the fourth of the famous ibn al-‘Assāl brothers, leading Coptic intellectuals and officials of the thirteenth century,6

2 G. Graf, Catalogue de manuscrits arabes chrétiens conservés au Caire [= Studi e Testi 63] (Vatican 1934) p. 64; M. Simaika, Catalogue of the Coptic and Arabic MSS. in the Coptic Museum . . . I (Cairo 1939) p. 6. The dates are 6 December 1249-21 January 1250, thus indicating that it took the scribe 46 days to complete Acts.
4 Cf. Horner 1898: xc-xci; Graf 1934 (above n. 2) p. 66; Simaika 1939 (above n. 2) p. 7. The year is A.D. 1257.
5 Horner 1898: xci-xcii; Graf 1934: 66; Simaika 1939: 7. The date is June 1257.
6 See W. Abullif OFM, “Vita e opera del pensatore copto al-Safi Ibn al-‘Assal (sec. XIII),” StudOrChriCollectanea 20 (1987) 142-143. Al-Amgad, the fourth brother, commissioned numerous works and was the dedicatee of several of his brother al-Safi’s theological treatises; he was secretary of the military diwan and had a large house in Haret

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Arabica, tome XLIII
namely al-Amgād Ibn al-ʿAssāl. The Bohairic colophon of Copt.Mus.Bibl. 93 states, “I wrote in the house of the blessed archon, truly gentle of heart, whose works/deeds are forever, al-Amgād Ibn al-ʿAssāl, the just . . . up till now I was in his house ten years, in Syria and in Babylon [= Old Cairo]”; while the Arabic colophon also states, “I wrote in my stay in Cairo in the house of the šayḫ al-Amgād Ibn al-ʿAssāl. . . up to the day of writing I stayed in his house about ten years in Syria and in Cairo.” Further, the patronage of his earlier MS. production, the Paris-Cairo New Testament, also came within the ambit of the al-ʿAssāl family. The Arabic colophon in the Epistles-Acts volume (Copt.Mus.Bibl. 94 as above) states that the MS. was copied for “the archon and šāikh, the man of God, the deacon and lord al-Nusuʿ Abū Sākir Ibn al-Saniʿ abū-ʿl-Karam Buṭrus Ibn al-Rahib Ibn al-Muhaddab.” This is the well-known Coptic polymath known as ibn ar-Rahib, apparently the teacher of the al-ʿAssāl brothers.

The second thing known of Gabriel is that he became patriarch of Alexandria between 1268 and 1271, under the name of Gabriel III. This identity was first noticed by Horner in 1898, on the basis of an Arabic inscription dated to 29 March A.D. 1271 on fol. 1r of the Gospel MS. Vatican Copt. 9, which states: “The writer of these lines is the poor Gabriel, by the grace of God and His incomprehensible decrees called patriarch of the city of Alexandria and its territory … Pharamuthi 3, Martyrs 986, [Hijra] 668.” This illuminated Vatican MS., dated A.D. 1205 (Martyrs 921; Horner 1989: lxii), was given as a waqf to the Red Sea monastery of St. Anthony’s by a deacon who was a physician. Gabriel replaced John VII in the see, only to be in his turn displaced for a return of John to the patriarchate for a second reign; he died in A.D. 1274, serving in the church of

Zuwaila. For more on the al-ʿAssāl family and Gabriel see Kh. Samir, al-Ṣafi Ibn al-ʿAssāl: Brefs Chapitres sur la Trinité et l’Incarnation, PO 42.3 (Turnhout 1985) 622-632, esp. 629-631.

7 Cf. the epitaph of his brother al-Ṣafi, arẖūn mutafaddīl: ibid., p. 143.
8 Cf. the earlier identification by G. Graf in Orientalia 1 (1932) 52-54.
9 Combining information from fols. 130r and 217v-218r: Graf 1934: 64.
10 See A. Sidarus, Ibn ar-Rahibs Leben und Werk (Freiburg 1975), 8-20 and here, on Gabriel’s work for him, esp. 23 with notes 82-83, and Document 9 reproducing the three subscriptions in Copt.Mus.Bibl. 94.
11 So stated by al-Ṣafi in his Book of Canons, written in Damascus ca. A.D. 1236: Abullif 1987 (above n. 6) 147; Sidarus 1975: 23 n. 82.
12 See Graf, GCal. II (= ST 133; Vatican 1947) 414, 428.
13 Horner 1898: lxix; A. Hebbelynck/A. van Lantschoot, Codices Coptici Vaticanli I (Vatican 1937) 31. Horner suggests the identity on p. xcii, in his note on what is now Copt.Mus.Bibl. 93 (in 1898 it was in the el-Moallaqa church).
14 The Ethiopic Synaxarion, in its entry on Gabriel (PO VII: 310-317), states that he had originally entered the monastery of St. Anthony’s (p. 312), later going to the Wadi Natrun, to Jerusalem, and to the el-Moallaqa church. After the election of John VII he returned to St. Anthony’s, to be summoned by the sultan’s command to the patriarchal see (p. 315). Cf. H.G. Evelyn White, Monasteries of the Wadi n-Natrun II (New York 1932) 391.
15 For the brief Copto-Arabic biography of Gabriel in his patriarchate see A. Khater et al., History of the Patriarchs of the Egyptian Church III.3 (Cairo 1970) 228-229. This source places him originally at the el-Moallaqa church.