



Coptic Apocrypha in the Dialect of Upper Egypt

E.A. Wallis Budge

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The present volume contains the Coptic texts, with translations, of an important series of Apocrypha, a Life of Pistentius, Bishop of Coptos in the seventh century, an Encomium on John the Baptist, attributed to Saint John Chrysostom, and a series of Instructions by Pachomius the Archimandrite; all of them are written in the dialect of Upper Egypt, and all are published for the first time. The editing of the texts has been carried out by an arrangement with my colleague Dr. L. D. Barnett, Keeper of the Department of Oriental Printed Books and Manuscripts in the British Museum. The longest and perhaps most interesting Apocryphon is the Book of the Resurrection which is attributed to Bartholomew the Apostle. It describes the descent of our Lord into hell, the conquest of Death and his sons, the defeat of the Devil, the destruction of the gates, bolts, and bars of hell, the extinction of its fires, the overthrow of its blazing cauldrons, the liberation of Adam and Eve and all the children of men, the final condemnation of Judas Iscariot, the ascent from hell of our Lord, His Resurrection, His appearances to the Apostles, His enthronement on the right hand of the Father in His Tabernacle of Light in the Seventh Heaven, and the reconciliation of God with Adam and his sons in the presence of myriads of Cherubim, Seraphim, Archangels, Angels, Thrones, Dominions, Principalities, Powers, and all the hosts of heaven. Here and there in the work there are passages that resemble parts of the mediaeval composition known as the Harrowing of Hell but its contents are entirely different from those of the second part of the Gospel of Nicodemus which deals with Christ's Descent into Hell. The whole Apocryphon exhibits strong Egyptian (Gnostic) influence, and professes to give the actual words of the divine unknown language in which our Lord and the Virgin Mary spoke to each other. The MS. from which the text is edited was written probably in the tenth or eleventh century, and it was presented to the church of Illartê by an unnamed benefactor who states in the colophon that he supplied his own parchment. The form of the name Illartê suggests that this church was situated in Nubia, perhaps near the modern town of Wâdî Halfah. In view of the importance of the work, and the very mutilated condition of the text, the Trustees ordered a complete facsimile of the MS. to be made and published with the text (Plates I-XLVIII).

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