

Religious Literature in Christian Nubia. Greek Manuscripts from Qasr Ibrim

Qasr Ibrim, called Phrim in Greek and Coptic, and Silmi in Old Nubian, was a fortified settlement located in Lower Nubia, more or less midway between the First and the Second Cataract. It fulfilled the functions of a capital for the independent Kingdom of Nobadia between the fifth and the beginning of the seventh century, and later, after Nobadia was incorporated by Makuria, for the province of Nobadia within the Kingdom of Makuria. It was a bishopric see from the time of Christianisation of Nubian Kingdoms in the sixth century until, at least, the last quarter of the fifteenth century. Located on a rocky outcrop rising *ca.* 60m above the level of the Nile, Qasr Ibrim was kept safe from being flooded by the waters of the Nubia Lake, which allowed archaeological investigations to be carried out there by a mission of the Egypt Exploration Society between 1963 and 2008. The excavations abounded in finds illustrating various aspects of the material and cultural life of the settlement and its inhabitants in Christian times. The most remarkable discovery was a rich collection of written sources. There were more than 1000 fragments of parchment, papyrus, paper, wooden tablets, and ceramic sherds (ostraca) inscribed with texts in Greek, Coptic, and Old Nubian, and representing a variety of documentary and literary genres. Among the latter, fragments of Greek liturgical books discovered in a dismantled bundle near the cathedral could have originally been a part of the cathedral library. Only a small portion of the discovered texts have been published so far. At present the texts from Qasr Ibrim are dispersed in the collections of the British Museum, Coptic Museum in Cairo, Egyptian Museum in Cairo, and the Nubian Museum in Aswan.

The main objective of the present project is to prepare a comprehensive edition of Greek Christian literary manuscripts from Qasr Ibrim, including both unpublished texts and published ones. The inclusion of published texts into the project is justified by the fact that their publications are highly dispersed and frequently require reexamination with respect to both the reading and the interpretation. The result of the project published in form of a book will give access to a rich and multifaceted collection of written sources containing, among others, Biblical fragments, apocrypha, patristic and hagiographic literature, homilies and liturgical texts. The publication of all these sources will significantly enlarge the corpus of literary texts known from Christian Nubia, and will contribute considerably to our knowledge of the Christian Nubian literary culture and religiousness of the local people. Furthermore, it will enable a thorough study of the liturgical practice of the Nubian Church, which, mainly due to the lack of published sources, still remains one of the biggest challenges for scholars. The study will also attempt to place the Nubian practice in a broader context of Eastern Church traditions. Additionally, the project assumes conducting paleographical and codicological research, which, together with analyses of textual parallels, should provide answers to questions regarding the roots of the Nubian literary traditions.