

Two Epithets of Mark the Evangelist: Coptic θεώριμος and Byzantine Greek θεόπτης

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THE HIGH PROPORTION of Greek words appearing in Coptic texts has been discussed by many scholars and from different perspectives.¹ Some of these Greek loanwords provide evidence for the difficulties that readers as well as scholars find in tracing their specific origin. In what follows, I discuss how the treatment of Greek loanwords in Coptic gives us some indications of these difficulties.

Greek loanwords in Coptic are divided into two types: (1) Words which entered the target language, Coptic, without change either in form or in meaning, so that the speaker used them as a part of his vocabulary in Coptic—such as εὐ-αγγέλιον, ἐκκλησία, συναξάριον, ὁμοούσιος, etc. (2) Words which entered Coptic after suffering some corruption and paramorphism—such as ποδήρης (‘reaching to the feet’) which entered Bohairic Coptic as ποτηρι² (which in Modern Greek means ‘glass’ or ‘cup’!). The present research addresses the

¹ See W. A. Girgis, “Greek Loan Words in Coptic,” *Bulletin de la Société d’Archéologie Copte* 17 (1964) 63–73; 18 (1966) 71–96; 19 (1970) 57–88; 20 (1971) 53–68; 21 (1975) 33–53; 23 (1976–1978) 199–222; 30 (1991) 77–92.; 40 (2001) 61–88; Matthew Almond, *A Comparative Study of Loanword Integration in Fourth-Century Coptic Literature* (diss. Macquarie Univ. 2011); Sofia Torallas Tovar, “What is Greek and What is Coptic? School Texts as a Window into the Perception of Greek Loanwords in Coptic,” in Frank Feder and Angelika Lohwasser (eds.), *Ägypten und sein Umfeld in der Spätantike* (Wiesbaden 2013) 109–119.

² Girgis, *Bulletin de la Société d’Archéologie Copte* 21 (1975) 35.

second type of Greek loanwords in Coptic, which will require investigation of both languages.

Saint Mark, whose epithet is the subject of this research, was according to the tradition of the Church a disciple from among the Seventy, the author of the second canonical Gospel, and identical with the John Mark mentioned in Acts (12:12, 25, 15:37). He was the son of a certain Mary who dwelt at Jerusalem (Acts 12:5, 11 ff.); he was perhaps converted to Christianity by Peter and for this reason called Peter's son (1 Pet 5:13). He was the cousin of Barnabas of Cyprus (Col 4:10) and the companion of Paul in some of his apostolic travels (Acts 12:25, 13:1–5, 15:39). Other traditions add that Mark was a Levite and after becoming a Christian he amputated a finger to disqualify himself for that service, hence his Greek nickname *κολοβοδάκτυλος*.³ He is represented as having remained in Cyprus until after the death of Barnabas (1 Cor 9:5–6) and then to have gone to Alexandria, where he founded the church,⁴ became its first bishop, and there died (or was martyred) in A.D. 63.

The Coptic Church alone gives Saint Mark the epithet *ⲑⲉⲱⲣⲓⲙⲟⲥ* or sometimes *ⲑⲉⲟⲣⲓⲙⲟⲥ* (see PLATE 1). This unparalleled term from its form and its ending would seem to be of Greek origin and mean “Beholder of God.” It was believed that Mark knew/saw Christ as an eye-witness and was present at the wedding of Cana in Galilee—he was the man who was carrying the jar when the two disciples went to prepare a place for the celebration of the Passover (Mk 14:13–14, Lk 22:11). Mark was also the man who fled naked before the crucifixion (Mk 14:51–52). Because of these passages, the Coptic Church calls Saint Mark the *ⲑⲉⲱⲣⲓⲙⲟⲥ*, and in his Coptic Doxology and on many occasions and places⁵ as well he is addressed with

³ Hippol. *Haer.* 7.30.1 (p.311 Marcovich).

⁴ Eus. *HE* 2.15–16.

⁵ Such as the Coptic Synaxarium (30 Paramuda), the Diptych of the Coptic Church (al-Majma'), Psali Adam and Psali Watos of 30 Paramuda, the Troparia of the Cymbal, and the Hitennis.

this epithet:⁶

Χερε πακ ὦ πιμαρτυρος: χερε πιεγάγγελιστης:
χερε πιὰποστολος: αββα Υαρκος πιθεωριμος.

Hail to you, o martyr, hail to the Evangelist, hail to the Apostle,
Mark the beholder of God.

ἮΠοc εἶρηι εἰωπ: ω πιθεωριμος ηἰεγάγγε-
λιστης: αββα Υαρκος πιὰποστολος: ηἰτεq χα
νεηποβι παη εἰβoλ.

Pray to the Lord on our behalf, o beholder of God and Evan-
gelist, Saint Mark the Apostle, that He may forgive us our sins.

Given the obscurity of this epithet, one has doubts concern-
ing its genesis—its meaning in the Greek language and its
Coptic origin—hence these questions: Is **θεωριμος** actually a
correct Greek word? Does it in fact mean “Beholder of God”?
Is it a general and recognized ancient epithet of Saint Mark the
Evangelist? Is it found in any other ancient Church? Does the
Liturgy of Saint Mark contain such an epithet? How do the
ancient ecclesiastical writers, either Greek or Coptic, call Mark
the Evangelist? Why is Mark the Apostle considered the only
“beholder of God”?

From the linguistic perspective, the word **θεωριμος**, sup-
posedly Greek in origin and meaning “Beholder of God,” in
fact does not occur in any Greek text, either ancient or
modern. A simple TLG search shows that a word **θεωριμος** is
not found in extant Greek, whether Classical or Patristic, nor is
it in any Greek dictionary. **θεωριμος** is used only in the
Coptic Church and has no Greek attestation.

Accordingly, the epithet does not appear in Greek where we
might have expected it. So the title of the Alexandrian Liturgy
attributed to Saint Mark:⁷ Ἡ Θεία Λειτουργία τοῦ Ἀποστόλου
καὶ Εὐαγγελιστοῦ Μάρκου, μαθητοῦ τοῦ ἁγίου Πέτρου, “The
Divine Liturgy of the Apostle and Evangelist Mark, Disciple of
Saint Peter.”

⁶ *Holy Annual Psalmody of the Coptic Orthodox Church* (Beni Suef 1908) 357.

⁷ F. E. Brightman, *Liturgies Eastern and Western* 1 (Oxford 1896) lxiii, 113.

None of the Greek ecclesiastical historians applies this epithet to Mark. Eusebius speaks about him thus (*HE* 2.16.1):

τούτον δὲ Μάρκον πρῶτον φασιν ἐπὶ τῆς Αἰγύπτου στειλόμενον, τὸ Εὐαγγέλιον ὃ δὴ καὶ συνεγράψατο, κηρῶσαι, ἐκκλησίαις τε πρῶτον ἐπ' αὐτῆς Ἀλεξανδρείας συστήσασθαι.

And they say that this Mark was the first that was sent to Egypt, and that he proclaimed the Gospel which he had written, and first established churches in Alexandria itself.

Theodoret of Cyrrihus once calls him *τρισμακάριος*,⁸ “thrice-blessed,” and once *μακάριος*,⁹ “blessed,” and elsewhere *ὁ θειότατος Μάρκος*,¹⁰ “the most divine Mark.” Thus the epithet *θεώριμος* has no precedent in the Church historians; if it were originally Greek we would expect it first in Eusebius and then in the later historians.

Further, the *History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria* never gives Saint Mark this epithet. It begins: “The first biography of the history of the Holy Church. The history of Saint Mark, the Disciple and Evangelist, Archbishop of the great city of Alexandria, and first of its Bishops.”¹¹ And in an encomium in a Coptic codex from the White Monastery, Mark is nowhere given the epithet.¹²

Abū al-Barakāt ibn Kabar (†1324), in his *Miṣbāh al-ḡulmah wā idāh al-khidma* (*The Lamp of Darkness and the Explanation of the Service*), on the names of the seventy Apostles, calls him simply “Mark the Evangelist.”¹³ And as for the liturgies used in the

⁸ *Eranistes*, ed. G. H. Ettliger (Oxford 1975) p.212.31.

⁹ *Eranistes*, p.263.31.

¹⁰ *Comm. in Isaiam* 12.34; ed. J.-N. Guinot, *SC* 295 (1982) II p.396.

¹¹ Ed. B. Evetts, *PO* 1.2 (1904) p.135; see also Johannes Den Heijer, *Mawḥūb ibn Maṣṣūr ibn Mufarriḡ et l'historigraphie copto-arabe: Etude sur la composition de l'Histoire des Patriarches d'Alexandrie* (Louvain 1989).

¹² Tito Orlandi, “Un codice copto del ‘Monastero Bianco’, Encomii di Severo di Antiochia, Marco Evangelista, Atanasio di Alessandria,” *Le Muséon* 81 (1968) 351–405.

¹³ Anba Samuel Bishop of Šibīn al-Qanāṭir (ed.), *Miṣbāh al-ḡulmah wā idāh al-khidma* (Cairo 1998) 87–89, 101.

Coptic Church, ibn Kabar mentions the one of Saint Mark as “The Liturgy of Saint Mark, Martyr, Apostle, Evangelist and the Preacher of the Country of Egypt.”¹⁴ Thus the epithet **θεωρίμιος** is also not found in the ecclesiastical historians of the Coptic Church.

In the liturgical books of the Greek Church there is no trace of the epithet. Moreover, in the *Μηναῖα* the Byzantine hymnographers call Mark by many other epithets, but not this one. Thus in the *Ἀπολυτίκιον*: Ἦχος δ΄. ταχὺ προκατάλαβε: τοῦ Πέτρου συνέκδημος, καὶ κοινωνὸς ἱερός, τοῦ Λόγου διάκονος, καὶ ὑποφίτης σοφός, ἐδείχθης Ἀπόστολε, ὅθεν τὸ τοῦ Σωτῆρος, Εὐαγγέλιον θεῖον, Μάρκε διαχαράττεις, ὡς οὐράνιος μύστης, διὸ Εὐαγγελιστὰ σέ, πόθω γεραίρομεν,¹⁵ “The fellow-traveler of Peter, the holy participant, the servant of the Word, the wise interpreter, you received, o Apostle, from the Savior the Holy Gospel, and wrote it down, o Mark, as a heavenly confidant, so with love we honor you, the Evangelist.” In another place on the same day Mark is addressed thus: Ἦχος γ΄. Ἀπόστολε ἅγιε καὶ Εὐαγγελιστὰ Μάρκε, πρέσβευε τῷ ἐλεήμονι Θεῷ,¹⁶ “O Holy Apostle and Evangelist Mark, intercede on our behalf before the merciful God.” In the Byzantine *Synaxarion* Mark is known as Ἅγιος Ἀπόστολος καὶ Εὐαγγελιστῆς Μάρκος,¹⁷ “the Holy Apostle and Evangelist Mark.” The hagiographer Symeon Metaphrastes (ca. 960) calls him ἀγιώτατον Μάρκον ... ὅθεν καὶ εὐαγγελιστὴν αὐτὸν ἐθέσπισαν οἱ μακάριοι κανόνες τῆς ἀγίας καὶ ἀποστολικῆς Ἐκκλησίας, “The most holy Mark ... so the blessed canons of the Holy and Apostolic Church call him Evangelist,” and ἐκοιμήθη ὁ μακάριος

¹⁴ *Misbāh* 123, 124.

¹⁵ *Μηναῖα τῆς Ἀποστολικῆς Διακονίας τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τῆς Ἑλλάδος* (Athens 1959–1973) Ἀπριλίου 25, p.97.

¹⁶ *Μικρὸν Ὡρολόγιον, ἔκδοσις Παπαδημητρίου* (Athens 2001) 364.

¹⁷ *Μηναῖα*, Ἀπριλίου 25, p.97; Σ. Αγουρίδης, “Μάρκος,” *Θρησκευτικὴ καὶ Ἠθικὴ Ἐγκυκλοπαίδεια* 8 (1966) 748–755, and Σ. Εὐστρατιάδου, *Τὸ Ἀγιολόγιον τῆς Ὀρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας, Ἀποστολικὴ Διακονία τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τῆς Ἑλλάδος* (Athens 1995) 303, 304.

Μάρκος ὁ εὐαγγελιστὴς καὶ πρωτομάρτυς τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν, “The Blessed Mark, the Evangelist and the first martyr rested in our Lord” (*PG* 115.164A, 169C). As we see, the Greek Church gives Saint Mark many epithets, but **θεώριμος** is not among them.

Greek loan-words in the Coptic language have been well studied.¹⁸ Various sorts of dictionaries have been compiled of terms of Greek origin to be found in Coptic documentary sources, with full references to the original sources and valuable, with some limitations, also for literary Coptic.¹⁹ And a reasonably complete list of names in Coptic documentary texts includes Greek, Egyptian, Biblical, and Arabic names.²⁰ None of these mentions the term **θεώριμος** or claims for it a Greek origin.²¹

Arietta Papaconstatinou in her study of the cult of saints in Egypt cites for Μάρκος Εὐαγγελιστῆς many epithets, including ἅγιος, ἀπα, ἀπόστολος, and πεπαιωτ (“our father”): again, **θεώριμος** is absent.²²

In what follows I endeavor to investigate the possible interpretation of the origin of the epithet **θεώριμος**.

It can be proposed that Coptic **θεώριμος** may be a corruption for the Greek θεωρήμων/θεορήμων (deriving from θεός + ῥήμα),²³ which in effect means ‘theologian’ as does θεολόγος. It is applied for example to Gregory of Nazianzus²⁴ and John

¹⁸ M. Paryski, *A Study of Greek Loan-Words in the Sahidic and Bohairic Dialects of the Coptic Language* (diss. Univ. Michigan 1941).

¹⁹ Hans Forster, *Wörterbuch der griechischen Wörter in den koptischen dokumentarischen Texten* (Berlin/New York 2002).

²⁰ Monika Hasitzka, *Namen in koptischen dokumentarischen Texten* (2007: http://www.onb.ac.at/files/kopt_namen.pdf).

²¹ It is absent too from J. Cerny, *Coptic Etymological Dictionary* (Cambridge 1976) 43–44.

²² *Le culte des Saints en Egypte des Byzantins aux Abbassides* (Paris 2001) 141–143.

²³ Cf. Sophocles, *Lexicon* 577.

²⁴ John of Damascus *Orationes de imaginibus tres* 1.11; ed. B. Kotter (Berlin

Chrysostom.²⁵ This term occurs in the *Life* of Saint John Khame, describing Saint Macarius:²⁶

οὐορ ἀϑωεπτοτς ἀϑῑ ἔβοδ ριτοτς ἁενοϋιρηνη
 οὐορ ἀϑτηϑ ἔπιμωιτ ἡμωϑι εϑϑ ἡτοτϑ
 ηχενπιρμωτ ἡτε Φϑ ὡαντεϑῑ ἔπιτοπος εϑοϑαβ
 ητε πενθεορνημωπος ἄμμᾱ ηθεοσεβηστατος
 πενωτ ἔϑοϑαβ ἀββα μακαρι

And he saluted her and departed from her in peace and betook him to the high-road, the grace of God assisting him, until he came to the holy topos of our divinely-speaking (? : θεορρήμων) and most pious, holy father, Abba Macarius.

And so of Mark himself: in the Athos MS. *Actes inédits de Saint Marc* 9 our Saint is referred to as ὁ ἀξιάγαστος καὶ θεορρήμων Μάρκος, “the marvelous and *divinely-speaking* Mark.”²⁷ In the *Rite of Consecration of the Patriarch of Alexandria* (dated 1364),²⁸ we have four times θεοριμος (pp.12.15, 30.17, 33.9, 46.13) and one time θεοριμενος (41.18), normalized in R. Tuki’s edition as θεορρημενος.²⁹ Tuki’s Arabic translation is *al-mutakallim bi’l-ilahiyāt* and one time (p.151.2) *al-nāṭiq bi’l-ilahiyāt*.

This interpretation of the word may be valid, and the change of form can reflect the fact that the ancient Copts commonly changed the unusual Greek endings of nouns, especially those that do not end in -ος. For example, Greek μάρτυς entered Coptic as μαρτυρος. As the ancient Copts, it appears, were not accustomed to such endings, we can suppose that something like that happened to θεορρήμων: final -ων became -ος, η rendered as ι is familiar, so the epithet θεορρήμων became θεώριμος. Thus the origin of the epithet of Saint Mark may

1975) III 85.

²⁵ Georgius Cedrenus I 94.3 Bonn.

²⁶ M. H. Davis, *The Life of Abba John Khamé* (PO 14.2 [1919]) 335.

²⁷ F. Halkin, *AnBoll* 87 (1969) 343–371, at 353.

²⁸ Ed. O. H. E. Khs-Burmester (Cairo 1960).

²⁹ R. Tuki, *Πιχωμ εϑεραπαντοκτιη εχενπιεϑχη εϑοϑαβ* I (Rome 1761).

be θεορρήμων, “speaking from God” (Lampe 632), i.e. Theologian—although Mark was far from being a theologian in the same meaning and level of John the Evangelist, for example, or Gregory of Nazianzus, and he has never been classified as a theologian.

But how in fact did the Greek Church call Saint Mark? In the Canon of the Feast of Saint Mark on 25 April,³⁰ attributed to a hymnographer named Theophanes (maybe the Confessor, VIII–IX cent.), Mark is called Μάρκος ὁ θεόπτης, “Mark the Beholder of God,” or “One who sees God” (Lampe 632). In an encomium for Mark written by Procopius Diaconus (†815) the evangelist is referred to again by the correct Greek epithet θεόπτης (PG 100.1196C). The epithet is associated specifically with those few who have seen God, like Moses and Elijah.³¹

The question then is: Why was Saint Mark specially called in these two ancient churches θεόπτης and θεώριμος? For every one of the Twelve Disciples and all of the Seventy Apostles saw Jesus Christ and could be called θεόπτης and θεώριμος. In a text attributed to Papias of Hierapolis, who wrote before the middle of the second century, we find that he had some doubts about Saint Mark and his canonical apostolicity:³²

Μάρκος μὲν ἐρμηνευτὴς Πέτρου γενόμενος, ὅσα ἐμνημόνευσεν ἀκριβῶς ἔγραψεν, οὐ μέντοι τάξει, τὰ ὑπὸ τοῦ Κυρίου ἢ λεχθέντα ἢ πραχθέντα. οὐτε γὰρ ἤκουσεν τοῦ Κυρίου οὐτε παρηκολούθησεν αὐτῷ, ὕστερον δέ, ὡς ἔφην, Πέτρω, ὃς πρὸς τὰς χρείας ἐποιεῖτο τὰς διδασκαλίας, ἀλλ’ οὐχ ὡσπερ σύνταξιν τῶν κυριακῶν ποιούμενος λογίων, ὥστε οὐδὲν ἤμαρτεν Μάρκος, οὕτως ἔνια γράψας ὡς ἀπεμνημόνευσεν. ἐνὸς γὰρ ἐποίησατο

³⁰ *Μηναια* 25 Απριλίου, p.96.

³¹ Sophocles, *Lexicon* 577; *Rhetorica anonyma* 27.5 (III p.175.20 Spengel); Manetho *FGrHist* 609 F 2 (p.12); Theodore Stud. *Epist.* 51.69, 465.11, 557.30 (ed. Fatouros); John Damasc. *Hom. in sabbatum sanctum* 25 (PG 96.624D); George Monach. *Chron.* p.135.12, 492.4 de Boor; George Syncell. p.2.4 Mosshammer.

³² Eus. *HE* 3.39.15 = K. Bihlmeyer and W. Schneemelcher, *Die apostolischen Väter*³ (Tübingen 1970) 134–139.

πρόνοιαν, τοῦ μηδὲν ὧν ἤκουσεν παραλιπεῖν ἢ ψεύσασθαι τι ἐν αὐτοῖς.

Mark, having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately whatsoever he remembered. It was not, however, in exact order that he related the sayings or deeds of the Lord. For he neither heard the Lord nor accompanied Him. But afterwards, as I said, he accompanied Peter, who accommodated his instructions to the necessities [of his hearers], but with no intention of giving a regular narrative of the Lord's sayings. Wherefore Mark made no mistake in thus writing some things as he remembered them. For of one thing he took especial care, not to omit anything he had heard, and not to put anything fictitious into the statements.

From this passage of Papias³³ we can perceive an accusation that St. Mark never heard or followed Jesus in the flesh; and so a trend emerged in the Greek and the Coptic Churches to give Saint Mark a special epithet confirming that he was a real and canonical apostle and a contemporary of Jesus. Its function was to defend Mark against the denials of Papias and others that he knew/saw Christ. This epithet includes at the same time a defense by these two churches of their canonical and apostolic position. So the epithet (Beholder of God) exists in a correct form θεόπτης in the Greek Church, but by some error was introduced into the Coptic Church as **θεώρημος**.

How early does the epithet **θεώρημος** occur in the Coptic Church? All that can be said is that we see it first in the *Sullam*³⁴ of Anba Yuhannā al-Samannūdī which dates from the middle of the 13th century (see PLATES 2–3).³⁵ It appears also in many

³³ See A. Farrer, *A Study in St. Mark* (Westminster 1951) 20.

³⁴ The Arabic term for a Coptic-Arabic dictionary is *sullam* (“ladder”), as the words are arranged to the left (Coptic) and the right (Arabic) in a way that gives the impression of a ladder (Latin *scala*).

³⁵ Bishop of Samannūd in the western Delta in the mid 13th century, author of the first Coptic grammar, who also wrote the first known Coptic dictionary. Of his *Al-Sullam al-Kana'isi* (or *Scala Ecclesiastica*) two versions survive, Sahidic (cf. H. Munier, *La Scala copte* 44 [Cairo 1930] 1–43) and

manuscripts of the 14th–15th century, for example *Vat. Copto* 24, *P. Copte* 26, *Vat. Copto* 18, *P. Copte* 73, and *P. Copte* 30. All these include liturgies of the three Saints Basil, Gregory, and Cyril.

We can conclude that the Coptic word **ⲑⲉⲱⲣⲓⲙⲟⲥ** as an epithet of Saint Mark the Evangelist does not have a simple or obvious derivation from Greek. I propose the following possibility: The Coptic tradition knew the Greek **θεορρήμων**, “divinely-speaking” (as in the Greek texts for Mark and the Coptic for Macarius: 500 above), but at some stage it was misspelled to become **ⲑⲉⲱⲣⲓⲙⲟⲥ**, and there was also a misunderstanding of the meaning, and so **ⲑⲉⲱⲣⲓⲙⲟⲥ** was translated into Arabic by al-Samannūdi as *nazir al-ilah*, “beholder of God” (PLATE 1).

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Bohairic, both found in many manuscripts: G. Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur* II (Vatican City 1947) 372–374).



PLATE 1: MS. Mingana Arabic 61, 14th cent.

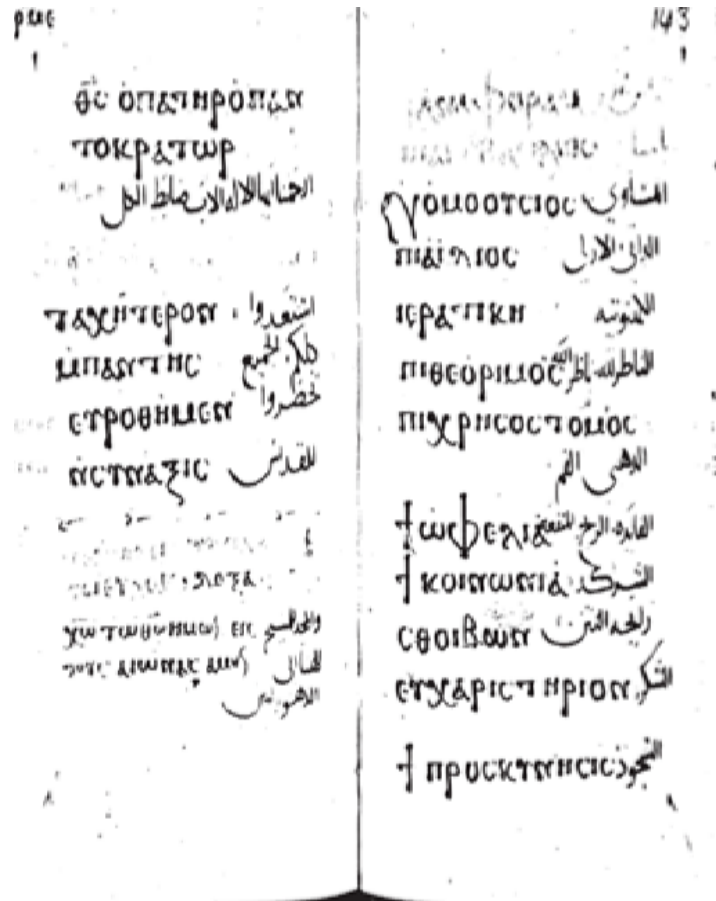


PLATE 2: *Al-Sullam* of al-Samannūdī
MS. Huntington 365 (Bodleian Library, Oxford)



PLATE 3: *Al-Sullam* of al-Samannūdi
MS. Huntington 384 (Bodleian Library, Oxford)