

Coptico-Graeca: the Sahidic Version of St Athanasius' *Vita Antonii*

Gerald M. Browne

IT IS A WELL-KNOWN FACT that from Alexander the Great's conquest until subjugation by the Arabs, Egypt was a bilingual society, in which a large percentage of the population was completely fluent in both Greek and Egyptian. For over a millennium Greek was the official language of the country, and anyone who studies the papyri which have survived from the period soon realizes that all dealings with the ubiquitous bureaucracy had to be carried on through Greek documents. The practical value of acquiring the ability to read, write and speak Greek was enormous, and it did not take long for bilingualism to develop.¹

This bilingualism has an interesting ramification which has not yet been sufficiently explored. In studying the Coptic translations of Greek biblical and patristic literature, scholars have long used the Greek original to elucidate the meaning and structure of Coptic. But the operation can be reversed: we can learn something about Greek if we pay close attention to the work of the Coptic translators. Since the latter had an intimate knowledge of Greek, it is not surprising that they should reproduce in their versions the subtleties and nuances of the original.

To demonstrate the skill of the Coptic translators, I have selected some passages from the Sahidic version of St Athanasius' *Life of St Antony* and have compared them to the original Greek.² These passages

¹ For aspects of this bilingualism, see W. Peremans, "Over Tweektaligheid in ptolemaeisch Egypte," *AntCl* 4 (1935) 403-17; H. C. Youtie, "ΑΓΡΑΜΜΑΤΟΣ: An Aspect of Greek Society in Egypt," forthcoming in *HSCP* 75 (1971); G. Mussies, "Egyptianisms in a Late Ptolemaic Document," *Antidoron Martino David [Papyrologica Lugduno-Batava 17]* (Leiden 1968) 70-76. I should like to thank my colleagues, Bentley Layton and Zeph Stewart, for their helpful advice in the preparation of these notes.

² Ed. G. Garitte, *S. Antonii Vitae versio Sahidica* [CSCO 117, *Scrip.copt.* iv.1] (1949), cited by page and line number; Greek ed. Montfaucon, in Migne, *PG* 26 (1887) 835-976.

show that the Copts were familiar with features of Greek that are by no means obvious to modern scholars.

I

In chapter 52 the author relates how Satan sent a pack of hyenas to attack St Antony. The latter addressed the animals in uncompromising terms, and the text continues: ταῦτα τοῦ Ἀντωνίου λέγοντος, ἔφυγον ἐκείναι ὡς ὑπὸ μάστιγος τοῦ λόγου διωκόμεναι (920 A 1–3).

The syntax of ὡς ὑπὸ μάστιγος τοῦ λόγου διωκόμεναι has frequently been misunderstood; editors and translators have long tended to regard τοῦ λόγου as dependent upon μάστιγος and to render accordingly: “as if pursued by the whip of the word.” The anonymous fourth-century Latin version³ has *beluae fugiebant, quasi a flagello sermonis effugatae*; and Evagrius, who translated the text ca. A.D. 370, appears to have a similar view of the syntax of the passage, despite his rather free paraphrase:⁴ *omnis bestiarum multitudo, quasi maiestatis verberare caederetur, aufugit*. Bernard de Montfaucon’s version, which appeared originally in 1698 and which was reprinted in Migne, has *aufugere illae quasi verbi flagello pulsae*. Finally, in 1950, R. T. Meyer wrote⁵ “they fled, as though hounded by the whip of that word.”

These translators should have noticed that ὡς ὑπὸ μάστιγος τοῦ λόγου διωκόμεναι is an idiomatic piece of Greek, which means not “as if pursued by the whip of the word,” but rather “pursued by the word as if by a whip.” We are dealing with a condensed form of expression for ὑπὸ τοῦ λόγου ὡς ὑπὸ μάστιγος διωκόμεναι. When cases other than the genitive are involved, the construction is clearer; e.g. 856 B 1 *παρεκαθέζοντο ὡς ἐπὶ νεκρῷ τῷ Ἀντωνίῳ*; Heliodorus, *Aethiopica* 9.18.3 *ὥσπερ ἐπὶ λόφον ἢ φρούριον τὸ ζῶον καταφεύγοντες*.

Phrases of this type appear occasionally in classical Greek (see Kühner-Gerth II p.492.2), but the construction is not confined to Attic. The XVIII-century scholar d’Orville, on p.283 of his commen-

³ Ed. G. Garitte, *Un témoin important du texte de la vie de S. Antoine par S. Athanase* [Études philol.arch.hist.anc. 3] (Brussels–Rome 1939); and H. W. F. M. Hoppenbrouwers, *La plus ancienne version latine de la vie de S. Antoine par S. Athanase* (Utrecht 1960).

⁴ Text in Migne PG 26, 835–976 below the *Vita*; for the date, see Garitte, “Le texte grec et les versions anciennes de la vie de Saint Antoine,” *Studia Anselmiana* 38 (1956) 5.

⁵ R. T. Meyer, *St. Athanasius, The Life of Saint Antony* [Ancient Christian Writers 10] (Westminster 1950).

tary on Chariton,⁶ collected instances from the Koiné. From his examples I select the following:

Heliodorus 9.22.2 *εἰσῆλασεν ὥσπερ ἐφ' ἄρματος τοῦ ἐλέφαντος*,
 “he rode in, mounted on the elephant as if on a chariot.”

Here it is particularly obvious that the second noun cannot depend upon the first.

Chariton 3.2.6 *ἀνακύπτειν ἐβιάζετο καθάπερ ἐκ τρικυμίας τοῦ πάθους*,
 “he forced himself to bear up under his passion, as if under a mighty flood.”

Especially close to the phrase *ὡς ὑπὸ μάστιγος τοῦ λόγου* are the following examples from d’Orville:

Heliodorus 7.24.5 *ἐβέβλητο μὲν ὡς ὑπὸ τρώσεως τῶν λόγων*,
 “he was struck by the words as if he were wounded.”⁷ The author expressed the same idea in 7.7.7 *ὥσπερ βέλει τῷ ῥήματι βληθείς*, “wounded by the word as if by a missile,” a phrase which elucidates the syntax of *ὡς ὑπὸ τρώσεως τῶν λόγων*.

Chariton 6.5.6. *τὴν καρδίαν ἐπλήγη ὥσπερ ὑπὸ ξίφους τοῦ λόγου*,
 “she was struck in her heart by the word as if by a sword.”

There can now be no doubt that *ὡς ὑπὸ μάστιγος τοῦ λόγου διωκόμεναι* is to be translated “pursued by the word as if by a whip.” The Coptic translator has not fallen into the error of the versions listed above; his translation shows that he correctly understood the passage: *αγπωτ ἡβὶ νετῦαγ ερε πεφωαχε πητ ἡσωογ ἡε ἡ ἡογυαστιγξ*⁸ (p.59.3–4), “they fled, with his word pursuing them like a whip.”

II

In chapter 33 St Antony discourses on the futility of knowing the future in advance. He concludes: *οὐδεὶς γὰρ ἡμῶν κρίνεται διὰ τί οὐκ οἶδε, καὶ οὐδεὶς μακαρίζεται ὅτι μεμάθηκε καὶ ἔγνω* (893 A 5–6). The

⁶ J. P. d’Orville, *Charitonis Aphrodisiensis de Chaerea et Callirhoe amatoriarum narrationum libri viii*, 2nd ed. C. D. Beck (Leipzig 1783).

⁷ See the remark of the Budé editors of Heliodorus, R. M. Rattenbury, T. W. Lumb, and J. Maillon, 2nd ed. (Paris 1960) *ad loc.*: “L’authenticité du texte est confirmée par maints passages analogues, par ex. A II, 5 3 *ὥσπερ ὑπὸ πρηστῆρος τῆς ὄψεως βληθέντες*, et A XXIII, 2 3 *ὕπὸ τῶν λόγων ὥσπερ τινὸς χειρῆνος κεκλημένος.*”

⁸ *ἡ ἡογυαστιγξ* for *ἡογυαστιγξ*.

anonymous Latin version renders this sentence as *nemo enim nostrum iudicari habet*⁹ *quia non scit, neque beatus appellari habet quia dicit talia aut novit*; Montfaucon has *nemo nostrum in iudicium vocatur, quod ea non norit*; *nemo beatus censetur, quod didicerit et noscat*; and Meyer translates "for no one of us is judged by what he does not know, and no one is called blessed because of what he has learned and knows."

These versions ignore the precise meaning of *διὰ τί*; it is not the equivalent of *ὅτι* or *διότι* ('because'), but is rather an interrogative, 'for what reason?', 'why?'.¹⁰ The Coptic translator has captured its proper force: *ⲛ̅ⲛ̅ ⲗⲗⲁⲮ ⲒⲀⲮ ⲙ̀ⲙⲟⲛ ⲉⲮⲛⲁⲓ ⲒⲀⲡ ⲉⲣⲟⲗ ⲭⲉ ⲉⲧⲃⲉ ⲟⲮ ⲛ̅ⲒⲘⲘⲟⲟⲮⲛ ⲁⲛ ⲛ̅ⲛⲁⲓ ⲁⲮⲱ ⲙ̀ⲛ̅ ⲗⲗⲁⲮ ⲉⲮⲛⲁⲙⲁⲕⲁⲣⲓⲗⲉ ⲙ̀ⲙⲟⲗ ⲭⲉ ⲁⲒⲉⲓⲙⲉ ⲉⲛⲁⲓ* (p.40.21–23), "for there is no one of us whom they are going to judge by saying 'why does he not know these things?', and there is no one whom they are going to bless by saying 'he knows these things'."¹¹

III

In "Kolon und Satz II"¹² E. Fraenkel showed that the particle *ἄν* could be used to determine the division of a Greek sentence. Fraenkel was concerned with semantically independent units, which he called cola, and he maintained that *ἄν*, when not immediately attached to a verb, invariably occupies second place in a colon. The particle not only marks the beginning of the colon in which it occurs, but it indicates that the preceding word-group is also a colon. Isaeus 3.51 (cited by Fraenkel p.94) provides an obvious example: *γενομένων δὲ τούτων, δοκεῖ ἄν ὑμῖν ὁ θεῖος ἐπιτρέψαι κτλ.* But cola need not be syntactically isolated clauses; they may be prepositional phrases, adverbial ex-

⁹ *Habere*+infinitive is used in this Latin version as a future expression; see Hoppenbrouwers, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.3) 39.

¹⁰ See e.g., K. van Leeuwen-Boompkamp, "*Τί* et *διὰ τί* dans les Évangiles," *REG* 39 (1926) 327–31, and cf. *Hermae Pastor*, ed. M. Whittaker (GCS 1956) II (27) 5 οἱ οὖν λαμβάνοντες ἀποδώσουσιν λόγον τῷ θεῷ διὰ τί ἔλαβον καὶ εἰς τί, "those then who receive alms shall render account to God as to why and for what purpose they received them," where *διὰ τί* more or less=*εἰς τί*. [I owe the reference to the *Hermae Pastor* to Bentley Layton.]

¹¹ Coptic characteristically uses *oratio recta* to render Greek *oratio obliqua*. The *or.rec.* may be introduced by *ⲭⲉ*, a common ellipse for *ⲉⲒⲒⲱ ⲙ̀ⲙⲟⲘ ⲭⲉ*. See W. Till, *Koptische Grammatik*² (Leipzig 1961) §397. The conjunction *ⲭⲉ* in *ⲭⲉ ⲁⲒⲉⲓⲙⲉ ⲉⲛⲁⲓ* could mean 'because', i.e. *ὅτι*, but it is more likely that the translator here handled his original somewhat freely and continued the direct discourse of *ⲉⲧⲃⲉ ⲟⲮ ⲛ̅ⲒⲘⲘⲟⲟⲮⲛ ⲁⲛ ⲛ̅ⲛⲁⲓ*.

¹² *Kleine Beiträge* I (Rome 1964) 93–130 (= *NAkG* 1933, 319–54).

pressions, or even nouns. If they function as cola, they acquire an emphasis and semantic independence that they would not normally have. In Isaeus 4.11 (Fraenkel p.119), *πρὸ δὲ τούτων, οὐδ' ἂν τῶν τεθνεώτων οὐδεὶς κατεψεύδετο*, the position of ἂν shows that *πρὸ δὲ τούτων* is semantically isolated from the rest of the sentence; it functions as a substitute for a clause and means “and, what is more important than this” (Wyse’s translation, quoted by Fraenkel, *loc.cit.*).¹³

We can find a quite different kind of support for Fraenkel’s view if we examine the Coptic translation of a passage from the *Vita*, *ταύτην μὲν οὖν τὴν πρόθεσιν δικαίως ἂν τις ἐπαινέσειε* (837 A 5–6). Athanasius is about to pass on to a new topic and the phrase *ταύτην μὲν οὖν τὴν πρόθεσιν* summarizes what has been said in the preceding sentences; ἂν shows that the words constitute a separate colon, which we can perhaps translate “as far as this purpose is concerned.”¹⁴ The Coptic version reflects the emphasis of the Greek with noteworthy accuracy: ΠΕΙΟΥΡΟΤ ΔΕ ΝΤΕΙΩΙΝΕ ΟΥΔΙΚΑΙΟΝ ΠΕ ΕΤΡΕ ΟΥΟΝ ΝΙΟΥ ΑΙΠΑΙΝΟΥ ὕμοϣ (p.1.11–12), “as for such a resolve as this, then, it is just for everyone to praise it.”

IV

It is a demonstrable feature of Greek that in phrases of which the kernel consists of a nominative participle+ subject+ verb, the subject is to be taken directly with the participle, not, as we might think, with the finite verb. *E.g.* ἀκούσας ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἀπῆλθεν is to be articulated with a comma after, not before, ὁ ἄνθρωπος. We can demonstrate the correctness of this articulation by referring to Fraenkel’s doctrine of ἂν as a colon-marker. Since ἂν is the second word of a colon, such a sentence as Demosthenes 19.313 (cited in “Kolon und Satz II,” p.98) can be divided only as follows: ὧν ἀποστερῶν ἐκείνους οὗτος, αὐτὸς ἂν τῆς

¹³ Fraenkel’s views on colometry have been most recently expressed in his *Leseproben aus Reden Ciceros und Catos* (Rome 1968); see pp.13f for a summary of his previous work on the subject. Although this book is mainly concerned with Latin, his remarks can be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to Greek. For a sensitive evaluation of Fraenkel’s work in this area, see E. Laughton’s review of *Leseproben* in *JRS* 60 (1970) 188–94.

¹⁴ Strikingly similar is the following sentence from Hdt. 6.98: *τούτους μὲν δὴ τοὺς βασιλέας ἶδε ἂν ὀρθῶς κατὰ γλώσσαν τὴν σφετέρην Ἑλλήνας καλέουεν. Τούτους μὲν δὴ τοὺς βασιλέας* is a separate colon, as the position of ἂν shows; the words are emphasized because Herodotus wished to indicate clearly that he had reached the end of one section and was about to proceed to a new subject; see “Kolon und Satz II,” p.112.

ἐπιτιμίας δικαίως νῦν στερηθείη. This type of pattern may also be compared to sentences like ἀκούσας τις ἀπήλθεν, which, because of the enclitic, must be analyzed as ἀκούσας τις, ἀπήλθεν.

Since the Copts were completely fluent in Greek, it is not surprising that they should appreciate this form of articulation. I here list examples of this pattern which I have found in the *Vita*. In each case the translator has preserved the Greek word order and, by using the particle **ἄβι** ('namely'), has associated the subject with the Coptic equivalent of the Greek participle.

τοῦτον ἰδὼν Ἀντώνιος, ἐζήλωσεν (844 B 5–6), **παι δε ἄβιτερεφναγ εροφ ἄβι αντωνιος ακωζ εροφ** (p.5.13–14), "and as for him, when he, namely Antony, saw him, he became jealous of him."

οὕτω δὴ οὖν συσφίξας ἑαυτὸν ὁ Ἀντώνιος, ἀπήρχετο εἰς τὰ . . . μνήματα (853 C 1–3), **ἄβιτερε δε ακροκῆ ἄβι αντωνιος ακβωκ εροφν ενῶζααγ** (p.12.25–26), "and thus he, namely Antony, braced himself, and went to the tombs."

τοιούτος δὲ φαινόμενος ὁ τῶν δαιμονίων ἄρχων, ἐκφοβεῖ (877 C 3–4), **εφοφωφζ δε ἄβιτερε εβολ ἄβιτερε ἄβι παρφωφν ἄβιτερε εροφν ενῶζααγ**¹⁵ **εφ† ροτε** (p.30.19–20), "this then is the way in which he manifests himself, namely the leader of the evil spirits, when he inspires terror."¹⁶

HARVARD UNIVERSITY

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¹⁵ **ἄβιτερε εροφν ενῶζααγ** for **ἄβιτερε εροφν ενῶζααγ**.

¹⁶ Cf. also 888 A 12–13 (p.36.22–23), 949 B 12 (p.82.18), 956 B 2–4 (p.86.21–23).