

“СЪОБЩЕНИЯ”

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THE GOTHIC CULTURAL PRESENCE IN LATE ANTIQUAE EGYPT

*Готското културно присъствие в късноантичен
Египет*

*Съобщението се отнася до намерените в Антинуполис (Шейх ел Ебада)
папируси с новозаветен текст на готски език.*

The possibility of the existence of a research on Gothic culture in late antique Egypt was out of the question until a couple of documents (*Codex Gissensis*) has been discovered in the remains of Antinopolis (El-Sheikh Ebadah) in Upper Egypt in 1907. Undoubtedly, it owes a lot to the dry climate of Egypt that these documents and its likes have been preserved. There are still unexplored areas that have similar documents which have not yet been dug out. Professor Paul Glaue has undertaken to analyze this couple of documents and, therefore, has drawn attention to the village of El-Sheikh Ebadah and the possibility of Gothic presence in late Roman period.

In order to study the issue of the discovered documents (fragments of a Bible in the Gothic and Latin Languages) I shall discuss three points in an attempt to unveil their ambiguity. The first point is how the document was discovered in this place and how it was preserved. The second point would examine the efforts of previous research in the study of this document. As for the third, it attempts to explain the existence of this document in the area of El-Sheikh Ebadah.

This document has been found in the remains of Antinopolis, a city established in 130 A.D. by the Roman Emperor **Hadrian (117–138)**. This document had been offered for sale in the city of Mallawy which is close to the village of El-Sheikh Ebadah, by some merchants. Thus, it had been sold among other documents in 1907 and found its way to the library of Gissen University in the State of Hessen, Germany. It has been preserved under number 651/20 and remained there until it was destroyed as a result of the flood of the Lahn River in 1945. It is noteworthy that this documents was not in the form of a roll as the case with other documents but rather in the form of two folding

papers held together. Each paper has inscriptions on both sides and each paper carries a number which means that they were part of a lost book, since the face of the first paper has the number “1” while the back carries number “2”, while the face of the second paper has number “15” and the back number “16”. It has been found that the first page is written in Latin as the page carrying number “15”, while pages “2” and “16” were written in the Gothic language. This may lead to the belief that single page numbers in this manuscript (1, 3, 5, until 15) were written in the Latin language while the pages with double numbers (2, 4, 6, until 16) were written in the Gothic language.

Examining the face of the first paper, Prof. Paul Glaue found that it includes a Latin text of Luke, 23, verses 2-6. The back of the paper, on the other hand, carries the verses 11–14 of the same text. The face of the second paper (carrying number 15) includes a Latin text of Luke 24, verses 5-9 while the back of this paper (numbered 16) the verses 13–17 of the same text. This means that the verses found on the face are not the same verses found on the back; something that probably applies to the whole documents. This means that the Gothic text is not necessarily following the Latin text. But it may be said that this documents, in addition to the lost pages (3–14), were a fragment of a Bible written in the Gothic and Latin languages. In fact, this was not a new phenomenon in the late Roman period since there are other examples of manuscripts including texts in both Gothic and Latin languages in the same document such as Codex Carolinus.

If Professor Glaue has recognized the Latin text, he has been confused with regard to the other text supposing at first that it was a Coptic text. He later recognized that this text is not Coptic but rather a Gothic one. He arrived to this conclusion after the comparison he made with Codex Brixianus. If Codex Brixianus is a 6th century text of the Holy Bible, it is considered a copy of an older Latin text which Ulfila (310-383) may have relied on while translating the Holy Bible into the Gothic language.

It is no doubt that this documents is of paramount importance as an evidence for the early Gothic writing which Prof. Burkitt has recognized in a separate study through a comparison with Codex Brixianus.

Different views have been given to explain the existence of this documents in upper Egypt. However some see that the discovery of this documents in the area of Antinopolis was related to the people who inhabited this city. It would have been better to shed light on the city of Antinopolis in the late Roman period. It is known that Egypt did not have Greek cities except the city of Alexandria, Naukratis in the Delta, Bratinium in the North West part of Egypt, Batlamiya in Suhag (Upper Egypt) . Antinopolis was the sole city to be built in the Roman era. This city is located at the Eastern bank of the river Nile, some 287 km south of Cairo, definitely against Hermopolis Magna (now Al-Ashmoniyeen). This Roman city was built on the remains of ancient village. Thus it has become one of the most vital areas for spreading Hellenistic culture, particularly as Emperor **Hadrian** was a Philhellene.

Antinopolis carried all the features of Greek cities as the Bouleuterion, some public baths, porticoes and Gymnasium beside a Hippodrome where the theater has been found. The city was divided into tribes and demes. This is the system followed in the establishment of Greek cities.

This city had risen to greatness in the Byzantine period as it was the cradle of Christianity in the 4th century A.D. some of the earlier churches were found in it, in addition to the monasteries that had spread after the development brought about by St. Pachomius on the monastic life.

Antinopolis has carried different names in its long history. It was known as Dimai in the Pharaoh era, Antinos, Antinopolis, or the city of the Antinopolitans and Ansenia in the Roman and Byzantine periods. It was known as Ansa in the Islamic era, which was the Arabicized form of its Byzantine name. After the Islamic conquest the Muslims have established nearby the village of El-Sheikh Ebadah whose name goes back to Ebadah Ibn El-Samit, one of the Muslim leaders who accompanied Amr Ibn El-Aas in his conquest of Egypt and who became a martyr at that time. If Antinopolis had declined after the Arabic conquest, what remained of it was destroyed by an earthquake in the nineteenth century.

Antinopolis was inhabited by diverse segments of population; the natives and the newcomers: Romans, Greeks and Jewish segments were found in it side by side with some Egyptians. Before recognizing Christianity at the beginning of the fourth century, Christians took refuge in the city to escape religious persecution. Despite the ethnic differences, the population of Antinopolis had enjoyed an excellent amount of Greek culture and had been used to the Greek way of life. The immigrants to the city came from: the Arsinoite Nome, Ptolemais, Hermopolis Magna, in addition to the retired soldiers since the age of Antoninus Pius (138-161).

Antinopolis was certainly a place of attraction for these people. If the retired soldiers had found their way to it, this was due to the privileges and exemptions they enjoyed to settle down and invest in it. Moreover, the commercial activities and the flourishing economic life added to its attraction. This had resulted in the establishment of some commercial zones close to the city as manifest in Quift, a nearby Port on the Nile. Antinopolis had also smaller port of its own. Such privileges include tax exemptions for its citizens, real-estates, goods as well as the exemption from performing some liturgies. These privileges had drawn the attention of many people to settle down there. This had accelerated its athletic and economic activities on the model of Greek cities.

Some others see that this manuscript has come to Egypt by chance or as a cover for anything that came to Antinopolis. Although this hypothesis is very far from possible due to the holiness of the Bible and the high prices of papyri, it could have been part of a Holy Bible written in both Latin and Gothic languages. There is reason to believe that more fragments of the same bilingual Bible could be discovered in the same area.

Another view sees that it had reached Egypt with some Visigothic forces that came to Egypt at the end of the fourth century and the beginning of the fifth after Emperor **Theodosius I (378-395)** had concluded the settlement (382) with the Goths following the battle of Adrianapole (378). It is known that due to this settlement many Goths had been recruited in the Roman armies in the Eastern part of the Roman Empire. according to Zosimus The Roman Government during the reign of Emperor **Theodosius I**

had drawn some Roman regiments from Egypt to support its defences on the Danube and replaced them by forces in which the Goths were the majority. This had taken place in the eighties of the fourth century. As these soldiers spoke the Gothic language, it is possible that some of them carried texts of the Bible written in both Gothic and Latin.

It is well known that the Holy Book had been translated into Gothic language by Ulfila from 348 to 383. He had relied in his translation on the Greek version of the Holy Book and on some Latin incomplete translations before Jerome's translation. It was common among the Goths to use copies of the Holy Bible in both languages (Gothic and Latin) during the period from late 4th to the 6th centuries.

Not only Gothic soldiers found their way to Egypt but also exiled or non-gratia elements reached upper Egypt. Thus, one of them could have possibly taken with him a copy of the Gothic-Latin text of the Holy Bible. Some of the exiled elements had taken with them their women and children and some of them were priests for preaching among soldiers particularly those who are not able to read. The last possibility is related to the monasteries and monks who were highly respected in Egypt in the second half of the 4th century. Some bishops of Antinopolis had played a vital role in religious disputes in the 4th century. Bishop Tyrannos had attended the Council of Nicaea 325 and was on the side of Athanasius at the synod of Tyre in 335. Bishop Ammon attended a synod in Constantinople in 394. This reflects the eminent religious position that the Antinopolis Church had enjoyed as manifest in the several monasteries that had been built close to it. There were many monasteries such as Abu Hennes, Al Berche, Sombat, Al Dik and Al Nassara. These monasteries had then become pilgrimage sites for several Christians from the Roman Empire. Someone could have brought a copy of bilingual Bible with him to practice his own rites.

Apart from the way this documents had reached Egypt, it points to a certain fact: Egypt was a place of attraction for many newcomers and immigrants from all over the Roman Empire whether they were soldiers, merchants, priests or exiled people. The finding of the documents in Antinopolis refers to the political and economic importance that the region had enjoyed in the late Roman period. There is still hope to find more documents that would add further information on the nature of life and the population of Upper Egypt during the Roman and Byzantine periods.

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