

The Holy Bible in its Arabic Language among the Orthodox Copts – Contributions and Issues

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Abstract

The Holy Bible has been transmitted to the languages of the world through translation, which is the safest bridge to reach all people regardless of their different languages and tongues. Since Arabic is one of these languages, it is only natural that the biblical text be translated into it as well, so that it may reach Arabic speakers. Numerous Arabic translations have emerged since the era of printing, and they have been distributed among different churches: Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox.

In this context, the present study aims to trace the transmission of the biblical text to the Coptic Orthodox Church in its Arabic language. The research adopts both a descriptive-analytical method and a critical-comparative approach.

A number of conclusions were reached, the most important of which are:

- *There is a significant theological and historical relationship between translation and the Holy Bible.*
- *The Protestant churches have carried out the most extensive translation and printing work of the biblical text.*
- *The Coptic Orthodox Church does not possess an official, complete Arabic translation of the Holy Bible.*

Keywords: *Holy Bible, Orthodox Copts, Translation, Arabic.*

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Introduction

For believers in Christianity, the Holy Bible, with its Old and New Testaments, is considered divine revelation conveyed through writers inspired by the Holy Spirit, as stated by Peter in his Second Epistle (1/21): **“For prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.”** The texts of the Old Testament were written in Hebrew and Aramaic, and those of the New Testament in Greek. As Christianity expanded, translations into other languages began to appear such as Latin, Syriac, Coptic, and Ethiopian versions which served as vessels conveying the sacred text.

With the advent of Islam and its territorial expansion, along with the adoption of Arabization policies, Arabic gradually replaced local languages. Some portions of the Bible began to appear in Arabic, and this situation persisted until the printing era, which marked the birth of the Arabic text of the Holy Bible. This text continued to evolve until reaching its current form through the various translations available to Arabic-speaking Christian readers.

From this background emerged the idea for this study, which involves two interrelated aspects: the first is linked to the dynamics of translating the religious text among Arab Christians in general, and the second concerns the translation and circulation of this text specifically among the Orthodox Copts. Thus, the scope of this research lies in the intersection between the sacred text and its translation as a vehicle for

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transmission an issue of considerable complexity due to the need for deep excavation into the intellectual and theological system surrounding the Holy Bible.

Significance of the Study

- To clarify the extent of the contribution of the Coptic Orthodox Church to the movement of translating the Holy Bible into Arabic.
- To anticipate a translation project independently led by the Coptic Orthodox Church, in accordance with its identity, cultural background, historical roots, and theological heritage.
- To identify the translational obstacles both in form and content that delay the appearance of a complete, independent Coptic edition of the Holy Bible or at least one of its Testaments.

Problem Statement

1. This research stems from a set of fundamental questions:
 - What is the current state of the Arabic biblical text available to Arab Christians?
 - Does the Coptic Orthodox Church need to develop a new translation of its own that aligns with its identity and intellectual foundations?

Hypotheses

2. The research is based on the following hypotheses:
 - There is no need for a new Coptic Arabic translation, and the existing versions are sufficient for the Arabic-speaking Christian reader.
 - There is a need to develop a new Arabic translation that conveys the text with precision and fidelity, while aligning with the Coptic tradition and heritage.

Objectives of the Study

- To trace the historical development of the Arabic translation of the Holy Bible in the printing era.
- To highlight the main ecclesiastical efforts in serving the Holy Bible through translation work.
- To examine the dilemma of continuity or renewal in the Arabic translations of the Holy Bible.

Methodology of the Study

This study relies on both the descriptive-analytical method and the critical-comparative approach. The descriptive-analytical method is used to present the centrality of translation in the transmission of the Arabic text of the Holy Bible among Christians, from manuscript to print. The critical-comparative approach is employed to examine the Arabic translations in circulation among the Copts, comparing them and highlighting critical observations.

Research Structure

3. The study is organized into an introduction, two main sections, and a conclusion, as follows:
Introduction: Discusses the importance of the topic, its problematics, hypotheses, objectives, methodology, and research structure.

Section One: The Copts and the Biblical Text – Between the Dialectic of Sanctity and Language

- Subsection One: The Copts and the Arabic Language
- Subsection Two: Arabic Translations in Circulation among the Orthodox Copts
- Subsection Three: Major Translation Projects of the Holy Bible among the Orthodox Copts

Section Two: Toward Anticipating a Distinct Coptic Arabic Translation

- Subsection One: The Need for a Translation Specific to the Orthodox Copts
- Subsection Two: Characteristics of the Anticipated Coptic Arabic Translation
- Subsection Three: Obstacles to the Existence of a Coptic Arabic Translation of the Holy Bible

Conclusion: Includes the most important findings reached.

List of Sources and References**Section One: The Copts and the Biblical Text – Between the Dialectic of Sanctity and Language****Subsection One: The Copts and the Arabic Language**

The Coptic language is considered the official language of the Orthodox Copts, and it remained so with the advent of Christianity in Alexandria and even after the arrival of the Arabs and Muslims in Egypt. It continued to be used by the people in daily life and remained the language of religious rites for many centuries. However, over time, the language began to lose its presence in various aspects of life within the Coptic community, eventually being limited to the liturgy in the Church and neglected elsewhere. Archdeacon Habib Guirguis stated: **“It is a shame that the Church preserved this language during times of persecution and oppression, only to abandon it in the age of light and freedom.”**ⁱ

Arab Christians or Arabized Christians especially among the Syriacs gradually began, at an early stage, to shift toward the Arabic language, becoming attracted to it and engaging with its sciences and literature. This was driven by a sense of belonging to the broad and emerging cultural space, and they made significant and clear contributions to Islamic civilization whether through translation and transmission or through original writing and authorship in various scientific and intellectual fields such as theology, philosophy, and medicine.

The first Christian theologian to write in Arabic was Theodore Abu Qurrah (825 AD)ⁱⁱ, during the Abbasid Caliphate. He was able to **“present theological expressions in eloquent Arabic and bring Christian mysteries closer to the Islamic mindset.”**ⁱⁱⁱ This occurred in a context of religious, intellectual, and cultural freedom extended to all people under the caliphate. In parallel, religious debate among different religions, sects, and schools of thought also flourished. In this environment of openness, Abu Qurrah authored a number of works in the form of **Mayamirs**^{iv}, such as **Maymar on the Existence of the Creator and the True Religion**^v, **Maymar on Free Will**^{vi}, and **Maymar on the Veneration of Icons**^{vii}, through which he was able to mold Christian theological and philosophical concepts in the Arabic language.

In Egypt, Arabic gradually began to spread among the Coptic population due to the Arabization policy adopted by the Islamic state, and later due to the conversion of thousands of Copts to Islam. However, the shift to Arabic among the Orthodox Copts was relatively late compared to their Arab Christian counterparts in Syria, Iraq, and elsewhere. The first to write in Arabic was Anba Sawiris Ibn al-Muqaffa of Upper Egypt

in the 10th century AD, who noted a separation between the language of the people and the language of religion. He thus marked the beginning of a new phase.^{viii}

Several Coptic fathers were known for translating into Arabic, among the most notable: Anthony the Father of Monks, Pachomius, Shenoute, Timothy of Alexandria, Biondius of Qift, Constantine of Asyut, John of Parallos, Benjamin the Patriarch, Qyriacus of Bahnasa, Macarius of Egypt, Macarius of Alexandria, Stephen the Theban, and Moses the Ethiopian.^{ix}

Due to all of this, the Coptic language receded in favor of Arabic and is now only used in liturgies, church prayers, Sunday Schools, and the Clerical College.

Subsection Two: Arabic Translations in Circulation among the Orthodox Copts

First: The Motives for Translating the Holy Bible into Arabic

Human beings have known and practiced translation since ancient times due to the vital need for it in the process of coexistence and human interaction among peoples of different tongues. **“Translation is the process of rendering something written or oral from one language (the source language) into another (the target language).”**^x

The Holy Bible reached Arabic-speaking populations in their own language for several reasons, the most important of which include:

Conveying the message of Christ (peace be upon him) through the preaching of the Gospel to the entire world. Translation thus became a present and essential tool in fulfilling this Christian mission. **“The written Gospel is a means of preaching and a primary testimony for the whole world, from generation to generation and everywhere.”**^{xi}

It is stated in the Second Epistle of Paul to Timothy (4/2): **“Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.”** Accordingly, it became important for new believers to receive the Word of God in their own native language.

The Church’s belief in the importance of the message of salvation over the letters through which it is delivered. The Holy Bible is the Word of God expressed in human language. As stated in the Gospel of John (6/63): **“The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life,”** and in the Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians (3/6): **“For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”**

Based on this, the Church did not confine itself to the sanctity of the original languages in which the Holy Bible was written be it Hebrew, Greek, or even Aramaic, the language spoken by Christ (peace be upon him). Rather, it moved beyond the question of the sanctity of language toward the broader scope represented by translation. As Father Habib Saeed puts it: **“A Christian does not object to the translation of his Book into all the languages of the earth, for the value of words is not in their literal form, but in their spirit and meaning, and in the living message they convey.”**^{xii}

The spread of Islam across the Arab world and the Middle East—namely, the Levant, Egypt, and Iraq made Arabic the official language in those vast geographical regions. Arabic thus transformed from a local language into a global one, pushing other languages into retreat. **“Classical Arabic was not originally the language of everyone, but it prevailed along with the Qur’an and the Islamic state as the language of religious and scholarly interaction amidst many dialects. Furthermore, the deeply rooted popular culture shared by Muslims, Christians, and pagans alike was essentially one culture.”**^{xiii}

The adoption of the Arabic language by Arab Christians as their official language for expressing faith, both in worship and liturgy, as well as in authorship and writing. This led to a growth in their intellectual and scholarly output, including the translation and transmission of the Holy Bible.

Second: The Most Well-Known Modern Arabic Translations of the Holy Bible and Their Use among Orthodox Copts

Van Dyck:

This is the "**Van Dyck**" translation by Al-Bustani, also known as the "**Beirut Edition.**" It is the most widely used and circulated translation among the Orthodox Copts, whether at the personal or communal level, particularly because it is low in cost. Therefore, it has become an almost official translation, read in spiritual gatherings at church and used to interpret texts from both Testaments except in liturgical Masses, which are usually conducted in the Coptic language. This translation is devoid of the seven deuterocanonical books.^{xiv}

This translation relies on literal word-for-word transfer rather than on conveying the meanings produced by the vocabulary, sentences, and structures. Hence, it requires revision, correction, and refinement of its circulated text. Two major works attempted to introduce amendments to this translation, but neither of them was officially published despite their completion. These are:^{xv}

- The work of Dr. Butrus Abdel Malek and Dr. John Thompson in the 1960s, focusing on the New Testament, from which some photocopied booklets were published.
- The work of Dr. Abdel-Masih Estefanos and Dr. Ghassan Khalaf in the 1990s, from which individual books of the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles were published.

One of the main issues Orthodox Copts have with this translation is its omission of the deuterocanonical books, as it was published by the Protestant Church, which does not recognize the sanctity of these seven books and thus excludes them from the edition. In contrast, the Orthodox and Catholic Churches regard these books as canonical.^{xvi}

As a result, the Coptic Orthodox Church printed these seven omitted books in a separate volume.

Al-Hayat (The Life Translation):

This is an explanatory translation of the Holy Bible published by Dar Al-Thaqafa in Egypt. It is a collaborative effort among Christian churches. Written in contemporary Arabic in a simple yet eloquent style, it is closer to the average Christian reader. Its goal is to simplify difficult expressions and words and modernize the language. It first appeared in (1988).^{xvii}

Jesuit (Jesuite) Translation:

After the release of the **Van Dyck** translation, the Jesuit Fathers French Catholics decided to produce an Arabic translation of the Bible. They enlisted the help of the writer **Ibrahim Nasif Al-Yaziji** to refine the Arabic style of the Old Testament, and Professor **Gerges Zuwein** and **Father Youssef Al-Bustani** to refine that of the New Testament. It was published in Beirut in (1881), based on the Greek texts available to Catholic scholars at the time. This version is known as the Old Jesuit Translation.^{xviii}

This translation contains all the books of the Holy Bible. It is distinguished by the presence of introductions to both Testaments and scholarly introductions to the individual books, outlining the author, the time of writing, language, general and specific themes, and unique features of each book in historical, theological, and biblical contexts. It also includes critical footnotes that explain obscure terms, provide background on places and people, and offer cross-references to other biblical passages for comparison, expansion, and enrichment. It further engages in textual criticism by addressing manuscript differences, additions, or omissions, and evaluating various readings.

Father Samir Khalil stated that it is superior to the Beirut (Van Dyck) translation: **“Because it relied on the original translation and improved it, it was accused of being based on the Latin rather than the**

Greek. This accusation is false; it was based on the Greek, though when there was disagreement over certain terms, the Latin text in the common translation (the Vulgate) was sometimes consulted.”^{xix}

However, the Jesuit translation did not gain widespread popularity among Orthodox Copts, except among intellectual elites or specialists in comparative religion and interfaith dialogue. Its large size, published in two volumes, and high cost further limited its circulation. More importantly, the Jesuit translation is a critical translation based on textual criticism, which does not align with the traditional thought of the Coptic Orthodox Church. In this context, Pope Shenouda III stated under the title "The Danger of Biblical Criticism": **“Some Bible teachers and preachers in Western countries act as though they are masters over the Holy Bible: they scrutinize its words as if they were language experts, criticize as they please, and delete as they please as if the Bible were subject to their minds, rather than their minds being subject to the Bible.”^{xx}**

The Common Arabic Translation:

This is a complete translation of the Holy Bible both Old and New Testaments and is the first unified Arabic translation produced by a committee of biblical and theological scholars representing various Christian denominations: Catholic, Orthodox, and Evangelical. It relied on the best printed biblical texts available in Hebrew and Greek. For the Old Testament, the committee used the Stuttgart edition of the Torah from Germany (published between 1968–1976), consulting Aramaic where necessary. For the New Testament, it relied on the Nestle-Aland edition (No. 26) and **the third edition** published by the Bible Societies.^{xxi}

The representative of the Coptic Orthodox Church was Anba Gregory, alongside contributors from other churches such as Bishop Antonios Naguib, **Father Michel Najm**, **Father Pauls al-Faghali**, **Pastor Ghassan Khalaf** (as coordinator), and **Dr. Emmanuel Genschten** as an advisor from the Bible Society.^{xxii}

Nevertheless, this translation did not gain widespread popularity among the general Coptic community.

Subsection Three: Major Translation Projects of the Holy Bible among the Orthodox Copts

There have been some Coptic attempts to produce independent Arabic translations based on original Coptic manuscripts, reflecting the Church’s identity and thought and attributing the work directly to itself apart from the translations of other denominations and sects. The involvement of the Coptic Orthodox Church in Bible translation efforts can be divided into two categories:

First Category: Collaborative Work

The Coptic Orthodox Church has taken part in some cooperative efforts with other churches, such as the Common Arabic Translation, which stated in its introductory preface: **“This is the first Arabic translation produced by a committee composed of biblical scholars and theologians from various Christian churches Catholic, Orthodox, and Evangelical.”^{xxiii}**

However, the Coptic influence in such projects remained minimal compared to the Protestant and Catholic contributions, especially those from Lebanon.

Second Category: Independent Work

The Coptic Orthodox Church has not carried out any fully independent translation of the Holy Bible into Arabic since the work of Ibn al-Assal, with the exception of two major efforts:

(A) Translation by Archdeacon Habib Guirguis:

This translation was printed in (1935) during the papacy of Pope John XIX. It includes only the four Gospels, presented in Arabic alongside the corresponding Coptic text.

This edition was characterized by several features: ^{xxiv}

- a. The preparation committee relied on a large number of references, both manuscript and printed, in Coptic, Arabic, and other languages.
- b. The inclusion of footnotes indicating variant readings in different translations.
- c. The Arabic translation was aligned closely with the spirit of the Coptic language.
- d. The Gospels were divided into major and minor sections.

(B) Translation by Anba Gregorios:

During the papacy of Pope Cyril VI (116th Patriarch, passed away in 1971), and by official decree, a recognized church committee was formed to issue a translation of the four Gospels. This edition, known as the *Dar Al-Maaref Edition*, includes both the text and its interpretation.^{xxv}

This edition was supervised by Anba Gregorios, Bishop of Scientific Research and Coptic Studies, in (1968), in collaboration with Professor Zaki Shenouda, Dr. Mourad Kamel, Dr. Bahour Labib, and Mr. Helmy Mourad.

The committee based the translation on Coptic, Greek, Hebrew, Syriac, Aramaic, and Ethiopian texts, and consulted Arabic, English, French, German, and Latin translations—both ancient and modern. However, special attention was given to the Coptic text due to its significance among all the aforementioned versions.
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(C) Translation by Father Kozman al-Baramosi:

This translation was published in (1981) during the papacy of Pope Shenouda III. It focused on the New Testament, translated by Father **Kozman al-Baramosi** from the Greek and compared with the Bohairic Coptic dialect.

It was reviewed by Dr. **Eugene Michaelios**, and the literary style and punctuation were reviewed by **Dr. Ahmed Suleiman**.^{xxvii}

This edition preserved the Van Dyck translation text, with Coptic readings indicated in the footnotes. Each book was divided into chapters without explanatory headings.

Section Two: Toward Envisioning a Distinct Coptic Arabic Translation**Subsection One: The Need for a Translation Specific to the Orthodox Copts**

It is quite surprising that a Church such as the Coptic Orthodox Church with its intellectual heritage, historical depth, and large number of adherents, being the largest Arabic-speaking Church still does not possess an official Arabic translation of the entire Holy Bible, both Old and New Testaments, based on the original Coptic texts. Instead, it relies entirely on translations produced by other churches with differing doctrines. As Father Samuel Kozman Ma'wadh stated: **“To this day, there is no complete modern Arabic translation of the Holy Bible based on the Coptic language.”**^{xxviii}

This may have been justifiable in earlier times when the reading and circulation of the Bible depended solely on handwritten manuscript copies, which were difficult for the general public to access and were mostly preserved in churches, monasteries, or owned by nobility, wealthy individuals, or a select group of clergy. Thus, the Copt's connection to the Bible came through the Church. **“As there was no full Arabic translation of the biblical text in the modern history of the Orthodox, their only access to it was by listening to readings during services and liturgies.”** ^{xxxix}

This situation continued throughout the Ottoman period. The Coptic Orthodox Church did not have a complete Bible directed toward Arabic speakers. During this period, the Church focused heavily on liturgy, using readings distributed throughout the year, although the Bible is not a liturgical book in itself. This led to the loss of the Bible's importance in Orthodox practice. ^{xxx}

With the advent of the printing era, the Bible began to spread among the people in Egypt in Arabic, mainly through missionary societies.

Although Egypt's monasteries, museums, and private and public libraries contain hundreds of Arabic or bilingual (Arabic/Coptic) translations, these resources have not been properly studied or activated as starting points for renewed scholarly engagement. **“Most of the Coptic Arabic translations of the Bible or their revisions of older translations are of unknown authorship.”** ^{xxxix}

One of the most well-known Coptic Arabic translations with a known author is that of Hibat Allah Ibn al-Assal (1252 AD), often referred to as the **Vulgate of Alexandria**. ^{xxxii}

Ibn al-Assal was both a translator and interpreter of the Gospels. In the mid-13th century, he compiled twelve Arabic manuscripts of the New Testament and found significant variations among them. He devised twenty-eight symbols to refer to these manuscripts and their differences. His translation was full of marginal notes and colored indicators. Although the original translation has been lost, a monk named **Gabriel** copied it in (1260 AD), and that version is preserved in the British Museum. It includes the four Gospels. There are 21 known copies of this manuscript in various libraries, but only the London copy contains the aforementioned annotations. ^{xxxiii}

Ibn al-Assal's work was limited to the translation of the four Gospels only, excluding the rest of the Old and New Testament books. The reason for this limitation is that the four Gospels are the most frequently read and circulated texts throughout the year among Christians, both individually and in church services during liturgies and feast days. Thus, his translation may be classified as a liturgical translation.

In conclusion, apart from the work of **Hibat Allah Ibn al-Assal**, the Coptic Orthodox Church has remained a consumer of Arabic Bible translations produced by other churches.

Subsection Two: Characteristics of the Envisioned Coptic Arabic Translation

The most important characteristics that the Coptic Orthodox Church should aim to provide in any future Arabic translation of its own include the following:

Simplicity and Clarity of Language:

The translation must use a language accessible to the average reader, especially considering the current linguistic decline in the Arab world. This requires the involvement of skilled linguists capable of adapting the language to accommodate the sacred religious text.

Early printed Arabic translations notably enlisted Muslim scholars for linguistic correction and refinement, shaping the sacred text in grammatically sound and stylistically accurate Arabic. For example, the American missionary Dr. **Eli Smith** worked with **Sheikh Nasif al-Yaziji**, and **Cornelius Van Dyck** collaborated with **Sheikh Yusuf al-Asir al-Azhari**. Likewise, the Jesuit Fathers in Lebanon consulted **Sheikh Ibrahim al-Yaziji**, son of **Sheikh Nasif al-Yaziji**. ^{xxxiv}

Nonetheless, many Arabic translations contain significant linguistic and spelling errors, with awkward and unclear expressions. Sometimes, the intended meaning can only be understood after careful reading in context or with the aid of dictionaries and commentaries. One such example is Job (15/26): **“He charges at him with a stiff neck, with the thick bosses of his shield.”**

For this reason, many biblical theology scholars call for a reconsideration of the language used in biblical translation, arguing that it does not align with the average reader’s level nor with the spirit of our current era, which is marked by linguistic weakness and a reliance on colloquial dialects over classical Arabic. A new linguistic approach is needed in terms of vocabulary and sentence structure. For instance, terms such as **“Kharayibuh”**^{xxxv}, **“Yajramiz”**^{xxxvi}, **“Every tree that does not bear fruit”**^{xxxvii}, and **“Dabbabat”**^{xxxviii} used to refer to creeping animals.

These linguistic concerns were summarized by Father Ayoub Shahwan, who stated: **“And the issue of language if Jesus spoke to farmers in His time, if Paul wrote to workers, artisans, and slaves and they understood him, then why do we complicate the language and style so that the Bible only reaches a select group? Why don’t we speak to people in the language of the people, so that God’s word reaches them in its simplicity and depth? There is no doubt that the need for proper language is important, but if we become enslaved to literalism to the point where the modern reader cannot understand the text, then we face another issue. To sanctify a translation as though it is equal to the Hebrew or Greek texts is a sign of stagnation that pulls us back to the roots without allowing us to emerge into the present.”**^{xxxix}

Reflecting the Coptic Spirit:

The translation process is inherently linked to cross-cultural exchange, as the translator moves not only from one language to another but also from one culture to another. Translation is not a mere linguistic exercise but a cultural, social, and historical activity especially considering that the intended audience of this translation consists of Arab Christians within a Middle Eastern context infused with Arabic culture and Islamic influence. Many events in both the Old and New Testaments occurred in this same Eastern environment.

Overcoming Sectarian Biases:

Previous translations often included denominational insertions by the publishers to support specific theological doctrines. The envisioned translation must adopt theological positions that align with the doctrine of the Coptic Orthodox Church. Translation is a form of Christian theological interpretation, often infused with theological content and narrow sectarian frameworks. Each denomination tends to embed within the translated text elements that promote its own creed. This is clearly seen in the Beirut translation (Van Dyck), which **“was intended by Protestants to serve their missionary efforts in the Arab East.”**^{xl}

Accuracy of Translation and Its Source:

The issue of the source and target languages plays a major role in the integrity of a translated text. Riyad Youssef Dawood notes: **“But every translation is a betrayal, because it is difficult to transmit the full nuances of the original text with precision.”**^{xli}

A key challenge for the Coptic translation project is determining its source: Should it be based on ancient manuscript traditions acknowledged by Orthodox ecclesiastical tradition, or on prior Arabic translations?

Adoption of Modern Critical Textual Methodologies:

Textual criticism follows several essential stages: ^{xlii}

a. Collecting and organizing available manuscripts.

b. Developing theories and methodologies to utilize this data in reconstructing the most accurate version of the biblical text.

c. Rebuilding the transmission history of the text to identify influences and variations.

d. Evaluating specific readings in light of linguistic, theological, and historical contexts in order to uncover the form of the text assumed to be original.

Subsection Three: Obstacles to the Existence of a Coptic Arabic Translation of the Holy Bible

There are several methodological, theological, and historical obstacles that hinder the realization of a comprehensive project to create a distinct Arabic translation of the Holy Bible for the Coptic Orthodox Church. These obstacles can be summarized as follows:

The lack of a perceived need for a new translation, based on the belief that existing translations are sufficient, and that it is enough to adopt the idea of partial revisions and amendments to the versions already circulated among churches in the Arab world.

Fear of undermining the integrity and reliability of the biblical text, and the implicit concern that this could be construed as an admission of textual corruption especially when comparisons are made between a newly developed translation and previous Arabic versions. As Dr. Reverend Ghassan Khalaf explains: **“Among these circles, views are widespread suggesting that any revision or modification of the Gospel constitutes a threat to the Christian faith and its identity in the East particularly in an Islamic world that views the Qur’an as an unchanging revealed text. Thus, they cling to the Arabic translation of the Holy Bible and fiercely defend its current form out of fear of potential accusations by some Muslims that the Gospel has been altered.”**^{xliii}

Failure to distinguish between the translation and the original text, where the translation is treated as if it were the very text written by the holy men of God. Consequently, revising, amending, or even replacing the Van Dyck translation is seen as tampering with the sacred text itself.

Lack of support both financially, in terms of funding a project that may take many years, and intellectually, due to the significant need for experts in ancient languages, Arabic, translation methodologies, and text editing.

The Coptic mindset, long accustomed to the Van Dyck translation, makes it very difficult to break this deeply rooted habit and convince people to accept a new translation with a fresh spirit and methodology. For many laypeople, the distinction between the translation and the original text has faded; the translation has become, in the collective imagination, the Holy Bible itself.

Therefore, any attempt to revise the translation is perceived as tampering with the Bible. It is essential to change these mindsets and foster awareness within the Church about the concept of divine inspiration in Christianity, as well as to clarify the complex relationship between the sacred text and its translation.

Fear of violating scriptural warnings against altering the Bible. As stated in the Book of Revelation (22/18): **“For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book.”**

Conclusion

Since the beginning of the movement to translate the Holy Bible into Arabic, several editions have been produced by different churches across the Arab East. However, the Arab reader is generally familiar only with the Van Dyck translation. The Coptic Orthodox Church, unfortunately, has not had any significant or

active role in the translation efforts of the Holy Bible. Instead, it has relied on and circulated some of these translations, despite the theological and linguistic issues they contain.

Therefore, there is an urgent need for a complete Arabic translation of the Holy Bible specific to the Coptic Orthodox Church—one that reflects its identity, restores its cultural and historical role, and provides the reader with a text that is clearly worded, accessible in meaning, and accurately and faithfully translated. Such a translation should also employ modern methodologies in light of linguistics, textual criticism, and manuscript analysis, all while being deeply infused with the Coptic spirit.

This research has led to several conclusions, the most important of which are:

Protestant, followed by Catholic, initiatives have dominated the Arabic translation of the Holy Bible.

The Coptic Orthodox Church has been absent from the Arabic Bible translation movement.

Some limited Coptic efforts have enriched the Arabic library with a few translations, but these did not achieve widespread circulation.

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FOOTNOTES

ⁱ Archdeacon Habib Girgis, Scientific Means for Coptic Reforms – Hopes and Dreams, (p. 117).

- ⁱⁱ See: Father Samir Khalil S.J., in the book *Abu Qurrah – Biography and References*, and the book *Abu Qurrah – Writings*, both published by Dar Al-Machreq, Lebanon.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Father Dr. Ignatius Dick, *Introduction to the Homily on the Existence of the Creator and the True Religion*, (p. 6).
- ^{iv} Priest Constantine Al-Basha printed many of them in his book *Homilies of Theodore Abu Qurrah, Bishop of Harran – The Oldest Christian Arabic Writing*, printed at Al-Fawa'id Press, Beirut, 1904.
- ^v Edited, introduced, and indexed by Father Dr. Ignatius Dick, *Paulist Library – Lebanon*, 1982 edition.
- ^{vi} Printed by Father Samir Khalil, *Dar Al-Machreq, Lebanon*, 1st edition: 2006.
- ^{vii} Edited, introduced, and indexed by Father Dr. Ignatius Dick, *Paulist Library – Lebanon*, 1986 edition.
- ^{viii} See: Father Suheil Qasha, *The History of Arab Christian Heritage*, (p. 342).
- ^{ix} See: Father Samir Khalil S.J., *Introduction to Ancient Arab Christian Heritage* (3), (pp. 196–197), *Priest's Friend Magazine*, vol. 23, issues 3–4, September–December 1982; Father Suheil Qasha, *The History of Arab Christian Heritage*, (p. 39).
- ^x *The Story of the Bible*, F.F. Bruce et al., (p. 173).
- ^{xi} *Key to the New Testament*, by Pope Tawadros, (1/26).
- ^{xii} *Introduction to the Bible*, Habib Said, (p. 18).
- ^{xiii} Farajallah Saleh Deeb, *Christianity and Arab Christians and the Origin of the Maronites*, (p. 30).
- ^{xiv} See: Pope Tawadros, *Key to the New Testament*, (1/13); Adnan Makrani, *An Intellectual Biography: Interview with Father Samir Khalil*, (p. 40).
- ^{xv} See: Dr. Pastor Ghassan Khalaf, *The Gospel Between Byzantium and Alexandria*, (p. 14).
- ^{xvi} See: Anba Gregorios, *The Holy Bible and Methods of Studying It*, (1/137–105).
- ^{xvii} See: Pope Tawadros, *Key to the New Testament*, (1/13); Adnan Makrani, *An Intellectual Biography: Interview with Father Samir Khalil*, (p. 39); Dr. Pastor Samuel Youssef, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, (p. 69).
- ^{xviii} Dr. Pastor Ghassan Khalaf, *The Gospel Between Byzantium and Alexandria*, (p. 58).
- ^{xix} Adnan Makrani, *An Intellectual Biography: Interview with Father Samir Khalil*, (p. 38).
- ^{xx} Pope Shenouda III, *Biblical Criticism*, (p. 5).
- ^{xxi} See: *Introduction to the Common Arabic Translation* (without page numbering).
- ^{xxii} Dr. Pastor Ghassan Khalaf, *The Gospel Between Byzantium and Alexandria*, (p. 58).
- ^{xxiii} *Introduction to the Common Arabic Translation*, (p. 6).
- ^{xxiv} See: *Introduction to the Bible – New Testament – from the Bohairic Coptic Text*, (p. 6).
- ^{xxv} Pope Tawadros II, *Key to the New Testament*, (1/13).
- ^{xxvi} See: *Introduction to the Gospel of Saint Matthew*, *Dar Al-Maaref* edition, (p. 5).
- ^{xxvii} Father Qozman Al-Baramosi, *Introduction to the Bible – New Testament*, without page numbering.
- ^{xxviii} Dr. Samuel Qozman Maawad, *Introduction to the Critical Edition of the Four Gospels by Ibn Al-Assal*, (p. 8).
- ^{xxix} Father Ayoub Shahwan et al., *Bible Translations in the East*, (p. 283).
- ^{xxx} See: Father Ayoub Shahwan et al., *Bible Translations in the East*, (p. 284).
- ^{xxxi} Dr. Samuel Qozman Maawad, *Introduction to the Critical Edition of the Four Gospels by Ibn Al-Assal*, (p. 8).
- ^{xxxii} Dr. Pastor Tharwat Qaddis, *The Bible in Contemporary Arab History*, (p. 33).
- ^{xxxiii} Father Ayoub Shahwan et al., *Bible Translations in the East*, (pp. 260–261); see also: *Key to the New Testament*, (1/28); Adnan Makrani, *An Intellectual Biography: Interview with Father Samir Khalil S.J.*, (p. 37).
- ^{xxxiv} Pope Tawadros, *Key to the New Testament*, (1/27).
- ^{xxxv} *Job* (8:16; 15:30); *Ezekiel* (17:4; 17:22); *Hosea* (14:6).

^{xxxvi} Job (38:40).

^{xxxvii} Matthew (3:10; 7:19); Luke (3:9).

^{xxxviii} Genesis (1:25; 6:20); Psalms (104:25); Ezekiel (8:10).

^{xxxix} Father Ayoub Shahwan et al., Bible Translations in the East, (p. 41).

^{xl} Father Ayoub Shahwan et al., Bible Translations in the East, (p. 43).

^{xli} Eng. Riyad Youssef Dawood, Introduction to Biblical Criticism, (p. 27).

^{xlii} See: The Story of the Bible, F.F. Bruce et al., (p. 117).

^{xliii} Dr. Pastor Ghassan Khalaf, The Gospel Between Byzantium and Alexandria, (p. 16).