

---

## Book Review

# Coptic Texts from Daily Life

Sherine Ramadan

---

**Book Title:** Coptic Texts from Daily Life

Author: Maher Ahmed Eissa

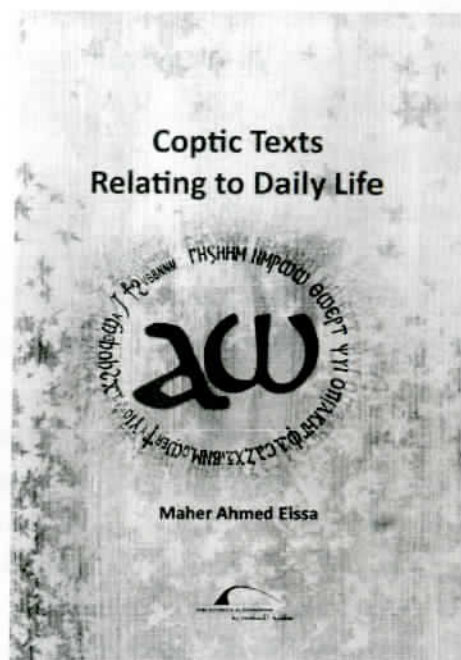
Publisher: Bibliotheca Alexandrina

Year of  
Publication: 2008

ISBN: 978-977-452-173-7

No. of Pages: 88

Book Size: 17 X 24 cm



The book includes three chapters, in addition to preambles (introduction, list of abbreviations and list of illustrations) and the appendices (conclusion, list of references and illustrations).

The importance of this book lies in the fact that it contains Coptic texts from the Coptic Museum – published for the first time – related to daily life and illustrating how Egyptians lived in this era (from the 5<sup>th</sup> century to the 9<sup>th</sup> century) which is sometimes referred to as the Coptic Era.

### Chapter One

#### Manuscript No. 3530

The manuscript is a personal letter written in literary Upper Egypt dialect, dated around the 8<sup>th</sup> century AD. This letter includes the main elements of Coptic letters: opening and

greeting, body of the letter, followed by the ending and the address.

It seems that this letter was sent to a person of high stature in a monastery or a church. This is clear from the use of different official expressions in the elements of the letter. From the few signs in the letter, it obviously tackles an issue pertinent to the monastery. In this regard, the author of the book indicates that most of the time, one cannot know the full content of the letter, although the letter is complete. This is due to the way Coptic letters are. The letter head with the recipient includes a certain topic known to only the two of them without mentioning any details. Therefore, the letter appears short and unclear to us.

One of the most important topics that the author deals with in this chapter is the different forms of greeting that come at the beginning of the letter, and the importance of each form.

The author also tackles the problem of Coptic proper nouns and their divisions, with special focus on Coptic names and their different sources.

## Chapter Two

### Manuscript No. 4057

This is a letter written in the Upper Egypt dialect with some affects from the Middle Egypt dialect. The letter was found in Kom Eshkaw.

The importance of this letter goes back to its belonging to the 'Dioscorus of Aphrodito Coptic Archive'. Dioscorus, a jurist and a poet, lived in the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD. He composed many poems and writings in Greek. All his works were published in the Greek language. However, the texts written by Dioscorus in Coptic remain unknown. Most of his Coptic papyri were destroyed upon discovery because the researchers then did not care and did not know their importance. Antiquity dealers took what remained and we did not know anything about those until recently.

In this chapter, the author focuses on this unique text with respect to its linguistic content and the cultural and historical information it contains, in addition to the idea it gives on the Greek and the Dioscorus Coptic archive.

The author also focuses on the importance of the Coptic archive, as the Coptic texts in this archive; one of which is text 4057, gives us a clear and almost complete idea on life in Egypt during that time.

One of the important issues with which the author dealt was that of omitting, adding or inverting some letters in the words without causing any change in the meaning, like the letter 'Ϩ' 'Horee'.

At the end of the chapter, the author tackles the phenomenon of writing some parts of the Coptic letter, especially the address, in Greek, and clarifies the reason for this.

## Chapter Three

### Three Manuscripts

This chapter contains three different manuscripts; one contract and two letters.

#### 1<sup>st</sup> Manuscript

This is a financial contract which date goes back to the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century/beginning of the 9<sup>th</sup>. In this part of the chapter, the author focuses on the different forms of Coptic contracts and gives a lot of information on how Coptic contracts in particular and Coptic documents in general are dated.

#### 2<sup>nd</sup> Manuscript

This is a letter written in Upper Egypt Dialect, with some affects from the Fayoum dialect. It dates back to the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century/beginning of the 9<sup>th</sup>. It tackles a financial problem between the sender and the recipient. In this part, the author focuses on some affects of the Fayoum dialect within Upper Egyptian texts. He also focuses on money-related words.

#### 3<sup>rd</sup> Manuscript

This is a letter that dates back to the 6<sup>th</sup> century, written in Upper Egypt Dialect, and contains information on agriculture, especially on agricultural products.

At the end of the book, the author offers some information on the texts he published and their importance, in addition to ways to

benefit from them while studying the Egyptian society during the Coptic era.