

(CE:459a-459b)

CANONS OF SAINT BASIL, one of the sources of Coptic church law. They appear in two series. The first, containing thirteen canons, is shared with the Melchites; the second, of 105 or 106 canons, is peculiar to the Copts.

The first series includes disciplinary sanctions with regard to priests or deacons and the prohibition against the burning of relics or of the Eucharist. These canons appear to be borrowed from the works of Saint Basil. The 105 or 106 canons are preserved partly in Coptic, but the complete text has survived only in Arabic. The original was written in Greek. As is shown by canons 15, 46, and 95, the text was composed outside Egypt. In particular, canons 46 and 95 show an ecclesiastical organization based on the metropolitan. In Egypt everything depended on the patriarch, and it was to him that the ordination of bishops reverted. For this reason the canons of Basil, which confer upon the metropolitan the right of ordaining bishops, cannot have been composed in Egypt and were probably borrowed from Syria.

We possess in Coptic an extract from canon 1 (Drescher, 1951, pp. 252, 255, 256) and canon 36 (Kahle, Vol. 1, pp. 410, 413-415, 416). Canons 14, 28-33, 38-40, 90, 93, and 94 are preserved in the Turin papyri (see Orlandi, 1974, p. 125). Canons 48-96 are in the Chester Beatty fragments, which are parchments deriving from the White Monastery (Dayr Anba Shinudah). The Coptic text is sometimes remote from the Arabic, to the point that the latter appears to be a reworking of the original text. It cannot be said to what extent it has been "adapted" to the Egyptian situation. As they appear in Arabic (Riedel, 1900, pp. 233ff.), the Canons of Basil include a trinitarian and Christological profession of faith (canon 1). They then speak of the two ways, of good and evil (canon 2); of marriage and its discipline (canons 3-19); penitence (canons 20-27); and the clergy (canons 38-95). They end with rules concerning the liturgy (canons 96-106). Alongside archaic prescriptions, such as those concerning *virgines subintroductae* (women living with men in spiritual marriage), they contain passages that are relevant to the Arab period (e.g., canon 86). They deserve a better critical edition.

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