

“OMIT THIS — IT WAS FALSE”:  
EDITING, ERASURE, AND MULTIPLE  
AUTHORS IN PS.-JOHN CHRYSOSTOM’S  
*ON MICHAEL A*

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**Abstract**

This article examines a particular instance of erasure in MACA.AF, a text version of Ps.-Chrysostom’s *On Michael A* deriving from the Monastery of Saint Macarius. This particular erasure is accompanied by a marginal note stating that the removed passage was ‘false’ (ΜΕΘΝΟΥΧ). This raises questions about why the content was erased, who was involved in the erasure, and what this can tell us about manuscript production and textual fluidity in Coptic literature from a monastic context.

Among the various amendments made in antiquity to Ps.-John Chrysostom’s *On Michael A*<sup>1</sup> (MACA.AF = Vat. Copt. 58, ff. 24-34), one instance stands out in particular. On page 10 of the manuscript (f. 28v), the entire first paragraph, which narrates the role of the archangel in Constantine’s famous vision of the Cross, has been removed (lines 4-13, see fig. 1). This erasure is accompanied by a series of marginal notes, the most significant of which states “Omit this. Do not read it, namely (instance) 11. [It] was false. Read the 12<sup>th</sup> instance which is day 12 of Hath[or]” (χαφαι εβολ μπερωϥ ετε̄τ̄ᾱ η̄ο[γ]μεθνοϥχ [πε] ωϥ μπιμαζ̄ῑβ̄ η̄σοπ ετεσογ̄ῑβ̄ ναϥ[ωρ] πε).

Although largely overlooked within commentaries of the text,<sup>2</sup> this erasure and the accompanying marginal notes raise a number of questions.

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<sup>1</sup> CPC 431, CPG 5150(1).

<sup>2</sup> For examples in which the passage in question is presented without any mention of erasure or marginal notes, see Pearson and Vivian, *Two Coptic Homilies* 23 and n. 41; Müller, *Die Engellehre* 171 and n. 980.

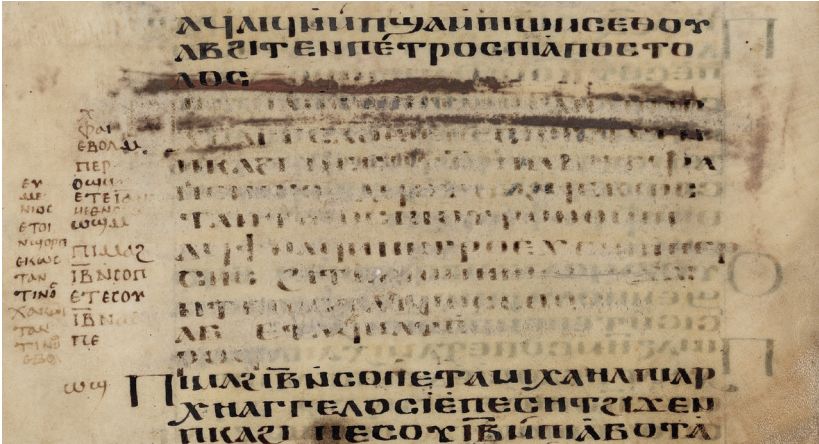


Fig. 1. Erasure and marginal notes, Vat. Copt. 58 f. 28v, ll. 3-16  
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In particular, what was it about the passage which the commenter deemed to be false? How many people were involved in the emendation? What does this emendation tell us about the process of editing and the use of the manuscript within a monastic setting? By examining this erasure from the perspective of Material Philology, focusing on the relationship between manuscript, audience, and scribe, the amendments to MACA.AF can provide an insight into the fluidity of Coptic literature in a monastic context.

### 1. The text, the work, and the manuscript

MACA.AF is one of a number of Coptic codices from the Monastery of St. Macarius (Dayr al-Anbā Maqār) at Scetis (Wādī al-Naṭrūn) which are now held in the Vatican library. These artefacts were collected by Giuseppe Simonio Assemani during his 1715-1717 mission to acquire manuscripts from Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon for Pope Clement XI Albani.<sup>3</sup> MACA.AF is a parchment codex, measuring 346 × 275mm. As with the other manuscripts collected by Assemani, this manuscript is not contained in its original binding, but rather was separated and rebound with parts of other codices at a later date.<sup>4</sup> The text is in a dialect of Bohairic referred to

<sup>3</sup> Buzi et al., “Vat. Copt. 57” 162; Proverbio, “Per una storia del fondo dei Vaticani Copti” 14; Simon, “Homélie copte inédite (a)” 217.

<sup>4</sup> Müller, “Re-Editing” 975; see also Buzi et al., “Vat. Copt. 57” 161, in which Vat. Copt. 57 is described as a ‘modern re-binding’. These new bound volumes are not

as “Nitrian Bohairic”, written in the so-called “Nitriot majuscule” hand which is typical of the St. Macarius manuscripts.<sup>5</sup> The date of the manuscript is uncertain. Hebbelynck and van Lantschoot date it broadly to the 10<sup>th</sup> century, although they do not provide any criteria on which this date is based.<sup>6</sup> Simon also dates the manuscript to the 10<sup>th</sup> century, based on its palaeography.<sup>7</sup> More recently, the PAThs project has widened the date to cover the 9<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, based on related manuscripts from St. Macarius.<sup>8</sup> More generally, Evelyn-White argues that the ancient library of the monastery, as it survives today, cannot be dated earlier than the 9<sup>th</sup> century since any earlier texts were likely destroyed in the Arab raid of c. 817 CE.<sup>9</sup>

MACA.AF represents the only known Coptic version of *On Michael A*, and the work is not attested in any other language to date. It is framed as a sermon given by Chrysostom during a feast for the archangel Michael, which can be divided into seven sections:

1. Title: page 1 (f. 24r)
2. The introduction to the sermon: pp. 1-3 (ff. 24r-25r)
3. Praise addressed directly to Michael: pp. 3-5 (ff. 25r-26r)
4. An account of the appearances of Michael on earth: pp. 5-11 (ff. 25r-29r)
5. Praise given to Michael and the Virgin Mary: pp. 11-15 (ff. 29r-31r)
6. An account of the words of the Good Thief at the crucifixion, and praise addressed to him: pp. 15-22 (ff. 31r-34v)
7. Conclusion of the sermon: page 22 (f. 34v)

representative of codicological units existing in antiquity, with some exceptions (such as Vat. Copt. 57 which represents a single, albeit incomplete, ancient codex: see Buzi et al., “Vat. Copt. 57” 161). According to the PAThs database (<https://atlas.paths-erc.eu/>), Vat. Copt. 58 contains parts of eight other manuscripts aside from MACA.AF — MACA.AD (ff. 1-9), MACA.AE (ff. 10-23), MACA.AG+AH (ff. 35-78), MACA.AI+AJ (ff. 79-107), MACA.AK (ff. 108-122), MACA.AL (ff. 123-150), MACA.AM+AN (ff. 151-177, containing two homilies on the Psalms attributed to John Chrysostom = CPC 485 On Psalm 38 and CPC 486 On Psalm 50; Hom. 1-2), and MACA.AO (ff. 178-194).

<sup>5</sup> On ‘Nitrian Bohairic’, see Müller, *Grammatik des Bohairischen* 687-698; van der Vliet, “History through Inscriptions”; Grossman, “Worknotes”; on the Nitriot majuscule style, see Buzi et al., “Vat. Copt. 57” 166; Boud’hors, “Pentateuque copte–arabe” 65; Boud’hors, “L’onciale penchée” 120.

<sup>6</sup> Hebbelynck and van Lantschoot, *Codices Coptici Vaticani* 387.

<sup>7</sup> Simon, “Homélie copte inédite (a)” 222.

<sup>8</sup> <https://atlas.paths-erc.eu/manuscripts/75>

<sup>9</sup> Evelyn-White, *The Monasteries of the Wadi El Natrûn, Part I: New Coptic Texts from the Monastery of Saint Macarius* xxiv; for a discussion of the raid and the date proposed by Evelyn-White, see Evelyn-White, *The Monasteries of the Wadi ‘N Natrun, Part II* 297-98.

Like many other manuscripts in the Vatican collection, MACA.AF most likely had a liturgical function at some point in its history. A note appears at the top of page 1 (f. 24r), which reads “Day 12 of Mekhir, in (the church of?) Abba Benofer (Onuphrius)” (ϢΟΥΙΒ ΜΜΕΧΙΡ ΗΕΝΑΒΒΑ ΒΕΝΟΦΕΡ). The text was therefore intended to be read for that month’s feast for Michael.<sup>10</sup> If the phrase ΗΕΝΑΒΒΑ ΒΕΝΟΦΕΡ is understood correctly, this suggests that the feast would have been carried out in a church dedicated to Saint Onuphrius. Although no church with this name is known in the modern monastery, a reference to a “Church of Saint Onuphrius” appears in the *History of the Patriarchs*, and as such, the church was in use at least in 1007 CE.<sup>11</sup> A similar liturgical note, appearing on page 1 of MACA.BG (= Vat. Copt. 61 ff. 82-116), reads “Day 12 of Mesore in (the church of?) Abba Benofer” (ϢΟΥΙΒ ΜΜΕΣΩΡΗ ΗΕΝΑΒΒΑ ΒΕΝΟΦΕΡ). The manuscript contains a version of Ps.-Peter of Alexandria’s *On Riches/On Michael* (CPC 311), suggesting the church of Abba Benofer may have been associated with feasts in honour of Michael.

Several significant emendations were made to *On Michael A* in antiquity. The first three lines have been removed on page 8 (f. 27v), and have been added to the end of page 6 (f. 26v).<sup>12</sup> This erasure is accompanied by the word ϘΩΦΤ “error” in the left margin and χακ “pause” in the right margin, and the word ωϘ “read” is written next to the following paragraph. Furthermore, on page 7 (f. 27r), the name ‘Gideon’, erroneously described as the father of Samson, has been corrected to ‘Manoah’. However, the erased section on the vision of Constantine, together with the accompanying marginal notes, remains the most significant amendment to the text.

## 2. The erasure and marginal notes

The account of the vision appears within a list of dated appearances of the archangel Michael upon the earth. The entire 11<sup>th</sup> appearance has

<sup>10</sup> A commemoration to Michael is held on the 12<sup>th</sup> day of every month, as is also explained in the text (page 10).

<sup>11</sup> Evelyn-White, *The Monasteries of the Wadi 'N Natrun, Part III* 37, 46 According to Evelyn-White, it was most likely ‘no more than a side chapel or appendage to the main church’ (37).

<sup>12</sup> The passage reads ἀφρη οριερατγ ηεν[τφε ν]ογλογνογ [ερο]τε νι[ε]ζ[σογ] νι[ε]τρομπι τηρς “The sun was in the sky for an hour more than the days of the entire year”. Originally, this statement was associated with the fourth appearance of Michael on earth, which ends page 7 (f. 27r), however it has been changed to coincide with the second appearance of Michael, which ends page 6.

been removed, while the 10<sup>th</sup> appearance, in which he revealed himself to Cornelius the centurion, and the 12<sup>th</sup> appearance, in which he destroys Boh, the idol of Alexandria, remain intact. The erased text is still somewhat visible, and was included in Jean Simon’s French edition of the text, published in the 1930s.<sup>13</sup> The following is a semi-diplomatic edition and English translation of the passage, based on an infrared image obtained from the Vatican Library.

5. [[ΠΙΜΑΖ ἰ̅ ἡ̅ ϛ̅[ΟΠ] ΕΤΑ[ΜΙΧ]ΑΗΛ ΠΙΔΡ-  
 ΧΗΑΓΓΕΛΟΣ ἰ̅ ΕΠΕΣΗΤ ΖΙΧΕΝ-  
 ΠΚΑΖΙ ΠΕΣΟΥἸ ΜΠΙΔΒΟΥΤ ΦΑ-  
 ΜΕΝΩΘ ΑΦΟΥΟΝΖΦ ΕΚΩΣ-  
 ΤΑΝΤΙΝΟΣ ΠΙΟΥΡΟ ΝΟΜΗΙ  
 ΑΦΤ ΝΑΦ ΜΠΙΒΡΟ ΕΧΕΝΝΙΠΕΡ-  
 10. ΣΗΣ ΖΙΤΕΝΠΙΜΗΝΙ ΝΟΥΧΑΙ  
 ΝΤΕΠΙΣΤΑΥΡΟΣ ΕΘΟΥ-  
 ΑΒ ΕΤΑΦΝΑΥ Ε-  
 ΡΟΥ]]

“The 11<sup>th</sup> time that Michael the Archangel came down upon the earth, day 10 of the month of Phamenoth (Paremhat), he revealed himself to Constantine the true king, and he gave him the victory over the Persians through the salvific sign of the holy cross which he (i.e. Constantine) saw.”

Two columns of marginal notes appear to the left of this passage. The outermost column reads ΕΥΜΕΝΙΟΣ ΕΤΟΙ ΝΨΟΡΠ ΕΚΩΣΤΑΝΤΙΝΟΣ ΧΑΚΩΣΤΑΝΤΙΝΟΣ ΕΒΟΛ, which Simon interprets as one phrase: “Eumenios précédant Constantin, laisse Constantin de côté” (Eumenius preceding Constantine, leave Constantine aside).<sup>14</sup> However, this interpretation is in need of reassessment. In the first place, the translation of ΕΥΜΕΝΙΟΣ ΕΤΟΙ ΝΨΟΡΠ ΕΚΩΣΤΑΝΤΙΝΟΣ should be amended. As Matthias Müller has noted, the construction NN + relative present/future in Bohairic can be interpreted as a cleft sentence in which the copula is omitted — for example ΒΕΛΖΕΒΟΥΛ ΕΘΝΕΜΑΦ “It is Beelzebub who is with him” (Mark 3:22).<sup>15</sup> As such, the outer column of notes contains two main clauses: a cleft sentence — “(It is) Eumenius who is before Constantine” — and an imperative (as Simon also interpreted it) — “Omit

<sup>13</sup> For the edition of the Coptic text, see Simon, “Homélie copte inédite (a)”; for the French translation, see Simon, “Homélie copte inédite (b)”.

<sup>14</sup> Simon, “Homélie copte inédite (b)” 227 n. 5.

<sup>15</sup> Müller, *Grammatik des Bohairischen* 326.

Constantine”. The innermost column reads  $\chi\alpha\phi\alpha\iota\ \epsilon\beta\omicron\lambda\ \mu\pi\epsilon\rho\omega\gamma\ \epsilon\tau\epsilon\iota\bar{\alpha}\ \eta\epsilon[\gamma]\mu\epsilon\theta\eta\nu\omicron\gamma\chi\ \tau[\epsilon]\ \omega\psi\ \mu\pi\iota\mu\alpha\zeta\bar{\iota}\bar{\nu}\ \eta\sigma\omicron\pi\ \epsilon\tau\epsilon\sigma\omicron\gamma\bar{\iota}\bar{\nu}\ \eta\alpha\theta[\omega\rho]\ \pi\epsilon$  “Omit this. Do not read it, namely (instance) 11. It was false. Read the 12<sup>th</sup> instance which is day 12 of Hathor”. The word  $\omega\psi$  “read” also appears in the left margin next to the first line of the 12<sup>th</sup> appearance of Michael.

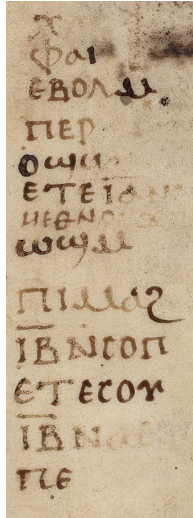


Fig. 2. Note 1 — Vat. Copt. 58 f. 28v  
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These marginal notes can arguably be divided into three units. The innermost column (fig. 2, hereafter ‘Note 1’) was most likely the first to be written, since it is closest to the main text. The interpretation of the outer text is less straightforward. There is some palaeographical evidence to suggest that these two sentences were written at different times, and should therefore be classed as two separate notes:  $\epsilon\gamma\mu\epsilon\eta\iota\omicron\varsigma\ \epsilon\tau\omicron\iota\ \eta\psi\omicron\rho\pi\ \epsilon\kappa\omega\sigma\tau\alpha\eta\tau\iota\eta\omicron\varsigma$  (Note 2) and  $\chi\alpha\kappa\omega\sigma\tau\alpha\eta\tau\iota\eta\omicron\varsigma\ \epsilon\beta\omicron\lambda$  (Note 3). Most noticeably, the ink of the final two syllables of the first  $\kappa\omega\sigma\tau\alpha\eta\tau\iota\eta\omicron\varsigma$  (line 8) are heavy, as though the pen had just been re-dipped, while  $\chi\alpha\kappa\omega\sigma\tau\alpha\eta\tau\iota\eta\omicron\varsigma\ \epsilon\beta\omicron\lambda$  which immediately follows (lines 9-12) is written in a much lighter ink, as though added later (see fig. 3). Note 3 begins noticeably further to the left of Note 2, although neither margin is straight. Finally, the text of Note 2 consistently slants to the right, while that of Note 3 is more upright, suggesting that the manuscript was at different angles when these two notes were written.

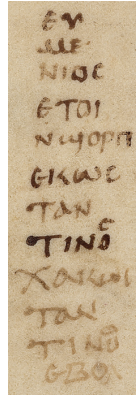


Fig. 3. Notes 1 and 2 — Vat. Copt. 58 f. 28v  
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Furthermore, the palaeography of Note 2 and 3, and indeed Note 1, contain slight differences which could point to the presence of different scribes. The name Constantine appears in both Note 2 and 3, and can therefore be used as a point of comparison (fig. 4). In Note 2, there are no ligatures, and the oblique stroke of the alpha extends a bit further above the loop. Conversely, in Note 3, the tau, alpha, and nu are ligatured, although there is enough space to execute them in the same manner as Note 2, and the curved stroke of the alpha meets the oblique stroke at the top. The alphas in Note 1 are more rounded than those in Notes 2 and 3. The first curve of the omega in Note 1 is written with two separate strokes, while those in Notes 2 and 3 (while smaller) appear to be written in a single movement. A similar pattern of formation can be seen in the formation of shai in Notes 1 (two curves in two strokes) and 2 (two curves in one stroke). Finally, the betas of Note 1 consist of three strokes: a vertical stroke and two closed curves, in which the top curve is distinctly narrower than the bottom. On the other hand, the beta in Note 3 appears to be formed in two movements: a vertical stroke and two curves executed in one movement which are not attached to the vertical at the place in which the two curves meet. These letterforms are compared in Table 1.



Fig. 4. The palaeography of the name Constantine in Note 2 (left) and Note 3 (right)  
 — Vat. Copt. 58 f. 28v © Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Città del Vaticano











	Note 1	Note 2	Note 3
α			
Β		-	
ω			
ϣ			-

Table 1: Comparison of letterforms in Notes 1-3 — from Vat. Copt. 58 f. 28v  
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Since there is little text to work with, it is difficult to identify conclusively whether these three notes were written by multiple hands. The differences in handwriting could be the result of the speed and care with which these notes were written (since Note 1 in general is written with much more uniformity and neatness than Note 3), the quality of the particular tool used in each instance, or simply variation in an individual hand writing at three different points in time. However, based on the palaeographical evidence outlined above, the presence of at least two (possibly three) different writers is likely — one for Note 3, and one (or two) for Notes 1 and 2. Furthermore, due to the differences in style between marginal notes and the literary text itself, it is difficult to determine whether any of the notes were written by the main scribe of the manuscript.

The three marginal notes can therefore be summarised as follows:

	<b>Note 1 = Hand 1</b>	<b>Note 2 = Hand 2</b>	<b>Note 3 = Hand 3 (?)</b>
	χα-	εγ-	χακωσ-
	φαι εβολ μ-	με-	ταν-
	περ-	νιος	τινος
	οψφ	ετοι	εβολ
5.	ετε-	νψορπ	



- |     |              |       |
|-----|--------------|-------|
|     | Γ̄Α Ν̄Ο[Υ]-  | ΕΚΩC- |
|     | ΜΕΘΝΟΥϠ [ΠΕ] | ΤΑΝ-  |
|     | ΩΨ Μ-        | ΤΙΝΟC |
|     | ΠΙΜΑΖ-       |       |
| 10. | Γ̄Β Ν̄CΟΠ    |       |
|     | ΕΤΕCΟΥ-      |       |
|     | Γ̄Β ΝΑΘ[ΩΡ]  |       |
|     | ΠΕ           |       |

Note 1: “Omit this. Do not read it, namely (instance) 11. It was false. Read the 12<sup>th</sup> instance which is day 12 of Hathor.”

Note 2: “(It is) Eumenius who is before Constantine.”

Note 3: “Omit Constantine.”

The notes, their significance, and the erasure itself, have received little attention within scholarship. In his edition of the text, Simon remarks that the passage has been erased, and includes a transcription and translation of the marginal notes.<sup>16</sup> However, he does not discuss the meaning behind the marginal notes, nor the significance of the erasure. Similarly, Hebbelynck and van Lantschoot note the erasure and present a Latin translation of the marginal notes, but do not provide any further remarks on its meaning.<sup>17</sup> In some cases, the erasure and the notes have not been discussed at all. In C. D. G. Müller’s discussion of the text, he makes no mention of either the marginal notes nor of the fact that the passage in question is erased, despite a footnote mentioning the absence of Michael in other Coptic accounts of the vision.<sup>18</sup> Likewise, Pearson and Vivian’s summary of the appearances of Michael in *On Michael A*, which they compare to accounts of Michael in Ps.-Peter of Alexandria’s *On Riches*, mentions neither the notes nor the erasure of the passage.<sup>19</sup> These two sources therefore present the account of Michael’s appearance to Constantine as though it had not been erased at all.

The absence of discussions surrounding the erasure and notes in *On Michael A* most likely stems from the focus of existing scholarship on the original version of texts and their authorship. Conversely, under the lens of Material (or “New”) Philology, with its emphasis on variation, manuscript culture, and interactions between reader, scribe, and manuscript, it is possible to use these emendations to develop a greater understanding

<sup>16</sup> Simon, “Homélie copte inédite (a)” 233 n. 1; Simon, “Homélie copte inédite (b)” 227 n. 5.

<sup>17</sup> Hebbelynck and van Lantschoot, *Codices Coptici Vaticani* 388.

<sup>18</sup> Müller, *Die Engellehre* 171 and n. 980. On the absence of Michael in Coptic narratives of the vision, see below.

<sup>19</sup> Pearson and Vivian, *Two Coptic Homilies* 23 and n. 41.

of MACA.AF as a living, fluid artefact.<sup>20</sup> As Lied and Lundhaug discuss, traditional philological studies often present the idea that a text is, at some point, finished.<sup>21</sup> However, the later omission or addition of passages to a text, as well as the incorporation of earlier editorial notes into new manuscript copies, is common in antiquity, as witnessed by the numerous examples attested within Coptic literature of variation between different versions of a single work.<sup>22</sup> Through the following analysis of the marginal notes in *On Michael A*, it is possible to view the text as the product of multiple authors engaged in copying and correction, and to understand the motivations behind the editorial decisions they made.

### 3. “(It is) Eumenius who is before Constantine”

The relationship between Note 2 (“It is Eumenius who is before Constantine”) and the erased passage is perhaps the most straightforward of the three marginal notes. The name ‘Eumenius’ in this context refers to the 7<sup>th</sup> patriarch of Alexandria (also written as ‘Eumenes’) who is mentioned in the 12<sup>th</sup> appearance of Michael which follows the erasure. The text states that during this appearance, the archangel “crushed Boh the idol in the city of Alexandria and in all of Egypt” (ⲁⲓⲃⲟⲙⲉⲙ ⲛⲃⲟⲗ ⲡⲓⲓⲃⲱⲗⲟⲛ ⲃⲈⲚⲚⲠⲟⲗⲓⲥ ⲠⲀⲔⲟⲦ ⲛⲈⲙⲃⲈⲚⲬⲬⲘⲓ ⲚⲘⲠⲠⲟ) (28v). The author then states that “it was in the presence of Abba Eumenius, the archbishop of Alexandria, that this marvel appeared” (ⲛⲁⲗⲠⲠⲁ ⲃⲈ ⲛⲁⲃⲃⲁ ⲈⲮⲘⲈⲛⲒⲐⲟⲥ ⲡⲓⲀⲠⲬⲬⲈⲠⲓⲔⲔⲐⲔⲟⲥ ⲛⲚⲈⲠⲠⲟⲦ ⲈⲚⲚⲀⲚⲟⲩⲠⲘⲠⲓ ⲟⲘⲱⲛⲗ Ⲉⲃⲟⲗ) (28v). However, Eumenius was patriarch during the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century, more than a century before Constantine was born.<sup>23</sup> As such, there is a chronological error in the text regarding the order of the appearances of Michael, identified by the scribe of Note 2.

It is possible that this reason alone was sufficient for erasing the text. Indeed, it is the only error which is explicitly mentioned in the marginal

<sup>20</sup> On Material Philology and its use in manuscript studies, see Lundhaug and Lied, “Studying Snapshots” 3-12; Eriksen, “New Philology/Manuscript Studies”; Nichols, “Dynamic Reading of Medieval Manuscripts”; Nichols, “Why Material Philology?”; Nichols, “Introduction: Philology in a Manuscript Culture”.

<sup>21</sup> Lundhaug and Lied, “Studying Snapshots” 9.

<sup>22</sup> See for example Lundhaug, “An Illusion of Textual Stability” 23-46; Jenott, “Reading Variants” 64-77; Lundhaug, “The Investiture of the Archangel Michael”.

<sup>23</sup> The exact dates for which Eumenius was in office are unknown, however Eusebius’ *History of the Church* places his succession ‘a year and some months’ after the succession of the patriarch Justus (*History of the Church*, 4:5), who took office in the ‘third year of Hadrian’s reign’ (*History of the Church*, 4:4): see also Davis, *The Early Coptic Papacy* 15, 133.

notes. However, a complete erasure of the passage solely on this basis seems somewhat unnecessary. Instead, the commenter or scribe could easily have made a note indicating that the order of these two passages should be reversed. Alternatively, the erased passage could have been reinserted in the correct position. Such a technique was used for the first three lines on page 8 which were erased and moved to page 6.<sup>24</sup> It is therefore possible that other factors may have also played a role in the decision to completely erase the 11<sup>th</sup> appearance of Michael. In order to investigate this, it is necessary to compare the account of the vision of Constantine in *On Michael A* with those found in both Egyptian and non-Egyptian sources.

#### 4. The vision of Constantine in non-Egyptian sources

Constantine’s vision of the cross is known primarily from two sources outside of Egypt. The first is the 4<sup>th</sup> century Greek work *Βίος Μεγάλου Κωνσταντίνου* (*Life of Constantine the Great*) by Eusebius of Caesarea.<sup>25</sup> Eusebius’ account of the vision of Constantine (I, 28-32) is as follows:<sup>26</sup> While on campaign with his soldiers, Constantine invokes a prayer to the God of his father (I, 28.1). At the time of the midday sun, he saw in the sky a “cross-shaped trophy formed from light” (σταυροῦ τρόπαιον ἐκ φωτὸς συνιστάμενον), accompanied by the words “by this, conquer” (τούτῳ νίκα) (I, 28.2). During the night following this vision, Christ appeared to him in a dream, urging him to make a copy of the cross to use as protection against his enemies (I, 29). The remainder of the passage recounts the construction of a standard bearing the sign of the cross (I, 30-31), before returning to the moment of the vision and the identification of the sign as belonging to Christ by “those expert in their words” (τοὺς τῶν αὐτοῦ λόγων μύστας) (I, 32).

The second main ancient source for the vision of Constantine is Lactantius’ 4<sup>th</sup> century Latin work *De mortibus persecutorum* (*On the Deaths of the Persecutors*). In this account, the cross appears to Constantine not as a vision, but in a dream. During the civil war with the Roman Emperor

<sup>24</sup> It should be noted, however, that this passage is much shorter than that narrating the vision of Constantine, and, due to location of the correct position, could be reinserted into the bottom margin.

<sup>25</sup> On the history of scholarship surrounding the authenticity of Eusebius’ authorship of the work, see Winkelmann, “Zur Geschichte des Authentizitätsproblems”.

<sup>26</sup> Edition: Winkelmann and Bešliev, *Eusebius Werke: 1:1*. 29-32.

Maxentius, on the eve of the battle of Milvian Bridge, Constantine was directed in a dream (although it is not mentioned by whom) to place a “heavenly sign” (caeleste signum) on the shields of his soldiers (44, 5).<sup>27</sup> The sign in question, that is the christogram, is described as “a transverse letter X, the top of the head being bent around” (transversa X littera, summo capite circumflexo) (44, 5).<sup>28</sup> The text then continues, describing the battle, in which the armies of Constantine are victorious. Unlike the account of Eusebius, there is no mention of the symbolism of the cross being explained to Constantine. Furthermore, although it is commonly believed that, like Lactantius, Eusebius locates the vision during the battle of Milvian Bridge, Cameron and Hall note that this is not the case.<sup>29</sup> Rather, the vision is said to have occurred “while he (Constantine) was on campaign somewhere” (στειλλομένῳ ποι πορείαν) (I, 28.2).<sup>30</sup> The association by both ancient writers and modern historians between the vision and the battle of Milvian Bridge appears to be a result of harmonisation of the different accounts by Eusebius and Lactantius.<sup>31</sup>

As the above discussion demonstrates, the non-Egyptian accounts of Constantine’s vision differ greatly from the erased passage in *On Michael A*. In both Eusebius and Lactantius’ accounts, the vision is not associated with a battle against the Persians, nor is it attributed to the archangel Michael. These differences between *On Michael A* and the non-Coptic accounts are perhaps unsurprising, given the different socio-cultural contexts in which they were produced. However, the question remains as to whether this was sufficient reason for the author of Note 1 to identify the erased section as “false”. In order to better assess this possibility, it is necessary to examine *On Michael A* in light of accounts of the vision found in other Egyptian sources.

### 5. The vision of Constantine in Egyptian sources

Very few Egyptian sources relate events in the life of Constantine. As noted by Wilfong, whose study of Constantine in Coptic literature is the most extensive to date, the emperor plays only a minimal role in historical texts, and is utilised as a historical figure rather than a main protagonist in literary works.<sup>32</sup> In particular, he is identified primarily in the Coptic

<sup>27</sup> Edition: Städele, *De mortibus persecutorum* 202.

<sup>28</sup> Edition: Städele, *De mortibus persecutorum* 202.

<sup>29</sup> Cameron and Hall, *Life of Constantine* 206.

<sup>30</sup> Edition: Winkelmann and Bešliev, *Eusebius Werke: 1:1*. 30.

<sup>31</sup> Cameron and Hall, *Life of Constantine* 204.

<sup>32</sup> Wilfong, “Constantine in Coptic” 177.

tradition as a military victor over the Persians, which Wilfong argues is a reflection of the anxieties of the population regarding the Sassanian Empire.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, Constantine’s vision of the cross is recounted in several Egyptian works (primarily in Coptic) beyond *On Michael A*.

The most widely attested work in which the vision of Constantine appears is Ps.-Cyril of Jerusalem’s *Discourse on the Cross* (CPC 120, CPG 3602). According to the PATHs database, this work is attested in six Coptic manuscripts, as presented in Table 2.<sup>34</sup>

APOCRYPHA ID <sup>35</sup>		Place of discovery	Dialect	Date	Dating criteria
text	manuscript				
133	96 (= MERC.AE)	Monastery of Mercurius, Hagr Edfu	B	1053	colophon
134	97 (= MICH.AO)	Monastery of the Archangel Michael, Phantouu	S	854-855	colophon
135	98 (= MICH.AP)	Monastery of the Archangel Michael, Phantouu	S	905-906	colophon
115	80 (= MONB.GD)	White Monastery, Atripe	S	900-1050	related manuscripts
137	99 (= CML 1688)	unknown		unknown	n/a
138	100 (= CML 6430)	Monastery of Qasr el-Wizz	S	unknown	n/a

Table 2: Text versions of Ps-Cyril of Jerusalem’s *Discourse on the Cross*

Of these versions, the passage containing the account of the vision of Constantine is only preserved in texts 133, 134, and 135. All three copies are post-conquest, dated securely by colophon, and they all belong to different centuries — 11<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, and 10<sup>th</sup>, respectively.

While there is some variation in phrasing, vocabulary, and morphology, the account of the vision in all three texts remain the same. Constantine is engaged in a war with the Persians at Kallamakh. The Persians have

<sup>33</sup> Wilfong, “Constantine in Coptic” 177.

<sup>34</sup> <https://atlas.paths-erc.eu/works/120>

<sup>35</sup> The APOCRYPHA text and manuscript IDs refer to the as yet unpublished database of the APOCRYPHA project (<https://www.tf.uio.no/english/research/projects/apocrypha/about-the-project.html>).

recruited seven other nations (ΖΕΘΝΟΣ) to join them in the battle. Discouraged, Constantine sends a message to the Persians, saying that if the Roman army is not strong enough to fight them, they will surrender. That night, however, unable to sleep, he sees a vision among the stars of a cross of light with words written in ‘Roman’ letters (Ν̄CΖΑΙ CΗΖ ΕΡΟQ Ν̄ΖΡΩΜΑΕΙΚΩΝ), saying: “Through this sign, you shall conquer those who fight against you: and seek the God of your fathers and you will find him” (ΖΙΤ̄Ν̄ΠΙΜΑΕΙΝ ΠΑΙ Κ̄ΝΑΧΡΟ ΕΝΕΤ̄ Ν̄ΜΜΑΚ: ΑΥΩ ΨΙΝΕ Ν̄CΑΠΝΟΥΤΕ Ν̄ΚΕΙΟΤΕ ΑΥΩ Κ̄ΝΑΖΕ ΕΡΟQ) (MERC.AE = BL.OR.06799 26r).<sup>36</sup> The text then continues with Constantine questioning his priests the following morning about the sign, until one soldier, Eusignius, identifies the cross as the symbol of Christ. Constantine and his army then proceed to defeat the Persians in battle.

The vision of Constantine also appears in another named Coptic work — the *Passion of Eusignius* (CPC 506) which discusses the life and martyrdom of the soldier Eusignius (the same soldier who appears in the *Discourse on the Cross*). According to PATHs, two copies of this work are attested in Coptic, both originating from the White Monastery: MONB.IY (= CML 446) dated to the 10<sup>th</sup> century and CML 1262, whose identification is less certain.<sup>37</sup> An edition of MONB.IY was published by Coquin and Lucchesi in 1982.<sup>38</sup> The *Passion of Eusignius* is also attested in Greek in several manuscript copies.<sup>39</sup>

This work is unique in that it records two instances in which Constantine receives a vision of the cross before battle, both of which are recorded only in MONB.IY. The first (paragraph 9, according to the edition of Coquin and Lucchesi), occurs during a battle against the Byzantines (Ν̄ΒΥCΑΝΤΙΟΝ/οἱ βυζάντιοι). Having suffered great losses in two advances against the Byzantine army, Constantine looks to the sky and sees in a star the words “Constantine, know the god who saves you, and be victorious in battle” (ΚΟCΤΑΝΤ̄ΝΟC CΟΥΝΠΝΟΥΤΕ ΕΤΝΟΥΖΜ ΜΜΟΚ ΝΓΧΡΟ ΖΜΠΠΟΛΥΜΟC) (MONB.IY = IFAO Copte 96r).<sup>40</sup> A second sign then appears to him, in which he sees in another star a cross inscribed

<sup>36</sup> Edition: Budge, *Miscellaneous Coptic texts* 212.

<sup>37</sup> See <https://atlas.paths-erc.eu/manuscripts/1262> for an updated discussion of the codicology.

<sup>38</sup> Coquin and Lucchesi, “Une version copte”. In this edition, the leaf labelled Inst. Fr. Caire, Copte 21 ff. 1-5 corresponds to PATHs/CMCL’s IFAO Copte 96 + 92-95. For the codicological structure of this manuscript, see Coquin and Lucchesi, 189.

<sup>39</sup> On the Greek versions of The Passion of Eusignius, see Winkelmann, “Die Überlieferung”.

<sup>40</sup> Edition: Coquin and Lucchesi, “Une version copte” 195.

with the words “Through this, you will be victorious in the battle” (ΖΜΠΑΙ ΕΚΝΑΧΡΟ ΖΜΠΠΟΛΥΜΟΣ) (MONB.IY = IFAO Copte 96r).<sup>41</sup> Constantine fashions a cross using his spear, and bearing it into battle, he is victorious.

The second vision in the *Passion of Saint Eusignius* (paragraphs 11a-b) is more similar to that narrated in the *Discourse on the Cross*. The vision is situated within a campaign against the Persians, referred to in the text as both ΠΕΡΣΟΣ/Πέρσαι ‘Persians’ and ΒΑΡΒΑΡΟΣ/βάρβαροι ‘Barbarians’. The narrative states that, in the month of January in the 7<sup>th</sup> year of his reign, a host of Persians gathered at the Danube (ΤΑΝΟΥΒΙΣ/Δανούβιος). Being troubled at the sight of the opposing army, Constantine sees the sign of the cross accompanied by the words “You will be victorious through this — therefore seek firmly to which god this sign belongs” (ΕΚΝΑΧΡΟ ΖΜΠΑΙ ΩΙΝΕ ΟΥΝ ΖΝΟΥΩΡΧ ΧΕΠΑΝΙΜ ΝΝΟΥΤΕ ΠΕ ΠΕΙΜΑΕΙΝ) (MONB.IY = IFAO Copte 93r).<sup>42</sup> He has the sign of the cross made for him and brought into battle, in which his army is victorious. He consults his priests who say that the sign does not come from any of the gods they worship. The king is then approached by the ‘Nazarenes’ (ΜΜΙΖΕΡΑΙΟΣ/οἱ Ναζωραῖοι), who inform him that the sign represents Jesus Christ.

Two further short Coptic texts also recount the vision of Constantine. The first is a single paper leaf held in National University Library of Strasbourg, published by Spiegelberg in 1901.<sup>43</sup> Spiegelberg does not record the inventory number of the leaf, and as yet it has not been rediscovered among the collection. Little is known about its origins, having been purchased in Cairo in 1899,<sup>44</sup> and as such the provenience and date of the leaf is unknown. The text was republished in 1911 by Junker, who describes the text as a “poetic song” whose refrain is “Look to the sky, Constantine, the great king” (ΘΩΩΤ ΕΖΡΑΙ ΕΤΠΕ ΚΩΣΤΑΝΤΙΝΟΣ ΠΝΟΘ ΕΝΡΡΟ).<sup>45</sup>

The beginning of the text is lost, and the account deals primarily with Eusignius’ explanation of the sign. At the beginning of the fragment, Constantine sees “some shining stars taking the form of the [cross]” (ΖΕΝΣΙΟΥ ΕΥΡΟΥΘΕΙΝ ΕΥΧΙ ΜΠΤΗΠΟΣ ΜΠΕΣ[ΤΑΥΡΟΣ]).<sup>46</sup> Eusignius then comes forth to tell Constantine that the sign “is not that of the gods of

<sup>41</sup> Edition: Coquin and Lucchesi, “Une version copte” 195.

<sup>42</sup> Edition: Coquin and Lucchesi, “Une version copte” 197.

<sup>43</sup> Spiegelberg, “Koptische Kreuzlegenden”.

<sup>44</sup> Spiegelberg, “Koptische Kreuzlegenden” 206.

<sup>45</sup> Junker, *Koptische Poesie* 176-181; see also Wilfong, “Constantine in Coptic” 182.

<sup>46</sup> Edition: Spiegelberg, “Koptische Kreuzlegenden” 207.

Diocletian, but rather that of my lord Jesus Christ” (ΜΠΑΝΝΟΥΤΕ ΔΗ ΠΕ ΝΔΙΟΚΛΗ̄ ΑΛΛΑ ΠΑΠΑΟΣ̄ ῙΣ ΠΕΧ̄Σ ΠΕ).<sup>47</sup> The text then recounts the fashioning of the sign of the cross, after which the manuscript becomes difficult to read.

The second short text, titled *Concerning the Holy Cross* (ΕΤΒΕΠΕΣΨΟΣ ΕΤΟΥΔΑΒ), is found in a single leaf acquired by the Egyptian Museum of Cairo in February 1917, published in 1918 by Munier.<sup>48</sup> Munier states that the leaf originates from Tebtunis (Umm el-Bouriqat) in the Fayum.<sup>49</sup> As with the earlier fragment published by Spiegelberg, Munier does not provide any inventory number for this text. According to Munier, the Cairo text is “without a doubt” a continuation of the Strasbourg fragment published by Spiegelberg, since they share the same system of punctuation and ornamentation, the same subject matter, and some similarities in palaeography.<sup>50</sup> However, without the ability to consult the original manuscripts, this assumption cannot be verified. In terms of subject matter, Wilfong argues that the parallels which Munier draws between the Cairo and Strasbourg texts are “not particularly close”.<sup>51</sup>

In the Cairo text’s account of the vision, Constantine states that he saw a sign in the sky, a great grace surrounding [it] (ΕΡΕΟΥΝΟΣ ΝΧΑΡΙΣ ΚΩΤ[Ε ΕΡΟQ]). Written above the sign were the words (mostly reconstructed by Munier) “By this s[ign] you [will rule over your enemies, Constan]tine, the god-loving king” (ΖΜΠΙΜ[ΑΕΙΝ Π]ΑΙ ΚΝΑΡΧ[ΟΕΙΣ ΕΝΕΚΧΑΧΕ ΚΩΣΤΑΝ]ΤΗΝΟΣ ΠΡΡΟ ΜΜΑΙΝΟΥΤΕ).<sup>52</sup> He then goes on to ask Eusignius the meaning of this sign. The context in which this vision takes place is not specifically stated. However, Eusignius says to Constantine that the sign of the cross which he used as a standard “gave you victory, [oh Constan]tine, it defeated the barbarians, it ruled over its enem[ies and] every man who fights with you” (ΑQ† ΠΕΚΡΟ Ν[ΑΚ· Ω ΚΩΣΤΑΝ]ΤΗΝΟΣ· ΑQΩΠΤ̄ ΕΝΕΒΑΡΒΑΡΟΣ· ΑQΡ̄ΧΟΕΙΣ ΕΝΕQΧΑ[ΧΕ ΜΝ̄Ν]ΡΩΜΕ Ν̄Μ ΕΤ̄Μ̄ΩΕ Ν̄ΜΑΚ·). It is unlikely that this could be anything other than a reference to the Persians, which is strengthened by the fact that the term ΒΑΡΒΑΡΟΣ is used interchangeably with ΠΕΡCOC in the *Passion of Eusignius*.

<sup>47</sup> Edition: Spiegelberg, “Koptische Kreuzlegenden” 207.

<sup>48</sup> Munier, “Un éloge copte”.

<sup>49</sup> Munier, “Un éloge copte” 65.

<sup>50</sup> Munier, “Un éloge copte” 65.

<sup>51</sup> Wilfong, “Constantine in Coptic” 182.

<sup>52</sup> Munier, “Un éloge copte” 67.



One final work — John of Nikiou’s *Chronicle*<sup>53</sup> — bears witness to the vision of Constantine, although its inclusion in this list is somewhat tentative. The work is not believed to be pseudepigraphical, but rather is thought to have been composed by John himself during the late 7<sup>th</sup> century (the latest entry being for the year 700).<sup>54</sup> To date, the work survives only in five Ethiopic manuscripts from the 17<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and two Amharic translations made in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>55</sup> The Ethiopic versions are considered to be translations of one or more earlier Arabic works, although no such Arabic manuscripts have been discovered.<sup>56</sup> However, there is some debate as to whether the original language of composition was Coptic or Greek. It is beyond the scope of the present discussion to delve into these arguments.<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, while the work represents an Egyptian tradition, no textual copies survive which are contemporary to *On Michael A*, and it is difficult to determine how much the work may have changed between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Unlike the other Egyptian sources cited, the *Chronicle* is not a homily or martyrdom, but rather a historiographical work. The account of the vision which it contains is almost identical to that found in Lactantius’ *De mortibus persecutorum*. According to John of Nikiou, on the eve of the battle of Milvian Bridge, Constantine sees in a dream “a vision in a form of the Holy Cross in the sky” with the inscription: “By this sign of the Cross you shall conquer him” (*Chronicle* 77.52).<sup>58</sup> Awakening from the dream, he goes into battle and conquers the opposing army (*Chronicle* 77.53). Furthermore, as with the account of Lactantius, the symbolism of the cross is not explained to Constantine within the narrative. Rather, upon relating his vision to the court in Rome, the people say: “The God of the Christians is great, who saved us and our city from the hands of these impious” (*Chronicle* 77.59).<sup>59</sup>

<sup>53</sup> For English translations of the work, see Elagina, “The Textual Tradition”; Charles, *The Chronicle of John*.

<sup>54</sup> Brown and Elagina, “A New Witness” 121; Fraser, “John of Nikiou” 1367.

<sup>55</sup> For the most recent list of attested versions, see Brown and Elagina, “A New Witness” 121.

<sup>56</sup> Brown and Elagina, “A New Witness” 125; Wilfong, “Constantine in Coptic” 178.

<sup>57</sup> For a summary of the debate around the original language of the Chronicle, see Brown and Elagina, “A New Witness” 123-125.

<sup>58</sup> Edition Elagina, “The Textual Tradition” 99; see also Charles, *The Chronicle of John* 63.

<sup>59</sup> Edition Elagina, “The Textual Tradition” 101; see also Charles, *The Chronicle of John* 64.

With the exception of the account in John of Nikiou's *Chronicle*, the works cited above share several features regarding their accounts of Constantine's vision. Most importantly, all four works attested in Coptic contextualise the vision within a campaign by Constantine against the Persians (aside from the first of the two visions presented in the *Passion of Saint Eusignius*). In this regard, the account in *On Michael A* is consistent with the existing Egyptian tradition regarding the vision, which itself is markedly different from non-Egyptian traditions. Furthermore, the explanation of the cross and its association with Christ is given by the soldier Eusignius in all texts save for the *Passion of Saint Eusignius*, in which he is the narrator, and in which the explanation is attributed to the Nazarenes, and *On Michael A*, which does not go into great detail about the event. As such, even with the vastly different account in John of Nikiou's *Chronicle* (which may be influenced by the fact it is historiographical rather than homiletic), a distinct Egyptian tradition regarding the vision of Constantine is visible.

However, all the aforementioned accounts differ from *On Michael A* in that the vision is not attributed to the archangel Michael. In fact, as in the non-Egyptian traditions, the vision is not directly attributed to any external agent, although it is implicitly attributed to God. As such, in addition to the chronological error related to the ordering of Eumenius and Constantine, the account of the vision in *On Michael A* may also have been deemed 'false' because of its attribution to the archangel. It is likely that the main reason for which the passage was deemed erroneous was the chronological error, since it is explicitly pointed to in the marginal notes. As such, the additional problem of the absence of Michael in other accounts of the vision may have led to the decision to remove the passage entirely, rather than to simply reorder the appearances.

## 6. Michael and Constantine

One final question regarding the erased passage in *On Michael A* remains: namely, why was Michael associated with the vision of Constantine to begin with? It is not uncommon within the Coptic tradition for Michael to be associated with an unnamed angel.<sup>60</sup> In fact, for several other appearances of Michael listed in *On Michael A*, the corresponding biblical account mentions only "an angel of the Lord"; for example, the prophesying of the birth of Samson (4<sup>th</sup> appearance of Michael =

<sup>60</sup> Müller, *Die Engellehre* 21-23.

Judges 13:3), his appearance to King David on the threshing floor of Ornan (4<sup>th</sup> appearance of Michael = 1 Chronicles 21:18-30), his appearance to Habbakkuk (6<sup>th</sup> appearance = Daniel 14:33-39), and his deliverance of Peter from the prison of Herod (9<sup>th</sup> appearance = Acts 12:6-11). However, as the above discussion of textual evidence shows, neither the Egyptian nor the non-Egyptian literary sources mention any angel in conjunction with the vision of Constantine.

A possible explanation for Michael’s association with the vision can be found in the Copto-Arabic *Synaxarium*. The entry for the feast day commemorating the death of Constantine (Paramhat 28, the feast day for the death of Constantine) contains an account of his vision of the Cross.<sup>61</sup> In this version, the vision occurs during a civil war against Maximianus. In the night following his vision, the angel of the Lord appears to Constantine in dream and urges him to make a sign like the one that he had seen in the sky so that he may be victorious over his enemies.<sup>62</sup> While in this account the angel (which could easily be associated as Michael) does not cause Constantine to have the vision, there is still enough proximity to the event to influence its inclusion in the list of Michael’s appearances in *On Michael A*. This association may be strengthened by the fact that the monthly feast day for Michael on Mesore 12 coincides with a commemoration of the reign of Constantine, in which the vision of the Cross is mentioned in passing.<sup>63</sup>

This is not the only overlap found between *On Michael A* and the *Synaxarium*. The archangel’s appearance to Joshua outside of Jericho on Paone 26, part of his 2<sup>nd</sup> appearance as listed in *On Michael A*, also appears in the *Synaxarium* in the description of Michael’s feast days on both Hathor 12<sup>64</sup> and Paone 12.<sup>65</sup> Most notably, in the account given for Paone 12, the *Synaxarium* states that the archangel “stopped the sun for him (Joshua)”.<sup>66</sup> This is also included in the version of the event narrated in *On Michael A* (page 6, inserted in the bottom margin): “The sun was in the sky for an hour more than the days of the entire year” (αφρη οζειρατq ηεν[τφε ν]ογ[ογνογ [ερο]τε νι[ε]ζ[οογ] νιτε†ρομη†ι τηρς).<sup>67</sup> Although

<sup>61</sup> Basset, *Le Synaxaire* [907-908].

<sup>62</sup> Basset, *Le Synaxaire* [908].

<sup>63</sup> Basset, *Le Synaxaire* [1259-1260], although Basset’s edition does not include the commemoration of Michael.

<sup>64</sup> Basset, *Le Synaxaire* [203-204].

<sup>65</sup> Basset, *Le Synaxaire* [1098-1099].

<sup>66</sup> Basset, *Le Synaxaire* [1099].

<sup>67</sup> This phrase was removed from the end of the fourth appearance (David upon the threshing-floor of Ornan) and added to the end of the account of Joshua and the fall of Jericho.

this phenomenon is not directly attributed to the archangel in *On Michael A*, it is more similar to the account in the *Synaxarium* than to the biblical account (Joshua 10:12-14), in which the sun and the moon are stopped through the supplications of Joshua to God.

The exact relationship between *On Michael A* and the *Synaxarium* is unclear. The date, authorship, and eventual compilation of the *Synaxarium* and its recensions is uncertain.<sup>68</sup> Similarly, it cannot be ruled out that the text of *On Michael A* presented in MACA.AF is a copy of an earlier work. As such, no concrete claims can be made regarding whether one work influenced the other, or whether they were both influenced by a third, as yet unknown work. It is possible that the *Synaxarium* reflects an existing tradition prior to the composition of *On Michael A*, so that the inclusion of Michael in the vision of Constantine was not a reason for the erasure at all. Conversely, the presence of Michael may have been deemed false, but reflected a popular belief that was eventually worked into the *Synaxarium*. In any case, the overlaps between *On Michael A* and the *Synaxarium* cannot be ignored, and suggest that they are built upon a tradition which differs from other literary accounts of these particular events.

### **7. Conclusion: MACA.AF from the perspective of Material Philology**

The notes and amendments in MACA.AF bear witness to its existence as a living, dynamic artefact, as well as highlighting the ways in which individuals composed and engaged with manuscripts and their texts. Focusing specifically on the erased section on the vision of Constantine, the evidence discussed above suggests the following process of emendation:

1. Note 1, stating that the passage was ‘false’, was written first, by an individual who may have identified that the chronological order of Michael’s appearances was incorrect. Rather than recommending that the passage should be erased, the note instructed the reader to skip this passage and continue with the next.
2. Note 2, stating that Eumenius was “prior to Constantine”, was then written by (possibly) a second individual to clarify the issue with the passage.

<sup>68</sup> On the issues surrounding the dating and authorship of the *Synaxarium*, see Luzzi, “Synaxaria” 204; Coquin, “Le Synaxaire des coptes”; Burmester, “On the Date and Authorship”.

3. Note 3, “Omit Constantine”, was added last, possibly by a third individual, who may have also recognised that the archangel Michael was not involved in the vision of Constantine, recommending that the entire passage be removed.

There are two ways in which this process can be interpreted. If the notes were written by two or more individuals, as the palaeographical analysis of the notes suggests, this process of emendation points to an ongoing editorial dialogue within the margins of the text. As such, the version of *On Michael A* presented in the manuscript can be viewed as a collaborative effort. Rather than being the product of a single author who wrote the “original” work, the text in MACA.AF can be said to have multiple authors, with several people actively involved in creating the text through the process of editing and erasure. If, however, the notes were written by the same hand (presumably an editor or the main scribe themselves), there is sufficient variation in the hand and position of the notes to suggest that they were not written at the same time. As such, this points to an extended period of editing, during which the scribe may have consulted other written sources, or conferred with other members of the monastery.

Several questions regarding the erasure still remain unanswered. It is uncertain what works the monastic community had access to which may have informed them about the vision of Constantine and the dates of his life in comparison to Eumenius. None of those texts mentioned above which include the vision (Ps-Cyril of Jerusalem’s *Discourse on the Cross*, the *Passion of Saint Eusignius*, John of Nikiou’s *Chronicle*, and the unidentified texts of the Spiegelberg and Munier fragments) are attested from the Monastery of Saint Macarius, or from the 10<sup>th</sup> century in which MACA.AF was most likely written. This may of course be a result of the accident of survival. Other accounts of the vision may have existed in the monastery’s library at some point. However, in the absence of any evidence, the sources for the authors’ knowledge of Constantine and his vision cannot be ascertained.

Furthermore, it is not clear why the erased passage was not replaced, nor the 12<sup>th</sup> appearance renumbered. Within the text, there are two points of symmetry created through the significance of the number 12, related to the monthly date of Michael’s feast day. The second of these is a list of twelve things which occur through the intercession of Michael and the Virgin Mary, including the growing of trees and the producing of fruit, and the shining of the sun, moon, and stars (pages 11-14), each headed by the phrase “through the prayers of Michael” (ϠΙΤΕΝΝΕΝΤΩΒϠ

ΜΜΙΧΑΗΛ).<sup>69</sup> The first, prior to the amendment to the text, is the list of the 12 appearances of Michael upon the earth. The erasure of the 11<sup>th</sup> appearance therefore creates an imbalance and sense of incompleteness in the text which is not rectified, since no other appearance is added to create a total of 12.

There also remains the question of the identity of the individual(s) involved in the erasure, and in what capacity they were able to recommend corrections or changes to the text. There is nothing within the notes or the manuscript which provide any information about who the note-makers were — even the scribe of the main text is unnamed. Given the apparent liturgical use of the manuscript, discussed above, the marginal notes may have been made by one or more monks involved in reading the text during liturgies. The notes may also have come about through the process of reading, in which a listener may have recognised errors in the passage. Furthermore, although the manuscript had a liturgical function, this does not exclude the possibility that it was also used for individual study. As such, the notes may have been made by a monk in their capacity as a reader. However, in any of these situations, the terms reader or listener do not accurately capture the role of the commenters, since their notes and observations were crucial in creating the text as it exists today.

Finally, there is the issue of the lack of knowledge regarding the textual transmission of the work itself. In the absence of any other copies of *On Michael A* in either Coptic or any other language, it is not clear whether MACA.AF is a copy of an earlier work. As such, the erased passage could have been copied from an earlier version, which was only identified as erroneous when copied in the monastery of Saint Macarius, or if it was added by the copyist and then re-removed. It is also possible that this is the first copy of a newly composed text, and that the various amendments serve as a guide for future copies. However, in the absence of any evidence, any such analysis is purely speculative.

The examination of MACA.AF and *On Michael A* present above highlights the importance of studying manuscripts through the lens of Material Philology. The erasure and amendments to *On Michael A* are evidence of a text changing through the course of its use: that is, rather than being a static, finished entity, it is a living cultural artefact. The marginal notes themselves provide a rare glimpse into the motivations behind these editorial decisions. The result is the image of a text in flux, produced by

<sup>69</sup> The only exception is the first instance which begins ϺΙΤΕΝΠΡΩΟ ΜΠΑΡΧΗΑΓΓΕΛΟΟ ΕΘΟΥΑΒ ΜΙΧΑΗΛ “through the supplication of the holy archangel Michael” (page 11).

multiple copyists and scribes rather than a single author. As such, *On Michael A* provides yet another attestation of the fluidity of texts within the Coptic monastic manuscript culture.

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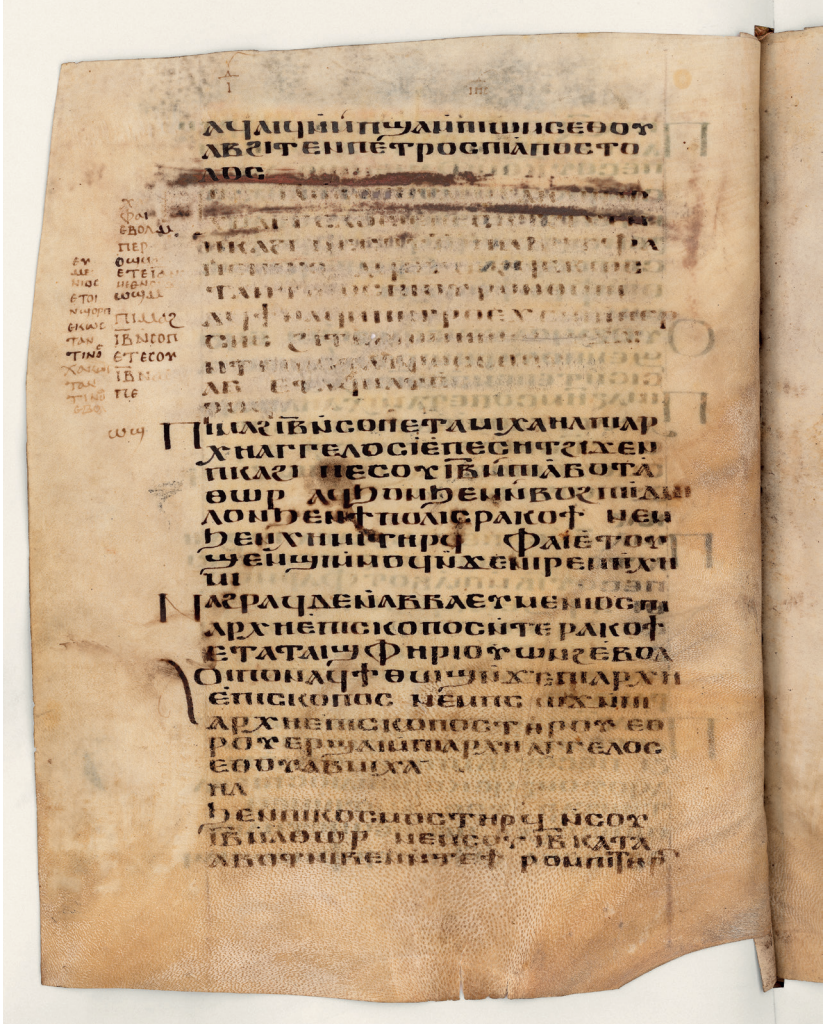


Fig. 5. Vat. Copt. 58 f. 28v  
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