

The term "Coptic" designates the final stage of the ancient Egyptian language– the descendant of the earlier stages (Hieroglyphic, Hieratic, and Demotic scripts). Coptic was written in the Greek alphabet, supplemented by six or seven letters borrowed from the Demotic script and used by Egyptians in the text production between the 3rd and 13th cent. CE. It continues to be used by Coptic Orthodox Christians as a liturgical language. The probable origin of Coptic as a literary language lies in the translation of the Bible, Old, and New Testament, from Greek into the local language of Egypt as part of the spread of Christianity from Alexandria into the provinces. Religious and literary texts were not only translated into Coptic but also newly–composed in this language. In addition to these genres, we find legal, documentary, and scientific texts in Coptic. The study of non–literary texts gives us a close view of the daily life of the Egyptian population in this period. In the following, I consider Coptic scientific texts, from the beginnings to late antiquity and the early Arabic period. The term 'scientific' here indicates medical, pharmacological, chemical, and other learning documents. These texts are not devoid of magical ritual practices and are greatly influenced by Ancient Egyptian, Greek, and Arabic magical traditions. The Coptic magical texts date back to between the fourth and the twelfth century CE: the period of different religious conversion in Egypt. Thus the magical texts were affected by this conversion and present to us different religious aspects of various religious cults, i.e. "pagan", "gnostic", "Judaism", "Christianity" and "Islam". Still, as a native speaker, I can identify these words and their meanings, which enables me to provide an updated version of certain texts. Subsequently, almost Coptic magical texts contain Greek and Arabic loanwords.