

Rubrication Patterns in Two Old Nubian Manuscripts from Serra East

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Abstract: The present paper analyses the rubrication patterns in two Old Nubian manuscripts (known under the sigla St and SC) both originally intended for deposition at the Jesus Church in Serra East. Through a comparison with rubrication patterns in other Old Nubian manuscripts, the authors argue that the rubricated phrases in St and SC show an internal coherence that could be interpreted as a ‘second voice’ in a ‘polyphonic’ text.

Keywords: Old Nubian, rubrication, Biblical citations, Serra East, polyphony, manuscripts

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In 1906, the German Coptologist Karl Schmidt purchased in Egypt, among other manuscripts, a small codex, which was subsequently registered as Berlin, Kgl. Bibl. MS. Orient. Quart 1020. It was Schmidt himself who first suggested that the language of this manuscript was ‘Old Nubian’.¹ The first person, however, to decipher longer parts of the text was the Egyptologist Heinrich Schäfer, director of the Egyptian Museum in Berlin between 1914 and 1935. Schäfer introduced the language to the British Egyptologist Francis Llewellyn Griffith, who pioneered the systematic study of both the Meroitic and Old Nubian languages. Griffith and Schäfer made the first transcript of the text and identified it as *mainly a discourse of Christ with his apostles before the Ascension, concerning the Cross, followed by a hymn to the Cross*.² The two works, named by Griffith and Schäfer as the *Stauros-Text*, were followed by a colophon stating *that it was dedicated before Jesus of σερρεν ματτο ‘East Serra’*.³

¹ Schäfer, Schmidt 1906: 775.

² Griffith 1913: 41–42.

³ Griffith 1913: 4.

Seventy years later, Gerald Michael Browne, who worked on almost the entire corpus of Old Nubian texts and produced both an *Old Nubian Grammar*⁴ and an *Old Nubian Dictionary*,⁵ published a revised edition of the *Stauros-Text*.⁶ The reason for returning to this manuscript was the discovery of two codices containing elements of the *Stauros-Text*.⁷ At Serra East, the Nubian Expedition of the Oriental Institute of Chicago had discovered a new codex preserving the longest known Old Nubian text, namely the pseudo-Chrysostomian *Sermon on the venerable Cross*, which partially overlapped with the hymn to the Cross at the end of the *Stauros-Text*.⁸ The same expedition also uncovered a small codex in Sahidic Coptic at Qasr el-Wizz, containing two works, the first of which is identical to the first part in the *Stauros-Text*.⁹ Thus, there appears a tradition in Nubia of combining in a single codex two works relating to the Cross, probably from a common pool of texts, as is shown by the overlaps between the three above-mentioned witnesses.

It is important to note that the colophon of the *Stauros-Text* is remarkably similar to the one of the *Sermon on the venerable Cross*, both mentioning the deposition of the codex in the Jesus Church of Serra East. However, only the latter received the name *Serra East codex*. Such literary creations undoubtedly served to praise the donor in front of the priesthood and God, and therefore their material manifestations are of primal importance for achieving this goal. In other words, they can be expected to be objects of prestige, careful in offering the best possible version of what a luxurious codex would be expected to offer in a given cultural context, and, if possible, even excelling in the beauty and richness of the impression they would make. Both the *Stauros-Text* and the *Serra East codex* definitely achieve this task, as exemplified by the skilful and elegant handwritings, the well-planned layout of the nicely decorated pages, and in the case of the *Stauros-Text*, last but not least, the colourful illustration of, most probably, the donor of the work.¹⁰

The use of colour in the text itself is an important element in attaining a high degree of quality in a Nubian manuscript. The most common practice of colour decoration is called rubrication and consists of the addition of red colour for special sections of a text, like the titles and the colophons, or for particular words and phrases that the scribe wished to highlight, primarily the *nomina sacra*. The tradition goes back to hieroglyphic texts¹¹ and it becomes a diagnostic element of Christian practice in texts from the Nile region to such an extent that when at the beginning of the nineteenth century the ‘Egyptologist’ Henry Salt traveled to Ethiopia, he did not manage to get the locals interested in printed Ethiopic psalters that he had brought along to exchange with their manuscripts, as they *found fault [...] with the sacred names because they were not done in red ink*.¹²

⁴ Browne 2002.

⁵ Browne 1996.

⁶ Browne 1983.

⁷ Browne 1983: 75–76.

⁸ Browne 1984.

⁹ Hubai 2009.

¹⁰ Woźniak 2018.

¹¹ E.g. Parkinson, Quirke 1995: 44–45.

¹² Quoted in Russell 1985: 304–305.

In the present paper, we will first see how the use of especially red ink underlines this high artistic quality and adds symbolic value to Nubian manuscripts. And second, we will investigate various explanations for the choices Nubian scribes had in rubricating parts of their work. Finally, although until now no particular system for the particularities noted (for example, selective rubrication of names of divine beings) has been detected, we will propose paths to identifying such systems, based on two of the four complete literary works extant in Old Nubian: the *Serra East codex* (SC) and the *Stauros-Text* (St).

COLOUR USAGE IN THE NUBIAN MANUSCRIPT TRADITION

In the Mediterranean basin, black and red have been the primary colours used in the production of codices, and later books. The time span of this scribal custom covers all periods from proto-history (e.g. use of red colour in hieroglyphic texts) to modern times (e.g. printed editions of liturgical books for use in churches). The large number of examples and their spread across chronological, geographical, cultural, and linguistic frontiers have kept their exhaustive collection and systematic analysis a desideratum. In anticipation of such a project, it is worthwhile turning our attention to the particular case study of manuscripts from Christian Nubia, both because the corpus of known texts is relatively small and because it offers some very interesting insights into the phenomenon examined here.

Literacy in medieval Nubia is expressed multilingually.¹³ Apart from Old Nubian, Greek and Coptic (primarily Sahidic, but also Bohairic) are widely used. Arabic also appears, while there have been instances of the use of Ottoman Turkish, Syriac, and Latin as well. All the three most popular languages have been used to write both literary and documentary texts and have been attested on manuscripts made of paper, parchment, leather, and papyrus. All the texts on soft carriers are written with black or brown ink. Occasionally, however, an additional colour, red, is employed.

As stated above, the colour red is used primarily in order to mark special sections in a manuscript, like incipits and explicits, head chapters and colophons, or to highlight important words like *nomina sacra*, and to decorate individual signs (letters or punctuation). There are also attested a couple of instances where the entire text has been rubricated, possibly underlining the significance of its content and/or purpose.¹⁴

These customs appear across the languages used in Christian Nubia, but some discrepancies have been discovered that offer points of reference for further investigation. For example, it has been observed that decorating the lobes of the letter ϕ with red, which is a very common phenomenon in Nubian literacy, occurs exclusively in texts of a religious character.¹⁵ Nevertheless, it would be wrong to assume that manuscripts with religious texts were seen by Nubians more highly than for example manuscripts of a documentary

¹³ Ochała 2014.

¹⁴ See, for example: Tsakos forthcoming; Van Gerven Oei, Łajtar 2019: 92–96. Interestingly, both texts appear to refer to the cult of the Archangel Michael, which was very popular in Christian Nubia (see: Gilhus, Tsakos, Wright (Eds) 2019: 76–107).

¹⁵ Tsakos 2016.

character, since royal decrees and other legally binding texts had great significance in Nubian society, albeit apparently of a different order than religious manuscripts. Given the absence of the usage of the red colour in documentary texts from medieval Nubia, we suggest that for the Nubians, the colour red added symbolic value of a religious nature to the manuscripts in which it was used.

These observations hold especially for Old Nubian manuscripts, for which, on the one hand, we can be quite certain that the creators were Nubians representing the intellectual choices of local society, while, on the other hand, Old Nubian manuscripts illustrate clearly what can be seen as not more than tendencies in manuscripts in Greek and Coptic.¹⁶ Nevertheless, the study of manuscript decoration¹⁷ and the derivation of the ‘Nubian-type majuscules’ common in Nubian manuscripts from the Coptic *oncial penchée*,¹⁸ have underlined the initial dependence of the Old Nubian manuscript tradition on centers of Egyptian, especially Sahidic literacy.

In any case, once adopted by the Nubians, this system of decoration with red ink seems to have been developed to its maximum potential: it appears, among others, in rubrics and interpunction (e.g. *Old Nubian Lectionary* = Kgl. Bibl. MS. Or. Quart 1019; *DBMNT* 687), incipits (e.g. *Miracle of Saint Menas* and the (pseudo-)Nicene canons = BL Or. 6805; *DBMNT* 713), and to mark the names of holy figures (e.g. *The Attiri Book of Michael* = Sudan National Museum SNM 23045; *DBMNT* 714). There are, however, two manuscripts that stand out because of their high quality and some peculiar aberrations from this general categorisation.

RUBRICATION IN SC AND ST

Like other Old Nubian manuscripts, the pseudo-Chrysostomian homily *Sermon on the venerable Cross* (traditionally known under the siglum SC; *DBMNT* 1385)¹⁹ is written in a neat and regular Nubian-type majuscule. Browne offers an overview of the rubrication,²⁰ which includes the title and the marginal note, lobes of the ϕ , and interpunction. He also provides a list of ‘certain religious names and words’, which, however, do not appear consistently rubricated. Moreover, there are several instances in which additional words before or after ‘certain religious names and words’ are rubricated. Keeping in mind that the effort put into the manuscript and its value as a devotional object, which suggest a careful handling of every aspect of the text, including the rubrication, it appears reasonable to us to consider the possibility that there is an underlying pattern to the usage of colour.

¹⁶ For example, the paleographic customs examined here can only be observed in a small subset of the manuscripts in Sahidic Coptic unearthed at the monastery of Qasr el-Wizz. The reasons may be linked with the suggestion that many were imports from Egypt (see: Tsakos forthcoming).

¹⁷ Tsakos 2016.

¹⁸ Boud’hors 1997. Further influences upon the formation of the Old Nubian paleographic styles can be found among scripts used at Sinai and at Fayyum, but their study is still in progress.

¹⁹ For a detailed treatment of SC, see: Van Gerven Oei, Tsakos forthcoming.

²⁰ Browne 1984: 19–20.

There are two segments in SC where another pattern emerges. SC 12.5–13 consists of two sentences, the first one explaining and introducing the second, which is a citation from Ps 7:12. Now in what appears to be an ‘inverse’ rubrication pattern, SC 12.5 [τλ]λ, SC 12.7 [τ]λλογ, and SC 12.8 ΔΑΥΤΙ have been rubricated, while the only sacred name inside the citation, SC 12.10 τλλ is not. A similar inverse pattern is found in SC 17.11–24. This is a meditation on Jn 1:1, which only appears at the end of the segment. Again, the sacred names SC 17.11 χςς̄ιμ[Δ], SC 17.13 ιςς̄ιμα, SC 17.16 πᾱπλο, SC 17.19 τλλ̄ι, and SC 17.21 [ι]ωαννη are rubricated, whereas those actually inside the citation, SC 17.23 τλλιαλο and SC 17.24 τλλ[λων] are not.

What both patterns of rubricating the biblical citation or its immediate elaboration share with the rubrication seen in the ‘Credo’ and the ‘Hymn of the Cross’ is a conscious attempt to ‘highlight’ certain rhetorically important structures in the homily. They guide the reader’s eye to the most salient points in the text.

Another way of reading through the rubrications in SC is by considering how they mark the first instance of every important biblical author: SC 11.3 πετροσιλλε (also part of Mt 16:18); SC 11.7 [π]αγλοσι (author of subsequent 1 Cor 3:11 that follows); SC 12:8 ΔΑΥΤΙ (author of subsequent Ps 7:12–14); SC 17:21 [ι]ωαννη (author of subsequent Jn 1:1). Note then that the second instance of Paul, SC 16.25 παγλοσι remains unrubricated; his name has already been highlighted.

There are, of course, also what appear to be exceptions or inconsistencies. For example, SC 22.18 τλλλλον (πεσςνα· δδδμηγ[λ]λε)²³ is rubricated as part of Gen 3:17, even though the Septuagint does not explicitly mention God: τῷ δὲ Ἀδὰμ εἶπεν. Following the rendering in black of SC 22.9 τλλ[ι]τλλε, another interpolation, we would have expected the same here. However, when taken together with first mention and (otherwise inexplicable) rubrication of the Holy Trinity in SC 4.9–11, SC 22.18 τλλλλον and SC 24.10 χς̄ι [3–4], the last two occurrences of God and Jesus in the text before the colophon (which is written in a different hand), we find in fact a perfectly symmetrical rubrication marking the beginning and end of the homily: Christ–(God the) Father–Holy Spirit–God (the Father)–Christ.

Even though our analysis so far may account for most of the rubrications, and provides a framework in which to think the ways in which rhetorical emphasis was given to different elements of the text, there are still several rubrications that require an explanation: SC 10.3 ε̄ιμο χς̄ι<κα>; SC 10.20–21 χς̄ικα μαρῑεῑο; SC 21.9–10 τλλικα μα[ς]μα-; and SC 21.15 τλλλλον . . .,²⁴ which we can loosely translate as *We know that Christ... Christ from Mary ... ignorant of God ... God [says]*. Similar examples can be found in the *Stauros-Text*.²⁵

Like SC, St was intended for deposition at the Jesus Church in Serra East, and contains the ‘Hymn on the Cross’ also featured in SC, and here we find a similarly remarkable

²³ The non-rubricated part of the phrase is parenthesised.

²⁴ Browne 1984: 67 has τλλλο πς̄.

²⁵ The same holds for P. Attiri 2.i.18–19 (see: Van Gerven Oei *et al.* 2016: 44–45), but this case will not be analysed, because the manuscript is very fragmentarily preserved and does not provide the same picture as SC and St discussed here.

usage of colour. As in SC, certain elements are consistently rubricated: supralinear strokes, interpunction, and the lobes of the letter ϕ and sometimes the o (e.g. St 11.8). Furthermore, red is used for the incipit (St 1.1–2.8) and what Griffith calls ‘leading phrases’.²⁶ Browne is even less committal when he simply states: *I have underlined all words that are in red ink [...]. This seems preferable to Griffith’s vague statement.*²⁷ Like Griffith, however, Browne fails to analyse the specific phrases that are marked in red.

To start, all instances of the word ḥṯaγpoc, ‘cross’ have been rubricated, as in the ‘Hymn on the Cross’ section in SC. Although there seem to be no exceptions to this in the main text, the scribe frequently seems to ‘overshoot’, rendering more words in red ink than appears to be strictly necessary. For example, the entire sentence in St 10.3–5 ḥṯaγpocka aiḏal koγnḏ kḏarē, ‘I will come having the cross with me’ is rubricated, as is St 13.7–8 ḥṯaγpocī eoγpṛw taγwlo, ‘under the shadow of the cross’. Also sentence fragments are rubricated, creating what appear to be noun phrases on top of a regular sentence. For example, in St 19.7–9 ḥṯaγpocḏ doγnḏ(γoγna ekkṭṭalw), ‘the cross is the comfort of the infants’, the sequence ḥṯaγpocḏ doγnḏ is rubricated, rendering something like ‘the pregnant cross’. Such rubrication occurs multiple times in the manuscript.

Apart from ḥṯaγpoc and related ‘leading phrases’, there are also other elements that are rubricated. For example, we find in St 30.8–9 eoḏoγ eīnoγ ic xḥna ṭṭ(ṭḏe), ‘the grace of Jesus Christ, our Lord’, in red, while in St 4.7–8, 6.11 eoḏa ṭḏa oγna, ‘our Lord and God’ is in regular black ink. Also, other instances of (persons of) the Holy Trinity remain unrubricated. In a statement dealing with Trinitarian economy, St 17.4–10 eoκḏ eīnalo paṛa ealla ḏoγlla: ea paṛḏ ḏoγlla: ceγaptoγ eḥḥilo ḏaγ eīnḏ, *The glory is yours, Father who is in the Son, Son who is in the Father, being together with the Holy Spirit*, none of the persons are rubricated. And also, St 32.11–12 eoḏoγ ṭḏloγ, ‘God the Lord’ is written in black. Similar inconsistencies are found with the name of the apostle Peter. In St 4.5–6 peṭpocion is written in black, while in St 5.10 and 8.3 peṭpōci is red, as well as the phrase St 6.9–10 peṭpōcion oγcka peccna>, ‘Peter answered and said’. The only occurrence of a biblical citation, St 29.10–30.6 ṭannaḥw ḏpona ṭapoyaccapoyēke: kṛ ceγēṭannaḥw eṛkane kocmocin oγkṛṭlō ṭapa ṭocoy oγnnaγrḏ meḏḏḏ[ic]ḏ[n]ka ḏḏḏka, *Come, you who my Father blessed, come and inherit the kingdom that they caused to be born, prepared and made ready(?) before from the foundation of the world* (Mt 25:34) contains the sacred name ḏpona, but this is not rubricated.

If we then turn toward to the colophon (St 31.11–36.11), we find several instances of *nomina sacra*, such as St 35.2–3 iḥcoγ[ci] xṛicoc, ‘Jesus Christ’ and ṭḏl, ‘God’ *passim*. Unlike in the main text, none of the instances of the word ḥṯaγpoc have been rubricated, except one, St 32.7–8 ḥṯaγpocī ḏḏ(ṫḕkena oγocka), ‘the book of the life-giving cross’, which seems to refer to the title of the work.

²⁶ Griffith 1913: 41.

²⁷ Browne 1983: 78.

‘POLYPHONIC’ TEXTS

Based on the above observations, the rubrication in St differs from the one in SC and is unrelated to biblical citations. Much more prominent, however, is the use of rubrication to highlight a text ‘on top’ of the text, a text that consists of the rubricated phrases alone. We hinted at this possibility in SC, but this technique seems fully deployed in St. Let us therefore have a closer look at the non-trivial rubrications in St, namely all rubrications in the main text that are not simply $\epsilon\tau\alpha\gamma\rho\sigma$.

St 5.9–10	$\pi\epsilon\tau\rho\acute{o}\sigma\iota$, ‘Peter’
St 6.9–10	$\pi\epsilon\tau\rho\acute{o}\sigma\iota\omicron\upsilon\sigma\kappa\alpha\ \pi\epsilon\sigma<\sigma\eta\alpha>$, ‘Peter answered and said’
St 8.3	$\pi\epsilon\tau\rho\acute{o}\sigma\iota$, ‘Peter’
St 10.3–5	$\epsilon\tau\alpha\gamma\rho\sigma\kappa\alpha\ \alpha\acute{\iota}\delta\alpha\lambda\ \kappa\omicron\upsilon\eta\eta\lambda\ \kappa\bar{\alpha}\bar{\alpha}\rho\acute{\epsilon}$, ‘I will come having the cross with me’
St 12.5–6	$\epsilon\tau\alpha\gamma\rho\sigma\lambda\alpha\gamma\lambda\lambda\epsilon\ \pi\iota\sigma\tau\epsilon\upsilon(\omicron\lambda\gamma\omicron\gamma\lambda\lambda\omicron\upsilon\sigma)$, ‘Believe in the cross’
St 13.7–8	$\epsilon\tau\alpha\gamma\rho\sigma\bar{\eta}\ \epsilon\omicron\upsilon\gamma\rho\rho\omega\ \tau\alpha\gamma\bar{\omega}\lambda\omicron$, ‘Under the shadow of the cross’
St 14.1–2	$\epsilon\tau\alpha\gamma\rho\sigma\omicron\upsilon\ \omicron\upsilon\epsilon\ \lambda\prime$, ‘One cross’
St 15.5–6	$\epsilon\tau\alpha\gamma\rho\sigma\omicron\upsilon\ \epsilon\omicron\kappa\kappa\omicron\eta\alpha$, ‘Of the glorious cross’
St 16.2–3	$\epsilon\tau\alpha\gamma\rho\sigma\omicron\upsilon\ \epsilon\omicron\kappa\kappa\ \omicron(\kappa\alpha)$, ‘Call the glorious cross’
St 18.8–9	$\epsilon\tau[\alpha]\gamma\rho\sigma\bar{\eta}\ \tau\omega(\epsilon\kappa\kappa\alpha)$, ‘Power of the cross’
St 19.7–8	$\epsilon\tau\alpha\gamma\rho\sigma\bar{\lambda}\ \delta\omicron\gamma\eta\lambda(\gamma\omicron\gamma\eta\alpha\ \epsilon\kappa\kappa\tau\tau\alpha\lambda\omega)$, ‘The cross that is pregnant’
St 30.8–9	$\epsilon\omicron\delta\omicron\upsilon\ \epsilon\bar{\eta}\bar{\eta}\bar{\nu}\omicron\upsilon\ \bar{\iota}\bar{\sigma}\ \bar{\kappa}\bar{\iota}\bar{\eta}\bar{\nu}\alpha\ \tau\bar{\tau}\bar{\iota}(\tau\bar{\lambda}\bar{\Delta}\bar{\epsilon})$, ‘Grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ’

The rubricated text opens with a triple invocation of the apostle Peter, which stresses his importance in the St. The importance of Peter is a topos in the type of literature to which St belongs, namely the *Pseudo-Apostolic Memoirs*. According to the most authoritative analysis of these works,²⁸ they can be divided in three parts: first, an introduction; second, a discourse where an apostle questions Christ concerning the topic of interest in the given work; and third, the commissioning of the apostles by Christ to proclaim his teaching to the whole world. Peter plays the most prominent role in the discourses of the second part of these *Memoirs*,²⁹ and characteristically the title *Gospel of Peter* has been assigned to a manuscript fragmentarily preserved with many similarities to the contents of the St.³⁰

Especially with regard to the rubricated phrases in St, Peter seems to have a rather structural role. So, the first rubricated phrase, St 6.9–10 $\pi\epsilon\tau\rho\acute{o}\sigma\iota\omicron\upsilon\sigma\kappa\alpha\ \pi\epsilon\sigma<\sigma\eta\alpha>$, ‘Peter answered and said’, suggests that the following rubricated phrases form a coherent speech that could be attributed to him. Several of the phrases are completely rubricated and form a syntactical unit. In several other cases, however, only part of the last word is rubricated. The result is a reinterpretation of grammatical relations. For example, the whole phrase St 12.5–6 $\epsilon\tau\alpha\gamma\rho\sigma\lambda\alpha\gamma\lambda\lambda\epsilon\ \pi\iota\sigma\tau\epsilon\upsilon(\omicron\lambda\gamma\omicron\gamma\lambda\lambda\omicron\upsilon\sigma)$ means ‘those who believed in the cross’.

²⁸ Suciú 2017.

²⁹ Suciú 2017: 8.

³⁰ Suciú 2017: 3 and n. 7; Schenke 1998.

The rubricated part, however, invites the imperative interpretation ‘believe in the cross’ or perhaps infinitival ‘to believe in the cross’. Even more dramatically, St 19.7–8 ⲉⲧⲁϣⲣⲟϥⲗ ⲃⲟϣⲏⲗ(ⲟϣⲏⲗ ⲉⲕⲕⲧⲁⲗⲗⲟ) means ‘the cross is the comfort of infants’,³¹ but its rubricated part could be rendered ‘the cross that is pregnant’.

Thus, the syntactical reinterpretation that the rubrication allows strengthens the idea that we are dealing here with a deliberate attempt of the scribe to lift out a ‘second’ text from the primary text, a rubricated text that we would tentatively like to call the ‘Prayer of Peter’. The result is a form of ‘polyphony’ or ‘counterpoint’ of the non-rubricated and rubricated text that provides a structure for the entire *Stauros-Text*. For the text opens with Peter asking Jesus to reveal the mysteries of the cross to the assembled apostles. This is followed by Jesus’s answer (in the form of a discourse preserved in Coptic literature both from Nubia and Egypt) and the extensive ‘Hymn on the Cross’ (also preserved in the SC, as well as in Coptic literature).³² Thus, the ‘Prayer of Peter’ straddles both parts of the manuscript and provides a contrapuntal commentary that is both contained in and distinct from Jesus’s speech.

These observations allow us to return to SC, and the few extended rubrications that defied our earlier interpretative attempts:

- SC 10.3 ⲉⲃⲏⲙⲟ ⲭⲥⲓ<ⲕⲁ>, ‘We know Christ’
 SC 10.20–21 ⲭⲥⲓⲕⲁ ⲙⲁⲣⲓⲁⲓⲉⲓⲟ, ‘Christ from Mary’
 SC 21.9–10 ⲧⲗⲗⲓⲕⲁ ⲙⲁ[ϥ]ⲏⲁ(ⲁ ⲁⲛⲕⲓⲙⲏⲏⲉϥⲟ), ‘Does not know God’
 SC 21.15 ⲧⲗⲗⲟⲛ . . (ⲏⲟⲏⲁ), ‘God [says]’

As in St, the rubrications significantly alter the syntactic relations. In SC 10.3 ⲭⲥⲓ<ⲕⲁ> is actually the subject of a complement clause, but in the rubricated phrase it functions as a direct object of ⲉⲃⲏⲙⲟ. Similarly, in SC 21.9 ⲧⲗⲗⲓⲕⲁ ⲙⲁ[ϥ]ⲏⲁ(ⲁ ⲁⲛⲕⲓⲙⲏⲏⲉϥⲟ), ⲧⲗⲗⲓⲕⲁ is the subject of the complement clause, ‘Don’t think that God is ignorant/doesn’t know’. However, in the rubricated phrase, it is the direct object of the verb ⲙⲁ[ϥ]ⲏⲁ. Thus, the scribe here seems to use the same technique more extensively employed in St, bringing out a second voice in the text through rubrications of more than one word. The two crucial elements here are the mention of Mary as the one from whom the Christ was born and not knowing God.

The importance of Mary for Nubian Christianity was recognised from early on in research,³³ also linked with the Christological conflicts between pro- and contra-Chalcedonians.³⁴ With an initial focus on the evidence provided from mural paintings and in comparison with both Egyptian and Byzantine material,³⁵ Mary’s role in Christian Nubia has been variably discussed, often in connection with royal authority.³⁶ Most recently, evidence of

³¹ Browne 1983: 91 translates ‘The cross is the instructor of children’.

³² For the latest discussion, see: Suciú 2017.

³³ Müller 1978: 213–214.

³⁴ Van Moorsel 1970.

³⁵ Scholz 2001: 225–228.

³⁶ Zielińska 2014: 946–948; Van Gerven Oei 2017.

a special role in the funerary cult has been identified as linking with Ethiopian traditions as well.³⁷ However, in SC 9.21–10.23, the discussion is about what the homilist and his congregation know about Christ through a series of aphorisms creating an image of their Christological beliefs. Against this context, the reference to the birth from Mary is used in juxtaposition with the reference of Christ born before the ages (SC 10.20–23 $\epsilon\mu\mu\omicron\ \chi\acute{\sigma}\iota\kappa\alpha\ \mu\alpha\rho\iota\acute{\alpha}\epsilon\iota\omicron\ \omicron\gamma\eta\eta\omicron\gamma\tau\alpha\kappa\alpha\rho\epsilon\iota\eta\eta\ \epsilon\mu\mu\omicron\ \chi\acute{\sigma}\iota\kappa\alpha\ \delta\epsilon\lambda\gamma\omicron\gamma\lambda\omicron\ [\tau\omicron\gamma]\sigma\omicron\gamma\ \omicron\gamma\eta\eta\iota\tau\alpha\kappa\alpha\rho\epsilon\iota\eta\eta$). The birth from Mary is a reference to Christ's humanity, which remains nevertheless undivided from his divinity (SC 10.17–20 $\tau\lambda\lambda\iota\kappa\alpha\ \delta\epsilon\ \delta\omicron\delta\omega\eta\ \delta\epsilon\rho\omicron\eta\ \epsilon\tau\kappa\lambda\omicron\epsilon\iota\omicron\ \mu\alpha\delta\iota\mu\mu\eta\eta\alpha\lambda\omicron\ \epsilon\eta\eta\omicron\mu\alpha\lambda\omicron\ \delta\alpha\delta\eta\kappa\alpha\eta\gamma\omicron\gamma\lambda\lambda\omicron\ \omicron\gamma\epsilon\rho\iota\epsilon\alpha\ \mu\epsilon\tau\alpha\kappa\eta\eta\eta\alpha\eta$). It is thus tempting to call this contrapuntal text a 'Mariological Credo'.

The question that arises is whether the other two rubricated phrases are related to this 'Mariological Credo'. This is difficult to ascertain, but if this were the case then the absence of knowledge about God might imply either that the Mariological belief shows 'ignorance of God' and therefore we should understand that the copyist responsible for the rubrications takes distance from these beliefs; or that indeed the birth from Mary did not know God (in the biblical sense, i.e. carnal knowledge and sexual intercourse, e.g. Gen 4:1 *And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived*) and was thus unrelated to divinity. In the latter case, the copyist not only endorses the general Christological overtone of the pseudo-Chrysostomian homily but even underlines through the rubrications that God says (SC 21.15) this: *We know Christ* (SC 10.3), *Christ born from Mary* (SC 10.20–21) *without knowing God* (SC 21.9–10). This hypothesis should remain an open question, perhaps to be elucidated by future discoveries that will throw new light on the scribal practices examined here, their meanings, and their implications.

CONCLUSION

Our analysis of two Old Nubian texts, the pseudo-Chrysostomian homily *Sermon on the venerable Cross* and the *Stauros-Text*, both destined for deposition at the Jesus Church at Serra East, has shown that both manuscripts feature rubrication patterns of particular interest. These rubrication patterns serve as a rhetorical device to highlight prominent figures and passages, such as biblical citations. The rubrication found in both texts also appears to serve the creation of secondary texts or 'voices' within the main text, creating what we call a 'polyphonic' text.

It is in itself remarkable that this usage of rubrication is found in two texts that can be precisely located at the same site. This perhaps indicates the presence of a manuscript tradition associated with the Jesus Church in Serra East, the 'Hymn on the Cross', or a combination of both. Without further evidence it is uncertain in which direction the link can be found. What we have established, or at least made plausible, is that the rubrications are not the product of mere authorial fancy or chance, and that there is number of shared characteristics, and even semantic coherence, between the rubricated phrases.

³⁷ Łajtar, Van der Vliet 2017: 260–276.

It is impossible to know to what extent the intentionality we are ascribing to the rubrication of SC and St is grounded in the lived experience of the scribe who prepared the manuscript. The alternative, however, is to abide by referring to ‘certain religious names and words’ or ‘leading phrases’ without the chance to deepen our understanding of Nubian manuscript culture and the potential meaningfulness of every aspect of the text. Not doing so would reject out of hand valuable insights that may be gleaned from the few materials that have survived.

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