



PHILLIPS, Kim, *Two Early Byzantine Bible Manuscripts in Christian Palestinian Aramaic: Codex Climaci Rescriptus II & XI*. «Cambridge Semitic Languages and Cultures» 34. Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 2025. viii+212 pp. ISBN: 978-1-80511-542-7.

Following the acknowledgements that open the book (pp. vii–viii), the volume comprises four chapters: 1) “Introduction” (pp. 1–19), consisting of two sections; 2) “CCR II: Pauline Epistles” (pp. 21–125), also divided into two sections; 3) “CCR XI: Acts and Catholic Epistles” (pp. 127–165), composed of three sections; and 4) “Textual and Linguistic Commentary” (pp. 167–192). These four chapters are followed by two appendices: “Is Sin. Syr. NF M64N Part of CCR II?” (pp. 193–196) and “Mingana Syr. MS. 637” (pp. 197–198). The book concludes with the bibliography (pp. 199–206) and the indexes: one of biblical references (pp. 207–210) and a general index of names and subjects (pp. 211–212).

This volume represents a significant advance in the study of Christian Palestinian Aramaic (CPA) texts and in the broader field of early Byzantine manuscript transmission. The work brings to light two early biblical witnesses preserved as undertexts in the well-known *Codex Climaci Rescriptus*, a 10th c. palimpsest whose erased leaves conceal fragments of earlier biblical manuscripts. Through an exacting combination of codicological, linguistic, and technological analysis, Phillips reconstructs, edits, and interprets two distinct CPA subcodices (CCR II and CCR XI) thereby expanding the corpus of known CPA biblical material and offering new insight into the transmission of the Pauline Epistles, Acts, and the Catholic Epistles within the Aramaic-speaking Christian communities of the Byzantine Levant. The result is a meticulously crafted study that stands at the intersection of philology, palaeography, and digital humanities, and which redefines the methodological expectations for work in this field.

The study opens with an introduction that situates the *Codex Climaci Rescriptus* (CCR) within the history of manuscript reuse and palimpsesting. Phillips outlines the discovery, composition, and subsequent study of the CCR, whose eleven undertexts represent a rich palimpsestic mosaic of early Christian writings, many in CPA. He describes the codex’s journey from its monastic origin in the Sinai to its current housing in the Museum of the Bible collection, and situates CCR II and XI within that complex structure. In the introduction, the author also explains the palaeographical dating of the undertexts to the 6th or 7th centuries, identifying them as among the earliest extant witnesses to the New Testament in CPA. The author justifies his focus on these two sections by noting their relative completeness and their potential to illuminate the early CPA biblical tradition.

The following chapters provide an exhaustive codicological and palaeographical description of each manuscript. For CCR II, which preserves portions of the Pauline Epistles, The author carefully reconstructs the original quire structure, layout, and ruling pattern. He analyses the script, identifying it as an early rounded majuscule typical of 6th c. CPA hands, and he offers parallels with other known CPA manuscripts, such as the St. Catherine Monastery fragments and the Lewis Collection pieces. His treatment of the physical condition of the parchment (its erasures, overtext, and ink residues) demonstrates not only philological acuity but

also a rare sensitivity to the material culture of the codex. The same attention characterises his study of CCR XI, which contains Acts and the Catholic Epistles. Although this undertext is more fragmentary and affected by later overwriting, Phillips applies multispectral imaging (MSI) and advanced digital reconstruction techniques to recover substantial portions of text. His presentation of this evidence is methodical, with careful documentation of image-processing steps, spectral filters, and palaeographic observations.

The core of the book lies in the new diplomatic editions of both CPA texts. The author reproduces the transcribed lines with full preservation of orthographic irregularities, diacritic marks, and scribal abbreviations. The editorial policy is conservative: the text is presented without normalisation, preserving every peculiarity of the hand, which makes it a valuable resource for philological study. Each section includes an *apparatus criticus* comparing the CPA readings with extant Greek, Syriac, and Coptic versions, as well as with other CPA fragments where available. The comparison reveals both expected alignments with the Greek *Vorlage* and distinctive renderings that may indicate independent CPA translation traditions. The author notes that the CPA Pauline text shows close affinity to the Byzantine text-type, while certain lexical and syntactic peculiarities suggest an intermediary phase of translation distinct from the later Syriac Peshitta.

Particularly noteworthy is Phillips' analysis of the CPA linguistic features. The commentary identifies characteristic forms of the CPA dialect, including its tendency toward partial Hellenisation in vocabulary and syntax. The treatment of verbal forms, orthographic variation, and the inconsistent use of *matres lectionis* all receive detailed attention. The author situates these features within the broader spectrum of Western Aramaic dialects, emphasising their relevance to the reconstruction of late antique Aramaic phonology and to the study of language contact in the Byzantine Near East. His commentary also addresses translation technique: the CPA translators appear to have favoured a relatively literal approach to the Greek source, though with occasional paraphrastic renderings that reflect adaptation to Aramaic idiom. In this respect, Phillips' work provides valuable data for ongoing debates about the nature of CPA as a liturgical and vernacular language in the sixth century.

The author's engagement with technology is among the most striking aspects of the book. Here Phillips demonstrates how multispectral imaging has transformed the study of palimpsests. By employing spectral filters across ultraviolet and infrared wavelengths, he successfully distinguishes the faint iron gall ink of the CPA undertext from the later Syriac overtext. The inclusion of spectral data and image comparisons makes the work not merely a philological edition but also a methodological model for future palaeographic research. Phillips' discussion of imaging parameters, contrast enhancement, and digital compositing reflects a level of technical precision rarely found in textual studies, showing how traditional philology can benefit from the interdisciplinary integration of physics and computer science.

The analytical commentary following the editions situates CCR II and XI within the history of the CPA biblical tradition. Phillips correlates the linguistic and textual evidence with what is known of Christian Palestinian monasticism and scribal activity in the Byzantine period. He argues that both manuscripts likely originated in a monastic environment in Palestine or Sinai, perhaps associated with the Melkite communities that maintained CPA liturgy alongside Greek. The presence of the Pauline and Catholic Epistles, he suggests, indicates a growing interest in the complete New Testament corpus within these communities, complementing the better-known CPA Gospel fragments. By tracing variant readings and loanwords, the author convincingly shows the coexistence of Greek and CPA literacy in the region, and the gradual decline of CPA as Greek became the dominant ecclesiastical language.

Critically, one of the principal contributions of Phillips' work lies in his codicological precision and his ability to link physical manuscript analysis to linguistic conclusions. He convincingly demonstrates that the reuse of CPA biblical parchment as palimpsest material reflects not neglect but rather pragmatic adaptation to the changing linguistic landscape of Byzantine Christianity. His discussion of the economic and cultural factors underlying palimpsesting (the scarcity of writing materials, the prestige of Greek, and the evolving liturgical needs of monasteries) adds depth to what might otherwise be a purely technical study. The argument that CPA texts were deliberately overwritten with Syriac ones, rather than incidentally recycled, is both courageous and plausible, and it opens new perspectives on the fate of vernacular Christianity in Palestine.

From a linguistic standpoint, Phillips' meticulous documentation of orthographic and morphological features makes his book an indispensable resource for dialectological studies. The differentiation he draws between earlier and later CPA orthographic tendencies is particularly valuable, offering evidence for diachronic change within a corpus otherwise too small to chart such developments. His work also demonstrates how CPA mediates between classical Syriac and the colloquial Aramaic substratum of the region, a topic of increasing interest for scholars concerned with the sociolinguistics of late antiquity.

Despite its many virtues, the book is not without certain limitations. The focus on two manuscripts, while justified by the project's aims, inevitably narrows the scope of its conclusions. The author occasionally extrapolates general statements about CPA translation technique or script development from a limited dataset. A fuller engagement with other CPA fragments, especially those of the Gospels, might have provided firmer ground for some of his broader linguistic claims. Moreover, the textual apparatus, though precise, might have benefited from deeper integration with the major critical editions of the Greek New Testament. Cross-references to the Nestle-Aland or UBS apparatuses are sporadic, and the discussion of textual affiliations remains at times descriptive rather than analytical. The potential significance of certain CPA variants for the history of the Greek text could therefore have been explored more systematically.

Another area of interest is the discussion of historical context. While the author notes that the manuscripts reflect Melkite monastic production, his treatment of the social and theological milieu of these communities remains relatively brief. The CPA biblical tradition developed within a complex environment marked by linguistic competition, doctrinal disputes, and the gradual Arabisation of the Levant. A more extensive exploration of how these forces influenced the copying, translation, and eventual palimpsesting of the CPA texts would have enhanced the interpretative dimension of the study. Similarly, the absence of a dedicated conclusion leaves the reader without a synthesising reflection on the broader implications of the findings.

Nevertheless, these are real *minutiae* in a work of otherwise exceptional quality. Phillips' prose is clear, avoiding both the excessive technicality that sometimes burdens palaeographic writing. His integration of codicology, linguistics, and technology is exemplary. The book sets a new standard for CPA textual editions, and by making the material open access.

The broader significance of this work extends beyond the field of CPA studies, just enough to extend to the field of Christian Arabic translations, which follow the same translation patterns as their predecessors, the Palestinian Arab Christian translators. It contributes to our understanding of how sacred texts circulated, were translated, and were physically transmitted in multilingual Christian communities of the Byzantine period and beyond. It also underscores the importance of minor languages like CPA for reconstructing the lived realities of Christianity outside the dominant Greek, Latin and Arabic spheres. The *Codex Climaci Rescriptus*, as illuminated by Phillips, becomes a testimony not only to textual history but also to cultural negotiation: a material embodiment of the transition from local Aramaic expression to the hegemony of Greek and, later, Arabic.

In conclusion, Phillips' book is an exemplary piece of scholarship that combines philological rigour with technological innovation. It recovers two neglected biblical witnesses, elucidates their linguistic and historical significance, and models a methodological path for future interdisciplinary manuscript studies. The volume stands as an impressive treatment of these CPA texts and a milestone in the modern study of Aramaic Christianity. Scholars of biblical textual criticism, Aramaic linguistics, and Byzantine manuscript culture, but also Christian Arabic translation studies, will find in Phillips' work a rich resource and a methodological guide. It deserves to be recognised as one of the most substantial contributions to the field of Christian Palestinian Aramaic studies in recent years.

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