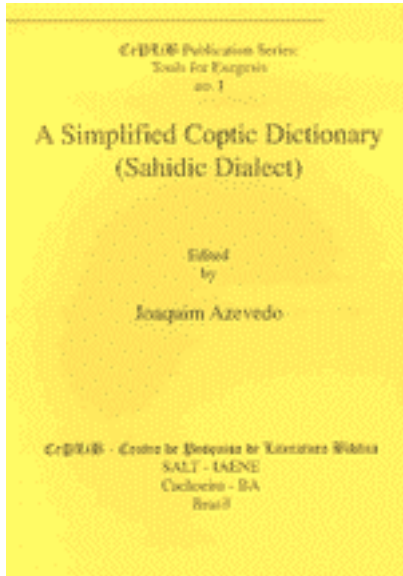


RBL 05/2003



Azevedo, Joaquim, ed.

A Simplified Coptic Dictionary (Sahidic Dialect)

CePLiB Publication Series: Tools for Exegesis 1

Cachoeira, Brazil: Centro de Pesquisa de Literatura Bíblica, 2001. Pp. xl + 186. Paper. No Price Available. ISBN 8588818019.

Robert Paul Seesengood
Drew University
Madison, New Jersey

Dr. Joaquim Azevedo is affiliated with the Seminário Adventista Latin-Americano de Theologia and the Instituto Adventista de Ensino do Nordeste. His *Simplified Coptic Dictionary* is offered as a student/reading lexicon for Sahidic Coptic.

This dictionary has the purpose of supplying a handy and affordable tool for beginners and scholars of various areas of studies. It is not intended to replace other specialized dictionaries. On the contrary, advanced students are advised to become familiar with those dictionaries according to their progress of study. (ix)

A Simplified Coptic Dictionary is offered as volume one of a new series, Tools for Exegesis. Indeed, Azevedo's *Dictionary* will, I think, very likely enable and enhance serious exegesis and reading of a wide number of Coptic texts.

Coptic has for some time been left without a suitable reader's lexicon that features a brief gloss along with any relevant notes or references and cross-listed irregular spellings and forms. The situation seems particularly egregious. While the benefits of Coptic studies for New Testament criticism and translation are obvious, Coptic plays a significant role in the study of early Christian development and doctrine, a major role in much post-Nicene patristic scholarship, and a vital role in studies of the Nag Hammadi manuscripts

and Gnosticism. Unfortunately, many of us must make due with a hurried year of grammar studies (perhaps with some elementary readings if we have been lucky) taken early in our doctoral work. While Azevedo's dictionary may be intended for students, it is also quite useful as a reading dictionary for many of us whose Coptic skills are largely self-developed.

Prior to Azevedo's simplified lexicon, students of Coptic were somewhat confined either to the brief word lists provided in Thomas Lambdin's *Introduction to Sahidic Coptic* (an excellent reference, though short and obviously created to address that grammar's particular needs) or the technical, expensive (and, for students, intimidating) *Coptic Dictionary* by Crum. Further, Crum's organization based on lexical roots is a fundamental difficulty for beginning students, and its size and expense have kept it from being common in the private libraries of many scholars of the New Testament and early Christianity. Until now, Coptic readers have made due with Spiegelberg's *Koptisches Handwörterbuch* or Metzger's *Lists of Words Occurring Frequently in the Coptic New Testament*. While Azevedo's brief lexicon will never replace Crum, its usefulness to beginning students and general reading is obvious. It is not unfair to suggest Azevedo is to Coptic and Crum what *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* is to Greek and Liddell and Scott.

Azevedo's lexicon includes several useful characteristics. First, the vocabulary is tailored to the Nag Hammadi texts, the New Testament, and Lambdin's grammar. Azevedo offers cross-references to irregular verb and noun spellings, cross-references to Crum, notes on verb-noun derivations and relationships, and brief tables of grammatical paradigms (though the necessarily abbreviated form of these tables makes them seem cramped [xiii–xix]). In addition, Azevedo offers a list of common proper and place names (particularly oriented to biblical texts [xx–xxiii]), an extensive list of Greek words commonly used in early Christian Coptic, and a selected bibliography of Coptic studies in French, English, and German that cites well over one hundred articles and monographs from the twentieth century. It is difficult to imagine what more could be included to better aid Coptic students and readers.

While scholars of early Christianity may be interested in texts written in (Sub) Achmimic Coptic (particularly, I am thinking of *Gospel of Thomas*), “the Sahidic dialect was chosen for this dictionary due to the amount of literary works extant in this dialect and because of its antiquity” (viii). The choice to focus on Sahidic does, indeed, make the text useful for reading the majority of “literary” Coptic. Sahidic preserves most of the early patristic and virtually all the non-Christian Coptic. Still, one might hope for more interaction (or the inclusion of notes) for forms or usages present in Sub-Achmimic. Students reading *Thomas* and a few other Nag Hammadi texts will still need to consult commentaries or

wrestle with Crum. Azevedo's choice of Sahidic does, however, make his *Simplified Coptic Dictionary* an ideal companion to Lambert's grammar.

Future editions might profitably include abbreviated references to major articles (many that I might have in mind are included in the bibliography) under key words. In particular, the articles by Crum (*ZAE* 1931), Cerný (*JEA* 1937) Devaud, Drioton, or Edgerton (*AJSLL* 1931–32) and many other similar studies could be referenced after the relevant vocabulary. Users of the dictionary in its present form are well-advised to thoroughly acquaint themselves with Azevedo's bibliography. Instructors who wish to use this text for beginning Coptic courses might also be advised to contact the publisher regarding availability; I conducted searches on several major Internet book distribution sites and did not find *A Simplified Coptic Dictionary* listed as available—even for specialty orders.

I tested the dictionary with a quick reading of *Gospel of Thomas* and Luke 3–6 and found the dictionary well-proofed and seemingly very complete. (There are, however, a number of typographical errors in the preface.) In virtually every case where a gloss seemed inadequate, Azevedo included a reference to Crum. Further, Azevedo has included a fairly extensive treatment of prepositions and other, often tricky, adverbs and particles. Azevedo has included frequent and useful comments on grammatical issues within the definitions of many words (indicating such data as significance and construction of relative clauses, subtle usage differentials, and idiomatic functions). Main entries are marked with an asterisk; entries that reflect irregular spellings or derivative forms provide a quick explanatory gloss and a cross-reference to the location of the main entry. Many Greek words are included within the lexicon proper and not merely the introductory lists. Part of speech (i.e., noun, verb) is identified along with the gender of each noun and any irregularities for each verb. The text, though paperbound, is durable with a reinforced spine and can be made to lay flat (though this takes some “encouragement”). Azevedo has included a single-page table for the relative clause (xvi, adapted from Walter) that is quite handy. I would also add that his table on the numerals (xiv) very nicely collects information easily forgotten.

On the whole, *A Simplified Coptic Dictionary* is a tremendously useful tool. It makes a good reading companion for general readers of Coptic and a tremendous asset to beginning students. The dictionary alone is not adequate for serious translation. I would offer, however, that its ease of use will prompt more scholars to actually engage Coptic texts and not merely rely on other studies—certainly a major benefit to the field of Coptic studies. I would very much recommend the inclusion of *A Simplified Coptic Dictionary* in the required-to-purchase list for beginning students, particularly those using Lambert as a grammar.