These texts were first published by Hermann Junker in 'Koptische Poesie des 10. Jhdts' in Oriens Christianus 7 (1907) pp. 136ff. I have transcribed the text presented by Junker, using square brackets only when text is missing that cannot obviously be supplied. My translation is to the right of the Coptic. The translation is line-by-line, more or less in accordance with the original, and I hope that it may be of use to students wishing not only to understand the text but also to follow the course of it, and such languages notes as I have included are intended for them. The abbreviation CD is for W.E. Crum A Coptic Dictionary (1939)

I have omitted the square brackets required in any edition where the reading is obvious but included them where it is not. The stanzas vary from three to five lines in length lines which are made up of a variable number of syllables. In the songs that give instructions about which mode is to be used for the vocal rendition I have omitted these instructions. Crudely put, the instruction is: 'Sing this to the tune of NN'.

In Or. Chr. 6 (1906) pp. 345 ff. Junker examines the terms ctoixoc and ouwxm, both used frequently in many of the song texts: broadly speaking, the former has to do with the rhythm and the latter with the tune. The subject of stanza structure is examined in pp. 347ff. and it is clear that some songs involved stanza and counterstanza (strophe and antistrophe), essentially duets with two people singing alternate units. Whether they also involved the turning movement of the 'strophe', as in Greek tragedy, is not known. If action were involved, one might legitimately use the term 'drama' to describe the performance. Rhythm is based on stress, as is so common in many poetical traditions, except of course for the quantitative form used in Classical Greek and Latin. Broadly speaking, it would seem that in each line three syllables are stressed, the others, however many there may be, unstressed. On p. 388 of this volume Junker addresses the subject of the age and type of poetry/songwriting involved: the former is not certain and the latter is 'popular'.

The language of the text may be loosely described as affiliated with Sahidic, but there are other forms that may reflect some other dialect, the pronunciation of the writer or increasing estrangement from the grammatical conventions observed at an earlier period. The aberrant nature of the language is particularly evident in the treatment of verbs, to which I have drawn attention in a note.

There are, not surprisingly, quite a few stories about Solomon in the closely interrelated Jewish, early Christian and Islamic traditions. Being the illegitimate child of an illicit liaison between a reigning monarch and the wife of a soldier deliberately sent by that monarch to his...
death, his talent for pithy utterances, wisdom, temple building and liaison with an exotic queen could hardly fail to make Solomon an attractive character. The stories translated below are: The Stepson, Solomon and Sheba (subdivided by Junker into four sections), The Magic Cup and the Magic Column and The Thieves in the Garden, with a Concluding Song.

The Stepson

This song seems to have its beginning and end intact. The boy's complaint in the second stanza suggests that his father was in a monogamous marriage, unlike Solomon. The 'wicked stepmother' trope is common in European storytelling (for example in the rewritten stories of Charles Perrault and the Grimm Brothers) and the reputation of this figure is clearly much older: Herodotus 4, 154 writes of the ruler of Crete's new wife (who is never named) as coming into the house as the wicked stepmother not only in name but also in reality (ἡ δὲ ἐπεσελθοῦσα ἐδικαίου καὶ τῷ ἔργῳ εἶναι μητρυή), which seems to confirm what Euripides later wrote of the stepmother in Alcestis 311 as someone 'no kinder than a viper' (ἐχίδνης οὐδὲν ἡπιωτέρα).
My Lord, have mercy on me.
Give me just judgement,
for my mother has gone to her rest.

My father took another in her place,
A merciless woman in her heart.
She committed great wicked acts against me."

At the time when Solomon was king
Giving upright judgement,
God of heaven being with him

Every man glorifies him.
There is a wealthy man
Whose wife died

A boy, extremely handsome
In his blessing [...]

...small boy .........
She did not do anything good with him
She did not anoint his head with oil ever

Merciful people used to anoint him.
She did not put clean clothes on him
It was the charitable who clothed him

When got up early every day
She would give him three loaves of bread
He would take them from gratefully

He would go... they did not seek him
He would go his mother's grave
And sit and weep... for her

"If only you had taken me down with you,
My beloved mother ......................
.................................................................."

...the woman oppressed him,
He rose and went to Solomon the king.
He wept and cried out:

'My lord, have mercy on me
Give me a just judgement,

For my mother is dead.

My father has taken another in her place.
She is merciless in her heart.
She has done me great wrong.

When Solomon heard these words
Uttered by the boy
He became sad for . . . him

For he was a handsome . . .

“Arise and go home . . .
. . . seven days . . . . die/death
I will give you a judgement

The son arose and went home
He lay down ill
The woman never looked at him

She did not do a good thing for him
She did not give a cup of cool water
As for all those who are sick

She would go in his room and come out
Without saying a word to comfort him.
He would raise his eyes to the Lord

As for all our fathers.

Solomon was told about him by the Spirit:
“He has been taken up to the bosom of Abraham,
Who comforts him with his good things

Isaac took him into his arms
Several words including ‘father’, ‘God’ and ‘face’ can be read, but there is no connected sense
They gave him great honours

Coptic colca can also mean ‘adorn’
Solomon and the Queen of Sheba

Hebrew tradition (e.g. midrash) has several examples of interviews between these two characters, in which the king poses riddles that he then answers and petitioning queen poses questions and riddles magisterially solved Solomon. I have not been able to find any of the stories told here, apart from the reference to the ring and demons.

Arise and let us go to Jerusalem
To see Solomon who has been made
And built the house of the Lord of Hosts.
He completed it in joy

Gold and silver and every precious stone
in its construction
The kings of the earth brought their gifts to him from all over
For his honour is great.
There is no-one like him.

"Your good fame has come to me
While I was still in my country
For you are wise and intelligent.
There is no-one like you

I have come to you, Solomon
And my servants with me
Separate them for me from each other
And I will sing your praise

No man has been found in Israel
Full of wisdom like you
Solomon, the just king

The Lord swore to David your father.
He placed you on his throne.
The peace of God be with you

Your honour is great
And the glory that God has given to you,
Solomon the just king.

You built the house of the Lord well
You finished in joy

4 This form of the neg. aor. prefix in the status nominalis, also used later on, is not recorded by Crum cf. CD 182b
Your joy was complete.

Truly, it is great, your honour
And the glory God has given to you,
Solomon the king of kings.
There is no-one like you.

For you have built the house of the Lord of Hosts
The peace of God be with you
Everywhere you go

There is a tree growing in my country,
Solomon the king of kings of the earth,
Very high and spreading,
With fruit on it.

If you take some of its leaves
And press them into the cup and drink,
A fragrance forms in your mouth.
There is nothing like it.

There is a spring of water in my country,
Solomon, lord of kings of the earth,
Its water sweeter than honey,
To which the illuminating beacons come.

My eyes have seen the sun and the moon
That came down and bathed in it
On 7th of Parmoute
The trees bursting into leaf.

There is a tree growing in my city,
King Solomon,
Growing in the garden of my fathers.
The fruit which it produces
Has an image depicted on it.

When women see it,
They desire it
And bear their children according to it.
I want you to tell me what it means,
For you are wise and intelligent."

"The tree you speak of,
Sheba queen of the Ethiopians,
Is the sun, the beacon
That is in the east.
No-one knows its course.

5 Not necessarily an alternative form of the name, but the Arabic vocative particle یا
When women see it, They desire it For its light that shines, They rejoice and are joyful." Solomon the wise king Solved the mystery.

“There is a tree growing in my country, King Solomon, It is very beautiful.

It is cut down at evening And grows in the morning. I have never seen anything as beautiful on earth.

There is a field to the right of it Full of precious stones Which everyone desires.

A messenger comes once a year; Laden with good things Which he gives to all of those in my country.

He returns and leaves his house. I want you to explain this to me, Solomon, And I will sing your praise."

“The tree growing in your country, Sheba queen of the Ethiopians, Is like the sun.

It sets every evening And shines early every morning. I have not seen anything as beautiful on earth.

The field next to the tree, It is like heaven. The precious stones are the stars

That shine at evening. When the sun shines, they become dark Because of the light surroundig the sun.

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7 The verb used here is πώρα (divide, separate), often confused with πώρα (spread out). They convey the same idea as the Latin solvere, which of course has found its way into English. Junker understands this as ἔννεερχυ: πῶρα as ἔννεερχυ 'all'.

6 Coptic ὁιν. On this use of the conjunction cf. CD 772b meaning (b)

8 Parmoute is described in Pseudo-Cyril of Jerusalem Life and Passion of Christ (ed. and tr. R. van der Broek §1b of the Coptic text) as ἕνεκτ διῆπτω πῆρά ἔννεερχυ 'growing season of the trees'

9 This makes no sense. A verb such as κατε (or some form of it) 'turn' is required.
The messenger who comes to your country
Is the water of the river of Egypt
Which irrigates the land every year:"

I wish for a bird that flies and stops
To fly and come to me again
That I might tell it the mystery

And send it to the whole world.
I want a wise and intelligent man
To explain the mystery to me.

The young bird that flies and stops
Is the hidden word that is not uttered.
If it is uttered, it is divulged
And visits the whole world.

Solomon the 'proverbialist'
Has explained it to me.

The Magic Cup and the Magic Column

He also took a cup of wine and gave it to her,
Having put his ring in it.
Sheba the queen said to him:
"If I drink a cup of wine that is in your hand,
I become humble in your presence."
I will arise and take my mind, Solomon, lord of kings.
If ......................

There is a column in my country,
Solomon, lord of kings.
If you send and bring it here,
It will be useful in your palace.

Gather yourselves, all the demons
That are under your authority
That the column may be brought to me
The first made went: "... 10 until evening."
The second ........ at that moment.

Half of the demons went to Solomon:
"From the breath of your mouth to the breath,
I will bring you the column
Then, as Solomon was speaking.

Half of the demons came,
The column on their wings,
Swinging from side to side
Like the waves of the sea.

Every sight that is on the earth
Is depicted on the column
There being . . . . of the sun and the moon on it,
Mirabile valde visu.

The Thieves in the Garden

Solomon the son of David .......
little sense is to be got from the next few lines
............. the gardens ....
in his city .................
Went into the garden against his wish
And ate his grapes there
And left nothing but the roots.

The master came to the property of . . .
And found the thieves who had eaten . . .

I can make little sense of the next few lines

He walking and cursing David the king.

He found Solomon . . . before him,
He and all his troops.
He said to him: "Why are you walking
And cursing my father David?"

He answered him, saying . . . . . . .

Concluding song

The king who sits on his throne
Dispensing justice well in rectitude,
The vipers/crookbacks in his house.
This is Solomon son of David.
The demons are in his house.

11 The final φε may perhaps be understood as the archaic ο 'great' cf, CD 253a.
12 These are two possible ways of understanding the word: άξω (CD 25b) and ἄξο (CD 753b), the latter being particularly attractive as a contrast to what precedes it.
13 In medieval Jewish literature it is the ring or seal of Solomon that gives power over the demons, whom he was able to employ usefully in the construction of the temple cf. Testament of Solomon.