

Fourth-Century Monasticism in the Papyri

Since Edwin Judge's paper of the same name presented at the 16th Congress in 1980¹ the papyrological evidence for monasticism has been revisited frequently². A wide range of perspectives have been evident, as more frequent recourse is taken to the papyri documenting early monasticism in Egypt³. Yet many such studies continue to depend directly on Judge's work, and a new consolidated appraisal of the evidence seems both necessary and appropriate.

The papyrus record begins within a few years of Pachomius' first monastic foundation in the early 320's. Yet the earlier period, when loose patterns of ascetic individuals and small communities began to coalesce into a coherent phenomenon, remains difficult to chart in the papyri, and interest in it has lessened. Many of the documents which hint at such early communities cannot be dated more closely than III/IV cent., and are thus not easily positioned within a narrative sequence⁴. Monks are destined to remain indistinct in a period in which use of *μοναχός* for 'monk' had not achieved sufficiently widespread public usage to be usefully employed as a descriptive term in the written record⁵. Indeed, identifying late third or early fourth century 'brothers' who live in some sort of community as 'monks' ignores what the ambiguity suggests; that such distinctions were only in the early stages of gaining the public profile they later attained.

The distinction may perhaps now be traced slightly earlier, beyond the point at which Judge could begin; past Isaac the streetfighting *μοναχός* on the streets of Karanis in 324 (P.Col. VII 171) to a monk buying a house on the 'so-called mountain of Hathor' (*ἐν ὄρει καλουμένῳ Φαθώρ*) on the 15th of September (17

¹ E. A. Judge, *Fourth Century Monasticism in the Papyri*, Proc. XVI Int. Congr. Pap., Chico 1981, 613–620. Cf. idem, *The Earliest Use of Monachos for „Monk“* (P. Coll. Youtie 77) and *the Origins of Monasticism*, JbAC 20 (1977) 72–89.

² E. Wipszycka, *Études sur le christianisme dans l'Égypte de l'antiquité tardive*, Rome 1996, esp. Section III, 'Le monachisme égyptien'; *Quand a-t-on commencé à voir les moines comme un groupe à part? Pour comprendre Vita Antonii* 46, 2–5; JJP 27 (1997) 83–92, *The Nag Hammadi Library and the Monks: A Papyrologist's Point of View*; JJP 30 (2000) 179–191; *P.Coll.Youtie II 77 = P.Col. VII 171 Revisited*, in: *Essays and Texts in Honor of J. David Thomas*, edd. T. Gagos and R. S. Bagnall, Oakville 2001, 45–50; B. Kramer, *Neuere Papyri zum frühen Mönchtum in Ägypten*, in: *Philanthropia kai eusebeia. Festschrift für Albrecht Dihle zum 70. Geburtstag*, edd. G. W. Most, H. Petersmann and A. M. Ritter, Göttingen 1993, 217–232; on the Melitian monastic papyri in particular, see J. E. Goehring, *Ascetics, Society, and the Desert: Studies in Early Egyptian Monasticism*, Harrisburg 1999; H. Hauben, *The Melitian 'Church of the Martyrs'. Christian Dissenters in Ancient Egypt*, in: *Ancient History in a Modern University*, edd. T. W. Hillard, R. Kearsley et al., 2 vols., North Ryde 1998, II 329–349; idem, *Le Papyrus London VI (P.Jews) 1914 dans son contexte historique (mai 335)*, Atti del XXII Congresso Internazionale di Papirologia, ed. I. Andorlini et al., Firenze 2001, 605–618.

³ S. Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony. Monasticism and the Making of a Saint*, Minneapolis 1995, 116–125; G. Gould, *The Life of Antony and the Origins of Christian Monasticism in Fourth-Century Egypt*, *Medieval History* 1 (1991) 3–11; idem, *Early Egyptian Monasticism and the Church*, in: *Monastic Studies. The Continuity of Tradition*, ed. J. Loades, Bangor 1990, 1–10; A. Martin, *Athanase d'Alexandrie et l'église d'Égypte au IV^e siècle (328–373)*, Rome 1996, 653–662; S. Elm, 'Virgins of God'. *The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity*, Oxford 1994, 234–252; D. Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, Oxford 1995, 210–212. See also Goehring's assessment of the importance of the papyrological evidence after Judge's work, *Ascetics, Society, and the Desert* (above note 2), 3–4.

⁴ E. g. P.Gron. 17, 18 (?), III/IV), 'lettere de monaco' according to M. Naldini, *Il cristianesimo in Egitto*, 2nd ed., Firenze 1998 (his numbers 24–25). Some of the so-called 'Letters of Recommendation' have also been seen as chronicling monasticism (Naldini, *Il cristianesimo*, p. 39 n. 4), but see E. Wipszycka, *Remarques sur les lettres privées chrétiennes des II^e–IV^e siècles (a propos d'un livre de M. Naldini)*, JJP 18 (1974) 203–221 at 208ff.

⁵ Contrast the testimony of the Life of Antony, 14, implying currency somewhat earlier (c. 305 in the estimation of Judge, *Earliest Use* (s. above note 1), 77.

Thoth) 323 (P.Neph. 48). The dating clause is largely lost, but the lacuna seems capable of accepting only a consular formula for 323⁶. Acceptance of the dating in the HGV warrants consideration of its implications, although these should not be taken for conclusions while the possibility of a later date remains open⁷.

In the first instance, is the subject matter consistent with what else we know of monasticism in the early 320's? The papyrus records a transaction in which a μοναχός buys a property from a man (perhaps another monk) who himself inherited it from a πρεσβύτερος. The building is specified to be an οἰκία; need this be a monastic settlement? The text preserves no clue as to what sort of community this 'so-called mountain of Hathor' provided, although there were 'neighbours' (γείτονες), which the papyrus breaks off on the point of describing. ὄρος comes, of course, to mean 'monastery'⁸, one of a number of terms and concepts whose general usage is altered through Christian influence during the course of the fourth century. That the ὄρος is καλούμενος Φαθώρ may indicate that this is not a normal 'mountain' or 'desert'; are we witnessing the beginning of the influence of the monastic discourse on general usage? That a monastery of this name is known in the Heracleopolite in the ensuing decades increases the likelihood that we are dealing here with this community at an early stage. How early a stage? The sale of a house which had been on the 'mountain' for at least two generations implies that a community, not necessarily monastic in origin but now including monks, had been on the 'mountain' for some time. The date of the papyrus may be compared with Pachomius' foundation of his community at around this time⁹; before that, he dwelt with his ascetic master Palamon on a 'mountain' (ΤΩΟΥ) populated by other monks¹⁰. If the papyrus may be allowed to illustrate this early stage of monastic development, the suggested date is not historically implausible.

Among fourth century monastic papyri, those concerning Melitian monasticism have attracted most attention in recent years¹¹; here, then, let two points suffice. Firstly, if the Melitian monastic community of Hathor, well-known from the archives of Paieous¹² and Nephros¹³, can be placed in the Heracleopolite nome in 323, the homonymic monastery apparently attested in the Upper Cynopolite nome some 11 years later¹⁴ is likely to have been the 'daughter' monastery, if two monasteries are to be seen¹⁵. If — as seems more likely — we are dealing with one monastery, topographic confusion on the part of the writer of P.Lond. VI 1913 seems more probable, as the community which features in the mid fourth-century archive of Nephros is situated in the Heracleopolite. A location in the southern Heracleopolite near the border of the adjacent nomes may have promoted confusion¹⁶.

⁶ K. A. Worp, *Marginalia on Published Documents*, ZPE 78 (1989) 133–138, at 135; see P.Neph., Taf. 26. Reading το] γ/ rather than λαμ|πρ(στάτων) at the beginning of what remains of the first line (so Worp, and allowed by the editors, P.Neph. 48. In.), only τοῖς ἀποδειχθησομένοις ὑπάτοις τὸ γ appears to fit the c. 50 character lacuna, even if slightly too short.

⁷ Other fourth century dating formulae ending with 'for the third time' (e. g. 346, 354, 360, 370, 396) appear considerably too long, but alternate possibilities, e. g. idiosyncratic abbreviation of one of these, cannot be dismissed.

⁸ See H. Cadell and R. Rémondon, *Sens et emplois de τὸ ὄρος dans les documents papyrologiques*, REG 80 (1967) 343–349.

⁹ On the chronology see P. Rousseau, *Pachomius. The Making of a Community in Fourth Century Egypt*, Berkeley 1985, 57ff.; cf. J. E. Goehring, *Melitian Monastic Organization: A Challenge to Pachomian Originality*, in: *Ascetics, Society and the Desert* (see above, n. 2), 187–195, whose arguments for the contemporaneity of Melitian and Pachomian communal asceticism would be strengthened by an early dating for P.Neph. 48.

¹⁰ Bohairic Life of Pachomius, 10ff., esp. 16 (L.-Th. Lefort, ed., *S. Pachonii Vita Bohairice Scripta* [CSCO 89; 1964–1965] 17)

¹¹ See above, n. 2.

¹² P.Lond. VI 1913–1922 plus P.Lond. Copt. inv. 2724, ed. W. E. Crum, *Some Further Melitian Documents*, JEA 13 (1927) 19–26.

¹³ P.Neph. 1–42, comprising letters to Nephros and several other people involved with the monastery, along with documents from the same purchase, not all of which display an explicit connection with the monastery of Hathor.

¹⁴ P.Lond. VI 1913 (19. 3. 334), ll. 2–3.

¹⁵ See the discussion of the editors of P.Neph., Intro., p. 12–14; an early dating of P.Neph. 48 would make some explanations for the discrepancy less likely, e. g. the monastery is unlikely to have been destroyed and rebuilt across the nome border twice.

¹⁶ See the map provided by Kramer, *Neuere Papyri zum frühen Mönchtum* (see above, n. 2), 233.

This ‘mountain called Hathor’ might be thought an appropriate residence for the anchorite Papnouthios¹⁷, whose membership of the Melitian community at Hathor has been proposed and almost universally accepted since Judge wrote¹⁸. There is no evidence definitively disproving the contention. However, one might express concern at the pace at which the suggestive but inconclusive arguments for Papnouthios’ membership of the Hathor community have been accepted, to the point where it can be stated that ‘[t]oday, the Papnouthios archive is rightly understood within the Melitian context’¹⁹. It seems highly likely that the judgement of the first editor, H. I. Bell, was compromised in this regard by his determination that *the Athanasius* wrote P.Lond. VI 1929 to the anchorite²⁰, a proposition accepted by few subsequent commentators. However, some lexical similarities between the Papnouthios and Nephros archives notwithstanding, Bell’s assessment that there was nothing to specifically suggest that Papnouthios was a Melitian remains sound. From this does not follow his consequent conclusion that he was an ‘orthodox catholic monk’, just that we do not know. This being so, it might be preferable to bracket Papnouthios’ membership of the Hathor community and not make extensive usage of it to build or support theories about Melitian monasticism.

A more secure Melitian connection would favour a proposed identification of Papnouthios with the like-named Melitian monk and confessor known from literary sources²¹. As with the long-held view that P.Lond. V 1658²² was written by St. Antony himself and the more recent assertion that the bilingual archive of Apa Johannes²³ be identified as the papers of John of Lycopolis²⁴, the theory is attractive, but attended at many points by doubt. In all these cases the premise is in question at the stage of examining the papyrological material. A re-examination of the actual text of P.Lond. V 1658 has removed any likelihood that the correspondent of the Antonius who wrote the letter was called Ammon²⁵. The connection of the archive of Papnouthios with the securely Melitian archives — on which its owner’s identify with the influential Melitian confessor depends — is not certain²⁶. The route by which the papers of John of Lycopolis are said to have travelled from the Deir el-Azam to modern collections requires contemporary excavation reports²⁷, accounts of the purchase of the texts²⁸, and the numerous connections between the dispersed papyri of this purchase and the Hermopolite nome²⁹ to be either supplemented or explained away.

¹⁷ P.Lond. VI 1923–1229 (mid-IV). SB I 2266 (= Pap.Heid. I 6) (mid-IV) is probably addressed to the same man, so too a further two letters from the Heidelberg collection to be published by in U. and D. Hagedorn in the *Gedenkschrift Sijpesteijn*; see <http://aquila.papy.uni-heidelberg.de/kat.html>, entries for P.Heid. inv. 38 and P.Heid. inv. 863.

¹⁸ See P.Neph., Intro., p. 23 n.7; cf. p. 21. Concurrence in e. g. J. E. Goehring, *Monastic Diversity and Ideological Boundaries in Fourth-Century Christian Egypt*, in: *Ascetics, Society and the Desert* (see above, n. 2), 196–218 at 203, n. 22; R. S. Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, Princeton 1993, 308 with n. 274; H. Hauben, *Jean Arkhaph, évêque de Memphis, dans la catalogue mélitien*, in: *Philohistôr. Miscellanea in honorem Caroli Laga septuagenarii*, edd. A. Schoors and P. Van Deun, Leuven 1994, 23–33, at 25 n. 16.

¹⁹ Goehring, *Ascetics, Society, and the Desert* (see above, n. 2), 7.

²⁰ P.Lond. VI, pp. 115–118.

²¹ Hauben, *Jean Arkhaph, évêque de Memphis* (s. above, n. 18), 25 n.16. Not presumably the Melitian Papnouthios who identifies as being from the monastery of Ptemensyrcois in the Antaeopolite nome, Athanasius, *Apol. c. Ar. 67*. On the confusing (and often conflating) traditions involving men of this name in fourth century Egypt see Martin, *Athanase* (s. above, n. 3), 43–49.

²² See N. Gonis, *Antony and His Letter to a Dead Man*, APF 43 (1997) 364–367.

²³ P.Herm. 7–10, P.Ryl. Copt. 268–276, probably also SB XVIII 13612; see esp. P. van Minnen, *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity*, APF 40 (1994) 71–85.

²⁴ C. Zuckerman, *The Hapless Recruit Psois and the Mighty Anchorite Apa John*, BASP 32 (1995) 183–194.

²⁵ Gonis, *Antony and His Letter to a Dead Man* (s. above, n. 22): "Αμ[μῶνι] cannot be read in line 1.

²⁶ Principally, lexical coincidence between the archives of Papnouthios and Nephros does not appear as significant when viewed against literary usage. Nor do rough contemporaneity, presumed similarity of provenance, or the presence of the archive of Papnouthios and half of that of Paieous within a larger purchase of various provenance offer any more conclusive proof.

²⁷ See M. effendi Chabân, *Les fouilles de Deir al Aizam (Septembre 1897)*, Annales du service des antiquités de l’Égypte 1 (1900) 109–119. Zuckerman’s interpretation of the apparent discrepancies between Chabân’s report (esp. p. 110) and the inventory given by Gaston Maspero in an appendix (116) are not entirely convincing (e. g. why would the parchment not have also been sold by the excavators?), *Hapless Recruit* (s. above, n. 24), 191–192.

²⁸ P.Herm., Intro., p. v, and P.Ryl. Copt., Intro, p. vii. See esp. van Minnen, *Roots* (s. above, n. 23), 80–82, tracing the involvement of Grenfell and Hunt. Zuckerman’s reconstruction seems to presuppose separation of Greek and Coptic texts before their purchase (*Hapless Recruit* [see above, n. 24], 188–192).

²⁹ See the remarks of Crum, P.Ryl. Copt., Intro, p. vii; cf. van Minnen, *Roots* (above n. 23), 81–82; idem, ZPE 82 (1990) 95.

Beyond the papyrological material yawns the gap between genres of evidence, in which the papyrological dossiers must meet the framework of the narrative sources in some form. More than simple homonymy is required to bridge this; nor is a jump to a preconstructed history necessarily appropriate. A wider perspective reveals similar approaches: The monks who feature in the Nag Hammadi cartonnage papyri³⁰ have been most frequently read against the known features of Pachomian monasticism; similarities and differences noted³¹. So too, until recently, the Melitian monks of Hathor. When allowed to speak for themselves, the Melitian papyri indicate a thriving system arising contemporaneously with, and independently from, that of Pachomius³². Presumed proximity to Pachomian communities alone should not deny Sansnos and the other monks in the Nag Hammadi cartonnage texts similar consideration, especially as Pachomian literature itself evidences other ascetic groups, orthodox and otherwise, in the vicinity of Pachomian establishments³³.

So too should Apa Johannes' dossier be allowed its own voice. Noting, as we must, that he is a monk of similar standing to John of Lycopolis allows use of the literary traditions concerning the latter in interpreting the papyrological material. But once we say that Apa Johannes is John of Lycopolis, we face temptation, if not compulsion, to interpret the papyri in the light of what is known of the great monk's career. This process may not always allow the papyrological sources due weight, and runs the risk of subsuming the only record of an influential monk within a wider body of evidence for a more famous homonymic contemporary.

New publications and new interpretations of the monastic assemblages of the Apa Johannes texts and the Hathor dossier have seen a progressive coalescence in the provenances of a significant portion of fourth century monastic papyri. The Hathor dossier, which began with the eleven texts of the archive of Paieous, as now conceived of comprises over sixty documents. This includes the archives of Nephros³⁴ and Pappouthios, and several other pieces which mention the monastery³⁵. The suggested association of three other Coptic letters³⁶ with the Melitian community owes more to the status of P.Lond. VI 1920–1922 as the best known examples of fourth century Coptic letters when these texts were published than to any specific content. While all could be read as proceeding from a monastic context³⁷, it need not be the same monastic context. Nor need the use of Coptic imply such where it is not explicit (even in the case of P.Lond. VI 1922, which nothing but rough contemporaneity connects with the dossier of Paieous³⁸.)

The archive of Apa Johannes, which once consisted (as it was known) of four texts³⁹, now encompasses 28, if all suggestions are included. Five Greek and nine Coptic letters may be assigned with relative

³⁰ P.Nag. Hamm. Gr. 68, 72, 75, 76, 77, 78, and Copt. 5 are addressed to a Sansnos, described variously as *πρεσβύτερος* or *μοναχός* if the same man (nothing speaks against this, although see the caution in P.Nag. Hamm. Intro., pp. 7–9). The Sansnos mentioned in Copt. 8 (sent by a ΜΟΝΑΧΟC) is perhaps connected, that who sends Gr. 69 less likely so; cf. E. Wipszycka, *Les clercs dans les communautés monastiques d'Égypte*, JJP 26 (1996) 135–166, at 144, n. 17; idem, *Nag Hammadi Library* (see above, n. 2), 190–191. Aphrodisios, the writer of Copt. 5, may be from another monastic community. More sensationally, perhaps, but no less conclusively (see esp. Wipszycka, *Nag Hammadi Library*, 181–182) Copt. 6 is written by Pachom to Panoute.

³¹ See J. W. B. Barns, *Greek and Coptic Papyri from the Covers of the Nag Hammadi Codices. A Preliminary Report*, in: *Essays on the Nag Hammadi Texts in Honour of Pahor Labib*, ed. M. Krause, Leiden 1975, 9–18; P.Nag. Hamm., Intro., pp. 5–11; C. Scholten, *Die Nag-Hammadi-Texte als Buchbesitz der Pachomianer*, JbAC 31 (1988) 144–172.

³² Contrast Goehring, *Melitian Monastic Organization* (see above, n. 9), with the earlier work he surveys.

³³ See e. g. the Bohairic Life of Pachomius, 42 (ed. Lefort, pp. 44ff.); cf. Rousseau, *Pachomius*, 72 and P.Nag. Hamm., Intro., p. 6, n. 12.

³⁴ As published, the archive includes documents from the same purchase (said to be from a single find) but with no further evident connection with Nephros or Hathor; see P.Neph., Intro., pp. 4–6.

³⁵ See the texts published in the second half of P.Neph. ('Verwandte Texte'), of which P.Neph. 48 and 49 mention Hathor itself.

³⁶ P.Crum VC 47; P.Mich. Copt. I 5, I 6.

³⁷ Especially P.Crum. VC 47 (Panopolis?, IV), in which a *presbyteros* requests his fellow *presbyteros* Apa Sie to take care to bring them (? ΝΓΤΟΥΝΤΟΥ; cf. W. Till, *Zu Crums Varia Coptica*, Muséon 53 [1940] 111–122 at 121) 'up to the capacity of the ΤΟΥΥ'. ΤΟΥΥ, like the Greek ὄρος, is at a lexical crossroads in this period, but here has already taken on the meaning of 'monastery'.

³⁸ Admitted already in the ed. pr., P.Lond. VI, p. 97. Although from the same purchase, there is no substantial onomastic overlap between the letter and the rest of the archive; nor does it appear to have been addressed to Paieous or any other member of the Hathor community known from the archive.

³⁹ P.Herm. 7–10.

confidence to the monk's collection of letters⁴⁰. A further fourteen letters from various collections have also been associated in one forum or another with the archive. A number of other Coptic texts in the Rylands collection of similar date⁴¹ were hypothesised by their first editor to have been from the same source, a conjecture which has found increasing support as the archive has taken fuller shape⁴². Some of the letters at least are likely to have been sent to Johannes, in particular P.Ryl. Copt. 301 and 396⁴³. But *in toto* the contention it is unprovable, as nearly all have lost their addresses. One whose opening lines have survived is addressed to an Apa Kollouthos⁴⁴. This strongly suggests that, as with the Greek texts from the purchase, the early Coptic papyri come from more than one ultimate source. An additional five further letters written to or by a Johannes have been associated with the monk⁴⁵; some are likely additions, but in others little supports the identification except the name. Letters written by a Johannes, such as P.Amh. II 145 and P.Crum. ST 173, might have been written by the monk in question, but are not likely to have been found with his papers, even if they were part of the same purchase⁴⁶.

It is not impossible that we are dealing with a single monk's papers here, but if letters sent to or from monks⁴⁷ called Johannes are to be automatically assigned to this Johannes, the evidence of literary sources that at least eleven monks of this name were active in fourth century Egypt⁴⁸ must be set aside. While grouping monastic papyri under fewer headings can have the effect of better illuminating particular monks or monasteries, if carried out too incautiously it has the potential to distort the picture. Where we may have seen a large number of texts illustrating a diverse range of monks, we instead see the same number of texts illustrating basically two communities; this is not necessarily a positive thing.

Further 'unorthodox' expression of asceticism are now found in the μοναχός who appears in the Kellis agricultural account-book⁴⁹ paying 'on behalf of Mani', assumed by its editor to equate to the 'place of Mani' (Τόπος Μανι) which features elsewhere in the text. Τόπος, like ὄρος, acquires the meaning of 'monastery' during the fourth century. Assuming it has something of this sense here (and it would be one of the earliest usages in this sense in the papyri), this 'place' may be the monastery which features in several letters from the site, one of them from a Manichaean context⁵⁰. Assumptions made so far require further corroboratory evidence to be secure, but even with what is known, the relationship between Manichaean and 'Christian' forms of asceticism deserves reconsideration, even if the evidence from Kellis is too late to speak directly to Ludwig Koenen's posited connection between the example of Manichaean missionaries and earliest Christian monks⁵¹. In the changing lexical landscape of late antique Egypt, here too further evidence for ambiguity. The account book, which the heading ΧΜΓ indicates was produced within a

⁴⁰ See above n. 23.

⁴¹ P.Ryl. Copt. 292, 301, 310–14, 352, 396.

⁴² See Zuckerman, *Hapless Recruit Psois* (see above, n. 24), 189ff.; van Minnen, *Roots* (above n. 23), 80ff. is more cautious.

⁴³ P.Ryl. Copt. 301 mentions an Apa Shoi, perhaps the writer of P.Ryl. Copt. 268 and 269; if the same hand wrote P.Ryl. Copt. 275 and P.Ryl. Copt. 396 (so Crum) the latter may also be to Johannes.

⁴⁴ P.Ryl. Copt. 352

⁴⁵ P.Crum ST 172–173, P.Lond. III 981, P.Herm. 15, P.Amh. II 145.

⁴⁶ Note however the apparent presence of a letter from Paieous in his archive, P.Lond. VI 1921. Both the opening line and the address are not clear. However, ΠΔΕΙΗΟΥΣ ΔΙΚΑΙΟΥ in the latter cannot be the monk's patronymic, as suggested by the editors, P.Lond. VI 1921, Intro. (see P.Lond. VI 1913. 2: [Αὐρήλ]ιος Παγεῦς Ὁρου). Their statement that „he is not likely to have called himself 'the just'“ should be qualified by the common use of *dikaios* as an epithet for monks; see Antony so described by Evagrius, apud Socrates, *H. E.* 4. 23. 43, and ascetics called *oi dikaioi* in the *de virginitate* (spuriously) attributed to Athanasius (PG 28. 251–282, at 277).

⁴⁷ It might be noted that some of the letters bear no explicit evidence of monasticism; in particular, the use of the term 'Apa' does not guarantee this.

⁴⁸ Three feature in the *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto* (HM 1; 13 3–12; 26) and eight in the alphabetical collection of the *Apophthegmata Patrum*.

⁴⁹ P.Kell. IV Gr. 96, (Kellis, 376–379?) ed. R. S. Bagnall, 1. 975.

⁵⁰ P.Kell. I Gr. 12 (IV), P.Kell. V Copt. 12 (IV²); cf. I. Gardner, *He has gone to the monastery*, in: *Studia Manichaica*, edd. R. E. Emmerick, W. Sundermann and P. Zieme, Berlin 2000, 247–257.

⁵¹ *Manichäische Mission und Klöster in Ägypten*, in: *Das römisch-byzantinische Ägypten*. Akten des internationalen Symposiums 26.–30. September 1978 in Trier, edd. G. Grimm, H. Heinen, and E. Winter, Mainz am Rhein 1983, 93–108.

Christian (as opposed to Manichaean) setting⁵², refers to a Manichaean ascetic as a *μοναχός*; one more indication that the battle fought through the Life of Antony to secure the title of *μοναχός* for ‘approved’ ascetics was not successful, at least not in the distant Oasis⁵³.

In the Melitian and Manichaean material, the papyri illuminate the diversity within Egyptian monasticism, giving it a prominence frequently glossed in the literary sources. Yet virtually none of the diversity derives from theology or doctrine expressed within the papyri themselves. If we did not know what Melitians and Manichaeans were, little would suggest these monks were other than ‘orthodox’. That is to say, the quantitative evidence of diversity must be filled out in terms of belief and ascetic practice by literary sources. That hardly any of the monastic papyri can be classified in theological terms indicates how little impact theological controversies made on everyday lexical usage, although we must allow that such subjects frequently have no natural place in everyday personal communication.

The geographical and linguistic axes of the earliest expressions of monasticism continue to be debated on various fronts. The concept of ‘urban monasticism’⁵⁴ has retained its prominence and perceived importance. Certainly, where the papyrus record for monasticism is sufficiently localised, the symbiotic environment with nearby or geographically contiguous ‘urban’ areas is clear, if ‘urban’ is defined broadly⁵⁵. So much is to be expected from the predominantly ‘urban’ (again in a broad sense) provenance of most papyri. But if ‘urban’ is taken in a stricter sense, to mean the larger metropolitan settlements in which Church infrastructure, theological and philosophical schools were concentrated, then the papyri do not strongly testify to an early (i. e. pre c. 350) expression of the large and vital presence which can be clearly seen in papyrological and literary⁵⁶ sources later in the century. If anything they testify to the opposite: monks associated with village life are much more common. Despite the metropolitan origin of so many of the papyri, we wait until shortly after 346/7 for an *ἀποτακτικός* (who may not even have lived there) to be listed as owning land in Hermopolis⁵⁷. Another *ἀποτακτικός* is left some Oxyrhynchite property a short time later⁵⁸, but neither the location of the property nor the regular abode of the monk are given, and it is not until 400 (shortly after the author of the *Historia Monachorum* visited the city) that monastics dwelling in the town itself are attested (P.Oxy. XLIV 3203). Here they are female ascetics (*μοναχὰ ἀποτακτικαί*), also attested in Lycopolis⁵⁹ and Panopolis during the course of the century⁶⁰. Melitian monks meet in Alexandria in the 330’s⁶¹, and someone writes to Nephros about a monk ‘in the city’⁶²; in more ambiguous earlier letters, a monk (?) travels though Antinoë and Arsinoë⁶³. But the scattered evidence cannot be made to speak to a role within the ascetic evolution of the Alexandrian Christian community or schools of Hellenic

⁵² If the letters are an acrostic for *Χριστὸν Μαρία γεννῶ* (or similar; see most recently T. Derda, P.Naqlun, Appendix [pp. 179–187]; A. di Bitonto Kasser, *Una nuova attestazione di χριστον μαρια γεννω*, *Aegyptus* 78 [1998] 123–129), Manichaeans are unlikely to have used them; see e. g. Augustine *Ep.* 236. 2 (ed. Goldbacher).

⁵³ See Judge, *Earlier Use* (see above, n. 1); a full exposition of the program in Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism* (see above, n. 3).

⁵⁴ Judge highlighted the importance in *Earliest Use* (see above, n. 1); cf. E. Wipszycka, *Le monachisme égyptien et les villes*, in: *Études sur le christianisme dans l’Égypte* (see above, n. 2), 281–336, and the focus of Goehring’s recent work as explained in the Introduction to *Ascetics, Society and the Desert* (see above, n. 2)

⁵⁵ As in, e. g. Goehring, *Ascetics, Society and the Desert* (see above, n. 2), 4, n. 4: „I use ‘urban’ here to refer to a setting within a village, town, or city, as opposed to location in the countryside or desert“.

⁵⁶ The exaggerated testimony of the author of the *Historia Monachorum* (*HM* 5. 1–4) is only the best known example.

⁵⁷ P.Landlisten G 505, F 722.

⁵⁸ P.Oxy. XLVI 3311 (c. 373/4).

⁵⁹ P.Lips. I 43, from Lycopolis and before 347 if the Bishop Plousianos judging the case involving the *ἀειπαρθένος* Thais is the man known from literary sources; see Martin, *Athanasie* (see above, n. 3), 708 (although Elm, *Virgins of God* [see above, n. 3], 235, n. 23, cites contrary opinions). Debate on the significance of the title (and whether it even indicates an ascetic life) in A. M. Emmett, *Female Ascetics in the Greek Papyri*, *JÖB* 32 (1983) 507–515; Elm, *Virgins of God* (see above, n. 3), 239–240.

⁶⁰ P.Lips. I 60 (Panopolis, before 371), an *ἀειπάρθενος*.

⁶¹ P.Lond. VI 1913; cf. P.Neph. 8.

⁶² P.Neph. 16.

⁶³ P.Gron. 18 (III/IV); cf. above, n. 4.

(or Gnostic?) speculation; nor is there strong evidence for monks from ‘elite’ backgrounds⁶⁴. Rural, village settings are more frequently evoked in the papyri⁶⁵.

The educational standards of early monastic communities prove difficult to elucidate, and such inquiries may not lead very far in any case, as there was clearly a wide spectrum. It should be noted, however, that the standard of Greek used in letters from lay Christians to monks (for such comprise the majority of the fourth century ‘monastic archives’) does not explicitly speak to this question⁶⁶. Despite this, the language in which such communications were made deserves attention. Within the archives of Paieous, Nepheros, and Johannes lie the best known fourth century Coptic documentary papyri, and the spread of Coptic as a vehicle for personal written communication and the rise of monasticism are virtually contemporaneous. How much more than chronological is this relationship? Recent re-readings have seen a much closer relationship with Hellenic and Alexandrian culture in early monastic thought and life⁶⁷. At the same time, the broad cross section of village life from which the Kellis correspondence derives shows decisively what the (still relatively small) corpus of Coptic documents dated to the fourth century already suggested, that the use of Coptic for non-literary purposes took place both within and outside a ‘monastic context’⁶⁸. The state of Coptic palaeography continues to inhibit the view, and the c. 120 published texts which have or can be dated to this period may form but a small part of the Coptic documentation which has survived from this time. Yet even within them, usage seems diversified, in terms not only of dialect, provenance, and script, but also of social context. Less than thirty can be confidently linked with monasticism in terms of their content or associations. The smallness of the sample size necessitates a considerable margin of error, but not so much that it could continue to be claimed that the use of Coptic for writing letters or personal accounts was relatively circumscribed within a monastic context in the fourth century⁶⁹. Rather, indications are that a monastic context, however we might wish to define that, cannot be assumed merely on the basis of linguistic choice.

This is not to deny the role played by monasticism as a broad phenomenon in the rise and spread of Coptic, and its written use in non-literary contexts. But this relationship, and the papyrological evidence for it, must be positioned within a view of the Late Antique world in which monasticism can be read as evolving in a more bilingual, culturally interactive climate, one in which the use of Coptic for literature and documents expands along paths which seem increasingly geographically, religiously, and dialectally diverse. The spread of the use of Coptic in both literary and documentary contexts is a process which runs alongside and intersects with the development of monasticism; despite these points of intersection, they should not be analysed as part of the same continuum.

⁶⁴ Despite e. g. Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony* (see above, n. 3), 118 („the papyri reveal that a number of apotactics and anchorites came from the urban elite“), the frequently cited Agathos ἀποτακτικός, son of a *prytanis* from Arsinoë, who subscribes P.Würzb. 16 (349) in the Fayum village of Kerkesephis, and Didyme the Panopolitan ἀειπάρθενος, daughter of a former magistrate and councillor of the city (P.Lips. I 60 [371]) seem to be the only fourth century ascetics who can be explicitly linked with an ‘urban elite’.

⁶⁵ The monastery of Hathor was near enough the village of Nesos for Nepheros to act as its priest; see also P.Col. VII 171 (Karanis, 324); P.Würzb. 16 (Kerkesephis, Arsinoite, 349); P.Lips. I 28 (Areos, Hermopolite, 381); SB VIII 9683 (Ankyron, Heracleopolite, IV); P.Kell. I Gr. 12, P.Kell. V Copt. 12 (Kellis, Mothite, IV). PSI XIII 1342 (Alabastrine, Hermopolite) has been dated as early as IV¹ (ed. pr.; BL 4, 91), but is more probably from the fifth century (BL 4, 91; 6, 186; 9, 231).

⁶⁶ See the discussion of Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony* (see above, n. 3), 120–121 and the critique of G. Gould, *Recent Work on Monastic Origins: a Consideration of the Questions Raised by Samuel Rubenson’s The Letters of St. Antony*, *Studia Patristica* 25 (1993) 405–416.

⁶⁷ See esp. Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony* (see above, n. 3).

⁶⁸ See also the Coptic ostraca from Douch (e. g. O.Douch. I, 40, 44, 49) showing some degree of use in an administrative context.

⁶⁹ See e. g. Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity* (see above, n. 18), 239–240.