Appeals to the Intercessions of Mary in Greek Liturgical and Paraliturgical Texts from Egypt

Egypt has yielded a rich harvest of textual and material evidence of Christian reflection upon and devotion toward Mary in late antiquity. This bounty is not merely due to an environment conducive to the preservation of materials, important as this has undoubtedly been. There is more going on. But exactly what is going on is harder to determine than at first sight. Several elements of the cult of Mary in Egyptian Christianity become less certain when they are examined more closely. This may be illustrated by considering questions associated with early oblique indications of devotion toward Mary in Egypt, focusing on the epithet Theotokos, which inevitably figures in discussions of the origins of the cult of Mary in late antiquity. As is well known, the epithet is indisputably attested by Alexandrian writers in the fourth century, and in fact by writers around the eastern Mediterranean irrespective of doctrinal allegiance. Whereas the epithet apparently required explanation in the third century, when they are examined more closely, this may be illustrated by considering questions associated with early oblique indications of devotion toward Mary in Egypt, focusing on the epithet Theotokos, which inevitably figures in discussions of the origins of the cult of Mary in late antiquity. As is well known, the epithet is indisputably attested by Alexandrian writers in the fourth century, and in fact by writers around the eastern Mediterranean irrespective of doctrinal allegiance. Whereas the epithet apparently required explanation in the third century, fourth-century writers use it incidentally and without comment, suggesting that the term had been accepted into

1 I gratefully acknowledge support for the research of this paper in the form of a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and release from teaching from the Faculty of Arts in the University of Ottawa. I have benefitted from comments offered at colloquia and conferences where portions of this paper have been read at various stages its development, including the Centre for Early Christian Studies in Australian Catholic University; the North American Patristics Society; and the Fourth Annual Coptic Studies Symposium in Canada; and the Sixteenth International Conference on Patristic Studies. I wish to thank Pauline Allen in particular for encouraging me to pursue this inquiry, and Leena Mari Peltomaa for inviting me to contribute a paper to this volume. The responsibility for the paper is, of course, mine.


While G. Giamberardini, Il culto mariano in Egitto, vol. 1 (Pubblicazioni dello Studium biblicum franciscanum anacleta 6; Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1975) conveniently presents much of the evidence, it must be read critically and supplemented by more recent finds and studies.


theological usage by then. The devotional value of the epithet in the third and fourth centuries is less clear, however. Although Cyril of Alexandria comes to its defence for soteriological reasons, he is not particularly concerned with the epithet prior to the controversy with Nestorius. Nor does he appeal to its cultic significance when he takes up its cause, although in his homilies at Ephesus Mary is hailed as the one through whom salvation has come and creation has been restored. It has been suggested that the epithet was first used in hymns. But if this is so, we do not know whether these hymns were addressed to Mary; they are more likely to have been theological or christological in nature. Much has been made of P.Ryl. III 470, which preserves an early witness to the antiphon Sub tuum praesidium, a prayer for protection addressed directly to the Theotokos. But it is less certain now that this papyrus should be assigned to the fourth century, let alone the third century; it probably belongs to the sixth or seventh century, or even later, though scholars of the cult of Mary have been either unaware of, or slow to accept, recent paleographical examinations of the papyrus. The most common name for churches or other sites dedicated to Mary in Egypt is “holy Mary,” an expression that appears from the fifth century onward. Considerably fewer sites are dedicated to the Theotokos, a name that first appears in the sixth century.

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13 P.Ryl. III 470; F.F. Mercier, “L’antienne mariale grecque la plus ancienne,” Le Muséon 52 (1939), 229–33; O. Stegmüller, “Sub tuum praesidium: Bemerkungen zur ältesten Überlieferung,” Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie 74 (1952), 76–82; G. Giambardini, “Il ‘Sub tuum praesidium’, 324–62; H. Förster, “Zur ältesten Überlieferung der marianischen Antiphon ‘Sub tuum praesidium’,” Biblos 44 (1995); 183–92. For a review of studies that discuss the papyrus see A.M. Triacca, “Sub tuum praesidium’,” 348–62. A full consideration of Förster’s arguments is beyond the scope of this paper; I hope to discuss them elsewhere. Suffice to say, however, that any argument for a third- or fourth-century date for the antiphon must take as its point of departure the paleographical considerations of Förster (as well as Stegmüller) allowing for a later date for P.Ryl. III 470. Lobel’s brief paleographical remarks in P.Ryl. III 470 intro. cannot remain the principal basis for assigning the papyrus an early date. The issue is now no longer whether a prayer referring to Theotokos can be assigned to the third century; Roberts’ argument on that point has, obviously, been refuted. The issue is whether an antiphon whose earliest witnesses may be assigned to the sixth or seventh centuries or later originated in the third century. Cf. now also the second witness to the antiphon in K. Treu and J. Diethart (eds.), Griechische literarische Papyri christlichen Inhaltes II (Mitteilungen aus der Papyrussammlung der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek Neue Serie XVII; Vienna: Brüder Hollinek, 1993), 56, no. 29.

14 As initially proposed by Roberts on terminological grounds (P.Ryl. III 470 intro.); cf. also Stegmüller, “Sub tuum praesidium,” 78 and 82.


18 Förster’s article of 2005 has, to my knowledge, not been considered in any of the more recent studies of the origins of the cult of Mary. Some studies also do not take his article of 1995 into account, e.g., Johnson, “Sub tuum praesidium,” 254–55; Price, “The Theotokos,” 89 n. 4 (corrected in Price, “Theotokos: The Title,” 56 n. 1, but without substantial discussion). A full consideration of Förster’s arguments is beyond the scope of this paper; I hope to discuss them elsewhere. Suffice to say, however, that any argument for a third- or fourth-century date for the antiphon must take as its point of departure the paleographical considerations of Förster (as well as Stegmüller) allowing for a later date for P.Ryl. III 470. Lobel’s brief paleographical remarks in P.Ryl. III 470 intro. cannot remain the principal basis for assigning the papyrus an early date. The issue is now no longer whether a prayer referring to Theotokos can be assigned to the third century; Roberts’ argument on that point has, obviously, been refuted. The issue is whether an antiphon whose earliest witnesses may be assigned to the sixth or seventh centuries or later originated in the third century. Cf. now also the second witness to the antiphon in K. Treu and J. Diethart (eds.), Griechische literarische Papyri christlichen Inhaltes II (Mitteilungen aus der Papyrussammlung der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek Neue Serie XVII; Vienna: Brüder Hollinek, 1993), 56, no. 29.


the predominance of “holy Mary,” a form of regard used for other saints as well, has prompted the suggestion that Mary was revered as one saint among many others in Egypt. Indeed, at Oxyrhynchus in the early sixth century, liturgies were celebrated either more frequently or as frequently at churches dedicated to several other saints than at the church dedicated to Mary.

I do not mean to suggest by this litany that there is no evidence of devotion to Mary in Egypt in the third or fourth centuries. I merely wish to emphasize that closer scrutiny of the evidence may lead one to qualify the inferences one draws from or between early oblique indications of a cult of Mary. This paper on the intercessory function of Mary in Egypt therefore focuses on only a portion of the evidence: (mainly) Greek liturgical and para-liturgical texts from Egypt. I must leave it to others to consider theological treatises, homilies, hymns, iconography, vestments, ecclesiastical and monastic architecture and inscriptions. The main question I pursue is the following: in what form and at what time did appeals to the intercessions of Mary appear in eucharistic liturgies and individual prayers for healing and protection in Egypt? To answer this question I turn to recent scholarship on Egyptian eucharistic anaphoras, and to my own research into Greek amulets from Egypt containing Christian elements. In both cases – the anaphoras and the amulets – we are fortunate to have some important early evidence, thanks, as I have already noted, to the Egyptian environment. But the evidence is fragmentary and sporadic, sometimes difficult to decipher and hard to date, leaving us to propose hypotheses where we might prefer to establish conclusions.

Eucharistic Liturgies

Since eucharistic liturgies present more or less authorized formulae of invocation used by the church, they are a useful point of departure. However, liturgies are living expressions of local devotion; they vary between regions and develop over time. The study of their development and variations, particularly in the early centuries of Christian worship, is a complex undertaking, as any foray into liturgical scholarship will show. I will focus on early witnesses to the principal eucharistic liturgies in Egypt in late antiquity – the liturgies of St Mark and St Cyril, St. Basil, and St Gregory – and in particular on the commemorations, the section of the anaphora that over time came to include an appeal to the intercessions of Mary or the saints.

We have many early, if fragmentary, witnesses of the anaphora of the liturgy of the patriarchate of Alexandria, which goes by the names of St Mark and St Cyril. (We are less well served with regards to the pre- and post-anaphoral portions of the Alexandrian liturgy, where we must rely on later medieval manuscripts in Greek,

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24 I discuss texts in Coptic only insofar as they bear directly on the liturgical or para-liturgical texts under consideration.
28 Johnson, “Sub tuum praesidium,” 247–49, which came to my attention after I had substantially completed this section of the paper, covers some of this material, but does not refer to the most recent critical editions.
30 The Alexandrian liturgy was used by adherents of Chalcedon under the name of St Mark and by opponents of Chalcedon under the name of St Cyril; see H. Brakmann, “Das Alexandrinische Eucharistiegebet auf Wiener Papyrusfragmenten,” Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum 39 (1996), 149–64 at 152–53. Today in the Coptic Orthodox church the liturgy is rarely used; see J. Henner, Fragmenta Liturgica Copta (Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum 5; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 22–23.
Coptic, and Ethiopic.) One of the earliest witnesses to the Alexandrian anaphora, the Strasbourg papyrus gr. inv. 254,31 has been assigned to the fifth or even fourth century,32 but preserves a text that may go back to the late second or early third century.33 In its commemoration of the dead and the living in the presence of the offering, it refers to the prophets, apostles, and martyrs, and to their intercessions.34 The text is fragmentary at this point, and difficult to reconstruct,35 but it makes no mention of Mary. In this regard the Strasbourg papyrus resembles the account of the anaphoral intercessions in the late-fourth-century Mystagogical Catecheses.36 There the saints are remembered so that through their prayers and intercessions God may receive the supplications of the faithful,37 but Mary is not mentioned.38 (The Mystagogical Catecheses distinguishes between remembering the saints and praying for the rest of the dead in the presence of the offering;39 other fourth-century accounts, such as the Apostolic Constitutions and the sermons of John Chrysostom, reflect an older tradition of remembering, or praying for, all the dead, as well as the living, without discrimination in the presence of the offering.40) In later manuscripts of the anaphora of St Mark, on the other hand, Mary is singled out for commemoration by the priest,41 without, however, appealing to her intercessions.42 The form of this commemoration – referred to as the Theotokos ekphonesis because it was chanted aloud by the presiding celebrant – resembles that introduced around 470 by bishop Gennadius into the liturgy at Constantinople immediately before the diptychs of the dead recited by the deacon.43 This

34 τῶν / ἠμῶν σοι προσευχῆν ἄνοιξεν ἡμῖν / τὸν / τῆς προσευχῆς θείου τῆς ἤμων τῆς [ ... ] [ ... ] τῆς. The categories of saints named in Eastern anaphoral commemorations are usefully compared at H. Engberding, “Das anaphorische Fürbittgebet der byzantinischen Chrysostomusliturgie (Fortsetzung),” Orientalia Christiana Periodica 46 (1962), 33–60 at 34–35.
35 See Hammerstaedt, Griechische Anaphorenfragmente, 40–41, II. 20–24 comm. Regrettably, another early witness to this same text, P.Lit. Lond. 232 recto, assigned to the sixth or seventh century, breaks off at a point several lines before the Strasbourg papyrus; see now Andrieu, “Fragments,” 490–91.
36 The authorship and date of the Mystagogical Catecheses, attributed both to Cyril, bishop of Jerusalem from approximately 351 to 387 CE, and to his successor John, have been a subject of ongoing debate. A. Piérdagnet, “Introduction” and “Appendice I,” in Cyrille de Jérusalem: Catéchèses mystagogiques (SC 126 bis; Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1988; repr. 2004), 18–40, 177–87, reviews the discussion up to 1987. A.J. Doval, Cyril of Jerusalem. Mystagogy: The Authorship of the Mystagogical Catecheses (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2001), concludes after a systematic examination of the evidence that the lectures are the work of Cyril and were delivered toward the end of his episcopate.
37 Catech. myst. 5.9 (SC 126 bis: 158): Ἐπί τήν μνήμονιμον τῆς και τῶν κοινομημένων, πρώην πατριαρχῶν, προφητῶν, ἀποστόλων, μάρτυρων, ὅσος ὁ θεὸς εὐφέμοιαν καὶ προσευχῆς προσέφει ἡμῖν τῇ δόξῃ.
38 The formulaic conclusions of fourth-century sermons and treatises also invoke the prayers and intercessions only of the saints; cf., e.g., Evagrius of Pontus, cap. pract., epilogue, l. 7 (SC 171, 712; cf. 713–14); Gregory of Nyssa, Staph. 2 (G. Hell, J.P. Cavarnos, and O. Lendle (eds.) Gregoryi Nysseni sermones, Pars II [Gregorii Nysseni Opera 10.1; Leiden: Brill, 1990], 105); John Chrysostom, hom. I in Gen. (PG 53: col. 26); John Chrysostom, In illud. Hoc scitote quod in novissimis diebus (PG 56, col. 278).
42 Cuming, Liturgy, 114.

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specific commemoration of Mary was an innovation – previously only categories of saints (patriarchs, prophets, apostles, martyrs, etc.) were mentioned – and initially only she was named, without further mention of other individual saints (John the Baptist, etc.).

According to Robert Taft, the Theotokos ekphronesis was inserted into the anaphora of St John Chrysostom in imitation of the anaphora of St Basil. The early history and transmission of this anaphora is complex. It exists in two families: a shorter Egyptian form attested in Sahidic (ES-Basil), Bohairic (EB-Basil), Greek (EG-Basil), and Ethiopic (Eth-Basil) versions; and a longer form found in Armenian (Arm-Basil), Syrian (Syr-Basil), and Byzantine (Byz-Basil) versions. The question of the language and provenance of the anaphora at each of the key points in its development – the original form of the anaphora (Ur-Basil), the form from which the Egyptian versions derive (E-Basil), and the form from which the Armenian, Syrian, and Byzantine versions derive (Ω-Basil) – is not settled. Nevertheless, it is generally agreed, with some recent qualifications, that the Egyptian versions originated earlier than and developed independently of the Armenian, Syrian, and Byzantine versions. Some have proposed that the Egyptian form of the anaphora originated in Egypt; others have argued that it originated outside of Egypt, either in Cappadocia or Syria. The current view is that the anaphora came to Egypt from Syria in the sixth or seventh century (at the latest) as non-Chalcedonians looked to Syria for liturgical models after the breach with the Chalcedonian church.

The Sahidic version is shorter than the other Egyptian versions. Like the Bohairic version, it was initially translated from the Greek version. However, because the use of Sahidic in the liturgy was limited to upper Egypt and was eventually abandoned, the Sahidic version did not undergo the sustained development of the Greek and Bohairic versions, which were used throughout Egypt, the one earlier, the other later. The Sahidic version is


48 Gabrielle Winkler has recently argued that the original form of the anaphora (Ur-Basil) was likely Syrian, and that the form from which the Armenian, Syrian, and Byzantine versions derive (Ω-Basil) was certainly Syrian; see Winkler, “Zur Erforschung orientalischer Anaphoren in liturgievergleichender Sicht II: Das Formelgut der Oratio post Sanctus und Anamnese sowie Interzessionen und die Taufbekennnisse,” in Taft and Winkler, Comparative Liturgy, 407–93 at 486–91. She thus breaks with the view of Engberding that Ω-Basil was a revision by Basil of Caesarea of a pre-existing Greek anaphora from Cappadocia (Ur-Basil); see Engberding, Das eucharistische Hochgebet, lxxxiv–lxxxi; Winkler, “Zur Erforschung II,” 408–11; Winkler, Die Basilios-Anaphora, 16, 20. However, Winkler’s arguments have not proven to be conclusive; see A. Budde, “Typisch syrisch? Anmerkungen zur Signifikanz liturgischer Parallelen. Der Ursprung der Basilios-Anaphora in der Diskussion,” Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum 45 (2002), 50–61.
49 See Winkler, Die Basilios-Anaphora, 15, 876–77.
preserved in a number of witnesses which vary one from another,\(^{53}\) suggesting that they were prepared independently from the Greek in different linguistic contexts.\(^{54}\) One of the earliest and most complete, MS Lefort copt. s. n., is written in a hand that could be assigned to the eighth or ninth century, but preserves a text dated to the seventh century on internal evidence.\(^{55}\) In this source Mary alone is named in the commemoration of the dead, in the phraseology of the Theotokos ekphonesia: “vouchsafe to remember … all the righteous who are perfected in the faith, especially the ever-virgin, the holy and glorious Mary, the God-bearer.”\(^{56}\) Moreover, it is her prayers alone that are mentioned as benefitting the saints: “and have mercy on us all through her prayers.”\(^{57}\) Two other later witnesses to the Sahidic version of the anaphora similarly remember Mary alone: Cod. Vat. copt. 103,2\(^{58}\) and Cairo, Catalogue général 9260 (Coptic Museum 3911),\(^{60}\) an unnumbered sheet from the Great Euchologion of the White Monastery,\(^{61}\) a collection of prayers from about the tenth or eleventh century.\(^{62}\) In the former, the commemoration of Mary breaks off in mid-sentence.\(^{63}\) In the latter, she alone is named, but the appeal for intercession is in the plural, referring not only to her but to the aforementioned patriarchs, prophets, etc.\(^{64}\) In naming Mary alone – a feature, as we have seen, of the earliest commemoration of Mary in the anaphora of St John Chrysostom\(^{65}\) – the Sahidic version of the anaphora differs from all subsequent versions of St Basil, both Egyptian and non-Egyptian. All other versions of the anaphora – EB-Basil, EG-Basil, Eth-Basil, Syr-Basil, Arm-Basil, Byz-Basil – also name John the Baptist, Stephen the first martyr, and other saints, bishops, and monks.\(^{66}\)

While the Great Euchologion of the White Monastery is a later witness to the Sahidic version of the anaphora of St Basil, it is in fact an early witness to Sahidic versions of many other named anaphoras.\(^{67}\) The diversity of anaphoras, known and unknown, included in this collection is itself noteworthy.\(^{68}\) Its texts of the anaphoras of St Cyril, St Severus, and several unknown anaphoras include the commemoration of the saints.\(^{69}\) Achim Budde has compared the sequence of elements in the Theotokos ekphonesia in these Sahidic anaphoras (including the Sahidic versions of the anaphora of St Basil) with the sequence of elements in later Bohairic and Greek anaphoras.\(^{70}\) In the Sahidic anaphoras the ekphonesia includes fewer epithets: “God-bearer” (five witnesses), “our Lady” (four witnesses), “ever-virgin” (three witnesses), “most glorious” (three witnesses), “all-holy” (two witnesses). Moreover, their placement varies and their translation is not standard. Thus while the principal epithets applied to Mary

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\(^{54}\) Budde, *Die ägyptische Basilius-Anaphora*, 104.


\(^{56}\) Doresse and Lanne, *Un témoin archaïque*, 26; Budde, *Die ägyptische Basilius-Anaphora*, 180 (v. 145): ΠΩΨΟΥ ΔΕ ΤΗΡΟΧΗΣ ΗΝΟΧΟΦΗ ΜΗ ΕΤΟΥΛΑΙ[...] ΑΥΙΔ ΕΤΡΟΜΟΥ ΜΑΡΙΑ ΤΗΡΧΗΝΗΝΟΥΤΕ.\(^{57}\)

\(^{57}\) Doresse and Lanne, *Un témoin archaïque*, 26; Budde, *Die ägyptische Basilius-Anaphora*, 188 (v. 161): ἱήσα ἡμι τὴν ΖΗΝΗ ΠΕΣΤΟΣΕΙ.\(^{58}\)


\(^{59}\) Budde, *Die ägyptische Basilius-Anaphora*, 97–98.


\(^{63}\) Budde, *Die ägyptische Basilius-Anaphora*, 180, apparatus to the Sahidic version at v. 145, siglum γ: ΠΩΨΟΥ ΔΕ ΗΝΟΧΗΣ ΤΗΡΟΧΗΣ ΕΤΜΕΣ ΗΝΟΧΟΥ ΤΗΝ [...].\(^{64}\)


\(^{65}\) Cf. n. 44 above.


\(^{67}\) For an overview see Henner, *Fragmenta Liturgica Copta*, 19–35.

\(^{68}\) For an overview see Henner, *Fragmenta Liturgica Copta*, 12–19.

\(^{69}\) Lanne, *Le Grand Euchologe*, 292, II. 7–31 (St Cyril); 300, I. 1–12 (unknown); 320, I. 13–322, I. 5 (St Severus); 340, I. 25–342, I. 14 (unknown).

\(^{70}\) Budde, *Die ägyptische Basilius-Anaphora*, 487–90.
are well-attested, their exact rendering is still flexible as late as the tenth or eleventh century – even, as Budde has remarked, in a single collection of anaphoral prayers from a major liturgical centre in Egypt.\textsuperscript{71}

Since Mary is followed by other saints in these commemorations, they conclude with an appeal to the intercessions of all those named, not just of Mary alone. This is true of the anaphora of St Cyril\textsuperscript{72} – a departure from the practice of the anaphora of St Mark.\textsuperscript{73} It was probably also true of the anaphora of St Gregory. The anaphora of St Gregory in the Euchologion unfortunately does not include the commemoration of the saints.\textsuperscript{74} Nor does an earlier sixth-century fragment, P.Vindob. K. 4854.\textsuperscript{75} Belonging to the Syrian-Antiochene tradition,\textsuperscript{76} this anaphora probably originated in the fifth century,\textsuperscript{77} and was introduced into Egypt somewhat later. Like the anaphora of St Basil, it is attested in Sahidic, Bohairic, and Greek versions; the Sahidic version was based on the Greek, the Bohairic derived from the Sahidic.\textsuperscript{78} Also like the Bohairic and Greek witnesses of the anaphora of St Basil, the Bohairic and Greek witnesses of the anaphora of St Gregory commemorate a series of saints, beginning with Mary, and appeal to the intercessions of them all.\textsuperscript{79}

In short, most of our early witnesses to Egyptian anaphoras derive from a period when Mary was commemorated along with other saints, all of whose intercessions are sought. In the earliest of these witnesses – the text of the anaphora of St Basil found in MS Lefort copt. s. n. – Mary alone is named and her intercessions alone are rated along with other saints, all of whose intercessions are sought. In the earliest of these witnesses – the text of the earliest Egyptian versions, we do not know exactly when this commemoration came to be associated with an appeal for intercessions or when it was first employed in Egypt. But if one grants that the conjunction of remembering Mary and appealing to her intercessions was already present in the Greek version of the anaphora of St Basil that lies behind the earliest Egyptian versions, the practice would appear to date from the sixth century.

We must bear in mind, however, that the great anaphoral traditions capture only a portion of the liturgical production of Egypt, which varied by settings (in the community and in monasteries) and by region (in Alexandria and in north and south Egypt).\textsuperscript{80} Intercessory litanies could occur in several places in the eucharist, as well as in the monastic cycle of daily prayer.\textsuperscript{81} We possess a number of liturgical lists or litanies from Egypt whose affiliation or purpose is not always clear, but which nevertheless expand our sense of the scope of liturgical expression.\textsuperscript{82} Several of these refer to Mary. They include an intercessory fragment assigned to the second half of the sixth century that probably arrived in Egypt in the sixth century. The form of the commemoration is that of the Theotokos ekphosis introduced into the diptychs in Constantinople toward the end of the fifth century. We do not know exactly when this commemoration came to be associated with an appeal for intercessions or when it was first employed in Egypt. But if one grants that the conjunction of remembering Mary and appealing to her intercessions was already present in the Greek version of the anaphora of St Basil that lies behind the earliest Egyptian versions, the practice would appear to date from the sixth century.

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\begin{thebibliography}{1}
\bibitem{Budde} Budde, \textit{Die ägyptische Basilios-Anaphora}, 488–89.
\bibitem{Cf.n.42} Cf. n. 42 above.
\bibitem{Foran} For an overview of Sahidic witnesses to this anaphora, see Henner, \textit{Fragmenta Liturgica Copta}, 32–35.
\bibitem{Newlyedited} Newly edited with a commentary in Henner, \textit{Fragmenta Liturgica Copta}, 36–77.
\bibitem{A.Gerhards} A. Gerhards, \textit{Die griechische Gregoriosanaphora. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des eucharistischen Hochgehbes} (Liturgiewissenschaftliche Quellen und Forschungen 65; Münster: Aschendorff, 1984), 168; Henner, \textit{Fragmenta Liturgica Copta}, 32.
\bibitem{SeeTaft} See Taft, \textit{Diptychs}, 23–27, 80.
\bibitem{Taft} Taft, \textit{Diptychs}, 79–94.
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of the spotless and undefiled and holy and barren virgin mother Mary, the Theotokos and protector of our spirit”, and a corrupt eight- or ninth-century Coptic Greek litany. Interestingly, though this small sample is evidently not enough to go by, the later the text, the more developed the series of epithets. None of these texts, however, takes us into the fifth century or earlier. Some amulets, on the other hand, do.

**AMULETS**

Amulets were widely employed in antiquity to obtain protection from adversity, relief from sickness, or help in daily affairs. As the position of Mary in the devotion and reflection of the church became more prominent and established, one would expect amulets to appeal to her, directly or indirectly, for help. Among the many amulets containing Christian elements that have been found in Egypt, there are three that appeal to Christ through the intercessions of Mary and several others that appeal directly to her.

*PGM PSb,* found folded and tied with a string in Oxyrhynchus, has been assigned to the fifth century. It appeals to Christ to heal and protect a certain Joannia “through the prayers and intercessions of our Lady the Theotokos and the glorious archangels, and the holy and glorious apostle and evangelist and theologian John, and the holy Serenus and the holy Philoxenus and the holy Victor and the holy Justus and all the saints.” The presence of several saints in addition to Mary is of interest. In Oxyrhynchus there were churches or martyria dedicated to each of the saints named in the amulet. The sites are mentioned in a liturgical calendar from the town for the period from 21 October 535 to Easter 536, as well as in other fifth- or sixth-century documents. Oxyrhynchus is the only town in Egypt that is certain to have had a church dedicated to John the Evangelist. Local devotion to him would explain why he, rather than John the Baptist, is named after Mary. (John the Baptist usually follows Mary in prayers and anaphoral commemorations.) Justus, Serenus, and Philoxenus were also important local saints. Victor, on the other hand, was honoured throughout Egypt. As we have already noted, Oxyrhynchus also had a church dedicated to Mary. Interestingly, although the amulet refers to her as Theotokos, the church was named simply “holy Mary.” We are reminded that different types of sources, considered independently, offer only a partial view.

*PGM P18,* a papyrus assigned to the fifth or sixth century, appeals to Christ to “[h]eal also her who wears this divine amulet of the disease afflicting her, through the prayers and intercession of the ever-virgin mother, the

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87 *P.Oxy.* VIII 1151.38–51, with Hagedorn, “Bemerkungen zu Urkunden,” 226: εὐχές (read: εὐχής) / καὶ προσβας (read: προσβείας) τῆς / διεσπαρέως ἡμῶν, τῆς / θεοτοκός καὶ τῶν / ἐνδόξων ἀρχαγγέλων καὶ λαόν κ(α) τοῦ ἁγίου καὶ ἐν- / δώμοι ἀποστόλου κ(α) εὐαγγελιστοῦ κ(α) θεο- / λόγου ἑορτάζου κ(α) τοῦ ἁγίου Σερήνου κ(α) τοῦ ἁγίου Φιλοξένου κ(α) τοῦ ἁγίου Βικτώρου κ(α) τοῦ ἁγίου Ἰωάννου κ(α) πάντων τοῦ ἁγίου.


91 E.g., *P.Leid.Inst. 74.3–4* (cf. n. 155 below); *SB XXII 15209.1–3* (cf. n. 156 below). *PGM P12.1–4,* a prayer of Severus of Antioch against poisonous bites, on the other hand, invokes the name of Mary, John the Baptist, and John the Evangelist; see now C.E. Römer, “Gebet und Bannzauber des Severus von Antiochia gegen den Biss giftiger Tiere, oder: Maltomini hatte recht,” *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 168 (2009): 209–12, uniting P.Vindob. G 29508 and G 329.


93 Papconstantinou, *Le culte des saints*, 204.


Theotokos, and all …”

The amulet contains another element which both enriches and complicates its interpretation. It begins with a recitation of the Sanctus: “† Holy, holy, holy Lord Sabaoth; full are heaven and earth of […] glory.”

Although the lines are difficult to read, they resemble the early form of the Sanctus in both the Egyptian and Syrian-Antiochene traditions. Whereas later versions of the Sanctus in the Egyptian anaphoras of St Mark/St Cyril and St Basil conclude with “of your holy glory”, the earliest form in Egypt – attested by the fourth-century Euchologion attributed to Serapion of Thmuis, and the Dér-Belizéh papyrus (fifth or sixth century) – concludes simply with “of your glory,” and the earliest form in the Syrian-Antiochene tradition – attested by the anaphora in the Apostolic Constitutions (fourth century), the homilies of John Chrysostom (fourth century), and a homily attributed to Asterios Sophistes (fourth century) – concludes with “of his glory.” Unfortunately, the poor quality of the third line of the amulet prevents one from determining which of these early forms – “your glory” or “his glory” – the writer followed. Thus, while both the use of the Sanctus as an invocation and the appeal to the prayers and intercession of the ever-virgin mother, the Theotokos,” indicate that the writer of the amulet was familiar with the liturgy of the church, exactly which liturgical tradition – Egyptian or Syrian-Antiochene – is less clear.
P.Oxy. LXXV 5024, on the other hand, clearly draws on the liturgical tradition of St Mark. This strip of parchment, assigned to the late sixth or early seventh century, preserves a prayer for salvation ending in a petition for the flooding of the Nile similar to that found in the anaphoral intercessions of St Mark. There are traces of folds, which suggest that the parchment may have been carried as an aide-mémoire or an amulet. The prayer concludes with an appeal to the Lord through the intercessions of Mary: “through the intercession of the woman who bore you, we beseech you, Lord, good and abounding in mercy, hear us and have mercy on us.”

Finally, SB XVIII 13602, a parchment assigned to the seventh century, appeals to Christ to relieve a woman of her afflictions “through the intercessions of your holy martyr George” and “through the intercessions of our Lady, the all-glorious Theotokos and ever-virgin Mary.” This amulet is instructive because, although it contains a more developed Marian formula, the writing deviates from standard orthography and a few of the epithets – δεσποινης and θητοκου – presented some difficulty to the scribe. The text illustrates how by this relatively late date (the seventh century) the practice of appealing to Mary was, on the one hand, elaborate and formulaic, and, on the other, living and personal.

In addition to these amulets that appeal to Christ through the intercessions of Mary, we have several amulets from the fifth or sixth century that appeal directly to her. Although these amulets do not mention the intercessory function of Mary, they still confirm that she was addressed as a source of help and protection.

Suppl. Mag I 26, a papyrus with traces of folding, assigned to the fifth century, opens with the prayer: “Having received grace from your only-begotten Son, stop the discharge, the pains of the eyes of Phoibammon, son of Athanasios.” The prayer is striking in that it explains the source of Mary’s power, and does so in unusual terms; “only-begotten Son” is typically used in relation to God the Father. Moreover, the prayer is expressed in choliambic trimeters, an indication of the studied character of the request and of its debt to a literary culture.

Echoes of a wider culture can also be observed in PGM P15b. When this papyrus, assigned to the fifth or sixth century, was unfolded, it revealed a few leaves of a plant, identified as trefoil, used for menstrual periods, intermittent fever, and three-day fever. After appealing to archangels for protection against a “headless dog,” the text calls upon Mary to do what she had promised and heal the woman bearing the amulet: “O Theotokos,

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111 P.Oxy. LXXV 5024. Although the parchment is published in the Oxyrhynchus series, it and P.Oxy. LXXV 5023 may not have been found there; see P.Oxy. LXXV, p. 8.


113 See P.Oxy. LXXV, p. 8. On the purpose of items simply on the basis of folding, see de Bruyn and Dijkstra, “Greek Amulets and Formularies,” 172–73.

114 P.Oxy. LXXV 18–23: τῆς πρεσβείας/ τῆς δέσποινης (read: τεκτόσης) κατά/ με τάκτισμάν αυ/ αγά/ τη ρολούντολαγ/ (read: ρολούντολαγ) / κεν (κόμα) απόκεν/ αν ημών κά (α)λέκέρην.


116 Brashear, Magica Varia, 64, ll. 8–10, 12–16: δά το (read: τού) προες/ /βων (read: προεβευον) τοῦ αγίου σου μαρτύρου (read: μαρτύρου) Γεωργίου ... δά τον προες/ /βων (read: προεβευον) τῆς ’δετούς κοιμήτης μ [....] / τῆς δεσποινῆς (read: δεσποινῆς) υμῶν (read: υμών) τῆς παν/νοενδού (read: πανενδού) θεοτούκου (read: θεοτόκου) καὶ ἀν/παθήνου Μαρίας. Regarding δετούς κοιμήτης μ [....] Brashear, 68, comments: “It appears that the writer was attempting to correct something erroneously written into δεσποινῆς, gave up, crossed out the rest of the line and recommenced in the following line.”

117 See n. 116.


121 PGM P15b intro., citing Dioscorides, De mat. med. 3.109.

122 PGM P15a-b intro. takes κολύμαει to refer to ἀπήφαλον, miaphysites who repudiated Peter Mongus, the miaphysite patriarch of Alexandria, after he accepted emperor Zeno’s Henoticum; it thus dates the papyrus after 482. M. Meyer and R. Smith (eds.), Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1994), 48, no. 24, interprets the phrase as referring to a headless power. The latter seems more plausible to me, given the purpose of the amulet.
incorruptible, unfledged, unstained mother of Christ, remember that you have said these things. Again heal her who wears this.” The alpha-privative epithets ascribed to Mary recall the language of hymns and sermons, as does the appellation “mother of Christ.” The specific appeal – “remember that you have said these things” – suggests that Mary had been consulted and heard from in an oracle or a dream or some other medium.

Less regular, but for that reason indicative of the position attributed to Mary, is an invocation in P.König VIII 340. Assigned to the fifth or sixth century, the text on one side of this papyrus consists of a row of seven staurograms, John 1, 1–11, and several invocations. On the other side are two *orantes* and a short, poorly preserved text in a different hand but from the same period. The invocation immediately following the opening verses of the Gospel of John has been reconstructed as follows: “I call upon you, God – and Mary the Mother of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, that you send forth your angel to heal the one who wears this adjuration and chase from him all sickness and all infirmity.” The appeal to Mary has been interjected; a more regular form of the invocation is attested in another amulet from the sixth or seventh century: “I call upon you, God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you send forth your angel on the one who wears this.” There are supralinear strokes above “Mary” and “… tokos,” an extension of the method used to indicate *nomen sacrum.* Both the interjection and the supralinear strokes are irregular, but for that reason they attest to Mary’s role and importance as a source of help.

Finally, two early witnesses of uncertain or disputed significance should be noted. One is *P.Bon.* I 9, the concluding fragment of a prayer: “[in the most blessed name] of the holy Theotokos and ever-virgin Mary and the holy Longinus, the centurion, one holy Father, one holy Son, one Holy Spirit. Amen, amen, amen.” It has been suggested that the papyrus was an amulet against diseases of the eye and injuries on account of the mention of Longinus, who was invoked in such circumstances. Only the end of the first word of the fragment has been preserved, suggesting the above reconstruction. Nevertheless, it is sufficient to rule out an appeal to the intercessions of Mary and Longinus. The papyrus was initially assigned to the third or fourth century, an estimate that was subsequently revised to the fourth or fifth century. Is it significant that this, the earliest of the invocations we have discussed thus far, appears to be made in the name of Mary rather than through her intercessions? Possibly...
bly, if the assigned date is correct. But a similar formula appears in a liturgical fragment for the Feast of the Assumption assigned much later to the seventh or eighth century.136 The fragmentary opening of P.Bon. I 9 should not be freighted with too much meaning.

More problematic is PGM P5a, an amulet against fever prepared for a certain Aria, assigned to the fourth century.137 At the end of the text one finds several names written around a cross: “Jesus, Father, Son, Mother, Christ / α ο / Holy Spirit / Abrasax.” “Jesus” and “Christ” are written in larger characters as nomina sacra in the genitive. In the line above and to the right is a gap sufficient for five characters followed by iota and sigma. PGM 5a here supplies θναμος and translates the subsequent lines as “[Power] of Jesus Christ. Father, Son, Mother, Holy Spirit, α ο, Abrasax.” In a recent re-edition Megali de Haro Sanchez leaves the text of the gap unresolved, and translates the subsequent lines as “Father of Jesus” is Jesus, Son, Mother of Christ, α ο, Holy Spirit, Abrasax.”138 However, the reading “Power of Jesus Christ” is warranted.139 One can make out the lower left corner of delta at the beginning of the gap and the upper right tip of η at the end of the gap; the intervening space is sufficient for five letters. Moreover, the same phrase appears, along with three stauromgrams each with α ο, in the invocation of another amulet against sickness.140 The smaller writing of “Father, Son, Mother, Holy Spirit, Abrasax” relative to the nomina sacra suggests that they should be read as a group. The centre of the group is the cross with “α ο,” which appears to have been written before the words “Father, Son, Mother, Holy Spirit, Abrasax” and encircling points were added.141 The question is, what are we to make of “Father” and “Mother” on either side of “Son”? It has been suggested that “Mother” refers to the Holy Spirit.142 But then why is the Holy Spirit named in the next line? One could see here a reference to the triad Father, Mother, and Son that is characteristic of Sethian gnosticism.143 But the correspondence is not exact, since here “Mother” follows rather than precedes “Son.”144 The lines remain a puzzle. However, they do not present an unambiguous appeal to Mary, the mother of Christ.

To summarize, appeals to Mary and to her intercessions begin to appear in Egyptian amulets in the fifth century, and they use formulaic language associated with liturgical prayers. In amulets that appeal to Mary’s intercessions, the earlier the assigned date, the simpler the epithets, though the sample is small. It is not Mary’s intercessions alone that are sought; those of other saints are also invoked. Nevertheless, appeals addressed directly to Mary in other amulets indicate her importance and role as a protector, already in the fifth century.

Two chronological aspects of the material should be considered. First, the dates of the above texts have been assigned on paleographical grounds, which is inevitably subjective and imprecise. Still, in the absence of further studies questioning the assigned dates, it is best to accept the current estimates. Second, it is possible that the chronological distribution of the texts reflects not so much increasing appeals to Mary in Egypt as the growing establishment of the church in Egypt. Documentary evidence of the church in Egypt is much scarcer in the fourth century than after the middle of the fifth century.145 This pattern can also be observed in the corpus of Greek amulets from Egypt containing Christian elements; relatively more of them are assigned to the fifth or sixth centuries.146 There are, however, a few formularies and amulets assigned to the fourth century that refer to Mary in

136 P.Amb. I 9(b). Papaconstantinou, Le culte des saints, 139, assigns P.Bon. I 9 as well as P.Amb. I 9(b) to the seventh or eighth century, but does not explain why.


139 Thus, leaving aside the series of vowels written vertically at the left and right edges of the text, ll. 14–15 read as follows: διάνοιαμι / Ἰησοῦν Υἱὸς τῆς ζωῆς μήτηρ Χριστοῦ.


141 One of the five points observed by de Haro Sanchez is the lower left corner of delta; in addition, there is a point between the eta and rho of ζωῆς and below the alpha of πνεύματος.


144 Cf., e.g., Ap. John (NH II,1, 9.10–11; BG 2, 19; NH III,1, 13.15–16); Gos. Eg. (NH III,2, 47.9; NH IV,2, 50.25–26).


146 See de Bruyn and Dijkstra, “Greek Amulets and Formularies,” 174.
other (mainly christological) contexts.\textsuperscript{147} This suggests that the absence of amulets appealing to Mary in the fourth century is not merely a function of the relative scarcity of documentary and semi-literary evidence of Christianity in Egypt from the fourth century, and that the presence of amulets appealing to Mary in the fifth or sixth centuries reflects a devotional trend. Evidence of appeals to Mary for help begins to appear in Christian literature in the latter half of the fourth century, and is more plentiful and widespread during and after the fifth century.\textsuperscript{148} The texts we have considered above do not contradict this wider observation.

**CONCLUSIONS**

None of the fourth-century witnesses to the anaphora, within Egypt and elsewhere, refer to Mary (or any other saint by name) or appeal to her (or their) intercessions in the commemorations. An explicit commemoration of Mary was introduced into the diptychs at Constantinople toward the end of the fifth century, but it was not associated with an appeal to her intercessions. In all likelihood Egyptian anaphoral commemorations of Mary appealed to her intercessions already in the sixth century, but the earliest evidence we have of such appeals is in a seventh-century Sahidic version of the anaphora of St Basil (MS Lefort Capt s.n.).

However, the earliest appearances of appeals to the intercessions of Mary in the major anaphoral traditions cannot be our only point of reference. Liturgical sources are often conservative; they preserve texts from an earlier period. While they attest to the continued use of older traditions – as H. Brakmann has remarked, liturgies were written down to be used, not to be archived\textsuperscript{149} – they do not register concurrent changes or variations in liturgical or devotional practice.

At this point the witness of amulets is particularly precious, above all \textit{PGM} P5b and \textit{Suppl. Mag} I 26, both of which are assigned to the fifth century. \textit{PGM} P5b includes a fully developed formula of appeal to the intercessions of Mary and other saints revered in Oxyrhynchus. It demonstrates that even if in anaphoral commemorations the earliest appeals for intercessions refer only to Mary, appeals to a series of intermediaries beginning with Mary are attested elsewhere already in the fifth century. Moreover, the formula of appeal suggests that by that time the practice was well established and liturgical in nature. \textit{Suppl. Mag} I 26, for its part, shows that people appealed directly to Mary for help in the fifth century. In addition, the stylized form of appeal, as with the formula in \textit{PGM} P5b, suggests that the practice was well established and liturgical in nature.

This leads us to a crux in discussions of the emergence of the cult of Mary. Were these forms of appeal already present in the fourth century or earlier? We can no longer turn to \textit{P. Ryl}. III 470, since recent paleographical examinations now favour a much later date for this papyrus.\textsuperscript{150} Nevertheless, on the basis of the amulets alone I would suggest that appeals to the intercessions of Mary were probably already an aspect of Egyptian devotion in the fourth century. It is more plausible to me that the developed formulae found in fifth-century amulets reflect a practice that was already achieving liturgical expression in the fourth century, than that these formulae were introduced in the fifth century and rapidly disseminated thereafter. However, this provisional hypothesis must be accompanied by several caveats. First, as we have already noted, dates assigned on the basis of paleographical assessments are not unassailable. If the amulets in question are reassigned to the sixth century, the hypothesis is weakened. Second, we have amulets assigned to the fourth century that refer to Mary, but none of these appeals to her or to her intercessions.\textsuperscript{151} This silence begs explanation.


\textsuperscript{149} Brakmann, “Neue Funde,” \textit{Actes du IV Congrès copie}, 422; Brakmann, “Zwischen Pharos und Wüste,” 345.

\textsuperscript{150} See nn. 16–18 above.

\textsuperscript{151} \textit{PGM} P10.43–44 would appear to be an exception, a long spell in one of its adjurations mentions “the angels who stand in the presence of our Lady.” However, the date is disputed – Wessely assigns the hand to the fourth century, but Preisendanz to the sixth – and the allusion to Mary is an editorial reconstruction: τοῖς ἀγίοις ἄγιοις ἀνακοίνωσι τοῖς [πρό-] τοίς ἐνάσεωι τῆς δοξοσείρης θημά. The papyrus has deteriorated since Wessely transcribed it; he read a delta, now missing, at the end of l. 44 (της δ), which would appear to support the
In the end, the liturgical and paraliturgical evidence is, in and of itself, not decisive; it is suggestive but lacunose. A wider consideration of textual discourses, social milieux, and geographic locales is called for, as indicated by the papers in this volume. Moreover, in making inferences from textual and material evidence, unevenly distributed as it is, recourse to theory is inevitable. Even so, whatever theory is brought to bear on the evidence, it must account for the absence, thus far, of amulets appealing to Mary prior to the fifth century – an absence that is all the more intriguing inasmuch as amulets were the product of textual traditions, local expertise, and popular demand, all of which are aspects of devotional practice.

EXCURSUS: FORMULAIC INVOCATIONS IN DOCUMENTS

Our sources of evidence for Christian invocations are not limited to liturgies and prayers. Christian invocations also appear in late antique documents. At the end of the sixth century the emperor Maurice required that legal documents begin with a christological invocation. The first instance appears in Egypt in 591. Maurice’s successor Phocas replaced the christological invocation with a trinitarian one, but under Heraclius the formula used by Maurice was restored in Lower Egypt and Arcadia, while the trinitarian formula continued to be used in Upper Egypt. In the Arsinoite and the Herakleopolite nomes in Lower Egypt the christological and trinitarian invocations refer also to Mary and sometimes the saints. Christological invocations referring to Mary appear in documents dated to the second half of the seventh century; trinitarian invocations referring to Mary appear in documents dated to the first decade of the seventh century. The references to Mary take several forms, but in each case the wording is relatively consistent, as one might expect with legal formulae imposed by imperial decree. Mary is invoked as “our Lady the Theotokos,” “our Lady the holy Theotokos,” or “our Lady the holy Theotokos and ever-virgin Mary.”

While these invocations attest to the official use of standard epithets to refer to Mary, they do not appeal to her intercessions. There are, however, a few fragmentary sixth- or seventh-century documents that do appeal to Mary’s intercessions. They concern, or appear to concern, marital matters. In two fragments one cannot tell whether the formula with which the text begins was an invocation or a prayer. In two other fragments the text appeals explicitly to the prayers of Mary. There are slight variations in the wording. One fragment appeals to “the prayers of the holy Theotokos … the Forerunner …”; “holy” is added above the line. The other fragment appeals to “the prayers and intercessions of the holy … fair-virgin Mary and the … and John the martyr and the whole …” The epithet “fair-virgin” is unusual. It is otherwise unattested in documentary papyri. It is ascribed to Mary in a reconstruction. Cf. Wessely, “Neue griechische Zauberpapyri,” 65–67 and PGM P10. An image of the papyrus can be found at H. Förster, “Alltag und Kirche,” in J. Henner, H. Förster and U. Horak (eds.), Christliches mit Feder und Faden: Christliches in Texten, Textilien und Alltagsgegenständen aus Ägypten. Katalog zur Sonderausstellung im Papyrussammlung in der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek aus Anlaß des 14. Internationalen Kongresses für Christliche Archäologie (Nîlus 3; Vienna: Österreichische Verlagsgesellschaft, 1999) 46–47, no. 36.

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treatise attributed to Cyril of Alexandria, but the attribution is highly doubtful; the epithet, along with other vocabulary in the treatise, is not found in Cyril’s undisputed works.

A few observations are warranted here. First, the practice of appealing to the intercessions of Mary (along with others) in documents was not limited to marital matters, nor to Egypt. A similar appeal to the intercessions of Mary, John the Baptist, and all the saints concludes an account of various trading activities found in Palestine. Second, the appeals are not addressed exclusively to Mary; they continue with appeals to the intercessions of John the Baptist, specific saints, or all the martyrs and saints. The intercessory function of Mary is not unique to her, though she is ranked first and foremost among the company of saints whose intercessions are sought. Third, the sequence of epithets applied to Mary in the marital documents is similar to the sequence of epithets applied to her in other documentary formulae of invocation. Finally, while all these documents shed light on formulaic ways of referring to Mary, they do not help us determine when appeals to Mary’s intercession first arose in liturgical and paraliturgical texts in Egypt, since the documentary evidence is relatively late (sixth or seventh century).


160 P. Ness. III 89 (late sixth or early seventh century).