

Prophethood, Texts, and Artifacts: The Monastery of Epiphanius

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AS LONG AGO as 1820 the Greek merchant Ioannis Athanasi¹ identified a site within the Pharaonic Egyptian antiquities complex of Luxor/Thebes/Deir el-Bahri/Medinet Habu, on the west bank of the Nile, as a Coptic Christian “chapel,”² which, on the basis of a Greek wall inscription, he mistakenly dated to the fourth century, to the patriarchate of his namesake Athanasius (328–373). In conjunction with the main official project to excavate an Eleventh-Dynasty Pharaonic tomb at the site, the entire Christian complex was explored by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1912 and 1914. The excavators’ findings are published in two splendidly produced volumes that contain a wealth of reportage on both the physical, material remains and the documentary and literary texts recovered. Thus the Epiphanius site is one of the very few in Egypt from Late Antiquity from which we have both texts and objects, together with their built space, in a documentable and datable context.³ It is worth investigating the interrelation of

¹See Warren R. Dawson, *Who Was Who in Egyptology*² (London 1972) 13.

²Herbert E. Winlock, Walter E. Crum, Hugh G. Evelyn White, *The Monastery of Epiphanius at Thebes I–II* (New York 1926: hereafter *Ep.*) I 25; cf. Malcolm L. Peel, “Dayr Epiphanius,” *Coptic Encyclopaedia* III (1991) 800–802, here 800.

³Datable in fact to the sixth and seventh centuries, as we shall see. The fourth-century village site at Kellis in the Dakhleh Oasis is being revealed as comparable: see Iain Gardner and Samuel Lieu, “From Narmouthis (Medinet Madi) to Kellis (Isment al-Kharab),” *JRS* 86 (1996) 146–169; Paul Mirecki,

objects and texts at this site for the light such investigation may shed on doctrinal and ascetic practices in sixth-century Egypt.

The ancient tomb had in fact been the nucleus from which the Christian complex had grown. Since Antony the Great it was traditional for Egyptian charismatic ascetics to take up residence in tombs, the better to do battle against demons.⁴ As David Brakke has explained, "Antony's battles with the death-dealing demons and with his body's weakness in the tombs plays out Christ's victory over the tomb."⁵ Sometime in the reign of Maurice in the 580s A.D.⁶ a Coptic hermit and local wonder-worker named Epiphanius started living in the tomb of Daga, a semi-ruined ancient structure west of the Valley of the Kings (*Ep.* I 29–32). Using recycled ancient bricks, he built a tower for storage and protection (I 32–36). Around his charismatic figure gathered other hermits, as tended to happen, and building

Iain Gardner, and Antony Alcock, "Magical Spell, Manichaean Letter," in *Emerging from Darkness: Studies in the Recovery of Manichaean Sources*, Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies 43, ed. Paul Mirecki and Jason BeDuhn (Leiden 1997) 1–32, here p.1 on the interrelation of texts and artifacts in a datable context. Cf. Introduction to Klaas A. Worp, *Greek Papyri from Kellis (P.Kell. I)* (Oxford 1995) 1–11. The recently excavated late antique monastery of Deir Abu Fana, for its part, has not yielded papyri: Helmut Buschhausen *et al.*, "Die Ausgrabungen von Dair Abu Fana in Ägypten in den Jahren 1991, 1992 und 1993," *Ägypten und Levante* 6 (1996) 13–73.

⁴The locus classicus is Athanasius' *Life of Antony* 8–10, ed. G. J. M. Bartelink, Sources Chrétiennes 400 (Paris 1994).

⁵David Brakke, "'Outside the places, within the truth': Athanasius of Alexandria and the Localization of the Holy," in *Pilgrimage and Holy Space in Late Antique Egypt*, ed. David Frankfurter, Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 134 (Leiden 1998) 445–481, here 457, cf. 458; cf. also David Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism* (Oxford 1995) 239–244.

⁶A date inferred from the data in KRU 75, a Coptic document translated in *Ep.* II 344–348 and dated by Crum to the early seventh century. See Walter C. Till, *Erbrechtliche Untersuchungen auf Grund der koptischen Urkunden* (Vienna 1954) 198–204, who however dated KRU 75 to the mid-seventh century (198); *idem*, *Datierung und Prosopographie der koptischen Rechtsurkunden aus Theben* (Vienna 1962) 79–80, 102, 236. This text had been known long before the Metropolitan Museum's archaeological campaign on the ground, having been first published in 1876 (see *Ep.* II 343). Coptic documents are cited here according to Arthur A. Schiller, "A Checklist of Coptic Documents and Letters," *BASP* 13 (1976) 99–123.

operations expanded to include dwellings, storage spaces for foodstuffs, work areas for the practice of crafts, prayer sites (of course), burial places, and eventually a carefully laid out and decorated set of approach spaces through which visitors would pass on their way to see the holy man.⁷

All over the site, in every space, texts were found: Greek and Coptic wall inscriptions,⁸ some very lengthy, and graffiti; Greek and Coptic letters and documents on papyri and both pottery sherds and limestone flakes; Greek and Coptic literary, patristic, and liturgical texts.⁹ Clearly this was a world of bilingual literacy in several registers.¹⁰ From the letters directed to Epiphanius himself and to his companions and followers we find that he was addressed as a "prophet." *Ep.* no. 162, a Coptic letter on papyrus, was written to "my holy lord father, being the

⁷*Ep.* I 36–50, *cf.* 30 on the "Vestibule"; Winlock, though, misinterpreted this space as one in which the anchorites habitually sat (on the wall benches) instead of as an approach space.

⁸Also the Lord's Prayer inscribed on a wall in Syriac: *Ep.* II 342 with Plate XVII; also I 140–141.

⁹*Cf.* *Ep.* I xxii–xxv.

¹⁰The rise of Coptic alongside Greek as a language used for legal documents, a phenomenon in place by the sixth century, still occasions debate. See Leslie S. B. MacCoull, "Further Notes on Interrelated Greek and Coptic Documents of the Sixth and Seventh Centuries," *ChrEg* 70 (1995) 341–353, esp. 341–342, and "Dated and Datable Coptic Documentary Hands Before A.D. 700," *Le Muséon* 110 (1997) 349–366, esp. 351. At the Epiphanius site were found, in Greek, fragments of legal agreements, deeds, inventories, accounts, and a petition to a magistrate (*Ep.* II 137–139 [texts], 323–325 [transl.]); in Coptic, contracts (agreements to pay or to perform tasks, with provisions for fines if transgressed), deeds, wills, acknowledgements of debt, and accounts (of expenses, receipts, payments) (II 27–32, 110–116 [texts], 173–178, 284–297 [transl.]): leaving aside the category of letters, which are of course found in both languages (though predominantly in Coptic). As Hannah Cotton has written, the use of a language in legal documents comes from "... the need to make the contracts valid in a court of law which had the power to enforce them when necessary ... documents [which] could later be produced in court as evidence": "The Languages of the Legal and Administrative Documents from the Judaean Desert," *ZPE* 125 (1999) 219–231, here 230. Members of the Epiphanius settlement were not unmindful of the fact that such legal recourse might become necessary at any time, especially in the unsettled conditions of the reigns of the strongly Chalcedonian emperors Maurice, Tiberius II, Phocas, and Heraclius (up to A.D. 641).

temple (*rpe*) of God, Apa Epiphanius the prophet and anchorite, from Joseph the most humble archdeacon."¹¹ Joseph, a subordinate of an unnamed bishop¹² of a see farther south (whether Hermonthis or some other is impossible to infer), has been forbidden¹³ by his bishop to consult Epiphanius in person about his money, family, and job troubles. So he writes, "As I desire (*epithyme*) to see God, I desire to see the blessed face of your fatherly holiness and to receive blessing from it, entreating the Lord for me to have mercy on my poor soul, for I know that He will hear you and will receive your prayer.¹⁴ ... What God will reveal (*cholp ebol*, a verb that can be used of, among other things, seeing visions¹⁵) to you, indicate to me ... I know that you are near (*hên ehoun*) to Him ... Assign (*horize*) me some prayers ... (and) pray for me in my encountering (*apanta*) God, the one to whom you are pleasing (*r anaf*), ... (you) who have done the will of God in all things" (lines 2–5, 18–21, 22–24). Epiphanius is recognized as a person acceptable to God, who can both effectively channel divine power and assign spiritual exercises to those who consult him.

¹¹Coptic text, *Ep.* II 45; Crum's translation, 194–195; Plate VI. Translations in the present paper are my own.

¹²For archdeacons on bishops' staffs see Ewa Wipszycka, "Les ordres mineurs dans l'Église d'Égypte du IV^e au VIII^e siècles," *JJurP* 23 (1993) 181–215. Cf. Klaas A. Worp, "A Checklist of Bishops in Byzantine Egypt (A.D. 325–c.750)," *ZPE* 100 (1994) 283–318.

¹³Surely an example of the often-found tension between local charismatic personalities and the hierarchy of the "official" church: cf. David Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt: Assimilation and Resistance* (Princeton 1998) 189, 277, and "Approaches to Coptic Pilgrimage," in Frankfurter (*supra* n.5) 1–48, here 24, 33, 39, 48; Roger S. Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity* (Princeton 1993) 204–205; Leslie S. B. MacCoull, "Paul of Tamma and the Monastic Priesthood," *VigChr* 53 (1999) 316–320.

¹⁴For a collection of papyrological data on written requests for a monk to pray for the letter-writer, see *P.Col.* XI 301. For the importance of intercession and mediation at the Epiphanius community site see also C. Rapp, "'For next to God, you are my salvation': Reflections on the Rise of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," in *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages: Essays on the Contribution of Peter Brown*, edd. J. Howard-Johnston and P. A. Hayward (Oxford 1999) 63–81, here 72.

¹⁵See Leslie S. B. MacCoull, "Gregory Thaumaturgus' Vision Re-envisioned," *RHE* 94 (1999) 5–14, here 10.

Clearly these are circumstances in which, and particularly expectations with which, one would consult a "prophet" in late antique Egypt.¹⁶ Recent work has elucidated the cultural role of such a figure. Local prophetic thaumaturges deeply rooted in their own regions are thought to have moved into the roles earlier played by members of the old Egyptian local priest-hoods, and provided direct access to supernatural power that often bypassed the "official" church.¹⁷ From Joseph's letter it is apparent how Epiphanius was in direct competition with the traditional mode of power¹⁸ represented by the obstructionist bishop. His face conferred blessing, for he was regarded as one having God's ear and as a recipient of visions, able in his turn both to require his clients to perform spiritual works and to resolve their problems. Dozens of other letters attest to Epiphanius's competence in matters of sickness, poverty, and conflict resolution. He was not the only Egyptian ascetic to be openly styled "prophet."¹⁹ "Prophet" is *the* title par excellence attached to the name of Shenoute, fifth-century head of a large

¹⁶Compare also the prominent role assigned to "prophets" and their connection with the eucharist in the *Didache*, a Coptic papyrus text of which antedates Epiphanius: see F. Stanley Jones and Paul A. Mirecki, "Considerations on the Coptic Papyrus of the *Didache* (British Library Oriental MS 9271)," in *The Didache in Context: Essays on its Text, History and Transmission*, ed. Clayton N. Jefford, *Novum Testamentum Suppl.* 77 (Leiden 1995) 47–87, esp. 82–83.

¹⁷"Prophetic figures ... appropriating in charismatic form such traditional priestly services as divination, social mediation, healing, and supernatural protection": Frankfurter, *Religion* (*supra* n.13) 215, cf. 30, 35, and 258 with n.60 on magic at the Epiphanius monastery (to which we shall return below). See also Bagnall (*supra* n.13) 299–303.

¹⁸As in Frankfurter, "Approaches" (*supra* n.13) 24–26: Epiphanius clearly "played administrative roles ... resolving village disputes, healing supplicants, and issuing talismans" (25). For healing see Crum, *Ep.* I 164. Conflicts between individual ascetics and bishops are not uncommon in the documents of this culture; Joseph is clearly relying on a local holy individual rather than his own bishop, and this could have led to a turf dispute.

¹⁹Other epithets addressed to Epiphanius are "pneumatophore" ("Spirit-bearer"), "true Christ-bearer," and "new psalmos," as collected by Peel (*supra* n.2) 801. Crum (*Ep.* II 196 n.23) wondered if this last meant that he composed hymns.

monastic congregation centered on the monastery at Atripe in the Panopolite nome, where manuscript colophons and ex-voto donations always record that they were made for the *topos* of “our father the prophet Apa Shenoute.”²⁰ Other famous charismatic “prophets” so styled were Macarius the Great of the Wadi Natrun; Epiphanius’s contemporary Pesyntheus of Coptos (who was a monk-ascetic long before being made a bishop);²¹ and Longinus abbot of the Enaton monastery near Alexandria, famous opponent of the council of Chalcedon and miracle-worker.²² This Enaton connection will return when we come to consider the interrelations of written text and built space in the Epiphanius complex.

Winlock’s Chapter 3 of *Ep. I* (51–97), “Trades and Occupations at the Monastery as Shown by the Excavations,” is an exhaustive and illuminating summary of the material remains. Even more illumination results from correlating the written texts—the notes and messages of everyday life—with the physical objects, as partially done in Crum’s justly famous Chapter 6, “Theban Hermits and their Life” (I 125–185). Just to follow the outline in the excavation report shows this inter-relatedness in detail. Ostrakon 400 is a request for 300 bricks “for the lower level, not the upper,” as made plain by the actual masonry construction (I 51–53). Ostrakon 540 lists names with quantities of large and small loaves of bread, corresponding to the products of the ovens discovered (I 53–54). Papyrus 432

²⁰ A few examples (of many) listed in Leslie S. B. MacCoull, “The Coptic Inscriptions on the Votive Cross of the Monastery of Shenoute,” *CahArch* 44 (1996) 14, 16. For the manuscript colophons see now also Tito Orlandi, “The Library of the Monastery of Apa Shenoute at Atripe,” paper at the Leiden symposium “Perspectives on Panopolis,” 17 December 1998 (I thank Roger Bagnall for a copy of the abstract).

²¹ Crum’s n.20 to *Ep. no. 162.28: Ep. II* 195, cf. I 221–231.

²² See Leo Depuydt, “A Homily on the Virtues of Saint Longinus Attributed to Basil of Pemje,” in *Coptology—Past, Present, and Future: Studies in Honour of Rodolphe Kasser*, edd. Søren Giversen, Martin Krause, and Peter Nagel (Leuven 1994) 267–291; Tim Vivian, “Humility and Resistance in Late Antique Egypt: The Life of Longinus,” *Coptic Church Review* 20 (1999) 2–30.

mentions cutting acacia wood, the most frequently used for the furniture and latticework found along with carpentry tools (I 54-60; *cf.* also ostrakon 547). Epiphanius himself wrote papyrus letter 397 to his mother, asking to have a lock and key made—presumably just like the wooden lock found on site (I 58-60). As expected, foodstuffs such as grain, vegetables, fish, and wine are mentioned very often in the letters (*cf.* I 144-149), and actual specimens, as well as the agricultural tools and irrigation devices for producing and processing them (I 61-67), were recovered.

A large-scale occupation of the ascetics, attested in the documents, was the textile craft: growing flax (no. 85),²³ spinning it (no. 353), and weaving it on looms (no. 351; *cf.* Index [II 374] *s.vv.* "Linen," "Loom"), as well as making garments from the cloth (no. 465; *cf.* I 155-158). Actual remains of fibres, spindle whorls, parts of looms and their emplacements, woven goods, and garments were found on site (I 67-71). Although the textile craft is usually regarded as the realm of women in Byzantine Egypt,²⁴ it is also recognized as a specialty trade of male monastics since as early as the fourth century.²⁵ A particular category of textile woven by the hermits was their own grave clothes, shrouds, and tapes for binding the shrouds (*e.g.* no. 532: I 70-71), a striking *memento mori*. Just these products were found on the bodies in the monastic cemetery (I 45-50)—bodies that, interestingly, seem to have been not circumcised.²⁶

²³See Philip Mayerson, "The Role of Flax in Roman and Fatimid Egypt," *JNES* 56 (1997) 201-207.

²⁴See Joëlle Beaucamp, "Organisation domestique et rôles sexuels: les papyrus byzantins," *DOP* 47 (1993) 185-194.

²⁵According to *P.Kell.* C.12, Tithoes, grandson of a carpenter, was sent to a monastery to learn this trade: Iain Gardner, "'He has gone to the monastery,'" forthcoming in the next Proceedings of the International Congress of Manichaean Studies: see Roger Bagnall, *The Kellis Agricultural Account Book* (Oxford 1997) 10 with n.17.

²⁶This determination is not always easy to make. *Cf.* Gudrun Fischhaber, *Mumifizierung im koptischen Ägypten: Eine Untersuchung zur Körperlichkeit im 1. Jahrtausend n.Chr., Ägypten und Altes Testament* 39 (Wiesbaden 1997)

Mats (no. 358), ropes (no. 398), and baskets (no. 537) were woven and recovered (I 72–75). Animals (goats and sheep) were raised for leather, which was made into belts, aprons, and sandals (no. 371), and used for bookbinding (no. 380) (I 75–78). Pottery, always the most frequent archaeological find, was the standard material for storage vessels (*cf.* nos. 531, 549), and other objects of everyday use were recovered in ample quantity (I 78–93). And to fascinate the text specialist, reed pens were found, just such as were used to write on the inscribed papyrus, pottery, and limestone surfaces that bear the Epiphanius texts (I 93–95, *cf.* 186–195).

Those texts were, as mentioned above, not only such as could be held in the hands. Leading up to Epiphanius's own dwelling there was constructed an elaborate series of spaces through which a visiting client would pass on his or her²⁷ way to consult the "prophet." Such a visitor entered the monastic complex through a gate in the wall, passed the imposing First Tower built by Epiphanius himself (I 33), and went through two anterooms separated by rising stairs (plan, *Ep.* I 27, *cf.* Plate III). On the left-hand wall just after the second staircase the visitor encountered a Coptic homiletic text that warned against attacks by evil powers upon the faithful (*pistos*), using the metaphor of a tree root splitting a rock (transl. II 337). On the facing right-hand wall the eye was struck by the most imposing inscription of all, three tall columns giving the synodal letter of Damian, the

41–42, for uncircumcised monastic bodies. This evidence might be taken to militate against the later belief that circumcision was a very ancient practice in Egypt; however, circumcision in the Pharaonic age seems to have been fairly widespread and well-attested, but to have fallen out of general favor in Graeco-Roman times except for some elite males. (I thank Terry Wilfong for his advice on this point.) For parallels to circumcision among later medieval Coptic males see also Leslie S. B. MacCoull, "The Rite of the Jar: Apostasy and Reconciliation in the Medieval Coptic Orthodox Church," in *Peace and Negotiation: Strategies for Coexistence in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. Diane Wolfthal (Turnhout 2000) 145–162: emphasizing influence of the surrounding Islamic culture and differentiation from the dyophysite Melkites.

²⁷For women visitors and their interaction with Epiphanius and his followers see *Ep.* I 131–133, 182.

Syrian-born former monk of the Enaton who was patriarch of Alexandria from 578 to 607,²⁸ a letter that is a fiercely partisan exposition and defense of Monophysite Christology.²⁹ Damian's text praises the unfailing orthodoxy of the great fathers, Athanasius, Cyril of Alexandria, and Severus of Antioch, who had come to exile in Egypt and whose burial place at the Enaton had become a Monophysite pilgrimage goal since his death in A.D. 538.³⁰

Next the visitor came into a long horizontally-oriented space (termed the "Vestibule") stretching out into left and right wings. To the left of the facing doorway were two Coptic wall inscriptions. From left to right: first, a dogmatic epistle by Severus of Antioch expounding the Trinity and the Incarnation of the Hypostasis of the Word "... both God and Man ... not being divided into two natures" (II 337–338). Then, a two-part Coptic homiletic text on the Annunciation and the Incarnation "without change, without confusion" (two of the important Christological adverbs) of Christ, who again is not "divided by the heretics' division" (338–340). Also in the "Vestibule" were two Greek wall inscriptions: an extract from Athanasius' anti-Arian "Letter to the Monks" (with a clear anti-Chalcedonian subtext), and the famous Twelve Anathemas of Cyril condemning, among other things, the dividing of Christ after the union and the Nestorian concept of the "assumed man" (306–308). Flanking the facing doorway were a further pair of grouped Coptic inscriptions, all apparently taken from the works of Cyril of Alexandria. To the right of the door are a credal confession of

²⁸On Damian see C. Detlef G. Müller, "Damian Papst und Patriarch von Alexandrien," *OC* 70 (1986) 118–142; and Philippe Blaudeau, "Le voyage de Damien d'Alexandrie vers Antioche puis Constantinople (579–580) – Motivations et objectifs," *OCP* 63 (1997) 333–361.

²⁹Coptic text *Ep.* II 148–152; Crum's translation II 332–337: "We anathematize the synod that gathered in Chalcedon which declared this in trickery against the upright faith, and everyone that declares two natures in Christ after the union" (lines 86–88).

³⁰See Jean Gascou, "Enaton," *Coptic Encyclopaedia* III (1991) 954–958.

the hypostatic union in Christ, worshipped without division, and a proclamation of Christ's victory over death and its gift of immortality to all (341). To the left is a tripartite Cyrillian text yet again forbidding the division of Christ into two and stressing the true reality of his human birth and death (340–341).³¹ This impressively textualized space layout³² amounted to a way of giving the visitor to Epiphanius's room a crash course in Monophysite theology. Such a visitor would be assumed to be sufficiently literate in both Coptic and Greek to appreciate how powerfully the space was progressively imbued with the force of the sacred words. For that matter, even the monolingual and/or marginally literate visitor would have been filled with awe at this uniquely textualized space. By the time he or she arrived at Epiphanius in person, the client would ideally have been fully indoctrinated with enthusiastic Monophysite spirit.³³

³¹Not all originals of these texts are yet identified, especially of the Cyrillian texts in their Coptic form. For the astonishing lack of a "Corpus Cyrillianum Copticum" see Leslie S. B. MacCoull, "Coptic Sources: A Problem in the Sociology of Knowledge," *BullSocArchCopte* 26 (1984) 1–7 esp. here 1–2.

³²For Coptic space see now the papers from the 1997 American Research Center in Egypt panel on "House, Church, and Monastery: Coptic Uses of Space from Late Antiquity to the Present Day," published in *BASP* 35 (1998) 9–95 (papers by Thelma K. Thomas, Helen Saradi, Rebecca Krawiec, Elizabeth S. Bolman, and Sheila McNally, with mention of the work of Elizabeth Oram on the modern period). Also Svetlana Popović, "The Trapeza in Cenobitic Monasteries: Architectural and Spiritual Contexts," *DOP* 52 (1998) 281–303, at 281: "The spiritual life of monasticism found material expression in a spatial structure known as the monastery. The concept of this establishment thus has many layers of meanings in which the architectural and spatial layout is prominent. There is a very close relationship between the monastic way of life and its architectural setting. Building forms and their spatial arrangement often have symbolic meaning ... The layout of buildings in the monastery and their architectural relationships interacted closely with the prescribed daily life and ritual performed in the community." True of non-cenobitic forms also.

³³Crum (*Ep.* I 151–153) has a strangely contradictory comment, simultaneously saying that Epiphanius's hermits favored Monophysite views but that Christological problems were largely ignored in Upper Egypt. Nor, equally strangely, did Winlock think that the wall texts would have been related to disputes in the "distant north" (I 99). For a more balanced view on Upper Egyptian hermits' awareness of the Christological controversies see Mark Sheridan, *Rufus of Shotep: Homilies on the Gospels of Matthew and Luke* (Rome 1998) 53–58, 303–308.

Besides letters and other documents of worldly affairs, found in abundance in the hermits' dwellings,³⁴ literary texts, intended for reading and reciting, were also recovered in large numbers (I 196–208). Two of the best preserved and most extensive were papyrus codices: one in Greek, of the Psalms³⁵ (no. 578 = "Codex U"),³⁶ and one bilingual, of Greek alphabetic acrostic hymns with a Coptic translation on the facing page of each bifolium (nos. 592 and 49).³⁷ Reciting the Psalter was of course a central part of any monk's daily activity,³⁸ as was the use of hymns in the day hours whether by oneself or with a group.³⁹ The two best preserved of the Epiphanius hymns are one in honor of an ascetic Saint Ammonius, presumably either the early Ammonius of the Wadi Natrun or the later Ammonius of the Hermopolite,⁴⁰ and one on the Resurrection emphasizing the defeat of the power of idols (and Jews). Thus it is apparent that texts embodying both the ascetic ideal of the transfigured life to benefit others and the hoped-for triumph of the Monophysite way were copied with care and in enduring form.⁴¹

Epiphanius was, as we have seen, simultaneously a world-renouncing recluse and a thaumaturge acting to help his clients. Connected with his latter role we may consider the magical papyrus found in a jar under the floor of a room in the outlying

³⁴Cf. *Ep.* I 42–43, 178–182, 186–192.

³⁵For all the biblical texts, see *Ep.* II 3–7, 155–159 (Coptic), 119–121, 299–301 (Greek).

³⁶*Ep.* II 299 with literature; Plate XVII.

³⁷*Ep.* II 309–312.

³⁸Cf. *Ep.* I 166–169.

³⁹Robert F. Taft, *The Liturgy of the Hours in the Christian East* (Collegeville, Minn., 1986) 249–259.

⁴⁰DeLacy O'Leary, *The Saints of Egypt* (London 1937) 70–72; Crum (*Ep.* II 310) refused to venture an identification. Ammonius of Esna is mentioned in KRU 75 (*supra* n.6) (*Ep.* II 346).

⁴¹Other (Coptic) hymn texts build on New Testament quotations and on sermons by Athanasius and Severus of Antioch, the latter on the dignity of craft practice, consonant with the activities we see embodied in the monastery's material remains (*Ep.* II 161).

part of the complex.⁴² After “names of power” and similar utterances juxtaposed with the Persons of the Trinity, this text (Cairo 45060) gives spells for diseases that involve writing texts on specific days of the month; to obtain favors or to deter the harmful actions of rulers, involving the use of parts of mummies (easily obtainable in the Epiphanius monastic graveyard);⁴³ and dealing with the sorts of problems clients might have, such as defusing quarrels, sending an enemy away “into the desert,” and desiring to have a child. To obtain an oracular response,⁴⁴ the client is advised to say a certain prayer at the rising of the morning star. The papyrus even gives a procedure for laying a foundation, employing a wax figure with amuletic texts written on it, and one for purifying a cistern,⁴⁵ using texts written on a pot to be thrown into it. Could such procedures have been followed at the monastery’s beginnings, on laying its foundation and blessing its water source? In any case, most of the magical ingredients used in the spells, such as pitch, vinegar, salt, oil, palm leaves, dates, and honey, are also mentioned in the papyrus letters and ostraka and/or actually found in trace amounts on site.⁴⁶

Epiphanius continued, in true holy-man fashion, to work his wonders after his death (*cf. Ep. I 214*). Besides the invocations of him given by Crum, an unpublished Coptic parchment fragment in the Princeton University Library attests, I believe, to the cult of the wonder-working properties of his body buried in its

⁴²See *Ep. I 21, 207*; not published by Crum *et al.* but in 1930–31 by Angelicus Kropp; transl. by David Frankfurter in Marvin Meyer and Richard Smith, *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power* (San Francisco 1994) 270–273 no. 128. See Frankfurter, *Religion* (*supra* n.13) 258–259 with n.60.

⁴³Also embalming salts, used by the monks in their burials.

⁴⁴For oracles in Christian Egypt, see Arietta Papaconstantinou, “Oracles chrétiens dans l’Égypte byzantine: le témoignage des papyrus,” *ZPE* 104 (1994) 281–286.

⁴⁵On the monastery complex’s water supply see *Ep. I 149*.

⁴⁶Other spells use bat and dove blood; and both “bat” and “dove” are listed on *Ep. no. 621*, a papyrus containing bird names.

tomb (PLATES 1–2).⁴⁷ The text of this fragment,⁴⁸ which appears to be a hymn from a later period, tells the story of a woman wanting to bring her sons as oblates to serve (*hmhal*)⁴⁹ the monastery, which appears deserted (*shôf ... laaue seep erof*, “deserted ... nothing remains of it”) long after the founder’s death. Finding this situation she cries out and weeps “fit to burst,” lamenting that neither Father Epiphanius nor God in Heaven is present.⁵⁰ “She wept and besought God and our father Epiphanius; her tears flowed down upon the grave ... God took pity on her, the grave opened, she looked down upon the honored body of our father” (side A lines 11–15). This narrative may have been composed in the period after the Arab conquest of Egypt, prompted perhaps by an accidental discovery of buried bodies at the

⁴⁷Princeton GD (Garrett Deposit) NS 19, Manuscripts Division, Princeton University Library; bought from the Cairo dealer Maurice Nahman in 1929, dated by an earlier cataloguer 10th/11th century. I am grateful to Dr Rosalie Cook of Columbia University; Dr Don C. Skemer and Ms. Anna Lee Pauls of the Princeton University Library, for photographs and permissions; and Dr Todd Hickey of the University of Chicago, who is preparing the Princeton Coptica for imaging in the APIS project (Advanced Papyrological Information System).

⁴⁸I opt for the identification with Epiphanius of Thebes (despite Crum’s uncertainties in *Ep.* I 217), rather than Bishop Epiphanius of Salamis in Cyprus, who (pace Hickey) does not seem to have been the object of a pilgrimage cult in Egypt, though there is a Coptic commemoration of the translation of his relics to Cyprus (M. de Fenoyl, *Le sanctoral copte* [Beirut 1960] 156) on 28 Pachon. See also C. Rapp, “Epiphanius of Salamis: The Church Father as Saint,” in *The Sweet Land of Cyprus: Papers at the 25th Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies* (Nicosia-Birmingham 1993) 169–187. Since no place of origin is attached to the “Father Epiphanius” in the Princeton text, Thebans would, in the absence of contradictory local details, have assumed that this was “their” Epiphanius.

⁴⁹See Leslie S. B. MacCough, “Child Donations and Child Saints in Coptic Egypt,” *East European Quarterly* 13 (1979) 409–415.

⁵⁰Twice the text uses the unattested Greek word ἐπισκέπτιον, apparently meaning something like “visitors’ shelter” near the burial place. Etymologically it may imply a place where one viewed (*episkepein*) the preserved body of the saint. Still to appear is the paper of J. M. H. Smith, “Women at the Tomb: Access to Relic Shrines in the Early Middle Ages,” in *The World of Gregory of Tours*, edd. K. Mitchell and I. Wood (forthcoming).

monastic cemetery site giving rise to a renewed impulse to reanimate the pilgrimage shrine.⁵¹

Viewed as a whole, the Monastery of Epiphanius presents the historian of late antiquity with a marvelously interrelated set of written texts and material remains both built and portable. This assemblage was excavated before the First World War, and published soon after the spectacular golden Pharaonic treasures of Tutankhamen's tomb had dazzled the world; humble Coptic remains were treated with disdain.⁵² Two years earlier, in 1924, Francis Kelsey of the University of Michigan had begun excavating the village site of Karanis, emphasizing not precious objects of the elite but the ordinary people's level of daily life, with texts and artifacts interrelated.⁵³ However, this polarization between expensive "high art" ("power art") and humble objects thought appropriate to provincial, unworldly Christian believers was to prove both erroneous and misleading.

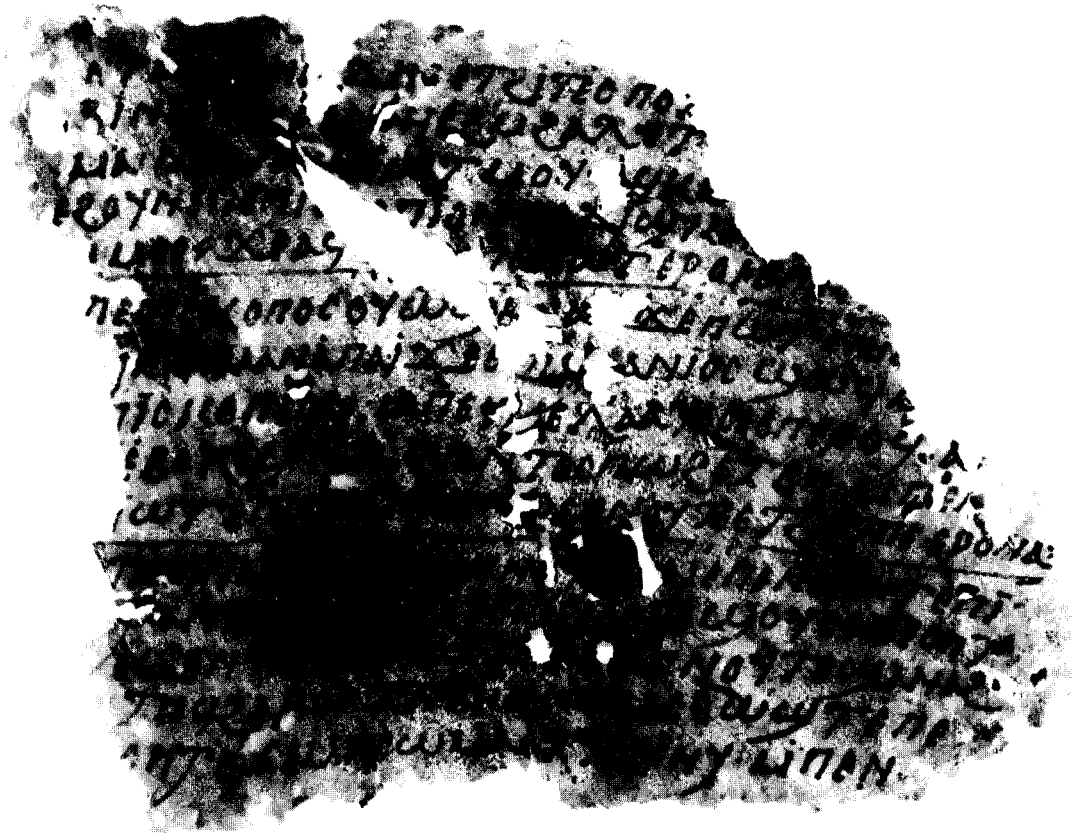
In 1894, the controversial Austrian art historian Josef Strzygowski,⁵⁴ at the age of 32 newly appointed to a chair at the University of Graz, accepted a summons from Gaston

⁵¹The Epiphanius monastery is thought to have ceased to exist after the conquest: Peel (*supra* n.2) 801; *cf. Ep.* I 103. However, if the references to silver currency (rare, as Crum remarked *ad loc.*) in ostrakon 525 in fact refer to Arab silver dirhems, that would support the hypothesis that it survived.

⁵²William H. C. Frend, *The Archaeology of Early Christianity* (London 1996) 144–150.

⁵³Stephen L. Dyson, *Ancient Marbles to American Shores: Classical Archaeology in the United States* (Philadelphia 1998) 187; Florence Friedman *et al.*, *Beyond the Pharaohs: Egypt and the Copts in the 2nd to 7th Centuries A.D.* (Providence 1989) 90–124.

⁵⁴For all of this I have derived a great deal from the essay by Suzanne L. Marchand, "The Rhetoric of Artifacts and the Decline of Classical Humanism: The Case of Josef Strzygowski," *H&T Beih.* 33 (1994) 106–130. However, although Marchand terms Strzygowski "relatively obscure" (106), for Coptologists not a day goes by still that we do not have recourse to his *Koptische Kunst* of 1904, a monograph that records many objects no longer extant. Long before Marchand's essay I had discovered Strzygowski's "Nordic" theories in the Library of Congress.



COPTIC PARCHMENT PRINCETON GD NS 19: SIDE A
By permission, Princeton University Library

PLATE 2 MACCOULL



COPTIC PARCHMENT PRINCETON GD NS 19: SIDE B
By permission, Princeton University Library

Maspero, director of the Egyptian Antiquities Service, to catalogue the Coptic objects in the Cairo Museum. His nearly two years in Egypt would bring him to a whole new terra incognita for interpretation,⁵⁵ the world of Coptic objects that developed within the context of late classical art but that seemed very different from it, more within the realm of ethnographical or folkloristic material.⁵⁶ The powerful impact of Coptic material culture impelled Strzygowski to formulate his famous question as to what was the origin of "our" civilization, *Orient oder Rom?* (the title of his 1901 monograph). But answering the question with a resounding "*Orient*" to oppose the dominance of text-based *klassische Altertumswissenschaft*⁵⁷ led to nearly a century of Coptic art history and Coptic archaeological studies that took up the "*Los von Rom*" (if you will) approach with a vengeance.

Coptic studies had begun as a text-based discipline, largely centered on early dialect versions of biblical texts and on editing sermons and saints' lives from medieval parchment codices. Many Copticists were Roman Catholic or Protestant clergy, concerned either to bring Monophysite "heretics" back to Chalcedonian Rome or (in the case of Anglicans) to show how it was possible to be ancient without being papal. Material studies came later, as a welcome alternate to texts. Because recovered Coptic objects, like the wood carvings, textiles, and pottery from the Epiphanius complex, were not opulent silver and gold plate like the church treasures of Syria, because the wall

⁵⁵Marchand (*supra* n.54) 117–118.

⁵⁶Marchand (*supra* n.54) 108–109. In an 1898 paper ("Die christliche Denkmäler Ägyptens," *RQA* 13 [1898] 1–41) Strzygowski characterized this Christian Egyptian object realm as a sleeping volcano that would have staggering impact: Frend (*supra* n.52) 145.

⁵⁷Christopher Stray, *Classics Transformed* (Oxford 1998), has outlined a cultural process whereby texts from the Latin realm studied by men came to be less favored than objects from the Greek realm studied by women. Also entering the mix were both texts and objects from non-Mediterranean realms studied by outsiders to the classical mainstream: Suzanne L. Marchand, *Down from Olympus: Archaeology and Philhellenism in Germany, 1750–1970* (Princeton 1996) 152–227.

paintings were not Constantinopolitan gold mosaics or silver-sheathed icons, Coptic material culture was regarded as the production of peasants, barely literate *Untertanen* of an exploited province who could not command such elite resources. Since they did not look like “classical high art,” these objects came to be taken up by local antiquarian enthusiasts in Egypt between the world wars as manifesting “Egyptian nationalistic” revolt against Roman-Byzantine cultural hegemony, a revolt empowered by a nativistic Christianity that, itself inspired by European scholars, was determined to see “survivals” of Ancient Egypt in Coptic Christianity.⁵⁸ And from the 1920s on, what were seen through the distorted optic of contemporary anomie as the “expressionistic” features of Coptic art objects appealed to the pessimistic mood of an “age of anxiety” and of “failure of nerve.”⁵⁹ Fortunately, the generation of Coptic art historians practicing at present is better informed, reads the languages, and is equipped with a solid knowledge base about the late antique Mediterranean.⁶⁰

The publication of the Monastery of Epiphanius⁶¹ is most enlightened in that it brings together both texts and material objects, categories that more usually have been studied separately to the detriment of both. When the material from this site is grasped as an entire assemblage, it demonstrates that the

⁵⁸On survivals and “survival-hunting” see the sensible remarks of Heike Behlmer, “Ancient Egyptian Survivals in Coptic Literature: An Overview,” in *Ancient Egyptian Literature: History and Forms*, ed. Antonio Loprieno, *Probleme der Ägyptologie* 10 (Leiden 1996) 567–590.

⁵⁹*Cf.* Marchand (*supra* n.54) 127–129. All three of these tendencies are all too visible in the earlier standard surveys, such as Pierre Du Bourguet, *Coptic Art* (New York 1967 and later editions).

⁶⁰For example, see Lucy-Anne Hunt, Hero Granger-Taylor, and Dominic Montserrat, “Coptic Art,” in *The Dictionary of Art* VII (1996) 818–830; and now Thelma K. Thomas, *Late Antique Egyptian Funerary Sculpture* (Princeton 2000), esp. xvii–xxv, 33–46, 81–83 with notes.

⁶¹More texts and objects are still in the Metropolitan Museum’s collection in New York, together with Columbia University’s. I thank Dr Raffaella Criadore for checking on a couple of items for me.

objects as well as the texts carry messages and transmit ideas. Weaving tools helped the monks and their visitors meditate on their own mortality, on the day when their own bodies would be wrapped in the cloth and bound with the tapes. Agricultural implements helped remind the monks to “pray without ceasing” as they raised and processed both their own daily food and the material elements of the eucharist. And as they raised their eyes to the texts on their walls, they could never cease to be aware of the paradox of God made human, who ate, died, and rose to save: an incarnate God whom they, not the dyophysites, could understand.

Coptic material culture no longer needs to be forced into a typology that squeezes everything into a narrowly-defined slot such as “Early Christianity” or into a dichotomy like “Greek versus Egyptian.” A relation between material culture and mentality is helpful in discerning the ways in which people and groups redefined their identities in the changing world of the later Roman Empire.⁶² Such a repositioning can be seen in the final clauses of the synodal letter that Damian of Alexandria wrote and circulated upon assuming the Monophysite patriarchate in the late summer of A.D. 578, the fiercely partisan Monophysite proclamation that was so prominently inscribed on the Epiphanius wall. After condemning Chalcedon and all its works, Damian says that he will bid his faithful “to continue to send up prayers for the good life of the kings that they may attain a great age, and for the pious (*eusebês*) Caesar that God may keep watching over him, and that every *barbaron ethnos* of the earth may be subject under their hands ...”⁶³ These “kings” are Justin II and Sophia, the Byzantine emperor and empress who had originally been Monophysites but changed to the Chal-

⁶²I have learned much from the essay of M. Alkemade, “Elite Lifestyle and the Transformation of the Roman World in Northern Gaul,” in *The Transformation of the Roman World A.D. 400–900*, edd. Leslie Webster and Michelle Brown (London 1997) 180–184.

⁶³*Ep.* II 152 (Coptic text), 337 (for Crum’s translation).

cedonian allegiance;⁶⁴ the “Caesar” is the current Byzantine *kaisar*, the future emperor Tiberius,⁶⁵ a Chalcedonian who continued to confront the problem of his Monophysite provinces. The Epiphanius monks beheld this text every day, and presumably offered the formulaic prayers⁶⁶ while they practiced their handicrafts.

A further very specific relation among texts, objects, and physical surroundings emerges from *KRU* 75, the seventh-century Coptic will in which Jacob, successor of Psan the successor of Epiphanius, bequeaths his dwelling in the complex to his own designated successor Stephen.⁶⁷ After carefully describing the spatial boundaries, Jacob, who could not write but dictated his will to a priest scribe, ensures by a Trinitarian oath and a prescribed fine that dwelling, objects (*hylê*), and books will go *in toto* to his monastic disciple and definitely *not* to any fleshly (*katasarx*) relative. The monastery of Epiphanius was similarly united by a common Monophysite world view promoted simultaneously by the experience of space, the veneration of a “prophetic” holy person, the crafting of objects of daily use, and the copying and reciting of texts.⁶⁸

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⁶⁴Irfan Shahîd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century* I.2 (Washington 1995) 794.

⁶⁵Walter E. Kaegi, “Tiberius I,” *ODB* III 2083–2084.

⁶⁶*Cf.* Leslie S. B. MacCoull, “P.Madrid 189 Revisited,” *ZPE* 112 (1996) 285–287, a Greek-Coptic bilingual eucharistic anaphora text that prays for the continued victory of the Byzantine emperors over their enemies.

⁶⁷See *supra* n.6.

⁶⁸In addition to previous expressions of thanks, I am also grateful to the Interlibrary Loan Service of Hayden Library, Arizona State University, for access to texts, and to Dr Karen Lemiski of Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies for her keen eye and impeccable critical standards. This essay is dedicated, as always, in loving memory of Mirrit Boutros Ghali: as Cole Porter wrote, “After you, who?”