

Esther Garel, Héritage et transmission dans le monachisme égyptien. Les testaments des supérieurs du *topos* de Saint-Phoibammôn à Thebes (*P.Mon. Phoib.Test.*). Bibliothèque d'études coptes 27. Cairo: IFAO 2020. 376 pages. ISBN 978-2-7247-0760-1. € 62.-.

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This book is a revised version of the author's dissertation submitted to the *École pratique des hautes études*, Paris, in 2015. Its first half represents the analysis of the second, which contains the edition of four wills on papyrus (*P.Mon.Phoib.Test.* 1–4), the first and oldest in Greek, the other subsequent three in Coptic, which were drawn up during the 7th century by the first four abbots of the Monastery of Apa Phoibammôn in Western Thebes. The edition of this important dossier serves the author as the basis of a multi-layered analysis with regards to wide-reaching questions of legal history; religious, literary, and monastic discourses and their intertextuality; Greek-Coptic bilingualism in late antique Egypt; the social practices, institutions, and local Theban history of monasticism.

Chapter 1 (pp. 5–12) provides an indispensable overview of the Theban legal documents and the four documents comprising the dossier: the 7th-century wills of the abbots Abraham, Victor, Peter, and Jacob. Most significantly, we learn of the rediscovery of the Lyon papyri, containing in P.Lyon III the will of Peter (now: *P.Mon.Phoib.Test.* 3), and *not* being the continuation of *P.KRU 77* (*pace* Till and already corrected by Krause), which contains, in fact, the beginning of the will of the previous abbot, Victor (now completed, thanks to P.Lyon II, as *P.Mon.Phoib.Test.* 2), the rest of this document being comprised of P. Inv. Sorb. 3680. The reconstruction and first-time complete edition of two out of the four wills represents the most significant of this book's achievements.

Chapter 2.1 (pp. 14–37) explores the extent to which these wills conform to the Roman law of the period (the eve of the Arab conquest) and how the relationship between the three Coptic specimens to their Greek pendant(s) is to be assessed. To begin with, Byzantine Greek wills and their Coptic pendants are identified as basically representing the type of Roman will that became available to all free inhabitants of the empire and was permitted to be written in Greek instead of Latin following the *Constitutio Antoniniana* early in the 3rd century. The author lays out a convenient overview of the standard clauses that typically make up a Byzantine Greek will (p. 14), thus providing us with the structure of an ideal type against which the dossier at hand can be measured.

The author identifies a number of trends and developments that, while technically “wrong” in traditional Roman terms, show how specific social and religious needs led to the reinterpretation or fresh introduction of passages originating partly in actual wills, but often in entirely different types of documents and discourses. For one, Greek and Coptic wills tend to amass verbose or even redundant enumerations expressing the testator’s mental condition, property, and in particular the all-important dispositions for funerary purposes and commemorative offerings. With Mario Amelotti, Garel observes here an influence by the increasingly popular “paratextamentary” deeds which are born of a desire to guarantee the immediate transfer of property by means of a *donatio inter vivos* to the benefiting religious institution where neither the benefiting monastery nor the testator have to wait for the latter’s death to see the salvific transfer of property take place.

In the same vein, the Greek and Coptic wills assimilate numerous phrases belonging to (originally) unrelated document types. It seems that, even if one had to wait in the context of a will, one still wanted to be able to *guarantee* to the designated heir (Abraham tellingly calls his will an ἀσφάλεια, as if declaring a debt to someone) that the latter will receive what was promised. In effect, the late Greek and Coptic will become another type of bilateral contract analogous to the many sales, settlements, and donations from Western Thebes. Like the latter, a will may be called a πρῶσις which can mean any kind of transfer of property at this point. The heir of the Coptic wills is no longer called an heir, but rather he becomes the $\chi\omicron\epsilon\iota\varsigma$ “lord/owner” = *dominus* who $\lambda\mu\alpha\sigma\tau\epsilon$ “seizes possession” of the listed property, as he does in any sale, settlement, or donation. Wills come to include long sequences of negative expressions characterizing the property transfer as “intransgressible,” “indissoluble,” “unshakeable”, etc., that make it unmistakably clear that nobody will be able to change or undo the document—not even the testator him/herself. The latter, as noted by Garel, is unthinkable according to traditional Roman law: while Greek wills sometimes contain a codicillary clause permitting the later substitution of the will by a new document submitted by the testator, Abraham explicitly denies this right to everyone, including himself! What matters is that one party can absolutely guarantee to the other that they are the undisputed new owners, using the trusted language of bilateral deeds. In this unifying trend, the Coptic wills and other legal documents always try to follow the *cheirographon* pattern of notarial deeds, even where the resulting clauses end up being meaningless according to Roman law, such as the stipulation or the

penalty clause that threatens any transgressor with both financial and divine punishment.

Chapter 2.2 examines various aspects of the abbots' wills in their specific capacity as *monastic* wills—being at once legal dispositions and “political testaments” for the testator’s spiritual community—in the light of legal, documentary, and literary sources that pertain to them or whose discourses are reflected in them.

The previously unedited wills of Victor and Peter allow the author to confirm and expand on the results of earlier studies of these and other Coptic wills by Steinwenter and Schiller. Pages 37–40 are dedicated to the legal status of the monasteries and the question to what extent monks were permitted to own personal property. The concept of total renunciation is identified as a hagiographically encoded ideal. In practice, monks could and often did dispose of their property, including their cell, by sale or will, though there were laws and restrictions depending on the current Roman law and the type of monasticism.

Pages 40–44 discuss “la spécificité juridique des testaments monastiques”. While certain specimens are entirely comparable to “regular” wills (such as *P.KRU 67*, concerning Paham’s property from before his time as a monk), the wills of the abbots of the monastery of Apa Phoibammon are mixed insofar as the abbots dispose of their own private property while also entrusting the institutional care of the monastery to their successor, who will be “un héritier à la fois spirituel et institutionnel, et devient tout simplement propriétaire du monastère.” It becomes apparent from Theban monastic wills that there were limits as to whom the abbot can reasonably appoint as heir and successor: *P.KRU 75*, the will of the abbots of the monastery of Epiphanius, forbids leaving the monastery to blood relatives, instead the leadership must always pass to a God-fearing monk. The *P.Mon.Phoib.Test.* wills do not make this rule so explicit, but betray the same mentality when, e.g., Jacob justifies his choice by relating how he first met Victor II and observed his spiritual dedication and growth, i.e., his qualification; the same will makes repeated references to the previous wills which were apparently understood as implying the same demands.

The next subsection explores how the special relationship between testator and heir in these monastic wills differs from the “normal” wills according to Roman law as discussed earlier: The testator does not simply leave his private property to a relative; the latter is a non-related person who is installed as the “trustee” or “fidéicommissaire” who is charged with the administration of the property, which is an institution with charitable pur-

poses. This is a supra-individual process of which some of the wills remind us by referring to a whole sequence of previous testators, or by instructing the successor whom they should in turn name as successor. *P.Mon.Phoib. Test.* 3 adds the important nuance that, while the will as such technically designates the new abbot, the real abbot is ultimately defined by the performance of his main duties: the economic (διοίκησις) and the religious (λειτουργία) leadership of the monastery.

In the next main section (pp. 44–48), the author highlights the difficult question of whether these monastic wills—chimeras as they are between a “normal” Roman will and a monastic idiosyncrasy full of particular clauses and a quite distinct concept of the “heir” as the “trustee” of a spiritual institution (not to mention their being written in Coptic, see chapter 4)—were even legally valid in the sense that they would have been recognized by the authorities, or if perhaps they reflect “only” a customary law that commanded respect locally but may not have held up in a Byzantine court. Garell aims to show that the wills of the abbots Phoibammon were, at the very least, respected by the local village authorities. Two Coptic ostraca are offered as evidence: *O.Crum* 132 concerning the will of Abraham and *P.Mon. Epiph.* 257 concerning that of Victor. The first of these I believe to be completely unrelated, a case which I will argue on another occasion.

Chapter 2.2.4 considers the spiritual testament as represented by the texts in this dossier as a literary genre. From the wider Hellenistic horizon, strong similarities are cited, following Steinwenter, with the testaments of famous philosophers (pp. 48–49), in particular Epicurus, who leaves the leadership of his school and the maintenance of his garden and property to his “fiduciaries” in a comparable manner to the abbots of our wills, using the means of private law to ensure the continuity of the spiritual community.

The abbots’ wills are further (pp. 50–52) diagnosed as sharing substantially in the “farewell discourse” as it is characteristic of many Coptic hagiographical works, of which the author cites a few. The respective monastic father, such as Samuel of Kalamun, when approaching his end, always summons the monks and exhorts them to keep all of God’s commandments, to love each other, to resist the Enemy’s temptations, etc., so that the supra-individual institution stands a chance to survive the loss of a great leader, a pathos clearly shared by the abbots’ wills. It might have been more coherent to combine this part with 5.3.2, also dedicated to the abbots’ wills’ intertextuality with other types of literature.

Chapter 3 (pp. 53–94) is a crucial part of this book as it firmly locates these Theban wills, by now thoroughly analyzed as wills in general, in

Thebes and its specific monastic environment. In an overview that is recommended to anyone wishing to familiarize themselves with the subject matter, Garel surveys (not comprehensively, of course, but with a focus on aspects illuminated by the dossier at hand) the history of the Monastery of Apa Phoibammon as an institution (pp. 53–61), and finds certain phrases in the abbots' wills compatible with Martin Krause's theory, which seems to be the *communis opinio* at this point, that *P.KRU* 105 and *O.Lips.Copt.* I 10 document the relocation of the original Monastery of Apa Phoibammon, further south near Hermonthis, to its final Theban location at Deir el-Bahari.²

A highlight deserving special attention (if not a publication of its own) is the section devoted to the person of the priest Victor, the testator of the second will in the dossier (pp. 62–69). Garel gives a convenient table of some seventy documents (not including the will edited here) that are clearly or very probably written by, to, or mentioning Victor, as well as certain criteria, such as palaeography, that were the basis of this selection. Based on this dossier, Garel sketches a vivid picture of the career, titles, and the manifold social and economic activities which show Victor, though not a bishop like his predecessor, wielding considerable influence in the region. The discussion of titles of monastic leaders such as *πρεσβύτερος*, *ἡγούμενος*, *προεστώς*, *οἰκονόμος*, most of them used for Victor at some point, will be particularly helpful to scholars that often encounter and wonder about the relationship between these terms.

Within the history of the monastery, the author devotes special attention to the most exciting episode that is revealed by her dossier: the scandal of the fugitive monks (pp. 70–71). In his own will, Victor's successor Peter justifies at length his decision to expel the monks Daniel and Jacob from the monastery, even though Victor had named them co-heirs besides Peter. Garel argues that *P.Mon.Epiph.* 257 documents exactly this conflict from the perspective of Daniel and Jacob, who try to enforce their rights as heirs. In this section, the author observes that when a monk leaves or is expelled from his monastery, this renders him *ἀλλότριος* = *ωμμο* "estranged." It

² This "Hermonthite prehistory" of the monastery, I have recently argued, can now be traced back a good bit into the 6th century to Abraham's own predecessors, see F. Krueger, "Revisiting the First Monastery of Apa Phoibammon. A Prosopography and Relative Chronology of its Connections to the Monastery of Apa Ezekiel within the Monastic Network of Hermonthis during the 6th Century," in *APF* 66 (2020), pp. 150–191.

should be noted that the use of this technical term is also well known from Shenoute and the Theban monk Frange.³

The rest of chapter 3 (pp. 78–94) is all about the description of the physical monastery, its buildings, architecture, and geographical situation insofar as these are referenced by the wills, as well as the monastic institutions, rules and habits.⁴ The earlier inquiry into the act and terminology of *leaving* a monastery now turns to *becoming* a monk. The examination of the notoriously difficult title πιστός, according to the author perhaps neither a full novice nor a lay assistant, but something in between, comes as a welcome reassessment of an old problem.

The chapter closes with an overview of the abbot's duties, above all the economic (διοίκησης) and the spiritual (λειτουργία) leadership of the monastery, that can be reconstructed based on the wills in the dossier. The remainder of the analytical part of the book before the catalogue reflects this proximity by its technical-philological focus.

Chapter 4 (pp. 95–108) offers a detailed palaeographical study of the dossier, including samples of close parallels to the handwritings of both the Greek and the Coptic wills. With reference to the summary and typology of Alain Delattre, the author reminds us that the art of Coptic palaeography is still in its infancy and that the major division between types of script that we need to observe is between “majuscule” (essentially bilinear, roughly equally large separate letters, few if any ligatures, more or less cursive) and “minuscule” (essentially quadrilinear, letters of contrasting sizes, rich in ligatures, more or less cursive and elegant) handwritings. The former is by far the more frequently encountered, but Coptic documentary texts, and in particular legal documents written in Coptic since the later 6th century,

³ Anne Boud'hors, “Aspects du monachisme égyptien : les figures comparées de Chénouté et Frangé,” in: F. Jullien, M.-J. Pierre (Eds.), *Les monachismes d'Orient. Images, échanges, influences. Hommage à Antoine Guillaumont*, Turnhout 2011, 217–226; see also *O.Frangé*, vol. 1, 18.

⁴ Of the physical places that are mentioned, I would just like to comment on the tomb or reliquary of St. Phoibammon which Garel thinks (pp. 80f.) probably existed at the monastery based on Abraham's formulation in his will “le saint martyr victorieux *apa* Phoibammôn qui gît dans la susdite divine montagne des Memnonia” according to her translation. As I have explained in detail in Krueger, “Revisiting the First Monastery of Apa Phoibammon,” 173–75, I think this is incorrect; countless parallels indicate that διάκειμαι = κη ερραι always indicates the location of a place or monastery, not that of the saint himself. That there were relics of the martyr at the monastery is, of course, likely regardless.

show an increasing proclivity to adopt the quadrilinear-cursive tendency of their Greek counterparts.⁵

By comparing the handwriting of the individual Coptic wills, dating between 634 and ca. 695, with 7th/8th-century Coptic-documentary hands from Thebes and elsewhere, Garel tries to determine whether any evolution is observable. The will of Victor is diagnosed as following by and large the majuscule pattern, although with certain quadrilinear-cursive influences. Close parallels are cited both with other legal documents as well as some of the most famous Theban ostraca hands, parallels so consistent that Garel sees here the effect of a common Theban scribal “school.” In the second Coptic will (the third in the dossier), that of the abbot Peter, the handwriting is sloppy and irregular by comparison, which is accompanied by the presence of local Thebanisms that contrast with the “good Sahidic” of the other wills. Both return to form with the last will in the dossier, that of the abbot Jacob, where the strictly upright writing is in fact closest to the first text in the dossier, Abraham’s Greek will.

A small section discusses the Greek-Coptic digraphism found in Coptic legal documents, meaning that the same scribe will usually use two very different styles for his Greek and Coptic sections,⁶ though Garel notes this difference is often neglected or outright ignored in her dossier. Chapter 4 closes with a description of the diacritical signs used by the scribes of the dossier.

The last chapter before the catalogue (pp. 109–138) is devoted to language and rhetoric of the abbots’ wills. We need not retread in detail the extensive summary of the numerous phonological and syntactical observations, as well as the numerous phrases and stylistic devices that are generally copied or calqued after Greek prototypes. The author is, of course, aware of this and integrates these phenomena in her nuanced discussion of whether and to what extent a Greek-Coptic bilingualism in 7th-century Thebes is evinced by our dossier.

Here recurs the question of whether legal documents in Coptic were as officially recognized as their Greek prototypes. The fact that Victor and his successors shifted from Greek to Coptic for their wills and that the village of Jême transfers ownership of Deir el-Bahari to the monastery in the Coptic *P.KRU* 105 even before Abraham’s traditionally Greek will, would seem to

⁵ For a nuanced study of the sociolinguistic reasons behind this, see now J.-L. Fournet, *The Rise of Coptic. Egyptian versus Greek in Late Antiquity*, Princeton, 2020, esp. 16–18.

⁶ On this subject see *ibid.* as well as the titles cited by Garel.

indicate so. As Garel points out, it also provides important Theban evidence for a case that has largely been made based on texts from Middle Egypt, particularly the archive of Dioskoros of Aphrodito: Beginning in the later 6th century, Coptic begins to be used for some, then more and more, types of legal documents, finally becomes “une langue de prestige” (p. 117). At Thebes, where Greek documents are extremely rare (and those that exist are often written in poor Greek), Coptic even acquires a near-monopoly. For the Monastery of Apa Phoibammon in particular, Garel attributes this to the “contexte monastique,” though one should also stress that we can probably always expect a much lower use of Greek (corresponding to a greater enthusiasm for using Coptic) in a village such as Jême as opposed to intensely hellenized urban centers like Hermopolis (where the nearby Bawit monastery remains bilingual), or an exceptional former city like Aphrodito.⁷

Finally, a brief section contextualizes the dossier within the debate (the author summarizes the state of research developed, e.g., by Fournet, Papaconstantinou, and Richter) around the development of a whole new bilingual scribal school in Upper Egypt which must also have produced the professional scribes behind the Coptic abbots’ wills.

Chapter 5 closes with an overview of the intertextuality that the wills share with the Bible and other Christian literature, as well as topoi from funerary stelae. Regarding the latter, one misses Bianca Tudor’s important monograph in the bibliography.⁸ As stated, this section is closely related to 2.2.4, but it is understandable that concrete “citations” rather than a general genre-affinity be included in this chapter instead. A concise conclusion (pp. 139–141) summarizes the major findings of the book.

Roughly the second half of the volume is taken up by the expert edition of the four wills, accompanied by excellent translations and extensive line-by-line commentaries. In addition to the main dossier, a short appendix also gives editions of *P.KRU* 105 and *O.Lips.Copt.* I 10.

An index identifies anthroponyms; toponyms; autochthonous Egyptian words as well as Greek loanwords; titles and functions; biblical quotations; as well as a selection of the more interesting grammatical phenomena.

After the bibliography, the book is closed by high quality plates, in color where possible, of all the papyri of the dossier, plus *P.KRU* 105. The last plates are two useful maps of the area around Thebes and Hermonthis gen-

⁷ I thank Lajos Berkes for reminding me of this aspect of the issue.

⁸ Bianca Tudor, *Christian Funerary Stelae of the Byzantine and Arab Periods from Egypt*, Marburg 2011.

erally, and of Western Thebes in particular, containing all known sites of monastic habitation.

To conclude, I will briefly repeat my initial recommendation: the expert edition of such an important dossier along with the analysis of its implications for various fields like legal history, religious, literary, monastic discourses and their intertextuality; Greek-Coptic bilingualism; the social practices, institutions, and local Theban history of monasticism – these aspects conspire to produce an impressive feat of coptological and papyrological research.

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