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STUDIA PATRISTICA

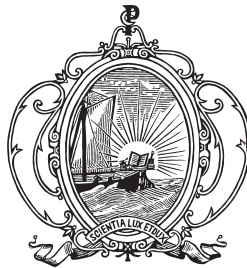
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Occasional Prayers Written by Monks and Visitors at the Monastery of Apa Apollo

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ABSTRACT

While numerous Christian liturgical prayers have survived from the late antique period in Egypt, occasional prayers are less frequently attested. One source of occasional prayers, albeit minimalist in form, are prayers that monks and visitors scratched (graffiti) or painted (*dipinti*) in monastic spaces imbued with the presence of a saint or other intermediaries. This article reviews prayers left in such a space at the Monastery of Apa Apollo in Bawit. It describes the typical structure and phraseology of the prayers, and it discusses information gleaned from the prayers about patterns of pilgrimage to the site, the roles and occupations of people named in the room, and the gendered perception of familial and social relations.

The initial impetus for this article came from the *euchologia* project currently under way at the Austrian Academy of Sciences.¹ A team of scholars led by Claudia Rapp is examining all extant manuscripts of Byzantine prayer books prior to 1650 in order to document and investigate the numerous prayers for everyday occasions – ‘occasional’ or ‘small’ prayers – preserved in those manuscripts. These prayers, and the manner in which they are presented in individual manuscripts, could potentially contribute significantly to our understanding of social practices and daily life. But they have been underused as a source for social history because of the expertise required to examine the manuscripts and the difficulties posed by their location in disparate libraries. The *euchologia* project aims to make the prayers more accessible to scholars.

A different problem obtains in the period of Late Antiquity (*circa* 300 to 800 CE), prior to the production of Byzantine prayer books. While the material record from this earlier period, concentrated in Egypt, preserves numerous liturgical prayers,² occasional prayers are infrequently attested. It could be that they were not thought to be sufficiently important to be written down. It could also

¹ For an introduction to the project, see Claudia Rapp, Eirini Afentoulidou, Daniel Galadza, Ilias Nesseris, Giulia Rossetto and Elisabeth Schiffer, ‘Byzantine Prayer Books as Sources for Social History and Daily Life’, *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 67 (2017), 173-211.

² See now Ágnes T. Mihálykó, *The Christian Liturgical Papyri: An Introduction*, Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum 114 (Tübingen, 2019).

be that they were not used as systematically as liturgical prayers. Whatever the reason, their relative scarcity leads one to look elsewhere for evidence of prayers Christians offered in response to recurring concerns or events in their lives. In this article I turn to prayers that Christians etched or painted on surfaces in shrines and monasteries that they visited or inhabited. While these graffiti and *dipinti*, as they are technically termed, only record the prayers (and other writings) that people customarily left at such sites, and not prayers for other occasions, they nevertheless afford a glimpse of how people routinely formulated their prayers. Moreover, since the prayers were written for or by a large number of individuals, they can be mined for evidence of social habits or daily activities, which is one of the objectives of the *euchologia* project. In short, these sources seem to hold some promise, given the relative scarcity of occasional prayers from late antique Egypt.

Christian monastic sites from late antique Egypt are a rich source of both formal and informal inscriptions.³ A review of all informal prayers left by inhabitants or visitors at these sites is beyond the scope of this article. For a sample of prayers people wrote at such sites, I turn to graffiti and *dipinti* found at the Monastery of Apa Apollo at Bawit, a large monastic settlement comprised mainly of hermitages,⁴ located in the Hermopolite nome at the foot of cliffs about fifteen kilometres west of the Nile.⁵ The veneration of Apollo, a fourth-century ascetic, his companion Phib, and a third figure Anoup,⁶ is attested by inscriptions found throughout Egypt.⁷ The monastery at Bawit was an important centre for their cult, attracting both monks and visitors. It flourished from the sixth to the tenth century.⁸

³ For an overview, see Jacques van der Vliet, 'The Christian Epigraphy of Egypt and Nubia', in Gawdat Gabra and Hany N. Takla (eds), *Christianity and Monasticism in Upper Egypt*, vol. 2: *Nag Hammadi – Esna* (Cairo, 2010), 147-55.

⁴ On the monastery, see Ewa Wipszycka, *The Second Gift of the Nile: Monks and Monasteries in Late Antique Egypt*, trans. Damian Jasiński, *The Journal of Juristic Papyrology Supplements* 33 (Warsaw, 2018), 322-8; Darlene L. Brooks Hedstrom, *The Monastic Landscape of Late Antique Egypt: An Archaeological Reconstruction* (Cambridge, 2017), 200-21; Alain Delattre, *Papyrus coptes et grecs du monastère d'apa Apollô de Baouît conservés aux Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire de Bruxelles* (Brussels, 2004), 45-54.

⁵ TM Geo 10454 (www.trismegistos.org/place/10454); on this database of places in the ancient world (mainly Egypt), see Herbert Verreth, *A Survey of Toponyms in Egypt in the Graeco-Roman Period*, Version 2.0, Trismegistos Online Publications 2 (Leuven, 2013), and www.trismegistos.org/geo/about.php. For a map with the location of Bawit, see Roger S. Bagnall and Dominic W. Rathbone (eds), *Egypt from Alexander to the Early Christians: An Archaeological and Historical Guide* (Los Angeles, 2004), 156.

⁶ On the legends and cult of Apollo, Phib, and Anoup, see D.L. Brooks Hedstrom, *Monastic Landscape* (2017), 165-70; A. Delattre, *Papyrus* (2004), 36-41; René-Georges Coquin and Maurice Martin, 'Bawit: History', in Aziz S. Atiya (ed.), *The Coptic Encyclopedia* (New York, 1991), II 362-3.

⁷ Arietta Papaconstantinou, *Le culte des saints en Égypte des Byzantins aux Abbassides: l'apport des inscriptions et des papyrus grecs et coptes* (Paris, 2001), 51-2, 53-6, 388, 400.

⁸ D.L. Brooks Hedstrom, *Monastic Landscape* (2017), 202-3; A. Delattre, *Papyrus* (2004), 54-8.

The site was the subject of several French archaeological campaigns at the beginning of the twentieth century, a few Egyptian campaigns in the last quarter of that century, and a new series of campaigns under the aegis of the Institut français de l'archéologie orientale and the Musée du Louvre in the first decade of this century.⁹ The buildings uncovered in the early campaigns, long since buried in sand, have now been precisely located by means of magnetic prospection.¹⁰ For the purposes of this article, I focus on graffiti and *dipinti* written on the walls of Room 6 in a complex of rooms that Jean Maspero designated by the letter 'B'.¹¹

This long rectangular room, measuring almost twenty-nine metres long and seven metres wide, was, in its final state, lined with benches on the south, east, and west sides.¹² The north wall originally had a bench as well, but a second wall was built without a bench in front of the original wall. The walls were decorated with elaborate and complex geometric panels, with a decorative band running along the top. At some point, a niche was built into the east wall and painted in two registers: above, Christ enthroned, surrounded by the symbols of the four evangelists and by the archangels Michael and Gabriel; below, Mary enthroned with the child Jesus on her lap, surrounded by the twelve apostles and two other figures, 'saint' Paul of Psilikous (possibly Psilichis?)¹³ and 'our father' Nabhero.¹⁴ The room appears to have served as a refectory.¹⁵ Numerous graffiti and *dipinti* – 380 edited by Maspero and Drioton – were etched or painted on the walls,¹⁶ suggesting that the room was also used to

⁹ D.L. Brooks Hedstrom, *Monastic Landscape* (2017), 201-3; A. Delattre, *Papyrus* (2004), 30-1; Dominique Bénazeth, 'Histoire des fouilles de Baouit', in Jean-Marc Rosenstiehl (ed.), *Études coptes IV: quatrième journée d'études, Strasbourg, 26-27 mai 1988*, Cahiers de la Bibliothèque copte 8 (Louvain, 1995), 53-62. On the recent excavations, see Gisèle Hadji-Minaglou, 'Découvertes récentes à Baouît', in Paola Buzi, Alberto Camplani and Federico Contardi (eds), *Coptic Society. Literature and Religion from Late Antiquity to Modern Times*, 2 vol., Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 247 (Leuven, 2016), I 639-50.

¹⁰ Tomasz Herbich and Dominique Bénazeth, 'Le kôm de Baouît: étapes d'une cartographie', *Bulletin de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale* 108 (2008), 165-204. For a simplified map, see E. Wipszycka, *The Second Gift* (2018), 323 (fig. 17).

¹¹ Jean Maspero, *Fouilles exécutées à Baouît par Jean Maspero*, ed. Étienne Drioton, Mémoires de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale 59.1-2 (Cairo, 1932 and 1943), 1 (fig. 1); T. Herbich and D. Bénazeth, 'Le kôm' (2008), 179-80, 200 (fig. 17).

¹² For a description of the room and its decoration, see J. Maspero, *Fouilles* (1932), vi-vii, 20-2, with (1943), plates XV-XXV; D.L. Brooks Hedstrom, *Monastic Landscape* (2017), 209-10.

¹³ TM Geo 8197 (<https://www.trismegistos.org/place/8197>).

¹⁴ J. Maspero, *Fouilles* (1943), plates XXI-XXIV. The niche is now in the Coptic Museum in Cairo.

¹⁵ A. Delattre, *Papyrus* (2004), 50; Colin C. Walters, *Monastic Archaeology in Egypt* (Westminster, 1974), 109. Peter Grossmann, *Christliche Architektur in Ägypten*, Handbook of Oriental Studies, Section One, The Near and Middle East 62 (Leiden, 2002), 281, includes the room in his discussion of community prayer halls.

¹⁶ J. Maspero, *Fouilles* (1932), nos. 58-398, 511-49. Here and in what follows, inscriptions are identified by number (preceded by 'no.' or 'nos.', to distinguish from page references), for ease of reference. The papyrological abbreviation, used in other literature but not here, is *MIFAO* 59.

receive pilgrims.¹⁷ Such a concentration of informal inscriptions in a space frequented by visitors is not uncommon among monastic sites; one observes the same phenomenon, for example, in oratories or martyria, along with their adjoining rooms, in hermitages at Kellia.¹⁸ Although few of the graffiti and *dipinti* can be dated with precision, most were probably written in the seventh and eighth centuries.¹⁹ Unfortunately, the archaeological report included photos of only a few graffiti and *dipinti*; it is not possible, therefore, to examine the writing of each of the inscriptions in order to verify the transcription or take scribal features into consideration.

Many visitors wrote only their names. Others wrote requests for prayer (ΩΛΗΛ ΕΧΝ-, ΤΩΒΖ ΕΧΝ-).²⁰ Still others wrote requests for help (βοήθει, βοήθησον),²¹ protection (ΡΟΕΙC Ε-), mercy (ΑΡΙ ΟΥΝΑ ΜΝ-, etc.), or remembrance (ΑΡΙ ΠΜΕΕΥΕ).²² Requests for prayer are usually simple in their formulation. They typically consist of the name or names of the persons to be prayed for, followed by the request 'Pray for me/us/them'. (The request may be phrased in the singular – 'pray for me' – even when more than one person is named.) Occasionally, the purpose of the prayer is specified: to receive forgiveness,²³ instruction,²⁴ a good end, or a long life.²⁵ Requests for help, protection, remembrance, and the like have a different structure. The request is usually preceded by an invocation. The invocation may be as brief as 'Lord', 'God', or 'Jesus Christ' (the latter usually abbreviated as a *nomen sacrum*); it may include the trinitarian formula 'Father, Son, and Holy Spirit'; or it may appeal to the 'Angel of this vault' or the 'Angel of this place', the saints of the monastery (chiefly Apollo, but also Anoup and Phib), or other saints, with or without one or more of the preceding ways of invoking God (The prayers addressed to the 'Angel of this vault'²⁶ or the 'Angel of this place'²⁷ reveal that people were drawn not simply to the monastery but to this room in particular and to its mediatory presences²⁸). A few prayers begin with the common

¹⁷ *Ibid.* vii-viii; A. Delattre, *Papyrus* (2004), 40.

¹⁸ See, e.g., the concentration of informal inscriptions in Room 29 in Hermitage Q1z 45, discussed at Philippe Bridel *et al.*, *EK 8184*, Tome III: *Explorations aux Qouçoûr El-Izeila lors des campagnes 1981, 1982, 1984, 1985, 1986, 1989 et 1990* (Leuven, 2001), 191-5, 223-4, 225-30; and in Room 12 in Hermitage QH 39-40, discussed at Philippe Bridel *et al.*, *EK 8184*, Tome IV: *Explorations aux Qouçoûr Hégeila et Éreima lors des campagnes 1987, 1988 et 1989* (Leuven, 2003), 153-80.

¹⁹ A. Delattre, *Papyrus* (2004), 35.

²⁰ See these entries in the indices at J. Maspero, *Fouilles* (1932), 176-7.

²¹ The Coptic equivalent, ΑΡΙ ΒΟΗΘΙΝ, is not used.

²² See these entries in the indices at J. Maspero, *Fouilles* (1932), 174, 176, and 179.

²³ *Ibid.* nos. 127, 281, 300.

²⁴ *Ibid.* no. 387.

²⁵ *Ibid.* no. 207.

²⁶ *Ibid.* nos. 145, 203, 296.

²⁷ *Ibid.* nos. 73, 195, 345.

²⁸ See D.L. Brooks Hedstrom, *Monastic Landscape* (2017), 210-11.

acclamations ‘Jesus Christ conquers’ or ‘one God’.²⁹ The ensuing request always names, and sometimes describes, the persons or persons who are its object. Sometimes the prayer concludes with one, two, or three amens.

The prayers left in this room were neither original nor, for the most part, elaborate. One finds similar prayers at other monastic sites.³⁰ Evidently, prayers left in such spaces – spaces associated with mediatory figures and set apart in a monastic complex – followed certain conventions. While the prayers remain the expressions of individuals, they are generic in form. They do not reveal much that is personal beyond a person’s name, affiliation, and occupation, if even that much is mentioned. In this regard, it is appropriate to consider them occasional prayers, simple as they may be. They are prayers that befit an occasion that is common to many, not specific to one, and their formulation will be recognizable to many, not determined by one. Moreover, like other occasional prayers, the prayers left at the monastery were not wholly private; they were visible for others to see and read. This, in fact, is what distinguished them from comparable prayers that people may have spoken in the course of a day or a year: the prayers left in the room are perpetual, rather than momentary, requests, rendered so by writing.³¹ They appeal continually to both heavenly and human intermediaries. Thus, the space, the inhabitants (heavenly and earthly) of the space, and the way in which people viewed and approached the space – the occasion in all its dimensions – generated an enduring inscription.³²

Although people followed conventions in recording their presence or their prayers in this room, their inscriptions are nevertheless a resource for social history, since, in addition to referring to individuals by name, they also identify them by familial or monastic affiliation or by position or occupation in the community or the monastery. These data complement those gathered from other finds, such as documents or letters, as sources of information about the life and activities of people in the monastery and its environs.³³

Several broad groups of people can be identified from among those who are named, with or without an explicit prayer or request for prayer. The ecclesiastical offices of priest, deacon, reader, and chanter occur frequently,³⁴ not

²⁹ J. Maspero, *Fouilles* (1932), nos. 300, 398.

³⁰ See, e.g., the more than forty prayers left in ‘Cell B’ at the Monastery of Epiphanius, in Herbert E. Winlock and Walter E. Crum (eds), *The Monastery of Epiphanius at Thebes*, 2 vol. (New York, 1926), II, nos. 660-75, 683-702, with discussion at I 43.

³¹ See Lara Weiss, ‘Perpetuated Action’, in Rubina Raja and Jörg Rüpke (eds), *A Companion to the Archaeology of Religion in the Ancient World* (Chichester, 2015), 60-70, 63.

³² David Frankfurter, *Christianizing Egypt: Syncretism and Local Worlds in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, 2017), well describes how devotional practices are shaped by cultural habits associated with a place: by what the place signifies, by what devotees expect, and by what experts offer.

³³ For an overview of occupations and functions in the monastery and its environs, see A. Delattre, *Papyrus* (2004), 65-93.

³⁴ See the indices at J. Maspero, *Fouilles* (1932), 170-2, s.v. ΟΥΗΒΒ, πρεσβύτερος; διάκονος; ρερωϞ, ἀναγνώστης; ψάλμωδός, ψάλτης; cf. A. Delattre, *Papyrus* (2004), 72-4.

surprisingly, given that persons in these offices would most likely have been able to read and write. Specific monastic offices are occasionally mentioned: the ‘father of the little ones’³⁵ and the ‘father of the cell’.³⁶ A few professions appear: doctor,³⁷ lawyer,³⁸ notary,³⁹ scribe,⁴⁰ school master,⁴¹ and surveyor.⁴² Three soldiers request prayers,⁴³ one identifying himself as the commander of the garrison at Koussai (modern El-Qusiya),⁴⁴ approximately nineteen kilometres south-east of Bawit. Artisans, vendors, and labourers appear throughout: several carpenters,⁴⁵ two masons,⁴⁶ one painter⁴⁷ – trades employed in construction or decoration at the monastery; a certain Victor who worked the olive press;⁴⁸ sellers of oil,⁴⁹ honey,⁵⁰ white bread,⁵¹ and jars;⁵² several boatmen,⁵³ a shepherd,⁵⁴ a gardener,⁵⁵ a potter,⁵⁶ two sack-makers,⁵⁷ a vellum-maker,⁵⁸ and, possibly, a water-carrier.⁵⁹ Two men are identified, in several inscriptions, as βουκινάτωρ (*sic*); we shall return to them below.⁶⁰

The inscriptions also permit us to identify some of the towns or villages from which individuals originated. Approximately thirty places are named in the graffiti and *dipinti* in the room.⁶¹ About half of these can be identified with

³⁵ J. Maspero, *Fouilles* (1932), nos. 249, 376; cf. A. Delattre, *Papyrus* (2004), 69.

³⁶ J. Maspero, *Fouilles* (1932), no. 80; cf. A. Delattre, *Papyrus* (2004), 68-9.

³⁷ J. Maspero, *Fouilles* (1932), no. 278, possibly also no. 330.

³⁸ *Ibid.* nos. 149, 291.

³⁹ *Ibid.* no. 124.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* nos. 149, 225, 354.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* no. 390.

⁴² *Ibid.* no. 198.

⁴³ *Ibid.* nos. 85, 144, 338.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* no. 85; for Koussai, see TM Geo 1176 (www.trismegistos.org/place/1176).

⁴⁵ J. Maspero, *Fouilles* (1932), nos. 96, 108, 124, 149, 203.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* nos. 100, 348.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* no. 81.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* nos. 339, 346.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* no. 326, with n. 1.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* no. 268.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* no. 277, with n. 1; for the term, see Hans Förster (ed.), *Wörterbuch der griechischen Wörter in den koptischen dokumentarischen Texten*, Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur 148 (Berlin, 2002), 359.

⁵² J. Maspero, *Fouilles* (1932), no. 81, with n. 2.

⁵³ *Ibid.* nos. 149, 210.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* nos. 149, 150, 151, all naming a certain Jeremiah, the shepherd of Temdjir, discussed below.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* no. 285.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* no. 211.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* nos. 205, 268.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* no. 253.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* no. 348, with n. 1.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* nos. 147, 257, 284, 300.

⁶¹ See *ibid.* 169-70 (indices B and C). A few of the place names are not found at the reference given.

attested places in late antique Egypt. Half of these in turn – eight out of the thirty – can be located on the map of Egypt in the Roman period, allowing us to measure their approximate distance from Bawit. Some individuals came from nearby villages, such as Paploou (modern Beblaou),⁶² about ten kilometres to the west of Bawit, and Somou (modern Ismu el-Arus),⁶³ about fifteen kilometres to the north. Some originated in villages or towns further afield: Deir Abu Hennes and Thmoresis,⁶⁴ about forty kilometres north of Bawit; Temsiris (modern Damsir),⁶⁵ about seventy-three kilometres to the north; and Aphrodito (modern Kom Ishgau),⁶⁶ about one hundred and sixteen kilometres to the south. It is possible that one person originated over four hundred kilometres away, from the village of Bouto (modern Tell el-Fara'un) in the northwestern Delta of the Nile.⁶⁷

We cannot assume in all these cases that people were visiting the monastery from the places they named. It is possible they named their place of origin, but in fact lived elsewhere or even in the monastic settlement. One graffito, for instance, names men from three different villages, Mena from Pne, Victor from Somou, and Paul from Mares (possibly Tamares).⁶⁸

The village of Temsiris – identified by its Coptic name, Temdjir (ΤΕΜΧΙΡ) – stands out among places mentioned in the inscriptions. It appears that this village had a particular devotion to the saints of the monastery: sixteen graffiti or *dipinti* in the room are written by or for people from the village. Several of the prayers invite further discussion.

On the reconstructed north wall of the room there are two long prayers written one beside the other.⁶⁹ Both are written by a scribe from the village, named Mena. The prayers are similar, but not identical. The invocations vary, one calling on ‘the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, our father Apa Apollo and Apa Anoup, Mena, Phib’, the other calling on ‘the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, [Jesus, son of (?)] Holy Mary,⁷⁰ our father Apa Apollo, our father Apa Phib’. Both prayers seek protection for all the inhabitants of Temdjir ‘from the smallest to the greatest’, but they differ in the offices, persons, and occupations they name. One prayer refers specifically to ‘the leaders of the village, and ... the priests, and the deacons, readers, and chanters’ (149.12-4), before going on

⁶² *Ibid.* no. 349; cf. TM Geo 2951 (www.trismegistos.org/place/2951).

⁶³ J. Maspero, *Fouilles* (1932), no. 252; cf. TM Geo 7220 (www.trismegistos.org/place/7220).

⁶⁴ Deir Abu Hennes: J. Maspero, *Fouilles* (1932), no. 110; cf. TM Geo 3506 (www.trismegistos.org/place/3506). Thmoresis: J. Maspero, *Fouilles* (1932), nos. 89, 112, 117; cf. TM Geo 9470 (www.trismegistos.org/place/9470).

⁶⁵ J. Maspero, *Fouilles* (1932), 76 n. 1; cf. TM Geo 7516 (www.trismegistos.org/place/7516); see discussion below.

⁶⁶ J. Maspero, *Fouilles* (1932), no. 128; cf. TM Geo 237 (www.trismegistos.org/place/237).

⁶⁷ J. Maspero, *Fouilles* (1932), no. 156; cf. TM Geo 3685 (www.trismegistos.org/place/3685).

⁶⁸ J. Maspero, *Fouilles* (1932), no. 252; cf. TM Geo 6788, 7220, and 10156.

⁶⁹ J. Maspero, *Fouilles* (1932), nos. 149, 150.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 77 n. 4; compare no. 240.2, quoted below at n. 85.

to name numerous individuals. The other prayer begins by naming several individuals and their relatives, before interceding on behalf of ‘all the rest of the village: the farmers, the poor, the labourers, the abandoned, the unfortunate, and the needy’ (150.13-5), if this is the correct rendering of these terms. Each prayer thus preserves what appears to be a standard set of intercessions, one for office holders in the village, the other for its more vulnerable inhabitants. But the scribe nevertheless improvises in each of the prayers, seemingly naming individuals as they come to mind. In the first prayer, after naming the office holders, Mena asks for protection for two series of individuals. He concludes the initial group by referring to ‘our entire village, from the greatest to the smallest’ (149.17-8), but then continues with another group, eventually concluding the prayer with ‘and the rest of the village’ (149.26). Likewise, the second prayer, after interceding for the village’s unfortunates, adds a further invocation and petition (150.15-9).

The way in which individuals are named in these two prayers also differs. The first prayer mentions twenty-three individuals (including Mena, the writer of the prayer) by name and occasionally by occupation. The second prayer mentions only nine individuals by name (again, including Mena), but refers in addition to members of his extended family, revealing the relationship Mena has with several of those named. Victor the village headman, whom he names first, could be Mena’s brother, if the word is not used in an extended sense, as it often was in Egyptian communication and correspondence (150.8-9).⁷¹ Apollo and Isaac are Mena’s sons (150.10-1). Victor’s wife, children (literally, ‘sons’, $\omega\eta\rho\epsilon$), and brothers are mentioned but not named (150.6-7), as are Isaac’s children (150.11). Anoup, a grandson Mena names in the first prayer (149.5-6), is not mentioned in the second prayer (Was this an oversight, or had Anoup died, indicating that the second prayer was in fact written later than the first prayer?). The familial connections mentioned in the second prayer reveal that the writing of these prayers had more than one motivation. A primary motivation, no doubt, was to secure the welfare of the village and to establish its connection with the monastic sanctuary. But embedded in the welfare of the village is the welfare of its leading inhabitants, including the scribe and his relations.

Interestingly, both prayers mention Jeremiah the shepherd (149.15-6, 150.12-3). Jeremiah is also the sole object of a further short prayer written next to the second prayer: ‘O God of Apa Apollo, help Jeremiah, the shepherd of Temdjir, wherever he goes. Amen’.⁷² The phrase ‘wherever he goes’ appears to allude to the practice of shepherding, which took the shepherd into terrain outside the

⁷¹ See, in general, Eleanor Dickey, ‘Literal and Extended Use of Kinship Terms in Documentary Papyri’, *Mnemosyne* 57 (2004), 131-76. See also Terry G. Wilfong, *Women of Jeme: Lives in a Coptic Town in Late Antique Egypt* (Ann Arbor, 2002), 70-2.

⁷² J. Maspero, *Fouilles* (1932), no. 151.

village and was not without danger.⁷³ One cannot help but ask why this additional prayer was written. Was it because Jeremiah asked for it to be written, or because his role as shepherd was important to the village,⁷⁴ or because his work as shepherd entailed some risk? While the prayer does not offer an answer, it does prompt further inquiry.

Two people from the village who also appear in several prayers are Phoibammon and Castor, together referred to as βουκινάτωρ.⁷⁵ In military parlance, the word, derived from the Latin *buccinator*, referred to a trumpeter or bugler;⁷⁶ a receipt from Oxyrhynchus for supplies provided to escort troops (*buccellarii*) in 561 CE names a certain Theodoros βουκινάτωρ.⁷⁷ In one of the prayers, Phoibammon and Castor are called ‘the βουκινάτωρ of the Archangel Michael of Temdjir’,⁷⁸ possibly referring to a church dedicated to the archangel.⁷⁹ If this supposition is correct, then the term refers to some role in the service of the church.⁸⁰ Incidentally, Castor’s name is spelt differently in each of the three prayers that mention him, and there are also variations in the spelling of βουκινάτωρ. We may infer, therefore, that the prayers were written at different times and probably also by different writers.

Several prayers were written on behalf of a group of workers, indicating that labourers and artisans identified with their *métier* and *confrères*, as it were. One inscription records the prayer of seven boatmen who worked a boat of Apa Victor of Temdjir.⁸¹ Another records the prayer of five fisherman employed by

⁷³ See James G. Keenan, ‘Village Shepherds and Social Tension in Byzantine Egypt’, *Yale Classical Studies*, vol. 28: *Papyrology* (Cambridge, 1985), 245-59, 257 n. 36.

⁷⁴ Shepherds also served as field guards, driving off livestock from other villages and protecting against thieves; see *ibid.* 254-6.

⁷⁵ J. Maspero, *Fouilles* (1932), nos. 147, 284, 300; Phoibammon alone is named βουκινάτωρ at *ibid.* no. 257.

⁷⁶ Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott and Henry Stuart Jones (eds), *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th ed., with a revised supplement (Oxford, 1996), s.v. βουκινίζω. There is no entry for the word in Friedrich Preisigke, *Wörterbuch der griechischen Papyrusurkunden*, 3 vol. (Berlin, 1926-1931); Emil Kiessling, *Wörterbuch der griechischen Papyrusurkunden*, vol. 4: *Supplement* (Amsterdam, 1969-1971); or Förster, *Wörterbuch* (2002).

⁷⁷ Benard P. Grenfell, Arthur S. Hunt and Harold I. Bell (eds), *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, vol. 16 (London, 1924), no. 1903.8; see also Robert P. Salomons (ed.), *Papyri Bodleianae I*, *Studia Amstelodamensia* 34 (Amsterdam, 1996), no. 145.5, assigned to the first half of the seventh century.

⁷⁸ J. Maspero, *Fouilles* (1932), no. 147.

⁷⁹ A. Papaconstantinou, *Le culte des saints* (2001), 154-6, lists documentary evidence for sites named after the archangel (rubric III/1); the village does not figure in the evidence. As it happens, recent excavations at Bawit have revealed that the North Church in the Monastery of Apa Apollo was dedicated to the Archangel Michael; see Florence Calament, ‘L’apport des nouvelles découvertes épigraphiques à Baouït (2006-2012)’, in P. Buzi, A. Camplani, and F. Contardi (eds), *Coptic Society* (2016), I 659-68, 662.

⁸⁰ No such role is discussed, however, in Georg Schmelz, *Kirchliche Amtsträger im spätantiken Ägypten nach den Aussagen der griechischen und koptischen Papyri und Ostraka*, *Archiv für Papyrusforschung und verwandte Gebiete*, Beiheft 13 (Munich, 2002), 38-9.

⁸¹ J. Maspero, *Fouilles* (1932), no. 210.

Apa Victor of Temdjir, presumably the same person, here named village headman.⁸² An unnamed carpenter, one assumes, left the following prayer: ‘Merciful God. Angel of this vault. Remember me, my brother Psha, the carpenter, and all the brother carpenters according to their names. Amen’.⁸³

While most prayers ask for help or mercy or protection without specifying a particular need, a few prayers offer more details. One relatively elaborate prayer, reconstructed with some reservation by Drioton,⁸⁴ reveals the importance of daily subsistence: ‘The Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit. Apa Phib, Apa Apollo, remember Apa Hor, the reader. Jesus, son of Mary, help him in everything he undertakes. Amen. God Almighty (*Pantocrator*), remember his father, and his mother, and all his brothers, and assure them of their bread, their oils, their beans, by their daily work, as much as they will need. Bless the bread and all that belongs to them, forever. Amen’.⁸⁵ But not all needs were basic, as another prayer reveals: ‘I am Heraklammon. My father is Isak, my mother is Euphemia, my brothers, Apa Ol (a variant of Horus), Ourania, Phania.⁸⁶ Pray for them, Apa Apollo. Amen. Jesus Christ, God, Lord, Emmanuel, grant success to Romane at the hippodrome. Amen’.⁸⁷ This reference to a pastime is rare among the inscriptions. It supplements other evidence of the continuing existence of the hippodrome in late antique Egypt.⁸⁸

It is telling that neither prayer mentions sisters. In fact, no prayer in the room refers to the sister of a man, although one prayer refers to the brother of a woman.⁸⁹ One prayer, by a certain Kyriakos, mentions ‘the sister of my mother ... Ioulia’ – in other words, an aunt, if the term is not used in an extended sense – but not a sister of Kyriakos himself.⁹⁰ Prayers that most likely refer to immediate family members often intercede for fathers, brothers, and sons.⁹¹ When prayers list family members in a series, they typically refer to father, mother, and brothers.⁹² A few prayers refer to a daughter by name.⁹³ We can be sure that in the villages from which visitors to the monastery came there were sisters and daughters. Are they absent from the inscriptions because they were less

⁸² *Ibid.* no. 292; the plate to which the edition refers is too indistinct in my electronic copy to be of use.

⁸³ *Ibid.* no. 203.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 94 n. 1.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* no. 240; my translation is based on Drioton’s French translation.

⁸⁶ The feminine forms of the latter two names are unusual; Drioton renders them ‘Ouranie’ and ‘Phanie’.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* no. 142.

⁸⁸ Jean Gascou, ‘Les institutions de l’hippodrome en Égypte byzantine’, *Bulletin de l’Institut français d’archéologie orientale* 76 (1976), 185-212.

⁸⁹ J. Maspero, *Fouilles* (1932), no. 145.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* no. 157.

⁹¹ E.g., *ibid.* nos. 195, 207, 218, 225, 244, 255, 257, 260, 279, 295.

⁹² *Ibid.* nos. 240, 327; see also no. 132.

⁹³ See n. 100 below.

free to travel outside of their villages to the monastery, or because they were subsumed under their fathers and brothers in the public presentation of family? We know from letters and documents that women in this period were active in domestic, economic, and religious life,⁹⁴ although they had less access to public status and office than men,⁹⁵ and gained social status primarily as mothers and wives.⁹⁶

Women are nevertheless named in the inscriptions,⁹⁷ although far less frequently than men. Most of the women appear in lists of names without any indication of a relational status. In a few prayers, women are named as the mother,⁹⁸ wife,⁹⁹ or daughter¹⁰⁰ of a man. One prayer, unusually, intercedes for a woman and her brother: 'Helen and her brother Palau'.¹⁰¹ Occasionally a prayer is written for only a woman. One such prayer reads: 'Abla, daughter of Ptolemy, a man from Temdjir: remember her. Amen'.¹⁰² It is likely that this prayer was written by Ptolemy for his daughter, perhaps because she was ill or had passed away. At least one prayer may have been written by a woman. It reads: 'Phib. God. Pray for him. Anna. Sara'.¹⁰³ I take this to be a prayer offered by two women for an unnamed male relative. It need not have been written for them by a man, since graffiti written by women are preserved in a few domestic rooms elsewhere in the settlement,¹⁰⁴ probably evidence that there was a women's monastery within the settlement.¹⁰⁵ Similar in form is a prayer written for a woman and a man: 'Phib. God. Pray for me. Aseph. Kasia'.¹⁰⁶ Who wrote this prayer or asked for it to be written: Aseph (a man's name) or Kasia (a woman's name)? We cannot know, although the probability is in favour of the man.

⁹⁴ T.G. Wilfong, *Women of Jeme* (2002), 87-88, 110-12.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* 89-92.

⁹⁶ For a recent overview of the social status of women over their lifetime in Ptolemaic and Greco-Roman Egypt, see Ada Nifosi, *Becoming a Woman and Mother in Greco-Roman Egypt: Women's Bodies, Society and Domestic Space* (Abingdon, New York, 2019), 13-48. For prior literature, see Terry G. Wilfong, 'Gender and Society in Byzantine Egypt', in Roger S. Bagnall (ed.), *Egypt in the Byzantine World, 300-700* (Cambridge, 2007), 309-27, 310-2.

⁹⁷ See the index of proper names at J. Maspero, *Fouilles* (1932), 159-69; women's names are indicated by 'f'.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* nos. 142, 157, 300.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* no. 300.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* nos. 231, 268, 300.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* no. 145.

¹⁰² *Ibid.* no. 231.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.* no. 316.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* nos. 498-501, 504-9.

¹⁰⁵ See E. Wipszycka, *The Second Gift* (2018), 414-15, along with *ead.*, *Moines et communautés monastiques en Égypte (IV^e-VIII^e siècles)*, *The Journal of Juristic Papyrology Supplements* 11 (Warsaw, 2009), 583-6; D.L. Brooks Hedstrom, *Monastic Landscape* (2017), 219-20, with 68-70.

¹⁰⁶ J. Maspero, *Fouilles* (1932), no. 309.

Conclusion

The informal inscriptions left in this room at the Monastery of Apa Apollo may be regarded as ‘occasional prayers’ inasmuch as they are generated by a particular type of occasion – entry into a space that collective practice had rendered a place of mediatory efficacy – and a generic type of need – the need for heavenly assistance or assurance with regard to one’s earthly welfare or one’s eternal future. The prayers are not original or wide-ranging in their formulation; they employ a recognizable repertoire in their invocations, and they follow common phrasing in making their requests. Nevertheless, the prayers are a valuable resource for the study of devotional practice and social organization. They attest to the value that a space within a monastic site could acquire as a place of mediatory agency. The repetitiveness of their formulation suggests they preserve language that people used when they prayed informally in domestic or occupational settings. Although the prayers are repetitive in structure and requests, they remain the expressions of individuals or of distinct groups of individuals. Apart from the varied ways in which they appeal to heavenly intermediaries or the vagaries of vocabulary and spelling, the prayers record details of the persons they name – where they lived or came from, how they were related to one another, what their status was or what they did. The prosopographical information gleaned from the names and prayers left in the room may be less valuable than those offered by letters and documents, since the latter typically offer more contextual information. But people mentioned in these graffiti and *dipinti* may never figure in a letter or document; their inscriptions supplement data from these other sources. Moreover, because people identified with their occupations and their villages when leaving their name or request, we are able to map the connexions that people had with one another and with this particular shrine. While not all occasional markings at holy sites may be equally fruitful, this brief review suggests that a systematic study of prayers and other writings left by Christians in (disused) temples, churches, and monasteries in Late Antiquity could yield valuable insights.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ For a comparable study of graffiti written by Jews, see Karen B. Stern, *Writing on the Wall: Graffiti and the Forgotten Jews of Antiquity* (Princeton, 2018), esp. ch. 2.