



The Rundle Foundation for Egyptian Archaeology Newsletter

January 2009

Issue 107

COPTIC STUDIES AT MACQUARIE: THE FIRST FIVE YEARS

This issue of the Newsletter is devoted to Coptic Studies, one of the 'youngest' subjects at Macquarie University and a pioneering course of studies in Australia. Introduced as an M.A. coursework degree in 2005, Coptic Studies is also open to B.A. students, including those doing their Honours year, and to Ph.D. candidates. As an integrated course that can be studied online from Macquarie, it is a 'world-first'. The success of the young course may be gauged in a number of ways; classes include students from Coptic and non-Coptic backgrounds; the online facility attracts students from all over the world and the programme has expanded to cover archaeology, culture, early Coptic society and advanced language study.

MACQUARIE'S COPTOLOGISTS AT THE INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF COPTIC STUDIES IN CAIRO

The International Congress of Coptic Studies, held every four years in different locations around the world, is the premier scholarly event in the field. In 2008, the 9th International Congress was held at the Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate in Cairo from September 14-20. It was attended by scholars and students from over 20 countries and by a large interested local audience of clergy and laypersons.

In a number of sessions the most recent research developments in the history, archaeology, language and literature of Egypt after the Pharaohs were discussed. Papers were given on a wide range of subjects, from the works of Shenoute, the most important writer in Coptic, to the most recent archaeological discoveries in Egyptian monasteries and to the intricacies of Coptic linguistics.

What was remarkable from our perspective was the attendance of students or former students from Macquarie University's Coptic Studies program (<http://www.coptic.mq.edu.au>). Other than two staff members, Malcolm Choat and Heike Behlmer, who both gave papers on Coptic books and on a magical text from Macquarie's Museum of Ancient Cultures (Malcolm) and Coptic Literature (Heike) and participated in a panel discussion on the Christian settlement in Luxor/Thebes, there were eight students present who are either currently enrolled in the program or recently graduated

To give you an idea of the depth and breadth of interest generated by the courses (and that students bring to their study), we include Dr Behlmer's account of Macquarie students' participation in the 2008 International Congress of Coptic Studies and articles written by three graduates: Mathew Almond, who is engaged in linguistic research, Sara Wienand, who writes on a most interesting aspect of the early Coptic Church, 'sibling saints', and Matthew Underwood, who has worked with Assoc. Professor Ockinga's team at Luxor and has helped with the transcription of Coptic documents found on the site.

Coptic Studies opens up for students fascinating areas of enquiry, among them the investigation of post-pharaonic Egypt and the relations between the early Christian Church and the Roman Empire. It is not surprising that the course has been so well received.

The Editors



MACQUARIE GRADUATES AND STUDENTS WITH HEIKE BEHLMER AND MALCOLM CHOAT AT THE CONGRESS IN CAIRO

from it. Three of Macquarie's students presented their research in papers that were well received by the audience.

These students had a great opportunity of broadening their knowledge of Coptic through listening to stimulating research papers and expanding their contacts within the academic world through discussion with some of the most renowned Coptic scholars from around the globe. As one student put it, "The Conference gave me the opportunity to meet the world's leading Coptologists and ask questions relating to my research". The students also commented on the organisation, "Firstly, I must congratulate the organizers. As those of you who have been to Egypt well know, timetables can be somewhat hallucinatory. But the organisation was almost perfect – in fact, it was perfect", on the "magnificent" venue and the quality of the papers. A point repeatedly made was the large amount of interest in Coptic Studies among the Coptic Orthodox community in Egypt and elsewhere, which now embraces the academic study of post-Pharaonic Egypt in growing numbers. As one member of the group, who has been actively involved in promoting Coptic Studies among Copts, comments, "My positive impression of the

IN THIS ISSUE

- 1 Coptic Studies at Macquarie: the First Five Years
Macquarie's Coptologists at the International Congress of Coptic Studies in Cairo
- 2 The Coptic Documents from TT233 at Dra' Abu el-Naga
- 3 Meet the Students: Mathew Almond and Sara Wienand
- 4 Happy Birthdays, New Publications, Contact Us

Coptic Studies Congress is really the number of younger people that attended and presented from multiple countries, including Copts from Egypt and elsewhere. This is a healthy sign for Coptic Studies in general for it gaining traction (or finding a foothold) in the Coptic community." Another Coptic student was equally happy about this development, "For me, there is a change in attitude towards learning and more tendency towards our history."

I think the comment from one of our M.A. students sums up the experience, "... it was a Coptic Paradise ... and it has made my enthusiasm for Coptic even greater, if that was possible."

The Macquarie participants at the Congress as they appear from left to right in the photograph on page 1 are as follows:

- *Magda Kamel*. Magda, who lives in Cairo, is an advanced student in the M.A. Coptic Studies program. Her studies have been sponsored by a generous donor from Los Angeles.
- *Hany Takla*. Hany is the founder and president of the Los Angeles-based St Shenouda the Archimandrite Coptic Society, which has been successfully promoting Coptic Studies for 25 years. Hany, who graduated from the M.A. program in 2007, has published, among other topics, on the Coptic Bible.
- *Malcolm Choat*.
- *Bruce Barnes*. Bruce is an M.A. graduate in Ancient History and now a M.Phil. student who researches group identities in Late Antique Egypt.
- *Heike Behlmer*.
- *Diliana Atanassova*. Diliana has a Ph.D on the Bible in Old Bulgarian, but now works in Salzburg, Austria, on Coptic texts which preserve the Bible readings used in the liturgy in Egypt in the Middle Ages. These texts were the subject of her paper at the conference. Diliana is in her last semester of the M.A. program.
- *David Bunting*. David, besides being a well-known British musician and artist, is a keen and gifted student of matters Coptic and wishes to go on to Ph.D studies after completing his M.A. in 2009.
- *Kneeling: Mathew Almond*. Mathew is a 2nd-year Ph.D student, who works on Greek loanwords in Coptic texts and in Cairo gave a paper on this topic, which generated much interest from the audience (see also his profile in this Newsletter).

Missing from the picture but in Cairo with us were *Mervat Halaka* and *Lisa Agaihy*. Mervat and Lisa both graduated from the M.A. program in 2006 and are currently pursuing research on women saints in Late Antique Egypt and the modern Coptic Church (Mervat) and Monks and manual labour (Lisa).

Also missing from the picture because at the last minute she could not travel to Cairo: *Anetta Lyzwa*, who is working on a Ph.D. at Macquarie on the medieval pottery from the Deir Baramus monastery south of Alexandria. Anetta's paper on this topic was read in her absence.

Heike Behlmer

COPTIC DOCUMENTS FROM TT233 AT DRA' ABU EL-NAGA

The Nineteenth Dynasty Theban Tomb no. 233 of Saroy and his son Amenhotep/Huy and its associated structures are well known to the membership, having been excavated by the Macquarie University Theban Tombs expedition directed by Assoc. Prof. Boyo Ockinga over five seasons from 1996 to 2002. TT233 overlooks the location of the once spectacular temples of the Kings of the Seventeenth Dynasty, and tales of tomb robbery still haunt the imagination. Long after the tombs were built during

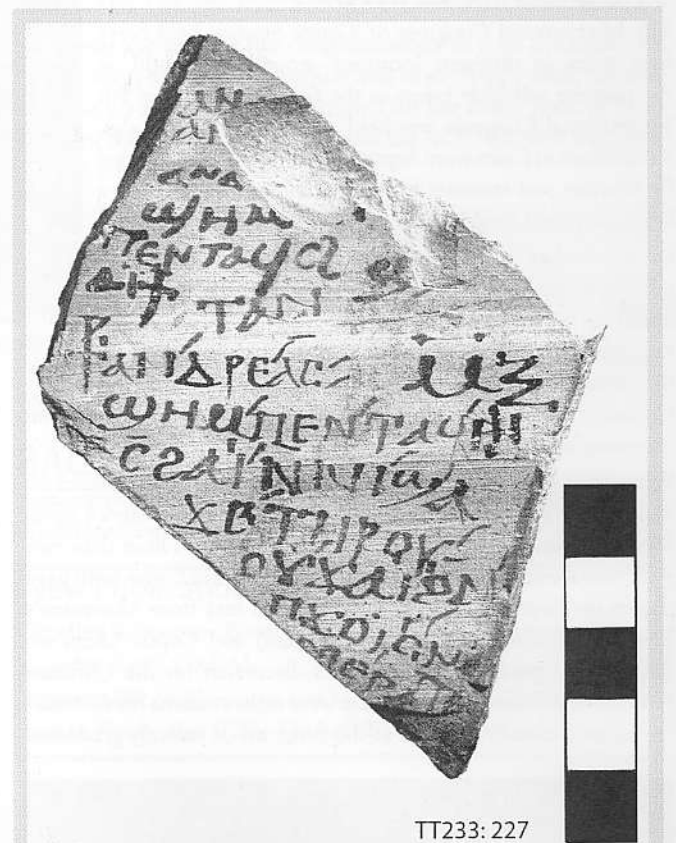
the New Kingdom Christianity came to Upper Egypt, and during the 6th to 8th centuries AD the surrounding district was filled with monastic communities. These were built mainly in and over the temples and tombs of the Pharaonic age.

On the brow of the north-eastern height of Dra' Abu el-Naga the towering monastery of Deir el-Bakhit overlooked our well known tombs, TT148 and TT233, which lie about 200m to the north. Both tombs show signs of extensive use during the Coptic period with the Coptic period habitation built directly over the Pharaonic period debris. So it comes as no real surprise that TT233 contained a collection of Coptic documents, consisting of ostraca, mainly on potsherds, papyrus fragments and a graffito on one of the walls. Actually there is also a mystery here, its close neighbour TT148 has none of these findings.

The Coptic documentary material consists mainly of small fragments and it cannot have been a major site for writing correspondence or teaching. Most probably TT233 was used for industries such as baking, brewing and the stabling of animals or occupied by anchorites.

The research into the Coptic documents of TT233 is being conducted under a collaborative research project between Drs. Heike Behlmer and Malcolm Choat of Macquarie University that is analysing the letters sent between monasteries in the Theban region. I have been lucky enough to be able to work on this material. By the strangest coincidence I was a team member in the 1996/7 season when the excavation of TT233 began. I could never have imagined I would be assisting with the publication of its Coptic texts.

There are 163 registered Coptic ostraca and papyrus fragments from the TT233 excavation. The collection of documents



TT233: 227

In the writing exercise shown in the photograph we see Andrew the Less practicing letter writing. He has some false starts and then breaks into: "It is Andrew the Less who wrote all the words. Farewell in the Lord, my beloved ..." and then he runs out of space. On the other side of the sherd he practices writing the Greek alphabet. I think that we can see in this letter a young man who is learning to write and probably in the process of becoming a monk.

is composed of 121 on potsherds and 42 grouped on papyri. The identified texts from the ostraca and papyrus finds from TT233 include religious texts, jar labels, school exercises and documentary texts, but mostly letter fragments.

Despite the fragmentary nature of the material the documents mention a surprisingly large number of individuals by name including: Aaron, Abraham, Cyriacus, Faustus, Jacob, John, Matthew, Mina, Papnoute, Paul, Peter, Phillip, Poseidon and Victor. One of the more often mentioned people in the documents is Andrew the Less and he may have lived in the tomb at some time (See the photo and caption).

Another interesting example is composed of three papyrus fragments catalogued together originally because of the same handwriting. These have been virtually joined back together and contain names in a sequence which leads us to assume that we are looking at a list of Old Testament books (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Ezra and Judith). It could be part of the library catalogue of a monastery.

Overall the documentary finds fall within the established patterns of monastic hermitage style settlements in the Theban necropolis. After further careful study these may make some useful contributions to the understanding of the inhabitants of the area and their communications with each other.

Matthew Underwood

Meet Mathew Almond

- Second year PhD candidate at Macquarie University
- Presented a paper at the Australian Society of Classical Studies annual conference in Christchurch in 2008
- Presented a paper at the International Congress of Coptic Studies in Cairo in 2008
- Assists with the teaching of Coptic Language and history courses at Macquarie University

As an academic discipline, Coptic Studies remains a largely untapped resource among Australian scholars. However this field has immense potential for academia, with veins of research extending deeply into many other disciplines. In September of this year the 9th International Congress of Coptic Studies, held in Cairo, emphasised for me what has long been utilised by European and American scholars; the place of Coptic in the broader field of ancient history. Research into early Christianity has greatly benefited from the wealth of archaeological data from the Coptic period, as well as from a massive extant literary corpus. Like the Gnostic and Manichaean texts, much of this is preserved solely in Coptic translation.

Beyond the religious sphere Egypt's unique position, with its access to ancient papyri and the conditions necessary to preserve these documents, gives us a rare insight into the past. With Coptic documents, such as private letters and administrative records written in Coptic, surviving from the Roman, Byzantine and Islamic empires, we can observe at a very personal level the day-to-day lives of ancient peoples.

A further field for study, often unconsidered, is the value of Coptic for Egyptological research. Though occasionally dismissed as "too late" for real Egyptology, many scholars do explore the aspects of cultural continuity in Egypt, and have brought to light the Coptic era's connection with its Pharaonic past. Indeed, in the mid-seventeenth century it was Athanasius Kircher who first suggested that the mysterious hieroglyphic script of the Egyptians had evolved into the Coptic; a suggestion adopted and

refined by Champollion to enormous success.

My own research focuses on cultural interaction and change as evident in language. Coptic – the final stage of native Egyptian – shows its Greek influence most obviously in its adoption of the Greek alphabet. Due to the integration of Hellenic culture in this period, the native language became heavily supplemented by a Greek vocabulary (though no systematic count has been done, some estimates put the number of loanwords in written sources at twenty per cent). The question I am asking about loanwords – applicable to ancient and modern languages – is when do they cease to be foreign elements (like the French *bon appétit* in English) and become a part of the adoptive language (like *café*). When one works with a "dead language", this task becomes more difficult because resources are limited to written sources, which always differ from the spoken language; the latter generally being the better indicator of natural language use. Thus the evidence from the Coptic literary corpus has to be explored cautiously for its revelations about the socio-cultural relevance of Greek loanwords.

As one would expect, foreign concepts introduced to Egyptian culture were received with foreign terminology. When backed by powerful institutions, this jargon was soon naturalised; this is evident in the growing dominance of Christianity, which furnished Egyptian with a new vocabulary, for example, *euangelistēs* = evangelist, *stauros* = crucifix. Equally influential was the vast and complex bureaucracy, which introduced marks of the Graeco-Roman imperialism that remained entrenched in the language even up into the Arabic period, and introduced words such as *démosion* = poll-tax. Yet there is a vast grey area of words for which the question "native or foreign" cannot be easily resolved; why, for example, are both Greek *dunamis* and Egyptian *qom* used for power? Or Greek *chōri* and Egyptian *bōk* for to go? So far I have noticed that most of these lexical choices are dependent upon a variety of social circumstances, such as style, audience, dialect and era. In my work I hope to discover the motivation behind these linguistic choices, and to present Greek loanwords in Coptic as a case-study in the history of interaction between cultures.

Mathew Almond

Meet Sara Wienand

- Dip. Ancient Languages completed 2006
- B. Ancient History (Honours) completed 2007
- First year Ph.D Student at Macquarie working on family relationships in Coptic literature

I first became interested in Coptic studies in 2005 while studying Dr Heike Behlmer's new courses on the Sahidic Coptic dialect and Monasticism in Egypt, which led to a continuing interest in this particular area of Egyptian history. During this past year I completed my honours thesis supervised by Dr. Behlmer, entitled *Saintly Sisters: Brother-Sister Relationships in Coptic Hagiography*. The genre of hagiography, or legends about the saints, has fascinated me since high school and having the opportunity to work on this topic for my honours thesis was fantastic.

My thesis was concerned particularly with Coptic texts dealing with sibling saints and the sibling relationships depicted in them in order to look at issues such as sanctity, gender and family relationships both within the texts and in Egyptian society. The texts were Coptic language accounts mainly describing martyrdoms occurring under the Roman emperor Diocletian who ruled in the late 3rd century AD. At this time, edicts were proclaimed, commanding all in the Roman Empire to sacrifice to