

The Rundle Foundation

for

Egyptian Archaeology

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NEW RESEARCH ON SHENOUTE - ABBOT AND KEY FIGURE IN COPTIC LITERATURE

As I have mentioned in a previous newsletter, in the past Egyptologists used to consider Coptic Egypt, in the words of Egyptologist Siegfried Morenz writing about 50 years ago, as the “spindly afterbirth the ancient and famous Nile culture produced” (my translation). It was necessary to learn Coptic, because after all, it was the language that helped the great Champollion decipher the hieroglyphs, and texts written in Egyptian, including all the vowels, might come in useful at some point! However, texts in Coptic were often regarded as epigonous, that is, there was a steep decline in quality from both the pharaonic literature and the classical literature of the Greeks and Romans who governed Egypt from 332 BCE onward.



LINTEL WITH THE REPRESENTATION OF A
MONASTIC SAINT AND THE INSCRIPTION
“APA SHENOUTE”.

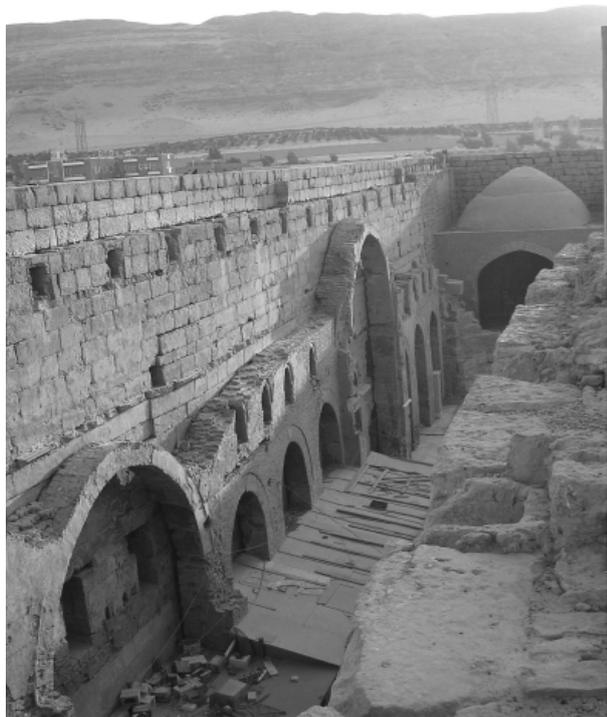
Berlin, Museum für Spätantike und
Byzantinische Kunst (Photo: A. Effenberger/
H. G. Severin, Das Museum für Spätantike
und Byzantinische Kunst, Mainz 1992)

One Coptic writer in particular who used to be much undervalued is Shenoute. In around 385 CE he became the abbot of the monastery of Atripe (Monastery of Apa Shenoute, Dayr Anba Shinudah, also known as the “White Monastery”) located on the west bank of the Nile, vis-à-vis the ancient nome capital of Panopolis (modern Akhmim). We do not know exactly when he was born, but the latest research on his date of death suggests the year 465 (Stephen Emmel’s reconstruction of a date under discussion for a century). Shenoute thus lived through a very interesting period in history. The 4th century was a period of great changes. While at the beginning of the century Christians were still persecuted as enemies of the social order of the Roman Empire, by its end Christianity had moved from persecution via toleration to being the official religion. The first half of the 5th century saw important debates and power struggles in the newly triumphant church, centred on the divine and human natures of Christ, which were acted out in a number of church councils. In his writings Shenoute tells us that he attended one of these, the Council of Ephesus in 431, in the retinue of archbishop Cyril of Alexandria (412-444). Cyril’s patriarchate saw the Egyptian Church at the apex of its power, but Shenoute lived long enough to also witness the beginning of a split within the universal church, when Cyril’s successor Dioscorus was deposed and exiled at the Council of Chalcedon in 451. This led to a slow process of separation between what would become the Coptic Orthodox Church and the Greek Orthodox Church.

When Shenoute became abbot, taking over the leadership of a small monastic community from his maternal uncle Pgol, communal monastic living in Egypt had already been in existence for several decades. The model community for monks and nuns living together in a structured community with a written rule,

was also located in Upper Egypt, the federation of monasteries named Pachomian after its founder, Pachomius (292-346). The rule of the Pachomian federation was adapted and modified for Shenoute's monastery, and under his rule, the monastery prospered to include two monasteries for men and one for women. Later tradition speaks of 4000 monks and nuns in different houses.

Shenoute is the first major writer in Coptic. The idea of producing texts in Coptic (instead of Greek, the dominant language of Egypt under the Roman Empire) was not his invention, but he brought the language



VIEW FROM THE ROOF INTO THE NAVE OF THE MONASTERY CHURCH WHICH GOES BACK TO SHENOUTE'S LIFETIME.

In antiquity, all the area now open was roofed, making it one of the largest churches in Egypt. (Photo by Lisa Agaiby, a recent graduate from the Coptic Studies program at Macquarie. Lisa will be at the monastery in a few days to participate in a dig directed by Darlene Brooks Hedstrom from Wittenberg University).

to its first quality peak which subsequent writers would struggle to imitate. He was a prolific writer, leaving a large number of sermons, letters, and writings on the monastic life (including rules of behaviour for monks and nuns), which were mainly preserved in the library of the monastery itself as early medieval parchment books copied from earlier papyrus books. However, in early modern times, the monastery fell into ruins and the impressive monastic library (which with an estimated 1000 volumes was larger than many Medieval monastic libraries in Europe) was dispersed into a large number of museums worldwide.

These fragments – often two pages here, eight pages there, then lacunae of twenty and ten pages in yet another museum in yet another country – have now been virtually unified. Stephen Emmel in his seminal work “Shenoute's Literary Corpus”, published in 2004 has put together what belongs together, even if the original parchment books will never be reunited practically. Emmel has also initiated a major international project of a general edition of the works of Shenoute, a project which has been highly active and successful since its foundation in 2000 with a number of work meetings and which has attracted considerable funding from several institutions in various countries. Within the framework of this project here at Macquarie University a new edition

of one of the books of Shenoute will be produced. This collection of writings contains fascinating problems such as opposition to Shenoute's leadership and the strategies he used to stay in power.

This monumental new edition is projected to be finished by the year 2015, and will show a wider public what the current generation of scholars in Coptic Studies have known for quite a while: that in Shenoute we have a skilful writer and fascinating subject of research, and that Coptic literature is by no means a “spindly afterbirth”.

Heike Behlmer

REFLECTIONS ON A TASK COMPLETED

On the 30th June this year, I walked into the office of the Higher Degree Research Unit at Macquarie University and handed over three copies of my PhD. thesis entitled, “The representation of animal behaviour in Old Kingdom tomb scenes from Giza and Saqqara”. I had finally completed the most challenging project of my life – a behemoth that had consumed my every waking moment for the past eight years. What a rush of emotions followed. First came relief that I'd managed to finish, despite many obstacles along the way. That was quickly followed by sheer joy – especially after a few glasses of

celebratory champagne! One might expect that the next feeling was one of relaxation. However, after the initial euphoria subsided, I was instead left with a nagging worry that I had mislaid something somewhere – a withdrawal effect from no longer having to think about my studies every day. And then finally, to my surprise, I felt a sense of loss. I missed my research! I missed the thrill of the hunt for that elusive piece of information. I missed the excitement of finding new images and proposing different interpretations about the past. Most of all I missed getting inside the minds of ancient Egyptian artists by examining their extraordinary pictures of animals. By comparing these detailed images with the behaviour of live mammals, birds, reptiles, fish, amphibians and insects, I had been privileged to see exactly what they had observed and to experience the same awe that they had surely felt when confronted by the beauty and complexity of nature. It is an addictive sensation – one that I simply cannot give up!

So, in the weeks since submitting my thesis, I have continued to think and write and follow up new ideas enthusiastically. Where my PhD. will lead me next, I do not yet know, but I feel extremely fortunate to have had such a profoundly life-changing experience for, without a doubt, studying the fascinating animals of ancient Egypt is now an integral part of who I am. Linda Evans

BUS TRIP TO CANBERRA

A contingent of 92 members and guests in two buses made its way to Canberra on Sunday November 26th to visit the *Egyptian Antiquities at the Louvre: Journey to the Afterlife* exhibition at the National Gallery of Australia. The exhibition was very colourful and beautifully displayed. It contained over 600 items (in 202 catalogue numbers) some of which have never been on view to the public. During the afternoon we enjoyed a fascinating talk by Dr Colin Hope. Sadly the four hours we had there was not enough, however all agreed that it was an event not to be missed. I encourage all members, who have not yet seen the exhibition, to take the time to visit between now and February 25th 2007, after which it travels to Adelaide and then to Perth. Leonie Donovan

Our thanks and apologies to Peter Hanna for his article entitled “What it Means to Graduate in Coptic Studies at Macquarie” in our last newsletter. His name was inadvertently omitted from the text

CONTINUING EDUCATION COURSES - FIRST SEMESTER 2007

Monday 26th February to Friday 4th June

The following courses will be available for Continuing Education Students at a cost of \$150 each subject.

AHST 100 Introduction to Egyptian Archaeology Dr C Köhler & Prof. Ockinga
This unit will deal with developments in Ancient Egyptian society from the Prehistoric Period to the end of the New Kingdom as reflected in the archaeological record. Wed. 10-12 am or Wed 6-8pm

AHST 260 Introduction to Hieroglyphs Prof. Kanawati
This unit is an introduction to the hieroglyphic system of writing and the classical ancient Egyptian language written in this script. Tues. 10-1pm or 6-9pm

AHST 261 Egyptian Culture and Society Dr Köhler
This unit is a study of Egyptian history and civilisation in the predynastic and pharaonic periods. In addition to the historical problems, themes covered will include the development of the state, administration, imperialism, art, architecture, literature and society. Thurs. 11-1pm or 6-8 pm

For further information contact Anne Irish on (02) 9850 8833.

DIARY DATES

Mini Conference

Sunday April 1st 2007

Auditorium, Ryde Eastwood Leagues Club

Annual Dinner

Saturday June 16th 2007

Heritage Function Centre, Ryde Eastwood Leagues Club

RUNDLE FOUNDATION SUBSCRIPTIONS

If *The Bulletin of the Australian Centre for Egyptology*, Volume 17 has not been included with this newsletter, this indicates that your membership of the Rundle Foundation has expired. If you wish to renew for 2006-2007 please forward your payment to this office and a Bulletin will be forwarded. We extend a sincere “thank you” for your previous support to those members not renewing.

Single Membership \$33

Double Membership \$38

Student Membership \$22

Life Membership \$550

Double Life \$650

NEW PUBLICATIONS

Lists of the contents of BACE (1990 – 2005) and of ACE current publications are available on request.

Reports 23: N. Kanawati (2005) *Deir El-Gebrawi, Volume 1. The Northern Cliff*, Oxford

Reports 24: N. Kanawati (2006) *The Teti Cemetery at Saqqara, Volume VIII. The Tomb of Inumin*, Oxford

ACE Studies 7: C.A. Hope & A. McFarlane (2006) *Akhmin in the Old Kingdom, Part II: The Pottery, Decoration Techniques and Colour Conventions*

The price of Reports 1 to 18 is \$44 each (incl. GST) and Reports 19 onward are \$55 each (incl. GST).

All Studies are priced at \$44 (incl. GST).

CHANGES TO EVENT BOOKING PROCEDURES

Please note that telephone bookings for upcoming events will only be recorded on an “Expression of Interest” list and will now only be finalised upon receipt of payment. We will also keep a waiting list for cancelled bookings.

From time to time we have events that take place at short notice; there often not being enough time to advertise them in this Newsletter. To be fair to all members, and to limit postage costs, in future we will notify those without email addresses by mail of these events and two days later we will email those members for whom we do have addresses. Would you kindly ensure that you have notified the office of your current email so that you will be sure to know about what’s coming up.

WEBSITE

www.egyptology.mq.edu.au

All cheques should be made to MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY and all prices quoted include GST.

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