

Who is Monk Phoibammon of *al-Daīr al-Baḥrī* Temple? ¹

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In the Coptic Synaxare, we found four monks bearing the same name “Phoibammon”. But who is the one that belongs to the monastery of *al-Daīr al-Baḥrī*? Burmester and Khater, supported by their historical background, were able to exclude two names that were not famous at all. That leaves us with other two monks bearing the same name².

First, monk Phoibammon of Bousem was very famous for his miraculously healing powers. In the Coptic Synaxare the Monk’s celebration date is on the 27th of Tubi. He was born of two wealthy

¹ Two of the learned Napoleon’s expeditions to Egypt in 1798 first made the temple of *al-Daīr al-Baḥrī* known to the modern world, releasing part of it from its sandy embrace. Champillion was responsible for deciphering the hieroglyphics and attempting to unravel the family feud. Marlette interpreted the reliefs of the voyage to Punt. In 1894 the Egyptian Exploration Fund started to exhume the temple properly but their work was not completed for nine years. Some of the colonnades were roofed in and certain other necessary alterations were carried out to preserve the remaining reliefs and colonnades. For several years, the Polish team has been excavating and reconstructing the temple. In 1969 they unearthed a small temple built by Tuthmosies III to the left of the upper terrace of the temple and parallel with the rock-hewn inner chambers. In 1970 they unearthed what at first appeared to be another terrace but has since been described as a protective roof to the rear of the temple to safeguard against falling rock. *Hatshepsut's Temple* is called by the Egyptians *Djeser-djeseru* " Sacred of the sacred's", Hatshepsut's terraced and rock-cut Temple at *al-Daīr al-Baḥrī*, is one of the most impressive monuments of western Thebes. Situated directly against the rock face of *al-Daīr al-Baḥrī's* great rock bay, the Temple not only echoed the lines of the surrounding cliffs in its design but fused so effectively with them that it seems a natural extension of its setting CF. Kamil, J., *Luxor, a Guide to Ancient Egypt*, New York, 1973, p. 79.

² Despite of the fame of *Hatshepsut's* terraced and rock-cut Temple at *al-Daīr al-Baḥrī*, such Temple, is never mentioned by its real name “Temple” but always as “the Monastery of Phoeibammon or *al-Daīr al-Baḥrī* Monastery”. It seems that the religious settlement was far more important in its echo and effect than the Ancient Egyptian one. None of the Coptic inscriptions found at *al-Daīr al-Baḥrī* states in equivocal terms the name of the monastery that was built there. Jeme documents in general do not supply definite data for locating the numerous graphical names, which they record, but on the interval evidence in an ostraca, (dealt with later in the report), was a bishop Abraham. Who seems to have bequeathed the Monastery of Saint Phoibammon to the monk victor. Probably the hemgoumenus of that place, and one of the persons most frequently addressed or referred to among the *al-Daīr al-Baḥrī* letters. This attribution of the Monastery to Phoibammon and a mention of Saint Phoibammon in the will of the Monk Jacob and his companion Elias of the monastery of Epiphanius, all of which lead us, to do some search in hope of clarifying the identity of our Saint here.

parents of Bousem, and since his birth he was fasting and praying a lot and was always seeking solitaries. His monastic acts reached to the Roman Emperor Maximien, who gave his orders to Arien, the governor of Southern Egypt, to go to Bousem and see if the news were right or not. As such monk never gave any concern to the formal processions of the Emperor, instead he prayed and kneeled in front of Jesus³.

When Phoibammon refused to kneel before the Roman idols and to present incense to them, Arien punished him and sent him to the Emperor himself to punish him. The Roman Emperor had no mercy in torturing the monk and he sent him to Armenius, governor of Alexandria at that time, to continue his torture. Then, once again, he was re-sent to Arien who planned to send the monk to Akmim to be killed there, but a miracle happened and the boat never moved. At the end, the soldiers took the monk to a small town named Tima close to the village of Qaou, where he was beheaded. The servant of the monk, who was present at the moment, was able to gather his blood in a towel and took it with him to Bousem where a church was built after the name of the Martyr. His mercy was said to extend from his tomb at Tima until his church at Akmim⁴.

The other Saint Phoibammon that we have is probably the right one to whom *al-Daīr al-Baħr* monastery was believed to be erected for. His celebration's date is the first of Bauni⁵.

During the time of the Emperor Diocletian (r. 284-305), a decree was issued and sent to everywhere in Egypt stating that everyone must kneel in front of the Emperor's idol and give offerings to the Gods or else they will be executed. Once the Emperor envoy reached to the castle of Abraht, its officer gathered all his troops and announced such decree upon them.

Among those soldiers, there was a young soldier in his 30th named Phoibammon (Bifam). His duty was to burn innocence to the gods in such ceremonies. There he refused the order, as well as announced his refusal of accepting the Emperor as a God. Then, he took off his military belt and threw it in the face of the Emperor envoy. The chief in command ordered his soldiers to lock him in prison. Inside the prison, the legend states that the Archangel Michael came to him saying, "*you brave one,*

³ Burmester, O. H. E., and Khater, A., *Le monastere de Phoibammon dans la Thebaide*, Le Caire, 1981 pp. 11, 12.

⁴ Burmester and Khater, *Le monastere de Phoibammon dans la Thebaide*, pp. 11-12.

⁵ There were a basaltic, present in the Coptic Museum that carries number 275 *M.S. Hist.*, talks about the life time of such Monk in Arabic as a sort of wisdom for others to learn from.

the Martyr of Jesus Christ, you have a garland prepared for you up in heavens.”

Next day, the soldier was called to make offerings in front of the gods, so he refused again that order. After that he was sent in chains to the Roman Emperor Maximien, (the governor of Upper Egypt at the time), where he was taken by soldiers over a boat to Antinoe (Ansana). But when they were informed that the governor was in Asūt they continued there journey to it.

On the monk's arrival to the Emperor, the governor tried to persuade him to present the offerings to the gods. But when he found no way to do it, he sent him to torture and at last he was taken by the soldiers outside the town to be beheaded. Before his beheading, the Archangel Michael appeared to him once again saying, *“Halleluiah Brave soldier of God, Martyr of Jesus Christ, you have 3 garlands prepared for you up in heaven waiting for you.”*

Then, the Archangel informed him that on the spot of his beheading, a beautiful church will be built after his name and any one who will come asking for healing will be cured because of him.

After the persecutions, a beautiful church was built on the same spot where his body was moved to and buried, and the first of Bauni was the date of his death celebration and it was said that a number of healing miracles occurred since then on such site.

Now we have to take a good look at the Coptic iconography done during such period to be able to know whether they give us some information about the identity of these two monks bearing the same name of Phoebammon.

Fortunately, we have a fresco scene taken from Bawīt monastery dates back to the 5th or 6th century AD. showing the monk Phoebammon as a knight over his horse, holding in his right arm a long spear topped by a cross and over his left arm he is holding a royal crown. At the back of the monk, the Archangel Michael is shown presenting to him another crown or garland. Such details are very important in determining the identity of our monk to whom the monastery was built⁶.

If we want to identify such monk and make similarity between him and our *Daīr al-Baħr* monk, we can notice that the crown he is holding in his hand is one and the Archangel is holding for him another.

⁶ Burmester and Khater, *Le monastere de Phoibammon dans la Thebaide*, pp. 12-15. Because of the fancy cloth he is wearing in such scene, some authors presumed that it could be Phoebammon from Bousem, as he was born of wealthy family. However, this is a weak opinion, as maybe the artist wanted to show the brave soldier in his best uniform and best shape, while is in heaven as a reward for his bravery and martyrdom.

This proves the Arabic story of his life that states that he was promised three garlands or crowns waiting after his martyrdom.

After all, these are all assumptions in an attempt to identify the identity of our monk until something new comes up and proves other things.



(The Tower of the Monastery of Saint Phoeibammon
After Bagnall, S., *Egypt from Alexander to the Copts*, p. 194.)

About the Monastery itself:

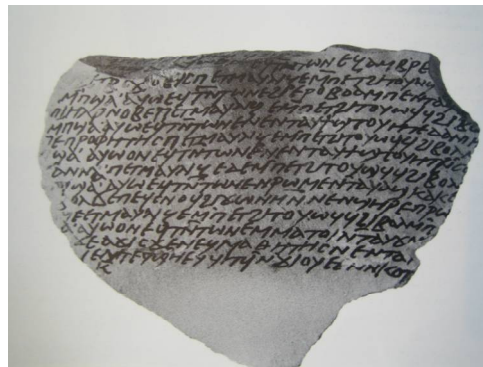
The date where the Monastery was constructed can be determined from some scripts that give us clues to that history⁷. Such scripts are in Greek and Coptic written as it may seem by volunteers that were hiding inside the monastery from soldier-ship. Rémondon assured also that during such period the enforcement to the army was increasing and increased a lot by the 4th century AD., which leads to us finding the

⁷ The first modern western visitor to leave a record of the site of *al-Dair al-Bahārī*, the northern (Coptic) monastery, was Richard Pococke, who visited the rather inhospitable site in 1737. His description and plan reveal that the only visible remains belonged to the monastic structures, but he reported seeing large numbers of mummies. The scholars, who accompanied Napoleon's expedition to Egypt, made the next record on the map. Shows the outline processional way, leading from the edge of the flood plain to the *Hatshepsut's* temple enclosure, some remains of constructions on the lower terrace with part of the northern colonnade of the lower terrace, the ramps leading from the lower to the middle to the upper terrace, and the granite and the walls of the Coptic structures on the upper terrace with Pharonic foundations. CF. Strudwick, N., and Taylor, J., *The Theban Necropolis Past, Present, and Future*, London, 2003, p. 132.

remains of such volunteer's presence in the monastery, hiding from being taken by force to serve in the army⁸.

One of the monks of this monastery Abraham became (about 590 AD.) bishop of Hermonthis founded the monastery. Because of the remote position of the monastery and the wish of Patriarch Damian, he left this monastery and founded another one of Phoibammon near the town of Jeme in the former temple of Hatshepsut, *al-Daīr al-Bahārī*. The existence of this monastery was known from documents found at different sites of the Theban Mountain, in particular at *al-Daīr al-Bahārī* and *Daīr al-Bahīt* where manuscripts and Ostraca originating from the monastery of Phoibammon were found⁹.

The monastery of Phoibammon at *al-Daīr al-Bahārī* quickly became the most important monastery in the western Theban area as it attested in the extensive corpus of Coptic documents from and concerning the site.



(A Letter from Abraham, dating back to the 7th century AD., found in site, excavated by the Egyptian Exploration Society)

There is a letter from Abraham that dates back to the 7th century AD. and is written on a limestone Ostraca. It was found by the Egyptian Exploration Society at the site of the monastery¹⁰. This letter is attributed to Hermonthis (Thebes) that is written on a Limestone Ostraca that measures 12.7 X 17.8 cm. (written in Coptic Shadiac). This letter runs as follows:

“This is a highly rhetorical pastoral letter from Abraham of Hermonthis, superior of the monastery of saint Phoeibammon at Thebes

⁸ Burmester, and Khater, *Le monastere de Phoibammon dans la Thebaide*, p. 2

⁹ Haeny, G., *New Kingdom Mortuary Temples*, in Shafer, E. B., *Temples of Ancient Egypt*, London, New York, 1997, p. 86.

¹⁰ Now it is in the British Museum and carries number 32782.

around 600 AD. He declares that he has been informed that a certain Psate has been oppressing the poor, anyone who would do this; says the bishop is like all the worst people of the Old and New Testaments; Like Judias Iscariot, the mockers of Christ, the mercenary Gehazi, the murders Can and Zimiri, the idolater Jeroboam, those who falsely accused Daniel and Susanna, the mob who demanded Christ's blood, and the soldiers who spread the lay that the disciples had stolen away Christ's body to fake a resurrection, anyone who oppresses the poor; says the Bishop is to be excommunicated".¹¹

Such letter shows to what extent the local bishop in Egypt became the champion of the little man. The downtrodden or the underclass and could back up his power with ecclesiastical sanctions. The strongly repetitive Biblical style in which it is composed (characteristic of all Abraham's letters) is a typical example of the extent to which Coptic language, thought and behavior were completely and naturally interwoven with quotations from the scriptures. When something happened in the life of the ordinary person, the first response to describe it is by using biblical parallel, public stories were the prime factor for Coptic folklore¹².

The monastery of Phoibammon had close connections to the nearby town of Jeme. The monastery served as a depository for legal documents from Jeme and there was much interaction and trade between the monastery and town.

The monastery was abandoned sometime before 800 AD. along with most of the western Thebean area. Graffiti attest visits to the site after its abandonment suggesting that it may have become a destination for pilgrimage.

Documents from the monastery began appearing on the antiquities market in the mid-19th century AD. The Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Polish mission at *al-Daīr al-Bahrī*, were the first who excavated the site in the early 20th century AD. by Egypt exploration fund. Then, the modern presentation of the site of *al-Daīr al-Bahrī* was directed almost entirely towards the architectural and artistic remains of the region of Hatshepsut. However, the visitor can find graffiti and other traces of the monastery of Phoibammon there. Little remains at the site of the original desert monastery which is difficult to the visitors to reach¹³.

¹¹ Friedman, D. F., *Beyond the Pharaohs, Egypt and the Copts in the 2nd to the 7th centuries AD.*, Rhode Island, 1989, p. 136.

¹² Crum, W. E., *Catalogue of the Coptic Manuscripts in the British Museum I*, London, 1905, p. 71.

¹³ Bagnall, R. S., *Egypt from Alexander to the Copts*, London, 2004, p.195.

The Temple itself appears to have been abandoned by the end of the 20th dynasty, however, probably because of a landslide that may have seriously damaged it. It was then heavily quarried for its stone and later the site was used as a cemetery for the adjacent Coptic monastery. Some magnificently carved and painted blocks (two of which are on display in the Luxor Museum) have been recovered from the site by the Polish-Egyptian mission that has continued to study and to restore the Temple where possible¹⁴.

Graffiti on the cliff face confirm that the monastery was dedicated to saint Phoibammon, there exists a homily in Arabic, over 200 graffiti in Greek and Coptic, and few Ostraca were found on the site but no manuscript there¹⁵.

The monastery excavated by Bachatly was probably voluntarily abandoned in the 18th century AD. Presumably, because it was feared that the whole cliff against which the monastery was built might crumble, fifteen inscriptions were found and three of them bear the name of Apa Pisenthus.¹⁶

The Ostraca uncovered during the excavations of the Egypt Exploration fund led by Naville at *al-Daīr al-Baḥrī* on Hatshepsut's temple and at Mentuhotep's temple (1894-1895) are now in the British museum and in the Egyptian Museum of Cairo.¹⁷

The Testament of Apa Jacob, abbot of the monastery late 7th century AD., gives an evidence that at this post he was preceded by bishop Abraham, priest Victor, and priest Petros. Therefore, bishop Abraham (590–620 AD.) was apparently the first abbot and founder of *Daīr Apa Phoibammon* at *al-Daīr al-Baḥrī*.

One thing seems definite without a doubt is that the monks of such monastery were able to maintain the law of monk life in the area, which is proved by how the monastery was erected: cells with two or

¹⁴ Wilkinson, R. H., *The Complete Temples of Ancient Egypt*, London, 2000, pp. 176-179.

¹⁵ Notice that Phoeibammon was a soldier like Saint Pachum, affected by his teachings and the same concepts of the monastic dwellings.

¹⁶ Boutrous, M. G., *Coptic Encyclopedia*, Vol. III, New York, 1991, p. 779.

¹⁷ Most probably the wooden box containing Coptic papyri connected with *Daīr Apa Phoibammon* (Testaments of Abbots, deeds, and legal documents) accidentally uncovered during the winter of (1854 – 1855) was also found in the ruins of the Monastic building at *al-Daīr al-Baḥrī*, all these documents, including the group of the so-called Jeme papyri, edited by Crum and G. Steindorff (1912 Vol. I) were kept in the archives of *Daīr Apa Phoibammon*, it is very likely that another Jeme papyrus concerning private affairs had been deposited in the Monastery. CF. Boutrous, *Coptic Encyclopedia*, p. 779.

three beds each, dining room, bakery, stable, and some remains of vegetations and animal deposits.

As for the position and the finding of such monastery that is richly decorated with paintings, scripts, and graffiti, it was during the work of the IFAO in Luxor, when one of the Bedouins talked to *monsieur* Bruyere, who was the head of the excavators in the area, about the presence of a monastery that is hidden under 25 meters of the sand and rocks from so long. The monastery was totally buried under the sand out of site.¹⁸

Such monastery was not reachable except from a very tough rocky narrow mountain alley. Over both sides of the rocks upon which the monastery is resting a number of scripts and graffiti is that were all taken out by Yassah 'Abd al-Masih. That is why elevators of 15 meters in height were made especially for there removal from the site.

In same area of such elevated cliff, two Monk mummies were discovered wrapped in coffins¹⁹, one of them was most probably belonging to Abraham the economic responsible. The funerary script that is written for such person is written in red ink, over the side rocks, and mentioning his death, and an appeal for prayers to be given to him, as he was the economic responsible for the monastery of Saint Phoibammon²⁰.

During the excavations that was done in such area, a room was discovered as well that was furnished with carpet and some wooden pieces that fell from its roof, such room was known afterwards that it was liker storage room. As it comprised a number of Jars that had the remains of black liker, which after examination was proofed to be liker²¹.

As for the monk's cells, that was excavated over the eastern side of the monastery. They were painted and coated with a plaster layer, for blocks coverage, and colored by different colors. And they were all erected on the same bases of the Pachomian monastic constructions. Their kitchen comprised a number of pottery vessels and food remains.

¹⁸ Burmester and Khater, *Le monastere de Phoibammon dans la Thebaide*, pp. 3-4.

¹⁹ It seems that Copts never found any embarrassment to be buried in pagan graves, on the contrary their Monks and Holy characters were buried in the famous necropolis of Ancient Egyptian constructions, like Da'ir al-Bahri, Da'ir al-Madinah and Madinat Hapu.

²⁰ The habit of having appeals written, and required readings, for their dead recalls into mind, the "Magical formulas", adopted by the ancient Egyptians over their tombs, and Sarcophaguses. As a guarantee for passing to the good life in the afterlife world, where here the large number of scripts for dead monks, or even for normal Coptic deceased, ensures the continuation and the presence of such heritage within to the Coptic community adopted but differently suiting the new belief.

²¹ Saint Anthony's monastic school was the one that permitted the buying and selling of wine.

The rooms, kitchen, and the dining room were all connected to each²², other by a long narrow corridor that has its floor paved with white blocks that measured 42x21 cm., which leads to the church entrance or the prayer room connected to the monastery.

Unfortunately, the walls in a very bad state partially ruined. Nothing remained except some recesses and some red colored crosses engraved over the walls. A small upper opening most probably used as the sanctuary, also an incense burner from pottery, was found over the floor. Some fresco remains that has a scene for a man with black hair head, and short curly beard. Over the eastern side of the church a grave²³ from blocks was discovered most probably was for the high priest of the Monastery.

Over the northeastern side of the monastery, a number of stables, and a place for rabbits and other domestic animals were found. All that was known from the remains of animal and food deposits, also an oven, bakery and a yard for seeds, as well as pits for seed storages²⁴, all of which considered to be from the monastery construction annexes.

During the excavations done in site, a small cave was discovered over the upper most edge of the cliff overlooking the monastery. The small cave has more than 15 scripts, written over its walls. From such scripts there are two that carries numbers 173 and 174, that bears the name of Pisentius a third script that carries number 176, bears a plea from Anpa Pisentius for prayers and that he lived in Abū Maqaram Dgoug (which is the monastery of Phoibammon) for 16 years which is also written as “Sem’ah mountain”.

If that is the original place where Saint Pisentius lived for 16 years, so that might proof the assumption, that such monastery, that was

²² Saint Pachoum believed in the community life, to be a monk in a dwelling ok, but live in community, that’s why the cells were connected.

²³ The treatment of the dead bodies was never apart from the Ancient Egyptian practices of mummification, the Copts who couldn’t afford mummification, salted their dead bodies to preserve them from decaying and planted nice smell plants over them, to keep them always smelling good, and any body that had a broken neck, was given a wooden supplier to fix it, where they continued in believing in the importance of body preservation, especially the neck for identification in the afterlife world. But here Christians supported their habit of preservation from the New Testament, where they were told by Jesus Christ: “nothing is buried that shall not rise”. CF. Puech, H., *En quête de la Gnose II*, Paris, 1978, pp. 59-62.

²⁴ Such habit was seen in a number of areas that encloses monastic dwellings, like Madinat Hapu, Daīr al-Madinah, and here in our Temple, and the Nūbīan Temples as well where Qasr Ibrim was a very clear example of such storage facilities.

excavated by the Coptic archeological institute in Cairo, is the original one of Saint Phoibammon²⁵.

Murray spoke about the Coptic presence in the temple differently as follows: “*They built a brick monastery on the upper court, with a high tower overlooking the plain, they divided the colonnades with brick walls for the brethren, and as the sculptures of the heathen were always of demons and were undoable inhabited by the devils, whose portraits they were, the monks with zeal as fierce and holy as that of Akhenaton fell upon these accursed figures and destroyed them. Thenceforward there would be nothing to disturb the pious meditations of the recluses, who could fix their thoughts on the world to come, rejoicing that the fate of the worshippers of those heathen images would not be theirs*”.²⁶

However, unfortunately, the early Egyptologists did not realize that every period has its interest, but they cleared away Coptic buildings without recording, not remembering that the remains of an early Christian monastery even though it belonged to monk as ignorant as the Copts of the 5th and the 6th centuries AD., might have shed light on the beliefs and conditions of the people of that time²⁷.

Several people, including bishops during the 10th and 11th centuries AD., visited *al-Daīr al-Bahrī*. that was known from the Coptic graffiti preserved inside Hatshepsut’s Chapel²⁸.



²⁵ Burmester and Khater, *Le Monastere de Phoibammon dans la Thebaide*, pp. 4-8.

Mariette made a similar clearance at *Abydūs*, also making no record, and our knowledge of the period when Christianity was making its way is the poorer for these irreparable losses.

²⁶ Murray, M. A., *Egyptian Temples*, London, 1931, p. 127.

²⁷ Murray, *Egyptian Temples*, pp. 127, 128.

²⁸ Godlewski, *Coptic Encyclopedia*, pp. 780,781.

Conclusion:

The monastery of Phoibammon highlights certain facts that can be summarized in the following points.

The choosing of such high location above the cliffs, in spite of the difficulties that had faced them in food and water supplies, adding extra efforts on them, puts us in a pause for a while. Those people do not have normal simple brains, they worked their brains a lot. All in the favor of their religion and message needed to be delivered to their followers and believers. They were setting idols to be followed. Not enough that they had chosen solidarity and life desires became history to them. But also they choose to do it in the hard way, setting an idol of patience and high level of spirituality.

Building of the monastery in an Ancient Egyptian mortuary temple that was constructed on the western side (which meant Death towards the Egyptians) means a lot. It leads to ask what monasticism is all about and what is the message that these monks wanted to deliver and the idol that they wanted to set. As if, they wanted to stress upon the real meaning of being a monk, monastic life meant their separation from real life. That is so true; they left all life desires at the front steps of the monastery and entered into a spiritual level of feelings.

An important question poses itself here, why the monks and even normal Christians prefer being buried in a sacred area, even if the ground does not hold their same religion and life values?²⁹

To answer that question, a number of information afforded by many texts dating from that period had to be gone through. Texts relating

²⁹ A large number of Coptic mummies were found in the cemetery of Daīr al-Bahāri temple area, and even inside the Mortuary temple itself, not only here but also a large number of Coptic mummies were found buried within pagan mummies inside Ancient Egyptian graves. James E. Quibell gave the oldest good, if not complete, description of Christian tombs; the tombs, which he excavated near the monastery of Jermias at Saqqara, could be dated from the 5th up to the 9th centuries AD. Some years later, in 1926, H. E. Winlock and W. E. Crum published their research about the monastery of Epiphanius in the Theban western bank, where eleven tombs of monks were excavated. The monastery was dated to the seventh century AD. In the same year, 1926, H. Ranke, published the cemetery of Karara (al-Hibeh, Middle Egypt), that had been explored during the year 1914. In this cemetery, many tombs were obviously Christian or pagan. Moreover, precise information about the human remains from the site is unhappily lacking. Cf. Quibell, J. E., *Excavations at Saqqara (1908-1909-10), The Monastery of Apa Jermias*, Cairo, 1912. H. E. Winlock, W. E. Crum, and H. G. Evelyn, *The Monastery of Epiphanius at Thebes*, 2 Vols., New York, 1926. Cf. Dunand, F., *Egyptian Funerary practices in Late Antiquity*, in Bagnall, R. S., *Egypt in the Byzantine World, 300-700 AD.*, Cambridge, 2007, pp. 164-183.

to the life and death of the “Holy fathers” and monks of the Egyptian deserts are *vita Antonii*,³⁰ which is written by bishop Athanasius of Alexandria in the second half of the 4th century AD., *Historia Lausiaca* by Palladius³¹, which probably was about 420 AD., and the various collected stories called *Apophthegmata patrum*³², that were probably assembled towards the end of the 5th century AD. Much information could also be gathered from the Greek and Coptic documentary texts from that period like private letters or testaments, as well as funerary inscriptions³³.

One might think that it is all about the idea of resurrection. It seems that in Coptic Egypt, as in other Christian societies, most of the Christians by the 5th until the 7th century AD. thought that it was essential to put dead bodies in good and secured tombs to grant them resurrection. Earth was assimilated to the motherly womb, inside which the dead would be born again. Hence, the so frequent habits, in many Christian countries, to bury the dead near the tombs of holy men and martyrs, so as to obtain their protection against anybody liable to disturb their grave³⁴.

Religious tolerance is from one of the very clear atmospheric beliefs that could be detected from the 1st century until the 4th century AD. There were never any sign of animosity (Hostility). The members of the old and new religion worked and lived side by side.

They shared their cemeteries at Hawara, Kharara, and Bagawat, Christian tombs were found beside others, which were obviously “pagan”. We must not be surprised that the funerary practices should be common in both communities. If all members of a certain family had been mummified, it would be difficult to give up this custom, even if clerics were heard preaching against it³⁵.

The custom of building of the Churches inside cemeteries in order to celebrate liturgies for the dead, which is attested in the Balkan region from the end of the 4th century AD. and on, was adopted in Egypt. But

³⁰ CF. Lauvaud, B., *Vie et conduite de notre père saint Antoine*, Paris, 1989. (translated by Lauvaud)

³¹ CF. Butler, C., *The Laustic History of Palladius*, Cambridge, 1904.

³² CF. Guy, J. C., *Les apophthegmes des pères: collection systématique, sources chrétiens 387 AD.*, Paris, 1941.

³³ CF. Lefebvre, G., *Recueil des inscriptions grecques-chrétiens d’Egypte*, Le Caire, 1907. CF. Cramer, M., *Die Totenklage bei den kopten; mit Hinweisen auf die totenklage im Orient Überhaupt*, Vienna, 1914.

³⁴ Duval, Y., *Auprès des saints, corps et âme: L’inhumation ad sanctos’ dans la chrétiens d’orient et d’occident du III^e au VII^e siècle*, Paris, 1988, pp. 191- 192.

³⁵ Hauser, W., *The Necropolis in the Kharga Oasis*, *Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* 27, New York, 1932, pp. 38-50.

possibly a little later, as it appears in the Egyptian Christian cemetery which is dated to the 5th or the 6th centuries AD. information about funerals coming from the Christian Egypt indicates a rather close relationship with the Byzantine ritual, even if the latter placed more stress. As it seems upon hymns, praying and reading texts from the Old and New Testament³⁶.

Christians thus continued for a long time to observe many old customs like mummification that was of great importance, but they were also taught new ideas about the life to come. In addition, they learned gradually to think differently about what would become of the body after death and perhaps what kind of treatment they therefore needed to apply to the dead.

³⁶ Amèlineau, E., *Les oeuvres de Schenoudi*, I, Paris, 1914, p. 60.