Originalveröffentlichung in: Gawdat Gabra (Hrsg.), Coptic civilization. Two thousand years of Christianity in Egypt, Cairo ; New York 2014, S. 131-144

11

Daily Life: Documentary Evidence

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The Study of Everyday Life as a Historical Endeavor

Historically and locally specific conditions and habits of day-to-day life and everyday culture form a relatively recent topic on the schedule of historians' scholarship. Up to the mid-nineteenth century, related issues and the kinds of sources bearing upon them have mainly been studied in scholarly contexts outside or at the margin of academic frameworks. A first approach, fundamental to a number of recent academic disciplines such as classical archaeology, the history of religions and others, went under the name of *antiquitates* 'antiquities,' traditionally subdivided into the four domains of religious *(sacrae)*, military *(militares)*, private *(privatae)*, and administrative *(publicae)* antiquities (Momigliano 1995a). Scholarly interest in the agrarian history of the Roman republic and empire as emerged in the nineteenth century triggered further questions in the social and economic history of antiquity.[1] In the twentieth century, society and economy became more and more the preferred subjects of historical investigation and, under the flag of 'new history,'[2] started competing with traditional topics of historical scholarship, such as the formation and development of (mainly European) national states, their political and intellectual elites, and their public institutions. Only, however, in post–Second World War times, the small-scale settlement, the common life of the many, their 'average' biographies, and their ways of comprehending and coping with their world caught the attention of academic historians. Programmatic labels such as *Histoire des mentalités* (Ariès 1990; Groh 1992a), *Microstoria* (Ginzburg 1993; Levi 1991; Medick 1994), or *Alltagsgeschichte* (Hardtwig 1994; Lüdtke 1994; Lüdtke 2007) stand for different scopes and attitudes within a wider range of historical endeavors of this type, partially overlapping with, and paralleled by, contemporary approaches in Social and Historical Anthropology (Groh 1992b), such as *Thick Description* (Geertz 1973), *Village Studies* (Marriott 1955; von Oppen 1996), or *Subaltern Studies* (Ludden 2001; Chaturvedi 2000).

Papyrology Setting up a Look-out on Everyday Life in Antiquity

Due to the limits of evidence, a focus on everyday life is hardly encouraged for the study of most periods and places of the ancient world. Egypt, however, is

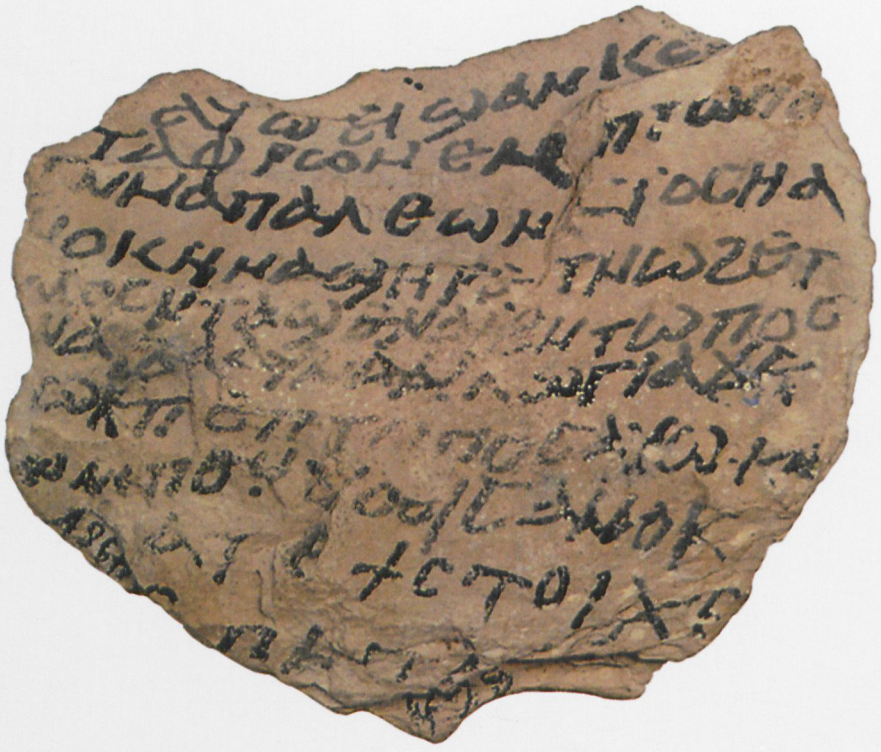

Fig. 11.1. O.Crum Ad. 9, University of Leipzig, Egyptian Museum inv. 498: verso side: Guarantee to Bishop Abraham by which a father stipulates (for his two sons and himself) to behave well in a monastery named after an Apa Leontios; otherwise he agrees to leave the monastery. Written around 600 CE on a small limestone slab, Theban area.

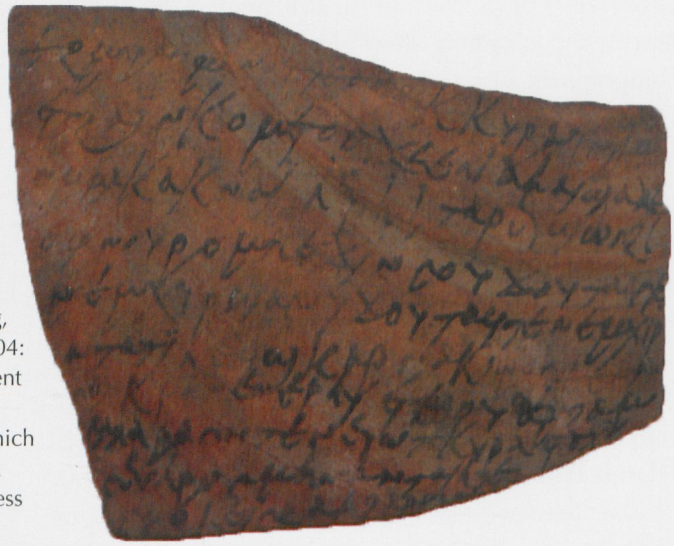

Fig. 11.2. O.Crum Ad. 15, University of Leipzig, Egyptian Museum inv. 504: an 8th-century Coptic rent contract concerning a house in Hermonthis which is let out by his owner, a woman, for 1 *Dirham* (less two *habba*) a year.

different, since substantial numbers of Demotic, Greek, Coptic, and Arabic documentary texts allow us to address just this kind of issue properly. In fact, the type of information as available in the papyri from Greco-Roman, late antique, and early Islamic Egypt comes close to the data upon which scholars of the 'third generation' of historians connected to the journal *Annales Economies, Societés, Civilisations* based their approach to medieval and early modern history: So it comes as no surprise that this approach has appealed to and challenged papyrologists more than other ancient historians.[3] James Keenan, alluding to the concepts of 'New History,' made a programmatic plea for a 'New Papyrology': "First contact with these books had already been for some papyrologists a transforming, enlightening, yet reassuring experience. The reassurance no doubt stemmed from a feeling that Le Roy Ladurie worked with *his* evidence the way papyrologists could (or did) work with theirs; and from the fact that his work tended to validate the worth of local documentary studies as an historian's enterprise. There is a sense of kinship here because the *papyrologist's* evidence, like Le Roy Ladurie's, comes almost exclusively from country villages and towns" (Keenan 1991: 160; Keenan 2009).

Documentary Evidence as Historical Source

As a distinct type of source for historical study (Bagnall 1995a; Bagnall 2009; Hickey 2009), documentary texts bear evidence of everyday events and conditions such as childbirth, childhood and education, marriage and matrimonial life, illness and healing practices, death, funerals and the commemoration of the dead, dietary habits, private legal practice, small scale business such as local trade, handicraft, and agriculture, and religion and magic in daily practice. In addition, they convey—explicitly or implicitly—a good deal of their protagonists' attitudes and opinions toward their world and their life. Archives, as original assemblages of interrelated documents connected to private persons or public institutions (Vandorpe 2009; Clarysse 2010; Sijpesteijn 2010),[4] if found and kept together or—less luckily but more frequently—spread over collections and reconstructed by scholarly work, allow us not just to catch glimpses, historical 'snapshots' as it were, of isolated events, but to watch micro-historical sequences, 'moving pictures.' Events known from one document can be contextualized by additional information on personal constellations, preceding or succeeding

events, or accompanying circumstances as evidenced by other, related documents[5]. Conclusions on daily life and, eventually, steps toward a social history resulting from such an approach are firmly grounded in tightly meshed nets of prosopographic data.[6]

Coptic Documentary Texts

Coptic documentary texts, such as private legal records, private and business letters, lists and accounts, a few types of official documents, oracular requests, magical and medical documents as well as epigraphic texts, and first and foremost, funerary inscriptions, survived on papyrus, potsherds, stone slabs, wooden tablets, leather, parchment, and, by the tenth century AD, also on paper.[7] The Coptic language entered day-to-day written usage as early as in the fourth century AD, at the time when it first emerged as a written language (Choat 2006; Choat 2010; Fournet 2010; Richter 2008a: 14–27; Richter 2009b: 401–17; see also Chapter 7 by Zakrzewska in this volume), and continued to serve such a purpose up until the eve of the linguistic Arabization of Egyptian Christianity from the eleventh century onward (Richter 2008a: 155–65; Richter 2009b: 417–46). The core period of documentary Coptic, however, runs over two centuries from about AD 600 to 800, that is, the period lasting from some decades before up to one and a half centuries after the political events that turned the former Byzantine province into a governorship of the Caliphate. The underlying changes in social realities and shifts in sociolinguistic habits allowing the choice of Coptic in functional domains that were previously dominated by Greek (for Byzantine and post-Conquest Greek documentary papyri, see, for example, Worp 1984, Fournet 2009a, Luiselli 2008, Morelli 2010, and Papathomas 2010) and were afterward occupied by Arabic (for the incipient occurrence of Arabic in the papyrological record, see Diem 2008, Grob 2010: 1–21, and Sijpesteijn 2010) have hardly been studied so far (MacCoull 2013). Although the contexts where Coptic documentary texts circulated are likely to have been marked socially in some way, they cannot simply be identified with one homogenous milieu,

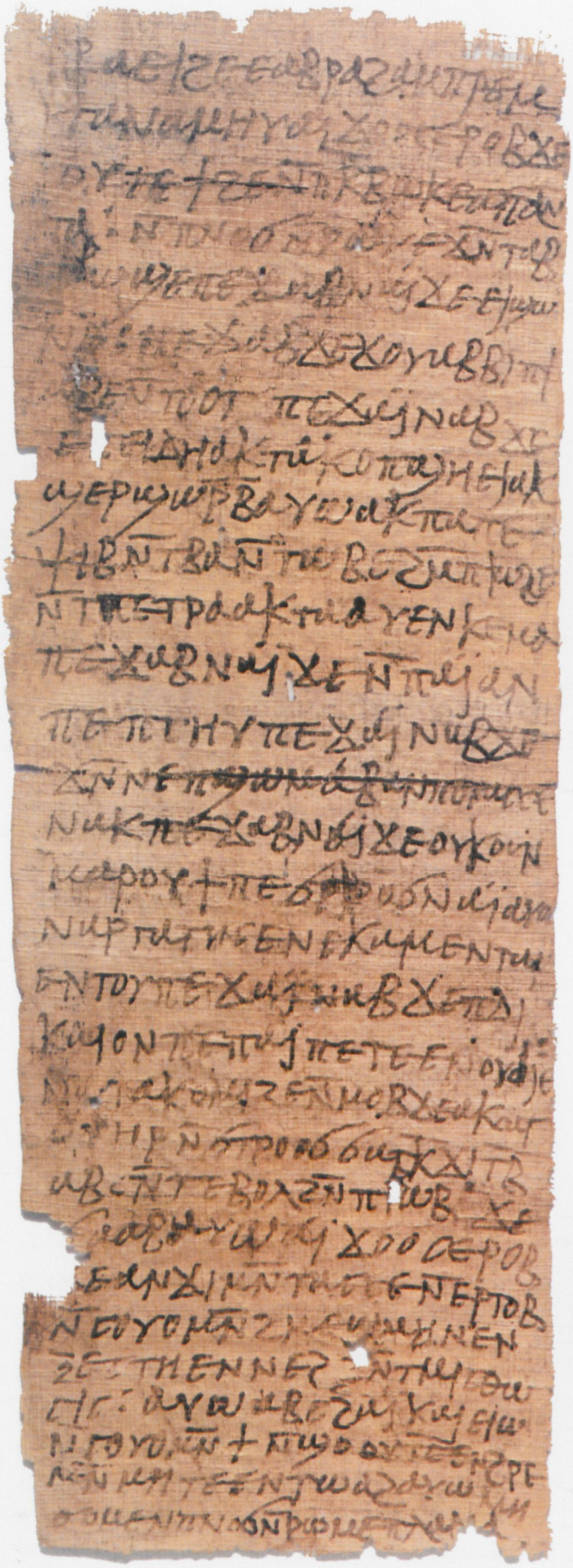

Fig. 11.3. University of Leipzig, Egyptian Museum inv. 6652: Business letter (or memorandum) dealing with quarrels between a lessee and his lessor's agent about titles and duties connected to the lease. Probably from al-Ashmunayn, 7th century.

but include villages as the ground level of society,[8] monolingual Egyptian-speaking inhabitants of urban communities,[9] and institutions of Egyptian Christianity, especially monasteries. At any rate, it is important to take account of the social constraints of written Coptic as opposed to the standing of Greek, and then Arabic, as dominant, official languages of the first-millennium AD Egyptian society, and to consider that Coptic documentary evidence mostly and essentially is incomplete evidence (Fournet 2009a; Richter 2010b). In contrast to its functional limitation in the written culture of Egypt, in Nubia Coptic shared the high status of Greek as an official language.

Demographic Parameters of Daily Life in Late Antique Egypt

For dealing with daily life, we may aptly start with demography and ask what an average life in late antique Egypt meant in terms of life span. Although there is no sufficient evidence in the Coptic papyri, we can draw on a unique documentary corpus written slightly earlier in Greek, the so-called *census declarations* (Bagnall and Frier 1994; Scheidel 1997) which "are usually conceded to be the most credible demographic evidence that survives from the Greco-Roman world" (Bagnall and Frier 1994: 110). Thorough analysis of about three hundred extant items of this document type running from the early first to the mid-third centuries AD (each of which was issued, for taxation purposes, by the head of a family who had to specify the persons belonging to his household according to sex, age, and marital status, allowed scholars to address issues such as life expectancy), the mortality rate, the fertility rate, marriage patterns, and household structure. While marriage and household patterns seem to be subject to cultural differences and historical changeability, and the validity of their respective data from the census declarations might be limited to their narrower milieu (that is, middle Egyptian towns and villages in the high and later Roman empire), there is no reason to doubt that demographic ground data concerning life expectancy, mortality rate, and fertility rate remained relatively stable over a long period of time. Second- and third-century AD figures based on the census declarations thus may justly be applied to late antique and early Islamic Egypt as well.

According to these figures, average life expectancy was about 22.5 years for females and about 25 years for males. Certainly these figures are strongly affected by an infant mortality rate of about 30 percent and a mortality rate for children under the age of six of about 50 percent. To see at least two children growing up and reaching adulthood, women had to undergo childbirth six times during child-bearing age. For survivors of the first ten years, average life expectancy increased to more than 45 years, and those who survived the age of 40 had a good chance to live a further twenty years and to survive to age 60, which was reached by 14 percent of any given age group. Only 6 percent of that age group, however, would survive to age 70, and just 1 percent to age 80, although considerably higher ages occurred sporadically.[10]

Childhood

Although the social concepts and realities of historical childhoods have been extensively investigated over the last few years (for the state-of-the-art for our period, see Horn and Phenix 2009; Papaconstantinou and Talbot 2009a), it is still difficult to produce evidence for 'unmarked' traits of childhood in antiquity, as well as to estimate the true significance of the 'marked' ones. Boys might have become involved in daily work or apprenticeships (only a minority was privileged to receive a formal education, including reading and writing skills) by an average age of twelve, and reached their majority at the age of fourteen; for girls this was eventually when they were married. Infants in antiquity were under the latent threat of evils such as dying prematurely from illness (Bagnall and Frier 1994; Holman 2009) or from infanticide, or exposure (Bagnall 1997; Harris 1994; Pomeroy 1986) or being sold into bondage (Memmer 1991; Vuolanto 2003), or of becoming an orphan, which in antiquity meant losing one's father (Hübner and Ratzan 2009b; Kotsifou 2009; as to the education an orphan could hope for, see Cribiore 2009): ill fates which only partly depended on social

and economic parameters. While infanticide, exposure, and the purchase of children seem to have hardly been palatable to traditional Egyptian morality (Feucht 1995: 367–71), they were in full accordance with both Greek and Roman mentality and law. Only from the late fourth-century AD, under the rule of Christian emperors and the impact of Jewish-Christian anthropology, did latent moral disapproval of the practice start affecting legislation and became more and more embodied in civil and criminal law (Harris 1994; Kelley 2009; Memmer 1991), and this changed view was fully shared by later Islamic jurisprudence (Schneider 1999). Apparently the changed legislation in combination with a change of moral values had a strong effect on daily practice, as there is little evidence for a continuation of these practices after the fourth century.[11] The practice of child donation to a monastery as evidenced by a unique dossier of documents from the Theban Monastery of Phoibammôn *(P.KRU 78-103)* has occasionally been interpreted as an updated Christian version of exposure (Thissen 1986), however the religious, social, and medical implications of these documents speak in favor of a more complex kind of interaction between the monastery and its environs (see Papaconstantinou 2002a; Papaconstantinou 2002b; Richter 2005a; Schroeder 2009: 333–36).

Marriage and Matrimonial Life

Egyptian weddings seem to have been bare of any formality. A marriage was neither subject to registration nor was there a need, or even a regular custom, of issuing contracts between bride and bridegroom or between their parents (Pestman 1961; Lippert 2008: 57–60, 119–23). Extant Demotic documents issued on the occasion of a marriage (sometimes, however, years after the wedding) were voluntary commitments usually made by the husband in favor of his wife, by which the distribution of matrimonial property and inheritance in the case of dissolution of the marriage (be it by the husband's death, or by divorce initiated by either side) was settled in advance (Lüddeckens 1960; Lippert 2008: 166–69). The small amount of Coptic documents relating to marriage (Till 1948; Richter 1997)—fewer than 10 in 600 years—is striking if compared to some 60 Demotic documents from 600 years (Lüddeckens 1960), almost 150 Greek documents from 700 years (Yiftach-Firanko 2003), more than 60 Arabic documents from 400 years (Al-Mudarris 2009; for Arabic marriage contracts among Copts, see Abbott 1941), and hundreds of Jewish *Ketubot* from the Cairo Genizah papers of a period of about three hundred years (Goitein 1967–88, vol. 3; Olszowy-Schlanger 1998). It seems to indicate that at the times, places, and milieus illuminated by Coptic documentary texts, marriage was even less regularly subject to any written record than otherwise in Greco-Roman, late antique, and Islamic Egypt.

Divorce was a legal option for either side, although in practice often the husband was the privileged party to the disadvantage of his wife. While the Christian emperors made attempts to discourage divorce by legislation (Bagnall 1987; Evans Grubbs 2002: 202–209), Byzantine Greek papyri bear massive evidence for the continuity of *rhipoudion* 'divorce,' (Urbanik 2011) and among the handful of Coptic legal documents relating to marriage, there is also one declaration of divorce (Balogh and Kahle 1953; Richter 1998).

The aforementioned census declarations from Roman Egypt (Bagnall and Frier 1994: 111–17; Mitthof 2005) as well as documents from the Cairo Genizah corpus reflecting upon Fatimid and Ayyubid Egypt (Friedman 2002; Goitein 1967–88, vol. 3; Grossman 1990) indicate that girls were given into marriage rather early. At the age of 13, girls were considered bodily and mentally mature for marriage, and by age 20 roughly two-thirds of women seem to have entered into matrimony. It is likely, although difficult to prove, that this marriage pattern holds true also for the Christian, Coptic-speaking communities of late antique and early Islamic Egypt. A Coptic ostracon from Jême (*O.Crum Ad. 13*) reflects a case where a young woman (called *sheere shêm* 'girl') is staying with an older couple, perhaps her parents, apparently in order to escape *condominium* with her husband. The ecclesiastical authority who writes

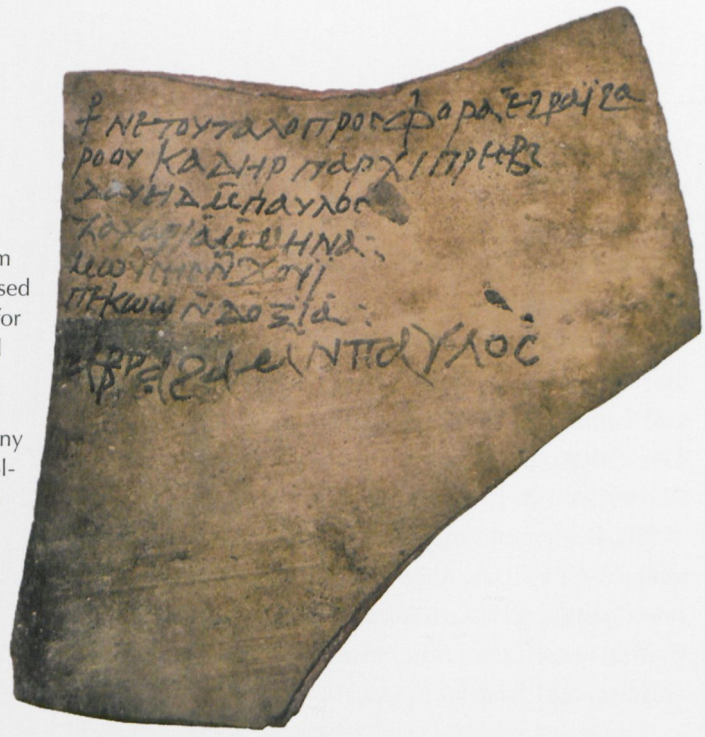

Fig. 11.4. University of Leipzig, Egyptian Museum inv. 1608: A list of deceased persons, headed "Those for whom *prosphora* (funeral offerings) are offered"; a priest charged with the commemorative ceremony may have used it to recollect their names. Theban area, 7th/8th century.

strongly disapproves of the private asylum and wants the young wife to rejoin her husband and to fulfill her matrimonial duties.[12] This document, harsh as it sounds, goes well along the line of Coptic documents bearing evidence for pastoral endeavors by clergymen to encourage quarrelling couples to reconcile with each other (Wilfong 2002: 43–45).

Women's Lives

It has sometimes been argued that Egypt was the most favorable place to be born as a female in antiquity, due to the less asymmetric gender relations here as compared to Greek and Roman, as well as ancient Oriental, societies. The constraints of a woman's life in Greco-Roman Egypt depended on the milieux and traditions in which a woman was living: in culturally more Hellenized (or Romanized) surroundings, female life was to some extent more restricted socially and legally (Lippert 2008: 166–72; Kreuzsaler 2005) than in more traditional Egyptian communities and families. A case study in women's lives on the basis of the huge Coptic documentary corpus from Jeme (Medinet Habu), a small town or, rather, urban village, on the Theban west bank that flourished in the seventh and eighth centuries AD, has been presented by Wilfong (2002). In these records women figure quite prominently. They occur as purchasers, sellers, and heirs of property (Schiller 1952), lessors of houses and land (Richter 2002: 139), lenders of substantial amounts of money (Wilfong 1989), and they eventually dispose of their fortunes and possessions in wills (Till 1954). Wilfong (2002: 144–45) concluded that women in this environment could gain considerable power and influence in the spheres of private life and the local economy while they were virtually excluded from the public sphere.

An issue hotly debated for Greco-Roman Egypt is the question about how wide-spread and far-reaching the education of female children was, especially in terms of literacy (Bagnall and Cribiore 2006; van Minnen 2000; Zdiarsky 2010). According to the common opinion, female literacy did exist and could go quite far, although with strong dependence on social status. We do also have a number of Coptic letters from women, some of them probably written by themselves. It is possible that the spread of the Coptic written language led to an increase in female literacy by recruiting literate women from previously illiterate social strata (MacCoull 2005).

Fig. 11.5. University of Fribourg, Museum Bibel+Orient, AeT2006.11: A Coptic letter in original folding, showing the external address; "Give it to . . . "

Death, Funerals, and the Commemoration of the Dead

Coptic funerary customs, namely the continuation of mummification, have frequently been noted and investigated on the basis of archaeological and literary evidence (Fischhaber 1997; Dunand 2007; Krause 1983; Krause 2003a). There is also massive documentary evidence for the funerary and commemoration practices of Christian Egyptians in late antiquity. In testaments (Till 1954) the socially accepted fear of death is envisaged, which was the fear of a sudden unforeseen death preventing its victims from preparing themselves by disposing of their estate and, even more importantly, by setting up a pious endowment called *prosphora* '(funeral)

offerings' for the salvation of the soul. Funerary inscriptions, by far the most frequent and diversified type of Coptic epigraphic formulary, commemorate the name of the deceased, then called *makarios* 'late' (literally, 'blessed'), and the day of his or her death (Krause 2003a; Tudor 2011). Extant name lists of the deceased and calendars of commemoration days written on pieces of papyrus or potsherds obviously served clerics charged with celebrating remembrance ceremonies, that is, the offering of the *prosphora* (Krause 1991b; Krause 2003a).

Dietary Habits

Staple food in antiquity, as in the Mediterranean far beyond antiquity, mainly consisted of bread (or rather, wheat), oil, and wine. This modest tripartite diet can explicitly be found, portioned according to daily, monthly, or yearly rations, in documents such as working contracts of laborers (Mitthof 2006). In a Coptic contract on camel work from seventh-century Jême, the employer, representative of a monastery, stipulates yearly wages, depending on the height of the Nile flood, as follows (*O.ÄMUL inv. 1611*, ed. Richter 1998): "Twenty *artabas* of wheat in the big year, together with twenty five jars *(angeion)* of wine, and one *artaba* of dates, and two bottles *(lagynos)* of oi[l]." "In the small year however sixteen *artabas* of wheat, and twenty jars *(angeion)* of wine, and two bottles *(lagynos)* of oi[l]." The low-flood option is close to the amount which apparently was considered the subsistence level. This very pattern of remuneration occurs in similar contexts strikingly unaltered over centuries (Table 11.1). A frugal diet like this was the daily lot of the vast majority of the Egyptian population, although people might have tried, and occasionally succeeded, in supplementing their menu with fruits and vegetables, dairy products, fish, or even some meat. Certainly, documentary texts also give us an idea of the wide range of foods available to the economically less dependent and of the rich (Papathomas 2006). While dietary customs of worldly people were shaped, by and large, by social and economic constraints, the diet of monastic folk

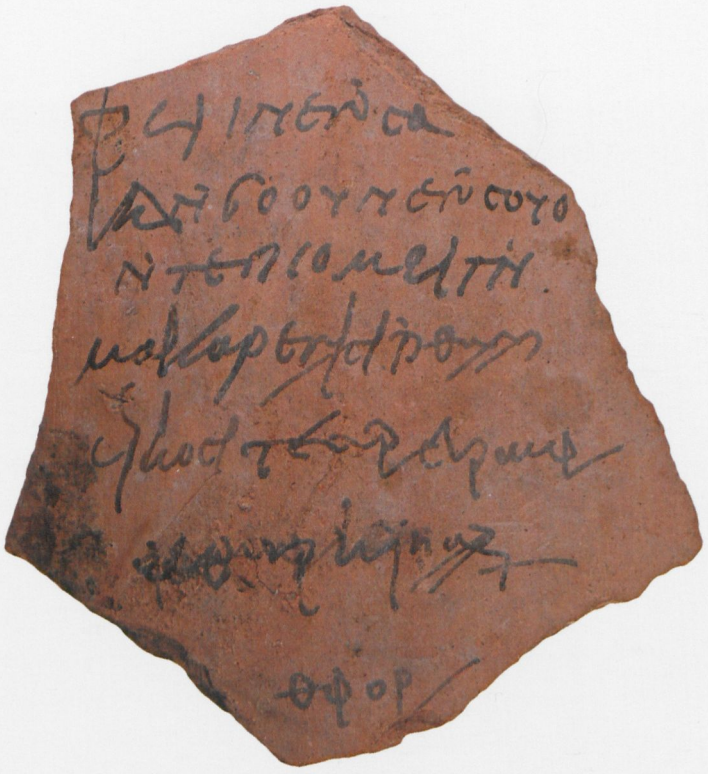

Fig. 11.6. University of Fribourg, Museum Bibel+Orient, AeT2005.50: Specimen of a large series of similar documents related to the acquisition of staple food by the Hermopolite Monastery of Apa Apollo (Bâwît), many of them commencing with the phrase *shine nsa*, "Request for . . . ." Their serial character makes these plain texts a valuable source for our knowledge of that monastery's economy and the dietary habits observed by its inhabitants.

	Mining worker 2nd cent. AD	Soldier 4th cent. AD	Ward 6th cent. AD	House servant 7th cent. AD	Camel worker 7th cent. AD		Sailor 8th cent. AD
					small year	big year	
Wheat	1 kg	1 kg	800 g	1 kg	1.3 kg	1.6 kg	1 kg
Barley	–	–	330 g	500 g	–	–	
Legumes	100 g	–	–	–	–	–	165 g
Dates	–	–	–	–	–	83 g	–
Meat	–	160 g	–	–	–	–	–
Oil	2.5 cl	–	1.6 cl	1.6 cl	1-2 cl	1-2 cl	1.7 cl
Wine	–	5 dl	1-2 dl	1-2.5 dl	1-2 dl	1-2 dl	1.7 cl

Table 11.1: Daily rations of dependent wage earners according to *O.ÄMUL 1611* (Richter 1998) and similar evidence (Mitthof 2006).

was dictated by additional religious motives. The dietary habits as observed in Shenoute's monastic congregation were different according to different categories of food recipients (Layton 2002). The daily ration of healthy monks was close to the modest diet of wage earners outside the monastery, and was even diminished on the two feast days a week. The convalescent diet served to the sick and weak in the infirmary of the monastery, however, was much more diversified and included kinds of foodstuff strictly forbidden to healthy monks, such as fish, dairy products, and poultry. Also, the daily meals offered at the gate of the monastery to the poor and passersby were more substantial than those served to its inhabitants. It is revealing to compare these dietary rules known from the normative writing of Shenoute (extracted by Layton (2002) mainly from Shenoute's *Canons*) with documentary evidence from other monasteries, such as the Monastery of Bawit. Short texts relating to the food supply of that monastery (*shine-nsa*-texts) bear evidence for daily deliveries of grain, wine, and fish, mainly pickled and salted (Boud'hors 2004; Delattre 2007; Delattre 2008; Richter 2005b). Also, the archaeological record confirms the regular consumption of fish products at this place (van Neer et al. 2007); a foodstuff that belonged to those forbidden to monks in Shenoute's congregation.

Religion and Magic in Day-to-day Life

Religion, so closely connected to many aspects of Coptic culture, and magic, separately dealt with in Chapter 12 by Jacques van der Vliet, were certainly integral parts of daily life in late antique Egypt, and are massively evidenced by documentary texts.

A great deal of extant Coptic magical texts are, in fact, magical *documents*,[13] as opposed to magical formularies[14] and magical manuals.[15] They have not been recorded in order to be archived and to provide magical knowledge, but to serve actual, 'historical' applications. Instead of using functional headings (like *oyrôme ef-* 'a man who…') and blanket names (like the Greek *ho deina tou deinos* or the Coptic *nim pshn-nim* 'NN, son of NN'), they refer to real people

Far right: Fig. 11.7. Pit loom, detail: Front beam with warp. Agricultural Museum, Luxor.

Right: Fig. 11.8. Pit loom, a type of loom that became common in Egypt during Byzantine times. The weaver would sit at arm level with the front beam, his back turned to the wall, while his legs resting in the pit. Loom pits are found in archaeological contexts of monasteries, and also in rock tombs, bearing evidence for the re-use of ancient Egyptian funerary structures by hermits (Sigl 2011). Agricultural Museum, Luxor.

by using their names, and undoubtedly they have been actually applied, to whatever end. They might, for example in the case of amulets, have been worn by the beneficiaries of their protective power, folded up as small packets, or, in the case of curses, they might have been deposited on mummies of the violently deceased whose anger was to be focused on the victim of the spell.

Religion in daily life is documented, for instance, by the correspondence of ecclesiastical officials (Schmelz 2002). The largest and most important collections are the correspondence of Pesynthios, the bishop of Coptos (AD 569–632), a personality otherwise known from literary sources (Gabra 1984; Gabra and Müller 1991; see also chapters 2 and 10 by Youssef in this volume) and that of Apa Abraham, who simultaneously acted as bishop of Hermonthis (Armant) and abbot of the Monastery of Apa Phoibammon (Dayr al-Bahari) near Jeme (Medinet Habu) around AD 600. These dossiers show their protagonists concerned with many aspects of religious and daily life in their dioceses, including ecclesiastical routine procedures such as the ordination of candidates as priests and deacons and measurements of penance imposed on clergymen as well as laymen, up to the arbitration of disputes among villagers about matters of private law (Schmelz 2002). The correspondence of single hermits, such as Frange (see note 4), gives valuable insight into the daily interaction between local populations and their holy men. Another highly intriguing Coptic documentary dossier relating to daily religious practice is formed by oracular requests (Papaconstantinou 1994; Delattre 2010b), by which people approached local saints to receive advice on how to behave aptly at times of serious decisions, and about medical treatment.

Illness and Healing Practice

What has been said about Coptic magical texts holds true of Coptic medical texts as well: many of the extant manuscripts, mostly recipes, are documentary texts in the sense that they apparently have been recorded on a particular occasion and

Fig. 11.9. Threshing machine. As in the case of the water-lifting devices shown below, the same kind of machine is already mentioned in Greek and Coptic papyri of the Byzantine period of Egypt. Agricultural Museum, Luxor.

Fig. 11.10. Archimedes' screw, one of the water-lifting devices used already in Greco-Roman Egypt and still in the 20th century. Agricultural Museum, Luxor.

Fig. 11.11. Oil mill to be driven by draft cattle. Agricultural Museum, Luxor.

were probably meant to be applied to individual persons. This is particularly clear in the letter *P.YCtBR inv. 3353* (Crislip 2006) where a recipe of *materia medica* is explicitly ordered for a "brother Paulus who suffers pain at his face." Intriguing evidence of medico-religious healing practice comes from the aforementioned corpus of child donation documents from eighth-century Jeme (Medinet Habu). The stereotyped story at the beginning of these documents usually tells of a severe illness that had been brought upon the boy to be donated, as a punishment for his parents' sins, and which was only cured after the parents went to, and beseeched, St. Phoibammon for a cure. A couple of times, the description of the healing procedure is more detailed, as in *P.KRU 91, 11-20*: "We brought him [the sick child] into that monastery and we poured the water bowl of the holy place upon his body, and God and the prayers of this martyr [St. Phoibammon] granted him healing, and he improved step by step …; further we left him within the holy place a couple of days, while the *oikonomos* cared for him together with myself, Pesynthios, his father, up until he gained healing within the holy place and improved step by step. Now, when God, the one to whom those verdicts *(hap)* belong, had visited the little boy, and granted him healing, we took him to our home and spent a lot of days caring for him, until his body became stronger." The same type of cure is evidenced in the aforementioned corpus of oracular requests. All such glimpses show us a dedicated although non-professional, non-academic type of healing practice which has aptly been called, in analogy to a medieval Western phenomenon, *Klostermedizin* 'monastery medicine' (Wilsdorf 1974; Crislip 2006) and whose origins have recently been traced in Coptic literary sources on early monasticism (Crislip 2005).

Legal Practice, Handicrafts, and Agriculture

Daily business, professions, and occupations are foremost topics of Coptic legal documents, and they also figure quite prominently in business and private letters, lists, and accounts. For instance,

Fig. 11.12. Potter's wheel. Agricultural Museum, Luxor.

Fig. 11.13. The waterwheel, nowadays called a *saqiya,* however mentioned already in Greek papyri as *mechanê, organon,* and *kykleutêrion,* and in Coptic ones as *hoi,* was the most efficient water-lifting device available in antiquity. It permitted the perpetual watering of considerable plots of arable land outside the area naturally inundated by the annual Nile flood. Its use spread during the first centuries AD and became frequent in Byzantine times. Agricultural Museum, Luxor.

Fig. 11.14. Detail of the construction of a *saqiya*: The vertical wheel, driven by a horizontal wheel for its part moved by draft cattle, transfers its rotation via an axle to another vertical wheel carrying a conveyor-belt equipped with large jugs. Agricultural Museum, Luxor.

Fig. 11.15. Detail of the construction of a *saqiya*: One of the large jugs which, fixed on a rotating conveyor-belt, receives water from a well and feeds it into a ditch. Agricultural Museum, Luxor.

at a place such as Jeme (Medinet Habu) and its environs, with its estimated one to two thousand inhabitants (Wilfong 2002: 8–13; Römer 2004/5)—not quite a town, but still rather urban in terms of a village—professions and occupations such as baker and butcher, camel herdsman and shepherd, peasant and harvester, fisher, sailor and river laborer, date dealer, honey dealer, vegetable dealer and oil dealer, washer, shoemaker and purple dye dealer, craftsman and laborer, land surveyor and master builder, merchant and physician, scribe and clerk, smith and goldsmith, watchman, policeman, and soldier are attested by documents. Some kinds of document are particularly revealing in terms of social history, such as land leases (Richter 2009a) which reflect not only the most important business of any pre-modern economy —agriculture (Schnebel 1925; Banaji 1999; Banaji 2001)—but also the fundamental societal asymmetry between people having access to arable land and those who do not (Eyre 1997; Eyre 1999; Hickey 2007). Coptic land leases are particularly interesting in that they indicate the alteration of Egyptian society and economy after the Arab conquest. The forms, clauses, and phrases of Coptic lease documents of the seventh and eighth centuries are virtually identical to the latest Greek lease documents from the sixth and early seventh centuries, thereby attesting an unbroken continuity of the legal and economic order of Byzantine Egypt, although the land plots leased out and the amounts of rent agreed in the Coptic documents are significantly smaller than those of the average Greek lease document. The shift of focus from large-scale to small-scale business might indicate a real shift in society, namely the loss of power and partial abandonment of the former urban elite of landlords after the Conquest. Only in the ninth century, however, do Coptic lease documents in the tradition of the Greek *misthosis* 'lease' and *ephyteusis* 'long term lease,' eventually disappear as the apparent result of substantial changes in legal practice and of the alteration and transformation of the social realities of late antique and early Byzantine Egypt toward a new type of society.

Fig. 11.16. The so-called *shaduf*, the most archaic of Egypt's water-lifting devices, attested as early as in the late 18th dynasty (New Kingdom, ca. 1350 BC), which still today can frequently be seen in rural environs. Agricultural Museum, Luxor.

Notes

1 For example, Barthold Georg Niebuhr and Theodor Mommsen, in their exhaustive works on Roman history; Johann Karl Rodbertus, whose 1864 study of Roman agrarian history went far beyond the nineteenth-century idea of historical scholarship; and certainly Max Weber 1891 and 1909; cf: Momigliano 1995c; Capogrossi Colognesi 2004.

2 This claim was made, although with different scopes and creeds, for example, by Karl Lamprecht 1896 ("ein neues Zeitalter der Geschichtswissenschaft"), James Harvey Robinson 1912 ("New History") and later still by Henri Berr 1930 ("nouvelle histoire").

3 Roger Bagnall (1995a: 113) put it like this: "For other times and places [of the ancient world], it is not much of an exaggeration to say that the evidence is not so much *fragmentary* as *non*existent, and that the main reaction of the ancient historian to the work on medieval and early modern Europe by the *Annalistes* can only be envy. If the *papyrological* historian does not at least make the attempt, one can hardly avoid a sense of a lost opportunity."

4 Important archives containing Coptic material are, for example, the *administrative archive* of the pagarch of Aphrodite, the so-called Qurra papyri (Richter 2010b; Sijpesteijn 2010); *monastic archives* such as those of Dayr al-Balayza (Kahle 1954; Sijpesteijn 2010), Bawît (Boud'hors 2004; Clackson 2000; Clackson 2008; Delattre 2007; Krause 2009), Wadi Sarga (Bell and Crum 1922), the Monastery of Epiphanius (Winlock and Crum 1926), and the Monastery of Apa Phoibammôn (Krause 1981; Krause 1982; Wilfong 1989; Cromwell 2007); or *private archives* of secular individuals such as the bilingual notary and poet Dioscorus of Aphrodite (MacCoull 1988; Fournet 1999) or the so-called 'Family' archive from Jême (Schiller 1952; Wilfong 2002: 47–68), a female moneylender's archive (Wilfong 1990), and of spiritual authorities such as the hermits Apa John (Choat 2006; Choat 2007; Zukerman 1995) and Frange (Boud'hors 2002; Calament 2006; Heurtel 2008; Boud'hors and Heurtel 2010).

5 So, for example, the sequence of events related to the dispute about the house of a certain Thekla as evidenced by the Coptic hearing protocol *P.Budge*, the Greek sale document *P.BL 2018*, and the Greek settlement document *(diálysis) P.BL 2017*, forming part of the archive of a peasant from Edfu named Philemon, see: Schiller 1964 and 1968, and Allam 1991 and 1992.

6 A method perfected by Schlomo Dov Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society*, whose analysis, or 'portrait' as he called it, of the Jewish community of Fatimid and Ayyubid Fustat was largely based on a comprehensive collection of prosopographical information (Goitein 1967: 23).

7 On Coptic letters, see Förster 2010, Hasitzka 2010, and Richter 2008b; on Coptic legal documents, see MacCoull 2009, Richter 2010a, and Steinwenter 1955; for a database providing metadata for the complete Coptic documentary corpus, see Alain Delattre, *Brussels Coptic Database*. http://dev.ulb.ac.be/philo/bad/copte/baseuk.php?page=accueiluk.php. On Coptic epigraphic sources, see Tudor 2011.

8 Van Minnen 1998, investigating the literacy of inhabitants of Fayoum villages, points to a considerable diversity in terms of education and bi- *vs.* monolingualizm among what may be called 'villagers,' as opposed to inhabitants of the metropoleis, thereby posing a caveat against too plain a concept of 'rural milieu.' See also: Keenan 2007.

9 For the increasing significance of Greek in the metropoleis, from an estimated majority of monolingual speakers of Egyptian in the third century AD up to a virtually full linguistic Hellenization in the sixth century, see: van Minnen 2000, 2007 and 2009: 237.

10 See Behlmer 1998, for the amazing longevity of Shenoute the famous abbot of the White Monastery. See also: Behlmer 1996, Emmel 2002, and Luisier 2009.

11 Wilfong 2002, 40f. quotes a badly damaged letter to Pesynthios of Coptos "apparently about the abandonment of a female child," but the precise meaning remains unclear.

12 O.Crum Ad. 13 (Jême, ca. AD 600): "You know that I wrote you and advised you an earlier time, (saying:) 'You are my siblings, I don't wish to hear any bad things about you.' Now I was told that you permitted the girl to stay with you. Unless there were some unfair [...], if you resist and don't teach the wife of the man to join him and to be obedient to him like every wife and to work for him, then you shall know that I excommunicate you as long as she will be bewildered this way. I wrote you this other time. To Papnute and Elisabeth, from Markos, the priest." On Mark the priest of Saint Mark, see Heurtel 2007.

13 Examples of magical 'documents': *BKU* III 387; *BKU* III 388; *BKU* III 389; *P.Michigan* 1523; *P.Michigan* 3565.

14 Examples of magical 'formularies': *P.Berlin P* 8313; Old-Coptic *P.Schmidt*; Coptic *P.Schmidt* 1 and 2.

15 Examples of magical 'manuals': P.*Cair.* 42573; P.*Cair.* 45060; *P.Heid.* 685; *P.Heid.* 686; *P.Leiden Anastasi* 9; *P.Lond. Hay* 10391; *P.Macquarie* 1; *P.Michigan* 593.