# Medicine, Magic, Miracle:
# The Role of Monks and Monasteries in Healthcare in Late Antique and Early Islamic Egypt

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"In every age and every social setting, a primary concern of human beings is health."
– H.C. Kee, *Medicine, Miracle, and Magic in New Testament Times*

"Alongside medicine, or when it fails, prayer and healing rituals—individual and communal—have been common responses to illness, from ancient times to the present."
– H. Remus, 'Health and Illness'

In the ancient world, diseases and sickness were everyday realities. To deal with them, people had many options, for example, home remedies, medicinal and pharmacological treatments provided by physicians, amulets, incantations, recipes, and, from Late Antiquity onwards, prayers and consecrated substances supplied by the functionaries of the Christian Church. Much of Harold Remus' work focused on these different responses to illness in Antiquity,[1] including strategies belonging to the categories of "magic" and "miracle", how these were conceptualised, and how they often stood at the heart of social conflicts.[2] One shortcoming of modern scholarship on the topic is a tendency to set apart all these healing strategies and study them separately by placing them in strictly defined categories—medicine, magic, and miracle. However, though these categories are necessary heuristic tools for the study of ancient religions and cultures, they often create artificial barriers by identifying specific strategies as either "medicine", "magic", or 'miracle", whereas the distinction may not have been so clear cut in the mind of the people using them. Indeed, many of these healing techniques overlapped (for example, the magical and pharmacological remedies or the magical incantations and liturgical prayers), and the healthcare providers were often the same for various methods (for example, the priests of the Greco-Egyptian cults and the Christian monks). Therefore, studying all healing strategies together is methodologically more efficient, as it allows us to better understand the practicalities of healing methods in the ancient world, how people conceptualised diseases and healing, and how this affected social interactions.

As a case study to test that theory, this paper will consider the Coptic material from Late Antique and Early Islamic Egypt, which is vastly understudied compared to the Greek material, focusing on how the different healing strategies were related to social interactions. The arrival of Christianity in Late Antiquity profoundly impacted healthcare, both theoretically and practically. It saw, for example, the emergence of new theological discourses on health and diseases,[3] an effort in collecting and standardising medical knowledge,[4] as well as the appropriation and

[1] See e.g. H. Remus, "Disease and Healing," in P.J. Achtemeier et al. (eds), *The Harper Collins Bible Dictionary* (San Francisco, 1985) 222–23, *Jesus as Healer* (Cambridge, 1997), and "Health and Illness," in E. Fahlbush et al. (eds), *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, 3 vols. (Leiden, 2001) 2:504–505.

[2] See in part. H. Remus, "'Magic or Miracle'? Some Second-Century Instances," *The Second Century: A Journal of Early Chrisitan Studies* 2 (1982) 127–56, *Pagan-Christian Conflict Over Miracle in the Second Century* (Cambridge, MA, 1983), and "Miracle (NT)," in D.N. Freedman et al. (eds), *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols. (Ney Work, 1992) 4.846–69.

[3] See e.g. V. Boudon-Millot and B. Pouderon (eds.), *Les pères de l'église face à la science médicale de leur temps* (Paris, 2005).

[4] For example, the works of compilers such as Oribiasius, Aetius, and Paul of Aegina; see e.g. V. Nutton, "From Galen to Alexander, Aspects of Medicine and Medical Practice in Late Antiquity," *DOP* 38 (1984) 1–14; P.J. van der Eijk, "Principles and Practices of Compilation and Abbreviation in the Medical 'Encyclopedias' of Late Antiquity," in M. Horster and C. Reitz (eds.), *Condensing Texts—Condensed Texts* (Stuttgart, 2010) 519–54.

transformation of ancient healing methods (for example, amulets appealing to the healing power of Jesus).[5] One of the most significant innovations of Late Antique Christianity was monasticism, and with it, the monasteries' internal health care system,[6] which also had an important impact on the outside world. From the fourth century onwards, monks took on the role of healers and miracle workers. They were responsible for copying hagiographical and apocryphal narratives concerning miraculous healing and for transmitting medical knowledge (pharmacological recipes copied in medical handbooks). Literary, paraliterary, and documentary sources also confirm that the monks were healing people from outside the monasteries through different methods (pharmacological remedies, amulets, prayers, and consecrated substances). By looking at the sources related to healing and diseases preserved in Coptic, this paper will investigate the role of monks and monasteries in healthcare and how it impacted their social interactions with the general population in Late Antique and Early Islamic Egypt.

*Preliminary Remarks: Monasticism and Healthcare*

In Late Antiquity, early Christian monastic communities developed an elaborate internal healthcare system, deeply rooted in their social organisation. Although both lavra and cenobitic monasticism had organised healthcare, I will focus here on the cenobitic system and its features, which included an important innovation: the infirmary.[7] In cenobitic monasteries, such as the Pachomian monasteries and those from Shenoute's White Monastery federation, healthcare was delivered through both inpatient and outpatient care. Inpatient care was provided at the infirmary, a specialised building with its administrative staff, equipped with beds, medical supplies, and its own refectory, where a dedicated corps of monastic healthcare providers (physicians, nurses, and stewards) offered care to the sick monks. For minor ailments and wounds, care was also provided on an outpatient basis, where the medical staff visited the sick monastics in their cells. The therapeutic methods of cenobitic healthcare included diagnosis procedure (with a taxonomy of ailments and demonic afflictions), nonmedical healing—such as prayer, exorcism, laying on of hands, application or consumption of consecrated substances—dietary care, hygiene, pharmacology, and even surgery (from monastic or lay physicians, hired from the outside).

The monastic internal healthcare system, and in particular the infirmary, was therefore in itself an innovation, but it also paved the way to another important development: the hospital. Many hypotheses have been put forward as to the origin of the hospital, some identifying other potential precursors such as the Asklepia or the military infirmaries, but the most likely scenario is that the hospital was born when the monastic healthcare system, with its commodities and services, was integrated into the pre-existing system of ecclesiastical charities.[8] From the beginning, care for the sick through charity was highly valued in Christian thought, but before the rise of monasticism, and later of the hospital, the Church services for the sick were limited, delivered mainly through

[5] On the appropriation of ancient magical practices (among other things for healing) by Christian in Late Antique Egypt, see R. Bélanger Sarrazin, "Appropriating the Gods: Magic in the Changing Contexts of Late Antique Egypt," in J.H.F. Dijkstra and A. Bendlin (eds), *Appropriation: A New Approach to Religion in Antiquity* (Cambridge, forthcoming).

[6] See in part. A.T. Crislip, *From Monastery to Hospital: Monasticism and the Transformation on Health Care in Late Antiquity* (Ann Arbor, 2005).

[7] For an overview of both lavra and cenobitic internal healthcare systems, see Crislip, *From Monastery to Hospital*, 9–38, and "Monastic Health Care and the Late Antique Hospital," in J. Chirban (ed.), *Holistic Healing in Byzantium*, (Brookline, 2010), 91–118. The following description is based on these discussions.

[8] For an overview of the different hypotheses and potential precursors to the Late Antique hospital, see Crislip, *From Monastery to Hospital*, 120–33.

orders of clerics who would visit the sick or care for them in churches, and directed especially towards the poor.[9]

Charity was also a monastic ideal, and with the development of monasticism, we saw the establishment of charitable institutions, within or affiliated with monasteries: the *ptōchotropheion* (for the poor), the *xenōn* (for the strangers), the *orphanotropheion* (for the orphans), the *keluphokomeion* (for the lepers), the *gerontokomeion* (for the elderly), and the *nosokomeion* (for the sick). Alternatively, cenobitic monasteries received visitors, poor, and sometimes sick people at the gatehouse. The care provided included housing, food, education for the orphans, and some forms of healthcare, even though the monastic infirmary itself was in theory restricted to the care for monastics.[10]

As a logical development, then, the innovation of the hospital was to combine the ideal of charity and the monastic internal healthcare system to provide a full range of medical and social services to the general population. The first such hospital is usually identified as the one founded by Basil of Caesarea in 370 CE (later called the Basileia), a complex of buildings including medical facilities, housing, refectories, and baths, as well as an affiliated monastery, which provided professional and charitable care for the poor, the orphans, the elderly, the strangers, the sick, and the lepers.[11] From there, hospitals took different forms, usually designated as *nosokomeia*, *xenōnes*, or *xenodocheia*, some founded by the Church, some affiliated to (and run by) monasteries, and others founded by the emperors or private individuals. Staff could comprise both monastic and/or lay caregivers, including trained physicians and nurses.

If we now turn to Late Antique Egypt, Greek and (to a lesser degree) Coptic documentary papyri—for example, letters, lists, accounts, receipts, and wills—are full of evidence for the existence of hospitals and other charitable healthcare institutions, mainly in large cities like Alexandria, Oxyrhynchus, Hermopolis, and Antinoopolis, but also in smaller villages.[12] However, these documents are often quite pragmatic and do not provide much information on the organisation of these institutions, their size, whether they were private or affiliated to monasteries or churches, or which kind of treatments were offered there. Archaeological evidence on Late Antique Egyptian hospitals is also nearly non-existent. Only one such institution, the infirmary (ⲡⲛⲁ [ⲛⲛⲣⲱⲙⲉ] ⲛⲉⲧⲱⲱⲛⲉ "the place for the sick") of the monastery of Apa Jeremias at Saqqara, was identified through excavations.[13] Several graffiti on the walls of the monastery mention the infirmary, and the vocation of the building itself is confirmed by an inscription with pharmacological recipes on one of its walls.[14] It is unclear whether this "place for the sick" was restricted to the care of sick monks, as early monastic infirmaries ought to be, or if people from the outside were also treated there. However, we know from the writings of Shenoute, who forbade monastic doctors from treating non-monastics, that this practice was rather common, even if controversial.[15]

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[9] See e.g. G.B. Ferngren, "Early Christianity as a Religion of Healing," *BHM* 66 (1992) 1–15 and *Medicine and Health Care in Early Christianity* (Baltimore, 2009) 113–23.

[10] On the charitable institutions affiliated to monasteries, see Crislip, *From Monastery to Hospital*, 133–37. On the care provided to outsiders in these institutions and at the monasteries' gatehouse, see note 31 below.

[11] See T.S. Miller, *The Birth of the Hospital in the Byzantine Empire* (Baltimore, 1985) 119–35; Crislip, *From Monastery to Hospital*, 120–33; Ferngren, *Medicine*, 124–30.

[12] See in part. P. Van Minnen, "Medical Care in Late Antiquity," *CM* 27 (1995) 153–69.

[13] See M. Rassart-Debergh, "La décoration picturale du monastère de Saqqara: Essai de Reconstruction," *Acta Ad Archaeologiam et Artium Historiam Pertinentia* 9 (1981) 9–124 (fig. 3); Crislip, *From Monastery to Hospital*, 11.

[14] Inscriptions mentioning the infirmary: J.E. Quibell, *Excavations at Saqqara, 1907–1908* (Cairo, 1909) 28 (nr. 2) and *Excavations at Saqqara, 1908–1909, 1909–1910.* (Cairo, 1912) 52 (nr. 179a–b) and 63 (nr. 207). Inscription with pharmacological recipes: Quibell, *Excavations at Saqqara, 1907–1908*, 54 (nr. 103); see below.

[15] Shenoute, *Canon* 9 (*CSCO* 73, p. 160–61).

If the impact of monasticism on the development of healthcare systems and institutions is thus undeniable, the practical implication of monks and monasteries in the market for healing of Late Antique and early Islamic Egypt is not so much apparent from the documentary and archaeological evidence for hospitals alone. Therefore, to gain more insights, we should concentrate on all sources concerning healing strategies, how those testify to the roles of monks and monasteries in healthcare, and how these responsibilities affected their social interactions with the outside world. In what follows, I will investigate Coptic sources from the fourth to fourteenth centuries, focusing on two aspects: 1) the monasteries as repositories of literature concerning diseases and healing; 2) the monasteries and monks as healthcare centers and providers of different healing strategies.

*Monasteries as Repository of Knowledge*

The monasteries of Late Antique and early Islamic Egypt, with their large libraries, were major repositories of knowledge on a vast array of topics. Most of the surviving manuscripts from these libraries are now scattered across the world, in museums and university collections, with only a small proportion still in situ.[16] The manuscripts contain mainly Christian literature—biblical, apocryphal, patristic, hagiographical, and historical works, canons and rules, acts of councils, and liturgies—but also works of classical authors (especially philosophical and medical treatises), poetry, as well as pharmacological and magical handbooks. As health has always been a primary concern of human beings, many of these works deal with illness and healing in some way. When searching for information on healing strategies in literary sources from monastic libraries, one can distinguish two categories of evidence: representations of illness, diseases, and healing strategies, and practical knowledge intended to be used to provide healthcare.

Representations of diseases and healing are frequent, for example, in biblical, apocryphal, and hagiographical works. The New Testament, which has been preserved (partly or completely) in many Coptic manuscripts from monastic contexts,[17] is full of healing miracles operated by Jesus: the healing and casting out of demons in the synagogue (Mt 4:23), the healing of Peter's mother-in-law (Mk 1:30–31; Mt 8:14–15), the bleeding woman (Lk 8:41–56), the blind (Mk 8:22–26, 10:46–52; Matt 9:27–34; Lk 18:35–43), the lepers (Matt 8:1–4; Lk 17:11–19), and so on.[18] Apocryphal works often take up the same biblical healing miracles, but sometimes also incorporate new ones. The apocryphal acts of the apostles, for example, emphasise the role of the apostles as healers in the name of Jesus.[19] One of the best-known apocryphal healing miracles is no doubt that of Abgar, king of Edessa, who was healed through a letter written by Jesus' "very own hand", promising health and protection to Abgar and his city.[20] The Abgar correspondence, comprising the letters exchanged between the king and Jesus, is one of the apocryphal works most attested in Coptic, with at least seven textual versions preserved in manuscripts from monasteries.[21]

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[16] For example, the manuscripts from Dayr al-Suryan are kept at the monastery, which is still operational today; see S.J. Davis and M.N. Swanson, *Catalogue of Coptic and Arabic Manuscripts in Dayr Al-Suryan*, 4 vols. (Leuven, 2020–2022).

[17] E.g., from the monastery of St. Macarius: Oxford Bodleian Lib, Huntington 17 (1174 CE; four Gospels). From the White monastery, 10th–11th cent., with the four Gospels: MONB.KB, KJ, KL, and LB.

[18] On healing miracles by Jesus in the New Testament, see Remus, *Jesus as Healer*, in part pp. 13–91.

[19] Remus, *Jesus as Healer*, 96–103; P. Chalmet, "Le pouvoir de guérir. Connaissances médicales et action thaumaturge sans les plus ancients actes apocryphes des Apôtres," in Boudon-Millot and Pouderon *Pères de l'église*, 193–215.

[20] For a good overview of the mentions and uses of the Abgar correspondence in Late Antique literature and magic, see J.G. Given, 'Utility and Variance in Late Antique Witnesses to the Abgar-Jesus Correspondence', *ARG* 17 (2016) 187–222.

[21] For the Abgar correspondence in Coptic, see the section "amulets" below.

Some apocryphal works also contain descriptions, prescriptions, or explanations regarding certain healing practices, such as amulets, pharmacological remedies, and prayers. For example, in Ps-Cyril of Jerusalem, *On the Honour of the Twenty-Four Presbyters*, preserved in four Coptic manuscripts, we learn that the names of the presbyters were revealed to man by Jesus, and, although we cannot utter them, we can write them down and use them as a ϥγλακτηριον ("protection" or "amulet") to heal every disease.[22] In the quest for healing Adam, the *Life of Adam and Eve* presents the fragrances of Paradise as the origin of remedies on earth.[23] These oils, incenses, and spices—a list of which appears in one of the Coptic fragments of the work[24]—correspond to ingredients found in Greek, Latin, and Coptic pharmacological treatises. In the *Mysteries of John*, extant in two Coptic manuscripts,[25] we hear again of pharmacology. In one dialogue (7.9–16), a cherub reveals to John that King Solomon had learned from demons all the medicines and herbs useful to heal diseases, which he then wrote on the walls of the house of God so that every sick person could enter the temple, find the appropriate medicine, and praise God. When king Solomon died, king Hezekiah smeared the walls of the temple with plaster, thinking that people should rather turn to God for healing. As he himself became sick, and could not find any remedies, he prayed to God, wondering if he had done the right thing. Eventually, the Lord answered his prayer and sent Isaiah the prophet with a cure for Hezekiah: a fig cake to smear on his body.

Apart from biblical and apocryphal works, representations of illness, diseases, and healing are also found in literary sources focusing on healing saints, especially lives, encomia, martyria, and miracula. Many healing saints were popular in Late Antique and early Islamic Egypt, with churches and sanctuaries dedicated to them, for example, Come and Damien, John and Cyr, Kollothos, Phoibamon, and Menas.[26] Some sanctuaries, which could house the saints' bodies or relics, were sites for healing cults, where the sick would go to seek treatment or advice from the saints. For example, the sanctuary of Kollouthos in Antinoopolis is well-known for its Coptic oracular questions, most of which concern diseases and requests regarding treatments.[27] An important literary dossier on Kollouthos has also been preserved in Coptic, with most manuscripts originating from monastic libraries: one martyrium extant in three different manuscripts, two encomia—one

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[22] Ps-Cyril of Jerusalem, *On the Honour of the Twenty-Four Presbyters* (cc0560), edited by A. Maresca in A. Campagnano, A. Maresca, and T. Orlandi, *Quattro omelie copte* (Milano, 1977) 83–104. The list of names is in Bodl. Lib., Clar. Press B 4.2, fr. 42, f. 81v; the prescription to use as a healing amulet in MONB.DC (IB.13.40r).

[23] *Life of Adam and Eve* (a.k.a. *Apocalypse of Moses*), 29, 40, and 43. On the oils and spices of Paradise as remedies, see R. Nvir, "The Aromatic Frangrances of Paradise in the Greek *Life of Adam and Eve* and the Christian Origin of the Composition," *Novum Testamentum* 46 (2004) 20–45; P.-B. Smit, "Incense Revisited: Reviewing the Evidence for Incense as a Clue to the Christian Provenance of the 'Greek Life of Adam and Eve,'" *Novum Testamentum* 46 (2004) 369–75; B. Caseau, "Parfum et guérison dans le christianisme ancien et byzantin: Des huiles parfumées des médecins au myron des saints byzantins," in Boudon-Millot and Pouderon, *Pères de l'église*, 141–91 at 154–55.

[24] Berlin P 3212 = *BKU* I 181. The fragment corresponds to the *Life of Adam and Eve*, 28–29, where 29 has a list of oil, spices and incenses from Paradise: Cinnamomum iners (ϧⲁⲥⲓⲁ), incense (ϣⲟⲩϩⲛⲓ), branch of […] (ϧⲗⲁⲧⲟⲥ), frankincense (ⲗⲓⲃⲁⲛⲟⲥ), and galbanum (ϧⲁⲗ[ⲃⲁ]ⲛⲉ).

[25] *Mysteries of John* (cc0041). For an introduction to the work (including information on the manuscripts, editions, and a bibliography) as well as a recent English translation, see H. Lundhaug and L. Abercrombie, "The Mysteries of John: An Introduction and Translation," in T. Burke (ed.), *New Testament Apocrypha: More Noncanonical Scriptures*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, 2020), 481–98.

[26] See e.g. A. Papaconstantinou, *Les cultes des saints en Égypte: Des Byzantins aux Abbassides* (Paris, 2001); M. Cappozzo, "Saints guerisseurs dans l'Égypte copte," *RSO* 85 (2012) 125–57; C. Cannuyer, "Des dieux aux saints guérisseurs dans l'Égypte pharaonique et copte," in R. Lebrun and A. Degrève (eds), *Deus Medicus* (Turnhout, 2014) 21–48.

[27] See in part. A. Delattre, "L'oracle de Kollouthos à Antinoé. Nouvelles perspectives," *SMSR* 79 (2013) 123–33.

by bishop Isaac of Antinoopolis and the other by bishop Phoibamon of Akhmim, each preserved in three manuscripts—as well as a collection of miracles, also preserved in three manuscripts.[28] All these works present the life of St. Kollouthos, focusing on his healing miracles.

The few examples provided above suffice to show that representations of illness and diseases, as well as healing narratives and miracles, were frequent in different genres of Christian literature, many of which are preserved in Coptic manuscripts from monastic libraries. The question is: How are these useful to the study of healthcare and healing strategies in Late Antique and early Islamic Egypt? As a rule, one should be careful not to take the information presented in these works at face value, as accurate representations of healing strategies—or, at the very least, one should compare the descriptions and narratives from biblical, apocryphal, and hagiographical works to data from archaeological, documentary, and paraliterary (pharmacological, magical, and liturgical) sources. Nevertheless, these Christian literary works become more interesting when we consider them as part of a rhetoric of healing, directed towards the general population.

The works preserved in the manuscripts from monastic libraries were not merely copied and kept there, they were also read, and not only by (or for) the monastics. The encomia on saints, for example, were read during the celebrations and the liturgy of those saints' feast days, which the general population could also attend.[29] The healing miracles served as justification for the cults of healing saints, some of which were affiliated to monasteries, and generated large amounts of offerings in kind, goods, and services. Furthermore, when combined with the Christian ideal of charity towards the poor and sick, these literary works, with tropes about the efficacious and miraculous healing of Jesus, the apostles, and the saints, served a financial purpose: to encourage almsgiving so as to help alleviate the suffering of the sick—which would benefit one's own salvation—and, for the wealthiest, to help fund hospitals and other charitable institutions.[30]

In summary, the monastic libraries of Late Antique and early Islamic Egypt were repositories of literary works incorporating discourses on illness, healing, and health that were part of the Christian rhetoric of salvation and charity. But at the same time, these libraries also comprised works with practical knowledge on diseases and healing methods, such as pharmacological, magical, and liturgical handbooks. These works, together with other archaeological, epigraphical, and papyrological sources, provide information on the healing strategies used in monasteries to offer healthcare to both monastics and the general population. In what follows, I will consider all sources for each healing strategy, focusing on those related in any way to monks and monasteries.

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[28] G. Schenke, *Das koptisch hagiographische Dossier des Heiligen Kolluthos, Arzt, Märtyrer und Wunderheiler* (Leuven, 2013).

[29] Hagiographic texts, liturgical manuscripts, and archeological evidence from the White Monastery suggest that the general population could visit the monastery for pilgrimages and at the occasion of saints' feasts days, when they could attend mass and participate to prayer. It seams, however, that these practices started at least a few centuries after the death of Shenoute, around the sixth or seventh century. For an overview of this evidence, see L. Blanke, "The Allure of the Saint: Late Antique Pilgrimage to the Monastery of St Shenoute," in T.M. Kristensen and W. Friese (eds), *Excavating Pilgrimage. Archaeological Approaches to Sacred Travel and Movement in the Ancient World* (New York, 2017), 203–23. See also H. Behlmer, "Visitors to Shenoute's Monastery," in D. Frankfurter (ed.), *Pilgrimage and Holy Space in Late Antique Egypt* (Leiden, 1998) 342–71; L.S.B. MacCoull, "Chant in Coptic Pilgrimage," in Frankfurter, *Pilgrimage*, 404–13; J.A. Timbie, "A Liturgical Procession in the Desert of Apa Shenoute," in Frankfurter, *Pilgrimage*, 415–41 and "Once More into the Desert of Apa Shenoute. Further Thoughts on BN 68," in G. Gabra (ed.), *Christianity and Monasticism in Upper Egypt* (Cairo, 2008) 169–78.

[30] See in part. N. Underwood, "Medicine, Money, and Christian Rhetoric: The Socio-Economic Dimensions of Healthcare in Late Antiquity," *Studies in Late Antiquity* 2 (2018) 342–84.

## Traditional medicine

A significant part of the healthcare provided in monasteries, whether in the monastic infirmary, affiliated hospital, or other charitable institutions, falls into the category of "traditional medicine", that is, the different types of care and treatments found in the medical treatises of classical Greek and Latin medical authors: hygiene, dietary care, surgery, and pharmacology. Among our best Coptic sources on medical care in monasteries, especially concerning the internal healthcare system, are the writings (*Rules*, *Instructions*, and *Letters*) of Pachomius and his successors (Horsiesios and Theodore), as well as the *Canons* of Shenoute.[31] From those, we know that basic healthcare—that is food (one meal per day), clean clothes, sheets, and a place to rest—was provided to the poor, orphans, travellers, and sick in the monasteries' gatehouses and their affiliated charitable institutions.[32] Similarly, dietary and hygienic care was provided to the monks at the infirmaries:

> Let no one who is not sick enter the infirmary. The one who falls sick shall be led by the master to the refectory for the sick. And if he needs a mantle or a tunic or anything else by way of covering or food, let the master himself get these from the ministers and give them to the sick brother.[33]

In monasteries, dietary care was of particular importance. Sick monks had access to a larger array of food and drinks, such as meat, wine, and fish broth, and were allowed to eat whenever it was medically appropriate.[34] More elaborate care was also available to sick monastics, for example, washing localised external injuries with water and bathing.[35] Furthermore, monastic medicine in the infirmaries included pharmacology (see below) and surgery. Minor surgeries, like cauterisation and bleeding, could be performed by the nursing staff, stewards, and regular monastics,[36] but there were also physicians (either resident within the monastery or hired from the outside) to perform more important procedures, like treating wounds and eye disorders:

> No one among us shall go to a doctor for him to treat them for a hidden illness within them, in their head or abdomen or bowels, except for this only, for them to be treated for a pustule or a "*deute*" or a tooth or an eye or any other external ailment.[37]

Other sources also attest to the presence of trained physicians in monasteries. A Coptic dedicatory inscription on a frieze from the monastery of Apa Jeremias at Saqqara, dated to the

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[31] For the writings of Pachomius and his successors, see L.Th. Lefort, *Oeuvres de S. Pachôme et de ses disciples*, 2 vols. (*CSCO* 159–160; Leuven, 1956); A. Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia*, 3 vols. (Kalamazoo, Mich., 1980). For Shenoute, see E. Amélineau, *Oeuvres de Schenoudi : Texte Copte et Traduction Française*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1911); J. Leipoldt and W.E. Crum, *Sinuthii Archimandritae Vita et Opera Omnia*, 2 vols. (*CSCO* 42, 73; Leuven, 1954–1955); B. Layton, *The Canons of Our Fathers: Monastic Rules of Shenoute* (Oxford, 2014). On methods of healthcare in Pachomius and Shenoute's monasteries, see esp. Crislip, *From Monastery to Hospital*, 28–38 and "Care for the Sick in Shenoute's Monasteries," in Gabra, *Christianity and Monasticism*, 21–30.

[32] See e.g. Pachomius, *Praecepta* 50–52; Shenoute, *Canon* 5 (*CSCO* 73, p. 53–54), *Canon* 7 (*CSCO* 42, p. 69–74); cf. B. Layton, "Social Structure and Food Consumption in an Early Christian Monastery: The Evidence of Shenoute's Canons and the White Monastery Federation A.D. 385–465," *Muséon* 115 (2002) 25–55 at 39–44; Crislip, *From Monastery to Hospital*, 133–37.

[33] Pachomius, *Praecepta* 42 (trans. Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia* II, 152). On dietary and hygienic measures in the monastic infirmaries, see also Pachomius, *Praecepta* 40–47; Shenoute, *Canon* 5 (*CSCO* 73, p. 56).

[34] Pachomius, *Praecepta* 45–46; Shenoute, *Canon* 5 (*CSCO* 73, p. 55; on food for the sick) and 9 (*CSCO* 73, p. 154–55; on eating when medically appropriate); cf. Layton "Social Structure" 38–39.

[35] Pachomius, *Praecepta* 92 (*CSCO* 159, p. 33).

[36] Pachomius, *Praecepta* 82; Shenoute, *Canon* 5 (*CSCO* 73, p. 73).

[37] Shenoute, *Canon* 5 (*CSCO* 73, p. 73; trans. Crislip, *From Monastery to Hospital*, 31).

seventh century, mentions "the master (ϧⲁϩ), Victor the physician (ϧⲁⲉⲓⲛ), and his son Shoi".[38] A Coptic letter on an ostracon from the monastery of Epiphanius at Thebes, sent by a monk to Apa Isaac, alludes to the visit of Daniel the physician (who could be either a monk himself, or a doctor from outside the monastery).[39] In a contract on an ostracon, a man calls himself "Johannes, physician and monk" (ⲓⲱϩⲁⲛⲛⲏⲥ ⲡϩⲓⲁⲧⲣ[ⲟⲥ] ⲁⲩⲱ ⲡⲙⲟⲛⲟϧ).[40] Shenoute also often refers to "the physicians among us" (ⲛⲥⲁⲓⲉⲛ ϩⲣⲁⲓ ⲛϩⲏⲧⲛ).[41] These monastic physicians received medical training and education either before or after they joined the monasteries, by apprenticing with a master physician (like Victor) or attending lectures on Greek medical classics.[42]

Additionally, works of classical medical authors (like Hippocrates, Dioscorides, and Galen), as well as those of later compilers and encyclopedists (like Oribiasius and Aetius), were certainly available in the libraries for the monastic physicians, nursing staff, and other monks to read.[43] However, no such works have been preserved in Coptic.[44] We do have references in Coptic to "doctors' books" (ϫⲱⲙⲉ ⲛⲓⲁⲧⲣⲟⲥ/ⲛⲥⲁⲉⲓⲛ), for example in a letter from a priest asking Apa Athanasios (a monk?) for a ϫⲱⲙⲉ ⲛⲓⲁⲧⲣⲟⲥ.[45] Nevertheless, it seems that these doctors' books were not translations of known medical works, but rather collections of pharmacological prescriptions.

## Pharmacology

Although it does belong to traditional medicine, pharmacology is discussed here separately as it occupies a special place on the border between medicine and magic. In Classical and Late Antiquity, both medical works (for example, Diosorides, *De Materia Medica*) and magical texts included pharmacological prescriptions. Modern scholarship has a tendency to study these separately, distinguishing between "medical" prescriptions—recipes and instructions for the creation and application of drugs—from "magical ones"—which also include the performance of other ritual actions (such as offerings, burning of incense, writing/wearing texts, speaking formulas, and so on).[46] However, the two types of prescriptions have much in common, for example, with regard to the illnesses treated and the ingredients used. Some texts particularly difficult to classify are even often included in both the "medical" and "magical" corpora.[47]

[38] Quibell, *Excavations at Saqqara, 1908–1909, 1909–1910*, 139 and pl. 43 (nr. 3).
[39] *P.Mon.Epiph.* 223 (seventh–eighth centuries).
[40] *O.Crum* 296 (6th–8th cent.).
[41] Shenoute, *Canon* 9 (*CSCO* 73, p. 160–61).
[42] I. Andorlini, "Teaching Medicine in Late Antiquity: Methods, Texts and Contexts," in P. Lendinara, L. Lazzari, and M. d'Aronco (eds), *Form and Content of Instruction in Anglo-Saxon England in the Light of Contemporary Manuscript Evidence. Papers Presented at the International Conference Udine, 6–8 April 2006* (Turnhout, 2007) 401–14.
[43] Crislip, *From Monastery to Hospital*, 35–36.
[44] Medical education in Late Antiquity was based on reading works from classical authors, especially the Greek works of Hippocrates and Galen. The people receiving this education were literate and, presumably, bilingual enough to be able to read those works in Greek, which would have rendered their translation into Coptic unnecessary; cf. Andorlini, "Teaching Medicine" 386–89.
[45] *O.Crum* 253; cf. T.S. Richter, "Medical Care on the Theban Westbank in Late Antiquity," *JCS* 20 (2018) 151–63 at 154–55.
[46] K. Dosoo, "Healing Traditions in Coptic Magical Texts," *TiC* 13 (2021) 44–94 at 61.
[47] For example, Michigan Ms. 136 is a fourth-century parchment codex with thirty-one healing prescriptions, recipes and rituals. Nineteen are strictly pharmacological, but others use invocations, prayers, and other ritual actions. The codex is usually included in both the corpora of "medical" and "magical" manuscripts, and was recently reedited as a codex with "medical and magical texts", by M. Zellmann-Rohrer and E.O.D. Love, *Traditions in Transmission: The Medical and Magical Texts of a Fourth-Century Greek and Coptic Codex (Michigan Ms. 136) in Context* (Berlin, 2022).

Furthermore, medical and magical pharmacological prescriptions have been preserved in Coptic manuscripts from monasteries, suggesting that both types of recipes were used as means of healing without distinction or discrimination.

The corpus of Coptic medical pharmacological texts today comprises over forty textual units of various lengths.[48] Most of them probably stem from monastic contexts, although this is confirmed for only a few manuscripts and inscriptions. For example, two inscriptions on the walls of monastic infirmaries preserve fragmentary pharmacological recipes: one from the monastery of Apa Thomas in Wadi Sarga (*P.Sarga* 21, seventh–eighth centuries), with remedies for fever and eye diseases, and the other from the monastery of Apa Jeremias at Saqqara, with several ingredients (charcoal, olive wood, salt, water) to use in remedies for various unidentified conditions.[49] Those recall the pharmacological inscriptions on the wall of the temple in the story from the *Mysteries of John* and remind us that biblical, apocryphal, and hagiographical narratives about healing could be inspired by real-world practices still taking place in the monasteries.

From the manuscripts, *P.Mon.Epiph.* 574 and 575 (seventh–eighth centuries), two ostraca from the monastery of Epiphanius at Thebes, preserve one prescription each (for "casting up blood" and for a burn). *O.Crum* 487 (seventh–eighth centuries), an ostracon from the monastery of Apa Phoibammon at Deir el-Bahari, preserves three recipes with lists of ingredients. *P.Sarga* 21 (seventh–eighth centuries), a fragmentary papyrus from the monastery of Apa Thomas, concerns illness of the belly and feet. P.Carlsberg 500 (sixth–seventh centuries),[50] a parchment codex from the monastery of Apa Jeremias, contained a pharmacological handbook from which twenty-three prescriptions survived. Those include recipes for people suffering from leukoma, worms, urinary problems, headaches, and diseases of the spleen and liver. A leaf from a parchment codex (ninth–tenth centuries), discovered at the monastery of St. Antony at the Red Sea, contains recipes and instructions for the treatment of various ailments (for example tumours and fevers).[51] Finally, Cod.Med.Copt. (ninth–eleventh centuries), a parchment codex from the White Monastery, preserves fifty-six prescriptions, many of which concern venereal ailments and diseases of the breast: "For a breast that is painful. Take mother's milk. Smear on it. It is also useful for testicles and penises that are painful".[52]

To the "purely" pharmacological evidence, we must also add magical texts with pharmacological prescriptions. The corpus of Coptic magical texts now comprises over five hundred manuscripts dated between the fourth and thirteen centuries.[53] In general, a text will be identified as magical based on the presence of certain textual, paratextual, or material features. The former includes specific vocabulary and expressions (for example, self-identification as an

[48] See esp. W.C. Till, *Die Arzneikunde Der Kopten* (Berlin, 1951); T.S. Richter, "Toward Sociohistorical Approach to the Corpus of Coptic Medical Texts," in M.F. Ayad (ed.), *Studies in Coptic Culture: Transmission and Interaction* (Cairo, 2016) 33–54; A. Grons, "The Question of the Effectiveness of Coptic Pharmacological Prescriptions," *TiC* 13 (2021) 122–53 and "Coptic Medical Texts: An Overview of the Corpus and the Present State of Research," in A. Guardasole, A. Ricciardetto, and V. Boudon-Millot (eds), *Médecine et Christianisme: Sources et Pratiques* (Leuven, 2022) 187–210.

[49] Quibell, *Excavations at Saqqara, 1907–1908*, 54 (nr. 103).

[50] Edited by W. Erichsen, "Aus Einem Koptischen Arzneibuch," *Acta Orientalia* 27 (1963) 23–45; T.S. Richter, "Neue koptische medizinische Rezepte," *ZÄS* 141 (2014) 154–94 at 183–89.

[51] CAT.NO. 137 (98:Ms4), edited by J. Blid et al., "Excavations at the Monastery of St Antony at the Red Sea," *Opuscula* 9 (2016) 133–215 at 191–93.

[52] Cod.Med.Copt., p. 214–15 (BnF 132.5.1) and 241–44 (P.Borg.Copt. 278), edited by Till, *Arzneikunde*, 112 and 135–37. Translation from Crislip, "Care for the Sick", 25.

[53] On the corpus of Coptic magical texts, see K. Dosoo, E.O.D. Love, and M. Preininger, "The Coptic Magical Papyri Project," *JCS* 24 (2022) 43–100.

"amulet"; exhortations like "now now, yea yea, quickly quickly"), formulas to be spoken (including adjuration formulas, invocations, prayers), "magical" elements (*voces magicae*, *charakteres*, and *figurae magicae*), as well as ritual instructions (offerings, burning, burying). The latter refers to any material indications that the manuscripts or objects bearing the texts were used for magical purposes (for example, traces of rolling or folding, containers, or strings suggesting that the manuscripts would have been worn as amulets).[54]

Within the corpus, a distinction is usually made between formularies (or handbooks), which contain one or more texts with ritual instructions for various purposes, and applied texts (like amulets and curse tablets), which are the finished products created during the rituals and are usually intended to be worn, placed or deposited in meaningful locations. Regarding types of rituals, healing represents the largest category, with approximately one-third of the texts of the corpus related to healing or protection.[55] These can, in turn, be divided into three general categories: scriptural amulets with biblical and apocryphal quotations, prayers and invocations to be recited aloud, and pharmacological prescriptions. This is a general and pragmatic classification, mostly for the purpose of this paper, and it must be stressed that one healing ritual can combine many elements, for example, a prayer, the creation of a pharmacological remedy, and other ritual actions. The first two categories (scriptural amulets, and prayers) will be discussed below, but the magical pharmacological prescriptions should be considered together with their "medical" counterparts.

In magical texts, pharmacological prescriptions are generally found in formularies. From the published and unpublished Coptic formularies, at least thirty-six include healing prescriptions with pharmacological recipes. Among those with known (or suspected) provenience, five are from monastic contexts. Naqlun N. 41/91 (fifth–sixth centuries), a fragmentary parchment formulary with one prescription to return an unfaithful wife to her husband followed by eight pharmacological prescriptions for various conditions (including migraine and fever), was found in hermitage 44 of the monastery of Archangel Gabriel at Naqlun.[56] Cairo JdE 45060 (sixth century), a papyrus rotulus formulary with seventeen prescriptions for various purposes, including two healing recipes, was found buried in the floor of a monk's cell in Dra' Abu el-Naga' near the monastery of Deir el-Bakhit.[57] P.Heid.Kopt. 685 and 686 (tenth century), two parchment codices copied by an individual identified as Deacon Johannes, servant of Michael, include long prayer texts (see below) followed by several prescriptions for healing and protection.[58] Both are palimpsests constructed from the

[54] For discussions on the definition of "magic" and "magical texts", see e.g. Y. Harari, "What Is a Magical Text? Methodological Reflections Aimed at Redefining Early Jewish Magic", in S. Shaked (ed.), *Officina Magica: Essays on the Practice of Magic in Antiquity* (Leiden, 2005) 91–124; J. Sørensen, "Magic Reconsidered: Towards a Scientifically Valid Concept of Magic", in B.-C. Otto and M. Stausberg (eds), *Defining Magic: A Reader* (London, 2014) 229–42; D. Frankfurter, "Ancient Magic in a New Key: Refining an Exotic Discipline in the History of Religions", in D. Frankfurter (ed.), *Guide to the Study of Ancient Magic* (Leiden, 2019) 3–20; J.E. Sanzo, "Deconstructing the Deconstructionists: A Response to Recent Criticisms of the Rubric 'Ancient Magic'", in A. Mastrocinque, J.E. Sanzo, and M. Scapini (eds), *Ancient Magic: Then and Now* (Stuttgart, 2020) 25–46.

[55] See in part. Dosoo, "Healing Traditions".

[56] Unpublished; cf. J. van der Vliet, "Les anges du soleil: À propos d'un texte magique copte récemment découvert à Deir en-Naqloun (45/95)," in N. Bosson (ed.), *Études Coptes VII : Neuième journée d'études* (Paris–Leuven, 2000) 319–37 at 320–21. Other discoveries from hermitage 44 include a bronze medical spoon, as well as a parchment leaf with a charm against fever, that could be recited or used to create amulets (Naqlun N. 93/78, 10th cent.; edited by E. Kalchenko and J. van der Vliet, "'The Burning Months of the Year,'" *JCS* 24 [2022] 203–41).

[57] Edited by A.M. Kropp, *Ausgewählte Koptische Zaubertexte*, 3 vols. (Bruxelles, 1930) 1.20–54 (nr. K).

[58] P.Heid.Kopt. 685 was edited by M. Meyer, *The Magical Book of Mary and the Angels (P. Heid. Inv. Kopt. 685): Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Heidelberg, 1996); P.Heid.Kopt. 686 by A.M. Kropp, *Der Lobpreis Des Erzengels Michael (Vormals P. Heidelberg Inv. Nr. 1686)* (Bruxelles, 1966). These are part of a collection of nine magical manuscripts, six of which were copied by deacon Johannes; see in part. I. Gardner and J. Johnston, "I, Deacon

same original codex, which, according to recent studies, probably belonged to a monastic library somewhere in the Fayum.[59] Deacon Johannes, as a member of that monastery, would have reused an old codex to produce magical manuscripts, some of which contain healing prayers and pharmacological prescriptions. Finally, a miscellaneous parchment codex from the White Monastery, which was rebound in modern times and comprises mostly liturgical material, has one leaf with medico-magical prescriptions, including a ritual for a woman in labour that uses fumigation and wine.[60]

These medical and magical pharmacological texts from monastic contexts were no doubt used by the lay and monastic medical staff to provide care for sick monks. There is also evidence that pharmacological treatments were offered to people from outside the monasteries. For example, in its fifth-century phase, hermitage 44 of the monastery of Archangel Gabriel at Naqlun had a room with benches accessible from the hermitage and the outside. Together with the finds from the hermitage (pharmacological texts and medical instruments), this suggest that its inhabitant offered healthcare services to the local population.[61] If we go back to Shenoute, we know he forbade monastic physicians from healing outsiders, either for a wage or free of charge, especially women (in general) and men suffering from genital diseases.[62] However, this rule paired with the pharmacological handbook and magical recipes from the White Monastery suggests that it was rather common to treat female and male outsiders for these types of conditions.[63] Furthermore, these are not the only practices Shenoute disapproved of: elsewhere, he also mentions (or rather complains about) monks providing other means of healing to people from the outside, like holy water and amulets.[64]

## Amulets

Amulets are, broadly defined, small objects with or without images and texts, intended to be worn or placed in significant locations, to protect people, animals, or places from evil, enemies, or diseases. When Shenoute mentions amulets, he refers to fox claws and crocodile teeth that people wore around their necks. In the context of Coptic magic, we are rather talking about textual amulets: small pieces of papyrus, parchment, paper, or ostraca, inscribed with a single text for one specific goal. Within the corpus of Coptic magical texts, over seventy amulets deal with healing or protection from diseases. Many of those are scriptural amulets, which contain mostly or solely citations of biblical or apocryphal texts. Among the scriptural passages used for healing purposes,

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Iohannes, Servant of Michael," *JCS* 21 (2019) 29–61; I. Gardner, "An Archive of Coptic Handbooks and Exemplars for the Making of Amulets and the Enacting of Ritual Power from the Tenth Century (P. Heid. Inv. Kopt. 680–683 and 685–686)," in J. Johnston and I. Gardner (eds), *Drawing Spirit: The Role of Images and Design in the Magical Practice of Late Antiquity* (Berlin, 2023) 73–134.

[59] I. Gardner, "The Heidelberg Magical Archive: A Discussion of Its Origins, Context and Purpose," in Johnston and Gardner, *Drawing Spirit*, 45–71.

[60] BnF Copte 129 (20) fol. 178, edited by M. Preininger, "BnF Copte 129 (20) fol. 178: Three Healing Prescriptions," *APF* 68 (2022) 344–57.

[61] For this discussion, see in part. T. Derda and J. Wegner, "The Naqlun Fathers and Their Business Affairs: Private Assets and Activities of the Monks in a Semi-Anchoritic Community in the Late Antique Fayum," in L. Blanke and J. Cromwell (eds), *Monastic Economies in Late Antique Egypt and Palestine* (Cambridge, 2023) 99–126 at 119.

[62] Shenoute, *Canon* 9 (*CSCO* 73, p. 160–61).

[63] The pharmacological handbook and magical recipes from the White Monastery are from a period long after the death of Shenoute, which may indicate that not all the rules and regulations outlined in Shenoute's *Canons* were regarded as equally important or valid at that later point in time. Conversely, the existence of such rules from (presumably) the hand of Shenoute also renders it likely that such practices were taking place also in Shenoute's day.

[64] Shenoute, Acephalous Works A 14; cf. Dosoo, "Healing Traditions" 51–52.

we find several of Jesus' healing miracles: when Christ healed every sickness and every infirmity in the synagogues (Mt 4:23), the healing of Peter's mother-in-law (Mt 8:14–15), and that of the bleeding woman (Lk 8:41–56).[65] However, the most attested healing miracle in Coptic amulets is that of King Abgar.

In Coptic, the Abgar correspondence appears in twenty-two manuscripts, of which twenty are of a magical nature. From these, one is a formulary with the whole correspondence (Leiden Anastasy 9, sixth century) and all the others are amulets, eighteen with the letter of Jesus, and one with the letter of Abgar.[66] The Coptic version of the letter of Jesus to Abgar contains a claim that it was written with his own hand, as well as a promise that "the place to which this manuscript will be affixed, no power of the Adversary nor any work of unclean spirits will be able to approach nor to pervert that place forever".[67] Through that promise, amulets bearing the letter of Jesus would transfer the healing and protection bestowed upon Abgar and his city to other people and places.

Interestingly, many of the Coptic versions of the Abgar correspondence are from monastic contexts. The two non-magical manuscripts are codices including other biblical and liturgical material: P.Mich. inv. 166 (sixth–ninth centuries) from the monastery of Apa Jeremias at Saqqara, and MSS 383 (1255 CE) from Dayr al-Suryan in Wadi al-Natrun. The magical formulary Leiden Anastasy 9—which also includes magical prayers and other elements to be used for the creation of amulets (the names of the seven sleepers of Ephesus, the list of the forty martyrs of Sebaste, and the incipits of the four Gospels and Psalm 90 [LXX])[68]—has an unknown provenience. However, many of its material and paratextual features point to a monastic origin: the Alexandrian majuscule hand, the pagination and quire numbers, the initial and closing titles, and, most of all, the beautiful leather cover.[69] This codex suggests that people from the monastery in which it was kept (medical staff, other monks, or laypeople) used the formulary to produce healing and protecting amulets, some with the Abgar correspondence.

Incidentally, three of the Coptic amulets with the letter of Jesus to Abgar, all ostraca, are from Theban monastic contexts: *P.Mon.Epiph.* 50 (sixth–eighth centuries) from the Monastery of Epiphanius, *O.Saint-Marc* 398 (seventh–eighth centuries) from the monastery of St. Mark, and O.Gurna Górecki 108 (seventh–eighth centuries) from Hermitage MMA 1152.[70] These amulets were probably both copied and used by the monks themselves, for healing or protection. Furthermore, the letter of Jesus is found as an inscription on the wall of an interior courtyard of the monastery of Apa Apollo at Bawit, there again probably as a protection against diseases and other dangers for the monastery and its inhabitants.[71]

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[65] For Jesus' healing miracles in Coptic magical texts, see in part. R. Bélanger Sarrazin, "Les appels au 'Jésus guérisseur' dans les formules iatromagiques coptes," in A. Boud'hors et al. (eds), *Études Coptes XVI. Dix-huitième Journée d'études* (Paris, 2020) 171–88.

[66] On the Abgar correspondence in Coptic magic, see Given, "Utility and Variance", 201–207; Bélanger Sarrazin, "Appels au 'Jésus guérisseur'", 191–93 and "Appropriating the Gods".

[67] This phrasing is found in the three codices (Leiden Anastasy 9, P.Mich. inv. 166, and Al-Suryan MSS 383) as well as five amulets: Vienna K 8636, P.Ryl.Copt.Suppl. 50, P.Mich. inv. 6213, Musée Bible et Orient inv. ÄT 2006.8, O. Gurna Górecki 108.

[68] See e.g., on the use of incipits in magical texts, J.E. Sanzo, *Scriptural Incipits on Amulets from Late Antique Egypt: Text, Typology, and Theory* (Tübingen, 2014).

[69] Edited by W. Pleyte and P. Boeser, *Manuscrits Coptes Du Musée d'antiquités Des Pays-Bas à Leide* (Leyde, 1897) 441–79. Images of the codex are available online at https://hdl.handle.net/21.12126/21319.

[70] Edited by A. Boud'hors, "The Coptic Ostraca of the Theban Hermitage MMA 1152. 3. Exercises (O Gurna Górecki 97–161)," *JJP* 49 (2019) 41–96 at 59–60.

[71] R.-G. Coquin, "Un nouveau témoin de la 'lettre (apocryphe) de Jésus à Abgar' (recension copte)," *BIFAO* 93 (1993) 173–78.

As for the other Coptic amulets, Vienna K 03151a, which bears the letter of Abgar to Jesus, is of particular interest.[72] Its provenience is unknown, but its paratextual features suggest a monastic origin. The hand is a nice and formal Alexandrian majuscule. At the bottom of the papyrus, after the end of the letter of Abgar, there are two lines with "X" signs in between, similar to the types of decorations used in literary manuscripts from monasteries to delimitate main texts from titles. Below that, we can read the remnants of a closing title: "Here is the letter" (ⲉⲓⲥ ⲧⲉⲡⲓⲥⲧⲟⲗⲏ). Though closing titles are not standard features of amulets, they are often found in literary manuscripts and, sometimes, in formularies. The formulary Leiden Anastasy 9 with the Abgar correspondence, which was certainly from a monastic context, has both an opening and a closing title for the letter of Jesus to Abgar. Therefore, it is probable that the amulet Vienna K 03151a with the letter of Abgar and the closing title was copied from a similar manuscript, perhaps kept in a monastic library. Then, it could have been used either by someone in the monastery or given (or sold) to someone from the outside.

In fact, we know from literary (e.g. Shenoute) and documentary sources that monks were providing amulets to people outside the monasteries. For example, letters by the eighth-century Theban monk Frange mention requests for creating amulets for livestock, which he supplied to the recipients of the letters.[73] This, paired with the evidence from the Coptic attestations of the Abgar correspondence, suggest that other amulets from unknown provenience—or discovered in non-monastic contexts—might originally have been produced in monastic contexts, and then made their way into the hands of outsiders. To fully comprehend the extent of the monastic involvement in the production and dissemination of healing amulets, we would require a detailed analysis of all Coptic amulets dealing with healing or protection from diseases, focusing not only on their content but especially on their paratextual and material features. However, such a study is beyond the scope of this paper.

## Prayers

As we continue our survey of healing strategies in monasteries, we come to another borderline category, this time between magic and liturgy: that of prayers. Like medical and magical pharmacological prescriptions, liturgical and magical prayers often have much in common, including their wording and structure—with, for example, an address to God, recollections of biblical events (*anamnesis*), supplications or requests for the sanctification of wine (*epiclesis*), and doxologies.[74] It is easier to make the distinction between liturgical and magical when we have context, for example for prayers included in official liturgical rites (like the anaphora). Similarly, a prayer will be termed "magical" if it contains some of the textual and paratextual elements mentioned earlier (like *voces magicae* and *charakteres*) or if it is included in a magical formulary, with other texts that present these elements. However, the line is sometimes blurry, especially with prayers addressing concrete individual concerns such as healing, and there is often no indication of whether the people using these prayers termed "liturgical" or "magical" by scholars would have

[72] Edited by V. Stegemann, *Die Koptischen Zaubertexte Der Sammlung Papyrus Erzherzog Rainer in Wien* (Heidelberg, 1934) 76–78. Images of the amulet are available online at https://digital.onb.ac.at/RepViewer/viewer.faces?doc=DOD_%2BZ12029280X&order=1&view=SINGLE.

[73] *O.Frange* 190 and 191 (8th cent.).

[74] On the structure and functions of *euchologion*-prayers, see esp. E. Afentoulidou "Zwischen Liturgie und Magie: Die byzantinischen Gebete zum Wochenbett", in C. Rapp, E. Schiffer, and E. Afentoulidou, "Das Wiener Euchologien-Projekt: Anlassgebete als Quelle zur Sozial- und Alltagsgeschichte. Drei Fallbeispiele", *Das Mittelalter. Perspektiven mediävistischer Forschung* 24 (2019) 337–69 and "Between Incantation and Prayer: Guardian Angels in Amulets, Euchologia, and Canonical Texts", in C. Rapp (ed.) *Studia Patristica CVIII.5. Euchologia* (Leuven, 2021) 77–87.

made these distinctions. Therefore, it is better to consider "prayer" as one category of healing strategies encompassing many types and forms.

First, healing prayers and ritual actions benefiting the sick were part of the official rites of Coptic liturgy in Late Antique and early Islamic Egypt. The most attested practice is the intercession for the sick, a prayer included among other places in the pre-anaphoral part of the Eucharistic liturgy and in morning and evening services.[75] For example, prayers for the sick appear among the intercessions in a Coptic witness to the morning offering of incense (eleventh–twelfth centuries),[76] as well as in the Coptic Bohairic recensions of the liturgy of St. Mark (thirteen–fourteenth centuries), in the pre-anaphoral and anaphoral intercessions.[77] The prayers consist of requests to God to heal the sick and drive away from them the spirit of sickness and all unclean spirits. The Coptic recessions of the anaphora of St. Mark also include a prayer for the consecration of bread and wine, which lists the healing of body and spirit as a benefit of communion.[78] Although these rites took place in churches all over Egypt, some of our evidence for the prayer for the sick and the healing properties of consecrated substances are found in Coptic manuscripts from monasteries. For example, the Great Euchologion of the White Monastery (end of the tenth century) has an intercession for the sick in an otherwise unidentified anaphora, as well as a prayer for the sanctification of the bread, which will become a "bread of healing". [79]

Apart from liturgical prayers, manuscripts from monastic contexts also contained "magical" prayers. Many of these manuscripts have been mentioned in the previous sections, as they are formularies which also contain pharmacological prescriptions and texts designed for the production of healing and protective amulets. The formulary Leiden Anastasy 9, with the Abgar correspondence, preserves three prayers: the *Prayer and Exorcism of Gregory* against evil and sickness, an unidentified prayer for protection against unclean spirits, and the *Prayer of Judas Cyriacus*, presumably for healing or protection, although the goal is not expressed. The two palimpsest codices copied by deacon Johannes preserve two of the best-known Coptic prayers for healing and protection against diseases and demons, the *Prayer of Mary at Bartos* in P.Heid.Kopt. 685 and the *Praise of Michael the Archangel* in P.Heid.Kopt. 686.[80] The same two prayers are found together in another palimpsest formulary, Collège de France 2 (eleventh century), whose undertext resembles those from the White Monastery.[81] Finally, a third version of the *Prayer of Mary* is preserved in a palimpsest manuscript (BL.Or. 4714, eleventh–thirteenth centuries), and both the undertext and the paratextual features of the upper text suggest a monastic origin.[82]

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[75] On healing practices in Christian liturgy, see in part. Á.T. Mihálykó, "Healing in Christian Liturgy in Late Antique Egypt: Sources and Perspectives," *TiC* 13 (2021) 154–94.

[76] Prague Or. Inst. MS I p. 3.12–6.14, edited by V. Hažmuková, "Miscellaneous Coptic Prayers," *ArchOrient* 8 (1936) 318–33.

[77] Published by F.E. Brightman, *Eastern Liturgies Being the Texts Original or Translated of the Principal Liturgies of the Church* (Oxford, 1886). For the Coptic manuscripts, see p. 112. For the pre-anaphoral intercession for the sick, see p. 157, and for the anaphroral intercession, p. 166.

[78] Brightman, *Eastern Liturgies*, 148.

[79] MONB.VE, edited by E. Lanne, *Le Grand Euchologe Du Monastère Blanc* (Turnhout, 1958). See in part. pp. 338 and 396–99.

[80] On the *Prayer of Mary at Bartos* in Coptic magic, see in part. Meyer, *Magical Book of Mary*, "The Prayer of Mary Who Disolves Chains in Coptic Magic and Religion," in P.A. Mirecki and M. Meyer (eds), *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World* (Leyde, 2002) 407–15, and "Mary Dissolving Chains in Coptic Museum Papyrus 4958 and Elsewhere," in M. Immerzeel and J. van der Vliet (eds), *Coptic Studies on the Threshold of a New Millennium*, 2 vols. (Leuven, 2004) 1.369–76.

[81] Unpublished; edition in preparation by K. Dosoo. For comments on the undertext, see A. Boud'hors and M. Tardieu, "Retour des parchemins coptes au Collège de France," *La Lettre du Collège de France* 18 (2006) 16.

[82] W.E. Crum, "A Coptic Palimpsest," *PSBA* 19 (1897) 210–18.

These healing prayers are all magical, as they include elements like adjuration formulas, *voces magicae*, and *charakteres*, but they are similar in structure and content to liturgical prayers, which is why some scholars have placed them in a category of "magical liturgies".[83] For example, the *Prayer of Mary* and the *Praise of Michael* include large sections with recollections of biblical events (*anamnesis*), as well as invocations addressed to God or his angels to come down and sanctify cups of water and oil (*epiclesis*). Here, the consecrated substances were used for anointing or washing the sick and providing them healing, rather than for consumption—like the consecrated bread and wine of the communion.

If both liturgical and magical prayers are indeed preserved in manuscripts from monastic contexts, we often lack information about how exactly these prayers were used within the monasteries. The recitation of intercessions for the sick and the Eucharist took place during the liturgical services celebrated in the monasteries. However, sick monks were not required to attend services.[84] The healthcare personnel in the infirmary and those responsible for visiting the sick monks in their cells probably also provided them with communion wine and bread and prayed for them. Prayer might also have been a way to provide care for the sick in the monasteries' gatehouse or affiliated charitable institutions, as some Church canons mention the use of prayer, together with the consumption or anointment with holy water or oil, as efficacious therapies for the sick who came to Church or were visited by members of the clergy.[85]

Despite our lack of concrete evidence for this, insights into how the liturgical prayers for the sick were used might be drawn from a small piece of parchment on which was copied the diaconal call for the intercession for the sick in the anaphora of St. Mark (P. CtYBR inv. 2124, eleventh–fourteenth centuries):

> Pray for our fathers and our brothers who have fallen sick with whatever sickness, whether in this place or in any (place) of Christ our God. Favour them all with health and the absence of sickness and let him forgive us our sins.[86]

The small format (approximately eleven by eight point five centimetres), as well as the creases (three horizontal and three vertical), indicate that the parchment was folded and worn as an amulet. Unfortunately, nothing expressly suggests that this amulet was produced or used by monks, although this would not be outside the realm of possibilities.[87] Nevertheless, this provides us with a great example of the overlap between liturgy and magic, and how healing liturgical prayers could be used following "magical" practices.

Even more information on how to use healing prayers may be gathered from the magical formularies. The *Prayer of Gregory* from the Leiden Anastasy 9 codex requests healing and protection for everyone who would recite the prayer or wear it as an amulet. The *Praise of Michael the Archangel* in P.Heid.Kopt. 686 is followed by twenty-three ritual prescriptions indicating how to use the prayer for various situations and health conditions. Many prescriptions require reciting the prayer, sometimes over water and oil for washing, anointing, or eating. Alternatively, one could

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[83] Cf. J. van der Vliet, "Christian Spells and Manuals from Egypt", Frankfurter, *Guide*, 322–50 at 340–43.
[84] Shenoute, *Canon* 5 (*CSCO* 73, p. 67); cf. Crislip, *From Monastery to Hospital*, 73–74.
[85] E.g. Hippolytus, *Canons* 21 and 24; Basil of Caesarea, *Canon* 34; cf. Mihálykó, "Healing in Christian Liturgy", 165–66 and 170.
[86] Edited by S. Emmel in M. Meyer and R. Smith, *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power* (Princeton, 1999) 355–56.
[87] See the translation by Emmel (Meyer and Smith, *Ancient Christian Magic*, 104) which has "this monastery" instead of "this place" for ⲡⲑⲱⲡⲟⲥ. The introduction also states that this amulet belonged to a monk (although without any supporting evidence).

copy the prayer on ostraca or pieces of parchment or papyrus and wear it as an amulet. By chance, we do have evidence for the amuletic use of these prayers. For example, an abbreviated version of the *Prayer of Mary at Bartos* was preserved on a small piece of papyrus that was then folded many times, suggesting it was worn as an amulet (*BKU* I 6, sixth–seventh centuries). This specific amulet cannot be linked to a monastic context, neither for its production nor use, but as shown earlier, we know from other sources that monks were involved in the production of amulets. It is therefore probable that healing prayers, liturgical or magical, were copied onto amulets by monks, to be used either by themselves or by outsiders.

Finally, the last place to look for information on the use of prayers for healing in monasteries is the Coptic documentary evidence from monastic archives and dossiers, which are full of requests for prayers, mostly for sick monks, but also for outsiders. Many letters from the archive of the eight-century monk Frange mention sick brothers (sometimes Frange himself), asking the recipients (mostly other monks) to pray for the sick.[88] Letters from the archives of the Monastery of Hathor (fourth century), in particular those of two monks, Paphnutius (*P.Lond.* 1923–29) and Nepheros (*P.Neph.*), show how monastics were regarded by outsiders as religious healers. For example, one of Paphnutius' followers who had fallen ill, a non-monastic man called Heraclides, wrote to the monk asking for his prayers and for some oil—presumably consecrated oil for healing.[89] Similarly, letters from the Monastery of Epiphanius include requests from outsiders, asking the monks to pray for them or members of their families who were sick.[90]

Most of these letters do not mention any kind of payment in exchange for the prayers, although many of the outsiders reaching out to monks for healing entertained some kind of commercial or economic relationship with them. For example, in one of the letters from the Monastery of Epiphanius (*P.Mon.Epiph.* 329), after the request for prayer, the sender inquires whether Epiphanius still needs sesame, and if so, he is to send money to pay for it. Furthermore, some documents indicate that payment, or at least exchange of goods, was expected in return for the monks' prayers. For example, *O.Frange* 84, a letter from the monks Frange and Moses to a man named Mark, requests that Mark bring them oil for Lent, in exchange for them (successfully) praying for him to receive a son. Altogether, this evidence shows not only that monks were considered as healthcare providers by the surrounding communities, but also that healing, especially through religious means like amulets and prayers, played its part in the social and economic interactions between monks and outsiders.

## Healing Practices in Saints' Shrines

To conclude this survey of healing strategies, I will briefly address healing practices that took place in healing shrines, some of which were affiliated with monasteries. Shrines dedicated to healing saints were numerous in Late Antique and Early Islamic Egypt and many of them were sites of healing cults. The sanctuary of St. Kollouthos at Antinoopolis is well-known for its Coptic oracular questions, many of which concern healing. The sanctuary also had bath installations for the sick.[91] The shrine of Saints Cyrus and John at Menouthis was a site for incubation, where the sick could

[88] E.g. *O.Frange* 635, 639, 640, 664.

[89] *P.Lond.* VI 1928. On this letter and others from the archives, see A.T. Crislip, *Thorns in the Flesh: Illness and Sanctity in Late Ancient Christianity* (Philadelphia, 2013) 41–44.

[90] E.g. *P.Mon.Epiph.* 329 and 359.

[91] See P. Grossmann, "Antinoopolis. The Area of St. Colluthos in the North Necropolis," in *Antinoupolis II,* ed. R. Pintaudi (Florence, 2004) 241–300; Delattre, "L'oracle de Kollouthos".

sleep and receive healing dreams[92]. The sanctuary of St. Menas at Abû Mînâ produced pilgrim flasks decorated with images of the saint, which were filled with "martyr oil"—oil that was poured into the reliquary and gained the healing power of the relics by coming onto contact with them.[93]

At first glance, monasteries and healing shrines might seem like competitors in the healing market. However, that was not necessarily the case. As mentioned previously, monastic libraries were the repositories of literature about the saints, their lives, and their miracles. These were read during ceremonies for their feast days—which the general population could attend—and served to justify the healing cults. In some cases, monasteries and healing shrines entertained even closer relationships.

Of particular interest here is a group of eighth-century Coptic legal documents addressed to the monastery of Apa Phoibamon at the mountain of Jeme.[94] The documents report donations of male children, handed over by their parents to the monastery as lifelong servants, in return for healing miracles granted by Phoibamon, the monastery's patron saint, in his local shrine.[95] Sometimes, the contracts also mention offerings or yearly payments to the monastery. The documents further imply that the healing shrine was located at the monastery itself and that the children were to serve in the shrine, where they facilitated the healing process by tending to the sanctuary and its patients. Not much is said about the miracles themselves or the healing techniques: there are mentions of water from the holy basins and oil from the lamps (both used either for washing or consumption), as well as prayers, or even the mere presence of the child in the shrine. In addition, common healing practices known from other sanctuaries, such as incubation, might have been used. In summary, this is the perfect example of a monastery and its staff offering various means of healing to the general population, in return for which they received (and perhaps expected) payments in money, goods, or services.

### *Conclusion: Monasteries, the Healing Market, and Socio-Economic Relations*

The evidence outlined above shows how monasteries and monks were involved in the healing market of Late Antique and early Islamic Egypt. The monasteries were healthcare centers that provided care both to monks (at the infirmary and in their cells) and the general population, in particular the poor, strangers, elderly, and orphans, either at the monasteries' gatehouses, affiliated hospitals, or charitable institutions, or even at an affiliated healing shrine. In addition, some healing methods could be delivered through correspondence with the population of nearby villages. The healthcare providers were specialised corps of monks, including physicians, nurses, and stewards, but also regular monks, and sometimes laypeople. If physicians were in theory not allowed to treat outsiders—although the existence of those rules suggests they did—the other healthcare providers tended to both monks and the general population.

A study of the literary, paraliterary, and documentary evidence from monasteries provides us with a good, comprehensive portrait of the various healing strategies used in monasteries and their affiliated institutions. Basic care comprised dietary and hygienic care—food, water for

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[92] See D. Montserrat, "Pilgrimage to the Shrine of SS Cyrus and John at Menouthis in Late Antiquity," in Frankfurter, *Pilgrimage*, 257–79; J. Gascou, "Les origines du culte des saints Cyr et jean," *AB* 125 (2007) 241–81.

[93] See P. Grossmann, "The Pilgrimage Center of Abû Mînâ," in Frankfurter, *Pilgrimage*, 281–302; M. Gilli, *Le Ampolle Di San Mena. Religiosità, Cultura Materiale e Sistema Produttivo* (Rome, 2002).

[94] On which see in part. G. Schenke, "The Healing Shrines of St. Phoibamon: Evidence of Cult Activity in Coptic Legal Documents," *ZAC* 20 (2016) 496–523.

[95] *P.KRU* 78–103, plus 104, which is a self-donation document of a man named Petronios. Eighteen documents specifically mention healing as the reason for the donation: *P.KRU* 78–81, 84–86, 88–89, 91, 93, 96–98, 100, 102–104.

washing/bathing, clean clothes—as well as a bed, or at least a place to rest. Considering the number of sources from monastic contexts (inscriptions and manuscripts), pharmacology seems to have been a common means of healing. The preparation and application of drugs were sometimes paired with other ritual actions, like burning incense and reciting formulas. Among the more "religious" means of healing, we know that monks produced amulets, both for themselves and for outsiders. The consumption or anointment with consecrated substances (either the communion bread and wine, holy water, or even oil which had been in contact with saints' relics) was also common. Furthermore, practices such as oracular questions and incubations could take place in healing saints' shrines that were affiliated with, or part of, the monasteries. However, the most common religious healing strategy was probably prayer, both communal and individual, liturgical and magical. Intercessions for the sick were part of the liturgical services, monks prayed for their sick brothers as well as for outsiders, who often requested prayers through letters. They could even copy a liturgical or magical prayer on a potsherd or small piece of parchment and wear it as an amulet.

Two important conclusions can be drawn from this material. First, even though the official discourses—the rules, canons and other writings from the Church Fathers—prohibited certain practices that would belong to the category of "magic" (like amulets), in practice, it appears that there was no discrimination or even distinction (at the "appropriateness" level) between the different healing strategies. Second, despite the ideal of charity, healing was very much at the center of the socioeconomic relations between monasteries and the outside world. There was an important rhetoric of healing, witnessed by the works preserved in monastic libraries, designed to justify healing practices and encourage rich people to fund hospitals by giving alms. If healthcare for outsiders in the monasteries and affiliated institutions was provided out of charity, we also have sources suggesting that monks were accepting or even requesting payments, either in money (forbidden by Shenoute), exchange of goods or services (attested in monastic correspondence), or even child donation.

Finally, if we already have a considerable number of sources pertaining to healing with known or suspected monastic provenience, there are probably much more, especially among the paraliterary sources—pharmacological, magical, and liturgical texts. Until now, studies of this material have mostly focused on its textual content. A detailed study of these manuscripts, in particular their paratextual and material features, which could tell us more about where (and by whom) they were produced and used—in monastic contexts or elsewhere—thus constitute an important desideratum.