

## INFORMATION TO USERS

The most advanced technology has been used to photograph and reproduce this manuscript from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book. These are also available as one exposure on a standard 35mm slide or as a 17" x 23" black and white photographic print for an additional charge.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

# U·M·I

University Microfilms International  
A Bell & Howell Information Company  
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA  
313/761-4700 800/521-0600





Order Number 8920380

**The Melitian schism: Coptic Christianity and the Egyptian church**

Carroll, Scott T., Ph.D.

Miami University, 1989

Copyright ©1989 by Carroll, Scott T. All rights reserved.

**U·M·I**  
300 N. Zeeb Rd.  
Ann Arbor, MI 48106

---



THE MELITIAN SCHISM: COPTIC  
CHRISTIANITY AND THE EGYPTIAN CHURCH

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty of  
Miami University in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Department of History

by

Scott T. Carroll  
Miami University  
Oxford, Ohio

1989

---

MIAMI UNIVERSITY - THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
CERTIFICATE FOR APPROVING THE DISSERTATION

We hereby approve the Dissertation

of

Scott T. Carroll

Candidate for the Degree:

Doctor of Philosophy

Edwin Domaschi

Director

Maynard W. Swanson

Reader

Chickie Kierma Gledy

Reader

\_\_\_\_\_  
Reader

\_\_\_\_\_  
Howell B. Bortis  
Graduate School Representative

Copyright  
Scott T. Carroll  
1989

---

## ABSTRACT

### THE MELITIAN SCHISM: COPTIC CHRISTIANITY AND THE EGYPTIAN CHURCH

by Scott T. Carroll

The Melitian movement was a Coptic sect that emerged out of the Diocletianic persecution. The movement was named after its founder, Melitius of Lycopolis. The Melitians' protest was similar to the protest of the Novatianists and the Donatists. Each opposed, in varying degrees, the readmittance of the lapsed with the church. The Melitians also placed an emphasis on the virtues of suffering for the faith and on martyrdom. Because the Melitians desired to have a pure church and because they emphasized suffering for Christianity rather than capitulating to the persecutors, I have characterized the group as "puritanical rigorists."

The Melitians' historical origin, growth and eventual demise is investigated in this dissertation. The movement grew rapidly between the Edict of Toleration and the Council of Nicaea and came into repeated conflicts with the Alexandrian patriarchs at that time. Unsuccessful attempts were made to reconcile the Melitians back into the Alexandrian church. After the rise of Athanasius, the Melitians joined forces with the Arians to resist the expanding authority and centralized power of the Alexandrian bishop. The movement's machinations led ultimately to the first deportation of Athanasius in 335, but the Melitians' over-eagerness to control places of authority in

the Egyptian church resulted in the banishment of their own leadership. The Melitians are found later primarily in monastic sources. In the mid-eighth century over three thousand Melitians were exterminated bringing the schism forcibly to a close.

In addition to delineating the chronological turning points of the rise and eventual fall of the Melitians, this study attempts to reconstruct the Melitians' intriguing beliefs and practices. The Melitians had one of the earliest chains of monastic communities, wrote and distributed apocryphal books, sold relics, had unusual eucharistic ceremonies, and were among the first to teach that the Virgin Mary was assumed bodily into heaven. The schism's geographical distribution, ethnicity and religious ideas are used to prove that the group was an indigenous Coptic Christian movement.

This dissertation is an analysis of the Melitian schism and its relationship to the fourth-century Egyptian Church. The study attempts to place the Melitian schism into the religious, political, and social context of fourth-century Egypt. The Melitian conflict with Athanasius and their union with the Arians is also studied. Finally, the Melitian's intriguing beliefs and practices are reconstructed and compared with the emerging consensus of the church. This study is an attempt to place the Melitians back into the history of the early church.

---

I would like to dedicate this work  
to my loving wife Denise  
and to my two understanding children  
Benjamin and Barbara Joy.

---



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE.....	vii-viii
Chapter	
I. RELIGION IN FOURTH-CENTURY EGYPT.....	1-31
Political Context	
Religious Context	
Conclusions	
II. THE FIRST STAGE OF MELITIUS' PROTEST:	
A.D. 302-305.....	32-63
An Outline of the Great Persecution: A.D.	
303-305	
The Great Persecution in Egypt: A.D. 303-305	
Justification for Flight	
The Rise of Melitius	
Conclusions	
III. THE SECOND STAGE OF THE MELITIAN SCHISM:	
A.D. 306-313.....	64-97
Peter of Alexandria on the Lapsed	
Melitius on the Lapsed	
Revival of Persecution A.D. 306-313	
The Fate of Peter and Melitius	
Conclusions	
IV. ALEXDRIAN EPISCOPAL SUCCESSION AND THE	
MELITIAN SCHISM.....	98-120
Episcopal Succession in Alexandria	
Alexandrian Episcopal Authority Through	

A.D. 328  
 Melitian Opposition to the Succession of  
 Athanasius  
 Conclusions

V. THE STRUGGLE FOR COPTIC CHRISTIAN  
 ALLEGIANCE.....121-162

Socio-Economic Oppression of the Copts  
 Melitian Machinations A.D. 328-335  
 Athanasius' Coptic Campaign  
 Conclusions

VI. MELITIANISM: BELIEF AND PRACTICE.....163-187

The Melitian View of God  
 The Melitian View of the Church  
 The Melitian Eucharistic Practice  
 The Melitian View of the Virgin Mary  
 The Melitian Monastic System  
 Conclusions

.....

APPENDICES.....188-214

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY.....215-221

## ABBREVIATIONS

<u>AJAH</u>	<u>American Journal of Ancient History.</u>
<u>AnBol</u>	<u>Analecta Bollandiana.</u>
<u>ANF</u>	<u>Ante-Nicene Fathers.</u>
<u>ANRW</u>	<u>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt</u> , ed. H. Temporini and W. Hasse (Berlin).
<u>ASAE</u>	<u>Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypt.</u>
<u>BASP</u>	<u>Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists.</u>
<u>BSAC</u>	<u>Bulletin de la Société d'Archéologie Copte.</u>
<u>CistSS</u>	<u>Cistercian Studies Series.</u>
<u>CSCO</u>	<u>Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium.</u>
<u>DACL</u>	<u>Dictionnaire d'Archéologie Chrétienne et de Liturgie</u> , ed. F. Cabrol and H. Leclercq (Paris, 1907-53).
<u>DCB</u>	<u>Dictionary of Christian Biography</u> , ed. W. Smith and H. Wace (London, 1877).
<u>GCS</u>	<u>Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte</u> (Leipzig and Berlin, 1897-).
<u>HTR</u>	<u>Harvard Theological Review.</u>
<u>JAC</u>	<u>Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum.</u>
<u>JEJ</u>	<u>Journal of Egyptian Archaeology.</u>
<u>JEH</u>	<u>Journal of Ecclesiastical History.</u>
<u>JRS</u>	<u>Journal of Roman Studies.</u>
<u>JTS</u>	<u>Journal of Theological Studies.</u>
<u>NPNF</u>	<u>Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers.</u>
<u>OrChr</u>	<u>Oriens Christianus.</u>
<u>PG</u>	<u>Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Series Graeca</u> , ed. J. P. Migne (Paris, 1857-1904).
<u>PL</u>	<u>Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Series Latina</u> , ed. J. P. Migne (Paris, 1884-1904; Suppl. 1958-).
<u>RAC</u>	<u>Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum</u> , ed. T. Klauser (Stuttgart, 1950).
<u>TU</u>	<u>Texte und Untersuchungen.</u>
<u>VC</u>	<u>Vigiliae Christianae.</u>
<u>YCS</u>	<u>Yale Classical Studies.</u>
<u>ZAS</u>	<u>Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde.</u>
<u>ZNW</u>	<u>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde des Urchristentums.</u>

## PREFACE

The Melitian movement was a Coptic sect that emerged out of the Diocletianic persecution. The movement was named after its founder, Melitius of Lycopolis. The Melitians' protest was similar to the protest of the Novatianists and the Donatists. Each opposed, in varying degrees, the readmittance of the lapsed with the church. The Melitians also placed an emphasis on the virtues of suffering for the faith and on martyrdom. Because the Melitians desired to have a pure church and because they emphasized suffering for Christianity rather than capitulating to the persecutors, I have characterized the group as "puritanical rigorists."

The Melitian schism grew rapidly between the Edict of Toleration and the Council of Nicaea and came into repeated conflicts with the Alexandrian patriarchs at that time. Unsuccessful attempts were made to reconcile the Melitians back into the Alexandrian church. After the rise of Athanasius, the Melitians joined forces with the Arians to resist the expanding authority and centralized power of the Alexandrian bishop. The movement's machinations led ultimately to the first deportation of Athanasius in 335, but the Melitians' over-eagerness to control places of authority in the Egyptian church resulted in the banishment of their own leadership.

Despite the popularity and significance of the Melitian schism in early Egyptian church history, the movement has never been studied thoroughly. No comprehensive

study has been made of the movement, and most of the existing studies that consider the Melitians focus on Bishop Peter of Alexandria, Athanasius or Arius and are only tangentially interested in the Melitian schism. Unfortunately these studies only provide a brief history of the movement during its formative stages from 303 to approximately 340. All of the existing studies on the Melitians are myopic, dated and lack the comprehensive treatment that the movement deserves.

There are several explanations for this lack of scholarship on the Melitian schism. First, a priority has been placed on Latin and Greek Christianity. Only recently has attention been directed to the Coptic Christianity let alone a Coptic Christian schism. Second, papyrological evidence about the Melitians has only recently come to light, in particular data contained in the vast array of monastic fragments. Much of this evidence has not been analyzed with respect to the Melitians. Finally, the extant evidence about the Melitians is linguistically diverse and varies in reliability and require careful critical analysis.

This monograph attempts to place the Melitian schism into the religious, political, and social context of fourth-century Egypt. The movement's historical origin, growth and eventual demise is analyzed. The Melitians' conflicts with the Alexandrian Patriarchate and their union with the Arians is also studied. Finally, the Melitian's intriguing beliefs and practices are reconstructed and compared with the emerging consensus of the church. This study is an attempt to place the Melitians back into the history of the early church.

## CHAPTER ONE

### RELIGION IN FOURTH-CENTURY EGYPT

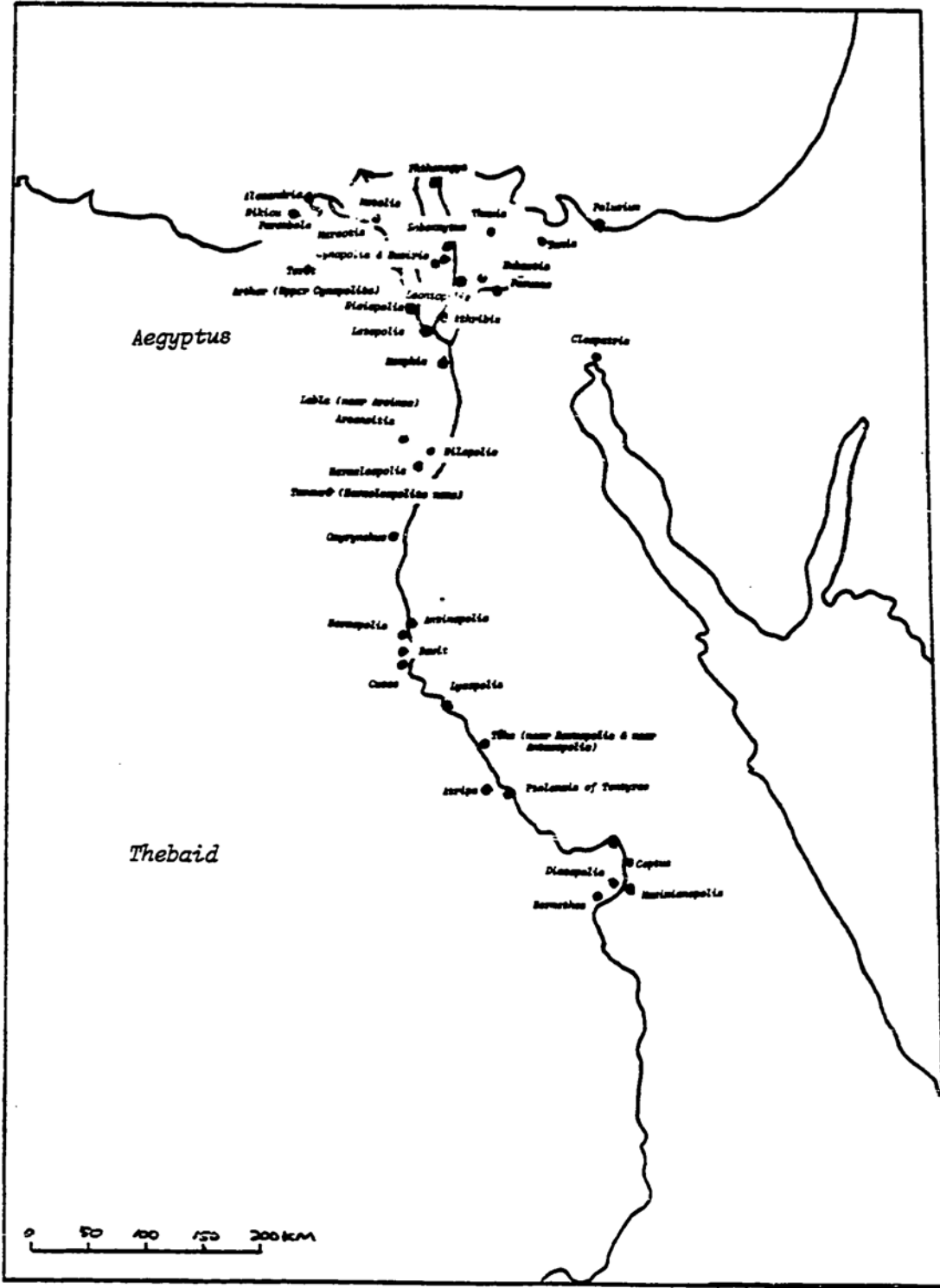
The fourth century in Egypt is one of the most crucial epochs in church history. The study of fourth-century Egyptian Christianity is essential for a more accurate understanding of key theological and ecclesiastical developments in the history of the church. Efforts to publish fourth-century Egyptian papyri have advanced our knowledge of early church history beyond the limited and often myopic patristic sources. By piecing together the fragmentary evidence we can begin to reconstruct a clearer picture of the religious and social context of this significant century.

The Melitians were a significant, yet little-known group that thrived in the fourth-century Egyptian Church.<sup>1</sup> This study is intended to draw together all that is known about Melitian history and practices and to place the movement into the broader

---

<sup>1</sup> The correct form of the name is Melitian rather than Meletian, as it is normally found. See H. I. Bell and W. E. Crum eds., Jews and Christians in Egypt (London: The British Museum, 1924; repr. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1972), p. 39, n. 1; Edouard Schwartz, "Zur Geschichte des Athanasius," Nachrichten von der Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen (Phil.-hist.-Klasse) (1905): 164; and Tim Vivian, St. Peter of Alexandria: Bishop and Martyr (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), p. 16, n. 36. The Melitian schism in Egypt should be distinguished from the Meletian schism at Antioch which was not connected with the Egyptian movement.

### MAP 1



picture of Egyptian Christianity and the history of the church. The goal of this chapter is to provide an overview of the complexed religious milieu from which the Melitian schism emerged in the fourth century.

### Political Context<sup>2</sup>

The Emperor Diocletian (284-305) ushered in the fourth century with policies that would greatly affect Egypt.<sup>3</sup> Attempting to salvage the Roman Empire from what appeared to be the brink of political and economic disaster, Diocletian instituted wide-sweeping administrative, economic and religious reforms that would indelibly shape the events of fourth-century Egypt. Egypt enjoyed a privileged status in the Roman Empire until 296 when the Egyptian prefect Lucius Domitius Domentianus rebelled against Rome. The rebellion was crushed after a long siege of Alexandria, directed by the Emperor Diocletian himself. The Imperial government subsequently divided Egypt into separate administrative provinces (See Map 1).<sup>4</sup> Aegyptus Jova (in the western

---

<sup>2</sup> For a general historical overview of Egyptian political history in the late Roman Empire consult H. I. Bell, Egypt From Alexander the Great to the Arab Conquest (London: Oxford University Press, 1948); A. K. Bowman, Egypt after the Pharaohs (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); A. C. Johnson, Roman Egypt to the Reign of Diocletian, Vol 2 of An Economic Survey of Ancient Rome, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1936); A. H. M. Jones, The Later Roman Empire, 284-602 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964); N. Lewis, Life in Egypt Under Roman Rule (London: Oxford University Press, 1983); J. G. Milne, A History of Egypt under Roman Rule (3d ed; London: Methuen, 1924); and Cambridge Ancient History (A. E. Austin, F. W. Walbank, editors, 2d ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), Vol. 7, pt. 1, see especially the bibliography pp. 554-74.

<sup>3</sup> Diocletian's economic policies are examined closely in Chapter Five and his persecution of the church is examined in Chapter Two.

<sup>4</sup> Diocletian divided Egypt into two administrative units (Aegyptus and the Thebaid) in 295. Between 314/5-325 Aegyptus was subdivided into Aegyptus Herculia and Aegyptus Iovia and the imperial administration divided Libya into two parts. Between 325-341 Aegyptus Herculia and Aegyptus Iovia were reunited as Aegyptus again. From 341 Egypt was successively subdivided so that by 560 Egypt was



Delta) was placed under the authority of a prefect. Aegyptus Herculia (in the eastern Delta and in Middle Egypt) and the Thebaid were both placed under the rule of separate praesides. As in other provinces, the Egyptian territories were also subdivided at the district and municipal levels. This administrative reform was designed to facilitate a tightly regulated and systematic collection of taxes. Diocletian's revival of the Roman state religion and the subsequent persecution of Christianity constituted a capstone in the emperor's attempt to reunify and revitalize the decaying Roman state.

The envisioned stability promised by the Diocletianic state was short lived. From 305 to 324, political intrigue and machination led to civil war and social strife. In the end, Constantine emerged as the new head of state and the champion of a new state religion—Christianity. Aside from the enforced resurgence of paganism during the reign of the Emperor Julian "the Apostate" (361- 3), Christianity remained the officially favored religion of the Roman Empire. Christianity, however, could not stem the tide of economic and political woes faced by the Empire. Internal, economic upheaval, coupled with the external pressures of barbarian invasions, culminated ultimately in the administrative collapse of the Roman Empire at the beginning of the fifth century.

### Religious Context<sup>5</sup>

#### Fourth-century Egyptian Christianity

---

organized into seven administrative units (Aegyptus I, Aegyptus II, Augustamnica I, Augustamnica II, Arcadia, Lower Thebaid and Upper Thebaid).

<sup>5</sup> See Birger A. Pearson and James E. Goehring, eds., The Roots of Egyptian Christianity (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986); and Edward Rochie Hardy, Christian Egypt: Church and People (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952).

The religious history of fourth-century Egypt is multifaceted and extremely complex. A principal problem is the question of the rate of Egypt's conversion to Christianity in the fourth century. This is a problem because evidence for the rate of Christianization varies depending on the location. Both the diffusion of Christianity and the extant evidence for conversion varies from region to region in Egypt. By the close of the fourth century, for example, Oxyrhynchus was entirely Christian while the villages around Hermopolis and Antinoopolis were predominantly pagan.<sup>6</sup> It would be reckless to presuppose that Egypt was entirely Christianized during the doctrinally inchoative fourth century.

Evidence drawn from the papyri, if used cautiously, gives an indication for the rate of conversion to Christianity. Looking for evidence of Christianity in papyri alone, however, may expect too much from the papyrological sources. Apart from evidence of Christian names, most papyri were business records that could not be expected to supply religious evidence. Judging from the papyri, only a small minority of Egyptians were Christian during the early fourth century.<sup>7</sup> A recent study, relying on evidence of Christian nomenclature, estimated that between 318 and 330 fifty percent of Egypt

---

<sup>6</sup> The use of the term "pagan" here and throughout the monograph is not intended to be a Christian pejorative but rather to be a descriptive name for ancient non-Judaeo-Christian or Mohammedan religious systems. *Historia monachorum in Aegypto* 8. 24-5; H. MacLennan, *Oxyrhynchus, an Economic and Social Study* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1935), pp. 52-3; and Theodoret *Hist. Eccl.* 4. 18. 7. When Rufinus visited Oxyrhynchus he found more monasteries in the city than houses, with monks even occupying abandoned public buildings and former temples. The bishop told Rufinus that there were 10,000 monks and 20,000 virgins living in the city.

<sup>7</sup> Bell, *Egypt From Alexander the Great to the Arab Conquest*, p. 104. Note E. A. Judge and S. R. Pickering, "Papyrus Documentation of Church and Community in Egypt to the Mid-Fourth Century," *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 20 (1977): 47-71.

was Christianized and that by the latter half of the century between eighty and ninety percent of Egyptians were Christian.<sup>8</sup>

These findings appear to concur with the epigraphical data which shows that the era following the legalisation of Christianity marked a watershed in the frequency of Christian funerary inscriptions, as might be expected. A more thorny question is how many Christian gravemarkers pre-date Constantine's Edict of Toleration but are indistinguishable as such because they employ pagan formulae and artistic motifs. The Egyptian Church began to grow in numbers of converts during the tumultuous years of the Diocletianic Persecution, confirming Tertullian's incisive insight about the compelling impact that the martyrs made on the unconverted.<sup>9</sup> Avowedly Christian inscriptions gradually increased in number until the legalization of Christianity, after which time most epitaphs were Christian.<sup>10</sup>

Christianity in fourth-century Egypt was fractionalized and the complexity becomes more apparent when one turns to the theological controversies that monopolized the period. A wide variety of Christian movements were active in Egypt during the early church, ranging from the center of orthodoxy to the most extreme heresies.<sup>11</sup> A succession of distinguished theologians led the catechetical school of

---

<sup>8</sup> R. S. Bagnall, "Religious Conversion and Onomastic Change in Early Byzantine Egypt," *BASP* 19 (1982): 105-23. Bagnall's views have been questioned by Alan K. Bowman, *Egypt after the Pharaohs: 332 B. C.-A. D. 642*, p. 47; and Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire: A. D. 100- 400* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), pp. 156-7, n. 41, question Bagnall's methodology and conclusions, and suggest a less rapid process of Christianization.

<sup>9</sup> Tertullian *Apologia* 1.

<sup>10</sup> L. Jalabert and R. Mouterde, "Inscriptions grecques chrétiennes," *DACL* 7, cols. 623-94; see especially 623-4.

<sup>11</sup> The terms "orthodox" and "heretical" are used in this monograph in their

Alexandria and counted among its teachers and students such eminent men as Pantaenus, Clement, Origen, Dionysius, Pierius, Peter, Athanasius, Didymus and Cyril.<sup>12</sup> The Hellenized brand of Christianity that developed in the catechetical school of Alexandria was characteristically different from the kind of Christianity that emerged in the Coptic countryside.<sup>13</sup> At the same time orthodoxy was burgeoning, Gnostic sects and gnosticizing tendencies permeated Egyptian Christianity.<sup>14</sup> Many of the Gnostic teachers and Christian theologians with gnosticizing elements were also from

---

traditionally understood sense with respect to the doctrinal and creedal formulations of the early church. Walter Bauer, Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity ed. and trans. Robert Kraft and Gerhard Krodel (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), argued that Christianity was theologically diverse in Egypt through the third century. See Thomas A. Robinson, The Bauer Thesis Examined: The Geography of Heresy in the Early Christian Church (Lewiston, N. Y./ Queenston, Canada: The Edwin Mellon Press, 1988), especially pp. 40 n. 15; and 59-69; and Colin H. Roberts, Manuscript, Society, and Belief in Early Christian Egypt The Schweich Lectures of the British Academy for 1977 (London: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 51-3.

<sup>12</sup> J. Quasten, Patrology (Westminster, Maryland: Christian Classics, Inc., 1983), 2. 1-120, esp. 2-4. Note also, H. Chadwick, The Alexandrians (Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1954); Robert M. Grant, "Theological Education at Rome," pp. 178-89; and Robert L. Wilken, "Alexandria: A School for Training in Virtue," in Schools of Thought in the Christian Tradition, Patrick Henry, editor (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), pp. 15-30.

<sup>13</sup> See Carl Andresen, "Siegreiche Kirche im Aufstieg des Christentums: Untersuchungen zu Eusebius von Caesarea und Dionysius von Alexandrien," ANRW 2. 23. 1: 387-459; and Martin Krause, "Das christliche Alexandrien und seine Beziehungen zum koptischen Agypten," in Alexandrien: Kulturbegegnungen dreier Jahrtausende im Schmelztiegel einer mediterranen Grossstadt, Gunter Grimm, ed. (Aegyptiaca Treverensia: Triere Studien zum griechisch-römischen Agypten 1; Mainz-am-Rhein: Von Zabern, 1981), pp. 53-62. The term "Coptic" is used in this monograph as a designation for the Egyptian people.

<sup>14</sup> The term "Gnosticism" is used in a narrowly defined historical sense as a self-designated name of an ancient Christian sect. For the problems surrounding the definition of Gnosticism see E. M. Yamauchi, Pre-Christian Gnosticism: A Survey of the Proposed Evidence (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1983), pp. 13-9; and 188-90.

Alexandria.

Gnosticism appeared in Alexandria in the second century with the rise of Basilides (132-35), purportedly the disciple of an interpreter of St. Peter named Glaucias.<sup>15</sup> Another Alexandrian Gnostic was Valentinus, who began his teaching some time between 117 and 138. Valentinus was the student of a certain Theudas who, in turn, was supposedly the disciple of the Apostle Paul.<sup>16</sup> Alexandria was a center for Valentinianism and Gnostic teachers such as Ambrose, Heracleon, and Marcus. Theodotus followed in the Alexandrian Valentinian tradition during the late second and third centuries.<sup>17</sup> The eminent Alexandrian theologians Clement and Origen, while stern opponents of Valentinianism, also exhibited gnosticizing elements characteristic of the intellectual and religious tradition of their day.<sup>18</sup> At the turn of the third century, Gnostic teachers in Alexandria were associating themselves with wealthy patrons and their services were attended by fellow Gnostics and orthodox Christians alike.<sup>19</sup> The

---

<sup>15</sup> B. Layton, The Gnostic Scriptures (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1987), p. 417, and BasFragG, pp. 442-3.

<sup>16</sup> Layton, The Gnostic Scriptures, pp. 217, 303-304 and (A Prayer of Paul the Apostle), p. 305.

<sup>17</sup> Ambrose was a wealthy pupil of Origen's Eusebius Hist. Eccl. 4. 23. Marcus was a contemporary of Irenaeus Adv. Haer. I. 13.2. According to Hippolytus, Marcus was a disciple of a certain Kolorbasos, see Kurt Rudolph, Gnosis ed and trans. by R. McL. Wilson (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983), pp. 324, 388, n. 147. On Heracleon, forty-eight quotations from his commentary on John have been preserved in Origen, Commentary on St. John's Gospel see W. Foerster, ed., Gnosis: A Selection of Gnostic Texts 2 vols. (London: Oxford Press, 1972), I. 162-83. For excerpts belonging to the Gnostic teacher Theodotus see F. Sagnard, Extraits de Théodote: texte grec, introduction, traduction et notes (Sources chrétiennes vol. 23; Paris: Cerf, 1948).

<sup>18</sup> Layton, The Gnostic Scriptures, p. 270.

<sup>19</sup> Eusebius Hist. Eccl. 6. 2. 14.

Nicolaitans, Carpocratians, a certain Paulus, and a heretic by the name of Prodicus were other Gnostics who were active in Egypt during these early centuries.

The relatively recent discovery of a cache of eleven Coptic codices, and fragments of two others found near Nag Hammadi in 1945,<sup>20</sup> have raised new questions concerning Gnostic infiltration into other parts of Egypt. Scholars have responded by using these new sources to understand more clearly the milieu of fourth century Egyptian Christianity. By the fourth century, Gnostic groups had spread throughout Egypt. Epiphanius of Salamis records an eyewitness account of heresies in Egypt during the fourth century in his Panarion (or Adv. Haer.).<sup>21</sup> By the mid-fourth century, there were Gnostic sects active in Alexandria, Athribis, Prosopis Antinoe, Paralus, and several congregations active around Phbow.<sup>22</sup> Valentinians, Basilideans,

---

<sup>20</sup> See J. Robinson, ed., The Nag Hammadi Library in English (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1977; rev. ed. 1989); B. Layton, The Gnostic Scriptures; and Yamauchi, Pre-Christian Gnosticism. Consult also D. Scholer, Nag Hammadi Bibliography, 1948- 69 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971), supplemented annually in Novum Testamentum beginning with vol 13 (1971). There is also a wealth of material on Christianity in Egypt and Gnosticism in J. Doresse, The Secret Books of the Egyptian Gnostics: An introduction to the Gnostic Coptic Manuscripts Discovered at Chenoboskion (New York: Viking Press, 1960).

<sup>21</sup> The reliability of Epiphanius's work has been the subject of close scrutiny. See for example, S. Benko, "The Libertine Gnostic Sect of the Phibionites According to Epiphanius," Vigiliae Christianae 21 (1967): 103-19; L. Fendt, Gnostische Mysterien (München: Kaiser, 1922), pp. 3 ff.; H. Leisegang, Die Gnosis (4th ed.; Stuttgart: Kroner, 1955), pp. 186-95; and E. Yamauchi, Gnostic Ethics and Mandaean Origins (Harvard Theological Studies 24; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), pp. 26-8. For a complete translation of the Adv. Haer. (or the Panarion) and a commentary consult, M. Tardieu, "Epiphane contre les gnostiques," Tel Quel 88 (1981): 64-91; and for significant excerpts see, B. Layton, The Gnostic Scriptures, pp. 185-214. K. Koschorke, Die Polemik der Gnostiker gegen das kirchliche Christentum (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978), pp. 123-4 rejects the patristic sources that describe the antinomian Gnostic sects.

<sup>22</sup> See S. Gero, "With Walter Bauer on the Tigris: Encratite Orthodoxy and Libertine Heresy in Syro- Mesopotamian Christianity," in Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism,

Borborites, Phibionites, Sethians and Stratiotics, along with other unnamed Gnostic groups, thrived in Egypt during the fourth century.<sup>23</sup>

The Manichaeans, a Persian Gnostic sect, expanded in Egypt from the city of Lycopolis (Siut) beginning in the late third century. The Manichaeans published their works in Coptic, as is attested by fourth-century codices found at Medinet Madi (Fayum).<sup>24</sup> If the Annales of Eutychius can be partially trusted, Manichaean religion was embraced by many Egyptian Christians before 377.<sup>25</sup> Legislation was directed against the Manichaeans from the Edicts of Diocletian (302) and Valentinian I (372) to Theodosius I (382), eventually depriving the Manichaeans of all religious protection by the fifth century.<sup>26</sup>

A number of polemics were written by Egyptians against the Manichaeans throughout the fourth<sup>27</sup> and early fifth centuries.<sup>28</sup> There are several extant accounts of

---

and Early Christianity (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Pbl., 1986), pp. 287-307; K. Koschorke, Die Polemik; and B. Layton, The Gnostic Scriptures, Maps 1-6.

<sup>23</sup> Although many of the sects listed in Epiphanius are classified together and share common anti-ascetic peculiarities, each group should be understood as uniquely distinct from the other groups; see H. Chadwick, "Enkrateia," RAC 5 (1962): cols. 349-51.

<sup>24</sup> See Josef Vergote, "Het Manichaeisme in Egypt," JEOL 9 (1944): 77-83 (German translation in Der Manichaeisme ed. G. Widengren [Darmstadt: Wiss. Buchgesellschaft, 1977], pp. 385-99); Gedaliahu G. Stroumsa, "The Manichaean Challenge to Egyptian Christianity," in The Roots of Egyptian Christianity, pp. 307-19; P. Brown, "The Diffusion of Manichaeans in the Roman Empire," JRS 59 (1969): 92-103; and J. Jarry, "Le manichéisme en Egypte Byzantine," Bulletin de l'institut français d'archéologie de Caire 66 (1968): 121-37.

<sup>25</sup> Sa'ad ibn Batriq (Eutychius, Melkite patriarch of Alexandria from A. D. 933-40) Annales, ed. L. Cheikho CSCO, pp. 146-8. See Stroumsa, "Manichaean Challenge," pp. 312-14 and ns. 24-5.

<sup>26</sup> Legum Mosaicarum 15. 3; Codex Theodosius 16. 5. 3; and 16. 5. 9.

<sup>27</sup> The pagan philosopher Alexander of Lycopolis composed an anti-Manichaean tract at the beginning of the fourth century; see Alexander Lycopolitanus, Contra

confrontations between orthodox Christians and Manichaeans in Egypt at this time as well as numerous incidental references to the group. Peter, Bishop of Alexandria, for example, boasted of converting Basil the Persian from Manichaeism to orthodox Christianity.<sup>29</sup> Philostorgius reported a debate in Alexandria around 340 between Aetius, an Arian theologian, and a Manichaean divine named Aphthonius.<sup>30</sup> The Historia Monachorum in Aegypto records a verbal confrontation between Abba Copres

---

Manichaei opiniones disputatio, ed. A. Brinkmann (Leipzig: Teubner, 1895); P. W. van der Horst and J. Mansfeld, An Alexandrian Platonist against Dualism (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974); and A. Villey, Alexandre de Lycopolis: Contra la Doctrine de Mani (Paris: Cerf, 1985). The first Egyptian Christian attack on the Manichaeans was written anonymously but may belong to Theonas, Bishop of Alexandria, see Epistle Against the Manichees (P. J. Rylands 469) ed. by C. H. Roberts, Catalogue of the Greek and Latin Papyri in the John Rylands Library (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1938), 3.38-39; and compare the tradition about Theonas retained in W. E. Crum, "Texts Attributed to Peter of Alexandria," JTS 4 (1902-1903): 391. A second apology was written by Serapion of Thmuis, see R. P. Casey, ed., Serapion of Thmuis. 'Against the Manichees' (HTS 15; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931), chapter 3, p. 30; and thirdly, Didymus the Blind Against the Manichaeans (PG 39. 1085-1110). Note also G. Bardy, Didyme l'Aveugle (Etudes de theologie historique 11; Paris: Beauchesne, 1910), pp. 33-5; J. Leipoldt, Didymus der Blinde von Alexandria (TU 29; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1905), pp. 14-16; M. Gronewald, Didymos der Blinde: Kommentar zum Ecclesiastes Papyrologische Texte und Abhandlungen (Bonn: Habelt, 1977-9), 2. 114-15, for a refutation of the Manichaean view of marriage and 5. 8-11, for Didymus' refutation of the Manichaean view of the devil. Note a similar dialogue in which the Bishop Paphnutius defends marriage in Socrates Hist. Eccl. 1. 11 (PG 67. 101-4).

<sup>28</sup> Schenoute De Vetere Testamento contra Manichaeos in Emile Clément Amélineau, Oeuvres Schenoudi, 2 vols in 6 Fasc. (Paris: Leroux, 1907-14), 1. 5; and J. Leipoldt, Schenute von Atripe und die Entstehung des national ägyptischer Christentums (TU 25; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1903), p. 87.

<sup>29</sup> J. Barns and H. Chadwick, "A Letter Ascribed to Peter of Alexandria," JTS 24 (1973): 443-55.

<sup>30</sup> J. Bidez, ed., Philostorgius Kirchengeschichte (Hist. Eccl.)(GCS 3. 15; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1913), pp. 46-8. Ironically this incident took place after Aetius had been defeated in a debate by a Borborite theologian! The incident may be dated early in the reign of Constantius II, ca 340. See also E. Venables, "Aetius," DCB 1. 50-53; the reference in Philostorgius is unfortunately overlooked.



and a Manichaean which was followed by an "ordeal by fire."<sup>31</sup> There are several other accounts of Egyptian monks who attacked the disciples of Mani, including a reference in the Apophthegmata Patrum,<sup>32</sup> an account retained by Rufinus<sup>33</sup> and, finally, Shenoute's boast that he burned two Persian heretics.<sup>34</sup>

The rise of monasticism is another intriguing development of fourth-century Egypt's religious history.<sup>35</sup> The Christian monastic movement bears a resemblance to certain ascetic groups found in Greco-Roman paganism, the recluses of Sarapis, the Jewish Therapeutai and Essenes, Manichaeism, and even Buddhism. Monasticism's early historical development is shrouded in obscurity. The first Christian ascetics were anchorite hermits who separated themselves from society to live alone in the caves of

---

<sup>31</sup> A. J. Festugière, ed., Historia Monachorum in Aegypto SHG 53 (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1971), pp. 87-8; translated in idem, Les Moines d'Orient (Paris: Cerf, 1964), 4/1. 75-6.

<sup>32</sup> Apophthegmata Patrum (PG 65. 202D-204A); for the relationship between monasticism and dualism see Janet Timbrie, "Dualism and the Concept of Orthodoxy in the Thought of the Monks of Upper Egypt," University of Pennsylvania, Ph. D., Diss., 1979.

<sup>33</sup> Rufinus Verba Seniorum: De vitis Patrum Liber 5. 13. 2 (PL 3. 945C-D).

<sup>34</sup> H. de Vries, Homélies coptes de la Vaticane (Houniae: Gyldendal, 1922), 1. 80-88.

<sup>35</sup> See D. I. Chitty, The Desert a City (Oxford: Mowbrays, 1966); H. G. Evelyn-White, The Monasteries of the Wadi 'n Natrun Vols 1, 7-8 (New York: Publication of the Metropolitan Museum of Art Egyptian Expedition, 1926, 1932-3), pt. 1, "New Coptic Texts from the Monastery of St. Macarius;" pt. 2, "The History of the Monasteries of Nitria and Scetis;" and pt. 3, "The Architecture and Archaeology;" Karl Heussi, Der Ursprung des Mönchtums (Tübingen: Mohr, 1936; repr. Aalen: Scientia, 1981); D. Knowles, Christian Monasticism (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1977); Otto F. A. Meinardus, Monks and Monasteries of the Egyptian Desert (Cairo: American University, 1961); A. Salih, The Churches and Monasteries of Egypt and Some Neighboring Countries trans. B. T. A. Evetts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1895); Helen Waddell, The Desert Fathers (London: Constable and Co., 1960) and C. C. Walters, Monastic Archaeology in Egypt (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1974).

the Egyptian desert. The ascetics waged battle with Satan and his demons in the desert regions (traditionally considered to be the domain of evil).

According to Jerome, the first anchorite was Paul of Thebes who withdrew to the desert during Decius's persecution (251).<sup>36</sup> Antony was the most illustrious hermit<sup>37</sup> but, by his own admission, he was not the first monk.<sup>38</sup> Antony retreated to the desert around 271, following an individual who had been a hermit since Decius' persecution. In 305, Antony began to challenge others to take up the solitary life.<sup>39</sup> Many individuals inspired by Antony's example, clustered in cells around the famous ascetic at Karanis, giving rise to a type of anchorite settlement called Antonian communities.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> See J. Bidez, Deux versions grecques inédites de la vie de Paul de Thèbes (Université de Grand, Recueil de Travaux, 25me Fasc. Brussels, 1900). The name "Paulos" appears in P. Oxy. 33. 2665 dated A. D. 305/6. In the certificate the property registrars referred to a certain "Paulos from the "Oxyrhynchite nome" apparently not knowing any more specific information about Paulos' parents. This Paulos had been sentenced by the governor (a notorious Christian-hater) and had neither wife nor property.

<sup>37</sup> Athanasius Vita Ant. (PG 26. 835-976); English translation, Athanasius: 'The Life of Antony' and 'The Letter to Marcellinus' trans. and intro Robert C. Gregg, preface William A. Clebsch (New York: Paulist Press, 1980). For the seven letters attributed to Antony see, Gerard Garitte, Lettres de s. Antoine, version georgienne et fragments coptes (CSCO 148/149. 1955); Wolf-Peter Funk, "Eine Doppelte Überliefertes Stück spätägyptischer Weisheit," ZÄS 103 (1976): 8-21; and Karl Heussi, Der Ursprung des Mönchtums; for the sayings attributed to Antony in the Apophthegmata Patrum see the index in Owen Chadwick, ed., Western Asceticism, p. 363.

<sup>38</sup> Apophthegmata Patrum 23.

<sup>39</sup> Athanasius Vita Ant. 14. H. Dörries, "Die Vita Antonii als Geschichtsquelle Athanasius," Wort und Stunde 1 (Göttingen, 1966): 145-224, suggested that Athanasius used the life of Antony to try to win the monks' allegiance (see Chapter Five). According to Dörries, the 38 Apophthegms attributed to Antony differ in many ways from Athanasius' characterization of the hermit in the Vita.

<sup>40</sup> Athanasius Vita Ant. 15, implies that Antony was an overseer of anchorites living in the Arsinoite nome, a days walk from Karanis.

In 313, Antony retired to an even more secluded mountain retreat where he remained until his death in 356. Papyrological sources also refer to Christian ascetics as early as the first quarter of the fourth century.<sup>41</sup>

A variety of cenobitic and semi-communal monasteries also emerged during the first quarter of the fourth century in Egypt.<sup>42</sup> Pachomius, the disciple of Palamon, organized one of the first cenobitic monasteries at Tabennesi in 329.<sup>43</sup> Later, other foundations in nearby Phbow, Shenaset, and Thmoushons submitted to Pachomius' rule and were admitted into the Koinonia (or fellowship of Pachomian monasteries). Near the end of Pachomius' life (between 340-345), a community at Thbew, in the Diocese of Schmin, requested admission into the Koinonia and became the administrative center for a second series of Pachomian foundations. Two other monasteries were founded in the vicinity of Schmin and a fourth was founded at Phnoum. When Pachomius died in 346, there were nine monasteries for men and two for women in the Koinonia.<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup> E. A. Judge, "Fourth-Century Monasticism in the Papyri," in the Proceedings of the Sixteenth International Congress of Papyrology (Chico, Ca.: Scholars Press, 1981), pp. 613-20.

<sup>42</sup> For the wide variation of early monastic foundations see, E. A. Judge, "The Earliest Use of Monachos for 'Monk' (P. Coll. Youtie 77) and the Origins of Monasticism," Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum 20 (1977): 72-89.

<sup>43</sup> Armand Veilleux, Pachomian Koinonia: The Lives, Rules and Other Writings of Saint Pachomius and His Disciples (3 vols CistSS 45, 46, 47; Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Pbl., 1980-82); James E. Goehring, "New Frontiers in Pachomian Studies," in The Roots of Egyptian Christianity, pp. 236-57; and P. Rousseau, Pachomius. The Making of a Community in Fourth Century Egypt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

<sup>44</sup> See Armand Veilleux, "Monasticism and Gnosis," in The Roots of Egyptian Christianity, pp. 273-77. Certainly the preface of Jerome's translation of the "Rule of Pachomius" which refers to 50,000 monks was an exaggeration. Palladius Lausiac History 32. 8, refers to 1300 monks and 18.13 refers to 1400 monks at Phbow with between 200 and 300 ascetics at the other monasteries.

Petronius, the founder of the monastery at Thbew, succeeded Pachomius in 346, but control rapidly passed to Horsiesios and then to Theodore until his death in 368 and then, finally, back again to Horsiesios. No new monasteries were added to the Koinonia during Horsiesios' first superiorship from 346 to 347. Under Theodore's leadership, from 347 to 368, only two foundations of monks and two for nuns were established.<sup>45</sup> During Horsiesios's second mandate from 368 to 380, no new foundations were established. There were other monasteries that accepted the Pachomian rule but were never organized into the Koinonia, including a monastery at Canops<sup>46</sup> and one at Atripe. Shenoute's uncle, Pjol, introduced Pachomian rule to the great White Monastery of Atripe.<sup>47</sup>

There were other cenobitic monasteries that developed simultaneously with the Pachomian Koinonia. Amoun founded a community in 325 in Nitria which grew to number five thousand by the end of the fourth century.<sup>48</sup> Macarius established a monastery in Scete in 330,<sup>49</sup> and communities of Melitian monks were active in Middle

---

<sup>45</sup> L. T. Lefort, S. Pachomii vitae bohairice scripta (CSCO 89; 1925, repr. 1965), SBQ 134.

<sup>46</sup> The monastery was founded by Theophilus who destroyed the Temple of Serapis in 390, and established a monastery at the site.

<sup>47</sup> Shenoute joined the White Monastery in 370/1. See J. Leipoldt, Schenute von Atripe und die Entstehung des national-ägyptischen Christentums, pp. 42-44.

<sup>48</sup> Palladius Lausiac History 8; see C. Butler ed., The Lausiac History Texts and Studies 6. 1-2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1904); Socrates Hist. Eccl. 4. 23; and L. Duchesne, The History of the Christian Church: From Its Foundation to the End of the Third Century 3 vols (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1909-24), 2. 391. Amoun's wife, with whom Amoun had lived in celibacy for eighteen years, began a convent for women.

<sup>49</sup> See Palladius Lausiac History 18. 3 (Macarius) records how this native Alexandrian ate only cabbage, attempted to stay awake for twenty consecutive days, and tried to stand throughout Lent. The Apophthegmata, trans. by Owen Chadwick,

and Upper Egypt in 334.<sup>50</sup> The monastic movement in Egypt became the subject of works like Palladius' Lausiac History, Rufinus' Historia monachorum in Aegypto, and the collection of the Apophthegmata Patrum. An increased number of pilgrimages were also made to the deserts of Egypt.<sup>51</sup> The development of the monastic movement in fourth-century Egypt further underscores the significance of this century in the history of the early church.

The rivalries in the Egyptian Church are most readily seen in the Christological controversies that dominated the fourth century. The two opposing views debating the nature of the person of Christ were defined by Arius (256-336) and Athanasius (295-373), both products of the Alexandrian Church.<sup>52</sup> A concomitant theological

---

Western Asceticism, pp. 162-3 relates several intriguing stories including Macarius' decision to retire to Scete (pp. 162-3), and an account of how Macarius slept one night in a "pagan cemetery" and used a mummy for a pillow! (see p. 84).

<sup>50</sup> See H. I. Bell and W. E. Crum, eds., Jews and Christians in Egypt; and Judge, "The Earliest Use of Monachos," pp. 83- 5.

<sup>51</sup> The shrine of St. Menas located west of Alexandria at Abu Mena was one of the most popular Christian pilgrimage sites in Egypt in late antiquity. St. Menas was an Egyptian recruit in the Roman army who was martyred for his Christian beliefs. For a discussion of the sources of the Menas legend see Z. Kiss, "Des ampoules de St. Menas découvertes à Kom el-Dikka (Alexandrie) en 1967," Travaux du Centre d'Archéologie Méditerranéenne de l'Académie Polonaise des Sciences Vol. 8 (Études et Travaux III, 1969), pp. 155-6 nos. 13-17; and K. Weitzmann, ed., Art of Spirituality. Late Antique and Early Christian Art. Third to the Seventh Century (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1979), pp. 573-4 no. 512. Water from a spring near the saint's relics was believed to have medicinal powers and consequently attracted pilgrims from throughout the empire. The Byzantine emperors patronized the healing shrine by erecting elaborate buildings at the site; see Weitzmann, Art of Spirituality, pp. 662-4 n. 591. St. Menas flasks filled with holy water from the saint's shrine have been found throughout the Mediterranean world, testifying to the popularity of the site, see K. M. Kaufmann, Zum Ikonographie der Menas-Ampullen (Cairo, 1910).

<sup>52</sup> On Arius' connection with Lucian of Antioch see, Charles Kannengiesser, "Athanasius of Alexandria vs. Arius: The Alexandrian Crisis," in The Roots of Egyptian Christianity, pp. 204-215.

development in the fourth-century Egyptian Church was the rise of anti-Origenism in Alexandria seen as early as 300. Arius' Christology appeared to bear a resemblance to Origen's subordinationist view of the relationship between the Father and His Son.<sup>53</sup> Arius' views were also similar to the Neoplatonic theory of intermediaries between God and the world, as he ascribed such a position to the only begotten Son of God. Some time between 318 and 323, Arius began to teach the controversial notion that the Son was not equal to the Father because He was begotten.<sup>54</sup>

Arius refused to comply with a command by Alexander, Bishop of Alexandria, to abandon his innovations and was condemned and deposed by a Synod of 100 bishops in 318. Arius continued to rally his adherents but was condemned at the Council of Nicea in 325 and exiled to Illyricum. Athanasius, the champion of Nicæan orthodoxy; however, fell from Imperial favor and was banished in 335 to Trier by the Imperial Synod of Tyre and Constantine. Although Arius died the following year, his doctrine disrupted the church for many decades. His adversary Athanasius lived to be the controversial religious leader of Alexandrian orthodoxy.<sup>55</sup>

---

<sup>53</sup> Aside from the critics of Origen who lived during his lifetime, the first critics of Origen were Methodius of Olympus (d. 311), Epiphanius *Adv. Haer.* 64; Theophilus of Alexandria and Jerome. Origen was posthumously condemned by the Emperor Justinian in 553. See Vivian, *St. Peter of Alexandria*, pp. 110-38; Wolfgang A. Bienert, *Dionysius von Alexandrien: Zur Frage des Origenismus im dritten Jahrhundert* (Berlin/ New York, 1978), pp. 6-25; and J. N. D. Kelly, *Jerome* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 227-42.

<sup>54</sup> See Robert C. Gregg and Dennis E. Groh, *Early Arianism: A View of Salvation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981); Frances M. Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), pp. 57-64; for a summary of Arius' ideas and the relevant literature; and W. G. Rusch, ed. and trans., *The Trinitarian Controversy* (Sources of Early Christian Thought; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980).

<sup>55</sup> W. H. C. Frend, "Athanasius as an Egyptian Christian Leader in the Fourth Century," in his collected studies, *Religion Popular and Unpopular in the Early*

The lack of homogeneity in the Egyptian Church is also evident in areas of Christian practice. After Christianity became the preferred religion of the Roman state, a number of nominal converts flooded the Egyptian Church "baptizing," rather than abandoning, many of their pagan conventions. The syncretism of paganism and Egyptian Christianity is readily seen in Egyptian-Christian burial practices. Numerous Christian gravestones employed pagan formulae and/or pagan artistic motifs.<sup>56</sup> The Egyptian symbol of life (the ankh) was used by Christians on their gravemarkers and was gradually transformed into a cross known as the crux ansata during the fourth century.<sup>57</sup>

The Egyptian converts were also slow to abandon pagan Egyptian burial traditions. Antony attacked Christians who kept the mummified bodies of dead relatives and particularly the mummies of martyrs in their houses.<sup>58</sup> Many excavated

---

Christian Centuries (London: Variorum Reprints, 1976), chapter XVI.

<sup>56</sup> See G. Lefebvre, Recueil des inscriptions grecques-chrétiennes d'Égypte (Cairo: L'Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1907), pp. xxii-xxiii; and quoted by H. Leclercq, "Égypte," DACL 4/2; cols. 2486-2521, and especially 2514-15. Note also the survey by S. Kent Brown, "Coptic and Greek Inscriptions from Christian Egypt: A Brief Review," in The Roots of Egyptian Christianity, pp. 26-41.

<sup>57</sup> See for example The Royal Ontario Museum, the Walter Massey Collection no. 910. 108. 151, in Florence D. Friedman ed., Beyond the Pharaohs: Egypt and the Copts in the 2nd to 7th Centuries A. D. (Providence, RI: Rhode Island School of Design, 1989), no. 177; and Coptic Museum, Cairo nos. 8518 and 8531, in W. E. Crum, Coptic Monuments (Cairo: Catalogue Général des Antiquités Égyptiennes du Musée du Caire, 1902, pl. 21-2; and Coptic Museum, Cairo no. 8574, in Bowman, Egypt after the Pharaohs, p. 50 ill. 32. The ankh also appears in other arts, for example, Coptic tapestries (see Victoria and Albert Museum no. 258. 1890 in Friedman, Beyond the Pharaohs, no. 129). The use of the ankh cross proliferates between the sixth and seventh century according to A. Badawy, Coptic Art and Architecture (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1978), pp. 210-21.

<sup>58</sup> See Athanasius Vita Ant. 90-1; and H. I. Bell, Cults and Creeds in Graeco-Roman Egypt (Chicago: Ares Pbl. Inc., 1957), pp. 90-1. Owen Chadwick, ed., Western Asceticism, p. 84 (4. 10) provides an interesting account associating pagan mummies

Christian graves are hardly distinguishable from pagan burial sites. In two Christian graves, baskets and jars were buried with the decedents, possibly for food and drink in the afterlife or, perhaps, as part of a Eucharistic ritual.<sup>59</sup> Another mummy, found with other undoubtedly Christian mummies, was decorated with the pagan "swastika" and two depictions of Anubis. The decedent holds an ear of corn and a cup in his hands.<sup>60</sup>

It should be clear that although the majority of Egypt was converted to Christianity during the fourth century, by no means did pagan religion immediately disappear.<sup>61</sup> Greco-Roman pagan culture thrived in Egypt centuries after the majority of Egyptians were converted to Christianity. Classical themes dominated the intellectual life of the Egyptian people and Coptic artistic motifs are replete with

---

and demons and at the same time illustrates the monastic disdain for mummies.

<sup>59</sup> P. D. Scott-Moncrieff, Paganism and Christianity in Egypt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913), pp. 102, and 110.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 126.

<sup>61</sup> See, M. C. Ross, "Paganism and Christianity in Egypt," BSAC 7 (1941): 47-50; and B. R. Rees, "Popular Religion in Graeco-Roman Egypt: II," JEA 36 (1950): 86-100.

---



themes from their classical and native Egyptian heritage.<sup>62</sup> Amuletic jewelry adorned with pagan and Christian scenes were also popular in Coptic Egypt.<sup>63</sup> Christianity in Egypt (as elsewhere) was influenced by Greco-Roman and native culture.

#### Late Egyptian Paganism<sup>64</sup>

Despite the gains made by the church in fourth-century Egypt and legislation against paganism, pagan religion continued to thrive.<sup>65</sup> From the Ptolemaic period,

---

<sup>62</sup> Coptic textiles and funerary and public sculpture abound with pagan themes. Greco-Roman mythological figures are recurrent in the textiles. The clearest illustration of the remnants of paganism in Egyptian Christianity in sculpture is probably the conversion of the image of Isis nursing Harpocrates (the nude child Horus) into the representation of Mary and Jesus. See A. Badaway, Coptic Art and Archaeology: The Art of the Christian Egyptian from the Late Antique to the Middle Ages (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1976); idem., Coptic Art and Architecture; and Brown University, Survival of the Gods: Classical Mythology in Medieval Art (Providence, RI: Brown University Department of Art, 1987); and the collected Coptic items in John D. Cooney, Pagan and Christian Egypt (Brooklyn, NY: The Brooklyn Museum, 1941); and idem., Late Egyptian and Coptic Art (Brooklyn NY: The Brooklyn Museum, 1943); and Friedman, Beyond the Pharaohs.

<sup>63</sup> An excellent example of the Christian use of the pagan magical past is the appearance of the Chnoubis (an ancient Egyptian lion-headed snake thought to be efficacious in combating stomach ailments and to have power over the uterus) on a Christian amuletic armband with scenes including, the annunciation, the nativity, (the Chnoubis), baptism, crucifixion, women at the tomb, the Holy Rider, and the ascension; from J. Maspero, "Bracelets-amulettes d'époque byzantine," ASAE 9 (1908): 246- 58. fig. 1. See also C. Bonner, Studies in Magical Amulets, Chiefly Graeco-Egyptian (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1950).

<sup>64</sup> See Scott-Moncrieff, Paganism and Christianity in Egypt; H. I. Bell, Cults and Creeds in Graeco-Roman Egypt; ibid., "Popular religion in Graeco-Roman Egypt," JEA 34 (1948): 82-97; B. R. Rees, "Popular Religion in Graeco-Roman Egypt II," pp. 86-100; M. L. W. Laistner, Christianity and Pagan Culture in the Later Roman Empire (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1951); Johannes Geffcken, The Last Days of Greco-Roman Paganism, trans. Sabine MacCormack (Amsterdam: North Holland, 1978); and F. Dunand Religion populaire en Egypte romaine: les terres cuites isiaques du Musée du Cairo (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1979).

<sup>65</sup> Jerome's Chronicle for the year 331 attributes an edict to the Emperor Constantine calling for the destruction of pagan temples; and Theophanes Theophanes Chronographia ed. by C. de Boor, 2 vols. (Leipzig, 1883, 1885; repr. Hildesheim/New York: Olms, 1963), p. 28, adds the interesting point that "their revenues were given to

Egyptian religion had amalgamated with a variety of foreign cults. Many of Egypt's magnificent temples were constructed, or extensively embellished, in Greco-Roman times. At the temple of Amon at Luxor, there is an altar with an inscription dating to the reign of Constantine. The wall-paintings in one room indicate that that particular room served as a cultic center and, perhaps, even as a throne room for the emperor in 300.<sup>66</sup> The role of the pagan temple, the central focus for cultic ceremony and activity, did not diminish significantly during the fourth century.<sup>67</sup> Until the 380's Alexandria served as a hospice city for throngs of pagan pilgrims who traveled to Egypt to worship<sup>68</sup> and the Serapeum was "crowded as usual" in the late fourth century.<sup>69</sup> There is record of regular sacrifices offered to the Nile (Hopi) as late as 385.<sup>70</sup> If monastic invectives provide a reliable picture, the most prominent Egyptian deities in the late fourth century were gods of the underworld who were associated with demons by the early Christians.<sup>71</sup>

---

the churches of God."

<sup>66</sup> I. Kalavrezou-Maxeiner, "The Imperial Chamber at Luxor," Dumbarton Oaks Papers 29 (1975): 225-51; Bowman, Egypt after the Pharaohs, pp. 165-202.

<sup>67</sup> See for example, J. A. S. Evans, "A Social and Economic History of an Egyptian Temple in the Greco-Roman Period," YCS 17 (1961): 145-283.

<sup>68</sup> Eunap. Vit. soph. 471, gives an account of pilgrims to a shrine; Themistocles Or 4. 1; describes ceremonies at Sais in 357; compare this with Herodotus 2. 59. 63.

<sup>69</sup> Ammianus 22. 11. 7.

<sup>70</sup> Libanius Or. 30. 35.

<sup>71</sup> See A. Guillaumont, "Le démon dans la plus ancienne littérature monastique," Dictionnaire de spiritualité, ascétique et mystique (Paris: Beauchesne, 1952), Vol 4 cols. 190-1; A. C. Baynes, "St. Antony and the Demons," IEA 40 (1954): 7; and P. du Bourguet, "Diatribes de Chenoute contre le démon," BSAC 16 (1961-2): 20.

The Isis cult was one of the most popular and long-lasting of Egyptian religions.<sup>72</sup> A Greek fragment of Olympiodorus states that the priests of Isis were active in Upper Egypt during the last quarter of the fourth century<sup>73</sup> and an Isis temple near Alexandria remained a popular resort through at least the sixth century.<sup>74</sup> The Isis temple at Philae, still surrounded by avowed pagans in the fifth century, was closed and converted into a church in the sixth century.<sup>75</sup> It appears that paganism played a dominant role in Egypt and Egyptian paganism remained influential throughout the Roman Empire until the Edict of Theodosius the Great and the end of state-permitted cults near the end of the fourth century.<sup>76</sup>

Magic<sup>77</sup> and theurgy<sup>78</sup> were as significant an aspect of late Egyptian paganism

---

<sup>72</sup> See R. E. Witt, "The Importance of Isis for the Fathers," Studia Patristica 8 (TU 93; Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1966); idem., Isis in the Graeco-Roman World (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1971); Friedrich Solmsen, Isis among the Greeks and Romans (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979); and Ramsay MacMullen, Paganism in the Roman Empire (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981).

<sup>73</sup> Olympiodorus frg. 37.

<sup>74</sup> Vita Severi 18, in M. -A. Kugener, Vie de Sévère par Jean (Patrologia Orientalis II,1; Paris, 1907).

<sup>75</sup> H. Munier, "Le Christianisme à Philae," Jam'iyat al-Athar al-Qibtiyah 4 (1938): 44; and William Macquitty, Island of Isis: Philae, Temple of the Nile (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1976).

<sup>76</sup> K. Parlasca, "Rilievi funerari di epoca tardo-imperiale e paleocopta," Corsi di cultura sull'arte ravennate e bizantina 28 (1981): 225; and MacMullen, Christianizing the Roman Empire; p. 83. The Emperor's actions against paganism instigated extensive pagan uprisings in Alexandria, see P. Petit, "Sur la date du 'Pro templis' de Libanius," Byzantion 21 (1951): 303-304; Socrates Hist. Eccl. 5. 16; and Sozomen Hist. Eccl. 7. 15.

<sup>77</sup> A. D. Nock, "Greek Magical Papyri," JEA 15 (1929): 219-35; Angelicus Kropp, Ausgewählte koptische Zaubertexte (Brussels: Fondation Egyptologique Reine Elisabeth, 1930-1); C. Bonner, Magical Amulets; Paul E. Kahle, Bala'izah: Coptic Texts from Deir El-Bala'izah in Upper Egypt 2 Vols. (London: Oxford University Press), 1. 252-9; David E. Aune, "Magic in Early Christianity," ANRW II/26. 2 (1980): 1507-

as were the polytheistic temple cults. The Neoplatonic school in Alexandria thrived through the fifth century with a line of eminent philosophers who taught their philosophical religion to Christians and pagans alike. Magical writings and the Hermetic Corpus provide another dimension of Egyptian paganism in late antiquity. The Hermetica are Greek astrological, magical, philosophical, and religious tracts written between the second and third centuries and attributed to Hermes Trismegistus.<sup>79</sup> The "thrice-great" Hermes was identified with the Egyptian god Thoth, the divine patron of learning, literature, the scribe of the gods, the god of the moon and the god of the calendar.<sup>80</sup> The Hermetica claimed to be inspired and typically stressed the importance of having a personal knowledge of god. The first tractate of the Hermetica is called the Poimandres and reveals the origin of the universe and the way of salvation. Nothing specific is known about the authors of the Hermetica or about its

---

57 (see especially p. 1516 n. 32 for a listing of Egyptian magical handbooks from the 2nd-5th century); and A. F. Segal, "Hellenistic Magic: Some Questions of Definition," Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religions, R. van der Broek and J. Vermaseren, eds., (Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'empire romain, 91; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981). Note also the Coptic Magical Texts Project being conducted by The Institute for Antiquity and Christianity.

<sup>78</sup> Theurgy, the result of combining Platonism with magical practices, was extremely popular in Roman Egypt. See Hans Lewy, Chaldaean Oracles and Theurgy: Mysticism, Magic, and Platonism in the Later Roman Empire, Michel Tardieu, ed., (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1978); and Franz Cumont, Astrology and Religion among the Greeks and Romans (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1912; repr., New York: Dover Pbl., 1960), pp. 73-102.

<sup>79</sup> See A. D. Nock and A. J. Festugière, eds., Corpus Hermeticum (2d ed 4 vols; Paris: Belles Lettres, 1954-60); Bentley Layton, The Gnostic Scriptures, pp. 447-62; and E. M. Yamauchi, Pre-Christian Gnosticism, pp. 69-72, and 204-206. Note also that some of the Hermetica were found among the Nag Hammadi texts, see J. A. Brashler, "Die koptischen Hermetica von Nag Hammadi," ANRW II. 22.

<sup>80</sup> G. Fowden, The Egyptian Hermes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

original readers.

The extant works and records of the Egyptian Church also testify to the vitality of fourth-century Egyptian paganism. Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, wrote a single volume work consisting of two sections (Contra gentes and De incarnatione) to attack paganism and to establish an apologia for Christianity.<sup>81</sup> Athanasius gathered together traditional arguments against paganism in his Contra gentes and used his forceful rebuttal of paganism to provide an explanation for the need for the incarnation in his De incarnatione. Athanasius' opus magnum is very similar in purpose, design, and grandeur to Anselm's Cur deus homo. The folly of polytheism and idol worship is contrasted with the sensibility of monotheism. According to Contra gentes, mankind was fashioned after the image of God and was consequently endowed with reason. Although mankind originally had a "vision of God and everything that is good," they were corrupted by selfishness and worshipped the creature in place of the Creator. Reason was abandoned and mankind was reduced to the level of beasts and, consequently they pursued theriolatry. The incarnation, according to Athanasius, was God's solution to mankind's dilemma. Christ, the Divine Logos, while in the flesh, revealed God to the world by direct contact.

#### Anti-Pagan Violence

Alexandria was the scene of a series of conflicts between Christianity and paganism at the end of the fourth and beginning of the fifth centuries. Theophilus,

---

<sup>81</sup> Athanasius Contra gentes and De incarnatione, ed. and trans. R. W. Thompson (Oxford Early Christian Texts; London: Oxford University Press, 1971). See also Edward R. Hardy, Christology of the Later Fathers (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954), pp. 15-110.

Bishop of Alexandria, destroyed the Mithraeum and the Temple of Serapis in 391.<sup>82</sup> When Theophilus died, he was succeeded by his nephew Cyril, who served as Bishop of Alexandria from 414 to 444. Cyril wrote a tract entitled Contra Iulianum which attempted to refute the Emperor Julian's Contra Galilaeos.<sup>83</sup> The introduction to Cyril's refutation indicates that paganism was still a formidable force in fifth-century Egypt. Cyril's efforts to curb anti-Christian sentiments in Alexandria led to a severe confrontation between Christians and the prefect.<sup>84</sup> Orestes was a pagan prefect who was influenced by a Neoplatonic philosopher named Hypatia. She taught in the (old) Neoplatonic school of Ammonius Saccas and Plotinus. Synesius of Cyrene was one of Hypatia's disciples who was later converted to Christianity.<sup>85</sup> Cyril attempted to extirpate theosophic paganism from the universities of Alexandria by arranging Hypatia's execution. Pagan philosophers were not dissuaded by Hypatia's death, however, and continued to teach in Alexandria for several centuries.<sup>86</sup>

---

<sup>82</sup> Socrates Hist. Eccl. 5. 16; Sozomen Hist. Eccl. 7. 15; Rufinus Hist. Eccl. 2. 23; and Theodoret Hist. Eccl. 5. 22; on the conspicuous absence of Mithraism in late Egyptian paganism see Gary Lease, "Mithra in Egypt," in The Roots of Egyptian Christianity, pp. 114-29.

<sup>83</sup> Cyril of Alexandria Contra Iulianum, PG 76. 509-1058; because Julian's work is lost, Cyril's apologetic is the major source for the content of Julian's attack. Gregory Nazianzus, Apollinaris of Laodicea and Philip Sidetes also attempted to refute Julian's polemic.

<sup>84</sup> Socrates Hist. Eccl. 7. 13-15. See the account of the upheaval in Alexandria in J. B. Bury, History of the Later Roman Empire (2 Vols.; New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1958), 1. 216-20.

<sup>85</sup> Synesius of Cyrene reluctantly accepted an appointment as Bishop of Ptolemais and metropolitan of the Pentapolis in Libya. He refused to abandon, however, his philosophical convictions. See H.-I. Marrou, "Synesius of Cyrene and Alexandrian Neoplatonism," in The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century, A. Momigliano, ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), pp. 126-50.

<sup>86</sup> See Hardy, Christian Egypt, pp. 123-4; Bowman, Egypt after the Pharaohs, pp.

Shenoute was the most zealous opponent of Egyptian paganism. Shenoute's writings, and accounts of his life, provide striking examples of the existence of paganism in Egypt through late antiquity.<sup>87</sup> Shenoute led numerous raids against temples and private households, destroying cultic objects and magical writings.<sup>88</sup> The destruction of pagan temples by monks was a wide-spread phenomenon at this time.<sup>89</sup> After Shenoute and his brigand-like monks destroyed a pagan temple at Pnueit, the pagan priests attempted unsuccessfully to prosecute Shenoute. Note Shenoute's intriguing reply to a protest by a landowner whose house had been raided by Shenoute and his monks.<sup>90</sup> Shenoute also wrote some vociferous invectives against pagan religion, magic, and hieroglyphics. Three anti-pagan sermons by Shenoute are extant.<sup>91</sup>

---

230-1; Zacharias Vita Severi in Patrologia Orientalis, vol. 2; J. Maspero, "Horapollon et la fin du paganisme égyptien," Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale 11 (1913): 163-95; and P. Cairo 67295.

<sup>87</sup> Besa Life of Shenoute trans. David N. Bell, (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Pbl., 1983); and J. Leipoldt, Schenute von Atripe; Janet Timbie, "The State of Research on the Career of Shenoute of Atripe," in The Roots of Egyptian Christianity, pp. 258-70.

<sup>88</sup> See John Barns, "Shenute as a Historical Source," (Warsaw/Cracow: Actes Du Xe Congrès International De Papyrologues, 1961), pp. 151-9.

<sup>89</sup> Libanius Pro templis, ed. by R. van Loy, "Le pro Templis de Libanius," Byzantion 8 (1933): 7-39; see chapter 8 which criticizes in part "the men dressed in black (monks) who eat more than elephants" and destroy the shrines and temples in the countryside.

<sup>90</sup> Barns, "Shenute as a Historical Source," pp. 156-9.

<sup>91</sup> The first extant sermon denounced pagans as worse than demons and justified the destruction of pagan idols; see in J. Leipoldt and W. E. Crum, Sinuthii archimandritae vita et opera omnia (CSCO 42; Paris: e Typographeo reipublicae, 1908), no. 25; Emile Clement Amélineau, Oeuvres Schenoudi (2 vols in 6 Fasc.; Paris: Leroux, 1907-14), 1. 11; and Emile Chassinat, La quatrième livre des entretiens et épîtres de Schenouti (Mémoires publiés par les membres de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale 23; Cairo: Fouilles de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1911), no. 1. The second sermon entitled Adversus Saternum was directed against a pagan magistrate who persecuted monks, and is found in Chassinat, Le

The last remnants of Egyptian paganism were apparently among the wealthy landowners who were in an economic position to oppress the destitute Coptic Christian population. The Christian peasantry depended on the paternal care of monks like Shenoute during the economic and political upheaval of the fourth and fifth centuries.<sup>92</sup> Christian raids on pagan temples and landowners by the Shenoutian vigilantes had both religious and economic dimensions.

During this same period abandoned pagan temples were converted by Christians into churches. In a portion of a sermon preached by Shenoute on the occasion of a dedication of a church that was formerly a temple, he states,

Thus then at the site of a shrine to an unclean spirit, there will henceforth be a shrine to the Holy Spirit. And where there is sacrificing to Satan and worshipping and fearing him, Christ will henceforth be served therein, and He will be worshipped, bowed down to and feared. And where there are blasphemings, it is blessings and hymns that will henceforth be therein.<sup>93</sup>

This was the boldest declaration of Christianity's final triumph over paganism--temples

---

quatrième livre, no. 5 and Leipoldt and Crum, Sinuthii, no. 17. The third extant sermon by Shenoute entitled Contra idolatras, de spatio vitae refuted pagan fatalism and is found in Leipoldt and Crum, Sinuthii, no. 17; and Carl Wessely, ed., Griechische und koptische Texte theologischen Inhalts (Leipzig: Avenarius, 1917), no. W69. See in addition, Dwight W. Young, "A Monastic Invective Against Hieroglyphs," in Studies Presented to H. J. Polotsky, D. W. Young, ed. (Beacon Hill, Mass.: Pirtle and Polson, 1981), pp. 348-60; Pierre du Bourguet, "Diatribes de Shenoute contre le démon," BSAC 16 (1961-2): 17-72; and Klaus Korschörke, et al., "Shenoute: De certamine contra diabolum," OrChr 59 (1975): 60-77.

<sup>92</sup> P. R. L. Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," JRS 61 (1971): 80-101; and idem., "Town, Village, and Holy Man: The Case of Syria," in Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), pp. 153-65.

<sup>93</sup> Dwight W. Young, "Unpublished Shenoutiana in the University of Michigan Library," in Egyptological Studies, S. I. Groll, ed., (Scripta Hierosolymitana 28; Atlantic Highlands, N. J.: Humanities Press, 1983), pp. 261-2.



were converted into churches.

#### Egyptian Judaism in Late Antiquity<sup>94</sup>

A large number of Jews also lived in Egypt during the Roman Empire. The Jewish population was most highly concentrated in the ancient city of Alexandria, a city with a population which exceeded 600,000 people.<sup>95</sup> Although two of the five sectors of Alexandria were labelled "Jewish,"<sup>96</sup> synagogues were located throughout all five sectors of the ancient city.<sup>97</sup> The Jews lived in other areas of Egypt outside of Alexandria. During the early Imperial period Philo, a native Egyptian Jew, said that his Jewish people filled the land of Egypt.<sup>98</sup> At about the same time, the geographer, demographer and historian Strabo referred to the Jewish diaspora saying,

this people (the Jews) has already made its way into every city, and it is not easy to find any place in the habitable world which has not received this nation and in which it has not made its power felt.<sup>99</sup>

Papyrological and archaeological evidence attest to a high concentration of Jews in the Heliopolitan nome around the ancient Temple of Onias at Leontopolis.<sup>100</sup> The Jews

---

<sup>94</sup> See G. Alon, Jews, Judaism and the Classical World: Studies in Jewish History in the Time of the Second Temple and Talmud trans. I. Abrahams (Jerusalem: 1977); and A. Linder, "The Roman Imperial Government and the Jews under Constantine," Tarbiz 44 (1974/75): 95-143.

<sup>95</sup> J. B. Bury, History of the Later Roman Empire, 1. 215-16 n. 1.

<sup>96</sup> Philo In Flaccum 55; and Josephus War 11. 495.

<sup>97</sup> Philo Legatio 132.

<sup>98</sup> Philo In Flaccum 43.

<sup>99</sup> Quoted in Josephus Antiquities 14. 115.

<sup>100</sup> See Josephus Wars 1. 33; 7. 423; and Ant. 12. 387; and 13. 62ff.

also populated villages and towns especially in the Fayum at Euhemeria, Philadelphia, Apollonias, Bacchias, and Arsinoe.<sup>101</sup> There is also evidence of a Jewish population in Oxyrhynchus of Middle Egypt,<sup>102</sup> Hermopolis Magna, Ptolemais Hermaeu<sup>103</sup> and Apollinopolis Magna (Edfu) in Lower Egypt<sup>104</sup> during the Roman Imperial age.

While many of the Jews that inhabited Egypt were converted to Christianity,<sup>105</sup> the Jewish population had not declined significantly by the end of the Roman Principate. Evidence from the Talmud suggests that Jewish life and customs carried on in Egypt throughout the Roman period.<sup>106</sup> Jews also prospered economically at the close of the fourth century<sup>107</sup> and were, consequently, persecuted by a frustrated and impoverished Christian populace. Two Imperial Edicts dating between 390 and 423 pertain to Egyptian Jews. These Edicts seem to illustrate attempts to coerce the Jews

---

<sup>101</sup> V. A. Tcherikover, A. Fuks, M. Stern, eds., Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum (3 Vols., Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1957-64), nos. 409, 411, 413, 416, 420-1, 427, 428, 430, 431, 432-3, and 434.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., nos. 410, 414, 422-3, and 425.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., nos. 412, and 424.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., Introduction to vol. 2, Section 9, pp. 108-119; and nos. 160-229; and 236-374.

<sup>105</sup> See Roberts, Manuscript, Society, and Belief in Early Christian Egypt; Birger Pearson, "Earliest Christianity in Egypt: Some Observations," in The Roots of Egyptian Christianity, pp. 132-59; and A. F. J. Klijn, "Jewish Christianity in Egypt," in The Roots of Egyptian Christianity, pp. 161-75.

<sup>106</sup> Aryeh Kasher, "The Alexandrian Jewish Community in Talmudic Tradition," in The Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1985), pp. 346-55.

<sup>107</sup> M. Avi-Yonah, The Jews under Roman and Byzantine Rule (London: Basil Blackwell, 1976; New York: Schocken Books; repr. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1984), p. 226.

through economic pressure in the late fourth century. One law specifically protected the economic interests of Jewish merchants implying that they suffered economic persecution. The second law on the other hand, was issued against the Jews. This law forbade Jews who pretended to be converts from receiving asylum in a church from creditors or against legal proceedings.<sup>108</sup> At the beginning of the fifth century, Cyril, Bishop of Alexandria, was involved in a plot against the Jews. He drove the Jews from the city of Alexandria and encouraged Christians to plunder the expelled Jews' property.<sup>109</sup> Throughout the fourth and fifth centuries the laws increasingly associated Jews with heretics and pagans.<sup>110</sup> All of these factors illustrate that a strong Jewish element was still present in Egypt during the fourth and fifth centuries and that the Jewish people were a significant part of the religious context out of which the Melitians emerged.

### Conclusions

The final persecutions of the church, the decline of paganism, the triumph of Christianity, the spread of Manichaeism and Gnosticism, the rise of monasticism and

---

<sup>108</sup> See Codex Theodosianus 13. 5. 18; = Codex Justinianus 10. 40. 8; and Codex Theodosianus 9. 45. 2; = Codex Justinianus 1. 12. 1; in Amnon Linder, ed., The Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation (Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State University Press, 1987), nos. 19 and 26.

<sup>109</sup> See above footnote no. 77. Note also M. Simon, Verus Israel: Etude sur les relations entre Chrétiens et Juifs dans l'Empire romain (135-425) (Fasc. 166; Paris: Bibl. des Ecoles Françaises d'Athènes et de Rome, 1948). Laws to protect Jews and synagogues (with a variety of restrictions) were enacted because of anti-Jewish riots by Christians; see Codex Theodosius 16. 8. 9; 16. 8. 21; 16. 8. 25; 16. 10. 24; 16. 5. 59; and Codex Julianus 1. 9. 14; 1. 9. 16; 1. 11. 16; in Linder, The Jews in Imperial Rome, nos. 21, and 46-49.

<sup>110</sup> See Linder, The Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation, pp. 18, 78-9.

the Christian Christological formation make fourth-century Egypt a crucial period in the history of the early church. The Melitian movement was an extremely significant schism in the early church yet the movement has not been given its due place in history. The Melitians emerged out of the Diocletianic persecution and rose in popularity to such a place that the churches that were Melitian at one point in the fourth century competed for control of the see of Alexandria and drove the powerful Athanasius from his episcopal chair. The Melitian movement continued until the eighth century at which time the surviving Melitians were exterminated. The Melitians had one of the earliest attested monastic networks and had extensive political dealings with the Arians and Athanasius. Finally, the Melitian movement represented what appears to be an indigenous Coptic brand of Christianity which opposed Roman control in both ecclesiastical and political affairs. The religious history of fourth-century Egypt is missing an important ingredient because the Melitians have been heretofore neglected.

---

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE FIRST STAGE OF MELITIUS' PROTEST:

302 TO 305

The difficulties that hinder a historical reconstruction of the Melitian movement are formidable, but surmountable. The primary sources on the history of the church during the Diocletianic persecution are often contradictory and biased. The fourth-century Christian chroniclers who recorded the history of the Great Persecution wrote accounts that in many cases were narrow in focus and more often resembled a hagiography than a historical narrative.<sup>1</sup> Inferential results of Diocletian's persecution in Egypt can only be gleaned from the evidence. Recently identified sources shed more light on the activities of the Alexandrian Church during the early fourth century and greatly facilitate a reconstruction of the origin of the Melitian schism.

This chapter investigates the initial consequences of the Diocletianic Persecution in Egypt, concentrating in particular on the clerical response to persecution. The

---

<sup>1</sup> See Timothy D. Barnes, Constantine and Eusebius (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), pp. 148-63.

primary focus will be on the events that facilitated Melitius' rise to power and his efforts to preserve the ministry of the church in the face of vacant ecclesiastical posts. The period from 303 to 305 marks the first stage of Melitius' activities and is important for establishing a rationale for his shift from an orthodox bishop to a zealot activist.

#### An Outline of the Great Persecution: 303 to 305<sup>2</sup>

The Christian church faced its most severe challenge from the Roman state during the first decade of the fourth century Diocletian's Great Persecution would be the last sustained attempt by Rome to forcibly subject Christians to the pagan emperor cult. Lactantius, mindful of biblical, pseudepigraphal, and Sybilline predictions and inspired by an apocalyptic fervor, interpreted the persecution as a prelude to the cataclysmic destruction of Rome by Christ.<sup>3</sup> A proper historical understanding of Melitius' early activities depends on the chronological sequence of Diocletian's edicts

---

<sup>2</sup> My outline of the persecution of the church under Diocletian generally follows N. H. Baynes' excellent survey, "The Great Persecution," in Cambridge Ancient History (London: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 12. 665-77; and the bibliography on pp. 789-95. See also Geoffrey de Ste. Croix, "Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted?" Past and Present 26 (1963): 6-38; and W. H. C. Frend, Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church (London: Basil Blackwell, 1965; repr., Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1981), pp. 477-535.

<sup>3</sup> Lactantius Div. Inst. 7; "As many as believe him and support him shall be marked by him as sheep, but those who refuse his mark shall either flee into the mountains or be seized and slain with exquisite tortures. He will burn righteous men amidst the books of the prophets, and powers shall be given him to desolate the earth for forty-two months. . . . The righteous shall separate themselves from the wicked, and flee into the wilderness. When he hears of this, the impious king, inflamed with anger, will come with a great army and surround the mountain on which the righteous are all gathered. They, besieged on all sides, will call on God with a loud voice; and He shall hear them, and send from Heaven a Great King to rescue them, and destroy all the wicked with fire and sword."

against the Christians, the edicts' provisions and the impact that the Great Persecution had on Egyptian Christianity.

Diocletian instituted far-reaching political and economic changes, temporarily stabilizing the tottering empire.<sup>4</sup> Diocletian, a devotee of Jupiter, the "sovereign overlord," placed a high value on his subjects' submission to the state and on the maintenance of public order. His reform policy insisted on corporate unity, signified by participation in the revived Roman Imperial cult. But Christians refused to offer a sacrifice to the state gods because they did not want to involve themselves in idolatry. Diocletian was initially reluctant to challenge the Christians directly by enforcing a token submission to his civil religion. He believed that an edict forcing Christians to sacrifice publicly to the Roman gods would inspire zealotry and martyrdom and would thus be ultimately counter-productive.

Diocletian determined to enforce religious uniformity without bloodshed, as long as it was possible. While the main sources agree in blaming Galerius,<sup>5</sup> the Eastern Caesar in Diocletian's tetrarchy, for instigating the anti-Christian legislation, it would be preposterous to conclude that Galerius prevailed by convincing an indifferent Diocletian. Indifference and lack of control were as inharmonious for Diocletian's character as these attributes would be for his god, Jupiter the Cosmocrator, the master-organizer of the universe. As with his god over the universe, so Diocletian controlled the important affairs of state.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, persecution was the legitimate and necessary

---

<sup>4</sup> See Stephen Williams, Diocletian and the Roman Recovery (New York: Methuen, Inc., 1985).

<sup>5</sup> Lactantius Mort. Pers. 11; and Eusebius Vita Const.

<sup>6</sup> Vita Numeriani 13, in E. Hohl ed., Scriptores Historiae Augustae 2 vols.

means used by Diocletian prior to the persecution of the Christians, to accomplish religious conformity. Diocletian had issued in 302 a rescript to Julianus, the Proconsul of Africa in Alexandria, against the Manichaeans.<sup>7</sup> The edict was issued at the end of the Roman-Persian War as an attempt to dissuade the spread of Persian influence.

The anti-Manichaean edict,

sets out due and fitting pains and penalties for them (the Manichaeans). For we order the authors and leaders (auctores ac principes - ie. the 'Elect') of the sect, to be subjected to a very severe penalty, namely, to be burnt, along with their abominable scripture: but their followers (the 'Hearers'), who are persistently obstinate we order to be punished with death, and we ordain that their property be confiscated to our treasury. If any persons of the official classes, or of any rank no matter what. . . betake themselves to this unheard of, base, and utterly infamous sect . . . see that their property is attached to our treasury and that they are themselves committed to the mines of Phaeno or Proconnesus.<sup>8</sup>

---

(Leipzig: Teubner, 1955); and N. H. Baynes, The Historia Augusta, Its Date and Purpose (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1926). Williams, Diocletian, pp. 173-5; argues that Diocletian alone was responsible for the anti-Christian legislation. See A. J. Mann, The Persecution of Diocletian (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1876); K. Stade, Der Politiker Diokletian und die letzte grosse Christenverfolgung Diss. Frankfurt a. Main, Wiesbaden, 1926; Baynes, "The Great Persecution," p. 668; and Idem, "Two notes on the Great Persecution," Classical Quarterly 18 (1924): 189-93; are some attempts to relieve Diocletian of the responsibility for the persecution that would eventually bear his name.

<sup>7</sup> See Samuel N. C. Lieu, Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), pp. 91-5. There is a disagreement over the precise date that this edict was issued. In A New Eusebius ed. J. Stevenson (London: SPCK, 1963), p. 282 dates the rescript to A. D. 295(?); Frend, Martyrdom, p. 478; and idem., The Rise of the Early Church (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), p. 457; dates the edict to 31 March 297.

<sup>8</sup> Codex Gregorianus Book VII, De Maleficiis et Manichaeis 6- 8. For the text see Alfred Adam, Texte zum Manichäismus (Kleine Texte 175; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1954), pp. 82-3; Legum Mosaicarum XV. 3, Fontes Iuris Romani antejustiniani (2d ed ed. S. Riccobono et al.; Florence, 1948), 2. 580-1; E. Seckel and B. Kuebler eds., Lex Dei sive Mosaicarum et Romanorum Legum Collatio 15. 3 in Iurisprudentiae Antejustinianae Reliquiae (6th ed. Leipzig: Teubner, 1927), vol. 2, Fasc. 2, pp. 381-3; and J. Stevenson, A New Eusebius (London: SPCK, 1963), p. 282 no. 285.



The extant legislation enacted against the Christians by Diocletian is not found in the contemporary historical accounts nor in the Acta of the martyrs who died during the Great Persecution. Diocletian's rescript De Maleficiis et Manichaeis probably resembled the Emperor's later lost edicts directed against Christianity. Having just finished fighting the Persians, Diocletian's primary concern with the Manichaeans was to crush the influx of oriental influence through the spread of Persian religious propagation and to punish a cult that might be associated with anti-Roman obstinacy. Similar accusations were made about Christianity and eventually the church suffered the same fate as the Manichaeans.<sup>9</sup> Diocletian's legislation against Christianity was not an experimental stricture, but was in actuality an extension of the Emperor Valerian's (253 to 260) persecution of the church.<sup>10</sup> Diocletian's policy of religious coercion was similar to his anti-Manichaean legislation and found a precedent in the previous action of Emperor Valerian.

Diocletian's first edict against the Christians was issued on 23 February 303 from his imperial capital at Nicomedia.<sup>11</sup> Eusebius gives the following information about Diocletian's first edict,

It was the nineteenth year of the reign of Diocletian, and the month Dystus, or March, as the Romans would call it, in which, as the festival of the Savior's Passion was coming on, an imperial letter was everywhere promulgated, ordering the razing of the churches to the

---

<sup>9</sup> See similar legislation against Druidism, Suetonius Vita Divi Claudii 25. 5. Manichaeism, Druidism and Christianity were all officially declared religio illicita by Rome.

<sup>10</sup> See Cyprian Ep 80.

<sup>11</sup> According to Lactantius Mort. Pers. 11; and Eusebius Vita Const. 50; Diocletian consulted his closest advisors and even made an inquiry at the oracle of Apollo at Didyma before he instigated the anti-Christian persecution.

ground and the destruction by fire of the Scriptures, and proclaiming that those in households, if they persisted in their profession of Christianity, would be deprived of their liberty. Such was the first document against us.<sup>12</sup>

Diocletian's barbarities were inaugurated by razing a newly built Christian church in Nicomedia.<sup>13</sup> Churches, houses where private meetings were held, Scriptures and liturgical books were destroyed. The first edict was aimed primarily at Christians in the imperial service.<sup>14</sup> The extent to which the edict was enforced in Egypt is not known; however, it must have been carried out widely in the eastern empire, judging by the Christian protests provoked in Melitene and Syria by the legislation.<sup>15</sup> Shortly after the publication of the first edict, the imperial palace caught fire twice within fifteen days. One of the fires began in Diocletian's own bedroom. The emperor's worst fears seemed to be confirmed: Christians in the imperial service were plotting against him. More drastic measures seemed necessary. A grim persecution ensued beginning with a purging of the imperial palace, followed by the publication of a second edict against all Christians empire-wide.<sup>16</sup>

Diocletian's second edict against the Christians was probably published in the late spring or early summer of 303. The second edict focused the attack at the

---

<sup>12</sup> Eusebius Hst. Eccl. 8. 2.

<sup>13</sup> The persecution was launched on the Kalends of March on the festival of the god Terminus (23 February 303). See Lactantius Mort. Pers. 12-13; and Eusebius Hst. Eccl. 8. 1-3 and 5.

<sup>14</sup> See Baynes, "Great Persecution," p. 666 n. 4.

<sup>15</sup> Eusebius Hst. Eccl. 8. 6.

<sup>16</sup> Lactantius Mort. Pers. 14; Eusebius Hst. Eccl. 8; and Constantine's Oratio ad Sanctos.

church's leaders. Eusebius recorded the event, as follows:

Such was the course of action in the first year, when the presidents of the Church were alone menaced by the persecution. But when the second year came round and, further, the war against us increased in intensity (Urban being at that time governor of the province), imperial edicts then visited us for the first time, in which by a general ordinance the command was given that in the several cities all the people in a body should sacrifice and offer libations to the idols.<sup>17</sup>

It is not clear how thoroughly the second edict was enforced in Egypt but it was probably no less exempt from the consequences than any other eastern province. Jails were filled with Christian prelates to a point of over-capacity creating a dilemma, particularly for smaller towns and villages that had limited jail facilities and probably needed all the room they had for common criminals. Eusebius recounts,

. . . an imperial command went forth that the presidents of the churches everywhere should be thrown into prison and bonds. And the spectacle of what followed surpasses all description; for in every place a countless number were shut up, and everywhere the prisons, that long ago had been prepared for murderers and grave-robbers, were then filled with bishops and presbyters and deacons, readers and exorcists, so that there was no longer any room left there for those condemned for wrong doing.<sup>18</sup>

Diocletian issued a third edict in September or November of 303 to remedy the overcrowding of the jails with Christians by offering amnesty to all those who sacrificed to the gods. Christian prisoners who refused to sacrifice in exchange for their freedom were mockingly forced through the motions of sacrifice and expelled from the prisons.<sup>19</sup> The prisons were eventually emptied but Diocletian continued to menace the church. The first three edicts were issued within the span of one year.

---

<sup>17</sup> Eusebius Mart. Pal. 3. 1 (L).

<sup>18</sup> Eusebius Hst. Eccl. 8. 6.

<sup>19</sup> See Eusebius Hst. Eccl. 8. 2; and *ibid.*, Mart. Pal. praefatio and 1. 1.

At the age of sixty, Diocletian celebrated his Vicennalia in Rome on 29 November 303. Returning to Nicomedia during the winter of 304, the emperor fell deathly ill.<sup>20</sup> At Pannonia in April of 304, Diocletian reluctantly issued the drastic fourth edict against the Christians and revived Decian's policy of total persecution against the church.<sup>21</sup> The fourth edict required all inhabitants throughout the empire to sacrifice to the gods of the Roman imperial cult to show their allegiance to Rome. Those who refused to comply with the fourth edict were subject to arrest and execution.<sup>22</sup>

The emperor recovered from his illness in March 305. On 1 May 305 Diocletian and Maximian both voluntarily abdicated his authority and retired.<sup>23</sup> The two Caesari, Constantius in the west and Galerius in the east, advanced as the new Augusti. To the surprise of many (Constantine included), the newly appointed Caesari were Severus in the west (a military colleague of Galerius) and Maximinus in the east (Galerius' nephew).<sup>24</sup> Maximinus shared his uncle's anti-Christian fanaticism and was an aggressive persecutor of the church. Galerius and Maximinus waited for a year

---

<sup>20</sup> See Williams, Diocletian, pp. 186-200.

<sup>21</sup> Eusebius Hst. Eccl. 8. 9-13; and *ibid.*, Mart. Pal. 3. 1. For Decius' anti-Christian policy see Frend, Martyrdom, pp. 389-439.

<sup>22</sup> Geoffrey de Ste. Croix, "Aspects of the 'Great' Persecution," HTR 47 (1954): 80 and 96.

<sup>23</sup> Lactantius Mort. Pers. 11. Diocletian and Maximian were the first Roman emperors to abdicate voluntarily since Nerva in 96. For the interpretation that Diocletian abdicated in order to disassociate himself from the persecution of Christians see Victor Caes 39. 47; and A. H. M. Jones, Constantine and the Conversion of Europe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1948).

<sup>24</sup> See Lactantius Mort. Pers. 18-19, and 26; Eutropius Breviarium 10; and Zosimus Historia Nova 2.

before reinstigating the persecution. Eusebius confirms that the year 305 was relatively peaceful for the church, remarking that the entire year passed in Palestine without a single martyrdom.<sup>25</sup> This year-long respite from Christian bloodshed may also be reflected in a letter retained by Eusebius in which Maximinus says to Sabinus:

But when under happy auspices I came for the first time to the East, and learnt that in certain places very many who were able to serve the public good were being banished by the judges for the aforesaid reason (professing Christianity), I gave orders to each of the judges that none of them in the future was to deal harshly with the provincials, but rather by persuasive words and exhortations to recall them to the worship of the gods.<sup>26</sup>

The year 305 is an identifiable break in the enforcement of Diocletian's fourth edict and marks the close of the initial stage of the Diocletianic persecution.

#### The Great Persecution in Egypt: 303 to 305

The general outline of Diocletian's persecution is well-known. A difficult task, however, is to determine (if at all possible) how intense the initial stage of the persecution was in Egypt between 303 and 305. This initial stage of the Diocletianic persecution is critical to the study of Christianity in Egypt, the origins of the Melitian movement, and even for the rise of Coptic monasticism. Unfortunately, comprehensive sources do not exist for the early years of the persecution in Egypt.<sup>27</sup> No contemporary church historians provide a first-hand account of persecution in Egypt between 303 and 305. Lactantius gives an eyewitness account of events during this initial stage in Nicomedia and Bithynia, but not in Egypt. Eusebius recounts the

---

<sup>25</sup> Eusebius Hst. Eccl. 9. 9.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> See Frend, Martyrdom, pp. 496-8, and 534 n. 270.

persecution of Christians in Palestine between 303 and 311, and in Egypt from 311 to 312. The events recorded through this period by Eusebius are, regrettably, out of chronological order, with only sparse details about the persecution in Egypt during this period.<sup>28</sup> The inadequate historical narratives can be supplemented with select portions of the life and works of Bishop Peter of Alexandria (300 to 311),<sup>29</sup> a few reliable accounts of martyrdoms from this period,<sup>30</sup> and several representative papyri.<sup>31</sup> These sources can be used to estimate how extensive persecution was in Egypt between 303 and 305.

The intensity of the persecution in Egypt was contingent upon the disposition of the local official called to enforce the emperor's edicts. The edicts were issued at the imperial court and distributed throughout the empire by envoys. The method of distribution might be reflected in the later martyrdom of SS. Apaïoule and Pteleme, which says:

---

<sup>28</sup> Barnes, Constantine and Eusebius, pp. 148-63. See below p. 97 n. 64.

<sup>29</sup> See T. Vivian, St. Peter of Alexandria: Bishop and Martyr (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), for a collection and translation of Peter's works and accounts that pertain to the bishop's life.

<sup>30</sup> Note H. Delehay, Les passions des martyrs et les genres littéraires (2d ed.; Subsidia Hagiographica 13 B; Brussels, Soc. des Bollandistes, 1966), pp. 173ff; for a classic critique of the fictional nature of the Egyptian martyrologies. De Lacy O'Leary, The Saints of Egypt (London, Church Historical Society, 1937), p. 20, goes to the extreme of claiming that most of the characters in the *vitae* are fictitious. A more optimistic view which maintains that there is a historical substratum to many of the martyrologies and even historical accuracy with respect to the Acta of Phileas and the Martyrdom of Coluthus is presented by E. A. E. Reymond and J. W. B. Barns, eds., Four Martyrdoms from the Pierpont Morgan Coptic Codices (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973) pp. 1-19. See also Frend, Martyrdom, pp. 494-5; and 528 n. 130.

<sup>31</sup> See Judge and Pickering, "Papyrus Documentation of Church and Community in Egypt to the Mid-Fourth Century," Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum 20 (1977): 47-71.

"I, the emperor Diocletian, write to the governors of the several cities: Greeting! I inform you that I have published an ordinance in the whole earth, that everyone is to sacrifice to the gods which I have made." Straightway he gave the ordinance to Sebastianus the count. He came south through all Egypt; and when he came to Alexandria, he gave the dispatches to Culcianus the governor of Alexandria. Straightway as soon as he received the dispatches, he saluted them; and he ordered all those of his entourage to be assembled, and he had the epistle of the emperor read to them, and they all sacrificed. Thereupon Sabastianus took the ordinance, and came south through all Egypt with a large force of soldiers attendant upon him . . . .<sup>32</sup>

The edict was apparently published throughout the land of Egypt, from Alexandria to the smallest villages. According to one papyrus, Diocletian's edicts were issued by a chain of command which began with the governor and then was sent to the magister rei privatae followed by the procurator rei privatae. The rescript was finally sent to members of the local boule who were then responsible for enforcing the proscriptions.<sup>33</sup> The cases were heard by the governor or praetor, who presided over a traveling circuit court. By this method, an entire nation was neatly subdivided so that no one could evade the requirements of the edict. This was further reinforced by Diocletian's census which provided current information on the lineage and land holdings of the Egyptian people.<sup>34</sup> The only escape from Diocletian's edicts, short of sacrificing (or having someone sacrifice in one's place), was to hope for a breakdown in the communication or enforcement of the laws. Many Christians also fled from the city and went into

---

<sup>32</sup> SS. Apaious and Pteleme in Four Martyrdoms from the Pierpont Morgan Coptic Codices, pp. 121, and 223.

<sup>33</sup> P. Oxy. 33. 2673. See also A. K. Bowman, The Town Councils of Roman Egypt (American Studies in Papyrology 11; Toronto: A. M. Hakket, 1971).

<sup>34</sup> Diocletian called for a census in 297 for the purpose of establishing a new basis for the tax assessment. A couple of years later another census was taken followed a census in 312, which began a fifteen-year cycle for new assessments.

hiding in the countryside.

There were breakdowns in communication and even a lax attitude toward enforcing the edicts, particularly in the west. There were also Roman governors who did not seriously enforce Diocletian's edicts, accepting the mere semblance of obeisance to the edicts as satisfying the law. Whether laxity toward the enforcement of the edicts was motivated by compassion for the Christians or whether a milder policy was adopted by some because it seemed to be the most sensible and pragmatic approach to the problem of Christianity, cannot be determined. There were other Roman provincial leaders, however, who were zealous persecutors of the Christianity. It is historically irresponsible to assume that Diocletian's persecution was uniformly harsh or mild in any given area. The intensity of persecution varied because it was always contingent ultimately on the disposition of the local provincial leaders. The historian has a responsibility to consider the fragmentary evidence about the persecution at the regional and local levels before drawing conclusions about the effectiveness of the persecution in any larger area.

Judging from the evidence, we may conclude that the Roman provincial leaders in Egypt were some of the most notorious persecutors of the church during Diocletian's persecution. We are fortunate in having an abundance of historical, epigraphical, and papyrological evidence from which detailed conclusions can be made about the identity and character of the successive praetors over the Thebaid and also about the governors of Egypt.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> See J. Lallemand, L'administration civile de l'Égypte, 284-382 (Brussels, Palais des Académies, 1964); C. Vandersleyen, Chronologie des préfets de l'Égypte de 284 à 395 (Revue d'Études Latines; Brussels, Latomus, 1962); and A. H. M. Jones, J. R. Martindale and J. Morris, The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire (London:



There is a gap in the fasti of praetors for the Thebaid between 300 and 307, but Satrius Ar(r)ianus is well known through Greek documentation as Praetor of the Thebaid as early as 304 and as late as 307.<sup>36</sup> Ar(r)ianus probably succeeded Aurelius Reginus as praetor.<sup>37</sup> The way Ar(r)ianus spelled his name may be somewhat revealing about his personality. If the praetor's original name was the Greek "Areios," his name could have been dignified by adding (-anus) to the end of it and by adding in its midst the second (r) to suggest that his name was derived from the Roman gentilic name "Arrius."<sup>38</sup> Perhaps Ar(r)ianus shunned his family name because he thought that the first step toward Roman prestige was a dignified name. Faced with a growing Christian population in the Thebaid and a desire to rise in prominence in Roman government, this praetor enthusiastically enforced the Emperor's edicts. Two revealing papyri characterize Ar(r)ianus in a grim light as a persecutor of Christians. A letter dating to the early period of Diocletian's persecution (P. Grenf. II. 73), recounts the banishment of a Christian woman named Politike presumably by the authority of Ar(r)ianus. Similarly, P. Oxy. 23. 2665 gives a report of another Christian who was

---

Cambridge University Press, 1971), Vol. 1.

<sup>36</sup> Jones, et al., Prosopography, p. 14, lists the Praetor's name as 'Adrianus' adopting a doubtful reading from Vitelli in P. Flor. 33; where the editor marked the (d) as doubtful. See F. Preisigke, Berichtigungsliste der griechischen Papyrusurkunden (Berlin, Leipzig, Heidelberg, 1922), 1. 455.

<sup>37</sup> See Jones et al., Prosopography, pp. 14; 318; 762; and 1098. The identification of !Eutychianus! as predecessor to Ar(r)ianus is dependant on the accuracy of his identification in "Passio Macarii" AnBol 40 (1922): 131-4, which appears doubtful.

<sup>38</sup> Reymond and Barns, eds., Four Martyrdoms, p. 7 n. 23.

sentenced by the Thebaid Praetor.<sup>39</sup>

Satrius Ar(r)ianus was depicted in the Coptic martyrologies as an anti-Christian arch-villain.<sup>40</sup> While it is undeniable that many of the *vitae* are filled with legendary exaggerations and stock scenes, they have, nonetheless, retained certain trustworthy, historical traditions. Satrius Ar(r)ianus appeared in many of the later accounts as the Christians' deadly adversary. The *Martyrdom of S. Coluthus*<sup>41</sup> has retained an actual court hearing, conducted by Ar(r)ianus. The transcription of the trial may have been obtained by bribing a public official<sup>42</sup> or the court hearing could have been transcribed by an official scribe planted in the court by the authority of a certain Julius of Aqfahs to record martyrs' trials.<sup>43</sup>

Coluthus' trial took place "in the twentieth year of the emperors Diocletian and Maximian, the transgressors . . . on the fourth day of Pashons (4 May 304)." Coluthus was a Coptic Christian presbyter and physician by profession.<sup>44</sup> According to a later

---

<sup>39</sup> Judge and Pickering, "Papyrus Documentation of Church and Community in Egypt to the Mid-Fourth Century," nos. 9 and 18.

<sup>40</sup> Note for example "Passio Philemonis"; "Passio Macarii"; "Passio Paphnutii" and "Passio Psotii" in *AnBoI* 40 (1922).

<sup>41</sup> *Martyrdom of S. Coluthus* in Reymond and Barns, *Four Martyrdoms*, pp. 25-9; and 145-50. For a translation of a later sensationalized rendition named by the eds. 'Coluthus II' see *idem.*, pp. 11-13.

<sup>42</sup> An example is given by Delehaye, *Les passions des martyrs*, p. 130.

<sup>43</sup> See *S. Shenoufe and His Brethren* 138 R ii-138 V i; in Reymond and Barns, eds., *Four Martyrdoms*, pp. 9-10; 127; and 222; note also p. 6 n. 20.

<sup>44</sup> A healing cult grew around the memory of the martyred physician which involved incubation in the martyr's tomb. For more details on Coluthus see Walter E. Crum, "Coluthus, The Martyr and His Name," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 30 (1929/30): 323-27.

tradition, Ar(r)ianus was married to Coluthus' sister, who was also a Christian.<sup>45</sup> The trial provides a glimpse of the praetor Ar(r)ianus, earnestly imploring Coluthus, by reason and with the threat of a variety of tortures, to denounce his faith and sacrifice to the gods.<sup>46</sup> The praetor, like the earlier Emperor Marcus Aurelius, was depicted as an urbane Roman who shuddered in horror at the treasonous and even suicidal contumacy of the Christians. Ar(r)ianus reasoned with Coluthus saying,

There was a man here today on a charge of murder. This man wants to live; but as for you Coluthus, something evil possesses you to make you destroy yourself with murderers!<sup>47</sup>

The manner in which Ar(r)ianus conducted the trial and the kinds of questions he asked show that the praetor was familiar with hearing the cases of Christians, as the praetor himself confessed.<sup>48</sup> Ar(r)ianus condemned his own brother-in-law Coluthus saying, "If you will not sacrifice, hear your sentence, which you have earned: I order you to be burned alive."<sup>49</sup>

---

<sup>45</sup> See Reymond and Barns, Four Martyrdoms, p. 14.

<sup>46</sup> The praetor said to Coluthus, "the tortures of the law court are many . . . ." S. Coluthus 89 R i; and he threatened the saint with fire, the rack, and a weight (which was hung around his neck). In S. Coluthus II the saint magically delivers himself from the tortures, to which is added a heated helmet (cassis), along with the rest of the instruments of torture," *ibid.*, p. 12 n. 41.

<sup>47</sup> S. Coluthus 90 V i-90 V ii; in Reymond and Barns, Four Martyrdoms, pp. 27; 147-8.

<sup>48</sup> S. Coluthus 90 R ii-90 V ii; *ibid.*, pp. 26-7; and 147.

<sup>49</sup> S. Coluthus 92 V i; *ibid.*, pp. 29; and 149. Burning the victim was an unusual mode of punishment for the Coptic martyrologies perhaps because no relics would remain or because it was an admittedly cruel way to kill a person; see Crum "Coluthus, The Martyr and His Name," p. 326.

Ar(r)ianus earned his reputation of villainy soon after Diocletian's edicts were published. By 4 May 304, the praetor could list prominent Christians whom he had persuaded to renounce their faith and sacrifice to the Roman gods. Using the stories of illustrious Christians who had lapsed (and yet retained their communities' admiration), Ar(r)ianus attempted to persuade Coluthus saying,

Be sensible now, and do as you are told. There was Apollonius, the bishop of Siout (Lycopolis); his people were most understanding about him, and took a dignified view of his prudence, since he did not wish to be disobedient, or to be brought to court and hear all this rigmarole, but he proceeded of his own accord into the temple and sacrificed in full view of everyone, with the vessels of libation in his hand, standing there and offering up sacrifice; he is not at all ashamed, and every one honors him . . . . Well now, speak to me, Coluthus, and you shall be in special honor . . . . Then there was P(l)utarchus, the bishop of Sbeht; this man for excellence of his wisdom is worthy of all respect. He was prudent and revered the Emperor's gods, and offered up sacrifice to them; and look at him now! He is alive, with every one who sacrificed with him, and is bishop over them.<sup>50</sup>

The Diocletianic edicts were thus enforced by the notorious anti-Christian praetor Ar(r)ianus who condemned his wife's brother to death, and probably convinced other prominent Christians to recant. Many Christians, including at least two bishops, renounced their faith and sacrificed. Certainly other nameless Thebaid Christians were imprisoned, tortured and condemned to die by the court of Ar(r)ianus.

---

<sup>50</sup> S. Coluthus 92 V i; Reymond and Barns, Four Martyrdoms, pp. 29; and 149.

The Governor of Egypt from 302-307 was Clodius Culcianus, an equally ruthless adversary of the Christians.<sup>51</sup> Culcianus enforced Diocletian's edicts, closing churches and incarcerating Christian leaders. According to a papyrological source, churches in the remote countryside under Culcianus' jurisdiction were forced to close their doors and surrender their property. P. Oxy. 33. 2673 retains a catalogue of church property, in triplicate, which was presented by the church's former lector who was named Aurelius Ammonius, to three members of the local boule.<sup>52</sup> The papyrus dates to 3 February 304, before the final edict was issued by the emperor. There was no indication as to whether Aurelius Ammonius lapsed or not<sup>53</sup> but for whatever reason, there was no hint of reprisal in the text. Valuable possessions catalogued in the church inventory were confiscated and sent to Alexandria by order of Culcianus. Aurelius Ammonius certified by oath that his former church in the village of Chysis owned, "Neither gold nor silver nor money nor clothes nor beasts nor slaves nor lands nor property either from grants or bequests," outside of a bronze gate which was

---

<sup>51</sup> Vandersleyen, Chronologie, pp. 73-93; places Culcianus' terminus at A. D. 308, while Jones et al., Prosopography, pp. 233-4; makes A. D. 306 Culcianus' last year as Governor of Egypt. The early date should be preferred because Clodius Culcianus was succeeded as Governor of Alexandria by Hierocles in A. D. 306/7, another infamous persecutor of the church (see Chapter 3). See Eusebius Mart. Pal. 5. 3 (L); and H. Delehay, "Les martyrs," p. 28.

<sup>52</sup> See Judge and Pickering, "Papyrus Documentation of Church and Community in Egypt to the Mid- Fourth Century," no. 17. Frend, Martyrdom, pp. 533-4, n. 267, mistakenly attributes the affliction reflected in P. Grenf. II. 73 to Culcianus. It should be noted that the Oasis Magna was in the Thebaid, outside of Culcianus' jurisdiction; see Jones, et al., Prosopography, p. 14.

<sup>53</sup> Aurelius Ammonius was a popular name in the late third and early fourth centuries in Egypt, but the individual of this papyrus cannot otherwise be identified. He was probably Coptic-speaking, and certainly a Roman citizen as signified by his nomen 'Aurelius.'

shipped to Alexandria.<sup>54</sup>

Culcianus must have set a high price on the head of Peter, Bishop of Alexandria who was at that time, the single most influential Christian in Egypt. Some time after the publication of Diocletian's fourth edict, probably in early 304, Peter fled for his life from Alexandria to the east. The Martyrdom of Saint Peter recounts the event as follows:

Peter avoiding the madness of the persecutors, went as a fugitive from place to place. Hiding himself, he passed most of the time in Syria or Phoenicia. He continued his wandering for a longer time in Palestine, and stayed for some time in the islands.<sup>55</sup>

The Encomium of Saint Peter, written by Bishop Alexander of Alexandria, records Peter's flight to the east, supplying the interesting detail that Peter was accompanied on his flight by the author of the Encomium and Achillas, both of whom would succeed Peter as Bishop of Alexandria.<sup>56</sup> The Encomium was written in the first person plural, providing a sense of realism and possibly a testimony of the account's authenticity. A letter purportedly written by Peter also relates the story of Peter's

---

<sup>54</sup> P. Oxy. 33. 2673. The bronze gate must have been a costly adornment for the poor village church.

<sup>55</sup> W. Tefler, "St. Peter of Alexandria and Arius," AnBoll 67 (1949): 126; and Vivian, St. Peter, pp. 18, and 68. For other renditions of this incident in the various vitae of Peter see P. Devos, "Une passion grecque inédite de S. Pierre d'Alexandrie et sa traduction par Anastase le Bibliothécaire," AnBoll 83 (1965): 157-87; no. 7; Vivian, St. Peter, Appendix 3 p. 73; see also Severus, History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria, trans. B. Evetts Patrologia Orientalis 1. 103-211; pp. 383-401. There are also two editions of an Encomium of Peter attributed to Alexander, Bishop of Alexandria. See Tito Orlandi, "La versione copta (saidica) dell' 'Encomio di Pietro Alesandrino,'" Rivista degli studi orientali 45 (1970): 151-75; and Henri Hyvernat, Les actes des martyrs de l'Egypte (Hildesheim, New York: Olms, 1977), pp. 247-62; translated by Vivian, St. Peter, Appendix 4, pp. 78-84.

<sup>56</sup> See Vivian, St. Peter, Appendix 4, pp. 78-86.

flight, but places the event in 303 and mistakenly makes him visit Oxyrhynchus.<sup>57</sup>

Although Peter abandoned his bishopric, he worked diligently in absentia writing letters of encouragement, admonishment, and instruction to his congregation. While in hiding, Peter received a letter about the status of the persecution in Alexandria. The reference to the letter was retained in a fragmentary narrative about the life of Peter. The letter clearly implied that persecution worsened in the bishop's absence and also referred to the compulsory worship of idols. The fragment says

and when the Holy Archbishop Abba Peter received (the letter), he wept, saying this: 'There is woe on account of these persecutions which have arisen against the children of peace. Our fathers in their time lived together (in peace) with the emperors, but now, on the other hand, behold, the emperors have broken the law! I write to them (the Christians) to console (them) while they are in grief, knowing that it is an important thing that is happening in the city of Alexandria as a result of it (the persecution).

Almighty Lord, do not humiliate us again beneath the bloodshedders, for they have exalted themselves over us and have brought in upon us (the) worship of idol(s), that which cast us aside from (the) worship (of) God alone (and) which is appropriate (only) to the evil demons.<sup>58</sup>

Hundreds were imprisoned in Alexandria. The most illustrious of Culcianus' captives at Alexandria were four bishops from Lower Egypt: Hesychius, Pachomius, Theodorus, and Phileas. A reliable transcription of the trial of the Bishop Phileas was

---

<sup>57</sup> The fragment was first published as an authentic letter of Peter's by Carl Schmidt, "Fragmente einer Schrift des Martyrerbischof Petrus von Alexandrien," TU n. F. 5/4 (1901): 1-50; and was followed by Frend, Rise, pp. 447, and 458. The work has been proven to contain a number of glaring anachronisms, and was probably written after A. D. 450; see H. Delehay, "Review of C. Schmidt's 'Fragment'," AnBol 20 (1901): 101-103; W. E. Crum, "Texts Attributed to Peter of Alexandria," JTS 4 (1902-03): 387 n. 1; Barns and Chadwick, "A Letter Ascribed to Peter of Alexandria," JTS 24 (1973): 444; T. Orlandi, "La raccolta," p. 131; and Vivian, St. Peter, p. 57.

<sup>58</sup> The Sahidic Coptic fragment was translated by Vivian, St. Peter, p. 55. See Carl Wessely, Studien zur Paleographie und Papyruskunde 15. 143 (K9429, no. 245b); and T. Orlandi, "La raccolta cop'a delle lettere attribuite a Pietro Alesandrino," AnBol 93 (1975): 130-1.

recorded in the Acta Phileae.<sup>59</sup> Culcianus attempted to persuade Phileas, Bishop of Thmuis, to sacrifice, arguing, "You (Phileas) have killed many men by not sacrificing. Pierius saved many (men) by submitting."<sup>60</sup> Pierius was a presbyter in the church of Alexandria and perhaps the leader of the catechetical school in his day.<sup>61</sup> Culcianus engaged the defendant in a theological and philosophical exchange to attempt to persuade the Christian leader to commit idolatry. The Governor conducted himself in a similar manner in the semi-historical Passio Sancti Dioscori.

Bishop Phileas of Thmuis sent a letter to his church from prison (Epistula Phileae)<sup>62</sup> recording the atrocities commissioned against the Christians at Alexandria by Culcianus. According to the letter preserved in Eusebius, Culcianus subjected Christians to the most barbarous tortures. As the prisoners were being tortured, Culcianus personally tried to convince them to recant.<sup>63</sup>

Clodius Culcianus, completely enveloped by the Christian problem, exhausted all means at his disposal to attempt to convince Christians to comply with the Roman state religion. Many Alexandrian Christians were imprisoned, tortured, humiliated and

---

<sup>59</sup> See Herbert Musurillo, The Acts of the Christian Martyrs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), pp. xlvi-xlvii; no. 27, pp. 328-353.

<sup>60</sup> Acta Phileae 2. 5-8. The same argument would be used by Peter later against the zealots, who, he argued, cause through their actions an increase in persecution.

<sup>61</sup> According to Eusebius Hist. Eccl. 7. 32; and Jerome De Vir. Ill. 76; Pierius succeeded Theognostus as head of the school of Alexandria. During the Diocletianic persecution he fled to Rome. Photius Bibl. cod. 119, on the contrary recorded, "According to some, he suffered martyrdom; according to others, he spent the rest of his life at Rome after the time of persecution." Because Pierius wrote the life of Pamphilus, who died in 309, the later tradition was certainly correct.

<sup>62</sup> Musurillo, The Acts of the Christian Martyrs, pp. xlvi; and no. 26, 320-7.

<sup>63</sup> Eusebius Hist. Eccl. 8. 10.



killed by Culcianus. Many more like Peter, Achillas, and Alexander, fled for their lives. Culcianus was later commissioned by Maximinus to help persecute the church in the Thebaid. The former governor's final ill-fated policy against the Christians led ultimately to his death in 313.

Diocletian's edicts against the Christians were thus cruelly enforced between 303 and 305 by the Roman Governor of Egypt, Culcianus and the Praetor of the Thebaid, Ar(r)ianus. The Egyptian Church was then faced with one of the most controversial issues in the early church, namely: What is the proper Christian response to persecution and how should the church deal with Christians who lapse? These issues lay at the root of the Melitian schism.

#### Justification for Flight

The appropriate response to persecution was one of the most divisive issues in the early church. Peter, the most prominent Christian leader in Egypt in the midst of persecution, went into hiding and remained in hiding for almost his entire career as Bishop of Alexandria. How was his conduct justified and was it consistent with the orthodox tradition? Several inter-connected arguments were used to justify flight in persecution.

First, the most significant justification for flight was that disassembly was endorsed by tradition. Jesus taught his disciples to flee from the persecutors,<sup>64</sup> practicing his teaching by never going headlong into the hands of the persecutors and, often, avoiding them altogether. In Peter's Canonical Letter he used the Gospel

---

<sup>64</sup> Matt. 10. 23.

precedent to justify his own action:

He also wishes us to move about from place to place when we are being persecuted for his name, as we hear him saying: "And when they persecute you from this town, flee to the next."<sup>65</sup>

In Canon 13, Peter listed a variety of scriptural examples that support flight from persecution. Peter considered fleeing during persecution to be an obedient response to the Savior's command and to the teaching of the New Testament.

Many of the church fathers similarly advocated flight from persecution. Bishop Polycarp hid from the maddened mob in Smyrna until he was eventually sought out and killed.<sup>66</sup> Clement of Alexandria cited Matthew 10.23 to encourage prudence during the Severan persecution.<sup>67</sup> Origen's youthful zeal for martyrdom was modified in his later years in Contra Celsum where he argued

Jesus taught his disciples not to be rash, saying to them: "If they persecute you in this city flee to another; and if they persecute you in that, flee again to yet another." And he gave them this teaching by his tranquil life; he was careful not to meet dangers unnecessarily or at the wrong time or for no good reason.<sup>68</sup>

---

<sup>65</sup> Canon 9. The text of Peter's fifteen canons known as his "Canonical Letter" is most conveniently found in PG 18. 467-508. For a translation see Vivian, St. Peter, pp. 138; and 185-92. There are also two additional canons found in the Paris Syriac codex 62. The two Syriac canons can be found in P. A. de Lagarde ed., Reliquiae iuris ecclesiastica antiquissimae (Leipzig: Teubner, 1856), pp. 99-117. The two canons have been translated from a Greek retroversion by Vivian, St. Peter, pp. 193-5; who, along with others, consider the additions to be authentic, see *ibid.*, p. 193 n. 138.

<sup>66</sup> Martyrdom of Polycarp in J. B. Lightfoot, Apostolic Fathers II. 3 pp. 363-401; see also Stevenson, A New Eusebius, no. 18. The account of Polycarp's flight contrasts with Ignatius of Antioch's zeal for martyrdom. The Martyrdom was probably written or redacted after the outbreak of Montanism (A. D. 171/2). The author used the death of Polycarp as a polemic against the Montanists' zeal for martyrdom, see also Mart. Pol. 4. 1, "But one of them, Quintus by name, a Phrygian (pejorative for Montanist?), lately arrived from Phrygia, when he saw the beasts, was afraid."

<sup>67</sup> Clement of Alexandria Stromateis 4. 10.

<sup>68</sup> Origen Contra Celsum 1. 65.

Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, was probably the most vocal proponent of hiding during persecution.<sup>69</sup> Writing during the Decian persecution, Cyprian believed that "the Lord commanded us to withdraw and flee from persecution, and to encourage us to it, he both taught and did so himself."<sup>70</sup> On the other hand, many Christians were hesitant to flee because they were afraid to lose their worldly possessions.<sup>71</sup> Flight from the persecutor was an act of witness, second only to being arrested for one's faith.<sup>72</sup> Rather than sacrificing life or health, Cyprian argued a Christian who disassembled, sacrificed his property.<sup>73</sup> In reality, flight from persecution was more expedient for clergy, who often did not have a great deal of private property and had therefore nothing in terms of material possessions to lose.<sup>74</sup>

Flight from persecution was also a sure way of avoiding a lapse of faith, which might lead to a coerced sacrifice in prison. Countless bishops and prominent Christians including Dionysius, Pierius, Achillus, Alexander, Eusebius and even Athanasius approved of flight from persecution. Athanasius summarized the tradition that supported flight in persecution as follows:

Thus the saints, as I said before, were abundantly preserved in their flight by

---

<sup>69</sup> See Cyprian De lapsis 3; and 10; and idem., Ep 8; 20; 57; 58; and 81.

<sup>70</sup> Idem., De lapsis 10.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 11-12.

<sup>72</sup> Cyprian De lapsis 3, "If the primary claim to victory is that, having fallen into the hands of the pagans, a man should confess the Lord, the next title to glory is that he should have gone underground and preserved himself for further services of the Lord."

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>74</sup> The same thing might be said of wealthy property owners who were able to have people run their estate in their absence.

the providence of God, as physicians for the sake of them that had need. And to all men generally, even to us is this given, that we should flee when we are persecuted, and hide ourselves when we are sought after, and not rashly tempt the Lord, but should wait. . . . This rule the blessed martyrs observed in their several persecutions. When persecuted, they fled; while concealing themselves they showed fortitude; and when discovered they submitted themselves to martyrdom.<sup>75</sup>

Peter's ideas regarding flight from persecution were shaped by an Alexandrian tradition, much narrower than any kind of universal consensus. In fact, Alexandria alone could boast of having clergy and teachers who were not at all inclined to have a zeal for martyrdom. Flight from persecution was the traditionally preferred response of the Christian leaders in Alexandria when persecuted. Neither the Montanists nor the Novatianists would make substantial inroads among the Alexandrian Christians. Basilides, Heracleon, Clement, Origen, Dionysius, Pierius, Peter, Achillas and Alexander all supported flight in persecution either through their teaching and/or by their practice.

#### The Rise of Melitius

This context of intense persecution and disassembly coupled with the circumstances under which Melitius himself became Bishop of Lycopolis are extremely significant for establishing a motive for his early activities. The Christians of Lycopolis suffered under the unrelenting hand of Satrius Ar(r)ianus, the Thebaid Praetor. When Ar(r)ianus heard the trial of Coluthus in 304, it was public knowledge that two Thebaid bishops, Apollonius of Lycopolis and Plutarch of Sbeht (Apollinopolis Minor) had apostasized. Apollonius was removed from his office but Plutarch retained the admiration of his congregation. The Thebaid Church's testimony waned as

---

<sup>75</sup> Athanasius De fuga 22.

Christian resilience was broken by Roman persecution.

Peter issued a harsh letter of rebuke to Apollonius in 304, "after he heard that he had fallen away when he fell down into the pit of idolatry."<sup>76</sup> (See Appendix 1). Apollonius' apostasy is described as a heinous offense with terms such as "betrayal," "error from the Godhead," "denial," and even "treason." Peter even attacked the bishop's ministry and lack of effectiveness against the Manichaeans.<sup>77</sup> The text of the letter breaks off before Peter actually removes Apollonius from his office, but the disposition of the letter clearly implies that Peter intended to depose the apostate bishop. Peter castigated Apollonius writing

It is truly a shame, the denial which has caught you in a trap, and something from which there is no escape. Who suggested to you treason like this? I had no intimation of your evil disposition before today; or else I could not have borne to refrain from sending to correct you.<sup>78</sup>

Later in his Canonical Letter, Peter barred apostate clergy from returning to their office.<sup>79</sup> There is no extant evidence, however, to determine whether the same action was enforced against Plutarch or not. In 304, Peter deposed Apollonius and ordained Melitius as the new Bishop of Lycopolis.<sup>80</sup> Nothing is known about the life of Melitius prior to his ordination.<sup>81</sup> Melitius was properly ordained by Peter and his

<sup>76</sup> J. Barns and H. Chadwick, "A Letter Ascribed to Peter of Alexandria," JTS 24 (1973): 443-55.

<sup>77</sup> Apollonius' city of Lycopolis was the center for the diffusion of Manichaeism in Egypt. Peter couches his attack on the bishop's lack of effectiveness by telling how he himself was used by God to supernaturally convert a Manichaean.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 452; and 455.

<sup>79</sup> Canon 10, in Vivian, St. Peter, pp. 189-90.

<sup>80</sup> Barns and Chadwick, "A Letter Ascribed to Peter," p. 448-9; and Reymond and Barns, Four Martyrdoms, pp. 8-18; and 25-9.

<sup>81</sup> It is possible that Melitius' name was actually Pilate and he change it because

claim to the bishopric of Lycopolis was never questioned.

The timing and context of Melitius' ordination were extremely significant. Melitius was ordained Bishop of Lycopolis in the midst of Satrius Ar(r)ianus' extension of the Diocletianic persecution. Many Coptic Christians died, but certainly many more Thebaid clergy and laity compromised their faith and apostasized. Melitius was appointed to replace Apollonius, one of the apostate bishops.

The immediate prominence of Melitius is difficult to explain. The city of Lycopolis was a significant ecclesiastical center in the Thebaid and Melitius was probably the metropolitan over an entire district. The four Egyptian bishops who had been imprisoned in Alexandria (Hesychius, Pachomius, Theodorus and Phileas) wrote a letter to Melitius known as the "Letter of Phileas," or the first Veronese fragment (from the Codex Veronensis LX, see Appendix 2). The letter implies that the Bishop of Lycopolis had broad ecclesiastical authority in his own district.<sup>82</sup> Melitius may have

---

of the name's Biblical associations. This inference comes from an Encomium on the martyr Claude by Constantine (died 605), Bishop of Asiut (Lycopolis). The Encomium and other panegyrics on St. Claudius are edited by Gérard Godron, Textes coptes relatifs à Saint Claude d'Antioche Patrologia Orientalis 35 Fasc. 4, no. 166 (1970). See also W. E. Crum, Catalogue of the Coptic Manuscripts in the British Museum (London: 1905), no. 358. In P. Morgan 47 line 185, a priest confesses, "Thus have I secretly believed, the things taught to me by Marcion and the deceiver Pilates, the author of the heresy of Melitius." The author confuses Marcion with the Melitians but the reference to Pilate might be historically worthwhile. (It may, however, be an attempt to associate Melitius as an enemy of Christ). W. E. Crum, "Some further Meletian Documents," JEA 13 (1927): 22-3, suggests that it is not inconceivable to think that Pilate may have been Melitius' actual name. The particular form of the name Pilate used is scarcely known in Egypt apart from one instance from Upper Egypt, two occurrences in Lower Egypt, and a number of instances in Middle Egypt, where the Melitians were concentrated. There is also a prominent "Pilate legend" that makes the infamous procurator an Egyptian native.

<sup>82</sup> See Codex Veronensis LX, in Ecclesiae Occidentalis Monumenta Iuris Antiquissima Vol. I ed. Turner pp. 634-5; and M. J. Routh, Reliquiae Sacrae (2d ed. Oxford: E. Typographeia Academica, 1846; repr. Hildesheim/New York: Olms, 1974),

represented the Alexandrian bishop as a special representative.<sup>83</sup> Epiphanius suggested that Melitius was considered "first among (the bishops) throughout Egypt and was second only to Peter in the archbishopric (of Egypt)."<sup>84</sup> The safest explanation for Melitius' early prominence is that he probably filled a power vacuum caused by the incarceration and/or flight of the Thebaid clergy.<sup>85</sup>

Melitius worked together with Peter for several months before the Bishop of Alexandria abandoned his see. Under the circumstances of Melitius' ordination, Peter's flight from persecution must have frustrated or even angered the Thebaid bishop. Peter justified his self-imposed exile in a traditional manner, claiming that he controlled his bishopric by writing letters of encouragement, admonition and instruction to his flock while in hiding. In his History Severus recorded that Peter said,

I did not neglect the care of Phileas and Hesychius and Pachomius and

---

4. 91-3; and Stevenson, A New Eusebius, no. 251. See also the comments by J. M. Neale, A History of the Holy Eastern Church. The Patriarch of Alexandria (London: J. Masters, 1847), pp. 90-1; and E. Schwartz, "Zur Geschichte des Athanasius," Nachrichten von der Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Goettingen (Phil.-hist.-Klasse) (1905): 164-87. For historians who do not believe that Melitius was an archbishop or a metropolitan, see S. L. Greenslade, Schisms in the Early Church (London: SCM Press, 1953), p. 51; and F. H. Kettler, "Der meletianische Streit in Agypten," Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde des Urchristentum 35 (1936): 166.

<sup>83</sup> See F. H. Kettler, "Der meletianische Streit in Agypten," p. 166.

<sup>84</sup> Epiphanius Adv. Haer. 68. 1. Epiphanius refers to Peter as archbishop but he also refers to Melitius as an archbishop in Adv. Haer. 69. 1. The earliest use of the title "archbishop" is in a list of Melitian clergy presented to Alexander, Bishop of Alexandria and recorded in Athanasius Apologia contra Arianos 71 (see Appendix) where the title refers to Melitius. Cyril of Alexandria is the first patriarch to claim exclusive rights to the title; see G. W. H. Lampe, A Patristic Greek Lexicon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 237B. Vivian, St. Peter, p. 1 n. 1, makes the interesting suggestion that the term "arch (supreme) bishop" may have originally been an Upper Egyptian title.

<sup>85</sup> This appears to be the implication in Epiphanius Adv. Haer. 68. 1-2.

Theodorus, who were imprisoned for the faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and merited grace from God, for I used to write to them, and to speak of them in my epistles from Mesopotamia.<sup>86</sup>

In a letter to Diocletian, purportedly written by him, Peter attempted to exonerate him from charges of faintheartedness. With an uncharacteristic bravado, Peter was made to declare to Diocletian, "I have inquired, and I understand that you have given yourself over to the demons!"<sup>87</sup> Despite the justifications for his flight and disclaimers of weakness, Peter's action must have had devastating consequences on the unity of the Egyptian Church.

Melitus' primary concern was now to keep the ministry of the church going in the midst of Diocletian's onslaught. Melitus ordained replacements to minister in the Thebaid churches that were without clergy. Some time after the flight of Peter, Melitus left the Thebaid and began ordaining presbyters who were willing to risk their lives for the church in other dioceses. The bishops responded from prison by issuing a letter to Melitus (the first Veronese fragment, see Appendix 2), accusing Melitus of acting outside the authority and tradition of the church by this intrusion into their dioceses. He was also sharply rebuked for appointing clergy flippantly and for trying to replace bishops who were in prison but still very much alive. The bishops assumed that Melitus' would justify his actions along these lines:

But perhaps you will say: I did this to prevent many from being drawn away by the unbelief [ie. apostasy and flight] of many, because the flocks were in

---

<sup>86</sup> Severus History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria trans. B. Evetts Patrologia Orientalis 1 (1907): 392 ff.

<sup>87</sup> Vivian, St. Peter, pp. 55-6.



need and forsaken, there being no pastor with them.<sup>88</sup>

According to another fragment from the Codex Veronensis (the second Verones fragment, see Appendix 3), "when all these bishops, presbyters and deacons suffered martyrdom," Melitius entered into Alexandria.<sup>89</sup> Peter had appointed certain laymen, in his absence, to act as "parish-visitors" during the emergency but they apparently did not have authority to administer the eucharist.<sup>90</sup> Melitius probably ordained individuals who were already ministering to the church for the purpose of vesting them with a sacramental authority.<sup>91</sup> He even ordained two confessors, one to minister in the prison and the other to minister in the mines.<sup>92</sup> The ordination of the confessors was intended to fill vacancies caused by the execution of the clergy in prison.

---

<sup>88</sup> Stevenson, A New Eusebius, p. 291; and Appendix 2.

<sup>89</sup> According to Bishop Constantine's Encomium on Claudius, Melitius attempted to carry the martyr's body with him as he went northward to Alexandria; see P. Morgan 47. 153. Although this may seem unbelievable and macabre, there is an apparently close connection between Melitius' supposed action and Athanasius' later condemnation of the Melitians' preoccupation with relics and their desecration of martyrs tombs, see Crum, "Some further Melitian Documents," pp. 23-4 n. 14.

<sup>90</sup> The bishops argued that the Christians were not destitute, "because there are many going about (to) them . . . in a position to act as visitors." The term used for "visitor" (circumventes) probably denoted a layperson appointed to make visits within a parish. See Kettler, "Der meletanische Streit in Ägypten," p. 160; and Vivian, St. Peter, p. 23.

<sup>91</sup> W. Tefler, "Meletius of Lycopolis and Episcopal Succession in Egypt," HTR 48 (1955): 227-8.

<sup>92</sup> Melitius' appointment of individuals for the prisons and mines fits sensibly with the suggestion that his primary concern was the revival of the liturgy. It is well known from the accounts of Epiphanius Adv. Haer. 68. 3, and Eusebius Mart. Pal. 13, that the Christians continued their services while in prison. Individuals were sent to minister to the confessors' physical and spiritual needs. Eusebius even suggests that some very bold liturgical ventures were instigated by Thebaid Christians, some of whom were identified as Melitians.

The second Veronese fragment (see Appendix 3) includes the detail that Melitius ordained two individuals by the name of Isidore and Arius. Both individuals were said to be of questionable character and in search of vainglory. The anti-Melitian fragment relates,

Now in that city (Alexandria) there was a certain person, by name Isidore, turbulent in character and possessed with the ambition to find a teacher. And there was also a certain Arius, who wore the habit of piety, and was in like manner possessed with the ambition to find a teacher.

Was this Arius the infamous heretic and, if so, was his name included to discredit Melitius? The Greek Martyrdom of Peter transformed him into a precursor of Nicæan orthodoxy and the excommunicator of the heretic Arius (an accomplishment with which no fourth-century writer concurred).<sup>93</sup> The Passio S. Petri<sup>94</sup> and Sozomen suggest that Arius the heretic was a follower of Melitius, and that he abandoned the schism and was ordained deacon by Peter.<sup>95</sup> When Peter excommunicated the Melitians and invalidated their baptism, Arius again sided with the Melitians and was likewise cast out by the Bishop of Alexandria. According to Sozomen, Peter's successor, Achillas, restored Arius and eventually elevated him to presbyter.<sup>96</sup> The earliest evidence, however, Alexander's Encomium, Athanasius and Epiphanius, make no connection

---

<sup>93</sup> P. Devos, "Une passion grecque inédite de S. Pierre d'Alexandrie et sa traduction par Anastase le Bibliothécaire," AnBoll 83 (1965): 157-87; and Vivian, St. Peter, pp. 23 n. 76; 70-8. The problems with connecting the Melitian Arius with the heretic are manifold; see R. Williams, "Arius and the Melitian Schism," JTS n.s. 37/1 (1986): 35-52; and Vivian, St. Peter, pp. 23-5.

<sup>94</sup> See Tefler, "St. Peter of Alexandria and Arius," pp. 128-30; and Vivian, St. Peter, pp. 69-70.

<sup>95</sup> Sozomen Hist. Eccl. 1. 5.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

between the Melitian Arius and the heretic, although it would have been to the advantage of Alexander and Athanasius to have done so if the evidence existed. It is therefore probably certain that the Melitian Arius was not the same individual as the later heretic.

Melitius' actions were attacked by his contemporaries in the catholic church and by later generations. Bishop Alexander of Alexandria condemned Melitius for lustfully seeking the archbishopric of Alexandria in Peter's absence.<sup>97</sup> The second Veronese fragment, perhaps of Athanasian authorship, attempts to discredit Melitius by also suggesting that he was motivated by an envy for Peter's authority and that he promised greater prestige to those who followed him. Both Alexander and Athanasius had a lot to gain by assassinating Melitius' character.<sup>98</sup> Similar allegations of arrogance and self-will are found in later Coptic works.<sup>99</sup> There is no evidence, however, to suggest that Melitius' motives were less than sincere.

Peter wrote a letter to his Church in Alexandria responding to Melitius' actions (the third Veronese fragment, see Appendix 4). Peter knew that the four bishops had written a letter of admonition to Melitius, and that Melitius continued to ordain presbyters outside of his jurisdiction. Peter's primary contention against Melitius was

---

<sup>97</sup> Alexander's Encomium on St. Peter, the Coptic text is in Hyverant, Les actes des martyrs de l'Égypte, p. 60. See also Vivian, St. Peter, pp. 78-84.

<sup>98</sup> It is regrettable that many historians have accepted these highly biased accounts as reliable.

<sup>99</sup> The Hamburg text of Severus' Patriarchal History (ed. C. F. Seybold CSCO 52), sect. 42, states, "And Melitius, Bishop of Asiut, descended upon the city of Alexandria and entered it, bringing money, which he distributed among a few folk, weak in faith and understanding; and they received him and he became their leader; and he found favor with the clergy and carried out ordinations of bishops."

that the illegal ordinations were performed in disregard for the authority of Peter's office. Peter ends the letter by advising his followers to "be on your guard, and do not associate with him until, with our wise men in attendance, I can meet with him and see what he is planning."<sup>100</sup> Peter did not formally excommunicate Melitius in this letter, but rather cautioned his people not to have anything to do with Melitius until matters could be resolved.<sup>101</sup>

### Conclusions

The Melitian movement went through its first stage of development between 303 and 305. Several inter-related factors contributed in shaping the schism that would disrupt the unity of the Egyptian church for much of the fourth century. Persecution in Egypt, lapsed and disassembled clergy, and the decline in the frequency of the liturgy motivated Melitius to action. Melitius' desire to fill the vacancies in Egypt, however, was only the first stage of his protest against the Alexandrian bishop. Melitius' ideas evolved as he was gradually forced to focus his agenda. The second stage of the protest, which led to Melitius' excommunication, was the question of the purity of the church and the penitential restoration of the lapsed.

---

<sup>100</sup> PG 18. 509; Codex Veronensis LX, I. 636; Routh, Reliquiae Sacrae, 4. 94. See also Stevenson, A New Eusebius, no. 253; and Vivian, St. Peter, p. 26.

<sup>101</sup> See Vivian, St. Peter, pp. 26-7; and R. Williams, "Arius and the Melitian Schism," JTS n.s. 37,1 (1986): 36.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### THE SECOND STAGE OF THE MELITIAN SCHISM:

306 TO 313

The interconnected factors and motives that generated the Melitian schism are not readily apparent. It is historically simplistic to make the personal ambitions of Melitius the prime cause for the movement.<sup>1</sup> Many factors worked together over a period of several years to contribute to the outbreak of this schism. The religious or theological factors have been divided into two developmental stages.

First, Melitius was initially motivated by a desire to strengthen the church during the Diocletianic persecution. As a high ranking official in the Egyptian Church, he ordained clerics in and outside of his Thebaid bishopric as vacancies occurred. Melitius' ordinations outside the area of his jurisdiction showed a complete disregard for earlier church precedent. There is no evidence, however, that any other issues were

---

<sup>1</sup> S. L. Greenslade, Schisms in the Early Church (London: SCM Press, 1953), pp. 48, and 52, makes the personal ambition of Melitius the prime mover in the schism. See also T. Vivian, St. Peter of Alexandria: Bishop and Martyr (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), p. 39; and L. W. Barnard, "Athanasius and the Melitian Schism," JEA 59 (1973): 182.

at stake in the earliest stage of Melitius' protest.

Second, the watershed in Melitius' evolution from a rigoristic zealot to a puritanical schismatic occurred in the critical year 306. The issue of apostasy and penitential restoration would irreparably divide Melitius from the orthodox Alexandrian Church and ultimately force him into schism.

#### Peter of Alexandria on the Lapsed

On 1 May 305, Diocletian and Maximian abdicated and transferred their imperium to Maximinus and Galerius. Between May of 305 and March of 306, the persecution of Christians temporarily abated. This moratorium brought a new dawn of hope for Christians which was marked by the gradual return of the lapsed to the church seeking forgiveness and readmission. Ecclesiastical leaders were faced with the dilemma of how to deal with such apostates who now sought forgiveness and restoration. Peter also returned to Alexandria during the temporary peace in order to personally confront Melitius and to address the question of the lapsed.<sup>2</sup>

Peter then published his Canonical Letter defining his position on the restoration of the lapsed to the church. The canons were issued from Alexandria in 306 and illustrate the deepening disagreement between Peter's position of lenient mercy toward the lapsed and Melitius' inclinations toward severity.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Vivian, St. Peter, p. 33.

<sup>3</sup> See Canon 1, ". . . and this is now our fourth Easter under persecution." For the date the Canons were issued see O. Bardenhewer, Geschichte der altkirchlichen Literatur (2nd ed.; Freiburg, Herder, 1913), p. 243; F. H. Kettler, "Petros 1," in Realencyklopaedia der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft 19,2 (1938): 1281; A. von Harnack, Geschichte der alterchristlichen Literatur bis Eusebius (2nd ed.; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1893, repr. 1958), 1/1:144; B. Altaner and A. Stuiber, Patrology (Freiburg, Herder, 1966), p. 212; Schwartz, "Zur Geschichte," p. 171; J. Quasten, Patrology (1953 repr.; Westminster, Maryland: Christian Classics, Inc., 1984), 2. 115-16; and Vivian,

Apart from the Christological debates, the most divisive controversies in the early church were ecclesiastical, centering on the question of penance and the restoration of Christians who had fallen into notorious sin. Several early synods and tracts focused on how the church should deal with the lapsed, but the exact viewpoints delineated by the early church varied in degree between rigorism and leniency. Canons instituted by synods and early clerics required the lapsed to fulfill specified periods of penance, which outlined a gradual restoration of the lapsed to the local church. Rigorists resoundingly objected to the restoration of the lapsed to church membership. The Novatian and Donatist controversies closely paralleled the dispute that emerged between Peter and Melitius. While viewpoints on the lapsed varied chronologically and geographically, generally speaking, the early church gradually disavowed puritanical rigorism and progressively moved toward a more moderate policy of penitential restoration.

Peter's canons expressed a spirit of an overly generous moderation toward the lapsed, which was out of harmony with the emerging consensus of the church. The Canonical Letter imposed periods of penance for various acts of apostasy which were of an unprecedented leniency. Peter's impositions were less severe than any canon or penitential work written prior to or after his day.<sup>4</sup> Peter's canons seemed to provide a bold apologetic for flight from persecution and an exculpation of his own flight. He also suggested that those who lapsed under torture could not reasonably be held

---

St. Peter, p. 196 n. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Vivian, St. Peter, p. 146.

responsible for their actions, and consequently had no need to do penance.<sup>5</sup>

For those who lapsed but later repented and were imprisoned, their prison terms were normally applied retroactively toward their total penance. Customarily, the penitent lapsed were restored to the church after the end of the persecution, when an assembly of clergymen had an opportunity to evaluate each individual case and to decide on appropriate periods of penance. Peter's canons also mark a departure from this customary practice.

Peter's canons suspended the assembly of the clergy and supported an immediate restoration of the lapsed to the church before the end of the persecution, provided the individuals fulfilled their penance.<sup>6</sup> Admitting the penitent lapsed to the church during persecution may demonstrate nothing more than a premature judgment on Peter's part, if he mistakenly believed that the persecution was over when he issued his canons. Peter's actions showed a disavowal for the church's penitential tradition and an inflated view of his own episcopal authority which, in light of Melitius' activities, may have reflected an urgent sense of insecurity on his part.

The Canonical Letter was unlike any other ante-Nicene work of its kind in that it lacked the bitterly vindictive denunciations of the persecutors and the stereotypical exultations of suffering and martyrdom customarily seen in works of this nature.<sup>7</sup> The question of whether confessors and martyrs could intercede on behalf of the lapsed was

---

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 154.

<sup>6</sup> Quasten, Patrology, 2. 116.

<sup>7</sup> Compare Peter's Canonical Letter with the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch; Tertullian; the Pseudo-Cyprianic De laude martyriis; Origen; Cyprian; and Eusebius' Mart. Pal..



another thorny controversy in the early church. According to Eusebius, the tradition may have begun with the martyrs at Lyons, who procured forgiveness for those who were not martyred.<sup>8</sup> The canons attempted to put an end to the spiritual authority given to martyrs and confessors.<sup>9</sup>

At the end of the Diocletianic persecution, Epiphanius reported that the lapsed at Alexandria, "went to those who had confessed and borne witness in order to obtain mercy through repentance."<sup>10</sup> The power of martyrs and confessors to intercede on behalf of the lapsed challenged episcopal authority and was attacked by Peter.<sup>11</sup> By the mid-third century in Alexandria, a variation of confessor forgiveness was practiced that granted a special authority to the martyrs to intercede on behalf of sinners after the martyrs' death when the martyred appeared before the throne of God. Peter approved of the confessors' petitions on behalf of the wayward Christian, but Peter did not vest the authority in the confessors to expiate sin.<sup>12</sup>

Peter also openly attacked zealotry in his canons, fearing that it would antagonize the persecutors and ultimately worsen matters for other Christians. These ideas were probably aimed directly at Melitius and his followers. Canon 9 speaks in

---

<sup>8</sup> Eusebius Hst. Eccl. 5. 1. 45.

<sup>9</sup> Hans Lietzmann, A History of the Early Church (Cleveland: 1961), pp. 104-105; and Vivian, St. Peter, p. 142.

<sup>10</sup> Epiphanius Adv. Haer. 68. 2; and Eusebius Hst. Eccl. 9. 1. 9.

<sup>11</sup> See Tertullian, Ad martyres 1; Tefler, Forgiveness of Sins (London:1969), pp. 67-9; Frend, The Donatist Donatist (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), pp. 116, and 121; and Vivian, St. Peter, pp. 148-50; and 167-8.

<sup>12</sup> Vivian, St. Peter, p. 168; and Dionysius, Letters 5 in C. L. Feltoe, DIONYSIUS LEIPSANA: The Letters and Other Remains of Dionysius of Alexandria (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1904).

a derogatory manner about zealots who,

throw themselves into a conflict which is painful and promises to be a protracted one; they bring upon themselves a temptation which is like fighting against the sea and its many waves- or rather, they are as it were heaping up coals to inflame the sinners against the brethren. . . . For he (Christ) does not wish us of our own accord to go over to the supporters and accomplices of the devil, for if we did so we would become the cause of many deaths and would be forcing them to become harsher and to carry out their works of death.<sup>13</sup>

Peter similarly barred clergy from the ministry who lapsed on account of their zealotry but later repented. Peter considered the lapsed zealot clergyman to be in the most shameful of circumstances. Peter states in Canon 10

Therefore it is not fair that those who of their own accord deserted and fell from the (ranks of the) clergy and (later) took up the struggle remain any longer in church office. They abandoned the Lord's flock and brought blame upon themselves- which none of the apostles ever did. . . . Therefore, those who sought to justify the faith in prison, but who fell from their ministry and (afterward) took up the struggle again, clearly lack perception. For why else do they seek that which they have abandoned when they are able for the present to be of some benefit to their brethren? As long as they remained steadfast, they were forgiven for what they had done contrary to reason, but since they have lapsed- as people who boast and bring blame upon themselves- they are no longer able to minister in the church. Therefore, let them in humility give thought to how they might perform penance rather than sacraments, ceasing from vanity and self-delusion.<sup>14</sup>

Peter continued to say that a sufficient recompense for the lapsed zealot's bold pretension was a restoration to Christian fellowship but not to the ministry.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, it is possible that Peter treated clergy who lapsed through cowardice with greater laxity than was the practice in early church tradition, though this is a matter of debate.<sup>16</sup> Certainly this notion is implied by Epiphanius.<sup>17</sup> Peter may have

<sup>13</sup> St. Peter, Canonical Letter 9; in Vivian, St. Peter, pp. 188-89.

<sup>14</sup> St. Peter Canonical Letter 10; and Vivian, St. Peter, pp. 160; and 189-90.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> See Frend, Martyrdom, p. 540; Bright, "Petrus I.," p. 332; and Vivian, St. Peter,

supported restoring (after proper penance) the clergy who had lapsed as a result of fear. In a Syriac fragment attributed to Peter entitled, "Concerning Those Who Lapsed During Persecution," the Alexandrian bishop makes some curious statements which seem to admit a greater toleration toward lapsed clergy than what had traditionally been the case.<sup>18</sup> Peter favored a general restoration of penitent clergy and laity alike, despite a conflict which he saw with two scriptural injunctions. Peter also seemed to suggest that lapsed clergy could be restored to their full ministry except in the area of the Eucharistic liturgy. Peter stated,

Therefore, it is necessary for those who interpret to the catechumens, imparting (to them) baptism and (giving) to the laity the distribution (of the Eucharist) to show fruit worthy of repentance. If it is pleasing to you, let these things be applied in general to those from the laity and those from the clergy, even if it is written that "the powerful will be afflicted powerfully, and the least will be shown mercy," "and the one to whom much has been given, more will be demanded from him."

But it suffices for them, that is, to those of the clergy, the other additional penalty: they no longer can boast of taking part in the Eucharistic liturgy- not only them but also those who were considered worthy of the spiritual gifts and later fell- except if someone renews the struggle and overcomes (his fall) by his own patient endurance.<sup>19</sup>

---

pp. 202-203.

<sup>17</sup> Epiphanius Adv. Haer. 68. 2-3.

<sup>18</sup> Paris Syriac codex 62 found in P. A. de Lagarde ed., Reliquiae iuris ecclesiastici antiquissimae (Leipzig, Teubner, 1856), pp. 46-54; and Schwartz, "Zur Geschichte," pp. 166-69; with a translation of a Greek text retroverted from the Syriac by Vivian, St. Peter, pp. 193-5. A number of scholars maintain the authenticity of the fragments including, Shwartz, "Zur Geschichte," pp. 164-87; F. H. Kettler, "Petros 1," Realencyklopaedia der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft 19,2 (1938): 1286; Harnack, Geschichte, 1. 1. 445; 2. 2. 73; O. Bardenhewer, Geschichte der altkirchlichen Literatur (2d. ed.; Freiburg, 1914), 2. 243; and Vivian, St. Peter, p. 193.

<sup>19</sup> Peter of Alexandria, "Concerning Those Who Lapsed during the Persecution," Fragment 2, in Vivian, St. Peter, pp. 194-5.

To lapse in persecution was a very serious crime equivalent to committing idolatry and was deemed the most serious of offenses in Judaism and early Christianity. Because the clergy had to maintain a ritual purity for the administration of the sacraments, the church generally excluded from the ministry clergy guilty of mortal sin. There was at least one instance, however, when ritual purity was suspended because of a shortage of orthodox clergy, resulting in the restoration of bishops who were guilty of a deadly sin to the ministry after serving their penance.<sup>20</sup> This would seem to be a plausible motive for Peter's penitential system because he reinstated clergy who lapsed due to fear and restored lapsed clergy to non-liturgical clerical status. He excluded, however, those who lapsed as zealots from the ministry.

A dominant theme in the extant works, purportedly by Peter or about him, emphasizes the characteristics of mercy and forgiveness. These qualities were even symbolized as a healing gift used by Peter to mend the church. In the Encomium on St. Peter, Alexander wrote,

O you (Peter of Alexandria) were worthy of the gift of healings, like Peter, head of the apostles, your namesake, from whom you have inherited the power which was given of binding and losing in heaven.<sup>21</sup>

Peter clearly argued that a lapsed individual's good deeds should be considered when deciding how to determine the person's restoration process. Depending on the individual, Peter even called for the suspension of the traditional, penitential strictures, as he saw fit. He suggested in "Concerning Those Who Lapsed during Persecution,"

---

<sup>20</sup> Athanasius Canon 42; and *ibid.*, pp. 16-18.

<sup>21</sup> Henri Hyvernât, Les actes des martyrs de l'Égypte (Hildesheim New York: Olms, 1977, 247-62; and Vivian, St. Peter, pp. 79, 81, and 83.

that good works have a redemptive efficacy that transcended penitential restoration.

The Bishop of Alexandria claimed that,

. . . even if certain limits and forms and regulations for repentance be set down, nevertheless the ardent faith of each person and the firm steadfast zeal and especially good deeds done both before and after this great temptation, and the pure way of life in Christ all constitute (even) stronger and more powerful healing agents.<sup>22</sup>

The central role that forgiveness played in Peter's life can also be readily seen in a Greek homiletic fragment by the Alexandrian bishop entitled "Who is among the Saints." While Melitius is not mentioned by name in the fragment, he may well have been the individual to whom the fragment was originally addressed. A portion of the homily says:

The Lord cried out, "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say? This is to say, 'Will to learn my will.'"

He who wishes to be saved will do these things: love one another and forgive each other's sins. Do not let the sun go down upon your anger. Love your brother. But if you hate your brother, I hate you also. Why, man, do you call me saying, 'Father, forgive us our debts as we also forgive our debtors?' Why do you lie? Do you not know that I am a knower of hearts? And how have you dared to lie about this matter? Have I not said to you through my prophet that I will send into flaming fire all those who speak lies? Why do you pray for yourself? May you (not?) cast yourself into eternal fire and destruction! O wretched, empty, and corrupt man! You have forgiven no one, and how you entreat me and dare to open your mouth and speak, asking (me) to forgive your sins, your voluntary and involuntary errors, done knowingly and in ignorance, done in word and deed, by night and by day, by the hour and by the minute.<sup>23</sup>

Although Peter's penitential canons appear, to the modern inquirer, to represent a culmination in an evolving penitential tradition,<sup>24</sup> they must have been shocking to

---

<sup>22</sup> Peter of Alexandria, "Concerning Those Who Lapsed during the Persecution," Fragment 2, in Vivian, *St. Peter*, pp. 194-5.

<sup>23</sup> J. M. Heer, "Ein neues Fragment der Didaskalie des Martyrerbischofs Petros von Alexandrien," *OrChr* 2 (1902): 344-51; and Vivian, *St. Peter*, pp. 58-9.

<sup>24</sup> Hans Lietzmann, *A History of the Early Church*, 3. 104-105; Vivian, *St. Peter*,

the churchmen who embraced the spirit of rigorism. Peter's Canonical Letter circumvented trials by assembly of clergy, shortened periods of penance, condoned immediate reinstatement, boldly defended flight from persecution, excused the act of sacrificing under torture, attempted to end the spiritual authority given to martyrs and confessors, and attacked zealotry. Peter's laxity was pragmatically expedient. The bishop, like other Christian leaders, identified himself with the conservatism of the Roman power structure, despite the Romans' persistence in persecuting Christians. As a chief administrator over a highly centralized ecclesiastical government, Peter adopted models of Roman political conservatism to control church affairs, and he used a lenient policy to buttress his own authority.<sup>25</sup>

#### Melitius on the Lapsed

Epiphanius provides the sole, primary testimony of Melitius' views on the question of the lapsed.<sup>26</sup> Scholars are highly critical of Epiphanius' narrative, suggesting that his favorable disposition toward the Melitians was the result of

---

pp. 141-84.

<sup>25</sup> Raymond E. Brown and John P. Meier, Antioch and Rome (New York: Paulist Press, 1983), pp. 181-3; and Vivian, St. Peter, p. 162.

<sup>26</sup> Epiphanius Adv. Haer. 68. 2.

influences by Melitian sources from his hometown of Eleutheropolis.<sup>27</sup> It should be remembered that Melitian sources are as biased in favor of Melitius as Petrine sources are against him, which should cause the historian to welcome Epiphanius' account. If Epiphanius was influenced by Melitian sources, which seems to have been the case, these latent influences provide all the more reason to carefully consider his narrative as a counterbalancing testimony to the later "official" account of the schism.

There are two major problems with Epiphanius' description of the outbreak of the Melitian controversy. First, Epiphanius recorded that the primary cause for the Melitian schism was the question of the treatment of the lapsed. Epiphanius relates that

The most holy Peter, since he was merciful and was the father of all, pleaded and entreated saying, "Let us receive them as repentants and set penances for them, so they might remain in communion with the church. And, since the Word has come to us and embraces us, let us not turn them away, not even the clergy, for fear that those who through cowardice and weakness were at one time set upon and shaken loose by the devil be irrevocably turned away and never healed. As it is written, 'Do not turn away the lame, but rather heal them.'" Peter's words were words of mercy and love for his fellow man; Melitius' and those with him were words of truth and zeal.

Therefore, because of these reasons presented and thought godly by both men, the schism occurred, some saying this and some saying that.<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> Telfer, "St. Peter and Arius," *AnBoll* 67 (1949): 125-27; B. J. Kidd, *A History of the Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1922), 1.531-32; R. Williams, "Arius and the Melitian Schism," *JTS* n.s. 37,1 (1986): 35-52; Vivian, *St. Peter*, p. 21; J. M. Neale, *A History of the Holy Eastern Church. The Patriarch of Alexandria* (London: J. Masters, 1847), p. 91 n. 1; W. Bright, "Petrus I., St." *Dictionary of Christian Biography* 4. 332; C. Hefele, *History of the Ecclesiastical Councils* (2nd ed.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1872), 1. 350; and F. J. Foakes-Jackson, "Meletianism," *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* ed. J. Hastings (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1915); 8. 538-9; maintain that Epiphanius' account was influenced by Melitians or Melitian sources.

<sup>28</sup> Epiphanius *Adv. Haer.* 68. 3.

Epiphanius' account seemingly contradicts the earlier Verona fragments which make the initial cause for the schism Melitius' illegal ordination of clerics to posts vacated during the persecution. But Epiphanius' account should not be dismissed as contradictory and, consequently, inaccurate. Instead, Epiphanius' explanation should be treated as a later, Melitian testimony to the decisive, climactic issue that irreparably separated Peter and Melitius--the question of the restoration of the lapsed.<sup>29</sup>

The second problem with Epiphanius' account of the outbreak of the Melitian schism is that he places Peter and Melitius in prison together. Epiphanius records

Melitius was seized at the time of the persecution together with Peter the holy bishop and martyr along with other martyrs. He was seized by those whom the emperor had appointed as rulers of Egypt and Alexandria at this time. Culejanus was procurator of the Thebaid, Hieroklas of Alexandria. Melitius himself had been confined in prison together with the above-mentioned martyrs and the above-mentioned Peter, archbishop of Alexandria. . . . For when the Archbishop Peter saw that the Melitians opposed his counsel of brotherly love and bore an excessive godly zeal, he himself, by spreading out his himation, that is, his cloak or pallium, set up a curtain dividing their prison and proclaimed through his deacon, "Let those who are of my opinion come forward to me and let those who hold the view of Melitius go to him." Only a few altogether went with Archbishop Peter, a few bishops and some others. These prayed by themselves, and the others did likewise. In like manner, with regard to the other holy offices, each side completed them by themselves.<sup>30</sup>

Epiphanius' account is the only extant source that places Melitius and Peter in prison together.<sup>31</sup> It is likely that Epiphanius was deceived by a later Melitian tradition

---

<sup>29</sup> H. I. Bell, "The Melitian Schism," in *Jews and Christians in Egypt* (London, The British Museum, 1924; repr., Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1972), p. 38

<sup>30</sup> Epiphanius *Adv. Haer.* 68. 1 and 3.

<sup>31</sup> Epiphanius' account is accepted in degree by a number of scholars including Frend, *The Donatist Church*, p. 22; idem., *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1965), p. 539; and idem., "The Failure of the Persecutions in the Roman Empire," in *Town and Country in the Early Centuries* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1980), x. 280; Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire (AD 100-400)* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), pp. 92 n. 17;



which romanticized the schism's origin. If the prison story was true, it could have been used apologetically in later accounts of Peter's life and death, yet it does not appear anywhere else. No other source about Peter's life refers to any imprisonment other than his incarceration prior to his martyrdom.<sup>32</sup> The story about Peter dividing the prison with his cloak may also have been contrived to symbolize the divisive nature of Peter and Melitius' disagreement among their fellow Christian prisoners.<sup>33</sup>

Despite its obvious shortcomings, Epiphanius' account is helpful because Peter's canons do not define what Melitius' position was with regard to the *lapsi*. The penitential issues that later divided Peter and Melitius, according to Epiphanius, began with controversies in prison among Christian confessors over whether or not to grant forgiveness to the penitential *lapsi*. Epiphanius records,

And while some have borne witness, others have lapsed from witnessing. They have under compulsion offered sacrifice and have committed the sinful act of worshiping idols. Therefore, they fell and sacrificed. Having transgressed, they went to those who had confessed and borne witness in order to obtain mercy through repentance. Some were from the rank and file of the church, while others were various orders of the clergy- some elders, some deacons, and others.

Now, there was an extraordinary commotion among those who were ready to bear witness for Christ. Some were saying that those who fell once and denied Christ and because of their lack of bravery did not put up a struggle

---

and 160; H. I. Bell, "The Melitian Schism," in Jews and Christians in Egypt, p. 39; C. A. Papadopoulos, Historia tes Ekklesias Alexandrias (Alexandria: Patriarchikon, 1935), p. 154; J. Lebreton and J. Zeiler, The History of the Primitive Church (New York: Macmillan Co., 1949), pp. 1048-9; Robin Lane Fox, Pagans and Christians (New York: Knopf, 1987), pp. 609-610; and Peter Brown's review of Pagans and Christians, "Brave Old World," New York Review of Books 12 (March, 1987): 25.

<sup>32</sup> The historicity of Epiphanius' prison story is rejected by Williams, "Arius and the Melitian Schism," p. 36; Greenslade, Schisms in the Early Church, pp. 53-4; T. D. Barnes, Constantine and Eusebius (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 184; and Vivian, St. Peter, p. 27.

<sup>33</sup> See Vivian, St. Peter, p. 32 n. 105.

should not be considered worthy of repentance. (They said this) so that those who still remained steadfast would not swerve from the path and join the God-denying and impious idolaters, paying little heed to penance and seeing how swiftly forgiveness could be obtained.

And what was said by those who had confessed was reasonable. For they were saying this- Melitius and Peleus and many of the martyrs and confessors with them. It was obvious, then, that those who were saying these things had demonstrated their zeal for God and had suffered.<sup>34</sup>

The confessors were apparently alarmed over the possible implications of granting forgiveness to those who lapsed without a struggle. The dilemma was accentuated by the fact that certain of the lapsed were from the ranks of the clergy.

Epiphanius (or Melitius) is criticized for contradicting himself, allowing at first no forgiveness for the lapsed and then delineating provisions for their restoration. The apparent contradiction, however, can be resolved. The initial decision was made in the midst of persecution and the major issue was over those who had lapsed without putting up any kind of a struggle. This decision was probably a temporary expedient directed, in particular, against a number of lapsed clergy, with the ultimate purpose of benefiting those Christians who were tempted to commit idolatry. The confessors feared that the merciful treatment of the penitent lapsed might motivate faint-hearted confessors during persecution to deny their faith and commit idolatry with the hope of receiving forgiveness. Melitius therefore endorsed the severe measure as a necessary judgment.

Melitius and his fellow confessors also delineated their own severe canon, preserved by Epiphanius, which provided for restoration of some of the lapsed. Epiphanius relates,

They said that during a time of peace, after the persecution was over, and after

---

<sup>34</sup> Epiphanius Adv. Haer. 68. 2.

a sufficient period of time, repentance should be allowed to those mentioned above, if they truly repented and showed the fruit of their repentance- not, to be sure, so that each might be received back into his own clerical order, but rather that after an interval of time they might be gathered in the church and in fellowship, in the church body but not in the clergy. This (decision) was full of truth and of the zeal of God.<sup>35</sup>

Epiphanius records four provisions for restoration laid out by Melitius. First, the persecution had to be absolutely over before any of the lapsed were allowed to begin penance. Second, restoration was contingent on a sincere penance which lasted for a prescribed duration and gave evidence of a changed life. The ambiguity of Epiphanius' record of "an interval of time" seems to suggest an appeal to known, fixed penitential periods. Third, Epiphanius mentions twice that lapsed clergy, though penitent, would not be restored to the ministry. Finally, after a genuine fixed penance, beginning after the persecution had ended, the penitent lapsed (whether clergy or laymen) were to be restored to church fellowship (presumably to communion).

A comparison of the penitential views of Peter with Melitius clearly illustrates the differences that led to the second, final step toward schism between the two leaders. It is impossible to determine whether Peter or Melitius propounded his viewpoints first. In any case, Peter's canons and Epiphanius' later account of Melitius' penitential views marked the battleline that divided the two parties. The only common ground between the two leaders was that each made provisions for certain of the lapsed to do penance and to receive forgiveness.

Peter and Melitius' treatment of the lapsed differed to a decisive degree and these differences marked the central disagreement that led to an irreparable schism.

---

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

Peter abandoned the traditional trial by assembly of clergy, condoned reinstatement of the lapsed during persecution, excused sacrifices made under duress, defended flight from persecution, shortened periods of penance, attempted to undermine the authority of confessors, and dealt less harshly with penitent lapsed clergy than with zealots. Melitius supported fixed periods of penance which were to begin after persecution was completely over. Melitius also consciously identified himself with the martyrs and confessors, supported zealotry and was much harsher than Peter in his treatment of lapsed clergy.

#### Revival of Persecution 306 to 313

When Diocletian retired on 1 May 305, he appointed Maximinus as Caesar over the Eastern Roman Empire. Maximinus was a caesar in the East until 309 and then served as an Augustus from 309 until his death in 313. The first year of his reign as Caesar, however, marked a period of transition. In the spring of 306, Maximinus renewed a vigorous policy of persecution against the church.<sup>36</sup> At the same time in the Western Empire, Maximinus' counterpart, Constantius, left the church unmolested.

I will first survey the principal actors and events of Maximinus' persecution and then examine specifically what happened to Egyptian Christians between 306 and 313. Then I shall attempt to determine how the Egyptian Christians responded to this final persecution as it relates to the emerging controversy between Peter and Melitius.

Maximinus was a capable ruler who believed that Christianity posed theological and political problems for the Roman state. He attempted to stabilize the tottering

---

<sup>36</sup> Maximinus' persecution must have followed Peter's publication of his canons, which were issued on or around Easter (18 April 306).

empire by reinstating an enforced religious unity under the ancestral gods. Maximinus' solution to Rome's political, economic and social dilemma was no different from the solution sought by Diocletian and Constantine, but his agenda was bolder and more innovative. Maximinus, much like the later Julian the Apostate, tried to re-convert Christians back to paganism by making pagan religion a viable and vibrant alternative. He hoped to accomplish this feat by elevating paganism to its former position of illustrious prominence.

The early church historians castigate the character and ability of Maximinus. Eusebius and Lactantius depict him as a demented tyrant.<sup>37</sup> Eusebius makes Maximinus out to be the greatest adversary ever faced by the church.

Maximinus Caesar, the moment he came to the principate, displayed to all the tokens, as it were, of his innate enmity with God and his impiety by setting to work with greater vigor than his predecessors on the persecution against us.<sup>38</sup>

Maximinus' bureaucratic underlings also played an important role sustaining the savage persecutions against the Christians. Maximinus surrounded himself with able administrators who, in Egypt, were unequaled in their infamies against Christians. Eusebius wrote that Maximinus motivated the governors and generals by rapacity and greed "to proceed with their oppressions against their subjects . . . almost as if they were his fellow-tyrants."<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup> Eusebius Hist. Eccl. 8. 14; idem. Mart. Pal. 4, 7, 9; and Lactantius Mort. Pers. 38.

<sup>38</sup> Eusebius Mart. Pal. 4 (S); and *ibid.*, Hist. Eccl. 8. 14. 9.

<sup>39</sup> Eusebius Hist. Eccl. 8. 14.

Clodius Culcianus was prefect in Egypt until 308 and under Maximinus' direction, persecuted the church in Alexandria. The ruthless tortures and executions orchestrated by Culcianus were described in a letter from Phileas to his congregation at Thmuis, recorded by Eusebius.<sup>40</sup> Culcianus devised cruel tortures and

he bade them (his soldiers) to add to their bonds without mercy, and, when they were at the last gasp after all this, take them down to the ground and drag them off.<sup>41</sup>

Culcianus later served as a special envoy to carry out Maximinus' persecution in the Thebaid.<sup>42</sup> Eusebius recorded that Culcianus reveled in the "deaths of thousands of Christians in Egypt."<sup>43</sup>

Sossianus Hierocles was promoted to prefect of Egypt by Maximinus. Hierocles was a seasoned Roman administrator who began his career with successive appointments as Governor of Augustus Libanensis, vicarius of the diocese of Oriens,

---

<sup>40</sup> Eusebius Hist. Eccl. 8. 10; and compare further with ibid., 8. 7-8; and Frend, Martyrdom, p. 534 n. 270.

<sup>41</sup> Eusebius Hist. Eccl. 8. 10; and 12.

<sup>42</sup> Eusebius and Epiphanius place Culcianus as Governor over the Thebaid at different times. It is improbable that Culcianus ever served in an official capacity as Governor over the Thebaid. On the weight of Eusebius' eye-witness testimony, Culcianus must have represented Maximinus and the persecution in an official capacity. See Frend, Martyrdom, p. 531 n. 202.

<sup>43</sup> Eusebius Hist. Eccl. 9. 11. 4.

praeses of Bithynia in 303, and in 310 prefect of Egypt.<sup>44</sup> Prior to the Diocletianic persecution, Hierocles published a tract entitled Lover of Truth, in which he attempted to advise Christians to shun the vain fables of the Bible.<sup>45</sup> Eusebius quotes Hierocles to say

Why then have I recorded these facts? So that it may be possible to compare our accurate and solid judgment on each point with the frivolity of the Christians. For we hold that a man who has done such things is not a god, but a man favored of the gods, while they proclaim Jesus a god because of a few tricks. . . . And it is worth noting that, whereas Peter and Paul and a few like them, fellows known to be uneducated liars and cheats, have exaggerated the doings of Jesus. . . .<sup>46</sup>

As a member of Diocletian's imperial staff in 303, Hierocles enthusiastically enforced the persecution of the church.<sup>47</sup> It was even said that he was known to have recited

---

<sup>44</sup> Lactantius Mort. Pers. 16. 4; Eusebius Contra Hierocles 4; CIL 3.133 (Palmyra); P. Oxy. 3120; P. Cairo Isid. 69; P. Berol. Inv. 21654, published by H. Maehler, Collectanea Papyrologica. Texts Published in Honor of H. C. Youtie 2 Papyrologische Texte und Abhandlungen 20 (Bonn, 1976), pp. 527-33. Frend, Martyrdom, p. 531 n. 201; follows Eusebius, Mart. Pal. 5.3 (L); and H. Delehay, "Les Martyrs d'Egypte," AnBol 40 (1922): 28; placed Hierocles appointment in Egypt to A. D. 306/7 (Frend, Martyrdom, p. 531 n. 214, statement that Hierocles was "prefect of Egypt to 307," is an error).

<sup>45</sup> Lactantius Div. Inst. 5. 2. 13; 3. 22; T. D. Barnes, "Sossianus Hierocles and the Antecedents of the Great Persecution," Harvard Studies in Classical Philology 80 (1976): 239- 52; and idem., Diocletian and Constantine, pp. 22. Apparently Eusebius wrote his rebuttal against Hierocles before A. D. 303. Hierocles was a philosophical monotheist who presented himself as the "Lover of Truth." Hierocles warned Christians not to be deluded by Jesus, who was no different than the charlatan Apollonius of Tyana. Hierocles' command of Scripture led Lactantius to believe that he was once a Christian.

<sup>46</sup> Eusebius Contra Hierocles 2.

<sup>47</sup> Note Lactantius Div. Inst. 5. 2. 15, who "saw in Bithynia the prefect (Hierocles) wonderfully elated with joy as though he had subdued some nation of barbarians, because one who had resisted for two years with great spirit appeared at length to yield."

his treatise, Lover of Truth, while enforcing Diocletian's edicts in Nicomedia.<sup>48</sup>

Under Maximinus there were three periods of intense persecution, the first in the spring of 306, the second in the autumn and winter of 309/10, and the third in 311. In the spring of 306 an edict was issued calling every individual to sacrifice under the supervision of the magistrates.<sup>49</sup> Maximinus used Galerius' census lists, compiled that year, to keep a thorough check on whether every individual had sacrificed or not.<sup>50</sup> As the persecution intensified again in Egypt, there is little doubt that Peter returned to hiding.<sup>51</sup>

Prisons in Egypt were rapidly filled with confessors in the year following Maximinus' edict. One notable martyr in Egypt was Aedesius, the brother of the martyr Apphianus, and like his brother, a student of Pamphilus.<sup>52</sup> Aedesius was tortured and executed because he accosted Culcianus while he was trying Christians in Alexandria.<sup>53</sup> In 307, Maximinus attempted to relieve prisons overcrowded with Christians awaiting martyrdom, by barbarously mutilating and exiling non-compliant

---

<sup>48</sup> Lactantius Div. Inst. 5. 2. 12; and idem. Mort. Pers. 16. 4.

<sup>49</sup> Eusebius Mart. Pal. 4. 8.

<sup>50</sup> Lactantius Mort. Pers. 23. Earlier edicts were difficult to enforce because officials lacked thorough census lists, see G. E. M. de Ste Croix, "Aspects," pp. 97, and 113. Galerius' census in 306 aimed at being as comprehensive as possible, and these lists were used for the purpose of the persecution by Maximinus, see Barnes, Constantine and Eusebius, pp. 151-2.

<sup>51</sup> Frend, Martyrdom, p. 506; and Vivian, St. Peter, pp. 40-1.

<sup>52</sup> Eusebius Mart. Pal. 4. 8-15; and 5. 2. Both Pamphilus and Apphianus were executed 2 April 306. For an explanation of Eusebius' personal and highly selective account of martyrdoms, see Barnes, Constantine and Eusebius, p. 155.

<sup>53</sup> Eusebius Mart. Pal. 5. 3.



Christians to mines and quarries in Palestine.<sup>54</sup> Eusebius recorded the apparent change in Imperial policy,

For (they declared) that this their punishment of us (death) had been stopped, thanks to the humanity of the rulers. Then orders were given that their eyes should be gouged out and one of their legs maimed. . . . because of this humanity of the part of godless men, it is now no longer possible to tell the incalculable number of those who had their right eye first cut out with a sword and then cauterized with fire, and the left foot rendered useless by the further application of branding irons to the joints, and who after this were condemned to the provincial copper mines, not so much for service as for ill-usage and hardship, and withal fell in with various other trials, which it is not possible even to recount; for their brave and good deeds surpass all reckoning.<sup>55</sup>

After the persecution, confessors who had been maimed were given immense respect and were elevated to places of authority. Such confessors later elevated to the office of bishop included Paphnutius in the Upper Thebaid and Maximus, who succeeded Macarius as Bishop of Jerusalem.<sup>56</sup> The respect and authority that the confessor Bishop Paphnutius enjoyed is described by Socrates as follows:

Paphnutius then was bishop of one of the cities of Upper Thebes: he was a man of such eminent piety, that extraordinary miracles were done by him. In the time of persecution he had been deprived of one of his eyes. The emperor honored this man exceedingly, and often sent for him to the palace, and kissed

---

<sup>54</sup> Eusebius Hist. Eccl. 8. 12; idem., Mart. Pal. 7. 2. Delehayre, "Les Martyrs d'Egypte," p. 29; dates the change in policy to spring of 307; however, Lawlor dates the change to spring 308.

<sup>55</sup> Eusebius Hist. Eccl. 8. 12.

<sup>56</sup> See Rufinus Hist. Eccl. 10. 4; Socrates Hist. Eccl. 1. 11; Sozomen Hist. Eccl. 1. 10; and 1. 23; Theodoret Hist. Eccl. 1. 7; and 2. 26; and Gelasius of Cyzicus Hist. Eccl. 2. 9.

the part where the eye had been torn out.<sup>57</sup>

Several confessors were known to be in positions of influence in the Melitian movement including a certain Paphnutius<sup>58</sup> and Paieous, the leader of a large Melitian monastic community.<sup>59</sup>

The church in Egypt in particular suffered under the hands of Maximinus, Culcianus and Hierocles. According to Eusebius, in the spring of 308 Firmilianus tried 97 men, women, and children sent to him in Diocaesarea from the Thebaid.<sup>60</sup> After the Thebaid confessors' right eyes were poked out, their sockets seared, and the tendons on their left ankles severed, they were dispatched to mines in Palestine. In the same year, a second convoy numbering 130 Egyptian confessors were mutilated by Firmilianus and sent to mines in Palestine and Cilicia.<sup>61</sup>

In the summer of 308 there was a short respite in the persecution of the church. Several reasons can be suggested for the change in the Imperial policy. First, Urbanus the Governor of Palestine, a zealous persecutor of the church, fell from favor. Second,

---

<sup>57</sup> Socrates Hist. Eccl. 1. 11. Bishop Paphnutius was an avid supporter of Athanasius and was present at the Council of Nicaea and at the Synod of Tyre; see Socrates Hist. Eccl. 1. 8, and 1. 11; Sozomen Hist. Eccl. 2. 25; and Rufinus Hist. Eccl. 1. 4. Bishop Paphnutius urged his fellow confessor Bishop Macarius of Jerusalem not to consort with the Melitians against Athanasius at the Synod of Tyre, see Sozomen Hist. Eccl. 2. 25; and Barnes, Eusebius and Constantine, pp. 239, and 388 n. 123.

<sup>58</sup> The Melitian Paphnutius was sent in a Melitian deputation to Constantine, see Epiphanius Adv. Haer. 68. 5. For an overview of the significant individuals with the common name Paphnutius see Bell, Jews and Christians in Egypt, pp. 100-103.

<sup>59</sup> Paieous is either the recipient or author of the corpus of Melitian papyri in Bell, Jews and Christians, pp. 38-99.

<sup>60</sup> Eusebius Mart. Pal. 8. 1 (L); and 11. 31 (S). See also Lawlor and Oulton, Eusebius, 2. 328.

<sup>61</sup> Eusebius Mart. Pal. 8.

Maximinus was preoccupied with the proceedings of a conference at Carnuntum held in November 308, where his rival Licinius was recognized as Augustus.<sup>62</sup> Eusebius indicates that there was a temporary relaxation without indicating exactly how long the period lasted.

These brave deeds on the part of the magnificent martyrs of Christ were followed by a lessening of the fire of persecution, which was being quenched, as it were, by their sacred blood: relief and liberty were now granted those who for Christ's sake were suffering affliction in the mines of the Thebais; and were just about to regain a breath of pur air . . . .<sup>63</sup>

Because there were no Palestinian martyrs between 25 July 308 to 13 November 309, it is safe to assume that the peace lasted until the autumn of 309.<sup>64</sup>

In 309 the temporary peace ended. Maximinus dictated a new edict that reinstigated persecution and attempted to restore paganism. According to Eusebius, the edict provided

that those temples which had fallen should be rebuilt with all speed; that care should be taken that all the people in a mass, men with their wives and households, even babes at the breast, should offer sacrifice and libations and taste with scrupulous care the accursed sacrifices themselves.<sup>65</sup>

All articles in the marketplace were sprinkled with a libation or with sacrificial blood and guards were posted at the public baths to sprinkle all who entered.<sup>66</sup> On 19 November three young men, including a native from Eleutheropolis named Zebina,

---

<sup>62</sup> Frend, Martyrdom, p. 508. For Maximinus' envy at Licinius' appointment see Eusebius Hist. Eccl. 8. 13. 14; and Lactantius Pers. Mort. 36. 2.

<sup>63</sup> Eusebius Mart. Pal. 9. 1 (S).

<sup>64</sup> See Barnes, Constantine and Eusebius, p. 153; and G. M. Richardson, "The Chronology of Eusebius: Addendum," Classical Quarterly 19 (1925): 96-100.

<sup>65</sup> Eusebius Mart. Pal. 9. 2 (S).

<sup>66</sup> Eusebius Mart. Pal. 9. 2-3.

were beheaded for attempting to keep the governor from offering a sacrifice.<sup>67</sup>

The most severe persecution was witnessed in the last months of 309 and the first few months of 310.<sup>68</sup> Some Egyptians who were sent to minister to confessors in Cilicia were arrested and tried in Ascalon. The Egyptian zealots were condemned by Firmilianus: three were martyred and the rest were mutilated and condemned to the mines.<sup>69</sup> On 10 January 310, two Christians from Anaia, a village near Eleutheropolis, were burned to death.<sup>70</sup> The following month five more Egyptians were arrested upon their return from ministering to the confessors in Cilicia. On 16 February the five Egyptians were tried and executed along with Pamphilius, two of his companions from prison, and four members of Pamphilius' household.<sup>71</sup>

According to Eusebius, prisoners at Phaeno, while incarcerated, displayed an amazing boldness, building rudimentary shelters and meeting together for worship.<sup>72</sup> The confessors numbered 150 and were led by two Egyptian Bishops- - Nilus and Peleus, an anonymous presbyter, and a well known confessor named Patermuthius.<sup>73</sup> The four leaders were executed on 19 September 310. Peleus, according to Epiphanius, was a cohort of Melitius' and took a leading role earlier in his career

---

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 9. 4.

<sup>68</sup> Barnes, Constantine and Eusebius, p. 154.

<sup>69</sup> Eusebius Mart. Pal. 10. Of the three who died for their confession, one named Ares was burned, and two others named Promus and Elias were beheaded.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 13. 1.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 13. 2.

delineating along with Melitius, the rigorists' position on the lapsed.<sup>74</sup> Nilus and Paternuthius were also Egyptian by name.

There was another group of confessors who were allowed to meet and worship while incarcerated without suffering any repercussions.<sup>75</sup> Prisoners who had been maimed, were sick or too old to work, were exiled to an isolated prison camp. The Christians' meetings were organized by a confessor named Silvanus, Bishop of Gaza. Eusebius mentions that many confessors from Egypt were associated with Silvanus.<sup>76</sup> The most illustrious confessor in this group, according to Eusebius, was an Egyptian named John.<sup>77</sup> John had been blinded and crippled for his faith, yet he was able to recite extended portions of the Bible by memory with such lucidity that Eusebius thought that he was actually reading the Scripture.<sup>78</sup>

In the spring of 311 Galerius contracted a fatal disease<sup>79</sup> and one of Galerius'

---

<sup>74</sup> Epiphanius Adv. Haer. 68. 2.

<sup>75</sup> Eusebius Mart. Pal. 13. 6.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 13. 1 (L) and 13. 6 (S). On 4 May 311 Silvanus was executed together with thirty-eight other confessors (the context would seem to imply that many of these were Egyptians). Eusebius in Mart. Pal. 13. 9-10 (S) records, "The bitter foe determined to kill and remove from the earth as annoying him those whose quiet army (Silvanus' group of confessors) against him by prayer to God he could no longer endure. And God also permitted the accomplishment of this his endeavor, so that at the one time he might not be hindered from the wickedness he purposed, and that they might at length receive the prizes of their varied conflicts. So then, forty save one (Mart. Pal. 13. 10 (L) records 40) were decapitated on a single day by the order of that accursed Maximin."

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> John probably memorized the Greek Scripture as Eusebius understood the quotations. This might indicate that John was from the Alexandrian region of Egypt.

<sup>79</sup> Eusebius Hist. Eccl. 8. 16. 3; Lactantius De Mortibus 33; compare further with Josephus Ant. 17. 169; and II Macc. 9. 9.

doctors informed the emperor that the sickness was a judgment from God.<sup>80</sup> On 30 April 311 Galerius issued an edict providing legal recognition of Christianity.<sup>81</sup> The persecution was suspended and confessors were released from prison.<sup>82</sup> A second edict requested Christians to pray to their God, "for our safety and that of the commonwealth."<sup>83</sup> The emperor, however, unable to placate the God of the Christians with such late concessions, died on 4 May 311.

#### The Fate of Peter and Melitius

Maximinus reluctantly upheld the amnesty for six months.<sup>84</sup>

Some time between May and November 311 Peter, along with other Christian confessors who were in hiding, returned to Alexandria.<sup>85</sup> By late October or November 311 Maximinus reinstigated the persecution for a final time.<sup>86</sup> From 303 to 310 matters had steadily increased in severity in Egypt coming to a fatal climax in Maximinus' last efforts to persecute the Egyptian Church.<sup>87</sup>

---

<sup>80</sup> Orosius Hist. adv. Paganos 7. 28.

<sup>81</sup> On the famous "Palinode of Galerius" see Baynes, "Persecution," pp. 671-4; for the text of the palinode and a discussion; J. R. Knipfing, "The Edict of Galerius, 311 A. D. reconsidered," Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire 1 (1922): 695-705; Frend, Martyrdom, pp. 509-12.

<sup>82</sup> Eusebius Hist. Eccl. 8. 17. 2.

<sup>83</sup> Frend, Martyrdom, p. 511.

<sup>84</sup> Eusebius Hist. Eccl. 9. 1-2; and Baynes, "Persecution," pp. 686-7.

<sup>85</sup> Vivian, St. Peter, p. 42.

<sup>86</sup> Eusebius Hist. Eccl. 9. 6; Baynes, "Persecution," pp. 686-7; and Frend, Martyrdom, pp. 512-14.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 515.

The reason for the sudden outburst of persecution in Egypt directed at the clergy is not completely clear. Peter and a number of other Egyptian bishops were executed on 25 November 311. Eusebius says that Peter was

... seized for no reason at all and quite unexpectedly; and then immediately and unaccountably beheaded, as if by the command of Maximin. And along with him many others of the Egyptian bishops endured the same penalty.<sup>88</sup>

Severus suggests that Peter was executed in retaliation for baptizing the children of a woman who was married to an unbeliever.<sup>89</sup> A later account of Peter's life records that the bishop was arrested while celebrating the commemoration of the holy martyrs before a multitude of Christians. Could this celebration have led to a riot with the Melitians like a similar instance in North Africa?<sup>90</sup> It appears that the best explanation for Peter's execution was that he became a victim of a general inquisition designed to exterminate the clergy. But the execution of clergy inaugurated a final attempt to exterminate all Egyptian Christians.

---

<sup>88</sup> Eusebius Hist. Eccl. 9. 6.

<sup>89</sup> Severus Patriarchal History 384-5.

<sup>90</sup> W. Tefler, "St. Peter of Alexandria and Arius," AnBol 67 (1949): 127; see also Vivian, St. Peter, pp. 40-4. Tefler has conjectured that Melitians may have been omitted from the list of martyrs, precipitating a riot which required imperial intervention, see Tefler, "St. Peter and Arius," p. 124; and *ibid.*, "Melitius of Lycopolis and Episcopal Succession in Egypt," HTR 48 (1955): 231. The account cited by Tefler says that Maximinus ordered Peter's execution because of the bishop's effective ministry, an explanation also found elsewhere; see Anastasius Bibliothecarius, Martyrdom of Saint Peter ANF 6. 262; PG 18. 451-66; and The Life and Martyrdom of the Holy and Glorious "Holy Martyr" of Christ, Peter Archbishop of Alexandria edited by P. Devos, "Une passion grecque inédite de S. Pierre d'Alexandrie et sa traduction par Anastase le Bibliothécaire," AnBol 83 (1965): 157-87; and Vivian, St. Peter, Appendix 3 p. 70.

Eusebius adds an eyewitness account of the persecution in the Thebaid between 311 and 312. He writes,

And we ourselves also beheld, when we were at these places, many all at once in a single day, some of whom suffered decapitation, others the punishment of fire; so that the murderous axe was dulled and, worn out, was broken in pieces, while the executioners themselves grew utterly weary and took it in turns to succeed one another. It was then that we observed a most marvellous eagerness and a truly divine power and zeal in those who had placed their faith in the Christ of God. Thus, as soon as sentence was given against the first, some from one quarter and others from another would leap up to the tribunal before the judge and confess themselves Christians; paying no heed when faced with terrors and the varied forms of tortures, but undismayedly and boldly speaking of the piety towards the God of the universe, and with joy and laughter and gladness receiving the final sentence of death; so that they sang hymns and thanksgivings to the God of the universe even to the last breath.<sup>91</sup>

Frend has noted that, "nothing reveals more clearly the change of morale among the Egyptian Christians which had taken place since Decius' time."<sup>92</sup> The Christians responded in defiance of the canonical counsel of their martyred bishop. Perhaps the otherwise inexplicable revolution of the Egyptian Christian spirit was the result of Melitian influence.

The activities of Melitius between 306 and 311 must have been eventful but, unfortunately, have been obscured by insufficient documentation. Athanasius relates that Peter deposed Melitius<sup>93</sup> and the charge is repeated by Socrates.<sup>94</sup> If Peter met with Melitius to depose him, the meeting took place after Phileas and his fellow

---

<sup>91</sup> Eusebius Hist. Eccl. 8. 9. 4-5. On the date of this eyewitness account and its placement in an earlier chronological section see Barnes, Eusebius and Constantine, p. 157.

<sup>92</sup> Frend, Martyrdom, p. 516.

<sup>93</sup> Athanasius Apologia contra Arianos 59.

<sup>94</sup> Socrates Hist. Eccl. 1. 6.



bishops were executed (4 February 307).<sup>95</sup> If Melitius was deposed, the excommunication probably took place in 307.<sup>96</sup> With the excommunication of Melitius, the die was cast, instigating a full-fledged schism.

Melitius continued ordaining rigorist ministers and established rigorist fellowships that were separate from the followers of Peter. Sometime between 306 and 311, Melitius was arrested and eventually sent to the mines of Palestine.<sup>97</sup> Because there is no tradition that Melitius was maimed, his arrest and banishment probably took place in early 307. Epiphanius says that

Melitius and many others were banished and exiled to the mines of Phainos. After this time Melitius himself, with all those who professed his cause and had been swept away with him, founded their own churches. Whether they were in the jail or on the road, going through every land and every place they established clergy--bishops, elders, and deacons. And the two opposing sides were not in communion with each other.

Each side gave a name to its own church. Those who succeeded Peter, in possession of what was ancient in the church, (called themselves) the Catholic Church; and the Melitians (called themselves) the Church of Martyrs. Therefore, Melitius himself, as he traveled, ordained many men in Eleutheropolis and in Gaza and in Aelia [Jerusalem]. It happened that he spent time in the above-mentioned mines. But afterwards the confessors were freed from the mines, those of Peter's party--for there were still many--and those of Melitius'. They did not have fellowship with each other in the mines, nor did

---

<sup>95</sup> In Peter's Letter to the four bishops (Appendix 4); he reassures the bishops that he will meet with Melitius. On the date of the martyrdom of Phileas see Frend, Martyrdom, p. 534 n. 270. Tefler, "Melitius of Lycopolis and Episcopal Succession in Egypt," p. 230 ns. 18 and 19, suggests without conclusive evidence (appealing to Athanasius, Apologia contra Arianos 59) that Melitius was condemned in absentia.

<sup>96</sup> Barnard, "Athanasius and the Meletian Schism in Egypt," p. 182; and Vivian, St. Peter, p. 34-5.

<sup>97</sup> Epiphanius Adv. Haer. 68. 3, notes that Epiphanius places Melitius' banishment after Peter's martyrdom in A. D. 311 which is unlikely, see R. Williams, "Arius and the Melitian Schism," pp. 36-7; Vivian, St. Peter, p. 34; L. W. Barnard, "Athanasius and the Meletian Schism in Egypt," p. 182; and H. I. Bell, Jews and Christians in Egypt, p. 39.

they pray together.<sup>98</sup>

A nagging question is, how did Melitius maintain such freedom of operation while incarcerated? Several historians have rejected Epiphanius' account of Melitius' banishment and have suggested that Melitius was never in bonds. They argue that Melitius somehow maintained open access to the jails and even appointed others to visit the prisons and mines and further his cause.<sup>99</sup> But the proposal creates its own set of difficulties, the most serious of which is, how did Melitius avoid arrest when he certainly opposed fleeing from persecution and offering sacrifice?<sup>100</sup> The safest course is to accept the reliability of Epiphanius until more substantial information becomes available or until his account can be amended by a reliable primary source.

The evidence from Eusebius corroborates Epiphanius' account concerning Melitian activity in Egypt and Palestine. Throughout Egypt, Christians acted in a way that contradicted the pragmatically tolerant intentions of Peter's canons. One might wonder to what extent the persecution appeared to be more severe in Egypt (especially

---

<sup>98</sup> Epiphanius Adv. Haer. 68. 3.

<sup>99</sup> This argument was originally suggested by C. Schmidt, "Fragmente einer Schrift des Märtyrerbischofs Petrus von Alexandrien," TU n.s. 5.4b (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1901), p. 30; and note Williams, "Arius and the Melitian Schism," p. 37; who says, "This, though in itself somewhat far-fetched, would at least help to explain the otherwise wildly implausible sneer of Athanasius (Apologia 59) at Melitius for sacrificing during the persecutions: how else but by satisfying the authorities (a hostile chronicler might wonder) would a prominent Christian bishop retain such open freedom of movement, including access to gaols, when others were in hiding?"

<sup>100</sup> The charge that Melitius sacrificed was a common attack used to defame an individual's character. See Athanasius Apologia contra Arianos 11 (PG 25. 256ff.) translated in Stevenson, A New Eusebius, pp. 379-81; Bell, Jews and Christians in Egypt, p. 38; Hefele, Councils, 1. 346. Similar charges of apostasy (also politically motivated) were brought against Eusebius of Caesarea by Potamon, see Athanasius Apologia contra Arianos 8. 3; and Epiphanius Adv. Haer. 68. 8.

the Thebaid) and Palestine because of the zealotry of the Church of the Martyrs. Accounts of Thebaid prisons filled to capacity, recurring Coptic names, Egyptian Christians boldly jeopardizing their own lives to minister to confessors in prison, the heroic martyrdoms, the church services in prison organized by Peleus, Melitius' colleague, are conclusive evidence for Melitian activity in Palestine. Between 306 and 311, Eusebius also recorded the bold heroism of Christians from Eleutheropolis and Gaza, coincidentally two areas in which Melitius was said, by Epiphanius, to have begun ministries.<sup>101</sup>

The Christians living in Egypt and Palestine, whether in bonds or free, were faced with a decision of whether to remain in the catholic tradition, under the leadership of the Alexandrian bishop, or to join Melitius' Church of Martyrs. Vivian astutely notices that

the 'increasing horrors' of 306-11 and Peter's renewed absence probably helped the Melitian cause to gather support. During such extreme times, moderation such as Peter's was probably not welcome.<sup>102</sup>

It is not suprising that many Palestinian Christians identified with the Church of Martyrs.<sup>103</sup> After all, they lived in the land of the Maccabees, were traditionally anti-Roman and volatile by nature, and harbored deep-seated suspicions of anything from Alexandria. Furthermore, the Palestinian Christians were inescapably caught in a

---

<sup>101</sup> The Melitian fellowships in Palestine were probably limited to their immediate influence in the prison camps and mines.

<sup>102</sup> Vivian, *St. Peter*, p. 35; following Frend, *Rise*, 493; and Greenslade, *Schisms in the Early Church*, p. 54.

<sup>103</sup> The name "Church of the Martyrs" was claimed by a number of schismatic and heretical groups in the early church.

caldron of intense persecution and the rigorist ideas suited them well for their battles.

This initial stage of the beginning of the Melitian schism is closed by an ironic turn of events. After the Palinode of Galerius, Melitius was set free from a prison at a Palestinian mine. He returned to Egypt a proud confessor. But as fate would have it, Peter gained the ultimate glory through martyrdom. Peter was not arrested and executed for his resistance to sacrifice. This was a stock element included in the later *Vitae* but which was conspicuously omitted in more reliable accounts of his arrest and martyrdom.<sup>104</sup> Popular tradition remembered Peter as "the last of the martyrs" or "the seal of the martyrs."<sup>105</sup> Many other Christians were martyred after Peter's death before Constantine's Edict of Toleration was issued on 13 June 313, but Peter was hailed above all of his martyred contemporaries.<sup>106</sup> The number of extant lives of Peter indicate the popularity of the bishop in later traditions.<sup>107</sup> Sozomen records that

it was the custom of the Alexandrians to celebrate with great pomp an annual festival in honor of one of their bishops named Peter, who had suffered

---

<sup>104</sup> Ste. Croix, "Aspects of the Great Persecution," *HTR* 47 (1954): 80-1; and Vivian, *St. Peter*, p. 43 n. 154.

<sup>105</sup> See Athanasius *Vita Ant.* 47; and Vivian, *St. Peter*, p. 49. Tito Orlandi, "Sull'Apologia secunda (contra Arianos) di Atanasio di Alessandrino," *Augustinianum* 15 (1975): 58-9 has suggested that Athanasius, in his *Apologia contra Arianos*, polemically emphasized Peter's martyrdom and deliberately overlooked Peter's *Canons*.

<sup>106</sup> For some later martyrdoms see Jerome *De Viris Illust.* 83 (P L 23. 691A); Eusebius *Mart. Pal.* 6; Le Nain de Tillemont, *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire ecclésiastique des six premiers siècles* (Paris, 1690-1712), 5. 108-112; W. M. Calder, "Some Monuments of the Great Persecution," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 8 (1924): 345; and Frend, *Persecution*, p. 515.

<sup>107</sup> See D. B. Spanel, "Two Fragmentary Sa'idic Coptic Texts Pertaining to Peter I, Patriarch of Alexandria," *Bulletin de la Société de la Société d'archéologie Copte* 24 (1979-82): 91.

martyrdom.<sup>108</sup>

Peter's death "set a seal of divine approval on his policies."<sup>109</sup> Tefler has gone so far as to state that "Peter could have done nothing so effective for his cause, against that of Melitius, as in dying under the executioner's sword."<sup>110</sup> Peter was not remembered scornfully by the early church as the champion of penitential laxity or as a pusillanimous coward. Instead, by death, he became the hero of the Egyptian Church, an act that Melitius was never able to follow.

### Conclusions

There were two interconnected theological issues that ultimately drove Melitius into schism. The first issue was that Melitius was willing to defy imperial bans and church tradition in order to restore ministers to vacant posts. There are several important ramifications of Melitius' position. His insubordinate behavior was motivated by a realization of the political and liturgical necessity of the bishop. As a result of the devastating toll of the persecution on the Egyptian clergy, the church was in dire need of ministers to perform the rituals and to administer the eucharist. Christians needed the clergy, as well, to function as shepherds over the people, protecting them economically, politically and spiritually.

The second important theological issue was Melitius' puritanical rigorism. He opposed the unconventional leniency and (what he considered to be) the hypocritical

---

<sup>108</sup> Sozomen Hist. Eccl. 2. 17.

<sup>109</sup> Frend, Religion Popular and Unpopular in the Early Christian Centuries, XVI. 29.

<sup>110</sup> W. Tefler, "Meletius of Lycopolis and Episcopal Succession in Egypt," p. 231.

timidity of Peter. Melitius' penitential ideas were similar in spirit to those of the Novatians and Donatists, yet were somewhat milder. His zeal for martyrdom and his elevation of the confessor also had its antecedents in the early church. A revival of the intercessory role of the confessor was practical in persecution, but it had anti-hierarchical implications. Much like the conflict between the prophet and the bishop in the second century, the authority of the bishop was undermined by faith in the intercessory role of the confessor.<sup>111</sup>

The Melitian schism officially began in 307 when Melitius was excommunicated from the church. Melitius' protest movement spread rapidly in Egypt, especially in the Thebaid region. During the persecution, Melitius and a large number of his followers, were deported to prisons and mines in Palestine. They continued to ordain ministers and to organize churches in prison camps. Melitian churches were established in the vicinity of Eleutheropolis, Gaza and Jerusalem. When Rome declared an amnesty and the persecution ended permanently, Melitius and his Church of the Martyrs returned to Egypt. At the same time the Alexandrians were bereft of their leader Peter. The two parties were entrenched and the chasm between the Catholics and the Melitians was destined to widen.

---

<sup>111</sup> Obviously, because martyrs died, they never posed the kind of threat that confessors did.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### ALEXANDRIAN EPISCOPAL SUCCESSION AND THE MELITIAN SCHISM

In 313, a year and a half after Peter's martyrdom, Constantine issued the Edict of Toleration officially ending the persecution of the church. Peter's death brought the age of the martyrs in Egypt to a close and provided an apologia for his ministry, sealed by his blood and confirmed by popular support.<sup>1</sup> Peter was immediately venerated as the last martyred bishop and became the symbol of a new age of peace.<sup>2</sup> The Roman Empire, however, was far from peace. Constantine inherited an empire on the verge of political and economic disaster. His hope of using Christianity to create national unity was shattered by the divisions of the Egyptian Church. Undaunted by Peter's fateful success, Melitius continued to ordain clergy and to establish dissident churches.

---

<sup>1</sup> W. H. C. Frend, "Athanasius as an Egyptian Christian Leader in the Fourth Century," in Religion Popular and Unpopular in the Early Christian Centuries (London: Variorum Reprints, 1976), XVI. 29.

<sup>2</sup> See Athanasius Vita Ant. 47; Sozomen Hist. Eccl. 2. 17; and T. Vivian, St. Peter of Alexandria: Bishop and Martyr (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), p. 50.

During the fourth century as the Roman administration and economy languished, the office of the metropolitan bishop reached new heights of prestige and authority. Soon after Constantine's legalization of Christianity, the Bishop of Alexandria was given a broader administrative district and increased political power. In attempting to draw the marginal, non-Greco-Roman population under the influence of the church, the Alexandrian bishop began a gradual process of ecclesiastical expansion.<sup>3</sup> The aggrandizement of episcopal authority in Alexandria did not go unchallenged. This chapter will investigate irregularities in the traditional process of episcopal succession in Alexandria, particularly between the reigns of Peter and Athanasius and the Melitian counterclaim to episcopal authority in Alexandria.

#### Episcopal Succession in Alexandria

The Alexandrian tradition of episcopal selection and ordination was the focus of intense controversy early in the fourth century in Egypt.<sup>4</sup> The debate centered around the question of what constituted a legitimate succession to the Alexandrian office of the bishop. Tangential issues were: who could properly receive the office of bishop and how was the chosen bishop properly installed. The fundamental issue,

---

<sup>3</sup> Note for example the Sixth Canon of the Nicaean Council which placed the churches of Libya and Pentapolis under the jurisdiction of the Alexandrian see.

<sup>4</sup> The Alexandrian tradition of episcopal selection has been the focus of sectarian debate in Great Britain, as well, producing some useful, though somewhat myopic, scholarship on the issue. See E. W. Brooks, "The Ordination of Early Bishops of Alexandria," *JTS* 2 (1901): 612-3; C. Gore, "On the Ordination of the Early Bishops of Alexandria," *JTS* 3 (1902): 278-82; idem., *The Church and the Ministry* (London: New Edition, 1919); W. Telfer, "Episcopal Succession in Egypt," *JEH* 3 (1952): 1-13; idem., "Meletius of Lycopolis and Episcopal Succession in Egypt," *HTR* 48 (1955): 227-37; and E. W. Kemp, "Bishops and Presbyters at Alexandria," *JEH* 6 (1955): 125-42.



however, was one of authority: whether the authority to select a bishop lay in an apostolic succession or whether a bishop was to be chosen by a representative branch of the church.<sup>5</sup>

There are only two theories of order that need serious consideration: those which make valid ministry depend either on appointment by Christian society, more or less localised, or on a specific clerical order in the Christian society, self-perpetuated since its first members received their transmissible commission from the Apostles.<sup>6</sup>

Several ancient authors wrote about episcopal succession in Alexandria, but as their works differ drastically in their dates of authorship and reliability, they provide what often appears to be a jumbled picture of what actually took place. The wide range of evidence that touches on the subject, directly and inferentially, was collected by Tefler<sup>7</sup> but the author's historical methodology was severely criticized in a scathing article by Kemp.<sup>8</sup> What appears certain is that the Church of Alexandria practiced a unique method of episcopal appointment that has attracted the curiosity of both ancient

---

<sup>5</sup> One should be careful to avoid the naive assumption that an appointment of a bishop by presbyters is necessarily distinct from apostolic succession; see Darwell Stone, Episcopacy and Valid Orders in the Primitive Church: A Statement of Evidence (2d ed.; London: Longmans, 1926), p. iii-iv, who wrote, "An episcopal succession in which there was a body of presbyters who had received the episcopal powers and authority, who for a time shared in the act of ordaining which was later restricted to the one monarchical bishop, would be, as far as the point of the maintainance of the succession is concerned, the same in principle as the rule of a single bishop." Conversely, one cannot necessarily reduce apostolic succession into an unbroken series of consecrations by monarchical bishops.

<sup>6</sup> J. Vernon Bartlett and A. J. Carlyle Contemporary Review 64 (Aug. 1898): 255; quoted by Kemp, "Bishops and Presbyters at Alexandria," p. 142 n. 3.

<sup>7</sup> Tefler, "Episcopal Succession in Egypt," pp. 1-13. Tefler's conjectural arguments are built on an uncritical use of Origen, Epiphanius, Jerome, Ambrosiaster, Severus of Antioch, Eutychius, Passio Petri Alexandriae, Severus (Ibn el Moquaffa) Bishop of El Eschmounein in Upper Egypt, and Liberatus.

<sup>8</sup> Kemp, "Bishops and Presbyters at Alexandria," pp. 125-42.

and modern historians.

Several comments can be made about Alexandrian episcopal succession. First, all the sources agree that Alexandrian presbyters in the early church enjoyed exceptional authority.<sup>9</sup> Second, two sources suggest that the Church of Alexandria maintained a college of presbyters who ordained the bishop of Alexandria from their members. In a frequently cited passage Jerome wrote,

For at Alexandria, from Mark the Evangelist up to the bishops Heraclas and Dionysius, the presbyters always nominated one chosen from among themselves to be placed in the highest position.<sup>10</sup>

Eutychius (Sa'id Ibn Batrik), a tenth-century Melchite Patriarch of Alexandria, concurred with Jerome in tracing the origin of the custom back to the Apostle Mark. Eutychius wrote,

S. Mark along with the patriarch Anianas, appointed twelve presbyters, to remain with the patriarch, so that when the chair should become vacant, they might choose one out of the twelve, on whom they might lay their hands, give a benediction, and make him patriarch. They must then chose some eminent man and make him presbyter, in the place of the newly appointed patriarch, so that there will still be twelve presbyters in number.<sup>11</sup>

Severus of El Eschmounein may also allude to the Alexandrian custom of presbyteral election, although his renditions of episcopal elections and appointments are not always consistent.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 138.

<sup>10</sup> Jerome *Ep* 146 (*ad Evagrium*) (PL 22. 1194A).

<sup>11</sup> Eutychius *Annals* PG 111. 982BC (PG 111. 903-1156). Eutychius' *Annals* are filled with legendary and, for the most part, unreliable material. See Tefler, "Episcopal Succession in Egypt," pp. 6-7; Kemp, "Bishops and Presbyters at Alexandria," pp. 138-9 and Vivian, *St. Peter*, p. 14. Eutychius' account provides a remarkable parallel to Jerome. The parallel accounts differ from each other with regard to some details to such a degree that one might have trouble arguing that Eutychius was dependent on Jerome.

<sup>12</sup> Tefler, "Episcopal Succession in Egypt," pp. 6-10; Vivian, *St. Peter*, pp. 13-15.

A third aspect about episcopal succession in Alexandria is the fact that the ancient presbyterial college was eventually replaced. The precise time that this ended appears, at first glance, to be in question. On the one hand Eutychius clearly states that presbyterial elections ended in the time of Bishop Alexander.

This institution for creating a patriarch from out of the twelve presbyters was continued until the time of Alexander, the Alexandrian Bishop present at Nicaea. He no longer allowed the presbyters to elect the new patriarch, and decreed that, when a patriarch died, bishops (from throughout Egypt) should assemble and consecrate his successor. He decreed, in addition, that when a vacancy occurred, they (the bishops assembled in Alexandria) should elect some outstanding and upright man, from any part of the land, whether he be one of the twelve Alexandrine presbyters or not, and make him patriarch. Thus ceased the ancient custom of the presbyters appointing the bishop, and there took its place the rule of the patriarch being made by bishops.<sup>13</sup>

Eutychius relates that the change in episcopal appointment was a two-fold process. First, new bishops of Alexandria following Alexander would be nominated and consecrated by area bishops, not city presbyters. Second, the prospective candidates for the Alexandrian episcopal chair were no longer limited to the twelve city presbyters from Alexandria.

Eutychius' evidence agrees with at least one earlier testimony which also indicates that a change in policy took place at the Council of Nicaea. Severus of

---

Kemp, "Bishops and Presbyters in Alexandria," pp. 133-4; has demonstrated that Severus has no uniform formula for describing the Alexandrian custom of episcopal appointment. In *ibid.*, pp. 138-9, Kemp notes that the context of Severus' reference may also be held to imply that the presbyters appointed (or consecrated) the new bishop. The question as to whether the presbyter appointed or consecrated the new bishop is dependent on whether the Greek cheirotonein is equivalent to the Latin nominabant or not; see Tefler, "Episcopal Succession in Egypt," p. 10; Kemp, "Bishops and Presbyters at Alexandria," p. 138; and G. W. H. Lampe, ed., A Patristic Greek Lexicon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp. 1522-23.

<sup>13</sup> Eutychius Annals PG 111. 982BC.

Antioch, in a letter written from Alexandria in 518, discussed the canonical irregularity of a single bishop consecrating another to be his successor. Severus argued that the ancient custom of Alexandria and canonical law invalidated any autocratic appointments of this kind. He reasoned that

the bishop of the city renowned for orthodox faith, that is the city of the Alexandrines, used in former days to be appointed by presbyters, but in later times in accordance with the canon.<sup>14</sup>

One might also, with the utmost caution, suggest that Ambrosiaster's Commentary on Ephesians refers to a change in custom in Alexandria which took place at the Council of Nicaea.<sup>15</sup> It is apparent then from these sources that the Nicaean Council was a crucial turning point in the Alexandrian custom of episcopal appointment.

At the time of the Council of Nicaea, the church was divided on several fronts over the question of proper episcopal succession. The council was called to unify the church, doctrinally and ecclesiastically. The Fourth Canon of the Council of Nicaea defined precisely episcopal elections.

The bishop shall be appointed by all (the bishops) of the province. If that is impossible, because of pressing necessity, or on account of the length of the journey, at least three bishops shall meet and proceed with the consecration with the written permission of those absent. The confirmation of what is done rightfully belongs to the metropolitan of each province.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> E. W. Brooks, ed. The Sixth Book of the Select Letters of Severus (London: Text and Translation Society Publications, 1902), p. 213. See also Tefler, "Episcopal Succession in Egypt," p. 6; and Kemp, "Bishops and Presbyters at Egypt," p. 139.

<sup>15</sup> See Tefler, "Episcopal Succession in Egypt," pp. 6-7; and 11-12; and Kemp's cautions in his, "Bishops and Presbyters at Alexandria," p. 135.

<sup>16</sup> C. J. Hefele, A History of the Christian Councils (2nd rev. ed. trans. by W. R. Clark; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1887), 1. 381; with a discussion of the Canon 1. 381-6.

The Fourth Nicaean Canon was specifically directed against the early episcopal appointments made by Melitius during the Diocletianic persecutions. The canon, however, also addressed a pressing challenge to the Alexandrian bishopric made by the Melitians and others between 312 and 325.

The provisions of the Fourth Nicaean Canon are noteworthy. First, the council decided that a single bishop of a province was not sufficient for the appointment of another. Second, a new bishop must be appointed by no less than three bishops from the province. Third, the bishops present for the appointment were not allowed to proceed with the election without written permission from all of the bishops of the province who were absent at the time. Fourth, the metropolitan must approve of the newly appointed bishop. The Fourth Canon officially ended the Alexandrian practice of presbyterial elections of bishops.

But the early church sources do not testify unanimously that the custom of presbyterial elections continued in Alexandria until Nicaea. Jerome stated that the Alexandrian custom continued until the days of Heraclas (d. 247) and Dionysius of Alexandria (d. 264).<sup>17</sup> There are several contradictory interpretations of Jerome's seemingly dissident voice.<sup>18</sup> I suggest another interpretation which is novel, but

---

<sup>17</sup> Jerome *Ep* 146 (*ad Evagrium*) (PL 22. 1194A).

<sup>18</sup> To illustrate the wide variety of interpretations of Jerome's statement see Gore, "On the Ordination of the Early Bishops of Alexandria," p. 280, who argued that presbyterial elections of the Alexandrine bishop ended with Heraclas, who arranged for his successor Dionysius to be episcopally consecrated. Tefler, "Episcopal Succession in Egypt," pp. 4-5; conjectures that Jerome is relying on Origen for his information and therefore knew only that the custom lasted through the days of Origen. Kemp, "Bishops and Presbyters at Alexandria," pp. 128-31, and 139-40, shows the implausibility of Tefler's position but leaves unanswered what appears to be a mistake in Jerome's date for the change in custom.

historically demonstrable. Jerome's reference should be understood as evidence of an early unofficial change in Alexandrian custom which was later made official at Nicaea. Jerome was familiar with both the Fourth Nicaean Canon and Alexandrian custom. It is clear from the Vitae of Peter, and perhaps implied in the work of Severus of El Eschmounein, that from the time of Bishops Heraclas and Dionysius the Alexandrian bishops were appointed by their predecessors. It is possible that the custom of presbyterial elections was abandoned as a temporary expedient because of the confusion and upheaval that resulted during the years of persecution between the reigns of Decius and Diocletian.

I might summarize by suggesting that the Alexandrian tradition of the presbyterial election of their bishop was unofficially abandoned by Heraclas and officially rejected at Nicaea. The change in custom centralized the power and authority of the Alexandrian patriarch. These changes were opposed but, none the less, officially recognized at Nicaea. Jerome's evidence is necessary for an understanding of the gradual evolution in the Alexandrian practice and for a precise understanding of the dimensions of the episcopal conflicts in Alexandria between 312 and 325.

#### Alexandrian Episcopal Authority through 328

After Peter's death, the Alexandrian see remained vacant for about a year before the appointment of Achillas.<sup>19</sup> Achillas, who was mistakenly blamed for reinstating Arius to the church,<sup>20</sup> died five months after becoming Bishop of Alexandria.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> Gelasius of Cyzicus Hist. Eccl. 2. 1. 13; and Theodoret Hist. Eccl. 1. 2. 8. Epiphanius Adv. Haer. 68. 3, mistakenly suggests that Alexander was Peter's immediate successor.

<sup>20</sup> The hagiographical accounts of Peter's life state that Bishop Achillas, acting against Peter's counsel, reinstated Arius to the church. The later accounts probably

Although Arius hoped to be appointed to the vacant episcopal chair in 312/3, the office was given to Alexander.<sup>22</sup>

The Melitians in all probability harbored hostile feelings toward Peter's two successors. It should be remembered that both Achillas and Alexander fled along with Peter during the initial stages of the Diocletianic persecution and probably remained in hiding with him for the duration of the persecution. It is unlikely that Melitius would have been any more tolerant of Achillas and Alexander than he was of Peter. In fact, Athanasius later writes,

From the times of the bishop and martyr Peter, the Melitians have been schismatics and enemies of the Church: they injured Bishop Peter, maligned his successor Achillas, and denounced Bishop Alexander to the Emperor.<sup>23</sup>

---

confused Achillas, Bishop of Alexandria with Arius' associate, Achilles. The sources that indicate that Arius was excommunicated during Peter's episcopacy are found in the later lives of Bishop Peter, see Vivian, *St. Peter*, pp. 23-5, 69, 74, 83-4. The historical reliability of these accounts are questioned by T. Orlandi, "Ricerche su una storia ecclesiastica aleandrina del IV sec." *Vetera Christianorum* 11 (1974): 299-304; and R. Williams, "Arius and the Melitian Schism," *JTS* 37.1 (1986): 35-52. The later accounts by Sozomen *Hist. Eccl.* 1. 15; Theophanes *Chronographia* PG 108. 77B, 88C-89A; and Cassiodorus *Historia tripartita* 1. 12. 4; and the edited narration by the ninth century Neapolitan Guarimotus PG 18. 453-66 further entrenched the mistaken notion that Bishop Peter excommunicated Arius.

<sup>21</sup> Achillas, Bishop of Alexandria, should not be confused with one Achillas, or Achilles, who was an Alexandrian priest, head of the catechetical school in Alexandria, associate of Pierius, and supporter of Arius. See Barnes, T. D., *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 202.

<sup>22</sup> Theodoret *Hist. Eccl.* 1. 2. 4; and Gelasius Cyzicenus *Hist. Eccl.* 2. 1. 13. The Arian historian Philostorgius 1. 3 asserts that Arius surrendered votes intended for him to support the Episcopacy of Alexander.

<sup>23</sup> Athanasius *Apologia contra Arianos* 11; and 59; idem., *ad episc. Aegypti et Libyae* 23; and Socrates *Hist. Eccl.* 1. 6.

After the persecution, Melitius returned to Egypt but not to his hometown of Lycopolis. He chose to lead a Melitian congregation in Alexandria which probably indicates that he desired to be at the ecclesiastical nexus of Egypt. We have no evidence that expressly states that after Peter's martyrdom Melitius claimed the bishopric of Alexandria or established himself as an anti-bishop. It might be inferred from a passage in Theodoret, that Melitius, at least outwardly, did not claim to have ecclesiastical headship over his movement.<sup>24</sup> It seems likely, none the less, that during the interim between Bishop Peter and Achillas, the most influential cleric in Alexandria was Melitius. Under these circumstances, the silence of the evidence is intriguing.

The painstaking detail given to explain the ordination of Achillas may have been aimed at combatting a Melitian counterclaim to the Alexandrian episcopacy. The sources detail how Peter hand-picked not only his immediate successor, but also his successor's successor.<sup>25</sup> The political ramifications of Peter's appointments are significant. After the persecution, the Bishop of Alexandria emerged as the most powerful figure in Egypt, who maintained his power by appointing a successor that re-enforced his own religious and political agenda.

---

<sup>24</sup> Theodoret Haer. Fab. 4. 7. (See Appendix 22.)

<sup>25</sup> Severus History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria trans. B. Evetts. In Patrologia Orientalis 1 (1907): 392; and the Life and Martyrdom of the Holy and Glorious "Holy Martyr" of Christ, Peter Archbishop of Alexandria 6 and 9; in P. Devos, "Une passion grecque inédite de S. Pierre d' Alexandrie et sa traduction par Anastase le Bibliothécaire," AnBoI 83 (1965): 157-87. See also Orlandi, "Ricerche," p. 303. Perhaps the measure was precautionary due to the old age of both Achillas and Alexander. In any case, the appointment of two successors shows Peter's unprecedented boldness.



The author of the sixth-century Martyrdom of Peter of Alexandria used details about a later ritual in order to substantiate the episcopal claim of Achillas. The result is an anachronistic account of a ritual ceremony through which episcopal authority was transferred to the dead bishop's successor. The corpse of the dead bishop was placed by his devoted followers on his episcopal chair and was probably interred sitting on the throne.<sup>26</sup> Between the enthronement and the burial was a bizarre ritual used to symbolize the transfer of authority from the dead bishop to his successor.<sup>27</sup> The Martyrdom reports that:

The ministers of the Levitical priesthood with haste entered the sanctuary and, putting on the emblems of their office, took the holy martyr, with the crowd gathered around the bishops and elders of the city, they sat him on the throne. And all the church rejoiced, saying, "Even if while living, thrice-blessed and holy father, you refused to sit on your throne, now you have been perfected with Christ and have not refused, but have been seated. Therefore pray also on our behalf, father, holy one of God.

Then all the bishops took the holy Achillas and stood him near the throne where they had also seated the martyr. And they took the pallium of the most holy and famous bishop Peter and placed it upon him. And saying to the people, "Peace be with you," and after praising for many hours the pious and most excellent Peter, the holy martyr of God, he (or: they) hastened to place him in the tomb.<sup>28</sup>

Tefler has reconstructed an elaborate, highly imaginative and anachronistic Alexandrian ritual. His hypothetical rite relies on the Greek Martyrdom; a similar, yet

---

<sup>26</sup> The Ethiopic Synaxerium preserves an account of the enthroned burial in Budge, E. A. Wallis, The Book of the Saints of the Ethiopian Church (Hildesheim/New York: Olms, 1976), p. 303.

<sup>27</sup> Severus Patriarchal History p. 400. W. Tefler, "Episcopal Succession in Egypt," p. 7, relies heavily on the testimony of Severus. Severus narrates the ritual transfer of the symbols of authority but, as Vivian, St. Peter, p. 48 notes, "(Severus' account) conspicuously lacks the details of 'posthumous consecration' by the dead bishop."

<sup>28</sup> Devos, "Une passion," 18; in Vivian, St. Peter, Appendix 3, p. 78.

somewhat more vague account in the sixth-century work of Liberatus and the tenth-century account of Severus of El Eschmounein. Tefler conjectures that

the dead pope's body is washed, vested, and carried into church to be seated in the chair of St. Mark; the city presbyters elect his successor and bring him to the throne where he kneels and lifts the dead man's right hand to lay it on his head (thus taking the authority of his office directly from his predecessor); the presbyters now transfer the omphorion to the new pope's shoulders and take their seats on the bench; the living pope, standing beside the dead, now presides over the liturgy and finally completes the obsequies.<sup>29</sup>

There is no evidence for this supposed ancient tradition before the sixth century, at which time the evidence is too inferential to refer to the practice as a rite. What we do have, however, seems to be an apologetic use of a sixth-century custom to substantiate the episcopal claims of Achillas.

Alexander, who was selected by Peter before his death, succeeded Achillas as Bishop of Alexandria. Severus of El Eschmounein writes

When Achillas, the patriarch, went to his rest, the people assembled and laid their hands upon the Father Alexander, the priest, as the Father Peter, the last of the martyrs, had charged them: and he sat upon the episcopal throne.<sup>30</sup>

There are conflicting testimonies about Melitius' relationship with Bishop Alexander. Epiphanius reported:

Melitius still lived a long time (after Peter's martyrdom), and was in friendly relations with Alexander, the successor of Bishop Peter. He occupied himself much with the preservation of the faith. Melitius lived at Alexandria, where he had a church of his own. It was he who first denounced the heresy of Arius

---

<sup>29</sup> Tefler, "Episcopal Succession in Egypt," pp. 7-11. Tefler's suggestion that Melitius had claim to the episcopal chair because he was a participant in the enthroned burial ritual is purely conjectured. Compare with the comments by Kemp, "Bishops and Presbyters at Alexandria," pp. 135-6; and 142; and Vivian, *St. Peter*, pp. 12-15; and 46-9.

<sup>30</sup> Severus *Patriarchal History* 1. 401-402.

to Bishop Alexander.<sup>31</sup>

Epiphanius' information about a cordial relationship between Melitius and Alexander was probably a Melitian fabrication.<sup>32</sup> Athanasius characterized Melitius as the Bishop Alexander's bitter rival. According to Epiphanius, Melitius was the first to denounce the teachings of Arius,<sup>33</sup> which may, however, have been a Melitian attempt to expunge any taint of heresy from their founder. If he did indeed challenge Arius' orthodoxy, Melitius' actions may have been designed to embarrass Alexander.<sup>34</sup>

As Alexandrian episcopal authority waned between the reigns of Achillas and Alexander, the presbyters became increasingly powerful and divisive. The weakened authority of the Bishop of Alexandria gave rise to bitter rivalries between the Alexandrian presbyters. Alexander's episcopate was almost universally unpopular. Colluthus, the senior presbyter in Alexandria, claiming that Alexander had forfeited his office, established himself as an anti-bishop. At the same time, Arius, followed by five Alexandrian presbyters and the head of the Catechetical School, established a schismatic church. Alexander may have been forced by the circumstances to attempt to solidify his authority by eliminating presbyterial power and thereby creating a more monarchical episcopacy.<sup>35</sup> Melitius, however, continued his activities in Alexandria in

---

<sup>31</sup> Epiphanius *Adv. Haer.* 68. 4.

<sup>32</sup> See Hefele, *Councils*, 1. 351; and R. Williams, "Arius and the Melitian Schism," *JTS* 37 (1986): 47.

<sup>33</sup> See Epiphanius *Adv. Haer.* 68. 4.

<sup>34</sup> H. I. Bell *Jews and Christians in Egypt* (London: The British Museum, 1924; repr. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1972), p. 39 n. 6.

<sup>35</sup> Williams, "Arius and the Melitian Schism," p. 51.

the context of the ecclesiastical upheaval there.

The next reference to the Melitian schism was at the Council of Nicaea (A. D. 325). The council was called by the Emperor Constantine to attempt to legislate unity within Christendom. It is well known that the council addressed the Arian controversy, which was rapidly growing in Egypt and the East. The council also addressed the problems caused by the Melitian schism. The pressing Melitian issue at Nicaea was the question of what constituted a legitimate ordination. The council also prescribed a process to reconcile the Melitians and gently place them under the authority of the bishop of Alexandria.

Two Canons issued at Nicaea were probably intended to be a direct response to the Melitian schism. The Fourth Canon centralized the authority of Catholic clergy and episcopal succession.<sup>36</sup> Melitius initially appointed presbyters and his ordinations may have been more in line with the ancient custom of presbyterial appointment than with the newly emerging process of episcopal succession. Whether the Melitians represented a concerted effort aimed at preserving the voice of the people in episcopal appointments or not is impossible to say. There is, however, an account of a Melitian abbot who seems to have allowed an election for his replacement to discharge his functions in his absence. The deed of replacement states:

. . . it is necessary for me to appoint a deputy in my place until my return, (wherefore) I gathered together the monks of our monastery in the presence of Patabaeis, priest of Hipponon, and Papnutius the deacon of Paminpesla and Prouis, former monk, and many others; and they . . . and approved with

---

<sup>36</sup> H. Hess, Canons of the Council of Sardica (Oxford: Oxford Press, 1958), p. 93, notes that ecclesiastical organization paralleled provincial organization in the East, increasing the power of the bishop (especially the metropolitan) and diminishing the role of the populus. This trend is reflected in the Fourth Canon of Nicaea as well as Canons 18 of Ancyra, 19 and 23 of Antioch, and 13 of Laodicea.

unanimity, voluntarily and spontaneously and with irrevocable decision. Aurelius Gerontius my full brother as a person fitted to occupy my place until my return temporarily (?) (and) to supervise and administer and control all the affairs of the monastery, both as regards . . . and to chose the stewards of the monastery in the same way as myself, and that no innovations shall be made without the consent of (?) the priors of the monastery . . . .<sup>37</sup>

This Melitian replacement deed stands in sharp contrast to the problems of succession that reoccur in the fourth-century Pachomian monasteries.<sup>38</sup>

The Sixth Canon of Nicaea was similarly aimed at discrediting any episcopal claims in Alexandria that Melitius may have been making.<sup>39</sup> The Sixth Canon declared that,

The ancient order of things must be maintained in Egypt, in Libya, and in Pentapolis; that is to say, that the Bishop of Alexandria shall continue to have authority over the other bishops, having the same relation as exists with the Bishop of Rome. The ancient rights of the Churches shall also be protected, whether at Antioch or in the other bishoprics. It is evident, that if one should become a bishop without the consent of his metropolitan, he could not, according to the order of the great Synod, retain this dignity; but if, from a pure spirit of contradiction, two or three should oppose an election which the unanimity of all the others renders possible and legal, in such a case the majority must carry the day.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup> P. London 6. 1913; see Appendix 7.

<sup>38</sup> See P. Rousseau, Ascetics, Authority, and the Church in the Age of Jerome and Cassian (London: Oxford University Press, 1978); and James E. Goehring, "New Frontiers in Pachomian Studies," in The Roots of Egyptian Christianity B. Pearson and J. Goehring, eds. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), pp. 245-7.

<sup>39</sup> See Theodoret Haer. Fab. 4. 7. (See Appendix 22.) See also Chadwick, H., "Faith and Order at the Council of Nicaea: A Note on the Background of the Sixth Canon," HTR 53 (1960): 171-95; and Everett Ferguson, "Attitudes to Schism at the Council of Nicaea."

<sup>40</sup> The Sixth Canon of the Council of Nicaea in Hefele, Councils, 1. 353; and 388-404. It is possible that Canon Five (on excommunication) was also directed at the Melitians. Canons Four through Six should then be regarded as an anti-Melitian unit.

The council issued a letter to the Egyptian Church delineating a plan for reconciling the Melitian clergy into the official Alexandrian Catholic Church (see Appendix 5).<sup>41</sup> The synodical letter reaffirmed the orthodoxy of the Catholic Church and the ancient privileges of the Alexandrian bishop over Egyptian Christians. After Catholic confirmation of the Melitian ordination, the former Melitian clergy were readmitted to the Catholic Church and subordinated to the orthodox bishop in their area. They were not allowed to nominate others without the approval of the Catholic Bishop of Alexandria. If a Catholic bishop died, the restored Melitian bishop was not guaranteed absolute right of succession, despite the fact that he would have been considered the most likely candidate for the post. Melitius was consigned to his hometown of Lycopolis and retained only the title of bishop, without any privileges of the office. While the letter was obviously an attempt to provide a reasonable compromise, both sides completely disregarded its advice soon after its publication.

The requirements for a Melitian to succeed the Catholic bishop were almost unattainable. First they had to be above reproach, i.e., they should no longer have any Melitian connections. Second, the local (Catholic) presbyters voted on whether they wanted to be governed by the ex-Melitian or not. It is noteworthy that when a Catholic bishop died and a "reconciled" Melitian bishop was the natural successor, the Synodical letter endorsed the traditional practice of choosing the bishop by lay suffrage. The phrase, "that the people should elect them," was probably accomplished through the presbyterial college. Finally, the decision had to be ratified by the Bishop of

---

<sup>41</sup> In Socrates *Hist. Eccl.* 1. 9. 1-14; Theodoret *Hist. Eccl.* 1. 9. 2-13; Gelasius 2. 33. For a translation see Hefele, *Councils* 1. 352-3; and L. W. Barnard, "Athanasius and the Meletian Schism," *JEA* 59 (1973): 182-3.

Alexandria.<sup>42</sup>

Athanasius later regarded the Nicaean policy toward the Melitians to be an abysmal failure lamenting, "would to God it had never taken place!"<sup>43</sup> In order to execute the provisions of the synodical letter, Alexander requested from Melitius a list of all the bishops, priests, and deacons in his schism. The list, called the Breviarium Melitii, would prevent Melitius from continuing to expand his movement and abuse the generosity of the Nicaean policy (see Appendix 6). The list would also expedite the restoration process and, at the same time, it would allow for a surveillance of potential agitators. The Breviarium Melitii was submitted to Alexander, presumably in the months following Nicaea,<sup>44</sup> and was later inserted by Athanasius in his Apologia against the 'Arians.

The Breviarium Melitii shows that the Melitian schism spread rapidly and was a threatening force in Egypt by 325. The list numbered twenty-nine bishops in Egypt, including Melitius, and four presbyters, three deacons and a military almoner at Alexandria. There was one Melitian bishop for every six episcopal cities in the Delta and a Melitian bishop in every second town in the Thebaid. The movement spread along the length of the Nile valley and threatened the autonomy of Egyptian Christianity and the political authority of the Alexandrian Catholic Bishop.

The solution devised at Nicaea for restoring the Melitians was a failure. Constantine summoned another Council at Nicomedia in 327 to re-address the Arian

---

<sup>42</sup> See Chapter Five on Athanasius' political use of clerical appointments.

<sup>43</sup> Athanasius Apologia contra Arianos 71; see also *ibid.*, 59.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

and Melitian controversies.<sup>45</sup> In December 327, two hundred and fifty bishops convened at Nicomedia with the Emperor presiding over the debates. According to Athanasius, the Nicomedian Council made some progress toward reintegrating the Melitians into the Catholic Church.<sup>46</sup> But Melitius was unwilling to relent. He appointed John Archaph, Bishop of Memphis, as his successor and quietly died in 327.<sup>47</sup> Bishop Alexander did not attend the second council and according to Epiphanius, continued to persecute the Melitians after Melitius' death.<sup>48</sup> During the unstable episcopal reigns of Achillas and Alexander the Melitians were able to sustain their cause and consolidate their efforts. The focus of their protest turned from the fading memories of the lapsed to an emerging concern for Egyptian ecclesiastical hegemony. But the controversy was soon to pass to a new generation.

#### Melitian Opposition to the Succession of Athanasius<sup>49</sup>

Bishop Alexander died on 17 April 328.<sup>50</sup> Prior to his death, Alexander supposedly designated one of his deacons, Athanasius, to be his successor.<sup>51</sup> Athanasius was at the imperial court when Alexander died, creating a temporary break in the

---

<sup>45</sup> Eusebius Vita Const. 3. 23.

<sup>46</sup> Athanasius Apologia contra Arianos 59; and Sozomen Hist. Eccl. 2. 17. 4.

<sup>47</sup> Sozomen Hist. Eccl. 2. 21.

<sup>48</sup> Epiphanius Adv. Haer. 68. 5.

<sup>49</sup> See the insightful summary by L. W. Barnard, "Two Notes on Athanasius," Orientalia Christiana Periodica 41 (1975): 344-56 (reprinted in L. W. Barnard, Studies in Church History and Patristics, pp. 329-40).

<sup>50</sup> Athanasius Festal Index.

<sup>51</sup> Sozomen Hist. Eccl. 2. 17. 2 (quoting Apollinaris of Laodicea); and Epiphanius Adv. Haer. 68. 7.



episcopal succession at Alexandria. Athanasius was appointed bishop on 8 June 328. Epiphanius, insisting on a continual succession of legitimate bishops, filled the lacuna between Alexander and Athanasius. Compelled to fill the fifty-two day vacancy, Epiphanius wrote,

It is the custom in Alexandria that when a bishop dies, there is no delay in appointing his successor, but it takes place at once, for the sake of the peace in the church, and so that disturbances may not arise among the people, some wanting this man for bishop, and some that.<sup>52</sup>

Epiphanius' report, if isolated from its immediate context, may seem to suggest yet another Alexandrian method of episcopal election.<sup>53</sup> Epiphanius' account of the period between Alexander and Athanasius is in error at several points. Achillas was bishop before (not after) Alexander<sup>54</sup> and despite Epiphanius' effort to amend the account, there was a brief hiatus between the death of Bishop Alexander and the appointment of Athanasius. According to Severus of El Eschmounein, "the church (of Alexandria) was widowed (at this time) for a few days."<sup>55</sup>

The fact that Epiphanius' work at points is chronologically garbled does not make his entire account useless. Epiphanius includes the interesting detail that there was public unrest over the appointment of Alexander's successor and that the Arians

---

<sup>52</sup> Epiphanius Adv. Haer. 69. 1.

<sup>53</sup> Tefler, "Episcopal Succession in Egypt," p. 5, suggests that Epiphanius, "implies that surrounding the Alexandrine pope are agents capable, upon his demise, of giving him a successor before the plebs are aware of the need." Kemp, "Bishops and Presbyters at Alexandria," p. 132; notes Epiphanius' unreliability as an historian. He suggests, however, that Epiphanius may have been referring to an actual custom and that he "believed in it so strongly that he twisted events to fit the theory, but his statement of the custom cannot be accepted without independent support."

<sup>54</sup> Epiphanius Adv. Haer. 69. 11.

<sup>55</sup> Severus Patriarchal History 1. 403.

and the Melitians were at the center of the protest. It is well known that emotions ran high in faction-torn bishoprics when the incumbent died.<sup>56</sup> In the absence of Athanasius, the Melitians appointed Theonas to be Bishop of Alexandria.<sup>57</sup> It is likely that Theonas was already in a place of prominence in the Melitian community in Alexandria prior to Alexander's death. Melitius probably elevated Theonas in 325 when Melitius was exiled to Lycopolis. If this was the case, Theonas would have been subordinate to Alexander and a likely candidate to succeed him, although his name does not appear in the Breviarium Melitii.

The episcopacy of Theonas was immediately challenged. Fifty-four bishops, including supporters of both Theonas and Athanasius, met to decide whose candidate should be the next Bishop of Alexandria.<sup>58</sup> When they were unable to arrive at an acceptable settlement, the supporters of Athanasius took matters into their own hands. Six or seven bishops who supported Athanasius<sup>59</sup> barricaded themselves in the Church of Dionysius and appointed him the new Bishop of Alexandria.<sup>60</sup>

---

<sup>56</sup> H. Chadwick, The Role of the Christian Bishop in Ancient Society, (Berkeley: Center for Hermeneutical Studies, 1979), p. 8.

<sup>57</sup> Epiphanius Adv. Haer. 68. 7; see also ibid., 69. 11, which states that the Arians at the same time placed a certain Achillas on the throne, who, like Theonas, died after three months. One of the stories is probably a doublet of the other and matters are made more complex by the fact that both Theonas and Achillas were names of previous bishops of Alexandria. Most scholars accept the historicity of the Melitian Theonas, see H. Hauben, "On the Melitians in P. London VI (P. Jews) 1914: The Problem of Papas Heraiscus," Proceedings of the XVI Int. Congr. of Papyrology (Chico, Cal.: Scholars Press, 1981), pp. 453-4 nts. 29-30.

<sup>58</sup> Sozomen Hist. Eccl. 2. 17. 4; and 2. 25. 6.

<sup>59</sup> The variation with the number of bishops involved comes from Athanasius Apologia contra Arianos 6.

<sup>60</sup> Sozomen Hist. Eccl. 2. 17. In response to this account two arguments were developed to disqualify Athanasius, using the Nicæan canons. Philostorgius Hist. Eccl.

The official account of Athanasius' ordination was immediately altered. An encyclical letter written by the Egyptian Catholic bishops and recorded by Athanasius in his Apologia contra Arianos attempted to expurgate Athanasius of the charge of an irregular ordination. The letter emphasized that God elevated Athanasius to the bishopric (a recurring theme) and that the people unanimously confirmed his ordination.<sup>61</sup> Apocryphal stories were later created to further elevate Athanasius' reputation.<sup>62</sup>

The questionable incidents surrounding Athanasius' illegal ordination were a matter of contention for years to follow. The arguments against Athanasius' ordination can be summarized as follows: First, Athanasius was only a deacon when elevated and the first Alexandrian bishop who was not chosen from the ranks of the Alexandrian presbyterate. Second, Athanasius was under the canonical age of thirty when he became bishop.<sup>63</sup> Third, Athanasius was not elected by a majority of the Egyptian

---

2. 11, alleged that Athanasius was ordained by two Egyptian bishops against their will. Socrates Hist. Eccl. 1. 23, states that he was nominated by "disqualified persons." This may be a reference to his election by presbyters rather than bishops. A Melitian (or Arian) monk, while visiting a certain monk named Poemen charged that Athanasius had been elected by presbyters; see Apophthegmata Patrum PG 65. 341. See also Tefier, "Episcopal Succession in Egypt," p. 11; and Kemp, "Bishops and Presbyters at Alexandria," pp. 136-7.

<sup>61</sup> Athanasius Apologia contra Arianos 6. The alleged unanimous ratification by the people was secured by Athanasius after years of propagandizing and politicizing; see Chapter Five.

<sup>62</sup> Rufinus Hist. Eccl. 1. 14 and Sozomen Hist. Eccl. 2. 17 both record the story about when Alexander first saw Athanasius with his playmates playing "church" and baptizing youths. They confessed that Athanasius was their bishop. Sozomen Hist. Eccl. 2. 17 also quotes a tradition from a certain Apolinarius the Syrian that when Alexander died his designated successor, Athanasius, was found hiding and was forced into ordination. The story is reminiscent of the O. T. King Saul and of numerous similar early church examples of forced ordination.

<sup>63</sup> According to the Syriac Chronicon (PG 26. 1352A) opening the collection of

bishops and in fact, was officially confirmed by Constantine. Finally, I would suggest that the Melitian Theonas had an arguable claim to the episcopal chair, which ultimately led to the illegal ordination of Athanasius.<sup>64</sup>

### Conclusion

Theonas, the Melitian Bishop of Alexandria, died after only three months in the office. Heraiscus succeeded him as the next Melitian Bishop of Alexandria (see Appendix 8).<sup>65</sup> Although Melitius made an early bid to establish a stronghold in Alexandria, neither Melitius nor his successor John aspired to control their movement through the episcopal chair at Alexandria. They each, however, found it of eminent political importance to depose the bishop of Alexandria. Melitian authority, however, did not reside in the See of St. Mark but in the desert regions of Coptic Middle and Upper Egypt. In many ways, the Melitians were a protest against the emerging monarchical authority of the Catholic Church centered at Alexandria. The Coptic Christian autonomy was jeopardized by the authoritarian claims of the Alexandrian bishopric which the Melitians resisted.

---

Athanasius' Festal Letters he was under age at the time of his ordination, however, the later Coptic Encomium on Athanasius puts Athanasius' age in conformity with the canonical regulations.

<sup>64</sup> Tefler, "Meletius of Lycopolis and Episcopal Sicection in Egypt," pp. 227-37, argues that Constantine interpreted the terms of the Nicaean settlement so as to give John Arcaph prospective rights to the see of Alexandria. Barnard, "Athanasius and the Meletian Schism in Egypt," pp. 185-6; and 188-9; and Hauben, "The Melitians in P. London IV," p. 454, both reject Tefler's over enthusiastic reconstruction.

<sup>65</sup> P. London 6. 1914 (Appendix 8) and Hauben, "The Melitians in P. London IV," pp. 447-56.

The Melitians would spar for control of Coptic Egypt with their staunch opponent Athanasius. The Melitians worked indefatigably against Athanasius, and continually sought the deposition of the controversial bishop. Athanasius, fought back and attacked the heart of the Melitian stronghold, proclaiming the message of the orthodoxy of Catholicism to the Copts.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE STRUGGLE FOR COPTIC CHRISTIAN ALLEGIANCE

One of the most perplexing problems faced by church historians interested in heresies and schismatic movements is the question of the relationship between social and political unrest and religious expression.<sup>1</sup> It is simplistic to argue that social or political protest is the primary motive for religious upheaval. Explaining religious aberration with a strictly social model overlooks individual motivation, faith and theology. On the other hand, early church schisms and heresies did not emerge out of a political and economic vacuum. While causal relationships are often difficult to establish and more than often misleading, it would be naive to ignore the political,

---

<sup>1</sup> See E. R. Hardy, "The Patriarchate of Alexandria: A Study in National Christianity," Church History (1946): 81-100; A. H. M. Jones, "Were Ancient Heresies National or Social Movements in Disguise?" JTS n.s. 10.2 (1959): 280-97; R. Grant, "Nationalism and Internationalism in the Early Church," Anglican Review (1959): 167-76; W. H. C. Frend, "The Roman Empire in the Eyes of Western Schismatics," Bibliothèque de la Revue d'Histoire ecclésiastique [= Miscellanea Historiae Ecclesiasticae] Fasc. 38 (Louvain, 1961): 9-22; S. L. Greenslade, "Heresy and Schism in the Later Roman Empire," in Schism, Heresy and Religious Protest ed. by Derek Baker Studies in Church History Vol. 9 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), pp. 1-20; and W. H. C. Frend, "Heresy and Schism as Social and National Movements," in Schism, Heresy and Religious Protest, pp. 37-56.

economic, and social context from which the Melitian movement emerged.

The fourth-century Coptic people lived in a disquieting age, witnessing the emerging authority of church and state amid immense economic frustration. Coptic nationalism was not a revival of ancient Egyptian culture which was in opposition to Greco-Roman influence.<sup>2</sup> Coptic nationalism was a distinct by-product of Christianity forged by the hammer of Roman persecution and of later imperial economic oppression. The Melitians protested the emerging authority of the Alexandrian Patriarch, who's political power was reinforced by the imperial government. This chapter investigates the relationship between Coptic nationalism and the Melitian movement and the schism's struggle against Athanasius for Coptic allegiance. The Melitians attacked the authority of Athanasius who responded by regimenting a phalanx of Coptic support against the growing indigenous Coptic schism.

#### Socio-Economic Oppression of the Copts

Significant administrative and economic changes that affected the Coptic people were introduced into Egypt during the imperial period. These innovations were, in part, in response to political and economic upheaval and military crises. The changes enabled the wealthy landowners who included the official Egyptian Church, to become wealthier and more powerful. The changes left the destitute in a condition of inexorable poverty. During this period many Coptic people who had lived for centuries on sustenance farming, were gradually reduced to a status of agrarian servitude.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> See W. H. C. Frend, "Athanasius as an Egyptian Christian Leader of the Fourth Century," in Religion Popular and Unpopular in the Early Christian Centuries (London: Variorum Reprints, 1976), XVI. 20-37; esp. p. 29; compare with J. Grafton Milne, "Egyptian Nationalism Under Roman Rule," 14 (1928): 226-34; and R. MacMullen, "Nationalism in Roman Egypt," Aegyptus 44 (1964-65): 179-94.

<sup>3</sup> For a general introduction to economic factors in Graeco-Roman Egypt see M.

The efficient collection of taxes was the most pressing administrative concern in Egypt in late antiquity. From the reign of Diocletian through Justinian, a number of political changes were introduced in Egypt which were designed to increase bureaucratic efficiency. The political reorganization of Egypt created a rigid, centralized, hierarchical bureaucracy, which actively employed the support of local officials at the ground level. As Egypt was divided into provinces and reduced to the status of other provinces throughout the empire, this undermined national identity and any sense of autonomy. Due apparently to the increased costs of the new bureaucracy and an administrative breakdown at the local level, the political reforms proved to be fiscally unsuccessful.<sup>4</sup> The Coptic people of the early Byzantine era lived under the dual threat of the oppressive presence of the imperial government and the corrupt rule of local tyrants.

The Egyptians' political anxieties were heightened by their economic woes. Diocletian introduced a tax reform designed to regularize and simplify the existing tax

---

Rostovtzeff, The Social and Economic History of the Hellenistic World (2nd ed.; 3 Vols; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959); A. C. Johnson, An Economic Survey of Ancient Rome: Roman Egypt to the Reign of Diocletian ed. by Tenney Frank (2nd ed.; Paterson, NJ: Pageant Books, 1959); Naphtali Lewis, Life in Egypt Under Roman Rule (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983); Henry A. Green, "The Socio-Economic Background of Christianity in Egypt," in The Roots of Egyptian Christianity ed. by Birger A. Pearson and James A. Goehring (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), pp. 100-113; R. Taubenschlag, The Law of Graeco-Roman Egypt in the Light of the Papyri 332 B. C. E.-640 C. E. (2nd ed.; Warsaw: Panstwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1955); and Alan K. Bowman, "The Economy of Egypt in the Early Fourth Century," Imperial Revenue, Expenditure and Monetary Policy in the Fourth Century A. D. (ed. by C. E. King; British Archaeological Reports, International Series 76; 1980).

<sup>4</sup> See P. Beatty Panop. 1. 167-79, which contains a file of letters dating to A. D. 298 clearly illustrating the breakdown of local administration. When the Arabs conquered Egypt, the country was managed more effectively although the administration was left unchanged.



code with the ultimate hope of increasing imperial profit.<sup>5</sup> Diocletian's tax reforms, however, incited a rebellion in Egypt in 297 as the people anticipated their growing tax burden.<sup>6</sup> A quota for each province was determined annually with the assessment based on units of productivity.<sup>7</sup> A new assessment was fixed every fifteen years based on an updated census. The reforms were inadequate, inflexible and too late to stem the economic decline.

The new system was not without loopholes.<sup>8</sup> Many found it to their advantage to allow less fertile land to go uncultivated to reduce their total tax liability while automatically increasing their productivity per man hour.<sup>9</sup> While productivity lagged, the imperial expenditures continued to increase. The agrarian peasantry of Egypt

---

<sup>5</sup> The edict as announced by the prefect Aristius Optatus has been preserved on a papyrus published and discussed by A. E. R. Boak, "Early Byzantine Papyri From the Cairo Museum," *Études de Papyrologie* 2 (1934): 1-18; no. 1. See W. Ensslin, "The Reforms of Diocletian," in the *Cambridge Ancient History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939), 12. 383-408.

<sup>6</sup> See *P. Cairo Isid.* 1; T. D. Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), chapter 14; and idem., *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), pp. 17-18.

<sup>7</sup> For cultivatable land a unit of productivity was called a *iugum* "yoke" which was equivalent to the amount of land that one man could work. The size of the *iugum* varied according to the land's quality and the crop that was grown. For human labor the taxable unit was called the *caput* "head".

<sup>8</sup> See H. I. Bell, *Egypt From Alexander the Great to the Arab Conquest* (London: Oxford University Press, 1948), p. 117.

<sup>9</sup> This may be one of the reasons for the depopulation of the Fayum in the second and third centuries. See below.

carried the economic burden of an expensive bureaucracy.<sup>10</sup> The imperial government not only refused to reduce the annual quotas but also decided to bind peasants to their land for the economic well-being of the state.

The tax was collected by individuals called pegarchs who made their livelihood on what could be exacted over and above what was owed the government. The pegarch approached his duty with zeal as he was responsible for any arrears.<sup>11</sup> Complaints about high taxes abound in the papyri. Ironically, the pegarchs exploited those least able to pay, the peasantry. At times, wealthy individuals, villages, and the Church were granted the privilege of avoiding the pegarch's fee and were instead allowed to pay their taxes directly to the imperial government. The following papyrus illustrates the fact that a town which had the privilege of collecting its own taxes (pegarchy) was not necessarily exempt from the burden of high taxes.

Owing to the unfruitfulness of our lands, which are of poor quality, we were formerly assessed along with all the landowners of the unhappy pegarchy of Antaeopolis, at only two keratia per aroura of arable land and eight keratia for vineyards. . . in the winter we live on vegetables instead of cereal food and nothing is left over to us and our children for our maintenance.<sup>12</sup>

At the beginning of the fourth century, state owned property previously rented

---

<sup>10</sup> A. E. R. Boak, "An Egyptian Farmer of the Age of Diocletian and Constantine," Byzantina Metabyzantina 1 (1946): 39-53; and Bell, Egypt from Alexander the Great, p. 118.

<sup>11</sup> The pegarch was obligated to collect the established quota which was often an impossible task with peasants abandoning their land or allowing it to lay fallow. As a result of this dilemma, the pegarchs increased the percentage due to cover for arrears. Under these circumstances, it was difficult to recruit pegarchs. Lactantius Mort. Pers. 23. 7. 1 and 23, none the less, remarks that the hordes of tax collectors were more numerous than taxpayers.

<sup>12</sup> P. Lond. 6. 1674; and Alan K. Bowman, Egypt after the Pharaohs (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), p. 86.

to peasants was sold to private individuals. The increase of land ownership by the wealthy furthered the gap between the rich (potentiores) and the poor (humiliores). Many of the wealthy landowners were pagan and used their social and political power to persecute the poorer Christians.<sup>13</sup> Although many independent, small landowners survived through late antiquity, the wealthy were able to gradually increase their landholdings. A typical example of the distribution of land can be illustrated from the mid-fourth century landholding register from the Hermopolite nome.<sup>14</sup> There were 441 total resident landowners in the Hermopolite nome in 350. Four percent of the total land (between 1-10 arourae) was owned by 188 landowners (44% of the total) and 51% of the total property (tracts over 200 arourae) was owned by only sixteen people (or 3.6% of the total).<sup>15</sup> Thirty six percent of the registered land in the Hermopolite nome was owned by 0.2% of the total landowners. Wealthy landowners rented portions of their estates to tenant farmers. These farmers were gradually reduced to a total obligation to the landlord for economic protection, curtailing the peasants' economic freedom and mobility.

Individuals unable (or unwilling) to pay their taxes could either run away<sup>16</sup> or

---

<sup>13</sup> See above pages 30-1.

<sup>14</sup> P. Landlisten in Alan K. Bowman, "Landholdings in the Hermopolite Nome in the Fourth Century A. D." JRS 75 (1985): 137-63.

<sup>15</sup> An aroura was equivalent to 100 square cubits. Athanasius Vita Ant. 2 relates that St. Antony was heir to a fertile tract of 300 arourae, which was equivalent to approximately 207 acres.

<sup>16</sup> There was a direct correlation between people deserting their land because of their inability to pay their taxes and the increase of monasteries in Egypt. See W. L. Westermann, "On the Background of Coptism," in Coptic Egypt (Brooklyn, NY: Brooklyn Museum, 1941), pp. 12-13; and W. H. C. Frend, The Rise of Christianity (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), pp. 423, 574-8; see also Athanasius Vita Ant. 44 (PG 26. 908), "So their cells in the hills were like tents filled with divine choir. . . It

subject themselves to servitude by becoming a colonus adscripticius. Many peasants safeguarded themselves from imperial economic oppression and skyrocketing inflation by placing themselves under the protection (patronage) of a wealthy individual or the church. An imperial constitution issued in 415 officially recognized the validity of such patronage.<sup>17</sup> Bishops and monks became the social advocates of the peasantry and increased the dependent relationship between the established church and the Egyptian people.<sup>18</sup>

During the fourth century there is also evidence of the depopulation of some of the villages of the Fayum. How wide-spread this phenomenon was and why it occurred is impossible to determine. Perhaps a plague or the advancing desert drove the peasants from their villages. It is also possible that people deserted marginal land that took more work to make a profit on than they were willing to do. The course of events in the Fayum are accentuated by the fact that that this region was at one time one of the most fertile and easily irrigated regions in Egypt.<sup>19</sup> It was necessary to

---

was as if one truly looked on a land all its own- a land of devotion and righteousness. For neither perpetrator nor victim of injustice was there, nor complaint of tax collector." The Apophthegmata Patrum are replete with references to the socio-economic conditions in Egypt; see for example another saying attributed to Abba Antony, "Why are there some poor and some wealthy? And why are the rich unrighteous and grind the faces of the righteous poor?"

<sup>17</sup> Codex Theodosius II. 24. 6.

<sup>18</sup> See Peter Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," JRS 61 (1971): 80-101; Shenoute's role as a social advocate closely parallels Brown's discussion of holy men in Syria; See also Henry Chadwick, "The Role of the Christian Bishop in Ancient Society," Colloquy 35 Protocol of the Thirty-fifth Colloquy: 25 February 1979 (Berkeley: Center for Hermeneutical Studies, 1980), pp. 1-14.

<sup>19</sup> See H. Kees, Ancient Egypt: A Geographical History of the Nile (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961).

irrigate the land in order to keep the desert from advancing over mediocre territory. The task of maintaining the irrigation system was the responsibility of the peasantry and its neglect posed a perennial problem.

Diocletian attempted to arrest the runaway inflation he inherited from a century of war and decreasing productivity. First, the emperor integrated Egyptian coinage into the monetary system of the rest of the empire. He re-evaluated Egyptian coinage and attempted to fix maximum prices on all goods and services.<sup>20</sup> In the fourth century the currency was intentionally depreciated which was apparently followed by dramatic increases in the price of goods and services. In the first half of the fourth century, for example, the price of glass escalated 550%.<sup>21</sup> The independent small farmer faced the necessity of having to purchase increasingly expensive beasts of burden. Provision for this costly investment was usually provided in the lease of tenant farmers by the lessor. Because the wealthy landowners and the church had assets in land, and more often than not in gold, they were not affected by the fluctuating price changes.<sup>22</sup> The tenant farmers, on the other hand, who were in the process of retrogressing to a barter economy, were least able to cope with the economic changes and price increases and were effectively reduced to destitution.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> Bowman, Egypt after the Pharaohs, pp. 89-120.

<sup>21</sup> P. Coll. Youtie 81. 15.

<sup>22</sup> Bowman, Egypt after the Pharaohs, pp. 89-120.

<sup>23</sup> Notice the plethora of references to poverty and the overwhelming gap between the wealthy and the needy in Wilhelm Riedel and Walter E. Crum, The Canons of Athanasius Vol 9 (London: Text and Translation Society, 1904; repr. Amsterdam: Philo Press, 1973). The text is conservatively dated by the editors to circa 346-350, however, they concede that it may have been written as late as 500; see p. xiv.

The abject servitude of the Egyptian people is highlighted in the papyri dating from the fourth through the sixth centuries. The sources are filled with both self-righteous Christian verbiage directed to the authorities alongside self-abasing descriptions of individuals' economic woes. In the sixth century a peasant on the famous Apion estate petitioned his landlord saying,

To my good master, lover of Christ, lover of the poor, all-esteemed and most magnificent Patrician and Governor of the Thebaid, Apion, from Anoup, your miserable slave upon your estate called Phacra.<sup>24</sup>

Even a privileged village registered the same kind of complaint as seen in the opening lines of a letter from the autopract village of Aphrodite in 567 to the Governor of the Thebaid,

To Flavius Triadus Marianus Michael Gabriel Constantine Theodore Martyrius Julianus Athanasius, the most renowned general and consular and most magnificent Patrician of the Prefect Justin, Governor and Augustal of the Thebaid for the second year. Petition and supplication from your most pitiable slaves, the wretched small owners and inhabitants of the all-miserable village of Aphrodite, which is under the sacred household and your magnificent authority. All justice and just dealing forever illuminate the proceedings of your pre-eminently excellent and magnificent authority, which have long expected as the dead in Hades once awaited the coming of the Christ, the everlasting God. For after Him, our master God, the Savior, the Helper, the true and merciful Benefactor, we set all our hopes of salvation upon your Highness, who are among all men praised and proclaimed abroad. . . and without fear we come to grovel in track of your immaculate footsteps and to inform you of the state of our affairs.<sup>25</sup>

The dismal economic situation for some Copts is illustrated by two Melitian letters P. London 6. 1915 and 1916, written by a certain Herieous some time between 330-340 (see Appendices 9-10). The letters were an urgent plea made on behalf of a

---

<sup>24</sup> P. Oxy 1. 130.

<sup>25</sup> P. Cair. Masp. 67002.

Melitian wine dealer named Pamonthius who had fallen into deep debt, due to the high exactions made by the financial officials. This unfortunate individual was forced to borrow a large sum of money but was unable to payoff the debt.<sup>26</sup> Herieous comments,

... and not being able to meet his liabilities, he was compelled by his creditors to sell all that he had, even to the garments that cover his shame; and when these were sold, scarcely could he get together half of the money for his creditors, who, those pitiless and godless men, carried off all his children, being yet quite in their infancy.<sup>27</sup>

Pamonthius was temporarily imprisoned but released on bail, which was raised by his Melitian friends. Herieous and his friends contributed all the money they could spare in order to help Pamonthius and were now appealing to other Melitians to help ransom his children and payoff his dept.

It is undeniable that the political and economic woes of late antiquity in Egypt were shared by all. But at the same time, those most tragically affected were the poor, and the highest concentration of poor were Coptic, and Christian by increasing numbers. The Melitian movement emerged out of the context of economic and political oppression, and to a degree, at least for Pamonthius, was an answer to these problems. The Melitian schism may have been a Coptic channel of protest for some. All Melitians certainly opposed the emerging authority of the bishop of Alexandria.

---

<sup>26</sup> Because of the circumstances under which Pamonthius borrowed the money, he was probably obligated to pay a high rate of interest. According to P. London 6. 1916 line 43; based on the reconstruction suggested by Bell, Jews and Christians, p. 80 n. 43, Pamonthius owed (after the liquidation of his entire estate for half the sum) 500 talents principal and 800 talents total interest.

<sup>27</sup> P. London 6. 1915 lines 21-8. On the popularly attested (and illegal) practice of pledging children as a security on a loan see Bell, Jews and Christians, pp. 72-3.

The protest, however, may have had more deeply underlying political and economic roots.<sup>28</sup>

I would like to suggest that the Melitian schism was primarily an indigenous Coptic Christian movement. There are two main lines of evidence that indicate a relationship between the Melitians and Coptic Egypt. First, the Melitians spread rapidly throughout Middle and Upper Egypt (see Map 2). Their Coptic names and documents readily show that the schism was predominately a Coptic movement. Second, the Melitians' idiosyncratic beliefs and practices (see Chapter Six), further underscore the relationship between the movement and Egyptian culture. Athanasius worked tirelessly to counter the Melitian schism by winning the Coptic Christian over to the patronage of the Alexandrian see. Let us now investigate the Melitians' unsuccessful struggle with Athanasius for a Coptic Christian coalition.

#### Melitian Machinations 328-335

The Melitians worked indefatigably toward the deposition of Athanasius after his usurpation of the bishopric of Alexandria.<sup>29</sup> On the the grounds of Alexandrian Church tradition, they maintained that Athanasius had unlawfully taken the episcopal office over the legitimate claims of the rival Melitian Theonas.

This ecclesiastical setback was exacerbated by the political anxieties and economic despair that the Coptic Melitian constituency was experiencing. The

---

<sup>28</sup> Compare W. H. C. Frend, "The Roman Empire in the Eyes of Western Schismatics During the Fourth Century A. D.," in Religion Popular and Unpopular in the Early Christian Centuries, X. 9-22.

<sup>29</sup> Athanasius Apologia contra Arianos 59, states that five months after the death of Bishop Alexander the Melitians "like dogs unable to forget their vomit, were again troubling the Churches."





Melitians' frustration was heightened by Athanasius' propagandizing and heavy-handed economic and ecclesiastical coercion. The Melitians' vain attempt to depose Athanasius led them to desperate actions.

The Melitian efforts against Athanasius are interconnected with the fate of Arianism between 328 to 330. The Council of Nicomedia had readmitted Arius into the communion of the church and Constantine and the bishops were eager to have Athanasius carry out the restoration as quickly as possible. Eusebius of Nicomedia wrote a letter to urge Athanasius to receive the Arians back into fellowship and threatened to involve the emperor if he continued to be uncooperative.<sup>30</sup> Athanasius refused to yield on the grounds that condemned heretics had no communion in the church.<sup>31</sup> Eusebius persuaded Constantine to address a letter to Athanasius, admonishing Athanasius for his reluctance to comply with the decree of the council and the imperial order. The letter states,

Having therefore knowledge of my will, grant free admission to all who wish to enter the Church. For if I learn that you have hindered or excluded any who claim to be admitted into communion with the Church, I will immediately send someone who will depose you by my command, and will remove you from your place.<sup>32</sup>

Athanasius responded that there was no place in the Church for anti-Christian heretics.<sup>33</sup>

In 330 the Melitians sent a delegation to Constantine at Nicomedia to petition for the right to worship without fear of violent repercussions. The Melitian delegation

---

<sup>30</sup> Sozomen Hist. Eccl. 2. 18.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> A fragment of the letter is preserved in Athanasius Apologia contra Arianos 59.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 60; and see Socrates Hist. Eccl. 1. 27.

was led by John Archaph, Bishop of Memphis, Callinicus of Pelusium, and a confessor named Paphnutius.<sup>34</sup> Because the palace officials were not acquainted with the Melitians, the delegates were not given an audience with Constantine. The Melitian contingent waited in the vicinity of Nicomedia where they made acquaintance with Eusebius of Nicomedia, whom they knew had access to the emperor. Eusebius of Nicomedia, while outwardly accepting the Nicaean Creed, was in actuality Arian in sympathy and hostile toward Athanasius.<sup>35</sup> Eusebius agreed to intercede on the Melitians' behalf if they promised to join forces with the Arians in united opposition against Athanasius. The Melitians consented, their petition was brought to Constantine, and a fateful alliance was established--fateful for the unity of the Church and for the survival of the Melitians.

By 330 the Arians had joined forces with the Melitians against Athanasius. Although the two groups had been opposed to each other on theological grounds, they had a common agenda--Athanasius' banishment. Clearly they felt that their combined forces would be strategically significant. There is no solid indication of any theological concessions by the Melitians in the early stage of their union with the Arians.<sup>36</sup> According to Sozomen,

When the Arians perceived that the Melitians were introducing innovations, they also attempted to involve the churches in trouble. For, as frequently occurs in similar contests, some applauded the dogmas of Arius, while others contended that those who had been ordained by Melitius ought to govern the churches. These two bodies of sectarians had hitherto been opposed to each other, but, on

---

<sup>34</sup> Epiphanius Adv. Haer. 68. 5.

<sup>35</sup> Epiphanius Adv. Haer. 68. 6; Socrates Hist. Eccl. 1. 27; and Sozomen Hist. Eccl. 2. 21.

<sup>36</sup> See for example Athanasius Ep. ad Episc. Aeg. et Lib. 22.

perceiving that the clergy of the Catholic church were followed by the multitude, they, from motives of jealousy, formed an alliance together, regarding the clergy of Alexandria as their common enemies. . . . But although their sentiments [or theology] were thus at variance, they had recourse to dissimulation, in order to carry on conjointly their schemes against the Catholics.<sup>37</sup>

Melitian activity between 328 and 330 played an important complementary role that facilitated the resurgence of Arianism. Despite the incorrigible orthodoxy of Athanasius, the council's and emperor's threats may have been sufficient to insure Arius' restoration. The Melitians sustained protest after Nicomedia, however, and their willingness to work together with the Arians provided a numerical base that gave new fervor to the Arian movement.<sup>38</sup>

Eusebius of Nicomedia urged the Melitians to accuse Athanasius of criminal activity. Several Melitians, including a certain Ision, Eudaemon, Callinicus, and Hieracammon, formally accused Athanasius of attempting to impose an unauthorized linen tax on the Egyptians.<sup>39</sup> Athanasius withdrew to the Thebaid, but sent two Alexandrian presbyters named Apis and Macarius to the imperial court to plead his case.<sup>40</sup> The presbyters disproved the extortion charges against Athanasius, but the Eusebians and Melitians were working on more serious allegations.

---

<sup>37</sup> Sozomen Hist. Eccl. 2. 21.

<sup>38</sup> Sozomen records in Hist. Eccl. 2. 21, "This (the combined efforts of the Arians and the Melitians) revived the original controversy concerning Arius, and some of the clergy and laity seceded from communion with the others."

<sup>39</sup> Athanasius Apologia contra Arianos 60. 1; Sozomen Hist. Eccl. 2. 22; and Socrates Hist. Eccl. 1. 27.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. (Socrates gives the first name Alypius for Apis).

Constantine summoned Athanasius to appear before him in 331 in Nicomedia. Athanasius made a slow journey to Asia Minor and appeared before Constantine at Psamathia, a suburb of Nicomedia. Athanasius faced four charges.<sup>41</sup> First, the Melitians renewed their extortion charges. Second, they claimed that Athanasius was below the canonical age of thirty when he was elected bishop. Third, the Melitians claimed that the Alexandrian presbyter Macarius was ordered by Athanasius to break a sacred chalice.<sup>42</sup> The final charge was the most serious, alleging that Athanasius bribed Philumenus (with a casket of gold) to murder Constantine.<sup>43</sup> After a hearing, Constantine acquitted Athanasius. Athanasius announced his acquittal in his Easter Festal Letter of 332, which was written from Nicomedia and delivered to Alexandria by a lackey of the Christian praetorian prefect.<sup>44</sup> Constantine also sent a letter to the Catholic Christians of Alexandria affirming Athanasius' innocence and denouncing the disruptive and time consuming machinations of the Melitians.<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup> For the charges see Athanasius Festal Letter 4. 5; *ibid.*, Apologia contra Arianos 60. 4; Socrates Hist. Eccl. 1. 27; and Sozomen Hist. Eccl. 2. 22.

<sup>42</sup> For an example of a glass chalice from Egypt, see Florence D. Friedman, Beyond the Pharaohs (Providence, RI: Rhode Island School of Design, 1989), p. 209 no. 122. Most chalices were metal and apparently the glass chalices were made to imitate more expensive metalware. A glass chalice might illustrate the poverty of the congregation. That the altar was the focus of the alleged attack is interesting in light of the Melitians' eucharistic irregularities.

<sup>43</sup> According to Philostorgius Hist. Eccl. 1. 9, Philumenus was a magister officiorum in 325, who was accused of plotting against Constantine; see Socrates Hist. Eccl. 1. 13; and Photius Bibliotheca 258.

<sup>44</sup> Athanasius Festal Letter 4. 5.

<sup>45</sup> Athanasius Apologia contra Arianos 61.

With the apparent triumph of Athanasius in late 331, Constantine turned against the Arians with full vigor. Two letters were sent by Constantine in 332 denouncing Arius and his followers.<sup>46</sup> One letter, intended for distribution to all bishops and clergy, declared that Arius was an enemy of Christianity and that his writings must be destroyed.<sup>47</sup> The other letter intended for the Arians was an outspoken and insulting denunciation of Arius and his theology.<sup>48</sup> Constantine prescribed burdensome penalties against any who refused to rejoin the church (which must have also included the Melitians). A penalty of ten capita was added to the census assessment of all who remained in concert with Arius, and clergy were required to serve as decurions and to do mandatory public labor (liturgies).

Soon after the circulation of Constantine's encyclicals against Arius, the Melitians renewed charges against Athanasius. They maintained that he was guilty of two criminal charges, one that had already been investigated and another that was new. First, the Melitians revived the claim that the Alexandrian presbyter Macarius broke a sacred chalice. The Melitians complained that Athanasius sent Macarius to summon a schismatic priest named Ischyra in the Mareotis and that the broken chalice was the result of an altercation between the two.<sup>49</sup> Ischyra was a schismatic ordained by Colluthus, who had joined the Melitian cause. The account, however, was

---

<sup>46</sup> See Sozomen Hist. Eccl. 2. 22; and Socrates Hist. Eccl. 1. 28.

<sup>47</sup> H. G. Opitz, Urkunden zur Geschichte des arianischen Streites, 318-328 (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1934), p. 33.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 34; H. Chadwick, "Athanasius, De Decretis XL. 3," JTS 49 (1948): 168-9; and F. Scheidweiler, "Zur neuen Ausgabe des Athanasios," Byzantinische Zeitschrift 47 (1954): 73-94.

<sup>49</sup> For Athanasius' rendition of the incident see his Apologia contra Arianos 63.

progressively elaborated. The Melitians later alleged that Athanasius himself broke the chalice, smashed the altar, overturned the priest's chair, and demolished Ischyras' church.<sup>50</sup>

Athanasius collected (or fabricated) a dossier of letters for his own defense, to establish his innocence. Even prior to the second allegation, Athanasius received a letter from Ischyras who confessed,

I therefore submit to you my apology in writing, in order that you may understand, that violence was used towards me, and blows inflicted on me by Isaac and Heraclides, and Isaac of Letopolis, and those of their [the Melitian] party. And I declare, and take God as my witness in this matter, that none of the things which they have stated, do I know you to be guilty. For no breaking of a cup or overturning of the Holy Table ever took place, but they compelled me by violent usage to assert all this. And this defense I submit to you in writing, desiring and claiming for myself to be admitted among the members of your congregation.<sup>51</sup>

Constantine refused to reopen the case of the broken chalice.

The second charge raised by the Melitians against Athanasius was much more serious. The Melitians claimed that Athanasius arranged the murder of a confessor, a Melitian named Arsenius, the Bishop of Hypsele in Upper Egypt.<sup>52</sup> As evidence the Melitians even submitted as evidence an arm which they thought had belonged to Arsenius, and maintained that Athanasius was using the limb for magical purposes.<sup>53</sup>

---

<sup>50</sup> According to the Melitian letter to the Oriental Council of Sardica; Hilary of Poitiers 4 and Socrates *Hist. Eccl.* 1. 27, adds that sacred books were burned.

<sup>51</sup> Athanasius *Apologia contra Arianos* 64. The confession was sworn and signed in the presence of six presbyters and seven deacons (three of the deacons were from Alexandria, see Alexander *Deposito Ariani* 7).

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 65; and Sozomen *Hist. Eccl.* 2. 23.

<sup>53</sup> Rufinus *Hist. Eccl.* 10. 18; Socrates *Hist. Eccl.* 1. 27; and Sozomen *Hist. Eccl.* 2. 23.

Between 333 and 334, Constantine ordered the censor Dalmatius to investigate the homicide charge and he wrote warning Athanasius to prepare a defense.<sup>54</sup> Athanasius wrote to all the bishops of Egypt inquiring about Arsenius and sent a deacon in search of his whereabouts.<sup>55</sup> At the same time, Athanasius withdrew to the "lower country."<sup>56</sup> Constantine called for a council of bishops to convene at Caesarea, to be presided over by Eusebius of Caesarea and Dalmatius.<sup>57</sup>

Constantine circulated letters to the Egyptian bishops, presbyters and all other interested parties, requesting their presence at the council.<sup>58</sup> A papyrus letter records the preparations made by a Melitian monk named Aurelius Pageus to attend the Synod. Aurelius Pageus was prior of a monastery at Hipponon in the Heracleopolite nome. The letter shows the political consequences which appeared to be at stake at the council. Pageus states that the purpose for the council was "to arrive at a decision concerning the cleansing of the holy Christian body."<sup>59</sup> Because the council was

---

<sup>54</sup> Athanasius Apologia contra Arianos 65. The terminus ad quem is based on the use of the title censor which apparently is not attested prior to February 333; see T. D. Barnes, "Emperors and Bishops, A. D. 324-344," AJAH 3 (1978): 61-2. The terminus ad quo is established by P. London 6. 1913 (a Melitian papyrus discussed below) which was signed 19 March 334 (see Appendix 7).

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. Athanasius stated that he had not seen Arsenius for five or six years.

<sup>56</sup> Festal Index 6.

<sup>57</sup> Constantine's letter convening the Synod is not extant, so it is difficult to ascertain why it was convened. See the reason for the council given in the Melitian P. London 4. 1913 line 6 (see Appendix 7) and compare the reason given by Constantine the following year for convening the Synod of Tyre; Eusebius Vita Const. 4. 42.

<sup>58</sup> Sozomen Hist. Eccl. 2. 25; and Theodoret Hist. Eccl. 2. 28; and P. London 6. 1913 lines 3-6 (see Appendix 7).

<sup>59</sup> P. London 6. 1913 line 6 (see Appendix 7).



controlled by Arians,<sup>60</sup> Athanasius refused to attend. The council of convening bishops denounced Athanasius in absentia.<sup>61</sup>

In the meantime, Athanasius' agents discovered that Arsenius had been hiding in a Melitian monastery in Ptermenkurkis in the Antaeopolite nome of the Thebaid. Before they could apprehend Arsenius, the prior of the monastery, a monk named Pinnes sent him by boat to Tyre. Athanasius' agents arrested Pinnes and another monk at the monastery named Elias and delivered them over to the Duke in Alexandria. After they were tortured, they confessed that they were hiding Arsenius. Pinnes wrote a letter to John Archaph, retained by Athanasius, warning him that their plan was detected.<sup>62</sup> Arsenius was discovered in Tyre but would not admit that he was indeed Arsenius until he was convicted before a court presided over by Bishop Paul of Tyre.<sup>63</sup> Macarius delivered a letter to Constantine from Athanasius containing proof of his bishop's innocence.

Constantine disbanded the Synod of Caesarea and wrote a public letter to the Bishop of Alexandria declaring him innocent and condemning "the most perverse and ungodly Melitians."<sup>64</sup> Athanasius received letters of congratulations and included in his account a letter from Alexander, Bishop of Thessalonica.<sup>65</sup> Athanasius was also

---

<sup>60</sup> Sozomen Hist. Eccl. 2. 25, which states that Athanasius "refused to attend, and for thirty months, in spite of all remonstrances, (he) persisted in his refusal."

<sup>61</sup> Theodoret Hist. Eccl. 1. 28.

<sup>62</sup> Athanasius Apologia contra Arianos 65 and 67.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

able to secure a written confession from Arsenius in which he renounced Melitianism and placed the clergy in his city of Hypsele under the metropolitan authority of Alexandria.<sup>66</sup> John Archaph countered by writing a letter to Constantine affirming that he was reconciled with Athanasius and requesting an audience with the emperor. Constantine replied with a warm letter and agreed to transport John to his court at public expense.<sup>67</sup> Thus a temporary stalemate in the Athanasian-Melitian controversy was established.

With Athanasius and John Archaph in positions of favor with the emperor, another confrontation appeared inevitable. Eusebius of Nicomedia encouraged the Melitians, Arians, and Colluthians to write another letter to Constantine charging Athanasius with several crimes.<sup>68</sup> The Eusebians persuaded Constantine to summon a Council at Tyre and to force Athanasius to attend.<sup>69</sup> Constantine appointed the former governor of Syria, Flavius Dionysius, to preside over the council and placed a detachment of soldiers at his disposal. Using threats of punishment, Constantine also made sure that both the Melitians and Athanasius would be present at the council. Macarius was also arrested and escorted under guard to Tyre.<sup>70</sup> A Melitian papyrus dated May 335 relates that Athanasius was despondent over the allegations against him

---

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>67</sup> Athanasius Apologia contra Arianos 70.

<sup>68</sup> Athanasius Apologia contra Arianos 77; 78; 80.

<sup>69</sup> Theodoret Hist. Eccl. 1. 28.

<sup>70</sup> Eusebius Vita Const. 4. 42; and Athanasius Apologia contra Arianos 71-72.

and reluctant to leave the safety of his see.<sup>71</sup> (See Appendix 8.) By 11 July 335, Athanasius finally left for Tyre, flanked by a number of boisterous and disruptive supporters.

When the Synod convened, the Melitians leveled a number of charges against Athanasius, some old and some new. The Melitian Bishop Callinicus of Pelusium and Ischyrras renewed the charge that Athanasius had broken a sacred chalice. There were also several charges of assault and violence brought against Athanasius. Finally, the claim that Athanasius unlawfully secured the episcopal chair of Alexandria was reiterated.<sup>72</sup>

The Melitians presented an elaborate explanation for their mistaken charge that Arsenius had been murdered.<sup>73</sup> The Melitians called a number of witnesses (some former allies of Athanasius) to testify of the bishop's despotism, heightening suspicions of Athanasius' character. They also argued that Athanasius ordered a bishop named Plusianus to severely beat Arsenius, leave him locked away in a cell and burn down his house.<sup>74</sup> Arsenius, however, escaped through a window and remained in hiding. John Archaph naturally supposed that Arsenius had died a cruel death as a martyr and applied himself to bringing Arsenius' murder to justice. The Melitians argued that they

---

<sup>71</sup> P. London 6. 1914.

<sup>72</sup> Sozomen Hist. Eccl. 2. 25; and Sozomen Hist. Eccl. 1. 28-30.

<sup>73</sup> Sozomen Hist. Eccl. 2. 25. The passage derived from Gelasius of Caesarea later accuses Athanasius of fornication. (See Rufinus Hist. Eccl. 10. 18.) Sozomen states, however, that there was no evidence for the charge in the original acta of the Synod.

<sup>74</sup> Plusianus may have been a former Melitian; see Athanasius Apologia contra Arianos 69.

had made an understandable mistake and that Athanasius was still guilty, at least of arson and assault.

A delegation was sent to investigate the allegation about the chalice in Mareotis, and returned with enough evidence to find Athanasius guilty as charged.<sup>75</sup> A joint session of bishops, convening temporarily at Jerusalem in the interval caused by the investigation at Mareotis, reinstated the Arians to the communion of the church.<sup>76</sup>

The Synod of Tyre deposed Athanasius from his see and exiled him from Alexandria. Athanasius departed by night to appeal directly to Constantine, a higher and less biased judge. At first, Constantine appeared willing to temporarily suspend the council's findings for further inquiry.<sup>77</sup> A new charge accused Athanasius of threatening to hold back the imperial corn shipment which was to be sent from Alexandria to Constantinople. This charge resulted in his immediate exile.<sup>78</sup> According to Sozomen, Constantine said,

it was scarcely likely that a large assembly of respected and distinguished bishops would have passed sentence (on Athanasius) with hatred and favor.<sup>79</sup>

---

<sup>75</sup> For the account see Athanasius Apologia contra Arianos 72. For allegations of a biased witch-hunt against Athanasius see *ibid.*, 72-81. Upon the delegation's arrival in Mareotis, fifteen priests and fifteen deacons swore that the charges against Athanasius were fabricated, *ibid.*, 76. But the delegation found enough witnesses who, under torture, supplied incriminating evidence against Athanasius, see *ibid.*, 75.

<sup>76</sup> Athanasius Apologia contra Arianos 84; *ibid.*, De Synodis 21; and Sozomen Hist. Eccl. 2. 27.

<sup>77</sup> Socrates Hist. Eccl. 1. 34.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 1. 25.

<sup>79</sup> Sozomen Hist. Eccl. 2. 31.

Athanasius went into exile to Trier in November 335 and returned after Constantine died in 337.

The Synod of Tyre also restored John Archaph and the Melitians to communion and to their clerical posts.<sup>80</sup> Following Athanasius' deportation, the Melitian clergy returned to Egypt and attempted to occupy positions of ecclesiastical authority, perhaps including the vacant episcopal chair at Alexandria. Constantine immediately checked the Melitians and exiled John Archaph and possibly other Melitian clergy.<sup>81</sup> The efforts of Athanasius among the Copts prior to his deportation were of abiding political significance. After the deportation of the Melitians' clerical leadership the movement was doomed to obscurity.

#### Athanasius' Coptic Campaign

When Athanasius became bishop, the unity of the Egyptian Church was threatened by the Melitians, the Arians, and the Manichaeans. Athanasius, convinced that the Melitian movement was potentially the most divisive of the three, turned, as Frend has written, "the full force of his personality against them."<sup>82</sup> The imperial solution for the Melitian schism appeared ineffective to the impatient Bishop of Alexandria. Athanasius' new solution to the Melitian problem had two ingredients. He would aggressively court the favor of the Coptic Christians and at the same time force the Melitians into submission by orchestrating a policy of ecclesiastical and economic coercion.<sup>83</sup>

---

<sup>80</sup> Sozomen Hist. Eccl. 2 25.

<sup>81</sup> Sozomen Hist. Eccl. 2. 31.

<sup>82</sup> Frend, Athanasius as an Egyptian Christian Leader in the Fourth Century," p. 30.

<sup>83</sup> For this period see Annik Martin, "Athanasios et les Mélitiens (325-335)," in

Immediately after his disputed election, Athanasius launched a campaign to win the Coptic Christians to his patronage. This tireless propagandizer set out on a tour of his entire see. Athanasius spent the best part of his first six years as bishop visiting monastic circles and the Christian communities of Lower Egypt. The reason for leaving on a tour immediately after becoming bishop was to gain ratification and popular support for his disputed appointment. During Athanasius' extensive journeys through Egypt he established lasting ties with the emerging monasteries in Upper Egypt. During his forty-five year tenure in office, Athanasius established a solidarity with the Coptic Christians through the monastic movement, which bound together the otherwise fractionalized Egyptian Church.

In 329 and 330 Athanasius boldly traveled to the center of Melitius' stronghold. While in the Thebaid, Athanasius met the Bishop of Tentyra who asked him to ordain a monastic named Pachomius, who initially elluded ordination but who seems to have submitted a few years later.<sup>84</sup> In Pachomius' early years, he complained about being bothered by Melitians and Marcionites.<sup>85</sup> Pachomius was the founder of a network of cenobitic monasteries throughout Upper Egypt. He gave his unfailing support to Athanasius.<sup>86</sup> The heretics we encounter in the Pachomian sources are either Arian

---

Politique et théologie chez Athanase d'Alexandrie Actes du Colloque de Chantilly 23-25 septembre 1973 ed. C. Kannengiesser (Paris: Beauchesne, 1974), pp. 31-61.

<sup>84</sup> Theodore, Vita Pachomii 28; ed. by L. Th. Lefort CSCO Script. Coptici III. 7 (Louvain: 1936). On the possibility of his later ordination see B. J. Kidd, A History of the Church (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1922), 2. 105.

<sup>85</sup> EpAm 12. See Pachomian Koinonia 2. 79-80, and n. 107.

<sup>86</sup> See Armand Veilleux, Pachomian Koinonia: The Lives, Rules and Other Writings of Saint Pachomius and His Disciples 3 Vols. Cistercian Studies 45, 46, 47 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Pubs., 1980-82); Idem., "Monasticism and Gnosis in Egypt," in The Roots of Egyptian Christianity ed. by Birger A. Pearson and James E.

or Melitian.<sup>87</sup>

When Pachomius died in 346, the Pachomian fellowship was led by Petronios for two months and then by Horsiesios for only a year.<sup>88</sup> Horsiesios abdicated and turned his authority over to Theodore, the old associate of Pachomius and one-time heir apparent. Theodore, like Pachomius, stabilized his authority by a close association with the Bishop of Alexandria.<sup>89</sup>

The most popular and influential of the earliest monastics, however, was Antony. An old tradition derived from a misreading of the Greek Life of Antony makes Athanasius, in his youth, a disciple of the venerated ascetic.<sup>90</sup> Athanasius was certainly an admirer of Antony but there was no known contact between the two prior to Athanasius' rise to the episcopal chair. According to a later account of Athanasius'

---

Goehring (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), pp. 271-306; and James E. Goehring, "New Frontiers in Pachomian Studies," in Roots of Egyptian Christianity, pp. 236-57.

<sup>87</sup> Veilleux, "Monasticism and Gnosis," p. 287 n. 73. See also James E. Goehring, "Pachomius' Vision of Heresy: The Development of a Pachomian Tradition," Muséon 95. 3-4 (1982): 241-62.

<sup>88</sup> For another Pachomium invective against the Melitians see W. E. Crum, Der Papyruscodex Saec. VI-VII der Phillips-Bibliothek in Cheltenham (Strassburg: Trübner, 1915), p. 43 line 12 (S. 163). The text records the visit of the Pachomium Horsiesios to Alexandria, to discuss moral questions with the Bishop Theophilus and to give his opinion on arguments posed by a certain Faustus and Timotheus. Similarly in Horsiesios' vision of hell he saw "those that had renounced the Apostles' teaching and hearkened to the Melitians," in C. Wessely, Studien zur Palaeographie und Papyruskunde 18 (1922): 52.

<sup>89</sup> See Goehring, "New Frontiers in Pachomian Studies," pp. 246-7 n. 53.

<sup>90</sup> Athanasius, Vita Ant. Praef.

election, it was maintained that the people put him forward as "one of the ascetics."<sup>91</sup> An Arabic fragment of a later Coptic legend places Athanasius' birthplace in Upper Egypt and makes him the son of a partly pagan Coptic family.<sup>92</sup> This legend is similar to several monastic accounts and illustrates, "the truly Egyptian dimension of Athanasius' personality."<sup>93</sup> A further significant fact is that Athanasius certainly knew Coptic and probably used the language in Upper Egypt to draw upon a common Coptic identity.<sup>94</sup>

Immediately after Athanasius' ordination, according to a tradition retained by Socrates,

This monk (Antony) came to him when he (Athanasius) requested his presence, and together with Athanasius visited the cities of Egypt, and accompanied him to the churches, and agreed with him in opinion concerning the Godhead. He (Antony) evinced unlimited friendship towards him, and avoided the society of his enemies and opponents.<sup>95</sup>

Several instances illustrate the ongoing contact between the two leaders. In 333 Athanasius visited the Thebaid and Tabennesi where he certainly met with both Antony

---

<sup>91</sup> Athanasius, *Apologia contra Arianos* 6. One of the objections to Athanasius' election was that, contrary to tradition, he was not an Alexandrine presbyter. Claiming to be an ascetic certainly helped Athanasius win Coptic support.

<sup>92</sup> See Charles Kannengiesser, "Athanasius of Alexandria vs. Arius: The Alexandrian Crisis," in *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity* ed. by Birger A. Pearson and James E. Goehring (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), pp. 211; who cites G. H. Bebawi from the Coptic Orthodox Theological Seminary in Cairo who made this argument at the Ninth International Patristic Conference at Oxford, England, in September 1983.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 212.

<sup>94</sup> See Frend, "Athanasius as an Egyptian Christian Leader in the Fourth Century," p.33 and n. 2.

<sup>95</sup> Socrates *Hist. Eccl.* 2. 16.



and Pachomius.<sup>96</sup> During Athanasius' first exile Antony,

wrote frequently to the emperor to entreat him to attach no credit to the insinuations of the Melitians, but to reject their accusations as calumnies.<sup>97</sup>

When Athanasius returned from his first exile to Alexandria in 338, he was personally congratulated by Antony.<sup>98</sup> When exiled for a second time in 340, Athanasius brought monks along with him to Rome. After his return in 346, Athanasius was greeted by monks from Tabennesi who also brought greetings from Antony.<sup>99</sup> Athanasius was exiled a third time between 356 and 361 at which time he escaped the imperial authorities and hid among the monks of Upper Egypt. Athanasius even claimed to be an heir of Antony's along with Athanasius' assistant, Bishop Serapion of Thmuis.<sup>100</sup>

After Antony died in 356, Athanasius composed a biographical sketch of the famous anchorite. Athanasius realized that the Copts and the monks in particular would form a strong coalition of support. In the mid-fourth century, between exiles, Athanasius was moved by an Arian power-play to elicit Athanasius' monastic support.<sup>101</sup>

---

<sup>96</sup> Vita Pachomius 27 (PL 73. 247 A); and Athanasius, Festal Index 6.

<sup>97</sup> Sozomen Hist. Eccl. 2. 31.

<sup>98</sup> Athanasius, Vita Ant. 70-1; and Idem., Festal Index 10.

<sup>99</sup> Vita Pachomii 77 (Acta Sanctorum Maii 3. 326); and Tillemont, Mém. 8. 130.

<sup>100</sup> Athanasius, Vita Ant. 91, "To Bishop Athanasius I give the one sheepskin and the cloak on which I lie, which he gave me new, but I have by now worn out. And to Bishop Serapion I give the other sheepskin. . . ." The symbolism of an alliance between Coptic and Egyptian Christianity and the mantle of Antony's authority being passed to Athanasius is significant.

<sup>101</sup> The significance of monastic support is illustrated at this point from Socrates, Hist. Eccl. 6. 20, "Lucius went with the governor of Egypt and a band of soldiers against the monks in the desert; for he imagined that, if he could overcome their opposition by interrupting the tranquility which they loved, he would meet with fewer obstacles in drawing over to his party the Christians who inhabited the cities. The monasteries of this country were governed by several individuals of eminent sanctity,

The Vita Ant. skillfully bolstered Athanasius' cause by enlisting the total support of the dead monastic hero and making him (posthumously?) favor Athanasian theology and oppose all schismatics and heretics who assailed the Alexandrian bishop.<sup>102</sup>

After a brief introduction, Athanasius opens his classic account proclaiming that, "Antony was an Egyptian by race."<sup>103</sup> Athanasius relates that Antony was reluctant to deliver himself up for martyrdom during the Diocletianic persecution and, although he prayed for martyrdom, the Lord protected him. So as not to lose favor altogether with the Copts on this point, Athanasius has Antony boldly taunting the Roman authority and diligently serving confessors.<sup>104</sup> In the next section, on the heels of his discussion of the Great Persecution, Athanasius includes a line of praise for Bishop Peter.<sup>105</sup> Athanasius said that Antony did not place himself over the constituted clergy, but instead,

he honored the rule of the Church with extreme care, and he wanted every

---

who were strenuously opposed to the heresy of Arius. The people, who were neither able nor willing to enter upon the investigation of doctrinal questions, received their opinions from them, and thought with them; for they were persuaded that men whose virtue was manifested by their deeds were in possession of truth. We have heard that the leaders of these Egyptian ascetics were two men of the name of Macarius, of whom mention was already made, Pambonius and Heraclides, and other disciples of Antony. On reflecting that the Arians could never succeed in establishing an ascendancy over the Catholic church, unless the monks could be drawn over to their party, Lucius determined to have recourse to force to compel the monks to side with him, all gentler measures having been attended with signal failure; but here again his schemes were frustrated; for the monks were prepared to fall by the sword rather than to swerve from the Nicene doctrines;" and compare with Socrates, Hist. Eccl. 4. 24.

<sup>102</sup> For a recent analysis of the Vita see M. Tetz, "Athanasius und die Vita Antonii: Literarische und theologische Relationen," ZNW 73 (1982): 1- 30.

<sup>103</sup> Athanasius Vita Ant. 1.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., Vita Ant. 46.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 47.

cleric to be held in higher regard than himself. He felt no shame at bowing the head to the bishops and priests; if even a deacon came to him for assistance, he discussed the things that are beneficial, and gave place to him in prayer, not being embarrassed to put himself in a position to learn.<sup>106</sup>

With respect to areas of belief, Athanasius writes that Antony had the spiritual gift of discernment so that he was never deceived by a demon or false teaching.

Athanasius writes with respect to the Melitians,

In things having to do with belief, he was truly wonderful and orthodox. Perceiving their wickedness and apostacy from the outset, he never held communion with the Melitian schismatics.<sup>107</sup>

According to Athanasius, when it was revealed to Antony that he was to die, he traveled to inspect the monks of the "outer mountain" for the last time and warned them,

Be zealous in protecting the soul from foul thoughts, as I said before, and compete with the saints, but do not approach the Melitian schismatics, for you know their evil and profane reputation.<sup>108</sup>

His disciples embraced their leader's animosity toward the Melitians. When visiting a Pachomian monastery, Antony's disciples expressed their displeasure when they were asked whether they were Melitians or not.<sup>109</sup> Athanasius' popular account memorialized Antony as a co-champion of orthodoxy and furthered the bishop's cause among the monks and Coptic Christians.

Athanasius ascended to a hegemony over the monastic movement and throughout his career he continued to work to maintain their devotion to him. Athanasius

---

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>109</sup> SBo 129.

dedicated his Historia Arianorum to his monkish supporters and two of his letters to monastic leaders are extant. Athanasius corresponded with Amoun,<sup>110</sup> the monk who introduced monasticism to Nitria. He wrote a letter to a monk named Dracontius, who was Bishop of Hermopolis Parva,<sup>111</sup> and he may have corresponded with a certain Paphnutius.<sup>112</sup> Athanasius also filled episcopal vacancies with monks, the most famous of whom was Bishop Serapion of Thmuis. The appointment of Serapion was politically expedient for two reasons. First, Serapion was not merely a monk, but a friend and legatee of Antony.<sup>113</sup> And second, Serapion was appointed Bishop of Thmuis, the City of Phileas, one of the first opponents of Melitius. The Melitians' also had a bishop in Thmuis and so Athanasius countered their work with the elevation of Serapion the monk.<sup>114</sup> In time, Bishop Serapion became Athanasius' most valued assistant and replaced Athanasius as a temporary Bishop of Alexandria during his second exile from 339 and 346.<sup>115</sup>

Athanasius undeniably formed significant political ties with the monastic leaders of his era but the extent of their commitment to orthodoxy as defined by Athanasius

---

<sup>110</sup> Athanasius, Ep. 48 (Opitz, Urkunden, 2. 765-8; PG 26. 1169-76).

<sup>111</sup> Idem., Ep. 48 (Opitz, Urkunden, 1. 207- 11; PG 25. 523-34).

<sup>112</sup> P. London 6. 1929; see Bell, Jews and Christians, pp.115-20.

<sup>113</sup> Athanasius, Vita Ant. 91.

<sup>114</sup> Athanasius had a similar result in mind when he appointed the illustrious confessor Paphnutius to the see of a city in Upper Thebes.

<sup>115</sup> Serapion was Bishop of Thmuis from 337 to 370. He is the author of the Sacramentary which contains one of the oldest written liturgies, known as the Liturgy of Serapion; see J. Wordsworth, Serapion's Prayer-Book (London: S. P. C. K., 1899). Athanasius also addressed to him De morte Arij and four epistles Ad Serapionem.

is still a matter of debate. Shenoute,<sup>116</sup> the irascible fifth-century monk, is another charismatic Coptic leader who, at least in his rhetoric, appears to be an unswerving follower of Athanasian theology.<sup>117</sup> Shenoute emerges as the fifth-century champion of Coptic orthodoxy, opposing Gnostics, Origenists, Arians, Nestorians, unnamed heretical groups and Melitians.<sup>118</sup> In several extant references to the Melitians made by Shenoute he provides intriguing information about the schism's practices and activity in the fifth century.

Shenoute refers to the Melitians in his anti-heretical homily entitled Contra Origenistas et gnosticos. In a section condemning the use of apocryphal books by heretics he writes,

Therefore, he who says, "I know," because he reads apocryphal books, is greatly ignorant. And he who thinks that he is a teacher because he receives apocryphal books, is more ignorant still. . . . Indeed, the great teacher of the faith, Apa Athanasius, said in his works: 'I wrote this because of the heresies,

---

<sup>116</sup> See Johannes Leipoldt, Schenute von Atripe und die Entstehung des national ägyptischen Christentums TU 25/1 (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1903); Besa, Life of Shenoute trans. David N. Bell (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Pubs., 1983). For a bibliography on Shenoute see P. J. Frandsen and Richter-Aeroe, "Shenoute: A Bibliography," in Studies presented to H. J. Polotsky ed. D. W. Young (Beacon Hill, MA: Pirtle & Polson, 1981), pp. 147-76; Janet Timbie, "The State of Research on the Career of Shenoute of Atripe," in Roots of Egyptian Christianity, pp. 258-70; and Tito Orlandi, "Coptic Literature," in Roots of Egyptian Christianity, pp. 51-81.

<sup>117</sup> See Janet Timbie, "The State of Research on the Career of Shenoute of Atripe," in Roots of Egyptian Christianity, pp. 258-70. L. Lefort, "Athanasie, Ambrose, et Shenoute," Muséon 48 (1935): 55-73, discusses Shenoute's dependence on the works of Athanasius; and Gérard Garitte, "A propos de lettres de S. Antoine l'ermite," Muséon 52 (1939): 11-31, discusses Shenoute's use of Vita Ant.

<sup>118</sup> See Tito Orlandi, Shenute Contro gli Origenisti (Rome: CIM, 1985); and idem., "A Catechesis Against Apocryphal Texts by Shenute and the Gnostic Texts of Nag Hammadi," HTR (1982): 85-95. See also Shenoute's De Vetere Testamento contra Manichaeos in Emile Amélineau, Oeuvres de Shenoudi 2 Vols. (Paris: Leroux, 1907-14), 1. 5; and De praeexistentia Christi in L. T. Lefort, "Catechèse christologique de Shenoute," ZÄS 80 (1955): 40-45.

especially the wretched Melitians who pride themselves upon what are called apocrypha.<sup>119</sup>

The obvious question is whether the Melitians (or any other heretical group) had infiltrated into the White Monastery or if they were simply active around the area of Atriye. Portions of Contra Origenistas et gnosticos bear significant parallels with Shenoute's sermon entitled Contra Melitianos<sup>120</sup> and Theodoret's description of the Melitians.<sup>121</sup> (See Appendix 22.) Shenoute's intriguing sermon, Contra Melitianos, denounced the Melitians for their unusual eucharistic rituals. (See Appendix 21.)

While bidding for monastic support and Coptic allegiance, Athanasius waged a ruthless campaign against the Melitians utilizing political, economic and ecclesiastical coercion to force them into submission. Between 328 and 335, Athanasius used several strong-arm political maneuvers to try to intimidate the Melitians to return to the Catholic Church. While Athanasius goes to great lengths to clear himself of a number of dubious charges brought against him by the Melitians, nowhere does he refer to the violent incidents related in the Melitian sources. Sozomen and Melitian documentation accuse Athanasius of violent reprisals against the schismatics.

The Melitian P. London 6. 1914 (see Appendix 14) complains of an attack carried out against Melitians instigated by followers of Athanasius. The Christians

---

<sup>119</sup> Shenute, Contra Origenistas et gnosticos (AD, pp. 21-2) from Orlandi, "Catechesis," pp. 88-9.

<sup>120</sup> H. Guérin, Sermons inédits de Senouti (Paris: Leroux, 1903), pp. 17-8. See also Timbie, "The State of Research on Shenoute," pp. 265-6. Note also Shenoute refers to the Melitians as allies of the Arians in P. Paris 130. 28; and in his Apocalypse (CSCO 73. 202) he may refer to a Melitian soul in hell.

<sup>121</sup> Theodoret Haer. Fab. 4. 7. (See Appendix 22.)

from Athanasius' party inspired drunk soldiers to try to seek out and arrest the Melitian Bishop Isaac of Letopolis<sup>122</sup> and Bishop Heraiscus of Alexandria<sup>123</sup> who were meeting at the great military installment outside Alexandria near the suburb of Nicopolis. Hearing of the impending violence, certain "God-fearing" soldiers<sup>124</sup> hid Isaac and Heraiscus in a storage room.<sup>125</sup> Exasperated in their search, the mob seized four Melitians coming into the camp and beat them severely. The mob then proceeded to a hostel known to harbor Melitians. They rounded up five more Melitians, jailed them overnight and the next day threw them out of town. The keeper of the hostel, who was "bound and maltreated," and an individual named Ammoun (both Melitians?)<sup>126</sup> were detained by the authorities and warned never to show hospitality to the

---

<sup>122</sup> There were at least two prominent Isaacs who were Melitian, see Athanasius Apologia contra Arianos 64. Bishop Isaac of Letopolis, who is first mentioned in Melitius' list of bishops, had a significant role in the Melitian attack on Athanasius at the Synod of Tyre (see Athanasius Apologia contra Arianos 64). He was also present at Tyre according to Sozomen Hist. Eccl. 2. 25; where he accused Athanasius of the events recorded in the Melitian papyrus. Isaac also signed the letter issued at the Oriental Council of Sardica according to Hilary of Poitiers 4.

<sup>123</sup> The fact that Heraiscus was the Melitian Bishop (Papas) of Alexandria and archrival of Athanasius explains why the Athanasian party aggressively persecuted him. It is curious that Athanasius makes no mention of Heraiscus and his name is only found in P. London 6. 1914. See Bell, Jews and Christians, pp. 63-4 and n. 7; and p. 69 ns. 48-50.

<sup>124</sup> Bell, Jews and Christians, p. 64 n. 7, makes the interesting suggestion that the soldiers were Melitians.

<sup>125</sup> Bishop Heraiscus was kept in confinement at the camp for at least four days. Callistus, the author of P. London 6. 1914, complains that he is kept from seeing Heraiscus. If Callistus is not referring to the bishop's four-day confinement, he may be suggesting that Heraiscus was not allowed to have contact with other Melitians as a provision for his release; see Bell, Jews and Christians, p. 65 n. 25.

<sup>126</sup> This interpretation would be based on a narrow use of the epithet "brother" by Callistus.

schismatics again.<sup>127</sup> Athanasius was probably responsible, directly or indirectly, for the mob violence.<sup>128</sup>

A military troop stationed in an Egyptian village and, in particular, the commander of such a unit, played a strategic role in the dynamics of village life. The mid-fourth-century papers of Flavius Abinnaeus illustrate that the negative role played by the unit as they report frequent complaints about the excesses of the soldiers. The president of the Council of Arsinoe wrote the following protest against the soldiers, which closely corresponds with the violence that the Melitians suffered at the hands of ruffians in the Egyptian army:

You are not justified in acting as you do but are running the risk of being convicted of criminal conduct. You sent to Theoxenis the soldiers under your command and amongst the many outrages that have been committed in the village you press-ganged them. For you know that the house of Hatres was looted, and that too when he had so many goods of other people deposited with him. And cattle have been driven off and you did not permit inquiry to be made for them but you carried them off as if there were no laws. For by god either you will send these men so that we may learn by them what happened or all we of the council will report to my master the Duke of the Thebaid.<sup>129</sup>

Callistus places the blame for the violence, however, squarely on Athanasius. Athanasius' actions were in retaliation to Melitian activities in the imperial court against him.<sup>130</sup> Callistus continues his charges, relating,

---

<sup>127</sup> This would make travel extremely difficult and hazardous and would break down the unity of the group. Callistus complains that a similar tactic of intimidation has dissuaded others from giving lodging to the Melitians.

<sup>128</sup> The soldier responsible for the maltreatment of the Melitians, who was himself a pagan, sent a letter apologizing to Athanasius. Athanasius tacitly dismissed the soldier's actions as a kind of deed that a Gentile might be expected to do.

<sup>129</sup> P. Abinn. 18; and compare P. Cair. Masp. 67002, from A. D. 567.

<sup>130</sup> This conclusion is based on the reading of P. London 6. 1914 lines 29-32. See Bell, Jews and Christians, p. 66 n. 29-32.



I have written to you so that you might be aware of the kinds of afflictions we are suffering. For he carried off a Bishop of the Lower Country and shut him in the meat market, and a priest from the same region he shut-up in temporary confinement,<sup>131</sup> and a deacon in the principal prison, and Heraiscus was confined in the camp until the twenty-eighth of Pachon. Indeed I give thanks to God our Master that the scourging they endured has ceased.<sup>132</sup>

Although the Greek of this papyrus is inexact at points, the use of the third person singular (he) in this passage is significant. Callistus is making an intentionally obscure reference to Athanasius as the perpetrator of the violence. P. London 6. 1914 was written during the intervening period after Constantine called the Council of Tyre but before Athanasius actually left for the synod. These violent activities against the Melitians may have been attempts by Athanasius to keep his opponents from attending the synod.

Athanasius also marshalled economic sanctions against the Melitians in order literally to starve them into submission. The Bishop of Alexandria played a key role in the economic affairs, not only of Egypt, but of the entire empire. According to Socrates, the inhabitants of the new capital of Constantinople were accustomed to receive a daily corn ration of 80,000 modii.<sup>133</sup> Because the primary supplier of corn was Egypt (and Coptic Egypt at that), the emperor no doubt made special efforts to maintain peaceful relations with the Bishop of Alexandria.<sup>134</sup>

---

<sup>131</sup> See Bell, Jews and Christians, p. 68 n. 44 on the meaning of the term used here.

<sup>132</sup> P. London 6. 1914 lines 41-6.

<sup>133</sup> Socrates Hist. Eccl. 2. 13.

<sup>134</sup> L. W. Barnard, "Athanasius and the Roman State," in Studies in Church History and Patristics Analecta Vlatadon 26 ed. Panayotis C. Christou (Thessaloniki: Patriarchal Institute for Patristic Studies, 1978), p. 317.

Athanasius was well acquainted with the financial responsibilities of the bishop and used his power to his own advantage despite his self-deprecating cry that he was but a poor bishop. Athanasius was accused on several occasions of financial impropriety. In one instance, Athanasius allegedly obliged certain Egyptians to pay a special tax on linen tunics and kept the money for himself.<sup>135</sup> On another occasion, Athanasius was accused of diverting for his own gain an imperial grain shipment intended for Libyan and Coptic widows.<sup>136</sup> There may have been a tradition that linked the Bishop of Alexandria with export of grain<sup>137</sup> and the distribution of the bread supply in each city.<sup>138</sup> George, the fourth-century rival of Athanasius, maintained a monopoly on nitre, papyrus, reeds and salt.<sup>139</sup> All of these factors underscore the seriousness of the charges brought against Athanasius after the Council of Tyre, that he was planning to withhold the grain shipment to Constantinople. A likely charge and

---

<sup>135</sup> Athanasius, Apol. Sec. 60. 1; and Sozomen Hist. Eccl. 2. 22; and Socrates Hist. Eccl. 1. 27 confuses the exact incident but has preserved the names of the Melitians; Ision, Eudaemon, and Callinicus (of P. London 6. 1914), who brought the accusation.

<sup>136</sup> Athanasius, Apologia contra Arianos 18. The reason for the alleged attack on the widows of these two countries in particular must be that Arius was Libyan and that the Melitians had a stronghold in Coptic Egypt.

<sup>137</sup> See P. Amherst 3 A; in A. Deissmann, Light from the Ancient East trans. L. R. M. Strachan (London: Hodder & Stoughton, Ltd., 1927; repr. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1978), no. 21; pp. 205-13. The papyrus records corn and grain sales and the purchase of linen shipments. The corn was shipped from Arsinoe and sold in Rome. The Bishop of Alexandria was the link between the Christians in the Fayum and their agent in Rome. Bishop Maximus' steward was Theonas who, in all likelihood, may have succeeded Maximus as bishop from 281 to 300.

<sup>138</sup> During the Arian domination a frequent complaint was that the Arians were depriving the Catholics of their bread supply; see Athanasius Historia Arianorum 10, 31, 54, and 63; idem., Apol. de fuga 6; and PG 26. 1338 A.

<sup>139</sup> Epiphanius Adv. Haer. 76. 1. 4-7.

certainly equivalent to treason.

Furthermore, the clergy of Alexandria may have been entitled to a free allotment of bread, distributed by the bishop. One of the Melitian letters retains a protest against Athanasius for neglecting their due allotment, which forced the Melitians to rely on their own resources. Callistus seems to refer to this dilemma when he remonstrated,

Do not neglect us then, brethren, since they left behind the bread, in order that it might not be taken outside, on account of the Bishop, to the intent that he might keep it by him. For when buying loaves for our sustenance I bought at 14 talents the artaba of wheat. As soon therefore as you find a competent person send me a few loaves.<sup>140</sup>

Constantine later banished Athanasius because he threatened to hold up the Imperial grain fleet from its destination in Upper Egypt, perhaps an action on his part to try to make the Melitians of Upper Egypt appear responsible. The evidence of economic manipulation was so overwhelming against Athanasius that he was banished without an opportunity to defend himself.<sup>141</sup>

Together with policies of political intimidation and economic coercion, Athanasius organized an ecclesiastical phalanx to force the Melitians back to the church. Athanasius moved the church against the Melitians by controlling ecclesiastical elections<sup>142</sup> through strategic anti-Melitian appointments. Constantine, in a letter addressed to Athanasius from 329, reproves the bishop for not allowing the Arians and Melitians the opportunity to be restored to the Catholic communion.<sup>143</sup> A delegation of

---

<sup>140</sup> P. London 6. 1914 lines 48-50. See also the discussion in Bell, Jews and Christians, pp. 69-70 n. 48-50.

<sup>141</sup> Athanasius Apologia contra Arianos 87.

<sup>142</sup> See Barnes, Constantine and Eusebius, p. 232.

<sup>143</sup> The fragment is preserved in Athanasius Apologia contra Arianos 59.

Melitian bishops petitioned the emperor for permission to congregate without the fear of violent repercussions.<sup>144</sup> Callistus later complained that Athanasius caused seven Melitian bishops to be banished, illustrating the peremptory authority that the Bishop of Alexandria wielded.<sup>145</sup>

Athanasius found some loyal supporters among those who were formerly Melitian clergy. When Constantine summoned Athanasius to the Council at Tyre, he arrived flanked by 47 supporters, of whom at least 17 were once Melitian.<sup>146</sup> As late as 347, Athanasius was still appointing former Melitians to strategic posts.<sup>147</sup>

Athanasius also initiated several significant measures aimed at curbing the propagation of Melitianism. Contained within the intriguing canons attributed to Athanasius are several references to the Melitians. There are two canons that explicitly and two canons that implicitly denounce the Melitians. Canon 12 says

The singers shall not sing the writings of Melitius and of the ignorant, who sing without wisdom, not as David and in the Holy Spirit, but like the songs of the heathen, whose mouths ought to be stopped. But if they sing not in the Holy Spirit, let them sing not at all. It is written, "You shall not add thereto neither

---

<sup>144</sup> Epiphanius Adv. Haer. 68. 6. Epiphanius claims, incorrectly, that this incident took place before the death of Bishop Alexander of Alexandria; see Barnes, Constantine and Eusebius, p. 231. Athanasius states that the Melitians did not cause trouble from the death of Alexander through the winter months of 328 (Athanasius Apologia contra Arianos 59). The Melitians could not have petitioned Constantine at Nicomedia because the emperor was not there nor would he return to Asia Minor until 330.

<sup>145</sup> P. London 6. 1914 line 47.

<sup>146</sup> These conclusions are cautiously based on the prosopographic and statistical conclusions of Martin, "Athanasie et les Mélitiens," pp. 31-61. However, one cannot press these conclusions too far. Common names, the paucity of sources, and the inability to produce a fail-proof system of identification require caution.

<sup>147</sup> See Athanasius Festal Letter 19; where Arsenius is restored, Eudaemon is made bishop in Lycopolis instead of Plusianus, Isidorus at Xoïs, Paulus at Clysmā, and Paphnutius at Nemésion, to name a few.

take from it.<sup>148</sup>

This canon condemns the practice made popular by the Gnostics, Arians, Manichaeans and the Melitians of indoctrinating the masses by means of songs. It insists that any song that is not a Psalm is essentially an addition to the divine Scriptures. No Melitian hymns have as yet been identified; however, it can be affirmed that these songs were used in their eucharistic rituals and also perhaps in commemoration of Melitian martyrs. The 25th Athanasian Canon calls upon the Egyptian Christians to abandoned the Melitian schismatics.

Who ever says that Melitius has a Church, the same is accursed. For "if they had been of us, they would have continued with us," and would not have set themselves against the Lord nor have separated them from His Church. And how can there be two churches, while the Apostle Paul says that the Church is one.<sup>149</sup>

Athanasius' 39th Festal Letter of 367 and fragments of two other unnumbered Festal Letter are indisputable attempts by the Bishop to quell the popular influence of the Melitians (see Appendices 18-19 and Chapter Six).<sup>150</sup> Melitian apocryphal works are denounced and for the first time in the history of the church, the 27 books of the

---

<sup>148</sup> Athanasius Canon 12.

<sup>149</sup> Athanasius Canon 25.

<sup>150</sup> See L. T. Lefort, S. Athanase: Lettres Festales et Pastorales en copte (CSCO 150, 1955), 1. 25-6, and 2. 43-4; PG 26. 1437; Clarendon Press no. 50, fol. 2 in W. E. Crum, "Some further Meletian Documents," JEA 13 (1927): 24-5; Georgius Zoega ed., Catalogus codicum Copticorum manu scriptorum with historical intro. and bibl. notes by Joseph-Marie Sauget (Hildesheim/New York: Olms, 1973), pp. 625-6 no. 277. Many have conjectured about the possible relationship between the issuing of Athanasius' Festal condemnation of apocryphal works and the burial of the Nag Hammadi codices. It must be remembered, however, that Athanasius' actions were primarily motivated by Melitian works; see E. M. Yamauchi, "The Nag Hammadi Library," Journal of Library History 22 (1987): 432-3; and Armand Veilleux, "Monasticism and Gnosticism in Egypt," pp. 289-91.

New Testament are declared to be canonical.<sup>151</sup> Two Athanasian Canons provide interesting parallels to the 39th Fetsal Letter. The 11th Canon states,

The reader shall read nought but from the catholic word, lest the people mock at the lying words of the writings that have been set aside.<sup>152</sup>

Similarly the 18th Canon states, "the bishop shall prove the reader and the singers often, that they read not any books but the common, Catholic books."<sup>153</sup> As yet, no Melitian works have been identified. The works, however, must have been both popular and threatening to induce these prohibitions. The apparently thorough purge of Melitian works lends credence to the accusation that Athanasius confiscated and burned some of their books.<sup>154</sup>

### Conclusions

Athanasius gained control of a church that was socially and theologically fragmented. The Bishop of Alexandria considered the Melitian movement to be the greatest threat to his hegemony over the Egyptian Church. Immediately after his ordination Athanasius began to campaign for popular Coptic Christian support by winning the allegiance of charismatic monastic leaders. At the same time, Athanasius dealt harshly with the Melitians. He used political intimidation and economic sanctions to shatter Melitian resistance. He also controlled ecclesiastical appointments, patronized

---

<sup>151</sup> PG 26. 1437. See also W. R. Farmer and D. M. Farkasfalvy, The Formation of the New Testament Canon (New York: Paulist Press, 1983), pp. 9-10; B. M. Metzger, The Canon of the New Testament (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987); and F. F. Bruce, The Canon of Scripture (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1988).

<sup>152</sup> Athanasius Canon 11.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>154</sup> Athanasius Apologia contra Arianos 28; and 46.

former Melitians and legislated against popular aspects of Melitian propaganda.

The Melitians' political agenda forced them to ally themselves with the Arians. The chief instigator of the alliance and perpetrator of the sustained attack against Athanasius was Eusebius of Nicomedia, an avid Arian and opponent of the Bishop of Alexandria. The Melitians became an ecclesiastical pawn sacrificed for the cause of Arianism. Their fortune was thus inextricably attached to an unstable and heretical movement. The modicum of respect that the Melitians received at Nicaea, compared to the harsh treatment of the Arians, was forever lost. By casting their lot with the Arians, the Melitians enjoyed a temporary ascendancy which was, however, quickly eclipsed by the changing political and religious currents of the fourth century. Melitian distinctives were lost in their alliance with Arianism.

---

## CHAPTER SIX

### MELITIANISM: BELIEF AND PRACTICE

Athanasius, who disparaged the Coptic schism, asked, "What kind of (theological) instruction can be obtained among the Melitians?"<sup>1</sup> The Alexandrian Bishop referred to the Melitians as uneducated, credulous children "tossed about by every wind of doctrine."<sup>2</sup> The Melitians have been routinely stereotyped as a "non-theological" schism in the early church. The prevailing patristic bias has reasoned that if the Melitians were predominately Coptic, then their theology must have been unsophisticated and inconsequential. The evidence, however, shows that the Melitians were theologically minded and that their intriguing beliefs and practices underscore the indigenous nature of their obscure movement. This chapter will demonstrate that the Melitians played a significant role in the theological controversies in the fourth-century church and that they were also forerunners of several unique theological innovations.

The evidence useful for beginning a tentative reconstruction of what might be

---

<sup>1</sup> Athanasius Historia Arianorum 78-9; see Appendix 20.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., from Eph. 4.14.



called Melitianism varies in reliability. Several later sources charge the Melitians with ritual idolatry, sorcery and crimes against humanity. In the dossier of Coptic texts related to the martyr Claudius, the Melitians are accused of several bizarre practices.<sup>3</sup> Melitius allegedly taught his followers to slaughter pigs, camels, crows, panthers and other (unnamed) unclean animals for blood sacrifices.<sup>4</sup> According to the Arabic version of the passage, the Melitians prostrated themselves before idols and used the blood as a libation offering.<sup>5</sup> The account closes with an incident of how a certain Christian woman poured pig's blood on Melitius and said, "the God of the Christians does not walk with you!"<sup>6</sup>

Athanasius charged the Melitians with writing astrological works.<sup>7</sup> Severus' Patriarchal History also charged the Melitians with sorcery and devil worship. Severus relates that,

they (the Melitians) bewitched children, and led them out into the desert, and bound them where none could see them; and if they complained of thirst, they gave them nothing to drink; and when their thirst became severe, they poured water over their heads and bodies; and when one of them was near death, and his eyes started out of his head, and his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth, they cut off his head with a knife before he died, so that Satan might speak through those heads, without falsehood, and they might lead men astray with

---

<sup>3</sup> Gérard Gordon ed., Textes coptes relatifs à saint Claude d'Antioche *Patrologia Orientalis* 35 Fasc. 4, no. 166 (1970). Several of the works on Claudius have been attributed to Constantine, Bishop of Siut (seventh century). Constantine used his work on Claudius apologetically against the Melitians, who were originally from his bishopric of Siut (Lycopolis).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 176-9.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 177 n. 5.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 178 lines 5-6.

<sup>7</sup> Athanasius Festal Letter 39.

their devilish and shameful deeds.<sup>8</sup>

The Melitians were alleged to be involved in soothsaying and exorcistic magical practices. Severus contrasts the Melitians with a hermit who used the symbol of the cross to overcome Satan. He concludes his description by asking, "is there any power greater than the power of those who worship God with a pure and honest intention and a firm faith?"<sup>9</sup> While these panegyrics appear to be stock denunciations there are other less fantastic and more reliable descriptions of Melitianism.

#### The Melitian View of God

Although the Melitians were to join forces together with the Arians against Athanasius, there is no indication that they ever accepted Arian theology. Later monastic sources denounce the two groups together but there are no Melitian sources that express Arian Christology. It is significant that Athanasius condemned the Melitians as opportunists, as theologically gullible, and even as chameleons, but never as heretics. Stronger descriptive language was always reserved by Athanasius for Arius. Melitius may have been the first to warn Bishop Alexander of Alexandria about the unorthodoxy of Arius' theology. Theodoret states that the Melitians separated

---

<sup>8</sup> Severus Patriarchal History 200-201.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 201. The sermon by Shenoute Contra Origenistas et gnosticos says, "in moments of the suffering, however, (there are some who) when they fall into poverty or become ill-- or indeed other temptations-- abandon God and have recourse to enchanters or oracles or. . . other deceptive things: just as I myself have seen-- the snake's head bound to the hand of some, and another with the crocodile tooth bound to an arm, another with fox claws bound to his legs: especially as there was a magistrate who told the latter that he was wise to do so. Indeed, when I reproachfully asked him whether it was the fox claws that would heal him, he said: "It was a great monk who gave them to me saying, 'Bind them to you, and you will recover,'"

from their former allies the Arians, but refused to reunite with the catholic party.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the Melitians probably maintained an orthodox Nicaean Christology.

There are two passages from the Melitian sources that seem to indicate a belief in Nicaean Christology. First, in the letter P. London 6. 1917 a Melitian confessed, "by night and day (I) entreat God the Lord of all--they that are in the Son are in the Father, and he that is in the Father is in the Son. . . ."<sup>11</sup> In another reference from P. London 6. 1919 the Melitian author writes, "in the faith of our ever-to-be-remembered God and Saviour. . . ."<sup>12</sup> The grammatical construction that connects the Greek words for God and Saviour implies that the writer considered them to be one and the same.

If the Melitians were the first to expose Arius as a heretic and if they were orthodox with respect to Nicaea, then a surprising hypocrisy is revealed by their union with the Arians. The Melitians apparently set aside their theological convictions in order to work for a common political agenda with the Arians. Their conduct accentuates the bitterness of their struggle with Athanasius. Because of their coalition with the Arians, the Melitians were probably characterized appropriately by Athanasius as political opportunists.

After 451 it appears that the Melitians were Chalcedonian in their theology.<sup>13</sup> Bishop Constantine of Siut warned his followers in his Second Panegyric to "separate, from the defiled Melitians, who try to divide the nature of the Indivisible Christ."<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Theodoret Haer. Fab. 4. 7, see Appendix 22.

<sup>11</sup> P. London 6. 1917 lines 15-17; for the Melitian papyri see Appendices 7-16.

<sup>12</sup> P. London 6. 1919 lines 19-20.

<sup>13</sup> See Walter E. Crum ed. Der Papyruscodex Saec. VI VII der Phillips-Bibliothek in Cheltenham (Strassburg: Trübner, 1915), p. 43 lines 11-12, and pp. 165-6.

<sup>14</sup> Constantine of Siut Second Panegyric of Saint Claudius of Antioch, p. 242 lines

According to an earlier passage in the Arabic version of the Second Panegyric, Constantine charged the Melitians with "blaspheming against the Messiah by separating his human nature from his divine nature."<sup>15</sup> The pro-Chalcedonian position of the Melitians put them in conflict with the vast majority of monophysite Christians, intensifying the struggle between the Melitians and the Coptic Church.<sup>16</sup> The rivalry between monophysite monks and the Chalcedonian Melitians can be seen perhaps in the Panegyric on Apollo by Stephen of Hnes. Apollo was a Pachomian archimandrite who was driven from his monastery by Justinian for his monophysite creed. While in exile he came into conflict with the Melitians who populated the region of Heracleopolis at that time.<sup>17</sup>

There are several references which seem to indicate that the Melitians were later involved in a trinitarian irregularity. The Melitians "taught not to recite from the Scriptures, but to say 'the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,' dividing them from one another."<sup>18</sup> The text follows by saying that "the faithful ones do not divide the

---

9-12 (Godron ed.).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 177 n. 2. See a similar charge in the Arabic version of the Posthumous Miracles of St. Claudius, particularly the part entitled "Daniel the Melitian Priest" in *ibid.*, p. 207 n. 1.

<sup>16</sup> See David W. Johnson, "Anti-Chalcedonian Polemics in Coptic Texts, 451-641," in The Roots of Egyptian Christianity ed. by Birger A. Pearson and James E. Goehring (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), pp. 216-34. For a historical study of the monophysite movement see W. H. C. Frend, The Rise of the Monophysite Movement (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972). Frend, however, incorrectly argues that the Melitians considered themselves to be anti-Chalcedonian, see *ibid.*, p. 326.

<sup>17</sup> See Stephen, Bishop of Heracleopolis Magna A Panegyric on Apollo, Archimandrite of the Monastery of Isaac (ed. K. H. Kuhn; CSCO Vols. 394/395, 1978).

<sup>18</sup> See W. E. Crum ed. Catalogue of the Coptic Manuscripts in the British Museum (London: The British Museum, 1905), pp. 168-9 (BM 358); and the Posthumous Miracles of St. Claudius, the section entitled "Daniel the Melitian Priest," pp. 204-207

Holy Trinity."<sup>19</sup> The exact nature of the error is not clear, but in the minds of their opponents the Melitians' trinitarian irregularity may have raised some questions about their view of the divinity of Christ.<sup>20</sup> Perhaps a creedal irregularity was the aim of the denunciation rather than a doctrinal heresy.

#### The Melitian View of the Church

The Melitians, like other rigorist sects, believed that the church should have a pure membership. This was one of the initial issues that gave rise to the schism during the Diocletianic persecution. The Melitians, however, were somewhat more mild in their application of puritanical rigorism than other rigorist sects, making provision for restoration to lay status for those clergy who lapsed but later fulfilled a proper penance. The Melitians' primary opposition was directed against clergy who lapsed or dissembled during persecution. Melitius replaced a bishop who lapsed in Lycopolis and opposed three successive bishops in Alexandria who fled during the Great Persecution. The Melitians refused to acknowledge the ecclesiastical authority of one who had denied the faith by dissembling during persecution.

Melitius' views on ecclesiastical nominations appear to be closely connected with his opposition to the Alexandrian bishopric. The Melitians may have represented a protest against the move away from lay authority, particularly seen in the change in episcopal ordination. This was certainly the case with Athanasius and it may have

---

and 207 n. 1 (Godron ed.). See also W. E. Crum ed. Theological Texts from Coptic Papyri Anecdota Oxoniensia (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), pp. 13-4 no. 4, Fol. 2 verso.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., BM 358 line 40.

<sup>20</sup> See Crum, Theological Texts, pp. 13-4, no. 4, Fol. 2 verso.

been the basis for their opposition to Achillas and Alexander. The Melitians may have been protesting the centralization of catholic authority and the broadening power of the episcopacy. The Melitian belief in lay suffrage might be suggested by their unprecedented election of a monastic official. It might also be implied in an interesting remark of Athanasius who commented that the Melitians regard the church as a civil senate.<sup>21</sup>

The Melitians continued to have no regard for the traditional boundaries of ecclesiastical authority. Melitius and his successors appointed clergy wherever they could find a following. Melitius was initially reprimanded for ordaining clergy outside of his see. Melitius continued without any regard for traditional authority as seen by his ordination of clergy after the Nicæan Synod. In an unnumbered Festal fragment, Athanasius complained of the unlawful disruption caused by the Melitians who intruded into other people's bishoprics and appointed their own clergy (see Appendix 18).

The Melitians were perhaps anti-hierarchical but they were not necessarily anti-clerical. Melitius was the first individual to be called an "archbishop," which may have been a Coptic title. However, he never attempted to usurp the bishopric in Alexandria. According to Theodoret, Melitius did not consider himself to be the leader of the movement that took his name. He also chose not to make Alexandria the headquarters of his movement. Melitius chose a bishop from Memphis as his successor, and thereby established the authority for the schism in non-Alexandrian areas.

A final, intriguing note on the Melitian view of ecclesiastical authority is their

---

<sup>21</sup> Athanasius Historia Arianorum 78, see Appendix 20.

apparent unprecedented preoccupation with martyr worship in the early church. Melitius vested religious authority in the confessors and martyrs and named his church (like other rigorists) the "Church of the Martyrs." The prominence of the martyr is of principal importance to the Melitians. According to tradition, when Melitius left his bishopric in Lycopolis and moved into Alexandria to ordain clergy during the Diocletianic persecution, he took the bodily remains of the martyr Claudius of Antioch along with him.<sup>22</sup> The Melitians were later denounced by Athanasius for their extraordinary veneration of the martyrs and their preoccupation with the collection and, apparently, sale of relics. In an unnumbered Coptic fragment of a Festal letter Athanasius writes,

An iniquity it is to take toll of, and to rob the martyrs' tombs and not to bury them like the saints, and before all, like the Lord. . . . Who beholds the corpses of the martyrs and the prophets, caste out and exposed, and yet does not tremble? This is not a Christian deed. Paul has not given (taught) these things to us, nor did the prophets in times past. But the Melitians devised these things for profit. Their conduct resembles Jeroboam's guile, who sold doves and took money in the temple of God.<sup>23</sup>

The Melitians were charged with desecrating the tombs of saints and with trafficking with their relics. It is possible that the Melitians' eucharistic practices were connected with their veneration of the martyrs.

#### The Melitian Eucharistic Practice

---

<sup>22</sup> See Constantine's Second Panegyric on St. Claudius of Antioch p. 176 lines 1-5; p. 245 lines 25-7; and note also the Arabic rendition p. 245 n. 6 (Godron ed.).

<sup>23</sup> Georgius Zoega ed., Catalogus codicum Copticorum manu scriptorum with historical intro. and bibliographical notes by Joseph-Marie Sauget (Hildesheim/New York: Olms, 1973), pp. 625-6 no. 277.

Another intriguing characteristic of Melitian Christianity was their eucharistic practice. Their practices may have incited Athanasius' alleged attack against the Melitian altar. According to Severus' Patriarchal History, during the patriarchal reign of Damian (569 to 605) the Melitians were denounced because they received, "the Chalice many times in the night, before they came to church."<sup>24</sup> Similarly, the Second Panegyric of St. Claudius makes a reference to the Melitian table; i.e., their eucharistic table or altar.<sup>25</sup> The most substantial description of the Melitian eucharistic irregularities is given by Shenoute in a sermon entitled Contra Melitianos (see Appendix 21).<sup>26</sup> Shenoute denounced the Melitians, writing,

We are speaking in the fear of God concerning the boldness of those who celebrate the eucharist (mystery) without fear or trembling. For what fear do they have of God, these infidels, these men who carry out the sacrament into the cemeteries or other places thirteen, fourteen, or even eighteen times in a single day! And in addition to these things, they regard the sacred body of our Lord and his blessed blood merely as food and drink (for physical nourishment). And they gather together for the orgy, yes I said the orgy, namely these wild

---

<sup>24</sup> Severus Patriarchal History p. 209 (Evetts, Patrologia Orientalis I Fasc. 4).

<sup>25</sup> Constantine of Siut Second Panegyric of St. Claudius of Antioch p. 242 lines 9-12.

<sup>26</sup> Two consecutive sermons by Shenoute address eucharistic irregularities. In the first the Melitians are named, however, there are no sectarian names found in the second diatribe. Because of the common theme and apparent continuity between the two diatribes when I refer to the Contra Melitianos, I am in fact referring to the combination of two sermons by Shenoute. The texts have been edited in H. Guerin, "Sermons inédits de Senouti," Revue Egyptologique 11 (1905): 17-8; and an earlier discussion can be found in idem., "Sermons inédits de Senouti," Revue Egyptologique 10 (1902): 148-64. See also Tito Orlandi, "Coptic Literature," in Roots of Egyptian Christianity, pp. 64-9; and Janet Timbie, "The State of Research on the Career of Shenoute of Atripe," in Roots of Egyptian Christianity, pp. 258-70.



beasts; the Melitians.<sup>27</sup>

There were several distinctive characteristics of the Melitian eucharistic practice. The Melitians gathered together for their ritual (often at night) in cemeteries and other designated places, but apparently not at the church.<sup>28</sup> Shenoute states that the Melitians forbade participation in the eucharist on Sunday and instead conducted their ceremonies on "days of honor."<sup>29</sup> These days of honor were probably days designated to commemorate martyrs and saints. This marked a departure from the practice of the fourth-century Egyptian catholic church which only permitted the eucharist to be celebrated on Sundays.<sup>30</sup>

The Melitians did not attach any special spiritual significance to the elements used in the eucharistic service but at the same time they held a high regard for the significance of the service.<sup>31</sup> They were condemned by Shenoute for teaching, "if you

---

<sup>27</sup> Shenoute Contra Melitianos lines 1-12. My references are from Guérin, "Sermons inédits de Senouti," (1905), and my line numbering begins on p. 17 with the second column on line twenty-five as line 1 and continues consecutively through p. 18 (column two) line 70.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., lines 4-5; and Severus Patriarchal History p. 209 (Evetts ed., Patrologia Orientalis I Fasc. 4).

<sup>29</sup> Shenoute Contra Melitianos 42-4; and 50-4. Guérin, "Sermons inédits de Senouti," (1902): 152-4 suggests that those who avoided the eucharist on Sunday were the Judaizers condemned by the Synod of Alexandria (362); and he also made a connection between the the irregular eucharistic practices and the Arians. But P. du Bourguet, "Diatribes de Shenoute contre le démon," BSAC 16 (1961-1962): 57 showed that there was no evidence for irregular eucharistic practices by the Arians.

<sup>30</sup> This seems to be implied in Athanasius Apologia contra Arianos 11, where Athanasius argues that if Macarius' chalice was broken (as alleged) on a week day, then it could not have been a sacred chalice because the eucharist was not observed on week days. The argument is groundless with respect to Melitian practice and illustrates the contrived nature of Athanasius' defense. See also *ibid.*, 63, 74, and 76.

<sup>31</sup> Shenoute Contra Melitianos lines 6-8. An interesting parallel is found in Shenoute's diatribe against apocryphal works entitled Contra Origenistas et gnosticos.

sin many times a day, take the eucharistic bread and your sins will be forgiven you."<sup>32</sup> The Melitians celebrated their eucharistic ceremonies many times in a day and the explanation, according to Shenoute, was that they made their appetite their god.<sup>33</sup> It appears, however, that the Melitians practiced what resembled a eucharistic feast, perhaps along the lines of the first-century "love feast."

Melitian eucharistic feasts were apparently connected with their veneration of martyrs.<sup>34</sup> Shenoute suggests that the festivities were popular, by writing, "and many of us have been taught by them in these things"<sup>35</sup> and again, "those who give this harmful teaching have injured the souls of many brothers and sisters, unfortunate and

---

The Melitians are specifically named in the tract which condemns those who say, "that the bread and the chalice are not the body and blood of Christ, rather only a symbol," and, "but they do not care, just as if they were eating bread and drinking wine. Truly whoever says that it is not his body nor his blood, especially those belonging to us (Christians)--nor just the pagans--is worse than dogs and pigs," see Tito Orlandi, "A Catechesis against Apocryphal Texts by Shenute and the Gnostic Texts of Nag Hammadi," *HTR* 75,1 (1982): 92; and idem., *Shenute Contro gli Origenisti* (Rome: CIM, 1985).

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., lines 35-8.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., lines 5-6, and 19-27. This might also be inferred from Athanasius' *Historia Arianorum* 79, which states rather facetiously that the Melitians' motto was, "let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."

<sup>34</sup> This is also indicated by Constantine of Siut *Second Panegyric* p. 244 lines 27-31. Martyr festivals were a popular and common occurrence, see Laodicaean Canon 9; and Gangr. Canon 20; and Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981). Annual festivals took place in chapels dedicated to martyrs frequently in cemeteries. The festivities were often conducted at night, employed secular entertainment, and gradually received the status of a public holiday; see Basil Canons 31, and 32. The Athanasian *Canon* 92 forbids monks and nuns to attend martyrs festivals and instead counsels them to hold solemn festivals in their own monasteries.

<sup>35</sup> Shenoute *Contra Melitianos* lines 13-5. (See Appendix 21.)

uninformed people."<sup>36</sup> The Melitian eucharistic feasts were accompanied by elaborate and probably compelling festivities. The Melitians were charged with allowing the laity to carry the elements in a ceremonial eucharistic procession.<sup>37</sup> Theodoret records that the Melitians designated certain days (their holy days?) to ritually cleanse their bodies and to gather together for charismatic festivities (see Appendix 22).<sup>38</sup> In their eucharistic celebrations, according to Theodoret, the Melitians clapped their hands, sang hymns, danced a ritual dance wearing a bell-covered vestment, and practiced other unnamed but similar rituals.<sup>39</sup>

There is a strong possibility that the eucharistic irregularities were part of the Melitian movement from the beginning of their schism. Melitius may have been motivated initially to ordain clergy during the persecution out of a concern for the restoration of the celebration of the eucharist. An interesting letter attributed to Bishop Peter of Alexandria may cast more light on the eucharistic practices of the Melitians in the earliest stages of their schism.<sup>40</sup> The Coptic fragment addressed questions about

---

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., lines 52-56.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., lines 16-17.

<sup>38</sup> Theodoret Haer. Fab. 4. 7.

<sup>39</sup> Theodoret Haer. Fab. 4. 7. According to Theodoret, the festivities began with ritual bathing, for a parallel see idem., Hist. Eccl. 1. 9. 14, which states, "they (the Melitians) do not accept sound doctrine, and in their way of life they follow vain practices concordant with the infatuations of the Samaritans and Jews."

<sup>40</sup> Paris. MS. cote 132 (1), fol. 27, ed. by W. E. Crum, "Texts Attributed to Peter of Alexandria," JTS 4 (1902-1903): 387-97, fragment Aa. See also Tito Orlandi, "La raccolta copta delle lettere attribuite a Pietro Alesandrino," AnBol 93 (1975): 130-1; J. Barns and H. Chadwick, "A Letter Ascribed to Peter of Alexandria," JTS 24 (1973): 443; and T. Vivian, St. Peter of Alexandria: Bishop and Martyr (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), p. 54.

the Great Persecution and eucharistic practices. The portion of the text concerning the persecution may have been authentic.<sup>41</sup> In the portion concerning persecution, Peter condemned zealotry and by implication it would seem likely that he was, in fact, attacking the Melitians.<sup>42</sup> The second part of the homily addressed irregular eucharistic practices and probably dates to a later period.<sup>43</sup> The writer instructed the recipients of the letter not to celebrate the eucharist twice in the same day on the same altar.<sup>44</sup> The prohibition was confirmed by a vision of the Virgin Mary holding Jesus with two fingers outstretched, warning an assembly of 43 bishops against eucharistic irregularities. Peter may also have supported the restoration of clergy to the ministry of the eucharist who had lapsed (through fear) but had done penance, which would have added to the outrage of the Melitians.

Eucharistic irregularities were common in fourth-century Egypt as illustrated by the practices of the various antinomian Gnostic sects (who were active in the same area

---

<sup>41</sup> See Barns and Chadwick, "A Letter Ascribed to St. Peter," p. 443; and Vivian, St. Peter, p. 54.

<sup>42</sup> Crum, "Texts," p. 390. Peter writes, "beloved sons, be not severe with godless ones, lest . . . we be delivered into their hands. . . . Be not reckless; because if we appear in the streets of the cities, our enemies will talk against us, saying: 'Whence are they thus so proud and come not to worship the king's gods? And thus a great disorder and disturbance shall befall the faithful.'"

<sup>43</sup> There is a seam in the text between Peter's advice in persecution and his alleged admonition concerning eucharistic practice. Even if the latter portion is a late addition (which seems likely), it is still significant that the eucharistic advice would be posthumously ascribed to Peter, the adversary of the Melitians.

<sup>44</sup> For a similar prohibition (which may also be aimed against the Melitians) see P. Morgan M662 B12. The papyrus is a marriage contract in which the groom (probably a subdeacon) vowed in the presence of the Holy Trinity (among other things) never to take another wife, nor to fornicate, nor to consort with wandering monks (the Sarakote, see below), nor to celebrate more than one liturgy in one sanctuary per day.

as the Melitians). Shenoute suggested that eucharistic irregularities were addressed by a certain Synod:

praise be to heaven that a holy Synod has handled these problems so that one can acquaint the uninformed with that which is ordained in the canons of our father from the beginning.<sup>45</sup>

Several canonical instructions come to mind. First, the reference may have been to the Athanasian Canon 25 which excluded all who say that the Melitians have a church from the Eucharist.<sup>46</sup> Second, Griffith's so-called Nicene Canons condemned eucharistic irregularities and parallels the practices found in Shenoute's sermon against the Melitians.<sup>47</sup> Griffith's 'Nicene Canon' (19) states,

If anyone blasphemes and says of this holy sacrament which is on the altar: 'It is only bread, it is only wine,' let him come forth from the church through the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, now and in the future."<sup>48</sup>

In another parallel between Griffith's 'Nicene Canons' and the Melitians the canon says,

I see many who, if they take the sacrament when the church is not open, eat. Woe to their soul, because in return for remission of sin, they bring what is transitory. Truly, if anyone eats when the church is not open, he is guilty of great punishment.<sup>49</sup>

---

<sup>45</sup> Shenoute Contra Melitianos (see Appendix 21).

<sup>46</sup> W. Riedel and W. E. Crum eds. The Canons of Athanasius (London: Text and Translation Society, 1904; repr. Amsterdam: Philo, 1973), pp. xvi, and 30.

<sup>47</sup> BM OR. MS. 6805 (16 unnumbered pages [19]-[34]), transcribed and translated by F. L. Griffith, The Nubian Texts of the Christian Period (Abhandlungen der königliche Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-historische Klasse, Berlin, 1918), pp. 16-24; and the revision and re-edition of the text by Gerald M. Browne, "Griffith's 'Nicene Canons,'" BASP 20. 3-4 (1983): 97-112.

<sup>48</sup> Browne, "Griffith's 'Nicene Canons,'" p. 98.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102.

A final section condemns those who partake of the eucharist without hearing the epistle and those who sing hymns that insult God.<sup>50</sup> Finally, the Council of Carthage in 390 condemned private masses which were apparently related to the rites conducted in the cemeteries.<sup>51</sup>

### The Melitian Apocryphal Writings

The Melitians were condemned for their production and circulation of a number of apocryphal works and hymns. Their works prompted Athanasius' denunciation in his famous 39th. Festal Letter of 367 (see Appendix 19).<sup>52</sup> Athanasius responded to the disastrous potential of Melitian apocrypha by publishing a list of canonical New Testament books. Similarly, Shenoute condemned Melitian apocrypha in addition to a variety of other heretical non-canonical works in his Contra Origenistas et gnosticos. Shenoute explicitly names the Melitian writings:

Therefore, he who says, "I know," because he reads apocryphal books, is greatly ignorant. And he who thinks that he is a teacher because he receives apocryphal books, is more ignorant still. . . . Indeed, the great teacher of the faith, Apa Athanasius, said in his works: "I write this because of the heresies, especially the wretched Melitians who pride themselves upon what are called apocrypha."<sup>53</sup>

Shenoute may have referred to the Melitians earlier in his sermon when he wrote,

They say that there is another gospel besides the four gospels, and that the church does not reject it as heretical. It does not say that "there is not another one," but that "there are some who want to confound you, changing the gospel of Christ. . . ." Why (then) did not all the holy fathers, and especially our father

---

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>51</sup> Jean Gaudemet, L'église dans l'empire romain (Paris: Sirey, 1958), p. 563.

<sup>52</sup> Athanasius Festal Letter 39, in L. T. Lefort, S. Athanase: Lettres Festales et Pastorales en copte (CSCO 150, 1955). See also Athanasius Historia Arianorum 78; and the Athanasian Canons 11, 12, and 18.

<sup>53</sup> Orlandi, "Catechesis," pp. 88-9.

Apa Athanasius the archbishop, the truly wise man, receive them? On the contrary, he rejected them. And what is the "Gospel of Jesus son of God, generation of the angels?"<sup>54</sup>

No apocryphon has been identified as Melitian. Using Athanasius and Shenoute, only the most cursory description of the possible contents of the Melitian apocrypha can be given. Athanasius stated that some of the Melitian works were astrological charts (or tables) showing constellations named after saints.<sup>55</sup> Likewise, the Melitians were allegedly involved in magic, so it might be reasonable to expect to find magical works among their writings.<sup>56</sup> It is certain that some of the Melitian apocrypha contained legends about the Virgin Mary, with whom they were particularly captivated (see below).

The condemnation of Melitian writings probably carried over to include their hymns, perhaps to martyrs and the Virgin, which were popularly circulated and certainly used in their eucharistic feasts.<sup>57</sup> Some of the Melitian writings must have

---

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>55</sup> Athanasius Festal Letter 39. A portion of Shenoute's Contra Origenistas et gnosticos may also refer to astrological content in a Melitian apocryphon, see Orlandi, "Catechesis," p. 90.

<sup>56</sup> Athanasius Canon 25; and Severus Patriarchal History pp. 200-201 (Evetts ed. Patrologia Orientalis V Fasc. 1). See also Shenoute Contra Origenistas et gnosticos, in Orlandi, "Catechesis," p. 90.

<sup>57</sup> Athanasius Canon 12; and Theodoret Haer. Fab. 4. 7, (see Appendix 22). Arius, the Manichaeans and other Gnostic groups sought to propagate their beliefs by means of songs.

been theological in content.<sup>58</sup> Veilleux has suggested that there might be a connection between the Melitians and the Nag Hammadi codices.<sup>59</sup> Any connection with the Gnostics is purely imaginative speculation until more substantive information can be discovered about Melitian beliefs. Short of identifying Melitian apocrypha, the most useful inquiries will be made by critically extracting Melitian beliefs from general diatribes like Shenoute's Contra Origenistas et gnosticos.

#### The Melitian View of the Virgin Mary

An elaborate apocryphal tradition was produced in the early church which related legends about the life and death of the Virgin Mary. On the cross Jesus delivered his mother over to the watch care of the apostle John and she was present with the disciples when Jesus ascended into heaven.<sup>60</sup> Nothing is known about the later life and death of Mary apart from these later Scriptural references. The questions surrounding the life and death of the Virgin were later inextricably associated with the later Christological debates. The combination of the lack of evidence with the desire

---

<sup>58</sup> See Crum, Theological Texts, pp. 13-4 no. 4, Fol. 2 verso, which says, ". . . and they that go with them (the Melitians) unto their filthy oracles, that is, their dwelling-places; neither any one that believes with them in their filthy heresy, who write great impurities unto the divinity of Emmanuel, by dividing the holy Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. . . ."

<sup>59</sup> Armand Veilleux, "Monasticism and Gnosis in Egypt," in Roots of Egyptian Christianity, p. 284, states, "nobody so far has expressed the hypothesis that our documents (the Nag Hammadi codices) belonged to a community of Melitian monks. Such communities are known to have existed in Upper Egypt at the time that interests us. And that hypothesis, as gratuitous as it is, is as worth considering as the other ones that were proposed. What we know about the Melitians makes this quite possible."

<sup>60</sup> See R. E. Brown, K. P. Donfried, J. A. Fitzmyer, and J. Reumann, Mary in the New Testament (Philadelphia: Fortress Press; New York: Paulist Press, 1978).



to use aspects of the life of Mary apologetically provided the initial impetus for the development of an embroidered legend.<sup>61</sup>

By the time of Epiphanius, there was debate over the question of whether Mary actually died or not. Epiphanius suggested that the Scriptures were silent because of "the extraordinary nature of the prodigy, in order not to shock the minds of men."<sup>62</sup> The story of Mary's assumption into heaven was probably first conceived at the end of the fourth century in Coptic Egypt.<sup>63</sup> A comprehensive description of the "Assumption of the Virgin Mary" is extant in Greek, Latin, Syriac, Coptic, and Arabic. The original Coptic account was a by-product of Egyptian pagan and Coptic Christian ideas. Motifs from Egyptian mythology, including references to the underworld, called Amenti and Isiac themes were interwoven with the story of Mary's mysterious death and translation into heaven.<sup>64</sup> These Coptic apocryphal stories are a marvelous testimony to the nature of the popular religion of the Coptic Christians.

Although the doctrine of the assumption of the Virgin Mary was gradually accepted by the official church, it was not immediate nor without controversy. Several

---

<sup>61</sup> See Edgar Hennecke, New Testament Apocrypha ed. by Wilhelm Schneemelcher trans. by R. Mcl. Wilson (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), 1. 429. On Mariology see for example Geoffrey Ashe, The Virgin (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976).

<sup>62</sup> Epiphanius Adv. Haer. 78. 11.

<sup>63</sup> Hennecke, The New Testament Apocrypha, 1. 429. See also Forbes Robinson, Coptic Apocryphal Gospels (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1896), which includes a collection of Coptic texts which relate details about the life and death of the Virgin with an informative introduction and critical endnotes. The Assumption of Mary was not defined as an article of faith by the Catholic Church until 1950 (Pius XII, Munificentissimus Deus).

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

factors might indicate that the Melitians were both preoccupied with the Virgin Mary and that they held to her bodily assumption prior to the canonization of that notion by the Coptic church. An early Sahidic fragment of the Life of the Virgin Mary warned, "do not say as the heretics that a power caught her (Mary) away, or say as the Melitians that she was taken up in her body into heaven."<sup>65</sup> It is possible that some of the Melitian apocryphal works may have elaborated ideas about the Virgin Mary. The pagan ingredients and date of the emergence of the legend of the assumption of Mary may also suggest that the dogma was initially a Melitian invention. Another factor illustrates the Melitian interest in the Virgin Mary. Mary was inserted into a sermon by Peter of Alexandria against rigorism, which was probably aimed at the Melitians. The appended story about the Virgin was probably designed as an apologetic against the Melitians' eucharistic practices.

In another passage discussing the immaculate conception and the birth of Jesus, a Coptic author declared, "let the Melitians be now ashamed, who cast suspicion. . . ." at which point the text unfortunately breaks off.<sup>66</sup> The Melitians apparently maintained an unconventional belief concerning either the conception and/or birth of Jesus which somehow appeared to have compromised their view on the person of

---

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., Sahidic Fragment of the Life of the Virgin no. 1 lines 13-15. The idea that Mary was a power is again referred to in *ibid.*, p. 108 line 10. On the Virgin as a "power" see also Cyril of Jerusalem Discourse on Mary Theotokos Fol. 3 in E. A. W. Budge, Miscellaneous Coptic Texts in the Dialect of Upper Egypt (London: The British Museum, 1915), p. 628, "Let Ebion now be ashamed, and the Harpocratians, these godless heretics who say in their madness that, she (Mary) was a force (or abstract power) of God which took the form of a woman, and came upon the earth, and was called Mary, and this force gave birth to Emmanuel for us." The Encomium ends with the death of the Virgin and the miraculous disappearance of her body.

<sup>66</sup> Crum, Theological Texts, p. 13 no. 4 Folio 2, recto.

Jesus. The context of the dispersion seems to indicate that these ideas came out of a Melitian apocryphal legend concerning Mary. The legend may have had a connection with Shenoute's Contra Origenistas et gnosticos which stated that, "some blasphemously say that Mary did not conceive the Christ, and that if she had conceived him, then her belly would have protruded before it collapsed."<sup>67</sup>

### The Melitian Monastic System

The Melitians developed one of the earliest cenobitic monastic networks in the history of the early church. The Melitian development parallels if it does not precede the famous Pachomian foundations. The only exclusively Melitian sources that we have are monastic sources, which also happen to be among the earliest Coptic Christian correspondences. The Melitian monastic sources date between 330 and 340 but the foundations appear to be much older.<sup>68</sup> Paieous was the central figure of the Melitian monastic papyri and the head of a large Melitian community located somewhere in the eastern desert of the Upper Cynopolite nome. Paieous was both a confessor from the Great Persecution and a priest as indicated by the prefix "Apa" that appears before his name. The correspondences contain references to other Melitian monasteries and lists of greetings to a number of individuals.

---

<sup>67</sup> Orlandi, "Catechesis," p. 92.

<sup>68</sup> The communities' size and organization would seem to indicate that the movement had existed for some time prior to 330. An interesting reference is found in P. London 6. 1913 line 10 which names a certain Melitian named Proous, who was formerly a monk (illustrating that the movement had been around and that former Melitian monks were not ostracized because of the schism).

The Melitian monastic papyri provide insight into the life and industry of the Melitian monks. According to these sources, the Melitian monasteries appear to have been similar to the Pachomian foundations. Although no rules have survived one Melitian papyrus implies that the Melitian monastery was strictly organized.<sup>69</sup> There were a number of Melitian anchorites, showing that the Melitian monastics were not exclusively cenobitic. The most significant difference between the Melitian and Pachomian monasteries appears to have been the Melitian method of electing a replacement for the prior, and ultimately their view of authority. The nomination was confirmed by a contract.<sup>70</sup> The occurrence of womens' names in the monastic correspondences is another unusual note of interest revealed in the Melitian papyri.<sup>71</sup>

The Melitian monks were actively involved with private industry including the production of cloaks, shoes, and napkins<sup>72</sup> and it would appear the cultivation of grain (wheat), vegetables, figs, dates, olives, lentils and grapes.<sup>73</sup> The communities traded these necessities with one another and probably dispensed them among non-monastic Melitians living in the vicinity of the Melitian monasteries. Another interesting aspect

---

<sup>69</sup> P. London 6. 1913.

<sup>70</sup> P. London 6. 1913.

<sup>71</sup> P. London 6. 1922 was co-authored by a woman named Bes. A woman by the name of Helene is referred to in P. London 6. 1920 line 6 and P. London 6. 1922 line 13; and an Isidore appears in P. London 6. 1921 line 20.

<sup>72</sup> See P. London 6. 1920 lines 10-20; P. London 6. 1922 lines 10-15. The fact that the Melitians produced by-products from linen casts an interesting light on Athanasius' alleged linen tax, which may have been designed as a direct attack on the Melitian monastic industry.

<sup>73</sup> P. London 6. 1914; P. London 6. 1917; P. London 6. 1919; P. London 6. 1920; and P. London 6. 1922.

about the Melitian seen in the monastic papyri was their financial intercession on behalf of a brother overtaken in debt.<sup>74</sup>

The Melitians' sense of brotherhood and mutual concern is also seen in their requests for intercessory prayer and by the extended lists of names and greetings found in the papyri. One Melitian papyrus supplies an interesting illustration of their concern for intercessory prayer. The author asks that requests for prayers be circulated among the cells of Melitian anchorites throughout the Thebaid.<sup>75</sup>

Melitian foundations for men and women were later found throughout Middle and Upper Egypt.<sup>76</sup> All of the later sources concerning the Melitians refer to them in monastic settings.<sup>77</sup> Probably as the result of the disbanding of Melitian monasteries, Melitians joined Pachomian and orthodox communities where they attempted to indoctrinate the monks with their beliefs. Wandering monks, called Sarakote, were condemned in monastic invectives. The Sarakote certainly included wandering Melitians and it is likely that the term was a pejorative referring exclusively to wandering Melitian monks.<sup>78</sup>

---

<sup>74</sup> P. London 6. 1915-1916.

<sup>75</sup> P. London 6. 1917.

<sup>76</sup> See A. H. Sayce, "Deux contrats grecs du Fayoum," Revue des études grecques 3 (1890): 131-44. Sayce has edited two contracts from A. D. 512-13 in which a certain Eulogius, a former Melitian monk has negotiated a sale of a monastery at Labla near Arsinoe to a certain Melitian monk (SB 5174). The second contract records a transaction negotiated by Eulogius for the similar sale of a monastery to two Melitian monks from the monastery at Labla (SB 5175).

<sup>77</sup> See the sermon by Patriarch Benjamin (d. 659) in Henri DeVis ed. and transl. Homélies coptes de la Vaticane (Haunia, Gyldendal: Nordisk forlag, 1922-29), p. 65.

<sup>78</sup> See for example P. Morgan M662 B 12, L. S. B. MacCoull, "A Coptic Marriage Contract in the Pierpont Morgan Library," Actes du XVe Congrès international de papyrologie II (Brussels, 1979): 116-23. A. Alcock, "Two Notes on

Violent measures were taken against the Melitians during the sixth and seventh centuries. Non-monastic Melitians were probably the first to capitulate, which perhaps explains why the later evidence for the Melitians is exclusively monastic. The last vestiges of Melitian resistance would be in the monasteries. Melitians who were forced out of their monasteries infiltrated the orthodox monasteries or became wandering monks. Chronologically, the last reference to the Melitians was from the Patriarchate of Michael I (744-68). According to Severus,

Now there were two parties of heretics, the followers of Melitius, who lived in ancient times, and of Julian. So the father (Michael I) sent messengers to him. Then he went himself to visit them, but could not bring them back to a right heart. For they denied that they were heretics, and they remained dissidents, some of them in the monasteries and some in the deserts. So he raised his hands to heaven, and said: "If these are they who have denied thee and done evil deeds, show forth a sign speedily without delay, so that all may see them, and glorify thy name." Accordingly, after a short time, the Lord destroyed them, and caused them to disappear, as he destroyed Sodom. And at the monastery wherein there were three thousand persons, there no longer remained any save ten souls, who were believers and did not walk in their path.<sup>79</sup>

The passage seems to imply that some time in the mid-eighth century the Melitians died as a result of a cataclysmic natural disaster or a plague, or that they were exterminated. It is possible that the Melitians were massacred by invading Islamic hordes. Beyond the mid-eighth century there are no references to the Melitian schism.

### Conclusions

The unique nature of the Melitians is most vividly illustrated by the schism's beliefs and practices. Athanasius characterized the Melitians as unlearned pagan

---

Egyptian Monasticism," *Aegyptus* 67 (1987): 189, suggests that "Sarakote" may simply refer to non-Pachomian monks (which would obviously include the Melitian monks).

<sup>79</sup> Severus *Patriarchal History* pp. 198-99 (Evetts ed. *Patrologia Orientalis* V Fasc. 1).

converts, one step away from their former life of idolatry.<sup>80</sup> Herein lies the key to understanding the Melitian schism. Their beliefs and practices appear to have been influenced by the amalgamation of Christian puritanical rigorism and Egyptian paganism, underscoring the indigenous nature of this Coptic Christian schism.

The Melitians played an extremely significant role in the history of the early church in Egypt. First and foremost, they facilitated the return of Arianism. The Melitians' controversy with Athanasius, which resulted in the bishop's first deportation and which drove him to solidify his Coptic constituency, is also of utmost importance. The production of Melitian apocrypha and the relationship between these works and apocryphal writings from Coptic Egypt is also intriguing, particularly if there was a connection with the Nag Hammadi codices, though such a relationship seems unlikely.

Several Melitian innovations survived the movement and were later accepted by the orthodox church. The Melitians had one of the earliest networks of cenobitic monastic communities. The groups' veneration of martyrs and their notions about the dormition of Mary were also later accepted by the orthodox church.

The Melitians were not an insignificant and obscure schism in the Egyptian Church. At one time they jeopardized the authority of Athanasius, the single most powerful figure in the fourth-century Egyptian Church. The Melitians were destined to fail, however, after their leadership was banished by Constantine and they were outbid by Athanasius for Coptic allegiance. The Melitians lasted until the mid-eighth century, entrenched in remote regions of Upper Egypt, before they were forcibly

---

<sup>80</sup> Athanasius *Historia Arianorum* 78-9, see Appendix 20. Some of the areas that embraced Melitianism (Hermopolis and Antinoopolis) were the last areas to abandon pagan religion (see above pp. 5-6).

brought to submission and quite literally became "the church of the martyred." The Melitian schism went from almost overthrowing Athanasius in the fourth century to obscurity in the eighth century. But the most interesting phenomenon about the Melitian movement is that after they disappear, many of the ideas which were a distinct by-product of the movement, are found in the official Coptic Church. The Melitians were officially persecuted (and possibly exterminated) but the spirit of Melitianism was absorbed by Coptic Christianity.

---



## APPENDIX 1

Peter of Alexandria Epistle to Apollonius.

Barns and Chadwick, JTS 24 (1973): 443-55.

[...] Epistle [of...] Peter the Archbishop of [Alexandria, which he wrote] to Apollonius the Bishop of Sioout after he heard that he had fallen away when he fell down into the pit of idolatry.

'I am grieved indeed for this sheep who has strayed--or rather for this shepherd whom the evil hunter has [caught] and has caused [him] to stray to him [...] and has brought him low through the awakening of evil thoughts and the idolatry of (those whom) I considered to fall away through a fateful mis-step (?) and to have betrayed their own selves. As for you, poor wretch, perhaps Apollinarius has dragged you down with him in to the pit of destruction since the writing of your name and his begin with the same letters! I am at a loss about you, where your wits have gone, that you have not had the wit to exercise yourself and escape by means of [others] who have their wits about them, before you were ruined. If you had given yourself over [to me] before you were ruined, I would by all means have helped you, as I did in the case of another who came to me and I helped him, namely Basil the Persian. When this man came into us, he saw us in our chamber praying, and wondered at us. I said to him 'Do you not worship god in this way?' He said 'I believe in the sun and the moon, and water, and fire, as illuminators of the whole world.' And when I heard this, I wept; and when I wept, my tears poured upon him, and I baptized him with them; and when he saw me weeping, he himself wept as well; and thus it was that he acknowledged the Godhead, and believed even as I had told him; and I evangelized him with the Faith. But as for you, Apollonius, why have you not made haste to save yourself from the snare in which you have

been caught? If you had paid heed thoroughly, God would (have) give(n) you strength. I wonder at you, that you should join in debate with the enemies of Him in Whose holy Name you were baptized. Who has put this beast's heart in you? I do not know. You have established [...a] faith worthy of veneration. What has happened to you? Tell me! Speak to me, you who have been separated (?) by error from the Godhead. Know the Faith of the Almighty! Say yourself, 'My God, convert me[...]' It is truly a shame, the denial which has caught you in a trap, and something from which there is no escape. Who suggested to you treason like this? I had no intimation of your evil disposition before today; else I could not have borne to refrain from sending to you to correct you. In whom have you baptized, brother? Have you not baptized[...

## APPENDIX 2

### Letter of Phileas.

Kettler, "Streit," pp. 159-63; and Stevenson, A New Eusebius, pp. 290-3.

Hesychius, Pachomius, Theodorus and Phileas, to Melitius our beloved and fellow-minister in the Lord, greeting.

In simplicity of mind we have heid runours about you to be unreliable. Visitors have told us of certain attempts--and even completed actions--alien to divine order and the Chlurch's rule: these we would not credit having regard to the greatness of the audacity and strange temerity involved.

But since many who are visiting us at the present time have certified the truth of these reports, and did not hesitate to attest them as facts, we have been utterly astounded and have been compelled to write this letter to you. What agitation and sadness have been caused to

us all in common and to us individually by the report of the ordination carried through by you in parishes wholly unconnected with you, we are unable sufficiently to express. We shall not delay, however, to address a brief rebuke.

There is the law of our fathers and forefathers, of which you are not yourself ignorant, established according to divine ecclesiastical order—for by them in all respects it has been established and settled with due regard to the good pleasure of God and zealous anxiety for better things—that it is not lawful for any bishop to celebrate ordinations in parishes other than his own; a law which is exceedingly important and wisely devised. For (1) it is but right that the conversation and life of ordinands should be examined with great care; and, (2) that all confusion and turbulence should be done away with. For every one of us will have enough to do in managing his own parish, and in finding with great care and many anxieties suitable ministers among those with whom he has passed his whole life, and who have been trained under his hands. But you, neither taking any account of these things, and with no regard for the future, and the law throughout of our blessed fathers and those who have been taken to Christ in succession, nor the honour of our great bishop and Father Peter, on whom we all depend in the hope which we have in the Lord Jesus Christ, nor softened by our imprisonments and trials, and by the disgraces daily heaped upon us and by the oppression and straits in which all of us are, have ventured on subverting all things at once. What chance of excuse have you for such acts?

But perhaps you will say: I did this to prevent many being drawn away from the unbelief of many, because the flocks were in need and forsaken, there being no pastor with them. But it is most certain that they are not in such destitution: (1) because there are many going about them and in a position to act as visitors; and (2) even if there was some measure

of neglect on their side, than the proper way would have been for representations to be made promptly by the people, and for us to do our duty by them. But they knew that they were in no want of ministers, and therefore they did not come to seek them. They knew that if we made due inquiry, of course, embodied in advice to them, was to dismiss the case, or to have everything done which seemed to be expedient; for + all was done under correction, + and all was considered with well-approved honesty. You, however, giving such strenuous attention to the deceits of certain parties and their vain words, made a stealthy leap to the conducting of ordinations. For if indeed those with you were constraining you to this, and in their ignorance were doing violence to ecclesiastical order, you ought to have followed the common rule and have informed us by letter; and in that way what seemed expedient would have been done. And if perchance some persuaded you to credit their story that it was all over with us (a thing of which you could not have been ignorant, because there were many going to and returning from us who could visit you), even although, I say, this had been the case, yet you ought to have waited for the judgment of the superior father (i.e. Peter of Alexandria), and for his permission to do this. But without giving heed to these matters, but indulging in a different expectation, yea rather, indeed, denying all respect to us, you have provided certain rulers for the people. For already we have learned too that there have been also divisions, because your unwarrantable exercise of the right of ordination displeased many.

And you were not persuaded to delay such procedure to retrain your purpose readily even by the word of the Apostle Paul, the most blessed seer, and the man who put on Christ, who is the Apostle of all of us; for he, in writing to his dearly-beloved son Timothy, says: Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins. And thus he at once shows his own anxious consideration for him, and gives him his example and exhibits the law

---

according to which, with all carefulness and caution, persons are to be chosen for ordination. + He speaks with a view to the more distant future. We make this declaration to you, + that you may study to keep within the safe and salutary limits of the rule.

### APPENDIX 3

#### Second Veronese Fragment.

Kettler, "Streit," pp. 159-63; and Stevenson, A New Eusebius, pp. 290-3.

After receiving and perusing this epistle, he neither wrote any reply nor repaired to them in the prison, nor went to the blessed Peter. But when all these bishops and presbyters and deacons had suffered martyrdom in the prison at Alexandria, he at once entered Alexandria. Now in that city there was a certain person, by name Isidore, turbulent in character and possessed with the ambition of finding a teacher. And there was also a certain Arius, who wore the habit of piety, and was in like manner possessed with the ambition to find a teacher. And when they discovered the object of Melitius's ambition, and what he wanted, hastening to him and being envious of the episcopal authority of the blessed Peter, (the motive of Melitius being disclosed), they discovered to Melitius certain presbyters, then in hiding, to whom the blessed Peter had given power to act as parish-visitors. And Melitius recommending them to improve the opportunity given them, separated them from Peter's communion, and himself ordained two persons, one in prison and another in the mines. On learning these things, the blessed Peter, with much endurance, wrote to the people of Alexandria a letter in the following terms.

## APPENDIX 4

Peter of Alexandria Concerning Melitius.

PG 18. 509; and Vivian, St. Peter, p. 26.

Peter, to his beloved brethren, established in the faith of God, greeting. Since I have found out that Melitius acts in no way for the common good—for neither is he contented with the letter of the most holy bishops and martyrs—but, invading my parish has assumed so much to himself as to endeavour to separate from my authority the presbyters and those who had been entrusted with visiting the needy; and, giving proof of his desire for pre-eminence, has ordained in the prison several for himself; now take heed to this and hold no communion with him until I meet him in company with some wise and discreet men, and see what his designs have been. Farewell.

## APPENDIX 5

## Nicaean Synodal Letter.

Socrates Hist. Eccl. 1. 9. 1-14; Theodoret Hist. Eccl. 1. 9. 2-13; and Gelasius 2. 33; transl. mine.

Acting with more clemency towards Melitius, although strictly speaking he was wholly undeserving of pardon, the Council permitted him to remain in his own city, and decreed that he should exercise no authority either to nominate for ordination or ordain; that he should appear in no other district or city on this pretense, but simply retain a nominal dignity.

That those who had received appointments from him, after having been confirmed by a more mystical ordination [i.e., it was not to be repeated, but simply validated] should be admitted to communion on these conditions: that they should continue to hold rank and

ministry, but regard themselves as inferior in every way to all those who had been previously approved and nominated in each place and church by our most honoured brother and fellow-minister Alexander. In addition to these things they shall have no authority to propose or nominate whom they please, or suggest names or to do anything at all without the concurrence of some bishop of the Catholic Church who is one of Alexander's suffragans. As for those who, by God's grace and through their prayers, have been preserved from any participation in the schism, and have inviolably attached to the Catholic Church, without giving any reason for dissatisfaction, they shall preserve the authority of taking part in all ordinations, of presenting perspective candidates for the office of the ministry, and of doing whatever the laws and dispensation of the church allow.

When it happens that any one of those holding office in the Church die, then let such as have recently been admitted into orders [i.e., the Melitians], be preferred to the dignity of the deceased, provided they should appear worthy, and that the people should elect them, the bishop of Alexandria also confirming and ratifying their choice.

This privilege is conceded to all the others indeed, but to Melitius personally we by no means grant this same license, on account of his former disorderly conduct; and because of the rashness and levity of his character he is deprived of all authority and jurisdiction, as a man liable again to create similar disturbances.

## APPENDIX 6

### Brevarium Melitii.

Athanasius Apologia contra Arianos 71.

I, Melitius of Lycopolis, Lucius of Antinopolis, Phasileus of Hermopolis, Achilles of Cusaw, Ammonius of Diospolis.

In Ptolemais, Pachymes of Tentyrae.

In Maximianopolis, Theodorus of Coptus.

In Thebais, Cales of Hermethes, Colluthus of Upper Cynopolis, Pelagius of Oxyrhynchus, Peter of Heracleopolis, Theon of Nilopolis, Issac of Cleopatris, Melas of Arsenoitis.

In Heliopolis, Amos of Leontopolis, Ision of Arthribis.

In Pharbethus, Harpocraton of Bubastius, Moses of Phacusae, Callinicus of Pelusium, Eudaemon of Tanis, Ephraim of Thmuis.

In Sais, Hermaeon of Cynopolis and Busiris, Soterichus of Sebennytus, Pininuthes of Phthenegys, Cronius of Metelis, Agathammon of the district of Alexandria.

In Memphis, John who was ordered by the Emperor to be with the Archbishop. There are those of Egypt.

And the Clergy that he had in Alexandria were Apollonius Presbyter, Irenaeus Presbyter, Dioscorus Presbyter, Tyrranus Presbyter. And Deacons; Timotheus Deacon, Antinous Deacon, Hephaestion Deacon. And Macarius Presbyter of Paremboule.

Appendices 7-16 from Bell and Crum, Jews and Christians in Egypt.

## APPENDIX 7

P. London 6. 1913.



'In the consulship of Flavius Optatus, Patrician, and Anicius Paulinus the most illustrious, Phamenoth 23. Aurelius Pageus son of Horus, of the village of Hipponon in the Heracleopolite nome, priest, to the Priors of the monastery of monks called Hathor situated in the eastern desert of the Upper Cynopolite nome. Whereas sacred Imperial letters have been sent up by the most pious Emperor Constantine ordering certain persons from Egypt, both bishops and priests and many others and myself among them, . . . to proceed to Caesarea in Palestinian Syria to come to a decision concerning the purgation of the holy Christian body and I am desirous to make a journey of this kind to the aforewritten Caesarea to fulfil the orders given, it is necessary for me to appoint a deputy in my place until my return, (wherefore) I gathered together the monks of our monastery in the presence of Patabaeis, priest of Hipponon, and Papnutius the deacon of Paminpesla and Proous, former monk, and many others; and they. . . and approved with unanimity, voluntarily and spontaneously and with irrevocable decision, Aurelius Gerontius my full brother as a person fitted to occupy my place until my return temporarily (?) [and] to supervise and administer and control all the affairs of the monastery, both as regards. . . and to choose the stewards of the monastery in the same way as myself, and that no innovations shall be made without the consent of (?) the priors of the monastery in the matter of the . . . monks and of those who desire to depart. . . The deed of appointment is valid wheresoever it is produced, and in reply to the formal questions I have given my consent. I Aurelius Pageus the aforesaid have signed the deed. We the aforesaid. . .and... and Colluthus and Dioscorides. . . I Colluthus have written on behalf of the others, as they are illiterate. We . . . and Proous. . . are present (?) [and approve?]. I Papnuthius. . . have given my approval.'

## APPENDIX 8

P. London 6. 1914.

'To my beloved brother Apa Paieous and Patabeit, priests, Callistus greeting in the Lord God. We wish you to know the events which have occurred here; for you heard at the time what we suffered that night at the house of Heraclius the recorder. For there were also certain brethren of them that came to you with us in the house and they can themselves inform you of what occurred. Well, after that day, on the twenty-fourth of Pachon, Isaac the Bishop of Letopolis came to Heraiscus at Alexandria, and he desired to dine with the Bishop in the Camp. So the adherents of Athanasius, hearing of it, came bringing with them soldiers of the Dux and of the Camp; they came in a drunken state at the ninth hour, having shut the Camp, wishing to seize both him and the brethren. So certain soldiers who were in the Camp and had the fear of God in their hearts, hearing of it, took them and hid them in the store-chambers in the Camp; and when they could not be found they went out and found four brethren coming into the Camp; and they beat them and made them all bloody, so that they were in danger of death, and cast them forth outside Nicopolis. After they had cast them forth they departed again to the Gate of the Sun, to the hostel in which the brethren are entertained, and they seized five others there and confined them in the Camp in the evening; and they shut them up till the praepositus came out to the guard-room towards morning; and the praepositus and the scribe took them and he ordered them to be cast forth out of Nisopolis; and Heraclides the keeper of the hostel they bound and maltreated, threatening and enjoining him: 'For what reason did you admit the monks of the Meletian party into the hostel?' Another brother Ammon, who was in the Camp and himself receives the brethren, they shut up in the Camp forbidding him to receive monks in his house. For there is no

other brother but these two who receives the brethren; they made them play the coward. So we are greatly afflicted, being separated by them each in his own place; and so we are troubled that they will not suffer us to depart to the papas Heraiscus and visit him; for on the night in which the brethren were maltreated the praepositus of the soldiers sent a report to the Bishop saying: 'I sinned and was drunken in the night, in that I maltreated the brethren'. And that day he had a service said, though he is a Gentile, on account of the sin which he committed. Athanasius is very despondent, and on his side he causes us distress by reason of the writings and the reports that come to him from abroad, since the Emperor, having found Macarius abroad at court, . . . to -yrus writing. . . that having bound him and... he should. . ., in order that. . . So Archelaus the. . . and . . . having departed with Athanasius son of Capito, wishing to carry off Macarius, the report came to Apa John at Antioch; he came and seized them and put them under arrest, because they had written vile slanders against Heraiscus, and Archelaus himself took the letters abroad. It was God who sent the three of them abroad and keeps them abroad! So Athanasius heard this news, that Archelaus was arrested, and Athanasius is very despondent. Often (?) did they come to him, and till now he has not left the country; but he had his baggage embarked at sea as though he would leave the country, and then again he took his baggage off the ship, not wishing to leave the country. . . . I have written to you in order that you might know in what affliction we are; for he carried off a Bishop of the Lower Country and shut him in the Meat Market, and a priest of the same region he shut in the lock-up, and a deacon in the principal prison, and till the twenty-eighth of Pachon Heraiscus too has been confined in the Camp--I thank God our Master that the scourgings which he endured have ceased--, and on the twenty-seventh he caused seven Bishops to leave the country; Emes and Peter are of their number, the son of

Toubestis. Do not neglect us then, brethren, since they left behind the bread, in order that it might not be taken outside, on account of the Bishop, to the intent that he might keep it by him. For when buying loaves for our sustenance bought at 14 talents the artaba of wheat. As soon therefore as you find a competent person send me a few loaves. I greet my father Prauous (?) and all the brethren who are with him, and Theon the deacon and Saprion and Horion and Papnutius and Apa Sarmates and Paomius and Pior and Eudaemon and Apa Tryphon and Gerontius and Apa Hierax and Apa Helenas and Apa Hareous and Apa Piam and Cornelius and Pisatius and Colluthus and Joseph and his children and Phines. So do not neglect, my father, to send to Psaid of Terot for the artaba of wheat, and cause Touan of Tamouro as well to depart to Tamouro for the artaba of wheat; for the days are come when they should receive them. I greet Paul the lector and Apa Elias and Anubas the elder and Anubas the younger and Pamutius and Titoues and his children and Hor of Tournakon and all his brethren who are with him and Papnutius and Leonides his brother and the other brother who is with them'. (Addressed) 'To Apa Pajieou and Patabeit, from Calllistus.'

#### APPENDIX 9

P. London 6. 1915.

'[To the. . .] brother (?) Paieous, Herieous greeting in the Lord. To those who have fallen into. . . misfortune the word of God exhorts us to give succour; to all, and most to our brethren. Since therefore our brother Pamonthius, having fallen into no common vicissitudes, has suffered most shamefully at the hands of pitiless and godless men so that he is compelled, one might also say, to lose our blessed hope, for which reason he besought us to make application by these present letters to your brotherliness, setting forth all his affairs, to the end

that you too, knowing thereof, may help him, remembering the command of the blessed Apostle not to neglect those who are weak, not only in the Faith but even in the affairs of this world. For this brother of our was formerly a wine-dealer, and being long importuned by the magistrates of this native place with exactions beyond his means, and having for this reason borrowed a great sum of money, and being asked for this and not being able to meet his liabilities, he was compelled by his creditors to sell all that he had, even to the garments that cover his shame; and when these were sold, scarcely could he get together the half of the money for his creditors, who, these pitiless and godless men, carried off all his children, being yet quite in their infancy. Wherefore we direct to you this letter, requesting you to help him to the extent of your power, that he may recover them from them. P.S. [So will you be?] sons of our Heavenly Father. P.P.S.... by all means help him, since. . . our brother, because they carried off his children into slavery. Therefore do not neglect the [matter?, speedily?] by all means.' (Addressed) 'Deliver to Paieous, priest, from brother Herieous.,

#### APPENDIX 10

P. London 6. 1916.

'To the all-holy, beloved, and most sweet Paieous, priest, and Dioscorus and Hierax and. . . and Apa Sourous and all the brethren and all them that are with you by name, Moses [and Herieous?] the most humble among you, greeting in the Lord. First making obeisance to you, beloved patrons, we desire to [inform] you concerning this be[loved Pamonthius], that he is in great straits and has suffered shamefully at the hands of certain pitiless and godless men, that you too [may succour] him . . . from your superfluity to dwell in (?) the love which is in heaven. By all means then succour him without hesitation, because his creditors have

carried off his children into slavery; and if you hold this man as brother, join in giving help, beloved, because these straits have afflicted us exceedingly, and we ourselves will not shrink (from helping him). Whatever we could find we have given him; yea, we have done even beyond our means. Whatsoever you can collect in money pay it over, and write to me of what you have given, that we may know for certain, that we may have assurance, since he owes much, very much money. See that you do not neglect, beloved, since our brother will fall into so great straits. I pray for your health... P.S. Show then the love and compassion that are native to you and the affection of your fatherliness. P.P.S. I write to you then, brother Paieous, [to inform you of?] these straits, to the end that [you may] by all means [help him?] and appoint. . . for him among the brethren, to the end that they may give. . . ; for I know that they. . . much. . . And dispatch to the brethren. . . I have written to you. Whatsoever [you can collect?] among the neighbouring brethren secure and place it under seal. I have taken him on bail from the soldiers for five hundred talents capital and interest 800 talents.'

#### APPENDIX 11

P. London 6. 1917.

'To the most genuine and most enlightened, most blessed, beloved and in God's keeping and filled with the Holy Ghost and most valued in the sight of the Lord God, Apa Paieous, greeting in our Master Jesus Christ. Before all things I pray for prosperity for you with the Lord God. This our letter I wrote on this papyrus that you might read it with joy and with most secure peace from the Holy Ghost and with cheerfulness in God's keeping and with entertainment of long-suffering filled with the Holy Ghost. To you then I write,

most genuine and most secure in the sight of the Lord God Apa Paieou, that you may lift up your hands to our Master God, in the semblance of a cross, . . . in God's keeping for me the humble and wretched and unworthy to behold the light of the sun, that God may [annul] the bond of my sins by your most secure, most holy prayers. I desire you then to know, most genuine and most blessed one, that when we were in the Island of Memphis with the most holy brethren, they,... and Apa C...s and Apa Orsenuphius and Apa Sourous and Apa Pebe and Paul the priest of Teenis and Antinous [and?...]us son of Touan the son of Ouenaphriusn and Apa Megalonymus, made concerning me the covenant in God's keeping, excellent and blessed of the Holy Ghost, that you (?) shall hand me over to Apa Sourous, to his cell. Land I abode, being tempted, in the vegetable garden, and I abode there till Phamenothi, and so soon as I went out I departed to the..., and now there has befallen me a diabolical transgression. By all means therefore, beloved, most genuine, and most worthy in the sight of the Lord God, with zealous entertainment of the Holy Ghost in God's keeping, by night and day entreat God the Lord of all--they that are in the Son being in the Father, and he that is in the Father is in the Son--that he may restore me into your hands;... burnt offering of the Holy Ghost. And not only did I write this, but I wrote also to Apa Ammon and Apa... and Apa Pebe and to the Upper Country to Megalonymus for myself, I Horion, that they may lift up their most holy hands to God with all their hearts, in the semblance of a cross, and may not cut me off and may not [cast me out?], but to him to whom God is compassionate and merciful so do you too be compassionate and merciful, being zealous on my behalf to God. By all means then, beloved, write from cell to cell at Apa Sourous and to Apa Pebe, that they also may be merciful for me and may call upon God with zeal of the Holy Ghost in God's keeping, that so they too may write with zeal of their whole heart for me to the Upper Country from cell

to cell, enjoining (all) to pray for me... for me, that God will be long-suffering and merciful... with zeal... I greet you, blessed Apa Paieou... Apa Pebe... and all the brethren with you.'

## APPENDIX 12

P. London 6. 1918.

'To the most valued and beloved father Apa Paieous, Charisius very many greetings. Before all things I greet you much in the Lord; I greet Apa Dioscorus and Apa Tryphon and Apa Gerontius and Apa Hierax and the brethren with you by name; I greet Petnirius and Leonides and Petthubestius and Papnouthes and Apa Touan and Apa Panare; I greet Papnouthes of Antaeopolis and Colobus and the brethren by name. Knowing then your zeal, father Apa Paieous, for all the brethren, and especially myself, behold I have sent you dates, two artabae, and lentil meal, one artaba and upwards, and grapes, one cnidion, and sweet olives, one cnidion; and if you need anything send to me and do not neglect (?) the matters of which I told you; and if God will I hope to come to you speedily. Psalious and those that are with us greet all [who are with you?]. (Addressed) 'Deliver to Apa Paieoius, from Charisius.'

## APPENDIX 13

P. London 6. 1919.

'To our lord and brother Apa Paieous, Pennes, very many greetings in the Lord. Before all things I pray to the Lord God... I pray therefore to the ever-to-be-remembered God at all hours on your behalf and on behalf of the brethren in Christ; for indeed it is fitting that we make mention of each other in the Lord Christ for the health of both; and so doing we



shall be called Christians in Christ. This I have in my heart, that even though we were far from each other, (yet) in the faith of our ever-to-be-remembered God and Saviour [we are united?] and in him is our salvation, if we are by power of Christ with those who do his mighty power [sc. will?] and have jointly obtained the appellation [i.e. of Christians]. I greet you much and all the brethren by name that are with you. The blessed Paul greets you and the brethren with you, and all the brethren with us greet you with all the brethren with you. Your love which is trumpeted abroad was shown in all things, particularly that which was testified to us by Psais and Harpocras the fishermen, even as it is numbered among your other works of love. And doing this we shall be called fellows with Christ.'

#### APPENDIX 14

P. London 6. 1920.

'Hatre of Tmoumpahom it is that writes (to) his father Paeiew of P-hathor, greeting him much. In the Lord hail. I greet my father Patabeit; I greet the little Paeiew and all the brethren that are with you, according to their names; I greet Hor of Tohe and his mother Helene and her children. I greet you (plur.) much in the Lord, desiring to see your face as it were the face of angels. Seeing that I spoke, then, to you, on the day when you came to us, respecting the fashion of a cloak; so now, if it be possible, make it according to your wish (?) [.....] ... I send it when you shall come. And... whatever you shall spend thereon. He that [shall bring] this letter to you, the same [shall take] it (sc. the cloak) to you. Again if you wish, [.....] ... But as to the fashion of the shoes, [.....] make them; there has not been means [that I] should make them, for there has been a little sickness. If you make it (sc. the cloak) and you find a brother about to come, send it, or give it to Pahbew. See, an oipe of dried

grapes have I given to Pahbew... [.....]. I know indeed that you are a good (?) man, but have mind of me also and pray for me. Farewell in the Lord and do you (plur.) have mind of me also.

Verso. 'Give it to Paiew the confessor, form Ha[tres].'

#### APPENDIX 15

P. London 6. 1921.

'Pets..... Paieu.

In the Lord hail! Before [all] things [I] give thanks unto God because of your (?) [.....], since you are a man most (?) blessed.... and zealous in your good (?) works (inspired) of God, so that..... with joy because of your faith [and] your love that you have toward every one. We are glad a little because of your [manner (? of life)], since you are a soldier of Christ; even as the Lord said in the ....., "No one that is a soldier mixeth (himself) in the affairs of [this] life" and "the husbandman that laboureth, [he] it is [taketh] of his (sic) fruit the first." We believe Him (?), that thus it shall be fulfilled toward (?) every one that labours. And we are glad because of..... For the scripture saith, "Whosoever believeth on Him shall not be put to shame." So now, my father and my beloved, do you (?) remember me in [your] holy prayers. Isidore greets [you]. I greet Apa Tryphon, I greet..... Hierax and the other brother that is with him. I greet (and) I do obeisance to Dioscorus. And now I have sent you fifteen..... and other six by (?) Megalonymus, who desires (?) that you should know that Apa Megalonymus.....; for if he had sold (?) (them), he would have sent them, with those that you (already) have. But he greets you and (so do) all [those] that are with him. I greet you [and] all [those with] you, according to their names. [Fare you well], I pray, in the Lord God,

most blessed [and] most [saintly] father.'

Verso. 'From Paieous (son) of Dikaïos.'

#### APPENDIX 16

P. London 6. 1922.

'Bes and Aphinge it is that write to... and all the brethren. They greet you, our father. Seeing how you went forth from us (saying), "I am coming north," we are grown weary expecting that you should come. You have not come with (?) the cloak and the napkin. [We] sent them to Chariton (saying that he should) give them to you. And seeing you I said regarding the two artabas of lentils that [were to be?] bought, have a care for the two artabas of olives; send them to me (?)... with (?) the cloak of... on account of (?)... of his... and yours. We greet Apa Pshen... and those with him, and Hele[ne. The (?) napkins we have sent to Horior the... (of) Chariton, (saying that he should give them to you. We greet... and those with him. We greet T... and his brother. If you have in hand... of dates, send them. And... fetch them (?). Thirty-two lengths (?) of... make them (?) at the price [of] the small... [send?] them to us, if we can do according... you. All the brethren greet [you?].... something to get (?). Write...

(Verso).... But if... If he... what you said..., let (?) the answer reach us.'

#### APPENDIX 17

BM 2724.

Crum, JEA 13 (1927): 19-26.

"Timotheus that writeth unto his beloved....., brother (?) - loving, righteousness-loving..... who beareth...; who hath renounced worldly things, looking toward things heavenly; who hath [renounced] things that perish, looking toward things imperishable; who humbleth himself unto such as be unworthy of him because of the height of heaven; who forgiveth the sins of his children because of God's mercy; who forgiveth the trespasses of his brethren (?) because of the seventy-times seven; who forgiveth the debts of his..... because of the word of the Gospel. so now, my father, I write unto thee, beseeching thee; for when I quitted thee thou wast grieved because of the lie that I had told. So now I would have thee know that I told it not intending deception, but I told it because of human shame. For God knoweth, that shall give..... of men whether Yea or Nay. I beseech [thee], then,..... for]give the sins... because of [the word? of the Gos]pel(?)[....."

#### APPENDIX 18

P. Clarendon Press no. 50, Fol. 2.

Crum, IEA 13 (1927): 19-26.

"...ordain clerics to dioceses other than their (the bishops') own. But this is naught else than biting and devouring one another and destroying one another, unless they cease to do this thing. For from unlawfulness such as this come strife and envy and irritation, thereafter causes of disruption. Whereby not the churches alone are upset, but the monasteries likewise; for them also hath the aforesaid recklessness attained to. And who is it hath enjoined this thing upon them, or from what scripture have they been taught this? They will not be able to answer, for they have naught to say. But rather they do this for gain, being enticed and

beguiled through their own lusts. For everything standeth in a right (lit. good) order and each created thing abideth even as it hath been set, as it is written: the sun knoweth his place of going down and the moon doth hold the governance of the night, overstepping not his limits; and for the waters likewise He hath set a limit which they may not exceed, according to the Psalmist's words, nor may they return to cover the earth. And the mountains hath he measured with a measure and the valleys with a balance; the body, even as Paul saith, hath God compounded, having given greater honour unto the (part) which lacketh, so that there be therein no schism, but that the members should have care one for another. So then, seeing that all creatures are rightly ordered and there is none interfereth with his neighbour, neither seize they on the business one of another, but that the affairs of the churches (likewise) have their own allotted-parts - how is it now a shameful thing which the priests do, or how shall not any one justly blame us, if we observe not the limits that have been set us? But not such was Paul; for after that he had fulfilled the ministry that had been committed unto him, he boasted and taught us, that we might have profit. For he writeth to the Corinthians, saying: 'I will not boast.'"

#### APPENDIX 19

##### Excerpts from Athanasius' Festal Letter 39.

1. The Melitians have fabricated books which they call books of tables, in which they show stars, to which they give the names of Saints. And therein of a truth they have inflicted on themselves a double reproach: those who have written such books, because they have perfected themselves in a lying and contemptible science; and as to the ignorant and simple, they have led them astray by evil thoughts concerning the right faith established in all truth

and upright in the presence of God.

2. But since we have made mention of heretics as dead, but of ourselves as possessing the Divine Scriptures for salvation; and since I fear lest, as Paul wrote to the Corinthians, some few of the simplicity and purity, by the subtilty of certain men, and should henceforth read other books—those called apocryphal—led astray by the similarity of their names with the true books; I beseech you to bear patiently, if I also write, by way of remembrance, of matters with which you are acquainted, influenced by the need and advantage of the Church.

6. These are fountains of salvation, that they who thirst may be satisfied with the living words they contain. In these alone is proclaimed the doctrine of godliness. Let no man add to these, neither let him take ought from these. For concerning these the Lord put to shame the Sadducees, and said, 'Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures.' And He reproved the Jews, saying, 'Search the Scriptures, for these are they that testify of Me.'

7. But for greater exactness I add this also, writing of necessity; that there are other books besides these not indeed included in the Canon, but appointed by the Fathers to be for instruction in the word of godliness. The Wisdom of Solomon, and the Wisdom of Sirach, and Esther, and Judith, and Tobit, and that which is called the Teaching of the Apostles, and the Shepherd. But the former, my brethren, are included in the Canon, the latter being [merely] read; nor is there in any place a mention of apocryphal writings. But they are an invention of heretics, who write them when they choose, bestowing upon them their approbation, and assigning to them a date, that so, using them as ancient writings, they may find occasion to lead astray the simple.

## APPENDIX 20

Athanasius Historia Arianorum 78-9.

78. This was an easy proposition for the Meletians to comply with; for the greater part, or rather the whole of them, have never had a religious education, nor are they acquainted with the "sound faith" in Christ, nor do they know at all what Christianity is, or what writings we Christians possess. For having come out, some of them from the worship of idols, and others from the senate, or from the first civil offices, for the sake of the miserable exemption from duty and for the patronage they gained, and having bribed the Meletians who preceded them, they have been advanced to this dignity even before they had been under instruction. And even if they pretended to have been such, yet what kind of instruction is to be obtained among the Meletians? But indeed without even pretending to be under instruction, they came at once, and immediately were called Bishops, just as children receive a name. Being then persons of this description, they thought the thing of no great consequence, nor even supposed that piety was different from impiety. Accordingly from being Meletians they readily and speedily became Arians; and if the emperor should command them to adopt any other profession, they are ready to change again to that also. Their ignorance of true godliness quickly brings them to submit to the prevailing folly, and that which happens to be first taught them. For it is nothing to them to be carried about by every wind and tempest, so long as they are only exempt from duty, and obtain the patronage of men; nor would they scruple probably to change again to what they were before, even to become such as they were when they were heathens. Any how, being men of such an easy temper, and considering the Church as a civil senate, and like heathen, being idolatrously minded, they put on the honourable name of the Saviour, under which they polluted the whole

of Egypt, by causing so much as the name of the Arian heresy to be known therein. For Egypt has heretofore been the only country, throughout which the profession of the orthodox faith was boldly maintained; and therefore these misbelievers have striven to introduce jealousy there also, or rather not they, but the devil who has stirred them up, in order that when his herald Anti-christ shall come, he may find that the Churches in Egypt also are his own, and that the Meletians have already been instructed in his principles, and may recognise himself as already formed in them.

79. Such is the effect of that iniquitous order which was issued by Constantius. On the part of the people there was displayed a ready alacrity to submit to martyrdom, and an increased hatred of this most impious heresy; and yet lamentations for their Churches, and groans burst from all, while they cried unto the Lord, "Spare Thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage unto Thine enemies to reproach; but make haste to deliver us out of the hand of the lawless. For behold, they have not spared Thy servants, but are preparing the way of Antichrist." For the Meletians will never resist him, nor will they care for the truth, nor will they esteem it an evil thing to deny Christ. They are men who have not approached the word with sincerity; like the chameleon they assume every various appearance; they are hirelings of any who will make use of them. They make not the truth their aim, but prefer before it their present pleasure; they say, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." Such a profession and faithless temper is more worthy of Epicritian players than of Meletians.

#### APPENDIX 21

Shenoute Contra Melitianos.

Guerin ed. transl. mine.



We are speaking in the fear of God concerning the boldness of those who celebrate the eucharist (mystery) without fear or trembling. For what fear do they have of God, these infidels, these men who carry out the sacrament into the cemeteries or other places, 13, 14 or even 18 times in a single day! And in addition to these things, they regard the sacred body of our Lord and his blessed blood as food and drink (for the body). And they gather together for the orgy, yes the orgy, namely these wild beasts; the Melitians. They are polluted and so is everyone who is like them in every place. And many of us have been taught by them in these things, because they obey men rather than God. They allow the people, anyone and everyone to bear the sacrament. They deceive us, these insane men who serve these things which are foolish. How many times have they carried the offering there? Again, they have prepared the drink (eucharistic cup or libation) of this sort up to many times in a day not only until they are drunk, but in reality, as far as I know, until they have thrown up. I also know as a fact, they have used the eucharistic bread on occasion to satisfy their love for food, these men whose God is their belly, and who glory in their shame. These men who dream of earthly and human things instead of divine and heavenly things. The holy apostle gave us this instruction with fear he cried out in great power [I Cor 11:28-30]. These are the mindless and lazy persons who deviate from what is right and tell those who are also hardened by this error, "if you sin many times a day, take the eucharistic bread and your sins will be forgiven." Shenoute.

What are these other evil things which come out of the mouths of these lying brothers. I am revealing these things so that every one might know it.

Those who say blasphemously, "we must not carry the eucharistic bread on Sunday," these are the new Jews, heretics and false prophets, who are like foxes in their deserts,

according as it is written about them, "woe unto those who prophesy according to their own hearts, they have no prophetic vision whatsoever." These are the ones who deceive themselves and others with what they write. I say do not follow them at all. We have never heard of such a thing, that Christians continued about carrying the eucharistic bread on the days of honor (holy days; martyrs' festivals?) in such a way that men would have to rest from their participation there. As a result those who give this harmful teaching have injured the souls of many brothers and sisters, unfortunate and uninformed persons.

Praise be to heaven that a holy synod has handled these problems so that one can acquaint the uninformed with that which is ordained in the canons of our father, from the beginning. Those who deceive them are those to whom the demons have spoken. The serpent, who at the beginning chased men from Paradise, has perverted and assimilated them. But they are worse than the serpent who is on their lips, that is their doctrine which they profess, is the doctrine of an unclean spirit. Satan has therefore become a serpent and ever since that moment he has entered into this beast for deceiving souls. Men have become vessels of impurity, heretics, vessels of debauchery, prepared for perdition. Shenoute -- Amen.

## APPENDIX 22

Theodoret Haereticar Fabular Compendium 4. 7.

PG 83. 361-2, transl. mine.

### Concerning the Melitians in Egypt.

In Alexandria of Egypt, at the time that Arius began to blaspheme against the Only Begotten, a certain bishop named Melitius rose up against the leadership of Bishop Alexander the Great. He (Melitius) ordained bishops, presbyters and deacons in many cities although he

did not rule the new heresy. But the one who understand these things (which took place) in the church, is the one who admits that the incident shows his (Melitius') love for power. When the holy fathers of the church convened together at Nicaea, they withstood this one's spiritual leadership. They stripped away the ordination of the ones who had been ordained by him because he illegally appointed them. As a result, the Melitian schism in Egypt was (temporarily) reunited (into the church). But indeed that one (Melitius) instituted none of the godly decisions. And these saw the heresy of Arius at that time confirming itself (strengthening its political connections), so unto these they (the Melitians) turned aside. And now he (Melitius) said to these ones (his followers) to depart from this sickness (the Arians) and to separate unto themselves. Not wishing to be ruled by the others (the catholics) they even avoided union with the church. On account of these things, as self-ruled ones they devised certain things that are a derision. (They) set aside certain days to cleanse the body with ritual washings and to compose hymns for certain dances accompanied by the clapping of hands and many bells on a certain evil ornamentation are set in motion, and even other such things which are similar to these (are done on these days). And after he gave grace to them, that great one Athanasius, by being violent, brought (them) to an end.

## SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

Apophthegmata Patrum. Translated by Owen Chadwick in Western Asceticism. Library of Christian Classics XII, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1958.

Athanasius. Select Works and Letters. Vol. 4 NPNF Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1898.

Baker, Derek, ed. Schism, Heresy and Religious Protest. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972.

Barnard, L. W. "The Antecedents of Arius." Vigiliae Christianae 24 (1970): 172-88.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Athanasius and the Meletian Schism in Egypt." Journal of Egyptian Archaeology 59 (1973): 181-89.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Some Notes on the Meletian Schism in Egypt." Studia Patristica 21 (1971): 399-405.

Barnes, T. D. Constantine and Eusebius. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Emperor and Bishops, A. D. 324-344: Some Problems." American Journal of Ancient History 3.1 (1978): 53-76.

\_\_\_\_\_. The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine. Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1982.

Barns, J. and Henry Chadwick. "A Letter Ascribed to Peter of Alexandria." Journal of Theological Studies 24 (1973): 443- 55.

Baynes, N. H. "The Great Persecution." in the Cambridge Ancient History Volume 12: Imperial Crisis. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Two Notes on the Great Persecution." Classical Quarterly 18 (1924): 189-93.

Bell, David. Besa: The Life of Shenoute. Cistercian Publication 73; Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publ., 1983.

Bell, H. I. "Athanasius : A Chapter in Church History." Congregational Quarterly 3 (1925): 175-6.

\_\_\_\_\_. Cults and Creeds in Graeco-Roman Egypt. Chicago: Ares Publ. Inc., 1957.

- \_\_\_\_\_. Egypt From Alexander to the Arab Conquest. Chicago: Ares Publ., 1980.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Jews and Christians in Egypt. London: The Britism Museum, 1924; repr. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1972.
- Bowman, Alan K. "The economy of Egypt in the earlier fourth century." Imperial Revenue, Expenditure and Monetary Policy in the Fourth Century A. D. Edited by C. E. King British Archaeological Reports, International Series 76; 1980.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Egypt after the Pharaohs: 332 B.C.- A.D. 642. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Landholding in the Hermopolite Nome in the fourth century." Journal of Roman Studies 75 (1985): 137-63.
- Brooks, E. W. "The Ordination of the Early Bishops of Alexandria." Journal of Theological Studies 2 (1901): 612- 13.
- Brown, P. R. L. "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity." Journal of Roman Studies 61 (1971): 80-101.
- Browne, G. M. "Griffith's 'Nicene Canons.'" Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists 20.3-4 (1983): 97-112.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Town, Village and Holy Man: The Case of Syria." in Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982; pp. 153-65.
- Case, Robert A. II. "Will the Real Athanasius Please Stand Up?" Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 19.4 (1976): 283-95.
- Chadwick, H. The Early Church. New York: Penguin, 1967.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Role of the Christian Bishop in Ancient Society. Berkeley: Center for Hermeneutical Studies, 1980.
- \_\_\_\_\_. History and Thought of the Early Church. London: Variorum Reprints, 1982.
- Crum, W. E. Catalogue of Coptic Manuscripts in the British Museum. London: The British Museum, 1905.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Der Papytuscodex saec. VI-VII der Phillippsbibliothek in Cheltenham. Strassburg: Karl J. Trübner, 1915.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Some further Meletian Documents." Journal of Egyptian Archaeology

13 (1927): 19-26.

- \_\_\_\_\_. Theological Texts from Coptic Papyri Anecdota Oxoniensia Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913.
- Delehay, H. "Les Martyrs d'Egypte." Analecta Bollandiana 40 (1922): 5-154 and 150-66.
- Epiphanius. Panarion Haeresium. Vol. III. Edited by K. Holl. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1985.
- Eusebius. The Ecclesiastical History and the Martyrs of Palestine. Edited by H. J. Lawlor and J. E. L. Oulton. London: Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, 1927.
- Evetts, B. ed. transl. Severus. History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria Patrologia Orientalis Vols. I Fasc. 4 and V Fasc. 1.
- Foakes-Jackson, F. J. "Meletianism." Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics. Edited J. Hastings, London: T. & T. Clark, 1915; 8. 538-9.
- Frend, W. H. C. The Donatist Church. London: Oxford University Press, 1952.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Heresy and Schism as Social and National Movements." in Schism, Heresy and Religious Protest. Edited by Derek Baker. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church. London: Basil Blackwell, 1965.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Religion Popular and Unpopular in the Early Christian Centuries. London: Variorum Reprints, 1976.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Rise of Christianity. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Town and Country in the Early Christian Centuries. London: Variorum Reprints, 1980.
- Godron, Gérard. Textes Coptes Relatifs à Saint Claude d'Antioche. CSCO 35 Fasc. 4 no. 166, 1970.
- Greenslade, S. L. Schisms in the Early Church. New York: Harper and Row, 1953.
- Gregg, Robert C. ed. Arianism. Cambridge: Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1985.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Athanasius: the Life of Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus. New York: Paulist Press, 1980.

- Gregg, R. C. and Groh, D. Early Arianism. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981.
- Griggs, Charles Wilfred. "The History of Christianity in Egypt to 451 A. D." Ph. D. Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley.
- Guerin, Henri. "Sermons inedits de Senouti." Revue égyptologique 10 (1902): 148-64.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Sermons inedits de Senouti." Revue égyptologique 11 (1905): 15-34.
- Hardy, E. R. Christian Egypt: Church and People. New York: Oxford University Press, 1952.
- Harris, B. F. and Pickering, S. R. "The Evidence of Papyri for Early Christianity in Egypt." Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt II.22 Edited by H. Temporini and W. Haase, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, forthcoming.
- Hauben, H. "The Melitians in P. London VI (P. Jews) 1914: The Problem of Papas Heraiscus." Proceedings of the XVI Int. Congr. of Papyrology (Chico: Ca.: Scholars Press, 1981), pp. 447-56.
- Hefele, C. J. and Leclercq, H. Histoire des Conciles. Paris: Letouzey et Ane, 1907.
- Helgeland, John. "The Transformation of Christianity into Roman Religion." in Traditions in Contact and Change. Edited by Slater and Wiebe. Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1983.
- Heussi, Karl. Der Ursprung des Mönchtums. Tübingen: Mohr, 1936; repr. Aalen: Scentia, 1981.
- Holl, K. "Die Bedeutung der neuveröffentlichten melitianischen Urkund für die Kirchengeschichte." Gesammelte Aufsätze: Der Osten, Halbband ii, Tübingen, 1928.
- Jones, A. H. M. The Cities of the Eastern Roman Empire. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1937.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Later Roman Empire: 284-602. A Social, Economic and Administrative Survey. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964.
- Jones, A. H. M.; Martindale, J. R. and Morris, J. Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire I: 260-395. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971.
- Judge, E. A. "The Earliest Use of Monachos for 'monk' (P. Coll. Youtie 1977) and the Origins of Monasticism." Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum 20 (1977):

72-89.

- \_\_\_\_\_. "Fourth Century Monasticism in the Papyri." in the Proceedings of the XVI International Congress of Papyrology. Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1981; pp. 613-20.
- \_\_\_\_\_. and Pickering, S. R. "Papyrus Documentation of Church and Community in Egypt to the Mid-Fourth Century." Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum 20 (1977): 47-71.
- Kemp, E. W. "Bishops and Presbyters at Alexandria." Journal of Ecclesiastical History 6 (1955): 125-42.
- Kettler, F. H. "Der melitianische Streit in Aegypten." Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche 35 (1936): 155-93.
- Kidd, B. J. A History of the Church. London: Oxford University, 1922.
- Lefort, L. T. S. Athanase: Lettres Festales et Pastorales en copte. Corpus scriptorum christianorum orientalium 150. Louvain: Durberg, 1955.
- Leipoldt, J. Schenute von Atripe und die Entstehung des nationalägyptischen Christentums. Texte und Untersuchungen 25/1. Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1903.
- Liou, Samuel N. C. Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985.
- MacGregor, Geddes. The Nicene Creed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980.
- MacMullen, R. Christianizing the Roman Empire A. D. 100-400. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Roman Governments' Response to Crisis. New Haven: Yale Press, 1976.
- Martin, Annik. "Athanase et les Mélitiens (325-335)." in Politique et Théologie chez Athanase d'Alexandrie. Actes du Colloque de Chantilly, 23-25 septembre 1973. Edited by C. Kannengriessers. Paris: Beauchesne, 1974; pp. 31-61.
- Milne, J. G. "Egyptian Nationalism under Greco-Roman Rule." Journal of Egyptian Archaeology 14 (1928): 226-34.
- Musurillo, Herbert. The Acts of the Christian Martyrs. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972.
- Orlandi, T. "A Catechesis Against Apochryphal Texts by Shenute and the Gnostic



- Texts of Nag Hammadi." Harvard Theological Review 75 (1982): 85-95.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Shenute Contro gli Origenisti. Rome: CIM, 1985.
- Pearson, Birger A. and Goehring, James E., eds. The Roots of Egyptian Christianity. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986.
- Pelikan, Jaroslav. The Christian Tradition: A History of Development of Doctrine, I: The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition 100-600. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974.
- Riedell, W. and W. E. Crum. The Canons of Athanasius. London: Text and Translation Society, 1904; repr. Amsterdam: Philo, 1973.
- Roberts, Colin H. Manuscript, Society, and Belief in Early Christian Egypt. London: Oxford University Press, 1979.
- Rousseau, P. Ascetics, Authority, and the Church in the Age of Jerome and Cassian. London: Oxford University Press, 1978.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Pachomius. The Making of a Community in Fourth Century Egypt. Berkley: University of California Press, 1985.
- Sayce, A. H. "Deux contrats grecs du Fayoum." Revue des études grecques 3 (1890): 131-44.
- Schwartz, Edouard. Gesammelte Schriften. Berlin, 1959.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Zur Geschichte des Athanasius," Nachrichten von der Gessellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Goettingen (Phil.-hist.-Klasse) (1905): 164-87.
- Socrates. Ecclesiastical History. London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, 1844.
- Sozomon. Ecclesiastical History. London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, 1844.
- Ste Croix, G. E. M. de. "Aspects of the 'Great' Persecution." Harvard Theological Review 47 (1954): 75-113.
- Stevenson, James. Creeds, Councils and Controversies. London, 1981.
- \_\_\_\_\_. A New Eusebius. London: SPCK, 1963.
- Telfer, W. "The Codex Verona LX (58)." Harvard Theological Review 48 (1955): 227-37.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Episcopal Succession in Egypt." Journal of Ecclesiastical History 3 (1952): 1-13.

- \_\_\_\_\_. "Meletius of Lycopolis and Episcopos Succession in Egypt." Harvard Theological Review 46 (1955): 227-37.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "St. Peter of Alexandria and Arius." Analecta Bollandiana 67 (1949): 117-30.
- Theodoret. Ecclesiastical History. London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, 1844.
- Veilleux, Armand. Pachomian Koinonia: The Lives, Rules and Other Writings of Saint Pachomius and His Disciples. 3 Volumes. Cistercian Studies Series 45, 46, 47; Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publ., 1980-82.
- Vivian, Timothy. St. Peter Bishop of Alexandria. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987.
- Williams, R. "Arius and the Meletian Schism [codex veronensis 60]." Journal of Theological Studies ns37,1 (ap 1986): 35-52.
- Williams, Stephen. Diocletian and the Roman Recovery. New York: Methuen, 1985.
- Zoega, G. Catalogus codicum Copticorum manu scriptorum. Hildesheim/New York: Olms, 1973.