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Vignette:

Gold coin of King Aphilas, early third century CE, as drawn by A. Luegmeyer after the coin in Rennau collection. Weight 2.48 grams, diameter 17 mm.

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The journal focuses on philology, linguistics, archaeology, history, cultural anthropology, religion, philosophy, literature, and manuscript studies with a regional emphasis on Eritrea, Ethiopia, the Horn of Africa, and related areas. The editors welcome contributions on relevant academic topics as well as on recent research in the respective field. Each issue of AETHIOPICA contains reviews of books which form a substantial section of the journal.

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Editorial

The present issue of AETHIOPICA is the twenty-fifth since the journal's founding in 1998. It is also the thirteenth issue I have worked on as editor-in-chief, one more than that of founder Siegbert Uhlig. The present time, however, does not lend itself to celebrations of any sort. The global political crisis and the situation in the Horn of Africa are having a deep impact on the scholarly community, which appears divided and radicalized on opposite or increasingly diverging positions as never before. The growing influence of diaspora communities is at times marked by waves of resurgent nationalism. The challenge posed by main-stream policy in countries of established scholarly traditions gives less and less space to small fields—as is the case of Ethiopian and Eritrean studies. The consequent lack of resources triggers the fragmentation of the scholarly scene. New balances based on mutual legitimation and acknowledgement of a common scholarly method are not obvious. The consequence of this complex situation, which reflects global changes, is that scholarly and academic freedom can be put at risk. Of all priorities envisaged in the mission of AETHIOPICA, preservation of academic freedom along with scholarly quality has been, is, and will remain the top priority of the journal.

I regret that in the past, and still now, the lack of available qualified authors has prevented AETHIOPICA from duly commemorating distinct colleagues and researchers recently passed away who were more than deserving of an obituary. I would like to remember at least some of them here, by name, as a very modest tribute to their work and memory: Johannes Launhardt (1929–2019), Mesfin Wolde Mariam (1930–2020), Steffen Wenig (1934–2022), Girma Fisseha (1941–2020).

To end on a positive note, three colleagues active in Ethiopian and Eritrean studies have received important awards this year, and we would like to mention them here: Samantha Kelly (Professor of Medieval History at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, also on our International Editorial Board), has won the Choice Outstanding Academic Title 2020, and the African Studies Review Prize for the Best Africa-focused Anthology or Edited Collection 2021, for her *A Companion to Medieval Ethiopia and Eritrea* (Leiden–Boston, MA: Brill, 2020); Verena Krebs (Junior-Professorin für Mittelalterliche Kulturräume at Ruhr-Universität Bochum) has received the Dan David Prize for her *Medieval Ethiopian Kingship, Craft, and Diplomacy with Latin Europe* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021); and Massimo Zaccaria (Professore Associato in Storia e Istituzioni dell'Africa at Università degli Studi di Pavia) has received the Giorgio Maria Sangiorgi award of the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei 'per la Storia ed Etnologia dell'Africa'. To all of them—the warmest congratulations from AETHIOPICA!

ኑ ፡ የነበረውን ፡ የአካባቢው ፡ ሁኔታ ፡ ማለትም ፡ ማሳበረሰባዊ ፡ አወቃቀርና ፡ አደረጃጀት ፡ ሃይማኖትና ፡ ፖለቲካ ፡ ለማወቅ ፡ ይረዳል ። በአርትዖት ፡ የተሰናዳው ፡ ጽሑፍ ፡ የእንግሊዝኛ ፡ ትርጉሙ ፡ የግርጌ ፡ ማብራሪያና ፡ ትንታኔው ፡ ጎንደር ፡ በተደጋጋሚ ፡ ከተመዘበረኛና ፡ ከተቃጠለኛ ፡ በኋላና ፡ በዘመናዊነቷ ፡ ዋዜማ ፡ የነበረውን ፡ የጎንደሮች ፡ የታሪክ ፡ አረዳድ ፡ ያሳያል ።

LEAH MASCIA, *The Transition from Traditional Cults to the Affirmation of Christian Beliefs in the City of Oxyrhynchus*, PhD Dissertation in Egyptology, Faculty of Humanities at Universität Hamburg, defended on 23 May 2022.

This dissertation aimed at reconstructing the religious panorama of the Egyptian city of Oxyrhynchus (modern el-Bahnasa) during its transition phase from Pharaonic and Greco-Roman cults to the affirmation of Christianity (second–fourth centuries), establishing a dialogue between textual and archaeological evidence. Oxyrhynchus has been at the centre of scholarly attention for over a century. Its importance resides in the discovery of over half a million papyrus texts within this ancient site’s rubbish dumps, which provide detailed information on the history of its inhabitants during the Greco-Roman and Byzantine periods. However, the extraordinary importance of the collected Greek papyri has inevitably overshadowed texts in other languages, especially Egyptian, whose importance remains essential for a clear understanding of this city’s religious history. Furthermore, predominant interest in the papyrological documentation has also resulted in the absence of the adequate publication of numerous written artefacts other than papyri, associated with various ritual practices, now dispersed in countless museum collections and research institutions. Alongside this extraordinary textual documentation, the archaeological investigations carried out over the last decades are now shedding new light on the ancient city’s religious and funerary landscape. This wealth of textual and archaeological evidence makes Oxyrhynchus a unique case study for comprehending the complex dynamics, leading to the transition from the traditional cults to Christianity. This research inevitably began evaluating the papyrological documentation published thus far, in particular over six hundred documentary, literary, and para-literary texts dating from between the second and the fourth centuries. Aside from the Greek documentation, the examination of texts in other languages (i.e. Egyptian, Latin, Nabataean, Hebrew) to determine the continuity of the native tradition and the social role held by other communities present in this city has been essential. Furthermore, this study has offered a detailed analysis of a corpus of published

and unpublished religious, magical, and funerary artefacts preserved not on papyri but other materials. These feature texts in various languages, many of which were collected by the author in the course of lengthy investigations in American and European museum collections and research institutions. Alongside the materials examined during this ‘museum archaeology’ activity the evaluation of various written artefacts discovered during recent archaeological investigations has been highlighted. All the information provided by the textual documentation has been subsequently integrated into the study of the archaeological context, which has benefited from the examination of the notes and photographic documentation, partly unpublished, by the scholars who excavated Oxyrhynchus between the late nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. Furthermore, the thirty years of excavations carried out on this site by the Universitat de Barcelona’s mission, of which the writer is an active member since the 2020 excavation campaign, is taken into consideration. The integration of the textual and archaeological documentation has made it possible to offer a new perspective on the religious history of Oxyrhynchus during its long transition to Christianity. Whereas previous studies often present Oxyrhynchus as largely a Hellenized centre, it has been possible to demonstrate the contrary and show the central role Egyptian culture held until the late antique period. Indeed, the Egyptian temples of Oxyrhynchus clearly continued to exercise a profound influence over the local society. Thoeiris and her main sanctuary, the Great Thoeireion, dominated this city’s varied and vivid religious landscape until Late Antiquity. Due to contemporary papyrological documentation, it has been possible to reconstruct the names, religious offices, private, administrative, and ritual activities of the temple personnel primarily in this sanctuary and the minor temples of Thoeiris until the middle of the fourth century. Furthermore, it has been possible to determine the principal activities and means of subsistence of these religious institutions throughout the Roman phase. It can now be demonstrated how, at least until the second century CE, numerous literary, ritual, and scholastic texts were produced in Egyptian, namely in Demotic, hieroglyphic, and hieratic scripts. This evidence appears to reveal the existence of a temple *scriptorium* (perhaps a ‘House of Life’), probably associated with the Great Thoeireion of Oxyrhynchus. Further evidence supporting the notion of the native culture’s long continuity is provided by investigations of the temple-catacomb of Osiris, appearing to prove that the sanctuary experienced a new phase of prosperity in the second century, most probably due to the promotion of the cult of Osiris-Antinous by the will of Emperor Hadrian. Moreover, evidence provided by the excavations of the local necropolises, references to funerary priests and necropolis workers in the papyrological documentation, and the examination of numerous inscribed funerary artefacts (i.e. mummy labels, textiles, coffins) prove the existence of a well-organized funerary workshop until the beginning of the fourth century.

Despite the persecutions of the local Jewish community recorded in second-century papyri, the information provided by administrative documents and the lively production of literary and ritual texts in Greek and Hebrew dating from the third and fourth centuries demonstrates that in this phase the local Jewish community performed their liturgical services and celebrated their festivals in the local synagogue. However, aside from several literary texts dating most likely from the late second century, it is only in the third century that a slow emergence of the Christian community is traceable. Administrative documents began to record the presence of Christian places of cult, letters, and reports citing individuals in service to the local Christian religious institutions. Many papyri also witness a rich production of literary, liturgical, and scholastic texts. The wealth of documents gained from this period, which include manuscripts of varying qualities and formats, perhaps indicates the presence of a *scriptorium* in Oxyrhynchus, at least from the end of the third century. While the documentation in Greek is certainly predominant, the emergence of the Coptic language is evidenced in the fourth century, testified by the production of letters, contracts, and even ritual texts. The linguistic and material heterogeneity of the fourth-century Christian manuscripts in particular provides further insights into the vivacious production and circulation of texts used in liturgical and educational settings and domestic contexts. The number of Coptic literary texts dating from this phase is indeed significant, seeming to indicate the beginning of local production, alongside that in Greek language. In the same historical phase, changes can be detected in the managing of the city's necropolises as embalmers and necropolis workers disappear and it is noted that older funerary monuments undergo crude restoration. Embalming practices were replaced by treatments, which however appear to imitate the traditional techniques. Elements of continuity within the traditional funerary customs are evidenced by the fourth-century production of stelae, funerary textiles, and mummy labels in both Greek and Coptic script. Furthermore, the endurance of ancient practices is also to be seen in the composition of magical and divination texts, only marginally influenced by the Christian tradition which continues up to the end of this transitional phase.

In the dialogue between textual and archaeological evidence, the transition to Christianity at Oxyrhynchus emerges as a slow and fluid process. During this phase the affiliation to the Christian religion seems not to incur clear changes in religious and funerary customs. On the contrary, Christians most likely continued adopting embalming procedures, choosing the same funerary and magical rites, and perhaps even retaining their customary cultic habits for a long period without perceiving them to be at any odds with their religion.