Byzantine Egypt: urban élites and book production

HERWIG MAEHLER

This paper is in three parts, and I must begin with definitions. But first of all, let me emphasize that even in Egypt, which we like to think of as a fairly well explored part of the ancient world, there remains an enormous amount of research to be done when we take a closer look at the Byzantine period there.

I What do we mean here by 'Byzantine'? It seems generally agreed that 'Byzantine' begins with the time of Constantine, or from A.D. 330 when Byzantion was renamed Κωνσταντίνου πόλις and became the capital of the eastern half of the Empire. And when does it end ? As far as Egypt is concerned, not with the fall of Constantinople but much earlier: with the Arab invasion in 641, even though Greek continued in use for another two or three generations until it was gradually replaced by Coptic and later by Arabic. So the Byzantine period in Egypt is really only the early Byzantine period, just over three hundred years from Constantine to Heraclius.

My second definition will try to establish what one might call urban élites in Byzantine Egypt. It is tempting to quote the Apion and Strategios family here, but they are clearly not typical of the urban élite in Egypt, first of all because they owned such vast amounts of lands; in fact, their estates stretched over three districts or νομοί, the Oxyrhynchite, the Heracleopolite and the Arsinoite nomes in Middle Egypt. Moreover, the leading members of the Apiones and Strategioi clan were active not so much in the provincial capitals in Egypt as at the imperial court in Constantinople itself. If we are looking for a more modest but also more typical model of an upper middle-class family in a medium-sized town in Egypt, we might look at Dioskoros of Aphrodito (or Ἀφροδίτης κώμη) whose family papers survived in the ruins of his house.[1] They include not only documents and business or administrative correspondence, petitions and so on, written in the time of Justinian, but also a large number of poems in hexameters and in iambic trimeters, as well as a biography of Isocrates. In fact, Dioskoros is – to my

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knowledge – the only ancient poet known by name whose poems have come down to us in his own hand, as αὐτόγραφα, which is extremely interesting.[2] His poetic production, which has been conveniently collected in Heitsch,[3] is all the more remarkable as his first language seems to have been Egyptian, i.e. Coptic, not Greek. Sadly, his Greek poems are extremely bad – certainly if one applies the standards of classical poetry to which Greek poets in Egypt like Nonnus of Panopolis in the (?) fifth century still conformed. Dioskoros is perhaps not a true representative of the sixth century *urban* élite because, even though he had dealings and close links with the administration of the provincial capital, Antinoupolis, his home town was Ἀφροδίτης κώμη, which was, in administrative terms, a village.[4] In spite of this, and in spite of his bad hexameters, he is worth mentioning here because he was the owner of the great papyrus codex of Menander in Cairo.[5]

The story of its discovery is worth a digression because it may tell us something about the fate of classical texts in the age of Justinian. Gustave Lefebvre has given a vivid description in his publication of the Menander codex. It was in July 1905; he had been working at Assiût, when he was informed of a papyrus find at Kôm Ishgaou, where an enclosure wall had collapsed and revealed a gap, at the bottom of which numerous papyrus rolls could be seen. However, Lefebvre had to wait till the end of 1905, when the owner of the plot decided to rebuild the wall and to renovate his house; for a sum of money he allowed the Antiquities Service to excavate his plot, which took three days. At one metre below the surface, brick walls of a vaulted building came to light; these walls were about two metres high, and the vaults had collapsed. The house had three rooms in a row; in the third room, which was very small, a large clay jar with a broken neck was found, 90 cm high and brim-full of papyri; more papyri, some rolls and detached sheets, were scattered around it in the rubble. The papyrus codex of Menander was in the jar, on top, covering a large number (approximately 150) of rolled-up documents; six leaves of this codex, plus several fragments, had fallen out of the jar and were found in the rubble (*sebakh*). From this situation Lefebvre concluded that the Menander codex had not meant very much to its owner, who had used it just to protect his precious documents. That may be so, although I suspect that it was perhaps not Dioskoros himself, the poet and village scribe, who had discarded the manuscript in this irreverent way, but rather his heirs and successors when they sorted out the family papers.

Be that as it may, I think this is symptomatic of what happened to classical

pagan literature in the sixth century, and probably not just in Egypt.[6] Menander had outlived his usefulness. In 529, Justinian closed the Academy in Athens, and in 562 manuscripts of pagan authors were burned in Constantinople, in a bonfire inspired by Justinian's policy against the Ἕλληνες and for the triumph of orthodox Christianity.[7]

One might object that what happened in Kôm Ishgaou, a small town in Middle Egypt which had been demoted from the status of district capital, Ἀφροδίτης πόλις, to that of a village, Ἀφροδίτης κώμη, in the time of Justinian, was not typical of the fate of classical authors in the cities of Egypt. What do we know about urban élites in Egypt in the time between Constantine and Justinian? How did they live, what kind of careers did they have, what properties did they own, were they wealthy or even rich? To answer these questions, or some of them, I have selected three family archives from Hermupolis (el-Ashmunein) in Middle Egypt, south of al-Minya, but administratively part of the Thebaïd. The first belongs to the later fourth century, the other two to the fifth.

The first archive belongs to a Flavius Isidorus. In the documents he appears both as an official in the τάξις (*officium*) of the governor (*praeses*) of the Thebaïd at Antinoupolis, and as a landowner.[8] He first appears in 368 as an *officialis*, then, in the 370s, as a *beneficiarius*. He owned pieces of land of various sizes in the Hermopolite nome, a two-storey house with a basement in the East Quarter of Hermupolis; he also owned flocks of sheep, for which he leased pastures. In his semi-military capacity (because of his position on the staff of the *praeses* at Antinoupolis), he owned several small, scattered properties in the area; he was a minor absentee owner who employed, at least in the 370s, a manager (ἐπίτροπος), a retired *officialis*, who would look after his properties.

Soldiers or employees in the military administration, like Flavius Isidorus, as farmers and landowners are not uncommon in the fourth century (there are other examples in the Aurelia Charite archive, also from Hermupolis).[9] They lived in the city, and some of them were part of the local garrison, the so-called *Mauri Scutarii* of the *numerus Maurorum Scutariorum* who are attested already in the earlier fourth century by the *Notitia Dignitatum.*[10]

This leads me to my second and third examples of land-owning soldiers and officials who formed the 'bourgeoisie' of Hermupolis in the fifth century. My next case study begins with Flavius Taurinus, son of Plusammon,[11] who first appears as a soldier in the *numerus* of the *Mauri* at Lykôn Polis in A.D. 426. By 430 he had been transferred to Hermupolis and promoted from στρατιώτης to βίαρχος. He

continued to advance in military rank, becoming a *centenarius* by 446. He died before 457, having been promoted to and probably discharged as *primicerius*, which was the second highest rank in the regiment, below the *tribunus* (commander).The dates of his military career suggest that the troop of *Mauri* formed part of the *limitanei* (the 'border troops', or territorial army) where soldiers served for 24 years, as opposed to the *comitatenses* who served only 20. So, if Taurinus was a soldier in 426, he must have been discharged by or before 450. The documents also show him as a rather modest land-owner and lessor of small properties in the Hermopolite countryside – two aruras here, one arura there, a vineyard, some land in another village. In Hermupolis itself, Taurinus owned an ἔπαυλις in the East Citadel quarter, an agricultural building with a barn (for straw, an ἀχυροθήκη), a well (φρέαρ) and farm implements, for which he received a year's rent of 1800 myriads and the right to feed one goat from the green fodder (ἐν τῇ χλωροφαγίᾳ).

In the next generation we see a considerable expansion of the family property. Taurinus' son, Flavius Ioannes, first appears in November 457 and again in 464 as being 'seconded' (probably from the regiment of *Mauri*) to the military officium of the Thebaïd. In 472 he was *scriniarius* (secretary), and a few years later he was promoted to the rank his father had held, that of *primicerius* of the troop of the *Mauri*, so at some time before his discharge, in or before 485, he had been reassigned from the military *officium* back to the regiment.

Ioannes must have inherited a fair portion of his father's property and acquired more. The plots he leased out to farmers in the countryside are considerably larger than those described in his father's contracts: 4½ aruras, 6 aruras, 12 and even 18 aruras. If one adds them all up, and assumes that he did not sell any land, one gets a figure between 35 and 40 aruras. In addition, he also appears as money-lender; one piece of land had been mortgaged to him by a city councillor (βουλευτής) as security for a loan, which he sub-leases to a farmer, taking the rent in place of interest on the loan. He seems generally to have preferred taking his rents in cash rather than in kind. As all the contracts were written and signed in the city, the lessees had to travel from their villages to Hermupolis; the witnesses were civilian residents of Hermupolis, including a deacon, a priest, and two teachers (γραμματικοί). His property may have generated a yearly income of at least 30 solidi, in addition to his salary from the administration.

His son, Taurinus II, followed his father into the military bureaucracy, first as *commentariensis* in the office of the border troops, from 494 as *scriniarius*. He

apparently retired from service without further advancement, probably in order to manage his estates, and he eventually (in 510) appears as a priest, πρεσβύτερος καθολικῆς ἐκκλησίας of Hermupolis. His property included a town house in the 'West Citadel' quarter of Hermupolis in addition to his own family residence, which he leased out; and a large plot of land, 31 aruras, to the east of the city, a plantation of acacia trees which he leased to a tanner, a vineyard with date palms. Two contracts stipulate deliveries of ταριχίων βρωσίμων ἀγρείων, 'salted wild fowl' (ducks?) plus lentils and beans, in addition to the yearly rent in wheat. All this gives an impression if not of luxury, then at least of a comfortable lifestyle.

Before we ask what books, if any, these people owned and perhaps even read, let me briefly introduce my third family-archive from Hermupolis, also of the fifth century. It belonged to Flavius Sarapodorus and his sister Aurelia Eucharistia, son and daughter of Hermogenes.[12] Their names are an interesting illustration of the progress of Christianity into the urban élite of Hermupolis. Their father Hermogenes was clearly still loyal to the traditional faith when he named his son Sarapodoros, but may have converted to the new faith by the time his daughter was born (unless the daughter converted later and changed her name to Eucharistia). That she was younger than her brother Sarapodoros is suggested by the fact that she survived him by many years, even though Sarapodoros himself lived to the age of at least seventy-five. He was born about 410 and was still alive in 485, but by 498 he had died, whereas his sister was still alive and kicking – very much so, in fact, since in the document in question, she is trying to kick a relative named Theodoros, perhaps another brother, out of some house property which they had inherited jointly.[13] Her elder brother Sarapodoros is first attested in 439 as a *devotissimus magistrianus* in the Imperial administration, probably in the office of the *Dux Thebaïdis* (ὁ καθοσιωμένος μαγιστριανὸς τῶν θείων ὀφφικίων). *Magistriani* are the so-called *agentes in rebus*, government commissioners who were answerable not to the provincial governors but directly to the Imperial Court at Constantinople, so they could act as a kind of watchdog over the provincial administration. And it seems as though Sarapodoros was often away on business, because some of his tax payments were carried out by his sister on his behalf, some others by Flavius Taurinus I whom we have already met. Given that the Taurinus documents and most of the fifteen Sarapodoros/Eucharistia documents were found together, on the same days, in the same heaps of rubble (*sebakh*), there is a strong possibility that they were somehow connected through family links. The exact details have so far eluded us, but there is hope, as some documents that might

tell us more have yet to be published.

Having met some of the people who might reasonably be regarded as representatives of the urban élite of Hermupolis, we shall now look at the fragments of literary texts from those same excavations. There are problems here because, unlike Bernard Grenfell and Arthur Hunt, the British Dioscuri of papyrology, the German excavators, Otto Rubensohn and Georg Möller, did not publish their finds themselves. They left the scholarly exploitation and publication to others, with the result that of the documents, only a handful were published before 1974, whereas the literary texts were almost automatically reserved for the great Wilamowitz, who picked out the most complete pieces and published a fair number of them in the early volumes of *Berliner Klassiker-Texte* – though he could never be bothered to record their provenances. And yet the excavators' unpublished diary describes some of them in such detail that they can be identified. For 25 January 1905, for example, it records the find of many fragments of what turned out to have been a large codex of Aristophanes, written towards the end of the fifth or the very beginning of the sixth century.[14] As it was found on the same spot and on the same day as a large number of documents belonging to the Taurinus archive, it seems likely that it once belonged to either Flavius Ioannes or to Flavius Taurinus II. It contains substantial portions of *Acharnians, Birds, Frogs*, and *Plutus*. This codex had both pagination and quire numbers. *Acharnians* 904 is the beginning of page 65, which is the first page of quire 9; this was therefore preceded by eight quaternions, and *Acharnians* began on page 53; before that, there must have been room for three other plays.

From the same findspot come three fragments of Aristophanes' *Peace*, datable to the same period.[15] The hand is slightly different but the format and the number of lines per page match the other leaves, so it seems just possible that it belongs to the same codex.

Also from this findspot come substantial fragments of a fifth-century codex of Euripides' *Phoenissae* and *Medea*, and fragments of a sixth-century codex of *Phoenissae*, of a late fifth-century codex of Sophocles' *Ajax*, of a sixth-century codex of Euripides' *Orestes*, late fifth-century fragments of *Andromache* and of the *Bacchae*, and a large number of Homeric fragments, in addition to works by Apollonius Rhodius, Theocritus, and Isocrates.[16] It is, of course, noteworthy that all these authors, and all the plays represented in these fifth- and sixth-century codices from Hermupolis, are those which survived the Middle Ages. In other words, the urban élite of Hermupolis read, or at any rate owned, only those books

of which copies also reached Constantinople and which were later transcribed into minuscule. Most of these works were also transmitted with marginal commentaries (scholia).

There is, of course, no rule without an exception. Among the literary texts from Byzantine Hermupolis, there are two exceptions which are worth mentioning here. One is a small scrap of Menander's *Dyscolus*, of the sixth or maybe even seventh century, to judge by the handwriting;[17] the other one is more interesting. For 27 January 1905, the excavation diary records the largest find of documentary papyri, '40 complete documents, and a leaf from a parchment codex.' The 40 documents turned out to be the bulk of the family papers of Taurinos and his son and grand-son (and of Sarapodoros and Eucharistia), the two archives described above. The parchment leaf preserves 52 lines (26 per page) of Euripides' *Cretans* (= Pack^2 437). There is a strong probability that it formed part of this archive. Its handwriting points to the late second or (perhaps more probably) the early third century; the leaf has suffered some damage in the middle – one large hole and two small ones – but the margins are preserved intact on all four sides; no other part of this parchment codex has been found, not even a small scrap. It therefore looks very much as though this was an isolated leaf, torn out of a codex and kept for a long time, perhaps because the owner could not bring himself to throw it away. Maybe the later owners realized that there was no other copy of this play to be found anywhere, and kept it as a rarity – I think that would not have been beyond Taurinos I the soldier or his son Ioannes the civil servant.[18]

Before I turn to the more general aspects of book production, which will be dealt with in the last part of this paper, I should like to mention one other find from Hermupolis. Würzburg Papyrus 1 is a large leaf of a papyrus codex of the sixth century; it contains a kind of commentary on parts of Euripides' *Phoenissae*. I say 'a kind of commentary' because it is very oddly arranged. Each lemma is marked off from the explanation which follows it by a double diagonal line or brackets, as one would expect; the odd thing is that lemmata and explanations are both very selective, and presented in a strange sequence. On the two pages they range from line 344 to line 1108; from 344 to 808 there are only 13 lemmata, in the order of the text but with many omissions; after 808, the lemmata are: 606, 24, 43, 982, 90, 1019, and then, in the right order again, 1023 to 1108. The explanations are mostly quite different – not so much in substance but in wording – from the scholia of the later manuscripts; they are often shorter but in several cases quite substantially more detailed, offering mythological accounts of the oracle of Dodona, of the

origin of the Sphinx, and of the Meleager and Atalanta story. How does one account for this ?

I have recently offered a speculative explanation.[19] I suspect that this Würzburg codex was copied from a papyrus roll which was already incomplete, and torn into several detached pieces; the scribe tried to salvage what was left by copying it into a codex, but he took some of the fragments in the wrong order because he had no complete text of the play against which he could have checked the sequence of his lemmata – or perhaps he just couldn't be bothered. At any rate, this codex leaf in Würzburg shows that commentaries (ὑπομνήματα) circulated, independently of the poetic texts they explain, as late as the sixth century. Although the codex with marginal scholia did already exist (see the famous Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 2258 of Callimachus, which has, however, remained unique for this period), it did not become standard until much later. The Würzburg papyrus leaf proves that there was still, in the sixth century, at least one person in Hermupolis who went to great lengths to try to understand the text of Euripides' play.

II In Byzantine Egypt, texts of classical pagan authors continued to be produced as in the preceding centuries, i.e. in the cities, like Oxyrhynchus and Hermupolis, where nearly all the literary papyri have been found (we shall see that this does not apply to Christian books). However, when you compare the range and quantity of books, you will see a significant change after about A.D. 300. The number of books copied declines rapidly after the time of Constantine, and many authors who were read and copied before are no longer found in the fourth century.

The following statistics on book production in Byzantine Egypt tell an interesting story:

(A) Pagan authors, by name:

Date:	IV	IV-V	V	V-VI	VI	VI-VII	VII	later	total
Aeschines			1						1
Aesop	1	1							2
Apollonius Rhodius	1	1	2		1		1	1	7
Aratus	1			1					2
Aristides	1						1		2
Aristophanes	3	2	10	4	4				23
Aristotle	1					1			2

Date:	IV	IV-V	V	V-VI	VI	VI-VII	VII	later	total
Callimachus	8	2		1	1				12
Chariton						1			1
Demosthenes	8	5	3	3	1				20
Dio Chrysostom	1								1
Dionysius Thrax	2		1						3
Euphorio			1						1
Eupolis		1							1
Euripides	1	3	11	3	5	4		1	28
Galen	1				2				3
Herodotus	2	1							3
Hesiod	4	5	2	1	1	1			14
Himerius			1						1
Hippocrates					3	1			4
Homer, *Iliad*	24	12	16	9	14	9	1		85
Homer, *Odyssey*	11	6	9	3	5	3			37
Homerica: scholia etc.	6		4	2	2	1	3		18
Isocrates	8	3	2	1	1				15
Libanius			1					1	2
Manetho			1						1
Menander	4		3	2	1	1			11
Nonnus						1			1
Oppian	1								1
Pamprepius				1					1
Pancrates (?)			1						1
Parthenius (?)		1							1
Philo		1			1				2
Philostratus	1								1
Pindar				1	1				2
Plato	2				1				3
Sappho						1			1
Sophocles	1	2		3		1			7
Soranus	1								1
Themistius		1							1
Theocritus			1	2	1	1			5
Thucydides	2	1		2					5
Xenophon	3								3

(B) Anonymous, by genre:

Date:	IV	IV-V	V	V-VI	VI	VI-VII	VII	later	total
Anthologies, verse			1		2	2			5
Comedy	2	1	3						6
Tragedy	1	1	1						3
Iambic eulogies	1				1				2
Epic	14	8	7	4	3	1	1		38
Gnomic verse	1	1							2
Lyric poetry	3	2	2						7
Astronomy, astrology	4	1	1	1		1			8
Biography	1	1	1			2			5
Cooking		1							1
Divination	3								3
Glossaries, grammars	6	2	5	3	1	1	4		22
History, ethnography, geography	3		5		1		1		10
Law		2	3	2	3	1	1		12
Oratory	2	3	3	4	2				14
Mathematics	4	1			5				10
Medicine	3	2	4	5	14	2	1		31
Mime				1					1
Philosophy	2					1			3
Romance	2			1	1				4
Various prose works	2	1	3	2	1	2	1		12

(C) Latin:

Date:	IV	IV-V	V	V-VI	VI	VI-VII	VII	later	total
Cicero		2	4	1					7
Juvenal				1					1
Lucan				1					1
Sallust	4		1						5
Terence, *Andria*	1	1							2
Vergil	5	3	4	1					13
Law	11	8	2	1	10	2			34

Date:	IV	IV-V	V	V-VI	VI	VI-VII	VII	later	total
Glossaries, grammars alphabets	2	1		3	2				8
Writing exercises		2		1	1				4
Totals:	176	92	120	71	82	41	15	3	600

These tables have to be used with caution, for two reasons. First, they have been compiled on the basis of Roger Pack's Catalogue of 1965,[20] updated to the present as best I could, though some items may, of course, have been overlooked; and secondly, the dates suggested by the editors are often no more than subjective impressions and approximations, not based on reliable dating criteria. But a general trend does seem to emerge nonetheless, and where we have sufficient numbers, the individual inaccuracies may cancel each other out.

The first result, if one looks at the total figures at the end, is that the production of non-Christian books appears to have declined very sharply after the time of Justinian. Taking the first four columns together, which cover the two centuries between A.D. 300 and 500, we get a total of 459 books, which is more than three times the figure for the next two hundred years from A.D. 500 to 700, or 76.5% of the grand total of 600 books. This figure of 459 is itself a significant drop from the figures for the second and third centuries which represent the peak of book-production in Roman Egypt, as far as we can tell from the surviving remains. Still, the figures for the fourth century and those for the late fourth and early fifth are quite substantial, and they include a fair number of authors who no longer appear in the sixth and seventh centuries (Aesop's fables, Dio Chrysostom, Eupolis, Oppian, Parthenius, Philostratus, Soranus, Themistius, Xenophon). Book production in Egypt at this time may have been encouraged by efforts on the part of the Imperial government in Constantinople, notably Emperor Constantius II, to save as many older manuscripts as possible from destruction and decay by having them copied into new codices. In his fourth oration Εἰς τὸν Αὐτοκράτορα Κωνστάντιον of A.D. 357, Themistius tells us that this enlightened emperor made funds and technicians available to 'save monuments which had, through long (?) periods of neglect, been crumbling like buildings in the treasure-house of memory, and were in danger of being destroyed and effaced completely and so of letting the souls deposited in them [= the authors' works] disappear with them.'[21]

From Themistius' speech one can see quite clearly what the emperor was trying to do: not to make Constantinople the intellectual capital of the Empire (the university there was founded only later, in A.D. 425, by Theodosius II), but, as Cavallo puts it in his excellent account of the survival and loss of the Greek texts,

> to recover as much as was still possible of the works of Greek authors, in the belief (or illusion?) that, while some texts would be certain to be transcribed and preserved by private initiative due to their 'excellence' (by the standards of their time), others, those rarely or no longer read and circulated, needed to be rescued by the State. From this point of view, the 'public monuments' to be saved must be the books of institutional rank (philosophy and oratory in the first place); if their survival was in danger, this revealed a crisis of the public libraries, of the school syllabus, of traditional curricula. Therefore the initiative of Constantius II – together with the explicit acknowledgement, attested elsewhere, of the importance of the study of literature – was aimed at bridging to some extent the gap in the transmission of the ancient culture which had been created by a new upper class, recruited not from the schools of rhetoric, which were attended less and less, but from schools of short-hand writers or, at most, solicitors.[22]

In other words, education in cultural values was replaced by vocational training – does it not sound disturbingly familiar? Moreover, the arrival, or rather imposition, of Latin as the official language was an additional factor threatening the Greek literary tradition.

It seems that these tendencies are reflected in our statistical tables from Egypt. Among the classical authors who do not appear at all after the time of Constantine are Aeschylus, Alcaeus, Alcman, Anacreon, Bacchylides and most of the orators: Lysias, Hyperides, Antiphon, Dinarchus, Isaeus, Lycurgus. Of the plays of the Attic dramatists only a small selection is represented, basically only those plays which also survived the Middle Ages – the notable but quite untypical exception being the isolated parchment leaf of Euripides' *Cretans* in the family archive of Taurinus, mentioned earlier. Authors still widely read down to the sixth century (those with totals in double figures) are Aristophanes, Callimachus, Demosthenes, Euripides, Hesiod, Homer, Isocrates, and Menander.

Looking at Table B, one notices one very obvious feature: the sudden popularity of epic, with a peak in the fourth century and continuing through to the

seventh. Much of this is due to eulogies in hexameters, such as those composed by Dioscorus – encomia on the Dux of the Thebaïd and such-like – but apart from these ephemeral compositions there was a genuine revival of epic poetry going on in Egypt at this time, represented by such authors as Triphiodorus, Nonnus, Musaeus, Pamprepius, and Colluthus. Apart from that, one can see the shift of interest towards 'vocational' subjects, such as medicine, grammar and glossaries (i.e. elementary language teaching), oratory, law, mathematics, geography, and astrology.

A similarly utilitarian or vocational interest is revealed by Table C, Latin texts, where legal items form by far the biggest group. The other remarkable thing here is that enthusiasm for Latin classical authors, quite strong, rather suddenly, in the fourth century, evaporates completely after the early sixth century. It was obviously linked only to the official and compulsory use of Latin as the language of the courts and the higher administration; when that was abandoned, Cicero and Vergil ceased to be read in Egypt.

So much for the general tendency. Some individual survivals deserve pointing out. Aeschines still appears, once, in the fifth century, Aelius Aristides in the seventh, Callimachus' *Aetia* and Menander are still read in the sixth century, even Pindar's *Epinicians*. The most remarkable is probably a single fragment of a parchment leaf of Sappho, from the Fayûm, of the late sixth century; someone out there still wanted to read her poem for Gongyla (frr. 95 and 92 Lobel-Page). But it is very obvious how precarious the survival of most classical authors had become, depending on whether or not one manuscript found its way to Constantinople or into some monastery, where it might be transcribed into minuscule, to survive, with luck, into the Renaissance and the age of printing. Sappho, Menander and Callimachus' *Aetia* might have made it (although it is difficult to imagine Sappho being copied by monks on Mount Athos); they did not quite.

III Now, these statistics about pagan book production show us only one side of the coin. The other side is, of course, Christian book production, in Greek and in Coptic.[23] Although I have not been able to compile statistics for this, it is obvious that Christian texts were produced in fair numbers in the period under consideration, but that the centres of production changed. In part, at least, they moved away from the cities to the monasteries, and while there is very little evidence for the way in which pagan books were produced in Byzantine Egypt, we do have some rather interesting sources for Christian book production. Two of them I shall

present here, one in Greek,[24] the other in Coptic.

Τῷ ἀγαπητῷ ἄππα	To our beloved father
Ὀνωρίῳ Διονύσιος.	Honorios from Dionysios.
ἤκουσα τὴν σὴν εὐλάβια(ν)	I have heard your Reverence
4 μενβρά\ε/ϊανα ἠγορακένε.	has bought parchment.
κατα̣ξίωσον οὖν, πα[ρ]α-	Please deign to visit us,
καλῶ, εἰ δυνατόν ἐστιν,	if possible, so that I can
σκυλῆνε πρὸς ἡμᾶς,	discuss with you, so that
8 εἵνα σοι διαλεχθῶ, εἵν' ὅ-	whenever you have time, you
ταν σχολάση̣ς, ἄρξη̣ γρά-	begin to write for us a book
φιν ἡμῖν βιβλίον διὰ	on parchment; you will not
μενβραίνων μηδὲν	make a loss. In response to this,
12 βλαπτόμενος. πρὸς	deign to reply or to come
ταῦτα οὖν καταξίωσο(ν)	so that I stop worrying and
ἀντιγράψε ἢ ἐλθῖν, εἵνα	learn when you <will> start
ἀμέριμνος γένωμε	writing for me, while I sup-
16 καὶ μάθω, πότε ἄρχη̣	ply the copy [i.e. the book
τοῦ γράφιν μοι ἐμοῦ	to be copied].
παρέχοντος ἀντίγραφ(ον).	If you need anything, let us
ἄν τινος δὲ χρία ἦ̣, κέλευε	know: we shall be happy to
20 ἡμῶν ἡδέως ὑπουργούντω(ν).	help.
εὔχου ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν. ἐρρῶσ-	Pray for us. I pray for
θέ σε εὔχομαι.	your health.

As the title suggests, Appa Honorios is a monk. The writer, Dionysios, has heard that Honorios has bought parchment, μενβράϊνα, and now he wants him to use that parchment to write a book for him; he will supply the ἀντίγραφον, the copy – this must mean the exemplar, the book to be copied. He asks Honorios to come, evidently so that he can give him this ἀντίγραφον together with instructions, and he adds that Honorios will do this μηδὲν βλαπτόμενος, 'without suffering any loss' – in other words, he will be paid for it. It may have been the scribe's responsibility to provide or procure the writing material, just as the *scriptoria* did. This is also suggested by a papyrus letter from Oxyrhynchus (P.Oxy. 2156) of the late fourth or early fifth century, where someone writes to a fellow Christian to say that he is sending him parchment (διφθέραν [τ]ῶν

μεμβρανῶν) in the form of 25 quaternions (ἐν τετραδίοις εἰκοσιπέντε), to the value of 14 talents, and that he can buy another six talents' worth of parchment if required. Twenty-five quaternions are 400 pages, so that would make a very substantial parchment codex. If the scribes provided the writing material, that would explain the detailed accounts found in some medieval manuscripts for expenses not only for writing and decorating the codex but also for ink and parchment.

The Coptic letter from the same period reveals a rather different situation:[25]

Flesh side:

ⲡⲉϣⲱⲧ ⲡⲉⲧⲥϩⲁï ⲙ̄ⲡⲉϥⲥⲟⲛ
ⲕⲟⲗⲟⲩⲑⲉ ⲙⲛ̄ ⲡⲉϥⲥⲟⲛ ⲧⲓⲙⲟⲑⲉⲟⲥ
ⲛⲉϥⲥⲛⲏⲩ ϩⲙ̄ ⲡϫⲟⲉⲓⲥ ϩⲁⲑⲏ ⲛ̄-
ϩⲱⲃ ⲛⲓⲙ ϯϣⲓⲛⲉ ⲉⲣⲱⲧⲛ̣̄ ⲉ-
5 ⲙⲁⲧⲉ ⲙⲛ̄ ⲛⲉⲧⲛ̄ⲥⲛⲏⲩ ⲙⲁⲕⲁ-
ⲣⲉ ⲙⲛ̄ ⲛⲓⲗⲗⲉ ⲙⲛ̣̄ ⲧⲉⲧⲛ̣̄ϩⲗ̄ⲗⲱ
ⲙⲛ̄ ⲡⲕⲉ ⲥⲉⲉⲡⲉ ⲉⲧ\ϩ/ⲙ̄ \ⲡ/ⲏⲉⲓ :
ⲧⲉⲛⲟⲩ ⲇⲉ ⲡⲓϫⲱⲱⲙⲉ ⲛ̄ⲧⲁïⲧⲛⲟ-
ⲟⲩϥ ⲛⲏⲧⲛ̄ ⲣⲱϣⲉ ⲉⲣⲟϥ ⲉⲕⲟ-
10 ⲥⲙⲓ ⲙ̄ⲙⲟϥ : ⲥⲡⲟⲩⲇⲁⲍⲉ ⲉⲛⲉϥ-
ⲡⲟϭⲉ ⲥⲟⲧⲡⲟⲩ ⲉⲛⲁⲛⲟⲩⲟⲩ ⲙ̄ⲙⲁ-
ⲧⲉ ⲙ̄ⲡⲣ̄ϣⲟϫⲧ̄ ⲛ̄\ϩ/ⲏⲧⲟⲩ ⲕⲁⲧⲁ ⲑⲉ ⲛ̄-
ⲧⲁïϫⲟⲟⲥ ⲛ̄ϩⲩⲗⲓⲁⲥ : ⲧⲁⲁϥ ⲙ̣̄ⲡ̣ⲉⲧⲛⲁⲣ̄
ⲫⲱⲃ ⲕⲁⲗⲱⲥ ⲛϥ̄ⲕⲟⲥ[ⲙ]ⲓ̣ [ⲙ̄ⲙ]ⲟ̣ϥ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲉⲩϣⲁⲛⲟⲩ
15 ⲉⲩⲧⲁⲙⲓⲟ ⲙ̄ⲙⲟϥ ⲉϣ[ⲟⲡϥ̄ ⲙ̄]ⲡⲁⲧⲓⲉⲓ ⲉϩⲏⲧ
ⲙⲁ ⲧⲛⲟⲟⲩϥ ⲉⲣⲏⲥ ϯ[ⲟⲩⲱϣ ⲅ]ⲁⲣ ⲉⲉⲓ
ⲉⲣⲉϣⲁⲛⲡϫⲟⲉⲓⲥ ⲧⲟ[ϣⲧ̄: ϯ]ϣⲓⲛⲉ ⲉïⲥⲓⲇⲱⲣⲉ
ⲙⲛ̄ ⲡⲉϥϩⲗ̄ⲗⲟ ⲙⲛ̄ ⲧⲉ[. . . .] ⲙⲛ̄ ⲛ[ⲉ]ⲧ̣-
ϩⲙ̄ ⲡⲏⲉⲓ: ϯϣⲓⲛⲉ ⲉ[. . . .]ⲕⲟⲩ[. .]
20 ⲙⲛ̄ ϩⲩⲗⲓⲁⲥ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲙⲛ̄ [ⲛⲉⲥⲛⲏ]ⲩ ⲉⲧ-
ϩⲁ ϩⲏⲧ ⲡⲟⲩⲁ ⲡⲟⲩⲁ ⲕ̣[ⲁⲧ]ⲁ̣ ⲡⲉϥⲣⲁⲛ:
ⲙⲛ̄ ⲡⲕⲉ ⲥⲉⲉⲡⲉ ⲛ̄ⲛ[ⲉⲥ]ⲛ̣ⲏⲩ ⲧⲏ-
ⲣⲟⲩ ⲛ̄ⲧⲁïⲥⲟⲩⲱⲛⲟⲩ:
ϣⲗⲏⲗ ⲉϫⲱⲉⲓ ϩⲛ̄ ⲡⲉ̣[ⲧ]ⲛ̄ϩⲏⲧ
25 ⲧⲏⲣϥ̄ ⲟⲩϫⲁï ϩⲙ̄ ⲡϫ[ⲟⲉⲓ]ⲥ

Hair side:

ⲁⲝⲓⲥ ⲙ̄[ⲡ]ⲕ̣ⲟⲥⲙⲓⲧⲏⲥ
ⲉⲧⲣⲉϥϯ ϩⲛ̄ⲕⲟⲩⲓ̈ ⲛ̄ⲉⲓ-
ⲉⲡⲥⲁ ⲉⲣⲟϥ ⲉⲓⲧⲉ ⲟⲩⲡⲩⲗⲏ
ⲉⲓⲧⲉ ⲟⲩⲕⲟⲧ: _ . . ⲟ
30 . . ⲉ̣ⲓ̣ⲧ . . . ϩⲟⲉ
. . ⲣ. ⲙ̣̄ⲙⲟ̣ϥ ⲟⲩⲙⲉ-
ⲗⲓ̈ ⲛ.ⲛⲁ̣. . . ⲉ ⲏ
ⲁⲛⲟ - - - ⲛϥ̄ⲧⲉ
- - - - - - ⲛⲉ
35 ⲉⲓⲧⲛⲟⲟⲩ ⲙ̣̄ⲙⲟϥ ⲛ̄ⲕⲟ-
ⲗⲟⲩⲑ̣ⲉ ⲉⲧⲙ̣ⲉ ⲛⲉϥⲛϥ̄ⲧⲉ´

Peshôt writes to his brother Koloutbe and to his brother Timotheos, his brothers in the Lord. Above all, I greet you and your brothers Makare and Nille and your old woman, and the others in the house. Well now, the book which I sent you, busy yourselves with decorating it (κοσμεῖν), take care (σπουδάζειν) with the [blank?] pages. Select good ones. Do not scratch into them, as I have told Hylias [= Elias]. Give it to someone who does the job well (καλῶς) so that he decorates it (κοσμεῖν), and if it has been completed to be received before I travel to the North, have it sent to the South. For (γάρ) I shall come, God willing. I greet Isidore and his old man and Te[...] and those in the house. I greet E[...] and Hylias and the brothers who are in the North, each one by name, and also the other brothers whom I have met. Pray for me from the bottom of your heart. Fare well in the Lord.

P.S. Tell the decorator (κοσμητής) to add small ornaments in it, be it a 'gate' (πύλη) or a wheel. [*Rubbed out*: .... honey .... while I send him to Kolouthe who loves his flatulence (?).]

The sender, Peshôt, has sent a book to his 'brothers' Kolouthe and Timotheos and now wants them to decorate it, or rather to look for somebody who will do the job competently, as is clear from lines 13-14 ⲧⲁⲁϥ ⲙ̄ⲡⲉⲧⲛⲁⲣ̄ ϕⲱⲃ, 'give it to someone who will do the task well' (καλῶς), ⲛϥ̄ ⲕⲟⲥⲙⲓ ⲙ̄ⲙⲟϥ , 'to decorate it.' Having ended the letter with the usual greetings, Peshôt adds a postscript on the back: 'Tell the decorator (κοσμητής) [literally] who is the one

who gives small ornaments to it, either a gate (πύλη) or a wheel' (?).[26] What exactly this refers to is difficult to see; my guess is that it means decorated initials, or possibly borders or frames for titles.[27] Given that the letter is written not in cursive but in a skilled Coptic bookhand, Peshôt may well have been the scribe who wrote the codex which he now wants to have decorated.

With the demise of secular pagan education in Egypt, schools and public libraries also disappear. While in the fourth century a book catalogue from Hermupolis lists prose authors like Herodotus, Xenophon, Thucydides, Aristotle and Demosthenes and the orator Callinicus, as well as commentaries (ὑπομνήματα) on Archilochus and Homer (and perhaps Aeschines, and Demosthenes' private speeches),[28] book catalogues in the time of Justinian look very different. One of them, written on a large limestone ostracon from the monastery of Elias near Thebes in Upper Egypt,[29] lists some eighty titles, mostly of papyrus codices, some of them of parchment, occasionally with the note 'new'. In addition to the books of the Old and the New Testaments, it mentions lectionaries, church canons, a book about the birth of the Lord and the feast of Epiphany, the life of Mary, books about John the Baptist, works of Pachômius and Shenûte, of the church fathers Athanasius and Cyril, biographies of monks, martyrs, and church fathers, two books about burials, and one on medicine. An equally interesting book catalogue forms part of an inventory, apparently of a church rather than a monastery, drawn up in Greek on a papyrus roll in the late seventh or early eighth century.[30] It lists a total of 45 books (biblical, theological, hagiographical, even a biography of the empress Galla Placidia), some of them bilingual (δίγλωσσα, i.e. in Greek and Coptic), the others apparently in Greek rather than Coptic.[31]

Classical literature, on the other hand, was no longer copied in Egypt, apart from a mere handful of texts in the seventh century. Traditional values and the stylistic standards set by classical authors were no longer relevant, no longer perceived as useful. The fate of the great Library at Alexandria is unknown.[32] The very survival of classical Greek literature and philosophy, the foundation of our common European culture, looked very precarious indeed. It has been rediscovered and revived once, and as a result, European culture has flourished for centuries. But now we seem to be entering another dark period of ignorance and indifference to culture, where nothing will survive that cannot be made into money, where only a faint memory of ancient literature will linger on for a while in translations and anthologies, before that, too, will be forgotten. As George

Steiner writes:[33]

> The great majority of us can no longer identify, let alone quote, even the central biblical or classical passages which are not only the underlying script of Western literature . . . but have been the alphabet of our laws and public institutions. The most elementary allusions to Greek mythology, to Old and New Testament, to the classics, to Ancient and European history, have become hermetic. Short bits of text now lead precarious lives on great stilts of footnotes. The identification of fauna and flora, of the principal constellations, of the liturgical hours and seasons on which . . . the barest understanding of Western poetry, drama and romance from Boccaccio to Tennyson intimately depends, is now specialized knowledge. We no longer learn by heart. The inner spaces are mute or jammed with raucous trivia.

NOTES

1 See L.S.B. MacCoull, *Dioscorus of Aphrodito, His Work and His World* (Berkeley 1988).

2 There are a few other autographs among the papyri from Egypt, some of them in verse, but they are all anonymous.

3 E. Heitsch, *Die griechischen Dichterfragmente der römischen Kaiserzeit*, I (Göttingen 1963).

4 See J.G. Keenan, 'Aurelius Apollos and the Aphrodite village élite', in: *Atti del XVII Congresso Internazionale di Papirologia* (Naples 1984) 957-63.

5 P. Cairo, Journal d'entrée 43227; first published by G.Lefebvre, *Fragments d'un manuscrit de Ménandre* (Cairo 1907) = R.A. Pack, *The Greek and Latin Literary Texts from Greco-Roman Egypt*[2] (Ann Arbor 1965), no. 1301.

6 In fact, it seems that pagan literary traditions survived longer in the Eastern provinces of the Empire than in Constantinople itself; the (rather scanty) evidence has been collected and discussed by G.Cavallo, 'Qualche riflessione sulla continuità della cultura greca in oriente tra i secoli VII e VIII', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 88 (1995) 13-22, who states (p.15): 'certo si deve ammettere in quei secoli una rarefazione della produzione libraria e più in generale scritta anche nelle aree e nelle città di antica tradizione ellenistica; non la scomparsa.'

7 On this, see G.Cavallo, 'La circolazione libraria nell'età di Giustiniano', in: G.G.Archi (ed.), *L'imperatore Giustiniano: Storia e mito* (Milano 1978) 221ff.

8 His career and social position is illustrated by a number of documents in the Leipzig collection: P.Lips. I 17, 20-3, 33-7, 45-55, 58-61, and 64; see A.H.M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire* (Oxford 1964), I, 596; R.S. Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity* (Princeton 1993) 65.

9 See K.A. Worp (ed.), *Das Aurelia Charite Archiv* (Zutphen 1980).

10 *Or.* 31,23.

11 See *BGU* XII, Intro., xix-xxvi; J.G. Keenan, 'Soldier and civilian in Byzantine Hermopolis', in: *Proceedings of the 20th International Congress of Papyrologists* (Copenhagen 1994) 444-51.

12 See B. Palme, 'Flavius Sarapodorus, ein agens in rebus aus Hermupolis', *APF* 40 (1994) 43-68.

13 *BGU* XII 2173.
14 P. Berol.13231 + 21201 + 21202 = Pack[2] 139; *BKT* V 2,99-108 + *APF* 30 (1984) 18-29.
15 P. Berol.21223: *APF* 30 (1984) 17-18.
16 Euripides' *Phoenissae* and *Medea*: P. Berol.17018 + 21218 (*APF* 30,1984,8-16); *Phoenissae*: P. Berol.21207 (*APF* 30,7-8); *Bacchae*: P. Berol.21203 (*APF* 30,6-7); *Orestes*: P. Berol.21180 (*Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 4 [1969] 108f.); *Andromache*: P.Berol.13418 (*Journal of Juristic Papyrology* 2 [1948] 84-7 = Pack[2] 383) and P. Berol.17021 (W. Müller, *Forschungen und Berichte der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin* [= *FuB*] 6 [1964] 8-9); Sophocles' *Ajax*: P. Berol.21208 (*APF* 30,5-6); Apollonius Rhodius: P. Berol.17020 (*FuB* 10 [1968] 124f.) + 21275; Theocritus: P. Berol.21182 (*ZPE* 4 [1969] 114-16); Isocrates: P. Berol.13279 (*FuB* 10 [1968] 130-1).
17 P. Berol.21199, published in *ZPE* 4 (1969)113.
18 This leaf had been reported missing since the end of World War II. Quite recently, however, it has turned up again: it is in the National Museum in Warsaw, waiting to be returned to Berlin.
19 'Die Scholien der Papyri in ihrem Verhältnis zu den Scholiencorpora der Handschriften', in: *La philologie grecque à l'époque hellénistique et romaine* (Geneva 1994) 95-141 (esp.135) (Fondation Hardt Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique 40).
20 See n. 5 above. For a comparison with statistics for Oxyrhynchus alone, see J. Krüger, *Oxyrhynchos in der Kaiserzeit* (Frankfurt 1990) 227-45.
21 Themistius, *Or.* 4.59d-60a ταῦτα οὖν τὰ μνήματα ὑπὸ μικρᾶς (v.l. μακρᾶς) ἀθεραπευσίας διαρρυέντα ὥσπερ οἰκοδομήματα ἐν τῷ θησαυρῷ τῆς μνημοσύνης καὶ κινδυνεύοντα παντάπασιν αὐτά τε ἀϊστωθῆναι καὶ ἀποσβῆναι καὶ συναποσβέσαι τὰς ψυχὰς τὰς ἐγκειμένας, ἀναζωπυρεῖν παραγγέλλει, καὶ τάττει μὲν ἄρχοντα ἐπὶ τῷ ἔργῳ, καὶ ἐπιδίδωσι τὴν χορηγίαν τῷ ἐπιτηδεύματι.
22 G. Cavallo, 'Conservazione e perdita dei testi greci: Fattori materiali, sociali, culturali', in: *Società romana e impero tardoantico: Tradizione dei classici, Trasformazioni della cultura*, IV, ed. A. Giardina (Bari 1986) 83-172 and 246-71, at p.90.
23 See T.C. Skeat, *Early Christian Book Production*, in: G.W.H. Lampe (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, II (Cambridge 1969), 54ff.
24 P. Colon. inv.no. 1473, published by L. Koenen, *Ein Mönch als Berufsschreiber*, in: *Festschrift zum 150jährigen Bestehen des Berliner Ägyptischen Museums* (Berlin 1974) 347-54; 7 x 16 cm, provenance unknown, 5th/6th century.
25 P. Colon. inv.no. 10213, published by M. Weber, *Enchoria* 3 (1973) 53-62 and plates 7 + 8; parchment, 16.5 x 14.5 cm; provenance unknown.
26 OYKOT – but KOT can also mean a 'basket.'
27 'Wheel' could mean something like those asterisks with blobs around the end-title of the *Vision of Dorotheos* (*P.Bodmer XXIX: Vision de Dorothéos*, edd. A. Hurst, O. Reverdin, J. Rudhardt: Geneva 1984).
28 P. Berol.21247 = *P.Turner* 9.
29 Institut français d'archéologie orientale, inv.no.13315; republished by R.-G.Coquin, 'Le catalogue de la bibliothèque du couvent de St.Élie "du Rocher"', *Bulletin Inst. fr. Arch. Or.* 75 (1975) 207-9 and plates 38 + 39.
30 Published by F.A.J. Hoogendijk and P. Van Minnen, *Papyri, Ostraca, Parchments and Waxed Tablets in the Leiden Papyrological Institute* (Leiden 1991), no.13, pp. 40-77 and plates vi-ix (Papyrologica Lugduno-Batava 25).
31 Other book catalogues of the late Roman and early Christian periods from Egypt are listed by Hoogendijk and Van Minnen, *Papyri*, 45-7.
32 See D. Delia, 'From romance to rhetoric: the Alexandrian library in Classical and Islamic traditions', *American Historical Review* 97 (1992) 1449-67 (esp. 1464ff.).
33 G. Steiner, *No Passion Spent* (London 1996) 14-15.