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Monks and the Desert in Western Thebes from the Sixth to the Eighth Century

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Abstract

Many heroes of early monastic history were active in Egypt, because the desert was a convenient space in which to retire from the world. Among them was Pachomius, who founded cenobitism, which is the most popular form of monasticism today. Pachomian monasteries were not 'desert monasteries'. Most of them were actually situated in the suburbs of a city.

Theban monks were faithful to Pachomius's monastic rule, but they wished to be 'desert hermits'. This mentality was inspired by the landscape of Western Thebes, where there were many tombs and caves suitable for seclusion.

One of these monks, Pisentios, was appointed Bishop of Koptos by Damianos, the anti-Chalcedonian patriarch of Alexandria. When the Persians invaded Egypt, Pisentios abandoned his religious duties and escaped. The *Life of St. Pisentios* does not attempt to vindicate his behaviour. Rather, it makes the point that the ideals of a monk were superior to the responsibilities of the bishop.

Monks living in this area were indifferent to heresies because they desired to shun any association with other people and engrossed themselves in reading the Bible as much as possible. However, the establishment of Arab Muslim rule in Egypt made the Egyptian people yearn for their former sovereigns and their culture. When the monastery of St. Phoibammon was forced to move from deep in the mountains of Djeme to the ruined Temple of Hatshepsut, the larger context changed for the monks of Western Thebes. The monastery became a religious centre that attracted people from far away, while many monastic communities and hermitages were overwhelmed. 'Hermitages in the desert' disappeared.

I. Introduction

In Egypt, the desert has played the roles of boundary and highway since ancient times. For example, thick-walled ruins from the dynasty of Ramesses were dotted from the edge of the Western Nile Delta to Alamein and Mersa Matruh; they defended the green belt against the Libyan enemy.[1]

Oases were at the centre of traffic in Egypt. As a place of exchange for people and articles, the desert is often compared to the sea. But the former is more secure, because it has fewer obstacles than the latter.[2]

This study does not focus on the desert as a boundary or highway, but as a place of seclusion. Egypt was the cradle of monasticism. Many of the heroes of early monastic history were active in Egypt, and the form of monasticism that was born there greatly influenced the whole Mediterranean world.

The reason monasticism developed in Egypt was that the desert provided convenient spaces for monks to retire from the world. Anchoritism, an ascetic way of life in the desert, developed during the initial period. At that time, those who intended to live a secluded life gathered around a senior anchorite and a loose community was formed.

1. S. Hasegawa, 'The natural environment and trace of human activity of the Nile Delta: The strategy for life in Green belt, desert, rocky ridge and wetland', in F. Hasebe (ed), *The Environment and Civilizations of the Nile Delta I [Nile Delta no kankyou to bunmei I]*, Organization for Islamic Area Studies, Waseda University, 2012, pp. 44-45.

2. H. Kato, *The Nile: The river linking regions [Nile: Chiiki wo tsumugu kawa]*, Tokyo, Tosui Shobo, 2008, p. 85.

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Anchorites lived an ascetic life, offering prayers to God every day. Manual labour was indispensable, but they earned a minimal living. They followed experienced elders in their community but could break off the master-disciple relationship at any time. Their communities were not governed by strict, codified regulations. Anchorites followed the instructions of their masters.[3] In Egypt, Anchoritism developed in Wadi al-Natrun,[4] Nitria, and Kellia in the Southwest Delta of the Nile and in Thebes in Upper Egypt.

Among the anchorites, Antony (ca. 251-356) is the most famous. He is known as 'the father of the monks'. The *Life of Antony* by Athanasius, the fourth century Patriarch of Alexandria (r. 326-372), was translated into Latin and had great influence in the Mediterranean world.[5] The monastery of St. Antony is at the foot of the Wadi Araba, near the Red Sea. It originated from the hermitage of Antony, where anchorites gathered and built a community. By the fourth century, Sulpicius Severus (ca. 360-420) had already left a record of this monastery.[6]

Macarius ranks alongside Antony in early monastic history. He came from a village on the Southwest Delta of the Nile and went into seclusion on Wadi al-Natrun in about 330. Shortly after Macarius secluded himself in the place where the huge monastery that bore his name was subsequently built, his disciples joined him. A new style of monasticism began to prosper.

Macarius's version of monasticism is called semianchoritism. Monks who observed this form of monasticism lived alone in private cells but gathered on Saturday and Sunday to celebrate mass and take part in a common meal. Semianchoritism developed between the fourth and the fifth centuries and spread across Lower Egypt. When Macarius died in 390, there were four monasteries in Wadi al-Natrun: Macarius, Pshoi, John-the-Little, and al-Baramous. Thirty anti-Chalcedonian (Coptic) patriarchs were chosen from among the monks of St. Macarius. Epiphanius of Jerusalem (ca. 800) speaks of 'a thousand cells' dominated by a fortress at the site of the monastery.[7]

One form of monasticism that is familiar today is known as cenobitic monasticism. The founder of this type of religious community was Pachomius (292–346), who was born in a small village on Esna. Although his parents were pagans, he was converted to Christianity and retired from the world. When Pachomius became the pupil of a senior anchorite, he realised that most people could never attain the life of an anchorite. He therefore decided to develop a new form of monasticism.

Many cenobitic monasteries were built in quick succession, after Pachomius founded his first monastery at Tabennisi in Upper Egypt. In his interpretation of monastic life, monks lived together in a space that was distinctly marked off from the outside world. Pachomius established precise rules that governed almost every aspect of the monks' lives, including prayer, mass, work, meals, and sleep.[8]

Obedience was the most important discipline in cenobitism. All monks were told to submit themselves to their superiors and the strict monastic rules. They also lived in honest poverty. In cenobitic monasticism, monks had no private property. Their monastery managed common property and provided them with the necessities of life. Pachomius's monastic rule was translated into Latin and cenobitism became popular in Europe.

The *Life of Antony*, which is mentioned above, defined Egyptian monasticism as a desert movement. As Pachomian cenobitic monasticism was another form of Egyptian monasticism, it is generally considered part of the desert movement. According to James E. Goehring, however, Pachomian monasteries were not 'desert monasteries'. The nine monasteries founded during Pachomius's lifetime were all in villages on or near the banks of the Nile in Tabennisi and Pbow. It is clear that, for the Pachomians, ascetic withdrawal could be accomplished within villages.[9] Tabennisi and Pbow are both in Upper Egypt, about 400 km south of Cairo (for the names of places in this treatise, see Maps 1 and 2).

3. K. S. Frank (S. Toda trans.), *Geschichte des christlichen Mönchtums [Shuudouin no rekishi: Sabaku no injya kara Taizé kyoudoutai made]*, Tokyo, Kyobunkwan, 2002 (Original work published 1975), pp. 35-36.

4. Situated about 80 km south of Alexandria, it is also known as Scetis or Wadi Habib.

5. G. Gabra, *Historical Dictionary of the Coptic Church*, Cairo, 2008, p. 203.

6. *Ibid*., pp. 188-189.

7. *Ibid*., pp. 172, 192, and 203.

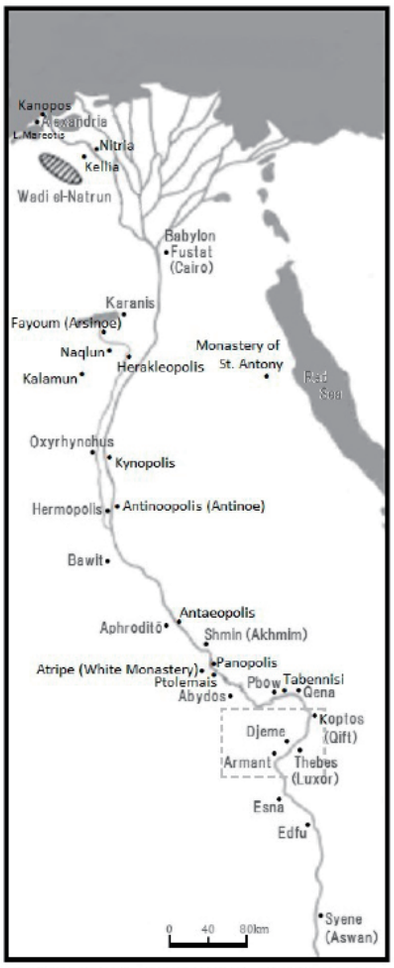
8. *Ibid*., p. 219.

9. J. E. Goehring, *Ascetics, Society, and the Desert*, Harrisburg, 1999, pp. 89-109.

Ewa Wipszycka points out that most of the 'desert monasteries' mentioned in narrative and documentary sources were actually situated in the suburbs of cities; only in exceptional cases did the distance between a monastery and its closest city exceed 20 km. Moreover, she argues that the two institutions needed each other. City residents went to worship at the monastery and asked the monks to mediate disputes. At the same time, according to Wipszycka, cities were economically indispensable to the monks. They could not manage their monasteries without contributions, so it made sense to live in a place that the inhabitants of the city could easily visit. Cities were also excellent places to sell products made by monks.[10]

Goehring and Wipszycka's outline covers the whole of Egypt. This treatise aims to supplement their opinions by presenting research that focuses on a specific region—Western Thebes. This area is located on the western bank of the Nile, about 450 km south of Cairo; the famous city of Luxor is situated on the opposite bank. Why focus on Western Thebes? For one thing, many sources that describe it have survived. In addition, Gawdat Gabra notes that the monks who lived in Western Thebes were faithful to Pachomius's monastic rule.[11] This means that the monks in this area are comparable to those in Goehring's study.

The monastic communities of Western Thebes developed between the sixth and seventh centuries; I will therefore start from the sixth century.

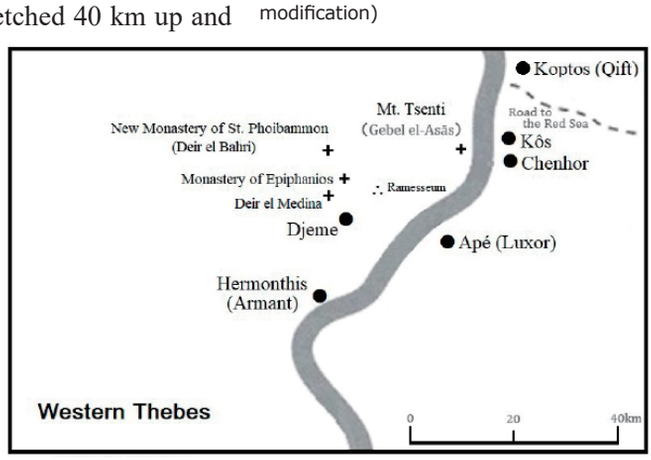


Map1 Egypt
(quoted from T. G. Wifong, Women of jeme: Lives in a Coptic Town in Late Antique Egypt. Ann Arbor, 2002, p. 2 with partial modification)

II. The 'Desert' of Western Thebes

Geographically, Western Thebes consists of the town of Djeme (Jeme) and the 'desert'. Djeme is a comparatively large town, whose population has tended to range between 1,000 and 2,000 people.[12] The well-known Rameseum is situated 1 km to the northeast of this town. Djeme was dependent on agriculture. It was part of an economic network that stretched 40 km up and down the Nile, into the neighbouring city territories of Koptos (Qift) and Latopolis (Esna). Beyond that, connections are rare in the narrative and document sources.[13]

The desert, which is Djeme's hinterland, is a wilderness rather than a sand sea, like the popular image of the Sahara. Many of the monastic communities of Western Thebes were not built on or near the banks of the Nile but higher up, at a sufficient elevation to command a magnificent view across the desert to the green fields beyond.[14] Why was this? Because the Theban necropolis, which was built after the Middle Kingdom period in Egypt, stretched for 7 km and was surrounded



Map2 The Westan Theban Area
(quoted from T. G. Wifong, Women of jeme: Lives in a Coptic Town in Late Antique Egypt. Ann Arbor, 2002, p. 2 with partial modification)

10. E. Wipszycka, 'Le monachisme Égyptien et les villes', *Travaux et memoires*, vol. 12, Paris, 1994, pp. 1-44.
11. G. Gabra, *Untersuchungen zu den Texten über Pesyntheus: Bischof von Koptos (569-632)*, Bonn, 1984, S. 310.
12. T. G. Wilfong, *Women of Jeme: Lives in a Coptic Town in Late Antique Egypt,* Ann Arbor, 2002, pp. 12-13 and 24.
13. C. Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages. Europe and the Mediterranean 400-800*, Oxford, 2005, pp. 421-422.
14. W. E. Crum and H. G. Evelyn White (eds.), *The Monastery of Epiphanius at Thebes*, Part I, New York, 1926, p. 12.

by steep, rocky mountains. The monks used the ruins of ancient shrines and tombs as hermitages; they became the core of monasteries. As a result, monastic communities were concentrated in a limited space.

According to Wipszycka, these conditions were convenient for the monks because they satisfied their two contradictory desires: to be solitary and to be in a group. She argues that, as time went by, some monastic communities regrouped and 'sacred deserts' were formed.[15]

On the other hand, as mentioned above, she insists that monks and local residents had a close relationship. However, the unusual landscape of Western Thebes, which featured tombs and caves conducive to a secluded life, does not support her theory. These unique surroundings birthed a mentality that was peculiar to the monks who lived there.

III. The Monks in Western Thebes and their Mental Characteristics

I will now present the life of a monk from Western Thebes as an example of the monastic lifestyle in this area. His name was Pisentios[16] and he lived from the second half of the sixth century to the first half of the seventh century.

Three different sources on Pisentios are now available: The *Life of St. Pisentios*, written by his disciples; his episcopal archive, which consists mainly of letters written to him by local people; and his sermons.

Pisentios was born in 568 or 569 in the city of Koptos, Hermonthis (Armant), or the surrounding neighbourhood. Hermonthis lies about 20 km southwest of Djeme. His parents were comparatively wealthy and he may have studied at a school in Hermonthis from the age of seven. He began his monastic life when he was approved by Elias, the Abbot of the Monastery of St. Phoibammon.[17] This monastery was deep in the mountains of Djeme, behind the town. Pisentios then moved to the mountains of Tsenti, which were near Deir el Bahri, namely the well-known temple of Hatshepsut. There he devoted himself to a solitary life.

In about 598, Pisentios was appointed Bishop of Koptos by Damianos, the anti-Chalcedonian Patriarch of Alexandria (r. 578-607). According to the *Life of St. Pisentios*, he did not establish his episcopal see in the city of Koptos, but in a monastery in the mountains of Tsenti.

When the Sasanian Persians invaded Egypt, Pisentios fled deep into the mountains of Djeme and hid there for a period of time. He then joined the Monastery of Epiphanios and supervised his diocese from there. He died in 632, after the Byzantine Empire had recovered Egypt from the Persians.

The three sources mentioned above show that Pisentios communicated with the inhabitants of Western Thebes through various means. Firstly, he held ordinary masses and special ceremonies, not only in his own episcopal see, but also in neighbouring villages, which he visited.[18] Secondly, local residents visited him to ask for his prayers, intercession, and economic aid.[19] Thirdly, he corresponded with local people, especially when mediating disputes.[20]

As Wipszycka suggests, interactions between Pisentios and the Theban people certainly took place. However, an analysis of texts about the Theban monks suggests that such social connections were troubling to Pisentios.[21] The *Life of St. Pisentios* depicts him as shunning associations with other people as much as possible. In particular, his reaction to the Persian invasion of Egypt was described as being most characteristic of an exemplary monk. When

15. E. Wipszycka, *Moines et communautes monastiques en Egypte (IVe-VIIIe siècles)*, Varovie, 2009, p. 171.

16. Pesynthios in Sahidic dialect, Pisentios in Bohairic dialect and Bisintaus in Arabic. The second one which is better known than the others is used in this paper.

17. D. O'Leary (ed. and trans.), *The Arabic life of S. Pisentius: according to the text of the two manuscripts Paris Bib. nat. arabe 4785, and arabe 4794*, Paris, 1930, pp. 7, 18; Gabra, *Untersuchungen*, S. 309.

18. E. A. W. Budge (ed. and trans.), *Coptic apocrypha in the dialect of Upper Egypt*, London, 1913, pp. 112, 116 and 306; E. Amélineau, 'Un évêque de Keft au VIIe siècle', *Mémoires de l' Institut d'Égypte*, Tome 2, 1889, p. 389; O'Leary, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

19. Budge, *op. cit.*, pp. 113-115, 120, 307-309 and 315; Amélineau, *op. cit.*, pp. 393-394; O'Leary, *op. cit.*, pp. 93-94, 117-122 and 137-138.

20. Budge, *op. cit.*, pp. 115-119 and 309-314; O'Leary, *op. cit.*, pp. 72-74, 87-92 and 124-130; *RE* (= *P. Pisentius* = E. Revillout, 'Textes coptes extraits de la correspondance de St. Pésunthius, évêque de Coptos, et de plusieurs documents analogues (juridiques ou économiques)', *Revue égyptologique*, vol. 9, Paris, 1900, pp. 133-77; vol. 10, 1902, pp. 34-47) nos. 20; 21; 22; 26; 32; 40; 50; 52.

21. A. Kaibara, 'Pisentios of Koptos: Episcopal Power in the Society of Upper Egypt in the Sixth and Seventh Centuries', *The Studies in Western History [Seiyoshigaku]*, vol. 252, 2014, pp. 1-19.

the Persians invaded, Pisentios abandoned his duties as Bishop and took refuge in the mountains of Djeme.[22] The *Life* does not attempt to excuse his behaviour. Rather, it emphasises the point that a monk's ideals are superior to the responsibilities of a bishop.

The escape of Pisentios is not a hagiographical rhetorical device. In a letter written to him,[23] a local resident mentioned that he disappeared for five years. Pisentios's case is not an exception. In another letter,[24] his disciple Moses complained that his fellow monks 'threw me from the holy place and handed me over to a congregation to have me pollute myself in their words'.

Theban monks, like the monks of Tabennisi and Pbow who were studied by Goehring, followed Pachomius's monastic rule; they did interact with local people, as Wipszycka insists. However, the monks in Western Thebes took a different approach and tended to be 'desert hermits'.

This tendency among Theban monks is illustrated by Pisentios's attitude to religious controversy. Each of three sources on Pisentios notes that he was indifferent to heresies, despite the fact that religious conflict between the Chalcedonians and anti-Chalcedonians had become a grave issue at the time, with contemporary clergymen and monks harshly criticising heresies in their works.[25]

The overwhelming predominance of anti-Chalcedonians in the area around Thebes is thought to have contributed to Pisentios' indifference to heresies. Jean-Luc Fournet argues that there were no Chalcedonians in the area and Pisentios exercised absolute power beyond his own diocese; this is why there is no description of them in the sources mentioned above.[26]

Wipszycka argues against this, saying that Pisentios did not participate in the affairs of Koptos inhabitants because the authorities of that city, whether secular or sacred, are not mentioned in the three sources on Pisentios.[27] My investigations suggest that Pisentios only directed the villages adjacent to the monastery where he lived: Kôs, Chenhor, and Djeme. There were two episcopal sees in the same district.

Pisentios was unconcerned with heresies, despite the contemporary situation, because he was essentially a monk who preferred to be distant from the world and to engross himself in reading the Bible, as mentioned above. He was reluctant to accept the Bishopric of Koptos.

The depth of local people's comprehension of Christianity must have reinforced the posture of the Theban monks in desiring to escape the everyday world as much as possible. The sources of information on Pisentios often refer to old customs, especially adultery, that Christians were forbidden to engage in.[28] Through the network of clergy and secular powers at his disposal, Pisentios examined the relationships of members of his diocese in some detail. In his sermons, he explicitly admonished them against fornicating.[29]

However, Pisentios' efforts did not succeed. The fact that the *Life of St. Pisentios,* which was written after his death, repeatedly mentions fornication proves that this practice was not eradicated. The local people do not seem to have followed his guidance. This is clear from an indignant letter of complaint against Pisentios, in which the writer accuses 'the holy man' of 'making many troubles' and tells Pisentios, 'you made me poor'.[30]

A sense of Christian values had not yet penetrated Eastern and Western Thebes; as a result, the Theban monks

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22. Budge, *op. cit.*, pp. 96-99, 121-122, 288-291 and 317; Amélineau, *op. cit.*, pp. 395-411; O'Leary, *op. cit.*, pp. 66-72 and 105-117 and 150-151.

23. *RE* 3.

24. *RE* 6.

25. H, Gelzer, *Leontios' von Neapolis Leben des Heiligen Johannes des Barmherzigen Erzbishofs von Alexandrien* (= *Sammlung ausgewählter kirchen - und dogmengeschichtlicher Quellenschriften, Heft 5*), Freiburg und Leipzig, 1893, S. 85; John, Bishop of Nikiu, *Chronicle*, R. Charles (trans.), Oxford (repr. Amsterdam), 1916, pp. 143-146, 184-186 and 198-200 etc.

26. J.-L. Fournet, 'Coptos dans l'Antiquité tardive (fin IIIe -VIIe siècle apr. J.-C.)', *Coptos: L'Égypte antique aux portes du désert : Lyon, musée des Beaux-Arts, 3 février-7 mai 2000*, Paris, 2000, pp. 208-210.

27. E. Wipszycka, 'The Institutional Church', in R. S. Bagnall (ed.), *Egypt in the Byzantine World, 300-700*, New York, 2007, pp. 331-349.

28. Budge, *op. cit.*, pp. 110-112 and 304-306; Amélineau, *op. cit.*, pp. 386-389; O'Leary, *op. cit.*, pp. 82-84; *RE* 14, 15, 16, $18_{ter,}$ 19, 38, 41, 45, 54, and 55.

29. W. Crum, 'Discours de Pisenthius sur Saint Onnophrius', *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien*, vol. 20, Paris, 1915-1917, pp. 38-67, esp. 49, 51, 54, 61-63, and 65.

30. *RE* 48.

wished to stay in their 'hermitages in the desert'.

IV. Western Thebes in the Early Islamic Period

Most of the hermitages of Western Thebes disappeared during the last years of the seventh century. The transfer of the Monastery of St. Phoibammon may be one reason for this phenomenon. This monastery had existed deep in the mountains of Djeme as stated above and owned a relic of St. Phoibammon.

In about 600, the then Abbot, whose name was Abraham, was assigned the Bishopric of Hermonthis by the Patriarch Damianos. He was occupying this position in about 620, when he died. Having placed his episcopal see in his monastery, he decided to move it to the site of the temple of Hatshepsut, which was closer to Djeme.

Abraham sent a letter to his subordinate, emphasising that he was unwillingly moving the monastery at the request of Damianos, who was worried about difficulty of access.[31] From that point on, Abraham and his correspondent shared the mentality of the monks of Western Thebes.

After the move, more lands were donated to the new Monastery of St. Phoibammon[32] and the inhabitants of distant cities were among the donors.[33] Many boys were dedicated to the monastery by their parents. They came from not only Djeme, but also from neighbouring areas, such as Apé (now Luxor),[34] Tout,[35] and Hermonthis.[36] The dedications of boys increased as time went by.

Twenty-six child donation documents from Western Thebes have been preserved. They were drawn up between 734 and 785 and all of them were addressed to the monastery of St. Phoibammon. In most cases, one boy was being donated.[37] Most of the boys were young children. There is only one case in which the age of the donated child was stated: he was three years old, probably the youngest child donated to that monastery.[38]

Parents were motivated to donate their children as a cure for sterility, to relive their own or their children's souls, and to cure childhood illnesses. Seventeen of the twenty-six documents mention the last motivation. Parents with a sick child swore they would dedicate him to the monastery if he regained his health.

Why did the donation of children to the monastery of St. Phoibammon increase? Some studies assume there must have been an economic crisis, in which parents who had sunk into poverty drove their children to the monastery to reduce the number of mouths they had to feed. Alternatively, the poor monastery may have urged local people to donate children to escape from some difficult situation.[39]

It is commonly accepted that monasteries suffered economically after 705, when the government of the Umayyad imposed a poll tax on the monks in Egypt. However, Djeme's high point had been the late seventh and eighth centuries, especially the middle of eighth century, according to Chris Wickham[40] and Terry G. Wilfong. Documents concerning Djeme are rare before that period and do not exist after the ninth century. It is possible that the conquest of Egypt by the Arabs promoted Djeme's economic growth. The fact that Arabic names seldom appeared on docu-

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31. *CO* (= *O. Crum = Coptic Ostraca from the Collections of the Egypt Exploration Fund, the Cairo Museum and Others*, W. E. Crum (ed.), London, 1902), no. Ad. 59.

32. *CO* 138, 140, 185, 206, 303, 307, 482, Ad. 3; *KRU* (= W. E. Crum, *Koptische Rechtsurkunden des achten Jahrhunderts aus Djême (Theben)*, Leipzig, 1912), no. 108, 111; *BKU* (= *Aegyptische Urkunden aus den Koeniglichen (later Staatlichen) Museen zu Berlin: Koptische Urkunden*, Bd. II, Berlin, 1904), no. 48; *ST* (= W. E. Crum, *Short Texts from Coptic Ostraca and Papyri*, Oxford, 1921), no. 60.

33. *KRU* 107, 109, 110.

34. *KRU* 86.

35. *KRU* 95.

36. *KRU* 80.

37. Exceptionally, in only one case, two boys were donated. Perhaps they were twins. *KRU* 99.

38. *KRU* 78; T. S. Richter, 'What's in a Story? Cultural Narratology and Coptic Child Donation Documents', *The Journal of Juristic Papyrology*, vol. 35, 2005, pp. 237-264.

39. A. Papaconstantinou, 'THEIA OIKONOMIA. Les actes thébains de donation d' enfants ou la gestion monastique de la pénurie', *Travaux et Mémoires*, vol. 14, 2002, pp. 511-526.

40. Wickham, *op. cit.*, pp. 421-422.

ments from Djeme may mean that it continued to pay taxes, and therefore to be allowed autonomy.[41]

One of the causes of the increased donations is likely to have been the control of Egypt by Arab Muslims. Arietta Papaconstantinou argues that 'Byzantinisation' developed in Egypt during the early Islamic period.[42] In Djeme, Greco-Roman names, such as Andronikos, Asklepios, and Sophia, frequently appeared, not only in legal documents but also in private letters from the second half of the seventh century, and especially during the eighth century. This suggests that having a Greco-Roman name became generally accepted in all social strata.

The Arab conquest therefore influenced Theban society at a psychological rather than economic level. Under Islamic rule, the Egyptian people yearned for their former sovereign and his culture encouraged the belief in Christian saints and the monasteries that bore their names.

Another reason for the increase in contributions was the location of the new Monastery of St. Phoibammon. In addition to owning relics of that saint, the monastery's new address helped it surpass other monasteries in Western Thebes. Not only did access become easy for the inhabitants of Djeme, but the monastery also occupied a very noticeable place—on the ruins of the famous temple of Hatshepsut. Local people paid much more attention to it, as Damianos had expected.

Furthermore, there was once an ancient pagan sanatorium in that spot. As a child, St. Phoibammon had once healed an epileptic. The admiration for Byzantine rule that arose in the region, alongside treasured ancient customs, heightened these connections. As a result, St. Phoibammon became known as a saint who could cure illnesses in children,[43] and the monastery that bore his name rose in prominence. Child donation may have become popular as a consequence.

V. Conclusion

By the eighth century, only the Monastery of St. Phoibammon and a monastery called Deir el Medina with a church dedicated to St. Isidore still existed.[44] The establishment of Arab Muslim rule in Egypt and the forced moving of the monastery of St. Phoibammon from deep in the mountains of Djeme to the ruins of the Temple of Hatshepsut changed the circumstances of Theban monks and the 'hermitages in the desert' became extinct. Monastic life was captured by the principles of the world; as a result, the connections between monks and secular people grew deeper. In Western Thebes, a lot of monastic communities and hermitages were overwhelmed; the local people's faith was concentrated on two monasteries near Djeme because they were accessible and people longed for the culture of the pre-Islamic era.

The monks living in the Theban desert had contact with the inhabitants of Djeme, and the town and desert were part of one social network. However, the monks tried to keep the desert separate from this network as much as possible. When Islamic rule began, the Monastery of St. Phoibammon became a religious centre that attracted people who lived far away. At the same time, the Theban desert became separated from the network; monks were not inhabitants of the desert.

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44. Wipszycka, *Moines et communautes monastiques*, pp. 196-197.

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