

## Two notes on Egyptian monasticism

The term « Sarabaitae » is used by Cassian (*Collationes* xviii 7) and Benedict (*Regula* 1) to describe a particularly reprehensible variety of Egyptian monk who lives in a small community, has his own wealth and obeys no superior. It is without doubt a word of Egyptian origin, and I suggest the following etymology:  $\text{c}\Delta$  « man (of) » and  $\text{p}\Delta\text{r}\text{H}$  « community, neighbourhood » (1). It is possible that the resulting form \* $\text{c}\Delta\text{p}\Delta\text{r}\text{H}$  may have become \* $\sigma\alpha\rho\alpha\beta\eta\tau\eta\varsigma$  in Greek, a form that would yield the plural ending  $-\alpha\iota$ . It is generally thought that the Sarabaitae were the equivalent of the Remnouoth mentioned by Jerome (*Epistula* 32) (2). It is perhaps worth mentioning that the Egyptians themselves do not appear to have been as scandalized by the behaviour of these monks as the Western observers of Egyptian monastic life. Indeed, the earliest use of the term *monachos* (3) suggests that monks were members of the community who were able to go about within that community in the ordinary way.

In an article in « Journal of Theological Studies » 5 (1954) Prof. K. H. Kuhn discussed the meaning of the phrase « at the gate » (p. 180) in connection with punishment administered in monasteries. A passage in the works of Besa, the successor of Shenute as abbot of the White Monastery in Upper Egypt, specifies that the punishment area was at the gate (4). Kuhn speculates on the possibility that the « person at the gate had authority to punish evildoers ». There may be archeological evidence to support this view. At Qasr el Wizz

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(1) W. E. CRUM, *A Coptic Dictionary* (Oxford 1939):316a ( $\text{c}\Delta$ ) anh 306a ( $\text{p}\Delta\text{r}\text{H}$ ).

(2) W. VYČIČHL, *Dictionnaire Etymologique de la Langue Copte* (Geneva 1983):173.

(3) Discussed by E. A. Judge in his article in « Jahrbuch für Christentum und Antike » 20 (1977):72-89.

(4) K. H. KUHN, *The Letters and Sermons of Besa* (Louvain 1956) fr. 22

in Nubia Dr George Scanlon discovered the « crickled remnant of a leather belt with stamped and tooled geometrical designs in panels » in a building which he identified as the gate house (5). The remains of three thongs at one end of the belt suggested to Dr Scanlon a possible use in flagellation.

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(5) In his excavation report in « JEA » 58 (1972):7 n. 4.