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# *Papyri from the Great Persecution: Roman and Christian Perspectives*

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Two papyrus documents from the time of the Great Persecution—an official document relating to the confiscation of church property and a private letter from a man to his wife—show how Christians were coping with the imperial measures by small acts of resistance. These mundane texts thus nuance our understanding of this formative period for ancient Christianity.

## PERSECUTION, MARTYRDOM, AND CHRISTIAN IDENTITY

From New Testament texts to the writings of Ignatius, Tertullian, Cyprian, and Eusebius, early Christian authors have often framed Christian identity in terms of persecution and martyrdom.<sup>1</sup> Yet as I will show, two papyrus documents pertaining to the so-called Great Persecution (303–311) present a perspective on this formative period that is different from the literary narratives.

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1. Pohlsander draws attention to the perspectival character of the word persecution, noting: “It is . . . good to bear in mind certain problems which may arise from the use of the word ‘persecution.’ 1. The term is an exclusively negative one, obscuring the fact that anti-Christian measures could serve positive ends. 2. The term is a decidedly one-sided one, viewing events from the Christian perspective only. . . . 3. The term covers a large variety of different measures. The anti-Christian measures of Nero have little in common with the anti-Christian measures of Decius . . .” (Hans A. Pohlsander, “The Religious Policy of Decius, *ANRW* II 16.3 [1986]: 1826–42, 1831).

The main sources for the Great Persecution are the writings of church historians Eusebius and Lactantius and hagiographic literature.<sup>2</sup> In these texts, one can generally distinguish two approaches to the persecutions: glorification of martyrdom and disdain for apostasy. The martyr acts present the persecution and trial of Christians as contests over Christian identity between Christians and Roman officials, with Christians proudly stepping forward, confessing the *nomen Christianum* by saying: “I am a Christian” and dying as a consequence of that statement.<sup>3</sup> Since these texts have Christian authors, it is evident that they are biased towards reporting the heroic confessions of faith and martyrdom of Christians. Indeed, as G. E. M. de Ste. Croix remarked: “the great majority of the trials of Christians we know about in detail end in conviction and a death

2. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, text and translation J. E. L. Oulton, LCL 265 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), and Lactantius, *De mortibus persecutorum*, text and translation Alfons Städele: *Laktanz, De mortibus persecutorum. Die Todesarten der Verfolger* Lateinisch-Deutsch, Fontes Christiani 43 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003). For scholarly discussions on the Great Persecution, see, e.g., Karl-Heinz Schwarte, “Diokletians Christengesetz,” in *E fontibus haurire. Beiträge zur römischen Geschichte und zu ihren Hilfswissenschaften*, ed. Rosmarie Günther and Stefan Rebenich, Studien zur Geschichte und Kultur des Altertums 8 (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1994), 203–40, and the reaction by Winrich A. Löhr, “Some Observations on Karl-Heinz Schwarte’s ‘Diokletian’s Christengesetz,’” *VC* 56 (2002): 75–95. Furthermore, P. S. Davies, “The Origin and Purpose of the Persecution of AD 303,” *JTS* 40 (1989): 66–94; Werner Portmann, “Zu den Motiven der diokletianischen Christenverfolgung,” *Historia* 39 (1990): 212–48; Frank Kolb, “Chronologie und Ideologie der Tetrarchie,” *Antiquité tardive* 3 (1995): 21–31. On Egypt in particular, see: Hippolyte Delehaye, “Les Martyrs d’Égypte,” *AB* 40 (1922): 5–154 and 299–364. Willy Clarysse supplemented Delehaye’s work with the evidence from newly discovered texts in “The Coptic Martyr Cult,” in *Martyrium in multidisciplinary perspective. Memorial Louis Reekmans*, ed. M. Lamberigts and P. van Deun, BETL 117 (Leuven: Leuven University Press/Peeters, 1995), 377–95. See also Arietta Papaconstantinou, *Le culte des saints en Égypte des Byzantins aux Abbassides. L’apport des inscriptions et des papyrus grecs et coptes*, Le monde byzantin (Paris: CNRS, 2001).

3. Confessing the *nomen christianum* is the ground for accusation and therefore for punishment in the Roman legal system, as De Ste. Croix argued: “the normal charge against Christians was simply ‘being Christians’: they are punished, that is to say, ‘for the Name,’ *nomen Christianum*. This is quite certain from what the Christian Apologists say in the second and third centuries . . . and from the technical language used by Pliny and Trajan in their celebrated exchange of letters . . .” (G. E. M. De Ste. Croix, “Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted,” *Past and Present* 26 [1963]: 6–38, at 9). Judith Lieu made the important observation that “Martyrdom and identity are in many ways cross-referential terms: to be willing to die for a cause is to acknowledge that it is determinative of one’s being . . .” (“I am a Christian’),” in *Neither Jew Nor Greek? Constructing Early Christianity*, Studies of the New Testament and Its World (London/New York: T & T Clark, 2002), 211–31, at 211.

sentence.”<sup>4</sup> Of course, not all Christians died a martyr’s death. Canons of Church councils and books on fallen Christians reveal another side of the debate:<sup>5</sup> the aftermath of the persecutions forced Christians to deal with those who had refused martyrdom and had instead succumbed to the pressures to sacrifice to the Roman deities; such Christians were thus known as the “fallen” ones (*lapsi*), giving rise to ensuing controversies for re-admittance into the church.

### *Persecution in the Papyrological Record*

Traces of the persecutions also appear in the papyrological record, allowing us to catch a glimpse of the impact the persecutions had on the population of Egypt from a different angle. These understudied documents add contemporaneous evidence and lead to a better understanding of the situation “on the ground.” The papyri under discussion—an official communication about the confiscation of church property and a private letter from a man to his wife—offer insights into the intricate workings of the Roman bureaucracy and reveal the subtle strategies of compliance and resistance with which Christians countered imperial edicts that had been issued against them. Instead of the clear heroizing of Christian martyrs in Eusebius and martyr acts, we view another side of the story: *P.Oxy. XXXIII 2673*, an official document, gives us a glimpse of the possible temptations to bribery or collusion that humble Christian churches might have faced when threatened by imperial orders to dismantle. A private letter, *P.Oxy. XXXI 2601*, presents sacrifice to the emperor as routine business of the court; yet this mundane routine proved troubling to a man who sends greetings to his wife while away on a business trip. Both incidents, drawn from everyday life during this tumultuous period, show the impact of the persecutions on select individuals in Egypt; they provide a counterpoint to literary portraits of martyrdom, which are punctuated by acts of heroism or apostasy and marked by stark moral dichotomies between good and evil.

4. “Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted?” 13.

5. For example, Canons of Peter of Alexandria, and of the Councils of Elvira and Ancyra. On the Melitian schism in Egypt, see especially Hans Hauben, “The Melitian ‘Church of the Martyrs,’” in *Ancient History in a Modern University 2: Early Christianity, Late Antiquity and Beyond. Proceedings of a Conference held at Macquarie University, 8–13 July 1993*, ed. T. W. Hillard, R. A. Kearsley, C. E. V. Nixon, and A. M. Nobbs, Ancient History Documentary Research Centre, Macquarie University, N. S. W., Australia (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 329–49.

*Confiscation of Church Property*

In his *Ecclesiastical History*, written shortly after the end of the persecutions, Eusebius described the onset of Diocletian's persecution as follows:

. . . in the nineteenth year of the reign of Diocletian . . . an imperial letter was everywhere promulgated, ordering the razing of the churches to the ground and the destruction by fire of the Scriptures, and proclaiming that those who held high positions would lose all civil rights, while those in households, if they persisted in their profession of Christianity, would be deprived of their liberty.<sup>6</sup>

Eusebius's account of these times implies that Diocletian's persecution impacted Egypt greatly, approaching in its final phase a situation of civil war.

On February 5, 304, almost a year after the edict that Eusebius mentioned had been sent out, a certain Ammonius from a village in middle Egypt files a report with three high-ranking officials, stating that his church possessed no property, apart from some bronze materials. On the bottom of the declaration, another person has written the oath for Ammonius. The document, composed in the tedious prose that characterizes bureaucracy of all times, reads in translation:<sup>7</sup>

During the consulship of our lords the emperors Diocletian, for the ninth time, and Maximian, for the 8th time, the Augusti.

6. Eusebius, *h. e.* 8.2, 4–5: ἔτος . . . ἑννεακαιδέκατον τῆς Διοκλητιανοῦ βασιλείας, . . . ἡπλωτο πανταχόσε βασιλικά γράμματα, τὰς μὲν ἐκκλησίας εἰς ἕδαφος φέρειν, τὰς δὲ γραφὰς ἀφανεῖς πυρὶ γενέσθαι προστάττοντα, καὶ τοὺς μὲν τιμῆς ἐπειλημμένους ἀτίμους, τοὺς δ' ἐν οἰκεταίαις, εἰ ἐπιμένοιεν τῇ τοῦ Χριστιανισμοῦ προθέσει, ἐλευθερίας στερεῖσθαι προαγορεύοντα (Oulton, *Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History*, 2:257–59).

7. See the Greek text and papyrological description in Appendix I. Edition: J. R. Rea, *P.Oxy.* XXXIII (1968) and idem, “*P.Oxy.* XXXIII 2673.22: ΠΥΛΗΝ τὸ ὙΛΗΝ,” *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 35 (1979): 128. For discussions of this papyrus, see E. Wipszycka, “Un lecteur qui ne sait pas écrire ou un chrétien qui ne veut pas se souiller? (*P.Oxy.* XXXIII 2673),” in *Études sur le Christianisme dans l'Égypte de l'Antiquité tardive*, *Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum* 52 (Roma: Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 1996), 415–20 (= *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 50 [1983]: 117–21), and eadem, “Encore sur le lecteur ‘qui ne sait pas écrire,’” in *Études*, 421–26; G. W. Clarke, “An Illiterate Lector?” *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 57 (1984): 103–4; L. Michael White, *Social Origins of Christian Architecture* 2 (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity, 1997), No. 46 “Declaration of Church Property (5 February 304),” 166–70; E. A. Judge and S. R. Pickering, “Papyrus Documentation of Church and Community in Egypt to the Mid-fourth Century,” *JbAC* 20 (1977): 47–71, No. 17: “Declaration on Church Property by *anagnostes*,” 59–60.

To Aurelius Neilus alias Ammonius (former-?) gymnasiarch and city-council member, *prytanis* in office, and Sarmates and Matrinus, both (former-?) gymnasiarchs, city-council members, *syndics*, all of them of the glorious and most glorious city of the Oxyrhynchites, Aurelius Ammonius, son of Copeus, reader of the former church of the village of Chysis.

Whereas you (pl.) commanded me in accordance with what was written by Aurelius Athanasius, *procurator rei privatae*, because of an order of the most eminent *magister rei privatae*, Neratius Apollonides, about the surrender of all the goods in the same former church and whereas I declared that the same former church had neither gold nor silver nor money nor clothes nor cattle nor slaves nor building-sites nor possessions, neither from gifts nor from bequests, apart from only the bronze matter which was found and given over to the *logistes* in order to be brought down to the most glorious Alexandria in accordance with what was written by our most eminent governor Clodius Culcianus, I also swear by the genius of our lords the emperors Diocletian and Maximian, the Augusti, and Constantius and Galerius, the most illustrious Caesars, that these things are thus, and that nothing is cheated, or I may be liable to the divine oath.

In the 20th and 12th year of our lords the emperors Diocletian and Maximian, the Augusti, and Constantius and Galerius, the most illustrious Caesars. Mecheir 10th.

(2nd hand) I, Aurelius Ammonius, swore the oath as aforesaid. I, Aurelius Serenus, wrote for him since he does not know letters.<sup>8</sup>

Two points in the declaration arouse suspicion: 1) did the church really possess only some bronze materials, and 2) why did Ammonius, the church reader, not sign the document himself? To investigate these matters we shall turn first to the characters in the drama, then to the issues at stake.

### *High Officials*

This legal document is densely populated with officials decked out in their full titles. Three important men in the local government of the ancient

8. There is a parallel document, *P.Harr.* II 208 (ed. Donatella Limongi; see Greek text and description of the papyrus in Appendix II). Dated February 9, 304, this text was written only four days after the "Declaration of Church Property" (*P.Oxy.* XXXIII 2673). The preserved text of *P.Harr.* II 208 is exactly the same as that of *P.Oxy.* XXXIII 2673, apart from the date and the word ἀυτοκρατόρων in *P.Oxy.* 2673.27 but lacking in line 6 of the Harris papyrus. However, two important parts are missing in the Harris fragment: 1) the section containing the specifics, a parallel to the circumstances outlined in lines 8–22 of *P.Oxy.* XXXIII 2673, and 2) the subscription. Its date and the parallel as well as the officials mentioned in it suggest that this text should be interpreted in light of Diocletian's edict. All we find out is that something is being transported to Alexandria.

Egyptian city of Oxyrhynchus are the addressees; one of them is the city's *prytanis*: the main local officer and president of the city council.<sup>9</sup> The confiscated bronze materials are, at the time of writing, in the possession of the Oxyrhynchite *logistes*, the "imperial official in overall charge of a particular city."<sup>10</sup> The declaration is occasioned by two high financial officials at the level of the government of the province of Egypt.<sup>11</sup> Presumably, these officials issued orders to confiscate property in compliance with the imperial edict. At the top of the chain of command, occupying the highest government job in Roman Egypt, stood Clodius Culcianus, prefect of Egypt. Culcianus held this position in the early years of the fourth century,<sup>12</sup> hence the persecutions of Christians under the emperor Diocletian took place during his term in office. This man figures prominently in Christian literary texts such as the *Acts of Phileas* and Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History*. In short, the men involved in this matter are all high-ranking officials, both at the local and at the provincial level. This document, for one, exposes the pervasive reach of Roman power in the life of an Egyptian village. The declaration is preserved in three copies, that were tied together, probably one for each official.<sup>13</sup> They are written in non-identical hands, indicating that someone dictated the text to a group of scribes. Thus the

9. Aurelius Neilus alias Ammonius, Aurelius Sarmates, and Aurelius Matrinus. All three are βουλευταί, members of the city council and (former?) gymnasiarchs. (It is not clear whether the three are current or former gymnasiarchs, because the word for it is abbreviated: γυμ'.) The *syndics* represented the city "externally in its dealings with the imperial government, and internally in its dealings with private citizens" (Alan K. Bowman, *Town Councils of Roman Egypt*, American Studies in Papyrology 11 [Toronto: Hakkert, 1971], 47).

10. Roger S. Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 337. The Latin term is *curator civitatis*.

11. Aurelius Athananius, *procurator rei privatae* and Neratius Apollonides, *magister rei privatae*. The *procurator rei privatae* was a financial officer subordinate to the *magister rei privatae*; see Jacqueline Lallemand, *Administration civile de l'Égypte de l'avènement de Dioclétien à la création du diocèse (284–382). Contribution à l'étude des rapports entre l'Égypte et l'Empire à la fin du III<sup>e</sup> et au IV<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Koninklijke Academie van België, klasse der letteren, verhandelingen, 57.2 (Brussel: Paleis der Academiën, 1964), 89 and 90–92. See also Bowman, *Town Councils*, 49.

12. When precisely Culcianus was appointed as prefect is not clear. The papyri indicate that he held that office for at least five years. The earliest reference to him is dated June 6, 301 (*P.Oxy.* XLVI 3304), the latest dates from May 29, 306 (*P.Oxy.* VIII 1104). See also Parsons in *P.Oxy.* L 3529, note to line 1. According to Eusebius (*b. e.* 9.11, 4), Culcianus was murdered after the persecution, but this cannot be verified.

13. The papyri were found tied together. For official documents written in multiple copies, see B. Nielsen, "A Catalogue of Duplicate Papyri," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 129 (1999): 187–214.

government allocated many people to this project, although the returns in this case were insignificant.

Last and least among these officials, but most important for our interests, we meet “Aurelius Ammonius, son of Copreus, reader of the former church in the village of Chysis.”<sup>14</sup> As a reader, Ammonius read aloud liturgical texts during worship.<sup>15</sup> Since few people in antiquity were able to read, the reader of a church had an important task: to provide the Christian congregation access to its Scriptures.<sup>16</sup> It is noteworthy that the government officials are dealing with the former church’s reader. Did they not

14. Chysis (modern Schuscha) was a village in middle Egypt located on the Bar Yusuf canal on the trade route between two large cities, Oxyrhynchus and Hermopolis Magna. Julian Krüger characterizes it as “(eine) wahrscheinlich nicht unbedeutende Siedlung” (*Oxyrhynchos in der Kaiserzeit: Studien zur Topographie und Literaturrezeption*, Europäische Hochschulschriften 3, 441 [Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1990], 268). Judge and Pickering describe it as an “obscure . . . village” (“Papyrus Documentation,” 69).

15. According to the *Traditio apostolica*, the reader read the Scriptures and the bishop interpreted them (“Die heiligen Schriften, die auszulegen jetzt dem Bischof vorbehalten ist, dürfen jedoch noch vom Lektor vorgetragen werden”; Hippolytus, *Traditio apostolica: Apostolische Überlieferung*, trans. and comm. Wilhelm Geerlings, *Fontes Christiani* 1 [Freiburg: Herder, 1991], 174). In earlier times, some readers may have also interpreted the readings, so Harry Y. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 219.

16. See Gamble: “In any congregation only a small number of persons could read at all, and fewer could read publicly. In the early period, and long afterward in small communities, there may have been no more than one or two who had the ability. The task of reading inevitably fell to the literate, and because the congregation depended upon them for its access to texts, a great importance accrued to them . . .” (*Books and Readers*, 220). On literacy in antiquity, see especially William V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

In this period the status of readers varies: some sources consider readers as important lay people, others as ordained clergy and it remains unclear which procedure was followed at Oxyrhynchus or the Oxyrhynchite countryside. The earliest certainly Christian reader in the papyri appears in *P.Amb.* I 3a.3, 42 (*SB* VI 9557 from 264–82), where he is associated with *papas* Maximus of Alexandria. In a tax list dated roughly a decade later than our papyrus we meet a Besarion, reader at Tampetei in the Oxyrhynchite countryside (Βησαρίων ἀνα[γ]νώστης, *P.Oxy.* LV 3787.56–57, from ca. 313–320 c.e.). This Besarion was in all likelihood a Christian reader. Other readers in papyrus documents from Oxyrhynchus are for instance Morus (*P.Oxy.* XLI 2969, dated 323 c.e.), and Horus (*P.Oxy.* XXIV 2421, 4th c.), from elsewhere, e.g. Herminus (*P.Neph.* 12.11, 4th c.). In a few instances the word ἀναγνώστης occurs in a non-Christian context: at Oxyrhynchus in the year 58 c.e. an ἀναγνώστης shows up (*P.Oxy.* XLIX 3463.18). *SB* IV 7336.28 (late 3rd century) features a reader called Sarapas, mentioned in an account for a pagan religious festival; in this context, it is unlikely that he was Christian.

find other clergy at Chysis?<sup>17</sup> I suspect that the fact that they are working with a reader has to do with the handing over of manuscripts. A closer examination is therefore required.

### *Concealing Property?*

The document from February of 304 c.e. refers to ἡ ποτε ἐκκλησία (“the former church”). This means that the Christians at Chysis used to gather in a church.<sup>18</sup> Why is this building now described as “former”? What happened to this church? Eusebius and Lactantius both recount the destruction of churches during Diocletian’s persecution.<sup>19</sup> Yet some scholars have suggested that not all churches were burnt or completely ruined during the Great Persecution, but only stripped of valuables and closed.<sup>20</sup> Whether

17. For example, in the *Acta* of Munatius Felix (dated 303 c.e.), preserved in the *Gesta apud Zenophilum*, the government officials negotiate with the bishop. Readers also figure prominently in other texts of that period. In the martyrdom of Dioscorus, Culcianus asks Dioscorus whether he is a reader (*P.Oxy.* L 3529). He replies that his father was one. Apparently Culcianus expected Dioscorus to be a reader. Perhaps also, other clergy had already suffered martyrdom.

18. About Christians at Chysis we know nothing besides the little information we can glean from this declaration. The document uses the word ἐκκλησία, “church.” In this context, this word indicates not a general assembly, the original meaning of the word, but the place where a Christian congregation gathers. This word can refer to a so-called *domus ecclesia*, with Christians worshipping at someone’s house. According to the *Acta Saturnini* (12 February, 304) the congregation of Abitina in Numidia met in the house of the reader, Emeritus. Interviewed by the proconsul, this Emeritus reportedly said: “I am the guardian in whose house the congregation was assembled” (*ego sum auctor . . . in cuius domus collecta facta fuit*). And later: “In my house we conducted the Lord’s Supper” (*in domo mea . . . egimus dominicum*) (White, *Social Origins* [No. 21], 88 [Latin] and 89 [translation]). Or ἐκκλησία can mean a building specifically set aside or even built as church. As D. Willy Rordorf observes: “Die . . . Tatsache, daß die Privathäuser, die in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten zu gottesdienstlichen Zwecken benützt wurden, auch einfach “Kirchen” genannt werden konnten, macht es schwer, im einzelnen Fall zu entscheiden, ob es sich um eine Hauskirche oder um ein von den Christen eigens erbautes Kirchengebäude handelt, wenn in einem Text von einer Kirche die Rede ist.” Rordorf’s timeframe is the pre-Constantinian period; he mentions examples from the period of the Great Persecution, thus contemporary to our text here (“Was wissen wir über die christlichen Gottesdiensträume der vorkonstantinischen Zeit?” *ZNTW* 54 [1963]: 110–28, 122).

19. See Eusebius, quoted above (*b. e.* 8.2, 4). According to Lactantius the persecution began with the destruction of the Christian church at Nicomedia, and the burning of the Scriptures (*Mort.* 12). Lactantius also refers to Constantius ordering the destruction of church buildings in the West, but not the killing of people (*Mort.* 15.7). See also Rordorf, “Die christlichen Gottesdiensträume,” 123.

20. For instance, Frend mentions that the church in Heraclea, Thrace, was not destroyed but locked and sealed, with reference to a Martyrdom of Philip. It is however not clear what text he is referring to here. See W. H. C. Frend, *Martyrdom*

or not that was the case with other churches, at the Chysis church not only were its possessions confiscated, but the description “former church” implies that the building was no longer in existence at the time the document was written, thus confirming the situation that Eusebius and Lactantius sketch.

The papyrus gives an indication of what officials expected to find in a church;<sup>21</sup> it even seems that they were working from a standardized checklist,<sup>22</sup> signaling the government’s systematic bureaucratic effort.<sup>23</sup> Their list

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*and Persecution in the Early Church: A Study of a Conflict from the Maccabees to Donatus* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965), 499. L. Michael White points to the Edict of Milan, quoted by Lactantius, containing a section on the reinstatement of possessions to churches. This leads White to observe that “[t]he provisions for restoration of church properties . . . make it clear that a universal ‘destruction of churches’ was not the order of the day, but rather the rhetorical symbol among the Christians. It appears instead that search and seizure of the properties was more common . . .” (*Social Origins*, 116, note 42).

21. According to Judge and Pickering, “the catalogue presumably defines the range of property expected to be found in the possession of a church at this time” (“Papyrus Documentation,” 59). Cf. Bagnall: “The list . . . at least suggests what the authorities thought a church might possibly own” (*Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 290).

22. Especially the fact that these two documents are almost exactly the same (*P.Oxy.* XXXIII 2673 and *P.Harr.* II 208, see above footnote) suggests to me that the officials used a standard form (but, of course, the second text lacks crucial sections that would have proven this). The reference to *written* instructions from the *procurator rei privatae* further supports my assumption that a standardized checklist was used (ἀκολουθῶντες τοῖς γραφεῖσι ὑπὸ Ἀρηλίου Ἀθανασίου ἐπιτρόπου πριουάτης, l. 10–12).

23. Such a checklist could be based on finds from other churches, temple inventories, or private possessions. For an overview of church inventory lists and bibliography, see Růžena Dostálová, *P.Prag. Wess.* II 178 “Klosterinventar” (1995): 137–39, and eadem, “Gli inventari dei beni delle chiese e dei conventi su papiro,” *Analecta Papyrologica* 6 (1994): 5–19. See also Peter van Minnen, *P.L.Bat.* XXV 13, with a list of inventories on page 47. All these documents, however, are much later than our papyrus. As for temple inventories: until the mid- or late third century, Egyptian temples submitted yearly an inventory of priests, revenues, and possessions, the so-called γραφαὶ ἱερέων καὶ χειρισμοῦ. For an overview of such declarations, see *P.Oxy.* XLIX 3473, pp.141–42. In their introduction to *P.Oxy.* XII 1449 Grenfell and Hunt listed the objects from temple dedication split out into gold, silver, bronze, and stone, clothing and miscellanea (p. 136). See also Fabienne Burkhalter, “Le mobilier des sanctuaires d’Égypte et les ‘listes des prêtres et du cheirismos,’” *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 59 (1985): 123–34. On private possessions: see, e.g., *P.Oxy.* XXXIV 2713, “Petition to a Prefect” (297 C.E.), about a woman complaining about her uncles taking her share of the inheritance. She refers to “slaves and lands and moveables” (ἀνδροπόδων καὶ οἰκοπέδων καὶ ἐνδομ[ενίας]); *P.Oxy.* XLIII 3119, a fragmentary preserved official document probably from the persecution under Valerian, deals with Christians and property. Two papyri contemporary with our papyrus, *P.Oxy.* XXXIII 2665 and *M.Chr.* 196, may be inquiries into private property of individual Christians.

was rather broadly defined: they checked for lands, buildings, cattle, money and precious metals, clothing, and also slaves—these all could be sold.

The *Gesta apud Zenophilum*, trial proceedings from the year 320, incorporate an earlier document dated May 19, 303, the *Acta* of Munatius Felix from Cirta in Numidia.<sup>24</sup> This earlier document, contemporaneous with our papyrus text, serves as an interesting point of comparison. The situation depicted in it is as follows: a delegation of government officials visits the church in Cirta in Numidia (present day Constantine in Algeria), and requests books and other church property. From the church are brought out a good amount of gold and silver objects, some clothes, and a number of shoes that would make Imelda Marcos jealous:

two gold chalices, six silver chalices, six silver urns, a silver cooking-pot, seven silver lamps, two wafer-holders, seven short bronze candle-sticks with their own lights, eleven bronze lamps with their own chains, 82 women's tunics, 38 capes, 16 men's tunics, 13 pairs of men's shoes, 47 pairs of women's shoes, and 19 peasant clasps.<sup>25</sup>

Upon closer inspection, another silver lamp and a silver box appear, and also four large jars and six barrels from the dining room, as well as one large codex.<sup>26</sup> In addition, the officials visited the homes of seven read-

24. Critical edition: Karl Ziwsa, *S. Optati Meleвитани Libri VII*, CSEL 26 (Prague, Vienna, Leipzig: Tempsky, 1893). See also the new study of this text by Yvette Duval: "L'église et la communauté chrétienne de Cirta-Constantine de la Grande Persecution au process de Silvanus en 320," in her *Chrétiens d'Afrique à l'aube de la paix constantiniennne. Les premiers échos de la grande persecution*, Collection des Études Augustiniennes, Série Antiquité 164 (Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 2000), 13–209, and photographic reproduction of pages of the Cormery manuscript in the appendix, 470–85.

25. *Gesta apud Zenophilum* 2: *calices duo aurei, item calices sex argentei, urceola sex argentea, cucumellum argenteum, lucernas argenteas septem, cereofala duo, candelas breves aeneas cum lucernis suis septem, item lucernas aeneas undecim cum catenis suis, tunicas muliebres LXXXII, mafortea XXXVIII, tunicas viriles XVI, caligas viriles paria XIII, caligas muliebres paria XLVII, capulas rusticanas XVIII*. Latin from Ziwsa, with modification from Duval (viz. in the last line of the quotation *capulas* instead of *caplas*, "L'église et la communauté chrétienne," 416; trans. Mark Edwards, *Optatus: Against the Donatists*, Translated Texts for Historians 27 [Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1997], 154). The *capulas rusticanas* could also be translated as "plain cloaks." The enumeration of shoes and clothing is striking. Were these liturgical vestments or everyday pieces? Duval argues that they are for charity ("L'église et la communauté chrétienne," 415–17). Clothing in antiquity was a different commodity than today; for instance, items of clothing, even worn pieces, are listed in wills.

26. *Gesta apud Zenophilum* 3 and 4 (Edwards, *Optatus*, 154).

ers, confiscating in total 37 manuscripts, which the readers had hidden.<sup>27</sup> Clearly, the Christians at Cirta had unsuccessfully tried to conceal their possessions, but succumbed to the pressures. Whether this was the total inventory of the church, we will never know.

Compared to the long list of assets of the congregation at Cirta in North Africa, the inventory of the church at Chysis is meager;<sup>28</sup> there is just that “bronze matter” (χαλκῆν ὕλην, l. 22).<sup>29</sup> These bronze materials could be bronze lamps, as listed in the Cirta inventory, but might also indicate liturgical vessels.<sup>30</sup>

Was this “bronze matter” really all that the Chysis church possessed? If so, the church was modest, to say the least. However, as Rea remarks, it “is doubtful whether we should believe that this village church was extremely poor or suspect that the nil return was part of the Christian resistance.”<sup>31</sup> *Immobilia* were recorded in the city archives, so the document must be factually correct with regard to these.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, in two other papyri relating to the persecution, officials sent inquiries to the city archivists (βιβλιοφύλακες) about property belonging to individuals.<sup>33</sup>

27. The readers could have brought the books home to practice reading aloud their passages. However, given the fact that the book cupboards (*armaria*) in the church library (*in bibliothecis*) were found empty, it seems fair to assume that most books, under normal circumstances, would have been stored in the church, and that the readers had indeed concealed them in their houses because of the persecution. See Gamble, *Books and Readers*, 147, and Duval, *Chrétien d’Afrique*, 412–13.

28. Granted, Cirta was a city, so a richer inventory should not surprise. The *Acta* with the details in the inventory and proceedings give a pretty reliable impression, although one may wonder whether the transmitters of these acts did not at some point embellish the story somewhat, and perhaps enriched the church interior with extra gold and silver. Overall, however, I consider them trustworthy.

29. Rea noted: “In our context a mass of unworked bronze seems unlikely. The very general term was probably chosen for the sake of brevity. The most likely guess is that the phrase refers to a quantity of bronze objects, not necessarily the sacred ones that spring to mind” (“ΠΥΛΗΝ to ὙΛΗΝ,” 128). The section “Additions and Corrections” in *P.Oxy* XLVIII, p. xvii refers to *P.Col.* VII 141.23–33 χαλκῆς χυτῆς ὕλης (“poured copper material,” l. 26, cf. l. 29), with the comment that “It might have been either copper or bronze . . . . The wording indicates that it was cast copper which needed further refining.” Another papyrus, *SB* XIV 11958.2.75 (“Teil einer Abrechnung über Arbeiten an einem Tempel,” Oxyrhynchite, 117 c.E.), reads: εὔρεθ( ) ὕλης χαλκοῦ[ ? ].

30. Both are known also from the later church and monastery inventories (see footnote 23 above), but also the “pagan” temples (e.g., *P.Oxy.* XII 1449.36 λύχ(νος) χα(λκοῦς)).

31. Rea, *P.Oxy.* XXXIII 2673, 106.

32. So Bagnall: the declaration is “unlikely to be false in the matter of real property, which could be checked in the registers” (*Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 289–90).

33. *P.Oxy.* XXXIII 2665 and *M.Chr.* 196.

However, the checklist in our document contains much more: gold, silver, money, clothes, cattle, and even, listed as inventory, slaves! In the *Acta* of Munatius Felix, the people at the North African church tried to conceal some of their possessions, not only the books, but also lamps and jars. The apparent paucity of possessions of the Chysis church gives rise to an intriguing set of explanations: Ammonius may have hidden some of the objects in the church or at home. Church property may have been spared on account of bribery by Ammonius or collusion on the part of the officials. I can imagine Ammonius and some fellow-Christians from Chysis secretly hiding some of their church's possessions, a silver lamp or liturgical vessel, as their contemporaries in Cirta did, or even some clothing. Or were perhaps the officials in some way corrupt? Roger Rémondon suspects the latter: "Je ne doute pas que les autorités aient fermé les yeux."<sup>34</sup> One can picture the Christians bribing them. Perhaps also they encountered an official sympathetic to their case. Aurelius Athanasius, the assistant to the finance minister in Alexandria, may have been a Christian himself; at least his name can be interpreted that way.<sup>35</sup> Either way, unless we assume a poor church, which cannot be ruled out, we have to suppose that one party was in some way fraudulent, whether it was Ammonius, the church reader, or a government official.

#### *An Illiterate, Bookless Reader*

In the *Acta* of Munatius Felix the first items the Roman official requested were not church silver and gold, but rather books.<sup>36</sup> However, manuscripts are absent in the declaration from Chysis. It is certainly likely that the congregation possessed at least some manuscripts. Why else would it have a reader, whose job it was to read Christian texts during worship?

34. "L'Église dans la société égyptienne à l'époque byzantine," *Chronique d'Égypte* 47 (1972): 254–77, 255.

35. This Aurelius Athanasius features in *P.Oxy.* XXXIII 2673 and 2665, and presumably also in *P.Harr.* II 208. He is not known from other texts besides these. As *procurator rei privatae* in Egypt he resided in Alexandria.

36. *Gesta apud Zenophilum* 3 and 4: *cum ventum esset ad domum, in qua christiani conveniebant, Felix flamen perpetuus curator Paulo episcopo dixit: proferte scripturas legis et, si quid aliud hic habetis, ut praeceptum est, ut iussioni parere possitis. Paulus episcopus dixit: scripturas lectores habent. Sed nos, quod hic habemus, damus.* "When they arrived at the house in which the Christians gathered, Felix, the permanent priest and curator, said to Paul, the bishop, 'Bring forth the writings of the Law and anything else that you have here, as is commanded, so that you may comply with the edict.' Paul the bishop said, 'The readers have the scriptures, but we give you what we have here'" (trans. Edwards, *Optatus*, 153, modified).

The manuscripts might have belonged to the church collectively or alternatively they may have been privately owned. If held in private possession, perhaps Ammonius himself owned a codex. My explanation for the absence of manuscripts in the checklist is that, if confiscated, books were destroyed and therefore did not need to be recorded. As we have seen in the passage from Eusebius, Diocletian's edict required the burning of manuscripts.<sup>37</sup> Unlike the other items on the list, Christian books had no retail value and therefore did not need to be transported to Alexandria. Instead they were burned on the spot, in agreement with the edict. Given this scenario, it is only likely that the manuscripts' owners would try to avoid this fate for their precious books. The *Acta* suggest that clergy from the Circa church had hidden manuscripts in their homes and this may have happened at Chysis, too.

At the foot of each document a Serenus penned the oath formula for Ammonius, stating that the latter "does not know letters" (μη εἰ[δότης] γρά[μματα], l. 34). Papyrus documents often contain this formula of illiteracy,<sup>38</sup> since the majority of the population "did not know letters," although scholars disagree as to the exact percentage. But what a surprise to encounter an illiterate reader!<sup>39</sup> How should we interpret this sentence?

37. Eusebius, *b. e.* 8.2, 4 ("destruction by fire of the Scriptures," Oulton, 259). As Gamble remarks: "At the start of the fourth century, Diocletian took it for granted that every Christian community, wherever it might be, had a collection of books and knew that those books were essential to its viability" (*Books and Readers*, 150). In other literary sources on the persecution, the handing over or not of Christian manuscripts figures prominently. See Gamble, *Books and Readers*, 147–51. People that had handed in manuscripts were called *traditores*. In fact, *traditio* (handing over manuscripts) became an important theological issue in the West resulting in the Donatist controversy. Church and monastery inventories from the fifth and sixth century consistently list manuscripts among various worldly possessions. *P.Prag. Wess.* II 178.5–6, a monastery inventory mentions the manuscripts at the beginning of the list, after four silver cups, a silver pitcher and a small altar (βιβλία διάφορα) βιβρ[άινα] καὶ χάρτινα ε, "different parchment and papyrus books: five"), *P.Grenf.* II 111.27–28 (5th/6th c.), a church inventory (βιβλία δευμάτινα) κα' ἰ ὁμοί(ωξ) χαρτία γ', "parchment books: 21; papyrus ones: 3"), *P.L.Bat.* XXV 13 (7th/8th c.) enumerates "some forty odd books" (p. 42), most of them in Greek, some bilingual Greek-Coptic, others Coptic.

38. Compare Herbert Chayyim Youtie, "AGRAMMATOS: An Aspect of Greek Society in Egypt," in *Scriptiunculae II* (Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1973), 611–27 (= *HSCP* 75 [1971]: 161–76).

39. I share this surprise with several other scholars: Wipszycka remarks: "Qu'un anagnostes, un 'lecteur', ne sache pas écrire, voilà qui est surprenant" ("Lecteur," 117). Clarysse calls it "rather astonishing for a lector" ("Coptic Martyr Cult," 380) and White finds it "perplexing" (*Social Origins*, 169). In general on this question, see Wipszycka, "Un lecteur qui ne sait pas écrire ou un chrétien qui ne veut pas se

Three scenarios are possible: The first, most literal interpretation is that Ammonius was indeed illiterate, unable to write a short statement under the declaration. This is not unprecedented.<sup>40</sup> If indeed he were illiterate, what then are we to think about his position as reader? In his function in the church, he would have relied on his memory for reciting scriptural passages.<sup>41</sup> A second interpretation is that Ammonius only knew Egyptian.<sup>42</sup> According to Rea, the village church in Chysis belonged to a predominantly Egyptian speaking community, their reader reciting from Coptic manuscripts in the service. The underlying and more dangerous assumption here is that Egyptian speakers are ignorant and illiterate. Moreover, as Criboire has shown, students had to learn to write Greek before they

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souiller? (P.Oxy. XXXIII 2673),” and eadem, “Encore sur le lecteur ‘qui ne sait pas écrire,’” 421–26, Clarke, “An illiterate lector?”; Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 256–57 n. 142; Gamble, *Books and Readers*, 250 n. 31.

40. For instance, at Oxyrhynchus some twenty years later, in the year 323, there is another reader who is unable to sign his own name, this time for medical reasons: Morus, ἀναγνώστης, needed Horion to sign for him because he (Morus) had hurt his eyes (᾿Ω[ρίων] ἔγρα(ψα) ὑ(πὲρ) αὐτ(οῦ) βεβ<λ>αμμένου τὰς ὄψης [*sic*, with two sigmas; ἰ. ὄψεις, P.Oxy. XLI 2993, 11–12). Being incapable of writing because of bad eyesight differs significantly from being illiterate. The very fact, however, that Horion explicitly mentions this as reason why Morus did not sign himself indicates that Morus had been literate. Thus this example actually supports the view that normally readers are able to write. Eye-related illness in Egypt is not uncommon (cf. below, P.Oxy. XXXI 2601). Other illiterate clergy, e.g., a deacon (cf. G. H. R. Horsley, *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity* 1, p. 121–24, no. 80, on the contract for a deacon, unknown provenance, early 4th c.: “. . . Aurelius Basis son of Akoris . . . Since today I was ordained into your diaconate and made a public profession to you that I should be inseparable from your bishopric etc.” Then at the end: “I, Aurelius Basis, the aforesaid, have had the aforesaid document made and agreed as aforesaid, [I] Aurelius Hierakion [wrote] on his behalf [since he is illiterate] . . .” (*New Documents*, 122). Clarke offers several other examples of illiterate readers from epigraphical and literary sources. Some readers, he shows, were young children (Clarke, “An Illiterate Lector,” 103–4). In his article “(Il)literacy in Non-Literary Papyri from Graeco-Roman Egypt: Further Aspects of the Educational Ideal in Ancient Literary Sources and Modern Times,” *Mnemosyne* 53 (2000): 322–42 (esp. 329 and 334–38), Thomas J. Kraus gives the example of village scribes who are illiterate, unable to write more than their own names. He warns also that it cannot be maintained that “those we expect to be able to read and write actually are in possession of these abilities” (334).

41. Bagnall offers this as a possibility (*Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 256–57 n. 142).

42. Rea, ed. princ. 105. Eric G. Turner followed this interpretation. “What this means is that he was a ‘reader’ of Coptic, not Greek texts” (*The Typology of the Early Codex*, Haney Foundation Series 18 [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1977], 85). Cf. also Judge and Pickering: “no doubt a poor Coptic-speaking community—Ammonius the lector did not know how to sign his name in Greek” (“Papyrus Documentation,” 59).

could learn to write Coptic,<sup>43</sup> and Ammonius may have been bilingual.<sup>44</sup> So the issue whether the villagers were Egyptian- or Greek-speaking (the former is not unlikely),<sup>45</sup> does not have a direct bearing upon the question of why Ammonius did not sign the declaration himself. All he needed to write, as Wipszycka notes, was the short sentence Αὐρήλιος Ἀμμώνιος ὄμοσα τὸν ὄρκον ὡς πρόκειται (“I, Aurelius Ammonius, swear the oath as aforesaid”). If he knew how to write in Coptic, copying a short sentence in Greek would not have been particularly difficult, since Greek and Coptic share the same alphabet.<sup>46</sup> Wipszycka proposed a third interpretation. Her assessment is that Ammonius pretended to be illiterate in order to avoid signing an oath swearing to the *tyche* of the emperors.<sup>47</sup> This is

43. Raffaella Cribiore, “Greek and Coptic Education in Late Antique Egypt,” in *Ägypten und Nubien in spätantiker und christlicher Zeit. Akten des 6. internationalen Koptologenkongresses, Münster, 20.–26. Juli 1996. Band II*, ed. Stephen Emmel et al., *Sprachen und Kulturen des christlichen Orients* 6, 2 (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1999), 279–86 and eadem, *Gymnastics of the Mind: Greek Education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 157.

44. Ammonius and his father Copres bore Greco-Egyptian, not Egyptian names, so Ammonius was probably bilingual in Greek and Coptic (perhaps that was the reason he was filing the declaration). His nomenclature and church position make it unlikely that he was a peasant. Even if he was literate in Egyptian, this would not be a sign of low status, for, as Bagnall observes, literacy in Coptic is at this time not the domain of poor people (*Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 5).

45. See on this and related questions Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, “Spoken and Written Greek in the Villages,” 240–46.

46. Wipszycka wrote: “Pour une personne habituée à écrire en copte, cela ne devait pas présenter de difficulté. Il est faux de voir une analogie entre le cas du ‘lecteur’ Ammonios et ceux des prêtres égyptiens sachant écrire en démotique, et pas en grec. La différence entre l’écriture démotique et l’écriture grecque est totale, celle entre l’écriture copte et l’écriture grecque est minime” (“Lecteur,” 416).

47. “Je suppose que c’est pour des raisons religieuses que le ‘lecteur’ Ammonios n’a pas voulu signer le document de sa main et s’est déclaré analphabète. Notre Ammonios a dû être tiraillé entre des sentiments opposés. D’un côté, il redoutait les répressions; de l’autre côté, il sentait que son comportement, tout en n’enfreignant pas les règles admises dans l’Église, n’était pas irréprochable; il sentait que ce n’était pas une bonne action que de livrer aux autorités les objets appartenant à sa communauté, et qui étaient probablement des objets servant au culte. La pression de la part des extrémistes, qui désiraient le martyr et condamnaient sévèrement ceux qui obéissaient aux ordres des autorités impériales, était probablement très forte” (Wipszycka, “Lecteur,” 417). Cf. De Ste. Croix’s observation on the oath formula: “One often hears it said that the Christians were martyred ‘for refusing to worship the emperor.’ In fact, emperor-worship is a factor of almost no independent importance in the persecution of the Christians. It is true that among our records of martyrdoms emperor-worship does crop up occasionally, but far more often it is a matter of sacrificing *to the gods*—as a rule, not even specifically to ‘the gods of the Romans.’ And when the cult act involved does concern the emperor, it is usually an oath by his Genius (or in

a better explanation than the *communis opinio* that as a Copt Ammonius was illiterate in Greek.<sup>48</sup> Ammonius had publicly acknowledged the validity of the document and then had arranged for the signing by someone else. The work of James Scott on forms of resistance by subordinate groups helps to understand the situation better: Ammonius played dumb to preserve his religious integrity as a small act of resistance against the imperial measures.<sup>49</sup>

### *Restoration of Property*

What happened to the goods that were transported from Oxyrhynchus to Alexandria? The possessions obtained from the church at Chysis did not amount to much, but as is clear from the enumeration of property at the church in Cirta, North Africa, some churches contributed valuables in gold and silver. Were these objects sold or stored? At least, from these papyri it is clear that they were catalogued. This inventory therefore not only has the negative side of confiscation, it also meant that the institutions had an official document listing what had been confiscated—a legal document to which they could appeal for restitution. Lactantius reports that after the persecution the emperor Licinius ordered that property should be restored to Christians.<sup>50</sup> This restitution of property relates to land and buildings,<sup>51</sup> but also to goods (*bona*). We don't know whether the congregation at Chysis obtained their "bronze stuff" back again, but they might well have received its value eventually.

This declaration and other papyrus documents relating to the Great

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the East by his Τύχη) or a sacrifice to the gods on his behalf" (De Ste. Croix, "Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted?" 10). De Ste. Croix offers an example from the Scillitan martyrs, and refers to Tertullian, *Apologeticus*.

48. Clarysse ("Coptic Martyr Cult," 380) follows Wipszycka's interpretation.

49. James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance. Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990). Scott notes that "the hidden transcript is not just behind-the-scenes griping and grumbling; it is enacted in a host of down-to-earth, low profile stratagems designed to minimize appropriation" (188).

50. *Mort.* 48, 7–10. See also Lactantius, *Mort.* 48, 13: *His litteris propositis etiam verbo hortatus est, ut conventicula <in> statum pristinum redderentur* ("After this letter had been published, he [Licinius] even encouraged orally that the places of assembly be restored to their former state"). *conventiculum* is the legal term for the Christian places of assembly used in the edicts. Alfons Städele (transl.), *Laktanz, De mortibus persecutorum. Die Todesarten der Verfolger Lateinisch-Deutsch, Fontes Christiani 43* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), 71 n. 195. So in 15.7; 34.4; 36.3; 48.9. Frend remarks: ". . . detailed instructions for the complete restoration of Church property, *bona fidei* purchasers having the right, however, to indemnity from the Imperial Treasury" (*Martyrdom and Persecution*, 519).

51. Lactantius, *Mort.* 48.7–9.

Persecution center on the confiscation of property.<sup>52</sup> Such matters do not constitute a central theme in martyr acts and church histories, which highlight the drama of martyrdom. The papyri clearly show that Diocletian's persecution not only had personal and theological implications for the Christians, but indeed also had a very material aspect. However, as we have seen, Christians employed subtle strategies to evade the edict's measures. This greatly nuances our understanding of the period by helping us to see that resistance occurred not only in the grand and torturous deaths like those of the nameless martyrs from the Egyptian Thebaid,<sup>53</sup> but also in the small negotiations and rebellions around writing and hiding property.

### BALANCING BELIEF AND BUSINESS

Our second papyrus is a private letter (*P.Oxy.* XXXI 2601).<sup>54</sup> This is the only papyrus document that gives a personal perspective on the persecutions—all other documentary papyri relating to the persecutions are official documents. The main interest of the letter lies in the fact that the sender, a man called Copres, informs his wife Sarapias how he made someone else sacrifice on his behalf. He wrote (in translation):

Copres to his sister Sarapias very many greetings. Before all things I pray before the Lord God that you (pl.) are in good health.

I want you to know that we arrived on the 11th and it was made known to us that those who appear in court are compelled to sacrifice and I made a power of attorney to my brother and until now we have accomplished nothing but we have instructed an advocate on the 1?th, so that the matter about the *arourai* might be brought into court on the 14?th.

But if we accomplish something, I write you. But I have sent you nothing since I found that Theodorus himself is going out. But I am sending you this (letter) through someone else quickly. But write us about the well-being of you all and how Maximina has been, and Asena. And if it is possible, let her/him come with your mother so that her leucoma may be healed.<sup>55</sup> For I

52. *P.Oxy.* XXXIII 2665 and 2673, *P.Harr.* II 208, and *M.Chr.* 196.

53. See Eusebius, *h. e.* 8.9. Eusebius claims to have been an eyewitness (8.9, 4).

54. P. J. Parsons, editor (1966). See also an edition with short notes in P. W. Pestman, *The New Papyrological Primer* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), no. 69, 255–57; Naldini, *Cristianesimo* no. 35, 169–72. Naldini basically follows Parsons' assessment and interpretation of the letter and its historical circumstances. Judge and Pickering comment briefly on this letter ("Papyrus Documentation," 53 and 69, no. 6).

55. Who is having eye problems? According to Pestman, the subject of ἐρχέσθω is Maximina (note to l. 31, page 257), according to Naldini, it is Asena ("Kopres . . . invita presso di sé un certo Asena (su figlio?) affetto da leucoma" (no. 35, 169). Perhaps it is Copres' mother-in-law.

have seen other people (that had been) healed. I pray for your (sgl.) health. I greet all our (friends/loved ones) by name.

Deliver to my sister from Copres. 99.<sup>56</sup>

Away on a trip for a court case about a plot of farmland,<sup>57</sup> Copres gives word to Sarapias at Oxyrhynchus (where the letter has been found) about what happened to him after his arrival. Copres does not mention his whereabouts, but presumably he was in Alexandria. Sarapias, the woman he addresses as his sister, must be his wife,<sup>58</sup> and the two persons mentioned by name at the end, Maximina and Asena, are probably his children.

Copres was involved in a legal case about a piece of land. He and his family must have been well-to-do, for Copres could afford to travel to and stay at Alexandria (perhaps Theodorus had traveled with him), he was able to hire a lawyer, and he had a court case about several *arouras* of land.<sup>59</sup> He probably penned the letter himself; an indication that he had received schooling, which fits well with the overall impression of his social status. Specifically Christian scribal practices he employed (*nomina sacra* and *isopsephy*)<sup>60</sup> attest that he also had some Christian education or experience with Christian manuscripts. Copres also is eager to hear back from Sarapias, and expresses his concern about the health of one of their children, exhorting her to come up with her grandmother.

At the end of his letter Copres wrote Ϡθ', the number 99.<sup>61</sup> This is not

56. See Greek text and papyrological description in Appendix III.

57. One *aroura* is about half a soccer field (c. 2756m<sup>2</sup>), so P. W. Pestman, *The New Papyrological Primer* (second ed., rev.; Leiden: Brill, 1994), 49.

58. It was common parlance in Egypt to address one's spouse as sister or brother. See also Eleanor Dickey: "This usage [of sibling terminology] (particularly to spouses and particularly in direct address . . .) is also characteristic of native Egyptian language . . ." ("Literal and Extended Use of Kinship Terms in Documentary Papyri," *Mnemosyne* 57 [2004]: 131–76, 154, note 42).

59. As Bagnall remarks: "Lawyers and stays away from home were expensive, and only the urban elite could afford such direct access [i.e., to the governor] . . ." (*Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 64). See also Judge and Pickering, "Papyrus Documentation," 69.

60. *Nomina sacra* are contractions of certain words consisting, in most cases, of the first and last letter of a word with a supralinear stroke above them. Isopsephy entails the numerical value of words, as the characters of the Greek alphabet serve both as letters and as numbers. Therefore, numbers can have special cryptic meaning.

61. See also the comments by Parsons on this line (34, p. 171). For literature and other examples, see François Bovon, "Names and Numbers in Early Christianity," *NTS* 47 (2001): 267–88; L. Vidman, "Koppa Theta = Amen in Athen," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 16 (1975): 215–16; Henri Leclercq, "Isopsépie," *DACL* 7.2 (1927): 1603–6; S. R. Llewelyn, "ΣΔ, a Christian Isopsephism?" *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 109 (1995): 125–27 and idem, "The Christian Symbol ΧΜΓ, an Acrostic or an Isopsephism?" *New Documents Illustrating Early Christian-*

just any number. Rather in the cryptic language of isopsephy<sup>62</sup> this is how one writes ἀμήν (amen), for in Greek the numerical value of the letters of the word added together make up the number 99: α' (= 1) + μ' (= 40) + η' (= 8) + ν' (= 50) = ϑθ' (= 99).<sup>63</sup> François Bovon characterizes the early Christians' use of numbers and names as "theological tools."<sup>64</sup>

Only five other papyrus letters of the fourth century have the isopsephism ϑθ.<sup>65</sup> Copres' letter, datable to the early years of the fourth century, contains

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*ity* 8 (1998): 156–68; Louis Robert, "Pas de date 109, mais le chiffre 99, isopsépie de Amen," *Hellenica* (Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1960), 11:310–11; T. C. Skeat, "A Table of Isopsephisms (*P.Oxy.* XLV 3239)," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 31 (1978): 45–54.

62. Henri Leclercq describes isopsephy as follows: "Les lettres servant aux Grecs de signes numériques, ils appelaient *nombre* (ψηφος, ἀριθμός) d'un mot . . . la somme des valeurs numériques représentées par les lettres de ce mot . . . Deux mots . . . sont *isopsèphes* qui ont même ψηφος" ("Isopsépie," 1603).

63. Bovon refers to another use of the number 99, related to the *flexio digitorum*: "Passing from tens to hundreds was particularly important, because counting up to 99 was executed by the left hand, while counting from 100 on was done with the right hand. Remembering that the left side was considered a negative one, the passage to 100 was considered with pleasure." Bovon refers in this respect to the passage in the *Gospel of Truth*, wherein the shepherd finding the 100th sheep rejoices "for ninety-nine is a number that is in the left hand that holds it" (Bovon, "Names and Numbers in Early Christianity," 284).

64. Bovon, "Names and Numbers in Early Christianity," 267. According to Henri Leclercq, first century Alexandrian Leonidas is the earliest known Greek author to have used this ("Isopsépie," 1603). In Jewish Kaballah amen equates Yahweh Adonai, cf. Dominic J. Unger, *St. Irenaeus of Lyons Against the Heresies*, ACW 55, vol. 1, book 1 (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1992), 215. Irenaeus in his *Adversus haereses* refers to this isopsephism for "amen" when he discusses the Gnostic sect of the Marcosians: Οὕτως οὖν καὶ (ἐπὶ) τοὺς ἀριθμοὺς τοὺς καταλειφθέντας, ἐπὶ μὲν τῆς δραχμῆς τοὺς ἑννέα, ἐπὶ δὲ τοῦ προβάτου τοὺς ἑνδεκα ἐπιπλεκομένους ἀλλήλοις τὸν τῶν ἑνενηκονταεννέα τίκτειν ἀριθμόν· ἐπεὶ ἐννάκις τὰ ἑνδεκα ἑνενηκονταεννέα γίνεταί. Διὸ καὶ τὸ ἀμήν τοῦτον λέγουσιν ἔχειν τὸν ἀριθμόν ("Accordingly, when the numbers that are left over—namely nine in reference to the coins and eleven in reference to the sheep—are multiplied by each other, the number ninety-nine is the result, because nine multiplied by eleven makes ninety-nine. And for this reason, they say "Amen" contains this same number." *Adv. haer.* 1.16, 1, trans. Unger, *St. Irenaeus of Lyons Against the Heresies*, 69). Whereas Irenaeus ascribes this way of writing to a group which is in his eyes heretical, Copres' use of the isopsephy of amen does not give any indication whatsoever about his theological leanings. As a matter of fact, an annotation to the text of the Council of Nicaea on amen recommends the use of the isopsephy in letters: *Addat praeterea separatim in epistola etiam nonagenarium et novem numeros, qui secundum greca elementa significant* AMHN (Latin from H. Leclercq, "Litterae commenditiae et formatae," *DACL* 9.2 [1930]: 1574–75).

65. (1) *P.Oxy.* VIII 1162.15 (Oxyrhynchus, 4th c.), (2) *P.Oxy.* LVI 3857.13 (Oxyrhynchus, 4th c.), (3) *P.Oxy.* LVI 3862.1 (Oxyrhynchus, 4th/5th c.), (4) *PSI* XIII 1342.1 (Hermopolite, ca. 330–350), and (5) *SB* XVI 12304 (Panopolis?, 3rd/4th c.).

one of the earliest papyrological records of this practice.<sup>66</sup> The use of the isopsephy in this letter is a strong indication of the family's piety. By writing "amen" at the end of his letter, it is as if Copres concludes a prayer or a part of a liturgy.<sup>67</sup> "Names and numbers," Bovon concludes, "are a gift from God that express an extralinguistic reality beyond what other words are capable of transmitting."<sup>68</sup> In that light I think the *koppa theta* at the end of Copres' letter to his wife should be interpreted as a prayer, a sign of his faith, and an indication that he was safe and sound.<sup>69</sup>

### *The Sacrifice*

Copres brings up the issue of the sacrifice immediately after his letter's *proemium*, the standard opening section of a letter with greetings. The turn of phrase γινώσκειν σε θέλω ("I want you to know") is exceedingly common in private letters, used to begin the letter body and introduce the reason for writing. Copres informs Sarapias that he arrived—safely, that is—at his destination, and upon arrival or some time thereafter he found out that he would have to make a sacrifice if he wanted to take his case about a piece of land to court, which was apparently the reason for his trip.<sup>70</sup> This clearly came as a surprise to Copres; if it had been a routine procedure, he would not have mentioned it here. The situation Copres is

66. Apart from *PSI XIII 1342*, all other four letters also contain *nomina sacra* besides the isopsephy. The *PSI* letter is a business letter, which may explain the absence of *nomina sacra*, although it does start with *χμγ*. The position of the "amen" in these early letters occurs either at the very end of the letter, as in Copres' letter, or in the first line. Last line, as final "word" of the letter: *P.Oxy. VIII 1162* and *SB XVI 12304*. In *P.Oxy. LVI 3857* it is written at the end of body of the letter, just before the final greeting. In *P.Oxy. LVI 3862* and *PSI XIII 1342* the isopsephy stands in the first line of the letter, in both cases preceded by another cryptic Christian sign, *χμγ*. Three of the five other roughly contemporary letters with this isopsephy are Christian letters of recommendation (*P.Oxy. VIII 1162*, *P.Oxy. LVI 3857* and *SB XVI 12304*), written by and addressed to clergy members.

67. Early Christians adopted the Hebrew word aleph-mem-nun in their usage to conclude sermons, prayers, and other parts of liturgy. In the New Testament gospels, for instance, Jesus frequently says ἀμήν, λέγω σοι or ὑμῖν ("Amen, I say to you") (so in the synoptics, in John the amen is always repeated: ἀμήν, ἀμήν).

68. Bovon, "Names and Numbers in Early Christianity," 288.

69. This is assuming that Copres expected Sarapias to understand his cryptic final greeting. If not, it may have had an apotropaic function.

70. The passive voice of ἐγνώσθη ἡμῖν ("it was made known to us," or "it became known to us," l. 8) does not specify how Copres found out about the sacrifice, whether there was an official posting, or whether he heard it through social contacts. Yet his use of the verb ἀναγκάζω (compel, urge, ask, etc.) tells Sarapias that this was not voluntary sacrifice.

facing in the courtroom seems comparable to the one Lactantius describes in his *De mortibus persecutorum*. Lactantius mentions an edict intended to discourage Christians to go to court:<sup>71</sup>

The next day an edict was published, in which it was ordered that every lawsuit against them (i.e., the Christians) should succeed, that they themselves should not be able to go to court, not about insult, not about adultery, not about stolen matters, in short, that they should not have freedom nor voice.<sup>72</sup>

Altars were set up in courtrooms—the church historian reports—and people were forced to sacrifice there in the presence of the judges.<sup>73</sup> Sacrifice was, of course, the test of loyalty to the Roman deities. If this stipulation about sacrificing in court is indeed the historical background of Copres' letter, it also provides a date for the papyrus in the early years of the fourth century. The edict was issued 23 February 303,<sup>74</sup> which becomes the date *post quem* for our letter.

Unlike the Christians in the martyr acts, Copres did not openly refuse to sacrifice in the courtroom by appealing to his Christianity and confessing the *nomen Christianum*. Yet he found a way to comply with the edict's obligatory sacrifice without compromising his Christian faith: He made his "brother" (ἀδελφός) a power of attorney (ἀποσυστατικός), who then performed the sacrifice for him. Who was this brother? Copres' sibling? A fellow-Christian? Or a "pagan" friend? It was common practice in antiquity, as it is in certain circles today, to address friends in familial terms, hence the brother was not necessarily a sibling.<sup>75</sup> And although Christians

71. Lactantius, *Mort.* 13.1 (ed. Städele, *Laktanz*, 122): *Postridie propositum est edictum, quo cavebatur, ut . . . adversos eos omnis actio valeret, ipsi non de inuria, non de adulterio, non de rebus ablatis agere possent, libertatem denique ac vocem non haberent.*

72. Städele translates this expression as "Recht auf Meinungsäußerung" (*Laktanz*, 123).

73. Lactantius, *Mort.* 13.1 (Städele, *Laktanz*, 122): *arae in secretariis ac pro tribunali positae, ut litigatores prius sacrificarent atque ita causas suas dicerent, sic ergo ad iudices tamquam ad deos adiretur* ("altars were placed in the council chambers and before the judgment seat, so that the parties in a lawsuit/litigants ought to sacrifice first and in this way plead their cases, so therefore one ought to approach the judges as the gods").

74. Judge and Pickering, "Papyrus Documentation," 53.

75. As Dickey notes, "Kinship terms in papyrus letters do not always refer to actual relatives and so pose many problems for modern readers." About the use of brother, she writes: "the widespread use in letters of ἀδελφός, for example, for people other than brothers does not imply that ἀδελφός no longer meant 'brother' at all, but rather

used (and still use) sibling language to address each other, I doubt that this “brother” was a fellow-Christian; why would he sacrifice and Copres not? The brother must have been a “pagan” friend. He performed the sacrifice for Copres as a favor<sup>76</sup>—otherwise the lawyer that Copres mentions hiring would have taken care of it.

Copres was not the only Christian who came up with this practical solution to the enigma of sacrifice, a solution that many church leaders refused to accept. Peter, bishop of Alexandria, addresses this strategy and the appropriate punishment for it in his Canons from the year 306.<sup>77</sup> The fifth canon applies here:<sup>78</sup>

. . . there are those who have not nakedly written down a denial [of their faith] but rather, when in great distress, . . . have mocked the schemes of their enemies: they have either passed by the altars, or have made a written declaration, *or have sent pagans [to sacrifice] in their place*. Certain ones of those who confessed the faith, as I have heard, have forgiven them since, above all, with great piety they have avoided lighting the sacrificial fire with their own hands and have avoided the smoke rising from the unclean demons, and since indeed they were unaware, because of their thoughtlessness, of what they were doing. Nevertheless, six months of penance will be given to them.<sup>79</sup>

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that there were certain situations in which it was appropriate to call someone other than a brother ‘brother’” (“Literal and Extended Use of Kinship Terms in Documentary Papyri,” 131 and 133 resp.).

76. In canon XII Peter condemned people that paid money to buy “ease and freedom.” Cf. much earlier and from North Africa, Tertullian, *De fuga in persecutione* on paying others.

77. On the date of these Canons, Tim Vivian states: “The first canon states that ‘this is now the fourth Easter under persecution.’ Since the persecution under Diocletian began during Lent of 303, these canons must have been written in 306, but the text does not make clear whether they were written before or after Easter.” *St. Peter of Alexandria, Bishop and Martyr*, Studies in Antiquity and Christianity (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 140.

78. καὶ μὴ γυμνῶς ἀπογραψαμένοις τὰ πρὸς ἄρνησιν, ἀλλὰ διαπαίξασιν κατὰ πολλὴν στενοχωρίαν . . . τὰς τῶν ἐχθρῶν ἐπιβουλὰς, ἥτοι ὡς διελθόντες βομῶν, ἥτοι ὡς χειρογραφήσαντες, ἥτοι ὡς ἄνθ’ ἑαυτῶν βαλόντες ἔθνικούς· εἰ καὶ τισιν αὐτῶν συνεχώρησάν τινες τῶν ὁμολογησάντων, ὡς ἤκουσα, ἐπεὶ μάλιστα κατὰ πολλὴν εὐλάβειαν ἐξέφυγον αὐτόχειρες γενέσθαι τοῦ πυρός, καὶ τῆς ἀναθυμιάσεως τῶν ἀκαθάρτων δαιμόνων· ἐπεὶ τοίνυν ἔλαθεν αὐτοὺς ἀνοίᾳ τοῦτο πράξαντας, ὅμως ἐξάμηνος αὐτοῖς ἐπιτεθήσεται τῆς ἐν μετανοίᾳ ἐπιστροφῆς. Martinus Josephus Routh, *Reliquiae sacrae, sive, auctorum fere iam perditorum secundi tertiiue saeculi post Christum natum . . .*, IV Hildesheim, New York: Georg Olms, 1974 (reprint of 2nd ed. Oxford, 1846), 28.

79. Translation modified from Vivian, *St. Peter of Alexandria*, 186–87, emphasis mine.

The bishop of Alexandria mentions that Christians, in order to avoid having to sacrifice, sent pagans (ἔθνικούς) in their place. This seems to be the background to the situation Copres alludes to in his letter. Copres, a Christian, had a pagan friend whom he trusted enough to ask to conduct the sacrifice for him, and who, for his part, was apparently willing to do so.<sup>80</sup> Copres' social circle evidently consisted of Christians and "pagans," presumably a common situation for Christians. Copres does not seem concerned about the church-related effects of his actions, at least not in his short epistle to Sarapias. He may, of course, have had no idea about ecclesiastical repercussions, like those we read in the canon.<sup>81</sup>

### *An Easy Way Out?*

Scholars have expressed surprise at Copres' easy way out.<sup>82</sup> Copres' quick and apparently legal solution indicates that he knew how to react. Parsons commented that for Copres the sacrifice was "a minor nuisance."<sup>83</sup> However, Copres found the obligatory sacrifice significant enough to mention at the beginning of his letter. The situation was clearly something he wanted his wife Sarapias to know about as soon as possible.<sup>84</sup> Since he announces that Theodorus will visit her soon with goods, it is evident that Copres was eager to tell his family about what had happened to him, sooner even than Theodorus's arrival.

For Wipszycka, Copres' lack of emotions is striking: "c'est sans aucune émotion qu'il en parle . . ." <sup>85</sup> Copres indeed does not describe whether he was worried about what had happened, or even thought it was amusing

80. According to De Ste. Croix, "some Christians successfully deceived the authorities by inducing pagans to impersonate them at the ceremony of sacrificing" ("Aspects," 100). The procedure Copres describes to Sarapias appears to be slightly different. The main difference lies in the fact that Copres made his "brother" a power of attorney, he did not ask the person to impersonate him. In doing so, Copres created a perfectly legal solution to his problem.

81. Wipszycka also comments: "Il ne semble pas que Copres ait eu des doutes sur l'honnêteté de son comportement" ("Lecteur," 419).

82. Parsons describes how Copres "easily evaded the sacrificial test" (*P.Oxy.* XXXI 2601, 168). For Judge and Pickering, this papyrus letter "confirms the impression that people were generally not anticipating conflict, insofar as it shows the perfunctory way in which he [Copres] side-stepped Diocletian's new rule on sacrificing" ("Papyrus Documentation," 70).

83. *P.Oxy.* XXXI 2601, 168.

84. Copres explicitly says that he was in a hurry to write Sarapias (ἀποστέλλω σοι δὲ αὐτὰ διὰ ἄλλου ταχέως, 25–27). This may explain why he used a damaged sheet. Was it the only available piece of writing material he had at hand?

85. Wipszycka, "Lecteur," 419.

how he evaded the sacrifice. But that does not mean that he did not have feelings about it. This lack of emotions that disturbs Wipszycka is more a part of the genre of ancient letters than it is due to Copres' situation or personality.<sup>86</sup>

What sort of man was Copres? According to Parsons, "Copres writes colourless, paratactic Greek, with normal vulgarisms of spelling and syntax; he shows his Christianity by using the abnormal  $\theta$ , but mishandles a *nomen sacrum*. That is, he was a man of average education, a zealous but not very intelligent Christian."<sup>87</sup> Especially the use of the isopsephy for amen was for Parsons a sign of Copres' devotion.<sup>88</sup> Thus Parsons portrays Copres as a zealous Christian, but not a smart one at that, for he goes as far as calling into question Copres' acumen based on the aberrant spelling of the *nomen sacrum* in line 5.<sup>89</sup> Leaving aside the question of his intelligence—the brevity of the letter does not give adequate indication about this—Copres to me seems more practical than "zealous" in his Christian faith. For his family, he discerns himself as Christian by his use of *nomina sacra* and isopsephy (probably this made him pious in the eyes of the readers), but in the courtroom he prefers not to stand out as such. That he is well aware of the dangers of admitting to being a Christian is clear not only from the fact that he asked a pagan friend to perform the sacrifice for him, but also from the fact that this is the first, and presumably therefore most important, matter he writes about to his wife, and his urge to communicate this quickly.

86. As Juan Chapa, for instance, noticed in his study on condolence letters. These letters are worded fairly stereotypically with many common places, whereas in this genre of letters we would expect show of emotion (*Letters of Condolence in Greek Papyri*, Papyrologica Florentina 29 [Firenze: Gonnelli, 1998], 49). This is not to say that people in antiquity did not have strong emotions and feelings, of course they did! Sometimes they surface in the papyri, such as in the affidavit of the woman who complains about her husband and his abuse, *P.Oxy.* VI 903. However, private letters or business letters in antiquity were not, as they are today, vehicles for expressing strong personal emotions in an explicit fashion. Cf. Roger S. Bagnall and Raffaella Cribiore, *Women's Letters from Ancient Egypt, 300 BC–AD 800* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), chapter 4 "Late Medieval Letters as Comparative Evidence," especially when they note that ". . . in later centuries the ethos of letter writing starts to change, particularly in the direction of the expression of the writer's personal feelings" (26).

87. *P.Oxy.* XXXI 2601, 168.

88. "This unusual feature may be a sign of special zeal" (*P.Oxy.* XXXI 2601, note to line 34, 171).

89. "Due presumably to inexperienced or unintelligent Christians" (*P.Oxy.* XXXI 2601, note to line 5, 170).

## CONCLUSION

When Christians relate information about the persecution in church histories and martyrologies, they frame it in spectacular martyr stories. Certainly, Christians were put to death by the Roman state for confessing the *nomen Christianum*. Yet the papyri we have investigated provide different, more nuanced Christian roles. By observing Ammonius, the reader of an Egyptian village church, and Copres, a well-to-do Christian businessman, we witness Christians negotiating their identities while dealing with the Roman government. With their lives and also their possessions at stake, both men seem to have been resourceful in evading, at least partially, the imperial measures against Christians. They “worked the system”: in order to save their lives and belongings they complied to some degree with the edicts, but they were able to maintain their identity as Christians—at least as they saw it.

It is clear from these papyri that the persecution not only touched people through the dramatic deaths of the Christian martyrs, but that it interrupted the lives of people in everyday situations: the Christians in the village of Chysis lose the use of their place of worship and some of its possessions; a church member, the reader, is dealing with the government officials trying to minimize the damage for his congregation. A father far away from home worries about his wife and children when he has to perform a sacrifice. Yet he could rely on the support of a “pagan” friend in this stressful situation, suggesting that Christians were not socially isolated during the persecution.

Although they contain neither high drama nor bloody details, these mundane documents exhibit the texture of Roman persecution as individuals and local communities experienced it. The powerful presence of the Roman government was felt all the way from the Alexandrian courtroom to the remote corners of the Egyptian countryside. The Christians in these texts adopted different tactics of identity: instead of confessing the *nomen Christianum*, they weaved the fabric of everyday life with subtle yet distinct threads of resistance.

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## APPENDICES

I. *P.Oxy.* XXXIII 2673

This document is preserved threefold. All three copies are written by different scribes, in professional and competent hands, but the subscription is penned in the same handwriting on all three sheets. The text below is from copy A (measuring 12 x 26 cm.).<sup>90</sup> All three scribes started out the document writing legibly in professional cursive hands, but, as is common in handwritten texts, their writing becomes more crammed towards the end of the page, scribbling in the words to leave room for the subscription, the hand becoming fast, much smaller, and less neat.

- ἐπὶ ὑπάτων τῶν κυρίων ἡμ[ῶν] αὐτοκρατόρων  
 Διοκλητιανοῦ τὸ ἕνατον καὶ Μαξιμιανοῦ  
 τὸ ἧ' Σεβαστῶν  
 Αὐρηλίους Νεῖλω τῷ καὶ Ἀμμωνίῳ γυμ[ ] βουλ(ευτῆ)  
 5 ἐνάρχῳ πρυτάνει καὶ Σαρμάτῃ καὶ Ματρίνῳ ἀμφοτέροις  
 γυμ[ ] βουλ(ευταῖς) συνδίκους τοῖς πᾶσι τῆς λαμ(πράς) καὶ  
 λαμ(προτάτης)  
 Ὁξυρυγχιτῶν πόλεως (vac.)  
 Αὐρηλίος Ἀμμωνίος Κοπρέως ἀναγνωσ-  
 τῆς τῆς ποτε ἐκ<κ>λησίας κῶμης Χύσεως  
 10 ἐπιθεμένων ὑμῶν ἐμοὶ ἀκολούθως  
 τοῖς γραφ<ε>ῖσι ὑπὸ Αὐρηλίου Ἀθανασίου ἐπιτρό-  
 που πριουάτης ὡς ἐκ κελεύσεως τοῦ δια-  
 σημ(οτάτου) μαγίστρου τῆς πριουάτης Νερατίου  
 Ἀπολλωνί<δ>ου περὶ τοῦ παραστήσαι ἅπαντα  
 15 τὰ <ε>ῖδη τὰ [ἐ]ν τῇ αὐτῇ ποτε ἐκ<κ>λησίᾳ καὶ ἐμοῦ  
 προενεγ'καμένου μὴ ἔχειν τὴν <αὐτὴν> ἐκ<κ>λη-  
 σ[ε]ίαν μῆτε χρυσὸν μῆτε ἄσημον  
 μῆτε ἀργύριον μῆτε ἐσθῆτα μῆτε τετρά-  
 ποδα μῆτε ἀνδράποδα μῆτε οἰκόπαιδα  
 20 μῆτε ὑπάρχοντα μῆτε ἀπὸ χαρισμάτων  
 μηδ' ἄλλ' ἀπὸ διαθηκῶν εἰ μὴ μόνην  
 τὴν εὐ[ρε]τίσαν χαλκῆ[ν] ὕλην καὶ παραδο-  
 τίσαν τῷ λογιστῇ πρὸς τὸ κατενεγ'χθῆναι  
 ἐπὶ τὴν λαμ(προτάτην) Ἀλεξάνδριαν ἀκολούθως τοῖς γρα-  
 25 φ<ε>ῖσι ὑπὸ τοῦ διασημ(οτάτου) ἡμῶν ἡγεμόνος Κλωδίου  
 Κο<υ>λκιανοῦ καὶ ὀμνύω τὴν τῶν κυρίων ἡμῶν  
 αὐτοκρατόρων Διοκλητιανοῦ καὶ Μαξιμιανοῦ Σεβασ(τῶν)

90. Rea, the editor, was able to benefit from the triply-preserved document, adding readings from B and C when A was hard to read, a real luxury for a papyrologist. In line 22 Rea originally read χαλκὴν πύλην (a “bronze gate”). In a subsequent publication, he corrected the reading to χαλκῆν ὕλην, “bronze materials” (“ΠΥΛΗΝ to ὙΛΗΝ,” 128, cf. “Additions and Corrections,” in *P.Oxy.* XLVIII, page xvii).

- καὶ Κωνσταντίου καὶ Μαξιμιανοῦ τῶν ἐπιφανεστάτων  
 καισάρων τύχην ταῦθ' οὕτως ἔχειν καὶ μηδὲν διε-  
 30 ψευῆσθαι ἢ ἔνοχος εἶην τῷ θεῷ ὄρκῳ  
 (ἔτους) κ' καὶ ιβ' τῶν κυρίων ἡμῶν Διοκλητιανοῦ καὶ Μαξιμιανοῦ  
 Σεβαστῶν καὶ Κωνσταντίου καὶ Μαξιμιανοῦ τῶν ἐπιφανεστάτων  
 καισάρων·  
 Μεχεῖρ [ι'·  
 (2nd hand) Ἀυρήλιος Ἀμμώνιος ὄμοσα τὸν ὄρκον  
 ὡς (πρόκειται)· Ἀυρ(ήλιος) Σερήνος ἔγρα(ψα) ὑ(πὲρ) αὐτοῦ μὴ εἰ(δότης)  
 γρά(μματα)

19 l. οἰκόπεδα, 22f l. εὐρεθείσαν, παραδοθείσαν.

## II. *P.Harr.* II 208

This 7 x 8.7 cm. papyrus sheet most likely comes from Oxyrhynchus.<sup>91</sup> The handwriting is “una cancelleresca con una forte concessione alla corsiva.” It is—as Donatella Limongi, the editor, noted—so similar to that of copy A of *P.Oxy.* XXXIII 2673 that they were perhaps the work of the same scribe.<sup>92</sup> Therefore, we may conclude that both papyri derive from the same office, probably at Oxyrhynchus.<sup>93</sup>

- ]. [ . . . ]  
 [c. 13 παρ]αδοθεῖσαν τῷ λογιστῆ  
 [πρὸς τὸ κατενεγχθ]ῆναι ἐπὶ τὴν λαμ(προτάτην) Ἀλεξάνδρια(ν)  
 [ἀκολούθως τοῖς γρα]φεῖσι ὑπὸ τοῦ διασημοτάτου  
 5 [ἡμῶν ἡγεμόνος Κλ]ωδίου Κουλ{κουλ}κιανοῦ  
 [καὶ ὀμνύω τὴν τῶν] κυ[ρ]ίω[ν] ἡμῶν Διοκλητιανοῦ  
 [καὶ Μαξιμιανοῦ Σεβαστῶν] καὶ Κωνστα `ν' τίον κ[α]ῖ Μαξιμιανοῦ  
 [τῶν ἐπιφανεστάτων Κ]αισάρων τύχην ταῦθ' οὕτως  
 [ἔχειν καὶ μηδὲν] διεψευῆσθαι ἢ ἔνοχος εἶην τῷ θεῷ [φ]  
 10 [ὄρκῳ. (ἔτους) κ// κα]ῖ ιβ// τῶν κυρίων ἡμῶν Διοκλητια(νοῦ)  
 [καὶ Μαξιμιανοῦ Σεβαστ]ῶν καὶ Κωνστα[ν]τίου καὶ Μαξιμιανοῦ  
 [τῶν ἐπιφανεστάτων Καισ]άρ[ων], Μεχεῖρ ιδ<sup>-</sup>

91. In the Preface to the volume, the editors write: “Oxyrhynchus is the provenance of many of the texts in the present volume, and may well be the provenance of others which provide no internal indication” (*P.Harr.* II, ed. Revel Coles, Mandredo Manfredi, Piet Sijpesteijn, page vii).

92. “. . . la scrittura . . . è molto simile a quella della copia A di *P. Oxy.* XXXIII 2673 e non si può escludere che si tratti della stessa mano” (*P.Harr.* II 208, page 109).

93. As Limongi states: “È dunque probabile che questa dichiarazione sia uscita dallo stesso ufficio ossirinichita in cui sono state stilate le tre copie del documento edito come *P. Oxy.* XXXIII 2673” (*P.Harr.* II 208, 109).

III. *P.Oxy.* XXXI 2601

The papyrus sheet measures 7 x 26.6 cm. Copres filled the recto of the sheet entirely with writing, continuing in the left margin, and added three sentences on the back. In the lower part of the sheet, below line 19, two to three strips of the upper (horizontal) layer of the papyrus have broken off, leaving the vertical fibers of the back exposed. On this spot several lines are left blank. No text seems to be lacking, however, and even the first *rho* of ἀρουρῶν in line 19 continues on the vertical fibers. Therefore the writer penned his letter on a damaged sheet.<sup>94</sup>

The hand is “a competent sloping semicursive assignable to the late third or to the fourth century.” The letter is written in one hand, perhaps suggesting that the sender penned his own letter.<sup>95</sup>

*recto*

- Κοπρῆς Σαραπιάδι ἀδελ-  
 φῆ πλεῖστα χαίρειν·  
 πρὸ μὲν πάντων  
 εὐχομε ὑμᾶς ὀλοκλ-  
 5 ρὶν παρὰ τῷ κυρι(φ) θ[(ε)φ].  
 γινῶσκιν σε θέλω  
 ὅτι τῆ ἱᾶ εἰσήλαμεν  
 καὶ ἐγνώσθη ἡμῖν  
 ὅτι οἱ προσερχόμενοι  
 10 ἀναγκάζονται θύ-  
 ειν καὶ ἀποσυστατι-  
 κὸν ἐποίησα τῷ ἀ-  
 δελφῷ μου καὶ μέ-  
 χρι τούτου οὐδὲν  
 15 ἐπράξαμεν ἕκατη-  
 χήσαμεν δὲ ῥήτορα  
 τῆ ἱ· ἵνα τῆ τῷ εἰ-  
 σαχθῆ τὸ πρῶγμα  
 περὶ τῶν ἀρουρῶ(ν).

(fibers of the recto broken off)

- 20 εἴ τι δὲ ἐὰν πράξω-  
 μεν γράφω σοι· οὐ-  
 δὲν δέ σοι ἔπεμψα  
 ἐπιδὴ εὔρον αὐτὸν  
 Θεόδωρον ἐξερχόμε-  
 25 νον· ἀποστέλλω σοι  
 δὲ αὐτὰ διὰ ἄλλου τα-

94. Parsons also concluded: “presumably the papyrus was already damaged when the letter was written” (*P.Oxy.* XXXI 2601, note to line 19).

95. So also Parsons, *P.Oxy.* XXXI 2601, 167.

χέως· γράφε δὲ ἡμῖν  
 περὶ τῆς ὀλοκληρίας  
 ὑμῶν πάντων καὶ  
 30 πῶς ἔσχεν Μαξιμίνα

(left margin)

καὶ Ἄσενά. καὶ εἰ δυνατὸν ἐστὶν ἐρχέσθω (*broken off fibres*) μετὰ τῆς  
 μητροῦ σου

(*verso, along the fibers*)

ἵνα θεραπευθῆ τὸ λευκωμάτιον· ἐγὼ γὰρ (*space*) εἶδον ἄλλους  
 θεραπευθέντας· ἐρρωσθαί σε εὔχομαι· ἀσπάζομαι πάντας τοὺς ἡμῶν κατ'  
 ὄνομα.

(upside down compared to the previous two lines)

34 ἀπ(όδος) τῆ ἀδελφῆ π(αρὰ) Κοπρητ(ος) ●θ  
 35 (illegible traces of letters)<sup>96</sup>

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4 ὑμας    7 ια: the bow of α crosses the ι; perhaps [[ι]α    10 αναγ'κ    13  
 μου: μ written over σο    17 ἱνα. ἰδ: δ corrected from α? Both numeral strokes are very  
 faint, the second perhaps delusory    19 αρουρῶ    29 ὑμων    32 ἱνα    34 απ',  
 π'. κοπρητ·

96. According to Parsons, “the traces are too substantial to be accident or offset; the script should be Greek (it is not Latin or Coptic or Aramaic). But I have found no satisfactory reading” (*P.Oxy.* XXXI 2601, note to line 35, 171).