

2 The Martyrs of Oxyrhynchus. Remembering the Great Persecution in the City of the Sharp-Nosed Fish

2.1 Introduction

Oxyrhynchus, an important regional capital in Middle Egypt, is often mentioned as the hometown of martyrs or as the city where Christians received martyrdom.¹¹⁹ One of the stories tells of a day in August, in the reign of the Emperors Diocletian and Maximian, when the bishop and his clergy, a soldier, a tribune and his family, and eight other Christians were tried before the court of the notorious governor Culcianus. Witnesses told Culcianus that these people were ‘the only individuals in the city of Oxyrhynchus’ who had not followed the imperial precept, disregarded the gods and defied his tribunal.¹²⁰ Therefore, Culcianus ordered the seventeen Christians to sacrifice to the Roman gods. They refused, and were thrown before the wild beasts in the arena. However, instead of attacking the Christians, the beasts fell down at their feet as if they were gentle lambs. Culcianus then tried to burn the Christians, but the fire miraculously went off. So the seventeen martyrs were decapitated and after the execution a certain priest named Julian collected their relics and sent his son to bring them back to Oxyrhynchus.¹²¹

Recently, Lincoln Blumell has labelled this story about the seventeen martyrs of Oxyrhynchus ‘the only direct piece of evidence for Christian martyrdom at Oxyrhynchus’.¹²² He mentions one historical mistake in the story of the martyrs of Oxyrhynchus that its first editors also note: the date given in the manuscripts – the second consulship of Diocletian and the first of Maximian – is clearly incorrect. The Great Persecution did not start when Diocletian first came to power, but coincided with the celebrations of the twentieth year of his reign. The editors solved this problem by simply omitting the consulships and instead mention only the names of the emperors. Apart from this mistake, Blumell argues that there are ‘no blatant anachronisms that would suggest it [= the martyr story] ought to be discounted outright’.¹²³

119 For places mentioned in this study, see Fig. 1. Modern placenames follow the spelling in J. Baines and J. Málek, *Cultural Atlas of Ancient Egypt* (Oxford, 2000, rev. ed. of *Atlas of Ancient Egypt* [Oxford, 1980]).

120 J. Pinio, G. Cupero and J. Stilingo, *Acta sanctorum: Augusti tomus sextus* (Paris, 1868) 14: (...) *solī (...)* in *Oxyrinchena civitate*.

121 For the story of the martyrs of Oxyrhynchus see Pinio, Cupero and Stilingo, *Acta sanctorum*, 14–5.

122 L.H. Blumell, *Lettered Christians: Christians, Letters, and Late Antique Oxyrhynchus* (Leiden, 2012) 252.

123 Blumell, *Lettered Christians*, 253.

He points out that the names of many of the martyrs – Serapion, Ammonius, Chiron – were common Oxyrhynchite names in the early fourth century. Furthermore, the governor Culcianus is known from other martyr stories, is mentioned by Eusebius and he even appears in papyri from Oxyrhynchus. Although Blumell proposes that these elements suggest that there may be some historical basis to this account, other arguments can be made that engender doubt about the veracity of the story. First, the tale is preserved in a passage from the *Acta sanctorum*, a seventeenth-century encyclopaedic text examining the lives of Christian saints. This is a relatively young edition and it is uncertain on which sources it is based.¹²⁴ Second, the story tells about martyrs who feature under different names and who are not always in the company of the same martyrs in other manuscripts.¹²⁵ Therefore, instead of using the *Acta* as historical evidence, I would see this image of a small community wiped out during the final, ‘Great Persecution’ as a typical case of a later ‘invention of tradition’.

This chapter is about the martyrs of Oxyrhynchus, who, like the martyrs in the *Acta*, transmit memories of the Great Persecution. We will furthermore examine them as Christian role models who, in hagiographical literature, refused to sacrifice to the gods and died for their faith and who, in the papyrological record, appear as

124 The editors have arranged the saints according to the date of their feast days and included notes, indexes and chronologies. For the story of the martyrs of Oxyrhynchus they refer to two Latin manuscripts: one is located in Florence and the other is identified as the Clunianensis manuscript. The former is believed to have been compiled in the late sixth century by monks in Gaul, who used calendars or martyrologies originating in Rome, Africa and the Eastern Roman Empire, and additional literary sources. This manuscript is now lost, but the Clunianensis manuscript can be consulted in the 18th-century edition of J. Mabillon, *Praefationes actis sanctorum ordinis S. Benedicti* (Rouen, 1732). It had come into the possession of this French scholar through his friendship with the prior of the Benedictine monastery in Cluny. Unfortunately, it is not known what happened to this manuscript after Mabillon made his edition. According to H. Achelis, *Die Martyrologien, ihre Geschichte und ihr Wert* (Berlin, 1900) 19 it either stayed in Paris and got lost in the inheritance of Mabillon or it returned to Cluny to disappear there. Either way, by the time the story appeared in the *Acta sanctorum*, it had a long road behind it.

125 When comparing these manuscripts with the *Acta sanctorum*, Achelis, *Martyrologien*, 173-7 and Delehay, ‘Martyrs d’Égypte’, 65 note that whereas one manuscript refers to Tomis as the place of execution, a second manuscript mentions Thmuis and a third speaks of *Omoinem civitatem*. In the *Acta*, a specific place is not even mentioned anymore. The martyrs are just said to have died at an unspecified place ‘in Egypt’, but now – for the first time – they are said to have come from Oxyrhynchus. Delehay, ‘Martyrs d’Égypte’, 5 concludes that ‘cette fois, du moins, ce sont les reliques, venues d’un peu partout, qui ont fourni au rédacteur le personnel de son récit. Il a pu ignorer les pays d’origine de chacun des martyrs, et les prendre pour des indigènes. Pareille confusion ou transformation est loin d’être sans exemple’. In other words, the martyrs of Oxyrhynchus may not have been citizens of Oxyrhynchus at all. After years and years of editing, the origins and place of the trial of the martyrs are less than certain – and cultural memories of later generations of Christians shine through the inconsistent versions of the story.

patrons of the poor and healers of the sick. As we will see, the martyrs of the Great Persecution were embedded in the everyday life of Late Antique Oxyrhynchus.

Our trip down memory lane begins in the fourth century, when Christianity became organized and slowly spread throughout Egypt, and ends in the sixth century, when the majority of the Egyptians were Christians and Christianity had obtained a prominent position within society. With Christianity's gradual integration into Egyptian society, the cognitive ecology in which the Great Persecution was remembered changed. In the theoretical framework discussed in the General Introduction, we have seen that these changes can be traced by looking at three different aspects of the cognitive ecology: the social setting, cognitive artefacts and the physical environment. In the remainder of this section, an application of these three aspects to Late Antique Oxyrhynchus provides us with a solid basis for an examination of the memories of the Great Persecution in Oxyrhynchus throughout Late Antiquity.

In the first place, the social setting changed when Christianity became institutionalized. The organization of Christianity through the Church, with a structure of bishops, priests and deacons, was already visible to some extent in the second half of the third century, when the earliest known bishop of Oxyrhynchus appears in the papyrological record. We see him busy networking with other Christians, involved in teaching, fund-raising and perhaps also copying Scripture.¹²⁶ However, only after the Great Persecution and from the reign of Emperor Constantine onwards did the Church become more powerful and Christianity gradually a more visible part of society. Families more often chose Christian names for their children, naming them after biblical figures or saints.¹²⁷

The city of Alexandria became one of the main centres of the Church and Oxyrhynchus received, as most nomen capitals did, an episcopal see. According to the anthropologist Jan Vansina, strong and structured cultural memories first appear when those who remember them have organized themselves in central political institutions.¹²⁸ The strongest cultural memories of the Great Persecution indeed appear to have been formulated and promulgated by the Church. Already in the mid-

¹²⁶ Luijendijk, *Greetings*, 81-151. The discovery of the Ethiopic version of the *History of the Alexandrian Patriarchate* has recently confirmed Luijendijk's argument that Sotas was indeed bishop in the later third century. According to the *History*, Sotas was ordained by Bishop Maximus of Alexandria (264-282). See A. Luijendijk, 'On and beyond Duty: Christian Clergy at Oxyrhynchus (c. 250-400)', in R.I. Gordon, J. Rüpke and G. Petridou (eds.), *Beyond Priesthood. Religious Entrepreneurs and Innovators in the Imperial Era* (Berlin, 2017) 103-26 at 107 and 109.

¹²⁷ R.S. Bagnall, *Later Roman Egypt. Society, Religion, Economy and Administration* (Aldershot and Burlington, 2003) Chs. VIII-IX, M. Depauw and W. Clarysse, 'How Christian Was Fourth Century Egypt? Onomastic Perspectives on Conversion', *VChr* 67 (2013) 407-35, D. Frankfurter, 'Onomastic Statistics and the Christianization of Egypt: A Response to Depauw and Clarysse', *VChr* 68 (2014) 284-9 and M. Depauw and W. Clarysse, 'Christian Onomastics: A Response to Frankfurter', *VChr* 69 (2015) 327-9.

¹²⁸ J. Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (Madison, 1985) 95.

dle of the third century, Christians in Carthage and Rome remembered the days of their martyrs' deaths and wrote these down in martyrological calendars.¹²⁹ This remembering presupposes the initiative and influence of the clergy.¹³⁰ However, Jan Bremmer rightly reminds us that commemoration is not the same as cult and that the latter clearly was a (post-)Constantinian phenomenon.¹³¹ In the case of Egypt, the cult of the saints became visible in the landscape and hagiography came to maturity only from the middle of the fifth century onwards.¹³²

Memory is a wily time traveller. It rewrites the past with knowledge of the present and individuals as well as societies update old memories with new experiences, thereby creating stories that fit in the current world. Within memory studies, it is often assumed that the composition and coordination of collective memories are tasks of a political system: a new ruler feels the need to justify his rule, legitimate the new political order, set himself apart from his rivals and create 'a new beginning' with a new identity and new collective identity types.¹³³ Although the cult of the martyrs often began with Christians gathering at private places to commemorate their 'very special dead', bishops struggled to take control over these monuments. By gaining control over private martyr shrines, they not only dealt with power bases of potential rival religious leaders, but they could also better control the way in which Christians remembered these martyrs.¹³⁴

Under the auspices of the institutionalized Church, the martyr cult was used for the formation of a new Christian collective memory. According to Philippe Buc, contemporary Christians remembered the trials and executions of fellow Christians

129 A. Struiber, 'Heidnische und christliche Gedächtniskalender,' *JbAC* 3 (1960) 24-33 and C. Pietri, *Christiana respublica. Éléments d'une enquête sur le christianisme antique*, 3 vols. (Rome, 1997) 2.1283-8.

130 Pietri, *Christiana respublica* 2, 1287 remarks that the composing of martyrological calendars presupposes the initiative and control of the clergy. See also Bremmer, 'Heroes to Saints', 52, who refers to Cyprian's insistence that confessors should be included in the martyrological calendar, revealing his influence in its composition.

131 Bremmer, 'Heroes to Saints', 50-4, 57-64. See also the discussion about the development of the cult of the martyrs in F. Lifshitz, 'The Martyr, the Tomb, and the Matron: Constructing the (Masculine) "Past" as a Female Power Base', in G. Althoff, J. Fried and P.J. Geary (eds.), *Medieval Concepts of the Past: Ritual, Memory, Historiography* (Cambridge, 2008) 310-41.

132 See p. 16 above.

133 For memory politics, see e.g. M. Kohlstruck, 'Erinnerungspolitik: Kollektive Identität, Diskurshegemonie', in B. Schwellig (ed.), *Politikwissenschaft als Kulturwissenschaft. Theorien, Methoden, Problemstellungen* (Wiesbaden, 2004) 173-93, Berek, *Kollektives Gedächtnis*, 150-61 and H. König, 'Das Politische des Gedächtnisses', in Gudehus, Eichenberg and Welzer, *Gedächtnis und Erinnerung*, 115-25.

134 Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, 23-49. See Lifshitz, 'Martyr', 310-41 for the role of women in organizing martyr shrines.

not as punishments of criminals but as victories over the Devil.¹³⁵ Focusing on North African Christianity, Robert Markus argues that the members of the now triumphant Church presented themselves as the heirs of the martyrs of the final, 'Great Persecution'.¹³⁶ As for Egypt, it has been asserted that the representation of the martyrs changed with the Church's retrospective self-understanding, as it underwent immense changes after the Council of Chalcedon and the Arabic conquest. Diocletian became the prototype of the wicked emperor and the martyrs of the Great Persecution representatives of those who fought against religious enemies or imperial power.¹³⁷

This brings us to the second aspect of the changing cognitive ecology, cognitive artefacts. Only in the fifth century, when the Christian population of Egypt had increased considerably and the Persecution had become a matter of the past, does commemoration seem to have developed into cult. The papyrological record of Oxyrhynchus, as well as of other cities and villages in Late Antique Egypt, reveals a flourishing cult of the martyrs. From the second half of the fourth century onwards, the martyrs were present, through a whole range of means, in the everyday lives of the Oxyrhynchites. These means, or cognitive artefacts, have noteworthy parallels with Graeco-Roman culture. For instance, whereas the Oxyrhynchites used to go to Sarapis with their oracular questions, in Christian times they went to the oracle of the martyr Philoxenus.¹³⁸

David Frankfurter has argued for a 'demographic continuity' of ritual practices from Roman to Late Antique Egypt. He points out that Christian clergy acted as healers and diviners and continued to use traditional Egyptian images, amulets and

¹³⁵ P. Buc, 'Martyre et ritualité dans l'Antiquité tardive. Horizons de l'écriture médiévale des rituels', *Annales (HSS)* 48 (1997) 63-92.

¹³⁶ R. Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge, 1990) 24, 86-100.

¹³⁷ Orlandi, 'Cycle', 'Hagiography, Coptic' and 'Letteratura copta' argues that literary developments in hagiography were consequences of the Council of Chalcedon and the Arabic conquest. See also Naguib, 'Martyr and Apostate' and Papaconstantinou, 'Historiography, Hagiography', who posits that the martyrs became prototypes for those who fought with religious enemies. Furthermore, Van der Vliet, 'Bringing Home', 40 observes that under Islamic rule, the protagonists in martyr stories often apostatized, reconverted and subsequently suffered martyrdom. For summaries of these passions see Detoraki, 'Greek Passions', 81-4.

¹³⁸ According to L. Papini, 'Domande oraculari: Elenco delle attestazioni in greco e copto', *APapyrol* 4 (1992) 21-7 at 24-5, the oracle of Philoxenus replaced an earlier oracle of Sarapis. There is, however, a gap of three centuries between the latest 'pagan' and Christian oracle tickets. Moreover, these tickets were used in Pharaonic, Graeco-Roman, Late Antique as well as in medieval times (see D. Valbelle and G. Husson, 'Les questions oraculaires d'Égypte: histoire de la recherche, nouveautés et perspectives', in W. Clarysse, A. Schoors and H. Willems [eds.], *Egyptian Religion. The Last Thousand Years. Studies Dedicated to the Memory of Jan Quaegebeur*, 2 vols. [Leuven, 1998] 2.1055-71). Therefore, I would rather agree with Wiśniewski, *Beginnings*, 76, who states that it is not evident that Christian oracles were inspired by 'pagan' examples.

divination techniques.¹³⁹ The everyday lives of the Oxyrhynchites hardly changed when they converted to Christianity. They continued to live in the same streets, speak the same language, wear the same clothes and have the same everyday worries as before. Christian clergy, far from having the same beliefs or conceptions as the ritual experts in Pharaonic Egypt, still thought with the same set of cognitive artefacts and therefore rather acted as ‘local agents of religious transformation in Late Antique Egypt’ when they adapted existing religious practices such as ‘magic’ to new purposes.¹⁴⁰

Over the course of the centuries, this religious transformation also led to a shift in the topography of Christian buildings. In Oxyrhynchus, the earliest evidence for church buildings surfaces around the early fourth century, when a North Church Street and a South Church Street are mentioned in a list of streets and buildings.¹⁴¹ Apparently, at the beginning of the fourth century, these two churches dominated the street view at either side of the city. By the end of the century a Palestinian pilgrim wrote enthusiastically about a thoroughly Christianized city, ‘for there was no heretic or pagan inhabitant in the city, all the citizens alike were believers and catechumens’.¹⁴² His travelogue, however, says more about the enthusiasm of the pilgrim than about late fourth-century Oxyrhynchus, for the papyrological record demonstrates that the inhabitants of this city – as the rest of the Roman Empire – did not massively convert to Christianity, but only gradually became Christian in the course of the fourth and fifth centuries. By the sixth century, the Oxyrhynchus papyri walk the reader through a city filled with churches, monasteries and other Christian buildings.

The third aspect of the cognitive ecology, the environment, had now profoundly changed. As the sacred landscape of Late Antique Egypt became filled with churches and monasteries, the martyrs too were visible in the urban and rural environ-

139 D. Frankfurter, ‘Ritual Expertise in Roman Egypt and the Problem of the Category “Magician”’, in P. Schäfer and H.G. Kippenberg (eds.), *Envisioning Magic: A Princeton Seminar and Symposium* (Leiden, 1997) 115-35 at 129-30, *Religion in Roman Egypt: Assimilation and Resistance* (Princeton, 1998) 259-61 and *Christianizing Egypt. Syncretism and Local Worlds in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, 2018) 15-20.

140 T.S. de Bruyn and J.H.F. Dijkstra, ‘Greek Amulets and Formularies from Egypt Containing Christian Elements: A Checklist of Papyri, Parchments, Ostraka, and Tablets’, *BASP* 28 (2011) 163-216 at 182. For the problematic term ‘magic’, see, conveniently, J.N. Bremmer, ‘Preface: The Materiality of Magic’, in D. Boschung and J.N. Bremmer (eds.), *The Materiality of Magic* (Paderborn, 2015) 7-19 at 10-2.

141 *P.Oxy.* I 43 v° i 10: ῥ(ύμη) τῇ βοριν[ῇ] ἐκκλησίᾳ, iii 19: ῥ(ύμη) τῇ νοτινῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ. The *recto* of this papyrus is dated to 295. In the Oxyrhynchite nome, the earliest datable mention of a church is the confiscation of the property of a church in Chysis (*P.Oxy.* XXXIII 2673), dated 304. For a discussion of this papyrus see Luijendijk, *Greetings*, 191-210.

142 *h. mon.* 41-2: ἀλλὰ γὰρ οὐδεὶς ἦν οἰκίτωρ αἰρετικὸς οὐδὲ ἐθνικὸς ἐν τῇ πόλει. ἀλλὰ πάντας ὁμοῦ οἱ πολῖται πιστοὶ καὶ κατηχούμενοι. Translations are mine, unless indicated otherwise.

ments. The papyrological record of Oxyrhynchus reveals some forty churches by the sixth century, of which thirty were dedicated to saints alone.¹⁴³ In terms of archaeology, in the 1930s Evaristo Breccia reported about ‘the remnants of a large Christian building’ with a crypt.¹⁴⁴ More recently, Eva Subías identified two chapels, a monastic site and a fifth- to seventh-century *basilica*, in which the tombstone of a certain Menas, the abbot of a monastery of Saint Cyriacus, is located.¹⁴⁵ At the same time, most temples had lost their once sacred functions and had been reused for new purposes. A Serapeum built in the reign of Philip III Arrhidaeus (323-317 BCE), for instance, functioned as a church in Late Antiquity, probably dedicated to the local saint Philoxenus.¹⁴⁶ Furthermore, the Caesareum had been transformed into a church by at least 406, when a certain Phoibammon paid three golden *solidi* for a pair of double-fleeces on behalf of Peter, its priest.¹⁴⁷

In this chapter, I will try to capture these three changing aspects of the cognitive ecology and the influence they had on the memories of the Great Persecution for

143 For an overview of the saints venerated in Oxyrhynchus, see Papaconstantinou, *Culte des saints*, 286-8. For an overview of Christian institutions attested at Oxyrhynchus see G. Pfeilschifter, ‘Oxyrhynchus: Seine Kirchen und Klöster auf Grund der Papyrusfunde’, in A.M. Gietl (ed.), *Festgabe, Alois Knöpfler zur Vollendung des 70. Lebensjahres gewidmet von seinen Freunden und Schülern* (Freiburg, 1917) 248-64, G. Modena, ‘Il cristianesimo ad Ossirinco secondo i papiri’, *BSAA* 9 (1937) 254-69, P. Barison, ‘Ricerche sui monasteri dell’Egitto bizantino’, *Aegyptus* 18 (1938) 29-148 at 75-83, L. Antonini, ‘Le chiese cristiane nell’Egitto dal IV al IX secolo’, *Aegyptus* 20 (1940) 129-208 at 172-83. More recent lists are found in S. Timm, *Das Christlich-koptische Ägypten in arabischer Zeit*, 6 vols. (Wiesbaden, 1984-92) 1.287-91, R. Alston, *The City in Roman and Byzantine Egypt* (London, 2002) 295-6 and Blumell, *Lettered Christians*, 330-6.

144 E. Breccia, *Le Musée Gréco-Romain 1931-1932* (Bergamo, 1932) 36.

145 E. Subías, ‘A Byzantine Domain in the Suburbs of Oxyrhynchus’, in Buzi, Camplani and Conradi, *Coptic Society* 2, 1381-94. For the Late Antique ‘fortress’, see also her earlier overview ‘La fortaleza bizantina del suburbio noroccidental de Oxirrincio (El-Minia, Egipto)’, in L.M. de Araújo and J. Das Candeias Sales (eds.), *Novos trabalhos de Egiptologia ibérica. IV Congreso ibérico de Egiptología*, 2 vols. (Lisbon, 2012) 2.1163-78 and for a recent archaeological description of Oxyrhynchus and the surrounding area, ‘Oxyrhynchus: Metropolis and Landscape’, in E. Subías et al. (eds.), *The Space of the City in Graeco-Roman Egypt: Image and Reality* (Tarragona, 2011) 93-116. For the stela of Menas, see C. Piedrafita, ‘El prior Menas i una inscripció amb l’era de Dioclecià a Oxirrinc’, in N. Castellano, M. Mascort and C. Piedrafita (eds.), *Ex Aegypto lux et sapientia. Homenatge al professor Josep Padró Parcerisa* (Barcelona, 2015) 455-66 at 455-8 (no. 1), with corrections by A. Delattre, J.H.F. Dijkstra and J. van der Vliet, ‘Christian Inscriptions from Egypt and Nubia 7 (2019)’, *BASP* 57 (2020) in press (no. 6).

146 J. Padró, J.J. Martínez and C. Piedrafita, ‘Historia de un edificio religioso en Oxirrincio, desde el siglo IV a.C. hasta el siglo VII d.C.’, in A. Guzmán Almagro and J. Velaza (eds.), *Miscellanea Philologica et Epigraphica Marco Mayer Oblata* (Barcelona, 2018) 702-718. For images of the graffiti referring to Saint Philoxenus, see pp. 710-1 (Figs. 7, 9). For an edition of the graffiti based on these photos, see Delattre, Dijkstra and Van der Vliet, ‘Christian Inscriptions from Egypt and Nubia 7’, in press (nos. 8, 10).

147 P.Mert. I 41.

Egypt as a whole and Late Antique Oxyrhynchus in particular. The City of the Sharp-Nosed Fish, where Bernard Pyne Grenfell (1869-1926) and Arthur Surridge Hunt (1871-1934) excavated thousands of papyrus fragments, provides a treasure trove of information concerning the roles that the martyrs fulfilled in the everyday lives of the Oxyrhynchites. Both literary and documentary papyri and later hagiographical literature allow us to see the martyrs in different contexts and situations.

First, I will discuss the literary evidence to show how later generations of Christians remembered the Persecution. The focus will be on stories about martyrs found among the literary papyri from Oxyrhynchus and on martyrs from Oxyrhynchus figuring in later hagiographies. The hagiographical works contain, in addition to a wealth of information about which martyrs were remembered, invented traditions of how Christian Oxyrhynchites had reacted in the face of persecution. In other words, although the representation of the martyrs in Late Antique Egypt was far removed from historical reality, the Great Persecution was considered an important moment in the history of Late Antique Oxyrhynchus.

The martyrs, however, were not only figures from a persecution of the distant past: the past had become a living reality. The second part of the chapter, then, addresses the different roles of the martyrs in the daily lives of the Oxyrhynchites. The papyrological record reveals how the martyrs, visible in the urban landscape, shaped the collective memory of the Christian community. It shows, furthermore, how martyrs acted as patrons of the poor and how the power of the saints was used in everyday life. Far from being figures known from a long past persecution, the martyrs were still highly relevant in the contemporary world.

2.2 The Earliest Martyrdom Account

Before we start looking in more detail at the hagiographical fragments found in Oxyrhynchus, it is necessary to make a few introductory remarks about the *Acta martyrum*. In response to common misconceptions, Jan Bremmer has recently reminded us that ‘the term “martyr acts” is a modern construct that imposes a unity on what is, at least initially, an essentially heterogeneous corpus of texts and certainly not a genre’.¹⁴⁸ Its origins are traditionally seen to lie in the reports of court

¹⁴⁸ J.N. Bremmer, *Maidens, Magic and Martyrs in Early Christianity* (Tübingen, 2017) 349-86 at 350 (‘Perpetua and Her Diary: Authenticity, Family and Visions’, 2002¹). On the development of hagiography as a genre see also S. Efthymiadis, ‘Introduction’, in Efthymiadis, *Ashgate Research Companion* 2, 1-21. On defining ‘hagiography’ as a genre, see the articles by M. Van Uytenghe, ‘L’hagiographie: un “genre” chrétien ou antique tardif?’, *AB* 111 (1993) 135-88 and ‘L’origine et les ingrédients du discours hagiographique’, *SEIG* 50 (2011) 35-77 in which he proposes to use the term ‘hagiographical discourse’ instead of characterizing hagiography as a genre. In a similar way, C. Rapp, “‘For Next to God, You Are My Salvation’: Reflections on the Rise of the Holy Man in Late

cases, letters from one congregation to another or even, in the case of Perpetua, a combination of a diary kept in prison while awaiting her trial, a report of a dream and editorial comments.¹⁴⁹

The earliest martyrdom account found in Oxyrhynchus belongs to the group of martyr stories that is regarded as accounts of the trials of Christians based on, and with little to no alteration of, the official court record. The editor notes that the handwriting of this papyrus is similar to fragments dated to the first century CE, but points out that the content requires a date after 307. He reports, however, that Theodore Skeat (1907-2003) compared the palaeography with a more similar fourth-century papyrus written in a formulized documentary style and therefore assigned the account to the fourth century: the handwriting indeed indicates a date perhaps not long after the Great Persecution.¹⁵⁰ Apparently, the papyrus fragment was part of a book-roll (the back is blank) and it contains the beginning of the martyr story of Dioscorus, a city councillor from Oxyrhynchus' neighbouring city of Kynopolis.¹⁵¹

[...of Dio]cletian.... [Diosco]rus, [a city councillor] from [Upper Kynopolis, was arrested and brought before the prefect Culc]ianus. [Culcianus said:] 'Dioscorus, we have heard [that you are quite wise because of your pai]deia. Sacrifice and sub[mit to the commands of the lords emperors.] Dioscorus said: ['I am not sacrificing to gods like these nor do I submit except] to God alone... ..?... ..in heart... [Culcianu]s asked him: ['Are you a lector?' Dioscorus said: 'I am not, but my fath]er was a lec[tor].'¹⁵²

The story begins in protocol style, with the date, the name, the occupation and the place of residence of the accused. Then the prefect orders Dioscorus to sacrifice, which the city councillor refuses, and an interrogation begins. The different worldviews of Culcianus and Dioscorus, or, in a broader sense, the Roman stand-

Antiquity', in Howard-Johnston and Hayward, *Cult of Saints*, 63-81 argues that 'hagiography' says more about the subject of a text than about its literary representation.

149 Reports of court cases also inspired the martyr stories of Alexandrian martyrs who died defending the rights of Greeks before the Roman emperors, see H.A. Musurillo, *The Acts of the Pagan Martyrs* (Oxford, 1954). See also Van Minnen, 'Saving History?', 68, who reminds us that texts were reused in different contexts and Coptic hagiography was influenced by different literary genres and local traditions.

150 I would like to thank Guglielmo Cavallo for clearly describing the palaeography of the scribe of *P.Oxy. L 3529*.

151 It is tempting, but cannot be proven, that the Dioscorus of this papyrus fragment is the same Dioscorus as the one mentioned in the Coptic Church calendar (ed. W.E. Crum, 'Fragments of a Church Calendar', *ZNW* 37 [1938] 23-32 at 26, l. 36: ἀνα ΔΙΟΣΚΟΡΟΣ) that will be discussed below.

152 *P.Oxy. L 3529*: [Διο]κλητιανού[... συλληφθεὶς Διόσκο]ρος ἀπὸ τ[ῆς Ἄνω Κυνοπολιτῶν βουλευτῆς εἰσῆλθῃ πρὸς Κουλκ]ιανὸν ἡγεμ[όνα. Κουλκιανὸς εἶπεν·] Διόσκορε, ἡκούσα[μεν ὅτι λίαν συνετὸς γέγονας τῇ παι]δ(ε)ίᾳ. θύσον καὶ ὑπά[κουσον τοῖς προστάγμασι τῶν κυρίων σεβαστῶ]ν. Διόσκορος εἶ[πεν·] θεοῖς τοιοῦτοις οὐ θύω οὐδὲ ὑπακούω εἰ μὴ μό]νον τῷ Θε(ε)ῷ [...]νῶ ὃς οὐκ ἐκ' φα[ίνεται ...]τῇ καρδίᾳ[... Κουλκιανὸς αὐτῷ εἶπεν· ἀναγνώστης εἶ· Διόσκορος εἶπεν· οὐκ, ἀλλ' ὁ πατ]ῆρ μου ἀναγ[νώστης ἦν].

ards versus the Christian mentality, are immediately obvious. In the mind of Culcianus, it was inconceivable that a well-educated person could fail to observe the Roman rituals. For Dioscorus, however, sacrificing to the gods meant forsaking his Christian faith. The words of the martyr during his trial, which were recorded in the court proceedings, would later inspire, astonish and, if necessary, strengthen the congregation in their own suffering.¹⁵³

The dry sands of Egypt have preserved numerous copies of court proceedings, taken from official records.¹⁵⁴ It follows that these official documents were publicly accessible and that Christians must have been able to make copies of, for instance, the trial of Dioscorus from Kynopolis. In fact, bishop Dionysius of Alexandria (190-265) quoted the transcript of his own trial during the persecution of Valerian in a letter to his congregation in which he gave his own, personal impression of the hearing.¹⁵⁵ Moreover, it seems that from an early date onwards Christians started collecting the *Acta martyrum* and used them during the liturgy.¹⁵⁶ At the end of the

153 According to S.R. Huebner, 'Soter, Sotas, and Dioscorus before the Governor: The First Authentic Court Record of a Roman Trial of Christians?', *Journal of Late Antiquity* 12 (2019) 2-24, *P.Mil.Vogl.* VI 287 may constitute the first verbatim copy of a trial of Christians. However, this fragmentary second- or third-century papyrus of unknown provenance does not provide conclusive evidence to connect the recorded trial with the persecutions or the mentioned names with two known Christians. For stenographers writing court proceedings see W. Ameling, 'Zwei epigrafische Bemerkungen zum *Martyrium Pionii*', *ZPE* 198 (2016) 68-74 at 68-71. For martyr stories as entertainment, Zandee, 'Patroon der martyria', 1-28, who compares the reading of the adventures of the martyr by ancient audiences with the reading of a detective novel today. Grig, *Making Martyrs*, 34-53, esp. pp. 42-3 argues that the tortures in martyr stories were presented as Christian alternatives to Roman spectacles in the arena, which Church fathers considered inappropriate entertainment.

154 For a discussion of the copying of court proceedings see Van Minnen, 'Saving History?', 60-3. On the form and development of court protocols see R.A. Coles, *Reports of Proceedings in Papyri* (Brussels, 1966) and, more recently, various articles by R. Haensch: 'Das Statthalterarchiv', *ZRG* 100 (1992) 209-317, 'Typisch römisch? Die Gerichtsprotokolle der in Aegyptus und den übrigen östlichen Provinzen tätigen Vertreter Roms. Das Zeugnis von Papyri und Inschriften', in H. Börm et al. (eds.), *Monumentum et instrumentum inscriptum* (Stuttgart, 2008) 117-25 and 'Die Protokolle der Statthaltergerichte der spätantiken Provinzen Ägyptens', in R. Haensch (ed.), *Recht haben und Recht bekommen im Imperium Romanum. Das Gerichtswesen der römischen Kaiserzeit und seine dokumentarische Evidenz* (Warsaw, 2016) 299-324. For a comparison of martyr acts with court proceedings preserved on papyrus see G. Lanata, *Gli atti dei martiri come documenti processuali* (Milan, 1973).

155 The letter of Dionysius of Alexandria is quoted by Eusebius (*h.e.* 7.11.3-11). Additionally, fellow bishops wrote to Cyprian that they had read his court proceedings and taken the answers which Cyprian gave during his trial as an example of how to act in court (*Cypr. Ep.* 77.2.1). The court records of Cyprian are also mentioned in *V. Cypr.* 11.1.

156 Eusebius was the first to speak of his 'collection of the martyrdoms of the ancients' (*h.e.* 4.15.47 and 5: τοῖς τῶν ἀρχαίων συναχθεῖσιν ἡμῖν μαρτυρίοις καὶ τῇ τῶν μαρτύρων ἡμῖν (..) συναγωγῇ). See also V. Saxer, 'Les actes des martyrs chez Eusèbe de Césarée et dans les martyrologues syriaque et hiéronymien', *AB* 102 (1984) 85-95. According to G. Lazzati, *Gli sviluppi della letteratura sui martiri nei primi quattro secoli. Con appendice di testi* (Turin, 1956) 13-62 and B. de Gaiffier, 'La lecture des

fourth century, this practise seems to have become official, when the Council of Hippo in 393, reiterated at Carthage in 397, declares: 'It is also permitted to read the passions of the martyrs, when their anniversaries are celebrated'.¹⁵⁷ In the fifth century, Shenoute of Artripe even writes that a true martyr should have a martyr act (ΝΕΥΠΟΜΝΗΜΑ ΝΗΜΑΡΤΥΡΟΣ 'the public records/acts of the martyrs') in which his martyrdom is described. According to Shenoute, false martyrs did not possess such documents.¹⁵⁸

In Late Antiquity, when the persecutions belonged to the past and Christianity gradually integrated into society, stories like the one of Dioscorus were retold by later generations.¹⁵⁹ Moreover, new stories were created as the martyr cult grew and developed. Concerning Egypt, 'epic' passions were created, characterized through long discussions between judge and martyr, detailed descriptions of gruesome tortures, comforting visions of Christ and the archangels, and fantastic miracle stories. For many, the 'epicness' of Coptic martyr stories has become the defining feature of Coptic hagiography. In recent years, however, scholars have acknowledged that 'this image is found only in a specific group of rather late martyr stories, which can by no means stand as representative of all hagiography in Coptic'.¹⁶⁰ Zooming in on the hagiographical literature found in Oxyrhynchus, we indeed find a wide variety of literary styles.

2.3 Other Hagiographical Literature from Oxyrhynchus

Concerning the few hagiographical fragments that have been found at Oxyrhynchus, it might not be unimportant to note that they have been rediscovered at the

actes des martyrs dans la prière liturgique en Occident', *AB* 72 (1954) 134-66 at 165-6, the liturgy played a key role in the formation and redaction of the martyr texts.

157 *Concilium Hipponense* (CCSL 149, p. 21), also *Reg. eccl. Carth. exc.* 46 (CCSL 149, p. 186): *Liceat etiam legi passiones martyrum cum anniversarii dies eorum celebrantur*. For the reading of the martyr story at the anniversary of the martyr, see also L.E. De Lacy O'Leary, *The Saints of Egypt* (London, 1937) 32, Baumeister, *Martyr invictus*, 172-3 and Horn, *Untersuchungen*, lviii-lix.

158 Shenoute, *Since It Behooves Christians* (ed. Amélineau, *Oeuvres de Shenoudi* 2, 208). For this sermon see Emmel, *Shenoute's Literary Corpus* 2, 668-9, 858.

159 See the four parallel texts: the fifth- or sixth-century Syriac *Passion of Dioscorus* (ed. E. Tisserant and H. Quentin, 'Une version syriaque de la Passion de S. Dioscore', *AB* 39 [1921] 333-44), a twelfth-century Latin *Passion of Dioscorus* (ed. H. Quentin, 'Passio S. Dioscori', *AB* 24 [1905] 321-42), another twelfth-century Latin *Passion of Dioscorus* (ed. H. Delehaye, 'La Passion de S. Dioscore', *AB* 40 [1922] 352-4) and a thirteenth-century Latin *Passion of Dioscorus* (ed. Quentin, 'Passio S. Dioscori,' 321-42). The fifth- or sixth-century Greek parchment leaf P.Mich. inv. 33 (P.J. Sijpesteijn, 'P.Mich. inv. 33: A Fragment of a Martyrology?', *BASP* 31 [1994] 121-4) contains a dating formula parallel to those in the literary texts and may be the end of a parchment codex which once included the *Passion of Dioscorus*.

160 Papaconstantinou, 'Hagiography in Coptic', 323.

ancient rubbish dumps.¹⁶¹ What does the fact that these texts were discarded as garbage say about their readership? And which martyrs were mentioned in the manuscripts that were not thrown away? As we will see below, the Oxyrhynchites venerated various martyrs. There must have existed at least a minimal narrative about their martyrdoms. Nevertheless, the papyrological record of Oxyrhynchus has not preserved these accounts. Even the names of the local martyrs Philoxenus, Serenus and Justus, which we will later in this chapter encounter in a liturgical calendar, letters about feasts and charity, amulets and oracular tickets, do not occur among the hagiographical fragments in Oxyrhynchus.¹⁶² Moreover, the stories about their lives and deaths have not been found in the documentary papyri and do not occur in sources outside the city either.¹⁶³

The absence of these martyr stories in Oxyrhynchus seems to confirm a hypothesis posited by Willy Clarysse, who suggests that whereas martyr stories had been used in local cults for centuries, perhaps transmitted orally, they were only copied and gathered on a large scale after the Arab conquest, at the same time as the dating according to the 'Era of the Martyrs' became common.¹⁶⁴ When comparing hagiographical works with other Greek and Coptic Christian literature dated up to the Arab conquest, Clarysse points out that martyr legends do not seem to have been a popular genre. Of the *Catalogue des papyrus littéraires juifs et chrétiens*, complemented with the Christian papyri collected by Kurt Treu, only 0,6% of the total are martyr stories.¹⁶⁵ Additionally, Clarysse could find only a few examples of martyr stories in catalogues of monastic libraries before the seventh century.

161 A. Luijendijk, 'Sacred Scriptures as Trash: Biblical Papyri from Oxyrhynchus', *VChr* 64 (2010) 217-54.

162 See below, pp. 52-64.

163 The first editors of *P.Oxy.* XI 1357 identify Philoxenus with the bishop of Hierapolis, who died in 523. A. Papaconstantinou, 'La liturgie stationale à Oxyrhynchus dans la première moitié du 6^e siècle. Réédition et commentaire du *P.Oxy.* XI 1357', *RÉG* 54 (1996) 135-59 at 145 and *Culte des saints*, 204 shows that this is impossible, since a church of Philoxenus already existed in 487. A monastery of Serenus is mentioned in a papyrus fragment from the Memphite nome (*CPR* XIV 52 C 31) and in a litany from Saqqara (H. Thompson, 'The Coptic Inscriptions', in J.E. Quibell [ed.], *The Monastery of Apa Jeremias* [Cairo, 1912] 47-125 at 67), although Papaconstantinou, *Culte des saints*, 187-8 points out that these are not necessarily the same persons. At p. 109 of the same monograph, she notes that a Justus who died on the same date as the Justus in the Greek liturgical calendar from Oxyrhynchus is mentioned in an unedited text from the Vatican.

164 Clarysse, 'Coptic Martyr Cult', 392-5. See Van Minnen, 'Saving History?', 63-4, who also concludes that hagiographical literature was relatively unimportant before the eighth century. For the Era of the Martyrs, see above, p. 17 (n. 71).

165 J. van Haelst, *Catalogue des papyrus littéraires juifs et chrétiens* (Paris, 1976) and K. Treu, 'Christliche Papyri', *APF* 19 (1969) 169-206; 20 (1970) 145-52; 21 (1971) 207-14; 22 (1973) 367-95; 24/25 (1976) 253-61; 26 (1978) 149-59; 27 (1980) 251-8; 28 (1982) 91-8; 29 (1983) 107-10; 30 (1984) 121-8; 31 (1985) 59-71; 32 (1986) 87-95; 34 (1988) 69-78; 35 (1989) 107-16; 36 (1990) 95-8; 37 (1991) 93-8.

When we take the hagiographical fragments that have been unearthed from Oxyrhynchus' rubbish dumps and place these stories next to other Christian literature found in the city, the results confirm Clarysse's hypothesis that hagiographical literature was clearly less popular than for instance the *apocrypha*.¹⁶⁶ About half of the Christian literary papyri are fragments from the New Testament and 19% are apocryphal texts, which leaves us with fifty texts of a Christian character outside the Bible. Among these are works of well-known Church fathers (11%), anonymous Christian hymns and homilies (7%) and hagiographical literature (4%). If we take only the Late Antique papyri (dated from the fourth century onwards) into account, the percentages do not change much. Again, approximately half of the papyri are texts from the New Testament and 17% are apocryphal texts. Among the remaining 35 texts are writings of Church fathers (9%) and hymns and homilies (10%). The hagiographies, which are all dated to the fourth century or later, now account for 7%: a considerably higher percentage than the 0,6% found by Clarysse. Additionally, a parchment containing the name 'Apa Victor' in uncials and within an ornamental border may have served as a cover or title for a work dedicated to this saint.¹⁶⁷ Furthermore, the Oxyrhynchite monk Theon opens two letters with a quotation in Latin from the martyr story of Apollonius: not only was Theon apparently acquainted with this well-known passion, but he also actively used it in his letters.¹⁶⁸

The majority of these 7% of hagiographical texts that have been unearthed from Oxyrhynchus' rubbish dumps were not necessarily connected with a martyr cult, for the names of these martyrs only occur in literary papyri. They do, however, provide us with information as to which martyrs were known and how their stories were presented. From papyri containing the *acta* of biblical saints to fragments of martyr stories staged during the reigns of Commodus, Septimius Severus and Diocletian, the Oxyrhynchites could choose from a wide variety of texts about persecution and martyrdom.¹⁶⁹

Instead of starting with a narrative concerning the Great Persecution, we will first look at a text written approximately during that time: a fourth-century Coptic papyrus containing the beginning of the story of a certain priest John, who died

¹⁶⁶ These percentages are taken from the lists of Christian literary papyri – excluding 'magical' papyri – from Oxyrhynchus dating from the second to the eighth centuries, as collected by Blumell, *Lettered Christians*, 318–25.

¹⁶⁷ *P.Oxy.* VI 987. The martyr Victor was known in Oxyrhynchus. Since Victor is a common name, however, it must remain a hypothesis that this parchment may have been one of the few written narratives about the martyrs venerated in Oxyrhynchus.

¹⁶⁸ L.H. Blumell, 'A Potential Source for the Latin Preface in *P.Oxy.* XVIII 2194', *ZPE* 183 (2012) 72–4 and L.H. Blumell and T.A. Wayment, *Christian Oxyrhynchus: Texts, Documents, and Sources* (Waco TX, 2015) 590.

¹⁶⁹ The Acts of the Apostles are written in a different tradition than the martyr stories and are therefore not further discussed here.

during the persecution of Septimius Severus.¹⁷⁰ Alcock suggests that the scribe never finished writing the story: the *verso* of the papyrus is left half empty. Reymond and Barns, however, do not consider the piece incomplete; they assume that the scribe simply wrote all that he knew about the early history of priest John. Content-wise, the scribe indeed seems to have combined two stories about priest John. For our purposes, John's story is particularly interesting as it contains a fascinating description of how Christians reacted in the face of persecution:

He [=Severus] raised a persecution against the Christians. Among those who believed in Christ, many were afraid and sacrificed to the idols, but others withdrew from the city, because they were unable to tolerate the polluted worship which they saw. For altars were set down in the square (while it was said): 'The one who wishes to receive something from the emperor, he will go first and sacrifice, and a reward will be put aside for him'. There was a great persecution in the land of Egypt. The emperor had the Christians killed and temples of the so-called gods were built. But some of the Christians withdrew from the city.¹⁷¹

When remembering the persecutions, most hagiographical works remain silent about the uncomfortable phenomena they wished either to forget or to remember only in certain, specific contexts. Interestingly, however, the narrative about priest John does mention the other, uncomfortable side of the story: not all Christians had stuck to their faith. The aftermath of the persecutions forced Christians to deal with those who had given in to the pressure to sacrifice to the gods. Others, however, had

170 *P.Oxy.* IV 1B 74/K (a). A translation of this text appears in Reymond and Barns, *Four Martyrdoms*, 16. The latter author was preparing an edition of this text, but never published it. An edition and commentary are now available in A. Alcock, 'Persecution under Septimius Severus', *Enchoria* 11 (1982) 1-5 and for a revision see H.-M. Schenke, 'Bemerkungen zum P. Hamb. Bil. 1 und zum altfayumischen Dialekt der koptischen Sprache', in G. Schenke Robinson, G. Schenke and U.-K. Plisch (eds.), *Der Same Seths. Hans-Martin Schenkes Kleine Schriften zu Gnosis, Koptologie und Neuen Testament* (Leiden, 2012) 744-71 at 763-5 ('Bemerkungen zum P. Hamb. Bil. 1 und zum altfayumischen Dialekt der koptischen Sprache', 1991¹). Concerning the date, both palaeography and orthography indicate that the story was written in the early fourth century, around the time of the Persecution. The scribe wrote in what Reymond and Barns, *Four Martyrdoms*, 16 recognized as an unfamiliar Middle Egyptian dialect, 'abominably spelt' and in 'a coarse semi-literate hand'. However, Schenke, 'Bemerkungen', 763, 766 speaks about an 'etwas wilde, und doch kontrolliert wirkende Orthographie', which has many similarities to an early Faiyumic dialect he encountered in an early fourth-century papyrus codex. According to him, this dialect represents a direct connection of Middle Egyptian to Faiyumic and thus reveals a bilingual Christian community.

171 *P.Oxy.* IV 1B 74/K (a) (ed. Schenke, 'Bemerkungen', 764 r^o, II. 6-23): ἀγτοοῦν νογδιωμοc εχεν νεχρnc· οὐαμ νιμ οὔν ετε ναγνιστεοῦε επεχpc· ααc μεν νζητοῦ αγερατε αϋϋciaze ννειδωλον· zenkaoye δε αγαναχωρι ππαλ ντπολιc εμπογνεωcεneδaм ετοοῦν αα πωemwe εтxεzm εтcene epay· nape zenowoye γαρ ναγkη ερпи zi тагорa· пeтcнeepзneч exи oγνnnei eβαλ zιтп nepa ωαcωe neч нωapи нϋϋciaze нceкω neч epпи noγoтwнion· nape oγnaδe naдиωmoс naчωaп зп тexωpa нкzme· neчpnc мен nape nepa зoтв ммау· ayω neрпнe ннeтcemoγтe epay xe нт naγкoт ммау· zaine δε eβαλ зп neчpnc αγαναχωρι neγ ππαλ νтπολιc. Tr. based on Schenke, 'Bemerkungen', 764.

fled to escape persecution, which the author of this text seems to consider acceptable. His main character owned an estate located two miles outside Alexandria, and some Christians withdrew to this place.

The narrative about priest John provides an unexpected glimpse into the way in which a writer from Late Antique Oxyrhynchus represented the early history of the Christians in Egypt. At the same time, it shows how he presented his readers with a Christian role-model in the figure of priest John. But who were these readers? Alcock suggests that the sentence '[John,] of whom we have already spoken to you' indicates that this text was to be read out aloud, as indeed most of these stories were, eventually, meant to be.¹⁷² Reymond and Barns propose that although the story of priest John begins at Alexandria, it may have ended with his martyrdom in Oxyrhynchus. In addition, Blumell has suggested that this John might be identified with the 'martyrium of Saint John' mentioned in a sixth-century list of churches and in an order for a supply of wine.¹⁷³ Nonetheless, it is needless to say that John is a common name and such connections must remain unproven.

The names of the martyrs in the Oxyrhynchite papyri are not always easy to identify. In the late fourth or early fifth century, for instance, a Christian hymn on the martyrs was written on the back of an *epikrisis* return.¹⁷⁴ Unfortunately, the papyrus is damaged – half to two-thirds is missing – but the words and half-sentences give an impression of the form that the remembrance of martyrs in Oxyrhynchus could take. The hymn begins by invoking the martyrs as heroes of the Church, tells about their victory over evil and their reward of eternal life and ends by stressing the importance of this for the Christian community. The author, at least, seems to refer to the martyrs and to address a Christian audience at the same time. Martyrs and the members of the Christian community shared a past – 'Moses (...) leader of our ancestors' – and are today's 'righteous offspring of the Church'.¹⁷⁵ Normally, hymns conclude by invoking the martyrs and the last line indeed contains names. The editor, however, could not identify these names with any well-known martyrs and they do not occur among the martyrs featuring in the documentary papyri of Oxyrhynchus. She suggests that they were local martyrs whose commemoration never developed into a cult, or citizens being praised in the way martyrs usually were.¹⁷⁶

172 P.Oxy. IV 1B 74/K (a) (ed. Schenke, 'Bemerkungen', 764 v^o, II. 9-10): ΕΤΑΝΕΡΩΘΕΡΗ ΝΧΑΘ ΕΡΟΤΕΝ.

173 P.Oxy. LXVII 4619 and 4622. See Blumell, *Lettered Christians*, 252.

174 P.Yale inv. 1360v^o (ed. S.A. Stephens, 'A Eulogy for Christian Martyrs?', *BASP* 22 [1985] 333-48). P.Yale inv. 1360v^o (ed. S.A. Stephens, 'A Eulogy for Christian Martyrs?', *BASP* 22 [1985] 333-48). On the nature of this text, see also Á.T. Mihálykó, *The Christian Liturgical Papyri: An Introduction* (Tübingen, 2019) 37. For the *epikrisis* return, P.Yale inv. 1360, see S.A. Stephens, 'An Epicrisis Return and Other Documentary Fragments from the Yale Collection', *ZPE* 96 (1993) 221-6.

175 P.Yale inv. 1360r^o (ed. Stephens, 'Eulogy', 338): μοισείας (...) ἄρχων τῶν προγόνῃ (...) δ[ι]καίων συστοιχίας ἐκκλησίας ἔγγονοι.

176 Stephens, 'Eulogy', 335-6.

Whereas the story of priest John was written on a single piece of papyrus and the hymn on the martyrs appeared on the back of another document, other stories were written in luxury codices or included in collections of hagiographies. A fifth-century papyrus that belonged to a *volumen* of ‘Hagiographica’, for instance, preserves a scene from the martyrdom of the anchorite Paphnutius of Dendara: the story, as we will see in more detail in chapter three, reads like a combination of a monk’s *vita* and a martyr’s passion.¹⁷⁷ On the *verso* of this papyrus, part of the martyr story of Christine of Tyre was recorded.¹⁷⁸ Furthermore, some elegantly written sixth- or seventh-century pieces of papyrus, together forming almost a complete leaf of a luxury papyrus codex, preserve part of the hearing of a certain Pamoun by a governor who may be identified with Sossianus Hierocles.¹⁷⁹ His story does not have the simplicity of a court record, although Pamoun’s speeches are not extremely elaborate either.

All in all, the papyri containing the martyrdom accounts of Dioscorus and Pamoun, the collection of ‘hagiographica’ including scenes from the passions of Paphnutius of Dendara and Christine of Tyre, the Christian hymn on the martyrs and the Coptic martyrdom of priest John give an impression of a wide variety of literary styles throughout the centuries. Furthermore, the hagiographical papyri show that there was more literature circulating about martyrs in Oxyrhynchus than estimated by previous research. Nevertheless, the martyrs mentioned in these literary papyri are hard to identify with martyrs in the documentary record. In the next section, we will see that the martyrs known from the papyri are different from martyrs mentioned in later literature as well.

2.4 The *Synaxarium*

It seems that later generations of Christians, who in manuscripts often mentioned Oxyrhynchus as the hometown of martyrs or as the city where Christians received martyrdom, thought that the Persecution had impacted the city greatly. This is apparent from the story of the seventeen martyrs of Oxyrhynchus in the *Acta sanctorum*, as we have seen in the introduction, but also from the seventh-century *Passion*

¹⁷⁷ PSI I 26. A Paphnutius is also mentioned in the Coptic Church calendar (ed. Crum, ‘Fragments’, 25: [ⲡⲁ]ⲛⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ) that will be discussed below, pp. 54-5. Paphnutius, however, was a common name and could refer to several persons.

¹⁷⁸ PSI I 27.

¹⁷⁹ *P.Oxy.* LXX 4759. Pamoun was a common name in Late Antique Egypt and Chapa, the editor of these fragments, lists several saints with this name mentioned in passions. None of these saints, however, can be directly linked to the martyr in the Oxyrhynchus fragments. For a short discussion on Pamoun’s identity see also G. Schenke in the Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity database (available online at <http://csa.history.ox.ac.uk>), no. E012665.

of *Apater and Irai*.¹⁸⁰ This passion tells us about the children of Diocletian's general Basilides, Apater and Irai, who wish to receive martyrdom and travel to Egypt for this purpose. They end up in a prison at Oxyrhynchus, where they meet priests from various Egyptian cities, among them the otherwise unknown Philotheus of Oxyrhynchus and characters that we will meet in chapter two and three: the physician saint of Antinoopolis, Colluthus, and the anchorite Paphnutius of Dendara.

The story of Apater and Irai as well as those of a considerable number of Oxyrhynchite martyrs have been preserved in the *Synaxarium*: a list of saints, with for each entry an abbreviated story about the saint connected to his or her feast day.¹⁸¹ The stories recorded are often quotes from their known or unknown passions or *vitae*. Unfortunately, a good edition of the *Synaxarium* is lacking and questions as to who first compiled the *Synaxarium*, who made the final revision and where and when composition took place still remain uncertain.¹⁸²

The *Synaxarium* includes the stories of the monk Dermatheus, Elias the eunuch, Epima from Pankoleus, the monk Harmina, Apa Absada, Isaac of Tiphre, James the Severed, Apa Kaou of the Faiyum, Apa Latsun and the martyr Shenoute of Oxyrhynchus.¹⁸³ Interestingly, these are all monks and martyrs who do not occur in the papy-

180 See above, pp. 33-4. The *Passion of Apater and Irai* has been preserved in Sahidic (ed. T. Orlandi, *Papyri copti di contenuto teologico* [Vienna, 1974] 149-54) and Bohairic (ed. H. Hyvernat, *Les actes des martyrs de l'Égypte tirés des manuscrits coptes de la Bibliothèque Vaticane et du Musée Borgias* [Paris, 1886-1887] 78-113). About the names Apater and Irai see Horn, *Studien zu den Märtyrern*, 2.87-94.

181 *PO* 1, pp. 303-5 (28 Thoth = 25 September).

182 O.H.E. Burmeister, 'On the Date and Authorship of the Arabic Synaxarium of the Coptic Church', *JThS* 39 (1938) 249-53; R.-G. Coquin, 'Le synaxaire des coptes. Un nouveau témoin de la recension de Haute Égypte', *AB* 96 (1978) 351-65, 'Synaxarion, Copto-Arabic', in *Copt.Enc.* VII (1991) 2172-3 and 'Quelle est la date possible de la recension de Basse Égypte du Synaxaire des coptes?', in J.-M. Rosenstiehl (ed.), *Études coptes IV* (Leuven, 1995) 75-84; M.N. Swanson, 'The Copto-Arabic Synaxarion', in D. Thomas and A. Mallett (eds.), *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, 4 vols. (Leiden, 2012) 4.937-45.

183 Dermatheus: *PO* 3, pp. 396-402 (7 Choiak = 3 December). Elias: *PO* 11, pp. 726-32 (28 Tybi = 23 January); the beginning of a story about a certain Elias, a rich citizen of Oxyrhynchus, found on a ninth- or tenth-century Coptic manuscript definitely refers to a different Elias, see W.E. Crum, *Catalogue of the Coptic Manuscripts in the Collection of the John Rylands Library* (Manchester, 1909) 218-9 (no. 439). Epima: *PO* 17, pp. 637-9 (8 Epeiph = 2 July); additionally, two versions of the martyrdom of Epima survive: a Bohairic and a more extensive Sahidic version. For the Sahidic version, see T. Mina, *Le martyre d'Apa Epima* (Cairo, 1937) 1-38 (text) 39-85 (tr.), for the Bohairic version G. Balestri and H. Hyvernat, *Acta martyrum I*, 2 vols. (Leuven, 1960-1961²) 1.78-98 (tr.), 2.120-56 (text). Harmina: *PO* 3, pp. 371-4 (2 Choiak = 28 November). Absada: *PO* 11, pp. 689-94 (24 Tybi = 19 January). Isaac of Tiphre: *PO* 16, pp. 356-8 (6 Pachon = 1 May). James the Severed: *PO* 3, pp. 342-4 (28 Hathyr = 23 November). The martyr story of James has been preserved various languages. For the three Greek martyrdoms, see P. Devos, 'Le dossier hagiographique de S. Jacques l'Intercis', *AB* 71 (1953) 157-210 and 72 (1954) 213-56. For the Bohairic text, see Balestri and Hyvernat, *Acta martyrum I* 2, 24-61 and its English translation A. Alcock, 'James the Persian', published online at

rological record of Oxyrhynchus. Moreover, these characters are absent from papyri and inscriptions. A similar problem occurs in the Islamic period, when Coptic and Arabic references to a church of the Holy Family also cannot be confirmed by the occurrence of this church in the papyri.¹⁸⁴ Similar too, is the absence of monks of the Pachomian, Shenoutean, Antonian and Lower Egyptian monastic traditions on genealogical inscriptions found in monasteries, which list the names of other monks.¹⁸⁵ Although the *Synaxarium* seems to represent a tradition different from traditions existing within the city of Oxyrhynchus, it nevertheless gives some interesting insights in stories circulating about the martyrs of Oxyrhynchus.

In the *Synaxarium*, a shared memory of a Christian history was stored quite literally in the form of summaries of monks' *vitae* and martyrs' passions. Reading the entries about the Oxyrhynchite martyrs, three functions of martyr stories can be observed. A first function was not so much remembering the past, but connecting the community with the persecuted Church. It has been argued that in the seventh century, when Christians found themselves under Arab rule, they felt a need to identify themselves as the heirs of the martyrs of the Great Persecution: just as the martyrs would rather die than apostatize, the present generation would not convert to Islam.¹⁸⁶ It may not be surprising that the *Passion of Apater and Irai* describes Oxyrhynchus, the city referred to as the Christ-Loving City, as a city where the prison had once been filled with future martyrs.¹⁸⁷

Secondly, martyr stories were meant to instruct and exhort.¹⁸⁸ For instance, listening to the martyrdom of Epima, the audience was told how communities had

<https://suciualin.files.wordpress.com/2015/12/james-the-persian.pdf>. Kaou of the Faiyum: *PO* 11, pp. 736-752 (28 Tybi = 23 January). Latsun: *PO* 17, pp. 570-5 (16/17 Payni = 10 June). Shenoute of Oxyrhynchus: *PO* 16, pp. 228-9 (14 Phamenoth = 10 March).

184 D.W. Rathbone, 'Preface,' in E.R. O'Connell (ed.), *Egypt in the First Millennium AD: Perspectives from New Fieldwork* (London, 2014) xi-xiv at xiii. The church of the Holy Family is said to have been converted into a mosque in 934, as confirmed by an inscription found at a mosque in Oxyrhynchus. For the excavation report see G. Fehérvári, 'The Kuwaiti Excavations, 1985-87', in A.K. Bowman (ed.), *Oxyrhynchus: A City and Its Texts* (London, 2007) 109-28 at 112-4, who concludes that the sanctuary was not originally built as a mosque, but is not able to confirm that the building is located on the foundations of an earlier church.

185 Choat, 'Narratives', 419 concludes that 'these inscriptions are thus the best witnesses to an entire monastic tradition which has been marginalized within the grand narrative of Egyptian monasticism in favour of more enduring traditions, just as Shenoute – one of the most famous monks within Egypt in the late fourth and early fifth century – finds no place in any Greek or Latin text'.

186 Papaconstantinou, 'Historiography, Hagiography', 65-86.

187 *SB* VI 8987 (644/45). According to N. Gonis, 'Oxyrhynchus, the Christ-Loving City?', *ZPE* 129 (2000) 182, the use of the epithet for cities other than Alexandria appears to be rare.

188 P. Brown, 'The Saint as Exemplar in Late Antiquity', *Representations* 2 (1983) 1-25. For examples from Aserius and John Chrysostom, see J. Leemans, 'Flexible Heiligkeit. Der Beitrag der Märtyrer zur Identitätskonstitution christlicher Gemeinden im griechischen Osten im 4. Jahrhundert', in P. Ge-

scape. The stories of most of the saints mentioned in the *Synaxarium*, however, are unknown from the papyri. Perhaps they were part of a different tradition, since three of these saints – Epima, Apater and Irai – do appear in martyrdoms dated to the seventh century and are thus contemporaneous with some of the papyri.¹⁹⁴

To sum up what has been said so far, in the first three sections about literary evidence we have seen that knowledge of the historical truth was only of minor or even no importance in the context of our hagiographical heroes. Martyr stories were not necessarily told to preserve the past: they first and foremost served present purposes. The stories in the *Synaxarium* reveal how later generations of Christians used them to identify their local community with the persecuted Church, to instruct, exhort and entertain. These literary texts, however, seem to represent a different tradition than the documentary papyri. Although Justus is known both from the papyri and a possible manuscript in the Vatican and, as we will see in the following section, Apa Hor in the Coptic calendar of saints is equated with a man of similar name in the *Passion of Apa Epima*, most other stories in the manuscripts, the *Synaxarium* and the hagiographical literature from the Oxyrhynchus papyri do not feature martyrs known from the documentary record.¹⁹⁵ In order to get a more complete image of the remembrance of martyrs and the different roles they had in the daily life of the Oxyrhynchites, we shall now turn to these documentary sources.

2.5 Two Calendars

For an obvious starting point from which to establish the extent and shape of the martyr cult in Oxyrhynchus, we can turn to a Greek liturgical calendar from the city found on papyrus. This calendar, covering the period between October and February-March of 535/536, shows that the Oxyrhynchites celebrated the days of a wide variety of martyrs.¹⁹⁶ The festivities took place in various churches in the city.

194 Churches of Epima and Absada are not mentioned in medieval manuscripts, travelogues or lists of bishops. According to the *Synaxarium*, a church dedicated to Absada in Aswan is mentioned by Abu Salih. However, the distance between Oxyrhynchus and Aswan is almost seven hundred kilometres and a connection therefore seems unlikely. J. Padró, 'Recent Archaeological Work', in Bowman, *Oxyrhynchus*, 129-38 at 134 hypothesizes that the *tetrapylon* mentioned in the *Passion of Apa Epima* 'very probably corresponds to the lower part of the column drawn by Denon'.

195 E.A. Judge and S.R. Pickering, 'Papyrus Documentation of Church and Community in Egypt to the Mid-Fourth Century', *JbAC* 20 (1997) 47-71 at 47, argue that whereas literary papyri give us valuable insights into the internal life of the churches, documentary papyri reveal more about the public life of the Christian community. According to them, literary papyri 'represent a largely self-contained tradition'.

196 *P.Oxy.* XI 1357.

Papaconstantinou has given us some insights as to what went on at the martyrs' feast days with the help of this Greek liturgical calendar.¹⁹⁷ In Oxyrhynchus, every martyr's feast was publicly celebrated in his or her own church – if there was one – under the patronage of the bishop. Instead of staying at one central church, the bishop of Oxyrhynchus thus visited the different sanctuaries of the city: even the Sunday sermon was not held in the same church.¹⁹⁸ The calendar shows that the bishop would visit the churches dedicated to the physician saint Cosmas, the soldier-saints Victor and Menas, and the virgin saint Euphemia.¹⁹⁹ The day of Epimachus, who did not have his own church, was celebrated in the Church of Phoibamon.²⁰⁰ The calendar informs us that the bishop also visited the sanctuaries of the city's local martyrs: the *martyria*, that is, martyr shrines, of Serenus, Justus and Philoxenus.²⁰¹ Unfortunately, it is impossible to determine whether or not they were martyred during the Great Persecution: there are no fragments of their hagiographies among the Oxyrhynchus papyri and – possibly apart from Justus – their stories have not been preserved in later calendars or manuscripts.

Together, the names on the calendar sketch a collective history of the Christian community of Oxyrhynchus. Their shared history begins in a distant biblical past, remembered during festivals such as Christmas and Epiphany. The times of persecution, however, dominate the calendar. The Oxyrhynchites celebrated the feast days of foreign, Egyptian and local Egyptian martyrs. This diversity shows how they placed the heroes of their own local Christian community within the global history of a universal Church: the festivities of the two local martyrs Philoxenus and Serenus, for instance, were held during six days immediately preceding the Christmas celebrations.²⁰² The calendar also reveals that at least in some cases, martyrs' feasts took place around the time of traditional Egyptian holidays. For example, on the day on which the ancient festival of the Nile was traditionally celebrated, the feast of Epiphany took place. And the feasts of the Archangel Michael, the well-known martyr Menas and the local martyr Justus coincided with the end of the sowing and the return of the Nile to its riverbed.²⁰³

197 Papaconstantinou, 'Liturgie stationale'.

198 For this system, known as 'stational liturgy', see J. Baldovin, *The Urban Character of Christian Worship: The Origins, Development, and Meaning of Stational Liturgy* (Rome, 1987).

199 *P.Oxy.* XI 1357.20 (Victor), 11-2 (Menas) and 41, 51 (Euphemia).

200 *P.Oxy.* XI 1357.6.

201 *P.Oxy.* XI 1357.2, 28-9, 53 (Serenus), 10, 13 (Justus) and 24-7, 38, 58 and 64 (Philoxenus).

202 In a similar way, Choat, 'Narratives', 403-30, shows that monastic genealogies found in inscriptions in monasteries explicitly link the monk in whose name the text was created with his monastic predecessors, martyrs and biblical figures.

203 A well-known example of a calendar including traditional holidays and martyrs' feasts and numerous other Christian festivities is the calendar made for the wealthy Roman aristocrat Valentinus in 354. For the edition and commentary see J. Divjak and W. Wischmeyer (eds.), *Das Kalenderhandbuch von 354. Der Chronograph des Filocalus*, 2. Vols. (Vienna, 2014). For a detailed discussion

An entirely different perspective, however, is found in a fifth- or sixth-century Coptic calendar.²⁰⁴ This calendar lists names of saints connected to a feast day, often mentioning several saints per day. Among them is a certain Apa Hor, followed by 'our father', which leads the editor to suggest that the calendar might have been monastic. This Apa Hor from Oxyrhynchus is buried in a grave in Beni Hasan, where a Coptic inscription on the wall of his tomb mentions him.²⁰⁵ With Apa Hor, we seem to have found at least one saint who is known both in the documentary papyri and in the literary tradition: the *Passion of Epima* stars an Apa Hor of Toji of the Oxyrhynchite nome.²⁰⁶

Within the presumably monastic environment in which the Coptic calendar was used, a wide variety of saints and other holy men were remembered. The calendar, however, includes names of patriarchs, prophets, martyrs, apostles and ascetics who do not often occur elsewhere in the Oxyrhynchus papyri. There are unexpected biblical figures, such as Benjamin, Miriam and Manassa. Then the calendar mentions a number of well-known saints: the Egyptian martyr Eudaemon, who suffered under Diocletian in Antinoopolis, the anti-Chalcedonian martyr Macarius of Tkow and the fifth- or sixth-century hermit John of Pake. On a more local level, the well-known bishop Aphous of Oxyrhynchus is mentioned.²⁰⁷ Finally, there are names

of the social and political contexts in which this calendar was made and used see R.W. Burgess and M. Kulikowski, *Mosaics of Time: The Latin Chronicle Traditions from the First Century BC to the Sixth Century AD. Volume I: A Historical Introduction to the Chronicle Genre from Its Origins to the High Middle Ages*. (Turnhout, 2013). On the title of the work and its new edition see R.W. Burgess, 'The *Chronograph of 354*: Its Manuscripts, Contents and History', *Journal of Late Antiquity* 5 (2012) 345-96 and 'The New Edition of the *Chronograph of 354*: A Detailed Critique', *ZAC* (2017) 384-415.

204 According to the editor, Crum, 'Fragments', 23-4 nothing on the sheets indicates their provenance. However, he points out that considering that these Coptic documents were given to him by Grenfell and that among the sites that Grenfell and Hunt excavated only Oxyrhynchus yielded manuscripts of such a late date, it can be safely assumed that the calendar comes from this city.

205 Ed. and trans. W.E. Crum, 'The Greek and Coptic Graffiti', in P.C. Newberry (ed.), *Archaeological Survey of Egypt: Beni Hasan*, 4 vols. (London, 1893-1900) 2.65-8 at 68 = *SB Kopt.* IV 1996: ⲁⲡⲁ ⲫⲟⲣ ⲡⲣⲙ ⲡⲉⲙⲭⲉ ⲁⲕⲙⲧⲟⲛ ⲛⲙⲟⲩ ⲛⲥⲟⲩ ⲙⲏⲧ ⲛⲉⲙⲱⲓⲣ ⲛ̀ⲛ̀ ⲟⲩⲉⲓⲣⲏⲏ ⲛ̀ⲁⲙⲏⲏ ⲁⲣⲓ ⲧⲁⲓⲁⲛⲏ ⲁⲣⲓ ⲡⲉⲕⲙⲉⲩⲉ 'Apa Hor, the man from Oxyrhynchus, went to his rest on the tenth day of Mechir. In peace, amen. Be so kind to remember him'.

206 According to Crum, 'Fragments', 31 some names reappear in groups of subordinate martyrs who figure in later martyr stories. Crum refers to the martyrs mentioned in the passions of Anoup, Epima, Didymus and Pater, as mentioned by Delehay, 'Martyrs d'Égypte', 111-2. However, on close observation only 'Apa Hor, our father' in the calendar can be identified with the Apa Hor of Todji of the Oxyrhynchite nome in the Bohairic *Passion of Epima* (ed. Balestri and Hyvernat, *Acta martyrum I* 2, 127).

207 The *Life of Aphous* is known from a seventh- or eighth-century manuscript from Thunis in Upper Egypt, first published by E. Revillout, 'La vie du bienheureux Aphou, évêque de Pemdje (Oxyrinque)', *RevEg* 3 (1883) 27-33. In this article, Revillout says to continue editing this text, which never happened. Instead, see the publication by F. Rossi, *Trascrizione di tre manoscritti copti del museo egizio di Torino* (Turin, 1885) 5-22. On Aphous, see most recently D.F. Bumazhnov, 'Zur Inter-

which are difficult to identify, among them Sirenus and Levi the renunciants, Apa Amoun of Tamma, Apa Maximinus of Piom, Apa Kouï of Psammoou and the martyrs Kermane and Apa Hale. Interestingly, the Coptic calendar also remembers ‘Constantine, the righteous emperor’.²⁰⁸

The names in this Coptic calendar provide an entirely different perspective upon a shared Christian past. Like the Greek liturgical calendar, the Coptic one too begins its history in a distant biblical past and mentions martyrs of the Diocletianic persecution, but then also remembers more recent figures such as the Emperor Constantine and a martyr who disagreed with the Council of Chalcedon, and includes names of desert fathers. Remarkably, with Apa Hor we seem to have at least one example where we can connect a saint from the calendar with both a documentary source and a saint from the literary tradition. Apart from Apa Hor, however, the Coptic calendar does not mention any of the martyrs known from the liturgical calendar or other documentary sources in Oxyrhynchus. Instead, it seems to focus on holy men. Whereas this would not be an illogical choice for a calendar that seems to have been used within a monastic environment, the citizens of Oxyrhynchus seem to have preferred martyrs over monks.²⁰⁹ In any case, these calendars show that even within the same city, history could be remembered and represented in different ways.

2.6 The Martyrs in the Documentary Papyri

The papyrological record of Oxyrhynchus provides us with a wealth of information about the martyrs known and venerated in this city, though the picture remains inevitably incomplete. The papyri have been preserved by chance rather than purpose: names of martyrs appear rather randomly in private letters or on official correspondence that ended, as did the literary papyri discussed above, as waste paper on the city’s rubbish heaps.²¹⁰ Which feasts were celebrated during the days that the fragmentary calendars do not include? And which martyrs were mentioned in papyri that have not been preserved? The hardly complete list of saints known in Oxyrhynchus includes the foreign martyrs Cosmas and Damian, Euphemia, George and

pretation der *Vita des seligen Aphu von Pemdje*’, in L. Perrone (ed.), *Origeniana Octava: Origen and the Alexandrian Tradition* (Leuven, 2003) 987-93. For an approximate date of the episcopate of Aphous see Timm, *Christlich-koptische Ägypten* 1, 285, K.A. Worp, ‘A Checklist of Bishops in Byzantine Egypt (A.D. 325-c.750)’, *ZPE* 100 (1994) 283-318 at 304, A. Martin, *Athanase d’Alexandrie et l’église d’Égypte au IV^e siècle (328-373)* (Rome, 1996) 721-2 and A. Papaconsantinou, ‘Sur les évêques byzantins d’Oxyrhynchos’, *ZPE* 111 (1996) 171-4 at 173. See also the discussions by T. Orlandi, ‘Aphu’, in *Copt.Enc.* I (1991) 154-5 and Papaconstantinou, *Culte des saints*, 58-9.

208 Ed. Crum, ‘Fragments’, 25: [ΚΩΣΤΑ]ΝΤΙΝΟΣ ΠΡΟ ΝΤΙΚΑΙΟΣ.

209 This confirms the observation made by Papaconstantinou, *Culte des saints*, 245-7, that martyrs were more important in the everyday life of Egyptian Christians than other saints.

210 See above, pp. 43-4.

Thecla. Among the Egyptian martyrs are Anoup, Colluthus, Epimachus, Menas, Nilus, Pamouthius and Victor. Finally, there are the local martyrs Philoxenus, Serenus and Justus, whose names occur repeatedly in the papyri, but – apart from Justus – do not appear in sources outside Oxyrhynchus.²¹¹ Despite the limitations of the papyri, however, these documents reveal the different roles of the martyrs in the daily lives of the Oxyrhynchites.

Previously, we have seen that at the anniversary of the martyr, the Oxyrhynchites would gather at his or her sanctuary and listen to the sermon by the bishop in which he remembered and praised the saint.²¹² The celebrations could last a couple of days, during which people sang psalms, celebrated the Eucharist, enjoyed the food and drinks and generally had a good time.²¹³ Our focus has been on the hagiographical literature found in Oxyrhynchus, and later stories about Oxyrhynchite martyrs. In this section, we will continue with a description of the churches and *martyria* visible in the urban landscape, and analyse the different functions of these sanctuaries: we already mentioned the church as a place to celebrate the martyr's feast and will in this section continue with the church as a charitable institution and as a place to consult oracles.²¹⁴ Strolling through the streets of Late Antique Oxyrhynchus, we can see that the martyrs were not just figures from a long past persecution, but that this past had become a living reality.

By the first half of the sixth century, the evidence from Oxyrhynchus shows a city filled with churches, monasteries and other Christian buildings. Among the forty churches, thirty were dedicated to saints alone.²¹⁵ These saints included biblical figures such as Mary, the Archangels Michael and Gabriel, John the Baptist and the apostle Peter.²¹⁶ Other churches were built in commemoration of holy men, such as the church of Aphous, a late fourth-century bishop of Oxyrhynchus.²¹⁷ Then there was a church dedicated to Thecla, the young virgin who followed the apostle Paul

²¹¹ For a list of saints venerated in Oxyrhynchus, see Papaconstantinou, *Culte des saints*, 286-8.

²¹² See above, pp. 52-3.

²¹³ Although the Church fathers complained that the feastgoers had too good a time, including dancing and drunkenness. See M. Harl, 'La dénonciation des festivités profanes dans le discours épiscopal et monastique, en orient chrétien, à la fin du IV siècle', in F. Dunand (ed.), *La fête, pratique et discours: d'Alexandrie hellénistique à la Mission de Besançon* (Paris, 1981) 123-47, S. Vyonis, 'The *Panegyris* of the Byzantine Saint: A Study in the Nature of a Medieval Institution, Its Origins and Fate,' in S. Hackel (ed.), *The Byzantine Saint* (Crestwood NY, 2001) 196-226 at 210-3, D. Frankfurter, 'Beyond Magic and Superstition,' in V. Burrus (ed.), *A People's History of Christianity. Volume 2: Late Ancient Christianity* (Minneapolis MN, 2005) 255-66.

²¹⁴ For the church as a place to celebrate the martyr's feast, see above, pp. 52-3.

²¹⁵ See above, p. 39 (n. 143).

²¹⁶ Saint Mary: *P.Oxy.* XI 1357.30, 45; XVIII 2197.11; LXVII 4617.15. Michael: *P.Oxy.* XI 1357.8-9, 39; XVI 1912.119; 1954.2; XVIII 2195.88; XIX 2243a.77. Gabriel: *P.Oxy.* XI 1357.54; LXVII 4617.16; 4618.9, 13. John the Baptist: *P.Oxy.* XI 1357.47; LXVII 4617.8; 4618.14. Peter: *P.Oxy.* XI 1357.33.

²¹⁷ *P.Oxy.* XVI 1912.117 mentions a monastery of Aphous. For Aphous see above, p. 54 (n. 207).

and survived several attacks on her life.²¹⁸ Papyrological evidence further testifies to the importance of the martyrs of the Great Persecution: the Oxyrhynchites had dedicated churches to Colluthus, Cosmas and Damian, Euphemia, Menas, Nilus and Victor, and a shrine of Anoup is also mentioned.²¹⁹ Finally, there were the *martyria* of Philoxenus, Serenus and Justus.²²⁰

The liturgical calendar has shown that the Oxyrhynchites celebrated the feast days of these martyrs and that the festivities took place in churches dedicated to them. Churches or *martyria* were, indeed, more than just buildings where Christians would meet to pray or listen to sermons. Ann Marie Yasin has argued that Christians gathered in church buildings not only to commemorate a shared past, but also to thereby define a collective identity.²²¹ The collection of Christian buildings in Oxyrhynchus shows how the collective past of the Christian community was visible in the urban landscape. From figures from a distant biblical past, to martyrs of the persecutions in Roman times, to the late fourth-century local bishop Aphous, the churches presented a shared history of persecution and triumph.

Although archaeologically speaking we are on somewhat unstable ground owing to the lack of material evidence, the papyrological record gives an impression of how important the churches had become within Oxyrhynchus. Toponyms gave cognitive shape to the physical environment. Names of cities, quarters and streets do not generally change quickly, and the square where the city's Serapeum was once located continued to be called the Quarter of the Dromos of Sarapis long after the temple had fallen out of use.²²² But in the early fourth century, the North Church Street and the South Church Street indicate that these churches dominated the street view, and in the sixth century, the mentioning of the Street of Saint Euphemia

218 *P.Oxy.* XVI 1993.18-20; XXIV 2419.2; LXVII 4617.10.

219 Colluthus: *P.Oxy.* XVI 1934.4-5; LXVII 4618.10,16. Cosmas: *P.Oxy.* XI 1357.22; *PSI* VII 791.16; *P.Wisc.* II 64.1. Cosmas and Damian: *P.Oxy.* XVI 1955. Euphemia: *P.Oxy.* VII 1038.23; XI 1357.41, 51; LXVII 4617.11; *PSI* VIII 953.31; *SPP* X 35.6. Menas: *P.Oxy.* XI 1357.11-12; LXVII 4617.9; 4619.5. Nilus: *P.Oxy.* XVI 1898.20; LXVII 4617.12; 4618.2. Victor: *P.Oxy.* XI 1357.20; XVI 1956; LXVII 4617.13; 4618.1. Anoup: *P.Oxy.* XI 1357.56; LXVII 4619.3.

220 Philoxenus: *P.Oxy.* XI 1357.24-7, 38, 58, 64; XVI 1950.1; 2041; LXVII 4617.18; 4620.8; *PSI* VII 791.4-5, 12; *SPP* X 35.11. For a church probably dedicated to Philoxenus in the upper necropolis of Oxyrhynchus, see above, p. 39 (n. 146). Serenus: *P.Oxy.* VI 941.3-5; XI 1357.4, 28-9, 53; XVI 1911.92; LXVII 4619.2; 4620.10; LV 3804.164; *PSI* VII 791.7; VIII 953.10. Justus: *P.Oxy.* X 1311.1; XI 1357.10, 13; XXVII 2480.299; LXVII 4617.7; 4618.24; 4620.12; *PSI* VII 791.6.

221 A. Yasin, *Saints and Church Spaces in the Late Antique Mediterranean: Architecture, Cult, and Community* (Cambridge, 2009).

222 See on this topic J. Westerfeld, 'Saints in the Caesareum: Remembering Temple-Conversion in Late Antique Hermopolis', in M. Bommas et al. (ed.), *Memory and Urban Religion in the Ancient World* (London, 2012) 59-86.

shows that this church was prominently present in this quarter.²²³ The liturgical calendar reveals that the Oxyrhynchites would celebrate their Sunday services alternately in the Church of the Martyrs, the Church of the Evangelist, that of Anniane, Phoibammon or Serenus. Concerning feasts, the churches of Phoibammon and Philoxenus were most regularly visited. The Oxyrhynchites attended the former church for Sunday services and Epiphany, and the day of Epimachus – who did not have his own church – was celebrated here. The latter church seems to have been a prominent building as well. It was renovated and enlarged in the sixth century and seems to have had ample space to host the Christian community celebrating the four-day feast of Philoxenus and accommodate the oracle.²²⁴ Recent excavations reveal that this church may have been located in the upper necropolis of Oxyrhynchus, where a five-nave *basilica* containing many sixth- and seventh-century graffiti referring to Philoxenus was found.²²⁵

When a church dedicated to a saint or a *martyrium* functions as a medium for representation of the past, it follows that the person who controls the sanctuary could use this medium to present his own image of or ideas about that past.²²⁶ Some churches, such as those of Alexandra, Anniane and Phoibammon, were named after their founders.²²⁷ Therefore, the Oxyrhynchite churches, like other churches in the Roman Empire, were not only commemorating the sacred past but probably also functioned as ‘epigraphic monuments’: at entranceways, pavements, walls or columns of churches one could read the names of those who contributed to their construction, renovation or decoration.²²⁸ In the third century, the earliest known bishop of Oxyrhynchus, Sotas, already sent fundraising letters.²²⁹ In the fourth or fifth century, a certain Didymos urged a man called Athanasios to finish the church: ‘in name of your God in heaven, (...) before all else, with me as your debtor for this

²²³ For the North and South Church, see p. 38 (n. 141) above. For the church of Saint Euphemia, see *P.Oxy.* I 43v⁰ 1, 10 and 3.19 and VII 1038.24.

²²⁴ *P.Oxy.* XVI 2041. For a revised edition of and commentary on this papyrus see A. Papaconstantinou, ‘La reconstruction de Saint-Philoxène à Oxyrhynchos: l’inventaire dressé par Philéas le tailleur de pierres’, *T&MByz* 15 (2005) 183-92.

²²⁵ See p. 39 (n. 146) above.

²²⁶ For sanctuaries as bases of power see Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, 23-49, B. Ward, *Miracles and the Medieval Mind: Theory, Record, and Event, 1000-1215* (Philadelphia, 1982) and Lifshitz, ‘Martyr’, 310-41.

²²⁷ As is apparent from the addition εἰς τὴν followed by the name in the genitive: Anniane: *P.Oxy.* XI 1357.21; Phoibammon: *P.Oxy.* XI 1357.3.6. See Papaconstantinou, ‘Liturgie stationale’, 153 and 155, where she suggests that the church of Phoibammon might be the same church as the Catholic Church, i.e. the cathedral church, which is absent in the calendar but attested in other Oxyrhynchus papyri. However, a bishop Phoibammon of Oxyrhynchus, after whom the church would have been named, is not known in other sources.

²²⁸ For church buildings as epigraphic monuments see Yasin, *Saints and Church Spaces*, 101-50.

²²⁹ *P.Oxy.* XII 1492. See Luijendijk, *Greetings*, 125-36.

great favour, devote yourself to the church!’²³⁰ Didymos had paid for the stones and their transportation, and expected the church to be finished soon. In a way similar to classical euergetism, wealthy Christians donating to the Church or supporting new ecclesiastical buildings expected status and honour in return: a church named after its founder would ensure that the donor was remembered and prayed for.²³¹

In Oxyrhynchus, the wealthy Apion family not only generously donated to circus factions, the running of stables and the public baths, but also supported ecclesiastical institutions.²³² This euergetism could take the form of providing wine and bread: a papyrus documents the donation of more than 360 litres of wine and wine vinegar ‘to the holy churches and *xenodocheia* and *martyria* of the city and in the country [of Oxyrhynchus]’.²³³ As we have seen, euergetism could also involve the financing of the building of a church.²³⁴ Among the churches from the Apion family was the *martyrium* of Serenus.²³⁵ The appearance of this *martyrium* and other Apion churches in the Greek liturgical calendar demonstrates that the bishop of Oxyrhynchus did not treat these buildings as outside his spiritual jurisdiction.²³⁶ Nevertheless, the generous donations of the Apion family do indicate certain wishes for their family members to be remembered by the Christian community during the liturgy,

230 *P.Oxy.* LIX 4003.2-11: τὸν ἐπωράνιον σου θεόν (...) πρὸ πάντων χρεώστην με ἔχω(ν) τῆς μεγάλης ταύτης χάριτος, ἐπειθεὶς σεαυτὸν εἰς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν (...). The letter continues on the back of the papyrus with instructions which are chiefly about the management of an estate, suggesting that Didymus was a landowner of considerable wealth.

231 See e.g. R. Haensch, ‘Christlicher Euergetismus *ob honorem*? Die Einsetzung von Klerikern in ihre Ämter und die von diesen vorangetriebenen Bauprojekte’, in J. Leemans, P. Van Nuffelen, S.W.J. Keough and C. Nicolay (eds.), *Episcopal Elections in Late Antiquity* (Berlin, 2011) 167-81.

232 A list of donations made by the Apion family to ecclesiastical institutions in Oxyrhynchus is included in J.P. Thomas, *Private Religious Foundations in the Byzantine Empire* (Washington, 1987) 98-102 and T.M. Hickey, *A Public ‘House’ but Closed: ‘Fiscal Participation’ and Economic Decision Making on the Oxyrhynchite Estate of the Flavii Apiones* (Chicago, 2001) 218-24. See more generally, T.M. Hickey, *Wine, Wealth, and the State in Late Antique Egypt: The House of Apion at Oxyrhynchus* (Ann Arbor, 2012).

233 *P.Oxy.* LVIII 3960.20-2: εἰς τὰς ἀγί(ας) ἐκκλησί(ας) καὶ ξενοδοχ(εῖα) καὶ μαρτύρ(ια) τῆς πόλεως καὶ ἐν ἀγοαῖς (...).

234 On church building in Egypt see E. Wipszycka, *Les ressources et les activités économiques des églises en Égypte du IV^e au VIII^e siècle* (Brussels, 1972) 105-9.

235 *P.Oxy.* XVI 1911.72.

236 This would have been according to Justinian legislation, as the emperor ordered that private founders of charities had to secure episcopal approval and that, in turn, ecclesiastical authorities had to preside over liturgical rites at these places (*NJ* 67.1 [546] and *NJ* 131.7 [545]). On these laws see e.g. H.-R. Hagemann, *Die Stellung der Piae Causae nach justinianischem Rechte* (Basel, 1953) and ‘Die rechtliche Stellung der christlichen Wohltätigkeitsanstalten in der östlichen Reichshälfte’, *RIDA* 3 (1956) 265-83 at 272-3; Thomas, *Private Religious Foundations*, 42-3, 85-6.

as a donation of 416 artabas of grain ‘for the holy [funeral] mass for our grandmother’ suggests.²³⁷

Christians, however, would not just visit churches on Sundays or feast days. One could, for instance, turn to the saints as patrons of the poor. Churches often owned bakeries and the earliest reference to a *martyrium* in Oxyrhynchus suggests that the sanctuary provided the poor with bread: dated 14 August 398, the papyrus contains an order for enormous amounts of wheat and vegetable seeds.²³⁸ In the late fifth or early sixth century, the widows of Oxyrhynchus would receive wine at the church of Michael the Archangel, the church of Ptoleminus and at the churches of the martyrs Victor and Cosmas and Damian.²³⁹ The level of organization of almsgiving becomes even clearer through a papyrus dated to 27 January 480, when the cathedral of Oxyrhynchus ordered Peter, the *oikonomos* of (the church of) Saints Cosmas and Damian, to give the widow Sophia a coat.²⁴⁰

In Late Antique Egypt, as in the rest of the Roman Empire, the bishop was responsible for charity in his diocese.²⁴¹ In late fourth-century Oxyrhynchus, the well-

237 *P.Oxy.* LXVII 4620.2-4: εἰς τὴν ἀγί(αν) προσφορ(άν) τῆς μάμμης (ἀρταβαί) υἱς. The editor, J.D. Thomas, notes that the term προσφορά can refer to any sort of pious donation, although it is sometimes used specifically for donations made for funeral masses and for the mass itself. See for discussions of this term E.R. Hardy, *The Large Estates of Byzantine Egypt* (New York, 1931) 143 and Wipszycka, *Ressources*, 65, 69-70.

238 *P.Haun* III 67. A certain Phileas orders to supply the *martyrium* of Apa T[—] with eight artabas of grain and two artabas of vegetable seeds, together around 270 litres. Therefore, I would suggest that this ‘offering from a well-off layperson’, as the editor of the papyrus writes, was used to make bread.

239 The wine for the churches of Michael, Victor and Cosmas and Damian was ordered from the wine merchant Viktor on August 9 in an unknown year during the late fifth or early sixth century, perhaps in honour of the Feast of the Assumption (Papaconstantinou, *Culte des saints*, 280). The papyri containing the orders were published in 1924, in the ‘Minor Documents’ section of *P.Oxy.* XVI 1954-6 = *SB* XXII 15528-30. Ptoleminus’ church is mentioned in *P.Oxy.* LXVII 4621.

240 *P.Wisc.* II 64 was first published by R. Rémondon, ‘L’Église dans la société égyptienne à l’époque byzantine’, *CdE* 47 (1972) 254-77 to illustrate the charity of a church. Several other instructions given by the church have been preserved. See e.g. *P.Oxy.* XVI 1950 and 1951, in which ‘the holy church’ orders an *oikonomos* from the church of Philoxenus to deliver wine for a feast and instructs a wine steward to provide wine to a σπρώτης, which could refer to a servant. For the meaning of this term see A. Serfass, ‘On the Meaning of *strotēs* in *P.Oxy.* XVI 1951’, *ZPE* 161 (2007) 253-9. See also *P.Oxy.* VI 993 for an order of the ‘holy church’ for the payment of two jars of wine for a feast. For other papyrological evidence for charity in Late Antique Egypt see A. Serfass, ‘Wine for Widows: Papyrological Evidence for Christian Charity in Late Antique Egypt’, in S. Holman (ed.), *Wealth and Poverty in Early Church and Society* (Grand Rapids, 2008) 88-102.

241 See e.g. A. Martin, ‘L’image de l’évêque à travers les “Canons d’Athanasie”: devoirs et réalités’, in É. Rebillard and C. Sotinel (eds.), *L’Évêque dans la cité du IV^e au V^e siècle: image et autorité* (Rome, 1998) 59-70, E. Wipszycka, ‘L’attività caritativa dei vescovi egiziani’, 71-80 in the same volume and J-U. Krause, ‘La prise en charge des veuves par l’église dans l’antiquité tardive’, in C. Lepelley (ed.), *La fin de la cité antique et le début de la cité médiévale de la fin du III^e siècle à l’avènement de Charlemagne* (Bari, 1996) 115-26 at 117-8.

known bishop Aphous gave the surplus of the service to the poor, whom he visited on Saturdays and Sundays when they received alms in the church.²⁴² The papyrological record reveals that widows were associated with a particular church: ‘give to the widows of Saints Cosmas and Damian,’ reads a sixth-century papyrus, thereby placing the widows not only under the protection of the ecclesiastical organization, but also indirectly giving them these saints as patrons.²⁴³ Nevertheless, Jens-Uwe Krause points out that the help offered was limited and that the introduction of Christian charity generally had little effect on the social situation of the widows.²⁴⁴

So far, we have discussed papyri referring to charitable services. A problem could arise if the congregation accepted the martyr as its hero, but not in his role as protector of the poor. In the fourth or fifth century, a certain Philoxenos – who carried the name of the local Oxyrhynchite martyr – ended a letter to his parents and uncle in Oxyrhynchus with the request to pray to several saints venerated in the city: ‘Pray on behalf of me [...] through Saint John, Saint Euphemia, Saint Menas, Saint Peter and Saint Julianus’.²⁴⁵ In a similar way, a certain Ioannes carved a graffiti dated to 27 March 520 in the church at the upper necropolis of Oxyrhynchus, in which he asked the ‘[+ God?] of Saint Philoxenus, guard your servant Ioannes against every evil thing and help me, who does everything according to your will’.²⁴⁶

Philoxenos and Ioannes would pray to the martyrs as intermediaries on their behalf before God, but the power of the saints was, in a quite similar way, also used differently in everyday life. ‘Magic’ was both widespread among non-Christians and Christians alike, even though it was officially condemned by the Church fathers.²⁴⁷ In Oxyrhynchus, the papyrological record shows Christians turning to the saints to find healing or ask oracular questions. For instance, a Christian woman named Ioannia asked Christ, the archangels, the apostle John, the well-known martyr Vic-

²⁴² Martin, *Athanase d’Alexandrie*, 721-2.

²⁴³ *P.Oxy.* XVI 1955.2-3: δὸς ταῖς χήρ(αις) τοῦ ἀγί(ου) Κοσμᾶ καὶ Δαμιανοῦ.

²⁴⁴ J.-U. Krause, *Witwen und Waisen im römischen Reich* (Stuttgart, 1995) and ‘Prise en charge des veuves’, 115-26.

²⁴⁵ *P.Oxy.* LVI 3862.25-8: εὐξέστε περὶ μ[... ..] τοῦ ἀγίου Ἰωάννου καὶ τῆς ἀγίας Εὐφημίας καὶ τοῦ ἀγίου Μηνᾶ καὶ τοῦ ἀγίου Πέτρου καὶ τοῦ ἀγίου Ἰουλιανοῦ.

²⁴⁶ Delattre, Dijkstra and Van der Vliet, ‘Christian Inscriptions from Egypt and Nubia 7’, in press (no. 10): [+ Θ(έο)ς (?) τοῦ ἀγίου Φιλοξέ[νου φύλαξ]ον τὸν δοῦλό[ν] σου Ἰωάννην ἀπὸ παντὸς κακοῦ πράγματος καὶ σύνελθέ μοι πάντα καταθυμίως πράτ’τοντι’. For an image of the inscription see Padró, Martínez and Piedrafita, ‘Historia de un edificio religioso’, 711 (Fig 9). For the church, see above, pp. 000 (n. 000) and 000.

²⁴⁷ Frankfurter, *Christianizing Egypt*, 103. In Egypt, the hard stances of Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, and Shenoute, the leader of the Shenoute monastery, towards the cult of the saints are well-known. See above, pp. 8-9, 20.

tor, and the local martyrs Justus, Serenus and Philoxenus for protection against fever.²⁴⁸

Tradition recommended the use of amulets for the protection of the home and restoring health. For centuries, the Oxyrhynchites had asked Egyptian or Graeco-Roman gods and goddesses for help. Now, they invoked a certain Saint Phocas to prevent scorpions and other reptiles from entering a house. ‘The door, Aphrodite, phrodite, rodite, odite, dite, ite, te. Oror, Phorphor, Iao, Sabaoth, Adonai, Artemisian Scorpion: deliver this house from every evil crawler and thing, quickly, quickly. Saint Phocas is here’.²⁴⁹ In another amulet, a Christian woman named Aria asked for protection against agues and invoked the father of Jesus, the son, the mother of Christ, the Holy Spirit and Abrasax.²⁵⁰ As these amulets show, the methods were still the same: magical elements used for healing purposes and magical powers – be they Christian, Jewish, Egyptian or Greek – were told to do something and to do it quickly. Alongside these traditional invocations, the use of passages from Scripture or sentences reflecting the liturgy shows the influence of the Christian Church. Ioannia, for instance, referred to healing acts of Jesus recounted in the Gospel of John and the Gospel of Matthew. Another amulet has the heading ‘healing Gospel according to Saint Matthew’ and is followed by verses recalling, among other things, how Jesus had healed diseases when preaching in Galilee.²⁵¹

The invocation of the power of Christ, the archangels and the saints in amulets made their works not only recognized in the past, but also felt in the present. When appealing to the power of the martyrs in everyday life, Christians acknowledged that those who had died for their faith so long ago were still relevant in the contemporary world. ‘Save me now and in the time to come through our Lord and Saviour

248 *P.Oxy.* VIII 1151. For a discussion of this papyrus see A. Luijendijk, ‘A Gospel Amulet for Joannia (*P. Oxy.* VIII 1151)’, in K.B. Stratton and D.S. Kalleres (eds.), *Daughters of Hecate: Women and Magic in the Ancient World* (Oxford, 2014) 418–44. According to Luijendijk, the standard phraseology, the neat handwriting, the use of *nomina sacra* and the crosses indicate – but do not prove – that Joannia went to a religious expert from among the clergy.

249 *P.Oxy.* VII 1060.1–9: + Τὴν θύραν τὴν Ἀφροδίτην φροδίτην ροδίτην οδίτην διτὴν ιτὴν τὴν ην. ωρωρ φωρφωρ ἰαὼ σαβαὼθ ἄδονὲ δενοσε σκορπίε αρτερησιε, ἀπάλλαξον τὸν οἶκον τοῦτον ἀπὸ παντός κακοῦ ἐρπετοῦ (καὶ) πράγματος ταχὺ ταχύ. ὁ ἅγιος Φωκάς ὧδε ἐστίν. According to the editor, Phocas must have been the martyr of Antioch on the Orontes, who had died during the Great Persecution and was known to heal snake bites. See also G. Schenke in the Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity database (available online at <http://csa.history.ox.ac.uk>), E02277, who notes that the date mentioned in l. 10 of the papyrus (13 Phamenoth = 9 March) is around the martyr’s feast day.

250 *P.Oxy.* VI 924.

251 *P.Oxy.* VIII 1077.1: Ἰαματικὸν εὐαγγέλιον κατὰ Ματθαῖον. The citation of Matt. 4:23–4 often occurs in amulets, see T.S. de Bruyn, *Making Amulets Christian: Artefacts, Scribes, and Contexts* (Oxford, 2017) 147. For the amulet as an artifact see J.H.F. Dijkstra, ‘The Interplay between Image and Text on Greek Amulets Containing Christian Elements from Late Antique Egypt’, in D. Boschung and J.N. Bremmer (eds.), *The Materiality of Magic* (Paderborn, 2015) 271–92 at 285–6.

Jesus Christ, through whom the glory and the power for ever and ever, amen,' wrote someone in the late third or early fourth century.²⁵² Far from being figures from a collective history, biblical figures as well as martyrs from times of persecutions were still able to influence the present.

One of these influential martyrs was Philoxenus. Whereas in the Graeco-Roman period the Oxyrhynchites had put their problems before Sarapis or Thooris, in the sixth century we find them asking similar questions to this local martyr, the 'God of Saint Philoxenus' or both: '+ My Lord God Almighty and Saint Philoxenus my patron, I ask you by the great name of the Lord God, if it is not your will that I speak either about the bank or the weighing-office, I ask you to teach me this, in order that I may not speak +'.²⁵³ As Sarapis had been in previous times, Philoxenus would now be consulted about all the big and small problems of everyday life, ranging from banking business to health and travel. Even the way of posing questions was the same: '+ God of our protector Saint Philoxenus, if you tell us to bring Anoup into your hospital, show your power and let this message come out'.²⁵⁴ Visitors of the sanctuary of Philoxenus could simply write their question in both a positively and negatively phrased sentence on two different pieces of papyrus and they would receive the ticket containing the divine answer.²⁵⁵ For instance, a monk called Paulos consulted the oracle in Lykopolis before undertaking a journey:

252 *P.Oxy.* III 407.4-7: (...) σώσον με ἐν τῷ νῦν καὶ ἐν τῷ μέλλοντι αἰῶνι διὰ τοῦ κυρίου κα[ι] σωτήρος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ δι' οὗ ἡ δόξα καὶ τὸ κράτος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων[ν] ἀμήν.

253 *P.Oxy.* XVI 1926: + Δέσποτά μου θεὲ παντοκράτωρ, καὶ ἄγι(ε) Φιλόξενε πρόστατά μου, παρακαλῶ ὑμᾶς διὰ τὸ μέγα ὄνομα(α) τοῦ δεσπότου θεοῦ, ἐὰν οὐκ ἔστιν θέλημα ὑμῶν λαλήσαι με μηδὲ περὶ τραπέζ(ης?) μηδὲ περὶ ζυγοστασίας, παρακελεύσαι με μαθεῖν, ἵνα μὴ λαλήσω. + Its positive counterpart is *P.Harr.* I 54.

254 *P.Oxy.* VIII 1150: + Ὁ θεὸς τοῦ προστάτου ἡμῶν τοῦ ἁγίου Φιλοξένου, ἐὰν κελεύεις εἰσενεγκεῖν εἰς τὸ νοσοκομῖόν σου Ἀνούπ· δεῖξον τὴν δύναμ[in σου] καὶ ἐξέλθῃ τὸ πιττ[ά]κ[ιον].

255 A. Delattre, 'Nouveaux textes coptes d'Antinoé,' in T. Gagos (ed.), *Proceedings of the Twenty-Fifth International Congress of Papyrology* (Ann Arbor, 2010) 171-5 at 173 reports that at the sanctuary of Colluthus in Antinoopolis, a ticket only containing the word συμφέρον 'useful' was found. He states that oracle tickets asking for a συμφέρον were found as well, but in his article 'L'oracle de Kollouthos à Antinoé', *SMSR* 79 (2013) 123-33 at 129 he suggests that this ticket and a ticket with only a cross were the result of questions asked orally. On ticket oracles see A. Papaconstantinou, 'Oracles chrétiens dans l'Égypte byzantine: Le témoignage des papyrus', *ZPE* 104 (1994) 281-66 at 281-6 and *Culte des saints* 336-9, G. Husson, 'Les questions oraculaires chrétiennes d'Égypte: Continuités et changements', in B. Kramer, W. Luppe and H. Maehler (eds.), *Akten des 21. internationalen Papyrologenkongresses* (Stuttgart, 1997) 482-9, Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, 193-5 and 'Voices, Books, and Dreams: The Diversification of Divination Media in Late Antique Egypt', in S.I. Johnston and P.T. Struck (eds.), *Mantikê: Studies in Ancient Divination* (Leiden, 2005) 233-54.

Almighty God, if you command me, your servant Paulos, to go to Antinoopolis and remain there, order me through this ticket.²⁵⁶

Almighty God, if you command me, your servant Paulos, to remain under the roof of the monastery of Apa Thomas, order me through this ticket.²⁵⁷

When Paulos received back one of the tickets, he knew whether he would go to Antinoopolis or stay in his monastery. The sanctuaries in Oxyrhynchus and Lykopolis are two of the six known Christian oracular sites where ticket divination was offered in Late Antique Egypt. There was a sanctuary of Saint Colluthus in Antinoopolis, to which we will turn in the next chapter, a shrine in Krokodilopolis and other sites at unknown locations where Saint Leontius, the Saints Cosmas and Damian, and Saint Severus could be consulted.²⁵⁸ Probably, there was an oracle of Saint Apollo in Bawit as well.²⁵⁹

To conclude, as we have seen by looking at the various functions of their sanctuaries, martyrs were there to rely on, whether you prayed through them to God, received bread and wine or other charitable services at their sanctuaries, invoked them in amulets or went to their sanctuaries for oracular advice. They were vividly present in Oxyrhynchite society, in similar ways as the non-Christian divine had once been, or, in the slowly changing religious environment, still was. Day-to-day life had not changed much and neither had the ways in which the Oxyrhynchites solved their problems or searched for protection, albeit now in a Christian context.

2.7 Conclusion

By exploring the memories of the martyrs in the documentary and literary records of Oxyrhynchus, in this chapter we have gained a general overview of the role the Great Persecution played in the everyday life of an Egyptian city in Late Antiquity. The Oxyrhynchites commemorated a wide variety of martyrs who had died during the Persecution. Nevertheless, given the gradual integration of Christianity into Egyptian society in Late Antiquity, it is not surprising that the commemoration and,

²⁵⁶ Ed. H. de Nie, 'Een Koptisch-Christelijke Orakelvraag', *JVEG* 8 (1942) 615-8 at 616: $\pi\eta\sigma\gamma\tau\epsilon$ $\pi\eta\alpha\tau\omega\kappa\rho\alpha\tau\omicron\rho$ $\epsilon\omega\phi\eta$ $\kappa\omicron\gamma\epsilon\varsigma\alpha\varsigma\eta\epsilon$ $\kappa\alpha\iota$ $\alpha\eta\omicron\kappa$ $\pi\epsilon\kappa\tau\mu\gamma\alpha\lambda$ $\pi\alpha\gamma\lambda\omicron\varsigma$ $\epsilon\tau\rho\alpha\beta\omega\kappa$ $\epsilon\alpha\tau\iota\eta\omicron\sigma\gamma$ $\tau\alpha\delta\omega$ $\kappa\epsilon\lambda\epsilon\gamma\epsilon$ $\bar{\eta}\alpha\iota$ $\gamma\iota\tau\bar{\eta}$ $\tau\iota\pi\iota\tau\alpha\gamma\eta$.

²⁵⁷ Ed. De Nie, 'Koptisch-Christelijke Orakelvraag', 615-8 at 616: $\pi\eta\sigma\gamma\tau\epsilon$ $\pi\eta\alpha\tau\omega\kappa\rho\alpha\tau\omicron\rho$ $\epsilon\omega\phi\eta$ $\kappa\omicron\gamma\epsilon\varsigma\alpha\varsigma\eta\epsilon$ $\kappa\alpha\iota$ $\alpha\eta\omicron\kappa$ $\pi\epsilon\kappa\tau\mu\gamma\alpha\lambda$ $\pi\alpha\gamma\lambda\omicron\varsigma$ $\epsilon\tau\rho\alpha\delta\omega$ $\gamma\alpha\tau\omicron\gamma$ $\epsilon\varsigma\omicron\iota$ $\eta\eta\mu\omicron\eta\alpha\varsigma\tau\eta\rho\iota\omicron\eta$ $\eta\alpha\pi\alpha$ $\theta\omega\mu\alpha\varsigma$ $\kappa\epsilon\lambda\epsilon\gamma\epsilon$ $\bar{\eta}\alpha\iota$ $\gamma\iota\tau\bar{\eta}$ $\tau\iota\pi\iota\tau\alpha\gamma\eta$.

²⁵⁸ For papyrological evidence of oracles in Late Antique Egypt see Papaconstantinou, 'Oracles chrétiens'. For Severus see G. Schenke, 'Das Orakel des Heiligen Severus', *APF* 57 (2011) 65-72.

²⁵⁹ *P.Louvre.Bawit* 66 is a fragmentary texts that seems to have been an oracle question. Whom it addresses remains unknown: $\pi\eta\sigma\gamma\tau\epsilon$ $\eta\phi\alpha\gamma\iota\omicron\varsigma$ [...] $\epsilon\omega\phi\eta$ 'God of Saint...[...], if...'.

later, the cult of the martyrs must have evolved gradually in the course of the fourth, fifth and sixth centuries.

In the introduction, we noted that with the increasing organization of the Church and Christianity's gradual integration into Egyptian society, the cognitive ecology in which the Great Persecution was remembered changed. One of the central elements in any cognitive ecology is the social setting within which it operates. In Oxyrhynchus, the bishop would visit the sanctuary of the martyr at his or her anniversary, and remember and praise the saint in a sermon. He would recount the story of the martyr's trial and execution, or even tell extended stories including a biography of his or her life before the martyrdom and the miracles that happened there. Ideally, this public sermon would align with the experiences of the individual believer: he or she would admire the pious practices that the martyr performed during his life and suffer with the saint during his martyrdom. At the same time, listening to the martyr story identified the local Christian community with the persecuted Church. From a cognitive perspective, then, one may say that the bishop – or, more broadly speaking, the Church – formulated and promulgated the cultural memories of its listening audience. At the same time, however, the bishop was also responding to the recollections of the past of his listeners. It follows that memories of the Great Persecution were shaped in constant dialogue between clergy and flock.

To make the experience even more affective, the martyr story was not just preached and written: the audience would commemorate their collective past and was presented with a Christian role-model to follow in the present while standing at the shrine of the martyr. This brings us to the second aspect of the changing cognitive ecology, the environment. In this chapter, we have seen how the urban landscape of Oxyrhynchus became filled with churches, monasteries and other Christian buildings. Together, these buildings shaped an understanding of the past. The many churches named after biblical figures show that the Oxyrhynchites were aware of their place in a Christian tradition, with roots stretching back well beyond the origins of their local community. Moreover, they considered their community as part of a universal Church: churches were dedicated to the local heroes of Oxyrhynchus as well as to other Egyptian and foreign martyrs.

Finally, memories were formed through a whole range of means or cognitive artefacts. Martyr stories had presumably been told since the immediate aftermath of the Great Persecution. As for Oxyrhynchus, an account of the trial of the city councillor Dioscorus from Upper Kynopolis was entrusted to papyrus in the fourth century, which makes the document the earliest known martyrdom story found in the city. Nevertheless, most martyrs known from stories circulating in Oxyrhynchus were not necessarily subject of a martyr cult, as their names do not occur in the documentary papyri. In a similar way, the Oxyrhynchite martyrs appearing in the *Synaxarium* and the *Passions of Epima* and *Apater and Irai* seem to stem from a different tradition, as these martyrs do not appear in the Oxyrhynchus papyri.

Whereas the literary tradition gives us valuable insights into the written memories of the martyrs, the documentary papyri reveal more about the roles of the martyrs in everyday life. The martyrs were clearly not just memories from a long past persecution: from the middle of the fifth century literary and documentary evidence becomes frequent and we can see how the past had become a living reality. The martyrs of Oxyrhynchus were key parts of the cognitive environment of the Oxyrhynchites: they were embedded in each layer of everyday life. The Oxyrhynchites would pray to them and go to their churches to receive charitable help. Additionally, they called upon them in their amulets and visited the oracle to ask for advice about their everyday concerns. In the next chapter, we will see that around the same time, in the Egyptian city of Antinoopolis, they were as omnipresent and popular. Through miracle stories and ‘magic’, the power of the martyrs could be felt in the present. Although they had died long ago, the martyrs had become essential parts of social and religious life.