

*The Healing Shrines of St Phoibammon Evidence of Cult Activity in Coptic Legal Documents**

English Abstract

A group of 8th century Coptic child donation documents addressed to the monastery of Apa Phoibammon on the mountain of Jeme in Upper Egypt has been the subject of much discussion. The exclusively male children donated by their parents have always been understood as gifts to the monastery itself, a place where they were, however, not intended to grow up as monks, but to remain as lifelong servants. The reason stated for these donations were miracle healings granted by Apa Phoibammon, the patron saint of that monastery, in his local healing shrine. Such donations of cured former patients are a common feature especially to shrines of healing saints as demonstrated by their frequent descriptions in miracle stories circulating widely in the early Arab period. Juxtaposing phrases used in these Coptic legal texts with those from miracle stories of famous Egyptian healing saints, such as Coluthus, Menas, and Phoibammon himself, can demonstrate the impact hagiography had on daily experience and vice versa. The documentary evidence from Jeme thus forms the missing link between hagiography and reality as it emphasizes the practicalities involved when people were donated as living testimonies of a saint's miraculous healing power. Due to the desire to legalize such donations, a written contract could only have been drawn up with the saint's legal representative, in this case the abbot of the monastery at Jeme, who ran the healing shrine of Apa Phoibammon in which the donated children were to serve.

German Abstract

Die als Kinderschenkungsurkunden bekannten koptischen Textzeugnisse aus der Gegend um Djeme haben immer wieder zu Diskussionen angeregt, sind dabei jedoch stets als Schenkungen an ein Kloster verstanden worden, an dem die geschenkten Knaben nicht zu Mönchen heranwachsen, sondern ausdrücklich auf Lebenszeit zu Diensten verpflichtet sein sollten, eine Praxis, die zahlreiche Interpretationsschwierigkeiten bereitete. Vor dem Hintergrund hagiographischer Literatur erscheinen diese Zeugnisse der früh-arabischen Zeit dagegen als natürlicher Bestandteil der Heiligenverehrung und des Heilkults. In gängigen *miracula*-Sammlungen kommt es durch die Hilfe eines Heiligen zu Wunderheilungen, für die sich die so Begnadeten anschließend zu lebenslangem Dienst im Heiligtum verpflichten. Genau dieser Vorgang scheint in den thebanischen Kinderschenkungsurkunden festgehalten worden zu sein, in denen Eltern die Wunderheilungen ihrer Kinder dokumentieren und als Grund der Schenkung anführen. Diese richtet sich faktisch an den Heiligen selbst, dessen Kultstätte jedoch organisatorisch und rechtlich zum gleichnamigen

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Kloster gehörte, ein hagiographisch vielfach zelebrierter Vorgang, der im echten Leben nur mit gültiger Rechtsurkunde zweier vertragsfähiger Parteien als unanfechtbar gelten konnte.

The Documentary Evidence

A group of legal documents from the 8th century concerns donations (□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□/δωρεαστικὸν ἔγγραφον) to Apa Phoibammon, the patron saint of the monastery on the mountain of Jeme in Upper Egypt. These documents attest donations of animals, fields, plants, as well as to self-donations and donations of male children who were handed over by their parents to the “(holy) place” (τόπος) of Apa Phoibammon as lifelong servants.¹ The reasons stated for these child donations were miracle healings of the children concerned that had taken place at the saint’s sanctuary, which functioned as a local healing shrine. Patients are described as washing with holy water from basins standing next to the altar, a process through which healing was then obtained. The descriptions provided in many of these legal documents offer a glimpse of the family background, providing explanations for the occurrence of an illness for which the patient or its parents blame themselves. In many cases, it is due to an unfulfilled vow or a false oath sworn to the saint, or to general sinful behaviour, that parents felt punished with a fatal illness of their child. These parents then decide to bring their dying child to the sanctuary (τόπος) of the saint to invoke his help in the matter, and when successful, they resolve that their child should remain and live at the saint’s holy *topos* as his servant in return for the healing.

In this article, I will argue that the child donation and self-donation documents addressed to the monastery of Apa Phoibammon on the mountain of Jeme were in fact not dedications to the monastery as such, but to the healing shrine of St Phoibammon which the monastery ran. Consequently, the donated persons were not intended as servants to the monastery, but to the saint and his shrine, serving as living testimonies of the saint’s miraculous powers.² Such donations are a common feature especially to shrines of healing saints as demonstrated by their frequent descriptions in miracle stories circulating widely in the early Arab period. When juxtaposing phrases used in these Coptic legal texts with those from miracle stories of famous Egyptian healing saints, such as Kolouthos/Coluthus, Menas, and Phoibammon himself, the potential impact hagiography had on the experience of daily life and vice versa becomes evident.

¹ None of the documents discussed here have a secure find-provenance, but their content suggests that they come from the archives of the monastery of Apa Phoibammon on the mountain of Jeme, see details further down.

² Even though in practice this distinction may have been elided.

The Hagiographical Evidence

Saint Apa Phoibammon, a young soldier stationed at the Roman army camp at Preht and a recent convert to Christianity, died as a martyr in the city of Assiut (roughly 220 km north of Jeme) in the early days of the persecution. An edition of a collection of his miracle stories³ and the account of his martyrdom⁴ have shed new light on the identity of the saint Phoibammon mentioned in these child donation documents. It becomes now extremely likely that the healing saint at the monastery on the mountain of Jeme is indeed the soldier martyr of Preht rather than one of his two less colourful namesakes,⁵ despite the geographical distances. Though Crum had already pointed out that one of the ostraca he published from the monastery of Apa Phoibammon on the mountain of Jeme listed the feast day of Phoibammon of Preht (1st of Pashons),⁶ scholars remained undecided as to the identity of the Phoibammon at Jeme.⁷ Looking at the hagiographical corpus of the soldier martyr Phoibammon of Preht available now, this saint seems to be one with a speciality in detecting unfulfilled oaths and in punishing parents via their children.

In the martyr story of Apa Phoibammon of Preht from the Pierpont Morgan Codex M 582, produced between the years 822 and 913/14, one episode portrays the saint's particular trait as one who punishes parents through the suffering of their children so clearly that there can be little doubt that this is the saint whose powers parents acknowledged and feared even at Jeme. During his trial in the city of Assiut, where he eventually died as a martyr, Phoibammon of Preht, making the sign of the cross had caused so much trouble on the public stage, that the *dux* in uncontrollable rage over such disobedience and destruction cursed all Christians collectively. Phoibammon, deeply upset over this, replied in the most intimidating manner possible: □□□ □□□□□□□□ □□

³ From the Pierpont Morgan Codex (M 582), published by Kerry E. Verrone, *Mighty Deeds and Miracles by Saint Apa Phoebammon. Edition and Translation of Coptic Manuscript M 582 ff. 21r–30r in the Pierpont Morgan Library*, Providence, Rhode Island 2002.

⁴ Forthcoming edition by Sami Uljas, "The Martyrdom of St Phoibamon of Preht," Pierpont Morgan Codex M 582, ff. 1r–20v", in: Matthias Müller and Sami Uljas (eds.), *Of Martyrs and Archangels*, vol. I. This is the only complete surviving manuscript of the martyrdom of St Phoibammon which precedes his miracles in the Pierpont Morgan Codex (M 582). I wish to thank Sami Uljas for kindly providing me with his edition prior to publication.

⁵ These are Phoibammon, son of John, persecuted by Arianus, with an entry in the Ethiopian *synaxarion* on 5 Sanê, and Phoibammon, a Roman noble man from Latopolis, martyred north of Antinoopolis and commemorated in the Copto-Arabic *synaxarion* on 27 Tubi. See the latest discussion by Uljas, "The Martyrdom of St Phoibamon of Preht" (forthcoming).

⁶ Walter E. Crum, *Coptic Ostraca from the Collections of the Egypt Exploration Fund, the Cairo Museum and Others*, London 1902, 41–42 and 75, no. 455; see also Herbert E. Winlock and Walter E. Crum, *The Monastery of Epiphanius at Thebes I*, New York 1926, 109–110; and Arietta Papaconstantinou, *Le culte des saints en Égypte des Byzantins aux Abbassides*, Paris 2001, 213.

⁷ See Uljas, "The Martyrdom of St Phoibamon of Preht" (forthcoming) for the most recent overview and literature.

¹⁶ For the identification of Thône as Tuna el-Gebel, see Dieter Kessler, *Historische Topographie der Region zwischen Mallawi und Samalut*, Wiesbaden 1981, 19, 108.

in a dream. He said to him, 'I am telling you to make you believe that just as my powers work in the place where my body is, in the city of Touho, and in the place where my blood was shed, in the city of Assiut, they also work now in this place.'"

Phoibammon until the day of his death, thanking God for the healing he had obtained." This combination of a healing miracle following the acknowledgment of a false oath is a common feature also in many donation documents from the Theban area, as we shall see.

Testimonies of a Healing Cult in Action

Having looked at the hagiographical material, I would now like to turn attention back to the documentary evidence concerning the healing cult of saint Phoibammon on the mountain of Jeme. These documents have come to light mainly through the antiquities market and are available in text editions²³ and selected translations.²⁴

Excavations on the mountain of Jeme at Deir el-Bahari located under the cliffs on the west bank of the Nile, near the Valley of the Kings, were conducted by the Egypt Exploration Fund [the predecessor of the Egypt Exploration Society] in 1894/95 under Eduard Naville. These were directed at the Egyptian middle-kingdom mortuary temple of queen Hatshepsut whose upper levels had been occupied by the monastery of saint Phoibammon. In order to get to the remains of the 18th dynasty Egyptian temple, the Christian habitat had to be destroyed. This was done very successfully, and sadly without any documentation of the process of destruction, which leaves us today with a very large question mark concerning the appearance, size, and structure of this famous monastery known through large numbers of documents.

The still ongoing Polish-Egyptian conservation mission in the area of the temple of Hatshepsut published a volume in 1986 with an attempt to reconstruct the monastery of Apa Phoibammon through its remains and photographs found in the British excavation archives.²⁵ This volume also provides a catalogue of the Coptic finds: fragments of wall-painting and ostraca with images, objects of daily use, such as lamps, clothing, mats, and remains of wooden furniture, and numerous papyri assumed to have been taken from the site prior to the British expedition. Many of these papyrus documents are housed in the British Library in London, and to a lesser extent in collections at Cairo and Berlin.

Among the numerous papyri of the 6th, 7th and 8th century associated with Deir el-Bahari, there is a self-donation document, *P.KRU* 104,²⁶ presumably found at the site of

²³ Walter E. Crum and Georg Steindorff, *Koptische Rechtsurkunden des achten Jahrhunderts aus Djeme (Theben)*, Leipzig 1971, 253–323 (*P.KRU* 78–104, Coptic texts, without translations).

²⁴ Walter C. Till, *Die Koptischen Rechtsurkunden aus Theben*, Vienna 1964, 149–188 (German translations of *P.KRU* 78–104).

²⁵ Włodzimierz Godlewski, *Le monastère de St Phoibammon, Deir el-Bahari V*, Warsaw 1986.

²⁶ *P.KRU* 104 refers to Walter E. Crum and Georg Steindorff, *Koptische Rechtsurkunden des achten Jahrhunderts aus Djeme (Theben)*, Leipzig 1971, 321–323.

to serve there for the rest of her life: ⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓ ⲁⲓ ⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓ ⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓ ⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓ
ⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓ ⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓ ⲁⲓⲁⲓ ⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓ ⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓ ⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓ ⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓ
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ⲁⲓⲁⲓ ⲁⲓⲁⲓ ⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓ, "She rose and went to her house. She brought all her possession and
her entire supply. She remained in the *topos* of saint Kolouthos serving through any
service and working with her hands."³⁰

Also many of the miracles from a collection of the well-known Egyptian saint Apa Mena
(Pierpont Morgan Codex M 590) show these grateful self-donations. In the sixteenth
miracle, for example, a Samaritan woman suffering severe headaches decided to visit the
shrine of Apa Mena. On her way, an innkeeper attempts to rape her. She is eventually
delivered from both evils, saved from the rapist and healed from her headaches. She
becomes a Christian and donates herself to the shrine as a lifelong servant: ⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓ
[ⲁⲓ]ⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓ ⲁⲓ ⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓ ⲙⲓⲁⲓ ⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓ ⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓ, "She remained
serving in the martyr shrine until the day of her death."³¹ Even the rapist, punished by an
illness that petrified his hand, was brought into the same shrine and received healing only
after he vowed that he would remain there as a servant for the rest of his life, and so he
vows: [ⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓ]ⲁⲓ[ⲁⲓ] ⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓ[ⲁⲓⲁⲓ ⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓ ⲁⲓ ⲁⲓ]ⲁⲓⲁⲓ ⲁⲓⲁⲓ[ⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓ ⲁⲓⲁⲓ]ⲁⲓ ⲙⲓⲁⲓ ⲁⲓⲁⲓ[ⲁⲓⲁⲓ
ⲁⲓⲁⲓ]ⲁⲓⲁⲓ, "I shall not leave your *topos*, being a servant for you until the day I die."³² At
the end of the story one reads: ⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓ ⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓ ⲁⲓⲁⲓ ⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓ ⲙⲓⲁⲓ ⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓ
ⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓ, "He remained serving in his *topos* until the day of his death."³³

Many other items could be donated to the shrine in gratitude, though they usually were
in some way connected with the miracle experienced. In miracle three from the collection
of miracles of Apa Mena, a rich man from Alexandria intended to donate one of his two
silver plates (*pinax*) to the shrine of Apa Mena, but decided to keep the more exquisite
one of the pair for himself. On his way to make the donation, his young servant boy
drowned in an attempt to retrieve one of the precious silver plates which had fallen into
the water. His master appeals to the saint for help, and the boy—complete with dish—is
miraculously saved. Master and servant boy make their way to the shrine of Apa Mena,
and the master acts as follows: ⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓ ⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓ ⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓ ⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓ ⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓ
ⲁⲓⲁⲓ ⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓ ⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓ ⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓ ⲙⲓⲁⲓ ⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓ ⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓ, "He

³⁰ Gesa Schenke, *Das koptisch hagiographische Dossier des Heiligen Kolluthos – Arzt, Märtyrer und Wunderheiler*, eingeleitet, neu ediert, übersetzt und kommentiert, CSCO 650 Subsidia 132, Louvain 2013, 266, *Borg. Copt.* 109, fol. 244 I,16–II,8.

³¹ James Drescher, *Apa Mena. A Selection of Coptic Texts Relating to St. Menas*, Cairo 1946, 31, M 590, fol. 48r II,14–18.

³² Drescher, *Apa Mena*, 32, M 590, fol. 48v I,24–27.

³³ Drescher, *Apa Mena*, 32, M 590, fol. 48v II,26–29.

donated the two silver plates to his *topos* and also the young servant boy, so that he would remain serving (there) until the day of his death.”³⁴

Something very similar appears in the so-called child donation documents from the monastery of Apa Phoibammon on the mountain of Jeme. Saint Apa Phoibammon punishes parents for their wrongs, in most cases negligence of former vows, by bringing physical suffering over their children, just as Apa Mena had done in the case of the servant boy, when he punished his master for wishing to keep the finer dish for himself. Of the twenty-six child donation documents³⁵ known so far, dating to a fifty-year period between the years 734 and 786, nearly half are entirely preserved.³⁶ In these documents parents from Hermonthis, Jeme or the surrounding villages state their desire to donate their son as a lifelong servant to Apa Phoibammon at the monastery on the mountain of Jeme. The explanation provided in these documents is miracle healing bestowed upon these children through the intercession of Apa Phoibammon.³⁷ It is explicitly stated that parents proceed with this donation for the salvation of their own soul. In most documents, fathers are donating the child with the consent of its mother. Occasionally, however, this procedure is carried out by mothers acting independently,³⁸ as widows, or by simply not mentioning a husband. These documents testify, often in great detail, to the healing cult taking place at the saint’s shrine of the monastery dedicated to Apa Phoibammon. Patients remain in the holy place (*topos*) for a period of time, praying and entreating the saint to grant healing, receiving the Eucharist and washing with holy water.

Formally, these donation documents following a successful healing are drawn up as

³⁴ Drescher, *Apa Mena*, 21–22, M 590, fol. 26r II,30– 26v I,5.

³⁵ *P.KRU* 78–103, Crum and Steindorff, *Koptische Rechtsurkunden*, 253–320. See also the study of these texts by Anneliese Biedenkopf-Ziehner, *Koptische Schenkungsurkunden aus Thebais. Formeln und Topoi der Urkunden, Aussagen der Urkunden, Indices*, Göttingen 2001.

³⁶ *P.KRU* 79–82 86, 88, 91, 93, 96, 99, 100, Crum and Steindorff, *Koptische Rechtsurkunden*, 256–317.

³⁷ Only two of the complete documents refrain from offering any explanation around an illness for the child donation: *P.KRU* 99, in which twins are donated, and *P.KRU* 82 which only mentions an oath given at birth, but no subsequent illness. Seven child donation documents report that a child was pledged to the saint at birth, on the analogy of 1Samuel 1, but because parents failed to honour this agreement, they were punished with the severe illness of their child. *P.KRU* 80, 85, 86, 89, 96, 97, and 100 belong to this group of documents: child pledged at birth, oath dishonoured, punishment by illness, healing of child, donation. Since also in the self-donation document *P.KRU* 104 reference is given to Samuel, one might speculate whether Petronios was originally pledged at birth but had failed to be handed over, and therefore fallen fatally ill later in life. A group of nine child donation documents do not mention an oath at birth, *P.KRU* 78, 79, 81, 84, 88, 91, 93, 98, and 102, but only a serious childhood illness, the saint entreated for help, the child healed and donated to the saint at the monastery in return, see Crum and Steindorff, *Koptische Rechtsurkunden*, 253–319.

³⁸ *P.KRU* 79, 81, 86, 95, see Crum and Steindorff, *Koptische Rechtsurkunden*, 256–301.

and whatever else might be needed in the holy *topos* (see full text and translation as Text 2 in the Appendix).

Something very similar, but including a broken vow, appears in another such document, *P.KRU* 86, dated to 29 August 766. A woman named Tachel, daughter of Sophia, from Ape in the district of Hermonthis, is acting together with her sister Elisabeth and donates her son Athanasios. Tachel pledged her child already when he was ill at the age of only seven months; but when he grew up, his mother decided against the donation. As punishment for this sin, God brought a severe illness upon the boy, in the form of a demon. His mother decided to entreat the saint in his sanctuary to grant the boy healing. If he would do so, she would fulfill her original promise and donate the boy as a lifelong servant to the saint's holy *topos* (see full text and translation as Text 3 in the Appendix).

Lifelong Service in Return for a Saint's Miraculous Intervention

illegitimate children whose penniless parents seized the opportunity to relieve themselves of unwanted offspring by fabricating false reports.⁴⁷

The intended place of service for these donated children, who in many cases came with money,⁴⁸ was the saint's shrine, where they seem to have facilitated the healing process by attending to the saint's sanctuary and keeping it clean, presumably along with any adjacent patients' resting quarters. We hear of their responsibility for the (healing) water basin,⁴⁹ for the (oil of the) lamp on the altar,⁵⁰ for the offerings (*prosphora*) made,⁵¹ for the sweeping and sprinkling,⁵² and for the handing out bread to visitors,⁵³ for all services needed at the holy place,⁵⁴ as well as generally for any necessary matter within or outside of the monastery that they would be asked to do.⁵⁵ The monastery as their legal owner had the right to demand obedience to its rules and regulations⁵⁶ and might at times have interpreted their status rather freely according to its needs. After all, just as one could not make a legal contract with a saint, it was likewise not the saint himself, but the organizational structure around his sanctuary—in this case, the monastery—which would

Dagron, Paris 2002, 511–526; Caroline T. Schroeder, "Children and Egyptian Monasteries", in: C. B. Horn und R. R. Phenix (eds.), *Children in Late Ancient Christianity. Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum* 58, Tübingen 2009, 317–338; Ewa Wipszycka, "Resources and Economic Activities of the Egyptian Monastic Communities (4th–8th century)", *The Journal of Juristic Papyrology (JJP)* 41 (2011), 159–263, esp. 221–227.

⁴⁷ Tonio Sebastian Richter, "What's in a story? Cultural narratology and Coptic child donation documents", *The Journal of Juristic Papyrology (JJP)* 35 (2005), 237–264, esp. 260–261.

⁴⁸ E.g. *P.KRU* 78 and *P.KRU* 92, Crum and Steindorff, *Koptische Rechtsurkunden*, 253–256 and 292–294. See the remark by Sophia Schaten, "Koptische Kinderschenkungsurkunden", *Bulletin de la Société d'archéologie copte (BSAC)* 35 (1996), 129–142, esp. 139. In contrast to others, Schaten, "Koptische Kinderschenkungsurkunden", 136, does point out a religious reason behind these donations and even states, p. 132, that something similar is described in the Life of saint Biktor with reference to Otto van Lemm, "Zu einem Enkomium auf den heiligen Viktor", *ZÄS* 48 (1910) 81–86. Cf. also Papaconstantinou, "Notes sur les actes de donation d'enfants au monastère thébain de Saint-Phoibammon", 95.

⁴⁹ *P.KRU* 80.38, Crum and Steindorff, *Koptische Rechtsurkunden*, 262; *P.KRU* 93.32, Crum and Steindorff, *Koptische Rechtsurkunden*, 296.

⁵⁰ *P.KRU* 80.38, Crum and Steindorff, *Koptische Rechtsurkunden*, 262; *P.KRU* 93.33, Crum and Steindorff, *Koptische Rechtsurkunden*, 296; *P.KRU* 92.14, Crum and Steindorff, *Koptische Rechtsurkunden*, 292.

⁵¹ *P.KRU* 92.15, Crum and Steindorff, *Koptische Rechtsurkunden*, 292.

⁵² *P.KRU* 80.38, Crum and Steindorff, *Koptische Rechtsurkunden*, 262; *P.KRU* 93.32, Crum and Steindorff, *Koptische Rechtsurkunden*, 296.

⁵³ *P.KRU* 93.33–34, Crum and Steindorff, *Koptische Rechtsurkunden*, 296.

⁵⁴ *P.KRU* 80.39, Crum and Steindorff, *Koptische Rechtsurkunden*, 262.

⁵⁵ *P.KRU* 93.34–37, Crum and Steindorff, *Koptische Rechtsurkunden*, 296. Similarly also in *P.KRU* 87.14–23, Crum and Steindorff, *Koptische Rechtsurkunden*, 279–280; or much shorter in *P.KRU* 80.39–40, Crum and Steindorff, *Koptische Rechtsurkunden*, 262.

⁵⁶ See for example *P.KRU* 92, line 13, Crum and Steindorff, *Koptische Rechtsurkunden*, 292, where the donated boy is to be submissive just as novices or youngsters of all monasteries.

and offspring is given, in which case, however, his children will have to serve (*leitourgein*) like their father does,⁶⁶ presumably financially.

In preparation for their future cult function, children donated as servants to their healing saint do not appear to be left without parents arranging for their dietary needs, lodgings, pastoral care, and various eventualities concerning their beloved offspring's further development. Such practicalities could only have been arranged by a contract with the governing body of the institution overseeing the healing shrine, in this case the monastery, where the children would be physically accommodated, an aspect of reality largely absent from most literary miracle stories. Likewise absent from hagiographical accounts are mentions of any written documents needed to legalize such thankful donations to the numerous saints and shrines in Egypt. The desire to legalize such donations with a written contract entails the necessity to name the governing institution of the saint's shrine as the legally competent addressee of these gifts and donations, which offers us a glimpse into who ran such successful healing shrines.

Appendix

Text and Translation of Example Donation Documents

1. Self-donation document of Petronios, son of Georgios, after receiving healing through the water from the basin located by the altar in the sanctuary of saint Phoibammon; date: 771/772 (*P.KRU* 104).

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⁶⁶ *P.KRU* 95, lines 22–25, Crum and Steindorff, *Koptische Rechtsurkunden*, 300.

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... without any pressure] on me, or fear, force, deceit, or circumvention, but with a sharp mind and unwavering reasoning, a fixed opinion and a guile-lacking conviction, just as towards God, I proceed and obey the laws which the ruling masters have commanded, that it is allowed to let anyone do what he wants with that which is his own. I myself have yielded to the fulfilment of the laws which the masters commanded from the beginning. I went forward writing to the legal body (*dikaion*) of the holy monastery of the victorious prize bearer, saint Apa Phoibammon, the martyr, this one which is located on the mountain of Jeme in the district of the city of Hermonthis.

In this tenth indiction year, with God, through the will of God, God, the good, the bearer of miraculous judgment, brought a severe illness over me. I dried out and was withering away, so that I was about to die. Faithful people said to me, "Entreat the God of saint Apa Phoibammon, he will have mercy on you." I gained a sharp mind and a deep honest desire, and I sent (someone) to the holy place (*topos*) of saint Apa Phoibammon. I received water from the holy basin (*louter*) located by the altar through the holy hands of that steward (*oikonomos*). It was brought to me and poured over me, and immediately the Lord listened to my crying and my sighing. He granted me healing and I recovered from the severe illness. Great joy came over me and I myself said, "It is befitting and it is just to let me donate my body to him, since health came upon me through his intercession (*presbeia*)."

Now then, through the will of God, from today onwards, no one shall be master over my body except for this aforementioned holy monastery of saint Apa Phoibammon, the great martyr, which is located on the holy mountain of Jeme, and I shall be serving it and act towards it in the manner of a servant acquired by money.

Whoever shall dare and take (legal) action against the holy place (*topos*) and lay hands on this sacrifice which is my body, this one which I have donated to him, he shall, first of all, not gain anything, but shall be under the true judgment of God, the Almighty, the true creator (*demiourgos*); and saint Apa Phoibammon shall take revenge on him at the frightful tribunal of God. Furthermore, he shall be a stranger to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

I also entreat any authority into whose hands this document will come to let it be put into place as produced, so that God shall bless it, for it is a loving gift to God. And you, my brothers, all know that it is not right to let someone make a gift and let someone else say, "I shall not carry it out." Truly, my brethren, do not act like robbers of promises to the Lord, nor inherit their dwelling places, because, this arrangement was not created through ourselves, but exists and remains since (the time of) Samuel, the prophet, who was given to the temple of the Lord.

We have produced this donation document while the deacon Apa Sourous is the superior (*proestos*) over the holy place (*topos*) of Saint Apa Phoibammon located on the mountain of Jeme, and while the great administrator and manager, master Psmo, the

great official, is financial administrator over the *castron* Jeme.

I, Petronios, the son of Georgios, have produced (it for) the legal body (*dikaion*) of the holy monastery. I have asked the notary and trustworthy and truthful witnesses. They bore witness to it according to the power of the laws. The document was read out to us. We have recognised its validity and have agreed, accepted, and confirmed it.

I have executed it through the will of God.

2. Child donation document of the widow Kalisthene who donates her son Merkourios after he was healed through the saint's intercession. When the boy reaches legal age, he agrees to his donation; date: 765–785 (*P.KRU* 79).

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I, Kalisthene, the daughter of *NN* (*space left on the papyrus for the father's name to be added later*), resident of Nehbabe in the district of Primide, write to the holy place (*topos*) of Apa Phoibammon, the holy martyr, on the mountain of Jeme, represented through you, the most pious Apa Sourous, the deacon and superior (*proestos*) of that holy monastery, and through anyone who will ever be established after him; greetings.

The law of God encourages all of humankind to let them do the good deed, which is pleasing to God, as a benefit to their souls, while no authority hinders anyone to do what he wants with that which is his own.

I considered that I am a sinner, dwelling on earth like all my ancestors, and so I decided and donated my beloved son Merkoure to the holy oratory of saint Apa Phoibammon on the mountain of Jeme, to let him live there as a servant in the holy place eternally for the salvation of my sinful soul and of my blessed husband (*space left on the*

papyrus for name).

But I will tell you precisely: When God, the compassionate and merciful, gave the young child to me, afterwards, when the tiny youngster grew up, God, the good one, brought a very difficult and severe illness upon him, so that I gave up on him, since he was to die. Now, we implored the God of saint Apa Phoibammon, "If you grant him healing, I will donate him to your altar and he will serve God in exchange for the kindness you have bestowed upon me." I nurtured this aforementioned young child and brought him up in my knowledge. When he came of age, he wished and agreed to go into the holy monastery of Apa Phoibammon on the mountain of Jeme, for the salvation of his soul. We said that it is a desert place, needing this kind of oath. We were pleased with this kind of good deed.

With respect to the security for this holy monastery, I have proceeded concerning this donation document for eternity. It is I, Talistene (i.e. Kalistene), the daughter of (*space left blank for the father's name to be added*), who was mentioned above, I am willing and I am convinced without any guile, fear, force, deceit, or deception, while there is no pressure on us, but through our very own decision, I declare that I donated my beloved son Merkoure to this holy monastery of saint Apa Phoibammon on the mountain of Jeme, so that he be a servant for it, for its sweeping and its sprinkling and for any necessary thing for those of the holy monastery, and so that this holy monastery be his master eternally, and (master over) the work of his hands and the wages of his body, whether he be in the monastery or outside of the monastery, in accordance with the demand of this superior (*proestos*, i.e. Sourous).

It is not possible for me or for anyone of my family members, nor for anyone at all from the people of my village, neither old nor young, neither those who rule (now), nor those who will rule over us, to be able to come and to take action against this holy monastery with respect to this particular young son, nor to file any complaint against it before a power or an authority, small or great, to do this. First, he shall not gain anything, but God will place him at his holy oratory together with me, and I will litigate with him, and he will testify on the tribunal of God to that which he has done, that he has attempted to destroy this oath and offering, this one which I have made to God, and he shall attract the great curses of the scripture, the ones in the Deuteronomion of Moses, and he shall see the kingdom of God open, but shall be prevented from entering it.

Thus, for your security, I have produced this donation document and I agree to it according to what is written in it.

I, Magarre, resident of Sne, I bear witness and I agree.

I, Papnoute, resident of Hermonthis, I bear witness and I agree to this donation document and I bear witness.

3. Child donation document of Tachel, daughter of Sophia, acting with her sister Elisabeth. She donates her son Athanasios after he received healing through the saint for a second time. The first time around, she had ignored her vow to donate her son in return for the

saint's intercession; date: 29 August 766 (*P.KRU* 86).

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from me concerning my beloved son Athanasios, this document with which I have proceeded, while being alive, my mind with me, my reasoning strong, without any physical impairment on me, but through my inner desire and my very own decision, without any guile, fear, force, deceit or deception, I acknowledge and assign my son Athanasios to the aforementioned holy monastery, from now on until eternity and for any time coming after me until eternity.

The person who shall dare to come forth against this mentioned young child, will submit to the condemnation of my sacrifice at God's tribunal (*bema*) and I will litigate with him.

As security then for the holy place, I have produced this donation document, it being firm and valid at any place at which it will be shown.

I, the deacon Papas, and Georgios, son of Philotheos, and Chael, son of John, these men, residents of Ape, we bear witness.

I, Senaga, have written for them.

Gesa Schenke (University of Oxford)