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The editors ask contributors to observe the following guidelines:

- Abbreviations for editions of papyri, ostraca and tablets should follow the *Checklist of Editions of Greek, Latin, Demotic and Coptic Papyri, Ostraca and Tablets* (http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/papyrus/texts/clist.html). The volume number of the edition should be included in Arabic numerals: e.g., *P.Oxy.* 41.2943.1-3; 2968.5; *P.Lond.* 2.293.9-10 (p.187).
- Other abbreviations should follow those of the *American Journal of Archaeology* and the *Transactions of the American Philological Association*.
- For ancient and Byzantine authors, contributors should consult the third edition of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, xxix-liv, and *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, xi-xiv.
- For general matters of style, contributors should consult the 15th edition of the *Chicago Manual of Style* or this issue of *BASP*.

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Malcolm Choat, *Belief and Cult in Fourth-Century Papyri*. Studia Antiqua Australiensia 1. Turnhout: Brepols, 2006. xiv + 217 pages. ISBN 2-503-51327-1.

This is the inaugural volume of a new series edited at the Ancient History Documentary Research Centre of Macquarie University. It began life as a chapter, plus its related tables, in Malcolm Choat's Macquarie dissertation (2000) but has now grown to take on a life of its own. In it, Choat aims to assess the various words, phrases, and manners of writing that have been used to establish religious identity in documentary papyri. As he puts it modestly, "This is a study of patterns of word usage within the documents of public and private life" (p. 1). ("Belief and cult" in the title is a periphrasis for "religion.") He is less concerned to assert novel interpretations or provide a broad synthesis of religious trends in the fourth century than to offer a balanced view of the state of scholarship, along with his own point-by-point judgments. In this way, he seeks to build up a comprehensive view of the ways in which scholars can and should – and even more, cannot and should not – use the various markers in question in looking at the state of belief and cult in the long fourth (i.e., late third to early fifth) century. The raw material at stake is to a large degree papyrus letters, but other document types figure as appropriate in the various chapters.

There are fourteen of these chapters in all, of which the first four are introductory and the last a conclusion. The introductory chapters set out the task and its boundaries, establishing the context of the investigation and its methodological principles. Choat also discusses the relationship between Greek and Coptic in documentary use, taking this question well beyond his fourth century center to contextualize it properly. The chapters on particular criteria cover (I reproduce Choat's own phrasing) direct identification (chapter 5), onomastics (6), the casual appearance of cult officials (7), citation, allusion, echo, and coincidence (8), words and concepts (9), greeting, prayer, devotion, and farewell (10), crosses in the margins (11), *nomina sacra* (12), and "those who think differently" (i.e., identifying schism and heresy) (13).

These subjects all have ample bibliographies, and Choat's own list of references runs to 25 pages. The reader may wonder whether there is enough still to be said about some of these subjects to warrant a treatment like this. The answer, in my view, is unequivocally positive. At the most basic level, there is nowhere else one can turn to find all of the references and bibliography for these subjects so conveniently brought together and summarized. It is very valuable to have them all treated together and in relationship to one another,

rather than piecemeal as is usual in articles. Every major controversy that I can think of is covered here, the main lines are laid out, and the evidence is reviewed. Choat is very aware that most of these topics started their scholarly lives by being framed in terms of the identification of Christians, and indeed this study was written in the larger context of the Macquarie project on "Papyri from the Rise of Christianity in Egypt." He is neither a minimizer nor a maximizer in such identifications of Christians; rather, he is intent on recentering the discussion on a more comprehensive view of individuals' religious commitments in this era of change, a view less focused on Christianity alone. The recent emergence of Manichaeism as a possible alternative to Christianity in identifying the allegiance of some letter-writers, for example, gets full treatment. But Choat never loses his balance in these matters or exaggerates the numerical importance of such groups.

There are certainly some places throughout the book where I would come down differently on the subject of a particular document, usually where I think Choat has been too cautious in making an identification (one such instance will be treated below), but never an instance where I thought the problem was not fairly set forth and judiciously analyzed. That is no small thing in a subject as difficult as this, and it enables one to recommend the book to graduate students as an intelligent and balanced introduction to a world of documentary criticism otherwise not easy to enter.

There are also three useful tables. The first (at the start of chapter 8) lists quotations or echoes of scripture. The second lists all known papyrus letters, in both Greek and Coptic, from the late third to early fifth century. These 721 letters are classified by religious character; about half (355) have "no explicit evidence" to decide the character. Of the remainder, 219 are Christian and 40 Manichaean. Another 73 are monotheistic but not securely attributable, just 3 are Jewish (and only one of these certain; the other two could be Christian), and only 31 are pagan or polytheistic. Notes explain some of the categorizations. A random example of Choat's cautious approach may be useful: *O.Douch* 1.34 is categorized as "C(hristian)?" The note (p. 172) explains, "Johannes writes to his ἀγαπητός Palamon; the instructions concern, *inter alia*, a man called Joseph." Now there can hardly be any doubt that Johannes was named by Christian parents, and at the date of the Douch ostraka (end of the fourth or start of the fifth century) there is hardly any reason to doubt that he was a Christian. So, no doubt, was Joseph. But Palamon cannot be categorized onomastically; it is clear too that the adjective ἀγαπητός is not exclusively Christian, and ἀδελφός, to which in combination with the adjective ἀγαπητός Choat gives more credence as a Christian marker (pp. 90-92), is lacking. This is in fact a business order, not a personal letter. It seems fair enough to conclude that those of the parties

involved whose religion can be determined were Christian, but there is nothing Christian about the text itself or the transaction recorded in it.

Even from this trivial example the underlying problem of the investigation emerges. What is it that we are trying to identify? People or texts? Choat's concluding chapter is a strong argument that we cannot easily elide the distinction, because these people lived in "a society where such interaction can take place; where people of diverse beliefs but most other things in common live and work side by side in villages, and meet in metropolitan circles" (p. 147). That is certainly correct. Fourth-century Egypt was not a set of religious communities isolated from one another. Choat goes on to remark that part of the difficulty of identifying religious affiliation is precisely that there was a "core of formulaic and customary phraseology drawn on by all composers and scribes" in writing letters, or an "indefinite language of the documentary texts" that helps keep religious identity in the background. That statement, of course, does not apply equally to all of the various linguistic criteria canvassed here; it does not apply at all to some of them. Undoubtedly some of the cases where we cannot be sure about the implications of particular terms reveal nothing more than our ignorance, not ambiguity in an ancient context.

This may be the case, for example, with κοιμητήριον, about which Choat has the following remark (pp. 136-137): "Commentators cannot have it both ways: if mid-fourth century πρεσβύτεροι or ἀναγνώσται [*sic*] are to be accepted as Christian without any justification being necessary, then the Christian discourse must be taking over to the point where it is crowding out the alternative secular usage. But such a situation makes it difficult to argue that words like κοιμητήριον in the same period belong to a specific Christian discourse, and that their use indicates a Christian context." The logic escapes me. It is precisely the terms for Christian clergy that are routinely used to identify Christian milieus, and I can see no reason why an analogous analysis is not valid for κοιμητήριον. In both cases, of course, Choat's larger point can be maintained: the presence of distinctively Christian vocabulary is not necessarily a sign that all of the people involved in a document were Christian. We do not really know how someone of the generation of Aurelia Charite perceived a word like κοιμητήριον.

There is a larger and more unsettling implication of all this, however, which Choat does not fully pursue. There are no "Christian letters" (a term Choat retains, e.g. on p. 143), only letters written by Christians, to Christians, or both. It is not helpful to analytic clarity for scholars to "baptize" letters. Some of the question marks afflicting the categorization in this table of letters are surely the product of exactly this difficulty. *O.Douch* 1.34 cannot be described as a "Christian letter:" even if the *marion* of wine that is to be delivered was

for eucharistic purposes (which is most unlikely),[1] this still would not be a Christian letter. It is an everyday business document in which at least some of the individuals involved were Christians. The numbers given above have some interest in giving us a sense of how often we can identify something about the beliefs or practices of individuals involved in these letters, but they run up against the limits they face precisely because the entire concept is unusable.

None of that detracts in the slightest from the usefulness of having such an integrated list as a basis for future research.[2] Table 3, listing Coptic documentary papyri down to the middle of the fifth century, will also be highly useful. Choat is fully cognizant of the uncertainty of many of the dates for these texts given in the literature, and he rejects some claimed early documents. This table serves as a support for the discussion of language in chapter 4. There he remarks, "In the case of the fourth-century documents, most bear positive evidence of Christian or Manichaean authorship. In the case of those which do not, assignation [*sic*] to the Christian tradition on purely linguistic grounds may be precipitous. No securely 'pagan' fourth-century Coptic letter has been published, but it seems unwise to stress the argument from silence when so much Coptic material remains unpublished. Possibilities should to some degree remain open" (pp. 41-42). I would again say that the letters themselves are not Christian, Manichaean, or pagan. But all of the evidence suggests that the users of Coptic in fourth-century letters were Christians and Manichaeans.[3] Nor do I know of any evidence that substantial numbers of unpublished fourth-century Coptic letters are awaiting publication.[4] One might wonder why the argument from the silence of the unpublished should be treated as stronger than that from the silence of the more than a hundred published texts.[5]

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[1] The order also concerns *tiphagia*, a still mysterious product: see R. S. Bagnall, U. Thanheiser, and K. A. Worp, "Tiphagion," *ZPE* 122 (1998) 173-188.

[2] The references to "Bahira, Lesser Oasis" in the table are a misprint; these are the *O.Bahria* from the Small (i.e., Bahariya) Oasis published by G. Wagner in his book on the oases and reprinted in *SB* 20.

[3] On the third-century Coptic letter on an ostrakon from Kellis, evoked on p. 41, see my remarks in "Linguistic Change and Religious Change: Thinking about the Temples of the Fayyum in the Roman Period," in G. Gabra (ed.), *Christianity and Monasticism in the Fayoum Oasis* (Cairo 2005) 11-19.

[4] I also cannot agree with the assertion (p. 32) that "the apparent lack of use of Coptic in late-antique and Byzantine Oxyrhynchus is a function of the lack of attention paid to the not insubstantial Coptic remains from the site." It is true that there is more than has been published, but the numbers are small against the total corpus of unpublished Oxyrhynchite papyri.

[5] I plan to return to the nature of the fourth-century Coptic documentation in the published version of the Sather Classical Lectures that I gave at the University of

It is striking that the bulk of the published letters in Coptic so far do seem to come from within Christian and Manichaean groups; they do not obviously cross religious lines in the way that the Greek letters do. That could to a large degree be the result of the archival nature of our finds of early Coptic letters; but the archival character itself may not be fortuitous.

This study of word usage thus in the end brings us face to face with much more profound questions about the religious world of fourth-century Egypt. Choat treats his conclusion more as an agenda for further investigation than as a synthesis, and that is appropriate. The book will serve both as an exceptionally useful handbook on the subjects it treats and a stimulus to further thought about the implications of those subjects. It is very welcome on both counts.

Columbia University Roger S. Bagnall

California, Berkeley, in fall, 2005.

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