

# **DIOSCORUS OF APHRODITO**

## **Man and Circumstance**

Part One: Chapters I, II, III

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An earlier version of this material appeared as Chapter 2 of Clement A. Kuehn, *Channels of Imperishable Fire: The Beginnings of Christian Mystical Poetry and Dioscorus of Aphroditto* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1995). The reader is invited to look there for a more complete treatment of some of the subjects.

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# **Part One**



# CHAPTER I

## BYZANTINE PAPYRUS

### DISCOVERY AND DISPERSAL

#### (1) DISCOVERY

(1.1) In July of 1905, Gustave Lefebvre had been Inspector in Chief of the Antiquities Service of Egypt for barely six months. Suddenly a man from Tima, about four hundred kilometers south of Cairo, informed him of a new find of papyrus at Kom Ashkaw.<sup>1</sup> Part of an old wall of a house had collapsed and revealed a chasm below. At the bottom of this crevice were seen numerous rolls of papyrus. By the time Lefebvre arrived, however, the rolls were gone. What fragments remained were torn apart and mutilated. The rest had probably been distributed among the villagers and concealed. Yet when the remaining fragments, filled with Coptic and Greek writing, were removed from the crevice, Lefebvre noticed what seemed to be verses of a Greek comedy. These 120 verses proved to be a fragment of a

<sup>1</sup> The following description of the 1905-7 discoveries is based primarily upon G. Lefebvre, *Fragments d'un manuscrit de Ménandre* (Cairo 1907), viii-xi. For an important find of primarily Arabic papyri at Kom Ashkaw in 1901, see J. Quibell, "Kom Ishgau," *Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte* 3 (1902): 85-88. He and Lefebvre both report that the 1901 discovery was made while natives were constructing a tomb: Quibell 1902, 85; Lefebvre 1907, viii-ix. Harold Idris Bell, however, writes: "The discovery was made in 1901 by some of the villagers who were digging a well"; "The Aphrodito Papyri," *JHS* 28 (1908): 97. Bell, who was never in the village, does not explain the variant report; he may be taking the term *fasguyeh* (used by Quibell in addition to *tomb*) to mean *well*. Whatever the reason for the variant, it is Bell's version which is generally repeated by scholars writing about the 1901 discovery. For the distribution and first publications of the 1901 find, see Bell 1908, 97-98; Nabia Abbott, *The Kurrah Papyri from Aphrodito in the Oriental Institute* (Chicago 1938).

fourth- or fifth-century A.D. codex of the comedy *Demes* by Eupolis. Very little by this Athenian comedy writer from the fifth century B.C. had survived to the modern era. These verses gave Lefebvre hope of still finding something valuable.<sup>2</sup>

(1.2) The houses were too close together to excavate between, so he asked the village headman to inform him as soon as anyone in the neighborhood made plans to demolish a house. By the end of the same year the owner of the collapsed wall decided to tear down and rebuild his home. Gaston Maspero, Director of the Antiquities Service of Egypt, gave Lefebvre the authorization; and for a few pounds the owner of the house gave permission to excavate his property all the way to the street.

(1.3) Lefebvre began immediately. After only one meter of digging, he uncovered ancient walls of unbaked brick. There had been a roof, of which the first few courses were still visible. The walls continued down for another two meters and demarcated three rooms. It was a medium-sized house, which had been built during the Roman period (30 B.C. - A.D. 300). In the corner of one small room, which had an area of no more than one and a half square meters, stood a large jar which was shattered down to its neck. It was now about .90 meter tall. Spread out around the jar in the *sebakh* ("rich soil," often found around ancient sites) lay papyrus rolls and fragments that had escaped from the container. The jar itself was filled with more papyrus, on top of which lay eleven leaves (twenty-two

<sup>2</sup> For the fragment of Eupolis, see G. Lefebvre, ed., *Catalogue général des antiquités égyptiennes du Musée du Caire, No. 43227: Papyrus de Ménandre* (Cairo 1911), xxi-xxiii; more recently, C. Austin, ed., *Comicorum Graecorum Fragmenta in Papyris Reperta* (Berlin 1973), 84-92; R. Kassel and C. Austin, eds., *Poetae Comici Graeci (PCG)*, vol. 5 (Berlin 1986), 344-51.



pages) of a fifth-century *codex* (“book”) of Menandrian comedies.<sup>3</sup> In the *sebakh* were found six more leaves of the same codex, thus making a total of thirty-four pages containing more than 1300 verses—all from an author whose works had virtually disappeared during the Middle Ages. This fourth-century B.C. author, Menander (Comicus), had been held in the highest esteem during the Hellenistic, Roman, and early Byzantine periods. In fact, he was considered second only to Homer in poetic excellence.<sup>4</sup> Yet during the fourteenth century, the monks of Constantinople condemned his comedies and burned his manuscripts.<sup>5</sup> From the Renaissance to the beginning of the twentieth century all that remained were his astounding reputation and a few excerpted *sententiae*.<sup>6</sup> Discoveries of papyrus fragments by Nicole, Jouguet, and Grenfell and Hunt increased somewhat the size of his surviving *oeuvre*. But the leaves of the codex which Lefebvre now held in his hands were—in his own words—“without argument, the most important which have been discovered to this day.”<sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup> For the date, see G. Lefebvre, *Catalogue général des antiquités égyptiennes du Musée du Caire, No. 43227: Papyrus de Ménandre* (Cairo 1911), i note 1. For the text, *ibid.*, iv-xvi. For a discussion of the editing of this codex, see A. Gomme and F. Sandbach, *Menander: A Commentary* (Oxford 1973), 3, 42-46. For a photographic reproduction of the codex (and the Eupolis fragments), see L. Koenen, et al., *The Cairo Codex of Menander* (London 1978).

<sup>4</sup> Lefebvre 1907, viii; cf. Gomme-Sandbach 1973, 2 and footnote 5. See the remark by Aristophanes Byzantinus, *IG* xiv 1183c. See also the chapter on Menander by E. Handley in *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature*, eds. P. Easterling and B. Knox (Cambridge 1985), 414-25.

<sup>5</sup> This is Lefebvre’s account; Gomme-Sandbach only speculate about the disappearance.

<sup>6</sup> See S. Jaekel, *Menandri Sententiae* (Leipzig 1964). *Sententiae* were short, clever phrases culled from famous authors’ works. They dealt with specific topics and were used when the occasion called.

<sup>7</sup> “Les nouveaux fragments, publiés dans ce volume, sont sans contredit les plus importants qui aient été découverts jusqu’à ce jour.” Lefebvre 1907, viii.

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(1.4) Beneath this codex had been stored about one hundred and fifty papyrus scrolls, containing primarily personal, legal, and government documents. Many of these documents, as though they had been considered scrap paper, had poems written on their *versos* (“backs”).<sup>8</sup> These poems were in Greek; and because of the corrections and revisions, they appeared to be original compositions.<sup>9</sup> Lefebvre noted that the Menandrian codex had been used as a sort of cork to close the jar and protect the papyri beneath, as though for the owner the latter had been more important.<sup>10</sup>

(1.5) Gustave Lefebvre returned to excavate at the same site in 1906 and 1907, but found little more of value.<sup>11</sup> He then brought what he had

<sup>8</sup> The inside of the papyrus roll is called the *recto*; it was usually the smoother side and used first for writing. The outside of the roll is called the *verso*; it was often left rough and used to label the roll. See E. G. Turner, *Greek Papyri: An Introduction*, paperback edition with supplementary notes (Oxford 1980), 4-5, 181 note 19, 199; cf. idem, “The Terms Recto and Verso; The Anatomy of the Papyrus Roll,” in *Actes du XV<sup>e</sup> Congrès International de Papyrologie, première partie* (Brussels 1978). Since ancient writers did not always begin writing on the recto, and papyrus was not always rolled, papyrologists also use the terms “writing along the fiber (→)” of the papyrus and “writing against the fiber (↑)” or *transversa charta*. See A. Bülow-Jacobsen, “Writing Materials in the Ancient World,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Papyrology*, ed. R. Bagnall (Oxford 2009), 21.

<sup>9</sup> Lefebvre does not mention the original compositions in his early description (1907) of the find. Although Lefebvre unrolled several documents, the initial inventory seems to have been made by Maspero; see Lefebvre 1907, x note 1. Jean Maspero writes that it was apparent that the poetry written on the verso of many of the documents were original compositions; “Un dernier poète grec d’Égypte: Dioscore, fils d’Apollôs,” *REG* 24 (1911): 456.

<sup>10</sup> “Les pages [du manuscrit de Ménandre] n’en devaient servir au notaire que comme feuillets de garde pour l’entretien de ses contrats, plus précieux à ses yeux.” Lefebvre 1907, x.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, xi.

found to the Egyptian Museum in Cairo.<sup>12</sup> There Lefebvre quickly edited the Menandrian *codex* and Jean Maspero, the young son of the Director of the Antiquities Service, edited the other Greek papyri. These rolls and fragments filled three volumes, which are now referred to as *P.Cair.Masp.* I, II, and III.<sup>13</sup> The first two volumes were published in 1911 and 1913; Jean's father, Gaston, published the third volume in 1916 after his son had died in battle. At the time of death, Jean was only twenty-nine.<sup>14</sup>

(1.6) Jean Maspero discovered that the literary and documentary papyri of the 1905–7 excavations at Kom Ashkaw had belonged to a certain Flavius Dioscorus, who had lived during the sixth century A.D. Some of the documents, accounts, and letters concerned his family and their property. Others concerned the village of Aphrodite. (During the pharaonic era, the inhabitants of Kom Ashkaw had worshipped Hathor, the goddess of love. Later, the Greeks associated Hathor with Aphrodite and called the place Aphroditopolis. Historians now refer to the village as

<sup>12</sup> For a discussion of this collection, see J. Keenan, "On the Cairo Maspero Papyri," in *Proceedings of the XIXth International Congress of Papyrology*, ed. A. El-Mosalamy (Cairo 1992), 85-94.

<sup>13</sup> *Catalogue général des antiquités égyptiennes du Musée du Caire: Papyrus grecs d'époque byzantine*, 3 vols. (Milan 1973; reprint of the 1911-1916 editions). These volumes also include some papyri obtained from M. Beaugé, chief engineer of Egyptian railroads at Asyut, and from others; see Gaston Maspero, intro. to *P.Cair.Masp.* III, p. viii. For the abbreviations of papyrological sources, such as *P.Cair.Masp.*, see John Oates et al., *Checklist of Editions of Greek and Latin Papyri, Ostraca and Tablets*, 5th ed. (American Society of Papyrologist 2001); now available (up to 2008) online at: <http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/papyrus/texts/clist.html>.

The fate of many Coptic documents brought to the Egyptian Museum by Lefebvre is unknown. See L. MacCoull, *Dioscorus of Aphrodito: His Work and His World* (Berkeley 1988), 20; eadem, "The Coptic Archive of Dioscorus of Aphrodito," *Chronique d'Égypte* 56 (1981a): 185-93.

<sup>14</sup> 17 February 1915. He fell in battle at Vauquois on the Lorraine. For excerpts from his diary and poetry, see G. Maspero, intro. to *P.Cair.Masp.* III, pp. viii-xxxiv.

Aphrodito.)<sup>15</sup> Some more documents involved the neighborhood and had been composed or acquired by Dioscorus during his career as lawyer and headman of Aphrodito. Still other papers had been brought back from Antinoöpolis, the principal city of the Thebaid region in southern Egypt. Dioscorus had lived and worked there for seven years.<sup>16</sup>

## (2) DISPERSAL

(2.1) Many of the papyri from the Dioscorian archive had apparently been removed and concealed before Lefebvre's arrival. A large number of these (some threescore papyri) were purchased by the British Museum in 1906 and 1907, and edited by Harold Idris Bell in a single volume, *P.Lond.* V (1917). The University of Florence purchased still another score of papyri between 1905 and 1907. Girolamo Vitelli edited many of these in *P.Flor.* III (1915). In fact, the first publication of a document from the Dioscorian archive was a divorce contract published in 1906 as *P.Flor.* I 93.<sup>17</sup> In addition, there were clandestine excavations at Kom Ashkaw and the

<sup>15</sup> The papyri of 1905-7 (dating from the sixth century AD) refer to the village as Ἀφροδίτης κώμη. Yet, because the 1901 find (letters and accounts composed after the Arab conquest) refers to the village as Ἀφροδίτῳ, the later appellation continues to be used by most scholars. Maspero, *P.Cair.Masp.* I, p. ii note 1; MacCoull 1988, 3 note 7.

<sup>16</sup> For brief *vitae* of Dioscorus see: Maspero 1911, 454-69; H. I. Bell, "An Egyptian Village in the Age of Justinian," *JHS* 64 (1944): 21-36; MacCoull 1988, 9-14. For a detailed *vita*, see C. A. Kuehn, *Channels of Imperishable Fire: The Beginnings of Christian Mystical Poetry and Dioscorus of Aphrodito* (New York 1995), 59-76.

<sup>17</sup> = *M.Chr.* 297. *P.Lond.* V 1713 is a copy of this document; but whereas *P.Flor.* I 93 was intended for the husband, *P.Lond.* V 1713 was intended for the wife. Both were probably composed and written by Dioscorus. See Bell, intro. to *P.Lond.* V 1713, pp. 145-46.

discoveries were privately sold.<sup>18</sup> The end result was that papyri which had once belonged—in Bell’s words—“to a single ‘muniment room,’ that of the poet Dioscorus,”<sup>19</sup> became dispersed throughout the Western Hemisphere. They can now be found in Cairo and—in James Keenan’s words—“in Alexandria, Aberdeen, Cologne, Hamburg, Berlin, Erlangen, Heidelberg, Florence, Ghent, Geneva, Paris, Strasbourg, Vienna, Princeton, Michigan, and the Vatican—and even this list may not be exhaustive.”<sup>20</sup>

(2.2) As the archive was spread around the world, parts of what had been a single document or single poem turned up in different collections. An example of the capriciousness of the dispersal of the Dioscorian archive is the hexameter *panegyric* (“poem of praise”) to John, *P.Berol.* 10580. Although first published in Berlin in 1907 as *BKT V 3*, it was augmented in 1936 by the addition of an iambic prologue that was among the Cairo

<sup>18</sup> Because of the extensive digging at Kom Ashkaw after Lefebvre, the papyri concerning Byzantine Aphrodito probably come from more archives than the first excavated house. For a discussion of the archives, see J.-L. Fournet, “Archive ou archives de Dioscore? Les dernières années des ‘archives de Dioscore,’” in *Les archives de Dioscore d’Aphrodité cent ans après leur découverte. Histoire et culture dans l’Égypte byzantine* (Paris 2008), 17-30. The most complete discussion of the sales of Aphrodito papyri is by J. Keenan, “The Aphrodite Papyri and Village Life in Byzantine Egypt,” *Bulletin de la Société d’Archéologie Copte* 26 (1984a): 52-53 and notes; cf. idem, “The History of the Discipline,” in *Oxford Handbook of Papyrology*, 66-67. See also MacCoull 1988, 4 note 11.

<sup>19</sup> Bell, intro. to *Greek Papyri in the British Museum, Vol. V (= P.Lond. V)*, (London 1917), p. iii.

<sup>20</sup> J. Keenan 1984a, 53; add perhaps Barcelona. See the list of publications of Dioscorian papyri, arranged by date of publication, in G. Malz, “The Papyri of Dioscorus: Publications and Emendations,” in *Studi in onore di Aristide Calderini e Roberto Paribeni*, vol. 2 (Milan 1957), 347-48. For a list of the papyri of Aphrodito arranged by the date of the document, see A. Calderini, *Dizionario dei nomi geografici e topografici dell’Egitto greco-romano*, vol. 1, part 2 (Madrid 1966), 302-309; see also the *Supplemento* by S. Daris (Milan 1988). For emendations to these lists see Keenan 1984a, 58 note 6. For a recent list, see J.-L. Fournet, “Liste des papyrus édités de l’Aphrodité byzantine,” in *Les archives de Dioscore d’Aphrodité*, 307-343.

papyri published by Maspero in 1916.<sup>21</sup> Another example is the beautifully scripted encomium to Romanus (Heitsch 12, Fournet 4).<sup>22</sup> The hexameter section with a column of words from the iambic prologue was published with the London collection in 1917 and 1927 (first a description of the papyrus as *P.Lond.* V 1817; later, the text and a photo as *P.Lond.Lit.* 98). The rest of the iambic prologue was not found until 1940, when P. Collart published the papyrus collection of Théodore Reinach (*P.Rein.* 2070).<sup>23</sup> Still another example and “no doubt the most striking single instance of the archive’s dispersal,” writes Keenan, “was revealed in the 1976 publication by the late Rev. J. W. B. Barns of a papyrus owned by Dr. W. M. Fitzhugh of Monterey, California—the upper half of a document whose lower half was among the Cairo Museum papyri published by Maspero in 1911.”<sup>24</sup>

(2.3) In his publication of the Dioscorian archive at the Egyptian Museum, Jean Maspero divided the Greek papyri into five categories:

<sup>21</sup> *P.Cair.Masp.* III 67317. See F. della Corte, “Otto papiri letterari editi o inediti del Museo Berlinese,” *RFIC* 64 (1936): 399-404.

<sup>22</sup> After the first edition of thirteen poems by Maspero in 1911, Ernst Heitsch collected and edited twenty-eight of Dioscorus’s poems for section XLII of *Die griechischen Dichterfragmente der römischen Kaiserzeit*, vol. 1, 2nd ed. (Göttingen 1963), 127-52, and one more poem in volume 2 (1964), S 10. Citations from these editions will be abbreviated Heitsch, followed by the poem number and verse number in his collection. Jean-Luc Fournet published fifty-one poems and combined them with diplomatic transcriptions, plates, and French translations (as in Maspero’s earlier editions of the poetry). These were joined with the Homeric fragments found in Dioscorus’s archive in *Hellénisme dans l’Égypte du VIe siècle. La bibliothèque et l’œuvre de Dioscore d’Aphrodité*, MIFAO 115, 2 vols. (Cairo 1999). Citations from this edition will be abbreviated Fournet, followed by the poem number and verse number in his collection.

<sup>23</sup> See P. Collart, ed., “Poème de Dioscoros d’Aphroditô,” *BIAO* 39 (1940): 19-22.

<sup>24</sup> Keenan 1984a, 53 (referring to *P.Coll.Youtie* 92). Another good example is a papyrus from Dioscorus’s archive now in the Michigan collection, *P.Mich.* XIII 661. James Keenan pointed out to me that the upper left corner seems to have been located in Barcelona. See *SB* XVI 12542.

administrative; financial; private documents from Aphrodito and the Antaeopolite nome; private documents from Antinoöpolis and other neighboring cities; and literary fragments.<sup>25</sup> Most of these documents were composed in the sixth century A.D. during the reigns of Justin I, Justinian, and Justin II.<sup>26</sup> Some of the more interesting non-documentary items include—in addition to the Menandrian *codex*—the remains of a *codex* of Homer’s *Iliad* and fragments of (possibly) an Aristophanic comedy (or comedies),<sup>27</sup> a biography of the Athenian orator Isocrates, a Greek-Coptic glossary, a letter from the sixth century AD philosopher Horapollon, metrological charts, and conjugations of Greek verbs. A Latin-Greek-Coptic glossary may also have belonged to Dioscorus.<sup>28</sup> It is without doubt one of the richest and most important papyrological finds ever. “If the still scanty band of papyrologists,” Bell wrote in 1925, “should ever compile a calendar of their own, it would be necessary to assign a red letter day to the memory of Dioscorus.”<sup>29</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Intro. to *P.Cair.Masp.* I, pp. ii-iii.

<sup>26</sup> J. Maspero, “Études sur les papyrus d’Aphrodité,” *BIAO* 6 (1908): 75; see also Malz 1957, 345.

<sup>27</sup> For the text of the *Iliad*, see *P.Cair.Masp.* II 67172-67174; Fournet 1999, 45-67. For the texts of the comedy fragments, see Lefebvre 1911, xxi-xxv; cf. Bell 1944, 27.

<sup>28</sup> Bell 1944, 27. For a brief discussion of the above items, see H. I. Bell and W. Crum, “A Greek-Coptic Glossary,” *Aegyptus* 6 (Milan 1925): 177-81. For a translation and discussion of the philosopher’s letter, see Bell 1944, 29-30. For a text of the Latin-Greek-Coptic glossary and a commentary, see J. Kramer, *Glossaria Bilinguia in Papyris et Membranis Reperta* (Bonn 1983), 97-108.

<sup>29</sup> Bell-Crum 1925, 177.

## CHAPTER II BYZANTINE POETRY

### PUBLICATIONS AND INTERPRETATIONS

(1) Among the fragments of Menander and Homer were found poems composed by Dioscorus himself.<sup>1</sup> They are the world's oldest surviving poems written by the hand of a known poet.<sup>2</sup> Yet before the discovery of the archive, modern scholars were ignorant of the poetry of Dioscorus. There is no mention of him in ancient anthologies, no transmitted manuscript has been found, and no papyrus from another site contains his verses.

(2) Since their discovery, the poems have been published many times. The first appearance of his poetry in the modern era was in 1907, when a collection of literary papyri purchased by the Berlin Museum was published in *Berliner Klassikertexte V. Griechische Dichterfragmente I: Epische und elegische Fragmente (BKT V)*. In this edition, among papyrus fragments of Homer, Hesiod, Theocritus, and Nonnus, there appeared three *panegyrics* ("poems of praise") in trimeters and hexameters. The author of the first panegyric poem (*P. Berol.* 5003) could not be identified in 1907. (Later, in 1968, Toivo Viljamaa suggested that "the poem relates a battle against the Blemmyes during the reign of Theodosius II, and its

<sup>1</sup> For the evidence which led to the conclusion that these poems were composed and written by Dioscorus, see Maspero 1911, 454-56; see also the discussion below.

<sup>2</sup> For a survey of autograph literature discovered on ancient papyri, see M. Parca, *Ptocheia or Odysseus in Disguise at Troy (P. Köln VI 245)* (Atlanta 1991), 3-4 note 7. For a survey of annotations and comments on poetry in the papyri, see K. McNamee, *Annotations in Greek and Latin Texts from Egypt* (New Haven, 2007).



probable writer is Cyrus of Panopolis.”<sup>3</sup>) The second panegyric poem (*P.Berol.* 10580) was addressed to John, “the new leader”. W. Schubart, Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, and Paul Friedländer studied the poem and suggested that this John was an important administrator of Egypt, the *Praefectus Praetorio Orientis*.<sup>4</sup> They further surmised that the third panegyric poem (*P.Berol.* 9799) was addressed to a duke of the Thebaid, a region in southern Egypt.<sup>5</sup> The authors of these last two poems were unknown; it was not suggested that a single author had composed both. Three years later, in 1910, Jean Maspero published a poem in *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* that he was certain was by the same author as the panegyric to John.<sup>6</sup> And in an essay published in 1911 in *Revue des études grecques*, Maspero identified the author as Dioscorus of Aphrodito.<sup>7</sup>

(3) What had led Maspero to this identification was the observation that the handwriting of some hexameter verses on the *verso* (“back”) of *P.Cair.Masp.* I 67097 matched the handwriting of a receipt signed by Dioscorus, which was written immediately above the verses.<sup>8</sup> Dioscorus

<sup>3</sup> T. Viljamaa, *Studies in Greek Encomiastic Poetry of the Early Byzantine Period* (Helsinki 1968), 49.

<sup>4</sup> *BKT* V, pp. 117-26. This poem, joined with *P.Cair.Masp.* III 67317, was included by Heitsch as number 3, and later by Fournet as number 11. Maspero suggested that John was a duke of the Thebaid; see Maspero 1910, 3-6; MacCoull 1988, 140-41; Fournet 1999, 525.

<sup>5</sup> *BKT* V, pp. 114-17 (= Heitsch, vol. 2, S 10).

<sup>6</sup> J. Maspero, “Un papyrus littéraire d’Αφροδίτης κώμη,” *BZ* 19 (1910b): 1-6. The poem is *P.Cair.Masp.* 67055 verso (= Heitsch 2, Fournet 20).

<sup>7</sup> Maspero 1911, 454-56.

<sup>8</sup> Two early observations about Dioscorus’s handwriting were made by Bell and Maspero. Bell says (intro. to *P.Lond.* V, p. iv note 2): “Dioscorus wrote sometimes in uncials and sometimes in cursive, but the general character of both is the same, and not infrequently he mixed the two styles.” Maspero says (1911, 454): “L’écriture des différentes pièces n’est pas absolument identique; on y distingue deux types: une onciale

had obviously reused this papyrus with the receipt and the sale of land on the *recto* (“front”) as scrap paper on which to sketch out several poems. Furthermore, verses of the poem below the receipt corresponded to verses in poems on other papyri from the Dioscorian archive, which poems had verses that corresponded to those in the panegyric to John. These repeated verses acted “as a signature which permitted us to recognize his authorship, when the capriciousness of his handwriting gave rise to doubts.”<sup>9</sup> The revisions squeezed between verses and into the margins indicated that Dioscorus had not merely copied but had composed the poems. The Berlin panegyric to John was augmented in 1936, as mentioned in chapter one, by the addition of an iambic prologue, which had been published with the Cairo papyri in 1916 but had not been recognized as part of the poem to John.<sup>10</sup> The author of the panegyric to the duke of the Thebaid (*P.Berol.* 9799) was not identified until 1927, when H. J. M. Milne stated that it too was composed by Dioscorus.<sup>11</sup> Leslie MacCoull confirmed this statement in 1988 on the basis of an examination of a photograph of the papyrus.<sup>12</sup>

(4) In his article of 1911, “Un dernier poète grec d’Égypte: Dioscore,

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légèrement penchée en avant, et une écriture droite, moins régulière, comportant quelques ligatures.” More recently, see Fournet 1999, 245-58. Images of all his papyri are now available online: [http://www.misha.fr/papyrus\\_bipab](http://www.misha.fr/papyrus_bipab). For an example of the elegant uncial hand of some of the poetry, see *P.Lond.Lit.* 98 (cf. *P.Aphrod.Lit.* IV 4). For a study of handwriting styles found in papyrus, see Guglielmo Cavallo, “Greek and Latin Handwriting in the Papyri,” in *Oxford Handbook of Papyrology*, 101-48.

<sup>9</sup> “Notre poète aimait à se répéter : et ces vers ‘cheville’ qui se montrent plusieurs fois chacun dans son oeuvre, sont comme une signature qui nous permet de reconnaître son inspiration, quand le caprice de sa main a fait naître des doutes.” Maspero 1911, 454.

<sup>10</sup> *P.Cair.Masp.* III 67317.

<sup>11</sup> H. J. M. Milne, intro. to *P.Lond.Lit.* 98-101, p. 68. Neither Denys Page nor Toivo Viljamaa attribute the poem’s authorship to Dioscorus. Viljamaa, in fact, denies that it is Dioscorian. Viljamaa 1968, 51-54, esp. 52; D. Page, *Sel.Pap.* III, 588-89.

<sup>12</sup> MacCoull 1988, 131-34.

files d'Apollôs," Jean Maspero published thirteen poems by Dioscorus,<sup>13</sup> French translations, and an examination of their style.<sup>14</sup> Twelve of the poems make use of the popular genres of *encomium* ("praise for a distinguished person") and *epithalamium* ("celebration of a wedding"). The thirteenth poem begins with sixteen *anacreontic* verses, reflecting the style and ethos of Anacreon of Teos. It ends with a *chairetismos*, a popular hymn form in which a litany of verses begins with the repeated salutation *Chaire!* ("Hail!"). The addressees of several of the poems are named by Dioscorus in the verses or in the titles: Athanasius (1, 2), Victor (5), Dorotheus (6), Constantine (7), Colluthus (9, 10, 12), and Callinicus (13). The honorees of the other poems are not named. Dioscorus calls one

<sup>13</sup> The Heitsch numbers of the thirteen Maspero poems are: 1=H.4; 2=H.4b; 3=H.9; 4=H.6; 5=H.10; 6=H.14; 7=H.15; 8=H.16; 9=H.13; 10=H.17; 11=H.28; 12=H.21; 13=H.5. At the time, Maspero identified 26 separate Dioscorian poems among the Cairo papyri (p. 471). Fournet has counted a total of 51 separate poems in all the collections of Dioscorian papyri.

<sup>14</sup> Maspero (pp. 456-69) also attempts to reconstruct the life of the poet by combining information from the poems and documents in the Cairo Museum. Most of Maspero's speculations about the life of Dioscorus and the social situation in Aphrodito have been challenged. His chronology of events (especially the many flights as fugitive) are refined by Bell, *P.Lond.* V, pp. iv, 57-58; idem 1944, passim. Although Bell's chronology is an improvement over Maspero's, Bell's evaluation of the social situation in Aphrodito has been revised by subsequent historians. For more recent evaluations of the social situation in Aphrodito, see esp. J. Keenan's articles: "Aurelius Phoibammon, Son of Triadelphus: A Byzantine Egyptian Land Entrepreneur," *BASP* 17 (1980): 145-54; "The Aphrodite Papyri and Village Life in Byzantine Egypt," (1984a; full citation above): 53-57; "Aurelius Apollos and the Aphrodite Village Élite," in *Atti del XVII congresso internazionale di papirologia*, vol. 3 (Naples 1984b): 957-63; "Village Shepherds and Social Tension in Byzantine Egypt," *YCS* 28 (1985a): 245-59; "Notes on Absentee Landlordism at Aphrodito," *BASP* 22 (1985b): 137-69; "On Languages and Literacy in Byzantine Aphrodito," in *Proceedings of the XVIII International Congress of Papyrology*, ed. B. G. Mandilaras, vol. 2 (Athens 1988c): 161-67; "'Tormented Voices': P.Cair.Masp. I 67002," in *Les archives de Dioscore d'Aphrodité*, 171-80. Maspero republished the thirteen poems, this time including line-by-line textual and interpretive commentaries, in *P.Cair.Masp.* I, II, and III.

addressee a pagarch and count (10), others are counts (6, 12). Maspero suggested that some of the poems were addressed to dukes: Athanasius, Callinicus, John (not in this collection), and the recipient of poem 3.<sup>15</sup> One poem was addressed to a *praeses* (“civil governor”) of the Thebaid: Victor. Examining the style of the poetry, Maspero (like Schubart and Wilamowitz) found that the hexameter verses of the *encomia* and *epithalamia* were similar to those of Nonnus’ poems,<sup>16</sup> whose Homeric vocabulary and strict metrical system exerted a strong influence among poets of the sixth century.<sup>17</sup> Maspero thought that Nonnus’ talent was remarkable, but Dioscorus was no more than a distant disciple.<sup>18</sup> Maspero complained that Dioscorus was obscure. There was tension between, on the one hand, the ideas that Maspero imagined Dioscorus was trying to

<sup>15</sup> 1911, 462 note 1: 1<sup>0</sup> and 2<sup>0</sup>. Cf. the lists at J. R. Martindale, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire* (Cambridge 1971-92), vol. 3, p. 406; Fournet 1999, 326-36; G. Ruffini, *A Prosopography of Byzantine Aphrodito* (Durham, N.C. 2011).

<sup>16</sup> Ausilia Saija did very valuable work in this regard when she published her lexicon of Dioscorus’ poetic vocabulary: *Lessico dei carmi di Dioscoro de Aphrodito* (Messina 1995). The lexicon repeatedly shows Nonnus of Panopolis as a source for Dioscorus’ words.

<sup>17</sup> For Nonnus’ style (especially his metrics), see J. Golega, *Studien über die Evangeliendichtung des Nonnos von Panopolis* (Breslau 1930), 8-62; R. Keydell, ed., *Nonni Panopolitani Dionysiaca*, vol. 1 (Berlin 1959), 9\*-81\*; F. Vian, ed., *Nonnos de Panopolis, Les Dionysiaques*, vol. 1 (Paris 1976), li-lv. Cf. P. Maas, *Greek Metre*, trans. H. Lloyd-Jones (Oxford 1962), *passim*. For a detailed examination of Nonnus’ metaphorical language and the influence of Neoplatonism, see D. Piccardi, *Metafora e poetica in Nonno di Panopoli* (Florence 1985). For Nonnus’ influence, see A. Wifstrand, *Von Kallimachos zu Nonnos: Metrisch-stilistische Untersuchungen zur späteren griechischen Epik und zu verwandten Gedichtgattungen* (Lund 1933), *passim*. Despite many arguments to the contrary, Alan Cameron insists that the *Dionysiaca* is not a Christian allegory: “Dionysos is *not* portrayed as a saviour or redeemer. His mission is simply to bring men and (especially) women joy in the form of wine”; “Poets and Pagans in Byzantine Egypt” in *Egypt in the Byzantine World, 300-700*, ed. R. Bagnall (Cambridge 2007), 37.

<sup>18</sup> “Le style de Dioscore fait pauvre figure.” Maspero 1911, 472.

convey and, on the other hand, the expressions that Dioscorus had actually used. Certain phrases were so ambiguous that Maspero wondered if Dioscorus himself had understood what they meant.<sup>19</sup>

(5) In 1917 H. I. Bell briefly described the Dioscorian poems that had been found among the papyri purchased by the British Museum (*P.Lond.* V 1817-1820), and in 1927 H. J. M. Milne published the texts and his commentaries on the eleven poem fragments. Milne's opinion of the talent of the poet was even more damning than Maspero's. "At no moment," Milne wrote, "has he any real control of thought, diction, grammar, metre, or meaning."<sup>20</sup>

(6) Dioscorian poems and poem fragments continued to turn up in other collections.<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately, when someone fortuitously or clandestinely unearthed a Dioscorian papyrus, he sometimes tore it apart, either by accident or with the intention of earning a greater profit, and sold the pieces to different collectors. This dispersal and fragmentation created a significant obstacle for literary critics attempting to study the poetry of Dioscorus. Thus Ernst Heitsch made a valuable contribution when, over half a century after their first discovery, he gathered most of

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 427.

<sup>20</sup> *P.Lond.Lit.*, p. 68. Several scholars' criticism of the Dioscorian poems is based not solely upon the difficulty in understanding them, but also upon a comparison with poetry of the sixth through fourth centuries BC. See, for instance, T. Gagos and P. van Minnen write: "To be sure, most of these poems are not great works of literature, especially when compared with their illustrious classical models"; *Settling a Dispute: Toward a Legal Anthropology of Late Antique Egypt* (Ann Arbor 1994), 20.

<sup>21</sup> Subsequent publications of individual poems include: R. Keydell, "Ein jambischer Brief des Dioskoros von Aphrodito," *Byzantinisch-neugriechische Jahrbücher* 10 (1933): 341-45; G. Malz, "Three Papyri of Dioscorus at the Walters Art Gallery," *AJP* 60 (1939): 170-177; P. Collart, "Poème de Dioscoros d'Aphroditô," *BIAO* 39 (1940): 19-22; C. A. Kuehn, "A New Papyrus of a Dioscorian Poem and Marriage Contract: P.Berol. Inv. No. 21334," *ZPE* 97(1993): 103-15, plates 2-3.

the fragments attributed to Dioscorus into one volume: *Die griechischen Dichterfragmente der römischen Kaiserzeit*, vol. 1 (Göttingen, second edition 1963), section XLII.<sup>22</sup> For each of the twenty-nine poems in his edition, Heitsch identified the collection or collections holding the papyrus, gave a brief bibliography, and appended a critical apparatus. This remained the definitive edition of the poetry of Dioscorus for three and a half decades. Then in 1999, Jean Luc Fournet published *Hellénisme dans l'Égypte du VIe siècle* (Cairo). In two volumes Fournet combined and brought up to date the earlier editions of the poetry and also included the fragments of the *Iliad* and its scholia found in the Dioscorian archive.

(7) Maspero's and Milne's negative evaluations of the quality of the poetry went virtually unchallenged by subsequent historians—except for Leslie MacCoull. MacCoull began already in 1976 to challenge the traditional views, which were based on comparisons to Classical and Hellenistic models.<sup>23</sup> Yet it wasn't until her 1988 monograph, *Dioscorus of Aphrodito: His Work and His World* (Berkeley), that she offered a comprehensive view of her position: the obscurity in his poetry was due largely to the influence of the Coptic language and culture. If one were to understand the Coptic language and culture, one would better appreciate the poems. Yet, although MacCoull showed the presence of the Coptic

<sup>22</sup> Heitsch's collection (including one Dioscorian poem [S 10] in volume 2) contains twenty-nine poems (716 verses), twenty-one of which are encomia. The encomia are written in dactylic hexameter and iambic trimeter. This collection also includes epithalamia, ethopoeiae, and an anacreontic. If one adds Dioscorus's *chairetismos*, the isopsephistic encomium to St. Senas, and the poem to the new monk, the verses total about 737. Ernst Heitsch did not include all the Dioscorian verse fragments with which he was familiar. And after his publication, more verses have been identified as Dioscorian. For a 1968 list of some of the poems excluded by Heitsch, see Viljamaa 1968, 33 note 55. For a 1999 list, see Fournet 1999, 371-372.

<sup>23</sup> See also Fournet 1999, 258-290 and 669-690, and Alan Cameron 2007, 34-44, who focus on the Hellenism and Classicism of Dioscorus and Byzantine poets in general.

culture in the poems, her discussions never demonstrated how Dioscorus's Coptic heritage interfered in the logic of the poetry. So Maspero's argument of obscurity, presented in his 1911 collection and essay, remained virtually intact.

(8) This was changed in 1995, when Clement Kuehn published *Channels of Imperishable Fire: The Beginnings of Christian Mystical Poetry and Dioscorus of Aphrodito* (New York). In his evaluation, Kuehn examined the poetry not from an anachronistic perspective of the Classical and Hellenistic cultures, but the Byzantine culture (A.D. 300 - 700 in Egypt).<sup>24</sup> After describing the literary trends of the early Byzantine period, and Dioscorus's many personal and business ties with the monasteries in the Thebaid, Kuehn showed that the imagery in the Dioscorian poetry corresponded to the spiritual allegories of the era. Spiritual allegory was popular in poetry and in literary and biblical exegesis, and these allegories were regularly read aloud to the monks. Spiritual allegory was also prevalent in Byzantine artwork. For instance, the early icons at St. Catherine's monastery in Sinai, Egypt, portray spiritual personalities (saints, angels, and the Trinity) as nobilities in an imperial court: emperor, empress, dukes, counts, and generals. Dioscorus's poetry, Kuehn said, falls into the category of *typology*. In this kind of allegory, the surface level of the poem's narrative contains some historical truth. The poem gains its real force, however, through its spiritual symbolism: the historical persons and events are *types* of spiritual realities. Not every historical element in such a poem is symbolic, but the symbolic level functions simultaneously with the historical. Dioscorus's verses are also saturated with Hellenistic

<sup>24</sup> See L. William Countryman, "Review of *Channels of Imperishable Fire: The Beginnings of Christian Mystical Poetry and Dioscorus of Aphrodito*, by Clement A. Kuehn," in *Church History* 66:4 (1997): 787-9.

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(and Coptic and pharaonic) motifs, but this was a standard, accepted, and even respected practice in Byzantine spiritual poetry, as seen in the celebrated verses of Gregory of Nazianzus.



**CHAPTER III**  
**THE VILLAGE OF APHRODITE,**  
**APOLLOS, AND RELIGIOUS LIFE**

**(1) APHRODITO**

(1.1) “The village of Aphrodite,” James Keenan wrote, “was more than an ordinary Byzantine Egyptian village.”<sup>1</sup> During dynastic times and into the early Roman period, Dioscorus’s village had been the capital city of its own nome, the tenth of Upper Egypt. A *nome* was a governmental district similar to a county in the United States. (Egypt was a *province* of the Byzantine Empire, similar to a state. Upper Egypt was in the south, which is higher in altitude than the north of Egypt.) Perhaps at the beginning of the Byzantine period and certainly before the sixth century, the tenth nome was merged with the Antaeopolite nome across the Nile River, and Aphroditopolis lost its status as a capital and its designation as a *polis* (“city”). It was now the village of Aphrodite, or simply Aphrodito.<sup>2</sup> During

<sup>1</sup> 1984a, 54. For a description of the Byzantine village, see MacCoull 1988, 6-7. For the papyrological sources of her description, see Calderini 1966, 323-25. See also J. Keenan, “Egypt,” in *The Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. 14 (Cambridge 2000), 633-36. A more general discussion of villages in Byzantine Egypt, including Aphrodito, is presented by J. Keenan, “Byzantine Egyptian Villages,” in *Egypt in the Byzantine World*, 226-43.

Kom Ashkaw was called by the Greeks Ἀφροδίτης πόλις *the city of Aphrodite*, because they worshipped the Egyptian deity Hathor, identified by the Greeks with Aphrodite, the goddess of love (and by the Romans with Venus). The city’s Egyptian name in Coptic was ⲬⲔⲱⲐⲟⲩ, which suggests that the village had a reputation as the district’s emporium. MacCoull 1988, 6.

<sup>2</sup> Although the city was usually called Ἀφροδίτης πόλις, during Ptolemaic times it was referred to as a μητρόπολις, and Pliny called it *Veneris oppidum*. In Dioscorus’s archive it is usually referred to as Ἀφροδίτης κώμη or simply Ἀφροδίτη. Common epithets are:

the fifth century, moreover, the administrative structure of Upper Egypt underwent a transition. The areas of a nome outside of the capital city were divided into *pagi* (“districts”) and placed under the jurisdiction of a pagarch. The *pagarch* had the responsibility of collecting the public taxes from the villages under his or her jurisdiction.<sup>3</sup> Aphrodito, however, received from the emperor the privilege of *autopragia*, which meant that the village was given the right to collect its own imperial taxes and deliver them directly to the provincial treasury.<sup>4</sup> Thus Aphrodito was outside the jurisdiction of the pagarch with respect to public taxes. The surviving documents do not disclose exactly when Aphrodito received this special

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ἀθλία κώμη, πανταθλία κώμη, Παφίη and Ἀφρογενέη. For references, see Calderini 1966, 310-11. See also J.-L. Fournet, “Appendice sur le nom d’Αφροδίτης κώμη,” *REG* 105 (1992): 235-36.

<sup>3</sup> Bell 1944, 22-23. For the pagarch, pagarch-by-delegation, and the pagarch’s assistants, see Bell’s intro. to *P.Lond.* V 1660, pp. 21-22. With respect to the one documented female pagarch, Patricia (*P.Lond.* V 1660.7), Bell writes (intro. to *P.Lond.* V 1660, p. 22): “As it is not very likely that a woman would be specially appointed pagarch it may well be the case that she held the office by succession to her father. . . . Patricia, though called pagarch, does not herself exercise the functions of the office, but deposes them.” For more comprehensive studies of the office of the pagarch, see J. Gascou, “La détention collégiale de l’autorité pagarchique,” *Byzantion* 43 (1972): 60-72; J. H. Liebeschuetz, “The Origin of the Office of the Pagarch,” *BZ* 66 (1973): 38-46; idem, “The Pagarch: City and Imperial Administration in Byzantine Egypt,” *Journal of Juristic Papyrology* 18 (1974): 163-68; R. Mazza, “Ricerche sul pagarca nell’Egitto tardoantico e bizantino,” *Aegyptus* 75 (1995): 169-242; B. Palme, “The Imperial Presence: Government and Army,” in *Egypt in the Byzantine World*, 263.

<sup>4</sup> See the discussion and bibliography by O. Montevecchi, *La papirologia*, 2nd edn. (Milan 1988), 169-70; cf. A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire, 284-602, A Social Economic and Administrative Survey* (Norman, OK, 1964), 407, 780; G. Geraci, “Per una storia dell’amministrazione fiscale nell’Egitto del VI secolo d.C.: Dioskoros e l’autopragia di Aphrodito,” in *Actes du XV<sup>e</sup> Congrès International de Papyrologie* (Brussels 1979), 195-205; L. Migliardi Zingale, “Osservazioni sulla domus divina di Teodora,” in *Annali della Facoltà di Giurisprudenza di Genova* 20 (1984/5): 142-49.

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privilege,<sup>5</sup> but for several generations (Dioscorus insists) it faithfully met its public tax requirements.<sup>6</sup> And in the mid-sixth century, for reasons unknown, Aphrodito was enjoying the special patronage of the empress Theodora.<sup>7</sup>

(1.2) The pagarchs living in Antaeopolis, now the capital city of the merged nome, seem to have resented the village's autopraxia, and the papyri show that the pagarchs often violated Aphrodito's special tax-status.<sup>8</sup> The pagarchs were able to do so with some degree of impunity because the pagarchs were, in effect, powerful.<sup>9</sup> The pagarch's official responsibilities, as mentioned above, were the financial affairs of a nome, especially the taxes. The pagarch came from the nobility of the area and always had an honorific title. He or she was probably selected by the nobles, bishop, and corn-buyer of the capital city of the nome. And the selection could have been based upon the amount of land the candidate

<sup>5</sup> *P.Cair.Masp.* I 67019 suggests that under Emperor Leo (r. 457–474) Aphrodito was granted exemption from the pagarch's jurisdiction; see Bell 1944, 24; Jones 1964, 358.

<sup>6</sup> *P.Cair.Masp.* I 67002, line 18.

<sup>7</sup> See esp. the discussion of the evidence by Maspero, intro. to *P.Cair.Masp.* III 67283, pp. 15-17; cf. Bell 1944, 31; Keenan 1984a, 54.

<sup>8</sup> See especially *P.Cair.Masp.* I 67019 verso and III 67283 (petitions to the emperor Justinian and to the empress Theodora); *P.Cair.Masp.* I 67024 (a rescript from the emperor Justinian to the duke of the Thebaid); and *P.Lond.* V 1677 and *P.Cair.Masp.* I 67002 ("two of his grandest pieces of prose centering round this theme"; MacCoull 1988, 24).

<sup>9</sup> The following description of the office of pagarch is, admittedly, tentative and needs further investigation. It is based largely upon Liebeschuetz' careful interpretation of the papyri and imperial laws. See "The Origin of the Office of the Pagarch," *BZ* 66 (1973): 38-46; "The Pagarch: City and Imperial Administration in Byzantine Egypt," *Journal of Juristic Papyrology* 18 (1974): 163-68. Both these articles are reprinted in J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz, *From Diocletian to the Arab Conquest: Change in the Late Roman Empire* (Aldershot, U.K., 1990). For an incomplete list of pagarchs (with dates), see J. R. Martindale, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire* [=PLRE] (Cambridge 1971-92), vol. 3, 1498-99; cf. Liebeschuetz 1973, 43 note 48.

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owned (to cover any delinquencies in the tax collection). Once a candidate was selected, he or she was appointed by the praetorian prefect—an appointment that had to be confirmed by the emperor. Once the appointee was in office, the reigning duke of the region could issue orders to him or her and express any dissatisfaction to the emperor, but the duke could not remove the pagarch. And while the papyri show that there was a rapid turnover of dukes, the pagarchs of the nomes under his jurisdiction tended to remain in office for a long time.<sup>10</sup> The office was sometimes passed on hereditarily.<sup>11</sup> To enforce his work, the pagarch could and did employ local policemen, men from the provincial government, the private guards of large estate owners, and soldiers. Thus the pagarch—because of personal wealth, strong ties to the nobility of the community, the appointment by Constantinople, a relatively long term in office, and an armed “backup”—was a person whose disfavor was avoided. The conflicts that developed between Aphrodito and the pagarchs were neither trivial nor bloodless.

### (2) APOLLOS, FATHER OF DIOSCORUS

(2.1) Resistance against the injustices of the pagarchs seems to have begun already with Dioscorus’s father, Apollos. The papyrus document *P.Cair.Masp.* II 67126 reveals that on January 7, 541, Dioscorus’s father was in Constantinople,<sup>12</sup> the capital of the Byzantine Empire. “It is usual to

<sup>10</sup> See *ibid.*, 42. Liebeschuetz pointed out to me that it is difficult to say anything about the pagarch’s normal length of office; cf. PLRE, vol. 3, 1498-99.

<sup>11</sup> The “House” of the Apions had a permanent hold on the pagarchy at Arsinoe and sometimes held the pagarchy at Oxyrhynchus. See PLRE, vol. 3, s.vv. Apion 3, Apion 4, Strategius 10; *P.Oxy.* 133, 139, 1981, and probably 1829.

<sup>12</sup> The actual circumstance of the surviving document is Apollos’ borrowing of twenty *solidi* of gold from Anastasius, an imperial courtier and banker, for (probably) his return

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speculate,” says Keenan, “that Apollos’ presence in ‘the queen of cities’ had to do with his village’s pressing its claims to special tax status, *autopragia*, at the imperial court.”<sup>13</sup>

(2.2) Apollos was a landowner and entrepreneur.<sup>14</sup> Keenan explains that the papyri preserved by his son Dioscorus make it clear that:

He began with some inherited property, both from his father’s and from his mother’s side: a walled area in the village proper, leased out for use by a coppersmith; at least two plots of land in Aphrodite’s *pedion*. He in turn bequeathed to his own heirs property not readily identifiable with what he himself inherited: a vineyard and some pastures in the village’s southern plain, and an *epaulis* located south of the village.<sup>15</sup>

Acquiring land also by lease, Apollos managed and contracted out both his own and his leased plots. The property under his control extended beyond Aphrodito to the neighboring villages of Phthla and Thmonachthe.<sup>16</sup> He was not one of the largest landowners in Egypt—like the Apions at Oxyrhynchus or even Count Ammonius at Aphrodito—but Apollos appears

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home. For the details of this loan, see J. Keenan, “A Constantinople Loan, A.D. 541,” *BASP* 29 (1992a): 175-82.

<sup>13</sup> Keenan 1984b, 958; cf. 1992a, 176-77. Bell writes (1944, 31): “There was constant friction between village and pagarch and a tendency on the part of the latter to ignore the rights of the former. It was very likely one of these disputes which took Apollos to Constantinople in the autumn of 540.”

<sup>14</sup> The most complete *vita* of Apollos is by Keenan, “Aurelius Apollos and the Aphrodite Village Élite,” in *Atti del XVII congresso internazionale di papirologia*, vol. 3, 957-63. See also the extensive introduction and commentary by Traianos Gagos and Peter van Minnen of the papyrus *P.Vat.Aphrod.* 10 + *P.Mich.inv.* 6922, which involves Apollos: *Settling a Dispute: Toward a Legal Anthropology of Late Antique Egypt* (Ann Arbor 1994).

<sup>15</sup> Keenan 1984b, 960; cf. *P.Lond.* V 1691, 1692, 1697; *P.Cair.Masp.* III 67325; *P.Michael.* 40.

<sup>16</sup> For an examination of the evidence, see Keenan 1984b, 960 note 15.

to have been financially secure.<sup>17</sup>

(2.3) In addition to being a proprietor, Apollos engaged in local politics. A board of directors consisting of property owners, contributors, and the village headmen made the village's important decisions.<sup>18</sup> This board was responsible for the village's corporate taxes, defense, and order. The three groups above may have represented a *cursus honorum* ("political ladder"),<sup>19</sup> and Apollos is shown by the papyri to have climbed these titular rungs.<sup>20</sup> Around 541, Apollos was awarded the status designation *Flavius*.<sup>21</sup> It seems that, if Aphrodito were sending a representative to Constantinople to seek a solution for its tax conflicts with the pagarch, the father of Dioscorus was the right man to send.

### (3) RELIGIOUS LIFE

(3.1) Apollos was accompanied to Constantinople by a Christian priest, his nephew Victor. They may have gone to Constantinople

<sup>17</sup> For the Apions, see Alan Cameron, "The House of Anastasius," *GRBS* 19 (1978): 268-69; J. Gascou, "Les grands domaines, la cité et l'état en Égypte byzantine," *Travaux et Mémoires* 9 (1985): 1-90; T. Hickey, "Aristocratic Landholding and the Economy of Byzantine Egypt," in *Egypt in the Byzantine World*, 288-308 passim; G. Ruffini, *Social Networks in Byzantine Egypt* (Cambridge 2008), 94-146. For Count Ammonius, see Keenan 1984a, 55 and note 31. Liebeschuetz pointed out to me that in terms of land ownership the Apions and Count Ammonius were not remotely in the same league. The Apions were a leading house of the imperial senatorial aristocracy, and Ammonius merely a local rich man. For the financial well-being of Dioscorus's family, see Maspero 1911, 456-57; see also MacCoull 1988, 8.

<sup>18</sup> For a discussion of this *collegium*, see Keenan 1984a, 55-56.

<sup>19</sup> Keenan 1985a, 253 note 16; cf. 1984a, 55.

<sup>20</sup> Keenan 1984b, 959.

<sup>21</sup> *P.Cair.Masp.* II 67126; but see the questions raised by Keenan 1984b, 958-59. For a discussion of the status designations *Aurelius* and *Flavius*, see J. Keenan, "The Names Flavius and Aurelius as Status Designations in Later Roman Egypt," *ZPE* 11 (1973): 33-63; and *ZPE* 13 (1974): 283-304.

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indirectly, by way of a religious pilgrimage.<sup>22</sup> The speculation of a pilgrimage is supported by several considerations, not the least of which is the intensely religious atmosphere in which Apollos and Victor lived. One of the most visible features of Aphrodito in the papyri is its pervasive religious life. “Near the village were many monasteries,” writes Keenan, “and in the village proper the buildings most frequently named in the papyri are the churches.”<sup>23</sup> The village and its surrounding countryside had over thirty churches and nearly forty monasteries.<sup>24</sup> Dozens of nearby farms had names that suggest original religious or monastic settlers or owners.<sup>25</sup> Leslie MacCoull, Coptic historian, imagines the visual impact:

None remain standing; but in the sixth century this one Byzantine Egyptian city must have gleamed with white limestone and the

<sup>22</sup> Keenan 1984b, 958. For more on this trip, see idem, “A Constantinople Loan, A.D. 541,” *BASP* 29 (1992a): passim; C. Zuckerman, “Les Deux Dioscore d’Aphrodite ou les limites de la pétition,” in *La Pétition à Byzance*, ed. D. Feissel and J. Gasco (Paris 2004), 75-92; Ruffini 2008, 153-54.

<sup>23</sup> 1984a, 55, and see note 29. See also Gagos-Minnen 1994, 17.

<sup>24</sup> For more on monasticism in Egypt during the early Byzantine period, see Jones 1964, 929-33. For the papyrological sources, consult Montevicchi 1988, 291-92, 294-95, 581-82. Dioscorus’s own documents remain the best source of information on the Thebaid monks’ business and legal concerns. For the period between 450 and 650, one of the best (if somewhat outdated) reviews of the sources is the published dissertation by P. van Cauwenbergh, *Étude sur les moines d’Égypte, depuis le concile de Chalcédoine (451) jusqu’à l’invasion arabe (640)* (Paris 1914). For a comparison of the financial prosperity and spiritual poverty of the monks in Byzantine Egypt, see J. Goehring, “Monasticism in Byzantine Egypt: Continuity and Memory,” in *Egypt in the Byzantine World*, 390-407.

<sup>25</sup> MacCoull 1988, 7; citing S. Timm, *Das christlich-koptische Ägypten in arabischer Zeit*, vol. 3 (Wiesbaden 1985), 1438-1461. For the names of the churches and monasteries and the papyrological sources, see Calderini 1966, 325-40. Concerning the doctrinal beliefs of the churches and monasteries around Aphrodito (Chalcedonian or Monophysite), MacCoull remarks (1988, 7 note 22): “It is interesting that, for a period that later historians construe as one in which the confessional lines were so painfully sharply drawn, evidence for this situation does not appear in the documentary sources.”

columns and arches of basilicas along every vista. ... Aphrodito was a city of churches.<sup>26</sup>

(3.2) Not far from the village were the now renowned monastic sites of Bawit, Balayza, and Wadi Sarga.<sup>27</sup> A little north of Aphrodito was Hypselis, where in the sixth century Rufus wrote his extensive Bible commentaries.<sup>28</sup> Lycopolis (the Byzantine name of Asyut) was the hometown of Plotinus, whose extensive Neoplatonic writings were crucial to the development of Christian mystical philosophy.<sup>29</sup> In the other direction, about fifty kilometers south of Aphrodito, stood the famous White Monastery, which was founded in 440 by Shenoute, a vigorous and powerful Coptic abbot.<sup>30</sup> (The Coptic language was the last stage of the original Egyptian language, and the Coptic culture was Christian.) Across the river from the White Monastery lay Panopolis (the Byzantine name for

<sup>26</sup> MacCoull 1988, 7.

<sup>27</sup> The following description of the area around Aphrodito follows closely MacCoull 1988, 5-6. For a brief introduction to these monastic sites, especially their architecture, see R. Bagnall and D. Rathbone, eds., *Egypt: From Alexander to the Early Christians* (Los Angeles 2004), 172-182. For comprehensive examinations of church and monastic structures in Egypt, see P. Grossman, "Early Christian Architecture in Egypt and its Relationship to the Architecture of the Byzantine World," in *Egypt in the Byzantine World*, 103-36; idem, *Christliche Architektur in Ägypten* (Leiden 2002), passim. Alexander Badawy offers a concise study of the monastery at Bawit in *Coptic Art and Archaeology: The Art of the Christian Egyptians from the Late Antique to the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, MA, and London 1978), 258-60.

<sup>28</sup> See G. Garitte, "Rufus de Shotep," *Muséon* 69 (1956): 11-33.

<sup>29</sup> It was also the birthplace of Colluthus (fl. AD 491–518), author of the *epyllion* Ἐλένης ἄρπαγή *The Rape of Helen*. For the Greek text, French translation, and a detailed discussion, see P. Orsini, ed. and trans., *Collouthos: L'enlèvement d'Hélène* (Paris 1972).

<sup>30</sup> See S. Emmel, "Shenoute the Monk: The Early Monastic Career of Shenoute the Archimandrite," in *Il monachesimo tra eredità e aperture* (Rome 2004), 151-74; idem, *Shenoute's Literary Corpus*, 2 vols. (Leuven 2004).



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Akhmim), a cultural center and the hometown of Nonnus.<sup>31</sup> Nonnus of Panopolis, who was writing at the beginning of the fifth century A.D., was the author of the two most influential epics in the early Byzantine period. These were a verse paraphrase of the gospel of Saint John and the *Dionysiaca*, which recounts in hexameters the myths of Dionysus. Panopolis was also the birthplace of Cyrus, a popular poet, a consul in Constantinople (441), and later an exceptionally devout bishop in Phrygia. South of Panopolis and up the river's bend was the site of the first Christian monasteries, those established by Pachomius.<sup>32</sup> The monastic library of the Pachomian headquarters at Pbow (the Byzantine name for Faw Qibli) included the mystic *Vision of Dorotheus* (P.Bodmer XXIX), the Homeric epics, and the comedies by Menander.<sup>33</sup> And not far from this monastery, in the cliffs of Jebel Tarif, were found the Nag Hammadi gnostic codices.<sup>34</sup> It is evident that Aphrodito and its surrounding community were an important center and source not only for the culture

<sup>31</sup> It was also the birthplace of the poet Pamprepus (AD 440–484). For a text of his Greek poems, see H. Livrea, ed., *Pamprepus Panopolitani Carmina* (Leipzig 1979).

<sup>32</sup> For the beginnings of *coenobium* monasticism, see P. Rousseau *Pachomius: The Making of a Community in Fourth-Century Egypt* (Berkeley 1985). See also J. Gascou, "P.Fouad 87: les monastères pachômiens et l'état byzantin," *BIFAO* 76 (1976): 157-84.

<sup>33</sup> For discussions of excavations at Faw Qibli, see P. Grossmann, "The Basilica of St. Pachomius," *The Biblical Archaeologist* 42 (1979): 232-236; S. Emmel, "The 'Coptic Gnostic Library of Nag Hammadi' and the Faw Qibli Excavations," in *Christianity and Monasticism in Upper Egypt*, vol. 2: *Nag Hammadi - Esna*, eds. G. Gabra and H. Takla (Cairo 2010), 33-37.

<sup>34</sup> These Coptic documents, not all of which are gnostic, were buried around AD 400. For a discussion of their ties to the Pachomian monasteries in that area, see A. Veilleux, "Monasticism and Gnosis in Egypt," in *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity*, ed. B. Pearson and J. Goehring (Philadelphia 1986), 271-306.

of the Byzantine Empire,<sup>35</sup> but also for Christian living, writing, and thought.<sup>36</sup>

(3.3) Apparently many of Apollos' own business transactions involved monasteries and churches.<sup>37</sup> Then Apollos himself, just before his trip to Constantinople or soon after his return, renounced his seemingly successful career and entered the monastic life.<sup>38</sup> He entered a monastery that he himself had founded, the Monastery of the Holy and Christ-Bearing Apostles (later called, less formally, the Monastery of Apa Apollos). He gave responsibility for the monastery's legal affairs to his eldest son, the poet and lawyer Flavius Dioscorus.<sup>39</sup> Apollos, although

<sup>35</sup> With respect to the poets, Alan Cameron remarks: "The fact that so many of these poets came from the Thebaid suggests that there were some very competent schools and teachers there to foster the tradition; it is most unlikely that they *all* received their instruction in Alexandria." "Wandering Poets: A Literary Movement in Byzantine Egypt," *Historia* 14 (1965): 473 note 17.

<sup>36</sup> There is an enormous amount of monastic writing from the Byzantine period in Egypt that was transmitted to the modern age through the manuscript tradition. No comprehensive study of this literature has been made; but see P. van Cauwenbergh, *Étude sur les moines d'Égypte, depuis le concile de Chalcédoine (451) jusqu'à l'invasion arabe (640)* (Paris 1914). See also the remarks by C. A. Kuehn, "Egypt at Empire's End," review article of *Egypt in the Byzantine World, 300-700*, in *BASP* 46 (2009): 175-189.

<sup>37</sup> See *P.Lond.* V 1690; *P.Cair.Masp.* III 67307 (re-edited by Malz 1957, 353-54). The surviving papyri show that also his brother Besarion and his cousin-in-law Phoebammon leased church land. For Besarion: *P.Lond.* V 1705; cf. 1694 and *P.Cair.Masp.* I 67107 (where Besarion leases land privately owned by a priest). For Phoebammon: see the list of transactions in J Keenan, "Aurelius Phoibammon, Son of Triadelphus: A Byzantine Egyptian Land Entrepreneur," *BASP* 17 (1980), 151.

<sup>38</sup> For a discussion of the date of Apollos' entrance into monastic life, see Keenan 1984b, 958; idem 1992a, 176.

<sup>39</sup> *P.Cair.Masp.* I 67096; cf. *P.Cair.Masp.* I 67064. Bell 1944, 26-27, found evidence for a younger brother, Menas (*P.Cair.Masp.* III 67319.16; *P.Lond.* V 1702.2), and two sisters (*P.Lond.* V 1677.23; *P.Cair.Masp.* I 67108.7; II 67134). Martindale, at PLRE, vol. 3, s.v. Fl. Dioscorus 5, found evidence for only one brother, Phoebammon (*P.Cair.Masp.* II 67134; I 67109, 67024). Gagos-Minnen (1994, 11-12, 22-23, 38, fig. 1) found evidence

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continuing some secular involvements, remained a monk until his death in 546/7.<sup>40</sup>

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for another brother, Senouthes (*P.Cair.Masp.* III 67283.21; cf. I 67032.11, 22, 118). Ruffini 2008 repeats their identification of Senouthes, 170-72; but cf. Ruffini 2011. There is need for further research on Dioscorus's immediate family. For more on the monastery, see J. Gascou, "Documents grecs relatifs au monastère d'Abba Apollôs." *Anagennesis* 1 (2): 219-30.

<sup>40</sup> See *P.Cair.Masp.* I 67108.