A Coptic Magical Text for Virginity in Marriage: A Witness to "Celibate Marriage" from Christian Egypt*

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Abstract

The Rosicrucian Egyptian Museum in San Jose (CA) owns a small but important collection of unpublished Coptic papyri and parchments. One notable papyrus preserves a unique text in which the practitioner invokes an unnamed female figure to help a woman protect her "purity," "virginity," and "marriage." Although the specific context behind the text is not altogether clear and the appeal for virginity in marriage is curious and without parallel in other magical texts, one possibility is to see the text in light of the Christian practice of celibate marriage whereby a male and female entered into a non-sexual marriage.

Keywords

Coptic, amulet, magic, celibate marriage, celibacy

* We would like to thank Lorraine Katich at the Rosicrucian Egyptian Museum for permission to edit this papyrus and to publish an image of it. We would also like to thank Matthew McReynolds for bringing it to our attention and Frederic Krueger for helping us find Coptic attestations of παρθενία. Additionally, we would like to thank Jason Combs, Mark Ellison, John Gee, Zakarias Gram, and Ágnes Mihálykó, who all commented upon earlier drafts of this paper. Abbreviations used frequently throughout this article include: ACM = *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power* (ed. Marvin Meyer and Richard Smith; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); TM = Trismegistos Number (http://www.trismegistos.org).

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Introduction

The Rosicrucian Egyptian Museum in San Jose (CA) possesses one of the largest collections of Egyptian artifacts in the USA, with material spanning the Pharaonic through the Arabic periods.[1] Among the diverse artifacts on display in the museum is a small collection of Coptic texts.[2] One of these is particularly noteworthy because it contains a rather curious "magical" text (hereafter: P.Rosicr.Mag.Copt.). It can be readily identified as such due to certain genre-specific features: it begins with the performative phrase "I adjure" (ϯωρκ), widespread in magical invocations, and it contains the generic name marker (l. 13, ⲁ̄ ⲁ̄) that is common in Greek and Coptic magical formularies.[3] While the text begins with an appeal "to you" (pl. ⲉⲣⲱⲧⲉⲛ), the subject of the adjuration, identified as feminine and singular by later pronouns, is not made explicit anywhere in the text. As the invocation proceeds, the subject is appealed to as one who "guarded" (ϩⲁⲣⲉϩ) her "virginity" (ⲡⲁⲣⲑⲉⲛⲓⲁ; Gk. παρθενία), "purity" (ⲧⲃⲃⲟ), and "marriage" (ⲕⲁⲙⲟⲥ; Gk. γάμος); thus, the text seeks to help another individual (whose identity as a woman is clear from the use of the feminine possessive prefixes, ll. 3–5), similarly guard her "virginity," "purity," and "marriage," and employs the very same terms (although they are repeated in a different order). While spells for the protection of virginity or sexual purity are known from Christian Egypt,[4] an amulet for virginity within marriage is unattested, and, at first sight, rather paradoxical. Thus, the context in which this seemingly unique text was manufactured and produced is not immediately apparent. Nonetheless, while there could be a few different contexts in which it may have functioned, one distinct possibility is to understand it in light of the Christian practice of "celibate marriage"—a marriage that was not consummated and where the couple remained continent within the marital bond.[5] If such is the case, even

[1] On the museum and its collection, see its website: http://www.egyptianmuseum.org.

[2] There are six other Coptic texts in the collection: three letters written in the Fayumic dialect; a large text composed of multiple fragments that appears to preserve a list of some sort; a small fragment containing three lines that are largely effaced but are written in Akhmimic; and a small note or label for a container (?) in Sahidic.

[3] The symbol ⲁ̄ derives from Greek magical practice, where it was the abbreviation for δ(ε)ῖ(να) "so-and-so/NN," doubled to indicate ὸ/ἡ δεῖνα τῆς δεῖνα ("NN child of NN"). The equivalent full writing in Coptic is ⲛⲓⲙ ⲡ/ⲧⲫⲉ ⲛ̄ⲛⲓⲙ. See Jacco Dieleman, "What's in a Sign? Translating Filiation in the Demotic Magical Papyri," in *The Multilingual Experience in Egypt, from the Ptolemies to the 'Abbāsids* (ed. Arietta Papaconstantinou; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010) 127–52, at 132–34.

[4] See "Comparable Magical Material" below.

[5] As one of our anonymous reviewers pointed out, the term "celibate marriage" poses an etymological contradiction, since it is derived ultimately from the Latin *caelebs*, referring to an unmarried man who may or may not be sexually active, the equivalent of the modern English "bachelor." This meaning was still current until quite recently; the Oxford English Dictionary, a historical dictionary, gives the primary sense of "celibate" as "Unmarried, single; bound not to marry." This entry has not been updated since 1899, however, and the latest example usage is from 1882. The modern sense of the word in English is better reflected by the Merriam-Webster, which notes the primary sense as "not engaging in or characterized by sexual intercourse." It is this sense which has led to the scholarly use of the term "celibate marriage" to refer to a marital union not characterized by sexual activity.

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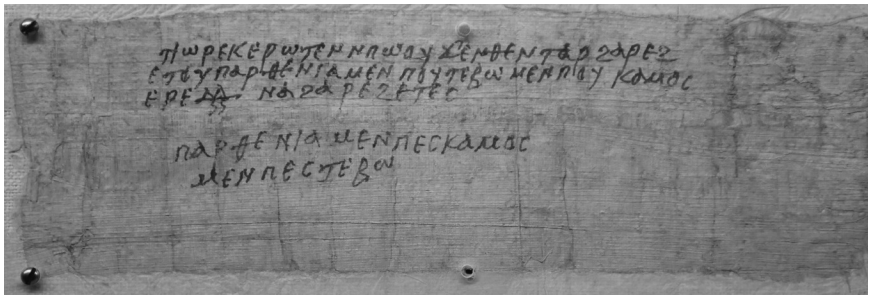
though there are no distinct Christian markers in the text, the feminine subject that is addressed at the start of the amulet could conceivably be Mary, the mother of Jesus, who eventually came to be regarded as an "ever-virgin" (ἀειπάρθενος) despite her marriage to Joseph.[6] Seen in this light, the text may well have been created for a woman involved in such a marriage and for whom Mary's help was invoked to keep her "virginity" and "purity" intact in "marriage." If this is the correct interpretation, P.Rosicr.Mag.Copt. is especially noteworthy as it would constitute the only direct piece of evidence for this practice outside of miscellaneous references by various church fathers.



P.Rosicr.Mag.Copt (recto). Reproduced with permission from Rosicrucian Egyptian Museum, San Jose, California, USA.

Description of P.Rosicr.Mag.Copt.

Due to the circumstances in which P.Rosicr.Mag.Copt. was acquired, the provenance of the piece is unknown.[7] While there are a few phonetic spellings and one grammatical feature that might suggest it was written somewhere in Upper Egypt, these are not conclusive.[8] The papyrus upon which the text is written measures

For example, see Anne P. Alwis, *Celibate Marriages in Late Antique and Byzantine Hagiography: The Lives of Saints Julian and Basilissa, Andronikos and Athanasia, and Galaktion and Episteme* (New York: Continuum, 2011) 10–12; cf. Dyan Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993) 3–4. This contradiction, present in the etymology of the word "celibate," if not in its modern English meaning, is paralleled by the idea present in the Greek and Coptic sources we discuss below that see "virginity" and "marriage" as natural opposites, and virginity in marriage as a paradox (either divine or dangerous, depending on the author).

[6] See n. 136.

[7] The papyrus is inventoried as RC-2643. The Master Artifact Record database of the Rosicrucian Egyptian Museum records that it was purchased as part of a lot of six Coptic manuscripts (nos. RC-2642-2647) for $150 on Oct. 13, 1952 from Ulrich Steindorff Carrington, the son of the Egyptologist Georg Steindorff, who had died in August of the previous year. The papyrus had been part of his father's collection. A preliminary description of the papyrus, as well as of at least two other Coptic papyri from the sale (RC-2644 & 2645), was made by Elinor Mullett Husselman later in 1952. We are very grateful to Julie Scott, Executive Director of the Rosicrucian Egyptian Museum, for providing us with access to their database records.

[8] Three of the other Coptic pieces in the collection are written in Fayumic and one in Akhmimic (see

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approximately 8 cm x 24 cm (H x W)[9] and is light brown in color. The papyrus survives almost intact, although the uninscribed right margin has sustained some damage, leaving the individual fibers visible. Between ll. 3 and 4 there is a distinct space of about 1 cm, but it is apparent that no text is missing as a single word is split between the two lines (ⲉⲧⲉⲥ|ⲡⲁⲣⲑⲉⲛⲓⲁ); it therefore appears that this space was due to damage to the papyrus that had already occurred before the text was inscribed.[10] There are a number of vertical folds on the papyrus in increments of ca. 2 cm that suggest that at one point it was folded up, which may imply that the text is an amulet, since amulets, often being portable, were frequently folded,[11] although there are also examples of formularies (texts consisting of one or more recipes) written on single sheets that are also folded.[12] The use of the generic name marker might imply a formulary, although examples of the copying of such paratextual material into amulets and other such applied texts is also attested.[13]

The five-line text is written clearly with a dark brown ink in a bilinear script, slightly inclined to the right, of the type often known as the "sloped majuscule." From the mid-point of l. 3 the strokes used to write the letters are noticeably thinner and lighter, perhaps indicating a change of ink or stylus or the sharpening of a reed pen. A few letters (notably theta, tau, upsilon, and djandja) have slight serifs. While the letters are generally well-spaced, some letters touch and theta-epsilon combinations are ligatured with the crossbar of theta extending and forming the crossbar of epsilon (ll. 1, 2, 4). Notable letterforms include djandja, which is written with a distinct hook at the top of the right oblique, and perhaps alpha, whose form varies throughout the text.[14] The text demonstrates several common non-standard orthographies (ⲅ > ⲕ, ⲟ > ⲱ, ⲧ > ⲧⲓ, and ⲉⲓ > ⲓ), the assimilation of ⲛ > ⲙ is not written (l. 1), and the short vowel indicated by a supralinear stroke in standard

n. 2), though it is unknown whether this text was donated as part of a group of texts or individually.

[9] There is a small upper margin of 0.9 cm and generous left and right margins of 3.7 and 6.9 cm, respectively, while the uninscribed lower margin is 2.5 cm in height.

[10] A similar phenomenon occurs in P.Oxy. 31.2601 (TM 32692; shortly after 23 February 303 CE). See also Brice C. Jones, "Scribes Avoiding Imperfections in their Writing Materials," *APF* (2015) 371–83.

[11] On the folding, tying, and wearing of earlier amulets, see Jacco Dieleman, "The Materiality of Textual Amulets in Ancient Egypt," in *The Materiality of Magic* (ed. Dietrich Boschung and Jan N. Bremmer; Morphomata 20; Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2015) 23–58.

[12] If we take the presence of the generic name marker (see n. 3) as a likely diagnostic sign of a formulary, then examples of folded Coptic formularies include HS Schmidt 1 (TM 98043; 4th–7th cents. CE), P.Berlin 8322 (TM 100006; 7th–9th cents. CE), and Vienna Nationalbibliothek K 192 (TM 91396; 7th–8th cents. CE).

[13] See, for example, Suppl.Mag. I 29, whose nature as an amulet is clear from its use of personal names in place of the generic name marker (l. 9), but which seems to have preserved the title from the formulary from which it was copied; and P.Kellis G I 87, an amulet which seems to preserve ritual instructions (David R. Jordan, "Intrusions into the Text of the Amulet 'P. Kellis G.' I 87?," *ZPE* 137 [2001] 34).

[14] The first alpha in l. 3 takes a rather irregular form but this might be due to imperfections on the papyrus.

Sahidic orthography is instead written using epsilon in several places. Overall the script and orthography are fairly regular and give the impression that the writer was reasonably competent.

The dating of informal Coptic hands poses numerous well-known problems; the type of script used here, the "sloped majuscule," seems to have developed from the angular "severe style" in the fourth century CE, but continued to be used and developed for Coptic texts into at least the twelfth century CE.[15] Alongside its use in documentary texts it is often found in what Walter C. Till called *Kleinliteratur*––"folk literature," liturgical texts, and proto-scientific works, including medical, magical, and alchemical texts.[16] While similarities to the hand may be noted in seventh-century manuscripts,[17] the closest parallels seem to be with liturgical texts from the ninth century, in particular Pierpont Morgan inv. M636, which can be dated with some likelihood based on its re-use of a protocol from the governorship of ʿUbayd Allāh (795–797 CE),[18] and P.Lond.Copt. 514, which likely dates to the patriarchate of Michael III (880–907 CE).[19] Although both of these hands represent more formal versions of the hand appearing in P.Rosicr.Mag.Copt., there are notable similarities, in particular the distinctive serifs on the upsilon, delta, tau, and djandja, and the narrow theta which is ligatured to the following letter (cf. P.Lond.Copt. 514 verso, l. 2). Based on these comparanda, a ninth-century date seems most likely, although it might equally be placed in the late eighth or early tenth centuries. Such a date would coincide with the period of the greatest production of literary texts attesting to the discourse of celibate marriage in Egyptian Christianity (discussed below), which tend to come from the eighth to the eleventh centuries.[20]

[15] See Anne Boud'hors, "L'onciale penchée en copte et sa survie jusqu'au XVe siècle en Haute-Égypte," in *Scribes et Manuscrits du Moyen-Orient* (ed. François Déroche and Francis Richard; Paris: Bibliotheque Nationale de France, 1997) 117–33; Ágnes T. Mihálykó, "Writing the Christian Liturgy in Egypt (3rd to 9th cent.)" (PhD diss., University of Oslo, 2017) 56–61.

[16] Walter C. Till, "Koptische Kleinliteratur," *ZÄS* 77 (1942) 101–11, at 101.

[17] See P.Lond.Copt. 445 (TM 86134; ca. 620 CE) and P.Lond.Copt. 467 (TM 83563; 7th cent. CE).

[18] While this manuscript is not fully published, a discussion of the date, as well as photographs, may be found in Perrine Pilette and Naïm Vanthieghem, "À propos de la datation du Manuscrit Pierpont Morgan Inv. M636. Édition d'un protocole arabe inédit," *JCoptS* 17 (2015) 147–52.

[19] While this text is in Greek, its late date and context mean that it closely resembles contemporary Coptic hands. For its date, see Mihálykó, "Writing the Christian Liturgy," 60.

[20] Maged S. A. Mikhail, *The Legacy of Demetrius of Alexandria: 189–232 CE; The Form and Function of Hagiography in Late Antique and Islamic Egypt* (Routledge Studies in the Early Christian World; London: Routledge, 2017) 42.

Edition of P.Rosicr.Mag.Copt.

Provenance unknown, 8.0 cm x 24.0 cm (H x W), Late Eighth–Early Tenth Centuries CE

→ ⲧⲓⲱⲣⲉⲕ ⲉⲣⲱⲧⲉⲛ ⲛⲓⲱⲟⲩ ⲭⲉ ⲛⲑⲉ ⲛⲧⲁⲣⲍⲁⲣⲉⲍ
ⲉⲧⲟⲩⲡⲁⲣⲑⲉⲛⲓⲁ ⲙⲉⲛ ⲡⲟⲩⲧⲉⲃⲱ ⲙⲉⲛ ⲡⲟⲩⲕⲁⲛⲟⲥ
ⲉⲣⲉ ϯ ϯ ⲛⲁⲍⲁⲣⲉⲍ ⲉⲧⲉⲥ-
(vac.)
ⲡⲁⲣⲑⲉⲛⲓⲁ ⲙⲉⲛ ⲡⲉⲥⲕⲁⲛⲟⲥ
5 ⲙⲉⲛ ⲡⲉⲥⲧⲉⲃⲱ

1. *l.* ϯⲱⲣⲕ; *l.* ⲛⲓⲱⲟⲩ. 2. Gk. παρθενία; *l.* Gk. γάμος; *l.* ⲧⲃⲃⲟ. 3. *l.* Gk. δεῖνα δεῖνα. 4. Gk. παρθενία; *l.* Gk. γάμος. 5. *l.* ⲧⲃⲃⲟ.

Translation

I adjure you (pl.) today, that, just as you (fem. sing.) guarded your virginity and your purity and your marriage, NN daughter of NN will guard her virginity and her marriage and her purity.

Notes

1. ⲧⲓⲱⲣⲉⲕ ⲉⲣⲱⲧⲉⲛ ⲛⲓⲱⲟⲩ. Illocutive performative phrases of this type, using first person verbal forms, are common in Greek and Coptic magical texts, especially at the beginning of invocations. The verbs used tend to be verbs of either invocation—calling upon the named power—or adjuration—placing the power under an obligation comparable to an oath.[21] In Greek texts, the most common verbs of adjuration are ὁρκίζω[22] and ἐξορκίζω,[23] while Demotic does not seem to use a directly comparable form.[24] Coptic texts use either the Greek loanwords, the verb ⲱⲣⲕ[25] or its causative equivalent ⲧⲁⲣⲕⲟ.[26]

In this context, ⲱⲣⲕ is always followed by an object indicated by the preposition ⲉ-/ⲉⲣⲟ. Grammatically, the addressee here is plural, although the following possessive pronouns (ⲡⲟⲩ-, ⲧⲟⲩ-) are feminine singular, which would seem more

[21] For a useful discussion of the concept of adjuration, see Scott Shauf, *Theology as History, History as Theology: Paul in Ephesus in Acts 19* (BZNW 133; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2005) 202–11.

[22] For example, see *PGM* I.305–312; III.226; IV.978, 3205; VII.5.

[23] See *PGM* I.225; III.10; IV.3235; VII.478.

[24] The equivalent in Demotic texts may be *twy ḥwy ḫyṯ r.r=k* ("I cast divine fury against you"), found in *PDM* xiv.224, 277, 656, 1036, 1125.

[25] For example, see London Ms.Or. 6795 ll. 29–30 (TM 100018; 6th–7th cents. CE); P.Baden V 123 ll. 7–8, 34–35 (TM 102087; 7th–8th cents. CE); P.Baden V 138 l. 11, 14 (TM 102077; 10th–11th cents. CE); P.Heid.Inv.Kopt. 685 5.12 (TM 102074; 10th cent. CE); Vienna, Nationalbibliothek K 8686 recto l. 7 (TM 91422; 10th cent. CE); Cologne, Papyrussammlung P.1470 l. 14 (TM 102255; 7th cent. CE).

[26] See P.Lond.Copt. 524 ll. 65–66, 94 (TM 98056; 4th–9th cents. CE); Rossi's Gnostic Tractate 7.18 (TM 98062; 6th–11th cents. CE); BKU I 8 l. 18 (TM 63027; 7th–9th cents. CE).

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appropriate for the figure we take to be the most likely object of the adjuration, the Virgin Mary. The use of a plural pronoun here is thus surprising and might be understood either as an indicator of respect, or as a mistake, arising from a mechanical use of the plural in a formulaic phrase. While the use of the second person plural for a singular addressee as an indicator of respect is not discussed in any grammar of Coptic, and does not seem to have been treated at any length in print, it is found in certain documentary texts from at least the seventh century, presumably as a borrowing from Greek, where it is standard by the sixth century CE.[27] Nonetheless, a number of other Coptic magical papyri alternate in usage between a second person singular and plural form of address without any obvious motivation, indicating either confusion (a lack of mastery of the language or register) or, perhaps more likely, a lack of care when reproducing formulaic phraseology.[28] Here we suggest that the use of a plural is an error, although the possibility that it is used meaningfully in deference to the status of the adjured being must be borne in mind as a possibility; a future study of pronoun usage in such texts, though beyond the scope of this discussion, may provide a more definitive answer.

The female identity of the addressee is unusual and deserves comment. Female deities are regularly called upon in older Greek magical texts, and several Coptic texts mention Isis[29] or the Virgin Mary, or feature the practitioner speaking in the person of Mary.[30] In these examples, however, they do not invoke or adjure either Isis or Mary as a power. Such direct invocations and adjurations of female beings in Coptic magical material are much rarer; there seems to be only one example in the corpus of 304 manuscripts published in 2017 by Roxanne Bélanger Sarrazin,[31]

[27] See, for example, O.Mon.Epiph. 163 (7th cent. CE), a letter where the address formula makes it clear that there is one recipient, Epiphanius, despite the fact that the plural second person pronoun is used to address him, one linguistic marker of respect among several others used in this text. Compare the examples from the Papas Archive (late 7th cent. CE) published in Anne Boud'hors et al., "Un nouveau depart pour les archives de Papas. Papyrus coptes et grecs de la jarre d'Edfou," *BIFAO* 117 (2017) 87–121, in particular no. 4, which varies between the use of the plural and the singular to address the singular addressee, the pagarch Papas. For the Greek usage, see Henrik Zilliacus, *Selbstgefühl und Servilität. Studien zum unregelmässigen Numerusgebrauch im Griechischen* (Commentationes Humanarum Litterarum 18.3; Helsinki: 1953) 73–75. We are very grateful to Anne Boud'hors, Jean-Luc Fournet, Marja Vierros, and Sonja Dahlgren for providing us with help in finding these references.

[28] See P.Kell.Copt. V 35 (5th cent. CE), which uses a second person plural pronoun in ll. 7–8 despite using a singular pronoun elsewhere. The same phenomenon can be found in ACM 104 l.8 (6th cent. CE); ACM 111 ll. 4–8 (8th cent. CE); ACM 121 ll. 17–19 (8th cent. CE).

[29] For a list of these, see Lincoln H. Blumell and Korshi Dosoo, "Horus, Isis, and the Dark-Eyed Beauty: A Series of Magical Ostraca in the Brigham Young University Collection," *APF* (2018) 199–259, at 257–59.

[30] The most notable of these are attestations of the so-called "Prayer of Mary at Bartos." For discussion and further bibliography, see Marvin Meyer, "The Prayer of Mary Who Dissolves Chains in Coptic Magic and Religion," in *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World* (ed. Paul Mirecki and Marvin Meyer; RGRW 141; Leiden: Brill, 2002) 407–15.

[31] Roxanne Bélanger Sarrazin, "Catalogue des textes magiques coptes," *APF* 68 (2017) 367–408.

and the subject in this case is a female demon adjured to leave a patient alone.[32] A second, unpublished invocation calls upon a female power, perhaps the Greek goddess Artemis, to protect the user.[33] Invocations to Mary are found, however, in a group of Greek amulets offering healing and protection from disease and demonic forces, and dating to between the third and seventh centuries, which address or invoke Mary either alone, with other Christian figures such as saints, or with God.[34]

The third element, "today," appears in several Greek materials,[35] but becomes very standard in Coptic performative phrases.[36] The use of this adverbial element may be tied to the concern for immediacy common in magical texts—compare "now, now, quickly, quickly"(ἤδη ἤδη ταχὺ ταχύ),[37] a regular element at the end of invocations—a demand that the request be carried out as soon as possible.

The writing of ⲱⲣⲕ and ⲉⲣⲱⲧⲏ̄ with epsilons between the two final consonants is not particularly diagnostic; these kinds of writing are common in standard Bohairic and Fayumic, although Kahle notes that they are found extensively in non-literary texts from Ashmunein and further north.[38] In regards to ⲡⲱⲟⲩ, Crum[39] and Westendorf[40] note forms with the vowel sequence ⲱⲟⲩ as Sahidic with Akhmimic influence, Akhmimic, and Lycopolitan, although Kasser notes the same form as appearing in a Bohairic text.[41] The predominance of forms from southern dialects might suggest an origin in Upper Egypt for this text, although the substitution of omicron and omega in non-standard Coptic is widespread.

ⲛⲧⲁⲣϩⲁⲣⲉϩ. For reasons discussed below (see "Comparable Magical Material"), the concept of virginity as something that needed to be especially "guarded" or "kept" (ϩⲁⲣⲉϩ ≈ φυλάσσω)[42] does not seem to occur in Egyptian-language texts before the advent of Christianity. It does appear by at least the third century BCE in Greek language texts, for example in Callimachus's *Hymn to Artemis*, in which

[32] P.Heid.Kopt. 685 9.13–20 (TM 102074; 10th cent. CE).

[33] Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale Suppl. Grec. 1340 (TM 145245; 5th cent. CE). An edition of this text is in preparation by Korshi Dosoo.

[34] Theodore S. de Bruyn, "Greek Amulets from Egypt Invoking Mary as Expressions of 'Lived Religion,'" *JCSCS* 3–4 (2012) 55–69. The most explicit invocation is found in P.Köln VIII 340 (TM 61663; 5th–6th cents. CE) ll. 1–3: "We invoke you (ἐ[πικαλοῦ]μέν σε), God, and Mary the Theotokos."

[35] For example, see *PGM* VII.546; cf. *PGM* III.51; XII.65; LXI.22.

[36] P.Heid.Inv.Kopt. 678 ll. 10, 14 (TM 102077; 10th–11th cents. CE); Cologne, Papyrussammlung P. 1470 l. 14 (TM 102255; 7th cent. CE); BKU I 1 l. 4 (TM 105606; 7th–9th cents. CE); BKU I 9 ll. 4, 14 (TM 98050; 7th–9th cents. CE).

[37] In Coptic texts this is found in ACM 46, 48, 66, 76, 97, to give only a few examples.

[38] Paul E. Kahle, *Bala'izah: Coptic Texts from Deir el-Bala'izah in Upper Egypt* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954) 52–54.

[39] Walter E. Crum, *A Coptic Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939) 730a, s.v. ϩⲟⲟⲩ.

[40] Wolfhart Westendorf, *Koptisches Handwörterbuch* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 1965/1977) 403.

[41] Rudolph Kasser, *Compléments au Dictionnaire Copte de Crum* (Bibliothèque d'études coptes 7; Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1964) 103 (731a).

[42] For this equivalence, see Crum, *Coptic Dictionary*, 707b, s.v. ϩⲁⲣⲉϩ.

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he recounts how the goddess asked Zeus to "allow [her] to guard [her] virginity forever" (l. 6: δός μοι παρθενίην αἰώνιον . . . φυλάσσειν).

The concept seems to become more common in Christian texts. Its use in two contexts is particularly relevant for our discussion here. Several texts refer to Mary, mother of Jesus, as having "kept/guarded" her virginity even in motherhood. Gregory Thaumaturgus claims that "the Holy Virgin carefully guarded the lamp of virginity" (ἐπιμελῶς γὰρ ἡ ἁγία Παρθένος τὴν λαμπάδα τῆς παρθενίας φυλάττουσα),[43] while Basil of Caesarea insists that the example of the vulture shows that it is not impossible for "a virgin to give birth, keeping her virginity immaculate" (παρθένον τεκεῖν, τῆς παρθενίας αὐτῆς φυλαττομένης ἀχράντου),[44] and John of Damascus refers to Mary as "she who kept her virginity unblemished in childbirth" (τῆς ἐν τῷ τίκτειν φυλαξάσης τὴν παρθενίαν ἀλώβητον).[45]

In other contexts, individuals in non-sexual marriages are described as "protecting" their virginity. Thus, in Palladius's *Lausiac History,* Amoun tells his wife on their marriage night that they should sleep separately "so that [they] may please God, keeping [their] virginity untouched" (ἵνα καὶ τῷ θεῷ ἀρέσωμεν φυλάξαντες ἄθικτον τὴν παρθενίαν),[46] while, in the *Life of Julian and Basilissa,* Julian exhorts his bride to accept the commands of Christ "so that we may guard <our> virginity" (ἵνα τὴν παρθενίαν . . . φυλάξωμεν).[47] This language recurs in the Coptic *Life of Abba John Khame*, in which the holy man explains to his wife that if they "guard [their] virginity" (ⲉⲩϣⲟⲡ ⲁⲛϣⲁⲛⲧⲁⲣⲉϥ ⲉⲧⲉⲛⲓⲡⲁⲣⲑⲉⲛⲓⲁ), they will receive the inheritance of the righteous.[48] In the Coptic *Life of the Virgin Mary*, the Theotokos is described as being welcomed into Paradise by the male and female virgins "who guarded their virginity" (ⲛⲧⲁⲩⲥⲁⲣⲉϥ ⲉⲧⲉⲩⲓⲡⲁⲣⲑⲉⲛⲓⲁ),[49] and likewise, in the Coptic *Apocalypse of Paul*, those who "guard the purity of their virginity"

[43] Gregory Thaumaturgus, *In annuntiationem sanctae virginis Mariae* 2 (*S. P. N. Gregorii cognomento Thaumaturgi, opera quae reperiri potuerunt omnia* [ed. J.-P. Migne; PG 10; Paris: Imprimerie catholique, 1857] 1157.19–20).

[44] Basil of Caesarea, *Homiliae in hexaemeron* 8.6.32–33 (*Basile de Césarée. Homélies sur l'hexaéméron* [ed. S. Giet; 2nd ed.; SC 26; Paris: Cerf, 1968] 462).

[45] John of Damascus, *In dormitionem sanctae Dei genitricis Mariae orationes* 14.23–24 (*Opera homiletica et hagiographica* [ed. Bonifatius Kotter; vol. 5 of *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*; PTS 29; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1988] 531).

[46] Palladius, *h. Laus.* 8.2 (*Palladio. La storia Lausiaca* [ed. Gerhardus J. M. Bartelink; Verona: Fondazione Lorenzo Valla, 1974] 42).

[47] François Halkin, "La passion ancienne des saints Julien et Basilisse," *AnBoll* 98 (1980) 241–96, at 250 ll. 11–12.

[48] Margaret H. Davis, "The Life of Abba John Khamé: Coptic Text Edited and Translated from the Cod. Vat. Copt. LX," *PO* 14 (1920) 317–72, at 327 [15.15]; cf. 330 [18.11], 331 [19.8].

[49] Forbes Robinson, *Coptic Apocryphal Gospels* (Cambridge: University Press, 1896) 34, fr. IV.76 (Coptic), 35 (trans.); cf. *The Discourse on Mary Theotokos by Cyril, Archbishop of Jerusalem*, in *Miscellaneous Coptic Texts in the Dialect of Upper Egypt* (ed. and trans. Ernest A. Wallis Budge; London: British Museum, 1915) 68 ll. 1–5 (Coptic), 645 (trans.).

(ϵⲧⲛⲁϩⲁⲣⲉϩ ϵⲡⲧⲃⲃⲟ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲩⲡⲁⲣⲑⲉⲛⲓⲁ) are described as dwelling in Paradise with the children slain by Herod.[50]

2. ϵⲧⲟⲩⲡⲁⲣⲑⲉⲛⲓⲁ. The word ⲡⲁⲣⲑⲉⲛⲓⲁ does not seem to occur in the primary Sahidic translation of the Bible; παρθενία is instead translated as ⲙ̄ⲡ̄ⲧⲡⲁⲣⲑⲉⲛⲟⲥ (Jer 4:2), ⲙ̄ⲡ̄ⲧⲣⲟⲟⲩⲛⲉ (Sir 42:10, Luke 2:36), or even ⲟⲩⲁⲁⲃ (Sirach 15:2: ⲛⲑⲉ ⲡⲟⲩⲥϩⲓⲙⲉ ⲉⲥⲟⲩⲁⲁⲃ < ὡς γυνὴ παρθενίας). Nonetheless, it does appear in a number of documentary, literary, and magical texts.[51] It always seems to refer, for both men and women, to the state of being without sexual experience in a fairly literal fashion.[52] In the testament P.KRU 67 (seventh or eighth century CE), for example, a father describes the problems in his son's marriage as being due to the fact that the παρθενία of his son's wife was "not intact" at marriage (l. 22: ⲧⲉⲥⲡⲁⲣⲑⲉⲛⲓⲁ ⲟⲩⲟⲭ ⲁⲛ). In the *Martyrdom of Apater and Erai*, Erai is dragged to a tavern (ⲙⲁ ⲡ̄ⲕⲁⲡⲏⲗⲟⲥ) by a soldier who "desires to do violence and undo her virginity" (ⲉⲫⲟⲩⲱϣ ⲉ̄ⲑⲉⲃⲓⲟⲥ ⲟⲩⲟϩ ⲉ̄ⲃⲱⲗ ⲉ̄ⲃⲟⲗ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲥⲡⲁⲣⲑⲉⲛⲓⲁ̄),[53] while in the *Encomium of Pisentius* the fallen angels are said to have "abandoned the perfume of virginity" (ⲉⲁⲩⲭⲱ ⲛⲥⲱⲟⲩ ⲙ̄ⲡⲥⲏⲙⲟⲩϥⲓ ⲛ̄ⲧⲡⲁⲣⲑⲉⲛⲓⲁ) and "mixed with the pollution of women" (ⲁⲩⲙⲟⲩⲭⲧ ⲛⲉⲙ ⲡϣⲟⲗⲉⲃ ⲛ̄ⲛⲓϩⲓⲟⲙⲓ).[54] These passages strongly suggest that ⲡⲁⲣⲑⲉⲛⲓⲁ in Coptic refers to literal virginity rather than simply continence, a point which will be discussed further below.

ⲡⲟⲩⲧⲉⲃⲱ. The form ⲧⲉⲃⲟ for Sahidic ⲧ̄ⲃⲃⲟ is listed by Crum as Fayumic,[55] but by Kasser simply as non-standard Sahidic.[56] We see here the same writing of ⲟ as ⲱ observed above in ⲙ̄ⲡⲟⲟⲩ, and the same use of ϵ for the standard supralinear stroke seen in ⲱⲣⲕ (l. 1) and ⲙ̄ⲛ̄ (ll. 2, 4, 5).

Of the various Greek terms for which the noun ⲧ̄ⲃⲃⲟ stands in translated literature,[57] the most relevant here seems to be ἁγνεία, literally "purity," but with a secondary meaning of "chastity,"[58] which is regularly associated with παρθενία in Christian literary texts. Although the pairing does not seem to be biblical, it begins

[50] *Miscellaneous Coptic Texts* (ed. and trans. Budge), 534 l. 26 (Coptic), 1054 (trans.).

[51] For the occurrences of παρθενία in Coptic magical texts, see "Comparable Magical Material" below.

[52] This is despite texts that extend "virginity" of the body to speak of, for example, a comparable requirement of spiritual virginity, e.g., the *Life of Julian and Basilissa,* in which Basilissa reports that "the virginity of the flesh has no power wherever resentment of the heart resides" (1.13.29–30: οὐδὲν ἰσχύει ἡ παρθενία τῆς σαρκὸς ὅπου οἰκεῖ ὀργὴ καρδίας). A rare exception to the literal meaning of "virginity" occurs in the Coptic translation of the *Encomium on John the Baptist* attributed to John Chrysostom, in which Jesus is said to have "made a prostitute into a virgin" (ⲟⲩⲡⲟⲣⲛⲏ ⲁⲕⲁⲁⲥ ⲛ̄ⲧⲡⲁⲣⲑⲉⲛⲟⲥ; *Coptic Apocrypha in the Dialect of Upper Egypt* [ed. and trans. Ernest A. Wallis Budge; London: British Museum, 1913]135 ll. 16–17 [Coptic], 342 [trans.]).

[53] Henri Hyvernat, *Les Actes des martyrs de l'Égypte* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1886) 98 l. 20.

[54] Émile Amélineau, "Un évêque de Keft au VIIe siècle," *Mémoires de l'Institut Égyptien* 2 (1889) 261–423, at 379 ll. 9–11.

[55] Crum, *Coptic Dictionary,* 399a.

[56] Kasser, *Compléments,* 62b: S_{vl} = "Sahidique, langue vulgaire ou *lapsus*."

[57] Crum, *Coptic Dictionary,* 400a.

[58] *PGL* s.v. ἁγνεία, sense B.

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to appear regularly around the fourth century in reference to the male and female virgins who formed part of Christian congregations. Eusebius speaks of those women who dedicate themselves to God, "practicing absolute purity and virginity" (ἁγνείαν παντελῆ καὶ παρθενίαν ἀσκήσασαι),[59] while Cyril of Jerusalem says that those who receive the reward ("crown"; στέφανος) for "virginity and purity" will shine like angels (ἀναγραφαῖς ἔχει παρθενία καὶ ἁγνεία, καὶ μέλλεις λάμπειν ὡς ἄγγελος).[60] The *Apostolic Constitutions* lists "those that are in purity and virginity" (τῶν ἐν παρθενίᾳ καὶ ἁγνείᾳ) alongside the widows and those who are married as the beneficiaries of a prayer.[61] This language recurs in the *Lausiac History,* in which Amoun instructs his bride in "the principles of virginity and purity" (περὶ παρθενίας καὶ ἁγνείας εἰσηγεῖτο λόγον).[62]

The pairing of "purity" with "virginity" continues in Coptic texts which were probably influenced by this Greek discourse. As we have seen, the *Apocalypse of Paul* speaks of the post-mortem rewards of those who "guard the purity of their virginity" (ⲉⲧⲛⲁϩⲁⲣⲉϩ ⲉⲡⲧⲃⲃⲟ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲩⲡⲁⲣⲑⲉⲛⲓⲁ),[63] while in the *Life of Abba John Khame*, the holy man prays to the Lord to remain "in the purity of virginity" (ϩⲉⲛ ⲟⲩⲧⲟⲩⲃⲟ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉ ⲧⲡⲁⲣⲑⲉⲛⲓⲁ), and in the final address his "perfume" (ⲥⲧⲟⲓ ⲛⲟⲩⲫⲓ) is said to have spread abroad like a lily from the "purity of [his] virginity" (ⲡⲧⲟⲩⲃⲟ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲕⲡⲁⲣⲑⲉⲛⲓⲁ).[64] Other occurrences associate "purity and virginity" not with ordinary virgins, but rather with the Virgin Mary herself. Thus, for example, in the Coptic *Discourse of Mary Theotokos* attributed to Cyril of Jerusalem, Jesus promises to cause the angels to hymn his mother constantly, "for [she] resembles them in [her] purity and in [her] being a virgin" (ϫⲉ ⲉⲣⲧⲛ̄ⲧⲱⲛ ⲉⲣⲟⲟⲩ ϩⲙ̄ ⲡⲟⲩⲧⲃⲃⲟ ⲙ̄ⲙⲏ ⲧⲟⲩⲁⲓ ⲛ̄ⲧⲡⲁⲣⲑⲉⲛⲟⲥ).[65]

3. ⲉⲣⲉ ⲁ ⲁ ⲛⲁϩⲁⲣⲉϩ. Although this form resembles a second future, its function is clearly optative or jussive, expressing a wish or command, rather than one of contrastive emphasis, the normal function of the second future in Coptic. This usage has recently been treated extensively by Leo Depuydt, who notes it as a particular feature of the southern dialects (Sahidic, Akhmimic, and Lycopolitan/Subakhmimic).[66]

[59] Eusebius, *Dem. Ev.* 3.6.21 (*Die Demonstratio evangelica* [ed. Ivar A. Heikel; vol. 6 of *Eusebius Werke*; GCS 23; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1913] 135).

[60] Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catecheses ad illuminandos* 15.23 (*S. Patris Nostri Cyrilli Hierosolymorum archiepiscopi opera quae supersunt omnia* [ed. Willhelm Karl Reischl and Joseph Rupp; 2 vols.; Munich: Lentner, 1848–1860] 2:186).

[61] Apos. Con. 8.12.44 (*Les constitutions apostoliques* [ed. and trans. Marcel Metzger; 3 vols. SC 320, 329, 336; Paris: Cerf, 1985–1986] 3:202).

[62] Palladius, *h. Laus.* 8.2 (*Palladio. La storia Lausiaca* [ed. Bartelink], 42).

[63] Budge, *Miscellaneous Coptic Texts*, 534 l. 26 (Coptic), 1054 (trans.).

[64] Davis, "Life of Abba John Khamé," 327 [15 ll. 9–10], 367 [55 ll. 13–15].

[65] Budge, *Miscellaneous Coptic Texts*, 67 ll. 25–27 (Coptic), 645 (trans.).

[66] Leo Depuydt, "A New Verb Form in Coptic," in *From Gnostics to Monastics: Studies in Coptic and Early Christianity in Honor of Bentley Layton* (ed. David Brakke, Stephen J. Davis, and Stephen Emmel; OLA 263; Leuven: Peeters, 2017) 213–44.

Comparable Magical Material

Magical texts that aim to manipulate sexual relationships have a long history in Egypt,[67] and the extensive corpus of Greek and Demotic material from the Roman period presents us with over one hundred examples.[68] The largest subset of these are "love spells," which may be defined as those texts whose aim is to attract a desired sexual partner, or to maintain exclusive sexual and romantic claims upon an existing partner,[69] although a smaller number of spells in this broad category are aimed at separating couples.[70] Both of these types continue to appear in the later Coptic material, but in addition we find a few instances of two almost entirely new variants: spells designed to reconcile separated couples,[71] and spells intended to prevent individuals from having sexual intercourse with one another.

We are aware of seven surviving Coptic examples of this last type of recipe, and at least one Greek example. The Greek text, found in a fourth-century CE handbook,[72] is intended to prevent a woman from "ever being had by another man" (ἐὰν θέλῃς γυναῖκας οὐ μὴ σχεθῆναι ὑπὸ ἄλλου ἀνδρός) and involves placing a clay crocodile in a lead coffin with *voces magicae* along with the request written upon it. The request here names the woman, but also the client (assumed to be male), and so has much in common with binding love spells which demand that the victim have sex only with the client.[73] Two similar examples are found in a ninth- or tenth-century Coptic handbook; the first is for a man whose wife is sinning against him (ⲧⲉⲃⲥⲓⲛⲓ ⲉⲣⲛⲁⲃⲓ ⲉⲣⲁⲃ),[74] and is aimed at ensuring that "no-one [else] will be able to sleep with her" (ⲛⲟⲩⲁ ⲛⲉⲯⲕⲁⲧ ⲛⲉⲙⲁⲥ), while the second is for

[67] The earliest-known published love spell from Egypt was found in Deir el-Medinah and dates to the Twentieth Dynasty (1186–1069 BCE); see Paul Smither, "A Ramesside Love Charm," *JEA* 27 (1941) 131–32.

[68] For an introduction to love spells in the Greek-speaking world, see Christopher A. Faraone, *Ancient Greek Love Magic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

[69] For this latter category, see *PGM* VII.191–192; *PDM* xiv.335–355, 355–365, 1190–1193, 1194–1195; cf. *PGM* VII.405–406, 661–663.

[70] *PGM* XII.365–375, XIII.239–242, LXVI.1–11, CXXVIa.1–21, CXXVIb.1–17; *PDM* xii.50–61, 62–75. For Coptic examples, see Egyptian Museum JdE 42573 1.1–16, 2.20–23, 4.11–17 (TM 102268; 10th–11th cents. CE); P.Bosson (TM 316184; 6th–8th cents. CE); Leiden F 1964/4.14 v.16–7, 18–20 (11th cent. CE; edited in Michael Green, "A Late Coptic Magical Text from the Collection of the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, Leiden," *Oudheidkundige Mededelingen* 67 [1987] 29–43); London Hay 10391 83–86, 89–90 (ACM 127; TM 100015; 6th–7th cents. CE); Louvre E.l4.250 (ACM 109; TM 99997; 10th cent. CE). For Greek examples, see the discussion in Christopher A. Faraone, "The Agonistic Context of Early Greek Binding Spells," in *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion* (ed. Christopher A. Faraone and Dirk Obbink; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) 3–32, at 13–14.

[71] E.g., Egyptian Museum JdE 42573 2.1–5; Leiden F 1964/4.14 verso 11–12 (see n. 70).

[72] *PGM* XIII.320–326.

[73] Compare in particular *PGM* XXXVI.283–294; cf. *PGM* IV.352–353, VII.911–12.

[74] ACM 135 l. 260 (recipe no. 10). Cf. Naqlun N. 41/97, an unpublished parchment text containing eight recipes, the first of which is intended to return an unfaithful or insubordinate wife to her husband; see Jacque van der Vliet, "Les Anges du Soleil," *Études Coptes* 7 (2000) 319–27, at 320–21.

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dealing with a man who is "chasing after a woman" (ⲟⲩⲣⲱⲙⲉ ⲉⲃⲡⲏⲧ ⲉⲩⲥⲓⲙⲓ),[75] and aimed at ensuring that "he will no longer chase after strange women" (ⲙⲉⲃⲡⲏⲧ ⲥϩⲓⲙⲓ ⲛϣⲉⲙⲁ)—that is, presumably, he will ignore women other than his wife. An interesting counter-example is found in a slightly later codex, with the title "a binding of a bridegroom" (ⲟⲩⲙⲟⲩⲣ ⲛⲛⲉⲙⲫⲓⲟⲥ); the editor suggests that its goal was to prevent the consummation of a marriage.[76]

Three texts, two applied and one recipe, include the names of both the woman and the man with whom she is not to have intercourse. These are, for the most part, phrased as curses against the man's potency:[77] he is to be unable to have intercourse, he must be unable to ejaculate, his penis is to shrivel to become "like an ant," and so on. In two of these, the term virginity (παρθενία) is used; the man is to be unable to "release" (ⲃⲱⲗ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ) the virginity of the woman.[78] In addition to binding the man's virility, the example that survives as a recipe also binds the woman, or more specifically, her "virginity" (ⲡⲁⲣⲑⲉⲛⲓⲁ); by being magically "bound" (ⲙⲟⲩⲣ), it cannot be "released."[79]

All of these examples share the commonality of preventing sexual contact; in this sense they are almost inverse love spells. It is not clear, however, that they all come from the same social contexts. The first examples we considered were explicitly intended for the use of individuals in relationships, and intended to prevent their partners from having intercourse with other, unnamed individuals. It is less clear that the later examples, however, belong to this context, especially in view of the fact that "virginity" is mentioned in two of them. It is of course possible that "virginity" here should not be understood in a strict sense; that is, it could refer to the woman remaining a "virgin" only with respect to the specific named male, or remaining "virginal" only while their partner is absent. But as discussed above, ⲡⲁⲣⲑⲉⲛⲓⲁ in Coptic does seem to refer to an absolute lack of sexual experience rather than simply continence. This suggests that the spells mentioning παρθενία are in fact

[75] ACM 135 l. 269 (recipe no. 19).

[76] Cairo 42573 recipe III (fol. 1 r 6–10; TM 102268; 10th–11th cents. CE); Émile Chassinat, *Le manuscrit magique copte no. 42573 du Musée égyptien du Caire* (Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1955) 28–31; cf. P.Heid.Inv.Kopt. 678 verso (TM 102077; 11th cent. CE), which contains a curse whose final phrase ⲙ̇ⲡⲁⲧⲉϥⲃⲱⲕ ϣⲁⲧⲉϥⲥⲓⲙⲓ (l. 22: before he has gone to his wife) implies that it may be intended to prevent a husband from consummating his marriage. Greek parallels include *PGM* V.304–369 (TM 64368; 4th cent. CE), a binding spell whose purposes include ensuring that a particular man does not marry a particular woman (329–330: ὅπως μὴ γαμήσῃ τὸν δεῖνα ἡ δεῖνα).

[77] ACM 85 (TM 99574; 9th–11th cents. CE). In addition to the specific curse (Pharaouō must not have intercourse with Touaein), the victim is cursed to be unable to have sex with "any woman" (l. 9: ⲗⲁⲁⲩ ⲛⲥϩⲓⲙⲉ). See also ACM 86 (TM 99576; 967 CE); ACM 87 (TM 99577; 7th–11th cents. CE) ll. 11–12.

[78] ACM 87 ll. 11–12: "Neither shall he be able to undo the virginity of Seine the daughter of Moune" (ⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲛⲉϥⲏϣ ⲃⲱⲗ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲛⲧⲡⲁⲣⲑⲉⲛⲓⲁ ⲛⲥⲉⲓⲛⲉ ⲧϣⲉ ⲛⲙ̣ⲟⲩⲛ̣ⲉ). For the second example, see the following note.

[79] ACM 86 ll. 25–28: "And you shall bind the virginity of NN (female); NN (male) shall not be able to undo (her) virginity until the virginity of the Holy Virgin is undone" (ⲕⲉⲙⲟⲩⲣ · ⲡⲁⲣⲑⲉⲛⲓⲁ ⳅ̄ⳅ̄ ⲛⲉⳅ̄ ⲛⲁⲉϣ ⲃⲱⲗ ⲉ̄ⲃ̄ⲁ̄ⲗ̄ ⲡⲁⲣⲑⲉⲛⲓⲁ ϣⲁⲛⲧⲟⲩⲃⲱⲗ ⲉ̄ⲃ̄ⲁ̄ⲗ̄ · ⲡⲁⲣⲑⲉⲛⲓⲁ ⲛ̄ⲡⲁⲣⲑⲉⲛⲟⲥ ⲉⲧⲟⲩⲁⲁⲃ).

intended to "protect" women who were virgins. It is possible to imagine that the spells would have been used by sexual rivals who wanted to ensure that they would have the opportunity to "undo" the girl's virginity themselves—virgins were the stereotypical victims of love spells in literary texts—and such a motivation may lie behind the spells which aim to prevent a man from consummating his marriage with his wife. In most cases, though, we might expect that a rival suitor would be more likely to turn to a love spell.

This leaves the woman's own family as perhaps the most likely commissioners of such a spell. It may be that the importance of young women's sexual innocence for the honor of their family and her future marriage possibilities (and the economic prospects which depended upon them) could have motivated family members to use magic to prevent her from having pre-marital intercourse with less than desirable men.[80] This possibility might also explain why this particular type of text appears only in Coptic texts, produced in a Christian milieu, and not in the earlier Greek or Demotic material. Several scholars have noted that virginity does not seem to have been accorded the same value in traditional Egyptian society as it had in Greek, Roman, and later Christian culture;[81] the paradigm of Egyptian femininity, Isis, was said to have had intercourse with her brother-husband Osiris in the womb, and was thus, in a sense, never a virgin.[82] By contrast, virginity was an ideal in the broader Greek- and Latin-speaking world, and even more so in Christianity: Mary, the mother of Jesus, is explicitly invoked as an example in one of these "virginity spells": "[the man] must not be able to release the virginity [of the woman] until the virginity of the Holy Virgin is released."[83] It is possible that this shift in the ideological valuation of virginity may have led to the development of a new type of magical spell, intended to preserve the virginity of young women.

The present text displays some clear similarities to the examples discussed above; like them, it is intended to prevent sexual activity, employs the word παρθενία, and uses the example of the virginity of a female divine being as a mythic precedent for the virginity of the woman at whom the spell is targeted. But there are also notable differences: first, while the "virginity-spells" discussed above function primarily by binding a male victim, our text is intended to function by causing the female

[80] That this was a concern for some parents may be implied by a passage from the *Apocalypse of Paul* which describes "those who defiled their virginity (ⲛⲧⲁⲩⲭⲱϥ ⲛⲛⲉⲩⲛⲏⲧⲡⲁⲣⲑⲉⲛⲟⲥ) before they were given to husbands and before they were of age to be married, neither did their parents know of their doings," being given necklaces of fire to wear in hell (Coptic version in Budge, *Miscellaneous Coptic Texts,* 542 ll. 24–31 [Coptic], 1063 [trans.]). For a discussion of this motif in apocalyptic literature more widely see Martha Himmelfarb, *Tours of Hell: An Apocalyptic Form in Jewish and Christian Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983) 103–4.

[81] Lyn Green, "In Search of Ancient Egyptian Virgins: A Study in Comparative Values," *JSSEA* 28 (2001) 90–98; Janet H. Johnson, "Sex and Marriage in Ancient Egypt," in *Hommages à Fayza Haikal* (ed. Nicolas-Christophe Grimal et al.; Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 2003) 149–59.

[82] Joachim F. Quack, "Der pränatale Geschlechtsverkehr von Isis und Osiris sowie eine Notiz zum Alter des Osiris," *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur* 32 (2004) 327–32.

[83] ACM 86 ll. 25–28; see n. 79.

target to protect her own virginity with the assistance of the adjured female power. Secondly, it is not her virginity alone which is to be protected, but her "virginity, her marriage, and her purity." As we have seen, references to "virginity and purity" are common in discussions of consecrated virgins, but "marriage" is, at first glance, surprising here, given that sexual intercourse is typically understood as a necessary constituent part of marriage, to the extent that marriage itself is often cast as the opposite of virginity. While we might be dealing here with a "fidelity-spell" of the type dealt with above—to prevent a woman from having intercourse with other men—this seems unlikely, given the apparent specificity of the term παρθενία. This leads us to suggest another potential context for the amulet, the phenomenon of celibate marriage that existed in late antique Christianity.

Spiritual and Celibate Marriages

For the purposes of our discussion here we will divide marriages in which sexual renunciation was practiced by Christians into two types. The first type, the "spiritual marriage," was a union contracted between two individuals, at least one of whom had already committed themselves to celibacy. By contrast, a "celibate marriage" was one in which two individuals married and subsequently decided to remain celibate and to never consummate the marriage. In practice, our sources do not always distinguish clearly between the two (or even variations among them),[84] but it is a distinction worth noting, not least because the two practices often attracted different evaluations by patristic authors.[85] While the former was roundly criticized for endangering committed virgins by presenting them with the temptations of married life, the second was praised for introducing virginal purity into the married state.

According to one definition, "spiritual marriage" was embodied in "the domestic relations under which two self-professed ascetics of different sexes decided upon chaste cohabitation."[86] This union was designated in various church fathers primarily by reference to the female partner; in the East they were pejoratively referred to as συνεισάκτοι ("those brought in together")[87]—whence the term *syneisaktism* to refer to the practice—and in the West primarily as *virgines subintroductae*,

[84] One variant of celibate marriage could be a "continent marriage" where a couple married, had children, but then decided to renounce sexual relations. For example, Paulinus of Nola and his wife Therasia renounced their conjugal rights in ca. 390 CE after having at least one child (Augustine, *Ep.* 31.6, 127.9). Jerome likewise praised Theodora and her husband Lucinius for eventually renouncing sexual relations in their marriage (*Ep.* 75.2). Gregory of Nazianzus hailed his sister Gorgonia in her funeral oration for combining celibacy and marriage; after bearing five children she and her husband renounced their conjugal rights. See *In laudem sororis suae Gorgoniae*, *Orationes* 8.

[85] Cf. Kate Cooper, *The Fall of the Roman Household* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) 175, who discusses challenges and problems associated with terminology used to describe asexual marriages in late antiquity.

[86] Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage*, 3; cf. Derrick S. Bailey, *Sexual Relation in Christian Thought* (New York: Harper, 1959) 33.

[87] *PGL* s.v. συνείσακτος.

literally "virgins surreptitiously brought in."[88] Though it has been argued that 1 Corinthians 7:36–38 can be read as evidence for apostolic sanction of *syneisaktism*,[89] unambiguous examples of this union do not emerge until the third century.[90]

The first clear reference to this practice appears in a letter of Cyprian from the middle of the third century. In this letter (*Ep*. 4) Cyprian replies to a priest named Pomponius regarding a question about excommunication.[91] Pomponius had informed Cyprian that he recently excommunicated a deacon because it had come to his attention that he was cohabitating with a consecrated virgin, apparently even sharing the same bed, although both maintained that they had preserved their virginity.[92] Cyprian censures the practice and credits Pomponius with having taken the correct course of action in excommunicating the deacon.[93]

By the beginning of the fourth century the practice was common enough that the Councils of Elvira (306 CE) and Ancyra (314 CE) issued specific canons against it;[94] the practice was condemned once again at the first ecumenical council of Nicaea (325 CE).[95] In fact, between the fourth and eighth centuries, over twenty councils explicitly condemned the practice, which might suggest that it was fairly widespread.[96] Though it is sometimes assumed that the practice effectively ended in

[88] Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage*, 32 n. 56. Other pejorative titles included *agapetae* ("beloved"), *mulieres adoptivae* ("adopted women"), or *mulieres extraneae* ("women from without"). See Rosemary Rader, *Breaking Boundaries: Male/Female Relationship in Early Christian Communities* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983) 62 n. 2; cf. Antoine Guillaumont, "Le nome des 'Agapètes,'" *VC* 23 (1969) 30–37.

[89] Hans Achelis, *Virgines subintroductae. Ein Beitrag zum VII. Kapitel des I. Korintherbriefs* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1902). For a history of the interpretation of this passage, see Elliot, *Spiritual Marriage*, 23 n. 22; on the patristic interpretation of this passage, see Elizabeth A. Clark, "John Chrysostom and the *Subintroductae*," *CH* 46 (1977) 171–85, at 174–75.

[90] From the middle of the 2nd cent. there is a passing reference in the *Shepherd of Hermas* (Herm. Sim. 9.11.3 [88.3]), in which his female companions inform him that he can sleep with them, but "as a brother and not as a husband" (κοιμηθήσῃ ὡς ἀδελφὸς καὶ οὐχ ὡς ἀνὴρ ἡμέτερος). On this passage, see Pierre de Labriolle, "Le 'mariage spirituel' dans l'antiquité chrétienne," *Revue Historique* 137 (1921) 204–25, at 210. See also Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 1.6.3; Pseudo–Clement, *Ep*. 1.10; 2.1, 10; Tertullian, *Exh. cast.* 12; *Mon*. 16; Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.18.6.

[91] Cyprian, *Ep*. 4 (ca. 250–258 CE; *Opera omnia: S. Thasci Caecili Cypriani opera omnia* [ed. Guilelmus de Hartel; CSEL 3.2; Vienna: Geroldi, 1871] 472–78). See also *Ep*. 13.5.1 and 14.3.2.

[92] *Ep*. 4.1.

[93] Cyprian, *Ep*. 4. A short time later Paul of Samosata was condemned at the Council of Antioch (ca. 268 CE) in part because, according to Eusebius, he had cohabited with "*syneisaktoi* (συνεισάκτους), as the residents of Antioch call them"; *Hist. eccl.* 7.30.12 (*Eusèbe de Césarée. Histoire ecclésiastique* [ed. Gustave Bardy; SC 41; Paris: Cerf, 1955] 217).

[94] Council of Elvira Canon 27 (on this canon, see Samuel Laeuchli, *Power and Sexuality: The Emergence of Canon Law at the Synod of Elvira* [Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1972] 129), and Council of Ancyra Canon 19.

[95] Council of Nicaea Canon 3.

[96] de Labriolle, "Le 'mariage spirituel,'" 222 n. 1.

the sixth or seventh century, as the *Novellae constitutiones* of Justinian outlawed it,[97] there is evidence that forms of this practice may have lingered beyond this time.[98]

In the later fourth and fifth centuries we have the most explicit evidence for the practice from the church fathers, as well as the most blistering attacks. All three Cappadocian fathers—Gregory of Nyssa,[99] Basil of Caesarea,[100] and Gregory of Nazianzus[101]—were aware of it and condemned it; the latter, at somewhat of a loss to describe the practice, referred to such marriages as "ambiguous unions" (ἀμφίβολοι συζυγίαι).[102] But the most caustic reference comes from Jerome. In a letter to Eustochium, who had asked how the "plague" of *agapetae* came to be within the church, Jerome calls the agapetae "one-man whores" (*meretrices univirae*) and "a race of novel concubines" (*novum concubinarum genus*).[103] Chrysostom devoted two treatises to the subject, the only two such discussions devoted to the subject that have survived from antiquity.[104] Chrysostom's treatment of the practice is more moderate than Jerome's caustic statements, even though, like Jerome, he is thoroughly opposed to it. For Chrysostom, unmarried men and women living together and even sharing the same bed not only looked very bad, but could potentially lead to weaknesses of the flesh and immorality. While he conceded that some such couples remained pure and chaste, he also alleged that the women involved in such unions periodically required the services of a midwife.[105]

While the church fathers were almost unanimously opposed to "spiritual marriages," their attitudes toward "celibate marriages" were quite different. Unlike the former, these were legal marriages where a male and female joined in a union and were accorded the status of a married couple, but chose sexual renunciation within the marriage.[106] This type of asexual marriage may have had its origins as

[97] Justinian, *Nov.* 123c29.

[98] Roger E. Reynolds, "*Virgines Subintroductae* in Celtic Christianity," *HTR* 61 (1968) 547–66; Claudia Bornholdt, *Saintly Spouses: Chaste Marriage in Sacred and Secular Narrative from Medieval Germany (12th and 13th Centuries)* (Tempe, AZ: ACMRS, 2012).

[99] Gregory of Nyssa, *De virginitate* 23.

[100] Basil of Caesarea, *Ep.* 55.

[101] Gregory of Nazianzus, *Epig.* 10–20 (*Sancti Patris Nostri Gregorii Theologi, vulgo Nazianzeni, Archiepiscopi Constantinopolitani, opera quae exstant omnia* [ed. J.-P. Migne; PG 38; Paris: Imprimerie catholique, 1862] 85–93).

[102] Gregory of Nazianzus, *Epig.* 15 (*Sancti Patris Nostri Gregorii Theologi, vulgo Nazianzeni, Archiepiscopi Constantinopolitani, opera quae exstant omnia*, 89–90).

[103] Jerome, *Ep.* 22.14 (*Sancti Eusebii Hieronymi Stridonensis Presbyteri opera omnia* [ed. J.-P. Migne; PL 22; Paris: Imprimerie catholique, 1845] 402–3).

[104] *Refutation Directed against those Men Cohabiting with Virgins* and *On the Necessity of Guarding Virginity*. On the dating of these texts, see Clark, "John Chrysostom and the *Subintroductae*," 175; see also Elizabeth A. Clark, *Jerome, Chrysostom, and Friends: Essays and Translations* (New York: Mellen, 1979) 160.

[105] John Chrysostom, *Fem. reg.* 2; cf. 5. In *Ep.* 22.13, Jerome also notes that the wombs of such "virgins" sometimes swelled.

[106] Alwis has noted that in general there was not a technical term or phrase used to identify this kind of marriage by church fathers or in hagiographical writings (*Celibate Marriages*, 63). However, the Coptic *Life of Abba John Khame* refers to its protagonist's celibate marriage as a "spiritual"

early as the second century with the emergence of the Encratite movement. For example, in the *Shepherd of Hermas* the author is told by an angel to henceforth treat his "wife" (σύμβιος) as a "sister" (ἀδελφή).[107] While various third-century references to celibate-like marriages could be cited,[108] one of the most well-known examples is found in the *Acts of Thomas* 11–13 where Christ, in the form of Thomas, preaches sexual renunciation to a couple on their wedding night to which they mutually agree.[109] Another notable example comes from an anonymous third-century writer in North Africa who composed a homily that drew on the language of the hundredfold, sixtyfold, and thirtyfold harvests in Jesus's parable of the sower (Matt 13:8, 23, 29);[110] here it was argued that the hundredfold reward was for virgins, the sixtyfold reward was for chaste widows, and the lowest tier was only for the married who had renounced sexual relations and lived in a celibate marriage—married couples who were sexually active were apparently disqualified from reward.[111] The fourth and fifth centuries brought forth a number of well-known examples of celibate marriages. Paulinus of Nola, in an *epithalamium* for Julian of Eclanum and his bride-to-be Titia, enjoins them from the start of the marriage to renounce sexual relations and to agree on a "compact of virginity" (*concordia virginitatis*).[112] Elsewhere, Paulinus praises married couples who had renounced sexual relations and lived as "brother and sister."[113]

Celibate Marriages in Egypt

Turning specifically to the evidence for Egypt, there are a number of stories from the fourth through the tenth centuries that describe "celibate marriages," although we have been unable to find explicit references to "spiritual marriages."[114] The earliest attested example of a celibate marriage in Egypt appears in the anonymous *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto* (ca. 396/397 CE) and Palladius's *Lausiac History*

(ⲡⲛⲉ(ⲉⲩⲏ)ⲁⲧⲓⲕⲟⲛ [πνευματικόν]) or "immaterial union" (ⲟⲩϩⲱⲧⲡ ⲧⲙⲛⲧⲁⲧϩⲩⲗⲏ [privative ⲁⲧ + ὕλη]); see Davis, "Life of Abba John Khamé," 327 [15 ll. 9, 12].

[107] Herm. Vis. 2.2.3 (6.3).

[108] Methodius, *Symposium (Convivium decem virginum)* 9.4 (*Méthode d'Olympe. Le Banquet* [ed. Herbert Musurillo and Victor-Henri Debidour; SC 95; Paris: Cerf, 1963] 278–79), registers continent couples in the vision of the elect. Cf. *Sententiae Sexti* 230a and b; Clement, *Strom.* 6.45–49.

[109] On the 3rd-cent. date of this text, see J. Keith Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) 442.

[110] *De centesima, sexagesima, tricesima*. This text was preserved among the writings of Cyprian. For a discussion, see Melissa Harl, "The Hundredfold Reward for Martyrs and Ascetics: Ps.-Cyprian, *De centesima, sexagesima, tricesima*," StPatr 36 (2001) 94–98.

[111] David G. Hunter, *Marriage, Celibacy, and Heresy in Ancient Christianity: The Jovinianist Controversy* (OECS; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) 114–15.

[112] Paulinus of Nola, *Carm.* 25.233 (*Paulini Nolani Carmina* [ed. Franz Dolveck; CCSL 21; Turnhout: Brepols, 2015] 660).

[113] Paulinus of Nola, *Ep.* 18.5.

[114] For a possible passing reference, see Athanasius, *Ep. virg.* (Syr.) 29.

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(ca. 420 CE). Both sources contain accounts, which some variations, of an Abba Amoun of Nitria (ca. 290–347 CE) who was forced to marry but convinced his new bride on their wedding night to live in a celibate marriage.[115] John Cassian likewise preserves with approval a story that was related by an Abba John from Scetis of a layman who was endowed with a special grace from God so that he could cast out all sorts of demons because although he had been married twelve years he had never consummated the marriage and "kept [his wife] a virgin and treated her as a sister" (*sororis loco a se virginem custodiri testabatur*).[116] While it is also alleged that the fourth-century Macarius the Great (ca. 300–390 CE), the famous ascetic who first settled at Wadi al-Natrun and then further south into the desert region, also had a celibate marriage, this is only claimed in his much later hagiography.[117] Along the same lines, another late hagiography tells the story of an Egyptian martyr named Julian who was executed in Antinoopolis during the Great Persecution (ca. 303–305 CE), and who lived in a celibate marriage.[118]

Writing in the late fourth century, Jerome claimed that the patriarchs of Alexandria were celibate and that those who were married had "abandoned their conjugal rights" (*aut si uxores habuerint, mariti esse desistunt*).[119] The best-known example, albeit from much later sources, of an Alexandrian patriarch who had allegedly lived in a celibate marriage is that of Demetrius (bishop ca. 189–232 CE).[120] The story of the patriarch's virginity seems to first appear in the *Encomium on Demetrius,* attributed to Flavian, bishop of Ephesus, and probably dating to the tenth century CE, before being further elaborated in later biographies.[121] Accused

[115] Palladius, *h. mon.* 22; *h. Laus*. 8. For an analysis of the variations preserved in the two accounts, which both agree that Amoun lived in a celibate marriage, see Susanna Elm, *'Virgins of God': The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity* (OCM; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) 325–27; Mikhail, *Legacy of Demetrius*, 38–39. In the later ecclesiastical histories of Socrates (*Hist. eccl.* 4.23) and Sozomen (*Hist. eccl.* 1.14), this story is picked up and retold with a few additional details.

[116] John Cassian, *Conf.* 14.7.4–5 (*Iohannis Cassiani. Conlationes XXIIII* [ed. Michael Petschenig; CSEL 13; Vienna: Geroldi, 1886] 403–4). Cf. *Conf.* 21.4.2–9.4.

[117] The 8th-cent. CE *Life of Macarius of Scetis* claims that on his wedding night he attempted to convince his new bride to live in a celibate marriage; she was less than thrilled with the idea of living in an asexual union, and this tension was only resolved by her untimely death shortly after the marriage. On this text and passage, see *Saint Macarius the Spiritbearer: Coptic Texts Relating to Saint Macarius the Great* (ed. and trans. Tim Vivian; Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004), §§ 7–9 (pp. 157–60). For the Coptic text of this treatise, see "Vie de Macaire de Scété," in *Histoire des monastères de la Basse-Égypte* (ed. and trans. Emil Amélineau; Annales du Musée Guimet 25; Paris: Leroux, 1894) 46–117.

[118] This account of Julian's celibate marriage and passio is contained in the *Life of Julian and Basilissa*; see Alwis, *Celibate Marriages*, 157–248, for the Greek text, translation, and notes. §§ 5–9 (pp. 188–91) detail the circumstances of the oath of celibacy in the marriage.

[119] Jerome, *Vigil.* 2 (*Adversus Vigilantium* [ed. J.-L. Feiertag; CCSL 79C; Turnhout: Brepols, 2005] 8). See also *h. mon.* 14.12–13 for another Egyptian example of someone abandoning their conjugal rights.

[120] Mikhail, *Legacy of Demetrius*, 32–33.

[121] For a discussion of the date of the text, see Mikhail, *Legacy of Demetrius*, 32–45, who also discusses the earlier and later traditions.

by his congregation of unworthiness due to his married state, Demetrius is commanded by an angel to reveal the "mystery" (μυστήριον) that exists between him and his wife. On the morning of Pentecost, Demetrius and his unnamed wife perform a miracle before the whole Christian community of Alexandria, passing a burning coal between their robes without their being burned. He then goes on to reveal that when they were married by Demetrius's parents, they agreed to forego a sexual relationship in order to be guaranteed a marriage that would continue into eternity in Paradise. Their celibacy is guaranteed by the presence of a "creature resembling a flying eagle" (ⲥⲟⲩⲍⲱⲟⲩ ⲛⲑⲉ ⲛⲟⲩⲁⲓⲧⲟⲥ ⲉϥϩⲏⲗ) that appeared in their bed each night, covering their bodies with its wings to prevent any shameful sights.[122] The identity of this "creature" is made explicit in the retelling of the story from the Arabic-language *Synaxarium* (thirteenth century CE), where it is called "the Angel of the Lord" (ملاك الرب).[123]

As one moves to the eighth through tenth centuries there are additional stories of Egyptian holy men, bishops, and patriarchs living in celibate marriages. The biography of Patriarch Khā'īl I (Michael: 743–767 CE) preserved in the Arabic *History of the Patriarchs* makes passing reference to a bishop of Gaugar named Abba Cyrus who lived with his wife in a celibate marriage for many decades while sharing the same bed.[124] John of Khame's (d. 859 CE) tenth-century hagiography contains an episode wherein he convinces his new bride on their wedding night to live in a celibate marriage.[125] Likewise, in the biography of Patriarch Mīnā II (956–974 CE), written by bishop Michael of Tinnīs (d. after 1055 CE), he convinces his new bride to live in a celibate marriage, although this only comes out when a certain group of followers reject his episcopal nomination on the grounds that he is already married; however, through an interview with his wife it is discovered that the marriage had never been consummated and so his appointment is approved.[126]

[122] *Coptic Martyrdoms in the Dialect of Upper Egypt* (ed. and trans. Ernest A. Wallis Budge; London: Longmans, 1914) 146 l. 17 (Coptic), 399 (trans.); see also the revised translation in Mikhail, *Legacy of Demetrius*, 128. Cf. Rev 4:6–8.

[123] René Basset (ed. and trans.), "Le Synaxaire arabe-jacobite (redaction copte)," *PO* 16 (1922) 185–424, at 219 ll. 5–6. Compare the similar story of John Khame, discussed below, whose telling in the *Synaxarium* includes the detail (absent in his Bohairic *vita*) that the "angel of the lord, like a bird" descended from heaven and spread its wings over John and his wife as they slept; see René Basset (ed. and trans.), "Le Synaxaire arabe-jacobite (redaction copte)," *PO* 3 (1909) 243–545, at 520 ll. 5–6. Interestingly, the son of the governor also sees men "like gold, in the likeness of eagles" (ὡσεὶ χρυσοῦς ὡς ὁμοίωμα ἀετῶν)—clearly angels—attending Julian in the *Life of Julian and Basilissa* 2.27.12.

[124] Basil T. A. Evetts (ed. and trans.), "History of Patriarchs of the Coptic Church. III. Agathon to Michael I (766)," *PO* 5 (1910) 1–215, at 206: "Abba Cyrus … had been married in his youth, and lived long with his wife in great devotion … And those two were pure virgins, sleeping on one bed for a long time."

[125] Davis, "Life of Abba John Khamé," 326–28 [14–16]. On the dating and composition of this text, see Maged S. A. Mikhail, "A Lost Chapter in the History of Wadi al-Natrun (Scetis): The Coptic *Lives* and Monastery of Abba John Khame," *Mus* 127 (2014) 149–85.

[126] *History of the Patriarchs of the Egyptian Church, Known as the History of the Holy Church*

Towards a Context for P.Rosicr.Mag.Copt.

The presence of the terms "virginity" and "marriage" in P.Rosicr.Mag.Copt., as well as the literary evidence from Egypt from roughly the same period that attests to the practice of celibate marriage, leads us to suggest that celibate marriage is the most likely context for its use. As noted in the textual commentary, it uses the same terminology—"protecting virginity" (ϩⲁⲣⲉϩ ⲉⲧⲡⲁⲣⲑⲉⲛⲓⲁ ≈ φυλάσσειν τὴν παρθενίαν) and "purity" (ⲧ̅ⲃⲃⲟ ≈ ἁγνεία)—that recurs in the accounts of celibate marriage recorded in the *Lausiac History, Life of Julian and Basilissa, Encomium on Demetrius* and *Life of Abba John Khame*, as well as other accounts of consecrated virgins and monks. Here we will briefly draw upon these parallels and attempt to describe possible lived contexts in which this "magical" text might have been used.

One of the key events in the accounts of celibate marriages is that which previous authors have called the "bridal chamber scene"—the moment in which the newly married husband and wife find themselves alone in their bridal chamber (νυμφών) after the wedding, and, rather than consummating their marriage, decide to dedicate themselves to celibacy.[127] As noted by Mikhail, while Western examples of the topos tend to have the wife persuading the husband to be celibate, the Egyptian texts generally reverse this, having the husband persuade the wife, who may nonetheless have come to the same decision independently.[128] The outcome is usually that the pair make an agreement, at times described as a pact (διαθήκη,[129] ⲥⲛⲓⲛⲉ[130]), often explicitly deciding to keep it secret from their families, who are generally the ones who arranged the marriage.

In addition to this basic format, there are two variants of interest to us here. The first is the phenomenon of prayers to God for assistance in keeping their virginity,[131] which may provide a parallel to the use of a "magical" invocation—the texts which we call "spells" usually are described as "prayers" in the texts themselves.[132] The second is the intervention of supernatural beings to assist the couple in keeping their oath. The most explicit of these is the appearance of an aquiline angel in the *Encomium of Demetrius,* a figure who recurs as an "angel of the Lord, like a bird" in the retelling of the life of John Khame in the *Synaxarium*.[133] Less clear in its function, but perhaps parallel, is the appearance of Jesus and Mary to Julian and Basilissa after they have pledged themselves to virginity, alongside virgins and angels who crown the couple in a second marriage ceremony and confirm their

by Sawīrus Ibn Al-Muḳaffa', Bishop of Al-Ašmūnīn: Vol. II. Part II, Khaël III – Šenouti II (A.D. 880–1066) (ed. and trans. Aziz S. Atiya et al.; Cairo: Société d'Archéologie Copte, 1948) 124–28.

[127] Alwis, *Celibate Marriages,* 114–15; Mikhail, *Legacy of Demetrius*, 36–42.

[128] Mikhail, *Legacy of Demetrius*, 38. See also John Cassian, *Conf.* 21.4.2–9.4 (see n. 116).

[129] Davis, "Life of Abba John Khamé," 331 [19.7].

[130] *The Encomium on Demetrius* in Mikhail, *Legacy of Demetrius*, 128 .

[131] *Life of Julian and Basilissa* 1.6. 4–11; Davis, "Life of Abba John Khamé," 326 [14.3–17].

[132] Examples of magical "spells" being internally referred to as "prayers" (ϣⲗⲏ, προσευχή) may be found in ACM 61 l. 1, ACM 68 sec. IV l. 1, and ACM 73 l. 249.

[133] For references, see n. 123.

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destiny among the heavenly virgins;[134] a still earlier example of this topos may be the appearance of Jesus to newlyweds in the *Acts of Thomas*.[135] These accounts thus represent the acceptance of a celibate marriage as a kind of "ritual" which involves three individuals—a wife, a husband, and God, who may be represented by an angel or saint.

The magical text contained in P.Rosicr.Mag.Copt. assumes likewise three figures, although they are not, perhaps, the same three as in the literary accounts of celibate marriage. The identity of the first figure, the practitioner who speaks the adjuration in the first person ("I"), is unclear. The second figure is the female being who is adjured in the second person ("you") as a paragon of married virginity and purity, who finds a parallel in the superhuman beings who assist the literary couples. The third is the female "target," referred to in the third person ("she, her"), who is to follow the example of the female being and keep her own married virginity and purity.

The likely identity of the adjured female being seems fairly apparent. While the most explicit hagiographical parallels have an angel perform the role of supernatural helper, such angels are always male, and so the most likely solution in this case seems to be the ever-virgin Mary.[136] While Mary is not appealed to as an explicit example for married virgins in the extant Egyptian evidence, she is often invoked as a model for virgins in general.[137] But as noted in the textual commentary, the language used to describe Mary is almost identical to that used for other virgins, and as we have seen, she appears to Julian and Basilissa in their *vita*, speaking to the bride just as Christ speaks to the husband. In this scene, she is accompanied by other virgins, among whom the couple are promised a place, and this link between Mary and the heavenly virgins recurs in the Coptic accounts of the virgins in heaven welcoming the Theotokos to Paradise, which use the same language of "purity" and "virginity."[138] Finally, we may also recall that one of the few other attested "virginity spells" makes an explicit reference to Mary,[139] who thus seems to be the most likely candidate for the adjured female being here.

[134] *Life of Julian and Basilissa* 1.7.

[135] Acts Thom. 11–13.

[136] In the earliest Christian sources Mary's virginity is assumed *ante partum* (Ign. *Eph*. 19.1; Justin, *Dial*. 87.2, 100.4–6 [cf. Matt 1:23 and Luke 1:27]). The *Protevangelium of James* from the 2nd cent. is the first text to put forth that Mary remained a virgin throughout her life (Prot. Jas. 9.1, 10; 13.1; 14.2, 16; 19.3–20.2). See also Clement, *Strom*. 7.16; Origen, *Comm. Matt.* 10.17. Mary's *perpetua virginitas* received a significant confirmation at the second Council of Constantinople in 553 CE in Canon XIV with the phrase "glorious and ever-virgin Mary mother of God" (ἐκ τῆς ἁγίας ἐνδόξου θεοτόκου καὶ ἀειπαρθένου Μαρίας; *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Generaliumque Decreta Editio Critica I. The Oecumenical Councils: From Nicaea I to Nicaea II (325–787)* [ed. Giuseppe Alberigo; Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2006] 177).

[137] See, for example, the *Discourse of St. Cyril on the Virgin Mary*: "come, Oh all you women who desire virginity (ⲉⲧⲉⲡⲓϣⲩⲛⲉ̀ ⲉⲧⲓ̅ⲡ̅ⲧⲡⲁⲣⲑⲉⲛⲟⲥ), emulate the example of Mary, the mother of my Lord" (Budge, *Miscellaneous Coptic Texts*, 143 [Coptic], 721 [trans.]).

[138] See "Notes" above.

[139] ACM 86 ll. 25–28 (text in n. 79).

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The female target is, as we have said, most likely a woman in a celibate marriage. This raises the interesting question of whether a parallel invocation once existed for such a woman's husband, addressing a male supernatural figure—Jesus, an angel, or a virgin saint—for the same purpose. While this remains a possibility, Alwis has noted that hagiographical accounts of celibate marriages usually focus on the woman as the key site for the preservation of and anxieties about virginity, and so it seems very possible that no such parallel male invocation ever existed.[140]

The identity of the practitioner in P.Rosicr.Mag.Copt. poses the most problems.[141] While we might imagine that the woman herself used the invocation, this seems unlikely, as spells asking for help for the speaker usually refer to the beneficiary in the first person.[142] Consequently, it seems that the practitioner was probably a different individual—either male or female; the woman's husband, or, perhaps more likely, a ritual specialist commissioned by the husband, the wife, or perhaps even another interested party. Here though we should note the theme of secrecy which often occurs in accounts of celibate marriages—the couple keep their decision secret from their family—and Alwis has noted that the very few known historical examples of celibate couples may confirm that such practices were often highly secretive, threatening as they did the reproductive role of the family, and confusing the spheres of virgin monastics and married laypeople.[143] For this reason it is possible that the husband, by definition already complicit in a celibate marriage, would be the most likely commissioner of a ritual of which this invocation was part. The issue of secrecy raises a second question: was the female target aware of the use of this adjuration? Or, like a love or separation spell, would one partner commission the ritual without the other's knowledge in an attempt to manipulate their behavior? That this could be the case is perhaps suggested by the "magical" form of the text.

The alternative would be to imagine a kind of formalized ritual, similar perhaps to the supernatural wedding scene in the *Life of Julian and Basilissa*, in which the couple pledged their commitment to married virginity in the presence of a ritual expert who read out the text. This would in turn imply that we are dealing with a text which might be better described as "liturgical," that is describing a formalized, if not official, public church ritual.[144] There are, indeed, many formal parallels

[140] Although we should note the existence of a "fidelity spell" for use against a male target (see n. 75), it is striking that the majority of such spells—both in formularies and applied texts—focus on female faithfulness. On the focus of hagiographies on female virginity, see Alwis, *Celibate Marriages,* 99–107.

[141] As David Frankfurter has noted (*Christianizing Egypt: Syncretism and Local Worlds in Late Antiquity* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018] 193–96), the producers and users of magical texts seem in many cases to have been monks, although we cannot exclude the participation of other categories of literate individuals. The predominance of monastic sites in the archeology of Christian Egypt may bias our evidence.

[142] See ACM 57a l. 1 ("send me (ⲛⲁⲓ) today Gabriel"); ACM 76 ll. 9–10 ("you will give a desire to me (ⲉⲣⲟⲓ)").

[143] See Alwis, *Celibate Marriages,* 63–65, 88–90.

[144] The definition of liturgical texts poses several problems, although there is some general

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between magical and liturgical texts, and the division between the two categories remains to be fully explored.[145] To some extent both represent, at least in the case of papyrological manuscripts, redescriptive categories used by modern scholars rather than categories explicit in the texts themselves. To name only the most obvious formal criterion of similarity, they both often use illocutive performative invocations in the first person, regularly using the same verbs—principally παρακαλέω. But we may note that while the texts categorized as "liturgical" usually have the practitioner speak in the first person plural,[146] "magical" texts usually involve the use of the first person singular—that is, in official Christian rituals the ritualist (bishop, priest, deacon, etc.) generally addresses God and his subordinate powers as the representative of his community, whereas in magical texts (as in private prayers), the ritualist addresses the supernatural power(s) as an individual.[147] P.Rosicr.Mag. Copt. also contains a second feature relevant to the liturgical/magical division, the use of an adjuration rather than an invocation. Adjurations do appear in liturgical texts, but not addressed to divine powers—prayers used to bless oil for healing in church rituals may use adjurations, but only against inanimate objects, such as oil, and hostile forces, such as venom, and never against God or his subordinate divine powers.[148] By contrast, adjurations regularly appear in Greek and Coptic magical

agreement among scholars in most cases about which texts should be described as such. For attempts at definitions, see Francesco Pedretti, "Introduzione per uno studio dei papiri cristiani liturgici," *Aeg* 35 (1955) 292–97; Mihálykó, "Writing the Christian Liturgy," 12–27.

[145] For some preliminary notes on the relationship between magical and liturgical texts, see *Ausgewählte Koptische Zaubertexte* (ed. and trans. Angelicus Kropp; 3 vols.; Brussels: Edition de la Fondation égyptologique reine Elisabeth, 1931) 3:229–44.

[146] We are not aware of any detailed linguistic studies of the early Greek and Coptic liturgy, so here we merely offer some preliminary observations, focusing on the verbs of invocation common to Greek and Coptic magical papyri, παρακαλέω and ἐπικαλοῦμαι. Looking through the three principal Greek liturgies used in the Coptic Church (Basil, Gregory, and Mark/Cyril), we find that they are used, without exception, in first person plural forms. In extending the study to the 4th-cent. CE liturgical prayers of Serapion of Thmuis, we find that this pattern is generally maintained, although we do find a single first person singular verb form. On these verbs in Greek and Coptic magical material, see Korshi Dosoo, "Zōdion and Praxis: An Illustrated Coptic Magical Papyrus in the Macquarie University Collection," *JCoptS* 20 (2018) 11–56, at 21–22; cf. Ágnes T. Mihálykó, "Christ and Charon: PGM P13 Reconsidered," *SO* 89 (2015) 183–209, at 188.

[147] We should note some important exceptions to this general rule, for which we are grateful for the comments of Ágnes Mihálykó. These include the *Prayer of the Veil* in the Liturgy of Gregory Nazianzus, in which the priest silently prays to God to be worthy of carrying out the divine liturgy. Such prayers are examples of the "I-Thou" style characteristic of this version of the liturgy; see Albert Gerhards, *Die griechische Gregoriosanaphora. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des eucharistischen Hochgebets* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1984) 156–65.

[148] Adjurations in liturgical material seem very rare; there are none in the four liturgies examined in n. 146. A rare example is represented in the late fourth-century CE oil exorcism preserved in P.Monts.Roca. fol.156a ll. 7–156b l. 3, used to adjure ("exorcise") the oil used to anoint the sick. We may note that the verb appears in the first person plural form ἐξορκίζομεν [sic] (156a l. 8; edition found in Ramón Roca-Puig, *Anàfora de Barcelona I altres pregàries* [Barcelona: Grafos, 1994] 87–115). Cf. *PGM* Christian 12 (TM 65256; 7th cent. CE), a prayer to heal a poisonous sting in which the speaker adjures (ἐξορκίζω, l. 9) the sting itself.

texts from Christian Egypt, addressing inanimate objects, and demonic and divine beings alike.[149] For these reasons, it seems more likely that the virginity adjuration under discussion here was not used in a public performance, but rather a private "magical" ritual, perhaps carried out in a clandestine fashion by an individual who offered a range of such services. This hypothesis may be strengthened by the fact that it mentions only the wife. Like a love or fidelity spell, it may have been commissioned by a husband anxious about the commitment of his wife to marital virginity and purity.

The final questions concern the type of manuscript which P.Rosicr.Mag.Copt. represents, and the type of ritual in which it was used. As discussed above, its physical format contains both features usually considered typical of an applied amulet (significant folding) and of a formulary (the presence of the generic name marker). In either case, we might imagine that the text itself would have existed in both forms. From other Coptic formularies, we know that "magical" rituals often consisted of three key acts—(1) the speaking of an invocation or adjuration, (2) the burning of an offering (usually some kind of incense), and (3) the creation of an applied object, often a written version of the invocation. The manuscript here, then, might represent either an exemplar to be recited and copied, or the outcome of such a ritual, which might then be worn, or, since we have suggested that the woman may not have been aware of the ritual, deposited in a significant place—a shrine of the invoked being, the door or the bedroom of the couple's house.[150] All these are speculations, but they would fit the general pattern of such texts.

Conclusion

The exact context of the amulet is difficult to pinpoint, as it lacks a clear provenance and is devoid of explicit references about who is being invoked and who is the practictioner. Nonetheless, keeping in mind the proposed date of the piece and what it does convey—it appeals to a female figure who guarded "virginity," "purity," and "marriage" and seeks the same for the text's female target—a very plausible context for the piece is a celibate marriage where Mary the perpetual—yet married—virgin is being adjured.

[149] E.g., ACM 53 ll. 3–4, which adjures the Three Hebrew Youths; ACM 59v l. 2, which adjures the Lord; ACM 64 l. 1, etc., apparently an adjuration of God and/or his archangels; ACM 71 l. 2, etc., and ACM 73 ll. 148–149, etc., adjurations of Gabriel; ACM 77 l. 44, an adjuration of Michael; ACM 83 l. 19, an adjuration of Jesus.

[150] For some examples of typical rituals used in Coptic magic, see the instructions which accompany the longer formularies, such as ACM 133 p. 5 l. 19–p. 11 l. 12; ACM 135 ll. 250–272.