

BOOK REVIEWS AND NOTES

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Greetings in the Lord: Early Christians and the Oxyrhynchus Papyri. By AnneMarie Luijendijk. Harvard Theological Studies 60. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008. xix + 294 pp. \$25.00 paper.

While most extant early Christian writings draw sharp distinctions between Christians and their pagan neighbors on the one hand and orthodox and heterodox Christians on the other, AnneMarie Luijendijk employs evidence from non-literary documents to show that Christianity “on the ground” looked quite different. The third- and fourth-century Christians encountered in this book lived their lives very much like their neighbors, untroubled by the kind of theological concerns that worried church fathers, focused instead on day-to-day existence.

Excluding the introductory and concluding chapters, Luijendijk’s book falls into three parts. In part 1, she investigates the complex problem of identifying Christians in ancient non-literary documents. The best indicators, she suggests, are specifically Christian names such as Peter or Paul and *nomina sacra*, the Christian scribal practice of abbreviating sacred names.

The second part of the book, chapters 4 and 5, deal with “Papa Sotas,” an important Christian in Oxyrhynchus who wrote, received, or is mentioned in five (and possibly six) documents, two of them written on parchment rather than the more commonly used papyrus (PSI 3.208 and PSI 9.1041). The first part of chapter 4 examines a letter that Luijendijk insists has been misunderstood by scholars (P.Oxy. 36.2785). Previously, it was thought to be a letter addressed to Sotas, a presbyter of Heracleopolis, but Luijendijk contends that it is a letter *from* the presbyters of Heracleopolis *to* Sotas, the bishop of Oxyrhynchus (the term for presbyter is abbreviated and so neither its case nor number can be known). Based upon Luijendijk’s reading, she notes that the presbyters address Sotas as “papa,” a term of respect reserved for a superior. She concludes from this that Sotas was a bishop, in fact, the first known bishop of Oxyrhynchus. Luijendijk then turns her attention to the three letters of recommendation in the group (PSI 9.1041, PSI 3.208, and P.Alex. 29). Luijendijk paints a portrait of Christians and catechumens travelling with letters from their bishop that ask foreign communities to

receive the travelers, provide hospitality, and allow them to participate in worship.

Luijendijk next focuses on the business of the bishop, including fundraising. In P.Oxy 12.1492, Sotas urges the donation of a plot of land that the letter's recipient had considered giving to the church. Another letter sees Sotas, "the Christian," in Antioch in the company of an athlete, the letter's author. Luijendijk conjectures that Sotas was in Antioch either on business or possibly to participate in the excommunication of that city's bishop, Paul of Samosata. Finally, Luijendijk speculates that the unusual use of parchment in two of Sotas's letters indicates that he was engaged in manuscript production and the parchment letters were penned on leftover scraps.

The third part of the book examines a number of texts that document the kind of interaction Christians had with government officials. The sixth chapter focuses on six documents: four *libelli*—documents certifying the holder's compliance with the Decian edict to sacrifice to the pagan deities—(P.Oxy. 4.658, P.Oxy. 12.1464, P.Oxy. 41.2990, and P.Oxy. 58.3929), one official summons (P.Oxy. 42.3025), and one fragmentary text that seems to deal with property confiscation during the Valerian persecution (P.Oxy. 43.3119).

Chapter 7 centers on three documents. In the first (P.Oxy. 33.2673), a certain Aurelius Ammonius, a "reader of the former church," attests that the property of that church had been surrendered in accordance with the imperial edict. Luijendijk identifies two acts of resistance attested by this document. One is Ammonius's unwillingness to sign the declaration (which contains an oath sworn to the genius of the emperors) under the pretext that, "he does not know letters," an unlikely claim given his role as church reader. Second was Ammonius's claim that anything of value had been handed over to officials. What had been turned over was merely some "bronze matter," but Luijendijk suggests that other property of value had probably been hidden. The second document examined in this chapter attests that a certain Paul, who had been sentenced (likely to death) by the governor, had no property. Of particular interest in this document is the name of the official who had ordered the confiscation of Paul's property, Aurelius Athanasius. His name, Luijendijk contends, indicates that this official had probably been a Christian who found himself in a difficult position during the persecution and chose his career over his faith. The final letter examined in this chapter was written by a Christian named Copres to his wife Sarapias. It describes a situation in which Copres, intending to go to court about a property dispute, found out that those who appeared in court were compelled to sacrifice to the gods. In response, he gave power of attorney to a friend (likely a pagan) who went to court in his place.

The documents introduced by Luijendijk, taken together, paint an interesting picture of daily life among Christians in third- and fourth-century Oxyrhynchus. The book's strength lies in the great wealth of detail that the

author is able to extract from the terse, non-literary documents examined. The information in Lujendijk's text is supplemented by numerous, extensive, and informative footnotes. As a result, Lujendijk has produced a unique and valuable work. However, while the book is impressive overall, there are places where Lujendijk's evidence does not support her conclusions or, more accurately, her conclusions represent only one of several possibilities. For example, she concludes that Sotas was a bishop based upon her new reading of P.Oxy. 36.2785. Her reading of this papyrus, however, represents only one possible interpretation. The former reading still remains a viable option. Another example concerns her assumption that Sotas produced books at his house based on his (albeit somewhat unusual) use of parchment for some of his letters. While this is a clever suggestion that certainly falls within the range of possibilities, it represents only one of a number of feasible explanations. Regardless, Lujendijk's book is groundbreaking. It presents a fascinating picture of Christian life in third- and fourth-century Egypt that is otherwise unavailable. It is highly recommended for students of early Christianity and particularly Christianity in Egypt prior to Constantine.

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Medici et medicamenta: The Medicine of Penance in Late Antiquity.

By **Natalie Brigit Molineaux**. Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2009. xviii + 315 pp. \$44.95 paper.

Natalie Brigit Molineaux became intrigued, she tells us, by the question of whether there were connections between the spiritual exercises of late antique ascetics and Celtic monastic penance (xiv). That enquiry broadened to encompass very large questions about the origins, functions, forms, and causes for change in penitential practices. This book presents the preparatory research for investigating those questions. Whether probing the concept of a priori religiosity (chapter 1), examining ante-Nicene authors for their perspectives on penance (chapter 6), investigating pre-Christian and Christian constructions of guilt and sin (chapter 5), rehearsing late antique interest in penance (chapter 7), arguing for "the monasticization of penance" (chapter 8), or reviewing the historiography of penance between the sixteenth and twenty-first centuries (chapters 2–4), her method is to survey many, many authors and to summarize each one's stance, contribution, or