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Remodeling the Christianization of Egypt

I. OVERTURE

Sometime in about the seventh century CE, an Egyptian monk recorded two healing charms on either side of a piece of papyrus. At this point the temples of Egypt were in ruins, silent enclosures for the occasional Christian chapel or private devotions, and for impressive architecture one looked to the great saints' shrines, the churches with their colorful wall paintings, or the great estates outside the towns. Christianity and its images and leaders fairly permeated the culture of Egypt. The stories and songs that people shared revolved around the saints and the Holy Family. And so the first spell the monk took down, introducing it with a series of holy titles to evoke church liturgy, told a story of Jesus's and the apostles' encounter with a doe in labor, how the doe appealed to Jesus to help her through childbirth, and how Jesus sent the Archangel Michael to ease the pain. But in the second charm the monk shifted to another set of figures, whose story he continued onto the other side of the papyrus:

> Jesus Horus [ⲓ̅ⲥ̅ ϩⲱⲣ] [the son of Is]is went upon a mountain in order to rest. He [performed his] music, [set] his nets, and captured a falcon, . . . a wild pelican. [He] cut it without a knife, cooked it without fire, and [ate it] without salt [on it].
>
> He had pain, and the area around his navel [hurt him], and he wept with loud weeping, saying, "Today I am bringing my [mother] Isis to me. I want a messenger-spirit [ⲀϩⲘⲞⲚ] so that I may send him to my mother Isis.
>
> . . .
>
> [The spirit] went upon the mountain of Heliopolis and found his mother Isis wearing an iron crown and stoking a copper oven.
>
> . . .
>
> [Isis] said to him, Even if you did not find me and did not find my name, the true name that the sun bears to the west and the moon bears to the east and that is borne by the six propitiatory stars under the sun, you would summon the three hundred vessels that are around the navel:

CHAPTER 1

> Let every sickness and every difficulty and every pain that is in the belly of N, child of N, stop at this moment! I am the one who calls; the lord Jesus is the one who grants healing![1]

Sandwiched between invocations of Jesus as healer emerges an extensive narrative about the ancient Egyptian gods Horus and Isis—at a time when no temples and no priesthoods were still functioning to sustain their myths and no one could still read the Egyptian texts in which such traditional stories had been recorded. And yet this charm for abdominal pain, and the four others like it (for sleep, for childbirth, and for erotic success), replicate many of the basic features of charms from many centuries earlier. As in those ancient Isis/Horus spells for healing, we note here the drama of Horus's suffering far from his mother Isis, the repetitive, almost singsong structure, and—as in the preceding legend of Jesus and the doe—its application to some specific real-world crisis.[2]

What is this text doing in Christian Egypt? What does it tell us about Christianization, about abandoned rites and traditions, about the folklore that might stretch between these two religious periods? Is it "pagan" or "Christian" to record or recite such spells? And what of the scribe, whose investment in the authority and magic of Christian ritual speech is apparent from the very beginning of the document? How did he understand these ancient names? And how many others copied similar spells—in monastic cells, at shrines, or in villages?

It is such cases that this book examines, those in which seemingly archaic religious elements appear in Christian form, not as survivals of a bygone "paganism," but as building blocks in the *process* of Christianization. And while I will focus on the Christianization of Egypt over the fourth through seventh centuries, the arguments I make and the models I propose about the conglomerate nature of Christianization should apply to other parts of the Mediterranean and European worlds as well.

In fact, it is rare that we find such overt examples of the recollection of archaic religious traditions in ongoing folklore and practice as appear in this magical text with Isis and Horus. More often we find, in the vague and hostile testimony of Christian bishops and abbots, references to local practices that may strike us, in their independence from church teaching and their suggestion of another sacred landscape entirely, as reflecting a more archaic religious order:

> . . . it is said that some of them ablute their children in polluted water and water from the arena, from the theater, and moreover they pour all over themselves water with incantations (spoken over it), and they break their clay pots claiming it repels the evil eye. Some tie amulets on their children, hand-crafted by men—those (men) who provide a place for the dwelling

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1 ACM 49 = Berlin 8313b; Beltz, "Die koptischen Zauberpapyri."
2 See Frankfurter, "Narrating Power," 457–76; and, more specifically on these magic spells, Frankfurter, "Laments of Horus in Coptic."

of demons—while others anoint themselves with oil that is evil and incantations and such things that they tie on their heads and necks.[3]

The author does not accuse his subjects of visiting temples, making sacrifices, or praying to ancient gods (although similar testimonies from Gaul and Iberia often did make these accusations).[4] But what is this realm of practice, with its pollution and demons, that the author is describing? Is it Christianity? "Paganism"? Is it "popular religion," and if it is, from what "proper religion" might it be distinct?

It is in these kinds of testimonies, and their echoes in the archaeological record, that we begin to find religion as it was lived, Christianity in its local constructions, and the *syncretism* that characterizes any religion as it is negotiated in time and space. Christianity in Egypt of the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries amounted to a framework within which mothers and scribes, artisans and holy men, priests and herdsmen experimented with diverse kinds of religious materials and traditions, both to make sense of the institution and its teachings and to conceptualize efficacy—the magic without which life couldn't proceed.

II. HISTORICAL SETTING

My 1998 book *Religion in Roman Egypt: Assimilation and Resistance* was intended to explore and model how Egyptian religion was able to continue in various ways, despite economic, legal, and social pressures (and albeit in diminished forms), into the fourth, fifth, and even sixth centuries in particular regions, then particular villages, then particular households. The underlying thesis, that religions don't just disappear over a few centuries but transform and shift in orientation, required a different concept of "Egyptian religion" than that held by many Roman historians raised to think of a monolithic "paganism" or a romantic era of great temples. Part of the work of the historian of religions is to think critically about what terms and models most productively cover the evidence one has.

While I also delved into types of continuity and preservation of Egyptian traditions in Christian guise (like the ticket oracle, to be addressed in more detail in chapters 4 and 6), it was not my goal then to address Christianization per se except in a series of preliminary observations at the end of the book proposing the religion's integration in Egypt as idiom, as ideology, and as license for iconoclasm. But since 1997 I have had the opportunity to rethink these observations in terms of new archaeological evidence and new discussions of Coptic literature as data for continuing traditions.[5] This book thus turns to the problem of Christianization indicated by *Religion in Roman Egypt*: Was this a "conversion" or a synthesis

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3 Pseudo-Athanasius, *Homily on the Virgin* 95, in Lefort, "L'homélie de S. Athanase," 35–36.

4 Dowden, *European Paganism*, 149–91.

5 E.g., Hahn, Emmel, and Gotter, *From Temple to Church*; and Dijkstra and Van Dijk, *Encroaching Desert*.

of religious traditions? How, and in what contexts, should we answer this question—through documents of ecclesiastical order, monastic or imperial administration, or even "degrees" of Hellenism? That is, what are the proper data for Christianization: The amount of churches or monasteries built?[6] The amount of people showing up at these places?[7] Their assimilation of "Christian" names?[8] A growing diversity of material objects that imply some association with the religion? Or, conversely, the functional end of all traditional religious infrastructure, perhaps implying people's concomitant absorption of Christianity?[9] Is there a point at which we can say that a "Christianity" has come to exist or that people "are Christian" or even hold a Christian "identity" in any sense?[10] Does the mere existence of Christian clergy—owning property, sending letters—signify the Christianization of culture or simply the growth of an autonomous institution?[11] These are all signs, to be sure, of an institution (or the decline of something in the culture), but do these types of documentation reflect cultural transformation, and if so, how?

My preference has always been for documents that illustrate "popular," "lived," or local religion: the cultures of pilgrimage and shrine, ritual expertise and magic, and domestic ritual concerns. These dimensions of the process of Christianization do not exclude or stand apart from the "institution," broadly defined. People of these cultures—the laity, members of the lower clerical ranks—can pay close attention to sermons and ecclesiastical instructions, but that still leaves us far from knowing the influence of those sermons and instructions.[12] At the same time, the various worlds of lived or local religion also exert their own innovations and self-determination—their own agency, as I will explain. And so the documents of lived or local religion do not tend to show a Christianity familiar to the modern historian (even if they do so to the anthropologist). They show a Christianity in gradual, creative assemblage, whose principal or most immediate agents may have been local scribes, mothers protecting children, or artisans, not priests or monks.

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6 In his detailed study of the Christianization of the Philae region, Dijkstra takes the position that Christianity is in effect when the trappings of its institution, from ecclesiastical leaders to infrastructure, are evident; Dijkstra, *Philae and the End*, 45–63, 341–42. It is unclear, however, the extent to which the existence of the institution (or, for that matter, the sporadic adoption of Christian names; ibid., 47) reflects peoples' actual religious practices.

7 See MacMullen, *Second Church*.

8 See Bagnall, "Religious Conversion and Onomastic Change"; idem, "Conversion and Onomastics"; Depauw and Clarysse, "How Christian Was Fourth Century Egypt?"; Frankfurter, "Onomastic Statistics"; Depauw and Clarysse, "Christian Onomastics."

9 Bagnall, "Combat ou vide."

10 Rebillard, *Christians and Their Many Identities*; Jones, *Between Pagan and Christian*.

11 See in general Luijendijk, *Greetings in the Lord*.

12 On the ineffectiveness of one particularly well-spoken bishop (Augustine of Hippo) to influence his church audiences to think of themselves as Christian, see Rebillard, "Late Antique Limits of Christianness."

But where do such materials leave us in gauging degrees or depths of Christi-
anness or even the means of Christianization? In fact, as with most of the late
Roman world, we have no data to explain how Christianity spread in Egypt. It
certainly did not happen simply by virtue of churches built and priests in resi-
dence. Hagiographical legends of saints motivating allegiance through the de-
struction of idols are so idealized as to be useless as documentation, and there is
little actual evidence beyond the mere texts of sermons how public preaching
occurred and to what effect. Most scholars have argued that Christianity spread
by village rather than individual. Ramsay MacMullen suggested that the process
must have involved miracles in some way, since hagiographies assume this, but it
is unclear how these performances would have taken place.[13] Peter Brown's sce-
nario, based generally on hagiography, in which holy men represented the face,
charisma, and ideologies of Christianity by virtue of their social functions in the
culture, seems quite likely (and is developed further in chapter 3),[14] although we
have little notion of what teachings these figures would have taught as Christian
or what ideas communities might have assimilated: One God or the powers of
angels? One Bible or their own prophetic powers? The saving power of Jesus's
crucifixion or the material efficacy of the cross symbol? The material signs of
Christianization from the fourth century on—from personal names to decorated
tombs, from monastic complexes to scripture fragments—do not tell us what
ideas this religion involved for its diverse local adherents. We cannot, that is, infer
a system of one Bible, one God, the power of the Eucharist, the authority of the
church, and the rejection of idols, except in the most abstract sense, when the
little data we have for lived religion show the power of martyrs and angels, the
apotropaic nature of scripture, the use of oil as a vehicle of church authority, and
an utterly fluid concept of idolatry. We must conclude that Christianity arose and
developed as a local phenomenon.

Of course, by the sixth century, Egypt was probably at least as Christian as any
premodern culture could be. Except for a few lingering shrines and isolated ex-
pressions of private or local devotion to the old gods, the traditional temple reli-
gion of Egypt had largely disintegrated, the result of internal economic decline,
Christian imperial pressure, and many other factors. At the same time, the evi-
dence gleaned from papyri, inscriptions, and archaeology shows the increasing
influence of the Christian institution in many parts of life. In the domestic sphere
we see a rise in Christian names (whether biblical or saints'), suggesting families'
inclinations to endow their children with the blessings of the new heroes and holy
beings.[15] In the urban sphere we see a shift in the topography of monumental
centers, from temples to churches and saints' shrines, with those institutions'

13 Wipszycka, "La christianisation de l'Égypte"; and MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Em-
pire*, 59–64.
14 Brown, "Rise and Function of the Holy Man"; and idem, *Authority and the Sacred*, 55–78.
15 Bagnall, "Religious Conversion and Onomastic Change"; Papaconstantinou, *Le culte des
saints en Égypte*; Frankfurter, "Onomastic Statistics."

liturgical calendars and processions now distinguishing public culture.[16] Christian offices seem to have provided civic reward for the local elite, and the schooling of those elite came to include Christian texts as well as classical.[17] Monks and monasteries also became central players in the social and economic lives of many regions of late antique Egypt, both as producers and as unofficial administrators. And the literary output in these monasteries was in full spate by the fifth century, offering a veritable library of documents describing the fantasies, ideals, pious models, scriptural exegeses, and often-conflicting ideologies embraced by Egyptian monks in late antiquity.[18]

In all these respects Egyptian culture—public, administrative, monastic—showed the influence of Christianity: Christianity as a context for prestige, as an extension of learning, as a framework for blessing one's children, and certainly as an idiom of imperial authority. But did these elements of influence amount to Christianization in the pervading sense that church historians usually mean it? How do we accommodate Peter Brown's important observations about the *function* of monks in their social environments, not as teachers of doctrine and exemplars of virtue, but as charismatic administrators of local tensions, conveyers of blessings, curses, and exorcisms?[19] And how do we accommodate the kinds of data with which this chapter began: the devotions, practices, texts, and visual materials that seem to belie simplistic labeling of the culture as "Christian" or "pagan," and that suggest that people at every level, in every social world, were actively engaged in working out what "Christian" meant in an ancient landscape, amid an ancient economy, and in the context of familiar gestures and the memories they bore?

This book starts from the position that "Christianity" describes not a state of cultural or religious accomplishment or "identity" but an ongoing process of negotiation—of syncretism (a term that I shall explain shortly). Indeed, this book is about how people in their various social worlds of home and shrine, workshop and cell, constructed Christianity as something both authoritative and recognizable. These various kinds of negotiation that allowed Christianity to take shape in culture did not amount to some national project of acculturation. This is why I use the term "Christianization," which suggests a process—or, as I describe in this book, multiple simultaneous processes that affected local traditions in discrete ways—rather than a historical achievement or monolithic cultural institution. It is also why I avoid the term "conversion," which carries the sense of a radical psy-

16 Alston, *City in Roman and Byzantine Egypt*, 277–322; Papaconstantinou, "Cult of Saints."

17 See Cribiore, "Higher Education in Early Byzantine Egypt"; and Wipszycka, "Institutional Church."

18 See, e.g., Pearson and Goehring, *Roots of Egyptian Christianity*; Brakke, *Demons and the Making*; Frankfurter, "Legacy of the Jewish Apocalypse."

19 Brown, "Rise and Function of the Holy Man"; idem, *Authority and the Sacred*. See also Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, 184–93; idem, "Syncretism and the Holy Man"; idem, "Curses, Blessings, and Ritual Authority."

chological shift at the level of the individual *even when* applied to the Roman Empire.[20] Christianization and syncretism both, I will argue, took place differently in different social worlds. How a grandmother integrated saints and blessings with family needs differed considerably from how a stonecutter deployed crosses on a traditional grave stela or from a ritual specialist combining magical names and prayers in a healing charm. While such social worlds and roles inevitably overlapped, their differing strategies and traditions led to different combinations of Christian and Egyptian symbols, ideas, and media. In these many linked social worlds and their active, creative agents, I argue, Christianity was constructed as a meaningful and authoritative framework for religious practice.

The different relationships to institution, authority, and tradition that people in these different social worlds cultivated emerge, in fact, through that startling range of materials—magical texts, bishops' sermons, and so on—in which modern historical scholarship finds "pagan survivals." But this term, with its latent assumptions about "paganism" and "conversion," has long distorted the nature of the religious practices and materials it is supposed to cover, as well as the very historical process of engaging Christianity. Indeed, all three of these terms force complex evidence into apologetic narratives of "true Christianity" or "pagan decay."

III. THE PROBLEM OF "PAGAN SURVIVALS"

Many of the materials that I use in this book as documents of the local process of Christianization, like magical texts, figurines, and apocryphal depictions of hell, have carried an unfortunate (if exotic) reputation as "pagan survivals"—that is, as persisting remnants of a pre-Christian religion. What is denoted in this term "pagan survival"?

One of Christianity's early conceptual innovations as a religious movement was the construction of an alternative, improper system of cult practice as a clear and demonic Other. Derived more from biblical depictions of improper cult than from actual observation of the cultural environment, "paganism" [*pagan-, hellēn-*] quickly became a standard term of censure, revolving around a purported affiliation between some implicated custom (a festival, a gesture) and the actual worship of demons.[21] Whether for Justin Martyr in the second century, John Chrysostom in the fourth, or local charismatic missionaries in Africa in the twentieth, the term "pagan" has always cast certain practices and customs at best as parochial and uncultured, and at worst as worship of the Devil—even when those practices and customs are intrinsic to local social life, community fortune, and the integrity of heritage.[22] Indeed, anthropologists and historians have tended to find that the

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20 James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, lectures IX–X; Nock, *Conversion*.

21 On the use of "paganism" as a discourse of censure, see Rothaus, "Christianization and De-Paganization"; and Frankfurter, "Beyond Magic and Superstition."

22 On the use of "pagan" in Roman antiquity, see O'Donnell, "Paganus"; and Remus, "End of

censure of a demonic "paganism" has usually masked a far more fluid sense of religious tradition in communities.[23]

A word with such archaic theological resonance and specific ideological force as "pagan" should properly have little utility for historians. As one scholar astutely noted in a review, "I do not see how it is possible to use the word at all without implicitly accepting that the Christians had it right about the world and its organization."[24] Still, the plain ease that "pagan" affords the historian in designating everything religious and cultic apparently outside (or prior to) Christianity and Judaism has maintained the term's currency in modern scholarship. Its value becomes, perhaps, greater for the study of late antiquity, when the term *Hellēn* came to signify for many non-Christian elites not just traditional modes of ceremony but culture, heritage, modes of social comportment, and familiar images of delight.[25] Shouldn't, then, the promotion of *Hellēn* as a religious alternative to Christianity by apparent insiders like Emperor Julian and the late fifth-century intellectual Damascius justify its use by modern historians? Or would we then be turning a rarefied rhetorical self-identification into a broadly descriptive category? What alternative to "paganism" do we even have for referring to non-Christian (and non-Jewish) religion, especially if we want to discuss wide currents in Mediterranean or regional cultural change? Might "polytheism" be a substitute, or does the increasing evidence for monotheism among non-Jews and non-Christians make this term too improper and even overtly theological—classifying religions by number of gods?[26] Ultimately, shouldn't the historian be able to use an inadequate word like "paganism" in a responsible way?

The problem with maintaining this convenient word to denote such a wide swathe of culture and religious experience in antiquity lies in the ways it ends up influencing discussion. Even the most objectively minded historians inevitably fall into the same traps of *imprecision* (what cultural features does "pagan" cover that would not have included "Christians"?),[27] *reification* (did non-Christian religions really constitute "-isms," or systems?), and—most classically—*triumpha-*

'Paganism'?" For contemporary examples of the same broad demonizing capacity of such terms, see Douglas, "Sorcery Accusations Unleashed"; Meyer, "Beyond Syncretism"; idem, "Modernity and Enchantment"; and Dulue Mbachu, "Christianity vs. the Old Gods of Nigeria," Associated Press, September 4, 2007.

23 A point made effectively by both Bonner, "Extinction of Paganism"; and Künzel, "Paganisme, syncrétisme."

24 James J. O'Donnell, review of *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy*, by Michelle R. Salzman, *Bryn Mawr Classical Review*, June 4, 2002.

25 See Chuvin, *Chronicle of the Last Pagans*; and Bowersock, *Hellenism in Late Antiquity*.

26 See Athanassiadi and Frede, *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity*.

27 "Sacrifice," for example, is often viewed as "paganism's" definitive characteristic. Yet for most of the late antique world offerings to gods involved not bloody animal slaughter but wine, oils, or cakes, and animal slaughter persisted at Christian festivals, whether or not it was designated as sacrifice. See, e.g., Paulinus of Nola, *Carmen* 20, on the St. Felix festivals; and Sozomen, *Hist. Eccl.* 2.4.3-4, on the Mamre festivals. See Frankfurter, "Egyptian Religion and the Problem," 86–87.

lism. "Later paganism," claimed the historian Harold Bell, "died with a kind of mellow splendor, like a beautiful sunset, but dying it was. It had been conquered by the truer and finer religion, for which it had itself prepared the way, a religion which at last brought the solution of problems which paganism had posed but to which it had found no answer."[28] Even Marcel Simon, the otherwise discerning scholar of early Christianity, considered "the inability of the old religion which— still partly caught in the paralyzing trammels of monotheism—cannot reorganize and rejuvenate itself around a central figure.... [So,] after having in some sort opened the way to Christianity by lending it a vocabulary and some concepts to define itself, paganism was reduced to a pale copy of the rival cult."[29] Both authors illustrate how imagining the religious landscape and the religious narrative of the Roman and late antique worlds in terms of three—or, more often, two—*different* entities in interaction and conflict *invariably* leads to the assumption of "pagan" decadence and Christian inevitability (or some variation on this story), which proceeds to color all subsequent historical discussion. In fact, as I argued in *Religion in Roman Egypt*, the decline of some traditional cults, the establishment of Christianity, the persistence of other traditional cults and practices, and the Christianization of other practices were all far more complex processes than could possibly be captured under the rubric of "decline of paganism/rise of Christianity." The term "paganism" itself was never meant as a term of scholarly convenience; quite to the contrary, as a Latin or Greek insider's term it always signified Christianity's invented foil—a polemical category with little relationship to the many local cults, traditions, and religious expressions that existed around the Mediterranean world. "Paganism" implies its own insufficiency and replacement.

Of course, to the degree that we need a word to capture the full prejudicial color of *paganus* or *Hellēn*, as Christian writers wielded these terms, it may be more accurate to use something like "heathen" (which no modern reader would mistake as neutral) to describe the recalcitrant, infidel Other who engages in bloody sacrifices and worships idols, trees, and demons.[30] But accuracy in interpreting and characterizing the traditional religious forms of the late antique Mediterranean world demands that we find alternatives to "pagan," whether we are framing ideologies, practices, shrines, or cultural displays. At the very least, we should be wary of a terminology that assumes more of a dichotomy between religious worlds and identities—"Christian" and "pagan"—than could possibly have existed in a premodern culture.

Bell's and Simon's evocative depictions of the twilight of the old religions highlight not just the inherent bias of "paganism" but also the problem of conceptualizing Christianization and religious change itself. Was a heathen culture in fact

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28 Bell, *Cults and Creeds*, 105.
29 Simon, "Early Christianity and Pagan Thought," 398.
30 I find encouragement in Jones's essay "The Fuzziness of 'Paganism.' "

"converted" to become Christian? How and where does conversion happen—in the individual, true-thinking soul, as Bell, Nock, and their Protestant forebears suggested, or in the complexities of village and urban life, as anthropologists would argue? Since well before William James, "conversion" has usually signified a private shift in spiritual allegiance from one religious identity to another.[31] In this sense the term has carried with it distinct theological overtones inherited from Protestant Christianity, a religion that offers individual salvation from sin and an intimate savior who symbolizes that process, culminating in a decisive shift from darkness to light. The very rupture or decisive shift in religion that we associate with conversion may be historically unusual, the post hoc construction of hagiography or modern psychology. Apart from certain rarefied and idealized testimonies, the shift to Christianity in antiquity and the Middle Ages, as in early modern Latin America and modern Africa, appears to have involved complex social dynamics, from elite interests in prestige to the public charisma of holy men and the erection of new shrines. Christianization could come about simply in the course of people's embrace of a new ritual medium (like a cross or oil) in their familiar landscape, or it could symbolize a new economic order or a broader cultural cosmos. In general, religious transformation was a group, not an individual, phenomenon and therefore involved much diversity among and across communities in terms of negotiating the relationship between the new religious system and the older traditions.[32]

Indeed, the decisiveness and completeness that the term "conversion" inevitably implies as a category has tended to run up against the evidence for "survivals"—appearances of older religious traditions within the new religious order—like those that began this chapter. How do we factor into our concept of conversion or Christianization all the many archaic-seeming folk customs that have punctuated local Christianities from late antiquity through today? The magical text and the condemnation of popular uses of "polluted" water quoted earlier thus become part of a curiosity cupboard of so-called "pagan survivals" that extends to "sacrifices" of animals for St. Felix in fifth-century Italy, the lighting of candles at crossroads in sixth-century Iberia, and rituals dedicated to fairies and elves in other parts of the medieval world. Even today we retain Christmas trees and Easter eggs, Catholics in Haiti and Brazil invoke *loa* and *orixas*, and an avid Red Sox fan might seek to magically hamper the success of the rival Yankees by burying a team jersey in the cement under the Yankees' new stadium—a ritual strategy akin to those in the Roman Empire for "fixing" chariot races.[33]

31 See, e.g., Nock, *Conversion*; the historiographical discussions by Papaconstantinou, "Introduction"; and Cameron, "Christian Conversion in Late Antiquity."

32 See MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire*; and, more generally, Fernández-Armesto, "Conceptualizing Conversion in Global Perspective." For modern religious change, see Goody, "Religion, Social Change"; and van der Veer, "Introduction."

33 On the binding spell against the baseball team, see Sushil Cheema, "The Big Dig: The Yanks

What does the persistence of these kinds of traditions mean? The term "pagan survival" in fact proposes its own intrinsic narrative: that these traditions all belonged to, and had greater meaning in, the ancient "pagan" religion—some putative organized religion that predated Christianity. Following Christianization, so the story goes, these various practices of the ancient "pagan cults" remained as random *superstitions*, or magic, or, in the words of the august antiquarian Alphonse Barb, "the syncretistic, rotting refuse-heap of the dead and dying religions of the whole ancient world."[34] "Pagan survival" implies both a *heritage* in a vague but historically prior religious system and a *resilience* in the face of true Christianity. At the same time, the continuity of these "pagan survivals" implies incomplete doctrinal instruction or lax missionizing, and certainly uncomprehending village folk.[35] Indeed, the portrayal of a Christian culture as rife with "pagan survivals" has long served as a kind of propaganda for proper missionizing and reform. Protestant histories and evangelists have often depicted idiosyncratic folk practices as evidence of an incomplete Christianity, a kind of whitewashed heathenism, and thus as a warrant for evangelization of these degenerate cultures outside of history. As the nineteenth-century archaeologist William Ramsay wrote:

> The introduction of Christianity into the country [of Asia Minor] broke the continuity for the moment. But the old religious feeling was not extirpated: it soon revived, and took up the struggle once more against its new rival. Step by step it conquered, and gradually destroyed the real quality of Christianity. The old local cults took on new and outwardly Christianised forms; names were changed, and outward appearance; a show of Christian character was assumed. The Iconoclasts resisted the revival for a time, but the new paganism was too strong for them. The deep-seated passion for art and beauty was entirely on the side of that Christianised paganism, into which the so-called Orthodox Church had degenerated. . . . There is little essential difference in religious feeling between the older practice and the new: paganism is only slightly disguised in these outwardly Christianised cults.[36]

Catholicism and the Greek and Russian Orthodoxies at one time or another have all been regarded as thinly veneered heathenisms on account of their inclusion of practices—folk and official alike—that seemed pre-Christian. Unique, culturally distinctive, or "excessive" religious movements within Christianity have likewise been understood as resurgences of some native "pagan" impulse.[37] But

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Uncover a Red Sox Jersey," *New York Times*, April 14, 2008; cf. Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells*, 53–74.

34 Barb, "Survival of the Magic Arts," 104.

35 Dennis, "Popular Religious Attitudes."

36 Ramsay, *Pauline and Other Studies*, 130–31.

37 See, e.g., Frend, *Archaeology of Early Christianity*, 117–18, on Numidian Christianity.

the rhetoric of "pagan survivals" has also enjoyed a positive, even nationalist spin, in the sense that surviving (or simply old) practices are viewed as artifacts of some "authoritative cultural heritage." For some modern Greeks and Irish, the strange festival practices of their rural compatriots bespeak the transcendent power of cultural heritage and provide cause to celebrate an unbroken lineage with the ancient Greeks or the Celts.[38] Likewise for modern Copts, the apparent wealth of "pharaonic" or ancient Egyptian imagery in early Egyptian Christian art demonstrates their proper inheritance of the glory of the pharaohs, so that Coptic Christianity is seen as actually maintaining that heritage instead of obliterating it. From this perspective it is the Coptic Church, not Islam, that preserves and conveys Egyptian heritage.[39]

But if the term "pagan survival" inevitably imposes these theological or nationalist narratives on materials that seem to harken back to a pre-Christian stage, the *materials themselves* remain complex and intriguing challenges to all our assumptions about Christianization, "paganism," and conversion—and all the more so because they were inevitably preserved or reported on by agents who considered themselves exemplary Christians. This chapter opened with a magical text invoking Horus and Isis that was inscribed and edited by someone literate and, we might infer, capable in others' eyes of healing by the power of liturgical formulations. He was thus most likely a monk. A Coptic saint's life of the sixth century mentions two distinct ranks of heathen priests, recalling their Egyptian titles (ϩⲟⲛⲧ, ⲟⲩⲁⲁⲃ). The same text recounts the exorcism of a temple haunted by "an evil demon named Bes"—a popular god throughout the Roman Empire whose famous oracle inhabited a temple in the same area.[40] Collectors of Coptic survivals look especially to the appearance of such names and stories long after the decline of the temples as evidence of continuities (in whatever form), and although many alleged survivals end up being misunderstandings of biblical themes or medieval archaisms, the evidence for persisting traditions is quite extensive.[41]

The writings of the great abbot Shenoute of Atripe, an important Christian reformer in the region of Panopolis during the late fourth and early fifth centuries, offer another type of apparent "survival." In one text, Shenoute mocks the private pieties of a local dignitary who—it has been reconstructed—was only claiming to be Christian. Shenoute reveals him publicly as a "crypto-*Hellēn*" by

38 See, e.g., Piggott, *Druids*; also see Hobsbawm, "Introduction."

39 See, e.g., Meinardus, "Some Theological and Sociological Aspects," 10–11. See also the trenchant remarks by Mayeur-Jaouen, *Pèlerinages d'égypte*, 33–56; and Van der Vliet, "Copts."

40 *V. Mosis*, in Moussa, "Abba Moses of Abydos"; Moussa, "Coptic Literary Dossier"; Till, *Koptische Heiligen- und Martyrerlegenden*, 2:46–81; Amélineau, *Monuments pour servir*, 2:680–706.

41 See Behlmer, "Ancient Egyptian Survivals." Classic formulations of Egyptian survivals include Budge, *Coptic Apocrypha*, lix–lxxii; Hallock, "Christianity and the Old Egyptian Religion"; Burmester, "Egyptian Mythology in the Coptic Apocrypha"; and Hammerschmidt, "Altägyptische elemente im koptischen Christentum." Important critiques include Zandee, "Traditions pharaoniques"; and Papaconstantinou, "Historiography, Hagiography."

enumerating the various ways he belied his public Christian identity: how he would pray toward the west, the land of the dead; how he would "pour out (libations) to Kronos over the waters"; how he would collect sacred images in an interior room in his house, which Shenoute and his monks invaded and pillaged; and how he was caught asperging the temple of Atripe with various scented plants after the Christians had gutted it.[42] Here, presumably, we have a more deliberate, self-conscious form of maintaining older religious traditions, involving secrecy and a sense of ideological discontinuity between public and private religious practices. Evidence of secret devotion to traditional cult has been found in many parts of the late antique Mediterranean world, including the remains of a domestic pig sacrifice in sixth-century Athens and a sixth-century Syrian report of a Christian icon that could be reversed to display an image of the god Apollo.[43] Across cultures, such secrecy has usually resulted in a change in the concept of the older traditions that were preserved. The traditions become idealized and idiosyncratic links to a mythic past, or the secrecy becomes such a part of the traditions that they cannot be performed in public at all.[44] In this regard, we cannot really call these practices "survivals"—in any continuous sense—of older cult practices.

The far more common repository of survivals from which historians have drawn is exemplified in the other text with which this chapter opened: a complaint about popular local practices among Christians, practices that the author associates with pollution and demons and that recall much older religious traditions. Abbot Shenoute echoes such complaints in some of his sermons, likewise indicating the presence of Christians in his region:

> Woe to any man or woman who gives thanks to demons, saying that "Today is the worship of *Shai*, or Shai of the village or Shai of the home," while burning lamps for empty things and offering incense in the name of phantoms. . . . Accursed be he who worships or pours out (libations) or makes sacrifice to any creature, whether in the sky or on the earth or under water! . . . Woe upon those who will worship wood or stone or anything made by man's handiwork (with) wood and stone, or (molded by putting) clay in-

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42 Shenoute of Atripe, *Not Because a Fox Barks*, in Leipoldt, *Sinuthii Archimandritae Vita*, 3:82; Turin cod. IV, "On the Last Judgment," fol. XLIr-v, in Behlmer, *Schenute von Atripe*, 91–92, trans. 248. See also idem, "Historical Evidence from Shenoute," 2:13; Van der Vliet, "Spätantikes Heidentum," 108–9; Emmel, "From the Other Side of the Nile"; idem, "Shenoute of Atripe"; and Brakke and Crislip, *Selected Discourses of Shenoute*, 193–265, with translations of some of the relevant texts.

43 Pig sacrifice: Karivieri, " 'House of Proclus,' " 133–36; and Lazaridou, *Transition to Christianity*, 79. Reversible image: John of Ephesus, *Hist. Eccl.* 3.29, in Smith, *Third Part of the Ecclesiastical History*, 214. Additional literary images of "crypto-devotion": Sophronios of Jerusalem, *Miracles of Ss Cyrus & John*, ch. 32, in Gascou, *Sophrone de Jérusalem*, 110–14; Cyril of Alexandria [attr.], *Sixth Miracle of the Three Youths*, in De Vis, *Homélies coptes de la Vaticane*, 2:185–89.

44 See Caseau, "Le Crypto paganisme," 541–72.

side them, and the rest of the kind, and (making from these materials) birds and crocodiles and beasts and livestock and diverse beings![45]

How do we categorize practices that seem prima facie to stand outside the penumbra of Christian piety yet do not apparently relate to any central cult or shrine to an ancient Egyptian god? Such lists of arcane local traditions that seemed to their authors to deviate from proper Christian practice appeared in many places in the Christianizing Roman Empire of the fourth through sixth centuries, especially in the Latin West. The sixth-century Iberian bishop Martin of Braga laments to churchgoers the "light[ing] of candles beside rocks and beside trees and beside fountains and at crossroads," as well as peoples' tendency "to put up laurel wreaths [at Kalends], to watch the foot, to pour fruit and wine on a log in the hearth, to throw bread into a fountain," and "for women at their weaving to call on the name of Minerva," all of which he labels Devil worship.[46] Caesarius of Arles, who more freely labels such rites *paganus*, attacks the "fulfilling of vows at trees or the adoring of fountains" by Christians, as well as "those wicked sacrifices which are still offered according to the custom of the *pagani*" and "those devilish banquets which are held at a shrine or fountains or trees."[47] In all such cases the subjects are viewed as part of an implicitly Christian audience—they are not imagined as adherents to some full-scale heathen cults—and the practices identified rarely involve any sort of sited or organized cult to a traditional god. They consist instead of traditional festivals, banqueting customs, and domestic gestures; of quotidian divination (in Caesarius) and amuletic protection; and, consistently, of visits to sacred places in the local environment. Do we call these "survivals"—and if we do, of what, exactly?—or are they elements of some "folkloric" or "popular" substratum of culture?[48] What models of "survival" or even of religion can help us to comprehend these reports from an officially Christianized region?

We need an approach to these materials and reports that both acknowledges their context in Christianized environments, and even the Christian identity of their subjects, and at the same time recognizes that a Christianizing culture depends on traditional forms of religious expression in order to make sense. How can we describe these traditional forms of religious expression in such a way as not to deny the "Christianness" of their agents? Here is the theoretical question that motivates this book. How do we draw on notions of folk agency, ritual fixity, *habitus*, and socially inscribed gesture to talk about, not survivals of some puta-

45 Shenoute of Atripe, *The Lord Thundered*, in Amélineau, *Oeuvres de Schenoudi I*, 66–70. See also Timbie and Zaborowski, "Shenoute's Sermon," 113–15.

46 Martin of Braga, *De corr. Rustic.* 16, in Barlow, *Iberian Fathers 1*, 81–82.

47 Caesarius of Arles, *Sermon* 54.5–6, in Delage, trans., *Césaire d'Arles*, 460–63; Mueller, *St. Caesarius of Arles*, 69–70.

48 On uses of the category "folklore" to designate a dimension of culture outside the Christian institution through which pre-Christian traditions are maintained, see Schmitt, " 'Religion populaire' "; and Jolly, *Popular Religion*, 10–11.

tive old religion, but, rather, the very construction of Christianity in local worlds through traditional practices and expressions?[49]

IV. SYNCRETISM AND PURIFICATION

My aim here is to shift the focus from collections of isolated "pagan survivals" to the ways that people in Christianized cultures maintain religious forms as components of tradition and social interaction, often in the service of expressing Christianity. Thus we can see how religious forms of every sort involve ongoing *bricolages*, combinations and recombinations of symbols, conducted in the home and the workshop, at the shrine and by the ritual expert. This term, introduced by Claude Lévi-Strauss to describe a culture's recourse to a diverse range of materials in order to convey mythic truths, offers an invaluable metaphor for the assemblages that make up religious systems, and I will use it throughout this book to depict syncretism as a creative process, the work of agents.[50] Christianization as bricolage taking place in particular spaces involves, alternately, the domestication of *institutional symbols* (like liturgical formulations or crosses) and the revitalization and sanctioning of *traditional practices* (like festivals or iconographic forms). In these ways we can speak of Christianization and the perpetuation of indigenous religious traditions together as *syncretism*.

"Syncretism" as a notion of cultural process has come under as much criticism as have the concepts of "fetish" or "paganism" in the modern study of religion. Where once one could speak confidently of monolithic institutions in struggle or collusion with each other, now we speak of contested regional identities, competing discourses of authority or modernity, and local religious self-determination. Because of its earlier assumptions of coherent theological systems, irresistible religious teachings, and native passivity and ignorance, "syncretism" has been largely abandoned for such terms as "hybridity," "heterogeneity," and "acculturation" as historians and anthropologists try to approach the mixture of traditions with more critically astute sensibilities about power, discourse, and identity and with the realization that "mixture" is normative to religions, while "purity" is rare and often invented.[51]

For antiquity, the scholarly interest in syncretism has addressed three areas in particular: pharaonic Egypt, where priests habitually recombined the powers and names of gods[52]; the Greco-Roman Mediterranean, where priests, intellectuals, artists, and prophets creatively assimilated deities of different heritages through iconography and new languages of invocation[53]; and the problem of survivals in

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49 For an unusually incisive discussion of these theoretical problems, see Pina-Cabral, "Gods of the Gentiles."

50 Lévi-Strauss, *Savage Mind*, 16–22.

51 See Johnson, "Migrating Bodies"; and idem, "Syncretism and Hybridization."

52 See, e.g., Bonnet, "On Understanding Syncretism"; and Baines, "Egyptian Syncretism."

53 See discussions in Dunand and Lévêque, *Les syncrétismes dans les religions*; Pearson and

Christianity, especially during late antiquity and the early Middle Ages. The term "syncretism" has been historically applied to each of these areas of religious combination, with the result that it has assumed an inappropriately self-evident meaning across the study of ancient religions, even while scholars have discovered how different each of these "syncretistic" endeavors could be: the Theban priest invoking Amun as Re, the terracotta image of the Syrian Magna Mater as Venus, and the maintenance of ancestral altars in Christian homes in Egypt. Like "pagan survival," "syncretism" often implies that the elements combined, or ostensibly combined, in some religious expression belong to pure and mutually exclusive religious systems—Egyptian and Greek, Jewish and Roman, Christian and heathen—when in fact all these alleged "systems" are themselves endlessly mutating and shifting bricolages taking place in many different regional and local contexts.[54]

But in recent years anthropologists have begun to rectify the notion of syncretism. This field has grown particularly attentive to how subjects and opponents each describe syncretistic phenomena and what the consequences of their different perspectives might be for our—the observer's—interpretation. Is a particular phenomenon, in fact, an ancient tradition or really a modern one? Do subjects consider it Christian? And what might "non-Christian" or "heathen" have actually meant for one or another historical community—in late antique Egypt or Gaul, say, or in modern Guatemala? From these questions has come a more nuanced sense of syncretism as not just religious combination but discourse *about* religious combination and purity. Thus it is useful to bring the term "syncretism" back into interpretive scholarship as a category not only sufficient for describing the diverse bricolages to which religions are perennially disposed but vital specifically because of its history of misapplications and distortions, as Charles Stewart and Rosalind Shaw proposed in 1994.[55] This rectified use of syncretism involves a multidimensional approach to cultures in transformation, recognizing their often-simultaneous tactics of embracing and eschewing modern religious idioms, inventing "authentic traditions," and appropriating new ideas to sanction old ones, all of which bear manifest political and economic implications.

Of course, as a condition of being readmitted, "syncretism" must imply not the weaving together of two theological systems or institutions, but rather an assemblage of symbols and discourses; not the reversion to a "semi-Christianity" or "Christianized paganism" among "converted" peoples, but rather cultures' inevitable projects of interpreting and assimilating new religious discourses; and not the leaving of "pagan survivals" in the wake of a people's uniform devotion to a

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Widengren, *Religious Syncretism in Antiquity*; Bonnet, *Les syncrétismes religieux*; Assmann, "Translating God."

54 See critiques of "syncretism" as applied to religions of the Greco-Roman world in Cassidy, "Retrofitting Syncretism?"; esp. Lincoln, "Retiring 'Syncretism.'"

55 Shaw and Stewart, "Introduction"; cf. Gellner, "For Syncretism"; Stewart, "Syncretism and Its Synonyms," esp. 55; and cf. Pye, "Syncretism Versus Synthesis."

new creed, but rather the inevitable use of traditional imagery and landscape to articulate a new religious ideology—Christian or, for that matter, Buddhist or Muslim.

The models underlying the notion of syncretism should not assume external missionary coercion and passive native absorption of religious ideas but rather *indigenous agency* in the development of meaning, and sometimes even the assertion of native culture within or against the new religious discourse.[56] The creative sources of this indigenous agency have often initially been prophets and ritual experts within the culture, not missionaries from without. Syncretism should be understood as equivalent to the creative, synthetic process by which any idea, symbol, or idiom is appropriated and embraced by a culture: a cross inscribed over a doorway, for example, or the procession of a book of gospels around a field.[57] But it should also be understood as an indication of the subtle attitudes and practices through which cultures *perpetuate* tradition, even in the use of new idioms and centers: a local shrine preserved through identification with a saint or angel, for example. Finally, syncretism must be understood as an experimental assemblage, not a fixed and harmonious melding of ideas. This process is inevitably incomplete and often carries a tension or irony, which may itself lead to controversy rather than the simple preservation of tradition.[58]

The study of syncretistic phenomena in late antique Egypt or Syria or Gaul, much as in early modern Mexico, involves not simply the haphazard collection of things that seem archaic or superstitious, but, more precisely, the examination of how these things are embedded in culture, serve as Christian media, or, alternately, are picked out of local culture by missionaries and reformers as "heathen." On what basis does the reformer isolate a practice as heathen—according to what models, memories, or even manuals? Who it is that identifies heathen practices or symbols in a Christian culture and whether the identification serves the aim of censure or of proving cultural heritage make a big difference historically and for insiders. Is such an identification something the *scholar* performs on a culture that itself sees everything religious as Christian? Is it the accusation of some bishop or scribe trying to make sense of anomalies in some region's ritual practice? Or does this kind of classification—heathen/Christian—actually stem from the culture itself—that is, does the labeling (or recalling) of certain practices as "heathen" function as an "ethnoclassification," in the same way that some cultures label practices as sorcery or wizardry?[59]

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56 See, e.g., Keane, "From Fetishism to Sincerity."

57 See, e.g., Flint, *Rise of Magic*, 254–328; and Roukema, "Early Christianity and Magic."

58 Compare Hugo Nutini's proposal of three "stages" of syncretism, progressing from confusion to integration in a new religious system; Nutini, *Ritual Kinship*, 7–9; this work is cited approvingly by Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage*, 105–6, but the model is far too teleological, since in real culture and history, authenticity and authority will always be contested.

59 Stewart describes these problems of gauging who is assessing and interpreting syncretism as the problem of framing in "Syncretism and Its Synonyms," 56. See in general Johnson, "Syncretism

The term "antisyncretism" has been proposed to describe the latter two circumstances, in which indigenous or alien reformers pick out certain practices as heathen (or otherwise as contaminants of an ostensibly pure religious system) and allow others as legitimate. As we have seen in the sermons of Shenoute of Atripe, Caesarius of Arles, Martin of Braga, and many other vexed observers of popular Christian practice, diverse local traditions can be identified and censured through *discourses* of idolatry, demon worship, and blood sacrifice—discourses that demand purity and the elimination of pollution.[60] While these purifying discourses historically were rooted explicitly in biblical texts, the practices thereby condemned varied considerably among the reformers, the "antisyncretists," who were themselves an idiosyncratic and inconsistent bunch. Shenoute might, as we saw earlier, have condemned Shai devotions in one sermon, but in another he celebrates the incorporation of Nile symbols into church processions.[61] And while Shenoute railed against dream incubation as a heathen practice, a Christian scribe at the sixth-century shrine of Sts. Cyrus and John outside Alexandria acclaimed the dreams that came from these saints as *superior* (and, hence, analogous) to those delivered by the goddess Isis.[62] If the fourth- to fifth-century Paulinus of Nola encouraged the dedication of animals to St. Felix for slaughter and distribution, the fifth- to sixth-century Caesarius of Arles attacked public animal slaughter for banquets and encouraged the demolition of traditional shrines, while in the late sixth century, Gregory the Great instructed his emissaries to encourage both festive animal slaughter and the preservation of temple structures.[63] In the East, the late seventh-century John of Damascus endorsed the worship of icons even while acknowledging their "foul" use by heathens.[64] And further afield the antisyncretist rhetoric of idolatry that Spanish missionaries used to sanction iconoclastic purges in the Andes gradually shifted to a rhetoric of accommodation that has preserved Andean religious forms as Christian to this day.[65] Paulinus, Gregory, John, and the later Spanish missionaries served thus as "syncretists" for their religious worlds, acknowledging the importance of preservation, combination, and resacralization for maintaining the vitality of the religious system in its local milieu.

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and Hybridization," whose recommendations for a rectified use of "syncretism" (766–67) resemble my use of the category in this book.

60 See esp. Markus, *End of Ancient Christianity*, chs. 7–9; Frankfurter, "Beyond Magic and Superstition"; Hen, "Converting the Barbarian West," 48–52.

61 Shenoute, *Let Our Eyes*, 2.5–6, in Emmel, "Shenoute of Atripe," 188.

62 Pseudo-Cyril of Alexandria, *Homily 3 on Ss. John and Cyrus*, in PG 77:1105A. On the context of the Cyril attribution, see Gascou, "Les Origines du culte"; and ch. 7 of this book. On diversity of Christian leaders' attitudes toward incubation, see Stewart, "Ritual Dreams and Historical Orders"; and Graf, *Roman Festivals*, 241–67.

63 Caesarius of Arles, *Sermon* 53–54; Paulinus of Nola, *Poem* 18 (also see ch. 4 of this book); Gregory the Great, *Ep.* 76 to Mellitus.

64 John of Damascus, in PG 94:1256–57.

65 MacCormack, "Gods, Demons, and Idols," esp. 642–47.

Given the diversity, idiosyncrasy, arbitrariness, and often-genuine modernity (as opposed to archaism or apparent traditionalism) of the historical reformers and purifiers—the "antisyncretists"—in their attacks on local practice, it becomes difficult to credit their anxious attention to heathenism and mixture as somehow representing a real orthopraxy, some "essential Christianity." Nor should a book like this one presume the existence of an essential Christianity from which a culture *claiming* Christian identity could so diverge as not to merit its own label from a historical perspective.

While antisyncretism captures the occasional idiosyncratic efforts that have been made to distinguish or purify a Christianity from heathen practices, "syncretism" refers to the whole dynamic process of religious acculturation and bricolage—the very process of interpreting, editing, and enacting a religious system in the local milieu.[66] The term also, as we have just seen, pertains to the politics of authenticity, the indigenous discourses of combination, or the ways in which religious leaders like Gregory the Great or Paulinus of Nola have self-consciously sanctioned or elided traditions. But I am most interested in syncretism as something the historian or ethnographer notices and seeks to understand. Let us consider, for example, the syncretism involved in a peculiar ritual that took place at some early Christian saint shrines in Egypt. A visitor would deliver a question to the entombed saint written in the form of two possible answers. One matched pair that was discovered read: "Oh God Pantokrator, if you command me, your servant Paul to stay under the roof of the monastery of Apa Thomas, command me in this ticket" and "Oh God Pantokrator, if you command me, your servant Paul to go to Antinoë, command me in this ticket."[67] The shrine attendants would return the answer chosen by the saint, according to some hidden rite we cannot reconstruct. This practice is attested at four major saints' shrines that were active in fifth- and sixth-century Egypt.

What is especially remarkable, however, is the ticket oracle's antiquity in Egyptian religion, attested at numerous shrines active since the New Kingdom and especially prominent in Egypt during the Ptolemaic and early Roman periods. It was a thoroughly Egyptian practice, an extension of the temple's authority into the legal and social life of a region, oriented toward individuals' concerns and enacted through the medium of writing. And now, in late antiquity, it became part of the communications of Christian saints. Yet there are no records that the ticket oracle was ever censured as a heathen practice. When we study it as one particular feature of the overall process of Christianization, this oracle practice could be described as a kind of syncretism. That is, as we shall see in chapter 7, the ticket

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66 "Syncretism" as used here and as developed in Stewart/Shaw, Keane, Pye, and others (see notes 56–57) is *not* equivalent to "hybridity," the phenomenon of self-fashioning that in colonized cultures combines, exploits, and critiques prevailing discourses of dress, economy, and power. On this phenomenon, see Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 113–22.

67 De Nie, "Een Koptisch-Christelijke Orakelvraag"; Papini, "Domande oracolari"; Papaconstantinou, "Oracles chrétiens."

oracle procedure represents not a holdover from the age of the pharaohs but a traditional Egyptian form of *Christian* practice—a kind of gesture basic to the region, part of the repertoire of communication at a holy site.[68]

Used in this way, not as a static assumption of pure sources, but as a dynamic *process* in religious transformation and historical perpetuation, syncretism can serve as a productive theoretical model for examining the materials and reports of religious mixture. No longer the peripheral detritus of rudimentary missions or the natural superstitions into which rustic cultures devolve—no longer "pagan survivals," that is—the materials and reports we have been reviewing, from magical texts and ticket oracles to the popular practices enumerated in antisyncretist sermons, all emerge as central documentation of the *process* of incorporating Christianity into society and landscape.

V. AGENCY, GESTURE, AND LANDSCAPE

This rectified model of syncretism turns our attention to the actual contexts of religious combination—those life settings in which syncretism takes place in culture and history. This book will attend particularly to three basic dimensions of religious syncretism: *agency*, *gesture*, and *landscape.*

Attention to agency in syncretism has probably led to the most important reorientation of the term in recent years, for agency takes us from abstract notions of religious merging into the sphere of practice and creative experiment, what I here call bricolage. In its most basic sense, agency comprises *self-determination* and *creativity*, demonstrated by real historical individuals in real historical communities proposing different media and different places for imagining a new religious system—what the medievalist Julia Smith offhandedly called "do-it-yourself Christianity."[69] We may think of an Andean villager locating a shrine to Jesus at a site where community members previously claimed to have seen an apparition, or a Voudoun mambo placing an image of the Virgin of Czestochowa in the middle of her altar to the *loa* Ezili Danto. These individuals would be acting creatively and with self-determination within social conventions, in the interest of collective tradition, and often in an extension of traditional social roles. (Agency in this sense is not simply individualistic but works within social structure and conventions.[70]) Attention to agency consequently rejects a model of syncretism that casts the process as the passive perpetuation of tradition, even while we accept that agency will be expressed (or mediated) through multiple forms of cultural and gestural conventions (a mountain shrine, an altar). Indeed, it is the interplay of agency and tradition that concerns this book. Whether it is manifested as indi-

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68 See in general Husson, "Les questions oraculaires chrétiennes"; Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, 193–95; and idem, "Voices, Books, and Dreams."

69 Smith, *Europe after Rome*, 237.

70 Emirbayer and Mische, "What Is Agency?"

vidual action (like the mambo's eclectic altar) or that of a group (like the dances of a village's pilgrims at a mountain shrine to Jesus), agency involves some degree of choice and effort. It may well be that participants impute their own agency to sources beyond themselves, a phenomenon we will see in chapter 4, in the case of magical efficacy and the crafting of amulets, and chapter 7, when we examine forms of spirit possession at saints' shrines.[71] But we must allow agency to play a role in the mediation of religious traditions and symbols even when it is credited to other sources.

The concept of syncretistic agency must also allow for a range of degrees of deliberate or self-conscious action. The most explicit examples of syncretistic agency are those people who resolutely maintain or even revitalize older traditions against or alongside newer ones—processes that we have already seen problematically labeled as "crypto-pagan." There were people who, following the repressive religious edicts of the Emperor Theodosius, whether for reasons of deliberate dissimulation or simply to continue traditional devotions under cover, kept traditional altars and observed festivals in secret while professing Christianity. These were unusual cases, and in late antiquity they provided bishops with especially graphic stories for sermons on proper Christianity, but they do illustrate the wide range of private efforts that were made to engage a new religious system alongside older traditions. Some people embraced the one by means of the other—Christ as a new form of hero or earth spirit or god—while others, accepting missionary discourse about Christian exclusiveness or imagining the systems as complementary, saw alternate ritual fields between which they were compelled to oscillate; still others created secret traditions behind the closed doors of the domestic sphere.[72] Many others, of course, conceptualized Christian saints, shrines, and ideas as a religious system with authority and efficacy; but they "performed" that system through the traditions and gestures passed down in local religious culture. Each strategy demonstrates agency, and by focusing on this idea we allow syncretism to cover all the ways that people act deliberately and creatively: choosing to maintain an ancestor shrine, add a cross to it, or burn it down; choosing to participate in a pilgrimage to a local spring, erect a cross there, or privately leave offerings.[73]

A final point regarding the application of syncretistic agency to the local worlds in which Christianity was assimilated concerns the actual artifacts or materials of religious bricolage: the votive deposits, crafted images, and amulets that constitute religious economy and practice. Through these objects—whether they are created, personalized, arranged, sold, exchanged, or deposited—one's agency is "distributed" throughout society and the environment. Thus, as the

71 Keane, "From Fetishism to Sincerity."

72 On the conceptualization of complementary ritual systems, distinguished spatially, linguistically, and otherwise, see McIntosh, *Edge of Islam.*

73 See in general Barasch, "Visual Syncretism," 52–54; and for antiquity, Graf, "Syncretism (Further Considerations)," 8934–38.

anthropologist Alfred Gell explained, the world of objects, images, and tools—especially those related to the performance of religion—is a social world in itself, where each piece or assemblage extends and refers back to the agency of a historical or mythic being.[74]

To the extent that agency is shaped by convention and that syncretism itself involves a historical dimension, in the sense of the preservation of practices and associations over time, we must look at gestures—those made at festivals or upon leaving the house, before a sick child, or inside a shrine—as having the capacity to maintain traditions and attitudes. I refer here to the deep sense of "gesture" as a medium of social affiliation, embodied communication, and memory developed by Marcel Mauss and Pierre Bourdieu under the term *habitus*.[75] How does someone know what to do at a sacred tree or a healing shrine, how to approach a saint, how to react to a neighbor's unsafe word, or how to dance at a festival? Whence comes the impulse, recorded in a photograph in a newspaper some years ago, for a man from Dedham, Massachusetts, to pour whiskey on a friend's grave in an action reminiscent of, but certainly unconnected to, ancient Mediterranean customs of *profusio* during family visits to an ancestor's grave?[76] Gestures seem right and customary on given occasions and engage the body in commemoration or devotion or acknowledgment. Gestures embody memory and local tradition; they involve the individual in collective practice and the collective in religious institutions. Gestures like the *orans* hand position, so distinctive of embodied Christian devotion in early images (and presumably practice), could distinguish a soul in transit, signify communication with gods, or link oneself to an official image, like that of a saint.[77] Facility with gestures identifies one person as a ritual authority and another as a devotee, as we saw in the passage at the beginning of this chapter, in which people are said to "tie amulets on their children, hand-crafted by men—those (men) who provide a place for the dwelling of demons."[78] This scenario of an amulet crafter or ritual specialist would have been distinguishable to a parent or grandparent through the use of distinctive gestures—through habitus. Communal gestures allow the perpetuation and adjustment of memories, whether those memories concern spirits of a pond, the power of an archaic image, or the necessity of some ritual for family prosperity, like the Shai lamp rites that Shenoute of Atripe described in the passage earlier.[79]

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74 Gell, *Art and Agency*; this idea is elucidated with regard to ancient magical objects by Gordon, "From Substances to Texts."

75 Mauss, "Techniques of the Body"; Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*; for an application to syncretism theory, see Rey and Richman, "Somatics of Syncretism." See also Connerton, *How Societies Remember*.

76 Cemetery *profusio*: see the photograph accompanying Jenna Russell, "Bonded in Life and Death," *Boston Globe*, November 11, 2006; cf. Toynbee, *Death and Burial*, 51–52.

77 Barasch, "Visual Syncretism," 45–46.

78 See pp. 2–3.

79 See p. 13. See esp. Rey and Richman, "Somatics of Syncretism."

Much of the evidence we have for so-called pagan survivals in fact depicts popular gestures of response to places, times, and events. The same complaint just cited about popular practices in late antique Egypt also describes how people "*ablute* [ⲉⲩϫⲱⲕⲙ̄] their children in . . . water from the arena [or] the theater, and . . . *pour all over themselves* [ⲉⲩⲡⲱϣⲧ̄ ⲉϫⲱⲟⲩ] water with incantations [spoken over it] and *break* [ⲉⲩⲟⲩⲱϭⲛ̄] clay pots, claiming it repels the evil eye . . . [and] *tie amulets* [ⲉⲩⲙⲟⲩⲣ ⲛ̄ϩⲉⲛⲫⲩⲗⲁⲕⲧⲏⲣⲓⲟⲛ] on their children."[80] In a text from about the same time in Gaul, Caesarius of Arles describes communal responses to a lunar eclipse, which the people "imagine they can overcome by the sound of a trumpet or the ridiculous tinkling of bells that are violently shaken," and common ritual responses to illness: "Let us," he parodies his audience, "sacrifice a garment of the sick person, a girdle that can be seen and measured. Let us offer some magic letters, let us hang some charms on his neck."[81] Again, what he here deems heathen are gestures of response that involve some measure of vital community tradition. Yet the Syrian holy man Simeon, who famously ascended a pillar on a rural mountaintop in the early fifth century by himself, invited great renown (as well as criticism) for this spectacular gesture, which resonated with pillar gestures and symbols common to Syrian religion of the Roman period. None of these practices points to holdovers from larger religious systems. Rather, each reflects gestures, habitus, and ways of acting socially that were embedded in life and directed at particular places, times, events, and even children. They are gestures that ecclesiastical witnesses may have picked out as anomalous or even heathen but participants regarded as necessary and congenial.[82]

These kinds of witnesses depict agency—one might even say assertiveness—in the maintenance of those gestures as part of the repertoire of safeguarding family members, marking time, addressing crises, and (in the case of Simeon) signifying holiness. But they also depict people negotiating forms of the new religious system within particular landscapes: rocks, trees, fountains, and even urban sites like the arena. Other sources show people conceptualizing Christianity, its saints and powers, in terms of particular mountains, rivers, marshes, boundaries, and even structures. We think with what surrounds us—with what we see, walk through, and steer away from. Social transition itself is invariably played out across territory, and dangers are invariably imagined according to pools, deserts, swamps, and crossroads. Anthropologists have long noted the capacity of landscape features to forbid or invite particular social groups, to symbolize liminality and center, to call for rites of passage and reentry, and to conjure both memory and emotion.[83] In his brilliant study of the Christianization of the Andes, Michael

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80 Pseudo-Athanasius, *Homily on the Virgin* 95, in Lefort, "L'homélie de S. Athanase," 36.

81 Caesarius of Arles, *Sermon* 52, in Mueller, *St. Caesarius of Arles*, 260–62.

82 This is a point made by Pina-Cabral, "Gods of the Gentiles"; Künzel, "Paganisme, Syncrétisme et culture religieuse populaire," 1062; and Béatrice, "La christianisation des campagnes," 38–39. On Syrian stylism, see Frankfurter, "Stylites and *Phallobatēs*"; and Eastmond, "Body vs. Column."

83 See, e.g., Stewart, *Demons and the Devil*

Sallnow noted that power itself "was always spatial, mapped out across the variegated natural environment and thus appearing to issue from the landscape itself. Social relations became spatial relations, conceptualized through an energized landscape. . . . Political control was extended and consolidated by gaining control of the landscape, by annexing and reenergizing sacred sites."[84]

In these ways, as chapter 7 will explain, landscape serves as the fundamental context for the religious authority of a system like Christianity—the primary medium for recalling gestures, encountering spirits, and conceptualizing religious systems.[85] Landscape, including its miniature enclosed forms at saints' shrines, the cells of holy men, and domestic structures, channels social experience (processions, family workshops) and frames the agency of social subjects as they move between ritual consultations, shrines, villages, and domestic spaces.

Agency, gesture, and landscape are the most basic dimensions in which we can begin to make sense of the syncretism behind our witnesses, for they frame what people are doing as sensible and meaningful without recourse to notions of "pagan survival." All three dimensions also amount to a model of Christianization itself, inasmuch as a novel religious system—in whatever form it has been historically introduced—depends on popular agency, traditional habitus, and the framework of landscape to be sensible.

VI. SOCIAL SITES AND RELIGIOUS WORLDS OF SYNCRETISM IN LATE ANTIQUE EGYPT

All three dimensions of syncretism—agency, gesture, and landscape—bring us into the practiced, lived world of people in space and time; and they also invite us into the particular social worlds in which people *express* agency, *develop* or *maintain* gestures, and *act* in the landscape. These social worlds encompass such religious agents as mothers and grandmothers, craftsmen, monastic scribes, ritual experts, and even pilgrims at shrines. All such social worlds, or what Theodore Schatzki calls "social sites," involve different configurations of activity and personal engagement, social bonding, social identity, and movement through fixed spaces.[86] And consequently, in the course of Christianization of a region, different social sites will involve different motivations, attitudes, materials, and creative innovation in the area of religion. One might say that each social site constitutes a kind of laboratory of religious symbols.

Creators of media—terracotta figurines, say, or written amulets—may exemplify the most vivid forms of agency, while those who assert their demands on saints' shrines or on ritual experts may contribute in other ways to the syncretistic

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84 Sallnow, *Pilgrims of the Andes*, 97–98; Frankfurter, "Introduction"; idem, "Espaces et Pèlerinage."

85 See Béatrice, "La christianisation des campagnes," 30–32.

86 Schatzki, *Site of the Social*; this work is usefully applied to religious creativity by Stowers, "Ontology of Religion."

construction of Christianity, as audiences, clients, tellers of stories, and collective shapers of tradition. In late antique Egypt both craftsmen and clients made up particular, if interconnected, social worlds: the clients impressed on craftsmen their demands for efficacious objects (figurines, vials), and the craftsmen developed from molds or traditional prototypes ritual materials that conveyed efficacy through their creative evocations of tradition or authority. Thus the project of describing religious syncretism—indeed, of locating the Christianization of Egypt or any other culture—becomes one of identifying the individual social sites at which religious agency was expressed.[87] In this way the locus of religious syncretism and Christianization shifts by necessity from the total culture—Egypt writ large—to individual social worlds that might have differed considerably in their agency and media of syncretism, their range of practices, and their sense of Christianity as a system of ideas. Neither the craftsman nor the grandmother nor the ritual specialist in his or her bricolages "represents" the culture and its Christianization; they simply stand for the exigencies and creative efforts of their respective social worlds in time and space. A sixth-century amulet invoking Isis and Horus, such as the one with which this chapter began, characterizes not Egyptian Christianity as a whole, but rather the social world of the ritual expert—or the scribe in his capacity as ritual expert—and the oral reservoir of charms from which he drew to create and edit this spell.

The subsequent chapters of this book investigate the social world, religious character, magical needs, and syncretistic impulses of a variety of contexts in which Christianization took place in late antique Egypt: the domestic sphere (chapter 2); the holy man (chapter 3); the saint's shrine (chapter 4); the workshop (chapter 5); the world and productions of monastic scribes (chapter 6); and the landscape itself, as a performative and social framework for acting, remembering, perpetuating, and erasing (chapter 7). Each social site involved a particular range of people and social roles, in ongoing or temporary interaction; a particular type and layout of space; and differing types of agency and creativity—all of which framed agency and habitus in the negotiation of Christianity. Each social world consisted of traditions that motivated and shaped creative action. The actual organization of each chapter will differ in order to capture the particular problems and character of each social site, its traditions, and the actual artifacts—archaeological, hagiographical, and magical—that illustrate it.

Most importantly, none of these social sites was entirely discrete; each naturally extended outward to overlap with others. As we will see in chapter 2, agents of the *domestic sphere*, the home, brought their needs and concerns to *holy men* and to *saints' shrines* for resolution through vows or by oracles, while the saint's shrine depended on *workshops* to produce images and amulets to commemorate devotees' visits and on *scribes* (often from monasteries) to develop legends for

87 This point was made most significantly by Graf, "Syncretism (Further Considerations)," 89–37.

public reading.[88] *Landscapes*, both rural and urban, linked private and public experiences and gestures (e.g., the reciprocal domestic sites of house and tomb) and involved a diversity of extra-institutional holy places (e.g., dilapidated temples and statues) for local devotions. There were essential overlaps linking the various worlds of Christianization, and yet individually each site had its own traditions—its own distinctive needs, gestures, and social contexts—in which Christianity was interpreted and constructed.

The domestic sphere (chapter 2)—including house, tomb, and sometimes shop—involved particular concern for the perpetuation of the family, for procreative fertility, for commemoration of ancestors, and for protection. Across cultures, the ritual gestures particular to the home and its concerns tend to be embedded in everyday gestures, from threshold crossing to hearth keeping, from hair combing to water fetching. Everything may be brought into ritual application. A vignette from a Coptic saint's life introducing a story of violent Christianization depicts a Christian scribe's view of domestic ritual in a village that had so far retained its traditional cult as follows: "There was a village on the west side of the river in which they worship an idol called Kothos, which is mounted in the niches of their houses. And when they go inside their doors, they are accustomed to bow down their heads and worship him."[89] The scribe describes the niche-altar, with its simple domestic image and specific devotional gestures, much as Abbot Shenoute in the earlier text describes verbal celebrations of the local fortune spirit Shai over domestic lamps. Indeed, it is no surprise that most antisyncretist accusations of heathen practices in early Christianity list gestures that occurred in and around the home and were concerned with the protection of family members and the propitiation of spirits related to the home. In many ways, the home became a kind of axis of ritual agency, stimulating family members to go out, to discover or perpetuate holy places, and to prevail on shrines and holy men for protective water, oil, sand, amulets, and the like. Syncretism, as the historian and archaeologist find it here, comprises simple gestures, often-local holy sites, and an openness to the most eclectic bricolages of Christianity and folk traditions for the sake of family security and the negotiation of crises. If traditional, avowedly non-Christian spirits were propitiated, as Abbot Shenoute describes regarding the lamps lit for Shai, it was rarely as "cult" and more often as a function of calendrical observance, protection, and ancestral commemoration.

Another social site vital for the regional articulation of Christianity—for situating Christian teachings in the Egyptian landscape—can be found in the holy man (chapter 3). Most historians agree with Peter Brown's proposition that it was such indigenous charismatic leaders who spearheaded the process of Christian-

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88 Frankfurter, "Interpenetration of Ritual Spaces."

89 Pseudo-Dioscorus, *Panegyric on Macarius of Tkow* 5.1, in Johnson, *Panegyric on Macarius*; see also Frankfurter, "Illuminating the Cult of Kothos," 180–82.

izing villages and regions in the eastern Mediterranean world.[90] The implication of their importance, however, is that Christianity itself—from the definition of its demonic world to the manipulation of its saving symbols—was subject to their synthetic visions. The same charismatic figures who saw demons in the images on temples might craft amulets of crocodile teeth; the same figures who were said to chat regularly with Christ in their caves might claim power over the Nile or deliver oracles in the possession of some spirit.

In what sense would the holy man have been a "social site," however? In fact, holy men in Egypt were embedded in society, the objects of plaintive letters and desperate regional supplicants, and often acted as "fathers" to an intimate band of acolytes. The archaeology of hermits' dwellings has revealed areas deliberately laid out for supplicants and for acolytes.[91] The syncretism of the holy man involved the integration of quite absolutist messages about the centrality of Christ with archaic Egyptian images of the demonic, like crocodiles and scorpions: it is Christ who repels the dangers you have always known in the landscape. Even in the amulets they distributed, holy men seem to have cleaved to some traditional media and gestures along with the inevitable sign of the cross. Holy men were both *prophets*—with a liminal role in society, representing a radical Christianity—and syncretistic *bricoleurs*, drawing on the gestures and symbols of the immediate culture to articulate Christian power.

Most of the social sites to which we can attribute syncretistic forms in late antique Egypt are distinctive for their dedication to the production of *Christian* materials: texts, figurines, lamps, vials, and even Christian legends and liturgical speech. Whether from the world of monks or craftsmen, these materials do not reflect some archaic world of belief and representation outside Christianization; instead, syncretism was the vehicle for the production of Christianity. We thus come in chapter 4 to the social world of the saint's shrine, a veritable crucible for the production of a lived Christianity and for the perpetuation of traditional religious forms. Saints' shrines served as regional religious centers for villagers and townspeople—agents of the domestic sphere—and as sites of creativity in ritual and craft. The space of the saint's shrine enveloped workshops, ecclesiastical performers, devotees, monks, and literate experts.

The central function of the saint's shrine in Christian Egypt—as, of course, elsewhere in the Christian world—was to offer the vital, healing presence of the saint him- or herself. Toward that end, and as a social site, the shrine involved various media, attendants, and ritual performances to construct that presence, ranging from iconography and the craftsmen who created it to the architecture that channeled devotees' activities and created a sense of center; the texts and scribes that permitted the collection of miracle stories and hagiography for public

90 Brown, "Rise and Function of the Holy Man"; and idem, *Authority and the Sacred*, 55–78. See as well Kaplan, "Ethiopian Holy Man"; Howard-Johnston and Hayward, *Cult of Saints*.

91 Brooks Hedstrom, "Divine Architects," esp. 376–77.

reading; the shrine attendants who interpreted the dreams of incubants and facilitated the placing of messages and votive offerings; the priests who devised and led processions from and around the shrine; and, of course, the workshops that manufactured the souvenir vials and figurines so central to the pilgrim's experience in Christian Egypt. At the same time, the shrine involved devotees, pilgrims, and the creative agency and traditions that they themselves brought to the shrine and its personnel. And out of this confluence of groups, attendants, and leaders there arose at different saints' shrines certain sanctioned forms of ritual interaction: stational processions; feasting and dance; incubation in some designated space near the shrine in order to receive the saint's direct vision; the removal of sand or oil as "blessings" in a souvenir vial; votive deposits of female figurines near the central crypt; and, most interesting for the study of syncretism in Christian Egypt, the submission of oracular questions in positive and negative forms, as we saw earlier, for the saint's divine choice.

While each of these forms of ritual interaction had pre-Christian precedents, they were not "pagan survivals" but basic gestures in the devotional interaction with a Christian shrine. Yet even in their essential function these gestures could be quite elaborate. The repertoire of embodied customs for interacting with the sacred comprised not just hand positions and utterances but sleep, the phrasing of questions, and the positioning of dolls. Of course, the religious world of the saint's shrine involved *peripheral* or unsanctioned forms of ritual interaction as well. There was feasting, for example, sometimes on the stamped cakes that were made locally as part of the pilgrim economy, and there was dancing. Both modes of interaction with the shrine expressed the traditions and agency of the domestic world, and, at least outside of Egypt, both modes could earn the censure of antisyncretists like Caesarius of Arles. But the religious world of the shrine, especially at festival times, called forth these expressions and these responses, and people ate and danced and sang as part of the celebration of the saint. "Syncretism" therefore lies not in the recycling of "heathen" ideas out of some uncatechized ignorance, but in the very acclamation of Christian power at a shrine or festival.

We might speak of a "magic" in the material presence of an amulet or holy man's blessing, but there was similarly a magic in the terracotta, stonework, woodcrafts, textiles, and carvings that workshops produced to decorate or protect homes, bodies, shrines, and gravesites—the subject of chapter 5. Considerable evidence of workshops in Roman and late antique Egypt reveals their great diversity in size and clientele, from large-scale urban stonecarving centers to local family-based pottery shops, some of which were attached to shrines and churches and some of which were entirely independent. It is therefore difficult to generalize about workshops as a single type of social site or religious world. Some stonecarvers maintained lively iconographies for tomb decoration based on classical mythology well into the fifth century, only occasionally adding crosses at clients' re-

quest.[92] The terracotta female figurines produced at Apa Mena and many other local ceramics workshops both for pilgrims' votive deposits and for domestic use clearly were a continuation of some type of pre-Christian ritual tradition, and yet each workshop developed its own distinct type of figurine, even adding *orans* or cross details to reflect Christian contexts. This chapter looks at five types of workshops or crafts (stonecarvers, terracotta artisans, painters, textile weavers, and mortuary specialists) to examine the ways that *efficacy*—a ritual functionality beyond decoration or mere representation—was constructed and involved traditions embedded in the workshop habitus. Mummification and burial in late antique (Christian) Egypt tends to be discussed in specific archaeological terms, and we know little about the sites and social contexts of those who carried out these services. Indeed, earlier assumptions that Christianity as an institution had an interest in, and effect on, mortuary traditions in the ancient world have been the subject of increasing skepticism, so we cannot assume that mortuary craft in late antique Egypt was practiced under church direction or in some other institutional context.[93] But even if it was not organized in guilds or institutions, mortuary preparations did constitute a craft, and a craft maintained for the purpose of ensuring an effective transition of the deceased, regardless of actual belief system.

The persistence and transformation of all these crafts, rather than representing a passive continuity of archaic tradition, involved the full agency and investment of craftsmen and clients. In the service of composing *efficacious* images for private devotion or spatial protection, mortuary safety or mythic heritage, workshops articulated the power and authority of the cross and saints (and, in the case of some tomb carvings, classical mythology as well) through traditional iconographic strategies—strategies that were handed down as part of the culture of the workshop and its clientele, not as dictates of the church.

In the case of texts and writing, the topic of chapter 6, syncretism appears to have occurred less through deliberate efforts at mixture and more often through attempts to articulate Christian verbal efficacy and stories for the various circumstances in which people engaged with writing, from liturgy to village crisis. Christian magical texts, for example, some of which combine Christian and Egyptian names (like the one at the beginning of this chapter), point not to some amorphous heathen underworld of magic but to scribes, literate specialists in the collection, editing, and construction of magical spells for everyday crises. These scribes seem to have had some sorts of monastic affiliations but operated across the worlds of monastery, church, shrine, and even village.[94] In addition, they had

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92 On the versatility of stonecarvers' use of Christian motifs, see Thomas, *Late Antique Egyptian Funerary Sculpture*, 28–55; and Török, *Transfigurations of Hellenism*, 196–97, 208.

93 Rebillard, *Care of the Dead*; Dunand and Lichtenberg, "Pratiques et croyances funéraires," esp. 3242–43, 3248–49; and Dunand, "Between Tradition and Innovation."

94 Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, 257–64; and Jacques van der Vliet, review of *Testi della magia copta* by Pernigotti, *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 62, nos. 3–4 (2005): 278–79.

the responsibility of copying biblical texts, editing festival encomia, and composing apocryphal books for the purpose of maintaining a culture of holy narrative and legend through texts. This overlap in monastic literary culture is apparent in the extant Coptic and Greek magical spells, which draw on liturgical language and esoteric lore about angels and demons, features that imply some affiliation with ecclesiastical and monastic culture.[95] In their readiness to reorient liturgical or ecclesiastical language and lore in order to protect homes, invite angelic powers, and bind people's rivals, literate experts evidently worked independently from strict institutional oversight. In that sense we credit them with considerable agency in their reorientation of Christian efficacious speech.

In addition to monastic scribes' role as literate ritual specialists mediating between an eclectic world of apocryphal and apocalyptic texts and a broader folk world of charms and veneration for the inscribed word, the chapter addresses two types of literature that arose within monastic Christianity: a type of oracle that embraced the totality of Egypt and texts that imagined the underworld in gruesomely attentive detail. Both types of literature seem to have revitalized earlier Egyptian literary forms. Indeed, some of the most challenging examples of "pagan survivals" have come from Coptic apocryphal books and martyrologies that were progressively compiled over late antiquity and the Islamic period. These books contain numerous elaborate depictions of afterlife demonology, reminiscent of the ancient *Book of the Dead*, and gruesome narratives of the distribution of martyrs' body parts, inviting analogies to the distribution of the god Osiris's body in earlier Egyptian mythology, although the late dates of their final editing challenge any simple notion of continuity. Still, the books must be factored into any model of Christianization, and their composition and editing point both to a public culture of martyr commemoration (at which many such texts were read aloud) and to a particular scribal culture in which certain older literary forms were recalled, in a kind of scribal habitus, in the course of composing and elaborating texts.[96]

I earlier described the principles for considering religions and religious transformations like Christianization within the context of local landscapes, which structure movement, give place to collective memory, and draw out values and dispositions through legends. Chapter 7 thus addresses ways in which landscape allowed the persistence of some traditions and the growth of an indigenized Christianity. Dilapidated temples might have provided the monumental framework for churches; villagers might have continued to visit fallen statues and mutilated iconography for ritual interventions; and the two orientations might have clashed in space and time, if some abbot deemed intolerable popular devotional practices at a heathen site. Elsewhere, innovative processional routes effectively rooted Christian traditions in the local landscape and offered calendrical struc-

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95 See Frankfurter, "Demon Invocations."
96 See Kotsifou, "Books and Book Production."

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