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## **Church treasures of Byzantine Egypt**

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Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach  
dozwolonego użytku.

Ewa Wipszycka

## CHURCH TREASURES OF BYZANTINE EGYPT

TREASURES UNCOVERED by archaeologists are not solely deposits of coins. There are also hoards of priceless objects, such as church implements used in cult on various occasions. For the sake of convenience, I will refer to them as “church treasures”. They not only include vessels intended for performing the Eucharist offering (chalices, patens of various shapes, plates, spoons for administering wine during the Holy Communion), but also crosses, silver and bronze jugs, bronze lamps suspended on chains, metal (silver or gilded) altar lids, bronze censers, occasionally metal fittings.<sup>1</sup>

Caches of church valuables appeared for much the same reasons as coin hoards. Someone hid the valuables and then failed to return for them. The only difference is that coin hoards are privileged to have the full interest of numismatists, archaeologists and historians, while church treasures do not get as much attention. Particular objects constituting such treasures happen to have extensive and critical art-historical literature, while church treasures in general are beyond the scope of research. Without attempting an exhaustive study of the phenomenon in the ancient world, I will try to collect and analyze the information concerning Byzantine Egypt that I have come across. A huge advantage of this

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<sup>1</sup> H. LECLERQ, ‘Inventaires liturgiques’, [in:] *Dictionnaire d’archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*, Paris 1926, s. v.; A. PAPACONSTANTINO, “La manne de saint Jean. À propos d’un ensemble de cuillers inscrites”, *Revue des Études Byzantines* 58 (2001), pp. 239–246.

data is its provenance from different kinds of sources that are supplementary to one another.

I shall begin with a story recounted in a mediaeval Egyptian synaxarion<sup>2</sup> under the date of the 1st of Abib (i.e. June 25):

In the locality of Touna in the diocese of Tanda there lived two brothers who were presbyters in the local church. Their father held the office of steward (he may have also been a member of the clergy, perhaps in the rank of deacon, but there is no mention of this – E. W.). One day he felt death coming. He sent for his sons in order to tell them personally where the holy vessels were hidden, but the brothers were already in their liturgical vestments preparing to officiate and, in the opinion of the author of the synaxarion, they could not take them off before the Eucharist offering was performed. Three times the father called them, but when they finally came to his deathbed, it was already too late. And thus, the priceless objects belonging to the church were lost forever. One of the brothers went to Sketis, a renowned monastic centre, where Anba Daniel (a semi-legendary figure, whom our sources place between 485 and 580) revealed the hiding place of the church treasure to him. This tale, however, does not end here. In the church where the brothers served, a snake devoured the Eucharistic reserve prepared in case of sudden illness and stored in a special box according to custom. The brothers killed the reptile without further thought, but then began wondering if perhaps they should eat it because the Eucharist had entered the snake's body. An angel appeared to them, confirming that they were right in their thinking. The brothers were poisoned by the reptile's meat and this tragic

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<sup>2</sup> Synaxarion – collection of lives of saints and martyrs of the Church in calendar order. Used to read from during mass on the days of the saints; perused by preachers for information about a given saint or church patron etc. The synaxarion of the Monophysite Coptic Church, written in Arabic, appeared in this form sometime in the 14th century in Lower Egypt and was altered in various ways in the course of numerous successive redactions. Its authors frequently availed themselves of older, largely unidentified sources. There are several editions and translations of the synaxarion, the one used most frequently (also by the present author) is the text prepared by R. BASSET, published in *Patrologia Orientalis*, I (1904); III (1907); XI (1916); XVI (1922); XVII (1924), Paris. We know of the existence of an Upper Egyptian synaxarion but it has never been published. The ethiopic version of the anecdote cited in the text was published by I. GUIDI in *Patrologia Orientalis* VII (pp.209–212).

death by choice (because the brothers knew what awaited them) ensured them a place among the martyrs and in the synaxarion.

This fictional tale is not excessively complicated in the literary sense. It is one of those fantastic stories which at first glance seem not to have any rational core or logic to them. It resembles other legends in which the sudden death of an ecclesiastic prevents him from passing on secret information of importance for the Christian community. Subsequently, it is necessary to search for a holy man who will either raise the man from the dead so that he can answer a given question or, like Daniel in this case, will know where the lost objects are concealed.

There is no doubt that the story should be classified as “narrative reality”, yet it also provides us with information about “experienced reality” (*la réalité vécue*). Confirmation for the above statement is found in can. 62–61 of *Canons of St. Athanasius*.<sup>3</sup> It discusses the issue of protecting

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<sup>3</sup> *The Canons of Athanasius of Alexandria*. The Arabic and Coptic versions edited and translated by W. RIEDEL and W. E. CRUM, London 1904. It is a highly interesting text of a normative nature. It takes on the form of a free discourse delivered by the bishop based on his own experience. The structure of the discourse is casual – from our “Western” (that is, subject to the influence of Roman law) point of view, we are dealing more with an elaborate sermon than with a set of codified rules. There is a similar piece in the pseudoepigraphic tradition – the *Didaskalia of the Apostles*. Dating and identification of the author of the *Canons of St. Athanasius* present some difficulty. Although the first publishers accepted the information provided by the colophon of the Arab manuscript as far as the author is concerned, other researchers easily added the descriptor “pseudo” in front of Athanasius’ name. True, the perspective of the author regarding the activities of the Church is that of a provincial bishop, not a bishop of Alexandria; not one thing in the entire text even suggests that the text was written by one of the greatest men of the Church of the mid 4th century. There is only one reason why the “pseudo” should be removed from the title: close stylistic parallels between some of the paragraphs of the *Canons* concerning women ascetics and some of the ascetic pieces securely attributed to Athanasius, cf. E. WIPSZYCKA, “L’ascétisme féminin dans l’Égypte de l’Antiquité tardive: *topoi* littéraires et formes d’ascèse”, [in:] *Le rôle et le statut de la femme en Égypte hellénistique, romaine et byzantine. Actes du colloque international, Bruxelles – Leuven 27–29 novembre 1997*, ed. H. MELAERTS & L. MOOREN [= *Studia Hellenistica* 37], Leuven 2002, pp. 355–396, esp. pp. 377–382). Even so, the attribution of the ascetic texts to Athanasius is still disputed. From the present point of view the matter is of secondary importance. For the same reason we need not be involved in a precise dating of the *Canons*. The important thing is that the stage of institutional development reached by the Church already included a network of non-episcopal churches requiring normative regulations. In Egypt, this occurred around the middle of the 4th century.



consecrated vessels. "The steward [= chief or great steward – EW] shall know all the consecrated vessels of the church and shall make a visitation thereof each year" (end of the canon 61 of the Arabic translation). "This also is the law of the lesser stewards. Every consecrated vessels shall be with him and the reckoning thereof shall be in the great church. All the consecrated vessels that have been vowed shall be given unto Him [W. E. Crum: sc. God], whether it be a vessel of gold or silver or bronze; and he shall tell the bishop concerning them at the Paschal feast, that he may write them down" (canon 62 of the Arabic translation).

The "great" steward (meaning the bishop's steward) was required to inspect all of these objects and it was the duty of the "lesser" stewards (in the non-episcopal churches) to extend personal care over the sacred vessels.<sup>4</sup> The annual inspection mentioned above took place in the "great church" (the episcopal cathedral) and a new list of the objects was made.<sup>5</sup>

It is immediately clear that the Canons are referring to the "lesser stewards", meaning the men responsible for the economic affairs of churches where worship was not conducted on a systematic weekly basis. Such churches were erected in commemoration of saints, opened primarily on the holy days dedicated to the worship of these saints and functioned according to a schedule established by the bishop.<sup>6</sup> The clergy was not as numerous in these churches and less people came to worship there regularly. The smaller churches were not as well furnished as a rule, but it did happen that the faithful brought rich offerings in gratitude for divine grace received through the saint to whom the church was dedicated. Thus the conditions for stealing were very favourable. Removing the valuables from the church for the duration of the period when they were not needed for celebration of the liturgy was the best solution from the point of

<sup>4</sup> On church stewards, cf. E. WIPSYCKA, *Les ressources et les activités économiques des églises en Égypte du IV<sup>e</sup> au VIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Brussels 1972, pp. 135–141.

<sup>5</sup> Once more the special responsibility of the stewards for the treasures of the churches: "As for the sick which are in the holy place, if they have wherewithal to live, they shall not be a burden upon the church. But if they be poor, the steward of the church shall watch over them as it were the vessels of the church, knowing that God shall enquire of him concerning the holy vessels ..." (canon 80 of the Arabic translation).

<sup>6</sup> For a characteristic of different kinds of churches, see E. WIPSYCKA, *Études sur le christianisme dans l'Égypte de l'antiquité tardive*, Roma 1996, pp. 139–156.

view of church administration. Whatever was needed was then taken out of the cache. The system operated efficiently, assuming that the steward was always at hand and did not die taking the secret of the location of the cache to the grave. In the story retold above, the steward could have left this information with someone, considering that he was able to send for his sons not once but three times, but logic is something literature is prone to avoid whenever the artistic effect is at stake.

One thing strikes me as noteworthy: the author of the Canons, like other authors of hagiographic texts retelling stories similar to the one cited here, refers to “vessels” even though vessels were not the only valuable objects offered to churches. They were, however, the most important valuables belonging to a church because they belonged to the sphere of the sacrum, used for the Eucharistic bread and wine, meaning the Body and Blood of Christ.

The sacred vessels were not always charged to the “great” or “lesser” stewards for safekeeping. At Sketis in the 7th century, this duty lay with the presbyter of the local church. We learn of this from a report concerning persecutions, which the pro-Chalcedonic church and state authorities launched against the Monophysite monks in 631.<sup>7</sup> An imperial official accompanied by a troop of soldiers arrived at Sketis with the *Tome of Leon*, one of the principal texts adopted by the Council of Chalcedon, and demanded that each of the monks sign it. Anticipating all the possible misfortunes that could befall this important monastic centre, Presbyter John escaped with the sacred vessels into the salty marshes, hoping to hide them there.<sup>8</sup> He must have had a secret cache prepared

<sup>7</sup> The report is known from two good hagiographic texts: 1. Arab translation of the *Life of John of Sketis*, produced in 677–686, published by U. ZANETTI, “Vie de Jean de Scete”, *Analecta Bollandiana* 114 (1996), pp. 272–405; 2. *Coptic Life of Samuel of Qalamun*, published by A. ALCOCK (*The Life of Samuel of Kalamoun by Isaac the Presbyter*, Warminster 1983). The author of the *Life of Samuel*, a monk from the monastery Samuel established at Qalamun, lived later, in the 8th century, but he was well acquainted with the story of the saint. A good exposition of the conflict within the Egyptian Church at this time is presented in A. GRILLMEIER, *Jesus der Christus im Glauben der Kirche*, vol. 2, *Die Kirche von Alexandrien mit Nubien und Aethiopien nach 451*, Freiburg 1990, pp. 60–75.

<sup>8</sup> A geographical commentary is in order at this point. Sketis lay in a desert extending alongside the western edge of the Delta, in a depression that was not entirely without water, but where the water was so rich in mineral salts that it was not potable. A local

somewhere just for such an occasion. Unfortunately, he was captured and enslaved by the Bedouins before he managed to hide the church treasure.

John's reaction seems peculiar. The imperial envoys were supposed to check how orthodox the monks were in their creed and to exert pressure on them in matters of the tenets of faith. Sacred vessels have nothing to do with doctrinal matters. But John must have known that interventions of this kind were violent and anything of value was ruthlessly looted on such occasions. It was better to avoid the risk. According to the *Life of Samuel*, an improbable number of 200 soldiers allegedly came to Sketis; an exaggeration of this sort is typical of hagiographic texts. Multiplying the number of soldiers was a useful tool in emphasizing the glory of Samuel who heroically opposed the action.

Interesting information on what could actually be robbed from churches can be drawn from a Coptic text included in a large dossier of St. Claudius of Antioch. The work in question is an *enkomion* composed by Constantine, the bishop of Lykopolis, delivered during the patriarchate of Andronicus (616–623).<sup>9</sup> Pieces of this kind were intended for ceremonies in commemoration of the saint and they were copied diligently because they constituted a useful introductory compendium for preachers preparing their sermons. Unlike the author of the synaxarion, Constantine addresses a specific reader, whom he knows well. This precondition imposes certain limitations on him. He can tell of fantastic miracles, but where he speaks of practical matters, he essentially needs to keep close to reality, otherwise he would not be considered credible.

The churches mentioned by Constantine in the story belong to a category conveniently called 'les églises à visites'.<sup>10</sup> We mean by this churches

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variety of reeds had adapted to these conditions so well that even today the waterlogged areas on lower ground are overgrown with these reeds. In a flat desert such clumps of reeds were the only place where anything could be concealed from Bedouin robbers who frequently raided the hermitages.

<sup>9</sup> The text is in St. Claudius' dossier: "Textes coptes relatifs à saint Claude d'Antioche", ed. G. GORDON, *Patrologia Orientalis* XXXV, Brepols 1970, pp. 611–655. The older edition by J. DRESCHER, "Apa Claudius and the Thieves", *Bulletin de la Société d'Archéologie Copte* 8 (1942), pp. 63–86, deserves a comprehensive consideration in view of the rich commentary.

<sup>10</sup> R. BOUTROS and Chr. DÉCOBERT, "Les installations chrétiennes entre Ballas et Armant: implantation et survivance", *Études Coptes* 7, Louvain 2001, p. 82.



Map illustrating the route of the thieves' raid  
(after J. Drescher, "Apa Claudius" [cit. n. 9], p. 85)

that possessed relics of martyrs and, being widely known, were visited not only by inhabitants of the neighbourhood, but also by people coming from far away, unknown to the local clergy. Most of these people were probably not typical pilgrims, but travellers who just took the opportunity of asking the local saint for protection.

Churches of that kind often had a rich outfit, consisting of gifts from grateful visitors. These precious objects were permanently exhibited as a testimony of the power of the saint and as an incentive for further generosity. Such churches were normally not left without surveillance during the night: members of the clergy took turns staying inside; this was all the more necessary that visitors often asked for permission to spend the night in prayer by the relics. However, the rule was not always rigorously observed.

Constantine's story was composed in commemoration of St. Claudius of Antioch, whose famous sanctuary was located at Pohe (see the map). The protagonists of this drama are three thieves, all of them pagans, who set out to plunder churches together. First they went to



Antinoe where they entered a famous sanctuary dedicated to Apa Koluthos, a martyr and city patron. They let themselves be locked inside the church for the night and took a few valuables, but we do not know what these valuables actually were. Then the robbers reached the church of St. Victor the Stratelates. There they stole a silver altar covering and a golden chalice, as well as a thin linen cloth of good quality, used to veil the altar. Then they crossed the Nile and came to a locality called Perchinoeit, to the sanctuary of Apa Timotheos,<sup>11</sup> whose daughter Martyria was also worshipped there. There was nothing of value that could be stolen from the church except for a silver necklace around Martyria's neck, which the thieves took. We could ask ourselves, how a necklace could be put around the neck of a mummified body. Mummies have no neck at all. However, Martyria's mummy might have been a special type, frequent in the Roman times, furnished with a plaster head and neck.<sup>12</sup>

It should be remembered that, in his sermon to the faithful, Constantine had to stay within the limits of what was believable. Something entirely impossible would have spoiled the overall effect. The ornaments on the mummies I am referring to here are usually painted, but a real necklace may have been offered in gratitude by one of the worshippers and placed around the mummy's neck.

Finally, the thieves came to St. Claudius' sanctuary near the village of Pohe. They entered the portico and asked the steward to open the church so that they could sleep inside it, because one of them was ill and hoped to ask the saint for a cure. In order to gain the steward's trust, the thieves gave him a golden chalice that they had stolen from the sanctuary of St. Victor Stratelates. They told him that, having heard of the powers of St. Claudius, they had decided to come all the way from the Oxyrhynchite nome and had had the chalice made as a votive gift.

From the sanctuary of St. Claudius the thieves took not only the chalice they had offered themselves, but also a silver cross on a silver chain, silver cups, two silver altar coverings (including one with a golden cross depicted in the centre). They also took the saint's silken robes.

<sup>11</sup> W. TILL, *Koptische Heiligen- und Martyrerlegenden*, Roma, vol. I, 1935, pp. III–125.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. F. DUNAND, "Between tradition and funerary practices in Late Antiquity" [in:] *Egypt in the Byzantine world, 300–700*, ed. R. S. BAGNALL (forthcoming).



These robes are just as intriguing as Martyria's necklace. Was the mummy dressed in such robes or were they put on top of the coffin or mummy? Anyhow, if these funerary vestments had lain with or on top of a dead body (be it dried flesh or a mummy), they would have been damaged enough to have value only as relics. In that case, the thieves would have had to declare the provenance of the stolen objects and that would have carried great risk. Let us keep in mind that the nature of the text (praise of a saint), delivered by an author we know, in a specific sanctuary, provides us with a guarantee that the reality presented in the story is credible.

Next, the thieves arrived at the sanctuary of Apa Helias in Kus, where they stole something which is not described in the text. After that, they decided to stop looting and go home, planning to go to Alexandria and sell all the stolen objects on the first occasion. The mention of Alexandria merits attention. It was obvious both to Constantine and to his listeners that there would be no buyers for the stolen goods in the vicinity of the robbed sanctuaries.

Finally, the expected "punishing" miracle, which is of no interest to us in this context, took place. Constantine's story is quite probable on the whole and in fact there is only one important gap in his account: he does not explain how the thieves repeatedly managed to escape from churches that were locked up for the night. It is possible, however, to explain why this issue was not discussed in the tale. Such details were simply of no importance to the listeners. They can be found in other tales, in which the authors, having great confidence in locks and wishing to magnify the crime, accuse the thieves of using magic.

Papyri bring a number of lists of valuables constituting church and monastery property.<sup>13</sup> Surprisingly, the documents mostly concern

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<sup>13</sup> See an article, conscientiously written albeit somewhat mechanical in listing the evidence without any comment: R. DOSTALOVA, "Gli inventari dei beni delle chiese e dei conventi su papiro", *Analecta papyrologica* 6 (1994), pp. 5–19. The most interesting documents include a highly detailed inventory of an episcopal church from the early 8th century, published in *Papyri, Ostraca, Parchments and Waxed Tablets in the Leiden Papyrological Institute (PL.Bat.25)*, Leiden 1991. The text numbered 13 in this edition was published by P. van MINNEN. In second place I would cite a monastic inventory from the turn of the 5th century, constituting part of the collection of the Prague papyri (*Papyri Graecae Vossellae Pragenses*, vol. 2, No. 178), published by R. DOSTALOVA and again quite recently by

churches that are neither episcopal cathedrals nor parish churches. In general, they are the churches administered by the “lesser stewards” mentioned in the canons of St. Athanasius. Even if the lists were made in connection with other procedures (for instance, when replacing stewards), they still give us an idea of what objects were held in the church treasuries. Apart from chalices, patens and spoons used for the Eucharist, crosses etc., the inventories often include such valuables as robes, curtains, even books. Presumably, these were also to be removed and hidden by the “lesser stewards”, although perhaps not in the “salty marshes” as in the story of John of Sketis. They took up more space and were heavier than the prized vessels (characteristically, the term ‘vessel’ refers to all the church valuables made of metal). The thieves described by Constantine of Lykopolis were not interested in books, but in some cases these were also stolen from the monks in hermitages and then sold.

Not many church treasures have been found and recorded in Egypt.<sup>14</sup> Even so, it is worthwhile to discuss them in some detail. They are as follows:

1. Cache from Luxor, from the 7th century. Found in 1899 when digging the temple of Ramesses II, inside a church that had occupied the south-western corner of a courtyard, between the wall and the baptismal font. The deposit included the following silver objects: a cross, three flat rectangular objects of debatable function, many fragments of other flat objects, three censers, fragment of a flask, fragment of a chain. The flat objects in form of rectangular trays are of the greatest interest at this point. (Benazeth catalogue nos. 309–312, with the following dimensions: no. 309 – H. 2.4; L. 65.5; W. 50 cm; no. 310 – H. 2.8; L. 52.4; W. 46 cm; no. 311 – H. 2.9; L. 26; W. 17.6 cm)

Number 311 of Benazeth’s catalogue has the following inscriptions:

a) On the flat surface, the name of bishop Abraham in the genitive (which enables us to approximately date the artefact: Abraham was bishop from 590 to some time between 610 and 620).

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M. HASITZKA and G. SCHMELZ, “Das Klosterbesitzverzeichnis P. Lond. IV 1631. Eine Neuedition”, *Archiv für Papyrusforschung* 49 (2003), pp. 79–112.

<sup>14</sup> They have been placed by D. BENAZETH in “Catalogue general du Musée copte du Caire. I. Objets en metal”, *Mémoires de l’Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale* 119 (2001),

## b) On the sides:

δούλη Θεοῦ Ἐὐλογία Ποτάμων ἀνέθηκεν) . . .  
 ἐκ διακονίας Πραιποσίτου πρεσβυτέρου) . . .  
 διὰ Γρηγορίου) . . . μυρ( ) . . . λιτρῶν) ἰδ' ὀγκιῶν) β  
 [γρ(αμμάτων) ις . . .

J. Maspero, who thought these objects were lids of boxes, interpreted the abbreviation μυρ( ) as μύρ(ου) and assumed this to denote incense (for perfumes could not be kept in boxes) and the weight notations to indicate the weight of the incense contained in the box. His opinion, although generally accepted at first, was proven false by Hélène Cuvigny. She points out that as a rule weight notations written on precious objects refer to the objects themselves, and secondly, that μύρον always denotes perfumed oil, never incense. She writes: “Je serais donc tentée de voir dans μυρ( ) le patronyme ou le technonyme abrégé de Grégorios (*e.g.* Μύρωνος, Μυρισμοῦ, μυροπώλης) en dépit du séparateur: en effet, le dernier mis à part, ces motifs, qui apparaissent à première vue comme des signes de ponctuation forts, pourraient aussi bien jouer le rôle de marques d'abréviation. On pourrait enfin songer (en admettant que notre objet est un couvercle) à résoudre μυρ(οθήκη), une ‘boîte à parfums’, qui serait complément de ἀνέθηκεν.” Another problem is the meaning of ἐκ διακονίας. Following a suggestion of J. Gascou, H. Cuvigny takes this phrase to mean ‘par l’entremise de ...’. To me this interpretation seems better than the one I suggested in *The Coptic Encyclopedia*, s. v. ‘diaconia’. I should say today that ἐκ διακονίας properly means ‘through the kindness of’.

Although the objects are known to have been discovered between the wall and the baptismal font, it is difficult to say whether this was a secret cache used for a long time, or one that was created *ad hoc* as circumstances demanded.

2. Cache from Kom Ombo (Benazeth [cf. note 11] nos. 97, 187, 214, 316, 317, 318). Found when excavating the Pharaonic temple at Kom Ombo, close to a church situated in the north-eastern corner of the structure, of which nothing but some traces remained. The deposit included bronze objects: two crosses, two chalices and a paten.

3. Cache from the main church in the monastery at Saqqara (Benazeth nos. 321, 322, 323, 324). Found in the apse erected at the end of the 5th century (?). Includes part of a bronze lamp and chain and a small spoon, also of bronze.

4. Cache from the church at Samannoud (Benazeth nos. 44, 48, 107, 325, 326, 327, 328, 329) containing bronze objects. It is not clear where exactly they were found. It consists of two candelabra, lamps, three bowls, three rings, two vessels (vases). Dated to the Byzantine period.

5. Cache from Kom Fares (Crocodylopolis in the Fayum – Benazeth nos. 45, 46, 56, 113, 114, 134). Found in the late 19th century. The context of the find is unclear. It consists of bronze objects: four candelabra, three lamps and a large vessel standing on feet. Dated to the Byzantine period.

These are modest treasures to say the least. Church inventories preserved on papyrus testify to a much richer furnishing of churches, presumably exhibited on grand occasions. A sufficient example would be *P. Grenf.* II 111 (5th/6th century) which refers to the church of apa Psojos in the small village of Ibion. Erected by a certain apa Psojos, it was not even the parish church of this locality.<sup>15</sup> The list was made by the archdeacon Elijah and delivered to John, the presbyter and steward. This apparently minor church was furnished with three silver chalices, a silver jug, two altar curtains, a marble altar, bronze tripod, 23 linen altar cloths, five woollen tablecloths, six door curtains, four bronze lamps, eight lamps of another type, two iron lamps, a bronze altar, two bronze washbasins, a vessel for ablutions, a jug, a bowl, a knife, a bier and another larger wooden bier, two leather pillows, three chairs with backrests, two seats of a different kind, and 21 parchment codices.

Even those of the treasures, which have been preserved for researchers seldom have a specified archaeological context. This makes it practically impossible to determine whether they were found in a secret cache where they were stored for everyday use in cult practices or they were concealed somewhere in or around the church and lost when the

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pp. 375–412. On the treasure of Luxor see lastly H. CUVIGNY, “Deux pièces d’argenterie hellénistique avec notations pondérales”, *ZPE* 147 (2004), pp. 195–198.

<sup>15</sup> Parish churches are referred to in the sources as *katholike*, never by the name of the founder or of a saint, cf. E. WIPSYCKA, *Études sur le christianisme* (cit. n. 6).

person in charge did not return to retrieve them. In the latter case, it is more likely that the cache was created to hold loot, a possibility that should always be taken into account.

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