Narrating the Holy Man in Late Antiquity: The Case of Shenoute of Atripe

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Abstract
Generally, in this paper we explore the central role of the holy man in Late Antiquity, and especially the case of Shenoute of Atripe, an extraordinary Egyptian monk from the first half of the fifth century. Our major premise is that in the Christian communities of Late Antiquity, the saint (the holy man so well studied by Peter Brown) played a role comparable to that of the prophet: the axis of the community. Our conclusion is that the holiness of this figure becomes a significant social factor in Late Antiquity.

Key words
holy man, spiritual authority, monasticism, holiness, Late Antiquity, Shenoute of Atripe

Introduction

In this paper we explore the central role of the holy man in late antiquity, and particularly the ascetic or prophet from the middle of the fourth century and fifth century. In this sense we chose an extraordinary Egyptian

monk, Shenoute of Atripe, a holy man saw himself as merely the instrument of God's will.

In the first part we will focus on the essential features of holy man as part of his charismatic authority, and then we will refer to the ascetic discourse that he put forward to promote and legitimize his active role in society. Mostly, the first section is based on Peter Brown's brilliant analysis of the holy man. First of all, we say that late antiquity was a time in which much of the accepted political, cultural, and social order was being transformed into something new: a Christian Mediterranean.[1] The visibility of holiness – the fact that holy men are observed and narrated – plays a central role in understanding the cultural significance of these figures in the late antique world.[2]

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[1] P. Brown reserved a privileged place for the rise of the Christian monk or holy man in the mutual histories of the Christian church and Mediterranean society in late antiquity. The birth of Christian monasticism in the deserts of Egypt, Syria, Asia Minor, and Judea during the late third and early fourth centuries occurred during a period of tremendous cultural, religious, and social ferment. Ascetic movements of various kinds – Gnostics, Manicheans, and others – already existed by the time the first Christian monks embarked upon their own experiments in contemplative living. The reasons for the growth and development of this widespread and diverse ascetic culture are complex and cannot be reduced to any single cause. Nor can the meaning of ascetic life for those who participated in it be accounted for in any simple way. Historian Peter Brown had made a persuasive case for understanding the rise of ascetic and monastic practice (both Christian and non-Christian) in Late Antiquity as a response to a "crisis in human relations" that had arisen amidst this instability and uncertainty. See Peter Brown, *The Making of Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978), p. 82. The social meaning and function of early Christian monastic practice owes much to Peter Brown's groundbreaking work, especially his early ("The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity") and widely influential essay on the holy man. There has been much subsequent reflection on and revision of Brown's important work on the holy man in late antiquity. See in this issue several other scholars influenced by Brown's model of the holy man: Claudia Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity: The Nature of Christian Leadership in an Age of Transition* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 2013; Neil McLynn, *Christian Politics and Religious Culture in Late Antiquity* (New York: Routledge), 2009; A. Papaconstantinou, D. Schwartz and N. McLynn, *Conversion in Late Antiquity: Christianity, Islam, and Beyond* (Farnham, Ashgate), 2016.

[2] Graham Anderson emphasizes the degree to which "action" and "display" are also intertwined in the lives and narratives of late antique holy men. See Graham Anderson, *Sage, Saint and Sophist: Holy Men and Their Associates in the Early Roman Empire* (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 112.

According to Susanna Elm, the late Roman Empire represents an era marked by increasing authorship and the development of new literary genres that "elaborated new notions of sanctity and charisma. It was the period in which models of martyrdom and confessional sainthood emerged." Through this abundance of hagiographical texts and miracle stories, the authors of this emerging culture of charisma reveal to their fellows the processes by which "humans could fashion themselves into saints."[3] A gallery of holy men, living in monasteries or isolated cells, in tombs, or on pillars, all broadened the network of holy space. All those blessed with *charisma* and gifted with *parrhesia* served as a focus of divine power and delineated a new territory of grace[4].

In the second part we will refer to one of the most spectacular holy man in late antiquity, Shenoute of Atripe. The story of this holy man crystallized the image of the charismatic sainthood, because he acts as a living mediator between earth and heaven. In this context we stress that Shenoute of Atripe played a vital pastoral role, as prophet and spiritual guide[5].

The Holy Man: Some Considerations

In this section we wish to indicate some nuances in the multifaceted picture of the holy person in late antique society, especially as it evolved during the last three decades of the seminal studies of Peter Brown.[6] As we know

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[3] Susanna Elm, "Introduction", in „Charisma and Society: The 25th Anniversary of Peter Brown's Analysis of the Late Antique Holy Man. Conference Held at the University of California at Berkeley, March 13-16, 1997", *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 6 (1998), p. 349.

[4] In late antiquity the holy man transformed his territory into a sacred space and created a new site for the interrelation between society and the sacred. For this aspect of the holy man, see the contribution of Mark S. Burrows, "On the Visibility of God in the Holy Man: A Reconsideration of the Role of the Apa in the Pachomian *Vitae*", *Vigiliae Christianae* 41 (1987), pp. 11-33.

[5] For the Peter Brown's classic description of the holy man as patron, and as a spiritual authority (a spiritual father), see "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man," in P. Brown, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982), 132-34, and P. Brown, *Authority and the Sacred: Aspects of the Christianisation of the Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 60-62.

[6] P. Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," *Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971), pp. 80-101; reprinted in idem, *Society and the Holy in Late*

in 1971 Peter Brown published his famous article, 'The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity'.[7] It is no exaggeration to say that this essay had transformed the way we think about saints in late antiquity. Brown' thesis that the rise of the holy man in the later Roman Empire reflected a watershed in religious history, that the veneration of living human beings constitued a realignment of the meaning of sanctity (,the holy man' in Brown's terminology) and of access to the power and social authority which such sanctity conferred, has nourished a rich literature on the Christian saints in late antiquity[8]. For Brown, the Christian saint has represen-

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Antiquity (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), pp. 103-152; now revised in P. Brown, *Authority and the Sacred* (1995): chapter 3 „Arbiters of the Holy: the Christian holy man in late antiquity", pp. 57-78. For assessments of the evolution of Brown's view of the holy person in Late Antiquity, see S. Elm, "Introduction", 6 (1998), pp. 343-51; and see Brown's own assessment, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity, 1971–1997", *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 6 (1998), pp. 353-76. The *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 6 (Fall, 1998) is completely devoted to a re-assessment of Brown's holy man. The significance of Brown's original article is manifest from the fact that in March 1997 a conference was held in Berkeley, California, to celebrate the quarter-centenary of its publication, the proceedings of which were published in *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 6 (1998), and from the publication of a symposium inspired by Brown's article: James Howard-Johnston and Paul Anthony Hayward, *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Middle Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[7] In this article the holy man's public role as *patronus* becomes relevant, but subsequently Peter Brown offered some emendations to his position in „The Saint as Exemplar in Late Antiquity", *Representations* 1 (1983), pp. 1–25, reprinted in John Stratton Hawley (ed.), *Saints and Virtues*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), pp. 3-14. In this article Brown highlights the holy man's exemplarity and his embeddedness in community from late antiquity. In this context we point out while Brown focused primarily on the figure of the holy man as a substitute for the village patron and as a "man of power," Philip Rousseau emphasized his figure as a new kind of teacher with a new kind of *paideia*, identifying the central expression of authority within ascetic society as the relationship between master and disciple. For more details, see Philip Rousseau, "Ascetics as Mediators and as Teachers," in J. Howard-Johnson and P. A. Hayward, *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (1999), pp. 45-59, esp. pp. 54, 57. See also Samuel Rubenson, "Philosophy and Simplicity: The Problem of Calssical Education in Early Christian Biography," in T. Hägg and P. Rousseau, *Greek Biography and Panegyric in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 110-139.

[8] The exegetical literature on the late-antique holy man is vast. For an introduction, see in particular Brown (1971, 1995, 1998) and Patricia Cox Miller, *Biography in Late Antiquity: a Quest for the Holy Man* (Berkeley: University of California Press,

ted the key to understanding the nature of human life in the late Roman Mediterranean. As Brown put it succinctly, „the rise of the holy man is the Leitmotiv of the religious revolution of late antiquity".[9] Shenoute not only served as abbot of the White Monastery. He also worked as a passionate and eloquent evangelist for Christianity. He sometimes targeted pagan survivals within ordinary Christian piety.[10]

From this perspective, Shenoute was seen by Besa, his biographer, as a prophet like Elijah. In Old Testament narratives, Elijah is portrayed not only as a prophet, but also as a violent opponent of the cult of Baal. As we will see, Shenoute saw himself as a divinely appointed prophet, and a medium both of God's message and of God's judgment.

Essentially, the holy man of late antiquity belonged simultaneously to the earthly and the heavenly world[11]. In Peter Brown's paradigmatic assessment, the late antique holy man is "an ,icon' who brought the holy into the world, a hinge person mediating between God and man."[12] Brown suggests that in the late Roman east, the divine comes to earth not through relics and bishops or even emperors, but through the charismatic holy man. Despite the discourse of ascetic isolation surrounding these figures,

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1983). On the role of the holy man in rural society in Late Antiquity, see P. Brown, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity*, (1982); on the Roman period, see G. Anderson, *Sage, Saint and Sophist: Holy Men and Their Associates in the Early Roman Empire* (1994); on the textual implications of the cult of the saints, see David Satran, *Biblical Prophets in Byzantine Palestine: Reassessing the Lives of the Prophets* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), pp. 97-105.

[9] Peter Brown, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (1982), p. 148. There are numerous appraisals. See especially the range of articles presented by leading historians and classicists in Howard-Johnston and Hayward, *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Middle Age*, (1999).

[10] See David Frankfurter, "Popular Religious Practices in Fifth-Century Egypt," in *Religions of Late Antiquity in Practice*, ed. Richard Valantasis (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000). The monastic prophet or holy man might violently confront traditional religion, but he could also act as a facilitator of more gradual religious change. See P. Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press 1995). The dossier of the monastic archimandrite Shenoute of Atripe (*c*. 350-465) provides rare firsthand documentation of a monk's often violent campaign against traditional religion in his context (Stephen Emmel, *Shenoute's Literary Corpus*, 2 vols., Louvain: Peeters, 2004).

[11] The relation of heaven and earth at the grave of a saint are already set forth in Peter Brown's *The Cult of the Saints* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981).

[12] John Howe, "Revisiting the Holy Man: Review Article," *Catholic Historical Review* 86:4 (2000), p. 641.

Brown emphasizes the degree to which the charismatic saint plays an integral social role as *patronus*[13] and mediator.[14] Both the philosopher and the saint encompass a life of intense holiness, and an intensely public life.[15] As Patricia Cox has argued, the "holiness" of these figures becomes a significant social factor in late antique life. "The *idea* of the holy man," Cox concludes, "became at least as important as the men themselves, for their existence (or, perhaps, their reputations) attested to the gods' concern for the welfare of humankind."[16] Tracing the emergence of the holy man as a cultural phenomenon, Cox demonstrates the widespread allegiance of late antique Christians and Pagans alike to "the new holy personality cult."[17]

In other words, in his cave, in his monastery, on his pillar, or at his grave, the holy man transformed his territory into a sacred space and created a new site for the interrelation between society and the sacred. Since

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[13] In Brown's account, the holy man remained sacred, and embodied an idea of the Christian God, but he was also a powerful patron in a world where mundane social, economic, and judicial responsibilities constituted the main sphere of his activity (cf. P. Brown, 'The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity', (1971), pp. 80-101. The most visible manifestation of the holy man was obviously care for widows, orphans and the poor which contributed to the growing prominence and influence of his in cities (cf. P. Brown, *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2002); Richard D. Finn, *Almsgiving in the Later Roman Empire: Christian Promotion and Practice, 313-450*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2006).

[14] Peter Brown notes that the holy man's true power came from his role as a "mediator" in village life (cf. Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity", p. 89).

[15] Though Brown's arguments regarding the social function of the Christian holy man are more well known, he also argued that the Pagan philosophers participated actively in public life as "holy men." The philosophers, Brown suggests, "summed up in their persons the 'core' of a cultural and religious tradition," internalizing and representing the pinnacle of a learning and life that marked the epitome of Roman cultural values. While this life was marked by renunciation and shaped by ascetic withdrawal, it also endowed them with an authority that thrust them into the center of public and political life. See Peter Brown, "The Philosopher and Society in Late Antiquity." *The Center for Hermeneutical Studies in Hellenistic and Modern Culture.* The Graduate Theological Union and the University of California Berkeley, ed. Edward C Hobbs and Wilhelm Wuellner, Vol. 34. December 1978, p. 3.

[16] Patricia Cox Miller, *Biography in Late Antiquity: A Quest for the Holy Man* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), p. 19.

[17] Also, in the case of both the divine philosopher and the charismatic saint, Robert Kirschner emphasizes the importance of the observer's gaze in constructing the holy man. See Robert Kirschner, "The Vocation of Holiness in Late Antiquity," *Vigiliae Christianae* 38, 2007, p. 114).

the publication of Peter Brown's seminal article "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man" thirty years ago, much scholarly energy has been devoted to this topic and has provided new insights.[18] By pointing out the psychological and sociological dimensions of the cult of the saints and holy men, and by stressing the existence and function of the emerging new centers of power comprising charismatic figures, Brown's study evoked the issue of the "spatialization of charisma."[19]

The saint or holy man has long been recognised as a figure of importance in the social and religious history of late antiquity, with his role as spiritual guide and patron in communities attracting particular attention.

In both Egypt and Syria, the holy man is one who opts out of the rising tensions of village social life with its irreconcilable demands in a heroic act of retreat (*anachoresis*). Once in the desert, in a process of self-discovery, the holy man did battle with the demonic, defeated the anomalous ,earthly powers' and in so doing forged a new identity, one which stood completely outside the structures of society. But in rejecting ,power', he gained whole new form of power: Furthermore, anachoresis placed supernatural power beyond the ambiguities of the earthly' regions by having grown it, in pure culture as it were, in the antithesis to human society. Prolonged rituals of social disengagement reassured the clientele of the ascetic that his powers were totally acceptable, because they were wielded by a man dead to human motivation and dead to human society. In other words, the monks

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[18] P. Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," (1971), pp. 80–101. And see now Brown's reassessment of his "holy man" in "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity, 1971–1997," *Journal Early Christian Studies* 6 (1998), pp. 353–376. See also S. Elm's introduction to the journal issue devoted to the twenty-fifth anniversary of Peter Brown's analysis of the late-antique holy man, *Journal Early Christian Studies* 6 (1998), pp. 343–51. On the origin of the holy man in Syria, see J.W. Drijvers, "Hellenistic and Oriental Origins," in *The Byzantine Saint,* ed. S. Hackel (London: Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius, 1981), pp. 25–33; Sebastian P. Brock and S. Ashbrook-Harvey, *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987).

[19] A term coined by John Eade and Michael J. Sallnow in *Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago, 2000, p. 8. See also J. Z. Smith's conclusion ("The Temple and the Magician," in *Map Is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions* [Leiden, 1978], p. 182) that "the locus of religious experience has been shifted from a permanent sacred center, the temple, to a place of temporary sacrality sanctified by a magician's power." Smith concludes (*ibid*., p. 187) that this shift had taken place already in the second century b.c. D. Frankfurter's analysis (*Religion in Roman Egypt: Assimilation and Resistance*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1998, chaps. 2, 4) casts doubt on this shift.

gained more power through rejecting it. From this perspective, Shenoute simultaneously places himself in the tradition of authoritative ascetics whose charisma („ascetic authority")[20], and ascetic practice rendered them ascetic fathers worthy of disciples.[21]

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[20] The nexus between asceticism and authority was examined by Claudia Rapp in *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity*. "Holy" is a central term in this book. What Claudia Rapp wants above all to demonstrate is that the most distinctive feature of episcopal leadership in late antiquity was not the bishop's political position, performance of ritual, teaching of scripture, or patronage of the poor, but the holiness that grounded these and all other aspects. In Rapp's view, bishops were esteemed as holy, so that ascetic authority of the bishop was linked to the holy man. Therefore, Rapp uses Peter Brown's ideas about this figure as a framework of interpretation throughout the book. The result is a subtly argued, erudite, and fascinating contribution to a subject of continuing interest to scholars of late antiquity. For more details, see Claudia Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity:The Nature of Christian Leadership in an Age of Transition,* (2005). The question of the relationship between asceticism and authority is rich in nuances throughout early Christian literature. Without referencing in detail the voluminous body of literature created by the discussion of the role of the 'holy man' in the late antique world, it is necessary to highlight at least a few of the more specific studies, which are immediately relevant as background to the present paper. Indispensible for situating the topic is Peter Brown's article „Arbiters of the Holy: The Christian Holy Man in Late Antiquity", in *Authority and the Sacred: Aspects of the Christianisation of the Roman World* (1995), pp. 55-78. For a study of the language of spiritual authority which monks created in the early medieval West, see Conrad Leyser, *Authority and Asceticism from Augustine to Gregory the Great* (2001). See also on the related subject of the rhetoric of gendered authority in ascetic and episcopal settings, Conrad Leyser, „Vulnerability and Power: The Early Christian Rhetoric of Masculine Authority", *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 80 (1998), pp. 159–173. Concerning the question of ecclesial dimensions of ascetic authority, see Simon J. Coates, „The Bishop as Pastor and Solitary: Bede and the Spiritual Authority of the Monk Bishop", *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 47 (1996), pp. 601–619; John Chryssavgis, „Obedience: Hierarchy and Asceticism: The Concept of Spiritual Authority in the Church", *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 34.1 (1990), pp. 49–60; Paul Henry, „From Apostle to Abbot: The Legitimation of Spiritual Authority in the Early Church", *Studia Patristica* 17. 2 (1982), pp. 491–505; Philip Rousseau, *Ascetics, Authority, and the Church in the Age of Jerome and Cassian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978); and Philip Rousseau, „Spiritual Authority of the Monk Bishop: Eastern Elements in some Western Hagiography of the Fourth and Fifth Centuries", *Journal of Theological Studies* 22 (1971), pp. 380–419. For a recent discussion of aspects of the question of the relationship between ascetic authority and ecclesiastical authority, see also Daniel Caner, *Wandering, Begging Monks: Spiritual Authority and the Promotion of Monasticism in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002). On individual figures of spiritual authority see also Jan Willem Drijvers and John W. Watt, *Portraits of Spiritual Authority: Religious Power in Early Christianity, Byzantium and the Christian Orient* (Leiden: Brill, 1999).

[21] One of the major themes in Shenoute's canons is the issue of monastic purity and holiness. This holiness was not just something considered at the level of the individual

Shenoute of Atripe and the Ascetic Authority: Text, Context, and Subtext

After Pachomius, St. Shenoute of Atripe[22] (*c*. 348 – *c*. 466 A.D) is the most important monastic figure of coenobitic monasticism in Egypt. As we will see his career as holy man was spectacular.

One common way in which holy persons become holy comes from their ability to serve as a conduit between the world of the transcendent and the world of the mundane. In this sense the holy man appears as „a kind of hinge person, whose vertical axis linked him to the realm of celestial powers and whose horizontal axis separated him from social engagement and the daily round of the quotidian"[23]. The holy person was holy both because of a vertical connection to the Holy and because of a horizontal severance from the world of the mundane through the practice of withdrawal (*anachoresis*) or asceticism. The two religious paradigms that shape Shenoute's self-presentation are that of prophet[24] – relating wis-

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monk, but was seen collectively: in the sense that each monk's holiness affected the holiness of the entire community. On this theme, see B. Layton, *The Canons of Our Fathers: Monastic Rules of Shenoute*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

[22] Shenoute of Atripe was the third leader of a notable monastic federation near Panopolis in Upper Egypt (present day Akhmim) that included two monasteries for male monks, the White Monastery (commonly known as Deir Anba Shenuda) and the Red Monastery (commonly known as Deir Anba Pšoi), and one for women in Atripe itself. There was very little academic attention given to Shenoute until ten to fifteen years ago when his literary corpus was reconstructed by Stephen Emmel. Now, besides a few versions of Shenoute's biography, there are several academic studies extant, including translations of nine volumes of his *Canons*, eight volumes of *Discourses*, and a number of letters. There is also an international team of researchers at work, directed by S. Emmel, professor of Coptology at the Institute of Egyptology and Coptology at the University of Münster in Germany. This team is working on transcribing, editing, translating and studying these precious manuscripts in order not only to understand Shenoute and his monastic federation, but also to fill in the gaps of understanding concerning various other aspects of life in late antiquity with which Shenoute was involved. Books reflecting this interest include Rebecca Krawiec's *Shenoute and the Women of the White Monastery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) and Caroline T. Schroeder's *Monastic Body: Discipline and Salvation in Shenoute of Atripe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

[23] Lawrence S. Cunningham, „Holy Men/Holy Women", in *The Blackwell Companion to the Study of Religion*, ed. Robert A. Segal, Blackwell Publishing, 2006, p. 287.

[24] David Frankfurter recognized the Egyptian Christian holy men as types of regional prophets, thus stressing the local and regional dimension of their cults. See D. Frankfurter, "Syncretism and the Holy Man in Late Antique Egypt", *Journal Early Christi-*

dom received from God – and that of suffering. A *prophet* – a term found in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – is one who claims to speak for God. Prophets are called by God to speak God's word to the people. They are mediators from the top down: from a divine source to a people. The precise function of the prophet is reflected in the Greek word itself: *pro-phetes*, one who speaks for another.

The holy man described by Peter Brown served as a mediator but, because of the power emanating from him, could also serve as a prophetic voice and a healer. In this context we stress that one of the most interesting aspects of Shenoute's monastic order was his involvement with the lay people of that region. In contrast with the Pachomian *Koinonia*, Shenoute opened his monastery on Saturdays and Sundays to lay people and pilgrims and gave them religious instruction. He was quite generous in providing for the poor and in many cases acted as their patron while at the same time he was robustly denouncing the wealthy, particularly the middle and upper classes of the local capital Panopolis; whom he thought had a careless attitude to the physical and spiritual welfare of their local people[25].

There are many important facets of Shenoute which touch on many important aspects about ancient Christianity, monasticism, and general conditions of life in Late Antiquity. His *Vita* and writings allows us a glimpse into the still obscure culture of his day. His important personality and the larger he had on the development of monastic lifestyles is only now being appreciated in its real importance[26].

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an Studies 11 (2003), pp. 339–85.

[25] Ariel G. López, *Shenoute of Atripe and the Use of Poverty: Religious Conflict, and Monasticism in Late Antique Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), pp. 57-62.

[26] Recent scholarship has turned its attention to Shenoute's identity and activities as a monk, and thus also to the importance of his writings for understanding the many worlds constructed and inhabited by early Christian ascetics. In addition to Emmel's work, see especially Bentley Layton, *The Canons of Our Fathers: Monastic Rules of Shenoute* (2014); David Brakke and Andrew Crislip, *Selected Discourses of Shenoute the Great: Community, Theology, and Social Conflict in Late Antique Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Ariel G. López, *Shenoute of Atripe and the Use of Poverty* (2013); Caroline T. Schroeder, *Monastic Bodies: Discipline and Salvation in Shenoute of Atripe* (2007); Andrew Todd Crislip, *From Monastery to Hospital: Christian Monasticism and the Transformation of Health Care in Late Antiquity* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2005; Rebecca Krawiec, *Shenoute and the Women of the White Monastery: Egyptian Monasticism in Late Antiquity* (2002).

Perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of Shenoute's monastic order was his involvement with the lay people of that region. In contrast with the Pachomian *Koinonia*, Shenoute opened his monastery on Saturdays and Sundays to lay people and pilgrims and gave them religious instruction. He was quite generous in providing for the poor and in many cases acted as their patron while at the same time he was robustly denouncing the wealthy, particularly the middle and upper classes of the local capital Panopolis; whom he thought had a careless attitude to the physical and spiritual welfare of their local people[27].

Nevertheless Shenoute of Atripe is a difficult figure to assess. If A. Veilleux reads Shenoute in negative terms: as „authoritarian, harsh, and violent", as „a force of nature, a volcano in perpetual eruption", J. Leipoldt describes as „Christ-less". In our opinion, this characterization seems imbalanced, if not unfair, especially in light of recent exegesis. As Krawiec has remarked, Shenoute saw himslef as a divinely appointed prophet, a „suffering servant", and a medium both of God's message and of God's judgment.[28] By taking on the persona of a biblical prophet, Shenoute solidifies his reputation as a spiritual father. As prophet, his role in the community is to peel away the monks' false sense of security in their salvation and reveal what he believes to be the true spiritual state of the monastery. As Schroeder has remarked

> „he frames his censure of the monks' disobedience to the rule
> and of the leader's failure to exercise authority over the monks
> in the context of prophetic duty. He presents himself as the mes-
> senger of the truth who must uncover and extinguish the false-
> hood and hipocrisy concealed in the monastery."[29]

In other words, Shenoute preaches repentance on earth and intercedes for sinners at the divine court.[30] Exposing sins, pronouncing judgment, interceding with Christ, as well as helping people with practical problems – these are the tasks of the prophet Shenoute, made possible by his clairvoyance[31],

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[27] A. Lopez, *Shenoute of Atripe and the Use of Poverty*, pp. 57-62.

[28] Krawiec, *Shenoute and the Women*, pp. 55-72.

[29] Schroeder, *Monastic Bodies*, p. 49.

[30] Compare P. Brown, *Authority and the Sacred* (1995), p. 74.

[31] Heike Behlmer notes that clairvoyance, the „gift to search hearts", was an element in the holy man's prestige, at least as Peter Brown articulated in The making of Late Antiquity, and she sees the Life as multiplying the instances in which Shenoute displayed this miraculous ability (H. Behlmer, „Visitors to Shenoute's Monastery", in David Frankfurter, *Pilgrimage and Holy Space in Late Antique Egypt*, Brill, Leiden, 1998, p. 357.

according to the *Life of Shenoute*.[32] Therefore, one of the interpretive keys to unlocking Shenoute's often complicated or elliptical language is his self-representation as a prophet for his community[33].

Conclusion

In the course of this paper we have tried to reflect on Peter Brown'article on the rise of the holy man in late antiquity, one of the most influential articles of the last half-century. We have attempted to set Brown's reflections in the context of the evolving notion of sanctity, or holiness, in the early ascetic tradition. In this sense, the case of Shenoute is very relevant. Briefly, for David Brakke, Shenoute of Atripe „is a violent and relentlessly demanding figure, and for that reason he is a prophet"[34].

According to D. Brakke,

„the revelations from God, constituted the essential element of Shenoute's authority as a prophet. It runs from his initial exposure of concealed sin in the monastery before he became its leader, through his interactions with his monks as their leader, including and especially the women, through his assertions of

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[32] The portraits of Shenoute that work from Brown's holy man, all find themselves drawn to the *Life of Shenoute*, which provides the best material for a Shenoute who acts as a patron, dispenses divine blessings, and performs ritual acts that mimic as much as they reject traditional pagan religious behaviour. For more details, see *The life of Shenoute by Besa*, introd., trans., and notes by Daniel N. Bell, Cistercian Publications, Kalamazoo, 1983.

[33] For example, in *Canon I*, Shenoute conforms to the literary and anthropological model of the biblical "peripheral prophet", a figure who stands outside of the community's primary religious and political authority system and speaks to the community from a marginal, but not wholly outside, position. For more details, see B. Layton, *The Canons of Our Fathers: Monastic Rules of Shenoute* (2014). On the Shenoute as a prophet, see Caroline T. Schroeder, *Monastic Bodies* (ch. I, pp. 24-53). On the figure of the biblical peripheral prophet, see Robert R. Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1980. On the biblical tradition of prophecy in Christian Egypt, see also David Frankfurter, *Elijah in Upper Egypt: The Apocalypse of Elijah and Early Egyptian Christianity*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1993.

[34] David Brakke, "Shenoute, Weber, and the Monastic Prophet: Ancient and Modern Articulations of Ascetic Authority", in A Camplani, G. Filoramo (eds.), *Foundations of Power and Conflicts of Authority in Late-Antique Monasticism: Proceedings of the International Seminar*, Turin, December, 2-4, 204, Peeters, Leuven, 2007, p. 51.

authority over persons outside the White Monastery (clergy, other monks, lay people). To know what God knows and to announce it to others – this was what it meant to be a prophet for Shenoute, and thus there is a strong continuity between the authority that he sought to establish within the monastic community and that which he sought outside of it"35.

Therefore, Shenoute was on the one hand a prophet, and on the other hand a holy man.

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35 David Brakke, "Shenoute, Weber, and the Monastic Prophet: Ancient and Modern Articulations of Ascetic Authority", p. 72.