Torallas Tovar's exposition of linguistic identity and Christianity (§8) is one of the highlights of the monograph. Here one finds the clearest statement of the valorization of the Egyptian language not only as a vehicle for Christianization, but also, increasingly, as 'a crystal-clear sign of identity' (74), a specifically *Egyptian* Christian identity. This is nowhere clearer than in the monasteries of Upper Egypt, where Coptic Egyptian was the principal, if not the only, language, and where it was not only spoken, but also taught.

The rest of the monograph deals with Egyptian monasticism, dwelling first on Pachomius and Shenoute, and on the flow of visitors who came from abroad, at times translating (and thereby disseminating) the texts produced in the monasteries. This is adduced as an introduction to the question of the linguistic situation within the monasteries themselves. The author notes the dearth of information available from the Coptic documents of the fourth century and turns to the literary record for evidence. She finds that bilingualism among monks was a known phenomenon, but was considered rare and even remarkable. She considers this as the reason for the beginning of Scriptural translation from Greek to Coptic. Any assumption of monolingualism must be qualified, as there must have been some means of communicating with the numerous visitors to the monasteries. This is further corroborated by the existence of multilingual 'conversation manuals'. It is also known that there were interpreters who served not only visitors from abroad but also Egyptians whose knowledge of Greek was insufficient to allow them to interact with the administration. In general, however, the author concludes that there can be no doubt that Coptic was the principal language of the Christian institutions and foremost among them the monasteries of Upper Egypt.

This study is a valuable introduction to the understanding of the interaction between Greek and Egyptian in Greco-Roman Egypt, and it provides a wide (if not exhaustive) account of the sources for such bilingualism from literary records. It will be of interest to students of Egyptian Christianity, Late Antiquity, and especially to those concerned with problems of bilingualism and language contact in ancient societies. For such readers, the materials found in this book should be supplemented by a new research on linguistic and religious identity from the contemporary documentary records, on one hand, and on the interaction between Demotic and other languages, especially Greek, on the other hand. Moreover, the theoretical and methodological models for the analysis of language contact in ancient societies are rapidly evolving, and already some of the data and approaches found in this book will be considered as dated. This does not, however, detract from the scholarly excellence of Torallas Tovar's monograph; it is rather a sign of the vitality of the discourse in which it is embedded.

Eitan Grossman Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Malcolm Choat, *Belief and Cult in Fourth-Century Papyri*, Studia Antiqua Australiensia 1, Brepols: Turnhout, 2006. xiv + 217 pages. ISBN 978-2-5035-1327-0.

This volume is Malcolm Choat's first book-length contribution to papyrology, and one can hardly imagine a more impressive introduction to his scholarly work. The goal of *Belief and Cult in Fourth-Century Papyri* is to examine the ways in which the language of personal documents reflects a particular society's beliefs. The author takes nothing for granted, questioning accepted modern categories such as 'Christian', 'pagan', 'private letter', and 'religion', leaving no concept unscrutinized. This is a welcome departure from the positivism often found in such studies, and gives Choat's work an importance well beyond his specific findings.

Chapters One through Three delimit the scope of the work and its terms of analysis. Chapter Two provides a nuanced discussion of the corpus itself, both assessing the extent to which Egypt can be taken as representative of the experience of the provincial Roman Empire, and delicately establishing the temporal boundaries of the corpus. In the latter case, the author justly opts for inclusiveness, due to the state of palaeographical dating and, more importantly, out of the need to

view the fourth century in its proper context. Choat correctly observes that this corpus does not neglect those on the margins of society, the illiterate, but only (and inevitably) those who did not participate in epistolary culture.

Chapter Three is largely a critique of the search for 'Christian' (or 'pagan') texts and the ways in which this search has been carried out, as well as a tight argument for inclusiveness in delimiting the corpus. For example, the form and content of certain 'official' documents often show them to be of value to the investigation, and in any event, to be rather close to personal documents. Moreover, the pre-analytical exclusion of texts judged to be non-Christian would have deprived this work of much of its insights, as the development of a common epistolary repertoire in fourth-century Egypt is one of its major findings. The author also questions the rigidity of categories such as 'literary' vs. 'non-literary', (intensely debated in research on pre-Coptic Egyptian 'documentary' texts such as Wenamun or the model letters) and finds evidence of 'religious sentiment' where previous editors have held none to exist. Here Choat shows an implicit sensitivity bordering on the anthropological: not only the beliefs of the sender, but those of the scribe and of the addressee himself are taken into consideration. One notes, incidentally, the importance of these factors in pre-Christian Egypt letter writing, in which there is often a dynamic tension between the sender of the letter and the scribe who actually commits it to writing (e.g., the fluctuation of feminine and masculine first person signs in letters sent by women but written down by male scribes). This sensitivity is also felt in his discussion of the category of 'private letters', which are often not all that private; Choat opts for the concept of the 'personal letter' as more inclusive. Already in this chapter, the author begins to develop his concept of fourth-century Egyptian epistolary culture as one characterized by cross-pollination and embeddedness in a wider common culture, linguistically and otherwise.

The all-important question of language is treated with much subtlety in Chapter Four, a treatment much better than the usual sort of discussion on language that one finds in such books, probably due to the author's intimate knowledge of both Greek and Coptic. Choat continues his critique of the discipline, charging that Greek has been systematically privileged over Coptic, while Egyptology and Classical Studies have parted ways, again at the expense of Coptic (one might add the estrangement of Demotic studies and Egyptology from each other). As a direct result, relatively few Coptic texts have been published, a fact that has inevitably distorted the picture for sites such as Oxyrhynchus. This chapter treats the question of the very use of Coptic as indicative of identity: why (and when) did speakers of Egyptian begin to write in Coptic for personal and official purposes? The author addresses the question of dialect as a means of dating; he supports early dates for several texts, but is skeptical about this method of dating in general. One notes, however, that an early date for Bohairic texts cannot be excluded on the basis of dialect alone, as we now have several significant texts in Early Bohairic. The author considers a firmer criterion for dating to be the mention of any interaction with the state or the administration; this seems to be a safe indication of a late date, as Coptic was not considered a suitable language in which to interact with the state until the sixth century. In any event, Choat stresses that the use of Coptic is not a safe indication of Christianity, as it was also used by Manichaeans, and it is impossible to exclude its use by 'pagans' in the fourth century. He is also reserved regarding 'nationalistic' interpretations of the rise of Coptic; this is especially justified for the use of Coptic in documentary texts. There is much more to be said on Choat's discussion of language (for example, is non-standard orthography really an indication of early date? non-scriptural literary texts display non-standard orthography well into the sixth century and beyond), but a full review is well beyond the limits of the present note.

Chapter Five treats the direct identification of membership in a particular religious tradition, while chapter Seven discusses the casual mention of cult officials (the latter understood in a broad sense). Choat finds little evidence of explicit identification, whether of the writer or of the addressee, as Christian, Jewish, Manichaean, or 'pagan.' In the fourth century CE, the term Ἕλλην

had not yet acquired its later meaning, while Ἰουδαῖος is found only as an epithet for parties other than those involved in the epistolary exchange. Moreover, writers from Kellis do not use the term 'Manichaean' in their letters. Finally, other terms thought to have had identificatory value, such as 'brother' and 'sister' (ἀδελφός, ἀδελφή, Coptic *son, sône*) 'friend' (φίλος), or πίστος are of general application, and are not used solely in addressing co-religionists.

Chapter Six, 'Onomastics', while admitting that a small number of names might be relatively safe indicators (e.g., Petros, Thekla), stresses the problems inherent in using onomastics as a means of ascertaining the religious identity of any individual. Choat makes a subtle and yet crucial point here: large-scale patterns of onomastic change may indeed be strongly indicative of a rate of religious conversion, as Bagnall has persuasively demonstrated, but this does not translate into a safe tool for the modern scholar in his attempt to identify a given individual with a specific system of belief. Theophoric names of Greek and Egyptian origin persist in Christian communities, the onomastic distinction between Christians, Jews, and Manichaeans is not always unambiguous, and perhaps above all, as an individual did not choose his own name — there is no evidence of a well-attested phenomenon of name-change upon conversion — it does not reflect his own system of belief.

The term 'cult officials', whose casual mention in the papyri is the topic of Chapter Seven, is understood in a typically broad sense, including figures with little institutional association, such as monks and 'holy men'. Choat examines titles such as ἱερεύς, προφήτης, παστοφόρος, διάκων, πρεσβύτερος, and ἐπίσκοπος. For many titles, the author demonstrates that individual uses tend to be ambiguous, as secular titles have not been fully appropriated by Christianity. Even ἀπᾶ, ἀμμά(ς), and πάπας are to be viewed with suspicion. Nevertheless, one clear trend can be observed, namely, the growing infrequency of titles of Graeco-Roman cult officials in specifically cultic contexts. This is one of the few instances in which the author admits of a correlation between such a trend in epistolographical reference and a sociological pattern, the decline of traditional religion in fourth-century Egypt. However, the casual appearance of such official titles or of related names (e.g., temple names) in a personal letter is considered to be a weak criterion for identifying the religious identity of the writer.

A criterion that would seem more secure, viz., citation (together with allusion and echo or reminiscence), is also problematized in Chapter Eight. Explicit citation of an identifiable sacred text is rare in the corpus investigated, and 'echoes' or 'allusions' are often a matter of editorial interpretation. Even well-established citations of any sort do not necessarily mark the writer as subscribing to the tradition to which the text is sacred. Moreover, the phrase or word in consideration may have entered the letter-writer's verbal repertoire by other means, such as oral contexts or epistolary formulae.

Chapter Nine raises a set of complex and difficult questions: can individual words (and concepts) be shown to have a distinctive association with particular traditions? And perhaps a more subtle question: if a word has acquired a new meaning, to what extent can its very use indicate membership in the tradition that originated that meaning? Here Choat shows the complexity involved in using words as indicators of religious affiliation in view of the porousness of the various social groups in interaction in fourth-century Egypt, especially in those of the upper class (and urban) milieus. In general, his findings are largely negative: words, even those which were later fully 'Christianized', are not exclusive indicators for religious identity. Choat places higher value on evidence from archives, which shows that people of different beliefs and traditions were engaged in social interaction, than on any attempt to isolate the religious affiliation of any specific individual. He also stresses the fluidity of definitions that characterizes the fourth century, witnessed by the persistence of 'pagan' habits and usages within Christian spheres of practice.

Epistolary formulae are the concern of Chapter Ten, and, as elsewhere, Choat problematizes the use of formulae as a criterion for determining religious affiliation, finding that even 'monotheistic' formulae are not exclusively Christian. As an aside, one notes that apparently

monotheistic terms are found in pre-Christian Egyptian letters and literature as well (e.g., the much-discussed problem of *nṯr* or *p3-nṯr* in letters and wisdom texts). An interesting aspect not especially developed in this chapter is the possibly oral character of Egyptian letters. The author notes the use of the verb *shai* 'to write' in Coptic letters, as opposed to earlier Egyptian letters, which use the verb *ḏd* 'to say'. One must make two comments here. First, alongside *ḏd*, one finds *h3b* 'to send', and on the other hand, the recipient rarely 'reads' a letter, but rather 'hears' it (*sḏm*). Second, writing is not an unproblematic concept in Coptic documents: in documentary texts, especially in witness formulae, one can 'write' by means of a proxy without physically writing, by reason of illiteracy. In short, I would not be certain of the non-oral character of Coptic letters just because of the presence of the verb 'to write'.

One of the most intriguing observations made by the author is found in Chapter Eleven, which treats symbols, isopsephisms, and acrostics, especially the staurogram or the cross: 'Most such codes fall into the realm of legitimating devices, and indicate the shared beliefs and knowledge of writer and recipient in the case of letters' (116). This statement reflects the author's awareness, often implicit, of the complex anthropological aspects of his subject-matter. One of the major undercurrents in Choat's work is the 'horizontal' aspect of social space, e.g., the ways in which linguistic and epistolary usages are not merely reflective of social identity, but also serve to negotiate and consolidate such identities between individuals, understood as socio-cultural *agents*. One hopes that the author will continue this thread of his work in future publications, expanding it beyond the limits of epistolography.

Unlike most of the criteria discussed in this volume, *nomina sacra*, the topic of Chapter Twelve, are indicative of the membership of a given author in a Christian tradition, although this too must be understood extremely broadly. Incidentally, I find intriguing the phenomenon of the expansion of *nomina sacra* to include κ(ύρι)ε in non-divine contexts. This may remind the reader of those New Kingdom texts, especially letters, in which the [DIVINE] classifier is used almost promiscuously, perhaps reflecting a generalized piety, at least in its early phases.

Especially important is Chapter Thirteen, which treats the representation of non-orthodoxy in the documentary papyri. Choat finds that the strife reflected in the literary records of the period is almost entirely absent from the documentary record; this is especially relevant for the charges of Arianism alleged against the Melitians. Choat does not judge whether the 'doctrinal neutrality' of the papyri stems from the lack of theological sophistication on the part of the laity or from the everyday character of the personal letters.

Choat's conclusions are wide-ranging and have considerable ramifications for the field: almost no criteria used till now in the search for specifically Christian documents survive his careful scrutiny. Choat cautions against projecting sixth- and seventh-century concepts and terms, fully Christianized, backwards onto the fourth century, a period in which the discourse of religious identity is far more fluid and permeable. Moreover, the Christian scribal tradition was not claimed by Christians alone; Manichaeans also located themselves within this tradition. Furthermore, Christians, Manichaeans, and 'pagans' were certainly in cultural interaction, as witnessed by archives and by individual texts. Choat further warns against considering every innovation in the epistolary repertoire to be a Christian development, especially given the wider Mediterranean context of fourth-century Egyptian epistolography. In short, there was no distinctively Christian epistolary style, at least not in any simple sense, and the burgeoning Christian repertoire remains elusive and fragmentary, often to be teased out of shifting meanings.

What remains after the author has poked a pin in the balloon of safely Christian means of expression? Rather than entrenching uncertainty, Choat proposes a positive insight, namely, that we are dealing here with a society in which constituent social groups are in constant interaction, and doctrinal differences promoted at high levels played a minor role in everyday life. The means of expression employed by Egyptians — whether pagan, Manichaean, or Christian — grew into a common repertoire of 'modes of formulae of belief, used across society' (148); the author suggests

that this homogeneity may be indicative of a society less differentiated along religious lines than the literary and elite-culture texts would lead one to believe. Moreover, this is not simply a matter of shared culture: rather, Choat envisions the fourth century, as seen through the documentary evidence, as a period in which distinct traditions were undergoing a process of convergence, not necessarily in terms of specific beliefs, but certainly in terms of the way these beliefs were given expression.

It would be no overstatement to say that Choat's book is one of the most thought-provoking and carefully argued and documented studies to have emerged from papyrology in recent years, and establishes its author as a major new voice in this field. If its arguments and findings are heeded, it will have done a major service by showing how thoroughly positivistic approaches to the documentary record have exhausted their potential for enlightening us regarding the way in which people lived and believed in Late Antique Egypt. It is to be hoped that this book will be read not only by papyrologists, but by Egyptologists as well; it should be a foundational text for any student of Egyptian epistolography, as its methods and theoretical underpinnings are of much value for anyone who hopes to use documentary texts to catch a glimpse of the people who wrote them and of the societies in which they lived.

Eitan Grossman Hebrew University of Jerusalem