



## Book Reviews

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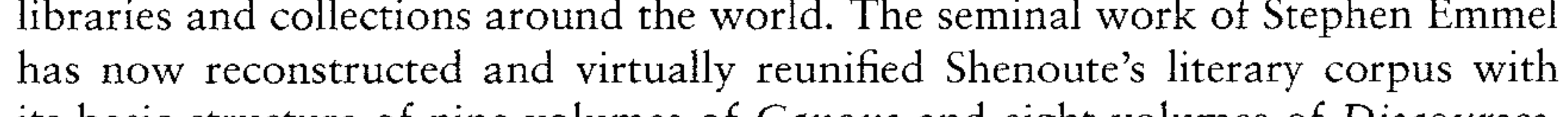
Caroline T. Schroeder

*Monastic Bodies: Discipline and Salvation in Shenoute of Atripe*

Divinations: Rereading Late Ancient Religion

Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007

Pp. viii + 237. \$79.95.



Research on Egyptian Christianity has experienced high growth in recent decades. In this area of research, the study of the works of the abbot Shenoute has enjoyed particular expansion. The literary legacy of this arguably most important of Coptic writers was transmitted almost exclusively in medieval parchment copies of earlier papyrus codices. These books were kept in the library of the monastery named after Shenoute in Upper Egypt and suffered neglect, loss, and finally dispersal into libraries and collections around the world. The seminal work of Stephen Emmel has now reconstructed and virtually reunified Shenoute's literary corpus with its basic structure of nine volumes of *Canons* and eight volumes of *Discourses*. Caroline Schroeder's study "Monastic Bodies" makes full use of Emmel's work by drawing on unpublished as well as published materials and assigning each quoted text to its rightful place in the original structure of Shenoute's *œuvre*.

In four interrelated chapters, Schroeder deals with a central aspect of Shenoute's religious thought, the body, and its manifestations: as the individual body of the monk or nun, the communal body of the congregation, the architectural body of the church constructed under Shenoute's leadership, and finally the resurrected body as central focus of Shenoute's Christology. Her discussion of the "problems and potentials of embodiment" (20) draws heavily on Michel Foucault's work, especially in her conceptualization of "power" and "discourse," which she defines with Foucault as "specifically linguistic expressions of systems of meaning" (10).

After an introduction, Chapter One discusses the use of sexual imagery in two fragmentary works from Shenoute's *Canon 1*, a collection of works ostensibly written before his rise to the abbotship. Schroeder outlines how Shenoute describes the relationship between God and the monastic community in the terms of the husband-wife imagery employed in the Old Testament to depict the relationship between God and the chosen people. Shenoute's presentation of sin and disobedience in the community as adultery allows him to criticize the current monastic leadership (the second abbot of the monastery) for failing to address these sins properly.

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Chapter Two focuses on the communal body of monks and nuns and bases itself mainly on *Canons* 3, 5, and 9. It argues that for Shenoute, the individual member of this body who transgresses the rules has the power to pollute the entire community and consequently a transgressor needs to be excised from the community. It also argues that the language of pollution is much more widespread in Shenoute than in the Pachomian corpus of rules.

The physical representation of the communal monastic body in architecture is the subject of Chapter Three. The chapter analyzes *Canon 7*, the first works of which are concerned with the building of the new monastery church in the later part of Shenoute's career. Shenoute casts the architectural body of the church as a symbol of the collective body of the monastery, which in its turn is tied to the individual body of the monk or nun, who is able to pollute and possibly destroy the collective body through a choice to sin. In the same chapter Schroeder also discusses the reception into the monastery of laypeople fleeing from nomadic invasions. These refugees and their worldly concerns are embraced by Shenoute and are not presented as a possible source of pollution. Schroeder, without being quite satisfied with her own interpretation, explains this apparent lack of concern with the outsider status of the refugees.

Chapter Four draws on several sermons from Shenoute's *Discourses*. Shenoute's pervasive concern with purity and pollution is discussed in the framework of his theology of the resurrection body, which for him requires maintaining the earthly body free from pollution. In this last chapter Schroeder goes beyond her Foucauldian paradigm. While Foucault has been accused of dissociating the regime which shapes the monastic body from the beliefs behind different forms of monasticism, Schroeder fully integrates Shenoute's Christology into her discussion. *Monastic Bodies* coherently and convincingly analyzes the discourse of the body in Shenoute's writings and raises intriguing questions for further investigation. For example, the letters addressed in Chapter One purportedly were written by a young monk prior to his accession to power. How much redaction do we need to assume to have been carried out on these letters (assuming they ever existed as such) in his later career? Chapter Two compares Shenoutean and Pachomian rules, which would merit an entire study in itself. Finally, while the book draws on Foucault's "technologies of the self," it might be fruitful to engage with Foucault's own writings on monastic discipline, in particular the process of self-examination under the direction of a spiritual leader which he discusses on the basis of John Cassian's writings.

*Monastic Bodies* is to be commended for providing ample translations from edited and unedited Shenoutean writings. While the translations provided are generally very accurate, the few misunderstandings still present show the profit that future studies will be able to draw from the new edition of Shenoute's works, which is currently being prepared under Emmel's general editorship. For example, the somewhat puzzling statement "we filled the borders" in "we filled the borders, we filled the cities and the villages and the roads crying out because of the fear of barbarians" (115) can be clarified by translating the Coptic word *tosh* with "nome" (province). Again, in the translation "as for everyone among us who will see a deceitful act in a pollution or in a theft . . ." (61), the Coptic

preposition *hn* here means, in my view, “consisting in,” which substantially changes the slant of the statement.

In sum, Schroeder’s study is an excellent, well-crafted example of the new era of studies on Egyptian monasticism, which fruitfully engage with cultural theory and bring fresh insights into long-neglected works of Coptic literature. I recommend it to students and scholars of late antique Christianity alike.

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Christine Shepardson

*Anti-Judaism and Christian Orthodoxy:  
Ephrem’s Hymns in Fourth-Century Syria*

North American Patristics Society

Patristic Monographs Series 20

Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University Press, 2008

Pp. xii + 191. \$34.95.

This is a book that needed to be written. It fruitfully synthesizes two disparate scholarly trends. The first is the historiographical transformation of Ephrem of Nisibis from an obscure, eastern, Semitic, turgid poet of little relevance to mainstream patristics into a pro-Nicene exponent of an anti-Arian Christianity akin to the fourth-century Greek fathers. The second trend concerns the increased focus over the past ten years on Jewish-Christian relations with particular attention to the social context and rhetorical function of Christian anti-Jewish literature. The latter trend is especially relevant to Ephrem because scholars have long noted the severity of his anti-Judaism. In this revised dissertation Christine Shepardson provides a brief, readable monograph, accessible to scholars of Syriac literature, patristics, and the history of late antiquity.

The first chapter presents the background and context of Ephrem’s works and sets the stage for Shepardson’s broader argument that “Ephrem’s Syriac texts demonstrate his passionate participation in the imperial theological struggles of the fourth century, as well as his relation to his Greek-speaking contemporary Athanasius” (3). In Chapter Two she places Ephrem’s often vitriolic writing within the tradition of early Christian anti-Judaism, especially that of the ante-Nicene period, and then examines Ephrem’s anti-Jewish language and motifs. Ephrem’s rhetoric depicting Jews and Christians as clearly distinct categories, Shepardson argues, does not represent social reality, but rather is an ideological attempt to impose a binary opposition on the more blurred communal boundaries of fourth-century Nisibis and Edessa. Ephrem’s claims about Jews are really about the limits of Christianity, and Shepardson rejects the claims of earlier scholars such as Edmund Beck—the modern editor of Ephrem’s works—that Ephrem was responding to aggressive Jewish proselytism. She then turns to “Ephrem’s Use of Scriptural History” (Chapter Three) and addresses the broader category of “Jew” developed by Ephrem through his exegesis, especially of paradigmatic