

## Space, Distance and Gender: Authority and the Separation of Communities in the White Monastery

The use of space takes on a particular quality in the context of Coptic communal monasticism. Rather than concentrate on the monks' individual cells, this essay focuses on the authority relationship among the houses that made up the White Monastery, in Late Antique Egypt.<sup>1</sup> The White Monastery is located near modern Sohag, about 250 miles south of Cairo.<sup>2</sup> It gets its modern appellation from the color of its walls, which are white, in contrast with the red walls of a nearby monastery.<sup>3</sup> Although there is

---

<sup>1</sup> This article is based on the paper I delivered at the annual meeting of ARCE in Ann Arbor, Michigan. That paper, in turn, is based on my doctoral dissertation. Since I have been asked to limit my article to the paper as it was delivered, I have had to leave various assertions about monastic life in the White Monastery, and women's life in particular, as brief as they were in that paper. I have, however, used the footnotes to refer the reader to larger discussions of these topics as they appear in my dissertation (Rebecca Krawiec, "Women's Life in Shenute's White Monastery: A Study in Late Antique Egyptian Monasticism" [Ph.D. diss., Yale Univ., 1996]). This article, then, serves as a window into the entirety of my dissertation, rather than providing a segment of just one chapter. For other general descriptions of women's life in Shenute's White Monastery cf. Johannes Leipoldt, *Schenute von Atripe und die Entstehung des national ägyptischen Christentums* TU 25.1 (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1903) 92-158 and Susanna Elm, *'Virgins of God': The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1994) 296-310, which itself is dependent on Leipoldt. I should note, however, that some changes have been made as a result of presenting this paper to the Seminar on Religions in the Ancient Mediterranean at Brown University, Providence Rhode Island, on October 7, 1997. I am grateful to the participants for their criticisms and suggestions.

<sup>2</sup> See Plate 8 of the present volume; and also Map 9, "The Monasteries of the Upper Sa'id," in vol. 8, *The Coptic Encyclopedia*, ed. Aziz S. Atiya (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1991). To determine how far the monastery is from Cairo, one needs also to consult maps 7 and 8.

<sup>3</sup> Shenute seems to have called the monastery simply "the congregations." Archaeologists now tend to call it the "Monastery of Apa Shenute." For a