Homer and verse maxims, which trace their origins back to Classical poetry, had a stable presence in Greek educational practice throughout Antiquity. This is no less true of Greco-Roman Egypt, as amply demonstrated by Raffaella Cribiore’s comprehensive survey of the papyri and other studies on Greek education in the Hellenistic and Roman worlds. When evidence for Homer and/or verse maxims emerges from settings in Egypt that may be described as securely or possibly monastic, the question of the relationship between monastery and school naturally comes into sharp focus.

Demonstrable links between Classical paideia and monastic settings in Egypt are few and far between. Documentary evidence for the borrowing of books as well as the so-called book lists (inventories of book-holdings or commissions for the production of books) from the early Byzantine period give the impression that the holdings of Egyptian monastic libraries either did not include works of Classical Greek literature or if they did, these works were not in wide circulation. Notable exceptions are excerpts from the Homeric epics and the collections of single-verse maxims loosely connected with the comic poet Menander (commonly known as Menandri Sententiae) that come from Upper Egyptian monasteries which flourished in the period from the late fifth to the seventh/eighth centuries. The monastic connection makes these finds much more than mere textual testimonies as they potentially offer insights into the Sitz im Leben of standard Greek educational texts within Egyptian monastic communities and by extension into the Christian...
monastics’ real contact with and reception of Classical Greek culture and education.

The interrelated aims of this paper are twofold: first, to explore the position and role of Classical Greek *paideia* within Egyptian monasticism as illuminated by textual finds from the monasteries in the region of Western Thebes; and secondly, in the light of these, to reflect on the relationship between monastery and school in a specifically Egyptian (or even Upper Egyptian) setting in Late Antiquity.

**Monastic Settlements in Western Thebes**

In the sixth and seventh centuries, the region of Western Thebes was honeycombed with monastic settlements, formed from single anchorites’ cells or, more often, from laura-type cell clusters. They arose as Christian redevelopments of the Pharaonic-period tombs and mortuary temples in the Theban necropolis. The nearest residential centre to the south was the town of (D)jeme/Medinet Habu, which developed on and around the mortuary temple of Ramses III. In the early days of Egyptian archaeology and papyrology, the investigation of these monastic settlements followed a random pattern: in some sites (Deir el-Bahri/Monastery of St Phoebammon) the Christian remains were cleared away to give access to the more interesting earlier phases of the site, thus decontextualising the textual record from Late Antiquity; other sites were visited intermittently by plunderers, and their textual contents reached papyrus collections with only very general (if any) information about provenance; finally, in a few exceptional cases (most notably, the Monastery of Epiphanius) monastic sites were excavated and the finds were published with something approaching proper scientific standards. Important research projects continue to shed light on the Christian monastic phase of the region and to connect unprovenanced finds in museums and papyrus collections with specific sites.

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4 For a presentation of the most important monastic establishments in the area, see Wipszycka 2009: 171–97.


6 Since 2001 the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut (DAI), Abt. Kairo in collaboration with the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München has been excavating the nearby site Deir el-Bachit (*topos* of Apa Paulos), see Burkard, Mackensen and Polz 2003 and Beckh, Eichner and Hodak 2011; the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology of the University of Warsaw (PCMA) in 2003 surveyed the hill Sheikh Abd el-Kurneh and discovered two codices and numerous ostraca, see Górecki 2007. A Hungarian mission led by T. A. Bács has explored the so-called Monastery of Cyriacus and the textual finds have been published partly in Hasznos 2013,
The *Topos* of Epiphanius

Although it was probably neither the most populous nor the most important among the Western Theban monastic settlements, the *topos* of Apa Epiphanius (conventionally referred to in the scholarly literature as the Monastery of Epiphanius) is by far the best documented one as it became the object of proper excavation, carried out in 1911–1912 and 1913–1914 under the aegis of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The finds were published in two splendid volumes, one documenting the settlement itself and the other the textual finds.\(^7\)

The monastic cluster was located halfway up the rocky slope of the Sheikh ‘Abd el-Kurneh’ hill. Its nucleus and main dwelling was the rock-cut tomb of vizier Daga (TT103, XI dynasty). A series of interconnected rooms erected in front of the central of the seven entrances to the tomb led into the burial chamber through a narrow corridor. This was accessed through a T-shaped room, labelled ‘vestibule’ by the excavators. It was paved with sandstone slabs, had benches around the passage walls and several arched niches on the walls on either side of the central part of the space. The niches were covered with doctrinal texts in Coptic and Greek, painted in red letters. They were placed in such a way as to be legible to those crossing the vestibule or sitting on the benches.\(^8\) The complex was separated from the outside world by an enclosure that encompassed a courtyard and two towers, used for storage and as dwelling places. The cemetery was located a few metres outside the enclosure wall.

The cluster included three further cells, the so-called outlying cells A–C, which also developed in and around rock-cut pharaonic tombs.\(^9\) Cells A and B, which have yielded the textual finds which interest us in the present context, were located at a distance of less than 100 metres from the main dwelling. Cell A was at approximately the same height as the Tomb of Daga/main dwelling, while cell B was located ca. 10 metres above cell A. They were connected to the main dwelling through a path leading up to its rear entrance.

\(^7\) The first volume will appear in the footnotes as Crum, *et al.* (1926), and the second as *Mon. Epiph.* ( = Crum, *et al.* 1926: II).


Cell A (Figure 6.1) was by far the larger and more elaborate of the two outlying dwellings. A small and narrow XI-dynasty tomb had been extended by means of a square room erected in front of the single entrance. This space corresponded to the so-called vestibule of the main dwelling. Its floor had

Figure 6.1 Monastery of Epiphanius, Cell A. From H. E. Winlock and W. E. Crum, *The Monastery of Epiphanius at Thebes* 1 (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1926), 40
been paved with limestone chips. Benches had been built against the walls to the right of the entrance while a loom occupied the innermost left corner. This design continued as one proceeded deeper into the corridor, climbing a step up and into a tile-paved section with benches along the walls and a second loom placed against the wall to the far right after a bench. A stone wall surrounded the structure creating a small courtyard which included a granary.

Cell B (Figure 6.2), originally also a small and narrow XI-dynasty tomb, had a very similar layout but on an even smaller and more modest scale. An extension had been added in front of the entrance. The entrance room had benches along its walls. A recess over the bench to the right was decorated with a stele containing either a text mentioning the Council of Chalcedon or a homily.\textsuperscript{10} The benches along the walls, which were plastered and whitewashed to a certain depth, continued as one proceeded deeper into the corridor-like space. A hole in the floor led down into a very low chamber, thought to have functioned as a place of retreat.

In terms of domestic economy the outlying cells appear to have been self-sufficient units with dwelling rooms, workspaces, equipment and granaries. Cell A even had its own donkey stable. In all probability they were dependent on the main dwelling only for the preparation of their bread, as they seem to have had no oven. The remains of organic materials and the implements recovered indicate that the monks were occupied with the production of mats, baskets, clothing and leatherwork in order to earn a living.\textsuperscript{11}

\textbf{Homeric Ostraca in Epiphanius}

Four ostraca, \textit{Mon.Epiph.} 611–14, each preserving a Homeric line or two, were recovered ‘around cell B’ according to the excavator, who does not record the precise find spots.\textsuperscript{12} Of these, \textit{Mon.Epiph.} 613 (\textit{Il.} 1.201 and \textit{passim}) and 614 (part of \textit{Il.} 1.22) no longer belong to the MMA collection, and it has not been possible to locate them.\textsuperscript{13} The remaining two ostraca preserve the opening line(s) of the \textit{Iliad} in various degrees of completeness.

\textsuperscript{10} \textit{Mon.Epiph.} 587 (= TM 112423) or 588 (= TM 112424).
\textsuperscript{12} Crum, et al. 1926: I, 44, n. 4. Other textual finds in the cell include: \textit{Mon.Epiph.} 573 = P.Rain. UnterrichtKopt. 276, TM 87109 (disconnected phrases, Coptic); \textit{Mon.Epiph.} 618 = P.Rain. UnterrichtKopt. 252, TM 65159 (days of the week with planetary equivalents, Greek); \textit{Mon. Epiph.} 589 = TM 65336 (homily, Greek); \textit{Mon.Epiph.} 608 = TM 65223 (troparion, Greek). \textit{Mon. Epiph.} 571 and 2, included in the list, come from an ‘unnumbered grave’ according to the relevant entries in \textit{Mon.Epiph.} (= Crum, et al. 1926: II).
\textsuperscript{13} TM 61100 and 61109, respectively.
Figure 6.2 Monastery of Epiphanius, Cell B. From H. E. Winlock and W. E. Crum, *The Monastery of Epiphanius at Thebes* 1 (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1926), 43
Mon. Epiph. 611 (Figure 6.3), a limestone ostracon with a very uneven surface, preserves in its upper middle and right part three instances of *Iliad* 1.1, the one arranged directly under the other. The beginning of writing is marked by a cross, a graphic convention at the time. In the first two lines where the text reaches the edge of the broken ostracon, it is unclear whether the entire verse was copied out. It is, however, beyond any doubt that when copying the verse for the third time, the copyist gave up at the end of the second metrical foot. The hand, which writes a fluid documentary cursive, is the same throughout although some letter forms in l. 1 (most notably M and N) are traced differently than the corresponding forms in ll. 2 and 3. The repetition of the same phrase suggests indeed that the aim was to be an ‘exercise in cursive Greek.’ Even so the organic diaeresis over the *iota* of *Πηληίαδε* (Pêlêiáde[odynamoe]) at l. 2 indicates a certain level of care and understanding of the text. In the blank space to the left of the three instances of *Il* 1.1, the same verse has been copied once again, possibly by another hand attempting to imitate the documentary cursive of the first copyist.

The final result is on the whole less successful than that achieved by the first hand: the writing appears more cursive and is partially marred by an ink smudge. Below the Homeric lines an artless, messy hand penned a letter (whether real or model) in Coptic. At 12 x 10 cm this ostracon could fit into an open palm. The second Iliadic ostracon from cell B (Figure 6.4) is triangular and much smaller, measuring a mere 3.7 x 3.8 cm. Nevertheless, the front surface accommodates *Iliad* 1.1 and the first word that occupies one and a half metrical feet of *Il* 1.2. The text follows the contours of the ostracon, which suggests that the writing surface retains its original shape and size. On the back, the same hand has continued with more of *Il* 1.2 (*ἡ μορί᾽ Ἀχαι* [hê múri’ Achai]), giving up at

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14 TM 61111; Cribiore 1996: 213, no. 168. Digital images for this and the other ostraca are accessible through the MMA website.
15 Carlig 2013: 69.
16 Editor’s description of Mon. Epiph. 611. Cribiore 1996: 213, no. 168 ‘Very proficient, a scribe’ and Bucking 2007: 41 ‘a highly skilled cursive hand that is very suggestive of a professional scribal setting…’
17 I owe this observation to Michael Zellmann-Rohrer.
18 The fourth occurrence of *Il* 1.1 is preceded by a cross, which also indicates a fresh beginning, i.e., another scribe at work.
19 Bucking 2007: 41-2 maintains that the fourth copy of *Il* 1.1 is penned by the same hand that wrote the Coptic text. He names as criteria the darker colour of the ink and what he takes as ligaturing of the final letter of the Homeric quotation with the chrism at the beginning of the Coptic letter. In my opinion, it is not certain that there is a chrism at the beginning of the Coptic letter, just a drawn-out version of the letter *eta*. In turn, the hand writing in Coptic is not necessarily identical with a second hand, or at least the matter cannot be firmly determined. Cribiore 1996: 213: ‘Coptic text by different hand’ and Cribiore 1999: 282.
mid-word in the fourth metrical foot.\textsuperscript{20} This hand also uses fluent documentary cursive\textsuperscript{21} that resembles that of Mon.Epiph. 611 but the limited space causes the copyist to downsize the letters. The hand and, above all, the minimal dimensions of the writing surface point again to a writing exercise aimed at practising cursive Greek script with the aid of a memorable verse. This may also have been the case with the other two Iliadic ostraca, Mon.Epiph. 613 and 614, the whereabouts of which are currently unknown, as mentioned above. They preserve the recurrent Homeric formulae καὶ μὲν φωνήσας ἔπεα πτερόεντα προσηύδα (‘and addressing him/her (s)he uttered winged words’) and ἐνθ’ ἄλλοι μὲν πάντες (‘then all others’), respectively.\textsuperscript{22} The cursive hand and the

\textsuperscript{20} Neither the first edition nor any of the subsequent studies note that the scribe continues II. 1.2 on the back.

\textsuperscript{21} Cribiore 1996: 225, no. 225: ‘Rapid, competent and well developed cursive letters’.

\textsuperscript{22} Cribiore 1996: 225–6, nos. 226 and 227. The former line counts thirty-one occurrences in total in the Homeric epics, while the latter counts nine occurrences. Strictly speaking, it is not certain that the scribe had the passages from Iliad 1 in mind, although Homer’s “readers” in Egypt showed a marked preference for the first book of this poem. The two ostraca may be viewed simply as quotations of Homeric formulae.
formulaic character of the text copied would also indicate that the goal was to practice writing.

A School in Epiphanius?

Somewhat surprisingly, given the assessment of the individual pieces, the editors of the Epiphanius textual material advanced a different overall interpretation of the setting, remarking apropos Mon.Epiph. 611, ‘this example, with 612–614, suggests that Homer was still used even in monastic schools—if only to provide copy-book maxims’. The cache of texts recovered in cell B led them to wonder whether one of its inhabitants might have been active as a school teacher.\(^\text{23}\) They were reluctant to accept the idea that the monastic dwellers of the place were active in teaching the young, however.\(^\text{24}\) Subsequent scholarly discussions based on this evidence and on the gnomological material from the site as well have been more prone to acknowledge the possibility that elementary teaching took place in

the monastery. In a recent article on the meeting between monasticism and the pagan philosophical, and more broadly literate, heritage, Samuel Rubenson states:

The tangible evidence we have for elementary teaching in a monastic setting, for the monastery as school, has up to now been centred on Upper Egypt and emerges from the archaeological excavations of monasteries of a somewhat later period (sixth to eighth centuries), where numerous papyri and ostraka used for school exercises, as well as copies of Homer and the Sentences of Menander, have been found in situ. But no thorough investigation of all material indicating school activity in early monastic sites has yet been done. A possible reason for the fact that the evidence for elementary education comes from monasteries in Upper Egypt may well be that it was mainly here that monastic communities were receiving monks who had not received any or much elementary education. As suggested elsewhere, it is reasonable to think that the creation of an elementary education on a Christian basis first happened in the periphery of traditional Greek culture.

At the opposite end of the spectrum Scott Bucking has questioned the straightforward connection of this and other material with formal schooling and has elaborated alternative scenarios depending on the type of evidence and its context, including documentary writing/scribal practice and personal use/private education.

In the specific case of cell B, while the presence of Homeric quotations – a standard educational text – immediately suggests school objects, the documentary hand and format of the texts corroborate the scenario of writing practice governed by practical or vocational aims. Moreover, the entire textual and archaeological layout of cell B needs to be brought to bear on the question, to the extent that this is possible. As stressed by the editors, cell B was a favourite place of pilgrimage for locals and visitors from places farther away who scratched requests on the walls to the holy man to pray on their behalf. In the ‘vestibule’ the visitors would have read the dogmatic or edifying text displayed on the stele – presumably giving

25 Cribiore 1997: 192, Cribiore 2001: 24–5 (both times cautiously, though), Larsen 2006a, 2008, 2013a, repeated by Rubenson 2012: 504–5. In her 2006 PhD thesis and subsequent work (Larsen 2008, Larsen 2013a and Larsen this volume), Larsen in particular has identified the educational function as a possible link between the monastic apophthegmatic literature and pagan collections of sayings. In Larsen 2008: 24, e.g., she wonders whether ‘gnomic sentences serve[d] a pedagogical role in the monastic milieu similar to the traditional rhetorical role accorded to sayings in ancient grammatical instruction’.

26 Rubenson 2012: 504, drawing on Larsen 2006a; 2008; 2013a; See also Larsen this volume.

27 Bucking 2007 and 2012.
a clear exposition of the doctrinal position of its anchoretic occupants. This setting is not incompatible with the possibility that the premises were used as a school as well; on the other hand, there is no decisive feature of the interior design that would indicate a school either, apart from the benches that characterise places of gathering in general, not schools in particular.

Of the other texts reportedly found in cell B, *Mon.Epiph. 589, 608 and 618* offer some interesting perspectives with respect to the question of education. *Mon.Epiph. 608* is a limestone ostracon the upper- and mid-left part of which has been chipped off leaving an ample surface blank. It probably bore two troparia, texts to be chanted in mass, one of which may have had the birth of Christ as a theme. The hand was a neat, clearly legible book hand, though some of the letters connected and some were penned rather rapidly. On the blank surface that was created as a result of the chipping, a scribe penned a word or two in rapid documentary cursive, again a sort of writing practice. Documentary cursive is also practised, admittedly in a rather messy manner, on the back of *Mon. Epiph. 589*. The front side of this ostracon has a text, penned in a practised, though not very elegant hand. The editors label the text ‘homiletic’, even if they consider the possibility of it serving as a school exercise. Although the content of the main text cannot be fully reconstructed, some noteworthy points are sufficiently clear: the third-person subject, whose identity is uncertain, is said to ‘grant to the ones who have learnt’ (l. 6) [διδωσι τοῖς μαθησί [dídôsi tois matho[usi]) and again to ‘grant to the ones who comprehend’ (l. 7) [διδωσι τοῖς νοοσι [dídôsi tois noous[i]). The same ideas are repeated in similar wording in ll. 8–9. But by far the most interesting clue about this piece may be provided by l. 2, if it is restored not as in the first edition, i.e., [ωτα ειδως [. [Ωta eidôs], but as γράμματα ειδως [. (grâm]mata eidôs), ‘knowing letters/being in possession of learning’. Learning (or specifically, learning to write), knowledge, understanding and the benefits or rewards gained from it is the topic, if the restoration is tenable. The text, which in this reading is taken to reflect some of the core values of its user(s), is compatible with

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28 The excavators assume that the vestibules were assembly spaces for the monks and reception spaces for their visitors, see Crum, *et al.* 1926: I, 30–1, and on the vestibule in the main dwelling, see MacCoull 1998: 314–16.

29 TM 65223. Digital images are accessible through the MMA website.

30 TM 65336. Digital images are accessible through the MMA website.

31 The editors supplemented κυρ[ι], ‘the lord’ at the end of l. 1 but this may not be the subject at all or the subject may have changed by the time we reach ll. 6–9, see *Mon.Epiph. 589*, pp. 126 and 308.
either an educational or a scribal setting depending on the connotations of the restored reading γράμματα (letters).

The main hand of Mon.Epiph. 618 shows certain similarities with the hands of 608 and 589, so that it is not inconceivable that all three ostraca were produced by the same scribe. It contains a list of the days of the week and their equivalents in the planetary week, and was classified with the school objects in the edition. The hand was aptly described as ‘evolving, pretentious with separated capitals decorated by serifs and roundels’. Two phases are discernible in the production of the text. As a first step the main copyist produced separate lists on either side of the ostracon. This hand is not fully proficient but the mannerisms point to someone with scribal ambitions and a degree of training. As a second step the same or, more likely, a second hand wielding a much thinner pen drew a dividing line formatted as a long, forked paragraphos and combined each of the days from Monday to Friday with its planetary equivalent. The second phase may have occurred as a result of the will or instruction of the producer of the independent lists, or independently at a later point. This is hard to determine. However, it is noteworthy that the combined version reproduces the content not the form of the first version. The hand which produces the combined list neglects the (semi-) calligraphic aspect of the model, copying and rearranging the content in (semi-) cursive. This would indicate learning or curiosity, not practice, as the main motive of the second copyist, while the first copyist is clearly interested also (if not primarily) in the form.

Interest in documentary writing in this particular monastic setting is documented also by Mon.Epiph. 620, reported as recovered in the ‘original monastery’. It contains the Greek alphabet arranged in four

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32 P. Rain. Unterricht Kopt. 252, TM 65159. The text has been recently re-edited by Rodney Ast (P. Bagnall 2: 15–16) and discussed as a testimony for the use of the planetary names of the days of the week. Digital images are accessible through the MMA website.
34 Cribiore 1996: 97–118 for a detailed discussion of criteria used in identifying and categorising school hands.
35 TM 65161; Cribiore 1996: 189, no. 67. Digital images are accessible through the MMA website.
36 About the value of this provenance indication, see Crum, et al. 1926: I, xxii–xxiii: ‘The whole place was a mass of broken pottery of which only a comparatively small part was inscribed. Many of the latter fragments would escape the diggers and be carried off to the dumps where they would be found by the [basket-] boys after it was too late to make an accurate record of their original positions. So far as possible we guarded against these fragments being mixed with the others and have given them merely the general designations of “original monastery” or “east buildings”, depending upon the season in which they were found (…). The site of the East Buildings was similarly covered with a large heap from excavations at the tomb of Sebeknakht. From these dumps came a large proportion of the ostraca, but having been recently disturbed,
lines with the individual letters standing independently. The syntagm θεοφιλέστατοι μοναχοί (‘monks most beloved of God/having the highest love for God’) was penned underneath with its letters ligatured. The hand displays advanced skill and has been described as ‘proficient, writing in clear, exemplary cursive’. A model.\textsuperscript{37} Paulinus Bellet accurately formulated the interpretative dilemmas posed by ostraca of this kind when in his discussion of \textit{Mon.Epiph}. 616 he remarked:

\begin{quote}
The interpretation of these materials on ostraca, especially those having the simple alphabet or (…) with a simple line of literary ductus, is not always easy. To call these texts school texts does not exhaust everything that can be said. An alphabet can be an exercise by a pupil, a dictation, a calligraphic model by a teacher, proof offered by a pupil of his training, a simple \textit{probatio pennae} and so on.\textsuperscript{38}
\end{quote}

Cribiore has stated as regards well-written alphabets on ostraca, ‘it is unclear whether they were written by regular teachers, by scribes, or by teachers in scribal schools’.\textsuperscript{39} It seems to me that in this particular case the fact that the alphabet includes three cursive variants of the letter lambda (ll. 2–3) strongly suggests that the copyist was not a conventional teacher but someone aiming either at imparting skills in documentary writing or at testing and developing (or even demonstrating) his own skill. On the other hand, the sparsity of the sample from the \textit{topos} of Epiphanius as well as the representation of scribal activity in the monasteries in the relevant literature suggest small-scale scribal activity rather than a scribal school proper.

**Homer in Deir el-Bahri/St Phoebammon**

Interesting comparative perspectives are offered by another Homeric ostracon, apparently originating from the nearby Monastery of St Phoebammon/Deir el-Bahri. Limestone O.Col. inv. 949\textsuperscript{40} (sixth century; Figure 6.5) belongs to a lot of (predominantly Coptic) ostraca cleared away during Naville’s excavation of the site in the excavator’s eagerness to

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\textsuperscript{37} Cribiore 1996: 189, no. 67.  
\textsuperscript{38} Bellet 1982: 4.  
\textsuperscript{39} Cribiore 1996: 125. The same scholar has also pointed out that many of the texts assembled in P. Rain.UnterrichtKopt. ‘were proficiently written by scribes and correspond to similar texts written in Greek schools specializing in scribal education’ (Cribiore 1999: 280, and n. 9).  
\textsuperscript{40} TM 117723. \textit{Ed.pr.} Cribiore 2008: 42–4.
unveil earlier phases of the monument (mortuary temple of Hatshepsut). Naville’s dump was re-excavated by Winlock in 1926–1928, and the ostraca recovered ended up (via the MMA) in the collection of Columbia University.\footnote{Acq. 64.11.280. On the provenance of the Columbia ostraca, see O’Connell 2006.} The inscribed surface (the back is blank) preserves four short lines. These form pairs in terms of both content and form. Lines 1–2 are a version of the second half of II 3.61 stripped of all traits of Homer’s poetic idiom and slightly but significantly altered: ὑπ’ ἄνέρος ὅς ρά τε τέχνη (hup’ anéros hös rá te téchnē) has been replaced by ὑπὸ τοῦ ἄνδρος ὅστις τῇ τέχνη (hupò tou andròs hóstis têi téchnē). This is no well-worn Homeric formula like the ones on the Epiphanius ostraca but a unique expression from a simile employed by Paris in his reply to Hector’s reproaches, one of the rare similes uttered by a Homeric character (as opposed to the epic narrator). Lines 3–4 contain the not-so-common formula ἀμεῖβετο διὰ γυναῖκῶν (ameibeto dia gunaikôn), used twice (II 3.171 and 228) to introduce replies by Helen to Priam in the Teichoscopia ('Viewing from the Wall'). The writing style changes dramatically from the first to the last line. The top pair of lines is in bookhand – a specimen of the sloping pointed majuscule, written with a thin pen. In l. 2 the same style is carried on but bilinearity is broken by an iota projecting above and below the line, and the last word exhibits an impressive ligature. There is, thus, a development towards a more documentary hand. The next pair of lines is written in pure cursive, exhibiting increasing speed and ligaturing.

Figure 6.5 Lines from Homer, Iliad (O.Col.inv. 949). Columbia Libraries
As the editor has remarked, ‘at least two hands are present, but it is not clear how many writers were involved’. The editor is inclined to associate this puzzling combination of Homeric paraphrase and citation with ‘the practice of questions and answers that went on in the ancient classroom’, hypothesising that ‘the teacher may have asked the student to provide a clear paraphrase of l. 61 in order to show that he understood it properly and then required of him to write down the ending of 171’. This interpretation places the hermeneutic weight on text-type, taking as its starting point the well-documented use of Homer in education in the form of short excerpts written verbatim or paraphrased. On the other hand the interpretation of the piece as ‘scribal exercise or pen trial’ transposes the weight of proof onto palaeography, as it assumes (without actually proving) that monastic provenance in itself enhances the plausibility of the piece representing scribal practice, a possibility already raised by the editor.

This is not a matter of ‘railroading epistemologies’ but of what criterion one considers to be weightier in a case where criteria point in different directions. For my part I would like to offer two observations which may perhaps have some bearing on the assessment of the piece: the two pairs of lines position ‘a man who by his craft/expertise’ against ‘a divine woman’ who answers, i.e., who utters words. Notice the polarities male vs. female, craft vs. discourse. If this is taken as a conscious choice, it would reflect the sophistication of the copyist (alternatively, it could convey a whiff of irony by the person who scribbled the second pair of lines). One wonders moreover whether the first pair of lines, speaking of ‘a man who by means of his art’ exhibits self-referentiality and self-consciousness, and thus whether the man alluded to is the scribe who demonstrates his art through the elaborate ligaturing of the first three letters of the word τέχνη (téchnê), i.e., the technical term for ‘craft/field of expertise’, at the precise point where a stylistic and formal turn is about to be effected. On balance then it seems to me that the Homeric ostracon from Deir el-Bahri may have served to demonstrate the expertise and sophistication of a copyist who worked across the board of writing styles.

45 Cribiore 2008: 42 ‘unless we suppose that its writer changed his pen and altered his style to practice different ways of writing’.
46 Bucking 2012, passim.
Menandri Sententiae in Epiphanius

I now return to the topos of Epiphanius to revisit the finds in outlying cell A. This cell has yielded a rich harvest of ostraca with Biblical, homiletic and liturgical texts in Coptic and in Greek,\(^{47}\) including ostracon Mon.Epiph. 615 (Menandri Sententiae in Greek), and papyrus Mon.Epiph. 621 (Greek part of a presumed bilingual list of birds, not arranged alphabetically),\(^{48}\) and much private correspondence in Coptic. Mon.Epiph. 615 (Figure 6.6)\(^{49}\) preserves a collection of single-verse maxims, traditionally ascribed to the comic poet Menander, although in practice their sources are diverse and their metre also exhibits a degree of variation. The writing surface is very uneven. The upper and lower edges of the stone have been cut in a straight line. The left and right parts are uneven and have suffered some damage,

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\(^{48}\) P.Rain.UnterrichtKopt. 247 = TM 65225.

although not much of the writing surface is missing. The state of preservation of the text is poor. Some of the over thirty maxims have been deciphered and restored partly with the help of other sources. Four maxims all beginning with a word starting with the letter alpha open the collection, which continues with an average of three maxims per letter up to and including maxims in theta. From iota onwards one maxim per letter is the rule but two maxims starting with phi (ll. 27–8 and 28–9) may have been included. The collection concludes with a maxim in chi (ll. 29–30) while the contents of the last line remain unclear.

Despite the considerable loss of text, it appears virtually certain that Mon.Epiph. 615 once contained a complete mini-collection of maxims arranged alphabetically. The hand appears neat (considering the uneven surface) with large, right-leaning letters penned in swift, confident strokes. As a whole it is an average specimen of the sloping, pointed majuscule. Cribiore considers it as ‘probably a teacher’s hand’ and includes the piece among the extant teachers’ models. This possibility cannot be definitely ruled out. However, the hand cannot be considered a sufficient criterion in this case as the artefact lacks other, more weighty indicators of models identified by Cribiore: for example, the text has not been recopied on the same surface in the hand of a learner. Other criteria need to be brought to bear on the discussion, more specifically the archaeological context, the form of the ostracon and perhaps also its content.

The archaeological context has been discussed exhaustively by Scott Bucking. This important discussion has yielded only modest insights, however. The piece was found with other ostraca and debris from the collapsing walls on a palm-leaf mat on the floor of the so-called ‘vestibule’. It is unclear whether this was the original and common location of the ostraca in the room, whether they were dumped there when the cell was abandoned or whether they fell as a result of the collapse of the walls. There is a chance that this may not have been a ‘sealed locus’ since ostraca now in the British Museum (and therefore removed from the site before the MMA excavations) join with ostraca found on the mat. On the other hand, damage and ensuing random dispersal of pieces within the site may have been responsible for pieces which initially belonged together having ended up in different collections and may not mean

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anything about the integrity of the lot on the mat of cell A. The upshot of
the discussion is that a considerable degree of uncertainty accompanies the
archaeological side of the find.

What is certain, on the other hand, is that the cell was the locus of scribal
activity. Some of the ostraca found together with Mon.Epiph. 615 were
copied by a scribe identified, in the light of correspondence from the same
deposit, as Moses. The hand of Mon.Epiph. 615 is similar, albeit not
identical, to Moses’ hand. In its present state the ostracon is ca. 22.5 cm
broad and ca. 21 cm high. In its original dimensions it would have been
somewhat broader (the original breadth may have been up to ca. 24 cm)
than longer, its height amounting to ca. ¾ of a normal sheet of modern
paper and its breadth somewhat exceeding one. As it was cut in a straight
line below, it could have been set up so that the text could be viewed by
someone from a distance in order to be read or copied. Yet the distance
cannot have been greater than that from which letters of average size
written on a normal sheet of paper would be visible. This is compatible
with reading or copying taking place on an individual basis or in small
groups. Moreover, an extensive interlinear addition of a forgotten maxim
from the beta-group between ll. 4 and 5 makes the ‘model’ interpretation of
Mon.Epiph. 615 appear as rather unlikely. Squeezed between lines, this
addition caused a muddle and reduced legibility, a feature which appears
more compatible with the assessment of this mini gnomologium as
‘intended for personal use and reference’.

A final step is to explore whether content may reveal something about
the user of this mini-gnomology. As the transmission of the Menandri
Sententiae is fluid and formed ad hoc, as is the case with other types of
apophthegmatic literature, the owner of this text may have been respon-
sible for the selection of maxims. Beginnings are significant loci of self-
positioning. This compiler/user has chosen to signpost the beginning
(Mon.Epiph. 615.1) with a maxim concluding with φόβος θεοῦ (‘the fear
of God’). Whether an iambic adaptation of Proverbs 1:7 (as some scholars
have assumed) or, as proposed by Hagedorn and Weber, a quotation of
this OT passage reading ἀρχὴ σοφίας, φόβος θεοῦ (‘the beginning of wisdom

56 The hand has copied Mon.Epiph. 3 (TM 108513), 7 (TM 108517), 8 (TM 108517), 15 (TM
108524), 16 (TM 108525), 19 (TM 108526), 31 (TM 108526), 32 (TM 112417), 46 (TM 112417),
47 (TM 112418), 68 (TM 112566) and 400 (a letter whose author identifies himself as Moses).
See editors’ note in Mon.Epiph. 3, p. 155.
57 Bucking 2007: 35.
58 Mon.Epiph. 63 Jaekel ἀρχὴν νόμισε τὸν θεόν † φοβεῖσθαι.
59 Hagedorn and Weber 1968: 26 (comm. on ll. 1–3). The restoration was later proposed
independently by Führer (1993: 14, n. 100) on grounds of space.
is the fear of God’) – the programmatic maxim reveals a devout compiler/user with σοφία (‘learning’, ‘erudition’, ‘wisdom’) as a core value.60

A comparandum is provided by the bilingual Greek and Coptic collection of Menandri Sententiae in a papyrus codex split between the Vatican Museum and the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, that begins by quoting Sophia Sirah 25:24 (ἅπτο γυναικὸς ἁρχὴ ἁμαρτίας ‘sin originated in a woman’) which encapsulates a core attitude running through the collection. As signalled by the opening maxim, the Vatican/Vienna bilingual gnomologium turns out to be replete with misogynistic maxims. This and considerations of space reinforce the possibility that the beginning of Mon.Epiph. 615 should be Proverbs 1:7.61

Predictably, maxims that stress the importance and prestige of learning predominate in Mon.Epiph. 615. Three maxims on the same topic follow immediately after the programmatic quotation: ll. 1–2 ‘learning is the best basis for wise/right thinking’, ll. 2–3 ‘let logos guide every authority’ and l. 4 ‘speak and learn eagerly the good things’. The topic re-emerges toward the end of the selection: ll. 22–3 ‘the learned person has a more developed sense/ability for reflection’; ll. 23–4 preserve a maxim that appears to compare learning with wealth (in what precise terms we do not know – wealth is held in high esteem in the gnomological tradition), followed by the unmetrical maxim ῥόπταλ[ων][γάρ οὐδὲν τοις μαθούσι] τὰ γράμματα, ‘no cudgel affects those who have learnt letters’ or ‘learning is no cudgel for those who have acquired it’ (ll. 24–5).62 The main term for learning is γράμματα. This is a semantically broad noun designating ‘literacy’ (including the letters of the alphabet in the concrete sense, the ability to write and read, and the professions exercised by using the alphabet), but also ‘learning’ and ‘education’ in a more general sense.64 In their study of the bilingual Vatican/Vienna codex, Hagedorn and Weber consider the creation of the group of sententiae about γράμματα as secondary in relation to the core of the collection and attribute it to ‘somebody lacking the correct idea as to the nature of an iambic trimeter’.65 The crucial question is what this word means (or connotes) in a Late Antique Egyptian context, how it

60 See Larsen 2013a for an alternate reading.
61 The use of excerpts from the Proverbs in Christian education is recommended by Basil of Caesarea (Reg. fus. 15), see Larsen 2013a: 63 (and n. 27) and Larsen this volume.
62 The restoration is Delattre’s 2012: 301. The reconstruction of the text is mine on the basis of the digital image.
63 E.g., in a sworn declaration P.Tebt. II 316.15–18 (99 CE), two young men, Demetrius, 23 years old, and Heliodorus, 18 years old, declare: τήχνη δὲ ύμων (l. ἡμῶν) γράμματα (‘we are scribes by profession’).
64 LSJ 9 1940: 358 s.v. γράμμα.
was understood by the compiler/user of the present and similar collections, and what it reveals about their conception and experience of learning and education. As regards the Vatican/Vienna collection Hagedorn and Weber noted that the translator rendered the Greek γράμματα μαθεῖν or μαθητήν as τελῶν εγράφαι or ενεργεῖαι, literally, ‘the teaching of writing’ (in other cases this expression corresponds to the Greek γράμματα διδάξαι [grámmata didáxsai (‘to teach letters’)]). While strictly speaking a misunderstanding on the part of the translator, the mistranslation may reflect the fact that he was an instructor/teacher who rendered the situation from his own point of view. More essentially, the rendering of γράμματα with ὁσ, i.e., a term which denotes literally the act of inscribing, drawing or forming the letters, appears intriguing and could be viewed as expressing the core of the translator’s educational ideal and experience. Based on her survey of extant material remains, Cribiore has suggested that in Coptic education ‘a beginner practiced writing before reading’.67

To map the exact meanings and connotations of γράμματα in Mon. Epiph. 615, the content of the individual maxims should be taken into account. As it is, the concept is associated with φρονεῖν (‘correct thinking’), νοῦν (‘(good) sense’) and finally with πλοῦτος (‘wealth’) and the absence of compulsion or toil. All this points to ‘education’ as an apt meaning except for the last instance, which may also imply a conception of γράμματα as practical expertise/vocational training which generates material welfare.

The above reflections and possibilities are cast in a new light by a recently published ostracon from the neighbouring hermitage of the scribe Frange (TT29), O.Frangé 751.68 The large ostracon (29 x 19 cm), which the editors have roughly dated to between the late sixth and the mid-eighth centuries in view of the archaeological context, is a sherd from a ribbed ceramic jar, pieced together from six fragments. The hand, which does not belong to Frange, displays a not yet fully developed writing skill (‘evolving hand’). Letters are mostly large and clumsily formed. Their shapes are not fully stabilised and neither is their size. The text consists of a chain of maxims. It opens with what seems to me to be part of Proverbs 1:7 (O.Frangé 751.1 [ὁ]ρχὴ σοφίας φόβου τοῦ θεοῦ).69 It continues with two maxims from Menandri Sententiae, the first starting with alpha (O.Frangé 751.1–3 = *889 Pernigotti) and the second with beta

66 Crum 1939: 381–2, s.v. СΨΛ. 67 Cribiore 1999: 284 (and n. 43).
68 TM 220289. Ed. pr. Boud’hors and Heurtel 2010: I 396. See also CPF II.2 137–8 (Menandri Sententiae no. 11). For a recent discussion and revision of the ostracon, see Maravela 2016.
69 Ed.pr. [.]ν σοφία φ.] ...
(O.Frangé 751.4–5 = 115 Pernigotti). These are also found in ll. 1–2 and 4–5 of Mon.Epiph. 615 as well as in other witnesses of Menandri Sententiae from Egypt in Late Antiquity. Lines 6–8 of O.Frangé 751 contain Matt. 25:13, functioning as a maxim which starts with gamma (γρηγορεῖτε δὴ τὸ οὐκ οἴδατε τὴν ἡμέραν οὐδὲ τὸν ἡμερών [‘be watchful for you do not know the day nor the hour’]). It is followed by a maxim starting with delta (O. Frangé 751.9–10 = *902 Pernigotti), which corresponds to the maxim in Mon.Epiph. 615.11, P.Bour. 1.178–80 and P.Copt. 85. Lines 12–14 of O. Frangé 751 contain the documentary version of the Trinitarian formula ἐν ὅμοιῳ πατρὸς καὶ υἱοῦ καὶ ἁγίου πνεύματος (‘in [the] name of [the] father and son and holy spirit’), which apparently functions as a maxim starting with epsilon. O.Frangé 751 is then related to Mon.Epiph. 615 in view of the shared opening maxim and another three shared sentences. On the other hand, it also differs starkly as its compiler opts for pious pronouncements, a New Testament passage on the significance of spiritual alertness where Mon.Epiph. 615 has maxims about women, and the Trinitarian formula. The scribe of O.Frangé 751 then (or the person who asked the scribe to copy the maxims) picks, perhaps from memory, from a source shared with Mon.Epiph. 615 but his strong religious-moral focus leads him to insert Biblical passages where the source did not provide suitable content. All the while the scribe struggles with the letter forms, and his errors in phonology and word division suggest that he is also struggling with Greek. Writing practice and improvement in Greek with a religious-moral agenda seem to be the keywords that describe the Sitz im Leben of this new ostracon.

O.Frangé 751 likewise has significance for the assessment of Mon.Epiph. 615 in the sense that it clearly strengthens the educational scenario. Writing practice and religious-moral exercise emerge as joint factors determining the use of gnomologies in monastic settings. At any rate the text has entirely lost its connections with its pagan origins and functions as a culturally rebranded manual of practical, personal ethics.

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70 O.Frangé 751.1–3 is also attested in P.Bour. 1.169–70 (IV); T.Würz. K 1023 (IV/V); T.Louvre AF 1195 side A (V); and T.Uni.Mich. inv. 29974 inner text (V/VI). O.Frangé 751.4–5 is also attested in P.Bour. 1.171–2 and P.Copt. 31–2.
71 Bagnall and Worp 2004: 99–109, esp. 100–1, 103–4 and 108.
72 Cf. Larsen 2013a; and others.
73 Perhaps then, given the monastic setting, one should not supplement with Jaekel [Ἰσόν θεῷ], but [Ἰσόν θεῷ] in l. 17.
74 For an interesting comparandum, the Christian assimilation of Pythagorean doctrines via the second-century gnomological Sentences of Sextus, see Pevarello 2013 and Pevarello in this volume.
Perspectives from the Petrie Ostraca

The recent publication of two archives of ostraca in the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology in London\textsuperscript{75} may illuminate the discussion from new angles. One lot of ostraca, designated as Group A, comprises predominantly Christian texts (Psalms, Acts, different NT epistles, two liturgical prayers), as well as three ostraca with excerpts from \textit{Iliad} and six ostraca with \textit{Menandri Sententiae}. All these appear to have been penned by the same hand (A) that has written some Coptic documents, an excerpt from 1 Ep.Jo. in Coptic and a couple of texts which cannot be identified with certainty.\textsuperscript{76} The most likely provenance is the wider area of Western Thebes. Given the date of the find (late fifth century) and the history of the area, it may be conjectured that these texts – which predate the Epiphanius and St Phoebammon texts by at least half a century – may represent a cache of monastic texts, although this is not absolutely secure. The mix of texts in the archive at any rate corresponds to what has been recovered in the Monastery of Epiphanius, including the presence of excerpts from the \textit{Iliad} and selections from \textit{Menandri Sententiae}. The hand has been described as a ‘fluid, practiced hand, though not a pure bookhand’ and as ‘an upright semi-bookhand (…) no doubt a hand practiced in copying texts for common use’.\textsuperscript{77} The inconsistent use of punctuation, \textit{trema} and other lectional aids (e.g., apostrophe to mark elision) as well as the semi-calligraphic hand probably indicate copies produced privately and intended for private use. Multiple reproductions of the same excerpt could point to a school (or to copies commissioned to the same scribe).\textsuperscript{78} However, no overlap is verifiable between the ostraca with \textit{Menandri Sententiae}. The only possible overlap is between O.Petr.Mus. 32 (\textit{Il.} 1.128–34) and 33 (\textit{Il.} 1.128–33?), but the latter object is in a bad state of preservation and its testimony cannot be decisive.

The Christian section of the archive comprises excerpts from the Acts as well as from the Pauline and the Catholic Epistles and an ostracon with two liturgical prayers. Significant variants, unattested in the rest of the manuscript transmission, point to an oral \textit{Sitz im Leben}, as the editor has argued. The variants, e.g., η\textit{με\v{e}σ} \textit{\v{a}γαπητοί} (‘we, beloved ones’) in P.Petr.Mus. 15 r.9 (= 1 Ep.Jo. 3:21) instead of a simple \textit{\v{a}γαπητοί} (‘beloved ones’) or \textit{\v{d}ε\v{l}φοι}


\textsuperscript{76} O.Petr.Mus. I, 3–4. \textsuperscript{77} Römer 2003: 184, and Funghi and Martinelli 2003: 144, respectively.

\textsuperscript{78} See the copies of the same prayer, \textit{Mon.Epiph.} 46 and 47, produced by Moses.
‘brothers’) in the manuscript transmission, and possibly ἡμεῖς ὀδηγοί ([‘we, brothers’] instead of ὀγκοπητοί [‘beloved ones’]) in 15 v.1 (= 1 Ep.Jo. 4.1), suggest that the texts were delivered orally for an audience, i.e., learnt by heart and used in preaching.⁷⁹ The presence of Homer and of Menandri Sententiae in this frame has rightly been explained as pools of maxims to be drawn upon in connection with moral oral instruction.⁸⁰ These texts were thus transfused into Christian and monastic environments as sources of moral learning imparted through self-education and in turn oral instruction of others – fellow monks and above all, novices.

Concluding Remarks

The Monastery of Epiphanius has long been the only properly documented monastic site in the region of Western Thebes, and it was only natural that the finds there have featured prominently in discussions of the relationship between school and monastery and of the fate of the Classical paideia within the monastic walls. The situation, however, is changing fast. Other, larger monastic sites in the area are being excavated or revisited and the publication of new school texts in Greek and in Coptic has been announced,⁸¹ while prepublications of new monastic ‘school texts’ have already generated much discussion.⁸² Their publications will bring the issues raised in this paper once more onto centre stage.

The present discussion of evidence for Classical paideia and typical educational texts in a Greek setting in monastic and similar milieus in Upper Egypt in Late Antiquity has suggested some leads and ideas to be revisited, and perhaps eventually revised, when more texts and archaeological reports become available. As expected in a setting where Coptic was the dominant linguistic medium and Christianity the dominant religion, the presence of Classical Greek paideia is meagre. The most famous and influential poet of Greek Antiquity, Homer, penetrated the boundaries of the Upper Egyptian monasteries

⁸¹ Texts from Deir el-Bachit, among them schools texts, are edited by S. Hodak (see Burkard, Mackensen and Polz 2003: 61–4; Beckh, Eichner and Hodak 2011: 20–6). The edition of the Coptic school texts in Columbia Deir el-Bahri/St Phoebammon is being carried out by R. Cribiore and J. Cromwell.
not as literature but as a repository of famous and memorable verses to be used in connection with the writing exercises of educated copyists active in the monastic community. The gnomological collection *Menandri Sententiae*, nominally going back to the comic poet Menander and other representatives of Greek dramatic poetry, functions as a pool of sayings to be drawn upon for writing practice and (oral?) moral instruction. In my opinion, the features of these texts suggest that they are not necessarily connected with the education of the youth who came under the authority of the Western Theban monasteries (through, e.g., child donations attested for the nearby Monastery of St Phoebammon). In and of themselves they likewise probably contribute nothing decisive to the discussion of whether children who grew up in Western Theban monasteries received an education.\(^{83}\) It seems far more likely that the forms of education indicated were directed at adults, fellow monks, perhaps in particular novices.\(^{84}\) Therefore as the discussion concerning the meeting between Christianity and school is picking up speed,\(^{85}\) the use of the term ‘educational texts’ instead of ‘school texts’ may be preferable.

In addressing some of these texts and their settings, Scott Bucking proposed that we should allow for the possibility of multifunctionality of the texts, i.e., that some of these texts may have had more than one use.\(^{86}\) Valuable as the point is, I wonder whether the multifunctionality of certain persons (and of the spaces they inhabited) provides a more efficient key to describe the situation in the monasteries and the production of the relevant texts. While in the context of the Greek pagan and urban education the teacher was mainly a teacher, in Christian monasteries the educated members of the community (figures like Moses who inhabited cell A of the *topos* of Apa Epiphanius, situated so as to be freely and easily accessible whether one approached from the town or from the direction of Deir el-Bahri)\(^{87}\) would take on different roles depending on needs and would function as copyists of books or of documents, as teachers (of their fellow-monks, especially the novices) or as preachers. The plausibility of this

\(^{83}\) No provision for the education of the children is made in the child donation acts, see P.KRU 78–103. The evidence for the presence and position of children in Egyptian monasteries is discussed in Giorda 2017.

\(^{84}\) See Bucking 2007: 38–9.

\(^{85}\) Overview and discussion of Christian educational papyri in Carlig 2013.

\(^{86}\) Bucking 2007: 35–6.

\(^{87}\) Crum, *et al.* 1926: I, pl. II.
scenario is indirectly underpinned by the semantics of the Coptic noun ṯⲧⲁⲯⲕⲧⲙⲓⲧ ('wise person') which bring together roles that presuppose literacy with roles that involve orality.\textsuperscript{88} It remains to test its validity in the light of the documentary evidence and literary accounts about Egyptian monastics.

\textsuperscript{88} Crum 1939: 383–4, s.v. ṯⲧⲁⲯⲕⲧⲙⲓⲧ.