The Manichaeans of Kellis : religion, community, and everyday life
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Chapter 3. Dakhleh's Wealth: The Socioeconomic Context of Ancient Kellis

3.1 Introduction

Kellis thrived. Built on the all-year-round agriculture of the oasis, the economy flourished. Trade routes, protected by the Roman military, facilitated the transportation of wine, cotton, and other commodities to the markets of the Nile valley.[1] Local merchants, craftsmen, and artists profited from this prosperity, and members of the regional administrative elite came to live in Kellis. For this reason, one of the papyrologists of the Dakhleh Oasis Project is said to have called Kellis a retirement village for magistrates. The archaeological finds from this project did not prove him wrong. On the contrary, vivid decorations and extensive architecture have shown that Kellis was more than just a rural backwater on the fringes of the Roman Empire.

This chapter sets out to take three important preliminary steps before we encounter the individual Kellites and their families. First, I will lay out some basic features of socioeconomic life to show that the "ordinary" people in the papyrus letters belonged to a well-to-do section of society in a relatively wealthy part of Roman Egypt (section 3.2). Second, by introducing the archaeology of the Roman period houses, it will be shown that both the archaeological and the papyrological evidence relate to the same people. Section 3.3 will argue that the Manichaean texts and personal letters not only derive from the context of these houses, but actually also belonged to its inhabitants. This means that we can reconstruct their everyday life through their letters, literature, and the archaeological remains of their living space. Third, as the material culture and documents from the excavation in Kellis are prolific in their details, they offer insight into the various religious and cultural repertoires of the village. Section 3.4 will briefly sketch the archaeological and papyrological evidence for the continuation of traditional Egyptian religious practices in the fourth century, the pervasiveness of Classical (Greek and Roman) cultural traditions, and the common use of amulets and horoscopes. The available evidence for Christian institutions and a Christian repertoire in papyrus letters and funerary traditions, moreover, will be introduced with some critical notes where it relates to the history of Manichaean practice in the oasis. The chapters of Part II will build on this contextual analysis, for example in Chapter 4 where the relation between Manichaeans and the Roman administrative and military elite will be discussed, or in Chapter 8 when the existence of Manichaean burials will be examined. Together, therefore, the sections of this chapter provide a necessary sketch of the socioeconomic and religious context of the Manichaeans of Kellis.

3.2. Kellis in the Dakhleh Oasis

The oases in the western desert of Egypt are fertile grounds. Not only did they produce prosperity for the desert's ancient inhabitants, but they also offer many new sources to modern scholarship. These relatively newly found sources have been made accessible by members of the Dakhleh Oasis Project. The initial survey of this project, which took place between 1977 and 1987, identified a minimum of five hundred historical sites and four

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[1] R. S. Bagnall et al., eds., *An Oasis City* (New York: Institute for the Study of the Ancient World, New York University Press, 2015), 149-54 on wine and pages 54-56 on cotton.

hundred prehistoric sites in the oasis.[2] Several excavations commenced after this initial phase, the most important for our purpose being Colin Hope's excavation of Ismant el-Kharab. A final synthesizing publication has yet to appear, but a continuous stream of field reports has presented the main finds.[3] In addition to this excavation, contemporary archaeological work on other sites in the oasis contributes to our knowledge of the social setting of the Kellis letters.

Kellis, the Roman name for the site located 2.5 km from the modern town of Ismant, was a village (*kome*) in the Dakhleh Oasis. Even though it was one of the four large settlements in the oasis, it never reached the size of the city of Mothis (modern Mut el-Kharab, excavated by Colin Hope and Gillian Bowen), Trimithis (Amheida, excavations under the direction of Roger Bagnall), and *Imrt* (Ein Birbiyeh, the site of ancient Mesobe?). Unlike Trimithis, Kellis never achieved the official status of a *polis*, and its population size has been estimated at about 1,000 to 1,500 at a time.[4] Most of the other settlements, which surrounded these larger places, were small agricultural hamlets that depended on them for their facilities.[5] Excavations at Ain el-Gedida, one of these small hamlets, convey a sense of communalism. The interconnected buildings with shared kitchens suggest communal and seasonal occupation, instead of fully developed villages.[6] This network of agricultural

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[2] C. S. Churcher and A. J. Mills, *Reports from the Survey of the Dakhleh Oasis: 1977–1987* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 1999).

[3] C. A. Hope and G. E. Bowen, eds., *Kellis: A Roman Period Village in Egypt's Dakhleh Oasis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Forthcoming). The field reports initially appeared in the Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities (JSSEA) and continued in the Bulletin of the Australian Centre for Egyptology (BACE). All reports are listed in the appendix together with a short indication of the areas discussed. This chapter will refrain from referencing to all the excavation reports, but for all factual descriptions the intellectual ownership lies with the excavator(s). I will only refer to specific publications for detailed interpretations or in cases I assess the material different from Hope and Bowen (Monash University).

[4] C. A. Hope, "The Kellis 1 Cemetery: Roman Period Burial Practices in Dakhleh Oasis," in *Le myrte et la rose. Mélanges offerts à Françoise Dunand par ses élèves, collègues et amis*, ed. G. Tallet and C. Zivie-Coche (Montpellier: CENIM, 2014), 332. Cf. R. S. Bagnall and B. W. Frier, *The Demography of Roman Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 55. Boozer has suggested a population of 25.000 for Trimithis, while Bagnall follows Wagner in suggesting Mothis was a little larger than Trimithis. A. L. Boozer, "Urban Change at Late Roman Trimithis (Dakhleh Oasis, Egypt)," in *Egypt in the First Millennium AD: Perspectives from New Fieldwork*, ed. E. O'Connell (Leuven: Peeters, 2014), 29; R. S. Bagnall, *The Kellis Agricultural Account Book* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 1997), 73.

[5] C. A. Hope, "The Roman-Period Houses of Kellis in Egypt's Dakhleh Oasis," in *Housing and Habitat in the Ancient Mediterranean: Cultural and Environmental Responses*, ed. A. A. Di Castro, C. A. Hope, and B. E. Parr (Leuven: Peeters, 2015), 200. On Mesobe see Bagnall, *KAB*, 74-5. Introductions with a more general overview of the oases have yet to appear. G. Wagner, *Les oasis d'Égypte à l'époque grecque, romaine et byzantine d'après les documents grecs* (Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale du Caire, 1987), was published before the results of the DOP could be included. General introductions by the team of Amheida are R. S. Bagnall, *Eine Wüstenstadt: Leben und Kultur in einer Ägyptischen Oase im 4. Jahrhundert n. Chr.* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2013); Bagnall et al., *An Oasis City*. For a broader audience, see H. Thurston, *Secrets of the Sands. The Revelations of Egypt's Everlasting Oasis* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2003), 233-258 on Kellis, the "desert Pompeii."

[6] Bagnall et al., *An Oasis City*, 166-8 (Aravecchia).

settlements associated with wells, villages, and towns constituted the Dakhleh Oasis (see Figure 1).

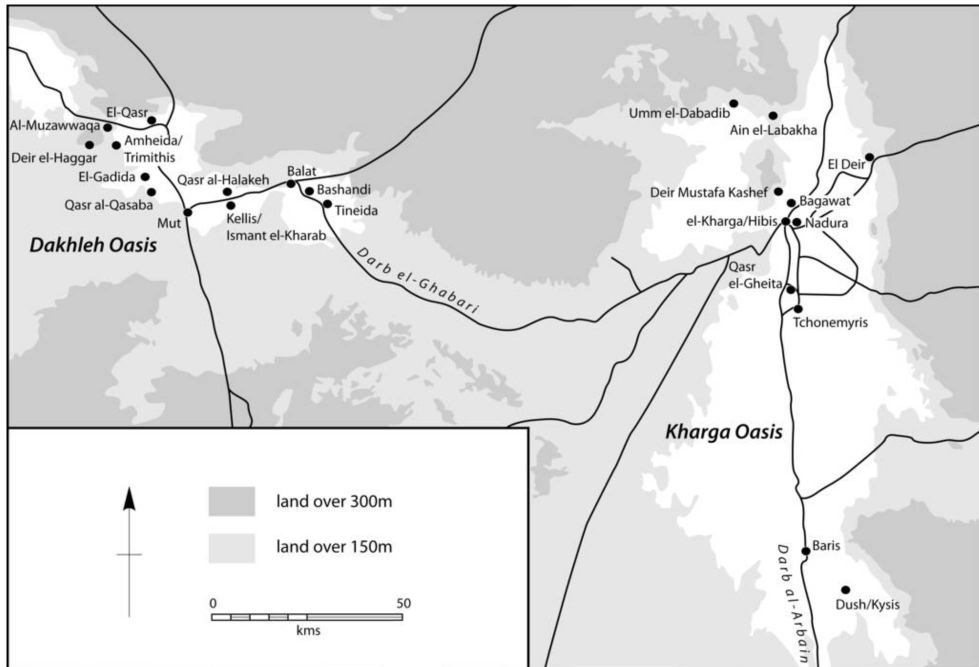

Figure 1: Kellis in the Dakhleh Oasis, drawn by M. Mathews, published by A. L. Boozer (Courtesy of the Amheida Project).

In Roman times, the Dakhleh Oasis and its neighbor, the Kharga Oasis, were designated together as the Great Oasis and were known separately as the outer and the inner oasis.[7] They belonged to a series of oases located in five geographical depressions carved into the Libyan Desert plateau. The Great Oasis was connected to the Farafra Oasis, the Bahariya Oasis (together called the "Small Oasis"), and the Siwa Oasis. Following desert routes, one could travel from Dakhleh all the way north to Siwa and the Fayyum. A more direct route to the Nile valley from Kellis via Kharga, about 365 km at best via the ancient roads, would have taken the villagers about three days, depending on the mode of transportation.[8] The 190 km distance between Dakhleh's and Kharga's main towns places them closer to each other than to the Nile valley. Such distances were regularly traversed by the residents of Roman Kellis, who traveled extensively (see Figure 2). The impact of geographical location on the

[7] Division by Olympiadorus of Thebes, corresponding to the current names "Dakhleh" and "Kharga" Oasis. Wagner, *Les oasis d'Égypte*, 131.

[8] Bagnall et al., *An Oasis City*, 29 (Bagnall). Some of the problems and restrictions experienced during traveling are summarized by C. Adams, "'There and Back Again': Getting around in Roman Egypt," in *Travel and Geography in Roman Egypt*, ed. C. Adams and R. Laurence (London: Routledge, 2001), 154-56. Strabo, on the other hand, suggested the journey from Abydos to the oases took seven days. Wagner, *Les oasis d'Égypte*, 143.

social and economic lives of Kellites is visible in the papyri; traveling must have characterized many of their days.[9]

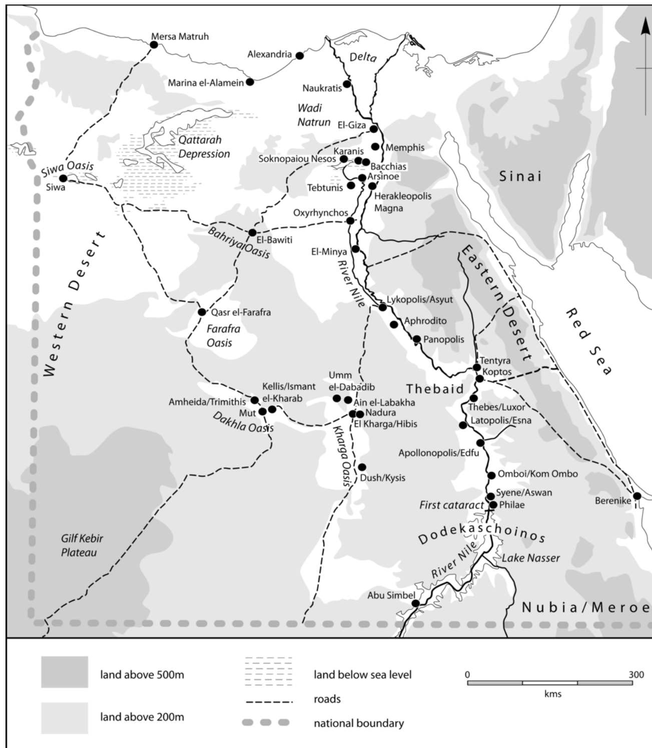

Figure 2: Dakhleh Oasis in Egypt, drawn by M. Mathews, published by A. L. Boozer (Courtesy of the Amheida Project).

Most of the villages and towns in the Dakhleh Oasis show flourishing activity and an expanding population during the Roman period, with a sudden decline and abandonment in the late fourth century, albeit some exceptions were inhabited for a longer time.[10] As a result, material from the Roman period is abundant. The last decades of the fourth century show architectural modifications, followed by the gradual decline and abandonment of entire villages. Kellis, following this pattern, was inhabited from the late Ptolemaic period onward

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[9] On traveling and rest places see also R.B. Jackson, *At Empire's Edge. Exploring Rome's Egyptian Frontier* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 198-200. The indication of a journey of four days and four nights between Khargah and Dakhleh in M.Chrest. 78 (late fourth century) must have been an exaggeration. Wagner, *Les oasis d'Égypte*, 144.

[10] Exceptional is Al-Qasr, which was inhabited continuously from the third century until the present; Deir Abu Matta with occupation into the seventh century; and Mut el-Kharab, which was occupied from the Old Kingdom until the Islamic period and today. Bagnall et al., *An Oasis City*, 173 (Bagnall). On Mut, see C. A. Hope, "The Excavations at Ismant el-Kharab and Mut El-Kharab in 2001," *Bulletin of the Australian Centre for Egyptology* 12 (2001): 47.

and was abandoned in the last decade of the fourth century. The last dated document is a Greek horoscope from the year 392 CE. Soon after this date, wind and sand roamed freely.[11]

Why the site was abandoned at the end of the fourth century is unknown. A number of suggestions have been made to explain the sudden decline, but none of them has reached general acceptance. It could have been related to environmental changes. The current climate is extremely arid. Annual rainfall is about 0.7 mm, with temperatures ranging from 21.5℃ on an average January day to 39℃ in July.[12] This climate, probably not any cooler in antiquity, made agriculture difficult. It was only with the introduction of the waterwheel (*saqiya*) during the early Roman period that agriculture advanced.[13] While this technology may have contributed to the abundant wealth of the oasis, the increasing demand on the agricultural land also led to soil depletion.[14] Another environmental factor to take into account is the wind, which was continuously shifting large amounts of sand and thereby creating moving sand dunes that could end up covering fertile lands. Architectural finds all over the oasis attest to the challenge this posed to the inhabitants: wells had to be deepened and reactivated artificially, channels dug, thresholds raised, and additional windscreens built.[15] The fourth-century residents of the oasis may have fallen prey to the upcoming wind and sand, which in a couple of years destroyed their ways of living.

Apart from environmental reasons, increasing insecurity on the roads to the Nile valley has been suggested as contributing to the declining population and abandonment of Kellis. One passage in the work of sixth-century author John Moschus tells about tribesmen

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[11] C.A. Hope (with an Appendix by G. E. Bowen), "Excavations in the Settlement of Ismant el-Kharab in 1995-1999," in *Dakhleh Oasis Project: Preliminary Reports on the 1994-1995 to 1998-1999 Field Seasons*, ed. C. A. Hope and G. E. Bowen (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2002), 205-206; G. E. Bowen, "The Spread of Christianity in Egypt: Archaeological Evidence from Dakhleh and Kharga Oases," in *Egyptian Culture and Society: Studies in Honour of Naguib Kanawati*, ed. A. Woods, A. McFarlane, and S. Binder (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2010), 19. The last dated document derived from D/8 and its dating is discussed in K. A. Worp and T. de Jong, "More Greek Horoscopes from Kellis (Dakhleh Oasis)," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 137 (2001): 206. On the date of the occupation of Kellis, see C. A. Hope, "Observations on the Dating of the Occupation at Ismant el-Kharab," in *Oasis Papers 1*, ed. C. A. Marlow and A. J. Mills (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2001), 43 - 59. This date is confirmed by numismatic evidence and the pottery assemblages; only three Roman coins from the period between 388-394 CE have been found (of the *salvs reipvblicae-* type) and there is no ceramic material indicative of the fifth century.

[12] A. J. Mills, "Research in the Dakhleh Oasis," in *Origin and Early Development of Food-Producing Cultures in North-Eastern Africa*, ed. L. Krzyzaniek and M. Kobusiewicz (Poznań: Polish Academy of Sciences, Poznań Branch: Poznań Archaeological Museum, 1984), 205-10.

[13] The dating of the introduction of the water-wheel is matter of discussion, an earlier date in the Ptolemaic period cannot be excluded.

[14] J. E. Knudstad and R. A. Frey, "Kellis: The Architectural Survey of the Romano-Byzantine Town at Ismant el-Kharab," in *Reports from the Survey of the Dakhleh Oasis 1977–198*, ed. C. S. Churcher and A. J. Mills (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 1999), 213. Colin Hope (Personal communication May 2016) reminded me, however, of the lack of strong indications of salt in the bodies from the cemeteries. If climate change indeed caused the saltification of the soil, one would expect to see traces in bioarchaeological materials.

[15] Wells and channels reactivated: Bagnall et al., *An Oasis City*, 17-18 (Davoli). Windscreen and raised threshold of House 3: C. A. Hope, O. E. Kaper, and G. E. Bowen, "Excavations at Ismant el-Kharab – 1992," *Bulletin of the Australian Centre for Egyptology* 3 (1992): 41.

ransoming elderly monks in the Kharga Oasis.[16] How this story relates to the visible presence of Roman military fortifications along those very roads is not clear, but the oases were conceived of as dangerous border zones. Was this more than a literary stereotype? Could it be that even the Roman army was unable to continue guaranteeing the safety of travelers on the roads from the oasis to the valley?[17]

Safety on the roads and the exceptional environmental conditions lay behind Dakhleh's wealth. The subterranean reservoirs of water in the oasis facilitated agriculture all year long. Water could reach the surface through natural fissures or artificial wells.[18] These wells have been a source of wealth for the entire oasis, to the extent that Trimithis's ostraka mention more than forty wells, ownership of which could be shared collectively or in individual shares.[19] The geographical distance to the Nile valley and the need for fertile areas and water wells has shaped the economy and commerce in the oases. While the advantage of the fertile Nile was absent, the groundwater allowed for multiple harvests a year, which could give a farmer a slight advantage over his competitors in the Nile valley. The cost of transportation, however, was high, and among the Kellis documents are numerous receipts for freight costs, either by camel or by donkey.[20] Many insights into the agricultural nature of the village economy derive from the so-called Kellis Agricultural Account Book (KAB), which contained the records of all income and expenditures of a section of a large estate.[21]

Based on these agricultural records, Roger Bagnall has identified the two main strategies behind the flourishing economy. First, many crops were grown for local consumption and second, value crops like olive oil, cotton, dates, figs, and jujubes were exported to the Nile valley to create a surplus.[22] The introduction of the camel was pivotal in this regard, because it could cross the desert without frequent access to food or water and

[16] Cited in Wagner, *Les oasis d'Égypte*, 384.

[17] Bagnall et al., *An Oasis City*, 172-3 (Bagnall). P.Kell.Copt. 127 refers to an attack on the road and expresses fear for the military (?) commander.

[18] Jackson, *At Empire's Edge*, 159.

[19] R. S. Bagnall and G. Ruffini, *Ostraka from Trimithis Volume 1: Texts from the 2004-2007 Seasons* (New York: Institute for the Study of the Ancient World and New York University Press, 2012), 31-39.

[20] Among the category of small hamlets or settlements the Kellis documents mention Thio (P.Kell. Gr. 45), Pmoun Tametra (P.Kell.Gr. 41), Pmoun Imouthou (twenty-one instances in the Kellis Agricultural Account book, KAB), Pmoun Tkele (KAB 1408) and many others. These toponyms starting with Pmoun ('the well') probably designated wells with small settlements. Examples include P.Kell.Gr. 51 and 52 and O.Kell. 80, 81, 102, 103. On wells see R. S. Bagnall and G. Ruffini, *Amheida I. Ostraka from Trimithis, Volume 1* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 31-37.

[21] On the large estates and the relation between city and village see Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 315-16. The estate behind the KAB was led by representatives of Faustianus son of Aquila, who might have been related to the former magistrate of Mothis and *defensor civitatis* of the Mothite nome (mentioned in P.Kell.Gr. 21, 321 CE). Bagnall, however, calls the identification of this magistrate with the landlord 'most unlikely' and suggests he was the (grand)father of the landlord, who presumably lived in Hibis (KAB 1146). Bagnall, *KAB*, 70.

[22] Bagnall et al., *An Oasis City*, 149-52 (Bagnall).

could carry up to six *artabas* across a longer distance.[23] In this way, the potential number of customers increased and a vibrant transportation sector came into being. The wealth resulting from these developments was depicted in relief scenes and paintings in tombs from the Nile valley (but also at el-Muzawwaqa in the oasis). They feature the agricultural wealth of the oasis and depict wine, fruits, baskets, and other agricultural products. The rapid expansion of the oasis in the first century CE built on new agricultural technologies like pigeon lofts and aqueducts, which attracted migrant farmers to the oasis.[24]

Cotton was one of the value crops grown in the oasis. Even though it plays a minor role in the KAB, where it is recorded in small quantities only, the ostraka from Kellis, Trimithis, and Dush attest to the commonality of cotton production.[25] Since cotton is a summer crop, it was not produced in the fertile regions of the Nile valley, which would have been flooded during this period. All papyrological evidence for cotton production therefore points to western oases, where it could be grown on the land that produced other crops in winter.[26] This two-season advantage worked for millet as well, which was found in large quantities in Kellis and was presumably used as animal food.[27] Apart from cotton and millet, olive oil and wine contributed to the wealth of the oases.[28] The transportation of these commodities to the Nile valley and the local production of textiles from cotton and wool presented two flourishing economic sectors that many inhabitants of Kellis participated in. Building on this layer of agricultural wealth, additional light industry such as metalworking

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[23] An example of a caravan of about seventy-five camels traveling between Oxyrhynchos and the oasis is discussed in C. Adams, *Land Transport in Roman Egypt: A Study of Economics and Administration in a Roman Province* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 235.

[24] Mills, "Research in the Dakhleh Oasis," 208-9. A pigeon loft has been found at Kellis (B/2/2, in the same area as the Roman Villa), which contained several thousand kilogram shreds of pigeon pots. These nesting pots were used to keep pigeons, necessary for providing fertilizers for the land and as addition to the oasis diet. Bagnall et al., *An Oasis City*, 31 (Bagnall).

[25] For example, from Kellis: O.Kell. 68 and 69, Trimithis: O.Trim.I. 38 and 44, Dush: O.Douch. 1.51, 4.381, 5.537, 5.634. For cotton production see R. S. Bagnall, "SB 6.9025, Cotton, and the Economy of the Small Oasis," *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 45 (2008): 21-30. Cotton has been identified by infrared light, see C. E. Coombs, A. L. Woodhead, and J. S. Church, "Report on the Characterization of Three Fabric Samples from Ismant el-Kharab," in *Dakhleh Oasis Project: Preliminary Reports on the 1994–1995 to 1998–1999 Field Seasons*, ed. C. A. Hope and G. E. Bowen (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2002), 115-19. Moreover, it has been found at the site as cotton bolls and seeds, see U. Thanheiser (with contributions by J. Walter and C. A. Hope), "Roman Agriculture and Gardening in Egypt as Seen from Kellis," in *Dakhleh Oasis Project: Preliminary Reports on the 1994–1995 to 1998–1999 Field Seasons*, ed. C. A. Hope and G. E. Bowen (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2002), 299–310. It is also listed in the KAB, 547, 556,558-59, 720 and 1484 and mentioned in ostraka from area C. G. E. Bowen, "Texts and Textiles: A Study of the Textile Industry at Ancient Kellis," *Artefact* 24 (2002): 18-28.

[26] Bagnall et al., *An Oasis City*, 154-6 (Bagnall).

[27] Bagnall et al., *An Oasis City*, 155 (Bagnall).

[28] Bagnall, *KAB*, 45, 56. cf. Wagner, *Les oasis d'Égypte*, 116 and 299-300. The location of the agricultural fields is not precisely known, but modern agriculture takes place on the west-southwest side of the village. Most of the wells and irrigation channels are probably recent and do not date back to antiquity. Knudstad and Frey, "Kellis: The Architectural Survey," 189.

and carpentry offered other opportunities for non-agricultural workers, craftsmen and women, traders and artisans.[29]

With these introductory sketches of the oasis setting, we can now turn to the archaeological evidence of social and economic life in the village of Kellis. The excavation of Ismant el-Kharab was divided into four areas for archaeological reasons (see Figure 3). Area A included a number of Roman houses, in which the Manichaean documents were found, as well as the East Churches and a bath house. Area B, just north of these houses, contained several large structures, with a large number of connected rooms without easily recognizable functions. Within one of these structures stood a large colonnaded hall, a *columbarium* (or dovecote), and a Roman villa with painted decorations. Area C, on the most eastern side of the excavation, comprised a number of residential units combined with light industrial activities. Area D, on the west side, consisted of the Main Temple of Tutu with several shrines, the West Temple, the West Church, the West Tombs, and a few other structures. Just north of Area D and on the western side of Area B, an interconnected series of tombs was located (the North Tombs). On the southern side, a series of tombs was found on the alluvial terrace (the South Tombs). Further north of the excavated areas, two large cemeteries were unearthed, divided by a wadi, labeled Kellis 1 and 2 or the East and West Cemeteries (see section 3.4.5).[30]

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[29] In area C, a pottery workshop (C/2/4) was located, with large stage bins, kilns, and unfired ceramics in the immediate surroundings. C. A. Hope (with an appendix by G. E. Bowen), "Excavations in the Settlement of Ismant el-Kharab in 1995-1999," in *Dakhleh Oasis Project: Preliminary Reports on the 1994-1995 to 1998-1999 Field Seasons*, ed. C. A. Hope and G. E. Bowen (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2002), 176. Several of the other units showed evidence for light-industrial activities, like the blacksmith at C/2/7, where layers with iron slag were found on the surface. The remains of glass-slag suggest the presence of glass industry in this section of the city. C. A. Hope, "The Excavation at Ismant el-Kharab in 1998/9: A Brief Report," *Bulletin of the Australian Centre for Egyptology* 10 (1999): 65.

[30] Low quality images of the site and excavation have been published online at http://artsonline.monash.edu.au/ancient-kellis/gallery/ and have been displayed at temporary exhibitions, published in O. E. Kaper and C. van Zoest, *Treasures of the Dakhleh Oasis: An Exhibition on the Occasion of the Fifth International Conference of the Dakhleh Oasis Project* (Cairo: The Netherlands-Flemish Institute in Cairo, 2006); C. A. Hope, *From the Sands of the Sahara: Ancient Kellis and Its Texts* (Clayton, VIC.: Monash University, 1998).

Figure 3: Map of the excavation of Kellis. Derived from Dakhleh Oasis Project 2006–2007 Season Final Report SCA. Courtesy of the Dakhleh Oasis Project (Colin Hope).

The following sections will discuss, in succession, the various residential areas; the Roman period temple and the available evidence for the cult of traditional Egyptian deities; and the fourth-century churches with the documentary indicators of emerging Christianity. Some of the administrative and military features of the oasis society will return in Chapter 4, when we zoom in on the papyrological finds.

3.3 Roman Period Housing

The excavations of the Roman houses in Area A commenced in the 1986 field season and continued until the early 1990s. During the 1991 season, large numbers of inscribed materials were unearthed in Houses 1–3. Among these materials were Manichaean liturgical documents, including wooden tablets with psalms, prayers, and fragments of Mani's canonical *Epistles* on papyrus. These Manichaean documents were found together with personal letters and business accounts of the houses' inhabitants. Upon abandoning the buildings, the owners of these papyri left enormous amounts of papyrus behind. The combination of papyri, and the architecture and archaeology of these houses provides the first context for the lives of Manichaeans in Kellis.

3.3.1 Houses 1–3 and the North Building

The central part of the village was constituted by a residential area, of which one square section was excavated. This structure on the north side of the residential area contained Houses 1–3 and the North Building. Streets on the south and north gave access to these mud-brick buildings (see Figure 4 for a plan of the houses). Occupation was mainly restricted to the fourth century, since all documents derived from the decades between 299 and 389 CE. Coins and ceramics confirm domestic activity during the same period.[31] After this date, the inhabitants of Houses 1–3 seem to have abandoned their houses, as did their neighbors. Consequently, the buildings were only occupied for a few generations.[32]

Figure 4: Plan of Houses 1–3 and the North Building (Area A). Courtesy of the Dakhleh Oasis Project (Colin Hope). Derived from the DOP website: http://artsonline.monash.edu.au/ancient-kellis/houses-1-2-and-3/ last updated 7 May 2013.

House 3 was the largest of the four mud brick buildings within the structure. It had ten main rooms, which could be accessed through the entrance system (room 1A and

[31] C. A. Hope, "The Archaeological Context," in *Coptic Documentary Texts from Kellis. Volume 1*, ed. I. Gardner, A. Alcock, and W. P. Funk (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 1999), 110-11 with the numismatic evidence analyzed by Gillian Bowen.

[32] Hope, "The Roman-Period Houses," 215.

corridor 1B).[33] A minor indication of the environmental challenges faced by the inhabitants is the semicircular wall in front of the entrance, which protected the house against the accumulation of sand. The courtyard at the north of the corridor contained animal mangers as well as facilities for cooking and storage. Most of the rooms were arranged around the central court (room 6, probably with a flat roof) from which most of the inscribed material derived. Rooms 2–5 and 8–10 were all barrel vaulted and light entered only through the staircase (room 7) into the central court and through the windows in the north walls of rooms 2 and 3. With the internal doors closed, the house must have been a rather dark place. All of the rooms were furnished with wooden doors, of which only the bolts and sockets remain. Most of the portable wood was taken out of the house during its abandonment.[34] Only some of the palm-rib shelves in the central court (room 6) were found buried under the sand. These shelves and open niches must have been used for storage purposes. The white-plastered area surrounding these cupboards may have facilitated some extra visibility in the gloom of oil lamps.[35] Other walls were simply mud plastered without decoration and were preserved at the highest point (House 1, room 5), up to 3.13 m. Room 7 provided access to the roof, which, based on the collected pottery of the roof collapse deposits, offered storage space for domestic utensils.

The house next door, House 2, consisted of nine rooms in an L shape interlocking with House 1 and a large courtyard, which could only be accessed from the street. One room (9) was added against the south wall and served as a kitchen. The entrance (via rooms 5 and 6) leads to two central rooms (rooms 3 and 2) that could be closed off with wooden doors. This spatial configuration suggests the organic development and inbuilding between the houses, without preconceived or externally controlled planning.[36] Through the central rooms, one could roam into three rectangular rooms, all with barrel-vaulted roofs and decorated with niches and palm-rib shelves defined by white-plastered sections (Figure 5). Through the corridor (7) one could access the stairs and the upper roof, as well as a narrow cupboard under the stairs. The circulation of light and air was facilitated by openings above the doors of some of the rooms. Daylight, however, must have been minimal, because most openings to the outside had to be covered against the sand.[37] As in House 3, the central rooms were flat-roofed, presumably supported by wooden beams. These roofs would have

[33] For all descriptions in these paragraphs see Hope, "The Archaeological Context," 100. More recently, Hope, "The Roman-Period Houses," 199-229.

[34] A picture of a wooden key is included in C. A. Hope, "Dakhleh Oasis Project: Report on the 1987 Excavations at Ismant El-Gharab," *Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities* 16 (1986): plate IV, d.

[35] Suggestion in G. E. Bowen, "The Environment Within: The Archaeological Context of the Texts from House 3 at Kellis in Egypt's Dakhleh Oasis," in *Housing and Habitat in the Ancient Mediterranean: Cultural and Environmental Responses*, ed. A. A. Di Castro, C. A. Hope, and B. E. Parr (Leuven: Peeters, 2015), 232.

[36] On the organic nature of the inbuilding, see A. L. Boozer, "Towards an Archaeology of Household Relationships in Roman Egypt," in *Mediterranean Families in Antiquity: Households, Extended Families, and Domestic Space*, ed. S.R. Huebner and G. Nathan (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), 197 and 199. But note that the specific details of her account of the architecture are not entirely correct.

[37] Hope, "The Roman-Period Houses," 219 refers to other sites with similar systems.

been covered with several storage vessels. House 1 comprised eleven rooms, divided into two blocks. The first block of rooms (1–6) contained a kitchen with a brick oven and storage bin (1). Despite this kitchen, the main living room (4) contained traces of a circular hearth in front of room 5. Two cooking areas could suggest that multiple families may have lived here. Most of the rooms were reached through the entrance room (9) and corridor (8), which also connected them to the second block of rooms (7–11) and the courtyard. The courtyard contained storage facilities and animal mangers. These could be closed off from the house with a wooden door in the corridor, just after the entrance to the dining area (room 7). The modifications to the two mangers suggest that initially sheep or goats were kept there, but eventually larger animals, such as donkeys, used the mangers.[38] Noteworthy in this section of the house is the large horseshoe-shaped structure with raised platform in the dining area. This *stibadium* was used for formal dining in the Roman world.[39] Just like in the other houses, most rooms were barrel-vaulted and dark, with the exception of this section of the dining area and courtyard, which was only partly covered.

Figure 5: One of the mud-brick structures at Kellis showing the plastered niches. 2006 NYU Excavations at Amheida (used with permission). AWIB-ISAW: Kellis (VIII).

[38] Hope, "The Roman-Period Houses," 218.

[39] Hope, "The Roman-Period Houses," 217.

The North Building, located to the north of these three houses, comprised a large open court (3) with two rooms on each side. Room 4 contained an oven and may thus have had a domestic function. Other rooms contained niches, as found in the other houses. Exceptional are the traces of painted decoration in rooms 1 and 2, which are not otherwise attested in these houses.[40] Rooms 1 and 2 contained a recognizable rubbish dump with fragments of papyri, some of which ended up in the floor deposits of the other houses.[41]

Floor deposits were found underneath the layers of sand and the roof collapse in all these houses. In room 6 of House 3, these included small wooden objects, ceramics, textiles, glass, some coins, and evidence of tailoring.[42] More outstanding finds included jewelry, fine worked glass, and an intaglio ring with the motif of a centaur grappling with a stag.[43] While most valuable items seem to have been taken out of the house during the process of abandonment, the ring remained. Was it lost when the last generation of occupants left the house? Whatever happened exactly, its presence indicates a certain level of wealth, and the centaur motif suggests at least some openness to Classical or Roman culture. This confirms the general impression of the village as a place for well-to-do families and individuals.

The most staggering find, however, was the large amount of inscribed materials. Among the debris in the North Building, for example, were the fragmentary remains of a codex with a text based on the *Acts of John* and a Manichaean psalm (P.Kell.Gr. 97). Further fragments from this codex were found in Houses 1 and 3, indicating postdisposition processes such as nesting rats, wind, and human intervention. Even though most inscribed objects were found in the early 1990s, so far not all of them have been published. Appendix 2 lists all of the published documents (with some exceptions) and can be used for preliminary statistical analysis. The visual representation of the most common find locations shows the prominence of Houses 1–3 and the North Building in comparison to House 4 and the Temple area (Figure 6). This provisional impression is far from complete, as the Greek ostraka have been excluded. Tables 2 and 3 supplement this reconstruction by providing a rough overview of the type and number of documents found in two specific fourth-century houses.

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[40] Hope, "The Archaeological Context," 100. However, Kellis House 2 had walls covered in grey mud plaster, while the vault roofs had a red colored plaster, over which were painted grey bands along the junction between the vaults and the walls. C. A. Hope, "Three Seasons of Excavation at Ismant el-Kharab in Dakhleh Oasis, Egypt," *Mediterranean Archeology* 1 (1988): 169.

[41] See the discussion in C. A. Hope, "The Archaeological Context of the Discovery of Leaves from a Manichaean Codex," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 117 (1997): 156-61.

[42] Hope, "The Archaeological Context," 103.

[43] C. A. Hope, "The 1991 Excavations at Ismant el-Kharab in the Dakhleh Oasis," *Bulletin of the Australian Centre for Egyptology* 2 (1991): 42.

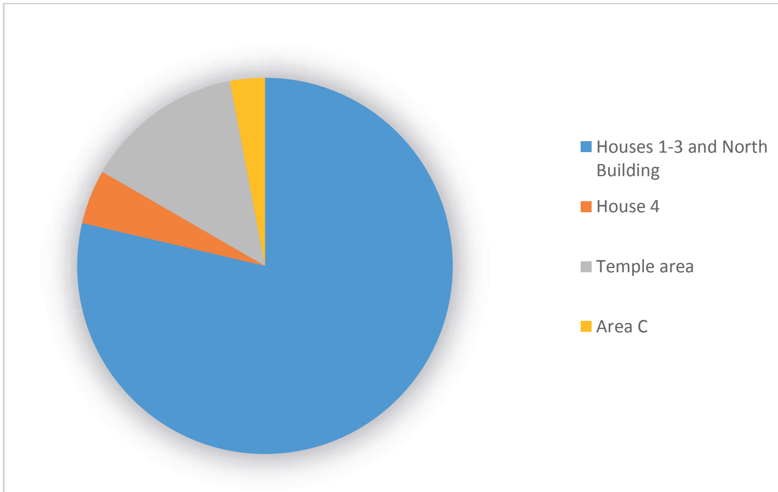

Figure 6: Greek and Coptic documents sorted by the most common find locations.

House 3 (Area A)
166 letters and administrative documents;
9 texts containing (parts of) Manichaean Psalms;
3 texts with biblical content;
9 documents with amulets, spells, or astrological content;
8 documents with Manichaean content and/or Syriac writing;
4 documents unknown/other.

Table 2: Types of documents found in House 3.

House D/8 (Temple Area)
13 letters and administrative documents;
1 document with biblical content;
6 documents with amulets, spells, or astrological content;
1 document with Manichaean content.

b

Table 3: Types of documents found in House D/8.

These brief overviews highlight the large number of documents found at House 3, many of which contained Manichaean content.[44] The other fourth-century houses preserved noticeably less Manichaean material. House 1 contained only one fragment from a codex with Manichaean psalms, which presumably derived from the dump in the North Building. This pattern is easy to explain, as there were strong connections with the neighbors in House 3, which are also attested in the papyri. House 2 and House 4 each contained one Manichaean document. In room 5 of House 2, a text with Manichaean cosmological discourse (P.Kell.Copt. 8) was found. Some of the inhabitants, therefore, must have belonged to the same social circle of Manichaeans.[45] The letters from House 4, on the other hand, show no prosopographical connections to the families of Houses 2 and 3. On the contrary, the language variation of the House 4 letters and their somewhat different Christian vocabulary seem to suggest that they belonged to an entirely different group of people (see the discussion on dialects and Christian vocabulary in Chapter 5). Despite these differences, room 1b revealed a wooden tablet with Manichaean psalms, not unlike the psalms from House 3 (T.Kell.Copt. 7). How this psalm ended up so far from the other Manichaean psalms is not easy to reconstruct. If it belonged to the occupants of the house, as proposed by the editors of the material, it would indicate a more widespread appeal of Manichaean texts.

Where did these documents come from? Who would have used the texts and why are they left among the domestic debris after the abandonment of the houses? Can we safely identify the inhabitants of the houses as the users of the Manichaean texts? At least one scholar has suggested that the large amount of papyri found in House 3 indicates that the rooms were used as rubbish dumps for the city's garbage.[46] She is hardly the only one wondering how to relate the prolific textual finds to the modest architecture of the find location. Editors of both the Greek and the Coptic documents have speculated about the house as a "storage place" during the last phase of the village's occupational history.[47] Against these cautious remarks, I will present three reasons to think that the documents and houses belong together. First, following the excavators of the village, I think that the way these papyri were stored reveals their importance to the inhabitants. Second, the clustering of the letters of one author most probably indicates that the archives were kept together. Third, the minor archaeological finds show a correlation between the content of the documents and the everyday activities in these houses. Together, this suggests that the authors and their families kept the letters on the roofs of their own houses.[48]

To start with the find location, Gillian Bowen has pointed out that many of the

[44] Psalm fragments have been found in rooms 4, 6, 7, 8, 9; the daily prayers in the backyard; a hymn of praise in room 9; fragments of Mani's *Epistles* were dispersed over House 3 but mainly from room 3 and 6; a devotional or theological text in room 11a.

[45] Strong prosopographical connections are found in P.Kell.Copt. 12 from House 2, with references to Kyria and Pshemnoute.

[46] L. Nevett, "Family and the Household, Ancient History and Archeology: A Case Study from Roman Egypt," in *A Companion to Families in the Greek and Roman Worlds*, ed. B. Rawson (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 22-23.

[47] K. A. Worp, ed. *Greek Papyri from Kellis I* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 1995), 52. Gardner, *KLT1*, ix.

[48] Many of these points have been observed in Bowen, "The Environment Within," 231-41.

documents in House 3 have been found in the immediate context of ceramic shards. While some of the documents from the North Building may have been thrown away and reused as filling in the construction of animal mangers next door (i.e., the text based on the *Acts of John*),[49] the majority of the Greek and Coptic documents have been found in close association with other textual fragments and next to the remains of large ceramic jars in the debris of the roof collapse (in particular in House 3, rooms 8, 9, and 10). The best explanation is, therefore, that papyrus archives were kept in jars and stored on the roof. With the abandonment of the house, the collection of jars on the roof was forgotten and subsequently tumbled down with the collapse of the roof. Environmental factors, such as the wind or nesting rats, led to a wider distribution of the fragments over the various rooms in the house(s).

Following this observation is the fact that we can show how letters of a particular author or his family were kept together (see Appendix 2). Petros's letters, for example, were stored together. Several letters from Pamour's family were, likewise, kept in a single jar. Some of Orion's letters were kept together in one room (or presumably on its roof), while an adjacent room contained one other fragment of his letters. Most of the letters associated with Makarios derived from a single find location in House 3, with an exception found in room 3 instead of room 6, presumably because of postdisposition processes such as nesting rats and whirling winds.[50] Initially, however, these letters were kept together and not gradually disposed of during a longer period.

Eventually, the letters were left on the roof, or taken from the dumped material in the North Building and reused to raise the floor levels of House 1 (as happened with the text based on the *Acts of John*).[51] By that time, the value of the text was probably long forgotten. This is imaginable in the case of the grandmother's correspondence, which was kept on the roof, but it is more difficult to grasp in the case of the deposition of liturgical documents or sacred scriptures. Comparative practices from Oxyrhynchus, however, show that ancient individuals and communities had less scruples about discarding biblical manuscripts than we would sometimes expect.[52]

A final argument for the close relation between the physical find location and the content of the letters is found in the minor archaeological finds. We do not only encounter individual villagers in their papyrus correspondences, but we can trace their lives in the material culture of their houses. Two examples may illustrate how these rich sources overlap and offer additional information on the lives of the inhabitants: the carpenters of House 2 and the textile production in Houses 1–3.

House 2 comprised a number of wooden codices, one containing the text of the orations of Isocrates and the other an account book of a large local estate. These codices were produced locally, maybe even in this very house, as several archaeological finds point to

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[49] Hope, "The Archaeological Context of the Discovery of Leaves from a Manichaean Codex," 160-1.

[50] Hope, "The Archaeological Context," 108 and table 4 on page 20.

[51] Hope, "The Archaeological Context of the Discovery of Leaves from a Manichaean Codex," 160-1.

[52] A. Luijendijk, "Sacred Scriptures as Trash: Biblical Papyri from Oxyrhynchus," *Vigiliae Christianae* 64, no. 3 (2010): 217 rebrands her discipline as "garbology" and asks "who discarded them [MB: biblical manuscripts], and why? And what does this imply for the attitude of Christians towards their scriptures?"

carpentry. Pieces of acacia wood, at various stages of its production, were found in nearby rooms. Carpenter's tools were found in a small box, together with wooden spindle whorls, a ceramic lamp, two fragments of inscribed wooden boards, and more fragments of worked acacia. The wooden codices with the account book and the Isocrates text were made from the same type of acacia wood.[53] Apart from wooden codices and woodworking tools, there is also papyrological evidence for carpenters in House 2. In documents from the 330s–350s CE, a carpenter named Gena acts as agent for Pausanias, a former magistrate of the capital of the oasis at Mothis (P.Kell.Gr. 4–7). A second group of documents belonged to the family of the carpenter Tithoes (P.Kell.Gr. 8–12 and P.Kell.Copt. 12) and dated from the second half of the fourth century. Finally, there is the request for a "well-proportioned and nicely executed ten-page notebook" in a letter from House 3.[54] It is not impossible that this request was aimed at one of the carpenters next door. As many Manichaean documents were written on wood, their connections to the neighbors must have been excellent, even though we have to admit that we cannot directly connect the carpentry tools of wooden codices to one of the carpenters known by name.

Carpentry is not the only occupation attested in both the papyri and minor archaeological finds from these houses. Material evidence for weaving is also abundant. Fragments of textile were found in almost every room and textile production is also attested in the papyrological sources, in architectural features, and in archaeological objects. Weaving was without question part and parcel of the lives of Kellites, for some as a domestic activity but for many also as a source of income. A wooden comb was found in front of the entrance of House 2, as were loom weights and cotton fibers.[55] Several holes in the walls of Houses 1–3 have been identified as gaps for warping frames, and the remains of wooden wall fittings at the door of room 4 in House 1 may have served a similar purpose.[56] Some of the inhabitants of these houses were clearly involved in weaving; others were even professionally involved in the textile industry of the oasis.

Papyrological evidence referring to the weaving process has been attested in abundance. One of the letters, for example, refers to a *sticharion* (a shirt or a tunic) and a *kolobion* (sleeveless tunic), as the author orders "tailor it for a cowl. Provide warp for it" and

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[53] For the entire paragraph see the notes of Colin Hope in Bagnall, *KAB*, 9; J. Whitehorne, "The Kellis Writing Tablets: Their Manufacture and Use," in *Archaeological Research in Roman Egypt: The Proceedings of the Seventeenth Classical Colloquium of the Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities, British Museum, Held on 1-4 December 1993*, ed. D. M. Bailey (Ann Arbor: Journal of Roman archaeology, 1996), 240-45.

[54] Πινακίδιον εὔμετρον καὶ ἀστῖον δέκα πτυχῶν πέμψον … P.Kell.Gr. 67.17-19.

[55] More large loom weights were found in Area C, indicating that weaving was also an important feature of the activities in this region (structure C/2/1). K. Hickson, "Excavations in Area C at Ismant el-Kharab in 1996-1997," in *Dakhleh Oasis Project: Preliminary Reports on the 1994-1995 to 1998-1999 Field Seasons*, ed. C. A. Hope and G. E. Bowen (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2002), 165.

[56] Bowen, "Texts and Textiles: A Study of the Textile Industry at Ancient Kellis." 18-28. This publication on the textile industry in Kellis is also available online http://artsonline.monash.edu.au/ancient-cultures/texts-and-textiles-a-study-of-the-textile-industry-at-ancient-kellis/ (accessed April 2016); Hope, "Three Seasons of Excavation," 168. I will follow Bowen's use of "textile industry" to designate large scale production or manufacturing of textiles for commercial purposes, even though this was primarily a domestic enterprise which shows little resembles with modern "industries."

"take it and see whether it is possible to dye it."[57] Textiles and the production of garments seem to be central issues in the correspondence of these households. One of the business accounts, found in House 3, refers to garment manufacture and reveals that the author hired two female weavers (Heni and Kame, P.Kell.Copt. 44.5–6). Another letter indicates that female slaves worked as weavers (P.Kell.Gr. 19a.8–11).[58] Presumably this letter reflects more than simply the domestic economy of a household. Professional weaving and textile industry is attested in the KAB, which refers to a weaving workshop (KAB 1266). One of the children of House 2 was sent to a monastery to learn the "linen weaving trade" as a profession (P.Kell.Gr. 12.21). Linen weaving and textile trade belonged to the professional and domestic world of Kellites.[59]

The combination of archaeological finds in the houses with the papyrological information about carpentry and weaving connects the content of the letters with the find location. Archaeology and papyrology, in this case, provide two windows into the daily lives of the inhabitants of these houses.

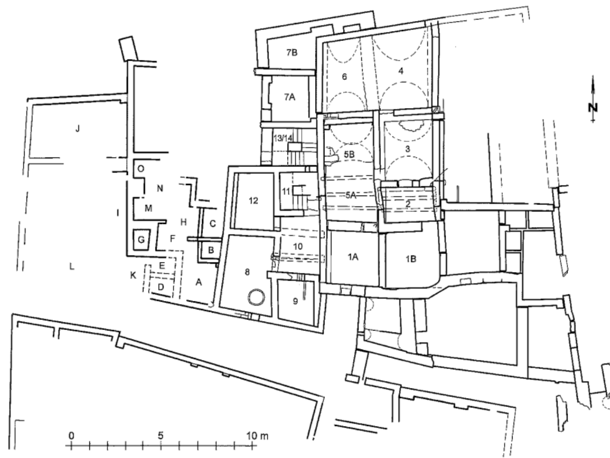

Figure 7: Plan of House 4. Courtesy of the Daklheh Oasis Project (Colin Hope). Derived from the DOP website: http://artsonline.monash.edu.au/ancient-kellis/house-4/, last updated May 7, 2013.

[57] … ⲥⲙ̄ⲛⲧⲥ̄ ⲛ̄ⲟⲩⲕⲗⲉϥⲧ’ ϯ ϣϯⲧ ϩⲁⲣⲁⲥ ⲉⲓⲥ ⲕⲁⲕⲉⲗⲟⲃⲓ .. and.. ϫⲓⲧϥ̄ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲧⲛⲛⲟ ϫⲉ ⲟⲩⲛ ϣϭⲁⲙ ⲛ̄ϯ ϫⲏ̣ϭⲉ ⲁⲣⲁ̣[ϥ…. P.Kell.Copt. 18.6-9.

[58] On this text, see the new edition and commentary in M. Bergamasco, "P.Kell.G. 19.A, Appendix," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 121 (1998): 193-96. In one of the second-century census returns from Kellis a woman is self-identified as "spinner." R. S. Bagnall, K. A. Worp, and C. A. Hope, "Family Papers from Second-Century A.D. Kellis," *Chronique d'Égypte* 86 (2011): 234.

[59] The passage in P.Kell.Gr. 12.21 is largely reconstructed: λινου- [φικὴν which presupposes a word like τέχνην, according to the editor. Worp, *GPK1*, 38. On textiles in the oasis, see also the evidence from Trimithis House B2, see A. L. Boozer, "Woven Material," in *A Late Romano-Egyptian House in the Dakhla Oasis / Amheida House B2*, ed. A. L. Boozer (New York: New York University Press / Ancient World Digital Library, 2015), 397-404.

3.3.2 Houses 4 and 5

House 4 was located east of the temple gate and provided an opportunity to examine domestic structures in another section of the village (see Table 4 on the chronology). The excavations concentrated on a number of central rooms, most of which were barrel vaulted. The building comprised twenty-two rooms and strongly resembles Houses 1–3. The large number of rooms and the wall alignment make it difficult to define the layout of the house. It appears to have contained at least three semiseparated units with their own entrances. The preservation of the building includes the first-floor level, which could be accessed from rooms 13–14 and 11. The central rooms 2, 3, and 5A and B were rectangular and barrel vaulted. Just like in Houses 1–3, the rooms were mud plastered and contained various niches, palm-rib shelves, and sections of white plaster around them.[60] Many inscribed objects and coins were found in deposits with ceramics, basketry, glass vessels, spindle whorls, textiles, and other objects. Most of these were dated in the fourth century, although some of the ceramics in subfloor deposits indicate occupation from the second and third century onwards. Some pieces of the faience date back as far as the first or early second century.[61]

Residential areas	Indication chronology
Area C/2 units	(early) second century
Area C/1 units	second half third century
Area B units	early second century–third century
Roman Villa (B/3/1)	(early) second century
Temple area unit D/8	second half fourth century
Houses 1–5 (Area A)	fourth century

Table 4: Chronology of the domestic units in Kellis. [62]

Several documents relating to Christianity and Manichaeism in the oasis have been found in House 4. In room 1b, a wooden board was found with fragments of a Manichaean psalm and a devotional postscript (T.Kell.Copt. 7). The identification of the text is not in question since this psalm resembles Manichaean psalms from Medinet Madi, mentions Mani as one of the supernatural figures, and was written in the same dialect as the other Manichaean documents (L4). Most of the other Coptic texts from House 4, however, were written in a modified southern version of Sahidic (P.Kell.Copt. 123, 124, 126, with the notable exception of 122). These Sahidic texts seem to correlate with non-Manichaean, Christian terminology (especially P.Kell.Copt. 124 and 126). Whether or not this linguistic correlation

[60] Hope, "The Roman-Period Houses," 221-2 with one of the few published maps of the house.

[61] C. A. Hope, "A Brief Report on the Excavations at Ismant el-Kharab in 1992-93," *Bulletin of the Australian Centre for Egyptology* 4 (1993): 25-26.

[62] These are general indications based on Hope, "The Roman-Period Houses," 199-229. The area B and C units appear to have been inhabited during the second and third century, but may have been abandoned end of the third century. Ceramics from the fourth century indicate reuse as stable. On the size of the enclosures B/1 and B/3 see G. E. Bowen et al., "Brief Report on the 2007 Excavations at Ismant el-Kharab," *Bulletin of the Australian Centre for Egyptology* 17 (2007): 29.

was characteristic of the socioreligious divisions in Late Antiquity is yet to be addressed in full (see Chapter 5).[63]

House 5, located at a distance from Houses 1–3 and 4, next to the Large East Church, yielded only a few inscribed materials. The excavations could only clear rooms 1 and 5 to floor level because of the instability of the walls. As with House 4, the upper level of House 5 was preserved and reached by the staircase in room 4. The central rooms of the house were presumably accessible through rooms 6 and 5. All rooms, except for the staircase, were barrel vaulted. The few Greek ostraka found in House 5 derived from the fourth century (O. Kell. 59, 86, 142), but no documents relating to Christian or Manichaean communities were found.[64]

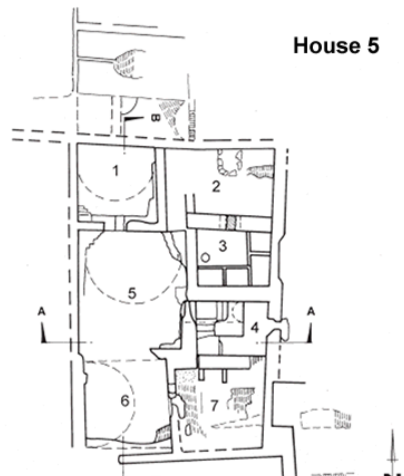

Figure 8: Plan of House 5 (Area A). Courtesy of the Dakhleh Oasis Project (Colin Hope). Derived from the DOP website: http://artsonline.monash.edu.au/ancient-kellis/house-5/, last updated May 7, 2013 (modified).

3.3.3 Other Residential Units from the Roman Period

Houses 1–5 from Area A were not the only residential units excavated by the Dakhleh Oasis Project. The large structures in Areas B and C contained another type of residential units. It is not always possible to discern discrete units in the large enclosures of Area B, which are characterized by many small rooms around large communal courts. Despite this layout, some independent units within the enclosure are visible. They reveal the Roman orientation of the wealthy elite, as B/1/2 was modeled after a Roman peristyle house and B/3/1 (the so-called Roman Villa) followed the Roman *tetrastyle* atrium house style. Other identifiable units, such as B/1/4 and smaller units in C/1 and C/2, were built in a simple architectural style that is also attested at Amheida. Regarding these smaller units, there has been some

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[63] Gardner, Alcock, and Funk, *CDT2*, 263-4 where they also suggest the wooden board was found near the surface and may not have belonged to the inhabitants of the building.

[64] C. A. Hope (with contributions by O. E. Kaper and H. Whitehouse), "The Excavations at Ismant el-Kharab from 2000 to 2002," in *Oasis Papers 3*, ed. G. E. Bowen and C. A. Hope (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2003), 238.

debate on whether they had open or roofed courts, which may determine whether they reflected a more traditional Egyptian style.[65]

Area C, although only partly excavated, comprised residential and light-industrial sections of the village. The papyrus evidence dates to the second or third century.[66] Most of this area consists of structures with open courts, flanked by small rectangular rooms with flat roofs.[67] Inscribed material from these rooms derived mostly from the third or fourth century and was found among animal droppings, which suggests secondary usage, while ostraka from the early second century belonged to a layer with domestic waste.[68] Some of these ostraka attest to the poll tax at Kellis, including details of particular families in the second century (O.Kell.30–33). Some documents from a unit nearby relate to a single family, the children of Tithoes and Talaeis, presumably living in C/2/5 during the period 111/2–146/7 CE.[69] Like the houses in Area A, their house contained a number of wooden boards, although this time without inscribed text. Among the domestic objects in the roof collapse of C/2/8 were wooden spindle whorls, mud loom weights, wooden toggles, mud jar sealings, and the body of a terracotta female figurine.[70] This material resembles the domestic waste found in the deposits in the fourth-century houses in Area A.

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[65] Hope, "The Roman-Period Houses," 225; P. Davoli, "Classical Influences on the Domestic Architecture of the Graeco-Roman Fayyum Sites," in *Housing and Habitat in the Ancient Mediterranean: Cultural and Environmental Responses*, ed. A. A. Di Castro, C. A. Hope, and B. E. Parr (Leuven: Peeters, 2015), 173-84.

[66] Hope and Bowen, "Excavations in the Settlement of Ismant el-Kharab in 1995-1999," 176; Hope, "The Excavation at Ismant el-Kharab in 1998/9: A Brief Report," 59-66.

[67] More specifically identified is the domestic unit in C/2/1 with a hearth and room for animals, dating to the third century. C/1/1 also had a domestic function with fifteen rooms arranged around a central room, leading to a chain of connected smaller rooms. Hickson, "Excavations in Area C," 157-61; Hope, "The Roman-Period Houses," 211.

[68] M. A. J. Eccleston, "Metalworking at Kellis: A Preliminary Report," in *Dakhleh Oasis Project: Preliminary Reports on the 1994-1995 to 1998-1999 Field Seasons*, ed. C. A. Hope and G. E. Bowen (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2002), 143-49.

[69] Hope, "Excavations in the Settlement of Ismant el-Kharab in 1995-1999," 178. See the texts in Bagnall, Worp, and Hope, "Family Papers," 228-53.

[70] See images 10 a-e in Hope and Whitehouse, "The Excavations at Ismant el-Kharab from 2000 to 2002," 240. C. A. Hope (with Appendices by H. Whitehouse and A. Warfe), "Report on the Excavations at Ismant el-Kharab and Mut El-Kharab in 2005," *Bulletin of the Australian Centre for Egyptology* 16 (2005): 35-83.

Another domestic unit was found on the northwest corner of the inner *temenos* of the Main Temple. A domestic structure (D/8) of about thirteen rooms was built close to the temple enclosure. The building comprised three rooms to the west of an open court and several rooms to the east, accessible through an entrance room giving out unto the lane to the north. Two sets of rooms formed discrete blocks, to be entered via a door to the west and through room 8 respectively. While most rooms had open roofs, rooms 7 and 14 and rooms 1 and 3 were barrel vaulted. A fourth-century date has been suggested for the occupation of this unit.[71] Just like the other fourth-century houses, this unit yielded large quantities of inscribed material, including a horoscope for the year 392 CE.[72] Noteworthy among these finds is a fragment with Syriac writing and the reference to the *Apostolos* in a personal letter (P.Kell.Copt. 127). Both point to a connection to Houses 1–3, where similar documents were found (compare P.Kell.Syr. 1 and P.Kell.Syr./Gr. 1). A papyrus with Psalm 9 (LXX) from D/8 may have been used by Manichaeans and Christians alike, even though Worp assumes it is more easily explained in a non-Manichaean setting.[73]

Figure 9: Plan of house D/8. Courtesy of the Dakhleh Oasis Project (Colin Hope). Derived from the DOP website: http://artsonline.monash.edu.au/ancient-kellis/main-temple/, last updated May 7, 2013 (modified).

The Roman Villa (B/3/1) was a large domestic unit within one of the enclosures of Area B. Excavation commenced in the 2005–2006 season, revealing an elaborate complex of twenty-two rooms, most of which contained painted decorations on the wall and ceiling plaster. These decorations will be discussed in section 3.4.2, for they bring a strong Classical or Roman decorative style to the fore. The architecture followed the Roman pattern of atrium houses,

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[71] Hope, "Excavations in the Settlement of Ismant el-Kharab in 1995-1999," 199-204.

[72] Hope, "The Excavations at Ismant el-Kharab from 2000 to 2002," 234.

[73] K. A. Worp, "Psalm 9.22-26 in a 4th-Century Papyrus from the Western Desert in Egypt," *Vetus Testamentum* 66, no. 3 (2016): 1-6. His argument about the Manichaean rejection of the Old Testament psalms is problematic, see Pedersen et al., *The Old Testament in Manichaean Tradition*, xv, xxxviii-xxxix.

although an *impluvium* did not match the local climate.[74] The heart of the unit lies in the two central rooms that gave access to other rooms on the east side and the west side. Numerous fragments of statuettes have been found in these rooms, like the fragments of a life-size statue and several pedestals with the feet of smaller statuettes, one painted in pink colors. The fragments were ornamented with elements like a snake bracelet, and another statue was holding a cornucopia. All these statuettes are Classical in style, just like the wall paintings.[75] The pottery came mostly from the second century, with some evidence for reuse in the fourth century. The size and decorations of this Roman Villa suggest it was inhabited by wealthy members of the elite during the second and third century CE. Their cultural repertoire was in no way restricted to the oasis setting but reached out to Classical Greek imagery and Roman decorative styles. It is therefore in many ways the opposite of the architecture of the fourth-century houses of Area A, which were more simple and almost without decorations.

Before we return to the cultural repertoires attested in the material culture, a statistical question should be addressed. How many people would have lived in these houses at a time? Should we imagine one family or multiple families under one roof? It has been calculated on the basis of the census returns that on average, the main resident family in a household would have entailed 4.3 persons, with village families usually a little larger than urban families.[76] Extended families or multiple families with slaves would have had an average size of about ten people. Although about 43.1 percent of the households consisted of small families (often nuclear households with unmarried children), the ideal remained a multiple-family household. The high mortality rate led to 15 percent of households consisting of only the nuclear family with coresident kin, and 21 percent of households including more than one married couple. Based on these calculations, Bagnall and Frier established that 42.8 percent of all people would have lived in households with multiple families.[77] Brothers or sisters, with their partner and children, lived together in their parental home.[78] Van Minnen has argued that second-century houses of four or five rooms would have been shared with four to five people, which would mean that the Area A houses in Kellis might have housed up to eleven or twelve people.[79] Such numbers are likely to have

[74] C. A. Hope and H. Whitehouse, "A Painted Residence at Ismant el-Kharab (Kellis) in the Dakhleh Oasis," *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 19 (2006): 318.

[75] C. A. Hope et al., "Report on the Excavations at Ismant el-Kharab and Mut El-Kharab in 2006," *Bulletin of the Australian Centre for Egyptology* 17 (2006): 26.

[76] Bagnall and Frier, *The Demography of Roman Egypt*, 67-8, as discussed in R. Alston, "Houses and Households in Roman Egypt " in *Domestic Space in the Roman World: Pompeii and Beyond*, ed. A. Wallace-Hadrill and R. Laurence (Portsmouth: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 1997), 33-34. A summary is found in M. Malouta, "Families, Households and Children," in *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Egypt*, ed. C. Riggs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 296-7.

[77] Bagnall and Frier, *The Demography of Roman Egypt*, 62-3; S. R. Huebner, "Household Composition in the Ancient Mediterranean - What Do We Really Know?," in *A Companion to Families in the Greek and Roman Worlds*, ed. B. Rawson (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 73-91.

[78] Bagnall and Frier, *The Demography of Roman Egypt*, 57-64 and 68.

[79] P. van Minnen, "House-to-House Enquiries: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Roman Karanis," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 100 (1994): 235-36.

varied considerably over time, as fertility and mortality rates were higher than most modern societies (see Chapter 8). Seasonal labor and migration, moreover, may have contributed to fluctuations in the household size.[80]

Another indication of what the composition of Kellite households looked like is offered in P.Kell.Gr. 13. This document, dated in 335 CE, contains a division of property between five parties: the three brothers Pekysis, Pebos, and Pachoumis, a half brother (?) Horos and their sister (?) Taoup.[81] Following the death of their father (P)alitous, the house was divided among them as part of the inheritance. The documents allotted to Pekysis a room on the second floor and one of the cellars, to Pebos a room at the level of the upper chambers and a section of the granary, the other half probably owned by Taoup. Horos received a room in the gateway. Together they held the undivided ownership of other sections of the house. The contract notes that any offense against the (voluntary but definitive) agreement could be treated with a penalty of at least a thousand talents. Unfortunately, the heavy mutilation of the papyrus hampers further identification of the allotments. Thus far, no Roman houses in Kellis have been found containing gateways and granaries.[82] Nevertheless, the image of multiple brothers and sisters living with their partners and children in one house, carefully dividing the available spaces between them, is the most probable setting for the daily life of most Kellites.[83]

3.4 Cultural-Religious Repertoires

The inhabitants of fourth-century Kellis lived in a complex sociocultural environment. Despite the somewhat remote geographical location, their economic and cultural lives were far from simple or singular. The architectural, archaeological, and art-historical evidence has shown a cultural dynamic between archaizing tendencies, independence, and innovation. Following Ellen F. Morris in her usage of the metaphor of islands to understand the oasis, we can see a tension between the remoteness of the oasis and the strong cultural ties with the Greco-Roman world *at large*.[84] Separated from the mainland of Egypt by long journeys through the desert, the inhabitants of the oasis showed an "extraordinary independence of mind," navigating between a strong attachment to their cultural past and the desire for a Classical or Roman education and lifestyle.[85] This double attachment, or their "island mentality," is visible in the art and archaeology of ancient Kellis. The preserved finds speak not only to wealth, or a broad cultural orientation, but also to the variety of religious

[80] On the household size of B2 at Amheida, see A. L. Boozer, *Amheida II: A Late Romano-Egyptian House.*

[81] Taoup employed the same hypographeus as Pachoumis, which may indicate she was his full sister. The four men are described as συγκληρονόμοι, and do not further appear in the Kellis letters from House 2. Pekysis has Stonios the priest from Kellis signing for him, while Pachoumis and Taoup employ someone from the city of Hibis as hypographeus. Could they have come from elsewhere in the oasis?

[82] Large quantities of millet have been found in storage bins at C/2/4.

[83] See the families and papyri cited in Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 204-5.

[84] E. F. Morris, "Insularity and Island Identity in the Oases Bordering Egypt's Great Sand Sea," in *Thebes and Beyond: Studies in Honour of Kent R. Weeks*, ed. Z. Hawass and S. Ikram (Cairo: Supreme Council of Antiquities Press, 2010), 129-44.

[85] O. E. Kaper, "The Western Oases," in *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Egypt*, ed. C. Riggs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 721-28.

repertoires of the inhabitants of the village. In this section, the evidence for these cultural and religious repertoires will be laid out to contextualize the position of the Manichaeans of House 3.

Before delving into the material evidence for the various cultural and religious repertoires, a parenthetical comment should be made. To classify diverse material culture into cultural containers may be misleading, as our categories do not correspond one-on-one with their self-understanding. What does it mean to consider something Egyptian? When is something legitimately called a Hellenistic practice? Archaeologists have called into question the conceptualization of material culture into geographically organized repertoires.[86] Egyptian-looking objects, for example, could have been made in Rome for the local market and connoted a high social status instead of a cultural-geographic area. The cultural connotations of ancient customers were not necessarily similar to ours. By classifying various phenomena together into cultural-religious repertoires I hope to avoid a reified notion of solid cultures, religions, or traditions, while still pointing to the patterns and similarities within the material. As noted in the previous chapter, practices described as traditional Egyptian could have been performed by people who self-identified as Christian, Manichaean, or simply as residents of Kellis. Documents and practices from a celestial-power repertoire were likewise ordered, held and performed by villagers from various backgrounds. The following classification into various cultural and religious repertoires is therefore primarily heuristic and serves the purpose of illustrating diversity and interconnections, instead of solid cultural boundaries.[87]

3.4.1 Traditional Egyptian Religion

One of the sensational discoveries of the Dakhleh Oasis Project is the Roman temple of Tutu at Kellis (in Area D). Tutu (Greek Tithoes) was venerated as the main deity of the village, together with his mother Neith and his consort Tapsais. The temple complex originated in the early Roman period and was perhaps built under Nero and extended under Hadrian. With further extensions in the second and third century, the sanctuary continued to function until the second or third decade of the fourth century.[88] The enclosure with the sanctuary

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[86] M. J. Versluys, "Haunting Traditions. The (Material) Presence of Egypt in the Roman World," in *Reinventing 'the Invention of Tradition'? Indigenous Pasts and the Roman Present*, ed. D. Boschung, A. W. Busch, and M. J. Versluys (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2015), 132-46. A similar critique on cultural containers is found in V. Stolcke, "Talking Culture: New Boundaries, New Rethorics of Exclusion in Europe," *Current Anthropology* 36, no. 1 (1995): 1-24.

[87] The usage of traditional mythological elements by Christian monastic scribes is discussed in depth in Frankfurter, *Christianizing Egypt*, 184-231. Many of the observations in the following sections should be read in dialogue with the evidence for traditional Egyptian religion and Christianity in Amheida. M. Brand, "Religious Diversity in the Egyptian Desert: New Findings from the Dakhleh Oasis," *Entangled Religions* 4 (2017): 17-39.

[88] C. A. Hope, "Objects from the Temple of Tutu," in *Egyptian Religion: The Last Thousand Years, Part II. Studies Dedicated to the Memory of Jan Quaegebeur*, ed. W. Clarysse, A. Schoors, and H. Willems (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 810. By the end of the third century, most Egyptian temples were in decline, even though local practices as festivals and oracles continued for some time. The previous consensus about the correlation between the decline of the temple cults and the rise of Christianity is no longer accepted. In

contained four associated shrines, a contra-temple, a forecourt, and a west court with additional rooms. A sacred processional road passes through the monumental entrances of the *temenos*. Egyptian and Roman architectural features characterize the buildings, with painted decorations depicting Roman and Egyptian deities, as well as life-size statues surrounding the processional road.[89]

Isis, Serapis, and Amun played a significant role in the sacred landscape of the oasis. Isis and Serapis were worshiped in the Kharga Oasis (Dush), just like Amun (throughout Kharga and at Deir el-Haggar and Ein Birbiyeh).[90] The absence of representations of Tutu and Amun together may have been caused by their close link, in which Tutu became the accessible form of the high god Amun-Re in Kellis.[91] In the temple complex, Tutu was worshiped together with his consort, while he featured next to Tapsais in the Main Temple, with Neith in the birth shrine (*mammisi*). Neith and Tapsais were venerated in the west temple.[92]

But what kind of deity was Tutu and how did his cult function in the village setting? Tutu was a protective deity, known in some subsidiary cults in the Nile valley, but was only venerated as a principle deity in Kellis.[93] In temple inscriptions, Tutu was hailed as the protector against demons and the “Agathos Daimon in this town,” while his consort Tapsais was praised as “the queen Tapsais, the mistress of the city.”[94] Many depictions portray Tutu as a sphinx, like the limestone fragment found in the sanctuary. The surface of this limestone image was coated with an oily mud layer. Such oily layers covered other statues of deities in the temple, so it presumably derived from oil libations as part of the cult’s practices.[95] This body of evidence for traditional Egyptian religious practice was supplemented by wooden

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contrast to the situation in the Fayyum, there is ample evidence for Roman period temples in the western desert, as building activities took place under the Roman emperors Hadrian and Antoninus Pius in the second century, as well as third-century modification to the temples at Hibis and Kellis. O. E. Kaper, "Temple Building in the Egyptian Desert During the Roman Period," in *Living on the Fringe*, ed. O. E. Kaper (Leiden: Research School CNWS, Leiden University, 1998), 151.

[89] These statues included Isis, Serapis and a stele of Tutu as a Sphinx, as well as a life-size bust of Isis-Demeter. O. E. Kaper, "The God Tutu at Kellis: On Two Stelae Found at Ismant el-Kharab in 2000," in *Oasis Papers 3*, ed. G. E. Bowen and C. A. Hope (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2004), 311-21.

[90] Hope, "Objects from the Temple of Tutu," 842.

[91] O. E. Kaper, *The Egyptian God Tutu: A Study of the Sphinx-God and Master of Demons with a Corpus of Monuments* (Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 112.

[92] Kaper, *The Egyptian God Tutu*, 110. A second or third-century bronze, of excellent quality, representing Tapsais indicates her role next to Tutu, just like the sandstone depiction of the Roman emperor Pertinax (short reign in 193 CE) offering her a *sistrum.* O. E. Kaper and K. A. Worp, "A Bronze Representing Tapsais of Kellis," *Revue d'Egyptologie* 46 (1995), 107-18; Hope, "Excavations in the Settlement of Ismant el-Kharab in 1995-1999," 180 plate 5.

[93] Kaper, *The Egyptian God Tutu*.

[94] Kaper, *The Egyptian God Tutu*, 76, R-61 and R-48 Tapsais in R-54.

[95] Hope, "Objects from the Temple of Tutu," 817.

and ceramic fragments of portable barque shrines (modeled after a type of boat), which were used during a regional festival to celebrate Tutu at Kellis and some other Dakhleh towns.[96]

It is noteworthy that a large number of protective deities were venerated in the oasis. Primarily, the cult of Seth, the "lord of the oasis," at the temple of Mut el-Kharab (Mothis) is remarkable, since the veneration of Seth was supposedly suppressed in the Nile valley after the 25th Dynasty.[97] More local characteristics include the usage of vaulted shrines, which were generally associated with funerary cults in the Nile valley, but appear regularly in the oasis, for example the impressively decorated *mammisi* of Tutu next to the Main Temple of Kellis.[98]

The decoration of this *mammisi* shows more traits of a local tradition: it only depicts one Pharaoh, among over four hundred supernatural figures. Outside Egypt, the role of the Pharaoh was more often suppressed in decorations, but it is exceptional within Egypt. The *mammisi* decoration was furthermore divided equally between Pharaonic-style paintings and Roman-style wall paintings; the latter were also found in the residential units and are dated to the early second century by Olaf Kaper.[99] Simpler versions of this design, known as the panel style, were used throughout the temple precinct.[100] This combination of styles was unheard of in the Nile valley, but occurred more often in oases' temples and tombs, reflecting their greater cultural freedom in decorative choices. The tomb of Petosiris at Qaret el-Muzawwaqa illustrates this curious mixture of cultural elements, as it depicts Anubis, Isis, and Nephthys next to the deceased on a funerary bed. Tutu, in his guise as a sphinx, was also depicted. The deceased is depicted in Egyptian dress, but also in a Roman-style painting, dressed in a Roman toga at an offering scene. This mixture of styles also characterized the zodiac ceiling of both chambers as well as the decoration at the neighboring tomb of Petubastis.[101]

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[96] Kaper, *The Egyptian God Tutu*, 153-4. On the portable shrines see Hope, "Objects from the Temple of Tutu," 836, 840-1.

[97] Kaper, "The Western Oases," 722; Hope, "The Excavations at Ismant el-Kharab and Mut El-Kharab in 2001," 49; Hope, "Report on the Excavations at Ismant el-Kharab and Mut El-Kharab in 2005," 47. New research into the cult of Seth in the oasis is commencing, funded by the Australian Research Council (2015).

[98] Kaper, "The Western Oases," 724.

[99] Kaper, "The Western Oases," 724. On the decorations, see C. A. Hope et al., "Excavations at Mut El-Kharab and Ismant el-Kharab in 2001-2," *Bulletin of the Australian Centre for Egyptology* 13 (2002): 102-5. On the suppressed role of the Pharaoh, see O. E. Kaper, "Galba's Cartouches at Ain Birbiyeh," in Tradition and Transformation: Egypt under Roman Rule, ed. K. Lembke, M. Minas-Nerpel, and S. Pfeiffer (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 181-201.

[100] Helen Whitehouse, "Mosaics and Painting in Graeco-Roman Egypt," in *A Companion to Ancient Egypt* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 1025 notes parallels at the temenos wall of the temple at Deir el-Haggar and the rock shrine at Ain el-Labakha. Cf. Hope, "Excavations in the Settlement of Ismant el-Kharab in 1995-1999," 191 and plate 14.

[101] H. Whitehouse, "Roman in Life, Egyptian in Death: The Painted Tomb of Petosiris in the Dakhleh Oasis," in *Living on the Fringe*, ed. O .E. Kaper (Leiden: Research School CNWS, Leiden University, 1998), 253-70. On this tomb see also C. Riggs, *The Beautiful Burial in Roman Egypt: Art, Identity, and Funerary Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 161-5; M. S. Venit, *Visualizing the Afterlife in the Tombs of Graeco-Roman Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 157-182.

Other features of the temple complex likewise highlight local traditions with archaizing tendencies, like the way the cartouches of emperors were written in the temples.[102] The calendar reform under Augustus was adopted in the oasis but they continued to make use of the traditional Egyptian calendar, even as late as in a horoscope from 392 CE.[103] Combined with the decorative program laid out above, this suggests that the inhabitants of the oasis had greater cultural freedom to navigate between traditional Egyptian practices—sometimes even adopting them anachronistically to stress their Egyptianness—and elements from the Classical and Roman world.

One of the most interesting figures found in the temple papyri is a certain Aurelius Stonios, a priest from the temple of Tutu, active during the turn of the late third/early fourth century. This "Aurelius Stonios son of Tepnakhthes, priest" is last mentioned in papyrus P.Kell.Gr. 13, where he acted as a witness in a legal contract from House 2 (335 CE). Presumably, he is the same man as the priest Stonios summoned by the local chief priest in one of the temple papyri.[104] He is also the author of at least two petitions to the governor of the Thebaid (dating from 288–300 and 300–335 CE).[105] These petitions derived from the temple archive, which contained at least three letters from the chief priest who resided in the nome capital. In these letters, he ordered people to come to him immediately upon receiving the letter, which suggests the presence of a fairly stable temple hierarchy. The chief priest must have had some influence, since two of the letters addressed the village heads (*comarchs*) of Kellis.[106] Another text contains a report sent to Valerius Sarapion, a provincial official, referring to circumcised adult priests and the presence of still-uncircumcised infants.[107] Together, these texts mention a large number of priestly offices in Kellis. They include *pastophoros* (lector priests),[108] *prophetes*,[109] and a priest scribe[110]. The inclusion of infants, the uncircumcised priests in training, suggests that they expected a new generation of priests in the early years of the fourth century.[111] These documents and ostraka contain at least twenty

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[102] Kaper, "The Western Oases," 724.

[103] Discussed in Kaper, "The Western Oases," 724. See also the late third-century contract O.Kell.145 (294 CE, which gives its date 'according to the traditional Egyptian calendar'). Kaper also noted the hieroglyphic names of the Roman emperors Galba and Pertinax, which do not appear outside the oasis. The horoscopes are published in K. A. Worp and T. de Jong, "A Greek Horoscope from 373 A.D.," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 106 (1995): 235-40; Worp and de Jong, "More Greek Horoscopes," 204n5.

[104] K. A. Worp, "Short Texts from the Main Temple," in *Dakhleh Oasis Project: Preliminary Reports on the 1994-1995 to 1998-1999 Field Seasons* ed. C. A. Hope and G. E. Bowen (Oxford: 2002), no.1.

[105] Worp, "Short Texts from the Main Temple," no. 4 and 5.

[106] Worp, "Short Texts from the Main Temple," 334, no. 1-3 probably dating from between 300-335CE.

[107] Worp, "Short Texts from the Main Temple," no. 10 dating after 304 CE.

[108] Worp, "Short Texts from the Main Temple," no. 7.5, 10.5 and unpublished D/1/75, D/1/84, D/1/84.26. K. A. Worp, *Greek Ostraka from Kellis* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2004), no. 98; 126; 134.

[109] Worp, "Short Texts from the Main Temple," no. 6.2 and D/1/75/35, D1/84.12, D/1/84/21 including someone called Pachoumis, just as in text 6.2.

[110] Worp, "Short Texts from the Main Temple," D/1/75.20.

[111] Text cited at Worp, "Short Texts from the Main Temple," 346, no. 10. Discussed in G. E. Bowen, "Some Observations on Christian Burial Practices at Kellis," in *Oasis Papers 3*, ed. G. E. Bowen and C. A. Hope (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2003), 174.

names of the priests in Kellis.[112] Clearly, the temple remained an economically viable institution during the first two decades of the fourth century.[113]

The temple's influence on and integration into village life during Late Antiquity is difficult to assess. The frequent occurrence of the name of Tutu (Tithoes) in personal names suggests the prevalence of private veneration, but no definitive evidence is found in Kellis for the domestic worship of Tutu.[114] Connections between the temple area and the domestic residences can be seen in the attestation of votive figurines in the domestic settings. A second-century painted panel of Isis, found in the temple complex, probably derived from a domestic context and was given as votive gift to the temple.[115] The widespread images of Isis in temple decoration and in domestic contexts show how her cult was present at various layers of society in the oasis.[116] The majority of the terracotta figures found in Kellis derived from the Main Temple, but about one-third came from domestic settings.[117] At House 4, a terracotta bust of a deity, presumably Serapis, was found among the remains of niches with palm-rib shelves.[118] Not all of these figurines depict supernatural beings, as most of them have the shape of horses, people, or form only the base of a statuette. The bust of Serapis at House 4 is the most explicit example of figurines used for household religion. Other tentative evidence includes a third-century (?) ceiling plaster with images of Isis, Serapis, and Serapis-Helios. Since a graffito in this house mentions "leadership" (of a priesthood or an association?), this decorative scheme could have conveyed the owner's elevated social position as well as a religious function.[119] Although no explicit religious renderings have been found in rooms with decorations, the traces of oily mud attest to ritual practices that were more common in the temple complex.[120] Intriguingly, close to the entrance of the building an entire adult female goat was buried, presumably as sacrifice, since one of the

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[112] Worp, *Greek Ostraka from Kellis*, 12.

[113] Kaper, *The Egyptian God Tutu*, 150.

[114] Kaper, *The Egyptian God Tutu*, 146 and 79-86 on personal names.

[115] H. Whitehouse, "A Painted Panel of Isis," in *Dakhleh Oasis Project: Preliminary Reports on the 1992–1993 and 1993–1994 Field Seasons*, ed. C. A. Hope and A.J. Mills (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 1999), 95-100; C. A. Hope, "Isis and Serapis at Kellis: A Brief Note," *Bulletin of the Australian Centre for Egyptology* 5 (1995): 37-42.

[116] O. E. Kaper, "Isis in Roman Dakhleh: Goddess of the Village, the Province, and the Country," in *Isis on the Nile. Egyptian Gods in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt*, ed. L. Bricault and M. J. Versluys (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 149-80.

[117] Stevens, "Terracottas from Ismant el-Kharab," 293. However, more recent excavations found a statuette of Isis and a anthropomorphic figurine in South tomb 4. Hope, "The Excavations at Ismant el-Kharab from 2000 to 2002," 284.

[118] A. Stevens, "Terracottas from Ismant el-Kharab," in *Dakhleh Oasis Project: Preliminary Reports on the 1994–1995 to 1998–1999 Field Seasons*, ed. C. A. Hope and G. E. Bowen (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2000), 294 and no. 1. Wrongly identified as Isis-Demeter, according to Kaper, "Isis in Roman Dakhleh," 173n74.

[119] Bowen et al., "Brief Report on the 2007 Excavations at Ismant el-Kharab," 21-52. C. A. Hope et al., "Report on the 2010 Season of Excavations at Ismant el-Kharab, Dakhleh Oasis," *Bulletin of the Australian Centre for Egyptology* 21 (2010): 42.

[120] The excavators point to the similarity with the niches in some of the rooms at Karanis Hope and Whitehouse, "A Painted Residence," 318. For the use of oil A. Ross and B. Stern, "A Preliminary Report on the Analysis of Organic Materials from Ismant el-Kharab," in *Oasis Papers 3*, ed. G. E. Bowen and C. A. Hope (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2003), 367-69.

scenes on the *mammisi* decoration depicts a sacrifice of a goat.[121] If this interpretation holds up with future explorations of this house, it would be the most explicit evidence for traditional rituals attested in the material culture of the Roman period households. The decorative scheme has also been interpreted, in light of the other finds, as reflecting the function of the house as a meeting place for a cult association.[122] Both suggestions call for further research, especially as there are a number of ceramic figurines found in Houses 1–5 that resemble Coptic figurines that may have been part of (Christian?) domestic religion.[123]

3.4.2 Classical Traditions from the Greek and Roman World

Kellites not only used the traditional Egyptian repertoire in their daily lives but also employed elements from Classical traditions beyond Egypt. Greek and Roman cultural influences are visible in decorative schemes, literary documents, school exercises, and Greek archaizing of personal names. Sometimes, these features carried a marked otherness, but often they would not have stood out. Greco-Roman influences had been part and parcel of Egyptian society for centuries. Classical education, therefore, belonged to the curriculum in late antique Kellis. Shrines I and III at the temple complex yielded remains of a local school: pens, ostraka, boards, and several school exercises. These two shrines, situated at the rear sides of the Main Temple, also preserved miniature codices with a text building on Homer, mathematical exercises, and a list with Greek verbs. From the mistakes in the exercises we can conclude that they functioned in the context of a school rather than a full-fledged scriptorium. Documents such as the Isocrates codex, a copy of Homer, and other texts in various Roman houses reveal that the influence of Classical literature extended beyond this late antique school setting.[124]

The Classical texts found in the Roman Villa indicate that the inhabitants received a Classical training, or pursued this for their children. This is paralleled in one of the houses at Trimithis, which had a school next door. This school building yielded not only many school exercises on ostraka, but had poetic texts written in red ink on the walls.[125] The *dipinto* consisted of five columns of text, framed by instructions to the students to imitate the text.

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[121] Hope et al., "Report on the 2010 Season of Excavations," 44.

[122] H. Whitehouse, "A House, but Not Exactly a Home? The Painted Residence at Kellis Revisited " in *Housing and Habitat in the Ancient Mediterranean: Cultural and Environmental Responses*, ed. A. A. Di Castro, C. A. Hope, and B. E. Parr (Leuven: Peeters, 2015), 243-54.

[123] Stevens, "Terracottas from Ismant el-Kharab," no. 20 and 35. Stevens notes that the lack of Nile sediments shows local production. On the continuation of these figurines in an Ancient Christian domestic religion, see D. Frankfurter, "Female Figurines in Early Christian Egypt: Reconstructing Lost Practices and Meanings," *Material Religion* 11, no. 2 (2015): 190-223.

[124] On the documents from Shrine I, see C. A. Hope and K. A. Worp, "Miniature Codices from Kellis," *Mnemosyne* 59, no. 2 (2006): 226-258. On the documents and setting from Shrine III, see K. A. Worp and C. A. Hope, "A New Fragment of Homer," *Mnemosyne* 51 (1998): 206-10. Recently reported are papyrus fragments from the *Odyssey* and Demosthenes' *In Aphobum*. Hope et al., "Report on the 2010 Season of Excavations," 27. These texts have not yet been edited and published and therefore do not appear in the list in the appendix.

[125] R. Cribiore, P. Davoli, and D .M. Ratzan, "A Teacher's Dipinto from Trimithis (Dakhleh Oasis)," *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 21 (2008): 179-91.

The first epigram received some extra attention because of its reference to "god" in the singular. The text in the first column is translated as:

> Here I withdraw near the sources of the sacred leaves. But may god grant my wishes that you all learn the Muses' honeyed works, with all the Graces and with Hermes son of Maia reaching the full summit of rhetorical knowledge. Be bold, my boys: the great god will grant you to have a beautiful crown of manifold virtue.[126]

Could this "god" have referred to the Christian god? Cribiore rejects the identification with Hermes Trismegistos, who often carried the epithet "great" and is identified with Thoth, the god of rhetoric as well as the city deity of Trimithis. Instead, she thinks it "seems very likely that the 'god' is the Christian God."[127] Such an identification would place the schoolmaster in the fourth-century dynamic of Christian teachers utilizing mythological gods and classicizing literature, despite resistance of some Ancient Christian authors. A similar argument has been made about a poetic adaptation of Homer, found in Kellis, which was presumably used by a local schoolmaster in his educative program.[128] Just like with the text from Trimithis, connections have been suggested between this adaptation of Homer and Christianity. Some scholars have recognized elements of the "Pater noster" in the text, in particular in the sentence: "Father Zeus, give us bread."[129] Both identifications, however, are tentative and hardly grounded in the texts themselves. What these documents show, even without the Christian connection, is that Classical literature was appreciated at Kellis and Trimithis, and was used with some creative freedom in an educational setting.[130]

A Classical and Roman cultural taste is also tangible in the decoration of the Roman Villa and the colonnaded court at Kellis. This decorative program reveals a strong interest in Classical themes and even the adaptation of the well-known Pompeian panel style. The excavated sections of the colonnaded court revealed a long central room with double columns and decorations. Fragments of plaster show how white plaster layers with pink painted sections and fragments of Corinthian capitals were used. Other rectangular, painted panels with yellow or pale-blue backgrounds were framed by black lines and fictive columns. These decorations depicted flora, fauna, and anthropomorphic figures. In one of these panels, a female bust with a plumed helmet was depicted and another large section depicts birds and foliage on a yellow or red background.[131] At the Roman Villa, similar panels portrayed Isis and Serapis-Helios, flanked by geometric patterns.[132] The geometric

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[126] Cribiore, Davoli and Ratzan, "A Teacher's Dipinto,"186.

[127] Bagnall et al., *An Oasis City*, 187 (Cribiore).

[128] Hope and Worp, "Miniature Codices from Kellis," 233.

[129] Hope and Worp, "Miniature Codices from Kellis," 247.

[130] Other school exercises include O.Kell. 153, 157, 161. More texts from the school at Trimithis are published as R. Cribiore and P. Davoli, "New Literary Texts from Amheida, Ancient Trimithis (Dakhla Oasis, Egypt)," *Zeitschrift fur Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 187 (2013): 1-14.

[131] Hope, "The Roman-Period Houses," 205-6.

[132] The decorated panels with painted plaster depict scenes from Greek literature: Perseus rescuing Andromeda, Odysseus being recognized by Eurykleia, the Olympian deities witnessing the adultery of

patterns seem to have been particular to the oasis; the wide range of imagery related to vines and grapes could have connoted the wine production in the oasis. Other themes, like the acanthus leaf ornaments, did not immediately connote the local environment, but belonged to the "decorative vocabulary of Greece and Rome," which was also found in the decorative program of the house of Serenos at Trimithis.[133]

The Roman Villa at Kellis harbored another exceptional find: a Greek clay tablet. The unbaked clay tablet is the only one of its sort with a Greek text, which makes this a unique find, even though the content of the document is a fragmentary economic account not unlike many others on ostraka and papyri. Other unbaked clay tablets may have failed to survive the test of time, but the two tablets from the temple area and from Amheida suggest that the use of these materials may have been a local tradition.[134]

Finally, Classical traditions reverberate in the onomastics. Roger Bagnall has highlighted the number of Classical Greek names in the oasis. Just like the reintroduction of the clay tablets and the curious dating practices in the temple, these names reflect an archaizing tendency. Some of the names refer to Classical Greek figures like Peleus (the father of Achilleus), Kleoboulos, Pausanias, or Isocrates, while many other names had either an Egyptian theophoric or a Christian background. This revival of old Greek names at the end of the third century CE is far more marked in the Great Oasis than elsewhere. It shows a new attachment to Greek *paideia*.[135] The enthusiastic embrace of Classical Greek traditions, whether in their Hellenistic or Roman versions, was part of the educated elite's culture. It was not directly connected to religious affiliations, as there is ample evidence for Christians participating in Classical education elsewhere in Egypt.[136] Just like images of Greek or Roman deities, these choices may have connoted wealth, social status, or educational standing rather than religious affiliation.

3.4.3 Celestial Power, Amulets, and Spells

Horoscopes, amulets, and spells are strongly related to both traditional Egyptian traditions and Classical traditions from the Greek and Roman world. Many of these texts from Kellis relate to the power of the stars. In the early Roman period, tomb decorations depicted the

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Aphrodite and Ares, Orpheus taming the animals and Zeus seducing Europa. These Classical themes are combined with a more local depiction of Polis, most probably the personification of Trimithis, as allusion to the role of the house owner in the administration. See also S. McFadden, "Art on the Edge: The Late Roman Wall Painting of Amheida, Egypt," in *Antike Malerei zwischen Lokalstil und Zeitstil*, ed. N. Zimmermann (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2014), 359-70.

[133] H. Whitehouse, "Vine and Acanthus: Decorative Themes in the Wall-Paintings of Kellis," in *Oasis Papers 6*, ed. R. S. Bagnall, P. Davoli, and C. A. Hope (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2012), 381. On the fourth-century house of Serenos, see Bagnall et al., *An Oasis City*, 179-212.

[134] K. A. Worp and C. A. Hope, "A Greek Account on a Clay Tablet from the Dakhleh Oasis," in *Papyri in Honorem Johannis Bingen Octogenarii*, ed. H. Melaerts (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 474. Kaper, "The Western Oases," 726-27 with picture of the clay tablet from Amheida.

[135] Kaper, "The Western Oases," 729; Wagner, *Les oasis d'Égypte*, 224-8. For Trimithis, Bagnall et al., *An Oasis City*, 212-16 (Bagnall).

[136] Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 251-52.

zodiac, and a temple at the western end of the oasis contained an astronomical ceiling.[137] In daily life, the attachment to celestial power became visible in amulets, spells, or horoscopes. A short overview of the sources will show how this type of religious practices drew on various religious repertoires.

Two prominent examples of documents relating to celestial power are the calendars of good and bad days, found at House 3 (P.Kell.Gr. 82 and 83). Calendars of lucky and unlucky days had a long tradition in Egypt. They offered guidance as to which days should be avoided for meaningful activities and which days were auspicious. They indicated which days would be favorable to rituals, which days were considered very bad, and which days remained to be a matter of observation.

Apart from calendars of favorable and unfavorable days, eight fragments of Greek horoscopes have been found. Two horoscopes on ostraka are relatively short, but a wooden board contains an entire horoscope (P.Kell.Gr. 84), written on the back of a Coptic business account (P.Kell.Copt. 48) from House 3.[138] During more recent excavations, two more horoscopes on wooden boards were found, which were written in the same (professional) hand. Despite this professional appearance, they also share a number of mistakes.[139] These mistakes are most likely to be made by a student, which is entirely plausible since most of these documents have been found in an educational setting inside the temple complex.[140] In total, at least six of the horoscopes date from the period between 332 CE and 392 CE.[141] The fact that the horoscopes continue to use the Egyptian calendar alongside the Greek calendar shows the archaizing tendency of the oasis, as most horoscopes from the Nile valley came to use another style of dating. The practitioner was therefore aware of local variation in style, or missed out on the more recent developments in the Nile valley.[142]

The calendars and horoscopes attest to the flourishing of astrological practice in the fourth century. Previous studies of amulets and other types of invocations have observed how Christian monks followed in the footsteps of Egyptian temple priests and itinerant

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[137] O. E. Kaper, "The Astronomical Ceiling of Deir El Haggar in the Dakhleh Oasis," *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 81 (1995): 175-95.

[138] I. Gardner, A. Alcock, and W. P. Funk, eds., *Coptic Documentary Texts from Kellis. Volume 1* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 1999), 266 argues that the Greek was written on top of the Coptic, since the business account in Coptic continued.

[139] Worp and de Jong, "A Greek Horoscope," 238 "astronomical dabbling," "skill is equally poor"; Worp and de Jong, "More Greek Horoscopes," 206 "astronomical ignorance." They have suggested that the documents served an educational purpose, but it seems unlikely that a teacher would make these kind of mistakes in example-pieces. On education, apprenticeship and initiation in astrology see T. Barton, *Ancient Astrology* (London: Routledge, 1994), 134-41.

[140] The one exception is found in House 3, but it is written by the same hand as two of the other texts. Worp and de Jong, "More Greek Horoscopes," 213.

[141] Excluding the two ostraka which contain only fragments. Worp and de Jong, "More Greek Horoscopes," 213. This long continuation is interesting since astrology met with imperial opposition during Late Antiquity. Laws under Constants (C.Th. 9.16.4 of 357 and 9.16.6 of 358) explicitly forbid the consultation of astrologers. Continuation of these laws under Valentinian C.Th. 9.16.8 and Honorius C.Th. 9.16.12 of 409 CE. T. Hegedus, *Early Christianity and Ancient Astrology* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 9.

[142] Worp and de Jong, "More Greek Horoscopes," 204n5.

ritual specialists by purveying amulets, custom made with liturgical or biblical features.[143] The Kellis horoscopes do not contain such specific features, but there are several reasons to think that they were ordered and used by the families and individuals known to be from Christian and Manichaean circles.

It is well known that some Early Christian theologians rejected astrology, while others embraced it within a monotheistic framework. Both Christians and Manichaeans paid elaborate attention to astrology and employed astrological metaphors in their theology and cosmology.[144] Manichaean sources include elaborate astrological systems of correspondences between the body and the cosmos (*melothesia*, see 1 Keph. 69 and 70).[145] They identified gods with stars and planets, attributed them with beneficent or maleficent influence on daily life, and struggled to articulate the balance between determinism, fate, and free will.[146] As Von Stuckrad argues, these astrological issues are best understood as a shared plural field of astrological discourses that allowed for multiple positions and interpretations.[147] Christians, Manichaeans, and others appropriated astrological traditions and altered them within their own religious frameworks and specific situations.

Allocating the Kellis horoscopes to distinct religious communities is not possible, due to the lack of personal names on the document. Who ordered a Greek horoscope for the birth

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[143] Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, 248-50; D. Frankfurter, "The Great, the Little, and the Authoritative Tradition in Magic of the Ancient World," *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 16, no. 1 (2014): 11-30; Frankfurter, *Christianizing Egypt*, 92-100; Th. S. de Bruyn, "P. Ryl. III.471: A Baptismal Anointing Formula Used as an Amulet," *Journal of Theological Studies* 57, no. 1 (2006): 108; A. Luijendijk, *Forbidden Oracles? The Gospel of the Lots of Mary* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014).

[144] Hegedus, *Early Christianity and Ancient Astrology*. K. von Stuckrad, *Das Ringen um die Astrologie: Jüdische und christliche Beiträge zum antiken Zeitverständnis* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2000). With a summary in K. von Stuckrad, "Jewish and Christian Astrology in Late Antiquity: A New Approach," *Numen* 47, no. 1 (2000): 1-40. Christians banned the use of scriptural texts for protective proposes at the Council of Laodicea, but literary as well as archaeological and epigraphical sources witness its widespread use. J. R. Strawbridge, "Early Christian Epigraphy, Evil, and the Apotropaic Function of Romans 8.31," *Vigiliae Christianae* 71 (2017): 315-29.

[145] Pettipiece, *Pentadic Redaction*, 62-68; H. G. Schipper, "Melothesia: A Chapter of Manichaean Astrology in the West," in *Augustine and Manichaeism in the Latin West*, ed. J. van Oort (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 195-204. Earlier discussion in Stuckrad, *Das Ringen,* 743-56; Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire*, 177-79; R. Beck, "The Anabibazontes in the Manichaean Kephalaia," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 69 (1987): 193-96; V. Stegemann, "Zu Kapitel 69 der Kephalaia des Mani," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 37 (1938): 214-23; A. Panaino, "Astrologia e visione della volta celeste nel manicheismo," in *Atti del terzo congresso internazionale di studi: "Manicheismo e Oriente cristiano antico*, ed. L. Cirillo and A. van Tongerloo (Turnhout: Brepols, 1997), 249-95.

[146] Hegedus, *Early Christianity and Ancient Astrology*, 3; Stuckrad, *Das Ringen,* 737-41. In particular noteworthy is the description of the Manichaeans by Mark the Deacon (Debate Manichaean electa Julia and the Christian bishop of Gaza, in the year 397 CE). Manichaeans "believe in horoscopes, fate, and astrology in order to be able to sin without fear since, according to them, we are not really accountable for sin, it is the result of a fateful necessity." Cited and translated in Gardner and Lieu, *MTRE*, no.32. See also 1 Keph. 46 and Hom. 30.2.

[147] K. von Stuckrad, "Interreligious Transfers in the Middle Ages: The Case of Astrology," *Journal of Religion in Europe* 1 (2008): 55.

of their child (the most common occasion for a horoscope)? Based on the find location(s), we cannot exclude the members of the Manichaean community (P.Kell.Gr. 82–84). In fact, an allusion to a celestial power in Matthaios's letter to his mother suggests familiarity with astrological discourse, as he refers to "whether they are dreams (?) or whether it is the sphere (ⲧⲥⲫⲉⲣⲁ)," they might "change and cast us once again towards you."[148] The hope for a benevolent influence of the stars and spheres visible in this letter must have been shared by others, regardless of their religious group. There is no explicit indication of Manichaeanness in this passage, even though it suggests a type of celestial power not unlike the allusions to notions of celestial determinism in the *Kephalaia* (1 Keph. 46, 117.32–118.12 and 48, 122.15), or the Syriac Manichaean fragments from Egypt.[149] Therefore, despite the absence of direct onomastic evidence, it is most likely that the Manichaeans of Kellis were involved in astrological discourse and, presumably, the use of Greek horoscopes.

The celestial power of the stars, or the divine providence of god(s), was not considered as written in stone. Rituals could be performed to influence fortune or move supernatural being(s) in one's favor. Many of these rituals have been classified as "magic," a category that is now widely recognized as problematic.[150] Amulets, spells, and magical alphabets are the material remains of religious practices that were often rejected by members of the institutional elite.[151] Despite this rhetorical rejection, the practitioners draw on

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[148] ⲉⲓϣϫⲉ̣ ⲛ̣̄..ⲥⲟ̣ⲩ ⲛ̣ⲉ ⲉⲓϣϫⲉ ⲧⲥⲫⲉⲣⲁ ⲧⲉ ⲡ̣ⲧ̣ⲱⲡ̣ ⲏ̣ ⲙ̄ⲙⲁⲛ ⲧ̣ⲁⲭⲁ ⲁⲛ ⲛ̄ⲥ̣ⲉϣ̣ⲓⲃⲉ ⲛ̄ⲥⲉⲛⲁϫⲛ̄ ⲛ̄ⲕⲉⲥⲁⲡ ϣⲁⲣⲱⲧⲛ̄· P.Kell.Copt. 25.27-28. The editors note it is difficult to read ⲥⲓⲟⲩ (stars) and therefore suggest to read [ⲡⲉ]ⲥⲟⲩ, and translate "dreams." The editors suggest a general meaning of "a wish (combined with a certain fatalism?) that circumstances will contrive to bring them together again." Gardner, Alcock, and Funk, *CDT1*, 192. Jean-Daniel Dubois translates "ou alors que ce soit des [rêves] ou la sphère de la [zoné]," in which he directly connects the (postulated) persecution with the demons in the zones or layers the soul passes in its ascent. J. D. Dubois, "Une lettre du manichéen Matthaios (P. Kell. Copt. 25)," in *Coptica, Gnostica, Manichaica: Mélanges offerts à Wolf-Peter Funk*, ed. L. Painchaud and P. H. Poirier (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 233. "Sphere" (ⲧⲥⲫⲉⲣⲁ) features in one of the Manichaean texts (P.Kell.Copt. 1, text A, line 6-8), but is also a common term in gnostic texts, see for example the relation between magic, astrology and "spheres" in the *Pistis Sophia*, discussed by J. van der Vliet, "Fate, Magic and Astrology in the *Pistis Sophia*, Chaps 15-21," in *The Wisdom of Egypt*, ed. A. Hilhorst and G.H. van Kooten (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 519-36. Note also that P.Kell.Syr/Copt. 2 deals with the moon-cycle, presumably in relation to the salvation of Light.

[149] The Allberry Fragments from the Cambridge University Library contain, most probably, an astronomical Manichaean text. N. A. Pedersen and J. M. Larsen, eds., *Manichaean Texts in Syriac* (Turnhout: Brepolis, 2013), 193-7.

[150] S. I. Johnston, "Review: Describing the Undefinable: New Books on Magic and Old Problems of Definition," *History of Religions* 43, no. 1 (2003): 50-54; D. Aune, "'Magic' in Early Christianity and Its Ancient Mediterranean Context: A Survey of Some Recent Scholarship," *Annali di storia dell'esegesi* 24 (2007): 229-94. With the exception of H.S. Versnel, "Some Reflections on the Relationship Magic-Religion," *Numen* 38, no. 2 (1991): 177-97.

[151] Among the papyri and ostraka are two examples of school exercises with the alphabet (O.Kell. 157 and P.Kell.Copt. 10). These exercises could have derived from a school, but can also be interpret as magical amulets. See notes at their editions Worp, *Greek Ostraka from Kellis*, no.157. Gardner, Alcock, and Funk, *CDT1*, 126-27. Manichaean rejections of magical practices are found in 1 Keph. 7 and CMC 137-40. P. A. Mirecki, I. Gardner, and A. Alcock, "Magical Spell, Manichaean Letter," in *Emerging from Darkness*, ed. J. D. BeDuhn and P. A. Mirecki (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 10-11 suggest that the author of P.Kell.Copt. 35 may have

elements from institutional or textual religion to bolster their authority. As result, these documents show an intriguing, shared religious *koine* focused on the anxieties of everyday life. Some of these documents employ Christian or Manichaean terminology, while others call on traditional Egyptian deities. The presupposed efficacy was sometimes influenced by the perceived origin of the spell, deity, or formulas, but the appropriation of such powerful elements happened beyond community boundaries.[152]

Text	Content	location
P.Kell.Gr. 85ab	Two magical formularies	House 3
P.Kell.Gr. 86	Fever amulet	House 3
P.Kell.Gr. 87	Fever amulet (copy of Gr. 85b?)	House 3
P.Kell.Gr. 88	Christian (?) liturgical document on a wooden board (amulet?)	House 3
P.Kell.Gr. 91	Greek Manichaean prayer of praise (amulet?)	Street near Houses 1–3
P.Kell.Gr. 92	Greek Manichaean amulet (?) or hymn	House 3
P.Kell.Gr. 93	Sethian invocation/scripture (?)	House 3
P.Kell.Gr. 94	Eulogy/amulet (?) on a wooden board	House 3
P.Gascou 84	Amulet (folded papyrus)	House 4
P.Gascou 85	Amulet (piece of a wooden board)	House 2
P.Gascou 86	Amulet	House 2
P.Gascou 87	Amulet	D/8
P.Gascou 88	Enigmatic text (magical?)	A/10/63
TM 700788	Page of Oracle Book (inv. P96.150) with mixture of names of Greek and Egyptian gods	D/8
P.Kell.Copt. 7	Sayings or amulet (?) (rolled papyrus text?)	House 3
P.Kell.Copt. 35	Personal (Manichaean) letter and magic spell	House 3
P.Kell.Copt. 56	Amulet against snake bite in a miniature papyrus codex	Temple area D/8
P.Kell.Copt. 126	Invocation (?)	House 4

Table 5: List of amulets and related texts from Kellis.

understood this polemic rejection as referring to Zoroastrian ritual, rather than as a full prohibition of "magic."

[152] The role of the practitioner in the composition of the spell is discussed by Shaul Shaked, who points to the incorporation of liturgical elements, or features from the Jewish Hekhalot texts, in some of the spells from incantation bowls. S. Shaked, ""Peace Be Upon You, Exalted Angels": On Hekhalot, Liturgy and Incantation Bowls," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 2 (1995): 197-219. For the Greaco-Egypian milieu, Richard Gordon argues against Frankfurter's "stereotype appropriation," by highlighting Egyptian priestly innovations and techniques to increase their personal authority. R. Gordon, "Shaping the Text: Theory and Practice in Graeco-Egyptian Malign Magic," in *Kykeon: Studies in Honour of H.S. Versnel*, ed. H. F. J. Horstmanshoff, H. W. Singor, and F. T. van Straten (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 69-111; R. Gordon, "Reporting the Marvellous: Private Divination in the Greek Magical Papyri," in *Envisioning Magic: A Princeton Seminar and Symposium*, ed. H. G. Kippenberg and P. Schäfer (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 65-92. The literature on "Christian magic" is extensive and often highlights the problems of associating texts with institutional religious categories. Boustan and Sanzo, "Christian Magicians, Jewish Magical Idioms, " 217-40. On the dynamics between liturgy and magic, see J. van der Vliet, "Literature, Liturgy, Magic: A Dynamic Continuum," in *Christianity in Egypt: Literary Production and Intellectural Trends*, ed. P. Buzi and A. Camplani (Rome: Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 2011), 555-74.

Traditional Egyptian, Christian, and Manichaean elements feature in the spells and amulets. P.Gascou 84 and 85 call on angelic figures; P.Kell.Copt. 56 adjures poison in the name of the "living God" and "Jesus, his Christ, the Nazarene"; P.Kell.Gr. 88 employs a section from a Christian liturgical book; P.Kell.Copt. 35 incorporates a spell in a Manichaean letter; and P.Kell.Gr. 87 calls on the Egyptian goddess of fertility and vegetation Thermuthis for the sake of Pamour and Mother Lo, both of whom we know as Manichaeans. The close relation between different types of religious repertoire has led at least one scholar to wonder whether (one of) these authors were "active participants in the Manichaean scribal mission," who strategically used the spell for the "success of the local mission."[153] The usage of familiar religious elements might have aided the transition of new converts to the Manichaean community. The spell in P.Kell.Copt. 35, for example, was aimed at the separation of a couple, for which "the One sitting above the Cherubim and Seraphim" was invoked.[154] A previous reconstruction of the situation, which suggested that the curse was meant to cut a woman loose from her network in order to integrate into the local Manichaean community, is merely speculation, as there is no explicit evidence for religious conversion at all.[155]

Recent work on the fuzzy boundaries between religious groups in antiquity has opened an alternative route. Rather than directly relating religious elements to a specific religious group, ritual specialists could draw on the various repertoires. A ritual specialist in the oasis saw no problem in invoking a traditional Egyptian deity for the health of two Manichaean individuals, nor was the spell in P.Kell.Copt. 35 specifically Manichaean in nature. [156] The use of specific supernatural names or citations from liturgy and scripture implies that the practitioners attributed a certain authority and efficacy to these features, which they creatively employed in the local ritual context.[157] The alterations in the amulet (?) P.Kell.Gr. 88 may reflect this process of appropriation, as it incorporates a Christian liturgical

[153] P. A. Mirecki, "Manichaeism, Scribal Magic and Papyrus Kellis 35," in *Gnostica et Manichaica*, ed. L. Cirillo and M. Knuppel (Wiesbaden Harrassowitz, 2012), 143-4. Contra previous interpretations in which Mirecki, Gardner and Alcock suggested that "they are not driven by particular evangelical fervour." Mirecki, Gardner, and Alcock, "Magical Spell, Manichaean Letter," 30.

[154] Τὸν καθήμενον ἐπάνω Χερουβὶν καὶ Σαρουφὶν P.Kell.Copt. 35.2-3.

[155] Contra Mirecki, "Manichaeism, Scribal magic and Papyrus Kellis 35"; Th. S. de Bruyn, *Making Amulets Christian: Artefacts, Scribes, and Contexts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 229-33.

[156] K. A. Worp, "Miscellaneous New Greek Papyri from Kellis," in *Mélanges Jean Gascou*, ed. J. L. Fournet and A. Papaconstantinou (Paris: Association des Amis du Centre d'Histoire et Civilisation de Byzance, 2016), 478 points for example to the use of the names of Christian angels in "pagan" contexts. Angels are also called on in Iranian Manichaean incantation texts, including incantation bowls, see E. Morano, "Manichaean Middle Iranian Incantation Texts," in *Turfan Revisited: The First Century of Research into the Arts and Cultures of the Silk Road*, ed. D. Durkin-Meisterernst, et al. (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 2004), 221-27; J. D. BeDuhn, "Magical Bowls and Manichaeans," in *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, ed. M. Meyer and P. A. Mirecki (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 419-34. Mirecki also notes the problem that the ritual text is "completely empty of any reference to Manichaean myth or Manichaean technical terms," but considers this as the integration of "indigenous ritual" for missional purposes. Mirecki, "Scribal Magic " 13.

[157] Frankfurter, "The Great, the Little, and the Authoritative Tradition," 12.

formula in a Manichaean context.[158] The introductory remarks made by Ouales in his letter accompanying a spell (P.Kell.Copt. 35) also hint at the decision-making process of the ritual specialist. Ouales used this freedom to send an alternative to a requested spell (which was lost): "[T]his is what I have found near me… for the other one is written on a small fragment of papyrus, and I did not find it…"[159] Ouales's choice for a separation spell (*diakopos*) is introduced with the words "perhaps this is what you need," which suggests prior correspondence about the purpose of the spell.[160] The placement of the amulet at the top of the papyrus and the empty spots for the clients' name, imply that the recipient needed a specific spell that was "traditional, tested, and efficacious" and could be applied to new situations and customers.[161]

Most exotic is the discovery of a fourteen-week-old fetus, found in an upper room of House 4. It was wrapped in linen and found among the wall debris of upper room 7b. The extensive wrapping of this fetus resembles the wrapping of amulets rather than the treatment of mummies.[162] While fetuses are not common in spells, David Frankfurter points to one papyrus in which a fetus was thrown (!) toward a victim as part of an aggressive curse-spell. Rather than deriving its authority from Egyptian or Manichaean cosmological or mythological stories, the impurity and weirdness of the object may have contributed to the postulated power of the spell.[163] A less spectacular interpretation of the fetus would be that it was placed in the wall awaiting burial, without the intention to serve as a hidden amulet.[164]

Together, the horoscopes, calendars of good and bad days, spells, and amulets show the continuing interest in celestial powers and the efficacy of specific rituals. Horoscopes were ordered until the end of the fourth century. Spells and amulets were collected and sent on request, with or without alterations to reflect group-specific terminology. Even though some members of the Christian and Manichaean institutional elite may have frowned on

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[158] C. Römer, R. W. Daniel, and K. A. Worp, "Das Gebet zur Handauflegung bei Kranken in P.Barc. 155.19 - 156.5 und P.Kellis I 88," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 119 (1997): 129 are careful with the Manichaean association, but note that the final lines on Christ as savior in the original document are missing in Kellis. It's find location in House 3 ties it closely to the Manichaean households of Kellis.

[159]πε πει εϥϩην αραϊ… ϫε ερε πκεογε cнϩ αγ[κο]γι ⲛ̄λεκμε ⲛ̄χαρτнc ⲙ̄πιϭⲛτϥ… P.Kell.Copt. 35.28, 30-31. There is no reason to assume Psais had sent a spell to Ouales previously, contra E. O. D. Love, *Code-Switching with the Gods: The Bilingual (Old Coptic-Greek) Spells of PGM IV (P. Bibliothèque Nationale Supplément Grec. 574) and Their Linguistic, Religious, and Socio-Cultural Context in Late Roman Egypt* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 173.

[160] P.Kell.Copt. 35.14. On similar spells, see Mirecki, Gardner, and Alcock, "Magical Spell, Manichaean Letter," 23-27.

[161] Mirecki, Gardner, and Alcock, "Magical Spell, Manichaean Letter," 9. See also M. Dickie, *Magic and Magicians in the Greco-Roman World* (London: Routledge, 2001), 303-4; K. Dosoo, *Rituals of Apparition in the Theban Magical Library* (Unpublished PhD dissertatie: Macquarie University, Sydney, 2014), 164-5; Love, *Code-Switching with the Gods*, 273-79.

[162] D. Frankfurter, "Fetus Magic and Sorcery Fears in Roman Egypt," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 46 (2006): 43.

[163] Frankfurter, "Fetus Magic," 55.

[164] This was the original interpretation by Gillian Bowen. The magical interpretation by Frankfurter is called into question by R.W. Daniel, "P.Mich. Vi 423-424 without Magic," *Zeitschrift fuř Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 200 (2016): 389-97.

these practices, and Roman emperors labored to forbid them, Kellites continued to appeal to celestial powers, using elements from various repertoires to protect themselves from harm.

3.4.4 Christian Institutions and Repertoire

If you could measure Christianization by counting church buildings, the Dakhleh Oasis must have been profoundly Christianized during the fourth century. The remains of eight church buildings have been found, three of which were located in Kellis.[165] Soon after the rise of Constantine, the first basilica-type church was built. Church buildings and references to ecclesiastical offices in papyri reflect the introduction of Christian institutions in the oasis, presumably well before the arrival of Manichaeans. I will use the designation "Church" for convenience's sake, to distinguish these buildings from the domestic architecture. It has to be borne in mind that these buildings had a wide range of usages, not all explicitly religious or "Christian." As we will see, it is difficult to discern what kinds of Christian practices were performed in these spaces.

a) The East Churches (Area A)

At walking distance from Houses 1–3 and directly next to House 5 stood two churches: a large basilica church and a smaller house-church. A third church was found closer to the temple complex (the West Church).

The excavations of the Small East Church revealed a domestic unit with major architectural modifications to facilitate its usage as church. Benches were added to the walls, cupboards were built, and the entire room was gypsum coated. Between the benches on the south wall, an apse with two side chambers was constructed, framed by three arches with pilasters on either side. The apse was decorated with geometrical motives and beneath those decorations was a slightly raised platform that could be screened off by wooden doors.[166]

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[165] I am not convinced that this is the best way of measuring Christianization, and I tend to disagree with Gillian Bowen's assessment of the rise of Christianity in the oasis. Frankfurter's approach to Christianity, on the other hand, seems to exclude any type of organized Christianity (with church buildings and regular gatherings for the liturgy) at all. Frankfurter, *Christianizing Egypt*, 237-242. Apart from the church buildings at Kellis, there was one at 'Ain al-Sebil, 'Ain al-Gedida, Dayr al- Makak (although maybe from a later date), Amheida, and Dayr Abu Matta. On the church in Ain El-Gedida, see N. Aravecchia, *Christians of the Western Desert in Late Antiquity: The Fourth-Century Church Complex of Ain El-Gedida, Upper Egypt* (University of Minnesota Ph.D. dissertation: University of Minnesota Digital Conservancy, 2009), 108-9. The fourth-century church from Amheida is discussed in Bagnall et al., *An Oasis City*, 119-30 (Aravecchia). On Dayr Abu Matta, see G. E. Bowen, "The Church of Dayr Abu Matta and Its Associated Structures: An Overview of Four Seasons of Excavation," in *Oasis Papers 6*, ed. R. S. Bagnall, P. Davoli, and C. A. Hope (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2012), 429-50. Another Christian building (a church?) may have been located in the temple temenos of Mut al-Kharab. G. E. Bowen, "Christianity at Mut Al-Kharab (Ancient Mothis), Dakhleh Oasis, Egypt," in *The Cultural Manifestations of Religious Experience. Studies in Honour of Boyo G. Ockinga*, ed. C. Di Biase-Dyson and L. Donovan (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2017), 241-48.

[166] G. E. Bowen, "The Small East Church at Ismant el-Kharab," in *Oasis Papers 3*, ed. G. E. Bowen and C. A. Hope (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2003), 159 with photographs. See the description of the decoration in Knudstad and Frey, "Kellis: The Architectural Survey," 205-7. On the Large East Church, P. Grossmann, "Typological Considerations on the Large East Church at Ismant el-Kharab," in *Dakhleh Oasis Project:*

Below one of the niches on the side was a decorated rectangular panel with a *crux ansata*.[167] The other main room of the modified house was easily accessible from the main room through two doorways. It may have functioned as a separate liturgical room for catechumens who were not allowed to see the performed rituals, while they did receive oral instructions by the preacher in the other room. Alternatively, it could have been used as a communal dining area.[168]

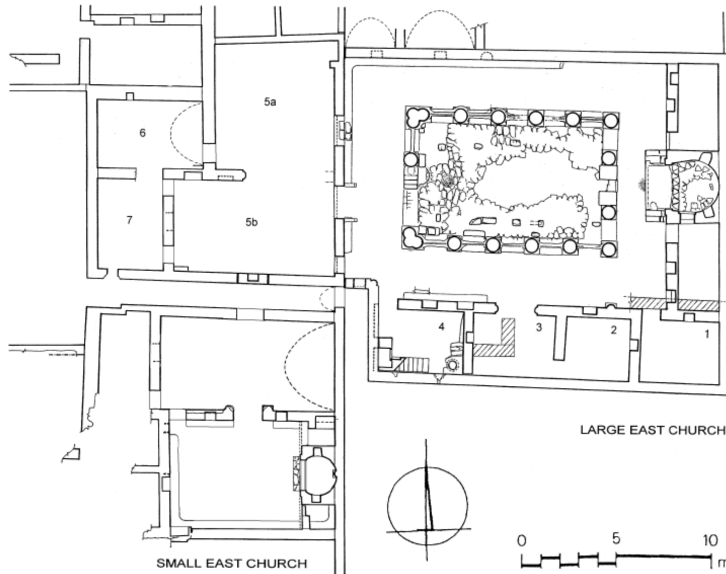

Figure 10: Plan of the East Churches (Area A). Courtesy of the Dakhleh Oasis Project (Colin Hope). Derived from the DOP website: http://artsonline.monash.edu.au/ancient-kellis/the-east-church-complex, last updated 7 May 2013.

As it predates the Large East Church next door, the Small East Church is best understood as modified house-church. Its layout resembles Early Christian church structures like the *domus ecclesia* at Dura-Europos. Numismatic evidence points to a date not long after 306 CE for the modifications in the building, which continued to be used until about the first half of the fourth century.[169] The last years of its usage must have been contemporaneous

Preliminary Reports on the 1994-1995 to 1998-1999 Field Seasons, ed. C. A. Hope and G. E. Bowen (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2002), 153-56.

[167] The plaster of the large East church also revealed the remains of a *crux ansata*, while there are no decorations preserved in the West Church, probably due to higher erosion on this edge of the site. G. E. Bowen, "The Crux Ansata in Early Christian Iconography: Evidence from Dakhleh and Kharga Oases," in *Le myrte et la rose. Mélanges offerts à Françoise Dunand par ses élèves, collègues et amis*, ed. G. Tallet and C. Zivie-Coche (Montpellier: CENIM, 2014), 291-303.

[168] Bowen, "The Small East Church," 162.

[169] This is based on coin finds. G. E. Bowen, "Coins as Tools for Dating the Foundation of the Large East Church at Kellis: Problems and a Possible Solution," in *Oasis Papers 6*, ed. R. S. Bagnall, P. Davoli, and C. A. Hope (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2012), 426-7. For a recent discussion of other early church buildings, see E.

with the Large East Church, which was founded in the second or third decade of the fourth century.[170] The construction of a basilica within two decades after the house-church suggests a sharp increase in the number of Christians and a change in their public visibility, presumably caused by the changing legal status of Christianity.

The Large East Church was built on an east–west axis and comprised a central nave with apse and two aisles on all sides. The nave contained benches alongside two walls, opposite the raised bema platform, and could hold about two hundred people.[171] Significant is the architectural layout with an apse, which became one of the prime characteristics of Early Christian architecture. Other sites in the oasis also contained early examples of the basilica with apse structures. In Ain el-Gedida, the apse was even built on the public road, leading to a more complex (and thus highly visible) infrastructural situation. For some reason, the Christians in the oasis decided to adopt the characteristic basilica structure as a visible component of their religious position. In terms of decoration, the apse above the platform of the Large East Church was roofed with a semicircular dome with at least one *crux ansata* on the edge of the apse.[172] Among the debris of the floor, several fragments of painted glass were found, whose depictions are said to be reminiscent of biblical iconography.[173] An extended structure on the west of the central nave comprised four rooms, one of which had two ovens, suggesting that dining and food preparation took place at a short distance from the meeting place.

The church and its officials are attested in the papyri. The church (ἐκλησία) is mentioned in the KAB as receiving expenditure from the *dapane* account (KAB 880, 883) or direct disbursements of wheat "to the church for the bishop" (εἰς ἐκλησία τῷ ἐπισκόπῳ KAB 620–1). The bishop is mentioned once again when he receives jujubes (KAB 706). None of these instances indicate whether he (and his church) was based in Kellis or elsewhere.[174]

Adams, *The Earliest Christian Meeting Places: Almost Exclusively Houses?* (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2016), 89-112.

[170] Its early date suggests that it may have served as the central and primary basilica of the village, modeled on the early basilicas built at cities in the Nile valley like Antinoopolis or Hermopolis. G. E. Bowen, "The Fourth-Century Churches at Ismant el-Kharab," in *Dakhleh Oasis Project: Preliminary Reports on the 1994-1995 to 1998-1999 Field Seasons* ed. C. A. Hope and G. E. Bowen (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2002), 84 on the basis of comparative material from early Constantinian basilicas.

[171] Other fragments with *crux ansata* figures were found on a pair of engaged columns. Bowen, "The Spread of Christianity in Egypt," 18.

[172] Bowen, "Fourth-Century Churches," 71.

[173] Bowen, "Fourth-Century Churches," 84. On glass in Kellis, see C. Marchini, "Glass from the 1993 Excavations at Ismant el-Kharab," in *Dakhleh Oasis Project: Preliminary Reports on the 1992-1993 and 1993-1994 Field Seasons*, ed. C. A. Hope and A. J. Mills (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 1999), 75-82. Images of these "biblical" themes have not (yet) been published, but at least one is announced as "a child swathed" or a "nativity scene." Thurston, *Secrets of the Sands*, 297.

[174] Bagnall suggests that the bishop was located in Mothis. Bagnall, *KAB*, 81. Wipszycka stresses that the centralization of the institutional church and the increasing power of the Alexandrian bishops took place during the second half of the third century. By the fourth century, therefore, a network of bishoprics was in place. E. Wipszycka, "The Institutional Church," in *Egypt in the Byzantine World, 300-700*, ed. R. S. Bagnall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 333.

Apart from this bishop, there are about six presbyters mentioned in the KAB: Pakous, Psenpnouthes, Psais, Psennouphis, Valerius, and Timotheos.[175] One deacon is listed as receiving jujubes.[176] While their names and the disbursements are recorded, no further information about these individuals is available. All seem to be involved in everyday economic transactions with the estate, not necessarily as representatives of the local churches.[177]

Could any of the church officials mentioned in the KAB have belonged to the Manichaean community? The Manichaeans designated their communal body as "the church" and they knew bishops, presbyters, and deacons in their ranks. Some voices have been raised about the possibility of a Manichaean monastery (see Chapter 7) in the oasis. Could these church officials have been associated with this monastery? In my opinion, we should be careful not to stretch the evidence this far. Although it is not entirely impossible, it remains best to assume that most presbyters and deacons belonged to non-Manichaean Christian communities, unless further strong evidence suggests otherwise.

Presbyters not only feature as tenants in the account book, but were also called on as witnesses and scribes of legal documents. In an official request to the *dux* (352 CE), the inhabitants of Kellis, headed by a presbyter and two deacons, request support against a certain Hatres (P.Kell.Gr. 24.11). Interestingly, among the individuals who signed the petition is Aurelius Pamour (III) son of Psais, one of the Manichaeans of House 3.[178] The prominent role of the priest and the deacons at the start of this list indicates their elevated social status within the community. Other references to priests specify them as "priest of the catholic church" (πρεσβυ[τ]έρου καθολικῆς ἐκκλησίας P.Kell.Gr. 24.3). This specific phrase returns in a lease document from 364 CE and an agreement from 337 CE (P.Kell.Gr. 532.21 and 58.8). Another presbyter witnessed the manumission of a slave and is referred to without this additional designation (P.Kell.Gr. 48.20, from 355 CE). The additional "catholic" as early as 337 CE is outstanding. In a village context, it most probably designates the most important church of the village.[179] At this point in time, it did not refer to a particular branch of Christianity and there is no reason to understand this designator as a type of self-

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[175] Pakous (KAB 142 if you follow Bagnall's reconstruction), Psenpnouthes (KAB 575-6, 1155-6 and 1179-80 only calling him "father"), Psais (KAB 1315 and possibly again without his title 1179-80), Psennouphis (KAB 96 designated only as "father"), Valerius (KAB 707, designated only as "father") and Timotheos (KAB 1307, designated only as "father").

[176] Petros *diakonos* (KAB 1576), presumably not to be identified with Petros *monachos* (see section 7.4).

[177] This is not unremarkable. The documentary sources appear to have the same selection-bias as the literary texts that inform us about the institutional church. Clergy are widely attested on and off duty in the papyri. A. Luijendijk, "On and Beyond Duty: Christian Clergy at Oxyrhynchus (C. 250 - 400)," in *Beyond Priesthood: Religious Entrepreneurs and Innovators in the Roman Empire*, ed. R. Gordon, G. Petridou, and J. Rüpke (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 103-26.

[178] Worp, *GPK1*, 75 unaware of the indications of this name.

[179] Worp, *GPK1*, 159. E. Wipszycka, "Καθολική et les autres épithètes." In the course of the fourth century, this title designates churches affiliated with the Alexandrian church. Wipszycka, *The Alexandrian Church*, 108-10.

differentiation in direct competition with the Manichaeans, who considered themselves to be the "holy church."

When exactly Christianity spread into the oasis is hard to determine. The tentative date of the modifications of the Small East Church soon after 306 CE and the subsequent construction of the Large East Church suggest a rapid growth in the early fourth century, but little is known about the time prior to this.[180] Gillian Bowen has attempted to pinpoint the earliest evidence for Christianity in the oasis through Christian names with patronyms. She tentatively suggests the presence of Christians in the village from about the 250s CE.[181] However, what exactly counts as a Christian name is open for debate. Some scholars believe names cannot be taken as indicators of religious identifications, since traditional names continued to run in the family (think of Tithoes, the carpenter of House 2). This makes it difficult to be certain about the presence of Christians in the oasis before the fourth century.[182]

Terminology and textual finds pointing to the "catholic church" instead of containing Manichaean features are found in the domestic unit close to the Temple (D/8, a papyrus leaf with Psalm 9 in Greek), the temple area (P.Kell.Copt. 128, a personal letter with Christian overtones), and House 4 (P.Kell.Copt. 126, invocation (?) with Christian overtones). This latter house also contained a letter (P.Kell.Copt. 124) of two presbyters, Besas (designated Apa Besas on the address) and Agathemeros, addressing their "blessed father" Stephanos in strong Christian vocabulary, while Hor "the subdeacon" (ϩⲱⲣ ⲡϩⲩⲡⲟⲇⲓⲁⲕⲟⲛⲟⲥ) added his postscript on the verso.[183] By the fourth century, the Alexandrian bishop was extending his control through regional bishops, of which there were at least fifty-seven by the end of the

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[180] The earliest documentary attestation of Christianity is dated 319 CE (PUG 20, P.Med. Inv. 68.82) See Wagner, *Les oasis d'Égypte*, 327-8. French translation in D.C. Gofas, "Quelques observations sur un papyrus contenant un contrat de société (PU. G II Appendice I),," in *Studi in onore fi Arnaldo Biscardi S.J.*, ed. F. Pastori (Milano: Istituto editoriale Cisalpino, 1982), 499-505. The text is a contract between two parties for transportation and commerce in the oasis. The formula in which God is called on for help identified them as Christians.

[181] Bowen, "Some Observations," 174.

[182] Klaas Worp has recently attempted to relate the three church buildings to significant numbers of Christian names in ostraka and papyri. His discussion and lists shows some of the problematic assumptions behind the notion of 'Christian names'. K. A. Worp, "Christian Personal Names in Documents from Kellis (Dakhleh Oasis)," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 195 (2015): 193-99. On the possibility of counting the number of "Christian names" and using them to discuss the Christianization of Egypt, see the following exchange. M. Depauw and W. Clarysse, "How Christian Was Fourth Century Egypt? Onomastic Perspectives on Conversion," *Vigiliae Christianae* 67, no. 4 (2013): 407-35; D. Frankfurter, "Onomastic Statistics and the Christianization of Egypt: A Response to Depauw and Clarysse," *Vigiliae Christianae* 68, no. 3 (2014): 284-89; M. Depauw and W. Clarysse, "Christian Onomastics: A Response to Frankfurter," *Vigiliae Christianae* 69, no. 3 (2015): 327-29. In his most recent contribution, Frankfurter takes Christian names to suggest the families' inclination to endow children with the blessings of Christian saints. Frankfurter, *Christianizing Egypt*, 5 and 38-9.

[183] P.Kell.Copt. 124.v40. For this ecclesiastical position and the ἀρχιδιάκονος mentioned in an unpublished Greek document from House 4, see Gardner, Alcock, and Funk, *CDT2*, 276; E. Wipszycka, "Les ordres mineurs dans l'église d'Égypte du IVe au VIIIe siècle," *Journal of Juristic Papyrology* 23 (1993): 181-215.

century.[184] In theory, at least, this structure would have kept the church firmly under Alexandrian control. The reality was different, as the fourth century started with chaotic leadership changes when the emperor exiled Athanasius four times from his seat, while Athanasius himself vigorously labored to gather popular and monastic support for his position.[185]

A remarkable Greek letter, found at House 4, may attest to these blurred and contested religious group boundaries, as it contains a letter from a church official (?) to several priests about the regalia that had been taken from him. The letter was written in a highly skilled hand, probably during the second half of the fourth century. It contains several scriptural allusions or quotations that connote Jewishness or Christianness, but never correspond to known religious texts. The remarkable features of the text (including a reference to the prophet Jeremias, an unknown priestly office, and a list of extravagant treasures) make it impossible to determine with certainty either a Manichaean or a "catholic" Christian background, but rather they convey a sense of highly skilled textuality based in a broad (and presumably shared) religious milieu.[186]

Biblical texts and ecclesiastical language are not the most reliable indicators of Christianity, as the copy of two New Testament texts in House 3 suggests. They were probably read by Manichaeans as well as Christians (see Chapter 9). Even with an explicit identification, the meaning of the phrases and the type of Christianity remains open to interpretation. In a Greek manumission document for a female slave, freed in the presence of a priest, the "most reverend father Psekes," the author boasts about his motives as stemming from "my exceptional Christianity, under Zeus, Earth, and Sun" (ὑπερβολὴν χ[ρι]στιανότητος ἀπελευθρωκέναι σε ὑπὸ Δία Γήν Ἥλιος P.Kell.Gr. 48.4–5).[187] This combination of Christianity with the traditional formula "under Zeus, Earth, and Sun," illustrates the mixture of traditional and Christian repertoire. The openness to combining phrases and practices from multiple repertoires shows the idiosyncrasies of everyday religion, even in the face of nascent Christian institutions.

b) West Church and West Tombs (Area D)

Close to the Main Temple are the remains of the West Church, built during the mid-fourth century and in use until the 390s. The mud-brick building consisted of two rooms, one of which had an apse to the east. Benches were lined up with the walls of both rooms and the

[184] Wipszycka, *The Alexandrian Church*, 108-09.

[185] D. Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

[186] The text is published and discussed in I. Gardner and K. A. Worp, "A Most Remarkable Fourth Century Letter in Greek, Recovered from House 4 at Ismant el-Kharab," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 205 (2018): 127-42. An inscription from Trimithis has been interpreted as highlighting religious competition, see Bagnall et al., *An Oasis City*, 131-33.

[187] The editor notes the possible presence of monks (line 11), which would be significant if this text was a "manumissio in ecclesia." Worp, *GPK1*, 142-3. The combination of the traditional formula used in manumissions (E.g. P.Oxy. IV 722.6) with Christian elements is also attested in P.Edmonstone 7-9, discussed at Dijkstra, *Philae and the End of Ancient Egyptian Religion*, 58-59.

apse was slightly raised with a bema platform. The ancillary rooms of the church contained benches and traces of a hearth, probably used during communal meal gatherings.[188] Two graves were located inside the nave of this church, in front of the platform, containing the bodies of a man and a six-month-old infant.[189] The east–west direction of these graves, combined with the lack of burial goods, has contributed to their identification as "Christian graves."[190] Similar graves along the walls of the church and inside its enclosure, all postdating its construction, followed the same arrangements. They all held single interments laid in a simple pit, some covered with low-stepped mud-brick structures. One of the graves had a small bowl at the head end, containing pieces of charcoal. According to Bowen, this may have been a Eucharist offered at the graveside.[191]

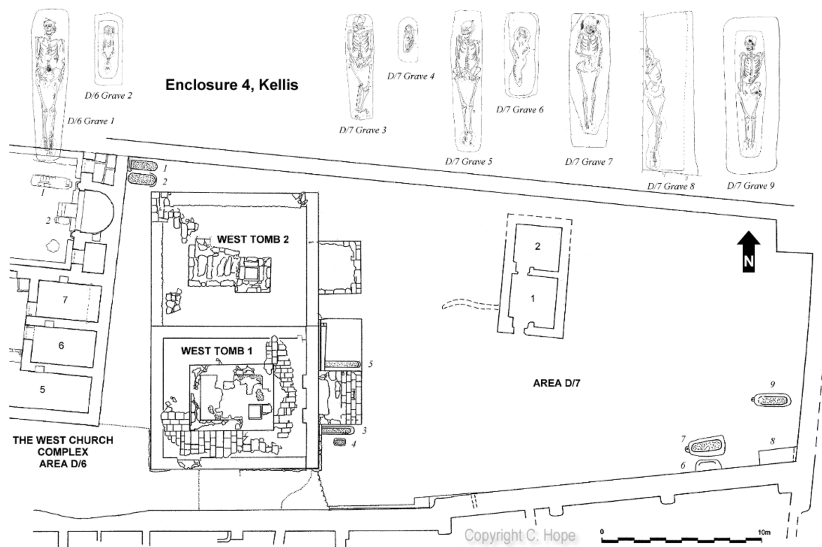

Figure 11: Plan of Enclosure 4 with the West Church and Tombs (with enlarged representations of the graves). Courtesy of the Dakhleh Oasis Project (Colin Hope). Derived from the DOP website: http://artsonline.monash.edu.au/ancient-kellis/west-church-complex, last updated May 7, 2013.

The church building and these graves were built right next to two monumental tombs on a platform. These West Tombs are from an earlier date; the original interments in the monumental structures derived from the period before the construction of the West Church.[192] Presumably originating in the second century, these tombs were reused for burials

[188] Bowen, "Fourth-Century Churches," 78. Among the objects found were ceramic vessels, coins, mud jar sealings, ostraka and a fragment of inscribed and uninscribed papyri. These papyri have not yet been edited, but G. Bowen assures me they are of an economic nature and do not further inform us about the nature of the church. Bowen, *Personal Communication,* May 2016.

[189] Bowen, "Some Observations," 176-7.

[190] Bowen, "Fourth-Century Churches," 78 therefore identified it as a church, contra earlier interpretations by Peter Grossmann.

[191] *Ibid*.

[192] Hope, "A Brief Report on the Excavations at Ismant el-Kharab in 1992-93," 21.

in the third and fourth century. The burials inside West Tomb 1 resembled the interments of the East Cemetery in their lack of traditional funerary items. Several golden rings with gems were found on the bodies. At least eleven people were buried in this tomb and their bodies had only received limited postmortem treatment.[193]

Moving a little more to the east side of the enclosure, a small, two-room structure was erected, either as superstructure above family graves, or as gathering place for funerary rituals.[194] The seven-room structure south of the West Church presumably fulfilled a similar function, as the benches, jars, and hearth point to the preparation of food (room 1).[195] Immediately east of the two-room structure, moreover, several deposits with decorated glass were found, including a colorful jug with depictions of gladiators, dating from the second half of the fourth century.[196] Whether this jug was lost, disposed of, or intentionally left near the graves is difficult to assert. It may have conveyed an ideological message about gladiator games and Roman culture, but could just as well have been a luxury item displaying wealth and social status.

3.4.5 Funerary Traditions: The West and East Cemeteries

The two cemeteries outside of the village proper (Kellis 1 and Kellis 2) yielded bioarchaeological materials that inform us about the mummification and burial customs, as well as local diet, diseases, and life expectancy.[197] Most importantly, the cemeteries have been understood as reflecting a sharp differentiation between Christian burial practice and all

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[193] G. E. Bowen, "Early Christian Burial Practices at Kellis, Dakhleh Oasis, Egypt," *Artefact* 26, no. 1 (2003): 84; C. A. Hope and J. McKenzie, "Interim Report on the West Tombs," in *Dakhleh Oasis Project: Preliminary Reports on the 1992-1993 and 1993-1994 Field Seasons*, ed. C. A. Hope and A.J. Mills (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 1999), 60-61.

[194] Bowen, "Some Observations," 177 calls the option of a family tomb "unlikely."

[195] Bowen, "Some Observations," 177.

[196] C. A. Hope and H. Whitehouse, "The Gladiator Jug from Ismant el-Kharab," in *Oasis Papers 3*, ed. C. A. Hope and G. E. Bowen (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2003), 290-310.

[197] A.C. Aufderheide et al., "Mummification Practices at Kellis Site in Egypt's Dakhleh Oasis," *Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities* 31 (2004): 63-77; A.C. Aufderheide et al., "Human Mummification Practices at Ismant el-Kharab," *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 85 (1999): 197-210; T.L. Dupras and Schwarcz, "Strangers in a Strange Land: Stable Isotope Evidence for Human Migration in the Dakhleh Oasis, Egypt," *Journal of Archaeological Science* 28 (2001): 1199-208; T. L. Dupras and M.W. Tocheri, "Reconstructing Infant Weaning Histories at Roman Period Kellis, Egypt Using Stable Isotope Analysis of Dentition," *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 134 (2007): 63-74; T. L. Dupras et al., "Birth in Ancient Egypt: Timing, Trauma, and Triumph? Evidence from the Daklah Oasis," in *Egyptian Bioarchaeology: Humans, Animals and the Environment* ed. S. Ikram, J. Kaiser, and R. Walker (Leiden: Sidestone Press, 2015): 41-53; M. W. Tocheri et al., "Roman Period Fetal Skeletons from the East Cemetery (Kellis 2) of Kellis,Egypt," *International Journal of Osteoarchaeology* 15 (2005): 326–41; S. Fairgrieve and J. E. Molto, "Cribra Orbitalia in Two Temporally Disjunct Population Samples from the Dakhleh Oasis, Egypt," *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 111, no. 3 (2000): 319-31; J. E. Molto, "Bio–Archaeological Research of Kellis 2: An Overview," in *Dakhleh Oasis Project: Preliminary Reports on the 1994-1995 to 1998-1999 Field Seasons*, ed. C. A. Hope and G. E. Bowen (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2002), 239-55; J. E. Molto, "The Comparative Skeletal Biology and Paleoepidemiology of the People from Ein Tirghi and Kellis, Dakhleh, Egypt," in *Oasis Papers 1*, ed. C. A. Marlow and A. J. Mills (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2001), 81-100.

other traditional customs. Chapter 8 will examine these funerary practices for evidence of Manichaean burials.

The West Cemetery (Kellis 1) has been dated to the late Ptolemaic and early Roman period, based on ceramics.[198] This cemetery consisted of a large number of tombs cut into the clay and the higher sandstone terrace, most with low ceilings and single chambers. These chambers had narrow entrances and they followed the contours of the hill, without a particular common orientation.[199] Most of the graves were disturbed by grave robbers, even though they were closed off by wooden doors or large sandstone slabs, which could be opened or replaced when new bodies were added to the tomb chambers.[200] In this cemetery, the bodies were not placed in coffins but were wrapped in shrouds and placed on funerary beds.[201] A few had cartonnage head and foot coverings, which was not unusual in the oasis.[202] One of the bodies was covered with a gilded cartonnage representing the god Tutu, and other grave goods included small wooden sculptures depicting the *ba*, the soul of the deceased. These *ba*-birds were equipped with human heads and outspread wings, which according to Olaf Kaper "represent an archaizing feature in the tomb equipment of the oases that had virtually disappeared elsewhere."[203] Libation tables reused in some of the fourth-century buildings probably came from these tombs and were used in the context of ritual commemoration.[204]

A parallel to these archaizing features of funerary culture at Kellis is the construction of two funerary pyramids at the cemetery of Trimithis. These two mud-brick superstructures stood above mausoleum tombs and were visible from a great distance. Together with similarly styled pyramids from Mut, these tombs are among the few Roman revivals of this ancient funerary tradition.[205]

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[198] M. Birrell, "Excavations in the Cemeteries of Ismant el-Kharab," in *Dakhleh Oasis Project: Preliminary Reports on the 1992-1993 and 1993-1994 Field Seasons*, ed. C. A. Hope and A. J. Mills (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 1999), 29. Although more recent insights doubt the early start at the Ptolemaic period and assign the cemetery to the first to third century CE Hope, "The Kellis 1 Cemetery," 331.
[199] Birrell, "Excavations in the Cemeteries of Ismant el-Kharab," 31.
[200] Hope, "The Kellis 1 Cemetery," 326-7.
[201] There are some traces of funerary beds. Hope, "The Kellis 1 Cemetery," 330.
[202] A. Schweitzer, "Les parures de cartonnage des momies d'une nécropole d'Ismant el-Kharab," in *Dakhleh Oasis Project: Preliminary Reports on the 1994-1995 to 1998-1999 Field Seasons*, ed. C. A. Hope and G. E. Bowen (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2002), 269-76.
[203] Citation and references in Kaper, "The Western Oases," 728.
[204] Hope, "The Kellis 1 Cemetery," 328.
[205] Bagnall et al., *An Oasis City*, 112-16 (Kaper).

The East Cemetery (Kellis 2) was located on the other side of the wadi. It contained about three to four thousand interments. In contrast to the West Cemetery, only single interments were found, in pit graves with an east–west orientation.[206] Few of these graves contained burial objects such as jewelry or amulets, but no traditional grave gifts have been found. Instead, most graves were only covered with pottery shreds, with large pieces covering the face of the deceased.[207] Another difference with the West Cemetery is the large number of infant burials. These fetuses were buried in shallow pits among adult graves at the East Cemetery. This practice has been interpreted in relation to the Christian concept of the soul, as the practice is uncommon in earlier cemeteries.[208] The inclusion of children's burials was paralleled in the cemetery of Bagawat, Kharga Oasis, where some of them were found with Christian names and symbols.[209] The treatment of the bodies in the East Cemetery was relatively limited. Fewer bodies showed traces of elaborate postmortem treatment, although the mummification practices in the West Cemetery also varied, from a full body treatment to cheaper treatment with resin and linen.[210] Many of these features have been understood as the difference between two coherent religious traditions: traditional Egyptian practices in the West Cemetery and Christian funerary practice in the East Cemetery. In Bowen's words: "Separate cemeteries; separate customs."[211] The neat division between a Christian cemetery and a "pagan" cemetery as early as the fourth century seems too good to be true.[212] The only

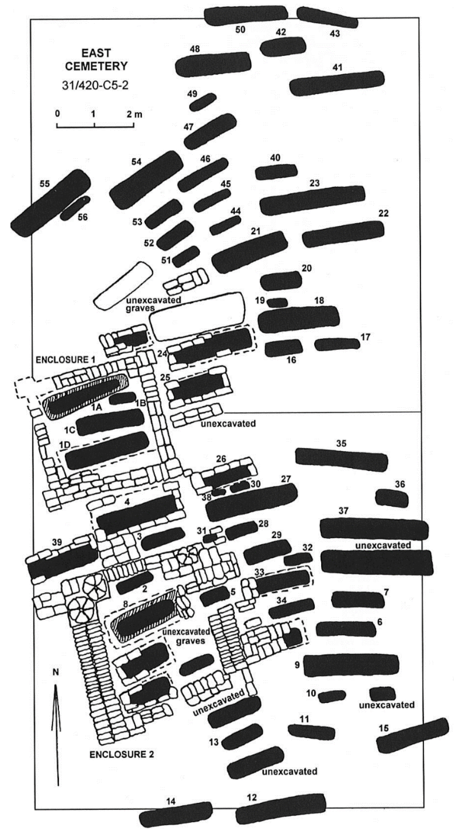

Figure 12: Plan of a section of the East Cemetery. Courtesy of the Dakhleh Oasis Project (Colin Hope). Derived from Birrell, "Excavations," 39.

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206 Birrell, "Excavations in the Cemeteries of Ismant el-Kharab," 38.

207 Size estimated in J. E. Molto, "Bio–Archaeological Research of Kellis 2," 41. Interestingly, at the Christian necropolis of el-Deir (Kharga) the East-West orientation is not the only orientation, as a second group of graves had a n/w-s/e orientation. M. Coudert, "The Christian Necropolis of El-Deir in the North of Kharga Oasis," in *Oasis Papers 6*, ed. R. S. Bagnall, P. Davoli, and C. A. Hope (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2013), 451-58.

208 Tocheri et al., "Roman Period Fetal Skeletons from the East Cemetery (Kellis 2) of Kellis, Egypt," 326–41; Bowen, "Some Observations," 178; G. E. Bowen, "Child, Infant and Foetal Burials of the Late Roman Period at Ismant el-Kharab Ancient Kellis, Dakhleh Oasis," in *L'enfant et la mort dans l'antiquite II,* ed. M. D. Nenna (Alexandria: Centre d'Études Alexandrines, 2012), 351-72.

209 The inclusion of children's burials was paralleled in the cemetery of Bagawat, Kharga Oasis, were large number of foetuses, infants and children were found combined with Christian names and *cruces ansatae* on the grave stelae. Bowen, "Child, Infant and Foetal Burials," 369.

210 Bowen, "Some Observations," 172.

211 Bowen, "Some Observations," 169.

instance in which a Christian identification was made explicit in the Kellis interments was in North Tomb 1. The tomb contained decorations of traditional Egyptian gods and the organization of the bodies suggests that the tomb was regularly opened to include recently deceased family members.[213] The last interments are different. These bodies were aligned with an east–west orientation, they lacked grave goods, and were only wrapped in linen. In this instance, a firm identification with Christianity has been found in the gypsum sealing with a *crux ansata*, found among the plaster decorations.[214] Religion, therefore, mattered in the funerary sphere, even if it may not have correlated one-on-one with identifiable religious groups (as I will argue in Chapter 8).

3.5 Conclusions

This overview of the social and economic context of ancient Kellis highlights the multiple repertoires available as cultural and religious options. It points to a strong attachment to traditional Egyptian traditions as well as a desire for Classical education and Greco-Roman-style decorations. This double attachment to the cultural developments of the outside world in combination with the revival of archaic Egyptian practices has been described in terms of the "extraordinary independence of mind" of the inhabitants of the oasis.[215] The wealth of the agricultural economy and the flourishing trade with the Nile valley made ancient Kellis an attractive place to live for the elite of the oasis. They presented themselves as well-educated and sophisticated magistrates, chose archaizing Greek names for their children, and spent money on Classical literature and education. Even though the most extravagant houses were abandoned in the fourth century, remnants of this wealth remained visible in architecture and decorations. The inhabitants of House 3 must have had their share of this wealth, as indicated by the intaglio ring found in room 6. It is this wealth that enabled the epistolary and literary developments in our corpus of Manichaean texts.

In short, this chapter has shown how the archaeological and textual material from the Dakhleh Oasis Project can contribute to the study of religious change in Late Antiquity. First, its finds enable a microhistorical approach in which both archaeology and papyrology play a role. The large corpus of papyrus documents found in various Roman period houses allows us to follow the lives of specific individuals and families. Their voices can be heard and their religious lives approached through textual and material sources. To appreciate this fully, Chapter 4 will highlight two specific families from the second half of the fourth century. Second, the wide array of sources offers evidence for multiple religious and cultural

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[212] Discussed in F. Dunand, "Between Tradition and Innovation: Egyptian Funerary Practices in Late Antiquity," in *Egypt in the Byzantine World, 300-700*, ed. R. S. Bagnall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 163-84. The same is argued under the header of syncretic practices for the Early Islamic and Coptic period in A. Pleşa, "Religious Belief in Burial: Funerary Dress and Practice at the Late Antique and Early Islamic Cemeteries at Matmar and Mostagedda, Egypt (Late Fourth – Early Ninth Century CE)," *Ars Orientalis* 47 (2017): 18-42.

[213] O. E. Kaper, "The Decoration of North Tomb 1," in *Oasis Papers 3*, ed. G. E. Bowen and C. A. Hope (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2003), 323-30.

[214] Bowen, "Early Christian Burial Practices," 81.

[215] Bagnall et al., *An Oasis City*, 116 (Kaper).

repertoires. This religious plurality, I have argued, can only be understood as the result of the specific geographical and social circumstances of the oasis: remoteness and wealth, openness and archaism. This facilitates the everyday groupness approach set out in the previous chapter, in which individuals and families are followed while they draw on these repertoires and act on a set of practices that stem from embodied dispositions. This chapter has shown the textual and material remains of repertoires associated with Christianity, traditional Egyptian religion, as well as some impressive visual features of Greco-Roman culture and religion. Kellis may have been an oasis village, but its inhabitants lived fully in a multicultural Roman-Egyptian society that was connected to the Roman Empire at large.

From the socioeconomic wealth of the oasis and the diversity of cultural and religious repertoires attested in the Kellis evidence, we will zoom in on the lives of two families in the fourth century. Their papyrus correspondence not only gives us a glimpse into daily life at Kellis, but also sheds light on the instances of marked Manichaeanness in their lives and letters.