

CLOTHES MAKE THE MONK:
THE RHETORIC OF CLOTHING IN LATE ANTIQUE
MONASTICISM¹

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Certain aspects of late antique monasticism are so fundamental as to seem obvious: for example, familial language serves as a basis for monastic relationships, both hierarchical and egalitarian. Male monks are “brothers”, the abbot a “father,” women monastics “sisters” and “mothers.” It is only when we pause and ask, “why those terms?” that their naturalness becomes destabilized. Likewise, clothing served as an indicator of either ascetic identity or actual membership within a particular monastery. Yet again, as with familial language, an examination of clothing and its role can help uncover how monasticism worked to create particular identities and roles for the people who converted to this life. Both rule material for monasteries and hagiographies, especially those that praise individual women, reveal the link, visually and rhetorically, between clothing and ascetic identity. Differences in gender emerge at points in various rule material but not necessarily consistently; hagiography, however, often creates different ascetic identities for men and women, as Lynda Coon has pointed out, even if the type of clothing—demure and somber rather than adorned and luxurious—was similar: she notes, “Whereas male garments signify power, female clothing usually represents sin or women’s subordination to the authority of men.”² In short, clothing in the ascetic context of late antiquity seems to have a role not dissimilar to its role in various other social settings that scholars have studied, including (but not limited to) modern drag queen balls where garments “create temporary utopias . . . they show that through active bodily devotion to an alternate vision of the world—ultimately through belief—people alter and recreate that shared system of ideas we call culture.”³ My goal in this article is first to give an overview of the role of clothing, especially for women, in some monastic rules and a few hagiographies in order to understand how it creates a “shared system” of monastic ideals that serves as a basis for monastic culture broadly construed; within that system, moreover, we can wonder to what extent it was indeed shared by all within the monasteries and how garment imagery can also be used to indicate deviance.⁴ This overview will create the context for a more detailed exploration of three letters by Shenoute, third abbot (388-464) of the White Monastery in Upper Egypt, all of which use garment imagery to explore a period of conflict within the monastery.

Monastic Rule Material

Evidence for the emergence of a Rule for monasticism, generally speaking, shows how ascetic identity was formalized and revealed through particular clothing. Susanna Elm has pointed out, for instance, that in many parts of the Roman world, women who took on the status of ‘virgin’ or ‘widow’ “achieved their status through a vow, and expressed it by wearing a specific habit.”⁵ Since clothing rules could differ for men and women in monasteries, garments could also create different statuses for each gender. In the Pachomian communities, for example, women had a particular relationship to clothing in two ways: (1) they were to produce all the clothing for the monastery, both male and female communities;⁶ and (2) they were not required--or perhaps allowed--to wear the ascetic hair shirt that was part of the men’s ascetic practice.⁷ The women’s ascetic practice was thus limited to something more suited for their weaker gender, and was connected to the type of the clothing worn. Whether it created a difference in their identity as Pachomian monks remains unclear and largely unrecoverable in Pachomian sources.

In contrast, both Augustine’s and Basil’s Rule make no distinction in clothing expectations for men and women. Although an author claiming to be Basil argues that the ascetic life is harder for women to adhere to, and that they must guard especially against gossip and in-fighting, he makes no mention of clothing as an area where women’s different natures or abilities need to be accommodated.⁸ Basil’s own specific section on clothing in his Long Rule, however, uses male-oriented imagery. Clothing should be “last and least” in accordance with the monastic values of poverty and humility; nevertheless, he writes “as one style of dress bespeaks the soldier, another, a senator, a third, some other high position, so that the rank of dignitaries can generally be inferred, so also it is right and proper that there be some mark of identity for the Christian which would bear out even as to his garments the good order spoken of by the Apostle.”⁹ “Christian” here, then, is implicitly male and so presents the normative monk as someone who otherwise might be able to be a soldier or senator. Basil remains silent on the role of female ascetic clothing, and its distinctiveness in relation to Roman clothing that distinguished the socio-sexual status of women.

Augustine’s discussion about clothing is more specific in addressing problems; but overall he is less concerned to create a link between clothing and proper ascetic behavior. He warns against grumbling about clothing inequities, because monks should worry about the “holy and interior clothing of the heart” rather than of the body.¹⁰ Along with these regulations Augustine notes that in general, clothing should not “attract attention,” a requirement that is open to interpretation.¹¹ It should neither be luxurious and a source of envy, but neither, seemingly, should it be so tattered and worn that it would arouse ascetic competition. His Rule also suggests that clothing provided by the monastery can vary according to the social background of the monks, but it does not engage gender as a variable.¹²

However, as Coon has shown, as monastic rules took into account the presence of women in monasticism, especially by creating separate rules for female monasteries, the

regulations constricting clothing increase for women to, in her words, “combat the inherent feminine impulse toward luxury.”¹³ Her example is the sixth-century western Rule by Caesarius who warns the women, but not men, against luxurious items, especially clothing. Monastic rules, then, can be frustrating since the point of commonalty is general—that clothing reveals the monastic identity linked to values of poverty and humility—and the variation in the details of function and meaning obscure overarching conclusions. When we add Shenoute to this list, the same holds true: his rules are similar to Basil’s in not making a gender distinction, but differ from Augustine’s in not allowing for variance due to economic or social background.

In the White Monastery, as elsewhere, the tunic that a person wore served as an identifier of his or her monastic identity.¹⁴ As was also the case in Shenoute’s control of other material goods (food especially),¹⁵ uniform clothing helped create a sense of shared community and any irregularities could, and did, divide what was intended to be a harmonious community. For example, clothing was not to reflect any sort of rank, either spiritual (those of higher monastic rank did not wear special clothing to mark their status)¹⁶ or social, that is, any previous differences in economic class. One rule reads:

All persons who enter these congregations at any time to be monks, whether male or female, shall not clothe themselves, either with a covering or a cloak or anything else from their own belonging brought from outside. This is so that there may be uniformity in everything and that ignorant people may not be inhabited by covetousness for a beautiful garment, or a covering, or a cloak, or anything like this, and so that no one shall say that anything is their own possession. All who persevere to the end in our community, whether male or female, have all things that belong to us as common property. Those who give up their perseverance at any point and leave us, or who are expelled because of the wicked deeds they did in our community, shall own nothing of this from that time on. Let them be beggars.¹⁷

Clothing thus serves for Shenoute as part of his overall strategy to create a uniform monastic experience in all aspects, both material and emotional, for all monks.¹⁸ Nevertheless, some letters that accompany Shenoute’s rules record arguments that arose over clothing: among the women (and perhaps men) these pertained to quantity of clothing received; again as with food, some monks received extra clothing while others did not. Moreover, as I shall explore below, Shenoute uses garment imagery in ways that also run counter to the expectation of uniformity that is prevalent in the rules. I shall argue that these seeming contradictions help give insight into Shenoute’s dynamic and ever-changing monasticism that serves as important corrective to the static nature of the various rules scattered throughout his writings.

Hagiography

Hagiography, particularly of women, works alongside the monastic rules to reveal the role of clothing as marking the moment of conversion to the ascetic life. Time and again,

Jerome praises a particular woman for taking on the demands of asceticism, as signified by her new, demure dress.¹⁹ Yet clothing can also obscure that new identity: Melania the Younger hides her hairshirt under her clothing to hide her ascetic practice, so that only her hagiographer can reveal her secret identity.²⁰ And, of course, there are numerous accounts of women concealing their gender with male clothing to make their ascetic practice possible. In addition to what clothes were worn, hagiographic images of the production of cloth, through spinning and weaving, also signifies women's devotion to asceticism.²¹

Moreover, clothing in hagiographies can, as with monastic rules, have multiple meanings, as we can see in two examples of male views of the significance of clothing for ascetic women. First, we have Augustine's letter to Ecdicia, which we might term an "antihagiography" for his chastisement of her determination to pursue her ascetic inclinations, even against her husband's wishes. There Augustine presents Ecdicia's change of dress differently than its general usage in other late antique sources. While it again signals her increased commitment to an ascetic life, it is also the proverbial straw that breaks the camel's back of her marriage; enforced celibacy did not lead her husband to adultery, but Ecdicia's shedding of "matron's garb" in favor of ascetic dress does. First, Augustine emphasizes that, although celibate, Ecdicia is still her husband's wife and therefore still subject to her husband's authority, even with regards to her clothing:

Therefore, you ought to have done nothing concerning your clothes and nothing concerning your gold or silver or any money, or any other of your earthly possessions, without his authority (*arbitrio*), lest you scandalize the man who had vowed to God, along with you, greater things and he had abstained, with self-restraint, from that which he was able by legal right (*licita potestate*) to exact from your flesh (*tua carne*).²²

Augustine then makes clear that there is no religious basis for her actions that would: "If [in these other matters] . . . you and your faithful husband ought to have shared advice . . . and you ought not to reject his wishes, how much more ought you to change nothing, or to usurp anything, concerning your clothes (*habitu*) and your dress (*vestitutu*)--a thing about which we have read no divine orders."²³ Augustine concedes that 1 Timothy 2:9 does discuss women's apparel, but those 'divine orders' pertain only to adornment for "empty show." The standard matron's cloak (*habitus matronalis*) is not, for Augustine, included: it may "befit faithful [i.e., Christian] wives with their religious observance intact."²⁴ Ecdicia, however, is wearing the garments associated with widows, much to her (live) husband's dismay. Augustine concludes that the quarrel that resulted over clothing was one that did more harm than any good Ecdicia gained from a change in clothing: "For what is more absurd than that a wife lords it over her husband about a lowly garment, when it could have been more useful for you to obey him with shining deeds than to fight against with him with your dark clothes?"²⁵ Augustine's overall point is not unlike his position in his monastic Rule: that the internal motivation ("clothing of the heart") matters more than external appearance. "even if you were compelled . . . you would be able to have a humble heart beneath your proud finery."²⁶

In contrast to Augustine's denial of the importance of clothing, we have Gregory's emphasis on dress as signifier of ascetic perfection in his account of his sister, Macrina, specifically after her death when Gregory, along with two women who lived in Macrina's monastery, prepares her body for her funeral.²⁷ Now that she is dead, Gregory determines that it is "above reproach to put brighter ornament on the body and to adorn with brilliant fine linen that pure and spotless flesh."²⁸ In allowing such ornamentation only in death, Gregory makes clear its unacceptability in the life Macrina had led; moreover, his helper Vetiana is only willing to allow its acceptability now if Macrina had given consent (prior to her death), to which another nun, Lampadium, bears witness. A problem arose, however, in that Macrina did not have "brighter ornament" or "brilliant fine linen" available, nor did the monastery as a whole (a point Gregory, the non-monastic visitor, seems to have missed when he asks whether any appropriate clothing can be found in the storage closets). Lampadium, in explaining the situation to Gregory, uses language that reflects the usual role of clothing for ascetic women: she specifically points to Macrina's "dress . . . the veil of her head, her worn-out sandals" as evidence that Macrina was a successful ascetic.²⁹ In what was the dominant trope for the dress of ascetic women, Macrina's ascetic deeds created her proper clothing: "the pure life was what she looked to as ornament for her, this was the decoration of her life and the shroud of death."³⁰

Macrina's clothing for her funeral remains controversial, however, when the "deaconess" (Lampadium) determines that "it was not suitable that she should be seen by the eyes of the virgins prepared as a bride."³¹ The inappropriateness lies not with Macrina, for whom it was suitable to be dressed in this fashion. Rather the danger lay in the possible misunderstanding on the part of her followers, that they might think her current funeral attire was somehow necessary: "that this holy beauty should not be made brilliant by the imported ornament of dress."³² The solution lay in a near-reversal of clothing in the Life of Melania the Younger. Whereas for Melania, opulent clothing hid a hairshirt, here a "dark cloak" which had belonged to Macrina's mother covers her bridal dress. The clear connection between clothing, ascetic deeds, and ascetic status all make garment imagery ripe for reflecting on the opposite scenario, where monks were not as faithful to ascetic ideals as Macrina was.

Shenoute and Garment Imagery in Canon 8

Into this general description of the role of clothing, we can examine the specific role of clothing in three letters by Shenoute. Shenoute's writings, both the Canons and Discourses, serve as the basis for understanding his monasticism and its relationship with the surrounding community. The letters recorded in the nine Canons vary widely with regard to their original recipient; individual monks as well as the monastic community, male and female, as a whole can be the audience. Moreover, these works (with the possible exception of Canon 7) largely pertain to times of conflict, which Shenoute used to continue to assert his vision of the monastic life. These two aspects--audience and conflict--would seem to limit the applicability of the letters. Yet they were chosen by Shenoute (or possibly a later editor) to be included in the Canons, that is, to serve as the

basis for teaching monks in the White Monastery about the monastic life. Once in the Canons, all monks, male and female, are now the intended audience and moments of conflict are important for their edification about how to avoid such errors. The Canons thus become simultaneously a record of historical events and an on-going metaphorical discourse about the monastic life.

Arguments about garments appear in several letters throughout the Canons, usually those with at least a section specifically addressed to the female members of the community who, like their counterparts in the Pachomian system, seem to have been responsible for the production of much, if not all, the clothing for the monastery, male and female communities alike.³³ Their role made them part of the larger economic activity of the various congregations that constituted the White Monastery, and at times this role served as the basis for Shenoute's appeal to unity among them. On one occasion, recorded in Canon 6, a dispute over the women's production of clothing led Shenoute to argue that that the material interdependence between the two communities, food and clothing, were meant to unite them, not separate them. Clothing, then, creates the relationship between Shenoute and the female community that also helped make their community part of the larger monastery. There existed a reciprocal relationship between the male community, which baked bread for all monks, and the female, which made the clothing. Shenoute makes clear that the women's garment production was thus not merely labor, but monastic labor for salvation. He writes,

Indeed, do you not realize that if I do not clothe myself with clothes from your community, you will be carefree and will not have to figure out the type of color or length and breadth and the decorations of garments? And if, unrelated to the present matter, it were possible to have others make the garments for the monks, indeed, it might happen that some companions persuade me to clothe myself from their community.³⁴

This passage concludes Shenoute's instructions about an actual conflict (where the women's work had been found wanting by the male monks), but in it he also uses "garment" and its production (color, length, breadth, and decorations) as metaphors for the women's proper monastic behavior. Without this work, the women would be "carefree", rather than engaged in "profitable" or "useful" labor, the phrase that Shenoute uses to indicate "able to lead to salvation." Shenoute also implies that if the women did not adhere to his instructions, they would lose him as a leader, and so lose the person who has the ability to guide them safely to salvation.

Garment imagery, in addition, is predominant in the three letters that begin Canon 8, entitled, respectively, *So Listen, My Heart is Crushed*, and *Who But God is the Witness?*³⁵ All three letters address one period within the monastery when certain transgressions by some members were polluting the community and so potentially endangering the salvation of all the monks. These three letters, taken together, show the importance of garment imagery as a subset of the larger category of body imagery for an audience whose lives were structured on control of that body.³⁶ Moreover, they reveal how an inherently gendered metaphor, like garments and their production, can be used to

subordinate an audience that includes both women and men.³⁷

So Listen begins:³⁸

So listen, you who have love for him who is disheartened [Shenoute]; observe his grief as he utters this, ‘See then, Lord, I am distressed, I am in torment within and my heart is in turmoil for I have indeed rebelled’. For this illness has left me without strength, thanks to the severity of the pain. As a result, I am averse to my garment or [my g]arments touching [my b]ody.³⁹

It is generally presumed that Shenoute, when writing these letters, was physically ill, and that his illness led to a skin condition that made wearing clothing painful and indeed contaminated his garments. He later mentions, “Were it possible I would lay them aside and not wear them.”⁴⁰ Yet, as is often the case with Shenoute’s writings, his language serves multiple purposes. Here, as Dwight Young has noted, Shenoute’s concern is not merely for his own health or even the cleanliness of his body and its coverings, but also for the purity, attained by correct monastic practice, of those who lived in the community.⁴¹ Shenoute continues by noting that his garment’s contaminated state could be improved through washing, which would make it clean and more wearable.

Although he is not explicit about the multivalent nature of his discourse, it is clear that Shenoute is not merely discussing his own dress but also turning the present circumstances into a metaphor. The situation in the monastery that his ruined and contaminated garment represents—that celibacy has been abandoned, that “loathsome deeds” were being committed, that monks “have destroyed all hope for yourselves”—is still “washable”, that is, correctable, but conditions apply. “Washing” the garment of the monastery to make it “wearable” again seems to involve not simply refraining from transgression but expelling those people who have committed transgression. Moreover, until the community is washed, Shenoute asks rhetorically, “Should I assemble or celebrate the Eucharist with impure folk who are perpetrating loathsome deeds?”⁴² In short, then, in the first letter (as, indeed, in all three) Shenoute’s major concern is with the state of the community as created by the actions of those who live there. He begins (but does not end) with garment imagery, which is intimately linked with the bodily imagery of illness.⁴³ He uses both the uncleanness of his garment (and, in the next letter, its eventual destruction) to chastise the polluting and hence destructive misdeeds of the monks. His own unclean, ill body reflects the unclean monastic body; the transfer of his illness to his clothing, such that he wants to avoid wearing it, reflects the extensive pollution of the monastery such that he has withdrawn from it to the nearby desert and refuses to return even to celebrate the Eucharist.

Shenoute begins the next letter, *My Heart is Crushed*, in a similar vein to the first, that is, with a description of the state of his garment and what actions need to be undertaken to correct the situation. Here, however, his garment is not ruined by an illness that has spread from his body; rather, it was destroyed by moth damage and thus Shenoute put it away in storage. Shenoute gives a lengthy lament of the loss of this garment, which was apparently quite beautiful and which he valued highly: “Just as I rejoiced greatly about it and I liked its color and its decoration, and others commented on its beauty, just so also I

was greatly pained.”⁴⁴ This glorification of a garment, when compared to his rules about the expectation of uniform clothing, is at best surprising and would be almost off-putting were there not some meaning beyond the literal.⁴⁵ Moreover (as I have noted elsewhere⁴⁶) Shenoute is defensive about the state of the garment, denying claims that he had mistreated it and then blamed an innocent moth for the damage; denying that he had hidden the garment to hide his negligence, since, of course, he was not negligent.⁴⁷ This defensiveness is primarily directed at the women who made the garment, since it is they whom he addresses: “My heart is crushed and it was crushed on account of the pain which evidently showed in your faces—you, the female elder, and Tapolle—as though you had been struck.”⁴⁸

Again, Shenoute’s language describes not only the situation with his clothing but also the continued transgressions in the community and now (clearly) the expulsions Shenoute has undertaken as a result.⁴⁹ Shenoute later refers to those who have been expelled from the monastery and significantly makes clear that these monks (both women and men) lost their monastic clothing when expelled: “Just as we tore the cloaks, having broken off the belts of those who had sinned among us, as if they were soldiers, for they sinned against their king, Jesus, so we pursued them and we sent them away from us.”⁵⁰ In his initial description, Shenoute’s defensiveness arises not just from the ruined state of a highly prized garment, but also from accusations that his leadership of the monastery (again, as whole) was “excessive,” and therefore that he was somehow responsible for people’s loss of salvation. Three items in his description are particularly worthy of mention in investigating this tension between actuality and metaphor in Shenoute’s discourse: first, his disregard for the garment, once it was damaged; second, his love for the garment before its destruction; and third, his dissatisfaction with the replacement garment, which did not measure up to the beauty and quality of the now-destroyed garment. First, if the garment were strictly equated with the community, Shenoute’s disregard would be misplaced. Rather, given that the garment—previously merely contaminated in *So Listen*—has been destroyed, it becomes clear that the old garment is now associated with those who had been committing transgressions and were expelled. Shenoute, likewise, had loved these people (and this garment); it had been beautiful and its beauty, that is, the ascetic practice and so the assured salvation of the monks, had caused him great joy; so too their transgression and expulsion cause him great pain.

Nevertheless, because of their transgressions, Shenoute must give up on this garment (and the now-expelled monks) and turn his attention to those who remain in the monastery. These people seem to be represented by the second, replacement garment, the one Shenoute has vociferous complaints about to the extent that he requests a new, third garment:

I was not pleased with, nor did I approve of, this linen cloak which you made for me—not equal to the one that I said the moth destroyed . . . But you will ask me, “why?” and, “what fault does it have?” First of all, it is heavy on me. For, instead of attaching fringe to it, or (setting) its tassels so that they will be spread apart . . . you have braided upon it like a tunic or a covering.⁵¹

Shenoute here continues his garment metaphor to suggest that the community, even

purged of its transgressors, remains a source of grief for him, most likely because of their questioning of his leadership throughout this entire crisis. Instead, the community needs to undertake a new path, presumably of unquestioning obedience to Shenoute, in order to be once again like the original garment, or community, whose beauty caused Shenoute such happiness. Thus, his request for a replacement garment, with which he ends the garment section which begins this letter, serves both as an actual request for a new piece of clothing from the women and as a more general command to the community of all monks, female and male, to become a pure monastic community:

“For if you will make a cloak for me, construct it for me completely fringed and totally decorated according to the specifications that I gave you, just like those of the tunic, so that I might wear it as a compensation and I might cover myself with it as a repayment.”⁵²

Now, Shenoute’s detailed instructions with regard to his wardrobe (as well as their inclusion in the monastic Canons) appear at least moderately less surprising, since they also signify his “specifications” about the monastic practice the monks are to follow. This garment imagery, while more complex than in *So Listen*, nevertheless also only serves as the introductory section of the letter; Shenoute again switches to illness and sexual imagery for the majority of the letter.

Finally, we can turn to portions of the third letter, *Who But God is the Witness*, only the beginning of which has been published. In the opening of this letter, Shenoute does not simply draw on his own experiences with his garments (as with *My Heart*) but speaks more broadly: “Who but God is the witness of what he said to another, [namely], ‘Have you seen [how] a moth gets into chests where garments are kept and destroys not only the fringes but also the middle thereof?’”⁵³ Here the notion of transgressions spreading (for which Shenoute often uses the image of an illness spreading through the limbs of a body) is represented by moth damage spreading throughout a garment which itself again serves as a metaphor that defines all members of the monastery, male and female. As Young has argued, the garment imagery stems from Shenoute’s use of his “mutilated robe to deplore the defiling deeds with which some in the community have ‘clothed themselves.’”⁵⁴ For both male and female monks in the White Monastery, clothing does not just signify monastic identity but also the spiritual status of that self, either pure or polluted. Shenoute’s ruined garment, both here and in the earlier letters, provided him with a metaphor that fit in with his larger discourse, which is designed to control the behavior of his monks.⁵⁵ The monks would not be able to conceal their sinful status from the community at large with such inadequate clothing (that is, misdeeds) or, alternatively, wrongful behavior will be exposed in their garments: “Your knees shall not cover you nor shall you clothe yourselves with your deeds. Or, if you have already clothed yourselves with them, on you it is as garments stained with blood.”⁵⁶ Shenoute here reverses the role of clothing as it appears in hagiographies like Macrina’s, which present positive portrayals of ‘successful’ monastics; rather than revealing perfection, clothing in the White Monastery reveals the sins that cannot be hidden.

These letters also reveal the complexity of gender within Shenoute’s garment imagery: his use of specifically female images, often directed at female monks, within letters that

also simultaneously address male monks. With *So Listen* this communal address, and so the male monks' submission to female metaphors, is implied by the general use of garment imagery to signal Shenoute's alienation from the entire monastery. In addition, it remains intriguing that Shenoute begins *My Heart* (as I have described, a letter that eventually includes the entire monastery) with such details about a predominantly female-oriented image (and indeed problem). Shenoute emphasizes that the women were responsible for the production of the first garment: "You [women] are the ones who sent it to me, with it having been worked with the needle since its stitching showed on it, or in it, from place to place."⁵⁷ When it fell into disrepair, Shenoute hid it rather than either asking for it to be mended or mending it himself. Despite this emphasis, as I have argued, the letter overall addresses a larger, gender-inclusive audience, including male monks who have also been part of the crisis of "abominations" that have led to an extensive two-month purge of the monastery's and Shenoute's own refusal to meet with the monks for an even longer period of time.⁵⁸ Garment imagery, then, in these two letters defines the female monks as female but also marks all the congregations as under Shenoute's authority. Some preliminary examples from the beginning of the unpublished portion of *Who But God* also illustrate this point, and further the connections among these three letters.

As in *My Heart*, Shenoute addresses the monks who make his clothing, although his language here is more ambiguous. Whereas he begins *My Heart* with a direct appeal, linked to garment imagery, to the female monastic leader and a female monk named Tapolle, in *Who But God*, Shenoute writes in his second sentence, "Therefore I teach you who take care of my garments."⁵⁹ We can infer from the previous letter that he means the female monks, a supposition that becomes more likely after Shenoute moves from what he needs to teach the monks to that which he does not: "It is not necessary for me to teach you, brethren, that I am ashamed as I set measurements for these garments, or as I cut from them, or as I give commandments concerning their fashion."⁶⁰ His language recalls the conflict in Canon 6, as well as *My Heart*, but with a notable difference. There his descriptions specifically address the female community as the garment producers;⁶¹ here Shenoute is clearly addressing a 'mixed' audience, yet he continues to present his alienation through garment metaphors. The question then, is to what extent are these garment metaphors directed solely at female monks in the audience and to what extent might they have been intended to include men?

That the garment metaphors might remain specifically female is suggested by Shenoute's differentiation between "brethren" who make clothes (women) and "brethren" who bake bread (men).⁶² That is, he addresses the female and male monks as separate members of that community, defined by the gendered work they perform as monks. His alienation from both groups within the community is marked by his refusal to accept the results of their monastic labors: "Therefore [I] did not find the means to speak freely concerning the garment and the cloak which [my] brethren made for [me] in all their love, and [I] did not find the means to eat from the multitude of bread you, brethren, make, especially when they are set before [me] in abundance."⁶³ Here in the White Monastery "gendered work tasks" functioned as M. Peskowitz has argued that they did in the larger culture;

they “demonstrated what men were and what women were, and they showed the clear distinction between the two.”⁶⁴ Shenoute is making this distinction even as he unites both men and women as monks under his care. They are “brethren” in that they perform labors for Shenoute, and so for salvation; but the labors they are to perform continue to underscore their gender.⁶⁵

Yet, despite this separation of gender in his address to his audience, Shenoute engages throughout the letter in extensive biblical exegesis of passages related to clothing, making reference to clothing worn by Joseph, Jacob, Rebecca, and Jesus himself, as well as to the various rules in Leviticus for priestly garments.⁶⁶ This exegesis, especially since it includes clothes worn by men, reads as intending to teach both women and men what sort of garments should be worn, namely, white, shining bright garments. In other words, both women and men are defined through the state of their clothing. Moreover, as with the two previous letters, Shenoute’s alienation, and its implications for the salvation of his monks, is generally symbolized by his desire “to not clothe himself” in garments which “shine with shame and disgrace” as a result of the pollution of the community. These examples support my suggestion that the application of these garment metaphors has a dual role: both to mark female monks as female, but also to mark all monks as “brethren”, that is, as submissive to Shenoute. They also emphasize, more than ever, that publication of Shenoute’s works remains an urgent concern for the study of late antique monasticism.⁶⁷

CONCLUSION

Shenoute’s use of these garment metaphors in all three letters raises a question about monasticism and gender: to what extent is Shenoute feminizing his entire audience?⁶⁸ With regard to rhetoric, the women’s submission here is less problematic (although the women did not always behave as good women, or good monks, ought to). But Shenoute’s use of what is generally regarded as predominantly female metaphors, defining proper female domesticity, in this letter is intriguing. One possibility, of course, is that the textile industry in Egypt has lessened the gender associations for garment imagery. Peskowitz has also argued that spinning flax differed from spinning wool largely because of male involvement in this industry. On the one hand, “men would have to compromise the proprieties of masculinity by spinning.” On the other, various ancient male authors worked to defeminize flax spinning (though not wool).⁶⁹ One might expect a similar recuperation in Egypt, where the textile industry was large and lucrative, and therefore could not exclude men.⁷⁰ Yet, despite these ancient attempts, Peskowitz asserts that spinning and weaving remained largely female-based metaphors, and so had particular resonances. Thus, in being subordinated to Shenoute’s leadership and to his rhetoric, the male monks (may) lose some of the attributes that made them male and, as listeners to this letter, become like women. That is, their monastic identity becomes linked to the metaphors of producing garments deemed worthy by Shenoute. The gendered images are expected for women, yet unexpected for men, and so these letters again show how Shenoute both tries to efface gender, and use it, in constructing his monastics. Here, he

implies a removal of the gender one of these tropes by including men within them, even as he uses them to subordinate all monks to his authority.

ENDNOTES

¹ An earlier draft of this paper was presented at the AAR annual meeting in Denver, Colorado (November, 2001) and to the LARCNY group in Syracuse, NY, in February, 2002. I thank the audiences on both those occasions, especially my panel respondent. [Further exploration of the issues, including some material discussed here, can now be found in Krawiec, “‘Garments of Salvation’: Representations of Monastic Clothing in Late Antiquity,” *J ECS* 17 (2009): 125-150. Ed.]

² Lynda L. Coon, *Sacred Fictions: Holy Women and Hagiography in Late Antiquity*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 31.

³ Hildi Hendrickson, ed., *Clothing and Difference: Embodied identities in Colonial and Post-Colonial Africa*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 6.

⁴ The way clothing functions in the rules is similar to the way Anne Meredith has argued Tertullian uses clothing imagery: that monks are different and so must look different; that clothing helps monks live faithfully even when in contact with the non-monastic world; and that monastic leaders “recognized the cognitive character of clothing and the power of clothing not only to express, but also to shape religious ideals and beliefs” (Anne Meredith, “Identity, Resistance, and Ideology: The Discourse of Dress in Tertullian’s Writings,” (unpublished paper, presented at LARCNY, Syracuse, NY, February, 2002). Tertullian focuses on forging a difference between Christian and non-Christian, whereas the monks are creating a particular Christian identity alongside both non-Christian and non-monastic Christian religious counterparts.

⁵ Susanna Elm, “*Virgins of God*”: *The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 233. Elm does not here discuss the nature of this clothing for women, but Coon has an extensive list of rules requiring women to wear veils, in accord with patristic interpretation of 1 Corinthians (Coon, *Sacred Fictions*, 38).

⁶ Elm, *Virgins*, 294. Women’s association with the production of garments also genders garment imagery, as I will explore in the section on Shenoute below.

⁷ This last point, however, comes to us not from the Rule or the Lives of Pachomius, but from another, outside source: Palladius’ *Lausiac History* 32.3 (for men) and 33.1 (where the women have the same way of life) (Cuthbert Butler, *The Lausiac History of Palladius: A critical discussion together with notes on early Egyptian monasticism* [Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1967], 89 and 96). Coon points to this aspect of the Pachomian community (without drawing attention to the difference in sources) as an example of a ban against transvestitism in the Pachomian system. The Pachomian sources suggest that the monastic lives of both men and women were the same (Elm, *Virgins*, 290).

⁸ This is from the spurious “Ascetical Discourse” attributed to Basil (see M. Monica Wagner, C.S.C., *Saint Basil: Ascetical Works, FC 1* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1950), 221). I have included it here because I am less interested in questions of authorship and more in an overall presentation of female characteristics of monasticism in the literature as a whole.

⁹ *MG* 31: 979. Translation Wagner, *Saint Basil: Ascetical Works*, 284.

¹⁰ *interiore sancto habitu cordis*. Translations are from George Lawless, OSA, *Augustine of Hippo and his Monastic Rule* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 95. Also, “If arguments and grumbling occur among you, and someone complains that he has received worse clothing than previously . . . you thereby demonstrate to yourselves how deficient you are . . . arguing as you do about the clothing of the body” (Rule 5.1) (Lawless, *Augustine*, 87).

¹¹ Rule 4.1 (Lawless, *Augustine*, 87).

¹² “If food, clothes, a mattress, or blankets are given to those whom come to the monastery from a more comfortable manner of life, the more robust individuals, to whom such things are not given and who are on this account more fortunate, ought to recall how much more affluent people have altered their lifestyle in order to embrace the present one” (Rule 3.4) (Lawless, *Augustine*, 87).

¹³ Coon, *Sacred Fictions*, 39.

¹⁴ The information in the following paragraph follows my arguments in Rebecca Krawiec, *Shenoute and the Women of the White Monastery: Egyptian Monasticism in Late Antiquity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 24.

¹⁵ For an examination of the role of food in the White monastery, see Bentley Layton, “Social Structure and Food Consumption in an Early Christian Monastery: The Evidence of Shenoute’s Canons and the White Monastery Federation A.D. 385-465,” *Le Muséon* 115 (2002): 25-55.

¹⁶ So Johannes Leipoldt, *Schenute von Atripe und die Entstehung des national ägyptischen Christentums* TU, v. 25.1 (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1903), 114, asserts, citing Johannes Leipoldt with W.E. Crum, *Sinuthii Archimandritae Vita et Opera Omnia* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1906-13) 4:104.

¹⁷ Leipoldt, *Sinuthius* 4:166 (Leipoldt, *Schenute*, 114). However, Leipoldt argues they were allowed to bring some pieces of material with them into the monastery (Leipoldt, *Schenute*, 114). This translation also appears in Krawiec, *Shenoute and the Women*, 187, n.99.

¹⁸ See Krawiec, *Shenoute and the Women*, 13-30.

¹⁹ The trope of donning particular clothing when converting to asceticism appears in nearly every instance of Jerome’s description of female ascetics (Marcella, Paula the Elder and the Younger, Eustochium, and Demetrias).

²⁰ Life of Melania the Younger 4. Elizabeth A. Clark, *The Life of Melania the Younger*. (Lewiston: Mellen Press, 1984).

²¹ See John Anson, “The Female Transvestite in Early Monasticism: The Origin and Development of a Motif,” *Viator* 5 (1974): 1-32. For a more recent study, especially from a literary perspective, see Stephen J. Davis, “Crossed Texts, Crossed Sex: Intertextuality and Gender in Early Christian Legends of Holy Women Disguised as Men,” *J ECS* 10 (2002): 1-36, esp. 15-19.

²² ep. 262.4 (CSEL 57: 624). My translations are all modified from St. Augustine: *Select Letters*, trans. J. H. Baxter. Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1930).

²³ ep. 262.9 (CSEL 57: 628). By “faithful,” Augustine means “Christian” especially since, of course, Ecdicia’s husband has committed adultery.

²⁴ ep. 262.9 (CSEL 57: 628).

²⁵ ep. 262.9 (CSEL 57: 629).

²⁶ ep. 262.10 (CSEL 57: 629), though keeping in mind that Ecdicia’s husband is not insisting on unbecoming dress, just the matron’s dress, which Augustine has already declared acceptable.

²⁷ Elm also examines the role of clothing in Macrina’s monasticism, though from a more historical perspective than from the rhetorical one (how Gregory uses the garment dispute and imagery) than I use here (Elm, *Virgins*, 98-99).

²⁸ *Vita Macrinae* 28.10-13 (SC 178: 234). Translations for this section are modified from Virginia Woods Callahan, *Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, FC 58 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 1967), 159-91. The Greek is in Gregory of Nyssa, *Vita Macrinae*, ed. Pierre Maraval, *Grégoire de Nysse: Vie de Sainte Macrine* SC 178 (Paris: Cerf, 1971).

²⁹ *Vita Macrinae* 29.15-16 (SC 178:236). See n. 3 above for reference to Coon’s

discussion of veils as ascetic women's clothing.

³⁰ *Vita Macrinae* 29. 6-8 (SC 178: 236).

³¹ *Vita Macrinae* 32.2-4 (SC 178: 246).

³² *Vita Macrinae* 32. 4-7 (SC 178: 246).

³³ These arguments, and the role of clothing in Shenoute's White Monastery in general and for the women's lives in particular, all appear at various points in my study of women and the White Monastery. For the role of clothing in the monastery in general (its production, distribution, and its role in creating a monastic identity) see Krawiec, *Shenoute and the Women*, 19-20, 24; for its role in conflicts between Shenoute and the women see 46-47, 47-48, 83-84, 152-54, 166-69 (in addition, the letters in which clothing plays an important role are summarized in Chapter 2).

³⁴ É. Amélineau, *Oeuvres de Schenoudi: Texte copte et traduction française* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1907-14), 1:158.

³⁵ "Titles" for works of Shenoute come from the incipit, which can be variously translated. I have followed the translations of Stephen Emmel, who has catalogued the works of Shenoute in his dissertation (Stephen Emmel, "Shenoute's Literary Corpus" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1993).

³⁶ For a fuller discussion of the role of the body in Shenoute's monastic rules, see Caroline T. Schroeder, "Disciplining the Body: Asceticism, Ideology, and Gender in the Egyptian Monastery of Shenoute of Atripe," (Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 2002), esp. Chapter 4, "The Ritualization of the Monastic Body: Shenoute's Monastic Rules," 86-154.

³⁷ Of these three letters, the surviving portions of the first have been published and so are accessible, albeit not in a critical edition. The second, *My Heart is Crushed*, remains largely unpublished. I have translated the entirety of the letter from its major codex (see n. XX). The third, *Who But God is the Witness?*, is likewise largely unpublished. For the majority of my argument below, I rely on that portion which has been published. Any other translations must be regarded as preliminary, and those arguments that remain speculative will be noted as such. I wish to thank Stephen Emmel for providing me with copies of photographs of the portions of the XO codex that serve as the major witness for this letter.

³⁸ The major codex for Canon 8 is XO (according to Emmel's classification). The first 16 folios of XO are wanting but parallels survive. The first line, including the incipit, survives in XL, the summary codex. Further parallels throughout XO 1-16 have been published in Dwight W. Young, "Additional Fragments of Shenoute's Eighth Canon" *APF* 44 (1998): 47-68.

³⁹ Young, "Additional Fragments," 49. Slight modification of his translation. For more on the relationship between monastic practice and purity of the monastic body, see Schroeder, "Disciplining the Body," 66-76 and 109-54.

⁴⁰ Young, "Additional Fragments," 39-40.

⁴¹ Young, "Additional Fragments," 50.

⁴² Young, "Additional Fragments," 54.

⁴³ By the end of the letter, Shenoute has switched metaphors entirely, although still on the subject of the pollution transgressions cause the community. Now the dominant image is of adultery, and Shenoute includes both men and women in his description: "And if you [man] commit adultery, having a wife; and if you [woman] fornicate, having a husband—truly you are no different from the beasts!" (Ariel Shisha-Halevy, "Two New Shenoute-Texts from the British Library" *Orientalia* 44 [1975]: 149-85, at 177). Despite this balance, images of women predominate throughout this last section of the letter.

⁴⁴ XO 63: 46-57. All translations of *My Heart is Crushed* are my own, based on the largely unpublished XO codex for Canon 8. The first two pages, XO 63 and 64, have recently

been published by Young, “Additional Fragments” 60-63. For these two folios, I follow Young’s line numbers rather than my own.

⁴⁵ Other papers presented at the Living For Eternity conference provided archaeological evidence that monks in Egypt were not always living the “simple life” historians associated with monasticism. Luxury pottery ware, for example, runs counter to modern expectations of ancient monasticism. This evidence again cautions us not to rely too heavily on monastic rules to create an historically accurate picture of life in the monastery. See especially, Darlene L. Brooks Hedstrom, “Tableware and Monastic Practice 600-1400: New Questions from the Ceramic Corpus at John the Little’s Monastery,” unpublished paper from *Living for Eternity: The White Monastery and its Neighborhood. Proceedings of a Symposium at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, March 6 – 9. 2003*. For the more immediate context of the White Monastery, see Christi Kotsifou, “Shenute, His Monasteries, and Economic Interaction” unpublished conference paper. [A revised version of this paper will appear in the *Journal of Juristic Papyrology*. Ed.]

⁴⁶ Krawiec, *Shenoute and the Women*, 153-54.

⁴⁷ “Since you care about the truth, how can you say that the moth did not damage it?” (XO 64: 24-31; see Young, “Additional Fragments,” 61).

⁴⁸ “It was not that I commanded that people not find it in the place where I put it (until the time came for me to tell you what I am going to do with it). And I am amazed to say that people did find it in that place” (XO 64: 42-57; see Young, “Additional Fragments,” 61).

⁴⁹ XO 63: 10-28 (see Young, “Additional Fragments,” 60).

⁵⁰ Young has argued that the garment is a metaphor for wrongdoings among the women’s community (Young, “Additional Fragments” 62, n. 6). While the beginning of the letter is clearly addressed to the women as the garment producers, the wrongdoings that have led to the current crisis affect the entire monastery, as later portions of *My Heart* make clear. Part of my argument then is that the garment imagery here, while addressed to the women, implicitly includes the male community.

⁵¹ As Shenoute continues his description, it becomes apparent that expulsion does not mean that the expelled will starve or have no means of support: “They were our brethren, our children, our co-servants of this single Lord, God, king, the almighty. Oh, what a great grief! Indeed, what a great pain! That God cast forth from his congregations the ones who were caught doing abominations among us. Indeed, they will not lack bread and water in the place where each one wishes to go” (XO 71: ii.27-72: ii.5).

⁵² XO 65: ii.22- 66: i.30. Shenoute’s distinction here between types of clothing is not entirely clear and more work needs to be done to sort out the Coptic terminology for various types of garments. I have gained some insights from Eunice McGuire’s paper at the Living for Eternity conference, but am still not clear on what precisely Shenoute objected to in his garment. My point, here, however, lies more in the fact that he is objecting, vociferously.

⁵³ XO 68: ii.31- 69: i.17. It is clear that, although still talking about garment production, Shenoute is describing a situation that involves both male and female monks because he links this command with a statement that both male and female monks had committed “abominations” in the community.

⁵⁴ Dwight W. Young, “Pages from a Copy of Shenute’s Eighth Canon” *Orientalia* 67 (1998): 64-84, at 75.

⁵⁵ Young, “Pages,” 75

⁵⁶ I have argued elsewhere that Shenoute uses other common tropes—the suffering servant, the suffering body, and humility—to extend his authority over the monks (Krawiec, *Shenoute and the Women*, 66-71). In her work, Schroeder specifically examines the role of Shenoute’s representations of his ill body in his discourse.

⁵⁷ XO 64: 32-42 (see Young, “Additional Fragments,” 61). Here I have also benefited from Young’s translation (62) and from correspondence with Stephen Emmel. Shenoute’s description of the stitching is meant as praise, and so seems to imply fine embroidery of some type.

⁵⁸ Krawiec, *Shenoute and the Women*, 47-48.

⁵⁹ XO 125: ii.16-20. It should be noted that the term “brethren” in Shenoute’s letters includes both men and women, and can be a generic term. See Krawiec, *Shenoute and the Women*, 102

⁶⁰ XO 126: ii. 11-21.

⁶¹ After the passage above, Shenoute provides a direct address: “But I am visiting you, the female elder, Tapolle, and the mothers who are with you and all those who are in agreement with you and with us.” See Krawiec, *Shenoute and the Women*, 46.

⁶² This link between female monks as clothing provider and male monks as bread providers echoes similar language used elsewhere in Shenoute’s letter (see Krawiec, *Shenoute and the Women*, 150).

⁶³ XO 127: i.22-ii.10. Shenoute here refers to himself in the third person, as he often does, which I have replaced with clearer first-person references. For “to speak freely” Shenoute uses a term that he also used in *My Heart* and which seems to create a philological link between them. In *My Heart*, Shenoute claimed that he could not speak freely about his displeasing garment; here he seems to be repeating, or recalling, the same claim but is now adding the male brethren immediately as fellow-listeners to the letter.

⁶⁴ Peskowitz, *Spinning Fantasies*, 80

⁶⁵ For more on this tension between a universal monasticism, which tries to efface gender, and gendered monasticism, see Krawiec, *Shenoute and the Women*, 92-119.

⁶⁶ Young, “Pages” 75, and especially 81-83, which contains a translation of these Scripturally based descriptions. So too Anne Boud’hours’ index of Coptic terms for clothing and clothes suggests that garment imagery is more thoroughgoing in this letter than the other two. Again, further work needs to be done in this area to explore the details of the letter.

⁶⁷ Stephen Emmel is heading a team of international scholars to produce publications of the various manuscripts for the Canons, as well as translations within the next ten years. This project, however, is still preliminary to critical editions. My own future work will include a fuller translation of this letter, and a more detailed analysis of its particular garment imagery in its own right. Here I am simply suggesting that the themes laid out in the first two letters at least continue in the third.

⁶⁸ My question here is similar to the questions posed in Caroline T. Schroeder, “Prophecy and Porneia in Shenoute’s Letters” Living for Eternity Conference. [Schroeder 2006. “Prophecy and Porneia in Shenute’s Letters: The Rhetoric of Sexuality in a Late Antique Egyptian Monastery.” *JNES* 65: 81-97. Ed.]

⁶⁹ Peskowitz, *Spinning Fantasies*, 80.

⁷⁰ Peskowitz, *Spinning Fantasies*, 81, where Peskowitz makes this argument about Palestine, which also had a large textile industry.