

MOURNING IN EARLY CHRISTIAN TIMES

As Spiegelberg's comparison with the Egyptian sources (pp. 32f.) has shown, the description of mourning given by Herodotus (1893, p. 118, no. 85) is both graphic and correct: "When in a house a respected inmate dies, all the female occupants smear their heads or faces with mud, leave the corpse lying in the house, and run through the town with bared breasts, smiting themselves; all the female relatives join them.

The men too smite themselves, and have their garment tied fast below the breast." The Copts mourned their [dead](#) in the same manner. In contrast with their attitude toward MUMMIFICATION, however, theologians and monks in Egypt turned against the continuance of the old Egyptian mourning rites in the Christian period. A dictum of SHENUTE has been preserved (*Mémoire de la mission*, IV.27), according to which [Christians](#) ought not to weep and mourn over faithful Christians, but over those who have died godless.

In the cenobite monasticism of the fourth and fifth centuries, the Egyptian church replaced mourning with prayers and psalm-singing, as the sources show. After the death of a monk, all the monks in the monasteries of Pachomius (Lefort, 1965, Vols. 99 and 100, pp. 87ff.) and Shenute (Leipoldt, 1903, 134) assembled round the mortal shell of the [dead](#) man, to sing psalms and to pray.

The arrangement of having the burial of [nuns](#) carried out by monks probably goes back to the observation that the women clung more than the men to the old customs. But despite all admonitions, the [Christians](#) continued to mourn their dead. On a gravestone from ANTINOOPOLIS the [dead](#) man, a deacon, invites the visitor to the grave to mourn: "All who would weep over those who have died from among them, let them come here, to speak a lamentation" (Hall, 1905, 400). At synods, mournings were forbidden, and those who offended had the church's ban imposed upon them (Riedel, 1900, 191).

But even these penalties could not dislodge the firmly rooted mourning of the dead. The Coptic church saw itself constrained not only to tolerate mourning but also to accept it into the funeral liturgy (Tuki, 1763, p. 499). At the beginning of this liturgy, as on the Antinoopolis gravestone, people are summoned to lamentation: “Gather you all with me, ye men skilled in speech, and let us together mourn in a great lamentation.”

There are also representations of mourning in [Coptic book](#) illustrations (Cramer, 1964, pl. 17). Even in the twentieth century, Blackman noted ancient Egyptian mourning at a Coptic funeral among fellahin in Upper Egypt. In the case of mourning, the old customs of the country won out over the prohibitions of the church.

[See also: Burial Rites; Funerary Customs.]

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