

Girls and Girlhood in Sources from the White Monastery: A Preliminary Study

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Women lived as monks in their own houses, in communities of women, and possibly as semi-hermits in caves or tombs.¹ In particular, at the White Monastery Federation, across the Nile from modern Akhmim and ancient Panopolis, a community of monastic women, one that included girls, existed from the fourth century on. In conducting my research for a forthcoming book on children and family, I found concrete evidence for the presence of girls in some monasteries – especially in the White Monastery Federation.² Unfortunately the evidence was scarce. Therefore, writing a comprehensive *social history* of girls in late antique Egyptian monasticism proved difficult.

Some knowledge we can gather from the rules and letters of Shenoute, the White Monastery Federation's most well-known leader. Girls and novice women monks could perform some duties for the great gathering of monks for prayer, but only with supervision. Girls, like boys, had specific supervisors or teachers assigned to them. Some other rules that mention girls are general rules about children or novices and include both boys and girls specifically in the directive.³

Other knowledge we can only infer. At least some girls were educated in reading and writing, although we don't know the extent to which they were educated in the monastery or in their household prior to joining. Shenoute wrote to the director of the women's community in the federation, and she corresponded with him in turn.⁴ Possibly all of the communication was facilitated by a male emissary or amanuensis, but more likely the Mother for the women monks read and wrote. A woman named Aphthonia—we don't know her age—was dedicated to the monastery by her family, an elite family in the region, since her father was a *komes* or local official.⁵ (Based on our

¹ Caroline T. Schroeder, “Women in Anchoritic and Semi-Anchoritic Monasticism in Egypt: Rethinking the Landscape,” *Church History* 83 (2014): 1–17.

² Caroline T. Schroeder, *Children and Family in Late Antique Egyptian Monasticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

³ Schroeder, *Children and Family*, chapters 6-7.

⁴ Rebecca Krawiec, *Shenoute and the Women of the White Monastery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Rebecca Krawiec, “The Role of the Female Elder in Shenoute’s White Monastery,” in *Christianity and Monasticism in Upper Egypt: Akhmim and Sohag*, ed. Gawdat Gabra and Hany N. Takla, vol. 1 (Cairo and New York: American University in Cairo Press, 2008), 59–71.

⁵ K. H. Kuhn, ed., *Letters and Sermons of Besa*, trans. K. H. Kuhn, vol. 1, *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* 157, *Scriptores Coptici* 21 (Louvain: L. Durbecq, 1956), 36–38; Besa, *To Aphthonia*, ed. Amir Zeldes et al., *Coptic Scriptorium*,

knowledge about the marital age for girls in late antique Egypt and the dedication of girls to asceticism at the age of engagement or marriage or earlier, we can infer that Aphthonia probably became a monk as a teenager.) She wrote to her household complaining about her treatment in the monastery. These examples thus provide good evidence for some level of literacy among the girls and women of the White Monastery.

This portrait of monastic girls, however, remains thin, and has led me to approach the question from a different angle: what if we approach the question from a different lens and ask about girlhood. The work of historian Joan Wallach Scott, who wrote the famous essay "Gender as a Category Analysis," called on historians to consider how gender structured societies and culture historically, and not restrict research methods to sifting through sometimes meagre evidence to reconstruct women's biographies and social histories.⁶ Likewise, historian of early Christianity Elizabeth Clark has applied the same methodologies to study gender in the Greek and Latin Christian writings of late antiquity.⁷ So following Scott and Clark, I want to ask not only where were girls and what did they do in the White Monastery, but also what is girlhood, what happens when White Monastery leaders deploy the language of girls and girlhood in their writings? When texts specifically refer to girls or daughters, what kinds of references are these? What kinds of language is used to describe girls? In what contexts are they mentioned? Where are girls absent from the literary world of the White Monastery.

This article represents preliminary research, applying digital tools to a select set of Coptic monastic writings to examine girls and girlhood. One difference between Coptic literature on the one hand and Greek and Latin early Christian texts or early modern French sources on the other hand is the availability of primary sources in either print or digital formats. Coptic primary sources from late antiquity are often partial, damaged, lost, unpublished, or some combination of all these characteristics.⁸ This essay examines selected writings of three White Monastery Federation leaders:

urn:cts:copticLit:besa.aphthonia.monbba. v 3.0.0, 2019-09-30, <http://data.copticscriptorium.org/urn:cts:copticLit:besa.aphthonia.monbba;> Heike Behlmer, "'Our Disobedience Will Punish Us...': The Use of Authoritative Quotations in the Writings of Besa," in *Texte, Theben, Tonfragmente: Festschrift Für Günter Burkard*, Ägypten und Altes Testament 76 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009), 37–54.

⁶ Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986): 1053–75.

⁷ Elizabeth A. Clark, "Women, Gender, and the Study of Christian History," *Church History* 70 (2001): 395–426; Elizabeth A. Clark, "The Lady Vanishes: Dilemmas of a Feminist Historian after the 'Linguistic Turn,'" *Church History: Studies in Christianity and Culture* 67, no. 1 (1998): 1–31.

⁸ See, for example, the reconstruction of Shenoute's "dismembered" corpus in Stephen Emmel, *Shenoute's Literary Corpus*, 2 vols., *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* 599–600 (Louvain: Peeters, 2004); also see Heike Behlmer, "The Recovery of the Coptic Sources for the Study of Gender in Late Antiquity," *Orientalia* 73 (2004): 255–69.

Shenoute, Besa, and Johannes. Shenoute the Great directed the Federation from the late fourth century into the mid-fifth century. Besa succeeded him, and Johannes served as leader at some point later. Most readers of *Coptica* will recognize Shenoute and Besa, due to the significant prior scholarship on these monks; Johannes is less known, but now Diliانا Atanassova has produced a digital edition of his *Canons for Monks*, enabling further research.⁹ We know girls lived in the women's community of the White Monastery Federation, and we know that the women's community read or heard read aloud the writings of some these leaders. The women's community also played an important role in the writings of Shenoute and Besa.

This article turns to girls and girlhood in the monastic leaders' discourse. My research here demonstrates that they are not absent from the rhetorical and discursive worlds of the male leaders, but it does indicate that girls are not often engaged in the literature as their own entities. They typically appear in passages about family and familial relations that also mention men and boys or in quotations from the Bible.

Defining Girlhood

One challenge of this research is simply finding girls in our sources – whether they are historical figures, people mentioned in references to other writings (such as the Coptic Bible), or metaphorical or rhetorical constructions. In Roman Egypt, girls and boys transitioned to adulthood at different ages—girlhood typically ended upon marriage, which in Egypt usually occurred in the mid to late teens.¹⁰ (For boys, “youth” could continue up to the age of 25.)¹¹

In the Coptic sources of the White Monastery, the term for “girl” is “little daughter” (*šēere šēm*). The word “daughter” (*šēere*) appears by itself, as well. Because of the paucity of references to “girls” I also include in this preliminary study passages about “daughters.” We also often see a collective term for “children” that can include boys or girls or both, which is “little ones” (*koui*). Since *koui* is gender neutral, I don't include it in my rhetorical and discursive study of “girlhood” here, though anyone interested in a social history of girls should examine passages about “little ones” to see if it is plausible to infer information about girls from the context.

⁹ Atanassova, ed., “The Canons of Apa John the Archimandrite – CoptOT Public”, <http://coptot.manuscriptroom.com/web/apa-johannes/>.

¹⁰ Sabine R. Huebner, *The Family in Roman Egypt: A Comparative Approach to Intergenerational Solidarity and Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 49–50.; Christian Laes and Johan Strubbe, *Youth in the Roman Empire: The Young and the Restless Years?* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 30–31.

¹¹ On male “youth” in the Roman Empire broadly, see Laes and Strubbe, *Youth in the Roman Empire*, 23–40; Huebner, *Family in Roman Egypt*, 50.

Methodology

My methodology includes both distant and close reading, by which I mean on the one hand digital methods to count words and their relationships to each other, and on the other hand the traditional historical and literary methodologies for reading and interpreting text. The digital method involves using software to count references to girls and daughters and then ascertain and count the words that appear most frequently with the words for girls and daughters. Some of the texts studied here have appeared in print editions, while others have never been published in traditional print book or journal.

Not all of Shenoute's known works have been published; for this essay, I have used the documents that have been digitized in the Coptic Scriptorium project's database as of summer 2019. Coptic Scriptorium has published online selections of his *Canons* or writings for monks as well as his *Discourses* – the more public sermons and treatises—in a digital, searchable format.¹² This collection comprises a small subset of Shenoute's works, which at the time of my research in summer 2019 equaled 19,970 words (see Table 1 below).¹³ Whenever Coptic Scriptorium has published two or more manuscripts of the same text, I have used only one manuscript witness. By the time of publication of this essay, this digital corpus of Shenoute will have increased, since the project typically releases new text data twice a year. Readers who visit the project site, thus, will find a different (and larger) dataset. All the project's releases, however, are archived on their GitHub site, and releases from 2019 forward will be archived on the University of Oklahoma public digital repository.¹⁴

Although Coptic Scriptorium has digitized and annotated more of Shenoute's *Discourses* than the *Canons*, as of this writing no references to “girls” or even “daughters” appear in our selection of *Discourses*.¹⁵ Also, Shenoute's *Canons* ultimately will be a richer source for this study; linguist Wolf-Peter Funk created a concordance of Shenoute's *Canons* (primarily

¹² Caroline T. Schroeder and Amir Zeldes, “Coptic Scriptorium,” Coptic Scriptorium, 2019–2013, <https://copticSCRIPTORIUM.org/>.

¹³ Shenoute, “Abraham Our Father,” “Acephalous Work 22,” “Some Kinds of People Sift Dirt,” “I See Your Eagerness,” “Not Because a Fox Barks,” “Whoever Seeks God Will Find,” “God Says through Those Who Are His,” in Coptic SCRIPTORIUM, [urn:cts:copticLit:shenoute.abraham, v. 2.7.0, 31 May 2019, http://data.copticSCRIPTORIUM.org/urn:cts:copticLit:shenoute](http://data.copticSCRIPTORIUM.org/urn:cts:copticLit:shenoute.abraham, v. 2.7.0, 31 May 2019, http://data.copticSCRIPTORIUM.org/urn:cts:copticLit:shenoute).

¹⁴ “Coptic Scriptorium Corpora Repository,” GitHub: Coptic SCRIPTORIUM, March 15, 2020, <https://github.com/CopticScriptorium/corpora>; “The University of Oklahoma,” ShareOK, accessed March 31, 2020, <https://shareok.org/handle/11244/1>.

¹⁵ Coptic Scriptorium, ANNIS query for Shenoute Corpora (nonredundant), <https://corpling.uis.georgetown.edu/annis/?id=2f9c7f53-5b66-41a2-bd4e-e363c12f3c4f>, accessed 20 July 2019. For the purposes of this paper, any query labeled “nonredundant” takes into account the presence of multiple manuscript witnesses to the same text and queries only for occurrences of terms in one witness.

Table 1
Size and Composition of Coptic Scriptorium Research
Corpora as of Summer 2019

	Total words (discounting parallel manuscript witnesses)	Girl/Daughter References
Shenoute in Coptic Scriptorium	29,970	22
<i>Canons</i> for monks (vol. 3)	12,785	22
<i>Discourses</i>	17,185	0
Funk's concordance of Shenoute's <i>Canons</i>	n/a	103
Besa, ed. Kuhn	>40,000	13
Apa Johannes <i>Canons</i> in Coptic Scriptorium	9,964	2

those published in print editions), which documents 103 mentions of *šeere*.¹⁶

Shenoute's successor as leader of the White Monastery was Besa; Kuhn published a critical edition of his letters, which So Miyagawa, a doctoral student at Georg-August University in Goettingen, has digitized and allowed me to use. Although this corpus of documents is more extensive and larger than the digitized *Canons* of Shenoute, it's not as rich a source for studying girls and girlhood, with only 13 references.

Johannes (or John) was one of the successors of Shenoute and Besa. Although we do not know his precise dates, he was probably leader of the Federation in the 6th or 7th century. Dr. Diliانا Atanassova has produced a digital edition of his writings based on the manuscripts. This is a born digital edition – no prior print edition exists. Coptic Scriptorium has collaborated

¹⁶ Wolf-Peter Funk, "A Work Concordance to Shenoute's *Canons*," 2007.

with Dr. Atanassova to republish her text in an annotated, searchable form.¹⁷ As of summer 2019, nearly 10,000 words had been published on Coptic Scriptorium, and in it there were only 2 references to girls.¹⁸ This is, however, just the tip of the iceberg that is the corpus of Apa Johannes; many more documents have been digitized and await importation into Coptic Scriptorium's database, so I am hopeful we will find more material.

This essay involves both close and distant reading. By close reading, I mean looking at the passages that mention girls, and interpreting them using the traditional methodologies of historians and philologists. Existing translations of a text help this work immensely, because then one does not have to translate in addition to read and interpret. In the case of the Apa Johannes material, no modern translation exists. Thus, this kind of close reading is difficult, because we cannot know the larger context of the two passages that mention girls without spending weeks on translation. By distant reading, I mean a specific type of machine-aided search and computation: counting words and calculating the words that appear in a text near other particular words.¹⁹ This essay examines three aspects: collocations, or the words that appear in the same passage as the terms for daughter or girl; references to "girl" compared to "daughter", "boy", and "son"; references within biblical quotations compared to other contexts, such as historical girls in the monastery.

Multiple digital tools are required to conduct this analysis. First, digital Coptic text must be processed and annotated using natural language processing tools, which separate Coptic text into individual words, annotate each word with its dictionary headword (lemma), tag each word for its part of speech, and more.²⁰ For the Shenoute and Johannes corpora, each digital text with annotations and metadata describing the text then is ingested into

¹⁷ Diliانا Atanassova, ed., "The Canons of Apa John the Archimandrite - CoptOT Public;" in Coptic SCRIPTORIUM, urn:cts:copticLit:johannes.canons, v. 2.7.0, 31 May 2019, <http://data.copticscriptorium.org/urn:cts:copticLit:johannes.canons>, <http://coptot.manuscriptroom.com/web/apa-johannes>.

¹⁸ Coptic Scriptorium, ANNIS query for Johannes *Canons* corpus (nonredundant), <https://corpling.uis.georgetown.edu/annis/?id=a664e6b5-ccc9-48f8-937e-b1de3c20abea>, accessed 20 July 2019.

¹⁹ See, for example, this discussion in Stéfán Sinclair and Geoffrey Rockwell, "Text Analysis and Visualization," in *A New Companion to Digital Humanities* (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2015), 274–90, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118680605.ch19>.

²⁰ Caroline T. Schroeder and Amir Zeldes, "Raiders of the Lost Corpus," *Digital Humanities Quarterly* 10, no. 2 (2016), <http://digitalhumanities.org/dhq/vol/10/2/000247/000247.html>; Amir Zeldes and Caroline T. Schroeder, "Computational Methods for Coptic: Developing and Using Part-of-Speech Tagging for Digital Scholarship in the Humanities," *Digital Scholarship in the Humanities* 30, no. suppl 1 (December 1, 2015): i164–76, <https://doi.org/10.1093/lc/fqv043>; Amir Zeldes and Caroline T. Schroeder, "An NLP Pipeline for Coptic," in *Proceedings of the 10th ACL SIGHUM Workshop on Language Technology for Cultural Heritage, Social Sciences, and Humanities (LaTeCH2016)* (Berlin, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.18653/v1/W16-2119>.

a public, online searchable database and visualization tool.²¹ So Miyagawa provided the digital Besa corpus in a searchable application that deploys on one's desktop computer using any browser software. Text from each of these sources was excerpted or downloaded for further close reading analysis or for computational analysis and visualization using the tool Voyant.²²

Johannes

Let's proceed backwards in time and begin with Johannes, the latest author chronologically. As of July 2019, only two passages contained references to girls or daughters. I present these excerpts as normalized text (normalized spelling and supralinear strokes removed). The text as it appears in the manuscript as well as this normalized version are preserved in the Coptic Scriptorium ANNIS database.²³

1. ΝΤΑΩΩΠΕ ΝΗΤΗ ΕΥΕΙΩΤ' ΝΤΕΤΝΩΩΠΕ ΝΑΙ ΕΞΕΝΩΗΡΕ ΜΗΞΕΝΩΕΡΕ ΠΕΧΕΠΧΟΕΙΣ' ΠΠΑΝΤΟΚΡΑΤΩΡ' (*Canons* 99 in MONB.FA 67)²⁴
2. ΧΕ ΑΚΥΙ ΝΑΩΗΡΕ ΝΤΞΕ ΝΟΥΑΙΧΜΑΛΩΤΟΣ ΖΗΤΣΗΦΕ' ΜΠΚΑΔΤΗ ΜΠΩΑ ΝΗΤΠΕΙ ΕΡΝΝΑΩΗΡΕ ΜΗΝΑΩΕΡΕ ΤΕΝΟΥ ΖΗΟΥΜΝΤΑΤΖΗΤ ΑΚΑΔΣ' (*Canons* 328.4 in MONB.FA 155-56)²⁵

The first passage consists of a quotation of 2 Cor 6:18 (itself probably quoting 2 Samuel 7:14). Table 2 presents the English NRSV translation of the passage, the Greek, the Coptic, and an English translation of the Coptic:

²¹ The tool is ANNIS, see Thomas Krause and Amir Zeldes, "ANNIS3: A New Architecture for Generic Corpus Query and Visualization," *Digital Scholarship in the Humanities*, October 24, 2014, <https://doi.org/10.1093/llc/fqu057>; Coptic Scriptorium's instance can be found at "Coptic SCRIPTORIUM: ANNIS," database, accessed November 13, 2019, <http://corpling.uis.georgetown.edu/annis/scriptorium>.

²² Stéfan Sinclair and Geoffrey Rockwell, "Voyant Tools (Home Page)," 2016, <http://voyant-tools.org/>.

²³ Coptic Scriptorium, ANNIS query for Johannes *Canons* corpus, <https://corpling.uis.georgetown.edu/annis/?id=a664e6b5-cec9-48f8-937e-b1de3c20abea>, accessed 20 July 2019.

²⁴ Apa Johannes, *Canons* 99 ed. Diliانا Atanassova, Elizabeth Platte, Caroline T. Schroeder, Coptic SCRIPTORIUM. urn:cts:copticLit:johannes.canons.monbfa:97-122. v 2.7.0 31 May 2019. <http://data.copticscriptorium.org/urn:cts:copticLit:johannes.canons.monbfa:97-122/>.

²⁵ Apa Johannes, *Canons* 328 in ed. Diliانا Atanassova, Caroline T. Schroeder, Elizabeth Platte, Coptic SCRIPTORIUM. urn:cts:copticLit:johannes.canons.monbfa:308-330. v 2.7.0 31 May 2019. <http://data.copticscriptorium.org/urn:cts:copticLit:johannes.canons.monbfa:308-330/>.

Table 2
2 Corinthians 6:18²⁶

NRSV	“and I will be your father, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.”
Greek	Καὶ ἔσομαι ὑμῖν εἰς πατέρα, καὶ ὑμεῖς ἔσεσθέ μοι εἰς υἱοὺς καὶ θυγατέρας, λέγει κύριος παντοκράτωρ.
Johannes Coptic	ΝΤΑΩΩΠΕ ΝΗΤΝ ΕΥΕΙΩΤ· ΝΤΕΤΝΩΩΠΕ ΝΑΙ ΕΞΕΩΩΗΡΕ ΜΗΞΕΩΩΕΡΕ ΠΕΧΕΠΧΟΕΙΣ· ΠΠΑΝΤΟΚΡΑΤΩΡ·
Johannes English	“And I became to you as a father, and you became to me as sons and daughters,” said the Lord the Almighty

Thus, here we find neither historical girls, nor minor children, nor legal familial relations, but a biblical quotation about sons and daughters of God as a likely metaphorical or symbolic genealogical reference to family as metaphor for the people of God or the monastic community. Additionally, daughters are paired with sons. There is no other discussion of women and girls in this section of Johannes' work; this passage is an incidental reference to the people of God, both men and women, as God's children.

The second occurrence of “daughter” in the searchable, digitized text of Apa Johannes's *Canons* also consists of a biblical quotation. Likewise, here too the author pairs sons and daughters. Before providing a translation or further analysis, I want to walk through the process of identifying the quotation using digital methods. I immediately had a hunch this passage contained a biblical reference because of the unusual vocabulary: prisoner (*aixmalōtos*) and knife or sword (*sēfe*). In the Coptic Scriptorium database, each word has been annotated for its dictionary headword (the lemma); the word then is annotated with a link directly to the Coptic Dictionary Online's entry for that lemma.²⁷ In the database, after searching for *šeere* and finding these two passages, I selected the Coptic *sēfe* in the second result, and examined the dictionary entry.²⁸ Additionally, the dictionary links two ways

26 “SBL Greek New Testament – Download,” accessed April 1, 2020, <http://sblgnt.com/download/>; Johannes Canons 99; Coptic translation is mine.

27 Frank Feder et al., “A Linked Coptic Dictionary Online,” in *Proceedings of the Second Joint SIGHUM Workshop on Computational Linguistics for Cultural Heritage, Social Sciences, Humanities and Literature* (Santa Fe, New Mexico: Association for Computational Linguistics, 2018), 12–21, <https://www.aclweb.org/anthology/W18-4502>; The Koptische/Coptic Electronic Language and Literature International Alliance (KELLIA), ed., *Coptic Dictionary Online*, accessed November 13, 2019, <http://coptic-dictionary.org/>.

28 TLA lemma no. C3939 (ⲥⲏⲫⲉ), in: *Coptic Dictionary Online*, ed. by the Koptische/Coptic Electronic Language and Literature International Alliance (KELLIA), <https://coptic-dictionary.org/entry.cgi?tla=C3939> (accessed 2020-04-03).

with the Coptic Scriptorium database: database users can click on the lemmas to reach the dictionary, and dictionary users can click on the Coptic Scriptorium logo in any entry to find all the occurrences for that word in the database. In the dictionary entry for *sēfe*, I clicked on the logo (a red “C”) and returned to the database results of all instances of the term in all digitized corpora, including the digitized Sahidic New Testament and Old Testament. Each result or “hit” in the database returns the search word in context of the larger phrase in which it appears. One of the hits for *sēfe* in the Coptic NT and OT also included *aixmalōtos*, that Greek word for prisoner or captive that also had caught my eye.²⁹ Thus, using the Coptic Scriptorium database and online dictionary, we can identify this passage as a quotation from Genesis 31:26-28. The NRSV translation of Gen 31:26-28 reads:

Laban said to Jacob, “What have you done? You have deceived me and carried away my *daughters* like captives of the sword. Why did you flee secretly and deceive me and not tell me? I would have sent you away with mirth and songs, with tambourine and lyre. And why did you not permit me to kiss my sons and my daughters farewell? What you have done is foolish.”

Johannes seems have taken pieces of verses 26 and 28:

ⲭⲉⲁⲕⲩ ⲛⲁⲟⲩⲣⲉ ⲛⲧⲉ ⲛⲟⲗⲁⲓⲙⲁⲗⲟⲧⲟⲥ ⲉⲛⲧⲥⲩⲥⲉ → “You have carried away my sons as prisoners of the sword” (paraphrasing Gen 31:26)

ⲙⲡⲕⲁⲁⲧ ⲛⲙⲡⲟⲗ ⲛⲛⲧⲡⲉⲓ ⲉⲣⲛⲛⲁⲟⲩⲣⲉ ⲙⲛⲛⲁⲟⲩⲉⲣⲉ ⲧⲉⲛⲟⲩ
ⲉⲛⲟⲩⲙⲛⲧⲁⲧⲉⲛⲧ ⲁⲕⲁⲁⲥ → “You did not do me the honor of kisses for my sons and my daughters now. Foolishly you did it.” (paraphrasing Gen 31:28)

Two important conclusions result from this discovery due to my “distant reading” of Apa Johannes for references to girls and daughters. First, either Johannes or a previous Coptic tradition of Genesis *changed* the mention of “daughters” in verse 26 to “sons.”³⁰ (The only known manuscript preserving this section of Genesis 31:26 records “daughters.”³¹) Johannes’s text keeps

²⁹ Coptic Scriptorium, ANNIS query for the lemma *sēfe*, <https://corpling.uis.georgetown.edu/annis/?id=f71a4bbd-5dd9-43b6-8716-f6aa3e2792b1>, accessed 20 July 2019.

³⁰ The Coptic word for “son” (instead of “daughter”) is clear in the manuscript MONB.FA f. 155.

³¹ See Gen 31:26 in Gaston Maspero, *Fragments de la version thébaine de l’Ancien testament*, vol. 1 of 5 vols., Mémoires publiés par les membres de la Mission Archéologique Française au Caire 6 (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1892), 19. I thank Alin Suci for this reference.

“daughters” only in the second part of the passage, when the term is paired with “sons” in Genesis 28. Daughters do not get to be on their own here, even as descendants in what is probably an allegory of some kind. Second, we have a newly found reference to Genesis 31 in Sahidic.

For our study of girls and girlhood, we find that in the digitized corpus of Johannes’s writings, daughters are paired with sons (not independently), they appear in a familial context, they appear in negative contexts (where people are acting foolishly or, in the worldview of the text, wrongly), and in biblical quotations rather than in a real-life monastic context.

How do these references compare to the language and rhetoric of sons and boys in this selection of Johannes *Canons*? To obtain a quick snapshot of the discourse of sons and boyhood, I examined the collocations of the term for “son”. Collocations provide a glimpse of word associations and themes. For this example, I used the query options in the ANNIS database to capture the five words *before* and the five words *after* every incidence of *šēre*.³² I then downloaded the results and put them through Voyant to calculate the frequencies of these terms and build a word cloud. Then I removed all the so-called “function” or “stop” words—terms like “the”, “an”, pronouns, converters, or prefixes—so that only meaningful content words remain. The select Johannes corpus contains no mentions of “boys” specifically (*šēre šēm*); it does contain more references to sons than to daughters—16 compared to 2. The collocations for “son” are consequently more extensive.

Table 3
Collocations of “son” appearing more than once;
Johannes corpus, summer 2019

ⲛⲟϥⲧⲉ	God	8
ϣⲉⲣⲉ	Daughter	2
ⲥⲕⲉⲡⲁⲗⲉ	To cover	2
ϣⲏⲣⲉ	Son	2

³² Coptic Scriptorium, ANNIS query for Johannes *Canons* Corpus (nonredundant) <https://corpling.uis.georgetown.edu/annis/?id=c83021c5-24b7-4c9f-b0a7-e33b1e71e5f1>, accessed 20 July 2019.

Table 4
Collocations of “daughter” appearing more than once;
Johannes corpus, summer 2019

ΠΡΟ	King	2
ἑμίμη	Wife	2

“Son of God” as a phrase alone appears four times. While “son” also appears often with other family terms (“daughter”, “wife”), it also appears in proximity to power (“God”, “king”). Sons are only paired with daughters twice – the two references already discussed above; most of the time “sons” stand on their own, not with daughters.

To conclude, although we have a significant amount of Apa Johannes’ corpus from Atanassova’s digital editions yet to annotate as searchable text for future study, thus far girls and daughters do not occupy much real estate in Apa Johannes’s symbolic or rhetorical universe. They exist as counterparts to their brothers, and in biblical citations; in one passage they perhaps were even erased from a biblical quotation.

Besa

In the letters of Besa, we have a bit more material to work with. For this corpus, which has received much more extensive study than the Johannes texts, I will focus on collocations. I searched for “daughter” (*šeere*) in the letters of Besa digitized by So Miyagawa; I then excerpted the five words before and the five words *after* every incidence of *šeere*, and then put them through Voyant to count their occurrences and create word clouds. I removed all the so-called “function” or “stop” words, such as “the”, “an”, pronouns, converters, or prefixes.

Table 5 Collocates of “daughter” appearing more than once; Besa corpus			Figure 1 Word cloud of collocates of “daughter”; Besa corpus
ἠνρε	Son	8	
μηδγ	Mother	3	
ἀγγελοσ	Angel	2	
διαβολοσ	Devil	2	
ἑμίμη	Wife/ woman	2	

In Besa’s writings, as in those two references in Johannes, daughters/girls are most associated with sons/boys; “son” appears eight times near “daughter.” In general, daughters/girls seem to be associated with family: son, wife, mother are all collates. We also find angel and devil. Other terms appear only once, and are not shown in Table 5 or Figure 1.)

Now, let’s contrast this discourse to the thematic and symbolic world of boys and sons.

Table 6 Collocates of “son” appearing more than once; Besa corpus			Figure 2 Word cloud of collocates of “son”; Besa corpus
CON	brother	9	
EIWT	father	6	
ΩΕΡΕ	daughter	4	
ΩHM	little	3	
EIP	do	2	
EIPHNH	peace	2	
MOY	die	2	
NAY	time <i>or</i> look	2	
CZIME	woman/ wife	2	
XPCCTOC	Christ		

The most frequent associated words are “son”, “father”, “daughter”, “little” (which signals the term for “boy” not “son”.) Like daughters, boys and sons also appear most often in familial contexts but not *mostly* paired with their female counterparts, daughters. “Sons” also appear independently or with other male figures. Additionally, we see references not just to sons but to “boys” *šēre šēm*. A much richer semantic discourse surrounds boys and sons.

Shenoute

Shenoute’s corpus poses particular challenges, since it has not been fully published. As mentioned above, Wolf-Peter Funk has identified over 100 mentions of “daughter” or “girl” in Shenoute’s *Canons* for monks. Coptic Scriptorium has published only a fraction of the *Canons*; all the documents on the site come from manuscripts of Shenoute's third volume of *Canons*,

which contains a famous letter called “Abraham Our Father.”³³ Rebecca Krawiec has studied this letter extensively, and as she has shown, Shenoute wrote the letter to the women's community – thus, a known audience of women and girls specifically – about problems he thinks exist in their community, especially in how they treat each other and serve each other as monastic sisters.³⁴ It also contains a number of biblical quotations and allusions, since Shenoute discusses Abraham, other biblical patriarchs, and prominent women of the Christian Old Testament. Coptic Scriptorium is I believe the only place in the world you can currently read the text in both Coptic and English. We've published all the manuscript fragments save one in Cairo. The other text published by Coptic Scriptorium from the *Canons* does not have a title and goes by the unceremonious designation of “Acephalous Work 22” (hereafter A22); not all manuscript witnesses to the work have been published online.³⁵ Nonetheless, again, Coptic Scriptorium is the only place in the world where one can read these selections together in one place. Some sections of this work are digital editions of manuscript pages that have never been published in print editions. The segments published online cover themes similar to those in “Abraham Our Father” and likewise contain extensive biblical references.

The Coptic term *šeere* appears 22 times in the digitized documents of the *Canons*. Of those mentions, 7 are “girls” and 15 are “daughters.”³⁶ Collocations can provide us a quick “distant reading.” Table 7 presents the semantically meaningful words that appear within five words of the word for “daughter.” (The table omits terms that appear only once.) Girls and daughters are most often associated with boys or sons but also occasionally with God, flesh, and goodness.

Table 7
Collocates of “daughter” appearing more than once;
Shenoute *Canons* corpora, summer 2019

ϥⲏⲣⲉ	son	17
ϥⲏⲙ	little	9

³³Shenoute, “Abraham Our Father,” in Coptic SCRIPTORIUM, urn:cts:copticLit:shenoute.abraham, v. 2.7.0, 31 May 2019, <http://data.copticscriptorium.org/urn:cts:copticLit:shenoute.abraham>.

³⁴Krawiec, *Shenoute and the Women of the White Monastery*, 38, 70.

³⁵Shenoute, “Acephalous Work 22,” in Coptic SCRIPTORIUM, urn:cts:copticLit:shenoute.a22, v. 2.7.0, 31 May 2019, <http://data.copticscriptorium.org/urn:cts:copticLit:shenoute.a22>.

³⁶Coptic Scriptorium, ANNIS query for digitized Shenoute *Canons* corpora (“Abraham Our Father,” A22, nonredundant) <https://corpling.uis.georgetown.edu/annis/?id=d1cf26d0-934d-424c-96f7-888453064253>, accessed 20 July 2019.

ΝΟΥΤΕ	God	3
ϘΑΡΞ	flesh	3
ΝΑΝΟΥ	good	2

All seven references to girls specifically occur in the same text, A22. To summarize our examination of digitized Shenoute: no mentions of girls or daughters appear in the digitized *Discourses*, only in the digitized *Canons*; “girls” (as opposed to “daughters”) specifically are mentioned only in one text of the digitized *Canons*—A22. (Again, these are not all the references to daughters or girls in Shenoute – we have at least 103 identified by Funk – these consist only of the mentions in *Canons* manuscripts that are digitized.)

As with our other corpora, we can compare the discursive context of Shenoute’s writing about girls or daughters to the context of his writing about boys or sons. Two-word clouds visualize the differences. Figure 3 visualizes the words that appear within five words of “daughter”, and Figure 4 visualizes the words that appear within five words of “son.” (Both word clouds exclude “stop” or “function” words.)

Figure 3
Word cloud of collocates of
“daughter”; Shenoute *Canons*
corpora



Figure 4
Word cloud of collocates of “son”;
Shenoute *Canons* corpora



As we can see, the thematic and symbolic discursive world of “sons” and “boys” is much richer and diverse than that of “daughters” and “girls”. For both, the term of the other gender is still the most common collocate.

Distant reading, as we saw with the *Canons* of Johannes, can also lead to discovery. A search for passages about girls in Shenoute’s work A22 leads us to an interesting passage in an edition of a manuscript fragment published only online, never in print. As with many initial editions of texts, analyzing the passage can be challenging without a translation of the entire document. This passage addresses education, teaching, and learning. Again, girls are paired with boys, but this is not to my knowledge a biblical reference; this

section concerns real boys and girls in the monastery – why and how to educate them.³⁷

ΔΥΩ ΝΤΗΝΜΟΟΥΕ ΖΗΟΥΕΙΡΗΝΗ ΖΙΟΥΣΟΝ(Π?)·
 ΗΝΝΑΠΑΙ ΗΔΡΝΠΑΔΕΥΕ ΗΝΩΗΡΕ ΩΗΗ ΗΝΝΩΕΡΕ ΩΗΗ ΕΤΝΖΗΤΗ
 ΖΗΟΥΒΕΡΩΒ· ΔΕΚΑΣ ΕΥΕΣΒΟ ΕΡΖΟΤΕ ΖΗΤΥ ΜΠΝΟΥΤΕ ΝΣΕΖΑΡΕΖ
 ΕΝΕΦΕΝΤΟΛΗ ΕΤΡΕΥΧΙΣΜΟΥ ΕΜΑΤΕ ΖΩΣ ΡΩΜΕ ΝΑΒΕ ΚΑΤΑΝΕΓΡΑΦΗ

And let us walk in peace together.
 After this let us teach the boys and girls who are among us
 forcefully so that they shall learn to fear God and keep his
 commandments in order that they receive many blessings as wise
 people, according to the scriptures.

We see Shenoute enjoining the monks to educate both boys and girls among them, and articulating a monastic *paideia* that claims as its basis the Christian scriptures.³⁸ Additionally, Shenoute’s call for “force” raises questions about the role of corporal punishment in monastic education; the Coptic term βερωβ means power or rod. Thus, Shenoute may allude, here, to beatings—a common practice in antiquity, even in educational settings.³⁹

Conclusions

Combining the digital computational methods, even very basic methods of “counting words”—counting key terms or counting words *around* key terms—with traditional methods of philological and historical research leads to new discoveries. We would expect to see similarities in discourse among these three authors, since they composed their works in the same context (the White Monastery Federation), and later authors read the previous one(s). Nonetheless, we have found some differences in the ways the discourses about girls and girlhood operate, as well. So far, in the writings of Johannes and Besa, girls and daughters are rarely discussed on their own or as contemporaneous historical people. For Johannes, in these selections

³⁷ Shenoute, A22, 815 in eds. Elizabeth Platte, Rebecca Krawiec, Caroline T. Schroeder, Amir Zeldes, [urn:cts:copticLit:shenoute.a22.monbyb:801-825](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:cts:copticLit:shenoute.a22.monbyb:801-825), v 2.7.0 31 May 2019.

³⁸ Possibly, the terms “boys” and “girls” may reference junior monks or novices, though without context it is equally likely Shenoute means minor children or a group that includes both minors and adult junior monks. See Schroeder, *Children and Family*, chapter 2, on language for children in monastic sources.

³⁹ Julian Hillner, “Monks and children: corporal punishment in Late Antiquity,” *European Review of History* 16 (2009) 773-91; Raffaella Criboire, *Gymnastics of the Mind: Greek Education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) 69-71; Schroeder, *Children and Family*, 134-37.

girls exist in biblical passages – and in one he or his source may even have erased a reference to “daughters” and replaced it with “sons.” As I work through more of the corpus, it will be interesting to see if other texts of his mention girls and women more. But in the selection of his writings I have analyzed, they exist only fleetingly as symbols, metaphors, and examples from the biblical world. Daughters and girls are more prominent in the semantic world of Besa, but rarely on their own terms. Besa primarily mentions them paired with boys or sons, or in discussions of family relations. Shenoute may provide our richest sources for understanding girls and girlhood, despite his authoritarian tendencies and usurpation of the women's community's female leader's authority. In our sample, he is more likely to talk about girls and daughters on their own terms. Girls in particular receive education and teaching as well as the boys.

These monastic leaders share some common thematic threads, as well. All mention girls and daughters alongside sons or boys more often than on their own. Girlhood and daughterhood exist primarily in familial contexts, while boyhood and sonship exist in a much richer discursive universe.

Boys in the White Monastery Federation who heard their leaders speak or who read their leaders' writings would have heard and seen themselves included in the vision of the White Monastery. Not so for girls, at least as far as these selections demonstrate. Other than Shenoute's works, girls barely exist in these works, and even in Shenoute's they seem concentrated in particular documents about women and girls. Contrast this with the very lively women's community we know existed from the descriptions in Shenoute's and Besa's writings and in the archaeological record from the sixth through seventh centuries, and we feel the absences of girls even more keenly.⁴⁰ As I move forward with this research, I seek to determine whether the trends exhibited in this sample continue as I research more of the writings of Johannes and Shenoute.

⁴⁰ Stephen J. Davis, with contributions by G. Pyke, L. Blanke, W. Dolling, and A. Urcia, “Anastasia, Thecla, and Friends: Archaeological and Epigraphic Evidence from the Shenoutean Women's Monastery at Atripe,” *Le Muséon* 133.2 (2020), 259–287.