



PROPHECY AND PORNEIA IN SHENOUTE'S LETTERS



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In his letters to the men and women of his monastery, Shenoute frequently draws on prophetic rhetoric taken from the Christian Old Testament to enhance his authority as an ascetic leader. In these same letters, Shenoute uses gendered and sexualized language to discuss and condemn sins he believes are being committed in the monastery. This paper will examine the relationship between Shenoute's use of prophetic discourse and his frequent condemnation of the sin of porneia in select texts. It will argue that Shenoute's references to sexual sin should not be interpreted simply as an account of the activities of the monks under his supervision. Rather, Shenoute's rhetoric reflects his vision of the monastery as a feminine space or figure comparable to Israel or Jerusalem in the Christian Old Testament, an entity whose sins are construed as faithlessness to God as the true object of Israel's, and now the monastery's, devotion.

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