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IN LATE ANTIQUITY
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The life of the forgotten, of the unknown individual man; his sorrows and his joys, his suffering and death, this is the real content of human experience down the ages. If that could be told by history, then I should certainly not say that it is blasphemy to see the finger of God in it. But such a history does not and cannot exist; and all the history which exists, our history of the Great and the Powerful, is at best shallow comedy; it is the opera buffa played by the powers behind reality.

(Karl Popper, ***The Open Society and Its Enemies***)

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Preface

This book is about religious encounters in Late Antique Egypt. The idea of writing it was born in 1999 when I finished my MA-thesis about a papyrus text that mentioned the reinstatement of 'the sanctuaries' for a group of desert people, the Blemmyes, in AD 567. I suggested that with 'the sanctuaries' could well have been meant the temples of Philae, an island on Egypt's southern frontier. However, if this were true, it would be in disagreement with an account by the Byzantine historian Procopius, commonly accepted by scholars, that Justinian made a definitive end to the Ancient Egyptian cults at Philae in 535-537. How far can we trust Procopius in this respect? As there had already been an episcopal see created on the same small island in the fourth century, I wondered how the religious transformation from the Ancient Egyptian religion to Christianity had taken place on Philae in Late Antiquity.

Two years earlier, in 1997, on the occasion of his valedictory lecture, Herman te Velde, Professor of Egyptology at the University of Groningen, the person who kindled my passion for Egypt, made the following observation: 'It would be interesting to know how the priests of the Christian church and the priests of the temple of Isis at Philae coexisted, apparently without noteworthy problems'.¹ How could I have known then that this question would later keep me busy as a PhD-student for almost four and a half years! Having read David Frankfurter's *Religion in Roman Egypt* of 1998, this book challenged me to study the religious developments at Philae in a regional context, that is, by including two other settlements in the area, Syene (modern Aswan) and Elephantine.

Encouraged by the many and various sources from and on the region, at the start of my PhD-project in 2000 my initial goal was to study all these sources together in order to extract a detailed picture of the religious transformation in the region over the entire period of Late Antiquity. One of the most promising sources was a Coptic hagiographical work on the region, the *Life of Aaron*. I soon discovered that the text was not well edited and therefore I studied the only completely preserved manuscript of the work, as well as some papyrus fragments of a second manuscript, in the British Library in 2001. In addition, Jacques van der Vliet kindly invited me to Leiden to study the *Life of Aaron* and several other Coptic saints' lives together with Klaartje ten Hacken, Joost Hagen and Robert Hub in 2001/2002. I vividly remember the lively debates we had about these exciting Coptic texts. On other occasions, Jacques was always there to exchange views and to advise me on the Coptic, preferably over a nice glass of wine.

The only type of sources I was at first less impressed by was the published archaeological record. Nevertheless, as I would be studying a region for at least four years, I thought I might as well visit the excavations in the area. After having sent an e-mail to Cornelius von Pilgrim, director of the Swiss Institute for Architectural and Archaeological Research Cairo, I was kindly invited to participate in the excavations. Fortunately, in 2000, excavations of Late Antique and Arab houses around the temple of Isis at Aswan had just started and during my first visit to Egypt in 2001 I contributed to the excavations by drawing the walls of one of these mudbrick houses. Soon, however, my attention was drawn to the place where we sought relief from the boiling heat and where we took our breaks: the temple of Isis. It turned out to contain many Christian graffiti and was apparently reused as a church after the Ancient Egyptian cults had ceased.

I therefore decided to return the next year to catalogue the graffiti in the temple of Isis, and to study its reuse as a church. Besides the fieldwork in Aswan, I also stayed in Cairo for several months to study the mentioned papyrus text in the Egyptian Museum. I joyfully remember the many pleasant hours I spent drinking tea with the Museum's employees. With the status of an assistant researcher, the Dutch-Flemish Institute kindly gave me the opportunity to carry out the research in the Museum and to have access to the main Cairene libraries. Finally, the serene environment of the Swiss Institute gave me shelter from the chaos

¹ H. te Velde, *Het einde van de Oudegyptische religieuze traditie* (Groningen, 1997) 10.

and noise of the streets of Cairo. It is with the warmest feelings that I look back on these months spent in Egypt, which have enriched me and will do so for the rest of my life.

Although I cannot mention all the people whom I am fortunate to have met in my time in Egypt, two persons in particular have to be mentioned. Firstly, Kai-Christian Bruhn was always there to discuss matters with me on site. He shared my conviction about the benefits of a multidisciplinary research and stimulated me throughout. Secondly, I am indebted to Cornelius von Pilgrim who allowed me to become a member of the Swiss excavations at Aswan and Elephantine, to study the temple of Isis at Aswan and to publish some recently discovered Late Antique inscriptions from the area. Moreover, he supported my stay at the Swiss Institute, also during a third visit to Cairo and Aswan in 2003, and gave me access to the institute's excellent library and the documents of the founder of the Swiss Institute, Ludwig Borchardt.

Besides these experiences in Egypt, I had the privilege of studying papyri in the original languages during the Papyrological Summer Institute, organised by the American Society of Papyrologists, at Yale University in 2003. During the month I spent in the basement of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, I broadened my knowledge of papyrology, while getting hands-on experience with the papyri in a highly stimulating environment and being educated by specialists in the field such as Adam Bülow-Jacobsen, Hélène Cuvigny, Ruth Duttonhöfer and Ann Hanson. I am grateful for the generous grants with which the Beinecke Library and the Stichting Philologisch Studiefonds, as well as the Dutch National Graduate School in Classical Studies (OIKOS) and the Faculties of Theology and Religious Studies and Arts of the University of Groningen, made my travels abroad possible.

The study of these sources, amongst others, and the experiences I had, have substantially contributed to the realisation of a detailed picture of the religious transformation on Egypt's southern frontier in Late Antiquity. Yet, despite this picture, the main insight that this study has given me is that it is only the tip of the iceberg and that we cannot really get through to what people experienced during the almost three and a half centuries that this study covers. There is thus much truth in Karl Popper's prudent remark, which has accordingly become the motto of this book, that the history that is written is almost exclusively the 'history of the Great and the Powerful'. However, precisely the few cases in which a glimpse can be caught of 'the unknown individual man' or an idea, albeit superficial, can be sensed of the religious encounters that were experienced, perhaps satisfy the historian the most. In fact, this is what has kept me going over the last few years.

In addition to my encounters with the sources, I also encountered many people who have assisted by word and deed to the realisation of this book. First of all, I enjoyed working together with my colleagues in the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Groningen, who made me feel that I had returned home after every journey I made. My participation in the interdisciplinary research programme 'Cultural Change' at the same university made my time as a PhD-student in Groningen particularly inspiring. Secondly, I would like to thank the members of the Papyrological Institute at Leiden University for their hospitality and kind assistance during my frequent visits. Thirdly, parts of the book were presented in several papers I gave over the last few years in Groningen and Leiden (on several occasions), Vienna, Rome (twice), Wassenaar, Cairo, Athens, New Haven, Leicester and Ottawa. I owe gratitude to the various audiences for the intellectual exchanges and fruitful discussions from which I benefited. Fourthly, several persons have read smaller or greater parts of the manuscript and have saved me from numerous errors or have helped me to attain new insights. I would especially like to thank Hélène Cuvigny, Jaap van Dijk, Jean-Luc Fournet, David Frankfurter, Jan van Ginkel, Geoffrey Greatrex, Peter Grossmann, Horst Jaritz, Justin Kroesen, Yme Kuiper, Ewa Laskowska-Kusztal, Bentley Layton, Christopher Lillington-Martin, Brian Muhs, Mieczysław Rodziewicz, Sofia Schaten, Arjo Vanderjagt and Jacques van der Vliet, as well as the members of the 'beoordelingscommissie', Gerard Luttikhuisen, Onno van Nijf and Klaas Worp, who read through the whole manuscript, and Julia Harvey, who corrected my English.

Pride of place is reserved for my two supervisors, Peter van Minnen and Jan Bremmer. Peter, who also supervised my MA-thesis, taught me the craft of classical philology, above all to be accurate, even while studying the tiniest details, and urged me to keep studying the texts. Jan Bremmer put me on the track of religious studies and taught me 'the rules of the game'. He was always there to give me a good piece of advice or to restrain my at times unbridled enthusiasm, and kindly helped me in the progression of my career. His erudition and broad scope on a dazzling range of subjects will always be an example to me.

My final words of thanks are for Judith, Justin and Paul, whose close friendship I have enjoyed for several years now, for Silvia, who lovingly helped me through some hard times and reminded me that there is more to life than work alone, and for my parents, who have always supported me. It is to them that I dedicate this book.

Groningen, 13 February 2005

Abbreviations

Throughout this book, classical sources are abbreviated according to H.G. Liddell, R. Scott, H.S. Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford, 1996⁹ with rev. suppl.) = *LSJ*, and *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae. Index* (Leipzig, 1990²), patristic sources according to G.W.H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford, 1968) = Lampe, *PGL*.

References to scholarly works are given by quoting the titles in full the first time and in abbreviated form subsequently. Titles which are quoted more than once are included in the select bibliography at the end of this book.

Abbreviations of journals are according to J. Marouzeau (ed.), *L'année philologique. Bibliographie critique et analytique de l'antiquité gréco-latine* (Paris, 1924-), and of reference works according to S. Hornblower, A. Spawforth (eds), *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (Oxford, 1996³) = *OCD*³.

If different abbreviations are used in Egyptology, these abbreviations have been preferred. For these, see W. Helck, E. Otto, H. Westendorf (eds), *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*, 7 vols (Wiesbaden, 1975-1992) = *LÄ*. For papyrological abbreviations, see J.F. Oates *et al.* (eds), *A Checklist of Editions of Greek and Latin Papyri, Ostraca and Tablets* (Atlanta, 2001⁵). Epigraphical abbreviations follow the *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* (Leiden and Amsterdam, 1923-) = *SEG*. Other abbreviations used are:

- ARG** *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte*
BMGS *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*
BSf *Beiträge zur Sudanforschung*
 Calderini, *Diz.geogr.*
 A. Calderini, S. Daris (eds), *Dizionario dei nomi geografici e topografici dell'Egitto greco-romano*, 8 vols (Cairo etc., 1935-2003)
Copt.Enc. A.S. Atiya (ed.), *The Coptic Encyclopedia*, 8 vols (New York, 1991)
Crum, Dict. W.E. Crum, *A Coptic Dictionary* (Oxford, 1939)
CSCO *Corpus scriptorum Christianorum orientalium* (Leuven, 1903-)
Description de l'Égypte
Description de l'Égypte ou recueil des observations et des recherches qui ont été faites en Égypte pendant l'expédition de l'armée française, 24 vols (Paris, 1821-1829)
DNP *Der Neue Pauly. Enzyklopädie der Antike*, 16 vols (Stuttgart, 1996-2003)
Documenta Monophysitica
 J.-B. Chabot, *Documenta ad origines monophysitarum illustrandas. I: Textus* (= *CSCO* 17; Paris, 1907).
FHN II T. Eide *et al.* (eds), *Fontes Historiae Nubiorum. Vol. II: From the Mid-Fifth to the First Century BC* (Bergen, 1996)
FHN III T. Eide *et al.* (eds), *Fontes Historiae Nubiorum. Vol. III: From the First to the Sixth Century AD* (Bergen, 1998)
FHN IV T. Eide *et al.* (eds), *Fontes Historiae Nubiorum. Vol. IV: Corrigenda and Indices* (Bergen, 2000)
Hist.Laus. E.C. Butler, *The Lausiaca History of Palladius. II: The Greek Text Edited with Introduction and Notes* (Cambridge, 1904)
Hist.Mon. A.-J. Festugière, *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto* (Brussels, 1961)
I.Aju.Dem.,
I.Bij.Dem.,
I.Dak.Dem.,
I.Kal.Dem.,
I.Philae.Dem. F.Ll. Griffith, *Catalogue of the Demotic Graffiti of the Dodecaschoenus*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1935-1937)

- L.Philae I** A. Bernand, *Les inscriptions grecques de Philae. Tome I: Époque ptolémaïque* (Paris, 1969)
- L.Philae II** É. Bernand, *Les inscriptions grecques et latines de Philae. Tome II: Haut et Bas Empire* (Paris, 1969)
- Joh.Eph. h.e III** E.W. Brooks, *Iohannis Ephesini historiae ecclesiasticae pars tertia. I: Textus* (= *CSCO* 105; Paris, 1935)
- Joh.Eph. Lives of the Eastern Saints** E.W. Brooks, *PO* 17.1-306, 18.513-697, 19.151-284
- JSSEA** *Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities*
- Life of Moses** É.C. Amélineau, *Monuments pour servir à l'histoire de l'Égypte chrétienne aux IV^e, V^e, VI^e et VII^e siècles*, 2 vols (Paris, 1888-1895) 2.680-706; W.C. Till, *Koptische Heiligen- und Märtyrerlegenden*, 2 vols (Rome, 1935-1936) 2.46-63
- Life of Onnophrius** E.A.W. Budge, *Coptic Texts IV. Coptic Martyrdoms in the Dialect of Upper Egypt* (London, 1914) 205-224
- Life of Severus** M.-A. Kugener, *PO* 2, pp. 1-115
- Life of Shenoute** J. Leipoldt, *Sinuthii Archimandritae vita et opera omnia. III: Textus* (= *CSCO* 42; Paris, 1908)
- MNL** *Meroitic Newsletter*
- NB** W. Preisigke, *Namenbuch* (Heidelberg, 1922)
- NB Dem.** E. Lüddeckens (ed.), *Demotisches Namenbuch* (Wiesbaden, 1980-2000)
- Panegyric on Macarius** D.W. Johnson, *A Panegyric on Macarius, Bishop of Tkôw, Attributed to Dioscorus of Alexandria* (= *CSCO* 415; Leuven, 1980)
- PapCongr:** *Proceedings of International Congresses of Papyrology* (1931-)
- PM** B. Porter, R.L.B. Moss, *Topographical Bibliography of Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphic Texts, Reliefs, and Paintings* (Oxford, 1927-)
- REM** J. Leclant *et al.* (eds), *Repertoire d'épigraphie méroïtique. Corpus des inscriptions publiées* (Paris, 2000)

General Introduction: Setting the Scene

The First Cataract Region as a Frontier Area

I was reflecting with a mixture of emotion, satisfaction and doubt that I was on one of the most remarkable spots on earth, in places which seemed in some way fabulous, and whose names, pronounced from the cradle, had taken a magnificent and almost magical significance. I was nearing the rocks of the cataracts, at the gates of Ethiopia, on the borders of the Roman Empire. I was about to enter the island where the tomb of Osiris lay, a holy island in the past, now neglected, the sanctuary of an antique religion and mother of so many other cults. Finally, I was approaching one of the immutable divisions of our globe, and the step I took was perhaps already in the Southern Hemisphere.¹

Buried in these thoughts, a scholar who accompanied Napoleon's army deep into Egypt walked down the ancient road from Aswan to the temple island of Philae. He captured the symbolic value the Ancient Egyptians attached to the region well, for it was regarded as the border of Egypt beyond which lay 'Ethiopia', a country more generally known as Nubia (see Fig. 1).² The frontier was created by natural circumstances - at Aswan the Nile widens as it crashes onto a mass of granite rocks, creating many small islands, and causing shallows and a strong current. At Aswan we find the first in a series of currents or 'cataracts' in the Nile, which gives the area its name: the First Cataract.³ Although several Pharaohs invaded Nubia and constructed fortifications further south, the symbolic, ethnic and natural border between Egypt and Nubia remained at Aswan: beyond the First Cataract Nubia began.

In Antiquity, when travellers sailed upstream in the direction of Nubia, they first arrived at the town of Syene (modern Aswan), which is situated on the east bank of the Nile (Fig. 2). Syene was not only a trading centre (the name 'Syene' is derived from the Egyptian word for 'trading place', *swnw*), it was also a town that controlled the traffic from Egypt to Nubia. Because of this nodal position, it seems only natural that throughout the Graeco-Roman period, soldiers were garrisoned at Syene.⁴ In front of Syene the traveller could see a longitudinal island rising from the Nile. This island was called Elephantine (island, from Greek Ἐλεφαντίνη: sc. νῆσος), '(island of) Ivory', with a homonymous town on an outcrop of granite at its southern edge which has been inhabited from c. 3500 BC onwards.⁵ For a long time it was also the religious centre of the region, its main god, Khnum, being worshipped there.

Although the temple of Khnum remained an important cult site during most of the Graeco-Roman period, under the Ptolemies the focus shifted from Elephantine further south, to Philae.⁶ Due to the currents and shallows in the Nile, the First Cataract, which starts at Elephantine/Syene, was barely navigable, and travellers had to take a road from Syene southward, the road that the French scholar quoted above also took. At the end of the road, travellers could already see the splendid temples on the small island of Philae, measuring only

¹ M.-A. Lancret, in *Description de l'Égypte* 1, 9.

² W.Y. Adams, *Nubia. Corridor to Africa* (London, 1977); S. Wenig, 'Nubien', *LÄ* IV (1982) 526-32; D.N. Edwards, *The Nubian Past. An Archaeology of the Sudan* (London, 2004).

³ For general descriptions of the region of the First Cataract see J. Ball, *A Description of the First or Aswan Cataract of the Nile* (Cairo, 1907); J. Locher, *Topographie und Geschichte der Region am ersten Nilkatarakt in griechisch-römischer Zeit* (Stuttgart and Leipzig, 1999) 1-4, 98-103; J. Baines, J. Málek, *Cultural Atlas of Ancient Egypt* (Oxford, 2000, rev. ed. of *Atlas of Ancient Egypt* (Oxford, 1980) 72-4; R.B. Jackson, *At Empire's Edge. Exploring Rome's Egyptian Frontier* (New Haven and London, 2002) 111-27.

⁴ *PM* V (1937) 221-4; L. Habachi, H. Riad, *Aswan* (Cairo, 1959); L. Habachi, 'Assuan', *LÄ* I (1975) 495-6; Calderini, *Diz.geogr.* IV (1983-6) 316-7, Suppl. I (1988) 237, II (1996) 197; Locher, *Nilkatarakt*, 58-89; W. Helck, 'Syene', *DNP* XI (2001) 1125-6; Calderini, *Diz.geogr.* Suppl. III (2003) 140-1.

⁵ For the etymology see Locher, *Nilkatarakt*, 22-4.

⁶ *PM* V (1937) 224-30; Calderini, *Diz.geogr.* II (1973-7) 138-40; L. Habachi, 'Elephantine', *LÄ* I (1975) 1217-25; Calderini, *Diz.geogr.* Suppl. I (1988) 104, II (1996) 50; S.J. Seidlmayer, 'Elephantine', *DNP* III (1997) 981-2; W. Kaiser, *Elephantine. Die antike Stadt. Offizielles Führungsheft des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Kairo* (Cairo, 1998); Locher, *Nilkatarakt*, 15-57; Calderini, *Diz.geogr.* Suppl. III (2003) 35.

460 by 150 m. The most important of these was dedicated to Isis, and became a renowned cult site of national, even international repute, in the Graeco-Roman period.⁷ Philae, a name of which the etymology is disputed, was closely connected to another island, Biga, on which the Egyptians situated one of the burial sites of Osiris.⁸ The cults at Philae-Biga commemorated the position ascribed to the area in Ancient Egyptian religion: that of the source of the Nile.⁹

In AD 298, an event took place that had important repercussions for the region. Until that date, the southern frontier of the Roman Empire had been drawn further to the south, at Hierakonpolis (modern Maharraga), the area between Philae and Hierakonpolis being called in Greek Dodekaschoinos or ‘Twelve Miles Land’.¹⁰ As is reported by one of the most informative sources for the history of the First Cataract region in Late Antiquity, the sixth-century historian Procopius, the Emperor Diocletian (284-305) travelled south and withdrew the frontier to Elephantine in that year.¹¹ This meant that the natural, ethnic and symbolic border became equated with the administrative and political frontier.

We also learn from this passage that Diocletian fortified Philae and allowed ‘both peoples’ to continue visiting the temples. The context indicates that these peoples were the Nubian people of the Noubades and a nomadic people originating from the Eastern Desert, the Blemmyes.¹² Modern scholarship has stressed the Blemmyes as agents behind this phenomenon, whereas the Noubades have been ignored. Moreover, on the basis of Procopius’ account, these studies have made artificial ethnic distinctions such as ‘Egyptian’ and ‘Blemmyan’, whereas such distinctions are hardly to be expected in a frontier region.¹³

⁷ I. Rutherford, ‘Island of the Extremity: Space, Language and Power in the Pilgrimage Traditions of Philae’, in D. Frankfurter (ed.), *Pilgrimage & Holy Space in Late Antique Egypt* (Leiden, 1998) 229-56.

⁸ Etymologies of Philae are proposed by L. Kákósy, *Selected Papers 1956-73* (Budapest, 1981) 185-94 (‘Zu einer Etymologie von Philä: “Insel der Zeit”’, 1968’), and Rutherford, ‘Island’, 233, but cf. E. Winter, ‘Philae’, *LÄ* IV (1982) 1022-7 at 1022; Locher, *Nilkatarakt*, 125-8.

⁹ Philae: H. Kees, ‘Philai’, *RE* XIX 2 (1938) 2109-13; *PM* VI (1939) 203-56; E. Winter, ‘Philae’, in *Textes et langages de l’Égypte pharaonique*, 3 vols (Cairo, 1972-4) 3.229-37, and ‘Die Tempel von Philae und das Problem ihrer Rettung’, *AW* 7.3 (1976) 2-15; W. MacQuitty, *Island of Isis. Philae, Temple of the Nile* (London, 1976); A. Giammarusti, A. Roccati, *File. Storia e vita di un santuario egizio* (Novara, 1980); Winter, ‘Philae’; Calderini, *Diz.geogr.* V (1987) 79, Suppl. II (1996) 231; Locher, *Nilkatarakt*, 121-58; K. Jansen-Winkel, ‘Philae’, *DNP* IX (2000) 780; Calderini, *Diz.geogr.* Suppl. III (2003) 159. Biga: E. Winter, ‘Abaton’, and ‘Bigga’, *LÄ* I (1975) 1-2, 792-3. Cf. Locher, *Nilkatarakt*, 159-77.

¹⁰ K. Sethe, *Dodekaschoinos. Das Zwölfmeilenland an der Grenze von Ägypten und Nubien* (Leipzig, 1901); G. Dietze, ‘Philae und die Dodekaschoinos in ptolemäischer Zeit’, *AncSoc* 25 (1994) 63-110; Locher, *Nilkatarakt*, 230-51.

¹¹ Procop. *Pers.* 1.19.27-37 = *FHN* III 328. For text and full bibliography of several of the sources discussed below, *FHN* III is referred to. If a more recent or authoritative text has been published, the name of the editor has been added with the reference to *FHN* III between brackets. Translations are based on those of the *FHN*; additions and modifications are indicated.

¹² On the Noubades, see Adams, *Nubia*, 419-22; D.A. Welsby, *The Medieval Kingdoms of Nubia. Pagans, Christians and Muslims along the Middle Nile* (London, 2002) 14-5. On the Blemmyes, see E. Revillout, *Mémoire sur les Blemmyes à propos d’une inscription copte trouvée à Dendur* (Paris, 1874; *non vidi*), and *Second mémoire sur les Blemmyes d’après les inscriptions démotiques des Nubiens* (Paris, 1887); J. Krall, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Blemmyer und Nubier* (Vienna, 1898); K. Sethe, ‘Blemmyes’, *RE* III (1899) 566-8; U. Monneret de Villard, *Storia della Nubia cristiana* (Rome, 1938) 24-60; T. Papadopoulos, *Africanobyzantina. Byzantine Influences on Negro-Sudanese Cultures* (Athens, 1966) 9-40; M. Krause, ‘Blemmyer’, *LÄ* I (1975) 827-8; A.M. Demicheli, *Rapporti di pace e di guerra dell’Egitto Romano con le popolazioni dei deserti Africani* (Milan, 1976); R.T. Updegraff, *A Study of the Blemmyes* (Ann Arbor and London, 1978); V. Christides, ‘Ethnic Movements in Southern Egypt and Northern Sudan: Blemmyes-Beja in Late Antique and Early Arab Egypt until 707 AD’, *LF* 103 (1980) 129-43; L. Török, ‘A Contribution to Post-Meroitic Chronology: The Blemmyes in Lower Nubia’, *RSO* 58 (1984) 201-43 = *MNL* 24 (1985); R.T. Updegraff, ‘The Blemmyes I: The Rise of the Blemmyes and the Roman Withdrawal from Nubia under Diocletian’, *ANRW* II 10.1 (1988) 44-106 (with additional remarks by L. Török); R. Grieshammer, ‘Blem(m)yes’, *DNP* II (1997) 710; M. Weber, ‘Blemmyer’, *RAC* Suppl. Lf. 9 (2002) 7-28.

¹³ E.g. U. Wilcken, ‘Heidnisches und Christliches aus Ägypten’, *AfP* 1 (1901) 396-436 at 404-7; *LPhilae.Dem.*, p. 4; Monneret de Villard, *Storia*, 34-5; *LPhilae* II, pp. 242-5; Rutherford, ‘Island’, 234. Cf. R.S. Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, 1993) 146, 251; F.R. Trombley, *Hellenic Religion and Christianization c. 370-529*, 2 vols (Leiden, 1993-4) 2.226; D. Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt. Assimilation and Resistance* (Princeton, 1998) 64; E. Cruz-Urbe, ‘The Death of Demotic at Philae. A Study in Pilgrimage and Politics’, in T.A. Bács (ed.), *Festschrift E. Gaál, U. Luft, L. Török* (Budapest, 2002) 163-84 at 166, 169, and R.S. Bagnall, *Later Roman Egypt. Society, Religion, Economy and Administration* (Aldershot and Burlington, 2003) Ch. X at 292-3 (‘Combat ou

As recent studies on frontiers elsewhere in the Roman Empire have demonstrated, the idea of a frontier should not be taken too strictly. Frontiers are not linear barriers but rather marginal zones or 'areas of differentiation', since they are often mixed ethnically, socially and economically. Regions on both sides of the frontier live together in an interdependent relationship, stimulating exchanges of food, trade and culture rather than blocking them. This symbiotic system of supply and demand could also lead to instability, famine and raids: 'Frontiers are always zones, constantly shifting and in ferment, ambivalent in their loyalties and often having more in common with the 'other side', as it were, than with their own political centre'.¹⁴ Rather than a line dividing peoples, the southern Egyptian frontier was therefore an 'open frontier'.¹⁵ In accordance with its position on this frontier, Philae's significance was inter-regional and must have attracted the mixed population of the region and the one to its immediate south, the Dodekaschoinos, which was oriented towards Philae.¹⁶

Similar problems surround the word commonly used for the Roman frontier, *limes*, which is often regarded as a line of defence, a 'border'. However, defence was just one of the functions of the soldiers garrisoned on a frontier, and the term could have different meanings depending on time and place. Accordingly, from the fourth century onwards *limes* came to have the administrative meaning of 'frontier district'. In this broad meaning, which is inherent to the very concept of frontiers, there could not have been a 'Grand Strategy' of defending Roman frontiers.¹⁷ Thus, in describing the region of the First Cataract, the word 'frontier' is more appropriate than 'border', since the latter has a connotation of a line of demarcation, whereas the former has a broader geographical meaning denoting the extremes of an inhabited area.¹⁸

These insights have recently been applied elsewhere in Egypt, to the Eastern Desert. Since the Egyptian frontier, with the notable exception of the southern frontier, consisted of all land that extended beyond the inhabited Nile valley, the Eastern Desert was also called a *limes*.¹⁹ This area has been defined as a chain of forts along the desert routes, which were heavily armed against attacks from nomads. However, excavations of these sites show that the military presence at the forts was minimal and that most troops were garrisoned in the Nile valley. Consequently, the function of the soldiers in the Eastern Desert was not primarily defensive, but rather aimed at making the exploitation of the desert, an area rich in resources, as profitable as possible. In order to enable this, the soldiers controlled water wells (*hydreumata*) or patrolled exploitable areas such as quarries.²⁰

The southern Egyptian frontier should be approached in a similar way. Before 298, there were three cohorts stationed at Syene, spread over several smaller garrisons in the Dodekaschoinos. It has been concluded from this situation that the Nubian garrisons formed part of a strategic defence system, called 'defence in depth', in which Syene was regarded as the

vide: christianisme et paganisme dans l'Égypte romaine tardive', 1988¹), who all mistakenly regard the Blemmyes as a Nubian people.

¹⁴ C.R. Whittaker, 'Trade and Frontiers of the Roman Empire', in P. Garnsey, C.R. Whittaker (eds), *Trade and Famine in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge, 1983) 110-27 at 122. See also his *Frontiers of the Roman Empire* (Baltimore and London, 1994) 98-131. Cf. Bagnall, *Egypt*, 147.

¹⁵ B. Isaac, *The Near East under Roman Rule. Selected Papers* (Leiden, 1998) 403-26 ('An Open Frontier', 1993¹).

¹⁶ Frankfurter, *Religion*, 105-6; Cruz-Urbe, 'Death of Demotic', 168-9.

¹⁷ For the term, see E.N. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire* (Baltimore, 1976).

¹⁸ B. Isaac, *The Limits of Empire. The Roman Army in the East* (Oxford, 1992²) 161-218, 372-418; P. Mayerson, *Monks, Martyrs, Soldiers and Saracens* (Jerusalem, 1994) 308-12 ('The Meaning of the Word *Limes* (λίμιτον) in the Papyri', 1989¹), and 327-39 ('Towards a Comparative Study of a Frontier', 1990¹); Whittaker, *Frontiers*, 194-209; Isaac, *Near East*, 345-87 ('The Meaning of *Limes* and *Limitanei* in Ancient Sources', 1988¹); J.-M. Carrié, A. Rousselle, *L'empire romain en mutation: des Sévères à Constantin, 192-337* (Paris, 1999) 616-21. For an even wider use of the term 'frontier', see R.W. Mathisen, H.S. Sivan (eds), *Shifting Frontiers in Late Antiquity* (Aldershot and Brookfield, 1996).

¹⁹ Mayerson, *Monks*, 311-2, quoting J. Maspero, *Organisation militaire de l'Égypte byzantine* (Paris, 1912) 10, who already pointed this out.

²⁰ Isaac, *Limits of Empire*, 199-204; M. Reddé, 'La présence militaire romaine dans le désert oriental', in M.-F. Boussac (ed.), *Autour de Coptos* (Lyon and Paris, 2002) 385-94.

'choke point in the southern defence of Egypt'.²¹ However, the term 'defence in depth' cannot be applied to the situation on the southern Egyptian frontier in this period, since the task of the soldiers stationed there was to keep control rather than to defend.²²

The main difference between Diocletian's 'fortification' of the southern frontier and the past was the withdrawal of the administrative frontier to the First Cataract region. Several sources mention measures taken by Diocletian to fortify other frontiers of the empire, measures which were by no means unique. The policy of Diocletian was therefore one of consolidation rather than of innovation: Diocletian reorganised the administration of the frontier zones in order to exert better control of these marginal areas.²³ On the southern Egyptian frontier he did so by giving up the Dodekaschoinos and by 'fortifying' Philae, although a garrison had certainly been stationed there before that time.²⁴ A papyrus text from 300 mentions soldiers of the *vexillatio* (detachment) of the *Legio III Diocletiana* under a *praepositus* Proclianus of Syene.²⁵ The name of the detachment supports the hypothesis that Diocletian indeed reorganised the troops on the southern Egyptian frontier.

A century later, the *Notitia Dignitatum*, a list of military units in the Roman Empire dating to around 400, mentions several regiments garrisoned in the First Cataract region:²⁶ *Milites miliarenses* at Syene, a *Cohors I felix Theodosiana* at Elephantine, a *Cohors V Suenensium* at Contra Syene (on the west bank of the Nile opposite Syene) and a *Legio I Maximiana* at Philae.²⁷ The name of the legion garrisoned at Philae suggests that from the Emperor Maximian (285-310) onwards, but in view of Diocletian's visit probably not for long after 298, the garrison at Philae consisted of a legion and formed the largest military unit in the First Cataract region, although the *Milites miliarenses* of Syene are also listed among the legions.²⁸ The name of Philae's legion thus confirms Procopius' account that Diocletian 'fortified' Philae, as long as it is understood as a reorganisation of the troops stationed there.

Other references to the units stationed at Syene and Philae during the fourth and fifth centuries come from papyrus documents that mention the delivery of goods to the garrisons.²⁹ In addition, the well-known petition of Appion, bishop of Syene, Contra Syene and Elephantine, to the Emperors Theodosius II and Valentinian III (425-450), to which we will

²¹ M.P. Speidel, 'Nubia's Roman Garrison', *ANRW* II 10.1 (1988) 767-98 (quote on p. 795), disregarding W.Y. Adams, 'Primis and the "Aethiopian" Frontier', *JARCE* 20 (1983) 93-104, who mentions a papyrus (*P.Oxy.* XII 1511) and archaeological material as evidence for Roman military presence at Primis (modern Qasr Ibrim) to the south of Hiera Sykaminos. Cf. Isaac, *Limits of Empire*, 398-9.

²² On the problems of using the term 'defence in depth' see Isaac, *Limits of Empire*, 170, 374; Whittaker, *Frontiers*, 206.

²³ Isaac, *Limits of Empire*, 161-70.

²⁴ Speidel, 'Nubia's Roman Garrison', 772-3; G. Dietze, 'Der Streit um die Insel Pso. Bemerkungen zu einem epigraphischen Dossier des Khnumtempels von Elephantine (*Th. Sy.* 244)', *AncSoc* 26 (1995) 157-84 at 171; Locher, *Nilkatarakt*, 138-41; G. Dietze, 'Temples and Soldiers in Southern Ptolemaic Egypt. Some Epigraphic Evidence', in L. Mooren (ed.), *Politics, Administration and Society in the Hellenistic and Roman World* (Leuven, 2000) 77-89 at 80-2.

²⁵ *P.Panop.Beatty* 2.245-6. A *praepositus* is a commander of a military unit on the frontier, see F. Mitthof, *Annona militaris. Die Heeresversorgung im spätantiken Ägypten*, 2 vols (Florence, 2001) 1.151-2.

²⁶ On the date, see C. Zuckerman, 'Comtes et ducs en Égypte autour de l'an 400 et la date de la *Notitia Dignitatum Orientis*', *AntTard* 6 (1998) = J.-M. Carrié, N. Duval (eds), *Les gouverneurs de province dans l'Antiquité Tardive* (Paris, 1998) 137-47.

²⁷ Not.dign. *or.* 31.35, 64-6, 41.37. See also the list by R. Alston, *Soldier and Society in Roman Egypt* (London and New York, 1995) 190-1. Cf. Speidel, 'Nubia's Roman Garrison', 773. The text has been persuasively emended here, see P. Brennan, 'Diocletian and Elephantine: A Closer Look at Pococke's Puzzle (*IGRR* 1.1291 = *SB* 5.8393)', *ZPE* 76 (1989) 193-205 at 200-1. A 'Castra Lapidaria' is also mentioned in this context, but its precise location is unknown.

²⁸ Probably a military detachment, Brennan, 'Diocletian and Elephantine', 200. For the legion at Philae, see also *P.Münch.* I 16.44 (c. 493), *P.Lond.* V 1722.57 (530), and *I.Philae* II 225.4 (Late Antiquity). *IThSy* 239.4 (undated) mentions a κάστρον Φιλῶν.

²⁹ *Stud.Pal.* XX 84 v° ii 2 (= Mitthof, *Annona militaris* 2, catalogue no. 76; this text could date to the very end of the third century); *P.Lond.* III 1245.3 (p. 228 = Mitthof, *Annona militaris* 2, no. 143); *BGU* IV 1025.2, 18 (= Mitthof, *Annona militaris* 2, no. 144); *P.Lips.* I 64.3 (= Mitthof, *Annona militaris* 2, no. 145); *BGU* III 974.4 (= Mitthof, *Annona militaris* 2, no. 147); *P.Giss.* 54.7 (= Mitthof, *Annona militaris* 2, no. 172). Cf. *BGU* IV 1027 (= Mitthof, *Annona militaris* 2, no. 142), which is probably also about delivery to Philae or Syene.

return in more detail in Ch. 5, mentions soldiers from the fortress (Greek φρουρίον) of Philae and soldiers from Syene.³⁰ By far the largest amount of evidence, however, comes from the Paternmouthis archive, which contains papyri dating from 493 to 614 and pertains to the army at Elephantine and Philae, but particularly at Syene. From this archive we know that in all three places soldiers were garrisoned, usually referred to as a *numerus*, 'regiment' (ἀριθμός) but also as a 'legion' (λεγεῶν).³¹ Although these legions have been identified with the military units mentioned in the *Notitia Dignitatum*, it is doubtful whether it is possible to draw such an inference.³² In this later period, sizes of units generally declined and a 'legion' became increasingly synonymous with a 'regiment'.³³

From Diocletian onwards, the main person responsible for the units stationed along the southern frontier was the *dux Thebaici limitis*, who was also called *comes*. The *dux Thebaici limitis* was the highest military authority not of the southern end of the Thebaid, as has previously been thought, but of the whole province.³⁴ This situation changed in 539 when Justinian made the *dux* the most important civil and military official of the province.³⁵ Inscriptions and papyri provide us with evidence of this official in the First Cataract region.³⁶ In the Appion petition, the bishop asks the emperors to order the highest responsible official of the soldiers in his see, the *dux*, to protect it against raids by the Blemmyes and Noubades. In addition to military affairs, the inscriptions demonstrate that the *dux* was also involved in regional building projects.

The soldiers were not always involved in strictly military affairs either. There is a wide consensus about their status: they were *limitanei* or soldiers serving in a frontier zone (*limes*).³⁷ As appears from evidence elsewhere in the empire, they were often locally recruited, were allowed to have families and could even work a piece of private land, although in principle they remained soldiers.³⁸ This has led to the suggestion that the *limitanei* of the southern Egyptian frontier also worked private land.³⁹ Yet, the papyri do not give any indication of soldiers working the land, and this would also have been improbable because the land in the First Cataract region was very poor.⁴⁰ The soldiers probably had other functions instead, such as ferrying boats on the busy Nile at Syene. According to one scholar, this implies that they 'did not take their military duties very seriously'.⁴¹ Such a conclusion is only possible if 'military duties' are conceived of as strictly consisting of frontier defence. However, like *limitanei* in other parts of the empire, the soldiers of the First Cataract region would have been allowed to organise their own activities as private persons.⁴²

Is there archaeological evidence for military installations in the region? Excavations have shown that the fortress of Philae was certainly not situated on the small island itself, as Procopius suggests, but on the east bank of the Nile at the end of the ancient road from Syene

³⁰ *P.Leid.* Z 9-10 = *FHN* III 314.

³¹ See J.G. Keenan, 'Evidence for the Byzantine Army in the Syene Papyri', *BASP* 27 (1990) 139-50.

³² Cf. A.H.M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire, 284-602. A Social Economic and Administrative Survey*, 4 vols (Oxford, 1964) 2.662.

³³ Keenan, 'Evidence', 141-2 (esp. n. 9); Isaac, *Limits of Empire*, 169; J. Gascou, 'L'Égypte byzantine (284-641)', in C. Morrisson (ed.), *Le monde byzantin. Tome I: L'Empire romain d'Orient, 330-641* (Paris, 2004) 403-36 at 422.

³⁴ Isaac, *Limits of Empire*, 208; J.-M. Carrié, 'Séparation ou cumul? Pouvoir civil et autorité militaire dans les provinces d'Égypte de Gallien à la conquête arabe', *AntTard* 6 (1998) = Carrié and Duval, *Gouverneurs de province*, 105-21 at 111-5; Mitthof, *Annona militaris* 1, 149-51; Gascou, 'Égypte byzantine', 416-7. Cf. Maspero, *Organisation*, 80-8; J. Lallemand, *L'administration civile de l'Égypte de l'avènement de Dioclétien à la création du diocèse (284-382)* (Brussels, 1964) 54-5.

³⁵ R. Rémondon, 'L'Édit XIII de Justinien a-t-il promulgué en 539?', *CdE* 30 (1955) 112-21; Carrié, 'Séparation ou cumul?', 115-8.

³⁶ *P.Leid.* Z 14-5 (*comes et dux*, 425-50); *I.Philae* II 194.1-6 (*comes*, 449 or 464), 220.1-4, 221.1-4, 222.1-4 (*comes*, Late Antiquity), on which see Mayerson, *Monks*, 309-10.

³⁷ Maspero, *Organisation*, 60-1; Jones, *Later Roman Empire* 2, 662-3; Keenan, 'Evidence', 141.

³⁸ Isaac, *Limits of Empire*, 208-13.

³⁹ Maspero, *Organisation*, 60-1.

⁴⁰ Keenan, 'Evidence', 146; Baines and Málek, *Cultural Atlas*, 71-2.

⁴¹ Jones, *Later Roman Empire* 2, 663.

⁴² Keenan, 'Evidence', 145-6.

to Philae (modern Shellal).⁴³ On the east side next to the road, which already existed in the pharaonic period, was a mud brick wall, called the 'Big Wall' in literary sources, to protect the traffic between Syene and Philae against brigands and raids.⁴⁴ To give an impression of its size: the wall originally extended for about 7 km, would have been approximately 10 m high and 3 m wide at the top.⁴⁵ On strategic points along the road, watchtowers were constructed between the early Roman period and the beginning of the third century.⁴⁶

As regards the fortification of Philae mentioned by Procopius, the excavators first concluded that the wall was built in Diocletian's reign and that 'this defence system of *castra* and small fortresses along the eastern bank of the Nile could well be called the 'Upper Egyptian *limes*'.⁴⁷ However, we have already seen that the depiction of a *limes* as a line of defence is inaccurate and that by this time it has to be seen as an administrative unit covering the entire region. Later, the excavators discarded their dating of the wall to the Roman period and suggested a much earlier, Middle Kingdom date.⁴⁸ Whatever the date, it seems likely that the impressive wall still flanked the ancient road from Syene to Philae in Late Antiquity.

This brief survey of the military presence on the frontier demonstrates that Diocletian reorganised the administration of the frontier region and the garrisons stationed there, while building upon an already long existing infrastructure. The measures concerning the frontier region were part of a whole range of administrative reforms under Diocletian and his successors. Firstly, whereas Egypt had previously been a separate province with a unique administration, in Late Antiquity it was increasingly treated like other provinces. Diocletian appointed a praetorian prefect at the head of the eastern provinces and under him *vicarii* at the head of groups of provinces (dioceses). From 293/294 onwards, Egypt was subdivided into several provinces but remained under the prefect of the East. Finally, around 371, Egypt became a separate diocese.

A second development connected to the administrative subdivisions was the decline of the nome system. Since time immemorial, Egypt had been divided into districts called 'nomes' (from Greek νομός), each of which had a capital, the *metropolis*. In contrast with the Greek cities in Egypt with *polis* status (Alexandria, Naucratis, Ptolemais and Antinoopolis), these *metropoleis* were 'towns'.⁴⁹ From 200 onwards, however, all *metropoleis* were governed by city councils, whose councillors became increasingly restricted in their tasks until they were mainly concerned with tax collection. In 307/308, the nomes were subdivided into new administrative units, *pagi*. By the end of the fifth century, a new office, that of the pagarch, was created, who, under Justinian, became a powerful regional official.⁵⁰

Amidst all these changing tides, the First Cataract area always occupied a special position. In the Ptolemaic period, the capital of the first Upper Egyptian nome was at Elephantine, but in the Roman period Omboi, situated about 40 km north of the region,

⁴³ G.A. Reisner, *The Archaeological Survey of Nubia. Report for 1907-1908*, 2 vols (Cairo, 1910) 1.72-3; P. Grossmann, *Elephantine II. Kirche und spätantike Hausanlagen im Chnumtempelhof* (Mainz, 1980) 27 (n. 156); Speidel, 'Nubia's Roman Garrison', 773; E. Fantusati, 'Gli accampamenti romani di Shellal', in N. Bonacasa *et al.* (eds), *L'Egitto in Italia dall'antichità al medioevo* (Rome, 1998) 247-53.

⁴⁴ H. Jaritz, 'The Investigation of the Ancient Wall Extending from Aswan to Philae. First Preliminary Report', *MDAIK* 43 (1986) 67-74; H. Jaritz, M. Rodziewicz, 'The Investigation of the Ancient Wall Extending from Aswan to Philae. Second Preliminary Report', *MDAIK* 49 (1993) 107-32; Locher, *Nilkatarakt*, 114-20.

⁴⁵ Jaritz, 'Ancient Wall. First Report', 69, 71; Jaritz and Rodziewicz, 'Ancient Wall. Second Report', 111.

⁴⁶ Jaritz and Rodziewicz, 'Ancient Wall. Second Report', 118-26; H. Jaritz, 'Die Signaltürme der frühen Kaiserzeit in der Oberen Thebais', forthcoming.

⁴⁷ Jaritz, 'Ancient Wall. First Report', 73-4. This hypothesis was not new, see Maspero, *Organisation*, 25-6.

⁴⁸ Jaritz and Rodziewicz, 'Ancient Wall. Second Report'. Cf. Locher, *Nilkatarakt*, 117-9, who unpersuasively argues against this dating and proposes instead a dating to after 27/6 BC and before AD 23 on the basis of literary sources. Although Strabo does not mention the wall, this does not necessarily mean that the wall did not exist before 27/6 BC.

⁴⁹ See for this distinction between 'city' and 'town', L.E. Tacoma, *Fragile Hierarchies. The Urban Elites of Third Century Roman Egypt* (Diss. Leiden, 2003) 2-3.

⁵⁰ Lallemand, *Administration civile*, A.K. Bowman, *Egypt after the Pharaohs, 332 BC-AD 642. From Alexander to the Arab Conquest* (Berkeley, 1986) 77-88; Bagnall, *Egypt*, 62-4; P.W. Pestman, *The New Papyrological Primer* (Leiden, 1994) 27-8; H.-A. Rupprecht, *Kleine Einführung in die Papyrologie* (Darmstadt, 1994) 63-5; J.G. Keenan, 'Egypt', *CAH* XIV (2000) 612-37 at 612-9.

became the administrative capital and *metropolis* of the nome.⁵¹ Nonetheless, Elephantine and Syene could equally be regarded as towns, for both stationed an important number of troops; Syene was probably at least as large as Omboi, and Elephantine remained an important religious centre.⁵² The position of Philae within the nome is even more anomalous. Although the small island could not have had many inhabitants, it was a major religious cult site, and a legion was garrisoned on its riverbank from around 300 onwards.⁵³ During the reign of Diocletian, the special position of the First Cataract region was recognised by describing it as an administrative frontier district, a *limes*. Thus, although it remained administratively dependent on Omboi, the region held a special position within the nome.⁵⁴

The Problem of the Late Antique Temple Cults at Philae in a Regional Context

As we have seen, one of the special characteristics of the First Cataract area in Late Antiquity was the access to the temples of Philae allowed to the Blemmyes and Noubades after 298. Procopius adds to his passage the remark that the peoples still had access to Philae in his day and that the Emperor Justinian (527-565) ordered one of his generals to destroy the temples.⁵⁵ On the basis of this literary source, Philae has been described as ‘one of the last bastions of pagan worship in Egypt’,⁵⁶ and most handbooks take it for granted that with the closure of the Isis temple, Ancient Egyptian religion came to an end.⁵⁷ Due to the special circumstances conditioned by the position on the southern frontier, the Ancient Egyptian cults remained alive at Philae until the sixth century when Justinian forced the temples to close and the island finally became Christian. Recently, several studies have paid attention to this exceptional situation, concentrating on different aspects of the cult site in Late Antiquity: its pilgrimage tradition, the persistence of its Ancient Egyptian scripts (hieroglyphic and demotic) and the effect of the closure of its temples upon the conversion of Nubia to Christianity.⁵⁸ Thus, Philae has often been considered as ‘a different story’.⁵⁹

Yet, this image of an abrupt replacement of Ancient Egyptian religion by Christianity in the sixth century poses a problem. As early as the fourth century, there had been an episcopal see on the small island and undoubtedly a Christian community had already established itself there by then. In the context of a world gradually becoming Christian, could the Ancient Egyptian cults have continued, seemingly undisturbed, for more than two centuries? In order to answer this question, let us make a brief excursion to another place and time, the eighteenth-century Maya revolt of Canek.

In 1761, Jacinto Uc, who called himself Canek, a traditional royal Mayan name, launched a revolt in the village of Cisteil in central Yucatán, Mexico. Canek had received a Spanish education but was of Mayan descent. After having been removed from a Franciscan

⁵¹ Modern Kom Ombo, not a place of the same ancient name near Naqada, cf. F. Gomaà, ‘Ombos’, *LÄ* IV (1982) 567-9 with A. Gutbub, ‘Kom Ombo’, *LÄ* III (1980) 675-83. See also Calderini, *Diz.geogr.* III (1978-83) 386-7, and Locher, *Nilkatarakt*, 201-27.

⁵² Tacoma, *Fragile Hierarchies*, 49-50, estimates the population size of Omboi as between 5,000 and 10,000 inhabitants on the basis of nome size, however, without taking into account the sizes of Elephantine and Syene. On the basis of the space occupied by these towns, the population sizes of Elephantine and Syene have been estimated as 3,000 and 10,000 inhabitants, respectively. See F. Arnold, *Elephantine XXX. Die Nachnutzung des Chnumtempelbezirks* (Mainz, 2003) 17-8.

⁵³ Arnold, *Elephantine XXX*, 17-8, estimates the population size of Philae as 1000 inhabitants, but this number seems too high. Cf. n. 35, in which Arnold estimates the inhabited area of Philae as 1.7 ha. With his ratio of 450 inhabitants/ha, this means that Philae would have had 765 inhabitants at most, if the entire area was inhabited in Late Antiquity.

⁵⁴ The administrative position of the First Cataract region within the first Upper Egyptian nome had always been equivocal during the Graeco-Roman period, see Locher, *Nilkatarakt*, 201-29; A. Geissen, M. Weber, ‘Untersuchungen zu den ägyptischen Nomenprägungen II’, *ZPE* 147 (2004) 259-79 at 260.

⁵⁵ Procop. *Pers.* 1.19.36 = *FHN* III 328.

⁵⁶ Bagnall, *Egypt*, 147.

⁵⁷ E.g. Winter, ‘Philae’, and Baines and Málek, *Cultural Atlas*, 74.

⁵⁸ Trombley, *Hellenic Religion* 2, 225-39; Rutherford, ‘Island’, 248-53; Cruz-Urbe, ‘Death of Demotic’; S.G. Richter, *Studien zur Christianisierung Nubiens* (Wiesbaden, 2002) 115-38.

⁵⁹ Bagnall, *Egypt*, 264; Gascou, ‘Égypte byzantine’, 431.

school, he had had to face the hard life of his fellow Mayas. Embittered by the treatment he received because of his ethnic descent, Canek decided to stir up the local population. He caused great panic among the Spanish, although the revolt never really became a serious threat to colonial rule.⁶⁰ What is interesting is that Canek did not summon the people to reinstate the old gods. Instead, he took the crown and blue mantle of the statue of the local Virgin Mary and claimed they were an expression of Mayan supernatural authority.⁶¹

The integration of the new religion, Christianity, in the Americas after the Spanish conquest has been much studied, and scholars generally agree that, although the position of the indigenous religion had become a subservient one, elements of the old religion lived on long after the initial missionary activities.⁶² A religion cannot at once replace another religion, but religions will not live side by side in complete isolation either: in the long run, they necessarily have to interact. Sometimes this interaction leads to conflicts, but more often less violent ways are found, in which traditional religious ideas and practices became adapted to the new religion, and vice versa, thus starting a complex process of religious transformation.⁶³ In the case of Canek, the result was the merging of Christianity with traditional Mayan beliefs.⁶⁴

In Late Antiquity, a similar process was underway.⁶⁵ It is still often thought that Christianity simply did away with the old religion as contemporary, Christian literary sources claim. However, this book is not a study of how religion changed shape according to the Christian, ideological perspective of the literary sources, where a clear-cut distinction is made between Christians and non-Christians, such as Jews, heretics and 'pagans'.⁶⁶ After all, is this picture maintained when we take a look at a particular region or locality? Anthropological studies suggest that religions that are clearly distinguished on a 'national' level on the basis of literary sources are less articulated in a local or regional context.⁶⁷ There, they are governed by factors specific to the region or locality, and less by ideology, thus allowing for a more complex and dynamic view of religious interaction. It therefore seems promising to study the religious transformation of Late Antiquity in a local or regional context, while taking into account documentary and archaeological sources in addition to the customary literary ones.⁶⁸

This is thus precisely what we hope to do. In the representation of the Ancient Egyptian cults at Philae, too much weight has been placed on the literary source of Procopius, and his remarks have not been balanced against the documentary and archaeological evidence, nor has the situation at Philae been placed in a regional context. The developments at Philae can be seen against the background of a series of regional trends, in which Christianity increasingly obtained the upper hand. Although it is difficult to prove that the religions directly interacted, these developments could hardly have failed to have an effect on the Ancient Egyptian cults at Philae. So what did change? And what was the role of Christianity in this process? Was Philae such a different story? Before answering these questions, we will first try to demonstrate what is the best approach to religious transformation on a regional level. We will then describe the sources available for the study, and their shortcomings.

⁶⁰ N.M. Farriss, *Maya Society under Colonial Rule. The Collective Enterprise of Survival* (Princeton, 1984) 68-72, 100; R.W. Patch, *Maya Revolt and Revolution in the Eighteenth Century* (Armonk and London, 2002) 126-82.

⁶¹ Farriss, *Maya Society*, 314; Patch, *Maya Revolt*, 140-1.

⁶² See e.g. Farriss, *Maya Society*, for Yucatán, and S. MacCormack, *Religion in the Andes. Vision and Imagination in Early Colonial Peru* (Princeton, 1991), for Peru.

⁶³ Cf. Patch, *Maya Revolt*, 128-30.

⁶⁴ Patch, *Maya Revolt*, 134-43.

⁶⁵ For comparisons between the religious transformation in Late Antiquity and that under Spanish colonial rule see R.A. Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge, 1990) 1-3, and MacCormack, *Religion*, 11-2, respectively.

⁶⁶ See e.g. Markus, *End of Ancient Christianity*, who bases himself mainly on the writings of Augustine.

⁶⁷ As the example of Southern China shows, see H. Seiwert, 'Orthodoxie und Heterodoxie im lokalen Kontext Südchinas', in H.G. Kippenberg, B. Luchesi (eds), *Lokale Religionsgeschichte* (Marburg, 1995) 145-55.

⁶⁸ Similar regional studies of religious transformation in Late Antiquity have only recently been attempted, see e.g. D. Bar, 'The Christianisation of Rural Palestine during Late Antiquity', *JEH* 54 (2003) 401-21. For Egypt such studies are rare, R. Boutros, C. Décobert, 'Les installations chrétiennes entre Ballâs et Armant: implantation et survivance', in N. Bosson (ed.), *Études coptes VII* (Paris, 2000) 77-108.

Approaching Religious Transformation in Late Antiquity

Edward Gibbon's ghost has long haunted, and still haunts, the study of the transition between the Roman Empire and the Middle Ages. In his famous book *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (published between 1776 and 1788), Gibbon singled out the rise to power of the Christian Church as one of the main features of the 'decline and fall' of the Roman Empire.⁶⁹ Gibbon's 'decline and fall' and 'Christian triumph' formed the backbone for approaches to the subject until the 1980s. Even though the one emphasised 'decline and fall', as Gibbon somewhat pessimistically had done, and the other 'Christian triumph', both approaches described a one-way process towards Christianity in which the new religion rapidly triumphed.⁷⁰

Undoubtedly, a giant step forward was the incentive Peter Brown gave to the subject in the early 1970s. He argued that the period in question was not only a transitional period, but also a period in its own right, which he called 'Late Antiquity'.⁷¹ Since the 1980s, the static approaches of 'decline and fall' and 'Christian triumph' were finally, though not always consistently, abandoned in favour of a more intricate web of developments, which have to be seen in their times and places against the background of a world that gradually became Christian.⁷² Since then, the study of Late Antiquity has developed into a separate and thriving field of classical studies.

Some of the more recent works have debated even such seemingly basic terms as 'Christianisation' and 'paganism', and it may be useful to briefly summarise the trend of these debates here. First of all, the term 'Christianisation' requires some explication. It is used for the process of converting to Christianity, but can also be applied to the establishment of the Church or to other ways of Christianity becoming visible in society, for example in discourse, works of art or the landscape. The first problem, then, is that diverse processes, however much they may or may not be interconnected, are included in the term 'Christianisation'.⁷³ Another problem is that 'Christianisation' implies a superimposition of Christianity on an old religion, looked at from the Christian perspective.⁷⁴

An additional dimension to this problem is the angle from which we look at 'Christianisation': is it our own perception of 'Christianisation' or 'Christianisation' in the eyes of the ancient beholder? Do we use 'Christianisation' for the process of a person, the active party, making another person, the passive party, Christian (an external process), or for

⁶⁹ E. Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 6 vols (London, 1776-88), on which see P. Brown, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1982) 22-48 ('Gibbon's Views on Culture and Society in the Fifth and Sixth Centuries', 1976¹), and 49-62 ('In Gibbon's shade', 1976¹). See also G.W. Bowersock (ed.), *Gibbon's Historical Imagination* (Stanford, 1988).

⁷⁰ Emphasis on 'decline and fall': J. Geffcken, *Der Ausgang des griechisch-römischen Heidentums* (Heidelberg, 1920; Eng. tr. *The Last Days of Greco-Roman Paganism* (Amsterdam, 1978); E.R. Dodds, *Pagans and Christians in an Age of Anxiety. Some Aspects of Religious Experience from Marcus Aurelius to Constantine* (Cambridge, 1965). On 'triumph': A. Harnack, *Die Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten*, 2 vols (Leipzig, 1924⁴; Eng. tr. *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries*, 2 vols (New York and London, 1908⁵). More nuanced are A.D. Nock, *Conversion. The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo* (Oxford, 1933), and A. Momigliano (ed.), *The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century* (Oxford, 1963).

⁷¹ P. Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity. From Marcus Aurelius to Muhammad* (London, 1971). See the commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the publication of this book in *SO* 72 (1997) 5-90.

⁷² R. MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire (A.D. 100-400)* (New Haven, 1984); R. Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (London, 1986); R. MacMullen, *Change in the Roman Empire. Essays in the Ordinary* (Princeton, 1990) 142-55 ('What Difference Did Christianity Make?', 1986¹); P. Chuvin, *Chronique des derniers païens* (Paris, 1990; Eng. tr. of part I as *A Chronicle of the Last Pagans* (Cambridge MA, 1990); Trombley, *Hellenic Religion*, R. MacMullen, *Christianity and Paganism in the Fourth to Eighth Centuries* (New Haven, 1997); A. Demandt, *Geschichte der Spätantike: Das Römische Reich von Diocletian bis Justinian, 284-565 n.Chr.* (Munich, 1998) 384-400.

⁷³ As with the term 'Romanisation', see G. Woolf, *Becoming Roman. The Origins of Provincial Civilization in Gaul* (Cambridge, 1998) 5-7.

⁷⁴ K.L. King, *What is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge MA, 2003), demonstrates how profoundly modern scholarship has thought along the lines of the Christian polemical sources in constructing one of the early branches of Christianity, 'Gnosticism', as a separate religious category.

the process of how people individually became Christian (an internal process)? And when can a person or object be called 'Christian'?⁷⁵ As with terms like 'Romanisation', 'Christianisation' can be used descriptively, as if it were an umbrella, but it can hardly account for the complex processes of cultural change it conceals.⁷⁶

A similar, if not greater tension surrounds 'paganism'. The term derives from the Latin *paganus*, meaning 'someone from the countryside', and came to be used from the fourth century onwards by Christians as a derogatory term for non-Christians, except for the Jews.⁷⁷ This categorisation implies that 'paganism' is a unified religious system, as if the various non-Christian cults, rituals and practices could all be gathered under the same heading. In reality, the line between them cannot be drawn as strictly as is sometimes portrayed in the Christian sources.⁷⁸ Thus, for its negative connotation and one-sided view, the term 'paganism' is hardly satisfactory. Recently, it has been proposed to replace the term by 'polytheist religion'.⁷⁹ However, this proposal is equally inadequate, since in this period religious thought generally tended towards monotheism.⁸⁰

A related term sometimes used is 'pagan survival', a term which basically comprises all continuities of the old religion from a previous period.⁸¹ This word is related to the idea that Christianity was superimposed upon the old religion, yet tries to account for the elements that escaped its grasping arm by explaining that these elements continued unaltered for some time due to special circumstances. However, the term 'pagan survival' is misleading, for it ignores the circumstance that the old religion could not remain unchanged under the new religion, as the example of Canek again well illustrates.⁸² It is with these terminological difficulties in mind that we should approach the religious transformation of Late Antiquity.⁸³

Towards a Regional Approach of Religious Transformation in Late Antique Egypt: Bagnall, Frankfurter, and beyond

One of the oldest religions that Christianity confronted in Late Antiquity was the Ancient Egyptian religion. Yet, religion in Egypt was not entirely 'old', as it had itself undergone significant changes in the Graeco-Roman period by incorporating Greek culture, and therewith religion, a process which is called 'Hellenism'.⁸⁴ The new religion was not entirely

⁷⁵ Markus, *End of Ancient Christianity*, 1-17; Av. Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire* (Berkeley, 1993) 24-9; P. Brown, 'Christianization and Religious Conflict', *CAH* XIII (1998) 632-64; K. von Stuckrad, "'Christen" und "Nichtchristen" in der Antike', in M. Hutter, W. Klein, U. Vollmer (eds), *Hairesis* (= Fs. Hoheisel; Münster, 2002) 184-202.

⁷⁶ For the different aspects of religious transformation within the 'Romanisation' process, see T. Derks, *Gods, Temples and Ritual Practices. The Transformation of Religious Ideas and Values in Roman Gaul* (Amsterdam, 1998) 1-26; Woolf, *Becoming Roman*, 206-37.

⁷⁷ Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 30-1; Brown, 'Christianization', 639. Cf. G.W. Bowersock, *Hellenism in Late Antiquity* (Ann Arbor, 1990) 9-11, for the Greek terminology.

⁷⁸ Bowersock, *Hellenism*, 5-6; Cameron, *Rhetoric of Empire*, 121-2, and *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity. AD 395-600* (London, 1993) 69-70; Frankfurter, *Religion*, 33-4.

⁷⁹ G. Fowden, 'Polytheist Religion and Philosophy', *CAH* XIII (1998) 538-60, and 'Religious Communities', in G.W. Bowersock, P. Brown, O. Grabar (eds), *Late Antiquity. A Guide to the Postclassical World* (Cambridge MA, 1999) 82-106.

⁸⁰ See e.g. Fowden's own *Empire to Commonwealth. The Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, 1993) 38-9. Cf. G.W. Bowersock, *Selected Papers on Late Antiquity* (Bari, 2000) 135-47 ('Polytheism and Monotheism in Arabia and the Three Palestines', 1997¹). See now also P. Athanassiadi, M. Frede (eds), *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 1999).

⁸¹ Cf. Fowden, 'Polytheist Religion', at 558, who describes Philae as 'the most famous of all polytheist survivals'.

⁸² Markus, *End of Ancient Christianity*, 9; Frankfurter, *Religion*, 30, and 'Syncretism and the Holy Man in Late Antique Egypt', *J ECS* 11 (2003) 339-85 at 341-2. Cf. the use of the term 'survival' by the famous anthropologist E.B. Tylor, on which see H.G. Kippenberg, *Die Entdeckung der Religionsgeschichte. Religionswissenschaft und Moderne* (Munich, 1997; Eng. tr. *Discovering Religious History in the Modern Age* (Princeton, 2002) 130.

⁸³ P. Garnsey, C. Humfress, *The Evolution of the Late Antique World* (Cambridge, 2001) 132-69, and P. Rousseau, *The Early Christian Centuries* (London, 2002), are well aware of these difficulties.

⁸⁴ For an overview of these changes see the contributions by M. Coenen, O.E. Kaper and K. Vandorpe in H. Willems and W. Clarysse (eds), *Les Empereurs du Nil* (Leuven, 2000) 123-37. For Hellenism in Late Antique Egypt, see Bowersock, *Hellenism*, 55-69, and G. Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes* (Princeton, 1993²).

'new' either when it became the state-favoured religion in the fourth century, nor was it uniform. Christianity had reached Egypt as early as the first century and had developed considerably by the fourth century.⁸⁵ What was new was that from the reign of the Emperor Constantine (306-337) onwards, Christianity, that is, the Christianity the emperor adhered to, became the religion that was privileged and increasingly propagated by the state.

Unlike more general works on religious transformation in Late Antiquity, in most accounts of religion in Late Antique Egypt, even the more recent ones, there is still a tendency to describe this process in terms of 'decline and fall' and 'Christian triumph', thus maintaining a one-sided and linear view of religious transformation during this period.⁸⁶ Recently, the papyrologist Roger Bagnall has attempted to account for the complexity of this development: 'one should not assume that the decline of pagan religion and the rise of Christianity are so simply related, like children at opposite ends of a see-saw'.⁸⁷ He bases himself on 'hard evidence', that is, archaeological material, inscriptions and, particularly, documentary papyri.⁸⁸

In surveying the material, Bagnall sees a steady decline in temple building and their cults: the traditional Egyptian scripts (hieroglyphic, hieratic and demotic) disappear, priests act mainly as private persons in the third and fourth-century documents, and there is hardly any evidence for the continuity of festivals. This decline had already set in during the reign of Augustus and was thus an internal decline, not one caused by Christianity. By the third century, so Bagnall concludes, Ancient Egyptian religion was so weak that Christianity only had to step into the void to rapidly gain victory.⁸⁹ The most striking evidence for this rapid 'triumph' is the appearance of Christian names in papyri from the fourth century onwards. Though admitting that it is only a rough estimate, on the basis of this corpus Bagnall quantifies the percentage of Christians in Egypt: 20 percent of the population in AD 313, 40 percent in 337 and 80 percent (or more) by the early fifth century.⁹⁰

In view of all this, Bagnall is sceptical about the 'survival' of Ancient Egyptian religion in the fourth century and later, although he does not think that all 'belief', whatever that may be, was lost.⁹¹ Accordingly, he points to some cases of continuity, with as most extreme case that of Philae, but he describes these as exceptions or explains them away by specific circumstances. And this is the critical point. Although Bagnall's arguments regarding certain elements of Egyptian religion are in themselves sound and of great importance for our understanding of the religious transformation in Late Antique Egypt, he stresses only one aspect, that is, change, whereas he underestimates continuity. In other words, as the terminology he uses already shows, Bagnall's account of the process of religious transformation in Late Antique Egypt is still firmly rooted in Gibbon's 'decline and fall' and 'Christian triumph'.

In reaction to Bagnall, David Frankfurter has recently attempted to transcend this static concept of religious transformation, in which the new religion replaced the old religion.

⁸⁵ See, generally, B.A. Pearson, J.E. Goehring (eds), *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity* (Philadelphia, 1986); C.W. Griggs, *Early Egyptian Christianity from its Origins to 451 C.E.* (Leiden, 1990).

⁸⁶ H.I. Bell, *Egypt from Alexander the Great to the Arab Conquest. A Study in the Diffusion and Decay of Hellenism* (Oxford, 1948); R. Rémondon, 'L'Égypte et la suprême résistance au christianisme (V^e-VII^e siècles)', *BIFAO* 51 (1952) 63-78; H.I. Bell, *Cults and Creeds in Graeco-Roman Egypt* (Liverpool, 1953); A.D. Nock, *Essays on Religion and the Ancient World*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1972) 2.566-74 ('Later Egyptian Piety', 1944¹); L. Kákosy, 'Das Ende des Heidentums in Ägypten', in P. Nagel (ed.), *Graeco-Coptica. Griechen und Kopten im byzantinischen Ägypten* (Halle, 1984) 61-76, and 'Probleme der Religion im römerzeitlichen Ägypten', *ANRW* II 18.5 (1995) 2894-3049 at 2927-48. The best general overview of Graeco-Roman Egypt, Bowman, *Egypt*, 201 and 207, still speaks of 'pagan survivals' and 'paganism', the latter being exclusively concentrated in the hands of the elite. More nuanced, though rather descriptive, is E. Wipszycka, *Études sur le christianisme dans l'Égypte de l'antiquité tardive* (Rome, 1996) 63-105 ('La christianisation de l'Égypte aux IV^e-VI^e siècles: aspects sociaux et ethniques', 1988¹).

⁸⁷ Bagnall, *Egypt*, 261-309 (quote on p. 261), and *Later Roman Egypt*, Ch. X. Cf. M. Vinzent, 'Das "heidnische" Ägypten im 5. Jahrhundert', in J. van Oort, D. Wyrwa (eds), *Heiden und Christen im 5. Jahrhundert* (Leuven, 1998) 32-65.

⁸⁸ Cf. an earlier overview of the papyrological evidence by F. Zucker, 'Priester und Tempel in Ägypten in den Zeiten nach der decianischen Christenverfolgung', in *PapCongr.* VIII (Vienna, 1956) 167-74.

⁸⁹ For Bagnall, *Egypt*, 261 (n. 1), the term 'victory' is not too inadequate a description of this process.

⁹⁰ Bagnall, *Egypt*, 280-1.

⁹¹ Bagnall, *Egypt*, 268-75.

His book is entitled *Religion in Roman Egypt*, but it should perhaps have been called *Traditional Local Religion in Roman Egypt*, as one reviewer remarked.⁹² Frankfurter's ideas have evoked much discussion, and it is therefore necessary to survey and scrutinise his arguments at greater length.⁹³

Frankfurter's fundamental critique of Bagnall is that the latter thinks of 'religion' as consisting merely of its infrastructure: temples, a priestly hierarchy and festivals (pp. 27-28).⁹⁴ By following the 'pan-Mediterranean' development towards Christianity, a development emphasising the great change that happened in Late Antiquity on the basis of (mostly, Christian) literary sources, which are haphazardly collected from all over the Mediterranean world, scholars have too often fitted Egyptian religion into this larger framework, thus ignoring aspects of continuity. But this too generic approach fails to take into account the specific character of Ancient Egyptian religion, developments of which can sometimes be traced back for a considerable period of time, as indeed Bagnall's study has demonstrated (11-15). Frankfurter therefore also wants to see religion in Roman Egypt in its Egyptian context, but defines 'religion' as follows: 'as a local, collective endeavor to negotiate fertility, safety, health, misfortune, identity, and collective solidarity' (6). In other words, Frankfurter approaches religion in Roman Egypt from an entirely different angle: 'from the bottom up', tracing religious developments in the long period from AD 100 to 600 on a local level (7). He then sees no 'decline' at all but rather a resilience of the old religion (18).

In his 'history of religions' approach (36), Frankfurter is influenced by the famous anthropologist Robert Redfield (1897-1958), who distinguished Little and Great Traditions, in dialectic with each other.⁹⁵ The Great Traditions denote the grand idea systems of the intellectual elite and the city, whereas the Little Traditions stand for the local folklore of the village. According to Frankfurter, in Late Antique Egypt traditional local religion, the Little Tradition, either embraced or rejected the Great Tradition, Christianity. These are the words of the subtitle of his book: assimilation (embracing the new religion) and resistance (rejecting the new religion). Seen in this way, local Egyptian religion is comparable to other Little Traditions and can be elucidated with anthropological parallels (6-7, 33-36).

But there is more. Whereas Bagnall was sceptical about the use of hagiographical sources, these are Frankfurter's main type of sources.⁹⁶ Although he points out that they are flawed by their ideological agenda and literary structure, he suggests that they can still be useful in isolating 'authentic details' of local religion (20-22). But if, so Frankfurter asks himself, local religion was so dynamic, how can we balance this with the evidence put forward by Bagnall, namely that temples were in decline, that the Egyptian sacred scripts were forgotten, and that priests appeared increasingly in a marginal position? Frankfurter's answer is that these elements caused a metamorphosis of local religion rather than a 'decline' of it. This metamorphosis was a centrifugal shift away from the main regional, 'national' temples, to the village shrine and the house altar (27-30). Frankfurter devotes the remainder of his book to showing how, in his view, this shift worked in practice.

First of all, Frankfurter reassesses the role of the temple in the Roman period as a focus for popular needs, such as the inundation of the Nile, fertility and healing cults, and festivals. Despite the disappearance of imperial finance, temples retained their local or regional focus. For example, festivals did not die out after the third century, but rather evolved into local and

⁹² G. Fowden, 'Religious Traditions Great and Small in Roman Egypt', *JRA* 13 (2000) 789-92 at 789.

⁹³ The book won the 1999 Award for Excellence in the Study of Religion of the American Academy of Religion. In the following summary, references to Frankfurter's book are given in the main text between brackets to avoid an accumulation of footnotes.

⁹⁴ See also Frankfurter's review of Bagnall's book in *BMCRev* of 19 March 1994, and MacMullen, *Christianity and Paganism*, 188 (n. 63).

⁹⁵ R. Redfield, *The Primitive World and Its Transformations* (Ithaca, 1953), *The Little Community. Viewpoints for the Study of a Human Whole* (Chicago, 1955), and *Peasant Society and Culture. An Anthropological Approach to Civilization* (Chicago, 1956). For an application of the model of the Little and Great Traditions, see M.B. Singer, *When a Great Tradition Modernizes. An Anthropological Approach to Indian Civilization* (New York, 1972). On Redfield, see the lemma in D.L. Sills *et al.* (eds), *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, 19 vols (New York, 1968-91) 13.350-3.

⁹⁶ Bagnall, *Egypt*, 7-8, 280 (n. 121), and *Later Roman Egypt*, Ch. X at 292-3.

incidental processions in a Hellenic guise. Popular rituals also continued to be carried out on the periphery (65). According to Frankfurter, this appears from popular support of temples as described in (mostly) hagiographical sources. In particular, he discusses the incident in which the zealous Abbot Shenoute of Atripe fulminated against the local aristocrat Gessios, whom Frankfurter sees as a 'patron' supporting local religion (81). Although the resilience depended on regional circumstances, hagiographical sources suggest that some temples continued to be in use into the fifth and sixth centuries (76).

Thus, instead of being concentrated in the large 'national' or regional temples, these popular cults could now be found in local temples or shrines (98). The shift in local religion was also towards the domestic sphere, for example in the form of terracotta figurines worshipped at home. Certain deities, like Bes, fitted the new kind of popular piety, which need not be seen independently of the local shrine; rather, they interacted with each other on the same level (131).

A second way in which local religion came to be expressed in the Roman period was through oracle cults. The main examples Frankfurter uses to support his point are the incubation cults at Canopus and Menouthis, both situated about 20 km east of Alexandria. Although there are no inscriptions after the third century, Frankfurter sees evidence in the Christian sources that both cults continued until they were deliberately closed, the former at the end of the fourth and the latter at the end of the fifth century (162-165). Another example is the oracle of Bes at Abydos, which the Christian holy man Moses allegedly ended in the fifth or sixth century, as described in his Coptic *Life* (169-174).

Thirdly, beside the dynamics of the oracle cult after the third century, Frankfurter sees a connection with the rise of the Christian holy man.⁹⁷ Since holy men fulfilled many of the same roles as oracle cults, they replaced these forms of popular need rather than introducing a new Christian ideology. Consequently, the focus shifted to Christian oracle shrines (193, 197).⁹⁸ But what happened to the holy man of old, the temple priest? According to Frankfurter, he continued to be the chief ritual specialist after the 'decline' of the temple, and came to fulfil the needs of everyday life rather than those of the temple cult: he became a 'prophetic figure' (203, 213-4).⁹⁹ After the third century, the number of ritual experts multiplied in the person of the holy man, causing competition among these experts (215).¹⁰⁰

Another function of the temple priest cast in a new guise by the Christian holy man was his accessibility to ritual texts. In the temple, the centre for ritual texts had been the House of Life. In Late Antiquity, ritual texts developed in an ecclesiastical and monastic context (260). In view of these similarities in function between the temple priest and the Christian holy man, Frankfurter is not surprised to find accounts in hagiographical works that temple priests turned into Christian holy men (262-264).

With the replacement of the temple priest by the Christian holy man, we come to the Christian society of the sixth century. Admittedly, Frankfurter still has to explain why, despite the revitalisation of Egyptian religion, the countryside acquired a more and more Christian face. As said before, several of the functions that fulfilled popular daily needs became concentrated in the hands of Christian holy men (267). Christianity, then, provided a new framework to fulfil these needs. But this new 'idiom' could not completely replace the old one, and there was room for a considerable overlap, which could adequately be described as 'syncretistic' (271-272).¹⁰¹ On the other hand, holy men had to emphasise what was new in the

⁹⁷ Frankfurter places himself here in a long tradition of scholarship since Brown's seminal article of 1971, *Society and the Holy*, 103-52 ('The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity', 1971). See also P. Brown, 'The Saint as Exemplar in Late Antiquity', *Representations* 1 (1983) 1-23, 'Arbiters of Ambiguity. A Role of the Late Antique Holy Man', *Cassiodorus* 2 (1996) 123-42, 'The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity, 1971-1997', *JCS* 6 (1998) 353-76, and 'Holy Men', *CAH* XIV (2000) 781-810.

⁹⁸ See also D. Frankfurter, 'Introduction: Approaches to Coptic Pilgrimage', in Frankfurter, *Pilgrimage & Holy Space*, 3-48.

⁹⁹ See also D. Frankfurter, 'The Consequences of Hellenism in Late Antique Egypt: Religious Worlds and Actors', *ARG* 2 (2000) 162-94 at 164-83, and 'Syncretism', 348-50.

¹⁰⁰ Frankfurter, 'Syncretism', *passim*.

¹⁰¹ See also Frankfurter, 'Syncretism'.

idiom they presented. They therefore polarised their own world with a world of demons, of 'pagans' and of the old religion (273-274).

One way of activating this new worldview was to actually demolish Ancient Egyptian temples, a feature that, according to Frankfurter, 'became epidemic around the Mediterranean world' at the end of the fourth century (278). Are these, then, acts forcing an 'ideology' upon the local population? Frankfurter answers this question with 'yes and no'. Evidently, Christianity brought a new ideology. However, for Frankfurter the acceptance of Christianity by the local population, whether through assimilation or resistance, worked as an appropriation of its 'idiom' rather than of its 'ideology'. He then summarises his point once more: 'After the initial violence, after the shift in mapping demonic powers, Christianity settled back to function as an idiom for supernatural authority' (283-284).

Although this summary of Frankfurter's book cannot do justice to its wealth of original and thought-provoking ideas, it has tried to illustrate both some of its paths and some of its pitfalls. Frankfurter must certainly be given credit for providing us with a lively picture of local religion in Roman Egypt. However, we should be more suspicious of his representation of the period we are interested in, the period when Christianity became the state-favoured religion.

Firstly, Frankfurter pushes his main thesis, of the 'resilience, indeed the triumph of local culture' (284), too far, as appears from his dating of events. For example, documentation for most festivals ends in the fourth century, but, Frankfurter counters, 'both the local scope of activity and identity in peasant life and the pressing everyday concerns about misfortune would have impelled traditional festival practices to continue well past the fourth century as an active concern of villages' (62), even though he does not produce any evidence in support of this statement. The same holds for the 'decline' of the temple, which Frankfurter perceives differently: 'For this scenario is largely inferred from the sudden drop in inscriptional and papyrological documentation after about 250 C.E. and not out of direct testimony' (200). Once again, Frankfurter does not adduce any evidence to show that the decrease in documentation does not mean what it obviously suggests, namely that the temple as an institution of Ancient Egyptian religion gradually disappeared from society.¹⁰²

Frankfurter also claims that the Isis cult continued after the third century, but he can only mention three examples. Among these, he counts the temple of Isis at Menouthis and a remote temple in the Dakhleh oasis. The third example, the temple island of Philae, 'may best represent the resilience of established Isis cults', although elsewhere he seems to acknowledge its unique position (104-105, cf. 64-65). Finally, 'the lack of documentation for processional oracles after the middle of the third century does not reflect the dwindling of this highly traditional religious form but rather the local and performative nature of the rite' (154, cf. 155-156). But the only examples Frankfurter can adduce for such oracles are a passage from a hagiographical work and, again, Philae. To sum up, Frankfurter's documentation for the 'resilience' of local religion after the third century is hardly impressive.

It seems that Frankfurter can balance the lack of documentation for this period only by quoting passages from hagiographical sources. This brings us to a second point. Although Frankfurter presents himself as being cautious in using these sources and is well aware of their problems, he is actually less critical when using them.¹⁰³ Can we make Gessios a patron of local religion on the basis of a single passage in Shenoute's literary corpus? (81).¹⁰⁴ Can we adduce the 'activity of some priesthood' in a local temple at Abydos at the end of the fifth century on the basis of a passage from the *Life of Moses*? (171; cf. 201). And can we see the destruction of temples by monks as a general phenomenon in fourth and fifth-century Egypt on the basis of a

¹⁰² See e.g. the review by O.E. Kaper in *BiOr* 58 (2001) 126-32, who also debates some of Frankfurter's views on religion in Roman Egypt.

¹⁰³ Cf. e.g. his remarks in 'Syncretism', 348, 352, 354, 359, 361.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. S. Emmel, 'From the Other Side of the Nile: Shenute and Panopolis', and P. van Minnen, 'The Letter (and Other Papers) of Ammon: Panopolis in the Fourth Century A.D.', in A. Egberts, B.P. Muhs, J. van der Vliet (eds), *Perspectives on Panopolis. An Egyptian Town from Alexander the Great to the Arab Conquest* (Leiden, 2002) 95-113 at 108-11, and 177-99 at 181 (n. 25), who doubt this.

few passages in saints' lives which, moreover, have a clear ideological agenda? (277-283).¹⁰⁵ It seems that Frankfurter is using passages from sources whose interpretation and dating is often more problematic than he acknowledges.¹⁰⁶

The image evolves of a countryside still flourishing with temples, festivals and cults until long after the third century, a countryside which almost seems to lead its own life independently of the greater urban centres.¹⁰⁷ Frankfurter certainly has a point that much of the old religion could live on for some time on a local level, but it seems that he cannot see past the Little Tradition.¹⁰⁸ Is it an accurate description to say that the Little Tradition dominates the Great Tradition? (35). Is it not a mutual process, the Great Tradition influencing the Little Tradition as much as the Little Tradition does the Great Tradition?¹⁰⁹ In this respect, it is questionable whether Frankfurter's statement that 'idiom' was more pervasive in the countryside than 'ideology' can be maintained, and whether he can draw such a firm distinction between both terms.¹¹⁰

Too strong a focus on the Little Tradition also has another disadvantage. After all, what exactly is the Little Tradition in this Egyptian context? Does it comprise a local shrine or a regional temple? Frankfurter seems to opt for both, which sometimes leads to confusing statements. For example, he refers to the temple of Isis at Philae as both a 'local' and a 'regional' temple (e.g. 105). In the shift from large regional temples to the small village shrine, he does not explain the difference between the two categories, although it is well known that many Egyptian towns possessed small temples and many villages large temples.¹¹¹ If these categories cannot be clearly separated, the influence of the Great Tradition may be more pervasive than Frankfurter allows: too much stress on the Little Tradition does not sufficiently account for the impact of Christianity.¹¹² The focus on the Little Tradition also influences Frankfurter's definition of 'religion', which he reduces to a minimal set of basic needs (6).¹¹³ In the end, the impact of Christianity cannot just be accounted for by the phenomenon of Christian holy men destroying Ancient Egyptian temples.¹¹⁴

Although Frankfurter's history of religions approach 'from the bottom up' has proven attractive in the study of religious transformation in Late Antique Egypt, the main problem with it is Frankfurter's dualistic view of the choices people made regarding religious matters. They either accepted (assimilation) or rejected (resistance) the new religion, whereas there is a whole spectrum of other possibilities in between, such as transmission, imitation, reproduction, adjustment, adaptation, conversion, reversal, subversion and perversion. Moreover, in cultural history assimilation has often been applied as the end product of the process of acculturation, which is hardly reconcilable with the 'bottom up' approach of

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Frankfurter, *Religion*, 283, where he concludes: 'Iconoclastic acts seem to have been part of the discourse of prophetic charisma during the fourth century', whereas the last example he mentions is taken from the fifth century, with the statement made on p. 265: 'the gutting and conversion of traditional Egyptian temples, often still functioning, was a widespread phenomenon in Egypt during the fourth, fifth and sixth centuries'.

¹⁰⁶ For an uncritical use of Shenoute, see also D. Frankfurter, "'Things Unbefitting Christians": Violence and Christianization in Fifth-Century Panopolis', *JECs* 8 (2000) 273-95. Cf. the too harsh criticism by M. Smith, 'Aspects of the Preservation and Transmission of Indigenous Religious Traditions in Akhmim and its Environs during the Graeco-Roman Period', in Egberts, Muhs and Van der Vliet, *Perspectives on Panopolis*, 233-47 at 245-7, on Frankfurter's use of passages from the Shenoutean corpus.

¹⁰⁷ E.g. Frankfurter, *Religion*, 197: 'The Christian oracle shrines and the mundane 'oracular' services of a number of holy men and women demonstrate a pronounced tendency in Egyptian religion of this time toward the localized, the everyday needs and religious world of the small community as these might be centered in a particular place or person, and away from (if never entirely departing) the ideology of the great tradition'.

¹⁰⁸ See the review by R. Valantasis in *ChHist* 69 (2000) 641-2 at 642.

¹⁰⁹ Anthropologists have long recognised the limitations of too strong a dichotomy between the Little and Great Traditions, see e.g. D.F. Eickelman, 'The Study of Islam in Local Contexts', in R.C. Martin (ed.), *Islam in Local Contexts* (Leiden, 1982) 1-16.

¹¹⁰ A point made in the review by G. Frank in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 69 (2001) 699-702 at 701.

¹¹¹ Cf. e.g. Bagnall, *Egypt*, 315.

¹¹² See the review by A.D. Lee in *CR* 51 (2001) 74-6 at 76.

¹¹³ Review by M. Malaise in *CdE* 74 (1999) 388-90 at 390.

¹¹⁴ Fowden, 'Religious Traditions', 791.

Frankfurter, since the notion is precisely associated with a one-way cultural transmission 'from the top down'.¹¹⁵ We should perhaps prefer a term that describes how people decode a transmitted message in various ways.

In recent years, cultural historians have increasingly begun to use the term 'appropriation' to describe such processes of cultural transmission.¹¹⁶ The notion was first developed by the cultural historian Michel de Certeau (1925-1986) and denotes the ways people receive a message and give meaning to it. Therefore, 'appropriation' is a particularly useful concept for our goal because it takes a perspective 'from the bottom up' and includes the entire spectrum of decoding transmitted messages. This means that imposed rules, norms and values are not always adopted slavishly. Often a particular person has his own set of mental tools, for example determined by tradition or local background, with which a message is filled in. Appropriation therefore does away with terms like 'Christianisation' and allows a more complex view of cultural transmission with a distinctively 'human face'.¹¹⁷

Accordingly, we will try to write religious history not from a 'national', ideological perspective but from a regional, 'interactional' one: the ways people decoded the message of Christianity - to which they adapted their religious ideas and practices or which they adapted to these ideas and practices, a two-way process that can more accurately be described as 'becoming Christian'.¹¹⁸ In this way, our study both builds upon and diverges from the studies of Bagnall and Frankfurter. Whereas Bagnall describes some of the longer term developments of the infrastructure of Ancient Egyptian religion in detail, his emphasis is still too much on what changed, leading to a Gibbonian 'victory' of Christianity, which replaced Ancient Egyptian religion in the fourth century. By contrast, although his picture is more dynamic, Frankfurter concentrates too much on aspects of continuity. He takes his examples of traditional local religion from all over Egypt and from a long period of time (AD 100-600). Consequently, single references may not do justice to their specific regional or local backgrounds. It may be more rewarding to examine one region, a region with a variety of sources to trace the complexity of the development in the religious sphere. Moreover, against Frankfurter's minimal view, 'religion' is taken here as a wider cultural phenomenon: one that also takes into account the organisation and increasing integration of Christianity into society, a development which is generally considered to have been completed by the sixth century.¹¹⁹ Frankfurter's examples seem to fade away in the fifth century, whereas it is also necessary to have a look at what happened after that date.

This book, then, aims to be a multidisciplinary study of how religion, in so far as it can be reconstructed from the variety of sources, became transformed on a regional level in Late Antiquity. It can therefore also be seen as a comprehensive study of the sources about the First Cataract area in Late Antiquity. In this sense, it is a continuation of a recent work on the region during the Graeco-Roman period that ends exactly in AD 298, the year in which our inquiry starts.¹²⁰ However, instead of analysing all sources of the period, we will direct our attention to one aspect of cultural change in particular, religious transformation.

Our focus will be on how the region became Christian, and how the Ancient Egyptian cults at Philae were affected by this development. How was Christianity appropriated in a regional context? Unfortunately, unlike historical studies of more modern societies, it is impossible to describe how people appropriated Christianity individually. The fragmented

¹¹⁵ See for example the attempt by J.M.G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora. From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE – 117 CE)* (Edinburgh, 1996), to apply the terms 'assimilation' and 'acculturation'.

¹¹⁶ E.g. Frankfurter, *Religion*, 283, and 'Consequences of Hellenism', 162, himself uses the term 'appropriation', but without applying it heuristically.

¹¹⁷ See the various studies by W. Frijhoff, e.g. 'Foucault Reformed by Certeau: Historical Strategies of Discipline and Everyday Tactics of Appropriation', *Arcadia* 33 (1998) 92-108, and *Embodied Belief. Ten Essays on Religious Culture in Dutch History* (Hilversum, 2002) 52-6, 284-8.

¹¹⁸ For the term 'interactional history', see P. van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters. Religion and Modernity in India and Britain* (Princeton, 2001) 3-13. For 'becoming Christian': R. Van Dam, *Becoming Christian. The Conversion of Roman Cappadocia* (Philadelphia, 2003). Cf. Woolf, *Becoming Roman*.

¹¹⁹ E.g. Bagnall, *Egypt*, 10-1. For the different aspects of 'religion' as a cultural phenomenon, see now H.G. Kippenberg, K. von Stuckrad, *Einführung in die Religionswissenschaft* (Munich, 2003).

¹²⁰ Locher, *Nilkatarakt*.

nature of our sources simply does not allow us to do this, the less so as Antique religion was generally a public and communal activity.¹²¹ While refraining from statements about what went on in people's minds, the best we can do therefore is to describe the framework provided by Christianity, which presented people with different appropriation choices. In view of the scanty sources, only in a few cases can these choices be elucidated with specific examples. It is exactly these examples, however, that provide us with a lively picture of religion in Late Antique Egypt.

The Sources: Nature and Scope

The sources referred to in this study date to between AD 298 and 642, a period which, for this region, can well be called 'Late Antiquity'. There always has been much discussion about the date of Late Antiquity, some scholars even opting for a range in time from 200 to 800.¹²² More often, however, a narrower range is taken, including the fourth to seventh centuries.¹²³ In Egypt in particular, Late Antiquity is usually dated between 284, the beginning of the reign of Diocletian who profoundly reformed the provincial administration of Egypt, and the Arab conquest, completed in 642.¹²⁴ This period is also referred to as the 'Byzantine period', because Egypt became one of the provinces of the Eastern Roman or Byzantine Empire.¹²⁵

Although these periodisations are somewhat forced because they draw an artificial line where history, and religious history perhaps even more so, is always fluid, a periodisation between 298 and 642 seems particularly useful since in both years important events took place that had a profound impact on regional life. In 298, as we have observed, Diocletian withdrew the southern Egyptian frontier to the First Cataract region. The consequence of this event was that the area south of the First Cataract ceased to be Roman territory, and the status of the First Cataract region itself changed into that of a frontier region, a *limes*. We will try to follow the process of religious transformation until the completion of the Arab conquest of Egypt, that is, until 642. After that date another religion, Islam, became the new religion.

In comparison with the rest of Egypt, the region of the First Cataract has a particularly rich assemblage of written and material sources. Some remarks on the nature and limitations of these sources are therefore necessary.¹²⁶ Firstly, there are many literary sources on the region, although they are almost all concerned with Philae. Notably, passages have been written by the fifth-century historian Priscus and the sixth-century historian Procopius (in Greek), and the sixth-century church historian John of Ephesus (in Syriac). Although all three of these works are considered as historiography, the church history has a different agenda than the preceding historical works. Another important source is formed by a relatively unknown Coptic hagiographical work about the region, the *Life of Aaron*.

Secondly, there is an abundance of documentary sources. In inscriptions, Philae is the richest source, with ninety-two published inscriptions in Greek and hieroglyphic/demotic dating to Late Antiquity. By contrast, Syene and Elephantine have only yielded ten inscriptions in Greek altogether. Then there are 127 ink-written potsherds (ostraka) in Greek and Coptic dating to Late Antiquity, which all come from Elephantine. Furthermore, thirty-eight Greek

¹²¹ See e.g. J.N. Bremmer, *Greek Religion* (Oxford, 1999²) 2-4.

¹²² E.g. Bowersock, Brown and Grabar, *Late Antiquity*, and *Interpreting Late Antiquity. Essays on the Postclassical World* (Cambridge MA, 2001).

¹²³ Cf. *CAH* XIII (1998) and XIV (2000), which divide the period into a 'Late Empire' from 337 until 425 and 'Late Antiquity' from 425 until c. 600, with the remarks by F. Millar, 'Pagan and Christian Voices from Late Antiquity', *JRA* 13 (2000) 752-62 at 752-5.

¹²⁴ Pestman, *New Papyrological Primer*; 12; Rupprecht, *Kleine Einführung* 10-1; Gascou, 'Égypte byzantine', 403-6. Cf. Bowman, *Egypt*, 46-53, taking the 'Byzantine period' to date between 312 and 642, with Bagnall, *Egypt*, ix, dating Late Antiquity to between 284 and the middle of the fifth century.

¹²⁵ A problematic and confusing term is 'Coptic period'. In this book, 'Coptic' refers only to the last phase of the Ancient Egyptian language, see B. Layton, *A Coptic Grammar* (Wiesbaden, 2000) 1-4.

¹²⁶ Cf. the remarks by Bagnall, *Egypt*, 8-13, about the sources for the study of Late Antique Egypt.

and Coptic papyri have been found on Elephantine, whereas there is only one from Philae and none from Syene.¹²⁷

There are serious problems in interpreting these documents. Some texts, such as the inscriptions from Philae, tell us much about religion. Others, such as the ostraka from Elephantine, give us little information in that respect. Furthermore, the documents are written in different scripts: one is written in hieroglyphic, others in demotic, Greek and Coptic (and perhaps also in Meroitic). Then, there is the diversity of the provenance of the material: one papyrus and no ostraka from Philae but many inscriptions; few inscriptions from Elephantine but many ostraka and papyri; no ostraka or papyri from Syene, and few inscriptions. However, the papyri from Elephantine, although found on the island, generally deal with Syene. Finally, although almost all the documents have as their provenance the major sites of Syene, Elephantine and Philae, there are also several documents with other provenances that mention these places. Other sites in the First Cataract region, such as for instance the islands of el-Hesa and Biga, and the so-called 'monastery of St Simeon' on the west bank, have left almost no records for this period.¹²⁸

Thirdly, a large amount of archaeological work has been conducted in the region, presenting its own problems. Elephantine is one of the archaeologically best known sites in Egypt. The French and the Germans carried out initial excavations in 1906-1911, followed from the 1960s onwards by extensive excavations by the German Institute in co-operation with the Swiss Institute at Cairo, which continue until the present day. These excavations have yielded hundreds more Greek and Coptic ostraka which are in progress of publication and could therefore not be incorporated into this study.¹²⁹

On the mainland, ancient Syene has largely disappeared underneath the modern city of Aswan, which makes systematic archaeological excavation difficult. However, in 2000 the Swiss Institute at Cairo started excavations of Late Antique and Arab houses at the temples of Isis and Domitian. During these excavations about a hundred ostraka in different scripts were collected, in addition to other archaeological objects such as pottery and coins. At the same time, several emergency excavations have brought to light data on small parts of the ancient town. Due to the preliminary state of research of these data, they also could not be integrated into this study. Because the Late Antique town is the first to appear from underneath the modern city, much can still be expected. Future publications may therefore support, nuance or refute several of the presently proposed theses.

The situation at Philae is again entirely different. Although its temples have been studied and preserved quite well, several Late Antique and Arab houses, made of mud brick, were cleared during excavations in preparation for the construction of the first Aswan Dam in 1895-1896. Two freestanding churches, or what was left of them, definitively disappeared under water in the 1970s. During a UNESCO rescue campaign the temples were transported to the nearby island of Agilkia due to the building of the Aswan High Dam. However, no care was taken of the remains of Christian Philae and the excavators have hardly provided any archaeological documentation. Again, sites outside the three main regional centres have not left many material remains, and almost nothing is known of them from Late Antiquity.¹³⁰

¹²⁷ Although *P.Leid. Z* is said to have been found on Philae, there are reasons to think it may have come from Elephantine as well, see D. Feissel and K.A. Worp, 'La requête d'Appion, évêque de Syène, à Théodose II: P. Leid. Z révisé', *OMRO* 68 (1988) 97-111 at 97-8 (n. 7).

¹²⁸ Cf. *IThSy* 304 and 306, found on the islands of Salib and Biga, respectively. The tombstones from the 'Monastery of St Simeon' published by H. Munier, 'Les stèles coptes du Monastère de Saint-Siméon à Assouan', *Aegyptus* 11 (1930-1) 257-300, 433-84 (nos. 1-177) = *SB Kopt.* I 498-675, have been dated from the sixth to the ninth centuries. Although some of the tombstones have a dating formula, the ones that are considered older do not have such a formula and more probably date to the seventh century or later. This is why they have been left out of consideration here. On the problematic dating of these stelae, see M. Krause, 'Die Formulare der christlichen Grabsteine Nubiens', in K. Michałowski (ed.), *Nubia. Récentes recherches* (Warsaw, 1975) 76-82 at 79-80, and 'Inscriptions', *Copt. Enc.* IV (1991) 1290-9 at 1293; W. Scheidel, *Death on the Nile. Disease and the Demography of Roman Egypt* (Leiden, 2001) 8.

¹²⁹ C. Müller and S. Schaten are in charge of the Coptic, R. Duttonhöfer of the Greek ostraka.

¹³⁰ For the scanty remains, U. Monneret de Villard, *La Nubia medioevale*, 4 vols (Cairo, 1935-57) 1.2-17. Cf. e.g. the badly preserved church found at Shellal, which dates to the second half of the eleventh century, but includes

In short, the sources for the study of religious transformation in the area of the First Cataract are plentiful and various, but each one of them presents its own limitations, which determine the questions that can be asked of the material. For example, almost no women are mentioned in the sources, and there is hardly any evidence of magic. Rather than a proper thematic approach, then, a more diachronic approach will be taken, in which the nature of the sources requires different methodologies, each depending on the type of source. Despite these shortcomings, however, the sources constitute a homogeneous picture of the regional developments of religion in this period.

Accordingly, the book is organised into three parts. Part I treats the old religion in the fourth and fifth centuries, Part II the new religion during these same centuries.¹³¹ Part III treats all sources from the sixth century together and pictures a society that had become Christian.

Part I centres on the temples of Philae, as practically all evidence of the old religion derives from that site. What happened to the Ancient Egyptian cults after 298? In Ch. 1, the passages by Procopius and Priscus, which provide us with important information about Late Antique Philae, will be discussed. In order to better understand the relations of Philae with the southern peoples, we will also have to analyse the sources concerning the Dodekaschoinos in the fourth and fifth centuries (Ch. 2). We will then turn to the most important sources from the island itself: the inscriptions. What do they tell us about the Late Antique cults? In Ch. 3 we will analyse the number, location and structure of the inscriptions, and in Ch. 4 attention will be paid to their contents.

Part II discusses the expansion of Christianity in the First Cataract area (including Philae). In Ch. 5, we will examine how Christianity organised itself in the region, and how it increasingly integrated into society. A large amount of Part II is reserved for the Coptic *Life of Aaron*, which describes the ascetic lives of several holy men from the area and also includes a history of the first bishops of Philae. As this work has not yet been systematically studied, Ch. 6 will be devoted to describing the work, its author and public. In Ch. 7 we will turn to the section on the bishops of Philae. How historical is it?

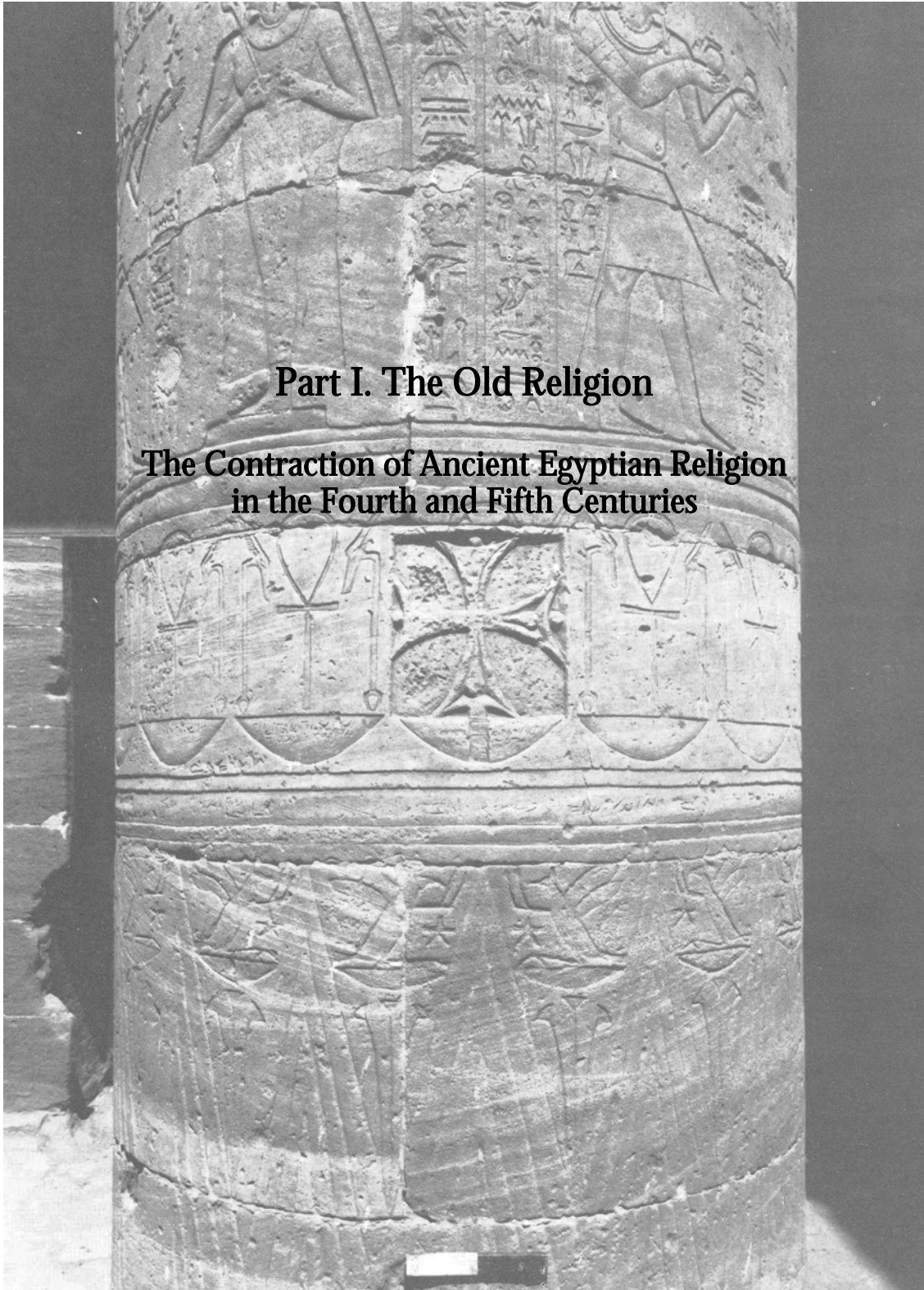
The saint's life also forms a natural transition to Part III, which is about the time the hagiographical work was probably composed: the sixth century, when Christianity had fully integrated into society. How did this become visible? Part III contains the greatest wealth of material. Undoubtedly, this is in large part because the see of Philae became involved in the missionary activities to Nubia that are reported by John of Ephesus. What was Philae's role in these events? (Ch. 8). At the same time, the archaeological material from the First Cataract region provides a detailed picture of how the sacred landscape had been transformed by the sixth century. In Ch. 9, we will discuss the remains of Christian Philae, its temples and churches, but also the inscriptions left on or near these buildings. How did Philae become Christian in the sixth century? These developments will be compared with the way in which the landscape became transformed at Elephantine and Syene, mainly by looking at what happened to their temples (Ch. 10). Finally, papyri and ostraka concerning Syene and Elephantine provide us with a picture of how the Church had integrated into the sixth-century Christian society of the First Cataract region. In the epilogue, the regional developments will be summarised, and some examples will be given of how people appropriated Christianity in the region.

The appendices contain the texts and translations of key passages by the historians Procopius and Priscus, a list of demotic graffiti in Egypt, a list of the Late Antique bishops of Syene and Philae, an updated text and translation of *P.Cair.Masp.* I 67004, a papyrus discussed

an earlier, undated predecessor, P. Grossmann, 'Zu der Kirchenruine von Šallal', in U. Luft (ed.), *The Intellectual Heritage of Egypt* (= Fs. Kákósy; Budapest, 1992) 235-43, and *Christliche Architektur in Ägypten* (Leiden, 2002) 465-6. Another example is the church that was built in a Ptolemaic temple on Biga and has tentatively been dated to the sixth century, but has now disappeared under water. See Monneret de Villard, *Nubia medioevale* 1, 11-3; P. Grossmann, 'Überlegungen zur Gestalt der Kirche im Tempel von Biga', in Bács, *Fs. Gaál, Luft, Török*, 279-87, and *Christliche Architektur*, 32, 48.

¹³¹ The idea is inspired by Robin Lane Fox' book *Pagans and Christians*, 'which puts their practice side by side in a context of civic life' (p. 7).

in Ch. 9, and the text and translation of some new inscriptions from Philae and Elephantine that have recently been published.



Part I. The Old Religion

**The Contraction of Ancient Egyptian Religion
in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries**

Introduction

In AD 248 or 249, Myron, acting high priest of Alexandria and all Egypt (διαδεχομένος τὴν ἀρχιερωσύνην), received a worrying note from as far south as Talmis (modern Kalabsha).¹ The priests of the Nubian god Mandulis, who could apparently appeal directly to Alexandria, stated that pigs, regarded by Egyptians as the most impure of animals, had entered the temple without being removed.² Myron ordered the responsible official, the *strategos* of Omboi and Elephantine, Aurelius Besarion, also known as Ammonios, to clear the temple.³ In an inscription on the temple's walls, the *strategos* orders the owners to drive off all pigs within a fortnight, 'so that the holy rites may take place in the customary way'.⁴ Apparently, turned into a pigsty, the temple could no longer perform its customary rites and the priests of Mandulis had to call in their superior's help.

This document is a sign of the times, for the Ancient Egyptian temple had lost most of its millennia-old splendour by the third century. By the end of that century, temple building was reduced to a minimum and the sacred scripts were virtually extinct.⁵ These were by no means phenomena exclusive to the third century, as we have seen, since the 'decline' of the temple can be traced back to the beginning of the Roman period. But it seems that the emperors had decided to reduce and, eventually, cease their financial support of the temples in the course of the third century, which is known for its empire-wide instability and crisis.⁶ This perhaps explains why priests figure so prominently as private persons in third and fourth-century documents, for they had to find other ways of income than those deriving from the temple.⁷

In some cases, cults had even ended by the third century, as for example in the famous temple complex of Luxor (Thebes) where Diocletian built a military camp.⁸ In other cases, however, the Ancient Egyptian cults continued, although temples now had to rely completely on their own resources. In the end, this development could hardly have missed its effect.⁹ The following examples illustrate well that from the fourth century onwards, the temples were in trouble.¹⁰

The remote temples in the Dakhleh oasis seem to have been abandoned in the course of the fourth century, the last evidence for the presence of priesthood being a

¹ See e.g. M. Stead, 'The High Priest of Alexandria and All Egypt', in *PapCongr.* XVI (Chicago, 1981) 411-8.

² For the religious taboo on pigs in temples, see W. Helck, 'Schwein', *LÄ* V (1984) 762-4, and F. Perpillou-Thomas, *Fêtes d'Égypte ptolémaïque et romaine* (Leuven, 1993) 203-9.

³ *SB* V 8534 = *FHN* III 248. *FHN* III, pp. 976-7, is in doubt about the date, but cf. J. Bingen, 'Date et genèse d'OGIS I 210 (Talmis – Kalabchah)', *CdE* 72 (1997) 348-54 at 348-50, and his review of *FHN* III in *CdE* 74 (1999) 388-90 at 389.

⁴ *SB* V 8534.9-10 (πρὸς τὸ δύνασθαι τὰ περὶ τὰ ἱερὰ θρήσκια κατὰ τὰ νενομισμένα γείνεσθαι).

⁵ D. Arnold, *Temples of the Last Pharaohs* (New York and Oxford, 1999) 272, says about declining building activity at temples: 'During the long period from AD 180 to 430, no noteworthy religious architecture was produced in Egypt'. The last Egyptian temple was erected in the reign of the Emperor Maximinus Daia (305-13) in Tahta, see H. Grégoire, 'L'énigme de Tahta', *CdE* 15 (1940) 119-23.

⁶ Bagnall, *Egypt*, 261-8; O.E. Kaper, 'Temple Building in the Egyptian Deserts during the Roman Period', in O.E. Kaper (ed.), *Life on the Fringe* (Leiden, 1998) 139-58 at 144-5; Frankfurter, *Religion*, 27-30; Bagnall, *Later Roman Egypt*, Ch. X. Cf. J. Baines, 'Temples as Symbols, Guarantors, and Participants in Egyptian Civilization', in S. Quirke (ed.), *The Temple in Ancient Egypt. New Discoveries and Recent Research* (London, 1997) 216-41 at 234, ascribing the reduction of temple finance to a combination of a reduction in government and local funds.

⁷ Bagnall, *Egypt*, 268.

⁸ M. el-Saghir *et al.* (eds), *Le camp romain de Louqsor* (Cairo, 1986), on which see J. Bingen, 'Épigraphie grecque: les proscunèmes de Louqsor', *CdE* 61 (1986) 330-4.

⁹ Cf. the lack of state finance for East German churches after 1955, for which see T. Hoffmann, G. Kehler, 'Finanzierung von Religion. Beispiel: DDR – Der Verlust von Staatsunterstützung', in Kippenberg and Luchesi, *Lokale Religionsgeschichte*, 289-93.

¹⁰ Bagnall, *Egypt*, 261.

papyrus of 335 that mentions the priest Aurelius Stonios, son of Tephnachthes.¹¹ In 340, the last stela dedicated to the Buchis bull was erected at Hermonthis (Armant), and some of the other stelae written in hieroglyphic and hieratic belong to the last dated attestations of these scripts in Egypt.¹² Nineteen years later, a remarkable incident occurred, which is reported by the Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus.¹³ When the Emperor Constantius II (337-361) heard about the contents of petitions that several prominent men had handed in to the oracle cult of Bes in the mortuary temple of Seti I at Abydos, the 'Memnonion', he sent one of his officials to investigate the case, and several of them were brought to trial.¹⁴ Whether the temple was closed afterwards, however, is unknown.¹⁵

Other examples come from Christian sources that recount the violent end of Ancient Egyptian cults. Undoubtedly the most famous of these accounts is the destruction of the Serapeum at Alexandria in 392, which is reported by several church historians.¹⁶ After riots had broken out, the temple was stormed and plundered with the help of the Archbishop of Alexandria, Theophilus (385-412).¹⁷ In the aftermath of this event, the temple of Serapis at Canopus, east of Alexandria, was also destroyed.¹⁸ One of the few fifth-century witnesses to the end of a temple cult is a passage from the *Life of Severus* written in Syriac by Zachariah Scholasticus in the sixth century. It includes an incident in which a professor of Greek philosophy at Alexandria was involved. The professor, Asclepiodotus, visited the temple of Isis at Menouthis, near Canopus, because his wife was barren. When she became pregnant, this was perceived as a miracle. In response, one of the Christian students, supported by the Archbishop

¹¹ For the temples: C.A. Hope in R.S. Bagnall (ed.), *The Kellis Agricultural Account Book (P.Kell. IV Gr. 96)* (Oxford, 1997) 12. For the papyrus: *P.Kell.* I 13.14. The priest is also mentioned in a number of papyri from the main temple at Ismant el-Kharab published by K.A. Worp, 'Short Texts from the Main Temple', in C.A. Hope, G.E. Bowen (eds), *Dakhleh Oasis Project: Preliminary Reports on the 1994-1995 to 1998-1999 Field Seasons* (Oxford, 2002) 333-49.

¹² J.-C. Grenier, 'La stèle funéraire du dernier taureau Bouchis (Caire JE 31901 = Stèle *Bucheum* 20)', *BFAO* 83 (1983) 197-208.

¹³ Amm. 19.12.3-5.

¹⁴ For this temple, see A. Piankoff, 'The Osireion of Seti I at Abydos during the Greco-Roman Period and the Christian Occupation', *BSAC* 15 (1960) 125-49. For the oracle cult, see F. Dunand, 'La consultation oraculaire en Égypte tardive: l'oracle de Bès à Abydos', in J.-G. Heintz (ed.), *Oracles et prophéties dans l'antiquité* (Paris, 1997) 65-84; I. Rutherford, 'Pilgrimage in Greco-Roman Egypt: New Perspectives on Graffiti from the Memnonion at Abydos', in R. Matthews, C. Roemer (eds), *Ancient Perspectives on Egypt* (London, 2003) 171-89 at 180.

¹⁵ See on this passage D. Frankfurter in R. Valantasis (ed.), *Religions of Late Antiquity in Practice* (Princeton, 2000) 476-8.

¹⁶ Rufin. *hist.* 11.22-3 (*GSC* 9.2, pp. 1025-30); Socr. *h.e.* 5.16-7 (*GCS* Neue Folge 1, pp. 289-91); Soz. *h.e.* 7.15 (*GCS* 50, pp. 319-21); Thdt. *h.e.* 5.22 (*GCS* Neue Folge 5, pp. 320-1).

¹⁷ J. Schwartz, 'La fin du Serapeum d'Alexandrie', in *Essays in Honor of C. Bradford Welles* (New Haven, 1966) 99-111; F. Thélamon, *Païens et chrétiens au IV^e siècle. L'apport de l'"Histoire ecclésiastique" de Rufin d'Aquilée* (Paris, 1981) 255-7; MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire*, 99; Chuvin, *Chronique*, 70-1; P. Athanassiadi, 'Persecution and Response in Late Paganism: The Evidence of Damascius', *JHS* 113 (1993) 1-29 at 14; Trombley, *Hellenic Religion* 1, 129-45; J. Hahn, *Gewalt und religiöser Konflikt* (Berlin, 2004) 78-101; P. Grossmann, 'Modalitäten der Zerstörung und Christianisierung pharaonischer Tempelanlagen', forthcoming. Although the destruction of the Serapeum is usually dated to 391, I follow the persuasive arguments by Hahn, *Gewalt und religiöser Konflikt*, 81-5, to date the event to 392. Cf. Frankfurter, *Religion*, 41, 164, who dates the event to 389.

¹⁸ Rufin. *hist.* 11.26 (*GSC* 9.2, pp. 1032-3). See R. Herzog, 'Der Kampf um den Kult von Menouthis', in T. Klauser, A. Rucker (eds), *Pisciculi. Studien zur Religion und Kultur des Altertums* (= Fs. Dölger, Münster, 1939) 117-24 at 119-20; Thélamon, *Païens et chrétiens*, 257-8; Athanassiadi, 'Persecution', 14-5; Hahn, *Gewalt und religiöser Konflikt*, 102; Grossmann, 'Modalitäten', and 'Zur Gründung des Heilungszentrums der Hl. Kyros und Johannes bei Menouthis', forthcoming. Cf. Wipszycka, *Études*, 80, and Frankfurter, *Religion*, 41, 164, who speak of an Isis cult at Canopus, and Trombley, *Hellenic Religion* 1, 137-9; 2, 5-6, who adds to the confusion by taking Menouthis and Canopus as one and the same site.

Peter Mongus of Alexandria (480-488), went to Menouthis together with a group of monks, set fire to a shrine there and burnt the idols hidden inside.¹⁹

In the course of the fourth century, then, it had become increasingly difficult to maintain Ancient Egyptian cults, and Christianity may have been a less contributing factor to this development than the Christian sources suggest.²⁰ The same tendency can be discerned in the First Cataract region. The great temple of Khnum at Elephantine had fallen out of use in the fourth century or earlier, for the houses within its temenos wall intended for temple personnel had been abandoned by that time.²¹ Thus, it seems that, as in Egypt as a whole, most cultic activity in the First Cataract area had ceased by the end of the fourth century.²²

Although Philae has, as we have seen, always been regarded as an exception to these developments, as in the rest of Egypt, building activity at the temples of Philae ceased after the third century. Nonetheless, several inscriptions in Greek and the Ancient Egyptian scripts, hieroglyphic and demotic, testify to the continuity of the temple cult in Late Antiquity. It is at Philae that we find the last hieroglyphic (394) and demotic (452) inscriptions in Egypt. Apparently, Philae had its own means of income to support its cults. The passage written by Procopius is often adduced to explain that the Blemmyes and Noubades were responsible for this exceptional situation. The same text states that the temples of Philae were destroyed in the reign of Justinian, an event that is usually dated between 535 and 537.

Part I examines the state of the Ancient Egyptian cults at Philae during the fourth and fifth centuries. In an introductory chapter (Ch. 1), we will briefly pay attention to the Roman perspective of this situation on the basis of the passages by Procopius and Priscus. But do these sources accurately describe the relations Philae had with the Blemmyes and Noubades? In Ch. 2 we will discuss the sources concerning the Dodekaschoinos in this period, and compare them with the Roman historians.

In the next two chapters, the demotic and Greek inscriptions from the island itself will be analysed. What was the character of the Late Antique cults? (Ch. 3). What do we know of the priests and their cultic activities? And what was left of the Ancient Egyptian cults by 535-537? (Ch. 4).

¹⁹ *Life of Severus* Kugener (*PO* 2, pp. 14-44). See Herzog, 'Kampf'; Thélamon, *Paiens et chrétiens*, 259; C. Haas, 'Patriarch and People: Peter Mongus of Alexandria and Episcopal Leadership in the Late Fifth Century', *J ECS* 1 (1993) 297-316 at 312-5; Trombley, *Hellenic Religion* 2, 219-25; Wipszycka, *Études*, 80-4; P. Athanassiadi, *Damascius. The Philosophical History* (Athens, 1999) 27-9; Hahn, *Gewalt und religiöser Konflikt*, 105; Grossmann, 'Modalitäten', and 'Zur Gründung'. Cf. Frankfurter, *Religion*, 40-1, 164-5, who dates this event to 484 and later to 'around 484', with D. Montserrat, 'Pilgrimage to the Shrine of Ss Cyrus and John at Menouthis in Late Antiquity', in Frankfurter, *Pilgrimage & Holy Space*, 257-79 at 261-6, who dates it to c. 489.

²⁰ Cf. the remark by H.J.W. Drijvers, *East of Antioch. Studies in Early Syriac Christianity* (London, 1984) Ch. XVI at 35 ('The Persistence of Pagan Cults and Practices in Christian Syria', 1982'), that Christian polemical sources are hardly informative on what happened in temples. This point is also made by Wipszycka, *Études*, 90.

²¹ Arnold, *Elephantine XXX*, 19-20.

²² This seems to be the general tendency, which does not mean that all cultic activity had ceased by the fourth century. For example, directly against the wall of Khnum temple, excavators found a house (M 22), in which they unearthed an undisturbed level of hardened clay, containing an offering table and a water vessel. Apparently, this room was used for ceremonial practices. The layer on top contained pottery dated to the second quarter of the sixth century. Apparently, this room was still in use as a domestic shrine even though the temple of Khnum had long been out of use (personal communication from M. Rodziewicz, cf. H. Jaritz in W. Kaiser *et al.*, 'Stadt und Tempel von Elephantine. 23./24. Grabungsbericht', *MDAIK* 53 (1997) 117-93 at 188).

1. Between Peace and War: Procopius and Priscus on Philae

Roman politics concerning Late Antique Philae can best be elucidated by analysing passages in two historical sources, Procopius and Priscus, which are often quoted by scholars (for the text and translation of these passages, see Appendix 1). The events as described in these texts serve as a chronological framework and *pièce de résistance* for sources to be analysed later.

In his *Persian Wars*, written around 550/551, Procopius describes the withdrawal of the Roman frontier in 298.²³ At that time, Diocletian was in Egypt to personally resolve a crisis after the revolt of Domitius Domitianus, which took place in 297/298.²⁴ Possibly as part of this campaign, the emperor marched against the 'Ethiopians'.²⁵ Another source mentions a Roman victory won over 'Ethiopians' between 296 and 298.²⁶ According to Procopius, Diocletian travelled to the area, probably in the autumn of 298, and conducted a peace treaty with the Blemmyes and Noubades.²⁷ It was agreed that the Romans would give up the Dodekaschoinos, annually pay a fixed amount of money to these peoples, and allow their priests to perform religious duties, alongside the 'Roman' priests, in the sanctuaries at Philae.²⁸

Although Procopius is the only source to inform us about the withdrawal of the Roman frontier, and there is no doubt that his account draws on a historical event, the historian is clearly writing from a Roman point of view, and as such conforms to imperial propaganda vis-à-vis 'barbarians'.²⁹ He presents Diocletian as making an independent, well-considered decision concerning the frontier, and sums up the reasons why the emperor came to this decision. However, Diocletian's considerations contrast with the concessions he had to make, and indicate that it is more likely that the emperor was forced to this decision through pressure from the peoples of the south.³⁰

Furthermore, Procopius states that 'Diocletian persuaded those barbarians (that is, the Noubades) to migrate from their own haunts and to settle on either side of the Nile'.³¹ The archaeological remains that reflect the society that inhabited Lower Nubia from the fourth to the sixth centuries show that there was never a complete break with the preceding period. It is therefore improbable that these Nubian tribes immigrated en masse to the Dodekaschoinos at the end of the third century.³² The Noubades probably already formed part of the indigenous population of the Nile valley, in which case Diocletian could not have instigated their settlement.

²³ For Procopius, see Av. Cameron, *Procopius and the Sixth Century* (London, 1985).

²⁴ J.D. Thomas, 'The Date of the Revolt of L. Domitius Domitianus', *ZPE* 22 (1976) 253-79, and 'A Family Dispute from Karanis and the Revolt of Domitius Domitianus', *ZPE* 24 (1977) 233-40. See now R.S. Bagnall, K.A. Worp, *Chronological Systems of Byzantine Egypt* (Leiden, 2004²) 241-2. I do not follow the attempts by J. Schwartz, *L. Domitius Domitianus (étude numismatique et papyrologique)* (Brussels, 1975), and F. Kolb, 'Die Datierung des ägyptischen Aufstands unter L. Domitius Domitianus und Aurelius Achilleus', *Eos* 76 (1988) 325-43, to date the event to 296/7.

²⁵ Zonar. 12.31 B-C = *FHN* III 281.

²⁶ Paneg. 8.5.2 = *FHN* III 280.

²⁷ The date of Diocletian's journey is derived from *P.Panop.Beatty* 1, on which see A.K. Bowman, 'Papyri and Roman Imperial History, 1960-75', *JRS* 66 (1976) 153-73 at 158-60. For the events culminating in Diocletian's visit, see Brennan, 'Diocletian and Elephantine'.

²⁸ Procop. *Pers.* 1.19.27-37 = *FHN* III 328.

²⁹ Török, 'Contribution', 217-8. See in general for imperial propaganda with regard to peace treaties with 'barbarians', P.J. Heather, 'Foedera and Foederati of the Fourth Century', in W. Pohl (ed.), *Kingdoms of the Empire. The Integration of Barbarians in Late Antiquity* (Leiden, 1997) 57-74.

³⁰ L. Török, *Late Antique Nubia* (Budapest, 1988) 30-1; G. Greatrex, *Procopius and the Persian Wars* (Diss. Oxford, 1994) 243; L.P. Kirwan, *Studies on the History of Late Antique and Christian Nubia* (Aldershot and Burlington, 2002) Ch. XV ('The X-Group Problem', 1982¹) 194.

³¹ Procop. *Pers.* 1.19.29.

³² Adams, *Nubia*, 345-8, 419-22. Cf. Demicheli, *Rapporti*, 155-6; Török, 'Contribution', 236; *FHN* III, p. 1192; Edwards, *Nubian Past*, 159.

Procopius also pictures the Blemmyes and Noubades as barbarians in the traditional Graeco-Roman manner.³³ After he has mentioned the annual payment to these peoples, Procopius states:

Although they have been receiving this (right) down to my day, none the less they continue to overrun the places in those parts. Thus, it seems, with regard to all barbarians, it is simply not possible for them to keep faith with the Romans unless through fear of active defence forces.³⁴

Typically, the Blemmyes and Noubades are portrayed here as untrustworthy barbarians, who can be subdued by violence only. Another example is Procopius' description of the religion of the peoples:

Both these peoples, the Blemmyes and the Nobatai (Noubades), revere all the other gods in which pagans (Ἕλληνας) believe, as well as Isis and Osiris, and not least Priapus. But the Blemmyes even have the custom of sacrificing human beings to the sun.³⁵

In the first place, it is mentioned in particular that the Blemmyes and Noubades worship Priapus, the ithyphallic god of sex and fertility, who was, to say the least, not a 'normal' deity.³⁶ Moreover, throughout Antiquity, human sacrifice was regarded as a typical feature of barbarians.³⁷ This angle from which Roman sources are written should be kept in mind when we discuss the other sources concerning the southern frontier in Late Antiquity.

What does Procopius say about Philae? Diocletian 'chose an island in the river Nile somewhere very near (ἄγχιστὰ πη) the city of Elephantine'.³⁸ Apparently, the historian was not too well informed about the location of Philae, as he also remarks that the emperor 'constructed a really strong fortification' there. As we have seen, this 'fortification' probably consisted of a reorganisation of the troops, which were not stationed on Philae but on the riverbank facing the island. Procopius continues:

... and in that place he founded some shrines and altars for the Romans and for these very barbarians in common and settled in this fortification priests of both (parties), in the expectation that their friendship would be secure for the Romans because they shared the sanctuaries with them.³⁹

According to Procopius, priests at Philae were allowed to come from both the 'Romans' (that is, Egyptians who were Roman citizens), and from the Blemmyes and

³³ See P.S. Wells, *The Barbarians Speak. How the Conquered Peoples Shaped Roman Europe* (Princeton, 1999) 99-104, on the Graeco-Roman perception of barbarians, and Y.A. Dauge, *Le barbare. Recherches sur la conception romaine de la barbarie et de la civilisation* (Brussels, 1981) 620-6; B.D. Shaw, *Rulers, Nomads, and Christians in Roman North Africa* (Aldershot and Brookfield, 1995) Ch. VI ('"Eaters of Flesh, Drinkers of Milk": The Ancient Mediterranean Ideology of the Pastoral Nomad', 1982/3¹), and Ch. VII ('Fear and Loathing: The Nomad Menace and Roman Africa', 1982¹), on the Graeco-Roman 'ideology' towards nomads. Cf. D.F. Graf, *Rome and the Arabian Frontier: From the Nabataeans to the Saracens* (Aldershot and Brookfield, 1997) Ch. X ('Rome and the Saracens: Reassessing the Nomadic Menace', 1989¹), for the Roman view of the Saracens.

³⁴ Procop. *Pers.* 1.19.33 (slightly adapted).

³⁵ Procop. *Pers.* 1.19.35-6. This statement may be connected to the solar god Mandulis, whom the Blemmyes worshipped in fifth-century Talmis. Cf. Nock, *Essays on Religion* 1, 357-400 ('A Vision of Mandulis Aion', 1934¹).

³⁶ Bremmer, *Greek Religion*, 41; T. Heinze, 'Priapus', *DNPX* (2001) 308-9.

³⁷ E.g. D.D. Hughes, *Human Sacrifice in Ancient Greece* (London, 1991); J. Rives, 'Human Sacrifice among Pagans and Christians', *JRS* 85 (1995) 65-85.

³⁸ Procop. *Pers.* 1.19.34.

³⁹ Procop. *Pers.* 1.19.34 (adapted). The translation of ἱερεῖς ἐκάστων with 'priests of both peoples' in *FHN* III, p. 1191, is inaccurate because on the one hand the Romans, and on the other hand the Blemmyes and Noubades are meant. The translation 'because they shared the sanctuaries with them' is preferable to 'because of their participation in the rites' (τῶ μετέχειν τῶν ἱερῶν), for ἱερῶν refers to νεῶς τε καὶ βωμούς 'shrines and altars'. Cf. ἱερά 'sanctuaries' in Procop. *Pers.* 1.19.36.

Noubades. However, the remark that Diocletian decided to have priests of both parties in the temple to keep the peace seems to illustrate the etymology of Philae that follows in the next sentence, which Procopius relates to the Greek word '(female) friends' (φίλαι), and which the historian seems to have adopted from earlier, Roman sources.⁴⁰ The permission to have access to the sanctuaries of Philae continued until Procopius' own day:

These barbarians retained the sanctuaries on Philae right down to my day, but the Emperor Justinian decided to destroy them.⁴¹

The second, equally important source for the history of Late Antique Philae is a fragment by the historian Priscus, which is preserved in a tenth-century encyclopaedic work compiled by the Byzantine Emperor Constantinus Porphyrogenitus, the *Excerpta de legationibus*.⁴² The passage was written in the last quarter of the fifth century, and describes a treaty after the Romans had defeated the Blemmyes and Noubades. These peoples twice sued for peace, the first time for as long as the Roman leader of the delegation, Maximinus, was in the Thebaid, the second time for as long as he lived. But Maximinus only wanted to accept a treaty that lasted for a hundred years.⁴³

According to the treaty, the peoples had to release Roman prisoners, they had to return animals, and they had to give young, well-born men as hostages. However, they could continue a long-standing tradition:

...and that, in accordance with the ancient right (νόμος), their crossing to the temple of Isis be unhindered, Egyptians having charge of the river boat in which the statue (ἄγαλμα) of the goddess is placed and ferried across the river. For at a stated time the barbarians bring the wooden statue (ξύλον) to their own country and, after having consulted it, return it safely to the island.

In this passage, the phrase 'in accordance with the ancient right' is contrasted with the ordinances of the present treaty between the Romans, and the Blemmyes and Noubades. This appears from the word 'ancient' (παλαιός), but the position of the adjective between the article and the noun, which in Greek indicates that the adjective is the most salient part of the noun phrase, is also clearly contrastive.⁴⁴ The 'ancient right' therefore seems to refer to an ancient tradition, perhaps ratified in a formal treaty or treaties, in which these peoples were allowed to have access to Philae.⁴⁵ The

⁴⁰ Procop. *Pers.* 1.19.35 (adapted). Although the Greek word φιλία, 'friendship', is mentioned in the preceding sentence, the Greek has an accusative plural of φίλη, '(female) friend', here, and should be translated accordingly (*pace FHN* III, p. 1191). For both etymologies, see I. Lévy, 'Sur deux contes étymologiques relatifs à Philae', *Latomus* 5 (1946) 127-30.

⁴¹ Procop. *Pers.* 1.19.36.

⁴² Prisc. F 27 Blockley (= *FHN* III 318). On Priscus, see R.C. Blockley, *The Fragmentary Classicising Historians of the Later Roman Empire*, 2 vols (Liverpool, 1981-3) 1.48-70; B. Baldwin, *Studies on Late Roman and Byzantine History, Literature and Language* (Amsterdam, 1984) 255-98 ('Priscus of Panium', 1980); D. Rohrbacher, *The Historians of Late Antiquity* (London and New York, 2002) 82-92; R.C. Blockley, 'The Development of Greek Historiography: Priscus, Malchus, Candidus', in G. Marasco (ed.), *Greek & Roman Historiography in Late Antiquity* (Leiden, 2003) 289-315 at 289-312.

⁴³ On the different proposals as to his function, cf. *PLRE* II s.v. 'Maximinus' 10-1, with Török, 'Contribution', 228-9, and *FHN* III, p. 1157.

⁴⁴ H. Dik, 'Interpreting Adjective Position in Herodotus', in E.J. Bakker (ed.), *Grammar as Interpretation. Greek Literature in Its Linguistic Contexts* (Leiden, 1997) 55-76. I owe this reference to S.J. Bakker.

⁴⁵ Normally, νόμος should be translated with either 'law' or 'custom', but both translations are not entirely satisfactory in this context. If we translate 'law' (*FHN* III, p. 1155), the access seems to be based on a formal treaty such as the treaty with Diocletian of 298, but the question is whether the word refers to a specific 'law' or, more generally, to the 'custom' of the southern peoples having access to the temple. Against the translation 'custom' (Blockley, *Classicising Historians* 2, 323) it can be argued that

connection with the second, explanatory sentence is harder to account for, but probably explains why the statue is ferried from Philae across the Nile in connection with the Blemmyes and Noubades: in order to be taken to their country every now and again. Interestingly, unlike Procopius, Priscus remarks that Egyptian priests were in charge.

Because of the connection of the Blemmyes and Noubades with Philae, the treaty 'of a hundred years' was concluded on the island. However, soon afterwards Maximinus suddenly died, and the peoples responded, ironically, by holding the Romans to their second proposal:

When the barbarians learned of Maximinus' death, they took away their hostages by force and overran the country.

This event, which can be dated to shortly before the end of 453 (452/453), indicates that the Romans tolerated Blemmyan and Noubadian worship at Philae well into the fifth century, even after a victory.⁴⁶ Although interpretation is difficult because the immediate context has not been transmitted, the treaty is seen through Roman eyes, for the text underlines the unreliability of the 'barbarians', who, as soon as Maximinus had died, started raiding again.⁴⁷

These passages by Procopius and Priscus show that Roman policy was aimed at keeping the peace on the southern frontier, which was apparently frequently disturbed by raids of the Blemmyes and Noubades.⁴⁸ Therefore, they paid these peoples and granted them access to the temples of Philae 'according to the ancient right'. This brings us to the question to be answered in the next section: when Priscus states that the Blemmyes and Noubades took a statue of Isis from Philae to their country, where did they go to?

this translation does not indicate a contrast with the treaty of 452/3. With Winter, 'Philae', 1026, the translation 'right' seems therefore more appropriate here. Cf. E. Winter in A.M. Blackman, *The Temple of Dendûr* (Cairo, 1911; repr. with supplement, Cairo, 1981) 373-83 at 382.

⁴⁶ Rutherford, 'Island', 235.

⁴⁷ Cf. e.g. Prisc. F 6.1 Blockley, for a similar story about the unreliability of 'barbarians' concerning a treaty.

⁴⁸ Cf. on the Roman attitude towards the Saracens in the reign of Justinian, Mayerson, *Monks* 313-21 at 319 ('Saracens and Romans: Micro-Macro Relationships', 1989): 'It is quite clear that the Romans were never able, or committed, to control the movement of Arab tribes'.

2. An Egyptian Sanctuary Looking South: Philae and the Southern Peoples

Today, Philae is known as the 'Pearl of Egypt', but at least part of its splendour was non-Egyptian. We have already seen that the Noubades were a Nubian people living south of Philae in the Nile valley. From their earliest appearance in the Graeco-Roman sources, the Blemmyes have been located between the Nile and the Red Sea, that is, in the Eastern Desert. For example, Strabo locates them there along with two other peoples, the Megabaroi and the Troglodytai.⁴⁹ In Late Antiquity, these peoples from the Eastern Desert came to be known under a single name, the Blemmyes. Thus far, scholars have tried to write a coherent history on the basis of too few sources, often with a strong bias towards political history, without taking into account the complexity of tribal societies and the nature of the concepts that lay behind the Graeco-Roman perspectives on 'the Blemmyes'. Before we create another, highly hypothetical, 'study of the Blemmyes',⁵⁰ we should therefore first discuss the basic problems.

The Late Antique sources concerning 'the Blemmyes' can be divided into two categories: the first category is the mainly literary sources that mention 'the Blemmyes' ('outside' sources), the second category is the documentary sources in which people speak of themselves as 'the Blemmyes' ('inside' sources). These sources come from or pertain to the settlements in the Nile valley, in particular the Dodekaschoinos, and may not have had any bearing on the dwellers of the Eastern Desert. Therefore, conclusions drawn from the literary sources only say something about the Blemmyes living in or near the Nile valley. These people may have been 'marginal', both with regard to the other people living in the Nile valley and to the dwellers of the Eastern Desert. In this chapter, we will focus on these marginal people, who became visible in the sources at the end of the fifth century. In particular, it will be asked how they came to be living alongside the indigenous, Nubian population, the Noubades. To learn more about these settlement patterns, we will turn to anthropological models and apply these to the information obtained from the sources.

However, we will first go slightly further back in time in order to trace the relationship of the southern peoples with Philae. We then will discuss the sources from the fourth and fifth centuries from the 'outside' (the Roman perspective) and the 'inside' (the southern perspective) and, particularly, Philae's role as a medium between both sides of the frontier.

Historical Background of the Relations with Nubia

From earliest times, Philae was oriented, quite literally, to the south: the main approach to the island was from that direction (Fig. 3).⁵¹ The 'Black Pharaoh' Taharqa of the Kushite 25th dynasty was probably the first to dedicate a shrine to Amun of Takompo (690-664 BC) on the island.⁵² In the Ptolemaic period, Philae remained under Nubian influence. Gradually, it won the struggle with the cult of Khnum at

⁴⁹ Str. 17.1.2.

⁵⁰ A good example is Updegraff, *Study*, the only comprehensive, if outdated, synthesis on 'the Blemmyes'.

⁵¹ *L.Philae.Dem.*, p. 42.

⁵² On the Kushite 25th dynasty see D. Wildung (ed.), *Sudan. Antike Königreiche am Nil* (Tübingen, 1996) 167-71; D.A. Welsby, *The Kingdom of Kush. The Napatan and Meroitic Empires* (London, 1996) 19-56; L. Török, *The Kingdom of Kush. Handbook of the Napatan-Meroitic Civilization* (Leiden, 1997) 131-88; Edwards, *Nubian Past*, 112-40. On the identification of Takompo with the region around Maharraqa at the southern end of the Dodekaschoinos see Locher, *Nilkatarakt*, 259-65. Cf. G. Haeny, 'A Short Architectural History of Philae', *BIFAO* 85 (1985) 197-233 at 201-2; Dietze, 'Philae', 68. The suggestion by Rutherford, 'Island', 231, that Taharqa may have founded the shrine as a Nubian counterpart to the Khnum cult at Elephantine is unfounded.

Elephantine for the position of dominant cult in the First Cataract area.⁵³ Ptolemy IV erected a temple dedicated to the Nubian god Arensnuphis, and a rather modest sanctuary was built for another Nubian god, Mandulis, at a later, though unknown, date. King Arqamani (Ergamenes) of Meroe, the kingdom that dominated Nubia from the third century BC until the third century AD, even seized Philae at the end of the third century BC.⁵⁴ Building blocks of his successor Adhikhalamani have also been found on the island.⁵⁵

Conflicts between Romans and Meroites reached a head in the period between 30 and 21/20 BC.⁵⁶ Eventually, the Roman general Petronius defeated the Meroites.⁵⁷ As in the case of the treaty of Philae in AD 298, in the peace treaty on Samos (21/20 BC) the glorious victory that our sources suggest contradicts with the contents of the treaty. The Emperor Augustus decided to withdraw the Roman frontier from Buhen to Hiera Sykaminos (Maharraqa; in other words, to reduce Roman territory from the Thirty Miles Land or Triakontaschoinos to the Dodekaschoinos), and to cancel the tribute that the Kingdom of Meroe had to pay.⁵⁸ The motivations behind this decision resembled those of Diocletian in later times: the emperor preferred to relinquish territory and to play safe than to renew conflict.

The reign of Augustus instituted a break with the Ptolemaic tradition of temple building as the priestly rights of asylum and other privileges were curtailed. From now on, the central government kept strict control over priests and temple lands. Roman power was also manifested by several building programmes throughout Egypt.⁵⁹ Undoubtedly to promote the stability in the new frontier region and to impress Meroe, Augustus launched a costly building programme. Several new temples were constructed and these were all connected with the Isis temple of Philae. Although the emperor sanctioned this project, its effectuation was probably more a concern of the local elite and the responsible officials,⁶⁰ who constructed temples of Isis at Maharraqa (with Sarapis), Dendur (with Osiris, and Peteisis and Pahor), and Tafa (two temples and a bark station),⁶¹ a kiosk at Qertassi,⁶² and a pylon at Biga.⁶³ The temple of Isis at Dabod was extended and placed in a monumental setting. Finally, the temple island of Philae was thoroughly reorganised. In front of the first pylon of the temple of Isis, a new trapezoidal court was built, the *dromos*, surrounded by colonnades to receive pilgrims (Fig. 3).⁶⁴ A kiosk, known as the 'Kiosk of Trajan', was erected as well as a small temple dedicated to Augustus on the northern part of the island.⁶⁵

⁵³ Dietze, 'Philae', 73.

⁵⁴ On the Kingdom of Meroe, see L. Török, *Der Meroitische Staat 1. Untersuchungen und Urkunden zur Geschichte des Sudan im Altertum* (Berlin, 1986), and 'Geschichte Meroes. Ein Beitrag über die Quellenlage und den Forschungsstand', *ANRW* II 10.1 (1988) 107-341; Wildung, *Sudan*, 207-17.

⁵⁵ Haeny, 'Short Architectural History', 201-2, 220-2; Rutherford, 'Island', 231-2.

⁵⁶ Monneret de Villard, *Storia*, 7-15; Demicheli, *Rapporti*, 66-94; Török, *Meroitische Staat*, 17-8, 'Augustus and Meroe', *OrSu* 38-39 (1989-1990) 171-90, *Meroe. Six Studies on the Cultural Identity of an Ancient African State* (Budapest, 1995) 115-27, and *Kingdom of Kush*, 448-55; J. Locher, 'Die Anfänge der römischen Herrschaft in Nubien und der Konflikt zwischen Rom und Meroe', *AncSoc* 32 (2002) 73-133.

⁵⁷ Str. 17.1.54, Plin. *nat.* 6.181-2; D.C. 54.5.4-6.

⁵⁸ Locher, *Nilkatarakt*, 252-6.

⁵⁹ G. Hölbl, *Altägypten im römischen Reich. Der römische Pharao und seine Tempel I* (Mainz, 2000) 17.

⁶⁰ Baines, 'Temples', 229-30.

⁶¹ A bark station is a sanctuary where rites were performed as part of processions, in which the statue of a deity, on its way to another deity, was carried in a processional boat or bark, see K.A. Kitchen, 'Barke', *LÄ I* (1975) 619-25; D. Arnold, 'Barkenraum', *LÄ I* (1975) 625-6.

⁶² W. Helck, 'Kiosk', *LÄ III* (1980) 441-2: 'eine offene Säulenhalle mit Schranken'.

⁶³ The monumental entrance to the temple was called by the Greeks 'pylon', see B. Jaroš-Deckert, 'Pylon', *LÄ IV* (1982) 1202-5.

⁶⁴ H. Jaritz, 'Die Westkolonnade von Philae', *MDAIK* 47 (1991) 179-86.

⁶⁵ Kaper, 'Temple Building', 140-1; Arnold, *Temples of the Last Pharaohs*, 235-44; Baines and Málek, *Cultural Atlas*, 73-4, 180-1. For details on the temples see the series of volumes known as *Les temples immergés de la Nubie*. On the 'Kiosk of Trajan', see Hölbl, *Altägypten*, 36, cf. Haeny, 'Short Architectural History', 228-30, who dates it to before Trajan.

The building programme in the reign of Augustus both kept the Dodekaschoinos open to the south and emphasised political reality, namely that the region was Roman territory.⁶⁶ Between 207/206 and 186 BC, the Meroitic king Arqamani had dedicated a temple to the Nubian god Mandulis at Talmis (Kalabsha).⁶⁷ In the Augustan building programme the shrine was enlarged and Mandulis genealogically connected to the triad of Philae consisting of Osiris, Isis and Horus. From now on, Mandulis was 'the son of Horus, Lord of Talmis'.⁶⁸ The same is true for the veneration of the local, according to legend, drowned brothers Peteisis and Pahor at Dendur, who were worshipped alongside Isis and Osiris.⁶⁹ This situation was also reflected in the traditional donations of the temples of the Dodekaschoinos to the temple of Isis, which continued into the Roman period, albeit under Roman control.⁷⁰ Thus, the sacred landscape of the Dodekaschoinos was reshaped: oriented as it was towards the temple of Isis at Philae, new and old cults were joined under its aegis.

In the following centuries, the policy of Augustus and his successors seems to have worked: we hear no more of conflicts. Moreover, the emperors tried to keep the peace by sending diplomatic missions to Meroe.⁷¹ From the reign of Augustus onwards, Meroitic officials became gradually more involved in the important temples of the Dodekaschoinos, including Philae. Clearly, Roman emperors tolerated Meroitic interference in the religious sphere, an interest the Nubians probably had had from earliest times. The greatest Meroitic involvement in the religious life of the Dodekaschoinos seems to have occurred in the third century. In this period, several demotic graffiti reveal that Meroitic officials frequently visited the temples.⁷²

Some scholars have even argued that the Meroites took over the Dodekaschoinos from the Romans in the third century, or that the Romans and the Meroites shared the power in the region.⁷³ As an argument, demotic graffiti of Meroites with titles such as 'the prophets of Isis, the *qereñs*, the agents of Isis, the agents of the king of Ethiopia' are adduced.⁷⁴ However, the demotic graffiti of the area show continuity with the previous centuries and not the Meroitic hegemony that

⁶⁶ Török, *Meroe*, 127-9. For building activity after Augustus, see Hölbl, *Altägypten*, 36.

⁶⁷ Mandulis is often seen as a Blemmyan deity, but the evidence is entirely based on fifth-century sources. It is better to say that the originally Nubian god Mandulis was worshipped by Blemmyes of Talmis in the fifth century. Cf. L. Török in Updegraff, 'Blemmyes', 100.

⁶⁸ *IKal.Dem.* 2.2-3 and 3.2-3. Cf. *I.Aju.Dem.* 1.3, in which Mandulis is called 'Son of Horus, great god, lord of Talmis (?)', and *I.Philae.Dem.* 436.1-2 = *FHN* III 306 (hieroglyphic text accompanying a demotic graffito), in which Mandulis is called 'Son of Horus', and 'lord of the Abaton, great god'.

⁶⁹ Blackman, *Temple of Dendûr*, 82-4.

⁷⁰ A. Burkhardt, *Ägypter und Meroiten im Dodekaschoinos* (Berlin, 1985) 14-6; Locher, *Nilkatarakt*, 152-3, 249, 345-7. For donations in the Ptolemaic period, see Dietze, 'Philae', 90-7. For a donation of a vineyard near Esna, dating to the reign of Marcus Aurelius (161-80), see H. Junker, 'Schenkung von Weingärten an die Isis von Philae unter Marc Aurel', *WZKM* 31 (1924) 53-81. For private donations in the late Ptolemaic period, as mentioned on a bilingual stela from the cemetery at el-Hesa where the priests of Philae were buried, see J.D. Ray, 'A Pious Soldier: Stele Aswan 1057', *JEA* 73 (1987) 169-80.

⁷¹ On Nero's mission to Meroe, according to Pliny (*nat.* 6.181 = *FHN* III 204) a military expedition, but according to Seneca a scientific mission to search for the sources of the Nile (*nat.* 6.8.3-4 = *FHN* III 209, cf. Lucan. 10.188-92), see Demicheli, *Rapporti*, 94-103, and Kirwan, *Studies* Ch. V ('Greek and Roman Expeditions to the Southern Sudan', 1982¹).

⁷² The clearest example of such Meroitic officials is the so-called Wayekiye family, which can be followed for six generations. See Monneret de Villard, *Storia*, 16-23; A. Burkhardt, 'Zu den Verwandtschaftsverhältnissen in der meroitischen Beamtenfamilie des Wayekiye', *AfO* 9 (1982) 33-41, and *Ägypter*, 17-8, 77-96.

⁷³ 'Condominium': Adams, *Nubia*, 337; Burkhardt, *Ägypter*, 16, 87-9; Rutherford, 'Island', 243-4. Expanding upon a remark in *I.Philae.Dem.*, p. 113, on the basis of a handful of inscriptions L. Török several times tries to demonstrate a short occupation of the Dodekaschoinos in 240/1-248/9, after which he describes the political situation as a 'status quo', see his *Economic Offices and Officials in Meroitic Nubia* (Budapest, 1979) 93-107, 'To the History of the Dodekaschoenos between ca. 250 B.C. and 298 A.D.', *ZÄS* 107 (1980) 76-86, 'Contribution', 216, *Late Antique Nubia*, 25-6, 'Geschichte Meroes', 150, 282-5, *Meroe*, 145-6; *Kingdom of Kush*, 470-9, and *FHN* III, pp. 998-1000, 1014-6.

⁷⁴ *I.Philae.Dem.* 410.4-5 = *FHN* III 249.

could have been expected if the Kingdom of Meroe had really taken over Roman territory.⁷⁵ Moreover, a recent re-edition of an inscription on a milestone from Kalabsha dating to the 290s proves that the Dodekaschoinos was indeed Roman territory until the peace treaty of 298, and thus confirms Procopius' account.⁷⁶

Meroitic officials were therefore not administrators of the temples in the Dodekaschoinos. As ambassadors of the Meroitic king they took part in festivals and donated money and gifts.⁷⁷ On one such occasion, in 251 or 252, the king sent Pasan, son of Paese, to Philae:

He ordered the King's Son together with the *qêreîs* of Isis to come to Egypt with me so that we could hold the festivals and the banquets which they celebrate in the temple complex of Isis [and the] whole [town].⁷⁸

Pasan was sent a second time in 252 and then stayed with the *qêreîs* of Isis at Philae for four months, after which the 'King's Son' (probably a title) joined them. However, the celebration of the festivals was only part of Pasan's mission, because afterwards he left for Rome with his colleague Harutsha, who was 'the great envoy to Rome'.⁷⁹ Since the Roman Empire was an ally of Meroe from the first century onwards, the Meroitic ambassadors formed a stabilising factor, not the enemy, for an empire in crisis.⁸⁰

By the end of the third century, Rome had probably lost its sway over the Dodekaschoinos, as southern Egypt was suffering from Blemmyan raids at this time.⁸¹ According to the *Historia Augusta*, a collection of imperial lives from 117 until 284 and dating to around 400, the Romans had to liberate the towns of Koptos and Ptolemais (el-Mansha) in the Upper Thebaid from the Blemmyes in 280.⁸² In another version of the event, the historian Zosimus (c. 500) tells us that Ptolemais revolted against Koptos with the help of the Blemmyes.⁸³ In 291, the Blemmyes are reported to be fighting with 'Ethiopians'.⁸⁴ The instable situation on the southern frontier deteriorated into the chaotic 290s with their revolts and raids led to the treaty of 298, in which Diocletian abandoned the Dodekaschoinos to the Meroites. The Kingdom of Meroe also happened to be in crisis, so that the Dodekaschoinos became, as it were, a void in the first half of the fourth century.⁸⁵ What happened after 298?

⁷⁵ Burkhardt, *Ägypten*, 88-9.

⁷⁶ The inscription is *CIL* III 14148³, see S.M. Burstein, 'The Roman Withdrawal from Nubia: A New Interpretation', *SO* 73 (1998) 125-32.

⁷⁷ For example in *I.Philae.Dem.* 410.8-9 = *FHN* III 249, it is explicitly stated: 'when they come annually from Ethiopia and perform the services for Isis'.

⁷⁸ *I.Philae.Dem.* 416.6-7 = *FHN* III 260 (slightly adapted). See also *FHN* III, pp. 1008-10, and F. Hoffmann, *Ägypten. Kultur und Lebenswelt in griechisch-römischer Zeit* (Berlin, 2000) 234-8.

⁷⁹ *I.Philae.Dem.* 416.18.

⁸⁰ Demicheli, *Rapporti*, 58-63; Locher, *Nilkatarakt*, 251.

⁸¹ See, generally, J. Desanges, 'Les relations de l'Empire romain avec l'Afrique nilotique et érythréenne, d'Auguste à Probus', *ANRW* II 10.1 (1988) 3-43 at 31-40.

⁸² *Hist.Aug. Prob.* 17.2-3, 6 Paschoud (= *FHN* III 284). This part of the *Historia Augusta* contains many fictitious elements, see T.D. Barnes, *The Sources of the Historia Augusta* (Brussels, 1978) 13-22; F. Paschoud, *Histoire Auguste V 1. Vies d'Aurélien et de Tacite* (Paris, 1996) xii-xliii; A.R. Birley, 'The Historia Augusta and Pagan Historiography', in Marasco, *Greek & Roman Historiography*, 127-49 at 133.

⁸³ *Zos.* 1.71.1 Paschoud (= *FHN* III 323). On the trustworthiness of this source, see F. Paschoud, *Zosime. Histoire Nouvelle I-II* (Paris, 2000²) lxiv-lxxx.

⁸⁴ *Paneg.* 11.17.4 = *FHN* III 279, in which the 'Ethiopians' are most probably Meroites.

⁸⁵ Adams, *Nubia*, 383-90; Török, 'Geschichte Meroes', 287-90, *Late Antique Nubia*, 33-46, *Kingdom of Kush*, 476-87, and 'The End of Meroe', in D.A. Welsby (ed.), *Recent Research in Kushite History and Archaeology* (London, 1999) 133-56; Kirwan, *Studies*, Ch. VI ('The Decline and Fall of Meroe', 1960'); Edwards, *Nubian Past*, 182-5.

The Void of the Fourth-Century Dodekaschoinos

The sources from the fourth century are so scanty that we can only suggest a very tentative reconstruction of what probably happened. Thus far, scholars have disregarded the fourth-century situation in the Dodekaschoinos and failed to fill in the gap between the almost silent fourth century and the better documented fifth century. Nevertheless, although the documents fall almost silent after 298, archaeological remains from the area abound.

This material culture is designated as the 'X-Group' or 'Ballana Culture'. It is dated to the fourth to sixth centuries and consists of more than one hundred and fifty sites, mostly cemeteries, from the First Cataract region up to the Abri-Delgo Reach, far to the south. The archaeologist George Reisner (1867-1942) coined the name 'X-Group' after the discovery of characteristic tombs south of Aswan during the first of two well-known surveys of Nubia.⁸⁶ Reisner attached a strong ethnic and racial label to the archaeological finds, although such an identification is rarely so straightforward.⁸⁷ Today, the name 'Ballana Culture' is more commonly used, since Ballana, excavated in the 1930s, is one of the major sites.⁸⁸

From 394 onwards, several documentary sources testify to the settlement of Blemmyan tribes in the Dodekaschoinos. The Blemmyan presence after 394 has often been interpreted in terms of 'conquest' and 'occupation', and some scholars even speak of a centralised 'Blemmyan State' occupying the region.⁸⁹ In a more nuanced view, it has been argued that the Blemmyes dominated the Dodekaschoinos from 394 until the middle of the fifth century. Several probably fifth-century sources have been adduced in order to show that at the time of the treaty of 452 or 453, as stated by Priscus, the Noubades took over from the Blemmyes.⁹⁰ The problem with this interpretation is that the sources never speak of a complete, Blemmyan occupation of the Dodekaschoinos, and this is also not to be expected of a group of nomadic or semi-nomadic tribes coming from the desert.⁹¹ This interpretation also leaves obscure what happened in the fourth century. It must have taken some time before the nomadic tribes became settled and the lack of historical sources seems to have led historians to cluster the events in the century about which we are best informed.⁹²

We will therefore interpret the sources not literally in terms of an abrupt 'conquest' and 'occupation', but rather in terms of a longer and more gradual process in which the nomadic Blemmyan tribes became settled among the indigenous,

⁸⁶ G.A. Reisner, 'The Archaeological Survey of Nubia', *Bulletin of the Archaeological Survey of Nubia* 3 (1909) 5-30 at 15-6. On the first (1909-11) and second (1929-32) archaeological surveys of Nubia, see W.B. Emery, *Egypt in Nubia* (London, 1969) 33-56.

⁸⁷ See the discussion by Kirwan, *Studies*, Ch. XV at 205-10.

⁸⁸ First used by L.P. Kirwan, 'The Ballaña Civilization: A Note on the Historical Geography of Lower Nubia', *BSGE* 25 (1953) 103-10. For the excavations see W.B. Emery, L.P. Kirwan, *The Royal Tombs of Ballana and Qustul*, 2 vols (Cairo, 1938). See also W.B. Emery, *Nubian Treasure. An Account of the Discoveries at Ballana and Qustul* (London, 1948), and *Egypt in Nubia*, 57-90.

⁸⁹ Updegraff, *Study*, 179; Christides, 'Ethnic Movements', 136; H. Belçaguy, 'Some Remarks on the Documents concerning the Blemmyes and the X-Group Culture', in N.B. Millet, A.L. Kelley (eds), *Meroitic Studies* (Berlin, 1982) 228-31; Welsby, *Medieval Kingdoms* 16-7.

⁹⁰ Török, 'Contribution', 220-36, *Late Antique Nubia*, 47-63, 'Notes on the Kingdom of the Blemmyes', in *Studia in honorem L. Fóti* (Budapest, 1989) 397-412, *Kingdom of Kush*, 487, *FHN* III, pp. 1156-8, 1165, and 'End of Meroe', 148, 152-3. Cf. Kirwan, *Studies*, Ch. IV at 28-9 ('The International Position of Sudan in Roman and Medieval Times', 1959'), Ch. X at 40 ('The problem of the Nubian X-Group', 1939'), Ch. XV at 196-9, and Ch. XXV at 76-86 ('Studies in the Later History of Nubia', 1937'), who opts for an incidental Blemmyan occupation of the Dodekaschoinos somewhere between 421 and the second half of the fifth century.

⁹¹ Papadopoullos, *Africanobyzantina*, 17-8; E. Fantusati, 'I Blemmi in Bassa Nubia: la fine del paganesimo e i primordi dell'evangelizzazione', *SMSR* II 17 (1993) 209-24.

⁹² Just as in the case of the Greek colonisation of Italy, in which the dates are clustered in the eighth century BC on the basis of Thucydides, see A.J. Nijboer *et al.*, 'A High Chronology for the Early Iron Age in Central Italy', *Palaeohistoria* 41-2 (1999-2000) 163-76.

Noubadian population of the Nile valley. The proposed reconstruction of settlement patterns in the fourth and fifth-century Dodekaschoinos is based on the model of the anthropologist Elman Service (1915-1996), which describes the evolution of societies from bands into the more complex forms of segmentary society, chiefdom and state.⁹³ Although this model has been criticised in the past, it is now generally accepted as a useful classification of societies in which 'analytical terms such as 'chiefdom' and 'state' (are to be regarded) as flexible ranges of organizational variation rather than as tightly defined structural types. By explicitly viewing chiefdoms and states as protean forms of political organization rather than as monolithic, structurally static social types, one can move beyond rigid typologies based on trait lists'.⁹⁴

After entering the fourth century, the Dodekaschoinos went through some radical changes. The Romans withdrew from the land that had been theirs for centuries, and this withdrawal must have struck a severe blow to the trade links between Egypt and Meroe.⁹⁵ What do we know of the decline of other early states? The term 'early states' denotes states in their earliest stage of development that lack the complexity of modern states with their monetary economies, bureaucracy, mass media and complicated infrastructures.⁹⁶ Examples from other ancient societies show that a dominant society influences peripheral societies considerably, and its decline therefore has far-reaching consequences.⁹⁷ The decline of a state and therewith the disintegration of its socio-political structure does not necessarily mean the end of its culture, however.⁹⁸ On the contrary, many examples show cultural continuities with a preceding era.⁹⁹ In the same way, the archaeological remains of the Dodekaschoinos from the fourth century onwards 'point unmistakably to cultural and social continuity', yet 'give the impression of a decentralized agrarian society, poorer but more self-sufficient than the society of Meroitic times'.¹⁰⁰

It seems likely that the Blemmyes were still nomadic to a large degree in this century, for there is no sign of sedentarisation in the documents. In two Greek inscriptions from the middle of the fourth century, King Ezana of Aksum, a powerful successor kingdom of Meroe, commemorates victories over both the Bougaeitoi (Βουγαῖτοι, that is, Blemmyes?) and the Noba (Νῶβα).¹⁰¹ In 373/374, the

⁹³ E.R. Service, *Primitive Social Organization. An Evolutionary Perspective* (New York, 1971²).

⁹⁴ Quote from M.S. Rothman, 'Introduction Part I. Evolutionary Typologies and Cultural Complexity', in G. Stein and M.S. Rothman (eds), *Chiefdoms and Early States in the Near East. The Organizational Dynamics of Complexity* (Madison, 1994) 1-10 at 4.

⁹⁵ Adams, *Nubia*, 383-90.

⁹⁶ H.J.M. Claessen, *Verdwenen koninkrijken en verloren beschavingen. Opkomst en ondergang van de Vroege Staat* (Assen and Maastricht, 1991) 25-32, 203-5; H.J.M. Claessen (ed.), *De ondergang van de vroege staat* (Leiden, 1992) 1-2. The notion of the 'early state' as a heuristic concept was developed by H.J.M. Claessen and P. Skalnik (eds), *The Early State* (The Hague, 1978). Cf. the recent reconstructions of the 'early state' of the Kingdom of Meroe, D.N. Edwards, 'Power and the State in the Middle Nile: Meroe in Context. An Example for the Study of State Development in Sudanic Africa', *Archaeological Review from Cambridge* 13 (1994) 5-19; D.Q. Fuller, 'Chiefdom, State or Checklist?', *Archaeological Review from Cambridge* 13 (1994) 113-22; D.N. Edwards, 'Meroe and the Sudanic Kingdoms', *Journal of African History* 39 (1998) 175-93.

⁹⁷ Claessen, *Verdwenen koninkrijken*, 187.

⁹⁸ Cf. Claessen, *Verdwenen koninkrijken*, 197.

⁹⁹ E.g. C.H.J. de Geus, 'Waarom verdwenen de vroege staten uit de Levant?', in Claessen, *Ondergang* 49-60.

¹⁰⁰ Adams, *Nubia*, 390-413 (quotations on pp. 392 and 404), 420. Cf. Török, *Late Antique Nubia*, 209-19; Welsby, *Medieval Kingdoms*, 20-4; Edwards, *Nubian Past*, 201-2.

¹⁰¹ *SEG* XXXII 1601, XXVI 1813 = *FHN* III 298-9. The name Bugaeti may be a local name for Blemmyes that resembles modern Beja. On the Beja, see A. Paul, *A History of the Beja Tribes of the Sudan* (Cambridge, 1954), and A. and A. Castiglioni, 'I Beja e le miniere del deserto nubiano', *Aegyptus* 79 (1999) 65-82. On the identification of Blemmyes with Beja, which has generally been accepted, see, most recently, G.M. Browne, 'Blemmyes and Beja', *CR* 54 (2004) 226-8. The Noba are of Nubian origin but are considered to have lived to the south of the Noubades, see Adams, *Nubia*, 386-7; Török, *Kingdom of Kush*, 482-3; Edwards, *Nubian Past*, 182-3. For the Kingdom of Axum, see S. Hable-Selassie, *Beziehungen Äthopiens zur Griechisch-Römischen Welt* (Bonn, 1964); H. Brakmann,

Blemmyes are reported to have been raiding as far north as the Sinai desert.¹⁰² In the last quarter of the fourth century, Ammianus Marcellinus situates the 'Ethiopians' south of Egypt, and the Blemmyes somewhere else, apparently outside the Nile valley, although he may have followed earlier sources.¹⁰³ These reports do not give another picture than that for the period before 298, in other words, they do not indicate the settlement of Blemmyan tribes in the Nile valley.

Two fourth-century sources suggest connections of some sort with the Roman Empire. In 336, foreign envoys, among whom were Blemmyes and 'Ethiopians', visited Constantine on the celebration of the thirtieth anniversary of his reign, or *tricennalia*.¹⁰⁴ Further evidence comes from a Latin papyrus in the archive of Abinnaeus, cavalry commander (*praefectus alae*) at Dionysias (in the Faiyum) from 342 until 351.¹⁰⁵ The text is a petition to the Emperors Constantius and Constans, dating to 345, in which Abinnaeus lists his prior occupations. He writes that with the *comes limitis* he escorted refugees (*refugi*) from among the Blemmyes to Constantinople in 337/338. He returned with them to their land, where he stayed for three years.¹⁰⁶ It is not easy to say what status these refugees had, but evidently the tribes at times called in the help of the Romans to resolve conflicts beyond the southern frontier.¹⁰⁷

A remarkable text from November or December 373, a demotic graffito on the temple walls of Philae, records an incident between the Blemmyes and the 'Nubians':

In the year in question the Blemmyes (*Ble.w*) had gone against the Nubians (*Nwbe.w*). They had handed over hostages in regnal year 90 of Diocletian.¹⁰⁸ In the year in question the bark of Isis, having been away for two years, had gone to Pure-island (the Abaton).¹⁰⁹

Although it is not clear whether the peoples exchanged hostages or one people was forced to do so by the other, the Blemmyes apparently attacked the Nubians. This conflict seems to have disturbed the cult of Isis at Philae because the processional boat or 'bark' in which the statue of the goddess was transported was away from the island for two years. The text is the first evidence for the involvement of the Blemmyes in the Isis cult at Philae and a confirmation of the later source of Priscus that the Blemmyes and Noubades carried the statue of Isis for consultation to 'their own country', that is, to the Dodekaschoinos. The graffito may also be a possible indication of Blemmyan settlement in the Nile valley, a process which had, after all, been completed, as appears from the sources from around 394 onwards, and cannot have occurred overnight.

Τὸ παρὰ τοῖς βαρβάροις ἔργον θεῖον. *Die Einwurzelung der Kirche im spätantiken Reich von Aksum* (Bonn, 1994), and 'Axomis (Aksum)', *RAC* Suppl. I (2001) 718-810.

¹⁰² Mayerson, *Monks*, 148-63 ('The Ammonius Narrative: Bedouin and Blemmye Attacks in Sinai', 1980¹).

¹⁰³ Amm. 22.15.2 = *FHN* III 303; Amm. 22.15.24 = *FHN* III 304.

¹⁰⁴ Eus. *v.C.* 4.7 = *FHN* III 293. On the passage see Av. Cameron, S.G. Hall, *Eusebius. Life of Constantine* (Oxford, 1999) 312-3.

¹⁰⁵ *P.Abinn.* 1.5-9 = *FHN* III 295. On Abinnaeus and his archive, see *P.Abinn.*, pp. 1-33.

¹⁰⁶ According to T.D. Barnes, *From Eusebius to Augustine. Selected Papers 1982-1993* (Aldershot, 1994) Ch. XV at 369-72 ('The Career of Abinnaeus', 1985¹), the Blemmyan ambassadors visited Constantinople on the same occasion as the one Eusebius describes: the *tricennalia* of 336. This suggestion was already made by Kirwan, *Studies*, Ch. XV at 196. For a similar embassy of 'Ethiopians' at Panopolis, see *P.Ammon* I 3 iii 18-26 (dated 348), with Van Minnen, 'Letter', 191.

¹⁰⁷ *P.Abinn.*, pp. 9-11.

¹⁰⁸ One of the chronological systems of Late Antiquity was that the years were counted from the first year of the reign of the Emperor Diocletian onwards (284/5), see Bagnall and Worp, *Chronological Systems* 63-87.

¹⁰⁹ *I.Philae.Dem.* 371 = *FHN* III 302 (adapted). E. Bresciani, *Graffiti demotiques du Dodécaschoene. Qertassi, Kalabcha, Dendour, Dakka, Maharraqa* (Cairo, 1969), adopted by J. Desanges, *Recherches sur l'activité des méditerranéens aux confins de l'Afrique* (Paris, 1978) 364 (n. 338), Burkhardt, *Ägypter*, 25, and *FHN* III, p. 1110-1, reads *zḥbi.w*, i.e. Hibis in the Kharga oasis, but this reading is convincingly refuted by D. Devauchelle in G. Wagner, *Les oasis d'Égypte* (Cairo, 1987) 397 (n. 1).

If we accept an increasing sedentarisation of Blemmyan tribes among the indigenous, Nubian people of the Dodekaschoinos in the fourth century, how did this work? An exemplary study on the settlement of nomads defines their sedentarisation as 'a voluntary, uncoerced shift from one available pattern to another in response to changing pressures, constraints, and opportunities both internal and external to the society'.¹¹⁰ In other words, there can be various reasons for nomads to settle and, conversely, they can again pick up their old way of living, if necessary.¹¹¹ It is tempting to suggest that after the economic, social and political changes at the end of the third century, Blemmyan nomads settled among the Noubadian population of the Nile valley and increasingly sedentarised over the course of the fourth century. The symbiosis of nomadic tribes and sedentary people has been studied and described in a model.¹¹² From these studies, it appears that pastoral nomads of the desert are economically dependent upon their sedentary neighbours who produce basic commodities like grain. As a consequence, both groups specialise: the sedentary people in agriculture and the nomads in herding. When the economic system of the sedentary people collapses, nomads cannot continue their specialisation in herding, for their basic commodities have fallen away. They then gradually become agriculturalists and are forced to sedentarise in the existing agricultural land.

This model has been successfully applied to the settlement of nomadic pastoralists in Iron Age Israel from the end of the thirteenth century BC onwards.¹¹³ The Israelite process of settlement was gradual and long lasting, since the majority of the population was fully sedentarised only at the end of the eleventh century BC. When the agricultural land became more crowded, local conflicts between sedentarised nomads and the original, Canaanite population led to the destruction of several cities.¹¹⁴ As has been pointed out, this process was the consequence of a series of trends and events.¹¹⁵

The model of the symbiosis of nomadic tribes and sedentary people may explain the situation of Blemmyan and Noubadian tribes in fourth-century Dodekaschoinos. Thus, the society of the Dodekaschoinos seems to have declined in complexity from what is in Servician terms called a 'state' to a 'segmentary society'.¹¹⁶ We can get a clearer picture of such a society by comparing it to the Nilotic tribes of the Nuer and the Dinka, living in modern Sudan; the former was studied extensively in the 1930s by the English anthropologist Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard (1902-1973).¹¹⁷

¹¹⁰ P.C. Salzman, 'Introduction', in P.C. Salzman (ed.), *When Nomads Settle. Processes of Sedentarization as Adaptation and Response* (New York, 1980) 1-19 at 14.

¹¹¹ Cf. F.M. Donner, 'The Role of Nomads in the Near East in Late Antiquity (400-800 C.E.)', in F.M. Clover, R.S. Humphreys (eds), *Tradition and Innovation in Late Antiquity* (Madison, 1989) 73-85; A.M. Khazanov, *Nomads and the Outside World* (Madison, 1994²). For further bibliography see P. Horden, N. Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea. A Study of Mediterranean History* (Oxford, 2000) 551.

¹¹² The model derives from S.H. Lees and D.G. Bates, 'The Origins of Specialized Pastoralism: A Systemic Model', *American Antiquity* 39 (1974) 187-93.

¹¹³ I. Finkelstein, *The Archaeology of the Israelite Settlement* (Jerusalem, 1988) 346, and *Living on the Fringe. The Archaeology and History of the Negev, Sinai and Neighbouring Regions in the Bronze and Iron Ages* (Sheffield, 1995) 37-42.

¹¹⁴ Finkelstein, *Israelite Settlement*, 341-51.

¹¹⁵ Finkelstein, *Israelite Settlement*, 345-6: 'Egyptian military campaigns, economic exploitation of Canaan by Egyptian overlords, conflicts among the Canaanite city-states, possible long-period droughts, and, finally, the pressure exerted by the Sea Peoples all shook the foundations of the political and economic order of Canaan and weakened the fabric of urban and rural life to an unprecedented degree (...). These same factors ultimately led to the settlement of non-sedentary groups'.

¹¹⁶ C. Renfrew, P. Bahn, *Archaeology. Theories, Methods and Practice* (London, 2000³) 169.

¹¹⁷ E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer. A Description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of a Nilotic People* (Oxford, 1940), followed by *Kinship and Marriage among the Nuer* (Oxford, 1951), and *Nuer Religion* (Oxford, 1956). See also E.E. Evans-Pritchard, 'The Nuer of the Southern Sudan', in M. Fortes, E.E. Evans-Pritchard (eds), *African Political Systems* (Oxford, 1940) 272-96, and, recently, D.H. Johnson, *Nuer Prophets. A History of Prophecy from the Upper Nile in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Oxford, 1994). For the Dinka, see G. Lienhardt, *Divinity and Experience. The Religion of the Dinka* (Oxford, 1961). Cf. C.G. and B.Z. Seligman, *Pagan Tribes of the Nilotic Sudan* (London, 1932)

What are these societies like? The tribes of the Nuer, who call themselves ‘*Nathi*,¹¹⁸ have no common organisation, central administration or government, they are, in the words of Evans-Pritchard, an ‘ordered anarchy’, simply living together and forming, if necessary, loose federations.¹¹⁹ In anthropology, such a society is generally referred to as an ‘acephalous kinship state’, that is, the structure of society is based on lineages of kinship without developed leadership.¹²⁰ The structural relations within tribes, between tribes, and even vis-à-vis other peoples, are maintained by warfare. Raiding happens frequently but on a small scale, for example to acquire cattle from neighbours or as an institutionalised action (*pec*) against the neighbouring people, the Dinka.¹²¹ On the other hand, however deep this opposition Nuer-Dinka may be, Nuer society remains open to Dinka, provided that that they integrate into the Nuer tribe.¹²²

The case of the Nuer suggests that the inhabitants of the Nile valley possibly also had their own, Nubian name. It cannot be a coincidence that they are referred to as ‘Noubades’ only in the Roman sources from the fifth century onwards. Perhaps they called themselves ‘Anouba’ as several Late Antique sources from the area itself do.¹²³ In any case, the use of the name Noubades may be considered as evidence of a growing organisation among the Nubian tribes on the southern Egyptian frontier, which probably took shape in the course of the fourth century.

In view of these developments, the account by Procopius cannot be an accurate description of the treaty of 298, in which the emperor deliberated with the Blemmyes and Noubades, for power remained in the hands of the Kingdom of Meroe throughout the third century. Therefore, Procopius’ description of the treaty of 298 is probably an anachronism.¹²⁴ As Priscus was one of his sources, Procopius may well have based himself on this fifth-century description of the situation on the southern frontier, and transposed it back to 298.¹²⁵ It is to this fifth-century situation that we will now turn.

‘Barbarian’ Threat and Roman Diplomacy: The Dodekaschoinos in the Fifth Century

At the end of the fourth century, the integration of Blemmyan tribes in the Dodekaschoinos had been completed. The first author to report this development is Epiphanius of Salamis, who wrote a work on the gems in the breastplate of the biblical

135-238. On the Modern British School of anthropologists, see A. Kuper, *Anthropology and Anthropologists. The Modern British School* (London and New York, 1996³). For Evans-Pritchard’s *The Nuer*; see pp. 83-91.

¹¹⁸ Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer*; 3.

¹¹⁹ Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer*; 5-6.

¹²⁰ Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer*; 192-248.

¹²¹ Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer*; 152, 161, 190. Cf. R.C. Kelly, *The Nuer Conquest. The Structure and Development of an Expansionist System* (Ann Arbor, 1985).

¹²² Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer*; 221-8.

¹²³ *P.Leid.* Z 6 = *FHN* 314 (Ἀννουβάρδων, in the petition of Appion, 425-50); Cairo, Coptic Museum inv. 76/50A.4, 21 = *FHN* 320 (ἈΝΟΥΒΑ), 76/50B.1 = *FHN* 321 (ΝΟΥΒΑ, from the letters of the Noubadian chieftain Tantani, probably second half of the fifth century); *Life of Aaron*, folia 18a (2x), 18b, 19b, 26b, 40b (sic), 41b, 42a, 42b (4x), 51a (ἈΝΟΥΒΑ, Coptic hagiographical work, probably sixth century); W.E. Crum, *Theological Texts from Coptic Papyri* (Oxford, 1913) no. 29 (ἈΝΟΥΒΑ, papyrus fragment found 30 km south of Dendara, sixth/seventh century); Munier, ‘Stèles coptes’, nos. 7.4-5 = *SB Kopt.* I 504, 26.5-6 = *SB Kopt.* I 523, 28.2 = *SB Kopt.* I 525, 39 [bis] 6 = *SB Kopt.* I 537, 49.4-5 = *SB Kopt.* I 547, 50.5-6 = *SB Kopt.* I 548, 127.6 = *SB Kopt.* I 625 (spelled variously: ἈΝΩΒΑΣ, ἈΝΟΥΒΑΣ, ἈΝΟΒΑΣ, Coptic stelae from Aswan, seventh century or later?). Cf. Kirwan, *Studies* Ch. IX (‘A Survey of Nubian Origins’, 1937¹) 53-4.

¹²⁴ Demicheli, *Rapporti*, 166; Török, *Late Antique Nubia*, 31; Greatrex, *Procopius*, 240-1. Cf. Heather, *Foedera*, 57-60, for a similar anachronism. Procopius here describes a treaty between Constantine and the Goths in 332 from a sixth-century perspective.

¹²⁵ On Procopius’ use of Priscus, see Blockley, *Classicising Historians* 1, 49.

Aaron around 394. He relates that Talmis (Kalabsha) 'is now held by the Blemmyes'.¹²⁶ This information is supported by the poet Claudius Claudianus who, around 400, situates the Blemmyes between Meroe and Syene.¹²⁷ In addition, Palladius wrote around 408 that he 'was kept under guard in the neighbourhood of the Blemmyes or Ethiopians (Βλεμμύων ἢ Αἰθιόπων ἐκ γειτόνων) at a place called Syene' in his years of exile there.¹²⁸

The so-called 'Wandering Poet' Olympiodorus of Thebes provides another testimony to the presence of Blemmyan tribes in fifth-century Dodekaschoinos, and an even wider area. According to Olympiodorus, the 'barbarians' occupied Primis (Qasr Ibrim), Phoinikon (Lageita), Khiris (?), Thapis (that is, Taphis, modern Tafa) and Talmis (Kalabsha).¹²⁹ In 421, he visited 'the barbarians around Talmis, that is, the Blemmyes', allegedly invited because of his reputation, and encountered their 'tribal chiefs and prophets'.¹³⁰ The term 'tribal chief' (Greek φύλαρχος) is used in Roman administration from the fifth century onwards as a technical term for tribal chiefs who entered into a formal treaty or arrangement (*foedus*) with the Roman Empire.¹³¹ In practice, this would mean that the Romans paid money or goods to the allied tribes (*foederati*).¹³² Examples from the Eastern Roman Empire show that phylarchs represented *foederati* at this time, and it is not unthinkable that the Blemmyan tribal chiefs had the same status. Relations with Rome could also explain the visit of the Roman diplomat Olympiodorus to the Blemmyes.¹³³

The presence of Blemmyes in the Dodekaschoinos is characterised by two kinds of activities. Firstly, Blemmyan tribes were apparently attracted to religious centres in the Nile valley, such as Philae. The Blemmyes also worshipped the Nubian god Mandulis in his main temple in Talmis. In addition to the evidence of Blemmyan prophets testified by Olympiodorus, there were several cult societies in Talmis in this period, as appears from a fifth-century inscription from the temple.¹³⁴ Furthermore, inscriptions of, presumably, Blemmyan 'kings' from Kalabsha, three inscriptions from Tamal and one from Isemne, show the importance of the temple of Mandulis for them

¹²⁶ Epiphan. 21 = *FHN* III 305. Versions survive in Latin (cited), Coptic and Georgian. By and large, the Coptic version agrees with the Latin version, whereas the Georgian version is suspect and only mentions that the Blemmyes 'rule many other places as well'.

¹²⁷ Claud. *carmin. min.* 28.19 = *FHN* III 308.

¹²⁸ Pall. v. *Chrys.* 20.41-2 (tr. A.-M. Malingrey, P. Leclercq, *Palladius. Dialogue sur la vie de Jean Chrysostome. Tome I* (= *SC* 341; Paris, 1988) 397, on the date see 19-21).

¹²⁹ Cf. *FHN* III, p. 1128, in which Prima is identified with Qurta.

¹³⁰ Olymp.Hist. F 35.2 Blockley (= *FHN* III 309). On Olympiodorus as a Wandering Poet, see Al. Cameron, *Literature and Society in the Early Byzantine World* (London, 1985) Ch. I at 493-4 ('Wandering Poets: A Literary Movement in Byzantine Egypt', 1965¹). See further E.A. Thompson, 'Olympiodorus of Thebes', *CQ* 38 (1944) 43-52; J.F. Matthews, 'Olympiodorus of Thebes and the History of the West (A.D. 407-425)', *JRS* 60 (1970) 79-97; Baldwin, *Studies*, 217-36 ('Olympiodorus of Thebes', 1980¹); Blockley, *Classicising Historians* 1, 27-47; Rohrbacher, *Historians of Late Antiquity*, 73-81; J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz, 'Pagan Historiography and the Decline of the Empire', in Marasco, *Greek & Roman Historiography*, 177-218 at 201-6.

¹³¹ M. Sartre, *Trois études sur l'Arabie romaine et byzantine* (Brussels, 1982); Isaac, *Limits of Empire*, 238, 243-9; M.C.A. MacDonald, 'Nomads and the Hawran in the Late Hellenistic and Roman Periods', *Syria* 70 (1993) 303-413 at 368-77; M. Sartre, 'Deux phylarques arabes dans l'Arabie byzantine', *Museon* 106 (1993) 145-53; Mayerson, *Monks*, 271-83 ('The Saracens and the *Limes*', 1986¹) 279-80, and 342-6 ('The Use of the Word *Phylarchos* in the Roman-Byzantine East', 1991¹); A.G. Grouchevov, 'Trois "Niveaux" de phylarques. Étude terminologique sur les relations de Rome et de Byzance avec les Arabes avant l'Islam', *Syria* 72 (1995) 105-31.

¹³² See Heather, 'Foedera', 66-71.

¹³³ Kirwan, *Studies*, Ch. XV at 197. About the relation of Rome with desert tribes see Graf, *Arabian Frontier*, Ch. IX ('The Saracens and the Defense of the Arabian Frontier', 1978¹). For a general overview of the relations of Rome with Nubia, see Kirwan, *Studies*, Ch. III ('Rome Beyond the Southern Egyptian Frontier', 1977¹).

¹³⁴ *SB* V 8697 = *FHN* III 313.

in the fifth century.¹³⁵ These texts all figure in a religious context and attest the appearance of a Blemmyan-centred cult in fifth-century Talmis. Other evidence for Blemmyan participation in Ancient Egyptian cults in the Dodekaschoinos may be found in the northern temple of Tafa, which now stands in the entrance hall of the Museum of Antiquities in Leiden. On the inner temple wall is a puzzling inscription about a cult society commemorating the building of a hall (*stoa*), which is dated on palaeographical grounds to the late fourth century.¹³⁶ It is unclear to which cult this society belonged, as the inscription is the only late testimony to Ancient Egyptian cults on these temple walls to have survived the rising waters of the Nile.¹³⁷

Apart from religious activities in the area around Talmis and, possibly, Taphis, economic activities are also attested to.¹³⁸ A few texts, which have already passed the review, indicate that the Blemmyes exploited emerald mines in the area 'around Talmis' in this period and that they must have traded this precious stone in the Red Sea area. The *Historia Augusta* contains the story of the rich merchant Firmus of Seleucia, who, reportedly, had Blemmyes as his friends in the last quarter of the third century.¹³⁹ Another passage in the same work reports the Blemmyan conquest of the towns of Ptolemais (el-Mansha) and Koptos.¹⁴⁰ According to Zosimus, Ptolemais revolted with the Blemmyes against Koptos.¹⁴¹ Koptos was the starting point for the desert route to the Red Sea harbour of Berenike and this nodal position may explain the involvement of the Blemmyan tribes.¹⁴²

In the passage by Epiphanius of Salamis already referred to, he mentions mines that were in use around Talmis:

There are also other mines established in the mountains in the barbarian district of the Blemmyes, near Talmis (Talmis), where the natives now dig to extract emeralds.¹⁴³

Olympiodorus adds to the evidence of emerald mines that the Blemmyes exploited:

He (Olympiodorus) says he learned that in these regions there were also emerald mines from which the kings of Egypt used to obtain emeralds in abundance.¹⁴⁴

The last remark, that the kings of Egypt exploited emerald mines 'in these regions', is an indication that the Blemmyes were exploiting the ancient mining site of Mons Smaragdus, situated in the Eastern Desert not far from the main track between Koptos and Berenike.¹⁴⁵ Therefore, we should not take Epiphanius' location of the mines 'near

¹³⁵ *SB* I 1521-4 = *FHN* III 310-1. Isemne may be the same person as the Yismeniye mentioned in a Meroitic inscription (*REM* 0094 = *FHN* III 300) of the probably Noubadian chieftain Kharamandoye at Kalabsha, but the inscription is still not fully understood. See, most recently, N.B. Millet, 'The Kharamandoye Inscription (MI 94) revisited', *MNI* 30 (2003) 57-72.

¹³⁶ *SB* I 5099 = *FHN* III 312. Add M.J. Raven, 'The Temple of Taffeh: A Study of Details', *OMRO* 76 (1996) 41-62 at 47-8.

¹³⁷ The temple must have contained several painted graffiti (*dipinti*). The Christian paintings on the interior wall of the temple have equally disappeared, M.J. Raven, 'The Temple of Taffeh, II: The Graffiti', *OMRO* 79 (1999) 81-102 at 83.

¹³⁸ Cf. for trading Saracens, Mayerson, *Monks* 315-6.

¹³⁹ *Hist. Aug. trig tyr.* 3.1-3 = *FHN* III 283.

¹⁴⁰ *Hist. Aug. Prob.* 17.2-3, 6 Paschoud (= *FHN* III 284).

¹⁴¹ *Zos.* 1.71.1 Paschoud (= *FHN* III 323).

¹⁴² S.E. Sidebotham, 'From Berenike to Koptos: Recent Results of the Desert Route Survey', in Boussac, *Autour de Coptos* 415-38. On Late Antique Koptos, see J.-L. Fournet, 'Coptos dans l'Antiquité tardive (fin III^e-VII^e siècle après J.-C.)', in P. Ballet *et al.* (eds), *Coptos. L'Égypte antique aux portes du désert* (Lyon and Paris, 2000) 196-215.

¹⁴³ Epiphan. 21 = *FHN* III 305.

¹⁴⁴ *Olymp. Hist.* F 35.2 Blockley (= *FHN* III 309).

¹⁴⁵ D. Meredith, 'The Roman Remains in the Eastern Desert of Egypt (Continued)', *JEA* 39 (1953) 95-106 at 103-5; J.R. Harris, *Lexicographical Studies in Ancient Egyptian Minerals* (Berlin, 1961) 104; A. Lucas, J.R. Harris, *Ancient Egyptian Materials and Industries* (London, 1962⁴) 389-90; S.E. Sidebotham, W.Z. Wendrich (eds), *Berenike '94. Preliminary Report of the Excavations of Berenike (Egyptian Red Sea*

Talmis' literally, for the distance from Mons Smaragdus to Talmis was over 200 km! In addition to Talmis and Taphis, Olympiodorus locates other Blemmyan activity at Laqeita (Phoinikon), an important desert station on the road to Berenike, and Khiris, which may be another desert station.¹⁴⁶ In the sixth century, Cosmas Indicopleustes states that the Blemmyes provided the 'Ethiopians' with emeralds for the trade with India, and this commercial activity continued into Arab times.¹⁴⁷

These sources suggest that from the fifth century onwards, the Blemmyes played an important role in the Red Sea trade centred in the harbour of Berenike. They are reported at different places along the trade route from Koptos to Berenike and exploited emeralds in the mines of Mons Smaragdus. Excavations at Berenike have brought to light archaeological evidence indicating that from the fourth until sixth centuries the harbour was partly inhabited by nomadic tribes who lived of sheep and goats. This nomadic-pastoralist population may have consisted of Blemmyan tribes who had settled in Berenike for economic reasons.¹⁴⁸ The same may have happened at Talmis, which is mentioned twice in connection with the emerald mines. Perhaps the Blemmyes revived the old trading link with the south and concentrated on Talmis as their central place, having recourse to the desert road from Koptos to Berenike or, even more likely, to direct tracks into their homeland, the Eastern Desert.¹⁴⁹

In addition to these activities, there are several sources about the continuity of Blemmyan raids into Egypt after around 394. In the Appion petition, the bishop asks for the troops stationed there to protect his see against raids by the Blemmyes and Noubades:

Since I find myself with my churches in the midst of those merciless barbarians, between the Blemmyes and Annoubades (Noubades), we suffer many attacks from them, coming upon us as if from nowhere, with no soldier to protect our places.¹⁵⁰

The account by Priscus of the treaty that Maximinus concluded with these peoples is another testimony to the problems that the Romans had with fifth-century Blemmyan and Noubadian raids.¹⁵¹ Finally, in his *Romana* (c. 551) the historian Jordanes refers to another raid. He mentions among events in the reign of Marcian (450-457) the expulsion of the Noubades and Blemmyes (*Novades Blemmesque*), 'who made incursions from Ethiopia'.¹⁵² The Roman military commander behind this campaign was Florus, *procurator* of the city of Alexandria.¹⁵³ It may be that Jordanes used Priscus as his source, but this is by no means certain.¹⁵⁴

Coast) and the Survey of the Eastern Desert (Leiden, 1995) 8; I. Shaw, J. Banbury, R. Jameson, 'Emerald Mining in Roman and Byzantine Egypt', *JRA* 12 (1999) 203-15; S.E. Sidebotham, W.Z. Wendrich (eds), *Berenike '98. Preliminary Report of the Excavations of Berenike (Egyptian Red Sea Coast) and the Survey of the Eastern Desert* (Leiden, 2000) 356-7; H. Cuvigny, 'Le fonctionnement du réseau', in H. Cuvigny (ed.), *La route de Myos Hormos. Praesidia du désert de Bérénice*, 2 vols (Cairo, 2003) 2.295-359 at 347-8.

¹⁴⁶ Kirwan, *Studies* Ch. XVIII at 123 ('Prelude to Nubian Christianity', 1966').

¹⁴⁷ Cosm. Ind. 11.21 (*SC* 197, p. 353). For the Arabic sources, see Kirwan, *Studies* Ch. XXV at 78.

¹⁴⁸ Sidebotham and Wendrich, *Berenike '94*, 8-10, *Berenike '95. Preliminary Report of the Excavations of Berenike (Egyptian Red Sea Coast) and the Survey of the Eastern Desert* (Leiden, 1996) 51, 353. Cf. *Berenike '96. Preliminary Report of the Excavations of Berenike (Egyptian Red Sea Coast) and the Survey of the Eastern Desert* (1998) 181, *Berenike '97. Preliminary Report of the Excavations of Berenike (Egyptian Red Sea Coast) and the Survey of the Eastern Desert* (Leiden, 1999) 452-3, and *Berenike '98* 419.

¹⁴⁹ 'Although no actual evidence survives of an ancient 'road' between the Dodekaschoinos and Berenike there is no reason to discount the possibility that the Bedouin could have travelled more directly between the Dodekaschoinos and Berenike than the route between Koptos and Berenike could have provided' (personal communication from S.E. Sidebotham).

¹⁵⁰ *P.Leid. Z* 5-7 = *FHN* III 314.

¹⁵¹ Prisc. F 27 Blockley (= *FHN* III 318).

¹⁵² Iord. *Rom.* 333 = *FHN* III 329.

¹⁵³ *PLRE* II s.v. 'Florus' 2. See also Carrié, 'Séparation ou cumul?', 111.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. *FHN* III, pp. 1156-7.

Significantly, the threat of raids is also reflected in other literary sources mentioning the Blemmyes. From their earliest appearance in Theocritus in the third century BC, the Blemmyes were portrayed as mythical 'barbarians'.¹⁵⁵ This myth-making sometimes even pervaded historiography, as we have seen in the accounts by Priscus and Procopius. What was new in fifth-century literature was the motif of Blemmyan tribes raiding into Egypt. Closest to the historical accounts comes an elaborate epic in the style of the *Iliad*, the *Blemymachia*, which was probably written by one of the 'Wandering Poets'.¹⁵⁶ On the papyrus fragments that have been found in a tomb and in the monastery of Phoebammon at Thebes we can read how a Roman general, Germanus,¹⁵⁷ defeated the Blemmyes and destroyed their 'huts'.¹⁵⁸

Besides appearing in this classicising poem, Blemmyan raids are a motif in fifth and sixth-century Christian literature. In two lives of Pachomius (c. 292-346), a monk is taken prisoner and forced to make libations to idols. In the first life, which was written after 346, this is done by 'barbarians', but in the second life, which is dated to the fifth century, by Blemmyes returning from a raid.¹⁵⁹ The sixth-century church historian Evagrius says that Nestorius was captured and released by raiding Blemmyes in the Kharga oasis during his exile in 435-436. Although it is within the realm of possibility that Nestorius was indeed captured by some desert tribe, it is doubtful whether they were Blemmyes, since other versions of the story are clearly of a legendary character.¹⁶⁰ One miraculous story is that related in the Coptic *Life of Shenoute* by Besa (written after 465).¹⁶¹ According to this story, the Blemmyes (ΒΛΛΗΜΜΩΟΥΙ) raided the countryside and entered deep into Egypt.¹⁶² On their return, they took captives and cattle with them. The archimandrite went after the Blemmyes and confronted them in Ptolemais (el-Mansha). When the tribesmen wanted to spear him, they froze. Impressed by this miraculous act, their chief set the captives free. Finally, a passage from the Coptic *Life of Moses*, in which the devil

¹⁵⁵ Theoc. 7.114 = *FHN* II 116. And the myth-making continues: in his novel *Baudolino* (Milan, 2000), the well-known Italian novelist and medievalist Umberto Eco describes a Blemmy as follows: 'La creatura, con spalle amplissime e dunque molto tarchiata, ma di vita sottile, aveva due gambe corte e pelose e non aveva testa, né peraltro collo. Sul petto, dove gli uomini hanno i capezzoli, si aprivano due occhi a mandorla, vivacissimi e, sotto un leggero rigonfiamento con due narici, una sorta di foro circolare, ma molto duttile, così che quando si mise a parlare gli faceva assumere varie forme, a seconda dei suoni che emetteva' (p. 373). This description draws on Mela 1.48 and Plin. *nat.* 5.46, and was adopted by Late Antique writers such as Sol. 31.5, Mart. Cap. 6.674, and Isid. 11.3.17, and even by early Buddhist literature, see J.D.M. Derrett, 'A Blemmya in India', *Numen* 49 (2002) 460-74.

¹⁵⁶ *P.Berol.* 5003 = *FHN* III 326, based on E. Livrea, *Anonymi fortasse Olympiodori Thebani Blemymachia. P.Berol. 5003* (Meisenheim, 1978). New fragments of the work have been published by L.S.B. MacCoull, 'Fragments from the Monastery of Phoebammon', in *Pap. Congr.* XVI (Chicago, 1981) 491-8, and M. Steinrück, 'Neues zur Blemymachie', *ZPE* 126 (1999) 99-114. On the author of the poem, see E. Livrea, *Studia Hellenistica*, 2 vols (Florence, 1991) 2.357-79 ('Chi è l'autore della Blemymachia?', 1976').

¹⁵⁷ This Germanus has been identified with a Roman general whom the Emperor Theodosius II sent on campaign against the Vandals in 441. Cf. *PLRE* II s.v. 'Germanus' 3; Kirwan, *Studies* Ch. XXV at 80-1. In *Hist. Mon.* 1.2 Festugière = *FHN* III 307, written c. 400, the monk John of Lykopolis predicts the victory of a Roman general over the 'Ethiopians' attacking Syene.

¹⁵⁸ F 13.3 Steinrück (Β]λεμύων κλισίας). Note that in F 4 a 'statue of Isis' is mentioned (β]ρέτας ἰσιδιος) and in F 20.3 possibly Osiris (ισιριδι).

¹⁵⁹ Pach., *Vita Prima Graeca* 85, *Paralipomena* 9 = *FHN* III 296. For the dating see P. Rousseau, *Pachomius. The Making of a Community in Fourth-Century Egypt* (Berkeley, 1999²) 39, 53-4.

¹⁶⁰ Evagr. *h.e.* 1.13. Cf. *Barhadbeshabba* 30 (*PO* 5, pp. 584-5), and *Letter to Cosmas* 13 (*PO* 13, pp. 273-4), in which versions the raiders are called 'Ethiopians'.

¹⁶¹ *Life of Shenoute* 89-90 Leipoldt = *FHN* III 301.

¹⁶² For several other stories of raiding 'Ethiopians' in the Shenoutian corpus, see J. Leipoldt, 'Berichte Schenutes über Einfälle der Nubier in Ägypten', *ZÄS* 40 (1902-3) 126-40, and 'Ein Kloster lindert Kriegsnot. Schenutes Bericht über die Tätigkeit des Weißen Klosters bei Sohag während eines Einfalls der Kuschiten', in U. Meckert, G. Ott, B. Satlow (eds), *"Und fragten nach Jesus". Beiträge aus Theologie, Kirche und Geschichte* (= Fs. Barnikol; Berlin, 1964) 52-6. Cf. W.E. Crum, 'A Nubian Prince in an Egyptian Monastery', in *Studies Presented to F.L. Griffith* (London, 1932) 137-48.

carried spears 'like the people of the Blemmyes' (ἄθε ἠπιρεθνοσ νενβλζμογ), can also be seen in this light.¹⁶³ Though literary in character, these sources probably also reflected the sentiments of this period: when raids loomed large.¹⁶⁴

Against this background of Latin, Greek and Coptic sources, we also have some fifth-century documents and inscriptions from the Blemmyes and Noubades themselves. They are few in number and written in obscure Greek or Coptic so that their interpretation, or even translation, is often difficult.¹⁶⁵ Nevertheless, they give us an 'inside' view of the society of these peoples, and a counterbalance to the 'outside' sources discussed thus far. The latter sources have not only attested a Blemmyan presence in the Dodekaschoinos and suggested that these Blemmyes were allies of Rome, but also created a picture of frequent raids carried out by 'the Blemmyes and Noubades', which the Romans had to keep in check. The 'inside' sources modify this image somewhat. Although they confirm the presence of Blemmyan tribes and the ties with Rome, they do not speak of raids in which Blemmyes and Noubades co-operated, but rather that conflicts existed between them.

The first of these sources is the well-known inscription of the Noubadian chieftain Silko on the western wall of the forecourt of the temple of Mandulis at Kalabsha.¹⁶⁶ Initially, the inscription was dated to the second half of the sixth century (that is, after the official conversion of Nubia to Christianity) due to the expression 'God gave me the victory'.¹⁶⁷ This dating has been particularly persistent, despite arguments for dating the inscription to no later than the fifth century, especially on palaeographical grounds.¹⁶⁸ However, the discovery of a papyrus at Qasr Ibrim in the 1970s is a powerful argument in favour of the fifth-century dating for it mentions a Silko and dates to that century.¹⁶⁹ In the first five lines of the Kalabsha inscription, Silko sets out his case:

I, Silko, kinglet (βασιλίσκος) of the Noubades and all the Ethiopians, came to Talmis and Taphis (Tafa). On two occasions I fought with the Blemmyes and God gave me the victory. On the third occasion I was again victorious and took control of their cities. I occupied (them) with my troops.¹⁷⁰

After his first victory, Silko concluded a treaty with the Blemmyan tribes:

...and they sued me for terms. I made peace with them, and they swore to me by their images (εἰδώλα), and I trusted on their oath that they were honest people.¹⁷¹

However, the Blemmyes broke the oath and renewed hostilities, for according to Silko two more campaigns were necessary. In the remainder of the inscription he tells us of

¹⁶³ *Life of Moses*, p. 50 Till (tr. Till, *Koptische Heiligen- und Märtyrerlegenden* 2, 69). Cf. M. Ullmann, 'Zum Ende des altägyptischen Kultus am Beispiel der Tempel von Abydos', *Biblische Notizen* 102 (2000) 133-40 at 136-7. On the Coptic names of the Blemmyes, see Crum, *Dict.* s.v.

¹⁶⁴ For stories of raiding Saracens, see Mayerson, *Monks* 271-83, and 313-21.

¹⁶⁵ T. Hägg, 'Some Remarks on the Use of Greek in Nubia', in J.M. Plumley (ed.), *Nubian Studies* (Cambridge, 1978) 103-7, 'Nubicograeca I-III. Bemerkungen zu griechischen Texten aus Nubien', *ZPE* 54 (1984) 101-12, and 'Blemmyan Greek and the Letter of Phonen', in M. Krause (ed.), *Nubische Studien* (Mainz, 1986) 281-6.

¹⁶⁶ See T. Hägg, 'Silko's Language: A Retrospect', in Bącz, *Fs. Gaál, Luft, Török*, 289-300, for an overview of the extensive list of publications on the inscription since its first edition by Niebuhr in 1820.

¹⁶⁷ A.-J. Letronne, *Oeuvres choisies*, 6 vols (1881-5) 1.3-54 ('L'inscription grecque déposée dans le temple de Talmis en Nubie par le roi nubien Silko', 1825¹); J. Kraus, *Die Anfänge des Christentums in Nubien* (Diss. Münster; Mödling bei Wien, 1930) 100-9; Monneret de Villard, *Storia*, 56-8; Papadopoulos, *Africanobyzantina*, 14-7; Demicheli, *Rapporti*, 189-91; G. Vantini, *Christianity in the Sudan* (Bologna, 1981) 30-1; *IProse* II, p. 173.

¹⁶⁸ Krall, *Beiträge*, 12, 25; Wilcken, 'Heidnisches und Christliches', 419, 436.

¹⁶⁹ *FHN* III, p. 1148.

¹⁷⁰ *SBV* 8536.1-6 = *FHN* III 317 (slightly adapted).

¹⁷¹ *SBV* 8536.7-9.

his other campaigns against the Blemmyes, and uses strong language to discourage his foes from contending again with him.

Silko calls himself 'kinglet' (βασιλίσκος), and expresses the competitiveness of his position as follows:

When I had become kinglet (βασιλίσκος), I did not by any means proceed behind the other kings (βασιλεῖς), but well ahead of them.¹⁷²

Apparently, Silko was the most prominent 'king' among the other Noubadian 'kings', and his title 'kinglet' does not diminish this position. On the contrary, it has been suggested that this title be regarded as only second to the king *par excellence*, the Roman emperor. If this interpretation is true, the title may be taken as an indication of a federate relationship with the Romans.¹⁷³

Be this as it may, it seems that at some time in the fifth century a federation of Noubadian tribes attacked Blemmyan tribes around Talmis and Taphis, and even further:

I fought with the Blemmyes from Primis (Qasr Ibrim) to Talmis (?);¹⁷⁴ on one occasion I ravaged the country of the others too, above the Noubades, because they contended with me.¹⁷⁵

Apparently, the conflicts with Blemmyan tribes extended from Primis (Qasr Ibrim) to Talmis. They seem to have taken place on such a large scale that Noubadian tribes had to unite under one chief to restore the peace.

On the wall with the triumphal inscription of Silko two pictures have been incised that may belong to the inscription. The first shows a warrior spearing his enemy. He is dressed in a Roman military outfit and is being crowned by the goddess Victory with the crown of the god of Talmis, Mandulis.¹⁷⁶ In the other picture is a warrior dressed with a royal double crown on his head, the hieroglyphic ankh sign in one hand and a sceptre in the other.¹⁷⁷ Taken together, text and images may represent Silko as a powerful and victorious Noubadian 'king'. In one picture he is dressed according to Roman iconography, which confirms the suggestion that Silko was engaged in a federate relationship with Rome.¹⁷⁸ The crown suggests divine leadership, sanctioned by Mandulis, who bestowed on Silko two victories over the Blemmyes and one over other tribes. Therefore, the God mentioned in line 3 is probably Mandulis, as would be expected in an inscription in his temple.¹⁷⁹

The other, Ancient Egyptian, attributes are reminiscent of the traditionalism in the 'royal' tombs of Ballana and Qustul. As at those cemeteries, characteristics of Meroitic iconography also seem to be present. Indeed, it is tempting to hypothesise that 'kings' such as Silko were buried in these tombs. The way Silko presents himself, as a powerful 'king of the Noubades and all Ethiopians',¹⁸⁰ is the only testimony from

¹⁷² *SBV* 8536.10-12.

¹⁷³ T. Hägg, 'Titles and Honorific Epithets in Nubian Greek Texts', *SO* 65 (1990) 147-77 at 148-56; *FHN* III, p. 1153.

¹⁷⁴ I follow the reading Τέλλ(μ)εως of *SBV* 8536, rather than that of *FHN* III, pp. 1149, 1151, where it is suggested that the place name is not Talmis, because that town is spelled correctly in line 2 of the same text, but Shellal (on the riverbank opposite Philae).

¹⁷⁵ *SBV* 8536.16-8. By 'above', upstream is probably meant as in lines 9-10, so that the other people may be the Noba, who lived further to the south. Cf. *FHN* III, pp. 1150-1 (n. 781 and 784).

¹⁷⁶ See L. Castiglione, 'Diocletianus und die Blemmyes', *ZÄS* 96 (1969) 90-103. On the crown of Mandulis see L.V. Zabkar, *Apedemak, Lion God of Meroe. A Study in Egyptian-Meroitic Syncretism* (Warminster, 1975) 102-5.

¹⁷⁷ *FHN* III, pp. 1151-2.

¹⁷⁸ Kirwan, *Studies* Ch. XV at 199, and Ch. XVIII at 123-4.

¹⁷⁹ *FHN* III, p. 1150 (n. 77-8).

¹⁸⁰ Cf. the inscriptions of King Ezana of Axum, *SEG* XXXII 1601 and XXVI 1813 = *FHN* 298-9.

the fourth to sixth centuries that can compare with the wealth of the tombs of Ballana and Qustul.¹⁸¹ It may well be significant that the sixth-century Kingdom of Noubadia had as its capital Faras, situated not far from Ballana and Qustul.

Silko is also mentioned in another document, a letter on papyrus from the Blemmyan chieftain Phonen to the Noubadian chieftain Abourni, Silko's probable successor.¹⁸² A certain Phonoin, who is attested in a fifth-century inscription about a cult association at Kalabsha with the function of 'tribal chief' (φύλαρχος), is probably the same person.¹⁸³ The papyrus was found at Qasr Ibrim in 1976, and on account of its archaeological context dated 'sometime around the second half of the fifth century'.¹⁸⁴ In his letter, the chieftain (βασιλεύς) of the Blemmyes demands that the Noubades withdraw from his people's lands: 'For indeed, you are not fighting for your lands; you are fighting for our lands'.¹⁸⁵ Apparently, the Blemmyes considered Talmis and its surroundings as 'our lands'.

After a formal address, Phonen continues by stating that he is of noble family: '(It is) a great (thing) for a man who is great [in his clan, τῷ γένει (?)]'.¹⁸⁶ He then vaguely alludes to an incident in which his brother Yeny was killed, but nevertheless expresses his wish to come to terms with the following proposal of the Noubades:

I want us to have concord between one another (and that) we have my cattle with your cattle, pasturing one with another and the sheep.¹⁸⁷

Phonen also relates some events that had happened previously:

For indeed, first Silko won and took Talmis. Today you won and took Talmis. First Silko seized our lands and kept us off them. Today you won and took Talmis. First Silko said that 'Give me sheep and cattle and camels enough' so that our lands be given (back). And I gave them all, and you were insolent, and he kept (them) from us. And I wrote to Yeny for the peace and sent my ambassadors under a flag of truce; and you were insolent and killed (a) tribal chief (φύλαρχος) and (a) sub-despot (ὑποτύραννος), and took the priests (προφῆται) in the place Phontauou.¹⁸⁸

Several comments can be made on this passage. Firstly, reference is made to the chieftain Silko who can hardly be other than the one in the inscription from Kalabsha, as he is also said to have taken Talmis there. The 'and you were insolent' phrases probably refer to Silko in both cases. 'You' may then be referring to Abourni, who has taken over Silko's responsibilities after succeeding him.¹⁸⁹

Secondly, Phonen complains about the killing of two high tribesmen and the taking of priests as hostages. One of these tribesmen may have been Yeny, Phonen's

¹⁸¹ Already Kirwan, 'Ballaña Civilization', *Studies* Ch. IV at 29, Ch. XI ('Comments on the Origins and History of the Nobatae of Procopius', 1958¹), and Ch. XV at 202, argues that the tombs of Ballana and Qustul are Noubadian.

¹⁸² *SB* XIV 11957.23 = *FHN* III 319. For the first edition see T.C. Skeat, 'A Letter from the King of the Blemmyes to the King of the Noubades', *JEA* 63 (1977) 159-70, revised by J. Rea, 'The Letter of Phonen to Aburni', *ZPE* 34 (1979) 147-62.

¹⁸³ *SB* V 8697 = *FHN* III 313. Cf. *L.Philae* II 199, which is also an inscription about a cult association and starts similarly. This text is dated to 456/7. The different spellings of the name of the Noubadian chieftain (Φωνην/Φονοιν) can be explained on the basis of the interchange of η and οι, see F.T. Gignac, *A Grammar of the Greek Papyri of the Roman and Byzantine Periods*, 2 vols (Milan, 1976-81) 1.265-7.

¹⁸⁴ J.M. Plumley, W.Y. Adams, E. Crowfoot, 'Qasr Ibrim, 1976', *JEA* 63 (1977) 29-47 at 34, 44-5. Cf. Rea, 'Letter', 147; J.M. Plumley, 'Preliminary Remarks on Four 5th Century Mss. from Qasr Ibrim', in Millet and Kelley, *Meroitic Studies*, 218-21 at 218-9.

¹⁸⁵ *SB* XIV 11957.23.

¹⁸⁶ *SB* XIV 11957.4-5.

¹⁸⁷ *SB* XIV 11957.10-1.

¹⁸⁸ *SB* XIV 11957.11-5. Phontauou has not been identified.

¹⁸⁹ Cf. *FHN* III, p. 1162 (n. 796).

brother, whose death is referred to earlier in the letter.¹⁹⁰ This passage probably gives the Blemmyan side of the capture of Talmis as reported in the Kalabsha inscription. According to Silko, the Blemmyes broke a truce. In Phonen's opinion, the Noubades acted even worse, for they not only broke a truce, they even killed men and took hostages:

Well, it is possible to become warlike, but it is not permissible that you should insult our men and kill the men (who were) under a flag of truce.¹⁹¹

Thirdly, the passage tells us about the highest ranks in a tribe: the tribal chief (φύλαρχος) and sub-despot (ὑποτύραννος).¹⁹² As in the account by Olympiodorus, these titles may have been used from a Roman perspective.¹⁹³ The inscription from Kalabsha in which Phoin (Phonen) bears the title of tribal chief also suggests relations between the Blemmyes and Rome. Though a problematic text, it seems to be a donation of a *comes*, probably the *comes limitis*, to a Blemmyan cult association at Talmis.¹⁹⁴

Finally, the sheep, cattle and camels that the Blemmyes had to give to the Noubades indicate that these animals belonged to their basic stock.¹⁹⁵ From the third century onwards, camels became the most common means of transport for the Blemmyes in the desert areas.¹⁹⁶ As regards the sheep and cattle, nomads normally settle first on the fringe of the agricultural land of the indigenous population and maintain themselves with animal husbandry and agriculture.¹⁹⁷ We should therefore not be surprised to find these animals mentioned in the letter as gifts to the Noubades.

After this passage, Phonen asks Abourni to forget 'the fate (of) Yeny and Silko' and to make peace.¹⁹⁸ Apparently, Silko was also killed or died not long after the diplomatic mission of Yeny. This may explain why Silko is mentioned in connection with the present chieftain, Abourni, who may have been his direct successor. Phonen's demands are clear:

Withdraw from our land and send the gods (τοὺς θεούς) to the temple so that I and you (can) make (a) good time with you.¹⁹⁹

The temple must be that of Mandulis, and the Noubades had apparently taken away its statues.²⁰⁰ Phonen threatens his fellow chieftain that if he does not return both land and gods, he will take action.

A fifth-century Coptic letter from Qasr Ibrim, which was found wrapped up together with the Phonen letter, is additional proof of diplomatic relations between the Noubades and the Roman Empire. In the letter from the *tribunus* Viventius to Tantani, tribal chief (φύλαρχος) of the Anouba (Noubades), the liaison officer concludes a peace treaty with them.²⁰¹ It seems that a *comes domesticon*, who was in

¹⁹⁰ *SB* XIV 11957.7.

¹⁹¹ *SB* XIV 11957.16.

¹⁹² The text is subscribed by the tribal chief (φύλαρχος) Breytek, *SB* XIV 11957.29. It appears from two, as yet unpublished, ostraka from the Eastern Desert, dating to the end of the second or beginning of the third century, that the title ὑποτύραννος was already in use before the fifth century, *O.Did.* inv. 1.5-6 and inv. 716.1. I am indebted to H. Cuvigny for showing me the transcript of the ostraka before publication.

¹⁹³ Hägg, 'Titles', 156-8. Cf. Papadopoulos, *Africanobyzantina*, 20-1.

¹⁹⁴ *SB* V 8697 = *FHN* III 313.

¹⁹⁵ Sheep and cattle are also mentioned in *SB* XIV 11957.10-1, 20, camels in *SB* XIV 11957.20, 32.

¹⁹⁶ Updegraff, 'Blemmyes', 89-90.

¹⁹⁷ Finkelstein, *Living on the Fringe*, 38.

¹⁹⁸ *SB* XIV 11957.18-9.

¹⁹⁹ *SB* XIV 11957.19-20.

²⁰⁰ Cf. *SB* XIV 11957.29.

²⁰¹ Cairo, Coptic Museum inv. 76/50A = *FHN* III 320 (*ed.princ.*).

charge of all soldiers in Egypt, had come to the First Cataract area and had delegated the task of signing the peace with the Noubadian chief to the *tribunus* who was a commander of a military unit at the frontier, but 'whom they have placed over all soldiers on the frontier of Egypt'.²⁰²

This text confirms the literary sources in which the Romans signed peace treaties with the southern peoples, albeit in this case not with 'the Noubades and Blemmyes' but only with the Noubades. It is also the first text which connects a tribal chief to a formal treaty with Rome. Since examples are known from the East in which these tribal chiefs, 'phylarchs', indicate a federate status of their tribes with the Roman Empire, both the Blemmyes and Noubades may well have been Roman federates.

Other, less formal, encounters on the southern frontier appear from a letter from the monk Apa Mouses of Philae to Tantani. Mouses wanted to send purple dye to Tantani and receive pepper from him in return. The monk also mentions captives in possession of Tantani.²⁰³ The last of these three so-called 'Tantani letters' is from a certain Yahatek to Tantani. We hear of some contact with Talmis, but the identity of Yahatek remains obscure.²⁰⁴ Thus there is a fair amount of evidence that both the Blemmyes around Talmis and the Noubades around Primis were federates (*foederati*) of the Roman Empire in the fifth century. Archaeology, too, suggests that there may have been a diplomatic relationship between Noubadian chieftains and the Roman Empire in this period, for in the tombs at Ballana several fifth-century, imported objects have been found that can be interpreted as diplomatic gifts. The best example is a folding chair, of which more have been found in tombs belonging to allied kings in other parts of the empire.²⁰⁵ Closer analysis of the grave furniture of the tombs at Ballana and Qustul shows that Noubadian chiefs were buried there from the late fourth century onwards until the late fifth century, first at Qustul and later at Ballana.²⁰⁶ The fifth-century diplomatic gifts belong to the time in which chiefs were buried at Ballana, the time of chiefs such as Silko.

Again, we may compare the society of the Dodekaschoinos after 394 with that of a modern Sudanese people, the Nuba.²⁰⁷ Characteristic of the Nuba are loose political boundaries and frequent raids over both small and long distances.²⁰⁸ For these reasons, the tribes are far from united.²⁰⁹ Many tribes do have chiefs (*Mek*) and 'sub-chiefs' (*Sheikh*), but political control is diffuse and rudimentary.²¹⁰ Migrations in these areas are common because of raids by other people, or the need for land or food.²¹¹

These characteristics have much in common with the fifth-century society in the Dodekaschoinos, in other words, it seems to have developed into a more coherent society, that of chiefdoms.²¹² Not only the tribal structure with its chiefs and sub-chiefs reminds us of the tribal chief and sub-despot of the Blemmyes and Noubades, but also the larger raids apparently involving several tribes and a large territory, and the way

²⁰² Cairo, Coptic Museum inv. 76/50A.2. On the title *tribunus* see Mitthof, *Annona militaris* 1, 151-2. Cf. the discussion of the titles in *FHN* III, pp. 1168-71.

²⁰³ Cairo, Coptic Museum inv. 76/50B [bis] = *FHN* III 322 (*ed. princ.*).

²⁰⁴ Cairo, Coptic Museum inv. 76/50B = *FHN* III 321 (*ed. princ.*). Cf. *FHN* III, p. 1172, in which Yahatek is identified with the Blemmyan Yeni of *SB* XIV 11957.5, 7, 8, 14, 17-8, 27-8 = *FHN* III 319, but the names differ too much.

²⁰⁵ See *FHN* III, p. 1153, for an overview.

²⁰⁶ L. Török, 'The Chronology of the Qustul and Ballana Cemeteries', in Krause, *Nubische Studien*, 191-7, and *Late Antique Nubia*, 75-178.

²⁰⁷ S.F. Nadel, *The Nuba. An Anthropological Study of the Hill Tribes in Kordofan* (London, 1947). Cf. Seligman and Seligman, *Pagan Tribes*, 366-412.

²⁰⁸ Nadel, *Nuba*, 301-2.

²⁰⁹ Nadel, *Nuba*, 5.

²¹⁰ Nadel, *Nuba*, 447-58.

²¹¹ Nadel, *Nuba*, 5. J.-C. Muller, 'Ideology and Dynamics in Dii Chiefdoms (Cameroon)', in H.J.M. Claessen, J.G. Oosten (eds), *Ideology and the Formation of Early States* (Leiden, 1996) 99-115 at 101.

²¹² On chiefdom societies, see T. Earle (ed.), *Chiefdoms: Power, Economy, and Ideology* (Cambridge, 1991); Stein and Rothman, *Chiefdoms*; S.K. McIntosh (ed.), *Beyond Chiefdoms. Pathways to Complexity in Africa* (Cambridge, 1999); Renfrew and Bahn, *Archaeology*, 176.

conflicts over land are described. Moreover, in modern tribal communities, breaking intertribal treaties is considered as bad as breaking the unwritten rules within a tribe, the so-called 'Tribal Code'. Such deeds, as well as murder and taking hostages, will certainly provoke counteraction.²¹³ These are exactly the reasons for the conflicts between Blemmyan and Noubadian tribes in the documents of Silko and Phonen.

A chiefdom society would also explain why Silko represents himself as a powerful and victorious Roman warrior, for chieftains tend to identify themselves with outside powers to reinforce their own position.²¹⁴ Such chieftains are chosen because of their status, which is based on wealth and sometimes on kinship or age, whereas their main task is to keep the peace among their tribe or tribes.²¹⁵ Although Silko calls himself a 'kinglet', it is therefore better to speak of his territory as a Noubadian chiefdom rather than a Noubadian kingdom, since the fifth-century society of the Dodekaschoinos lacks the characteristics of complexity usually associated with kingdoms: a capital, a fiscal system, clear boundaries.²¹⁶ But with his large-scale actions against Blemmyan and other tribes, and his assumed 'royal' burial at Ballana, Silko could well have embodied the growing self-consciousness of the Noubades.²¹⁷ Silko and his successors laid the foundations for the Kingdom of Noubadia, and the growing Noubadian power forced the Blemmyes into the margins again. In the sixth century, nothing is heard any more of Blemmyan settlement in the Dodekaschoinos.

Conclusion: From Kingship to Kinship

We can now tentatively reconstruct the settlement patterns of the Dodekaschoinos in the fourth and fifth centuries. With the regression of the Roman Empire in 298 and the decline of Meroe in the first half of the fourth century, the original, Nubian population came to live in a segmentary society. Due to economic, political and social trends, society was open for nomadic pastoralists, the Blemmyan tribes from the Eastern Desert, to settle on the fringe. Roughly a century later, these tribes had integrated completely in society and were concentrated in places like Talmis and Taphis.

The further we descend on the scale of organisation of societies, the fewer sources we find. It should therefore come as no surprise that the fourth-century sources are so scanty in comparison with those of the fifth. Apparently, fifth-century society was more complex than that of the fourth century.²¹⁸ It now consisted of chiefdoms with powerful leaders who engaged each other in conflicts over land.

²¹³ Nadel, *Nuba*, 148-59.

²¹⁴ K. Kristiansen, 'Chiefdoms, States, and Systems of Social Evolution', in Earle, *Chiefdoms* 16-43 at 39.

²¹⁵ Nadel, *Nuba*, 162-71.

²¹⁶ Claessen, *Verdwenen koninkrijken*, 41-2, 103-9. Cf. the word *Mek* for Nuba chiefs, probably a derivative of the Arabic *malek*, see Nadel, *Nuba*, 161 (n. 1), with the evidence for Arab chiefs called *malek* in Late Antiquity, see B. Isaac, 'The Eastern Frontier', *CAH* XIII (1998) 437-60 at 444. Although Kirwan, *Studies*, Ch. IX at 60, already calls Silko a *Mek*, he still insists on seeing Silko's chiefdom as a 'state on the Byzantine model'. Cf. Török, *Late Antique Nubia*, 221-6; *FHN* III, pp. 1132, 1156, and 'End of Meroe', 153-4;

²¹⁷ Cf. L. Török, 'Post-Meroitic History and Archaeology', in C. Bonnet (ed.), *Études nubiennes* 3 vols (Geneva, 1992) 1.141-3, and 'End of Meroe', 153-4; Kirwan, *Studies*, Ch. I at 2 ('Introduction: Post-Meroitic Nubia – A Reappraisal', 2002¹).

²¹⁸ For a similar development after a period of decline in several other ancient societies, see C. Renfrew, 'Post-Collapse Resurgence: Culture Process in the Dark Ages', in C. Renfrew, S. Shennan (eds), *Ranking Resource and Exchange. Aspects of the Archaeology of Early European Society* (Cambridge, 1982) 113-6.

Period	Third century	Fourth century	Fifth century
Type of society	'early state'	segmentary society	chiefdom
Social organisation	kingship class-based hierarchy armies war	lineage-based kinship without developed leadership loose federations raids of small bands	kinship-based ranking under tribal chief loose federations large raids inter-tribal conflicts
Economic organisation	centralised bureaucracy fiscal system laws	settled farmers pastoral herders trade 'Tribal Code'	some craft specialisation trade 'Tribal Code'
Settlement pattern	city	villages	fortified centres religious centres cities of the dead
Religious organisation	temples priestly class	temples	temples
Architecture	monumental public buildings	burial mounds	monumental graves
Modern parallels	non-existent	Nuer and Dinka	Nuba

Reconstruction of the development of society in the Dodekaschoinos in the third to fifth centuries²¹⁹

The increasing organisation of the Blemmyes and Noubades on the southern frontier in the fifth century forced the Romans to conclude treaties with them to prevent these peoples from raiding into Roman territory. The information provided by the 'inside' sources probably gives us a more reliable picture of how the Romans did this than the Roman historians. Sources like Priscus and Procopius speak of 'the Blemmyes and Noubades' raiding into Egypt, as if they consisted of a coalition of peoples invading Egypt. This picture contrasts with one of the Tantani letters, which mentions a Roman officer who signs a peace treaty with a local Noubadian chieftain.

The evidence suggests that the Romans did their best to keep the peace by giving these tribes, presumably the ones nearest to the frontier or the most powerful ones, a federate status. In this respect, Procopius is likely to be right in stating that the tribes received an amount of money every year. This was common practice among other Roman federates in the East. The Romans also wanted to maintain friendly relationships with these tribes by allowing them to continue worshipping Isis at Philae. Since the tribes received money, it is not unreasonable to suppose that they financed the cult with it. In this way, they would have continued the practice of the temples of the Dodekaschoinos of making donations to the temple of Isis at Philae. Having now discussed the relations between the southern peoples and Philae, it is time to turn to the island itself.

²¹⁹ After the model of E.R. Service, see Renfrew and Bahn, *Archaeology*, 174-7. Cf. Török, 'End of Meroe', 150-2.

3. Speaking Stones: Philae as a Nubian Holy Place

A rich archive of graffiti has been preserved on the walls of the temples of Philae. Among them are inscriptions written mainly in demotic and Greek that date to the fourth and fifth centuries. As demotic graffiti from this period are a unique phenomenon, we will first compare Philae with other cult sites in Egypt. We will then analyse the demotic and Greek inscriptions from Philae to see what difference there is in their usage by looking at the number and location of the inscriptions. In particular, we will consider what the difference is in number and location between the first three centuries of our era, and the fourth and fifth centuries. We will also compare the structure of these inscriptions, which in large part consist of pilgrimage inscriptions.

Philae and the Obsolescence of the Demotic Script

Demotic is the most cursive form of the Ancient Egyptian scripts. Developed out of late hieratic, it was written from the middle of the seventh century BC onwards, and endured for over a thousand years. In the earliest period, demotic was used for legal, administrative and commercial purposes. Under the Ptolemies the use of the script was extended to all kinds of texts, but the introduction of Greek gradually removed demotic from public life. From the first century onwards, demotic was increasingly restricted to the literary and religious sphere of the temple: the last preserved ostrakon dates to 232/233, the last preserved papyrus to 244-249. For the fourth and fifth centuries we have to rely entirely on the graffiti on the temple walls of Philae.²²⁰

The modern viewer is often struck by the sight of these graffiti, which are scratched in or painted on the walls of the Ancient Egyptian temples in a seemingly unconcerned way. Epigraphy differentiates between inscribed and painted graffiti (*dipinti*), but in Egyptology both categories are usually termed 'graffiti', whether inscribed or written in ink.²²¹ Demotic graffiti are heirs to a long tradition. The oldest Ancient Egyptian graffiti are found on rocks and date back to the Old Kingdom.²²² Demotic graffiti are in general neither anonymous nor official and have been engraved with religious intentions in places that were not originally intended for that purpose.²²³ Thus, the marked difference between Ancient Egyptian and modern graffiti is that the Ancient Egyptian ones are always written with religious intent.

With the disappearance of the demotic graffiti of Philae, the last remaining of the Ancient Egyptian scripts disappeared. Although the metaphor of 'death' has been applied to the disappearance of demotic, its going out of use is not the same as 'language death'. Whereas languages do not disappear all of a sudden, the knowledge of writing scripts may end abruptly. It is therefore better to use the term 'obsolescence' for the disappearance of demotic.²²⁴ Another difference between scripts and languages in pre-modern societies is that writing was restricted to a small group of literate

²²⁰ K.-T. Zauzich, 'Demotische Texte römischer Zeit', in G. Grimm, H. Heinen, E. Winter (eds), *Das römisch-byzantinische Ägypten* (Mainz, 1983) 77-80; N. Lewis, 'The Demise of the Demotic Document: When and Why', *JEA* 79 (1993) 276-81; Bagnall, *Egypt*, 235-7; M. Depauw, *A Companion to Demotic Studies* (Brussels, 1997) 22-6; Hoffmann, *Ägypten*, 13-9; T.S. Richter, *Rechtssemantik und forensische Rhetorik. Untersuchungen zu Wortschatz, Stil und Grammatik der Sprache koptischer Rechtsurkunden* (Leipzig, 2002) 11-6; S. Houston, J. Baines, J. Cooper, 'Last Writing: Script Obsolescence in Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Mesoamerica', *CSSH* 45 (2003) 430-79 at 435-50.

²²¹ Depauw, *Companion*, 80.

²²² H.-J. Thissen, 'Graffiti', *LÄ* II (1977) 880-2. For the graffiti of pharaonic Egypt, see A.J. Peden, *The Graffiti of Pharaonic Egypt. Scope and Roles of Informal Writings (c. 3100-332 B.C.)* (Leiden, 2001).

²²³ According to H.-J. Thissen, *Die demotischen Graffiti von Medinet Habu* (Sommerhausen, 1989) 1-2, the definition of demotic graffiti is: 'Demotischen Graffiti sind Inschriften unterschiedlichen Umfanges, die an nicht dafür vorgesehenen Orten von dort beruflich Tätigen oder Besuchern angebracht worden und zumeist als Zeugnisse persönlicher Frömmigkeit anzusehen sind'.

²²⁴ Houston, Baines and Cooper, 'Last Writing', 432. Pace Cruz-Urbe, 'Death of Demotic'.

people.²²⁵ The centre of knowledge and learning in Ancient Egypt was the temple. After Greek had become the dominant script in the public domain, demotic was pushed to the sidelines and eventually restricted to the religious context of the temple. The obsolescence of the script at Philae is therefore also an important indicator of the end of Ancient Egyptian religion as an institution, for the temple as a centre of knowledge and learning including their practitioners, the priests, disappeared with the sacred script.

It may be useful, then, to compare the case of Philae with other cult sites in Egypt. Besides on temple walls, demotic graffiti also appear in tombs and stone quarries. What is the difference between graffiti on temple walls and those in other locations? How are demotic graffiti in Egypt diffused geographically? How many graffiti are found in these places? What is their chronological range? And what do these data tell us about the obsolescence of demotic at Philae?

In order to solve these questions, a list is given in an appendix with the location, number and chronological range of the graffiti (Appendix 2). The list is based on a recent survey of demotic graffiti appended to an edition of five demotic stelae.²²⁶ This survey excludes the dates of the graffiti because several of them are disputed or simply lacking. However, general patterns can be deduced from the dates, which are significant and illustrative for our purpose, and therefore they have been included in our list. Moreover, the survey can be supplemented and updated by several other graffiti, although the list given in the appendix is not intended to be exhaustive.²²⁷ Finally, the main division in the categories tombs, quarries and temples is not always consistent, as appears from the graffiti that have been found in marginal desert areas on rocks.²²⁸ These, however, will not be considered here.

To start our analysis with the first two categories, and keeping in mind the religious aspect of the graffiti, it is not surprising that they have been found in tombs and quarries. In burial rituals, the Egyptian gods always played an important role. Moreover, every quarry worshipped its own or a regional god.²²⁹ Although the numbers of these graffiti are small in comparison with those of the temples, they occur in several Egyptian sites. They are found in the main burial sites along the Nile such as Saqqara and the West Bank at Thebes, as well as in the oases. The graffiti from the stone quarries are situated in the main quarry areas in Egypt. The oldest dated graffito in these categories comes from the Wadi Hammamat (Saite/Persian period), the last dated one from the Kharga oasis (AD 113).

As is to be expected, graffiti on temple walls are much more frequent, but they do not predate the Ptolemaic period. Although they are diffused over practically all extant major religious centres, the greatest number of them has been found in the area around Thebes (about a thousand). However, contrast the 'several hundred' graffiti found within the temple precinct of Karnak, measuring 1.5 by 0.8 km, with Philae where 450 graffiti have been found within an area of 460 by 150 m! Most graffiti seem to come from Upper Egypt but, as so often, this preponderance may be due to the hazards of time and place.²³⁰ The graffiti from Kom Abu Billo and Tanis in the Delta show that the practice of scratching religious messages on temple walls was a habit that was widely diffused in Egypt during the Graeco-Roman period.

Within this general pattern, it is striking that Philae and the temples of the Dodekaschoinos are the only localities in Egypt where demotic graffiti have been found post-dating the second century. Although only a small percentage of the

²²⁵ Houston, Baines and Cooper, 'Last Writing', 432-5.

²²⁶ A. Farid, *Fünf demotische Stelen* (Berlin, 1995) 201-5.

²²⁷ I kindly thank E. Cruz-Urbe, J.D. Ray and H.-J. Thissen for compiling the list.

²²⁸ E.g. C. di Cerbo, R. Jasnow, 'Five Persian Period Demotic and Hieroglyphic Graffiti from the Site of Apa Tyrannos at Armant', *Enchoria* 23 (1996) 32-8, which date to 14 October 504 BC.

²²⁹ D. Devauchelle, 'Notes sur les inscriptions démotiques des carrières de Tourah et de Mâsarrah', *ASAE* 69 (1983) 169-82 at 177-8.

²³⁰ Cf. Bagnall, *Egypt*, 6-7, 15-6.

transmitted texts are dated, and it cannot be ruled out that there were other Egyptian temples in which demotic was still being written in the fourth and fifth centuries (for example at Hermonthis), it seems that Philae was building upon a strong regional tradition of writing demotic as a sacred script. After the collapse of Meroe, no graffiti survive from the Dodekaschoinos. As marginalised scripts need few people to be maintained, they can persist for a long time under special circumstances.²³¹ It is safe to assume that the special relations with the southern peoples favoured the script being kept alive at Philae. But the very use of demotic in the fourth and fifth centuries at Philae only also seems to point to an isolated position of the script and therefore of the Ancient Egyptian cults. An isolated position further appears from an analysis of the inscriptions from the island.

Demotic and Greek inscriptions

It is often hard to distinguish between the strictly defined demotic graffiti ('occasional' and 'religious') and Greek inscriptions ('official'), for sometimes demotic graffiti have an official character and in other cases Greek inscriptions an unofficial one.²³² Although generally this distinction may be true, it is better to treat all the texts together under the heading 'inscriptions' and see if we can deduce certain patterns.²³³

The following graph shows the number of Greek and demotic inscriptions from the first until fifth centuries.²³⁴ The Greek inscriptions from the Ptolemaic period have been left out because they do not immediately concern us here.²³⁵ Inscriptions that testify to the Christian community on the island, have also been excluded and will be studied separately in Chs. 5 and 9. Finally, although there are some Latin and Meroitic inscriptions from Philae, the former are too few in number and the latter are imperfectly understood and only rarely dated.²³⁶ Of the 450 demotic inscriptions from Philae, seventy-seven are dated (17.1 percent).²³⁷ Because several persons are also mentioned in other, undated inscriptions, sixty-four have been added, so that the total of the dated demotic texts amounts to 141 (31.3 percent).²³⁸ Of the 361 Greek inscriptions from Philae, including the Christian ones, 160 are dated (44.3 percent).

²³¹ Houston, Baines and Cooper, 'Last Writing', 433.

²³² Cf. *I.Philae.Dem.*, pp. 8-9.

²³³ See also the wide definition of Greek graffiti used in a recent epigraphical handbook, B.H. McLean, *An Introduction to Greek Epigraphy of the Hellenistic and Roman Periods from Alexander the Great down to the Reign of Constantine (323 B.C.-A.D. 337)* (Ann Arbor, 2002) 207-8, and his remarks on the categorisation of inscriptions, pp. 181-2. For the coexistence of Greek and demotic inscriptions, see M. Parca, 'Local Languages and Native Cultures', in J. Bodel (ed.), *Epigraphic Evidence. Ancient History from Inscriptions* (London and New York, 2001) 57-72 at 62-3.

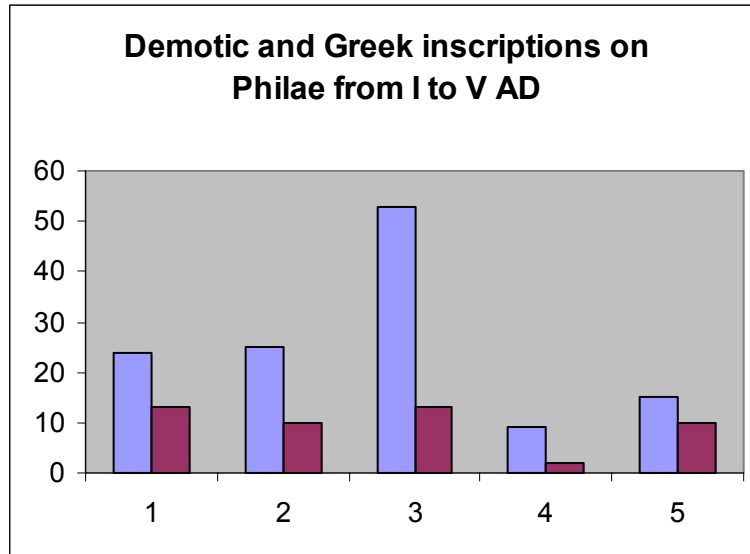
²³⁴ The Greek inscriptions are published as *I.Philae* II, the demotic ones as *I.Philae.Dem.* Thirteen Greek inscriptions dated to the Roman period (*I.Philae* II 173; *IThSy* 326-7, 333-4, 336-9, 341-4) have been excluded for they cannot be divided into centuries. Because of the break between the Ptolemaic and Roman period in the first century BC, these inscriptions have also not been included.

²³⁵ For the Greek inscriptions of the Ptolemaic period, see *I.Philae* I, complemented by *IThSy* 307-25. For Philae in the Ptolemaic period see F. Dunand, *Le culte d'Isis dans le bassin oriental de la Méditerranée*, 3 vols (Leiden, 1973) 1.150-62, E. Vassilika, *Ptolemaic Philae* (Leuven, 1989), Dietze, 'Philae', and Locher, *Nilkatarakt*, 121-41.

²³⁶ Latin inscriptions: *IThSy* 321 (bilingual), 323; *I.Philae* II 128 (trilingual), 147, 163. Meroitic inscriptions: F.L. Griffith, *Meroitic Inscriptions. Part II: Napata to Philae and Miscellaneous* (London, 1912) nos. 95-125 = *REM* 0095-0125, on which see Burkhardt, *Ägypter*, 47.

²³⁷ The dated inscriptions can be distilled from Burkhardt, *Ägypter*, 29-30, 43-5, 97-121.

²³⁸ On the basis of corresponding names and functions, see Burkhardt, *Ägypter*, 32-43. Add *I.Philae.Dem.* 296, 329, 251 = *FHN* III 231 (second century), 120 = *FHN* III 252, 254 = *FHN* III 262, 255 = *FHN* 256, 256 = *FHN* III 257, 257 = *FHN* III 250, 344 = *FHN* III 243, 403 = *FHN* III 263, 410 = *FHN* III 249, 411 = *FHN* III 253, 417 = *FHN* III 261 (third century), 237 (fifth century). However, this method is not always unproblematic, as it cannot be excluded that somebody else may have had the same name, e.g. *I.Philae.Dem.* 236, where we only have the name of the dedicant and his father. Another problem is the question of whether the dated texts (about 30 percent) are representative for all demotic inscriptions.



Light: demotic inscriptions
 Dark: Greek inscriptions
 1-5 (I-V): first until fifth centuries

The graph shows that demotic inscriptions are attested from the first to fifth centuries, and that they are more frequent than Greek inscriptions. On the other hand, in the Ptolemaic period this tendency is the other way round: there are eighty-four Greek inscriptions as opposed to twenty-eight in demotic. Surprisingly, in the first century BC there are sixty-one Greek inscriptions and only fourteen in demotic.

In the first three centuries of our era we see an increasing number of demotic graffiti, culminating in the third century. Although there is a discrepancy between the third and fourth centuries, demotic continues to be used, albeit much less than in the preceding centuries. The demotic inscriptions of the fourth century are low in frequency but in the fifth century the number of demotic graffiti slightly increases again, to disappear completely thereafter. Conversely, the number of Greek inscriptions seems to have been fairly stable during these same centuries, with the exception of, again, the fourth century.

Can we distil any patterns from these numbers? The general tendency of Greek inscriptions from the Roman period to increase in the first two centuries of our era and then to decrease steeply in the third (the so-called 'epigraphic habit'), appears to be absent from the Greek inscriptions of Philae.²³⁹ On the other hand, it can be no coincidence that in the third century the high number of demotic inscriptions seems to coincide with the greatest involvement of the Meroites at Philae.²⁴⁰ Although the Meroites used demotic as a model for writing their own script (Meroitic cursive), it was apparently more common to use demotic at Philae.²⁴¹ In the same way, it is tempting to relate the number of demotic graffiti after the fall of Meroe to the political

²³⁹ R. MacMullen, 'The Epigraphic Habit in the Roman Empire', *AJPh* 103 (1982) 233-46, and 'Frequency of Inscriptions from Roman Lydia', *ZPE* 65 (1986) 237-8. In a recent article, this development is ascribed to different attitudes towards Romanisation, E.A. Meyer, 'Explaining the Epigraphic Habit in the Roman Empire: The Evidence of Epitaphs', *JRS* 80 (1990) 74-96. For an overview of the discussion on this topic, see J. Bodel, 'Epigraphy and the Ancient Historian', in Bodel, *Epigraphic Evidence*, 1-56 at 6-10.

²⁴⁰ E.g. Török, 'Geschichte Meroes', 284-5.

²⁴¹ On Meroitic cursive, see N.B. Millet, 'The Meroitic Script', in P.T. Daniels, W. Bright (eds), *The World's Writing Systems* (Oxford, 1996) 84-7.

developments in the Dodekaschoinos.²⁴² The traditional link with the south probably received a severe blow in this century, after which it recovered slightly in the fifth century under the influence of the increasingly organised Blemmyan and Noubadian tribes on the frontier. In short, it may be suggested that there is a continuum in Nubian influence on Philae, but that it presents itself on a more modest scale from the fourth century onwards.

Patterns can further be detected in the places where the inscriptions appear on the island. They are found on practically all the main buildings and tend to be located closer to the temple of Isis as time passes. For example, the inscriptions in the porch of Nectanebo range in date from the Ptolemaic until the early Roman period, whereas the inscriptions on the first pylon nearer to the temple date from the Ptolemaic period until the third century AD.²⁴³

Two places remained virtually untouched by Greek inscriptions. Firstly, although several hundred demotic and Meroitic inscriptions can be found in the Mammisi or Birthhouse (Fig. 3, no. N), only one Greek inscription was, significantly, written on the exterior wall.²⁴⁴ Besides being one of the best-preserved Birthhouses in Egypt, Philae's holy building is of particular interest because it is situated between the two pylons of the Isis temple.²⁴⁵ Normally, a Birthhouse lies outside the inner temple (temenos) wall. The simple explanation for the remarkable location of the Birthhouse of Philae within the wall (W) is that it was built before the first pylon. This is clear from the passageway in the west tower of the first pylon that is directed towards the entrance of the Birthhouse and two walls connecting the first pylon with the Birthhouse.²⁴⁶ As it was normally forbidden for laymen to enter the inner temple domain through the first pylon, pilgrims would not have been allowed inside the Birthhouse at Philae either.²⁴⁷ Being the starting-point for processions, and therefore an appropriate place for dedicating pilgrimage inscriptions, priests would therefore have inscribed demotic inscriptions on the walls of the Birthhouse. It seems to have been 'not done' to inscribe Greek texts here.

The second place where no Greek inscriptions have been found is an exclusively Meroitic room, called the 'Meroitic Chamber', between the first and second pylon. It contains Meroitic inscriptions and pictures dating to the third century and shows a procession of Meroitic priests.²⁴⁸ It seems that the influence of the Meroites in the third century was so great that they were allowed to have a separate cultic room on the island.

In the fourth and fifth centuries, all inscriptions are found close to the temple of Isis (M). There are three Greek inscriptions at the back of the collonade between the two pylons,²⁴⁹ two demotic inscriptions on the second pylon, and the last-dated hieroglyphic inscription, combined with a demotic graffito, on the gateway of Hadrian

²⁴² Cf. Trombley, *Hellenic Religion* 2, 225-35, an account based on too few sources (only fourteen inscriptions in demotic/hieroglyphic from the fourth and fifth centuries).

²⁴³ Cf. Rutherford, 'Island', 250-2.

²⁴⁴ *I.Philae* II 146.

²⁴⁵ For the Mammisi or Birthhouse see F. Daumas, *Les mammisis des temples égyptiens. Étude d'archéologie et d'histoire religieuse* (Paris, 1958), and 'Geburtshaus', *LÄ* II (1977) 462-75. The Birthhouse of Philae is published by H. Junker and E. Winter, *Das Geburtshaus des Tempels der Isis in Philä* (Vienna, 1965).

²⁴⁶ Haeny, 'Short Architectural History', 210-2.

²⁴⁷ J. Assmann, 'Le temple égyptien et la distinction entre le *dedans* et le *dehors*', in P. Borgeaud *et al.* (eds), *Le temple, lieu de conflit* (Leuven, 1994) 13-34.

²⁴⁸ Griffith, *Meroitic Inscriptions* 34-42; L. Török, 'Two Meroitic Studies: The Meroitic Chamber in Philae and the Administration of Nubia in the 1st to 3rd centuries A.D.', *Oikumene* 2 (1978) 217-37, and 'Remarks on the Meroitic Chamber in Philae', in *Études nubiennes* (Cairo, 1978) 313-7. The inscriptions were published by Griffith, *Meroitic Inscriptions*, nos. 97-111 = *REM* 0097-0111 (= *FHN* III 267).

²⁴⁹ *I.Philae* II 190-2.

(I).²⁵⁰ The Birthhouse continued to receive demotic inscriptions on its walls - seven demotic inscriptions have been found on the building, three of which have been placed on the roof.²⁵¹ Five inscriptions have been preserved inside or outside the Isis temple.²⁵² Finally, most inscriptions are found on the roof of this temple, the majority in the so-called 'Osiris Chamber' which, like the Birthhouse, was used for ritual purposes.²⁵³

To summarise, besides the circumstance that demotic and Meroitic were written in the Birthhouse and Meroitic in the Meroitic Chamber, two trends are visible in the data: diachronically, the inscriptions move closer to the temple of Isis, and, synchronically, different groups occupied different spaces (e.g. the Meroitic Chamber). These trends may be due to contested space between different groups of visitors or between visitors and temple authorities, but there is no decisive proof of this.²⁵⁴ Moreover, the diachronic development can also be explained otherwise. As a rule, inscriptions were not written in parts of the temple that were still in use, exceptions to this rule being graffiti inscribed by priests.²⁵⁵ And, indeed, priests wrote most, if not all, of the Late Antique inscriptions and they were inscribed in a limited area of the temple complex. It could thus be argued that over time fewer and fewer parts of the complex were used. Just as the number of inscriptions indicates, their location seems to point to a contraction of the temple cults. We will now turn to what the structure of these inscriptions has to say about the Late Antique cults.

Pilgrimage and Pilgrimage Inscriptions

Studying ancient pilgrimage is a very complex matter, as the character of pilgrimage changed over the centuries and pilgrimage could be initiated by different motivations.²⁵⁶ In Egypt, the story is no different. People could visit a deity or a holy place to receive an oracle (as at the Memnonion at Abydos), or to ask for divine protection or healing (as at Deir el Bahari). Others were motivated by curiosity (tombs in the Valley of Kings) and come closer to what we would call 'tourists', although the religious aspect is never wholly absent. The occasions on which the holy places were visited also varied. Some people came to join in festivities purposefully, others by chance when passing through. In this diversity of pilgrimages, those to Philae have pride of place: from the Ptolemaic period onward, the goddess Isis attracted many pilgrims from near and far.²⁵⁷

Philae has a long history of multi-ethnic pilgrimage. In the Ptolemaic period, pilgrims came from Egypt, North Africa, Crete, Greece and Asia Minor to worship the

²⁵⁰ Demotic inscriptions: *I.Philae.Dem.* 258-9. Combined hieroglyphic-demotic inscription: *I.Philae.Dem.* 436.

²⁵¹ *I.Philae.Dem.* 96, 159, 194, 211, 236-7 (roof), 240 (roof).

²⁵² *I.Philae.Dem.* 332, 343, 351, 355; *I.Philae* II 199.

²⁵³ *I.Philae.Dem.* 364-6, 369-72, 375-6; *I.Philae* II 186, 188, 196-7. *I.Philae* II 189 and 198 were found reused as ground slabs in the West Church of Philae, but are said to have originally come from the terrace of the temple of Isis, *I.Philae* II, p. 247.

²⁵⁴ Rutherford, 'Island', 250-3. For a similar spatial and chronological analysis of graffiti at Abydos, see Rutherford, 'Pilgrimage in Greco-Roman Egypt', 182-6.

²⁵⁵ Cruz-Uribe, 'Death of Demotic', 179-80.

²⁵⁶ I. Rutherford, 'Theoria and Darshan. Pilgrimage and Vision in Greece and India', *CQ* 50 (2000) 133-46 at 133.

²⁵⁷ J. Yoyotte, 'Les pèlerinages dans l'Égypte ancienne', in A.-M. Esnoul *et al.* (eds), *Les pèlerinages* (Paris, 1960) 17-74; M. Malaise, 'Pèlerinages et pèlerins dans l'Égypte ancienne', in J. Chélini, H. Branthomme (eds), *Histoire des pèlerinages non chrétiens entre magique et sacré: le chemin des dieux* (Paris, 1987) 55-82; É. Bernard, 'Pèlerins dans l'Égypte grecque et romaine', in M.-M. Mactoux, É. Geny (eds), *Mélanges Pierre Lévêque*, 9 vols (Paris, 1988-95) 1.49-63; Frankfurter, *Pilgrimage & Holy Space*, and *Religion*, 105; Rutherford, 'Pilgrimage in Greco-Roman Egypt', 171-2.

goddess of Philae.²⁵⁸ This broad spectrum of visitors probably reflects the sphere of influence of the Ptolemies, who were the first to commemorate their pilgrimages to Philae in inscriptions on the island.²⁵⁹ Nevertheless, the cases in which ethnicity is indicated are rare, and the names seem to indicate that most people came from Egypt during this period.²⁶⁰ It is likely that pilgrims came from Nubia, too, but there are no pilgrimage inscriptions to prove their presence.²⁶¹

In the Roman period, the wide spectrum of visitors of the preceding period becomes narrower: in this period, pilgrims only came from Egypt and Nubia. What caused this sharp contrast with the growing popularity of the Isis cult in the whole Mediterranean Basin during the Principate?²⁶² At least part of the answer seems to be that Roman Isis, who was so popular throughout the empire, was adapted to Roman religious needs, whereas the Isis venerated at Philae remained essentially an Egyptian deity.²⁶³ These developments are therefore separate and need not have influenced each other.²⁶⁴

Few places in Egypt have as many pilgrimage inscriptions as Philae.²⁶⁵ Of the Greek inscriptions of the first three centuries of our era, twenty-three out of a total of thirty-six (63.9 percent) are pilgrimage inscriptions, and of the demotic inscriptions, seventy-two out of 102 (70.6 percent). But anyone who expects these inscriptions to convey detailed information about visitors to Philae will be disappointed: the bulk of the inscriptions were inscribed by temple personnel.²⁶⁶ Surprising though it may seem, the pilgrimage inscriptions therefore do not necessarily say anything about pilgrimage to Philae. In Ancient Egypt, the habit among pilgrims to leave an inscription on the walls of a god did not exclude priests from doing this too. On the contrary, the priests were the transmitters of knowledge and learning and it was not uncommon for them to record participation in festivals.

Greek pilgrimage inscriptions are usually referred to as *proskynemata*. The Greek word προσκύνημα derives from the verb προσκυνέω, 'fall down and worship' and, unlike the noun προσκύνησις, 'adoration', is used only in Egypt.²⁶⁷

Proskynemata appear in Egypt for the first time in the middle of the second century BC.²⁶⁸ The word is the adaptation of an ancient Egyptian custom to leave a name before a god (introduced by demotic *rn-f mne ty*, 'may his name remain here', or *rn nfr mni ty*, 'may the good name remain here'). In turn, the later demotic formula *t3*

²⁵⁸ On 26 August, 116 BC, the first four Romans came to Philae and left what are now the oldest dated Latin inscriptions of Egypt (*IThSy* 321, 323). See, most recently, J.L. Beness, T. Hillard, 'The First Romans at Philae (*CIL* I.2.2937a)', *ZPE* 144 (2003) 203-7.

²⁵⁹ Rutherford, 'Island', 236-8.

²⁶⁰ *I.Philae*I, p. 54.

²⁶¹ Rutherford, 'Island', 247-8.

²⁶² F. le Corsu, *Isis. Mythe et mystères* (Paris, 1977) 118-278; R. Merkelbach, *Isis regina, Zeus Sarapis. Die griechisch-ägyptische Religion nach den Quellen dargestellt* (Stuttgart and Leipzig, 1995) 59-307; S.A. Takács, *Isis and Serapis in the Roman World* (Leiden, 1995); E.A. Arslan (ed.), *Iside. Il mito. Il mistero. La magia* (Milan, 1997) 526-50.

²⁶³ Le Corsu, *Isis*, 227; F. Dunand, *Isis. Mère des dieux* (Paris, 2000) 29-31.

²⁶⁴ Cf. Rutherford, 'Island', 239-40.

²⁶⁵ *I.Philae.Dem.*, p. 9; *I.Philae*II, p. 8.

²⁶⁶ *I.Philae.Dem.*, p. 11; *I.Philae*II, pp. 26-7.

²⁶⁷ *LSJ*s.v.

²⁶⁸ According to its first editor, *I.Philae*I 14, dated to 28 October 142 BC, is the oldest *proskynema* from Philae. However, J. Bingen, *Pages d'épigraphie grecque. Attique-Égypte (1952-1982)* (Brussels, 1991) 136-8 (review of *I.Philae*I, 1970), suggests that this text more probably dates to 89 BC. Bingen also doubts whether other inscriptions of problematic dating are from the second century BC, e.g. he dates *I.Philae*I 23 to 90 BC. See now also his 'De quelques inscriptions pariétales de Philae', *CdE* 79 (2004) 249-56 at 249. Cf. Rutherford, 'Island', 237-8.

wš.t.t was derived from Greek προσκύνημα.²⁶⁹ By using *proskynemata*, the pilgrim placed himself symbolically under the eternal protection of a deity.²⁷⁰

At Philae, Greek pilgrimage inscriptions of the Roman period follow a fixed set of formulae. The most common opening formula is τὸ προσκύνημα, followed by the name of the pilgrim in the nominative (or genitive) case and accompanied by his or her father's name and function. Then the pilgrim mentions the deity to whom the *proskynema* is addressed. He sanctions the inscription with a vow (ἐπὶ ἀγαθῶ, 'for the good') or emphasises his piety (ὑπὲρ εὐσεβείας, 'out of piety'). The *proskynema* may end with the date.²⁷¹

The length of the inscription is usually a few lines, but may also consist of a name only.²⁷² Sometimes the inscription consists of the formula πόδας, 'feet', followed by the name of the pilgrim, and accompanied by a picture of feet.²⁷³ Its symbolism returns in the Greek verb ἦκω 'I have come, I am present', by which the result or goal of the pilgrimage, the presence of the adorant before the deity, is emphasised. This sense is also implicitly conveyed in the aorist variation ἦλθον 'I came', which characterises the state of affairs as being completed.²⁷⁴

The *proskynemata* of Philae do not provide much information about religious sentiments. They only rarely show piety, and then concisely. This appears, for example, from the *epitheta ornantia* of Isis.²⁷⁵ She is called 'goddess' (θεά), 'lady' (κυρία), 'greatest' (μεγίστη), 'with ten thousand names' (μυριώνυμος), 'saviour of all' (πανσώτειρα) and 'lady' (δεσποίνη), which are quite common names of Isis in Egyptian religion.²⁷⁶

In the period of our special interest, the fourth and fifth centuries, the number of Greek inscriptions decreases slightly: only twelve inscriptions date to this period, all dedicated by priests of Philae. Among them are ten *proskynemata*. Of these, four are dedications of feet,²⁷⁷ four are *proskynemata*,²⁷⁸ and the last two are names.²⁷⁹ The phraseology of these inscriptions thus shows continuity with the past, but is equally uninformative about religiosity. What we do know derives almost exclusively from comparison with the demotic graffiti. Doing this reveals the only *proskynema* of the fourth century.²⁸⁰ It consists of a name (Σανσωνῶς), which is accompanied by a more

²⁶⁹ A.J. Festugière, *Études de religion grecque et hellénistique* (Paris, 1972) 178-200 ('Les proscynèmes de Philae', 1970¹); G. Geraci, 'Ricerche sul proskynema', *Aegyptus* 51 (1971) 3-211; W. Helck, 'Proskynema', *LÄ* IV (1982) 1125; J. Bingen, 'Normalité et spécificité de l'épigraphie grecque et romaine de l'Égypte', in L. Criscuolo and G. Geraci (eds), *Egitto e storia antica dall'ellenismo all'età Araba. Bilancio di un confronto* (Bologna, 1989) 15-35 at 20; É. Bernard, 'Réflexions sur les proscynèmes', in D. Conso, N. Fick, B. Pouille (eds), *Mélanges François Kerlouégan* (Paris, 1994) 43-60; Rutherford, 'Island', 237, 240. For examples from nearby Elephantine dating to the Roman period see H. Maehler, 'Visitors to Elephantine: Who Were They?', in J.H. Johnson (ed.), *Life in a Multicultural Society. Egypt from Cambyses to Constantine and beyond* (Chicago, 1992) 209-13.

²⁷⁰ H. Cuvigny, 'Le crépuscule d'un dieu. Le déclin du culte de Pan dans le désert Oriental', *BIFAO* 97 (1997) 139-47 at 139: 'en gravant son nom, et éventuellement celui des siens, dans le sanctuaire, le dévot place à jamais sa personne et la leur sous la protection du dieu'.

²⁷¹ *I.Philae* II, pp. 8-14

²⁷² Cf. Festugière, *Études*, 195, who doubts whether all names are meant as *proskynemata*: 'Chacun sait que la manie d'inscrire son nom en un lieu célèbre est universellement répandue'. See also Bernard, 'Réflexions', 55.

²⁷³ For these inscriptions, see *I.Philae* II, p. 219.

²⁷⁴ On the use of the verb ἦκω and the aorist as completed state of affairs see A. Rijksbaron, *The Syntax and Semantics of the Verb in Classical Greek: An Introduction* (Amsterdam, 2002³) 9, 11.

²⁷⁵ *I.Philae* I, pp. 60-1; *I.Philae* II, pp. 29-30; Rutherford, 'Island', 253-4.

²⁷⁶ H.S. Versnel, *Ter Unus. Isis, Dionysos, Hermes. Three Studies in Henotheism* (Leiden, 1990) 66-7.

²⁷⁷ *I.Philae* II 188-9, 196, 198. Feet are incised beside these inscriptions.

²⁷⁸ *I.Philae* II 190-1, 193, 197.

²⁷⁹ *I.Philae* II 186, 192.

²⁸⁰ Another fourth-century inscription is a dedication from the reign of Diocletian, *I.Philae* II 185.

detailed demotic graffito.²⁸¹ Another *proskynema* is placed next to an almost identical demotic pilgrimage inscription, which adds the function of the priest and the date.²⁸² Just as in the case of the Birthhouse, these inscriptions show that the dedicants made a deliberate choice between the available scripts and that they chose demotic more often in a religious and personal context.

A curse is appended to two Greek inscriptions, both dated to the fifth century. The inscriptions warn against a person who wants to destroy them: "They (the gods) will destroy the family of whoever destroys these letters".²⁸³ This formula has been adopted from demotic graffiti, where it is common in phrases like 'He who shall erase this *proskynema*, his name be cut off'.²⁸⁴ The formula originates from the Old Kingdom and has a long tradition.²⁸⁵ Of the eleven demotic inscriptions containing the formula six are dated, four belong to the third century, one to the fourth and another to the fifth century.²⁸⁶ Apparently, in the special circumstances at Philae the formula was kept alive and eventually transposed into Greek.

Demotic pilgrimage inscriptions of the Roman period are similar to Greek ones in that they contain formulaic patterns. However, the demotic formulas are also different from the Greek ones. For example, although the expression 'I have come' (Greek ἦκω, demotic ρω.f) is also found in some demotic inscriptions, the phraseology differs.²⁸⁷ On the basis of specific phrases, three types of inscriptions have been distinguished: type 1, where only the name is given, type 2, which opens with *t3 wšt.t* ('*proskynema*') and type 3, which starts with *rn.f* ('his name'). Among these, the dated inscriptions confirm the general tendency in demotic that pilgrimage inscriptions of type 3 are found in earlier and those of type 2 in later times, whereas type 1 is used in all periods.²⁸⁸

The most important difference with Greek pilgrimage inscriptions, however, is the attention paid to personal religious sentiments. For example, epithets of Isis in demotic are more common and elaborate than in Greek. In one inscription, Isis is called:

...Isis of Philae and the Abaton, the great goddess, the beautiful noble lady, the beautiful refreshment of this year, giver of wealth, the mistress of heaven, of earth (and of) the underworld.²⁸⁹

A study of the demotic inscriptions has defined a group of thirty-six graffiti by Meroites, distinguished by their names. Although the problem of this analysis remains that people with Egyptian names could well have been of Nubian or mixed origin, it gives a fascinating insight into the use of pilgrimage inscriptions by these Meroites. The 'Meroitic' pilgrimage inscriptions are longer and contain more personal religious sentiments, such as prayers and reports about propitiating the deity, than the other,

²⁸¹ *I.Philae.Dem.* 372; *I.Philae* II 186.

²⁸² *I.Philae.Dem.* 376; *I.Philae* II 188. Cf. Rutherford, 'Island', 237: 'In exceptional cases, the same person leaves two *proskunemata*'.

²⁸³ *I.Philae* II 190.5-7, 191.4-7 (ὁ ἐξαλίφον ταῦτα τὰ γράμματα, ἐξαλίφουσιν τὸ γένος αὐτοῦ).

²⁸⁴ *I.Philae.Dem.* 97, 159.8-9, 269.7-8, 270.2, 289.8, 408.7-8, 416.23-4 = *FHN* III 260, 417.10 = *FHN* III 261, 420.8-9, 422.6, 450.7-9 (*p nt ne-fie ty wšte rn-f gbe* and variants). Cf. *I.Philae.Dem.*, pp. 9-10; *I.Philae* II, p. 223.

²⁸⁵ L.V. Zabkar, 'A Hieracocephalous Deity from Naqa, Qustul, and Philae', *ZÄS* 102 (1975) 143-53 at 150-2, which is basically the same text as his *Apedemak* 106-17.

²⁸⁶ *I.Philae.Dem.* 269, 416, 417, 422 (third century), 159 (fourth century), 450 (fifth century). The expression may have existed much longer at Philae, cf. D. Devauchelle, 'Les graffites démotiques du toit du temple d'Edfou', *BIFAO* 83 (1983) 123-31 at 124, who mentions several examples from Edfu, dating to between the second century BC and the first century AD.

²⁸⁷ *I.Philae.Dem.* 244.2, 410.8 = *FHN* III 249, 416.2, 3, 7 = *FHN* III 260, 421.10 = *FHN* III 245, 449.4.

²⁸⁸ Burkhardt, *Ägypter*: 20-46.

²⁸⁹ *I.Philae.Dem.* 417.1-2 = *FHN* III 261. Other epithets e.g. *I.Philae.Dem.* 255.10-1 = *FHN* III 256, 269.2-3, 359.1, 402.5-6, 416.1-2, 19 = *FHN* III 260. Cf. Burkhardt, *Ägypter*: 71-3.

'Egyptian' graffiti.²⁹⁰ No wonder, then, that the longest demotic graffito in Egypt (twenty-six lines) is found in this group.²⁹¹

The fourth and fifth-century demotic pilgrimage inscriptions do not display these characteristics. As compared with the Roman period, their number decreases even more dramatically than the Greek ones of the fourth and fifth centuries, and twenty-four demotic inscriptions date to this period. They are usually short and not as detailed as the 'Meroitic' texts in demotic, for most of them were incised by the priests themselves. Nevertheless, the formulation continues the practice of the preceding period. For example, two inscriptions have been found with dedications of feet.²⁹² Continuity also appears from the fact that the structure of thirteen graffiti belong to type 2 and only three to type 3, which is in agreement with the general tendency of the Roman period.²⁹³

A remarkable feature of these graffiti, also found in the Greek inscriptions, is that they are dated according to Diocletian years.²⁹⁴ This dating formula is first attested in the epigraphical evidence in a hieratic inscription from the Bucheum at Hermonthis (Armant) in 316/317. The graffiti from Philae are the only examples of this formula in demotic.²⁹⁵ Rather than dating to the reigns of Christian emperors, or using the more common dating formula in indiction years, the last priests of Philae dated their inscriptions to the emperor who had persecuted the Christians.²⁹⁶

An analysis of the Greek and demotic inscriptions at Philae thus shows that the Ancient Egyptian cults did not continue unaffected at Philae in Late Antiquity. The inscriptions, usually consisting of pilgrimage inscriptions, significantly decrease in quantity. The location of the inscriptions also shows a contraction in Late Antique cultic activity, for they are found ever closer to the main temple of Isis. Finally, the structure of the inscriptions, although continuous with the preceding period, suggests that the cults had become increasingly isolated. This appears from the distinction between demotic and Greek inscriptions, formerly clearly separated in phraseology, which becomes less clear. For example, the curse formula which was formerly used in the Egyptian scripts is now also found in Greek. Another example is the dating formula according to Diocletian years, which is written in demotic and Greek, and only attested in demotic at Philae. The practice of dedicating long and personal inscriptions in demotic, as we know from several Meroites of the Roman period, is also no longer attested. In the fourth and fifth centuries, almost nothing is known about pilgrims as priests dedicated most of the inscriptions. This phenomenon in itself is yet another indication that pilgrimage to Philae was not quite vibrant as before. It is to the priests, and their cultic activities, that we will now turn.

²⁹⁰ Burkhardt, *Ägypten*, 47-71. In addition, there are seven pilgrimage inscriptions in the Meroitic script (*tewišti*, cf. demotic *tꜣ wš.t.t*), but they are rather short and homogeneous, unlike the 'Meroitic' pilgrimage inscriptions in demotic. See Griffith, *Meroitic Inscriptions* nos. 95-6, 121-5 = *REM* 0095-6, 0121-5. Cf. L. Török, 'Meroitic Religion: Three Contributions in a Positivistic Manner', in F. Hintze (ed.), *Meroitische Forschungen* (Berlin, 1984) 156-82 at 173-81.

²⁹¹ *I.Philae.Dem.* 416 = *FHN* III 260. See Hoffmann, *Ägypten*, 234-5.

²⁹² *I.Philae.Dem.* 237, 376, accompanied by drawings of feet.

²⁹³ Type 1: *I.Philae.Dem.* 236, 355, 365. Type 2: 96, 194, 211, 259, 332, 351, 364, 369-72, 375, 450. Type 3: 159, 258, 343.

²⁹⁴ *I.Philae.Dem.* 159, 240, 259, 332, 364-6, 369-72, 376, 436 = *FHN* III 306, 450; *I.Philae* II 189-90, 193, 196-9. Griffith seems to have read *I.Philae.Dem.* 320.1 first as a 'year 16', but in the index *I.Philae.Dem.*, p. 215, followed by Bagnall and Worp, *Chronological Systems*, 71, he reads it as a Diocletian 'year 16[.]', that is, a date between 443 and 453.

²⁹⁵ Bagnall and Worp, *Chronological Systems*, 64.

²⁹⁶ Hoffmann, *Ägypten*, 241-2.

4. The Last Priests of Philae

Who were these priests? In this chapter, we will examine who the last priests of Philae were, what functions they had, and how they dramatically disappeared from the scene. As these priests dedicated most of the Late Antique inscriptions, they provide us with a lively picture of the ritual practices and festivals they performed. However, the inscriptions commemorating them end abruptly in 456/457, and we will try to find an explanation for this sudden end to the inscriptional evidence.

Priests and Workmen

Almost a century ago, Walter Otto (1878-1941) published a comprehensive book on priests and temples in Graeco-Roman Egypt.²⁹⁷ Unfortunately, his standard work has never been followed up regarding the subject of priests.²⁹⁸ Although detailed studies on specialised topics abound, a systematic, coherent and up-to-date account of this aspect of Egyptian religion in the Graeco-Roman period is still a desideratum.²⁹⁹ To take the case of Philae, although the material discussed thus far demonstrates that the combination of Greek and demotic inscriptions can add considerably to our understanding of priesthood, many texts from Philae, spanning the whole Graeco-Roman period, still remain to be studied. It is therefore necessary to pay some attention to priesthood in the Graeco-Roman period before we concentrate on the priests of fourth and fifth-century Philae.

Otto divides Egyptian priests of the Graeco-Roman period into two groups according to Greek terminology by comparing famous bilingual or trilingual documents like the Ptolemaic Rosetta stone and the decree of Canopus. He subdivides the higher priest class (ιερείς) into five subclasses (φυλαί). The 'high priests' (ἀρχιερείς) come first, then the 'prophets' (προφήται), followed by the *stolistai* (στολισταί), and finally the *pterophorai* (πτεροφόροι; singular πτεροφόρος) and *hierogrammateis* (ιερογραμματεῖς), who are more or less equal in status. Unfortunately, Otto's approach is one-sided and analyses from a Greek perspective. Consequently, he does not take into account the many different nuances in Egyptian terminology which exclude a one-to-one equivalence of Greek and Egyptian titles. Moreover, one priest could have several titles, both administrative and religious, and these titles varied from time to time and place to place.

The complexity of the Egyptian priesthood can be illustrated by listing the several functions of the different kinds of priests. High priests and prophets were in charge of the rituals of the temple. The *stolistai* were concerned with the garments of the deity, but also with various other aspects of the temple cult, such as prayers, hymns, inspection of sacrificial animals and offerings. The *hierogrammateus* had to find and inspect holy animals, take part in synods of priests and temple administration, compose priestly decrees and, finally, to test potential priests on cultic purity and writing skills. His titles are in hieroglyphs *rh-h*, 'savant', or *ty(?) pr-^cnh*, 'member of the House of Life', and in demotic *sh pr-^cnh*, 'scribe of the House of Life'. Although the exact difference with a *hierogrammateus* is still open to debate, it is generally accepted that a *pterophoras* designates a priest whose main concern was

²⁹⁷ W. Otto, *Priester und Tempel im hellenistischen Ägypten. Ein Beitrag zur Kulturgeschichte des Hellenismus* 2 vols (Leipzig and Berlin 1905-8).

²⁹⁸ Cf. J.A.S. Evans, 'A Social and Economic History of an Egyptian Temple in the Greco-Roman Period', *YCIS* 17 (1961) 143-283.

²⁹⁹ Cf. J. Quaegebeur, 'Priester(tum) (griech.-röm.)', *LÄ* IV (1982) 1098-1100. About the sources in Greek, demotic and hieroglyphic: 'elles sont toutes les trois insuffisamment exploitées' (p. 1098). About the need of a new work on Graeco-Roman priests: 'l'élaboration d'études de détail permettront d'écrire un jour une synthèse nouvelle' (p. 1100).

writing. His title is in hieroglyphic *sšw mdz.t-ntr*, and in demotic *sh md-ntr*, 'scribe of the divine book'.³⁰⁰

In general, we can say that the higher priests were divided into *hm-ntr* ('prophets') and *w^cb* ('priests'). According to Greek terminology, the 'high priests', 'prophets' and *stolistai* belonged to the 'prophets' (*hm-ntr*), but the *pterophorai* and *hierogrammateis* to the 'priests' (*w^cb*). The Greek term 'prophet' (προφήτης) could therefore denote both a specific function and a general designation of the highest priestly offices (Egyptian *hm-ntr*). Moreover, in addition to being a designation of the priestly offices lower than the 'prophets' (Egyptian *w^cb*), the Greek term 'priest' (ἱερεύς) was also a general term for higher priests (both *hm-ntr* and *w^cb*).

In addition to the priests who were paid by the temple, other people also worked in the temple, earning a living from private consultation, who were not strictly regarded as 'priests' (ἱερεῖς) by the Egyptians themselves. However, as we generally refer to Egyptian temple personnel as 'priests', we will call them 'lower priests' to discriminate them from the 'higher priests'.³⁰¹ The most important of these 'priestly' people were the *pastophoroi* (Greek παστοφόροι, Egyptian *wn*) whose precise functions remain as yet obscure.³⁰² What we do know is that they were responsible for guarding the temple area, and that they interpreted dreams.³⁰³ Besides these lower priests, there were a number of workmen (ἐργάται) involved in the temple cult.³⁰⁴

Several of these functions, particularly the higher ones, reappear among the fourth and fifth-century priests of Philae, and of these functions the name Smet (demotic Esmet) is most popular.³⁰⁵ On 17 December 373, a certain Smet dedicated a pilgrimage inscription, while his father, Smet the Elder, was a first prophet of Isis.³⁰⁶ On 24 August 394 another Smet, surnamed Akhom, dedicated the last hieroglyphic/demotic inscription of Egypt as *hierogrammateus* and in a pilgrimage inscription calls himself a banker (*Shyene* (?)) of Isis.³⁰⁷ We can trace back three generations of this family of Smets. Smet's father was another Smet, surnamed Panekhate and second prophet of Isis, who was married to Eswere and whose father was Pakhom, first prophet of Isis.³⁰⁸ Finally, a very late Greek inscription (454/455) mentions a Smet-Achates, son of Smet the Elder and Tsaouel.³⁰⁹

Lower priests are harder to find. For example, a certain Sensnaw was 'the chief baker of Isis' (*p mre 'o n 'S.t*). He recorded the names of his father, mother and grandfather.³¹⁰ In a pilgrimage inscription of 11 (?) November 373 we hear of a

³⁰⁰ Otto, *Priester* 1, 75-94; K.-T. Zauzich, 'Hierogrammat', *LÄ* II (1977) 1199-1201; H.-J. Thissen, 'Pterophoren', *LÄ* IV (1982) 1182-3; S. Sauneron, *Les prêtres de l'ancienne Égypte* (Paris, 1988²; Eng. tr. *The Priests of Ancient Egypt* (Ithaca, 2000) 63-71; R.B. Finnestad, 'Temples of the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods: Ancient Traditions in New Contexts', in B.E. Shafer (ed.), *Temples of Ancient Egypt* (Ithaca, 1997) 185-237 at 227-8. But cf. K. Ryholt, 'A Parallel to the Inaros Story of P.Krall (P.Carlsberg 456+P.CtYBR 4513): Demotic Narratives from the Tebtunis Temple Library (I)', *JEA* 84 (1998) 151-69 at 168-9, who equates *rh-ht* with πτεροφόρος and *sšw mdz.t-ntr* with ἱερογραμματεὺς.

³⁰¹ Otto, *Priester* 1, 94-8; Sauneron, *Prêtres* 76-7.

³⁰² H.-B. Schönborn, *Die Pastophoren im Kult der ägyptischen Götter* (Meisenheim, 1976); J.G. Griffiths, 'Pastophoren', *LÄ* IV (1982) 914; B.P. Muhs, 'Of Priests and Pastophoroi', forthcoming.

³⁰³ J.D. Ray, *The Archive of Hor* (London, 1976) 136, and 'Phrases used in Dream-Texts', in S.P. Vleeming (ed.), *Aspects of Demotic Lexicography* (Leuven, 1987) 85-93 at 89-91.

³⁰⁴ Otto, *Priester* 1, 98; Sauneron, *Prêtres* 78-9.

³⁰⁵ For a Smetkhem, son of Pheos and Tsensnos, see an undated Greek inscription from the island of Salib, not far from Philae, *IThSy* 304.

³⁰⁶ *I.Philae.Dem.* 369.1-2.

³⁰⁷ *I.Philae.Dem.* 159.2, 436.1-3 = *FHN* III 306. Cf. *I.Philae.Dem.* 237.1-2.

³⁰⁸ *I.Philae.Dem.* 159.2-5, 351.1-2, 436.4-7 = *FHN* III 306. The name Akhom may derive from Egyptian *hm* 'falcon', see W. Spiegelberg, 'Die Falkenbezeichnung des Verstorbenen in der Spätzeit', *ZAS* 62 (1927) 27-37. On the name Panekhate 'he of the *ht* demons', see *NB Dem.* s.v. *p-nz-ht.w* (pp. 382-3).

³⁰⁹ *I.Philae* II 198.1-3.

³¹⁰ *I.Philae.Dem.* 372.1-3; *I.Philae* II 186.

Patsinamre, whose father was Pge (?), ‘the great pharmacist (?) of the workshop (?)’ (*p nte ʿo n p wʿb*).³¹¹ This function may have had something to do with the ritual of embalming, which supports the suggestion that Patsinamre was a lower priest.³¹² In any case, his son could not write demotic, for Petesenufe, who certainly belonged to the higher priests, wrote the inscription.³¹³ This Petesenufe had the same function as his father Harentyotf, *pterophoras*, and was ‘the (chief) of secrets of Isis’ (*p (hry) sšt n ’S.t*) in 407/408.³¹⁴ Another potential higher priest was Petamanopet, who was ‘the librarian (?) of Isis’ (*p md (?) n ’S.t*), with the same function as his father Harentyotf in 404/405.³¹⁵

It is equally difficult to decide whether a person is a lower priest or a workman, because nearly every occupation on the island had some connection with the temple. When we look at all the titles in the demotic graffiti on Philae, the major lower priests, the *pastophoroi*, are not often mentioned and all dated testimonies come from the first century.³¹⁶ Most priests of the dated inscriptions of the fourth and fifth centuries, then, were higher priests, which is again a symptom that the Ancient Egyptian cults contracted considerably during these centuries.

Except for these functions, can we say any more about these priests? Since priestly offices were hereditary, it is likely that they were Egyptian, as they probably had been for centuries.³¹⁷ It is more probable, then, that Priscus was right that they considered themselves as Egyptians, rather than that they were of mixed ethnic origins, as Procopius suggests. In a classic essay, the papyrologist Ulrich Wilcken (1862-1944) suggested that the priests resided among the Blemmyes. This suggestion is based upon a single Greek inscription, which we will quote in full below, in which the priest Smet the Younger says that ‘he came here’ (ἦλθα ἐνταῦθα), that is, to Philae.³¹⁸ According to Wilcken this means that Smet resided among the Blemmyes and came from the Dodekaschoinos to Philae. He does not even exclude the possibility that all priests of Philae were in this position.³¹⁹ However, Smet could just as well have taken a short trip and afterwards dedicated the inscription. There is, then, no reason to assume that the last priests of Philae did not reside at Philae.

Besides knowing how to write Greek and demotic, there is a possibility that the priests could write Meroitic. On the roof of the Birthhouse, near a barely legible demotic inscription, three Meroitic inscriptions have been found, which are dedications of feet by the same person, and which have been translated as ‘the pilgrim (?) Shakhiye (?)’.³²⁰ However, it has recently been proposed that ‘Esmet the Younger’ (Meroitic *šri* = Egyptian *hm*) should be read. Now, we may well ask whether Smet (demotic Esmet) the Younger is also mentioned in the demotic inscription, which has been translated as: ‘The feet (?) of Esmet (?) of [Isis (?) son of (?) Pakho]m the prophet of Isis (?)’.³²¹ Although its reading is by no means unproblematic, the demotic inscription may well belong to the Meroitic inscriptions: consequently, a Smet the Younger is mentioned here too. Combined with a similar graffito on the roof of the Isis temple, which is dated to 408/409, Smet may be identified as belonging to the last-

³¹¹ *L.Philae.Dem.* 371.1 = *FHN* III 302.

³¹² Cf. the remark in *L.Philae.Dem.*, p. 105.

³¹³ *L.Philae.Dem.*, p. 103, suggests that *L.Philae.Dem.* 369-72 were all written by Petesenufe, since they were found in the same place, were written by the same hand, and were dedicated in the months Hathyr and Choiak (November-December) 373.

³¹⁴ *LBij.Dem.* 3.1; *L.Philae.Dem.* 211.1-3, 236.1-2, 364.1-3, 370.1-2, 371.5 = *FHN* III 302.

³¹⁵ *L.Philae.Dem.* 259.1-3.

³¹⁶ *L.Philae.Dem.* 37.5, 7, 8, 11, 12, 61.7, 64.8, 263.1.

³¹⁷ Otto, *Priester* 1, 203-4.

³¹⁸ *L.Philae* II 197.9.

³¹⁹ Wilcken, ‘Heidnisches und Christliches’, 404-7; Otto, *Priester und Tempel* 1, 210 (n. 8); *L.Philae* II, pp. 242-5; Trombley, *Hellenic Religion* 2, 229-30; Rutherford, ‘Island’, 249.

³²⁰ Griffith, *Meroitic Inscriptions* nos. 114, 116-7 = *REM* 0114, 0116-7.

³²¹ *L.Philae.Dem.* 237.

known priestly family in Egypt.³²² If the identification is correct, this fifth-century priestly family was trilingual.³²³

Although the priests might have known how to write perhaps a bit of hieroglyphic, demotic, possibly Meroitic and Greek, the ways these scripts were written display an increasingly isolated position. The only hieroglyphic text that has come down to us from this period is used as an introduction to a demotic pilgrimage inscription and is full of mistakes.³²⁴ Demotic graffiti decrease significantly after the third century and are poorly written.³²⁵ Ironically, of all the fourth and fifth-century priests of Philae, we are best informed about the family of Smet the Younger, the last-known priestly family of Egypt.

A Fifth-Century Priestly Family

Although most Greek pilgrimage inscriptions are not detailed in religious matters, one inscription does give us more information:

The *proskynema* of Smetkhem (Smet the Younger), the *protostolistes* (born out) of his father Pachoumios, prophet, (and) of his mother Tsensmet. I became *protostolistes* in the 165th year of Diocletian (448/449). I came here and did my duty together with my brother Smeto (Smet the Elder), the successor of the prophet Smet, a son of Pachoumios, prophet. We render thanks to our mistress Isis and our lord Osiris, for the good, today, 23 Choiak, the 169th year of Diocletian (20 December 452).³²⁶

The text is one of the last testimonies of the Ancient Egyptian cults. It mentions two brothers, Smet the Younger and Smet the Elder, who together dedicate a *proskynema* before the gods Isis and Osiris in the year 452. Smet the Younger has evidently taken the opportunity to celebrate his appointment as *protostolistes* four years earlier.³²⁷ Smet the Elder is the 'successor of the prophet Smet'. The third Smet is also mentioned in the last-known inscription testifying to the Ancient Egyptian cults, four or five years later, where he has the function of high priest (ἀρχιεροφότης).³²⁸ If they are one and the same person, it is likely that Smet had become high priest and Smet the Elder prophet not long before the inscription was written, perhaps still in December 452.

The parents of Smet the Younger and Elder were Pachoumios (demotic Pakhom) and Tsensmet. It cannot be a coincidence that the third Smet's father has the same name and function as the father of Smet the Younger and Elder. Obviously, we have three sons and a father holding the highest priestly functions in the Isis cult in the first half of the fifth century. Pachoumios was a first prophet of Isis at least from 408/409 until 20 December 452. Again, the Greek of these inscriptions is incomplete in religious terminology, for the demotic ones differentiate between a first and second prophet of Isis, whereas the Greek only speaks of a prophet.³²⁹ Pachoumios' wife

³²² *I.Philae.Dem.* 376.

³²³ A. Burkhardt, 'Zu späten heidnischen Priestern in Philae', in Nagel, *Graeco-Coptica*, 77-83.

³²⁴ Cf. the remark in *I.Philae.Dem.*, p. 126: 'The name and titles of the sculptor would be unintelligible without the key given by the demotic'.

³²⁵ Zauzich, 'Demotische Texte', 77; Hoffmann, *Ägypten*, 242. Cf. the remark in *I.Philae.Dem.*, p. 71, on *I.Philae.Dem.* 159: 'The writing and orthography are peculiar and probably not free from sheer mistakes due to want of practice at this late date'.

³²⁶ *I.Philae* II 197 (tr. after É. Bernand). Smetkhem (Σμητκήμη) and Smeto (Σμητό) are Greek transliterations of the Egyptian names meaning 'Smet the Younger' and 'Smet the Elder', respectively.

³²⁷ *I.Philae* II 193, dated to 448/9.

³²⁸ *I.Philae* II 199.1-2. Cf. an undated inscription from Biga, *IThSy* 306, in which a Smet, son of Pakoui and Tsensmet, is mentioned. If Pakoui is a variant of Pachoumios, just as Pachomios or Pakomios, this may be our Smet.

³²⁹ *I.Bij.Dem.* 6.2-3; *I.Philae.Dem.* 237.2 (?), 240.2, 332.2, 343.1-2, 365.1-2, 366.1-2, 376.2-3; *I.Philae* II 188.2-3, 193.2, 196.2, 197.4-5, 15-6. For second prophets: Otto, *Priester* 1, 81 (n. 2); 209-10 (n. 4).

Tsensmet did not have a priestly function, but she was ‘the daughter of a main priest of Isis’ (*t šr.t n wꜥb ꜥon ’S.t*).³³⁰

Their youngest son, Smet the Younger, was *protostolistes* from 448 until at least 452.³³¹ If the Meroitic texts on the roof of the Birthhouse are his, he was also a prophet at one time.³³² Smet the Elder was prophet of Isis in 452, but before that ‘scribe of the divine book’ or *pterophoras* (*sh md ntr*), in any case between 27 November 435 and 25 February 439.³³³ In one graffito he is called *wꜥb* priest of Isis, a general title used for higher priests, such as the *pterophorai*, but lower than prophets.³³⁴ The last brother, Smet, was probably the oldest and the most successful: he was prophet of Isis before December 452 and was high priest in 456/457.³³⁵

We can even reconstruct a third generation of this ‘Smet family’, namely two sons of Smet the Elder by his wife Tsenwer.³³⁶ The first son, Harpaese, was a ‘scribe of the House of Record (?) of Isis’ (*sh pr-sh* (?)), possibly a *hierogrammateus*.³³⁷ For his brother Harmaiese, no function is known.³³⁸ It is generally accepted that there was even a fourth and fifth generation of the Smet family.³³⁹ This hypothesis is based on the last dated demotic inscription:

Esmet the Elder, son of Pakhom, the first prophet of Isis, his mother’s name Tsensmet, the daughter of a chief priest of Isis. Esmet the Younger, the second prophet of Isis, son of Harentyotf. Today, 6 Choiak, year 169 (2 December 452).³⁴⁰

It was thought that Smet the Younger was the father of Tsensmet and, consequently, Harentyotf her grandfather, but this cannot be true. Firstly, the function of the father of Tsensmet is not specified (‘a chief priest of Isis’).³⁴¹ Secondly, in the demotic graffiti the titles are never written before the name of a person. Thirdly, the handcopy of the inscription makes it clear that the handwriting of the fourth line, which starts with the name Smet the Younger, is different from the preceding three lines (Fig. 4). We may conclude that Smet the Younger was somebody else, a priest who dedicated a pilgrimage inscription with Smet the Elder or independently, and that he was contemporaneous with Smet the Elder.³⁴²

³³⁰ *I.Philae.Dem.* 343.2, 366.2; *I.Philae* II 197.5-6. ‘Daughter of a main priest of Isis’: *I.Philae.Dem.* 365.3.

³³¹ *I.Philae* II 193.1, 196.1, 197.2-3, 6-8. No title: *I.Philae.Dem.* 237.1 (?), 376.1; *I.Philae* II 188.1. Cf. Trombley, *Hellenic Religion* 2, 227, 234, who equates *protostolistes* with first prophet, referring to *I.Philae* II, pp. 235-6 (n. 108), but no such identification can be found there.

³³² Griffith, *Meroitic Inscriptions* nos. 114, 116-7 = *REM* 0114, 0116-7.

³³³ Prophet: *I.Philae* II 197.13-5. *Pterophoras* *I.Bij.Dem.* 6.1-2; *I.Philae.Dem.* 240.1, 258.3-4, 332.1, 343.1, 355.1, 366.1. Without title: *I.Philae.Dem.* 365.1

³³⁴ *I.Philae.Dem.* 96.2.

³³⁵ Prophet: *I.Philae* II 197.14-5. High priest: *I.Philae* II 199.1-2. Without title: *I.Philae* II 194.1.

³³⁶ *I.Philae.Dem.* 258.4-5, 450.3-4. *I.Philae* II, p. 241 (n. 9) falsely includes *I.Philae.Dem.* 355.

³³⁷ *I.Philae.Dem.* 258.3, 355. *Hierogrammateus* *I.Philae.Dem.* 450.2.

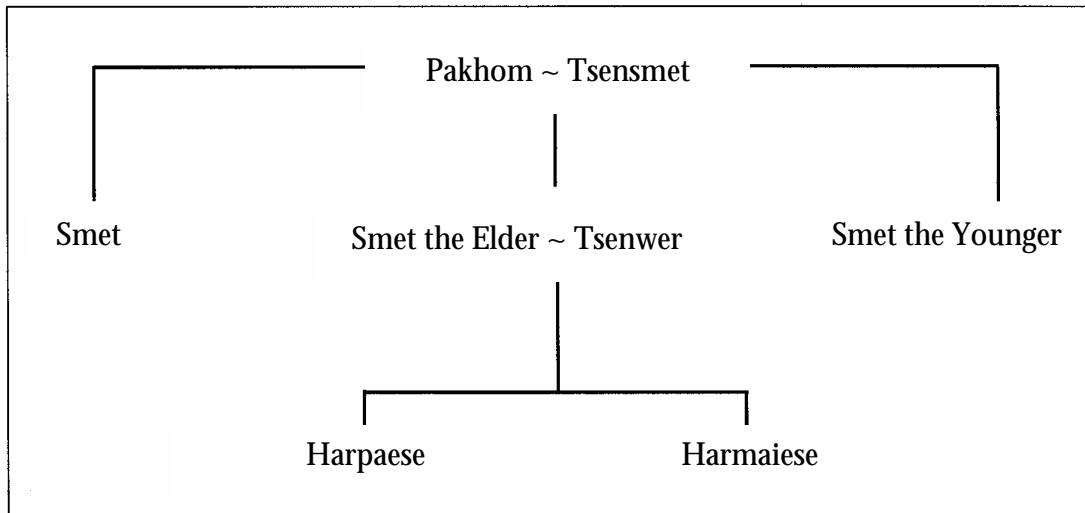
³³⁸ *I.Philae.Dem.* 96.1.

³³⁹ Otto, *Priester* 1, 208-9; *I.Philae* II, pp. 239-42; Burkhardt, ‘Späten Priestern’, 79, and *Ägypter*, 36-7.

³⁴⁰ *I.Philae.Dem.* 365 (tr. Griffith, adapted). Cf. the translation by Spiegelberg in *SBI* 1170b: ‘Der Name seiner Mutter (ist) Tsen-es-mêt. (Sie ist) die Tochter des großen Priesters der Isis Es-mêt, des Jüngeren, des zweiten Propheten der Isis des Gottesvaters (?) des (Gottes) Harendotes (?)’.

³⁴¹ Cf. for a parallel *I.Philae.Dem.* 159.4 of 26 November (?) 394, in which an Eswere is mentioned, ‘the daughter of a priest of Isis’ (*t šr.t wꜥb n ’S.t*), also without adding her father’s name.

³⁴² Smet the Younger, the second prophet of Isis, is probably also mentioned in *I.Philae.Dem.* 375.



The Smet Family

The Egyptian names of the members of the Smet family are revealing. Pakhom, or in Greek Pachomios, Pakomios or Pachoumios, means 'he of the holy falcon', the symbol of one of the main gods worshipped at Philae, Horus.³⁴³ The names of the two sons of Smet the Elder are both composed with the name of the falcon god: Harpaese means 'Horus is the son of Isis' and Harmaiese 'Horus is the beloved of Isis'.³⁴⁴

The other names are derived from Egyptian *mdw*, a holy staff ending in a ram's head and carried round in processions of Khnum. The god Khnum was worshipped at Elephantine, and the developed form of this word, *mtr*, is found in a series of names from the First Cataract area.³⁴⁵ One of these names is Esmet (Greek Smet), 'he of the holy staff' (from *ns-p3-mtr*). Like Pakhom (Greek Pachoumios and variations), the name is very common at Philae, especially in the demotic graffiti.³⁴⁶ Other members of the Smet family, Tsensmet 'daughter of Smet' and Tsenwer 'Daughter of the great (?)', also have regional names.³⁴⁷ Apparently, the Smet family consisted of priests with traditional Egyptian, regional names, which supports the hypothesis that the priests of Philae were Egyptian and came from the region. Although the family can only be followed for three, and not five, generations, it is striking that in almost all inscriptions of the fifth century the members of this family are mentioned. It seems that the last priests of Philae kept the highest priestly offices within the family.

Rituals and Festivals

The most important of the cults at Philae was that of Isis. To understand the cult of Isis at Philae properly, we have to know one of the most famous Egyptian myths: the murder of Osiris.³⁴⁸ In the version of Plutarch:

³⁴³ *LPhilae* II, p. 241; *NB Dem.* s.v. *P3-ḥm* (pp. 165-7). For this name see further Spiegelberg, 'Falkenbezeichnung'.

³⁴⁴ *NB Dem.* s.v. *hr-p3-is.t* (pp. 807-8); *hr-mr-is.t* (p. 819).

³⁴⁵ H. de Meulenaere, 'L'enseigne sacrée du dieu Khnoum dans l'ononastique gréco-égyptienne', *CdE* 75 (2000) 235-40.

³⁴⁶ *NB Dem.* s.v. *ns-p3-mtr* (pp. 664-6). See further S. Sauneron, 'À propos d'Éléphantine', *BIFAO* 58 (1959) 35-8 at 36-8; *LPhilae* II, pp. 241-2; H. Satzinger, 'Der heilige Stab als Kraftquelle des Königs', *Jahrbuch der kunsthistorischen Sammlungen in Wien* 77 (1981) 9-43 at 20; De Meulenaere, 'Enseigne sacrée', 236-7.

³⁴⁷ *NB Dem.* s.v. *t3-šr.t- ns-mtr* (p. 1136), and *t3-šr.t-wr* (p. 1093).

³⁴⁸ Le Corsu, *Isis* 7-13; R. Merkelbach, *Isisfeste in griechisch-römischer Zeit. Daten und Riten* (Meisenheim, 1963) 12-3; J. Assmann, *Ägypten. Theologie und Frömmigkeit einer frühen Hochkultur*

Having journeyed to her son Horus who was being brought up in Buto (in the Delta), Isis put the box aside, and Typhon (the Egyptian god Seth), when he was hunting by night in the moonlight, came upon it. He recognised the body, and having cut it into fourteen parts, he scattered them. When she heard of this, Isis searched for them in a papyrus boat, sailing through the marshes. That is why people who sail in papyrus skiffs are not harmed by crocodiles, which show either fear or veneration because of the goddess. From this circumstance arises the fact that many tombs of Osiris are said to exist in Egypt, for the goddess, as she came upon each part, held a burial ceremony.³⁴⁹

One of those places that possessed a tomb of Osiris was the First Cataract area. As in all nomes worshipping relics of the dead Osiris, this region within the first Upper Egyptian nome also worshipped a relic, viz. the deity's leg. Every nome in Egypt formed, as it were, part of the body of Osiris. The leg of Osiris was traditionally associated with the source of the Nile, since Osiris was seen as a personification of the river: just as Osiris had died, the water level dropped, and just as Osiris was revived, the Nile water rose again.³⁵⁰

We should not imagine these relics in the same way as we do modern relic worship.³⁵¹ Modern relics are worshipped because they allegedly belonged to a deceased holy person. For the Egyptians, the leg was a symbol of Osiris that could not have been part of the deity himself, because the gods were invulnerable and immortal. Moreover, if Osiris' members had been spread out over all of Egypt permanently, Isis could not have assembled and revived her husband. In one of the variants of the myth, Isis therefore left behind dummies of Osiris' members to confuse Seth.³⁵²

The tomb of Osiris in the First Cataract area was situated on the island in front of Philae, Biga Island, called in Greek the Abaton ("Αβατον), 'Untrodden Place', for it was forbidden for anybody except a priest to set foot on the island.³⁵³ Philae was closely linked with the Abaton: Isis was the deity on whose shoulders lay the burden of reviving Osiris, she was the giver of life, the protectress of Osiris, as she was the visible, active deity who could be worshipped in order to expect a good yield in return. Or, in the words of a hymn on the temple walls: 'She is the one who pours out the inundation'.³⁵⁴ The close link Isis had with the inundation of the Nile and the Osiriatic myth explains the popularity of the cult at Philae. Just as their son, Horus, was the lord of Egypt, Isis was the medium between the upper and the lower world, between life and death, between the now and the hereafter.³⁵⁵

In the gateway of Hadrian on Philae, two Ptolemaic decrees have been recorded in hieroglyphs which give us a clear impression of the cult.³⁵⁶ One of the most important rituals was the ferrying of Isis across the Nile from the gateway to the Abaton every ten days (the Egyptian week) to unite her symbolically with her husband and to perform the customary rites.³⁵⁷ Milk and water libations were poured and food

(Stuttgart, 1984; Eng. tr. *The Search for God in Ancient Egypt* (Ithaca and London, 2001) 149-77; Merkelbach, *Isis regina*, 3-22; Dunand, *Isis*, 15-20.

³⁴⁹ Plut. *Mor.* 357f-358a (tr. J.G. Griffiths, *Plutarch's De Iside et Osiride* (Cardiff, 1970) 145).

³⁵⁰ D. Bonneau, *La crue du Nil. Divinité égyptienne à travers mille ans d'histoire (332 av.-641 ap. J.-C.)* (Paris, 1964) 243-74; H. Beinlich, *Die "Osirisreliquien". Zum Motiv der Körperzergliederung in der altägyptischen Religion* (Wiesbaden, 1984) 209-13; D. Delia, 'The Refreshing Water of Osiris', *JARCE* 29 (1992) 181-190 at 182-5; Locher, *Nilkatarakt*, 104-13.

³⁵¹ See, generally, A. Angenendt, *Heilige und Reliquien. Die Geschichte ihres Kultes vom frühen Christentum bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich, 1997).

³⁵² H. Beinlich, 'Reliquie', *LÄV* (1984) 230-2, and "Osirisreliquien", 305-10.

³⁵³ The actual location of the tomb of Osiris was probably in a valley between the islands of el-Hesa and Biga, which has now disappeared under water, see Locher, *Nilkatarakt*, 171-3.

³⁵⁴ L.V. Zabkar, *Hymns to Isis in Her Temple at Philae* (Hanover NH, 1988) 51.

³⁵⁵ Winter, 'Philae', 1025-6.

³⁵⁶ H. Junker, *Das Götterdekret über das Abaton* (Vienna, 1913) 32-6, 80; Locher, *Nilkatarakt*, 165-74.

³⁵⁷ Junker, *Götterdekret*, 55-7.

was laid down for the dead deity.³⁵⁸ Although access to the Abaton was prohibited for pilgrims, they could watch the scene of the crossing of Isis from the colonnade that had been built in the reign of Augustus.³⁵⁹

In addition to this weekly crossing, there was also an annual crossing which celebrated the funeral of Osiris. The funeral was part of the festival which took place during the month of Choiak (27 November – 26 December), when the Nile inundation had ended, and lasted from 12 until 30 Choiak. The culmination point of the Choiak festival was the ferrying of Isis to the Abaton on 22 Choiak to bury her husband. Osiris was revived eight days later and this victory over death was celebrated with the ceremonial erecting of the *dd* pillar, a symbol of eternity.³⁶⁰

In symbolising the eternity of the cosmos through Osiris' death and renewal, the Choiak festival also had an agricultural aspect. The month of Choiak was generally the month of the completion of sowing new crops after the flood season, which started in July and ended in November.³⁶¹ To symbolise this, an image of Osiris was made from sand and corn, the so-called 'Corn Osiris', which was watered daily until the crops inside the sand had grown.³⁶² The victory over death on 30 Choiak therefore also symbolised the flooding of the Nile, and during the Choiak festival priests made offerings to Isis so that Osiris might produce a good harvest.³⁶³

In contrast with the Greek inscriptions, the majority of the dated demotic inscriptions of Philae are dedicated in this month of Choiak.³⁶⁴ They confirm that the Osiris festival was the most popular one at Philae. The same preponderance is seen in the demotic inscriptions of the fourth and fifth centuries. Of the twenty-four graffiti, thirteen contain an indication of the month, seven of which mention the month of Choiak. It therefore seems likely that the Choiak festival at Philae was still practised in the fourth and fifth centuries.³⁶⁵

However, these demotic inscriptions only rarely detail the ritual practices during the Choiak festival. Yet, an inscription in the Osiris Chamber on the roof of the Isis temple reports:

I am anointed for the cleansing festival (?), doing the services of Osiris for ever, in the year 90 of Diocletian (373). May I perform a great and good *proskynema*, and I will do for you (Isis) services according to their kind, like (?) as in the year named. I overlaid the statue of Cleopatra with gold. That the cool water of my father Harentyotf, scribe of the divine book (*pterophoras*), may live.³⁶⁶

³⁵⁸ Junker, *Götterdekret*, 12-7, and J.W. Yellin, 'Abaton-style Milk Libation at Meroe', in Millet and Kelley, *Meroitic Studies*, 151-5, emphasise the iconographical resemblance between depictions of milk libations at Philae and in Nubia, but milk libation was a general feature of Ancient Egyptian religion. Cf. e.g. R.O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts* (Oxford, 1969) § 734a-b: 'Raise yourself, O King! You have your water, you have your inundation, you have your milk which is from the breasts of Mother Isis'.

³⁵⁹ Jaritz, 'Westkolonnade'.

³⁶⁰ H. Altenmüller, 'Djed-Pfeiler', *LÄ I* (1975) 1100-5.

³⁶¹ Bagnall, *Egypt*, 20-3.

³⁶² C. Seeber, 'Kornosiris', *LÄ III* (1980) 744-6.

³⁶³ H. Junker, *Die Stundenwachen in den Osirisnysterien nach den Inschriften von Dendera, Edfu und Philae* (Vienna, 1910); Junker, *Götterdekret*, 57-8; Merkelbach, *Isisfeste*, 33-6; Bonneau, *Crue du Nil*, 368-70; D. Bonneau, 'Les fêtes de la Crue du Nil', *RdE* 23 (1971) 49-65; F. Daumas, 'Choiakfeste', *LÄ I* (1975) 958-60; F. Dunand, 'Les mystères égyptiens aux époques hellénistique et romaine', in F. Dunand *et al.* (eds), *Mystères et syncrétismes* (Paris, 1975) 11-62 at 21-5; Perpillou-Thomas, *Fêtes*, 129-36. Cf. É. Chassinat, *Le mystère d'Osiris au mois de Khoiak*, 2 vols (Cairo, 1966-8), who emphasises only the funerary character of the festival, on which see Dunand, 'Mystères', 21-2 (n. 43).

³⁶⁴ *I.Philae.Dem.*, p. 196.

³⁶⁵ Cf. *I.Philae* II, p. 27, and Rutherford, 'Island', 238, who base their observations on Greek *proskynemata* only.

³⁶⁶ *I.Philae.Dem.* 370.4-9. Cf. *I.Philae.Dem.* 369.5-6, 372.4-7. I would like to thank B.P. Muhs for helping me translate this passage. Griffith's translation of the last sentence is as follows: 'A true word, by the refreshment of Harentyotf, the *pterophoras* my father!' Cf. Trombley, *Hellenic Religion* 2, 227, who

Firstly, the name Cleopatra (demotic *Glpire*) attracts the eye. It was a common feature of the Ptolemies to identify themselves with Egyptian deities.³⁶⁷ Cleopatra III was the first to call herself 'Isis, great mother of the gods'. As appears from several literary and other sources, the most famous Cleopatra, Cleopatra VII, also identified herself with Isis.³⁶⁸ Furthermore, the so-called 'Alchemical Corpus', which contains quotations and short treatises from the first to third centuries claims that it was written by, among others, Cleopatra.³⁶⁹ This attribution would imply a semi-divine status for Cleopatra as late as the third century, and seems to support the identification of the statue with none other than the famous Ptolemaic queen.

Secondly, the acts of anointing and purifying were essential for the Osiris festival. People washed themselves ritually with Nile water in order to purify their bodies. Starting as part of the lustration of the deceased Pharaoh in the Old Kingdom, Nile water became associated with rejuvenation and immortality. The formula at the end of the inscription returns in Greek funerary inscriptions of the first to third centuries: 'may Osiris give the cool water to you', in other words, may he offer immortality to you.³⁷⁰ The dead needed life-giving water and water was poured for the dead, as this 'cool water' was associated with Osiris.³⁷¹ The dedicant therefore seems to pray to Osiris that his deceased father and brother may have eternal life.³⁷²

One decree gives the impression that more festivals in which Isis was ferried across the Nile were celebrated during the year.³⁷³ Priscus, too, mentions the transport in connection with the carrying of the holy bark to the land of the Blemmyes and Noubades, the Dodekaschoinos:

For at a stated time the barbarians bring the wooden statue to their own country and, after having consulted it, return it safely to the island.³⁷⁴

Bark transports, viz. of statues in processional boats, were common in Ancient Egypt.³⁷⁵ Because most of the rituals performed by priests took place inside the temple, processions like bark transports gave laymen the opportunity to communicate directly with the gods.³⁷⁶ During transport, people could see the statue being carried round by priests and consult it. The bark moved forward for a positive answer and backwards

refers to the figure of Cleopatra as 'perhaps a low-relief sculpture', although Griffith explicitly states that *Glpire* has the determinative of wood, and this cannot be a low-relief sculpture.

³⁶⁷ Dunand, *Culte d'Isis* 1, 27-45.

³⁶⁸ Dunand, *Culte d'Isis* 1, 42-5; M. Chauveau, *L'Égypte au temps de Cléopâtre, 180-30 av. J.-C.* (Paris, 1997; Eng. tr. *Egypt in the Age of Cleopatra* (Ithaca and London, 2000) 48. See now F. Muccioli, 'La titolatura di Cleopatra VII in una nuova iscrizione cipriota e la genesi dell'epiteto Thea Neotera', *ZPE* 146 (2004) 105-14.

³⁶⁹ M. Mertens, 'Alchemy, Hermetism and Gnosticism at Panopolis c. 300 AD. The Evidence of Zosimus', in Egberts, Muhs and Van der Vliet, *Perspectives on Panopolis* 165-75 at 166-7.

³⁷⁰ Cf. Delia, 'Refreshing Water', who gives a list of all texts with the Greek formula (δοίη σοι ὁ Ὀσειρις τὸ ψυχρὸν ὕδωρ). Other 'cool water' inscriptions from Philae are: *LPhilae.Dem.* 290.5-6, 301.2-3, and 372.5-7.

³⁷¹ R.A. Wild, *Water in the Cultic Worship of Isis and Osiris* (Leiden, 1981) 97-9, 123-6; E. Graefe, 'Die "Sonnenuntergang" zwischen den Pylontürmen', *OLP* 14 (1983) 55-79 at 68; P. Paminger, 'Das Trinken von Überschwemmungswasser – eine Form der jährlichen Regeneration des Verstorbenen', *GM* 122 (1991) 71-5; C. Spieser, 'L'eau et la régénération des morts d'après les représentations des tombes thébaines du Nouvel Empire', *CdE* 72 (1997) 211-28.

³⁷² Cf. Trombley, *Hellenic Religion* 2, 226, who interprets these formulae as petitions for fertility. Commemorations for the deceased are found more often in Egyptian temples, cf. e.g. Hoffmann, *Ägypten*, 228, with an example in demotic from Medinet Habu.

³⁷³ Junker, *Götterdekret*, 58.

³⁷⁴ Prisc. F 27 Blockley (= *FHN* III 318).

³⁷⁵ Sauneron, *Prêtres*, 98-104.

³⁷⁶ D. van der Plas, "'Voir" dieu. Quelques observations au sujet de la fonction des sens dans le culte et la dévotion de l'Égypte ancienne', *BSFE* 115 (1989) 4-35 at 11-6.

for a negative answer.³⁷⁷ Even then, however, the statue probably remained hidden from sight by a cloth or curtain, as we know happened with the statue of Amon that was transported from Thebes to Medinet Habu every tenth day.³⁷⁸ A well-known bark transport was the *hb shn* festival, in which Hathor of Dendara went to Edfu to be united with Horus.³⁷⁹ The bark transport to the Dodekaschoinos was possibly of a similar character.³⁸⁰

Is there evidence for a bark transport to the Dodekaschoinos in the inscriptions from this region? In an inscription from Dakka of 25 September 57, the *strategos* Abla decrees:

As regards the offering, everything that comes to the *wrk* will come to Philae and the people of Korte (a small temple nearby) (shall be caused to give?) two flagons (to?) the *wrk* of (?) Isis of Philae.³⁸¹

The word *wrk* has the determinatives for silver and stone, and seems to refer to some cultic object.³⁸² It may therefore well have been a statue of Isis that was brought in procession to the temple of Dakka. If this interpretation is correct, the procession may have been accompanied by a payment to Isis of Philae.

Another graffito from Dakka, from the third century, is a combined hieroglyphic-demotic pilgrimage inscription of the high priest of Thoth of Pnubs (from Egyptian *pr nbs*, 'house of the *nbs* tree'), a deity of Upper Nubia worshipped at Dakka.³⁸³ It mentions a procession of this god 'on the twenty-second of Epiphi, the crossing of Isis, the great goddess'.³⁸⁴ Although it is not entirely certain whether with Isis, Isis of Philae is meant, it is likely that the crossing of Isis of Philae is mentioned here in connection with the procession of the god Thoth of Pnubs on 16 July.

On the basis of this admittedly scanty evidence, it may be suggested that in the Roman period a statue of Isis was carried along the main temples of the Dodekaschoinos every year, possibly in July.³⁸⁵ The statue was undoubtedly carried by priests from Philae. A recent article argues on the basis of demotic ostraka that in the second century the priests of Renenutet of Narmuthis (Faiyum) provided the temples in the neighbourhood not only with ritual materials but also performed certain rituals themselves.³⁸⁶ The same may have been true at Philae, and the priests probably not only accompanied the statue, but also performed rituals in the temples of the Dodekaschoinos. The temples and bark stations at Maharraqa, Dendur, Tafa and Qertassi, built in Augustan times, of which we spoke in Ch. 2, may well have served this purpose. In return, the temples of the Dodekaschoinos seem to have supported

³⁷⁷ W. Barta, 'Kult', *LÄ* III (1980) 839-48 at 846; Sauneron, *Prêtres* 103-4.

³⁷⁸ M. Doresse, 'Le dieu voilé dans sa chässe et la fête du début de la décade', *RdE* 23 (1971) 113-36, 25 (1973) 92-135, 31 (1979) 36-65. Cf. D. van der Plas, 'The Veiled Image of Amenapet', in D. van der Plas (ed.), *Effigies dei. Essays on the History of Religions* (Leiden, 1987) 1-12, and "'Voir" dieu', 18-24.

³⁷⁹ See, most recently, H. Altenmüller, 'Die Fahrt des Hathor nach Edfu und die "heilige Hochzeit"', in W. Clarysse, A. Schoors, H. Willems (eds), *Egyptian Religion, The Last Thousand Years: Studies Dedicated to the Memory of Jan Quaegebeur*; 2 vols (Leuven, 1998) 2.753-65.

³⁸⁰ Cf. Rutherford, 'Island', 235: 'There is little evidence for this sort of practice in the sacred texts of Philae'.

³⁸¹ *LDak.Dem.* 12.8-10 (tr. Griffith, adapted, with thanks to B.P. Muhs, cf. Griffith's translation of lines 8-9: '(as to) each [festiv]al (?) which is held (?) the *wrk* shall come to Philae for his share (?)...').

³⁸² Cf. *LDak.Dem.*, p. 21, who suggests that the *wrk* is a treasurer.

³⁸³ H. Jacquet-Gordon, 'Pnubs', *LÄ* IV (1982) 1067-8.

³⁸⁴ *LDak.Dem.* 30.6 = *FHN* III 251. The procession is also mentioned in *LDak.Dem.* 33.5 = *FHN* III 245.

³⁸⁵ L.A. Christophe, 'Sanctuaires nubiens disparus', *CdE* 38 (1963) 17-29 at 28-9; C. Desroches-Noblecourt, 'Dieux et temples voyageurs de Dakka en Nubie perdue', *Archeologia. Fouilles et découvertes* 1 (1964) 8-16 at 14; Rutherford, 'Island', 242-3. Cf. the inscription, possibly from the reign of Augustus, which mentions the carrying of Nubian gods to Philae, *LPhilae* II 158 = *FHN* II 170.

³⁸⁶ P. Gallo, 'The Wandering Personnel of the Temple of Narmuthis in the Faiyum and Some Toponyms of the Meris of Polemon', in Johnson, *Life* 119-31.

the priests financially, thus continuing the traditional donations to the Isis temple at Philae.

It is as obscure what happened after 298. One of the few sources we have is Priscus, and his text is far from clear concerning the bark transport to the Dodekaschoinos. It seems that with the phrase 'Egyptians having charge of the river boat in which the statue of the goddess is placed and ferried across the river' the weekly, yearly or other transports from Philae to the Abaton are meant. Apparently, for part of the year the statue (ξόανον seems to be a variant of ἄγαλμα, and presumably refers to the same statue) was away from Philae and kept among the Blemmyes and Noubades.

This perhaps explains the statement in a demotic graffito from Philae of 373, also mentioned in Ch. 2, that the bark of Isis was away from Philae for two years because of a conflict between the Blemmyes and Nubians: without the bark, the cult of Isis was heavily disturbed.³⁸⁷ The transport alluded to by Priscus may have consisted of a journey to the other temples in the Dodekaschoinos, as was probably the case in the preceding period. Such a carrying around of the statue of Isis could have been accompanied by priests of Philae, and payments for its temples. Extra money from the Dodekaschoinos might have extended priestly life on the island considerably. Smet the Younger was perhaps returning from just such a visit when he dedicated his inscription on Philae with his brother in 452.

Other important festivals at Philae were the birth festivals of Isis and Osiris, which, traditionally, opened the new year. These festivals took place during the 'epagomenal days', which consisted of five days complementing the Egyptian calendar of twelve months with thirty days each. The gods were brought from the Birthhouse into the sunlight, which thereby symbolised their birth.³⁸⁸ The birthday of Osiris fell on the first epagomenal day (24 August), and that of Isis on the fourth epagomenal day (27 August), but over time, much variation in dates was possible.³⁸⁹ At Philae, we hear of the Birth Festival of Osiris in the combined demotic-hieroglyphic graffito of 394.³⁹⁰ The above-mentioned, third-century graffito from Dakka tells us that the high priest of Thoth of Pnubs visited the Birth Festival of Isis:

The year I was high priest I went to Philae ... on the fourth of Thoth, the Birth of Isis, there being a beautiful festival that we celebrated in the presence of the great mistress of the whole country, Isis, the great goddess, upon the court (*dromos*) ...³⁹¹

Some festivals that postdate the third century do not refer to the Birth Festival of Isis, but to other festivals (demotic ϣϣ).³⁹² However, like the Birth Festival of Osiris, the Birth Festival of Isis undoubtedly continued to be celebrated at Philae during the fourth and fifth centuries.

The son of Osiris and Isis, Horus, completed the triad of Philae. In a variation of the Osiris myth, also known at Philae, the crocodile, in Plutarch's version favourable to Isis, was Isis' own son, Horus, who helped his mother to collect together

³⁸⁷ *I.Philae.Dem.* 371 = *FHN* III 302.

³⁸⁸ For New Year's Day/1 Thoth, see F. Daumas, 'Neujahr', *LÄ* IV (1982) 466-72; Perpillou-Thomas, *Fêtes* 144-6.

³⁸⁹ G. Poethke, 'Epagomenen', *LÄ* I (1975) 1231-2; P. Kaplony, 'Geburtstage (Götter)', *LÄ* II (1977) 477-9; Le Corsu, *Isis* 136-7; D. Bonneau, 'Les fêtes Amesysia et les jours épagomènes', *ASAE* 70 (1984-5) 365-70; Perpillou-Thomas, *Fêtes* 66-71.

³⁹⁰ *I.Philae.Dem.* 436.13-4 = *FHN* III 306.

³⁹¹ *I.Dak.Dem.* 30.7 = *FHN* III 251 (slightly adapted).

³⁹² *I.Philae.Dem.* 207.5-6 (this festival is dated to 24-5 April), 411.4 = *FHN* III 253, 421.12 = *FHN* III 245 (mentioned in connection with the ferrying of Isis). Besides the meaning of 'dedication festival', with which Griffith translates ϣϣ, the term also has the wider meaning of 'festival', which seems more appropriate here. Cf. W. Erichsen, *Demotisches Glossar* (Copenhagen, 1954) s.v. (p. 56).

her dismembered brother and husband.³⁹³ Horus thus played an important role in the Isis cult, in which he was worshipped in the form of the falcon, his holy bird. The worship of sacred animals is already known from the New Kingdom, but was most popular in Graeco-Roman Egypt. In this period, it was common practice to keep sacred animals in temples. Like bark processions, the animals made worship more tangible for the devotees.³⁹⁴ The falcon was also worshipped at Edfu and Athribis (Tell Atrib). It was seen as the soul (the *bꜣ*) of Ra and as such connected with divine kingship: Horus was the successor of his father on earth.³⁹⁵

At Philae, both aspects of Horus, as protector and successor of his father Osiris, were incorporated into the falcon worship, as witness the hieroglyphs on the first pylon:

Horus the protector of his father, the great god on Biga, the wonderful falcon with sharp claws, who stands on his throne, on the seat of his father.³⁹⁶

The throne of the falcon (*srh*) has to be imagined literally, for the hieroglyphic texts inform us that when a falcon died, a new specimen was set on a throne in the same way as in royal ceremonies.

The place of this 'throne' of Horus can be exactly located. In his aspect of the soul of Ra, Horus had the horizon as symbol. The hieroglyph for horizon, *ꜣht*, consists of two mountains with a rising (or setting) sun in between. Since the Egyptians considered the temple to be a microcosm of the world, it is not surprising that they expressed the symbolism of the rising and setting sun in the pylon.³⁹⁷ The towers of the pylon represented the mountains with Horus of the Horizon (*Hr ꜣhty*), the rising and setting sun, in between. Indeed, in reliefs on the walls in between the two towers of the first pylon at Philae, gods are shown offering to the holy falcon. On this balcony, the falcon had its throne. Because there were walls on the balcony, the bird must have been shown on some sort of construction, called the 'Window of Appearance' (*sšd n hꜣ*). Just as at Edfu, the most important holy place of Horus, the falcon was probably carried in procession to the Window of Appearance every year on the first of Tybi (27 December), after the burial of his father Osiris and the erection of the *ꜣd* pillar. Here the new king was ceremonially crowned and shown to the pilgrims.³⁹⁸

At the beginning of the first century AD, Strabo describes the holy falcon of Philae:

Here, also, a bird is held in honour, which they call a falcon, though to me it appeared to be in no respect like the falcons in our country and in Egypt, but was both greater in size and far different in the varied colouring of its plumage. They said that it was an Ethiopian bird, and that another was brought from Ethiopia whenever the one at hand died, or before. And in fact the bird shown to us at the time mentioned was nearly dead because of disease.³⁹⁹

³⁹³ Junker, *Götterdekret*, 37-45, 79-80. Cf. Chassinat, *Khoiak* 1, 187, about the holy falcon of Athribis for a parallel.

³⁹⁴ Van der Plas, "'Voir" dieu', 25-6.

³⁹⁵ L. Kákósy, 'Götter, Tier-', *LÄ* II (1977) 660-4; D. Kessler, *Die heiligen Tiere und der König I. Beiträge zu Organisation, Kult und Theogonie der spätzeitlichen Tierfriedhöfe* (Wiesbaden, 1989); P. Dils, 'Les cultes des animaux', in Willems and Clarysse, *Empereurs du Nil*, 119-22.

³⁹⁶ Tr. after H. Junker, *Der grosse Pylon des Tempels der Isis in Philä* (Vienna, 1958) 77 (lines 12-4).

³⁹⁷ Finnestad, 'Temples', 203-4.

³⁹⁸ H. Junker, "'Der Bericht Strabos über den heiligen Falken von Philae im Lichte der ägyptischen Quellen', *WZKM* 26 (1912) 42-62 at 56-62, and *Grosse Pylon*, 73-5, 77-8; Graefe, "'Sonnenaufgang"', 68-9; Finnestad, 'Temples', 223. See now J.H.F. Dijkstra, 'Horus on His Throne. The Holy Falcon of Philae in His Demonic Cage', *GM* 189 (2002) 7-10.

³⁹⁹ Str.17.1.49 (tr. H.L. Jones, Loeb, slightly adapted).

At first sight, two of Strabo's statements seem to be supported by hieroglyphic texts. Firstly, its multicolouredness is often referred to in hieroglyphs which mention that the falcon has 'a beautiful face', 'a lapis lazuli-coloured head', that it is 'multicoloured' and 'malachite-coloured'.⁴⁰⁰ Secondly, that it was 'Ethiopian' (Nubian) may appear from a sentence such as: 'The living soul of Ra comes from Punt'.⁴⁰¹ From the Egyptian perspective, the mythical land of Punt was situated somewhere south of Egypt, and Nubia for that area was the general name.⁴⁰² However, epithets like 'multi-coloured' are standard formulas for falcon deities in Egyptian religion and need not necessarily indicate a different, Nubian falcon specimen.⁴⁰³ Strabo's explanation comes so close to the Ancient Egyptian symbolism attached to the falcon cult that he probably heard an 'official version' from Egyptian priests, out of which he moulded his own story.

Did the falcon cult continue into the fourth and fifth centuries? It certainly continued well after 298, for the probably sixth-century Coptic *Life of Aaron* that is the subject of Chs. 6 and 7 includes the story of how the early fourth-century Bishop Macedonius saw people 'worshipping a bird, which they called the falcon, inside some demonic cage' (ΜΑΓΚΑΝΟΝ).⁴⁰⁴ With this 'demonic cage' could well have been meant the Window of Appearance where the falcon was shown between the two towers of the first pylon. It thus seems that the falcon cult was still alive in the first half of the fourth century.⁴⁰⁵ Perhaps there is evidence that the cult continued for even longer.

At the back of the east colonnade between the two pylons, there are three Greek pilgrimage inscriptions that have long puzzled scholars since they mention persons with curious names such as Bereos (Βερός) and Tabolbolos (Ταβολβόλος), whose function is described as 'prophets of Ptireus'.⁴⁰⁶ One of the inscriptions is dated to 5 November 434 and the other two must also date to around 434 on the basis of the great similarity in handwriting and phrasing.⁴⁰⁷ The inscriptions are flanked by three drawings of falcon-headed deities, which may well be connected with the inscriptions. One of these represents a falcon-headed deity with a crocodile's tail, a palm branch in its claws, a lotus-flower at its back and a sun disk on its head. It rests on a pedestal.⁴⁰⁸

The picture betrays Nubian influence. To start with, the palm branch is typically Meroitic. Moreover, there are two falcon pictures from Nubia which are identical with the pictures from Philae, except for some minor variations. The first falcon-headed crocodile is found on the walls of the Meroitic Lion Temple at Naqa, the second example on a silver plaque, which originates from the 'royal' tombs at Qustul. Some scholars have connected the pictures and the inscriptions with the Blemmyes. In their view, the passage by Olympiodorus, in which prophets of the Blemmyes are mentioned, can be related to the prophets of Ptireus, and the pictures are so un-Egyptian that they must belong to the 'barbarian' Blemmyes.⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰⁰ Junker, *Grosse Pylon*, 73 (lines 12, 15), 74 (line 17), 77 (lines 9, 15)

⁴⁰¹ Junker, *Grosse Pylon*, 77 (line 6), cf. 73 (line 12).

⁴⁰² Junker, 'Bericht Strabos', 58-61.

⁴⁰³ See, most recently, J. Kenning, 'Zum Begriff *šꜥb šwt* – ein Zugang aus der Falknerie', *ZÄS* 129 (2002) 43-8.

⁴⁰⁴ Tr. Dijkstra, 'Horus on His Throne', 8, and for the translation of ΜΑΓΚΑΝΟΝ with 'demonic cage', see pp. 8-9.

⁴⁰⁵ W. Spiegelberg, 'Ägyptologische Beiträge III. Der Falkenkult auf der Insel Philae in christlicher Zeit', *AFP* 7 (1924) 186-9; Dijkstra, 'Horus on His Throne', 9.

⁴⁰⁶ Griffith, *Meroitic Inscriptions*, 48; *L.Philae.Dem.*, p. 59; *L.Philae* II, pp. 221-6; Zabkar, 'Hieracocephalous Deity' (= *Apedemak*, 106-17); *FHN* III, pp. 1143-4. The genitive Πτιρεως should refer back to a nominative *Πτιρεως, not to *Πτιρις, as *L.Philae.Dem.*, p. 59, suggested. See H.-J. Thissen, 'Varia Onomastica', *GM* 141 (1994) 89-95 at 93-5; *FHN* III, pp. 1142-3.

⁴⁰⁷ *L.Philae* II 190-1 = *FHN* III 315, *L.Philae* II 192.

⁴⁰⁸ See *L.Philae* II, Pl. 40.

⁴⁰⁹ *L.Philae* II, pp. 222, 225-6, followed by Frankfurter, *Religion*, 110.

The latter argument, however, is easy to refute for representations of falcon-headed hybrids are well attested in Egyptian art.⁴¹⁰ As regards the former argument, that the Blemmyes had prophets does not prove that the prophets of Ptireus were Blemmyan. Moreover, the names of three of the priests, Pasnous (Πάσνους), Pamet (Παμητ) and Panouchem (Πανουχημ) seem Egyptian, although Panouchem is not otherwise attested.⁴¹¹ Indeed, the name Pasnous is known from Philae and Elephantine only, and Pamet is one of the regional names derived from Egyptian *mdw*.⁴¹² Perhaps Panouchem was also a regional name. Thus, although the names indicate that they may have come from the region, it remains obscure who these prophets of Ptireus were.⁴¹³

Nonetheless, no scholar has yet connected these pictures and inscriptions with the falcon cult of Philae, in spite of the fact that the pedestal probably represents the throne of the falcon and the crocodile body reminds us of the version of the myth of the killing of Osiris in which Horus is transformed into a crocodile. Furthermore, the sun disc seems to point to Horus' aspect as the soul of Ra. In Egypt, the falcon-headed god most frequently represented is 'Horus who is in Shenwet', a protective god, but other falcon-crocodile hybrids are also attested.⁴¹⁴ The aspect of protection, however, is reminiscent of how Horus was worshipped at Philae. It therefore seems likely that the falcon picture portrays Horus of Philae, even though clearly inspired by Nubian iconography. The pictures and inscriptions suggest that the falcon cult at Philae, whatever form it may have taken, was still practised in the second quarter of the fifth century.

There were also religious associations at Philae until a late date. Although demotic and Greek inscriptions only provide evidence for associations from the first century BC until the first century AD,⁴¹⁵ one Greek inscription dealing with an association at Philae betrays a later date. In fact, it is the latest evidence for Ancient Egyptian cultic activities at Philae, for it is dated to 456/457. The beginning of the inscription is as follows:

When Smet was high priest, Pasnous, son of Pachoumios, in the year 173 of Diocletian (456/457) (dedicated this inscription): I am the *protoklinarchos*...⁴¹⁶

The title *protoklinarchos* (πρωτοκλίναρχος), 'first president of the association', probably refers to a religious association.⁴¹⁷ The tradition of Egyptian religious associations goes back to the sixth century BC, but even if the practices still remained largely Egyptian, the terminology of these associations and their social roles were

⁴¹⁰ Zabkar, 'Hieracocephalous Deity', 150-3. Nevertheless, Zabkar maintains that the prophets were Blemmyan.

⁴¹¹ *NB* s.v.

⁴¹² Pasnous: *I.Philae* II 190.1 (434), 199.2 (456/7); *P.Münch.* I 16.12 (c. 493). Pamet: *I.Philae* II 191.1 (c. 434); *P.Lond.* V 1722.60 (530). See *NB Dem.* s.v. *P3-mtr* (p. 375); De Meulenaere, 'Enseigne sacré', 236.

⁴¹³ Griffith, *Meroitic Inscriptions*, 48, 75, and *I.Philae.Dem.*, p. 59, connect the pictures and inscriptions with a demotic graffito on a nearby stone (*I.Philae.Dem.* 77), which mentions a certain Petearhensnufek, and suggest that Ptiris (sic) is a shortened form of this deity. However, Zabkar, 'Hieracocephalous Deity', 145-6, 149-50, already convincingly argued against this suggestion. Griffith's first reading seems more probable: 'Petearhensnufe (son of?) Bek'. See Thissen, 'Varia Onomastica', 94-5, for the suggestion of a Meroitic origin for the god Ptireus.

⁴¹⁴ Zabkar, 'Hieracocephalous Deity', 150-2, for an overview.

⁴¹⁵ *I.Philae* II 139 (13 BC); *I.Philae.Dem.* 36.5 (AD 46), 443.1 (AD 72). On the demotic graffiti, see G.R. Hughes, 'The Sixth Day of the Lunar Month and the Demotic Word for "Cult Guild"', *MDAIK* 16 (1958) 147-60 at 152-3.

⁴¹⁶ *I.Philae* II 199.1-5 (tr. after É. Bernand).

⁴¹⁷ Wilcken, 'Heidnisches und Christliches', 411-9; Otto, *Tempel und Priester* 1, 125-33; *I.Philae* II, pp. 250-1.

similar to other associations (συνόδοι) in the Graeco-Roman world.⁴¹⁸ In Ch. 2, we have already seen that religious associations were still active at Tafa at the end of the fourth century and at Kalabsha in the fifth century.⁴¹⁹ It therefore seems probable that Philae was building on a strong regional tradition. But whether Pasnous just bore the title or was actually presiding over a cult association, and if so what such a cult association looked like, must remain unclear. As the last sign of the Ancient Egyptian cults at Philae, we must now try to explain why the cults disappeared after 456/457, although Procopius claims that the temple of Isis was closed much later, in 535-537.

The Last Priests of Philae: A Mystery?

We have seen that the sources confirm the established picture of ongoing Nubia-oriented, Ancient Egyptian cults at Philae. They show that the cults were still alive and not only consisted of a hierarchy of priests, but also of rituals, festivals and religious associations. There are some possible indications that the cults continued even after 456/457. If we accept that the person mentioned in the Meroitic inscriptions on the roof of the Birthhouse was Smet the Younger, he is recorded as being a prophet in one of them.⁴²⁰ In view of the *cursus honorum* of a higher priest, Smet the Younger, who was *protostolistes* in 452, must then have been a prophet after 452.⁴²¹

Earlier it was argued that another Smet the Younger, the one who was not Smet the Elder's brother, probably lived at the same time.⁴²² A Smet the Younger with the same function and father is mentioned in a demotic graffito, the end of which has been translated as follows: 'Today, 10 Choiak, birth of Isis (?)'.⁴²³ Yet, the reading of the last group of signs is suspect, because a specification of the year would be expected after the date. Moreover, the writing of *ms*, 'birth', is unusual compared to the other occurrences in the demotic inscriptions from Philae,⁴²⁴ and the writing of 'S (?)', 'Isis' (?), does not resemble the writings of Isis in the preceding lines of the same inscription. On the basis of the facsimile provided by the first edition, it may read instead *h3 t-sp 90* 'regnal year 90' (373/374), a year date that is well attested at Philae.⁴²⁵ Alternatively, based on an earlier facsimile, the reading 'on 10 (or 30) Choiak of year 190' was suggested, which is 6 December 473.⁴²⁶ This reading has been rejected, but unfortunately we do not know on what grounds.⁴²⁷ The reading of the last line of the inscription has therefore to remain open and can only be solved by being checked on the temple walls of Philae.⁴²⁸

Finally, there may be literary evidence for a continuity of the Isis cult after 456/457. In 485, the fifth-century Alexandrian philosopher Marinus mentions 'Isis

⁴¹⁸ For cult associations in general: O.M. van Nijf, *The Civic World of Professional Associations in the Roman East* (Amsterdam, 1997). Cult associations in Graeco-Roman Egypt: F. de Cenival, *Les associations religieuses en Égypte d'après les documents démotiques* (Paris, 1972); M. Muszynski, 'Les "Associations religieuses" en Égypte', *OLP* 8 (1977) 145-74; B.P. Muhs, 'Membership in Private Associations in Ptolemaic Tebtunis', *JESHO* 44 (2001) 1-21.

⁴¹⁹ The title κλίναρχος is mentioned in the inscription from Tafa, *SB* I 5099.2 = *FHN* III 312, and several times in the inscription from Kalabsha, *SB* V 8697.2-5, 7, 11, 13 = *FHN* 313. Cf. the similar dating formula at the beginning of the latter inscription.

⁴²⁰ Griffith, *Meroitic Inscriptions* no. 117 = *REM* 0117. Cf. *I.Philae.Dem.* 237, 376; Griffith, *Meroitic Inscriptions* nos. 114, 116 = *REM* 0114, 0116.

⁴²¹ Although it is not certain whether he held the function after 456/7.

⁴²² *I.Philae.Dem.* 365.4-5.

⁴²³ *I.Philae.Dem.* 375.4.

⁴²⁴ Cf. *I.Philae.Dem.*, p. 153.

⁴²⁵ Cf. *I.Philae.Dem.* 369.6, 370.5, 371.7 = *FHN* III 302, 372.7. Thanks are due to B.P. Muhs for this suggestion. In this case, the Smet the Younger of *I.Philae.Dem.* 365 and 375 may not have been the same person.

⁴²⁶ K.H. Brugsch, *Thesaurus inscriptionum aegyptiacarum*, 6 vols (Berlin, 1883-91) 5.1008.

⁴²⁷ *I.Philae.Dem.*, p. 105: 'But this is not possible'.

⁴²⁸ Cf., however, the remark by Griffith: 'The graffito is now badly injured by modern names'.

who is still honoured at Philae'.⁴²⁹ However, this may well have been a rumour or description of an earlier situation. All in all, then, the suggestion of ongoing cult activities after 456/457 is not supported by conclusive evidence. So what happened to the Isiac cult over the next eighty years?

In a study on the 'Christianisation' of the Roman Empire, it has been suggested that the edicts against 'paganism' collected in the Theodosian Code of 438 may have affected the Ancient Egyptian cults at Philae. To support this hypothesis, a demotic graffito from Philae is cited to which the phrase 'the year of the evil command' has been added, and which dates to 25 February 439.⁴³⁰ These words have been interpreted as implicitly referring to the Theodosian Code.⁴³¹ However, the imperial edicts promulgated in the fourth century and the beginning of the fifth century did not have such a direct impact and were ideological rather than practical.⁴³² It is hardly likely that the effects of these edicts were ever felt at Philae, certainly in view of its special status where the Romans tolerated the Ancient Egyptian cults. 'The year of the evil command' therefore more probably refers to some local incident.

We should therefore not overestimate the dimensions of the Ancient Egyptian cults on Late Antique Philae. Pilgrims, once coming from far away, now probably came from the region. Only a small circle of priests occupied the highest priestly offices, performed the cultic activities and dedicated most of the inscriptions, which, moreover, decreased in number and were poorly written. The Late Antique cults had clearly considerably contracted.⁴³³ These features also indicate a weak position of the Egyptian scripts, and comparisons with similar situations elsewhere suggest that the knowledge of such isolated scripts may have ended abruptly.⁴³⁴ Amongst few others, the priests of the Smet family were the last to record their names on the sacred stones of their Isis temple. If the temple cults had still been alive after this date, we would certainly have heard more of them.⁴³⁵

The evidence thus points to a slow languishing of the last extant, major Ancient Egyptian cults in Egypt. This process did not start in 456/457, but its symptoms were already felt after Meroe declined as a driving force behind the temple cults. Consequently, Procopius' report of the destruction of the temples at Philae, somewhere between 535 and 537, on the Emperor Justinian's orders, could not have had the effect it claims:

Accordingly, Narses, (...) who was in command of the troops there, destroyed (καθεῖλε) the sanctuaries on the emperor's orders, held the priests under guard, and sent the images (ἀγάλματα) to Byzantium.⁴³⁶

Since there was not much to 'destroy', this event was more probably a symbolic closure than a religious turning point, enforced by the emperor. Nevertheless, Philae is the last-known site where Ancient Egyptian religion as an institution was still alive,

⁴²⁹ Marin. *Procl.* 19 (ἵσιν τὴν κατὰ τὰς Φίλας ἔτι τιμωμένην; tr. M. Edwards, *Neoplatonic Saints. The Lives of Plotinus and Proclus by Their Students* (Liverpool, 2000) 88, and 114 (n. 395) on the date).

⁴³⁰ *I.Philae.Dem.* 332.2-3.

⁴³¹ Trombley, *Hellenic Religion* 2, 232-3.

⁴³² D. Hunt, 'Christianising the Roman Empire. The Evidence of the Code', in J. Harries, I. Wood (eds), *The Theodosian Code* (London, 1993) 143-58; Frankfurter, *Religion*, 23-7; D.E. Trout, 'Lex and Iussio in the Theodosian Age', in R.W. Mathisen (ed.), *Law, Society, and Authority in Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 2001) 162-78. Cf. Trombley, *Hellenic Religion* 1, 1-97.

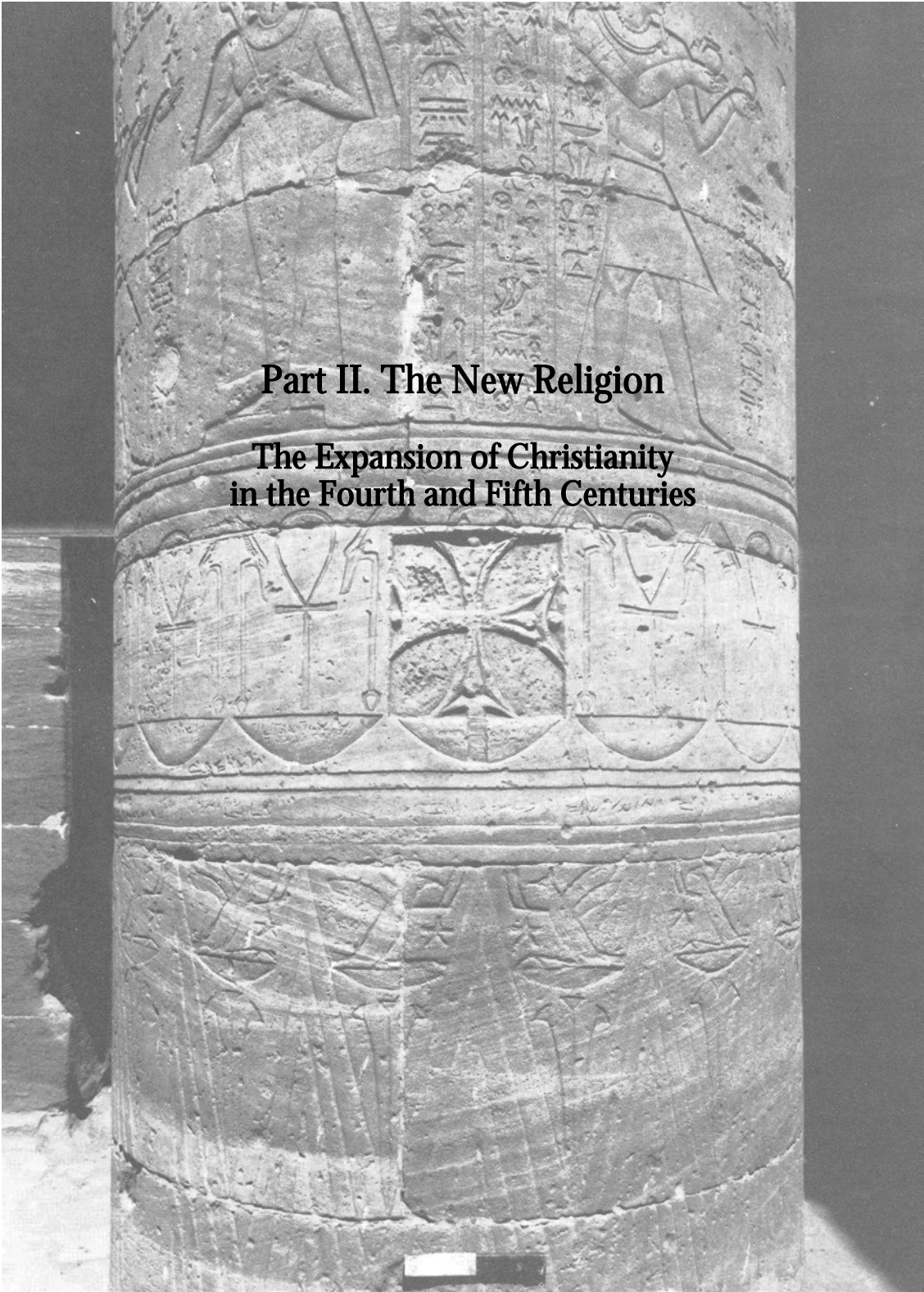
⁴³³ Cf. Trombley, *Hellenic Religion* 2, 226.

⁴³⁴ Houston, Baines and Cooper, 'Last Writing', 434.

⁴³⁵ Cf. Cruz-Urbe, 'Death of Demotic', 164, 181-4, who connects the 'death of demotic' to the destruction of the temples at Philae in 535-7, but ignores the question of why at that time no demotic graffiti had been written for 80 years.

⁴³⁶ Procop. *Pers.* 1.19.37 = *FHN* III 328 (slightly adapted).

and where the cults were openly tolerated. It was not a Byzantine general, it was the Smets who witnessed its end.



Part II. The New Religion

The Expansion of Christianity in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries

Introduction

Who is it that worked on whom you call 'Isis', so that he modelled her and you worshipped her? Is it not a human being? And are those people not human beings, who worked on all sorts of materials, wood, stone and everything else, until they made them into idols and shrines?¹ If Satan had not lured beforehand those people who model them, as well as those people who worship them, they would not have said they were gods! What kind of thing is the eagle, on which trust is put among you, just as on Isis, that lump of stone? Is it not a bird, and is the stone not cut off from a mountain?²

One of the most imposing persons in Egyptian Christianity, and the most important author of Coptic literature, was Shenoute of Atripe (c. 360-465), abbot of the White Monastery situated on the riverbank opposite Panopolis (Akhmim).³ In this passage from one of his works, Shenoute attacks the worship of a cult statue of Isis and that of a living bird, probably not an eagle but a falcon, as these birds were often confused in Egypt.⁴ Given the period when this passage was written (the end of the fourth or the fifth century), it is tempting to interpret it as referring to the cults of Isis and Horus of Philae, since these cults remained alive during most of Shenoute's life, if not during all of it.⁵ The text is an example of the Christian discourse against 'paganism' of the fourth century and later, in which an important theme was the discouragement of worshipping idols.

The motif we encountered above in the introduction to Part I, that of temple destruction, was related to the reproach of idol worship, and both motifs return in Coptic saints' lives. In the *Life of Shenoute*, attributed to his disciple and successor Besa and written after Shenoute's death, which largely draws on the writings of Shenoute, several actions are reported against idols and temples.⁶ It relates that Shenoute went to Panopolis to drive a demon out of a bronze statue; a fire from heaven expelled the demon.⁷ More actions took place in the village of Pneuit near Sohag, where a temple was destroyed and idols removed from houses.⁸ But Shenoute is best known for his confrontations at Panopolis with the local aristocrat Gessios, whom he also deprived of his private idols.⁹

Shenoute's *Life* is not the only hagiographical work in which the motifs of idol and temple destruction are represented. Two other lives were written, or in any case compiled, after the fifth century. The first is a panegyric on Macarius, bishop of Tkow, which is attributed to Archbishop Dioscorus of Alexandria (444-451). On the basis of internal evidence, the text can be dated to the early sixth century or later, although the parts on the life of Macarius may go back on an earlier *Vorlage*.¹⁰ In chapter 5, Dioscorus tells the story of the

¹ For the possible meaning 'shrine' of κω, see Crum, *Dict.* s.v. (p. 98), and W. Vycichl, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue copte* (Leuven, 1983) 71.

² G. Zoega, *Catalogus codicum Coptorum manu scriptorum qui in Museo Borgiano Velitris adservantur* (Rome, 1810) 599. Tr. after J. van der Vliet, 'Spätantikes Heidentum in Ägypten im Spiegel der koptischen Literatur', *RigBer* 1 (1993) 99-130 at 111.

³ J. Leipoldt, *Schenute von Atripe und die Entstehung des national ägyptischen Christentums* (Leipzig, 1903); Van der Vliet, 'Spätantikes Heidentum'; Hahn, *Gewalt und religiöser Konflikt*, 223-69. For the years of Shenoute's life see Emmel, 'Other Side', in Egberts, Muhs and Van der Vliet, *Perspectives on Panopolis*, 96-9.

⁴ E. Brunner-Traut, 'Adler', *LÄ* I (1975) 64-5; H. Altenmüller, 'Falke', *LÄ* II (1977) 94-7. See also Van der Vliet, 'Spätantikes Heidentum', 112.

⁵ Cf. Van der Vliet, 'Spätantikes Heidentum', 116.

⁶ For an overview see Van der Vliet, 'Spätantikes Heidentum', 101-9, Wipszycka, *Études*, 89-97; Hahn, *Gewalt und religiöser Konflikt*, 237-46, 254-7.

⁷ For the Sahidic version: Amélineau, *Monuments* 2, 644-7. Ethiopic: G. Colin, *La version éthiopienne de la vie de Schenoudi* (= *CSCO* 445; Leuven, 1982) 41-5 (tr.). Arabic: Amélineau, *Monuments* 2, 439-46.

⁸ *Life of Shenoute* 25 Leipoldt.

⁹ *Life of Shenoute* 23-4 Leipoldt. On Gessios see Leipoldt, *Schenute*, 180-2; H.-J. Thissen, 'Zur Begegnung von Christentum und "Heidentum"; Shenute und Gessios', *Enchoria* 19-20 (1992-3) 155-64; Van der Vliet, 'Spätantikes Heidentum', 102-6; Frankfurter, *Religion*, 77-82; Emmel, 'Other Side', 99-113. Cf. Van der Vliet, 'Spätantikes Heidentum', 103 (n. 20), who dates these events to c. 430, with Emmel, 'Other Side', 111-3, who dates them to c. 400.

¹⁰ D.W. Johnson, *A Panegyric on Macarius, Bishop of Tkôw, Attributed to Dioscorus of Alexandria* (= *CSCO* 416; Leuven, 1980) 8-11, on which see, most recently, S. Emmel, 'Immer erst das Kleingedruckte lesen: "Die Pointe verstehen" in dem koptischen Panegyrikos auf Makarios von Tkou', in A.I. Blöbaum and J. Kahl (eds), *Ägypten –*

worship of the idol called Kothos in the temple of a certain village, to whom children were sacrificed. Macarius wanted to end this practice and went to the temple with some notables, but the idol worshippers caught him. Shenoute's disciple, Besa, saved Macarius with a group of monks and the temple was set on fire. In the aftermath of the event, the high priest, Homer, was burnt, together with the idols found in his house. Afterwards many were converted to Christianity and a total of 306 idols were thrown into the fire.¹¹

The second story consists of two passages from the *Life of Moses*, who was a bishop of Abydos (c. 465-550).¹² Moses is said to have definitively ended the oracle cult of Bes, which we have already encountered in the incident reported by Ammianus. In the first passage, a temple of Apollo and four other temples were destroyed, and 30 priests died. Their children and the rest of the people became Christian.¹³ In a second, fragmentary passage, Moses marched with a group of monks against a demon in the temple of Bes. The fragment ends when the holy man has encouraged his fellow monks to enter the temple.¹⁴

There is much common ground in these stories. An influential holy man (Shenoute and Besa were abbots; Macarius and Moses were bishops) leads a group (usually monks) to a place or object of Ancient Egyptian worship (an idol or temple), and destroys it. Afterwards, many people are converted to Christianity. The examples come from fifth and sixth-century Coptic saints' lives.¹⁵ These passages, as is a common feature in hagiographical works, frequently allude to the Bible, most notably to the confrontation between Elijah and the Baal priests (1 Kgs. 18). In this passage, Elijah challenged a group of Baal priests to light a fire on Mount Carmel. Elijah won the contest through the intervention of Jahweh, who sent a fire from heaven. The motif of the 'Fire of Jahweh' returns in the stories of Shenoute and Macarius. The stories of Macarius and Moses even refer explicitly to the story of Elijah and the Baal priests, although the latter not in the passage of the idol burning but later on.¹⁶ As the connection between Elijah and the holy man is as old as the *Life of Antony* (c. 356), it is not surprising that these passages in Coptic saints' lives allude to the story of Elijah and the Baal priests in describing violent temple or idol destructions.¹⁷

Conversion by an act of a holy man appears for the first time in Egyptian hagiography in the Greek *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto* (c. 400). God instructed Apollo of Hermopolis in his youth to destroy 'pagan' philosophy and cult.¹⁸ Later in his life, Apollo, who was with some fellow monks, disturbed a procession, in which a wooden statue was carried through the villages, by sticking the people in the procession to the ground, including the temple priests

Münster: Kulturwissenschaftliche Studien zu Ägypten, dem Vorderen Orient und verwandten Gebieten (= Fs. Graefe; Wiesbaden, 2003) 91-104.

¹¹ *Panegyric on Macarius* 5.1-11 Johnson (tr. Johnson, *Panegyric*, 21-30 = Valantasis, *Religions of Late Antiquity*, 157-9). See on this passage Frankfurter *Religion*, 69-70, and Frankfurter in Valantasis, *Religions of Late Antiquity*, 156-7.

¹² On Moses of Abydos, see R.-G. Coquin, 'Moïse d'Abydos', in J.-M. Rosenstiehl (ed.), *Deuxième journée d'études coptes* (Leuven, 1986) 1-14, and 'Moses of Abydos', *Copt. Enc.* VI (1991) 1679-81; P. Grossmann, 'Zu Moses von Abydos und die Bischöfe seiner Zeit', *BSAC* 38 (1999) 51-64. Cf. Frankfurter, *Religion*, 129, 262, who places the events described in the work at the end of the fifth century, but apparently also dates the work to this time (p. 171), although it must have been written after Moses' death, that is, after c. 550.

¹³ *Life of Moses* pp. 49-51 Till (tr. Till, *Koptische Heiligen- und Märtyrerlegenden* 2, 68, cf. Ullmann, 'Zum Ende', 136-7).

¹⁴ *Life of Moses* pp. 52-4 Till (tr. Till, *Koptische Heiligen- und Märtyrerlegenden* 2, 71-2, cf. Frankfurter, *Religion*, 129-30), on which see Kákosy, *Selected Papers* 119-30 ('Der Got Bes in einer koptischen Legende', 1966); R. Schulz, 'Vom Schutzgott zum Dämon. Gedanken zur Struktur und Deutung der Bes-Legende bei Apa Moses', in R. Schulz and M. Görg (eds), *Lingua restituta orientalis* (= Fs. Assfalg; Wiesbaden, 1990) 311-20.

¹⁵ See, generally, A. Campagnano, 'Monaci egiziani fra V e VI secolo', *VChr* 15 (1978) 223-46; T. Orlandi, 'Letteratura copta e cristianesimo nazionale egiziano', in A. Camplani (ed.), *L'Egitto cristiano. Aspetti e problemi in età tardo-antica* (Rome, 1997) 39-120 at 107-10.

¹⁶ *Panegyric on Macarius* 15.8 Johnson; *Life of Moses*, p. 686 Amélineau (tr. Till, *Koptische Heiligen- und Märtyrerlegenden* 2, 68, cf. Ullmann, 'Zum Ende', 136).

¹⁷ D. Frankfurter, *Elijah in Upper Egypt. The Apocalypse of Elijah and Early Egyptian Christianity* (Minneapolis, 1993) 65-74, and *Religion*, 20-1. Cf. O. Chadwick, *The Reformation* (Harmondsworth, 1964) 336: "I longed", wrote the Jesuit Vilela in 1571, after he had seen the worshippers dancing at the Shinto shrine of Kasuga in Japan, "I longed to have had a second Elijah here to do what he did to the priests of Baal".

¹⁸ *Hist. Mon.* 8.3 Festugière.

who carried the idol. The holy man liberated them, after which they converted to Christianity and burnt the idol.¹⁹ In view of its popularity, this passage from the *Historia Monachorum* may well have influenced the later Coptic saints' lives, although these seem to have a more violent character. Such stories begin to appear in Coptic literature with the *Life of Shenoute* in the second half of the fifth century. Although it is beyond doubt that temples and statues were incidentally destroyed in Late Antiquity, and these Coptic saints' lives may sometimes contain 'authentic details', we must therefore be careful when extracting historical data from them. They should be approached primarily as literary works, written with an ideological agenda.²⁰ Furthermore, they say something about how a Christian author and public looked back on a 'pagan' past rather than that they reflect contemporary events.²¹

In Part I, we have seen that the idea expressed in some major handbooks in the field, that is, to relate the end of Ancient Egyptian religion to the closure of the temples at Philae in 535-537, needs revision. As in the rest of Egypt, the cults at Philae became increasingly marginalised after the third century, and were probably more dead than alive after the last epigraphical evidence in 456/457. Although based on an argument from silence, it can hardly be maintained that the cults were still thriving until the sixth century. Nevertheless, it was due to the special connection Philae had with Blemmyan and Noubadian tribes that Ancient Egyptian religion as an institution could continue into the fifth century. We will now turn to the question of how this regional development relates to the expansion of the new religion in the region during the same centuries.

As said before, in the fourth and fifth centuries Egyptian Christianity became increasingly organised until it had become an integral part of society by the sixth century. The form taken by institutionalised Christianity, the Church, was already visible to some extent before the Constantinian era, but from his reign onwards the Church became more powerful and gradually obtained a more prominent position within society. Although the lively theological debates within the Church may illustrate this point, they do not concern us here.²² Suffice it to say that Alexandria became one of the main centres of the Church in the Roman Empire. From this city, the archbishops, most notably Athanasius (328-373), strongly promoted the expansion of Christianity in Egypt. But, however self-consciously Christian discourse may have represented the new religion, the documents illustrate that Egypt did not become Christian rapidly over a small period of time, but only gradually in the course of the fourth and fifth centuries. Although the framework may have been laid in the reign of Constantine, it took a considerable time before Christianity took a firm footing in Egyptian society.²³

The organisation and gradual integration of Christianity into society can be traced in three developments that took place in Egypt as a whole, and the region of the First Cataract in particular. In the first place, the definitive organisation of the Church effected the creation of bishoprics, if not already there, in almost every Egyptian city and town.²⁴ A recent study has demonstrated that at the time of the Council of Nicaea (325) fifty-seven out of seventy-three cities and towns in Egypt (excluding Libya and the Pentapolis) already possessed an episcopal see. From 325 until the episcopate of Theophilus of Alexandria (385-412), this number slightly increased – sixty-three out of seventy-three cities and towns had an episcopal see, and another twelve sees were created outside cities and towns.²⁵ With the increasing organisation of the

¹⁹ *Hist. Mon.* 8.24-9 Festugière.

²⁰ Frankfurter, *Religion*, 22.

²¹ Van der Vliet, 'Spätantikes Heidentum', 99. Cf. Frankfurter, *Religion*, 21-2.

²² For a brief introduction see Bagnall, *Egypt*, 303-9.

²³ Bagnall, *Egypt*, 278-303.

²⁴ A. Martin, 'L'Église et la khôra égyptienne au IV^e siècle', *REAug* 25 (1979) 3-26; Bagnall, *Egypt*, 285; Wipszycka, *Études*, 139-56 ('La Chiesa nell'Egitto del IV secolo: le strutture ecclesiastiche', 1983); A. Martin, *Athanase d'Alexandrie et l'Église d'Égypte au IV^e siècle (328-373)* (Rome, 1996).

²⁵ Martin, *Athanase*, 17-115.

Church, the number of ecclesiastical dignitaries also grew: Egypt became filled with bishops, deacons and priests.²⁶

Secondly, the integration of Christianity becomes visible in the adoption of Christian names, which came to dominate, if never entirely replace, Egyptian nomenclature in this period. Although the question remains whether names can be taken as an indicator of the number of Christians in Egypt, it is evident that the number of Christian names increased considerably from the fourth century onwards.²⁷

The roots of the third development are to be found in the Egyptian desert. Whereas in earlier times people sought refuge from taxation, prosecution and persecution in the desert, in the Christian era they went into the desert, in the footprints of John the Baptist and Jesus Christ as it were, to find rest and to lead a contemplative and ascetic life.²⁸ The *Life* of the famous anchorite Antony, written by Athanasius (c. 356), became the model for the lives of holy men for many centuries to come.²⁹ Others, inspired by the father of coenobite monasticism, Pachomius, adopted a more communal (coenobitic) and less rigorous way of life in one of the many monasteries that filled the Egyptian landscape from the fourth century onwards.³⁰

How did Christianity become appropriated in the First Cataract area? Although we lack too many details, it can be said that the three developments mentioned created different ways for people to appropriate Christianity: by giving their children Christian names and by becoming associated, in one way or the other, with the Church or Monasticism. Therefore, in Ch. 5, we will try to reconstruct the organisation and subsequent integration of Christianity in the First Cataract area during the fourth and fifth centuries. When and where were sees created in the region? Is there evidence in the sources for an increasing use of Christian names? And is there evidence for monasteries? For the monks, we will turn to Chs. 6 and 7.

Chs. 6 and 7 is thus devoted to the Coptic *Life of Aaron*, which contains evidence for early monastic communities in the region and, especially, a history of the first bishops of Philae. This part of the hagiographical work includes exactly the motif of idol destruction, in this case at Philae, with which we started this introduction. As the *Life of Aaron* lacks a reliable and comprehensive edition, in Ch. 6 we will first discuss the manuscript tradition, title, provenance, date, contents, genre, authorship and intended audience of the work. With all this in mind, we will then pay attention to the history of the first bishops of Philae (Ch. 7). What does this part of the work say about the origins of the Christian community of Philae?

²⁶ Bagnall, *Egypt*, 283-5. For a list of bishops in Late Antique Egypt, see K.A. Worp, 'A Checklist of Bishops in Byzantine Egypt (A.D. 325 – c. 750)', *ZPE* 100 (1994) 283-318.

²⁷ Bagnall, *Later Roman Egypt*, Ch. VIII ('Religious Conversion and Onomastic Change in Early Byzantine Egypt', 1982¹), contested by E. Wipszycka, 'La valeur de l'onomastique pour l'histoire de la christianisation de l'Égypte. À propos d'une étude de R.S. Bagnall', *ZPE* 62 (1986) 173-81, and *Études* 66-7; and again Bagnall, *Later Roman Egypt*, Ch. IX ('Conversion and Onomastics: A Reply', 1987¹), on which see, yet again, Wipszycka, *Études* 103-4. Discussion summarised by Bagnall, *Egypt*, 280-1, and *Reading Papyri, Writing Ancient History* (London and New York, 1995) 85-9. See also G.H.R. Horsley, 'Name Change as an Indication of Religious Conversion in Antiquity', *Numen* 34 (1987) 1-17 at 10-3, and P. van Minnen, 'The Roots of Egyptian Christianity', *AJP* 40 (1994) 71-85 at 73-4.

²⁸ Markus, *End of Ancient Christianity*, 165.

²⁹ See e.g. Cameron, *Rhetoric of Empire*, 112-3, 181-2, and 'Form and Meaning: The *Vita Constantini* and the *Vita Antonii*', in T. Hägg, P. Rousseau (eds), *Greek Biography and Panegyric in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, 2000) 72-88.

³⁰ D.J. Chitty, *The Desert a City* (Oxford, 1966); E.A. Judge, 'The Earliest Use of Monachos for "Monk" (P. Coll. Youtie 77) and the Origins of Monasticism', *JbAC* 20 (1977) 72-89; Bagnall, *Egypt*, 293-303; Van Minnen, 'Roots', 78-80; Wipszycka, *Études* 281-336 ('Le monachisme égyptien et les villes', 1994¹); P. Brown, 'Asceticism: Pagan and Christian', *CAH* XIII (1998) 601-31; J.E. Goehring, *Ascetics, Society, and the Desert. Studies in Early Egyptian Monasticism* (Harrisburg, 1999); Rousseau, *Pachomius* and 'Monasticism', *CAH* XIV (2000) 745-80; M. Choat, 'The Development and Usage of Terms for "Monk" in Late Antique Egypt', *JbAC* 45 (2002) 5-23.

5. The Organisation and Gradual Integration of Christianity in the First Cataract Area

Until recently, it was believed that the spread of Egyptian Christianity was a gradual process that started in Alexandria and reached Philae, that bastion of 'pagan' worship, at the final stage.³¹ Thus, the new religion passed from region to region: first to the Delta, then to Middle Egypt and finally to Upper Egypt.³² In this view, the 'critical years' in which Egypt became Christian were during the first half of the fifth century, when temples were systematically closed, in Egypt starting with the destruction of the Serapeum in 392.³³ However, as we have seen, the main impetus to the organisation of Christianity in Egypt was already given under the Emperor Constantine in the first third of the fourth century. Consequently, the idea of a gradual diffusion of Christianity from north to south has to be discarded. This can be illustrated by discussing the evidence for Christianity at the southern end of Egypt during the fourth and fifth centuries.³⁴

Just as in Egypt in general, the Church had undoubtedly fully organised itself in the area of the First Cataract not long after 325. This appears from ecclesiastical documents, transmitted through the works of Athanasius, that mention bishops from the region.³⁵ In 346, Bishop Neilammon of Syene signed a list of ninety-four bishops at the Council of Sardica.³⁶ As is attested in a Festal Letter by Athanasius, a homonymous bishop succeeded Neilammon one year later, as the latter had died by then.³⁷ The creation of the diocese therefore dates back to before 346. As Neilammon is not mentioned in the list of new bishops in the preceding Festal Letter of 339, the bishop was probably ordained in the 330s, perhaps on the occasion of a visit by Athanasius to the Thebaid in 330.³⁸ The second Neilammon was banished to the Siwa oasis in 356 by the Arian Archbishop George of Cappadocia.³⁹

Another bishop of Syene was Hatre, who is mentioned in the Coptic calendar of saints, the *Synaxarion*, at 12 Choiak (8 December), and in two unpublished Arabic manuscripts, which contain a *Life* of Hatre with essentially the same information as provided in the *Synaxarion*.⁴⁰ All three texts probably draw on an earlier, Coptic *Vorlage*.⁴¹ Hatre was ordained bishop by Archbishop Theophilus of Alexandria (385-412) and died during the reign of Theodosius. It has been suggested that the epithet 'who loved God', added to the name Theodosius, must refer to Theodosius I (379-395), and, hence, that Hatre must have been bishop between 385 and 395. In support of this suggestion, a passage from the *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria* is quoted.⁴² However, in this passage the epithet is used for Theodosius II (408-450).⁴³ Nonetheless, the epithet seems to have been rather general and

³¹ E.g. Rémondon, 'Suprême résistance', 67-8; Trombley, *Hellenic Religion* 2, 205: 'The new religion took root at the great metropolis of Alexandria by the end of the first century and gradually spread to the smaller cities of the Nile basin'.

³² This is e.g. suggested by the title of Trombley's ninth chapter: 'The Nile valley from Canopus to Philae'.

³³ Rémondon, 'Suprême Résistance', 68-9; Trombley, *Hellenic Religion* 2, 206.

³⁴ Documents about Christianity on the southern Egyptian frontier have been collected by S. Timm, *Das Christlich-koptische Ägypten in arabischer Zeit*, 6 vols (Wiesbaden, 1984-92) 1.222-35, 392-401; 3.1044-9, and L.S.B. MacCoull, 'Christianity at Syene/Elephantine/Philae', *BASP* 27 (1990) 151-62.

³⁵ Martin, *Athanase*, 84-9.

³⁶ Ath. *apol. sec.* 49.3 Opitz 2, p. 129 (no. 184).

³⁷ Ath. *ep.* 19 (Migne, *PG* 26, col. 1430: *Ergo Syene pro Nilammone, alter pari nomine Nilammon*).

³⁸ See Athanasius' index of Festal Letters (*SC* 317, pp. 228-9).

³⁹ Ath. *h. Ar.* 72.2 Opitz 2, p. 222. See C. Haas, 'The Alexandrian Riots of 356 and George of Cappadocia', *GRBS* 32 (1991) 281-301. Cf. Hahn, *Gewalt und religiöser Konflikt*, 64-71.

⁴⁰ For the *Synaxarion* see E. De Lacy O'Leary, *The Saints of Egypt in the Coptic Calendar* (London and New York, 1937); R.-G. Coquin, 'Le synaxaire des coptes. Un nouveau témoin de la récénsion de haute Égypte', *AB* 96 (1978) 351-65, and 'Synaxarion, Copto-Arabic', *Copt. Enc.* VII (1991) 2171-3.

⁴¹ *PO* 3, pp. 430-4. On Hatre see De Lacy O'Leary, *Saints of Egypt*, 150; G. Gabra, 'Hatre (Hidra), Heiliger und Bischof von Aswan im 4. Jahrhundert', *MDAIK* 44 (1988) 91-4; R.-G. Coquin, 'Hadra of Aswan, Saint', *Copt. Enc.* IV (1991) 1190; A. Papaconstantinou, *Le culte des saints en Égypte des Byzantins aux Abbassides* (Paris, 2001) 224. The latter also mentions a monastery of Hatre in the Coptite nome.

⁴² Gabra, 'Hatre', 94.

⁴³ *PO* 1, p. 430.

cannot be used to distinguish a specific emperor.⁴⁴ Therefore, the dating of the episcopate of Hatre must remain within the years of the episcopate of Theophilus (385-412). From the *Synaxarion* at 11 Hathyr (7 November), three more bishops of Syene are known, Ammonius, who was ordained by Archbishop Timothy I (380-385) or II (457-477), and his immediate predecessor and successor, Valerius and Macrinus, respectively.⁴⁵ Whether they were bishops in the fourth or the fifth century must remain undecided, although it has been argued that the fifth-century date is more likely.⁴⁶

Through the Coptic *Life of Aaron*, the subject of Chs. 6 and 7, the names of the first three bishops of Philae are known, and they can thus be identified in ecclesiastical documents. The first bishop of Philae is apparently a certain 'Eusebius, bishop of Philae', who is attested in the *Annales* by the tenth-century Patriarch Euty chius of Alexandria, but this Eusebius of Philae is a mistake, probably for Eusebius of Caesarea.⁴⁷ The name of the first bishop of Philae, Macedonius, appears, just like Neilammon of Syene, on the list of the Council of Sardica in 346, so the diocese of Philae may have been created during the same visit by Athanasius in 330, or in any case not much later.⁴⁸

The second bishop of Philae, Mark, was banished to the Siwa oasis in 356 with five other bishops from the Thebaid, among whom was the second Neilammon of Syene.⁴⁹ In a letter to the Antiochenes in 362 Athanasius also mentions a 'Mark of Philae'.⁵⁰ Furthermore, the successor to Mark, the third bishop of Philae, Isaiah, is mentioned in a Coptic Festal Letter of 368.⁵¹ These attestations show that Athanasius, probably in 330, created two dioceses in the First Cataract area: at Syene and Philae. They also demonstrate that Christianity did not reach the extreme south of Egypt only at the end. Syene and Philae may not have been the earliest Egyptian dioceses, but they were created only five years after the Council of Nicaea, when the ecclesiastical map of Egypt was drawn.

However, documents illustrating Christianity are scarce for the fourth and fifth centuries. In Chs. 3 and 4, we discussed thirty-six fourth and fifth-century inscriptions, in both Greek and demotic, which have been found on Philae and testify to Ancient Egyptian cult activity, though languishing, until around 456/457. Additionally, seven inscriptions, though undated, have been adduced as witnesses to the Christian community of Philae before the sixth century.⁵² Most of these inscriptions, however, must date to the period when the Ancient Egyptian cults were no longer alive, so in any case after around 456/457, for the inscriptions were found within the walls of the temple of Isis. It is more likely that they date to the sixth century or later, as they were found in the part of the temple of Isis that was partly turned into a church in that century. Only a handful of inscriptions from other parts of the island can have dated to before this event, but unfortunately their dates are unknown.

⁴⁴ Cf. e.g. the Emperors Valentinian and Gratian, who have the same epithet in *PO* 1, p. 427. I kindly thank H. den Heijer for discussing this passage with me.

⁴⁵ *PO* 3, pp. 276-7. Macrinus directly succeeded Ammonius on the episcopal throne, as appears from *PO* 3, p. 277, where Ammonius says to Macrinus: 'Que ton âme soit animée d'un beau zèle, car je vois que les clefs t'ont été livrées', to which the following remark is added: 'il faisait allusion par là au degré de l'épiscopat après lui' (tr. Basset).

⁴⁶ Timm, *Christlich-koptische Ägypten* 1, 222-3; Gabra, 'Hatre', 94; Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, 137. Cf. *PO* 3, p. 277, and Monneret de Villard, *Storia*, 45.

⁴⁷ Migne, PG 111, col. 1005 (*Comites autem se Ario praebuerunt episcopi duo, quorum unus nomine Eumenius [Eusebius], Nicomediae episcopus, alter Eusebius Philae episcopus, open a Constantino implorantes*). See Martin, Athanasie, 88 (n. 240). Cf. G. Fedalto, *Hierarchia Ecclesiastica Orientalis II. Patriarchatus Alexandrinus, Antiochenus, Hierosolymitanus* (Padova, 1988) 654, and Worp, 'Checklist of Bishops', 305, who both include Eusebius in their lists of bishops of Philae.

⁴⁸ Ath. *apol. sec.* 49.3 Opitz 2, p. 130 (no. 218).

⁴⁹ Ath. *h. Ar.* 72.2 Opitz 2, p. 222.

⁵⁰ Ath. *tom.* 10 (Migne, PG 26, col. 808).

⁵¹ R.-G. Coquin, 'Les lettres festales d'Athanase (CPG 2102). Un nouveau complément: le manuscrit IFAO, Copte 25', *OLP* 15 (1984) 133-58 at 146 (IFAO, Copte 25, fol. 8a).

⁵² Trombley, *Hellenic Religion* 2, 237-9, wrongly refers to *LPhilae* II 227, 234, 235, 237, 238, 240 and 243 as 'pre-Justinianic Christian inscriptions', for they are generally dated to Late Antiquity. Similarly, Trombley remarks that *LPhilae* II 243 'suggests the existence of the new religion on the island in some form as early as the mid-fourth century', but Bernand only gives the reign of Constantine as a *terminus post quem*.

There remain two fifth-century inscriptions from Philae which commemorate the renovation of part of a quay wall. The inscriptions are similarly formulated, the first one being more detailed than the second one, and as the first inscription is dated to the month of Choiak and the second one to the month of Thoth, the renovation works probably took place in different stages. The first of the inscriptions starts by saying that the work was conducted ‘under the authority of my lord, the most excellent and courageous *comes* of the holy *consistorium* and the military units of the *Thebaici limes*, Flavius Damonikos’.⁵³ This Damonikos has the same title of *comes Thebaici limitis* on a wooden tablet now in the Hermitage in St Petersburg.⁵⁴ Furthermore, from a sixth-century literary source he is known to have died in a battle against the Huns in 468, where he is designated ‘*ex-dux*’ (ἀπὸ δουκῶν). This title probably refers to his function as *comes Thebaici limitis*.⁵⁵ The literary text therefore provides a *terminus ante quem* of 468 for the inscriptions. As they mention the indiction years 3 and 4, they have to date to the years 464 and 465 or, less likely, to 449 and 450.⁵⁶

The first inscription states that this part of the wall was renovated ‘through the zeal and goodness’ (σπουδῆ καὶ ἐπιεικείᾳ) of Bishop Apa Danielios. He is called Apa Daniel in the second inscription where he is said to have covered the expenses (ἀνα[λω]μάτων παρεχομένων).⁵⁷ Apparently, the bishop of Philae had taken the initiative for the project and had financed it with the consent of the highest official of the province. The involvement of bishops in secular affairs, such as urban building projects, is one of the phenomena that characterise the increasing power of the Church in fifth-century society. In the main, these initiatives were personally inspired and depended on regional and local circumstances.⁵⁸ The participation of Bishop Daniel(ios) of Philae in a local building project nicely illustrates the rise to secular prominence of the bishop.⁵⁹

Other fifth-century evidence for the co-operation of bishops with the secular authorities is the Appion petition (425-450), already mentioned in the General Introduction and Ch. 2, which we will now discuss in more detail.⁶⁰ It is actually a copy of Appion’s petition, accompanied by an imperial rescript of Theodosius II (*adnotatio*).⁶¹ It was sent to the *dux* of the Thebaid for execution, as requested by the bishop in his petition, and contains one of the few royal autographs of Antiquity.⁶² Like other Late Antique petitions, this document is formulaic in character, except for the *narratio*, which is freer in use and highly rhetorical in style. In this part of the petition, the case is set forth. Let us therefore reproduce the *narratio*.

⁵³ *I.Philae* II 194.1-6, cf. 195.1-4 (tr. after É. Bernand).

⁵⁴ *SB* IV 7433.1, 20 = *P.Ross Georg* V 30. See also Carrié, ‘Séparation ou cumul?’, 113-4.

⁵⁵ Malalas, p. 373 Dindorf. This reference to Malalas and the following ones are based on the translation by E. Jeffreys *et al.* (eds), *The Chronicle of John Malalas. A Translation* (Melbourne, 1986), which also refers to the page numbers in the *editio princeps* by Dindorf.

⁵⁶ *I.Philae* II, pp. 230-2; *PLRE* II, pp. 344-5; D. Feissel, ‘L’évêque, titres et fonctions d’après les inscriptions grecques jusqu’au VII^e siècle’, in N. Duval, F. Baritel, P. Pergola (eds), *Actes du XI^e congrès international d’archéologie chrétienne*, 3 vols (Rome, 1989) 1.801-28 at 823 (n. 101); Worp, ‘Checklist of Bishops’, 305.

⁵⁷ *I.Philae* II 194.6, 195.6-7 (tr. after É. Bernand).

⁵⁸ J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman City* (Oxford, 2001) 148.

⁵⁹ Feissel, ‘L’évêque’, 820-5; P. Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity. Towards a Christian Empire* (Madison, 1992) *passim*; Liebeschuetz, *Decline and Fall*, 137-55.

⁶⁰ *P.Leid. Z* = *SB* XX 14606 = *FHN* III 314. The first edition of the papyrus was published by C. Leemans, *Papyri Graeci Musei Antiquarii publici Lugduni-Batavi*, 2 vols (Leiden, 1843-85) 2.263-70, a re-edition, which replaced all previous editions, by Feissel and Worp, ‘P. Leid. Z revisé’. The most important discussions of the text are C. Wessely, ‘Ein bilingues Majestätsgesuch aus dem Jahre 391/2 nach Chr.’, *Jahresbericht Gymnasium Hernalis* 14 (1888) 39-47; Wilcken, ‘Heidnisches und Christliches’, 398-403; M. Gelzer, *Studien zur byzantinischen Verwaltung Ägyptens* (Leipzig, 1909) 10-1; Feissel and Worp, ‘P. Leid. Z revisé’; B. Porten (ed.), *The Elephantine Papyri in English. Three Millennia of Cross-Cultural Continuity and Change* (Leiden, 1996) 441-2 (no. D 19); *FHN* III, pp. 1138-41.

⁶¹ Feissel and Worp, ‘P. Leid. Z revisé’, 99-100.

⁶² The other known autographs are *P.Leid. G* 8 = *UPZI* 106 (Ptolemy X, 99 BC), and *P.Bingen* 45.16 (Cleopatra VII, 23 February 33 BC). On the latter document, see P. van Minnen, ‘An Official Act of Cleopatra (With a Subscription in Her Own Hand)’, *AncSoc* 30 (2000) 29-34, ‘Further Thoughts on the Cleopatra Papyrus’, *AJP* 47 (2001) 74-80, and ‘A Royal Ordinance of Cleopatra and Related Documents’, in S. Walker, S.A. Ashton (eds), *Cleopatra Reassessed* (London, 2003) 35-44. Cf. K. Zimmermann, ‘P.Bingen 45: Eine Steuerbefreiung für Q. Cascellius, adressiert an Kaisarion’, *ZPE* 138 (2002) 133-9.

Since I find myself with my churches in the midst of those merciless barbarians, between the Blemmyes and the Annoubades (Noubades), we suffer many attacks from them, coming upon us as if from nowhere, with no soldier to protect our places. As the churches in my care for this reason are humiliated and unable to defend even those who are fleeing for refuge to them, I prostrate myself and grovel at your divine and unsullied footprints so that you may deem it right to ordain that the holy churches [under my care (?)] be defended by the troops (stationed) near us, and that they obey me and be placed under my orders in all matters, just as the troops stationed in the garrison of Philae, as it is called, in your Upper Thebaid serve God's holy churches at Philae.⁶³

In line 3, Appion introduces himself as 'bishop of the legion of Syene, Contra Syene and Elephantine'. Although military chaplains were known in Late Antiquity, the term 'legion' does not seem to be in line with the *portée* of this part of the petition, in which Appion asks for troops to protect the churches in his diocese and for these troops to be put at his disposal.⁶⁴ For why should Appion want to ask for the protection and disposal of the troops of a legion if he himself belonged to it?⁶⁵ Moreover, a legion at Syene, Contra Syene and Elephantine is not attested in the sources. The *Notitia Dignitatum* (c. 400) only mentions a legion at Philae at this time, and smaller detachments at Syene, Contra Syene and Elephantine. It is thus improbable that Syene, Contra Syene and Elephantine together formed one legion less than fifty years later. Only from 493 onwards was a 'legion' stationed there, and this legion was at Syene.⁶⁶

The most probable solution to this problem is that λεγεῶνος (read λεγεῶνος) is a *lapsus* for ῥεγεῶνος, the Latin *regionis* not an illogical error in view of the context, in which soldiers play such a decisive role.⁶⁷ The term *regio* is used in contemporary sources for settlements that did not have the status of a town, but nevertheless had a bishop.⁶⁸ This would fit the anomalous position of Syene, which had all the characteristics of a town, but was not a town in a strict sense since it was not the nome capital.⁶⁹ It seems that Syene, being the largest settlement in the region, received the privilege of having a separate diocese. If the interpretation of *regio* for *legio* is correct, Appion's diocese consisted of Syene, Contra Syene and Elephantine.

The special status of Philae becomes apparent in that it constituted a second diocese in the region. It has been suggested that the bishops of Philae were *chorepiskopoi* (χωρεπίσκοποι), a kind of secondary bishops residing in villages who were subordinate to a nearby bishop, in this case the bishop of Syene.⁷⁰ However, there is no proof that the bishops of Philae were dependent upon the bishop of Syene. Rather, the Appion petition indicates that the bishop of Philae had attained special privileges earlier than the bishop of Syene, not the reverse. Moreover, the references in the ecclesiastical documents suggest that Philae was considered as a separate see.

The Appion petition also provides us with other important information on these dioceses. Both Syene and Philae are said to have 'churches', which makes it the first witness to such buildings in the area. Apparently, the soldiers stationed in the garrison of Philae already

⁶³ *P.Leid. Z* 5-11 = *FHN* III 314 (slightly adapted).

⁶⁴ *CPR* XXIV, pp. 90-105, discusses the evidence for ecclesiastical dignitaries in the Roman army without, however, mentioning bishops. In n. 28, it is stated: 'Sehr wahrscheinlich kein Militärbischof ist Appion'. Cf. Grossmann, *Elephantine II*, 26-9, followed by Arnold, *Elephantine XXX*, 20, who misinterprets this passage by inferring from it that there was no strong military presence in Syene, Contra Syene and Elephantine before Appion's request. However, Appion does not ask for more troops, but rather that the troops which are there should protect him and be put at his disposal.

⁶⁵ Feissel and Worp, 'P. Leid. Z revisé', 101.

⁶⁶ *P.Lond.* V 1855.7 + *P.Münch.* I 15.23, 25. The last attestation of the legion (λεγεῶν) of Syene is *P.Münch.* I 11.74 (586). The term 'regiment' (ἀριθμός) seems to have increasingly replaced λεγεῶν, an observation made by J.J. Farber and B. Porten, 'The Paternouthis Archive: A Third Look', *BASP* 23 (1986) 81-98 at 87.

⁶⁷ Wessely, 'Bilingues Majestätsgesuch', 45; Feissel and Worp, 'P. Leid. Z revisé', 101-3; *FHN* III, p. 1140 (n. 758); *CPR* XXIV, p. 97 (n. 28). Cf. MacCoull, 'Christianity', 152; Porten, *Elephantine Papyri*, 441-2 (n. 8).

⁶⁸ Feissel and Worp, 'P. Leid. Z revisé', 101-3, for an overview.

⁶⁹ For a list of other sees that were not situated in nome capitals, see Worp, 'Checklist of Bishops', 316-7.

⁷⁰ Cf. Worp, 'Checklist of Bishops', 317, who cites for *chorepiskopoi* e.g. Feissel, 'L'évêque', 804, 814-8.

protected the diocese of the bishop of Philae. This was not the normal situation, as appears from Appion's request itself. It seems that raids by southern tribes into his *regio* urged him to a direct appeal to the emperors.⁷¹

Although we have encountered only a few names thus far we have not found many examples of that second indicator of Christianity, Christian names. Three papyri from our region which date to this period and contain several subscribers may illustrate their increasing use. As it is problematic which names can be regarded as 'Christian', and our sample is too small to allow for a refined analysis, the best we can do is to look at how many names are certainly Christian and how they increase over time. In this approach, the non-Greek names from the Old and New Testament and a few other names, such as Martyria are taken to be 'Christian'. Originally Latin names such as Antonios and Viktor are counted as 'Greek' names, whereas Greek formations of Egyptian names are counted as 'Egyptian' names.⁷²

The first text is Papyrus Edmondstone, dating to 12 January 355, which comes from Elephantine and is now in a private collection.⁷³ The document, a manumission by the owner, Aurelia Terouterou, describes this event as follows:

... (I) have released you as free (persons) under earth and sky, in accordance with piety towards the all-merciful God, from now for all time, and in return for the good will and affection and moreover, for service that you have shown to me over time.⁷⁴

In this passage traditional and Christian elements seem to have been combined. Firstly, the phrase 'under earth and sky' (ὑπὸ γῆν οὐρανόν) is a variant of the formula normally used in manumissions 'under Zeus, Earth and Sun' (ὑπὸ Δία Γῆν Ἡλίον).⁷⁵ Perhaps the writer felt it would be improper to leave the names of the Greek gods Zeus and Helios in the formula and changed them into the more abstract 'earth and sky'.⁷⁶ Secondly, the phrase 'in accordance with piety toward the all-merciful God' (κατ' εὐσέβειαν τοῦ πανελεήμονος θεοῦ) is in itself unique but reminiscent of the opening phrase of Christian letters, 'I pray by the all-merciful God' (εὐχόμεαι πανελεήμονι θεῷ), the dates of which range from the fourth to the sixth centuries.⁷⁷ It is not clear if Terouterou was a Christian herself, nor can this be said of her husband, who wrote the document in her name.⁷⁸ In any case, of the persons mentioned, eleven bear Egyptian names, nine Greek names and not one a distinctively Christian name. The document may therefore show Christian traces, but this is suggested by the phrasing not by Christian names.⁷⁹

The next document, dating to the end of the fifth century, gives an entirely different picture. It is chronologically the first papyrus in the Paternouthis archive, to which we will come back in more detail in Ch. 11, and dates to 26 April 493.⁸⁰ The document contains the sale of a room and courtyard in the 'fortress' (φρουρίον) of Syene by Aurelia Thelporine to a soldier (whose name is lost) of the legion of the same town. Out of the twelve names mentioned, most of them subscribers, only two are Egyptian, seven are Greek, and three Christian. Moreover, the sale is written by the priest Phosphorios, who also wrote a cross

⁷¹ Cf. Brown, *Power and Persuasion*, 141-2.

⁷² Cf. Bagnall, *Egypt*, 280-1, and *Later Roman Egypt*, Ch. VIII at 110-2.

⁷³ *P. Edmondstone* = *P. Oxy.* IV, pp. 202-3 = *Chrest. Mitt.* 361, on which see R.S. Bagnall, K.A. Worp, 'Chronological Notes on Byzantine Documents, I', *BASP* 15 (1978) 233-46 at 235-6; Porten, *Elephantine Papyri*, 438-40 (no. D 18).

⁷⁴ *P. Edmondstone* 7-9 (tr. Porten, *Elephantine Papyri*, 439).

⁷⁵ E.g. *P. Oxy.* IV 722.6; *P. Kellis* I 48.4-5. See Wilcken, 'Heidnisches und Christliches', 404 (n. 1).

⁷⁶ Porten, *Elephantine Papyri*, 439 (n. 9).

⁷⁷ Porten, *Elephantine Papyri*, 439 (n. 10), with references. For this phrase in letters see G. Tibiletti, *Le lettere private nei papiri greci del III e IV secolo d.C. Tra paganesimo e cristianesimo* (Milan, 1979) 114.

⁷⁸ The statement 'Terouterou was clearly a Christian' by M.R. Jenkins, 'Two Christian Period Finds on Elephantine Island', *BACE* 9 (1998) 61-4 at 61, is overdone.

⁷⁹ Cf. *P. Kell.* I 48, which dates to the same year as *P. Edmondstone* (355), and combines the expression δι' ὑπερβολὴν χριστιανότητος, 'because of my exceptional Christianity', with ὑπὸ Δία Γῆν Ἡλίον.

⁸⁰ *P. Lond.* V 1855 + *P. Münch.* I 15 (tr. Porten, *Elephantine Papyri*, 443-6 (no. D 20). See Farber and Porten, 'Paternouthis Archive', 83-7; Porten, *Elephantine Papyri*, 443 (n. 1).

before his name, and two more priests of the church of Syene and another priest subscribed the document as witnesses.

Another document from Syene, written by the same Phosphorios, probably not long after 493, concerns the sale of a courtyard by the farmer Dios to a number of people (names lost).⁸¹ In this text, 39 names are mentioned of which thirteen are Egyptian, fourteen Greek, and twelve Christian. A deacon and a priest of the church of Syene subscribed the document, while four of the subscribers and the scribe have written a cross before their names. The number of distinctively Christian names, then, illustrates the increasing integration of Christianity in society, a development which can also be seen in the use of Christian phrases and crosses, and the increasing number of clergymen mentioned in the documents.

A final feature of the impact of Christianity was that monks filled the landscape. The fifth-century Coptic letter by Apa Mouses of Philae to the Noubadian chieftain Tantani, mentioned in Ch. 2, shows that monks were involved in the trade between Nubia and Egypt.⁸² Mouses informs Tantani that purple dye has been sent to him through another monk, Apa Hapi, and that pepper will be brought to the Egyptian town of Lykopolis (Asyut) through a third monk, Apa Paphnutius. The letter is Christian in style.⁸³ According to the author of the *Historia monachorum in Aegypto* (c. 400), the landscape around Syene was filled with monks:

What can you say about the Upper Thebaid, in the region of Syene, where even more admirable people live and an infinite number of monks? Nobody would believe in their ascetic practices, so much do they surpass human forces.⁸⁴

Despite the circumstance that no material evidence has yet been found of early monastic settlements, such a settlement can be assumed on the site commonly called the ‘monastery of St Simeon’, a site which originally bore the name of the bishop of Syene, Hatre (385-412).⁸⁵ Architecturally, the church within the monastic complex is dated to the first half of the eleventh century,⁸⁶ like two other monastic churches in the neighbourhood: the church of Qubbet el Hawa near the pharaonic tombs on the westbank of the Nile at Aswan (probably on the site where ancient Contra Syene has to be located), and that of Deir el Kubaniya, situated on the west bank 10 km north of Aswan.⁸⁷ The latter monastery was excavated in 1910-1911, but is now completely destroyed. From the texts and archaeological material found during the excavations, it is known that the site was called ‘the Mountain of Isis’ in Antiquity and contained a Ptolemaic temple.⁸⁸ The monastery was dated between the fifth and seventh centuries, but without conclusive evidence, and the typological arguments for a later dating are more convincing.⁸⁹

⁸¹ *P.Münch.* I 16 (tr. Porten, *Elephantine Papyri*, 447-50 (no. D 21).

⁸² Cairo, Coptic Museum inv. 76/50B [bis] = *FHN* III 322.

⁸³ *Contra FHN* III, p. 1175, it cannot be maintained that the phrase ‘God has appointed you’ makes Tantani a Christian.

⁸⁴ *Hist.Mon.* Ep. 1 Festugière (Τί γὰρ ἂν τις εἴποι περὶ τῆς ἄνω Θηβαΐδος τῆς κατὰ Συήνην, ἐν ἧ καὶ θαυμασιώτεροι ἄνδρες τυγχάνουσιν καὶ πλῆθος μοναχῶν ἄπειρον, ὧν οὐκ ἂν πιστεῦσειέν τις τὰς πολιτείας τὰς ὑπὲρ ἀνθρωπίνην ζωὴν ὑπαρχούσας; tr. after A.-J. Festugière, *Enquête sur les moines d'Égypte (Historia Monachorum in Aegypto)* (Paris, 1964).

⁸⁵ E. Somers Clarke, *Christian Antiquities in the Nile Valley* (Oxford, 1912) 95-111; U. Monneret de Villard, *Il monasterio di S. Simeone presso Aswân. Vol. I: Descrizione archeologica* (Milan, 1927) 9; Timm, *Christlich-koptische Ägypten* 2, 664-7; Gabra, ‘Hatre’, 91-2, and *Coptic Monasteries. Egypt's Monastic Art and Architecture* (Cairo, 2002) 108-14; Grossmann, *Christliche Architektur*, 562-5. The correct name is known from a stela and a recently republished *dipinto* from the monastery grounds. For the stela see Munier, ‘Stèles coptes’, no. 176.12-4 = *SB Kopt.* I 674. For the *dipinto* see J.H.F. Dijkstra and J. van der Vliet, ‘“In Year One of King Zachari”. Evidence of a New Nubian King from the Monastery of St. Simeon at Aswan’, *BSF* 8 (2003) 31-9.

⁸⁶ Grossmann, *Christliche Architektur*, 564-5.

⁸⁷ Qubbet el Hawa: P. Grossmann, ‘Ein neuer Achtstützenbau im Raum von Aswân in Oberägypten’, in P. Posener-Krieger (ed.), *Mélanges Gamal Eddin Mokhtar*; 2 vols (Cairo, 1985) 1.339-48; Gabra, *Coptic Monasteries*, 105-7; Grossmann, *Christliche Architektur*, 564 (n. 585). Deir el Kubaniya: H. Junker, *Das Kloster am Isisberg Bericht über die Grabungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien bei El-Kubanieh* (Vienna and Leipzig, 1922); *PM* V (1937) 218-9; Grossmann, *Christliche Architektur*, 560-2.

⁸⁸ Junker, *Kloster*: 7-14.

⁸⁹ Cf. Junker, *Kloster*: 23-5.

On the other hand, the dating of the church in the monastic complex of St Hatre on typological grounds is certainly in need of revision. A recently republished Coptic *dipinto* on the plaster of the southern wall of the northern aisle of the church, which dates to 19 April, 962, provides a *terminus ante quem* for the construction of the church.⁹⁰ Whatever the exact date of the monastic complex in its present state is, it must go back to an earlier predecessor, for monk cells within the complex, originally built inside ancient stone quarries, demonstrate a much older monastic community, whose wall paintings go back on the sixth or seventh century.⁹¹ Although material evidence for early monasticism in the First Cataract area is thus lacking, monasteries and monastic communities undoubtedly became part of the Christian landscape in the course of the fourth and fifth centuries.

By the sixth century Christianity had become fully integrated into society. This situation is hinted at, for instance, by the clergy writing and subscribing documents in the two late fifth-century papyri from the Paternouthis archive already mentioned. But evidence for the process that preceded these signs of a final integration is hard to come by. In 425-450, Bishop Appion of Syene asked the emperors to protect the churches in his see against raids of the Blemmyes and Noubades. Only two inscriptions from Philae can be ascribed with certainty to the fifth century. They attest to the supervision and financing of a building project by Bishop Daniel(ios) of Philae. For the rest, we are left entirely in the dark about the Christian communities in the First Cataract region.

It may be concluded from the few attestations that these communities were fairly small and insignificant, but the evidence from ecclesiastical documents and the *Synaxarion* speaks against this conclusion. They attest to sees that were already created in both Syene and Philae around 330 or not much later. Moreover, the bishops of both Syene and Philae took part in official ecclesiastical affairs. This appears from Neilammon of Syene and Macedonius of Philae, who attended the Council of Sardica in 346, and the second Neilammon of Syene and Mark of Philae, who were both banished to the Siwa oasis by the Arian Archbishop George in 356. Despite the lack of epigraphical evidence, it seems that the sees of Syene and Philae were not insignificant and that the framework for Christianity in the region, as in the rest of Egypt, was definitively laid in the reign of Constantine.

However, it was some time before Christianity became fully integrated into the society of the First Cataract region. The papyrus documents, although their number is perhaps too small to be diagnostic, show an increase in distinctively Christian names and other signs of Christianity such as formulae, crosses and titles, in the late fifth-century. An indication that the Church was becoming more powerful appears from the Appion petition and the inscriptions mentioning Daniel(ios) of Philae. These documents indicate that the bishop had gained an increasingly important position through co-operation with the secular authorities. In the meantime, Monasticism had also spread over the region. A hagiographical work about the fourth and fifth-century monks from the region is the subject of the next two chapters.

⁹⁰ Dijkstra and Van der Vliet, "In Year One of King Zachari".

⁹¹ Gabra, *Coptic Monasteries* 110, 112.

6. The Coptic *Life of Aaron*

A Manuscript and Some Fragments

The *Life of Aaron* is part of a tenth-century paper codex now in the British Library, London, and catalogued under the heading Oriental 7029, renumbered 163 in a more recent catalogue.⁹² The manuscript was acquired partly in November 1907 by De Rustafjaell (fol. 21), and partly in June 1909 by the Cairo dealer Nahman from Abd el-Nur Gubrial of Qena (near Dendara).⁹³ The manuscript is fairly well preserved, although oxidation has damaged the top and the bottom of many pages. The hand is neat but sober. Only occasionally can ornaments be found, such as decorated capitals or line divisions. The copyist used supralinear strokes, abbreviations, different colours and punctuation, but not consistently.

From the total of 78 folia, the *Life of Aaron* occupies 57 leaves (fol. 1a-57a), followed by seven lessons for the festival of Apa Aaron (ⲡⲓⲬⲁ ⲛⲁⲠⲓⲁ ⲉⲁⲣⲱⲛ; fol. 57a-61a),⁹⁴ the Prayer of Athanasius before he died on 7 Pachons (2 May; fol. 61a-67b) and a discourse on St Michael the Archangel ascribed to Archbishop Timothy of Alexandria (fol. 67b-75b). As most Coptic manuscripts of the ninth and tenth centuries are liturgical, the works were probably collected for liturgical purposes.⁹⁵ This is further suggested by the lessons accompanying the *Life of Aaron*. Moreover, the date of the festival of Apa Aaron, which presumably took place on the anniversary of the death of this saint on 9 Pachons (4 May), is close to that of Athanasius on 7 Pachons (2 May).⁹⁶ The phrase ‘after the foundation of this festival of the saints’ in the colophon (fol. 76a) may refer to such a festival or series of festivals.⁹⁷

The paper codex in the British Library is not the only manuscript of the *Life of Aaron*, for there was once an older papyrus codex, only a few scraps of which have survived.⁹⁸ They were discovered in 1987 when the new catalogue of Coptic manuscripts was prepared.⁹⁹ Thus far, the much-damaged fragments remain unpublished, but a recent, preliminary examination has shown that the difference between the fragments and the corresponding passages in the paper codex is minimal. On palaeographical grounds, the fragments can plausibly be dated to the sixth or seventh century.¹⁰⁰ A comparable situation exists for the equally unique *Dying Prayer of Athanasius*, which has survived in the same paper codex, and some older but textually inferior papyrus fragments in the collection of the University of Michigan, dated to

⁹² B. Layton, *Catalogue of Coptic Literary Manuscripts in the British Library* (London, 1987) 196-9. The first edition of the text by E.A.W. Budge, *Coptic Texts V. Miscellaneous Texts in the Dialect of Upper Egypt*, 2 vols (New York, 1915) 1.432-95, also contains a description of the manuscript (lvi-lix).

⁹³ Layton, *Catalogue*, xxviii, 199.

⁹⁴ Ps. 99.1-9, Heb. 4.14-5.6, Jas. 5.10-6, Acts 7.34-43, Ps. 77.18-20, Mt. 4.23-5.16, Mk. 16.1-20.

⁹⁵ T. Orlandi, ‘Literature (Coptic)’, *Copt. Enc.* V (1991) 1458-9.

⁹⁶ J.H.F. Dijkstra, ‘“Une Foule Immense de Moines”’. The Coptic *Life of Aaron* and the Early Bishops of Philae’, in *PapCongr.* XXII (Vienna, in press) 195-201 at 196. Cf. T. Orlandi, ‘Un testo copto sulle origini del cristianesimo in Nubia’, in *Études nubiennes*, 225-30 at 228-9, who suggests that the works were collected in connection with the flooding of the Nile. Note that Budge, *Miscellaneous Texts* 2, 1011, dates the festival of Apa Aaron to 2 May. The festival of St Michael the Archangel took place on 12 Payni (6 June), mistakenly referred to by Budge, *Miscellaneous Texts* 2, 1021 (n. 1), as 6 May.

⁹⁷ ⲙⲓⲛⲓⲥⲁ ⲑⲉⲓⲡⲱⲑⲉⲥⲓⲥ (read ⲑⲩⲡⲱⲑⲉⲥⲓⲥ) ⲟⲩⲛ ⲛⲓⲡⲉⲓⲱⲁ ⲛⲧⲉⲛⲉⲧⲟⲩⲁⲁⲃ, in which ⲑⲉⲓⲡⲱⲑⲉⲥⲓⲥ has to be read in stead of Budge’s reading ⲑⲉⲓⲡⲱⲑⲉⲥⲓⲥ. See A. van Lantschoot, *Recueil des colophons des manuscrits chrétiens d’Égypte*, 2 vols (Leuven, 1929) 1.198, 2.79. For this meaning of the word ⲉⲩⲡⲱⲑⲉⲥⲓⲥ, cf. Lampe, *PGL* s.v. ὑπόθεσις. The passages from the *Life of Aaron* quoted in Chs. 6 and 7 are based on the manuscript that I studied in London in June 2001. Later, I had at my disposal a CD ROM, kindly sent to me by T. Orlandi, and photocopies from the British Library. Translations are my own, and text critical signs follow the Leiden System (see Pestman, *New Papyrological Primer*, 15, and inside back cover). On supralineation see Layton, *Coptic Grammar*, 31-2. For a preliminary publication on the text see Dijkstra, ‘“Une Foule Immense de Moines”’.

⁹⁸ By ‘paper’, Oriental (Arabic) paper is meant, see Layton, *Catalogue* lix-lxiii.

⁹⁹ Layton, *Catalogue*, 172-3 (no. 150, pl. 21) = British Library Or.7558(89)(93)(150).

¹⁰⁰ Dijkstra, ‘“Foule Immense de Moines”’, 197. Cf. V. Stegemann, *Koptische Paläographie*, 2 vols (Heidelberg, 1936) 2, Pl. 8; M. Cramer, *Koptische Paläographie* (Wiesbaden, 1964), the dating being especially based on the writing of Ⲗ and ⲛ.

the sixth century or not much later.¹⁰¹ The fragments suggest that the text was written in haste and less neatly, which seems to warrant the conclusion that in this case, too, the later paper codex seems the more reliable source.

Unlike other saints' lives, which have survived in multiple languages and different Coptic dialects and have to be carefully scrutinised with regard to text and *Vorlage*, resulting in a complicated *stemma*, we can be comparatively brief about the manuscript tradition of the *Life of Aaron*: it has survived in only one complete manuscript in the Sahidic Coptic dialect.¹⁰² This is at the same time its greatest weakness, for we have to base our conclusions on a text that has been copied for centuries but cannot be compared with other transmitted texts. It is often hard to decide whether a phrase or line is original, corrupt or a later addition. Indeed, testimonies to its chequered history abound in the transmitted text, including scribal errors, the frequent interchange of personal pronouns, sudden shifts of narrative voice and downright errors in the story. To mention just one example:

Truly, my children, for not only did your holy father (Bishop Macedonius) lay down the foundation, {but he built until he finished the foundation} but he built until he finished it and gave it the crown (fol. 26b).¹⁰³

In this sentence, the copyist mistakenly wrote 'but he built until he finished the foundation', a word that needed no repetition, and then started the phrase again: 'but he built until he finished it'. Clearly, the phrase in between has to be deleted.

Manuscript Evidence and Date of Composition

The major saints mentioned in the colophon of the paper codex are Aaron, Athanasius and Michael. Given the prominent place of Apa Aaron, there is no doubt that the title of the first work in the manuscript must have been the *Life of Aaron*, although we know from the ancient pagination that the first leaf, which usually contains the title page, is lost. Indeed, in the conclusion (fol. 57a) the *Life of Aaron* is described thus:

This is the life of the holy anchorite of Philae, Apa Aaron, who finished his course in the desert east of Philae.¹⁰⁴

Furthermore, the entire work is centred around Apa Aaron. The first section (fol. 1a-10b) describing the ascetic life of several other monks in the region is only a prelude to the great deeds of Aaron himself in section three (fol. 37b-57a). At the start of section 2 (fol. 10b-37b), Aaron is represented as having heard the story of the first bishop of Philae from him personally. Moreover, at the end of the work Aaron is buried next to the first three bishops, which implies that the holy man's sanctity equals that of the bishops of Philae. And when Aaron is about to die, a choir of angels sings for him, a feature which can also be found in other saints' lives.¹⁰⁵ There is, then, every reason to discard modern titles given to the work, such as *Histories of the Monks in the Egyptian Desert* and *Stories of the Monks of the Desert*,

¹⁰¹ E.M. Husselman, 'The Martyrdom of Saint Phocas and the Dying Prayer of Athanasius. Fragments from a Coptic Papyrus Codex', in *Coptic Studies in Honor of W.E. Crum* (Boston, 1950) 319-37.

¹⁰² Cf. L.D. Reynolds, N.G. Wilson, *Scribes and Scholars. A Guide to the Transmission of Greek and Latin Literature* (Oxford, 1991³) 207-41.

¹⁰³ ⲱⲛⲧⲱⲤ ⲛⲁⲱⲏⲣⲉ ⲭⲉ ⲟⲩⲙⲟⲛⲟⲛ ⲭⲉ ⲁⲛⲉⲧⲛⲉⲓⲱⲧ ⲉⲧⲟⲩⲁⲁⲃ ⲕⲱ ⲉⲣⲣⲁⲓ ⲛⲧⲥⲏⲧⲉ {ⲁⲗⲗⲁ ⲁⲕⲣⲱⲧ ⲱⲁⲛⲧⲉⲕⲭⲱⲕ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲛⲧⲥⲏⲧⲉ} ⲁⲗⲗⲁ ⲁⲕⲣⲱⲧ ⲱⲁⲛⲧⲉⲕⲭⲱⲕⲥ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲛⲓⲕⲧⲓⲁⲱⲃⲱ. Cf. Budge, *Miscellaneous Texts* 2, 974, who did not recognise this copying error.

¹⁰⁴ ⲡⲁⲓ ⲛⲉ ⲡⲓⲟⲥ ⲛⲓⲡⲉⲧⲟⲩⲁⲁⲃ ⲛⲁⲛⲁⲭⲱⲣⲏⲧⲏⲥ ⲛⲣⲏⲡⲓⲁⲕ ⲁⲡⲁ ⲉⲁⲕⲭⲉⲕ ⲡⲉⲕⲁⲣⲟⲙⲟⲥ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲉⲃⲓⲡⲧⲟⲟⲩ ⲛⲓⲡⲉⲓⲉⲃⲧ ⲛⲓⲡⲉⲓⲁⲕ. For the metaphor of ascetic life as an athletic contest, see e.g. Marc. Diac. v. *Porph.* 1. Cf. M. Sheridan, 'Il mondo spirituale e intellettuale del primo monachesimo egiziano', in Camplani, *Egitto cristiano*, 177-216 at 203.

¹⁰⁵ E.g. the *Life of Onnophrius*, fol. 15a.

which are merely descriptions of its contents, and we will refer here to the work as the *Life of Aaron*.¹⁰⁶

The colophon (fol. 76a-77a) is also informative about the provenance of the work. It relates that a certain Zocrator, son of Joseph, the archdeacon of the church of Esna, copied the manuscript and that a deacon donated it to the *topos* of Apa Aaron in the desert at Edfu (ΠΤΟΠΟΣ ΝΑΠΑ ΖΑΡΩ(Ν) ΖΗΠΤΟΟΥ ΝΤΡΩ).¹⁰⁷ In this respect, it belongs to a group of twenty-one paper and parchment codices of the tenth and eleventh centuries, which were mainly copied at Esna and delivered to Edfu (the 'Edfu collection').¹⁰⁸ The papyrus scraps of the other manuscript of the *Life of Aaron* were reused in bindings of these manuscripts in the Edfu collection.¹⁰⁹ It is therefore perfectly possible that both the paper and the papyrus codex come from Edfu.

After the date (20 Epeiph, that is, 14 July 992), Zokrator also includes a prayer for his brother Diomites, with whom he wrote the manuscript.¹¹⁰ There follows a second dating and a miracle that took place:

In the year in which we wrote this book, that is, the 708th year (of the Era of Diocletian, i.e. AD 992) and the 382nd year of the Saracens (AD 992), a great miracle happened in connection with the rise of the water of the river (Nile). On 15 Mesore (8 August) we were taxed on a cubit of water. Afterwards it (the river) receded until it receded two cubits of water (fol. 76b).¹¹¹

Because the text is fragmentary after this passage it is not clear what exactly had happened, but apparently the Nile level was fixed on 8 August for taxation purposes and receded more than expected, thus causing great distress.¹¹² Through the intercession of Mary, however, a miracle happened, and after the manuscript was completed on 14 July, the passage about this miracle was added to the manuscript, probably not long after 8 August.¹¹³

To sum up, a complete manuscript dating to 992 survives, which was donated to a shrine of Apa Aaron in Edfu for liturgical purposes. Besides the shrine of Apa Aaron, there was also a festival of Aaron, probably on 4 May. What can we say further about the manuscript tradition of the *Life of Aaron*? In the cathedral of Faras, the capital of the Christian Kingdom of Noubadia, a wall painting has been found dating to the end of the tenth or the beginning of the eleventh century. The painting contains a mixed Greek/Coptic inscription, which mentions ΑΒΒΑ Ζ[ΑΡΩΝ...ΑΝΑΧ]ΩΡΙΤΗΣ, and underneath the painting an invocation of the saint, ΑΒΒΑ ΖΑΡΩΝ.¹¹⁴ Evidently, Apa Aaron was venerated as a saint in Faras and Edfu in the tenth century. If he was venerated further north as well, is unknown. An Apa Horon is mentioned on a papyrus from Old Cairo, and a St Apa Aaron, though the name is restored, in Karnak, but this is insufficient proof that Apa Aaron of Philae was worshipped north of

¹⁰⁶ Budge, *Miscellaneous Texts* 1, lviii; Layton, *Catalogue*, 196.

¹⁰⁷ Van Lantschoot, *Recueil des colophons* 1, 197-200; 2, 79-80 (no. 113).

¹⁰⁸ R. de Rustafjaell, *The Light of Egypt from Recently Discovered Predynastic and Early Christian Records* (London, 1909) 3-6, 108; Layton, *Catalogue*, xxvii-xxx. Cf., however, the cautious remark by Layton, *Catalogue*, xxvii: 'The unity of this collection is at best artificial'.

¹⁰⁹ Layton, *Catalogue*, 173.

¹¹⁰ There is no letter after the κ indicating the day, as Budge assumed, so the date must be 20 Epeiph (14 July). See Van Lantschoot, *Recueil des colophons* 1, 199; 2, 79.

¹¹¹ ΠΤΑΝΣΡΑΙ ΠΕΙΧΩΜΕ ΖΗΠΤΡΟΠΠΕ ΤΑΙ ΨΗ ΣΑΡΑΓΙΝΟΥ ΤΩΒ (read ΤΠΒ ?) ΑΥΝΟΣ ΠΩΠΗΡΕ ΩΠΠΕ ΖΗΤΑΝΑΒΑΣΙΣ ΠΠΕΙΕΡΟ ΠΠΟΟΥ. ΖΗΠΟΥ ΜΠΤΗ ΜΕΝ ΠΠΕΣΟΥΡΗ ΑΥΣΥΝΤΑΖΕ ΠΑΝ ΕΡΟΥ ΕΥΜΑΖΕ ΠΠΟΟΥ. ΜΠΠΣΩΣ ΑΩΩΠΠΗ ΩΑΝΤΕΩΩΠΠΗ ΣΝΑΥ ΠΠΑΖΕ ΠΠΟΟΥ. Following Van Lantschoot, *Recueil des colophons* 1, 199; 2, 80, ΤΠΒ needs to be read for ΤΩΒ, rather than Budge's ΤΩΒ, and the Coptic has ΑΥΣΥΝΤΑΖΕ instead of Budge's ΑΥΣΥΝΤΑΖΕ.

¹¹² For taxation and the Nile inundation see D. Bonneau, *Le fisc et le Nil: incidences des irrégularités de la crue du Nil sur la fiscalité foncière dans l'Égypte grecque et romaine* (Paris, 1971).

¹¹³ Van Lantschoot, *Recueil des colophons* 2, 80. Cf. Budge, *Miscellaneous Texts* 2, 1033 (n. 3).

¹¹⁴ K. Michałowski, *Faras, die Kathedrale aus dem Wüstensand* (Einsiedeln, 1967) 126-7 (Fig. 46); J. Kubinska, *Faras IV. Inscriptions grecques chrétiennes* (Warsaw, 1974) 146-8 (Fig. 81-2); K. Michałowski, *Faras. Wall Paintings in the Collection of the National Museum in Warsaw* (Warsaw, 1974) 46, 58, 219-21, 289; M. Martens-Czarnecka, *Faras VII. Les éléments décoratifs sur les peintures de la Cathédrale de Faras* (Warsaw, 1982) 64 (Fig. 96); A. Łukaszewicz, 'En marge d'une image de l'anachorète Aaron dans la cathédrale de Faras', *Nubia christiana* 1 (1982) 192-211.

Modern Scholarship

The first edition of the *Life of Aaron* appeared in 1915 as part of a series of publications of Coptic literary manuscripts in the British Library. Its editor, Sir E.A. Wallis Budge (1857-1934), set the stage for further research by providing the scholarly world with a description, summary, text and translation of the manuscript.¹²⁴ Budge has been generally criticised for his – according to modern standards – superficial treatment of the text and at times astonishing mistakes.¹²⁵ However, it was not Budge's intention to publish a definitive edition of the texts:

The chief object of the publication of this pioneer edition of the Edfu manuscripts is to make accessible as quickly as possible the information contained in them. Its plan and scope rendered it impossible to treat adequately the numerous points concerning the history, theology, mythology, eschatology, folklore, manners and customs, philology, &c., with which these texts abound. Even were a single editor capable of the task, any serious attempt to perform it must have doubled the number of volumes in the series, and delayed for several years the publication as a whole of this most important collection of ecclesiastical documents.¹²⁶

Budge's intention, then, was to make the texts available without delay; the remaining problems were left to the specialists.

It was nine years before the importance of the *Life of Aaron* was recognised. In 1924, the demotist Wilhelm Spiegelberg (1870-1930) published a short article in which he took the *Life of Aaron* as evidence for the existence of the cult of the holy falcon at Philae in the fourth century.¹²⁷ At the end of his article, he made another important observation about the origins of Christianity at Philae, which had been discussed among scholars for a considerable time.¹²⁸ Object of debate was the already mentioned letter by Athanasius to the Antiochenes in which 'Mark of Philae' (Μάρκος Φιλῶν) was mentioned.¹²⁹ At first this reading was rejected, for only bishops of Lower Egypt had signed the letter and Philae was apparently still entirely 'pagan'. Therefore, it was proposed to emend 'Mark of Silae' (a place in the Delta). It was Wilcken who argued that in the fifth century a Christian community had lived on Philae side by side with worshippers of the Isis cult and that Christianity may have reached back into the fourth century, making the conjecture unnecessary.¹³⁰ Spiegelberg confirmed this assumption on the basis of the *Life of Aaron*. For years to come, the insight that the work was an important source for early Christianity at Philae was prevalent. This appears from encyclopaedic and other general articles on Christianity at Philae.¹³¹ In other publications, the *Life of Aaron* was cited in connection with the Christianisation of Nubia, because Apa Aaron converted some local Nubians to Christianity.¹³²

With this knowledge in mind, it is the more surprising that thus far no scholar has tried to improve the Coptic text, and that Budge's edition is still considered the standard edition. An Italian translation of the text with an introduction and some improvements to the translation by Budge has been published, however without accounting for the Coptic.¹³³ Even a

¹²⁴ Budge, *Miscellaneous Texts* 1, lvi-lix (description); cxliv-clvi (summary); 432-95 (text); 2, 948-1011 (tr.).

¹²⁵ For some examples in the *Life of Aaron*, see Dijkstra, "Une foule immense de moines", 197 (n. 25).

¹²⁶ Budge, *Miscellaneous Texts* 1, xxiv.

¹²⁷ Spiegelberg, 'Ägyptologische Beiträge III'.

¹²⁸ E.g. Letronne, *Oeuvres choisies* 1, 55-99 at 81-2 (n. 2) ('Observations sur l'époque où le paganisme a été définitivement aboli à Philae dans la Haute Égypte etc.', 1833¹); J. Maspero, 'Théodore de Philae', *RHR* 59 (1909) 299-317 at 312-3.

¹²⁹ Ath. *tom.* 10 (Migne, *PG* 26, col. 808).

¹³⁰ Wilcken, 'Heidnisches und Christliches', 403-4.

¹³¹ Kees, 'Philai', 2111-2; H. Munier, 'Le christianisme à Philae', *BSAC* 4 (1938) 37-49 at 41-3; Timm, *Christlich-koptische Ägypten* 1, 392-4; MacCoull, 'Christianity', 159; R.G. Coquin, M. Martin, 'Philae: Monasticism', *Copt. Enc.* VI (1991) 1955-6.

¹³² Kraus, *Anfänge* 47-51; Monneret de Villard, *Storia*, 44-5, cf. the review of Monneret's work by P. Peeters in *AB* 61 (1943) 273-80 at 275-7; Demicheli, *Rapporti*, 168-9, and 'I regni cristiani di Nubia e i loro rapporti col mondo bizantino', *Aegyptus* 59 (1979) 177-208 at 179-80; Kirwan, *Studies*, Ch. XXV at 95-6; Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens* 121-3.

¹³³ A. Campagnano, T. Orlandi, *Vite di monaci copti* (Rome, 1984) 67-125.

recent translation in English follows the *editio princeps* for the greatest part, and the few improvements to Budge's translation, although said to be based on the manuscript, mainly serve to make the *Life of Aaron* known to a wider public.¹³⁴ It is equally astonishing that this text, already in 1937 characterised as 'the most valuable document for the history of early Christianity in the First Cataract region',¹³⁵ has been discussed in only one article, which is now over twenty-five years old.¹³⁶ However, this article poses some fundamental questions to which we will dedicate the remainder of this chapter, such as: What is the place of the *Life of Aaron* in Coptic literature? For what audience was it intended? What is its genre?¹³⁷ Before we address these questions, however, we first have to briefly summarise its contents.

Contents

The *Life of Aaron* consists of three separate but interrelated sections. The first section (fol. 1a-10b) starts when a certain Paphnutius (ΠΑΦΝΟΥΤΕ) visits a monastic community. Although the first leaf is missing, we can compare the opening scene with the *Life of Onnophrius* (fol. 1a-b), also attributed to a Paphnutius, and presume that the first leaf must have consisted of a title and short description of how Paphnutius arrived at the monastic community. When our text starts, Paphnutius decides to take part in the Eucharist, and afterwards talks with brother Pseleusius (ΠΣΕΛΕΥΣΙΟΣ) about another brother, Apa Zebulon (ΖΑΥΒΥΛΩΝ). This induces Paphnutius to ask Pseleusius about his own life.

Pseleusius tells Paphnutius that he fled from all sexual intercourse in his youth. He saw a vision, which a holy man explained to him, encouraging him to enter the monastic community of Apa John. A characterisation of John follows: his asceticism and nightly vigils, his revelations and visions. Pseleusius stayed in John's dwelling and asked him for monastic clothes. Afterwards, John instructed Pseleusius how to live in the desert, and Apa Zebulon (ΖΑΒΟΥΛΩΝ) accompanied Pseleusius there.

Pseleusius' story is clearly constructed:

- the novice's background and motivation to enter a monastic community are unfolded
- he meets a holy man
- his ascetic practices are told
- the holy man dresses the novice in monastic clothes, and instructs him
- the novice joins the holy man in the desert, and stays there.

This pattern is mirrored in the second story about two monks, told by Pseleusius' master John (ΙΩΩΔΗΝΗC).¹³⁸

John told Pseleusius that he went into the desert and reached an oasis where he met two men, Anianus (ΑΝΙΑΝΟΣ) and Paul (ΠΑΥΛΟΣ), whom he asked to tell their story. They were friends and lived in Syene. Inspired by the Holy Scriptures and the gospel, they went out of town in a little boat to the monastic community called the (Hill) Top (ΠΙΚΟΟΩ). Apa Zachaeus (ΖΑΧΑΙΟΣ) and his two disciples, Serapamon (ΣΑΡΑΠΑΜΩΝ) and Matthew (ΜΑΘΘΑΙΟΣ), lived there among the brothers. John first relates the ascetic behaviour of the disciples, after which Apa Zachaeus' practices are characterised. Zachaeus instructed Anianus and Paul and clothed them in the monastic habit. The holy man brought them to the desert and stayed until they knew how to live there. Zachaeus left them and went to his rest. From

¹³⁴ T. Vivian, *Paphnutius. Histories of the Monks of Upper Egypt and the Life of Onnophrius* (Kalamazoo, 2000²). A good translation in Dutch is J.F. Borghouts, *Egyptische sagen en verhalen* (Bussum, 1974) 184-9, but it covers only part of the work (fol. 11b-18a).

¹³⁵ Kirwan, *Studies* Ch. XXV at 95.

¹³⁶ Orlandi, 'Testo copto'.

¹³⁷ Orlandi, 'Testo copto', 229-30.

¹³⁸ Although the story is narrated in the third person, Pseleusius seems to account his personal story here, as appears from fol. 2a where his name is mentioned and from the circumstance that Pseleusius tells that John made him a monk directly after this passage (fol. 4a-5a). Cf. Campagnano and Orlandi, *Vite*, 72-3 (n. 4 and 6), who think that the story is about John.

that time on, they remained in that place, lived of date palms and participated in the Eucharist. They asked John to pray for them and he started to live in a dwelling. John later heard from another monk that they had died.

The second section is about the first bishops of Philae (fol. 10b-37b), in which we return to the conversation between Pseleusius and Paphnutius. Pseleusius finally wants to tell Paphnutius about Apa Isaac, a disciple of Apa Aaron. Paphnutius is impressed and wants to personally receive a blessing from the holy man. They embark in a small boat, travel four miles south and meet Isaac who is living on an island in the middle of the First Cataract. This means that the (Hill) Top was in the immediate vicinity of Syene. They eat together and Paphnutius asks Isaac about his work. Isaac answers by telling about the time when he was a disciple of Apa Aaron (sections 2 and 3).¹³⁹

Isaac begins by narrating a story that Aaron had heard from the first bishop of Philae, Macedonius (ΜΑΚΕΔΟΝΙΟΣ).¹⁴⁰ Because, according to the text, Macedonius was a pagarch, he went south to Philae and wanted to celebrate the Eucharist there. He heard that the Christians living on the island were oppressed by idol worshippers and that priests had to come from Syene to celebrate the Eucharist for them.¹⁴¹ When Macedonius went to Alexandria for a meeting with a military commander, he informed Archbishop Athanasius about the situation at Philae. He advised the archbishop to send a bishop south with him, but Athanasius persuaded Macedonius to become the new bishop of Philae himself. Macedonius agreed, returned to the south, distributed his possessions among the poor and lived as a citizen among the inhabitants of the island.

One day, Macedonius went into the temple area for he had seen people worshipping a falcon inside a 'demonic cage' (ΜΑΓΚΑΝΟΝ), as we have seen in Ch. 2 probably a construction on the first pylon where the falcon was shown. The temple priest was away on some business and his two sons had taken over the supervision of sacrifice. Macedonius went up to them and asked treacherously to sacrifice to 'God'. The sons prepared the altar, while Macedonius went to the demonic cage, took out the bird, chopped off its head and threw it into the fire. When the two sons saw what had happened, they decided to escape from the worshippers of the falcon and, especially, their father. Upon his return, the temple priest found neither his sons nor the falcon. An old woman who lived near the temple told him what had happened, and the priest swore to kill both his sons and Macedonius. Another man, a Christian, overheard the conversation and told Macedonius. The bishop cursed the old woman, but fled from the island to a place called the Valley (ΓΙΛΛΑ). There he saw a vision of a man standing before his two sons, while another man, a man of light, crowned the sons, first the older and then the younger, and handed over a staff and a key.

Next morning, a voice urged Macedonius to go and find his 'sons'. He found the two sons of the temple priest, half dead through lack of food and drink, and understood that these were the sons of his vision. The older boy told Macedonius that they had seen him in a vision, too, and a man of light with a book, who had dressed them in a tunic and fastened it with a shoulder strap, first the older and then the younger. They returned to Macedonius' place of dwelling and lived there together. He baptised his 'sons' and called them Mark (ΜΑΡΚΟΣ) and Isaiah (ΗΣΑΙΑΣ).¹⁴² The bishop shaved the brothers' heads and made them priest and deacon, respectively. In a variation on the stories in the first section, the old man has now found his novices.

It so happened that one day two Nubians (ΑΝΟΥΒΑ) began to fight near Macedonius' dwelling over a camel that had broken another camel's leg. Macedonius settled the dispute and asked Isaiah to sprinkle water over the camel's leg. Isaiah made the sign of the cross and the leg was healed. Some inhabitants of Philae spread the rumour of the miracle and told the temple

¹³⁹ Cf. Campagnano and Orlandi, *Vite* 68, who distinguish two sections: firstly the stories told by Pseleusius to Paphnutius (our section 1) and secondly those by Isaac to Paphnutius (our sections 2 and 3).

¹⁴⁰ The name is spelled here ΜΑΚΕΔΟΝΙΟΣ but seems to be a scribal error due to the word ΜΑΚΑΡΙΟΣ that precedes it, cf. Timm, *Christlich-koptische Ägypten* 1, 393 (Ma(r)kedonios).

¹⁴¹ The right to perform the Eucharist was primarily given to bishops but they could pass on their right to priests, see Archbishop Basilios, 'Eucharist', *Copt. Enc.* IV (1991) 1056-62 at 1061.

¹⁴² Spelled ΙΣΑΙΑΣ in fol. 17b, and ΗΣΑΙΑΣ in fol. 18a, 19b, 23a, 24b, 25b, 32b (2x), 33a, 33b, 34a, 56b.

priest that his son had taken part in it. The priest, whose name was Aristos (ἈΡΙΣΤΟΣ), went to Macedonius and prostrated himself before the bishop. Macedonius instructed him and the priest wanted to be baptised. However, Macedonius asked him first to make everything ready for his arrival at Philae and to build a church there.

After Aristos had arranged everything, Macedonius gloriously re-entered Philae and instructed the multitude from a throne in the priest's house.¹⁴³ The bishop converted all the inhabitants of Philae and baptised them. The first whom Macedonius baptised was Aristos, renaming him Jacob. He told Isaiah to hide because of what had happened in the temple and ordained him deacon.¹⁴⁴ Macedonius then asked for the Eucharistic vessels, which had been hidden before the conversion of Philae.¹⁴⁵ When they prepared the Eucharist, Macedonius remembered the accursed old woman, cured her and baptised her as the last person of Philae. They celebrated the Eucharist together, Macedonius appointed some of them priests or deacons, instructed them in the church and went home.¹⁴⁶ Later Macedonius fell ill, ordained Mark as his successor and died on 8 Mechir (2 February). He was buried outside his house.

The structure of the next episodes, covering the episcopates of Mark, Isaiah and Psoulousia, is the same:

- the people elect the bishop
- the future bishop says he is too humble but the people force him
- they go to Alexandria
- the archbishop ordains him
- the people celebrate the new bishop
- the bishop dies.

The city was without a bishop for a time and gathered to elect a new one. The most important among the priests proposed to elect him by lot, but the archdeacon said that Mark was to be the heir of Macedonius. The people approved of this statement and elected Mark. He behaved modestly but was forced to accept his election.

They went with him to Alexandria, but Athanasius was in a monastery in the western part of the city. They went there and prostrated themselves in front of the archbishop. He knew of Mark's vision, although Mark had not told anybody. In the morning, a group of notables wanted to see the archbishop but he sent them away, apparently because the ordination of Mark was more important. The embassy from Philae showed Athanasius an official document. After some instruction, Mark asked him if they should give bread to 'pagan' Nubians, living east and southwest of Philae. Athanasius explained that he had to give it to them by citing passages from the Bible and by telling a parable of two monks. Subsequently, Mark was consecrated bishop.

After three days the group was dismissed and given the episcopal licence. Athanasius told Mark to ordain his brother Isaiah first as deacon, then priest, and predicted that Isaiah would be his successor.¹⁴⁷ The group left Alexandria and arrived at Schissa (ΣΧΙΣΣΑ), where

¹⁴³ The sequence of fol. 21a-b in the manuscript is impossible, for after having told the priest to build a church, in fol. 21a Macedonius asks Mark to proclaim in the church that everybody has to come, whereas it is said that the priest has completed his task only in fol. 21b. As Campagnano and Orlandi, *Vite* 89-90, already observed, these leaves have to be reversed, and they adjusted their numbering of leaves (fol. 21a = Campagnano and Orlandi 21v; fol. 21b = 21r). However, they did not explain why this was so. Undoubtedly, the reason for the mistake in the binding of the manuscript is that the manuscript was acquired in two stages, first fol. 21 in 1907 and then the rest in 1909.

¹⁴⁴ Is this sentence corrupt? Isaiah had already been ordained deacon (fol. 18a) and there was no need to hide any more. To add to the confusion, in fol. 30a Athanasius asks Mark to appoint his brother Isaiah first deacon and then priest. Finally, Mark ordains Isaiah priest in fol. 32b.

¹⁴⁵ For Eucharistic vessels, such as the ark, *artophorion*, *asterisk*, chalice, paten and spoon, see Archbishop Basilios, E.M. Ishaq, 'Eucharistic Vessels', *Copt.Enc.* IV (1991) 1064-6.

¹⁴⁶ Since no other 'home' is mentioned as located on Philae, Macedonius must have continued living in his dwelling in the Valley.

¹⁴⁷ As noted before, this statement contradicts the previous ordinance of Macedonius who had already made Isaiah a deacon.

they could find no boat to carry them home. Fortunately, a ship from Syene with some notables came in, and the delegation from Philae asked the captain to take them south. When he heard that Mark had just been ordained bishop, the captain prostrated himself before him and did as the bishop wished. They returned to Philae and celebrated the bishop's appointment. They seated him upon a throne in the church, and he instructed them for three days. On the occasion of a great festival, Isaiah was ordained priest. Mark fell ill, declared Isaiah his successor and died on 14 Tybi (9 January). He was buried next to Macedonius.

We can be brief about the episcopate of Isaiah, for the same sequence of events, including his burial beside Macedonius and Mark, is repeated without noteworthy incidents. The next bishop, Psoulousia (ΠΣΟΥΛΟΥΣΙΑ), was a monk living on 'this island'.¹⁴⁸ Apa Aaron lived as a monk in this bishop's episcopate. The people elected Psoulousia bishop of Philae but he refused. Nevertheless, they took him to Alexandria. The bishop was consecrated, but when the embassy forgot the official appointment, the archbishop wrote another one. Psoulousia first returned to his place of dwelling on the island, but was persuaded to come to Philae as the bishops before him had done. He was enthroned in the church, celebrated the Eucharist with his people and instructed them. In addition, a miracle story is narrated concerning Psoulousia. When Archbishop Theophilus was elected, all bishops were invited to Alexandria, including Psoulousia. Yet, he deemed himself unworthy to pray with the other bishops at the baptismal font. Nevertheless, the archbishop asked Psoulousia to join. After having come closer to the font, the water in it began to boil and all bishops paid their respects to the bishop of Philae. Psoulousia died on 23 Payni (17 June). They buried him on the island on which he had lived.

Isaac now ends his story, and we enter the third section of the *Life of Aaron*, which is devoted to Apa Aaron (fol. 37b-57a). Apa Isaac tells Paphnutius what he had personally heard from Apa Aaron. In his youth, Aaron's parents had sent him into the army. Once he encountered a lion and promised to become a monk if he survived. In a passage with a quotation from and an allusion to the story of David and Goliath, Aaron beat the lion and became a monk, first in Scetis and later at Philae.¹⁴⁹

Then Paphnutius asks a second time for Isaac's own story. Isaac now starts the story of how he met his master with a similar structure as those in the first section. In his youth, Isaac learned to write and heard of the Holy Scripture. He heard rumours about Apa Aaron and wanted to receive a blessing from him. Isaac found him on a rocky (hill) top with a stone tied around his neck. The young man asked if he could become a monk. He received the monastic clothes, was shaved and Aaron instructed Isaac. At the end, the master left his novice.

But demons troubled Isaac and he searched for Aaron. He found him standing in the desert sand with a stone on his head. It was so hot that his eyeballs almost popped out. Isaac complained that he had been tormented by 'Nubians', but Apa Aaron explained that they were demons. Aaron also explained why he had given himself over to such ascetic practices. One day, demons visited Aaron and Isaac. Aaron told a story about a brother who was standing under a mountain ledge for six days and was visited by a demon with a golden staff. He drew a cross and the demon disappeared. Upon Isaac's supplications to tell him who this brother was, Aaron answered that it had been himself.

The end of the *Life of Aaron* consists of a catalogue of fourteen miracle stories which consist of the same pattern and often seem to have been modelled on biblical stories. The structure can be schematised thus:

- the motive: an accident in everyday life
- the act: the destitute goes to the holy man to help him
- the consequence: the destitute glorifies God and the holy man.

¹⁴⁸ Clearly not Philae, but the island in the middle of the Cataract on which the narrator Isaac lived. The name of the bishop is spelled variously: ΠΣΟΥΛΟΥΣΙΑ in fol. 34b, ΣΕΛΛΟΥΣΙΑ in fol. 35b, ΠΣΥΛΟΥΣΙΑ in fol. 36a-b, ΠΣΕΛΛΟΥΣΙΑ in fol. 36b and ΠΣΕΛΟΥΣΙΑΣ in fol. 37a (2x). Henceforth, I will refer to the bishop as Psoulousia. Cf. Vivian, *Paphnutius* 52, who adds to the confusion by mistakenly calling the bishop Pseleusias, a name that is mixed up with the name of the narrator of section 1, Pseleusius.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. 1 Sam. 17.36-7.

the stone on the ground and put on his garment. He looked at me and said: 'From where have you come here, my son?' I said to him: 'Forgive me, my father, for I am lost'. He said to me: 'Come and sit down, my son. Indeed, you are not lost, but you have found the right path'. When I had sat down, I asked him: 'I would like to become a monk with you'. He spoke wisely to me: 'Our Saviour says in the Gospels: "Come to me, whoever is weary, and I will give you rest".¹⁵⁶ The name of monasticism is good, but this life is difficult to complete'.¹⁵⁷ I said to him: 'I have come here because of that, my holy father. If I am able to complete it, you must have pity on me'. He said to me: 'It is something good you pursue, my son. Since you have begun the good thing, who will stop you, my son? (fol. 39a-b)'.¹⁵⁸

We must leave a full analysis of the narrative of the *Life of Aaron* to another study and focus our attention here on the questions relevant for the next chapter: 1). Is the *Life of Aaron* consistent or have some passages been added later? And 2). What are the genre, authorship and intended audience of the work?

Some structural features confirm the assumption already made, namely that the work as it is transmitted via the late tenth-century manuscript was of a single redaction. The pattern of the initiation of a potential anchorite occurs in the two stories in the first section (about Pseleusius, and Anianus and Paul), after which it returns in section three in the person of Isaac. At first sight, section two may seem to have an anomalous position between sections one and three, starting with the first bishop of Philae and followed by similar descriptions of his three successors. On the other hand, both sections two and three are presented as told by Apa Isaac to Paphnutius. Moreover, at the start of section two, Isaac authenticates his story by claiming that he has heard it from his master Apa Aaron, who in turn had heard it from Macedonius himself. This shifting of narrative levels to authenticate the story is also characteristic of the first section, or as Pseleusius summarises:

Well then, these are the things we told you, my brother Paphnutius, about those who live in the desert, about those whom I have seen and heard, and (about) the remembrance of their fathers who went before them and their perfection in death (fol. 10b).¹⁵⁹

The representation of Macedonius telling the conversion story of Philae to Aaron is clearly a literary device, for the first person, eye witness narrative soon changes into the third person (fol. 13b). Moreover, in the story of Bishop Psoulousia, fourth bishop of Philae, it is remarked between the lines that Aaron was a monk at the time Psoulousia was bishop of Philae: 'He, in whose episcopate our father Apa Aaron led his monastic life' (fol. 34b).¹⁶⁰ This remark seems the more trustworthy, as at the end of section three (fol. 56b) Aaron is buried beside Bishops Macedonius, Mark and Isaiah (Psoulousia was buried elsewhere, fol. 37b). Hence, Aaron must have lived after Isaiah had died and not during the episcopate of Macedonius.

¹⁵⁶ Mt. 11.28.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. Ath. v. *Anton*. Prol. 1 (*SC* 400, p. 126).

¹⁵⁸ ⲙⲓⲛⲓⲥⲱⲤ ⲁⲓⲥⲱⲱⲧ ⲉⲡⲉⲤⲏⲦ ⲉϭⲏ ⲡⲱⲟ (read ⲱⲱ) ⲁⲓⲛⲁϥ ⲉⲗⲉⲛⲧⲁⲃⲤⲉ ⲡⲓⲱⲛⲉ ⲉϥⲤⲱⲕ ⲉⲗⲟϥⲛ ⲗⲁⲟϥⲕⲱⲱⲗ (read ⲕⲟⲟⲗ) ⲡⲓⲡⲉⲧⲣⲁ ⲁⲓⲛⲟⲱⲉ ⲗⲁⲣⲁⲧⲟϥ ⲁⲓⲛⲓⲛⲉ ⲡⲓⲡⲁⲉⲓⲱⲧ ⲉⲧⲟϥⲁⲁⲃ ⲁⲡⲁ ⲗⲁⲣⲱⲛ ⲉⲣⲉⲟϥⲛⲟϥⲗ ⲙⲏⲣ ⲉϥⲛⲟⲃ ⲡⲓⲱⲛⲉ ⲉϥⲗⲁⲱⲉ ⲉⲡⲉϥⲙⲁⲕⲗ. ⲡⲓⲧⲉⲣⲓⲛⲟϥⲧⲉ ⲗⲉ ⲟϥⲃⲛⲏⲗ ϭⲉ Ⲥⲛⲟϥ ⲉⲣⲟⲓ ⲁϥⲗⲁⲣⲉ ⲡⲉϥⲙⲁⲕⲗ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲗⲓⲡⲓⲛⲟϥⲗ ⲁϥⲛⲉϭⲓⲡⲱⲛⲉ ⲗⲓϭⲏ ⲡⲓⲕⲁⲗ ⲁϥⲧⲓⲱⲱϥ ⲡⲓⲧⲉϥⲗⲟⲛⲏ ⲁϥⲗⲱⲱⲧ ⲉⲗⲟϥⲛ ⲉⲗⲣⲁⲓ ⲡⲉϭⲁϥ ⲛⲁⲓ ϭⲉ ⲉⲕⲛⲏϥ ⲧⲱⲛ ⲡⲁⲱⲛⲣⲉ ⲡⲓⲡⲉⲓⲛⲁ. ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲗⲉ ⲡⲉϭⲁⲓ ⲛⲁϥ ϭⲉ ⲕⲱ ⲛⲁⲓ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲡⲁⲉⲓⲱⲧ ⲡⲓⲛⲟⲛ ⲡⲓⲧⲁⲓϥⲣⲏ. ⲡⲉϭⲁϥ ⲛⲁⲓ ϭⲉ ⲁⲛⲟϥ ⲛⲓⲣⲓⲛⲟⲟⲥ ⲡⲁⲱⲛⲣⲉ ⲡⲓⲛⲟⲛ ⲡⲓⲧⲁⲕⲱⲣⲏ ⲁⲛ ⲁⲗⲗⲁ ⲡⲓⲧⲁⲕⲣⲉ ⲉⲧⲉⲗⲓⲛ ⲉⲧⲏⲁⲛⲟϥⲥ. ⲡⲓⲧⲉⲣⲓⲛⲟⲟⲥ ⲗⲉ ⲗⲁⲗⲧⲏϥ ⲁⲡⲓⲧⲁⲣⲁⲕⲁⲗⲉⲓ ⲡⲓⲛⲟϥ ϭⲉ ⲉⲓⲟϥⲱⲱ ⲗⲱⲱⲧ ⲉⲧⲣⲓⲕⲁⲁⲧ ⲡⲓⲛⲟⲛⲟϭⲟⲥ ⲗⲁⲗⲧⲏⲕ. ⲡⲉϭⲁϥ ⲛⲁⲓ ⲗⲓⲡⲟϥⲛⲓⲧⲣⲏⲡⲓⲗⲓⲛⲧ [ϭ]ⲉ ⲡⲓⲧⲁⲡⲉⲛⲥⲱⲧⲏⲣ ϭⲟⲟⲥ ⲗⲓⲡⲓⲛⲉϥⲁⲓⲣⲉⲗⲓⲟⲛ ϭⲉ ⲁⲛⲏⲓⲧⲓ ⲱⲣⲁⲟⲓ ⲟϥⲛⲟⲛ ⲛⲓⲛ ⲉⲧⲗⲟⲟⲥⲉ ⲁϥⲱ ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲧⲏⲁⲧⲓ ⲡⲓⲧⲟⲛ ⲛⲏⲧⲓ. ⲡⲣⲁⲛ ⲡⲓⲧⲏⲧⲏⲛⲟⲛⲟϭⲟⲥ ⲛⲁⲛⲟϥϥ ⲁⲗⲗⲁ ⲡⲓⲉⲓⲃⲓⲟⲥ ⲗⲟⲟⲥⲉ ⲡⲓϭⲟⲕⲗ] ⲉⲃⲟⲗ. ⲡⲉϭⲁⲓ ⲗⲉ ⲛⲁϥ ϭⲉ ⲡⲓⲧⲁⲉⲓ ⲉⲗⲣⲁ[ⲓ] ⲉⲡⲉⲓⲛⲁ ⲉⲧⲃⲉ ⲡⲉⲓⲣⲱⲃ ⲱ ⲡⲁⲉⲓⲱⲧ ⲉⲧⲟϥⲁⲁⲃ ⲉϥⲱⲡⲉ ⲧⲏⲁϥ ϭⲟⲕⲗ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲛⲓⲣⲓⲡⲓⲛⲁ ⲛⲓⲛⲁⲓ. ⲡⲉϭⲁϥ ⲛⲁⲓ ϭⲉ ⲟϥⲗⲱⲃ ⲉⲛⲁⲛⲟϥϥ ⲡⲉⲧⲉⲕⲱⲛⲉ ⲡⲓϭⲱϥ ⲱ ⲡⲁ ⲱⲛⲣⲉ. ⲉϭⲥⲉ (read ⲉϥϭⲉ) ⲁϭⲓⲧⲟⲟⲧⲓ ⲉⲡⲓⲣⲱⲃ ⲉⲧⲏⲁⲛⲟϥϥ ⲛⲓⲛ ⲡⲉⲧⲏⲁϥⲕⲱⲗϥ ⲡⲓⲛⲟⲕ ⲱ ⲡⲁⲱⲛⲣⲉ.

¹⁵⁹ ⲉⲓϭⲉ ⲛⲁⲓ ⲟϥⲛ ⲁⲛϭⲟⲟϥ ⲉⲣⲟⲕ ⲡⲁⲤⲟⲛ ⲡⲁⲡⲓⲛⲟϥⲧⲉ ⲉⲧⲃⲉ ⲛⲉⲧⲟϥⲛⲏⲗ ⲗⲓⲡⲓϭⲁⲓⲉ ⲉⲧⲃⲉ ⲛⲉⲛⲧⲁⲓⲛⲁϥ ⲉⲣⲟⲟϥ ⲛⲓⲛⲉⲛⲧⲁⲓⲟⲧⲏⲟϥ ⲁϥⲱ ⲡⲓⲣⲓⲛⲉⲉϥⲉ ⲡⲓⲛⲉϥⲓⲟⲧⲉ ⲡⲓⲧⲁϥⲉⲓ ⲉⲗⲣⲁⲓ ⲗⲓⲧⲟⲟⲧⲟϥ ⲛⲓⲡⲉϥϭⲱⲕ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ. For the translation of ϭⲟⲕ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ, see J. van der Vliet, 'A Note on ϭⲟⲕ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ "To Die"', *Enchoria* 16 (1988) 89-93.

¹⁶⁰ ⲡⲁⲓ ⲡⲓⲧⲁⲡⲉⲛⲉⲓⲱⲧ ⲁⲡⲁ ⲗⲁⲣⲱⲛ ⲣⲧⲉϥⲗⲓⲛⲟⲛⲟϭⲟⲥ ⲗⲓⲡⲓⲧⲉϥⲙⲓⲧⲉⲡⲓⲕⲟⲡⲓ ⲟⲩⲥ. Cf. Budge, *Miscellaneous Texts* 2, 983, Campagnano and Orlandi, *Vite*, 101, and Vivian, *Paphnutius*, 110, who mistranslate 'he was made a monk by Apa Aaron during his episcopate', implying that Aaron was bishop of Philae. However, the Coptic merely remarks that it is in Psoulousia's episcopate that Aaron lived as a monk. The story of Aaron becoming a monk in Scetis is told later (fol. 38a).

Aaron's burial is at the same time an important element for understanding the internal coherence of the three successive sections of the *Life of Aaron*. The first and by far the shortest section is rather a preamble to the great deeds of Apa Aaron narrated in section three. Section two serves to augment the holiness of Apa Aaron: not only does he tell the beginning of the story of the first bishops of Philae to his pupil Apa Isaac, he also claims to have heard it first hand from one of them. Apa Aaron takes his authority from these regional holy men, and his burial *ad sanctos* places him on an equal footing with them.

Finally, there may well have been a kind of *vaticinium ex eventu* in section one, where Apa Zachaeus describes the biblical Aaron:

With regard to Aaron, Scripture likens him to the places of rest that are in the heavens, to the rejoicing that is in heavenly Jerusalem, and to the throne and garments with which the holy men will be clothed (fol. 8b).¹⁶¹

The audience for the *Life of Aaron* would have associated the name of the biblical Aaron with Apa Aaron. In this respect, it is surely no coincidence that the biblical Aaron is mentioned in four of the seven lessons for the festival of Apa Aaron (fol. 57a-61a), although the names are spelled differently in Coptic (Apa Aaron: ραρων, biblical Aaron: ααρων). If there is some connection between them, it may be noted that in the first encounter between Aaron and Isaac quoted above the holy man wears a garment (στολη, fol. 39a), the same word as used for the biblical Aaron. The comparison of the biblical Aaron with the throne and the garments is also reminiscent of the episcopal dignity of the first bishops of Philae. In the vision of their future episcopate, Mark and Isaiah see a man of light clothing them in a garment (ϩβρω, fol. 16b, taken up again by the word ωτην in fol. 25b and 30a). Moreover, the unnamed archbishop who ordained Psoulousia referred both to the visions of Macedonius, and of Mark and Isaiah by mentioning that they were given keys and clothed in garments (using here, again, the word στολη, fol. 36a). Concerning the throne, it may be noted that Macedonius is seated upon a throne in the house of the temple priest, and the three other bishops are seated on thrones in the church (fol. 21b, 23a, 32a, 34a, 36a). Thus, the remark about the throne and garments, 'which will clothe the holy men', may implicitly refer to the first bishops of Philae in section two, and Apa Aaron in section three.

This short literary analysis suggests that the *Life of Aaron*, as it has come down to us, was compiled at one time in the past without major later additions. A comparison of the sixth or seventh-century papyrus fragments of the *Dying Prayer of Athanasius* with the complete text that has come down to us in the same tenth-century manuscript as the *Life of Aaron*, shows that in this case, too, additions or omissions were only marginal. Moreover, the *Life of Aaron* is not a loose compilation of stories, all three sections have clear and meaningful passages that mark the transition to a new section. The internal coherence shows that the work can be seen as a unity dedicated to the glory of Apa Aaron, anchorite of Philae. On the other hand, this does not exclude the possibility that the compiler of the work used different *Vorlagen*, a supposition that is made more likely on the basis of its complicated structure, many errors and inconsistencies.¹⁶²

But why, then, have scholars referred to the work as a history of monks (*historia monachorum*)? Whatever the name may have been before that time, the work was known in the tenth century as the *Life of Aaron*. Consequently, if we maintain the hypothesis of its unity, we cannot speak of, for example, *Histories of the Monks in the Egyptian Desert* as the first edition does. The parallel with the *Life of Onnophrius* and the *Life of Cyrus* shows that the name *Life of Aaron* for our text is more accurate.¹⁶³ Admittedly, the *Life of Aaron* is clearly

¹⁶¹ ααρων μεν ερετεγραφη εινε μη' ο'ι εχι ημα ηητον ετρηπηπηγε ηητευφροςυνη ετρηθιε(ρουσα)ληη ηητε ηηπεθρονος αυω νεστολη ετουηαταδυ ρηετουαδδ.

¹⁶² Cf. Orlandi, 'Testo copto', 229; Campagnano and Orlandi, *Vite* 67-8.

¹⁶³ For the *Life of Onnophrius*, see D.S. Chauler, 'Saint Onuphre', *Les cahiers coptes* 5 (1954) 3-15; R.-G. Coquin, 'Onophrius, Saint', *Copt. Enc.* VI (1991) 1841-2; J. Doresse, *Les anciens monastères coptes de Moyenne-Égypte*, 3 vols (Yverdon-les-Bains, 2000, repr. of diss. Paris 1971) 1.127-36. Recently, the text edited by Budge has been translated into English again by Vivian, *Paphnutius* 145-66. For the *Life of Cyrus* see the Sahidic Coptic version

written in the tradition of the *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*, which also shares its main theme with our work. Paphnutius travels to a monastic community near Syene to hear the stories of the local monks and to profit from them.¹⁶⁴ However, these stories only form a small part of the entire work, whereas one of the stories, the *Life* of Apa Aaron, is enlarged, so that this holy man becomes the central figure of the work (again the *Life of Onnophrius* and the *Life of Cyrus* are suitable parallels). The *Life of Aaron* ends again in the style of the *Historia Monachorum*, for after Paphnutius has promised to write down the story of Apa Isaac, he travels back to the north, presumably to the monastic community near Syene. The *Historia Monachorum* gained widespread popularity after its appearance around 400, and it is therefore not surprising that the work served as a frame for the *Life of Aaron*.¹⁶⁵ However, this does not necessarily have to make the work as a whole a history of monks.

The plot of the *Life of Aaron* is also influenced by the *vita*, a genre that went back to Athanasius' *Life of Antony* (c. 356) and was common in Coptic literature. In these lives, a characteristic, if rather obvious, pattern returns:¹⁶⁶

- prologue
- youth of the holy man
- ascetic life and miracles
- death of the holy man
- epilogue.

The *Life of Aaron* follows this general pattern, but adds the stories of the monks living near Syene and the history of the first bishops of Philae.¹⁶⁷ Apparently, in works like the *Life of Onnophrius*, the *Life of Cyrus* and the *Life of Aaron*, the genres of *vita* and *historia monachorum* were fused, a tendency which is also apparent in other hagiographical works.¹⁶⁸ Let us now turn to the remaining two elements of the *Life of Aaron*, the author and his public.

The author of a hagiographical work such as the *Life of Aaron* is usually mentioned on the first page, but, as has already been noted, precisely this page of the only completely transmitted text is missing. Nevertheless, the main character of the story, Paphnutius, states at the end of the work that he will write down what he has heard (and that he completed this task). A certain Paphnutius is also the author of the, in many respects similar, *Life of Onnophrius*, and this is why both works have been attributed to the same author, Paphnutius. There has been some debate about whom this Paphnutius can be.¹⁶⁹ The starting point of the discussion is the end of the *Life of Onnophrius*, in which it is remarked that Paphnutius told his story to some monks from Scetis, that they wrote it down quickly and placed the resulting book in the church of Scetis (fol. 21a-b).¹⁷⁰ However, Paphnutius is one of the most common

edited by Budge, *Coptic Martyrdoms* 128-36 (text), 381-9 (tr.). On Pambo, see Chitty, *Desert*, 46-7; L. Regnault, 'Pambo, Saint', *Copt. Enc.* VI (1991) 1877-8. Two fragments survive of another life similar to the *Life of Aaron*, in which the main character visits two Nubian monks, see Crum, *Theological Texts*, 167-70 (nr. 29).

¹⁶⁴ For the *Hist.Mon.* as travel writing, see G. Frank, 'The *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto* and Ancient Travel Writing', in E.A. Livingstone (ed.), *Studia Patristica* XXX (Leuven, 1997) 191-5, 'Miracles, Monks, and Monuments: The *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto* as Pilgrims' Tales', in Frankfurter, *Pilgrimage & Holy Space*, 483-505, and *The Memory of the Eyes. Pilgrims to Living Saints in Christian Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, 2000) 35-101.

¹⁶⁵ Orlandi, 'Testo copto', 230. The *Hist.Mon.* inspired other famous fifth-century works, such as the *Lausiac History* by Palladius (420) and the *Historia religiosa* by Theodoret (c. 450), and was soon translated into Latin. See Goehring, *Ascetics*, 73-88 ('The Encroaching Desert: Literary Production and Ascetic Space in Early Christian Egypt, 1993'); Frank, *Memory of the Eyes*, 39. For surviving fragments of a Coptic version see P. Devos, 'Fragments coptes de l'"*Historia Monachorum*" (Vie de S. Jean de Lycopolis *BHO* 515)', *AB* 87 (1969) 417-40.

¹⁶⁶ Campagnano, 'Monaci egiziani', 244.

¹⁶⁷ Prologue: lost. Youth: fol. 27b-38b. Life: fol. 38b-41b. Miracles: fol. 41b-56a. Death: fol. 56a-b. Epilogue: fol. 57a.

¹⁶⁸ E.g. Frank, *Memory of the Eyes*, 38-43.

¹⁶⁹ De Lacy O'Leary, *Saints*, 219-20; Vivian, *Paphnutius*, 42-50, 53-4. With more caution, Campagnano and Orlandi, *Vite*, 67.

¹⁷⁰ On Scetis see H.G. Evelyn-White, W. Hauser, G.P.G. Sobhy (eds), *The Monasteries of the Wadi 'n Natrûn*, 3 vols (New York, 1926-33), A. Cody, 'Scetis', *Copt. Enc.* VII (1991) 2102-6, and Gabra, *Coptic Monasteries*, 35-63.

names in Late Antique Egypt and a whole series of monks and clergymen are possible candidates. If we accept that there is a relationship between our author and Scetis, persons such as the Paphnutius mentioned in the *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*, a monk who came from Upper Egypt, can be discarded.¹⁷¹

There remain three Paphnutii. At the end of the fourth century, a Paphnutius surnamed 'Bubalis' and over ninety years old was an authoritative person in Scetis.¹⁷² In the 390s, Palladius met another authoritative person in Scetis, this one over eighty years of age, with the nickname 'Cephalas', who, on account of the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, can be connected with St Antony.¹⁷³ This Paphnutius can probably be identified with a third Paphnutius, who is also known from the *Apophthegmata Patrum* as 'Father of Scetis' and lived at about the same time.¹⁷⁴ It is unlikely that Paphnutius 'Bubalis' and Paphnutius 'Cephalas' were one and the same person, for we can expect that the same person may not have had two nicknames.¹⁷⁵ Thus, two (or three) Paphnutii remain who were authoritative persons in Scetis at the end of the fourth century and are reported to have been very old at that time.

Two problems prevent us from attributing the *Life of Aaron* to one of these Scetian monks. Firstly, internal evidence makes such an identification impossible. Apa Aaron was a monk (fol. 34b) during the episcopate of Psoulousia who took part in the celebration of the new archbishop of Alexandria, Theophilus, in 385 (fol. 36b). If this is true we have to add at least two generations to reach the time when Paphnutius visited Apa Isaac, for Apa Isaac was a pupil of Apa Aaron, and, as it were, Paphnutius in turn was a pupil of Apa Isaac. Without pretending accuracy, the narrated time of the *Life of Aaron* would then be placed around 425 and it would have still taken some time for Paphnutius to write down his story and for the cult of Apa Aaron to develop.¹⁷⁶ The internal evidence from the *Life of Aaron* indicates that none of the three Paphnutii from Scetis could have been alive when the *Life of Aaron* was written.¹⁷⁷

The second problem is that there is no connection with Scetis in the *Life of Aaron*, the only exception being that Apa Aaron started his monastic career in this place (fol. 38a). However, this is a normal way of authenticating the sanctity of a holy man, as Scetis was held in high esteem in this period.¹⁷⁸ For the rest, everything points to a regional *Sitz im Leben* of the *Life of Aaron*. In the first section, Paphnutius visits a monastic community near Syene. Other topographical indications are remarkably precise for a hagiographical work. For example, when Paphnutius and Pseleusius decide to visit Apa Isaac, it is remarked: 'He, who lived on the island in the middle of the Cataract, four miles to the south of us' (fol. 10b).¹⁷⁹ The island cannot be Philae, for in other places this island is referred to by its proper name.¹⁸⁰ Moreover, Psoulousia is said to have lived on 'this island' (τῆς νησοῦς, fol. 34b), which, as already remarked, refers to the same island in the middle of the Cataract as that on which the narrator, Isaac, lived. It is certainly another island than Philae, for when Psoulousia is chosen as bishop of Philae: 'They forced him, lifted him up and brought him to the city' (fol. 35a), by which Philae is meant.¹⁸¹ After Psoulousia had been ordained in Alexandria, he first returned to 'his place on the island' (ἐπέστρεψε εἰς τὴν νησοῦς). However, the inhabitants of Philae took him to their island:

¹⁷¹ *Hist.Mon.* 14 Festugière. Cf. A. Guillaumont, 'Paphnutius of Scetis', *Copt.Enc.* VI (1991) 1884. The Paphnutius mentioned in Ath. v. *Anton.* 58.3 (*SC* 400, p. 290), was a bishop of the Upper Thebaid.

¹⁷² Cassian. *conl.* 3.1 (*SC* 42, pp. 139-40), 10.2 (*SC* 54, pp. 75-6).

¹⁷³ *Hist.Laus.* 47 Butler, and *Apophth.Patr. Antony* 29 (Migne, *PG* 65, col. 85).

¹⁷⁴ *Apophth.Patr. Paphnutius* (Migne, *PG* 65, col. 377-80).

¹⁷⁵ Cf. Evelyn-White in Evelyn-White, Hauser and Sobhy, *Wadi Natrûn* 2, 121; Butler, *Lausiac History*, 224-5; Budge, *Coptic Martyrdoms*, xiv; Guillaumont, 'Paphnutius of Scetis', 1884; Vivian, *Paphnutius* 48-9.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. Vivian, *Paphnutius*, 52-3, who suggests that because Aaron was not buried beside Psoulousia but beside the first three bishops of Philae, Psoulousia was still alive at the time of Aaron's death, and that hence the work has to be dated to after 385 ('a date of 390-400 seems reasonable'). However, the text clearly states that Psoulousia was buried on 'this island', the island in the middle of the Cataract, and not beside the bishops three predecessors.

¹⁷⁷ *Contra* Vivian, *Paphnutius*, 49-50.

¹⁷⁸ Cf. Bishop Porphyry of Gaza who also became a monk at Scetis (Marc. Diac. v. *Porph.* 4).

¹⁷⁹ ΠΑΙ ΕΤΟΥΗΗΖ ΖΠΤΗΝΗΟΟ ΕΤΖΝΤΗΗΗΤΕ ΠΠΕΚΑΤΑΖΡΑΚΤΗΟ ΠΠΡΗΟ ΠΜΟΗ ΝΑΡΤΟΟΥ ΠΗΗΑΙΟΗ.

¹⁸⁰ Fol. 12a, 19b, 31a, 37b, 44b, 49a, 56b, 57a, spelled variously ΠΕΙΛΑΚ, ΠΕΛΑΚ and ΠΙΑΚ.

¹⁸¹ ΔΥΧΙΤῪ ΔΕ ΠΧΗΑΖ ΔΥΤΑΛΟῤ ΔΥΧΙΤῪ ΕΖΟΥΗ ΕΤΠΟΙΟΙ.

They brought him out, embarked him in a small boat and sang psalms in front of him until they brought him into the church (of Philae) (fol. 36a).¹⁸²

For ‘the island’ situated in the middle of the Cataract, one island in particular comes to mind: el-Hesa.¹⁸³ In Antiquity, it probably formed one island with Biga (and perhaps Awad), the place where the Abaton with the tomb of Osiris was located.¹⁸⁴ It was by far the largest island in the First Cataract and lies about four miles south of Aswan. Apparently, Bishop Psoulousia and, later, Apa Isaac lived on this island.

On their way to the island, the holy men meet the treacherous currents of the First Cataract:

We departed, went on board of a small boat and sailed southward to visit the holy old man Apa Isaac. There were large rocks rising up from the water in the middle of the river, and the water there roared out in a horrifying way (11a).¹⁸⁵

This is a strikingly realistic description of a boat journey on the First Cataract in Antiquity.¹⁸⁶ Small boats (larger ones would run aground) and an experienced boatsman were necessary requisites to arrive safely on the island of el-Hesa. As the currents were far stronger in Antiquity than they are today, there are several ancient testimonies that they made a roaring noise.¹⁸⁷

Furthermore, two monastic communities are mentioned in the region: the (Hill) Top (ΠΙΚΟΟΣ) near Syene (fol. 7a, cf. 39a) and the Valley (ΠΙΑ, ΠΕΙΑ) to the north of Philae (fol. 15a, 38b).¹⁸⁸ The Valley is the place where Macedonius fled after he had killed the holy falcon of Philae, where he lived together with Mark and Isaiah, and where the miracle of the camel’s leg took place. After he made his glorious *rentrée* at Philae, he ‘went to his place of dwelling’ (ΔΥΒΩΚ ΕΠΕΦΜΑ ΠΩΠΕ, fol. 23a), that is, the one in the Valley. Moreover, he was buried ‘outside his place of dwelling’ (ΑΥΤΩΜΕ ΠΜΟΚ ΠΒΟΛ ΠΠΕΦΜΑ ΠΩΠΕ, fol. 23b), as were his successors Mark and Isaiah (fol. 33a, 34b). Apa Aaron was living on the same spot, when Isaac asked him to become his master, and he was buried there next to the bishops after he died (fol. 56b). This valley can probably be identified with the wadi situated northeast of Philae (Fig. 2).¹⁸⁹ In the plain at the beginning of this valley lay the military camp of Philae, which was the end of the ancient road from Syene to Philae, and the only way to travel further south. Aaron’s place of dwelling seems to have been not far removed from this road. When a Nubian wanted to tell Aaron that his son had been eaten by a crocodile, the holy man charged Isaac to find an interpreter on the road: ‘After I had went, I found a man from Philae who had mounted a donkey and was going to Syene’ (fol. 42a).¹⁹⁰

There is, therefore, no doubt that the *Life of Aaron* is regional in outlook, and this conclusion suggests that a local monk, rather than a monk from Scetis, wrote the *Life of*

¹⁸² ΔΥΕΝΤΩ ΔΕ ΕΒΟΛ ΑΥΤΑΛΟΦ ΕΥΚΟΥΙ ΠΣΚΑΦΟΣ ΑΥΤΑΛΛΕΙ ΖΑΤΕΦΖΗ ΦΑΝΤΟΥΧΙΤΩ ΕΖΟΥΗ ΕΤΕΚΚΛΕΣΙΑ.

¹⁸³ Cf. Timm, *Christlich-koptische Ägypten* 3, 1052-3.

¹⁸⁴ Locher, *Nilkatarakt*, 159-64.

¹⁸⁵ ΔΝΕΙ ΕΒΟΛ ΑΝΑΛΕ ΕΥΚΟΥΙ ΠΣΚΑΦΟΣ ΑΝΡΩΤ ΕΡΗΣ ΕΤΡΠΒΩΚ ΦΑΠΖΛΛΟ ΕΤΟΥΑΔΒ ΑΠΑ ΙΣΑΔΚ. ΝΕΥΗ ΖΕΝΝΟΣ ΔΕ ΠΩΝΕ ΡΗΤ ΖΠΠΜΟΥ ΠΤΗΝΗΤΕ ΠΠΕΙΕΡΟ. ΕΡΕΠΜΟΥ ΕΤΠΜΑΥ ΩΦ ΕΒΟΛ ΕΦΟ ΠΖΟΤΕ.

¹⁸⁶ Locher, *Nilkatarakt*, 98-103.

¹⁸⁷ E.g. Cic. *rep.* 6.18: ‘We find a similar phenomenon, where the Nile rushes down from those lofty mountains at the place called Catadupa (‘Down-Crashers’, a name for the area of the First Cataract, cf. e.g. Hld. 2.29); the people who live nearby have lost their sense of hearing on account of the loudness of the sound’ (tr. C.W. Keyes, Loeb).

¹⁸⁸ The translation ‘(hill) top’ for ΚΟΟΣ, as correctly translated by Campagnano and Orlandi, *Vite*, 105, is more satisfying than another meaning of the word, ‘corner, bend’, as translated by Budge, *Miscellaneous Texts* 2, 954, 988, and Vivian, *Paphnutius*, 79, 117. See on ΚΟΟΣ Crum, *Dict.* s.v., and Vycichl, *Dictionnaire*, 91-2. For the monastic community see Timm, *Christlich-koptische Ägypten* 4, 1953-4.

¹⁸⁹ Timm, *Christlich-koptische Ägypten* 4, 1876-7.

¹⁹⁰ ΠΤΕΡΙΒΩΚ ΔΕ ΔΙΣΠ ΟΥΡΠΠΙΑΔΚ ΕΦΤΑΛΛΗΥ ΕΠΕΙΩ ΕΦΝΑΒΩΚ ΕΣΟΥΑΝ.

Aaron.¹⁹¹ Whether the monk was indeed called Paphnutius can be questioned, as the *Life of Omnophrius* seems to associate this Paphnutius with Scetis and the two works are remarkably similar. A possible solution for this discrepancy is that the local monk used the name of an authoritative person from Scetis, Paphnutius, most likely Paphnutius ‘Cephalas’, for he was the most renowned, to authenticate his story. A nice parallel is the *Life of Cyrus* attributed to Apa Pambo, who was also a famous fourth-century anchorite. Like Paphnutius, Pambo was associated with St Antony and Scetis.¹⁹² However, Pambo cannot have been the author of this saint’s life, for references to Shenoute (c. 360-465) and the Emperor Zeno (474-491) betray a date of composition at least after 474. Another work, the *Life of Hilaria*, is also attributed to Apa Pambo.¹⁹³ This feature, to attribute several works of different authors to famous fourth-century anchorites, is common in Coptic literature and nowadays known by the term ‘cycle’.¹⁹⁴

The *Life of Aaron* is thus the product of a literary tradition developing around local saints from the region of the First Cataract, and its theme is the profit that can be gained from the ascetic life and practice of these holy men.¹⁹⁵ Its world, even that of the first bishops of Philae, is predominantly a monastic world, but the regional outlook of the work suggests that the public for the *Life of Aaron* not only consisted of monks but also a wider, regional audience.¹⁹⁶ This suggestion will be further illustrated in the next chapter, where we discuss the historical value of the work.

¹⁹¹ Dijkstra, “‘Foule Immense de Moines’”, 199. Cf. Peeters, review Monneret de Villard, 275: ‘Elle a été composée sur place, par un Copte du pays, à une époque où la légende originale était encore vivace’.

¹⁹² Apophth.Patr. *Antony* 6 (Migne, *PG* 65, col. 77), and *Pambo* (col. 368-72).

¹⁹³ J. Drescher, *Three Coptic Legends: Hilaria, Archelites, The Seven Sleepers* (Cairo, 1947) iii-iv, 1-13 (text), 69-82 (tr.), 139-48 (additional fragments).

¹⁹⁴ Orlandi, ‘Coptic Literature’, in Pearson and Goehring, *Roots* 51-81 at 78-80; ‘Literature (Coptic)’, 1456-8; ‘Letteratura copta’, 111-3.

¹⁹⁵ For a similar literary tradition connected with local holy men around Armant see Boutros and Décobert, ‘Installations chrétiennes’, 77-86. Cf. J. Doresse, ‘Saints coptes de Haute-Égypte’, *JA* 236 (1948) 247-70.

¹⁹⁶ Orlandi, ‘Testo copto’, 229-30.

7. The *Life of Aaron* and the Origins of the Christian Community of Philae

The *Life of Aaron* as Spiritual Communication

The study of Late Antique hagiography has benefited from a series of recent publications following the commemoration of the 25th anniversary of Peter Brown's seminal article 'The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity' of 1971.¹⁹⁷ In these publications, there seems to be an overall tendency to look at the narrative principally as a discourse between author and public. To quote just one example: 'It is now the author who emerges as full-blooded, and the power of the saint as a fully textual persona is explored. Authors, their social and intellectual milieu, and the communities they seek to influence through their hagiographies now occupy center stage'.¹⁹⁸

In the same vein, one of these articles discusses the use of '*diegesis*' or discourse in hagiographical texts.¹⁹⁹ In this article, the connection between the saint, the hagiographer and his work, and the audience is called 'spiritual communication', that is, the author has heard – whether directly or indirectly – the story from the saint himself, who, through the hagiographer, radiates something of his holiness to the public, a holiness they can imitate or emulate: 'It is something like an event that with its own spiritual force links the saint, the eyewitness/hagiographer and the audience, and transports them to a level of timeless existence where the drama of the saint is played out perpetually and in eternity'.²⁰⁰ In these hagiographical works, the discourse itself is the message.

Some features of spiritual communication in the *Life of Aaron* have already been mentioned. To start with, well-known features of hagiographical works such as the holy men speaking and acting in imitation of Christ (*imitatio Christi*) and the simple and unadorned style are in itself ways of enhancing the trustworthiness of the account.²⁰¹ Moreover, the narrative structure of the *Life of Aaron* embodies the 'message' of the work by presenting it as a travelogue and emphasising its transmission through several holy men. The author is like a modern journalist who actually travels towards the holy men, thus embodying the hearing/seeing dimension even more prominently and involving the public in the story. Another way of emphasising the spiritual communication is to make the discourse plausible to the public. In the *Life of Aaron*, this is done by adding specific topographical information, by accounting historical events and persons, and even by pretending that the work was written by a famous fourth-century anchorite.

Historians sometimes tend to approach these details with the questions: What is fiction, what fact? However, such a clear-cut distinction does not work in hagiographical discourse, for the aim of the hagiographer is not to describe historical events as accurately as possible, but to directly involve his audience in the narrative.²⁰² Nonetheless, although these narratives may contain details, which are distorted or stereotyped in order to fulfil this goal, the spiritual communication with a regional audience, especially in the work under consideration here, may contain specific information on the region, which increases its interest for historians. For what a regional audience has in common is not only the general stock-and-trade of hagiographical works, but also a definite sense of a regional space. To compare once again with the *Life of Onnophrius*, the locations mentioned in that work are three monastic cells in caves and a well in the desert. It is not different for the *Life of Cyrus*, where the locations are two caves, a hut and a well. In contrast, the *Life of Aaron* contains

¹⁹⁷ *J ECS* 6 (1998) 343–539, and J. Howard-Johnston, P.A. Hayward (eds), *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1999).

¹⁹⁸ S. Elm, 'Introduction', *J ECS* 6 (1998) 343–51 at 348.

¹⁹⁹ C. Rapp, 'Storytelling as Spiritual Communication in Early Greek Hagiography: The Use of *Diegesis*', *J ECS* 6 (1998) 431–48.

²⁰⁰ Rapp, 'Storytelling', 441.

²⁰¹ See e.g. Cameron, *Rhetoric of Empire*, 112–3.

²⁰² Rapp, 'Storytelling', 444.

much more detailed information on a specific region, the First Cataract area. In view of the wider audience of the *Life of Onnophrius*, it may not have been a coincidence that it has been transmitted in (Sahidic and Bohairic) Coptic, Latin, Greek, Arabic, Syriac, Armenian, Georgian and Ethiopian. By contrast, the *Life of Aaron* has come down in only one complete (Sahidic) Coptic manuscript.²⁰³

Viewing the *Life of Aaron* as spiritual communication of a local monk with his regional audience not only explains the topographical details in the text, but also another unique feature of the *Life of Aaron*: the incorporation of a history of the first bishops of Philae. Why was this section added to the *Life of Aaron*? Unlike the other *Lives* discussed here, this section of the *Life of Aaron* is well anchored in time and space, which enhances its relevance to the people who are interested in that particular time and space: people from the island. The section explained the origins of the Christian community of Philae, cast in a series of legendary stories about the first bishops of Philae, but it also augmented the sanctity of Apa Aaron, and with him, of the other monks in the region. This unique feature of the *Life of Aaron* suggests that the intended audience of the work was not limited to the local clergy alone, but concerned the Christian community of Philae as a whole. In addition, the stories about the monks of the region would have appealed to a wider, regional audience. It is in this light that we will interpret the history of the first bishops of Philae.²⁰⁴

The First Bishops of Philae

At the start of his eyewitness account of the conversion of Philae to Christianity, Macedonius tells Aaron how he had become the first bishop of the island:

‘When I was still a notable, and started to become rich, I went south, because I was pagarch over these cities.²⁰⁵ I went to Philae and because it was Sabbath, I sought a place where I could celebrate the Eucharist - for I am an orthodox Christian -, because they worshipped idols in that place. Now, the remainder of the orthodox among them did not have freedom of speech because of the multitude of idol worshippers. Therefore I asked a Christian how the Eucharist was celebrated. He said to me: “Truly, my lord the notable, the inhabitants of the city are oppressed by the idol worshippers and, indeed, clergymen of the city of Syene have to come to us to celebrate the Eucharist for us on Sabbath and the Lord’s day”’ (fol. 12a).²⁰⁶

In this passage, the archetype of the Christian community of Philae is presented as a small group of Christians living among a majority of idol worshippers who dominate their acting and speaking. The clergy had to come from nearby Syene to lead the celebrations of the Eucharist each Saturday and Sunday.²⁰⁷

²⁰³ Several versions of the *Life of Onnophrius* are still unedited. The main editions in Coptic are: É.C. Amélineau, ‘Voyage d’un moine égyptien dans le désert’, *RecTrav* 6 (1885) 166-94; Budge, *Coptic Martyrdoms* 205-24; Till, *Koptische Heiligen- und Märtyrerlegenden* 1, 14-9; L.T. Lefort, ‘Fragments coptes’, *Muséon* 58 (1945) 97-120; T. Orlandi, *Koptische Papyri theologischen Inhalts* (Vienna, 1974) 158-61.

²⁰⁴ For a similar interpretation of such regional hagiographical works, see U. Gotter, ‘Thekla gegen Apoll: Überlegungen zur Transformation regionaler Sakraltopographie in der Spätantike’, *Klio* 85 (2003) 189-211.

²⁰⁵ For a comparison of text and translation of this sentence with Budge’s edition, see Dijkstra, “‘Une foule immense de moines”’, 197-8.

²⁰⁶ ⲉⲧⲓ ⲉⲓⲟ ⲛⲁⲣϣⲟⲛ ⲉⲁⲓⲁ ⲁⲣϣⲏ ⲛⲧⲏⲛⲧⲏⲓⲗⲟⲩⲥⲓⲟⲥ ⲁⲓⲉⲓ ⲉⲣⲏⲥ ⲉⲓⲛⲁⲒⲁⲣϣⲏ ⲉⲗⲁⲛⲏ ⲛⲉⲓⲛⲟⲓⲥ. ⲁⲓⲱⲕ ⲁⲉ ⲉⲓⲟⲩⲏ ⲉⲛⲉⲓⲁⲕ ⲁⲩⲥⲁⲃⲃⲁⲧⲟⲛ ⲱⲱⲛⲉ ⲁⲓⲱⲛⲉ ⲛⲥⲁⲟⲩⲏⲁ ⲕⲉ ⲉⲓⲛⲁⲥⲩⲛⲁⲒⲉ ⲕⲉ ⲁⲛⲓⲓ ⲟⲩⲟⲣϥⲟⲗⲟⲩⲟⲥ ⲉⲧⲱⲉ ⲕⲉ ⲛⲉⲩⲱⲛⲱⲉ ⲉⲓⲗⲟⲗⲟⲛ ⲛⲓⲛⲁ ⲉⲧⲓⲛⲁⲩ. ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛⲱⲱⲥⲓⲛ ⲟⲛ ⲛⲓⲛⲟⲣϥⲟⲗⲟⲩⲟⲥ ⲉⲧⲛⲓⲑⲏⲧⲟⲩ ⲛⲉⲛⲛⲧⲁⲩⲱⲛⲁⲣϣⲏⲥⲓⲁ ⲛⲓⲛⲁⲩ ⲉⲧⲱⲉ ⲛⲁⲱⲁⲓ ⲛⲓⲛⲣⲓⲱⲛⲱⲉ ⲉⲓⲗⲟⲗⲟⲛ. ⲁⲓⲱⲛⲉ ⲟⲩⲏ ⲛⲧⲟⲟⲧⲓ ⲛⲟⲩⲱⲛⲉ ⲛⲕⲣⲓⲥⲧⲁⲛⲟⲥ ⲉⲧⲱⲉ ϥⲉ ⲛⲥⲩⲛⲁⲒⲉ. ⲛⲧⲟⲩⲟⲩ ⲁⲉ ⲛⲉϥⲁⲕ ⲛⲁⲓ ⲕⲉ ⲱⲛⲧⲱⲥ ⲕⲩⲣⲓ ⲛⲁⲣϣⲟⲛ ⲥⲉϥⲏⲩⲩ ⲛⲁⲛⲁⲧⲛⲟⲓⲥ ⲛⲧⲟⲟⲧⲟⲩ ⲛⲓⲛⲣⲓⲱⲛⲱⲉ ⲉⲓⲗⲟⲗⲟⲛ. ⲕⲁⲓ Ⲓⲁⲣ ⲉⲱⲱⲁⲩⲉ ⲉⲓⲣⲁⲓ ⲱⲁⲣⲟⲛ ⲛⲁⲓⲣⲓⲉⲛⲕⲁⲏⲏⲣⲓⲕⲟⲥ ⲛⲧⲛⲟⲓⲥ ⲥⲟⲩⲁⲛ ⲛⲥⲉⲥⲩⲛⲁⲒⲉ ⲛⲓⲛⲟⲛ ⲓⲛⲓⲛⲥⲁⲃⲃⲁⲧⲟⲛ ⲛⲓⲧⲕⲩⲣⲓⲁⲕⲏ.

²⁰⁷ This remark cannot be taken as evidence for a chorepiscopate at Philae. It rather depicts a remote past, in which the Christian community was still the minority and lacked ecclesiastical organisation. Hence, the dependency of Philae on Syene is not one of a bishop of Philae on the bishop of Syene, but of priests performing the Eucharist in the name of the bishop of Syene, because Philae still lacked a bishop.

When Macedonius was in Alexandria to pay his respects to a military commander (ΣΤΡΑΤΗΛΑΤΗΣ), the pagarch went to Athanasius to inform him about the poor situation of the Christian community of Philae. Macedonius concluded:

“Well then, my lord and father, look for somebody who is worthy to take care of this necessary work, ordain him bishop and send him south with me”. The holy archbishop answered and said to me: “Because you pursue the good thing, who is wiser than you or who equals you in wisdom? You are the one who will be the shepherd over the sheep in that place”. And I said to him: “Forgive me, my holy father, for I am not worthy of such a work”. But he persuaded me with his sweet words and ordained me’ (fol. 12b-13a).²⁰⁸

The legendary story of the creation of the see of Philae has remarkable parallels with the story of the first bishop of Axum, Frumentius, as described by the fourth-century church historian Rufinus of Aquileia.²⁰⁹

In the tenth book of his *Church History*, which is an abridged Latin translation of the tenth book of Eusebius’ *Church History*, Rufinus accounts how Constantine completed the task of the apostles, who had spread the faith to the extremities of the world: Thomas to Parthia, Matthew to Ethiopia and Bartholomew to India (that is, Southern Arabia). Under Constantine, even more remote peoples were evangelised such as the further Indians (Axum), the Iberians (in modern Georgia) and the Saracens.

The first of these accounts is the evangelisation of Axum. Rufinus narrates how the philosopher Metrodorus went to this place to study the geography of the Nile. A Meropius of Tyre followed his example together with two pupils, Edesius and Frumentius. Once, when a truce with the Romans had been broken, the Axumites strangled all foreigners except for the two boys. While Edesius became a cupbearer, Frumentius’ insight and prudence were acknowledged and he was given a favoured position at the royal court. When the king had died and his son was still too young to reign, the queen appointed Frumentius as a regent. In this position he did everything to help the spread of Christianity, as there were already some Christians among the Axumites. After the prince had grown up, Edesius returned to his parents, but Frumentius went to Alexandria where he met Athanasius. He told the archbishop everything he had seen and admonished him to send a bishop to Axum. Athanasius answered:

What other man have we found of such qualities that he possesses the spirit of God like you, who are able to fulfil these tasks in this way?²¹⁰

²⁰⁸ ΤΕΝΟΥ ΔΕ ΠΑΧ(ΘΕΙ)Σ ΝΕΙΩΤ ΑΝΑΥ ΕΟΥΑ ΕΥΜΠΩΑ ΠΔΙΑΚΟΝΕΙ ΕΠΕΙΡΩΒ ΠΑΝΑΓΚΑΙΟΝ ΝΓΧΕΙΡΟΛΟΝΕΙ ΠΜΟΔ ΠΕΠΙΣΚΟΠΟΣ ΠΤΑΧΙΤΩ ΕΡΗΣ ΝΠΜΑΙ. ΠΑΡΧΗΠΕΠΙΣΚΟΠΟΣ ΔΕ ΕΤΟΥΑΑΒ ΑΦΟΥΩΨΒ ΠΕΧΑΔ ΝΑΙ ΧΕ ΕΒΟΛ ΧΕ ΑΚΩΠΗΕ ΠΣΑΠΖΩΒ ΕΤΗΑΝΟΥΔ ΝΙΜ ΠΕΠΣΑΒΕ ΠΖΟΥΟ ΕΡΟΚ Η ΝΙΜ ΠΕΠΡΠΠΖΗΤ ΕΥΠΠΤΩΝ ΕΡΟΚ. ΠΤΟΚ ΠΕΤΗΑΨΠΠΕ ΠΨΩΣ ΕΧΠ ΝΕΣΟΟΥ ΕΤΖΠΠΝΑ ΕΤΠΠΝΑΥ. ΑΝΟΚ ΔΕ ΠΕΧΑΙ ΝΑΔ ΧΕ ΚΩ ΝΑΙ ΕΒΟΛ ΠΔΕΙΩΤ [Ε]ΤΟΥΑΑΒ ΠΤΠΠΩΑ ΔΗ ΕΖΩΒ Π[ΤΕΙ]ΠΠΗΕ. ΠΤΟΔ ΔΕ ΑΥΠΠΘΕ ΠΠ[ΟΙ] ΖΠΠΠΕΔΨΑΧΕ ΕΤΖΟΛ[Σ] ΑΥΧΕΙΡΟΛΟ]ΝΕΙ ΠΠΟΙ.

²⁰⁹ Rufin. *hist.* 10.9-10 (*GCS* 9.2, pp. 971-3), on which are based the accounts by Socr. *h.e.* 1.19 (*GCS* Neue Folge 1, pp. 60-2), Soz. *h.e.* 2.24 (*SC* 306, pp. 329-35), Thdt. *h.e.* 1.23 (*GCS* Neue Folge 5, pp. 73-4) and Gel. Cyz. *h.e.* 3.9 (*GCS* 28, pp. 148-50). On Rufinus see Rohrbacher, *Historians of Late Antiquity*, 93-107. On Frumentius, see I. Engelhardt, *Mission und Politik in Byzanz. Ein Beitrag zur Strukturanalyse byzantinischer Mission zur Zeit Justins und Justinians* (Munich, 1974) 104-27; Thélamon, *Paiens et chrétiens*, 31-83, who also includes a French translation of the passage (pp. 39-41); B.W.W. and F.A. Dombrowski, ‘Frumentius/Abba Salama: Zu den Nachrichten über die Anfänge des Christentums in Äthiopien’, *OC* 68 (1984) 114-69; A. Grillmeier, *Jesus der Christus im Glauben der Kirche. Band 2/4: Die Kirche von Alexandrien mit Nubien und Äthiopien nach 451* (Freiburg, 1990) 301-7; Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth*, 109-16; Brakmann, *Τὸ παρὰ τοῖς βαρβάρους ἔργον θεῖον*, 51-67, and ‘Axomis (Aksum)’, 745-7; Rohrbacher, *Historians of Late Antiquity*, 228-9. For an English translation of the passage see P.R. Amidon, *The Church History of Rufinus of Aquileia. Books 10 and 11* (New York and Oxford, 1997) 18-20.

²¹⁰ Rufin. *hist.* 10.10 (*GCS* 9.2, p. 973: *Et quem alium invenimus virum talem, in quo sit spiritus dei in ipso sicut in te, qui haec ita possit implere?*). This phrasing probably draws on Gen. 41.38, where the Pharaoh appoints Joseph as his vice-regent (*Num invenimus talem virum, in quo spiritus dei?*). Note that one of the manuscripts of Rufinus’ *Church History* (*O*) has *invenimus* in stead of *invenimus*, and this form has also been preferred by Migne, *PL* 21, col. 480. I am grateful to Z.R.W.M. von Martels for discussing this passage with me.

Athanasius ordained Frumentius bishop of Axum and the new bishop converted a mass of people to Christianity. Rufinus ends his account with the announcement that he has heard the story personally from Edesius, Frumentius' brother.

This story closely resembles that of Macedonius reporting to Athanasius about the situation at Philae. Like Axum, Philae was situated at an extremity, on the southern Egyptian frontier. In both cases, too, the messengers became bishops and caused a mass conversion to Christianity. Thirdly, as in the case of Axum, the see of Philae was created through the intercession of Archbishop Athanasius of Alexandria. The episode on the creation of the see of Philae is therefore probably written in the tradition of Rufinus, and it may even have been inspired by it.

An important aspect of the story on the creation of the see of Philae is that it was sanctified by Athanasius and took place in the patriarchal city of Alexandria. Although banished several times, Athanasius was one of the most important persons in the Egyptian Church, and Alexandria was considered to be the Christian capital of Egypt.²¹¹ By involving Athanasius and his city in the story, the importance of the event is emphasised, and thus the creation of the see of Philae legitimised.

Athanasius not only instigated the creation of the see of Philae, he also ordained the second bishop, Mark (fol. 24b-30b). When the delegation from Philae arrived at Alexandria, the first thing Athanasius said was that he remembered the vision predicting the episcopate of Mark and Isaiah, although no one else than Macedonius knew of it. After having spent three days in Alexandria, Athanasius informed Mark, by referring to the same vision, that his brother Isaiah had to be promoted to priesthood and was going to be the future bishop. Thus, the archbishop not only fulfils the role of ordaining and thus authenticating the new bishops, he also seems to know beforehand the right path the bishops of Philae have to take.

Athanasius' insight is again apparent in the ordination of Isaiah (fol. 33a-b). Athanasius knew that the delegation had arrived and ordered to prepare the church for the consecration of the new bishop before they arrived. The fourth bishop, Psoulousia, is ordained by an unnamed successor of Athanasius (fol. 35a-36a), perhaps Timothy I (380-385), whose death is reported not long after this passage (fol. 36b). As already noted, the vision is again picked up when the delegation has forgotten the episcopal licence and the archbishop sends it after them containing the following statement: 'I saw you being clothed in a robe (στολη) and given keys in your hands' (fol. 36a).²¹² In this way, the vision about the appointment of Mark and Isaiah also authenticates Psoulousia's appointment.

The appointment of the first bishops of Philae is further authenticated by referring to an historical event and the mention of topographical details about Alexandria. Firstly, the description of the episcopate of Psoulousia contains the miracle story that is linked to the historical event of the celebration of the new Archbishop Theophilus in 385. Beside the glorification of Psoulousia, the miracle of a bishop of Philae in the presence of all other Egyptian bishops helps constructing a self-conscious identity of the local Christian community of Philae.

Secondly, the story contains specific information about the city of Alexandria. When the delegation arrived in order to ordain Mark, a few notables (γενάρχων) wanted to receive a blessing from the archbishop, but the future bishop of Philae was more important:

'Take the trouble to withdraw until tomorrow morning, for some brothers from the south are with us'. When he had talked to them they departed, saying: 'Pray for us, and we will go and pray in the monastery of Apa Menas, and we will return to you' (fol. 26a).²¹³

²¹¹ On Athanasius see e.g. D. Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism* (Oxford, 1995), and Martin, *Athanasius*. On Alexandria in Late Antiquity see C. Haas, *Alexandria in Late Antiquity. Topography and Social Conflict* (Baltimore and London, 1997), and Hahn, *Gewalt und religiöser Konflikt*, 15-120.

²¹² ἀπὸ αὐτοῦ ἐποικιστοῦ ἀρχιεπίσκοπου ἀθανασίου ἐπέμπετο πρὸς αὐτοὺς ἐπιστολή.

²¹³ σκύλλει μὴ μὲν ἀπὸ τῶν ἀρχιεπίσκοπων ἀθανασίου ἐπέμπετο πρὸς αὐτοὺς ἐπιστολή. ἀπὸ αὐτοῦ ἐποικιστοῦ ἀρχιεπίσκοπου ἀθανασίου ἐπέμπετο πρὸς αὐτοὺς ἐπιστολή. ἀπὸ αὐτοῦ ἐποικιστοῦ ἀρχιεπίσκοπου ἀθανασίου ἐπέμπετο πρὸς αὐτοὺς ἐπιστολή.

Possibly, the pilgrimage site of Apa Menas is meant here, which was situated 45 km southwest of Alexandria and was one of the most popular Christian pilgrimage sites in Late Antique Egypt.²¹⁴ Notables yielded a second time to the delegation when they reached the harbour of Schissa (fol. 30b-32a). On the basis of the description of the harbour, Schissa can probably be identified with Schedia,²¹⁵ a busy grain harbour on the nexus of the canal connecting Alexandria and the Canopus branch of the Nile.²¹⁶ The delegation could not find a boat carrying them to the south but soon a boat from Syene with notables and their families came in, who allowed the delegation to take the ship south. Schissa is mentioned a second time at the arrival of the delegation of Psoulousia in Alexandria (fol. 35a). The delegation took a small boat from Schissa to the city and arrived at the gate where the archbishop was talking to two other bishops. This gate may well be the West or Moon Gate, which is situated not far from one of the routes leading from Schissa into the city.²¹⁷

The detailed description of the election and ordination of the bishops of Philae is another way of legitimising them. Having elected the new bishop, the local community wrote an official document (†ΥΦΙCΜΑ, read †ΗΦΙCΜΑ) to the archbishop (fol. 24b and 26a). In Alexandria, the bishop was ordained in a special ceremony, after which he received an official letter of recommendation from the archbishop that confirmed his appointment (CΥCΤΑΡΗ, CΥCΤΑΔΙΚΗ, read CΥCΤΑΤΙΚΗ; fol. 29b-30b, 33b, 35b-36a). The custom that the local Christian community elects a new bishop, whom the archbishop subsequently ordains in Alexandria, is already known in Egypt since the Council of Nicaea (325).²¹⁸ Several stories about fourth-century bishops in Olbia in the Pentapolis (Libya), Thenessos (in the Delta), Hermonthis (Armant) and Syene witness to this use.²¹⁹ In one of his letters, Athanasius asks the future bishop of Hermoupolis (in the Delta) to hurry to Alexandria to be ordained.²²⁰ The stories on Hermonthis and Syene in the *Synaxarion* correspond closely to the pattern of election, modesty of the holy man, journey to Alexandria and ordination by the archbishop in the *Life of Aaron*. The *Synaxarion* consists of literary traditions around holy men collected for liturgical purposes, and it is possible that the similar pattern in the *Life of Aaron* may indicate that the history of the first bishops of Philae derives from just such a tradition.

All in all, then, authoritative persons and events situated in the landscape of the patriarchal city of Alexandria serve the purpose of legitimising the creation of the see of Philae and the ordination of the first bishops of Philae. The information on Alexandria does not diminish the regional outlook of the *Life of Aaron*, for the events are focused on the holy men from Philae. But besides the ordination of all four bishops, we hear not much more of their lives than their deaths and burials. Although Macedonius continues living in the Valley and Psoulousia on his island, and both bishops were involved in miracles, the ascetic deeds of the other saints in the region are recounted in greater detail and in a recurrent pattern. Apparently, the history of the first bishops of Philae has to be seen not in the first place as a description of the lives of holy men, but as a legitimation of the see of Philae. These aspects conform to the ideal of the monk-bishop which is widespread in Christian literature of Late Antiquity.²²¹ The bishops of Philae performed their duties for the Christian community of Philae, and afterwards went home to their ascetic environment.²²²

²¹⁴ E.g. P. Maraval, *Lieux saints et pèlerinages d'Orient* (Paris, 1985) 319-22; Haas, *Alexandria*, 38, 213, 345; P. Grossmann, 'The Pilgrimage Center of Abû Mînâ', in Frankfurter, *Pilgrimage & Holy Space*, 281-302.

²¹⁵ Timm, *Christlich-koptische Ägypten* 5, 2323-4.

²¹⁶ Haas, *Alexandria*, 25, 28, 348.

²¹⁷ Haas, *Alexandria*, 30, 208-9.

²¹⁸ Martin, *Athanasie*, 129.

²¹⁹ Olbia: Synes. *ep.* 76. Thenessos: Cassian. *conl.* 11.2 (*SC* 54, p. 102). Hermonthis: W.E. Crum, H.G. Evelyn-White, H.E. Winlock (eds), *The Monastery of Epiphanius at Thebes*, 2 vols (New York, 1926) 1.136-7. Syene: *PO* 3, pp. 276-7 and 430-4. See Bagnall, *Egypt*, 286, and Martin, *Athanasie*, 127-9.

²²⁰ Ath. *ep. Drac.* 7.1 Opitz 2, p. 306.

²²¹ P. Rousseau, 'The Spiritual Authority of the "Monk-Bishop"'. Eastern Elements in Some Western Hagiography of the Fourth and Fifth Centuries', *JThS* 22 (1971) 380-419; Markus, *End of Ancient Christianity*, 199-202.

²²² For Mark and Isaiah it is not explicitly stated that they were monk-bishops. However, they were buried on the same spot as Macedonius in the Valley, which suggests that they lived there, too. Moreover, in the Coptic Festal

The question remains how historical the description of the first bishops of Philae is. We already saw that three of the four bishops mentioned in the *Life of Aaron* are known from ecclesiastical documents. For example, the *Life of Aaron* uses almost the same formulation in Coptic for the succession of Mark by Isaiah as one of the ecclesiastical documents.²²³ The miracle story of Psoulousia, which is linked to the historical event of the celebration of the new Archbishop Theophilus in Alexandria in 385, probably gives an indication of the episcopate of a fourth bishop of Philae. Thus, the first three bishops of Philae are historical figures, and probably the fourth bishop too (for a complete list of the bishops of Syene and Philae, see Appendix 3).²²⁴

The representation of the bishops in the *Life of Aaron* conforms to what we know of fourth-century Egyptian bishops in the sense that they were recruited predominantly from the elite.²²⁵ A different case is Psoulousia, who already was a monk before his episcopate, but the appointment of bishops from monastic circles was also a well-known policy in the fourth century.²²⁶ Evidently, however, the representation of Macedonius as pagarch 'over these cities' reflects a later audience, since, as we have seen, the term is used in this sense only from the reign of Anastasius (491-518) onwards. Usually, hagiographical works do not indicate a precise function of somebody from the elite and limit themselves to such general terms as ἀρχων or νος 'notable'.²²⁷

The pagarch's main task was to collect taxes and in doing this he could act quite independently, as he was not directly responsible to the provincial governor (*dux*). Mostly, pagarchs were rich local landowners. A rich pagarch could guarantee that the expected amount of tax money reached the government even in times of distress.²²⁸ So when Macedonius states that he 'started to become rich' this could have something to do with the idea that a pagarch should be rich.²²⁹ No pagarchs are known from the region of the First Cataract. However, given the general picture that pagarchies seem to have followed Egypt's division into nomes, it may well be that the pagarchy corresponded to the first nome consisting of Ombi, the *metropolis* and the 'towns' on the southern frontier, Elephantine, Syene and Philae. Like in other pagarchies known from documentary sources, several pagarchs were probably responsible for one pagarchy and Macedonius could have been the pagarch of Elephantine, Syene and Philae.²³⁰

The bishop further remarks that he went to Alexandria to visit a military commander (στρατηλάτης), which suggests that he also had a military function. There are indeed a few cases in which a pagarch combines his office with being a military commander.²³¹ Moreover, in view of the military presence on the southern frontier it may not be surprising that Macedonius combined military and civil functions. Although the historical Macedonius

Letter by Athanasius, several bishops, including Isaiah, are described thus: 'tous ceux-ci sont des ascètes, menant la vie monastique' (tr. Coquin, 'Lettres festales', 155).

²²³ Cf. ἔπιμα ἱεραρχος περὶσον in fol. 33a of the *Life of Aaron* with ἡσαίας ἔπιμα ἱεραρχος, Coquin, 'Lettres festales', 146 (IFAO, Copte 25, fol. 8a).

²²⁴ App. 3 includes a list of the Late Antique bishops of Syene and Philae with their attestations, for which cf. Fedalto, *Hierarchia Ecclesiastica Orientalis* 654; Worp, 'Checklist of Bishops', 305, 307; Martin, *Athanasie* 764-83; Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens* 123, 137. G. Lefebvre, *Recueil des inscriptions grecques-chrétiennes d'Égypte* (Cairo, 1907) no. 684.3-4, mentions a Bishop Apa Kallinikos in a Greek inscription, which he suggests might come from Philae, but this provenance is far from certain, and the inscription is further left out of consideration here. See Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens* 121. Cf. Worp, 'Checklist of Bishops', 305, who has inserted this bishop under Philae with a question mark.

²²⁵ Bagnall, *Egypt*, 285, 292; Martin, *Athanasie*, 653-9.

²²⁶ Brakke, *Athanasius*, 99-110.

²²⁷ See, e.g., the notables yielding to the delegation of Mark in Alexandria in the *Life of Aaron* (fol. 26a and 30b-32a).

²²⁸ Liebeschuetz, *From Diocletian to the Arab Conquest*, Chs. XVII and XVIII; Mazza, 'Ricerche sul pagarca'; Liebeschuetz, *Decline and Fall*, 188-9.

²²⁹ The Greek loanword πλοῦσιος is not common in Coptic, but cf. *The Martyrdom and Miracles of Mercurius the General*, fol. 24a (ed. Budge, *Miscellaneous Texts* 1, 281), where the term ἀρχων is also mentioned in the context of the same word.

²³⁰ Liebeschuetz, *From Diocletian to the Arab Conquest*, Ch. XVII at 38-9; Mazza, 'Ricerche sul pagarca', 184-96.

²³¹ Liebeschuetz, *Decline and Fall*, 194-5, with references.

cannot have been a pagarch, the name Macedonius is not common in Egypt, and attested only twice in the papyri and once in a Late Antique inscription from Philae itself.²³² In reality, he may therefore well have been a military commander, who came to the southern Egyptian frontier in military service and later became the first bishop of Philae. Although it can therefore not be excluded that there is a core of truth in this story, it seems that the compiler of the *Life of Aaron* used an anachronism to give a meaningful explanation why Macedonius came to Philae.²³³

His successors, Mark and Isaiah, are said to have been the sons of the high priest (fol. 19b) of the temple at Philae, that is, the temple of Isis. Later, they converted to Christianity, were renamed and became ecclesiastical dignitaries, to end up as the second and third bishops of Philae; their father also converted and was renamed. Although we encountered the conversion of the children of temple priests before in the *Life of Moses*, turning children of priests into ecclesiastical dignitaries is a unique motif in Egyptian hagiography, and hence we may try to find an explanation for this remarkable feature.²³⁴ In order to understand the shift, the works about Cyprian of Antioch, which were also widespread in Egypt, are suitable parallels. According to this tradition, Cyprian was a magician and signed a treaty with the devil. When he discovered that the devil was not powerful enough, he converted to Christianity and ended up being martyred as bishop of Antioch.²³⁵ The paradoxical change from magician to bishop emphasises the message of this story that magical practices are worthless and demonic, and makes the martyrdom of the later bishop even more glorious. In the same way, even if it can not entirely be ruled out that Mark and Isaiah were the sons of a temple priest, their shift to becoming the bishops of Philae seems to be deliberately used to contrast it with their 'pagan' backgrounds.

This also appears from the change of Mark's and Isaiah's names. When Macedonius wanted to baptise them, he said:

'What are your names?' The elder said: 'Our names are hard to pronounce, for we are called by the names of gods', and they told them to the bishop. He said: 'You shall not be called by these names from now on'. And he gave a name to the elder one and baptised him. He called him Mark, and the younger one (he called) Isaiah (fol. 17b).²³⁶

It has been suggested that these names were 'hard to pronounce', because they were Nubian names.²³⁷ However, Mark does not hesitate to say the names because they were incomprehensible, but because they were 'the names of gods'. His remark reminds of Egyptian theophoric names such as Esmet and Pakhom, the names of the last priests of Philae. Mark probably refers to just such names, and felt ashamed to tell them in front of the Christian holy man. However, people normally received their names at birth and did not change them after conversion.²³⁸ Moreover, the repudiation of theophoric names was certainly not widely

²³² The name is spelled Μακεδόνιος in *P.Oxy.* VII 1028.2; *PSI* XIV 1421.11, and Μακεδώνιος in a Late Antique inscription from the East Church of Philae, which has recently been published by J.H.F. Dijkstra, 'Late Antique Inscriptions from the First Cataract Area Discovered and Rediscovered', *JJP* 33 (2003) 55-66 at 58 (no. 3.3). Both spellings return in the *Life of Aaron*, fol. 11b (*sic*), 12a, 13a-b (ΜΑΚΕΛΩΝΙΟΣ); 15b, 22b (2x), 23b, 24b, 25b, 26a (*sic*), 32b, 33a, 34b, 56b (ΗΑΚΕΛΩΝΙΟΣ).

²³³ Cf. Aaron, who also was a military official before he became a monk at Scetis, see fol. 37b-38a.

²³⁴ Cf., however, Frankfurter, *Religion*, 262-3, who quotes the example of a son of a temple priest who had become a monk.

²³⁵ L. Krestan, A. Hermann, 'Cyprianus II (Magier)', *RAC* III (1957) 467-77; J. van der Vliet, 'Cypriaan de Tovenaar. Christendom en magie in Koptische literatuur', in M. Schipper, P. Schrijvers (eds), *Bezweren en betoveren. Magie en literatuur wereldwijd* (Baarn, 1995) 84-94.

²³⁶ $\mu\mu\ \eta\epsilon\ \eta\epsilon\tau\tilde{\iota}\rho\alpha\eta\ \mu\epsilon\chi\alpha\delta\ \eta\beta\iota\mu\iota\sigma\ \chi\epsilon\ \eta\epsilon\eta\eta\alpha\eta\ \rho\omicron\varsigma\epsilon\ \eta\{\delta\}\eta\tau\omicron\gamma\ \epsilon\beta\omicron\lambda\ \chi\epsilon\ \eta\eta\alpha\eta\ \eta\eta\omicron\gamma\tau\epsilon\ \eta\epsilon\ \eta\tau\alpha\gamma\eta\omicron\gamma\tau\epsilon\ \epsilon\tau\tilde{\iota}\rho\omicron\eta\ \eta\eta\omicron\omicron\gamma\ \lambda\gamma\omega\ \lambda\gamma\chi\omicron\omicron\gamma\ \epsilon\pi\epsilon\eta\mu\iota\varsigma[k]\omicron\pi\omicron\varsigma\ \eta\tau\omicron\gamma\ \lambda\epsilon\ \mu\epsilon\chi\alpha\delta\ \chi\epsilon\ \eta\eta\epsilon\varsigma[\omega]\omega\eta\epsilon\ \epsilon\tau\tilde{\iota}\rho\omicron\eta\gamma\eta\omicron\gamma\tau\epsilon\ \epsilon\tilde{\iota}\rho\omega\tau\tilde{\iota}\ \eta\eta\eta\epsilon[\rho]\alpha\eta\ \chi\iota\eta\ \tau\epsilon\eta\omicron\gamma\ \lambda\gamma\omega\ \lambda\gamma\eta\omicron\gamma\tau\epsilon\ \epsilon\pi\eta\mu\iota\sigma\ \lambda\gamma\beta\alpha\pi\tilde{\iota}\tau\epsilon\ \eta\eta\omicron\gamma\ \lambda\gamma\eta\omicron\gamma\tau\epsilon\ \epsilon\tilde{\iota}\rho\omicron\gamma\ \chi\epsilon\ \eta\alpha\tilde{\iota}\rho\kappa\omicron\varsigma\ \lambda\gamma\omega\ \eta\eta\epsilon\tilde{\iota}\rho\ \varsigma\eta\lambda\gamma\ \chi\epsilon\ \iota\varsigma\alpha\eta\alpha\varsigma.$

²³⁷ Martin, *Athanase*, 644.

²³⁸ Martin, *Athanase*, 644; Horsley, 'Name Change', 10-1.

accepted in Egypt.²³⁹ It is, then, less likely that the historical Mark and Isaiah changed their names. Although they may have been brothers, for episcopal families did exist in Egypt,²⁴⁰ the change of names more probably was another literary device, which fits the metamorphosis of Philae from a predominantly 'pagan' into a fully Christian community. The representation of this shift in the *Life of Aaron* is the subject of the next section.

The Origins of the Christian Community of Philae

Another aspect of the story of Frumentius, which has not yet been treated in detail, is the mass conversion that resulted from his episcopate. The same allegedly happened at Philae. After Macedonius has returned from Alexandria, he converted the entire population of Philae to Christianity. But the conversion did not happen without a blow. First, Macedonius had to slaughter the holy falcon and to flee the idol worshippers, only to return gloriously after he had told Isaiah to perform the miracle with the camel's leg. In this respect, the story of the conversion of Philae to Christianity looks more like the *Life of Porphyry* by Mark the Deacon.²⁴¹

The Greek *Life of Porphyry*, which is also transmitted in a Georgian version translated from Syriac, was written down after 420 but reworked after 444/445.²⁴² The work contains a detailed description of the battle of Bishop Porphyry against idol worship at Gaza. The events described can be located in time from 395 until 420, and are ascribed to Porphyry's pupil, Mark the Deacon:

I will relate about his wars and oppositions, not only against the leaders and champions of idolomania, but also against a whole people filled with utter foolishness.²⁴³

At the beginning of the *Life*, we learn that the city was still predominantly 'pagan' before Porphyry became bishop of Gaza: 'At that time, the madness of the people concerning the idols flourished at Gaza'.²⁴⁴ After having described how the archbishop of Caesarea promoted Porphyry to bishop of Gaza, from Ch. 17 onwards Mark describes how Porphyry, despite severe resistance from the idol worshippers, converts many people to Christianity in a series of miracle stories. In addition, he receives an imperial edict to destroy all temples at Gaza, including the largest one, the temple of Marnas. With the money of the Empress Eudoxia a church is built on the spot of the Marneion.

There is much common ground in the story of the conversion of Philae to Christianity. Like in the *Life of Porphyry*, a destruction precedes the mass conversion. In the *Life of Aaron*,

²³⁹ Cf. Eus. *m.P.* 11.8, writing about Egyptian Christians who changed their birth names at the beginning of the fourth century: 'instead of the names associated with idols which their parents had given them, they called themselves after prophets' (tr. Horsley, 'Name Change', 1), but this name change is rather a statement of people being martyred in a time of persecutions. See Horsley, 'Name Change', 11.

²⁴⁰ Martin, *Athanase*, 643-4.

²⁴¹ For an elaborate introduction, the Greek text and a translation see H. Grégoire, M.-A. Kugener, *Marc le Diacre Vie de Porphyre, évêque de Gaza* (Paris, 1930). For the Georgian version see P. Peeters, 'La vie géorgienne de Saint Porphyre de Gaza', *AB* 59 (1941) 65-216. See generally, R. Van Dam, 'From Paganism to Christianity at Late Antique Gaza', *Viator* 16 (1985) 1-20; G. Mussies, 'Marnas God of Gaza', *ANRW* II 18.4 (1990) 2412-57 at 2415-8; Trombley, *Hellenic Religion* 1, 187-245; Hahn, *Gewalt und religiöser Konflikt*, 202-22.

²⁴² Cf. Peeters, 'Vie géorgienne', and Z. Rubin, 'Porphyrius of Gaza and the Conflict between Christianity and Paganism in Southern Palestine', in A. Kofsky, G. Stroumsa (eds), *Sharing the Sacred. Religious Contacts and Conflicts in the Holy Land: Fourth-Fifth Centuries CE* (Jerusalem, 1998) 31-66, who argue for a Syriac original, with Mussies, 'Marnas', 2455-7, and Trombley, *Hellenic Religion* 1, 246-82, who argue that the Greek text is the original one. However, the case is not settled, see J.W. Childers, 'The Georgian *Life of Porphyry of Gaza*', in M.F. Wiles, E.J. Yarnold (eds), *Studia Patristica XXXV* (Leuven, 2001) 374-84, and Hahn, *Gewalt und religiöser Konflikt*, 203 (n. 57).

²⁴³ Marc. Diac. *v. Porph.* 2 (Πολέμους τε αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀντιστάσεις ἱστορήσαμεν οὐ μόνον πρὸς τοὺς τῆς εἰδωλομανίας ἀρχηγούς τε καὶ προμάχους, ἀλλὰ καὶ πρὸς δῆμον ὀλόκληρον πάσης πεπληρωμένον ἀνοίας). Translations are based on Grégoire and Kugener's edition.

²⁴⁴ Marc. Diac. *v. Porph.* 4 (ἤκμαζεν δὲ ἐν αὐτῇ κατ' ἐκεῖνο καιροῦ ἡ περὶ τὰ εἰδωλα τῶν ἀνθρώπων μανία).

the destruction does not consist of the destruction of several temples and their idols, but only of the killing of the holy falcon of Philae, which, as also appeared from the passage by Shenoute at the start of Part II, is regarded as an 'idol':

I saw them going inside the temples to worship a bird they called the falcon, inside some demonic cage (ῥΕΝΗΑΓΚΑΝΟΝ).²⁴⁵ After having stayed a few days inside among them, the priest happened to leave the town for some business.²⁴⁶ However, his two sons stayed behind, in case somebody wanted to sacrifice to the idol. Now I, Macedonius, went up to them and said deceptively: 'I want to offer a sacrifice to God today'.²⁴⁷ They said to me: 'Come and offer it'. After he had went inside, he ordered them to lay wood upon the altar and light the fire beneath it. The two sons of the priest attended the wood until it got charred. Our father, Bishop Apa Macedonius, turned his steps to the place where the demonic cage was. He took out the falcon, cut off its head, threw it upon the burning altar, left the temple and went away (fol. 13a-b).²⁴⁸

Another parallel with the story of the conversion of Gaza is that a miracle, the miracle of the camel's leg, preceded the conversion. After the temple priest has heard of it, he converts, but not without preparing everything for Macedonius' arrival and building a church. Having entered, Macedonius baptised the priest first, changing his name into Jacob, and then the entire population of the island:

Afterwards, (he baptised) the entire population of the city: men, women and little children. There was nobody from among them who was not baptised that day (fol. 21a).²⁴⁹

The *Life of Aaron* resembles the *Life of Porphyry* in that both works describe a stage before the holy man takes action, a time when the city is almost entirely 'pagan'. Afterwards, mass conversion takes place and a church is built. In the case of the *Life of Porphyry*, the conversion of Gaza may not have involved mass conversions, because the number of converts given after each miracle is small in comparison with the supposed total population of the city, even when Porphyry died.²⁵⁰ However, if these numbers mean anything, they rather underscore the gradual growth of the number of Christians.²⁵¹

Thus, in that year about 300 names were added to the flock of Christ, and from that year on, the number of Christians grew every year.²⁵²

Nevertheless, the difference between both works remains that in the *Life of Porphyry* a series of miracle stories illustrates the steady growth of the Christian community of Gaza without converting the entire population.²⁵³ According to the *Life of Aaron*, for Philae one miracle was enough to convert the whole island.

²⁴⁵ The plural is probably a mistake by the copyist.

²⁴⁶ For this meaning of the word ἀποκρισις, see Lampe, *PGL* s.v. ἀπόκρισις 3.

²⁴⁷ Cf. for the motif of deceptively offering to God, the story of Jehu and the Baal priests, 2 Kg. 10.18-29.

²⁴⁸ ΑΙΝΑΥ ΔΕ ΕΡΟΟΥ [ΕΥ]ΒΗΚ ΕΖΟΥΗ ΕΝΕΡΠΗΥΕ ΕΥΦΩ[Ε] ΟΥΖΑΛΗΤ ΕΥΗΟΥΤΕ ΕΡΟΙ ΧΕ Π[ΒΗΚ] ΠΖΟΥΗ ΖΠΖΕΝΗΑΓΚΑΝΟΝ. ΔΩ[Ω]ΠΕ ΔΕ ΗΠΙΣΑ ΖΕΝΖΟΥΟΥ ΕΙ ΠΖΟΥΗ [ΖΑ]ΤΗΥ ΑΠΟΥΗΗΒ ΕΙ ΕΒΟΛ ΖΠΤΠΟΛΙΣ ΔΥΒΩΚ ΠΟΥΑΠΟΚΡΙΣΙΣ. ΠΕΩΠΗΡΕ Δ[Ε] ΣΝΑΥ ΝΕΥΠΡΟΣΚΑΡΤΗΡΕΙ ΕΤΒΕ ΟΥΑ ΕΦΗΔΡΘΥΣΙΑ ΠΠΕΛΟΛΟΝ. ΑΠΟΚ [ΛΕ] ΜΑΚΕΛΟΝΙΟΣ ΔΙΒΩΚ ΨΑΡΟΥ ΔΙΨΑΧΕ ΗΠΙΜΑΥ ΖΠΟΥΚΡΟΙ ΕΙΧΩ ΠΜΟ[Σ] ΧΕ ΨΟΥΩΩ ΕΤΑΛΕ ΘΥΣΙΑ ΕΖΡΑΙ ΠΠΗΟΥΤΕ ΠΠΟΥΟΥ. ΠΤΟΥΟΥ ΔΕ ΠΕΧΑΥ [ΗΑΙ] ΑΜΟΥ ΗΤΑΛΟΣ ΕΖΡΑΙ. ΠΤΕΡΩΒΩΚ ΔΕ ΕΖΟΥΗ ΑΦΟΥΕΖΣΑΖΗΕ ΕΤΡΕΥΤΑΛΕ ΠΨΕ ΕΧΠ ΤΩΗΥΕ ΠΣΕΧΕΡΕ ΠΚ[Ω]ΖΤ ΖΑΡΟΥΟΥ. ΠΕΩΠΗΡΕ ΔΕ ΣΝΑΥ ΠΠΟ[Υ]ΗΗΒ ΝΕΥΠΡΟΣΚΑΡΤΗΡΕΙ ΕΗΨΕ Ψ[Δ]ΤΟΥΡΧΒΒΣ. [ΠΕΝΕΩΤ] ΠΠΕΠΙΣΚΟΠΟΣ ΑΠΑ ΜΑ[ΚΕΛ]ΟΝΙΟΣ ΑΥΨΠΕΟΥΟΙ ΕΠΙΜΑ ΕΤΕ[Π]ΗΑΓΚΑΝΟΝ ΠΖΗΤΩ. ΔΥΕΗΗΕ ΕΒΟΛ ΠΒΗΚ ΔΥΩΩΛΠ ΠΤΕΩΑΠΕ ΔΥΗΟΥ[Χ]Ε ΕΒΟΛ ΠΜΟΥ ΕΧΠ ΤΩΗΥΕ ΕΤ[ΜΟΥ]Ζ ΔΥΕΙ ΕΒΟΛ ΖΠΠΡΠΕ ΔΥΒΩΚ.

²⁴⁹ ΗΠΠΙΣΩΣ ΝΑΤΠΟΛΙΣ ΤΗΡΣ ΠΖΟΥΟΥΤ ΗΠΠΕΖΙΟΜΕ ΠΠΗΩΠΗΡΕ [Π]ΚΟΥΙ. ΠΠΕΛΑΔΥ ΨΩΧΠ ΕΠΑΖΟΥ ΠΖΗΤΟΥ ΠΠΕΩΧΙΒΑΠΤΙΣΜΑ ΠΠΕΖΟΥΟΥ ΕΤΠΜΑΥ.

²⁵⁰ Trombley, *Hellenic Religion* 1, 223-34.

²⁵¹ MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire*, 87-8; Hahn, *Gewalt und religiöser Konflikt*, 206.

²⁵² Marc. Diac. v. *Porph.* 74 (Προσετέθησαν οὖν τῆ τοῦ Χριστοῦ ποιμένῃ ἐν ἐκείνῳ τῷ ἐνιαυτῷ ὡσεὶ ὄνόματα τριακόσια, καὶ ἐξ ἐκείνου καθ' ἕκαστον ἔτος αὐξήσιον ἐπεδέχεται τὰ Χριστιανῶν).

²⁵³ Hahn, *Gewalt und religiöser Konflikt*, 217.

The Late Antique inscriptions from Philae contradict this depiction of an abrupt conversion to Christianity during the episcopate of Macedonius in the second quarter of the fourth century. As we have seen in Chs. 3 and 4, the Ancient Egyptian cults, if languishing, were in use until around 456/457. Moreover, the holy falcon may have remained worshipped until at least the second quarter of the fifth century. As the burning of idols is a *topos* in Coptic saints' lives, the story about the burning of the falcon seems more likely to be legendary.²⁵⁴ There is, then, enough reason to think that the conversion of Philae to Christianity was a more gradual process than that described in the *Life of Aaron*. As has already been said at the start of this chapter, the story has to be seen not as an accurate description of a historical event, but as a story that has a message to convey. The message was that Philae had definitively done away with its 'pagan' past.

In this respect, it may also not have been without meaning that the high priest and his two sons figure so prominently in the conversion story of Philae and are the first to be converted. In the 'invented tradition' of the Christian community of Philae, the priests, who in reality had kept the Isis cult alive until around 456/457 and had been present on the island for such a long time, belonged to the past. The priest and his sons embodied this shift by being baptised and by changing their names into Christian ones. Moreover, the sons even became bishops. We may therefore assume that this aetiological story about the origins of the Christian community of Philae must have been composed at a time when Philae considered itself to be entirely Christian.

Significantly, the last to be converted on the island was the old woman, who had denounced Macedonius' slaughter of the holy falcon to the temple priest:

It happened, after their father had went inside the temple to worship the idol first before he went to his house, as was his custom – after he had gone inside, he did not find his sons. He directed his feet to the innermost part, but did not find them. Now he turned to the demonic cage, but he did not find the falcon inside. He went out in confusion and said: 'What happened? For I did not find my sons nor even the falcon god'. An old woman who lived beside the temple heard the priest. She called him and said: 'Come to me, blessed priest, and I tell you what I have seen today. For I saw this criminal monk, who has led some citizens astray, going inside the temple with your sons. Undoubtedly, he corrupted their minds. They took the falcon god and fled'. The priest listened to the old woman's words and went to town after his sons, saying: 'Not only will I kill my sons, but that monk too. If I find him, I will knock his brains out' (fol. 14a-b).²⁵⁵

Again, not too much should be made of the historicity of the old woman, since, like Mark, Isaiah and their father, she embodies the 'pagan' past of Philae, a time when almost everything was still the other way round.²⁵⁶

This inversion appears from the way she typifies the priest on the one hand ('blessed', ΣΜΑΝΑΔΤ) and Macedonius on the other ('criminal', ΠΑΡΑΒΑΤΗΣ; 'leading people astray', ΠΛΑΝΑ; 'corrupting their souls', ΤΑΚΕ ΠΕΥΖΗΤ). In Christian discourse, we would expect the first term to be used for a Christian and the other ones for a 'pagan'. This inverse idiom is set straight when Macedonius addresses the temple priest who has just arrived after the miracle with the camel's leg took place: 'Aristos, what do you gain by leading astray (ΠΛΑΝΑ) this multitude and causing them to loose their souls?' (fol. 20a).²⁵⁷ Eventually, the woman plays an

²⁵⁴ Cf. e.g. the burning of idols in the *Panegyric on Macarius* 5.11 Johnson.

²⁵⁵ ΔΣΩΠΠΕ ΛΕ ΠΤΕΡΕΠΕΥΕΙΩΤ ΕΙ ΝΤΒΩΚ ΕΖΟΥΝ ΕΠΡΠΕ ΕΤΡΤΟΥΩΠΤ ΠΠΕΙΛΩΛΟΝ ΠΩΟΡΠ ΚΑΤΑΠΕΦΕΘΟΣ ΠΠΑΤΕΦΒΩΚ ΕΠΕΦΗ. ΠΤΕΡΤΒΩΚ ΛΕ ΕΖΟΥΝ ΠΠΕΦΖΕ ΕΝΕΦΩΗΡΕ ΑΦΠΠΕΦΟΥΟΙ ΕΠΜΑ ΕΤΖΙΖΟΥ(Ν) ΠΠΕΦΖΕ ΕΡΟΟΥ ΑΦΚΩΤΕ ΟΝ ΖΠΠΠ[Δ]ΓΚΑΝΟΝ ΕΤΕΡΕΠΒΗΣ ΠΖΗΤΤ ΠΠΕΦΖΕ ΕΡΟΦ. ΑΦΕΙ ΛΕ ΕΒΟΛ ΕΦΑΠΟΡΕΙ ΕΦΧ[Ω]ΠΠΜΟΣ ΧΕ ΟΥ ΠΕΝΤΑΦΩΠΠΕ ΕΒΟΛ ΧΕ ΠΠΕΙΖΕ ΕΝΑΦΩΗΡΕ ΟΥΛΕ ΠΚΕΝΟΥΤΕ ΠΒΗΣ. ΑΣΣΩΤΠ ΕΡΟΦ ΝΣΙΟΥΖΛΛΟΥ ΠΣΖΙΜΕ ΕΣΟΥΗΗΖ ΖΙΤΟΥΩΦ ΠΠΡΠΕ ΑΣΗΟΥΤΕ ΟΥΒΗΦ ΕΣΧΩΠΠΜΟΣ ΧΕ ΑΜΟΥ ΦΑΡΟΙ ΠΟΥΗΗΒ ΕΤΣΜΑΝΑΔΤ ΠΤΑΤΑΜΟΚ ΕΠΕΝΤΑΠΝΑΥ ΕΡΟΦ ΠΠΟΟΥ. ΔΙΝΑΥ ΓΑΡ ΕΠΕΙΠΑΡΑΒΑΤΗΣ ΠΜΟΝΟΧΟΣ ΠΑΙ ΕΤΠΛΑΝΑ ΠΖΟΙΜΕ ΖΠΝΑΤΕΠΟΛΙΣ ΑΦΒΩΚ ΕΖΟΥΝ ΕΠΡΠΠΕ ΠΠΝΕΚΩΗΡΕ. ΟΥΠΑΝΤΩΣ ΠΤΟΦ ΠΕΝ[ΤΑΦ]ΤΑΚΕ ΠΕΥΖΗΤ ΑΥΦ ΠΠΟΥΤΕ [ΠΒΗΣ] ΑΥΠΩΤ. ΠΟΥΗΗΒ ΛΕ [ΠΤΕΡ]ΤΩΤΠ ΠΠΕΙΦΑΧΕ ΠΤΟΟΤΕ [Π]ΘΛΛΟΥ ΑΦΜΟΩΦ ΕΦΤΟΥΟΙ ΖΠΤ[Π]ΟΛΙΣ ΠΣΑΝΕΦΩΗΡΕ ΧΕ ΟΥΠΠΟΝΟΝ [Π]ΑΦΩΗΡΕ ΦΝΑΖΟΤΒΟΥ ΑΛΛΑ ΠΚΕΜ'Ο[Π]ΟΧΟΣ ΕΙΩΑΗΖΕ ΕΡΟΦ ΦΠΑΠΤΑΦ[Σ]Ε ΠΠΜΟΦ.

²⁵⁶ Cf. Frankfurter, *Religion*, 68.

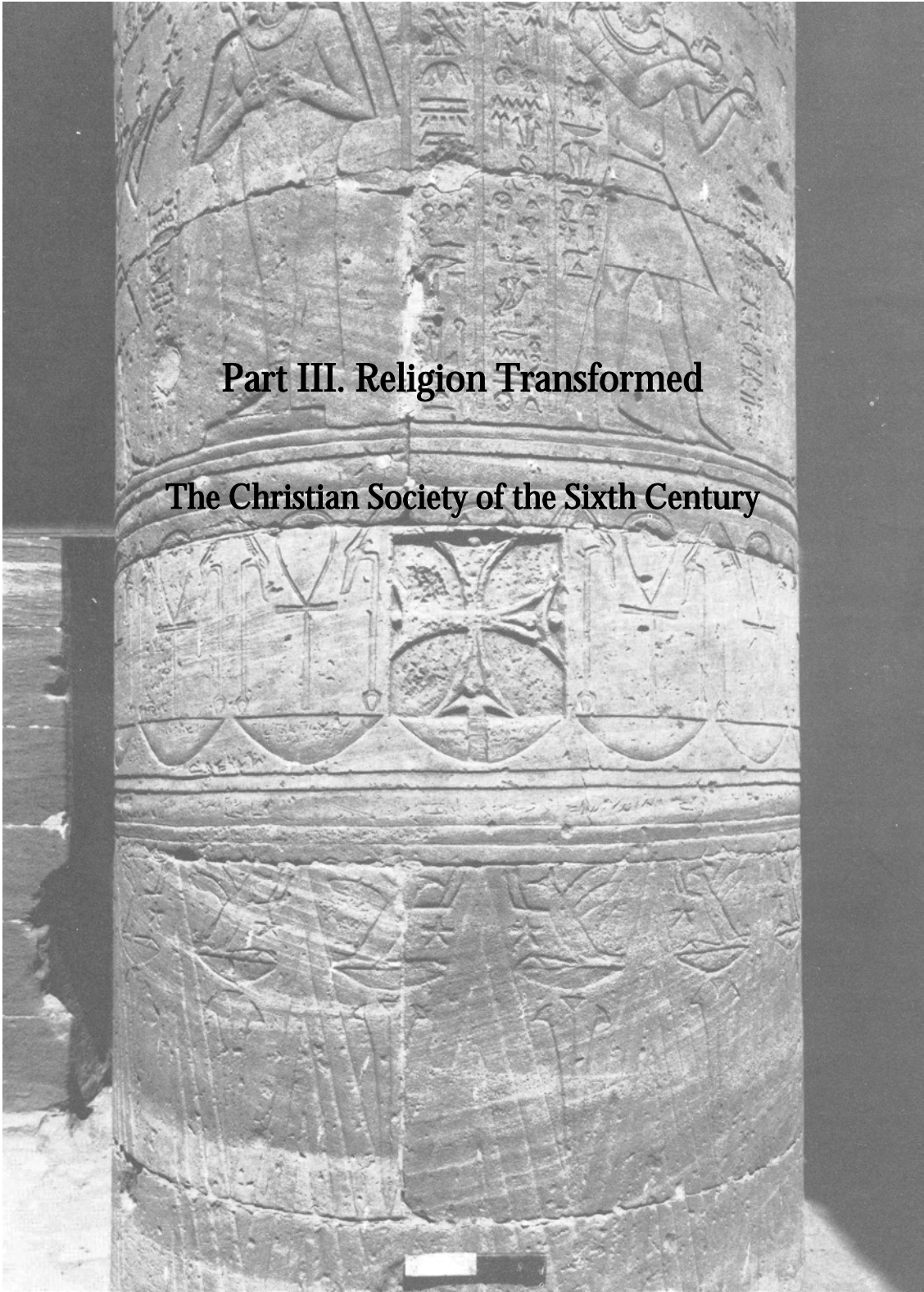
²⁵⁷ ΑΡΙΣΤΟΣ ΠΤΑΚΤΖΗΥ ΝΟΥ ΧΕ ΑΚΠΛΑΝΑ ΠΠΕΙΠΠΗΗΦΕ ΕΤΡΕΥΤΟΦ ΠΤΕΥΤΥΧΗ.

important part in the conversion story of Philae. When hearing of her words to the temple priest, Macedonius curses her and makes her dumb, but after the whole island has been converted she is the last to be converted after Macedonius himself has healed her (fol. 22a-23a). Moreover, the story of the old woman has the same structure as the miracle stories of section three of the *Life of Aaron*. Like Jesus' healing of a dumb man, Macedonius places his finger in the old woman's mouth and heals her.²⁵⁸ The only difference is that the holy man himself has caused her distress and that he returns to the old woman to heal her.

The conversion of Philae to Christianity as it is described in the *Life of Aaron*, then, is not a historical account. We have seen how the story functions in the section on the first bishops of Philae and in the larger unity of the *Life of Aaron*. It shows us the perspective of a Christian community on its formative period when almost everything was still 'pagan'.²⁵⁹ The legendary first bishop of Philae ended this situation for the glory of himself, his successors and, because he was buried beside three of them, of Apa Aaron. The author enriched his work with legendary stories about the creation of the see of Philae and its conversion, stories which have literary parallels in the mass conversions at Axum and Gaza, as told by Rufinus and Mark the Deacon. Section two of the *Life of Aaron* is in itself unique, but can now be placed in the context of Christian literature. In Ch. 9, it will be shown that the work probably reflects a sixth-century audience. However, that century will be treated in Part III.

²⁵⁸ Cf. Mk. 7.33-37.

²⁵⁹ Independently, J. Hahn, 'Die Zerstörung der Kulte von Philae. Geschichte und Legende', has come to the same conclusion in a paper presented at the symposium 'Zerstörung und Erneuerung lokaler Kulttopographie in der Spätantike', Münster 2002.



Part III. Religion Transformed

The Christian Society of the Sixth Century

Introduction

Modern visitors to the temple of Isis at Philae are often impressed by the striking signs of the reuse of the temple as a church in Christian times (Fig. 5). Large crosses have been incised next to the doorways, Ancient Egyptian reliefs have been hacked away and inscriptions commemorate what seems to have been the greatest deed of the sixth-century Bishop Theodore of Philae: the building of a church to St Stephen inside the temple of Isis.¹ Let us walk through the building and take a closer look at what happened to the former temple of Isis by reading through the inscriptions.

When a visitor enters the temple, either through the second pylon or the Porch of Tiberius, he first encounters the foundation inscription of the church of St Stephen on the right-hand side of the entrance to the second pylon:

+ This *topos* (τόπος) became, in the name of the holy and consubstantial Trinity, the house (οἶκος) of St Stephen under our most Godloving father, Bishop Apa Theodore. May God preserve him for a very long time.²

On walking inside, the visitor has to imagine, again on his right-hand side, a painting of St Stephen, which has now vanished but was still visible to nineteenth and early twentieth-century visitors. What remains is the following inscription:

+ After the most Godloving Bishop Apa Theodore, through the philanthropy of our Master Christ, has transformed (μετασχηματισάμενος) this sanctuary (ιερώων, read ιερόν) into a *topos* of St Stephen, (this was accomplished) for the good in the power of Christ + under the most pious Posios, deacon and president.³ +

Since the main verb of the sentence is missing, and there was once a painting of St Stephen on the wall, it could well be that the inscription refers to that lost painting and we have to add a phrase such as 'this painting was dedicated'.⁴

The visitor now walks through a hall with columns, the pronaos, and he may be amazed that on one column the ankh sign has been replaced by the cross. Three more inscriptions were incised by the entrance to the holiest part of the temple, the naos, an inscription on each side of the door, and one inside on the right-hand side. The one on the left-hand side of the door reads as follows:

+ Also this good work was done under our most holy father, Bishop Apa Theodore. May God preserve him for a very long time.⁵

Turning towards the right, the visitor can read the self-confident words:

+ The cross has conquered. It always conquers.⁶ +++

Finally, in the doorway to the naos on the right-hand side, an inscription can be found which is almost the same but slightly shorter than the one on the left-hand side of the door:

¹ *I.Philae* II 200-4 = *FHN* III 324 (slightly adapted). See P. Nautin, 'La conversion du temple de Philae en église chrétienne', *CArch* 17 (1967) 1-43 at 11-21; *I.Philae* II, pp. 251-68; *FHN* III, pp. 1179-81; Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens* 100-1.

² *I.Philae* II 200. Cf. the revisions in the word order proposed by D. Hagedorn, 'Inscription de Philae II 200', *ZPE* 9 (1972) 222, not taken into account in *FHN* III, p. 1177.

³ *I.Philae* II 203.

⁴ Nautin, 'Conversion', 18; *I.Philae* II, pp. 264-5; *FHN* III, p. 1179 (n. 831).

⁵ *I.Philae* II 202.

⁶ *I.Philae* II 201.

This work was done under our most God-loving father, the Bishop Apa Theodore.⁷

Thus, under Bishop Theodore the interior of the temple was radically transformed.

What kind of church was it that was built inside the ancient temple? In the dedicatory inscriptions, the renovated building is not called ἐκκλησίαια, the specific Greek term used for a regular church, but τόπος and οἶκος.⁸ The term τόπος is a general term for sanctuaries dedicated to saints.⁹ However, the term is sometimes used, alternating with οἶκος, for martyr shrines.¹⁰ As the church was modest and dedicated to the saint Stephen, who is undoubtedly St Stephen the Protomartyr,¹¹ the church was probably a martyr's shrine or *martyrium*, but not a regular church attended on regular days of worship.¹² It would be more accurate, then, to speak of a *topos* of St Stephen, rather than of the church of St Stephen, if with 'church' a regular church is meant. Although the exact status of the shrine remains obscure, it is clear that this *topos* was not the main church of Philae.¹³

Yet it has been ascribed the greatest importance in modern scholarship. Since the closure of the temple and the first imperial mission to Nubia were thought to have taken place at about the same time in the episcopate of Theodore, these events have been associated with each other, and the act of turning the temple into a church has been seen as the definitive 'triumph' of Christianity over 'paganism' at Philae. The idea behind this argumentation is that, although there was a Christian community on the island from the fourth century onwards, the Ancient Egyptian cults remained relatively strong until their end as reported by Procopius. However, in Part I it has been suggested that the late cults on Philae were not as lively as it has been supposed and Procopius' account reflects imperial propaganda about what could not have been more than a symbolic closure. In Part III, it will therefore be argued that the connection between the three events is not as straightforward as has been assumed.

In Ch. 8, we will turn to the accounts of the missions to Nubia by the Monophysite church historian John of Ephesus. In the sixth century, the Church was disrupted by disputes over doctrine. In 451, at the Council of Chalcedon, it had been proclaimed that Christ had two natures, a human and a divine one. By contrast, adherents to the Monophysite doctrine, also called the 'Monophysite movement', stressed that Christ had but one, divine nature. Most champions of Monophysitism lived in Syria and Egypt, and the clashes became more severe in the sixth century, when emperors such as Justinian (527-565) openly supported Chalcedon and persecuted the Monophysites. However, Monophysitism never became a separatist movement and maintained its loyalty to the emperor. It simply had another understanding of what was the right faith, the literal meaning of the Greek word 'orthodox' (ὀρθόδοξος).¹⁴ It is against this background that we have to see the imperial missions to Nubia. After the Western Roman Empire had fallen apart in 476, the Eastern Roman Empire continued to survive for 1000 years, and these missions

⁷ *I.Philae* II 204.

⁸ τόπος: *I.Philae* II 200.1, 203.4. οἶκος: *I.Philae* II 200.3.

⁹ L. Antonini, 'Le chiese cristiane nell'Egitto dal IV al IX secolo secondo i documenti dei papiri greci', *Aegyptus* 20 (1940) 129-208 at 129-33; C. Mohrmann, *Études sur le latin des chrétiens*, 4 vols (Rome, 1958-77) 4.211-30 ('Les dénominations de l'église en tant qu'édifice en grec et en latin au cours des premiers siècles chrétiens', 1962¹); G.J.M. Bartelink, "'Maison de prière" comme dénomination de l'église en tant qu'édifice, en particulier chez Eusèbe de Césarée', *REG* 84 (1971) 101-18; É. Bernard, 'Τόπος dans les inscriptions grecques d'Égypte', *ZPE* 98 (1993) 103-10 at 105; Papaconstantinou, *Culte des saints*, 267-78.

¹⁰ Papaconstantinou, *Culte des saints*, 270.

¹¹ For St Stephen the Protomartyr, see, generally, G.W. Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome* (Cambridge, 1995) 75-6.

¹² Nautin, 'Conversion', 20; *I.Philae* II, pp. 266-7; Papaconstantinou, *Culte des saints*, 274-5.

¹³ Papaconstantinou, *Culte des saints*, 304.

¹⁴ The standard study is still W.H.C. Frend, *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement* (Cambridge, 1972).

can now truly be called 'Byzantine'. They will be compared with the account of the closure of the temples at Philae by Procopius. Were these events related? And if so, how? These questions can be answered by evaluating Philae's role in the missionary activities.

In Ch. 9 we will concentrate on the transformation of the temple of Isis into a church. By looking at what happened to the other buildings on the island, we will situate this 'temple conversion' in a local context rather than regard it as the first act in the conversion of Nubia to Christianity. Why did Theodore transform the temple into a church? And how does the transformation of the temple fit into his episcopate?

Ch. 10 will continue the survey of the reuse of temples in the First Cataract region by comparing Philae with Syene and Elephantine. How was the sacred landscape of the First Cataract area transformed into a Christian one? This brings us to the final chapter (Ch. 11), which discusses the position of the Church in a society that had become Christian. Papyri and ostraka from Syene and Elephantine demonstrate that by the sixth century the Church had definitively become part of everyday life. Contrary to the preceding parts, the sixth-century, Christian society therefore provides us with a few striking examples of how people appropriated Christianity.

8. Philae and the Missions to Nubia

Byzantine Missions of the Sixth Century

Ever since the reign of the Emperor Constantine, the Christian mission had been part of imperial ideology.¹⁵ With the adoption of the Hellenistic concept of the *basileus*, the Christian emperors were regarded as God's representatives on earth, one of whose tasks it was to spread Christianity within the imperial frontiers, and beyond.¹⁶ At first, the emperor was not directly involved, as in the mission of Frumentius to Axum. It was only in the sixth century that the Emperor Justin I (518-527) and, especially, his successor and nephew Justinian, began to integrate imperial missions into foreign policy.¹⁷

Whereas in earlier centuries the Roman emperors had tried to bring foreign peoples inside the Roman world, Justinian acted more prominently in Christian terms as the central person who made this inclusiveness possible.¹⁸ The works of two authors to be discussed in this chapter, the historian Procopius and the church historian John of Ephesus, include passages on imperial policy regarding the southern Egyptian, 'Nubian' frontier. We will see how both authors write about missionary activities from a different angle owing to the different purposes of their works, and how the 'Nubia passages' fit in.¹⁹ We will start our inquiry with Procopius.

In his *Wars*, which were finished around 550/551 and contain the *Persian Wars* (two books), the *Vandal Wars* (two books) and the *Gothic Wars* (four books, the last of which was published around 552), Procopius included several accounts of peoples living near the Black Sea.²⁰ These peoples have in common that they converted to Christianity in the reign of Justinian in connection with imperial policy towards the Persians. The Caucasian kingdoms were situated in a mountainous area that was hard to control and thus was one of the hotbeds in the wars between the Roman and Persian Empires.²¹ It is worthwhile summarising these accounts in order to see how Procopius depicts the imperial missionary activities.

In the first account, Justinian provided the Heruli with fertile lands and other possessions. He persuaded them to become Christians and allies of the Romans: 'As a result of this they adopted a gentler manner of life and decided to submit themselves wholly to the laws of the Christians'.²² Nevertheless, they did not behave as good allies and violated their neighbours. Procopius illustrates this unruly behaviour by

¹⁵ Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth*, 90-3.

¹⁶ F. Dvornik, *Early Christian and Byzantine Political Philosophy. Origins and Background*, 2 vols (Washington, 1966) 2.611-850; J.A.S. Evans, *The Age of Justinian. The Circumstances of Imperial Power* (London, 1996) 58-65.

¹⁷ H.-G. Beck, *Ideen und Realitäten in Byzanz: Gesammelte Aufsätze* (London, 1972) Ch. IV ('Christliche Mission und politische Propaganda im byzantinischen Reich', 1967'); Engelhardt, *Mission*, J. Moorhead, *Justinian* (London and New York, 1994) 141-3; G.B. Greatrex, 'Byzantium and the East in the Sixth Century', in M. Maas (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Reign of Justinian* (forthcoming).

¹⁸ M. Maas, "'Delivered from Their Ancient Customs": Christianity and the Question of Cultural Change in Early Byzantine Ethnography', in K. Mills, A. Grafton (eds), *Conversion in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages: Seeing and Believing* (Rochester NY, 2003) 152-88 at 159-60.

¹⁹ Several of the examples mentioned here are treated by Engelhardt, *Mission*, and Cameron, *Procopius*, 120-6. English translations of Procopius' works are taken from Dewing's Loeb edition.

²⁰ Engelhardt, *Mission*, 22a-5; Cameron, *Procopius*, 122-3. On the date of Procopius' *Wars* see Cameron, *Procopius*, xii, 8; G. Greatrex, 'The Dates of Procopius' Works', *BMGS* 18 (1994) 101-14, *Rome and Persia at War, 502-532* (Leeds, 1998) 62, and 'Recent Work on Procopius and the Composition of *Wars VIII*', *BMGS* 27 (2003) 45-67.

²¹ On the politics concerning this frontier area, see Isaac, *Limits of Empire*, 232-4; D. Braund, *Georgia in Antiquity. A History of Colchis and Transcaucasian Iberia 550 BC-AD 562* (Oxford, 1994) 268-314; Greatrex, 'Byzantium and the East'.

²² Procop. *Goth.* 2.14.34.

mentioning that the Heruli used to mate with asses.²³ Procopius also places the conversion story of the Tzani in the reign of Justinian. They were paid annually by the Byzantine government but continued to raid the country. Consequently, they were defeated by a Byzantine general, became soldiers in the Byzantine army and converted to Christianity, or in the words of Procopius: ‘they changed their means of life to one of a more civilised sort’.²⁴

In the third passage, Procopius relates the conversion of the Abasgi: ‘these barbarians even down to my time have worshipped groves and forests; for with a sort of barbarian simplicity they supposed the trees were gods’.²⁵ They deposed their two kings, who had the cruel custom of selling boys from their own people as eunuchs to the Romans, and converted to Christianity: ‘But during the reign of the present Emperor Justinian the Abasgi have changed everything and adopted a more civilised standard of life’.²⁶ However, because they felt they were suppressed by the regulations of the Byzantine army, they later reinstated their kings and chose the side of the Persians. Justinian again sent one of his generals, who quashed the resistance of the Abasgi in battle.²⁷

Procopius here writes in the classical ethnographical tradition, in which in a recurrent pattern he describes other peoples as ‘barbarians’, who can be subdued only by violence and are untrustworthy as allies. On the other hand, he also follows imperial propaganda, in which Justinian is seen as the agent of ‘civilisation’ by bringing Christianity to these foreign peoples.²⁸

In his *Buildings* (c. 552), Procopius also describes the conversion of the Tzani.²⁹ The *Buildings* is a panegyric work about Justinian’s building policy and emphasises the imperial ideology of Justinian as the bringer of Christianity:³⁰ ‘They immediately changed their belief to piety, all of them becoming Christians, and they altered their manner of life to a milder way’.³¹ Out of fear that the Tzani would slide back into their previous ‘barbarian’ behaviour, Justinian took several measures, among them the building of a church.³² In this passage, the propagandistic message is apparent throughout, whereas in the *Wars* more attention is paid to the political circumstances of Justinian’s missionary activities.³³

Procopius reports more missionary activities in North Africa in the sixth book of his *Buildings*.³⁴ Firstly, in Boreium, a city to the west of the Pentapolis in Libya, a Jewish ‘sanctuary’ (νεώσ) that was believed to have been built by Solomon still flourished in Justinian’s time.³⁵ The emperor converted the population and transformed the building into a church.³⁶ In the Libyan Desert south of Boreium, two cities of the same name, Augila, possessed temples dedicated to Ammon and Alexander the Great, in which cults flourished until Justinian’s reign. The emperor taught them Christianity, converted the entire population and built a church of St

²³ Procop. *Goth.* 2.14.33-6. A contemporary writer, John Malalas, gives another account of the conversion of the Heruli. According to him, the king of the Heruli came to Constantinople to be baptised. See Malalas, pp. 427-8 Dindorf, and for similar stories pp. 412-3, 431 Dindorf.

²⁴ Procop. *Pers.* 1.15.20-5.

²⁵ Procop. *Goth.* 4.3.14.

²⁶ Procop. *Goth.* 4.3.18.

²⁷ Procop. *Goth.* 4.3.12-21, 9.10-30.

²⁸ For the Tzani in Procopius’ *Wars* see Maas, “‘Delivered from Their Ancient Customs’”, 161-3.

²⁹ Procop. *Aed.* 3.6.1-14. On the date, see Cameron, *Procopius* 9-12, 85-6; Greatrex, ‘Dates of Procopius’ Works’, *Rome and Persia*, 62, and ‘Recent Work’, 49-52.

³⁰ Cameron, *Procopius* 84-112.

³¹ Procop. *Aed.* 3.6.7.

³² Procop. *Aed.* 3.6.12.

³³ On the Tzani in the *Buildings* see Maas, “‘Delivered from Their Ancient Customs’”, 163-7.

³⁴ Engelhardt, *Mission*, 25-7; Cameron, *Procopius* 89, 123-4.

³⁵ For synagogues as religious institutions with a sacred status, see L.I. Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue. The First Thousand Years* (New Haven, 2000) 281.

³⁶ Procop. *Aed.* 6.2.21-3.

Mary Theotokos.³⁷ Justinian also converted the population of the city of Kidame, which from of old had been at peace with the Romans. They adopted Christianity voluntarily.³⁸ Next comes the city of Lepcis Magna which was in ruins and had been largely covered with desert sand. Justinian rebuilt the part of the city that was not covered, and among other building activities he constructed a church for, again, St Mary Theotokos and four other churches.³⁹ He also converted a people living close by, the Gadabitani, and built a church in another city.⁴⁰

Procopius' accounts of these missionary activities give the impression of a world in which 'barbarians' readily converted to Christianity through the agency of Justinian. In the *Wars*, these activities are connected with foreign politics, but in the *Buildings* they almost entirely conform to the ideal of the emperor as bringer of Christianity. In this way, Procopius followed Byzantine imperial propaganda, in which conversion was seen as an instrument of Byzantine control. For Procopius, the missionary activities were therefore closely linked to imperial politics and showed that 'spreading the faith' implied more than spreading faith alone: it also involved the spreading of Byzantine culture and ideology, and in this way of its control.⁴¹

John of Ephesus, for whom a few introductory words seem appropriate, gave a different picture of these missionary activities. He was born around 507 in the Ingilene near Amida, a city on another frontier of the Byzantine Empire, the eastern, Mesopotamian frontier.⁴² In his youth, John joined a monastery in Amida where he experienced the persecutions of the Monophysite movement. He was soon ordained a deacon and travelled several times to Antioch, to the monasteries of Scetis in Egypt and to Constantinople to meet famous ascetics. In 540, he went to Constantinople a second time and became an abbot of a monastery near the capital. Two years later, supported by the emperor, he started missionary activities in the countryside of Asia Minor, where he claimed to have converted 70,000 people. He was ordained bishop of Ephesus in, probably, 558, and soon became one of the advisors of Theodosius, the exiled Patriarch of Alexandria and leader of the Monophysites.

After Theodosius' death, in 566, John was the main representative of the Monophysite community at Constantinople. He was involved in disputes within the movement and, in 571, with the Emperor Justin II (565-578) himself. Building upon John's contacts at court in his period as a missionary in Asia Minor, Justinian and later Justin II had called on him to mediate in disputes with the Monophysites. When Justin changed his course of diplomacy and followed a more rigid path, John was banished to one of the Princes' Islands near Constantinople. Uncertain times followed. In 580, John briefly played a role in a Monophysite conflict concerning the Patriarch Paul of Antioch, but from 581 until his death, no more is heard of him. Shortly after 588 John died, according to a spurious account of him having been a prisoner in, ironically, Chalcedon for over a year.

John's extant works reflect his chequered monastic and ecclesiastical career. During the second half of the 560s, he wrote a series of Syrian saints' lives, the *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, which contain references to the years 566, 567 and 568, but did not receive a final redaction.⁴³ Shortly before Justin's persecutions of the Monophysites in 571, John completed the first two parts of his *Church History* covering the period until the sixth year of the reign of Justin II (571). The aim of the *Church History* was to provide a history of the Monophysite movement, in which John claimed that the

³⁷ Procop. *Aed.* 6.2.14-20.

³⁸ Procop. *Aed.* 6.3.9-12.

³⁹ Procop. *Aed.* 6.4.1-5.

⁴⁰ Procop. *Aed.* 6.4.12-3.

⁴¹ Cameron, *Procopius*, 123.

⁴² J.J. van Ginkel, *John of Ephesus. A Monophysite Historian in Sixth-Century Byzantium* (Diss. Groningen, 1995) 27-37; S. Ashbrook Harvey, H. Brakmann, 'Johannes von Ephesus', *RAC* XVIII (1998) 553-64 at 553-5. On the location of Amida, see Greatrex, *Rome and Persia*, 21.

⁴³ Van Ginkel, *John of Ephesus*, 42.

movement represented the true orthodox church, despite the imperial support for a different doctrine. The first two parts of the *Church History* end relatively optimistically with the attempts by Justin to come closer to the Monophysites. However, disappointed by the persecutions from 571 onwards, John decided to write an 'afterthought', the third part of the *Church History*, on which he was still writing in 588. The third part is therefore much more personal and partisan than the first and second parts, and supports the 'Monophysite cause' even more.⁴⁴

Although both were prominent figures at the Byzantine court Procopius and John differed in their public, the genre of their works and the intention with which they wrote them. John wrote in Syriac for a Monophysite, Syriac speaking public; Procopius for the Greek-speaking elite. John wrote hagiography and ecclesiastical history; Procopius history and panegyric. Finally, John wanted to emphasise that Monophysitism was the true, orthodox faith; Procopius wrote from the imperial, orthodox point of view. These differences of approach should be kept in mind when we give some examples of the missionary activities told by John of Ephesus in the *Lives of the Eastern Saints*

One of these examples is the account of Simeon the Mountaineer, an anchorite who went to a desolate area in the mountains on the Euphrates and stayed there for 26 years to civilise and reconvert the lapsed population to Christianity.⁴⁵ Another example is the account about John of Hephaestopolis. He was a Syrian, but the Patriarch Theodosius of Alexandria ordained him bishop of Hephaestopolis in Egypt. Upon an invitation from the emperor, he accompanied the patriarch to Constantinople and was forced to stay there. After having been banished with Theodosius, he pretended to be ill and requested to return to the capital, where he ordained new priests. When some of his antagonists noticed this, John retreated to a villa in the countryside, allegedly for reasons of health but in reality to get out of town. John journeyed to Asia Minor and Syria and ordained even more people. The Chalcedonian patriarch of Antioch heard of this affair and complained to the emperor. Meanwhile, John managed to return to the villa, and the Empress Theodora protected him by stating that John had not left the building. When this incident had blown over, John applied the same trick by asking for treatment for his disease at a hot spring. He journeyed to Asia Minor on another occasion, where he again ordained many new priests.⁴⁶ The last example consists of the missionary activities of James Bar'adai (Jacob Baradaeus). At the request of Arab tribes to send bishops, Theodosius sent James Bar'adai and Theodore of Arabia, who ordained many clerics.⁴⁷

These examples are different from the foreign, 'barbarian' peoples converted to Christianity as related by Procopius. The emperor does not play the central role, rather clergymen take the initiative. The first example is about an anchorite who starts his missionary activities in a remote area of the Byzantine Empire. The other examples are about two champions of Monophysitism, who help to spread the Monophysite church within the empire. John of Ephesus had met John of Hephaestopolis in Asia Minor around 542 and Bar'adai ordained him bishop of Ephesus in 558.⁴⁸ In between, John performed his own missionary activities in Asia Minor. Whereas the first example

⁴⁴ Van Ginkel, *John of Ephesus* 38-101; Ashbrook Harvey and Brakmann, 'Johannes von Ephesus', 555-6. For the *Lives of the Eastern Saints* see also S. Ashbrook Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis. John of Ephesus and the Lives of the Eastern Saints* (Berkeley, 1990).

⁴⁵ Joh.Eph. *Lives of the Eastern Saints* 16 Brooks (*PO* 17, pp. 229-47). Cf. Engelhardt, *Mission*, 158; Ashbrook-Harvey, *Asceticism*, 94-7.

⁴⁶ Joh.Eph. *Lives of the Eastern Saints* 25 Brooks (*PO* 18, pp. 526-40). On John of Hephaestopolis, see E. Honigmann, *Évêques et évêchés monophysites d'Asie antérieure au VI^e siècle* (Leuven, 1951); Frend, *Monophysite Movement*, 287-8; Engelhardt, *Mission*, 150-3; Ashbrook Harvey, *Asceticism*, 103-4.

⁴⁷ Joh.Eph. *Lives of the Eastern Saints* 50 Brooks (*PO* 19, pp. 153-8). On James Bar'adai see Honigmann, *Évêques*, 168-77; Frend, *Monophysite Movement*, 284-7; Engelhardt, *Mission*, 90-100; Ashbrook Harvey, *Asceticism*, 105-7.

⁴⁸ Van Ginkel, *John of Ephesus* 30, 32.

illustrates the virtues of a Syrian saint, the other examples witness the construction of a Monophysite hierarchy.

A structural analysis of the accounts of Byzantine missions during the reigns of Justin I and Justinian divides the missionary stories into three categories: missions the emperor initiated, missions under the imperial aegis but without the direct involvement of the emperor, and missions organised independently of the emperor.⁴⁹ According to this analysis, the more independent the missions were, the more religiously inspired and the more Monophysite they were. Although these divisions provide insight into the different ways that such stories are structured, the analysis raises the question of whether they adequately describe Byzantine missions. For example, if the missionaries are driven by religious zeal, it is in most cases Monophysitism that drives them. But were Chalcedonians then less involved in these missions?⁵⁰

The answer seems evident from the above analysis, namely that the representation that Monophysites were mainly involved in Byzantine missions is a bias in our sources. Procopius tells us about missionary activities among foreign peoples, and basically follows imperial propaganda, though he may sometimes criticise it in his *Wars*. Consequently, he refrains from statements about internal, doctrinal disagreements.⁵¹ For John of Ephesus this is different. In the *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, he tells us about missionary activities not among foreign peoples, but within the empire itself. These accounts have an outspokenly personal character, which is partly determined by the genre of the work, hagiography. But it also gives John the opportunity to present two of the champions of the Monophysite church and their struggle for the Monophysite cause.

The focus of these accounts on Monophysitism says more about their agendas than that they display a realistic picture of Byzantine missions. For Justinian, missionary activities meant the spread of Christian culture, and therewith Byzantine control. If a person came to the emperor with a proposal for missionary activities, or the emperor chose a missionary, it did not always matter if this person was Monophysite or Chalcedonian. In the case of John of Ephesus himself, the emperor supported his mission to Asia Minor fully, although he was, at that time, a prominent Monophysite abbot. And results there were, as John lists his many converts.⁵² Apparently, these results were more important to the emperor than disputes over doctrine.

John of Ephesus describes missionary activities among foreign peoples only in the passages about Nubia, and only in the third part of the *Church History* which is most clearly written with a Monophysite agenda. Rather than ascribing the characteristics of these accounts to a certain type of mission, we will therefore approach the missionary stories from the viewpoint of the author and his audience, just as we have done with the *Life of Aaron*. This approach may perhaps provide a better understanding of Byzantine missions in general, and imperial involvement in Nubian affairs in particular, as described by both Procopius and John of Ephesus.

Procopius' Nubia Passage in Context

In Part I, we discussed the passage on Diocletian's withdrawal of the southern frontier and the closure of the temples at Philae at length. Let us now look at the wider context

⁴⁹ Engelhardt, *Mission*, 178-86. Cf. the summary by O. Mazal, *Justinian I. und seine Zeit. Geschichte und Kultur des Byzantinischen Reiches im 6. Jahrhundert* (Cologne, 2001) 242-52.

⁵⁰ A question Engelhardt, *Mission*, 182-3, himself poses.

⁵¹ Cameron, *Procopius*, 124-5.

⁵² Cf. Bowersock, *Hellenism*, 1-4; M. Whitby, 'John of Ephesus and the Pagans: Pagan Survivals in the Sixth Century', in M. Salamon (ed.), *Paganism in the Later Roman Empire and in Byzantium* (Cracow, 1991) 111-31; Ashbrook Harvey and Brakmann, 'Johannes von Ephesus', 561-3.

of this passage to explain why Procopius included this intermezzo in his *Wars*.⁵³ In chapters 19 and 20 of book I of the *Persian Wars*, Procopius relates the efforts of Justinian to win over the Homeritae (Himyarites) and the 'Ethiopians', that is, the Axumites, to the Byzantine side against the Persian Empire.⁵⁴ However, before he relates these efforts, Procopius first describes, in an ethnographical digression, where these remote peoples live.

The Homeritae and Axumites lived on either side of the Red Sea, the Homeritae on the Arabian Peninsula (modern Yemen) and the Axumites on the African mainland. Procopius describes the many peoples that live around the Homeritae, generally called 'Saracens', and leaves the impression of a desolate and 'barbarian' land.⁵⁵ En passant, he relates how a certain Abocharabus bestowed upon Justinian a country consisting solely of palm trees, in return for which the emperor gave him the phylarchate over all Saracens in the area.⁵⁶ Procopius then turns to the Axumites and their position with respect to the Homeritae.⁵⁷ Finally, he explains the remarkable nature of the ships sailing between Axum and India.⁵⁸

Rather unexpectedly, Procopius here adds a further digression, in which he accounts how far Axum is removed from 'the Egyptian boundaries of Roman sovereignty'.⁵⁹ Just as in the digression on Abocharabus, it also gives him the opportunity to relate previous imperial policy concerning the country. As we have seen, the historian here digs deep into the past, as he wants to emphasise that the 'extreme parts of Roman sovereignty' formerly went further south, until Diocletian withdrew the Roman frontier to Elephantine in 298.⁶⁰ Diocletian also paid the Blemmyes and Noubades an annual amount of money, but the 'barbarians' were untrustworthy as they continued raiding. Moreover, the emperor allowed them to have priests on the island of Philae and ratified the treaty there. After a brief remark about the religion of the peoples, notably about the Blemmyes sacrificing human beings to the sun, Procopius returns to the present day by stating that Justinian ordered his general Narses to 'destroy' the temples at Philae.

The scene of the closure of the temples in Justinian's reign forms a natural transition to the main line of the story, for religious motivations also play an important role in the next scene.⁶¹ Here Procopius accounts an intervention by the Axumite king Hellestheaeus (known from other sources as Ella Asbeha), who was a Christian, against the Homeritic king, who was a Jew (Dhu Nawas), because the latter was persecuting the Christians there.⁶² After the intervention, a Christian vassal king, Esimiphaeus (Simyaf'a Ashw'a), was on the throne, and the Homeritae had to pay tribute to the Axumites. Not much later, the Homeritae revolted and Esimiphaeus was replaced by a certain Abramus (Abraha), who was also a Christian, but hostile to the Axumites (530/531). Hellestheaeus sent two expeditions against the Homeritae but, as both were unsuccessful, he did not send more.

Now, in the time that Hellestheaeus and his vassal Esimiphaeus were still kings, Justinian sent a diplomatic mission to them under a certain Julian (again in 530 or

⁵³ Thus far only attempted by Cameron, *Procopius*, 121-2.

⁵⁴ Procop. *Pers.* 1.19.1.

⁵⁵ Procop. *Pers.* 1.19.1-16. On the Saracens see e.g. Mayerson, *Monks*, 322-6 ('The Word Saracen (Cαρακηνός) in the Papyri', 1989'), and Graf, *Arabian Frontier*, Ch. IX at 14-5.

⁵⁶ Procop. *Pers.* 1.19.7-13.

⁵⁷ Procop. *Pers.* 1.19.17-26.

⁵⁸ Procop. *Pers.* 1.19.23-6.

⁵⁹ Procop. *Pers.* 1.19.27 (τὰ ἐπ' Αἰγύπτου ὄρια τῆς Ῥωμαίων ἀρχῆς).

⁶⁰ Procop. *Pers.* 1.19.28 (τὰ ἔσχατα τῆς Ῥωμαίων ἀρχῆς).

⁶¹ Cameron, *Procopius*, 122.

⁶² According to Malalas, pp. 433-4 Dindorf, who reports about the same event, the Axumite king declared war on the Homerites after they had killed some Roman merchants. The king stated that if he won, he would convert to Christianity. So it turned out, and he asked Justinian for a bishop and clerics to baptise and teach him.

531, so the mission must have taken place shortly before Abramus' revolt).⁶³ The emperor asked them to make common cause against the Persians 'on account of their community of religion'.⁶⁴ The Axumites would take over the silk trade to India from the Persians, while the Homeritae would launch an attack on Persia. Both kings agreed to this rather bold proposal, but neither did what was asked of him. Similarly, the later king of the Homeritae, Abramus, promised Justinian to invade Persia several times but never did so.⁶⁵ Such, then, were the relations of Justinian with the Homeritae and Axumites.

By describing the country of these peoples, and the land between Axum and Egypt, Procopius stresses the 'barbarian' character of the peoples on the fringes of the Roman world, culminating in their untrustworthiness as allies of the Romans, even if they were Christians. The description of the Blemmyes, who sacrificed human beings to the sun, compares well with the preceding ethnographical descriptions of the lands of the Axumites and the Homeritae, beyond whom, for example, live cannibalistic Saracens.⁶⁶ The explicit statement that the Blemmyes and Noubades did not keep to the treaty of Diocletian also serves to underline the untrustworthiness of the 'barbarians'. In this respect, it can be seen as an illustration of the later behaviour of the Homeritae and Axumites in connection with Justinian's foreign policy against Persia.

The digression is also a nice parallel for other missionary activities in the reign of Justinian as reported in Procopius' *Wars* and *Buildings*. Procopius not only stereotypes the Blemmyes and Noubades as 'barbarians', he also underscores Justinian's ideological position as bringer of civilisation. The emperor made an end to Blemmyan and Noubadian worship at Philae, and sent his general to destroy the temples. The difference, however, with the other accounts is that Justinian does not bring Christianity. It is not stated that he converted the Blemmyes and Noubades, as in the accounts in the *Wars*, nor does he convert the temples into churches or built new churches, as in the *Buildings*. Nevertheless, the account about the closure of the temples confirms the hypothesis posed earlier on the basis of epigraphical evidence, namely that it reflects imperial propaganda.⁶⁷

John of Ephesus' Nubia Passages in Context

Missionary activities further south consisted of the Christian missions to Nubia, as told by John of Ephesus. They cover chapters 6-9 and 49-53 of book 4 of the third part of John's *Church History*.⁶⁸ The first five chapters of this book have not been transmitted, except for their very end, which relates the death of Theodosius of Alexandria (566). Since it is clear from the sequel that book 4 concentrates on internal disputes within the Monophysite Church and relates the events chronologically, the

⁶³ *PLRE* III s.v. 'Iulianus 8'.

⁶⁴ Procop. *Pers.* 1.20.9 (διὰ τὸ τῆς δόξης ὁμόγνωμον).

⁶⁵ Procop. *Pers.* 1.20.1-13. For the historical background to Justinian's appeal to the Homeritae and Axumites, see Greatrex, *Rome and Persia*, 225-39; Brakmann, "Axomis (Aksum)", 753-62.

⁶⁶ Procop. *Pers.* 1.19.15.

⁶⁷ Cf. Cameron, *Procopius*, 89, who mentions the closure of the temple of Ammon at Augila, which was probably also for show.

⁶⁸ There is an occasionally unreliable English translation by R. Payne-Smith, *The Third Part of the Ecclesiastical History of John Bishop of Ephesus* (Oxford, 1860) 250-9 and 315-27, one in German by J.M. Schönfelder, *Die Kirchengeschichte des Johannes von Ephesus* (Munich, 1862) 141-7 and 180-8, and one in Latin by E.W. Brooks, *Iohannis Ephesini historiae ecclesiasticae pars tertia. II: Versio* (= *CSCO* 106; Paris, 1936). I follow the recent German translation of the Nubia passages by Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, 46-57, but have made some slight adaptations with the help of J.J. van Ginkel by checking Richter's translation against the Syriac text edited by Brooks. Cf. the earlier German translation of the passages by F. Althelm, R. Stiehl (eds), *Die Araber in der Alten Welt*, 6 vols (Berlin, 1964-9) 4.319-33. On the unreliable English translation by G. Vantini, *Oriental Sources concerning Nubia* (Heidelberg and Warsaw, 1975) 6-23, see Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, 42 (n. 3).

first five chapters probably concentrated on the Monophysites before 566. The central theme immediately after the first Nubia passage is the dispute between the Alexandrian clergy and James Bar'adai on the one hand, and Paul of Antioch on the other until 581 (chapters 10-48). John then introduces the second Nubia passage in chapters 49-53, after which he continues the story of the dispute until 584/585 (chapters 54-61).⁶⁹ Let us briefly survey the contents of the Nubia passages.

At the start of chapter 6, John gives a brief summary of its contents. We learn that this chapter is 'about the barbarian people of the Noubades, who converted to Christianity, and about the cause of their conversion'.⁷⁰ John here provides some other interesting details about the Noubades.⁷¹ According to him, they 'dwelled on the eastern frontier (area) of the Thebaid'.⁷² He further says that they were paid in order to prevent them from raiding into Egypt, which confirms Procopius' statement: 'they (that is, the Blemmyes and Noubades) receive this (gold) right down to my day'.⁷³

Immediately preceding chapter 6, John informs us that a priest called Longinus had taken over Theodosius' duties in celebrating the Eucharist because the patriarch was no longer able to do so. Thereupon, Theodosius had appointed Longinus as bishop of the Noubades.⁷⁴ The story therefore focuses on Longinus' second mission to Nubia, but without passing over an earlier mission by the priest Julian. This first story thus does not disturb the chronology of book 4, and serves to introduce Longinus' mission. Like Longinus, Julian was a Monophysite priest in Constantinople, where he developed the plan to convert the Noubades to Christianity.

There follows an amusing story of what can be described as a rally race between the Emperor Justinian and his wife Theodora. Julian told Theodora about his ideas and the empress responded enthusiastically. In her enthusiasm, she told the emperor, but he, already having plans in that direction, sent a rival mission to Nubia. When Theodora heard of this she cleverly sent a letter to the governor (*dux*) of the Thebaid, in which she threatened to kill him if he let Justinian's delegation depart for Nubia first. The governor delayed the delegation of Justinian, which had arrived first, and took care that Theodora's missionaries left before the other delegation, pretending that Theodora's delegation had forced its way through.

After Julian had arrived first in the Kingdom of Noubadia, he read out a letter written by Theodora, offered the king gifts and instructed the Noubades. Subsequently, Julian informed them that the emperor had tried to persuade Theodosius of his doctrinal convictions and, when he did not succeed, had removed the archbishop from his patriarchal seat. After some time, the other delegation arrived with an imperial letter and gifts. They proclaimed that the Noubades had to follow the Church and ignore the other delegation, which had been expelled from the Church. The king of the Noubades answered that he would exchange gifts with the emperor but that he would not follow the imperial faith because the emperor had expelled Theodosius from his see, and he did not want to fall from 'paganism' into another malicious belief.

Julian stayed in Noubadia for two years, and in a rather fantastic scene it is said that he used to stand for hours with the people in holes filled up with water to their nostrils because of the heat.⁷⁵ Julian baptised the king, his notables and many people in his retinue. Another man in his company was a certain Theodore, a bishop from the Thebaid, who reappears in the second mission to Nubia. When Julian went back to

⁶⁹ Van Ginkel, *John of Ephesus*, 75-6; Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, 57-8, 77-8, 98.

⁷⁰ Joh.Eph. *h.e.* III 4.6 Brooks (p. 183.1-2).

⁷¹ Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, 60-1.

⁷² Joh.Eph. *h.e.* III 4.6 Brooks (p. 183.6-7). Cf. the remark in the *Life of Aaron*, fol. 26b, that the Noubades lived east and south-west of Philae.

⁷³ Procop. *Pers.* 1.19.33 = *FHN* III 328.

⁷⁴ Joh.Eph. *h.e.* III 4.5 Brooks (p. 182.22-5).

⁷⁵ Cf. Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, 68-9.

Constantinople, he left the Noubades to Theodore. In the presence of John of Ephesus, Theodora received Julian with great honour.

On his deathbed (566), the Patriarch Theodosius remembered Julian's mission to Nubia, the more so because Julian had only recently died, and Theodora had died, too. He commissioned Longinus to finish the project, that is, to fully convert the country, and ordained him bishop of Noubadia. However, after Theodosius had died, and Longinus was preparing himself to travel south, malicious men informed the emperor (at this time, Justin II) about Longinus' plans. The emperor prevented his departure for three years, but in the third year (in 569) the bald bishop escaped by wearing a wig. In Noubadia, he was received with hospitality. The new bishop built a church, created an ecclesiastical hierarchy and instructed the Noubades. He induced the king to send an embassy to Constantinople, in which the king praised Longinus with the following words: 'Though we were Christians in name, yet we did not learn what Christianity really was, until Longinus came to us'.⁷⁶ Among the audience was, again, John of Ephesus.

However, after about six years had passed (c. 575), the devil devised a plan to separate Longinus from his good deeds and bring about a schism in the Monophysite Church. Longinus received a letter from the Archpriest Theodosius and the Archdeacon Theodore, two prominent members of the Alexandrian clergy, in which they asked Longinus to come to a place near Alexandria and ordain a new archbishop of Alexandria. The Noubades tried to prevent their bishop from leaving but he was determined to go north. Passing through Philae, Longinus visited Bishop Theodore, who is first identified here as bishop of Philae. Longinus discussed the request with Theodore and asked him to accompany him. However, Theodore, who had been ordained bishop fifty years earlier under the Patriarch Timothy III (that is, around 525), was too old for such a trip. Nevertheless, he supplied Longinus with a letter in which he permitted Longinus to act in his place.

We now jump to chapter 49, passing by several chapters of disputes between the Monophysite leaders concerning the appointment of a new patriarch of Alexandria. Here, John takes up the storyline of the first Nubia passage by summarising chapters 6-9. John announces that he will relate the conversion of the people of the Alodiai to Christianity. These people lived further to the south and were one of the three Christian kingdoms that had emerged in the realm of the former Kingdom of Meroe during the sixth century: Alodia (Alwa), Makouria and Noubadia.⁷⁷ Apparently, John saw the conversion of Alodia as a consequence of the conversion of Noubadia in the two earlier missions. As this third mission is less relevant, we will only briefly summarise its contents here.

Having heard of Longinus' deeds in Noubadia, the Alodiai asked Longinus to instruct and baptise them, but the disputes described in chapters 10-4 kept the bishop busy elsewhere. When the king of Alodia sent envoys to ask Longinus again to come to his country, the 'Alexandrians' tried to blacken Longinus' reputation.⁷⁸ But the Alodiai did not believe the accusations. Thereupon, the 'Alexandrians' sent an embassy to Alodia consisting of two bishops who proclaimed that Longinus had been removed from his see and that they came to baptise the Alodiai. But again the Alodiai did not listen and wanted Longinus to baptise them.

In 579/580, Longinus was back in Noubadia and started his journey to Alodia. Due to the heat and the hostile lands of the king of Makouria, 17 camels and the rest

⁷⁶ Joh.Eph. *h.e.* III 4.8 Brooks (p. 188.6-8).

⁷⁷ See, most recently, Welsby, *Medieval Kingdoms*, 24-30, and Edwards, *Nubian Past*, 212-55.

⁷⁸ From the context, it appears that 'Alexandrians' means the same clergymen who opposed the appointment of Theodore as archbishop of Alexandria in 575. See Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, 80-2.

of the animals died, and Longinus and all his companions suffered from illness.⁷⁹ When they arrived at the frontiers of Alodia, Longinus and his men were received in a most friendly manner. Longinus baptised the king and his notables, and many other people. Out of thankfulness, the king of Alodia sent a letter to the king of Noubadia, called *ἄνρωπυλῆ*, which John cites. He also includes an extract of a letter by Longinus to the Noubadian king, in which he describes his mission. Finally, John quotes an extract of a letter by the Noubadian king himself to the Patriarch Theodore of Alexandria, in which he related the same events.⁸⁰

The Nubia passages written by John of Ephesus have been so much discussed and referred to in past scholarship that we shall discuss only the most important contributions to the debate here.⁸¹ Thus far, scholars have mainly concentrated on two, interrelated problems concerning the missions to Nubia: 1. The reliability of John of Ephesus' *Church History* as a historical source, and 2. The struggle between Chalcedonians and Monophysites to convert the Nubian kingdoms to Christianity. Surprisingly, as with Procopius, no scholar has attempted to ask the questions why John included the Nubia passages in the third part of his *Church History* at all, and how this affects their interpretation.⁸²

Every student of the missions to Nubia described by John of Ephesus should start with the excellent article about Bishop Theodore of Philae written by Jean Maspero (1885-1915) in 1909.⁸³ Among many other interesting details concerning the dating of the closure of the temple of Isis, the missions to Nubia and the life of Theodore, to which we will return later, Maspero believed John's claim that Nubia became Monophysite in a brief period of time. He also discarded later sources, especially the tenth-century Patriarch Eutychius, who reported that Nubia became Monophysite only in the seventh century.⁸⁴ He thus concluded: 'Nubia, evangelised by the Jacobites (that is, the Monophysites, who were called after James Bar'adaï), was kept by them, and has never known the Catholic faith (that is, according to the doctrine of Chalcedon)'.⁸⁵

In a German dissertation on the origins of Nubian Christianity in 1930, Johann Kraus opposed this view and was more critical of John of Ephesus' account. Moreover, in addition to Eutychius he adduced John's contemporary John of Biclarum, who states that the Kingdom of Makouria became Christian in 569, probably meaning Chalcedonian. According to Kraus, Monophysite success was not as thorough as John suggests, and the imperial delegation succeeded in converting Makouria to Chalcedonianism. This would also explain why John states that the king of Makouria was hostile to Longinus on his journey via Makouria to Alodia. Hence, the partiality of John, who gave only the Monophysite side of the story, was underlined.⁸⁶

Some years later, an eminent scholar of Nubian Christianity, Ugo Monneret de Villard (1881-1954), went even further along this road. He based himself, in addition

⁷⁹ In his version of the event, the king of the Noubades claims that he sent Longinus to a Blemmyan king, who helped the bishop to reach Alodia. As it is said that the king of Makouria guarded all land until the Red Sea, this seems to confirm the traditional picture that the Blemmyes inhabited the Eastern Desert. See Kirwan, *Studies*, Ch. XXIII at 57 ('Notes on the Topography of the Christian Nubian Kingdoms', 1935').

⁸⁰ For a detailed comparison of the letters and their authenticity see Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, 85-90.

⁸¹ Cf. Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, 20-7.

⁸² Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, 57-8, 77-8, summarises the context but does not raise these questions.

⁸³ Maspero, 'Théodore'. Cf. Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, 57-114, who in his discussion of the chronology of the missions to Nubia omits any reference to Maspero, although he bases himself on most of the chronology established by this scholar.

⁸⁴ Maspero, 'Théodore', 315-7. Cf. J. Maspero, *Histoire des patriarches d'Alexandrie* (Paris, 1923) 233-5.

⁸⁵ Maspero, 'Théodore', 317.

⁸⁶ Kraus, *Anfänge*, 54-77.

to the literary sources, on the formulae of the Nubian epitaphs, which seemed to be inspired by mainstream Byzantine liturgy and were different from the Egyptian ones. This would imply that the Noubades were predominantly Chalcedonian at this time.⁸⁷ In an excellent review of Monneret de Villard's book, however, it was shown that these epitaphs cannot say anything about doctrinal preferences. In fact, the same literary sources have been used in order to argue the opposite, namely that Nubadia was indeed Monophysite first.⁸⁸

Meanwhile, excavations shed new light on Christian Nubia. These data were used by Sir Laurence Kirwan (1907-1999), one of the excavators of the tombs at Ballana and Qustul and a student of Christian Nubia well ahead of his time, to counterbalance the evidence of the literary sources.⁸⁹ Accordingly, he divided the conversion of Nubia into two phases: the first phase, in which Nubia became influenced by Christianity through exchange with Egypt, and the second phase, in which Byzantine missions definitively organised Christianity in the region.⁹⁰ Apparently, Nubia did not become Christian as abruptly as John of Ephesus wants us to believe.

Kirwan also made another important observation. Viewing Byzantine missions as imperial foreign policy, he shed doubt on the sharp division between Monophysitism and Chalcedonianism as drawn by Monneret de Villard (and, hence, regarding the whole previous discussion on the subject): 'Monneret de Villard, distracted perhaps by the account of the race so picturesquely described by John of Ephesus, attached an exaggerated importance to this division; fundamental though it was in theological terms, it never shattered the unity of the Empire. In so doing he failed to stress the primary function of these imperial missions from the City of Constantine. This was not exclusively or even primarily religious. It was diplomatic and cultural'.⁹¹

Finally, Kirwan refers to Procopius' pamphlet the *Secret History* (completed in 550/551),⁹² which states that the emperor and his wife took opposite views in religious matters to divide their opponents, but neither undertook anything separately.⁹³ This is so reminiscent of the rally race between Justinian and Theodora that, if we were to take Procopius literally, the Chalcedonian mission to Nubia could never have taken place. In conclusion, Kirwan therefore asks himself the question why the imperial delegation, if fictional, was mentioned at all: 'it (John's account of the missions to

⁸⁷ Monneret de Villard, *Storia*, 61-70. Cf. H. Junker, 'Die christlichen Grabsteine Nubiens', *ZÄS* 60 (1925) 111-48; Munier, 'Christianisme', 44 (n. 4); Engelhardt, *Mission*, 57-71; Adams, *Nubia*, 438-47; Demicheli, 'Regni', 191-5; Vantini, *Christianity*, 36-43; Grillmeier, *Jesus der Christus*, 278-82; W. Godlewski, 'A New Approach to the Christianization of Makuria: An Archaeological Note', in C. Berger, G. Clerc, N. Grimal (eds), *Hommages à Jean Leclant*, 4 vols (Cairo, 1994) 2.169-76; Kirwan, *Studies* Ch. XVI ('A Contemporary Account of the Conversion of the Sudan to Christianity, 1937'), Ch. XVII ('Christianity and the Kur'an', 1934¹), and Ch. XIX ('The Nature of Nubian Christianity', 1939¹); Welsby, *Medieval Kingdoms* 32-3. In support of Monneret de Villard's thesis, W.Y. Adams, 'Architectural Evolution of the Nubian Church, 500-1400 AD', *JARCE* 4 (1965) 87-139, tried to demonstrate that the doctrinal opposition was visible in the archaeological remains, but this was convincingly rejected by M. Krause, 'Neue Quellen und Probleme zur Kirchengeschichte Nubiens', in F. Altheim, R. Stiehl (eds), *Christentum am Roten Meer*, 2 vols (Berlin and New York, 1971-3) 1.509-31 at 516-21. Cf. Adams, *Nubia*, 442-6.

⁸⁸ E. Stein, 'Nubie chrétienne', *RHE* 36 (1940) 131-42 at 133-8.

⁸⁹ On Kirwan see the introduction to his *Studies* ix-xxi.

⁹⁰ Kirwan, *Studies* Ch. XX ('Some Thoughts on the Conversion of Nubia to Christianity', 1982¹), an expanded version of which, mainly concentrating on the archaeological finds, appeared as *Studies* Ch. XXI ('The Birth of Christian Nubia: Some Archaeological Problems', 1984¹).

⁹¹ Kirwan, *Studies* Ch. XX at 142. Cf. W.H.C. Frend, *Town and Country in the Early Christian Centuries* (London, 1980) Ch. XXII ('The Mission to Nubia: An Episode in the Struggle for Power in Sixth Century Byzantium', 1975¹).

⁹² On the date see Cameron, *Procopius*, 9, 52-4; Greatrex, 'Dates of Procopius' Works', and *Rome and Persia*, 62.

⁹³ Procop. *Arc.* 10.15, 23, cf. 27.13.

Nubia) was not perhaps such a transparent piece of propaganda as Ugo Monneret de Villard appears to have thought'.⁹⁴

Recently, Siegfried Richter has provided a new German translation of the Nubia passages in John of Ephesus, followed by an elaborate commentary. It analyses several other sources relevant to the context of the missions, especially a collection of Monophysite documents which had never been connected with the Nubia passages before.⁹⁵ He rightly criticises previous interpretations which label elements in the passages as either 'trustworthy' or not, on the basis of which a judgement is made of the whole account.⁹⁶ Indeed, it would be impossible to come to general judgements in terms of 'trustworthiness' of the passages as a whole, for they are not a unity and have to be seen in their context. Therefore, while taking into account the Monophysite agenda of the work, Richter concentrates on the elements in the account separately and, after comparing them with other sources, such as inscriptions and archaeological evidence, decides on the level of their trustworthiness.⁹⁷ Consequently, the information about Theodore of Philae and Longinus he regards as trustworthy because it can be supported by other sources. On the other hand, the rally race between Justinian and Theodora is not reported elsewhere and is thus possible but not proven.⁹⁸ He concludes that 'neither for Noubadia nor Alodia is there any reason to have doubts about Monophysite missionary activities'.⁹⁹

Although Richter is undoubtedly heading in the right direction, he fails to take the literary aspects of the passages sufficiently into account.¹⁰⁰ An element in the account may seem 'trustworthy' when checked against another source, but it may at the same time be heavily distorted to fit it into its literary context. It is therefore useful, certainly in this case where a strong Monophysite emphasis is expected, to first decide about the message of the passages by looking at their wider context. Only afterwards can questions be raised concerning the trustworthiness of an element or elements. Having said this, let us now look once more at the Nubia passages.

To start with, the context indicates that the missions to Nubia are about Bishop Longinus.¹⁰¹ As already remarked, the first mission under Julian is seen only as a preamble to the second mission under Longinus. Immediately before the first mission is related, Longinus is said to have taken over Theodosius' ecclesiastical duties, which indicates his important role as protégé of the exiled archbishop. As the events in book 4 are told chronologically, the story of the first mission is a flashback on what 'went before'. The earlier mission is at the same time presented as the direct cause of the second mission, for Patriarch Theodosius, when he was about to die, remembered the earlier mission and sent Longinus to Nubia as a bishop. Thus the mission is sanctioned by one of the prominent leaders of Monophysitism.¹⁰²

After the second mission, John of Ephesus describes the major dissensions between Paul of Antioch and the Alexandrian clergy, and later between Paul and James Bar'adai, in which Longinus played an important role. When Longinus came to Egypt around 575 to choose a new patriarch of Alexandria, two Syrian bishops (John of Chalcis and George Urtâyâ) arrived to deliberate with Longinus about the

⁹⁴ Kirwan, *Studies*, Ch. XX at 145.

⁹⁵ For a review of Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, which also evaluates the translation from the Syriac, see J.H.F. Dijkstra and J.J. van Ginkel in *Muséon* 117 (2004) 233-7.

⁹⁶ Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens* 25-7.

⁹⁷ Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens* 32-40.

⁹⁸ Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens* 111-2.

⁹⁹ Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens* 111.

¹⁰⁰ Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens* 31-2, 34-5, does discuss the genre of the work and its general aim.

¹⁰¹ For Longinus, see Honigmann, *Évêques* 224-9; Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens* 102-8.

¹⁰² Indeed, a letter from Theodosius to Paul of Antioch survives dated to 565, in which Theodosius, because of his bad health, asks Paul to consecrate Longinus bishop of the Noubades. See Honigmann, *Évêques* 225-6; A. van Roey, P. Allen, *Monophysite Texts of the Sixth Century* (Leuven, 1994) 278-9 (no. 18); Honigmann, *Évêques* 225-6.

conditional return of Paul of Antioch, who had fallen out of favour in his patriarchate. Longinus proposed that the bishops first consecrate a new patriarch of Alexandria. They found him in the person of Theodore, a Syrian monk, and ordained him. Although Paul did not participate in the consecration, he was probably not far away and started communicating with Theodore, as the patriarch of Antioch would normally do with the patriarch of Alexandria. The ordination, however, was not accepted by the Alexandrian clergy, who ordained a counter-patriarch, named Peter. These disputes, in the course of which James Bar'adai died (578), led to the tumultuous ordination of another Peter, Peter of Callinicum, as patriarch of Antioch in 581.¹⁰³

The success of Longinus' missions in Nubia forms a stark contrast with these disputes and this is probably the reason why John of Ephesus included them in book 4: if the Monophysites had stopped quarrelling they could have achieved what they did in Nubia. Moreover, Longinus' success in Nubia also puts his role in the disputes in a favourable light. For example, it explains why he was not more frequently present at these affairs, as Theodore of Alexandria complained.¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, the activities of Longinus in Nubia are certainly not meant to make up for his appointment of Theodore. John does not condemn the appointment, but he blames the 'Alexandrians' for having started and continued the disputes. This is also apparent from the third mission, in which the conversion of Alodia is delayed by them. Longinus' role in the disputes is thus portrayed by John as basically a good one, and his activities in Nubia confirm this. Significantly, at the end book 4 John does not write about Monophysite successes but about their disputes, and in particular about the sad death of Paul of Antioch, who had been relegated to the sidelines, in 581. Paul is said to have lived in the mountains for four years and to have died in a nunnery. With the missions to Nubia, John therefore wanted to hold up to his audience a mirror of what the Monophysite church should have been doing, instead of quarrelling with each other.

Consequently, John of Ephesus makes the Monophysite success in Nubia, and that of Longinus in particular, as glorious as possible. Two champions of Monophysitism play a key role in the success in Nubia. The first person is Theodosius of Alexandria, who instigated the second mission to Nubia and the ordination of Longinus. John even makes an explicit Monophysite statement in connection with Theodosius on the first mission under Julian. The Noubadian king accepted the Monophysite delegation because Theodosius had persisted in the 'true faith', until the emperor removed him from his see. This statement is in line with the goal of the *Church History*, for John claimed that the Monophysite movement preserved the doctrine of the true, orthodox church.¹⁰⁵

Significantly, a second champion of Monophysitism, the Empress Theodora, received Theodosius with hospitality in Constantinople. The role of Theodora as protectress of Monophysitism can also be found in the *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, for example in the story of John of Hephaestopolis. Pretending to be ill, this bishop, protected by the Empress Theodora, managed to keep out of the hands of Chalcedonian enemies and to continue his mission for the Monophysite cause. It is much the same with Longinus. The emperor kept him in Constantinople for three years, but Longinus escaped by wearing a wig.¹⁰⁶ The motif of the protection of

¹⁰³ See the accounts by Maspero, *Histoire des patriarches*, 212-49, 278-317; T. Hermann, 'Patriarch Paul von Antiochia und das alexandrinische Schisma vom Jahre 575', *ZNW* 27 (1928) 263-304; E.W. Brooks, 'The Patriarch Paul of Antioch and the Alexandrine Schism of 575', *BZ* 30 (1929-30) 468-76; Honigmann, *Évêques*, 232-5; Frend, *Monophysite Movement*, 326-8; Van Roey and Allen, *Monophysite Texts*, 295, 298-300; Van Ginkel, *John of Ephesus*, 75-6; Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, 77-8, 98.

¹⁰⁴ Joh.Eph. *h.e.* III 4.48, 55 Brooks (p. 232.13-29, 243.27-8).

¹⁰⁵ Van Ginkel, *John of Ephesus*, 99.

¹⁰⁶ In 568, Longinus signed a letter from the Monophysite bishops residing in Constantinople to the Church in the East. See Van Roey and Allen, *Monophysite Texts*, 281-3 (no. 25), 284-5 (no. 31). He also

Theodora returns in the passages on Nubia, although not in the second mission under Longinus because the empress had already died by then. Nonetheless, Theodora was the instigator of the first mission to Nubia under Julian and she took care that the Monophysite embassy was the first to arrive in Noubadia.

In view of this representation of Monophysite success in Nubia, to what extent is the rivalry race between Justinian and Theodora also distorted? On the basis of what we know of Byzantine missions, it is hardly credible that a rival mission between the emperor and empress would have taken place. The emperor's decisions were far more pragmatic than portrayed by John and would have allowed a foreign mission led by Monophysites, just as Justinian supported the Monophysite Ghassanids against the Persians.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, we have seen that Byzantine missions were primarily aimed at transmitting Byzantine culture, not specific doctrines.

In this respect, it may be significant to refer to the parallel Kirwan drew with the passage from Procopius' *Secret History*, where the emperor and his wife are said to have maintained a divide and rule policy against their enemies. In the *Secret History*, Theodora is stereotyped as a dangerous woman scheming behind the scenes. In John's works, Theodora's role is more positive as a guardian of the Monophysite movement. Nevertheless, John seems to have known of Procopius' stereotyping of Theodora, as appears from the passage in which the empress forces the governor of the Thebaid to support her delegation to Nubia.¹⁰⁸ It is thus also perfectly possible that John was inspired by sources like the *Secret History*, in which the imperial couple was said to take opposite views in religious matters. He used them for his account of the first mission to Nubia by letting the rivalry race between emperor and empress end in a glorious Monophysite victory. John's account of the first mission seems to have a clear ideological message.¹⁰⁹

It is therefore more likely that the story of the rivalry race between Justinian and Theodora should be seen as a literary invention by the author to support his activism for the Monophysite cause. The emperor probably instigated one mission from political considerations, and this mission would not have been primarily intended to fix the doctrine of Monophysitism in Nubia. Bearing this interpretation of the missions to Nubia by John of Ephesus in mind, as well as the passage on the closure of the Isis temple by Procopius, we will now try to see how they relate to each other.

The Nubia Passages by Procopius and John of Ephesus Compared

Thus far, the passages by Procopius and John have been combined almost without being based on sound grounds, so that the definitive conversion of Nubia has been seen as a logical result of the closure of the temples, first of all the temple of Isis, at Philae. Maspero already saw a connection between the events described by Procopius and John: 'the expedition of Narses had no doubt focused the attention of the Christian world on Nubia'.¹¹⁰ Other scholars, arguing further, saw a direct, causal relationship between the events, instigated by a deliberate, 'anti-pagan' policy of the emperor.

These scholars even adduced the victory of the Noubadian king Silko over the Blemmyes, which they believed dated to the sixth century, to support their point of view. They argued that the Byzantine elements in his triumphal inscription at Kalabsha demonstrated that Silko had diplomatic ties with the Byzantine Empire, and

attended a meeting of Monophysite bishops in Constantinople in 569. See Van Roey and Allen, *Monophysite Texts* 288-90 (no. 39). See further Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens* 104-7.

¹⁰⁷ See Cameron, *Procopius*, 125-6, and *Mediterranean World*, 120.

¹⁰⁸ Joh.Eph. *h.e.* III 4.6 Brooks (pp. 183.26-184.7), on which see Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, 63-4.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Cameron, *Procopius*, 76-80; Van Ginkel, *John of Ephesus*, 151-3; Ashbrook Harvey and Brakmann, 'Johannes von Ephesus', 560-1; Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, 37-9, 111.

¹¹⁰ Maspero, 'Théodore', 303.

in this favourable position conquered the Blemmyes in battle. According to them, this feat led Justinian to order his general Narses to close the temples at Philae and make a definitive end to the 'pagan' cults. In turn, the closure of the temples cleared the way for the conversion of Nubia, which took place soon afterwards.¹¹¹ Other scholars have dated the Silko inscription to after the closure of the temples,¹¹² or, even, to after the mission to Nubia under Julian.¹¹³ They all believed that the king converted in the first mission to Nubia was Silko.

The discovery of the letter of Phonen to Abourni in 1976 has proven this sequence of events to be wrong. As the Silko inscription dates back to the fifth century, there can be no direct relationship with the events described by Procopius and John. Despite this warning of the dangers of simply combining events, Richter still takes a close relationship between the closure of the temples at Philae and the missions to Nubia for granted. He even devotes a whole chapter to the conversion of Philae to Christianity, but never even questions the nature of the relationship between both sources under consideration: these events simply belong together.¹¹⁴

However, the question needs to be asked why an historical account, not even about a conversion but only about the closure of temples, and a history of the Church about missionary activities, in which the see of Philae plays an important role but no temples are mentioned, should belong together at all. Could it be that the closure of the temples at Philae was mentioned in the second, now lost part of John of Ephesus' *Church History*? This is unlikely, as John often depends for the events he did not experience personally on the writer of the first Christian chronicle of the world, John Malalas, and this author does not say anything about Philae.¹¹⁵ John seems to have inserted the mission under Julian in the third part of his *Church History* for the first time, as he does not refer back to a previous account. Apparently in his *Church History* John did not connect the closure of the temples at Philae with the missions to Nubia. It therefore seems likely that there is no necessary relationship between the two events either. On the other hand, there is no doubt that both accounts draw on historical events.

It has been suggested that in the 540s Procopius did not yet know the effects of the imperial policy concerning the southern Egyptian frontier and that he only recorded the first symbolic act in a lengthy process, whereas John was looking back on the events; in other words, that this different perspective resulted in two different accounts.¹¹⁶ This may well have been the case. If there is a connection between the two events, they should be seen as part of a series of imperial measures concerning the southern Egyptian frontier. In order to understand the background to the missionary activities, we have to pay some attention to the progression of Christianity in Nubia.

As a result of formal and informal contacts with Egypt, Byzantine culture, and therewith Christianity, reached Nubia before the sixth century. Further south, the Kingdom of Axum had already converted in the fourth century, allegedly through the efforts of Frumentius. In addition, we have seen some examples of Christian influence

¹¹¹ Kraus, *Anfänge*, 107-9, 137-8; Monneret de Villard, *Storia*, 53-60; E. Stein, *Histoire du Bas Empire. II: De la disparition de l'Empire d'Occident à la mort de Justinien (476-565)* (Paris, 1949) 300-2; Honigmann, *Évêques*, 225; Engelhardt, *Mission*, 48-51; Demicheli, *Rapporti*, 191, and 'Regni', 185-6; Grillmeier, *Jesus der Christus*, 273; H. Suermann, 'Der Bericht des Johannes von Ephesos über die Missionierung der Nubier im sechsten Jahrhundert', in R. Lavenant (ed.), *Symposium Syriacum VII* (Rome, 1998) 303-13 at 310.

¹¹² Maspero, 'Théodore', 301-2.

¹¹³ Frend, *Monophysite Movement*, 299-300, *Town and Country*, Ch. XXII at 10-1, and Ch. XXIV at 20 ('Recently Discovered Materials for Writing the History of Christian Nubia, 1975').

¹¹⁴ Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, 115-38, 192, on which see Dijkstra and Van Ginkel, review Richter, 236.

¹¹⁵ Van Ginkel, *John of Ephesus*, 65. On Malalas see E. Jeffreys, with B. Croke, R. Scott (eds), *Studies in John Malalas* (Sydney, 1990); E. Jeffreys, 'The Beginning of Byzantine Chronography: John Malalas', in Marasco, *Greek & Roman Historiography*, 497-527.

¹¹⁶ Cameron, *Procopius*, 121 (n. 54).

in fifth-century documents from the Dodekaschoinos. In the Phonen letter, one of the sons of the Noubadian chief Abourni had the Christian name Mouses.¹¹⁷ In the Tantani letters, we saw a Noubadian chieftain corresponding with a monk from Philae also called Mouses.¹¹⁸ In addition, several objects with crosses and Christian inscriptions have been found in the tombs at Ballana, dating to the fifth century. Although the latter may have been spoils, the evidence suggests that Christian culture had reached Nubia well before the sixth century. Consequently, conversion to Christianity may not have been such a large step for the Noubadian king of the first mission to Nubia, the more so because by doing so he could win or renew the ties with a powerful ally. Thus, for the convert king political considerations were probably more important than religious, let alone doctrinal, predilections.¹¹⁹

The missions to Nubia seem to have been a continuation of the imperial policy concerning the southern frontier during the fifth century. In this century, several treaties were concluded with the Noubades to stop them from raiding into Egypt. They probably had the status of federates and received special grants, such as a yearly payment and access to the temple island of Philae, according to Procopius and John of Ephesus even as late as Justinian's reign. The emperor seems to have opted for renewing the federate relationship with a gradually emerging Noubadian Kingdom. True, the shape such a relationship could take was dressed in Christian language, but doctrine was not the main issue.¹²⁰

The events as described by Procopius and John should therefore be seen in the general context of Byzantine imperial policy. The fact that two imperial missions were sent to Nubia indicates the interest of the emperor in this region immediately to the south of the Egyptian frontier. He may already have had an eye on the area when he gave the order to close the languishing temples at Philae in the 530s, an interest that may be reflected in John's description of the reaction of the emperor to the plans to send a mission to Nubia: '...he was not pleased, for he had planned to write to the Thebaid to his bishops (that is, the bishops of his doctrinal position), so that they would enter (the country), convert them (the Noubades) and plant the name of the synod (of Chalcedon) there'.¹²¹ Probably, the impact of the closure of the temples at Philae was minimal in connection with the missions to Nubia, and this would have been exactly the reason why John does not mention it. The active role of Philae in Nubia was rather a practical one: being the nearest see, the bishop of Philae was the right man in the right place to participate in the missions.

The Role of Philae in the Missions to Nubia

Even today, Philae is seen as the last in the chain of the conversion of Egypt to Christianity, spreading the faith from north (Alexandria) to south (Philae). Thus, the closure of the temples at Philae was regarded as the end point of this process, and the starting point of the conversion of the area to its immediate south: Nubia. We have already stressed, however, that this was not how conversion worked. Philae already

¹¹⁷ *SB* XIV 11957.2 = *FHN* III 319.

¹¹⁸ Cairo, Coptic Museum reg. no. 76/50B [bis] 1 = *FHN* 322.

¹¹⁹ For similar choices of kings converting to Christianity in Anglo-Saxon England, see N.J. Higham, *The Convert Kings. Power and Religious Affiliation in Early Anglo-Saxon England* (Manchester and New York, 1997). Cf. Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, 141-8, who, despite his mentioning this evidence, underestimates the impact of Christianity before the missions to Nubia, on which see P.O. Scholz, review Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, *OC* 87 (2003) 248-54; Dijkstra and Van Ginkel, review Richter, 236. See also Kirwan, *Studies*, Chs. XX and XXI, Welsby, *Medieval Kingdoms*, 38, and Edwards, *Nubian Past*, 217-8.

¹²⁰ Cf. Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth*, 116-7, who suggests that the Monophysite doctrine would have been easier to explain than the Chalcedonian doctrine.

¹²¹ Joh.Eph. *h.e* III 4.6 Brooks (p. 183.19-21).

had an episcopal see in the first half of the fourth century, and this shows that by that time the Church had organised itself as in the rest of Egypt.

It is precisely in this light that we have to see Philae's role in the missions to Nubia. Philae was the see on the frontier between Egypt and Nubia and had had contact with the other side of the frontier for ages. As the last station on the way to Nubia, it would seem natural for an imperial mission to contact the bishop of this see and to ask him to support the mission. And that is exactly what Theodore did. It is remarkable how the relatively invisible see of Philae came to play such an active role in the history of the Egyptian Church during the sixth century. Part of the success definitely consisted of Theodore's partaking in the first mission to Nubia. But there may have been another reason. Let us therefore try to reconstruct Philae's role in the events before finally assessing why Theodore could play the role he did in the ecclesiastical affairs of the sixth century.

When Longinus was called to Alexandria around 575, on his way north he visited Bishop Theodore at Philae. The bishop, so John of Ephesus says, was already fifty years in office and had been ordained by the Monophysite Archbishop Timothy III of Alexandria (517-535).¹²² Theodore's ordination, then, took place around 525, and he was already bishop of Philae when Narses the Persarmenian arrived at Philae. By following the latter's traces in Procopius' *Wars* we can determine the period in which Narses visited Philae.

Narses came from Persian Armenia and possibly belonged to the influential family of the Kamsarakan. This is why he is sometimes called Narses Kamsarakan, for earlier sources mention a person of the same name who belonged to this family.¹²³ We should be careful, however, because another Narses, a eunuch with whom our Narses is often confused, also came from Persarmenia and with the title of *cubicularius* became even more influential at Justinian's court.¹²⁴

Our Narses is already mentioned in the first book of the *Persian Wars* when he was still fighting for the Persians and gained victory over the Byzantine generals Belisarius and Sittas in Persarmenia in 525/526.¹²⁵ Procopius already looks ahead here by stating that Narses would later desert to the Romans and fight with his present enemy, Belisarius, in Italy.¹²⁶ The passage concerning Narses' desertion to the Romans, which took place in the summer of 530, follows three chapters later and there explicitly refers back to the earlier battle with Belisarius. His compatriot Narses *cubicularius* welcomed Narses' desertion with a large sum of money.¹²⁷

In his description of the closure of the temples at Philae, Procopius refers back to Narses' desertion. It is not clear what function Narses had during his expedition to Philae. He is called rather vaguely 'head of the troops there' (τῶν ἐκεῖνη στρατιωτῶν ἄρχων),¹²⁸ and it has been proposed that Justinian had made him the highest authority in the province, governor (*dux*) of the Thebaid, who was the main person responsible for the army garrisoned on the southern frontier. It also possible, however, that he was appointed as the actual commander of the garrisons in the region.¹²⁹

In the *Gothic Wars*, Procopius describes Narses' participation in the Italian campaign under Belisarius and Narses *cubicularius*, from the summer of 538 until at

¹²² Joh.Eph. *h.e* III 4.9 Brooks (p. 189.13-4).

¹²³ Stein, *Histoire*, 292 (n. 1); Nautin, 'Conversion', 3; *PLRE* III s.v. 'Narses 2'.

¹²⁴ *PLRE* III s.v. 'Narses 1'. For example, as Stein, 'Nubie chrétienne', 133, rightly observes, Monneret de Villard, *Storia*, 53, confuses Narses the Persarmenian with Narses *cubicularius*.

¹²⁵ Greatrex, *Rome and Persia*, 147-8.

¹²⁶ Procop. *Pers* 1.12.21-2.

¹²⁷ Procop. *Pers* 1.15.31.

¹²⁸ Procop. *Pers* 1.19.37 = *FHN* III 328.

¹²⁹ Cf. R. Rémondon, 'Soldats de Byzance d'après un papyrus trouvé à Edfou', *RechPap* 1 (1961) 41-93 at 47, with Maspero, *Organisation militaire*, 82; Nautin, 'Conversion', 6; Demicheli, *Rapporti*, 192-3 (n. 89), and 'Regni', 187; *PLRE* III s.v. 'Narses 2'.

least late 540, when Belisarius sent him away from Ravenna with some other commanders.¹³⁰ Maspero therefore concluded that Narses had closed the temples at Philae between 530 and 538, and even placed the event around 535, when there was a relative period of peace 'which gave Justinian the opportunity of using one of his most esteemed officers for such an infamous job as the destruction of some idols at Philae'.¹³¹

However, in 543 Narses appears again as a commander of the Roman troops in the East where he died in a Persian ambush.¹³² Therefore, there are two periods of time in which he could have closed the temples at Philae: between 530 and 538 or in the years 541/542.¹³³ However, when Belisarius sent Narses away from Ravenna, it is not said that the latter left Italy. On the contrary, after Belisarius himself left Italy at the end of 540, Narses probably stayed behind as one of the commanders.¹³⁴ In 543, he was commander of an army of Armenians and Heruli, so it would have been highly unlikely for him to have come to southern Egypt sometime during the short period of 541/542. More probably, he stayed in Italy and was ordered to move to Persia with his army in 543 or even earlier. Thus, 530-538 still seems the most likely period for the closure of the temple of Isis at Philae. Yet, the question remains why this general was in Egypt at that time. Perhaps the answer can be found in reconstructing the dates of the first mission to Nubia.

The first mission to Nubia must have ended in or before 548, for John of Ephesus states that Julian stayed for two years in Noubadia and was received afterwards in Constantinople by the Empress Theodora, who died in 548.¹³⁵ If we are to believe John, he was present himself at that time to hear about the stories of Julian, and as John came to Constantinople in 540, we may deduce that Julian did not return to the capital before 540.¹³⁶

There is more circumstantial evidence for the year in which Julian went to Nubia because we know Julian was in Constantinople in the 'synod' (Syriac ܫܢܘܕܐ, from Greek σύνοδος) of the Patriarch Theodosius.¹³⁷ Richter proposes to emend the Syriac text in order to read the rendering of Greek συνουσία, ܫܢܘܕܐ, a word used for the circle around Theodosius.¹³⁸ Like John of Hephaestopolis, Julian would then have come in the retinue of the patriarch from Alexandria to Constantinople. However, this emendation is not necessary, as the word 'synod' was used for the permanent, standing synod of Monophysite bishops and other prominent clergymen visiting or residing in Constantinople.¹³⁹ The remark that Julian was 'in the synod of Theodosius' therefore indicates that Julian belonged to the more prominent members of the Monophysites in Constantinople. Possible though it may still be, the word 'synod' cannot be taken to mean that Julian came with Theodosius to Constantinople. Whether Julian came from Alexandria or not, it is evident from this remark that Julian could only have been sent to Nubia after Theodosius had arrived in Constantinople and become the leader of the Monophysites there.

¹³⁰ Procop. *Goth.* 2.13.17, 16.21, 18.6, 26.3, 27.16, 29.29.

¹³¹ Maspero, 'Théodore', 302. See also his *Histoire des patriarches* 34.

¹³² Procop. *Pers.* 2.24.12, 25.11, 25.20-4, 26.

¹³³ For the latter date see *PLRE* III s.v. 'Narses 2'. Cf. Monneret de Villard, *Storia*, 53, who dates the event to either 536-8 or 540-3, on which see Stein, 'Nubie chrétienne', 133.

¹³⁴ Procop. *Goth.* 2.30.2. See Maspero, 'Théodore', 302; Nautin, 'Conversion', 4; *PLRE* III s.v. 'Narses 2'.

¹³⁵ Joh.Eph. *h.e.* III 4.7 Brooks (p. 186.11-26).

¹³⁶ Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens* 112.

¹³⁷ Joh.Eph. *h.e.* III 4.6 Brooks (p. 183.3-4).

¹³⁸ Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens* 58-60: 'im Gefolge des Papa Theodosius'.

¹³⁹ Dijkstra and Van Ginkel, review Richter, 235. For this meaning of 'synod' see A. Papadakis, 'Endemousa synodos', in A.P. Kazhdan (ed.), *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, 3 vols (New York and Oxford, 1991) 1.697.

When did this happen? After Timothy III had died on 7 February 535, Theodosius was elected as archbishop of Alexandria a few days later. Just as with the schism of 575, the Alexandrian clergy created an anti-patriarch, Gaianus. Chaotic times followed until Justinian sent Narses *cubicularius* to Alexandria to capture Gaianus (23 or 25 May 535) and protect Theodosius. Finally, Theodosius was 'invited' to Constantinople, probably after the council held there in May/June of 536, which was convoked against some of the Monophysite leaders, to discuss doctrinal matters with the emperor.¹⁴⁰ The emperor forced Theodosius to stay in Constantinople, deposed him of his see and banished him to Derkos in Thrace, possibly from the end of 537 to 538. In 539, Theodosius returned to Constantinople where he lived as leader of the Monophysite movement until his death in 566, despite his removal from the patriarchal see.¹⁴¹

According to Maspero, Julian could have been sent to Nubia only after Theodosius' banishment, a period which he dates somewhere between 540 and 545. Maspero further suggests that the mission under Julian may have taken place in the same year, 543, as Theodore of Arabia was sent to the Arabs.¹⁴² Yet there is no necessary connection between the two events.¹⁴³ As Julian is said to have stayed for two years in Nubia, any date between May/June of 536 and 546, except for the short period of banishment in 537/538, is possible as a starting date for the first mission to Nubia. To sum up, this mission must have taken place somewhere between 536 and 548.

The only meaningful connection between the closure of the temples at Philae (530-538) and the first mission to Nubia (536-548) must be sought in the period of overlap between the events. It is tempting to think that Narses the Persarmenian accompanied Narses *cubicularius* to Alexandria in 535/536 to restore order, as he also accompanied his compatriot in the Italian campaign of 538-540.¹⁴⁴ Accordingly, Narses *cubicularius* could have sent him to the southern Egyptian frontier. As a symbolic gesture, Narses the Persarmenian then closed the languishing temple of Isis, and soon returned to Alexandria, in any case before 538 when he was in Italy. Thus, the closure of the temples at Philae can tentatively be dated to the period 535-537.¹⁴⁵

It is possible that after the arrival of Theodosius and his retinue in Constantinople, Julian heard of this event and his attention was drawn to the area south of Philae. At the start of Theodosius' stay in Constantinople (536/537), when Justinian was still trying to solve problems with words, the emperor may have been attracted by the idea of sending an imperial mission to Nubia, which would have arrived there in around 538. If Julian had returned to Constantinople in 540, this would also fit the remark by John of Ephesus that he witnessed him there, for John was in the capital from 540 onwards. This, then, could be a plausible, if rather indirect, connection between the events described by Procopius and John.

According to John, Bishop Theodore of Philae accompanied Julian to the king of Noubadia. After he had stayed in Nubia for two years and had baptised the king, Julian left Noubadia to Theodore.¹⁴⁶ In the summary at the start of the second mission

¹⁴⁰ On the synod of May/June 536 at Constantinople see J. Speigl, 'Die Synode von 536 in Konstantinopel', *OS* 43 (1994) 105-53; Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens* 110.

¹⁴¹ Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens* 108-12. Cf. E.W. Brooks, 'The Dates of the Alexandrine Patriarchs Dioskoros II, Timothy IV, and Theodosius', *BZ* 12 (1903) 494-7; Maspero, *Histoire des patriarches* 102-34; Stein, *Histoire* 382-5; A. van Roey, 'Les débuts de l'Église jacobite', in A. Grillmeier, H. Bacht (eds), *Das Konzil von Chalkedon. Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 3 vols (Würzburg, 1951-4) 2.338-60 at 352-5; Nautin, 'Conversion', 4-5; Frend, *Monophysite Movement*, 270-4.

¹⁴² Maspero, 'Théodore', 302-4, and *Histoire des patriarches* 234; Monneret de Villard, *Storia*, 54-5, 61; Rémondon, 'Soldats', 71; Welsby, *Medieval Kingdoms* 32; Edwards, *Nubian Past*, 216.

¹⁴³ As Stein, 'Nubie chrétienne', 133, observes.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. E.R. Hardy, 'The Egyptian Policy of Justinian', *DOP* 22 (1968) 23-41 at 32-6, followed by Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens* 117, who take Narses the Persarmenian, who closed the temples at Philae, as the same person who restored order in Alexandria.

¹⁴⁵ Maspero, 'Théodore', 303; Nautin, 'Conversion', 5.

¹⁴⁶ Joh.Eph. *h.e* III 4.7 Brooks (p. 186.11-21).

to Nubia, John says even more about Theodore's stay in Nubia: 'He, this bishop, entered (the country), visited them (the Noubades), instructed them and returned to his city. They were in this situation for a period of more or less eighteen years'.¹⁴⁷ What follows is the second mission to Nubia, which Longinus undertook in 569. Theodore, then, returned to Philae eighteen years earlier, that is, in 551.

How should we imagine his stay in Noubadia? First of all, it is unlikely that Theodore left his see permanently for at least four years. It is more probable that he stayed in contact with the now Christian king of Noubadia and stimulated, for example, church building and the ordination of clergymen, although these achievements John of Ephesus ascribes to the episcopate of Longinus.¹⁴⁸ An illustration of Theodore's activity in Nubia is the so-called Eirpanome inscription from Dendur:¹⁴⁹

- By the will of God and the command
of King Eirpanome and the zealot
in the word of God, Joseph, **exarch**
of Talmis, and by receiving the cross
5. from Theodore, Bishop of Philae,
I, Abraham, most humble priest,
have erected the cross on the day
on which the foundations were laid of this church,
on 27 Tybi of the 7th indiction
10. in the presence of Shai, the eunuch, Papnute,
the '**stepharis**' (?), Epephanios (sic), the '**domesticus**
and Sirma, the '**veredarius**'. Everyone who
will read the things written, let him be so good
to say a prayer for me. Amen.

This Coptic inscription, found in the temple of Dendur 70 km south of Philae, commemorates the erection of the cross by Abraham on the occasion of the building of a church inside the temple. The transformation has been ordered by the Noubadian king Eirpanome and Joseph, the exarch (ἑξαρχος) of Talmis, a high Noubadian official who is also mentioned in a building inscription from Ikhmindi (Mehendi, situated near Maharraqa, just south of the Dodekaschoinos).¹⁵⁰ Moreover, the text says that Abraham received the cross from Theodore, bishop of Philae, and that the ceremony was attended by four officials with a strange mixture of titles that betray the influence of Byzantine administration (CΙΟΥΡ, 'eunuch': Coptic, ΣΤΕΦΑΡΙΣ, '**stepharis**': ?, ΣΑΜΑΤΑ, '**domesticus**': Old Nubian, and ΒΕΡΙΤΑΡΙΟΣ, '**veredarius**': Latin).¹⁵¹

The inscription is dated to 27 Tybi of the 7th indiction, which could be 22 January of the years 529, 544, 559 or 574, because these dates fall in the episcopate of Theodore of Philae. The oldest date, 529, is improbable as it dates to before the first mission to Nubia, which arrived in 536 or later. If we are to believe John's account that the Noubadian king was baptised on that occasion, this date is impossible, for Eirpanome seems to already have been a Christian. The last date, 574, is also unlikely,

¹⁴⁷ Joh.Eph. *h.e* III 4.49 Brooks (p. 233.27-30).

¹⁴⁸ Joh.Eph. *h.e* III 4.8 Brooks (p. 187.26-8).

¹⁴⁹ Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens* 164-72 (= *FHN* III 330), re-edits the text, with translation and commentary, which I follow here.

¹⁵⁰ For the *editio princeps* of this inscription, see S. Donadoni, *Cultura dell'antico Egitto* (Rome, 1986) 513-20 ('Un' epigrafe greco-nubiana da Ikhmindi', 1959') (= *SB* VIII 10074). See for discussion F.W. Deichmann, P. Grossmann, *Nubische Forschungen* (Berlin, 1988) 81-8; Bingen, *Pages d'épigraphie grecque* 160-2 ('Un roitelet chrétien des Nobades au VI^e siècle', 1961'); J. van der Vliet, 'Gleanings from Christian Northern Nubia', *JJP* 32 (2002) 175-94 at 191-4.

¹⁵¹ Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens* 170; J. van der Vliet, review of Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens* forthcoming. For the title *veredarius* see S. Daris, *Il lessico latino nel greco d'Egitto* (Barcelona, 1971) s.v. βερεδάριος (p. 33).

since Bishop Theodore was involved in the dedication, whereas Longinus was bishop of Noubadia from 566 onwards and would then have been expected to be responsible.¹⁵² Two dates remain: 544 and 559. Maspero rejected 544 because he suggested that Theodore was still in Nubia by then and would have presided over the ceremony himself. According to Maspero, the delegation of dedicating the church to the priest Abraham could have happened only after Theodore had returned to Philae in 551. Therefore, 559 would be the only option, and the bishop would have arranged the dedication of the church from Philae.¹⁵³

Recently, Richter has called this date, which has been accepted by almost all subsequent scholars, into question, precisely because after 551 Theodore had retreated to Philae and there was no longer a bishop in Noubadia. He claims that there are 'several grounds' for dating the event to 544 but only mentions that it falls in the period of the first mission, when Theodore accompanied Julian to Nubia (536-548). This argument is equally indecisive, however, for it is doubtful whether we should take John's statement that Theodore stayed for several years in Noubadia literally, and, after having returned to Philae in 551, cancelled all relations with Noubadia, including nearby Dendur. Nevertheless, whether the bishop was on Philae or in Nubia, it is tempting to relate the dedication of the church at Dendur to the first mission under Julian or shortly afterwards, when Theodore continued Julian's missionary activities.¹⁵⁴

A date of 544 does not contradict the suggestion that Julian went to Nubia in around 538 either. If he stayed for two years, he would have left the country to Theodore in 540. The bishop could have stayed for a few more years, or, more probably, he could have returned to his see and stimulated events such as the dedication of a church at Dendur from Philae. If this chronology is correct, it means that Eirpanome most probably was the Noubadian king who was baptised by Julian.¹⁵⁵ Whether the date of the inscription is 544 or 559, the Eirpanome inscription inevitably shows us that Nubia had been profoundly influenced by Byzantine administration before Longinus came south in 569, and that, *pace* John of Ephesus, church building and the creation of an ecclesiastical hierarchy had already taken shape before Longinus arrived.¹⁵⁶

We are on firmer grounds for the second mission. John states that Longinus was kept in Constantinople for three years and arrived in Noubadia in 569.¹⁵⁷ He then left for Alexandria after six years, that is, around 575, and returned to Noubadia before 579/580, when he undertook the third mission to Alodia. At the time Longinus was on his way to Egypt, Theodore's star had risen within the Monophysite movement. Longinus visited Philae and asked the bishop to participate in the ordination of a new

¹⁵² Cf. Monneret de Villard, *Storia*, 69, and Welsby, *Medieval Kingdoms*, 37, who think that the inscription has to be dated to either 559 or 574.

¹⁵³ Maspero, 'Théodore', 305-10. Cf. Kraus, *Anfänge*, 111-4; Monneret de Villard, *Storia*, 84-6; Rémondon, 'Soldats', 71; Engelhardt, *Mission*, 65-6; Demicheli, 'Regni', 195-8; Vantini, *Christianity*, 42-3; Grillmeier, *Jesus der Christus*, 276. Again, Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, 169-70, refers to Kraus for the date of 559, whereas Kraus, *Anfänge*, 112, explicitly refers to Maspero.

¹⁵⁴ The same seems to have happened at Talmis where an undated inscription mentions the priest Paulos who erected the cross in the temple of Mandulis. See Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, 162-3.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Maspero, *Histoire des patriarches*, 287 (n. 4), and Honigmann, *Évêques*, 228-9 (n. 7), who identify Eirpanome with *ἄρρυωλζ*, king of Noubadia during the second mission under Longinus. Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, 92, leaves this question open.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, 171-2, who unconvincingly argues that the Isis statue mentioned by Priscus F 27 Blockley (= *FHN* III 318) was kept for oracular purposes at Dendur, and that Eirpanome violently made an end to this cult by converting the temple into a church. See Dijkstra and Van Ginkel, review Richter, 236-7. On the motion oracle at Dendur ascribed to Amon of Debod, see R.S. Bianchi, 'The Oracle at the Temple of Dendur', in Clarysse, Schoors and Willems, *Egyptian Religion*, 2, 773-80.

¹⁵⁷ Edwards, *Nubian Past*, 216, mistakenly dates the event to 551.

archbishop of Alexandria. According to John of Ephesus, Theodore excused himself on account of his old age, but gave Longinus his mandate.¹⁵⁸

This document has indeed been preserved in a collection of 45 Monophysite documents, mostly letters, covering the period 564-575 (the *Documenta Monophysitica*). They have been transmitted in one manuscript which was probably copied not long after the last redaction in 580/581.¹⁵⁹ The letter by Theodore is included in one of these documents, a pamphlet in defence of Paul of Antioch.¹⁶⁰ In this letter, Theodore gives another reason why he did not accompany Longinus to Egypt: 'because of the treachery of those who now hold sway over the church'.¹⁶¹ John also does not tell that Theodore later resigned his mandate to Longinus in a letter which is referred to in the same document.¹⁶² The real reason, then, why Theodore did not come to Alexandria was the risk attached to ordaining the new archbishop, as appears from his later resignation.

John also states that in 575 the two Syrian bishops who came to Egypt to deliberate about Paul of Antioch, came for Longinus and Theodore. Longinus' important role should not surprise us, but why had Theodore become so important within the Monophysite movement? True, he had been actively involved in the first mission to Nubia and, undoubtedly, his name had been mentioned when Julian reported his mission at Constantinople.¹⁶³ But there may be another reason. John writes that already during Julian's first mission, Theodore was 'an old man',¹⁶⁴ and around 575 he was still 'the old bishop of Philae in the Upper Thebaid'.¹⁶⁵ Maspero calculated that he would have been born at the end of the fifth century, and would have been in his eighties when Longinus visited him.¹⁶⁶

Theodore had been appointed by Theodosius' predecessor Timothy III and had at least been ordained by a patriarch in normal office. No one could question Theodore's authority. His long episcopate and participation in the successful mission under Julian, which reached Constantinople in due time, would have contributed to Theodore's eminent place among the Monophysite Egyptian bishops. Another illustration of this prominence is the letter sent in 565 by Patriarch Theodosius to Theodore and the monks of Arcadia and the Thebaid, to three other Egyptian bishops (John of Kellia, Leonidas and Joseph of Metellis), and to the monks and clergy of Alexandria, in order to inform them that he had requested Paul of Antioch to consecrate new bishops at Alexandria.¹⁶⁷ Apparently, the number of Monophysite bishops had become few by the start of Justin II's reign, and Theodore was one of those remaining.¹⁶⁸ Besides being a prominent bishop in sixth-century Egypt, Theodore also left his mark upon his see. It is the work he did on Philae during his episcopate that is the subject of the next chapter.

¹⁵⁸ Joh.Eph. *h.e* III 4.9 Brooks (p. 189. 8-17).

¹⁵⁹ Van Roey and Allen, *Monophysite Texts*, 267-303. For a Latin translation, see J.-B. Chabot, *Documenta ad origines monophysitarum illustrandas. II: Versio* (= *CSCO* 103; Paris, 1933).

¹⁶⁰ Van Roey and Allen, *Monophysite Texts*, 295 (no. 43.6). See also Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, 75-6.

¹⁶¹ *Documenta Monophysitica*, p. 274.29-30, cf. 274.21-2 Chabot (tr. Chabot, *Documenta*, 192.7-8, 1-2). Cf. Honigmann, *Évêques*, 227 (n. 2), who suggests that this remark refers to Bishop John of Kellia.

¹⁶² *Documenta Monophysitica*, p. 276.3-7 Chabot (tr. Chabot, *Documenta*, 193.1-5), on which see Van Roey and Allen, *Monophysite Texts*, 295, 298.

¹⁶³ Joh.Eph. *h.e* III 4.7 Brooks (p. 186.21-6)

¹⁶⁴ Joh.Eph. *h.e* III 4.7 Brooks (p. 186.19). Cf. 4.49: 'a very old man' (p. 233.24).

¹⁶⁵ Joh.Eph. *h.e* III 4.9 Brooks (p. 189.9). Cf. Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, 50, who inaccurately translates 'in der inneren Thebais', on which see Dijkstra and Van Ginkel, review Richter, 235.

¹⁶⁶ Maspero, 'Théodore', 299-300.

¹⁶⁷ Van Roey and Allen, *Monophysite Texts*, 279-80 (nos. 20-2).

¹⁶⁸ Honigmann, *Évêques*, 175.

9. Philae in the Age of Bishop Theodore

In the preceding chapter, we saw that the closure of the temples at Philae and the missions to Nubia did not have a direct relationship in the sense that the events were part of a deliberate 'anti-pagan' policy, which marked the way to the 'Christianisation' of Nubia. In this rather simplified image of the conversion of Nubia to Christianity, first Philae had to become Christian before Christianity could finally reach Nubia. To this combination of events has been added another event, which has already been introduced at the start of Part III, that is, the transformation of the temple of Isis into a *topos* of St Stephen. According to this image, Bishop Theodore built a church inside the temple shortly after its closure, and this final 'triumph' of Christianity over 'paganism' stimulated the king of the Noubades, who had formerly worshipped Isis at Philae, to convert to Christianity. Thus, the turning of the temple into a church becomes of the utmost importance for the missions to Nubia.

However, we have seen that this development was far more complex and that Christianity had already reached Nubia well before the sixth century. Moreover, the closure of the temples at Philae and the missions to Nubia need to be seen more generally in the context of the imperial policy concerning the southern Egyptian frontier and the peoples living immediately to its south. Consequently, we have interpreted the closure of the temples at Philae as a symbolic deed, which confirmed that Philae was ripe for Christianity rather than that it was a 'Christian triumph' over 'paganism'. Without this import attached to the closure of the temple of Isis, we also may wonder why the transformation into a church should be so important for Nubian Christianity. Surely, the decision to turn an empty building into a church would have more likely been determined by local circumstances than that it had a direct bearing on the missions sent to Nubia.

In this chapter, it will therefore be argued that the temple of Isis stood empty for several years before it was turned into a church. The transformation of the temple into a church will be looked at against the background of the churches and other cases of reuse of temples on the island. In other words, this approach will place the transformation of the island's most important temple in a local context. But before we turn to the temples and churches of Philae, we must first examine the term usually given to the reuse of a temple as a church, 'temple conversion', and to what we know of the reuse of temples in Egypt in general.

'Temple Conversion' in Late Antique Egypt

The building of a church inside a temple or the destruction of a temple, or parts of the temple, and construction of a church in its place has generally been referred to by the term 'temple conversion'.¹⁶⁹ In a seminal article from 1939, Friedrich Deichmann (1909-1993) collected a wide variety of examples of the building of churches in ancient places of worship, from which he extracts the following pattern.¹⁷⁰ Although the earliest instance of a temple conversion, the church of the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem, dates to the reign of Constantine, the most violent temple conversions took place after Julian the Apostate (360-363) had briefly reverted to the old religion: 'Especially after Julian a new and violent movement begins, which suddenly and

¹⁶⁹ Trombley, *Hellenic Religion* 1, 108.

¹⁷⁰ F.W. Deichmann, *Rom, Ravenna, Konstantinopel, Naher Osten. Gesammelte Studien zur spätantiken Architektur, Kunst und Geschichte* (Wiesbaden, 1982) 56-94 ('Frühchristliche Kirchen in antiken Heiligtümern', 1939¹, with addenda), to be supplemented by his 'Christianisierung II (der Monumente)', *RAC* II (1954) 1228-41, and *Gesammelte Studien*, 27-34 ('Von Tempel zur Kirche', 1964'). For an update see J. Vaes, 'Christliche Wiederverwendung antiker Bauten: ein Forschungsbericht', *AncSoc* 15-7 (1984-6) 305-443 (tr. in abridged version in Italian and English in *Lotus International* 65 (1990) 16-39.

unexpectedly bursts forth time and again well into the sixth century'.¹⁷¹ Deichmann reinforced this impression with references to the imperial laws, which seem to point to increasing legislature against temples and to several literary sources about violent temple conversions, a well-known example being the already mentioned destruction of the Marneion at Gaza as described by Mark the Deacon in the *Life of Porphyry*. Only later, from the fifth century onwards, were the less conspicuous temples which had survived the actions of Christian zealots reused for more practical purposes.¹⁷²

Recent studies have tried to nuance this perspective. It is now held that the image given in the literary sources is a fragmentary picture of a much more complex development. In reality, violent actions against temples undertaken by Christian zealots were rather the exception than the rule. Temples were actually held in high regard and were seen as monuments that could be completely torn down only with special permission. Moreover, in most cases where the stories mention a 'destruction' of a temple, in fact only a closure took place.¹⁷³

In the same way, the building of a church need not always directly follow the closure of a temple. In Greece, temples were generally converted into churches in a later period and thus were left alone for a considerable time.¹⁷⁴ Violent temple conversions were, then, only part of reality. However, the impact these incidental temple conversions might have had cannot be ignored. The motifs of destruction and the purification of temples pervaded literature, especially Christian literature, and became one of the main paradigms of Christian ideology.¹⁷⁵

Matters were not different in Egypt. The closure of the Serapea at Alexandria and Canopus in 392, and that of a temple at Menouthis about a century later have already been mentioned. Moreover, there are several Coptic saints' lives dating to the fifth century and later which describe the destruction of a temple by a holy man and his companions. These sources have given Frankfurter the impression that 'the gutting and conversion of traditional Egyptian temples, often still functioning, was a widespread phenomenon in Egypt during the fourth, fifth and sixth centuries'.¹⁷⁶ Part of the success of Christianity in the Egyptian countryside was, according to him, the creation of the opposition of demons versus holy men. This 'demonisation' called for action by the ideologically inspired against temples, for temples were represented as the homes of demons.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷¹ Deichmann, *Gesammelte Studien*, 59.

¹⁷² Deichmann, *Gesammelte Studien*, 64. See also G. Fowden, 'Bishops and Temples in the Eastern Roman Empire A.D. 320-435', *JThS* 29 (1978) 53-78; R.P.C. Hanson, *Studies in Christian Antiquity* (Edinburgh, 1985) 347-58 ('The Transformation of Pagan Temples into Churches in the Early Christian Centuries', 1978¹); R. Klein, 'Spätantike Tempelzerstörungen im Widerspruch christlicher Urteile', in E.A. Livingstone (ed.), *Studia Patristica XXIV* (1993) 135-42; Trombley, *Hellenic Religion* 1, 108-47; Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens* 149-50.

¹⁷³ E.g. H. Saradi-Mendelovici, 'Christian Attitudes toward Pagan Monuments in Late Antiquity and Their Legacy in Later Byzantine Centuries', *DOP* 44 (1990) 47-61; J.-P. Caillet, 'La transformation en église d'édifices publics et de temples à la fin de l'antiquité', in C. Lepelley (ed.), *La fin de la cité antique et le début de la cité médiévale* (Bari, 1996) 191-211; B. Ward-Perkins, 'Re-using the Architectural Legacy of the Past, *entre idéologie et pragmatisme*', in G.P. Brogiolo, B. Ward-Perkins (eds), *The Idea and Ideal of the Town between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Leiden, 1999) 225-44 at 233-40; J. Hahn, 'Tempelzerstörung und Tempelreinigung in der Spätantike', in R. Albertz (ed.), *Kult, Konflikt und Versöhnung* (Münster, 2001) 269-86; B. Ward-Perkins, 'Reconfiguring Sacred Space: From Pagan Shrines to Christian Churches', in G. Brands, H.-G. Severin (eds), *Die spätantike Stadt und ihre Christianisierung* (Wiesbaden, 2003) 285-90.

¹⁷⁴ J.-M. Spieser, *Urban and Religious Spaces in Late Antiquity and Early Byzantium* (Aldershot and Burlington, 2001) Ch. VI ('The Christianisation of Pagan Sanctuaries in Greece', tr. of 'La christianisation des sanctuaires païens en Grèce', 1976¹, with addenda and corrigenda pp. 5-8), nuanced at some points by T.E. Gregory, 'The Survival of Paganism in Christian Greece: A Critical Essay', *AJPh* 107 (1986) 229-42.

¹⁷⁵ Hahn, 'Tempelzerstörung', 279-82.

¹⁷⁶ Frankfurter, *Religion*, 265.

¹⁷⁷ Frankfurter, *Religion*, 265-84. Cf. the papers presented by D. Brakke, 'From Temple to Cell, from Gods to Demons: Pagan Temples in the Monastic Topography', and Frankfurter, 'Iconoclasm and

However, it is doubtful whether this representation of temple conversions is not as influenced by literary sources as the idea that violent temple conversions dominated fourth and fifth-century society in the Mediterranean Basin. It is therefore better to have a look first at what archaeological traces remain of the reuse of temples as churches. In a recent study, Peter Grossmann gives an overview of several cases of the reuse of temples in Egypt.¹⁷⁸ Although he also emphasises that violent temple conversions took place in the initial period, he admits that most temples were not destroyed by force but were reused for different purposes, mainly for building material, or even remained untouched.¹⁷⁹

It is therefore less accurate to refer to the reuse of temples as 'temple conversions'; after all, that term implies that the temple was reused as a church, whereas various other possibilities also existed. Moreover, the reuse of ancient temples developed over time, in a certain socio-political context, with its own regional characteristics.¹⁸⁰ A regional approach has been rarely taken, and in this chapter and the next we will give an example of the benefits such an approach could have for the discussion on the reuse of temples in Late Antiquity.¹⁸¹

The Transformation of the Temple of Isis at Philae into a Church

Let us first compare the Christian discourse on temple destructions with the account of the closure of the temples at Philae, and therewith of the temple of Isis, by Procopius, who writes that, probably between 535 and 537, Justinian sent his general Narses to Philae to 'destroy' them. As has been said previously, this statement need not be taken too literally as it is part of the discourse of temple destructions.¹⁸² Procopius further remarks that the priests were arrested and the statues sent to Constantinople. The latter phenomenon is widely attested throughout the Mediterranean, and it is perfectly possible that this is what really happened.¹⁸³ Whether any priests still officiated in the temple of Isis has been questioned before due to the lack of epigraphical evidence for this period. In other cases, temples were merely closed and their statues sent to the capital. In fact, Procopius does not mention the temple of Isis at all, let alone the building of a church within its precincts. A priori, then, it is unlikely that the building of a church inside the temple of Isis directly followed its closure, for if that were the case Procopius would have mentioned it.

In an article from 1967, which scholars still generally regard as the standard study on the subject, the French scholar Pierre Nautin (1914-1997) argued that the transformation of the temple of Isis into a church did take place directly after its closure in 535-537.¹⁸⁴ It is therefore necessary to closely follow his train of thought. For Nautin, Justinian's decision to close the temple of Isis would have been a political

Christianization in Late Antique Egypt: Christian Treatments of Space and Image', at the symposium 'Zerstörung und Erneuerung lokaler Kulttopographie in der Spätantike', Münster 2002.

¹⁷⁸ P. Grossmann, 'Tempel als Ort des Konflikts in christlicher Zeit', in Borgeaud *et al.*, *Le temple*, 181-201, see also his *Christliche Architektur*, 43-8.

¹⁷⁹ Grossmann, 'Tempel', 191-2, and *Christliche Architektur*, 45. As examples of the former ways of reuse, he mentions Elephantine and Syene, and, of the latter, Philae.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. Saradi-Mendelovici, 'Christian Attitudes', 47; Hahn, 'Tempelzerstörung', 283.

¹⁸¹ See, for a preliminary publication, J.H.F. Dijkstra, 'Het hergebruik van Oudegyptische tempels in de late Oudheid. Een regionale studie', *Tijdschrift voor Mediterrane Archeologie* 30 (2003) 21-8. There are some recent examples of such regional studies, e.g. R. Bayliss, *Provincial Cilicia and the Archaeology of Temple Conversion* (Oxford, 2004).

¹⁸² Nautin, 'Conversion', 7.

¹⁸³ E.g. Saradi-Mendelovici, 'Christian Attitudes', 50-1; C. Lepelley, 'Le musée des statues divines. La volonté de sauvegarder le patrimoine artistique païen à l'époque théodosienne', *CArch* 42 (1994) 5-15; Hahn, 'Tempelzerstörung', 277.

¹⁸⁴ Nautin, 'Conversion'. See also e.g. Maspero, 'Théodore', 304; Kraus, *Anfänge*, 116; *I.Philae* II, pp. 253-4; Deichmann, *Gesammelte Studien*, 61-2; Grossmann, 'Kirche', 108; Trombley, *Hellenic Religion* 2, 238; *FHN* III, pp. 1179-81; Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, 101.

error if it had not been in a situation of war. That such a context of war existed has been argued by Roger Rémondon (1923-1971), though on the basis of little evidence, in an otherwise extremely well-documented article written earlier in the 1960s, where he re-edits a sixth-century papyrus text from Edfu that contained a list of payments for soldiers.¹⁸⁵

Rémondon suggested that Egypt was involved in three 'Blemmyan Wars', wars between the Blemmyes and the Byzantine Empire. The first period of war was dated to the reign of the Emperor Anastasius (491-518), the second from 540 until 543 and the third from 563 until 568. The closure of the temple of Isis would have been part of a military action against the Blemmyes during the second 'Blemmyan War' of 540-543. Although Nautin criticised this dating of the closure of the temple of Isis, and more accurately placed it between 535 and 537, he agreed that the closure had to be connected to a military campaign against the Blemmyes, whom he perceived as the main worshippers at Philae.¹⁸⁶

Justinian therefore sent one of his main generals to close the main temple of Philae and made him commander of the frontier troops. Nautin compares the official closure of the temple to other temples closed with the help of imperial troops, most notably the temples at Gaza as described by Mark the Deacon. According to Nautin, it would have been impossible to destroy the temples at Philae, as Procopius relates, and therefore Justinian asked Bishop Theodore, who participated in the first mission to Nubia not much later, to build a church inside the temple through the erection of the cross: 'Theodore's gesture of erecting the cross in the sanctuary of Isis between 535 and 537 was not only a local event; it went down in the history of the Church as the first act of the evangelisation of Nubia'.¹⁸⁷ In short, Nautin sees the erection of the cross inside the temple of Isis as the decisive moment in the deliberate, imperial 'anti-pagan' campaign that caused the conversion of Nubia to Christianity.¹⁸⁸

Nautin proceeds by discussing the visible traces of the conversion in the interior of the temple. In Nautin's view, the Christian community on the island, annoyed by the continuation of 'pagan' cults, must have felt a sense of triumph when they finally entered the holiest part of the former temple.¹⁸⁹ Their feelings were embodied in the inscription of the conquering cross.¹⁹⁰ According to Nautin, this inscription has to be taken literally: just as would have happened at Dendur, in a pious ceremony Theodore would have brought a cross inside the naos and erected it there to replace the cult image of Isis: 'from then on, the whole island was for the Christians'.¹⁹¹ The crosses and inscriptions, for which the prominent position near the doors presumes an ordered plan, were not only there to witness the glorious victory over paganism but also served apotropaic purposes.¹⁹² Furthermore, the gutting of Ancient Egyptian reliefs must have been a large project which, Nautin suggests, would have been carried out by Narses' troops, because they were there on the spot. Their help cannot have lasted for a long time, however, since the job was left unfinished.¹⁹³

Finally, Nautin differentiates two phases of Christian occupation of the sacred space. In the first phase, the church would have consisted of the entire space of the former temple, including the naos, and would have been oriented to the north, the direction to which the inscriptions point. The altar of red Aswan granite still standing today in the pronaos, which has been incised with a cross and faces eastward, would

¹⁸⁵ *P.Edfou* IX = *SB* VI 9613, on which see Rémondon, 'Soldats'. Cf. Demicheli, *Rapporti*, 192-6. The 'terreur blemmye' already occurs in Rémondon's earlier article 'Suprême résistance', 72-8.

¹⁸⁶ Nautin, 'Conversion', 4-6. Cf. Rémondon, 'Soldats', 70.

¹⁸⁷ Nautin, 'Conversion', 8.

¹⁸⁸ Nautin, 'Conversion', 6-8.

¹⁸⁹ See Trombley, *Hellenic Religion* 2, 238, for the same idea.

¹⁹⁰ *J.Philae* II 201.

¹⁹¹ Nautin, 'Conversion', 14-6.

¹⁹² Nautin, 'Conversion', 21-4.

¹⁹³ Nautin, 'Conversion', 25-7.

have first stood in the naos and later been transferred to the pronaos. This part of the temple belonged to the second phase of Christian occupation of the interior of the temple. In Nautin's opinion, such a small part of the former temple could only have been used in a later period, say the eleventh, twelfth or thirteenth century, when the Christian community on the island had become so small that it only needed part of the temple previously occupied in its entirety.¹⁹⁴

We can thus summarise Nautin's arguments in four main theses:

1. the closure of the temple of Isis was part of a military campaign against the Blemmyes
2. the closure of the temple was directly followed by the building of the *topos* of St Stephen, in which the frontier troops under Narses assisted
3. the Christian occupation of the sacred space consisted of two periods, the first period in which the whole temple was covered (shortly after 535-537) and the second one in which only the pronaos was occupied and the church became orientated eastward (perhaps between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries)
4. the erection of the cross by Theodore inside the naos of the former temple was the first act in the conversion of Nubia to Christianity.

However ingenious Nautin's arguments may have been, they cannot be maintained in the light of scholarship carried out since 1967. Firstly, Nautin's sketch of the situation at Philae was distorted to a large extent by the view of a strong 'people of the Blemmyes' still worshipping Isis at Philae and launching three wars into Egypt at the end of the fifth and in the course of the sixth century. As we have seen, the influence of the Blemmyes in the Nile valley declined in the course of the fifth century, and, although there are some examples of raids by Blemmyan tribes into Egypt during the sixth century, examples to which we will return in the next section, these raids were incidental and can certainly not be regarded as 'wars'.

Secondly, Grossmann's meticulous analysis of the reuse of the temple of Isis as a church reveals that first the main changes in the interior were carried out, such as removing superfluous elements that would disturb the interior of the church, attaching curtains and hacking out niches. Only later were walls which had remained within sight and were still covered with reliefs cut away or plastered. The soldiers of Narses could not therefore have assisted in hacking away the reliefs directly after the closure of the temple, for they first had to wait until these adjustments had been made. Neither was the job left unfinished, as the spots that were interpreted as such by Nautin can be shown to have been covered in the newly built church. It seems more likely that local workmen under the guidance of the bishop of Philae carried out the building project for the *topos* of St Stephen.¹⁹⁵

Thirdly, Grossmann also demonstrates that Nautin wrongly interpreted a modern restoration in the pronaos as part of the first phase of the reuse of the temple of Isis.¹⁹⁶ Moreover, there is nothing to support Nautin's suggestion that the first church was oriented northward and extended into the naos. The orientation and darkness of this room would have been useless for the interior of a church and no other Egyptian churches are known which use the naos.¹⁹⁷ He further convincingly

¹⁹⁴ Nautin, 'Conversion', 27-9, 34-43.

¹⁹⁵ P. Grossmann, 'Die Kirche des Bischofs Theodoros im Isistempel von Philae. Versuch einer Rekonstruktion', *RSO* 58 (1984) 107-17 at 109-10.

¹⁹⁶ As reported by A. Barsanti in G. Maspero, *Rapports relatifs à la consolidation des temples*, 2 vols (Cairo, 1911) 1.177-95 at 181-2 ('La protection de Philae pendant l'hiver de 1902 et l'été de 1903', 1903'). See Grossmann, 'Kirche', 109 (n. 12), 115-7.

¹⁹⁷ See the nice parallel of the temple of Mandulis at Kalabsha, in which special adaptations were made to construct a church in the pronaos facing eastward, on which see P. Grossmann, 'Christliche Einbauten im Tempel des Mandulis von Kalabša', *MDAIK* 47 (1991) 143-50, 'Tempel', 194, and

argues that the pronaos was used as a church from the start.¹⁹⁸ As the columns in the pronaos were ideal for a three-aisled church, the main axis of the sanctuary was changed from a south-north to a west-east orientation.¹⁹⁹

However, the main entrance to the church remained in the south, the door of the second pylon. The screens between the southern row of columns, which originally belonged to the temple interior, were removed to ground level to serve as benches for laymen. The altar room and side rooms of the clergy were closed off with a screen between the eastern pair of columns in the pronaos, and curtains divided the side rooms. The doors to the naos and the eastern side-entrance were probably blocked off, and the southeastern part of the pronaos served as a baptistery (Fig. 5).²⁰⁰ This reconstruction shows that the two phases Nautin discerns for the Christian occupation of the interior of the temple were actually one: the *topos* of St Stephen built by Theodore of Philae.

Fourthly, the reconstruction is at the same time a counterargument for the idea that Theodore triumphantly erected a cross on the place in the naos where the cult statue of Isis had been. Nautin assumed that the erection of the cross was the culmination of Christian struggles with 'paganism' on the island. However, we have seen that there is no evidence to support this. Christianity and the Ancient Egyptian cults had coexisted on the island from the fourth century onwards. By the sixth century, Ancient Egyptian religion was probably more dead than alive, and it is likely that the inscription mentioning the conquering cross had merely a symbolic meaning.

Variants of the inscription are not uncommon in the eastern half of the Mediterranean.²⁰¹ These inscriptions go back to the Roman period when they commemorated victories, especially in connection with sports. In Late Antiquity, they became strongly ideological. From then on, they commemorated Christian 'victories' like, as in the case of Philae, the dedication of a church inside a temple.²⁰² In the language of temple conversions, the temple had to be purified from demons, and crosses were fixed to commemorate this purification.²⁰³ As the worship of Christ in the form of a cross is well known in Nubia, the cross symbolised the divine presence of Christ, which protected the building against demons.²⁰⁴

To return once more to the Eirpanome inscription at Dendur, this inscription commemorates that the priest Abraham received the cross from Theodore of Philae and erected it at the start of the building activities inside the temple. A similar, probably contemporary, inscription exists at Kalabsha.²⁰⁵ These inscriptions concerning the erection of the cross have to be seen in the same context as the

Christliche Architektur, 47-8. Cf. the temple of Biga, in which a church was built on the forecourt between the pylon and the pronaos, see Grossmann, 'Kirche im Tempel von Biga'. As a sole exception, Grossmann, 'Tempel', 194, mentions the temple of Isis at Aswan, but the church was probably not built inside the naos. See Ch. 10.

¹⁹⁸ As Wilcken, 'Heidnisches und Christliches', 403, already presumed.

¹⁹⁹ Grossmann, 'Kirche', 117, and *Christliche Architektur*, 47.

²⁰⁰ Grossmann, 'Kirche', 109-15, 'Tempel', 194, and *Christliche Architektur*, 47.

²⁰¹ E.g. D. Feissel, *Recueil des inscriptions chrétiennes de Macédoine* (Paris, 1983) no. 212 (+ 'Εν τούτῳ οἱ πιστοὶ νικοῦσιν, Amphipolis, fourth/fifth century); *IGLS* III 746a (Σταυρὸς (...) νίκ(η) πι[στ]οῖς, near Antioch); *IGLS* VI 2835 (Χριστὸς τούτῳ † νικᾷ, Baalbek). See E. Dinkler and E. Dinkler-Von Schubert, 'Kreuz I', in K. Wessel, M. Restle (eds), *Reallexikon zur byzantinischen Kunst* (Stuttgart, 1963-) 5.1-219 at 135-8.

²⁰² Nautin, 'Conversion', 16-8; *I Philae* II, pp. 257-9.

²⁰³ Grossmann, 'Tempel', 189; Hahn, 'Tempelzerstörung'. In *Cod. Theod.* 16.10.25, dated to 435, it is ordered to purify temples 'by fixing the cross' (*conlocatione crucis*).

²⁰⁴ P.P.V. van Moorsel, 'Une théophanie nubienne', *RAC* 42 (1966) 297-316; A.J. Vanderjagt, 'Een mogelijke bron voor de kruis-devotie van de Nubiërs', in A. Hilhorst (ed.), *De heiligenverering in de eerste eeuwen van het Christendom* (Nijmegen, 1988) 53-62; Grillmeier, *Jesus der Christus*, 292-5; P.P.V. van Moorsel, *Called to Egypt. Collected Studies on Painting in Christian Egypt* (Leiden, 2000) 63-80 ('Die Nubier und das glorreiche Kreuz', 1972').

²⁰⁵ Kraus, *Anfänge*, 109-11; Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, 162-3.

conversion of the temple of Isis at Philae. They primarily had an apotropaic function, although a kind of ritual with an actual cross may have been involved in the dedication of the church.²⁰⁶ However, such a ritual is something other than the commemoration of an actual victory of Christianity over ‘paganism’, promoted by the emperor, and with enormous consequences for the conversion of Nubia.

There thus remains no decisive argument for a direct sequence between the closure of the temple of Isis and the building of a church inside it. The inscriptions are not dated, and could well belong to a later date in the long episcopate of Theodore, who was bishop from c. 525 until at least 577. Moreover, several examples could be given of other temples that were not directly converted into churches.²⁰⁷ We should therefore not reduce the conversion of Philae to Christianity to an inscription testifying to the triumph of the cross. Although the inscription, together with the other inscriptions and the Christian signs, may have evoked a sense of triumph amongst the visitors to the shrine, its primary function was to purify the demonic space and to ward off evil. As Bishop Theodore oversaw the building of the shrine, he would have taken the decision. And this decision apparently had nothing to do with imperial policy, as Nautin suggests, for Procopius following imperial propaganda does not mention it. More probably, the decision to turn the empty temple into a *topos* of St Stephen was ruled by local circumstances. There may even be evidence that it took a while for the bishop to come to his decision.

Isis Once More? The ‘Blemmyan Incident’ of c. 567

In 1911, Maspero published the first in a series of three volumes of Byzantine papyri from Aphrodite, modern Kom Ishqaw,²⁰⁸ situated 45 km south of Asyut, which were discovered there in 1905-1907.²⁰⁹ They belong to the family archive owned by Dioscorus, a wealthy landowner of Aphrodite, who was trained as a lawyer and was a notary at the governor’s court in Antinoopolis from around 565 to 573, where he wrote the bulk of the documents preserved in the archive, but also composed several poems. These poems, the only ones in the author’s own hand preserved from Antiquity, have given Dioscorus the dubious nickname of the ‘worst poet of Antiquity’.²¹⁰

This is another illustration of how academic discourse has been dominated by Gibbon’s ‘decline and fall’: Dioscorus was compared with classical literature and did not meet the requirements.²¹¹ Modern research, however, has seen in Dioscorus a lawyer typically representing the cultural change that took place in Late Antiquity.²¹²

²⁰⁶ Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens* 167-8.

²⁰⁷ To add an example from Egypt, the Serapeum at Alexandria was ‘destroyed’ in 392 and transformed into a church under the Emperor Arcadius (395-408), that is, at least three years later. See Grossmann, ‘Modalitäten’, forthcoming.

²⁰⁸ This village is often called Aphrodito, a name which is used in the later papyri from the Arab period, but in the sixth century its name was Aphrodite, see J.-L. Fournet, ‘Appendice sur le nom d’Aφροδίτης κώμη’, *REG* 105 (1992) 235-6.

²⁰⁹ *P.Cair.Masp.* I-III. For an account of their discovery, see G. Lefebvre, *Fragments d’un manuscrit de Ménandre* (Cairo, 1907) viii-ix. The last volume was published after Maspero had died on the French front in 1915, for which see *P.Cair.Masp.* III, pp. vii-xxxvi. Maspero published several preliminary studies on the archive, ‘Études sur les papyrus d’Aphrodité’, *BIFAO* 6 (1908) 75-120, ‘Études sur les papyrus d’Aphrodité II’, *BIFAO* 7 (1910) 97-152, ‘Un dernier poète grec de l’Égypte: Dioscore, fils d’Apollôs’, *REG* 24 (1911) 426-81, ‘Les papyrus Beaugé’, *BIFAO* 10 (1912) 131-57, and ‘Horapollon et la fin du paganisme égyptien’, *BIFAO* 11 (1914) 163-95.

²¹⁰ B. Baldwin, ‘Dioscorus of Aphrodito: The Worst Poet of Antiquity?’, in *PapCongr.* XVII, 3 vols (Naples, 1984) 2.327-31.

²¹¹ E.g. Maspero, ‘Dernier poète grec’, 427; H.I. Bell, ‘An Egyptian Village in the Age of Justinian’, *JHS* 64 (1944) 21-36 at 27; Cameron, *Literature and Society*, Ch. I at 483, 490, 508-9.

²¹² E.g. L.S.B. MacCoull, *Dioscorus of Aphrodito. His Work and His World* (Berkeley, 1988); T. Gagos, P. van Minnen, *Settling a Dispute. Toward a Legal Anthropology of Late Antique Egypt* (Ann Arbor, 1994).

An excellent study of the literary side of the archive has shown that Dioscorus' poems can be placed in a tradition of classicising Egyptian poets like Olympiodorus of Thebes, but that they also relate to the documents in the archive. Thus, for example, some of the poems probably accompanied petitions when handed over to the governor of the province.²¹³

One of these petitions published by Maspero in 1911 merits more attention than it has received because it contains interesting information on local Egyptian religion in the second half of the sixth century. Presumably, this neglect has been caused by the few concise notes and the lack of a translation in the first edition. Moreover, the text is damaged and misses about 28 letters at the end of each line, which makes the contents hard to reconstruct. The text is a petition from the councillors (βουλευταί) of Omboi to the governor of the Thebaid (*dux et augustalis Thebaidis*) Athanasius, in his second year in office, that is, in 567.²¹⁴ Although damaged, it is one of the few petitions from the total of thirty-five of this type of document preserved in the Dioscorus archive that includes all parts of the petition, and can therefore give a good idea of its contents.

Recently, the petition has been re-edited with a detailed commentary, translation and interpretation of the text.²¹⁵ Simultaneously, a French 'Habilitationsschrift' was published on the petitions in the Dioscorus archive with re-editions, translations and a lavish commentary, including some new readings and corrections of the re-edition.²¹⁶ We will concentrate here on what the text has to say about sixth-century local Egyptian religion; but the updated Greek text with a translation is included in Appendix 4.²¹⁷

The councillors of Omboi complain about a man whose name is not mentioned in the transmitted text, but who is nicknamed 'Eater of Raw Meat' (ὠμοφάγος).²¹⁸ Basically, they charge the accused with 'paganism' (lines 6-10) and disturbance of the tax collection (ll. 10-6), followed by some additional crimes (ll. 16-8).²¹⁹ Firstly, the person in question is charged with 'making his own life and deeds evil, setting aside the taught Christian worship and religion, and consecrating shrines with demons and wooden statues'.²²⁰ The accused is therefore a person who did not behave in the way a Christian was supposed to. Instead, he appealed to 'the barbarians, that is,

²¹³ *P.Aphrodit.Lit.* See also the recent contributions by J.-L. Fournet, 'Between Literary Tradition and Cultural Change. The Poetic and Documentary Production of Dioscorus of Aphrodite', P. van Minnen, 'Dioscorus and the Law', and J.H.F. Dijkstra, 'A World Full of the Word. The Biblical Learning of Dioscorus', in A.A. MacDonald, M.W. Twomey, G.J. Reinink (eds), *Learned Antiquity: Scholarship and Society in the Near East, the Greco-Roman World, and the Early Medieval West* (Leuven, 2003) 101-14, 115-33, and 135-46, respectively.

²¹⁴ The date of the petition is connected to a discussion regarding the date of the second year of Athanasius' governorship, to which several of the petitions are dated, and which Maspero, 'Papyrus Beaugé', 137-43, already dated between 567 and 570. *P.Aphrodit.Lit.*, pp. 330-6, demonstrates that Athanasius had been succeeded between May and July of 567 and that, consequently, the texts have to be dated before that date. Cf. Gelzer, *Studien*, 24-5, and 'Altes und Neues aus der byzantinisch-ägyptischen Verwaltungsmisere, vornehmlich im Zeitalter Justinians', *AfP* 5 (1913) 346-77 at 371, who dates the text to 552-3, U. Wilcken, 'Papyrus Urkunden XV', *AfP* 5 (1913) 442-9 at 443, who dates it to c. 552 and, most recently, Weber, 'Blemmyer', 26, who dates it to 548-53.

²¹⁵ J.H.F. Dijkstra, 'A Cult of Isis at Philae after Justinian? Reconsidering *P.Cair.Masp.* I 67004', *ZPE* 146 (2004) 137-54. Cf. Dijkstra, 'World Full of the Word'.

²¹⁶ J.-L. Fournet, *Entre document et littérature: les pétitions de Dioscore d'Aphrodité* (Habilitation Strasbourg, 2004) 192-216 (no. 9).

²¹⁷ I warmly thank J.-L. Fournet for sending me the relevant part of his Habilitation and discussing the translation in the appendix with me.

²¹⁸ *P.Cair.Masp.* I 67004.14.

²¹⁹ Fournet, *Entre document et littérature*, 194-5. Cf. Dijkstra, 'Cult of Isis', 138-9.

²²⁰ *P.Cair.Masp.* I 67004.8.

Blemmyes' (τοῖς βαρβάροις ἦτοι Βλέμυσι),²²¹ and renewed 'the sanctuaries' (τὰ ἱερά) for them.²²²

Secondly, in exchange for helping them to renew their old places of worship, the person is charged with 'having concluded an evil agreement' with these Blemmyes.²²³ He plundered and destroyed houses with his gang. Moreover, together they collected and appropriated the taxes of ordinary taxpayers, spent them on themselves and stripped the vineyards of their produce. Here we come to the actual accusation in the petition, to which the charge of 'paganism' is only an additional crime: that the behaviour of the accused is 'to the detriment of the public treasury'.²²⁴ The accused is also charged with other crimes like sleeping with his own daughter and melting 'the imperial standards' (τὰ ἱερά σίκνα, read σίγνα) into gold to turn them into a bracelet for a barbarian slave girl.²²⁵

Apparently, then, some powerful person was doing everything that was forbidden in the eyes of the Christian society of sixth-century Egypt. He dedicated shrines for the old gods, renovated 'the sanctuaries' and in this way persuaded the Blemmyes to lapse. This accusation is made even worse because it is stated that these people had converted to Christianity. Perhaps we should not take this last statement too literally as, for example, evidence for a mass conversion among 'the Blemmyes' during this period, for Dioscorus could well have included it for rhetorical effect.²²⁶ On the other hand, the accusation of apparently renovating Ancient Egyptian cult sites for these people seems too specific to reject out of hand.

Perhaps it is to this incident that Dioscorus refers later on in the petition where he mentions a certain Kollouthos.²²⁷ In the *editio princeps* this person has been taken to be the accused, but this cannot be true.²²⁸ The Kollouthos mentioned can probably be identified with a pagarch known from other texts in the Dioscorus archive.²²⁹ Although the exact meaning of the sentence is difficult to establish, Kollouthos apparently had tried to take steps against the accused, 'because of the lawlessness of that which was built by him'.²³⁰ In return for renovating the Blemmyes' old places of worship, they raided the lands around Omboi together with the accused.

Who are the Blemmyes with whom the accused schemed? We have seen that Blemmyan influence in the Nile valley south of Egypt faded away with the growing organisation of the Noubades in the course of the fifth century. However, this does not mean, as was previously thought, that 'the Kingdom of the Blemmyes' was conquered and 'the Blemmyes' chased into the desert. On the contrary, it is perfectly possible that Blemmyan tribes continued to settle in Lower Nubia. There is no evidence for this,

²²¹ The same phrase in Olympiodorus, F 35.2 Blockley = *FHN* III 309.

²²² *P.Cair.Masp.* I 67004.9.

²²³ *P.Cair.Masp.* I 67004.11.

²²⁴ *P.Cair.Masp.* I 67004.16.

²²⁵ *P.Cair.Masp.* I 67004.17.

²²⁶ Even more so because several allusions are made to 2 Pet. 2, which exactly concerns 'false prophets', leading people from the right path to lawlessness. See Dijkstra, 'World Full of the Word', 143-4, and 'Cult of Isis', 149; Fournet, *Entre document et littérature*, 206-7. Cf. Kirwan, *Studies*, XXV at 89-90, followed by Demicheli, *Rapport*, 194, and Weber, 'Blemmyer', 26, who concludes from the passage that 'the Blemmyes' had converted to Christianity.

²²⁷ *P.Cair.Masp.* I 67004.12.

²²⁸ Wilcken, 'Papyrus Urkunden XV', 444; Dijkstra, 'Cult of Isis', 139 (n. 20); Fournet, *Entre document et littérature*, 193. The persistence of the idea, however, is evident in recent studies like R. Alston, *The City in Roman and Byzantine Egypt* (London, 2002) 90, and A. Laniado, *Recherches sur les notables municipaux dans l'empire protobyzantin* (Paris, 2002) 83, 111.

²²⁹ *P.Aphrodit.Lit.* IV 14, 28; *P.Cair.Masp.* I 67005.19. See Wilcken, 'Papyrus Urkunden XV', 444; *PLRE* III s.v. 'Colluthus 3'; *P.Aphrodit.Lit.*, pp. 556-7; Fournet, *Entre document et littérature*, 194.

²³⁰ *P.Cair.Masp.* I 67004.12. On the different possibilities of translating this sentence, perhaps reading ἔχων in stead of ἐκόν, the latter reading of which has been preferred in App. 4, see Fournet, *Entre document et littérature*, 208-9. Cf. Dijkstra, 'Cult of Isis', 139, 153.

though, and the sixth-century sources on the Blemmyes are even scantier than those of the previous century.

Hints of their whereabouts are given only occasionally, for example in a letter from Justin I to King Elesbas of Axum in the Martyrdom of St Arethas dated to before April 525. In an account of the same conflict between Axum and the Himyarites as described by Procopius, the emperor urged Elesbas (Ella Asbeha, whom Procopius calls Hellesthaeus) to take action against the Jewish king of the Homerites. The Jew had behaved badly towards the Christians in his kingdom and the emperor threatened the Axumite king to send an army of Noubades and Blemmyes to his country if he would not act as the emperor wished.²³¹ Furthermore, although the land registry of Aphrodite dating to the beginning of the sixth century a ‘place of the Blemmyes’ (τόπος τῶν Βλεμμύων) is mentioned, this topographical name does not necessarily say anything about the permanent settlement of Blemmyes in the area.²³²

Another glimpse of the Blemmyes in the sixth century is provided by a dossier of thirteen documents found at Gebelein, 40 km south of Thebes, and written on leather in both Greek and Coptic.²³³ On palaeographical grounds they can be dated to the last quarter of the sixth century, although this dating is not decisive.²³⁴ As the texts mention the island of Temsir, also called Tanare, the provenance of these texts has been equated with the island on which they were found, Gebelein.²³⁵ Again, we cannot be sure if this is true.

One of the texts mentions a ‘kinglet’ (βασιλίσκος) of the Blemmyes, the same title the Noubadian chief Silko bore, who handed over the administration (*curatoria*) of the island to his children.²³⁶ As appears from the text, the administration included the levying of taxes, also among the ‘Romans’, that is, Egyptians who were Roman citizens, living on the island.²³⁷ The use of Byzantine titles (*domesticus*), but also the typical tribal titles ‘phylarch’ (φύλαρχος) and ‘sub-despot’ (ὑποτύραννος), suggests that these Blemmyes lived in Upper Egypt and had attained a special status.²³⁸ It seems that the tribe had come to an agreement with the Byzantine government to collect taxes in exchange for the right to live on the island.²³⁹

Probably on account of the growing organisation on Egypt’s southern frontier, Blemmyan tribes were thus pushed to the margins of society. But that did not mean they had vanished into thin air; small-scale raids into Egypt seem to have continued into the sixth century. This situation is reflected in the Dioscorus archive. ‘Fear of barbarians’ (βαρβάρων δέος) is a common *topos* in the petitions and poems written by Dioscorus.²⁴⁰ In the petitions, the evil deeds of the pagarch Menas are several times compared to the behaviour of ‘barbarians’, and this comparison also returns in our text, with the implication that the governor put an end to such ‘barbarian’

²³¹ *FHN* III 327, on which see Fournet, ‘Coptos’, 200, Brakmann, “‘Axomis (Aksum)’”, 755-6, and J.-L. Fournet, ‘Coptos gréco-romaine à travers ses noms’, in Boussac, *Autour de Coptos*, 47-60 at 59-60.

²³² *P.Freer* 08.45a-b 205, re-edited by J. Gascou, L.S.B. MacCoull, ‘Le cadastre d’Aphroditô’, *T&MByz* 10 (1987) 103-58 = *SB* XX 14669.

²³³ *BGU* III 795-7; *BKU* III 350, 359-61; *P.KölnÄgypt.* 13; *SB* III 6257-9, X 10552-3 = *FHN* III 331-43. In addition to the bibliography given there see Weber, ‘Blemmyer’, 34-5.

²³⁴ H. Harrauer in H. Satzinger, ‘Anmerkungen zu einiger Blemmyer-Texten’, in E. Plöckinger *et al.* (eds), *Lebendige Altertumswissenschaft* (= Fs. Vettors; Vienna, 1985) 327-32 at 330-1. Cf. *FHN* III, p. 1201.

²³⁵ *SB* III 6257.4, 6258.2.

²³⁶ *SB* III 6257, cf. 6258.

²³⁷ *FHN* III, p. 1199.

²³⁸ *Domesticus* *SB* III 6257.11. Phylarch: *BGU* III 795.1, 796.1, 797.2; *BKU* III 350.13; *P.KölnÄgypt.* 13.10, 12; *SB* III 6257.7. Sub-despot: *BKU* III 350.13; *P.KölnÄgypt.* 13.10; *SB* III 6257.7. King/kinglet: *P.KölnÄgypt.* 13.1, 10, 14; *SB* III 6257.1, 6258.1.

²³⁹ Török, ‘Contribution’, 236-41, and ‘Notes’, 406-8; *FHN* III, p. 1202; Dijkstra, ‘Cult of Isis’, 151.

²⁴⁰ The same expression is used on some second-century ostraka from the Eastern Desert, see Cuvigny, ‘Fonctionnement’, 351-2.

behaviour.²⁴¹ The theme is adequately summarised at the start of one of Dioscorus' poems:

Thebes, dance altogether, receive peace:
for no longer will you see malicious deeds,
nor fear of barbarians, nor arbitrariness of the greedy;
for everywhere flows a god-inspired Peace'.²⁴²

Further on in the poem, 'barbarians' are equated with 'the race of the Blemmyes and that of the Saracens'.²⁴³ In another poem, the governor is asked to put an end to 'the race of the Blemmyes, that is, the *adiutores*'.²⁴⁴ Evidently, just as in the petition in question these local officials, the *adiutores*, are being reproached for their 'barbarian' behaviour. In short, in the poems 'the race of the Blemmyes' is synonymous with 'the barbarians'.²⁴⁵

There are, however, two cases in which this metaphorical use of 'the Blemmyes' seems to have been abandoned and reference is made to actual Blemmyan tribes raiding into Egypt. These are precisely those cases where Blemmyes are mentioned in the petitions. The first case is when in a petition of around 567 the inhabitants of Antaeopolis (Qaw el-Kebir, on the other side of the Nile at Kom Ishqaw) look back on their past:

when the abominable barbarians, Blemmyes, at the time of our parents in those days had taken our city and plundered it horribly.²⁴⁶

When interpreting 'the time of our parents' as one generation back, the inhabitants of Antaeopolis must be referring to a raid in around 547.²⁴⁷ This phrase has been interpreted by Rémondon as referring to a more distant past, the reign of Anastasius (491-518), in which a first 'Blemmyan War' took place. Even if this dating is correct, however, the reference cannot be taken as proof for a war on the scale that has been imagined.²⁴⁸

The second case in which Blemmyes are mentioned in the petitions is in our text. They are introduced in connection with the incident of 'the sanctuaries' as 'the barbarians', with the explanation that they are (ἤτοι) 'Blemmyes'.²⁴⁹ Due to the specificity of the incident, there is no need to interpret this word in the metaphorical sense of 'the barbarians',²⁵⁰ as in the poems, although the idea returns in the same petition. Thus Dioscorus creates a subtle play on the uses of the term 'barbarian', sometimes referring to its metaphorical sense, sometimes to the specific group of Blemmyes.²⁵¹ To give an example, in one line Dioscorus describes the behaviour of the

²⁴¹ *P.Cair.Masp.* I 67002.ii 24, iii 3, 22, 67004.11, 12, 67021 v° 12. Cf. *P.Cair.Masp.* III 67283.i 5, *P.Lond.* V 1674.22, 1677 v° 36.

²⁴² *P.Aphrodit.Lit.* IV 10.1-4 (Θήβη, πᾶσα χόρευσον, εἰρήνην δέχου· Ιοῦ γὰρ θεωρήσει κακουργικὴν ἔτι, ἰοὺ βαρβάρων δέος, φιλοπραγμόνων κρίσιν· ἰ πάντη γὰρ Εἰρήνη θεόπνευστος ῥέει. Tr. Dijkstra, 'World Full of the Word', 141 (n. 35).

²⁴³ *P.Aphrodit.Lit.* IV 10.23.

²⁴⁴ *P.Aphrodit.Lit.* IV 11.82, cf. 83.

²⁴⁵ Fournet, 'Between Literary Tradition and Cultural Change', 110.

²⁴⁶ *P.Cair.Masp.* I 67009 v° 17-9 (τῶν ἀλιτηρ(ῶν) Βλεμύων βαρβάρων ἐπὶ τῶν πάλαι ἡμῶν γονέων παρειληφότων (ant. corr. παραλαβ[όντων]) [τὴν ἡμετέραν πόλιν] καὶ πα' ὀρθησάντων δεινῶς. Tr. Dijkstra, 'Cult of Isis', 153).

²⁴⁷ Dijkstra, 'Cult of Isis', 153-4, taking, however, 30 years for a generation. Cf. Rémondon, 'Soldats', 69; Demicheli, *Rapporti*, 189; *P.Aphrodit.Lit.*, p. 511; Fournet, *Entre document et littérature*, 196 (n. 21).

²⁴⁸ *P.Aphrodit.Lit.*, pp. 510-1.

²⁴⁹ *P.Cair.Masp.* I 67004.9. For the meaning of ἤτοι, see P.J. Sijpesteijn, 'The Meanings of ἤτοι in the Papyri', *ZPE* 90 (1992) 241-50.

²⁵⁰ As suggested by *P.Aphrodit.Lit.*, p. 511, and Fournet, *Entre document et littérature*, 196.

²⁵¹ *P.Cair.Masp.* I 67004.11, 16, 17.

accused and his gang of Blemmyes as ‘worse than barbarians (do)’, but in the same line he refers to the Blemmyes, with whom he came to an agreement, as ‘these said barbarians’.²⁵² Significantly, due to his involvement in the affairs of the Blemmyes and especially in the incident with the sanctuaries, the accused has turned partly into a ‘barbarian’ himself and is characterised as ‘half barbarian and half pagan’ (μιξοβάρβαρο[ς] καὶ μιξ[έ]λ[λη]ν).²⁵³ An incident therefore occurred in the first Upper Egyptian nome where a powerful person renovated ‘the sanctuaries’ for a group of Blemmyes.

Now, when taking a closer look at the incident it is tempting to identify ‘the sanctuaries’ with the temples of Philae.²⁵⁴ After having described generally in the preceding line that the accused person has decorated shrines, using three generic plurals without the article (δαίμοσι, ξοάνοις, σηκούς), the line in question explicitly states that the accused ‘renovated the sanctuaries’ (τὰ ἱερά (...)) ἄ[ν]ακαινίσασθαι).²⁵⁵ The noun is here articulated and ‘the sanctuaries’ seem to be well known to the persons at the governor’s court in Antinoopolis for whom the petition was intended, for no location has been added.²⁵⁶

For the year 452/453, we know from Priscus that the Blemmyes, together with the Noubades, still had access to the temple of Isis at Philae ‘according to the ancient right’.²⁵⁷ Procopius, again referring to both the Noubades and the Blemmyes recounts that ‘these barbarians retained the sanctuaries on Philae (τὰ ἐν Φίλαις ἱερά) right down to my day’.²⁵⁸ The accounts support the suggestion that the sanctuaries in which the Blemmyes were interested at this late stage could well be those of Philae. Moreover, Procopius uses the same plural for the temples at Philae as used in our petition. The plural also appears in Coptic in the *Life of Aaron* (fol. 13a), where Macedonius penetrates ‘the temples’ (ⲛⲉⲣⲡⲏⲏⲉ) in order to slaughter the holy falcon.²⁵⁹ In both cases, a general term is used to describe the island with all its temples, and the temple of Isis in particular.²⁶⁰ Furthermore, the remark that the sanctuaries were renewed for the Blemmyes is reminiscent of the Isis temple at Philae, which had been closed in around 535-537, and had therefore to be reopened before the old cults could be continued. These elements in the ‘Blemmyan incident’, then, point to Philae as the place where it all happened.

A powerful argument in favour of this circumstantial evidence is the occupation of the main person in the petition. It would not have been surprising if this person was a powerful local official like the pagarch Menas, as the incident reported at the end of the *narratio* suggests: ‘(he) melted the imperial standards into gold to make a bracelet for a barbarian favourite slave girl’.²⁶¹ Although different proposals have been made for reading this phrase, the accused apparently violated the

²⁵² *P.Cair.Masp.* I 67004.11.

²⁵³ *P.Cair.Masp.* I 67004.14. It is hardly convincing in a context in which the accused is charged with ‘paganism’ to doubt that the word μιξ[έ]λ[λη]ν does not have the meaning of ‘half pagan’, as Fournet, *Entre document et littérature*, 210, does. See Dijkstra, ‘World Full of the Word’, 145-6, and ‘Cult of Isis’, 141, 146.

²⁵⁴ Dijkstra, ‘Cult of Isis’, 149-54. Cf. Fournet, *Entre document et littérature*, 196-7.

²⁵⁵ *P.Cair.Masp.* I 67004.8-9.

²⁵⁶ Cf., however, Fournet, *Entre document et littérature*, 197 (n. 27).

²⁵⁷ Priscus F 27 Blockley (= *FHN* III 318).

²⁵⁸ Procop. *Pers.* 1.19.36 = *FHN* III 328. Cf. Procop. *Pers.* 1.19.37 (τὰ (...) ἱερά).

²⁵⁹ *Life of Aaron*, fol. 13a.

²⁶⁰ As is evident from the end of the passage from the *Life of Aaron*, in which Macedonius leaves ‘the temple’ (ⲛⲉⲣⲏⲉ, fol. 13b), which must be the temple of Isis. Cf. the singular τὸ ἱερόν τῆς Ἰσιδος and ἐν τῷ Φίλαις ἱερῷ used by Priscus and referring explicitly to the temple of Isis. On ἱερόν Ἰσιδος, see also Locher, *Nilkatarakt*, 141-53.

²⁶¹ *P.Cair.Masp.* I 67004.18.

imperial standards that were usually kept in a legionary camp.²⁶² Such an incident probably took place in one of the legionary camps stationed in the First Cataract area rather than at Omboi, where a modest military detachment was garrisoned at this time.²⁶³ Moreover, no involvement of the Blemmyes in Omboi is known and there is no indication of the persistence of cults there.²⁶⁴ The accused, then, would have been a high official on the southern Egyptian frontier who helped the local Blemmyes to regain their ancient places of worship. In exchange, he made use of them to carry out raids into Egypt, more specifically into the fertile region around Omboi, where the councillors had their estates.²⁶⁵ The councillors, who were responsible for the tax collection in the first Upper Egyptian nome, were disturbed in their work and thereupon charged the official at the governor's court in Antinoopolis.²⁶⁶

Once again, this petition has been brought into connection with a 'Blemmyan War', this time the third one, which Rémondon dated to between 563 and 568. This dating is already doubtful as Rémondon thought that the list of payments to soldiers at Edfu belonged to this period, but it has recently been argued that this date must be later.²⁶⁷ The incident mentioned in our text was described thus: 'There were not only raids by nomads, there was also a religious war, because wherever the Blemmyes passed through, Egyptians frequently renounced the Christian faith; the temples were reopened, new shrines dedicated'.²⁶⁸ Again, it goes too far to make a war, let alone a 'religious war', out of the incident described in the petition.²⁶⁹

Nevertheless, these views influenced Nautin. Because the incident was situated in Omboi, he did not have to think of a use for the sanctuaries at Philae after the temple of Isis had been converted into a church, which he placed shortly after 535-537.²⁷⁰ However, our text seems to suggest the continuation of a religious tradition of some sort at Philae after that date. This suggestion has already been made in previous scholarship, but without paying attention to its historical implications.²⁷¹ If our interpretation is correct, the temple of Isis at Philae did not become a church shortly after 535-537, but was left alone for at least three more decades.

How should we imagine this Blemmyan cult at Philae? Evidently, the petition is highly rhetorical and so much of the context has been lost that it is hard to understand what exactly happened. It would seem impossible, however, that the Blemmyes could have restored the cult of Isis in the great temple to its former glory. From Priscus, we know of only one cult of the Blemmyes at Philae: the one in which they took a wooden statue (ξύανον) of Isis to their country and consulted it.²⁷²

²⁶² Fournet, *Entre document et littérature*, 212-3. Cf. the reading by Dijkstra, 'Cult of Isis', 146-7: 'having treated scornfully the place where the imperial standards were kept by taking in hand (its) gold for bracelets for a barbarian slave girl' (τὰ ἱερά σίκνα χλευάσας χρυσᾶ εἰς κλα[νία] ἄβρας βαρβάρω[ν ἐγ?]χειρῶν). For τὰ ἱερά σίγνα as 'imperial standards', see P. van Minnen, 'Une nouvelle liste des toponymes du nome Hermopolite', *ZPE* 101 (1994) 83-6 at 85 (n. 13). For standards and legions, see C. Robert Philips III, 'Standards, Cult of', *OCD*³ (1996) 1437-8.

²⁶³ J. Gascou, 'Deux inscriptions Byzantines de Haute Égypte (Réédition de *I. Thèbes-Syène* 196 r^o et v^o)', *T&MByz* 12 (1994) 323-42 at 326.

²⁶⁴ For Omboi in Late Antiquity, see Timm, *Christlich-koptische Ägypten* 3, 1468-70.

²⁶⁵ Dijkstra, 'Cult of Isis', 152; Fournet, *Entre document et littérature*, 195.

²⁶⁶ Note the remarkably similar story of the 'rebel' Azarias, who in the reign of Heraclius mustered a large number of 'Ethiopian' slaves and brigands, and seized the imperial taxes without the knowledge of the officers of the province of Panopolis (Joh.Nik. 97.30).

²⁶⁷ J.-L. Fournet, J. Gascou, 'Papyrus inédits d'Edfou de la collection de l'Ifao', *BIFAO* 98 (1998) 171-96 at 186-91.

²⁶⁸ Rémondon, 'Soldats', 71.

²⁶⁹ Dijkstra, 'Cult of Isis', 153-4; Fournet, *Entre document et littérature*, 195-6.

²⁷⁰ Rémondon, 'Soldats', 71; Demicheli, *Rapport*, 192-5; Updegraff, *Study*, 150.

²⁷¹ Wilcken, 'Papyrus Urkunden V', 443-4; Kirwan, *Studies*, Ch. XXV at 89; Demicheli, *Rapport*, 193-4.

²⁷² Priscus F 27 Blockley (= *FHN* III 318). Cf. the use of the same word in our text, *P.Cair.Masp.* I 67004.8. Fournet, *Entre document et littérature*, 197, suggests that 'wooden statues' is something other than the wooden statue of Isis at Philae, but this can hardly be taken as a counterargument if the plural is generic.

Perhaps Blemmyan tribes kept alive this bark transport until the sixth century, and the incident described in our text may involve with such a tradition. In any case, the 'Blemmyan incident', which had apparently reached the governor's court, will have caused a scandal in the see of Philae. Bishop Theodore may well have reacted to this incident by announcing the construction of a shrine, modest though it was, inside the ancient temple of Isis. Such a background seems more likely to have caused the dedication of the *topos* of St Stephen than a deliberate anti-'pagan' policy vis-à-vis Nubia.

The Churches and Temples of Philae

The fate of the material remains of Christian Philae has been a tragic one. From the *Description de l'gypte* and travel stories of the nineteenth century, we know that the entire island, including its temples, was once completely covered with mudbrick houses dating to the Late Antique and Arab periods.²⁷³ In 1895, when plans were made to build the first Aswan Dam, which would submerge the temples of Philae if not entirely then for most of the year, the Egyptian Antiquities Service requested the engineer Captain Henry Lyons (1864-1944) to find out what damage the submersions would do to the temples and to do what was needed to keep these buildings from destruction. Moreover, the temples were to be cleared of the mudbrick houses and rubble which had accumulated over the years. Lyons was assisted in his work by the famous German Egyptologist and founder of the Swiss Institute at Cairo, Ludwig Borchardt (1863-1938). The renovation and clearing of the island lasted from 1895 to 1896, leading to a final report published by Lyons in 1896.²⁷⁴ Meanwhile several preliminary reports about the monuments of Philae were published.²⁷⁵ Some years later, Lyons wrote another report about the state of the monuments.²⁷⁶

Although Lyons made a valuable description of the state of the temples in his day and managed to make a still authoritative map of the island (Fig. 3), his carelessness about the fate of the mudbrick houses pervades both reports and no attempt was made to preserve them for posterity. The sole documentation left is the map, in which the ground plans of the houses are indicated, a brief description of some of their features and several photos in which the finds, ranging from Late Antique reliefs to columns, other stone ornamentation and pottery, are heaped up without providing any information on the archaeological context in which they were found.²⁷⁷ We are left entirely in the dark about the other finds. If properly excavated, these houses could have formed an invaluable source for the study of Late Antique (and later) Philae. However, they are lost forever.²⁷⁸

Philae also possessed two freestanding churches, which are generally referred to as the West and East Church (P and Q in Fig. 3). Their foundations were still standing several stones high until the 1960s, although they were under water for most of the year and were covered with mud. In 1970, Grossmann published an architectural study of the East Church, for which he necessarily had to rely on the

²⁷³ Haeny, 'Architectural History', 218.

²⁷⁴ H.G. Lyons, *A Report on the Island and Temples of Philae* (London, 1896).

²⁷⁵ H.G. Lyons and L. Borchardt, 'Eine trilingue Inschrift von Philae', *SPAW* 1896, no. 20, 469-82; L. Borchardt, 'Bericht über den baulichen Zustand der Tempelbauten auf Philae', *SPAW* 1896, no. 45, 1199-1215; L. Borchardt, 'Bericht über die Corrosion des Sandsteinmaterials der Tempelbauten auf Philae', *SPAW* 1898, no. 23, 291-303; L. Borchardt, 'Der Augustustempel auf Philae', *JDAI* 18 (1903) 73-90; O. Rubensohn and L. Borchardt, 'Griechische Bauinschriften ptolemäischer Zeit auf Philae', *AP* 3 (1906) 356-66.

²⁷⁶ H.G. Lyons, *A Report on the Temples of Philae* (Cairo, 1908).

²⁷⁷ Lyons, *Report on the Island and Temples*, 13-5, Pls. 46-50, 58-61, 66-7 (see also Monneret de Villard, *Nubia medioevale* 2, Pls. 2-5), plan I.

²⁷⁸ Cf. Monneret de Villard, *Nubia medioevale* 1, 8-10, who criticises Lyon's report because no context is provided, nor any clue as to the dating of the houses, e.g. by analysing the ceramics.

previously published maps.²⁷⁹ However, when the temples of Philae were moved to Agilkia in the 1970s, the churches were entirely neglected, and left under the waters of the Nile.²⁸⁰ To sum up, for a survey of Late Antique Philae we have to rely on the scanty remarks by Lyons and Borchardt, including the latter's diaries and other personal documents, which are kept at the Swiss Institute in Cairo, as well as on reports by previous visitors to the island. Moreover, there exist detailed architectural studies for the East Church and the *topos* of St Stephen. We have to reconstruct what is known about Late Antique Philae from these bits and pieces.

To start with the East and West Churches, both were built on the northern part of the island where no temples had been erected. This gave Wilcken the impression that the island had been divided between Christians in the north and 'pagans' in the south: 'In this way, the small island disintegrated into a pagan south and a Christian north'.²⁸¹ Thus, Wilcken presumed, the religious tension between 'pagan' and Christian was reflected in the separation of the two communities on the island. However, a more practical reason can be adduced for this separation. Presumably around 330, when a bishopric was created at Philae, the newly created see would soon have needed an episcopal church; in fact, a church may already have existed before that date.²⁸² On the island, which was covered with temples, the only area left was the northern part. It is therefore more probable that both churches were built in the northern part because of lack of space than because of religious tension.

In the Appion petition dated to 425-450, it is stated that the soldiers of Philae served 'God's holy churches on Philae' (ταῖς ἐν Φιλῶ(ν) ἁγίαις τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐκκλησίαις).²⁸³ This could be a rhetorical exaggeration, but on the other hand it seems likely that in the second quarter of the fifth century before temples were transformed into churches.²⁸⁴ Presumably, this also happened at Philae and a number of churches were built before the second quarter of the fifth century. As two churches have been preserved to us, it seems likely that these two could be the earliest churches on Philae. Although what survives of them suggests a later date, this does not preclude the possibility that they rest on earlier constructions, since the churches could have been rebuilt or renovated.

Which of the two churches was the episcopal church? A comparison of the ground plans of the churches shows that the East Church was once the most imposing church on the island (Q in Fig. 3).²⁸⁵ Grossmann has studied this church in detail, and it is from this study that the following reconstruction is distilled (Fig. 6).²⁸⁶ The ground plan of the East Church has a strange, trapezium-like shape, which can be explained

²⁷⁹ P. Grossmann, 'Überlegungen zum Grundriss der Ostkirche von Philae', *JbAC* 13 (1970) 29-41.

²⁸⁰ T. Säve-Söderbergh, *Temples and Tombs of Ancient Nubia. The International Rescue Campaign at Abu Simbel, Philae and Other Sites* (London, 1987) 151-86. Cf. Grossmann, 'Überlegungen', 41, who comments at the end of his article: 'Doch besteht die Hoffnung, daß im Zusammenhang mit der geplanten Versetzung des Isistempels, die eine vorübergehende Trockenlegung der Insel notwendig macht, auch einige Nachuntersuchungen in der Kirche selbst durchgeführt werden können'. Unfortunately, this never happened.

²⁸¹ Wilcken, 'Heidnisches und Christliches', 403.

²⁸² In the *Life of Aaron*, the first bishop of Philae, Macedonius, orders the temple priest Aristos to build a church on the island (fol. 21b). However, an inhabitant of Philae had already told Macedonius (fol. 12a) that before his arrival celebrations were led by priests from Syene. Hence there must have been some kind of place where the Christian community of Philae gathered. Just how far we can trust this information, however, is a matter of debate.

²⁸³ *P.Leid.* Z 10 = *FHN* III 314.

²⁸⁴ Grossmann, *Christliche Architektur*, 43. Cf. Adams, 'Architectural Evolution', 102-3.

²⁸⁵ Lyons, *Report on the Island and Temples*, 32-3; A.E.P. Weigall, *A Report on the Antiquities of Lower Nubia* (Oxford, 1907) 54; Somers Clarke, *Christian Antiquities*, 89-90; Monneret de Villard, *Nubia medioevale* 1, 7.

²⁸⁶ Grossmann, 'Überlegungen'. See this study for more details on the architecture of the building and add Grossmann, *Christliche Architektur*, 461-4.

by the limited space available on the island.²⁸⁷ The church consisted of four aisles and the main entrance was probably in the south, as is normal in Egyptian churches. The visitors would have used the fourth, extra aisle as a kind of entrance hall. Unlike other Egyptian churches, another entrance was situated on the northwestern side. Although the altar room cannot be exactly reconstructed, part of it has been preserved and probably projected into the middle aisle.²⁸⁸

Lyons included two photographs of an assemblage of stone carvings from the East Church.²⁸⁹ Among these are some stone ‘Transennen’, which were used in churches as screens to mark off the *presbyterium*, the room where the main altar stood and in which only the clergy was allowed.²⁹⁰ One of these contains the following inscription: ‘Theodoros’ († Θεοδωρο[...]).²⁹¹ This name has been identified as that of Theodore of Philae, and thus Nautin connected it with the inscription of the *topos* of St Stephen which begins as follows: ‘Also (καί) this good work was done...’.²⁹² Accordingly, Nautin thought that Theodore had built the East Church before the *topos* of St Stephen, and placed the dedication of the East Church around 530.²⁹³

Grossmann doubted whether the inscription in the *topos* of St Stephen necessarily referred to the building of the East Church, or whether the identification with Theodore would fix the dating of the church, for this stone carving could well have been added later. Yet, despite these doubts, he agreed with Nautin that the transformation of the temple of Isis into a church, which he also placed in 535-537, was of the greatest significance. Hence, he came with an architectural argument for dating the construction of the church before 535-537, since no significant material from other temples on the island was found reused in the East Church.²⁹⁴ According to Grossmann, *spolia* from other temples could have been reused only after the building of the *topos* of St Stephen. On the assumption that the church was built in the episcopate of Theodore all the same, he therefore dated the church between 525 and 535.²⁹⁵

Although Grossmann is right to doubt the connection between the inscription from the *topos* of St Stephen and the East Church, for the work done could refer to any work done by Theodore, even in the church itself, his only argument rests on the assumption that the other temples on the island could not have been reused before 535-537, and since the East Church does not contain reused material of temples, it must date to after 535-537. However, as we have seen, it can be doubted whether the closure of the temple was indeed such an important event. Moreover, if it is accepted that the *topos* of St Stephen was built later in Theodore’s episcopate, it is difficult to keep to such a precise dating for the work done in the East Church. It is then possible, but far from certain, that Theodore contributed to the building of the East Church. Significantly, in a recent book, Grossmann no longer mentions the sixth-century dating and, on the basis of the stonework, seems to be in favour of a later date, namely

²⁸⁷ Grossmann, ‘Überlegungen’, 33-5.

²⁸⁸ Grossmann, ‘Überlegungen’, 36-8.

²⁸⁹ Lyons, *Report on the Island and Temples*, Pls. 58-9.

²⁹⁰ Grossmann, *Christliche Architektur*, 123. See also S. Schaten in Arnold, *Elephantine XXX*, 211-2.

²⁹¹ For a photo see Lyons, *Report on the Island and Temples*, Pl. 58, and Monneret de Villard, *Nubia medioevale* 2, Pl. 5.

²⁹² *I.Philae* II 202.1. Cf. the similar use of καί in the inscriptions of Bishop Daniel(ios), *I.Philae* II 194.9, 195.5.

²⁹³ Nautin, ‘Conversion’, 42. As Grossmann, ‘Überlegungen’, 29 (n. 3), observes, Nautin has interchanged the names of the East and West Church.

²⁹⁴ Although some reused, if rather insignificant, fragments were found in the foundations, as noted by Borchardt, ‘Bericht über den baulichen Zustand’, 1204. The groundwork of the church consisted of prefabricated stone blocks; the rest of the church would have consisted of mudbrick.

²⁹⁵ Grossmann, ‘Überlegungen’, 40-1. If the closure of the temple of Isis took place somewhere between 535 and 537, Grossmann should have dated the construction of the East Church between 525 and 537, as Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, 127, does.

not before 600.²⁹⁶ Whether the church was rebuilt or renovated in the sixth century or later cannot be determined.

The other, now lost, church on Philae is the West Church (P in Fig. 3).²⁹⁷ This church was of a simple, three-aisled plan and was about the same size as the *topos* of St Stephen. Before the campaigns of Lyons and Borchardt in 1895-1896, granite stands and the platform on which the altar once stood could still be seen, as well as three pairs of feet on the floor with inscriptions.²⁹⁸ Of an unknown height, the church was constructed of reused blocks from the nearby temple of Harendotes (O in Fig. 3). A Coptic building inscription was found in the street to the west of the church, which Richter has recently re-edited.²⁹⁹ The inscription was incised on the back of an Ancient Egyptian block with a solar disk,³⁰⁰ and runs as follows:

+ In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost,
in the month Choiak the 21st, the 6th indiction, Diocletian year 469 (17 December
752).

- By the will of God, and through the care
and zeal of the god-loving brother, the lord
5. Joseph, son of the blessed Dios, this workplace
was established.³⁰¹ He donated it to the *topos*³⁰²
of the Lady of us all, St Mary Theotokos,
on Philae, in the second year of the
episcopate of our father, the god-honoured Apa Severos. May God bless him, his
children,
10. and his whole house. And may he have mercy upon his blessed
wife Nymphe. Amen, so be it! +³⁰³

Although the inscription dates to after the Arab conquest of Egypt, Richter interprets it as evidence for a cult adoption of the Isis cult at Philae.³⁰⁴ This interpretation was based on the epithets used for Mary, 'Our Lady' (ΤΕΝΧΟΕΙΣ, l. 7) and 'Theotokos' (ΘΕΟΤΩΚΟΣ, l. 7), which he equates with epithets frequently used for Isis in Greek (κυρία, 'lady') and hieroglyphics (*mwt-ntr*, 'mother of god', that is, mother of her son, the god Horus).³⁰⁵ The extension 'of Philae' (ΜΗΠΑΛΑΚ, l. 8), furthermore, reminds him of the Greek equivalent used for Isis (Ἰσις Φιλῶν). Finally, the inscription was dedicated in the month of Choiak, in which traditionally the most important festival

²⁹⁶ Grossmann, *Christliche Architektur*, 464.

²⁹⁷ Borchardt, 'Bericht über den baulichen Zustand', 1204-5; Lyons, *Report on the Island and Temples*, 32; Weigall, *Report*, 54; Somers Clarke, *Christian Antiquities*, 89; Monneret de Villard, *Nubia medioevale* 1, 7-8; Adams, 'Architectural Evolution', 105-6; P. Grossmann, *Mittelalterliche Langhauskuppelkirchen und verwandte Typen in Oberägypten* (Glückstadt, 1982) 105. See Grossmann, *Christliche Architektur*, 464-5, for architectural details.

²⁹⁸ G.J. Chester, 'The Early Christian Church at Philae', *The Academy. A Weekly Review of Literature, Science, and Art* 21 (1882) 107-8.

²⁹⁹ Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, 127-35 (= *SB Kopt.* I 302). For bibliography, see S. Schaten, 'Griechische und koptische Bauinschriften', in S. Emmel *et al.* (eds), *Ägypten und Nubien in spätantiker und christlicher Zeit*, 2 vols (Wiesbaden, 1999) 2.305-14 at 312-3.

³⁰⁰ Lyons, *Report on the Island and Temples*, 32.

³⁰¹ The same word, ΕΡΑΚΤΗΡΙΟΝ, but with a different meaning, is found in the Greek petition discussed above, *P.Cair.Masp.* I 67004.8.

³⁰² Rather than Richter's translation 'Er gab sie in den Topos'. For the meaning of † ΕΡΩΥΝ, see Crum, *Dict.* s.v. Cf. Van Lantschoot, *Recueil des colophons* who gives several examples of this phrase, e.g. no. 94.10-1.

³⁰³ Tr. after Richter. In addition to Richter's text, I read ΕΠΙΚΟ, instead of ΕΠΙΚ, in l. 9, as did L. Borchardt in his diary of 1895-1896, 2 March 1896, and which is also clearly visible on the photo in A. Mallon, 'Nouvelle inscription copte de Philae', *ASAE* 6 (1905) 107-11 at 108.

³⁰⁴ Followed by Grossmann, *Christliche Architektur*, 465. However, this interpretation is not new, see T. Baumeister, 'Das Stephanuspatrozinium der Kirche im ehemaligen Isis-Tempel von Philä', *RQA* 81 (1986) 187-94 at 187-8.

³⁰⁵ Cf. Trombley, *Hellenic Religion* 1, 158, for the same idea.

of the cult of Isis, the Choiak festival, was held. He concludes that the titles of Mary were deliberately chosen to encompass the cult of Isis, and Mary took over Isis' dominant position as 'Lady of Philae'. Two building inscriptions from the island, which mention 'the holy Virgin Mary Theotokos', are adduced to emphasise Mary's importance for Christian Philae.³⁰⁶ According to Richter, the cult adoption must have taken place before the conversion of the temple of Isis, placed in 535-537, for otherwise the temple would have been dedicated to Mary instead of Stephen.³⁰⁷

Although the idea of a cult adoption is a tempting one, the argumentation is hardly convincing.³⁰⁸ In the first place, the equations of epithets are arbitrary and inaccurate. For example, the epithet translated with 'Lady' is also commonly used for Isis in demotic.³⁰⁹ It may further be wondered why the Coptic word $\chi\omicron\epsilon\iota\varsigma$ has to represent the Greek word $\kappa\upsilon\rho\acute{\iota}\alpha$, the more so because the Coptic does not say 'Lady' but 'Our Lady' ($\tau\epsilon\lambda\epsilon\chi\omicron\epsilon\iota\varsigma$), and this combination is attested for Mary in Coptic.³¹⁰ Moreover, if the Coptic phrase was equated with a Greek word, the equivalent would have been $\delta\acute{\epsilon}\sigma\pi\omicron\iota\nu\alpha\ \eta\mu\omega\nu$, a combination attested for Mary in documents dating to the seventh and eighth centuries.³¹¹ Finally, the Egyptian concept of the 'mother of god' is different from the Christian doctrine of Mary who has given birth to her son.³¹²

Secondly, the combination of 'Lady' with 'of Philae' does not convey the meaning of the Coptic, which combines $\pi\tau\omicron\pi\omicron\varsigma$ and $\pi\bar{\iota}\pi\lambda\alpha\kappa$, 'the *topos* on Philae'.³¹³ The phrase 'Our Lady' is a separate epithet for Mary, like 'Saint' and 'Theotokos', and therefore not limited to Philae in particular.³¹⁴ The two other inscriptions in Greek that mention Mary and may date to before the eighth century have another epithet, 'Virgin' ($\pi\alpha\rho\theta\acute{\epsilon}\nu\omicron\varsigma$), an epithet which is not used for Isis at all. There is thus no evidence to support the conclusion that 'on the basis of this title adoption, the *topos* of the Lady Mary of Philae certainly goes back to the time of the confrontation with paganism'.³¹⁵

This brings us to the third point, namely that a highly questionable cult adoption, entirely based on an eighth-century inscription, is retrojected into a sixth century or even earlier situation. This cult adoption seems to have been inspired by the idea that Christian cults deliberately adopted 'pagan' cults to illustrate their 'triumph'. Several studies, however, show that more often than not the Christian cult was disconnected with the past.³¹⁶ To mention only one example, a sanctuary of the martyrs Cyrus and John was built near the temple of Isis at Menouthis.³¹⁷ Although there may have been continuity in the type of cult, for both sanctuaries were oracle cults, Richter suggests that the name Cyrus might have reminded the devotees of the epithet 'lady' ($\kappa\upsilon\rho\acute{\iota}\alpha$) of Isis, but this is hardly convincing.³¹⁸ Although it need not

³⁰⁶ *I.Philae* II 220.5-6, 221.4-5 (restored). Not included in a recent survey of documents mentioning Mary, A. Papaconstantinou, 'Les sanctuaires de la Vierge dans l'Égypte Byzantine et Omeyyade', *JJP* 30 (2000) 81-94.

³⁰⁷ Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens* 125-6, 133-6. Cf. Baumeister, 'Stephanuspatrozinium', 188.

³⁰⁸ See Dijkstra and Van Ginkel, review Richter, 236; Van der Vliet, review Richter, forthcoming.

³⁰⁹ E.g. T.M. Dousa, 'Imagining Isis: On Some Continuities and Discontinuities in the Image of Isis in Greek Isis Hymns and Demotic Texts', in K. Ryholt (ed.), *Acts of the Seventh International Conference of Demotic Studies* (Copenhagen, 2002) 149-84 at 161-4.

³¹⁰ As Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens* 134 (n. 90), himself admits.

³¹¹ Papaconstantinou, 'Sanctuaires de la Vierge', 83-4.

³¹² Cf. the discussion by T. Klauser, 'Gottesgebäerin (Θεοτόκος)', *RAC* XI (1981) 1071-1103 at 1099.

³¹³ Cf. Richter's translation 'er gab sie in den Topos unser aller Herrin, der heiligen Gottesgebäerin Maria von Philae'. For the correct translation, see Papaconstantinou, 'Sanctuaires de la Vierge', 90-1.

³¹⁴ Cf. Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens* 134, following *I.Philae*I, pp. 60-3.

³¹⁵ Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens* 135.

³¹⁶ E.g. Hanson, *Studies* 357-8; Deichmann, *Gesammelte Studien*, 65; Saradi-Mendelovici, 'Christian Attitudes', 54. Cf. Merkelbach, *Isis Regina*, 317-8.

³¹⁷ Athanassiadi, 'Persecution', 15; Montserrat, 'Pilgrimage', 259.

³¹⁸ Richter here follows Merkelbach, *Isis Regina*, 327-8, but see Baumeister, 'Stephanuspatrozinium', 187-8. Furthermore, Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens* 135 (n. 98), contradicts himself by reproaching

have been a coincidence that a church for St Mary Theotokos was dedicated on the island of Isis, the eighth-century inscription does not support such an assumption.

What we do know is that in the eighth century there was a church of St Mary Theotokos on Philae, and if the inscription indeed refers to the West Church, which is admittedly not certain, this church could have been dedicated to Mary before 752. Since the doctrine of St Mary Theotokos was promulgated at the Council of Ephesus in 431, the church will have been dedicated after this date.³¹⁹ The dedication took place when the temple of Harendotes had fallen out of use and the islanders decided to reuse the temple for building material. As we know that around 434 the falcon cult was still in use, and the cult of Isis probably until 456/457, the West Church in the state it has come down to us most likely dates to the second half of the fifth century or later. If the West Church indeed goes back on a fourth or fifth-century predecessor, the church may well have been rebuilt with blocks from the temple of Harendotes.

The other temples on Philae were similarly plundered. Between the temple of Augustus (L on Fig. 3) and the Gateway of Diocletian (R), to the east of the East Church, a quadratic church (of the 'Umgangsvierstützenbau' type) was built. On architectural grounds, the church can be dated to the seventh or eighth century.³²⁰ It has been assumed that two earthquakes damaged the temple of Augustus in different periods. The first one happened when the temple was still in use, resulting in the attachment of several dove tails to its walls. The second earthquake took place when the temple was already in ruins, after which several houses were built inside.³²¹ Building material from the temple was also used for houses in other parts of the island.³²²

Similarly, blocks from the eastern portion of the temple of Hathor (G) were found reused in some of the houses, and its forecourt was demolished, according to Lyons 'to form a Coptic chapel', but without any indication why this should be so.³²³ In the southern part of the island, reused blocks from the temple of Arensnuphis (B) were also found in houses.³²⁴ An apse of a church was built on the foundations of the temple, that is, when the temple was already in ruins, and Lyons informs us that crosses had been incised on the wall, as well as the name of a Christian saint.³²⁵ Finally, in the inner room of the small temple of Imhotep, also known as the temple of Asclepius (F), doors were hacked out in the east and west walls to facilitate housing. A *dipinto* was written on the wall and figures of saints painted on the plaster.³²⁶

Trombley, *Hellenic Religion* 2, 238-9, for equating 'Our Master' Jesus with the same epithet for Osiris on the grounds that the epithet 'Master' was too commonly used a term for Jesus. The same could be said of the epithet 'Lady' used for Mary.

³¹⁹ E.g. Cameron, *Christianity and Rhetoric*, 165.

³²⁰ P. Grossmann in W. Kaiser *et al.*, 'Stadt und Tempel von Elephantine. Erster Grabungsbericht', *MDAIK* 26 (1970) 87-139 at 106, *Elephantine II*, 101-3, and *Christliche Architektur*, 38. Cf. Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, 126, with 136, where the question mark behind the dating has disappeared.

³²¹ Lyons and Borchartt, 'Trilingue Inschrift', 469; Borchartt, 'Bericht über den baulichen Zustand', 1201, 1204, and 'Augustustempel', 85.

³²² Borchartt, 'Augustustempel', 78-9.

³²³ Lyons and Borchartt, 'Trilingue Inschrift', 469; Borchartt, 'Bericht über den baulichen Zustand', 1205; Lyons, *Report on the Island and Temples*, 27 (quote). Cf. Monneret de Villard, *Nubia medioevale* 1, 7, and Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, 125, who identify this 'chapel' as a church.

³²⁴ Borchartt, 'Bericht über den baulichen Zustand', 1209; Lyons, *Report on the Island and Temples*, 23-5; Rubensohn and Borchartt, 'Griechische Bauinschriften', 364.

³²⁵ Lyons, *Report on the Island and Temples*, 23; Weigall, *Report*, 42; Monneret de Villard, *Nubia medioevale* 1, 5-6; Grossmann, *Christliche Architektur*, 47; Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, 125.

³²⁶ L. Borchartt, Diary 1895-1896, 1 January 1896: 'Eine Kammer enthielt früher koptische Inschriften und Malereien, überschmiert'; Lyons, *Report on the Island and Temples*, 26. Cf. Monneret de Villard, *Nubia medioevale* 1, 6, and Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, 126, who suggest that the room might have been a small chapel. However, see M. Rodziewicz, *Alexandrie III. Les habitations romaines tardives d'Alexandrie à la lumière des fouilles polonaises à Kôm el-Dikka* (Warsaw, 1984) 194-208, 332, who discusses paintings found in a Late Antique residential quarter. See also Haas, *Alexandria*, 201-4.

All in all, then, Christian Philae consisted of at least five churches, two freestanding ones (the East and the West Churches) and three or more churches built in or nearby an Ancient Egyptian temple (temples of Isis, Augustus and Arensnuphis). Of these churches, the freestanding ones were probably the first to be erected on the northern part of the island. Presumably, if it was the episcopal church, the East Church may be the successor of the oldest sanctuary on the island, a fourth-century church. This church was possibly renovated under Bishop Theodore in the sixth century, but architectural features rather suggest a seventh-century (or later) date. The West Church was also rebuilt or renovated at a late stage, at least after the last Ancient Egyptian cult activities had ceased (around 456/457), for it was built of blocks from the nearby temple of Harendotes.

If the temple of Isis was turned into a church under Theodore, probably shortly after the 'Blemmyan incident' of around 567, both of the other churches built in or near other temples seem to have been of a later date. Meanwhile, the remaining temples had fallen out of use and became ruins. We have seen different ways in which they were reused: they were either completely dismantled and reused for other building activities (temple of Harendotes), used as building material for houses (temples of Augustus, Hathor and Arensnuphis) or actually as homes to live in (temples of Augustus and Imhotep (?)).

After the Ancient Egyptian cults had ceased, houses which had until then been built outside of the temenos wall of the temple of Isis now moved closer and closer until the temples too became part of the village.³²⁷ The process of destroying and rebuilding mudbrick houses must have raised the level of the village considerably through the ages. This feature has been observed for the level of the houses around the East Church, which at the end of the nineteenth century was considerably higher in comparison with the level of the church.³²⁸ The houses were small and fairly simple, but one house, which was found near the temple of Hathor, formed an exception because of its size and its use of columns.³²⁹ Stray finds of ostraka indicate that much more could have been expected if the houses had been properly excavated, but except for the photos published by Lyons, nothing more is left of the village.³³⁰

The picture emerging from the material remains of Christian Philae thus puts the chronology of the reuse of temples in a different light. Thus far, it has been assumed that the temples could only have been reused after the conversion of the most important temple, that of Isis, into a church, an event which was dated to 535-537.³³¹ However, as the examples of the East and West Churches show, it is inaccurate to use this date as a turningpoint in the dates of the reuse of the other temples. From around 456/457 onwards, the role of the cult of Isis had been reduced to a passive one, and it could well have been that from this time onwards empty buildings were reused. However, even this date is not fixed as the cults were longer in decline and buildings other than the temple of Isis could have been reused already before that date.

The reuse was therefore not determined by the closure of the temple of Isis, but rather depended on the local circumstances, circumstances which are hard to

³²⁷ Haeny, 'Short Architectural History', 218.

³²⁸ L. Borchart, Diary 1895-1896, 29 December 1895: 'Die koptische Kirche liegt ganz tief in den Häuserruinen, das Dorf war also koptisch oder später. Für das letztere spricht das Vorkommen von angemalten Pilgerschiffen p.p. im östlichen Theilen der ersten Colonnade'.

³²⁹ L. Borchart, Diary 1895-1896, 9 January 1896: 'Dicht beim Hathortempel grosses koptisches Haus mit bemerkenswerther Säule, die zwischen Fenstern stand. Ähnliche Säulen, nur einfacher, finden sich auch in anderen Häusern, aber nie in Situ, wohl aus einem oberen Stockwerk'.

³³⁰ L. Borchart, Diary 1895-1896, 1 January 1896 (Coptic ostrakon, found in the temple of Imhotep), 7 January 1896 (two Arabic ostraka), and 18 January 1896 (Greek ostrakon, found behind the 'Unfinished Chapel' (E)). These ostraka are also mentioned by Lyons, *Report on the Island and Temples* 12.

³³¹ For the most recent reconstruction of the chronology of temple conversions at Philae in this manner, see Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens* 124-36. In the same way, Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens* 149-93, tries to demonstrate that the conversion of Nubian temples into churches dates to after 535-7, on which see, however, Dijkstra and Van Ginkel, review Richter, 236.

reconstruct: it had more to do with finding new purposes for buildings that had fallen out of use, and the temple of Isis was just one of these. At the same time, the two churches, which had been erected on the northern part of the island and the predecessors of which may have been there already when Appion composed his petition in the second quarter of the fifth century, provided the island with a new religious focus, that of Christian Philae. It is to the ways in which the Christian identity was emphasised under Theodore of Philae that we now turn.

Constructing a Christian Identity under Bishop Theodore

In 575, when Bishop Longinus visited Theodore, ‘the old bishop of Philae’ could look back on a distinguished career of fifty years on the episcopal throne. Theodore had been involved in the first mission to Nubia and had helped to organise Christianity on the other side of the Roman frontier, as is testified in the inscription from Dendur. He had become a man of renown, who was actively involved in important matters concerning the Egyptian Church such as the ordination of a new archbishop of Alexandria.

Theodore had also achieved much on his small island. He had witnessed the closure of the temple of Isis on imperial orders, and as this building probably stood empty for several years, the question may have risen about what to do with the ancient temple. Perhaps in response to some incident with Blemmyan tribes still visiting the site around 567, the bishop decided to build a *topos* of St Stephen inside the temple in order to definitively break with the past. With this deed, Bishop Theodore would have contributed considerably to the construction of a Christian identity on Philae. This also appears from the other activities this bishop engaged in.

In an inscription from the *topos* of St Stephen mentioned in the introduction to Part III, it is said that Theodore transformed the sanctuary into a *topos* of St Stephen, ‘under the most pious Posios, deacon and leader’.³³² It is not clear what role Posios had in the building project, but as this inscription was incised near a painting of St Stephen, it is possible that Posios was responsible for it. In any case, a ‘leader’ (προεστώς) in an ecclesiastical context most often denotes an abbot of a monastery.³³³ Richter suggests that this Posios be identified with a certain Abba Pousi, mentioned on a Coptic tombstone said to come from Philae. Pousi is here mentioned as ‘the bishop of Philae and the first father of this monastery’ (ΠΕΠΙΣΚ(ΟΠΟΣ) ΜΠΙΛΑΚ ΔΥΩ ΠΩΟΡΠ̄ Ν̄ΕΙΩΤ̄ ΜΠΕΙΜΟΝΔ(ΣΤΗΡΙΟΝ)).³³⁴ Thus Richter thinks that Posios climbed the ecclesiastical ladder at Philae and, besides being the first abbot of ‘this monastery’, he later became bishop of Philae, perhaps as the successor of Apa Theodore. He identifies the monastery with that of St Hatre, which would mean that this monastery was founded in the sixth century.³³⁵

However tempting this interpretation may be, it cannot be proven. Richter assumes that Posios and Pousi are the same names and that the monastery referred to is that of St Hatre. Yet, there is no support for the identification of Posios with Pousi, and Posios may just as easily have been a ‘leader’ of another monastic community on Philae or in its vicinity.³³⁶ The community was probably not situated on the island, although in 1895-1896 a building north of the temple of Augustus was identified as a monastery.³³⁷ Posios may therefore have been the ‘leader’ of one of the monastic

³³² *J.Philae* II 203.6-7.

³³³ G. Schmelz, *Kirchliche Amtsträger im spätantiken Ägypten* (Leipzig, 2002) 36.

³³⁴ I follow the reading by Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens* 119, based on a recently published photo by W. Brunsch, ‘Koptische und griechische Inschriften aus Alexandria’, *WZKM* 84 (1994) 9-33 (inv. A 11806). Cf. *SB Kopt.* I 789.

³³⁵ Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens* 119-21.

³³⁶ Cf. for a similar combination of monastic and ecclesiastical titles, Schmelz, *Kirchliche Amtsträger*, 36 (πρεσβύτερος καὶ προεστώς).

³³⁷ Lyons, *Report on the Island and Temples* 14-5, but without indicating it on his map or describing it.

communities in the neighbourhood of Philae.³³⁸ If so, the inscription in which he is mentioned seems to indicate the co-operation between the see of Philae and a monastic community in the area.

In addition to the building of the *topos* of St Stephen and possibly the renovation of the East Church, the activities of Theodore also appear from local secular building. On 14 December 577, the construction of a quay wall in the southeastern part of the island was commemorated:

- By means of the providence of the Lord God and the fate of
our most pious masters Flavius Justinus
and Aelia Sophia, eternal *augusti* and emperors
and of the protégé of God, Caesar Tiberius,
5. the New Constantine, and by means of the philanthropy of Theodore
the renowned *decurio* and *dux et augustalis*
of the Thebaid for the first year, this wall has been constructed
thanks to prayers of the holy martyrs and the most holy Bishop Apa Theodore,
through the zeal and goodness of Menas, the most illustrious *singularis*
10. of the Ducal Office, in the month Choiak, the 18th, 11th indiction, for the good.³³⁹ +

This official inscription is reminiscent of the two inscriptions of Bishop Daniel(ios) who, more than a century earlier, in 449-450 or 464-465 had taken the initiative to renovate part of a wall at Philae, and paid for it, under the aegis of the governor of the Thebaid. In this case, it seems that the governor had ordered a minor administrator, Menas, to oversee the strengthening of the wall. Apparently, however, the building work could not pass by the bishop of Philae, as it is said that he prayed for the project to be brought to a good end.

The inscription of 577 forms part of a group of inscriptions mentioning repair works to the quay walls of the temple island, which are dated to the sixth century on the basis of this single inscription.³⁴⁰ However, in the fifth century Bishop Daniel(ios) was already involved in repair works, which shows that these inscriptions have to be dated more broadly to 'Late Antiquity'.³⁴¹ It seems, then, that in this period, the quay walls that surrounded the island needed extensive rebuilding, sometimes at the instigation of officials,³⁴² sometimes at that of the bishops of Philae.³⁴³ According to the *Description de l'Égypte*, the French army visiting Philae at the beginning of the nineteenth century could still see a large part of the surrounding wall of Philae and observed its irregular shape, which may have been caused by different renovation projects.³⁴⁴

It has been suggested that these renovations of the surrounding walls were the consequence of 'barbarian' invasions and hence that the walls were defensive walls, but it seems hardly likely that tribes of the Noubades and Blemmyes would have wanted to destroy their sacred island.³⁴⁵ This is confirmed by a similar building inscription that has been found near the temple of Isis at Syene. Presumably, this inscription commemorates the building of the town wall by the councillors (πολιτευόμενοι) of

³³⁸ Only a few monasteries have survived in the area but this does not mean that they were not there, as the *Life of Aaron* amply demonstrates. Cf. Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens* 120.

³³⁹ *I.Philae* II 216.

³⁴⁰ *I.Philae* II 218-28.

³⁴¹ *I.Philae* II 194-5.

³⁴² *I.Philae* II 216, 219, 224-6.

³⁴³ *I.Philae* II 194-5, 220-1 (restored), 227. This does not mean that officials were not involved in these building activities.

³⁴⁴ *Description de l'Égypte* 1, 34: 'D'ailleurs, il est probable que toutes les parties de ce mur n'ont pas été bâties dans le même temps, et qu'elles ont dû, à différentes époques, exiger des réparations: c'en est assez pour expliquer leurs contours irréguliers'.

³⁴⁵ *I.Philae* II, p. 13. Cf. Lyons, *Report on the Island and Temples* 41-2; Monneret de Villard, *Nubia medioevale* 1, 2-5.

Latopolis (Esna) and a local official (*epimeletes*) under the aegis of some military officials.³⁴⁶ The building of the quay walls therefore more probably had practical reasons, for example caused by the level of the Nile, which had risen considerably over the centuries.³⁴⁷

While the inscription of 577 demonstrates that the co-operation between bishop and secular authorities continued, it is also a testimony to the reputation that Bishop Theodore had attained. Line 8 of the inscription says that the work happened through prayers of the martyrs as well as of Theodore of Philae. It could be suggested that Theodore, like the martyrs, had died before this inscription was carved. This is unlikely, however, for if Theodore was indeed dead, he would have been referred to as 'blessed' (μακάριος). Moreover, the phrase 'thanks to prayers of' (εὐχαῖς) is attested in an inscription from Baalbek (Lebanon), possibly dating to the second half of the fourth century, in which the same phrase is used for 'the holy bishop Theodotos'.³⁴⁸ Apparently, Bishop Theodore was already held in high regard during his lifetime and was regarded as equal to the saints. This is the last testimony to Theodore and, as he was already very old in December 577, he probably died shortly afterwards.³⁴⁹

The mentioning of the martyrs may have been connected to the newly dedicated *topos* of St Stephen the Protomartyr, which, as has been suggested above, could have taken place under Theodore not long after 567.³⁵⁰ As regards the choice of St Stephen, Theofried Baumeister goes even further with Nautin's hypothesis that the erection of the cross at Philae was the beginning of the conversion of Nubia.³⁵¹ Theodore thus deliberately chose Stephen the Protomartyr as the saint of the church: 'Thereby he regards missionary activities as a continuation of the Christian universal mission, which goes back to the death of Stephen'.³⁵² In the light of what has been said above, it is questionable whether such importance can be attributed to the dedication of this modest church. Since the Christian community may not have had martyrs to worship, it is more likely that Theodore decided to dedicate part of the closed temple to the first and best-known martyr.³⁵³

As an argument for a connection with the mission to Nubia, Baumeister further suggests that 'nowhere can be discerned a particular Egyptian predilection for the worship of Stephen'.³⁵⁴ This argument cannot be maintained. Although St Stephen was certainly not the most popular saint in Egypt, recent surveys show that the martyr was included on different dates in the *Synaxarion*, while the documentary evidence for St Stephen seems to have concentrated on the area between Thebes and Philae, and to

³⁴⁶ *IThSy* 236, cf. 235, 237, on which see Laniado, *Recherches* 84. On the title πολιτευόμενος, see K.A. Worp, 'Ἄρξαντες and πολιτευόμενοι in Papyri from Graeco-Roman Egypt', *ZPE* 115 (1997) 201-20, and A. Laniado, 'Βουλευταὶ et πολιτευόμενοι', *CdE* 72 (1997) 130-44, on which see K.A. Worp, 'Bouleutai and Politeuomenoi in Later Byzantine Egypt Again', *CdE* 74 (1999) 124-32. See also Laniado, *Recherches passim*.

³⁴⁷ S.J. Seidlmayer, *Historische und moderne Nilstände* (Berlin, 2001).

³⁴⁸ *IGLS* VI 2830.5 (εὐχαῖς Θεοδότου τοῦ ὀσίου ἐπισκόπου), with the comment: 'La formule εὐχαῖς est de style pour toute intervention des saints et des hauts dignitaires ecclésiastiques'. Cf. e.g. *SB* IV 7496.1 (εὐχαῖς τῶν ἁγίων; Monastery of Epiphanius at Thebes), and Feissel, *Recueil*, no. 15.4-6 (εὐχαῖς π[άντων τῶν] ἁγ[ί]ων ... μαρτύρων; Edessa, fifth/sixth century).

³⁴⁹ Maspero, 'Théodore', 312.

³⁵⁰ Perhaps a fragmentary building inscription from Philae (*IThSy* 331.1) once mentioned an ecclesiastical dignitary associated with the *topos* of St Stephen: τοῦ ἁγίου Στεφάνου. See the *editio princeps* by A. Roccati, 'Alcune iscrizioni greche da File di età imperiale', in J. Vercoutter (ed.), *Bulletin du Centenaire. Supplément au BIFAO, T. 81* (Cairo, 1981) 437-42 at 439-40, but cf. *IThSy*, pp. 313-4.

³⁵¹ Baumeister, 'Stephanuspatrozinium'.

³⁵² Baumeister, 'Stephanuspatrozinium', 192.

³⁵³ Cf. the remarks by Cyril about the need to build a martyr shrine at Menouthis where there was a cult of Isis (quoted by Montserrat, 'Pilgrimage', 262).

³⁵⁴ Baumeister, 'Stephanuspatrozinium', 188. Cf. his *Martyr Invictus. Der Märtyrer als Sinnbild der Erlösung in der Legende und im Kult der frühen koptischen Kirche* (Münster, 1972) 90.

have postdated the sixth century.³⁵⁵ Consequently, these dedications could have been inspired by the dedication of the *topos* of St Stephen at Philae.³⁵⁶ On the other hand, the amount of evidence is limited, and the churches dedicated to St Stephen outside this area, for example at Arsinoe, speak against such an interpretation.³⁵⁷ In any case, it seems that no connection can be established between St Stephen and the missions to Nubia, and that Theodore decided to create a *martyrium* on the island, simply because there were no martyrs yet.³⁵⁸

What the Christian community also needed was a cult of local saints. In Chs. 6 and 7 we have seen that the *Life of Aaron* reflects the fulfilment of this need. It contains a series of stories on saints from the region, especially Apa Aaron. In addition, there are the legendary stories of the first bishops of Philae, which have led to the suggestion that this part of the hagiographical work was intended to explain the origins of the Christian community of Philae. As Aaron was buried next to the first three bishops of Philae, a cult of this saint may therefore have existed on Philae as early as the first half of the fifth century, or even earlier. It certainly existed when the *Life of Aaron* was composed.

When did this happen? If the story of the first bishops of Philae reflects the perspective of a Christian audience on its origins, it must have been at a time when the Isis temple was still physically present but not yet converted into a church. Significantly, Macedonius does not end the Isis cult by destroying its temple and building a church instead, as in the case of Gaza, but kills only the falcon. Additionally, then, it would have been a time when the cult of the holy falcon was still remembered. With the Isis temple still standing, it described the symbolic end to one of the most conspicuous cults in the collective memory of Christian Philae.³⁵⁹ The *Life of Aaron* could therefore be tentatively dated to the period before around 567, when the *topos* of St Stephen may have been dedicated. As Theodore was bishop of Philae at this time and his activities helped to construct a Christian identity on Philae, a work in which the creation of the see of Philae was legitimised and the origins of its Christian community explained would fit neatly in his episcopate. If it was indeed written during the episcopate of Theodore of Philae, the work has to be dated between around 525 and 567. A sixth-century audience also appears from other internal evidence.

When Mark was in Alexandria to be ordained he said to Athanasius:

‘One thing worries me that I want to tell you about, my holy father’. The archbishop said: ‘Go ahead’. Mark said: ‘There lives a people to the east and south-west of our city that is called Nubians who are very poor, for it regularly happens that they ask us: ‘Give us a piece of bread’. My mind is inclined to refuse it to them, because they are a people (that does not know ?) God (fol. 26b).³⁶⁰

It may well be that this remark reflects sixth-century sentiments. The Nubians are located to the east and south-west of Philae, where Nubia was supposed to start in that century. The first village of Nubia was situated one or two miles south of Philae on the

³⁵⁵ J. Horn, ‘Hinweise zu Kult und Literatur des Protomärtyrers Stephanus in der Kirche Ägyptens’, in G. Koch (ed.), *Studien zur spätantiken und frühchristlichen Kunst und Kultur des Orients* (Wiesbaden, 1982) 46-55; G.A. Pérez, ‘Stephen, Saint’, *Copt.Enc.* VII (1991) 2153-4; Papaconstantinou, *Culte des saints*, 193-5. There was also a local martyr called Stephen of Lenaios in a village in the Antinoite Nome. See Van Minnen, ‘Earliest Account’.

³⁵⁶ Papaconstantinou, *Culte des saints*, 195.

³⁵⁷ Cf. also the literary attestations in Horn, ‘Hinweise’.

³⁵⁸ Another martyr venerated on the island may have been Menas, mentioned on the fragment of a stela, on which see the next section.

³⁵⁹ See Dijkstra, ‘Horus on His Throne’, 9.

³⁶⁰ ΟΥΝ ΟΥΨΑΧΕ ΟΝ ΧΡΟΠ ΕΡΟΙ ΕΙΟΥΨΩ ΕΤΑΜΟΚ ΕΡΟΨ ΠΑΕΙΩΤ ΕΤΟΥΑΔΒ. ΠΕΧΕ ΠΑΡΧΗΕΠΙΣΚΟΠΟΣ ΧΕ ΑΧΙϞ. ΠΕΧΕ ΝΑΡΚΟΣ ΧΕ ΟΥΝ ΟΥΖΕΘΝΟΣ ΠΣΑΕΙΕΒΤ ΠΝΟΝ ΑΥΩ ΖΠΠΕΠΙΝΤΠΡΗΣ ΠΤΠΠΟΛΙΣ ΕΥΝΟΥΤΕ ΕΡΟΨ ΧΕ ΑΝΟΥΒΑ ΕϞΡΡΩΖ ΕΝΑΔΑΤΕ. ΨΑΣΨΩΠΠΕ ΓΑΡ ΠΣΕΝΟΥΤΕ ΕΖΟΥΝ ΕΡΟΝ ΧΕ ΤΟΥΟΕΙΚ ΝΑΝ ΨΑΡΕΠΑΛΟΓΙΣΗΟΣ ΚΙΝ ΕΡΟΙ ΕΤΠΤΨ ΝΑΥ ΕΒ[ΟΛ] ΧΕ ΟΥΖΕΘΝΟΣ Π[± 13] ΝΟΥΤΕ.

east bank. It is known from Arabic sources as el-Qasr, and a Greek papyrus from the sixth or seventh century mentioning ‘the camp of the Moors (that is, Nubians) near Philae’ (τὸ κάστρον τῶν Μαύρων τὸ πλησίον Φιλῶν) can probably be identified with this site.³⁶¹ Other Nubian settlements started south of the First Cataract region on the west bank, that is, to the south-west of Philae. Moreover, in the miracle story of the camel’s leg, two Nubians quarrel who ‘lived in that place’ (fol. 18a), namely the Valley, the wadi where first Macedonius dwelled and later Apa Aaron.³⁶²

Nubians not only figure prominently in the history of the first bishops of Philae, they reappear in section three of the *Life of Aaron*. When Aaron had left Isaac to be alone in the desert for a couple of days, his pupil sought his master because he was threatened by Nubian demons:

And he said to me: ‘Why have you come here my son?’ I said to him: ‘The Nubians have been tormenting me, and I have come to tell you’. He smiled and said: ‘Truly, these are invisible Nubians, my son’ (fol. 40b).³⁶³

Nubians also appear in a miracle story belonging to the catalogue of miracles of Apa Aaron: ‘A certain Nubian came out from the desert with his son to drink water from the river’ (fol. 41b).³⁶⁴ The son is caught by a crocodile and in despair the father cut himself on some rocks. Apa Aaron wanted to talk to him but could not communicate with him because ‘he could not understand what he was saying to him’ (fol. 42b).³⁶⁵ Aaron then asked Isaac to go to the road to find someone who spoke the language. He met a man who was travelling on a donkey from Philae to Syene and asked him: ‘Do you understand the language of the Nubians?’ (fol. 42a).³⁶⁶ He answered positively and translated the Nubian’s words. Apa Aaron gave a piece of wood to the Nubian, who threw it into the water. As a consequence, the crocodile released his son.

Another miracle story recounts the conversation between two Nubian men about Aaron’s greatness (fol. 51a-b). One of them was blind in one eye and speculated that Aaron could have to cure him if he really was a great man. Immediately, his one eye was cured, but now the other eye was blind. They went to Apa Aaron who already knew of what had happened and cured the blind man, ‘who was not a believer’ (fol. 51a).³⁶⁷

These stories about Nubians give the *Life of Aaron* its distinct *couleur locale* and confirm the picture of a mixed population in the First Cataract region. The Nubians are portrayed as poor and ‘pagan’. If this characterisation reflects a sixth-century situation, the work may be dated to before the official missions to Nubia, that is, to before 536, when the Kingdom of Noubadia officially adopted Christianity. But, since the image of a ‘pagan’ Nubia would have lived on for a while, and not all Nubians would have converted to Christianity right away, we should be careful not to pinpoint the work too precisely.³⁶⁸

³⁶¹ *P.Haun.* II 26, on which see A. Łajtar, ‘Τὸ κάστρον τῶν Μαύρων τὸ πλησίον Φιλῶν - Der dritte Adam über *P.Haun.* II 26’, *JJP* 27 (1997) 43-54. Interestingly, the letter mentions the meeting between the writer of the letter and a hermit (ἔγκλειστος) who had arrived at the camp. Łajtar (pp. 53-4) suggests that there may have been a connection with the missionary activities in Nubia, but too much of the context is missing.

³⁶² ΔΥΣΟΙΕ ΕΠΗΑ ΕΤΉΜΑΥ.

³⁶³ ΠΤΟΙ ΔΕ [ΠΕ]ΧΑ[Ι] ΝΑΙ ΧΕ ΠΤΑΚΕΙ ΕΠΑΙ]ΝΑ ΕΤΒΕΟΥ Ω ΠΑΦΗΡΕ. Π[ΕΧΑΙ ΝΑΙ] ΧΕ ΑΝΑΝΟΥΒΑ †ΡΙΣΕ ΝΑΙ ΔΙΕΙ ΕΤΑΜΟΚ. ΔΙΗΕΤΒ ΡΩΙ ΠΣΩΒΕ ΠΕΧΑΙ ΧΕ ΔΛΗΘΩΣ ΠΑΝΟΥΒΑ ΕΤΘΗΒ ΝΕ Ω ΠΑΦΗΡΕ. Nubian demons are a common motif in Egyptian hagiography, see, most recently, D. Brakke, ‘Ethiopian Demons: Male Sexuality, the Black-Skinned Other, and the Monastic Self’, *JHSex* 10 (2001) 501-35.

³⁶⁴ ΔΧΕΙ ΕΒΟΛ ΖΉΠΤΤΟΟΥ ΠΣΙΟΥΑΝΟΥΒΑ ΠΗ ΠΕΦΗΡΕ ΧΕ ΕΓΗΑΣΕΜΟΟΥ ΖΉΠΕΙΕΡ’Ο.

³⁶⁵ ΠΠΕΦΕΙΜΕ ΕΠΕΤΤΩ ΠΗΟΙ ΝΑΙ.

³⁶⁶ ΔΡ[Α ΚΗΟΙ ΠΤΑΣΠΕ ΠΗΑ]ΝΟΥΒΑ.

³⁶⁷ ΠΤΑΙΡΑΤΝΑΖΤΕ.

³⁶⁸ Cf. Dijkstra, “‘Une foule immense de moines’”, 201.

It would also be going too far to claim that all stories in the *Life of Aaron* necessarily reflect life in the First Cataract region during the sixth century. The catalogue of miracles serves primarily to confirm the holiness of Apa Aaron. All these miracle stories have the same structure and Aaron's miracles are part and parcel for every Late Antique holy man in his role as a patron: he settles disputes, rebukes the rich, helps the poor, heals the sick and mediates in taxation business.³⁶⁹ On the other hand, the miracle stories are all placed in the landscape of the First Cataract area: the clientele is formed by Nubians as well as by other people living in the region. Consequently, it can be expected that these problems were not strange to the audience for the *Life of Aaron*. It may not be a coincidence that at the end of the catalogue of miracles, two miracles are incorporated in which Apa Aaron took care that the lands were flooded with Nile water.³⁷⁰ This remarkable work thus not only reflects the perspective of a sixth-century Christian community on its origins, it also reflects some of the daily needs and problems of the local population of the First Cataract area.³⁷¹

Admittedly, Theodore's work at Philae was not new. Except perhaps for the cult of martyrs, which Theodore may have initiated with the *topos* of St Stephen, the involvement of the bishop in secular and ecclesiastical building, a cult of local saints, and the co-operation with monastic communities probably built on a long tradition. What is so remarkable about Theodore's episcopate is that all these elements together become visible in his episcopate, and they would have added to the construction of a 'Christian' Philae. This had perhaps not so much to do with Theodore's charisma, though it may have contributed to it. It had all the more to do with the transformation that had taken place and which is so brilliantly embodied in the *Life of Aaron*. By inventing the tradition of a Christian Philae from the first bishop of Philae onwards, a definitive end was made to Philae's 'pagan' past. The building of the *topos* of St Stephen inside the former temple of Isis was therefore the culmination of this development: the event was not the definitive end of Ancient Egypt cults at Philae, but rather a confirmation that the island had become fully Christian.³⁷²

Visitors to Christian Philae

Evidence that visitors from the region and perhaps from further away came to Philae to participate in the cults of Christian Philae has been found on Elephantine. During the campaign of 1910-1911, French excavators found a house that appeared to be an atelier containing moulds for terracotta figurines, flasks and lamps. The house was situated to the south of the portico of the Khnum temple and can be dated from the second half of the fifth century onwards.³⁷³ Some of the moulds were published in the 1980s, and have been dated broadly between the fifth and seventh centuries.³⁷⁴

The moulds have a parallel in the terracottas produced at the famous pilgrimage site of Abu Mina near Alexandria, which suggests that the moulds from Elephantine were equally intended for the pilgrimage industry. Some of the moulds contain the names of saints, like Onnophris and Stephen.³⁷⁵ Onnophris is a well

³⁶⁹ Brown, *Society and the Holy*, 116-8.

³⁷⁰ Frankfurter, *Religion*, 45-6, and 'Syncretism', 371.

³⁷¹ Brown, *Society and the Holy*, 126: 'Far from being bizarre fragments of folk-lore, such incidents have a social context'.

³⁷² The construction of a Christian identity seems to have become increasingly important in the sixth century, see G. Greatrex, 'Roman Identity in the Sixth Century', in S. Mitchell, G. Greatrex (eds), *Ethnicity and Culture in Late Antiquity* (London, 2000) 267-92 at 277-8.

³⁷³ Arnold, *Elephantine XXX*, 35-7.

³⁷⁴ P. Ballet, F. Mahmoud, 'Moules en terre cuite d'Éléphantine (Musée Copte). Nouvelles données sur les ateliers de la région d'Assouan, à l'époque byzantine et aux premiers temps de l'occupation arabe', *BIFAO* 87 (1987) 53-72 (nos. 1-16). For the date see pp. 61-2.

³⁷⁵ Stephen: Ballet and Mahmoud, 'Moules', 65-6 (nos. 2-3) = *SEG* XXXVII 1625-6. Onnophris: Ballet and Mahmoud, 'Moules', no. 10 = *SEG* XXXVII 1632. Ballet and Mahmoud, 'Moules', no. 8 = *SEG* XXXVII 1630, contained the name of a now lost saint.

known Egyptian saint, as appears from the *Life of Onnophrius*, which, like the *Life of Aaron*, is attributed to Paphnutius. The other saint, Stephen, can be none other than the saint who was venerated in the former temple of Isis at Philae.³⁷⁶ Two other inscriptions also point in the direction of Philae. Firstly, one mould contains the name of Theodore, who might well be the bishop of Philae.³⁷⁷ Another inscription is reminiscent of the inscription of the conquering cross in the *topos* of St Stephen: 'The cross always conquers'.³⁷⁸ These inscriptions indicate that the moulds have to be dated to the time after the dedication of the *topos* of St Stephen, for which we have argued a date after 567. Moreover, if Theodore of Philae is mentioned in the moulds, they must postdate 577, a year in which Theodore was still alive. The inscriptions on the moulds therefore suggest a date at the very end of the sixth, or more probably in the seventh century, when a cult of martyrs had definitively been established at Philae and their worship may have attracted pilgrims from near and far.

In addition to the official inscriptions already discussed, several other inscriptions have been preserved which tell us about the visitors to Christian Philae. The thirty-one inscriptions in Greek from the Christian period are almost equal the number of inscriptions in demotic and Greek (thirty-six), mainly pilgrimage inscriptions from the fourth and fifth centuries associated with the ancient cults. Often, the 'Christian' inscriptions contain the names of visitors, and thus continue the practice of leaving one's name on a sacred building. Seldom is the place of origin or ethnicity of the person specified, and therefore we do not usually know where these visitors came from. The inscriptions are also undated, which makes it hard to see patterns in them and leaves apart the possibility that inscriptions that are conveniently dated to 'Late Antiquity' may postdate the Arab conquest.

The inscriptions can be divided into three groups according to their location. The first group of inscriptions was incised after the *topos* of St Stephen had been built. Most of these can be found on the southern wall of the pronaos, to the west of the entrance through the second pylon, except for one on a column opposite the entrance (Fig. 5).³⁷⁹ All inscriptions begin with the word 'I' (ἐγώ), followed by the name of the visitor.³⁸⁰ Sometimes a cross is added to the inscription.³⁸¹ Some of the visitors explicitly added that they were of Nubian descent (Νοῦβια).³⁸² Five of eight names are Christian, three persons bear non-Christian names.³⁸³ According to Nautin, it is no coincidence that two of these non-Christian names, Dioskoros and Theodosios, are the names of the patriarchs who were exiled because of their anti-Chalcedonianism.³⁸⁴ However, both names are common in Late Antique Egypt, and it is impossible to be sure about such an identification, the more so because the third non-Christian name, which cannot be identified with a famous person, is left out of consideration.³⁸⁵

³⁷⁶ For another Egyptian mould containing the name 'St Stephen', see M.-C. Hellmann, C. Trost, *Lampes antiques de la Bibliothèque Nationale*, 2 vols (Paris, 1985-7) 1, no. 61. As the mould was said to have been found in 1902 and is dated to the sixth or seventh century, it could well have come from Elephantine.

³⁷⁷ Ballet and Mahmoud, 'Moules', no. 9 = *SEG* XXXVII 1631 (..]αϛ ἐνδοξον Θεόδωρ[ον ..]).

³⁷⁸ Ballet and Mahmoud, 'Moules', no. 7 = *SEG* XXXVII 1629 (.. σ]ταῦρος ἀεὶ νικᾷ).

³⁷⁹ *I.Philae* II 205-14. *I.Philae* II 215, the inscription on the column, contains only the word ἐγώ. Cf. Nautin, 'Conversion', 29-33.

³⁸⁰ *I.Philae* II 205-15. *I.Philae* II 209-10 probably belong together.

³⁸¹ *I.Philae* II 206, 212-4.

³⁸² *I.Philae* II 205, 208, 210, 213.

³⁸³ The Christian names are Ioseas, Iohannes (written in Coptic: ⲓⲱⲗⲁⲛⲛⲏⲥ), Ioseph, Aaron and Simeon.

³⁸⁴ Theodosios: *I.Philae* II 205 = *FHN* III 325. Dioskoros: *I.Philae* II 207.

³⁸⁵ *I.Philae* II 209-10 (Sophonias). See Nautin, 'Conversion', 32-3; *I.Philae* II, pp. 269, 272. Cf. *FHN* III, pp. 1181-2, in which it is mistakenly remarked that the Patriarch Theodosius had ordained Theodore of Philae.

A few other inscriptions in the temple of Isis can also be dated to the time after the turning of the temple of Isis into a church.³⁸⁶ A certain Ioseph and Anais incised inscriptions near the cross on the west side of the porch of the second pylon, that is, beside the entrance to the church,³⁸⁷ and a certain Viktor scratched his name in the roof of the Isis temple.³⁸⁸ Here the alpha and the omega were also incised twice, referring to the famous words of Christ: 'I am the alpha and the omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end' (Rev. 22.13).³⁸⁹ In the inner staircase of the second pylon was found an isopsephistic inscription. In isopsephistic inscriptions the sum of the words mentioned (in this case, θεός, ἄγιος, ἄγαθός) comes to the same amount (in this case, 284).³⁹⁰ The inscriptions by Strophion and Kyriakos, who incised their names on the back of the temple and on the first pylon, can probably also be dated to this period.³⁹¹

The second group of inscriptions comes from the East Church (Fig. 6). Recently a sketch map of the East Church has been discovered in the documents of Borchardt, to which he added in the margin several Greek inscriptions and their position within the church (see Appendix 5, nos. 1-4, for text and translation).³⁹² Unfortunately, the inscriptions and their position within the church can no longer be checked since the East Church is now under water, and we have to rely entirely on the notes left by Borchardt. However, he did mention the inscriptions in his diary: 'In the great Coptic Church, which is situated between four streets, (are) inscriptions, only names, but well cut and painted in with red paint'.³⁹³ Although in a letter Borchardt mentioned that the names had been found 'on some pillars', on the sketch map inscriptions are indicated on one pillar only, situated in the back row of pillars (nos. 3-4).³⁹⁴ Other inscriptions were found on the western wall at the back of the church (no. 1) and on the southern wall in the fourth, extra aisle of the church, directly left of the main entrance (no. 2). These inscriptions were thus incised on quite conspicuous places in the church, and they must date to the period in which the church was being renovated or rebuilt, that is, the sixth or seventh century, or later.³⁹⁵

Remarkably, of the nine readable names, four are the names of bishops of Philae: Markos (no. 1), Makedonios (no. 3), Theodoros and Severos (no. 4). The name Macedonius, which is rather rare in Egypt, particularly attracts the eye, and we might consider whether the names are part of a list of bishops. Nevertheless, except for Macedonius these names are quite common, and there is no indication of them being bishops.³⁹⁶ On the contrary, the only occupation mentioned is that of a deacon (no. 3). Just as with the stone carving containing the name of Theodoros, it is therefore better to be careful when identifying important persons on the basis of single names and assume that they belong to visitors to the church. An explanation for the rare name Macedonius would be that people from the region might have been willing to give the name of the legendary first bishop of Philae to their children.³⁹⁷

³⁸⁶ *L.Philae* II 229-33, 240-2.

³⁸⁷ *L.Philae* II 230 (with cross). *L.Philae* II, p. 306, mistakenly locates this inscription on the 'pylône sud'. Cf. Nautin, 'Conversion', 29, for the correct location ('pylône nord').

³⁸⁸ *L.Philae* II 233 (with cross).

³⁸⁹ *L.Philae* II 241-2.

³⁹⁰ *L.Philae* II 240. On isopsephism, see F. Dornseiff, *Das Alphabet in Mystik und Magie* (Leipzig, 1925²) 96-104.

³⁹¹ *L.Philae* II 229 (Kyriakos), 231-2 (by the same person: Strophion; the inscription has the 'T' form also used in the inscriptions from the *topos* of St Stephen).

³⁹² Dijkstra, 'Late Antique Inscriptions', 56-9.

³⁹³ L. Borchardt, Diary 1895-1896, 4 March 1896.

³⁹⁴ L. Borchardt, Letter to A. Erman, 20 March 1896.

³⁹⁵ Dijkstra, 'Late Antique Inscriptions', 55-7.

³⁹⁶ Cf. the bishop's list from Faras, published by S. Jakobielski, *A History of the Bishphric of Pachoras* (Warsaw, 1972) 190-201.

³⁹⁷ Dijkstra, 'Late Antique Inscriptions', 58-9.

There remains a group of inscriptions which although clearly Christian is hard to date.³⁹⁸ On the southern part of the island, inside the West Colonnade, one inscription complies entirely with the pattern known from Greek pilgrimage inscriptions: 'The *proskynema* of Kalasiris Patenoue + Panachatis (being) the father of Kalasiris'.³⁹⁹ The only difference with formulae of earlier times is that a cross has been added after the name Patenoue.⁴⁰⁰ Hence, it seems that this inscription belongs to a time when Christianity was still coexistent with the Ancient Egyptian cults, and that it has to be dated to before the sixth century. Outside the East Colonnade was a fragment of an inscription with a cross.⁴⁰¹ In the nearby temple of Arensnuphis, a Christian inscription has been found mentioning a certain Viktor, son of Paulos, and in the temple of Imhotep is one for the deacon Peteesis.⁴⁰² In front of the temple of Arensnuphis, amidst a heap of stelae and fragments of stelae, a piece was found with an acclamation to Jesus: 'Jesus Christ. Lord, remember Menas, the martyr'.⁴⁰³ Was Menas one of the martyrs venerated with St Stephen on the island, who were addressed in the building inscription of 577? Another alpha and omega have been incised in the west porch of the 'Kiosk of Trajan'.⁴⁰⁴ Finally, on a stone near the temple of Hathor was found the inscription 'Presbiteros +'. Whether a name is mentioned here, or a title, is unclear.⁴⁰⁵

On the northern part of the island, two Christian inscriptions have been found on the Gateway of Diocletian. The first mentions 'Apa Makarios and Petros, son(s?) of Iasios, of Philae', the only person or persons who certainly belonged to the Christian community of Philae.⁴⁰⁶ The other inscription has a cross, a crown and a palm branch, and reads 'Pachot the priest (?), son of Epiphanius'.⁴⁰⁷ The last Christian inscription to be mentioned here is from the West Church. It is an inscription similar to those in the *topos* of St Stephen and was incised on the outside wall: 'I + Zacharias, slave'.⁴⁰⁸ The inscriptions discussed here may have continued the practice of inscribing names on sacred buildings, and in the case of the Kalasiris inscription even the *proskynema* formula has been preserved; they also show that by the sixth century, the ways of expressing pilgrimage had attained a distinctively Christian shape.

³⁹⁸ *I.Philae* II 234-9, 243-4.

³⁹⁹ *I.Philae* II 234 (Τὸ προσκύνημα Κααλιρις (read Καλάσιρις) Πατενουε + Παναχάτις ὁ πατήρ Καλά(σι)ρις).

⁴⁰⁰ *I.Philae* II 234.

⁴⁰¹ *I.ThSy* 340.

⁴⁰² *I.Philae* II 235 (Πετεῆσις διάκ(ονος), 236 (Βίκ(τωρ) Παῦλος; for a similar abbreviation of the name Viktor, cf. *I.Philae* II 233).

⁴⁰³ *I.Philae* II 244 (the name Menas is partly reconstructed).

⁴⁰⁴ *I.Philae* II 243.

⁴⁰⁵ *I.ThSy* 332 (Πρεσβίτερος †).

⁴⁰⁶ *I.Philae* II 237 (Απα Μακάριος καὶ Πέτρος Ἰασίου Φιλῶν).

⁴⁰⁷ *I.Philae* II 238 (Παχώτ πρῆς Ἐπιφάνιος, in which read πρεσ(β)ύτερος). Or is πρῆς a nickname?).

⁴⁰⁸ *I.Philae* II 239 (Ἐγὼ + Ζαχαρίας δοῦλος).

10. The Reuse of Temples at Elephantine and Syene

A rather different situation from that of Philae existed in the two other 'towns' in the First Cataract area: Syene and Elephantine. Here there was not such a restricted area for habitation and many temples for which new purposes had to be found. We will now conduct a survey of the reuse of the temples in these places, which is greatly facilitated by recent excavations. Since no systematic survey of the material remains of Christian Elephantine and Syene as yet exists, it is necessary to describe some of the material in detail. Thus an idea can be given of the different ways their temples were reused.

The Reuse of Temples at Elephantine

On Elephantine Island, as we have already seen at the start of Part I, an entirely different fate awaited the great temple of Khnum from that of the temple of Isis at Philae (Fig. 7). Having lost its former pride, the temple had already fallen out of use by the fourth century. In the third or fourth century, fires were lit in the pronaos and the small northwest porch of the temple, the same phenomenon being noticed near a porch at the temple of Satet. These fires may be connected to the destructions of the temple terrace dating to the end of the third century.⁴⁰⁹ From this time onwards, the stones of the temple could have been reused for building purposes; this certainly happened after the second quarter of the fifth century.⁴¹⁰

The method of dismantling was not one of taking out the stones from top to bottom, but rather horizontally, and dependent on which part was free to be removed in the context of other building activities on the terrace.⁴¹¹ At an unknown time, a Ptolemaic porch used for processions in the temple's forecourt was razed to the ground, followed in the second quarter of the fifth century by a large building project covering the entire forecourt, in which a series of regularly built houses were erected. These have been interpreted as a military garrison,⁴¹² but, recently, doubts have been raised about the military settlement, and the house blocks have been reinterpreted as a neighbourhood for the poor.⁴¹³ The settlement probably existed for about a century, as after this time large parts of the former temple were pulled down, such as the pylon, the side porticoes and the pronaos.⁴¹⁴

The demolition is an indication that most of the temple was still standing in the sixth century. In the second half of that century, a church was built in the dismantled pronaos of the temple. This quadratic church of the type we encountered earlier at Philae ('Umgangsvierstützenbau'), and which can also be found in several places in Nubia, reused the former pronaos.⁴¹⁵ The foundations of two of its four piers had to be reworked, because the pavement of the pronaos had already been removed. The church probably consisted of a *baptisterium* in a northern room and a vaulted roof.⁴¹⁶ In any case the church remained in use into the ninth century, after which the situation is unclear.⁴¹⁷

⁴⁰⁹ Grossmann, *Elephantine II*, 15-6; H. Jaritz, *Elephantine III. Die Terrassen vor den Tempeln des Chnum und der Satet* (Mainz, 1980) 50-1.

⁴¹⁰ Grossmann, *Elephantine II*, 31; G. Haeny in Arnold, *Elephantine XXX*, 198.

⁴¹¹ Grossmann, *Elephantine II*, 30-1.

⁴¹² Grossmann, *Elephantine II*, 16-29. Cf. R.D. Gempeler, *Elephantine X. Die Keramik römischer bis früh-arabischer Zeit* (Mainz, 1992) 50.

⁴¹³ Arnold, *Elephantine XXX*, 20-1, 39-40. Cf., however, Grossmann, *Christliche Architektur*, 357 (n. 717).

⁴¹⁴ Grossmann, *Elephantine II*, 31-3.

⁴¹⁵ Grossmann, *Christliche Architektur*, 38, with more parallels.

⁴¹⁶ Grossmann in Kaiser *et al.*, '1. Grabungsbericht', 101-7; G. Grimm in W. Kaiser *et al.*, 'Stadt und Tempel von Elephantine. Fünfter Grabungsbericht', *MDAIK* 31 (1975) 39-84 at 79; Grossmann,

A badly preserved building (T 43) with a currently unknown function was found directly to the north of the church in the Khnum temple. In the middle of one of the rooms of this plastered structure, stone plates were aligned in a demicircle. Next to it was found a thick substance that may have had something to do with ritual purposes. On account of these features the building has been interpreted as a 'chapel' and dated to the fifth or sixth century. It could well have had a connection of some sort with the church just across the street, but unfortunately the scanty remains cannot provide us with a more complete picture.⁴¹⁸ The excavators also assumed a connection with the house T 11, to the northeast of the church, but for the precise relationship we are, again, left in the dark.⁴¹⁹

It seems that the dismantling of the Khnum temple had but one aim: to reuse its precious stones as building material. This process was slow, and was to a large degree determined by other building activities in the area, like the building of house blocks on the forecourt and a church in the pronaos. Blocks from the temple have also been discovered in the foundations of Late Antique houses nearby;⁴²⁰ other blocks were transported across the river to strengthen the town wall of Syene.⁴²¹

Another temple on Elephantine, known as 'Temple X', also served building purposes in Syene for many of its blocks have been found there. The temple was built by Ptolemy IV and was completely razed to the ground in Late Antiquity, which is why its original location on Elephantine is unknown.⁴²² The inspector of the Egyptian Antiquities Service at Aswan, who excavated 'around the temple of Isis at Aswan' in 1961-1963, collected these blocks but left not a single note.⁴²³ Apparently, he dumped the ones he found in the nearby temple of Isis, after which they were examined in the 1970s and published.⁴²⁴

In the autumn of 1907, the remains of a building, interpreted as a temple of the same Ptolemy IV which had been renovated by the Roman Emperors Tiberius, Claudius and Trajan, were discovered north of the English church in Aswan (the site of the present Coptic church, see Fig. 8).⁴²⁵ Earlier, in 1895, a paved road had been

Elephantine II, 22, 75-111; Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens* 138. Cf. Gempeler, *Elephantine X*, 47, who dates the church to the third quarter of the sixth century or slightly later.

⁴¹⁷ Cf. Grossmann, *Elephantine II*, 29-38, who distinguishes three 'Bebauungsphasen' (I: second half fifth-second half sixth century; II: second half sixth century-seventh century; III: seventh century), with the alternative chronology proposed by Gempeler, *Elephantine X*, 45-51, who extends the habitation of the forecourt into the ninth century. See, most recently, Arnold, *Elephantine XXX*, 47, 77, 102-3, who distinguishes three 'Bauschichten' (I: second half fifth-sixth century; II: seventh century; III: ninth century).

⁴¹⁸ G. Haeny in W. Kaiser *et al.*, 'Stadt und Tempel von Elephantine. Zweiter Grabungsbericht', *MDAIK* 27 (1971) 181-201 at 191, in W. Kaiser *et al.*, 'Stadt und Tempel von Elephantine. Dritter Grabungsbericht', *MDAIK* 28 (1972) 157-200 at 174-6, and in Arnold, *Elephantine XXX*, 198-200.

⁴¹⁹ Grossmann in Kaiser *et al.*, '2. Grabungsbericht', 186; Grimm in Kaiser *et al.*, '5. Grabungsbericht', 79.

⁴²⁰ E.g. in house M 10, which was built against the temple's rear wall. See Arnold, *Elephantine XXX*, 47.

⁴²¹ H. Jaritz, 'On Three Townsites in the Upper Thebaid', *CRIPPEL* 8 (1986) 37-42 at 40; Arnold, *Elephantine XXX*, 20. Cf. E. Bresciani and S. Pernigotti, *Assuan* (Pisa, 1978) 308-9.

⁴²² É. Laskowska-Kusztal, *Elephantine XV. Die Dekorfragmente der ptolemäisch-römischen Tempel von Elephantine* (Mainz, 1996) 15-21; Kaiser, *Elephantine*, 54.

⁴²³ J. Leclant, 'Fouilles et travaux en Égypte et au Soudan, 1960-1961', *Or* 31 (1962) 197-222 at 203 and 'Fouilles et travaux, 1962-1963', *Or* 33 (1964) 337-404 at 349 (n. 1); Bresciani and Pernigotti, *Assuan*, 9, 14-5, 309-10. Cf. W. Kornfeld, 'Aramäische Sarkophagen in Assuan', *WZKM* 61 (1967) 9-16, who published three Aramaic sandstone sarcophagi found by the inspector about 200 m from the temple of Isis.

⁴²⁴ Cf. the discussion of the material by Bresciani and Pernigotti, *Assuan*, 305-11.

⁴²⁵ 'Recent Discoveries in Egypt', *PSBA* 30 (1908) 72-4 at 73-4. Without doubt, this is the same site as the one mentioned by J. de Morgan *et al.*, *Catalogue des monuments et inscriptions de l'Égypte antique*, 3 vols (Vienna, 1894-1909) 1.57: 'Un peu au sud de ce temple en existait un second dont les débris sont enfouis sous plusieurs mètres de sable mêlé de briques sèches; quelques pierres en avaient été tirées autrefois pour être employées à la construction de murs; d'après les traces d'inscriptions qu'elles

found immediately west of the site with statue bases dedicated to Germanicus, Trajan, Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius. To the east of the road, a limestone block had been found which was interpreted as part of a gate.⁴²⁶ In 1904, another statue base was found dedicated to the Emperor Diadumenianus (217/218).⁴²⁷ Apparently the building stood at the end of the paved road. Inside the building, the excavators found a granite column 'having a cross within a circle sculptured in relief on it'. Other columns contained 'carved 'Byzantine' designs'. The objects found were a statue base, whose inscription had been erased and replaced by a cross carved within a circle, another statue base and an altar dedicated to Jupiter whose inscriptions had also been erased. On account of these features, the excavators thought that the 'temple of Ptolemy IV' had been reused as a church in Christian times.⁴²⁸

Although the objects found have since vanished, the exact location is unclear and the excavators left no precise documentation, this interpretation is probably false.⁴²⁹ In a letter of 15 January 1909, a French Egyptologist published the inscription on a rose granite altar found in the area of 'the remains of a Coptic church with granite columns' and 'several bases with Latin inscriptions'. The badly preserved inscription is dedicated to Jupiter Heliopolitanus, and the dedicant is apparently from Berytus (modern Beirut).⁴³⁰ Evidently, this description refers to the same site as the one excavated in 1895 and 1907, and suggests rather that the building was a church and not a temple reused as a church. As it cannot be a coincidence that the decorated fragments found in Aswan and belonging to the sacral complex that Ptolemy IV built on Elephantine ('Baukomplex X') date to the same reign as the building excavated at the beginning of the twentieth century, it seems likely that the building consisted of these blocks. In that case, the inspector probably took the blocks from the site of the 'temple of Ptolemy IV' and deposited them in the temple of Isis. If so, the alleged converted temple is not a temple at all, as has been maintained, but a church constructed of reused blocks from 'Temple X'.⁴³¹ These blocks were of a relatively small size, which could have been the reason why they were transported across the river.⁴³²

A considerable number of blocks from another dismantled temple, the so-called 'Temple Y', were also recovered. The remains of this Roman temple consist of two complexes of blocks, one transported at the beginning of the twentieth century to Cairo, the other found reused in a Late Antique quay wall. The quay wall was found near a monumental stairway built in Roman times in the harbour in the northeastern part of the antique town of Elephantine.⁴³³ 'Temple Y' would presumably have stood

portent, on peut établir que ce temple était lui aussi ptolémaïque et peut-être même de l'époque de Ptolémée IV Philopator comme le précédent'.

⁴²⁶ A.H. Sayce, 'Roman Inscriptions at Assuân', *PSBA* 18 (1896) 107-9.

⁴²⁷ 'Recent Discoveries', 74.

⁴²⁸ 'Recent Discoveries', 73.

⁴²⁹ As already hinted at by Laskowska-Kusztal, *Elephantine XV*, 21 (n. 181): 'Die Geschlossenheit des Dekorationskomplexes V und seine Beziehung zu einem Bauwerk auf Elephantine sind so gut begründet, da die Zugehörigkeit der in Assuan belegten Stücke zu dem nördlich der anglikanischen Kirche befindlichen Bauwerk ausgeschlossen ist (...). Die Beziehungen wären möglich nur bei der Annahme, da die fraglichen Fragmente in diesem Bauwerk wiederverwendet wurden'. See also J. Leclant, 'Fouilles et travaux en Égypte et au Soudan, 1981-1982', *Or* 52 (1983) 461-542 at 511; E. Lanciers, 'Die ägyptischen Tempelbauten zur Zeit des Ptolemaios V. Epiphanes (204-180 v.Chr.)', *MDAIK* 43 (1987) 173-82 at 176.

⁴³⁰ S. de Ricci, 'Lettres d'Égypte', *Académie des inscriptions et belles lettres. Comptes rendus des séances* (1909) 144-65 at 147-8 (quote on p. 147): 'On a notamment découvert, avec les ruines d'une église copte à colonnes de granit, plusieurs bases à inscriptions latines (...). Les derniers travaux ont amené la découverte d'un lourd autel de granit rose portant sur sa face antérieure une inscription fort mal conservée'.

⁴³¹ Cf. Bresciani and Pernigotti, *Assuan*, 14; Jaritz, 'Three Townsites', 40.

⁴³² Laskowska-Kusztal, *Elephantine XV*, 21.

⁴³³ E. Laskowska-Kusztal in G. Dreyer *et al.*, 'Stadt und Tempel von Elephantine. 31. und 32. Grabungsbericht', forthcoming. Cf. Laskowska-Kusztal, *Elephantine XV*, 21-5.

not far away.⁴³⁴ During a first exploration of the site in 1985, the wall was interpreted as belonging to a church on the grounds that crosses and ‘a Coptic inscription’ had been incised on the wall. Moreover, its orientation was similar to that of the church in the pronaos of the Khnum temple and sandstone columns with crosses had been found on the platform above the wall. Thus, the quay wall was interpreted as, ‘a nowadays uncovered segment of the foundation of the northern wall of a church that used to be quite large’.⁴³⁵ Recently, during excavations from 2000 until 2002, this wall could be further explored and was fully excavated.⁴³⁶

The excavations revealed constructions from the Roman until the Arab period, which are now situated about 50 m from the Nile but would once have stood on the Nile. In Late Antiquity, the quay wall was renovated several times (‘Bauschichten’ E-B). The last of these levels, which is dated on the basis of the pottery to the middle of the sixth century, consisted almost exclusively of blocks from ‘Temple Y’ (walls M 1273 and 1274; Fig. 9). In the seventh century, a ‘latrine’ was built in front of the wall, partly covering the side that faced the Nile, and several other renovation works were carried out in the area.⁴³⁷ On the blocks, the excavations have revealed about twenty-two crosses, five representations of boats and four Greek inscriptions, which have recently been published (see Appendix 5, nos. 5-8, for text and translation).⁴³⁸ Because the wall was dated to the middle of the sixth century and the area was renovated in the seventh century, they seem to date to around the second half of the sixth century.

The first inscription (no. 5), of which some letters have been lost to the left, contains the name of a Dios, son of Pasmēt, the same regional name constructed with the Egyptian word *mdw*, the staff of Khnum, as that of some of the last priests of Philae.⁴³⁹ His son Dios was an *actuarius*, an official involved in the distribution of the *annona* in the Late Antique army, who probably belonged to the regiment of Elephantine.⁴⁴⁰ The second inscription (no. 6) only contains an indiction year and a cross without a context, but is an indication of the way the blocks from ‘Temple Y’ were reused in the quay wall. The inscription was incised on a block with an Ancient Egyptian relief and clearly turned round. While leaving most of the relief intact, part of it was effaced and incised with the inscription. The third inscription (no. 7) reads ‘one (?) God is the helper’, which is a variant of the formula ‘there is one God who helps’ (εἷς Θεὸς ὁ βοηθῶν). This Christian formula was common throughout the Mediterranean and is also used in one of the building inscriptions from Philae.⁴⁴¹

A fourth inscription (no. 8), which was incised underneath no. 7, commemorates the inundation of the Nile on 17/18 September (Fig. 10). Several Nile level inscriptions which commemorate an extremely high Nile level and date to pre-Christian times have been preserved, and the inscription starts with the familiar formula ‘the Nile rose to...’. However, in this case the inundation level is marked by ‘the feet (?) of that footbench of the cross’, probably referring to the partly preserved

⁴³⁴ Kaiser, *Elephantine*, 53-4.

⁴³⁵ H. Jaritz in W. Kaiser *et al.*, ‘Stadt und Tempel von Elephantine. 13./14. Grabungsbericht’, *MDAIK* 43 (1987) 75-114 at 107.

⁴³⁶ After the excavations, the blocks were taken out, and are planned to be part of a reconstruction of ‘Temple Y’ in the archaeological park on the island. This reconstruction is being supervised by C. Ubertini. I would like to thank him and S. Schönerberger for discussing the material with me.

⁴³⁷ S. Schönerberger in G. Dreyer *et al.*, ‘Stadt und Tempel von Elephantine. 28./29./30. Grabungsbericht’, *MDAIK* 58 (2002) 157-225 at 200-9.

⁴³⁸ Crosses: Y 21, 31, 37 (three times), 39, 44, 51, 65-6 (three times), 80, 86, 119, 125, 211 (twice), 212, 213, 602, 605. Boats: YE 16 (two boats), Y 21, 48, 836. Inscriptions: Y 39, 51 (twice), 212. For the inscriptions, see Dijkstra, ‘Late Antique Inscriptions’, 59-66 (Figs. 3-5).

⁴³⁹ This is the only attestation of the name Pasmēt in inscriptions. For Pasmēt in the papyri, see *SB* XIV 12167 B 65; *P.Edmondstone* 3, 20; *P.Lond.* V 1734.26; *P.Münch.* I 2.17; *O.Wilck.* 287.3 (Πα...cμη^τ).

⁴⁴⁰ Mitthof, *Annona militaris* 1, 152-6.

⁴⁴¹ *I.Philae* II 227.1. See E. Peterson, *Εἷς Θεός. Epigraphische, formgeschichtliche und religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen* (Göttingen, 1926); Trombley, *Hellenic Religion* 1, 120-1.

cross underneath the inscription. It is well known that the recording of Nile levels continued into Late Antiquity, as appears, for example, from the Nilometers at Elephantine and Philae that were still in use in this period.⁴⁴² Yet, the unique formulation of this inscription demonstrates that the Nile cult had attained a Christian shape in Late Antiquity.⁴⁴³

The excavations have also revealed that there is no connection with other walls on the platform. Therefore its alleged function as the north wall of a church can be discarded. Nevertheless, a granite base found during the recent campaign confirmed the proximity of a Christian building. It may well have been the rectangular structure found on the platform (M 1276), of which only three layers of blocks have been preserved but which showed similarities to the church in the pronaos of the Khnum temple and other Late Antique buildings on Elephantine.⁴⁴⁴ Moreover, this building stood on the same level as the horizontal space constructed above walls 1273 and 1274.⁴⁴⁵ It seems, then, that this building can tentatively be identified with a church that was built on the platform after the quay wall was renovated in the middle of the sixth century. This would be a remarkable continuity with practices from time immemorial. Terraces with the Ancient Egyptian temples of Khnum and Satet on top are known from the same island, with the walls incised with graffiti.⁴⁴⁶ Our evidence suggests that this practice continued into the Christian period, and that pilgrims on boats disembarked on the island to ascend to their place of worship in the same way as many centuries before.

Having identified at least two churches on the island, probably both dating to the second half of the sixth century, we cannot pass over parts of at least a third one having found scattered around the island.⁴⁴⁷ Column bases, shafts and other building material of red Aswan granite have been reconstructed into the so-called 'Christian basilica' which is nowadays the first in a row of reconstructed buildings in the archaeological park on Elephantine. The reconstruction consists of finds from different parts of the island. They probably once belonged to a large church that no doubt was located in the northern area of the town on the highest layers of the ruin hill and that was dated, again, to the second half of the sixth century. The rest of the material probably not only belonged to this church but also to other Christian buildings on Elephantine which have now been lost.⁴⁴⁸

The Reuse of Temples at Syene

Whereas Elephantine has been thoroughly excavated since the 1960s, much of ancient Syene still needs to be discovered. The site is almost entirely covered by the modern town of Aswan and excavations have been carried out only incidentally (Fig. 8). Most

⁴⁴² Crosses have been found on both Nilometers, see for Philae Lyons, *Report on the Island and Temples*, 34, and for Elephantine *Description de l'Égypte* 1, Pl. 33.

⁴⁴³ Dijkstra, 'Late Antique Inscriptions', 65-6, with references.

⁴⁴⁴ Schönenberger in Dreyer *et al.*, '28./29./30. Grabungsbericht', 206.

⁴⁴⁵ Schönenberger in Dreyer *et al.*, '28./29./30. Grabungsbericht', 207.

⁴⁴⁶ Jaritz, *Elephantine III*, F. Junge, *Elephantine XI. Funde und Bauteile 1.-7. Kampagne, 1969-1976* (Mainz, 1987) 40-3.

⁴⁴⁷ Cf. MacCoull, 'Christianity', 153 (though speaking of two more churches), Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, 138, who only knows of the church in the pronaos of Khnum temple, and Arnold, *Elephantine XXX*, 41, who mentions three churches: the 'basilica', the church in the pronaos of Khnum temple and the 'chapel' in house T 43, although the function of the latter building is far from certain.

⁴⁴⁸ Parts of the 'basilica' had already been noticed during earlier German excavations: W. Honroth, O. Rubensohn, F. Zucker, 'Bericht über die Ausgrabungen auf Elephantine in den Jahren 1906-1908', *ZÄS* 46 (1909) 14-61 at 47. See further: Grossmann in Kaiser *et al.*, '2. Grabungsbericht', 189, and '3. Grabungsbericht', 182-3; W. Kaiser in Kaiser *et al.*, 'Stadt und Tempel von Elephantine. Vierter Grabungsbericht', *MDAIK* 30 (1974) 65-90 at 71, and *Elephantine*, 47; Arnold, *Elephantine XXX*, 26-8. Note that in the second report the church is dated on the basis of the capitals to the first half of the sixth century, whereas in the third report it is dated to the second half of that century.

of the work done so far has concentrated on the temple of Isis, a wonderfully preserved, almost unknown temple in the middle of modern Aswan. The temple was discovered in 1871 by engineers who were working on a railway, and published by the Egyptologist Auguste Mariette (1821-1881) shortly afterwards.⁴⁴⁹ He made a ground plan, side and frontal view of the temple, and published some of the reliefs. In 1894, another Egyptologist, Jacques de Morgan (1857-1924), together with his team, copied the plans by Mariette, but in addition indicated on two cross-sections the amount of rubble that had been taken away.⁴⁵⁰ On these cross-sections, it can be seen that a slope of rubble came down from the walls to the middle. Apparently, the interior of the temple had been filled up, and the first excavators made the holes that are still visible today at the top of the façade, both left and right, to enter the temple. De Morgan also edited the reliefs visible to him. He had removed the rubble in front of the façade down to the bottom, but the lower registers had already been covered again by the time of publication.⁴⁵¹

For a long time the temple languished, as can be seen by reading through Baedeker and other travel books. For example, in the French Baedeker edition of 1898, mention is made of the temple 'which is hardly worth being seen'.⁴⁵² The outside was still covered with rubble (except for the façade), just as the two side chapels on the inside. In the English edition of 1908, the side chapels seem to have been cleared for the first time. Some additional information is given on the hall in front of the naos, 'in which stand the bases of several statues and sacred boats'.⁴⁵³ This situation was still unchanged in 1928 and 1929,⁴⁵⁴ but the *Guide Bleu* of 1950 only mentions bark stands.⁴⁵⁵ As mentioned above, the inspector of Aswan used the Isis temple as a storage room for blocks found in the neighbourhood during excavations in 1961-1963.

All this material, together with the reliefs and a ground plan of the Isis temple, were published by an Italian team in 1978. Partly with the help of a bulldozer they laid bare the entire temple, which had become encroached upon by modern houses from all sides. The publication was prepared during two campaigns, after which the readings of the reliefs were checked several times in subsequent years.⁴⁵⁶ The temple was dedicated to Isis 'at the head of the army', no doubt connected to Syene's function as a garrison in the Graeco-Roman period.⁴⁵⁷ The decoration has remained unfinished, for only in the most important places, at the main entrances (B, C and E) and on the east wall of the naos (F), can reliefs be found (Fig. 11). They contain the cartouches of Ptolemy III and his successor Ptolemy IV. Originally, the temple was surrounded by a temenos wall which has been partly recovered. The interior consists of a hall with two square pillars (P I and P II) and a naos (F) with two side chapels (H and J). It is possible that the temple extended towards the west with walls of mudbrick, but this part has remained as yet unexcavated.

⁴⁴⁹ A. Mariette, G. Maspero, *Monuments divers recueillis en Égypte et en Nubie*, 2 vols (Paris, 1872-89) 2.6 (Pls. 22-6). Cf. A. Mariette, *Itinéraire de la Haute-Égypte* (Alexandria, 1872) 249.

⁴⁵⁰ De Morgan *et al.*, *Catalogue* 1, 47-57.

⁴⁵¹ De Morgan *et al.*, *Catalogue* 1, 51.

⁴⁵² K. Baedeker, *Égypte. Manuel du voyageur* (Leipzig, 1898) 331-2. Cf. the German edition of 1902⁵ (p. 330), the French edition of 1903² (p. 329) and the German edition of 1906⁶ (p. 335).

⁴⁵³ K. Baedeker, *Egypt and the Sudan. Handbook for Travellers* (Leipzig, 1908⁶) 350.

⁴⁵⁴ K. Baedeker, *Ägypten und der Sūdān. Handbuch für Reisende* (Leipzig, 1928⁸) 370, and *Egypt and the Sudan. Handbook for Travellers* (Leipzig, 1929⁸) 381.

⁴⁵⁵ M. Band, *Guide Bleu. Égypte* (Paris, 1950) 595-6.

⁴⁵⁶ Bresciani and Pernigotti, *Assuan*, 16. Cf. J. Leclant, 'Fouilles et travaux en Égypte et au Soudan, 1969-1970', *Or.* 40 (1971) 224-66 at 244 (Figs. 41-2); 'Fouilles et travaux, 1970-1971', *Or.* 41 (1972) 249-91 at 268; 'Fouilles et travaux, 1971-1972', *Or.* 42 (1973) 393-440 at 420-1; 'Fouilles et travaux, 1975-1976', *Or.* 46 (1977) 233-99 at 266; 'Fouilles et travaux, 1977-1978', *Or.* 48 (1979) 340-412 at 384. A preliminary report on the blocks was published by S. Pernigotti, 'Notizia preliminare su alcuni blocchi di Assuan', *SCO* 21 (1972) 314-20.

⁴⁵⁷ Bresciani and Pernigotti, *Assuan*, 21-6.

The excavators also found traces of the reuse of the temple as a church. First of all, they observed that several of the reliefs had been hacked away. Moreover, in the pillared hall they found Christian figurative graffiti representing boats and a rosette, crosses and Coptic inscriptions; the wall niches, the hacked away reliefs and certain adaptations in the pavement were also ascribed to the period of reuse as a church. Last but not least, the excavators found two Christian wall paintings which were in a bad state of preservation but were photographed with an infrared camera. The frescoes were found about 1 m above the ground and had a height of about 0.95 m. They were positioned opposite each other on the south wall of the northern pillar (P I) and on the north wall of the southern pillar (P II). On P I, a female figure seated on a throne and three persons standing on either side of her were depicted in blue, red and black paint. On the southern pillar three bearded figures and an angel were depicted.⁴⁵⁸ Both paintings were enclosed by red frames. Because of the painting showing a seated Mary, the church was thought to have been dedicated to Mary, thus demonstrating another case of adoption of a former cult of Isis. The excavators concluded that the church was located in the pillared hall D and assumed that the door to the naos E must either have contained an apse or other structure closing off this room, for the reliefs in the naos remained untouched. The converted temple would then have formed a three aisled church and the two side chapels could have been used by the clergy.⁴⁵⁹

Recently, Grossmann has challenged this view and suggested that the temple of Isis at Aswan was the only example of a converted temple using the naos in Egypt.⁴⁶⁰ In 2000, excavations of the mudbrick houses dating to the Late Antique and Arab periods around the temple of Isis were reopened.⁴⁶¹ Because the Italian team concentrated on the publication of the Ancient Egyptian reliefs and blocks, they had paid less attention to the graffiti and the reuse of the temple after the Graeco-Roman period. These were now fully explored during three campaigns from 2001 until 2003.⁴⁶² Here we will concentrate on how the temple was reused as a church; without passing over the graffiti that are informative about the reuse however.

In 1978, several of these inscriptions were published. Two Greek and three demotic inscriptions were found on the wall of the façade outside, but most were demotic and hieroglyphic inscriptions from the pillared hall possibly ranging in date from the reign of Ptolemy V (187 BC) to that of Commodus (184 AD).⁴⁶³ Just as at Philae, the form of these inscriptions is that of pilgrimage inscriptions, namely *rn-f mne ty*, 'may his name remain here', or they simply contain the names of the dedicants. In addition to the publication of these texts, traces of many more inscriptions were seen but on account of their poor preservation not deemed worthy of publication.⁴⁶⁴ In addition to these Graeco-Roman inscriptions, eight names written crudely in Coptic on the inside of the main entrance were also published, most of

⁴⁵⁸ Cf. the dubious identification of the figures by MacCoull, 'Christianity', 154, with Shenoute, Antony and Pachomius, the angel reading the latter's Rule.

⁴⁵⁹ Bresciani and Pernigotti, *Assuan*, 38-41 (with Pls. XXVII and XXVIII).

⁴⁶⁰ Grossmann, 'Tempel', 194.

⁴⁶¹ L. Giddy, 'Digging Diary 2000', *Egyptian Archaeology* 18 (2001) 28-32 at 32, and 'Digging Diary 2000-1', *Egyptian Archaeology* 19 (2001) 28-32 at 30; N. Grimal, E. Adly, 'Fouilles et travaux en Égypte et au Soudan, 2000-2002', *Or* 72 (2003) 1-127 at 92, and 'Fouilles et travaux, 2002-2003', *Or* 73 (2004) 1-149 at 109-10. For earlier work around the temple of Isis, see H. Jaritz, M. Rodziewicz, 'Syene – Review of the Urban Remains and Its Pottery', *MDAIK* 50 (1994) 115-41, and 'Syene – Investigation of the Urban Remains in the Vicinity of the Temple of Isis (II)', *MDAIK* 52 (1996) 233-49.

⁴⁶² An archaeological report on the reuse of the temple and a catalogue of the graffiti from the temple of Isis are in preparation by the author, see Grimal and Adly, 'Fouilles et travaux, 2002-2003', 109.

⁴⁶³ P.W. Pestman, 'Haronnophris and Chaonnophris. Two Indigenous Pharaohs in Ptolemaic Egypt (205-186 B.C.)', in S.P. Vleeming (ed.), *Hundred-Gated Thebes. Acts of a Colloquium on Thebes and the Theban Area in the Graeco-Roman Period* (Leiden, 1995) 101-37 at 136, who corrects the date of Bresciani and Pernigotti, *Assuan*, 141-2 (8 March 189) to 7 March 187, if the inscription indeed dates to the reign of Ptolemy V.

⁴⁶⁴ Bresciani and Pernigotti, *Assuan*, 121-46.

them preceded by a cross. The names are very common and seem to have been written on the wall in pairs.⁴⁶⁵

Apart from these published inscriptions, however, the walls of the temple contain many more graffiti, especially figurative graffiti, of which only a few are mentioned in the publication of 1978, and which tell us perhaps even more about the reuse of the temple as a church. For example, the crosses near the side entrance (C) indicate that laymen probably entered the church from this side and that the main entrance was closed or only used for special occasions. The Christian graffiti in the hall show that at the time of the reuse of the church, the floor was still at the same level. Neither of the secondary sanctuaries (H and J) bears any Christian vestiges. However, the main sanctuary (F) contains large *dipinti* probably added later and painted in brown paint high upon the walls. The concentration of crosses and paintings in the pillared hall indicates that this room was most probably used as the interior of the church proper, and not the naos. This assumption is supported by the place where the main altar of the church would have stood.

Of the four altars standing in the temple today, one is *in situ*. This altar once stood in a vertical position in the naos but has now fallen down. Two more altars that stand in a west-east line on both sides of pillar P I in room D may originally have stood elsewhere in the sanctuary. As the altars mentioned thus far all three bear the cartouches of Ptolemy X, the two in D having identical inscriptions, these two altars probably once stood in the side chapels (H and J). Perhaps they were moved to D to create an 'Umgangsvierstützenbau', the quadratic form we encountered before at Philae and Elephantine, and which was common in Nubian churches. The altar, the one that is *in situ*, is unlikely to have been used as the main altar in the church, however. The naos is very deep and dark, and the distance between clergymen and laymen would have been too far: looking from D through door E one could hardly have seen the clergymen performing their duties. Moreover, there is no trace of an apse or other structure which would have been expected at the east end of a church. Finally, if the altar in the naos was used as the main altar in Christian times, the hieroglyphs on it would have been hacked away, as was common practice. There is thus no reason to assume that this altar was reused as the main altar of the church.

The fourth altar does fulfil the requirements. It does not contain any inscriptions, and is clearly not *in situ*, as a recent removal of the altar from the wall has shown. The altar is made of red Aswan granite and is 86 cm high.⁴⁶⁶ It is interesting to compare this altar to similar altars found on nearby Philae.⁴⁶⁷ Two altars of red Aswan granite have been found inside the temple of Isis. These altars correspond in size to the three altars from the reign of Ptolemy X in the Isis temple of Aswan (heights between 110 and 120 cm). By contrast, the reused altar in the pronaos at Philae is different in size, and is 90 cm high. It served as the main altar of a church, the *topos* of St Stephen. The difference with the altar of the Isis temple at Aswan is that the back of the latter altar has remained unworked, as if it was intended to be put against a wall. Moreover, it contains a feature that the other altars do not have: a small ridge forming a circle with two holes in it on top of the altar, the original function of which remains unclear.⁴⁶⁸ Nonetheless, as the altar is about the same height as the reused altar in the

⁴⁶⁵ The names are from top to bottom and from left to right: Kosmas (ΚΟΣΜΑ), Kosmas (ΚΟΣΜΑ), Senoute (ΣΗΝΟΥΤΕ), Menas (ΜΗΝΑΣ), Menas (ΜΗΝΑΣ; *ed.princ.* reads ΠΑΗΣΙΣ), Senoute (ΣΗΝΟΥΤΕ), Parnouthis (ΠΑΡΝΟΥΘΙΣ), and Parnouthis (ΠΑΡΝΟΥΘΙΣ). Cf. Bresciani and Pernigotti, *Assuan*, 146 (Pl. XLVII).

⁴⁶⁶ Dimensions below: 86.5 x 95 cm; above: 90 x 102 cm. Cf. the measurements by Bresciani and Pernigotti, *Assuan*, 34.

⁴⁶⁷ F.L.I. Griffith, 'Four Granite Stands at Philae', *BIFAO* 30 (1930) 127-30. A fourth altar not mentioned here is a statue base from the reign of Ptolemy VI which was found on el-Hesa.

⁴⁶⁸ The altar may have been used as a statue base, the holes (of which one has been lost) serving for attachment of the statue (personal communication from P. Grossmann). Cf. Bresciani and Pernigotti, *Assuan*, 34, who interpret the altar as intended for libations.

topos of St Stephen at Philae, there can hardly be any doubt that it was used as the main altar in the church inside the temple of Isis at Syene.

What did the ground plan of the church look like? An important way of deciding this, is to locate the place where the altar stood. The reconstruction is made particularly difficult by the intensive reuse of the building through the ages and the gradual filling of the interior with rubble. These factors have caused several disturbances in the original pavement, which at certain places has disappeared entirely. Three identical, quadratic holes were cut out behind the door into the naos (E), which formed a triangle. The beams stuck in these holes could have formed a construction to fence off the main sanctuary (F). The construction was perhaps supported by a large hole in the northwestern corner of the sanctuary. Traces on the walls of E show that the construction may have been several metres high and would have hidden the sanctuary from sight. This structure almost certainly did not consist of a round apse but more probably had a rectangular shape, a not uncommon feature in Egyptian churches.⁴⁶⁹ The main altar would have stood in front of the apse, that is, in front of E on approximately the same line as the altar Db. On this spot a large disturbance was found caused by fire. The unworked rear side would have been turned towards the east and in this way would not have disturbed the laymen.

The area where the main altar stood was called the **presbyterium** and was only accessible to clergymen. It was closed off by screens (**cancelli**) which were generally less than 1 m in height and would have left small rectangular marks (**stipites**) in the pavement.⁴⁷⁰ Unfortunately, this is in large part unclear due to the disturbances. However, a large post hole was found between pillars P I and P II. The screen wall could have run between the southeastern corner of P I and the northeastern corner of P II, as well as from these corners towards the east wall of D. A small post hole on the south side may have been part of the screen wall but, admittedly, there are no further traces left.

Another hole, on the south side of P II is in line with the other large posthole and could have been part of an extension of the screen to the south of the pillar. The three sanctuaries probably remained in function for clerical purposes. Confusingly, in Christian architecture the place where the Eucharist was celebrated was also designated 'sanctuary'. The room was divided into several separate rooms, such as the apse, the **presbyterium** and side-rooms which were intended as the changing rooms for clerics or as a storage room for liturgical instruments, book rolls and church administration.⁴⁷¹ As the church did not contain a seat for the bishop (**synthronon**), this church was certainly not an episcopal church.⁴⁷² Both posts of the door to the main sanctuary (E), were worked to contain frescoes and originally would have contained reliefs.

Some of the niches are certainly from the Christian period, for temples usually did not contain wall niches. These niches are of two types: one that is rectangular in shape and the other, if also rectangular, containing beams above and below to close off the niche. It seems that these niches were part of the interior of the church: four on the south wall of D, one in the case of the east and west walls, and one in the naos (F): proof of its usage in Christian times.⁴⁷³ These niches were used for utilitarian purposes, like storing the liturgical vessels and books.⁴⁷⁴ At a later time, all the niches were widened and some other, simpler niches were added for domestic purposes. Use of the former church as housing or perhaps stables also appears from holes in the walls

⁴⁶⁹ Grossmann, *Christliche Architektur*, 116-8.

⁴⁷⁰ Grossmann, *Christliche Architektur*, 122-5.

⁴⁷¹ Grossmann, *Christliche Architektur*, 113-6.

⁴⁷² Grossmann, *Christliche Architektur*, 118, 189-91.

⁴⁷³ Grossmann, *Christliche Architektur*, 109-10, 184-6.

⁴⁷⁴ Grossmann, *Christliche Architektur*, 186.

intended for ropes to tether animals. Other holes could have served to divide the space into smaller units.

Although an exact ground plan of the church in the temple of Isis at Aswan cannot be established due to the disturbances in the pavement, a reconstruction of the reuse of the temple does reveal that it was first turned into a modest church. This church only occupied a small part of the former temple, namely the hall in front of the naos. This is a common feature of transformations of temples into churches in Egypt and Nubia, and has a nice parallel in the nearby temple of Isis at Philae. Unlike the main temple at Philae, a reorientation of the axis was not necessary as the main axis of the temple was already oriented eastwards. The small space with wall paintings on both pillars and on both sides of the entrance to the naos, as well as the crosses which were incised, all point towards the altar which was situated in front of the closed-off door.

In Arab times, the church fell into disuse and served profane purposes. Gradually, the building became filled with rubble, so that nineteenth-century visitors could only enter it through two holes near the roof of the building. The transformation of the temple of Isis at Aswan into a church is an interesting, local parallel to the conversion of the temple dedicated to the same goddess at Philae. The example demonstrates what fate awaited smaller, less renowned temples, if turned into churches.

Near the temple of Isis, earlier excavations have revealed the south-east angle of the town wall of Ancient Syene, with a watchtower at the corner. Blocks from several temples on Elephantine have been reused in this ancient wall. Moreover, blocks from 'Temple X' were reused for a church built somewhat to the south-east of the temple of Isis. In this stretch of the wall, including the watchtower, some 200 blocks of a temple from the reign of the Emperor Tiberius were found, which would have stood once nearby. A Maltese cross was incised in the blocks of the tower dated, on unclear grounds, to the sixth century. However, the pottery found underneath the wall dates the reuse of the temple of Tiberius to the fifth or sixth century.⁴⁷⁵

Yet not all temples in Syene were entirely reused. Besides the temple of Isis, only one other temple was known to nineteenth-century travellers, the temple of Domitian.⁴⁷⁶ Although its hieroglyphic inscriptions were published in 1960, the temple has remained largely unexplored.⁴⁷⁷ The circumstance that most of the temple was still standing in the nineteenth century, however, suggests that it served other than building purposes. Future excavations by the Swiss Institute, which have only just begun, may reveal more of its reuse.⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷⁵ Jaritz, 'Three Townsites', 41; Jaritz and Rodziewicz, 'Syene', 117, 120.

⁴⁷⁶ Champollion saw a temple of Nerva, but in fact this temple can be identified with that of Domitian. See H. Jaritz, 'Untersuchungen zum "Tempel des Domitian" in Assuan', *MDAIK* 31 (1975) 237-57, and 'Three Townsites', 41. Cf. *PMV* (1937) 223-4; Bresciani and Pernigotti, *Assuan*, 13-4.

⁴⁷⁷ R. Engelbach, 'Notes of Inspection, April 1921', *ASAE* 21 (1921) 188-96 at 195-6; C. de Wit, 'Les inscriptions du temple de Domitien à Assuan', *CdE* 35 (1960) 108-19.

⁴⁷⁸ In this respect, it may be noted that an emergency excavation in 2002 at another spot south of the German hospital unearthed a martyr's tomb and a *baptisterium* with a cross-shaped baptismal font, provisionally dated to the fifth or sixth century. In front of the *baptisterium*, Ancient Egyptian stelae were found reused as pavement slabs, the easternmost being set up with the inscriptions visible. As *baptisteria* are usually connected to the most important churches (Grossmann, *Christliche Architektur*, 127-48, especially at 145, for examples of cross-shaped baptismal fonts), it could well have been that the episcopal church of Syene or another important church was nearby. Several architectural elements of such a large building have been recovered, as well as fragments of a temple of Ptolemy VIII (Grimal and Adly, 'Fouilles et travaux', 109-10). A final analysis of the remains, however, has to await the forthcoming publication.

Conclusion: The Reuse of Temples in the First Cataract Area

Our survey of the reuse of Ancient Egyptian temples throughout the First Cataract region in Late Antiquity has shown a more complex picture than that of a linear transformation of temple to church. None of the temples was completely destroyed and replaced by churches. In only three instances was a church built inside a temple: in the temples of Isis at Philae and Aswan, both dating to the sixth century, and in the temple of Arensnuphis at Philae, probably of a later date. Small churches were built in front of two temples, both of quadractic form: in the second half of the sixth century in front of the temple of Khnum at Elephantine, and in the seventh or eighth century in front of the temple of Augustus at Philae.

However, most often the temples were reused for building material. Several blocks from temples on Philae were reused in houses. The temple of Harendotes was completely razed to the ground and reused for the West Church on Philae. The same happened to 'Temple X', blocks of which were transported across the river to serve as building material for a church at Syene. The great temple of Khnum was gradually dismantled from the fifth century onwards, perhaps even earlier, and its forecourt reused for housing. 'Temple Y' was completely dismantled and reused in a sixth-century quay wall. Many more blocks from temples on Elephantine were reused in building projects at Syene, most often in the town wall. Near the temple of Isis, a large part of a temple from the reign of Tiberius was reused in a corner tower and a stretch of the wall in the fifth or sixth century.

Among these examples, the transformation of the temple of Isis at Philae stands out as a special case since its Ancient Egyptian cults continued for much longer than the rest of the preserved temples in the region. We know, for example, that the most important temple of Elephantine, the temple of Khnum had been abandoned by the fourth century. However, just as in the case of the temple of Isis, in the other cases where a date could be given for the reuse of the temples as churches this took place in the sixth century or later, which confirms the hypothesis that most Egyptian temples were only transformed into churches at a later stage. Until the sixth century, the First Cataract area must still have preserved most of its sacred landscape. Though abandoned, the temples were still largely visible.⁴⁷⁹

Gradually, however, the sacred landscape changed and became filled with churches. From the Appion petition it is known that both Philae and Syene possessed 'churches' in the second quarter of the fifth century. Nevertheless, the evidence for freestanding churches before the sixth century is rather modest. Although the West Church of Philae could date from the second half of the fifth century, the East Church probably dates to the sixth century or later. The reconstructed 'basilica' on Elephantine dates to the second half of the sixth century and the church on top of the quay wall probably as well. This does not mean that freestanding churches did not exist before the sixth century. They have probably not been preserved because they were made of perishable material such as mudbrick. Another possibility is that they were dismantled to be built up anew or renovated, a situation that can be assumed for predecessors of both the East and the West Church.⁴⁸⁰ By the sixth century, the landscape had definitively become Christian, and new purposes had to be found for the old, ruined buildings.

The examples have shown that not all temples were reused for religious purposes: more often, practical considerations were more important. At Philae, people had to make the most of the available space, illustrated for example by the building of houses in former temples or other occupations of former sacred space. At Syene and Elephantine, we see large-scale building projects, which were apparently centrally administered. On the other hand, the ideological impact of the few cases in which

⁴⁷⁹ Cf. B. Caseau, 'Sacred Landscapes', in Bowersock, Brown and Grabar, *Late Antiquity*, 21-59.

⁴⁸⁰ Grossmann, *Christliche Architektur*, 4-5.

temples were turned into churches cannot be ignored. The conversion of the temple of Isis at Philae would have had its effect. However, the development from temple to church was just one of the options.⁴⁸¹ Having reached the end of the sixth century, we will now turn to the Patermouthis archive, a papyrus archive which has much to say about the role the Church had come to play in sixth-century Syene.

⁴⁸¹ Cf. Brakke, 'From Temple to Cell', forthcoming, in which he shows that empty temples were sometimes reused by anchorites as dwellings.

11. The Church at Syene and Elephantine

The Paternouthis Archive

To the same lot of Coptic manuscripts, among which was the manuscript containing the *Life of Aaron*, and which were acquired by De Rustafjaell in 1907, belonged 'a dozen Greek papyri with fragments' which came from the island of Elephantine.⁴⁸² De Rustafjaell passed them on to the papyrologist Sir Harold Idris Bell (1879-1967). In August of the same year an equally large group of papyri was shown to the German excavators at Elephantine, who acquired the texts only after a year and subsequently sent them to Munich.

The British and German teams started to publish both halves of what is now known as 'the Paternouthis archive': the Munich half was published in 1914 and the London half in 1917.⁴⁸³ Although some preliminary articles were published, and both teams shared descriptions of the papyri, the separate publication of both halves has left its mark on the archive.⁴⁸⁴ Nonetheless, since 1917 several useful studies have appeared, paying attention to more formal aspects of the documents such as the subscription of the documents by notaries and the use of imperial titulature. The archive has also been used as a source for Late Antique society, including its use of status designations and evidence for the late Roman army.⁴⁸⁵

Recently, it has been suggested that several fragments of papyri published separately belong together. These joins have important consequences for the chronology, and hence the interpretation, of the papyri.⁴⁸⁶ Subsequently, an issue of a journal was dedicated to four different points of interest emanating from the archive: the legal and financial disputes in the archive, the sale of houses containing detailed descriptions of the houses and topography of Syene, evidence for the army stationed there and, finally, the evidence for Christianity in the papyri.⁴⁸⁷ The first two documents in the archive (dating to 493) have already been discussed above and showed that, compared with other fourth and fifth-century papyri from Elephantine, Christian names had become a significant part of Syenian nomenclature by the end of the fifth century.

Reading through the sixth and seventh-century documents in the archive, this phenomenon needs no further explanation. Formulas in the archive are also of a demonstrably Christian character, including typical invocations of Christ and swearing by Christian relics (κειμήλια), chapels (εὐκτηρία) and, even, a monastic habit (σχημα).⁴⁸⁸ On the other hand, in one case the traditional swearing by the imperial fortune (τύχη) is maintained.⁴⁸⁹ Since the archive also gives a picture of how the Church had become intertwined with daily life in the sixth century, a subject only briefly touched upon in the article mentioned, we will focus our attention on this aspect.⁴⁹⁰ There is all the more reason to do so, since a recent study of ecclesiastical

⁴⁸² Rustafjaell, *Light* 3.

⁴⁸³ *P.Mon.*, of which a second edition appeared in 1986 as *P.Münch*. I, and *P.Lond*. V 1722-37.

⁴⁸⁴ E.g. H.I. Bell, 'Syene Papyri in the British Museum', *Klio* 13 (1913) 160-74.

⁴⁸⁵ Jones, *Later Roman Empire* 2, 654-5, 662-3, 669; J.G. Keenan, 'The Names of Flavius and Aurelius as Status Designations in Later Roman Egypt', *ZPE* 11 (1973) 33-63 at 35, 55, 62-3, and *ZPE* 13 (1974) 283-304 at 289, 295, 299-300; K.A. Worp, 'Byzantine Imperial Titulature in the Greek Documentary Papyri: The Oath Formulas', *ZPE* 45 (1982) 199-223 at 211-4, 217; J.M. Diethart, K.A. Worp, *Notarsunterschriften im byzantinischen Ägypten*, 2 vols (Vienna, 1986) 1.91-4.

⁴⁸⁶ Farber and Porten, 'Paternouthis', and Porten, *Elephantine Papyri*, 389-406.

⁴⁸⁷ J.J. Farber, 'Family Financial Disputes in the Paternouthis Archive', and G. Husson, 'Houses in Syene in the Paternouthis Archive', *BASP* 27 (1990) 112-21, 123-37; Keenan, 'Evidence'; MacCoull, 'Christianity'. For houses in the Paternouthis archive, see also, most recently, Alston, *City*, 110-1.

⁴⁸⁸ *P.Münch*. I 1.26; *P.Lond*. V 1728.9, 1729.25.

⁴⁸⁹ *P.Münch*. I 12.47.

⁴⁹⁰ Cf. MacCoull, 'Christianity', 156-8.

dignitaries in the papyri has greatly enhanced our knowledge on this subject and provides an excellent background for comparison.⁴⁹¹ Finally, the papyri from the Paternouthis archive can be complemented by the ostraka from Elephantine published thus far.

The Paternouthis archive consists of thirty-three Greek and four Coptic papyri, ranging in date from 493 to 613.⁴⁹² However, most of these texts fall in the period from 574 onwards, and only eight texts date to the period between 493 and 557 or 558.⁴⁹³ Among these are three loan contracts that were written in Thebes and some other documents that do not concern the family of Paternouthi(o)s, his wife Kako and his mother-in-law Tapia, the persons mentioned in almost all documents dated to after 574. It has therefore been presumed that the archive belonged to the family of Paternouthis, although the exact relation between the earlier and later texts has still to be satisfactorily clarified.

Paternouthis, son of Menas, is attested in documents from 578-582 until 613 and should not be confused with a Flavius Paternouthios, son of Dios, mentioned in an enrolment of a new recruit in the regiment of Elephantine,⁴⁹⁴ nor with Flavius Paternouthi(o)s, son of Menas, alias Benne, a soldier of the regiment of Syene whose sale of a boat has been recorded.⁴⁹⁵ Aurelius Paternouthis, son of Menas, is first mentioned in a sale of house shares, which is dated between 578 and 582.⁴⁹⁶ He was actually born in Syene, where he worked as a boatman.⁴⁹⁷ Later he became a soldier in the regiment of Elephantine and, probably for a brief intermediate period, in the regiment of Philae.⁴⁹⁸ Paternouthis received the status designation 'Flavius' upon becoming a soldier at Elephantine, for he is called Flavius Paternouthis for the first time as soldier of that regiment.⁴⁹⁹

The documents in the Paternouthis archive consist mainly of legal transactions performed for the family of Paternouthis, such as sales, loans, settlements of disputes and a will. Together they provide insight into the legal matters that occupied Paternouthis and his family at the end of the sixth and the beginning of the seventh century. At this point, it is important to realise that, although deposited on Elephantine, the documents were mainly written in Syene, which is why they are sometimes referred to as 'the Syene papyri'. Thus, over the shoulder of the legal issues concerning the Paternouthis family (and other people), we occasionally catch a glimpse of daily life in this town.

⁴⁹¹ Schmelz, *Kirchliche Amtsträger*.

⁴⁹² The texts are printed in English translation with commentary by Porten, *Elephantine Papyri*, nos. D 20-52 and E 1-3. Add the Greek fragments under the entries *P.Lond.* V 1850-9, 1861, and *P.Münch.* I 17-8, and the fragmentary Coptic text edited by S.J. Clackson, 'Four Coptic Papyri from the Paternouthis Archive in the British Library', *BASP* 32 (1995) 97-116 at 112-3. From now on, reference will be made to the Greek or Coptic text and Porten's translation.

⁴⁹³ *P.Lond.* V 1855 + *P.Münch.* I 15 = D 20; *P.Münch.* I 16 = D 21; *P.Lond.* V 1722 = D 22; *P.Münch.* I 8 + *P.Lond.* V 1857 = D 23; *P.Lond.* V 1720 = D 24; *P.Lond.* V 1734 = D 25; *P.Lond.* V 1719 = D 26; *P.Lond.* V 1721 = D 27. *P.Rein.* II 107 = D 28 dates to 27 March, 558 or 573.

⁴⁹⁴ *P.Münch.* I 2.2, 23 = D 31 (May-6 October 578).

⁴⁹⁵ *P.Münch.* I 5 r^o 1 + *P.Lond.* V 1726.5, 12 + *P.Münch.* I 4.47-8 + *P.Münch.* I 5 v^o 1 = D 34.1, 5, 12, 47-8, 59 (581).

⁴⁹⁶ *P.Lond.* V 1724.6-7 = D 32 (578-82).

⁴⁹⁷ *P.Münch.* I 7.10-1 + *P.Lond.* V 1860 = D 36.10-1; *Lond.* V 1729.7-8 = D 37; *P.Lond.* V 1727.4, 62-3 = D 38; *P.Münch.* I 9.9 + *P.Lond.* V 1734 = D 40.9; *P.Münch.* I 10.6-7 = D 43; *P.Lond.* V 1732.1-2 = D 44, *P.Münch.* I 14.14, 102-3 = D 48; *P.Lond.* V 1736.4-5 = D 51; *P.Lond.* V 1737.4-5, 28 = D 52 (dating from 23 June 583 to 9 February 613).

⁴⁹⁸ Regiment of Elephantine: *P.Lond.* V 1730.6-7 = D 41, *P.Münch.* I 10.6-7 = D 43, *P.Münch.* I 12.3-4 = D 46; *P.Münch.* I 13.7 = D 47; *P.Münch.* I 14.102 = D 48; *P.Lond.* V 1736.4, 21-2 = D 51; *P.Lond.* V 1737.4 = D 52 (22 August 585-9 February 613). Regiment of Philae: *P.Lond.* V 1732.1-2 = D 44 (16 August 586 or 601).

⁴⁹⁹ *P.Lond.* V 1730.6 = D 41 (22 August 585). For this phenomenon, see Keenan, 'Names', 61-3.

The Church at Syene

Two institutions seem to have been deeply integrated into the society of Late Antique Syene: the Army and the Church. This is already manifest from the topographical indications mentioned in the papyri.⁵⁰⁰ For example, in a sale dated to the end of the fifth century, a building is situated 'in the southern part of the fortress (φρουρίου) and in the quarter (λαύρα) called (quarter) of the camp, namely (quarter) of the cobblers (παρεμβολῆς ἤτοι σκυτέων)', a name it retained for at least another century.⁵⁰¹ Apparently, the military camp of Syene lent its name to the quarter it was situated in. Another point of reference in sixth-century Syene was 'the camel yard of the transport (service) from Philae (τοῦ καμηλῶνος (read καμηλῶνος) ἡ βασταγὴ τῶν Φιλῶν)', lying in the same quarter of the camp,⁵⁰² which later even gave its name to a separate quarter.⁵⁰³

Christian buildings also became points of reference in the town.⁵⁰⁴ The same southern part of the fortress contained 'the quarter of the shrine of the holy and triumphant Viktor (ἡ λαύρα τοῦ εὐκτηρίου τοῦ ἁγίου καὶ ἀθλοφόρου Βίκτορος)',⁵⁰⁵ apparently named after 'the holy *topos* of the martyr Apa Viktor (ὁ ἅγιος τόπος ἀπα Βίκτορος μάρτυρος)', lying in this quarter.⁵⁰⁶ All three these quarters were situated in the 'southern part of the fortress' (περὶ τὸ νότινον μέρος τοῦ φρουρίου), perhaps a general term for the fortified town of Syene.⁵⁰⁷ It has even been proposed that there is evidence for a monastery within the town walls. In the description of the boundaries of a courtyard, it is said that it borders on 'the public wall of the monastery' (τὸ δημοσίον τείχος τοῦ ὄρους).⁵⁰⁸ However, the term ὄρος also means 'desert' or 'mountain', and it is more likely that the town wall stretching towards the desert is meant, for otherwise the name of the monastery would have been mentioned.⁵⁰⁹

Another manifestation of Church and Army in the documents from Syene is through the persons involved in these texts.⁵¹⁰ In almost all cases where witnesses

⁵⁰⁰ Husson, 'Houses', 130-2. For the terminology of the division of towns, see Alston, *City*, 130-57. See now also K.A. Worp, 'Town Quarters in Greek, Roman, Byzantine and Early Arab Egypt', in P.M. Sijpesteijn, L. Sundelin (eds), *Papyrology and the History of Early Islamic Egypt* (Leiden, 2004) 227-48, which replaces Alston's lists.

⁵⁰¹ *P.Münch.* I 16.7-8 = D 21. Cf. *P.Lond.* V 1722.12-3 = D 22; *P.Münch.* I 8.19 + *P.Lond.* V 1857 = D 23.19; *P.Münch.* I 9.54-5 + *P.Lond.* V 1734 = D 40.54-5, *P.Münch.* I 13.21-2 = D 47.

⁵⁰² *P.Lond.* V 1722.14 = D 22 (adapted).

⁵⁰³ *P.Münch.* I 11.23 = D 45, *P.Münch.* I 12.18-9 = D 46.

⁵⁰⁴ For parallels in other cities, see Worp, 'Town Quarters', 236-45.

⁵⁰⁵ *P.Münch.* I 9.37 + *P.Lond.* V 1734 = D 40.37. Cf. *P.Lond.* V 1733.25 = D 49.

⁵⁰⁶ *P.Lond.* V 1733.36 = D 49 (slightly adapted). For the interchange of the terms εὐκτήριον and τόπος, see Papaconstantinou, *Culte des saints*, 272-3. On the basis of the term λαύρα, Timm, *Christlich-koptische Ägypten* 1, 224, and Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, 138, mistakenly think that the sanctuary is a monastery, but cf. Papaconstantinou, *Culte des saints*, 304 (n. 105). See also for a parallel Papaconstantinou, 'Sanctuaires de la Vierge', 83.

⁵⁰⁷ Cf. Husson, 'Houses', 129-30.

⁵⁰⁸ *P.Münch.* I 13.28 = D 47.

⁵⁰⁹ See H. Cadell, R. Rémondon, 'Sens et emplois de τὸ ὄρος dans les documents papyrologiques', *REG* 80 (1967) 343-9 at 344. A confirmation that in this case 'desert/monastery' is meant is provided by the inscription *IThSy* 237.6-7 from Syene, a building inscription of the town wall, which mentions 'that part of the wall which extends towards the desert' (τὸ μέρος τοῦτο τοῦ τείχο[υ]ς τὸ ἐπὶ τὸ ὄρος). Cf. Husson, 'Houses', 131; Farben, *Elephantine Papyri*, 532 (n. 21). For τὸ ὄρος in the sense of 'monastery', see Papaconstantinou, *Culte des saints*, 277-8, with examples.

⁵¹⁰ In the following analysis I have omitted the documents written in places other than Syene, *P.Lond.* V 1720 + *P.Lond.* V 1720 v^o = D 24, *P.Lond.* V 1719 = D 26, *P.Lond.* V 1721 = D 27 (Thebes), *P.Münch.* I 7 + *P.Lond.* V 1860 = D 36 (Antinoopolis), *P.Lond.* V 1735 + *P.Lond.* V 1851 = D 50 (Bau).

subscribed, they were either soldiers of the regiment of Syene or clergymen: of the 126 witnesses, ninety-three are soldiers and nineteen clergymen.⁵¹¹ What kind of titles do the latter bear? Some have the titles priest or deacon without further specification, some have the specification 'of Syene' and some have the specification 'of the church of Syene'.⁵¹² With 'the church of Syene', perhaps the main church, that is, the episcopal church is meant. In general the term used for it is ἡ καθολικὴ ἐκκλησία or ἡ ἅγια τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐκκλησία.⁵¹³ This last term is exactly what we find at another place in the archive, where a 'Ioannes, son of Abraamios, most humble priest of God's holy church of Syene' signs on behalf of the sellers of a house-share, because they are illiterate.⁵¹⁴ However, in the papyri it seems that with the term ἐκκλησία a concrete building is always meant. Because there were certainly several churches in Syene at this time, the most important of these buildings may be meant, that is, the episcopal church.⁵¹⁵ These examples illustrate the difficulty in identifying specific churches from papyri.⁵¹⁶

The signing of documents for private persons seems to have been left to the lower clergy: there is only one higher ecclesiastical dignitary mentioned as a witness, 'Isakos son of Taeion, archdeacon of (the church of) Saint Mary of Syene'.⁵¹⁷ The title archdeacon (ἀρχιδιάκονος) is not uncommon in the papyri and designates the leader of the deacons of a church.⁵¹⁸ The title implies that a larger number of clergy were involved in the church in question, and hence that it denotes a larger church. As is supported by our text, these churches need not always have been episcopal churches. On the basis of a single wall painting, it has been proposed that this church of St Mary was the converted temple of Isis.⁵¹⁹ However, it seems hard to base all this on one, fragmentary wall painting. Moreover, Mary is depicted in many churches which are not dedicated to her.⁵²⁰ We should therefore be hesitant in identifying the church mentioned in the papyri with the converted temple of Isis.

To return to the subscribers it appears that soldiers and clergymen were important persons in the daily life of the town for they were frequently asked to sign documents for private persons. In doing this, ecclesiastical dignitaries were not acting on their own behalf as private persons but as clergymen. On the other hand, this position was not based on their ecclesiastical prerogatives but on the trust and respect

⁵¹¹ In two cases, the soldiers are from Philae: *P.Münch.* I 16.49 = D 21 (Flavius Paenos, son of Iakob, *ordinarius* of Philae) and *P.Münch.* I 13.80 = D 47 (Flavius Psan, son of Aron, soldier of the regiment of Philae).

⁵¹² Priest/deacon: 6; priest/deacon of Syene: 2; priest/deacon of the church of Syene: 9.

⁵¹³ Wipszycka, *Études* 157-75 ('Καθολικὴ et les autres épithètes qualifiant le nom ἐκκλησία: contribution à l'étude de l'ordre hiérarchique des églises dans l'Égypte byzantine', 1994'); Papaconstantinou, *Culte des saints* 271; Schmelz, *Kirchliche Amtsträger*, 35.

⁵¹⁴ *P.Lond.* 1724.79-80 = D 32.

⁵¹⁵ Mohrmann, *Études* 4, 215.

⁵¹⁶ Personal communication from G. Schmelz. Cf. Wipszycka, *Études* 163: 'En ce qui concerne les actes officiels, le nom ἐκκλησία porte toujours une épithète (...), sauf dans les signatures des témoins, où les épithètes sont parfois omises'. On the terminology for Christian places of worship see Wipszycka, *Études* 157-75, and Papaconstantinou, *Culte des saints* 267-81.

⁵¹⁷ *P.Lond.* V 1731.45 = D 42 (20 September 585), *P.Münch.* I 11.77 = D 45 (7 October 586). The *editio princeps* of the Munich text reads Πταείονος, but this reading was corrected to Ταείονος by H.I. Bell, in *BL* I, p. 310 (I owe this reference to K.A. Worp). Apart from these papyri, one of the fragments belonging to the archive, *P.Lond.* V 1850, mentions a πρεσβύτερος τῆς ἁγίας Μαρίας. Cf. Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens* 138, who seems to equate the episcopal church with the church of St Mary, but this cannot be true, cf. Timm, *Christlich-koptische Ägypten* 1, 223; Husson, 'Houses', 131-2.

⁵¹⁸ Wipszycka, *Études* 195-224 at 222-3 ('Fonctionnement de l'église égyptienne aux IV^e-VIII^e siècles (sur quelques aspects)', 1992'); Schmelz, *Kirchliche Amtsträger*, 37. In n. 238 Schmelz overlooks the attestation *P.Lond.* V 1731 = D 42.

⁵¹⁹ Husson, 'Houses', 132: 'The church of Holy Mary must be the Ptolemaic temple of Isis', followed by Porten, *Elephantine Papyri*, 525 (n. 16); Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens*, 138.

⁵²⁰ Papaconstantinou, 'Sanctuaires de la Vierge', 90.

they had among the people. In this way, the authority of the clergy reached into the public sphere, where they acted as protectors, judges, guarantors in private matters, and local politicians.⁵²¹ Two such functions of the clergy in the public sphere return in the Paternouthis archive: clergymen as private notaries and clergymen as judges.

Clergymen as Private Notaries and Judges

Documents were usually drafted by professional notaries but could also be given to 'private notaries'. Private notaries were not officially trained for this task, but were sufficiently trained in legal matters to write down a document. Clergymen functioned both as professional and private notaries to draft documents.⁵²² In the papyri from the Paternouthis archive, only one professional scribe is mentioned with his title (συμβολαιογράφος), a Christophoros, son of Paternouthios.⁵²³ Besides this official scribe, of the twenty-seven scribes in total, nine are military officials and four belong to the clergy. As was to be expected, people in Syene also went to the record keepers of the army (the *adiutores*), and other military officials, such as former *vicarii*, soldiers, a *decurio* and a former *actuarium*.⁵²⁴ Among the clergymen writing down documents for people were Phosphorios, a priest (twice), Theophilos, a deacon, and Petros, a deacon.⁵²⁵ These numbers again show the important role of Army and Church in the society of sixth-century Syene, in which the function of military officials as notaries is particularly striking.⁵²⁶

Another function of Army and Church was to sign for people who were illiterate. Here the numbers are even more striking. Only four people could sign for themselves; in the cases where people could not sign, this was done by either clergymen (four times) or military officials, most often soldiers (twenty-one times). One of the clergymen signing for illiterates we have already encountered was Ioannes, son of Abraamios, priest of the church of St Mary.⁵²⁷ The other signers are the deacon Theophilos, son of Paeion, and the deacon Theophilos. In fact, the deacons may be one and the same person, and be identical with the private notary also called Theophilos the deacon.⁵²⁸ Apparently, military officials and ecclesiastical dignitaries had such standing that private persons asked them to write, subscribe and sign their documents.

A last public function the Army and Church performed in the Paternouthis archive was arbitration, a common means to avoid a trial in court.⁵²⁹ Both parties went to a person of standing, set out their case, the judge came to a verdict, and this verdict was sanctioned in an official document. For example, in the Paternouthis archive, a trained lawyer (σχολαστικός) arbitrated in a dispute over a legacy.⁵³⁰ In another

⁵²¹ E. Wipszycka, *Les ressources et les activités économiques des églises en Égypte du IV^e au VIII^e siècle* (Brussels, 1972) 154-73; Schmelz, *Kirchliche Amtsträger*, 255-6.

⁵²² Schmelz, *Kirchliche Amtsträger*, 250-4.

⁵²³ *P.Münch.* I 14.111 = D 48.

⁵²⁴ *P.Münch.* I 8.50 + *P.Lond.* V 1857 = D 23.50, *P.Lond.* V 1733.81 = D 49 (*adiutores*); *P.Münch.* I 2.22 = D 31 (*ordinarius* and *adiutor*); *P.Lond.* V 1727.73 = D 38, *P.Münch.* I 9.111 + *P.Lond.* V 1734 = D 40.111 (former *vicarii*); *P.Lond.* V 1722.60 = D 22 (*centurio*); *P.Lond.* V 1736.34 = D 51 (former *actuarium*); *P.Lond.* V 1723.29 = D 30, *P.Münch.* I 13.85 = D 47 (soldiers). On these functions, see Keenan, 'Evidence', 147.

⁵²⁵ *P.Lond.* V 1855 + *P.Münch.* I 15.26 = D 20.26, *P.Münch.* I 16.52 = D 21 (Phosphorios), *P.Lond.* V 1724.88 = D 32 (Theophilos), E 3.7 (Petros).

⁵²⁶ Diethart and Worp, *Notarsunterschriften* 1, 13: 'Es fällt auf, daß öfters Offiziere der Garnison Syene als Notare auftreten'.

⁵²⁷ *P.Lond.* V 1724.79-81 = D 32.

⁵²⁸ *P.Lond.* V 1728.25-6 = D 39; *P.Lond.* V 1733.73-4 = D 49.

⁵²⁹ Schmelz, *Kirchliche Amtsträger*, 272-88.

⁵³⁰ *P.Lond.* V 1849 + *P.Münch.* I 6.84 = D 35.4, 84. On σχολαστικός, see A. Claus, 'Ο σχολαστικός' (Diss. Cologne, 1965); Gagos and Van Minnen, *Settling a Dispute*, 21; *P.Aphrod.Lit.*, p. 688 (n. 98).

dispute over a legacy, the parties invoke 'the board of the devoted leaders of the regiment of Syene' (τὸ κοινὸν τῶν καθοσιωμένων πρώτων ἀριθμοῦ Συήνης), that is, a military board, to resolve the issue.⁵³¹ But it was apparently also quite normal to go to an ecclesiastical official to settle a dispute.

This appears from another settlement of a dispute over a legacy, this time involving Paternouthis and his brother-in-law, Ioannes.⁵³² Ioannes felt himself hard done by the inheritance of his father. Initially, Ioannes had gone to the lawyer (γραμματεὺς) Paeion to plea against his mother Tapia, and he had been accredited four *solidi*. This is where Paternouthis came in, for he prevented his mother-in-law from paying her son this amount. As a consequence, Ioannes again went to an arbitrator, this time to a *vicarius* of Hermonthis, who fined Paternouthis seven *solidi*. After having quarrelled over this settlement for a while, both parties agreed to ask the priest Sereu of the holy church of Omboi, that is, the episcopal church, who happened to be in Syene, to arbitrate again. Sereu decided that Ioannes' claim of the four *solidi* was still legitimate, but that Paternouthis had to be given back five *solidi* from the payment he had made for the previous settlement, leaving one *solidus* for Ioannes to pay to Paternouthis as a settlement of the dispute. This arbitration shows that clergymen, even when not in their own diocese, could exert judicial power in important cases, such as that between Ioannes and Paternouthis certainly was, as it had taken two previous settlements and was drawn up by a professional notary.

Finally, apart from these functions in public life, clergymen also acted as private persons. For example, in a document dated to 12 March 584, the priest Ioannes, son of Patechnoumios, donates all his possessions to Paternouthis after his death including as a security a share of a house which had come to Ioannes by a legacy from his sister Mary. Apparently, the ownership of the house was disputed.⁵³³ As can be seen from some erasures, at first the document was addressed to Paternouthis' mother-in-law, Tapia, to whom Ioannes had sold shares of houses earlier. As a reason for his donation, Patechnoumios mentioned the continuous care from Paternouthis, a common motif in these acknowledgements to give the gift a bona fide character.⁵³⁴

Another document is a settlement of a dispute between the nun Aurelia Tsone and her mother Tapia.⁵³⁵ Tsone's parents divorced when she was small and her father Menas gave Tapia four *solidi* to raise their child. Tapia, however, never looked after Tsone, and the child was raised by her father. Now Tsone wants to claim back the four *solidi*, which her mother said was her dowry and was paid by Menas when they divorced. They settled the dispute by acknowledging that Tapia had to pay the four *solidi* to her daughter. The circumstance that Tsone is a nun is an interesting element in the story. Apparently, after her father died there was no guardian left and she sought refuge in a nunnery.

The Church at Elephantine

Glimpses of the daily life of the clergy at Elephantine in this period are given by the ostraka found there. Thirteen of these, written in Coptic, were found during the earlier German excavations of 1906-1911. They are now in Berlin and were published in the 1970s.⁵³⁶ They are all loans or acknowledgements of debts and on account of their

⁵³¹ *P.Münch.* I 1.19-20 = D 29, *P.Münch.* I 2.1 = D 31.

⁵³² *P.Münch.* I 14 = D 48, also quoted by Schmelz, *Kirchliche Amtsträger*, 275, 280, 283, 286, 288.

⁵³³ *P.Lond.* V 1729 = D 37.

⁵³⁴ Porten, *Elephantine Papyri*, 500 (n. 1).

⁵³⁵ *P.Lond.* V 1731 = D 42.

⁵³⁶ F. Hintze, 'Berliner koptische Ostraka aus Elephantine', *ZÄS* 104 (1977) 97-112 (nos. 1-13) = *SB Kopt.* I 24-35 (nos. 1-11, 13), 235 (no. 12) = E 4-16. Note that one of these, no. 13 = *SB Kopt.* I 35 = E 10, has been re-edited as a Greek text with some Coptic elements, K.A. Worp, 'Das berliner Ostrakon P. 14735: Koptisch oder Griechisch?', *AfP* 36 (1990) 75-7.

formulae are tentatively dated to either of the following indiction cycles: 597-611 or 612-626.⁵³⁷ Four more ostraka are in other places (Bristol, Oxford, London and Cairo) and consist of an acknowledgment of debt, two orders (on one ostrakon), a contract and an account.⁵³⁸ These texts are undated, but are probably contemporary with the other documents mentioned here (that is, they date to the end of the sixth or the first quarter of the seventh century). The last-named account contains the name of Haronch(is) who was an archdeacon.⁵³⁹

Interesting is a fragmentary contract in which the priest Sarapamon orders a certain Ienhor to take his daughter in apprenticeship for two years, 'so that you do not neglect [her] but teach her her work... If you neglect her, this de[ed] is dissolved'.⁵⁴⁰ Two of the Berlin ostraka were written by the deacons Papas and Daueid, son of Menas, who at the same time acted as witnesses, while Daueid may be the same person as the witness of this name in another ostrakon.⁵⁴¹ Thus although in the papyri scribes and witnesses are usually not the same persons, these documents show that the public function of the clergy at Elephantine was not so different from that at Syene.

The last document from Berlin to be mentioned here has a peculiar character. It is an acknowledgement of debt by the 'board of the leaders of Elephantine and the whole fort', a military board which we already encountered in similar terms for Syene. They acknowledge that Paham, son of Abraham, had lent them one *solidus* but that one third of this sum had been put forward as Paham's share in an expenditure (ΑΝΤΑΛΛΩΜΑ) to the poor (ΖΟΜΟΙΡΟΣ). The last word has been interpreted as deriving from Greek ἄμοιρος, 'poor'. Hence, later commentators remark: 'This text is a significant witness to charitable activity at Elephantine'.⁵⁴²

Recently, this view has been challenged.⁵⁴³ Firstly, it is suggested that Paham, son of Abraham, was a *centurio* and belonged to the board of officers himself. The debt of the board was therefore some sort of account to which all officers had to contribute and from which they could spend money. Moreover, the Coptic word ΖΟΜΟΙΡΟΣ is derived from Greek ὄμηρος, 'hostage', a more plausible solution than the one proposed earlier. The deed for ransoming hostages is one in a long Christian tradition and is well imaginable in a frontier area. If the Berlin ostraka do indeed date to 597-611 or 612-626, which, admittedly, has yet to be proven, the dating of this ostrakon, the tenth indiction, would be either 25 May 607 or 622.⁵⁴⁴

In addition to the ostraka that the Germans found on Elephantine, a French expedition also found hundreds of ostraka which have mostly been stored in the Louvre. Recently, a study of the Greek papyri and ostraka from Elephantine, containing ninety-four ostraka dating to Late Antiquity, as well as a preliminary report on about sixty Coptic ostraka have appeared, which have greatly enhanced our view of Late Antique Elephantine.⁵⁴⁵ The Coptic ostraka were isolated from the large collection of the Louvre on several grounds: they contained the name 'Elephantine' (ⲒⲎⲔ) or terms and formulae found in other Coptic ostraka from Elephantine, they contained palaeographical similarities to these other ostraka or were identified on the basis of the pottery characteristic for Elephantine. On similar grounds, it seems that these ostraka

⁵³⁷ Porten, *Elephantine Papyri*, 572.

⁵³⁸ E 17-20.

⁵³⁹ E 20.2.

⁵⁴⁰ E 19.6-9.

⁵⁴¹ *SB Kopt.* I 24.13 = E 5; *SB Kopt.* I 26.8-9 = E 6; *SB Kopt.* I 30.18-21 = E 8.

⁵⁴² Porten, *Elephantine Papyri*, 585. Cf. Hintze, 'Berliner koptische Ostraka', 106.

⁵⁴³ P. van Minnen, 'Prisoners of War and Hostages in Graeco-Roman Egypt', *JJP* 30 (2000) 155-63 at 159-60.

⁵⁴⁴ Cf. Van Minnen, 'Prisoners of War', 160-1.

⁵⁴⁵ *O. Eleph. Wagner* 127-65, 220-78, 313-35, 361-72; S. Bacot, C. Heurtel, 'Ostraca coptes d'Éléphantine au Musée du Louvre', in Bosson, *Études coptes VII*, 17-45. Add a Coptic ostrakon now in Cairo which contains the name 'Elephantine' (ⲒⲎⲔ), R. Engelbach, 'A Coptic Ostrakon Mentioning Ieb (Elephantine)', *ASAE* 38 (1938) 47-51.

are contemporary with those of Berlin, that is to say, they date to the very end of the sixth or the early seventh century.

Just as in the Paternouthis archive, reference is made to military terms like 'camp' (ΚΑΣΤΡΟΝ) and 'regiment' (ΑΡΙΘΜΟΣ), as well as to a military official, the *actuarius*.⁵⁴⁶ Two of the officials mentioned, a *comicularius* and a stolarch, were originally military titles, but by Late Antiquity had also become administrative officials, the former being a scribe and the latter responsible for navigation. With the busy boat traffic on the Nile at Elephantine, the stolarch must have been an important official.⁵⁴⁷ Other military activities appear from ostraka containing numbers for the *naulon* (ναῦλον), a military tax on boat transport, which is also mentioned in one of the ostraka in Berlin.⁵⁴⁸ These texts imply a similar heavy presence of the Army at Elephantine as appears from the Paternouthis archive for Syene.

There is also some evidence of the Church in the ostraka. For example, one ostrakon mentions a lector (ΔΙΔΑΚΤΩΤΗΣ) Abraam, son of Iakobos, probably of the main church of Elephantine.⁵⁴⁹ In other Coptic ostraka, deacons, priests and a bishop are mentioned.⁵⁵⁰ A Greek testament written on a pot sherd contains the only reference found thus far to a church on Elephantine. Unfortunately, it breaks off after the phrase 'priest of the holy...' (πρεσβύτερος ἁγίας Ι), where the name of the church of a saint or of the episcopal church would have been mentioned.⁵⁵¹ On the other Greek ostraka, deacons and priests are mentioned, several of them in a list of clergymen.⁵⁵²

Recently, a fragmentary ostrakon has been published, which has been transcribed as being a Coptic ostrakon but must be a Greek one due to the name of Elephantine mentioned in the text (Ἐλεφαντίνη in stead of ΗΒ).⁵⁵³ According to the transcription, the ostrakon bears the name of an Aurelius Papnouthis, son of Viktor, lector (ἀνακν(ώστης), read ἀναγν(ώστης)?) of the church of Elephantine.⁵⁵⁴ Probably, just as at Syene, the expression 'the church of Elephantine' denotes the most important church of the island, the episcopal church.⁵⁵⁵

The last text mentioned here contains striking evidence for monasticism on the island, namely in connection with the matting industry. Several Greek and Coptic ostraka from Elephantine are tickets for the receipt of a certain number of bundles

⁵⁴⁶ ΚΑΣΤΡΟΝ: inv. AF 12607. ΑΡΙΘΜΟΣ: AF 12559, 12560. ΑΚΤΟΥΑΡ(ΙΟΣ): AF 12561. Cf. Dijkstra, 'Late Antique Inscriptions', 61-2 (no. 5), the mentioned Greek inscription of Dios, son of Pasmel, from the quay wall at Elephantine, probably contemporary with the latter ostrakon and abbreviated in the same way.

⁵⁴⁷ ΚΟΡ(ΗΙΚΟΓΛΑΡΙΟΣ): E 32583. ΣΤΩΛΑΡΧΗΣ: AF 12555. *Comicularii* are also known from two sixth-century Greek ostraka from Elephantine: *O.Eleph. Wagner* 315.1, 316.1. On these officials, see Bacot and Heurtel, 'Ostraca coptes', 30-4, and Mitthof, *Annona militaris* 1, 165.

⁵⁴⁸ *SB Kopt.* I 35.2 = E 10; AF 12605-6, 12608. See Farben, *Elephantine Papyri*, 588 (n. 7); Bacot and Heurtel, 'Ostraca coptes', 34-5.

⁵⁴⁹ AF 12594 (Fig. 3). On ecclesiastical lectors, see Wipszycka, *Études* 225-55 at 238-48 ('Les ordres mineurs dans l'église d'Égypte du IV^e au VIII^e siècle', 1992); Schmelz, *Kirchliche Amtsträger*, 38-9. Ecclesiastical lectors are attested only from the end of the fifth century onwards, which provides a *terminus post quem* for the dating of our document. The claim of Bacot and Heurtel, 'Ostraca coptes', 42, that this is the only known lector of Elephantine ignores the evidence of the ostrakon discussed below, which must also date to after the end of the fifth century.

⁵⁵⁰ Deacons/priests: inv. not mentioned. Bishop: E 32589.

⁵⁵¹ AF 12613. Cf. e.g. *P.Lond.* V 1850 (πρεσβύτερος τῆς ἁγίας Μαρίας); *P.Münch.* I 14.33 (πρεσβυτέρω τῆς ἁγίας ἐκκλησίας).

⁵⁵² Priests: *O.Eleph. Wagner* 128.4 (fifth/sixth century), 154 (fifth/sixth century), 156 ('Byzantine period'), 251 (?; 'Byzantine period'). Deacons: *O.Eleph. Wagner* 277.2 (fourth century), 367.5 (fourth century), 368.5 (sixth century). List of clergymen: *O.Eleph. Wagner* 372 (fourth/fifth century).

⁵⁵³ Personal communication from S. Schaten.

⁵⁵⁴ Jenkins, 'Two Christian Period Finds', 61.

⁵⁵⁵ Jenkins, 'Two Christian Period Finds', 61-2.

(ΜΤΟΝ) of alfa (ΚΕΜ), the material used for mat (ΤΜΗ) weaving.⁵⁵⁶ Mat-weaving is generally associated with the activities of monks.⁵⁵⁷ So it was at Elephantine, for one of the receipts reads as follows: 'Psan, the priest, who writes to Psan, the *oikonomos* (οἰκονόμος): give him eight bundles of alfa and ...'.⁵⁵⁸ The *oikonomos* arranged the financial affairs of a monastery and apparently Psan received the material which was to be worked by the monks. Besides being interesting for Egyptian monasticism in general, this text proves that Elephantine had a monastery in the sixth or seventh century, as a later Arabic source, Abû l-Makârim, reports that there was one, though in ruins, in the twelfth century.⁵⁵⁹ Although far scantier than the evidence from the papyri of the Paternouthis archive, the evidence from the ostraka seems to support the impression that the Church, and Monasticism, had become an integral part of society of the First Cataract region in the sixth century.⁵⁶⁰

⁵⁵⁶ Greek: *O. Eleph. Wagner* 150 (dated to the sixth century); 327-9 (fifth/sixth century). Coptic: E 17; AF 12562, 12619, E 32584-5, 32588. See on the matting industry at Elephantine Bacot and Heurtel, 'Ostraca coptes', 36-40.

⁵⁵⁷ E.g. Wipszycka, *Études* 324-5.

⁵⁵⁸ E 32584, cf. 32585.

⁵⁵⁹ Abû l-Makârim, fol. 101b (tr. B.T.A. Evetts, *The Churches and Monasteries of Egypt* (Oxford, 1895) 276). On the disputed authorship of the work see U. Zanetti, 'Abû l-Makârim et Abû Sâlih', *BSAC* 34 (1995) 85-138.

⁵⁶⁰ Undoubtedly, the ostraka to be published from Elephantine and Syene will teach us more about onomastics and the participation of the Church in daily life. One unpublished contract on a Greek ostrakon from Elephantine (*O.DAIK* inv. 3177) already gives a preview. In this contract an Appa Iosephios is mentioned who is bishop of Syene and lends money to Aurelius Eucharios Silvanos, probably from Elephantine. On palaeographical grounds, this ostrakon dates to the fifth or sixth century and provides us with the name of a previously unknown bishop of Syene (personal communication from R. Duttonhöfer). As this ostrakon has not been published yet, I have left Iosephios out of the list of bishops of Syene in App. 3.

Epilogue

When Mark was in Alexandria to be ordained as second bishop of Philae, he told Athanasius about a dilemma concerning whether or not to give bread to Nubians back home because they were not Christians. With several examples from the Bible and a story about two monks, the archbishop taught Mark that it was his duty to be charitable and told him that he did not need to worry about the religious background of these Nubians:

As regards this people, they are destined to believe in God after a while. That is why I have said all these things to you, for I found them to be like 'a grape in the bunch', as Isaiah (65.8) said, 'do not destroy them, for in them is a blessing of the Lord' (fol. 29b).¹

Although this passage from the *Life of Aaron* aims to be a Christian lesson in charity and certainly does not refer to the large period of time described in this book, the remarks of Athanasius may be taken as illustrative of the expansion of Christianity on Egypt's southern frontier in Late Antiquity. As this study has argued, the expansion was a gradual one, in which Christianity had already organised itself before becoming fully integrated into society. Rather than through a policy of conversion by coercion, the Christians laid a more peaceful framework in which different possibilities of appropriating the new religion were presented. And so, in the end the new religion prevailed, even in a region where the old religion had long held such a prominent position.

This view is different from the views proposed in modern scholarship, where the main focus has been on Philae, in particular on Procopius' account of the destruction of its temples. The temple island has been seen as a 'bastion of pagan worship', which was simply replaced by Christianity in the sixth century. This picture, which is still largely indebted to Gibbon's 'decline and fall' and 'Christian triumph', can be divided into four, interrelated elements. The first element consists of the idea that Christianity steadily progressed southward and that Philae, the southernmost Egyptian settlement, was the last station on the 'roadmap' to a Christian Egypt.

The second element that has remained particularly persistent is that the Ancient Egyptian cults at Philae continued undisturbed until the sixth century, an exceptional situation that was kept alive by the continuous worship of the peoples from the south, the Blemmyes and Noubades. This idea is based on the account by Procopius, in which he describes the peoples as having access to the temples until they were destroyed on imperial orders around 535-537. Although it has long been known that a Christian community lived on the island from the fourth century onwards, Philae was thought to have consisted of a 'Christian' north and a 'pagan' south, which lived in constant tension with each other, as if they were divided by a Berlin Wall, until Justinian ended the not so peaceful co-existence by force.

A strong 'pagan bastion' until the sixth century brings us to the third element, namely that the closure of the temples on Philae was a glorious victory of Christianity over 'paganism'. The conversion of the temple of Isis into a church by Bishop Theodore (c. 525-after 577) fits this picture well. In particular, a series of Greek inscriptions from the temple's walls have been adduced which use ideological language such as: 'The cross has conquered. It always conquers'.

Since the first imperial mission was sent to Nubia around this time, a fourth and final element has been assumed, that is, that the 'victory' at Philae was the direct cause of the conversion of Nubia to Christianity. This idea is related to the one of a steady spread of Christianity southward: first Philae had to be converted before Nubia experienced the same fate. Therefore, the closure of the temples at Philae has been seen as the first act in the conversion of Nubia to Christianity. As Justinian was thought to have instigated this series of

¹ ΠΡΕΘΗΝΟΣ ΕΤΙΜΑΥ ΖΑΠΤ ΠΕ ΕΤΡΩΠΙΣΤΕΥΕ ΕΠΝΟΥΤΕ ΜΗΝΣΑ ΟΥΘΕΩ. ΕΤΒΕ ΠΑΙ ΠΤΑΙΧΩ ΕΡΟΚ ΠΗΝΑΙ ΤΗΡΟΥ ΧΕ ΔΙΖΕ ΕΡΟΚ (read ΕΡΟΚ) ΠΘΕ ΠΟΥΒΙΑΒΙΑΕ ΖΗΠΕΣΗΑΖ ΚΑΤΑ ΘΕ ΠΤΑΙΧΟΟΣ ΠΙΝΣΑΙΑΣ ΧΕ ΠΠΡΤΑΚΟΖ ΧΕ ΟΥΝ ΟΥΣΜΟΥ ΠΤΕΠΧΟΕΙΣ ΠΖΗΤΩ. See Crum, *Dict.* s.v. ΒΛΒΙΑΕ, and *Theological Texts* 41, for the same quotation.

events, including the conversion of the temple of Isis into a church, the measures concerning the southern frontier were interpreted as part of a deliberate, 'anti-pagan' policy by the emperor.

This general picture has influenced various interpretations of the sources from Philae. For example, as the last dated demotic graffiti from Egypt are among the inscriptions from Philae, it has been suggested that the demotic script remained in use until the closure of the Isis temple around 535-537, and that pilgrimage also continued until this late date. Similarly, the reuse of the other temples at Philae has been dated to after the closure of the Isis temple. Thus a picture is conjured up of a monolithic process from 'paganism' to Christianity, in which the new religion won a glorious victory over the old religion, and at once replaced it.

Against this all too static picture of the religious transformation at Philae, this study takes a different perspective. Let us briefly recapitulate the arguments that have been produced by deconstructing the monolithic development as described in previous studies.

Firstly, the idea that Philae was reached at the last stage of the conversion of Egypt to Christianity has been proven untenable. Not much later than in the rest of Egypt, probably around AD 330, sees were created at Syene and Philae, and from several ecclesiastical documents their bishops are known to have been involved in the affairs of the Egyptian Church during the fourth century. Thus, the Church became organised in the First Cataract area as early as during the reign of Constantine, and from this period onwards, Christianity gradually integrated into society. Although the fourth and fifth-century sources are scanty, several factors, such as the increasing use of Christian names, formulae and symbols, and the presence of clergymen and monks in daily life, illustrate this development. Two sources in particular indicate that the bishops of the region became increasingly important: the Appion petition (425-450), which shows that the bishops of Syene and Philae co-operated with the local garrisons to protect the churches in their sees against raids from the southern tribes, and two inscriptions from Philae, which mention the involvement of Bishop Daniel(ios) in a local building project in 449-450 or 464-465.

Secondly, against this background, it is an inescapable conclusion that the Ancient Egyptian cults on Philae contracted considerably after 298. In this respect, Procopius' account can be shown to follow imperial propaganda rather than accurately describing the position of the Ancient Egyptian cults at Philae in Late Antiquity. Two elements in the historical account in particular have been distorted. In the first place, Procopius, presumably drawing on Priscus, makes an artificial ethnic distinction between 'the Blemmyes' and 'the Noubades'. Although there is no evidence that the Blemmyes were the main supporters of the cults, as previous scholars have suggested, undoubtedly the southern peoples were in large part responsible for their persistence after 298. Yet, the question rather is whether the image of both peoples living clearly separated south of the frontier is correct. A comparison of the sources from and about the Dodekaschoinos in the fourth and fifth centuries with anthropological parallels from modern societies has shown that the situation south of the frontier was more complicated. After Diocletian had withdrawn the Roman frontier to Elephantine in 298, the Dodekaschoinos became an instable and multi-ethnic, tribal society. The instable situation resulted in frequent raids by southern tribes into Egypt. The Romans tried to prevent these by paying the tribes money and keeping access to the temple of Isis at Philae open to them. It was therefore Roman policy to tolerate the Ancient Egyptian cults at Philae in the fourth and fifth centuries, and tribes from the region rather than whole peoples kept coming to the sacred island in this period.

Procopius also suggests that the worship of 'the Blemmyes and Noubades' at the temples of Philae remained the same as it had been until their closure around 535-537, but this supposition is not supported by the evidence from the island. An analysis of the inscriptions from Philae indicates that the Ancient Egyptian cults contracted considerably after 298: their number decreased, their location became ever closer to the temple of Isis and the priests themselves dedicated most of them. Although the inscriptions show continuity in formulation, and festivals, rituals and religious associations continued to exist, the knowledge and learning of the priests, and the circumstance that they kept the highest offices in a small

circle of priests unmistakably point to an increasingly isolated position of the Ancient Egyptian cults at Philae. Even if in 452 or 453 Priscus states that 'according to the ancient right' access to the temples was renewed in a treaty of the Roman official Maximinus with 'the Blemmyes and the Noubades', the inscriptions suggest that by 456/457, when the last dated inscription was incised, the Ancient Egyptian cults were probably more dead than alive. Thus the picture given by Procopius of still lively cults in 535-537 can be discarded and has to be seen as a propagandistic account of a merely symbolic act.

Thirdly, after 80 years of oblivion, a glorious victory over 'paganism' can therefore hardly be an accurate description of the closure of the temple of Isis. Since Procopius follows imperial propaganda but does not mention the building of a church inside the temple of Isis, and there is no evidence that the transformation directly followed suit, these events have now been disentangled. The assumption by previous scholars that there was a direct sequel of events was probably connected to the idea that temples were violently and on a large scale converted into churches throughout the Mediterranean in the fourth and fifth centuries, Philae being one of the latest and most conspicuous examples of this phenomenon.

Yet, the archaeological evidence from Philae, supported by that from Elephantine and Syene, has shown that a linear development from temple to church was rather the exception than the rule. In most cases, temples were reused for more secular purposes such as for building material. Moreover, in those cases where temples were indeed turned into churches, this took place only at a later stage, in the sixth century or later, when the buildings that had not already been reused, or those parts that were suitable for that purpose, could be turned into churches. The fixed chronology of the reuse of the temples on Philae, that is, that they could have been reused only after the closure of the Isis temple, can therefore also be rejected. The temples could have been reused after the Ancient Egyptian cults had stopped functioning, and this could have been any time after, say, the middle of the fifth century. On the same grounds, the dates of the two freestanding churches in the northern part of the island, the East and West Churches, the former one to before and the latter to after 535-537, are less certain than has always been believed. The transformation of the temple of Isis into a church has therefore been placed in a local context, in which the empty spaces available on the small island were reused as economically as possible. Rather than that it formed part of an imperial, 'anti-pagan' policy, a local incident such as that with a Blemmyan tribe mentioned in a petition to the governor of the Thebaid and dated to 567, if it indeed refers to Philae, may have caused the building of the church.

Fourthly, if the building of a church inside the empty temple was a local affair, and may not have been connected to the closure of the temple of Isis, the idea that the closure directly caused the conversion of Nubia to Christianity as part of a deliberate 'anti-pagan' policy also becomes less likely. On the other hand, both events can be seen in the general context of imperial policy towards the southern Egyptian frontier. The missions to Nubia probably continued the diplomatic ties with the Noubades of the previous century, and the involvement of Philae in the missions was only practical as it was the see closest to Nubia.

All in all, then, the process of religious transformation described here is of a multifaceted nature that is more complex than has hitherto been thought. On the one hand, Philae can still hold the claim that it was the last place in Egypt where Ancient Egyptian religion as an institution was practised consisting of a priesthood, rituals and festivals. Moreover, unlike in the rest of Egypt, the Ancient Egyptian cults at Philae were openly tolerated by the Roman emperor in this period. However, the cults had already started to lose their importance after 298, and there was probably not much left of them by the middle of the fifth century. After this date, the cults could only have continued at a low level, although small groups from the region, such as the Blemmyes mentioned in the papyrus text dated to 567, may still have been attracted to the site long after it had ceased to be in regular use. Thus, the commonly held view that connects the end of Ancient Egyptian religion to the closure of the Isis temple at Philae in 535-537 is too simple. On the other hand, Christianity expanded in the First Cataract area during the fourth and fifth centuries. In this respect, the situation at Philae was similar to that of Syene and Elephantine. Although the case of Philae is therefore a unique

one, it has now been placed in its regional context, and this context may not have been so different from the rest of Egypt.

By the sixth century, even Philae had become Christian. This Christian identity appears from the activities Bishop Theodore undertook. He was an important figure in the Egyptian Church of the sixth century. On the island itself, Theodore was closely involved in the building of the *topos* of St Stephen inside the temple of Isis, by which he probably initiated a cult of martyrs, in the co-operation with monastic communities in the region and in secular and other ecclesiastical building projects. These activities together probably contributed considerably to the construction of a Christian identity on Philae. This is why it has been suggested that the hagiographical work entitled the *Life of Aaron* was composed during his episcopate. The work not only testifies to monastic communities in the region and the existence of a cult of local saints at least from the fifth century onwards, it also provides a picture of Philae becoming entirely Christian under its first bishop, Macedonius. Consequently, the work was written at a time when the population of Philae was considered to be Christian, and the story of the first bishops of Philae served to explain the origins of this Christian community. The building of a church inside the temple of Isis thus needs to be seen as the ultimate confirmation of this break with the past. The success of Theodore's work appears from the moulds found at Elephantine, in which the bishop and St Stephen are mentioned, testifying to Christian pilgrimage to Philae at the end of the sixth or the beginning of the seventh century.

At Syene and Elephantine, the construction of a Christian identity was probably not that different from that of Philae, but here it is not as visible in the sources. Syene and Elephantine also had a 'pagan' past, which needed to be explained with stories. Perhaps the need on Philae with its ancient precincts, which now stood empty but could not be ignored, was stronger and required a more explicit break with the past. In any case, at Syene the Church had become fully integrated into society from the end of the fifth century onwards, as is evidenced by the Paternosters archive. These documents frequently mention clergymen who had important functions in public life, such as private notaries, subscribers of documents and settlers of disputes. Clergymen are also well attested as private persons in these documents. Finally, at Elephantine, the ostraka give the impression that the situation was not so different there, and also show that Monasticism had become part of everyday life.

In reconstructing religious transformation in Late Antiquity, some final words of caution are needed because, as a recent reviewer of a book on Alexandria in Late Antiquity remarked: 'Ancient historians often seem to forget that three hundred years is a very long time'.² This book covers an even longer period, 344 years, and, as already noted in the General Introduction, although the sources from the region are plentiful and various, they do not, and cannot, cover all aspects of religious life in the period under consideration, even if more finds, especially of ostraka and archaeological material, are expected to be published in the future. Besides describing the picture that arises from the sources, we therefore also have to account for what is missing.

For example, we have interpreted the lack of inscriptions regarding the Ancient Egyptian cults at Philae after 456/457 as an indication that they could only have been practiced on a low level after this date. Although some sources seem to point to a continuation into the second half of the fifth century, this evidence is inconclusive. The inscriptions dated to the fourth and fifth centuries show a marked decline compared with the preceding period, and the cults could therefore hardly have been as alive as before by 456/457.

On the other hand, there is almost no epigraphical evidence for members of the Christian community on Philae during the fourth and fifth centuries. There are the two inscriptions mentioning Bishop Daniel(ios) of Philae, and perhaps the inscription of Kalasiris also dates to this period. The other inscriptions left by Christian visitors are plentiful, but the dated ones belong to the sixth century or later. This does not mean that a Christian community did not exist or was insignificant before that time. As has been said, Philae had its own see from the fourth century onwards, and several ecclesiastical documents suggest that

² A. Papaconstantinou, review of Haas, *Alexandria*, in *JEA* 89 (2003) 295-7 at 295.

the bishops of Philae were involved in the affairs of the Egyptian Church. Moreover, the Appion petition and the inscriptions of Bishop Daniel(ios) inform us that Philae closely cooperated with secular authorities.

Finally, the lack of evidence has also made it hard to answer the question of how Christianity was appropriated in this regional context. The regional developments have already made it clear that Christianity laid a framework for people to appropriate the new religion in various ways. The Patermouthis archive is a good illustration of how clergymen had become part of everyday life from the end of the fifth century onwards. They were persons of standing who could be asked to write, sign or subscribe documents and to settle disputes. From the archive it also appears that it was generally accepted to give children Christian names. Finally, a specific Christian idiom with crosses and formulae had become common practice in the writing of documents. Although these examples provide a context for how people appropriated Christianity, they do not tell us how people, or groups of people, decoded the message of Christianity and gave meaning to it.

At first sight, the section of the *Life of Aaron* on the first bishops of Philae seems to describe how people from the island appropriated Christianity, because it shows some of them resisting or assimilating it. However, this is a literary work that is coloured by Christian ideology. Accordingly, the work gives a black-and-white picture of how people at first resistant to Christianity were persuaded to become Christian. In reality, people's reactions to Christianity can be expected to have been much more diverse. While they would increasingly have accepted Christianity as the religion of public life, at the same time they may have remained attached to traditional ways of communicating with the divine. We will therefore close by giving some examples in which these religious encounters are present in the ways people appropriated Christianity.

To start with, the moulds from Elephantine show that there was a Christian pilgrimage to the *topos* of St Stephen at Philae at the end of the sixth or the beginning of the seventh century. This means that Christian pilgrims still came to the place that had once been one of the most important and well-known pilgrimage sites in Egypt. The inscriptions from the island itself are most illuminating in this respect, for while they use Christian formulae like the 'I' clause and crosses, they continue the practice of leaving their names on a sacred building since time immemorial. One of the inscriptions even completely follows the *proskynema* formula used for Greek pilgrimage inscriptions until the fifth century. However, a cross has been added, which shows that the pilgrim, Kalasiris, was a Christian. Similarly, there were Christian people among the visitors to the *topos* of St Stephen who specified that they were Nubian, the same people who had come to worship Isis on the island for so long. As regards names, people may have chosen not only Christian names for their children but also the names of people who were associated with the local Christian community. For example, Makedonios, whose name was inscribed on a pillar in the East Church, was possibly named after the first bishop of Philae.

Secondly, an inscription was discovered during the recent excavations of a sixth-century quay wall at Elephantine, together with many other inscriptions and figurative graffiti. At first sight the inscription looked like the inscriptions commemorating a high Nile level that are widely attested before the Christian period. Yet, in the second part of the inscription it becomes clear that the level is measured according to a cross depicted below the inscription. As also appears from the Nilometers of Elephantine and Philae, Nile cults therefore continued, albeit transformed into a distinctively Christian shape. Finally, the construction of a church on top of the quay wall continued a practice going back to the pharaonic period, in which Ancient Egyptian temples were built on terraces towering high above the Nile, and in which graffiti were incised by the visitors on the quay walls below.

Such examples occasionally give us glimpses of how people from the First Cataract area appropriated Christianity. The story was more complicated than that described in Christian, literary sources, which is exemplified by one such work about the region, the *Life of Aaron*. Christianity was not always violently imposed on them, after which they willingly accepted the new religion. It took at least two centuries before traditional local religion had become

transformed, and this complex process resulted in a Christian society in which some elements of the old religion can still be detected. This merging of elements, which at first sight may look like a paradox, is typical of periods of cultural change, as the Mayan example of Canek mentioned at the start of this book illustrates for a different period of religious transformation.

Other regional studies of religious transformation in Late Antique Egypt may add more dimensions to one of the most profound, if highly complex, periods of cultural change in history. After all, the statement in the inscription from Philae, 'the cross has conquered', is perhaps not that inaccurate a summary of this process, as long as it is taken metaphorically to refer to the result of a gradual and complex process. Whether the second part of the inscription, that 'it always conquers', still has any value is for the believer to decide.

Appendix 1. Priscus and Procopius on Philae

1. Priscus, F 27 Blockley (= *FHN* III 318)

... εἶναι δὲ αὐτοῖς κατὰ τὸν παλαιὸν νόμον ἀκώλυτον τὴν εἰς τὸ ἱερόν τῆς Ἴσιδος διάβασιν, τοῦ ποταμίου σκάφους Αἰγυπτίων ἐχόντων τὴν ἐπιμέλειαν, ἐν ᾧ περ τὸ ἄγαλμα τῆς θεοῦ ἐντιθέμενον διαπορθμεύεται. Ἐν ῥητῷ γὰρ οἱ βάρβαροι χρόνῳ ἔς τὴν οἰκείαν διακομίζοντες τὸ ξόανον.

... and that, in accordance with the ancient right, their crossing to the temple of Isis be unhindered, Egyptians having charge of the river boat in which the statue of the goddess is placed and ferried across the river. For at a stated time the barbarians bring the wooden statue to their own country and, after having consulted it, return it safely to the island.

2. Procopius, *Persian Wars* 1.10.34-37 = *FHN* III 328

Καίτοι καὶ νῆσόν τινα ἐν ποταμῷ Νεῖλῳ ἄγχιστά πη τῆς Ἐλεφαντίνης πόλεως εὐρῶν ὁ βασιλεὺς οὗτος φρούριόν τε ταύτῃ δειμάμενος ὀχυρώτατον, κοινούς τινας ἐνταῦθα νεώς τε καὶ βωμούς Ῥωμαίοις τε καὶ τούτοις δὴ κατεστήσατο τοῖς βαρβάροις, καὶ ἱερεῖς ἐκάστων ἐν τῷ φρουρίῳ τούτῳ ἰδρύσατο, ἐν τῷ βεβαίῳ τὴν φιλίαν αὐτοῖς ἔσεσθαι τῷ μετέχειν τῶν ἱερῶν σφίσις οἰόμενος. Διὸ δὴ καὶ Φίλας ἐπωνόμασε τὸ χωρίον. Ἄμφω δὲ ταῦτα τὰ ἔθνη, οἳ τε Βλέμυες καὶ οἱ Νοβάται, τοὺς τε ἄλλους θεούς, οὐσπερ Ἕλληνες νομίζουσι πάντας, καὶ τὴν τε Ἴσιν τὸν τε Ὅσιριν σέβουσι, καὶ οὐχ ἥκιστα γε τὸν Πρίαπον. Οἱ μέντοι Βλέμυες καὶ ἄνθρωποις τῷ ἡλίῳ θύειν εἰώθασιν. Ταῦτα δὲ τὰ ἐν Φίλαις ἱερά οὗτοι δὴ οἱ βάρβαροι καὶ ἔς ἐμὲ εἶχον, ἀλλὰ βασιλεὺς αὐτὰ Ἰουστινιανὸς καθελεῖν ἔγνω. Ναρσῆς γοῦν, Περσαρμένιος γένος, οὗ πρόσθεν ἄτε ἠτύτομοληκότος ἐς Ῥωμαίους ἐμνήσθη, τῶν ἐκείνη στρατιωτῶν ἄρχων τὰ τε ἱερά καθεῖλε, βασιλέως οἱ ἐπαγγείλαντος, καὶ τοὺς μὲν ἱερεῖς ἐν φυλακῇ ἔσχε, τὰ δὲ ἄγάλματα ἐς Βυζάντιον ἔπεμψεν.

Even so this emperor chose an island in the river Nile somewhere very near the city of Elephantine and constructed there a really strong fortification. And in that place he founded some temples and altars for the Romans and for these very barbarians in common and settled in this fortification priests of both (parties), in the expectation that their friendship would be secure for the Romans because they shared the sanctuaries with them. This is the reason why he named the place "Friends" (Philae). Both these peoples, the Blemmyes and the Nobatai (Noubades), revere all the other gods in which pagans believe, as well as Isis and Osiris, and not least Priapus. But the Blemmyes even have the custom of sacrificing human beings to the sun. These barbarians retained the sanctuaries on Philae right down to my day, but the Emperor Justinian decided to destroy them. Accordingly, Narses, a Persarmenian by birth, whom I mentioned before as having deserted to the Romans, and who was in command of the troops there, destroyed the sanctuaries on the Emperor's orders, held the priests under guard, and sent the images to Byzantium.

Appendix 2: List of Demotic Graffiti in Egypt

After Farid, *Fünf demotische Stelen*, 201-5. Additions and corrections have been indicated. The localities are arranged along the Nile downstream, concluding with the marginal areas of the deserts and oases. Some localities within a region have been combined to make the table as convenient as possible.

a. Tombs

<i>Location</i>	<i>Number of Graffiti</i>	<i>First Date</i>	<i>Last Date</i>
el-Kab	2 ¹	?	?
Armant	? ²	late Ptolemaic	early Roman
Thebes West	48 ³	122/121 BC	42/43 AD
Saqqara	at least 155 ⁴	early Ptolemaic	late Ptolemaic
Dakhleh Oasis	2	I AD	I AD
Bahariya Oasis	4	?	?

b. Stone Quarries

<i>Location</i>	<i>Number of Graffiti</i>	<i>First Date</i>	<i>Last Date</i>
Gebel el-Tarif (el-Debba)	1	?	?
Gebel el-Silsila	116	12/11 BC	32/33 AD
Gebelein (el-Dababia) ⁵	?	?	?
Gebel el-Sheikh el-Haridi	1	63/62 BC	63/62 BC ⁶
Gebel Sidi Moussa	31	?	?
Gebel Abu-Feda	1	?	?
Wadi en-Nachleh	ca. 30	376/375 BC	372/371 BC ⁷
Darb el-Karaib	3	Ptolemaic	Ptolemaic
Antinoopolis (Deir Abu Hennes) ⁸	?	?	?
Tura/el-Masara	57 ⁹	393/392 BC	328 BC
Wadi Hammamat	160 ¹⁰	Saite/Persian period	beginning of Roman period
Kharga Oasis (Gebel el-Teir)	159 ¹¹	140 BC	113 AD

¹ Farid counts one graffito, but cf. Brugsch, *Thesaurus* 6, 1539.

² Farid counts eleven graffiti, but the exact number cannot be established, cf. R. Mond, O.H. Myers (eds), *The Bucheum*, 3 vols (London, 1934) 2.69-70.

³ Add J.K. Winnicki, 'Vier demotische Graffiti in den Königsgräbern in Theben', *Enchoria* 15 (1987) 163-8, and 'Zwei demotische Namen', *JJP* 25 (1995) 171-4 at 173-4.

⁴ E. Bresciani, 'L'attività archeologica in Egitto dell'università di Pisa: Saqqara 1974-1977', *EVO* 1 (1978) 1-40 at 13-4, mentions two graffiti instead of one.

⁵ G. Daressy, 'Les carrières de Gebelein et le roi Smendès', *RecTrav* 10 (1888) 133-8 at 135.

⁶ Re-edited by E. Cruz-Uribe and A. Farid, 'A New Look at an Ancient Graffito', *JSSEA* 27 (1997) 27-33.

⁷ Devauchelle, 'Notes', 181-2.

⁸ J. Jarry, 'Nouvelles inscriptions coptes, grecques, arabes, et syriaque de Deir Abou Hennes', *BSAC* 21 (1975) 55-81 at 78: 'Ces carrières possèdent aussi des graffiti démotiques qui malheureusement n'ont pas encore été déchiffrés'; A. Gasse, 'Rapport préliminaire d'une mission épigraphique à Deir Abou Hennes', *ASAE* 69 (1983) 95-102 at 102.

⁹ Devauchelle, 'Notes'. Farid has overlooked this publication and counts only forty.

¹⁰ Add E. Cruz-Uribe, 'Demotic Graffiti from the Wadi Hammamat', *JSSEA* 28 (2001) 26-54.

¹¹ E. Cruz-Uribe, *Hibis Temple Project. Volume 2: The Demotic Graffiti of Gebel Teir* (San Antonio, 1995).

c. Temples

<i>Location</i>	<i>Number of Graffiti</i>	<i>First Date</i>	<i>Last Date</i>
Kawa	2	?	?
Naqa	1	II/III	II/III ¹²
Dodekaschoinos	109 ¹³	145-116 BC	III
Philae	450	Ptolemaic	452 AD
Aswan	38 ¹⁴	189 BC	184 AD
Elephantine	8 ¹⁵	282/281 BC	first century BC
Kom Ombo	6	Roman	Roman
Edfu	49 ¹⁶	end second century BC	first century AD
El-Kab	2 ¹⁷	Ptolemaic/Roman	Ptolemaic/Roman
Tod	4	155 BC	88 BC
Karnak	several hundreds	late Ptolemaic	late Ptolemaic
Thebes-West	ca. 481	Ptolemaic	Roman
Nag' el-Madamud	2 ¹⁸	late Ptolemaic	early Roman
Qift	1 ¹⁹	41-54 AD	41-54 AD
Abydos	6 ²⁰	Persian period	late Roman
Athribis (near Sohag)	39	late Ptolemaic	early Roman
Kom Madi	2	?	?
Kom Abu Billo	1	Ptolemaic	Ptolemaic
Tanis	1	?	?
Wadi 'Abbad (Eastern Desert)	1	?	?
Kharga Oasis (Ain Amur)	at least 1 ²¹	Roman	Roman
Bahariya Oasis	? ²²	?	?

¹² H.-J. Thissen in K. Zibelius, *Der Löwentempel von Naq'a in der Butana (Sudan). IV: Die Inschriften* (Wiesbaden, 1983) 38-40, proposes reading Qeren, son of Wayeqiye, who is mentioned in *LDak.Dem.* 31.1.

¹³ *L.Philae.Dem.*, supplemented by Bresciani, *Dodécaschoene*, who has fifty-one still unedited texts in addition to Griffith's catalogue: Maharraqa one, Dakka twenty-two, Kalabsha eighteen, Qertassi ten. Moreover, Farid counts two graffiti at Dendur, whereas Griffith mentions only one.

¹⁴ But cf. Bresciani and Pernigotti, *Assuan*, 121: 'Purtroppo, su un'ottantina almeno che furono tracciati sulle pareti della sala con pilastri e sui pilastri stessi, le tracce attuali di circa metà sono tali, che non mi sono sentita di proporre neppure un tentativo di lettura'.

¹⁵ E. Lüddeckens, 'Das demotische Graffito vom Tempel der Satet auf Elephantine', *MDAIK* 27 (1971) 203-6; K.-T. Zauzich in Jaritz, *Elephantine III*, 78-80; U. Kaplony-Heckel, 'Zum demotischen Baugruben-Graffito vom Satis-Tempel auf Elephantine', *MDAIK* 43 (1987) 155-69.

¹⁶ Cf. Devauchelle, 'Graffites', who mentions 'une cinquante' of graffiti and lists forty-nine numbers, but the actual number of graffiti under these headings is higher.

¹⁷ P. Derchain, *Elkab I. Les monuments religieux à l'entrée de l'Ouady Hellal* (Brussels, 1971) 77, mentions two graffiti.

¹⁸ W. Spiegelberg, 'Demotica II (20-34)', *SBAW* 1928, no. 2, 1-57 at 28.

¹⁹ According to Thissen, *Medinet Habu*, 2, this inscription does not conform to the definition of demotic graffiti, for it was inscribed on a wall that was intended for that purpose.

²⁰ Add P.W. Pestman, J. Quaegebeur, R.L. Vos (eds), *Recueil de textes démotiques et bilingues I: Transcriptions* (Leiden, 1977) no. 11, a demotic text written in Greek letters and dated to the beginning of the second century BC.

²¹ A. Fakhry, 'A Roman Temple between Kharga and Dakhla', *ASAE* 40 (1940) 761-8 at 764, publishes one graffito. More graffiti were visible but the exact number is not specified, W.J. Harding King, *Mysteries of the Libyan Desert* (London, 1925) 333.

Appendix 3: List of Bishops of Syene and Philae in Late Antiquity

Syene

<i>Bishop</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Date</i>
Neilammon	Ath. <i>ap. sec.</i> 49.3	346
	Ath. <i>ep.</i> 19	347
Neilammon	Ath. <i>ep.</i> 19	347
	Ath. <i>h. Ar.</i> 72.2	356
Valerius	<i>PO</i> 3.3, pp. 276-277	predecessor of Ammonius
Ammonius	<i>PO</i> 3.3, pp. 276-277	380-385 or 457-477
Macrinus	<i>PO</i> 3.3, p. 277	successor of Ammonius
Hatre	<i>PO</i> 3.3, pp. 430-434	385-412
Appion	<i>P.Leid.</i> Z 3	425-450

Philae

<i>Bishop</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Date</i>
Macedonius	Ath. <i>apol. sec.</i> 49.3	346
	<i>Life of Aaron</i> , fol. 11b, 12a, 13a, 13b, 15b, 22b (2x), 23b, 24b, 25b, 26a, 32b, 33a, 34b, 56b	
Mark	Ath. <i>h. Ar.</i> 72.2	356
	Ath. <i>tom.</i> 10	362
	IFAO, Copte 25, fol. 8a	368
	<i>Life of Aaron</i> , fol. 17b (2x), 18a (2x), 18b, 20a, 20b, 21a, 22a, 23a (2x), 24b (3x), 25b (3x), 26b (2x), 27a (2x), 29b	

²² Cf. the remark by F. Colin, 'Un ex-voto de pèlerinage auprès d'Ammon dans le temple dit "d'Alexandre", à Bahariya (désert Libyque)', *BIFAO* 97 (1997) 91-6 at 92-3 (n. 6).

	(2x), 30a, 34b, 56b	
Isaiah	IFAO, Copte 25, fol. 8a <i>Life of Aaron</i> , fol. 17b, 18a, 19b, 23a, 24b, 25b, 32b (2x), 33a, 33b, 34a, 56b	368
Psoulousia	<i>Life of Aaron</i> , fol. 36b <i>Life of Aaron</i> , fol. 34b, 35b, 36a, 36b, 37a (2x)	385
Daniel(ios)	<i>I.Philae</i> II 194.7-8 <i>I.Philae</i> II 195.8-9	449 or 464 450 or 465
Theodore	Joh.Eph. <i>h.e</i> III 4.9 Brooks (p. 189.8) Joh.Eph. <i>h.e</i> III 4.7 Brooks (p. 186.17), cf. 4.49 (p. 233.24) Eirpanome inscription, l. 5 Joh.Eph. <i>h.e</i> III 4.49 Brooks (p. 233.24) <i>Documenta Monophysitica</i> , pp. 137.22, 138.5, 10 Chabot <i>I.Philae</i> II 200.6, 202.5, 203.3, 204.5 Joh.Eph. <i>h.e</i> III 4.9, 10 Brooks (pp. 189.8, 30), <i>Documenta Monophysitica</i> , pp. 272.8, 273.5, 7, 274.12, 20, 27, 275.13, 22, 28, 276.4, 278.4 Chabot <i>I.Philae</i> II 216.8	c 525 536-548 544 or 559 551 565 after 567 (?) 575 577

Appendix 4: *P.Cair.Masp. I 67004*

Text and translation after Fournet, *Entre document et littérature*, 192-216, whereas the numbering of the lines of Dijkstra, 'Cult of Isis', has been maintained. When Fournet's translation has not been adopted, this is indicated, with reference to the discussion in the main text.

Antinoopolis

567 AD

- 1a. + χμγ// + χμγ//
1. Ϡ Φλαυίω [Τρια]δίω Μαρνανῶ Μι[χα]ηλίω Γαβρηλι[ί]ω Θεοδώρω Κωνσταντίνω <Μάρτυρίω> Ἰουλιανῶ Ἀθανασίω, τῶ ἐνδοξοτάτῳ στρατηλάτῃ, ἀπὸ ὑπάτῳ[ν καὶ ὑπ(ερ)φνεστ(άτῳ) πατρικίῳ πραιφέκτου Ἰουστίνου, δούκι καὶ αὐγουσταλίῳ τῆς Θηβαίων χώρας τὸ β//.]
 2. *vacat 51 cm* + Δέησις καὶ ἰκεσία πα(ρὰ) τῶν ἐλεεινοτάτων βουλευτῶν Ὀμβων τῶν δούλων τῆς ὑμ[± 28]
 3. Ἔγνωσται τοῖς ἐν[οικ]οῦσι πᾶ[σα]ν τὴν ἀθλι[ί]αν ἡμῶν Θηβαίων χώραν ὁ πρ[ὸ]ς Θ(εὸ)ν καὶ σωτῆρα Χ(ριστὸ)ν ἰλασμοῦ ἡμῶν ἐκ τοῦ τὴν ἡμετέραν ταλαιπωρίαν ἀξιούσθαι πάλιν τῆς διαβεβοημένης ὑμῶν καὶ πανευφημουμένης (?)]
 4. παρουσίας, ἐλπίδ[ας σ]ωτηριώδε[ι]ς ἔχοντες ἐκ ταύτης ἐπ' ἀληθείας τυχεῖν λήθης τῶν συμβεβηκότων ἡμῖν πικρῶν ἀδικημάτων καὶ ἀνάπαυλαν ἐνδελεχῆ χορεῦσαι ὑπερευχ[± 28]
 5. μέρεσιν ἐφιλοπρ[αγμ]ονήθημεν οὐκ ὡς ἔτυχεν καὶ τὸ καθ' ἡμᾶς πρᾶγμα ἐξεῖπεν οὐκ ἠύραμεν, μὴ ὄντος λυτρουμένου μήτε σώσοντος εἰ μὴ ὑμᾶς τοὺς ὑπεροχωτάτους καὶ ἐνδόξους [± 28]
 6. τοῦ πανοικτιστοῦ Θε(ο)[ῦ. Τὸ] δὲ καθ' ἡμᾶς πρᾶγμα ἐν τούτοις ἔχομεν. + Διδάσκωμεν τὴν ὑπερφυῆ ὑμῶν καὶ ἐνδοξον δεσποτείαν ὡς μωρίαν καὶ ἀκαταστασίαν ἀμύθητον ἐνόσησεν τις ἀταξία φερόμ[ενος ± 24]
 7. καταγόμενος πρὸ [τῆς] π[ρό]λεως (?) καὶ μηδεμίαν ἐκπληξιν τῶν νόμων καρπούμενος μήτε ἀνθρώπων φειδόμενος κατὰ φόβον Θεοῦ. Οὐκ ὤκνησεν γὰρ ὁ τοιοῦτος μάταιος καὶ ὀλισθηρὸς καὶ .[± 28]
 8. πονηρὸν ἀπεργά[σασθαι] ἑαυτῷ βίον τε καὶ ἐργαστή[ρ]ιον καὶ τὸ μεμημένον [.οι] χριστιανικὸν ἀθετῆσαι σέβας καὶ θρησκός, καὶ δαίμοσι καὶ ξοάνοις ἀφιερῶσαι σήκους, ἀντιπολέμιον ἑαυτὸν ο[± 28]
 9. σκάνδαλα ποιησά[μενος] ἐν τῷ αὐτὸν τὰ ἱερὰ τοῖς βαρβάροις ἦτοι Βλέμυσι ἀ[ν]ακαινίσασθαι, μεθ' ὃ καίπερ ἐκεῖνοι τὸν αἴδιον ἐπιγινώσκουν Θεὸν ὑπεστράφοντο τῶν ἐξουδενώσεως εἰδώ[λων ± 25]
 10. ὠμοφάγων. Ὁ τοιοῦ[τος δ'] ἐπισπώ[μ]ενος ἔθελεν συν ὁμοίων ἀτάκτων· καὶ ἐπραίτευσαν ἡμᾶς παντελῶς καὶ ἀο[ι]κήτους τὰς ἡμετέρας ἐξεπόρθησεν οἰκίας, λεηλατήσας τὰ παντοῖα ἡμῶν πρᾶγματ[α ± 27]
 11. τέκνα πλέον βαρβ[άρων] τ[ο]ύτοις κακῶς διαπραξάμε[ν]ος συνομόνοι[α]ν τοῖς [εἰ]ρημέ(νοις) βαρβάροι[ς] καὶ ἄδειαν πράττω[ν] ἐν ἅπασι κεχρη[μ]ένοι[ς] κακοῖς αὐτον[ο]μί[α]ς τρόπῳ καθ' ὃ [Ἰ]ερωβοὰμ τὰς δαμάλει[ς ± 27]

12. εἰς τὰ εἶδωλα· ὁ τοιοῦ[τος π]λέον τούτ[ου] ἐχειργάσατο [ύ]πήκοο[ς] βαρβάρους γενάμενος καὶ ἐφ' οἷς ἐζήτει ἐκῶν (?) τότε Κολλοῦθος [ὁ] λαμπρό(τατος) ἐπιφάνει[αν] πρὸ[ς] αὐτό[ν] διὰ τὴν τοῦ παρ' αὐτοῦ κτισθέν[τος] ἡ[παρ]ανομίαν καὶ ἐπιτιμίαν ἡπαμίαν[αν] τοῦ [± 28]
13. συνήθροισεν πολλοὺς [τοιού]τους παρ[ε]πομένους [αὐ]τῶ, ἐπο[ί]ησεν μετὰ τὴν [πό]ρθησιν τῶν οἰκημά[των] ἡμῶ[ν] καὶ τῆ[ν] ἐκε[ίν]ων δια[ρ]παγήν, [κ]ατέ[στρ]εψεν τὰ πλεῖ[σ]τα μετ' αὐτῶν καὶ [..]α κατ' ἐ[ν]έπρησεν ο[...].α. [± 28]
14. ἡμῖν καὶ νηπίων τέ[κνω]ν κο...[.].[.].νον ...εν ὑ[.]. ὁ ὠμοφάγος ἐκ[εῖ]νος [καὶ (?)] μίξοβάρβαρος[ς] καὶ μίξ[έ]λλη, ἀπόντω[ν] ἡμῶν [καὶ] παρόντω[ν] ἐνταῦθα ἐπὶ τ[ῆ]σ[δε] [τ]ῆς πόλεως Ἀν[τ]ινόου[ς] δημοσίας χρε[ί]ας ἐνεκ- ± 27]
15. αὐτονομῶν ἀπήτ[η]σεν ἑαυτῶ οἰκειωσάμενος μετὰ τῆς ἐπομένης αὐτῶ τῶ[ν] ἀτάκτων συνόδου· [κατ]εδαπάνωσαν εἰς ἑαυ[τ]οὺς ἀφόβως καὶ τὰ ἀ[μ]πελικά αὐ[τ]ῶν χωρία ἀπετρύγησεν ἀπηλ[2/3].η.[± 28]
16. μείναντα πρὸς λύμην τοῦ δημοσίου λόγου καὶ τελεί[αν] ἡμῶν ἀνατροπήν· ἐξω[2/3].ι πρόσπορίσας βαρβάρους ἔθνεσι δῶρα καὶ λωτίσματα, συνθηρ[σ]κεύων τοῖς τοιού[τοις] ὁ βέβηλος καὶ πα[ρ]θeno.. [± 31]
17. δεῦρο ὑπὸ συλλησ[τῶ]ν (?) τοῦ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἰδικὴν ἐγγόν[η]ν (?) καταμοιχεύσας [..]. ἀδεῶς. Καὶ προσε[πὶ] τούτοις τὰ ἱερά σίκνα χ[ωνεύ]σας χρυσᾶ εἰς κλα[νί]ον ἄβρας βαρβάρω[ν 2/3] χειρῶν καὶ αὐτό[ς] μεταποιησάμενος ± 27]
18. εἰ οἷόν τέ ἐστι. Διὸ παρ[ακα]λοῦμεν τὴν ὑπερφυῆ ὑμῶ[ν] εὐκλειαν τὰ πάνδεινα τούτ[ου] τοῦ ἀτοπωτάτου καὶ ἀναξί[ως] ἔχοντος τῆς [κλή]σεως τοῦ αὐτοῦ ὀνό[μα]τος, ἅτινα χάρτης [οὐ] χωρεῖ οὔτε γλώσ[σαις] ἐκφράσαι [± 31]
19. ἀνασταλῆναι καὶ [παντε]λῶς ἀναιρεθῆναι πλ[έον] καπνοῦ εὐκατάγν[ωστον] (?) σβέννυσθαι ὥστ[ε] τὸ μνημ[ό]συνον τούτου καὶ τῆς ῥ[(?)]ίξης πώποτ[ε ...]θῆναι, ὅπως ἐ[ύρω]μεν εὐκόλως βι[ῶ]ναι οἷοι [± 31]
20. τὰ ἴδια τῶ δημοσίῳ [λόγ]ῳ ἐξυπηρετῆσαι τῇ το[ύ]τ[ου] εἰσ[φορᾶ] κατὰ τ[ὸ] ἔθος καὶ εὐρωμεν ἡσ[ύ]χως] διατρίψαι, προσ[ευ]χ[ό]μενοι ἀδιαλείπτως] τῶ ἀγαθῶ καὶ παν[ε]πόπτη Θεῶ ὑπ[ε]ρ [σωτ]ηρίας καὶ διαμονῆς ± 24]
21. ὑπερφύεστα(τοι) καὶ ἐ[ύκ]λεέστα(τοι) στρατηλ(άται), ὑπατοι, [π]ατρικιοι, δοῦκες, ἀγ[ο]υστάλιοι, κύριοι. † αω +[+]+

¹ To Flavius Triadius Marianus Michaelius Gabriellus Theodorus Constantinus <Martyrius> Iulianus Athanasius, the most glorious commander, ex-consul and most extraordinary patrician of Justin the prefect, *dux et augustalis* of the Thebaid for the second year.

² Petition and supplication from the most pitiable councillors of Omboi, the slaves of your [...].

³ The inhabitants of the whole of our unfortunate Thebaid know well that we have found favour with (our) God and Saviour Christ since our wretchedness is again deemed worthy of your celebrated presence [which is praised all-around], ⁴ we who,

on the basis of that (presence), entertain the salutary hope of really forgetting the bitter injustices that have befallen us and of celebrating perpetual rest, praying (?) [...] ⁵ we were the victims of greed out of proportions and had no chance to explain our case in its entirety, as there was nobody who could deliver or save us except for you, most eminent and glorious [...] ⁶ of God who pities all. Our case is as follows.

We inform your extraordinary and glorious lordship that someone has fallen ill with unspeakable madness and instability, being carried away by disorder [...] ⁷ ... before the city, and having enjoyed no terror for the laws nor sparing people out of fear of God. For that fool, renegade and [...] did not shrink [...] ⁸ from making his own life and deeds evil, from setting aside the taught Christian worship and religion and from consecrating shrines with demons and wooden statues, [(thereby) declaring himself (?)] an adversary [...] ⁹ and he laid traps by renewing the sanctuaries for the barbarians, that is, Blemmyes, after which they, although they had turned away from the despicable idols to know the eternal God, [...] ¹⁰ eaters of raw meat. By persuading them, that man bewitched (them) with his outlaws looking like him. They plundered us completely and he destroyed our houses, so that they became uninhabitable after having robbed (all) our various possessions ... [...] our] ¹¹ children, worse than barbarians (do), having concluded an evil agreement with these said barbarians, and passing over fearlessness on every occasion to those wicked people who behaved by taking the law into their own hands, just as Jerobeam [who ...] the heifers [...] ¹² to the idols. That person achieved, even worse than (Jerobeam) did, submitting himself to barbarians, and the things for which the illustrious Kollouthos then for his own accord sought to let him appear in front of him (?) because of the lawlessness of that which was built by him and the all-abominable crime [...] ¹³ he assembled many such people escorting him; he also caused, after the destruction of our houses, their robbery; he overturned the bulk with their help and laid in ashes [...] ¹⁴ to us and of our young children [...] that eater of raw meat, half barbarian and half pagan,²³ while we were absent and present here in this city, Antinoopolis, on account of official (tax) business [...] ¹⁵ taking the law in his own hand, he collected [the taxes (of the ordinary taxpayers)], appropriating (the taxes) for himself with the band of outlaws which accompanied him. They also fearlessly spent (the taxes) on themselves. And he harvested the vineyards of (the ordinary taxpayers) [...] ¹⁶ having remained, to the detriment of the public treasury and our total destruction. Moreover, after he had even sent the choicest gifts to barbarian tribes and worshipped together with these people, the wretched man and [violator (?)] of girls [...] ¹⁷ here by fellow-brigands of the same person and having fearlessly violated his own daughter (?). And on top of that having melted the imperial standards into gold to make a bracelet for a favourite barbarian slave girl [...] and having himself pretended [...] ¹⁸ if it is possible.

We therefore entreat your extraordinary honour that the all-dreadful deeds of that perfectly crazy man who is also not worthy of the name he bears, (deeds) which a papyrus roll cannot contain and which we cannot describe with (our) tongues [...] ¹⁹ are suppressed and that he is totally eliminated who deserves (?) to be condemned until he is quenched and is more reduced than smoke, so that the memory of that man [and of his family (?)] is forgotten (?) once and for all, in order that we find means to live peacefully [...] ²⁰ our part (of the taxes) to the fisc and to assist according to custom in the collection of this (part) and in order that we find means to pass our time in peace, while we continually pray to the good God who sees all on behalf of the salvation and preservation [of ...], ²¹ most extraordinary and honourable commanders, consuls, patricians, *duces, augustales*, lords.

²³ See p. 162 (n. 253).

Appendix 5: Recently Published Late Antique Inscriptions from the First Cataract Area

Text and translation are taken from Dijkstra, 'Late Antique Inscriptions'. Nos. 1-4 are from the East Church at Philae, nos. 5-8 from a Late Antique quay wall at Elephantine.

1. † Μᾶρκος 'Markos'
2. Νίγερ Δῖος † 'Niger, Dios'
3.
Λουκᾶ διακ(όνου) 'of Loukas, the deacon'
Μακεδωνίου . 'of Makedonios'
† Δῖος Κολλοῦθος 'Dios, Kollouthos'
4. †† Θεόδωρος Σευῆρος 'Theodoros, Severos'
5.] καὶ Δῖος Πασμητ ἀκτουάρ(ιος)
'... and Dios, son of Pasmēt, *actuariūs*'
6. ια ἰνδ(ικτίονος)
†
'at the eleventh indiction'
7. εἷς (?) Θεὸς
ὁ βοηθός
'there is one (?) God, the helper'
8. ἀνέβη ὁ *traces?*
Νῖλος ἐπὶ τῆς πόδ(ας ?) ἐκίνου
ὑποποδίου τοῦ σταύρου
τοῦ μηνὸς Θῶθ κ
†

2. Νῖλος: read Νεῖλος, τῆς: read τοὺς (?), ἐκίνου: read ἐκείνου

'The Nile rose to the feet (?) of that foot bench of the cross in the month Thoth, the 20th'.

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Figures

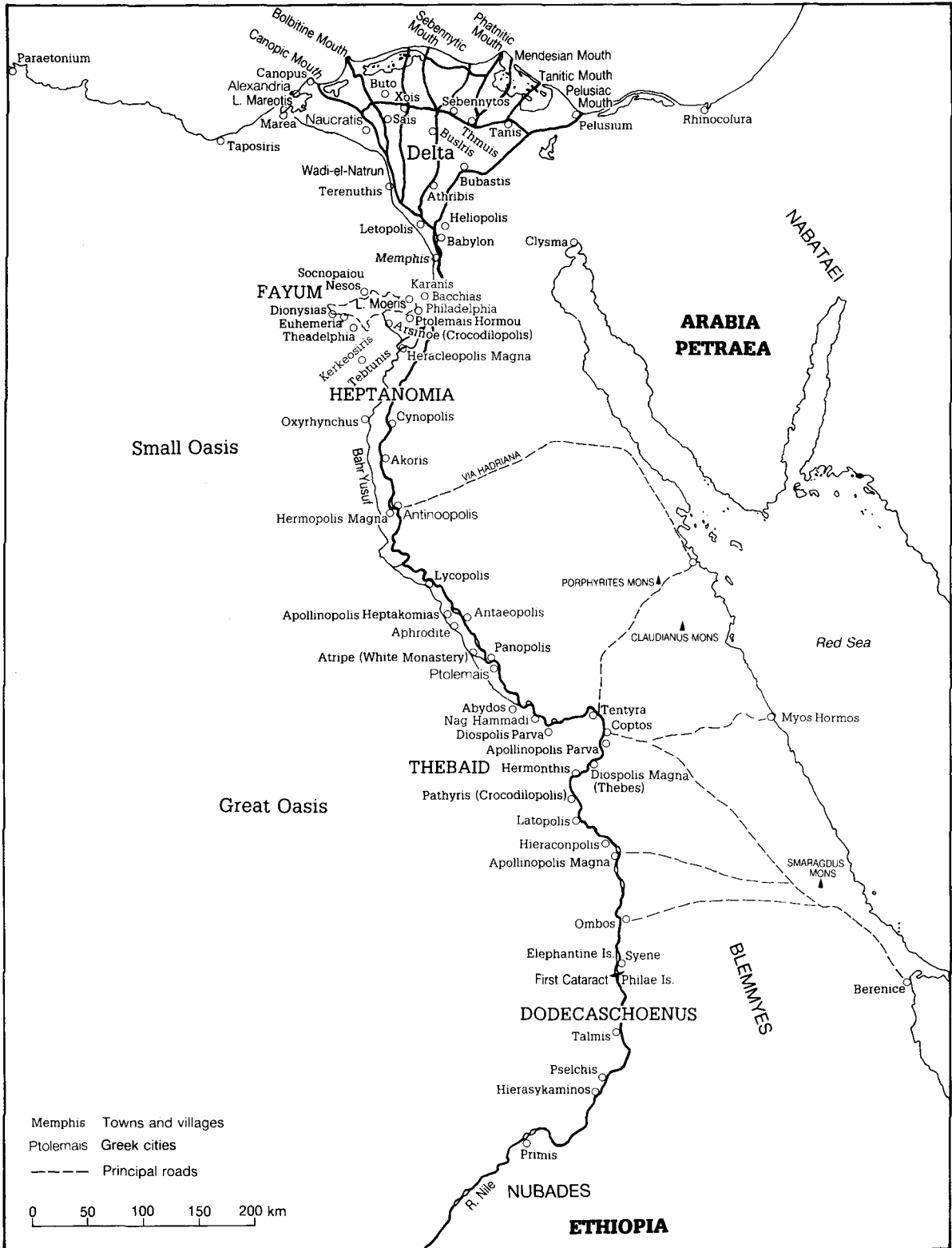


Fig. 1. Egypt in the Graeco-Roman period (Bowman, *Egypt*, Fig. 1).

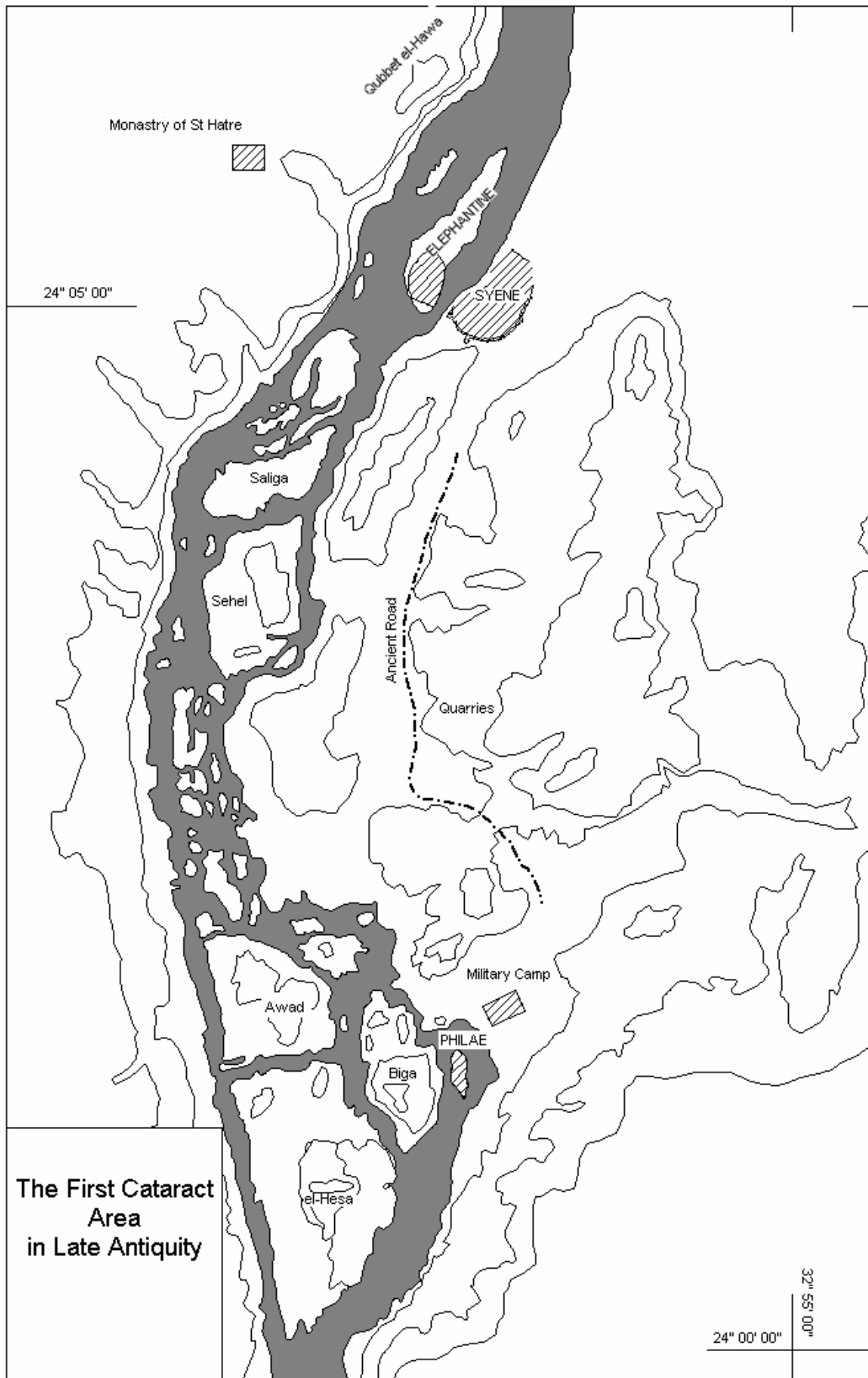


Fig. 2. The First Cataract area in Late Antiquity (with help of K.-C. Bruhn).

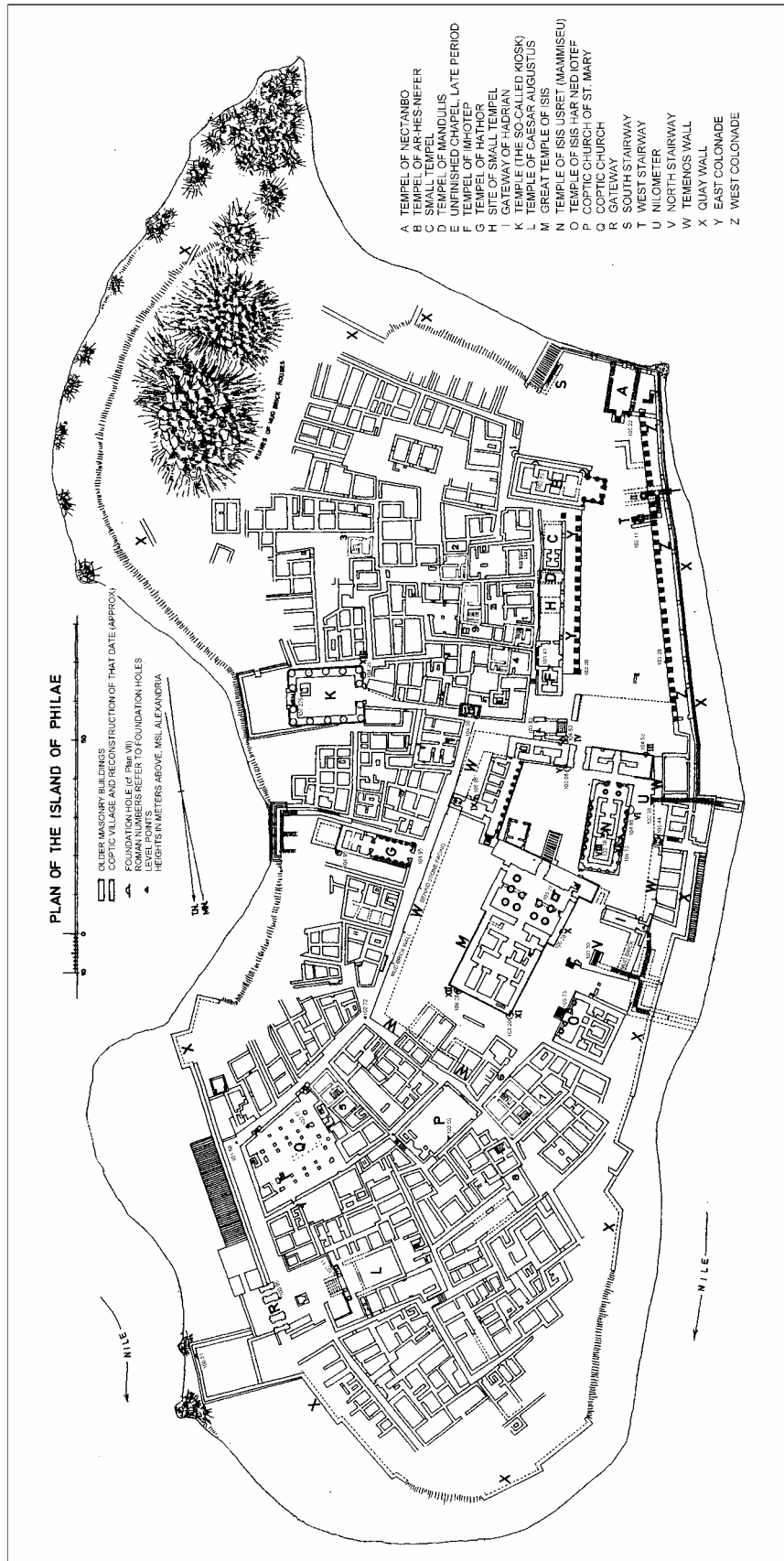


Fig. 3. Philae before the transportation of its temples to Agilkia (Lyons, *Report on the Island and Temples*, Pl. 1).

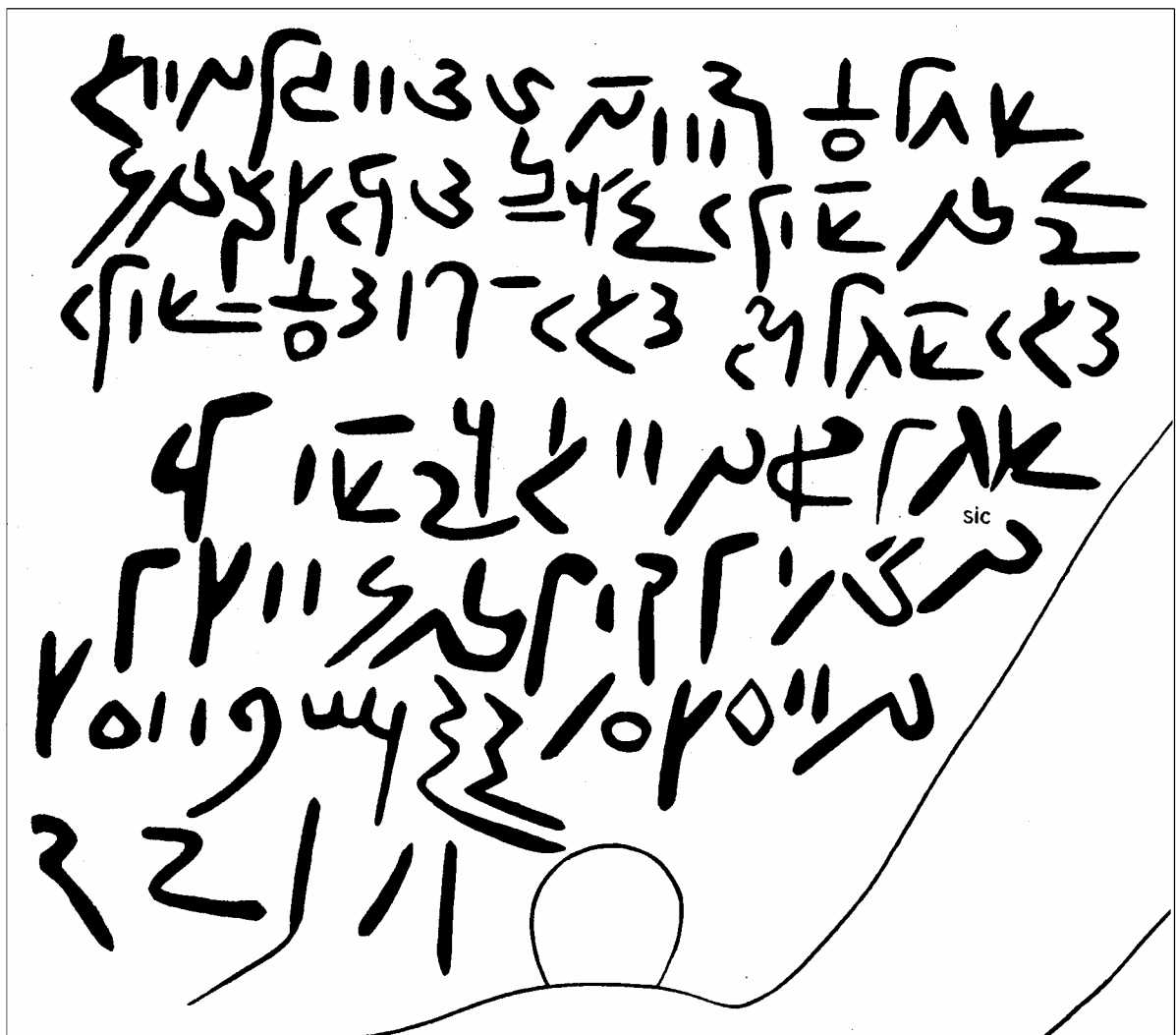


Fig. 4. Demotic Graffito from Philae (*I.Philae.Dem.* 365, Pl. 54).

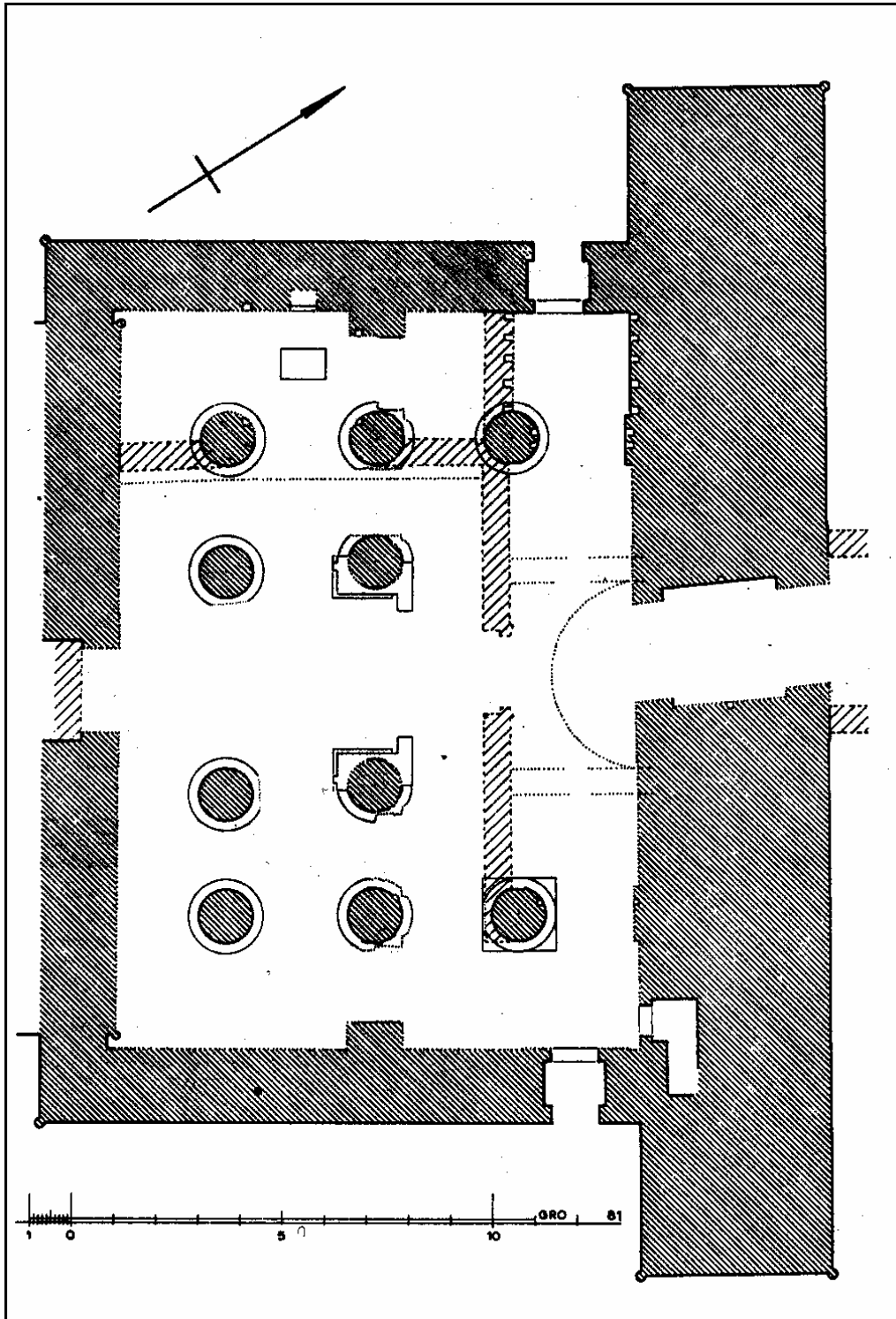


Fig. 5. The *topos* of St Stephen inside the temple of Isis at Philae (Grossmann, *Christliche Architektur*, Fig. 80).

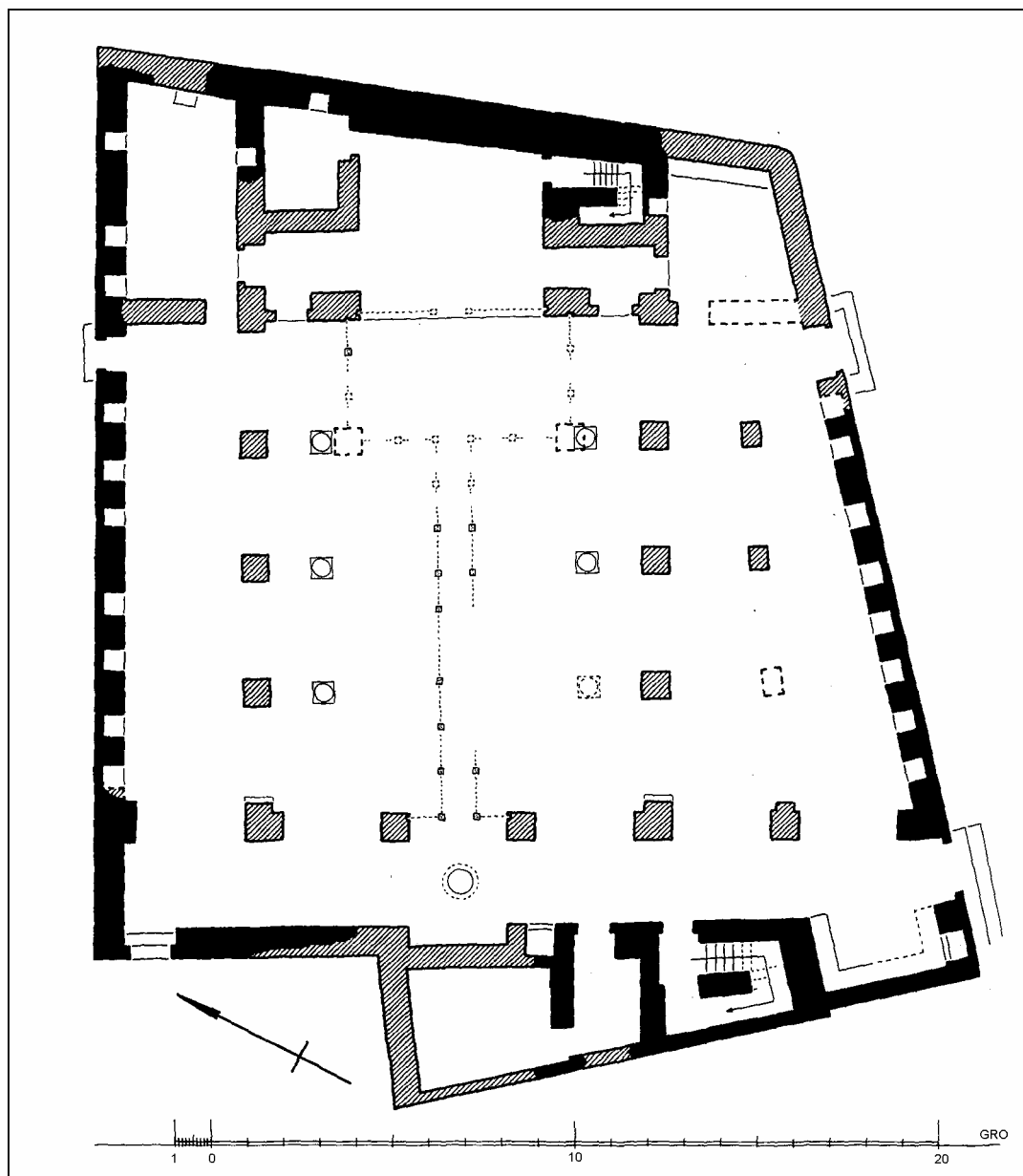


Fig. 6. The East Church of Philae (Grossmann, *Christliche Architektur*; Fig. 78).

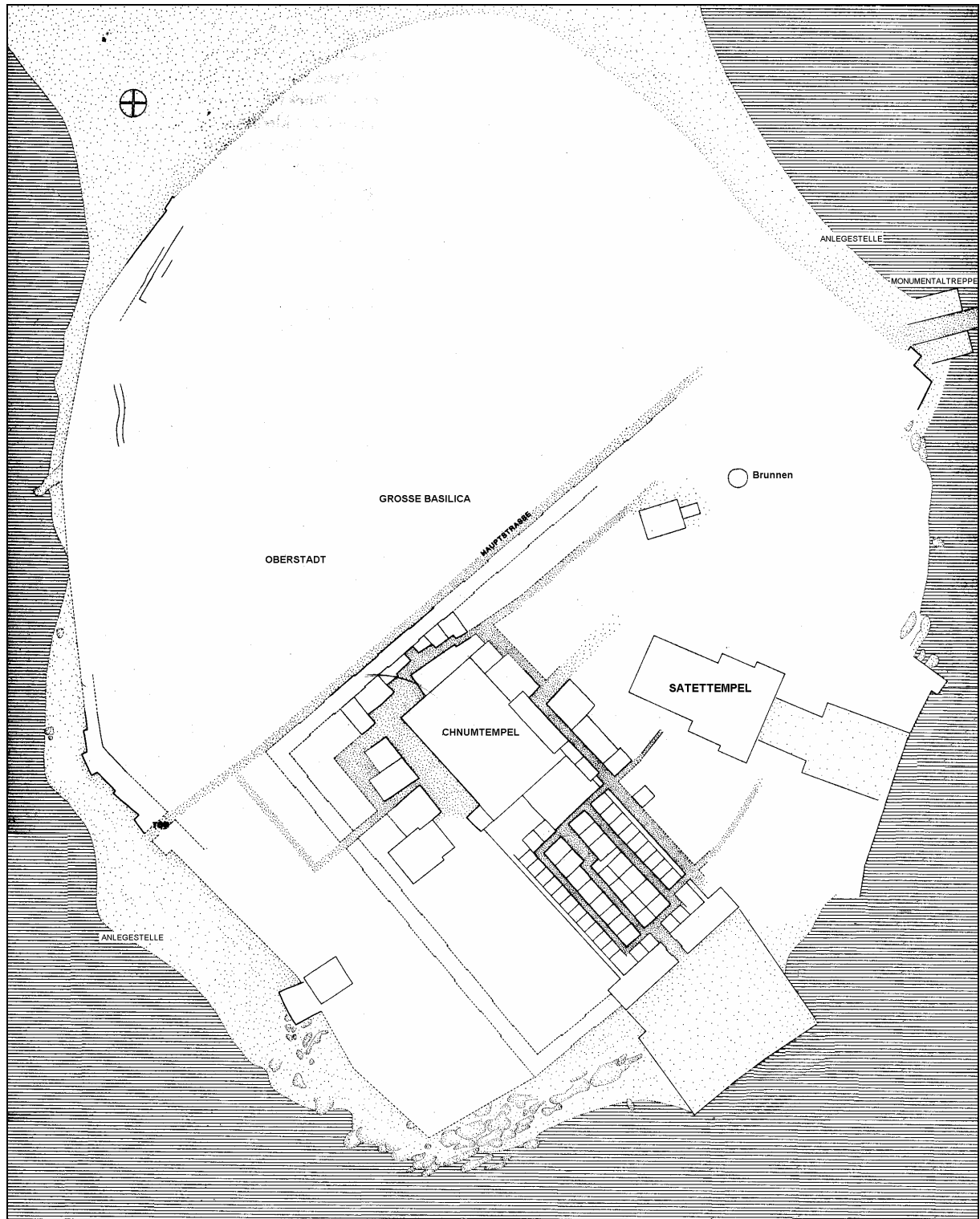


Fig. 7. Elephantine in Late Antiquity (Arnold, *Elephantine XXX*, Fig. 3).

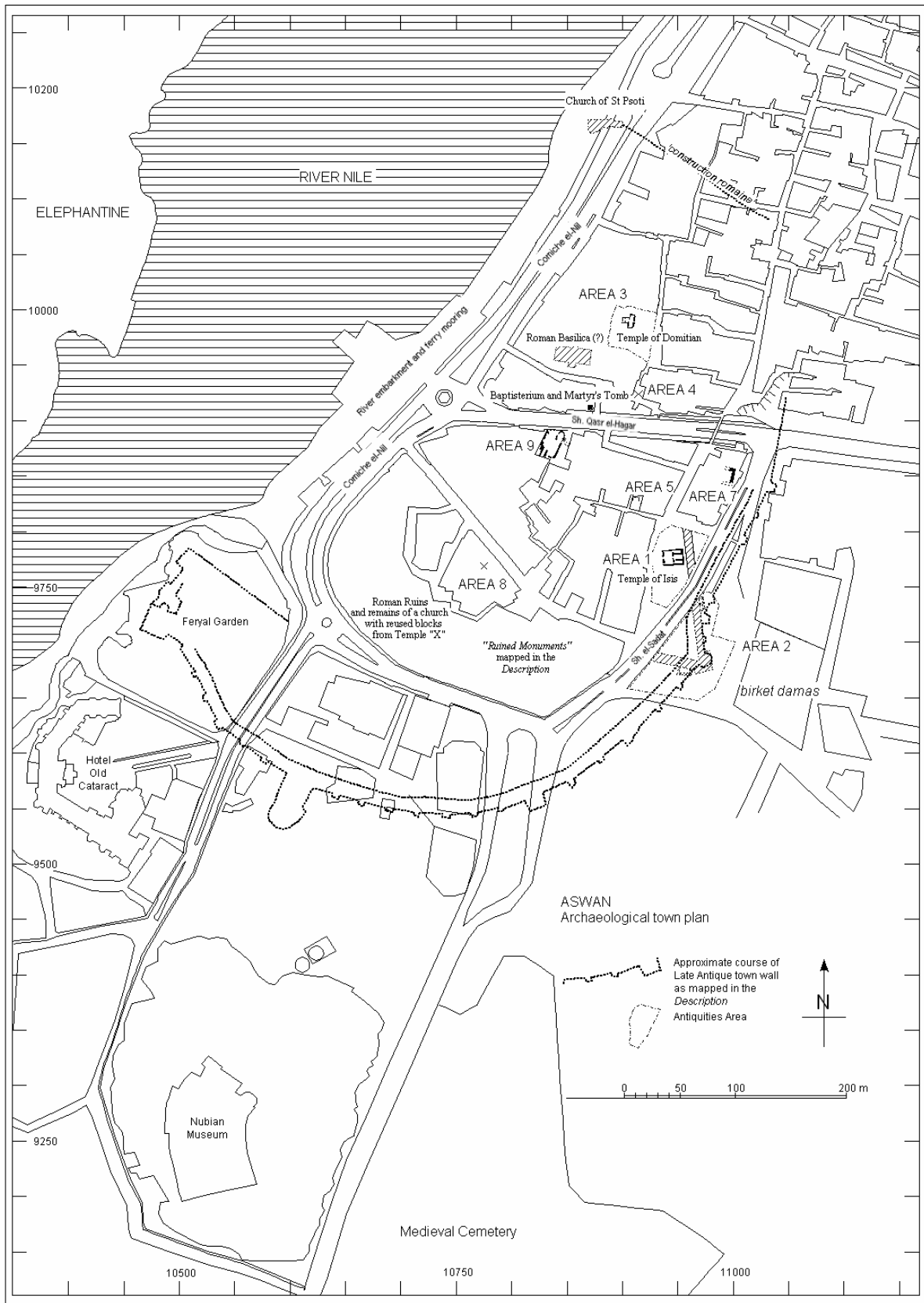


Fig. 8. Archaeological town plan of Aswan (with help of K.-C. Bruhn).

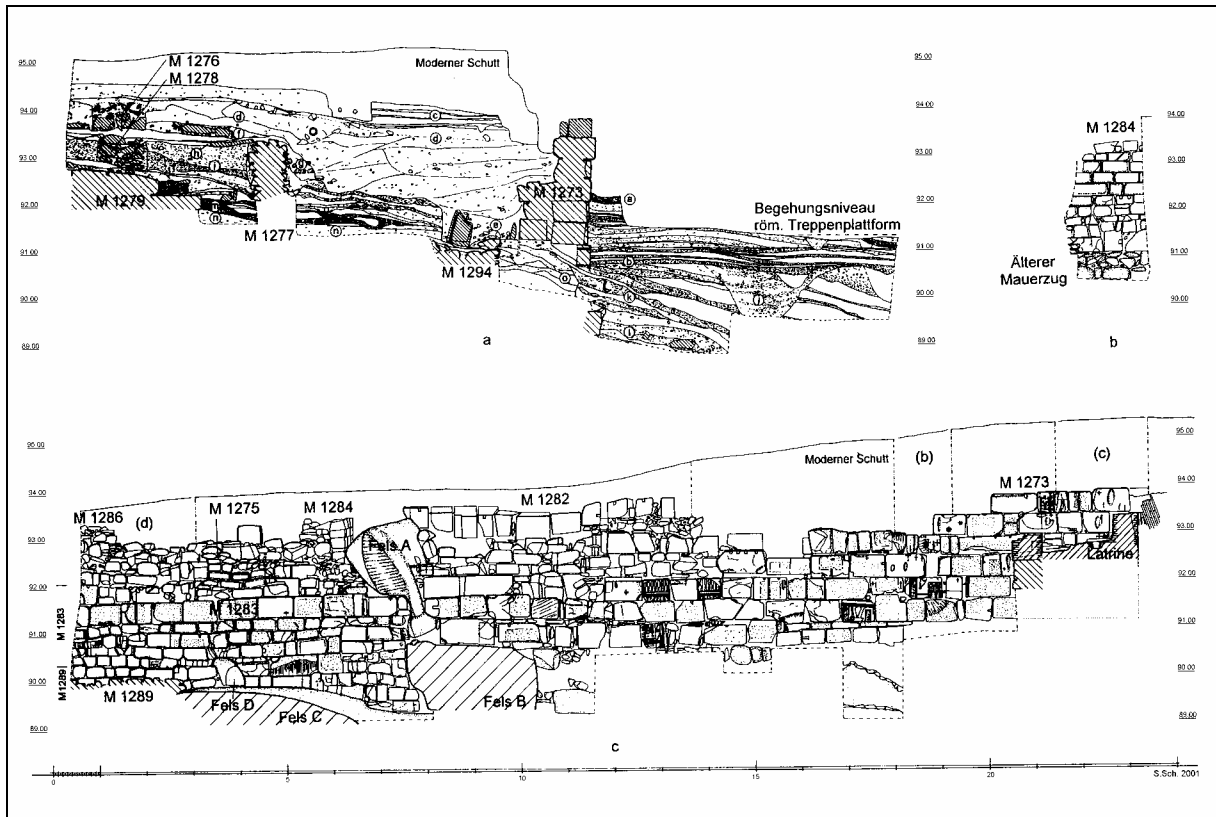
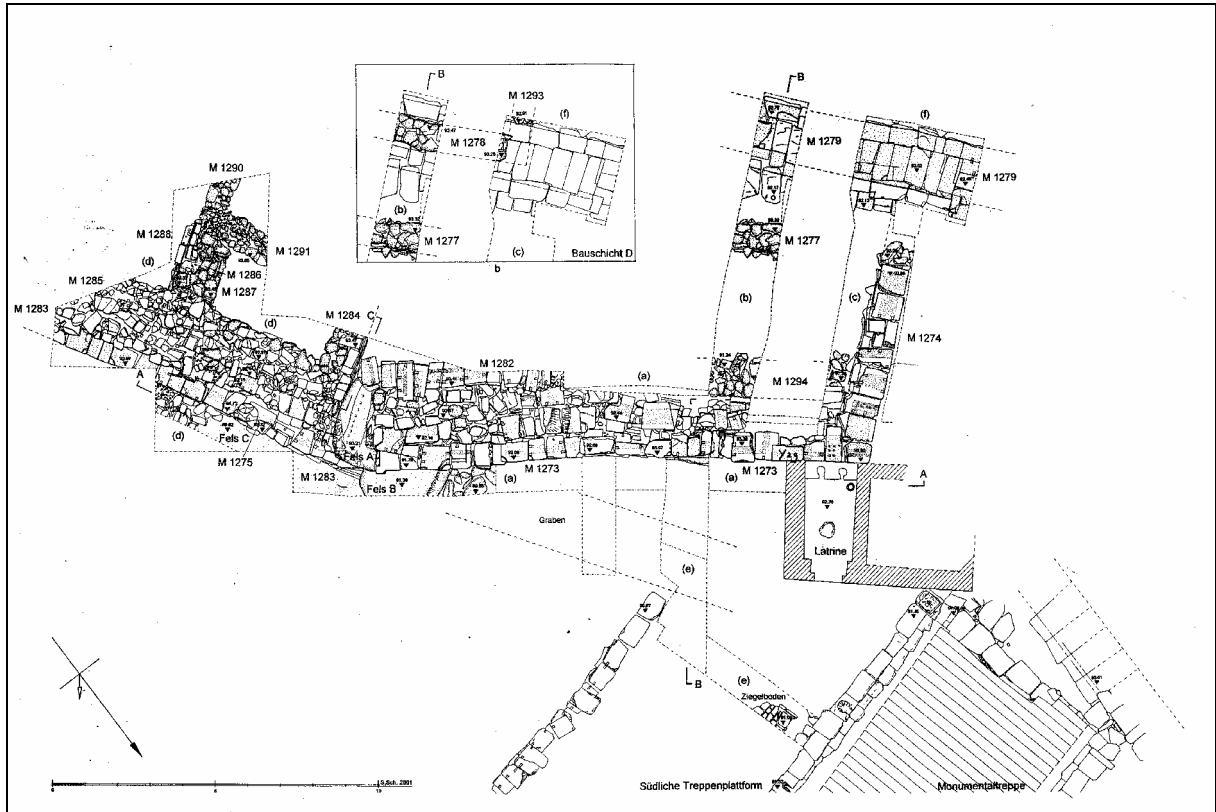


Fig. 9. General overview, cross section and frontal view of a Late Antique quay wall at Elephantine (Dreyer *et al.*, '28./29./30. Grabungsbericht', Fig. 14-5).

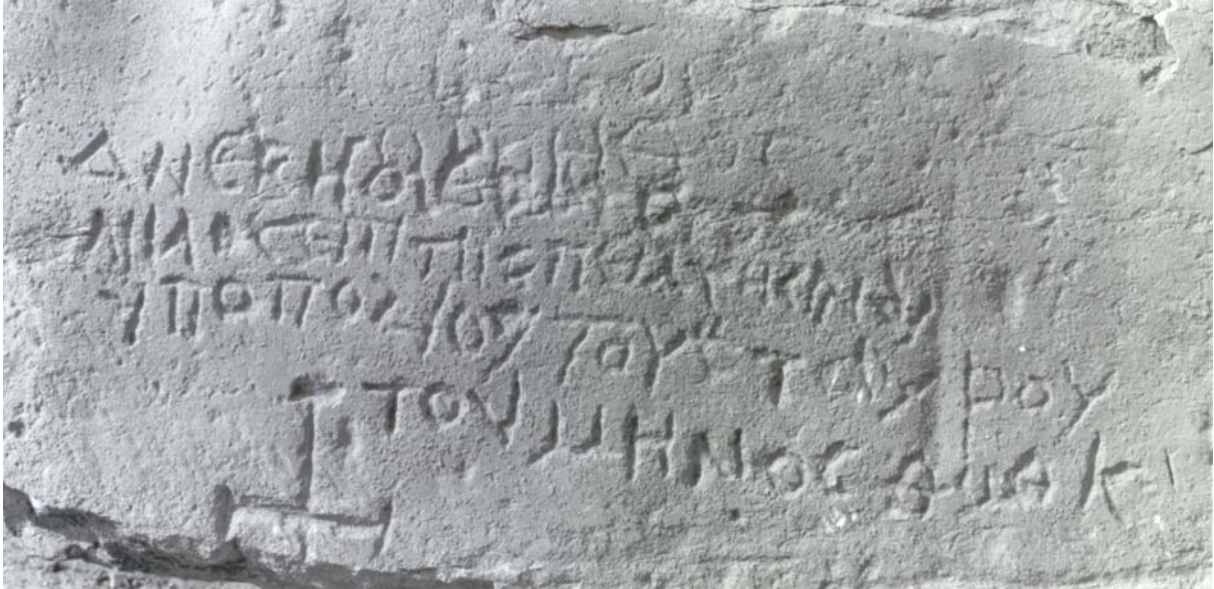


Fig. 10. Greek inscriptions from a Late Antique quay wall at Elephantine (photograph: Swiss Institute for Architectural and Archaeological Research Cairo/A. Paasch).

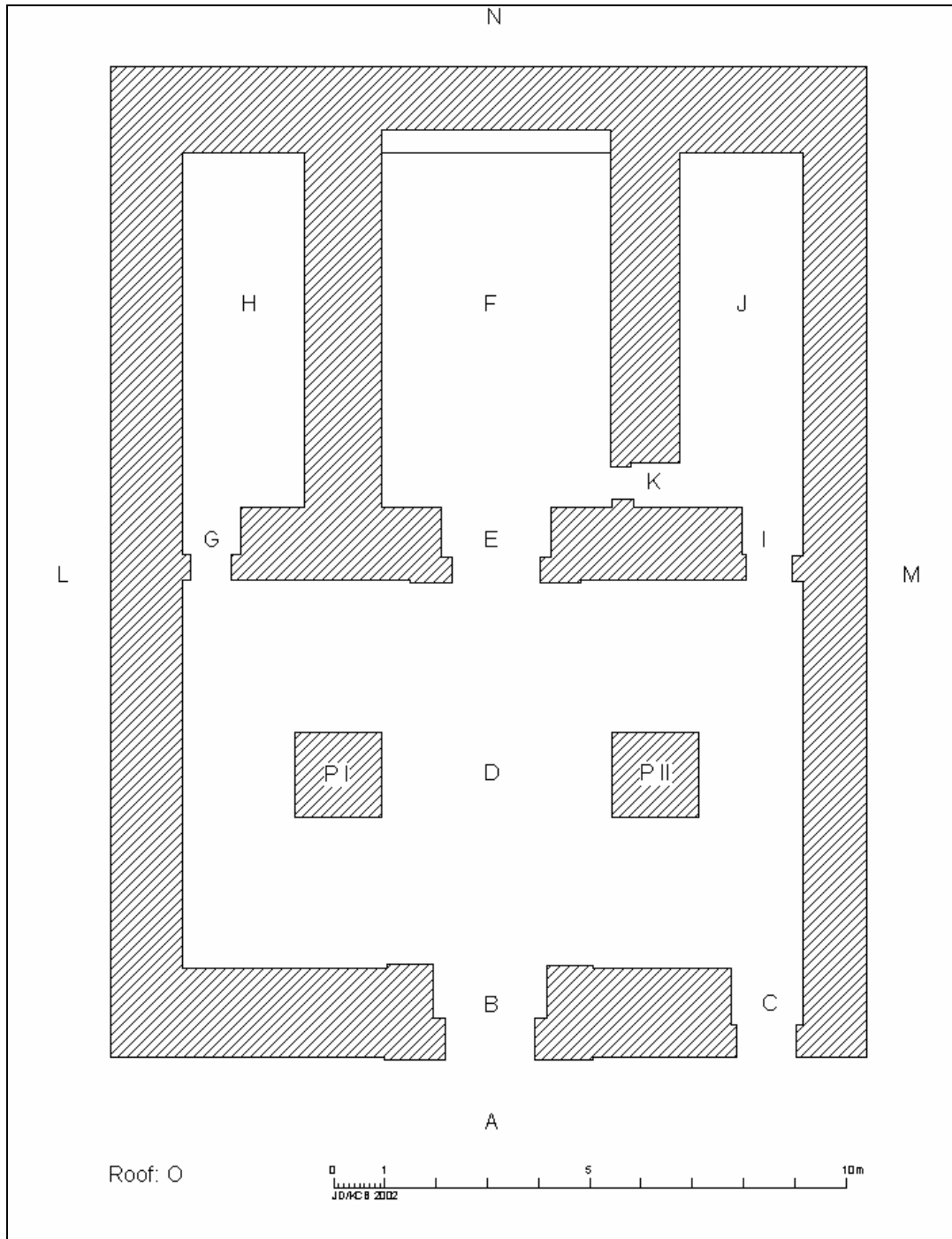


Fig. 11. The temple of Isis at Aswan (after Bresciani and Pernigotti, *Assuan*, Pl. 4).

Nederlandse Samenvatting

Inleiding

De Oudegyptische cultus op Philae, een eiland gelegen in het uiterste zuiden van het Oude Egypte en het Romeinse rijk, heeft altijd een uitzonderingspositie ingenomen in het onderzoek naar de religieuze overgang van de Oudegyptische godsdienst naar het christendom in de late Oudheid (4de-7de eeuw n.Chr.). Dit heeft alles te maken met de ligging van Philae aan de grens met het zuidelijker gelegen Nubië. Terwijl algemeen wordt aangenomen dat Egypte in de 6de eeuw christelijk was geworden, zouden de laatste priesters van Philae de rituelen nog in stand hebben gehouden.

Dit beeld is gebaseerd op een passage uit het werk van de 6de-eeuwse, Byzantijnse historicus Procopius, waarin deze vertelt hoe twee volkeren die leefden in het Nijldal in Nubië ten zuiden van Philae, de Blemmyers en de Noebaden, de tempels nog bezochten tot in de regeerperiode van keizer Justinianus (527-565). Volgens Procopius maakte deze keizer een einde aan de 'heidense' cultus door opdracht te geven aan zijn generaal Narses de tempels te vernietigen. Aldus geschiedde: Narses zette de priesters gevangen en stuurde de godenbeelden naar Byzantium (Constantinopel). Met deze gebeurtenis, die is te dateren tussen 535 en 537, zou een einde zijn gekomen aan de Oudegyptische cultus op Philae en daarmee aan de eeuwenoude Egyptische godsdienst.

Er zijn echter problemen verbonden aan deze letterlijke interpretatie van Procopius. Alleen al de mededeling dat de tempels vernietigd werden roept argwaan op, want de tempels van Philae behoren tot op de dag van vandaag tot de best bewaarde antieke monumenten in heel Egypte. Ook de suggestie dat de Oudegyptische cultus door toedoen van de Blemmyers en de Noebaden in de zesde eeuw springlevend was, roept vragen op. Al vanaf de vierde eeuw was er een bisschopszetel gevestigd op Philae en moet er ook een christelijke gemeente hebben geleefd op hetzelfde kleine eiland. Bovendien ligt het voor de hand dat een wereld die geleidelijk aan christelijk werd, haar effect moet hebben gehad op de Oudegyptische cultus op Philae. Het lijkt er dan ook op dat het verhaal ingewikkelder is dan Procopius het voorstelt. Wat gebeurde er met de Oudegyptische cultus op Philae in de late Oudheid? En welke rol speelde het christendom in deze veranderende situatie?

Om deze vragen te kunnen beantwoorden, probeert deze studie het beeld dat Procopius oproept op twee belangrijke punten te nuanceren. Ten eerste zijn de opmerkingen van Procopius getoetst aan andersoortige bronnen zoals documenten en archeologische gegevens. Ten tweede is de Oudegyptische cultus op Philae geplaatst tegen de achtergrond van een serie regionale ontwikkelingen, waarin het christendom langzamerhand de overhand kreeg. Een regionale studie kan een complexer en dynamischer beeld geven van het proces van religieuze overgang. Daarom gaat deze studie niet alleen in op het proces te Philae, maar ook in twee andere nederzettingen in de regio, Syene (het moderne Aswan) en Elefantine. Met regio wordt hier het gebied rond de eerste stroomversnelling van de Nijl bedoeld, oftewel het eerste Cataractgebied.

De Oudegyptische cultus op Philae in de vierde en vijfde eeuw

Voordat de situatie op Philae bestudeerd kan worden, is het echter noodzakelijk eerst iets naar het zuiden te gaan om de relatie van het tempeleiland met de zuidelijke volkeren te kunnen begrijpen. Ook in dit geval geeft Procopius een vereenvoudigde weergave van een veel complexere werkelijkheid. In de genoemde passage vertelt Procopius over de terugtrekking van de zuidgrens van het Romeinse rijk naar Elefantine in 298. Keizer Diocletianus zou op Philae vrede hebben gesloten met de Blemmyers en de Noebaden door hun, naast toegang tot Philae, jaarlijks een geldbedrag te beloven in ruil voor het niet uitvoeren van invallen in Egypte.

Dit beeld van twee volkeren die duidelijk gescheiden van elkaar aan de zuidgrens van het Romeinse rijk leefden, heeft de interpretatie van de vierde- en vijfde-eeuwse bronnen

aangaande de streek ten zuiden van Philae, de Dodekaschoinos (“Twaalfmijlenland”), bepaald. Uit een nieuwe interpretatie blijkt dat de situatie aan de zuidgrens veel complexer was dan Procopius het voorstelt. De bevolking van de Dodekaschoinos bestond uit een lappendeken van stammen. Blemmysche stammen, die oorspronkelijk de Oostelijke Woestijn bewoonden, vestigden zich in de loop van de vierde eeuw in de Dodekaschoinos te midden van de inheemse, Nubische bevolking. In de loop van de vijfde eeuw nam die Nubische bevolking, nu pas Noebaden genaamd, het heft in handen.

Procopius heeft deze vijfde-eeuwse situatie vermoedelijk geprojecteerd op 298, hiertoe geïnspireerd door de historicus Priscus. Deze beschrijft namelijk een ander vredesverdrag van de Romeinen met de twee volkeren in 452 of 453, waarbij hun onder meer toestemming werd gegeven de tempels van Philae te bezoeken. De bezoekers zullen echter eerder in kleine groepen dan in hele volksstammen naar Philae zijn gekomen. De Romeinen tolereerden de toegang van de zuidelijke stammen tot het eiland uit vrees voor invallen in Egypte, en dit moet de verklaring zijn waarom de Oudegyptische cultus op Philae na 298 nog zo lang voortleefde. Maar voor de vraag hoe lang, moet het antwoord gezocht worden in de inscripties op het eiland zelf.

Op de muren van de tempels van Philae is een rijk archief van inscripties overgeleverd. Het epigrafische materiaal varieert van keurig uitgehakte, officiële inscripties van de Ptolemaeën tot bezoekersinscripties waarin een naam, soms vergezeld van een gebed, wens of andere formulering, haastig in steen is ingekrast. In de Grieks-Romeinse periode was het gebruikelijk voor Egyptische pelgrims hun bezoek aan een tempel te vereeuwigen op de tempelmuren, zodat zij op deze manier voor altijd bij de goden zouden zijn. Zodoende zijn er vele honderden inscripties bewaard gebleven in verschillende schriftsoorten, met name in het Griekse en het Demotische schrift (het meeste cursieve van de Oudegyptische schriften), maar ook in het hiëroglifische, Meroïtische (het van het Demotisch afgeleide schrift van het rijk Meroë, een Nubisch koninkrijk gelegen ten zuiden van Egypte in de Grieks-Romeinse tijd), Latijnse en Koptische schrift.

Van deze inscripties dateren er twaalf Griekse en vierentwintig Demotische uit de vierde en vijfde eeuw. Aan één van de Demotische inscripties gaat een hiëroglifische inscriptie vooraf die dateert van 24 augustus 394. De inscriptie is daarmee de laatst gedateerde tekst in dit Egyptische schrift. Van de Demotische inscripties dateert de laatste tekst van 2 december 452. Deze laatantieke Demotische teksten zijn de enige die uit deze late periode bekend zijn en dit roept dan ook de vraag op hoe de positie van het Demotisch in deze tijd moet worden voorgesteld. Een vergelijking met andere antieke schriftsystemen toont aan dat marginaliserende schriften onder een kleine groep schrijvers nog lang in stand kunnen worden gehouden. Het schrift houdt op te bestaan bij de laatste beoefenaar ervan en verdwijnt daarna abrupt. Een dergelijke situatie lijkt ook van toepassing op de positie van het Demotisch op Philae in de vierde en vijfde eeuw. Deze veronderstelling wordt ondersteund door een analyse van het aantal, de plaats en de inhoud van de zesendertig laatantieke inscripties.

Om te beginnen bij de aantallen: het is verhelderend om het aantal Griekse en Demotische inscripties van de eerste drie eeuwen van onze jaartelling te vergelijken met dat van de vierde en vijfde eeuw. Uit deze vergelijking blijkt dat het aantal inscripties sterk afneemt in de late Oudheid, vooral wat de Demotische inscripties betreft. Daarnaast duidt ook de plaats waar deze inscripties zijn teruggevonden op een inkrimping van de Oudegyptische cultus in deze periode. Waar de eerdere inscripties gevonden werden op tempels verspreid over het hele eiland, zijn de laatantieke inscripties geconcentreerd in of vlakbij de belangrijkste tempel, die van Isis. De laatantieke cultus kan daarom niet onaangetast verder zijn gegaan, zoals ook duidelijk wordt uit een analyse van de inhoud van deze inscripties.

Het gaat hier merendeels om pelgrimsinscripties, die ook uit eerdere periodes bekend zijn. De laatantieke inscripties zeggen echter weinig over de bezoekers van Philae, omdat de schrijvers bijna allemaal priesters van Philae zijn. Dit duidt erop dat de cultus in deze tijd in toenemende mate geïsoleerd raakte. Isolatie blijkt ook uit wat bekend is over de in de inscripties genoemde priesters. De laatste hiëroglifische tekst is tegelijk de enige uit deze tijd en de manier waarop de Demotische inscripties zijn geschreven, laat zien dat de priesters de

Egyptische schriften nauwelijks meer meester waren. Verder trad er een vermenging op tussen de schriftsoorten, waardoor bijvoorbeeld een formulering die normaal gesproken alleen in het Demotisch werd geschreven, in het Griekse schrift werd weergegeven. Daarnaast zijn Demotische inscripties gedateerd naar de jaren van de christenvervolger Diocletianus, hetgeen voorheen niet voorkwam. Hoewel de dagelijkse rituelen, festivals en activiteiten van cultusverenigingen gewoon doorgingen, hielden de priesters de hoogste functies binnen een kleine kring. Zo is relatief veel bekend over de familie van de Smets, die in de meeste vijfde-eeuwse inscripties worden genoemd en drie generaties lang kunnen worden gevolgd. Rond 450 hadden drie broers uit deze familie de hoogste functies op het tempeleiland in handen.

Al deze kenmerken tezamen duiden erop dat de Oudegyptische cultus in de vierde en vijfde eeuw sterk was ingekrompen. Wanneer in een Griekse inscriptie van 456/457 voor het laatst sprake is van een nog bestaande cultus, dan kan deze niet lang meer hebben voortbestaan. De Oudegyptische schriften waren essentieel voor het uitoefenen van de cultus en met het schrift lijkt dan ook de cultus te zijn opgehouden. Deze constatering spreekt Procopius' bewering van een nog levende cultus in 535-537 tegen en het belang dat aan deze datum wordt gehecht moet dan ook worden heroverwogen. Het epigrafische materiaal laat zien dat de gebeurtenis niet veel meer kan zijn geweest dan een symbolische sluiting van de tempels.

De uitbreiding van het christendom in de regio in de vierde en vijfde eeuw

In deze zelfde periode had het christendom zich over het hele Cataractgebied uitgebreid. Deze uitbreiding is wat de regio betreft te volgen in drie ontwikkelingen. Ten eerste: waar misschien voorheen al enige organisatie aanwezig was, daar organiseerde de Kerk zich rond 330 definitief door twee bisschopszetels te creëren. Van oudsher was Egypte verdeeld in districten, gouwen genaamd, en de meeste bisschopszetels waren rond het Concilie van Nicaea (325) in de hoofdsteden van deze gouwen gevestigd. Het Cataractgebied lag in de eerste Opper-Egyptische gouw en had als hoofdstad Omboi (Kom Ombo), veertig kilometer ten noorden van de regio. Het getuigt van de bijzondere positie van het gebied aan de zuidgrens van Egypte dat rond 330, of in ieder geval niet lang daarna, twee bisschopszetels in de regio werden ingesteld: die van Syene, ook verantwoordelijk voor Elefantine en Contra-Syene, en die van Philae.

Op basis van kerkelijke documenten, overgeleverd in de werken van de aartsbisschop Athanasius van Alexandrië, de Koptische heiligenkalender (het ***Synaxarion***) en documenten uit het gebied zelf is het mogelijk twaalf vierde- en vijfde-eeuwse bisschoppen van Syene en Philae te achterhalen. Voor Philae is daarbij zelfs nog een legendarische geschiedenis van de eerste vier bisschoppen van Philae overgeleverd die onderdeel uitmaakt van een Koptisch heiligenleven, het ***Leven van Aäron***. De kerkelijke documenten laten zien dat de bisschoppen van Syene en Philae een bescheiden doch aanwezige rol vervulden in de Egyptische Kerk. Zo werden bisschop Neilammon van Syene en Marcus van Philae in 356 door de Arische aartsbisschop Georgius van Cappadocië verbannen naar de Siwa oase.

De documenten die uit de streek zijn overgeleverd, hoewel schaars, geven inzicht in de toenemende rol van de bisschop in de vijfde-eeuwse samenleving. Tussen 425 en 450 richtte bisschop Appion van Syene een petitie tot de keizers Theodosius II en Valentinianus, die bekend is geworden vanwege een opmerking die Theodosius zelf aan het document heeft toegevoegd. In de petitie vraagt Appion om bescherming van de troepen die in zijn bisdom zijn gelegerd tegen invallen van de Blemmyers en de Noebaden, zoals dat ook het geval was in het bisdom Philae. Een ander voorbeeld zijn twee inscripties uit 449-450 of 464-465, waaruit blijkt dat bisschop Daniël(ios) van Philae betrokken was bij bouwwerkzaamheden aan de kademuren van het eiland. De bisschop nam het initiatief tot het project en financierde in ieder geval een gedeelte ervan; dit alles met toestemming van de gouverneur van de provincie.

Ten tweede is de uitbreiding van het christendom in de regio te merken aan het toenemende gebruik van christelijke namen. Door papyri te bekijken die handtekeningen bevatten, is er – ondanks het kleine aantal ervan – een duidelijke toename van christelijke namen tussen de vierde en vijfde eeuw waarneembaar. Uit deze papyri wordt ook duidelijk dat

aan het einde van de vijfde eeuw het gebruik van christelijke formules en symbolen algemeen gangbaar was geworden. Verder duiken kerkelijke ambtsdragers regelmatig in de papyri op. Een derde ontwikkeling is dat kloostergemeenschappen zich in het gebied vestigden, hoewel ook hiervoor het bewijs schaars is. De belangrijkste bron voor lokale monniken is het eerdergenoemde **Leven van Aäron**.

Omdat deze hagiografische bron nog niet systematisch bestudeerd is, besteedt deze studie uitgebreid aandacht aan elementaire gegevens als de datum en de plaats van compositie van het werk, de auteur en zijn publiek. Gezien de regionale **Sitz im Leben** van het werk is het **Leven van Aäron**, niet de bijbelse figuur maar een plaatselijke monnik, vermoedelijk geschreven voor een regionaal publiek. Het werk beschrijft de levens van heilige mannen uit de streek, levens die in de vierde en begin vijfde eeuw gesitueerd worden. Het is onder te verdelen in drie samenhangende delen: een beschrijving van de levens van heilige mannen in de omgeving van Syene, een geschiedenis van de eerste bisschoppen van Philae en het eigenlijke leven van de monnik Aäron.

Het gedeelte over de eerste bisschoppen is daarbij opmerkelijk, want hiervoor bestaan verder geen parallellen in andere hagiografische werken. De vraag is dus hoe historisch dit gedeelte is. Zoals hierboven al opgemerkt is, zijn de genoemde bisschoppen hoogstwaarschijnlijk historische figuren. Maar dit wil niet zeggen dat het **Leven van Aäron** zomaar als historisch geïnterpreteerd mag worden. Het werk kan beter benaderd worden als 'spirituele communicatie' tussen een hagiograaf en zijn publiek, waarin de auteur door middel van het werk de heiligheid van de heilige tracht over te brengen op zijn publiek. Hij doet dit, in het geval van het **Leven van Aäron**, door aan te sluiten bij de belevingswereld van zijn regionale publiek, bijvoorbeeld door specifieke informatie te geven over de streek. Op deze manier kan ook de invoeging van de bisschopsgeschiedenis worden gezien: als legitimatie voor het ontstaan van het bisdom Philae en als verklaring voor het ontstaan van een volledig christelijke gemeenschap op het eiland. Dientengevolge kan geconcludeerd worden dat het **Leven van Aäron**, dat speelt in de vierde en het begin van de vijfde eeuw, geschreven moet zijn door een lokale monnik in een latere tijd waarin deze gemeenschap zich als geheel christelijk beschouwde. Er zijn aanwijzingen dat voor deze tijd aan de zesde eeuw moet worden gedacht.

De christelijke samenleving van de zesde eeuw

In de zesde eeuw speelde de bisschop van Philae een belangrijke rol in de eerste keizerlijke missie die naar Nubië werd gestuurd. Het verhaal van deze eerste missie is overgeleverd in de Syrische **Kerkgeschiedenis** van Johannes van Efeze. Daarin beschrijft Johannes hoe de priester Julianus het initiatief nam tot een missie naar Nubië met de bedoeling de monofysitische leer in te voeren (de leer dat Jezus van één, goddelijke natuur is). Daarop stuurden keizer Justinianus en zijn vrouw Theodora beiden een delegatie naar het zuiden: de eerste om de orthodoxe doctrine (de tweenaturenleer) en de tweede om de monofysitische doctrine te verkondigen. Door de intriges van Theodora arriveerde de monofysitische delegatie onder leiding van Julianus als eerste en zo bekeerde de koning van Noebadia zich tot het christendom. Hoewel deze beschrijving duidelijk is beïnvloed door de monofysitische agenda van de auteur en de 'wedstrijd' tussen keizer en keizerin waarschijnlijk verzonnen is, is er geen gereede twijfel over de historiciteit van de missie.

Uit de tekst valt op te maken dat de eerste missie naar Nubië ergens tussen 536 en 548 moet hebben plaatsgevonden. Julianus verbleef twee jaar in Nubië en liet het pas bekeerde koninkrijk over aan de bisschop van Philae, Theodorus. Die zou pas in 551 weer zijn teruggekeerd naar zijn bisdom. De sluiting van de tempels van Philae, zoals beschreven door Procopius, vond plaats in dezelfde tijd als de eerste missie naar Nubië. Tot nu toe is er een direct, causaal verband verondersteld tussen beide gebeurtenissen: eerst moest er een einde worden gemaakt aan de 'heidense' cultus van Philae alvorens Nubië gekerstend kon worden. De gebeurtenissen zijn dan ook geïnterpreteerd als deel uitmakend van een door Justinianus geïnitieerde, anti-'heidense' campagne.

Deze interpretatie roept echter de vraag op waarom de sluiting van de tempels van Philae, als die van zo wezenlijk belang was voor de missie, dan niet genoemd is in Johannes' verslag. De sluiting moet, zoals al was vermoed op basis van het epigrafische materiaal, eerder gezien worden als een propagandistische maatregel van Justinianus, die verder weinig te maken had met de missie naar Nubië. Met deze missie zette de keizer het vroegere beleid voort van verdragen sluiten met de volkeren aan de Egyptische zuidgrens. Als er al een verband was tussen de genoemde gebeurtenissen, dan moet deze worden gezocht in het algemene politieke beleid van de keizer.

Wat was dan Philae's rol in de eerste missie naar Nubië? Het aandeel van Philae in de missie kan verklaard worden doordat hier het dichtstbijzijnde Egyptische bisdom bij Nubië was. Een inscriptie uit Dendur, zo'n zeventig kilometer ten zuiden van Philae, uit 544 of 559, toont aan dat bisschop Theodorus zich bezighield met de stichting van Nubische kerken. Vermoedelijk deed hij dit vanuit zijn bisdom en verbleef hij niet een aantal jaren in Nubië, zoals Johannes beweert. Ook laat de inscriptie zien dat de Noebadische Kerk al enigszins georganiseerd was vóór de tweede missie naar Nubië plaats vond in 569. De opmerking van Johannes dat de leider van die missie, bisschop Longinus, deze organisatie volledig voor zijn rekening nam, is daarom onjuist. Behalve in de *Kerkgeschiedenis* van Johannes wordt Theodorus ook genoemd in enkele kerkelijke documenten. Kennelijk had hij een prominente positie verworven binnen de Egyptische Monofysitische Kerk. Deze positie was niet alleen bepaald door zijn aandeel in de eerste missie naar Nubië, maar ook omdat Theodorus één van de langstzittende monofysitische bisschoppen in Egypte was die nog door een gelijkgezinde aartsbisschop was benoemd.

Behalve op de Egyptische kerkpolitiek van de zesde eeuw, heeft Theodorus (ca. 525-na 577) ook een groot stempel gedrukt op het bisdom Philae. Zijn meest opzienbarende daad was de bouw van een kerk gewijd aan de heilige Stefanus in de voorhal van de tempel van Isis, waarvan enkele inscripties getuigen. Hoewel de inscripties ongedateerd zijn, zijn zij wel in verband gebracht met de sluiting van de tempels van Philae in 535-537. Dientengevolge is ook deze gebeurtenis geplaatst in het kader van de anti-'heidense' campagne van Justinianus: Theodorus zou na de sluiting in opdracht van de keizer spoedig een kerk hebben gebouwd in de tempel. Er is echter geen enkele reden om aan te nemen dat de kerkbouw direct volgde op de sluiting en ook Procopius noemt deze gebeurtenis niet. Waarschijnlijker is het dat de tempel enkele jaren leeg stond tot de bisschop, en niet de keizer, besloot tot de bouw van de kerk.

Aanleiding tot de bouw kan een incident zijn geweest dat rond 567 plaatsvond. In een petitie van de raadsliden van Omboi aan de gouverneur van de provincie wordt namelijk verteld over een hoge Egyptische functionaris die samenzweert met een groepje Blemmyers en in ruil voor hun steun bij het plunderen van het land, hun "heiligdommen" renoveert. In deze studie is beargumenteerd dat met "de heiligdommen" de tempels van Philae worden bedoeld. Als dit correct is, dan hielden de Blemmyers nog zo'n dertig jaar na de sluiting van de tempels hun band met het heilige eiland in stand, al moet hierbij niet worden gedacht aan een volledig herstel van de Oudegyptische cultus.

De inwijding van de kerk moet dan ook in een lokale context worden geplaatst. Theodorus nam tijdens zijn episcopaat enkele maatregelen die de christelijke identiteit benadrukten, zoals blijkt uit zijn betrokkenheid bij wereldlijke en kerkelijke bouwprojecten en uit zijn samenwerking met monniken uit de omgeving. Deze maatregelen waren niet nieuw, maar het is wel opvallend dat zij alle tezamen in zijn episcopaat voorkomen. Daarom is het *Leven van Aäron*, dat immers het ontstaan van die christelijke identiteit benadrukt, in deze periode gedateerd. De christelijke identiteit van Philae was zich al jaren aan het vormen, maar onder Theodorus werd dit proces van identiteitsvorming definitief afgesloten. De inwijding van de kerk van de heilige Stefanus in de tempel van Isis moet daarom niet worden gezien als een 'triomf' van het christendom na een strijd met het 'heidendom', maar als een bevestiging dat de identiteit van de bevolking van Philae volledig christelijk was geworden.

Net als op Philae was de samenleving in het hele Cataractgebied in de zesde eeuw christelijk geworden. Een analyse van het hergebruik van enkele tempels uit de streek laat zien

dat deze gebouwen niet massaal tot kerken werden omgebouwd in de vierde en vijfde eeuw, zoals wel wordt gedacht, maar dat de meeste gebouwen werden hergebruikt voor andere, meer wereldse doeleinden of eenvoudigweg leegstonden. Slechts in enkele gevallen werden tempels hergebruikt als kerken. Dit gebeurde in de zesde eeuw of later. Door de jaren heen was de focus van het religieuze landschap daarbij verplaatst naar de kerken. Een laatste factor waaruit blijkt dat de zesde-eeuwse samenleving een christelijke was geworden is de aanwezigheid van geestelijken in het openbare leven. Zo waren kerkelijke ambtsdragers betrokken bij het schrijven en ondertekenen van documenten, traden zij op als notarissen of rechters maar stelden zij als privé-personen ook documenten op.

Conclusie

Afsluitend kan geconcludeerd worden dat het proces van religieuze overgang in het eerste Cataractgebied veel geleidelijker is verlopen dan tot nu toe gedacht. Met name het beeld dat de Oudegyptische religie eindigde op Philae in 535-537 moet worden bijgesteld. Philae behoudt weliswaar de reputatie dat met zijn cultus de Oudegyptische religie als instituut, bestaande uit een priesterschap, Oudegyptische schriften, rituelen en festivals, ten einde kwam, maar de cultus was al vanaf de vierde eeuw in verval en hield waarschijnlijk niet lang na 456/457 op te bestaan. Dit hoeft echter niet te betekenen dat daarna alles voorbij was: bepaalde tradities, zoals bezoeken van de Blemmyers aan het eiland kunnen nog lang hebben voortbestaan, ook na 535-537. Hoe uniek de positie van de Oudegyptische cultus in de late Oudheid ook mag zijn geweest, zij moet tegelijkertijd worden gezien tegen de achtergrond van een ontwikkeling in de hele regio waarin de samenleving geleidelijk christelijk werd. In deze context was het misschien niet zo verwonderlijk, wellicht zelfs onvermijdelijk, dat de cultus de zesde eeuw niet haalde. Het waren de laatste priesters van Philae zelf, niet een Byzantijnse generaal, die zijn einde aanschouwden.