

Ewa Wipszycka

**WHAT CAN THE LIVES OF SAINTS
TELL US ABOUT HISTORY?
THE CASE OF THE COPTIC *LIFE OF AARON****

THE *LIFE OF AARON* is one of the most interesting works in Coptic hagiography. It describes the lives of monks and bishops of Philae in the fourth century (the last event mentioned in the work occurred in 384). The first edition of this work, published by E. A. Wallis Budge in 1915, was used during the entire twentieth century by scholars who researched the process of the Christianization of the Thebaid, as well as monastic and ecclesiastical history. It was frequently cited. Although it was universally known that the work included many legendary elements, historians perceived it as a reliable source written close to the end of the fourth century or at the beginning of the fifth century.

Jitse Dijkstra and Jacques van der Vliet announced that they were preparing a new edition of this text long ago. Now that the book is available, we can see why we had to wait for it so long: the creation of this masterpiece of editorial and exegetic art required an enormous and time-consuming effort from the two experts.¹

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¹ *The Coptic Life of Aaron. Critical Edition, Translation and Commentary* by J. H. F. DIJKSTRA & J. VAN DER VLIET [= *Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae* 155], Leiden – Boston 2020. Previ-



The work is framed by an account of Paphnutius – its presumed author – about his travel around the monastic world in the neighbourhood of the First Cataract of the Nile. The work is divided into three parts: the story of monks inhabiting the area (chapters 1–25), the story of the first bishops of Philae, who were monks (chapters 26–85), and, finally, the life of the man mentioned in the title of the work, the holy monk Aaron (chapters 86–140). The structure of the work is elaborate: it consists of embedded narratives or tales within tales. Apart from the introduction and conclusion, which are narrated by Paphnutius, the monks whom the narrator encounters recite their own tales. This arrangement lends personal voices to the protagonists, which is a device contrived for increasing the reliability of the stories. Dijkstra and van der Vliet made a great effort to establish which protagonist speaks in which part of the work (see the chart of plots illustrating the narrative structure, p. 329).

Not being a Coptologist, I do not feel entitled to comment on the results achieved by Dijkstra and van der Vliet as editors of the Coptic text. However, I can appreciate the exegetic side of the edition, namely the extensive introduction and the exhaustive explanations, which fill 121 pages and provide diverse information. I am of the opinion that from now on, the book should be compulsory reading for all scholars of Egyptian Christianity and not only that of the Thebaid, as the observations on ecclesiastical literature, history, and institutions included in the book extend beyond what one would expect from a commentary of a text about monks living in the far south of the Nile Valley.

The innovative character of the exegetic part of the book depends on two assumptions: a new dating of the work and the acceptance of a new way of assessing the possibility of using hagiographic works for the recon-

ous translators and commentators gave the work different titles: *Histories of the Monks in the Egyptian Desert by Paphnutius* (E. A. Wallis Budge); *Histories of the Monks of Upper Egypt* (T. Vivian); *Papnute: Storia dei monaci presso Siene* (T. Orlandi). However, in the colophon of the manuscript of the work, we find the following phrase: ‘This is the life of the holy anchorite from Philae, Apa Aaron, who finished his course in the desert east of Philae, for the glory of the Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, life-giving and consubstantial, now and forever until eternity’ (chapter 140). This explains the choice made by the current editors.

struction of real facts beyond the reality created by their authors – a way of thinking that has been gaining popularity among commentators during the last twenty-five years.

Already in his previous studies, Dijkstra had successfully argued that the *Life of Aaron* could not have been written earlier than the sixth century. (Indeed, it must have been written in the last quarter of that century, or even later, as I will try to show.) This dating relies on evidence that can be found in the work, such as terms unknown before the sixth century and ecclesiastical procedures characteristic of later times. Moreover, this dating is also suggested by the important role which is assigned to the Nubians in the narrative of the *Life of Aaron*. They appear in various episodes and are the subjects of miraculous interventions on the part of holy monks. Moreover, a separate discourse has been introduced which states that they should be treated as God's children on par with Christians (chapters 61–63). In order to emphasize its importance, the statement is uttered by Athanasius, the highest authority in the eyes of an Egyptian Christian. The Nubian theme suggests that the work was written in the period of missionary activity south of the First Cataract, which eventually led to the Christianization of Nubia, therefore no earlier than the sixth century. (I should rather say, no earlier than the last quarter of that century.)

If the author lived and wrote in a period so distant from the one he describes, we cannot consider the information included in his work as a reliable basis for the reconstruction of fourth-century reality without a detailed discussion. In particular, we need to find parallel testimonies in reliable sources. The editors of the *Life of Aaron* achieved this by implementing the 'hagiographic credo' formulated by Jacques Van der Vliet and Peter van Minnen in two studies included in the *Encroaching Desert* volume.² Both authors spoke about the need to identify the specific aims of any given hagiographic

² J. VAN DER VLIET, 'Bringing home the homeless: landscape and history in Egyptian hagiography', [in:] J. H. F. DIJKSTRA & H. VAN DIJK (eds.), *Encroaching Desert. Egyptian Hagiography and the Medieval West* [= *Church History and Religious Culture* 86], Leiden 2006, pp. 39–112; P. VAN MINNEN, 'Saving history? Egyptian hagiography in its space and time', *ibidem*, pp. 113–162.

writer (apart from the laudation of the protagonist). These specific aims dictated what was chosen as object of the narrative, what was omitted, and what model was used. The *Life of Aaron* provides us with an ideal material for an analysis that is meant to answer the question of the historical value of a narrative, studied episode by episode. Let me review the main results of the analysis carried out by Dijkstra and van der Vliet.

The names of the first three bishops of Philae (Macedonius, Mark, and Isaiah) mentioned in the work also occur in the writings of Athanasius; we thus have no reason to doubt that they were historical figures. Macedonius appears on the list of Egyptian bishops who signed the resolutions of the Council of Serdica,³ while Mark and Isaiah were mentioned in the 40th Festal Letter,⁴ and Mark in the so-called *Tomus ad Antiochenos* – the resolutions of the Council of 362.⁵ Athanasius' personal involvement in the ordination of the first bishops of Philae was of great importance for its inhabitants as it demonstrated the orthodoxy of their church. Therefore, it was well remembered and often mentioned in sermons, and there is no reason to doubt the value of the testimony of the *Life of Aaron* on this matter.

However, the circumstances of the foundation of episcopal see at Philae raise many doubts. Macedonius, a high-ranking secular official (*pagarches*), is said to have appeared in front of Athanasius during his stay in Alexandria and to have notified him of the existence of a Christian community in Philae, asking on its behalf for the appointment of a bishop. This story is a fiction based on real facts concerning the ordination of Frumentius as bishop of Axum, performed by Athanasius. The event is known to us through a letter written by Emperor Constantius, which is quoted by Athanasius, and through the *The Church History* by Rufinus of Aquileia.⁶ The author of the *Life of Aaron* was certainly acquainted with

³ The list is preserved in Athanasius, *Apologia secunda* 49.3, in *Athanasius Werke* II, ed. H. G. OPITZ, Berlin – Leipzig 1940, p. 130, no. 218.

⁴ See Atanasio di Alessandria, *Lettere festali, introduzione*, ed. A. CAMPLANI, Milan 2003, p. 524.

⁵ The text of the letter is found in *Athanasius Werke*, ed. OPITZ (cit. n. 3), p. 327.

⁶ Rufinus, *Historia ecclesiastica* 10.9–10, in *Eusebius Werke*, ed. Th. MOMMSEN [= *Griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte* NF 6/2], Berlin 1999, pp. 971–973.

those facts, whereas he could not know anything about the historical context of the establishment of an episcopal see at Philae, a small settlement (archaeologists think that its population did not exceed several hundred inhabitants at that time), situated only a few kilometres away from Syene, which was a large town and a bishopric.

Therefore, the foundation of a diocese at Philae must have had a different explanation than the author suggested. A hypothesis may be proposed. We know very well that in Egypt, sees were usually founded in the capitals of nomes, less frequently in large agglomerations of a city-like character (for instance, Syene). Wondering about the reasons behind Athanasius' decision, the editors write: 'No doubt the creation of a second see [after Syene, E.W.] at Philae was related to its strategic position at the southern end of the Cataract, which became especially prominent after 298, when Diocletian withdrew the frontier to the Cataract region, and a legion was garrisoned here, which formed the largest military unit in the region' (p. 183). However, I do not find this explanation convincing, as it transfers the interest in Nubia as a territory for potential missionary expansion to the times of Athanasius, while in reality, it arose much later. The presence of a legion stationed next to Philae (not at Philae) certainly did not provide favourable circumstances for the establishment of a new episcopal see in the first decades of the fourth century, since the army was still largely pagan in this period. I believe that the creation of both dioceses, that at Syene and that at Philae, has to be explained by Athanasius' political strategy aimed against the Melitians, who were strong in the south. This strategy was based on founding, whenever possible, new dioceses and entrusting them to his own adherents.⁷ We also know of some

⁷ It was in analogous manner that Athanasius granted the status of diocese to the town Boukolia in Mareotis (we do not know exactly where it lay). He did this so that he would have his own man in the area, in which a troublesome opponent of his, Ischyras, operated. Ischyras was a presbyter and a member of the schismatic group of Kollouthos, which was in conflict with Alexandria even before the Council of Nicaea. Athanasius sent his own presbyter against Ischyras. However, Athanasius' presbyter reportedly committed violations and worse, even sacrilege, by devastating the place of Eucharistic worship. The Melitians took up the case of Ischyras, seeing in this a chance to obtain a verdict condemning Athanasius. This case became one of the crucial points on the agenda of the Synod of Tyre

decisions of Athanasius that had no pastoral justification for northern Egypt – most often, such dioceses were discontinued in later times. The decision regarding Syene and Philae must have been made in 330 during Athanasius' journey to Thebaid.⁸

The author of the *Life of Aaron* says that when Mark, the next candidate for the episcopal seat, arrived in Alexandria, he found Athanasius in a small monastery situated in the western part of the city, not far from the Monastery of St Menas (chapter 57).⁹ I think that, when placing the seat of Athanasius in a monastery situated in the west, the author imagines the past according to the reality of his own time. Beginning with Peter IV (576–577/8), the anti-Chalcedonian patriarchs did not reside in Alexandria, even though they practiced their cult functions in at least one church in the city. Together with their curia, they lived in one of the monasteries located on a narrow strip of land (called *tainia*) between the

in 335. Ischyras was consecrated as a bishop, either during or shortly after this council. We know that a bishop of Boukolia, Heraclius, signed the decision made by the Synod of Serdica in 343. However, this is the last reference to this diocese. It likely ceased to be needed, and the successors of Athanasius adhered to the principle that the area close to Alexandria should not have a separate bishop. The creation of a diocese in Stathma, in Libya Inferior, constitutes a similar case, although this time it was to serve in the fight against the Arians. For the cases described here, see E. WIPSYCKA, 'The patriarchs of Alexandria and their bishops (4th–5th century)', [in:] *Bishops and Bishoprics (Egypt, Nubia and Ethiopia, Fourth–Thirteenth Century): Religious Authorities, Episcopal Seats and Interactions in Local and Regional Perspectives* (forthcoming).

⁸ We know about this from the *Life of Pachomius* – G¹ 30: 'At that time, Athanasius, the most holy archbishop of Alexandria, was beginning his episcopate and he wanted to go to the Upper Thebaid, up to Aswan, to give comfort to the Church of God. And as he sailed through Tabennesi, Pachomius and the brothers came out before him with joy and psalm-singing'. *SBo* 28: 'After his appointment as archbishop of Alexandria, Apa Athanasius came south to the Thebaid with the intention of proceeding as far as Aswan to give comfort to the holy Churches'. Translation by A. VELLEUX, *Pachomian Koinonia: The Life of Saint Pachomius and His Disciples*, vol. I [= *Cistercian Studies Series* 45], Kalamazoo 1980, p. 317].

⁹ It seems that the author meant the sanctuary of Abu Mena, but he made a mistake. It was a pilgrimage sanctuary, not a monastery. We do not know any Monastery of St Menas west of Alexandria. It is interesting that the author did not know anything about the famous sanctuary and the large settlement situated next to it. The Egyptians of the southern Nile did not go on pilgrimages to Abu Mena, even though the cult of this martyr was very popular.

sea and the Mareotic Lake. None of these monasteries existed in the time of Athanasius – they were founded about the mid-fifth century.¹⁰

It is important to note one more fact belonging to ecclesiastical procedures. Psoulousia, the last bishop of Philae mentioned in the *Life of Aaron*, goes to Alexandria twice, the first time to be ordained, and the second time after the death of Timothy (in 384) in order to pay his tribute to the new patriarch, Theophilus, ‘like all Egyptian bishops’ (chapter 83). This piece of information is very interesting. We do not know any other sources attesting that Egyptian bishops were in the habit of paying their tribute to a new patriarch, but we do not have any reason to dismiss the testimony of the *Life of Aaron* – this custom is attested in many regions of the East other than Egypt. Although most likely fictional, Psoulousia’s voyage to Alexandria is important for our understanding of ecclesiastical relationships, as it suggests that anti-Chalcedonian bishops could freely travel in Egypt. This should be noted by all scholars who are convinced that the authorities and the Chalcedonian Church severely persecuted members of the anti-Chalcedonian Church. In reality, the persecutions were selective and effective only to a limited extent. A journey between Alexandria and Syene lasted between thirty and forty days of navigation down the Nile, while the return journey lasted more or less twice this time.¹¹ As we see, the bishops did not hesitate to leave their dioceses for two or three months in order to establish a personal relationship with the superior of the Egyptian Church. This custom might have helped Damian (576–606) succeed in rebuilding the anti-Chalcedonian patriarchate after the great crises of the sixth century and is definitely the reason why this patriarch was exceedingly well versed in the affairs of Southern Egypt, as can be gathered from reliable sources – documents from the archives of three bishops, Andreas, Abraham, and Pisentios.¹² Damian personally persuaded

¹⁰ E. WIPSYCKA, *Moines et communautés monastiques en Égypte (IV^e–VIII^e siècles)* [= *The Journal of Juristic Papyrology Supplement* 11], Warsaw 2009, pp. 117–122.

¹¹ J. P. COOPER, *The Medieval Nile*, Cairo 2014, chap. 10: ‘Nile Journey Times’, pp. 155–166. Attention should be paid to two maps: 10.2 and 10.4.

¹² R. DEKKER, *Episcopal Networks and Authority in Late Antique Egypt. Bishops of the Theban Region at Work* [= *Orientalia Lovaniensia analecta* 264], Leuven 2018; E. GAREL, *Héritage et trans-*

Abraham, bishop of Hermonthis, to leave a monastery located in a wadi of the desert and to move to Deir el-Bahari, which lay closer to croplands.¹³ The nomination of Andreas, the abbot of the Monastery of Ezekiel, as ‘father of all monks in the *oikoumene*’ (this is a rhetorical exaggeration – the word *oikoumene* may denote Thebaid) was certainly decided in Alexandria.¹⁴ Damian must have known about this energetic abbot.

According to the *Life of Aaron*, the ordination of Psoulousia was preceded by additional rites. Since he was a monk, not a clergyman, before he was invested with episcopal authority, Psoulousia was promoted to a reader, deacon, and presbyter (chapter 81).¹⁵ In the known Egyptian sources, this practice of ‘express supplementation’ of the *cursus honorum* appears much later – in the medieval *Ordination Rites* in codex 253 Lit. Coptic Museum.¹⁶ The manuscript is dated to 1354, but the work is no doubt older. The detailed information about Alexandria it contains proves that it was written before the Arabic conquest. It refers to the ordination of a patriarch in the following way: ‘If he is not ordained a priest, let them ordain him and bless him. If he does not wear the monastic *skhema*, let them first recite over them all the Prayers of the *skhema* and clothe him with the complete angelic dress: the *thorakion*, the cowl, the scapular, which is the leathern *skhema*. The leathern girdle upon his loins,

mission dans le monachisme égyptien. Les testaments des supérieurs du topos de Saint Phoibammôn à Thèbes [= *Bibliothèque d'études coptes* 27], Cairo 2020; F. KRUEGER, *Andreas von Hermonthis und das Kloster von Apa Hesekiel. Mikrobistorische Untersuchungen zu Kirchengeschichte und Klosterwesen im Gebiet von Armant (Oberägypten) in byzantinischer Zeit anhand der koptischen Ostraka der Universitätsbibliothek Leipzig* (*O. Lips. Copt. II*) [= *Archiv für Papyrusforschung und verwandte Gebiete – Beibef. 43*], Berlin 2020.

¹³ *O. Lips. Copt. I* 10 (= *O. Crum Ad.* 29) with the useful commentary of GAREL, *Héritage et transmission* (cit. n. 12), pp. 59–60.

¹⁴ *O. Lips. Copt. II/2* 10.

¹⁵ The predecessors of Psoulousia, Mark and Isaiah, were already presbyters at the moment of episcopal ordination; Macedonius was not even a monk, but the author of our text followed Frumentius, and in the narratives about him, he did not find any information about any additional rites performed during the ordination by Athanasius.

¹⁶ It was edited in two volumes by O. H. E. KHS-BURMESTER, *The Rite of Consecration of the Patriarch of Alexandria*, Cairo 1960, and IDEM, *Ordination Rites of the Coptic Church*, Cairo 1985.

after the pallium. Then they shall leave him upon the Sunday'.¹⁷ An analogous procedure is foreseen in the case of presbyter: 'If they ordain him deacon, if he is not one, let them make him a reader and a subdeacon, and give the blessing on another day'.¹⁸ We find similar customs in the Monophysite Church in Syria.¹⁹

Various normative fourth-century texts coming from different parts of the Christian world share the notion that a candidate for the episcopal distinction should already have an ecclesiastical career rather than be a *homo novus*. It is much less frequently mentioned what the order of conduct was if a certain Christian community persisted in a choice that went against the universally accepted custom. An interesting procedure was proposed by Hosius during the Council of Serdica (343). In accordance with the canon adopted at his motion, the act of ordination had to be postponed, enabling the candidate to actually perform the duties pertaining to the intermediate distinctions, beginning with the reader.²⁰ It is important to pay attention to the justification of this procedure provided by the canon: 'For by these promotions, which in any case have extended time, his faith, his modesty, his dignity and his reverence can be proved' (canon 13). However, in the *Life of Aaron* and *Ordination Rites*, the supplementation of *cursus honorum* occurs immediately. The candidates are ordained ecclesiastics on the same day or in the days immediately preceding the episcopal ordination. Therefore, we have here a kind of liturgical formalism, a manifestation of a quasi-bureaucratic mentality, which is characteristic of the Byzantine period. This also is a reason to date the *Life of Aaron* closer to the end of the sixth century or even later.

Soon after their return to Philae, all the four bishops mentioned in the *Life of Aaron* withdraw to their cells in the desert, where they are visited

¹⁷ Fol. 40 recto, translation in BURMESTER, *The Rite of Consecration* (cit. n. 16), pp. 54–55.

¹⁸ Fol. 14 verso, translation in BURMESTER, *Ordination Rites* (cit. n. 16), p. 88.

¹⁹ W. SELB, *Orientalisches Kirchenrecht, II: Die Geschichte des Kirchenrechts der Westsyrer*, Vienna 1989, p. 233.

²⁰ C. H. TURNER, *Ecclesiae occidentalis monumenta iuris antiquissima*, vol. I/2.3, Oxford 1930, pp. 452–551; commentary and translation: H. HESS, *The Early Development of Canon Law and the Council of Serdica*, Oxford 2002, pp. 157–161.

by believers seeking help from their spiritual leaders. The author certainly bases himself on what he knows from the practice of his day: the bishops-monks whom we know from the papyrological archives of Andreas and Abraham (the bishops of Hermonthis) and Pisentius (the bishop of Kop-tos), manage their dioceses from monasteries situated at a certain distance from the diocesan seat.

In conclusion: the *Life of Aaron* may be a useful source of information on ecclesiastical institutions and practices, not of the fourth century, but of the end of the sixth century.

At the same time, it has to be emphasized that the *Life of Aaron* is not a reliable source for the study of monasticism. The narratives about the lives of monks and ascetic practices consist of an amalgam of motifs drawn from literary works that were circulating in Egypt. Undoubtedly the titular protagonist, the holy monk Aaron, was modelled on a real figure, but we cannot be equally certain of this with regard to other monks described in the work. They are hermits living, usually in pairs, in a nearby desert of undefined boundaries. In the stories that the narrator (Paphnutius) puts into their mouth, they mainly reminisce about their masters, their mortifications, and the miracles they worked. These masters part from their disciples rather soon (sometimes even after a few days), choosing a place for them in the desert and leaving them entirely alone, apparently convinced that such a short period of training was sufficient to start practicing asceticism independently. The monks wander around the desert, visiting other brothers in order to pray with them and discuss the Holy Scriptures.

Dijkstra and van der Vliet are clearly alarmed by this vague representation of the holy men, as it does not correspond to what is known about monastic practices from many literary texts. The relationship between masters and disciples, which is broadly described in the apophthegms, presupposes long years of teaching, and a tendency to creating communities existed almost since the beginnings of the monastic movement. Therefore, the editors sift through the work in search of passages that would attest to the existence of communities of the *laura* kind in this monastic world. However, the author of the *Life of Aaron* does not describe in a clear way any community that had an identity and a name (which would be important for the sake of the later geography of holy

space), and whose members undertook anything together. Contrary to Dijkstra and van der Vliet, I do not think that this should not make us wonder. Clearly, the author knew that monks had inhabited the area of the First Cataract in the distant past, but the memory about their monasteries (no matter what kind) did not survive. Therefore he was not obliged to write about monasteries. He decided to write only about hermits because it was widely believed that they could achieve the height of sainthood. Steadfast isolation from other people was thought to be the best way to acquire inner serenity, draw near to God, and achieve sainthood. This was preached by many authors, such as Paul of Tammah, who, in the early fifth century, wrote praises of being locked in a cell (*Sitting in your cell, On the cell*).²¹ Of course, in the image of the ideal world of hermits ordinary people must appear as recipients of miracles. They are mentioned in this role in the *Life of Aaron*. Dijkstra and van der Vliet treat the participation of monks in the Eucharist as evidence for the existence of a *laura* (or more precisely, of a cult place with a consecrated altar), but I do not think they are right. Regular reception of the Eucharist was a common practice of monastic life in the sixth century, and for this reason, it is given a prominent place in the fictional world of the *Life of Aaron*. Otherwise, the hermits would not have been holy men.

The *Life of Aaron* gained popularity among the scholars studying paganism in Egypt on account of an episode related in the section devoted to the episcopate of Macedonius, the first bishop of Philae (chapter 31). According to this story Macedonius performed a heroic act: he went to the temple of Horus, killed a falcon – the deity’s incarnation – and burned its carcass on the altar. Afterwards, he left the temple undisturbed by anyone and went back to his house in the desert, where he was able to convert the temple’s priest and his two sons to Christianity. These men assisted Macedonius in his quick and joyous deed of converting the inhabitants of Philae (as is common in hagiographic relations, some initial miracles were needed as a

²¹ Edition of the Coptic text along with an Italian translation: T. ORLANDI, *Paolo di Tamma, Opere*, Rome 1988. English translation with an ample commentary by T. Vivian in the anthology *Words to Live by. Journeys in Ancient and Modern Egyptian Monasticism* [= *Cistercian Studies Series* 207], Minnesota 2005.

sign of the Christian God's power). After a proper purification, the house of the former priest of Horus was converted into a church, and during a single ceremony, all the pagans were baptized. For a long time, scholars did not see any reason not to believe in the historic reality of at least some components of the story (especially the one concerning the killing/burning of the falcon).²² However, the research conducted by Dijkstra on the history of Philae in Late Antiquity showed that the story was invented by a man who had no idea about the pagan cult at Philae, apart from the fact that some pagan temples had existed, in which live animals were worshipped (this was common knowledge, as stone temples were still standing).²³ The inscriptions and archaeological remains found on the island as well as literary sources prove that the story is entirely fictional. Christianization in Philae, like in most settlements and towns in Egypt, was a slow process (this fact was unknown to people living in the already Christianized world). Moreover, it must be remembered that the traditional cults centred on the temples had begun gradually to die out already in the third century. Instances of violence against the temples on the part of Christians (mainly monks) were infrequent. Nevertheless, the memory of these devoutly violent acts thrived, becoming a widely used, effective motif that served to increase the dramatic character of a narrative.²⁴

²² D. FRANKFURTER, *Religion in Roman Egypt. Assimilation and Resistance*, Princeton 1998, pp. 109–111, 262, 282–283; IDEM, 'Iconoclasm and Christianisation in late antique Egypt: Christian treatments of space and image', [in:] J. HAHN, S. EMMEL, & U. GOTTER (eds.), *From Temple to Church. Destruction and Renewal of Local Cultic Topography in Late Antiquity*, Leiden 2008, pp. 135–159, esp. 145; J. HAHN, 'Die Zerstörung der Kulte von Philae. Geschichte und Legende am ersten Nilkatarakt', *ibidem*, pp. 203–242. It is interesting that Frankfurter took a more cautious stance in the article 'Hagiography and the reconstruction of local religion in late antique Egypt: memories, inventions and landscapes', [in:] DIJKSTRA & VAN DIJK (eds.), *The Encroaching Desert* (cit. n. 2), pp. 13–37. The article was based on a paper held during a session in which some opponents of his hypothesis were also taking part. This might have triggered the change in his approach.

²³ Dijkstra has written about this problem on several occasions, recently in J. H. F. DIJKSTRA, 'I wish to offer a sacrifice to god today', *Journal of the Canadian Society for Coptic Studies* 8 (2015), pp. 61–75.

²⁴ J. H. F. DIJKSTRA, 'The fate of the temples in late antique Egypt', [in:] L. LAVAN & M. MULRYAN (eds.), *The Archaeology of Late Antique Paganism*, Leiden 2011, pp. 286–436.

Chapter 92 provides us with an interesting detail: Aaron (the titular protagonist) charges a presbyter with putting the monastic habit on his (Aaron's) disciple; in other episodes narrated by the *Life of Aaron*, experienced monks did not hesitate to perform this kind of act themselves. The difference is significant. Apparently, the author wished to emphasize in this way the humility of this holy monk, who delegated the performance of the rite to a person he considered more worthy than himself. At any rate, this is a trace of a process that rendered the ceremony of conferring the monastic habit an almost sacramental character, which it did not have in the first generations of monasticism.

Lastly, I'll mention a detail that will be welcome news for archaeologists exploring the dwellings of ascetics: we learn that Aaron, who lived in el-Hesa, a small island on the Nile, owned a house with a top floor (chapter 95). His house resembled many (wealthy) houses in Egyptian villages.

As we see, the *Life of Aaron* is a treasury of information. The key for opening it has been given us by Jitse Dijkstra and Jacques van der Vliet in their excellent edition and commentary.

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Joshua ALLBRIGHT

The rhetoric of aikia in petitions from Roman Egypt

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Abstract: This article discusses the rhetorical usage of the verb *αἰκίζεσθαι* ('abuse', 'thrash', 'brutalize') and its derivatives in petitions from Roman Egypt. Curiously, this description of violence only appears in petitions from the Roman period. Using theories of conflict resolution and social control, it is argued that the writers of these petitions, the majority of whom lived in villages in the Arsinoite nome, used the concept of *aikia* in an attempt to overcome the inefficiency of the Roman Egyptian legal system by augmenting the severity of the crimes they suffered. The usage of the verb *αἰκίζεσθαι* (often paired with the noun *πληγαῖς*) emphasized the brutality and socially transgressive nature of the attack and presented it as something that needed to be addressed by the authorities immediately, as it affected the entire social order. Over time the phrase *πληγαῖς αἰκίζεσθαι* became formulaic in its expression, suggesting that it was not just contained to a handful of petitions. Rather it was a linguistic phenomenon in itself that reveals the effects of the social and legal environment of Roman Egypt on the language of petitions.

Keywords: Roman Egypt, violence, *aikia*, petitions, social control, rhetoric, Greek law, Roman law.

Grażyna BĄKOWSKA & Adam ŁAJTAR

ΜΕΓΑ ΤΟ ΟΝΟΜΑ ΤΟΥ ΣΑΡΑΠΙΣ:

An inscribed bronze ring from Marina el-Alamein

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Abstract: The article offers the publication of a bronze ring discovered during the archaeological work on the site of Marina el-Alamein, located on the

shore of the Mediterranean Sea, c. 100 kilometres west of Alexandria. The ring, dated to the second century CE on contextual and formal grounds, carries the acclamation 'Great is the name of Sarapis' in Greek inscribed on its bezel. The acclamation stems from the religious atmosphere of the times, which, in the quest for the divine, ascribed a sort of superiority to some gods of the polytheistic system. The ring contributes to the picture of religious beliefs and practices of the ancient inhabitants of an anonymous settlement hidden under the site of Marina el-Alamein.

Keywords: Marina el-Alamein, Roman jewelry, Sarapis, religious acclamations, 'megatheism', Greek inscriptions.

Lucia C. COLELLA

Riedizione del verbale di apertura di testamento latino

conservato in P. Berol. inv. 7124 = ChLA X 412

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Abstract: This paper proposes a re-edition of the opening protocol of M. Sempronius Priscus' will from AD 131 (P. Berol. inv. 7124 = ChLA X 412 = CPL 220). The testament is written in Latin, with the testator's signature in Greek, but in the Latin text itself some interference phenomena from Greek are noteworthy. New readings shed light on the objects of legacies, in particular concerning the bequeathing of land parcels. In the fideicommissary section the phrase *volo et iubeo*, rare in this period, is to be noted, together with a disposition concerning the *pupillae* Herais and Tamystha and another one ordering the testators' daughters not to litigate in court against each other. The place in which the will was opened was most probably Arsinoe, since this toponym seems not to have been crossed out, as was previously believed. All the names of the witnesses are now known.

Keywords: Roman will, M. Sempronius Priscus, P. Berol. inv. 7124, ChLA X 412, CPL 220.

Federica NICOLARDI

Vocabulary and practices of manumission

in a fragment of the Life of Philonides (P. Herc. 1044)

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Abstract: The biographical work on Philonides of Laodikeia on the Sea in Syria (P. Herc. 1044+1715+1746) is not merely a source of information about the life of the philosopher, it also bears witness to both well-known and lesser-known aspects of Hellenistic history and civilization, not to mention the fact that it is an extremely rare and precious example of Hellenistic biography. This paper presents a new edition of a passage of the text in which references to vocabulary and procedures of Greek manumission can be detected, which suggest a parallel with papyrological and epigraphic documentary sources. This

parallelism allows, in turn, to understand better the text of the papyrus and to supplement a technical term referring to relatives' consent to the manumission of slaves.

Keywords: Philonides of Laodikeia on the Sea, Herculaneum papyri, Greek manumission, ἀπελευθερώω, εὐδοκεῖν.

Joanna WEGNER

Monks and monasteries in Egypt between household and estate.

A case study from Bawit 83

Abstract: The article attempts to explore the applicability of the household model to the monastery of Bawit in Middle Egypt as seen through the papyrological documentation. By focusing on features and functions of household underscored in definitions used by sociology and economy, it defines the monastery as a unit where material and symbolic value was produced and transmitted, and brings to light connections between people, materialities, and labour.

Keywords: Bawit, Egyptian monasticism, monastic economy, household.

Ewa WIPSZYCKA

What can the lives of saints tell us about history?

The case of the Coptic Life of Aaron 105

Abstract: The excellent work done by Jitse Dijkstra and Jacques van der Vliet, who edited an important hagiographic text with a huge introduction and a huge commentary, prompted the author of the present paper to walk in their footsteps and to propose some corrections or supplements concerning the date of the composition of the text, the procedure of the election and ordination of bishops, the beginnings of monasticism in the region of the First Cataract. The *Life of Aaron* is a reliable source for the history of the Church of the sixth century (or rather the last part of it), not of the fourth century, as the anonymous author would suggest. On the other hand, its picture of monasticism is made up of stereotypes derived from literary works concerning monks. From it we cannot learn anything about monks living near Syene.

Keywords: Athanasius, bishops of Philae, ceremonies of episcopal ordinations, end of paganism, Nubians.

Marzena WOJTCZAK

How to become a monastic superior? Legal and mundane sine qua nonis 119

Abstract: The literary portrayal of the charismatic founders of monastic communities, and of their successors, abounds in descriptions of ascetic

practices and devotion. However, the *begoumenoi* also needed to be individuals of the right standing and competence, as it was only such people who could properly represent the communities in relations with both lay and ecclesiastical authorities, secure the obedience of all the brethren, as well as efficiently manage the community and its assets. The nature and the exact procedure of superior's appointment became increasingly relevant and began to interest both the church and the secular authorities once the monastic movement reached such a magnitude that it could no longer be left without proper institutional surveillance. In parallel, there was a growing awareness among monks themselves of the need to standardise the existing practices and experience.

In this article I focus on the legal conditions delimiting the transfer of headship over monastic communities and their reflection in mundane reality. My aim is to see how documents of legal practice relate to the imperial legislation dealing with the appointment of the people in charge of the monasteries. The analysis of the superior selection process will allow for commenting on both the legal framework within which the monastic communities functioned, and the much broader issue of imperial policy towards the emerging holy houses. It should also enable some conclusions on the legal status of monastic communities and how it may have influenced the realities of appointing their administrative and spiritual heads.

Keywords: monks, monasteries, Late Antiquity, papyri, legal practice, *proestos*, abbot, *begoumenos*, monastic legal capacity, Justinian, imperial legislation.

Uri YIFTACH

Olim tradita fuerunt?

On the obsolescence of the sollemnia verba in Inst. 3.15pr.

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Abstract: According to the classical dogma, the act of *stipulatio* was performed through the exchange of *sollemnia verba*, which were, according to my working hypothesis, verbs introducing the duty to perform a future act, a concept lucidly displayed by Pomponian (*Dig.* 45.1.5.1), hence the 'Pomponian tenet'. Documents preserved on papyrus, composed by 'new-Romans' after the *Constitutio Antoniniana*, exhibit a completely different concept: a stipulation-clause confirming a past, contractually significant activity. It is asked (but not conclusively answered) to what extent this alternative formulation has paved the way to the abandonment of the 'Pomponian tenet' by the emperor Leo in 472 CE (*CJ* 8.37.10). As we draw from Justinian's interpretation of *CJ* 8.37.10 in *Inst.* 3.15.1, the *sollemnia verba*, the use of which became outdated after Leo, was not the language of the stipulation-clause as incorporated in the written documentation of the contract, but that of the act of *stipulatio*, which, as before, was meant in the keep verbal.

Keywords: Greco-Roman Egypt, *homologia*, Justinian, Leo, stipulation.