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**BISHOPS OF THE PATRIARCHATE OF ALEXANDRIA
TRAVELLING TO MEET THEIR PATRIARCH
IN LATE ANTIQUITY AND EARLY MIDDLE AGES
A STUDY OF THE MOTIVES
AND DURATION OF THEIR JOURNEYS**

BISHOPS CONSTITUTED A GROUP OF ABOVE-AVERAGE MOBILITY in late-antique society. This was particularly true of the bishops of the Alexandrian patriarchate, who had more reason to travel than did their counterparts in other lands of the Mediterranean world. This was because, according to a custom formed in the third century, the bishop of Alexandria ordained all of the higher clergy of his extremely extensive dominion personally.¹ Apart from Egypt, the jurisdiction of the patriarch of Alexandria included Libya Inferior and Pentapolis (from the 2nd half of the 3rd cent.), and Nubia (from the 2nd half of the 6th cent.). To this we can add Ethiopia, the first bishop of which, Frumentius, had been ordained by Athanasius in the 350s.

Alexandria remained the seat of the patriarch even in the first centuries of Arab rule, though with time, the Monastery of St Macarius in Scetis became a sort of ‘second capital’ of the patriarch, who, traditionally, would spend there the period of Lent, or at least one week before Easter. The patriarch would consecrate the chrism there, which was a celebration

¹ In the present paper, I will be using evidence collected in my book *The Alexandrian Church. People and Institutions* [= *The Journal of Juristic Papyrology Supplement* 40] Warsaw 2015.

attended by many bishops. Ordinations, however, would not take place there.

At the end of the tenth century, the patriarch no longer resided in Alexandria, but in one of the smaller settlements of the Delta (first in Mahallat Danyal, then, for a hundred years from 970 onwards in Damru (possibly with brief Alexandrian interludes), then sporadically in Old Cairo, then permanently in Cairo since the patriarchate of Christodulos (1047–1077)).²

1. BISHOPS TRAVELLING FROM EGYPT, LIBYA INFERIOR AND PENTAPOLIS TO ALEXANDRIA

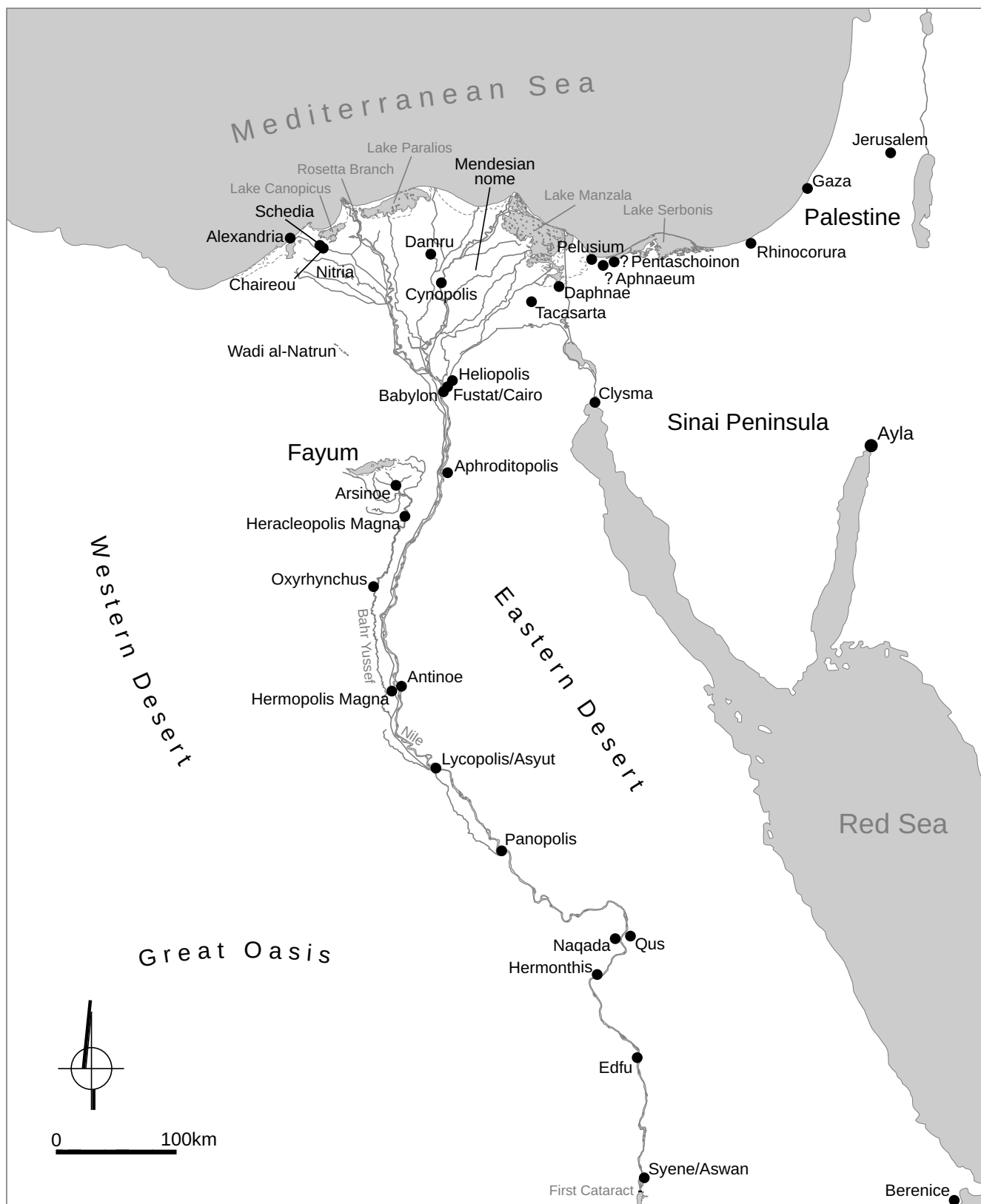
1.1. *Motivations and occasions for travel*³

In Egypt, a candidate for bishop was elected locally by the clergy of a particular church, with the participation of the bishops of neighbouring cities as well as through the acclamation of the faithful. The candidate would then travel to Alexandria, with an appropriate entourage of elected clergy and a document describing the selection procedure, in order to be ordained. We know that sometimes more than one candidate was chosen, leaving the final decision to the patriarch.

The patriarch could, however, ignore the local choice and ordain someone else. The earliest account of such a case is found in the *Life of*

² R.-G. COQUIN, 'Patriarchal residences', [in:] A. ATIYA (ed.), *The Coptic Encyclopedia* VI, New York 1991, pp. 1912–1913 (available online at <<https://ccdl.claremont.edu/digital/collection/cce/id/1532/rec/1>> [accessed 13 September 2022]).

³ Works on the travel conditions in Egypt: Ch. KOTSIFOU, 'Papyrological evidence of travelling in Byzantine Egypt', [in:] A. McDONALD & Ch. RIGGS (eds.), *Current Research in Egyptology 2000* [= *British Archaeological Reports International Series* 909], Oxford 2000, pp. 57–64; C. ADAMS, "There and back again". Getting around in Roman Egypt', [in:] C. ADAMS & R. LAURENCE (eds.), *Travel and Geography in Roman Empire*, London 2001, pp. 138–166; B. SALWAY, 'Travel, *itineraria* and *tabellaria*', [in:] *ibidem*, pp. 22–66; A. SELANDER, 'Travel in Coptic documentary texts', [in:] A. T. SCHUBERT & P. M. SIJPESTEIJN (eds.), *Documents and the History of the Early Islamic World*, Leiden 2006, pp. 77–99.



Map 1. Places mentioned in the article: Egypt, Sinai, and Palestine
(drawing S. Mašlak)

Aphou, a wandering ascetic practicing an extremely austere lifestyle among the animals roaming the edge of the desert near Oxyrhynchus. That is, at least, what the *Life of Aphou* tells us, though it is impossible to say whether this was really the case. The legitimate scepticism about the animals feeding him and shielding him from the wind and cold should not lead us to believe that this was a purely legendary figure, however.⁴ There is evidence enough to prove that he was a historical figure. In any case, the customs governing the procedures for the election of a bishop described in the *Life of Aphou* are plausible; the author of the *Life* had no reason to deviate from reality in this regard.

The *Life* narrates that Aphou, having heard the text of Theophilus' paschal letter (the one from 399) in church on Epiphany Day, recognised that it contained unorthodox statements. So, he left the desert and travelled to Alexandria, where he met with the patriarch. He is said to have had a dispute with the patriarch, in the effect of which he persuaded Theophilus of his interpretation of the biblical account that God created man in his own likeness (Gen. 1:26). When three years later, Theophilus received a letter from local clergy informing him of the death of the bishop of Oxyrhynchus, he decided to reject their candidate and instead ordain Aphou. It is clear from this story that before the patriarch performed the act of ordination, there was a phase of correspondence (or discussion) with representatives of the diocese concerned. We do not know whether this procedure was followed also in the case of dioceses which lay far to the south, so that the whole process of determining the future bishop would take considerable time, even up to two, three months, if not more.⁵

⁴ Publication: F. ROSSI, *I papiri copti del Museo Egizio di Torino*, Turin 1887, vol. I, fasc. 3, pp. 5–22, chap. 3. We do not know when exactly this text was written, probably in the course of the fifth century (in the middle?). This text is one of the most important testimonies of the Origenist dispute in Alexandria, and for this reason it has been the subject of commentaries by various scholars: see D. F. BUMAZHNOV, 'Zur Interpretation der *Vita der seligen Aphu von Pemdje*', [in:] E. PERRONE (ed.), *Origeniana octava*, Leuven 2003, pp. 987–994.

⁵ I know of one text that tells of such a case. It is the *Life of Pisentius*, bishop of Hermonthis at the time of the patriarchs Benjamin and Agathon; it is found in an Arabic synaxarion kept at Luxor and hitherto unpublished. Walter Crum quoted from it a passage concerning

Why would a patriarch reject the decision of local communities and choose another candidate? He might (as in the case of Aphou) have personally known the person he considered the better candidate. However, given the vastness of the area under his authority it would have been extremely rare for him to have such knowledge. Of course, the patriarch's envoys who travelled to diocesan seats on various matters (especially those who distributed the paschal letters) could suggest to their superior the clergymen whom they had met and who had made a good impression by their virtues and administrative abilities, or more often than not, the gifts they offered. Often the ambitious ecclesiastics would come to Alexandria themselves, bringing with them money to be handed over to influential officials in the patriarch's service.⁶ There were probably potential candidates for the vacant positions, and these pretenders would activate upon the news of a serious illness or death of a particular bishop.

From these considerations, we can conclude that a prospective bishop travelling to Alexandria was (usually) certain that he would receive the ordination, since the selection of candidates took place before he embarked on a journey for the ordination ceremony.

Pisentius in H. E. WINLOCK & W. E. CRUM, *The Monastery of Epiphanius at Thebes I*, New York 1926, pp. 136–137. It tells us that when the bishop of Hermonthis died, a monk from Jeme was chosen to replace him, but the patriarch rejected him and the other candidate until Pisentius was nominated. Gawdat Gabra, who researched the chronological aspects of Pisentius' biography (G. GABRA, 'Pesyntheus, Bischof von Hermonthis', *Mitteilungen des deutschen archäologischen Instituts. Abteilung Kairo* 40 [1984], pp. 27–29), proposed to date his ordination just before 631 and thus in the interval between the departure of the Persians from Egypt (629) and the arrival of the pro-Chalcedonian patriarch Cyrus (631). It is very difficult to establish the value of the information on the election of Pisentius. It appears to be an element of topical praise of the bishop. However, I am not aware of other texts using a topos about the double rejection of candidates so that the episcopal throne would fall to a worthy priest. Sticking to the text, we would have to conclude that the whole operation, the double journey of the delegation to Alexandria and back and the journey of the right candidate, at the familiar pace of travel on the Nile (more on that later) would have taken at least 150 days. In the complicated situation of the early 630s, such a delay in the consecration seems unlikely.

⁶ This is mentioned by Isidore of Pelusium in his letter to Cyril, II.127 (PG LXXVIII, coll. 567–572; the new edition of the letters of Isidore in *Sources chrétiennes* does not include this letter).

Bishops flocked to Alexandria when the vacant Alexandrian throne had to be filled, more precisely, some of the bishops. The Alexandrian clergy, also the secular authorities, wanted a quick decision in order to prevent riots which might be organized by groups supporting rival candidates. The need for haste favoured representatives of dioceses near to Alexandria; it was they who made the decision if the previous patriarch's terminal illness was short-lived. In other cases, the more influential bishops of more distant cities had time to show up in Alexandria and wait for the right moment. Almost all of the surviving accounts of the elections mention that Alexandrian notables took part in the election,⁷ but they were not a formalized group, nor do we know who decided to invite particular representatives of the elite.

Bishops who had not been able to come in time for the ordination ceremony would arrive later in order to pay a ceremonial visit to their new superior. We do not know when this custom was started, since our only (reliable) testimony of this, the *Life of Aaron*,⁸ dates from the late sixth century. However, it seems to me that the need to make personal contact with a powerful patriarch, who was, after all, the guarantor of the orthodox faith as it was to be professed and preached, must have existed much earlier, at least since the end of the Arian crisis (and thus the episcopal office of Timothy I [380–384]). I find it hard to imagine that the bishops did not pay tribute in this form to Theophilus (384–412), who ruled the patriarchate in an authoritarian and very effective manner. What we do not know, is whether the dates of these bishops' trips were of their own choosing, or whether they came to Alexandria on pre-determined, traditional feast days.

Synods, which all bishops subordinate to the patriarch were required to attend, offered another occasion for travel to Alexandria. There is only one mention of a synod held in a place other than Alexandria, namely a synod convened in Nitria in 400, which was intended to pacify an Ori-

⁷ WIPSZYCKA, *The Alexandrian Church* (cit. n. 1), pp. 149–154 ('The elections of the patriarch and their rules').

⁸ *The Coptic Life of Aaron. Critical Edition, Translation and Commentary*, ed. J. H. F. DIJKSTRA & J. VAN DER VLIET [= *Vigiliae Christianae Supplements* 155], Leiden 2020, p. 114.

genist faction of monks influential in this monastic centre. Synods played an important role during the Arian crisis.⁹ On at least two occasions, the vast majority of the bishops of Egypt and both Libyas convened. The first assembly, in 320/1, was called by Alexander to remove Arius from the Church; according to his letter, which was cited by Socrates in *HE* I, 6.14, about a hundred hierarchs were to attend. The number is inflated and rounded off, since other existing sources indicate that there were eighty-two bishops, and it is not at all certain that all of them were present in Alexandria. The second large synod was organised by Athanasius after his triumphant return from exile in 338. The participants were catholic bishops, as the Arian and Melitian bishops were of course absent. Later gatherings were much less numerous. We know nothing about the synods of the Arian and Melitian bishops who were active in the patriarchate in the fourth century. However, the lack of sources mentioning them should not be treated as strong evidence against the possibility that such gatherings took place.

We possess only one attestation to the convening of a synod dealing with day-to-day, routine matters (rather than condemning successive enemies of the orthodox faith, as in the time of Athanasius, Theophilus, and Cyril). It is found in the *Life of Isaac*, patriarch in 689–692, which was written by Menas, an author who was (more or less) a contemporary of the events. According to Menas, a ‘hundred’ (bishops, of course), who had not been allowed to gather in the time of Isaac’s predecessors because of the ‘enemies of religion’, were to assemble in Alexandria.¹⁰ It is not revealed who these enemies were and how many patriarchs were affected by this impossibility of assembling synods. The situation could have occurred under Agathon (665–680) and John III (680–689), as Benjamin’s (d. 665) good relations with the Arab authorities should have guaranteed the freedom to convene synods.

Finally, bishops elected by the patriarchs to be delegates to assemblies convened by the emperors would also gather in Alexandria. We are fortu-

⁹ WIPSZYCKA, *The Alexandrian Church* (cit. n. 1), pp. 280–281.

¹⁰ *Vie d’Isaac patriarche d’Alexandrie de 686 à 689, écrite par Mina, évêque de Pschati*, ed. E. PORSCHER [= *Patrologia Orientalis* 11], Paris 1915, p. 363.

nate that there survive lists of participants for the following synods: Nicea (325), Seleucia (359), Ephesus (431 and 449), Chalcedon (451), Constantinople (553).¹¹

The sources make no mention of bishops travelling to Alexandria in an attempt to handle the various affairs of their dioceses (for example organizing funds to build a church, negotiating fiscal concessions, seeking support for their eventual successors, resolving conflicts caused by their own clergy or monks, etc.). We have only one instance of disciplinary proceedings, namely a case when Patriarch Dioscorus (444–451) summoned the bishop of Panopolis with concern to an Origenist monk from Panopolis.¹² However, it is clear that bishops seeking help or being summoned for disciplinary action must have been common. This was an obvious consequence of the lack of a metropolitan see in Egypt and Libya Inferior. All of the matters which would usually fall within the competence of the metropolitan bishops in other sees of the late antique world or would be addressed during systematically held synods of the bishops of a province, had to be taken to the patriarch in Alexandria.

Only in Pentapolis was a metropolitan bishop present, and local synods held, but at the time when the Alexandrian patriarchate was at the height of its power, the curia was still informed of everything that was decided there, in order to receive the patriarch's assent. It was also the patriarch of Alexandria who consecrated bishops of the Pentapolis province.¹³

¹¹ On the lists of Egyptian delegates participating in synods, see E. WIPSZYCKA, 'The patriarchs of Alexandria and their bishops', [in:] M.-L. DERAT, A. ŁAJTAR, & A. TSAKOS (eds.), *Bishops and Bishoprics in Egypt, Nubia, and Ethiopia* (forthcoming).

¹² A letter of Dioscorus on this issue was published by H. THOMPSON, 'Diodorus and Shenute', [in:] *Recueil d'études égyptologiques dédiées à la mémoire de Jean-François Champollion*, Paris 1922, pp. 367–376. See also H.-J. CRISTEA, *Schenute von Atripe, Contra Origenistas: Edition des koptischen Textes mit annotierter Übersetzung und Indizes einschliesslich einer Übersetzung des 16. Osterfestbriefs des Theophilus in der Fassung des Hieronymus* [= *Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum* 60], Tübingen 2011, pp. 44–48.

¹³ We know this from letter 76 of Synesios to Theophilus: Synésios de Cyrène, *Correspondance: Lettres I–CLVI*, ed. A. GARZYA & D. ROQUES [= *Belles lettres* 397], Paris 2003.

1.2. *Duration of travel to Alexandria*
in the case of bishops from Egypt and Libya

It is not easy to establish how much time it would take for the bishops of the different dioceses to travel to Alexandria, since the authors of literary texts and of documents extremely rarely included detailed data on this subject.¹⁴ That is why this problem is practically absent from recent research on the functioning of ecclesiastic institutions in Egypt. Historians of the doctrinal controversies also neglect it, in spite of the evident fact that the duration of travels played an important role. Passing over this aspect of Church history is an error that impoverishes the possibilities of historical understanding.

Hopefully, future publications of papyri will provide us with useful evidence. However, even now it is possible to gather interesting pieces of information on the duration of travels in Egypt by searching through numerous texts relating to travellers who were not bishops. After all, bishops did not use other means of transport than people of their time. Even if they managed to make their journey in a shorter time (I will write about this a little further on), the differences could not have been that significant. I will not limit myself to establishing how many days it took to travel from a given bishopric to Alexandria: I will also try to establish what the geographical factors were that determined the duration. One more methodological remark is due here: in our examination, we should use sources not only from Late Antiquity, but also from the Ptolemaic and Roman periods, as the conditions of travel did not change significantly (apart from the increased rate of the use of dromedaries during desert journeys).

¹⁴ One such exception pertains to someone we might call a 'man of the Church', a prior of the Pachomian congregation named Victor. Cyril was said to have sent him to Constantinople just before the Council of Ephesus (431). From the Coptic records of that council (W. KRAATZ, *Koptische Akten zum Ephesinischen Konzil vom Jahre 431* [= *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur*, NF 11], Leipzig 1904, p. 4) we learn that Victor departed from Pbau (the Pachomian monastery near Tentyra, the seat of congregation's authorities), sailed ten days to Alexandria, and then twelve to Constantinople. Ten days for the Egyptian travel section is too little, the author of the acts got this figure out of the blue.

Bishops from Egyptian dioceses of the Nile Valley would start their journeys by travelling overland to the river. Such journeys could be made by donkey or mule, or along canals, especially for the bishops of the Fayum and the cities located along the banks of the Bahr Yusuf. From then on, they travelled along the Nile.

The Nile was a difficult river for all sorts of barges and ships: shallows changed locations, and river-currents were swift in some places.¹⁵ Sailing downstream was not at all easier than travelling south: in Egypt the winds (and they are strong) blow from the north-west for two-thirds of the year. In order to resist the force of the wind, it was necessary to resort to rowing or even towing the boats for long distances. Ships advancing upstream were unable to sail if there was no wind and there were too few oarsmen or too few people ready to tow to beat the current.

Sailing times depended on the conditions on the river. The flooding of the Nile would start in July/August and reach its highest level in September. After that the level of the river would gradually drop. This meant that May and June were the most difficult months for sailing. This was when various obstacles in the riverbed (sandbanks, rocks) were exposed. On the good months, these obstructions would not complicate the voyage too much, but on the difficult months, ships would usually sail by day; only in exceptionally favourable conditions, would it be possible to sail by night. In Upper Egypt, larger ships (160–200 tonnage) could only operate for five months.¹⁶ Many canals would dry up or had such low water levels that only small flat-bottomed boats could travel along them.

¹⁵ Detailed description of travel conditions from the point of view of a geographer and geologist carefully following the results of modern research: J. COOPER, *The Medieval Nile. Route, Navigation, and Landscape in Islamic Egypt*, Cairo 2014. See also C. SOMAGLINO, 'La navigation sur le Nil. Quelques réflexions autour de l'ouvrage de J. P. Cooper, *The Medieval Nile*', [in:] P. ARGÉMI & P. TAILLET (eds.), *Entre Nil et mers. La navigation en Égypte ancienne: Actes des rencontres de Provence Égyptologie, Musée Départemental Arles Antique, le 12 avril 2014* [= *Nebet* 3], Arles 2015, pp. 123–161. The author of this study supplements Cooper's source base with data from pharaonic times, also referring to accounts of travellers not included by Cooper.

¹⁶ On this topic, see P. ARNAUD, 'La batellerie de fret nilotique d'après la documentation papyrologique (300 av J.-C. – 400 après J.-C.)', [in:] P. POMEY (ed.), *La batellerie égyptienne. Archéologie, histoire, ethnographie* [= *Études alexandrines* 34], Alexandria 2015, pp. 99–149.

Despite all these difficulties, the Nile was traversed by a wide variety of ships and barges, of varying tonnage, size of sails, number of crew members. Indispensable for such crews were local navigators who were familiar with the river in a particular section and could pilot the boats.

Papyrus documents provide quite a lot of information about the duration of travel on specific stretches of the journey. Two such documents are of particular value to us. First, *P. Oxy.* XLII 3052 (1st cent. AD), an itinerary of a journey from Nicopolis near Alexandria to Oxyrhynchus. The stages of the journey lasted nine days: from Nicopolis to Schedia by the canal, along the Canopic branch of the Nile, after that on the main stream of the Nile from Babylon to Aphroditopolis, then westward along the Fayum on the canal, then to Ptolemaios Hormou on the Bahr Yussef, and, by Bahr Yussef, to Oxyrhynchus.

The other document is a letter in Arabic written in 735. It describes in detail a journey from the Fayum to Alexandria with a shipment of goods for sale.¹⁷ The trip lasted at least ten days, first by a barge on the canal, and afterwards on the Nile to the mouth of the Rosetta branch, situated about 60 km from Alexandria. Here, the traveller loaded his goods onto mules or donkeys and, in a single day, reached his destination (usually this section of the road took two days). Such an arrangement of travel in this place by both water and land was the norm: continuing travel by sea would have been dangerous because the broadly northward-flowing river encounters wind and wave conditions prevail in the broadly opposite direction particularly during the summer Mediterranean sailing season, when winds from the northerly quadrant are most frequent. These winds hampered the passage of vessels sailing out of the mouth. In addition, the same winds generate wave fields that bear down upon the Nile mouths whenever they blow.¹⁸ The travel that the author of this letter describes

¹⁷ Text published with a comprehensive commentary by P. M. SIJPESTEIJN, 'Travel and trade on the river', [in:] P. M. SIJPESTEIJN & L. SUNDELIN (eds.), *Papyrology and the History of Early Islamic Egypt* [= *Islamic History and Civilization* 55], Leiden 2004, pp. 115–152. The article cites data gathered from documents found in the Cairo Geniza (13th cent.), according to which ships departing from Cairo to Alexandria needed five–six days of travel.

¹⁸ COOPER, *The Medieval Nile* (cit. n. 15), pp. 144–145.

was undertaken in June, the worst possible time for navigation on the Nile. This circumstance accounts for the fact that it took him ten days, whereas other travels, attested by documents found in the Cairo Geniza, lasted five or six days.¹⁹ In general, using different means of travel in Egypt was common, which is important to note, because too often sailing on the Nile is envisaged as the only means of travel.²⁰

There is, in addition, a category of papyrological documents which provides us with useful information about the duration of Nile voyages in an indirect way, namely the archives from the early Arab period in connection with the transport of tax in form of grain (mostly from the village of Aphrodito) and of various materials needed for the construction of Fustat (from the archives of Senouthios, a high official of Hermopolis Magna). This data was used by Federico Morelli, publisher of the Senouthios archive, to study the speed of transport ships.²¹ His analysis also considered data contained in other sources, including literary texts and accounts found in the *Description de l'Égypte* produced after Napoleon's expedition to Egypt.²² In the conclusion of his detailed and, in my opinion, competent research, Morelli cautiously proposed that an average of 40 km could be done in the twelve hours of daily sailing. His findings apply specifically to large barges which were heavily laden and therefore submerged deep in water, and which traversed when the level of the Nile was high. Vessels only carrying passengers with little luggage in the same season were (presumably) faster.

¹⁹ SIJPESTEIJN, 'Travel and trade' (cit. n. 17), p. 138.

²⁰ See the case described by T. DERDA, 'Waterway Fayum–Alexandria: a note on *P. Lille I 1* (+ *P. Zen. Pest.*, Appendix A)', *The Journal of Juristic Papyrology* 36 (2006), pp. 9–20.

²¹ F. MORELLI, *L'Archivio di Senouthios anystes e testi connessi. Lettere e documenti per la costruzione di una capitale* [= *Corpus Papyrorum Raineri* 30], Berlin 2019, pp. 84–96.

²² See J.-M. LE PÈRE, 'Mémoire sur la vallée du Nil et le Nilomètre de l'île de Roudah', [in:] *Description de l'Égypte ou recueil des observations et des recherches qui ont été faites en Égypte pendant l'expédition de l'armée française*, Paris 1822, 'État moderne' 2.2.

1.3. *Data on the duration of Nile travel
provided by travellers of medieval and modern time*

Fortunately, we can supplement our scant knowledge derived from ancient sources by using accounts of travellers who made their way through Egypt; such accounts become numerous starting from the twelfth century. The art of building ships and the ability to navigate changed slowly until the technological revolution in the second half of the nineteenth century, and the stories of Arab travellers, and then of numerous Europeans wandering through Egypt for business and tourist purposes since the sixteenth century are also a good source for Late Antiquity. They have the advantage of giving us the length of a specific journey at a specific time, rather than an average length, which is always less reliable.

I am in a fortunate position of having at hand the book *The Medieval Nile* by John P. Cooper, cited above. The author of this remarkable monograph has gathered a wealth of information on the conditions of Nile navigation, the dangers involved, and the duration of the voyages. On this last point, he has taken into account not only medieval but also early-modern and even nineteenth century sources.²³

From the data he presented in table 10.1 (p. 159), I have selected the accounts several travellers. The differences in sailing speed are also influenced by whether the ship carried only people or also cargo (which we cannot, unfortunately, know). In the table below, I give Cooper's key findings for the journey up the Nile. The data analyzed by Cooper – to which we can also add a report on the journey of Claude Sicard, a Jesuit, travelling from Cairo to Naqada (roughly the same length as the Cairo–Qus route) in the fall of 1714, who sailed for ten days and six nights²⁴ – coincide (roughly) with those established by Morelli. The length of the Nile between Qus and Cairo is about 640 km, so the daily distance covered by the ships was just

²³ COOPER, *The Medieval Nile* (cit. n. 15), ch. 10: 'Nile journey times', at pp. 155–166. Attention should be paid to maps 10.2 and 10.4.

²⁴ Cl. SICARD, *Oeuvres II: Relations et mémoires imprimées*, ed. M. MARTIN, Cairo 1982, pp. 46–115.

Table 1. Duration of journey along the Nile
of some medieval and modern travellers

Journey upstream			
<i>Traveller</i>	<i>Month/year</i>	<i>Cairo-Qus</i> ²⁵	<i>Qus-Aswan</i>
Nasir i Khusraw	May-Jul. 1050		39 – entire journey
Ibn Jubayr	May 1183	19	
Norden	Nov.-Dec. 1738	20	9
Pococke	Dec.-Jan. 1737/8	22	6
Fuller	Feb. 1819	20	5
Nightingale	Feb.-May 1849	24	6
Swinburne	Nov.-Dec. 1850	14 ½	5
average		19	6

Journeys downstream ²⁶			
<i>Traveller</i>	<i>Month/year</i>	<i>Aswan-Qus</i>	<i>Qus-Cairo</i>
Norden	Jan.-Feb. 1738	10	17
Pococke	Jan.-Feb. 1738	7	6
Fuller	Apr. 1819	6	14
Nightingale	Feb.-Mar. 1850	7	21
Swinburne	Dec. 1850	6	9
average		7	13

over 40 km. A similar calculation for the entire Cairo-Aswan journey gives a slightly higher average, closer to 50 km. However, it took Nasir i Qusraw thirty-nine days to sail from Cairo to Aswan, so approximately 32 km per day, though this was during the lowest water level of the Nile.

²⁵ Qus was an important river port and a starting point for caravan routes through the Eastern Desert to ports on the Red Sea coast. In the early Middle Ages, it replaced Cop-tus, which lay 20 km to the north, in this role.

²⁶ The data for Nasir i Khusraw and Ibn Jubayr included in the first table is unavailable for their downstream journey.

The bishops of Pentapolis and Libya Inferior travelled to Alexandria primarily by sea. This would take five–seven in good conditions. When sailing was impossible, the land route attested in *Itinerarium Antonini* was chosen. Twenty days were needed to travel between Alexandria and Cyrene in this way.²⁷

1.4. *Data on the duration of travel in the Delta region*

The material gathered by Cooper for sailing in the Delta is insufficient for the purposes of my research. It is limited almost entirely to information about the route by the Nile from Cairo to Alexandria.²⁸ This is understandable: reconstructing the network of Nile branches and canals in the Delta is an extremely difficult and unrewarding task, for this network was subject to almost continuous changes because of the process of silting, which directed the Nile water to new outlets.

In the period I am dealing with, the northernmost part of that branch of the Nile that was nearest to Alexandria – the so-called Canopic Nile – shifted to the east, creating the canal that we call the Rosetta branch (from the name of a town that was founded in the ninth century near the mouth of that Nile branch).²⁹ In the Ptolemaic period, a canal was dug which connected Alexandria with the Nile. It provided the city with drinking water and shortened travel. Near the place where this canal met the Canopic branch of the Nile a big settlement, named Schedia, was soon founded. Here wares transported on the river

²⁷ See D. ROQUES, *Synésios de Cyrène et la Cyrénaïque du Bas-Empire*, Paris 1987, pp. 113–121.

²⁸ COOPER, *The Medieval Nile* (cit. n. 15), ch. 4: ‘The pre-Islamic Nile Delta’, and 5: ‘The Western Delta in the Islamic era’.

²⁹ The anonymous reviewer of my paper made the following remark concerning this passage: ‘I agree that “the northernmost part of that branch of the Nile that was nearest to Alexandria ... shifted to the east”, but it is not the case that the Canopic branch simply kept moving east until it reached Rosetta. The Canopic branch became blocked, and its waters found their way out through what was to become the Rosetta branch, which grew enormously as a result’.

were trans-shipped onto boats which went through the canal to Alexandria.³⁰ Bishops travelling to Alexandria disembarked in Schedia and pursued their travel through the canal; when returning to their diocese, it was in Schedia that they looked for a southbound ship.³¹

Arabic sources often mention a water way called ‘the canal of Alexandria’, which is never mentioned by authors of Late Antiquity. It started from the Delta apex and ran along the western border of the Delta up to the sea near Alexandria.³² There is no evidence about sailing conditions on that canal, but the fact that it was being kept by renovation works proves that it was useful.

Travellers who left behind accounts of their journeys from Cairo to Alexandria (or vice versa), unanimously state that the sailing would last on average four to six days on a distance of about 190 km.

Unlike Cooper, who focused on sailing on the Nile, Herbert Verreth investigated the area of the northern Sinai, from the Palestinian boundary to Pelusium.³³ The coastal land route along the Mediterranean Sea is mentioned many times in Roman literary sources, including Strabo, Pliny the Elder, Ptolemy, Flavius Josephus, and others. Travellers who were headed for Alexandria could choose one of two routes: a route north of Lake Serbonis, or a route closer to its southern coast. The Serbonian Lake is identified as Lake Bardawil (Sabkhat al-Bardawil), on the Sinai Peninsula’s north coast. As described by Herodotus, Strabo and other ancient geographers and historians, the Serbonian Lake was a mix of genuine sand bars, quicksand, asphalt and pits covered with shingle, with a channel running through it to the lake. This gave the wetlands the deceptive appearance of being a lake surrounded by mostly solid land. With time,

³⁰ On Schedia, see M. BERGMANN & M. HEINZELMANN, ‘Schedia, Alexandria on the Canopic Nile. Interim report on a German mission at Kom el-Gizah/Beheira (2003–2005)’, [in:] POMEY (ed.), *La batellerie égyptienne* (cit. n. 16), pp. 87–98.

³¹ This is attested in *The Coptic Life of Aaron*, ed. DIJKSTRA & VAN DER VLIET (cit. n. 8), chap. 70–71, pp. 105–107, 220.

³² COOPER, *The Medieval Nile* (cit. n. 15), pp. 48–68.

³³ H. VERRETH, *The Northern Sinai from the 7th Century BC till the 7th Century AD. A Guide to the Sources*, Leuven 2006 (available online at <<https://www.trismegistos.org/sinai/>> [accessed 13 June 2020]). A table collecting the results of the investigation can be found at pp. 71–74.

the lake shrank drastically, which made the journey safer, as the area posed a threat because of the uncovered quicksand. Before the shrinking of the lake, the quicksand would have been covered by water. The region witnessed a development of settlement network in Late Antiquity. Travelling along the route Rhinocorura – Ostracine – Casion – Gerra – Pelusium took from four to six days. The length of the route was, with slight deviations, c. 130 km. Taphnas, Gerra, Aphnaeum, Casion, Ostracine, and Rhinocorura were the bishoprics in the area.

Saline-sweet lakes and lagoons connected by narrow 'exits' to the sea were located on the northern edge of the Delta. The most important of these were Lake Manzala (also called Tanitike),³⁴ Lake Paralios, and Lake Canopicus. They were separated from the sea by sand bars. They were probably used for barge travel in places where the salt marshes gave way to sufficiently deep water.

The *Itinerarium Antonini Augusti*, written in the late third century, provides us with a list of cities along selected routes, together with the distances between them recorded in Roman miles.³⁵ The route from Pelusium to Alexandria went through Heracleopolis Parva, Tanis, Thmuis, Cynopolis, Taba (Tawa), Andropolis, Nitine, Hermopolis Parva, Chaireu. All of these towns were bishoprics, apart from Nitine, about which we have no information. According to the author of the *Itinerarium*, the entire route was 213 Roman miles.³⁶ John Ball, who verified this figure by comparing it with contemporary maps, gives a slightly lower figure, 192 Roman miles. This is about 288 km; assuming that 30 km is the usual daily route of a man riding a donkey or mule, the traveller needed nine–eight days to cover this distance. From Pelusium to Memphis the route ran along the eastern bank of the Delta through Daphnae, Tacasarta, Thou, Scenae Veteranorum, and Heliopolis. Overall, the route was 123 miles;

³⁴ See the excellent article by K. BLOUIN, 'God is in the marshes: Late antique ascetism and the North-Eastern Delta', *The Journal of the Canadian Society for Coptic Studies* 11 (2019), pp. 45–64. The author is the first to use the data provided by John Cassian's *The Conferences* (hence the ascetism in the title).

³⁵ O. CUNTZ, *Itineraria Romana* I, Stuttgart 1990 (first published: Leipzig 1929).

³⁶ 1 Roman mile = 1,478 m.

when confronted with modern maps the number is closer to 135 miles (199 km, so needs about six days).³⁷

The data contained in *Itinerarium Antonini* only concerns a few of the Delta cities. We know nothing about others. Unfortunately, medieval, and early-modern travellers who wandered through Egypt in different periods left no detailed accounts on their trips. Although the monumental *Description de l'Égypte* contains three extensive texts on physical geography and travel through the Delta, the detailed data which we are able to extract from them do not suffice to determine the time required to cover the distance between Alexandria and various places located far from the branches of the Nile.³⁸ It seems to me that one thing is certain: journeys which combined sailing on the channels with land travel were the standard.³⁹

Claudius Ptolemy mentions the existence of a canal he referred to as *Bouticus*. It started near Hermopolis Parva, then curved north to Buto, continue more or less horizontally to Sebennytos and finally reached a branch of the Nile flowing into the sea near Pelusium.⁴⁰ Modern cartographers frequently include it on maps (see *Barrington Atlas*, map 74). There is no evidence, however, for its existence in Late Antiquity. I mention this canal, however, as it might be connected to an episode described by Flavius Josephus, which can be useful when constructing a hypothesis on the duration of travel on the transversal canals.

In *Jewish War*, Flavius Josephus gives us an interesting account. While leading his army from Alexandria to Jerusalem, Titus first travelled a short distance overland to Nicopolis, where he and his soldiers boarded 'long'

³⁷ J. BALL, *Egypt in the Classical Geographers*, Cairo 1942, p. 141.

³⁸ *Description de l'Égypte* (cit. n. 22), 'État moderne', 2. The most important accounts: J.-M. DUBOIS-AYMÉ & P. JOLLOIS, 'Voyage dans l'intérieur du Delta', pp. 91-120; J. GRATIEN LE PÈRE, 'Extrait d'un mémoire sur les lacs et les déserts de la Basse Égypte', pp. 469-482; G. CHABROL & M.-A. LANCRET, 'Notice topographique sur la partie de l'Égypte comprise entre Rahmanyeh et Alexandrie et sur les environs du Lac Mareotis', pp. 483-502.

³⁹ I have been wondering how practical issues were handled while combining travel by water and by land. Boats were certainly hired, but animals (donkeys, mules, horses) were likely the property of the travellers and thus would have been shipped on boats. The sources are silent on this matter.

⁴⁰ See BALL, *Egypt in the Classical Geographers* (cit. n. 37), pp. 128-129.

(and therefore large) ships and sailed down the Nile to Hieraconpolis. From there they sailed along the canal to the city of Thmuis in the Mendesian nome. Then his men marched on foot to Tanis, where they stayed overnight. The route of the first day was (approximately) 72 km by water, 14 km by land. On the second day the goal was the city of Heracleopolis (8 km from Tanis) and, on the third day, Pelusium (14 km from Heracleopolis), for a total of 108 km.⁴¹ It is not clear why the soldiers marched on the second and third days given that the *Bouticus* Canal reached Pelusium. Perhaps Ball was mistaken, and the 'long ship' journey took place using a different canal? In any case, what is important for us is the information about the time required to cover the route Alexandria–Pelusium.

1.5. *Travel by means of the cursus publicus*

We know that in special situations bishops were allowed to use the *cursus publicus*, an imperial institution established at the beginning of the Roman empire providing authorized people travelling along important transportation routes with the free use of animals (horses, mules, donkeys) and carts, waiting for them in staging posts (*mutationes*), as well as accommodation in stations (*mansiones*), and a ration of food. Bishops were first given this privilege by Constantine the Great in 314, when they went to the synod of Arles.⁴² Subsequently, delegates to the Council of Nicaea were given similar permissions.⁴³ The custom certainly continued under Constantius II. Ammianus Marcellinus, who wrote about his reign, mentions that crowds of bishops going to so-called synods 'clipped the sinews' of the *cursus publicus*

⁴¹ Flavius Josephus, *Bellum Judaicum*, ed. H. St. J. THACKERAY, London 1927 (Loeb), IV, pp. 659–661. For comments, see K. BLOUIN, *Triangular Landscapes. Environment, Society, and the State in the Nile Delta under Roman Rule*, Oxford 2014, pp. 32–34.

⁴² Optatus, *Against the Donatists*, transl. M. EDWARDS [= *Translated Texts for Historians* 27], Liverpool 1997, Appendix 3; Eusebius of Caesarea, *Historia ecclesiastica*, ed. E. SCHWARTZ, Leipzig 1914, 10.5.21–24 = H. G. OPITZ, *Urkunden zur Geschichte des arianischen Streites* 318–328, Berlin & Leipzig 1934, nos. 14–15.

⁴³ Eusebius of Caesarea, *Über das Leben des Kaisers Konstantin*, ed. F. WINKELMANN, Berlin 1975, III, 6.1, p. 83.

(2I.I6.II). Another testimony to the privilege of bishops to travel at the expense of the state can be found in the *Chronicles* of Sulpicius Severus who recounts that bishops coming from Aquitaine, Gaul, and Britain going to a synod in Ariminum at the urging of Constantius II (359) did not want to use the *cursus publicus* because of Constantius' pro-Arian policy.⁴⁴ Whether all of the bishops indeed avoided the *cursus publicus* is impossible to determine, Sulpicius Severus was a 'Nicene', so he had every reason to exaggerate. Nevertheless, his story suggests that in his time the *cursus publicus* was at the disposal of the participants in the synods. Perhaps the powerful Alexandrian patriarchs of the first half of the fifth century (Theophilus, Cyril, Dioscorus) were able to obtain the required permits from the imperial authorities when they wished to bring certain bishops to Alexandria, at a certain time.

Fortunately, we can get an idea of the speed of travel using the *cursus publicus* by studying the dossier of Theophanes, an eminent figure from Hermopolis Magna, who filled an important post at the side of the prefect of Egypt. He travelled from Egypt to Antioch during the war between Constantine the Great and Licinius (perhaps, in fact, because of this war?). The journey was carried out between March and early August around year 320.⁴⁵ By virtue of his post, Theophanes travelled using the *cursus publicus*, namely by horse, stopping at its change stations with lodging (*mansiones*). Bills of his private expenses have survived, in which we find dates and the names of towns in which these expenses were incurred.

During the Egyptian part of his journey, Theophanes set off from Babylon, then travelled through Niciu,⁴⁶ Athribis, Leontopolis, Thmuis,

⁴⁴ Sulpice Sévère, *Chroniques*, ed. G. DE SENNEVILLE-GRAVE [= *Sources chrétiennes* 441], Paris 1999, II/41, pp. 318–319.

⁴⁵ This dossier comprises of papyri published primarily in *P. Ryl.* IV (chiefly texts 630–638) and in *P. Herm. Rees* (letters 2–6). I used a comprehensive, excellent study about this dossier by J. MATTHEWS, *The Journey of Theophanes: Travel, Business, and Daily Life in the Roman East*, New Haven 2006.

⁴⁶ Niciu, located to the west of the other *mansiones*, is surprising in this list; it was not on the way to Pelusium. MATTHEWS, *The Journey of Theophanes* (cit. n. 45), p. 49, thinks that Niciu constituted 'formal starting points' of the itineraries by *cursus publicus* in the Delta. Theophanes, who set out from his native Hermopolis Magna, did not become a travelling official until Babylon.

Tanis, Heracleopolis, Pelusium, Pentaschoinon, Casius, Ostracine, and Rhinocorura. This part of his journey took thirteen days altogether. Returning home, Theophanes chose another route (still by land and on horseback) – a desert trail from Pelusium along the eastern border of the Delta to Babylon. This journey took four days, which is not much, but Theophanes travelled on horseback. The change of route was probably the result of the fact the journey took place during the season of the highest flooding; thus, the land route through the Delta might have been impossible. There was no *cursus publicus* functioning there, which suggests that Theophanes had to pay for the rent of animals himself.

The dossier of Theophanes provides us with important information on travel times. As might be expected, daily distances required varying numbers of hours spent in the saddle, with an average of six hours, about 5 Roman miles (7.5 km) per hour. Sometimes Theophanes travelled even faster.⁴⁷ One can compare this information with the information provided by Gaius. In *Digesta* 2.11.1 he states that the mandatory standard time for litigants to appear before a tribunal when summoned by an official, was 20 miles per day; Theophanes travelled an average of 35 miles per day. Of course, not everyone (including those using the *cursus publicus*) used horses. Ordinary travellers rode donkeys (especially on shorter distances) and possibly mules, which were larger, and therefore more comfortable and faster than donkeys. Mules were favoured by the bishops, as it was not appropriate for them to travel on horseback (Christ rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, not a horse). Of course, we cannot know whether they always observed this limitation.⁴⁸

The route taken by Theophanes can be compared with the data contained in *SB XXVI 16607* (5th cent.):⁴⁹ it provides a list of stations *en route*

⁴⁷ Consider the bishops, usually elderly men, in such a situation. Maybe some would have chosen carts instead of mules or horses?

⁴⁸ See critical comments on Domninus, patriarch of Antioch (545–561), riding a horse in *Chronique de Michel le Syrien*, ed. J.-B. CHABOT, Paris 1899, vol. II, p. 267.

⁴⁹ M. PERALE, 'From Egypt to Constantinople: a pilgrimage route in a forgotten late antique itinerary (*SB XXVI 16607*)', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 199 (2016), pp. 155–159. The provenance of the papyrus is unclear; strangely enough, it was said to have been found in a Christian tomb near Sohag.

from Heliopolis to Antioch in Pisidia mentioning, in its Egyptian part, Heliopolis, Athribis, Natho, Taua, Eblil (= Iebli),⁵⁰ Pelusium, Aphnaeum, Pentaschoinos, Casion, Ostracine, Rhinocorura. It does not contain any information besides toponyms.

Among the papyri discovered at Oxyrhynchus are inventories created in the mid-fourth century of the expenses of a station (*mone* = *mansio*) located in Tacone, a village 24 miles to the north. They list the people who used the *cursus* and the expenses incurred for bread, wine, and meat for travellers, barley and chaff for animals. The most interesting thing is that the accounts include expenses incurred for those travelling to and from Oxyrhynchus. There is no information as to why these expenses were recorded in Tacone and not in Oxyrhynchus. Perhaps the Oxyrhynchus *mansio* did not have food and feed stores.

Bishops summoned to Constantinople, or the cities of Asia Minor, where councils were held, usually boarded ships in Alexandria, but they could choose to travel by land. We know, for example, that Timothy Aelurus travelled by land, under escort, when going to meet the emperor.⁵¹ Perhaps his choice of this route was due to the season? The usual halt in sailing during the fall and winter, could have forced him to go by land. It would be useful to know whether the sea journeys (or river journeys) were paid for by the fiscus, or whether they had to pay from their own coffers, but the sources are silent on this topic. We also do not know who covered the travel expenses of a bishop's retinue. There is no information either on how elderly bishops, who would have found it hard to spend many hours in the saddle, travelled.

1.6. *Conclusions for the sections 1.2–1.5*

With great caution, and bearing in mind that the duration of travel depended on the season of the year, I can propose the following figures

⁵⁰ A small village located about 60 km southwest of Tanis.

⁵¹ *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Zachariah Rhetor. Church and War in the Late Antiquity*, ed. G. GREAT-REX [= *Translated Texts for Historians* 55], Liverpool 2011, IV/5, pp. 147–150.

as averages for the bishops' travels to the patriarch, when he resided in Alexandria:

Delta	between 1 and 6 days near the Rosetta branch, the rest of the Delta cities between 3 and 8 days
Central Egypt	by Nile, between 9 and 10 days
Thebaid, Coptus area	by Nile, about 25 days
Syene	by Nile, about 30 days
Pentapolis	by sea 5–7 days; by land 20 days.

2. THE JOURNEYS OF NUBIAN AND ETHIOPIAN BISHOPS

Almost everything I have written so far about how bishops travelled does not apply to the churches of areas in the far south, Nubia and Ethiopia. The nature and frequency of their relationship with Alexandria was determined above all by geography, namely the great distance from the centre of the patriarchate. The Egyptian model, with its strong Alexandrian centre overseeing the course of pastoral activities in the dioceses, could not be applied to them. Of equal importance were the fundamental differences in social structure and system of governance, which determined the conditions under which the Church hierarchy operated in this 'non-Roman' part of the world. It seems obvious, however, that the different realities of the clergy of Nubia and Ethiopia, and the difficulties in commuting to Alexandria, did not stop those Churches from emulating the 'Mediterranean model' to the extent made possible by local conditions.

2.1. *The journeys of the bishops of Nubia*

It is likely that Christianity had already permeated into Nubia even before the missionary activities carried out in the mid-sixth century.⁵²

⁵² We know about missionary activities in Nubia from John of Ephesus' *History of the Church*, pt. III, book IV: *Ioannis Ephesini Historia ecclesiastica*, ed. E. A. W. BROOK [= *Corpus scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* 13], Louvain 1936, with a Latin translation.

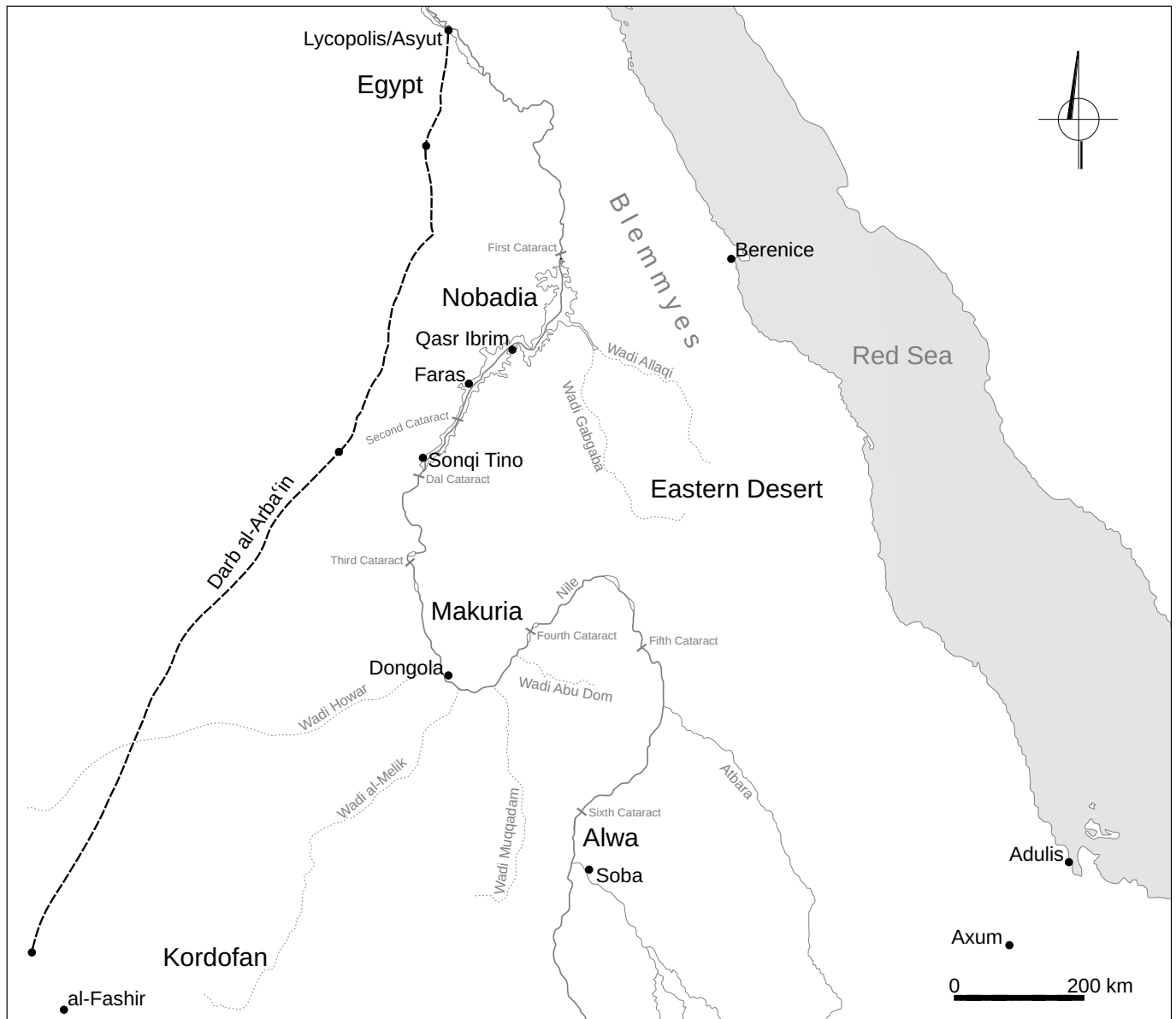
The first mission was organised by Empress Theodora, and it was destined for the kingdom of Nobadia, which was located in the north of Nubia. The mission was led by presbyter Julian, who was a man from the circle of Theodosius, the exiled patriarch of Alexandria, who stayed in Constantinople. Julian spent two years in Nubia, (between 537–545), after which he moved back to Constantinople, leaving the newly converted under the care of Theodore, bishop of Philae. The first bishop of Nobadia was Longinus. He was ordained in 566 in Constantinople on the initiative of Theodosius (though by that time the latter had already been dead; the ritual was fulfilled by Paul, patriarch of Antioch, at Theodosius' earlier request). Kept under surveillance by the authorities, Longinus managed to escape from Constantinople in disguise only after three years and reached Nobadia in 569 or 570;⁵³ the sources attribute to him the Christianisation of southern Nubian kingdom of Alwa in the 580s. Makuria, located between Nobadia and Alwa, converted to Christianity in 569 according to the *Chronicle* of John of Biclar.⁵⁴

In the period immediately following Christianisation, when the group of adherents to the new faith was still rather small, and consisted mainly of members of the elites, each of the three kingdoms apparently had only one bishop, sent there from Egypt.⁵⁵ One can suppose that the seats of these 'state' bishops were the royal capitals, thus Dongola for Makuria, Soba for Alwa, and Qasr Ibrim or, after the first half of the seventh century, Faras for Nobadia. It is highly likely that in the seventh century the candidates for assuming the dignity of 'royal' bishops were already members of the local clergy, often monks of local monasteries who, with the consent of the rulers, were sent to Alexandria to be ordained there. With the progress of Christianisation, in response to growing pastoral needs,

⁵³ On the complicated career of Longinus, see E. HONIGMANN, *Évêques et évêchés monophysites d'Asie antérieure au VI^e siècle* [= *Corpus scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* 127, *Subsidia* 2] Leuven 1951, pp. 223–231. What we do know of Longinus, we owe to John of Ephesus.

⁵⁴ *Chronica minora saec. IV. V. VI. VII*, ed. Th. MOMMSEN [= *Monumenta Germaniae historica. Auctores antiquissimi* 11], Berlin 1893, p. 212.

⁵⁵ A. ŁAJTAR, 'Nubian bishops: A study of a segment of Christian Nubian society', [in:] IDEM, *Nubica. Studies in History and Epigraphy of the Middle Nile Region in Christian Times* (forthcoming).



Map 1. Places mentioned in the article: Nubia and Ethiopia
(drawing S. Mašlak)

a network of bishoprics was established still at the time of three kingdoms. After the incorporation of Nobadia by Makuria, sometime in the seventh century, the unified Makurian Church apparently retained the

earlier administrative divisions. An inscription commemorating a synod of the Makurian Church discovered in Dongola suggests that, in the first quarter of the ninth century, this Church had ten bishoprics organised into two provinces with the centres in Faras (Nobadian) and Dongola (Makurian).⁵⁶ The bishops at the head of these bishoprics, the metropolitans, travelled to the seat of the Alexandrian patriarch for ordination, while the bishops of ordinary dioceses received ordination in the traditional way for antiquity, during a ceremony that had to be attended by at least three hierarchs.

Documents recounting the journeys of the metropolitans to the patriarch in Alexandria to receive episcopal sacraments never mention the duration of the voyage or specify what route they followed.⁵⁷ Everything depended, of course, on where the candidate was setting out from. The bishops of Qasr Ibrim, located about 200 km from Aswan (and later Faras, some 280 km from Aswan) were able to sail down the Nile, taking a 10 km land route along the First Cataract. It is, therefore, likely that sailing to Aswan, or rather till the beginning of the obstacle posed by the cataract, took about five days in the first case, and about seven days in the second. This was not the only option, as discussed below. The bishops of Dongola were in a completely different situation, as Dongola was located far to the south, close to where the Nile made a turn to the northeast. They were able to navigate the Nile, bypassing three cataracts along the way. We do not know how much time such a journey would have required at different times of the year (the river was as treacherous during low water as it was in Egypt).

⁵⁶ T. DERDA & A. ŁAJTAR, 'Organization of the Church in medieval Nubia in the light of a wall inscription newly discovered in Dongola', *Jahrbuch der österreichischen Byzantinistik* 69 (2019), pp. 135–154.

⁵⁷ For any researcher interested in the travels of the Nubian bishops but who does not know the country first-hand, I would advise starting by reading the introductory chapters of W. Y. ADAMS, *Nubia: Corridor to Africa*, London 1977. Of course, scholars today know much more than could be known back in 1970s, but Adams spent many years in Nubia, and wrote not only with specialists in the area in mind. He was able to draw a coherent picture, in which, in addition to geographical and geological topics, he gathered extremely useful information about fauna, flora, cultivation, and pastoralism.

An Arab writer, al-Mufaddal (d. before 1341), reporting on later Muslim expeditions against Nubia, tells us that in 1276 an army that set out from Cairo on 20 January and, travelling along the Nile (men, horses, and camels had to be constantly provided with water), arrived in Dongola in late March.⁵⁸ The two amirs in command of the victorious campaign, having returned to Cairo, were received by the sultan on 23 May. This information is not very helpful when trying to determine the conditions and timing of the Nile travel of ecclesiastical delegations, since they had no reason not to sail along the Nile. It is thus impossible to tell whether it would take them more or less time than an army consisting primarily of mounted warriors.

There existed other, faster ways of travel, which the amirs could choose, travelling through the desert by camel. In the far south, in Kobbei in Kordofan, which was some distance west of al-Fashir, began the route leading northwards. It led by the oases desert to Asyut (Greek Lycopolis). This route was known as Darb al-Arba'in, that is the 'Road of Forty Days'. Caravans of camels frequently used this route; even today, camels from Sudan destined for slaughter in Egypt are herded along Darb el-Arbain).

Another desert route began from the vicinity of the Fifth Cataract, this time on the eastern side of the Nile, by way of Wadi Allaqi (or Wadi Alalaqi) leading to the vicinity of Aswan (the entrance to Wadi Allaqi was about 116 km away). The length of the wadi was 250 km, and it ran through an area controlled by nomads called Blemmyes, ruling over the area rich in gold and metal. This route was more dangerous than the Darb al-Arba'in, although the image of barbarian plunderers constantly on the prowl for travellers does not seem to have corresponded to reality. The Blemmyes played an important role in the relationship between communities living along the Middle Nile and the Red Sea ports.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Translation in G. VANTINI, *Oriental Sources Concerning Nubia*, Heidelberg – Warsaw 1975, pp. 226–228. I used this anthology in its electronic version edited by G. Ruffini, R. Seignobos, A. Simmons and available at <http://www.medievalnubia.info/dev/index.php/Giovanni_Vantini%27s_Oriental_Sources_Concerning_Nubia> (accessed 20 July 2022). Another account of the expedition was written down by al-Nuwayri (d. 1332), translated by Vantini on pp. 222–223.

⁵⁹ Recent archaeological research found evidence of the role of the Blemmyes in trade between the shore of the Red Sea and Nubia. See, among others, H. BARNARD, 'The Eastern

2.2. *The journeys of bishops of Ethiopia to Alexandria*

We do not know when the first Christian communities were established in Ethiopia. Christian merchants and sailors undoubtedly visited Ethiopian Red Sea ports as they travelled along the well-established route to India and central Africa.⁶⁰

The first bishop of Ethiopia was ordained by Athanasius. Fortunately, we know some details of this event.⁶¹ At some point, the exact year remains unclear, a man from Tyre, named Frumentius, came to him. As a young man, when he was travelling to India, Frumentius was captured by slaver pirates and sold to the court of the ruler of Axum, called Ousanas. There, he made a name for himself, as he became the cupbearer of for the monarch and the tutor of his son, Ezana. When Ezana became the ruler, Frumentius managed to convert him to Christianity. After many years, Frumentius decided to return to his homeland and visited Alexandria on the way. There, he visited Athanasius to tell him about groups of Christians in Axum who lack their own bishop. In response, Athanasius convinced Frumentius to accept this position for himself.⁶²

Desert dwellers', [in:] S. E. SIDEBOTHAM, J. E. GATES-FOSTER, & J.-L. G. RIVARD (eds.), *The Archaeological Survey of the Desert Roads between Berenike and the Nile Valley: Expeditions by the University of Michigan and the University of Delaware to the Eastern Desert of Egypt, 1987–2015* [= *American Schools of Oriental Research. Archaeological Reports* 26], Boston 2019, pp. 389–408; R. AST & J. RĄDKOWSKA, 'Dedication of the Blemmyan interpreter Mochosak on behalf of king Isemne', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 215 (2020), pp. 147–158; and the collective volume H. CUVIGNY (ed.), *Blemmyes. New Documents and New Perspectives, Including O. Blem. 1–107* [= *Documents de fouilles de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale* 52], Cairo 2022.

⁶⁰ Perhaps even earlier, see V. KREBS, 'Christianity, Ethiopian', [in:] *The Encyclopaedia of Ancient History: Asia and Africa*, John Wiley & Sons 2021 (available online at <<https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119399919.eahaa00419>> [accessed 21 December 2021]).

⁶¹ Rufinus, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, ed. Th. MOMMSEN, Berlin 1908, 1.9–10. Frumentius' presence in Axum is confirmed in the letter of Emperor Constantius to 'tyrants' (that is barbarian tribal kings) of Axum, Ezana and Saizana, provided in *Athanase d'Alexandrie, Apologie à l'empereur Constance* [= *Sources chrétiennes* 56 bis], chap. 31, pp. 160–161. Commentary in F. THÉLAIMON, *Païens et chrétiens au IV^e siècle. L'apport de l'HE de Rufin d'Aquilée*, Paris 1981, pp. 37–83.

⁶² A. MARTIN, *Athanase d'Alexandrie et l'Église d'Égypte au IV^e siècle (328–373)* [= *Collection de l'École française de Rome* 216], Rome 1996, p. 503, places this event after Athanasius' return from the second exile (346) and before his retreat from Alexandria (356).

Although we do not know anything about Frumentius' direct successors, there is no doubt that Christian communities multiplied afterwards. Ethiopia's Christianisation in the fourth century is a fact. This is confirmed by archaeological data as well as by the fact that in the fifth–sixth century the Church in Axum adopted numerous Christian texts, not only the Bible. Translated from Greek to Ge'ez, they served primarily as normative texts, used for pastoral service by Ethiopian clergy who wished to emulate the models of the Mediterranean churches.⁶³

The first record after the time of Frumentius regarding the ordination of the bishop of Axum, comes from the time of Patriarch Simon (692–700). It confirms an already existing tradition according to which the bishop of Axum ought to be appointed by the patriarch of Alexandria from among Egyptian monks who were already ordained priests.⁶⁴ The procedure was conducted in two stages. First, the king of Ethiopia sent a delegation of clergy to the patriarch of Alexandria informing him about the death of the late bishop. Next, the new, ordained bishop embarked on a journey to his distant diocese. He had the right, following general rules of the Church, to ordain presbyters, deacons, and lower clergy, but he could not ordain other bishops.⁶⁵ This division of authority was observed until the 1950s when the Ethiopian Church proclaimed its sovereignty, after prolonged negotiations with the head of the Coptic Church.

The advent of Arab rule over Egypt complicated the procedure for ordaining Ethiopian bishops, because each time the patriarch needed to obtain permission from the governor of Egypt. This sometimes proved problematic for a number of different reasons. Thus, there were times, occasionally even quite long periods of time, when the Ethiopian Church did not have its leader. This must have had a negative impact on the way in which Christian communities in Ethiopia functioned, as performing

⁶³ A. BAUSI, 'Three brief points on "bishops" in Ethiopian tradition', [in:] DERAT, ŁAJTAR, & TSAKOS (eds.), *Bishops and Bishoprics* (cit. n. 11).

⁶⁴ *History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria* III [= *Patrologia Orientalis* 5], ed. B. EVETTS, Paris 1909, pp. 30 [290] – 41 [295].

⁶⁵ S. C. MUNRO-HAY, *Ethiopia and Alexandria. The Metropolitan Episcopacy of Ethiopia* [= *Bibliotheca Nubica et Aethiopica* 5], Warsaw – Wiesbaden 1997.

An Ethiopian delegation heading to Alexandria had to start its difficult and tiring journey in Adulis, a busy harbour on the coast of the Red Sea. The speed and security of ships depended primarily on the direction and strength of winds. In the southern three quarters of the Red Sea, approximately until Berenice, the weather was determined by monsoon winds from the Indian Ocean. Southerly quadrant winds were dominant from November to March while northerly quadrant winds from June to September/October. Thus, the most convenient time for sailing north across this part of the sea was between April and July. Further north, the journey became more difficult, though still possible as a mixture of northerly and changing winds demanded great skill from sailors as well as good knowledge of the coast. Coral reefs, especially in the northern section of the Red Sea, posed a significant danger to ships, particularly those submerged deeper due to their heavy cargo. These were the type of vessels used by monarchs' delegates and, subsequently, bishops with their entourage, as they could not have had their own sea vessels. In earlier times, their primary destination was Berenice (some 436 km from Adulis), from where they went across the Eastern Desert to reach Coptus on the bend of the Nile.

⁶⁶ A. BÜLOW-JACOBSEN, 'The traffic on the road and the provisioning of the stations', [in:] H. CUVIGNY (ed.), *La route de Myos Hormos: L'armée romaine dans le Désert Oriental d'Égypte*, Cairo 2003, pp. 399–413 (see: 'Travel speeds of camels', pp. 406–468); H. CUVIGNY, *Rome in Egypt's Eastern Desert I*, Cairo 2021, pp. 241–246 ('The main roads of the Desert of Berenike').

After reaching the Nile, the delegation to the patriarch still needed approximately twenty days of travel along the river.

However, Berenice ceased to exist sometime in the second quarter of the sixth century, as no coins of Justinian were found during excavations conducted there.⁶⁷ Naturally, ships still found anchorages on the western coast of the Red Sea, although there is nothing to suggest that there were still safe routes across the desert, equipped with a network of wells or cisterns, as well as stage posts offering accommodation and protected by guardians on camels. The cause of this was the shrinking of maritime movement on the route to Ethiopia, Yemen, and India, although it has to be noted that trade between Egypt and these distant regions did not disappear completely.⁶⁸ Ships had to sail farther north, all the way to the city of Clysma (medieval al-Qulzum, modern Suez), which was the final port on the Trajan's Canal route, which provided maritime connection between the Nile and the Red Sea, albeit only during the Nile inundation. Clysma is mentioned for the first time as a *kastron* by Claudius Ptolemy (c. 90 – c. 161), and several other late antique authors refer to it as an important harbour.⁶⁹ The thesis identifying Clysma, together with Ayla (its twin harbour at the top of the Aqaba Bay) as the main centres of maritime commerce in the Red Sea during the second half of the sixth century is supported by archaeology. Numerous distinct, late antique amphorae produced in Ayla are found in the south, in Yemen and Ethiopia. They were transported there by ships, as containers for wine and olive.⁷⁰ Even if in the eighth cen-

⁶⁷ Oral communication of Mariusz Gwiada, director of the Polish archaeological mission in Berenice.

⁶⁸ J. P. COOPER, 'No easy option: Nile versus Red Sea in ancient and medieval north-south navigation', [in:] W. V. HARRIS & K. IARA (eds.), *Maritime Technology in the Ancient Economy: Ship Design and Navigation* [= *Journal of Roman Archaeology. Supplementary Series* 84], Cambridge 2011, pp. 189–210.

⁶⁹ For an outline of the history of Clysma, see D. NAPPA, *I porti romani nel Mar Rosso da Augusto al Tardoantico* [= *Clio. Saggi di scienze storiche, archaeologiche e storico-artistiche* 20], Naples 2018, pp. 129–136.

⁷⁰ M. M. RAITH *et alii*, 'The view from Zafār – an archaeometric study the Aqaba Pottery Complex and its distribution in the first millenium B.C.', *Zeitschrift für Orient-Archaeologie* 6 (2013), pp. 320–350.

tury a land trade route developed along the eastern shore of the Arabian Peninsula, this still did not put an end to maritime travel.

The delegation asking for the ordination of the head of the Ethiopian Church, as well as the appointee himself, when travelling to his diocese after the ceremony, had to carefully choose the time of their maritime travel and be prepared for long delays, waiting for opportune moments to continue. Not all such journeys were successful. Aside from the bad weather, pirates were also an important and common threat in that area as they looted ships and killed or enslaved travellers. If Clysma was its destination, the delegation could choose several routes across the Delta, each certainly required additional few days at least. According to Michael, bishop of Tinnis, who is the author of a reliable source, a biography of Patriarch Cosmas (920–932), the royal delegation needed a whole year from their departure from Adulis until their return with the new bishop.⁷¹

Although maritime travel was the norm, there were cases when the land route across Nubia was chosen instead. This is indicated by an inscription mentioning archbishop of Axum discovered in the church at Sonqi Tino, on the western bank of the Nile, 70 km from the Second Cataract. The text, in Greek, is incomplete and has preserved only the title ἀρχ(ι)επίσκο(ο)πος Ἀξούμ(εος) (or Ἀξουμ(ειτῶν)).⁷² Its editors, Adam Łajtar and Grzegorz Ochała, believe that it was written when an Ethiopian bishop was visiting the church on the way to his diocese.

After reaching Ethiopia, bishops rarely returned to Egypt, unless they fell into conflict with the king, who could banish such unfavourable dignitary. We know about such cases, though they date from a much later period.⁷³

⁷¹ *History of the Patriarchs of the Egyptian Church, Known as the History of the Holy Church by Sawīrus ibn al-Mukaffāʾ, Bishop of al-Aṣmūnīn*, transl. YASSĀ ABD AL-MASĪḤ & O. H. E. BURMESTER, Cairo 1943, vol 2.2, pp. 118–121.

⁷² A. ŁAJTAR & G. OCHAŁA, 'An unexpected guest in the Church of Sonqi Tino (Notes on Medieval Nubia toponymy 3)', *Dotaṭwo* 4 (2017), pp. 257–268. The inscription dates from the twelfth–fourteenth century.

⁷³ See *ibidem*, p. 263 n. 27.

3. FINAL REMARKS

Aside from long journeys of candidates for Nubian metropolitans and Ethiopian bishops, much shorter voyages of bishops of dioceses located in Egypt and two Libyas to the patriarch's residence were also time-consuming and could, in extreme cases, take over a month. Given that all such data should be doubled, to account for the return journey, and adding additional time spent at the patriarch's side, the absence of a bishop from his own diocese could last even a couple of months. In cases when the patriarch summoned a bishop to his residence, one needs also to add the time for the sending of a letter or a messenger.

One can imagine the financial burden that travel expenses constituted for individual Churches. Bishops had to buy provisions and pay ship owners for passage for themselves and for their entourage. It is not clear whether they paid additionally for accommodation. Travel testimonies of early modern travellers, mentioned here after Cooper, indicate that travellers slept on board of rented ships such as *dahabiyas*, which had cabins. However, could travelling bishops of Late Antiquity do this as well? What if they stopped in various river ports or relied on the hospitality of local clergy? Did they visit local monasteries or stay in secular houses of wealthy hosts? All these options seem probable, but historic sources remain silent on these issues.

The financial resource available to bishops differed depending on the wealth of their dioceses. Geography worked against hierarchs from Upper Thebaid, as south of Latopolis the Nile Valley was narrower, which resulted in relatively lower population and a fewer number of settlements. Located by the First Cataract, Syene (Aswan) was a medium-sized settlement (due to its military garrison) and did not have a status of a city. The miniscule diocese of Philae was inhabited, according to archaeologists, by no more than several hundred people.⁷⁴ Both were located more than a month away from Alexandria, so travelling there must have posed a significant burden on financial resources available to their respective bishops.

⁷⁴ J. H. F. DIJKSTRA, *Philae and the End of Ancient Egyptian Religion. A Regional Study of Religious Transformation (298–642 CE)* [= *Orientalia Lovaniensia analecta* 173], Leuven, Paris, & Dudley, Ma. 2008, p. 35.

We know that delegations from Ethiopia and Nubia carried gifts for the patriarch. However, sources do not inform us whether this custom was also followed by future bishops from the territories of Egypt and Libya. I suspect it that it indeed was so, as we know that new bishops distributed a certain amount of money, known as *enthronistika*, to clergy of the ordaining bishop. In order to protect the Church's finances from excessive expenditure, Justinian introduced in Novel 123.3 a type of tariff that set the maximum amounts that each category of church could use for such occasions.⁷⁵ Gifts for the patriarch were most likely included in these funds.

The length and duration of bishops' travels is certainly impressive. Considering their costs, dangers, and physical strength required to undertake them, especially from people who were not infrequently quite old. Nonetheless, when one follows the history of Eastern Mediterranean churches, it becomes apparent that their bishops had no objections against embarking on journeys. One example of such eagerness is provided by the already mentioned 'apostle of Nubia', Longinus. Immediately prior to the beginning of his mission to Alwa in 575, he received a letter from a group of Alexandrian clerics who thought that he may have sufficient authority to help elect a new, anti-Chalcedonian patriarch of Alexandria (attempts at achieving this were unsuccessful since the death of Theodosius in 566). Longinus did not hesitate to undertake this task. In Philae, he met with Theodore, another anti-Chalcedonian bishop, and obtained from him a letter enabling him to act on Theodore's behalf. Nothing sensible came out of this though. Theodore, the new patriarch elected with the support of Longinus and his group, was ordained outside of Alexandria and was not accepted by the majority of anti-Chalcedonian clergy. Thus, another man, Peter IV, was chosen in his place. Condemned by some of the anti-Chalcedonian circles of the Orient for interfering in Alexandrian matters against the canons, Longinus embarked to defend his decisions, first in Tyre and then in the camp of the Arab Ghassanid sheikh, al-Mundar,⁷⁶ who sup-

⁷⁵ For discussion regarding *enthronistika*, see WIPSZYCKA, *The Alexandrian Church* (cit. n. 1), pp. 133–134, 226.

⁷⁶ The political centre of this tribal state, which was a vassal of Rome, was al-Jabiya, located between the Hawran plain and the Golan Heights.

ported the anti-Chalcedonians. Finally, he was lured by his enemies to attend the synod in the Mar Hanina monastery by Euphrates. Only after suffering failure there, Longinus decided to return to Nubia and launch his Christianisation mission to Alwa. Two years, thousands of kilometres, and Longinus was not a young man at that time.

In the eyes of Nubian and Ethiopian church dignitaries as well as rulers, it was clear that the heads of their respective Churches had to be sanctioned by the patriarch, regardless of the dangers and complications entailed by the long journey to Alexandria. Geographic distance made it practically impossible for the patriarch to exert any influence over these distant areas, which only nominally remained under his jurisdiction. Tradition, however, was a prime driving force in the lives of Churches and its strength was not neutralised by distance in time and space.

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