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Religious encounters on the southern Egyptian frontier in Late Antiquity (AD 298-642)

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Document Version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:

2005

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Dijkstra, J. H. F. (2005). *Religious encounters on the southern Egyptian frontier in Late Antiquity (AD 298-642)*. s.n.

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There remain two fifth-century inscriptions from Philae which commemorate the renovation of part of a quay wall. The inscriptions are similarly formulated, the first one being more detailed than the second one, and as the first inscription is dated to the month of Choiak and the second one to the month of Thoth, the renovation works probably took place in different stages. The first of the inscriptions starts by saying that the work was conducted 'under the authority of my lord, the most excellent and courageous *comes* of the holy *consistorium* and the military units of the *Thebaici limes*, Flavius Damonikos'.⁵³ This Damonikos has the same title of *comes Thebaici limitis* on a wooden tablet now in the Hermitage in St Petersburg.⁵⁴ Furthermore, from a sixth-century literary source he is known to have died in a battle against the Huns in 468, where he is designated 'ex-*dux*' (ἀπὸ δουκῶν). This title probably refers to his function as *comes Thebaici limitis*.⁵⁵ The literary text therefore provides a *terminus ante quem* of 468 for the inscriptions. As they mention the indiction years 3 and 4, they have to date to the years 464 and 465 or, less likely, to 449 and 450.⁵⁶

The first inscription states that this part of the wall was renovated 'through the zeal and goodness' (σπουδῆ καὶ ἐπιεικείᾳ) of Bishop Apa Danielios. He is called Apa Daniel in the second inscription where he is said to have covered the expenses (ἀνα[λω]μάτων παρεχομένων).⁵⁷ Apparently, the bishop of Philae had taken the initiative for the project and had financed it with the consent of the highest official of the province. The involvement of bishops in secular affairs, such as urban building projects, is one of the phenomena that characterise the increasing power of the Church in fifth-century society. In the main, these initiatives were personally inspired and depended on regional and local circumstances.⁵⁸ The participation of Bishop Daniel(ios) of Philae in a local building project nicely illustrates the rise to secular prominence of the bishop.⁵⁹

Other fifth-century evidence for the co-operation of bishops with the secular authorities is the Appion petition (425-450), already mentioned in the General Introduction and Ch. 2, which we will now discuss in more detail.⁶⁰ It is actually a copy of Appion's petition, accompanied by an imperial rescript of Theodosius II (*adnotatio*).⁶¹ It was sent to the *dux* of the Thebaid for execution, as requested by the bishop in his petition, and contains one of the few royal autographs of Antiquity.⁶² Like other Late Antique petitions, this document is formulaic in character, except for the *narratio*, which is freer in use and highly rhetorical in style. In this part of the petition, the case is set forth. Let us therefore reproduce the *narratio*.

⁵³ *I.Philae* II 194.1-6, cf. 195.1-4 (tr. after É. Bernand).

⁵⁴ *SB* IV 7433.1, 20 = *P.Ross Georg* V 30. See also Carrié, 'Séparation ou cumul?', 113-4.

⁵⁵ Malalas, p. 373 Dindorf. This reference to Malalas and the following ones are based on the translation by E. Jeffreys *et al.* (eds), *The Chronicle of John Malalas. A Translation* (Melbourne, 1986), which also refers to the page numbers in the *editio princeps* by Dindorf.

⁵⁶ *I.Philae* II, pp. 230-2; *PLRE* II, pp. 344-5; D. Feissel, 'L'évêque, titres et fonctions d'après les inscriptions grecques jusqu'au VII^e siècle', in N. Duval, F. Baritel, P. Pergola (eds), *Actes du XI^e congrès international d'archéologie chrétienne*, 3 vols (Rome, 1989) 1.801-28 at 823 (n. 101); Worp, 'Checklist of Bishops', 305.

⁵⁷ *I.Philae* II 194.6, 195.6-7 (tr. after É. Bernand).

⁵⁸ J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman City* (Oxford, 2001) 148.

⁵⁹ Feissel, 'L'évêque', 820-5; P. Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity. Towards a Christian Empire* (Madison, 1992) *passim*; Liebeschuetz, *Decline and Fall*, 137-55.

⁶⁰ *P.Leid. Z* = *SB* XX 14606 = *FHN* III 314. The first edition of the papyrus was published by C. Leemans, *Papyri Graeci Musei Antiquarii publici Lugduni-Batavi*, 2 vols (Leiden, 1843-85) 2.263-70, a re-edition, which replaced all previous editions, by Feissel and Worp, 'P. Leid. Z revisé'. The most important discussions of the text are C. Wessely, 'Ein bilingues Majestätsgesuch aus dem Jahre 391/2 nach Chr.', *Jahresbericht Gymnasium Hernalis* 14 (1888) 39-47; Wilcken, 'Heidnisches und Christliches', 398-403; M. Gelzer, *Studien zur byzantinischen Verwaltung Ägyptens* (Leipzig, 1909) 10-1; Feissel and Worp, 'P. Leid. Z revisé'; B. Porten (ed.), *The Elephantine Papyri in English. Three Millennia of Cross-Cultural Continuity and Change* (Leiden, 1996) 441-2 (no. D 19); *FHN* III, pp. 1138-41.

⁶¹ Feissel and Worp, 'P. Leid. Z revisé', 99-100.

⁶² The other known autographs are *P.Leid. G* 8 = *UPZI* 106 (Ptolemy X, 99 BC), and *P.Bingen* 45.16 (Cleopatra VII, 23 February 33 BC). On the latter document, see P. van Minnen, 'An Official Act of Cleopatra (With a Subscription in Her Own Hand)', *AncSoc* 30 (2000) 29-34, 'Further Thoughts on the Cleopatra Papyrus', *AJP* 47 (2001) 74-80, and 'A Royal Ordinance of Cleopatra and Related Documents', in S. Walker, S.A. Ashton (eds), *Cleopatra Reassessed* (London, 2003) 35-44. Cf. K. Zimmermann, 'P.Bingen 45: Eine Steuerbefreiung für Q. Cascellius, adressiert an Kaisarion', *ZPE* 138 (2002) 133-9.

the sixth century or not much later.¹⁰¹ The fragments suggest that the text was written in haste and less neatly, which seems to warrant the conclusion that in this case, too, the later paper codex seems the more reliable source.

Unlike other saints' lives, which have survived in multiple languages and different Coptic dialects and have to be carefully scrutinised with regard to text and *Vorlage*, resulting in a complicated *stemma*, we can be comparatively brief about the manuscript tradition of the *Life of Aaron*: it has survived in only one complete manuscript in the Sahidic Coptic dialect.¹⁰² This is at the same time its greatest weakness, for we have to base our conclusions on a text that has been copied for centuries but cannot be compared with other transmitted texts. It is often hard to decide whether a phrase or line is original, corrupt or a later addition. Indeed, testimonies to its chequered history abound in the transmitted text, including scribal errors, the frequent interchange of personal pronouns, sudden shifts of narrative voice and downright errors in the story. To mention just one example:

Truly, my children, for not only did your holy father (Bishop Macedonius) lay down the foundation, {but he built until he finished the foundation} but he built until he finished it and gave it the crown (fol. 26b).¹⁰³

In this sentence, the copyist mistakenly wrote 'but he built until he finished the foundation', a word that needed no repetition, and then started the phrase again: 'but he built until he finished it'. Clearly, the phrase in between has to be deleted.

Manuscript Evidence and Date of Composition

The major saints mentioned in the colophon of the paper codex are Aaron, Athanasius and Michael. Given the prominent place of Apa Aaron, there is no doubt that the title of the first work in the manuscript must have been the *Life of Aaron*, although we know from the ancient pagination that the first leaf, which usually contains the title page, is lost. Indeed, in the conclusion (fol. 57a) the *Life of Aaron* is described thus:

This is the life of the holy anchorite of Philae, Apa Aaron, who finished his course in the desert east of Philae.¹⁰⁴

Furthermore, the entire work is centred around Apa Aaron. The first section (fol. 1a-10b) describing the ascetic life of several other monks in the region is only a prelude to the great deeds of Aaron himself in section three (fol. 37b-57a). At the start of section 2 (fol. 10b-37b), Aaron is represented as having heard the story of the first bishop of Philae from him personally. Moreover, at the end of the work Aaron is buried next to the first three bishops, which implies that the holy man's sanctity equals that of the bishops of Philae. And when Aaron is about to die, a choir of angels sings for him, a feature which can also be found in other saints' lives.¹⁰⁵ There is, then, every reason to discard modern titles given to the work, such as *Histories of the Monks in the Egyptian Desert* and *Stories of the Monks of the Desert*,

¹⁰¹ E.M. Husselman, 'The Martyrdom of Saint Phocas and the Dying Prayer of Athanasius. Fragments from a Coptic Papyrus Codex', in *Coptic Studies in Honor of W.E. Crum* (Boston, 1950) 319-37.

¹⁰² Cf. L.D. Reynolds, N.G. Wilson, *Scribes and Scholars. A Guide to the Transmission of Greek and Latin Literature* (Oxford, 1991³) 207-41.

¹⁰³ ⲱⲛⲧⲱⲤ ⲛⲁⲱⲏⲣⲉ ⲭⲉ ⲟⲩⲙⲟⲛⲟⲛ ⲭⲉ ⲁⲛⲉⲧⲛⲉⲓⲱⲧ ⲉⲧⲟⲩⲁⲁⲃ ⲕⲱ ⲉⲣⲣⲁⲓ ⲛⲧⲥⲏⲧⲉ {ⲁⲗⲗⲁ ⲁⲕⲣⲱⲧ ⲱⲁⲛⲧⲉⲕⲭⲱⲕ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲛⲧⲥⲏⲧⲉ} ⲁⲗⲗⲁ ⲁⲕⲣⲱⲧ ⲱⲁⲛⲧⲉⲕⲭⲱⲕⲉ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲛⲓⲕⲧⲓⲁⲱⲃⲱ. Cf. Budge, *Miscellaneous Texts* 2, 974, who did not recognise this copying error.

¹⁰⁴ ⲡⲁⲓ ⲛⲉ ⲡⲓⲟⲥ ⲛⲓⲡⲉⲧⲟⲩⲁⲁⲃ ⲛⲁⲛⲁⲭⲱⲣⲓⲧⲏⲥ ⲛⲣⲏⲡⲓⲁⲕ ⲁⲡⲁ ⲉⲁⲕⲭⲉⲕ ⲡⲉⲕⲁⲣⲟⲙⲟⲥ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲉⲃⲓⲡⲧⲟⲟⲩ ⲛⲓⲡⲉⲓⲉⲃⲧⲉ ⲛⲓⲡⲉⲓⲁⲕ. For the metaphor of ascetic life as an athletic contest, see e.g. Marc. Diac. v. *Porph.* 1. Cf. M. Sheridan, 'Il mondo spirituale e intellettuale del primo monachesimo egiziano', in Camplani, *Egitto cristiano*, 177-216 at 203.

¹⁰⁵ E.g. the *Life of Onnophrius*, fol. 15a.

which are merely descriptions of its contents, and we will refer here to the work as the *Life of Aaron*.¹⁰⁶

The colophon (fol. 76a-77a) is also informative about the provenance of the work. It relates that a certain Zocrator, son of Joseph, the archdeacon of the church of Esna, copied the manuscript and that a deacon donated it to the *topos* of Apa Aaron in the desert at Edfu (ΠΤΟΠΟΣ ΝΑΠΑ ΖΑΡΩ(Ν) ΖΗΠΤΟΟΥ ΝΤΡΩ).¹⁰⁷ In this respect, it belongs to a group of twenty-one paper and parchment codices of the tenth and eleventh centuries, which were mainly copied at Esna and delivered to Edfu (the 'Edfu collection').¹⁰⁸ The papyrus scraps of the other manuscript of the *Life of Aaron* were reused in bindings of these manuscripts in the Edfu collection.¹⁰⁹ It is therefore perfectly possible that both the paper and the papyrus codex come from Edfu.

After the date (20 Epeiph, that is, 14 July 992), Zokrator also includes a prayer for his brother Diomites, with whom he wrote the manuscript.¹¹⁰ There follows a second dating and a miracle that took place:

In the year in which we wrote this book, that is, the 708th year (of the Era of Diocletian, i.e. AD 992) and the 382nd year of the Saracens (AD 992), a great miracle happened in connection with the rise of the water of the river (Nile). On 15 Mesore (8 August) we were taxed on a cubit of water. Afterwards it (the river) receded until it receded two cubits of water (fol. 76b).¹¹¹

Because the text is fragmentary after this passage it is not clear what exactly had happened, but apparently the Nile level was fixed on 8 August for taxation purposes and receded more than expected, thus causing great distress.¹¹² Through the intercession of Mary, however, a miracle happened, and after the manuscript was completed on 14 July, the passage about this miracle was added to the manuscript, probably not long after 8 August.¹¹³

To sum up, a complete manuscript dating to 992 survives, which was donated to a shrine of Apa Aaron in Edfu for liturgical purposes. Besides the shrine of Apa Aaron, there was also a festival of Aaron, probably on 4 May. What can we say further about the manuscript tradition of the *Life of Aaron*? In the cathedral of Faras, the capital of the Christian Kingdom of Noubadia, a wall painting has been found dating to the end of the tenth or the beginning of the eleventh century. The painting contains a mixed Greek/Coptic inscription, which mentions ΑΒΒΑ Ζ[ΑΡΩΝ...ΑΝΑΧ]ΩΡΙΤΗΣ, and underneath the painting an invocation of the saint, ΑΒΒΑ ΖΑΡΩΝ.¹¹⁴ Evidently, Apa Aaron was venerated as a saint in Faras and Edfu in the tenth century. If he was venerated further north as well, is unknown. An Apa Horon is mentioned on a papyrus from Old Cairo, and a St Apa Aaron, though the name is restored, in Karnak, but this is insufficient proof that Apa Aaron of Philae was worshipped north of

¹⁰⁶ Budge, *Miscellaneous Texts* 1, lviii; Layton, *Catalogue*, 196.

¹⁰⁷ Van Lantschoot, *Recueil des colophons* 1, 197-200; 2, 79-80 (no. 113).

¹⁰⁸ R. de Rustafjaell, *The Light of Egypt from Recently Discovered Predynastic and Early Christian Records* (London, 1909) 3-6, 108; Layton, *Catalogue*, xxvii-xxx. Cf., however, the cautious remark by Layton, *Catalogue*, xxvii: 'The unity of this collection is at best artificial'.

¹⁰⁹ Layton, *Catalogue*, 173.

¹¹⁰ There is no letter after the κ indicating the day, as Budge assumed, so the date must be 20 Epeiph (14 July). See Van Lantschoot, *Recueil des colophons* 1, 199; 2, 79.

¹¹¹ ΠΤΑΝΣΡΑΙ ΠΕΙΧΩΜΕ ΖΗΠΤΡΟΠΠΕ ΤΑΙ ΦΗ ΣΑΡΑΓΙΝΟΥ ΤΩΒ (read ΤΠΒ ?) ΑΥΝΟΣ ΠΩΠΗΡΕ ΩΠΠΕ ΖΗΤΑΝΑΒΑΣΙΣ ΠΠΕΙΕΡΟ ΠΠΟΟΥ. ΖΗΠΟΥ ΜΠΤΗ ΜΕΝ ΠΠΕΣΟΥΡΗ ΑΥΣΥΝΤΑΖΕ ΠΑΝ ΕΡΟΥ ΕΥΜΑΖΕ ΠΠΟΟΥ. ΜΠΠΣΩΣ ΑΦΩΠΗ ΦΑΝΤΕΦΩΠΗ ΣΝΑΥ ΠΠΑΖΕ ΠΠΟΟΥ. Following Van Lantschoot, *Recueil des colophons* 1, 199; 2, 80, ΤΠΒ needs to be read for ΤΩΒ, rather than Budge's ΤΩΒ, and the Coptic has ΑΥΣΥΝΤΑΖΕ instead of Budge's ΑΥΣΥΝΤΑΖΕ.

¹¹² For taxation and the Nile inundation see D. Bonneau, *Le fisc et le Nil: incidences des irrégularités de la crue du Nil sur la fiscalité foncière dans l'Égypte grecque et romaine* (Paris, 1971).

¹¹³ Van Lantschoot, *Recueil des colophons* 2, 80. Cf. Budge, *Miscellaneous Texts* 2, 1033 (n. 3).

¹¹⁴ K. Michałowski, *Faras, die Kathedrale aus dem Wüstensand* (Einsiedeln, 1967) 126-7 (Fig. 46); J. Kubinska, *Faras IV. Inscriptions grecques chrétiennes* (Warsaw, 1974) 146-8 (Fig. 81-2); K. Michałowski, *Faras. Wall Paintings in the Collection of the National Museum in Warsaw* (Warsaw, 1974) 46, 58, 219-21, 289; M. Martens-Czarnecka, *Faras VII. Les éléments décoratifs sur les peintures de la Cathédrale de Faras* (Warsaw, 1982) 64 (Fig. 96); A. Łukaszewicz, 'En marge d'une image de l'anachorète Aaron dans la cathédrale de Faras', *Nubia christiana* 1 (1982) 192-211.

Modern Scholarship

The first edition of the *Life of Aaron* appeared in 1915 as part of a series of publications of Coptic literary manuscripts in the British Library. Its editor, Sir E.A. Wallis Budge (1857-1934), set the stage for further research by providing the scholarly world with a description, summary, text and translation of the manuscript.¹²⁴ Budge has been generally criticised for his – according to modern standards – superficial treatment of the text and at times astonishing mistakes.¹²⁵ However, it was not Budge’s intention to publish a definitive edition of the texts:

The chief object of the publication of this pioneer edition of the Edfu manuscripts is to make accessible as quickly as possible the information contained in them. Its plan and scope rendered it impossible to treat adequately the numerous points concerning the history, theology, mythology, eschatology, folklore, manners and customs, philology, &c., with which these texts abound. Even were a single editor capable of the task, any serious attempt to perform it must have doubled the number of volumes in the series, and delayed for several years the publication as a whole of this most important collection of ecclesiastical documents.¹²⁶

Budge’s intention, then, was to make the texts available without delay; the remaining problems were left to the specialists.

It was nine years before the importance of the *Life of Aaron* was recognised. In 1924, the demotist Wilhelm Spiegelberg (1870-1930) published a short article in which he took the *Life of Aaron* as evidence for the existence of the cult of the holy falcon at Philae in the fourth century.¹²⁷ At the end of his article, he made another important observation about the origins of Christianity at Philae, which had been discussed among scholars for a considerable time.¹²⁸ Object of debate was the already mentioned letter by Athanasius to the Antiochenes in which ‘Mark of Philae’ (Μάρκος Φιλῶν) was mentioned.¹²⁹ At first this reading was rejected, for only bishops of Lower Egypt had signed the letter and Philae was apparently still entirely ‘pagan’. Therefore, it was proposed to emend ‘Mark of Silae’ (a place in the Delta). It was Wilcken who argued that in the fifth century a Christian community had lived on Philae side by side with worshippers of the Isis cult and that Christianity may have reached back into the fourth century, making the conjecture unnecessary.¹³⁰ Spiegelberg confirmed this assumption on the basis of the *Life of Aaron*. For years to come, the insight that the work was an important source for early Christianity at Philae was prevalent. This appears from encyclopaedic and other general articles on Christianity at Philae.¹³¹ In other publications, the *Life of Aaron* was cited in connection with the Christianisation of Nubia, because Apa Aaron converted some local Nubians to Christianity.¹³²

With this knowledge in mind, it is the more surprising that thus far no scholar has tried to improve the Coptic text, and that Budge’s edition is still considered the standard edition. An Italian translation of the text with an introduction and some improvements to the translation by Budge has been published, however without accounting for the Coptic.¹³³ Even a

¹²⁴ Budge, *Miscellaneous Texts* 1, lvi-lix (description); cxliv-clvi (summary); 432-95 (text); 2, 948-1011 (tr.).

¹²⁵ For some examples in the *Life of Aaron*, see Dijkstra, “‘Une foule immense de moines’”, 197 (n. 25).

¹²⁶ Budge, *Miscellaneous Texts* 1, xxiv.

¹²⁷ Spiegelberg, ‘Ägyptologische Beiträge III’.

¹²⁸ E.g. Letronne, *Oeuvres choisies* 1, 55-99 at 81-2 (n. 2) (‘Observations sur l’époque où le paganisme a été définitivement aboli à Philes dans la Haute Égypte etc.’, 1833¹); J. Maspero, ‘Théodore de Philae’, *RHR* 59 (1909) 299-317 at 312-3.

¹²⁹ Ath. *tom.* 10 (Migne, *PG* 26, col. 808).

¹³⁰ Wilcken, ‘Heidnisches und Christliches’, 403-4.

¹³¹ Kees, ‘Philai’, 2111-2; H. Munier, ‘Le christianisme à Philae’, *BSAC* 4 (1938) 37-49 at 41-3; Timm, *Christlich-koptische Ägypten* 1, 392-4; MacCoull, ‘Christianity’, 159; R.G. Coquin, M. Martin, ‘Philae: Monasticism’, *Copt. Enc.* VI (1991) 1955-6.

¹³² Kraus, *Anfänge* 47-51; Monneret de Villard, *Storia*, 44-5, cf. the review of Monneret’s work by P. Peeters in *AB* 61 (1943) 273-80 at 275-7; Demicheli, *Rapporti*, 168-9, and ‘I regni cristiani di Nubia e i loro rapporti col mondo bizantino’, *Aegyptus* 59 (1979) 177-208 at 179-80; Kirwan, *Studies*, Ch. XXV at 95-6; Richter, *Christianisierung Nubiens* 121-3.

¹³³ A. Campagnano, T. Orlandi, *Vite di monaci copti* (Rome, 1984) 67-125.

recent translation in English follows the *editio princeps* for the greatest part, and the few improvements to Budge's translation, although said to be based on the manuscript, mainly serve to make the *Life of Aaron* known to a wider public.¹³⁴ It is equally astonishing that this text, already in 1937 characterised as 'the most valuable document for the history of early Christianity in the First Cataract region',¹³⁵ has been discussed in only one article, which is now over twenty-five years old.¹³⁶ However, this article poses some fundamental questions to which we will dedicate the remainder of this chapter, such as: What is the place of the *Life of Aaron* in Coptic literature? For what audience was it intended? What is its genre?¹³⁷ Before we address these questions, however, we first have to briefly summarise its contents.

Contents

The *Life of Aaron* consists of three separate but interrelated sections. The first section (fol. 1a-10b) starts when a certain Paphnutius (ΠΑΦΝΟΥΤΕ) visits a monastic community. Although the first leaf is missing, we can compare the opening scene with the *Life of Onnophrius* (fol. 1a-b), also attributed to a Paphnutius, and presume that the first leaf must have consisted of a title and short description of how Paphnutius arrived at the monastic community. When our text starts, Paphnutius decides to take part in the Eucharist, and afterwards talks with brother Pseleusius (ΠΣΕΛΕΥΣΙΟΣ) about another brother, Apa Zebulon (ΖΑΥΒΥΛΩΝ). This induces Paphnutius to ask Pseleusius about his own life.

Pseleusius tells Paphnutius that he fled from all sexual intercourse in his youth. He saw a vision, which a holy man explained to him, encouraging him to enter the monastic community of Apa John. A characterisation of John follows: his asceticism and nightly vigils, his revelations and visions. Pseleusius stayed in John's dwelling and asked him for monastic clothes. Afterwards, John instructed Pseleusius how to live in the desert, and Apa Zebulon (ΖΑΒΟΥΛΩΝ) accompanied Pseleusius there.

Pseleusius' story is clearly constructed:

- the novice's background and motivation to enter a monastic community are unfolded
- he meets a holy man
- his ascetic practices are told
- the holy man dresses the novice in monastic clothes, and instructs him
- the novice joins the holy man in the desert, and stays there.

This pattern is mirrored in the second story about two monks, told by Pseleusius' master John (ΙΩΩΔΗΝΗC).¹³⁸

John told Pseleusius that he went into the desert and reached an oasis where he met two men, Anianus (ΑΝΙΑΝΟΣ) and Paul (ΠΑΥΛΟΣ), whom he asked to tell their story. They were friends and lived in Syene. Inspired by the Holy Scriptures and the gospel, they went out of town in a little boat to the monastic community called the (Hill) Top (ΠΙΚΟΟΩ). Apa Zachaeus (ΖΑΧΑΙΟΣ) and his two disciples, Serapamon (ΣΑΡΑΠΑΜΩΝ) and Matthew (ΜΑΘΘΑΙΟΣ), lived there among the brothers. John first relates the ascetic behaviour of the disciples, after which Apa Zachaeus' practices are characterised. Zachaeus instructed Anianus and Paul and clothed them in the monastic habit. The holy man brought them to the desert and stayed until they knew how to live there. Zachaeus left them and went to his rest. From

¹³⁴ T. Vivian, *Paphnutius. Histories of the Monks of Upper Egypt and the Life of Onnophrius* (Kalamazoo, 2000²). A good translation in Dutch is J.F. Borghouts, *Egyptische sagen en verhalen* (Bussum, 1974) 184-9, but it covers only part of the work (fol. 11b-18a).

¹³⁵ Kirwan, *Studies* Ch. XXV at 95.

¹³⁶ Orlandi, 'Testo copto'.

¹³⁷ Orlandi, 'Testo copto', 229-30.

¹³⁸ Although the story is narrated in the third person, Pseleusius seems to account his personal story here, as appears from fol. 2a where his name is mentioned and from the circumstance that Pseleusius tells that John made him a monk directly after this passage (fol. 4a-5a). Cf. Campagnano and Orlandi, *Vite*, 72-3 (n. 4 and 6), who think that the story is about John.

that time on, they remained in that place, lived of date palms and participated in the Eucharist. They asked John to pray for them and he started to live in a dwelling. John later heard from another monk that they had died.

The second section is about the first bishops of Philae (fol. 10b-37b), in which we return to the conversation between Pseleusius and Paphnutius. Pseleusius finally wants to tell Paphnutius about Apa Isaac, a disciple of Apa Aaron. Paphnutius is impressed and wants to personally receive a blessing from the holy man. They embark in a small boat, travel four miles south and meet Isaac who is living on an island in the middle of the First Cataract. This means that the (Hill) Top was in the immediate vicinity of Syene. They eat together and Paphnutius asks Isaac about his work. Isaac answers by telling about the time when he was a disciple of Apa Aaron (sections 2 and 3).¹³⁹

Isaac begins by narrating a story that Aaron had heard from the first bishop of Philae, Macedonius (ΜΑΚΕΔΟΝΙΟΣ).¹⁴⁰ Because, according to the text, Macedonius was a pagarch, he went south to Philae and wanted to celebrate the Eucharist there. He heard that the Christians living on the island were oppressed by idol worshippers and that priests had to come from Syene to celebrate the Eucharist for them.¹⁴¹ When Macedonius went to Alexandria for a meeting with a military commander, he informed Archbishop Athanasius about the situation at Philae. He advised the archbishop to send a bishop south with him, but Athanasius persuaded Macedonius to become the new bishop of Philae himself. Macedonius agreed, returned to the south, distributed his possessions among the poor and lived as a citizen among the inhabitants of the island.

One day, Macedonius went into the temple area for he had seen people worshipping a falcon inside a 'demonic cage' (ΜΑΓΚΑΝΟΝ), as we have seen in Ch. 2 probably a construction on the first pylon where the falcon was shown. The temple priest was away on some business and his two sons had taken over the supervision of sacrifice. Macedonius went up to them and asked treacherously to sacrifice to 'God'. The sons prepared the altar, while Macedonius went to the demonic cage, took out the bird, chopped off its head and threw it into the fire. When the two sons saw what had happened, they decided to escape from the worshippers of the falcon and, especially, their father. Upon his return, the temple priest found neither his sons nor the falcon. An old woman who lived near the temple told him what had happened, and the priest swore to kill both his sons and Macedonius. Another man, a Christian, overheard the conversation and told Macedonius. The bishop cursed the old woman, but fled from the island to a place called the Valley (ΓΙΛΛΑ). There he saw a vision of a man standing before his two sons, while another man, a man of light, crowned the sons, first the older and then the younger, and handed over a staff and a key.

Next morning, a voice urged Macedonius to go and find his 'sons'. He found the two sons of the temple priest, half dead through lack of food and drink, and understood that these were the sons of his vision. The older boy told Macedonius that they had seen him in a vision, too, and a man of light with a book, who had dressed them in a tunic and fastened it with a shoulder strap, first the older and then the younger. They returned to Macedonius' place of dwelling and lived there together. He baptised his 'sons' and called them Mark (ΜΑΡΚΟΣ) and Isaiah (ΗΣΑΙΑΣ).¹⁴² The bishop shaved the brothers' heads and made them priest and deacon, respectively. In a variation on the stories in the first section, the old man has now found his novices.

It so happened that one day two Nubians (ΑΝΟΥΒΑ) began to fight near Macedonius' dwelling over a camel that had broken another camel's leg. Macedonius settled the dispute and asked Isaiah to sprinkle water over the camel's leg. Isaiah made the sign of the cross and the leg was healed. Some inhabitants of Philae spread the rumour of the miracle and told the temple

¹³⁹ Cf. Campagnano and Orlandi, *Vite* 68, who distinguish two sections: firstly the stories told by Pseleusius to Paphnutius (our section 1) and secondly those by Isaac to Paphnutius (our sections 2 and 3).

¹⁴⁰ The name is spelled here ΜΑΚΕΔΟΝΙΟΣ but seems to be a scribal error due to the word ΜΑΚΑΡΙΟΣ that precedes it, cf. Timm, *Christlich-koptische Ägypten* 1, 393 (Ma(r)kedonios).

¹⁴¹ The right to perform the Eucharist was primarily given to bishops but they could pass on their right to priests, see Archbishop Basilios, 'Eucharist', *Copt. Enc.* IV (1991) 1056-62 at 1061.

¹⁴² Spelled ΙΣΑΙΑΣ in fol. 17b, and ΗΣΑΙΑΣ in fol. 18a, 19b, 23a, 24b, 25b, 32b (2x), 33a, 33b, 34a, 56b.

priest that his son had taken part in it. The priest, whose name was Aristos (ἈΡΙΣΤΟΣ), went to Macedonius and prostrated himself before the bishop. Macedonius instructed him and the priest wanted to be baptised. However, Macedonius asked him first to make everything ready for his arrival at Philae and to build a church there.

After Aristos had arranged everything, Macedonius gloriously re-entered Philae and instructed the multitude from a throne in the priest's house.¹⁴³ The bishop converted all the inhabitants of Philae and baptised them. The first whom Macedonius baptised was Aristos, renaming him Jacob. He told Isaiah to hide because of what had happened in the temple and ordained him deacon.¹⁴⁴ Macedonius then asked for the Eucharistic vessels, which had been hidden before the conversion of Philae.¹⁴⁵ When they prepared the Eucharist, Macedonius remembered the accursed old woman, cured her and baptised her as the last person of Philae. They celebrated the Eucharist together, Macedonius appointed some of them priests or deacons, instructed them in the church and went home.¹⁴⁶ Later Macedonius fell ill, ordained Mark as his successor and died on 8 Mechir (2 February). He was buried outside his house.

The structure of the next episodes, covering the episcopates of Mark, Isaiah and Psoulousia, is the same:

- the people elect the bishop
- the future bishop says he is too humble but the people force him
- they go to Alexandria
- the archbishop ordains him
- the people celebrate the new bishop
- the bishop dies.

The city was without a bishop for a time and gathered to elect a new one. The most important among the priests proposed to elect him by lot, but the archdeacon said that Mark was to be the heir of Macedonius. The people approved of this statement and elected Mark. He behaved modestly but was forced to accept his election.

They went with him to Alexandria, but Athanasius was in a monastery in the western part of the city. They went there and prostrated themselves in front of the archbishop. He knew of Mark's vision, although Mark had not told anybody. In the morning, a group of notables wanted to see the archbishop but he sent them away, apparently because the ordination of Mark was more important. The embassy from Philae showed Athanasius an official document. After some instruction, Mark asked him if they should give bread to 'pagan' Nubians, living east and southwest of Philae. Athanasius explained that he had to give it to them by citing passages from the Bible and by telling a parable of two monks. Subsequently, Mark was consecrated bishop.

After three days the group was dismissed and given the episcopal licence. Athanasius told Mark to ordain his brother Isaiah first as deacon, then priest, and predicted that Isaiah would be his successor.¹⁴⁷ The group left Alexandria and arrived at Schissa (ΣΧΙΣΣΑ), where

¹⁴³ The sequence of fol. 21a-b in the manuscript is impossible, for after having told the priest to build a church, in fol. 21a Macedonius asks Mark to proclaim in the church that everybody has to come, whereas it is said that the priest has completed his task only in fol. 21b. As Campagnano and Orlandi, *Vite* 89-90, already observed, these leaves have to be reversed, and they adjusted their numbering of leaves (fol. 21a = Campagnano and Orlandi 21v; fol. 21b = 21r). However, they did not explain why this was so. Undoubtedly, the reason for the mistake in the binding of the manuscript is that the manuscript was acquired in two stages, first fol. 21 in 1907 and then the rest in 1909.

¹⁴⁴ Is this sentence corrupt? Isaiah had already been ordained deacon (fol. 18a) and there was no need to hide any more. To add to the confusion, in fol. 30a Athanasius asks Mark to appoint his brother Isaiah first deacon and then priest. Finally, Mark ordains Isaiah priest in fol. 32b.

¹⁴⁵ For Eucharistic vessels, such as the ark, *artophorion*, *asterisk*, chalice, paten and spoon, see Archbishop Basilios, E.M. Ishaq, 'Eucharistic Vessels', *Copt.Enc.* IV (1991) 1064-6.

¹⁴⁶ Since no other 'home' is mentioned as located on Philae, Macedonius must have continued living in his dwelling in the Valley.

¹⁴⁷ As noted before, this statement contradicts the previous ordinance of Macedonius who had already made Isaiah a deacon.

they could find no boat to carry them home. Fortunately, a ship from Syene with some notables came in, and the delegation from Philae asked the captain to take them south. When he heard that Mark had just been ordained bishop, the captain prostrated himself before him and did as the bishop wished. They returned to Philae and celebrated the bishop's appointment. They seated him upon a throne in the church, and he instructed them for three days. On the occasion of a great festival, Isaiah was ordained priest. Mark fell ill, declared Isaiah his successor and died on 14 Tybi (9 January). He was buried next to Macedonius.

We can be brief about the episcopate of Isaiah, for the same sequence of events, including his burial beside Macedonius and Mark, is repeated without noteworthy incidents. The next bishop, Psoulousia (ΠΣΟΥΛΟΥΣΙΑ), was a monk living on 'this island'.¹⁴⁸ Apa Aaron lived as a monk in this bishop's episcopate. The people elected Psoulousia bishop of Philae but he refused. Nevertheless, they took him to Alexandria. The bishop was consecrated, but when the embassy forgot the official appointment, the archbishop wrote another one. Psoulousia first returned to his place of dwelling on the island, but was persuaded to come to Philae as the bishops before him had done. He was enthroned in the church, celebrated the Eucharist with his people and instructed them. In addition, a miracle story is narrated concerning Psoulousia. When Archbishop Theophilus was elected, all bishops were invited to Alexandria, including Psoulousia. Yet, he deemed himself unworthy to pray with the other bishops at the baptismal font. Nevertheless, the archbishop asked Psoulousia to join. After having come closer to the font, the water in it began to boil and all bishops paid their respects to the bishop of Philae. Psoulousia died on 23 Payni (17 June). They buried him on the island on which he had lived.

Isaac now ends his story, and we enter the third section of the *Life of Aaron*, which is devoted to Apa Aaron (fol. 37b-57a). Apa Isaac tells Paphnutius what he had personally heard from Apa Aaron. In his youth, Aaron's parents had sent him into the army. Once he encountered a lion and promised to become a monk if he survived. In a passage with a quotation from and an allusion to the story of David and Goliath, Aaron beat the lion and became a monk, first in Scetis and later at Philae.¹⁴⁹

Then Paphnutius asks a second time for Isaac's own story. Isaac now starts the story of how he met his master with a similar structure as those in the first section. In his youth, Isaac learned to write and heard of the Holy Scripture. He heard rumours about Apa Aaron and wanted to receive a blessing from him. Isaac found him on a rocky (hill) top with a stone tied around his neck. The young man asked if he could become a monk. He received the monastic clothes, was shaved and Aaron instructed Isaac. At the end, the master left his novice.

But demons troubled Isaac and he searched for Aaron. He found him standing in the desert sand with a stone on his head. It was so hot that his eyeballs almost popped out. Isaac complained that he had been tormented by 'Nubians', but Apa Aaron explained that they were demons. Aaron also explained why he had given himself over to such ascetic practices. One day, demons visited Aaron and Isaac. Aaron told a story about a brother who was standing under a mountain ledge for six days and was visited by a demon with a golden staff. He drew a cross and the demon disappeared. Upon Isaac's supplications to tell him who this brother was, Aaron answered that it had been himself.

The end of the *Life of Aaron* consists of a catalogue of fourteen miracle stories which consist of the same pattern and often seem to have been modelled on biblical stories. The structure can be schematised thus:

- the motive: an accident in everyday life
- the act: the destitute goes to the holy man to help him
- the consequence: the destitute glorifies God and the holy man.

¹⁴⁸ Clearly not Philae, but the island in the middle of the Cataract on which the narrator Isaac lived. The name of the bishop is spelled variously: ΠΣΟΥΛΟΥΣΙΑ in fol. 34b, ΣΕΛΛΟΥΣΙΑ in fol. 35b, ΠΣΥΛΟΥΣΙΑ in fol. 36a-b, ΠΣΕΛΛΟΥΣΙΑ in fol. 36b and ΠΣΕΛΟΥΣΙΑΣ in fol. 37a (2x). Henceforth, I will refer to the bishop as Psoulousia. Cf. Vivian, *Paphnutius* 52, who adds to the confusion by mistakenly calling the bishop Pseleusias, a name that is mixed up with the name of the narrator of section 1, Pseleusius.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. 1 Sam. 17.36-7.

It is not our purpose to relate all the miracle stories here. Suffice it to say that most of them are an imitation of Christ's deeds (*imitatio Christi*), as is well known in early Egyptian hagiography, for instance in the story of the fishermen whom Aaron tells to throw out their nets on the right-hand side.¹⁵⁰ Other miracle stories refer to the Old Testament, like the story of the rich man who wants to take away the vineyard of a poor man, reminding us of the story of Ahab and Naboth.¹⁵¹ In spite of this, the stories also have a distinct *couleur locale*. The 'clientele' of Aaron comes from the region and the accidents are typically those of the everyday concerns of people from the region: catching fish, harvesting vineyards, the danger of crocodiles, the rise of the Nile.

Isaac has told Paphnutius about Aaron's life, he is now going to tell him about his death. Apa Aaron fell ill and, while angels were singing for him, he died on 9 Pachons (4 May). He was buried beside Macedonius, Mark and Isaiah in the Valley. Thus ends the story of Apa Isaac. Paphnutius thinks Isaac worthy of a blessing for his account and states that he will write everything down. Isaac and Paphnutius finish their meal and Paphnutius continues his journey towards the brothers to the north.

Place of the Work in Coptic Literature

The theme and motifs of the *Life of Aaron* are not exceptional in early Egyptian hagiography. Paphnutius hears the stories of several holy men that can serve as *exempla* for posterity, or as Paphnutius says to Isaac at the end of the work:

'You are worthy of a great gift, because I have heard from you of the ascetic practices of these holy men. That is why I am going to write them down. You laid them down as a prescript for all generations to come.' And so I did (fol. 56b).¹⁵²

Just as in the *Life of Antony* and the *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*, the models of so many hagiographical works, the goal of the *Life of Aaron* is to profit (†ⲚⲏⲮ, fol. 1b) from the lives of the holy men of the desert.¹⁵³

The stories of these lives share much common ground.¹⁵⁴ The father (ⲁⲡⲁ, ⲈⲬⲬⲧ) and holy old man (ⲉⲧⲟⲩⲁⲁⲃ) introduces his pupil, his son (ⲠⲏⲢⲉ), to the monastic life and teaches him to face temptations and other hardships. Fundamental questions are: How to live the ascetic life? How to attain (inner) peace? What is the work of a monk? How can a monk please God? The answers – fasting, poverty, detachment from the world, right faith, humility, discernment and labour – can be augmented extensively.¹⁵⁵ The world of the desert fathers is a world full of miraculous cures, works of power, foresight and insight, visions and revelations. It is also a world full of competitiveness and confrontations with demons, a world full of temptations and hardships. One example, the first encounter between Isaac and Aaron, represents this world well:

After a while I looked down into the sand and I saw human footprints leading to a rocky (hill) top. I followed them and found my holy father Apa Aaron, with a rope connected to a large stone hanging from his neck. When I had cried to him: 'Give me a blessing,' he freed his neck from the rope, threw

¹⁵⁰ Fol. 49b-51a. Cf. Lk. 5.1-11; Jn. 21.1-14. When the fishermen come to Aaron he starts with a biblical quotation (Jn. 21.6) and then explains the phrase 'the right side' with a series of quotations from the Gospel of Matthew (Mt. 25.41, 34; 11.28; 25.34).

¹⁵¹ There is a reminiscence in fol. 45b, where it is said that the rich man wants to take the vineyard from the poor man who has inherited it from his parents, cf. 1 Kg. 21.3. The allusion is taken up in fol. 47a when Isaac refers literally to the story of Ahab and Naboth (1 Kg. 21.1-29).

¹⁵² ⲁⲕⲣⲏⲡⲱ ⲡⲟⲩⲛⲟⲥ ⲡⲓⲛⲟⲧ ⲭⲉ ⲁⲓⲒⲱⲧⲏ ⲈⲛⲈⲡⲟⲗⲩⲧⲁ ⲈⲈⲐⲟⲟⲧⲣ̅ ⲈⲛⲁⲢⲈⲡⲈⲧⲟⲩⲁⲁⲃ. ⲈⲧⲨⲉ ⲡⲁⲓ ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲗⲱ ⲧⲏⲁⲥⲗⲁⲓⲒⲟⲩⲱ ⲡⲏⲁⲕⲕⲁⲁⲟⲩⲱ ⲈⲗⲢⲁⲓ ⲈⲮⲏⲢⲟⲥⲧⲁⲒⲖⲁ ⲡⲏⲏⲏⲉⲛⲈⲁ ⲧⲏⲢⲟⲩⲱ ⲈⲧⲏⲁⲱⲱⲡⲈ. ⲁⲮⲱ ⲧⲁⲓ [ⲧⲉ ⲑⲈ] ⲡⲏⲁⲓⲒⲁⲓⲒⲟⲩⲱ.

¹⁵³ Ath. v. *Anton*. Prol. 3 (SC 400, p. 126); *Hist.Mon.* Prol. 12 Festugière. Also in Coptic saints' lives, e.g. *Life of Shenoute* 1 Leipoldt.

¹⁵⁴ See, conveniently, G. Gould, *The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community* (Oxford, 1993).

¹⁵⁵ Gould, *Desert Fathers* 89.

Aaron's burial is at the same time an important element for understanding the internal coherence of the three successive sections of the *Life of Aaron*. The first and by far the shortest section is rather a preamble to the great deeds of Apa Aaron narrated in section three. Section two serves to augment the holiness of Apa Aaron: not only does he tell the beginning of the story of the first bishops of Philae to his pupil Apa Isaac, he also claims to have heard it first hand from one of them. Apa Aaron takes his authority from these regional holy men, and his burial *ad sanctos* places him on an equal footing with them.

Finally, there may well have been a kind of *vaticinium ex eventu* in section one, where Apa Zachaeus describes the biblical Aaron:

With regard to Aaron, Scripture likens him to the places of rest that are in the heavens, to the rejoicing that is in heavenly Jerusalem, and to the throne and garments with which the holy men will be clothed (fol. 8b).¹⁶¹

The audience for the *Life of Aaron* would have associated the name of the biblical Aaron with Apa Aaron. In this respect, it is surely no coincidence that the biblical Aaron is mentioned in four of the seven lessons for the festival of Apa Aaron (fol. 57a-61a), although the names are spelled differently in Coptic (Apa Aaron: ραρων, biblical Aaron: ααρων). If there is some connection between them, it may be noted that in the first encounter between Aaron and Isaac quoted above the holy man wears a garment (στολη, fol. 39a), the same word as used for the biblical Aaron. The comparison of the biblical Aaron with the throne and the garments is also reminiscent of the episcopal dignity of the first bishops of Philae. In the vision of their future episcopate, Mark and Isaiah see a man of light clothing them in a garment (ρερω, fol. 16b, taken up again by the word ωτην in fol. 25b and 30a). Moreover, the unnamed archbishop who ordained Psoulousia referred both to the visions of Macedonius, and of Mark and Isaiah by mentioning that they were given keys and clothed in garments (using here, again, the word στολη, fol. 36a). Concerning the throne, it may be noted that Macedonius is seated upon a throne in the house of the temple priest, and the three other bishops are seated on thrones in the church (fol. 21b, 23a, 32a, 34a, 36a). Thus, the remark about the throne and garments, 'which will clothe the holy men', may implicitly refer to the first bishops of Philae in section two, and Apa Aaron in section three.

This short literary analysis suggests that the *Life of Aaron*, as it has come down to us, was compiled at one time in the past without major later additions. A comparison of the sixth or seventh-century papyrus fragments of the *Dying Prayer of Athanasius* with the complete text that has come down to us in the same tenth-century manuscript as the *Life of Aaron*, shows that in this case, too, additions or omissions were only marginal. Moreover, the *Life of Aaron* is not a loose compilation of stories, all three sections have clear and meaningful passages that mark the transition to a new section. The internal coherence shows that the work can be seen as a unity dedicated to the glory of Apa Aaron, anchorite of Philae. On the other hand, this does not exclude the possibility that the compiler of the work used different *Vorlagen*, a supposition that is made more likely on the basis of its complicated structure, many errors and inconsistencies.¹⁶²

But why, then, have scholars referred to the work as a history of monks (*historia monachorum*)? Whatever the name may have been before that time, the work was known in the tenth century as the *Life of Aaron*. Consequently, if we maintain the hypothesis of its unity, we cannot speak of, for example, *Histories of the Monks in the Egyptian Desert* as the first edition does. The parallel with the *Life of Onnophrius* and the *Life of Cyrus* shows that the name *Life of Aaron* for our text is more accurate.¹⁶³ Admittedly, the *Life of Aaron* is clearly

¹⁶¹ ααρων μεν ερετεγραφη εινε μη' ο'ι εχι ημα ηητον ετρηπηπηγε ηητευφροςυνη ετρηθιε(ρουσα)λημ ηητε ηηπεθρονος δω νεστολη ετοηναταδυ ρηετουαδδ.

¹⁶² Cf. Orlandi, 'Testo copto', 229; Campagnano and Orlandi, *Vite* 67-8.

¹⁶³ For the *Life of Onnophrius*, see D.S. Chauler, 'Saint Onuphre', *Les cahiers coptes* 5 (1954) 3-15; R.-G. Coquin, 'Onophrius, Saint', *Copt. Enc.* VI (1991) 1841-2; J. Doresse, *Les anciens monastères coptes de Moyenne-Égypte*, 3 vols (Yverdon-les-Bains, 2000, repr. of diss. Paris 1971) 1.127-36. Recently, the text edited by Budge has been translated into English again by Vivian, *Paphnutius* 145-66. For the *Life of Cyrus* see the Sahidic Coptic version

written in the tradition of the *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*, which also shares its main theme with our work. Paphnutius travels to a monastic community near Syene to hear the stories of the local monks and to profit from them.¹⁶⁴ However, these stories only form a small part of the entire work, whereas one of the stories, the *Life* of Apa Aaron, is enlarged, so that this holy man becomes the central figure of the work (again the *Life of Onnophrius* and the *Life of Cyrus* are suitable parallels). The *Life of Aaron* ends again in the style of the *Historia Monachorum*, for after Paphnutius has promised to write down the story of Apa Isaac, he travels back to the north, presumably to the monastic community near Syene. The *Historia Monachorum* gained widespread popularity after its appearance around 400, and it is therefore not surprising that the work served as a frame for the *Life of Aaron*.¹⁶⁵ However, this does not necessarily have to make the work as a whole a history of monks.

The plot of the *Life of Aaron* is also influenced by the *vita*, a genre that went back to Athanasius' *Life of Antony* (c. 356) and was common in Coptic literature. In these lives, a characteristic, if rather obvious, pattern returns:¹⁶⁶

- prologue
- youth of the holy man
- ascetic life and miracles
- death of the holy man
- epilogue.

The *Life of Aaron* follows this general pattern, but adds the stories of the monks living near Syene and the history of the first bishops of Philae.¹⁶⁷ Apparently, in works like the *Life of Onnophrius*, the *Life of Cyrus* and the *Life of Aaron*, the genres of *vita* and *historia monachorum* were fused, a tendency which is also apparent in other hagiographical works.¹⁶⁸ Let us now turn to the remaining two elements of the *Life of Aaron*, the author and his public.

The author of a hagiographical work such as the *Life of Aaron* is usually mentioned on the first page, but, as has already been noted, precisely this page of the only completely transmitted text is missing. Nevertheless, the main character of the story, Paphnutius, states at the end of the work that he will write down what he has heard (and that he completed this task). A certain Paphnutius is also the author of the, in many respects similar, *Life of Onnophrius*, and this is why both works have been attributed to the same author, Paphnutius. There has been some debate about whom this Paphnutius can be.¹⁶⁹ The starting point of the discussion is the end of the *Life of Onnophrius*, in which it is remarked that Paphnutius told his story to some monks from Scetis, that they wrote it down quickly and placed the resulting book in the church of Scetis (fol. 21a-b).¹⁷⁰ However, Paphnutius is one of the most common

edited by Budge, *Coptic Martyrdoms* 128-36 (text), 381-9 (tr.). On Pambo, see Chitty, *Desert*, 46-7; L. Regnault, 'Pambo, Saint', *Copt. Enc.* VI (1991) 1877-8. Two fragments survive of another life similar to the *Life of Aaron*, in which the main character visits two Nubian monks, see Crum, *Theological Texts*, 167-70 (nr. 29).

¹⁶⁴ For the *Hist.Mon.* as travel writing, see G. Frank, 'The *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto* and Ancient Travel Writing', in E.A. Livingstone (ed.), *Studia Patristica* XXX (Leuven, 1997) 191-5, 'Miracles, Monks, and Monuments: The *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto* as Pilgrims' Tales', in Frankfurter, *Pilgrimage & Holy Space*, 483-505, and *The Memory of the Eyes. Pilgrims to Living Saints in Christian Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, 2000) 35-101.

¹⁶⁵ Orlandi, 'Testo copto', 230. The *Hist.Mon.* inspired other famous fifth-century works, such as the *Lausiac History* by Palladius (420) and the *Historia religiosa* by Theodoret (c. 450), and was soon translated into Latin. See Goehring, *Ascetics*, 73-88 ('The Encroaching Desert: Literary Production and Ascetic Space in Early Christian Egypt, 1993'); Frank, *Memory of the Eyes*, 39. For surviving fragments of a Coptic version see P. Devos, 'Fragments coptes de l'"*Historia Monachorum*" (Vie de S. Jean de Lycopolis *BHO* 515)', *AB* 87 (1969) 417-40.

¹⁶⁶ Campagnano, 'Monaci egiziani', 244.

¹⁶⁷ Prologue: lost. Youth: fol. 27b-38b. Life: fol. 38b-41b. Miracles: fol. 41b-56a. Death: fol. 56a-b. Epilogue: fol. 57a.

¹⁶⁸ E.g. Frank, *Memory of the Eyes*, 38-43.

¹⁶⁹ De Lacy O'Leary, *Saints*, 219-20; Vivian, *Paphnutius*, 42-50, 53-4. With more caution, Campagnano and Orlandi, *Vite*, 67.

¹⁷⁰ On Scetis see H.G. Evelyn-White, W. Hauser, G.P.G. Sobhy (eds), *The Monasteries of the Wadi 'n Natrûn*, 3 vols (New York, 1926-33), A. Cody, 'Scetis', *Copt. Enc.* VII (1991) 2102-6, and Gabra, *Coptic Monasteries*, 35-63.

names in Late Antique Egypt and a whole series of monks and clergymen are possible candidates. If we accept that there is a relationship between our author and Scetis, persons such as the Paphnutius mentioned in the *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*, a monk who came from Upper Egypt, can be discarded.¹⁷¹

There remain three Paphnutii. At the end of the fourth century, a Paphnutius surnamed 'Bubalis' and over ninety years old was an authoritative person in Scetis.¹⁷² In the 390s, Palladius met another authoritative person in Scetis, this one over eighty years of age, with the nickname 'Cephalas', who, on account of the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, can be connected with St Antony.¹⁷³ This Paphnutius can probably be identified with a third Paphnutius, who is also known from the *Apophthegmata Patrum* as 'Father of Scetis' and lived at about the same time.¹⁷⁴ It is unlikely that Paphnutius 'Bubalis' and Paphnutius 'Cephalas' were one and the same person, for we can expect that the same person may not have had two nicknames.¹⁷⁵ Thus, two (or three) Paphnutii remain who were authoritative persons in Scetis at the end of the fourth century and are reported to have been very old at that time.

Two problems prevent us from attributing the *Life of Aaron* to one of these Scetian monks. Firstly, internal evidence makes such an identification impossible. Apa Aaron was a monk (fol. 34b) during the episcopate of Psoulousia who took part in the celebration of the new archbishop of Alexandria, Theophilus, in 385 (fol. 36b). If this is true we have to add at least two generations to reach the time when Paphnutius visited Apa Isaac, for Apa Isaac was a pupil of Apa Aaron, and, as it were, Paphnutius in turn was a pupil of Apa Isaac. Without pretending accuracy, the narrated time of the *Life of Aaron* would then be placed around 425 and it would have still taken some time for Paphnutius to write down his story and for the cult of Apa Aaron to develop.¹⁷⁶ The internal evidence from the *Life of Aaron* indicates that none of the three Paphnutii from Scetis could have been alive when the *Life of Aaron* was written.¹⁷⁷

The second problem is that there is no connection with Scetis in the *Life of Aaron*, the only exception being that Apa Aaron started his monastic career in this place (fol. 38a). However, this is a normal way of authenticating the sanctity of a holy man, as Scetis was held in high esteem in this period.¹⁷⁸ For the rest, everything points to a regional *Sitz im Leben* of the *Life of Aaron*. In the first section, Paphnutius visits a monastic community near Syene. Other topographical indications are remarkably precise for a hagiographical work. For example, when Paphnutius and Pseleusius decide to visit Apa Isaac, it is remarked: 'He, who lived on the island in the middle of the Cataract, four miles to the south of us' (fol. 10b).¹⁷⁹ The island cannot be Philae, for in other places this island is referred to by its proper name.¹⁸⁰ Moreover, Psoulousia is said to have lived on 'this island' (τῆς νήσου, fol. 34b), which, as already remarked, refers to the same island in the middle of the Cataract as that on which the narrator, Isaac, lived. It is certainly another island than Philae, for when Psoulousia is chosen as bishop of Philae: 'They forced him, lifted him up and brought him to the city' (fol. 35a), by which Philae is meant.¹⁸¹ After Psoulousia had been ordained in Alexandria, he first returned to 'his place on the island' (ἐπεστράφη εἰς τὴν νήσον). However, the inhabitants of Philae took him to their island:

¹⁷¹ *Hist.Mon.* 14 Festugière. Cf. A. Guillaumont, 'Paphnutius of Scetis', *Copt.Enc.* VI (1991) 1884. The Paphnutius mentioned in Ath. v. *Anton.* 58.3 (*SC* 400, p. 290), was a bishop of the Upper Thebaid.

¹⁷² Cassian. *conl.* 3.1 (*SC* 42, pp. 139-40), 10.2 (*SC* 54, pp. 75-6).

¹⁷³ *Hist.Laus.* 47 Butler, and *Apophth.Patr. Antony* 29 (Migne, *PG* 65, col. 85).

¹⁷⁴ *Apophth.Patr. Paphnutius* (Migne, *PG* 65, col. 377-80).

¹⁷⁵ Cf. Evelyn-White in Evelyn-White, Hauser and Sobhy, *Wadi Natrûn* 2, 121; Butler, *Lausiac History*, 224-5; Budge, *Coptic Martyrdoms*, xiv; Guillaumont, 'Paphnutius of Scetis', 1884; Vivian, *Paphnutius* 48-9.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. Vivian, *Paphnutius*, 52-3, who suggests that because Aaron was not buried beside Psoulousia but beside the first three bishops of Philae, Psoulousia was still alive at the time of Aaron's death, and that hence the work has to be dated to after 385 ('a date of 390-400 seems reasonable'). However, the text clearly states that Psoulousia was buried on 'this island', the island in the middle of the Cataract, and not beside the bishops three predecessors.

¹⁷⁷ *Contra* Vivian, *Paphnutius*, 49-50.

¹⁷⁸ Cf. Bishop Porphyry of Gaza who also became a monk at Scetis (Marc. Diac. v. *Porph.* 4).

¹⁷⁹ ΠΑΙ ΕΤΟΥΗΗΖ ΖΠῆΤΗΝΗΕ ΕΤΖΝΤΗΗΗΤΕ ΠΠΕΚΑΤΑΖΡΑΚΤΗΣ ΠΠΡΗΣ ΠΜΟΝ ΝΑΡΤΟΟΥ ΠΗΗΛΙΟΝ.

¹⁸⁰ Fol. 12a, 19b, 31a, 37b, 44b, 49a, 56b, 57a, spelled variously ΠΕΙΛΑΚ, ΠΕΛΑΚ and ΠΙΑΚ.

¹⁸¹ ΑΥΧΙΤῆ ΔΕ ΠΧΗΗΖ ΑΥΤΑΛΟϚ ΑΥΧΙΤῆ ΕΖΟΥΗ ΕΤΠΟΙΕ.

They brought him out, embarked him in a small boat and sang psalms in front of him until they brought him into the church (of Philae) (fol. 36a).¹⁸²

For ‘the island’ situated in the middle of the Cataract, one island in particular comes to mind: el-Hesa.¹⁸³ In Antiquity, it probably formed one island with Biga (and perhaps Awad), the place where the Abaton with the tomb of Osiris was located.¹⁸⁴ It was by far the largest island in the First Cataract and lies about four miles south of Aswan. Apparently, Bishop Psoulousia and, later, Apa Isaac lived on this island.

On their way to the island, the holy men meet the treacherous currents of the First Cataract:

We departed, went on board of a small boat and sailed southward to visit the holy old man Apa Isaac. There were large rocks rising up from the water in the middle of the river, and the water there roared out in a horrifying way (11a).¹⁸⁵

This is a strikingly realistic description of a boat journey on the First Cataract in Antiquity.¹⁸⁶ Small boats (larger ones would run aground) and an experienced boatsman were necessary requisites to arrive safely on the island of el-Hesa. As the currents were far stronger in Antiquity than they are today, there are several ancient testimonies that they made a roaring noise.¹⁸⁷

Furthermore, two monastic communities are mentioned in the region: the (Hill) Top (ΠΙΚΟΟΣ) near Syene (fol. 7a, cf. 39a) and the Valley (ΠΙΑ, ΠΕΙΑ) to the north of Philae (fol. 15a, 38b).¹⁸⁸ The Valley is the place where Macedonius fled after he had killed the holy falcon of Philae, where he lived together with Mark and Isaiah, and where the miracle of the camel’s leg took place. After he made his glorious *rentrée* at Philae, he ‘went to his place of dwelling’ (ΔΥΒΩΚ ΕΠΕΦΜΑ ΠΩΠΕ, fol. 23a), that is, the one in the Valley. Moreover, he was buried ‘outside his place of dwelling’ (ΑΥΤΩΜΕ ΠΜΟΚ ΠΒΟΛ ΠΠΕΦΜΑ ΠΩΠΕ, fol. 23b), as were his successors Mark and Isaiah (fol. 33a, 34b). Apa Aaron was living on the same spot, when Isaac asked him to become his master, and he was buried there next to the bishops after he died (fol. 56b). This valley can probably be identified with the wadi situated northeast of Philae (Fig. 2).¹⁸⁹ In the plain at the beginning of this valley lay the military camp of Philae, which was the end of the ancient road from Syene to Philae, and the only way to travel further south. Aaron’s place of dwelling seems to have been not far removed from this road. When a Nubian wanted to tell Aaron that his son had been eaten by a crocodile, the holy man charged Isaac to find an interpreter on the road: ‘After I had went, I found a man from Philae who had mounted a donkey and was going to Syene’ (fol. 42a).¹⁹⁰

There is, therefore, no doubt that the *Life of Aaron* is regional in outlook, and this conclusion suggests that a local monk, rather than a monk from Scetis, wrote the *Life of*

¹⁸² ΔΥΕΝΤΩ ΔΕ ΕΒΟΛ ΑΥΤΑΛΟΦ ΕΥΚΟΥΙ ΠΣΚΑΦΟΣ ΑΥΤΑΛΛΕΙ ΖΑΤΕΦΖΗ ΦΑΝΤΟΥΧΙΤΩ ΕΖΟΥΗ ΕΤΕΚΚΛΕΣΙΑ.

¹⁸³ Cf. Timm, *Christlich-koptische Ägypten* 3, 1052-3.

¹⁸⁴ Locher, *Nilkatarakt*, 159-64.

¹⁸⁵ ΑΝΕΙ ΕΒΟΛ ΑΝΑΛΕ ΕΥΚΟΥΙ ΠΣΚΑΦΟΣ ΑΝΡΩΤ ΕΡΗΣ ΕΤΡΠΒΩΚ ΦΑΠΖΛΛΟ ΕΤΟΥΑΔΒ ΑΠΑ ΙΣΑΔΚ. ΝΕΥΗ ΖΕΝΝΟΣ ΔΕ ΠΩΝΕ ΡΗΤ ΖΠΠΜΟΟΥ ΠΤΗΝΗΤΕ ΠΠΕΙΕΡΟ. ΕΡΕΠΜΟΟΥ ΕΤΠΜΑΥ ΩΩ ΕΒΟΛ ΕΦΟ ΠΖΟΤΕ.

¹⁸⁶ Locher, *Nilkatarakt*, 98-103.

¹⁸⁷ E.g. Cic. *rep.* 6.18: ‘We find a similar phenomenon, where the Nile rushes down from those lofty mountains at the place called Catadupa (‘Down-Crashers’, a name for the area of the First Cataract, cf. e.g. Hld. 2.29); the people who live nearby have lost their sense of hearing on account of the loudness of the sound’ (tr. C.W. Keyes, Loeb).

¹⁸⁸ The translation ‘(hill) top’ for ΚΟΟΣ, as correctly translated by Campagnano and Orlandi, *Vite*, 105, is more satisfying than another meaning of the word, ‘corner, bend’, as translated by Budge, *Miscellaneous Texts* 2, 954, 988, and Vivian, *Paphnutius*, 79, 117. See on ΚΟΟΣ Crum, *Dict.* s.v., and Vycichl, *Dictionnaire*, 91-2. For the monastic community see Timm, *Christlich-koptische Ägypten* 4, 1953-4.

¹⁸⁹ Timm, *Christlich-koptische Ägypten* 4, 1876-7.

¹⁹⁰ ΠΤΕΡΙΒΩΚ ΔΕ ΔΙΣΠ ΟΥΡΠΠΙΑΔΚ ΕΦΤΑΛΛΗΥ ΕΠΕΙΩ ΕΦΝΑΒΩΚ ΕΣΟΥΑΝ.

Aaron.¹⁹¹ Whether the monk was indeed called Paphnutius can be questioned, as the *Life of Omnophrius* seems to associate this Paphnutius with Scetis and the two works are remarkably similar. A possible solution for this discrepancy is that the local monk used the name of an authoritative person from Scetis, Paphnutius, most likely Paphnutius ‘Cephalas’, for he was the most renowned, to authenticate his story. A nice parallel is the *Life of Cyrus* attributed to Apa Pambo, who was also a famous fourth-century anchorite. Like Paphnutius, Pambo was associated with St Antony and Scetis.¹⁹² However, Pambo cannot have been the author of this saint’s life, for references to Shenoute (c. 360-465) and the Emperor Zeno (474-491) betray a date of composition at least after 474. Another work, the *Life of Hilaria*, is also attributed to Apa Pambo.¹⁹³ This feature, to attribute several works of different authors to famous fourth-century anchorites, is common in Coptic literature and nowadays known by the term ‘cycle’.¹⁹⁴

The *Life of Aaron* is thus the product of a literary tradition developing around local saints from the region of the First Cataract, and its theme is the profit that can be gained from the ascetic life and practice of these holy men.¹⁹⁵ Its world, even that of the first bishops of Philae, is predominantly a monastic world, but the regional outlook of the work suggests that the public for the *Life of Aaron* not only consisted of monks but also a wider, regional audience.¹⁹⁶ This suggestion will be further illustrated in the next chapter, where we discuss the historical value of the work.

¹⁹¹ Dijkstra, “‘Foule Immense de Moines’”, 199. Cf. Peeters, review Monneret de Villard, 275: ‘Elle a été composée sur place, par un Copte du pays, à une époque où la légende originale était encore vivace’.

¹⁹² Apophth.Patr. *Antony* 6 (Migne, *PG* 65, col. 77), and *Pambo* (col. 368-72).

¹⁹³ J. Drescher, *Three Coptic Legends: Hilaria, Archelites, The Seven Sleepers* (Cairo, 1947) iii-iv, 1-13 (text), 69-82 (tr.), 139-48 (additional fragments).

¹⁹⁴ Orlandi, ‘Coptic Literature’, in Pearson and Goehring, *Roots* 51-81 at 78-80; ‘Literature (Coptic)’, 1456-8; ‘Letteratura copta’, 111-3.

¹⁹⁵ For a similar literary tradition connected with local holy men around Armant see Boutros and Décobert, ‘Installations chrétiennes’, 77-86. Cf. J. Doresse, ‘Saints coptes de Haute-Égypte’, *JA* 236 (1948) 247-70.

¹⁹⁶ Orlandi, ‘Testo copto’, 229-30.