The Destruction of Statues in Late Antique Egypt:
A Widespread Phenomenon or Christian Polemic?

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Abstract

The topic of violence in Late Antiquity is a heavily debated subject and many scholars have focused on this issue, as evidenced by the many studies published within the last ten years.[1] The perception of Late Antiquity as a period of widespread religious violence is mainly influenced by Christian literary sources, who document accounts of violence against temples, statuary, and people alike. Egypt, in particular, has often been used as an example to demonstrate the destructive nature of religious violence that existed in the ancient world. However, the concept of religious violence is a complicated and nuanced topic. In Egypt, the many accounts by the Christian sources were written with specific intentions and the events documented in the texts were often exaggerated. The objective of this thesis is to provide a study of statue destruction by Christians between the fourth to seventh centuries CE in Egypt, and determine whether these destructions were acts of religious violence or were carried out for another reason in order to provide a more nuanced understanding of violence in Late Antiquity. By juxtaposing accounts from literary sources and archaeological evidence, the study seeks to determine whether the literary sources are accurate in their documentation of widespread statue destruction, or whether the violent discourse present in the literary sources is the result of Christian polemical purposes.

[1] E.g. M. Gaddis, *'There is No Crime for Those Who Have Christ': Religious Violence in the Christian Roman Empire* (Berkley, 2005); H. Drake (ed.), *Violence in Late Antiquity. Perceptions and Practices* (Aldershot and Burlington, 2006); J. Hahn, S. Emmel, and U. Gotter (eds.), *From Temple to Church: Destruction and Renewal of Local Cultic Topography in Late Antiquity* (Boston, 2008); T. Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity: Militant Devotion in Christianity and Islam* (Philadelphia, 2009); E. Watts, *Riot in Alexandria: Tradition and Group Dynamics in Late Antique Pagan and Christian Communities* (Berkeley, 2010).

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A Note on Abbreviations

Throughout this thesis, classical sources have been abbreviated according to H.G. Liddell, R. Scott, and H.S. Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford, 1996). Patristic sources have been abbreviated according to G.W.H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford, 1968). Latin authors of the Christian era have been abbreviated according to A. Blaise, *Dictionnaire latin-francais des auteurs chrétiens* (Turnhout, 1967). Abbreviations of scholarly journals are based on J. Marouzeau (ed.), *L'année philologique. Bibliography critique et analytique de l'antiquité gréco-latine* (Paris, 1924-). Sources and journals that are not contained within these volumes have been left in full. Items are featured below if they are not found in major reference sources.

Joh. Nik.	*The Chronicle of John of Nikiu*
LA	*Life of Aaron*
LM	*Life of Moses of Abydos*
LS	*Life of Shenoute*
Pan.	*Panegyric on Macarius*

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General Introduction

The topic of violence in Late Antiquity is a heavily debated subject and many scholars have focused on this issue, as evidenced by the many studies published within the last ten years.[2] The perception of Late Antiquity as a period of widespread religious violence is mainly influenced by Christian literary sources, who document accounts of violence against temples, statuary, and people alike. Egypt, in particular, has often been used as an example to demonstrate the destructive nature of religious violence that existed in the ancient world. However, the concept of religious violence is a complicated and nuanced topic. The term 'violence' can have a variety of meanings and actions based on each incident.[3] Violence exists in all places and times, and as a result, religious violence needs to be analyzed within each individual situation in the context of the local and historical circumstance in which it took place. In Egypt, the many accounts by the Christian sources were written with specific intentions and the events documented in the texts were often exaggerated. Religious violence occurred in specific circumstances for various reasons and differed according to region and date.

This understanding of religious violence as a more nuanced topic is evidence that scholars are now analyzing the literary accounts that describe acts of violence between Christians and non-Christians in a different manner.[4] The diversity in the conclusions of the new critical analysis of literary evidence is largely due to the increasing availability of archaeological data, although the perception of widespread violence against temples and statuary is still persistent. A study of the process of religious transformation from the Ancient Egyptian religion to Christianity in the region of Aswan in southern Egypt has recently challenged the traditional perception of widespread religious violence. The religious transformation that took place within the region, in places such

[2] E.g. M. Gaddis, *'There is No Crime for Those Who Have Christ': Religious Violence in the Christian Roman Empire* (Berkley, 2005); H. Drake (ed.), *Violence in Late Antiquity. Perceptions and Practices* (Aldershot and Burlington, 2006); J. Hahn, S. Emmel, and U. Gotter (eds.), *From Temple to Church: Destruction and Renewal of Local Cultic Topography in Late Antiquity* (Boston, 2008); T. Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity: Militant Devotion in Christianity and Islam* (Philadelphia, 2009); E. Watts, *Riot in Alexandria: Tradition and Group Dynamics in Late Antique Pagan and Christian Communities* (Berkeley, 2010).

[3] J.H.F. Dijkstra, 'Religious Violence in Late Antique Egypt Reconsidered: The Cases of Alexandria, Panopolis and Philae', *JECH* 5 (2015) 24-48.

[4] See S. Emmel, U. Gotter and J. Hahn, '"From Temple to Church": Analysing a Late Antique Phenomenon of Transformation', in Hahn, Emmel and Gotter, *From Temple to Church*, 1-22; R.S. Bagnall, 'Models and Evidence in the Study of Religion in Late Antique Egypt', in Hahn, Emmel and Gotter, *From Temple to Church*, 25-32.

as Philae, was an intricate process of interaction that was in fact rather peaceful.[5] The image is that of a complex process of religious transformation, where religious violence occurred only in specific circumstances rather than that religious violence was commonplace in Egypt as a whole. The benefit of studying Egypt lies in the fact that it provides many sources, including literary accounts, inscriptions, archaeological material, and papyri, that are not available in other areas of the Mediterranean. These sources support the theory of violence only occurring in specific circumstances with regional differences rather than widespread violence throughout Egypt.[6]

The numerous publications on the topic of religious violence in Late Antiquity illustrate the growing awareness about the complexity of this phenomenon. The objective of this thesis is to provide a study of statue destruction by Christians between the fourth to seventh centuries CE in Egypt, and determine whether these destructions were acts of religious violence or were carried out for another reason in order to provide a more nuanced understanding of violence in Late Antiquity. By juxtaposing accounts from literary sources and archaeological evidence, the study seeks to determine whether the literary sources are accurate in their documentation of widespread statue destruction, or whether the violent discourse present in the literary sources is the result of Christian polemical purposes.

Literature Review

> All the images were accordingly broken to pieces, except one statue of the god before mentioned, which Theophilus preserved and set up in a public place; 'lest', said he, 'at a future time the heathens should deny that they had ever worshipped such gods'.[7]

The destruction of Greco-Egyptian statues by Christians is a localized phenomenon and therefore must be studied at that level, with allowances for vagueness and uncertainty in the observed responses. In the past scholarship that has directly dealt with Christian responses to 'pagan' statuary in Late Antiquity has mainly done so either within the wider narratives of Christianization and religious conflict, or have only focused on single episodes documented in literary sources. In

[5] J.H.F Dijkstra, *Philae and the End of Ancient Egyptian Religion: A Regional Study of Religious Transformation (298-642 CE)* (Leuven, 2008).
[6] Dijkstra, 'Religious Violence', 30.
[7] Socr. *h.e.* 5.16.

recent years, the interest in the destruction of Late Antique statuary by Christians has grown, resulting in a number of articles and monographs on the subject. Many of these focus on single monuments or individual sites, but other works are broader in their geographical coverage. The majority of previous scholarship dealing with the issue of non-Christian statuary destruction either focuses solely on the literary sources, without considering the archaeological evidence, or they do not sufficiently transcend the violent discourse present in Christian literature.

Scholarship dealing with the topic of statuary destruction predominantly uses literary sources as the major form of evidence, mainly writings by Christian authors. C. Mango is concerned with the statues of divinities and their effect on Byzantine observers in order to determine the attitudes of the spectator towards non-Christian statuary. Mango uses literary sources, in particular, the lives of the saints, which are full of references about the destruction of non-Christian statuary, as the primary source of evidence. He divides Byzantine attitudes towards ancient statuary into two categories: the popular and the intellectual. The popular attitude was based on the belief that demons inhabited the statues and had to be destroyed. Regardless, some statues still survived, their original significance was forgotten, and a new 'folkloristic' significance emerged in the popular imagination. The intellectual attitude cannot be taken at face value and must be evaluated in the perspective of a long rhetorical tradition.[8]

Through accounts documented in literary sources, T. Thornton seeks to outline the changes in Christian attitudes towards idols and the reasons behind the changes. He demonstrates that during the reign of Constantine II, Constantius, and Constans, the significance of the destruction of idols is that it was regarded as an official Christian duty. This conclusion is reached through an analysis of events documented in the literary sources regarding violence against non-Christian statuary and is significant because the destruction of non-Christian statuary that took place within this period is more likely to be categorized, based solely on the literary sources, as acts of religious violence through the use of this method. This is an example of how ancient literary sources have influenced the perception of widespread violence throughout Antiquity through their accounts of various events.[9]

[8] C. Mango, 'Antique Statuary and the Byzantine Beholder', *DOP* 17 (1963) 55-75.
[9] T. Thornton, 'The Destruction of Idols: Sinful or Meritorious?', *JThS* 37 (1986) 121-9.

The use of literary sources as evidence is the dominant method in scholarship because they contain descriptive details about such events and sometimes are the only source of information regarding a specific act. Despite these advantages, there are many challenges that must be overcome when using the literary sources as evidence such as how to read the complex evidence and understand the combination of the author's position and purpose, as well as the literary motifs employed. The reliability of the literary sources provides another barrier as they often document events based on either previous works or sources written after the last eyewitness had died.[10] The topic of violence against non-Christians is a literary *topos* in many literary works written by Christian authors and as a result the sources write what they intend for the reader to understand. Christian literary sources that document non-Christian statuary violence may be based on true events, which have been materially attested to, but are witnessed and interpreted from a Christian point of view.

In his study of Roman statuary, A.P. Gregory uses the literary texts as the main source because of the lack of statues in their original physical context, but mainly because the literary sources are the only way to gain insight into the responses towards the statues.[11] Gregory's study is on political ideology and therefore places an emphasis on the literary mentions of statues in public situations. In contrast, Stewart uses both archaeology and literary texts to study violence against Roman statues.[12] The primary purpose is to determine the reception of statuary by the Roman people, using both primary texts and the physical statues. Although he does not provide a survey of statues in Roman provinces, Stewart examines a few provincial examples in order to understand the place of statues in Roman society from the late Empire to the beginning of the 3rd century CE, and how various forms of evidence such as archaeology, inscriptions, and literary sources provide different accounts of a story. He uses literary accounts with archaeology to determine the many reactions people had to the statuary.

Other recent studies on statue destruction also combine archaeological evidence with the literary sources in order to gain a fuller understanding of the situation, the majority of which focus on single monuments or individual sites. For instance, in *The Learned Collector,* Stirling focuses

[10] Bagnall, 'Models and Evidence', 25-6.
[11] A. P. Gregory, 'Powerful Images: Responses to Portraits and the Political Uses of Images in Rome', *JRA* 7 (1994) 80-99.
[12] P. Stewart, *Statues in Roman Society. Representation and Response* (Cambridge, 2003).

on groups of mostly fragmented statues that were part of Late Antique villas in Aquitaine. Her approach towards the reception of the statues is framed by the issue of Christian hostility against statues of deities and mythological characters. Nevertheless, she discusses the possibilities for distinguishing between mutilation and mere damage, as well as why understanding the physical setting of artwork is essential when evaluating its impact. As supplemental information, Stirling uses archaeological evidence along with literary sources that contain references to statues. She uses the statues as a tool to investigate a variety of issues relating to the use of sculpture in Late Antiquity and what information the statues can provide about society.

With this approach, Stirling shows that mythological subjects were admired and displayed by non-Christians and Christians alike. She suggests that it was not non-Christian resistance that accounted for the personal assemblages of mythological statues but instead a desire to possess the past. This conclusion downplays the violence often found in literary sources, and provides a more positive Christian point of view. In general, Stirling offers an excellent and technically proficient survey of Late Antique statues in Gaul. However, the study is limited as it only focuses on the statuettes that belong to villas, in particular the small scale, classicizing statuary of mythological figures carved from marble during the late fourth and early fifth centuries in Gaul. Stirling's study is an example of how the general discussion about the destruction of statuary has progressed from scholars who relied solely on the primary sources. Her work shows that there is a need to combine the literature with archaeology, along with an awareness of the problems that exist in the literary sources.[13]

Following the progression of combining archaeology and literature, scholars have applied this concept to studies on Egypt. E. Sauer, who covers a wide geographical range dealing with the topic of Christian destruction of non-Christian statuary, discusses in detail the Christian destruction of sculpture. The book draws on the author's experience with materials from the northwestern provinces and even extends to Egypt and the Near East. Sauer offers practical reasons to explain why certain images were mutilated while others were spared. While he offers a wide range of material and information, Sauer does not address the issues of divine representation and the meanings certain images carried in religious practice. His study also does not sufficiently deal with

[13] See L. Stirling, *The Learned Collector: Mythological Statuettes and Classical Taste in Late Antique Gaul* (Michigan, 2005).

the ambiguity present in Christian responses and his coverage of Egypt does not incorporate the archaeological and historical evidence that would offer a more detailed reading of the country. [14]

Frankfurter discusses the vitality of Egyptian images in Late Antique Christian memory and response. He focuses on the nature of the potency of traditional Egyptian divine images in the centuries after Christianity had been established in both positive and negative responses.[15] He stresses that the idea of statues being more than mere decorations and carefully made vessels for specific gods to inhabit, was the subject of much discussion in Late Antiquity. Christian writers tend to be ruthless about this idea and the language used in their accounts is evidence of this. To support his arguments, Frankfurter uses both material evidence and literary sources, in particular sermons by Christian authors, but he only focuses on a few single monuments within Egypt, which does not provide information about regional variances that may have existed in other areas.

Through an analysis of the various literary accounts concerning the destruction of the Serapeum, Kristensen demonstrates the problems of using only primary sources as evidence.[16] There are many accounts of the destruction by both Christian and non-Christian authors, which each have a different result for the sculptural decoration of the temple. He uses archeological evidence from the site of the Serapeum at Alexandria to illustrate that the literary texts are full of literary *topoi*. The archaeology proves that in contrast to what is documented in the literary accounts, not all of the statuary was destroyed. In a similar manner, J.H.F Dijkstra uses both literary sources and archaeology in order to gain a fuller understanding of the circumstances of religious violence against temples in Egypt. He cautions against the sole use of literary sources as evidence as the literary motifs surrounding idol and temple destruction is important in the Christian ideology of Late Antiquity.[17] Dijkstra demonstrates that temple destruction was common in Christian literature, and it is from these accounts that the perception of widespread religious

[14] E. Sauer, *The Archaeology of Religious Hatred* (Charleston, 2003).
[15] D. Frankfurter, 'The Vitality of Egyptian Images in Late Antiquity: Christian Memory and Response', in Y. Eliav, E. Friedland, and S. Herbert (eds.), *The Sculptural Environment of the Roman Near East* (Leuven, 2008) 659-79: how basic these assumptions were to Egyptian notions of the divine image appears from the Greek and Demotic 'magical' papyri.
[16] T.M. Kristensen, 'Religious Conflict in Late Antique Alexandria: Christian Responses to 'Pagan' Statues in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries AD', in G. Hinge and J. Krasilnikoff (eds.), *Alexandria - A Cultural and Religious Melting Pot* (Aarhus, 2010) 158-75 at 165.
[17] J.H.F Dijkstra, 'The Fate of the Temples in Late Antique Egypt', in L. Lavan and M. Mulryan (eds.) *The Archaeology of Late Antique 'Paganism'* (Leiden, 2011) 389-436.

violence developed. In order to gain the best understanding of a situation, literary sources should be used alongside other forms of evidence.

In his book *Making and Breaking the Gods*, Kristensen provides the only synthesis that covers Late Antique statuary destruction in Egypt. His views presented in the book are close to the nuanced portrayal that has been proposed for the topic of religious violence in Late Antiquity, in particular the perception of Egypt, as recently suggested by Dijkstra.[18] Kristensen addresses the ambiguity in Christian responses that Sauer did not. The approach taken in his study is that Christian responses were not random, but instead had specific meanings revelatory of contemporary visual practices. The book is conceived as an archaeological contribution to the history of response and deals specifically with Christian responses to non-Christian statuary in Egypt and the Near East. In the introduction, Kristensen discusses an inscribed marble base that was originally located in Ephesus. The inscription describes the destruction of a 'deceitful image of demonic Artemis' by a Christian. Kristensen uses this inscription as an example to highlight other issues that he will discuss later in the book, and as a way to demonstrate the Christian belief that certain images were possessed by demons, resulting in the destruction or neutralization of such images. Kristensen views the damage against such images as revelatory of the different ways that the material objects of the 'non-Christian' past could be overcome in Late Antiquity.[19]

A review by J.H.F. Dijkstra, however, points out some loose ends in Kristensen's discussion of terminology, mainly in his use of the terms 'iconoclasm' and 'pagan'.[20] He does not adequately define what he means by his use of 'pagan' throughout the study, instead using it as a general way to categorize any group that was not Christian.[21] Dijkstra also discusses the lack of clarity in Table 0.1, stating that while the table provides information on the diversity of responses, Kristensen does not highlight the differences between the various categories, where there is overlap.

Kristensen states that studying the destruction of statues is important because the development of Christian responses to non-Christian images allows scholars to follow the ways in which society changed during Late Antiquity. In the first chapter, Kristensen outlines his

[18] Dijkstra, 'Religious Violence', 30.
[19] T.M. Kristensen, *Making and Breaking the Gods* (Aarhus, 2013) 9-22.
[20] J.H.F Dijkstra, review of Kristensen, *Making and Breaking the Gods* in *BiOr* (2015).
[21] Kristensen, *Making and Breaking the Gods*, 34.

methodological approach and terminology. This chapter is focused on statues and sanctuaries in Rome. Kristensen mentions that until recently, Roman statues were primarily studied as objects of art, which distanced the statues from their original religious, social, and political contexts. He provides a detailed discussion about the theological nature of divine images in Roman religion as well as the targeting of certain body parts of a statue. Also discussed in this chapter is the *Abodah Zarah*, which is a part of the Talmud about the prohibitions against what the Jews thought were 'idols' that later influenced the Christian perception of this subject. The second chapter focuses on the material evidence from Egypt and the Christian attempts to either destroy or re-purpose them. Kristensen deals with evidence from Alexandria and the Nile Valley, including Abydos, Dendara, Luxor, Karnak, and the Theban region in order to show the various Christian responses to the images, in particular the targeting of certain body parts in hieroglyphic reliefs. He provides many case studies of Christian responses to 'pagan' statuary and demonstrates that some of the responses may be specific to Egypt and based in traditional Ancient Egyptian beliefs.[22]

The final chapter focuses on material from the Near East and the Christian responses to statuary in Late Antiquity. As in the previous chapter, Kristensen provides many case studies based on both literary sources and archaeological evidence. While the second chapter mainly dealt with religious shrines within Egypt, the third chapter deals with urban contexts. This includes the cities of Palmyra, Scythopolis, Caesarea Maritima, and Caesarea Philippi. One of the disadvantages of case studies in this area is the lack of publications containing archaeological information on sites and sculpture.[23] He shows that Greco-Roman sculpture was problematic for Christians, though in some situations, such as depictions of Greek stories of the gods, it was left untouched.

Kristensen provides a useful compilation of responses to statuary from Egypt and the Near East. His study is currently the only synthesis of Late Antique statuary destruction in Egypt. Using a variety of materials along with comparative material from other parts of the empire, Kristensen provides a more detailed understanding of the social and religious dynamics in Late Antiquity, although his analysis does not always sufficiently transcend the violent discourse present in the Christian literature or archaeology. This can be seen though his presentation of evidence from a positive Christian point of view and his interpretation of Christian reuse, alteration, and mutilation

[22] See Kristensen, *Making and Breaking the Gods*, 175-9, for more information.
[23] J. Pollini, review of Kristensen, *Making and Breaking the Gods* in *BMCR* (2014).

of images as appropriation.[24] Kristensen's observations are based on incidental visits to the various sites instead of a systematic study of the individual locations and the surrounding damage.[25] He places emphasis on Christian responses that have a violent connotation and often does not consider the possibility of practical reasons for destruction.[26]

Terminology

The term 'pagan' is problematic as it can encompass a variety of groups and peoples, and in using the term the distinction between 'pagan' and Christian must be made. For the purpose of this thesis, the term 'pagan' will not be used, and instead, we prefer the term non-Christian. During the fourth and fifth centuries, Christianity was the dominant religion. However, this does not mean that the people were always thinking in hostile terms towards non-Christians. By using this term instead of 'pagan', we will look at the various statue destructions from different viewpoints, such as practical reasons, rather than strictly antagonistic and deliberate violent destructions. Using the term non-Christian will allow this study to approach the destructions in chapter two, as documented in archaeology and other sources, with various possibilities in mind.

In Late Antiquity, Egypt saw the rise of Christianity and the decline of Greco-Egyptian culture. In the religions of Greco-Egyptian culture, the cult is central. The religion is the sum of the dedications, sacrifices, and rituals, which was centered on temples. Literary sources provide descriptions of statues that were made of precious materials, though these cult statues rarely survive.[27] An important aspect of the power of images in Egypt was the perceived magical abilities of these statues, especially in relation to healing cults.[28] Based on their setting in the innermost protected part of the sanctuary, the common perception is that these cult statues embodied the divinity and they functioned as living images. Literary sources document the destruction of such statues and discuss the demonic powers of non-Christian images.[29]

[24] Kristensen, *Making and Breaking the Gods*, 94-6.
[25] Dijkstra, Review of *Making and Breaking the Gods*, 680.
[26] Dijkstra, 'Fate of the Temples', 398.
[27] G. Robins, 'Cult Statues in Ancient Egypt', in N.H. Walls (ed.), *Cult Image and Divine Representation in the Ancient Near East* (Boston, 2005) 1-12; Kristensen, *Making and Breaking the Gods*, 111.
[28] See G. Pinch, *Magic in Ancient Egypt* (London, 1994); Frankfurter, *Religion*, 47-9.
[29] See for example *h. Mon*. 8.24.

When studying the destruction of statues by Christians, it is necessary to understand what constituted a cult statue and the reasons why these objects were considered dangerous, though caution must be exercised when attempting to define the term 'cult statue'. Statues of deities that were the primary focus of ritual and worship in a sanctuary are generally considered to be 'cult statues'.[30] These images were considered authoritative symbols of the cult and the majority of scholarship on divine images focuses on the 'cult statue', a definition that did not exist in Antiquity and is therefore problematic. There are many terms in both Greek and Latin that describe our modern understanding of 'statue' and as a result defining the term 'cult statue' can be challenging. In Latin, this is less problematic as the main terms that refer to statues are *statua, effigies*, and *imago*. The terms *signum* and *simulacrum* are used more specifically to address the images of gods.[31] The Greek terms prove more challenging and there are many types of statuary such as votive statue, a cult statue, and a miraculous image.

Some words that refer to 'statue' in the Greek language are ἄγαλμα, ξόανον, and εἴδωλον. These words refer to the physical object that is a statue. Unlike the other words used to describe statues in Greek, ἀφίδρυμα does not refer to any features of the object, but to a function. It is any sacred object that is used to begin and found a cult. It can be a cult statue, but this is not crucial to its meaning because an image can turn into an ἀφίδρυμα when it is used to introduce a new cult, but an ἀφίδρυμα does not need to be an image. A passage from Dionysius of Halicarnassus offers the best example of the function difference between a cult statue and one that has become an ἀφίδρυμα. For instance, he uses the term ἀφίδρυμα, describes a cult statue as ξόανον, but ἀφίδρυμα is used at a critical point of the story during the dedication, when the religious meaning is given to the statue and it determines the start of the cult.[32] Until that moment, the statue could not reveal its divine qualities. A cult image replaces the divinity in ritualistic circumstances and becomes a sacred representation.

The variety of terms used to describe 'cult statue' in Antiquity support the notion that these objects were not uniform in their function and significance. The identification of an object as a

[30] Robins, 'Cult', 2.
[31] J. Mylonopoulos, 'Divine Images versus Cult Images. An Endless Story about Theories, Methods, and Terminologies', in J. Mylonopoulos (ed.), *Divine Images and Human Imaginations in Ancient Greece and Rome* (Leiden, 2010) 1-21.
[32] D.H. *Ant. Rom.* 8.56.2.

'cult statue' emerges from a variety of factors including the use of the object in cult activity, the honours given to it, and its believed magical properties. Society had to recognize and accept divine images and images of cult and incorporate them into the ritual framework. According to J. Mylonopoulos, the three main characteristics that determine a cult statue are its position, the incorporation into ritual activity, and its appearance.[33] First, divine images that are centrally located in the *cella* of a temple are considered cult statues, while all other divine images within the space are thought to be votive offerings. This approach neglects various other religious spaces such as sacred groves and ignores the fact that many statues were venerated in sanctuaries dedicated to other deities. The exact position of an image is important, but it cannot be the only factor in categorizing an image as a cult statue.

Second, the incorporation of a divine image into cult activity is a tool for recognition of a cult statue, but there needed to be repetitive action for the divine image to be transformed into a cult statue. This creates another category of divine image, as there were permanent cult statues and images that could be transformed into a cult statue for a short period of time. The third factor for categorizing a cult image is appearance, although there is no way to recognize a divine image used in a cult based solely on appearance. Statues could be constructed out of a variety of materials including bronze, marble, gold, or wood. As a result, creating a hierarchy of divine representations based solely on the material would be inconclusive. The only way to distinguish between sculpted images of deities and cult images is to identify the attribute that makes a direct reference to ritual practice, associated with the cult image. All three factors used together can help categorize a cult statue, but they do not guarantee an accurate definition of a cult statue.

The general theory that the cult object is represented by a statue, while other kinds of representations are considered votive objects is based on the Greek belief that divinities had a similar appearance to mortals. Cult images are placed in temples where they are the object of ritualistic acts, which include receiving prayers and gifts.[34] The modern understanding of the function of divine representations includes two elements: cult images are understood as the

[33] See Mylonopoulos, *Divine Images*, 9-12, for more information concerning appearance and cult statues.
[34] M.C. Nicolae, 'Cult Images and Mithraic Reliefs in Roman Dacia', *Transylvanian Review* 20 (2011) 67-8; see also D. Lornton, 'The Theology of Cult Statues in Ancient Egypt', in M.B. Dick (ed.), *Born in Heaven, Made on Earth: The Making of the Cult Image in the Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake, 1999) 123-95 for information about the origins of cult statues in Egypt.

substitute representation of a divinity, and this image of a divinity is a gift to the god.[35] The double function of the statue as an object of worship and an object of offering in the cult shows the difficulty faced when trying to define what cult images were in Antiquity.

Images held an important religious role as mediators between the divine and the humans in Antiquity, and depending on the context, any image could have a sacred character. The devotion of worshippers and the relationship between the image and human is what defines a cult statue in the ancient world. For the purpose of this paper, the term 'cult image' and 'idol' will be used for the conventional meaning given to the word as the statues of deities that functioned as the primary object of worship in ritual, in a sanctuary or household. Generally located within a temple, these images were authoritative symbols of the cult, even though there is no evidence that the term 'cult statue' existed in Antiquity. Cult images are responsible for the discussion of the relationship between divinity, materiality, and representation that later found another form in early Christian texts about idolatry, which serve as evidence for the worship of images by the ancients.

Throughout this study, terms that describe violence against images and statuary, such as 'destruction', will be used. Though these words appear to be straightforward, it is important to define them so that they can be understood within the context of this study. In cases of religiously motivated violence against images, the term 'iconoclasm' is often used.[36] The study of iconoclasm in Ancient Egypt is problematic to define, in particular as it is most often understood in the context of a modern Christian definition. For the purpose of this thesis, the term 'iconoclasm' will not be used, due to the loaded implications of the word and because it is generally applied to acts of violence against religious images that occurred in eighth- and ninth-century Byzantium. The preferred term that will be used to describe acts of violence against the corpus of statuary analyzed in this thesis, where it is appropriate, is 'destruction', which generally refers to the intentional damage of an image.

Conclusion

[35] Nicolae, 'Cult', 68.

[36] E.g. Stewart, *Statues in Roman Society*; P. Wilson, 'Naming Names and Shifting Identities in Ancient Egyptian Iconoclasm', in A. McClanan and J. Johnson (eds.), *Negating the Image: Case Studies in Iconoclasm* (Burlington, 2005) 113-37; Frankfurter, 'Iconoclasm and Christianization in Late Antique Egypt: Christian Treatments of Space and Image', in Hahn, Emmel, and Gotter, *From Temple to Church*, 135-61.

Acts of religious violence presented in the literary sources are often depicted as destruction, which leaves no material residue. However, the literary sources often exaggerate the details of the events and the damage done to the images. Violence against statuary does not need to have brutally damaged the material integrity of the structure for it to be considered 'destruction'. During the period of Late Antiquity, if literary sources alone are to be consulted, the practice of intentionally damaging statutory and perceived cult objects was very common, but, even in specific cases of religious violence against statuary there are examples where the material is left intact and is instead repurposed or hidden. These statues often undergo hiding and burial, negative cultural redefinition, and re-purposing, and are often attested in both literary sources and material evidence. At the core of these actions are the motivations behind the attacks, and the process of transforming the meaning and social significance of the object.

Statuary that was not destroyed but hidden or re-interpreted form the basis of evidence to determine the motivations of the attackers. Destruction does not always imply an end, and in some cases, parts of the statues are re-used and re-purposed with a new meaning. This can constitute a practical use of the statue, though it does not mean that 'destruction' and 'practicality' are mutually exclusive. A statue could have been damaged for ideological purposes, while some material was re-purposed to suit the new representation of the image. Part of this process depends on the ability of the original viewers to re-interpret the monument in a new context. This argument has been applied in relation to various statues that were similar to those of Christian figures.[37] Through juxtaposing archaeological evidence and other sources with the accounts in hagiographies and Church histories, this thesis will focus on how idol destructions are represented in two different types of literary genres as well as the historical and religious contexts in which these narratives were written, in order to demonstrate that the widespread notion of religious violence is incorrect, and instead destruction occurred in specific circumstances for various reasons.

This thesis consists of three chapters. Chapter one deals with five literary texts, analyzed in chronological order, written by Christian authors, specifically the Christian narratives of the account of Apollo of Hermopolis documented in the *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto,* the *Life of Shenoute*, the destruction of the Horus falcon by Macedonius in the *Life of Aaron*, the *Panegyric*

[37] Kristensen, *Making and Breaking the Gods*, 33.

on Macarius attributed to bishop Dioscorus, and the *Life of Moses of Abydos*. These five sources were selected because they serve as examples of Christian hagiography and demonstrate what the perception of widespread religious violence is based on. Each of the selected hagiographies document accounts of violence between Christians and non-Christians during the fourth to sixth centuries CE and use similar literary motifs in their depictions of such events. In particular, all five Christian accounts document acts of violence against non-Christian statuary, and will be critically analyzed in order to determine the common literary motifs used when describing acts of violence.

Chapter two will juxtapose the passages of idol destruction from the Christian hagiographies of the *Life of Shenoute* and the *Life of Aaron*, studied in chapter one, with other forms of evidence such as other literary sources, including other Christian literary sources, and archaeology. Consulting other sources that document the events contained in the hagiographies reveals that these events characterized as religious violence were embellished and adapted to fit the ideological agendas of the various authors. Chapter three will focus Alexandria as a case study, using the five literary accounts of Rufinus of Aquileia, Socrates of Constantinople, Sozomen of Gaza, Theodoret of Cyrrhus, and Eunapius, to analyze the destruction of the Serapeum in Alexandria. Particular emphasis will be placed on the role of the cult statue of Serapis in the accounts by Rufinus and Theodoret. An analysis of these five accounts, written about the same event, will demonstrate that Christian authors wrote with many literary motifs to depicts the dominance of Christianity, and that the violence often associated with Late Antiquity is more nuanced than previously believed and occurred only in specific circumstances.

Chapter One
Idol Destructions: Literary Motifs in Hagiographical Works

Introduction

> Our father, Bishop Apa Macedonius, made his way to the place where the demonic cage was. He took out the falcon, cut off its head, threw it upon the burning altar, left the temple and went away.[38]

Christian sources writing about events in Late Antiquity depict a world full of religious violence, including idol destruction.[39] However, these Christian texts contain many literary tropes, particularly the motif of idol destruction. Christian arguments against the worship of idols can be traced back to early Jewish literature, mainly the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah, and the treatise known as the *Letter of Jeremiah*, from the Old Testament.[40] These arguments state that the statues are unable to represent gods because they are made of perishable materials and are manmade, which allows the creators to change the form of the statue into other objects that are unrelated to the original deity.[41] From the second century CE there was a growth in the censure of idol worship in Christian literature, and to these judgements, accounts of violence against statues were added. This chapter will address how literary these Christian sources are through an analysis of five sources in order to determine the common literary *topoi*. As this analysis will show, the five Christian hagiographies, presented here in chronological order, of Apollo of Hermopolis in the *History of the Monks in Egypt*, the *Life of Shenoute*, the *Life of Aaron*, the *Panegyric on Macarius*, and the *Life of Moses*, use many of the same literary *topoi* when documenting events of violence

[38] *LA* 31.
[39] See Dijkstra, 'Fate of the Temples', for a study on violence against temples.
[40] J.N. Bremmer, 'God against the Gods: Early Christians and the Worship of Statues', in D. Boschung and A. Schaefer (eds.), *Götterbilder der mittleren und späten Kaiserzeit* (Munich, 2014) 139-59 at 144: the *Letter of Jeremiah*, which dates between the sixth and second century BCE, was accepted into the Vulgate by Jerome.
[41] Jeremiah 10:3-4: 'For the customs of the peoples are false: a tree from the forest is cut down, and worked with an axe by the hands of an artisan; people deck it with silver and gold'; Habakkuk 2:18-9: 'What use is an idol once its maker has shaped it...For its maker trusts in what has been made... See, it is gold and silver plated, and there is no breath in it at all'; Romans 9:21-2: 'Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one object for special use and another for ordinary use? What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience the objects of wrath that are made for destruction'; 2 Timothy 2:20: 'In a large house there are utensils not only of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for special use, some for ordinary' (trans. NRSV); see on these texts Bremmer, 'Statues', 144.

between Christians and non-Christians. These five sources serve as examples of Christian hagiography on Late Antiquity that demonstrate what the perception of widespread religious violence during this period is based on.

Apollo of Hermopolis and the Idol Procession

During the end of the fourth century CE, many travellers visited the deserts of Egypt. Some of these travellers documented their journeys during the fourth and fifth centuries and described Egyptian monasticism, which led to more visitors coming to Egypt to learn from the monks. These accounts were written for the monks of the West, so that they could follow the same spiritual path of the Egyptian monks. One of the journeys undertaken in 394-5 CE produced the Greek account known as the *History of the Monks in Egypt*, which was written during the early fifth century CE. The true author of the *h. Mon.* is unknown. He seems not to have been a monk, but a traveller searching for monks, who provides an outsider's perspective of monastic life in the desert. The account of Apollo in the *h.Mon.* begins with the author writing that he and his companions visited a holy man, named Apollo, in the region of Hermopolis in the Thebaid. At the time of the visit, the author describes Apollo as the father of five hundred monks, renowned in the Thebaid, and with many great works ascribed to him. There is no mention of Apollo in any other literary sources, and the only information about his life comes from the stories documented in the *h.Mon.*

From childhood, Apollo had shown great discipline and was rewarded near the end of his life, when he established his own monastery with 'five hundred perfect men, almost all of them with the power to work miracles'.[42] Apollo of Hermopolis is mentioned in a story that describes the destruction of an idol. This is the only mention of idol destruction in the work. There was a large temple with a famous wooden idol and the priest and people would carry the idol in their processions through the villages. During one of these processions, Apollo was nearby with some of his followers. When he saw the crowd carrying the idol he immediately began to pray, and instantly all the non-Christians could not move. They remained immobile all day until their priest said that the Christian Apollo was responsible for this, and the non-Christians would have to ask for his help in order to save their lives. After many unsuccessful attempts to move, the non-

[42] *h. Mon.* 8.2.

Christians finally sent word to Apollo stating that if he would set them free they would renounce their ways. Apollo released them and all the non-Christians committed themselves to God. They burned the idol, and then joined the various Christian congregations.[43]

The account of idol destruction in the story of Apollo is depicted as an act of religious violence. The narrative presents a community of non-Christians engaged in a ritual procession,[44] and after a series of events, believe in the Christian God and burn the wooden idol. This account contains many literary *topoi.* The first is the miracle performed by the holy man, Apollo, who immobilizes the non-Christian procession. The performance of miracles is a common element in early monastic literature, as monks were thought of as champions of society in spiritual warfare.[45] In the *h.Mon.*, the types of miracles are divided into four categories, clairvoyance, dreams and visions, cures, and judgements and punishments.[46]

The first literary motif of the miracle instigates the next motif, which is the destruction of the idol. After the procession is freed by Apollo, the non-Christians believe in the power of God and willingly burn the wooden idol.[47] The idol must be destroyed, in this case through fire, so that any power that the object might have possessed is destroyed.[48] The burning of the idol implies the end of the local cult, as all the non-Christians choose to convert to Christianity. The two literary motifs of the miracle and idol destruction bring about the final motif of conversion, effectively ending the opposing religion. The account of Apollo in the *History of the Monks in Egypt* is the earliest hagiographical work to document an account of violence against an idol. It is also the first to use the three literary *topoi* of a miracle, idol destruction, and conversion, together in a Christian hagiography.

Shenoute: Demons, the Idols of Pneueit, and Gessios

[43] *h. Mon.* 8.25-9.
[44] *h. Mon.* 8.25: 'no doubt performing the ceremony to ensure the flooding of the Nile'.
[45] Russel, *Lives*, 13.
[46] Russell, *Lives*, 40-4.
[47] *h. Mon.* 8.29.
[48] Frankfurter, 'Iconoclasm', 139.

Shenoute of Atripe was the leader of the White Monastery, located in Upper Egypt, from 385 CE until his death in 465 CE.[49] In Egypt, Shenoute is one of the Coptic Church's most revered saints.[50] He is known for both his contribution to the development of Egyptian monasticism and Coptic literature. However, due to the prominence of the Greek language, Shenoute's influence and works were limited to Egypt.[51] Shenoute's many writings detail numerous events, which refer to violence against non-Christian worship in surrounding areas, mainly in Atripe and Panopolis. The references against non-Christians, found in the writings of Shenoute, can be compared with other similar stories from the *Life of Shenoute*.[52] The *LS* was attributed in the past to Besa, the disciple and eventual successor of Shenoute. Recent studies, however, have shown that the texts compiled in the *Life of Shenoute* are an encomiastic tradition and were not the work of one individual, but were most likely written by the many monks at his monastery, and developed over time.[53]

The work is a biography of an ecclesiastical leader, which idealizes the main character of the abbot, Shenoute. The *LS* is composed of one hundred and ninety chapters that can be divided into sections, in which several themes are covered such as the early life of Shenoute,[54] the many miracles and blessings he performed,[55] his visits with holy prophets, the Virgin Mary, and Jesus Christ,[56] his dealings with Cyril of Alexandria and the Council of Ephesus,[57] and his interactions

[49] The year of his birth is a debated subject. It is traditionally dated to 346, resulting in his being 118 when he dies. This is the age that the *LS* 174-5 gives and has been accepted in other studies. S. Emmel, "From the Other Side of the Nile: Shenute and Panopolis", in A. Egberts, B.P. Muhs, & J. Van der Vliet (eds.), *Perspectives on Panopolis. An Egyptian Town from Alexander the Great to the Arab Conquest* (Leiden, 2002) 95-113 at 98-9; S. Emmel, *Shenoute's Literary Corpus*, 2 vols (Leuven, 2004) 1.11, considers 362 to be the latest acceptable birth year, though he maintains 346; A.G. Lopez, *Shenoute of Atripe and the Uses of Poverty* (Berkeley, 2013) 132-3 challenges the traditional date for a birth date in the 380s.

[50] S. Emmel, 'Shenoute the Monk: The Early Monastic Career of Shenoute the Archimandrite', in M. Bielawski and D. Hombergen (eds.), *Il monachesimo tra eredità e aperture: Atti del simposio Testi e temi nella tradizione del monachesimo cristiano* (Rome, 2004) 151-74 at 151.

[51] Emmel, 'Shenoute the Monk', 152.

[52] There are various versions of the *Life of Shenoute*; for the purpose of this thesis the *LS* refers to the Bohairic version of the *Life of Shenoute*, unless otherwise stated.

[53] See K.H. Kuhn, 'A Fifth-Century Egyptian Abbot', *JThS* 5 (1954) 36-48 (part I), 174-87 (part II); 6 (1955) 35-48 (part III) for information about Besa; N. Lubomierski, *Die Vita Sinuthii: Form- und Überlieferungsgeschichte der hagiographischen Texte über Schenute den Archimandriten* (Tübingen, 2007) argues that the *LS* is an encomiastic tradition in which the life of Shenoute was read each year. Over time the story was expanded, with different versions translated in different languages, all ascribed to Besa. Cf. Lopez, *Shenoute*, 149.

[54] *LS* 1-14.

[55] *LS* 14-16; 20; 24; 27-8; 36-41; 66; 68-9; 76; 78-9; 80; 87; 141-3.

[56] *LS* 91-2; 93; 94; 95; 117-8; 138 (prophets); 146-7 (Virgin Mary); 22-3; 25-6; 30-2; 70; 154-60 (Jesus Christ).

[57] *LS* 18-21; 128-30.

with non-Christians.[58] In the various versions of the *LS,* Shenoute is mentioned in connection to three passages containing the literary motif of idol destruction.

On one occasion, Shenoute intended to go to the village of Pneueit to destroy the idols there. When the non-Christians learned of his intentions, they buried magical potions, made to hinder Shenoute, in the ground on the route that led to the village. Shenoute rode a donkey to the village, but whenever he neared a potion, the donkey would stop and dig, exposing the potions. As they continued towards the village, the servant would beat the donkey and encourage him to keep moving. However, Shenoute chastised the servant claiming that the donkey knew what he was doing. Shenoute instructed the servant with him to keep all the potions that were found so they could be hung on the necks of the non-Christians. When Shenoute entered the village, the non-Christians saw all the magical potions they had buried and fled. [59] Shenoute then entered the temple and destroyed the idols there, smashing them one on top of each other.[60]

This account of idol destruction in the *LS* contains two of the literary motifs that were seen previously in the *h.Mon.* The story begins with a miracle, when Shenoute is en route to the village of Pneueit and is hindered by the magical potions buried by the non-Christians. This scene in the *LS* is similar to the narrative of Balaam, the Donkey, and the Angel in Numbers 22:22-35.[61] In both scenes, the person is on the way to a village with idol worshippers, when the journey is stopped by an invisible force. Balaam is stopped by an angel and Shenoute is stopped by magical potions; in both scenarios, it is the donkey that respectively evades or exposes the force. In another reference to Balaam, where the donkey refuses to move and Balaam is rebuked by the angel, the servant of Shenoute beats the donkey in order to make it move, and is chastised by Shenoute. The miracle is followed by the destruction of the idol. Shenoute enters the temple and smashes the idols to pieces. The destruction is presented as an act of religious violence, though unlike the *h.Mon.*, the idols are smashed instead of burned. Both the miracle and idol destruction are literary motifs

[58] *LS* 81-2.
[59] Lubomierski, *Die Vita Sinuthii,* 200: the three different versions of the text, Bohairic, Arabic, and Ethiopic, differ in what objects the villagers buried. The Arabic and Ethiopic versions state that magical books were buried, while the Bohairic version talks about potions.
[60] *LS* 83-4.
[61] As mentioned by Lopez, *Shenoute*, 121 and J.H.F. Dijkstra, '"I Wish to Offer a Sacrifice to God Today": The Discourse of Idol Destruction in the Coptic *Life of Aaron*', *JCSCS* 7 (2015) 63-77 at 68.

meant to emphasize the power of Shenoute and God, in order to demonstrate the dominance of Christianity.

In another account of idol destruction in the Bohairic version of the *LS*, Shenoute went to the city of Panopolis at night to take some idols located in the house of Gessios.[62] Gessios is mentioned previously in *LS* 88, and if it is the same man, he was the impious non-Christian who would curse against Christ, and was then punished by God.[63] During the night, Shenoute went with two other monks in order to take the idols from the house of Gessios. They went to the river and were able to cross the water without a ship and enter the city. When they arrived at the house, the doors began to open until they came to where the idols were. Shenoute and his companions took the idols to the river, smashed them to pieces, and then discarded the pieces in the water. After this, Shenoute and his companions returned to the monastery in the same way, crossing the river without a ship.[64]

Similar to the first account of idol destruction in the Bohairic version of the *LS*, the second account of Shenoute and the idols of Gessios uses the same literary motifs of a miracle and the destruction of idols. The account begins with Shenoute and his companions miraculously crossing the river, both ways, without a ship, and continues with the doors of Gessios' house opening for Shenoute until they reach the room with the idols. The miraculous opening of doors is a common motif in Christian literature and hagiography.[65] The use of the miracle is a way to demonstrate the support for this act by the Christian God, and leads to the idol destruction. Therefore, it is likely a literary trope used to embellish the actual events, rather than an accurate portrayal of the events. As seen in the first account of the idols at Pneueit, the idols taken from the house of Gessios are smashed and the pieces are discarded in the river. In this account of idol destruction, Shenoute is acting to protect the innocent and the idols are destroyed for religious reasons.[66] Shenoute believes

[62] He is known as Kesios and Gessios. We will adhere to the latter here.
[63] *LS* 88; S. Emmel, 'Panopolis', 101-5; S. Emmel, 'Shenoute of Atripe and the Christian Destruction of Temples in Egypt: Rhetoric and Reality', in J. Hahn, S. Emmel, and U. Gotter (eds.), *From Temple to Church: Destruction and Renewal of Local Cultic Topography in Late Antiquity* (Boston, 2008) 161-99 at 166: Gessios has been identified as Flavius Aelius Gessius, who had served as the governor of Panopolis at the end of the 370s.
[64] *LS* 125-7; Lubomierski, *Die Vita Sinuthii*, 190: all three versions, Bohairic, Arabic, and Ethiopic, document this event in a similar way.
[65] O. Weinreich, 'Türoffnung im Wunder-, Prodigien- und Zauberglauben der Antike, des Judentums und Christentums', in *Genethliakon. Wilhelm Schmid zum siebzigsten Geburtstag am 24. Februar 1929* (Stuttgart, 1929) 200-452 at 427-34, cited by Dijkstra, 'Sacrifice', 70.
[66] Emmel, 'Rhetoric', 168; Lopez, *Shenoute*, 12.

Gessios to be a false Christian, who secretly worships idols. Gessios is written as the antagonist in the story, while Shenoute acts as the protagonist. Shenoute denounces the superficial Christian society that is filled with non-Christians, and reveals Gessios to be a false Christian. Through the use of the literary motifs of the miracle and idol destruction, the author of the Bohairic *LS* is able to depict the image of Christian dominance in his account of Shenoute's interactions with the non-Christians.

In a fragment of the *Life of Shenoute* preserved in the Sahidic, Arabic, and Ethiopic versions, there is an account of Shenoute and an idol possessed by a demon at Panopolis.[67] An angel came to Shenoute telling him about a demon who was in a statue and made the citizens wander away from God. The angel told Shenoute how to call the demon from the statue, and if that would not work, they would set a fire that would burn inside the statue until the demon came out. After the angel had spoken to Shenoute, he was turned invisible and flew with the angel to the city. Shenoute, invisible to the crowd, stood next to the statue praying and calling the demon out. The demon rebuked Shenoute's words and told him to leave him be in the statue. Shenoute spoke a second time and the statue was set on fire. The demon came from the statue and became a tall creature, with the face of a lion. The demon agreed to reveal himself to the crowd if Shenoute would allow him to go to the Devil afterwards instead of being banished. He then revealed himself to the crowd in the city.[68]

The account of Shenoute and the idol at Panopolis contains some of the literary *topoi* used in the other accounts of idol destruction in the *LS* and seen in the account of Apollo in the *h.Mon.* The account begins with an element of the miraculous, when Shenoute is made invisible by an angel and flown to Panopolis. However, the miracle does not enable the destruction as seen in the previous accounts. Instead, the fire is used to force the demon out rather than destroy the statue. The use of fire against idols was seen previously in the *h.Mon.* and is a common literary motif. In the account of Shenoute and the idol at Panopolis, the story of the fire is similar to the fire sent from Heaven in 1 Kings 18:17-40.[69] Elijah orders two bulls to be killed and laid on wood, one for

[67] E. Amelineau, *Monuments pour servir à l'histoire de l'Égypte chrétienne aux IV, V, VI et VII siècles*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1888-1895) 1.439-46 (Arabic); Amelineau, *Monuments* 2, 644-7 (Sahidic); G. Colin, *La version éthiopienne de la vie de Schenoudi*, 2 vols (Leuven, 1982) 1.63-9 & 2.41-5 (Ethiopic).
[68] Amelineau, *Monuments* 2, 644-7 (Sahidic).
[69] As mentioned in Dijkstra, 'Sacrifice', 69, the Ethiopic version is the only version to clearly state that the fire used against the demon was sent from Heaven.

the priests of Baal to be put on the wood without fire. Elijah will do the same with his bull, and both groups will pray to their respective gods in order for them to start the fire. The priests of Baal sacrificed their bull and called to their god, but no fire was sent. After some time, when the priest had no response from their god, Elijah summoned all the people and told them to surround him. He laid twelve stones and built an altar to the Christian God. He laid down the wood, put the pieces of the bull on it, and filled the trench around the altar with water. Elijah prays to God and God replies by starting a fire at the altar, which causes the people to believe. The same story of prayer to the Christian God and answer in fire is used in the account of Shenoute and the demonic statue at Panopolis, suggesting that the story was simply a literary trope, which was borrowed from the biblical account.

The accounts that document events between Shenoute and non-Christian statues use many of the same literary tropes in their depiction of the events. In the Bohairic versions of Shenoute and the incident at Pneueit and the destruction of the idols of Gessios, the passages begin with a miraculous event that instigates the proceeding actions. The motif of the miraculous event is a common literary trope found earlier in the *h.Mon.* Likewise, the miracle causes the subsequent literary motif of the idol destruction, where the idols are destroyed by Shenoute and the pieces discarded in order to show the dominance of Christianity over other religions. The versions of the *Life of Shenoute* that preserve the fragment regarding Shenoute and the idol possessed by a demon at Panopolis do not follow the pattern used in the two passages containing idol destruction in the Bohairic version of the *Life*. In this account, the literary motif of a miraculous event is not followed by the destruction of the idol. However, this passage uses another common literary trope, the motif of fire, to force the demon from the statue. This is a reference to an earlier biblical account that uses the same motif of fire to demonstrate the power of the Christian God.

Macedonius and the Holy Falcon of Philae

The *Life of Aaron* is a sixth century CE Coptic hagiographical work that describes Christianity in southernmost Egypt from the perspective of a local monk. It is part of a tenth-century paper codex

held at the British Library.[70] The *Life of Aaron* focuses on the life of the central character, Aaron, as told by Isaac to Paphnutius. Paphnutius was a very common name during the fourth and fifth centuries CE, meaning the one belonging to God.[71] It is likely that the author was a local monk using the name Paphnutius as a way to authenticate the story.[72]

The narrative can be divided into three parts: First, Paphnutius meets with various monks, including Pseleusius in the Thebaid in Upper Egypt. Second, Isaac tells Paphnutius about the history of the bishops of Philae, and third, the life of Apa Aaron.[73] The *Life of Aaron* is focused on the life and works of Apa Aaron. Biographical information about Apa Aaron is limited, though the text states that he became a monk while Psoulousia was bishop of Philae.[74] Information contained in the text, such as the different stories about the bishops and the term 'pagarch', indicates that the text was written sometime after the fifth century.[75]

In section two, Aaron tells the story of Macedonius, the first bishop of Philae, to his disciple Isaac. According to the story, Macedonius was a wealthy Christian magistrate who was pagarch over the cities in southern Egypt.[76] On a visit to Philae, he was told that the majority of the people were non-Christians and worshipped idols. The Christians in the city were so oppressed that they were forced to celebrate Mass in secret. Macedonius reported what he had heard and witnessed to Athanasius in Alexandria, and was promptly appointed bishop. He returned to Philae and witnessed the people going into the temple to worship the idol, a falcon. He entered the temple

[70] In 1915, the Egyptologist E.A. Wallis Budge published and translated the Esna manuscripts as part of series of publications of Coptic literary manuscripts in the British Museum. Due to the lack of a formal title, Budge proposed the *Histories of the Monks in the Egyptian Desert*, though this title did not become the standard in academia. In 1993, T. Vivian proposed the name *Histories of the Monks of Upper Egypt*. Due to the loss of the title page of the original manuscript, the name of the author and title of the work is left to interpretation. In 2002, J.H.F. Dijkstra adopted the title *Life of Aaron*. In contrast to general histories of monks, such as those found in the *h.Mon.*, the *Life of Aaron* is centered around one character and reads more like a biography. The first critical edition of the text is currently in preparation by J.H.F. Dijkstra and J. van der Vliet. I have had the privilege of using the aforementioned translation throughout this thesis. For more information about the upcoming edition see J.H.F. Dijkstra, 'Monasticism on the Southern Egyptian Frontier in Late Antiquity: Towards a New Critical Edition of the Coptic Life of Aaron', *JCSCS* 5 (2013) 31-47.

[71] For an account of men named Paphnutius, see Dijkstra, *Philae*, 60, 98, 81, 234-52, 300, 334.

[72] See Dijkstra, 'Monasticism', 35-6.

[73] Vivian, *Histories*, 50-1; Dijkstra, *Philae*, 234-9.

[74] *LA* 79: 'For some days, the city was deprived of a bishop. Now there also lived on this island a monk whose name was Psoulousia, and everyone who knew him testified to his works. (It was in his episcopate that our father Apa Aaron led his monastic life.)'.

[75] Dijkstra, *Philae*, 231.

[76] *LA* 29: 'While I was still a magistrate and had started to obtain wealth, I went south, because I was pagarch over these cities'.

under the pretence of offering a sacrifice, and while the two sons of the temple priest were occupied with the fire, Macedonius removed the falcon from where it was, chopped off its head, and then threw it in the fire. After destroying the falcon idol, Macedonius left the temple. When the two sons saw what had happened they fled to the desert out of fear.[77]

The temple priest returned, only to find the falcon idol and his two sons missing. An old woman told the father of the two boys about what happened, and how his sons had fled. This conversation was overheard by a Christian who warned Macedonius of the priest's vow to kill him. Macedonius cursed the old woman and left the city. He retreated to the Valley, a nearby wadi, and had a dream where he saw a vision of a man standing beside two kneeling boys. In the vision, the boys were crowned and each given a staff. At first Macedonius was confused by the dream, until he hard a voice call out to him and tell him where to locate the two sons. He found the boy in the desert, weak from hunger and thirst, recognizing them from his dream. The sons told him of a vision they had where a man clothed in light appeared to them, with a book in his hand. The man was dressed in an elegant robe and made the elder son stand up and then dressed him in a tunic, after the oldest son wore the tunic for a short time, the man removed it and then did the same with the younger son.[78]

Macedonius took the two sons to live with him. Later he baptized them and gave them the new names Mark and Isaiah. The two sons embraced their new faith and were obedient to Macedonius, and after a few days he made Mark a priest and Isaiah a deacon.[79] Sometime after this, one day two Nubians were fighting near Macedonius over a camel that had broken the leg of another camel. Macedonius settled the argument by instructing Isaiah to sprinkle holy water over the broken leg of the camel and make the sign of the cross. After this, the leg of the camel was healed and rumours about this event were spread through Philae. After some time, the priest heard from some travellers about the location of his sons and how the younger had performed a miracle. He went to his sons and Macedonius, immediately surrendering. He was moved by the holy spirit and asked Macedonius to baptize him. Macedonius refused saying that the priest must first return to the city and build a church. After some time, when the church was built and Macedonius had

[77] *LA* 29-33.
[78] *LA* 34-40.
[79] *LA* 41-2.

been teaching in it for a period of time, he baptized the priest and named him Jacob before baptizing the rest of the population of the city.[80]

The account of the falcon and Macedonius contains many literary *topoi* seen in the earlier hagiographies of Apollo in the *h.Mon.* and the *Life of Shenoute*. However, unlike the other two hagiographies, the account does not begin with the motif of a miracle. The destruction of the idol is the first literary motif presented in this event. In this account, the idol destroyed by Macedonius is a living falcon. Dijkstra makes two observations about the scene in which the idol is destroyed: first, the scene bears many resemblances to the story of Jehu and the worship of Baal in 2 Kings. In this passage, Jehu, like Macedonius, deceives the priests by claiming to want to worship the god.[81] Likewise, both texts state that Macedonius and Jehu shrewdly lied to the priest, and the priest's sons, in order to destroy the idol.[82] In 2 Kings, Jehu assembles all the worshippers in the temple and begins to make a burnt offering, but then summons his men to come and kill everyone. After this, Jehu burns the sacred pillar of the god Baal and destroys the temple.[83] In the story of Macedonius in the *Life of Aaron,* however, only the falcon is killed and then burned in the fire. After the conversion of the two sons, the non-Christians and temple priest are given the chance to convert to Christianity.

Dijkstra's second observation is that the text is about the worship of living animals, mainly the cult of the sacred falcon at Philae.[84] The author of the *Life of Aaron*, uses the motif of idol destruction by referring to the falcon as an idol. Although it is only called an idol once in the text, the decapitation of the bird by Macedonius before burning it, suggests that it was a live falcon. After the destruction of the falcon idol, the literary motif of miracles is used, when the broken leg of the camel is healed by Macedonius and Isaiah. Though the motif of the miracle is used after the idol destruction, it leads to the same outcome, the conversion of the local non-Christians. The motif of conversion after both a miraculous event and idol destruction, was previously seen in the account of Apollo in the *h.Mon.* Likewise, the method of idol destruction shares a striking resemblance to a biblical account, a trope previously attested in the account of the destruction of

[80] *LA* 48-51.
[81] Dijkstra. 'Sacrifice', 66.
[82] *LA* 31: 'Now I, Macedonius, went up to them and using deceit spoke with them'. 2 Kings 10:19: 'But Jehu was acting with cunning in order to destroy the worshippers of Baal.' (translation: NRSV).
[83] Dijkstra. 'Sacrifice', 66; 2 Kings 10:18-28.
[84] Dijkstra. 'Sacrifice', 67.

the idols at Pneueit (The story of Balaam's Ass). All of the literary motifs used in the account of Macedonius are adapted to fit the circumstances of the story in the *Life of Aaron*. The use of these literary tropes suggests that it is likely that the account is an embellished version of actual events.

Macarius and the Idols of Kothos

The Coptic hagiographical work known as *Panegyric on Macarius*, is attributed to Dioscorus of Alexandria, who was bishop of Alexandria from 444 until 451 CE. The manuscript, in which the story survives, comes from a sermon about the death of Macarius. Dioscorus delivered this sermon during his exile in Gangra, and Theopistus and Peter later committed the sermon to writing.[85] The authenticity of the text has been called into question by scholars based on some of the material presented in the work.[86] In chapter five of volume one of the *Panegyric*, Macarius and a few of his monks destroy the cult of Kothos by burning down its temple.[87]

There was a village located west where the people worshipped in the niches of their houses. When they entered through the door, they would bow their heads and worship the idol Kothos.[88] Some priests came and told Macarius about how the non-Christians would seize the children of the Christians and sacrifice them to the idol Kothos, pouring their blood on the altar. Some of the non-Christians were arrested and admitted, without being tortured, that they would trick the Christian children and hide them so no one could hear or find them. Then they would kill the children, pouring out their blood, taking their intestines to make harp strings and sing to their god. The remains of the children's bodies were then burned and their ashes scattered.[89]

After Macarius had heard these things, he went walking with two priests and the author until they came to the temple of Kothos. The priests with Macarius asked him not to go inside, but Macarius stated that he would stop the non-Christians even if it cost him his life. However, before

[85] D.W. Johnson, *A Panegyric on Macarius, Bishop of Tkow*, 2 vols. (Louvain, 1980) 1.9.
[86] The first critical study of the *Panegyric* was presented by F. Haase, 'Patriarch Dioskur I. von Alexandria', *Kirchengeschichtliche Abhandlungen* 6 (1908) 165-75.
[87] *Pan.* 5.1-11.
[88] See D. Frankfurter, 'Illuminating the Cult of Kothos', in J.E. Goehring and J.A. Timbie (eds.), *The World of Early Egyptian Christianity: Language, Literature, and Social Context: Essays in Honor of David W. Johnson* (Washington, 2007) 176-89, for information about the god Kothos.
[89] *Pan.* 5.1-2.

Macarius could reach the door of the temple, the demon who dwelled inside the idol of Kothos cried out, saying to cast out Macarius. The demon had felt a tremor when he saw Macarius, and if Macarius spent more time near him, the demon would leave and they would not be able to find him again. When the non-Christians heard the demon's words, they came out with rakes and the wives threw stones at Macarius and his companions. They questioned Macarius and said he had no business at their temple, because they knew he hated their god. Macarius responded to them by questioning their actions against the Christian children. When the non-Christians denied the accusation, Macarius asked to be allowed inside the temple so he could verify that they were telling the truth.[90] When Macarius entered the temple with his companions, the non-Christians attacked and tied the group up. They planned to offer them as a sacrifice when the high priest, Homer, arrived at the temple.[91]

The companions of Macarius were afraid, but Macarius continued to keep his faith in God. At the same moment, he spoke to the author about trusting God, Besa, the disciple of Shenoute, knocked on the temple doors. When Besa was refused entry, he prayed to God, and the temple doors opened. Besa entered with fourteen other monks, and the non-Christians in the temple were paralyzed with fear and unable to move. The chains, which had bound Macarius and the others, miraculously fell off. Besa suggested that either he or Macarius pray while the other burned the temple, but Macarius replied that they should both pray. As they prayed together, a voice from heaven warned them to leave the temple and save themselves. Once they had left, God sent a miraculous fire that burned the temple to its foundations.[92]

When the temple had been burned to its foundations, Macarius cursed the land so that nothing would be able to grow there, and only serpents and other beasts would breed there. At the same time, a demon possessed a non-Christian man. The man ran to the village and warned all the non-Christians to leave before Macarius and Besa came to their village. After cursing the land, Macarius, Besa, and their companions continued to walk towards the village. On their way, they met the high priest, Homer. Macarius ordered his companions to capture Homer, who was praying for Kothos to save him, so that he could be burned alive with his god. The group proceeded into

[90] *Pan.* 5.5-6: the text states that the two priests accompanying Macarius were too afraid to enter the temple and stayed outside, but later it states that there were four Christians inside.
[91] *Pan.* 5.3-6.
[92] *Pan.* 5.7-9.

the village, where the Christians greeted them by singing psalms. Macarius commanded for a fire to be started, and they threw Homer into it, along with all the idols the Christians had found in his house. After these events, some of the non-Christians choose to convert and are baptized, while the others leave the village with their idols.[93]

The *Panegyric* contains all the literary *topoi* previously seen in the earlier hagiographies. There are two miracles, first, the miraculous opening of the temple doors for Besa, previously seen in the account of Shenoute and Gessios' statues in the Bohairic version of the *LS*. The second miracle is the fire sent from God to burn the temple, another trope seen in the account of the statue at Panopolis in the Sahidic version of the *LS*. These miracles are followed by the motif of idol destruction, which is expanded in the *Panegyric* to include a temple destruction and burning of the high priest. In the account of the *Panegyric*, there are multiple mentions of non-Christian idol destructions and at the end of the narration of the destruction of the temple and god Kothos, three hundred and six non-Christians idols are mentioned as being found and destroyed after the citizens of the village convert or leave, respectively. [94] Unlike the other hagiographies previously analyzed, the author does not go into detail about their destruction, as it is one of three destructions. Following the miracles and destructions, the author uses the literary trope of conversion, as the villagers either choose to join the Christians or leave the village.

Moses of Abydos and Demons

The *Life of Moses* is a hagiographical work written after the death of Moses in ca. 550 CE. The work is only preserved in fragments and there is no detailed study of the source. Moses was born to a Christian family, and was the youngest of six children. The earliest date for the birth of Moses is 466 CE, the year Shenoute died, as the *Life of Moses* documents that Shenoute announced the birth of Moses before he died. The latest date for his death is 550 CE, which is derived from information in the *LM*. There was a confrontation between the emperor Justinian and the monk Abraham of Farshut, which took place sometime between 537 and 548.[95] Before the death of the

[93] *Pan.* 5.9-11.
[94] *Pan.* 5.10-11.
[95] J.E. Goehring, 'Chalcedonian Power Politics and the Demise of Pachomian Monasticism', *Occasional Papers for the Institute for Antiquity and Christianity* 15 (1989) 1-20 at 9.

Empress Theodora in 548, Abraham was in Constantinople before he went to the White Monastery in Atripe. At the monastery, Abraham copied the canons of Shenoute and sent them to the monastery of Saint Abu Masis.[96] Though the Alexandrian *Synaxarium* does not mention Moses, after Abraham had sent Shenoute's canons and had come to the monastery, he was greeted by an unnamed superior member of the monastery, presumed to be Moses.[97] In the *Life of Moses*, he is portrayed as a respected leader and the person who continued Shenoute's legacy of opposition against non-Christians in Egypt. Of the known fragments, two are relevant to the use of literary motifs in passages about idol and temple destructions in hagiographies.

In the first, which is about a temple destruction,[98] forty armed men are sent to ambush and kill Moses and the members of his community. Moses and four others, Apa Elijah, Apa Paul, Apa Andrew, and Apa Abraham, went to the hill. One of their brothers, Apa Joseph, who was in the village, had heard about the plan to ambush the monks, and went to warn them. Moses and his companions stayed on the hill through the night and prayed. An angel spoke to Moses and told him to be strong and pray for the temple of Apollo to be destroyed. Moses listened and prayed for God to destroy the temple. As Moses prayed, the temple began to shake and the non-Christians fled in fear. Only the priests stayed, as they believed that their god would protect them. The temple fell and killed the men inside, twenty-three priests and seven ministers. At dawn, another four temples were miraculously destroyed and the non-Christians of the community converted to Christianity.

The second fragment,[99] is about Moses and a demon. Citizens from two villages came to Moses and asked him for his help because a demon, named Bes, had entered a temple near the monastery. The demon would harm the people walking by, causing blindness, deafness, and other ailments. After hearing this, Moses went with some of his brothers, who were strong in their faith. The author states that he was among the chosen monks, which included Paul, Andrew, Elijah, Joseph, Psate, and Phoebamon. Moses told them to pray to God, and as they began the ground beneath them began to shake. The group also heard lightning and thunder. Moses told them not to

[96] M.R. Moussa, 'Apa Moses of Abydos', unpublished MA thesis (Washington, 1998) 53.
[97] Moussa, 'Moses', 53.
[98] M.R. Moussa, 'The Coptic Literary Dossier of Apa Moses of Abydos', *Coptic Church Review* 24 (2003) 66-90 at 79-80.
[99] Moussa, 'Coptic Literary Dossier', 83-4.

be afraid and explained that the sounds were deceptions sent by the demon. The group continued to pray until the middle of the night when the demon addressed them. He asked how long Moses would keep troubling him, and stated that he was not afraid of Moses or of the group's prayers. The demon then began to scream like an animal and shake the ground, but, Moses continued to be strong and encourage his companions to keep faith because God would see things through. The fragment breaks off here after Moses encourages his companions, and the ending of the story is unknown.

Though these accounts do not contain the destruction of an idol, they encompass other literary *topoi* that were visible in the previous hagiographies. The second fragment, as seen in the account of Shenoute and the demon at Panopolis, uses the motif of a demon hurting the innocent. Due to the fragmentary nature of the source, the events after Moses and his companions continue to pray are unknown. However, based on the other hagiographies and the previous account in the *Life of Moses*, it can be assumed that the account continued in a similar manner and would have used other literary motifs such as idol or temple destruction and conversion. Both accounts contain literary motifs adapted to fit the new narrative.

Conclusion

The five Christian texts analyzed in this chapter all contain literary *topoi* in their accounts. As demonstrated, many of these hagiographies use similar motifs when documenting interactions with non-Christians. The literary motifs of miracles, idol destruction, and conversion, are prevalent in the texts and at least one, if not all, are used by the authors. The account of Apollo, in the *History of the Monks in Egypt*, is the earliest hagiography to use a combination of the motifs. The account provides a basic literary formula that is found in many of the following hagiographies, consisting of: a miracle, the destruction of an idol, and the subsequent conversion of the local non-Christians.[100] This pattern is used in the *Life of Aaron*, modified and adapted to fit the narration. However, the miracle occurs after the destruction of the idol, though it has the same outcome, which is the conversion of the non-Christians. The pattern is subsequently used in the *Panegyric on Macarius*, but expanded to include the burning of the temple, high priest, and all the village

[100] Dijkstra, 'Sacrifice', 70.

idols, in addition to a miracle and conversion. All the accounts of idol destruction in the *Life of Shenoute* contain the literary motif of a miracle that precedes the destruction. Likewise, the fragments from the *Life of Moses* use the motif of miracles in the form of conversion after the destruction.

In order to give authority to the texts, the narrative must be set in a background containing standard literary *topoi*. The accounts portray a world that is full of darkness and evil people, which only a holy man or saint can conquer and save through a conversion to Christianity.[101] The accounts often include historical people used as 'stock dramatic foils', as demonstrated in the *Life of Shenoute* through the conflict between Shenoute and the non-Christian, Gessios.[102] Each text uses the basic formula with the literary *topoi* and creates a new story from this foundation.[103] All five hagiographies use a combination of common literary *topoi*. Together these sources may suggest a world of widespread religious violence, mainly in the form of idol destruction. However, the prevalent use of similar literary *topoi* in all the sources casts doubt on the validity of the source as an accurate account of the events, and suggests that the picture of religious violence in these stories is nothing more than a literary trope meant to demonstrate the dominance of Christianity. In Egypt, the many accounts by the Christian sources were written with specific intentions and the events documented in the literary texts were often exaggerated and embellished. As a comparison with other literary texts and archaeology will demonstrate, religious violence occurred in specific circumstances for various reasons and differed according to region and date.

[101] M.W. Dickie, 'Narrative Patterns in Christian Hagiography', *GRBS* 40 (1999) 83-98 at 87.
[102] D. Frankfurter, 'Hagiography and the Reconstruction of Local Religion in Late Antique Egypt: Memories, Inventions, and Landscapes', in J.H.F. Dijkstra and M. Van Dijk (eds.) *The Encroaching Desert: Egyptian Hagiography and the Medieval west* (Leiden, 2006) 13-38 at 19.
[103] Dijkstra, 'Sacrifice', 70-1.

Chapter Two
Other Evidence on the Idol Destructions at Panopolis and Philae

Introduction

The accounts in the Christian hagiographical works, which use the passages of statue destruction that contain typical literary motifs such as miracles, the fire from heaven, and conversion, present a world filled with acts of religious violence against non-Christians. These sources use such *topoi* to persuade their audience of the dominance of Christianity. This chapter will address what information can be inferred from other sources when compared with the hagiographical works analyzed in the previous chapter. As this analysis will show, consulting other sources that document the events described in the hagiographies demonstrates that these events portrayed as religious violence were exaggerated and altered to fit the ideological agendas of the authors. A closer look at other evidence concerning the incidents of Shenoute in the region of Panopolis and Macedonius and the sacred falcon at Philae, provides a more nuanced picture that demonstrates that the perception of widespread violence in Late Antique Egypt is inaccurate and often these events need to be viewed in their socio-political context in addition to their religious framework.

This chapter omits the account of Apollo of Hermopolis studied in the previous chapter, because the *History of the Monks in Egypt* is the only source to document Apollo and the idol destruction. There are no alternative literary sources or archaeological evidence regarding this event, to consult in order to verify whether the incident happened as described by the author. The god that the idol depicted along with the associated cult is unknown and therefore there are no other sources to provide additional information, though it is likely that this passage like other hagiographies is an embellished account of true events. Likewise, the account of Macarius and the demon Kothos from the *Panegyric on Macarius* is omitted as there is no other evidence that demonstrates that the events actually occurred. This chapter also omits the account of Shenoute and the demon at Panopolis from the Sahidic and Arabic translations of the *Life of Shenoute* and the narrative of Moses of Abydos and the demon in the *Life of Moses*. These accounts are not studied in this chapter because there is no evidence to support that these narratives occurred, as they are typical examples of stories concerning the driving away of demons.

Shenoute: Pneueit, Atripe, and the Idols of Gessios

The *Life of Shenoute* depicts several acts of violence undertaken by Shenoute against non-Christians. In the previous chapter, these accounts were summarized and analyzed to demonstrate their literary nature. This chapter will look at the works written by Shenoute himself in order to determine whether they provide additional information about these events. In a study of Shenoute, Johannes Leipoldt portrayed him as a religious fanatic seeking to destroy all non-Christian temples.[104] It is Leipoldt's depiction of a violent Shenoute that persists in many studies of him, as seen in the translation of the Bohairic *Life of Shenoute* by D. Bell, which utilized the earlier work of E. Amelineau, describing him as an 'erupting volcano'.[105] S. Emmel has contested this view of a violent Shenoute in his extensive work on Shenoute and his literary corpus.[106]

Emmel's study of an untitled lectionary, written by Shenoute, shows that there are only three incidents of violence against temples and idols documented in his works.[107] One is the case of a temple destruction at Atripe, which resulted in the destruction of the idols and the burning of the temple. The second is the destruction of a temple at Pneueit, an event in which Shenoute was only indirectly involved. The final incident is the destruction of the idols of Gessios, in which Shenoute confirms his involvement. The only manuscript containing this passage ends abruptly after the three deeds, and if it continues, the remaining contents are unknown.[108] When we compare this evidence from Shenoute's work with what was written about the same events in the *Life of Shenoute*, the manuscript contains information that corrects what we know of about two acts of violence by Shenoute mentioned in the *LS*, the destruction of the idols and temple at Pneueit, and the destruction of the idols of Gessios. The manuscript also contains new information confirming

[104] J. Leipoldt, *Schenute von Atripe und die Entstehung des national ägyptischen Christentums* (Leipzig, 1903) 175: 'Die Kopten seiner Zeit hatten aber nur Eine Leidenschaft: das war der Haß gegen die 'Hellenen', die Heiden. Und diesen Haß hat Schenute rastlos geschürt, hat aus ihm die lodernde Flamme erweckt, die einen Göttertempel nach dem anderen einäscherte.'; translated by Dijkstra, 'Religious Violence', 32-3: 'The Copts of his time had only one passion: this was the hatred against the 'Greeks', the pagans. And this hatred restlessly stirred up Shenoute and aroused in him the blazing flame to reduce one temple after the other to ashes'.

[105] Bell, *Life*, 9 paraphrasing E. Amélineau, *Les moines égyptiens: Vie de Schnoudi* (Paris, 1889) 58: 'Un volcan n'est jamais plus beau que lorsqu'il vomit le feu, les cendres et les laves. Le spectacle est imposant, mais il est horrible et malsain'; Dijkstra, 'Religious Violence', 33.

[106] See S. Emmel, *Shenoute's Literary Corpus*, 2 vols. (Leuven, 2004); Emmel, 'Rhetoric'.

[107] Emmel, 'Rhetoric', 162-3.

[108] Emmel, 'Rhetoric', 163: the context around Shenoute's claim of acting properly suggests that this passage was written during a time when Shenoute's actions were questioned by the authorities.

Shenoute's involvement in the destruction of the temple of Atripe, which is not mentioned in the Bohairic version of the *LS*.

Shenoute has often been credited with the destruction and dismantling of the temple in Atripe.[109] Though this event is absent from the *LS*, Shenoute refers to the destruction of the temple at Atripe three times in his own works: first in an unnamed lectionary that contains parts of Shenoute's work,[110] second in Shenoute's *De iudicio*,[111] and finally in his *Let Our Eyes*.[112] The first reference to the burning of a temple in Atripe, found in the untitled lectionary confirms Shenoute's involvement in his own words, 'For I have done nothing in a disorderly fashion: neither the time we burned the pagan temple in Atripe'.[113] The second reference to the destruction of a temple at Atripe from *De iudicio* supports the fragment from the unnamed lectionary. Shenoute writes, 'We burned that place of idols with fire along with everything that was in it'.[114] The final reference from *Let Our Eyes*, provides additional information about the temple of Atripe, mainly that there were idols within the temple: 'We smashed them (idols) in the temple that we burned along with everything inside it'.[115] According to the fragment, these idols were smashed by Shenoute before they were burned within the temple. Based on the phrasing used in the text, Emmel believes that there may only have been one temple that Shenoute burned himself.

There is, however, no other information regarding this event at present although the temple has been identified as the temple of the goddess Triphis, which existed in Atripe during the fourth century CE.[116] Archaeological evidence demonstrates that Shenoute never burned the entire temple, as it was a monumental stone structure. It would not have been possible for it to burn completely as described by Shenoute, as the structure did not contain any wooden elements. Egyptian temples were made of stone, with the exception of the doors, which were constructed with wood.[117] Thus, it is likely that he started a fire inside the temple to burn the cult idols and

[109] Leipoldt, *Schenute von Atripe*, 92-93; cf. Dijkstra, 'Religious Violence', 32.
[110] J. Leipoldt, *Sinuthii archimandritae vita et opera omnia*, 3 vols. (Leuven, 1908) 3;91.
[111] H. Behlmer, *Schenute von Atripe*, De iudicio *(Torino, Museo Egizio, Cat. 63000, Cod. IV)* (Turin, 1996) 113-4.
[112] *Let Our Eyes* fr. 2.10.
[113] Leipoldt, *Sinuthii*, 3:91.
[114] Behlmer, *Schenute*, 113-4.
[115] *Let Our Eyes* fr. 2.10.
[116] Behlmer, *Schenute*, lxi; Emmel, 'Rhetoric', 164.
[117] R. el-Sayed, *Athribis I, General Site Survey 2003-2007, Archaeological & Conservation Studies: The Gate of Ptolemy IX: Architecture and Inscriptions*, 2 vols. (Le Caire, 2012) 1.29.

other perishable ritual items.[118] Likewise, he did not completely dismantle the temple. A study shows that the *spolia* reused in the White Monastery were derived from monuments, including a few slabs from the roof of the temple of Atripe, which were likely removed for the specific reuse in the monastery staircase, but there is no evidence of large-scale reuse of the temple materials in the monastery.[119] The temple was incorporated into the nunnery and was used from the fifth century to the early Arab period.[120]

The second act, which is somewhat connected with the destruction of the temple at Pneueit written in the *LS*, is briefly mentioned in the manuscript. It is mentioned that in the region of Hermopolis and Antinoopolis, there was a temple destroyed by Christians, who were later taken to court. Shenoute's use of the words ⲕⲉ and ⲣⲱⲟⲩ, according to Emmel, indicate that he was not directly involved with the destruction of the temple, but acted as an advocate for the accused Christians and accompanied them to court.[121] The events at Pneueit are complicated and confusing, so Emmel does not deal with them further in his analysis. What is clear is that the event as portrayed in the *LS* is inaccurate as Shenoute was not himself responsible for the destruction of the temple at Pneueit, but was indirectly involved through his support of the responsible people by accompanying them to court.

The final act of violence mentioned in the unnamed lectionary and the *LS* concerns the well-known account of Shenoute and the idols of Gessios.[122] Shenoute refers to the incident documented in *LS* 125-7 in *Let Our Eyes*.[123] In the manuscript, Shenoute defends his actions against Gessios, specifically the theft of the idols from his house, 'what is the sin that I have committed, or how was it wrong for me to remove idols from the house of a godless man?'.[124] Shenoute's words confirm that the event documented in the *LS* did occur. His account in *Let Our*

[118] El-Sayed, *Athribis I*, 1.29: The fire was not one meant to destroy, but purify so that the temple could be converted into a suitable place for Christian religion.
[119] D. Klotz, 'Triphis in the White Monastery: Reused Temple Blocks from Sohag', *AncSoc* 40 (2010) 197–213 at 208; el-Sayed, *Athribis I*, 1.24-9; Dijkstra, 'Religious Violence', 32-3.
[120] R. el-Sayed, 'Schenute und die Tempel von Atripe: zur Umnutzung des Triphisbezirks in der Spätantike', in H. Knuf, C. Leitz, and D. Von Recklinghausen (eds.), *Honi soit qui mal y pense: Studien zum pharaonischen, griechisch-römischen und spätantiken Ägypten zu Ehren von Heinz-Josef Thissen* (Leuven, 2010) 519-38; el-Sayed, *Athribis I*, 1.29.
[121] Emmel, 'Rhetoric', 165.
[122] Emmel, 'Panopolis', 101-5; Emmel, 'Rhetoric', 166.
[123] Emmel, 'Rhetoric', 167: the fragment known as *Let Our Eyes* is presented as an open letter to the people of Panopolis.
[124] *Let Our Eyes* fr. 1.10 (trans. Emmel).

Eyes fr. 1.21-4 and 2.3-4, resembles the one preserved in the different versions of the *LS* and may well have been the original source:

> ...but that we opened those great doors that were very securely fastened...we opened them as the Lord ordained-and that the door by which we entered the private chamber on the [second storey, where] those [vain] things were kept, popped out.[125]

> ...the doors of the house opened immediately one after another until they entered the place where the idols were.[126]

In *Let Our Eyes* fr. 2.3, Shenoute writes that he is able to enter into the house of Gessios and open the various doors, which lead to the idols, with the help of God. In the *LS*, the author's depiction of the event implies that the doors opened by themselves in a miraculous manner, a motif previously used in the Bible.[127] It is likely that the author of the *LS* adapted the story from the manuscript, written by Shenoute, and embellished it to fit the hagiography by placing an emphasis on the miraculous manner in which the doors were opened. Even though the hagiographer added embellishments to the narrative, Shenoute confirms that he entered into Gessios' house and stole the idols, prior to their destruction.

In *Let Our Eyes*, Shenoute describes the idols found in the house. There is an image of Kronos, other unnamed demons, and images of bald priests who hold altars in their hands.[128] He writes that these idols were those that were also found in the temple before they were ordered to be destroyed, referring to the temple at Atripe that was previously burned by Shenoute. Shenoute places emphasis on 'the image of Kronos', which is mentioned again with an image of Hecate.[129] At the end of the work, before it abruptly ends, Shenoute draws attention to 'the image of Zeus'.[130] Shenoute states that these idols are the gods of Gessios. He worships them by lighting lamps, offering incense on altars, and breaking bread for them.[131] Shenoute mentions Kronos twice in the manuscript *Let Our Eyes*, and associates him with Petbe, the Egyptian god of protection. Shenoute

[125] *Let Our Eyes* fr. 2.3.
[126] *LS* 126.
[127] Mentioned in Emmel, 'Rhetoric', 177; cf. Acts 5:19, 12:10, 16:26.
[128] *Let Our Eyes* fr. 1.3.
[129] *Let Our Eyes* fr. 1.10; see J.N. Bremmer, 'Remember the Titans!' in C. Auffarth and L.T. Stuckenbruck (eds.), *The Fall of the Angels* (Leiden, 2004) 35-62 at 45; M.E. Williams, 'Hecate in Egypt', *Folklore* 52 (1942) 112-3.
[130] *Let Our Eyes* fr. 2.12.
[131] *Let Our Eyes* fr. 1.21.

turns Petbe, who was popular during the Roman period, into an evil god by merging him with Kronos, who ate his children.[132] Kronos and Hecate are deities that are associated with evil and sinister cult practices, and by drawing attention to the possession of idol in their form, Shenoute emphasizes the wickedness of Gessios. Zeus is a widely-worshipped god in Greco-Roman religion and it is possible that by mentioning his name Shenoute is adding credibility to his accusations of idol worship by Gessios.

The raid on Gessios' house was the climax of a conflict between Shenoute and Gessios.[133] Shenoute refers to a previous discussion with Gessios in *Let Our Eyes* fr. 1.3, when he accuses Gessios of previously lying about having idols in his house.[134] Before the raid mentioned in the *LS*, Shenoute had once before searched the house of Gessios, but was unable to find anything of importance.[135] This is supported by Shenoute's writing in *Let Our Eyes* when he first describes the idols found during the second raid on Gessios, mainly an image of Kronos and other demons. The second raid served the purpose of exposing Gessios and his worship of idols. Emmel suggests that Gessios was not a prominent non-Christian within the community, but instead was pretending to be Christian. By entering his house and removing the idols, Shenoute was able to expose him as a non-Christian to the public.[136] Though the evidence confirms that Shenoute intentionally destroyed the idols of Gessios, the other sources provide additional information regarding the motivation behind the destruction. The destruction of the idols was not a random act of religious violence, but part of a political conflict between the monastic leader with the elite members of the city of Panopolis on the other side of the Nile.[137] The idols were destroyed in order that Shenoute could reveal that Gessios was lying about being a Christian and still practiced idol worship.

Although the passages of idol destruction in the *Life of Shenoute* are based on actual events, the depiction of Shenoute as a religious fanatic responsible for the destructions of multiple temples is inaccurate. There is no mention of the destruction of the temple at Atripe in the *LS*, though

[132] D. Frankfurter, '"Things Unbefitting Christians": Violence and Christianization in Fifth-Century Panopolis', *JECS* 8 (2000) 273-95 at 280.
[133] Emmel, 'Rhetoric', 171: It is unknown how the conflict between Gessios and Shenoute began, though it is assumed that Shenoute chose to make an example out of him due to his prominent position within the community.
[134] See J.W.B. Barns, 'Shenute as a Historical Source', in J. Wolski (ed.) *Actes du Xe Congres International de Papyrologues* (Wroclaw, 1964) 151-9; Emmel, 'Rhetoric', 171.
[135] Emmel, 'Rhetoric', 171.
[136] Emmel, 'Panopolis', 108-11.
[137] Emmel, 'Panopolis', 107-8; López, *Shenoute of Atripe and the Uses of Poverty*, 102–26, with the review of this book by J.H.F. Dijkstra, *VChr* 69 (2015) 97-101.

Shenoute confirms his involvement in his own works. The events at Pneueit are unclear, though it is likely that the event as described in the various versions of the *LS* are embellished accounts of the incident. The lack of evidence suggests that there may have been a destruction of a temple at Pneuiet, in which Shenoute was only indirectly involved as an advocate for the responsible party.[138] In a similar manner, the other sources which document interactions between Gessios and Shenoute provide additional information in regard to the motive behind the raid and destruction of the idols. In his writings, Shenoute confirms that he removed the idols from the house of Gessios, although there is no mention of how they were destroyed it is assumed that they were discarded in the river. Rather than an act of religious violence, Shenoute's actions were politically motivated when placed in the context of a power struggle between the two.[139]

The acts of violence contained in the passages of idol destruction of the *LS* are exaggerations of the actual events. Shenoute's response to the accusations in his letter *Let Our Eyes* is evidence that the portrayal of the events in the hagiography differs from the real events. In *Let Our Eyes*, the event where Shenoute went before a judge in Hermopolis due to a complaint lodged against thim for the destruction of a temple somewhere in that region, states that Shenoute acted as advocate for the people in regards to the temple destruction at Pneueit, contrary to his depiction in the *LS* where he destroys the temple at Pneueit. While the letter confirms that he was actively involved in the destruction of Gessios' idols and was involved in the destruction of the temple of Atripe, an event that is absent from the hagiography, the *LS* embellishes these events to portray Shenoute as a hero. Evidence from Shenoute's own works and archaeological evidence provides a different portrayal of Shenoute and his involvement in the events, demonstrating that the depiction of Shenoute as a crusader involved in numerous acts of religious violence against non-Christian artifacts is inaccurate and an exaggerated version of the events adapted to fit the hagiography.

Macedonius and the Sacred Falcon of Philae

[138] Emmel, *Literary Corpus*, 2;618-9; Emmel, 'Rhetoric', 165.
[139] Lopez, *Shenoute*, 102-26, with the review of this book by Dijkstra, *VChr* 69 (2015): 97-101.

The second case that we will study is that of the Macedonius and the falcon of Philae. The story of Macedonius in the *Life of Aaron* contains one episode of idol destruction. Unlike the idols in the other texts that were analyzed, this bird idol is a live falcon. Animal cults were common throughout Greco-Roman Egypt, and the animals themselves were often kept in the temples.[140] These animals were considered the living incarnation of a specific deity, and there were different sacred animals associated with various gods and cities.[141] Falcons were mainly worshipped in Athribis, Edfu, and Philae, where it was connected to kingship because Horus was the successor of Osiris on earth.[142] The falcon cult held an important place in Athribis in the temple of Ptolemy XII.[143] The temple at Edfu was considered the most important site for the cult of Horus, the falcon god, in Egypt and falcons were also bred here.[144] The temple and cult of Isis at Philae was one of the most important, and is related to the falcon identified with Horus, who is the son of Isis. Together, Osiris, Isis, and Horus are the triad of gods worshipped at Philae.[145] As we have seen, in the *LA* Macedonius removes the live bird from its cage and throws it in the fire, after chopping off its head.

The passage about Macedonius and the destruction of the falcon at Philae is a well known story. However, like the previous texts, the author's embellished depiction of the events cannot be mistaken for realistic account of the events. The story contains many literary *topoi*, two of which are the burning of the idol and the conversion of the priest's sons and the non-Christian population. The literary context suggests that the conversion of the non-Christians was used as a way to demonstrate the transformation from a non-Christian past to a new Christian present to a much later sixth-century audience.[146] It is not a reflection of the historical reality as the hagiography suggests that the cult ended sometime in the fourth century while Macedonius was alive, but non-

[140] Dijkstra, 'Horus', 7.
[141] F. Scalf, 'The Role of Birds within the Religious Landscape of Ancient Egypt', in R. Bailleul-LeSuer (ed.), *Between Heaven and Earth: Birds in Ancient Egypt* (Chicago, 2012) 33-40 at 36.
[142] P. Dils, 'Les cultes des animaux', in H. Willems and W. Clarysse (eds.), *Les Empereurs du Nil* (Leuven, 2000) 119-22; Dijkstra, *Philae*, 209.
[143] el-Sayed, *Athribis I*, 14-5: the falcon was worshipped independently from his role in the triad with Osiris and Isis. The temple of Ptolemy XII was a centre of falcon worship based on the inscriptions in Greek and Demotic on the temple walls. There is also a separate bird cemetery on a rock gallery of the quarry area in the western mountain range.
[144] M. Alliot, *Le culte d'Horus a Edfu au temps des Ptolemées* (Cairo, 1949); Dijkstra, 'Horus', 7.
[145] Dijkstra, *Philae*, 209.
[146] Dijkstra, *Philae*, 243; Dijkstra, 'Monasticism', 38.

Christian cults continued to exist until the mid-fifth century, and there is evidence for the existence of the falcon cult during the fifth century. [147]

The author of the *Life of Aaron* uses the motif of idol destruction by referring to the falcon as an idol. Although it is only called an idol once, the need to decapitate the bird before burning it suggests it was a live falcon. Since the idol in this case is a live bird, no archaeological evidence of it would remain. The bird, however, was worshipped in a 'demonic cage',[148] and Macedonius opened the cage before burning the bird.[149] The temple is presumed to be the temple of Isis at Philae, based on information from the text, because Macedonius sees the people enter the temple and later goes 'in the temple' himself to sacrifice the falcon.[150] The temple of Isis at Philae is located on the southern frontier of Egypt, and because of its location, it remained open later than other Egyptian temples.[151] The last inscriptions written in the Ancient Egyptian scripts, hieroglyphic and Demotic, which date to 394 and 452, are found in the temple.

The layout of the temple of Isis at Philae is similar to the temple of the falcon in Edfu, and the bird would be shown each year between the two towers of the first pylon inside the temple of Isis at Philae.[152] In order for the falcon to be visible to the people, a structure on the balcony between the two towers is necessary.[153] A study made by Dijkstra of the temple of Isis in December 2001 led to the discovery of four postholes in the balcony that could have supported the structure needed for the falcon cage.[154] Dijkstra equates this window with the 'demonic cage' written in the *Life of Aaron*.[155] If a falcon was shown in this location, between the two towers of the first pylon, it would have been visible to the people in order for them to worship, but this was not where the falcon was permanently kept.

[147] The story of Macedonius is situated the fourth century based on information provided by the text. He is attested as a bishop by Athanasius in one of his works, dating him to ca. 343 CE.
[148] L.S.B. MacCoull, 'Christianity at Syene/Elephantine/Philae', *BASP* 27 (1990) 151-62 at 159; Dijkstra, 'Horus', 8-9.
[149] *LA* 31.
[150] Dijkstra, 'Horus', 9.
[151] Dijkstra, 'Religious Violence', 39.
[152] H. Junker, *Der grosse Pylon des Tempels der Isis in Philä* (Wien, 1958) 77; Dijkstra, *Philae*, 209.
[153] H. Junker, 'Der Bericht Strabos über den heiligen Falken von Philae im Lichte der ägyptischen Quellen', *WZKM* 26 (1912) 42–62; Dijkstra, 'Horus', 9.
[154] Dijkstra, 'Horus', 9.
[155] Dijkstra, *Philae*, 211.

Between the two pylons, there are three Greek inscriptions that mention unusual names, and date to around 434 CE. These inscriptions are next to three drawings of deities with falcon heads, one of which is a deity with a falcon head, crocodile tail, a palm branch in its claws, a lotus flower at its back, and a sun disk on its head, and is depicted resting on a pedestal. No scholars have connected the inscriptions and pictures to the Philae falcon cult, though Dijkstra suggests that the pedestal represents the throne and the crocodile is meant as a reminder of the myth of the killing of Osiris where Horus becomes a crocodile.[156] This serves as evidence that the falcon cult was still active in Philae during the fifth century, even after the burning of the falcon by Macedonius and contrary to the text which states that the cult ended when the people converted to Christianity. Other inscriptions found in temples serve as evidence for the existence of non-Christian cults in Philae long after the events of Macedonius. These inscriptions are written in Demotic, an Ancient Egyptian script that was used from the mid seventh century BCE until Greek became the administrative language in the third century BCE. From the first century CE, Demotic was then mainly used in relation to religious activities and temples. In Philae, the last Demotic inscription dates to 452 CE and is an indicator for the end of Ancient Egyptian religion. The last inscription, written in Greek, is dated to 456/7 CE. The dating of these inscriptions suggests that cult activities in Philae only ended in 456/7CE or shortly thereafter.[157]

Evidence from the works of Procopius also support that the cult continued to be active after the events of Macedonius. Procopius writes, 'These sanctuaries in Philae were kept by these barbarians even up to my time, but the Emperor Justinian decided to tear them down'.[158] His account implies that the southern peoples, the Blemmyes and Noubades, continued to worship in the temple of Isis until the sixth century. Contrary to the account by Procopius, the temple of Isis remains one of the best-preserved temples in Egypt and it cannot have been destroyed as Procopius suggests. Likewise, the implication of an Isis cult until the sixth century disregards the impact of Christianity in the region beginning in the fourth century.[159] The inscriptions on the walls contradict his portrayal of the event, in regards to the religious violence Justinian used to end the

[156] Dijkstra, *Philae*, 212.
[157] Dijkstra, *Philae*, 177-8.
[158] Procop. *Pers.* 1.19.37.
[159] Dijkstra, *Philae*, 266-67; Dijkstra, 'Religious Violence, 40.

cult of Isis.[160] The last inscription, written in Greek in 456/7 CE, represents the end of recording by the ancient priests and suggests that the cult practices stopped around this time.[161] This evidence indicates that the temple destruction described by Procopius was only a symbolic closure.[162]

The circumstances surrounding the story of Macedonius and the falcon are ambiguous, as the *Life of Aaron* is the only literary source that documents the event. There are no other literary sources to support the narrative. There is evidence of a falcon cult in Philae at the temple of Isis and archaeological evidence of the temple remains and the location of a birdcage. Based on the literary and archaeological evidence, the historicity of this account of idol destruction as depicted in the literary text is doubtful. The archaeological evidence and inscriptions from the temple of Isis at Philae demonstrate that the temple continued to be used for cult activities until its closure sometime during the mid-fifth century, that is well after the story of Macedonius and the idol destruction which is placed in the fourth century.[163] These facts cast doubt on the accuracy of the picture created by the text and suggest that the narrative of Macedonius and the falcon of Philae in the *Life of Aaron* is a fictional account. The narrative presents Macedonius engaging in an act of religious violence, through the destruction of the falcon idol, which effectively ends the cult and begins the Christianisation of the region, while the evidence from other sources demonstrates that the temple and cults continued to be in use after the fourth century. Consulting other sources that deal with this event reveals that violence that is prevalent within the hagiography is exaggerated and that when the temple was finally re-purposed into a church during the late sixth century, there was no religious violence. Instead the bishop gave a new purpose to a building that had been abandoned due to Justinian's closure by making into a Christian church.[164]

[160] J.H.F. Dijkstra, 'A Cult of Isis at Philae after Justinian? Reconsidering *P.Cair.Masp.* I 67004', *ZPE* 146 (2004) 137-54 at 151-2; Dijkstra, *Philae*, 275-76.
[161] Dijkstra, 'Religious Violence, 41.
[162] Dijkstra, 'Religious Violence, 41: it is known that Justinian closed other temples for show as part of his imperial propaganda.
[163] Dijkstra, 'Religious Violence', 40-41.
[164] See Dijkstra, 'Religious Violence', 41.

Conclusion

As demonstrated in the first chapter, all the literary sources analyzed follow a similar pattern in their depiction of religious acts of violence. The majority of the sources use the *topoi* of idol destruction and conversion as a way to depict the dominance of Christianity. In this chapter two of the hagiographical sources that are often used as evidence of widespread religious violence in Late Antiquity were compared with other sources available on the same incidents described in the texts. As shown in this chapter, when other sources are consulted and the events are taken out of a religiously violent context, the incidents occurred for specific reasons often not related to religion. In the *Life of Shenoute,* the depiction of two accounts of idol destruction differed when compared to other sources. There is no account in the *LS* detailing the destruction of the temple at Atripe, confirmed by Shenoute's own works. The destruction of the idols at Pneueit did not occur as depicted in the *LS*, as Shenoute was only indirectly involved here as an advocate for the responsible Christians. In the account of Shenoute and the idols of Gessios, evidence from written documents of Shenoute demonstrate that the conflict was rather political, and when placed in the context of a political struggle, it is evident that the destruction of the idols was not an act of an exclusively religious nature.

In the *Life of Aaron,* bishop Macedonius enters the temple of Isis and burns the live falcon idol, effectively ending the cult. The hagiography uses a variety of literary motifs to portray the triumph of Christianity and the conversion of Philae. Archaeological evidence and inscriptions contradict the account in the *Life of Aaron*. Two inscriptions dating to the fifth century show that the temple of Isis was still in use after the episcopate of Macedonius, and the end of the cult did not occur until the mid-fifth century, despite the claim of Procopius that it happened only in the sixth century under Justinian. Literary sources use common *topoi* in order to depict the events in a particular manner, which often embellish widespread violence and Christian dominance. In fact, there is no evidence of violence at Philae and it is likely that the account in the *LA* is fictional.

Additional sources of evidence surrounding the events of idol destruction in the hagiographies demonstrate the nuances that exist in the authors' depiction of outright and omnipresent religious violence. According to the inscriptions that demonstrate the existence of the cult long after the events described in the *LA*, there was no destruction at Philae that resulted in

the Christianization of the region and the end of the falcon cult. At Panopolis, it is likely that some statues were destroyed at Atripe, but in a temple that had been long-abandoned. The destruction of Gessios' idols did occur, but the violence must be viewed in the context of a political struggle between Shenoute and Gessios. When the various distinctions that arise from the consultation of other sources, which deal with the same events described within the hagiographies, are taken into consideration, a more nuanced depiction of the true events emerges. Hagiographies are not accurate representations of actual events, but are exaggerated accounts written to fit an ideological purpose. In the accounts treated above, the authors embellished the events to portray a world filled with religious violence in order to emphasize the dominance of Christianity. Juxtaposing the hagiographical writings with archaeological remains, other literary sources and inscriptions demonstrates that the religious violence that dominated Egypt in Late Antiquity was much less prominent than described and alternate factors, other than religion, were also involved.

Chapter Three
The Destruction of the Statue of Serapis at Alexandria

Introduction

> The Alexandrians are more delighted with tumult than any other people: and if they can find a pretext, they will break forth into the most intolerable excesses: nor is it scarcely possible to check their impetuosity until there has been much bloodshed.[165]

Late Antiquity, as depicted by Christian saint's lives, is a period filled with widespread religious violence between non-Christians and Christians. As demonstrated in the previous chapters, these Christian texts contain many literary *topoi* in their passages of Christian violence against non-Christians in order to create the perception of Christian dominance. When these texts are compared to other sources, it is clear that their depiction of widespread religious violence is inaccurate and the reality is much more complicated. In the previous chapters, the accounts by the Christian authors analyzed were saint's lives. This chapter will focus on the destruction of the Serapeum and, in particular, the cult statue of Serapis at Alexandria in 391/392 CE, through an analysis of various Church histories. Though history of the Church and hagiography are different genres, a main difference being the absence of a central protagonist who perform the miracles and takes part in idol and temple destructions, authors of Church histories still use some similar literary *topoi* in their writings in order to emphasize the dominance of Christianity, adapted to fit a different genre.

The case of the Serapeum at Alexandria and the destruction of the cult statue is an exception to the many accounts of religious violence, which are reported in other parts of Egypt.[166] Alexandria, which was one of the largest cities within the Roman Empire, had a large multi-ethnic population with a history of violence, in contrast to the cities and villages located in the Egyptian countryside where violence was less pervasive.[167] For example, the conflict that existed between the Jews and Greeks in Alexandria in 30 CE can be mentioned, as well as the Jewish revolt of 115-

[165] Socr. *h.e.* 7.13.
[166] For a background on the events leading to the destruction of the Serapeum see: D.L. O'Leary, 'The Destruction of Temples in Egypt', *Bulletin de la Societé d'Archéologie Copte* 4 (1938) 51-7 at 53-3; C. Haas, *Alexandria in Late Antiquity* (Baltimore, 1997) 159-68.
[167] Dijkstra, 'Religious Violence', 31.

117 CE.[168] Religious violence was also prevalent in Alexandria during Late Antiquity, as demonstrated by events such as the murder of Hypatia in 415 CE.[169] Episodes of religious violence in Alexandria should be viewed in their socio-political context rather than only within a religious framework, as demonstrated by Johannes Hahn.[170] For example, the death of Hypatia should be viewed in light of the political conflicts that existed at that time, mainly the power struggle between the prefect Orestes and Cyril of Alexandria, bishop of Alexandria from 412 to 444 CE, which demonstrates that her death was motivated by political concerns rather than religious reasons.[171] Likewise, an earlier attack on the Serapeum, while George of Cappadocia was bishop from 357 to 361 CE, should not be regarded as a conflict between Christians and non-Christians, as Socrates and Sozomen portray it, [172] but rather in the context of the tense atmosphere that was created by the imperial appointment of George, an Arian bishop.[173]

The later attack on the Serapeum is one of the most well documented accounts of religious violence in Late Antiquity.[174] There are four Christian accounts and one non-Christian account, which document the events surrounding the destruction of the Serapeum and its cult statue.[175] This chapter will address the literary nature of the Christian accounts through an analysis of the Church histories, in order of their composition: Rufinus of Aquileia, Socrates of Constantinople, Sozomen of Gaza, and Theodoret of Cyrrhus, in order to determine the common *topoi* used to dramatize the events surrounding the destruction of the Serapeum and determine the fate of the cult statue. The account by the non-Christian, Eunapius, will be analyzed in order to provide a different perspective regarding the destruction, as Eunapius wrote about the event from a non-Christian perspective.[176] Finally, the role of the cult statue of Serapis in the accounts by Rufinus and Theodoret will be analyzed in order to determine whether the accounts are trustworthy in their portrayal of the events

[168] J. Modrzejewski, *The Jews of Egypt: From Ramses II to Emperor Hadrian* (Philadelphia, 1993) 161; J.M.G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora. From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE – 117 CE)* (Berkeley, 1996) 48-71; E.S. Gruen, *Diaspora: Jews amidst Greeks and Romans* (Cambridge, 2002) 54-83.
[169] Socr. *h.e.* 7.15, on which see E. Watts, 'The Murder of Hypatia: Acceptable or Unacceptable Violence?', in H. Drake (ed.), *Violence in Late Antiquity. Perceptions and Practices* (Aldershot and Burlington, 2006) 333-42.
[170] J. Hahn, *Gewalt und religiöser Konflikt* (Berlin, 2004) 66-74.
[171] P. Athanassiadi, *Damascius: The Philosophical History* (Athens, 1999) 131.
[172] Socr. *h.e.* 3.3; Soz. *h.e.* 5.7.9.
[173] Hahn, *Gewalt und religiöser Konflikt*, 66–74; Dijkstra, 'Religious Violence', 31.
[174] Dijkstra, 'Religious Violence', 31.
[175] Eun. *VS* 421-3; Rufin. *hist.* 11.23; Socr. *h.e.* 5.16–17; Soz. *h.e.* 7.15; Thdt. *h.e.* 5.22.
[176] J. Hahn, 'The Conversion of the Cult Statues', in Hahn, Emmel, and Gotter (eds.), *From Temple to Church*, 336-66 at 339.

and to demonstrate how statue destruction is adapted to fit the genre of Church history. As we will see, it is evident that the Christian accounts of the destruction of the statue of Serapis and the Serapeum in Alexandria dramatize and alter the event to depict widespread religious violence throughout Egypt during the fourth and fifth centuries CE in order to emphasize the dominance of Christianity through the destruction of the false gods of the non-Christians. However, these violent events should be viewed within their urban context and the specific circumstances that occurred in Alexandria cannot be taken as a generalization for widespread violence in Egypt as a whole.

The Church History of Rufinus of Aquileia

Rufinus of Aquileia was born around 345 CE in Iulia Concordia to a wealthy family. He was educated in Rome, where he became close friends with Jerome, and spent some time in Egypt before he returned to Aquileia in 370 CE, where he joined the ascetic community there.[177] Together with Jerome, Rufinus made Greek-Christian literature accessible to the Latin-speaking Church. Rufinus wrote his *Church History* between 402-403 CE. With the exception of Books ten and eleven, the history is an edited translation of the *Church History* by Eusebius of Caesarea. Books ten and eleven cover the period from the Council of Nicea in 325 CE to the death of Emperor Theodosius in 395 CE. This analysis will focus on the passages in book eleven, which describe the destruction of the Serapeum and the statue of Serapis (11.22-30).

In the passage preceding the destruction of the Serapeum, Rufinus describes the conflict within Alexandria between the Christians and non-Christians that eventually led to the destruction of the Serapeum. Due to a revolt by the non-Christians where many were killed, an imperial decree ordered the destruction of the Serapeum.[178] He begins the passage containing the destruction by describing the temple, including the upper level which contained the sanctuary where the statue of Serapis was kept. The statue, which Rufinus calls a 'monster', is large enough that its hands touch two separate walls and is made of a variety of wood and metals.[179] Continuing from where the previous passage left off, Rufinus states that the Christians were ready to destroy the temple after

[177] P.R. Amidon, *The Church History of Rufinus of Aquileia* (Oxford, 1997) vii.
[178] Rufin. *hist.* 11.22.
[179] Rufin. *hist.* 11.23.

reading the imperial rescript, but were hesitant to destroy the statue of Serapis because there was a rumour that if any human hand touched the statue it would cause the earth to be 'split open on the spot and crumble into the abyss, while the sky would crash down at once'.[180]

This rumour prevented the people from pursuing their attack on the statue until a soldier, who had great faith took an axe and struck the statue on the jaw. Despite striking the statue, the earth did not collapse nor did the sky fall and the soldier continued to repeatedly strike at the statue until it was cut down. The head was separated from the neck, the feet and other body parts were cut with axes and dragged with ropes to different places throughout the city, and the statue was burned in public, effectively ending the cult.[181] After the statue of Serapis from the Serapeum had been destroyed, all of the idols in Alexandria were taken and destroyed in a similar manner by the Christian priests.[182] Numerous decapitated baby heads were found in gilded urns and other such things were found in the shrines and were displayed to the public. The destruction of the Serapeum is only reported later in the passage when Rufinus states that a Church was built on one side and a martyr's shrine on the other.[183]

While many scholars rely on the account by Rufinus, Hahn is critical of Rufinus due to the triumphal overtones throughout his work, preferring to use the account by Socrates.[184] Hahn considers Rufinus' account to be a piece of historical literature, on the verge of being a hagiography because of the literary tropes it contains. The account by Rufinus contains many of the literary motifs previously seen in the saint's lives. The passage begins with a great act of faith that is arguably a miracle, because the soldier chooses faith in God despite the threat of imminent death for everyone if the statue was harmed. This act of faith is followed by the motif of statue destruction, mainly the destruction of the cult statue of Serapis. The destruction is described in great detail by Rufinus in order to leave no doubt that the statue was destroyed in its entirety. The destruction is portrayed as an act of religious violence by the Christians who cut the statue into smaller pieces and drag them through the streets before they are burned. The use of fire as a method to destroy cult statues was seen in the hagiographies previously analyzed. As in these

[180] Rufin. *hist.* 11.23.
[181] Rufin. *hist.* 11.23.
[182] Rufin. *hist.* 11.24.
[183] Rufin. *hist.* 11.27.
[184] Hahn, *Gewalt und religiöser Konflikt,* 85-9, and 'Conversion', 345-48.

hagiographies, the burning of the statue is a literary trope used by Rufinus to signify the end of the cult, as the passage ends with many non-Christians leaving Alexandria. The implied conversion of Alexandria is a clear exaggeration as is his statement that all statues in Alexandria were destroyed after this event. Rufinus equates the destruction of one cult statue to the destruction of all cults in Alexandria to demonstrate the dominance of Christianity, though in the form of a Church history rather than a hagiography.

According to Hahn, the account is more legend than an accurate portrayal of the events as it contains 'unbounded exaggeration, contradiction, and implausible elements'.[185] The overall text of Rufinus is written with a deep Christian bias and cannot be relied upon as a truthful depiction of the destruction, in comparison to the account by Socrates. The excellent work by F. Thèlamon, who is the leading interpreter of the historical work of Rufinus, establishes that Rufinus wrote his account to show the divine plan of God in history.[186] In Rufinus' account of the destruction of the cult statue of Serapis, he provides many reliable details about the cult to support the credibility of his account.[187] While caution should be exerted when using Rufinus, Dijkstra has demonstrated that it is critical to start a reconstruction of the events at the Serapeum with the account by Rufinus.[188] Rufinus wrote his account a few years after the date of the destruction and is considered the most detailed of the surviving accounts.[189] The order of the events as described in his account are also the most credible.[190] Though the account contains many literary tropes and embellishments seen in hagiographies, Rufinus provides a detailed account of the events that later Church historians relied upon as a source in their individual accounts of the destruction of the Serapeum.

The Church History of Socrates of Constantinople

[185] Hahn, 'Conversion', 347.
[186] F. Thèlamon, *Païens et chrétiens au IV^e siècle: l'apport de l''Histoire ecclésiastique' de Rufin d'Aquilée* (Paris, 1981) 246-57.
[187] Thèlamon, *Païens et chrétiens*, 165-205.
[188] Dijkstra, 'Religious Violence', 33.
[189] Hahn, 'Conversion', 346.
[190] Dijkstra, 'Religious Violence', 33.

Socrates of Constantinople is considered one of the most important sources for the events of the 5th century. A native of Constantinople, Socrates withdrew from Alexandria to Constantinople during the time of Bishop Theophilus and the destruction of the Serapeum in 391/2 CE.[191] Information regarding the early life of Socrates is scarce, though it is known that he studied under Ammonius and Helladius, who fled after the destruction of the Serapeum.[192] His work, which covers the period from the accession of Constantine in the early fourth century CE until 439 CE is a continuation of Eusebius.[193] In his text, Socrates claims that he makes no literary pretensions and his account is simply a report of what he has witnessed or read, thereby claiming a greater accuracy in his work.[194] It is possible that Socrates was aware of the embellishments present in many Christian accounts of religious violence and made the statement in order to set his account apart. However, it is likely that Socrates used Rufinus as a source for books one through five.[195] This analysis will focus on the destruction of the Serapeum by Socrates in book five.

Socrates begins the destruction passage by stating that at the solicitation of bishop Theophilus, the emperor issued an order for the destruction of all temples. Theophilus proceeded to carry out the imperial order, beginning with the temple of Mithras where he exhibited the objects that were in the temple to the public. He next destroyed the temple of Serapis and had the *phalli* of Priapus carried through the forum as a way to demonstrate the extravagance associated with the idol Serapis. These actions angered the non-Christians who attacked the Christians at a 'preconcerted signal' causing the Christians to attack back. At the end of these events, the non-Christians fled Alexandria in fear because it was discovered that many Christians had been killed. After all these events, the commander-in-chief of the army helped Theophilus in destroying all the temples and objects within it. All the idols that were within were destroyed with the exception of one statue that was displayed in a public place to serve as a reminder.[196]

The account by Socrates does not contain all the literary motifs seen in other accounts and apparent in the earliest Serapeum account by Rufinus. This is perhaps because Socrates wanted to differentiate his account from Rufinus and add to its credibility. Socrates begins his account by

[191] T. Urbainczyk, *Socrates of Constantinople: Historian of Church and State* (Ann Arbor, 1997) 15.
[192] Socr. *h.e.* 5.16.9: see Urbainczyk, *Socrates*, 15.
[193] Urbainczyk, *Socrates*, 7; D. Rohrbacher, *The Historians of Late Antiquity* (New York, 2002) 109.
[194] Urbainczyk, *Socrates*, 42.
[195] Urbainczyk, *Socrates*, 59.
[196] Socr. *h.e.* 5.16.

naming Theophilus as the instigator of the events and states that the violence that occurred was a reaction to the exposure of the temple artifacts and the destruction of the Serapeum.[197] This differs from the account by Rufinus who downplays the role of Theophilus in his account.[198] Marking Theophilus as the instigator is a method to validate his account, as instead of a random soldier used by Rufinus, Theophilus was indeed the bishop of Alexandria during these events and would likely have been present at such a conflict, as confirmed by Eunapius who named Theophilus as the instigator in his account.[199]

Likewise, Socrates does not follow the typical order of the motifs: miracle, idol destruction, and conversion. Contrary to the hagiographies and the account by Rufinus, Socrates does not mention the destruction of the idol and makes no mention of the remaining Alexandrians converting to Christianity. It is unclear why Socrates omits the destruction of the statue, as in the account by Rufinus it was the climax of the turmoil in Alexandria that signified the end of the cult of Serapis in that region. The absence of the idol destruction is another attempt to differentiate his account by focusing only on the destruction of the temple without any embellishments. In his portrayal of the destruction of the Serapeum, Socrates documents a condensed and inversed version of the order of events by Rufinus.[200]

Despite the variance within the account in comparison to Rufinus, Hahn relies heavily on Socrates in order to reconstruct the events of the destruction. This is largely due to the fact that Socrates is able to name two witnesses to the event, his former teachers Ammonius and Helladius, who fled from Alexandria after the destruction of the temples.[201] However, the addition of these two names does not validate that the account by Socrates is more credible as Hahn states. There is no concrete evidence that Ammonius and Helladius provided the eyewitness account for Socrates' description as Hahn claims, as Socrates only states that they were present during the destruction.[202] The order of the events as presented by Socrates was likely selected in order to provide a more defined reason for the destruction of the Serapeum, mainly the edict of 391 CE that served as the

[197] Socr. *h.e.* 5.16.9, with Hahn, 'Conversion', 348.
[198] Socr. *h.e.* 5.16; Thdt. *h.e.* 5.22.
[199] Eun. *VS* 421.
[200] Dijkstra, 'Religious Violence', 34.
[201] Urbainczyk, *Socrates*, 156; Hahn, 'Conversion', 347.
[202] Socr. *h.e.* 5.16; L. Kaplow, 'Religious and Intercommunal Violence in Alexandria in the 4th and 5th centuries CE', *The McGill Journal of Classical Studies* 4 (2005) 2-26 at 5.

catalyst for the incident by interpreting the edict as an imperial order to destroy the temples.[203] As stated by Dijkstra, imperial policy before 435 CE did not target the destruction of temples, instead the edict of 391 CE forbade sacrifice and access to temples. It was not an order to destroy all temples, which casts doubt on the accuracy of Socrates' order of events.[204] At the core of the destruction passage, though Socrates does not dramatize the events in the same manner as Rufinus, his account still presents an act of violence by the Christians that resulted in the destruction of the temple and its idols.

The Church History of Sozomen of Gaza

Sozomen of Gaza was born to a Christian family in Bethelia, a town near Gaza, around 380 CE. It is believed that he travelled through the Roman East before settling in Constantinople around 426 CE. His *Church History* is unfinished and it is assumed it was written around 458 CE because it contains a dedication to Theodosius II, who died in 450 CE.[205] In his description of the events in Alexandria surrounding the Serapeum, Sozomen relies heavily on Rufinus and uses elements found in Socrates, along with some new material.[206]

Sozomen begins the passage by stating that an imperial decree had granted the bishop of Alexandria authority to convert temples into churches.[207] The statues and objects of the temples were removed and were displayed to the public. The exposition of the temple object angered the non-Christians and caused them to attack the Christians. Many Christians were killed in this attack and the temple of Serapis was seized and turned into a temporary citadel. In the citadel, captured Christians were tortured and killed for some time until the authorities arrived urging the non-Christians to leave the Serapeum. All attempts to calm the people of Alexandria were unsuccessful and the emperor was informed about the events. This caused the people inside the Serapeum to be

[203] Dijkstra, 'Religious Violence', 33.
[204] Dijkstra, 'Religious Violence', 32.
[205] Rohrbacher, *Historians*, 117-20.
[206] Rohrbacher, *Historians*, 279.
[207] Soz. *h.e.* 7.15. Sozomen does not mention Theophilus by name in his account, but Theophilus was bishop of Alexandria during this period.

afraid and they were persuaded to revolt by a man named Olympius, who told them death was better than neglecting their gods.

Olympius placated the non-Christians who were troubled by the destruction of their cult statues by stating that they were made of corruptible materials and the true powers that had been within them were in heaven. Once the emperor heard about these events he pardoned those who had murdered the Christians as a method to convince them to convert to Christianity and ordered the destruction of the temples. The non-Christians fled after hearing the decree and the Christians gained possession of the Serapeum. The night before the Christians took possession, Sozomen states that he was informed that Olympius heard a voice singing 'hallelujah' in the temple. He understood what the singing meant and quietly left for Italy without informing anyone. While the temple was being destroyed and later converted into a church, stones were found marked with the symbol of the cross, which caused many non-Christians to convert.[208]

The account by Sozomen is largely derived from Rufinus and Socrates. He uses many of the same elements seen in Rufinus, such as the preconcerted signal that led to the attack on the Christians and the conversion of some non-Christians. However, Sozomen does not detail the destruction of the cult statue as Rufinus did. In order to portray the dominance of Christianity, Sozomen instead uses the story of Olympius who fled after hearing a heavenly voice. Hahn is critical in his assessment of the account by Sozomen, stating that it is unreliable because it is almost entirely based on the accounts by Rufinus and Socrates. Hahn believes scholars, such as Bury, who allege that the events as described by Sozomen are more accurate do so due to their unfamiliarity with the facts.[209] As Sozomen was writing many years after the events at Alexandria and his account is largely based on Rufinus and Socrates, his account does not provide new information about the events.

The Church History of Theodoret of Cyrrhus

[208] Soz. *h.e.* 7.15.
[209] J.B. Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire*, 2 vols (London, 1923) 1.369; Hahn, 'Conversion', 347.

With the exception of Rufinus, Theodoret of Cyrrhus is the only other ancient Christian source to document the destruction of the statue of Serapis in his temple destruction passage. It is believed that Theodoret was born in Antioch around 393 CE and was raised in a pious home.[210] He later became a monk and was made bishop of Cyrrhus, a small Syrian city, in 423 CE where he served for over three decades. Theodoret is considered a major source for information about monasticism in northern Syria during the fourth and fifth centuries.[211] Among many other works, he is known for his writing of the *Church History* between 441 to 449 CE, which approximately covers the period between 323 to 428 CE.[212] The focus of the following analysis will be chapter twenty-two in book five, which documents the destruction of the Serapeum and the temple cult statue of Serapis. Theodoret begins the passage with a description of Bishop Theophilus, who succeeded Timothy to the episcopate. Theophilus is described as a prudent man who was responsible for showing the Alexandrians the errors of idol worship, destroying non-Christian temples, and exposing the non-Christian priests as deceivers to the public. He then begins his version of the destruction of the statue of Serapis.

Theophilus entered the temple of Serapis where he viewed an extremely large statue of Serapis that caused terror because of its size alone. This terror was further increased due to a rumour that if any one should dare to approach to statue it would immediately cause an earthquake which would kill all humans. Theophilus, however, was not deceived by this rumour and regarded it as random tales from drunken old women. He looked with disdain at the large statue and commanded a man who was holding a hatchet to strike at the statue of Serpais "with violence".[213] The man did as he was instructed and struck the statue, which caused the crowds to fear that the rumour would come true. However, since the statue was a wooded creation and not alive, the blow did not cause it any pain. Eventually the head of the statue was broken and when it was opened, a troop of mice ran out. The body of the statue was likewise broken into small pieces and burned, while the head was carried through the city in view of the people who had worshipped the god but

[210] G.F. Chestnut, *The First Christian Histories: Eusebius, Socrates, Sozomen, Theodoret, and Evagrius* (Macon, 1986) 208; T. Urbainczyk, *Theodoret of Cyrrhus: The Bishop and the Holy Man* (Ann Arbor, 2002) 10: the exact date of Theodoret's birth is unknown though it is largely assumed to be around 393 CE. However, there is no substantial evidence to confirm this.
[211] R.M. Price, *A History of the Monks of Syria by Theodoret of Cyrrhus* (Kalamazoo, 1985) v.
[212] Chestnut, *Histories*, 208; Urbainczyk, *Theodoret*, 30.
[213] Thdt. *h.e.* 5.22.

now 'ridiculed its weakness'.[214] The passage is concluded with a statement that all the temples of demons were destroyed throughout the world in a similar manner as that of the temple and statue of Serapis.

The account of the destruction of the statue of Serapis by Theodoret is largely derived from the account by Rufinus, therefore they share many similarities. Theodoret uses the literary motifs previously seen in Rufinus, as well as the hagiographies analyzed in the first chapter. Theodoret begins his account with an element of the miraculous, with Bishop Theophilus entering the temple to view the large statue and the rumour that had been spread. This is followed by the destruction of the statue, when Theophilus disregards the rumour, places his faith in the Christian God, and orders a man in the crowd to strike the statue. The destruction motif is written to leave no doubt that the idol was evil and destroyed, as Theodoret writes that mice had been living in the head of the statue. Likewise, the statue's body is broken into smaller pieces which are then burned, while the head is paraded through the city streets. Although there is no explicit mention of conversion by the non-Christians, Theodoret implies it when he states that the people who once worshipped the idol now ridiculed it as the pieces were dragged through the streets of Alexandria.

Theodoret's depiction of Theophilus, also found in the accounts by Eunapius and Socrates but missing from the account by Rufinus and Sozomen, as being the main instigator in the attack on the cult statue is similar to the account of Apollo in the *h. Mon.* where Apollo prayed to the Lord and the people destroyed the idol. Here Theophilus had faith in God and ordered the people to destroy the statue. Similar to the other hagiographies and the account by Rufinus, the passage by Theodoret contains some literary *topoi*, which includes an idol destruction and an implied conversion. It is written to show the dominance of Christianity and the end of the cult of Serapis in Alexandria. Theodoret provides an even more condensed version of Rufinus' account of the events, embellished with a few anecdotes used in the apologetic tradition.[215] Theodoret relies heavily on Rufinus, so his account is a condensed version of Rufinus that is not as much use for a reliable reconstruction of the events and whether the destruction of the cult statue occurred as described by Rufinus.

[214] Thdt. *h.e.* 5.22.
[215] Hahn, 'Conversion', 351.

Eunapius: The Lives of the Philosophers and Sophists

The non-Christian account by Eunapius of Sardis in the *Lives of the Philosophers and Sophists* documents the destruction of the Serapeum from the perspective of an author witnessing the decline of Late Antique Hellenism. Information concerning the life of Eunapius comes from the allusions he made to himself in his works, mainly in the *VS*. Eunapius was born in 346 CE in Sardis and was educated in Athens where he studied with a Christian sophist, though he remained consistent in his dislike of the growing Christian influence. After spending a period of five years in Athens, he was recalled to Lydia in 367 CE where he remained until his death around 414 CE. The account of the temple destruction in the *VS* is the earliest account written around 399 CE.[216] In his account of the destruction of the temple of Serapis, Eunapius does not directly mention the destruction of the cult statue, but he makes references to various objects inside the temple that were destroyed, including statues.[217]

During the reign of Theodosius, while Theophilus was bishop of Alexandria, the temples and cults in Alexandria ended. The Christians armed with rage attacked the temples without cause or justification and were victorious because they met no opposition. They fought against all the votive offerings and statues that were in the temple and stole them as well, leaving only the floor of the temple behind because they were unable to move the stones due to their weight. The Christians threw everything into confusion and their hands were 'stained with greed' as they boasted about their triumph over the non-Christian gods.[218]

Contrary to the accounts by the Church historians, Eunapius writes about the destruction of the Serapeum from the perspective of one witnessing the decline of Late Antique Hellenism. As a result, he is openly hostile towards the Christians in his account and in his portrayal of their actions. Similar to the Church historians, Eunapius confirms that the Serapeum was destroyed in some manner and that the Christians looted everything, leaving only the temple floor behind due to its weight. This too is a dramatized account of the events, though not written to show the dominance of Christianity but rather its weakness; the Christians, unprovoked, destroyed and

[216] Dijkstra, 'Religious Violence', 33.
[217] Eun. *VS* 423.
[218] Eun. *VS* 423.

looted the temple out of fear. It is noticeable that there is no description of the destruction of the cult statue similar to that of Rufinus, though that can be attributed to Eunapius choosing to focus on the destruction of the temple as a whole rather than just the cult statue. As a non-Christian author, Eunapius could have used the violent destruction of the cult statue as more propaganda to show the inadequacies of the Christian faith in a similar manner he portrayed their destruction of the temple. It is plausible that the lack of such a description suggests that the cult statue, though destroyed along with the other temple objects, was probably not destroyed in the violent and descriptive manner specified by Rufinus.

The Role of the Statue of Serapis in Rufinus

The Church histories analyzed in this chapter contain literary *topoi* in their accounts also seen in the saints' lives analyzed in the previous chapters. Likewise, Rufinus and Theodoret use similar motifs in their passages containing the destruction of the cult statue of Serapis in Alexandria: a miracle, the destruction of an idol, and the conversion of non-Christians from the area. Rufinus does not use the motif of a miracle as previous authors do, instead he implies a miracle through a great act of faith by the zealous soldier. Likewise, Theodoret implies a miracle of great faith shown through Bishop Theophilus rather than a zealous soldier. The miracle is followed by the destruction of the statue and the subsequent burning of its pieces. The burning signifies the Christian victory over the cult and demonstrates the powerlessness of the cult statue.[219] The conversion of remaining non-Christians emphasizes the Christian triumph and signifies the end of the cult of Serapis in Alexandria.

The passages about the destruction of the statue of Serapis written by Rufinus and Theodoret share many similarities, as Theodoret based his account largely on Rufinus. Both authors use common literary *topoi* that have been seen previously in other Christian hagiographies such as miracles, idol destruction, and conversion. However, there are a few differences between the two accounts. Rufinus writes that it was a zealous soldier who made the first strike against the statue, while Theodoret writes that Theophilus ordered a man in the crowd to strike the first blow.

[219] Kristensen, 'Religious Conflict', 166.

The addition of naming the bishop as Theophilus, as previously seen in the account by Socrates, is a method of validating the account and grounding it through a figure who would have been present at these events. Likewise, Theodoret adds the story of the mice that had been living within the head of the statue, which emphasizes the filth of the statue as rodents live in it. However, essentially the accounts are similar and are written to show the dominance of Christianity and the end of the cult of Serapis at Alexandria.

Rufinus and Theodoret are the only two authors who describe in detail the destruction of the cult statue of Serapis. The other three accounts mention the destruction of a collective of idols and never directly name specific statues. The destruction of the cult statue of Serapis serves as the climax of the destruction of the Serapeum in the account by Rufinus. The idol is destroyed in such a way as to leave no doubt of its demise, which leads to the conversion of some non-Christians in Alexandria. It is surprising that such an event, as described by Rufinus, is absent from the other accounts by Eunapius, Socrates, and Sozomen. The variances in Socrates and Sozomen may be explained by the date in which the accounts were written because they were not witness to the events and based their accounts on other sources. However, Eunapius provides the earliest account of this destruction. As a non-Christian author documenting the decline of Late Antique Hellenism, the destruction of the cult statue of Serapis could have been used as propaganda to show the wickedness of the Christians in the same manner he used to portray them through the description of the temple destruction.

It can be argued that the absence of the idol destruction from all the other accounts about the attack on the Serapeum is suggestive that the cult statue of Serapis was not destroyed in the manner described by Rufinus. As with the violent death of Hypatia of Alexandria,[220] it is curious that such a public and violent destruction sequence was not documented in other sources. Though such a detailed description of the destruction of the cult statue is missing from the other accounts, all the accounts mention the destruction of the statues and other objects that were within the Serapeum. This is likely because the other sources chose to focus on the temple destruction rather than the destruction of the cult idol. However, given the order of the events as described by Rufinus, his account cannot be dismissed. It is likely that the cult statue was damaged or destroyed

[220] Socr. *h.e.* 7.15; Soz. *h.e.* 8.9; Joh. Nik. 84.87-103.

in some manner, though it is used by Rufinus to fit his ideological agenda of portraying the dominance of Christianity. The destruction passage is adapted to fit the narrative and takes a different form from hagiography as Rufinus was writing a Church history. Although the account by Rufinus is clearly a polemical and embellished version of the events, the cult statue of Serapis was attacked and destroyed in some form, which led to the end of the cult of Serapis in Alexandria.

Conclusion

The accounts of the destruction of the Serapeum and its cult statue found in the Church histories of Rufinus, Socrates, Sozomen, and Theodoret all share many of the same literary tropes previously seen in hagiographies. However, the fate of the cult statue of Serapis is only mentioned in two of the accounts, Rufinus and Theodoret. As in the hagiographies, the destruction of the cult statue of Serapis is another case of idol destruction in Late Antique Egypt adapted to the genre of Church history. Information concerning the fate of the Serapeum and its statuary in Alexandria is mainly rooted in the Christian literary tradition, which is full of literary *topoi* that depicts Late Antiquity as a period filled with widespread religious violence. During the period of Late Antiquity, Alexandria was a city filled with violence between the various religions. However, many of the conflicts that occurred should be viewed within their local and political context in order to determine the true nature of the conflicts.

A comparison of five accounts detailing the same event demonstrates the liberty that authors took in emphasizing various parts. Most notable was the variance in the manner in which the authors wrote about the destruction of the cult statue of Serapis. The accounts by Eunapius, Socrates, and Sozomen do not highlight or directly detail the specific destruction of the cult statue, choosing instead to focus solely on the destruction of the temple. All three accounts generally mention that all objects that were within the temple were destroyed along with the temple. Rufinus and Theodoret, who relies on Rufinus as a source, are the only two accounts that emphasize the violent fate of the cult statue. Though the account by Rufinus is polemical and filled with exaggerations, it is likely that the cult statue was damaged or destroyed to some extent during the attack on the Serapeum as the account by Rufinus has the most plausible order of events. There is, however, little to no archaeological evidence to provide information that confirms or denies the

destruction of the statue of Serapis.[221] It is likely that the cult statue received more focused damage, as it would have been easier to destroy than the entire temple, though not necessarily in the stark terms used by Rufinus. The literary sources exaggerate the events and embellish them to fit their agenda, although the narratives of the destruction of the idol and temple take a different form in the genre of Church history.

[221] J. McKenzie, S. Gibson and A.T. Reyes, 'Reconstructing the Serapeum in Alexandria from the Archaeological Evidence', *JRS* 94 (2004) 73-121 at 107-8; Kristensen, 'Religious Conflict', 166; Dijkstra, 'Religious Violence', 34.

General Conclusion

The information contained within this analysis offers an in-depth look of literary sources, mainly hagiographies and Church histories, that contain passages dealing with idol destructions in Late Antique Egypt. It has incorporated archaeological evidence in addition to other evidence dealing with the same incidents mentioned in the texts. The combination of the various sources juxtaposed with the accounts in the Christian literary sources has provided a more nuanced picture of religious violence in Late Antique Egypt than what is described in the hagiographies and Church histories. The many publications dealing with religious violence in Late Antiquity, and the studies on Egypt in particular, have greatly increased awareness about this subject. However, many of the studies on the topic of religious violence in Late Antiquity rely heavily on the literary accounts as accurate portrayals of the events and support the perception of widespread religious violence. This study has attempted to provide a study of statue destructions by Christians, documented in Christian literary accounts, in Egypt during Late Antiquity, in order to demonstrate that these events must be viewed in their socio-political contexts because there were also other factors involved than just religious ones.

Chapter One introduced five Christian hagiographies that contained passages of statue destruction by Christians. It focused on the accounts of Apollo of Hermopolis documented in the *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto,* the *Life of Shenoute*, the destruction of the Horus falcon by Macedonius in the *Life of Aaron*, the *Panegyric on Macarius* attributed to Bishop Dioscorus of Alexandria, and the *Life of Moses of Abydos*. These five hagiographies are examples of what the perception of widespread religious violence is based on, as the sources document acts of violence against non-Christian idols in an embellished manner to emphasize the dominance of Christianity. The accounts contain common literary motifs, mainly the motifs of miracles, idol destruction, and conversion, in their description of interactions between Christians and non-Christians adapted to fit each situation. The chapter demonstrates that the prevalent use of the similar literary *topoi* in the hagiographies is suggestive of the negative picture of religious violence in the narrative is a literary trope used to fit the specific intent of each author, though the events described could still go back to actual events.

Chapter two juxtaposed the accounts in the *Life of Shenoute* and the *Life of Aaron* with the evidence we have from archaeology, other literary documents, and inscriptions. This evidence reveals that the events depicted as religious violence in the hagiographies were exaggerated and modified to fit the ideological agendas of the Christian authors. This can be seen in the *Life of Shenoute* where the Bohairic version states that Shenoute was responsible for the destruction of idols at Pneueit. However, information gathered from Shenoute's own works clarifies his involvement in the event at Pneueit, in that he was not directly involved in the destruction but instead acted as an advocate for the responsible Christians when they were called to court. Consulting other evidence related to the passages described in the hagiographies exposes the inconsistencies within the hagiographies, as seen with the destruction of the temple at Atripe that is missing from the *LS* but is documented in Shenoute's own works. The case of the destruction of the idols of Gessios is confirmed by Shenoute's own writings, though the events as portrayed in the hagiography are embellished. It is often the case that when the incidents are removed from the context of religious violence, it becomes apparent that these events occurred for other reasons not related to religion. The material remains and additional literary sources show that the hagiographies are not accurate representations of the events and that the topic of religious violence in Late Antique Egypt is much more nuanced than the hagiographies claim.

Chapter three built upon the evidence that was presented in the previous two chapters, while expanding the topic of idol destruction to the literary genre of Church history. Through an analysis of five accounts in Church histories on the destruction of the Serapeum at Alexandria in 391/2 CE, with a particular focus on the destruction of the cult statue in the account of Rufinus, demonstrates the freedom used by the authors in their descriptions of the same event. With the exception of Rufinus and Theodoret, the other accounts by Eunapius, Socrates, and Sozomen chose to focus on the destruction of the Serapeum. Rufinus focuses his account around the destruction of the cult statue, describing how the Christians destroyed the statue in stark polemical terms. Although his account is clearly embellished, the statue was destroyed during the attack on the temple and Rufinus remains the most reliable source writing about this destruction. By analyzing the portrayal of statue destructions in Church histories, literary sources tend to exaggerate the events that they are describing. While the account by Rufinus is most likely accurate in stating that the cult statue was destroyed during the attack on the Serapeum, Rufinus wrote a polemical

account, with features found in hagiography, embellishing the event to demonstrate the dominance of Christianity and to signify the end of the cult of Serapis in Alexandria.

This thesis does not dispute that acts of religious violence occurred in Late Antique Egypt, but rather the perception that religious violence was widespread throughout this period. Recent studies focused on archaeological remains related to religious violence against statuary and temples during Late Antiquity have demonstrated that episodes of violence were not the norm, but were instead exceptional circumstances. Likewise, religious motivations were not necessarily at the core of the violence and other factors were also involved. Late Antiquity should not be viewed as a period filled with widespread religious violence. As demonstrated by this thesis, the literary sources that document events of violence between Christians and non-Christians are filled with ideological discourse and embellish their depictions of the violent acts. Consulting other sources, including material remains, provides a more detailed picture of the events, which demonstrates that the topic of religious violence is much more nuanced and complicated in comparison to the simplistic violent events depicted in Christian hagiographies and Church histories.

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