

A Narratological Analysis of the *Life of Aaron*

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ΝΤΕΡΙΜΟΥΤΕ ΔΕ ΟΥΒΗΥ ΧΕ ΣΜΟΥ ΕΡΟΙ, ΑΦΣΑΖΕ ΠΕΦΜΑΚΖ ΕΒΟΛ ΖΜ ΠΝΟΥΖ ΑΦΝΕΧ ΠΩΩΝΕ ΖΙΧΜ
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When I called out to him, ‘Bless me!’, he loosened his neck from the rope, threw the stone on the ground and put on his robe. He looked into my face and said to me: ‘Where are you going, my son, in this place?’ I said to him: ‘Forgive me, my father, for I got lost’. He told me: ‘Come and sit down, my son, for you are not lost – rather, you have found the right way’. After I had sat down next to him, I requested him: ‘I would like, in my turn, that you admit me as a monk in your company’. He said to me in a considerate way: ‘Our Savior has said in the Gospels: *Come to me, everyone who is weary, and I will give you rest.* The name *monasticism* sounds good, but this way of life is difficult to fulfill’. And I said to him: ‘My holy father! For this I have come here, provided that I can fulfill it and that you have mercy on me!’ He told me: ‘What you seek, my son, is something good. Once you have begun the good work, who will be able to stop you, my son?’

— *Life of Aaron* 91

Abstract

This thesis analyzes the narratological structure of the *Life of Aaron*, a hagiographical text from Late Antique Egypt. Such an analysis has not yet been performed on this text, and the method is still rarely applied to hagiographical literature. In the short term, I intend for this thesis to expose the complex yet consistent structure of this fascinating text. In the long term, I see this thesis as part of a broader movement to incorporate Coptology into the mainstream study of Late Antique literature. My general introduction discusses the *Life of Aaron*, its manuscript and archaeological evidence, and the state of scholarship on it. Following this, my first chapter compares the text to five significant Late Antique hagiographical works from Egypt: the *Life of Antony*, the *Life of Pachomius*, the *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*, the *Life of Onnophrius*, and the *Life of Shenoute*. My second chapter surveys the ancient (Aristotelian) and modern (structuralist) narratological methods employed in this thesis. Finally, my third chapter contrasts the *Life of Aaron*'s literal structure with its underlying chronology - what narratologists call the *fabula* - and exposes the story's narrator hierarchy. An epilogue then proposes avenues for future research, and the thesis closes with two short appendix graphs which summarize my analysis.

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Lastly, I dedicate this thesis to God the Almighty Father. Praise to You so much for creating me and for granting me the strength to persevere in these studies – certainly among the hardest, but most rewarding, endeavours of my life.

Abbreviations

This page is intended to spell out acronyms for items not found in major reference sources. For full citations, see the bibliography. Items are featured below if they are not found in major reference sources. For Greek classical authors, see H.G. Liddel, R. Scott, H.S. Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford, 1996⁹ with rev. suppl.). For Greek patristic authors, see G.W.H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford, 1961). For Latin authors of the Christian era, see A. Blaise, *Dictionnaire latin-français des auteurs chrétiens* (Turnhout, 1967); for those prior, see P.G.W. Glare, *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (Oxford, 2012²). For journals, see J. Marouzeau, *L'Année philologique* (Paris, 1928-).

<i>Copt.Enc.</i>	<i>The Coptic Encyclopedia</i>
Crum, <i>Dict.</i>	<i>A Coptic Dictionary</i>
JCSCS	<i>Journal of the Canadian Society for Coptic Studies</i>
LA	<i>The Life of Aaron</i>
Lampe, <i>PGL</i>	<i>Patristic Greek Lexicon</i>
LO	<i>Life of Onnophrius</i>
LS	<i>Life of Shenoute</i>
LSJ	<i>Greek-English Lexicon</i>
PG	<i>Patrologia Graeca</i>
PL	<i>Patrologia Latina</i>
<i>v.Pach.</i>	<i>Life of Pachomius, generically</i>
G1	<i>Life of Pachomius, Vita Prima Graeca</i>
Bo	<i>Life of Pachomius, Bohairic version</i>

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General Introduction

This Master's thesis analyzes, for the first time, the narratological structure of a Coptic text. The specimen in question is a 6th-century hagiographical work known as the *Life of Aaron*. Our narratological analysis is necessary because it has never been done to this text – nor, as mentioned above, to any other Coptic work. In the short term, I intend for this thesis to expose the complex yet consistent structure of this fascinating text. In the long term, I see this thesis as part of a broader movement to incorporate Coptology into the mainstream study of Late Antique literature. Such a trend has already been happening in more specialized circles over the previous century, especially theology, following the discovery of the Gnostic codices in Nag Hammadi – and with it the growing necessity for at least a rudimentary familiarity of Coptic consciousness. Since then, Coptology has been experiencing a millennial boom. Our present study contributes one small step in that direction, towards a pan-Mediterranean view of Late Antique literature.

As a physical object, the *Life of Aaron* is part of a 10th century paper codex stored in the British Library under the catalogue heading Oriental 7029 – also classified as no. 163 in B. Layton's authoritative *Catalogue of Coptic Literary Manuscripts*.¹ The surviving codex consists of 78 folia, of which the *Life of Aaron* constitutes the first 57. The first page – the title page – is lost. Following the *Life of Aaron*, there are seven lessons for the festival of Apa Aaron (ⲡⲀⲚⲀ ⲚⲀⲢⲤⲀ ⲒⲀⲢⲠⲠⲚ; fol. 57a-61a), a deathbed *Prayer of Athanasius* (fol. 61a-67b), and a *Discourse on St. Michael the Archangel* ascribed to an Archbishop Timothy of Alexandria (fol. 67b-75b). Some pages have been damaged by oxidation and are missing a few top and bottom lines, totalling in the dozens. Aside from these losses, the majority of the text is intact, and this manuscript is the only 'complete' version known. There *does* exist an older (6th or 7th century) manuscript, corresponding to passages from fol. 28 and 30, but only a few scraps survive.² So far as we can tell, the *Life of Aaron* was not widely copied, nor was it ever translated into other languages. In other words, the text remained a local phenomenon.

¹ B. Layton, *Catalogue of Coptic Literary Manuscripts in the British Library* (London, 1987) 196-9 (no. 163). For the first edition of the text, see E.A.W. Budge, *Coptic Texts V. Miscellaneous Texts in the Dialect of Upper Egypt* (New York, 1915) 432-95 (text), 948-1011 (translation).

² Layton, *Catalogue*, lix-lxiii, 172-3 (no. 150, Pl. 21) = British Library Or. 7558 (89) (93) (150); see also J.H.F. Dijkstra, J. van der Vliet, 'The Earliest Manuscript of the Coptic *Life of Aaron*: British Library, Or. 7558 (89) (93) (150)', *VChr* 69 (2015), 368-92.

The *Life of Aaron*, as an independent text, is structurally complex but remarkably consistent. It has an expository introduction, a logical progression, and a clear conclusion which unifies everything that has preceded. We can divide it conveniently into three thematic sections. The first (paragraphs 1-25) consists of a *travelogue* – a memoir of the primary narrator’s travels to southern Egypt and his encounters with monks. The second (26-85) is a legendary history of the first four bishops of Philae, with particular attention to the first bishop, Macedonius, sent by Athanasius himself to convert the city and stamp out its idol cult. The final section (86-138) concerns the central protagonist of the text: Apa Aaron, a former soldier and pious monk, famous for his miraculous healing abilities. It is part biography, part compilation of miracle accounts, all reported by his top acolyte, Isaac. Finally, a brief epilogue (139-140) concludes the text, as the primary narrator of the first section vows to record all that he has just learned from this amazing journey. The narrators carefully avoid any loose ends or cliffhangers – every sub-narrative has its own beginning, middle, and end. Granted, there are scribal errors, some of which can cause confusion as to who precisely the narrator is in certain parts, but at no detriment to the sense of the overall work.³ Luckily, such ambiguities are always resolved when put under scrutiny.

Based on *internal evidence*, we can affirm that the manuscript (10th century) is a copy of a much older text (6th century) which itself reflects on even earlier events (4th and early 5th century). More precisely, the manuscript colophon contains a date in Seleucid years, corresponding to AD 992.⁴ The text features copious cameos of the Alexandrian Archbishops Athanasius (r. 328-373) and Theophilus (r. 385-412), situating the story – at least most of it – in their lifetimes. But the text features lexical anachronisms which reveal a later date of composition. Most telling is the use, in paragraph 29, of the term παγαρχη, from the Greek dignitary title πάγαρχος.⁵ This term came into use during the reign of Emperor Anastasius (r. 491-518), rendering 491 the effective *terminus post quem* of our text. Another possible lexical trigger appears in paragraph 30, with the term στρατηλατης – a joint civil-military rank

³ The most common situation is when the 3rd person suffix is written where the 1st is intended, or vice versa. For examples, see my third chapter.

⁴ See A. van Lantschoot, *Recueil des colophons des manuscrits chrétiens d’Égypte*, 2 vols (Leuven, 1929) 1.197-200; 2.79-80 (no. 113).

⁵ Translated as ‘local governor’ in Lampe, *PGL* 990; *magister pagi* in LSJ 1284; and *pagi praepositus*, *governor of a village* in E.A. Sophocles, *Greek Lexicon of the Roman and Byzantine Periods (from B.C. 146 to A.D. 1100)* (New York, 1957) 829.

instituted by Emperor Justinian in 539.⁶ However, this term, in its historically informed context, does not make a reliable *terminus post quem* because it assumes too much background knowledge from the author. Conversely, in terms of *terminus ante quem*, that other manuscript which we mentioned above – the fragmentary copy of the *Life of Aaron* – dates to no later than 700.⁷ To summarize, we can condense the dating question into a quick soundbite: *the Life of Aaron is a story set in the 4th and 5th century, written in the 6th (maybe 7th) century, and preserved in a 10th century manuscript.*

The *Life of Aaron* has a long but sparse incremental history of scholarship. It all began with the discovery of the manuscript in Edfu in two phases: folium 21 in 1907, and the rest in 1909. Then, in 1915, the British Egyptologist E.A. Wallis Budge (1857-1934), as part of a series of publications of Coptic literary manuscripts in the British Museum, published and translated the Edfu manuscripts. His treatment of the text, unfortunately, was superficial and full of errors, as appears from the following example:

αφχοος γαρ [...]ειο παρχων ειχι αρχη ντ[...]λογσιος δει ερης επαγαρχη εχνη νεπολις
Now he said, ‘When I became governor and took over the rule of [Syene]. I came to the South,
and I passed through the towns in this district’.⁸

This translation fails for three reasons.⁹ Firstly, in Coptic, the word *αρχων* has a more generic meaning than the Greek *ἄρχων*: it can denote anyone of upper class. Secondly, Budge ignored the first lacuna and invented the translation ‘Syene’ with no justification; since there is clearly a letter *μ* before the second lacuna, the only grammatically possible solution to the lacuna is *τμ[ντπ]λογσιος*. Lastly, Budge assumed that *παγαρχη* – another Greek dignitary title (*πάγαρχος*) – was a corruption of *παραγε* ‘to pass’, but this verb is impossible with the

⁶ From *στρατηλάτης*, translated as *general* or *commander* in Lampe, *PGL* 1263; LSJ 1652; and Sophocles, *Greek Lexicon*, 1014. Originally it was a high military rank but it generalized, in the Byzantine era, into an honorific administrative title; see A.P. Kazhdan (ed.), *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (New York and Oxford, 1991) 1965.

⁷ See n. 2.

⁸ *LA* 29, i.e. fol. 12a; cf. Budge, *Miscellaneous Coptic Texts in the Dialect of Upper Egypt*, 444, 960.

⁹ For a more thorough discussion, see J.H.F. Dijkstra, “‘Foule immense de moines’: The Coptic *Life of Aaron* and the Early Bishops of Philae”, in B. Palme (ed.), *Akten des 23 Internationalen Papyrologenkongresses, Wien, 22.28. Juli 2001* (Vienna, 2007) 191-7 at 193-4.

preposition εχλ. The proper translation should instead be as follows:

For he said to me: ‘While I was still a magistrate and had started to obtain wealth, I went south, because I was pagarch over these cities’.

To Budge’s credit, his intention was not to publish a definitive edition of the text, but rather to publish them immediately, leaving the many shortcomings under the care of future generations of specialists. Further to his credit, Budge did a service by at least releasing the manuscripts in the first place – had he not done so, scholarship would have progressed later and in a more restricted fashion.

After Budge, scholarship did not touch the *Life of Aaron* until 1924, when the German demotist Wilhelm Spiegelberg (1870-1930) cited it in a larger study on fourth-century Philae – more specifically, on the cult of the holy falcon, which appears in the *Life of Aaron*.¹⁰ Spiegelberg used the text as confirmation that a Christian community co-existed alongside the cult of Isis in Philae in the fourth century. Through his work, the text came to be seen as an important source for early Christianity in Philae. In the few years that followed, the text also began to be cited as a source for the southward spread of Christianity via Philae to the Nubian nations;¹¹ this remains the case in modern scholarship as well.¹² To be sure, the *Life of Aaron* is not alone in this regard: Egyptian hagiographical works are full of allusions to the general missionizing effort into Nubia. One later bishop of Philae, Theodore (525-567), made evangelism a cornerstone of his career.¹³ So prolific were his Christianization efforts both locally and abroad, that the *Life of Aaron* is strongly speculated to have been composed in, if not inspired by, his episcopate.

In want of a formal title for the work, Budge proposed *Histories of the Monks in the Egyptian Desert* – not entirely inappropriate, though it failed to become standard in scholarship.

¹⁰ W. Spiegelberg, ‘Ägyptologische Beiträge’, *AfP* 7 (1924) 183-9.

¹¹ Some of the classic studies include J. Kraus, *Die Anfänge des Christentums in Nubien* (PhD dissertation, University of Münster, 1930), L.P. Kirwan, ‘Studies in the Later History of Nubia’, *Liverpool Annals of Archaeology and Anthropology*, 24 (1937) 69-105, and U. Monneret De Villard, *Storia della Nubia cristiana* (Rome, 1938).

¹² See, for one major example, S.G. Richter, *Studien zur Christianisierung Nubiens* (Wiesbaden, 2002).

¹³ See J.H.F. Dijkstra, *Philae and the End of Ancient Egyptian Religion: A Regional Study of Religious Transformation (298-642 CE)* (Leuven, 2008) 41, 272, 329-33.

T. Vivian in 1993 proposed the name *Histories of the Monks of Upper Egypt*, which is at least more precise, but still artificial. The loss of the title page is significant here, because its loss had left both the title and the author up to interpretation. Since 2002, J.H.F. Dijkstra has adopted the name *Life of Aaron*, under the certain assumption that this was its original title. Note that, unlike more general histories of monks, the *Life of Aaron* features a central character with an expanded narrative designed to build up to his story. The work reads more like a biography than an anthology, even if Aaron only covers the last third of the text. Furthermore, an eponymous name (in which a text is named after its central character), is the common practice of hagiographical works, making the name *Life of Aaron* a suitable reconstruction.¹⁴ Throughout this thesis, I employ this name for the text.

With the exception of Dijkstra, only one article within the last thirty years has been written primarily about the *Life of Aaron*.¹⁵ Occasionally the text has been mentioned in passing.¹⁶ A definitive edition has yet to be published, hence Budge's rudimentary release a full century ago remains the standard. The text has been rendered into Italian, but it translates from Budge's text rather than re-examine thoroughly the actual manuscript. A good Dutch translation exists, but it only covers part of the work (fol. 11b-18a), and an Italian translation of Budge's text also exists.¹⁷ The latest English translation (2000) also follows Budge's text and thus is not a considerable improvement of the *editio princeps*. The first ever critical edition is currently in preparation, to be released by J. Dijkstra and J. van der Vliet in 2016.¹⁸ I have had privileged access to Dijkstra and Van der Vliet's preliminary text and translation, and I use them throughout my thesis.

Some major mysteries of the *Life of Aaron* remain unsolved, mainly on the issue of authorship. This is a classic problem in hagiography: monks were too humble to credit works to

¹⁴ Vivian himself admitted that the text, in its time, would most likely have been called the *Life of (Abba) Aaron*, but he adhered to a modern title. He credits Budge as the source who led him to the *Life of Aaron*; for Vivian's extended preface to it, see T. Vivian, *Paphnutius: Histories of the Monks of Upper Egypt and the Life of Onnophrius* (Kalamazoo, 20002) 9-70.

¹⁵ T. Orlandi, 'Un testo copto sulle origini del cristianesimo in Nubia', in *Études nubiennes. Colloque de Chantilly, 2-6 juillet 1975* (Cairo, 1978) 225-50.

¹⁶ More recently, for example, in L.S.B. MacCoull, 'Christianity at Syene/Elephantine/Philae', *BASP* 27 (1990) 151-62 at 159; and D. Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt: Assimilation and Resistance* (Princeton, 1998) 68.

¹⁷ J.F. Borghouts, *Egyptische sagen en verhalen* (Bussum, 1974) 184-9; A. Campagnano, T. Orlandi, *Vite di monaci copti* (Rome, 1984) 67-125.

¹⁸ For a preliminary advertisement of the project, 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.

themselves, so they ascribed their work to someone else. The act of attributing a text (or a group of texts) to a famous author is called a ‘cycle’, and was a commonplace means to lend authority to the work.¹⁹ The *Life of Aaron*’s true author is unknown, but the narrator goes by ‘Paphnutius’ (παπνουττε, literally ‘the one who belongs to God’). This is not particularly illuminating, however: not only is ‘Paphnutius’ among the most common names in Late Antique Egypt, but it could also have easily been a pseudonym.²⁰ Previous scholarship has proposed up to three possible Paphnutii from Scetis, but none of them would have likely been alive at the time that the *Life of Aaron* was written;²¹ moreover, Scetis is not urgently relevant to the story. Dijkstra – the leading authority on the text – prefers the scenario of an anonymous local monk (thus, not from Scetis) writing the *Life of Aaron*.²² Perhaps this monk adopted ‘Paphnutius’ after a famous Scetis anchorite by that name, doing so in order to enhance his work’s prestige.²³

If so, then a second mystery arises: the question of intended audience.²⁴ Considering its emphasis on First Cataract geography (both in its vivid depictions and in its assumption of common knowledge), the *Life of Aaron* must surely have been intended for First Cataract inhabitants. It is telling that the *Life of Aaron*, so far as we know, never existed outside of its native Sahidic Coptic, suggesting that global exposure was not a desire (or that the text did not attract global attention). Contrast this with the standard fate of most hagiographies, which were widely transmitted into major languages of the Late Antique world. And on a related note, although the environment in the *Life of Aaron* is primarily monastic, the audience need not have been exclusively monastic: the illustrative topography, along with the conversion story in Philae and the acts of local holy men, would have sufficiently entertained a lay audience.²⁵

¹⁹ It may even be possible that these texts originally circulated anonymously, having names for their authors superimposed on them by later scribes – a phenomenon known as a literary ‘cycle’; see T. Orlandi, ‘Literature (Coptic)’, *Copt.Enc.* 5.1450-60 at 1454.

²⁰ T. Orlandi, ‘Coptic Literature’, in B. Pearson and J. Goehring, *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity* (Philadelphia, 1986) 51-81 at 78-80; Orlandi, ‘Literature (Coptic)’, 1456-8; Dijkstra, *Philae and the End*, 247.

²¹ For a synopsis of the multiple Paphnutii, a good starting point are the two entries titled ‘Paphnutius’ in *Copt.Enc.* 6, one by R.-G. Coquin (pp. 1882-3), the other by A. Guillaumont (p. 1884). One may also consult E.D.L. O’Leary, *The Saints of Egypt* (London, 1937), 217-21, which mentions ten Paphnutii.

²² Dijkstra, “‘Foule immense des moines’”, 195.

²³ For an up-to-date exhaustive account of the major Paphnutii, see Dijkstra, *Philae and the End*, 60, 98 (n. 60), 81, 234-52, 300, 334.

²⁴ For a treatment of the concept of ‘intended audience’ across the hagiographic genre, see S. Efthymiadis, N. Kalogeras, ‘Audience, Language and Patronage in Byzantine Hagiography’, in S. Efthymiadis (ed.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography*, 2 vols. (Ashgate, 2011) 2.247-84.

²⁵ Orlandi, ‘Un testo copto’, 229-30. See also Dijkstra, *Philae and the End*, 225-70.

A third mystery of the *Life of Aaron* is the exact historicity of its protagonist. Biographical information on Apa Aaron is limited and confounded with biblical allegory. All that the *Life of Aaron* tells us is that he became a monk under the bishopric of Psoulousia, fourth bishop of Philae, and went on to become a famous holy man.²⁶ His depiction in the text alludes indirectly to the biblical Aaron, brother of Moses, except in spelling: Apa Aaron (ⲉⲁⲣⲟⲨ) vs. the biblical Aaron (ⲁⲁⲣⲟⲨ). His historicity is further confounded by the local tradition: he is not listed among the saints in the Coptic calendar (the *Synaxarion*), but at Edfu he had his own festival day.²⁷ Two other facts indicate that the communities (especially monastic) of Edfu and Faras (Nubia) venerated him throughout the tenth century: first, the tenth-century *Life of Aaron* manuscript originates from Edfu; second, a tenth-century cathedral in Faras features a wall painting of him, presumably as an icon.²⁸ This date identification is reinforced by a wall fresco bearing the mixed Greek-Coptic inscription ⲁⲖⲖⲁ ⲉ[ⲁⲣⲟⲨ...ⲁⲛⲁⲭ]ⲟⲣⲓⲧⲏⲥ, underneath which is another inscription: ⲁⲖⲖⲁ ⲉⲁⲣⲟⲨ. When all of the above is taken into account, therefore, we find no need to question Aaron's existence.

To summarize what we have reviewed in this general introduction: the *Life of Aaron* is a Coptic hagiographical work concerning the Philae desert father Aaron. It was probably written in the sixth century (maybe the seventh), but survives mainly in a 10th-century manuscript, and it narrates 4th- and early-5th-century events. It describes, with artistic licence, the formative beginnings of Christianization in the small island of Philae in the First Cataract of the Nile. Unlike other hagiographies, the *Life of Aaron* exists only in Coptic, and was not translated into other languages, suggesting that it was intended for a regional audience. It confirms the names of the earliest Christian bishops of Philae, as Athanasius documented them, and it portrays their local flavour of anchoritic life. There has been much speculation as to who the author was, though nothing can be proven: on the one hand the narrator, Paphnutius, may be the author

²⁶ LA 79: ⲡⲁⲓ ⲛⲧⲁⲡⲉⲛⲉⲓⲟⲩⲧ ⲁⲡⲁ ⲉⲁⲣⲟⲨ ⲣⲧⲉϥⲛⲧⲏⲧⲏⲟⲛⲟⲥ ⲉⲛⲧⲉϥⲛⲧⲉⲡⲉⲓⲕⲟⲡⲟⲥ; 'It was in his episcopate that our father Apa Aaron led his monastic life'. I refer to this passage again in pages 69 (n. 230) and 79-80.

²⁷ 9 Pachons, equal to May 4; Dijkstra, "Foule immense de moines", 192; Dijkstra, *Philae and the End*, 226.

²⁸ K. Michałowski, *Faras. Die Kathedrale aus dem Wüstensand* (Einsiedeln, 1967), 126-7 (Fig. 46); A. Łukaszewicz, 'En marge d'une image de l'anachorète Aaron dans la cathédrale de Faras', *Nubia christiana* 1 (1982) 192-211. See also J. Kubinska, *Faras IV. Inscriptions grecques chrétiennes* (Warsaw, 1974) 146-8 (Fig. 81-2); K. Michałowski, *Faras. Wall Paintings in the Collection of the National Museum in Warsaw* (Warsaw, 1974) 46, 58, 219-21, 289; M. Martens-Czarnecka, *Faras VII. Les éléments décoratifs sur les peintures de la Cathédrale de Faras* (Warsaw, 1982) 64 (Fig. 96).

himself – although this is unlikely; on the other hand, the author might have been an anonymous monk. If the latter is true, then the author adopted ‘Paphnutius’ as a popular pseudonym to enhance his work’s authority.

The *Life of Aaron* has significant literary value. It reveals the Late Antique Egyptian sentiment on a variety of social issues, from monasticism and miracle-healing to spiritual travelogue. It is a primary source for individuals inquiring into the ascetic mentality, capturing the Egyptian wonder and terror of the unforgiving desert. Finally, the *Life of Aaron* warrants attention on its own literary merits: its complex structure, with layers upon layers of embedded narrative, is an uncommon treat for antiquaries. Even for general readers, the text can still entertain. On a psychological level, this structural complexity demonstrates the monks’ humility insofar as they prefer to elaborate on someone else’s life rather than their own. As a result, the chronology shifts dramatically and spans generations, leading to such a level of complexity that, perhaps, even the author (or, alternatively, the scribe) confused himself with the chronology. Then again, this could be the result of a faithful compilation of an organic oral tradition; doing so can often reveal inconsistent variations of the same story.

Although this thesis does not address the broader mysteries mentioned above, it does unravel the underlying narratological structure. We proceed with the intent to answer the following research question: what is the narratological structure of the *Life of Aaron*? It is important to reiterate that our narratological analysis is the first of its kind in Coptic literature – let alone of the text itself. We will focus on the transitions from narrator to narrator. This thesis divides into three sequential chapters. The first, ‘The *Life of Aaron*’s Place in Coptic Hagiography’, compares the *Life of Aaron* with other contemporary hagiographical works from Egypt, with a view to situate the text within its literary context. The second chapter, ‘Narratology – Ancient and Modern, Theory and Practice’, introduces the reader to the narratological theory employed in this thesis. The third and final chapter, ‘A Narratological Analysis of the *Life of Aaron*’, reconstructs the chronology of the story and the hierarchy of the narrative levels. For the benefit of non-specialists, it is written in such a way that no knowledge of the *Life of Aaron* nor of the Coptic language is required. All text citations adopt the reference-marking scheme of Dijkstra and Van der Vliet, which divides the text into 140 paragraphs. All passages are cited in translation with the original Coptic provided.

Chapter 1: The *Life of Aaron*'s Place in Coptic Hagiography

Introduction

In the General Introduction we summarized the physical state of the manuscripts and the extent of scholarship on the *Life of Aaron*. Now with the core of our thesis defined, this chapter shall survey the literary culture behind it. This will help distinguish the uniqueness of the text from its debt to earlier hagiographical works. The scope of this chapter is selective but far-reaching: we seek the perfect balance of fullness and concisiveness. To achieve this balance, we must flush the most of what we can out of the most representative sample possible. Therefore, in chronological order, we study five of Egypt's greatest hagiographies, with the aim of finding common themes among them. Once such themes have been elucidated, we will be better able to situate the *Life of Aaron* within the cultural context of monasticism in early Christian Egypt. In the realm of comparative literature, we will also become better informed about the work's idiosyncrasies vs. its stereotypes.²⁹

There are copious amounts of early hagiographies, even if we filter for just the Coptic ones, so picking the top five is no easy task. No 'top five' will ever do justice to the full canon of specimens, but they at least provide the initiate with a springboard for further exploration.³⁰ Nevertheless, at least three essential works stand out. The *Life of Antony* (hereby *v.Anton.* for *Vita Antonii*) is by far the most obvious choice, because it is the prototypical work which spawned the whole hagiographical genre, if not monasticism altogether. Its situation in the Egyptian desert, coupled with its Egyptian author, make the work impossible to overlook – it is simply the most celebrated hagiographical work of all time. Aside from it, the other two essential hagiographical works are the *Life of Pachomius* (*v.Pach.*) and the *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto* (*h.Mon.*). Finally, the remaining two works in this study are the *Life of Onnophrius* (*LO*) and the *Life of Shenute* (*LS*). Following the survey of the above five works, we shall contrast them with the *Life of Aaron*.

²⁹ Note that this chapter is not concerned with hagiography *per se*, but with classic examples of such in Egypt. For the former, see A. Papaconstantinou, 'Hagiography in Coptic', in S. Efthymiadis (ed.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography*, 2 vols. (Ashgate, 2011) 1.323-44 (at 325-8 for *Vitae* specifically).

³⁰ The reader is encouraged to consult, for a broader but by no means exhaustive list of 4th-century Egyptian hagiographies, T. Orlandi, 'Hagiography (Coptic)', *Copt.Enc.* 4.1191-7 at 1193.

A word of justification of the above choices seems in order. I have already made clear that this chapter is a survey of Egyptian hagiographical works from Late Antiquity – broadly, the 4th and 5th centuries. All of my five specimens take place in Egypt. Three of them, however, are written in Greek (*v.Anton.*, *v.Pach.*, *h.Mon.*). The *v.Anton.* requires no justification, and the *v.Pach.* – being about another archetypal Egyptian saint – also makes for easy inclusion. The *h.Mon.*, on the other hand, deviates from the norm for three reasons: 1) its author is a foreign traveller, not a native Egyptian; 2) it concerns dozens of saints rather than one; and 3) it is also, just like the *LA*, a ‘travelogue’ – a text of geographical interest – as well as a hagiography. Despite these peculiarities, it is a classic in the genre of spiritual tourism, and gives highly valuable insights on life in the desert, so it makes for a good addition to our study. The remaining two texts (*LO* and *LS*) are obscure to the West, but not so in Coptic tradition. The *LO* is the closest stylistically to the *LA* which I have encountered, while the *LS*, to me, stands out as the perfect ‘foil’ to all of the above. Taken together, all five works attest to the diverse yet consistent features of Late Antique Egyptian hagiography.

The Quintessential Prototypes: Antony and Pachomius

For our purposes, we treat the *v.Anton.* and the *v.Pach.* together. I feel that there are already enough general introductions to either work in circulation, and that, for our purposes, a comparative survey would be more efficient. Both works are by far the most famous examples of Egyptian hagiography, and they both influenced the growth of monasticism throughout and beyond the Egyptian world. One may even consider them the first of their kind, though the *v.Anton.* came first (ca. 356) and the *v.Pach.* (finished ca. 390) took conscious inspiration from it – in this respect, we can consider them ‘first-generation’ and ‘second-generation’ hagiographical works, respectively. One major difference, however, lies in their legacy: the *v.Anton.* enjoyed immediate global success whereas the *v.Pach.* remained in Egypt for about a century before quietly spreading abroad. The *v.Pach.*, therefore, may not be as readily familiar to general Christian audiences, though his influence is greatly felt in the monastic tradition. In the following section, we flush out the topological features of both works in order to construct the foundational character of early Egyptian hagiography.

We start with the *v.Anton.*, for which documentation is generous. Antony (ca. 251-356) was not the first ascetic, nor even the first Egyptian ascetic, and the work itself admits this.³¹ He was, however, a pioneer in the eremitic (or anchoritic) movement. Prior to him, asceticism was an urban phenomenon: monks were apotactics (ἀποτακτικός ‘renunciator’³²), not full-blown *anchorites* (ἀναχωρητής ‘withdrawer’) – they renounced material indulgences but not society.³³ Antony broke from this soft-core norm and fled to the desert, taking the concept of ‘renunciation’ to the geographical extreme. His way of life earned the admiration of Archbishop Athanasius, who met him and authored the book which made him a legend. It was soon translated into Latin, and later (6th century) into Coptic.³⁴ It became an instant bestseller throughout the ancient world.³⁵ For its time, it was a revolutionary work: it sparked an exponential wave of desert migration, and with it the legend of the ‘Desert Fathers’. By the end of the century, hundreds of *Life* clones – including the *v.Pach.* – were in circulation. Thanks to its great success, the equation of spatial withdrawal with sanctity is now a hagiographic *topos*.

For modern readers, the *v.Anton.* follows a familiar biographical structure. It begins with a general address to the reader, then proceeds to narrate the story of Antony from birth to death. It follows a linear chronology, save for some ‘pauses’ (more on this term in chapter two) to make sweeping summaries about Antony’s practises and personality. There are no flashes backward or forward in time, just varying degrees of ‘narrative speed’. Athanasius skims through the childhood years, but narrates in epochal detail Antony’s iconic ‘conversion’ moment at the age of

³¹ He started his monastic life as an apprentice to another ascetic; *v.Anton.* 3.1-7.

³² Apotactics lived in the cities, independently of ecclesial authority – thereby stirring the ire of establishment authors. Jerome, in particular, denounced them as *remnuoth*, or degenerate fakes, and accused them of all kinds of lewd conduct; Hier. *Ep.* 22.34. To Jerome, ‘true’ monks live under clerical authority. Consequently, they are more easily controllable; J.E. Goehring, *Ascetics, Society, and the Desert: Studies in Early Egyptian Monasticism* (Harrisburg, 1999) 4, 22-4.

³³ Antony’s first mentor, who lived on inarable land within the fertile valley, is an example of this. The definitive study on the apotactic movement is E.A. Judge, ‘Earliest Use of Monachos for “Monk” (P. Coll. Youtie 77) and the Origins of Monasticism’, *JAC* 20 (1977) 72-89.

³⁴ There are important rhetorical differences between the Greek and Coptic *v.Anton.* The Greek dwells on symbolic imagery and nuanced vocabulary, whereas the Coptic version uses minimal vocabulary, allowing for ingeniously ironic double meanings not possible in Greek. It further eliminates all Hellenism from the text and brings Antony back to his native culture. For an extended discussion, see T. Vivian, A.N. Athanassakis, *Athanasius. The Life of Antony: The Coptic Life and The Greek Life* (Kalamazoo, 2003) xlvii-liiii.

³⁵ It reached the hands of none other than Augustine of Hippo, who credited reading it as a pivotal moment in his conversion to Christianity; see Aug. *Conf.* 8.29. Antony’s fame even spread to the Roman senate and noblewomen, as documented in Pall. *h.Laus.* and Hier. *Ep.* 127.5.

eighteen.³⁶ Similarly, the text ‘slows down’ to narrate the final days of Antony’s life. The work makes a big deal out of his death – Antony gives a dramatic speech, full of parting words of wisdom, to fellow brothers by his deathbed. His death is a triumph, as he goes the way of the biblical greats. The text briefly covers his burial, then closes with a short but edifying address to the reader.

But the *v.Anton.* is by no means an innocent tale of a holy man, because Athanasius wrote it with deeper political motives: to weaken his ecclesial opponents.³⁷ He presents an artificially orthodox and idyllic portrait of Antony – having him convert pagans, condemn heretics (specifically Arians and Melitians – both of whom are Athanasius’s enemies), discourse on demonology, and outsmart sophists through rustic logic and piety.³⁸ Antony performs many miracles, but they allude explicitly to biblical miracles in order to reinforce his holiness. During such scenes, Athanasius uses Antony as a vessel through which to channel himself. The text also has an unmistakably contrived anti-intellectual tone: Athanasius portrays Antony as illiterate and monolingually Coptic – he requires a Greek interpreter.³⁹ The implication here is that Antony symbolizes the *pure* way to God, not distracted by human education. Yet in fairness, Athanasius’s depictions of Antony’s strict austerity, piety, and steadfastness against temptations can be considered reasonably faithful to the historical Antony.⁴⁰ Through all of his deeds, Antony becomes the quintessential *imitatio Christi*: a model for how to live as divinely as practically possible. No pagan, and above all no Arian, Melitian, or other false monk, can achieve this, according to the *v.Anton.*

Let us now turn to the *v.Pach.* – another classic Egyptian hagiographical work, also

³⁶ Wherein Antony hears a Gospel passage in church (Mt 19:21), which inspires him to sell all his belongings, entrust his sister to the care of nuns, and devote his life to solitary asceticism; see *v.Anton.* 2.1-3.

³⁷ On the Athanasian Antony as the ‘face’ of Nicene orthodoxy, see D. Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism* (Oxford, 1995) 201-65.

³⁸ He is, however, his usual gentle self with ‘pagans’ (literally, people of Ἑλληνισμός ‘Hellenism’ – Athanasius’s own words) provided that they come to be converted; see *v.Anton.* 72.2, 78.1-3.

³⁹ Whereas in reality, we know of at least seven epistles attributed to Antony. However, it remains unknown whether he wrote the epistles himself or through a secretary, and whether they were originally Coptic or Greek. If the former, then Anthony could be considered the first original Coptic author. Realistically, he most certainly could have conversed in Greek; see S. Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony* (Lund, 1990) 186-7.

⁴⁰ To reinforce his humanness, Athanasius has Antony experience exhaustion, even annoyance, at the unending numbers of visitors. He admits that sometimes the visitors ask for things beyond his power. Sometimes he will refuse to answer the door for them, but they will camp by his abode in hopes that just being near to him will heal them: *v.Anton.* 48.1-50.7. In this context, Antony is great because of his simplicity, self-denial, and confession of personal limits.

written in Greek. Whereas Antony popularized personal isolation (eremiticism), Pachomius (ca. 292-348) pioneered ascetic community-living (coenobiticism) – more precisely, the centralization of groups of communities (*koinonia*) bound together by a Rule.⁴¹ It is difficult to reconstruct an historical portrait of Pachomius because his commentators had little to no personal acquaintance with him, and those who did had their own biases.⁴² We do know of his pagan upbringing in Chenoboskion, near Nag Hammadi.⁴³ He grew up during the Tetrarchy years, a time of traumatic religious persecution in Egypt, and he narrowly escaped conscription in 313. While under captivity, a group of Christians tended to him – their charity inspired him to devote his life to the monastic way. But rather than abandon society, Pachomius settled in the outskirts of the inhabited world (οἰκουμένη) and converted deserted villages into monasteries. His communities attracted thousands of recruits, and they set up trade networks among each other to ensure their prosperity. In his mature years, Pachomius later authored the *Ascetica*, a detailed rule for coenobitic monkhood. It inspired virtually every other Rule after it, and is still used today in the Eastern Orthodox Church. In some respects it is also among the earliest original Coptic works, making Pachomius a literary pioneer as well as a monastic one.⁴⁴

Unlike the *v.Anton*, the *v.Pach.* survives in at least four different Greek versions.⁴⁵ The primordial edition is the *Vita Prima* (hereby abbreviated G1). The subsequent *Vita Altera* embellishes the G1 with passages from the *Ascetica*. The *Vita Tertia* includes a life of Theodore – hence its alternative name, the *Life of Pachomius and Theodore* – as well as extracts from

⁴¹ Our main scholarly source on Pachomius is P. Rousseau, *Pachomius: The Making of a Community in Fourth-Century Egypt* (Berkeley, 1999²). For a cultural background, see his first chapter, ‘Egypt’ (1-36); for a discussion on primary sources on Pachomius, see his second, ‘The Sources’ (37-56). Cf. J. Goehring, ‘New Frontiers in Pachomian Studies’, in Pearson, Goehring, *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity*, 236-57 at 239-40.

⁴² Compounding this is the fact that few of his contemporary Christian writers even know of him. Jerome knew of a coenobitic movement in Egypt but only wrote of it in impersonal terms; Hier. *Ep.* 22.34-6. In short, our main source of information on him (and his system) is, as it so happens, the *v.Pach.* itself.

⁴³ The Pachomian monasteries are long suspected to have been the publication houses of the Nag Hammadi codices, an important collection of gnostic treatises. Today this hypothesis remains controversial. For a recent challenge, see N.D. Lewis, J.A. Blount, ‘Rethinking the Origins of the Nag Hammadi Codices’, *JBL* 133 (2014) 399-419. But for an up-to-date defense of the hypothesis, see H. Lundhaug, L. Jenott, *The Monastic Origins of the Nag Hammadi Codices* (Tübingen, 2015) – thank you, Prof. Piovanelli, for informing me of this study.

⁴⁴ Aside from his *Ascetica*, few other compositions survive: we have two Pachomian ‘catecheses’ for monks, as well as supposed *Letters* of his. See L.-Th. Lefort, *Oeuvres de s. Pachôme et de ses disciples*, 2 vols. (Leuven, 1956) 1.1-36. Their English translations can be found in A. Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia: The Lives, Rules, and Other Writings of Saint Pachomius and His Disciples*, 3 vols. (Kalamazoo, 1982) 3.13-49, 51-83.

⁴⁵ See Rousseau, *Pachomius*, 42, for an excellent genealogical table of the main *Lives* of Pachomius (based on Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia* 1, 17). For another detailed analysis of the sources, see W. Harmless, *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism* (Oxford, 2004) 116-7.

another major text called *Apophthegmata Patrum*. Lastly, the *Vita Quarta* is an abridgement of the *Tertia*.⁴⁶ In total, there are eight Greek recensions. There do exist up to twenty-two Coptic recensions, but most of them are fragmentary, some as short as one page. The most intact version is called the *Bohairic Life of Pachomius*, commonly abbreviated as Bo.⁴⁷ There are also fragments of Sahidic codices.⁴⁸ Taken together, the Coptic seems to embellish the Greek originals with their own oral traditions, which evolved gradually in favour of the Alexandrian orthodoxy. This becomes most apparent when we compare the translations, because the Greek and Coptic render some of the episodes differently – especially those with theological significance. For our study, however, we will focus on the two main versions: the Greek G1 and the Coptic Bo. I will mainly cite from the G1, considering its priority, unless the discussion calls for a cross-analysis.

We can briefly summarize the history of Pachomianism as follows: the movement essentially lasted from 316, when Pachomius became a monk, to about 548 when it disappears from the written record.⁴⁹ Pachomius founded his first community in 323 in Tabennese, then a deserted village, and brought about its repopulation.⁵⁰ Between 329 and 330, Athanasius visited and tried to ordain him, but he declined.⁵¹ Later, he then settled in Pbow in 336, which later became one of the largest monasteries in rural Egypt. By the end of his life he had 11 monasteries under his care. He died from plague in 348, and was succeeded by the less capable Horsiesius.⁵² When separatist revolts broke out, Horsiesius handed leadership to Theodore in 351, who placated the dissidents with administrative reforms.⁵³ When Theodore died in 368, Horsiesius led a second term, from 368 to 387. Around 390, the *v.Pach.* was compiled, after

⁴⁶ For all variants of the Greek *v.Pach.*, see F. Halkin, *Sancti Pachomii Vitae Graecae* (Brussels, 1932); for the G1, see 1-96. Whenever I cite from the G1, I refer to paragraph number.

⁴⁷ For the Bo, see L.-Th. Lefort, *S. Pachomii vita bohairice scripta* (Leuven, 1953).

⁴⁸ Which can be found in L.-Th. Lefort, *S. Pachomii vitae sahidice scriptae* (Leuven, 1952).

⁴⁹ This is a condensed summary of Goehring's reconstruction of Pachomian history; see Goehring, *Ascetics*, 162, 243-61. A similar condensed timeline for Pachomius can be found in Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 119.

⁵⁰ G1 12; Bo 17-25 – each describes his first monasery, Tabnennese, as οἰκημὶ κρημνός, οἰ κώμη τις, ἔρημος οὔσα 'deserted village'. Every Pachomian monastery was situated in the fertile valley; Goehring, *Ascetics*, 90-4.

⁵¹ G1 30; Bo 28. Both record Pachomius hiding from Athanasius during his visit of the monastery. Either Pachomius feared the prospect of jealousy or careerism among his disciples, or he simply wished to prevent interference from the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

⁵² G1 117-9, 122, 126-30; Bo 117-23. The G1 confirms Horsiesius's troubled end as leader, but offers a more positive portrait overall.

⁵³ He shuffled the abbots among the monasteries on a bi-annual basis, the idea being to keep the whole system interdependent. This practice is not recorded in the G1 but occurs in Bo 144; Goehring, *Ascetics*, 170.

which the historical record is patchy. We know that in 392, Archbishop Theophilus invited the Pachomians to build a monastery in place of the newly-demolished temple of Serapis; they named it Metanoia, and it became the Pachomian gateway to the rest of the ancient world.⁵⁴ They also built a marvellous basilica in Pbow in 459. A century later, Justinian, seeking to bring Egypt into the Chalcedonian communion, imposed a Chalcedonian abbot onto the Pbow monastery.⁵⁵ Resisters were expelled, and the prior abbot fled to Shenoute's White Monastery.⁵⁶ The rest of Egypt remained anti-Chalcedon, and they stopped recording Pachomian history, and the movement altogether slipped into oblivion. In a sense, the Pachomians were casualties of the Chalcedonian drama.

Arguably, the *v.Pach.* is a dual hagiography: primarily of Pachomius, but secondarily of Theodore, his successor in Tabennese from about 336 onward.⁵⁷ The text frames Theodore as a young prodigy, destined to lead from the start, to the brief chagrin of his older fellow monks (G1 78, 95; Bo 69). Theodore shares the same abilities of clairvoyance and keen intuition as his master Pachomius (G1 93, 102; Bo 82-3, 103). Pachomius sends him on errands to visit philosophers, comfort discouraged monks, and instruct the catechumens (for examples, G1 77-8, 92; Bo 69-70, 75). Pachomius, in turn, has high expectations and standards for his star pupil, so he gives particularly harsh penances to him.⁵⁸ Theodore is fully loyal to his master, travelling back and forth from Pbow to Tabennee to hear his homilies and relay them to other monasteries. Long after his master's death, Theodore continues to honour Pachomius by recanting stories to his subordinates about him. When Theodore dies, both the G1 and the Bo end with a laudatory letter from Athanasius to Horsiesius (G1 150; Bo 210).

The author of the *v.Pach.* is anonymous, entirely external, and self-conscious from time

⁵⁴ The *v.Pach.* most likely was written there, because it links the fall of paganism with the rise of monasticism. Some of the members of Metanoia maintained relations with Jerome and Evagrius Ponticus, the latter of whom owned and cited from a copy of the *Life of Pachomius and Theodore*; see Evagr. Pont. *or.* 108.

⁵⁵ During this time, the head of the Pachomian movement was Abraham of Farshūt, abbot of Pbow. He refused to obey Justinian with respect to the Chalcedonian creed, and thus Egyptian tradition praises him as a national guardian; see Cyr.S. *v.Abr.*

⁵⁶ He was later arrested and sent to Constantinople, but the Empress Theodora, a noted miaphysite sympathist, let him escape back to Egypt.

⁵⁷ Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 132-4.

⁵⁸ Mainly, when Theodore confesses his feelings of eagerness to lead the monasteries, Pachomius erupts with rage and deposes him for two years; G1 106-7. This is taken to be a foreshadowing for Theodore's leadership – a sort of 'detox' to purify his conscience to prepare him for his future office.

to time.⁵⁹ He meditates occasionally on his task as a writer, stating that his work is not a panegyric for Pachomius. He admits that he never met his literary subject – he got his stories from acquaintances of Pachomius. Pachomius counted himself only as a sinner unworthy of praise, and the author even partially agrees:

Ταῦτα δὲ γράφομεν ἡμεῖς, οὐ μὲν γε, ὡς προεῖρηται, κατελάβομεν αὐτὸν ἐντῶ σῶματι, ἀλλὰ τοὺς μετ’ αὐτοῦ εἶδομεν χρόνοντοιοῦτους ὄντας, οἵτινες τὸ κατὰ μέρος τούτων διηγήσατο ἡμῖν, εἰδότες αὐτὰ ἀκριβῶς. ... οὐχ ἵνα ἐπαινέσωμεν αὐτόν ἢ οὐ γὰρ βούλεται τὸν τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἔπαινον. ἐκεῖ γὰρ ἐστὶν μετὰ τῶν πατέρων αὐτοῦ, ὅπου ὁ ἔπαινος ὁ ἀληθινός. Καὶ γὰρ καὶ περὶ ὧν ἐν σῶματι, ὡς ἠκούσαμεν, προσευχόμενος πολλάκις οὐκ ἄξιον ἑαυτὸν ἠγεῖτο πρὸς βεῦσαι κἂν ὑπὲρ ἑαυτοῦ.

As we have already said, we are writing these things, albeit we ourselves did not see him in the flesh but later saw those who had been with him for a long time and were such as knew these things exactly, and recounted them to us in detail. ... And we did this not to praise him since he had no desire for human praise. He now is in the company of his fathers, where true praise is. We heard that while he still existed in the flesh he prayed frequently, yet did not consider himself worthy even of interceding in his own behalf.⁶⁰

Thus, like Antony, Pachomius is made into a role model of the highest rank. The author, in fact, alludes to the *v. Anton.* with the comment that ‘the most holy archbishop Athanasius’ has written for the purpose of edifying monks.⁶¹ The author also seems to acknowledge growing amnesia within the community, and a personal sense of duty to take action: when certain cynics deride the *koinonia* for not writing everything about Pachomius down in the first place, the author comes to their defence:

Ἐὰν δὲ εἴπη τις ἢ Διὰ τί οὐκ ἐγράψαν ἐκεῖνοι τὸν βίον αὐτοῦ; ... ἀλλὰ τάχα οὕτω καιρὸς ἦν. Ὅτε δὲ εἶδομεν ὅτι χρεία ἐστίν, ἵνα μὴ ἐπιλαθόμεθα ὧν ἠκούσαμεν περὶ τοῦ τελείου μονάζοντα πατρὸς ἡμῶν μετὰ τοὺς ἀγίους πάντας, ἐγράψαμεν ὀλίγα ἐκ πολλῶν.

Should anybody say: ‘Why did they themselves not write about his life?’ ... Their excuse was that

⁵⁹ For a similar judgment, see Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 140-1.

⁶⁰ G1 98. Note that this paragraph is situated in the middle of the text, while Pachomius is still alive. His actual moment of death occurs in G1 116.

⁶¹ G1 2: ὁ ἀγιώτατος ἀρχιεπίσκοπος Ἀθανάσιος; cf. the Bo prologue, which does not mention Athanasius.

there was not enough time. When we realized that writing was necessary so that we might not forget what we had heard about this perfect monk and our father after all the saints, we wrote about a few things from the many we had heard.⁶²

The author, therefore, is conscious that ‘things are not now as they used to be’⁶³ – spiritual and moral depression had taken root.

Antony makes a cameo appearance in both versions of the *v.Pach.*, and it is most interesting to compare the Greek (G1 120) to the Coptic (Bo 126-9). The latter is about triple the length, uses more dramatic language, and features more scenes. They begin similarly: just after Pachomius’s death, Theodore and another brother, Zacchaeus, travel to Alexandria and, on a spur of the moment, decide to pay the great hermit a visit. He blesses them and consoles them with extended praise for Pachomius.⁶⁴ He confides that he was not worthy of meeting Pachomius, though he wanted to.⁶⁵ He then waxes eloquent about his own initiation into the ascetic life, about what a seminal revolution Pachomius achieved, and how he, Apa Antony, is in his debt. Zacchaeus responds in disbelief, as a literary device to develop Antony’s praise of Pachomius – and this provides among the finer examples of the Bo’s emphatic licence:

ἄποκρίνεται ὁ ἀββᾶς Ζακχαῖος καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ · Σὺ μᾶλλον, πάτερ, παντὸς τοῦ κόσμου
τούτου φῶς τυγχάνεις...

The abbot Zacchaeus replied: ‘Father, it is you [i.e. not Pachomius] who are the light of all this world...’

ἀπα ζακχαῖος δε νηπιθεωφι ερωα ἀλλα ἀφογῶωβ ναα εφασῶογ δεπολλακικ γαρ εκρηαλ μμον...
ἀφογῶω δε ἀπα ἀντωνιος πεχαα δε†ναπιθε μμοκ πκογι ζακχαῖος, επειδη ογκολοβος πε...

But Apa Zacchaeus could not restrain himself and answered thoughtlessly: ‘Surely you are

⁶² G1 98. The Bo does not have this paragraph.

⁶³ Quote by H. Chadwick, in his own words, from “Pachomios and the Idea of Sanctity,” repr. in idem, *History and Thought of the Early Church* (London, 1982), 11–24 at 16.

⁶⁴ The Coptic has Theodore and Zacchaeus hold either arm of Antony to help him walk. In the Greek, Antony asks them how ‘Abba Pachomius’ is doing, and Theodore breaks down into tears when sharing the news of his death. In the Coptic, on the other hand, Antony already knows – at least, the news-sharing is not mentioned. His words of condolence are semantically the same in both languages, but paraphrased differently..

⁶⁵ G1 120: καὶ γὰρ ἀληθῶς πολλάκις ἐβουλόμην ἰδεῖν αὐτὸν καὶ ἐν σώματι ἵ τάχα δὲ ἄξιός οὐκ ἦμην. Cf. Bo 126: οὐτως αἰσιε εἰεπιθεῖμι ετραναγ ερωα αἰτει εφρηπῶμα ἵ ἀγῶ μεωακ μηρηπῶα. They both effectively say, ‘Indeed, I wanted to see him while he was in his body, but perhaps I was not worthy’.

deceiving us! ...’ Apa Antony replied: ‘I will convince you, little Zacchaeus’ – for he was short of stature...⁶⁶

By logical extension, according to either text, Pachomius’s legacy earned the personal admiration of Antony himself, who appears in order to lend authority both to the *v.Pach.* and to the whole coenobitic movement. While the G1 version ends here, the Bo continues (128-9) with a group of clerics interrupting the scene to complain to Antony. They protest how he acts like a weakling for them, yet leaps for joy and makes haste to Theodore and Zacchaeus – Antony explains that he got a rush of divine energy upon seeing the successors of Pachomius. The clerics then ask for, and receive, advice on what to do when other monks accuse them of Melitianism. The account ends just like the G1: with Theodore and Zacchaeus returning to Alexandria.

Pachomius makes for a fascinating study of religious contradiction. On the one hand, the *v.Pach.* is just as pro-establishment and anti-heretical as the *v.Anton.*. Arian zealots raid the desert and persecute the faithful *en masse*, and Pachomius drowns a book by Origen in the Nile – sparing it from burning only because it contains the Lord’s name.⁶⁷ But on the flipside, the *v.Pach.* does not reflect the full story. We know from other evidence that the Pachomians were not theologically systematic. Their library contained an eclectic mix of material, orthodox and heterodox alike. The Pachomians were far more concerned with proper ascetic practice than with doctrinal conformity – which came to them as an afterthought.⁶⁸ Particularly striking is Pachomius’s use of a secret alphabet at times (for which he successfully defended himself at the Synod of Latopolis in 345), as well as his hiding from Athanasius when the latter visited in 329 or 330.⁶⁹ There is no sign of open hostility between Pachomius and the ecclesiastical authorities, but the Pachomians were autonomous and prosperous, and wished to remain so.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ G1 120; Bo 126. The latter directly alludes to Zacchaeus the tax collector, who was also ‘short in stature’ (τῆ ἡλικίᾳ μικρὸς ἦν); Lk 19:3.

⁶⁷ This account appears only in the G1 30.

⁶⁸ In truth, when one strips away the theological differences, orthodox and schismatic monks behave identically. For more on this point, see Goehring, *Ascetics*, 143-60.

⁶⁹ See n. 51; G1 143-4; Bo 200-3. See also Goehring, *Ascetics*, 171, 208-11, and Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 122.

⁷⁰ The movement became more consciously Alexandrian after his death, prior to which it was more of a personality cult. Horsiesius met with Archbishop Theophilus in Alexandria, gifting to him a copy of the *Vita Tertia*. See G1 109, 113, 120; Bo 96-7. See also Goehring, *Ascetics*, 211, 254. W.E. Crum, *Der Papyruscodex saec. VI-VII der Phillippsbibliothek in Cheltenham* (Strasbourg, 1915) 12-7, 65-72; L.-Th. Lefort, *Les vies coptes de saint Pachôme et de ses premiers successeurs* (Leuven, 1943) 389-95.

There are other important differences between the *v.Anton.* and of the *v.Pach.*. Unlike the former, which was written shortly after the protagonist's death by a famous author, the latter was written anonymously over a posthumous span of forty years. There is only one *v.Anton.*, but multiple versions of the *v.Pach.*. The *v.Anton.* follows a more organized chronology, with no 'flashbacks' in the timeline, whereas the *v.Pach.* reads like a collection of memories tied together by a loose chronology. It features several – not many – 'flashback' scenes which serve to provide background context. Although both works have extended 'deathbed' scenes, the *v.Anton.* wraps up right after the burial scene, whereas the *v.Pach.* continues on with Theodore and Horsiesius for up to a quarter of the work. The implication to this is that the work acknowledges the continuing evolution of Pachomius's legacy.⁷¹ But perhaps the fundamental difference between them is that Antony withdrew *to* the desert, whereas Pachomius retreated *from* it – he set up his base along the fertile Nile Valley. Pachomius supplies an important link between the early village movement (*apotaktikoi*), which the *v.Anton.* helped suppress, and the later urban monasteries inspired by Pachomius.

Nevertheless, enough parallels between the two works exist to put them under the same genre. Both *Lives* trace the lives and monastic endeavours of their protagonists in an idyllic form. They are consciously pro-establishment and call out concrete enemies of Alexandria (Arians, Melitians, and Origenists); Athanasius's appearance in the *v.Pach.* reinforces the point.⁷² Overall, both works are idealized hagiography in narrative form, taking place in 4th-century Upper Egypt (Antony: ca. 251-356; Pachomius: 292-348). Their objective is not to record dry facts about their protagonists, but to bring their greatness to life for the reader. Their protagonists are holy men: role models who share our human weaknesses but transcend them. Both the *v.Anton.* and the *v.Pach.* are classic Egyptian hagiographical works, but the latter owes its own existence to the former. Both works accelerated the maturation of monasticism, which in

⁷¹ Exacerbating the crisis was the abdication of Horsiesius, Pachomius's failed successor, and the subsequent leadership of the much-better-suited Theodore (ca. 350). The sheer survival of these monastic communities may have depended on the composition of these *Lives*. For a discussion, see Rousseau, *Pachomius*, 45-8.

⁷² Moreover, in Bo 189 Pachomius elaborately praises the archbishop's famous thirty-ninth annual Festal Letter (for the year 367), which officially lists the canonical texts of Scripture. Pachomius then, like the paschal letter, goes on to condemn apocrypha and their adherents – 'the books composed by these defiled heretics, atheists, and truly irreverent people' (ἄβενηχῶν μπλαστον ἐτεμμάγ ντενιζερετικός εἰς τοῦ οὐροῦ νατνοῦτ ἐτεμμάγ οὐροῦ νασεβης ἀληθῶς). For more on the paschal letter itself, see L.-Th. Lefort (ed.), *S. Athanase. Lettres festales est pastorales en copte*, 2 vols. (Leuven, 1955) 1.15-22 (text), 2.31-40 (French trans.).

turn inspired Coptic vernacular literature.

Tourists Speak Out: The Historia Monachorum in Aegypto

From here, we move on to our third hagiographical specimen: the *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto* (Ἡ κατ' Αἴγυπτον τῶν μοναχῶν ἱστορία). The *h.Mon.* remains curiously understudied – it has not yet been subject to proper source criticism, though scholars have explored it in comparison with ancient travel literature.⁷³ Our chapter compares it with the two *Lives* seen above. Like the *Lives* of *Antony* and *Pachomius*, the *h.Mon.* was written in Greek in the late 4th century. The main difference involves provenance: the author came from Palestine, not Egypt. He was not a fellow monk either, but rather a travelling intellectual in search of monks. He had heard great legends of the Desert Fathers and wanted to see the phenomenon for himself. His resulting work is thus unique among our sample as both hagiography and travelogue: it gives an outsider's perspective of the monastic life. Consequently, the work is more general and less political, but no less lively and personal. It does not dwell on doctrinal disputes, nor does it idealize one central holy man: instead, it reports the author's experiences with about two dozen monks scattered across the Egyptian desert. Miracles are indeed performed, but to the appropriate aptitudes of each holy man.

The true author of the *h.Mon.* remains unknown – neither he nor the narrator introduces himself to the reader, and the narrator's companions (indicated by the use of the first person plural) are not identified. Consequently, the text is traditionally accredited to (Tyrannius) Rufinus of Aquileia (ca. 344 - 410) – a monk, historian, and theologian best known as a translator of Greek patristic writings into Latin. We henceforth refer to the author as Anonymous. Rufinus undoubtedly *translated* the work into Latin, and he and Anonymous were contemporaries.⁷⁴ During their lifetimes, monasticism had already become a permanent facet of

⁷³ For example, G. Frank, 'The *Historia monachorum in Aegypto* and Ancient Travel Writing', in *StudPatr* 30 (1997) 191-5; G. Frank, 'Miracles, Monks and Monuments: The *Historia monachorum in Aegypto* as Pilgrims' Tales', in D. Frankfurter (ed.), *Pilgrimage and Holy Space in Late Antique Egypt* (Leiden, 1998) 483-505; and G. Frank, *Memory of the Eyes: Pilgrims to Living Saints in Christian Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, 2000). The *h.Mon.* is compared against other hagiographical works in Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 290-9.

⁷⁴ Rufinus also trekked to the Egyptian desert to visit monks, visiting many of the sites in the *h.Mon.*, but he did so in the 370s – two decades before the trip described in the text. See N. Russell, *The Lives of the Desert Fathers. Historia Monachorum in Aegypto* (London, 1981) 3-9.

Egyptian culture, and interest in it hit fever pitches beyond the Mediterranean. Evidently, Anonymous wanted to witness the craze for himself and transmit his findings abroad. The *h.Mon.* narrates his trek along the Nile and through the desert in realistic detail. He travels with companions, who come and go along the journey – sometimes they require Coptic interpreters to communicate with the monks, and sometimes they get by in Greek. The events described date to 394-395, though the text itself was written around 400.⁷⁵ Rufinus then translated it into Latin circa 403-404, adding some passages.⁷⁶ The surviving Greek *h.Mon.* closely approximates the original, minus some overt Origenism.⁷⁷

The *h.Mon.* contains short lives of over two dozen monks.⁷⁸ Some of the figures are known only through the *h.Mon.*, while others are firmly secure in monastic lore. Throughout the text, Anonymous narrates, as primary narrator, in the first person. He depicts the monks as individuals, rather than representatives of any particular monastic expression. Whereas Athanasius saw Antony as a lonely exemplar, and whereas the Pachomians were framed as pious community-builders, Anonymous sees the monks more as rangers along a frontier – literally and spiritually. Like trees purifying the atmosphere,⁷⁹ they protect the countryside – and by extension the cities – from evils of all kinds, and inspire morality among the villagers.⁸⁰ But the monks are not unaccustomed to urban life either:⁸¹ the *h.Mon.* makes a particular example out of Oxyrhynchus, a virtual monastic city, bursting at its seams with monks. No region of Creation lies beyond the bound of Christ's footsoldiers – his 'athletes' as they are literally called.

As Andrew Cain has finely exposed, Anonymous was highly and consciously inspired by

⁷⁵ The text is chronistically appropriate, the accounts of the dangers encountered (from crocodiles to bandits, capsizing boats, and getting lost for days) feel fresh and honest, and the itinerary conforms to geographic logic (from south to north, with a detour to Oxyrhynchus).

⁷⁶ Such as personal insights from his visit to Nitria and Scetis in 375. His addenda are the main topographic source for these monastic sites, so they have unique value in their own right. For the critical edition of his translation, see E. Schulz-Flügel, *Tyrannus Rufinus, Historia Monachorum sive De vita sanctorum patrum* (Berlin, 1990).

⁷⁷ See C.P. Bammell, 'Problems of the *Historia monachorum*', *JThS* n.s. 47 (1996) 92-104 at 101.

⁷⁸ In order of appearance: John of Lycopolis, Or, Ammon, Bes, the urban monks of Oxyrhynchus, Theon, Elias, Apollo, Amoun, Copres, Paternuthius, Sourous, Helle, Apelles, John, Paphnutius, Pityrion, Eulogius, Isidore, Sarapion, Apollonius, Dioscorus, the monastic site of Nitria, Macarius, Amoun, Macarius of Alexandria, Paul, Piammonas, and John.

⁷⁹ Metaphor taken from Russell, *Lives of the Desert Fathers*, 12-14.

⁸⁰ Some of these 'other evils' include 'pagans', who raid the townsfolk and corrupt the nation with their false religion. The *h.Mon.*, giving the impression that both sides were in equal opposition, encourages Christians to treat pagans benignly, but to convert and civilize them if at all possible.

⁸¹ *h.Mon.* Prol. 10: monks of all ages can be found ἐν ταῖς ἐρήμοις καὶ ἐν ταῖς χώραις.

the *v.Anton.*⁸² Cain psychoanalyzes him as classically trained, though either somewhat bashful about it, or calculably restrained against such shows of erudition. Firstly, they did not serve the *h.Mon.*'s purpose. Secondly, sacred Scripture was plenty enough erudition for it – and Scripture, in the end, is the highest source of wisdom. The *h.Mon.* is saturated with Bible quotes and allusions.⁸³ Anonymous, in sum, was undoubtedly well-read. This can be demonstrated by his eloquent prose and rhetoric.⁸⁴ Presumably Anonymous's schooling took place in the Greek East. Along with this personal portrait, Cain also gives a synopsis of the *h.Mon.* and the *v.Anton.* He reveals interesting points of convergence in their prologues: both Anonymous and Athanasius discuss the occasion for their writing and acknowledge how their impetus came from a group of monks. They both avow to memorialize authoritatively the ascetic πολιτεία. They also both voice, in near-identical language, their anticipation about deriving spiritual edification from their composition:

h.Mon. Prol. 2: κάμοι τι κέρδος γένηται τῆς αὐτῶν ὠφελείας

v.Anton. Prol. 2-3: κάμοι γὰρ μέγα κέρδος ὠφελείας ἐστὶ

In the entire Greek literary tradition, the collocation of γένηται and ἐστὶ (functionally synonymous) – including the unusual dependency of genitive ὠφελείας on nominative κέρδος - occurs only in two texts: these ones!⁸⁵ Clearly, Anonymous is imitating Athanasius out of homage.

Another example of similar prose can be found in the levitation miracle of Amoun, mentioned in both the *h.Mon.* and the *v.Anton.*:

v.Anton. 60.4: πολλὰ καὶ δι' αὐτοῦ σημεῖα γεγενῆσθαι

h.Mon. 22.7: πολλὰ τε καὶ ἄλλα θαυμάσια ὁ ἀνὴρ ἐπεδείξατο

⁸² A. Cain, 'The Greek *Historia monachorum in Aegypto* and Athanasius' *Life of Antony*', *VChr* 67 (2013) 349-63.

⁸³ For an index of biblical passages in the *h.Mon.*, see P.W. van der Horst, *Woestijn, begeerte en geloof. De Historia monachorum in Aegypto* (ca. 400 na Chr.) (Kampen, 1995) 124-6.

⁸⁴ See A. Cain, 'The Style of the Greek *Historia monachorum in Aegypto*', *REAug* 58 (2012) 57-96.

⁸⁵ I have confirmed this by consulting the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* database. Aside from the *h.Mon.*, the only other text in which κάμοι, κέρδος and ὠφελείας appear within fifty words of each other is the *v.Anton.*

But the two accounts of Amoun's miracle diverge in their emphasis.⁸⁶ The *v.Anton.* provides a much more personal account, naming Theodore specifically as an eyewitness. The *h.Mon.* refers only to ἀδελφοί as vague witnesses. Furthermore, the *v.Anton.* explains the mechanics of the miracle and makes an example out of it. The *h.Mon.* treats it as incidental, being more concerned about Amoun's conversation with Antony – a conversation of which the *v.Anton.* makes no mention.

It seems, therefore, that Anonymous wished to counterbalance the *v.Anton.*'s panegyric, and frame Antony in the broader context of 4th-century monasticism.⁸⁷ In the process, the *h.Mon.* eclipses him by greater monks. Compared to them, Antony's miracles are rather minor – some cures and limited exorcisms (21.1, 24.10). Petermuthius, on the other hand, can raise the dead, make the Sun stand still, walk on water, teleport himself, and be transported physically to paradise (10.9-21). Unlike the *v.Anton.*, the *h.Mon.* nowhere credits Antony with pioneering the monastic life – that honour is given to Patermuthius (10.3), Or (2.2-6), and Apollo (8.3-4). In effect, Antony achieves importance merely by association with younger monks – *h.Mon.* 15.1-2 mentions him as the monastic mentor of Pityrion and Ammones, and in 20.13 he accompanies the 110-year-old Cronides. Note that none of these names appears in the *v.Anton.*, and that the *h.Mon.* contains other accounts of Antony not found in the *v.Anton.* – perhaps with the intention to supplement it with previously unrecorded oral traditions about him.⁸⁸ This would make sense as Antony is presented serially in scattered episodes, not in a chapter of his own.

Beside Scripture and the *v.Anton.*, there do not appear to be any substantial phraseological borrowings from any literary tradition. It would seem, therefore, that *Anonymous* wants to focus squarely on the *v.Anton.* as a real-life extension of the Christian canon. But there are, aside from literary borrowings, other signs of hagiographical correspondence. For example, all three hagiographical works examined so far display the *Wunderkind* archetype (also called 'elderly child', *puer senex*, or παιδαριογέρων).⁸⁹ The image of the *Wunderkind* – the monastic child prodigy – is a classic hallmark of hagiography. Ultimately, the *Wunderkind topos* has its roots in the Bible (in Luke 2:39-52, the twelve-year-old Jesus leads a Scripture lecture in the local

⁸⁶ Cain, 'Greek *Historia monachorum in Aegypto*', 358-60.

⁸⁷ Cain, 'Greek *Historia monachorum in Aegypto*', 360-1.

⁸⁸ This is argued more extensively in S. Rubenson, *The Letters of St Antony: Monasticism and the Making of a Saint* (Minneapolis, 1995) 179.

⁸⁹ Efthymiadis, Kalogeras, 'Audience, Language and Patronage in Byzantine Hagiography', 251 (esp. n. 13)

synagogue), but in hagiography proper, the prototype is Antony.⁹⁰ In the *h.Mon.* we find such prodigies in the persons of Abba Helle (who ‘persevered since childhood in ascetic discipline’) and Apollo (‘from childhood he had given proof of great ascetic discipline’).⁹¹ Arguably, Pachomius is another *Wunderkind*, albeit unconsciously – as a boy, he falls sick within a pagan environment and vomits. As for Antony, his mission began at the young age of eighteen.

There is much more to write about the *h.Mon.*, but our broad overview can end sufficiently here. We have just examined three Greek hagiographical works from 4th-century Egypt: the *Life of Antony*, the *Life of Pachomius*, and the *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*. The first work is the quintessential specimen of all monastic literature. The two other works have their own uniqueness, but they show clear influence from the *Life of Antony* – Antony appears in all three works, and the *h.Mon.* goes so far as to borrow some of its phraseology.⁹² All three works criticize paganism, yet their authors were classically educated – their rhetorical skills alone betray their *façade* of humility. All works come from Greek-speaking authors: an archbishop of Alexandria, an Egyptian monastic community, and a travelling scholar from Palestine. Despite their differing emphases, all are in broad agreement that monasticism was at its best on the geographical fringes of the civilized world. They acknowledge urban asceticism as a lesser precursor of the anchoritic practice. For our study, what should follow is a study of *originally* Coptic works of hagiography.

In Their Own Tongue: Onnophrius and Shenoute

In this section, we examine two hagiographical works which exist primarily in Coptic: the *Life of Onnophrius (LO)* and the *Life of Shenoute (LS)*. There is no Greek version of either work – a lack which they share with the *LA*. We start with the *LO*, a text from the fourth or fifth

⁹⁰ Cain, ‘Greek *Historia monachorum in Aegypto*’, 355-6.

⁹¹ *h.Mon.* 12.1: ἐκ παιδιόθεν τῇ ἀσκήσει προσκατερήσας; cf. *h.Mon.* 8.2-3: οὗτος γὰρ ἐκ παιδιόθεν πολλὰν ἄσκησιν ἐνδειξάμενος.

⁹² On a related note, the *h.Mon.* appears ignorant of Pachomius or any explicitly Pachomian movement.

century.⁹³ Like the *LA*, the *LO* survives in a much later Sahidic manuscript;⁹⁴ unlike it, however, the *LO* also survives in other languages (Bohairic, Arabic, and Latin) and was further translated in antiquity into Greek, Syriac, Armenian, Georgian, and Ethiopic.⁹⁵ Its namesake character, spelled ONNOΦPPOC in the text ($\text{O}\nu\acute{o}\upsilon\phi\rho\iota\omicron\varsigma$ in Greek), was a desert hermit from the Thebaid region of Egypt, now venerated as a saint.⁹⁶ The *LO* is our only source on him, and it is short in size and scarce on facts.⁹⁷ His year of birth is unknown, but he claims in the text to have been living in the desert for sixty years.⁹⁸ He is depicted as gentle, even timid, but most graceful. He was a total hermit, much like the desert monks of the *h.Mon.*, and even more reclusive than Antony or Aaron. Onnophrius never performs miracles, but rather, miracles are performed for him: God rewards his humility by arranging for food and water to appear magically for him. This, arguably, makes Onnophrius the most passive of all the holy fathers examined in our study.

Let us examine the *LO*'s story. Unlike the *v.Anton.*, the *v.Pach.*, or the *h.Mon.*, which all have long eloquent prologues, the *LO* jumps straight to the point. Here are the first two sentences of the text (note the shift from third to first person between them):⁹⁹

ΑΥCΩΝ ΝΑΝΑΧΩΡΠΤΗC ΕΠΙΡΑΝ ΠΕ ΑΠΑ ΠΑΝΟΥΤΕ ΕΖΗΓΙCΘΑΙ ΕΞΕΝCΗΥ ΜΜΑΙΝΟΥΤΕ · ΝΑΙ ΔΕ ΝΕ
ΝΩΑΔΕ ΝΤΑΥΧΩΟΥ ΔΕ ΑΝΟΚ ΠCΩΝ ΑΙΜΕΕΥΕ ΝΟΥΖΟΥ ΕΤΡΑΒΩΚ ΕΖΟΥΝ ΕΠΧΑΙΕ ΕΤΖΙΖΟΥΝ ΕΤΡΑΝΑΥ
ΔΕ ΟΥΝ CΩΝ ΜΜΟΝΟΧΟC ΜΠΑΖΟΥ

A certain brother, an anchorite by the name of Abba Paphnutius, narrated a story to the God-loving brethren, and these were the words that he spoke. I, your brother, was thinking one day

⁹³ There are actually several versions of the *LO*, each of which expands on existing materials. They could have been written by different monks, with later scribes taking more licence to ‘colour’ the narration; see K. Jones, *Butler’s Lives of the Saints: New Full Edition* (Wellwood, 1997) 94-6. See also M. Malevez, ‘La mission de Paphnuce. Premières recherches en vue de la constitution du dossier hagiographique des abba Onuphre, Paphnuce et Timothée’, in L. Cannyer, *Études Coptes VIII* (Lille, 2003), 225-36.

⁹⁴ Which dates to 1004; Layton, *Catalogue*, 192-3 (no. 161).

⁹⁵ See S. Chauleur, ‘Saint-Onuphre’, *Les cahiers coptes* 5 (1954) 3-15; T. Vivian, ‘The Life of Onnophrius: A New Translation’, *Coptic Church Review* 12 (1991) 99-111.

⁹⁶ The *editio princeps* is E.A.W. Budge, *Coptic Martyrdoms* (London, 1914) 205-24 (Sahidic text), 455-73 (English translation); recently re-translated into English by Vivian, *Paphnutius*, 145-66. My abbreviation, *LO*, refers to Budge and Vivian – both of whom mark the folium divisions, although the latter included his own paragraphing scheme. I refer to the folium scheme for quicker cross-referencing.

⁹⁷ For other research on Onnophrius, see; R.-G. Coquin, ‘Onophrius, Saint’, *Copt.Enc.* 6.1841-2; J. Doresse, *Les anciens monastères coptes de Moyenne-Égypte*, 3 vols. (Yverdon-les-Bains, 2000) 1.127-36; M. Malevez, ‘La mission de Paphnuce’, 225-36.

⁹⁸ *LO* fol. 6b-7a: $\text{NTOY ΔΕ ΠΕΧΑΥ ΝΑΙ ΔΕ ΟΝΝΟΦΡΠC ΠΕ ΠΑΡΑΝ ΔΥΩ ΕΙC CΕ ΠΡΟΜΠΕ †ΩΡΟΠ ΖΗΠΤΕΡΗΝΙΑ}$ ‘He said to me: “My name is Onnophrius, and for sixty years I have lived in this desert.”’

⁹⁹ *LO* fol. 1a. (ΝΑΝΑΧΩΡΠΤΗC sic.)

that I would go into the further desert so I could see whether there were any brother monks in the farthest reaches of the desert.

And thus Paphnutius wanders around the desert wilderness in search of monastic wisdom. The total journey takes at least 21 days, and he is divinely aided by magically appearing food – the moral being that the desert monks are too holy to be reached by human means alone. The first thing that he finds is the dried and crumpling corpse of a long-dead monk. Moving on, he meets Timothy (†ΜΟΘΕΟΣ) – perhaps the *LO*'s equivalent of Pseleusius in the *LA*, in that he tells his life story and, in the process, opens up a secondary narrative level (fol. 3a-5b).¹⁰⁰ Timothy recounts his early hardships, including a six-month affair with a girl-monk (ΜΟΝΑΧΗ) and his liver surgery, performed by a man of light. After Timothy's narrative, Paphnutius asks to live with him, but he refuses.¹⁰¹ Despite the rejection, Paphnutius returns to the desert with renewed vigour.

Next, he meets Onnophrius (fol 6a), who is clothed in leaves and with frenzied hair. This frightens Paphnutius at first, but the hermit's grace quickly wins him over. They chat and pray all night long, and Onnophrius tells an extended secondary narrative of his own (fol. 7a-14a). He originally lived in a monastic community, but decided that life was too good there, so he retired to a cave in the desert. The following morning, Onnophrius instructs Paphnutius to return to Egypt and proclaim what he had heard. Again Paphnutius asks to stay instead, but Onnophrius tells him that his (Paphnutius's) mission lies not in the hermit life. Onnophrius gives one final blessing, and then dies – with angels coming to sing his praises (fol. 14b). His cell immediately collapses to dust, which Paphnutius takes as a sign not to stay after all.¹⁰² Thus, he continues his wanderings, eventually settling around a well of water and vegetation (17a). Four men from Scetis appear, by the names John, Andrew, Heraklamon, and Theophilus (fol. 17b-20b). They recognize Paphnutius and are delighted to see him. They spend a week with him and share their own story (fol. 18a-19b).¹⁰³ Finally, another angel appears (fol. 20a-b), glorifying Paphnutius

¹⁰⁰ *LO* fol. 3a: ΝΤΟΥ ΔΕ ΑΦΑΡΧΕΙ ΝΩΔΑΧΕ ΝΗΜΑΙ ΕΦΧΩ ΜΜΟΣ ΔΕ ΑΝΓ ΟΥΡΩΜΕ ΜΜΟΝΟΧΟΣ ΕΙΟΥΗΗΖ ΖΗΟΥΣΟΟΖΣ ΜΜΟΝΟΧΟΣ ΝΑΥΗΤ ΖΗΘΗΒΑΕΙΣ 'Now he began to talk with me, saying: "I was a monk living in a community of monks in the Thebaid..."'

¹⁰¹ *LO* fol. 5b: ΝΤΚΒΟΜ ΑΝ ΤΕ ΕΤΩΟΥΝ ΖΑΘΟΡΜΗ ΝΗΔΑΙΜΩΝ 'You are not strong enough to resist the attacks of the demons.'

¹⁰² In other versions, a date palm collapses rather than Onnophrius's cell; see S. Baring-Gould, *The Lives of the Saints* (Edinburgh, 1914) 150-4.

¹⁰³ Thereby making themselves a rough equivalent to Anianus and Paul in the *LA*?

and telling him, for a third time, to return to Egypt to fulfill his mission. He complies with both sadness and rejoice, and stays with some brothers in Egypt for ten days, telling them all of the above. The last folium of the text (fol. 21b) switches to the third person.

In many ways, of all the hagiographical works in this study, the *LO* is the closest match to the *LA*. For one, we have already seen both are natively Coptic, surviving in medieval manuscripts, but narrating near the turn of the 5th century. Their narrators share the same name – Paphnutius (no provable relation) – as well as the same reason for writing: to describe their respective journeys through the desert. Their reason for travelling is the same: to learn from great monks. They are both first-time visitors to the desert, but not outright foreigners (as in the *h.Mon.*). Thematically, both texts fuse the genres of biography and travelogue together.¹⁰⁴ They both end with the news that ‘Paphnutius’ reported his story to monks, who in turn wrote it down and stored the manuscript in the local church.¹⁰⁵ The one substantial difference between the two texts is the *LO*’s lack of geographical precision: the *LA* is far more knowledgeable about its settings (Philae, Alexandria, and the First Cataract region). It is perhaps for the broad reason of accessibility that the *LO* and the *LA* met separate fates: the *LO* was translated into all the major languages of the Near East, whereas the *LA*, so far as we know, never left the Egyptian-speaking world. Perhaps *LA*’s intention for a specific regional audience hindered its appeal abroad. Otherwise, the two texts are structurally consanguine.

The last Coptic saint of our study is, as we shall soon see, the least ‘saintly’ of all: Shenoute of Atripe (died 465).¹⁰⁶ The details of his life are shrouded in mystery, with few dates established.¹⁰⁷ Shenoute’s name had long been unknown to the early West, but in Coptic

¹⁰⁴ Cf. the *h.Mon.*, which lacks a ‘central’ biography to unify the narrative; Dijkstra, *Philae and the End*, 246.

¹⁰⁵ *LO*, fol. 21a-b. Note also that only the *LA*, the *LO*, and the *h.Mon.* have interactive narrators. By contrast, 1) Athanasius does cameo in the *v.Anton.*, but he remains outside the narrated world; 2) the *v.Pach.* is entirely third person narration (no overt or identified narrator). As for our upcoming specimen, the *LS*, the narrator only passively participates: he uses the first person, but he interacts only as an eyewitness, not as a protagonist.

¹⁰⁶ Throughout the 20th century, the scholarly last word on Shenoute was J. Leipoldt, *Schenute von Atripe und die Entstehung des national ägyptischen Christentums* (Leipzig, 1903). Since then, S. Emmel has monumentally surpassed this classic work. Anything by Emmel is good scholarship, but see particularly S. Emmel, *Shenoute’s Literary Corpus*, 2 vols. (Leuven, 2004); and S. Emmel, ‘Coptic Literature in the Byzantine and Early Islamic World’, in R.S. Bagnall (ed.), *Egypt in the Byzantine World, 300-700* (Cambridge, 2007) 83-102.

¹⁰⁷ Most controversial of all being his year of birth. Traditionally it is reconstructed as 346, resulting in a lifespan of 118 years. This is the age given in *LS* 174-5, and scholarship has accepted it since at least 1903. One new study has challenged it in favour of birth in the 380s: A.G. López, *Shenoute of Atripe and the Uses of Poverty* (Berkeley, 2013). However, scholarly reaction is skeptical: see separate reviews by J. Timbie, R. Krawiec, and J.H.F. Dijkstra in, respectively: *J ECS* 22 (2014) 160-1; *Journal of Late Antiquity* 7 (2014) 374-6; and *VChr* 69 (2015) 97-103. Emmel considers 362 as the latest plausible birth year, but maintains 346/7; see Emmel,

tradition he has always been an icon. We do know that he grew up in his uncle Pjöl's White Monastery of Upper Egypt, situated in Panopolis, and he later became its abbot.¹⁰⁸ During Shenoute's tenure, the White Monastery grew to 2,200 monks and 1,800 nuns, becoming one of Egypt's largest monasteries. His intense charisma attracted hordes of destitute peasantry – known in Arabic as *fellahîn*. He was also the most prolific writer of the Coptic language, writing an unparalleled quantity of sermons and letters, and corresponding tirelessly to patriarchs and dignitaries.¹⁰⁹ But on the flipside, he also had an unpredictable temper, and frequently lashed out in violence. His reputation as a velvet tyrant casts a dark shadow on the man, one which not even the *LS* could mask.¹¹⁰ Nevertheless, Shenoute stands as the most prominent monastic leader of fifth-century Egypt, whose life and work undeniably accentuated the growth of Coptic literature. For this reason, the *Life of Shenoute* is a critical specimen of hagiographical study.¹¹¹

The *Life of Shenoute* reads, at first glance, like a forced panegyric. Thematically, the work is outlandish fantasy: Shenoute flies magic clouds, teleports at light speed, and has privileged visits from Jesus and all the major prophets.¹¹² It tries to frame him as a pious ardent monk, yet it only minimally mentions his ascetic practices (*LS* 12), and it fails to put a convincing spin on his temper. As the text itself admits, Shenoute beats a monk to death (109-14 at 113) and tramples over a magistrate (73).¹¹³ In one disturbing section, he even starves a

Shenoute's Literary Corpus, 11.

¹⁰⁸ The White Monastery was also situated in the fertile Nile valley, like the Pachomian communities; R.-G. Coquin, M. Martin, 'Dayr Anba Shinudah: History', *Copt.Enc.* 3.761-6; cf. Emmel, *Shenoute's Literary Corpus* 1, 6-24.

¹⁰⁹ Emmel categorizes Shenoute's corpus under two main headings: 'Canons' (κανων), i.e. monastic rules, and 'Discourses' – Emmel's catch-all designation for epistles (επιστολη), treatises or sermons (λογος), and sometimes exegesis (εξηγησις) or cathegesis (καθηγησις). Emmel also employs a miscellaneous third division for other filler material which the monastery put in the back of codices to fill up blank pages; see Emmel, *Shenoute's Literary Corpus* 1, 3-4, and *Shenoute's Literary Corpus* 2, 553-605, 606-72, 673-96.

¹¹⁰ This is also the image that Shenoute himself promotes. Leipoldt made much against him for this; see Leipoldt, *Schenute von Atripe*, 47-91. Emmel is more venial, describing Shenoute as having 'the aura of an Old Testament prophet'; Emmel, *Shenoute's Literary Corpus* 1, 12. Since the 1980s, scholars have distanced themselves from negative judgments, focusing on morally neutral issues like his grammatical style, etc.

¹¹¹ For the *editio princeps* of the Bohairic, see J. Leipoldt (ed.), *Sinuthii Vita Bohairice* (Leuven, 1906). This has been translated into English in D.N. Bell, *Besa. The Life of Shenoute* (Kalamazoo, 1983). Most conveniently, Bell follows the same section-numbering scheme as Leipoldt. Therefore, when I cite from the text, I will simply abbreviate as *LS* and give the section number.

¹¹² For many such examples, see *LS* 18-9, 22-3, 25-6, 58-9, 70-2, 94-7, 154-60. To be fair, the *v.Anton.* also shows Antony commanding wildlife to leave him alone, as in *v.Anton.* 9.6-11, 39.3, 50.8-9, 53.1-3. Such scenes are stock types of hagiography.

¹¹³ The magistrating-trampling scene is based on a true account, except that the text substitutes a demon for the magistrate; see Bell, *Life of Shenoute*, 103-4 n. 58.

homesick boy-monk to death so that he may ‘meet his true father’ (131-4).¹¹⁴ The *LS* also records a famous but entirely fictitious scene of his, in which he physically assaulted Nestorius at the Council of Ephesus – for which he received an admiring kiss and ordination from Archbishop Cyril (128-30).¹¹⁵ Lastly, he also endorses, and even participates in, total war against pagan Blemmyes – he enthusiastically blesses local dukes for slaughtering pagans, and in one epic battle scene he arrives on his magic cloud with a flaming sword to join in the killing spree (102-8 at 108). The text dwells harshly on what consequences await those who disobey God’s laws. Its ultimate teaching is *obedience* at all costs, and by extension, total responsibility of the human freewill.¹¹⁶

There are, of course, more positive scenes in the story. On the one hand, Shenoute obsessed over punishment (usually corporal, but also exile), but on the other, he showed mercy to repentant slackers. He acknowledged the forgiveness of sins through severe penance and self-denial, embodying the bipolar extreme of ‘tough love’.¹¹⁷ He also taught his disciples how to read, a skill for which his rustic students were no doubt grateful. Outside the monastic life, he commissioned large-scale building projects in nearby villages, and defended the peasantry against predatory ruling classes – by bad-mouthing corrupt imperial authorities, tax collectors, pagans, and heretics alike. He made a particular scapegoat out of a certain Gessios, a pagan governor and landowner in Panopolis, whom the *LS* turns into a one-dimensional antagonist, whom López calls a ‘bête noire’.¹¹⁸ Shenoute calls him out as a superficial Christian and a crypto-pagan, who pretends to lead a Christian life but who privately worships false gods. While Gessios is busy deceiving, terrorizing, and extorting wealth from the poor, and building mansions and boats for his own honour, Shenoute comes to the rescue: he goes so far as to break into Gessios’s house, steal his idols, and drown them.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁴ Lit. ἡναογορικ ἕροοῦμεῶννι ἐρατῆ μπεκίωτ ἡαλῆθῆνον ‘Truly, I will send you to your true father’; *LS* 132.

¹¹⁵ The text also has Nestorius desecrate the Gospels by placing them shameless on the ground; *LS* 130. Leipoldt and Emmel both agree that Shenoute did, in fact, attend the Council; see Leipoldt, *Shenute von Atripe*, 90; Emmel, *Shenoute’s Literary Corpus* 1, 7-8. The former suspects that the Patriarch Cyril invited him mainly so that he could have a bodyguard.

¹¹⁶ Consequently, Christ for Shenoute is a suffering role model, a magician, and the eternal judge. For more on this, see the introduction in Bell, *Life of Shenoute*, 19-20.

¹¹⁷ My words. This may be due to the demographic reality of his disciples: most of them are poverty-stricken bottom-class who are accustomed to corporal rule, and for the most part can only be kept in line with iron fists. Shenoute was therefore not unique in resorting to corporal punishment.

¹¹⁸ López, *Shenoute of Atripe*, 11-2.

¹¹⁹ According to the text, the doors to Gessios’s house magically open themselves up for Shenoute to raid in; *LS*

We can also state neutral facts about the *LS* itself. It was undoubtedly written sometime after 465, the year of Shenoute's death. This is evident simply by reading the text: the narrator introduces himself as a former disciple of Shenoute's, by the name of Besa, now of old age:

†ΝΑΕΡΖΗΤΗΣ ΝΣΑΔΙ ΕΘΒΕΝΙΔΟΜ ΝΕΜΝΙΩΦΗΡΙ ΕΤΑΦΑΙΤΟΥ ΝΔΕΦ† ΕΒΟΛ ΖΙΤΟΤΥ ΜΠΕΝΜΑΚΑΡΙΟΣ ΝΙΩΤ
 ΕΘΟΥΑΒ ΑΠΑ ΦΕΝΟΥ† ΝΑΙ ΕΤΑΙΝΑΥ ΉΝΝΑΒΑΛ ΔΝΟΚ ΒΗΣΑ ΠΕΦΜΑΘΗΤΗΣ ... ΙΣΟΥΜΗΩ ΓΑΡ ΝΕΖΟΥ
 †ΉΟΙ ΟΥΟΖ †ΩΤΕΡΤΩΡ ΕΙΕΡΖΟ† Ε† ΜΠΑΟΥΟΙ ΕΒΟΥΝ ΕΝΙΖΒΗΟΥΙ ΝΩΦΗΡΙ ΝΤΕΠΑΙΩΤ ΑΠΑ ΦΕΝΟΥ†
 ΔΕΑΝΟΚ ΟΥΑΘΕΝΗΣ ΟΥΟΖ ΝΖΙΔΙΩΤΗΣ ΉΝΠΣΑΔΙ ...

I will begin my account of the miracles and marvels which God affected through our blessed and holy father apa Shenoute, those which I, Besa, his disciple, saw with my own eyes ... Behold, I am burdened and troubled with many years, and since I am feeble and unskilled in speaking, I am afraid to go into the wondrous works of my father apa Shenoute ...¹²⁰

Even less is known of Besa than of Shenoute.¹²¹ Unlike Theodore in the *v.Pach.* or Paphnutius in the *LA*, Besa is not depicted meeting his great father for the first time – consequently, we know nothing about the generation gap between him and Shenoute. But modern scholarship has now established that Besa actually did not write the *LS* – rather, that honour belongs to an anonymous group writing under his name.¹²²

So far as we can tell, the *LS* is an original Coptic text, more specifically Sahidic, although today it survives intact only in Bohairic.¹²³ No Greek translation was ever made, although Ethiopic and (highly embellished) Arabic and Syriac versions exist. Stylistically, the text is *nonlinear*, and only partially chronological: each paragraph contains an isolated anecdote about Shenoute, arranged *non sequitur*. Only the first few paragraphs (3-10), which document Shenoute's early rise to prominence, and the final few (172-90), which document his death and burial, offer a sense of linear sequence. It is thus a *sandwich narrative*. As for Shenoute's own

126. In another episode (88), Gessios dies after a simple verbal curse from Shenoute. Even Shenoute's donkey can smell potions buried underground, and helps him uncover them (83-4).

¹²⁰ *LS* 2. The narrator routinely employs the first person and situates himself as a participating character.

¹²¹ The full extent of our knowledge on him is recorded in K.H. Kuhn, 'A Fifth-Century Egyptian Abbot', *JThS*, NS 5 (1954) 36-48 (= part I), 174-87 (= part II); 6 (1955) 35-48 (= part III).

¹²² For the evidence against Besa's authorship of the *LS*, see N. Lubomierski, *Die Vita Sinuthii: Form- und Überlieferungsgeschichte der hagiographischen Texte über Shenute den Archimandriten* (Tübingen, 2007).

¹²³ Via Leipoldt, *Sinuthii Vita*. The Sahidic fragments survive in É.C. Amélineau, *Monuments pour servir à l'histoire de l'Égypte chrétienne aux IV^e - VII^e siècles* (Paris, 1888).

fate, the *LS* depicts him dying in anguish over time. His recorded last words, full of *pathos*, invoke the great desert fathers of old:

αϥβΙϥΙ ΞΕΝΠΙΩΩΝΙ ΕΜΑΩΩ ... ΠΕΧΑϥ ΝΗΙ ΧΕΟΥΙ ΝΗΙ ΧΕΠΙΜΑ ΝΗΟΥΙ ΟΥΗΟΥ, ΔΙΝΑΦΟΥ ΩΑΔΩ
ΝΧΟΥ ΝΤΑΖΩΛ ΩΑΦ†; ΟΥΟΝ ΖΑΝΖΟΥ† ΖΙΠΙΜΩΙΤ ΝΕΜΖΑΝΕΖΟΥϥΙΑ ΕΥΧΟΡ, ΟΥΟΙ ΝΗΙ ΩΑ†ΕΡΑΠΑΝΤΑΝ
ΕΠΟϥ. ... ΙϥΝΙΠΑΤΡΙΑΡΧΗϥ ΔΥΙ ΝΕΜΝΙΠΡΟΦΗΤΗϥ ... ΠΑΙΩΤ ΑΠΑ ΠΩΟΙ ΠΑΙΩΤ ΑΠΑ ΔΑΝΤΟΝΙΟϥ ΠΑΙΩΤ
ΑΠΑ ΠΑΪΩΜ ΔΑΜΟΝΙ ΝΤΑΧΙΧ ΝΤΑΤΩΝΤ ΕΘΡΙΟΥΩΩΤ ΜΦΗ ΕΤΑΤΑΥΥΧΗ ΜΕΝΡΙΤϥ ΧΕΖΗΠΠΕ ΙϥΑϥΙ ΝΩΟΙ
ΝΕΜΝΕϥΑΓΓΕΛΟϥ.

He was in great pain from his illness. ... He said to me [i.e. Besa]: ‘Woe is me, for the road is long. How long must I wait before I go to God? There are terrors and strong powers upon the path – woe is me until I meet the Lord. ... Behold! the patriarchs have come with the prophets ... My father apa P̄soi, *my father apa Antony*, *my father apa Pachomius*, take my hand so that I may rise and worship him whom my soul loves, for behold! he has come for me with his angels!’¹²⁴

Immediately following which he dies (186). The sound of choirs ring throughout the monastery, singing praise of Shenoute (187-8). He was subsequently buried in a secret place (189-90). Sometime in the Middle Ages his corpse was found, exhumed, and maimed – only the right arm survives, preserved as a relic in the Church of St. Shenoute, Old Cairo.¹²⁵

Today, Shenoute is studied mainly for his literary output, but to a lesser extent for his monastic practice. Unlike most of his Egyptian contemporaries, Shenoute was acquainted with Greek tradition, albeit superficially. His corpus does not reveal an original thinker, nor even a deep one – he lacked theological formation, with the result that he was more concerned with assaulting heretics than with refuting them. That being said, he towed the Alexandrian line with exceptional authority. Concerning his monastic practice, the most concise fact to be stated is that Shenoute was a ‘semi-eremitic’ – he managed a community like Pachomius, but lived in quite seclusion in a cave, like Onnophrius. He inherited a modified, more austere Pachomian system from his uncle Pjōl, and in turn made it even more austere. For this reason, despite its recognizable commercial industry and internal hierarchy, Shenoute’s system is not considered Pachomian, but an idiosyncratic spin-off of it.

¹²⁴ *LS* 182-6 (emphasis mine).

¹²⁵ O.F.A. Meinardus, *Christian Egypt: Faith and Life* (Cairo, 1970) 148, 189. Cf. *LS* 189.

To conclude, the two most influential hagiographical works from Late Antiquity, which were originally written in Coptic, are the *LO* and the *LS*. I do not want to force an analogy, but Onnophrius reminds us of Antony, only even more reclusive; and Shenoute reminds us of Pachomius, only even more polemic. By making this analogy, I do not intend to make a normative statement: I intend simply to aid understanding of what makes these works part of a single genre. Onnophrius is pure eremitic (unlike Anthony, who was only mostly so), whereas Shenoute leads a strong balance between private and public asceticism. Both texts have an element of magic to them: Onnophrius exudes solemn mystery, whereas Shenoute exudes a more fearful (in the ambivalent sense) type of mystery. The two works show different faces of the same trope: the holy desert man.

Conclusion

We have just studied five Late Antique Coptic hagiographical works. Together, they represent the diverse yet unmistakable features of fourth- and fifth-century monastic life in Egypt. From them, we learn that monasticism was born independently in Egypt with institutional support (Antony), that the new movement drew thousands of like-minded ascetics together (Pachomius), that rumours of this movement fascinated foreigners (*h.Mon.*) and native Egyptians alike (Onnophrius, Shenoute). All of them broaden our perspective on the cultural background of the *LA*. But they also teach us an important caveat about the nature of hagiography: to make the subject larger than life. We should not treat hagiographical works as mines of unadulterated historical information. Rather, they are inspired memoirs of praise. To achieve this end, they routinely allude to biblical themes and miraculous stories to reinforce the glory of God channeling through the subject.

After having studied five other hagiographies, we can safely conclude that the *LA* is stylistically and thematically conventional with each of them in special ways. In the *v.Anton.*, we see the first classic example of hagiography: all the *LA*'s use of biblical allegory, miracle accounts, and even theological homilies can be found in the *v.Anton.* The *v.Pach.* is a bit less alike to the *LA*, because Aaron was not a coenobite, but we can still see an element of 'community-building' in both works (namely, in the legendary history of Macedonius and the

Christianization of Philae). From the *h.Mon.*, the *LA* clearly borrows the motif of travelogue: Paphnutius and Pseleusius each traverse the desert in search of monks, and the bishop elects of Philae take numerous well-detailed trips to Alexandria. As for the *LO*, that work shares with the *LA* the theme of innocent humility: neither Onnophrius nor Aaron make any mention of pagans, heretics, or even the whole question of ‘orthodoxy’.¹²⁶ Finally, the *LS* is the furthest removed from the *LA*, and likely the only one from this selection to have been written after it. Nevertheless they share common hagiographical motifs, such as idol-smashing, dehumanization of non-Christians, clairvoyant visions, and other supernatural abilities attributed to the protagonist. Taken together, we find many possible expressions of common themes in Egyptian hagiography.

While dozens of other promised hagiographical works could have found their way in this study, we chose the most well-known and representative from our relevant period of study. Their inspiration helped pioneer the Coptic language into an independent literature – some of these saints (Pachomius, Shenoute) were even prolific writers in their own right. Together, I believe that these five works demonstrate well enough the literary background from which the *LA* arises. Perhaps as a grand summary, we can see in the *LA* a conscious fusion of the literary patterns in the *h.Mon.* with a more extensive rescripting of the *LO* (itself inspired, like all hagiographical works, by the *v.Anton.*). The *LA* is, therefore, a masterful synthesis of the many varieties of hagiography extant in its place and time.

¹²⁶ I am talking exclusively about the third section of the *Life of Aaron*.

Chapter 2: Narratology – Ancient and Modern, Theory and Practice

Introduction

Before we can narratologically analyse the *Life of Aaron*, we must first introduce the theoretical models being adopted. For that reason, this chapter will present the methodology used in our analysis of the *Life of Aaron*. This is not a survey of narratological theories, but a statement of the specific tools employed in our study. Narratology is a new field, whose genesis dates to the turn of the twentieth century. Although originally homogeneous, from the mid-century onward it split apart into diverse and often opposing directions. One could study the *Life of Aaron* from any of these schools (feminism, postmodernism, psychoanalysis, and so on) and arrive at entirely different results. For our purposes, however, we stick to the traditional structuralist approach.

Narratology, in its basic sense, is the study of narrative, and a narrative is a personalized account of events, whether actual or fictional. The possibilities of form or style that narratives can take are endless, but each has a unique structure which follows universal patterns; for example, they normally describe a chain of causally-related events from beginning to end – such a chain is called the ‘plot’.¹²⁷ Narratology is thus a *semiotic* theory: it contrasts the content of a *story* with its presentation (the *text*).¹²⁸ In Antiquity, narratives appeared commonly in epic poetry, historiography, and oral tradition, though the standard genre for theoretical study was tragedy.¹²⁹ In modern times the novel genre has become the main inspiration for narratology. My own object of study – a hagiography – falls outside both mainstreams, and no official handbook exists for hagiographical narratology. The task of this chapter, therefore, is to customize our own niche methodology, and apply modern theory to an ancient text.

The first section of the present chapter represents the state of narrative theory in antiquity. In so doing, I aim to demonstrate the classical thought on narrative. Aristotle inevitably monopolizes the discussion for three reasons: first, he wrote the most lucidly on the subject, and

¹²⁷ As we shall later see, the narrator may violate the chronological flow in many creative ways.

¹²⁸ We will expand sufficiently on this point, but for a general introduction, see S. Onega, J.A.G. Landa, *Narratology: An Introduction* (London, 1996) 3-6.

¹²⁹ Consider the Homeric epics, the *Histories* of Herodotus, and the traditional mythologies, respectively.

is considered its top authority; second, the indigenous Egyptians never produced any competing methods of their own; third, although the Arabs wrote important works on narrative theory, they do not appear until long after our period of study.¹³⁰ Occasionally we will include Plato's ideas, but from an Aristotelian perspective. Following this, a section on modern narratological theory briefly defines the narratological background which our analysis will adopt. We will concentrate on the structuralist tradition and its formulation of key literary concepts. The final section will demonstrate how these definitions and formulations will be applied to the *Life of Aaron*.

Ancient Narrative Theory

It is important to keep in mind which literary concepts existed in Antiquity and which did not. Prior to the twentieth century, narratology as a scientific method did not exist. Whenever ancient authors engaged in the study of narrative, they did so as part of a broader study on rhetoric, drama, or poetry. Whenever ancient writers discussed 'narrative', they typically discussed its structure, its classification, or the eloquence of its presentation.¹³¹ Classical authors seldom invented new stories of their own, preferring to compile, commentate on, or emulate mythological themes.¹³² Thus, when modern narratologists praise Aristotle as the first of their kind, they do so anachronistically; his concept of 'narrative', although foundational, was far less systematic than ours. He himself does not define narrative, and seems to take the role of narrator for granted.¹³³ Much of his ideas remained undeveloped until the advent of structuralism in the twentieth century (more on this in the next section), but he had an immediate impact on literary criticism. In the remainder of this section, we will examine his major work on the subject, *Poetics* (Περὶ ποιητικῆς), and mine out the key points which apply to our current study. Although it focuses on tragedy, the *Poetics* offers broader insights into all varieties of

¹³⁰ For an introduction to Arabic literary theory, see G.J.H. van Gelder, *Beyond the Line: Classical Arabic Literary Critics on the Coherence and Unity of the Poem* (Leiden, 1982).

¹³¹ Consider, e.g., Horace's *Ars Poetica*, from which we sparingly cite below.

¹³² One major exception is Aesop, who 'wrote' many now-famous tales. Other examples of inventive fiction were usually written for rhetorical purposes: consider Plato's account of Atlantis in *Timaeus* (24e-25a), or the whole premise behind Lucian's *True History* – an intentionally satirical criticism against citing myth as truth.

¹³³ In any case, an Aristotelian could define 'narrative' as either 'a work with a plot' or, more narrowly, 'a work with a narrator'; see Onega and Landa, *Narratology*, 13-5.

narrative.¹³⁴ It does not set out to categorize or dogmatize drama, but rather to explore its mechanisms.¹³⁵ From now on, passages from this text will be cited with the appropriate Bekker reference number.

To Aristotle we owe the inspiration for the contrast between *logos* (λόγος ‘story’) and *mythos* (μῦθος ‘plot’). Both words have wide meanings, but in narratological circles *logos* means a scheme of events called *praxeis* (sg. πράξις ‘action’) – from which arise the related terms *pragma* (πράγμα ‘event’) and *prattōn* (πραττῶν ‘agent’) – while *mythos* means an artistic depiction or *mimesis* (μίμησις, ‘imitation’) of said *praxis*.¹³⁶ In hindsight, the *logos/mythos* dichotomy now ranks among the first critical breakthroughs of literary theory – leading to the *story/plot* dichotomy of 20th-century criticism. Of course, however, this formulation took millennia to develop: Aristotle himself simply meant *logos* – along with the derivative *lexis* (λέξις ‘way of speaking’) – in the sense of verbal skill, and *mythos* in the sense of compositional skill. The former skill forms the basis of the *Rhetoric*, and the latter of the *Poetics*. He did not directly cast the two words in opposition – in fact he takes the meaning of *logos* as self-evident, but defines *mythos* in great depth. The following passages sum up most of the above terms (and others which we will see shortly) in a comprehensive manner (underlines added for visual clarity):

ἐπεὶ δὲ πράξεως ἐστὶ μίμησις, ... ἔστιν δὲ τῆς μὲν πράξεως ὁ μῦθος ἢ μίμησις, λέγω γὰρ μῦθον τοῦτον τὴν σύνθεσιν τῶν πραγμάτων, ... ἀνάγκη οὖν πάσης τῆς τραγωδίας μέρη εἶναι ἕξ, καθ’ ὃ ποιά τις ἐστὶν ἢ τραγωδία ἢ ταῦτα δ’ ἐστὶ μῦθος καὶ ἦθη καὶ λέξις καὶ διάνοια καὶ ὄψις καὶ μελοποιία.

Since [tragedy] is the ‘imitation’ of an action, ... and [since] the ‘plot’ is the imitation of the action – for I use ‘plot’ in this sense: the putting together of the ‘events’ – ... because of all this, the [number of] ‘aspects’ to tragedy[-making] as a whole that account for tragedy as a distinct [species] must be [exactly] six: plot and characters and speech and thought and ‘visuals’ and song-making.¹³⁷

¹³⁴ More correctly, this may be an accident of history: the surviving Greek text is incomplete, with an entire section on comedy missing and various lacunae throughout, so perhaps the full text had a wider scope than tragedy alone; G. Whalley, *Aristotle’s Poetics* (Montréal, 1997) 35.

¹³⁵ J. Baxter in Whalley, *Aristotle’s Poetics*, xxvi-ii.

¹³⁶ For a thorough discussion, see S. Halliwell, *Aristotle’s Poetics* (Chicago, 1998) 140-4, especially at 141.

¹³⁷ Arist. *Po.* 1449b36-1450a10.

In the *Poetics*, Aristotle offers extensive advice on how to construct a beautiful *mythos*. For it to succeed, a *mythos* must follow certain norms: fundamentally, it must have a beginning (ἀρχή), a middle (μέσον), and an end (τελευτή), and its *praxeis* must neither begin nor end accidentally, but must transition logically, with no unexplained loose ends, to an inevitable and self-contained *telos* (τέλος ‘(purposeful) end’).¹³⁸ Aristotle’s formulation of the beginning-middle-end constraint is particularly famous:

ὅλον δέ ἐστιν τὸ ἔχον ἀρχὴν καὶ μέσον καὶ τελευτήν. ἀρχὴ δέ ἐστιν ὃ αὐτὸ μὲν μὴ ἐξ ἀνάγκης μετ’ ἄλλο ἐστίν, μετ’ ἐκεῖνο δ’ ἕτερον πέφυκεν εἶναι ἢ γίνεσθαι ἢ τελευτῇ δὲ τοῦναντίον ὃ αὐτὸ μὲν μετ’ ἄλλο πέφυκεν εἶναι ἢ ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἢ ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ, μετὰ δὲ τοῦτο ἄλλο οὐδέν ἢ μέσον δὲ ὃ καὶ αὐτὸ μετ’ ἄλλο μετ’ ἐκεῖνο ἕτερον. δεῖ ἄρα τοὺς συνεστῶτας εὖ μύθους μὴθ’ ὀπόθεν ἔτυχεν ἄρχεσθαι μὴθ’ ὅπου ἔτυχε τελευτᾶν, ἀλλὰ κεχρῆσθαι ταῖς εἰρημέναις ιδείαις.

A ‘whole’ is [something] that has a beginning, and middle, and an end. A ‘beginning’ is what does not necessarily have to follow anything else, but after which something naturally is or happens; an ‘end’, the other way round, is what naturally is after something else, either of necessity or usually, but has nothing after it; a ‘middle’ is what comes after something else and has something else after it. Well-constructed plots, therefore, must neither begin at an accidental starting-point nor come to an accidental conclusion, but must have followed the principles we have given.¹³⁹

Mythoi may be ‘simple’ (ἄπλοῖ) as in only one line of action, or ‘complex’ (πεπλεγμένοι) as in parallel actions converging together (more on this in the next paragraph). Either way, *mythoi* must have a moderate enough size (μήκος, μέγεθος interchangeably) to be memorable (literally, εὐσύνοπτον ‘discernible’) – some genres, like epic poetry, may have longer plots than others, but their size must still be ‘beautiful’ (καλόν) and ‘not arbitrary’ (μὴ τὸ τυχόν).¹⁴⁰ Lastly,

¹³⁸ Not synonymous with τελευτή; *telos* has no English equivalent, but ‘(purposeful) end’ comes close enough. It implies that tragedy itself is an action; see Whalley, *Aristotle’s Poetics*, 66 (n. 9), 72 (n. 29).

¹³⁹ Arist. *Po.* 1450b26-34. In the Roman world, Horace phrased this more poetically: *atque ita mentitur, sic veris falsa remiscet, primo ne medium, medio ne discrepet imum* ‘And so skillfully does he invent, so closely does he blend facts and fiction, that the middle is not discordant with the beginning, nor the end with the middle’; Hor. *Ars.* 151-2.

¹⁴⁰ Arist. *Po.* 1450b34-1451a5. Again Horace concurs: *Neve minor neu sit quinto productior actu fabula quae posci volt et spectata reponi* ‘Let no play be either shorter or longer than five acts, if when once seen it hopes to be

mythoi (for tragic plays, that is) must be arranged to bring out an appropriate emotional release (κάθαρσις ‘catharsis, purification, purgation’) from the audience.¹⁴¹ These basic constraints on narrative structure, as framed by Aristotle, remain universally valid.

Aristotle expands the discussion of simple vs. complex with important recourse to *peripeteia* (περιπέτεια, ‘reversal’) and *anagnorisis* (ἀναγνώρισις, ‘recognition’). *Peripeteia* refers to sudden change or reversal – more specifically, the necessary change in a play from one state of affairs to its opposite.¹⁴² When a character undergoes *peripeteia*, it is either internal (a ‘change of heart’) or external (a ‘change of fortune’ – both expressions mine), often with an element of irony. *Anagnorisis*, on the other hand, is what Aristotle calls ‘a change from not-knowing to knowing’,¹⁴³ a moment of sudden self-awareness or realization, often (though not necessarily) synchronous with *peripeteia*. One may liken *anagnorisis* to the pivotal moment when the protagonist finally understands his destiny, or his relationship to the antagonist, and so on. Moments of *peripeteia* or *anagnorisis* (or both) are focal points for maximum intensity – they concentrate their full emotional effect on a single point in time. Aristotle explicitly labels *mythoi* as ‘simple’ (ἄπλοῖ) when they occur without *peripeteia* or *anagnorisis*, and as ‘complex’ (πεπλεγμένοι) when they feature one or both.¹⁴⁴

Aristotle further divides the *mythos* into two phases: *desis* (δέσις ‘tying’) and *lysis* (λύσις ‘untying’) – these are the words from which we get the classic concepts of ‘complication’ and ‘denouement’ (or rising and falling action).¹⁴⁵ The analogy is quite simple: as a story progresses, its *desis* builds up, making the opening setting increasingly untenable; as tension reaches critical mass, *lysis* begins, and the story resolves towards a new permanent reality. The *desis-lysis* cycle

called for and brought back to the stage’; Hor. *Ars.* 189-90.

¹⁴¹ Arist. *Po.* 1149b28, 1455b15. Aristotle never defines *catharsis*, but the sense is clear enough.

¹⁴² Aristotle phrased it similarly: ἔστι δὲ περιπέτεια μὲν ἢ εἰς τὸ ἐναντίου τῶν πρατομένων μεταβολὴ καθάπερ εἴρηται ... κατὰ τὸ εἰκὸς ἢ ἀναγκαῖον ‘*Peripeteia* is a [sudden] change [over] of what is being done to the opposite ... according to likelihood or necessity’; Arist. *Po.* 1452a22-4. He then cites two examples: one from *Oedipus*, in which a messenger comes to quell his fear about his mother, only to do just the reverse and disclose who he really is; the second from *Lynceus*, in which Lynceus and Danaus both believe the latter will kill the former, but instead the opposite happens; 1452a24-30.

¹⁴³ ἀναγνώρισις δέ, ὡσπερ καὶ τοῦνομα σημαίνει, ἐξ ἀγνοίας εἰς γνῶσιν μεταβολή; Arist. *Po.* 1452a30.

¹⁴⁴ Arist. *Po.* 1452a12-8; cf. Whalley, *Aristotle’s Poetics*, 84-7 (n. 87-93). The ‘finest’ (καλλίστη) *anagnorisis*, according to Aristotle, co-occurs with *peripeteia*. He cites again from *Oedipus*, in which the protagonist realizes that he has killed his father and married his mother, as a prime example; Arist. *Po.* 1452a32-3.

¹⁴⁵ Arist. *Po.* 1455b24-32; cf. Whalley, *Aristotle’s Poetics*, 114-6 (n. 188, 190). Sometimes Aristotle substitutes δέσις with πλοκή, ‘weaving’; see Arist. *Po.* 1456a9.

can be likened to a compressed spring, which builds up in tension before it is released – in other words, the *desis* leads towards crisis, and the *lysis* away from it. Depending on the genre, this process may bring joy or misery to the protagonist, but either way, *lysis* begins irreversible change. Note that the *desis* may infer events that occurred before the main plot, but that the *lysis* must be entirely explained within the plot. Every *mythos* has a *desis* and a *lysis*. Aristotle offers some basic advice to poets on how best to convey *desis* and *lysis*. *Lysis* should result from the character's actions, not from chance or divine intervention, and the transition should be unexpected but innately logical.¹⁴⁶ Many story-writers tend to 'unravel' clumsily by selecting their actions without criteria.

Aristotle also provides a working theory of 'character' (ἦθος 'ethos'), albeit undeveloped.¹⁴⁷ Aristotle sees *ethos* not as a personal identity, but as incarnate behaviour: the actors perform the story's *praxeis*, through which they reveal their *ethos*.¹⁴⁸ For a drama to have greater effect, its characters and their circumstances must be believable; their nature must be consistent, predictable, and fully explainable. Curiously, however, a play can still succeed without any 'characters' at all – in the sense that the persons portrayed lack *ethos*. Aristotle even went so far as to rank (famously) *ethos* as inferior to *mythos* – which to him was the 'principle' and 'soul' of tragedy;¹⁴⁹ this has always been a controversial argument, from which modern narratology has since detracted. He did not venture far into the topic of character types, except for ranking characters as morally superior, inferior, or equal to the audience.¹⁵⁰ In sum, Aristotle was not a significant contributor to the field of character analysis.

Last but not least is the contrast of *mimesis* (which we have already seen) with *diegesis* (διήγησις, 'narration, report'). Aristotle made frequent use of the former term, though he never defined it except through example. *Mimesis* is a process, an ongoing relation between a natural phenomenon and an artistic representation of it. The actors perform *mimesis*, and the poet channels himself through their actions; this *mimetic* function makes *mythos* possible, because

¹⁴⁶ He specifically derides Euripides's *Medea* for its recourse to divine intervention; Arist. *Po.* 1454a37-54b2, 1455b29-32. Again Horace agrees with Aristotle: *Nec deus intersit, nisi dignus vindice nodus incidere* 'And let no god intervene, unless a knot come worthy of such a deliverer'; Hor. *Ars.* 191-2.

¹⁴⁷ He brings up the subject in passing, and the manuscript itself suffers from corruptions; see Arist. *Po.* 1454a15-33; cf. Whalley, *Aristotle's Poetics*, 106-11.

¹⁴⁸ Arist. *Po.* 1450a5, 1450b8.

¹⁴⁹ ἀρχὴ μὲν οὖν καὶ οἶον ψυχὴ ὁ μῦθος τῆς τραγωδίας, δεύτερον δὲ τὰ ἦθη; Arist. *Po.* 1450a38-9.

¹⁵⁰ Arist. *Po.* 1448a1-5.

mythos – as we have seen – is the *mimesis* of action. Plato, admittedly, is more helpful in this regard: he famously called *diegesis*, ‘speaking as oneself’ (λέγει τε αὐτὸς), as opposed to *mimesis*, whereby one speaks ‘as someone else’ (ὡς τις ἄλλος ὢν).¹⁵¹ Because of Plato’s incremental question-and-answer style, it is difficult to find a short passage that summarizes everything completely and didactically – the following are perhaps the most concise available:

εἰ δέ γε μηδαμοῦ ἑαυτὸν ἀποκρύπτοιο ὁ ποιητής, πᾶσα ἂν αὐτῷ ἄνευ μιμήσεως ἢ ποιήσις τε καὶ διήγησις γεγονυῖα εἴη.

But if the poet should conceal himself nowhere, then his entire poetizing and narration would have been accomplished without imitation.¹⁵²

He then explains:

εἰ γὰρ Ὅμηρος εἰπὼν ὅτι ἦλθεν ὁ Χρύσης τῆς τε θυγατρὸς λύτρα φέρων καὶ ἰκέτης τῶν Ἀχαιῶν μάλιστα δὲ τῶν βασιλέων μετὰ τοῦτο μὴ ὡς Χρύσης γενόμενος ἔλεγεν ἀλλ’ ἔτι ὡς Ὅμηρος, οἷσθ’ ὅτι οὐκ ἂν μίμησις ἦν ἀλλὰ ἀπλῆ διήγησις.

If Homer, after telling us that Chryses came with the ransom of his daughter and as a supplicant of the Achaeans but chiefly of the kings, had gone on speaking not as if made or being Chryses but still as Homer, you are aware that it would not be imitation but narration, pure and simple.¹⁵³

Thus, for Plato, in *mimesis* the action is enacted (‘shown’); in *diegesis* it is ‘told’. Narration is thus the antithesis of *mimesis* – pure *mimesis* has no narration.¹⁵⁴ In retrospect, only Plato’s material discusses *diegesis* in this narrative sense, so it is from him where modern narratology derives its formulation of narrative ‘voice’.¹⁵⁵ As for Aristotle, he restricts his treatment of

¹⁵¹ Pl. *R.* 393a, 393c. Here Plato dwells on Hom. *Il.* 1.15-6 as an example of λέγει τε αὐτὸς, though here he means διήγησιν in the sense of the whole set of events at Troy, rather than the manner of quoting. He develops that latter sense over the course of his discussion.

¹⁵² Pl. *R.* 393c.

¹⁵³ Pl. *R.* 393d – Plato is still referring to Hom. *Il.* 1.15-6, like in 393a.

¹⁵⁴ The remainder of his discussion sets normative constraints on *mimesis* for his ideal society; Pl. *R.* 394d-398b.

¹⁵⁵ Gerard Genette was particularly prominent in modernizing these concepts. He developed a three-level diegetic system: extradiegetic (when the narrator speaks), diegetic (when the characters speak), and metadiegetic or hypodiegetic (when the characters give sub-narratives of their own). He also attempted, with controversial success, to quantify *mimesis* based on one’s degree of faithfulness vs. licence when quoting discourse; in short, more faithfulness = more *mimesis*, more licence = more *diegesis*. For more detail, see G. Genette, *Narrative*

diegesis to rhetoric, but he makes clear the superiority of *mimesis* in drama.¹⁵⁶

In Late Antique hagiography, the term *diegesis* developed a different meaning. Greek hagiographers did not, in fact, refer to their own writings as *bios* (βίος, ‘life’), but as *diegesis* (sometimes *diegema*).¹⁵⁷ While technically any brief account of something is an act of *diegesis*, hagiographers took it to mean a descriptive portrait of a laudatory figure (especially based on eyewitness testimony).¹⁵⁸ The origin of using *diegesis* in this sense dates as far back as the Gospel of Luke in the first century.¹⁵⁹ By the third century, when the first Desert Fathers shared their experiences orally, the usage became commonplace. But *diegemata* can constitute more than just ‘words of wisdom’: it can apply metaphorically to one’s exemplary way of life. But as the hagiographical genre matured, the term *diegesis* narrowed to mean written storytelling, typified by unadorned style and intrinsic truth-value.¹⁶⁰ The unadorned style prevents distraction from lofty prose, and thus denotes honesty from the author. The author’s first-hand experience, either his own or of his informants, reinforces this.

To conclude, modern narratology casts Aristotle as its inspirational predecessor, albeit revisionistically. Narratives certainly existed in antiquity, but no rigorous system of narrative analysis. The ancients demonstrated more interest in rhetorical wordplay and the moral implications of plays than in their narrative structure. They also had a less developed, one-dimensional understanding of narrative levels – or at the very least, they took the complexity of stories for granted. Some contributions of Aristotle in this regard include the refinement of the concepts *mimesis* vs. *diegesis*, *mythos* vs. *logos*, *praxis*, and *ethos*; other literary terms which we

Discourse: An Essay in Method (Ithaca, 1980).

¹⁵⁶ See Arist. *Rh.* 1414a37-b15, 1416b16-1417b20; cf. Arist. *Po.* 1460a6-b5. In brief, Aristotle discouraged poets from speaking in their own person, lest they disrupt the important flow of *mimesis*.

¹⁵⁷ For more on this point, see C. Rapp, ‘Storytelling as Spiritual Communication in Early Greek Hagiography: The Use of *Diegesis*’, *J ECS* 6 (1998) 431-48, particularly at 432-5.

¹⁵⁸ For example, in Pall. *h.Laus.* Prol. 2, the author refers to his work as ‘*diegema*’ and ‘*diegesis*’. Secondly, in Thdt. *h.Rel.* Prol. 1, Theodoret of Cyrrhus also used the term to mean an individual narrative of each character in his work; Rapp, ‘Storytelling’, 433-4.

¹⁵⁹ Lk 1:1; see n. 185. Exegete François Bovon informs us: ‘Διήγησις is an oral or written report longer than a χρεία (‘anecdote’) and presupposes a narrative development. The word can also denote a historical account’; F. Bovon, *Luke 1: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 1:1-9:50* (Minneapolis, 2002) 19 n. 29. See also Rapp, ‘Storytelling’, 440, 445-6.

¹⁶⁰ The concept of ‘truth’ in hagiography makes a fascinating discussion. There the frequent accounts of superhuman asceticism, physical battles with demons, and amazing miracles, however fantastic, are not easily called ‘fiction’. Rather, ‘truth’ takes on a transcendental meaning in hagiography; see C. Mesis, ‘Fiction and/or Novelisation in Byzantine Hagiography’, in Efthymiadis, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography*, 2.313-41 at 313-7.

explored were *peripeteia* and *anagnorisis*. In our current study, Aristotle serves not to represent our methodology, but rather to enrich it – we will employ his ideas with the benefit of hindsight.

Modern Narrative Theory

Having just explored Aristotle’s proto-narratological perspective, we shall now explore the teachings of modern narratology. Aristotle’s ideas remained undeveloped all the way up until the 1910s, when the first narratologists revived them with the latest insights from theoretical linguistics.¹⁶¹ These first-wave narratologists are now called *Russian formalists* in literary circles (sometimes *modernists* more generally) because they came from Russia. They studied literature as a strict sum of its technical parts, and they ignored all sociological variables.¹⁶² By the middle of the century, formalists had put increasing emphasis on the more semiotic approach to linguistic theory, resulting in a second wave of narratologists: the so-called *structuralists*.¹⁶³ This new school posited that any object of study (in our case, narratives) can only be understood in comparison to related objects (that is, other narratives). Therefrom, structuralist narratologists seek to expose the ‘deep structure’ of all possible varieties of narrative. This line of thought enjoyed a ‘golden age’ of sorts during the mid-century, until a new generation of narratologists bestowed favour to postmodern theory and its preoccupation with social studies.¹⁶⁴

In this study, I adopt the old-school structuralist tradition, because it is the most useful one for our purpose: the study of narrative *structure*. I am indebted to three specific theorists who not only pioneered the field, but who directly inspired the framework for this study: Mieke Bal, Gérard Genette, and Gerald Prince. We will reference their works abundantly throughout this portion of the chapter. That being said, although their methodology is sound, the examples which they give are not suited for classical studies – to fill that void, I turn to Irene de Jong. She

¹⁶¹ Especially the work of Ferdinand de Saussure – his lecture notes, published posthumously as *Cours de linguistique générale* in 1916, inspired the whole structuralist movement which would supersede formalism.

¹⁶² Exemplary formalists include V. Shklovsky, B. Tomashevsky, and B. Eichenbaum, selections of whose works are translated in L.T. Lemon, M.J. Reis, *Russian Formalist Criticism* (Lincoln, 1965); see also V. Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale* (*Морфология Сказки*) (Leningrad, 1928).

¹⁶³ For a general introduction, see P. Barry, *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* (Manchester, 2009) 38-58.

¹⁶⁴ The motivation behind this is not relevant for this paper, but for a general reference, see M. Currie, *Postmodern Narrative Theory* (Houndmills, 2011).

specializes in Homeric epic, and has written a fine primer for applying modern narratology to ancient Graeco-Roman texts. It is accessible for classical and modern philologists alike. Lastly, note also that, because the *Life of Aaron* (and much of ancient literature) deals primarily with male characters, I will streamline my own diction and stick to the masculine pronoun.

Perhaps the most fundamental principle in narratology is the distinction between *text* and *story*. In the beginning, the Russian formalists had called these concepts *syuzhet* (сюжет) and *fabula* (фабула): *syuzhet* being a narrated arrangement of events, and *fabula* a ‘real’ sequence of events.¹⁶⁵ In structuralism, this would evolve into *text* and *story*: a *text* is simply a literary corpus, while a *story* is the narrative content within it. Throughout the mid-twentieth century, narratologists had been operating under this two-tier framework. Thanks to the innovative work of Mieke Bal, narratologists have now revived the old *fabula* concept, and devised a powerful three-tier narratological model: *text*, *story*, and *fabula*.¹⁶⁶ Under this innovation, the text tells a story about a series of events called a *fabula*. To put it another way: a text is written content; its *fabula* is whatever it describes; and the *story* is the precise way in which the *fabula* is conveyed. The *fabula* exists only as a reconstruction in the reader’s mind. This three-tier approach – which I adopt – is now the standard, because it reveals narratological nuances which the two-tier often overlooks.¹⁶⁷

To reiterate: there are three narratological levels to any literary work: the text, the story, and the *fabula*. The text is a written work, the story is the content of the text, and the *fabula* is the timeline of the story. While the following analogy may not be perfect, consider the Gospels: each is a separate text, each putting its unique spin (its story) on the same *fabula*: the life of Jesus Christ. But a ‘text’ need not be of enlightened value to qualify as such: in fact, narratology holds any random string of symbols to be a ‘text’, but not a story (certainly not a coherent one). A text

¹⁶⁵ The first person to use these terms was Viktor Shklovsky, albeit in passing, and Boris Tomashevsky would expand the idea into a formal essay. In his closing comments in one essay, Shklovsky quipped: ‘The idea of *plot* is too often confused with the description of events – with what I propose provisionally to call the *story*. The story is, in fact, only material for plot formulation’; V. Shklovsky, *Тристрам Шенди Стерна: Стилистические Комментарий* (Petrograd, 1921). Tomashevsky then added: ‘Plot is distinct from story. Both include the same events, but in the plot the events are arranged and connected according to the orderly sequence in which they were presented in the work’; B. Tomashevsky, ‘Тематика’, in *Теория Литературы* (Leningrad, 1925). Both works trans. Lemon, Reis, *Russian Formalist Criticism*, 25-57 at 57, 61-95 at 67, respectively.

¹⁶⁶ M. Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, (Toronto, 1997²) 5-7, 175-219; Onega and Landa, *Narratology*, 6-8.

¹⁶⁷ This becomes apparent in avant-garde or experimental narrative, especially with parallel or non-linear plots.

may creatively arrange its events in whatever order for whatever reason, but a *story* has only one ‘true’ chronology. A text is always ‘complete’ even if parts are missing, but a story is never complete without all its structural elements present. There are conflicting views as to what a story’s ‘elements’ are, but for our purposes we recognize two types: narrative or non-narrative.¹⁶⁸ A narrative unit drives the action, whereas a non-narrative unit simply provides circumstantial context. In other words, a narrative unit records an *event*, while a non-narrative unit does not.

As its name indicates, ‘narratology’ is the study of narrative. A *narrative*, in turn, is the written retelling of a series of *events* – historical or fictional. An *event*, in structuralist terms, is a transition from one state of existence to another.¹⁶⁹ Events come in two forms: active (as in ‘The sun was shining’) or stative (as in ‘John was handsome’). We may cautiously identify active events as *narrative units*, and stative events as *non-narrative units*, although this may be simplifying matters. The ratio of active to stative events in a text often reveals its genre – more actives make for a fast-paced story, while more statives make for a picturesque story.¹⁷⁰ For these events to form a narrative, they must be causally related and form a chronological whole. Sometimes an event does not fit neatly within the chronology, but if such misfits are few in number, then the narrative can still remain cohesive. Obviously, some events will be less relevant than others (this is normal), and so narratologists may opt to derive a hierarchy of relevance among them.¹⁷¹

Structuralist narratologists examine what all narratives share together, and the extent to which they can differ. Although narratives come in great diversity, they must conform to certain norms.¹⁷² First of all, they must describe events which relate *causally* and *temporally* to each other – too many contradictions or loose ends make for a rather sloppy narrative.¹⁷³ Second, a

¹⁶⁸ Sometimes these are called *functions* and *indices*, respectively – note how this is merely a rephrasing of the *mimesis/diegesis* distinction; see R. Barthes, ‘Introduction à l’analyse structurale des récits’, *Communications* 8 (1966) 1-27; T.G. Pavel, ‘Literary Narratives’, in T.A. van Dijk (ed.), *Discourse and Literature: New Approaches to the Analysis of Literary Genres* (Amsterdam, 1985) 85-104 at 93.

¹⁶⁹ Bal, *Narratology*, 182.

¹⁷⁰ G. Prince, *Narratology: The Form and Functioning of Narrative* (Berlin, 1982) 62-5.

¹⁷¹ In general, the more events that there are (i.e. the longer the narrative), the easier it is to construct such a hierarchy. The least relevant events may even be so superfluous that they do not contribute to the story-line and thus can be omitted; see Prince, *Narratology*, 68.

¹⁷² In extreme cases these norms can be bent, like in avant-garde or experimental literature, but since we are not covering them, we do not need to account for them.

¹⁷³ In the words of an influential modern novelist and critic, ‘Plot is a narrative of events, the emphasis falling on causality’; E.M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (London, 1927) 130.

narrative must have a *narrator* – some personified bias – who observes the events and records them from his perspective. A narrative, after all, is not a scientific tabulation of events, but an artistic retelling of them, so chronicles and bulletins are not considered narratives. Third, a narrative must minimally document at least *one* permanent transition (that is, two states of existence) over a definite span of time.¹⁷⁴ There is no maximum limit, provided that the whole is cohesive and consistent. In the following paragraphs, we illustrate the above principles.

A narrative text may be *purely narrative* (as occurs in epic, novel, and dithyramb lyrics), *applied narrative* (historiography, biography, hagiography), or a *narrative within a non-narrative* (myths or parts of a lyric, messenger speeches in drama, *narrationes* of oratory).¹⁷⁵ In pure narratives, the narrator is fully engaged in the story, vivifying and embellishing it with his unique expressive style. In fact, we could even say that in pure narratives, the narrator himself is the centre-point, or main attraction, of the story. In the classical world, Homer and Virgil are perhaps the most celebrated examples. In applied narratives, the narrator is still present, but the focus is more on the subject matter rather than the art of expressing it. In such cases, the works of Herodotus come to mind, as well as the hagiographical works examined in this thesis. Lastly, non-narratives like dramas simply do not have narrators, except for the odd character who may give an ‘epi-narrative’ of sorts – the archetypal example would be that of a messenger or eyewitness. One should never automatically equate the *narrator* (a creation) with the *author* (the creator), although of course the two can be the same persona (consider autobiography).¹⁷⁶

A story may have one or multiple narrators; if the latter, then structuralists typically construct a *hierarchy* over them. Whoever opens the entire narrative (whoever ‘narrates first’) is, structurally speaking, the *primary* narrator. This primary narrator may then introduce a new

¹⁷⁴ Depending on one’s definition, this transition is achieved by a minimum of either two or three events: an opening stative, an intermediate action, and a concluding stative. The prior stative represents an initial *troubled universe* which, courtesy of the intermediate action, transitions permanently into a *re-established universe*; see T.G. Pavel, ‘Literary Narratives’, 95-7.

¹⁷⁵ These classifications come from I.F. de Jong, *Narratology & Classics: A Practical Guide* (Oxford, 2014) 17-27. Her sixth to eighth chapters concentrate on pure, applied, and narrative-within-nonnarrative forms respectively: see 135-66, 167-96, 197-224.

¹⁷⁶ This point can get complicated. Sometimes, like in Hesiod’s *Theogony* 22-23, the author may invent a semi-fictional caricature of himself through which he tours his narrated world; De Jong, *Narratology & Classics*, 18. For the consequences of this important point in hagiography proper, see M. Hinterberger, ‘The Byzantine Hagiographer and his Text’, in Efthymiadis, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography*, 2.211-46.

(*secondary*) narrator, and when this happens, a new *narrative level* opens.¹⁷⁷ This cycle can continue indefinitely, but the more narrators there are, the more complex the hierarchy. If the narrator himself is a character in the story, participating or interacting in the events which he describes, then he is called an *internal narrator*. Otherwise, if he serves more as an outsider or witness, without influencing the events, then he is an *external narrator*.¹⁷⁸ I provide two examples below for illustration – in the first, the speaker (Aeneas) opens an *internal secondary narration*, while the second (Socrates) opens an *external secondary narration* (emphasis added for clarity):

*sed si tantus amor casus cognoscere nostros \ et breviter Troiae supremum audire laborem,\
quamquam animus meminisse horret luctuque refugit,\ incipiam. fracti bello fatisque repulsi \
ductores Danaum tot iam labentibus annis \ instar montis equum divina Palladis arte \
aedificant ...*

But if there is so much desire to learn our [i.e. personal] vicissitudes and briefly hear about Troy's last agony, although my mind shudders to remember and has taken refuge in sorrow, I will make the attempt. Broken by the war and thrust back by fate, the Greek leaders, seeing that the years were passing by, build with the help of Pallas' divine art a horse high as a mountain ...

εἰ δὲ βούλει, σοὶ ἐγὼ, ὡς τοῦτο οὕτως ἔχει, ἐθέλω λόγον λέξαι. ... ἄκουε δὴ, μάλα καλοῦ λόγου, ὃν σὺ μὲν ἠγήση μῦθον, ὡς ἐγὼ οἶμαι, ἐγὼ δὲ λόγον ἴσως ἢν οὖν νόμος ὁδε περὶ ἀνθρώπων ἐπὶ Κρόνου ... τῶν ἀνθρώπων τὸν μὲν δικαίως τὸν βίον διελθόντα καὶ ὀσίως, ἐπειδὴν τελευτήσῃ εἰς μακάρων νήσους ἀπιόντα οἰκεῖν ἐν πάσῃ εὐδαιμονίᾳ ἐκτὸς κακῶν ...

If you [Callias] want, I will tell you a story, to show you that the case is so. ... Give ear then, as they say, to a very fine story, which you will regard as a myth, I think, but I as a true story. ... Now in the time of Cronos there was the following law concerning mankind ... that every man who has lived a just and pious life departs after his decease to the Isles of the Blest and lives in total bliss without ill ...¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ Note that anteriority does not entail importance: conceivably, a *secondary* or even a *tertiary* narrator could play a more profound role than the primary narrator.

¹⁷⁸ Genette called internal narrators *homodiegetic*, and external narrators *heterodiegetic*.

¹⁷⁹ Verg. *A.* 2.10-6; Pl. *Grg.* 522e-3a. Both trans. De Jong, *Narratology & Classics*, 21-2. The backspaces in the former indicate line divisions, for the benefit of meter.

Both types of narrators may be *overt* (explicitly drawing attention to himself as a narrator) or *covert* (abstaining from any sign of self-awareness). Even if a narrator shows no lucidity towards his act of narrating, he may still employ deliberate rhetorical skill to persuade or manipulate the reader; but without that lucidity, he is still covert. By definition, pure narrators are always overt, while applied narrators can go either way. Internal primary narrators tend to be overt, since by definition they are characters in their own stories, and thus exhibit at least some degree of self-consciousness. Non-primary narrators are nearly always overt, because there has to be some verbal cue to signal the beginning of a new narrative (and the subsequent end of it, followed by a return to the main narrative). It is not always clear where to draw the line between overt and covert narration – either can be just as eloquent as the other, although in covert narration, the narrator keeps the attention away from himself. In the following examples, De Jong considers the first to be overt, and the second to be covert (emphasis added for clarity):

fortunati ambo! si quid mea carmina possunt, \ nulla dies umquam memori vos eximet aevo, \ dum domus Aeneae Capitoli immobile saxum \ accolet imperiumque pater Romanus habebit.

Happy pair! If my poetry has any power, no day shall ever blot you from time's memory, so long as Aeneas' house shall stand on the Capitol's immovable rock, and the Roman ruler supreme.

ἔζετ' ἔπειτ' ἀπάνευθε νεῶν, μετὰ δ' ἰὼν ἔηκε ἰ δεινὴ δὲ κλαγγὴ γένετ' ἀργυρέοιο βιοῖο ἰ οὐρῆμας μὲν πρῶτον ἐπῶχετο καὶ κύνας ἀργούς, αὐτὰρ ἔπειτ' αὐτοῖσι βέλος ἔχεπευκὲς ἐφίεις βάλλ' ἰ αἰεὶ δὲ πυραὶ νεκύων καίοντο θαμειαί.

He [Apollo] then settled at a distance from the ships and let an arrow fly. Terrible was the twang from his silver bow. The mules he attacked first and quick dogs, but then he sent his sharp arrow at the men themselves. And constantly burned the close-packed pyres of the dead.¹⁸⁰

In ancient literature, there exist other special forms of narration. One is the hybrid form between primary and secondary, called *reported narration*. In such cases, the narrator paraphrases a story attributed to someone outside it – often an anonymous ‘they’ or ‘he’.¹⁸¹ Many ancient historians ascribe their accounts to oral sources, with stock trigger phrases such as

¹⁸⁰ Verg. *A.* 9.466-9; Hom. *Il.* 1.48-52. Both trans. De Jong, *Narratology & Classics*, 26-7.

¹⁸¹ For examples, see De Jong, *Narratology & Classics*, 23.

‘they say, it is said’, and like varieties (λέγουσι, *dicuntur*, etc.). Another special form is the so-called *we-narration*, or first-person-plural narration, which is used to liven up the narrative when the narrator is among company. Lastly, even more dynamic is the *you-narration*, or second-person narration. In modern literature, second-person narration is rare, employed mostly for experimental effect; in ancient literature, however, a narrator will switch to second person in order to address a specific character within his own story. Note that when this occurs, the characters being addressed are *not* ‘narratees’ (explained in the next paragraph). Certain hymns employ *you-narration* with exceptional skill, but good examples also abound in Latin.¹⁸²

For every narrator there is a *narratee* – someone to whom the narrative is addressed.¹⁸³ Every narrative, logically, has at least one narratee whether explicit or not. A primary narrator narrates to a primary narratee, and a secondary narrator to a secondary narratee, and so on. Grammatically, the narratee is in the second person whereas the narrator is in the first.¹⁸⁴ The narratee may have much, little, or no familiarity to the narrator, the events, or the characters. Like narrators, they may also be overt (explicitly named) or covert (unidentified or implied). Even when covert, the narrator may still mark the narratee’s presence, perhaps by explaining certain issues on their behalf, or by using ‘insider’ jargon. I am reminded of one famous example from the New Testament:

Ἐπειδήπερ πολλοὶ ἐπεχείρησαν ἀνατάξασθαι διήγησιν περὶ τῶν πεπληροφορημένων ἐν ἡμῖν πραγμάτων, καθὼς παρέδοσαν ἡμῖν οἱ ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς αὐτόπται καὶ ὑπηρέται γενόμενοι τοῦ λόγου, ἔδοξε κάμοι παρηκολουθηκῶτι ἄνωθεν πᾶσιν ἀκριβῶς καθεξῆς σοι γράψαι, κράτιστε Θεόφιλε, ἵνα ἐπιγνῶς περὶ ὧν κατηχήθης λόγων τὴν ἀσφάλειαν.

Since many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as those who were eyewitnesses from the beginning and ministers of the word have handed them down to us, I too have decided, after investigating everything accurately anew, to write it down in an orderly sequence for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may realize

¹⁸² See, for example, *h.Hom. h.Ap* 124-9; or *Ov., Met.* 1.717-21. We abstain from reproducing these examples, because second-person narration does not occur in the *Life of Aaron* nor in the other hagiographical works examined. On the other hand, while *we-narration* abounds in the *Life of Aaron*, I deem the concept to be self-explanatory, so examples are not necessary.

¹⁸³ Prince, *Narratology*, 16-7, 21-4; De Jong, *Narratology & Classics*, 28-33.

¹⁸⁴ In fact, narratology holds that ‘third-person’ narrators do not actually exist – all narrators are first person whether expressed or not; see M. Bal, *On Story-Telling: Essays in Narratology* (Sonoma, 1991) 79; and De Jong, *Narratology & Classics*, 19.

the certainty of the teachings you have received.¹⁸⁵

In the above example, Theophilus is an external overt narratee. By contrast, the other canonical Gospels all have external covert narratees – they are not identified or otherwise addressed.

The narratee may be a character or group *outside* the story or simply the reader himself (*external narratee*), or a character or group *within* the story (*internal narratee*). Many combinations are possible. For example, character A may tell a past experience of his to character B (internal narrator to external narratee). Otherwise, A may talk to B about events in which neither participated (external narrator to external narratee) – or about events in which they both participated (internal narrator to internal narratee).¹⁸⁶ Whenever a character starts to narrate to the primary narrator, that character becomes the secondary narrator and the primary narrator becomes the secondary narratee. There are too many scenarios to give an example for each, so instead, I will illustrate them in my third chapter on a case-by-case basis, as the *Life of Aaron* provides. As for the Gospel of Luke, however, Theophilus is an overt external narratee, and Luke is (minus the prologue) a covert external narrator.

Narratives require a *character* – a ‘logical participant’¹⁸⁷ with a unique set of propositions (short; long black hair; Whistler’s mother, and so on) – to instigate events. The requirements to qualify as a character are strict but astonishingly flexible: any inanimate object can turn into a character, provided it is anthropomorphed. In other words, though normally human, any sentient entity can make for a valid character. For a character to *function*, however, it should be foregrounded (that is, distinguished from the background) at least once – for example, in the sentence: ‘There were thousands of people at the fair’, these thousands of people are part of the background, and hence are not characters. Characters may be further defined more sharply by their actions, words, feelings, and (above all) their relations with other characters. They may be dynamic (evolving for better or worse) or static (no evolution), predictable or unpredictable, complex or simple.¹⁸⁸ Sometimes they are categorised into generic archetypes like the ‘hero’, the

¹⁸⁵ Lk 1:1-4.

¹⁸⁶ By comparison, having an external narrator to an internal narratee is rare but not impossible. It would require a character who did not participate (or is not participating) in a series of events to narrate them to an actual participant of them. For example, a detective may share his reconstruction of a crime scene with his top suspect.

¹⁸⁷ Prince, *Narratology*, 71-3.

¹⁸⁸ Or in E.M. Forster’s terms, *round* and *flat*; Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, 67-78.

‘villain’, the ‘damsel in distress’, and infinitely more.¹⁸⁹ The most ‘textually prominent’ character (the one with the most propositions) is usually the *primary character* or the *protagonist*; less defined characters are called *secondary* or *minor*.¹⁹⁰ This protagonist is usually unique in some way: perhaps he has a unique quirk or moral superiority/inferiority, or perhaps he alone embarks on a certain mission. This protagonist normally dominates during the most important parts of the narrative (usually the beginning and the end). In most narratives (not all), characters are the essential driving force of the action.

Now with all of the above being said, note that simply obeying the rules will not guarantee a ‘good’ narrative: this is where *narrativity* comes into play.¹⁹¹ The concept is easy to understand yet difficult to measure. In short, narratives succeed as such to varying degrees. The higher its ratio of events to elaborations, the higher its narrativity. The graver its conflict or tension, the higher its narrativity. Narrativity increases the more its temporal sequences make sense, and are grounded with *certainty* in the past.¹⁹² Narrativity further increases when the narrative is semantically holistic, with a self-explanatory beginning that comes to a logical and complete (but not too predictable!) conclusion, and all parts accounted for. Ideally, the end is conditioned by all the precedents – conversely, a *non sequitur* development or any unexplained loose ends can impair narrativity. But perhaps most important of all, a narrative must have a *point* – it should be worth telling, and should not leave us begging the question: ‘so what?’.¹⁹³ In sum, ‘narrativity’ measures, albeit subjectively, the narrative’s quality as a narrative.¹⁹⁴

¹⁸⁹ Greimas categorized them as subjects (desiring an object), objects (desired by the subject), senders (motivating the desire), receivers (of the object), helpers (of the subject), and opponents (of the subject). Bremond, on the other hand, grouped them dichotomously as agents/patients, protectors/frustrators, seducers/intimidators, informers/concealers, etc. See Prince, *Narratology*, 72.

¹⁹⁰ More formally, the second-most important character is called the *deuteragonist*, and third-most the *tritagonist*. If there is a main opponent to the protagonist, that character is called the *antagonist* (sometimes the same as the deuteragonist or tritagonist).

¹⁹¹ What follows here is a summary of Prince’s treatise on the subject. Briefly, if a certain reader finds element Y in text X, the reader will consider X to be of high narrative value; see Prince, *Narratology*, 82-3, 143-59.

¹⁹² In other words, the events should be ‘factual’; even in fiction they should be presented as fact, not as probability. Now of course, a narrative may produce suspense or even some uncertainty, and in moderation this can boost the narrativity, but if left unresolved, it can impair the narrativity. Narrative abhors abstraction and thrives on concreteness: the reader needs to know *exactly* what is going on in the story.

¹⁹³ W. Labov, *Language in the Inner City* (Philadelphia, 1972) 366. That being said, the measurement of ‘point’ is not the concern of grammar, but of a more abstract theory of reading; see Prince, *Narratology*, 102.

¹⁹⁴ Prince, *Narratology*, 157, makes a related and most convincing point: ‘reading a narrative is waiting for the end and the quality of that waiting is the quality of the narrative’. At any rate, most people would agree intuitively what constitutes a ‘narrative’ (let alone a ‘good’ one) and what does not.

To conclude, narratives are ubiquitous and diverse, yet are all based upon a common theoretical structure – one which conforms to the same rules as human language, logic, and cognition.¹⁹⁵ Most narratives can be accounted for with relatively few rules, and narratologists seek to formulate them. In so doing, they have posited a multi-dimensional level of reading: the *text*, with a structure of its own, tells a *story*, itself with a structure of its own. Stories are made up of *events* – their core building blocks. Events are performed by *characters* and recounted stylistically by a *narrator* to a *narratee*, of whom there may be one or several; if several, then narratologists construct a hierarchy over them. A more complex hierarchy of narrators results in a more complex cycle of mini-narratives within the whole text. The characters themselves each possess unique propositions which identify their role(s) within the narrative. The narratologist's task is to rank the characters by their propositions: major characters have a greater number and prominence of propositions. When all of this is done, the narratologist then sets a value on the story's overall *narrativity*. This, in short, is structuralist narratology.

Putting These Concepts into Practice

So far we have cursively examined ancient literary theory and structuralist narratology; our task now is to demonstrate how to put these theories into practice in our analysis of the *Life of Aaron*. The following examples are simplified for illustrative purposes – we will refine our methodology as the study progresses. As usual, we adhere to Prince's template as our main inspiration, albeit with stronger consideration of Bal. Bal's three-tier model of narrative (*text*, *story*, *fabula*) excels on the discussion of *focalization*, and so we will explore her ideas shortly. The concept of focalization dates at least as far back as Genette, whose own model has since fallen out of date and been reformed by Bal.¹⁹⁶ As for Genette, his unique contribution lies in the discussion of 'mode', by which he means how much of the story appears in the text; for example, when the characters speak, are they quoted verbatim (as if from an exact transcript), or has their

¹⁹⁵ Such rules have been formulated elsewhere in sufficient detail, so we will not discuss them here. For examples, see R. Barthes, *S/Z* (Paris, 1970); R. Barthes, 'An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative', in R. Barthes, S. Heath (ed.), *Image, Music, Text* (New York, 1977) 79-117; C. Bremond, *Logique du récit* (Paris, 1973) 186.

¹⁹⁶ Bal, *On Story-Telling*, 80-4, has critically re-examined Genette's overall model in broader detail. I will be adhering to Genette's typology through the caveats of Bal's clarifications.

speech been either stylized or summarized? The way in which we answer this question affects the outcome of our structural interpretation.

Our main task is to reconstruct the *Life of Aaron*'s chronology of events – or in Bal's terms, its *fabula*. In a more complete analysis, events are meticulously numerated as events A, B, C, and so on thereby reducing the plot to a logical formula – if actions A and B are simultaneous, the narrator may use linguistic strategies ('meanwhile', etc.) to reflect this. Such an extensive approach exceeds the scope of our thesis, so a more broad plot summary will have to suffice. Still, I will leave the reader with an example of how such a full algebraic analysis works. Suppose two friendly characters produce $A + B$; two hostile characters would then produce $A - B$. Extending this analogy further, one may then derive the following formula for a play like Euripides' *Bacchae*:

$$(Pentheus - Dionysus) \& (Dionysus > Pentheus) \rightarrow (Pentheus = 0)$$

In other words, Pentheus' antagonism against Dionysus, combined with Dionysus's superiority, leads to Pentheus' death. Obviously, as we explore the full structure of the *Life of Aaron*, this system will complexify. During this reconstruction, we will compare the chronology to its textual presentation: the weaker their correspondence, the more distant the text and story;¹⁹⁷ the greater their distance, the more difficult our task will be.

From this we will derive the narrative's *rhythm*: its overall pattern of *narrative speed*.¹⁹⁸ Some events are elaborated upon in exquisite detail ('slow speed'), whereas others are quickly skimmed over ('fast speed'). Sometimes a certain span of time is skipped entirely ('ellipsis'), and in other cases the narrative comes to a complete pause ('zero speed').¹⁹⁹ In general, the more words devoted to an event, the slower its narrative speed. Note that narration normally occurs *after* the narrated events in time, but in complex cases there may be *intercalated narration*: suppose events from time A are related at time B, then events from time C are related at time D,

¹⁹⁷ Note that two narratives may structure their events differently but have identical propositional content. This freedom of structural possibilities accounts for the limitless possibility of what constitutes a narrative; see Prince, *Narratology*, 48-50.

¹⁹⁸ For specific treatments, see Bal, *Narratology*, 108; Prince, *Narratology*, 54-9.

¹⁹⁹ Prince's five discrete speeds: pause ('zero speed'), stretch ('slow speed'), scene ('normal speed'), summary ('fast speed'), and ellipsis ('infinite speed').

and so on.²⁰⁰ Whenever the narrative deviates from linear chronology, *anachrony* occurs, usually backwards but sometimes forwards. In both cases the narrator remains ‘situated in the present’.²⁰¹ The span of time between the narrated past and the relative ‘present’ is called the (*temporal*) *distance*,²⁰² and this distance is expected to fluctuate.²⁰³ Often we are told when events occurred, but less often are we told when the narration itself occurred; further, we may be told next to nothing about *how long* a narrative took to complete. Sometimes there are ways around this, but they may be sketchy.²⁰⁴ Of course, rather than despair, we will do what we can.

On the surface, the *Life of Aaron* appears to jump all over the place chronologically, but in reality it has a rational order of embedded narrations. Frequently, a character in the primary narrative will tell a story of his own, thereby opening a subordinate second level of narration.²⁰⁵ This process is usually (not always) made obvious through the use of a declarative verb. Some embedded narratives serve mainly to *explain* the past or present, others to *prophesy*, others to *persuade* either the reader or the narratee (especially about the greatness of a certain saint!), or others simply to *entertain*.²⁰⁶ Some embedded narratives even stand as microcosms of the main, thereby acquiring the name *mirror-story* and taking on a *thematic* role. In the most liberal definitions, embedded stories can be merely one sentence long,²⁰⁷ but normally they are sufficiently developed. If the embedded cycles are complex enough, the primary story may fade from memory.²⁰⁸ Sometimes the embedded stories will be more important than the primary; their

²⁰⁰ Note that grammatical verb tense need not necessarily correspond with chronology; consider the historical present as a common means to describe past events with extra vividness; Prince, *Narratology*, 27-9.

²⁰¹ Anachrony generally intensifies in proportion to the story’s complexity – presumably because of greater need to explain a longer background. Bal, *Narratology*, 83-4. See also Pavel, ‘Literary Narratives’, 98-9.

²⁰² Bal, *Narratology*, 89-91.

²⁰³ For example, the narrator could be discussing, over the years 450 to 455, events that happened in 440; then, he may discuss, in the year 455, events that happened between 440 and 450; see Prince, *Narratology*, 30.

²⁰⁴ Consider intercalated narrations (esp. diaries), which often reference the date and duration of narration; Prince, *Narratology*, 31.

²⁰⁵ A change in narrative level may coincide with a change in focalizing level, but not always. The former is usually easier to spot; see Bal, *On Story-Telling*, 91-5; also Prince, *Narratology*, 35.

²⁰⁶ Terminology from – in modified form – De Jong, *Narratology & Classics*, 34-6. Of course, some embedded narratives take on multiple roles: for example, what might be a *persuasive* narrative for the narratee may be a *prophetic* one for the reader.

²⁰⁷ For example: ‘I shall kill you at dawn to prevent you from deceiving me, because my first wife betrayed me’; Bal, *Narratology*, 55.

²⁰⁸ In some stories (like *One Thousand and One (Arabian) Nights*) this is an explicit goal, but not in the *Life of Aaron*: it aims not to forget the main narrative, but to build up to it; for more on *Arabian Nights*; see Bal, *Narratology*, 52-4.

inter-relationship will determine which, if any, is more important.²⁰⁹ We will lay out the *Life of Aaron*'s hierarchical narrative structure so as to reconstruct a single, synchronic and simplified sequence of events. Therefore, our chronology will be both horizontal (past to present) and vertical (main narrative to secondary, tertiary, and so on).

We will also engage in limited *character analysis* – we identify all the actors in the *Life of Aaron*, and position them within the narrative strata. In general, structuralists typecast characters through their functions and interpersonal relations. This is often expressed algebraically: suppose character X (subject) aspires towards goal Y (object, concrete or abstract). Perhaps external power Z either assists or inhibits the subject.²¹⁰ Other characters may be *anti-subjects* (not to be confused with the *antagonist* or opponent): they pursue their own aim, which by chance may support or inhibit the subject. Finally, if a certain character plays no functional role in the structure (perhaps because they do not cause or undergo actions), they may be omitted from the analysis.²¹¹ Another means of quantitative character analysis involves binary oppositions – either a character has or lacks a certain trait. The traits are selected arbitrarily by the analyst, then ordered by importance in the story. More mundane examples of binary opposition include +/- male, +/- friend, but the choice of traits to study lies with the analyst. Here is an sample chart for illustration.²¹²

Character	Qualifications:	strength	diligence	flexibility
farmer/father		+	+	-
student/son		-	-	Ø
mother		Ø	Ø	+

(+ = positive; - = negative; Ø = unmarked, or unspecified)

²⁰⁹ Some questions to consider: Does the narration of the embedded story influence the characters in the primary story? Does the primary story rely on descriptions of the embedded story to develop its own plot? Would the primary plot have developed the same way if the embedded story had not been extraposed?

²¹⁰ Anything supporting the subject's pursuit is called a *power*, and the person to whom the object is 'given' is called the *receiver*. Receiver and subject need not be the same. Greimas used the French terms *destinateur* ('sender') and *destinataire* ('receiver'). See Bal, *Narratology*, 197-203.

²¹¹ Bal, *Narratology*, 95.

²¹² Taken from Bal, *Narratology*, 126-9 at 127. Obviously this system has limitations – for one, it is inherently simplistic – but it is fast and accessible, hence its popularity. See the page references for a response to the criticisms of binary logic in narratology.

For our purposes, we will limit our character analysis to the use of *focalization* (also called ‘viewpoint’) – the precise manner in which events are viewed and filtered.²¹³ The *focalizer* is the subject observing events (the object, or *focalisé*) on behalf of the narrator; it is what can be called ‘the eyes of the narrator’.²¹⁴ No narrative can logically exist without focalization.²¹⁵ It may be fixed (only one perspective throughout), variable (toggling through individual perspectives), or multiple (simultaneous parallel perspectives). The focalizer may take the perspective of an omniscient spectator (‘non-focalized’, such as a god or prophet), an ignorant spectator (‘externally focalized’, such as a stock messenger in tragedies), or one of the characters (‘internally focalized’).²¹⁶ The less restricted the scope of the focalizer, the more that the narratee is allowed to know. As a character, an internal focalizer participates in the story’s action, unlike an external one.²¹⁷ The primary narrator is thus, by this virtue, a *narrator-focalizer*, and thereby can be overt or covert, external or internal.²¹⁸ On a theoretical note, focalization is arguably narratology’s most fundamental methodological contribution to classical studies. The process of analyzing focalization can become complex sometimes, not least due to its inherent ambiguity, but it uncovers critical insights into the bias behind the narrative.²¹⁹

With all of the above in mind, our analysis shall proceed as follows. First, we will enumerate all of the narrative events within the *Life of Aaron* both in order of textual presentation and in order of reconstructed chronology; wherever possible, we will assign an exact date to each event, otherwise we will keep their chronology relative. Second, we will identify all the spots in the text when the narrator changes (in other words, when a new *narrative level* opens or closes), and then identify who the narrators are; by so doing, we will be reconstructing the text’s

²¹³ Focalization is among the most complicated concepts used in this thesis, and it falls outside our scope to explain all its nuances. Still, I hope at least to present an overview. For more detail, see Bal, *Narratology*, 8, 142-4.

²¹⁴ Carefully note not to confuse *focalizer* (the ‘observer’) with *writer* (the ‘speaker’); it is quite common for one person (the narrator) to express the vision of another (the focalizer). In other words, person A says that B sees what C is doing. Focalization can shift freely from one character to another, even without any change of narrator. See Bal, *Narratology*, 146-50; Pavel, ‘Literary Narratives’, 99-100.

²¹⁵ For elaboration on this point, see De Jong, *Narratology & Classics*, 47.

²¹⁶ Bal and Prince both discuss the same concepts with similar terms but different subtleties in meaning; see Bal, *On Story-Telling*, 77, 84; Prince, *Narratology*, 50-4. Cf. De Jong, *Narratology & Classics*, 56.

²¹⁷ In Aristotelian terms, internal focalization is mimetic, and external is diegetic; external focalizers can also embed an internal (diegetic) narrator; see Bal, *Narratology*, 163.

²¹⁸ An overt narrator-focalizer will cast value judgments on the things being observed, whereas a covert one will *strive to appear* neutral (but may still harbour biases unexpressed). By definition, an *internal primary narrator-focalizer* is overt, because here the narrator is reflecting on his own life; De Jong, *Narratology & Classics*, 48-9.

²¹⁹ For elaboration, see De Jong, *Narratology & Classics*, 69.

narrative structure. Third, we will identify all of the characters (explicit or implicit) within the text, rank them by propositions, and tentatively reconstruct their own timeline. Occasionally, we will identify the changes in *focalization* – the spots where point of view shifts – and compare them with changes in narrator.

Conclusion

This chapter has condensed two historical frameworks of narratology into under twenty pages. We have skimmed through ancient Aristotelian as well as modern structuralist narratological theory, both of which will be employed in our analysis of the *Life of Aaron*. This will be done in a synthetic rather than comparative way: Aristotle serves to enrich our understanding both of narrative theory in Antiquity, and of modern structuralism. Thus, our study uses *one* method, not two. Our central modern methodological inspirations have come from Gerald Prince and Mieke Bal. Prince offers a practical approach to narrative study, whereas Bal offers advanced theoretical nuances. Both of their methods, which were broadly intended for all types of narratives, have been narrowed down and simplified for our unique purposes.

From this discussion, the most essential points to remember are the following. The Greeks did not have a conscious narratological methodology, but they were aware of narrative voice and various story elements (namely, that its events must have a self-contained teleological order). Narratology proper arose from Russia at the turn of the twentieth century, modernizing Aristotle's *logos/mythos* dialectic into the now-canonized *text/story* distinction. Among narratology's other most fundamental developments are the theories of *focalization* (a personalized point of view), *narrative speed/rhythm*, and *levels of narration*. Whereas tragedy was the standard literary study in Antiquity, nowadays it is the novel. Our specific variety of narratology is called *structuralism*, and it borrows terminology from theoretical linguistics to produce a linguistics-inspired *grammar of narrative*. Our study does not speculate on narrative grammar, but rather takes it as self-evident and employs its tenets.

As we mentioned in the General Introduction, narratology has not yet been applied to Coptic literature, so we have no direct model to follow. The closest models available are modern studies of classical poetry, of which Irene de Jong offers pioneering examples – especially from

Homer, her speciality. In the bigger picture, however, even Classical studies is underrepresented in the broader field of modern narratology. The reverse is also true: narratology is a fringe area of study within the Classics. The situation for Coptic literature is even more extreme, for narratology has barely been applied to it.²²⁰ Fortunately, Coptic literature (at least the kind which concerns this thesis) does not differ fundamentally in structure from Greek literature, so in effect, the theoretical groundwork (exemplified by De Jong *et alii*) has already been done. Furthermore, the *Life of Aaron* is a complex but accessible work, making it a good starting point for narratological analysis.

²²⁰ Among the mainstream exceptions that come to mind is E. Zakrzewska, 'The Coptic Language', in G. Gabra (ed.), *Coptic Civilization: Two Thousand Years of Christianity in Egypt* (Cairo, 2014) 79-90.

Chapter 3: A Narratological Analysis of the *Life of Aaron*

Introduction

In the first chapter we discussed the *Life of Aaron* (*LA* from now on), in the second we introduced narratological theory, and now we shall analyse, narratologically, the text in question. More specifically, we shall first summarize the contents of the text, and then reconstruct its root chronology – its *fabula*. This is an important first step because we must carefully discern between the *factual* and *textual* orders of events. The *LA* routinely flashes backward and forward in time in extended episodes, but fortunately, such shifts are announced by easy-to-follow formulas.²²¹ Some parts of the text match the *fabula* more closely than others, and some parts, such as exegeses and extended speeches, fall outside the definition of narrative. Our task will be to identify the more and the less chronologically structured parts. Wherever possible, we will propose as accurately a date as possible to the event in question – towards that end, it merits repeating that the *LA* takes place in the 4th-to-5th centuries, but was written in the 6th.

After reconstructing the *fabula*, we shall analyse the hierarchical relationship among the narrative parts. This entails a study of the narrative and focalizing structures. Whereas the *fabula* progresses horizontally from past to present, the *story* progresses both horizontally (from the beginning of the text to the end) and vertically (up and down the narrative levels). The *LA* has numerous narratives which arrange into a hierarchy – the *primary narrative* at the top governs all *secondary narratives*, which in turn govern all *tertiary narratives* and so on up to the *quaternary*. There is only one primary level but many sub-primaries – all tertiaries are entirely contained within the secondary, and all secondaries within the primary.²²² By this definition, the primary level occupies the entire story – it opens the text and occupies the temporal ‘present’, the most temporally advanced point of the narrative (there is never a flash forward into the ‘future’). In general, the further down the hierarchy one goes, the farther back in time the narrative takes place. The majority of narrative action takes place at the secondary level – that is, during the passages of Pseleusius and Isaac, both of whom narrate to Paphnutius. As we summarize the

²²¹ For example, in *LA* 28: ἡνατάμοκ ἐνετὰινὰγ ἐροοῦ μὴ νετὰιςοτμοῦ ντμπαεῖδτ ἐτοῦααβ ἀπα γαρων... ‘I shall tell you about the things that I have seen and heard from my holy father Apa Aaron...’.

²²² This is the most manifest in *LA* 1-4, 26-8, and 139-40 – where no secondary level coincides with the primary.

contents and distinguish the linear *text* from the linear *chronology*, we will also introduce the characters and settings of the story.

Crudely, the text divides into three sections. The first (1-28) reads like a travelogue of desert hermits. The second section (29-85) is a legendary history of the bishops of Philae – it also features travelogue, with lively depictions of Alexandria, Aswan, and the Cataract. The third section (86-138) reads like a biography of the desert monk Apa Aaron, after which a brief epilogue (139-140) concludes the text. Despite its high number of focal points, the text is marvellously well-tied together: its three sections can successfully stand alone as independent texts, yet together they make for a convincing unified narrative. Except for some obviously non-narrative portions (which are explicitly marked), the *narrativity* of this text is uniformly high.²²³ Finally, note that when I quote from the text, I use ellipses [...] to indicate that I am skipping parts, whereas I use dashes [---] to indicate lacunae within the text.

Linear Structure

We begin by examining the story in its textual order. The first narrator is Paphnutius, an aspiring monk on a journey to the south to learn from the anchorites near Aswan. He is not formally introduced to the reader, except presumably in the missing first page.²²⁴ In the first surviving paragraphs (1-3), he shares the Eucharist with Pseleusius (πσελεγιος) in the latter's abode. Present with them is Zaboulon (ζαβουλων), the companion of Pseleusius. Pseleusius shares his lifelong experiences with Paphnutius, recounting how, in his youth, he naturally inclined to the ascetic life (4). One day, a vision appeared to him, edifying him with Scripture quotes.²²⁵ When Pseleusius asked his wise neighbour about its meaning, the latter interprets this as a sign for him to retreat into the desert. The neighbour says, in prophetic language which encapsulates the entire theme of the text:

²²³ Examples of non-narrative parts: Zachaeus' homily to Anianus and Paul (18-22); and Athanasius' rant to Mark concerning the Nubians, minus his parable of Aphou and the two monks (62-63, 68).

²²⁴ The first appearance of his name comes at *LA* 26: εις ηαι ογν ανδρου εροκ, πασον παπνουτε... 'Well then my brother Paphnutius, we [i.e. Pseleusius] have told you these things...'.
²²⁵ Specifically Matt 6:24, Luke 16:13, and 2 Tim 2:4-5. This 'man full of glory' (εγρωμε εφρα εοογ) also says, εακπογδαζε εγρωβ ενανογφ ... κναχρο νσα ογναι ανω νσα ρβογρ 'You have hastened toward a good work ... You will be victorious on the right hand and on the left'; *LA* 4. Thereafter, this man disappears.

ΑΠΟΤΑΣΣΕ ΜΠΕΤΑΝΤΑΚ ΤΗΡΨ ΝΓΨΙ ΜΠΕΚΣΤΑΨΡΟΚ ΝΓΟΥΔΑΨΚ ΝΣΑ ΠΕΧΘΕΙΣ ΝΓΚΩ ΝΝΕΤΜΟΟΥΤ ΕΤΩΜΟ ΝΝΕΨΡΨΜΟΟΥΤ ΕΤ[---] ΕΤΩΟΥΕΙΤ. ΜΗ ΜΠΕΚΩΤΗ ΕΠΧΘΕΙΣ ΕΨΩΩ ΕΒΟΛ ΨΝ ΝΕΥΑΓΓΕΛΙΟΝ ΧΕ ΜΕΡΕ ΛΑΔΥ ΤΑΛΕ ΤΟΟΥΤΨ ΕΧΝ ΟΥΨΒΒΕ ΝΨΚΟΤΨ ΕΠΑΨΟΥΨ ΝΨΟΟΟΥΤΗ ΕΨΟΥΝ ΕΤΜΗΝΤΕΡΟΝ ΜΠΗΨΕ; ΠΕΙΩΔΑΧΕ ΔΕ ΧΕ ΩΩΩΤ ΕΠΑΨΟΥΨ ΨΨΥΜΑΝΕ ΝΝΡΟΟΩ ΜΠΚΟΜΟΚ ΕΤΩΟΥΕΙΤ ΜΗ ΝΕΨΨΥΛΕΙ ΝΤΗΝΤΜΟΟΥΩΝΟΥ. ΤΕΝΟΥ ΩΕ, ΠΑΜΕΡΙΤ ΝΟΝ, †ΟΥΩΩ ΜΕΝ ΔΝ ΕΤΡΚΒΩΚ ΝΓΚΑΔΤ ΕΤΒΕ ΤΕΚΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΕΙ ΜΗ ΤΕΚ<ΩΙΝ>ΕΙ ΩΑΡΟΙ ΕΤΜΕΨ ΝΨΗΨ, ΑΛΛΑ †ΟΥΩΩ ΟΝ ΕΤΡΕΚΜΟΟΨΕ ΨΗ ΠΤΩΨΗ ΝΤΑΨΤΑΨΜΕΚ ΕΡΟΨ. ΤΩΟΥΝ ΝΓΒΩΚ ΩΑ ΝΕΨΝΗΨ ΝΣΕ† ΨΙΩΩΚ ΜΠΕΨΧΗΜΑ ΝΤΗΝΤΗΜΟΝΟΧΟΚ ΔΨΩ ΩΕΝΑΤΑΜΟΚ ΕΘΕ ΕΤΩΨΕ ΕΡΟΚ ΕΑΔΣ.

Renounce everything that you own, take up your cross and follow your Lord. And let the dead bury their dead [---] that is vain. Have you not heard the Lord proclaim in the Gospels: ‘No one who puts his hand to the plough and turns backward is fitted for the Kingdom of Heaven?’ This word ‘to look backward’ signifies that we should ignore the vain cares of the world and its physical aspects. Well then, my beloved brother, because of your knowledge and valuable assets to me, I do not want you to go and leave me, but on the other hand I do want you to follow the vocation to which you have been summoned. Rise and go to the brothers in order that they may clothe you with the habit of monastic life and tell you how it is fitting for you to act.²²⁶

And thus begins Pseleusius’s desert voyage (6). Once there, he meets John (ΙΩΨΑΝΝΗΚ), his first ascetic mentor. The text depicts him identically to John the Baptist (7-8). Pseleusius lives with him for ‘several days’ (ΨΕΝΨΟΟΥ) and learns the monastic ways until he feels ready to move on (9). John helps him find a place of his own in the desert, then leaves him to his defences. After an unspecified time alone, he meets Zaboulon and bonds closely with him (10). On a two-day excursion deeper into the desert, he encounters Anianus (ΑΝΙΑΝΟΚ) and Paul (ΠΑΨΛΟΚ), who in turn share their life story (11-2). These two brothers hail from Aswan and have been lifelong companions;²²⁷ inspired by reading of Matt 16:25-6 one day at church, they relinquished all of their possessions to the poor and sailed off to the desert (13). They met and became live-in disciples of Apa Zachaeus (ΖΑΧΑΙΟΚ), who in turn hosted two other neophytes: Sarapamon (ΣΑΡΑΠΑΜΩΝ) and Matthew (ΜΑΘΘΑΙΟΚ) (14-6). Zachaeus imparts great wisdom onto them before they set off to live on their own – this includes an extended homily on the biblical story of Moses and Amalek (18-22, cf. Ex 17). Pseleusius had met Anianus and Paul within days

²²⁶ *LA* 5; cf. Matt 8:22, Lk 9:62.

²²⁷ The Coptic literally says, in *LA* 12: ΕΑΝΩΩΠΕ ΨΗ ΟΥΨΗΤ ΝΟΥΩΤ ΧΙΝ ΕΝΨΗ ΠΚΟΜΟΚ ΕΝΟ ΝΩΒΗΡ ΕΝΕΝΕΡΨΨ ‘we have been of one mind [i.e. together] ever since we are in the world, and are friends with each other’.

before their death; another brother, Banouphiel (ΒΑΝΟΥΦΙΗΛ), buries them (24-5).

When Paphnutius hears all of this, he is amazed, yet Pseleusius promises that even grander tales can be heard straight from Apa Isaac, a direct disciple of the great Apa Aaron (26). Paphnutius pleads for Pseleusius to introduce him, so they embark towards Isaac's island to the south, in the middle of the Cataract (27). They find, on arrival, that Isaac is already waiting for him by the shore, having been informed by the Holy Spirit of their arrival. When they meet, Isaac accepts them into his house and shares his tales (28). Henceforth, the *Life of Aaron* transitions into its second 'section' (as defined above) – a legendary history of the first bishops of Philae. Isaac proceeds to tell the story of Apa Aaron, beginning with the legacy of Macedonius, the first bishop of Philae, and the first protagonist of his story. This second section serves a narratological purpose: to establish a teleology between the Christianization of Philae and the legacy of Aaron. His exact words warrant reproducing because of their centrality in the story:

ΚΩ ΝΑΙ ΕΒΟΛ, ΠΑΕΙΩΤ ΠΑCΟΝ ΠΑΠΝΟΥΤΕ, ΔΗΓ ΟΥΡΩΜΕ ΝΕΛΑΧΙCΤΟΝ ΝΗΡΦΗΒΕ. ΕΠΕΙΔΗ ΔΚΧΝΟΥΙ
ΕΤΑCΙΝΡΩΒ, †ΝΑΤΑΜΟΚ ΕΝΕΝΤΑΙΝΑΥ ΕΡΟΟΥ ΜΗ ΝΕΝΤΑΙCΟΤΜΟΥ ΝΤΗΠΑΕΙΩΤ ΕΤΟΥΑΑΒ ΑΠΑ ΖΑΡΩΝ •
ΚΑΙ ΓΑΡ ΔΝΟΚ ΝΤΑΙΜΑΘΗΤΕΥΕ ΖΑΡΑΤΥ ΑΥΩ ΔΙCΠΩΠΥ ΕΤΡΥΧΩ ΕΡΟΙ ΝΝΕΝΤΑΦΝΑΥ ΕΡΟΟΥ ΜΗ
ΝΕΝΤΑΥΩΠΕ ΖΑΤΕΦΖΗ. ΠΕΧΔΦ ΓΑΡ ΝΓΙ ΠΑΕΙΩΤ ΕΤΟΥΑΑΒ ΑΠΑ ΖΑΡΩΝ ΔΕ †ΝΑΧΩ ΕΡΟΚ, ΠΑΩΗΡΕ,
ΝΝΕΝΤΑΙΝΑΥ ΕΡΟΟΥ ΜΗ ΝΝΕΝΤΑΙCΟΤΜΟΥ ΝΤΟΟΤΥ ΜΠΜΑΚΑΡΙΟC ΑΠΑ ΜΑΚΕΔΟΝΙΟC ΠΕΠΙCΚΟΠΟC.
ΑΦΧΟΟC ΓΑΡ...

Forgive me [i.e. Isaac], my father, brother Paphnutius, I am a most humble and sinful man. Since you have asked me about my practice, I shall tell you about the things that I have seen and heard from my holy father Aaron. For I was his disciple and begged him to tell me about the things that he had seen and had happened before his time. So indeed my holy father Apa Aaron said, 'I shall tell you, my son, about the things that I have seen and heard from the blessed Bishop Apa Macedonius. For he said...' ²²⁸

Macedonius, prior to becoming a bishop, was a wealthy Christian magistrate (ἀρχων, παγάρχη) in southern Egypt (29). He travelled to Philae one day and, to his horror, witnessed

²²⁸ LA 28-9. Note, by now, the extreme formulaism of the text. Note also that Aaron claims to have learned of the history of Philae directly from Macedonius. This is incorrect, because we learn later on (LA 86) that Aaron became a monk during the bishopric of Psoulousia, three decades after Macedonius' death. In other words, Aaron could never have met him – his claim to the contrary is a literary device to tie the entire narrative together.

the plight of the local believers under the idolatrous majority. Their oppression is so bad that they must observe Mass in secret with undercover priests from Aswan, the nearest city. Macedonius reports this to Athanasius in Alexandria, who then appoints him as the bishop in charge of saving them (30). Thus he surrenders his wealth and returns to Philae (31). As part of his mission, he enters the temple where the local idol, a falcon, resides in its ‘demonic cage’ (μαγκανον).²²⁹ He decapitates the bird and throws its carcass onto the altar fire. The temple guards – two small boys – flee for their lives to the desert (32-3). An old woman oversees all of this and reports it to their father, the temple priest (34-5). An incognito Christian, in turn, overhears him vowing to kill Macedonius, and warns him (36). Macedonius curses the old woman and retreats northeast to the Valley (37).²³⁰ In an act of foreshadowing, he prays: ‘Lord God, move the heart of that man [i.e. the temple priest] towards repentance’ (πλοοεισ πνογτε, κτο ηρηητ ηπειρωμε ευμετανοια). Thus begins the unravelling – the λύσις – of his mission.

In a dream that night, he sees a vision of a ‘man of light’ (ογρωμε νογοειν) standing beside two sleeping boys. The apparition crowns the boys and gives each of them a key and staff. He then ascends to heaven while they gaze at him. Meanwhile, unbeknownst to Macedonius, the boys have a similar vision – except that in theirs, the man instead brings a four-volume text (presumably the Gospels) and clothes. At first, the next morning, Macedonius has no idea what to make of this dream, but a further voice reaches him, commanding him to go to the ‘chosen vessels’ (ξεηκεγος ηωτηη) (38). Obediently he goes, and finds the boys in the desert, starving and feeble (39). Recognizing each other from their separate vision, they win each other’s trust (40). Macedonius takes them back to his dwelling, baptizes them as Mark and Isaiah, and ordains them priest and deacon, respectively (41-2). Through him, they learn the Christian faith and the monastic way of life (43).

An ensuing miracle brings about this story’s climax: the evangelization of Philae (44-47).

²²⁹ From μάγγανον, ‘any means for tricking or bewitching, a philtre, drug: a juggler’s apparatus’ (LSJ 421) or ‘1) engine of war, catapult; met. device (of Devil or demons) ... 2) windlass, crane, machine for hoising or lowering weights’ (Lampe, *PGL* 818). Dijkstra translates it as ‘demonic cage’, since the falcon residing in it is an ειδολον and, by extension, a δαιμωνιον. See J.H.F. Dijkstra, ‘Horus on His Throne. The Holy Falcon of Philae in His Demonic Cage’, *GM* 189 (2002) 7-10; Dijkstra, *Philae and the End*, 211 (n. 100); 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) 61-75 at 65, 70. Cf. W. Spiegelberg, ‘Ägyptologische Beiträge III. Der Falkenkultus auf der Insel Philae in christlicher Zeit’, *AfP* 7 (1924) 183-9 at 186-9; MacCoull, ‘Christianity at Syene/Elephantine/Philae’, 159, (n. 40).

²³⁰ More precisely, to a wadi on the east bank of the Nile, opposite Philae.

Two Nubian pagans, who had been travelling peacefully together for thirty years, get into a fight because one of their camels breaks the other's leg. Conveniently, Macedonius is nearby: he converses with them, examines the camel, and summons Isaiah to heal its broken leg. To do this, Isaiah sprinkles holy water over its leg and makes the *signum crucis*. Astonished, the Nubians and other passersby spread the news, which soon reaches Philae. When the temple priest hears, he rushes hastily to Macedonius's residence and surrenders immediately (48). He converts to Christianity, transforms his house into a church, and evangelizes the city of Philae (49-51). Macedonius then baptizes the entire population, ordains the incognito Christian as a deacon, and lifts the curse from the old tattletale woman (52-3). He stays in the church for seven days before returning to his dwelling. After some days, his body deteriorates, and he dies on the 8th of Mekhir, leaving behind the prophecy that Mark will succeed him (54).

For several days, the city is without a bishop, and the text depicts a bickering multitude.²³¹ Finally, the archdeacon of the church tells the people to elect Mark, the 'heir' (κληρονομος) of Macedonius (56). In this way, as prophesied, Mark becomes the next bishop – and the second protagonist in Isaac's narrative (55-74). The new elect sets sail to Alexandria so that Athanasius, who had also ordained Macedonius, can ordain him bishop (57).²³² In the process the Patriarch instructs him into the canons and proper interfaith relations with the Nubians in his diocese (62-8) – reinforcing his point with a parable of two bickering monks (which in turn contains its own sub-parable about two other monks). Finally, he prophesies the succession of Isaiah (69). Four days later, Mark and his companions take a ferry to Schissa, hoping ultimately to reach Antinoopolis, but get stuck in transit (70). They tarry for a few nights until a ship bound for Aswan arrives (71). Magistrates hijack the ship, but Mark's charisma pacifies them and they release it. Everyone arrives home safely. The Philaeans honour Mark with animals, psalms, hymns, and by enthroning him in their church (72-3).²³³ He dies of natural causes on the 14th of Tobe, and the Philaeans bury him beside Macedonius (74). They appoint Isaiah as the next bishop, just as Athanasius predicted (75).

²³¹ LA 55: [---] κεογα δε μεωθε νιμ νδιακον. νεαυρ ωμοντ δε νερου εγωαδε μη νεγερηγ ντειρε αγω μπουτεω λααγ νεωβ. '[---] another one (said): "Such and such a deacon." They spent three days talking with each other in this way and did not decide anything.' The acting priest then suggests casting lots, but this never takes place.

²³² A group of high-status magistrates arrive at the same time, hoping to receive a blessing, but Athanasius dismisses them and makes them come back some other time; LA 59.

²³³ The text does not say which town Mark is in, but it is Philae, receiving a warm welcome home; LA 72.

The story of Isaiah (75-78), the third bishop of Philae, is both the shortest and the least eventful. Its events are mundane and generic: Isaiah travels to Alexandria, gets ordained by the archbishop, takes a trip to Aswan, and receives a welcome ceremony. His ordination is depicted in brief but graphic detail. During his trip in Aswan, the local townsfolk sing for him and escort him into their church. They read his ordination certificate, he dismisses them, and after three days he returns to his dwelling. The narrator, however, does dwell a bit on Isaiah's personality; he generally prefers to live outside the city unless during a festivity, and even then, the clerics have to plea for him to attend. That being said, we (the reader) are assured of his beloved status as 'a man of good countenance' (ΟΥΡΩΜΕ ΠΕ ΕΝΔΗΟΥÇ ΜΠΡΟΣΟΠΟΝ) (78). After his death, the Philaeans bury him next to Macedonius and Mark. It could be that Isaiah's story is raw for a reason: to minimize repetition, given that it is structurally identical to the story of Mark.

The Philaeans elect Psoulousia (79-85) as the fourth bishop.²³⁴ He repeatedly declines the honour, so they kidnap him and take him to Alexandria under guard. The archbishop (who, by this point, is no longer Athanasius) consecrates him in a meticulously narrated ceremony. On their way out, they accidentally leave behind the election certificate so they must return to pick it up – and then they do, they are informed about a new vision that came concerning Psoulousia.²³⁵ When back in Philae, Psoulousia continually retreats to his remote island cell, so the jilted citizens keep having to sail off to receive his blessings *ex situ*.²³⁶ The narrator also reports a miracle of his during the accession of Patriarch Theophilus:²³⁷ when all the Egyptian bishops trek to Alexandria to pay their respects, they fill the baptismal font and pray over the Jordan – except Psoulousia, who feels unfit to participate. The new archbishop consoles him in private about the matter, and prays with him. Simultaneously the font water boils, and the bishops attribute this to Psoulousia's purity. When the archbishop dismisses everyone, Psoulousia remains in solitude in his old cell until his death on the 23rd of Paone. The Philaeans choose to bury him there, on his

²³⁴ Isaac adds (*LA* 79): ΠΑΙ ΝΤΑ ΠΕΝΕΙΩΤ ΑΠΑ ΖΑΡΩΝ Ρ ΤΕΦΗΝΤΜΟΝΟΧΟΣ ΖΗ ΤΕΦΗΝΤΕΠΙΣΚΟΠΟΣ 'It was in his episcopate that our father Απα Aaron led his monastic life'. Psoulousia is not attested in any other source.

²³⁵ Unfortunately, a long lacuna obscures the context. We know not who saw the vision, or who is even talking about it. All that survives is the following (81): [---] ΝΕΩΒ ΝΙΜ ΝΤΕ ΤΗΝΤΕΠΙΣΚΟΠΟΣ ΝΤΑΣΤΑΖΟΙ ΠΑΡΑ ΠΑΜΠΩΔ, ΕΦΧΩ ΜΜΟΣ ΧΕ ΔΙΝΑΥ ΕΡΟΚ ΝΤΑΥΣΟΟΛΚ ΝΟΥΣΤΟΛΗ ΑΥΤ ΝΡΕΝΩΟΥΤ ΕΡΡΑΙ ΕΝΕΚΣΙΧ '[---] everything of the bishopric that has befallen me beyond my worth, saying, "I saw you and you were clothed with a robe and keys placed in your hands"'.²³⁶

²³⁶ Though not named in the text, his island is most probably el-Hesa – itself, back in Antiquity, part of a larger island with Biga; see Dijkstra, *Philae and the End*, 249 (n. 95-6).

²³⁷ This occurred in 385; see N. Russell, *Theophilus of Alexandria* (London and New York, 2007) 5, 12.

private island, not beside his predecessors.

At this point, the text transitions into its third ‘section’ – recording the life of Apa Aaron (86-138).²³⁸ Isaac intermits, unsolicited:

ΤΕΝΟΥ ΘΕ ΠΑΣΟΝ ΠΑΠΝΟΥΤΕ, ΕΠΕΙΔΗ ΑΚΧΝΟΥΙ ΕΤΒΕ ΖΗΚΟΥΙ, ΕΙΣ ΖΗΗΤΕ ΔΙΤΑΜΟΚ ΕΤΒΕ ΝΕΠΙΣΚΟΠΟΣ
ΝΤΑΥΩΠΕ ΖΗ ΠΙΛΑΚ ΝΘΕ ΝΤΑ ΠΑΕΙΩΤ ΑΠΑ ΖΑΡΩΝ ΤΑΜΟΙ ΖΩΩΤ. ΑΝΕΦΕΙΟΤΕ ΔΕ ΖΩΟΥ ...

Now then, my brother Paphnutius, since you have asked me for some information, I have told you about the bishops who were in Philae, just as my father Apa Aaron told it to me. As for him, his parents... [Isaac then proceeds straight to the new narrative]²³⁹

This section actually divides further into three subsections: a brief biography (86-97), the miracle accounts (98-136), and his death and burial (137-138). As a boy, his parents forced him into the army. He shunned their bids to find a wife for him, and he remained a virgin throughout his life. The army provided him seven rations per day, which he donated to charity. One day, during a transfer to another city (87), he encountered an aggressive lion. Faced with the threat of death, he vowed to God that if he should escape this danger, he would renounce all of his possessions and withdraw entirely into the monastic life. Thus he slaughters the lion and survives (88). He adheres strictly to his vow and retires to Scetis to live as a monk.²⁴⁰ He leaves shortly thereafter, however, fearing that his parents are on a manhunt for him. He wanders around until settling in a certain desert spot.²⁴¹

Meanwhile, the legend of Aaron as a pious monk has reached the curious mind of Isaac, a young monastic aspirant (89-90). He retreats to the desert in hopes of meeting this Aaron of such high acclaim. After a full day of searching, he finds footprints in the sand and follows them to a rock cliff where, surely enough, he finds Aaron engaging in harsh austerity. Aaron receives him warmly, and agrees to instruct him in the monastic practice (91). Isaac gets his head shaved (a monastic rite of passage) and spends a week with Aaron as his apprentice. On one occasion, Aaron sneaks back into the desert to resume his austerity (92-3). After a week of absence, Isaac

²³⁸ The following section will talk more about how Isaac met Aaron; here, we focus on the miracles themselves.

²³⁹ *LA* 86.

²⁴⁰ This alludes to the biblical story of David and Goliath; see 1 Sam 17:36-7.

²⁴¹ This is an allusion to the biblical story of Samson; see Jdg 13-16.

becomes tormented by demons and sets out for Aaron's help.²⁴² To his distress, he finds the ascetic father dehydrating himself under the scorching sun. Aaron shrugs off all of Isaac's concerns and returns with him to his dwelling place. The demons return on another night, taunting them in the language of the Blemmyes – desert nomads east of Egypt (95). This terrifies Isaac, but through simple prayer, he and Aaron chase them away.²⁴³

Following this encounter, the text records about fifteen miracles, depending on one's numeration. The miracles appear in the following order (my paraphrases and numeration): 1) saving a boy who had just been eaten by crocodile (98-100); 2) saving another boy who had drowned in a fishing net (101-2); 3) reviving a vineyard worker who had fallen from a tree (103-4); 4) restoring a stillborn boy to life (105-8);²⁴⁴ 5) settling a financial dispute between a poor man in debt to an impatient rich lender (109-15);²⁴⁵ 6) teaching a man to whip his dead donkey with a staff, thereby restoring it to life (117); 7) plaiting exceptionally tough rope and selling it to a vineyard worker in need of heavy duty equipment (118); 8) boosting the productivity of a group of fishermen by making them sprinkle holy water over their nets (119-22);²⁴⁶ 9) being successfully called upon by a sailor to help him out of danger at sea (122); 10) lifting the semi-blindness from a Nubian man (123);²⁴⁷ 11) praying for an infertile woman, who then bears a son (124-6); 12) exorcizing a demon-possessed young man (127-30); 13-14) twice inducing, through prayer, the Nile to flood after extended drought (131-5); 15) lastly, blessing a poor man's artaba of wheat, allowing him to better feed his family (136). After this list of miracles come the death and burial of Aaron, followed by a closing passage from Isaac, a word of praise from Paphnutius, and the general conclusion of the text (137-140).

To conclude, we have just outlined the full structure of the *LA*. Our summary so far has been deliberately crude, in order to give a good working scope of the *Gestalt* before the nuanced

²⁴² He quickly changes his dilemma to 'Nubians'; *LA* 93.

²⁴³ Aaron then says, effectively, 'that's nothing!', and shares a past experience of his own with a demon in 96-7. At first he pretends that it happened to some other monk, but when pressed, he concedes otherwise.

²⁴⁴ Strictly speaking, it is the grandfather of the child who does this.

²⁴⁵ This same rich man goes on to heal his servant's gout by laying-on-hands (*LA* 116, which describes him as ερε νεχουρηντε † τκας εροϋ 'a man whose feet were painful'). Cf. the story of Ahab and Naboth; 1 Kg 21:1-29.

²⁴⁶ Embedded in this is a moral about casting nets on the 'right-hand side' vs. the left; cf. Matt 11:28 and 25:34-41; Luke 5:1-11; John 21:1-14.

²⁴⁷ This one is highly metaphorical: the Nubian in question has one blind eye and one working eye. When he openly doubts the greatness of Aaron to a friend, his blind eye recovers its vision but the other eye goes blind. Aaron restores him to full vision when he repents in fear. Note that Nubians are 'pagans', wherefore their blindness alludes to their spiritual ignorance.

analysis can begin. To this end, we have omitted a few points which can only receive their proper due in the technical section to follow: we did not have the space to discuss the narrative levels, and how they relate to the *fabula* – the underlying chronology – of the text. We also, for similar reasons, skimmed over the parables which Athanasius shared with Mark during his ordination ceremony – these require deeper analysis in the following section. Thus, having now exposed the story, next we can dig deeper into the narratological framework behind it. We begin by exposing the *fabula*.

Reconstructed Chronology

The story contains two independent overlapping chronologies: the narrative of Pseleusius (4-26) and the narrative of Isaac (29-138). The former combines autobiography with extensive mini-narratives of other monks whom he encounters (in order of presentation: John, Anianus and Paul, Zaboulon,²⁴⁸ Zachaeus, and Sarapamon and Matthew). Isaac's narrative begins as a (pre-)history of the earliest bishops of Philae, and then transitions into an eyewitness account of the deeds of Apa Aaron. Based on circumstantial evidence which we shall soon see, the story takes place in the 4th century, up to the turn of the 5th, over a span of generations. In the most obvious case, Macedonius and Mark are both explicitly ordained by the Patriarch Athanasius (328-373) – Isaiah's ordinator is unnamed but logically Athanasius. Later, Psoulousia attends the accession ceremony of Patriarch Theophilus (385-412), following the death of Timothy (380-385).²⁴⁹

We cannot harmonize the narratives of Pseleusius and Isaac into a singular *fabula*, because the former's is too vague. We can, nevertheless, visualize them as parallel 'forks'. The narrative of Pseleusius (and all its constituents) constitutes one fork, while the narrative-constituency of Isaac constitutes the other. Together they intersect in the 'narrative present' – that is, in the primary narrative of Paphnutius.²⁵⁰ We will begin our reconstruction with the narrative of Pseleusius, and then continue with the narrative of Isaac. When treating Pseleusius's narrative, which in itself is non-linear, we must devote more attention to reconstructing the

²⁴⁸ The text introduces Zaboulon before Pseleusius even talks, but in terms of the *fabula* he appears in this order.

²⁴⁹ The text does not mention Peter II (373-380); see Dijkstra, *Philae and the End*, 360.

²⁵⁰ For an illustration, see my Appendix section.

fabula. For Isaac's narrative, on the other hand, the story is already fairly linear, so our reconstruction has already been largely done in the previous section. Additionally, we are blessed with other literary sources, so we can devote more confident attention to dates and time.

The Pseleusian *fabula* runs as follows. The earliest documented event appears to be the withdrawal of Apa Zachaeus into the desert (18).²⁵¹ He spends a long time as an anchorite until two roaming aspirants, Sarapamon and Matthew, become his disciples. Meanwhile in Aswan, two other youth – Anianus and Paul – retreat into the desert and join them (14). Matthew dies on the 15th day of the month Paone (16), and Sarapamon sometime nearby.²⁵² Zachaeus instructs them in the ascetic life and in biblical exegesis. After he is finished, he departs from them and dies on the 11th day of the month Thoth (24). Anianus and Paul thus lead the ascetic life alone together. Meanwhile, the young Pseleusius has a visionary vocation of his own (4). The following morning, he seeks the counsel of his learned old neighbour, who prompts him to journey into the desert (5). Thus he wanders off, receives mentorship from John (6-9), and bonds with Zaboulon (9). Two days later, while travelling on his own, he encounters Anianus and Paul (11), who share their story with him (12-25). They die on the 3rd (Paul) and 20th (Anianus) of Paone, and are buried. He continues his anchoritic practices until Paphnutius visits him – it is implied that somewhere along the way Pseleusius either met or at least heard about Isaac.

Isaac's *fabula* is more linear, and supported by additional evidence. Since our previous summary of his narrative was sufficiently linear, we need not repeat it here. Unlike the Pseleusius narrative, which spans two generations (from Zachaeus to Pseleusius), Isaac's narrative spans five: from Macedonius to Mark/Isaiah to Psoulousia to Aaron to Isaac. This means that Isaac's narrative begins earlier but ends in the same time as Pseleusius's. It appears, based on external sources, that Macedonius began his episcopal ministry around 330, when the patriarch was Athanasius (328-373).²⁵³ As for Mark, our earliest known source on him dates to the year 356, so he must have been elected close to that time.²⁵⁴ With respect to Isaiah, the text

²⁵¹ An 'undocumented' event would be, e.g., the birth of Zachaeus – some obvious historical fact not mentioned in the text. We limit our discussion to 'documented' events.

²⁵² It is not clear the extent to which the Anianus and Paul interacted with Sarapamon and Matthew (17-19). Certainly they served as role models.

²⁵³ Ath., *Apol. c. Ar.* 50.51 – this contains a list of bishops (including Αἰγύπτου ... Μακεδόνιος) who subscribed to the acts of the Council of Sardica (ca. 343). The bishopric itself was created ca. 330; Dijkstra, *Philae and the End*, 54-5, 359.

²⁵⁴ Ath. *h.Ar.* 72.2 – this records the exile of Mark and other bishops during the Arian persecution of Egypt; cf.

does not name the patriarch who ordained him, but since his earliest known source dates to 368 (when he succeeded Mark), logically it too was Athanasius.²⁵⁵ Lastly, the beginning of Psoulousia's bishopric dates to before 385. He was most likely ordained by Timothy (380-385), although it could feasibly have been Peter II (373-380).

Meanwhile, Apa Aaron – the literary link between Macedonius and Isaac – was living as a monk during Psoulousia's episcopacy. Presumably Aaron was born sometime in the 370s, assuming that he was a boy when Psoulousia became bishop. We suspect that he was a legal minor when he joined the army, seeing how his parents bribed him into it.²⁵⁶ As for Isaac, the exact age gap between him and Aaron is unknowable, but presumably Isaac was an adolescent when he met Aaron. I would conjecture a birth sometime in the 390s for Isaac, from which I would situate their meeting in the 410s. In any case, Aaron has clear seniority, and his fame was already established by the time of Isaac's awakening.

Narratologically, it is Isaac who recalls (to Paphnutius) the miracles of Aaron which we have already mentioned in the previous section. The order is not meant to be taken literally, and is most likely a compilation of all the miracles attributed to Aaron throughout his long life. However, one of the miracle stories – that of the barren mother (124-126) – does make a direct reference to an aforementioned one – the resuscitation of the stillborn baby (105-8). A woman tells her husband:

ΕΚΩΑΝΒΩΚ ΩΑ ΠΠΕΤΟΥΑΑΒ ΑΠΑ ΖΑΡΩΝ ΠΑΡΑΚΑΛΕΙ ΗΜΟΥ ΝΟΥΤΩΒΖ ΜΠΕΧΡ(ΙΣΤΟ)Σ ΕΧΩΝ ΝΟΥ† ΝΑΝ
 ΝΟΥΣΠΕΡΜΑ ΝΡΩΜΕ · ΚΑΙ ΓΑΡ ΔΙΩΤΗ ΔΕ ΝΤΕΡΕ ΟΥΩΕΡΕ ΩΗΜ ΕΙ ΕΣΝΑΜΙΣΕ ΔΣΣΩΩΤ.
 ΝΤΕΡΣΕΠΙΚΑΛΕΙ ΔΕ ΗΜΟΥ ΕΤΒΕ ΠΕΙΖΩΒ, ΔΣΜΙΣΕ ΜΠΕΣΩΗΡΕ ΕΦΜΟΟΥΤ. ΑΠΕΣΕΙΩΤ ΒΩΚ ΩΑΡΟΥ
 ΑΦΠΑΡΑΚΑΛΕΙ ΗΜΟΥ ΑΥΩ ΠΕΧΔΥ ΔΕ ΝΤΕΡΦΔΙ ΝΟΥΚΟΥΓΙ ΝΚΡΜΕΣ ΖΙΡΗ ΠΡΟ ΜΠΕΦΜΑ ΝΩΩΠΕ ΑΦΝΟΧΦ
 ΕΧΜ ΠΩΗΡΕ ΚΟΥΙ ΕΤΜΟΟΥΤ ΑΦΩΝΖ ΝΤΕΥΝΟΥ.

When you go to the holy Apa Aaron, ask him to beseech Christ for us to give us male progeniture. I have heard that a girl when she was about to give birth was blocked, and when she called upon him [Aaron] for this matter, she gave birth to a dead son. Her father went to him and

Dijkstra, *Philae and the End*, 54-6, 359. This exile must certainly have been a major event in Marc's episcopate, but the *LA* does not mention it.

²⁵⁵ See the following MS, which mentions his succession to Mark: *IFAO Copte* 25, fol. 8a.

²⁵⁶ *LA* 86: † ΝΖΕΜΧΡΗΜΑ. The meaning of the expression is ambivalent: the narrator implies that his parents either bribed him to enroll, or bribed the army to draft him.

entreated him and – so they say – after he had taken a little dust from near the door of his dwelling, he scattered it over the little dead boy and he came to life immediately.²⁵⁷

Whether these two miracles really did transpire in this order, or whether this is a literary artifact, is unknowable. Aside from this, no other miracle story gives indication of posterity.

After the death and burial of Aaron, the second narrative ends, and the primary begins. For this reason, it is necessary that we treat the story of Paphnutius at the *end* of our reconstruction, even though he appears at the very beginning as the first narrator. Paphnutius says nothing about himself, but based on what text has survived, he is an aspirant monk who chances upon Pseleusius and Zaboulon in a search for wisdom. They welcome him in and they dine and chat. Pseleusius narrates his long story, and then begins to speak wonders about Apa Isaac, who is still alive. Overcome with excitement, Paphnutius begs Pseleusius to take him to Isaac, and so together they make the journey on the Nile. Isaac awaits them by the rocky shore, having already been alerted by the Holy Spirit of their coming. Isaac shows his hospitality and begins his long narrative, from the Christianization of Philae through the story of the first four bishops, all the way up to his eyewitness testimony of the life of Aaron. After the end of his long story, Paphnutius expresses his gratitude and vows to write down everything that he has learned. Following one last round of eat, drink, and prayer, Paphnutius departs for brothers to the north.

To reiterate: we have just seen how the earliest events in this story date historically to the 330s. The first four bishops of Philae form a story arc which spans four decades, after which – by the dawn of the fifth century – Aaron begins his own practice. We have cautiously dated the birth of Aaron to the 370s, and both the beginning of his mission and the birth of Isaac to the 390s. From there, we dated their first encounter to the 410s. The margin of error in these dates, however, measures upward of ten years, and our confidence in it declines as we advance in the story. What can be said certainly, is that the youngest (that is, last-born) character in the story is Paphnutius, being born in the first half of the fifth century (for argument's sake, say around 420). Furthermore, Isaac and Pseleusius are most likely generation cohorts – born around the same time, with Pseleusius perhaps being just a few years younger. When all of this speculation is thrown together, the ultimate date of the primary narrative – the era when Paphnutius actually

²⁵⁷ LA 124; cf. 105-8.

wrote all of this down – is around mid-5th century. By that time, Pseleusius and Isaac would be in their sixties, and Paphnutius in his twenties or thirties. This should by no means be taken conclusively, however – we are rationalizing in want of temporal cues.

Narrator Analysis and Narrative Hierarchy

Having thus teased apart the *fabula* of the *Life of Aaron*, we can now analyze the hierarchy that binds it. In this section, we study how the story embeds its constituent parts within the coherent whole. We will note all anomalies in the structure whenever evident, and analyze the literary nature of each narrator. Whenever the narrator, at any point in the text, says ‘I’ in reference to Paphnutius, then the active narrative level is the primary. When in reference to Pseleusius or Isaac, the active level is secondary. Lastly, when a character within either narrative uses the ‘I’ in a narrative of their own, the active level is tertiary. At its crudest, the primary narrative of Paphnutius covers the whole text (1-140), but is only ‘active’ at 1-6, 26-8, and 138-40. The secondary narrative of Pseleusius covers 7-26 (minus the tertiary narrative of Anianus and Paul: 12-24), and that of Isaac covers 29-138 (minus a variety of tertiaries and quarternaries – see discussion below). When Pseleusius begins to tell his story at 7, the narrative level shifts to the secondary, and when he finishes at 26, it returns to the primary. The same phenomenon occurs when Isaac begins at 31, and finishes at 138.

The situation becomes more complex when we examine the details. The beginning of a character’s story does not necessarily match the opening of a narrative level. For example, Pseleusius’s ‘story’ begins in paragraph 4, with Paphnutius narrating it (at the primary level) in the third person until paragraph 7, at which point Pseleusius tells the rest in his own words, and opens the secondary level. Evidence to this effect runs as follows:

πεχαλι ναυ δε ν[---] εε [---] ναυ νρε ρη πεφ[---] νεργαγια ν†μινε; πεχαυ και νοι πρλλο δε
сωтм нтамоκ. мφχι ναυ νογρime ρη τεφμнтврре · αγω νεφπροκοιπτει ρη ρωβ нιμ.

I [Paphnutius] said to him [Pseleusius]: ‘[---] how [---] such labour?’ The old man said to me: ‘Listen and I shall tell you.’ He [Pseleusius] never took a wife for himself in his youth and made progress in every respect...

αφχοος νοι παειωτ ετογααβ απα πσελεγχιος δε φαφναγ εραρ νοωλπ εβολ ηραρ νοοπ αγω
 φαδε ηιμ εφαφχοογ νεωαγωωπε ημε. ... πεχαφ οη νοι απα πσελεγχιος δε ητερει ογν φαροφ
 ετεπεηταιωρη φαδε εροφ, ετε ιωραηηης πε πεηταιδε ηειωαδε τηρογ ετβηηηφ, αφωοπη εροφ
 ρη ογνος ημμηηηαιρωμε ...

My holy father Apa Pseleusius said that he saw many revelations many times, and that every word that he said came true. ... Apa Pseleusius also said: ‘When I, then, had come to him – that is, the one about whom I have talked before, namely John, about whom I spoke all these words – he received me with great kindness...’²⁵⁸

The remainder of his story is in first person. When Pseleusius describes his experiences with John, the level remains secondary, because John never starts a new narrative of his own. On the other hand, when Anianus and Paul share their story, Pseleusius quotes them *directly*, to the effect that *they narrate it themselves*. In so doing, the first *tertiary narrative* of the text opens (12-24). When Anianus and Paul in turn tell the story of Zachaeus, they remain the narrators, wherefore the text remains at the tertiary level. They do, however, quote verbatim Zachaeus’s extended homily (18-22) in which he interprets the biblical story of Moses and Amalek.²⁵⁹ Since, however, Zachaeus does not produce a narrative, the level remains tertiary.

The complexities of Isaac’s narrative, however, pose logical problems. Almost immediately – at the first sentence! – Isaac purports to be quoting directly what Aaron told him. Before I make my case, let us reread what the text says, plus a little farther:

†ηαταμοκ ενενταιηαγ εροογ ηη ηενταιοημογ ηηηπαειωτ ετογααβ απα ραρων · και γαρ
 ανοκ ηηαιηαθηηεγε ραραιφ αγω αιςπωπη εηρηφω εροι ηηενταιφηαγ εροογ ηη ηενταιωωπε
 ραιηεφρη. πεχαφ γαρ νοι παειωτ ετογααβ απα ραρων δε †ηαφω εροκ, παωηρε, ηηενταιηαγ
 εροογ ηη ηηενταιοημογ ηηοοηφ ηηηακαρηος απα ηακεδονιος πεπησκοπος. αφχοος γαρ... ει
 ηαρηων εαιχι αρη ηηηηηηλογχιος δει ερης ειπαγαρη εχη ηειπολις.

I shall tell you about the things that I have seen and heard from my holy father Aaron. For I was his disciple and begged him to tell me about the things that he had seen and had happened before his time. So indeed my holy father Apa Aaron said, ‘I shall tell you, my son, about the things that

²⁵⁸ LA 4, 7. Note that when Pseleusius takes over as narrator, he repetitively reminds the reader that he is continuing the account of John, which Paphnutius had been paraphrasing on his behalf.

²⁵⁹ Ex. 17.

I have seen and heard from the blessed Bishop Apa Macedonius. For he said... “While I was still a magistrate and had started to obtain wealth, I went south, because I was pagarch over these cities.”²⁶⁰

If we believe this, then Aaron is opening a tertiary narration at 28, for which Isaac is the tertiary narratee. Then at 29, literally one sentence later, Macedonius opens up a new level – what would then be quaternary. In other words, under this model, Macedonius (quaternary narrator) narrated his story to Aaron (quaternary narratee), who relayed it to Isaac (tertiary narratee), who is relaying it to Paphnutius (secondary narratee), who ultimately is relaying it to us, the reader (primary narratee). *The problem is that Macedonius died before Aaron was born.* The narratological structure is internally contradictory, because Macedonius could not possibly have narrated to Aaron.

I have decided, therefore, to err on the side of simplicity and view Aaron’s narration as literary device – in other words I argue, upon close examination, that Aaron is actually not the narrator. My justifications are the following. First, the narration from paragraphs 31 to 85 is an extremely covert and external third person – this leaves the question of who is narrating open to interpretation. I permit that it *could* be Aaron, but I have seen no proof that it *must* be Aaron – indeed, the only remote evidence for him occurs in Isaac’s introduction to the whole remainder of the story. To put it another way, Aaron’s ‘presence’ as a narrator is too weak to attest. Second, Aaron’s supposed ‘narrative’ actually does not end properly. Let us reread the transition from the story of Psoulousia to that of Aaron:

ΤΕΝΟΥ ΘΕ ΠΑΡΟΝ ΠΑΠΝΟΥΤΕ, ΕΠΕΙΔΗ ΑΚΧΝΟΥΙ ΕΤΒΕ ΖΗΚΟΥΙ, ΕΙΣ ΖΗΗΤΕ ΔΙΤΑΜΟΚ ΕΤΒΕ ΝΕΠΙΣΚΟΠΟΣ
ΝΤΑΥΩΠΕ ΖΗ ΠΙΛΑΚ ΝΘΕ ΝΤΑ ΠΑΕΙΩΤ ΑΠΑ ΖΑΡΩΝ ΤΑΜΟΙ ΖΩΩΤ.

Now then, my brother Paphnutius, since you asked me for some information, I have told you about the bishops who were in Philae, just as my father Apa Aaron told it to me.²⁶¹

This is Isaac (the secondary narrator) alerting Paphnutius (the secondary narratee) about the transition from story to story. There is no closing statement by Aaron concerning his supposed

²⁶⁰ LA 28-9.

²⁶¹ LA 86.

narrative. Since the *LA* is such a highly structured text, with every detail carefully purposed, I would find it a glaring oversight for the author to make the central protagonist of the story such a discrete narrator! If Apa Aaron really were narrating the history of the bishops of Philae to his top disciple, I am sure that the author – who otherwise is a structural mastermind – would have reinforced the holy father’s narrative presence. Either the author had reasons for suppressing Aaron’s narrativity, or Aaron was never a literal narrator to begin with.

Between paragraphs 30 to 85, there are only two acknowledgements of the existence of Apa Aaron: one at 31, the other at 79. Neither of them, in my opinion, makes for a definitive case to prove Aaron as the narrator:

ΝΤΕΡΕΙΕΙ ΔΕ ΕΡΗΣ ΔΙΣΩΡ ΜΠΕΤΡ ΖΟΥΟ ΕΡΟΙ ΝΝΕΤΩΔΑΤ, ΔΙΕΙ ΕΠΕΙΝΑ, Ω ΠΑΧΟΝ ΡΑΡΩΝ, ΜΠΕΙ
ΕΩΠΑΡΖΗΝΙΑΖΕ ΜΜΟΙ ΕΠΙΣΚΟΠΟΣ...

When I went south, I distributed the excess of my possessions to the poor and came to this place.
My brother Aaron, I was unable to act freely as a bishop...

This sentence *per se* would suggest that Macedonius is narrating to Aaron, which we have already established is symbolic (that is, literary device). But even if taken at face value, this sentence would frame Aaron as a narratee, *not* as a narrator. I think that the author is trying to rationalize his own literary device, but then quickly abandons the pretense. An easier reality would be that Isaac is simply narrating the history of Philae which he learned from Aaron.

The second case (79), in my opinion, presents the strongest positive evidence against any real narration from Aaron:

ΠΑΙ ΝΤΑ ΠΕΝΕΙΩΤ ΑΠΑ ΡΑΡΩΝ Ρ ΤΕΦΜΝΤΜΟΝΟΧΟΣ ΖΝ ΤΕΦΜΝΤΕΠΙΣΚΟΠΟΣ

‘It was in his [Psoulosia’s] episcopate that our father Apa Aaron led his monastic life’.

If Aaron were truly narrating, the passage would instead have been to this effect: ΠΑΙ ΝΤΑΙΡ
ΤΑΜΝΤΜΟΝΟΧΟΣ ΖΝ ΤΕΦΜΝΤΕΠΙΣΚΟΠΟΣ ‘It was in his episcopate that I led my monastic life’. By
this point, the only way to rationalize Aaron as being the narrator, would be to assert that Isaac is
interjecting Aaron’s narrative, unannounced, to address Paphnutius. I find it far more tenable,

instead, to maintain Isaac as the sole narrator throughout the entire passage in question, from paragraphs 31 to 87. Thus, in the example above, Isaac is interrupting his own narrative in order to address his own listener, Paphnutius.

Thus, under my proposed model, whenever first person narration occurs in the story of Macedonius, the narrator is Macedonius himself, at the tertiary level; but whenever third person occurs, the narrator is Isaac, interrupting with secondary narration. Indeed, the person goes back and forth: in 30 and 31, the narrator twice asserts: ἀνοκ δε μακεδονιος ‘I, Macedonius’, yet from 31 onward, Macedonius is referred to in the third person. The ‘first person’ briefly returns in 40: ἀιμοοωε δε ερογν εροογ, πεχαδ, αγω ντερογναγ εροι ‘I walked towards them, so he said, and when they saw me...’, only to relapse into the third person once and for all in 41. The ‘so he said’ is spoken by Isaac.

From here on, the narratological reconstruction becomes much more straightforward. The ‘unstable’ first-to-third-person phenomenon persists into the stories of the remaining bishops (55-85), who *never* narrate. Although Mark, Isaiah, and Psoulousia are all regularly referenced in the third person, the narrator occasionally employs an unspecified ‘we’. This ‘we’ refers to the travelling companions of the bishops, as a stylistic device to enliven the narrative. These plurals, however, do not open new narrative levels – they are far too innocuous and arbitrary to qualify as new narrators. Instead, they indicate a brief *focalization* shift: a ‘zooming out’ in perspective, from Mark as an individual observant to Mark and his companions as a group. There are several examples in the text, but the following shows them going back and forth:

πλαγς δε τηρϩ ηγηε μμαρκος ετβε τεφειπικτμει μν τεφσοφια... αγχιτιϩ δε νχναδ αγρδα
μπαρχηνεπισκοπος ετογλαβ απα αθανασιος γαροϩ [---] αγω [---] αγσβηρ νμμαδ ερακοτε.
ντερνβωκ δε ερογν ετπολις ανωινη νσα ππατριαρχης μπενζε εροϩ...

The entire people loved Mark for his knowledge and wisdom... They seized him by force and wrote to the holy Archbishop Apa Athanasius about him [---] and [---] sailed with him to Alexandria. When we entered the city, we looked for the patriarch, but we did not find him...²⁶²

²⁶² LA 56-7.

ΝΤΕΡΦΟΥΩ ΔΕ ΕΦΩΔΧΕ ΝΜΜΑΝ ΠΕΧΕ ΜΑΡΚΟΣ ΠΕΠΡΕΣΒΥΤΕΡΟΣ ΧΕ...

When he [Athanasius] finished speaking to us, Mark the priest said...²⁶³

As for the ensuing parable from Athanasius (64-67), I classify it as a tertiary narrative, with Athanasius as tertiary narrator (and an external one at that) and Mark as tertiary narratee (also external). In the parable, two unnamed monks bicker over whether to keep their ascetic work secret or to showcase it in public. They cannot reach a consensus, so they consult Apa Aphou for arbitration. Aphou then tells his own parable (66), but it is very short (about 9 lines). In it, drought ravages the countryside and one man tries to sow what little he can, whereas by contrast another man loses all hope and does nothing. Technically, this mini-parable forms an additional level, with Aphou as quaternary narrator (external) and the bickering monks as quaternary narratees (external). It ends – meaning the text returns to the tertiary level of Athanasius – when Aphou quizzes his two locutors as to what its moral is. The parable ends with the two bickering monks reconciling their differences. Note that when Athanasius reflects to Mark on the moral of his parable, he is no longer narrating – we are thus back at the secondary level.

The variance between first and third person continues in the stories of Isaiah and Psoulousia. Both stories are in the third person, but occasionally shift to the collective ‘we’. Isaiah and Psoulousia, like Mark, are never referenced in the first person, indicating that the ‘we’ narrator refers, for the most part, to their travelling companions. We can further assert that the ‘we’ refers *only* to these travelling companions, and *not* to other inhabitants of Philae. Note how the opening sentence to the story of Isaiah (75) says:

ΝΤΕΥΝΟΥ ΕΤΜΜΑΥ ΑΥΑΜΑΖΤΕ ΝΗΣΑΙΑΣ ΠΕΠΡΕΣΒΥΤΕΡΟΣ ΑΥΧΙΤΥ ΕΞΟΥΝ ΕΤΠΟΛΙΣ ΖΜ ΠΕΞΟΥ ΝΟΥΩΤ

‘Immediately *they* [not we] seized Isaiah the priest and took him into the city on that same day’.

Furthermore, in 77:

²⁶³ LA 61.

μεφωδκ ετπολις ειμητει ογνος ηροου ηφα λγω ρι ηαι οη νεφारे πεκληρος ει μη νεκληρικός
μη ηνος ηπλαος ηεπαρακαλει ημοφ φαντεφογαρφ ηωωου

‘And he did not go to the city except on a major festival day. Even then the clergy had to come with (all) the clergymen and the notables of the people to plead with him until he followed them’.

The main exception is most likely a planned transition, when Psoulousia’s companions are referenced haphazardly in either person: third plural in 80, first plural in 81, and third plural again in 82, with explicit identification:

λνεσνηφ ετμοοφε ηημαφ ταμοου δε λχιροΔονει ημοφ.

‘The brothers who had accompanied him [Psoulousia] told them [the people of Philae] that he had been ordained’.²⁶⁴

At the end of the story of Psoulousia, Isaac switches gears to the story of Aaron. Isaac’s secondary narration resumes until 88, when Isaac ‘gives the floor’ to Aaron himself, and a tertiary level opens. This time, Aaron is indisputably the tertiary narrator.²⁶⁵ He tells his own story for a few paragraphs, before Isaac takes over again permanently in 89.²⁶⁶ Through all the ensuing miracle reports, Isaac is the narrator (secondary). The miracle accounts are littered with parables, some of which contain first-person mini-narratives by the characters. Technically, we may consider these tertiary narratives, with the character in question being the tertiary narrator, and either Aaron or Isaac (depending on the miracle) being the tertiary narratee. Most of the time, however, the characters are referenced in the third person, and the narrator remains Isaac himself.

To reiterate, I will consider only those narratives which introduce a new explicitly first person as opening up a new (tertiary) level – anything else is considered part of Isaac’s sweeping secondary narrative about Aaron. Under this definition, three first-person tertiaries occur: 101 contains a brief tertiary narrative, told to Isaac by a fisherman. In 102, another tertiary narrative

²⁶⁴ *LA* 82.

²⁶⁵ This is the same strategy by which Macedonius imparts his knowledge to Aaron: Aaron is to Isaac as Isaac is to Paphnutius.

²⁶⁶ Except for a minor tertiary mini-narrative, quoted verbatim by Aaron pretending to be an anonymous narrator, but later confessing to be narrating about himself; *LA* 96.

opens in which the fisherman's son tells his father what he had just experienced. In 113 a tertiary narrative occurs when the rich man, recently blinded, tells Aaron what happened to him on the previous day. The text returns to the primary level on 138, when the narrator becomes Paphnutius again.

To conclude: for every primary narrator is at least one primary narratee, and for every secondary narrator a corresponding narratee, and so on. In the *LA*, the primary *narratees* are the readers themselves. The primary *narrator*, Paphnutius, becomes the *secondary narratee* first to Pseleusius, and then to Isaac. Both Pseleusius and Isaac get a chance to become *tertiary narratees*: Pseleusius to Anianus and Paul, and Isaac to Macedonius *via* Aaron. Aaron himself does not narrate consciously, though his 'presence' allows the narrative of Macedonius (tertiary) to transmit to Isaac. Athanasius opens up another tertiary narrative level, of which Mark is the tertiary narratee. Within *that* narrative is a quarternary parable, with Aphou as narrator and his locuters as narratees.

Paphnutius and Pseleusius are plainly internal narrators: they narrate their own story and situate themselves in it. They are external narratees in the sense that they do not interact in the story about which they are being narrated. They are *overt* narratees in that they receive a prologue by their respective narrators (Pseleusius and Anianus and Paul), followed by a personal address to the narratee, after which the narratee (Paphnutius and Pseleusius) expresses their amazement at what they have just heard. Anianus and Paul, for their part, are internal narrators for the same reason as Paphnutius and Pseleusius: they tell their own story. As for Isaac, he is internal and overt when narrating the life of Aaron, but external and covert when narrating about the bishops of Philae. Athanasius, on the other hand, is external, because he does not situate himself in the parable which he tells – same with Aphou, who is not in his own parable. Finally, Aaron is an internal narrator within the context of his own early life.

Conclusion

The *Life of Aaron* is an enlivening story with a complex narratological structure. Through careful analysis, we have summarized the full contents of the text in chronological (horizontal) and narratological (vertical) form. In so doing, we proposed the analogy of two chronological

‘forks’ to represent the structure: one wing for the narration of Pseleusius, and the other for Isaac. They each contain their own narrated past, and they intersect at the narrated present; in other words, both these narrators co-exist, presumably as generation cohorts, and they share their stories with the same primary narratee: Paphnutius. The grand timespan of the text seems to cover almost a full century, from the 330s to not much later than the 440s. The majority of the story takes place in the Aswan region, with other major scenes in Alexandria. In Appendix A-B, I offer a full visual of both the chronology and the narrative structure.

In addition to being complex, the *Life of Aaron* is also highly artificial. There are nonstop amounts of biblical references, some of which are explicit (like Zachaeus lecturing on the story of Moses and Amalek; and various direct quotes from Scripture) while others are subtly borrowed (like imagery from Samuel and Kings). Furthermore, the lives of each narrator are structured near-identically: virtually everyone hears the ascetic call early in life, retreats to the desert in search of monks, and finds an influential first mentor (Paphnutius finds Pseleusius, Pseleusius finds John, Anianus and Paul find Zachaeus, Isaac finds Aaron).²⁶⁷ But on a broader level, the whole text is organized of three interdependent parts which culminate in the life of Apa Aaron. Through this chiasm, every event in the story is meant to premonish the legacy of Aaron, and to link it with the history of Philae in one unified narrative. In short, the *Life of Aaron* is a work of structural genius: whoever wrote it knew exactly what he was doing. He planned out the entire thing from beginning to end, and tied together Philae’s oral traditions into a logical narrative cycle. Such an embeddedness of narration to this degree is rare in Late Antique literature, let alone in hagiography.

²⁶⁷ Moreover, Pseleusius, Zachaeus, and Aaron explicitly shun all association with women – a stock type in hagiography.

Epilogue

In the short term, this study has broken down the narrative structure of the *Life of Aaron*, with the specific hopes of provoking further literary analyses on the text, but also with more general hopes of promoting narratology in ancient literature. Hagiography is already a field of superior longevity, particularly in Greek, but narratology remains a young and fringe tradition. Such ‘fringeness’ becomes even more apparent when one browses for narratological studies of Classical texts. One then hits virgin territory south of the Mediterranean. The ancients might have been ignorant of narrative theory, but they were wealthy beyond measure in narratives – with hagiography being just one small example. Ancient hagiography makes a nice introductory specimen for narratology because the language is simple, the style is uniform, and the themes are familiar, unmistakable, and easily traceable.

In the long term, this study has contributed just one small step in a larger trend in Egyptology and Classics: the mainstreaming of Coptic literature. The Christian Egyptian vernacular is sparking exponential interest in the academic world, and can no longer be contained in specialist isolation. The discovery of such significant Coptic texts as, for example, the Nag Hammadi codices, as well as increasing interest in inter-religious dialogue towards reconciling old schisms of the Christian Church, have forced patristic scholars and other theologians to recognize the overwhelming influence of Egypt on early Christian history. Coptic is the ‘gateway tongue’ (my words) between the Ancient Egyptian world, and the proto-orthodox Christian world. Through Coptic, one can examine how the Egyptians translated their unique religious heritage – complete with its own deistic trinities and ritual baptisms – into the new Christian faith. Through Coptic literature, one examines how blurry the line between Gnosticism and Orthodoxy once was in the embryonic years of Christianity. Finally, through Coptic, one understands more clearly the communication breakdown that split the Church in the 5th century. For these reasons and more, Coptic must (and will) come into its own as a major subject in early Christian studies.

Concentrating exclusively on the *Life of Aaron*, I can propose two courses of action for future research. The first are those which I feel competent enough to pursue myself, whereas the second are those better left to more qualified hands than mine. Let us start with the prior: I first

propose to systematize the full narratological structure of the *Life of Aaron* – in other words, to continue this analysis to a level of depth beyond what a Master’s thesis can achieve. This fulfills the *depth* criterion. The *breadth* criterion, on the other hand, involves applying these same narratological tools to other related hagiographies. The best places to start would be the ones which we examined in my first chapter: the *Life of Antony*, the *Life of Pachomius*, the *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*, the *Life of Onnophrius*, and the *Life of Shenoute*. Such a meta-analysis, however, would have to be synthetic (in other words, collective or comparative) in order to restrict the size and repetition. I believe it would be more elucidating to interpret their narratological structures together rather than in isolation. The end result of such a study could be neatly accomplished in a doctoral dissertation.

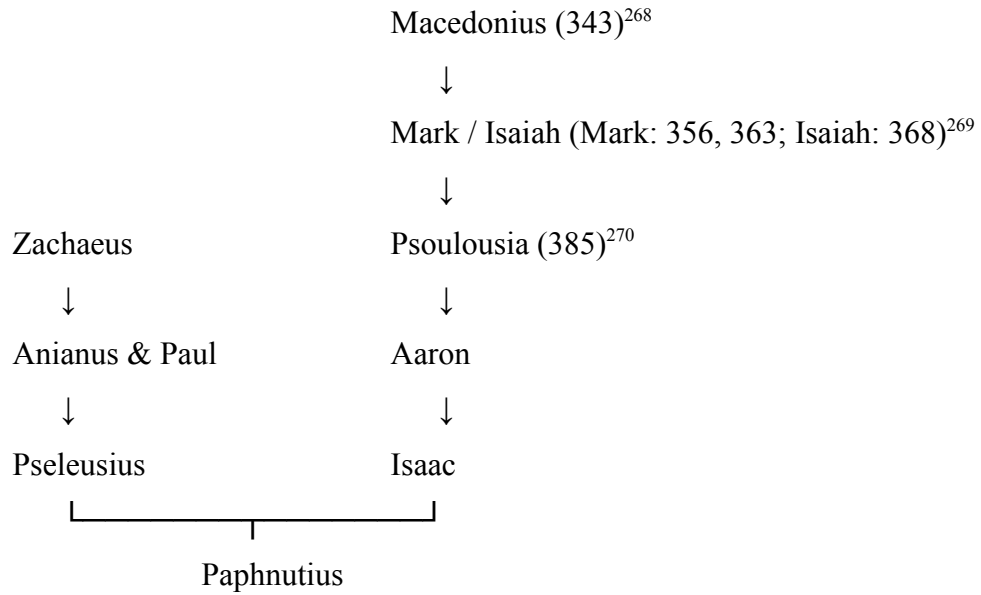
The second course of action for future study, that course which I delegate to greater specialists, involves a more multidisciplinary approach to narratology. Whereas the earlier proposal called for a structural analysis across hagiographies, a more technical study would call for an analysis of the hagiographical genre itself, across narratological traditions. Such a study may require a collegueship of narratologists working together on hagiographical texts. In a minimal scenario, there would be two colleagues: a narratologist and a hagiographer. If one demanded greater detail, one member could be a structuralist narratologist, another a postmodernist, and yet another a specialist of some sort in hagiography. Whatever the course, the ultimate goal of such a study would be to determine if hagiographical works of a certain era remain systematically regular in certain narratological methodologies (in which case the methodology in question is appropriately applicable to hagiography), or unpredictable in others (in which case either the hagiographical works lack a narrative pattern, or the methodology in question cannot apply to the genre). The ideal medium for such a study would be a compendium of mini-studies gathered sequentially in a single volume. Most realistically, each study would have its own author.

I, for one, have benefitted professionally and personally from this Coptological *coming-of-age*, and would encourage any Classicist or theologian to acquaint oneself with the language. It is exotic yet easy to learn – it combines the familiar vocabulary of Greek with the mystical phonology of Ancient Egyptian. One imagines oneself transported to fourth-century Philae, at the crossroads between the megalithic Pharaonic language of millennia past, and the rapidly-

advancing awakening of the Christian revelation – the new and eternal covenant. If Christianity was conceived and born in Palestine, then her surrogate mother was Egypt. Alexandria carried the baby faith to term, and Philae cared for the dying Osiris-Isis cults until they met their timely demise. Coptic connects the Old and New Ages in an unbroken linguistic line. The Copts to this day may, understandably, consider themselves the true heirs to Christian Orthodoxy, mutinied by a vindictive and heretical Chalcedonian *coup*. At the absolute least, they transmitted the Gospel into the longest-living vernacular known, and with astonishing steadfastness defended their Miaphysite faith through no less than 1,500 years of Byzantine, Arab, and Ottoman persecution. The Copts are survivors, passively upholding a worldview which transcends the extent of humankind’s literary record. For this they are to be commended, and because of this Coptology is enjoying its ascent.

When Paphnutius closes his grand narrative, he includes the following comment to Isaac (138): ΜΠΩΔ ΝΟΥΝΟΘ ΝΖΜΟΤ ΔΕ ΔΙΩΤΗ ΕΝΕΙΠΟΛΥΤΕΙΑ ΕΒΟΛ ΖΙΤΟΟΤΚ ΕΝΔ ΠΕΙΠΕΤΟΥΔΔΒ ΝΕ. ΕΤΒΕ ΠΑΙ ΔΝΟΚ ΖΩ †ΝΑΔΖΑΙΟΥ ΝΤΑΚΑΔΥ ΕΖΡΑΙ ΕΥΠΡΟСТАΓΜΑ ΝΝΓΕΝΕΔ ΤΗΡΟΥ ΕΤΝΑΩΩΠΕ ‘I have become worthy of great grace, because I have heard from you these ascetic feats of this holy man. Therefore, in my turn, I shall write them down and publish them as an ordinance for all generations to come’. It is humbling to imagine us, some millennium and a half after this promise was kept, being that generation of which he spoke. It is a testament to the immortal wisdom which he found in the desert, and the eternal truth on which it stands.

APPENDIX A: Lineage of Discipleship, with attested dates

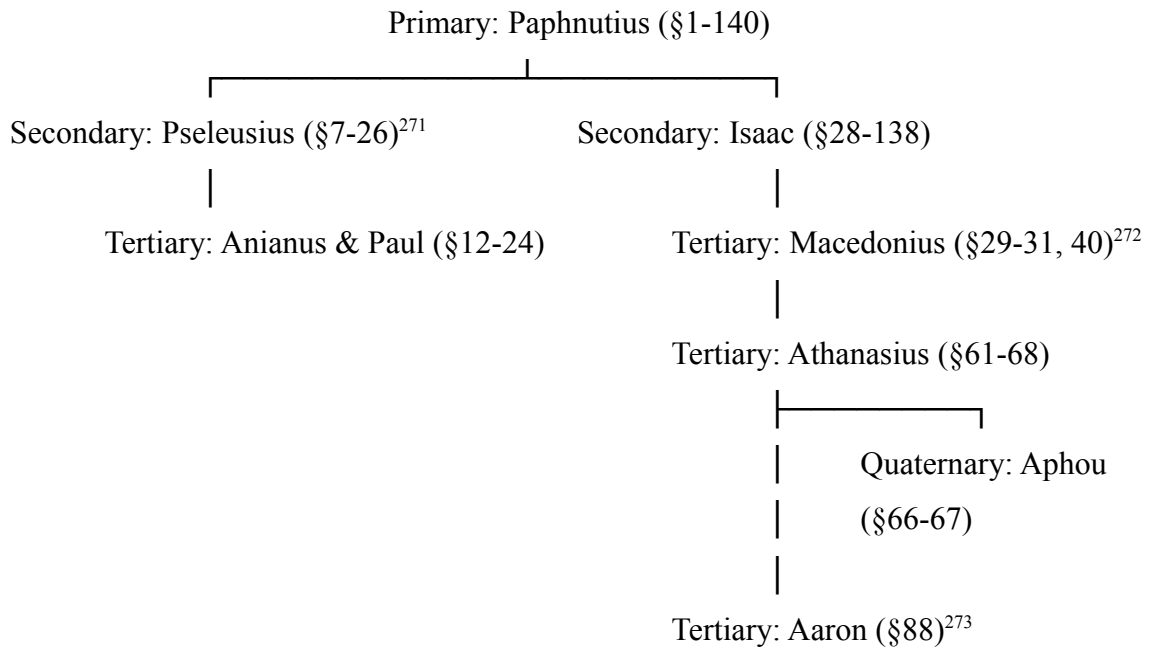


²⁶⁸ Ath., *Apol. c. Ar.* 50.51.

²⁶⁹ For the 356 attestation of Μάρκος, see Ath. *h.Ar.* 72.2. For the 363 attestation, see Ath. *tom.* 10. For mention of Isaiah's succession in 368, see IFAO *Copte* 25, fol. 8a.

²⁷⁰ By virtue of the fact that he attended the accession ceremony of Archbishop Theophilus; *LA* 83.

APPENDIX B: Illustration of the Narratological Structure



²⁷¹ The *story* of Pseleusius begins at §4, narrated by Paphnutius at the primary level.

²⁷² The *story* of Macedonius continues up to §54, narrated by Isaac at the secondary level.

²⁷³ The remainder of the *story* of Aaron (89-138) is Isaac's eyewitness account, narrated at the secondary level.

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