‘Une foule immense de moines’
The Coptic Life of Aaron and the Early Bishops of Philae

One of the most evocative passages of the Coptic hagiographical work known as Histories of the Monks in the Egyptian Desert is the episode of Macedonius and the holy falcon of Philae (fol. 13a-b)². According to the story, Macedonius, just appointed by Athanasius as first bishop of Philae to shepherd the small Christian community on the island³, walks into the area of the temples, where he has seen people worshipping a falcon in what is called in derogatory terms a “demonic cage” (ΜΑΓΙΚΑΝΟΝ, Greek μαγίκανον)⁴. He asks the two sons of the high priest, who are in charge of that day’s offerings, to offer a sacrifice to God. They light a fire and burn it down to the coals. Meanwhile Macedonius slips away, takes the bird out of the cage and cuts off its head. He then returns to the place of sacrifice and throws the bird into the fire: the old god is offered to the new one⁵.

Nobody has any doubt about the legendary character of this scene, which may be reminiscent of Jehu’s slaughter of the Baal priests in 2 Kings 10⁶. On the other hand, as we will see, the text comes close to the historical evidence we have for early Christianity at Philae. But what is history, what story? As I presume that the work is not generally known, I will first briefly summarise its contents. Secondly, attention will be paid to the transmission of the text and its editio princeps in order to indicate that a new edition of the work is needed. Thirdly, the text is placed in the context of Coptic literature. With this literary framework in mind, we will finally come back to the question of the historical value of the text. It will be shown that the work is of importance, not only for early Christianity at Philae but also for Egyptian early church history at large.

However, before we start with a summary, we first have to say something about the title of the work. As the title page of our only complete manuscript is lost, scholars have invented several names, merely to cover its contents: for example, the first editor, Budge, calls it Histories of the Monks in the Egyptian Desert⁷. However, there is good reason to suppose that the name of the work must have been the Life of Aaron, for this holy man is mentioned in both the coda and the colophon (fol. 57a and 76a). Furthermore, the text points to Aaron as the central figure⁸. In this paper, I therefore refer to the work as Life of Aaron (henceforth: LA).

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¹ I owe gratitude to comments by and discussions with J. N. Bremmer, A. Hilhorst, P. van Minnen and J. van der Vliet.
³ For a similar story, see Athanasius’ appointment of Frumentius as bishop of Axum in Ruf., HE 1.10.
⁵ For a Dutch translation of this passage, see J. F. Borghouts, Egyptische sagen en verhalen, Bussum 1974, 184–189.
⁶ A connection with the story of Daniel and Bel, 10–13, as Frankfurter, Religion (see n. 4), 110, n. 50 suggests, is unlikely.
⁷ Budge, Miscellaneous Texts (see n. 2), Iviii.
⁸ Apa Aaron is introduced in fol. 10b. His name is spelled ꝲ_fatal in Coptic, unlike the spelling of the biblical Aaron, ꝲ_fatal, who is mentioned in fol. 8b. The story of the first bishops of Philae (section two, fol. 10b–37b) is presented as told by Aaron to Isaac. As we will see, section three (fol. 37b–57a) is entirely dedicated to Apa Aaron.
The LA can be divided into three sections. In the first section (fol. 1a–10b), a certain Paphnutius travels to a monastic community near Syene (modern Aswan) where the monk Apa Psleusius tells him several stories about holy men in the area and teaches him the way of living in the desert. In the second section (fol. 10b–37b), Paphnutius decides to accompany Psleusius to an island in the First Cataract, near Philae, to receive a blessing from another monk, Apa Isaac. When they talk about his work, Isaac relates the history of the first bishops of Philae, which he, in turn, heard from his master Apa Aaron. Clearly, this is a literary device to authenticate the story. The rest of section two is dedicated to Macedonius and his successors, the converted sons of the high priest of Philae, Mark and Isaiah, and the monk Psolousius9. Section three (fol. 37b–57a) contains what can be described as a catalogue of miracles performed by Aaron, in which the author’s biblical erudition is displayed to an exhaustive, if not exhausting extent. Apa Isaac continues his story on Aaron by relating how he came to Philae. The monk then tells Paphnutius about his life with the holy man. Just as in the first section, the novice finds a master to teach him the life of the desert. The work is concluded with fourteen miracles performed by Aaron, and his death.

Text and Transmission

The LA as a whole is transmitted in one tenth-century paper codex10. Beside the LA, the manuscript consists of a series of biblical passages to be read at the festival of Aaron (Παύλ. Ἐκλ.Πλ. Πς.Πο.Νι., fol. 57a–61a)11, the prayer of archbishop Athanasius before he died (fol. 61a–67b)12, and a discourse on St. Michael the archangel (fol. 67b–75b)13. In the one article dedicated to the LA, Orlandi thought that these works were collected in connection with the flooding of the Nile14. Rather, the criterion of selection seems to have been the date: the date of death of Athanasius occurred on 7 Pachons (May 2) and the festival of Apa Aaron falls on 9 Pachons (May 4)15. The collection formed part of the liturgy of a festival or series of festivals, a common feature of Coptic literature in the ninth and tenth centuries16. According to the colophon, the manuscript was copied in Esna and given to the shrine (ΤΟΠΟΥ) of Apa Aaron in Edfu17. A tenth-century wall painting of Aaron from the cathedral of Faras, Nubia, indicates that in that century Apa Aaron was venerated as a saint from Faras to Edfu18.

9 The name (spelled ΠΣΟΥΔΟΥΣΙΩΣ in fol. 34b, ΠΣΟΥΔΟΥΣΙΩΣ in 35b, ΠΣΟΥΔΟΥΣΙΩΣ in 36a and b, ΠΣΟΕΛΛΟΥΣΙΩΣ in 36b, and ΠΣΟΕΛΛΟΥΣΙΩΣ in 37a) looks like that of Psleusius, the narrator of the first section, but probably both names are local. Vivian, Paphnutius (see n. 2), 52 adds to the confusion by calling the bishop Psleusius. Henceforth, I will refer to the bishop as Psolousius.

10 British Library Or. 7029 = B. Layton, Catalogue of Coptic Literary Manuscripts in the British Library Acquired Since the Year 1906, London 1987, 196–199 (nr. 163). For another description of the manuscript, see Budge, Miscellaneous Texts (see n. 2), lvi–lvi. I examined the manuscript in the British Library in June of 2001.

11 Budge, Miscellaneous Texts (see n. 2), 496–502, 1011. The lectures are Ps. 99. 1–9, Heb. 4. 14–5. 6, Jas. 5. 10–6, Acts 7. 34–43, Ps. 77. 18–20, Mt. 4. 23–5. 16, Mk. 16. 1–20. It can be no coincidence that the biblical Aaron (λ.λ.ΠΟΥ, cf. n. 8) features prominently in four of the seven lectures.

12 Budge, Miscellaneous Texts (see n. 2), 503–511 (text), 1012–1020 (translation).

13 Budge, Miscellaneous Texts (see n. 2), 512–523 (text), 1021–1032 (translation).


15 The festival of Michael the archangel was celebrated on 12 Pauni (June 6). Cf. Budge, Miscellaneous Texts (see n. 2), 1010–1012, 1021. He provides no date for the death of Aaron, and then talks about ‘the festival of the commemoration of Apa Aaron (May 2, síc). He also refers to the date of Athanasius’ death as May 2, which is in itself correct, but further equals 12 Pauni of the festival of Michael to May 6. Vivian, Paphnutius (see n. 2), 140 mistakenly dates the death of Aaron to May 17.


17 Layton, Catalogue (see n. 10), nr. 163 is part of a group of twenty-one parchment and paper codices of the tenth and eleventh centuries, which were mainly copied in Esna and delivered in Edfu (Layton, Catalogue, xxvii).

18 K. Michalowski, Faras. Die Kathedrale aus dem Wüstensand, Einsiedeln 1967, 126–127 (Fig. 46); A. Łukaszewicz, En marge d’une image de l’anachorète Aaron dans la cathédrale de Faras, Nubia christiana 1 (1982) 192–211.
When preparing his catalogue of Coptic manuscripts in the British Library, B. Layton discovered that three papyrus fragments, preserved from bindings of later manuscripts from Edfu, belonged to the LA. He identified them with the corresponding passages of the paper manuscript. However, the papyri, once part of a papyrus codex, were never published. A closer look at the scraps ascertained that they differ from the paper codex only to a small degree. On palaeographical grounds, the papyri can tentatively be dated to the sixth or seventh century. Interestingly, one of the other unique works in the paper codex, the Dying Prayer of Athanasius, is also otherwise preserved only in a few papyrus scraps, viz. at the University of Michigan.

These papyri are dated to the fifth or sixth centuries, but seem to be textually inferior to the paper codex of the British Library. The maxim recentiores non deteriores seems also applicable to the LA.

The complicated narrative structure of the text with many different narrators on different levels accounts for at least part of the scribal errors contained in the transmitted text. Budge’s edition does not deal with such problems and adds many more errors. Moreover, since the publication of the editio princeps, the LA has been severely neglected. One example will do to illustrate the shortcomings of Budge’s edition. At the beginning of the story of Mecander, the bishop tells Aaron that he went to Philae (fol. 12a). I give Budge’s text and translation:

ΑΛΧΟΟΣ ΓΑΡ [...], ΕΙΟΝ ΝΑΡΠΧΝ ΕΔΥΜΙ ΑΡΧΗ ΝΤ[...] ΑΟΥΩΟΟΣ ΔΕΙ ΕΡΗΣ ΕΙΤΑΓΑΡΧΗ ΕΩΝ ΝΕΙΝΟΙΣΙΣ

“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’.”

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19 Layton, Catalogue (see n. 10), 172–173 (nr. 150, pl. 21) = British Library Or. 7558/89/93/150.
20 1. Or. 7558/89/150 v² (error for v³) = Or. 7029, fol. 28a; 2. Or. 7558/89/150 r² (error for v³) = Or. 7029, fol. 28b; 3. Or. 7558/93 r³ = Or. 7029, fol. 30a; 4. Or. 7558/93 v³ = Or. 7029, fol. 30b. The readable lines of the papyri correspond to the following lines of the paper manuscript: 11–18, 18–21, 15–18 and 17–20. The similar location of these lines shows that the papyrus codex had the same layout as the paper codex.
24 As appears e. g. from the frequent interchanging of personal pronouns.
25 He made mistakes in transcription (e. g. ΡΗΕΗΜΟΝΤ ΨΑ ΠΑΝΙΑ ΕΤΤΟΣ ΠΑΣΟΝ for ΡΗΕΗΜΟΝΤ ΨΑ ΠΑΝΙΑ ΧΕ ΕΡΙΑ ΕΤΤΟΣ ΠΑΣΟΝ “I did not rest in my heart, for I did not find my brother Titus”, 6a), filled in lacunae wrongly (e. g. [.......]ΜΙΟΟΩΥ for [...]ΜΙΟΟΥ, 21b, cf. 23a), and left open obvious restorations (e. g. [.....]Υ for [ΤΟΥΝΟ], 15a), not to speak of the problematic ones (e. g. ΧΕ ΡΗΕΗΦ[Ω][Σ] for ΧΕ ΡΗΕΗΦ[Ω][Σ] “for he did not size”, 1b). Moreover, Budge had overlooked a complete folium of the colophon (fol. 77a), which has since been published by A. van Lantschoot, Recueil des colophons des manuscrits chrétiens d’Égypte I, Leuven 1929, 197–200 and II, 79–80. Vivian’s translation (see n. 2), although on some points complementing Budge’s translation and making the text available to a wider audience, essentially follows Budge’s text and is therefore not quite satisfactory.
This translation is both inaccurate and incorrect. Firstly, the translation of the word λΠΧΩΝ is, like other instances in the LA, deliberately left vague to denote someone of the upper class\(^\text{27}\). Secondly, Budge ignores the first lacuna and suggests the totally unjustified Syene for the second one. In fact, the letter “μ” is clearly discernible in the manuscript before the second lacuna, so that the only possibility to fill-in this gap is to read ΤΤΙ[ΝΠΠΙΑΟΥ]ΙΟΣ. Taken with ΠΛ and λΠΧΗ, for which the translation “taking over rule” is, as far as I know, not attested in Coptic\(^\text{28}\), but which is rather a rendering of the Greek verb ἀγριμιέω, the combination means “I started becoming rich”\(^\text{29}\). Thirdly, Budge’s translation of ΠΑΓ[ΛΠΧΗ] suggests a corruption for ΠΑΓ[ΛΓΕ] “to pass” but the use of a Greek noun for a verb is common in Coptic texts, and the combination of ΠΑΓ[ΛΓΕ] with εἷον is impossible\(^\text{30}\). Accordingly, the correct translation of the passage should be:

\[\text{ΔΧΘΟΟĆ ΓΑΡ [ΝΑ] ΣΕ ΕΤΙ] ΕΙΟ ΝΑΡΧΩΝ ΕΑΙΝΙ ΔΡΧΗ ΝΤ[ΝΠΠΙΑΟΥ]ΙΟΣ ΑΕΙ ΕΡΗΣ ΕΠΙΠΑΓΑΡΧΗ ΕΓΔΝ ΝΕΠΟΔΙΚ} \]

“For he said to me: ‘When I was still a dignitary, and started to become rich, I went south, because I was pagarch over these cities’”.

Macedonius, then, was a pagarch, not a “governor”.

The Life of Aaron and Coptic Literature

For understanding its historical interest, we now turn to the authorship of the LA. The main character of the story, Paphnutius, states at the end of the work that he will write down what he has heard (fol. 56b). Interestingly, the narrator of the Coptic Life of Onuphrius (henceforth: \(\text{LO}\))\(^\text{31}\) is also a Paphnutius and monks of Scetis are reported to have written down his words in the codex\(^\text{32}\). It has therefore been assumed that the author of the \(\text{LO}\) had as most likely candidate Paphnutius ‘Cephalas’\(^\text{33}\). This Paphnutius had known Antony the anchorite and was an authoritative person in Scetis as late as the end of the fourth century\(^\text{34}\). As the LA has certain characteristics in common with the \(\text{LO}\) and the LA contains historical references dating to the fourth century, it has been postulated that the author of the LA is equally none other than Paphnutius Cephalas. However, if this Paphnutius was indeed the author of the LA and the work was written in Scetis, it would not have had such a strong local character. A local history of bishops, and explicitly mentioned topographical indications\(^\text{35}\), are exactly what we do not find in the \(\text{LO}\). Moreover, last-named work is transmitted in eight languages, whereas, as we have seen, we have only one manuscript of the LA, and some

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27 Cf. fol. 26a, 31a–b, 49b, 50b.
29 Cf. the Martyrdom of Mercurius the General, Budge, Miscellaneous Texts (see n. 2), 281 (fol. 24a), in which the same word is mentioned in connection with dignitaries (λΠΧΩΝ, ΝΟΕ).
30 For the use of Greek nouns as verbs in Coptic, see P. E. Kahle, Bala ‘izah. Coptic texts from Deir el-Bala ‘izah in Upper Egypt I, London 1954, 189–190.
33 O’Leary, Saints (see n. 26), 219–220; Vivian, Paphnutius (see n. 2), 42–50. Cf. R.-G. Coquin, Paphnutius the Hermit, Copt. Enc. VI 1882–1883 with more caution. A. Guilmont, Paphnutius of Scetis, Copt. Enc. VI 1884–1885 suggests a Paphnutius mentioned in Hist. Mon. 14 as the author of the \(\text{LO}\).
35 The places mentioned in the LA are: Alexandria (ΠΑΣΟΤΗΤΗΣ), fol. 12a, 25a, 30b, 31a, 33a, 35a, 36b; Aswan (ΠΟΥΛΑΝ) 6a, 12a-b, 30b, 34a, 45b, 51a-b; Athribis (ΑΘΡΙΠΩΛΙΟΣ): 35a; Philae (ΠΕΛΑΚ, ΠΕΛΑΚ, ΠΕΛΑΚ): 12a, 19b, 31a, 37b, 44b, 49a, 56b, 57a; Scketis (ΣΚΕΣ): 38a; Schissa (ΣΧΩΣΣΑΣ): 30b, 35a. Monastic communities near Aswan/ Philae: the Corner (ΠΙΚΟΚΩ), 7a and the Valley (ΠΙΛ, ΠΕΙΛ): 15a, 38b.
fragments of another one, found in the same region and dedicated to the shrine of Apa Aaron\textsuperscript{36}. Another argument for the local character of the LA is the miracle story of Apa Psouslia, fourth bishop of Philae, when attending the celebration of a new archbishop (fol. 36b–37a). This miracle is a typical expression of local self-identity that has nothing to do with Scetis.

Given the local character of the work, the author of the LA probably was a local monk who used the name of one of the great anchorites of the past, thereby lending authority to his work\textsuperscript{37}. This feature is not uncommon in Coptic literature. For example, Apa Pambo was a famous fourth-century anchorite\textsuperscript{38}, but in a work attributed to him (the Life of Cyrus) he refers to Shenute and the fifth-century Emperor Zeno, which betrays a later date\textsuperscript{39}. In this way several works, written by different authors, could be attributed to one famous holy man. They are termed “cicili” by Orlandi and are quite common from the fifth century onwards\textsuperscript{40}. As one of the manuscripts of the LO was also found in Edfu, this manuscript may have been part of one of those cycles. What we have here, then, is a literary tradition developing around a local saint, probably from the fifth until the tenth centuries, that has an interesting, but somewhat later, parallel in a continuous literary tradition connected with the cult of holy men around Nagada\textsuperscript{41}. It is time to concentrate on the historical value of our text.

The Life of Aaron and History

In his checklist of Byzantine bishops, K. A. Worp mentions five fourth-century bishops of Philae, of whom four are mentioned in the LA\textsuperscript{42}. A fifth bishop of Philae, Eusebius, is certainly a corruption for Eusebius of Caesarea\textsuperscript{43}. It was W. Spiegelberg who, on account of the LA, first saw that Christianity at Philae started in the fourth century when Athanasius was archbishop\textsuperscript{44}. The only indication of the historicity of the bishops was a letter of Athanasius, dated 362, in which a Mark of Philae was mentioned\textsuperscript{45}. Recently, in her impressive book on Athanasius, A. Martin has shown that Macedonius, Mark and Isaiah are historical figures\textsuperscript{46}. Macedonius signed a list of bishops in 346\textsuperscript{47}, Mark is a second time mentioned in 356\textsuperscript{48}, and even the succession of Mark by Isaiah is documented in a festal letter of 368, expressed in the same words as

\textsuperscript{36} The absence of Aaron in Coptic lists of saints (synaxaria) is another indication that we are dealing here with a local saint. Cf. O’Leary, Saints (see n. 26); R.-G. Coquin, Le synaxaire des coptes. Un nouveau témoin de la récession de haute Égypte, Analecta Bollandiana 96 (1978) 351–365. Lukaszewicz, Image (see n. 18), 202–203 refers to two other places where an Apa Aaron is mentioned. Yet, these instances are insufficient proof that Aaron of Philae was ever worshipped north of Edfu.

\textsuperscript{37} Cf. Orlandi, Literature (Coptic) (see n. 16), 1458: “It also seems that the prominent authors of this period were not free, and did not feel free, to publish works under their own names, perhaps because they sought to give greater authority to their writings, by attributing them to a venerated author of antiquity”.


\textsuperscript{39} Budge, Coptic Martyrdoms (see n. 31), 128–136 (text), 381–389 (translation). Zeno (Emperor 474–491) is referred to in f. 23a, Shenute in 28b and 29b.

\textsuperscript{40} T. Orlandi, Letteratura copta e cristianesimo nazionale egiziano, in: A. Camplani (ed.), L’egitto cristiano. Aspetti e problemi in età tardo-antica, Rome 1997, 39–120 at 111–113. Cf. Orlandi, Literature (Coptic) (see n. 16), 1456–1458 in which these cycles are dated to the seventh and eighth centuries.

\textsuperscript{41} As C. Décobert recently demonstrated during the Journée d’études of the Association francophone de cœptologie at Lille. For the cult of local holy men at Nagada and Coptos, see J. Doresse, Saints coptes de Haute-Égypte, Journal asiatique 236 (1948) 247–270.

\textsuperscript{42} K. A. Worp, A Checklist of Bishops in Byzantine Egypt, ZPE 100 (1994) 283–318 at 305.


\textsuperscript{44} Spiegelberg, Ägyptologische Beiträge III (see n. 26), 186–189. Already U. Wilcken in his famous article Heidnisches und Christliches aus Agypten, APF 1 (1901) 396–436 at 403–404 takes into account a fourth-century bishop at Philae, yet he did not have recourse to the LA and left it at that: “Ich lasse diese Frage unentschieden”.

\textsuperscript{45} Ath., Tom. 10 (PG 26, col. 808).

\textsuperscript{46} Martin, Athanase (see n. 43), 84–89.

\textsuperscript{47} Μοσθόνος, Ath., Apol. cr. Ar. 49, 3 (Opitz 2, p. 130, nr. 218).

\textsuperscript{48} Μήρος, Ath., Hist. Ar. 72.2 (Opitz 2, p. 222). Mark is listed with six other bishops of the Thebaid, including the bishop of Syene.
the \textit{LA} (fol. 33a)\textsuperscript{49}. It is plausible, as Martin suggests, that the new see was created in 330 during the visit of Athanasius to Upper Egypt but, in any case, it must have been before 339\textsuperscript{50}. According to the \textit{LA}, our fourth bishop, Psoulosia, a contemporary of Aaron, attended the succession of archbishop Timothy by Theophillus in 385, when the aforementioned miracle took place. In sum, the first three bishops of Philae are historical figures; for the fourth, this is highly likely (Fig. 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bishops of Philae</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Macedonius</td>
<td>\textit{Ath. Apol. c. Ar.} 49.3</td>
<td>346</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>\textit{Ath. Hist. Ar.} 72.2</td>
<td>356</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>\textit{Ath. Tom.} 10</td>
<td>362</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>IFAO Copte 25, fol. 8a</td>
<td>368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isaiah</td>
<td>IFAO Copte 25, fol. 8a</td>
<td>368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psoulosia</td>
<td>\textit{LA}, fol. 36b</td>
<td>385</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Fig. 1: List of the first four bishops of Philae

The procedure of episcopal appointment by the archbishop of Alexandria, as described in the \textit{LA}, is likewise attested in other sources. For example, election of bishops by the people and local clergy, as well as visiting the archbishop in Alexandria before appointment is found in sources relating to Hermontis and Syene. Athanasius himself also refers to last-named feature\textsuperscript{51}. Yet, never do we find such a specific description as in the \textit{LA}, which makes it our most detailed source on fourth-century episcopal appointment in Egypt.

Let us finally return to bishop Macedonius and the story of the holy falcon of Philae. The passage may contain more historical information than appears on first sight. According to Strabo, the holy falcon, a Nubian bird, was worshipped at Philae in the early first century A.D.\textsuperscript{52}. Hieroglyphic texts on the walls of

Fig. 2: Falcon pictures on the outer wall of the temple of Isis at Philae (É. Bernand, \textit{Les inscriptions grecques et latines de Philae II. Haut et Bas Empire}, Paris 1969, Pl. 40)


\textsuperscript{50} Martin, \textit{Athanase} (see n. 43), 88. Macedonius is not mentioned in the appendix of newly ordained bishops of the Eastern letters of 339 and 346. It is therefore probable that Macedonius was ordained before Athanasius’ first exile, that is, before 335.

\textsuperscript{51} Martin, \textit{Athanase} (see n. 43), 128–129 with references in n. 43.

\textsuperscript{52} Str. 17. 1. 49.


\textsuperscript{54} I.Phiilae 190–192.
the temple of Isis confirm this account\textsuperscript{53}. Now, it is interesting that between the two pylons of the temple of Isis at Philae three inscriptions have been found that accompany pictures of a falcon (Fig. 2)\textsuperscript{54}.

The inscriptions, probably incised by local priests, are in Greek and date to the first half of the fifth century. The iconography of the pictures corresponds exactly to the descriptions of the falcon cult of earlier sources\textsuperscript{55}. Combining the inscriptions with the pictures, we see that worship of the holy falcon was still in use in the fifth century, and did exist at the time when Macedonius was bishop.

The story of Macedonius and the holy falcon seems to fall in the period of similar stories on actions against paganism by Shenute (written after Shenute’s death, ca. 465) and Moses of Abydos (after ca. 550)\textsuperscript{56}. The frequent appearance of Nubians, characterised as pagans, may be taken as evidence to date the work before the definitive Christianisation of Nubia, which took place in the second half of the sixth century\textsuperscript{57}. Finally, the information that Macedonius was a pagarch, a function which appears on the administrative scene of Byzantine Egypt only from the end of the fifth century onwards, suggests a date of composition in the first half of the sixth century\textsuperscript{58}. Thus, the LA offers a unique, local perspective of a sixth-century Christian community on its formative period.

Conclusion

I hope to have demonstrated that the LA contains important information about early Christianity at Philae. Nevertheless, one should not go too far in this. In his recent book about religion in Roman Egypt, D. Frankfurter refers to a passage in which an old woman denounces Macedonius’ slaughter of the holy falcon in order to prove his thesis of locals defending pagan temples in the fourth and fifth centuries\textsuperscript{59}. The old woman’s interference with Christian affairs, however, seems more a literary device illustrating the conversion of pagans than a historical fact. Macedonius curses the woman and makes her dumb, but later heals her en plein public after she has confirmed that she believes in God (fol. 14a–b and 22a–23a)\textsuperscript{60}. First and foremost, the LA is a literary work, an answer to the question posed in its famous predecessor, the \textit{Historia monachorum in Aegypto}, to quote A.-J. Festugièrè’s translation: “Que ne pourrait-on dire en effet sur la Haute-Thébaide dans la région de Syène, où vivent des hommes encore plus admirables et une foule immense de moines?” (Ep. 1)\textsuperscript{61}.

\textsuperscript{53} Cf. L. V. Zabkar, \textit{A Hieracocephalous Deity from Naqa, Qustul, and Philae}, ZÄS 102 (1975) 143–153, who mainly argues for an Egyptian origin of the representations at Philae but does not associate these pictures with the falcon cult at Philae.


\textsuperscript{55} Fol. 18a (2x), 18b, 19b, 26b, 40b, 41b, 42a, b (4x) 51a. For the Christianisation of Nubia see Richter, \textit{Christianisierung Nubiens} (see n. 26).


\textsuperscript{57} Frankfurter, \textit{Religion} (see n. 4), 68.

\textsuperscript{58} The story of the old woman has the same structure as the miracle stories of part three of the LA, which are often modeled on miracle stories from the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles (the story of the old woman is possibly modeled on Mk. 7. 33–37).

\textsuperscript{51} Τι γὰρ ἐν τις ἕτοι περὶ τῆς ἑνὸς ἠθηκόδος τῆς κατὰ Σωήνην, ἐν Ἡ καὶ ἡμαςιπάτεροι ἄνδρες τῷ γάετελωσιν καὶ πλῆθος μοναχῶν ἐπειρον; (Festugièrè). For the translation, A.-J. Festugièrè, \textit{Enquête sur les moines d’Égypte (Historia monachorum in Aegypto)}, Paris 1964, 130.