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

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RIJKSUNIVERSITEIT GRONINGEN

RELIGIOUS ENCOUNTERS ON THE SOUTHERN EGYPTIAN FRONTIER IN LATE ANTIQUITY (AD 298 – 642)

Proefschrift

ter verkrijging van het doctoraat in de
Godgeleerdheid en Godsdienstwetenschap
aan de Rijksuniversiteit Groningen
op gezag van de
Rector Magnificus, dr. F. Zwarts,
in het openbaar te verdedigen op
donderdag 10 maart 2005
om 16.15 uur

door

Jitse Harm Fokke Dijkstra
geboren op 13 december 1976
te Stadskanaal

Promotores:	Prof. dr. J.N. Bremmer Prof. dr. P. van Minnen
Beoordelingscommissie:	Prof. dr. G.P. Luttikhuizen Prof. dr. O.M. van Nijf Prof. dr. K.A. Worp

The life of the forgotten, of the unknown individual man; his sorrows and his joys, his suffering and death, this is the real content of human experience down the ages. If that could be told by history, then I should certainly not say that it is blasphemy to see the finger of God in it. But such a history does not and cannot exist; and all the history which exists, our history of the Great and the Powerful, is at best shallow comedy; it is the opera buffa played by the powers behind reality.

(Karl Popper, ***The Open Society and Its Enemies***)

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Preface

This book is about religious encounters in Late Antique Egypt. The idea of writing it was born in 1999 when I finished my MA-thesis about a papyrus text that mentioned the reinstatement of 'the sanctuaries' for a group of desert people, the Blemmyes, in AD 567. I suggested that with 'the sanctuaries' could well have been meant the temples of Philae, an island on Egypt's southern frontier. However, if this were true, it would be in disagreement with an account by the Byzantine historian Procopius, commonly accepted by scholars, that Justinian made a definitive end to the Ancient Egyptian cults at Philae in 535-537. How far can we trust Procopius in this respect? As there had already been an episcopal see created on the same small island in the fourth century, I wondered how the religious transformation from the Ancient Egyptian religion to Christianity had taken place on Philae in Late Antiquity.

Two years earlier, in 1997, on the occasion of his valedictory lecture, Herman te Velde, Professor of Egyptology at the University of Groningen, the person who kindled my passion for Egypt, made the following observation: 'It would be interesting to know how the priests of the Christian church and the priests of the temple of Isis at Philae coexisted, apparently without noteworthy problems'.[1] How could I have known then that this question would later keep me busy as a PhD-student for almost four and a half years! Having read David Frankfurter's ***Religion in Roman Egypt*** of 1998, this book challenged me to study the religious developments at Philae in a regional context, that is, by including two other settlements in the area, Syene (modern Aswan) and Elephantine.

Encouraged by the many and various sources from and on the region, at the start of my PhD-project in 2000 my initial goal was to study all these sources together in order to extract a detailed picture of the religious transformation in the region over the entire period of Late Antiquity. One of the most promising sources was a Coptic hagiographical work on the region, the ***Life of Aaron***. I soon discovered that the text was not well edited and therefore I studied the only completely preserved manuscript of the work, as well as some papyrus fragments of a second manuscript, in the British Library in 2001. In addition, Jacques van der Vliet kindly invited me to Leiden to study the ***Life of Aaron*** and several other Coptic saints' lives together with Klaartje ten Hacken, Joost Hagen and Robert Hub in 2001/2002. I vividly remember the lively debates we had about these exciting Coptic texts. On other occasions, Jacques was always there to exchange views and to advise me on the Coptic, preferably over a nice glass of wine.

The only type of sources I was at first less impressed by was the published archaeological record. Nevertheless, as I would be studying a region for at least four years, I thought I might as well visit the excavations in the area. After having sent an e-mail to Cornelius von Pilgrim, director of the Swiss Institute for Architectural and Archaeological Research Cairo, I was kindly invited to participate in the excavations. Fortunately, in 2000, excavations of Late Antique and Arab houses around the temple of Isis at Aswan had just started and during my first visit to Egypt in 2001 I contributed to the excavations by drawing the walls of one of these mudbrick houses. Soon, however, my attention was drawn to the place where we sought relief from the boiling heat and where we took our breaks: the temple of Isis. It turned out to contain many Christian graffiti and was apparently reused as a church after the Ancient Egyptian cults had ceased.

I therefore decided to return the next year to catalogue the graffiti in the temple of Isis, and to study its reuse as a church. Besides the fieldwork in Aswan, I also stayed in Cairo for several months to study the mentioned papyrus text in the Egyptian Museum. I joyfully remember the many pleasant hours I spent drinking tea with the Museum's employees. With the status of an assistant researcher, the Dutch-Flemish Institute kindly gave me the opportunity to carry out the research in the Museum and to have access to the main Cairene libraries. Finally, the serene environment of the Swiss Institute gave me shelter from the chaos

[1] H. te Velde, ***Het einde van de Oudegyptische religieuze traditie*** (Groningen, 1997) 10.

and noise of the streets of Cairo. It is with the warmest feelings that I look back on these months spent in Egypt, which have enriched me and will do so for the rest of my life.

Although I cannot mention all the people whom I am fortunate to have met in my time in Egypt, two persons in particular have to be mentioned. Firstly, Kai-Christian Bruhn was always there to discuss matters with me on site. He shared my conviction about the benefits of a multidisciplinary research and stimulated me throughout. Secondly, I am indebted to Cornelius von Pilgrim who allowed me to become a member of the Swiss excavations at Aswan and Elephantine, to study the temple of Isis at Aswan and to publish some recently discovered Late Antique inscriptions from the area. Moreover, he supported my stay at the Swiss Institute, also during a third visit to Cairo and Aswan in 2003, and gave me access to the institute's excellent library and the documents of the founder of the Swiss Institute, Ludwig Borchardt.

Besides these experiences in Egypt, I had the privilege of studying papyri in the original languages during the Papyrological Summer Institute, organised by the American Society of Papyrologists, at Yale University in 2003. During the month I spent in the basement of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, I broadened my knowledge of papyrology, while getting hands-on experience with the papyri in a highly stimulating environment and being educated by specialists in the field such as Adam Bülow-Jacobsen, Hélène Cuvigny, Ruth Duttenhöfer and Ann Hanson. I am grateful for the generous grants with which the Beinecke Library and the Stichting Philologisch Studiefonds, as well as the Dutch National Graduate School in Classical Studies (OIKOS) and the Faculties of Theology and Religious Studies and Arts of the University of Groningen, made my travels abroad possible.

The study of these sources, amongst others, and the experiences I had, have substantially contributed to the realisation of a detailed picture of the religious transformation on Egypt's southern frontier in Late Antiquity. Yet, despite this picture, the main insight that this study has given me is that it is only the tip of the iceberg and that we cannot really get through to what people experienced during the almost three and a half centuries that this study covers. There is thus much truth in Karl Popper's prudent remark, which has accordingly become the motto of this book, that the history that is written is almost exclusively the 'history of the Great and the Powerful'. However, precisely the few cases in which a glimpse can be caught of 'the unknown individual man' or an idea, albeit superficial, can be sensed of the religious encounters that were experienced, perhaps satisfy the historian the most. In fact, this is what has kept me going over the last few years.

In addition to my encounters with the sources, I also encountered many people who have assisted by word and deed to the realisation of this book. First of all, I enjoyed working together with my colleagues in the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Groningen, who made me feel that I had returned home after every journey I made. My participation in the interdisciplinary research programme 'Cultural Change' at the same university made my time as a PhD-student in Groningen particularly inspiring. Secondly, I would like to thank the members of the Papyrological Institute at Leiden University for their hospitality and kind assistance during my frequent visits. Thirdly, parts of the book were presented in several papers I gave over the last few years in Groningen and Leiden (on several occasions), Vienna, Rome (twice), Wassenaar, Cairo, Athens, New Haven, Leicester and Ottawa. I owe gratitude to the various audiences for the intellectual exchanges and fruitful discussions from which I benefited. Fourthly, several persons have read smaller or greater parts of the manuscript and have saved me from numerous errors or have helped me to attain new insights. I would especially like to thank Hélène Cuvigny, Jaap van Dijk, Jean-Luc Fournet, David Frankfurter, Jan van Ginkel, Geoffrey Greatrex, Peter Grossmann, Horst Jaritz, Justin Kroesen, Yme Kuiper, Ewa Laskowska-Kusztal, Bentley Layton, Christopher Lillington-Martin, Brian Muhs, Mieczysław Rodziewicz, Sofia Schaten, Arjo Vanderjagt and Jacques van der Vliet, as well as the members of the 'beoordelingscommissie', Gerard Luttikhuizen, Onno van Nijf and Klaas Worp, who read through the whole manuscript, and Julia Harvey, who corrected my English.

Pride of place is reserved for my two supervisors, Peter van Minnen and Jan Bremmer. Peter, who also supervised my MA-thesis, taught me the craft of classical philology, above all to be accurate, even while studying the tiniest details, and urged me to keep studying the texts. Jan Bremmer put me on the track of religious studies and taught me ‘the rules of the game’. He was always there to give me a good piece of advice or to restrain my at times unbridled enthusiasm, and kindly helped me in the progression of my career. His erudition and broad scope on a dazzling range of subjects will always be an example to me.

My final words of thanks are for Judith, Justin and Paul, whose close friendship I have enjoyed for several years now, for Silvia, who lovingly helped me through some hard times and reminded me that there is more to life than work alone, and for my parents, who have always supported me. It is to them that I dedicate this book.

Groningen, 13 February 2005

Abbreviations

Throughout this book, classical sources are abbreviated according to H.G. Liddell, R. Scott, H.S. Jones, ***A Greek-English Lexicon*** (Oxford, 1996[9] with rev. suppl.) = ***LSJ***, and ***Thesaurus Linguae Latinae. Index*** (Leipzig, 1990[2]), patristic sources according to G.W.H. Lampe, ***A Patristic Greek Lexicon*** (Oxford, 1968) = Lampe, ***PGL***.
References to scholarly works are given by quoting the titles in full the first time and in abbreviated form subsequently. Titles which are quoted more than once are included in the select bibliography at the end of this book.
Abbreviations of journals are according to J. Marouzeau (ed.), ***L'année philologique. Bibliographie critique et analytique de l'antiquité gréco-latine*** (Paris, 1924-), and of reference works according to S. Hornblower, A. Spawforth (eds), ***The Oxford Classical Dictionary*** (Oxford, 1996[3]) = ***OCD***[3].
If different abbreviations are used in Egyptology, these abbreviations have been preferred. For these, see W. Helck, E. Otto, H. Westendorf (eds), ***Lexikon der Ägyptologie***, 7 vols (Wiesbaden, 1975-1992) = ***LÄ***. For papyrological abbreviations, see J.F. Oates ***et al.*** (eds), ***A Checklist of Editions of Greek and Latin Papyri, Ostraca and Tablets*** (Atlanta, 2001[5]). Epigraphical abbreviations follow the ***Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*** (Leiden and Amsterdam, 1923-) = ***SEG***. Other abbreviations used are:

ARG ***Archiv für Religionsgeschichte***
BMGS ***Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies***
BSf ***Beiträge zur Sudanforschung***
Calderini, ***Diz.geogr.***
A. Calderini, S. Daris (eds), ***Dizionario dei nomi geografici e topografici dell'Egitto greco-romano***, 8 vols (Cairo etc., 1935-2003)
Copt.Enc. A.S. Atiya (ed.), ***The Coptic Encyclopedia***, 8 vols (New York, 1991)
Crum, ***Dict.*** W.E. Crum, ***A Coptic Dictionary*** (Oxford, 1939)
CSCO ***Corpus scriptorum Christianorum orientalium*** (Leuven, 1903-)
Description de l'Égypte
Description de l'Égypte ou recueil des observations et des recherches qui ont été faites en Égypte pendant l'expédition de l'armée française, 24 vols (Paris, 1821-1829[2])
DNP ***Der Neue Pauly. Enzyclopädie der Antike***, 16 vols (Stuttgart, 1996-2003)
Documenta Monophysitica
J.-B. Chabot, ***Documenta ad origines monophysitarum illustrandas. I: Textus*** (= ***CSCO*** 17; Paris, 1907).
FHN II T. Eide ***et al.*** (eds), ***Fontes Historiae Nubiorum. Vol. II: From the Mid-Fifth to the First Century BC*** (Bergen, 1996)
FHN III T. Eide ***et al.*** (eds), ***Fontes Historiae Nubiorum. Vol. III: From the First to the Sixth Century AD*** (Bergen, 1998)
FHN IV T. Eide ***et al.*** (eds), ***Fontes Historiae Nubiorum. Vol. IV: Corrigenda and Indices*** (Bergen, 2000)
Hist.Laus. E.C. Butler, ***The Lausiac History of Palladius. II: The Greek Text Edited with Introduction and Notes*** (Cambridge, 1904)
Hist.Mon. A.-J. Festugière, ***Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*** (Brussels, 1961)
I.Aju.Dem.,
I.Bij.Dem.,
I.Dak.Dem.,
I.Kal.Dem.,
I.Philae.Dem. F.Ll. Griffith, ***Catalogue of the Demotic Graffiti of the Dodecaschoenus***, 2 vols (Oxford, 1935-1937)

I.Philae I — A. Bernand, ***Les inscriptions grecques de Philae. Tome I: Époque ptolémaïque*** (Paris, 1969)

I.Philae II — É. Bernand, ***Les inscriptions grecques et latines de Philae. Tome II: Haut et Bas Empire*** (Paris, 1969)

Joh.Eph. ***h.e.*** III — E.W. Brooks, ***Iohannis Ephesini historiae ecclesiasticae pars tertia. I: Textus*** (= ***CSCO*** 105; Paris, 1935)

Joh.Eph. ***Lives of the Eastern Saints*** — E.W. Brooks, ***PO*** 17.1-306, 18.513-697, 19.151-284

JSSEA — ***Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities***

Life of Moses — É.C. Amélineau, ***Monuments pour servir à l'histoire de l'Égypte chrétienne aux IVe, V^{e}, VIe et VIIe siècles***, 2 vols (Paris, 1888-1895) 2.680-706; W.C. Till, ***Koptische Heiligen- und Märtyrerlegenden***, 2 vols (Rome, 1935-1936) 2.46-63

Life of Onnophrius — E.A.W. Budge, ***Coptic Texts IV. Coptic Martyrdoms in the Dialect of Upper Egypt*** (London, 1914) 205-224

Life of Severus — M.-A. Kugener, ***PO*** 2, pp. 1-115

Life of Shenoute — J. Leipoldt, ***Sinuthii Archimandritae vita et opera omnia. III: Textus*** (= ***CSCO*** 42; Paris, 1908)

MNL — ***Meroitic Newsletter***

NB — W. Preisigke, ***Namenbuch*** (Heidelberg, 1922)

NB Dem. — E. Lüddeckens (ed.), ***Demotisches Namenbuch*** (Wiesbaden, 1980-2000)

Panegyric on Macarius — D.W. Johnson, ***A Panegyric on Macarius, Bishop of Tkôw, Attributed to Dioscorus of Alexandria*** (= ***CSCO*** 415; Leuven, 1980)

PapCongr. — ***Proceedings of International Congresses of Papyrology*** (1931-)

PM — B. Porter, R.L.B. Moss, ***Topographical Bibliography of Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphic Texts, Reliefs, and Paintings*** (Oxford, 1927-)

REM — J. Leclant ***et al.*** (eds), ***Repertoire d'épigraphie meroïtique. Corpus des inscriptions publiées*** (Paris, 2000)

General Introduction: Setting the Scene

The First Cataract Region as a Frontier Area

I was reflecting with a mixture of emotion, satisfaction and doubt that I was on one of the most remarkable spots on earth, in places which seemed in some way fabulous, and whose names, pronounced from the cradle, had taken a magnificent and almost magical significance. I was nearing the rocks of the cataracts, at the gates of Ethiopia, on the borders of the Roman Empire. I was about to enter the island where the tomb of Osiris lay, a holy island in the past, now neglected, the sanctuary of an antique religion and mother of so many other cults. Finally, I was approaching one of the immutable divisions of our globe, and the step I took was perhaps already in the Southern Hemisphere.[1]

Buried in these thoughts, a scholar who accompanied Napoleon's army deep into Egypt walked down the ancient road from Aswan to the temple island of Philae. He captured the symbolic value the Ancient Egyptians attached to the region well, for it was regarded as the border of Egypt beyond which lay 'Ethiopia', a country more generally known as Nubia (see Fig. 1).[2] The frontier was created by natural circumstances - at Aswan the Nile widens as it crashes onto a mass of granite rocks, creating many small islands, and causing shallows and a strong current. At Aswan we find the first in a series of currents or 'cataracts' in the Nile, which gives the area its name: the First Cataract.[3] Although several Pharaohs invaded Nubia and constructed fortifications further south, the symbolic, ethnic and natural border between Egypt and Nubia remained at Aswan: beyond the First Cataract Nubia began.

In Antiquity, when travellers sailed upstream in the direction of Nubia, they first arrived at the town of Syene (modern Aswan), which is situated on the east bank of the Nile (Fig. 2). Syene was not only a trading centre (the name 'Syene' is derived from the Egyptian word for 'trading place', *swnw*), it was also a town that controlled the traffic from Egypt to Nubia. Because of this nodal position, it seems only natural that throughout the Graeco-Roman period, soldiers were garrisoned at Syene.[4] In front of Syene the traveller could see a longitudinal island rising from the Nile. This island was called Elephantine (island, from Greek Ἐλεφαντίνη: sc. νῆσος), '(island of) Ivory', with a homonymous town on an outcrop of granite at its southern edge which has been inhabited from ***c.*** 3500 BC onwards.[5] For a long time it was also the religious centre of the region, its main god, Khnum, being worshipped there.

Although the temple of Khnum remained an important cult site during most of the Graeco-Roman period, under the Ptolemies the focus shifted from Elephantine further south, to Philae.[6] Due to the currents and shallows in the Nile, the First Cataract, which starts at Elephantine/Syene, was barely navigable, and travellers had to take a road from Syene southward, the road that the French scholar quoted above also took. At the end of the road, travellers could already see the splendid temples on the small island of Philae, measuring only

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[1] M.-A. Lancret, in ***Description de l'Égypte*** 1, 9.

[2] W.Y. Adams, ***Nubia. Corridor to Africa*** (London, 1977); S. Wenig, 'Nubien', ***LÄ*** IV (1982) 526-32; D.N. Edwards, ***The Nubian Past. An Archaeology of the Sudan*** (London, 2004).

[3] For general descriptions of the region of the First Cataract see J. Ball, ***A Description of the First or Aswan Cataract of the Nile*** (Cairo, 1907); J. Locher, ***Topographie und Geschichte der Region am ersten Nilkatarakt in griechisch-römischer Zeit*** (Stuttgart and Leipzig, 1999) 1-4, 98-103; J. Baines, J. Málek, ***Cultural Atlas of Ancient Egypt*** (Oxford, 2000, rev. ed. of ***Atlas of Ancient Egypt*** (Oxford, 1980) 72-4; R.B. Jackson, ***At Empire's Edge. Exploring Rome's Egyptian Frontier*** (New Haven and London, 2002) 111-27.

[4] ***PM*** V (1937) 221-4; L. Habachi, H. Riad, ***Aswan*** (Cairo, 1959); L. Habachi, 'Assuan', ***LÄ*** I (1975) 495-6; Calderini, ***Diz.geogr.*** IV (1983-6) 316-7, Suppl. I (1988) 237, II (1996) 197; Locher, ***Nilkatarakt***, 58-89; W. Helck, 'Syene', ***DNP*** XI (2001) 1125-6; Calderini, ***Diz.geogr.*** Suppl. III (2003) 140-1.

[5] For the etymology see Locher, ***Nilkatarakt***, 22-4.

[6] ***PM*** V (1937) 224-30; Calderini, ***Diz.geogr.*** II (1973-7) 138-40; L. Habachi, 'Elephantine', ***LÄ*** I (1975) 1217-25; Calderini, ***Diz.geogr.*** Suppl. I (1988) 104, II (1996) 50; S.J. Seidlmayer, 'Elephantine', ***DNP*** III (1997) 981-2; W. Kaiser, ***Elephantine. Die antike Stadt. Offizielles Führungsheft des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Kairo*** (Cairo, 1998); Locher, ***Nilkatarakt***, 15-57; Calderini, ***Diz.geogr.*** Suppl. III (2003) 35.

460 by 150 m. The most important of these was dedicated to Isis, and became a renowned cult site of national, even international repute, in the Graeco-Roman period.[7] Philae, a name of which the etymology is disputed, was closely connected to another island, Biga, on which the Egyptians situated one of the burial sites of Osiris.[8] The cults at Philae-Biga commemorated the position ascribed to the area in Ancient Egyptian religion: that of the source of the Nile.[9]

In AD 298, an event took place that had important repercussions for the region. Until that date, the southern frontier of the Roman Empire had been drawn further to the south, at Hiera Sykaminos (modern Maharraqa), the area between Philae and Hiera Sykaminos being called in Greek Dodekaschoinos or 'Twelve Miles Land'.[10] As is reported by one of the most informative sources for the history of the First Cataract region in Late Antiquity, the sixth-century historian Procopius, the Emperor Diocletian (284-305) travelled south and withdrew the frontier to Elephantine in that year.[11] This meant that the natural, ethnic and symbolic border became equated with the administrative and political frontier.

We also learn from this passage that Diocletian fortified Philae and allowed 'both peoples' to continue visiting the temples. The context indicates that these peoples were the Nubian people of the Noubades and a nomadic people originating from the Eastern Desert, the Blemmyes.[12] Modern scholarship has stressed the Blemmyes as agents behind this phenomenon, whereas the Noubades have been ignored. Moreover, on the basis of Procopius' account, these studies have made artificial ethnic distinctions such as 'Egyptian' and 'Blemmyan', whereas such distinctions are hardly to be expected in a frontier region.[13]

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[7] I. Rutherford, 'Island of the Extremity: Space, Language and Power in the Pilgrimage Traditions of Philae', in D. Frankfurter (ed.), ***Pilgrimage & Holy Space in Late Antique Egypt*** (Leiden, 1998) 229-56.

[8] Etymologies of Philae are proposed by L. Kákosy, ***Selected Papers 1956-73*** (Budapest, 1981) 185-94 ('Zu einer Etymologie von Philä: "Insel der Zeit"', 1968[1]), and Rutherford, 'Island', 233, but cf. E. Winter, 'Philae', ***LÄ*** IV (1982) 1022-7 at 1022; Locher, ***Nilkatarakt***, 125-8.

[9] Philae: H. Kees, 'Philai', ***RE*** XIX 2 (1938) 2109-13; ***PM*** VI (1939) 203-56; E. Winter, 'Philae', in ***Textes et langages de l'Égypte pharaonique***, 3 vols (Cairo, 1972-4) 3.229-37, and 'Die Tempel von Philae und das Problem ihrer Rettung', ***AW*** 7.3 (1976) 2-15; W. MacQuitty, ***Island of Isis. Philae, Temple of the Nile*** (London, 1976); A. Giammarusti, A. Roccati, ***File. Storia e vita di un santuario egizio*** (Novara, 1980); Winter, 'Philae'; Calderini, ***Diz.geogr.*** V (1987) 79, Suppl. II (1996) 231; Locher, ***Nilkatarakt***, 121-58; K. Jansen-Winkeln, 'Philae', ***DNP*** IX (2000) 780; Calderini, ***Diz.geogr.*** Suppl. III (2003) 159. Biga: E. Winter, 'Abaton', and 'Bigga', ***LÄ*** I (1975) 1-2, 792-3. Cf. Locher, ***Nilkatarakt***, 159-77.

[10] K. Sethe, ***Dodekaschoinos. Das Zwölfmeilenland an der Grenze von Ägypten und Nubien*** (Leipzig, 1901); G. Dietze, 'Philae und die Dodekaschoinos in ptolemäischer Zeit', ***AncSoc*** 25 (1994) 63-110; Locher, ***Nilkatarakt***, 230-51.

[11] Procop. ***Pers.*** 1.19.27-37 = ***FHN*** III 328. For text and full bibliography of several of the sources discussed below, ***FHN*** III is referred to. If a more recent or authoritative text has been published, the name of the editor has been added with the reference to ***FHN*** III between brackets. Translations are based on those of the ***FHN***; additions and modifications are indicated.

[12] On the Noubades, see Adams, ***Nubia***, 419-22; D.A. Welsby, ***The Medieval Kingdoms of Nubia. Pagans, Christians and Muslims along the Middle Nile*** (London, 2002) 14-5. On the Blemmyes, see E. Revillout, ***Mémoire sur les Blemmyes à propos d'une inscription copte trouvée a Dendur*** (Paris, 1874; ***non vidi***), and ***Second mémoire sur les Blemmyes d'après les inscriptions démotiques des Nubiens*** (Paris, 1887); J. Krall, ***Beiträge zur Geschichte der Blemmyer und Nubier*** (Vienna, 1898); K. Sethe, 'Blemyes', ***RE*** III (1899) 566-8; U. Monneret de Villard, ***Storia della Nubia cristiana*** (Rome, 1938) 24-60; T. Papadopoullos, ***Africanobyzantina. Byzantine Influences on Negro-Sudanese Cultures*** (Athens, 1966) 9-40; M. Krause, 'Blemmyer', ***LÄ*** I (1975) 827-8; A.M. Demicheli, ***Rapporti di pace e di guerra dell'Egitto Romano con le popolazioni dei deserti Africani*** (Milan, 1976); R.T. Updegraff, ***A Study of the Blemmyes*** (Ann Arbor and London, 1978); V. Christides, 'Ethnic Movements in Southern Egypt and Northern Sudan: Blemmyes-Beja in Late Antique and Early Arab Egypt until 707 AD', ***LF*** 103 (1980) 129-43; L. Török, 'A Contribution to Post-Meroitic Chronology: The Blemmyes in Lower Nubia', ***RSO*** 58 (1984) 201-43 = ***MNL*** 24 (1985); R.T. Updegraff, 'The Blemmyes I: The Rise of the Blemmyes and the Roman Withdrawal from Nubia under Diocletian', ***ANRW*** II 10.1 (1988) 44-106 (with additional remarks by L. Török); R. Grieshammer, 'Blem(m)yes', ***DNP*** II (1997) 710; M. Weber, 'Blemmyer', ***RAC*** Suppl. Lf. 9 (2002) 7-28.

[13] E.g. U. Wilcken, 'Heidnisches und Christliches aus Ägypten', ***AfP*** 1 (1901) 396-436 at 404-7; ***I.Philae.Dem.***, p. 4; Monneret de Villard, ***Storia***, 34-5; ***I.Philae*** II, pp. 242-5; Rutherford, 'Island', 234. Cf. R.S. Bagnall, ***Egypt in Late Antiquity*** (Princeton, 1993) 146, 251; F.R. Trombley, ***Hellenic Religion and Christianization c. 370***-529, 2 vols (Leiden, 1993-4) 2.226; D. Frankfurter, ***Religion in Roman Egypt. Assimilation and Resistance*** (Princeton, 1998) 64; E. Cruz-Uribe, 'The Death of Demotic at Philae. A Study in Pilgrimage and Politics', in T.A. Bácz (ed.), ***Festschrift E. Gaál, U. Luft, L. Török*** (Budapest, 2002) 163-84 at 166, 169, and R.S. Bagnall, ***Later Roman Egypt. Society, Religion, Economy and Administration*** (Aldershot and Burlington, 2003) Ch. X at 292-3 ('Combat ou

As recent studies on frontiers elsewhere in the Roman Empire have demonstrated, the idea of a frontier should not be taken too strictly. Frontiers are not linear barriers but rather marginal zones or 'areas of differentiation', since they are often mixed ethnically, socially and economically. Regions on both sides of the frontier live together in an interdependent relationship, stimulating exchanges of food, trade and culture rather than blocking them. This symbiotic system of supply and demand could also lead to instability, famine and raids: 'Frontiers are always zones, constantly shifting and in ferment, ambivalent in their loyalties and often having more in common with the 'other side', as it were, than with their own political centre'.[14] Rather than a line dividing peoples, the southern Egyptian frontier was therefore an 'open frontier'.[15] In accordance with its position on this frontier, Philae's significance was inter-regional and must have attracted the mixed population of the region and the one to its immediate south, the Dodekaschoinos, which was oriented towards Philae.[16]

Similar problems surround the word commonly used for the Roman frontier, ***limes***, which is often regarded as a line of defence, a 'border'. However, defence was just one of the functions of the soldiers garrisoned on a frontier, and the term could have different meanings depending on time and place. Accordingly, from the fourth century onwards ***limes*** came to have the administrative meaning of 'frontier district'. In this broad meaning, which is inherent to the very concept of frontiers, there could not have been a 'Grand Strategy' of defending Roman frontiers.[17] Thus, in describing the region of the First Cataract, the word 'frontier' is more appropriate than 'border', since the latter has a connotation of a line of demarcation, whereas the former has a broader geographical meaning denoting the extremes of an inhabited area.[18]

These insights have recently been applied elsewhere in Egypt, to the Eastern Desert. Since the Egyptian frontier, with the notable exception of the southern frontier, consisted of all land that extended beyond the inhabited Nile valley, the Eastern Desert was also called a ***limes***.[19] This area has been defined as a chain of forts along the desert routes, which were heavily armed against attacks from nomads. However, excavations of these sites show that the military presence at the forts was minimal and that most troops were garrisoned in the Nile valley. Consequently, the function of the soldiers in the Eastern Desert was not primarily defensive, but rather aimed at making the exploitation of the desert, an area rich in resources, as profitable as possible. In order to enable this, the soldiers controlled water wells (***hydreumata***) or patrolled exploitable areas such as quarries.[20]

The southern Egyptian frontier should be approached in a similar way. Before 298, there were three cohorts stationed at Syene, spread over several smaller garrisons in the Dodekaschoinos. It has been concluded from this situation that the Nubian garrisons formed part of a strategic defence system, called 'defence in depth', in which Syene was regarded as the

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vide: christianisme et paganisme dans l'Égypte romaine tardive', 1988[1]), who all mistakenly regard the Blemmyes as a Nubian people.

[14] C.R. Whittaker, 'Trade and Frontiers of the Roman Empire', in P. Garnsey, C.R. Whittaker (eds), ***Trade and Famine in Classical Antiquity*** (Cambridge, 1983) 110-27 at 122. See also his ***Frontiers of the Roman Empire*** (Baltimore and London, 1994) 98-131. Cf. Bagnall, ***Egypt***, 147.

[15] B. Isaac, ***The Near East under Roman Rule. Selected Papers*** (Leiden, 1998) 403-26 ('An Open Frontier', 1993[1]).

[16] Frankfurter, ***Religion***, 105-6; Cruz-Uribe, 'Death of Demotic', 168-9.

[17] For the term, see E.N. Luttwak, ***The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire*** (Baltimore, 1976).

[18] B. Isaac, ***The Limits of Empire. The Roman Army in the East*** (Oxford, 1992[2]) 161-218, 372-418; P. Mayerson, ***Monks, Martyrs, Soldiers and Saracens*** (Jerusalem, 1994) 308-12 ('The Meaning of the Word ***Limes*** (λίμιτον) in the Papyri', 1989[1]), and 327-39 ('Towards a Comparative Study of a Frontier', 1990[1]); Whittaker, ***Frontiers***, 194-209; Isaac, ***Near East***, 345-87 ('The Meaning of ***Limes*** and ***Limitanei*** in Ancient Sources', 1988[1]); J.-M. Carrié, A. Rousselle, ***L'empire romain en mutation: des Sévères à Constantin, 192-337*** (Paris, 1999) 616-21. For an even wider use of the term 'frontier', see R.W. Mathisen, H.S. Sivan (eds), ***Shifting Frontiers in Late Antiquity*** (Aldershot and Brookfield, 1996).

[19] Mayerson, ***Monks***, 311-2, quoting J. Maspero, ***Organisation militaire de l'Égypte byzantine*** (Paris, 1912) 10, who already pointed this out.

[20] Isaac, ***Limits of Empire***, 199-204; M. Reddé, 'La présence militaire romaine dans le désert oriental', in M.-F. Boussac (ed.), ***Autour de Coptos*** (Lyon and Paris, 2002) 385-94.

'choke point in the southern defence of Egypt'.[21] However, the term 'defence in depth' cannot be applied to the situation on the southern Egyptian frontier in this period, since the task of the soldiers stationed there was to keep control rather than to defend.[22]

The main difference between Diocletian's 'fortification' of the southern frontier and the past was the withdrawal of the administrative frontier to the First Cataract region. Several sources mention measures taken by Diocletian to fortify other frontiers of the empire, measures which were by no means unique. The policy of Diocletian was therefore one of consolidation rather than of innovation: Diocletian reorganised the administration of the frontier zones in order to exert better control of these marginal areas.[23] On the southern Egyptian frontier he did so by giving up the Dodekaschoinos and by 'fortifying' Philae, although a garrison had certainly been stationed there before that time.[24] A papyrus text from 300 mentions soldiers of the ***vexillatio*** (detachment) of the ***Legio III Diocletiana*** under a ***praepositus*** Proclianus of Syene.[25] The name of the detachment supports the hypothesis that Diocletian indeed reorganised the troops on the southern Egyptian frontier.

A century later, the ***Notitia Dignitatum***, a list of military units in the Roman Empire dating to around 400, mentions several regiments garrisoned in the First Cataract region:[26] ***Milites miliarenses*** at Syene, a ***Cohors I felix Theodosiana*** at Elephantine, a ***Cohors V Suenensium*** at Contra Syene (on the west bank of the Nile opposite Syene) and a ***Legio I Maximiana*** at Philae.[27] The name of the legion garrisoned at Philae suggests that from the Emperor Maximian (285-310) onwards, but in view of Diocletian's visit probably not for long after 298, the garrison at Philae consisted of a legion and formed the largest military unit in the First Cataract region, although the ***Milites miliarenses*** of Syene are also listed among the legions.[28] The name of Philae's legion thus confirms Procopius' account that Diocletian 'fortified' Philae, as long as it is understood as a reorganisation of the troops stationed there.

Other references to the units stationed at Syene and Philae during the fourth and fifth centuries come from papyrus documents that mention the delivery of goods to the garrisons.[29] In addition, the well-known petition of Appion, bishop of Syene, Contra Syene and Elephantine, to the Emperors Theodosius II and Valentinian III (425-450), to which we will

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[21] M.P. Speidel, 'Nubia's Roman Garrison', ***ANRW*** II 10.1 (1988) 767-98 (quote on p. 795), disregarding W.Y. Adams, 'Primis and the "Aethiopian" Frontier', ***JARCE*** 20 (1983) 93-104, who mentions a papyrus (***P.Oxy.*** XII 1511) and archaeological material as evidence for Roman military presence at Primis (modern Qasr Ibrim) to the south of Hiera Sykaminos. Cf. Isaac, ***Limits of Empire***, 398-9.

[22] On the problems of using the term 'defence in depth' see Isaac, ***Limits of Empire***, 170, 374; Whittaker, ***Frontiers***, 206.

[23] Isaac, ***Limits of Empire***, 161-70.

[24] Speidel, 'Nubia's Roman Garrison', 772-3; G. Dietze, 'Der Streit um die Insel Pso. Bemerkungen zu einem epigraphischen Dossier des Khnumtempels von Elephantine (***Th. Sy.*** 244)', ***AncSoc*** 26 (1995) 157-84 at 171; Locher, ***Nilkatarakt***, 138-41; G. Dietze, 'Temples and Soldiers in Southern Ptolemaic Egypt. Some Epigraphic Evidence', in L. Mooren (ed.), ***Politics, Administration and Society in the Hellenistic and Roman World*** (Leuven, 2000) 77-89 at 80-2.

[25] ***P.Panop.Beatty*** 2.245-6. A ***praepositus*** is a commander of a military unit on the frontier, see F. Mitthof, ***Annona militaris. Die Heeresversorgung im spätantiken Ägypten***, 2 vols (Florence, 2001) 1.151-2.

[26] On the date, see C. Zuckerman, 'Comtes et ducs en Égypte autour de l'an 400 et la date de la ***Notitia Dignitatum Orientis***', ***AntTard*** 6 (1998) = J.-M. Carrié, N. Duval (eds), ***Les gouverneurs de province dans l'Antiquité Tardive*** (Paris, 1998) 137-47.

[27] Not.dign***. or.*** 31.35, 64-6, 41.37. See also the list by R. Alston, ***Soldier and Society in Roman Egypt*** (London and New York, 1995) 190-1. Cf. Speidel, 'Nubia's Roman Garrison', 773. The text has been persuasively emended here, see P. Brennan, 'Diocletian and Elephantine: A Closer Look at Pococke's Puzzle (***IGRR*** 1.1291 = ***SB*** 5.8393)', ***ZPE*** 76 (1989) 193-205 at 200-1. A 'Castra Lapidaria' is also mentioned in this context, but its precise location is unknown.

[28] Probably a military detachment, Brennan, 'Diocletian and Elephantine', 200. For the legion at Philae, see also ***P.Münch.*** I 16.44 (***c.*** 493), ***P.Lond.*** V 1722.57 (530), and ***I.Philae*** II 225.4 (Late Antiquity). ***IThSy*** 239.4 (undated) mentions a κάστρον Φιλῶν.

[29] ***Stud.Pal.*** XX 84 v° ii 2 (= Mitthof, ***Annona militaris*** 2, catalogue no. 76; this text could date to the very end of the third century); ***P.Lond.*** III 1245.3 (p. 228 = Mitthof, ***Annona militaris*** 2, no. 143); ***BGU*** IV 1025.2, 18 (= Mitthof, ***Annona militaris*** 2, no. 144); ***P.Lips.*** I 64.3 (= Mitthof, ***Annona militaris*** 2, no. 145); ***BGU*** III 974.4 (= Mitthof, ***Annona militaris*** 2, no. 147), ***P.Giss.*** 54.7 (= Mitthof, ***Annona militaris*** 2, no. 172). Cf. ***BGU*** IV 1027 (= Mitthof, ***Annona militaris*** 2, no. 142), which is probably also about delivery to Philae or Syene.

return in more detail in Ch. 5, mentions soldiers from the fortress (Greek φρουρίον) of Philae and soldiers from Syene.[30] By far the largest amount of evidence, however, comes from the Patermouthis archive, which contains papyri dating from 493 to 614 and pertains to the army at Elephantine and Philae, but particularly at Syene. From this archive we know that in all three places soldiers were garrisoned, usually referred to as a ***numerus***, 'regiment' (ἀριθμός) but also as a 'legion' (λεγεών).[31] Although these legions have been identified with the military units mentioned in the ***Notitia Dignitatum***, it is doubtful whether it is possible to draw such an inference.[32] In this later period, sizes of units generally declined and a 'legion' became increasingly synonymous with a 'regiment'.[33]

From Diocletian onwards, the main person responsible for the units stationed along the southern frontier was the ***dux Thebaici limitis***, who was also called ***comes***. The ***dux Thebaici limitis*** was the highest military authority not of the southern end of the Thebaid, as has previously been thought, but of the whole province.[34] This situation changed in 539 when Justinian made the ***dux*** the most important civil and military official of the province.[35] Inscriptions and papyri provide us with evidence of this official in the First Cataract region.[36] In the Appion petition, the bishop asks the emperors to order the highest responsible official of the soldiers in his see, the ***dux***, to protect it against raids by the Blemmyes and Noubades. In addition to military affairs, the inscriptions demonstrate that the ***dux*** was also involved in regional building projects.

The soldiers were not always involved in strictly military affairs either. There is a wide consensus about their status: they were ***limitanei*** or soldiers serving in a frontier zone (***limes***).[37] As appears from evidence elsewhere in the empire, they were often locally recruited, were allowed to have families and could even work a piece of private land, although in principle they remained soldiers.[38] This has led to the suggestion that the ***limitanei*** of the southern Egyptian frontier also worked private land.[39] Yet, the papyri do not give any indication of soldiers working the land, and this would also have been improbable because the land in the First Cataract region was very poor.[40] The soldiers probably had other functions instead, such as ferrying boats on the busy Nile at Syene. According to one scholar, this implies that they 'did not take their military duties very seriously'.[41] Such a conclusion is only possible if 'military duties' are conceived of as strictly consisting of frontier defence. However, like ***limitanei*** in other parts of the empire, the soldiers of the First Cataract region would have been allowed to organise their own activities as private persons.[42]

Is there archaeological evidence for military installations in the region? Excavations have shown that the fortress of Philae was certainly not situated on the small island itself, as Procopius suggests, but on the east bank of the Nile at the end of the ancient road from Syene

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[30] ***P.Leid.*** Z 9-10 = ***FHN*** III 314.
[31] See J.G. Keenan, 'Evidence for the Byzantine Army in the Syene Papyri', ***BASP*** 27 (1990) 139-50.
[32] Cf. A.H.M. Jones, ***The Later Roman Empire, 284-602. A Social Economic and Administrative Survey***, 4 vols (Oxford, 1964) 2.662.
[33] Keenan, 'Evidence', 141-2 (esp. n. 9); Isaac, ***Limits of Empire***, 169; J. Gascou, 'L'Égypte byzantine (284-641)', in C. Morrisson (ed.), ***Le monde byzantin. Tome I: L'Empire romain d'Orient, 330-641*** (Paris, 2004) 403-36 at 422.
[34] Isaac, ***Limits of Empire***, 208; J.-M. Carrié, 'Séparation ou cumul? Pouvoir civil et autorité militaire dans les provinces d'Égypte de Gallien à la conquête arabe', ***AntTard*** 6 (1998) = Carrié and Duval, ***Gouverneurs de province***, 105-21 at 111-5; Mitthof, ***Annona militaris*** 1, 149-51; Gascou, 'Égypte byzantine', 416-7. Cf. Maspero, ***Organisation***, 80-8; J. Lallemand, ***L'administration civile de l'Égypte de l'avènement de Dioclétien à la création du diocèse (284-382)*** (Brussels, 1964) 54-5.
[35] R. Rémondon, 'L'Édit XIII de Justinien a-t-il promulgé en 539?', ***CdE*** 30 (1955) 112-21; Carrié, 'Séparation ou cumul?', 115-8.
[36] ***P.Leid.*** Z 14-5 (***comes et dux***, 425-50); ***I.Philae*** II 194.1-6 (***comes***, 449 or 464), 220.1-4, 221.1-4, 222.1-4 (***comes***, Late Antiquity), on which see Mayerson, ***Monks***, 309-10.
[37] Maspero, ***Organisation***, 60-1; Jones, ***Later Roman Empire*** 2, 662-3; Keenan, 'Evidence', 141.
[38] Isaac, ***Limits of Empire***, 208-13.
[39] Maspero, ***Organisation***, 60-1.
[40] Keenan, 'Evidence', 146; Baines and Málek, ***Cultural Atlas***, 71-2.
[41] Jones, ***Later Roman Empire*** 2, 663.
[42] Keenan, 'Evidence', 145-6.

to Philae (modern Shellal).[43] On the east side next to the road, which already existed in the pharaonic period, was a mud brick wall, called the 'Big Wall' in literary sources, to protect the traffic between Syene and Philae against brigands and raids.[44] To give an impression of its size: the wall originally extended for about 7 km, would have been approximately 10 m high and 3 m wide at the top.[45] On strategic points along the road, watchtowers were constructed between the early Roman period and the beginning of the third century.[46]

As regards the fortification of Philae mentioned by Procopius, the excavators first concluded that the wall was built in Diocletian's reign and that 'this defence system of ***castra*** and small fortresses along the eastern bank of the Nile could well be called the 'Upper Egyptian ***limes***''.[47] However, we have already seen that the depiction of a ***limes*** as a line of defence is inaccurate and that by this time it has to be seen as an administrative unit covering the entire region. Later, the excavators discarded their dating of the wall to the Roman period and suggested a much earlier, Middle Kingdom date.[48] Whatever the date, it seems likely that the impressive wall still flanked the ancient road from Syene to Philae in Late Antiquity.

This brief survey of the military presence on the frontier demonstrates that Diocletian reorganised the administration of the frontier region and the garrisons stationed there, while building upon an already long existing infrastructure. The measures concerning the frontier region were part of a whole range of administrative reforms under Diocletian and his successors. Firstly, whereas Egypt had previously been a separate province with a unique administration, in Late Antiquity it was increasingly treated like other provinces. Diocletian appointed a praetorian prefect at the head of the eastern provinces and under him ***vicarii*** at the head of groups of provinces (dioceses). From 293/294 onwards, Egypt was subdivided into several provinces but remained under the prefect of the East. Finally, around 371, Egypt became a separate diocese.

A second development connected to the administrative subdivisions was the decline of the nome system. Since time immemorial, Egypt had been divided into districts called 'nomes' (from Greek νομός), each of which had a capital, the ***metropolis***. In contrast with the Greek cities in Egypt with ***polis*** status (Alexandria, Naucratis, Ptolemais and Antinoopolis), these ***metropoleis*** were 'towns'.[49] From 200 onwards, however, all ***metropoleis*** were governed by city councils, whose councillors became increasingly restricted in their tasks until they were mainly concerned with tax collection. In 307/308, the nomes were subdivided into new administrative units, ***pagi***. By the end of the fifth century, a new office, that of the pagarch, was created, who, under Justinian, became a powerful regional official.[50]

Amidst all these changing tides, the First Cataract area always occupied a special position. In the Ptolemaic period, the capital of the first Upper Egyptian nome was at Elephantine, but in the Roman period Omboi, situated about 40 km north of the region,

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[43] G.A. Reisner, ***The Archaeological Survey of Nubia. Report for 1907-1908***, 2 vols (Cairo, 1910) 1.72-3; P. Grossmann, ***Elephantine II. Kirche und spätantike Hausanlagen im Chnumtempelhof*** (Mainz, 1980) 27 (n. 156); Speidel, 'Nubia's Roman Garrison', 773; E. Fantusati, 'Gli accampamenti romani di Shellal', in N. Bonacasa ***et al.*** (eds), ***L'Egitto in Italia dall'antichità al medioevo*** (Rome, 1998) 247-53.

[44] H. Jaritz, 'The Investigation of the Ancient Wall Extending from Aswan to Philae. First Preliminary Report', ***MDAIK*** 43 (1986) 67-74; H. Jaritz, M. Rodziewicz, 'The Investigation of the Ancient Wall Extending from Aswan to Philae. Second Preliminary Report', ***MDAIK*** 49 (1993) 107-32; Locher, ***Nilkatarakt***, 114-20.

[45] Jaritz, 'Ancient Wall. First Report', 69, 71; Jaritz and Rodziewicz, 'Ancient Wall. Second Report', 111.

[46] Jaritz and Rodziewicz, 'Ancient Wall. Second Report', 118-26; H. Jaritz, 'Die Signaltürme der frühen Kaiserzeit in der Oberen Thebaïs', forthcoming.

[47] Jaritz, 'Ancient Wall. First Report', 73-4. This hypothesis was not new, see Maspero, ***Organisation***, 25-6.

[48] Jaritz and Rodziewicz, 'Ancient Wall. Second Report'. Cf. Locher, ***Nilkatarakt***, 117-9, who unpersuasively argues against this dating and proposes instead a dating to after 27/6 BC and before AD 23 on the basis of literary sources. Although Strabo does not mention the wall, this does not necessarily mean that the wall did not exist before 27/6 BC.

[49] See for this distinction between 'city' and 'town', L.E. Tacoma, ***Fragile Hierarchies. The Urban Elites of Third Century Roman Egypt*** (Diss. Leiden, 2003) 2-3.

[50] Lallemand, ***Administration civile***; A.K. Bowman, ***Egypt after the Pharaohs, 332 BC-AD 642. From Alexander to the Arab Conquest*** (Berkeley, 1986) 77-88; Bagnall, ***Egypt***, 62-4; P.W. Pestman, ***The New Papyrological Primer*** (Leiden, 1994^2) 27-8; H.-A. Rupprecht, ***Kleine Einführung in die Papyruskunde*** (Darmstadt, 1994) 63-5; J.G. Keenan, 'Egypt', ***CAH^2*** XIV (2000) 612-37 at 612-9.

became the administrative capital and ***metropolis*** of the nome.[51] Nonetheless, Elephantine and Syene could equally be regarded as towns, for both stationed an important number of troops; Syene was probably at least as large as Omboi, and Elephantine remained an important religious centre.[52] The position of Philae within the nome is even more anomalous. Although the small island could not have had many inhabitants, it was a major religious cult site, and a legion was garrisoned on its riverbank from around 300 onwards.[53] During the reign of Diocletian, the special position of the First Cataract region was recognised by describing it as an administrative frontier district, a ***limes***. Thus, although it remained administratively dependent on Omboi, the region held a special position within the nome.[54]

The Problem of the Late Antique Temple Cults at Philae in a Regional Context

As we have seen, one of the special characteristics of the First Cataract area in Late Antiquity was the access to the temples of Philae allowed to the Blemmyes and Noubades after 298. Procopius adds to his passage the remark that the peoples still had access to Philae in his day and that the Emperor Justinian (527-565) ordered one of his generals to destroy the temples.[55] On the basis of this literary source, Philae has been described as 'one of the last bastions of pagan worship in Egypt',[56] and most handbooks take it for granted that with the closure of the Isis temple, Ancient Egyptian religion came to an end.[57] Due to the special circumstances conditioned by the position on the southern frontier, the Ancient Egyptian cults remained alive at Philae until the sixth century when Justinian forced the temples to close and the island finally became Christian. Recently, several studies have paid attention to this exceptional situation, concentrating on different aspects of the cult site in Late Antiquity: its pilgrimage tradition, the persistence of its Ancient Egyptian scripts (hieroglyphic and demotic) and the effect of the closure of its temples upon the conversion of Nubia to Christianity.[58] Thus, Philae has often been considered as 'a different story'.[59]

Yet, this image of an abrupt replacement of Ancient Egyptian religion by Christianity in the sixth century poses a problem. As early as the fourth century, there had been an episcopal see on the small island and undoubtedly a Christian community had already established itself there by then. In the context of a world gradually becoming Christian, could the Ancient Egyptian cults have continued, seemingly undisturbed, for more than two centuries? In order to answer this question, let us make a brief excursion to another place and time, the eighteenth-century Maya revolt of Canek.

In 1761, Jacinto Uc, who called himself Canek, a traditional royal Mayan name, launched a revolt in the village of Cisteíl in central Yucatán, Mexico. Canek had received a Spanish education but was of Mayan descent. After having been removed from a Franciscan

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[51] Modern Kom Ombo, not a place of the same ancient name near Naqada, cf. F. Gomaà, 'Ombos', ***LÄ*** IV (1982) 567-9 with A. Gutbub, 'Kom Ombo', ***LÄ*** III (1980) 675-83. See also Calderini, ***Diz.geogr.*** III (1978-83) 386-7, and Locher, ***Nilkatarakt***, 201-27.

[52] Tacoma, ***Fragile Hierarchies***, 49-50, estimates the population size of Omboi as between 5,000 and 10,000 inhabitants on the basis of nome size, however, without taking into account the sizes of Elephantine and Syene. On the basis of the space occupied by these towns, the population sizes of Elephantine and Syene have been estimated as 3,000 and 10,000 inhabitants, respectively. See F. Arnold, ***Elephantine XXX. Die Nachnutzung des Chnumtempelbezirks*** (Mainz, 2003) 17-8.

[53] Arnold, ***Elephantine XXX***, 17-8, estimates the population size of Philae as 1000 inhabitants, but this number seems too high. Cf. n. 35, in which Arnold estimates the inhabited area of Philae as 1.7 ha. With his ratio of 450 inhabitants/ha, this means that Philae would have had 765 inhabitants at most, if the entire area was inhabited in Late Antiquity.

[54] The administrative position of the First Cataract region within the first Upper Egyptian nome had always been equivocal during the Graeco-Roman period, see Locher, ***Nilkatarakt***, 201-29; A. Geissen, M. Weber, 'Untersuchungen zu den ägyptischen Nomenprägungen II', ***ZPE*** 147 (2004) 259-79 at 260.

[55] Procop. ***Pers.*** 1.19.36 = ***FHN*** III 328.

[56] Bagnall, ***Egypt***, 147.

[57] E.g. Winter, 'Philae', and Baines and Málek, ***Cultural Atlas***, 74.

[58] Trombley, ***Hellenic Religion*** 2, 225-39; Rutherford, 'Island', 248-53; Cruz-Uribe, 'Death of Demotic'; S.G. Richter, ***Studien zur Christianisierung Nubiens*** (Wiesbaden, 2002) 115-38.

[59] Bagnall, ***Egypt***, 264; Gascou, 'Égypte byzantine', 431.

school, he had had to face the hard life of his fellow Mayas. Embittered by the treatment he received because of his ethnic descent, Canek decided to stir up the local population. He caused great panic among the Spanish, although the revolt never really became a serious threat to colonial rule.[60] What is interesting is that Canek did not summon the people to reinstate the old gods. Instead, he took the crown and blue mantle of the statue of the local Virgin Mary and claimed they were an expression of Mayan supernatural authority.[61]

The integration of the new religion, Christianity, in the Americas after the Spanish conquest has been much studied, and scholars generally agree that, although the position of the indigenous religion had become a subservient one, elements of the old religion lived on long after the initial missionary activities.[62] A religion cannot at once replace another religion, but religions will not live side by side in complete isolation either: in the long run, they necessarily have to interact. Sometimes this interaction leads to conflicts, but more often less violent ways are found, in which traditional religious ideas and practices became adapted to the new religion, and vice versa, thus starting a complex process of religious transformation.[63] In the case of Canek, the result was the merging of Christianity with traditional Mayan beliefs.[64]

In Late Antiquity, a similar process was underway.[65] It is still often thought that Christianity simply did away with the old religion as contemporary, Christian literary sources claim. However, this book is not a study of how religion changed shape according to the Christian, ideological perspective of the literary sources, where a clear-cut distinction is made between Christians and non-Christians, such as Jews, heretics and 'pagans'.[66] After all, is this picture maintained when we take a look at a particular region or locality? Anthropological studies suggest that religions that are clearly distinguished on a 'national' level on the basis of literary sources are less articulated in a local or regional context.[67] There, they are governed by factors specific to the region or locality, and less by ideology, thus allowing for a more complex and dynamic view of religious interaction. It therefore seems promising to study the religious transformation of Late Antiquity in a local or regional context, while taking into account documentary and archaeological sources in addition to the customary literary ones.[68]

This is thus precisely what we hope to do. In the representation of the Ancient Egyptian cults at Philae, too much weight has been placed on the literary source of Procopius, and his remarks have not been balanced against the documentary and archaeological evidence, nor has the situation at Philae been placed in a regional context. The developments at Philae can be seen against the background of a series of regional trends, in which Christianity increasingly obtained the upper hand. Although it is difficult to prove that the religions directly interacted, these developments could hardly have failed to have an effect on the Ancient Egyptian cults at Philae. So what did change? And what was the role of Christianity in this process? Was Philae such a different story? Before answering these questions, we will first try to demonstrate what is the best approach to religious transformation on a regional level. We will then describe the sources available for the study, and their shortcomings.

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[60] N.M. Farriss, ***Maya Society under Colonial Rule. The Collective Enterprise of Survival*** (Princeton, 1984) 68-72, 100; R.W. Patch, ***Maya Revolt and Revolution in the Eighteenth Century*** (Armonk and London, 2002) 126-82.

[61] Farriss, ***Maya Society***, 314; Patch, ***Maya Revolt***, 140-1.

[62] See e.g. Farriss, ***Maya Society***, for Yucatán, and S. MacCormack, ***Religion in the Andes. Vision and Imagination in Early Colonial Peru*** (Princeton, 1991), for Peru.

[63] Cf. Patch, ***Maya Revolt***, 128-30.

[64] Patch, ***Maya Revolt***, 134-43.

[65] For comparisons between the religious transformation in Late Antiquity and that under Spanish colonial rule see R.A. Markus, ***The End of Ancient Christianity*** (Cambridge, 1990) 1-3, and MacCormack, ***Religion***, 11-2, respectively.

[66] See e.g. Markus, ***End of Ancient Christianity***, who bases himself mainly on the writings of Augustine.

[67] As the example of Southern China shows, see H. Seiwert, 'Orthodoxie und Heterodoxie im lokalen Kontext Südchinas', in H.G. Kippenberg, B. Luchesi (eds), ***Lokale Religionsgeschichte*** (Marburg, 1995) 145-55.

[68] Similar regional studies of religious transformation in Late Antiquity have only recently been attempted, see e.g. D. Bar, 'The Christianisation of Rural Palestine during Late Antiquity', ***JEH*** 54 (2003) 401-21. For Egypt such studies are rare, R. Boutros, C. Décobert, 'Les installations chrétiennes entre Ballâs et Armant: implantation et survivance', in N. Bosson (ed.), ***Études coptes VII*** (Paris, 2000) 77-108.

Approaching Religious Transformation in Late Antiquity

Edward Gibbon's ghost has long haunted, and still haunts, the study of the transition between the Roman Empire and the Middle Ages. In his famous book ***The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*** (published between 1776 and 1788), Gibbon singled out the rise to power of the Christian Church as one of the main features of the 'decline and fall' of the Roman Empire.[69] Gibbon's 'decline and fall' and 'Christian triumph' formed the backbone for approaches to the subject until the 1980s. Even though the one emphasised 'decline and fall', as Gibbon somewhat pessimistically had done, and the other 'Christian triumph', both approaches described a one-way process towards Christianity in which the new religion rapidly triumphed.[70]

Undoubtedly, a giant step forward was the incentive Peter Brown gave to the subject in the early 1970s. He argued that the period in question was not only a transitional period, but also a period in its own right, which he called 'Late Antiquity'.[71] Since the 1980s, the static approaches of 'decline and fall' and 'Christian triumph' were finally, though not always consistently, abandoned in favour of a more intricate web of developments, which have to be seen in their times and places against the background of a world that gradually became Christian.[72] Since then, the study of Late Antiquity has developed into a separate and thriving field of classical studies.

Some of the more recent works have debated even such seemingly basic terms as 'Christianisation' and 'paganism', and it may be useful to briefly summarise the trend of these debates here. First of all, the term 'Christianisation' requires some explication. It is used for the process of converting to Christianity, but can also be applied to the establishment of the Church or to other ways of Christianity becoming visible in society, for example in discourse, works of art or the landscape. The first problem, then, is that diverse processes, however much they may or may not be interconnected, are included in the term 'Christianisation'.[73] Another problem is that 'Christianisation' implies a superimposition of Christianity on an old religion, looked at from the Christian perspective.[74]

An additional dimension to this problem is the angle from which we look at 'Christianisation': is it our own perception of 'Christianisation' or 'Christianisation' in the eyes of the ancient beholder? Do we use 'Christianisation' for the process of a person, the active party, making another person, the passive party, Christian (an external process), or for

[69] E. Gibbon, ***The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire***, 6 vols (London, 1776-88), on which see P. Brown, ***Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity*** (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1982) 22-48 ('Gibbon's Views on Culture and Society in the Fifth and Sixth Centuries', 1976[1]), and 49-62 ('In Gibbon's shade', 1976[1]). See also G.W. Bowersock (ed.), ***Gibbon's Historical Imagination*** (Stanford, 1988).

[70] Emphasis on 'decline and fall': J. Geffcken, ***Der Ausgang des griechisch-römischen Heidentums*** (Heidelberg, 1920; Eng. tr. ***The Last Days of Greco-Roman Paganism*** (Amsterdam, 1978); E.R. Dodds, ***Pagans and Christians in an Age of Anxiety. Some Aspects of Religious Experience from Marcus Aurelius to Constantine*** (Cambridge, 1965). On 'triumph': A. Harnack, ***Die Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten***, 2 vols (Leipzig, 1924[4]; Eng. tr. ***The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries***, 2 vols (New York and London, 1908[2]). More nuanced are A.D. Nock, ***Conversion. The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo*** (Oxford, 1933), and A. Momigliano (ed.), ***The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century*** (Oxford, 1963).

[71] P. Brown, ***The World of Late Antiquity. From Marcus Aurelius to Muhammad*** (London, 1971). See the commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the publication of this book in ***SO*** 72 (1997) 5-90.

[72] R. MacMullen, ***Christianizing the Roman Empire (A.D. 100-400)*** (New Haven, 1984); R. Lane Fox, ***Pagans and Christians*** (London, 1986); R. MacMullen, ***Change in the Roman Empire. Essays in the Ordinary*** (Princeton, 1990) 142-55 ('What Difference Did Christianity Make?', 1986[1]); P. Chuvin, ***Chronique des derniers païens*** (Paris, 1990; Eng. tr. of part I as ***A Chronicle of the Last Pagans*** (Cambridge MA, 1990); Trombley, ***Hellenic Religion***; R. MacMullen, ***Christianity and Paganism in the Fourth to Eighth Centuries*** (New Haven, 1997); A. Demandt, ***Geschichte der Spätantike: Das Römische Reich von Diocletian bis Justinian, 284-565 n.Chr.*** (Munich, 1998) 384-400.

[73] As with the term 'Romanisation', see G. Woolf, ***Becoming Roman. The Origins of Provincial Civilization in Gaul*** (Cambridge, 1998) 5-7.

[74] K.L. King, ***What is Gnosticism?*** (Cambridge MA, 2003), demonstrates how profoundly modern scholarship has thought along the lines of the Christian polemical sources in constructing one of the early branches of Christianity, 'Gnosticism', as a separate religious category.

the process of how people individually became Christian (an internal process)? And when can a person or object be called 'Christian'?[75] As with terms like 'Romanisation', 'Christianisation' can be used descriptively, as if it were an umbrella, but it can hardly account for the complex processes of cultural change it conceals.[76]

A similar, if not greater tension surrounds 'paganism'. The term derives from the Latin ***paganus***, meaning 'someone from the countryside', and came to be used from the fourth century onwards by Christians as a derogatory term for non-Christians, except for the Jews.[77] This categorisation implies that 'paganism' is a unified religious system, as if the various non-Christian cults, rituals and practices could all be gathered under the same heading. In reality, the line between them cannot be drawn as strictly as is sometimes portrayed in the Christian sources.[78] Thus, for its negative connotation and one-sided view, the term 'paganism' is hardly satisfactory. Recently, it has been proposed to replace the term by 'polytheist religion'.[79] However, this proposal is equally inadequate, since in this period religious thought generally tended towards monotheism.[80]

A related term sometimes used is 'pagan survival', a term which basically comprises all continuities of the old religion from a previous period.[81] This word is related to the idea that Christianity was superimposed upon the old religion, yet tries to account for the elements that escaped its grasping arm by explaining that these elements continued unaltered for some time due to special circumstances. However, the term 'pagan survival' is misleading, for it ignores the circumstance that the old religion could not remain unchanged under the new religion, as the example of Canek again well illustrates.[82] It is with these terminological difficulties in mind that we should approach the religious transformation of Late Antiquity.[83]

Towards a Regional Approach of Religious Transformation in Late Antique Egypt: Bagnall, Frankfurter, and beyond

One of the oldest religions that Christianity confronted in Late Antiquity was the Ancient Egyptian religion. Yet, religion in Egypt was not entirely 'old', as it had itself undergone significant changes in the Graeco-Roman period by incorporating Greek culture, and therewith religion, a process which is called 'Hellenism'.[84] The new religion was not entirely

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[75] Markus, ***End of Ancient Christianity***, 1-17; Av. Cameron, ***Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire*** (Berkeley, 1993) 24-9; P. Brown, 'Christianization and Religious Conflict', ***CAH***^{2} XIII (1998) 632-64; K. von Stuckrad, '"Christen" und "Nichtchristen" in der Antike', in M. Hutter, W. Klein, U. Vollmer (eds), ***Hairesis*** (= Fs. Hoheisel; Münster, 2002) 184-202.

[76] For the different aspects of religious transformation within the 'Romanisation' process, see T. Derks, ***Gods, Temples and Ritual Practices. The Transformation of Religious Ideas and Values in Roman Gaul*** (Amsterdam, 1998) 1-26; Woolf, ***Becoming Roman***, 206-37.

[77] Lane Fox, ***Pagans and Christians***, 30-1; Brown, 'Christianization', 639. Cf. G.W. Bowersock, ***Hellenism in Late Antiquity*** (Ann Arbor, 1990) 9-11, for the Greek terminology.

[78] Bowersock, ***Hellenism***, 5-6; Cameron, ***Rhetoric of Empire***, 121-2, and ***The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity. AD 395-600*** (London, 1993) 69-70; Frankfurter, ***Religion***, 33-4.

[79] G. Fowden, 'Polytheist Religion and Philosophy', ***CAH***^{2} XIII (1998) 538-60, and 'Religious Communities', in G.W. Bowersock, P. Brown, O. Grabar (eds), ***Late Antiquity. A Guide to the Postclassical World*** (Cambridge MA, 1999) 82-106.

[80] See e.g. Fowden's own ***Empire to Commonwealth. The Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity*** (Princeton, 1993) 38-9. Cf. G.W. Bowersock, ***Selected Papers on Late Antiquity*** (Bari, 2000) 135-47 ('Polytheism and Monotheism in Arabia and the Three Palestines', 1997^1). See now also P. Athanassiadi, M. Frede (eds), ***Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity*** (Oxford, 1999).

[81] Cf. Fowden, 'Polytheist Religion', at 558, who describes Philae as 'the most famous of all polytheist survivals'.

[82] Markus, ***End of Ancient Christianity***, 9; Frankfurter, ***Religion***, 30, and 'Syncretism and the Holy Man in Late Antique Egypt', ***JECS*** 11 (2003) 339-85 at 341-2. Cf. the use of the term 'survival' by the famous anthropologist E.B. Tylor, on which see H.G. Kippenberg, ***Die Entdeckung der Religionsgeschichte. Religionswissenschaft und Moderne*** (Munich, 1997; Eng. tr. ***Discovering Religious History in the Modern Age*** (Princeton, 2002) 130.

[83] P. Garnsey, C. Humfress, ***The Evolution of the Late Antique World*** (Cambridge, 2001) 132-69, and P. Rousseau, ***The Early Christian Centuries*** (London, 2002), are well aware of these difficulties.

[84] For an overview of these changes see the contributions by M. Coenen, O.E. Kaper and K. Vandorpe in H. Willems and W. Clarysse (eds), ***Les Empereurs du Nil*** (Leuven, 2000) 123-37. For Hellenism in Late Antique Egypt, see Bowersock, ***Hellenism***, 55-69, and G. Fowden, ***The Egyptian Hermes*** (Princeton, 1993^2).

'new' either when it became the state-favoured religion in the fourth century, nor was it uniform. Christianity had reached Egypt as early as the first century and had developed considerably by the fourth century.[85] What was new was that from the reign of the Emperor Constantine (306-337) onwards, Christianity, that is, the Christianity the emperor adhered to, became the religion that was privileged and increasingly propagated by the state.

Unlike more general works on religious transformation in Late Antiquity, in most accounts of religion in Late Antique Egypt, even the more recent ones, there is still a tendency to describe this process in terms of 'decline and fall' and 'Christian triumph', thus maintaining a one-sided and linear view of religious transformation during this period.[86] Recently, the papyrologist Roger Bagnall has attempted to account for the complexity of this development: 'one should not assume that the decline of pagan religion and the rise of Christianity are so simply related, like children at opposite ends of a see-saw'.[87] He bases himself on 'hard evidence', that is, archaeological material, inscriptions and, particularly, documentary papyri.[88]

In surveying the material, Bagnall sees a steady decline in temple building and their cults: the traditional Egyptian scripts (hieroglyphic, hieratic and demotic) disappear, priests act mainly as private persons in the third and fourth-century documents, and there is hardly any evidence for the continuity of festivals. This decline had already set in during the reign of Augustus and was thus an internal decline, not one caused by Christianity. By the third century, so Bagnall concludes, Ancient Egyptian religion was so weak that Christianity only had to step into the void to rapidly gain victory.[89] The most striking evidence for this rapid 'triumph' is the appearance of Christian names in papyri from the fourth century onwards. Though admitting that it is only a rough estimate, on the basis of this corpus Bagnall quantifies the percentage of Christians in Egypt: 20 percent of the population in AD 313, 40 percent in 337 and 80 percent (or more) by the early fifth century.[90]

In view of all this, Bagnall is sceptical about the 'survival' of Ancient Egyptian religion in the fourth century and later, although he does not think that all 'belief', whatever that may be, was lost.[91] Accordingly, he points to some cases of continuity, with as most extreme case that of Philae, but he describes these as exceptions or explains them away by specific circumstances. And this is the critical point. Although Bagnall's arguments regarding certain elements of Egyptian religion are in themselves sound and of great importance for our understanding of the religious transformation in Late Antique Egypt, he stresses only one aspect, that is, change, whereas he underestimates continuity. In other words, as the terminology he uses already shows, Bagnall's account of the process of religious transformation in Late Antique Egypt is still firmly rooted in Gibbon's 'decline and fall' and 'Christian triumph'.

In reaction to Bagnall, David Frankfurter has recently attempted to transcend this static concept of religious transformation, in which the new religion replaced the old religion.

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[85] See, generally, B.A. Pearson, J.E. Goehring (eds), ***The Roots of Egyptian Christianity*** (Philadelphia, 1986); C.W. Griggs, ***Early Egyptian Christianity from its Origins to 451 C.E.*** (Leiden, 1990).

[86] H.I. Bell, ***Egypt from Alexander the Great to the Arab Conquest. A Study in the Diffusion and Decay of Hellenism*** (Oxford, 1948); R. Rémondon, 'L'Égypte et la suprème résistance au christianisme (V[e]-VIIe siècles)', ***BIFAO*** 51 (1952) 63-78; H.I. Bell, ***Cults and Creeds in Graeco-Roman Egypt*** (Liverpool, 1953); A.D. Nock, ***Essays on Religion and the Ancient World***, 2 vols (Oxford, 1972) 2.566-74 ('Later Egyptian Piety', 1944[1]); L. Kákosy, 'Das Ende des Heidentums in Ägypten', in P. Nagel (ed.), ***Graeco-Coptica. Griechen und Kopten im byzantinischen Ägypten*** (Halle, 1984) 61-76, and 'Probleme der Religion im römerzeitlichen Ägypten', ***ANRW*** II 18.5 (1995) 2894-3049 at 2927-48. The best general overview of Graeco-Roman Egypt, Bowman, ***Egypt***, 201 and 207, still speaks of 'pagan survivals' and 'paganism', the latter being exclusively concentrated in the hands of the elite. More nuanced, though rather descriptive, is E. Wipszycka, ***Études sur le christianisme dans l'Égypte de l'antiquité tardive*** (Rome, 1996) 63-105 ('La christianisation de l'Égypte aux IVe-VIe siècles: aspects sociaux et ethniques', 1988[1]).

[87] Bagnall, ***Egypt***, 261-309 (quote on p. 261), and ***Later Roman Egypt***, Ch. X. Cf. M. Vinzent, 'Das "heidnische" Ägypten im 5. Jahrhundert', in J. van Oort, D. Wyrwa (eds), ***Heiden und Christen im 5. Jahrhundert*** (Leuven, 1998) 32-65.

[88] Cf. an earlier overview of the papyrological evidence by F. Zucker, 'Priester und Tempel in Ägypten in den Zeiten nach der decianischen Christenverfolgung', in ***PapCongr.*** VIII (Vienna, 1956) 167-74.

[89] For Bagnall, ***Egypt***, 261 (n. 1), the term 'victory' is not too inadequate a description of this process.

[90] Bagnall, ***Egypt***, 280-1.

[91] Bagnall, ***Egypt***, 268-75.

His book is entitled ***Religion in Roman Egypt***, but it should perhaps have been called ***Traditional Local Religion in Roman Egypt***, as one reviewer remarked.[92] Frankfurter's ideas have evoked much discussion, and it is therefore necessary to survey and scrutinise his arguments at greater length.[93]

Frankfurter's fundamental critique of Bagnall is that the latter thinks of 'religion' as consisting merely of its infrastructure: temples, a priestly hierarchy and festivals (pp. 27-28).[94] By following the 'pan-Mediterranean' development towards Christianity, a development emphasising the great change that happened in Late Antiquity on the basis of (mostly, Christian) literary sources, which are haphazardly collected from all over the Mediterranean world, scholars have too often fitted Egyptian religion into this larger framework, thus ignoring aspects of continuity. But this too generic approach fails to take into account the specific character of Ancient Egyptian religion, developments of which can sometimes be traced back for a considerable period of time, as indeed Bagnall's study has demonstrated (11-15). Frankfurter therefore also wants to see religion in Roman Egypt in its Egyptian context, but defines 'religion' as follows: 'as a local, collective endeavor to negotiate fertility, safety, health, misfortune, identity, and collective solidarity' (6). In other words, Frankfurter approaches religion in Roman Egypt from an entirely different angle: 'from the bottom up', tracing religious developments in the long period from AD 100 to 600 on a local level (7). He then sees no 'decline' at all but rather a resilience of the old religion (18).

In his 'history of religions' approach (36), Frankfurter is influenced by the famous anthropologist Robert Redfield (1897-1958), who distinguished Little and Great Traditions, in dialectic with each other.[95] The Great Traditions denote the grand idea systems of the intellectual elite and the city, whereas the Little Traditions stand for the local folklore of the village. According to Frankfurter, in Late Antique Egypt traditional local religion, the Little Tradition, either embraced or rejected the Great Tradition, Christianity. These are the words of the subtitle of his book: assimilation (embracing the new religion) and resistance (rejecting the new religion). Seen in this way, local Egyptian religion is comparable to other Little Traditions and can be elucidated with anthropological parallels (6-7, 33-36).

But there is more. Whereas Bagnall was sceptical about the use of hagiographical sources, these are Frankfurter's main type of sources.[96] Although he points out that they are flawed by their ideological agenda and literary structure, he suggests that they can still be useful in isolating 'authentic details' of local religion (20-22). But if, so Frankfurter asks himself, local religion was so dynamic, how can we balance this with the evidence put forward by Bagnall, namely that temples were in decline, that the Egyptian sacred scripts were forgotten, and that priests appeared increasingly in a marginal position? Frankfurter's answer is that these elements caused a metamorphosis of local religion rather than a 'decline' of it. This metamorphosis was a centrifugal shift away from the main regional, 'national' temples, to the village shrine and the house altar (27-30). Frankfurter devotes the remainder of his book to showing how, in his view, this shift worked in practice.

First of all, Frankfurter reassesses the role of the temple in the Roman period as a focus for popular needs, such as the inundation of the Nile, fertility and healing cults, and festivals. Despite the disappearance of imperial finance, temples retained their local or regional focus. For example, festivals did not die out after the third century, but rather evolved into local and

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[92] G. Fowden, 'Religious Traditions Great and Small in Roman Egypt', ***JRA*** 13 (2000) 789-92 at 789.

[93] The book won the 1999 Award for Excellence in the Study of Religion of the American Academy of Religion. In the following summary, references to Frankfurter's book are given in the main text between brackets to avoid an accumulation of footnotes.

[94] See also Frankfurter's review of Bagnall's book in ***BMCRev*** of 19 March 1994, and MacMullen, ***Christianity and Paganism***, 188 (n. 63).

[95] R. Redfield, ***The Primitive World and Its Transformations*** (Ithaca, 1953), ***The Little Community. Viewpoints for the Study of a Human Whole*** (Chicago, 1955), and ***Peasant Society and Culture. An Anthropological Approach to Civilization*** (Chicago, 1956). For an application of the model of the Little and Great Traditions, see M.B. Singer, ***When a Great Tradition Modernizes. An Anthropological Approach to Indian Civilization*** (New York, 1972). On Redfield, see the lemma in D.L. Sills ***et al.*** (eds), ***International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences***, 19 vols (New York, 1968-91) 13.350-3.

[96] Bagnall, ***Egypt***, 7-8, 280 (n. 121), and ***Later Roman Egypt***, Ch. X at 292-3.

incidental processions in a Hellenic guise. Popular rituals also continued to be carried out on the periphery (65). According to Frankfurter, this appears from popular support of temples as described in (mostly) hagiographical sources. In particular, he discusses the incident in which the zealous Abbot Shenoute of Atripe fulminated against the local aristocrat Gessios, whom Frankfurter sees as a 'patron' supporting local religion (81). Although the resilience depended on regional circumstances, hagiographical sources suggest that some temples continued to be in use into the fifth and sixth centuries (76).

Thus, instead of being concentrated in the large 'national' or regional temples, these popular cults could now be found in local temples or shrines (98). The shift in local religion was also towards the domestic sphere, for example in the form of terracotta figurines worshipped at home. Certain deities, like Bes, fitted the new kind of popular piety, which need not be seen independently of the local shrine; rather, they interacted with each other on the same level (131).

A second way in which local religion came to be expressed in the Roman period was through oracle cults. The main examples Frankfurter uses to support his point are the incubation cults at Canopus and Menouthis, both situated about 20 km east of Alexandria. Although there are no inscriptions after the third century, Frankfurter sees evidence in the Christian sources that both cults continued until they were deliberately closed, the former at the end of the fourth and the latter at the end of the fifth century (162-165). Another example is the oracle of Bes at Abydos, which the Christian holy man Moses allegedly ended in the fifth or sixth century, as described in his Coptic ***Life*** (169-174).

Thirdly, beside the dynamics of the oracle cult after the third century, Frankfurter sees a connection with the rise of the Christian holy man.[97] Since holy men fulfilled many of the same roles as oracle cults, they replaced these forms of popular need rather than introducing a new Christian ideology. Consequently, the focus shifted to Christian oracle shrines (193, 197).[98] But what happened to the holy man of old, the temple priest? According to Frankfurter, he continued to be the chief ritual specialist after the 'decline' of the temple, and came to fulfil the needs of everyday life rather than those of the temple cult: he became a 'prophetic figure' (203, 213-4).[99] After the third century, the number of ritual experts multiplied in the person of the holy man, causing competition among these experts (215).[100]

Another function of the temple priest cast in a new guise by the Christian holy man was his accessibility to ritual texts. In the temple, the centre for ritual texts had been the House of Life. In Late Antiquity, ritual texts developed in an ecclesiastical and monastic context (260). In view of these similarities in function between the temple priest and the Christian holy man, Frankfurter is not surprised to find accounts in hagiographical works that temple priests turned into Christian holy men (262-264).

With the replacement of the temple priest by the Christian holy man, we come to the Christian society of the sixth century. Admittedly, Frankfurter still has to explain why, despite the revitalisation of Egyptian religion, the countryside acquired a more and more Christian face. As said before, several of the functions that fulfilled popular daily needs became concentrated in the hands of Christian holy men (267). Christianity, then, provided a new framework to fulfil these needs. But this new 'idiom' could not completely replace the old one, and there was room for a considerable overlap, which could adequately be described as 'syncretistic' (271-272).[101] On the other hand, holy men had to emphasise what was new in the

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[97] Frankfurter places himself here in a long tradition of scholarship since Brown's seminal article of 1971, ***Society and the Holy***, 103-52 ('The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity', 1971[1]). See also P. Brown, 'The Saint as Exemplar in Late Antiquity', ***Representations*** 1 (1983) 1-23, 'Arbiters of Ambiguity. A Role of the Late Antique Holy Man', ***Cassiodorus*** 2 (1996) 123-42, 'The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity, 1971-1997', ***JECS*** 6 (1998) 353-76, and 'Holy Men', ***CAH***[2] XIV (2000) 781-810.

[98] See also D. Frankfurter, 'Introduction: Approaches to Coptic Pilgrimage', in Frankfurter, ***Pilgrimage & Holy Space***, 3-48.

[99] See also D. Frankfurter, 'The Consequences of Hellenism in Late Antique Egypt: Religious Worlds and Actors', ***ARG*** 2 (2000) 162-94 at 164-83, and 'Syncretism', 348-50.

[100] Frankfurter, 'Syncretism', ***passim***.

[101] See also Frankfurter, 'Syncretism'.

idiom they presented. They therefore polarised their own world with a world of demons, of 'pagans' and of the old religion (273-274).

One way of activating this new worldview was to actually demolish Ancient Egyptian temples, a feature that, according to Frankfurter, 'became epidemic around the Mediterranean world' at the end of the fourth century (278). Are these, then, acts forcing an 'ideology' upon the local population? Frankfurter answers this question with 'yes and no'. Evidently, Christianity brought a new ideology. However, for Frankfurter the acceptance of Christianity by the local population, whether through assimilation or resistance, worked as an appropriation of its 'idiom' rather than of its 'ideology'. He then summarises his point once more: 'After the initial violence, after the shift in mapping demonic powers, Christianity settled back to function as an idiom for supernatural authority' (283-284).

Although this summary of Frankfurter's book cannot do justice to its wealth of original and thought-provoking ideas, it has tried to illustrate both some of its paths and some of its pitfalls. Frankfurter must certainly be given credit for providing us with a lively picture of local religion in Roman Egypt. However, we should be more suspicious of his representation of the period we are interested in, the period when Christianity became the state-favoured religion.

Firstly, Frankfurter pushes his main thesis, of the 'resilience, indeed the triumph of local culture' (284), too far, as appears from his dating of events. For example, documentation for most festivals ends in the fourth century, but, Frankfurter counters, 'both the local scope of activity and identity in peasant life and the pressing everyday concerns about misfortune would have impelled traditional festival practices to continue well past the fourth century as an active concern of villages' (62), even though he does not produce any evidence in support of this statement. The same holds for the 'decline' of the temple, which Frankfurter perceives differently: 'For this scenario is largely inferred from the sudden drop in inscriptional and papyrological documentation after about 250 C.E. and not out of direct testimony' (200). Once again, Frankfurter does not adduce any evidence to show that the decrease in documentation does not mean what it obviously suggests, namely that the temple as an institution of Ancient Egyptian religion gradually disappeared from society.[102]

Frankfurter also claims that the Isis cult continued after the third century, but he can only mention three examples. Among these, he counts the temple of Isis at Menouthis and a remote temple in the Dakhleh oasis. The third example, the temple island of Philae, 'may best represent the resilience of established Isis cults', although elsewhere he seems to acknowledge its unique position (104-105, cf. 64-65). Finally, 'the lack of documentation for processional oracles after the middle of the third century does not reflect the dwindling of this highly traditional religious form but rather the local and performative nature of the rite' (154, cf. 155-156). But the only examples Frankfurter can adduce for such oracles are a passage from a hagiographical work and, again, Philae. To sum up, Frankfurter's documentation for the 'resilience' of local religion after the third century is hardly impressive.

It seems that Frankfurter can balance the lack of documentation for this period only by quoting passages from hagiographical sources. This brings us to a second point. Although Frankfurter presents himself as being cautious in using these sources and is well aware of their problems, he is actually less critical when using them.[103] Can we make Gessios a patron of local religion on the basis of a single passage in Shenoute's literary corpus? (81).[104] Can we adduce the 'activity of some priesthood' in a local temple at Abydos at the end of the fifth century on the basis of a passage from the ***Life of Moses***? (171; cf. 201). And can we see the destruction of temples by monks as a general phenomenon in fourth and fifth-century Egypt on the basis of a

[102] See e.g. the review by O.E. Kaper in ***BiOr*** 58 (2001) 126-32, who also debates some of Frankfurter's views on religion in Roman Egypt.

[103] Cf. e.g. his remarks in 'Syncretism', 348, 352, 354, 359, 361.

[104] Cf. S. Emmel, 'From the Other Side of the Nile: Shenute and Panopolis', and P. van Minnen, 'The Letter (and Other Papers) of Ammon: Panopolis in the Fourth Century A.D.', in A. Egberts, B.P. Muhs, J. van der Vliet (eds), ***Perspectives on Panopolis. An Egyptian Town from Alexander the Great to the Arab Conquest*** (Leiden, 2002) 95-113 at 108-11, and 177-99 at 181 (n. 25), who doubt this.

few passages in saints' lives which, moreover, have a clear ideological agenda? (277-283).[105] It seems that Frankfurter is using passages from sources whose interpretation and dating is often more problematic than he acknowledges.[106]

The image evolves of a countryside still flourishing with temples, festivals and cults until long after the third century, a countryside which almost seems to lead its own life independently of the greater urban centres.[107] Frankfurter certainly has a point that much of the old religion could live on for some time on a local level, but it seems that he cannot see past the Little Tradition.[108] Is it an accurate description to say that the Little Tradition dominates the Great Tradition? (35). Is it not a mutual process, the Great Tradition influencing the Little Tradition as much as the Little Tradition does the Great Tradition?[109] In this respect, it is questionable whether Frankfurter's statement that 'idiom' was more pervasive in the countryside than 'ideology' can be maintained, and whether he can draw such a firm distinction between both terms.[110]

Too strong a focus on the Little Tradition also has another disadvantage. After all, what exactly is the Little Tradition in this Egyptian context? Does it comprise a local shrine or a regional temple? Frankfurter seems to opt for both, which sometimes leads to confusing statements. For example, he refers to the temple of Isis at Philae as both a 'local' and a 'regional' temple (e.g. 105). In the shift from large regional temples to the small village shrine, he does not explain the difference between the two categories, although it is well known that many Egyptian towns possessed small temples and many villages large temples.[111] If these categories cannot be clearly separated, the influence of the Great Tradition may be more pervasive than Frankfurter allows: too much stress on the Little Tradition does not sufficiently account for the impact of Christianity.[112] The focus on the Little Tradition also influences Frankfurter's definition of 'religion', which he reduces to a minimal set of basic needs (6).[113] In the end, the impact of Christianity cannot just be accounted for by the phenomenon of Christian holy men destroying Ancient Egyptian temples.[114]

Although Frankfurter's history of religions approach 'from the bottom up' has proven attractive in the study of religious transformation in Late Antique Egypt, the main problem with it is Frankfurter's dualistic view of the choices people made regarding religious matters. They either accepted (assimilation) or rejected (resistance) the new religion, whereas there is a whole spectrum of other possibilities in between, such as transmission, imitation, reproduction, adjustment, adaptation, conversion, reversal, subversion and perversion. Moreover, in cultural history assimilation has often been applied as the end product of the process of acculturation, which is hardly reconcilable with the 'bottom up' approach of

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[105] Cf. Frankfurter, ***Religion***, 283, where he concludes: 'Iconoclastic acts seem to have been part of the discourse of prophetic charisma during the fourth century', whereas the last example he mentions is taken from the fifth century, with the statement made on p. 265: 'the gutting and conversion of traditional Egyptian temples, often still functioning, was a widespread phenomenon in Egypt during the fourth, fifth and sixth centuries'.

[106] For an uncritical use of Shenoute, see also D. Frankfurter, '"Things Unbefitting Christians": Violence and Christianization in Fifth-Century Panopolis', ***JECS*** 8 (2000) 273-95. Cf. the too harsh criticism by M. Smith, 'Aspects of the Preservation and Transmission of Indigenous Religious Traditions in Akhmim and its Environs during the Graeco-Roman Period', in Egberts, Muhs and Van der Vliet, ***Perspectives on Panopolis***, 233-47 at 245-7, on Frankfurter's use of passages from the Shenoutean corpus.

[107] E.g. Frankfurter, ***Religion***, 197: 'The Christian oracle shrines and the mundane 'oracular' services of a number of holy men and women demonstrate a pronounced tendency in Egyptian religion of this time toward the localized, the everyday needs and religious world of the small community as these might be centered in a particular place or person, and away from (if never entirely departing) the ideology of the great tradition'.

[108] See the review by R. Valantasis in ***ChHist*** 69 (2000) 641-2 at 642.

[109] Anthropologists have long recognised the limitations of too strong a dichotomy between the Little and Great Traditions, see e.g. D.F. Eickelman, 'The Study of Islam in Local Contexts', in R.C. Martin (ed.), ***Islam in Local Contexts*** (Leiden, 1982) 1-16.

[110] A point made in the review by G. Frank in ***Journal of the American Academy of Religion*** 69 (2001) 699-702 at 701.

[111] Cf. e.g. Bagnall, ***Egypt***, 315.

[112] See the review by A.D. Lee in ***CR*** 51 (2001) 74-6 at 76.

[113] Review by M. Malaise in ***CdE*** 74 (1999) 388-90 at 390.

[114] Fowden, 'Religious Traditions', 791.

Frankfurter, since the notion is precisely associated with a one-way cultural transmission 'from the top down'.[115] We should perhaps prefer a term that describes how people decode a transmitted message in various ways.

In recent years, cultural historians have increasingly begun to use the term 'appropriation' to describe such processes of cultural transmission.[116] The notion was first developed by the cultural historian Michel de Certeau (1925-1986) and denotes the ways people receive a message and give meaning to it. Therefore, 'appropriation' is a particularly useful concept for our goal because it takes a perspective 'from the bottom up' and includes the entire spectrum of decoding transmitted messages. This means that imposed rules, norms and values are not always adopted slavishly. Often a particular person has his own set of mental tools, for example determined by tradition or local background, with which a message is filled in. Appropriation therefore does away with terms like 'Christianisation' and allows a more complex view of cultural transmission with a distinctively 'human face'.[117]

Accordingly, we will try to write religious history not from a 'national', ideological perspective but from a regional, 'interactional' one: the ways people decoded the message of Christianity - to which they adapted their religious ideas and practices or which they adapted to these ideas and practices, a two-way process that can more accurately be described as 'becoming Christian'.[118] In this way, our study both builds upon and diverges from the studies of Bagnall and Frankfurter. Whereas Bagnall describes some of the longer term developments of the infrastructure of Ancient Egyptian religion in detail, his emphasis is still too much on what changed, leading to a Gibbonian 'victory' of Christianity, which replaced Ancient Egyptian religion in the fourth century. By contrast, although his picture is more dynamic, Frankfurter concentrates too much on aspects of continuity. He takes his examples of traditional local religion from all over Egypt and from a long period of time (AD 100-600). Consequently, single references may not do justice to their specific regional or local backgrounds. It may be more rewarding to examine one region, a region with a variety of sources to trace the complexity of the development in the religious sphere. Moreover, against Frankfurter's minimal view, 'religion' is taken here as a wider cultural phenomenon: one that also takes into account the organisation and increasing integration of Christianity into society, a development which is generally considered to have been completed by the sixth century.[119] Frankfurter's examples seem to fade away in the fifth century, whereas it is also necessary to have a look at what happened after that date.

This book, then, aims to be a multidisciplinary study of how religion, in so far as it can be reconstructed from the variety of sources, became transformed on a regional level in Late Antiquity. It can therefore also be seen as a comprehensive study of the sources about the First Cataract area in Late Antiquity. In this sense, it is a continuation of a recent work on the region during the Graeco-Roman period that ends exactly in AD 298, the year in which our inquiry starts.[120] However, instead of analysing all sources of the period, we will direct our attention to one aspect of cultural change in particular, religious transformation.

Our focus will be on how the region became Christian, and how the Ancient Egyptian cults at Philae were affected by this development. How was Christianity appropriated in a regional context? Unfortunately, unlike historical studies of more modern societies, it is impossible to describe how people appropriated Christianity individually. The fragmented

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[115] See for example the attempt by J.M.G. Barclay, ***Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora. From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE – 117 CE)*** (Edinburgh, 1996), to apply the terms 'assimilation' and 'acculturation'.

[116] E.g. Frankfurter, ***Religion***, 283, and 'Consequences of Hellenism', 162, himself uses the term 'appropriation', but without applying it heuristically.

[117] See the various studies by W. Frijhoff, e.g. 'Foucault Reformed by Certeau: Historical Strategies of Discipline and Everyday Tactics of Appropriation', ***Arcadia*** 33 (1998) 92-108, and ***Embodied Belief. Ten Essays on Religious Culture in Dutch History*** (Hilversum, 2002) 52-6, 284-8.

[118] For the term 'interactional history', see P. van der Veer, ***Imperial Encounters. Religion and Modernity in India and Britain*** (Princeton, 2001) 3-13. For 'becoming Christian': R. Van Dam, ***Becoming Christian. The Conversion of Roman Cappadocia*** (Philadelphia, 2003). Cf. Woolf, ***Becoming Roman.***

[119] E.g. Bagnall, ***Egypt***, 10-1. For the different aspects of 'religion' as a cultural phenomenon, see now H.G. Kippenberg, K. von Stuckrad, ***Einführung in die Religionswissenschaft*** (Munich, 2003).

[120] Locher, ***Nilkatarakt***.

nature of our sources simply does not allow us to do this, the less so as Antique religion was generally a public and communal activity.[121] While refraining from statements about what went on in people's minds, the best we can do therefore is to describe the framework provided by Christianity, which presented people with different appropriation choices. In view of the scanty sources, only in a few cases can these choices be elucidated with specific examples. It is exactly these examples, however, that provide us with a lively picture of religion in Late Antique Egypt.

The Sources: Nature and Scope

The sources referred to in this study date to between AD 298 and 642, a period which, for this region, can well be called 'Late Antiquity'. There always has been much discussion about the date of Late Antiquity, some scholars even opting for a range in time from 200 to 800.[122] More often, however, a narrower range is taken, including the fourth to seventh centuries.[123] In Egypt in particular, Late Antiquity is usually dated between 284, the beginning of the reign of Diocletian who profoundly reformed the provincial administration of Egypt, and the Arab conquest, completed in 642.[124] This period is also referred to as the 'Byzantine period', because Egypt became one of the provinces of the Eastern Roman or Byzantine Empire.[125]

Although these periodisations are somewhat forced because they draw an artificial line where history, and religious history perhaps even more so, is always fluid, a periodisation between 298 and 642 seems particularly useful since in both years important events took place that had a profound impact on regional life. In 298, as we have observed, Diocletian withdrew the southern Egyptian frontier to the First Cataract region. The consequence of this event was that the area south of the First Cataract ceased to be Roman territory, and the status of the First Cataract region itself changed into that of a frontier region, a *limes*. We will try to follow the process of religious transformation until the completion of the Arab conquest of Egypt, that is, until 642. After that date another religion, Islam, became the new religion.

In comparison with the rest of Egypt, the region of the First Cataract has a particularly rich assemblage of written and material sources. Some remarks on the nature and limitations of these sources are therefore necessary.[126] Firstly, there are many literary sources on the region, although they are almost all concerned with Philae. Notably, passages have been written by the fifth-century historian Priscus and the sixth-century historian Procopius (in Greek), and the sixth-century church historian John of Ephesus (in Syriac). Although all three of these works are considered as historiography, the church history has a different agenda than the preceding historical works. Another important source is formed by a relatively unknown Coptic hagiographical work about the region, the *Life of Aaron*.

Secondly, there is an abundance of documentary sources. In inscriptions, Philae is the richest source, with ninety-two published inscriptions in Greek and hieroglyphic/demotic dating to Late Antiquity. By contrast, Syene and Elephantine have only yielded ten inscriptions in Greek altogether. Then there are 127 ink-written potsherds (ostraka) in Greek and Coptic dating to Late Antiquity, which all come from Elephantine. Furthermore, thirty-eight Greek

[121] See e.g. J.N. Bremmer, *Greek Religion* (Oxford, 1999[2]) 2-4.
[122] E.g. Bowersock, Brown and Grabar, *Late Antiquity*, and *Interpreting Late Antiquity. Essays on the Postclassical World* (Cambridge MA, 2001).
[123] Cf. *CAH*[2] XIII (1998) and XIV (2000), which divide the period into a 'Late Empire' from 337 until 425 and 'Late Antiquity' from 425 until *c.* 600, with the remarks by F. Millar, 'Pagan and Christian Voices from Late Antiquity', *JRA* 13 (2000) 752-62 at 752-5.
[124] Pestman, *New Papyrological Primer*, 12; Rupprecht, *Kleine Einführung*, 10-1; Gascou, 'Égypte byzantine', 403-6. Cf. Bowman, *Egypt*, 46-53, taking the 'Byzantine period' to date between 312 and 642, with Bagnall, *Egypt*, ix, dating Late Antiquity to between 284 and the middle of the fifth century.
[125] A problematic and confusing term is 'Coptic period'. In this book, 'Coptic' refers only to the last phase of the Ancient Egyptian language, see B. Layton, *A Coptic Grammar* (Wiesbaden, 2000) 1-4.
[126] Cf. the remarks by Bagnall, *Egypt*, 8-13, about the sources for the study of Late Antique Egypt.

and Coptic papyri have been found on Elephantine, whereas there is only one from Philae and none from Syene.[127]

There are serious problems in interpreting these documents. Some texts, such as the inscriptions from Philae, tell us much about religion. Others, such as the ostraka from Elephantine, give us little information in that respect. Furthermore, the documents are written in different scripts: one is written in hieroglyphic, others in demotic, Greek and Coptic (and perhaps also in Meroitic). Then, there is the diversity of the provenance of the material: one papyrus and no ostraka from Philae but many inscriptions; few inscriptions from Elephantine but many ostraka and papyri; no ostraka or papyri from Syene, and few inscriptions. However, the papyri from Elephantine, although found on the island, generally deal with Syene. Finally, although almost all the documents have as their provenance the major sites of Syene, Elephantine and Philae, there are also several documents with other provenances that mention these places. Other sites in the First Cataract region, such as for instance the islands of el-Hesa and Biga, and the so-called 'monastery of St Simeon' on the west bank, have left almost no records for this period.[128]

Thirdly, a large amount of archaeological work has been conducted in the region, presenting its own problems. Elephantine is one of the archaeologically best known sites in Egypt. The French and the Germans carried out initial excavations in 1906-1911, followed from the 1960s onwards by extensive excavations by the German Institute in co-operation with the Swiss Institute at Cairo, which continue until the present day. These excavations have yielded hundreds more Greek and Coptic ostraka which are in progress of publication and could therefore not be incorporated into this study.[129]

On the mainland, ancient Syene has largely disappeared underneath the modern city of Aswan, which makes systematic archaeological excavation difficult. However, in 2000 the Swiss Institute at Cairo started excavations of Late Antique and Arab houses at the temples of Isis and Domitian. During these excavations about a hundred ostraka in different scripts were collected, in addition to other archaeological objects such as pottery and coins. At the same time, several emergency excavations have brought to light data on small parts of the ancient town. Due to the preliminary state of research of these data, they also could not be integrated into this study. Because the Late Antique town is the first to appear from underneath the modern city, much can still be expected. Future publications may therefore support, nuance or refute several of the presently proposed theses.

The situation at Philae is again entirely different. Although its temples have been studied and preserved quite well, several Late Antique and Arab houses, made of mud brick, were cleared during excavations in preparation for the construction of the first Aswan Dam in 1895-1896. Two freestanding churches, or what was left of them, definitively disappeared under water in the 1970s. During a UNESCO rescue campaign the temples were transported to the nearby island of Agilkia due to the building of the Aswan High Dam. However, no care was taken of the remains of Christian Philae and the excavators have hardly provided any archaeological documentation. Again, sites outside the three main regional centres have not left many material remains, and almost nothing is known of them from Late Antiquity.[130]

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[127] Although ***P.Leid.*** Z is said to have been found on Philae, there are reasons to think it may have come from Elephantine as well, see D. Feissel and K.A. Worp, 'La requête d'Appion, évêque de Syène, à Théodose II: P. Leid. Z revisé', ***OMRO*** 68 (1988) 97-111 at 97-8 (n. 7).

[128] Cf. ***IThSy*** 304 and 306, found on the islands of Salib and Biga, respectively. The tombstones from the 'Monastery of St Simeon' published by H. Munier, 'Les stèles coptes du Monastère de Saint-Siméon à Assouan', ***Aegyptus*** 11 (1930-1) 257-300, 433-84 (nos. 1-177) = ***SB Kopt.*** I 498-675, have been dated from the sixth to the ninth centuries. Although some of the tombstones have a dating formula, the ones that are considered older do not have such a formula and more probably date to the seventh century or later. This is why they have been left out of consideration here. On the problematic dating of these stelae, see M. Krause, 'Die Formulare der christlichen Grabsteine Nubiens', in K. Michałowski (ed.), ***Nubia. Récentes recherches*** (Warsaw, 1975) 76-82 at 79-80, and 'Inscriptions', ***Copt.Enc.*** IV (1991) 1290-9 at 1293; W. Scheidel, ***Death on the Nile. Disease and the Demography of Roman Egypt*** (Leiden, 2001) 8.

[129] C. Müller and S. Schaten are in charge of the Coptic, R. Duttenhöfer of the Greek ostraka.

[130] For the scanty remains, U. Monneret de Villard, ***La Nubia medioevale***, 4 vols (Cairo, 1935-57) 1.2-17. Cf. e.g. the badly preserved church found at Shellal, which dates to the second half of the eleventh century, but includes

In short, the sources for the study of religious transformation in the area of the First Cataract are plentiful and various, but each one of them presents its own limitations, which determine the questions that can be asked of the material. For example, almost no women are mentioned in the sources, and there is hardly any evidence of magic. Rather than a proper thematic approach, then, a more diachronic approach will be taken, in which the nature of the sources requires different methodologies, each depending on the type of source. Despite these shortcomings, however, the sources constitute a homogeneous picture of the regional developments of religion in this period.

Accordingly, the book is organised into three parts. Part I treats the old religion in the fourth and fifth centuries, Part II the new religion during these same centuries.[131] Part III treats all sources from the sixth century together and pictures a society that had become Christian.

Part I centres on the temples of Philae, as practically all evidence of the old religion derives from that site. What happened to the Ancient Egyptian cults after 298? In Ch. 1, the passages by Procopius and Priscus, which provide us with important information about Late Antique Philae, will be discussed. In order to better understand the relations of Philae with the southern peoples, we will also have to analyse the sources concerning the Dodekaschoinos in the fourth and fifth centuries (Ch. 2). We will then turn to the most important sources from the island itself: the inscriptions. What do they tell us about the Late Antique cults? In Ch. 3 we will analyse the number, location and structure of the inscriptions, and in Ch. 4 attention will be paid to their contents.

Part II discusses the expansion of Christianity in the First Cataract area (including Philae). In Ch. 5, we will examine how Christianity organised itself in the region, and how it increasingly integrated into society. A large amount of Part II is reserved for the Coptic ***Life of Aaron***, which describes the ascetic lives of several holy men from the area and also includes a history of the first bishops of Philae. As this work has not yet been systematically studied, Ch. 6 will be devoted to describing the work, its author and public. In Ch. 7 we will turn to the section on the bishops of Philae. How historical is it?

The saint's life also forms a natural transition to Part III, which is about the time the hagiographical work was probably composed: the sixth century, when Christianity had fully integrated into society. How did this become visible? Part III contains the greatest wealth of material. Undoubtedly, this is in large part because the see of Philae became involved in the missionary activities to Nubia that are reported by John of Ephesus. What was Philae's role in these events? (Ch. 8). At the same time, the archaeological material from the First Cataract region provides a detailed picture of how the sacred landscape had been transformed by the sixth century. In Ch. 9, we will discuss the remains of Christian Philae, its temples and churches, but also the inscriptions left on or near these buildings. How did Philae become Christian in the sixth century? These developments will be compared with the way in which the landscape became transformed at Elephantine and Syene, mainly by looking at what happened to their temples (Ch. 10). Finally, papyri and ostraka concerning Syene and Elephantine provide us with a picture of how the Church had integrated into the sixth-century Christian society of the First Cataract region. In the epilogue, the regional developments will be summarised, and some examples will be given of how people appropriated Christianity in the region.

The appendices contain the texts and translations of key passages by the historians Procopius and Priscus, a list of demotic graffiti in Egypt, a list of the Late Antique bishops of Syene and Philae, an updated text and translation of ***P.Cair.Masp.*** I 67004, a papyrus discussed

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an earlier, undated predecessor, P. Grossmann, 'Zu der Kirchenruine von Šallal', in U. Luft (ed.), ***The Intellectual Heritage of Egypt*** (= Fs. Kákosy; Budapest, 1992) 235-43, and ***Christliche Architektur in Ägypten*** (Leiden, 2002) 465-6. Another example is the church that was built in a Ptolemaic temple on Biga and has tentatively been dated to the sixth century, but has now disappeared under water. See Monneret de Villard, ***Nubia medioevale*** 1, 11-3; P. Grossmann, 'Überlegungen zur Gestalt der Kirche im Tempel von Biga', in Bácz, ***Fs. Gaál, Luft, Török***, 279-87, and ***Christliche Architektur***, 32, 48.

[131] The idea is inspired by Robin Lane Fox' book ***Pagans and Christians***, 'which puts their practice side by side in a context of civic life' (p. 7).

in Ch. 9, and the text and translation of some new inscriptions from Philae and Elephantine that have recently been published.