The Conversion of Pachomius Revisited

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Abstract

The article seeks to reassess and contextualise the conversion narrative of the Egyptian monk Pachomius, the founder of coenobitic monasticism. It thereby offers a case study into how and why the Pachomian literary tradition was shaped, altered and abridged, while also challenging the traditional views associated with Pachomius’ military career.

Keywords

Pachomius – Egyptian Monasticism – conversion – Roman military

1 Introduction*

In 1985 Philip Rousseau published a ground-breaking book. Drawing on socio-historical methods he was able to offer a new perspective on Pachomius, generally perceived to be the founder of coenobitic monasticism, and his religious community – the *koinonia*.¹ Instead of solely prioritizing the spiritual side and ascetic practices of monasticism, Rousseau situated the Pachomian *koinonia* within the political, economic and social developments of fourth century Egypt. Of course, Rousseau was by no means the first to employ social history

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1 P. Rousseau, *Pachomius. The Making of a Community in Fourth-Century Egypt*, Berkeley 1985.

to question and critically analyse the “myth of the desert” so prevalent in earlier studies.² Scholars working on documentary sources, like Ewa Wipszycka or Edwin Judge, had already begun to reappraise the origins of Christian monasticism.³ Rousseau’s insightful (re-)reading of the source material though opened up a new chapter for the study of (Egyptian) monasticism. Following Rousseau it is now widely accepted that a synthesis of this particular lifestyle would have to equally treat spiritual, social and cognitive developments.⁴ In the upcoming pages I will not attempt a grand synthesis, but instead intend to return to Rousseau’s original subject, the Pachomian koinonia. Inspired by his sociohistorical approach my aim is twofold:

One the one hand I believe that there are still many preconceived notions in modern scholarship about the early life of Pachomius. It has for example long been understood that the authors of hagiographical biographies sought to portray “their” saint not only as a model for emulation and reflection but also as an example of impeccable Christian virtues.⁵ Quite naturally these features could

2 See f. ex. the still palpable impact of the focus on asceticism in: L.M. Farag, *Monasticism. Living Scripture and Theological Orthodoxy* in: L.M. Farag, *The Coptic Christian Heritage. History, Faith and Culture*, London 2013, 116–131; S. Richter, *Vom mönchischen Leben. Entwicklungslinien des Mönchtums in Ägypten* in: W. Boochs (ed.), *Geschichte und Geist der koptischen Kirche*, Langwaden 2004, 131–149 reprinted in: H. Behlmer (ed.), *Christen in Ägypten*, Wiesbaden 2015, 25–41; K.S. Frank, *Geschichte des christlichen Mönchtums*, 6th Edition, Darmstadt 2010, 20–34. K. Heussi, *Der Ursprung des Mönchtums*, Tübingen 1936, V. H.-J. Derda, *Vita Communis. Studien zur Geschichte einer Lebensform in Mittelalter und Neuzeit*, Cologne 1992, 5ff.

3 For Wipszycka’s meticulous scholarship see now her two great monographs on Egyptian monasticism and the institutional church that in part update and rephrase her previously published work: E. Wipszycka, *Moines et communautés monastiques en Égypte, IV^e–VIII^e siècles*, Warsaw 2009 and *The Alexandrian Church. People and Institutions*, Warsaw 2015; E.A. Judge, *The Earliest Use of Monachos for ‘Monk’* (P. Coll. Youtie 77) and *the Origins of Monasticism*, *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 20, 1977, 72–89. Cf. also the collected articles of Roger Bagnall in: *Later Roman Egypt: Society, Religion, Economy and Administration*, Aldershot 2003.

4 M. Sheridan, *The Spiritual and Intellectual World of Early Egyptian Monasticism* in: M. Sheridan, (ed.), *From the Nile to the Rhone and Beyond. Studies in Early Monastic Literature and Scriptural Interpretation*, Rome 2012, 47–89, esp. 78–86; P.C. Dille, *Monasteries and the Care of Souls in late antique Christianity. Cognition and Discipline*, Cambridge 2017; I. Graiver, *Asceticism of the Mind. Forms of Attention and Self-Transformation in Late Antique Monasticism*, Turnhout 2018.

5 In addition Derek Krueger has made the valid point that writing hagiography should be seen as an act of religious devotion, ascetical practice and humility, exemplified in our case by the fact that all authors of the different Pachomian vitae chose to remain anonymous. D. Krueger, *Writing and Holiness. The Practice of Authorship in the Early Christian East*, Philadelphia 2004, 64–110. Further: C. Rapp, “For Next to God, You Are my Salvation”: *Reflections on the Rise of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity* in: J. Howard-Johnston, P.A. Hayward (ed.), *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. Essays on the Contribution of Peter Brown*, Oxford 1999, 63–81; A. Cameron, *Christian Conversion in Late Antiquity: Some Issues* in: A. Papaconstantinou,

be enhanced through accentuating the differences between Christianity and other religions like Judaism or Roman polytheism. In the case of Pachomius many scholars tend to similarly demarcate his religious endeavour from his past in the Roman military.⁶ Since the circumstances that directly influenced Pachomius' decision to convert to Christianity have received mixed interpretations I want to reassess the relevant passages. On the other hand this approach consequently has to also deal with the general question what reliable historical data we can expect from mining hagiographical texts?⁷

2 The Conversion of Pachomius

The hagiographical account of Pachomius' Life has been recorded in several languages, ranging from Coptic (Bohairic and Sahidic), Greek and Latin to Arabic.⁸ As with all other works of literature each version was intended for a specific audience, paid heed to the demands of the genre and was written with a clear political and/or religious agenda in mind. Some versions therefore contain unique material we cannot find elsewhere. The first steps towards becoming a Christian remain similar though:

N. McLynn, D.L. Schwartz (ed.), *Conversion in Late Antiquity. Christianity, Islam, and beyond. Papers from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Sawyer Seminar, University of Oxford, 2009-2010*, Farnham 2015, 3-23.

6 For the impact of the Roman state institutions on Pachomian monasticism see: C. Barthel, *In militia dei? A Sociohistorical Perspective on the Pachomian Koinonia* (forthcoming).

7 See the contributions in: J. Dijkstra, M. van Dijk (ed.), *The Encroaching Desert: Egyptian Hagiography and the Medieval West*, Leiden 2006.

8 For a discussion of the available source material see: A. Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia 1*, Kalamazoo 1980, 1-21; Wipszycka, *Moines*, 47-60; Rousseau, *Pachomius*, 37-55; J.E. Goehring, *The Letter of Ammon and Pachomian Monasticism*, Berlin 1986, 3-34; J. Grossmann, *Some observations on the Arabic Life of Pachomios* (MS Göttingen University Library n6) compared to the Coptic and Greek Lives, Bulletin de la Société d'Archéologie Copte (BSAC) 45, 2006, 43-58; Fr. Awad Wadi, *The Arabic Lives of St. Pachomius* in: G. Gabra, H.N. Takla (eds.), *Christianity and Monasticism in Upper Egypt, Vol. 2. Nag Hammadi-Esna*, Cairo 2010, 157-169; St. Efthymiades, V. Déroche, *Greek Hagiography in Late Antiquity (Fourth to Seventh Centuries)* in: St. Efthymiades (ed.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography. Volume 1: Periods and Places*, Surrey 2011, 35-94, esp. 41-43. The Coptic sources are taken from: L.-Th. Lefort, *S. Pachomii vita. Bohairice scripta, Vol. I-II*, Paris 1925-1934; L.-Th. Lefort, *S. Pachomii vitae. Sahidice scripta, Vol. I-II*, Paris 1933-34; L.-Th. Lefort, *OEuvres de S. Pachôme et de ses disciples*, Louvain 1956. Greek: F. Halkin, *Sancti Pachomii vitae graecae*, Brussels 1932. Latin: A. Boon, *Pachomiana Latina. Règle et épîtres de S. Pachome, épître de S. Théodore et "Liber" de S. Orsiesius*, Louvain 1932.

Pachomius was born into a polytheistic world.⁹ Together with his parents and at least two siblings, his older brother John and his sister Mary, he lived in the nome of Snê (modern Esneh) in Upper Egypt.¹⁰ Although his parents had chosen Greek Christian names for some of their children, they are still portrayed as practitioners of the traditional cults.¹¹ From an early age Pachomius thus came into direct contact with supernatural forces.¹² His introduction to the Egyptian deities for example went awry. The Bohairic Life recounts that Pachomius was unable to swallow the wine his parents had offered in a libation to the gods, probably the Lai-fish revered in the region of Latopolis. Fore-shadowing his future abilities he instead repelled and frightened them. This trend would continue. As a young boy, Pachomius was attacked by a band of demons disguised as dogs while delivering a cauldron of antelope meat to a couple of laborers, who were perhaps working on the estate of his family.¹³ Resisting the temptations of malicious spirits, fighting demons as well as performing miracles represent a major line of narrative throughout the saint's life.¹⁴ This rhetorical strategy also had the benefit of reminding the contemporary readers of the fourth and early fifth century that the temptations of pagan cults still persisted in their midst.¹⁵ A clear profession of the Christian faith therefore gained special significance:

A little later, after the persecution, the great Constantine became emperor; he was the first Christian among the Roman emperors. And he had not

- 9 I am aware of the flaws of this analytical category, but it underlines well the concurrence of different religious belief systems. See in general: H. Leppin, *Zum Wandel des spätantiken Heidentums*, Millenium 1, 2004, 59-81; E.J. Watts, *The Final Pagan Generation*, Oakland 2015, 17-36; J. Rüpke, *Wie funktioniert Polytheismus? Götter, Bilder, Reflexionen*, Mediterraneo Antico XV, 1-2, 2012, 233-246.
- 10 Bohairic Vita, ch. 3, henceforth SBo.
- 11 The "paganism" of his parents is also mentioned in the saying of Psenthaïsiōs in the *Apophthegmata Patrum*. See E. Schweitzer (ed.), *Apophthegmata Patrum (Teil 1). Das Alphabetikon- Die alphabetische-anonyme Reihe*, Beuron 2012, 324.
- 12 SBo 4-6. In Pachomian literature spiritual entities like demons can allude to „pagan“ gods but more often refer to strong physical or emotional passions and cardinal sins.
- 13 SBo 5. D. Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt. Assimilation and Resistance*, Princeton 1998, 62-63.
- 14 D. Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk. Spiritual Combat in Early Christianity*, Cambridge 2005, 78-97; M. Sheridan, *The Spiritual and Intellectual World of Early Egyptian Monasticism* in: M. Sheridan, (ed.), *From the Nile to the Rhone and Beyond. Studies in Early Monastic Literature and Scriptural Interpretation*, Rome 2012, 47-89; D. Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt. Assimilation and Resistance*, Princeton 1998, 273-284.
- 15 J. Dijkstra, *The Fate of the Temples in Late Antique Egypt* in: L. Lavan, M. Mulryan (eds.) *The Archaeology of Late Antique 'Paganism'*, Leiden 2011, 389-436; D. Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt. Assimilation and Resistance*, Princeton 1998, 238-264.

been reigning long when a tyrant of the Persians attacked him, wishing to take the empire away from him. At once he sent orders throughout his whole empire to induct big and sturdy conscripts to go to war against the enemy of God. The potentates of the palace, dispatched to all countries with the imperial decree, recruited sturdy [conscripts] in cities and villages. Young Pachomius, who was then twenty years old, was also recruited. Although he was not too sturdy, they took him in with the others because of the great number they recruited. As he was led away to the boat with his companions, he raised his eyes to heaven and sighed, saying, 'My Lord Jesus, may your will be done. They got on board and [the boat] sailed north with them. When they arrived at Ne, capital of the ancient empire, the men were brought into the city and thrown into prison. In the evening, some citizens of that city brought bread and victuals to the prison, and they compelled the recruits to eat, because they saw them sunk in great affliction. When young Pachomius saw them, he asked the men who were with him, 'Why are these people so good to us when they do not know us?' They answered, 'They are Christians, and they treat us with love for the sake of the God of heaven.' He withdrew to one side and spent the whole night praying before God saying, 'My Lord Jesus the Christ, God of all the saints, may your goodness quickly come upon me, deliver me from this affliction and I will serve humankind all the days of my life'. The next morning they were led out and put into the boat, and they travelled until they came to the city of Antinoe. When his companions went ashore to the cities to buy food – it was taken out of the imperial provisions – they would often constrain him and drag him to evil places for worldly pleasures. But he rebuked them because he loved that purity which God and the holy angels love.

While they were still detained in the prison of Antinoe, the godloving emperor Constantine, with God's help defeated his adversaries. At once he issued an edict all over the world that conscripts should be discharged. As soon as they were set free, each one returned home with great joy....¹⁶

Pachomius' stint in the Roman army is frequently perceived as a negative experience. Being "*not too sturdy*", sleeping in prison cells and having fellow soldiers that constrained him and brought him to places of temptation – the emotionally charged rationale is that Pachomius must have dreaded this period of his

16 SBo.7-8; Greek Vita Prima (G¹), Fourth Sahidic (S⁴) Vita, 7-8. Further: J.E. Goehring, *The First Sahidic Life of Pachomius* in: R. Valantasis (ed.), *Religions of Late Antiquity in Practice*, Princeton 2000, 19-34 (S¹).

life.¹⁷ All possible military influences on the Pachomian congregation, which were mentioned by scholars like Johannes Leipoldt or Derwas James Chitty, were subsequently discounted.¹⁸ In a radical interpretation, Johannes Grossmann even questioned the historicity of the whole episode. He believed that Pachomius was not a 20 year old recruit (*tiro*) at all, but rather a prisoner in Thebes and later Antinoopolis that was incarcerated for a robbery or another misdemeanour until the time of his trial.¹⁹ While Grossmann's analysis correctly exposed some irregularities in the biographical report, such as the (potential) lack of imperial provisions (*annona*) for the freshly collected recruits or their imprisonment, this does not mean that the whole event is necessarily a piece of hagiographical fiction. On the contrary I would argue that the historical core is not only valid but also that the military has been severely under-rated as a source of inspiration in the study of Pachomian monasticism. Hence the difficulties in interpreting this episode arise from the series of literary topoi and anachronisms that were inserted into the narrative stream in order to shape the memory of the founding father of the koinonia. These additions were not primarily intended to obscure any possible blemishes, character flaws or even major transgressions of Pachomius, like a violent criminal past, but rather served the purpose of communicating specific values and fortifying a communal tradition.²⁰ Andrew Crislip for instance has shown that Pachomius' weak stature, which is only mentioned in the Coptic *vitae*, laid the literary groundwork for his frequent bouts of illness that marked him as the embodiment of the sick saint.²¹ Furthermore, if we study the other extant writings of

- 17 Chr. Joest, *Die Mönchsregeln der Pachomianer*, Leuven 2016, 49f.; Chr. Joest, *Horsiese von Seneset. Regelkommentar zu den Mönchsregeln der Pachomianer*, Beuron 2015, 14-15; H. Bacht, *Das Vermächtnis des Ursprungs, Vol. II*, Würzburg 1983, 23.
- 18 J. Leipoldt, *Pachôm*, Bulletin de la Société d'Archéologie Copte (BSAC) 16, 1961-62, 191-229, esp. 194-198; D.J. Chitty, *The Desert a City. An Introduction to the Study of Egyptian and Palestinian Monasticism under the Christian Empire*, Oxford 1966, 22; H.C. Zander, *Als die Religion noch nicht langweilig war. Die Geschichte der Wüstenväter*, Gütersloh 2011, 147-195. Opposing any military influences: Chr. Joest, *Die Mönchsregeln der Pachomianer*, Leuven 2016, 50 with further literature in footnote 182; J.E. Goehring, *The Origins of Monasticism* in: Goehring, *Ascetics*, 13-35, esp. 29; F. Ruppert, *Das pachomianische Mönchtum und die Anfänge klösterlichen Gehorsams*, Münsterschwarzbach 1971, 265-271.
- 19 J. Grossmann, *Die Legende von Pachomios dem Rekruten* in: M. Popovic, J. Preiser-Kapeller (eds.), *Junge Römer – Neue Griechen. Eine byzantinische Melange aus Wien*, Vienna 2008, 55-71.
- 20 G¹ 98; SBo 194. See also: E. Wipszycka, *Moines et communautés monastiques en Égypte, IV^e-VIII^e siècles*, Warsaw 2009, 49-50; E.J. Watts, *Riot in Alexandria. Tradition and Group Dynamics in Late Antique Pagan and Christian Communities*, Berkeley 2010, 95-107.
- 21 A. Crislip, *Thorns in the Flesh. Illness and Sanctity in Late Ancient Christianity*, Philadelphia 2013, 109-138.

the Pachomians it is evident that the idea of self-improvement, to learn from struggle and failure in order to purify oneself and become *perfect* in the eyes of God, was a major component of being part of this community.²² If Pachomius really rose from prisoner to spiritual leader this would surely have been seen as a major turning point in his life or at least as an instructive anecdote by his biographers. But the focus of the episode above is firmly placed on Pachomius' meeting with a group of Christians that triggered his desire to join their religion and to serve others in need later on. From a literary point of view, Pachomius' affiliation with the Roman army thus creates a relatable and authentic atmosphere in order to highlight the compassion of his visitors. The historical accuracy does not seem as important. Nevertheless the apparent lack of further information on his military service is peculiar. Considering the magnitude of the event his biographers almost seem to treat this formative period of his life at a passing glance, how can this be?²³

The answer lies in the anachronisms that were inserted in this passage. The first is easy to spot – Pachomius already prays to God during his voyage on the Nile towards Thebes, before coming into contact with Christianity. The second one is of greater significance. At the beginning we are informed that emperor Constantine ordered the mass conscription in order to go to war against a Persian tyrant, who threatened his rule. Constantine emerged victorious out of the prolonged civil wars following the collapse of the Tetrarchic system.²⁴ He became the sole ruler of the Roman Empire in 324. From the *vita Constantini* of Eusebius of Caesarea and other historical sources we know that he planned a Persian campaign at the end of his reign, around the year A.D. 336.²⁵ Hence placing Pachomius' recruitment at the beginning of Constantine's rule clashes with the other available data we have of the saint's life, especially his death at age 60 in the 340s.

This opens up the possibility of another explanation: Both, Constantine and the Persian tyrant, were later alterations of the Life of Pachomius. Prematurely promoting the first "Christian" emperor to the purple and at the same time

22 Pachomius' desire to lead by example and refuse any special treatment permeates his life. See: S¹, Fragment 11, 5; SBo 47; 117; G¹ 54; 136. P. Rousseau, *Pachomius. The Making of a Community in Fourth-Century Egypt*, Berkeley 1985, 87–104.

23 In numerical terms: Of the 210 chapters the Bohairic Life devotes to Pachomius, and his successors Theodore and Horsiesus, only two mention his time in the military. In the shorter Greek *vita prima* the figures rise slightly with two to 150 chapters.

24 See in general J. Wienand, *Der Kaiser als Sieger. Metamorphosen triumphaler Herrschaft unter Constantin I.*, Berlin 2012, 197–352.

25 Eusebius, V.C., IV, 56, 1; E. Fowden, *Constantine and the Peoples of the Eastern Frontier* in: N. Lenski (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Constantine*, Cambridge 2006, 377–398.

creating an external, non-Christian threat seems like a very straightforward solution that was easy to conceive. Surprisingly though, Constantine does not feature as prominently in the Coptic sources as one would expect.²⁶ But as Tito Orlandi demonstrated the Age of Constantine, especially the so-called “*Legend of Eudoxia and the Holy Sepulchre*”, was of great interest to the Coptic Christians during the turmoil of the seventh century.²⁷ In the first half of this century the Persians, who in the past had already frequently invaded the country, as well as the unified Arab tribes successfully conquered Egypt.²⁸ It is thus feasible that both terms *Constantine* and the *Persian tyrant* were later added to the Bohairic and Arabic manuscripts of the *vita Pachomii* as a reference to contemporary events.²⁹

Therefore the historical Constantine was not involved with the conscription of Pachomius. Accordingly the actual tyrant in question should be one of Constantine's opponents for the imperial throne, the Dacian Licinus (308–324) or the Illyrian Maximinus Daia (305–308 as Caesar/308–313 as Augustus), who fought for the eastern half of the Empire in 312/313. Among these two Daia is the more logical choice. First of all his name appears in one manuscript containing the Greek *vita*,³⁰ but more importantly he favored the traditional cults, especially Serapis, and was also portrayed as being responsible for the last great persecution of Christians in Egypt.³¹ As a result the majority of our

26 T.G. Wilfong, *Constantine in Coptic. Egyptian constructions of Constantine the Great* in: S.N.C. Lieu, D. Montserrat (eds.), *Constantine. History, Historiography and Legend*, London 1998, 177–188; S.C. Lieu, *Constantine in Legendary Literature* in: N. Lenski (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Constantine*, Cambridge 2006, 298–325.

27 T. Orlandi et al. (eds.), *Eudoxia and the Holy Sepulchre. A Constantinian Legend in Coptic*, Milan 1980; H. Suermann, *Koptische Texte zur arabischen Eroberung Ägyptens und der Umayyadenherrschaft*, *Journal of Coptic Studies* 4, 2002, 167–182.

28 For the Persian Conquests of Egypt from the sixth century BC up to the seventh century A.D. see: O. Perdu, *Saites and Persians (664–332)* in: A.B. Lloyd (ed.), *A Companion to Ancient Egypt*, Vol. 1, Chichester 2010, 140–159; J.-L. Fournet, *Persian Egypt* in: Roger S. Bagnall et al. (eds.), *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History*, Vol. 9, Chichester 2013, 5192–5193.

29 Similar J. Grossmann, *Die Legende von Pachomios dem Rekruten* in: M. Popovic, J. Preiser-Kapeller (eds.), *Junge Römer–Neue Griechen. Eine byzantinische Melange aus Wien*, Vienna 2008, 59.

30 Manuscript B of the second Greek *vita* (G²). See A. Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia 1*, *Kalamazoo* 1980, 267.

31 H. Castritius, *Studien zu Maximinus Daia*, Kallmünz 1969, 43; 52–86; K.M. Giradet, *Das Jahr 311. Galerius, Konstantin und das Christentum* in: G. Bonamente et al. (eds.) *Constantino prima e dopo Constantine*, Bari 2012, 113–133, esp. 121–124; K. Ehling, *Sarapis contra Christum– Zur Religionspolitik des Maximinus Daia, Konstantins Gegenspieler im Osten* in: K. Ehling, G. Weber (eds.), *Konstantin der Große. Zwischen Sol und Christus*, Darmstadt 2011, 33–42; St. Pfeiffer, *Die religiöse Praxis im thebanischen Raum zwischen hoher Kaiserzeit und Spätantike* in: F. Feder, A. Lohwasser (eds.), *Ägypten und sein Umfeld in der Spätantike*.

(Christian) sources give him a negative treatment.³² Eusebius for example assesses his character with the following statement:

He suffered no one to surpass him in debauchery and profligacy, but made himself an instructor in wickedness to those about him, both rulers and subjects. He urged on the army to live wantonly in every kind of revelry and intemperance, and encouraged the governors and generals to abuse their subjects with rapacity and covetousness, almost as if they were rulers with him.³³

Apart from being a convenient literary motif to describe a bad emperor, the negative influence of Maximinus Daia on his soldiers could also be reflected in the crude behaviour of the other recruits in the Life of Pachomius. Ultimately it seems that the biographers of the *vita Pachomii* felt the need to hide the saint's association with the army of a known persecutor.³⁴ Fitting the military tenure of the founding father of the koinonia into a complaisant narrative of a Christian empire under attack by "the enemy of God" was a more attractive option to them instead.

Being a member of Daia's troops also has implications for the chronology of Pachomius' life. In a recent article Christopher Joest acknowledged his time in the military, but decided to put his recruitment in the year A.D. 307, and not in A.D. 312 as Ladeuze had done.³⁵ Joest believed that the growing tension between the Caesars would have created several opportunities for each contestant to bolster the ranks of his soldiers.³⁶ However his reasoning does not take into account that there is only one instance in the available timeframe where Pachomius could have been discharged from the military without facing (le-

Vom Regierungsantritt Diokletians 284/285 bis zur arabischen Eroberung des Vorderen Orients um 635-646, Wiesbaden 2013, 59-81. Licinus persecution of Christians has been put into question in recent scholarship. See B. Bleckmann, *Konstantin der Große*, 2nd edition, Reinbeck 2003, 79-97; W.H.C. Frend, *Persecutions: genesis and legacy* in: M.M. Mitchell, F.M. Young (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, Vol. 1. *Origins to Constantine*, Cambridge 2006, 503-523.

32 Eusebius, H. E., IX 1, 1-6; IX, 4,2; Lactantius, D. m. p., 36-40; M. Ijcks, *Bad Emperors on the Rise: Negative assessments of imperial investitures, AD 284-395*, *Klio* 94, 2012, 462-481.

33 Eusebius, H. E., VIII, 14,11.

34 Similar: D.J. Chitty, *The Desert a City. An Introduction to the Study of Egyptian and Palestinian Monasticism under the Christian Empire*, Oxford 1966, 7 with footnote 39.

35 P. Ladeuze, *Étude sur le cénobitisme pachômien pendant le ive siècle et la première moitié du Ve*, Leuven 1898, 237-241.

36 Chr. Joest, *Erneute Erwägungen zur Chronologie Pachoms (287-347)*, *Journal of Coptic Studies* 13, 2011, 158.

gal) consequences and that is after the victory of Licinus over Maximinus Daia in 313. A victorious emperor usually decided to pardon the soldiers of his enemy.³⁷ Such a gesture effectively displayed his clemency, an important imperial virtue, and avoided further bloodshed, but it also served the practical purpose of integrating the enemy units into his own army. In addition all elements unfit or unwilling to continue their time of duty, like the conscripted soldiers, could be released from their previous obligation.

If we instead assume that Pachomius simply left the army on his own terms, he would have been treated as a deserter and persecuted by the Roman authorities.³⁸ A fugitive on the run, hunted by the military – this again feels like appealing literary material to work with for any biographer, especially considering the uneasiness with which many Christian authors regarded war and the (un-)just use of violence.³⁹ As with the image of a redemptive prisoner turned abbot there is no trace of Pachomius's stint in the army coming to an unlawful end.

Another aspect of the biographical report that requires consideration is the imprisonment of Pachomius. The Bohairic *vita* mentions that he spent time in jail twice, first in Thebes and then in Antinoe/Antinoopolis. Interestingly enough we also hear that Pachomius and his fellow recruits were allowed to roam Antinoopolis freely to buy food and visit other establishments. Of course such an order of events would contradict the need to imprison the recruits in the first place. Since this detail is only given in the Bohairic and related Arabic accounts we can probably attribute it to a mistake of the authors. Given that we receive no additional information about the location of the prison complex in Thebes, I do not think we have to view it as a public facility in the city center,

37 H. Leppin, *Coping with a Tyrants Faction. Civil-War Amnesties and Christian Discourses in the Fourth Century AD* in: J. Wienand (ed.), *Contested Monarchy. Integrating the Roman Empire in the Fourth Century AD*, Oxford 2015, 198–214.

38 SB.xxiv.16333 demonstrates such a procedure. For an in-depth analysis see: A.M. Kaiser, *Die Fahndung nach Deserteuren im spätantiken Ägypten* in: P. Schubert (ed.), *Actes du 26e Congrès international de papyrologie, Genève, 16–21 août 2010*, Geneva 2012, 381–390; G. Wesch-Klein, *Hochkonjunktur für Deserteure? Fahnenflucht in der Spätantike* in: Y. Le Bohec, C. Wolff (eds.), *L'armée romaine de Dioclétien à Valentinien Ier. Actes du Congrès de Lyon, 12–14 septembre 2002*, Lyon 2004, 475–487.

39 J. Swift, *Early Christian Views on Violence, War and Peace* in: K.A. Raaflaub (ed.) *War and Peace in the Ancient World*, Oxford 2007, 279–297; H.C. Brennecke, »An fidelis ad militiam converti possit«? [Tertullian, *de idololatria* 19,1] *Frühchristliches Bekenntnis und Militär im Widerspruch?* in: U. Heil (ed.), *Ecclesia in re publica. Studien zur Kirchen- und Theologiegeschichte im Kontext des Imperium Romanum*, Berlin 2007, 179–233; J.F. Shean, *Soldiering for God. Christianity and the Roman Army*, Leiden 2010, 71–105.

as Grossmann did.⁴⁰ On the contrary the archaeological record shows that the famous temple of Luxor on the east bank of the Nile was reused as a legionary camp in Late Antiquity.⁴¹ The heavily fortified base had direct access to the Nile as well as two large tetrastyla open to the public, and with 3.72 ha of interior space there should have been sufficient room to fit a prison or at least a larger holding cell into it.⁴² In these cells the soldiers, who had offended military discipline would be put in custody until their commanding officers decided upon the appropriate punishment.⁴³ Pachomius and the other conscripted recruits could have stayed there as well. Since they did not willingly join the military, the risk of flight might have justified keeping them under guard.⁴⁴ We know of a similar incident from the late fourth century where a recruit by the name of Psois was detained for purposefully injuring his finger to avoid being drafted to the army.⁴⁵ This would also be an indication that Pachomius and his company were still in the preliminary stages of their military career. After their initial assessment the recruits first had to conduct a basic training to reach their full qualification for duty, in legal terms a time of proba-

40 J. Grossmann, *Die Legende von Pachomios dem Rekruten* in: M. Popovic, J. Preiser-Kapeller (eds.), *Junge Römer–Neue Griechen. Eine byzantinische Melange aus Wien*, Vienna 2008, 62.

41 N. Pollard, *Imperatores castra dedicaverunt: Security, Army Bases, and Military Dispositions in Later Roman Egypt (Late Third-Fourth Century)*, *Journal of Late Antiquity* Volume 6, 1, 2013, 3-36; M. El-Saghir et al., *Le Camp romain de Louqsor (avec une étude des graffites gréco-romains du temple d Amon)*, Cairo 1986, 11-16; 25-33; 121-122; P. Grossmann, *Christliche Architektur in Ägypten*, Leiden 2002, 347-362.

42 J.-U. Krause, *Gefängnisse im Römischen Reich*, Stuttgart 1996, 252-254.

43 For the conditions in a military prison and the punishment for fugitives see the military laws from Ruffus, Article 39: "Soldiers, who escape from custody as prisoners, if they prepare for flight by breaking their shackles, or by breaking open some part of the prison, or by practicing some other deceit upon the keepers, they shall be punished with death. But if they escape through the negligence of the keepers to whom they have been entrusted, they shall be punished less severely." Taken from C.E. Brand, *Roman Military Law*, Austin 1968, 163.

44 Scholars often have highlighted the negative aspects of military recruitment and conscription, like the self-mutilation of potential recruits, but the other end of the spectrum has to be recognized as well. In Egypt military service steadily gained popularity during the fourth century, especially if the soldiers were able to acquire an assignment close to their home. A.M. Kaiser, *Die Rekrutierungspraxis im spätantiken Ägypten* in: C. Wolff (ed.), *Le métier de soldat dans le monde romain. Actes de cinquième Congrès de Lyon, 23-25 septembre 2010*, Lyon 2012, 109-125; A.D. Lee, *War in Late Antiquity. A social History*, Routledge 2012, 74-98; Y. Le Bohec, *L'armée romaine sous le Bas-Empire*, Paris 2006, 55-67. For the administrative changes during the fourth and fifth century see: C. Zuckermann, *Two Reforms of the 370s: Recruiting soldiers and senators in the divided Empire*, *Revue Byzantine, Revue des études Byzantines* 56, 1998, 80-121.

45 P. Herm. 7. Psois petitioned the anchorite John to intervene on his behalf. For a discussion of this document see: C. Zuckerman, *The Hapless Recruit Psois and the Mighty Anchorite, Apa John*, *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 32, 1995, 183-194.

tion (*probatio*). Before entering the ranks of the soldiers they then swore an oath (*sacramentum*) and were added to the muster roll (*matrix*) of their respective units.⁴⁶ As newly recruited members of the army they were also entitled to the customary food rations (*annona*). These rations could be doled out in kind or converted into a certain amount of cash (*adaeratio*). Each soldier received a portion commensurate to his rank. Officers demanded multiple annona-rations per day, whereas lower ranks had to content themselves with a single unit or even half-rations.⁴⁷ In general the soldiers basic dietary needs were well met but their regular meals were far from being overabundant and luxurious. Basil of Caesarea could thus conveniently compare the dietary regime of a soldier to that of an ascetic.⁴⁸ The Life of Pachomius gives us a similar impression. At no point is it explicitly stated that the conscripts were not provided any food in Thebes, just that their Christian visitors gave them bread and victuals at night. Considering that they received money to buy food the following day, the opposite could also be the case. The “great affliction” the recruits suffered then would have resulted to a larger degree from the mental duress of a night in prison. This would fall in line with the other evidence, literary and documentary, we have of the prison system in Late Antiquity.⁴⁹ Constantine himself had issued a law to improve the conditions of the inmates, specifically called *miseri*, because they were often chained together in overcrowded cells and treated harshly by the guards. The charity of Christian groups was about the only source of comfort an inmate could hope for.⁵⁰

2.1 *Pachomian Travelogue?*

From an administrative perspective, the journey of Pachomius offers another interesting detail. We hear that he and his fellow recruits were first ferried to Thebes and then in just one day even further north to Antinoopolis. This raises

46 Ulpian, Digest 29, 1, 42; Vegetius, Ep. r. m. 11.5. For such a matrix, dating to the sixth century, see now: A. Benaissa, *A recruit's enrolment in a military unit and a new dux Thebaidis* in: J.-L. Fournet, A. Papaconstantinou (eds.), *Mélanges Jean Gascou: textes et études papyrologiques* (P.Gascou), Paris 2016, 55-64.

47 F. Mitthof, *Annona Militaris. Die Heeresversorgung im spätantiken Ägypten. Ein Beitrag zur Heeresgeschichte des Römischen Reiches im 3. Bis 6. Jh. n. Chr.*, Vol. 1, Florence 2001, 208-248; M. Junkelmann, *Panis militaris: die Ernährung der Soldaten oder der Grundstoff der Macht*, Mainz 1997, 86-94.

48 Basil, *De ieiunio* (PG 31,185-188).

49 S.T. Tovar, *Violence in the Process of Arrest and Imprisonment in Late Antique Egypt* in: H. Drake et al. (eds.), *Violence in Late Antiquity: Perceptions and Practices*, Ashgate 2006, 101-110; J. Hilner, *Prison, Punishment and Penance in Late Antiquity*, Cambridge 2015, 119-151; J.-U. Krause, *Gefängnisse im Römischen Reich*, Stuttgart 1996, 271-345.

50 C.Th. 9,2,3 = C.I. 9,4,1.

several questions. For example the distance between Thebes and Antinoopolis (roughly 400 km) could hardly have been covered in one day.⁵¹ Even if we attribute problems of time and space to the hagiographical nature of the text, the route they took still requires some consideration. Prior to his defeat in 313, Maximinus Daia was active in Asia Minor. We could of course assume that all additional troops were to be transferred there immediately after their recruitment. At the beginning of the fourth century the highest ranking military commander of Egypt, the *dux Aegypti et Thebaidos utrarumque Libyarum*, was stationed at Alexandria. The capital therefore could have been used as a rallying point. But without at least rudimentary training these fresh units would not have been of great use in actual combat. It thus seems more plausible that the recruits were en route to be formally enrolled into the military registers. The civil authorities responsible for this procedure, the *praeses Thebaidos* and his *officium*, were located in Antinoopolis.⁵² This however leaves the question when they were trained for active duty? The military camp in Thebes and the surrounding region would seem an ideal environment, even under the special circumstances of a large-scale conscription, but the *vita* stresses that their stay there was only temporary.⁵³ Just as with the appearance of the emperor Constantine and the Persian tyrant, the few specifics of Pachomius' time in the army could again be an anachronism of his biographer. The papyrological evidence shows us that the diocese of Egypt, as an administrative entity containing six provinces, was created by the end of the fourth century (around A.D. 381). Shortly afterwards the military command structure was changed as well. At some point between 384-391 the Thebais received its own military commander (*dux Thebaidos*), who generally resided in Thebes but could also be active in Antinoopolis.⁵⁴ Recent scholarship on the Pachomians has preferred

51 Even with a constant top speed of four nautical miles an hour the journey would have taken over two days. The Orbis Geospatial Network Model of the Roman World accordingly lists the duration of travel from Thebes (Thebai) to Hermopolis Magna (closest available polis to Antinoe) at five days. <<http://orbis.stanford.edu/> last used on 10.08.18>.

52 B. Palme, *Die Organisation der Statthalterbüros im spätantiken Ägypten* in: R. Rollinger et al. (eds.), *Altertum und Gegenwart: 125 Jahre Alte Geschichte in Innsbruck. Vorträge der Ringvorlesung Innsbruck 2010*, Innsbruck 2012, 207-236.

53 For military training see in general: P. Rance, *Simulacra Pugnae: The Literary and Historical Tradition of Mock Battles in the Roman and Early Byzantine Army*, Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies 41, 2000, 223-275; P. Rance, *Campidoctores, vicarii vel tribuni: the senior regimental officers in the late Roman army and the rise of the campidoctor* in A.S. Lewin, P. Pellegrini (eds.), *The Late Roman Army in the Near East from Diocletian to the Arab Conquest*, Oxford 2007, 395-409.

54 B. Palme, *The imperial presence: Government and army* in: R.S. Bagnall (ed.), *Egypt in the Byzantine World 300-700*, Cambridge 2007, 244-271; C. Zuckerman, *Comtes et ducs en Égypte autour de l'an 400 et la date de la Notitia Dignitatum Orientis*, *Antiquité Tardive* 6,

such a late date for the creation of the biography.⁵⁵ We can thus speculate that the author used his present day experiences to reconstruct the different stages of Pachomius' life. In short, military recruits from the Thebais would have been collected from their respective villages. Their basic training was then conducted at a suitable facility in the region. Afterwards they swore their military oath in Antinoopolis and were then dispersed among the army units stationed in Egypt.

3 Conclusion

After delving into the various scenarios and problems of Pachomius' military career, as well as contextualising the biographical report with other source material, we can now conclude that the inconsistencies in the biographical episode were most likely the result of a literary scheme to disguise the saint's involvement with the army of the persecutor Maximinus Daia. Apart from his recruitment, it is not possible to discern how exactly Pachomius was involved in the civil war between Daia and Licinus. Likewise we cannot deduce his emotional state during his military tenure. However we can be fairly certain that he came in contact with the different organizational structures of the army and experienced the daily minutiae of this organization. Following one year of service he was granted a release from his duty without facing any repercussions. The most striking feature of this episode therefore is that it allows us a brief glimpse into the formation, adaption and alteration of the Pachomian group tradition.

1998, 137-147; R. Rémondon, *Le P.Vindob. inv. 25838 et les commandants militaires en Égypte au IV^e siècle*, *Chronique d'Égypte* 40, 1965, 180-197; For evidence of a *dux* in Antinoopolis in the fifth century see: N. Lubumierski, *Vita Shenutii, Die Vita Sinuthii. Form- und Überlieferungsgeschichte der hagiographischen Texte über Shenute den Archimandriten*, Tübingen 2007, 198-201.

55 P. Grossmann, *Der Osterfeststreit 387, das Wunder des Theophilos und eine Episode aus der Vita des Horsiesos*, *Journal of Coptic Studies* 11, 2009, 23-43.