

**Pachomius as Discovered in the Worlds of  
Fourth Century Christian Egypt,  
Pachomian Literature and Pachomian  
Monasticism:  
A Figure of History or Hagiography?**

by

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## **Abstract**

The primary aim of the thesis is to discover the Pachomius of history in preference to the Pachomius of hagiography. The surviving direct links to Pachomius and the Pachomian era remain the original Pachomian texts, Pachomian monasticism, and Pachomian spirituality. While all these sources provide invaluable information, there are a number of problems associated with them. Pachomian literature is of a highly hagiographic nature, and care must be taken when accepting its historical and chronological accuracy. Since Pachomian monasticism ceased to exist during the early part of the seventh century, it is necessary to rely on the research carried out by various Pachomian scholars, including James Goehring, Graham Gould, Philip Rousseau, and Armand Veilleux, to assess its value. With regard to Pachomian spirituality, this is evidenced in his prayers, spiritual teachings, Instructions and writings. The literary works of Horsiesios and Theodore also provide an insight into the spiritual world of Pachomius.

Because of the lack of historical evidence it became necessary to fashion a methodology based on a two pronged approach: an indirect and a direct one. The first examined all the influences responsible for moulding the character of the youthful Pachomius. This indirect approach included assessing the importance of the Hellenism of the Ptolemies, the pragmatism of the Romans, the intellectualism of Gnosticism, the mores of ancient Egypt, and the world of the desert fathers. The direct approach included a review of all the Pachomian texts, and in particular assessment of their value as Pachomian sources. To arrive at a final judgment concerning the historical Pachomius, it was necessary to collate

all this material, and assess its value.

This approach resulted in an appreciation of the intellectual and spiritual wealth of early Egyptian Christianity. It also provided an introduction to the outstanding figures of this era: Antony, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Athanasius, Melitius, Basilides, Valentinus and others. It placed in perspective the problems associated with the development of orthodox Christian doctrines and the emergence of an institutionalized form of Christianity. The Pachomius of history achieved greatness, and as a man he did not need the embellishments and exaggerations offered by hagiography.

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## Abbreviations

|     |                                   |
|-----|-----------------------------------|
| AB  | Analecta Bollandiana              |
| ABR | American Benedictine Review       |
| Ag  | Arabic Life held at Gottingen     |
| Av  | Arabic Life held at the Vatican   |
| Bo  | <i>Bohairic</i> Life              |
| G1  | First Greek Life                  |
| HTR | Harvard Theological Review        |
| JEH | Journal of Ecclesiastical History |
| JRS | Journal of Religious Studies      |
| JTS | Journal of Theological Studies    |
| S   | Sahidic Lives                     |
| SBo | Composite <i>Bohairic</i> Life    |
| SM  | Studia Monastica                  |
| SP  | Studia Patristica                 |
| VC  | Vigiliae Christianae              |
| VBr | Vita Brevis                       |
| VTh | Life of Theodore                  |

## Preface

In the attempt to discover the reality of the historical Pachomius, a number of problems emerged, the main one being the lack of substantial historical evidence. This deficiency was overcome, to a large degree, by researching all the relevant Pachomian texts, making allowance for their hagiographic nature. Two other important sources were Pachomian monasticism and the world of Pachomian spirituality, which symbolized both his humanity and his sanctity. What started as a rather onerous task, became an all-consuming challenge. This attempt to discover the reality of the Pachomius of history also led to the discovery of the world of Egyptian Christianity. Perhaps the most interesting of the many issues involved, was how Pachomius and his monks adapted to the cenobitic way of life, and its effect on their spirituality. This and other topics emerged in the search for the historical Pachomius, and it was extremely difficult to put them to one side.

My thanks are due to the many people who helped me in every aspect of my studies. My wife Yvonne became my editor, advisor, critic and research assistant, also the coordinator of all operations. My family, James and Jane, Frances and Hugh, Moya, Michael and Julie, offered me their wholehearted support and encouragement, and also provided me with a computer to make my studies more manageable. My son-in-law, Hugh Dixon, was also always available to monitor the vagaries of the computer, and my constant companion, 'Toby' Drayton, whiled away many an early hour with me, and along with my grandchildren, helped maintain a sense of proportion at all times. I am grateful to

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It would be remiss of me not to thank the staff of Fisher Library at Sydney University, and also the Veech Library at Strathfield, for their generous help in locating obscure source material. The Coptic Theological College at Arncliffe was also supportive, as were the Cistercian monks at the monastery at Tarrawarra in Victoria, who enabled me to contact the Pachomian scholar Armand Veilleux at his monastery in Belgium. I am grateful also to my friends, Paul Musgrave who guided me through the minefield of English grammar, and Hector Morrison who helped unravel the mysteries of theological concepts.

The Department of Studies in Religion has provided me with much enjoyment and intellectual inspiration. What started out as another academic exercise, became a source of great satisfaction. For me Pachomius and his monks were no longer only shadows belonging to fourth century Egypt, but compatriots in a world enriched by their unique spirituality.

## Chapter One

# Socio-Economic Survey of Egypt under Ptolemaic and Roman Rule, Prior to the Advent of Christianity

## 1.1 Introduction

The primary aim of the thesis was to discover the reality of the Pachomius of history, as opposed to the Pachomius of hagiography. This proved to be a difficult task, as the surviving Pachomian literature, which is still the major source of information concerning the Pachomian era, is of a highly hagiographic nature.<sup>1</sup> These texts are the only direct link to Pachomius and the Pachomian era, and the Pachomian *Vitae* remain the only surviving biographies of Pachomius. They provide invaluable information but, because of their hagiographic nature, must be treated with a degree of caution. Their authors were monks who lived with Pachomius or knew monks who had lived with him, and they were chiefly concerned with presenting a rather idealistic image of Pachomius and the Pachomian monastic way of life, as well as advancing the cause of Christianity. Their integrity is not in question, though it is possible they were not overly concerned with paying a great deal of attention to the details of historical and chronological minutiae.

The other major source of information is the monasticism, founded by Pachomius. He became its father superior for over twenty years, during which time nine monasteries for

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<sup>1</sup> These Pachomian texts include three of the Pachomian *Vitae*; *The First Greek Life* (G1); *The Letter of Ammon to Theophilus*; writings of Pachomius; Horsiesios and Theodore. Whenever the term *Bohairic Life* is used in the thesis, it refers to the *Composite Bohairic Life*, (Sbo) *Composite Bohairic Life* (SBo); three fragmentary *Sahidic Lives* (S1, S2, S10); *The Paralipomena*.

men and two for women were established, and these bore the imprint of his spirituality, and stood as a visible symbol of the life of the Pachomius of history. A detailed study of these monasteries, including the daily lives of the monks, provided an insight into the character of Pachomius and his way of thinking and dealing with the many problems that arose. It is a valuable source of information, as it allows an informed judgment to be made, not by relying on the opinions and conclusions of other people, but by observing how Pachomius acted as a monk and the founder of a revolutionary form of cenobitic monasticism. This was the real Pachomius, and it is possible to discover him within the world of Pachomian monasticism. There can be seen his failings and weaknesses, his achievements, his greatness, the depths of his spirituality and his humanity.<sup>2</sup> Further valuable information came from the archaeological investigations carried out at the sites of ancient monastic establishments in Egypt, and this provided information concerning the layout of the monasteries and the nature of the daily lives of the monks.<sup>3</sup> A number of scholars have also made available the results of their research and this has proved to be of great assistance.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For a description of Pachomian monasticism and the daily life of a Pachomian monk, refer to D. Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1993; M. Burrows, 'On the Visibility of God in the Holy Man: A Reconsideration of the Role of the Apa in the Pachomian Vitae', *Vigiliae Christianae*, 41, 1987, pp. 11-33; G. Gould *The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community*, Clarendon Press, London, 1993; J. Goehring, *Ascetics, Society and the Desert: Studies in Egyptian Monasticism*, Trinity International Press, Harrisburg, PA, 1999, pp. 53-72, 89-109. P. Rousseau, *Pachomius: The Making of a Community in Fourth Century Egypt*, University of California Press, Berkeley/London, 1985, pp. 57-104.

<sup>3</sup> Refer to H. Evelyn White, *The Monasteries of the Wadi'n Natrum, Part Two: The History of the Monasteries of Nitria and Scetis*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1932. Evelyn White's work was first published more than seventy years ago in 1932, but it still remains one of the most valuable sources of information concerning the nature and layout of early Egyptian monasteries and also of the conditions under which the monks lived. See C. Walters, *Monastic Archaeology in Egypt*, Aris and Phillips, Warminster, England, 1974.

<sup>4</sup> These scholars include J. Goehring, G. Gould, P. Rousseau, A. Veilleux.

Pachomius was a Copt, born into an impoverished Egyptian farming community situated near Sne in the Upper Thebaid. Egypt was a multicultural society, dominated by the mores of ancient Egypt, the dogmatism of Judaism, the Hellenism of the Ptolemies, the pragmatism of Rome, and the spirituality of Christianity. Pachomius lived in an outlying village, removed to a large degree from the sophisticated life of the urban areas. Alexandria had become the cultural, intellectual and religious centre of Egypt, with large Greek and Jewish communities. It would be a fantasy to imagine Pachomius reaching maturity in this environment. He grew up in an outlying farming village, far removed from the cities, but it is possible these various cultural influences could have filtered through to him at Sne. It seems probable he received only a minimal education, and spoke only the Coptic *Sahidic* dialect, so any real contact with Greek people would not have taken place. Pachomius, during his youthful years, belonged to Egypt, but this was to change.

At the age of twenty he was conscripted into the army of Maximin Daia and came into contact with a group of Christians who inspired him to discover more about their faith. His time in the army must have been an overwhelming experience for him, and he became a man overnight. He converted to Christianity at a village known as Chenoboskion, and remained there for three years before deciding to become an anchorite. After seven years he believed he was called by God to establish a new form of communal living, and at the age of thirty founded Pachomian monasticism. For the remaining twenty years of his life he nurtured and expanded his monastic establishments,

and bequeathed to Christianity a revolutionary form of communal spirituality.<sup>5</sup> This is an extremely abbreviated life of Pachomius, but it forms the basis for the attempt in this thesis to discover the reality of the historical Pachomius.

The Pachomian *Vitae* and the *Paralipomena* offered excellent accounts of Pachomius' spiritual life, but only brief cameos of his life as a man. To discover the reality of him both as a man and a monk, it is necessary to discuss in detail the influences responsible for moulding his character, and in addition the major events connected with his monastic life. Next, in order to discover the reality of Pachomius the man, it is necessary to provide an answer to the questions the Pachomian sources leave unanswered. These answers will be based on interpretation, coupled with the use of informed speculation, in an attempt to discover how and why Pachomius acted as he did.

## **1.2 Brief outline of the Pre-Ptolemaic period of Egyptian**

### **History**

In 671 BCE the Assyrians entered Egypt as conquerors, and after seven years, in 664, Pssammetichus was installed as its puppet king. He was a more than competent administrator and when Babylon rose up against Assyria he severed all ties with his native country. Egypt was, for a period, ruled by a series of native kings. In 525 the Persians conquered Egypt and it came under their domination for the next hundred years. The Persians regarded Egypt as a virtual treasure house to be plundered at will, and they exploited and oppressed the Egyptian people, showing scant respect for their traditional

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<sup>5</sup> Sbo and G1 provided the information upon which these assertions have been

values and religious beliefs. In 490 the Persians were defeated by a Greek army at Marathon, and nine years later, Amyrtaios of Sais drove them out of Egypt.<sup>6</sup> Persia made a number of further attempts to re-capture Egypt and finally succeeded in 341. Years of harsh Persian rule followed until, in 332, Alexander the Great wrested Egypt from Persian control, entering the country as a liberator, not as a conqueror.

### **1.3 Egypt under Ptolemaic Rule**

Two historical periods dominated the evolution of the Egyptian nation, prior to the advent of Christianity: the Ptolemaic and the Roman. In 336 Alexander the Great ascended the throne of Macedonia and as the commander in chief of a mighty army, set out to conquer the then known world. In 334 he declared war on Persia, which was ruled by Darius III, and after a series of battles he destroyed the Persian army and liberated Egypt.

Alexander did not consider the Egyptians as a conquered people, and insisted that their cultural and religious customs be treated with the greatest respect. He spent a mere seven months in Egypt but laid the foundations for the arrival of Hellenism and the Ptolemaic era. He ordered the reconstruction of the Egyptian temples at Karnak and Luxor, and when he visited Memphis made offerings to Apis the bull, sacred to the god Ptah. Alexander was not only a brilliant military leader, but also colonized his conquests with great success. In November 332 he was crowned king of Upper and Lower Egypt, and in

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<sup>6</sup> For further information refer to J. Wilson, *The Burden of Egypt: An Interpretation of Ancient Egyptian Culture*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1951. B. Watterson, *Coptic Egypt*, Scottish Academic Press, Edinburgh, 1988, pp. 1-15.

accordance with Egyptian religious traditions, became a god. Alexander bequeathed three outstanding gifts to Egypt: Hellenism, the city of Alexandria, and the Ptolemaic era.

During the reign of the Ptolemies, Egypt began to enjoy periods of political stability and economic growth. It became an important part of the Mediterranean world, which was becoming increasingly Hellenized. Great improvements were made in the area of Egyptian agriculture, and in the latter part of the Ptolemaic era, new crops were introduced and a massive improvement in the irrigation system was implemented. As a result, trade and commerce flourished and the Ptolemies set about restructuring the administration of the Egyptian nation. They introduced a pyramid system of bureaucratic control with the king at its apex, while various levels of civil servants comprised the body of the pyramid. Sub-officials, who controlled the villages that combined to form the thirty-six *nomes* of Egypt, formed the base of this structure.<sup>7</sup> In the short term though, this reconstruction had an adverse effect on the Egyptian economy; in the long term it was to Egypt's advantage.

The economy of Egypt during the early Ptolemaic period was overseen by a virtual amalgamation of royal control and private ownership. A new monetary system was established, which allowed only royal coinage to be circulated in Egypt. An elaborate form of banking was set up, which strictly monitored the movement of money in the country. Trade increased under these changes, and Egypt began to enjoy a period of prosperity and expansion, with the potential to become one of the wealthiest and most

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<sup>7</sup> Green believed 'the Ptolemies had followed the ancient Pharaonic system whereby the state had been personified in and identified with the king. Egypt's territory was his private property. Productivity had fallen considerably and systems of taxation no longer guaranteed the state ready capital'. H. Green 'The Socio-Economic Background of Christianity in Egypt', *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity* in *Studies in Antiquity and Christianity*, ed. B. Pearson and J. Goehring, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1992, p. 102.

politically stable of the Mediterranean states.<sup>8</sup> The Ptolemies treated the religion of the indigenous Egyptian people with the greatest respect, and they realized the importance of controlling the power of the temple priests, and of limiting their political influence.

The Greek members of the community tended to identify their native gods with those of the Egyptians, for example Zeus with Amon, Apollo with Horus and Hephaestus with Ptah.<sup>9</sup> Over the years the Greeks began to experience a growing dissatisfaction with their own religious traditions and developed an interest in the mystery religions of the Orient. They sought a more redemptive form of religion, which would offer them a personal association with their deities.<sup>10</sup> The Hellenization process in Egypt was greatly assisted by the religious tolerance displayed by the Ptolemaic regime, and their attitude helped to bring about an increasing social interaction between Greek and Egyptian communities. The Ptolemaic era certainly added to the cultural and intellectual life of the upper echelon of the Egyptian people, but it is doubtful its influence played a direct major role in the life of the average Egyptian peasant.

Under the guidance of the Ptolemies, Alexandria became the most important port in the Mediterranean, and helped Egypt to become a leading trading nation.<sup>11</sup> It became a living symbol of Hellenism's two major gifts to Egypt, Greek culture and intellectualism. By

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<sup>8</sup> For a further history of the Ptolemaic era refer to A. Bowman, *Egypt after the Pharaohs 332 BC to 642 AD: From Alexander the Great to the Arab conquest*, British Museum, London, 1986; H. Bell, *Egypt from Alexander the Great: A Study in the Diffusion and Decay of Hellenism*, Gregynor Lectures, 1946, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1948.

<sup>9</sup> G. Holbl, *A History of the Ptolemaic Empire*, trans. T. Saavedra, Routledge, London, 2001, pp. 77-112.

<sup>10</sup> Bell believed 'the Greeks were craving for a more personal relationship to the deity and for a more redemptive religion. These they found in Oriental cults more than in anything the official religion of Greece could offer'. Bell, *Cults and Creeds in Graeco-Roman Egypt Being the Forwood Lectures for 1952*, University Press of Liverpool, Liverpool, 1953, pp. 2-3.

<sup>11</sup> C. Haas, *Alexandria in Late Antiquity*, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1997, pp. 19-90.

320 it had displaced Memphis as the capital of the Ptolemaic kingdom and developed into a city of great beauty. Its planning has been associated with Dinocrates, perhaps the most famous architect of his day. The city was divided into five regions, designated by the first five Letters of the Greek alphabet, and great wealth flowed into Alexandria. It gained the reputation of being the centre for trade and commerce in the world of the Mediterranean. Migrants flocked to the city and it became a cosmopolitan domain that absorbed the culture of various ethnic communities. As a Hellenized city, Greek customs and traditions dominated, and in time this became a cause for friction between the Greek, Jewish and Egyptian communities.

Alexandria adopted a constitution, which allowed the establishment of a city council employing a number of magistrates. They were responsible for enforcing the wishes not only of the king, but also of the people. The Greek citizens formed what became known as the 'gymnasium society', which allowed them to protect their Greek heritage and, follow the life style of an elitist society. At the same time many Jews had settled in Egypt, living in enclaves that formed a part of one of the five regions of Alexandria.<sup>12</sup> Under the rule of the Ptolemies, the Jewish people enjoyed many privileges and were allowed to follow their own religious traditions and laws, thus adding a Judaic element to the culture of the Egyptian people. After the arrival of Christianity however, dissension developed between the four communities, Greek, Jewish, Christian and Egyptian, and the indigenous Egyptians felt discriminated against, and believed their religious traditions were threatened.<sup>13</sup> Alexandria attracted the elite of the intellectual world, and as a result, the

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp. 91-127.

<sup>13</sup> R. MacLeod, *The Library of Alexandria*, I.B. Tauris, London, 2000, pp. 61-76, 127-142.

<sup>13</sup> R. Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1993, pp. 111-142.

arts and sciences flourished. An academy of learning, the *Museion*, with its magnificent library was established there, and the city gained the title of the Queen of the Mediterranean. It epitomized the intellectual world of Greek thought.<sup>14</sup>

In their effort to Hellenize Egypt, the Ptolemies established a number of Greek cities, including Alexandria, Naukrates and Ptolemais. The basis of Egyptian wealth at this time was its agriculture, which remained under the control of the king with the aid of the temple priests. The great influx of wealth did not reach the many villages in the countryside, there the peasants continued to eke out a miserable existence, as they lacked the educational background to make use of all available opportunities. They were exploited and oppressed to some degree, and remained entrenched in the traditions that governed Egyptian village life.<sup>15</sup> In the cities and urban areas Egyptian society came to realize the importance of embracing a Hellenistic way of life. In order to gain access to the 'gymnasium society', they were virtually forced to speak and read Greek and accept Greek names. Inter-marriage became another way they could enter the elite world of Hellenistic society. This state of affairs created a great deal of resentment among the Egyptian people. Hellenism however had a great impact upon Egypt and was responsible for aiding, in an indirect way, the rise of Christianity in Egypt.

During the Ptolemaic era Egypt experienced three centuries of prosperity and expansion, along with a period of great stability. The Ptolemies had succeeded in establishing a Hellenistic way of life, which added new dimensions to the cultural traditions of the

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., pp. 128-172.

<sup>14</sup> R. MacLeod, *The Library of Alexandria*, I.B. Tauris, London, 2000, pp. 61-76, 127-142.

<sup>15</sup> R. Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1993, pp. 111-142.

Egyptian people. The overall result of the Hellenization of Egypt was to enable it to take its place as the economic, political and intellectual capital of the Mediterranean. This was the country that became the eastern province of the Roman Empire, and also the future cradle of Christianity in the eastern world.

## **1.4 Egypt under Roman rule**

After the battle of Actium in 31 and the subsequent deaths of Antony and Cleopatra VII, Egypt became a vassal of the Roman Empire. There was no longer any claimant to the throne of the Ptolemies and the victorious Octavian (Augustus Caesar) appointed a Roman equestrian as the Prefect of Egypt. A military force, composed of three Roman legions, together with a number of auxiliary cohorts supported him.<sup>16</sup> The first appointee was Cornelius Gallus, a Roman poet and senator, who was directly answerable to the Emperor. Augustus soon recognized the potential wealth of his latest acquisition, and it became his private treasure chest. During the first four centuries, Rome and the provinces were ruled by a number of dynasties. The Julio Claudian dynasty ruled from 14 to 68 CE, the Flavian from 69 to 96, the Antonines from 96 to 192, and the Severan dynasty from 193 to 235. This was followed by fifty years of virtual military anarchy, which witnessed the rule of thirty emperors. Diocletian founded the Tetrarchy towards the end of the third century, and Constantine the Great, in 312, was victorious at the battle of Milvian Bridge. He became the emperor of a united Empire<sup>17</sup> and decriminalized Christianity. Towards the end of the fourth century, during the reign of Theodosius, it was to become the state religion.

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<sup>16</sup> N. Lewis, *Life in Egypt Under Roman Rule*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1983, pp. 9-17.

At the beginning of Roman control, Augustus Caesar ruled for forty-one years. He was an astute political figure, an excellent administrator and a man of vision. He came to look upon Egypt as his personal treasure house and laid the foundations for it to become an important Roman colony. During the Augustan era the emperor was content to allow the Ptolemaic system of administration to continue for some time. He later instituted a number of changes, which included appointing a *strategos* to take charge of each *nome*, supported by a number of magistrates and a large body of civil servants. He insisted the army was not to be under civil control, but to be directly answerable to him. Augustus laid the foundation for Egypt to become an extremely successful Roman satellite.

Egypt possessed great agricultural wealth and this enabled it to supply one third of Rome's requirement for grain. It is of interest to note that slave labour played virtually no part in Egyptian agriculture, as the land was usually worked by tenant farmers assisted by hired hands, such as day labourers. Families of peasants also played an important role in Egyptian agriculture, and Pachomius' family belonged to a typical Egyptian farming community. The innovative Roman approach to irrigation helped to increase the output of various cereal crops, as previously the farmers were completely dependent upon the level of the Nile.<sup>18</sup> The importance of the Egyptian farmers to the economy of Egypt, and to the food supply of Rome, encouraged the Emperor Hadrian to grant them substantial tax relief.

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<sup>17</sup> For a brief history of Constantine, J. Boardman, J. Griffen, O. Murray, ed. *The Oxford History of the Classical World*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1991, pp. 856-858.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 107-133.

Taxation became the means by which Rome attempted to control the increasing wealth of Egypt, and to guarantee a continuous supply of revenue for the Emperor. The Romans developed an extremely efficient system of taxation, which was far superior to that installed by the Ptolemies.<sup>19</sup> The major effect of this on the Egyptian population was exploitation and repression, which increased the poverty endured by the peasants and farm workers. Even the temples were required to pay tax, both on their income and also on the value of the temple land, and many people fled to the Egyptian desert to avoid the unfair burden of the Roman tax laws. Officials realized the problems faced by the businessmen and landowners, and offered lower tax rates to them. Towards the end of the third century many Roman civil servants had become lazy and inefficient, and they lacked the motivation to maintain the level of work necessary to secure the required amount of taxation returns. During the third and fourth centuries, possibly due to the intervention of Diocletian, Egypt began to show signs of an economic revival, but taxation still remained an onerous burden on the Egyptian people. The Christians endured persecution and oppression during this time and many people fled into the desert to escape martyrdom. During the reign of Constantine (306-337), persecution of the church diminished and it began to flourish. Pachomius and his monks were then able to practice their monastic way of life, free from the threat of persecution.

Traditional Egyptian religion continued to flourish in the areas removed from the cities. As was the case with the Greeks during the Ptolemaic era, a merger of Roman deities with a number of Egyptian gods occurred. There now existed in Egypt three sets of Gods: Greek, Egyptian and Roman, and a certain degree of syncretism also occurred. Rome

traditionally refused to interfere in the religious practices of the provinces, and this approach helped the people to accept Roman rule.<sup>20</sup> The acceptance by the Romans of the divinity of the Emperor coincided with the Egyptian belief in the divinity of the Pharaohs, and this became a common denominator between the two faiths. The religious world of Egypt was to be changed with the advent of Christianity. Both the Ptolemies and the Romans had played a role in aiding, albeit indirectly, the Christianization of Egypt.

## **1.5 The Advent of Christianity into Egypt**

The Christianity that came to Egypt, possibly in the late first or early second century, was closely associated with Judaism. It was however to develop a decidedly Greek character in the latter part of the second century. Two important issues concerning the Christianization of Egypt will be discussed in Chapter. Two of the thesis: When did Christianity reach Egypt, and the nature of the early Christian teaching. The early church was subjected to a number of persecutions, instigated by the emperors Decius, (249-251) and Diocletian (284-306), and many Egyptian Christians were martyred. Though a number of Christians apostatized during this period, many remained loyal to the Christian faith. Two results of these persecutions included the flight of many people to the safety of the Egyptian desert and the emergence of the Melitian schism. With the accession of Constantine the Great to the leadership of the united Roman Empire, the church began to enjoy a period of peace and expansion.<sup>21</sup> Other forces however were gathering, which threatened to destroy the very fabric of Christianity, and these were mainly of Gnostic origin.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pp. 156-184.

Many administrative changes, which occurred in Roman Egypt during the third and fourth centuries, coincided with the arrival of Christianity and the emergence of the Byzantine Empire. The relationship between Egypt and Rome became strained with the founding of the city of Constantinople in 330. A power struggle developed between the Alexandrian bishops and the imperial authorities in Constantinople, but Rome's dependence upon Egyptian agriculture helped the Alexandrian church to retain its place as a dominant force in the world of Christianity. This overview of the history of Egypt before the time of Pachomius, is an attempt to describe the world, which welcomed him and his cenobitic form of monasticism into Egypt.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., pp. 84-106.

<sup>21</sup> A. Kee, *Constantine versus Christ*, SCM Press, London, 1982, pp. 1-27, 88-101.

## Chapter Two

### Christianization of Egypt

#### 2.1 Origins of Egyptian Christianity

A major problem confronting scholars, as they attempt to unravel the complexities and uncertainties surrounding the coming of Christianity to Egypt, is the lack of substantial historical evidence associated with this period. Despite a great deal of research into literary and archaeological sources, three important questions remain unanswered: Exactly when did Christianity reach Egypt? Who was responsible for bringing Christianity to the Egyptian people? What was the nature of early Egyptian Christianity?

The answer to the first question remains locked in the world of conjecture. Scholars are unable to decide exactly when Christianity entered Egypt, although consensus is that it probably arrived either late in the first or early in the second century.<sup>22</sup> Many theories have been advanced to explain its arrival into Egypt, but conclusions remain speculative. It has been suggested that an Alexandrian Jew named Apollos, an alleged associate of the apostle Saint Paul, was responsible for its arrival, probably around the middle of the first century.<sup>23</sup> This belief depends upon an interpretation of passages from the *Acts of the Apostles* and lacks any other form of corroboration.

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<sup>22</sup> Roberts understood the problems that faced scholars studying the history of the early Egyptian church and wrote ‘the obscurity that veils the early history of the church in Egypt, does not lift until the beginning of the third century, constitutes a conspicuous challenge to the historian of primitive Christianity’. Roberts, *Manuscripts, Society and Belief in Early Christian Egypt, the Schweich Lectures of the British Academy*, published for the British Academy, London, 1977, p. 1. Griggs supported this view as he believed ‘no manuscript has yet been discovered which defines the time when Egyptian Christianity was founded or chronicled the religions earliest development along the Nile’. Griggs, *op. cit.*, p.13.

<sup>23</sup> *Acts* 18:24, 19:1-10.

Up to the present time hardly any acceptable evidence has been presented to substantiate the claim, that a number of Christian communities existed in Egypt prior to the second century. Despite this, certain traditions continue to hold that Christianity existed in some parts of Egypt during the latter part of the first century, and some documentary evidence has been advanced to support this belief. This includes a letter, allegedly written during the first century by the emperor Claudius to the people of Alexandria, which discussed the problems associated with an influx of Syrian Jews into Alexandria. Sections of this letter have been interpreted as referring to the presence of Christians in first century Egypt. Salomon Reinach, supported by a number of scholars including M. Cumont, accepted this view. Other scholars including Griggs, were more cautious in their assessment of the historical value of this letter.<sup>24</sup>

In his 1977 Schweich Lectures to the British Academy, C. Roberts provided an illuminating insight into the world of early Egyptian papyrology. This has proved to be an invaluable source of information, and has enabled scholars to penetrate the ‘deathly silence’ that enveloped the history of the early Egyptian Christian church.<sup>25</sup> He placed great emphasis on the use and interpretation of *sacra nomina* as a tool for paleographers, in their study of

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<sup>24</sup> Bell wrote ‘Reinach’s idea found no general acceptance and it seems to me both unnecessary and unconvincing’. Bell, *Cults and Creeds in Graeco-Roman Egypt*, University of Liverpool Press, Liverpool, 1953, p.78. Griggs believed that ‘the founding of life in the Christian movement in Egypt was obscured by legends which are difficult to evaluate for historical accuracy’ and added ‘the belief of Reinart and Cumont that Christian proselyting was responsible for social unrest cannot be defended’. Griggs, op. cit., pp. 13-19.

<sup>25</sup> He prefaced his lectures with the following statement: ‘the purpose of these lectures is to discover whether the Christian literary papyri, both biblical and other, can be called on as evidence for the history and character of the church in Egypt’ Roberts, op. cit., p 2. He stressed that a number of factors must be taken into account, including the state of preservation of the papyri and the need for correct interpretation and evaluation of the information provided by them.

ancient religious texts.<sup>26</sup> Roberts quoted J. Danielou as supporting the role of *sacra nomina* in this study.<sup>27</sup> He firmly believed that the examination of Christian papyri indicated Christianity had reached Egypt from Palestine, in a form strongly influenced by Judaism, though he offered no clear indication as to when this occurred.

## **2.2 Four Theories Concerning the Arrival of Christianity in Egypt**

Many theories have been advanced to explain how Christianity came to Egypt. Their conclusions are based on speculation, traditional legends and pious beliefs, unsupported by firm evidence. An early hypothesis claimed that the presence of the holy family in Egypt resulted in the advent of Christianity into that country. This argument is based on a passage in Matthew's Gospel<sup>28</sup> that describes the flight of the holy family to Egypt, to escape the clutches of Herod. For Coptic Christians, the presence of the infant Jesus in the country was a gift from God, and they built many shrines to commemorate this event. They believed the physical presence of the infant Son of God was responsible for many graces being granted to Egypt and its people. This pious belief has become an integral part of their religious tradition, but lacks any degree of historical substantiation and belongs to the realm of faith.<sup>29</sup>

The second theory claimed Mark the evangelist was responsible for bringing, not only Christianity to Egypt, but also for founding the church of Alexandria, becoming its first bishop, establishing the Catechetical School of Alexandria and being Egypt's first martyr. These beliefs belonged to the traditional teachings of the early Coptic Church, and through

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., pp. 26-48.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>28</sup> Matthew 2:13.

<sup>29</sup> Griggs, op. cit., p.13.

Mark's alleged association with the Egyptian church it is able to claim its right to Apostolic succession.<sup>30</sup> These pious beliefs are not based on historical evidence, but a statement credited to Eusebius is believed to substantiate them. This is of dubious value, as Eusebius prefaced his statement by adding the term 'they said' to his comment that Mark had been sent to Egypt, and thus gave the impression that he was passing on a pious belief and not an historical fact.<sup>31</sup>

Another source of information concerning Mark is the apocryphal work *The Acts of Mark*, which offered an hagiographic rather than historical account of his life in Egypt.<sup>32</sup> It is possible to accept Mark was actively involved in the Christianization of Egypt, but whether he performed all the activities attributed to him remains doubtful.<sup>33</sup> Devout Coptic Christians, during the early days of Christianity, built up a rich tradition of pious beliefs,

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<sup>30</sup> A.S. Atiya, *History of Eastern Christianity*, Methuen and Co., London, 1968, pp. 25-28.

<sup>31</sup> Eusebius *The Ecclesiastical History*, The Loeb Classical Library, Vol. 1, Ed. T. Page and W. Rouse, trans. K. Lake, William Heinemann, London, 1926, p. 143.

For opinions concerning Mark's role in the Christianization of Egypt see Grigg's comment. He noted 'the assertion that Mark was the first missionary to Egypt is also couched in somewhat ambiguous terms, for Eusebius had no document or authority beyond the local tradition (they say)'. Griggs, op. cit., p.20 and passim.

Pearson took a more cautious position and believed 'the historicity of this tradition though unproveable should not be ruled out' B. Pearson, 'Earliest Christianity in Egypt :Some Observations', *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity*, in *Studies in Antiquity and Christianity*, ed. B. Pearson, J. Goehring., Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1992, pp. 133-156.

Bell considered the theory of Mark as the first Christian missionary to Egypt to be extremely doubtful, Bell, *Cults and Creeds in Graeco-Roman Egypt – Being the Forwood Lectures for 1952*, University of Liverpool Press, Liverpool, 1953, Lecture 4, p.79.

Bauer wrote concerning Mark and Egypt, 'the fact one has to rely on legends is a fresh and clear indication that historical recollection did not support and never was the basis of such a view'. Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1971, p. 60. Bauer also put forward the theory (a rather controversial one) 'that Rome placed at the disposal of orthodox Alexandria the figure of Mark as founder of the church (in Egypt) and apostolic initiator of the traditional succession of bishop'. Bauer, op. cit., , p.60

<sup>32</sup> The English translation of this work is by A. Callahan, 'The Acts of Mark: An Introduction and Translation', in *The Coptic Church Review*, 1933, Vol. 14, no. 1, pp. 3-10

<sup>33</sup> Pearson discussed the place of the *Acts of Mark* in early Christian literature. Pearson, op. cit., 1992, pp.140-145. He wrote that the Acts of Mark was 'a fabulous piece of hagiography utterly devoid of historical value'. Pearson, op. cit., p.,140, in Footnote no. 37.

which depended upon acts of faith. It is possible to assume that Pachomius, a Copt who spoke only the Sahidic dialect, after his conversion would have been influenced by these widely held beliefs.

The third hypothesis, known as the ‘Pentecostal theory’, claimed that Alexandrian Jews converted to Christianity at the time of Pentecost, and on their return to Egypt from Jerusalem, acted as Christian missionaries. The Jewish community in Egypt at this time was mainly concentrated in and around Alexandria, and if the Pentecostal theory were correct, then these Jewish enclaves would have become a base for the Christian missionaries.<sup>34</sup>

The fourth theory is associated with the third and claims it was possible that traders and travelers who had converted to Christianity would have attempted, on their arrival in Egypt, to spread the Christian message. This, if correct, indicates that Christianity in its early days would have been found in both the Jewish and Greek communities. The first two theories are based primarily on pious traditional beliefs, which lack any degree of historical substantiation. The belief that the Holy Family’s presence in Egypt was responsible for the rise of Egyptian Christianity, while it added greatly to the spirituality of the Coptic people, lacks the backing of any firm evidence. The same judgment must be passed on the second claim that Mark the evangelist brought the Christian faith to Egypt, though this belief remains deeply entrenched in the Coptic religious tradition. The two remaining hypotheses

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<sup>34</sup> In *Acts 2* there is a description of the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles and of the way the crowd heard the Christian message each in his own language. Griggs gave his support to the Pentecostal theory when he wrote ‘ it is possible pilgrims in the audience not only took some form of Christian belief back to their homeland but might have been expected to proselytize subsequently’ Griggs, op. cit., p.14.

offer a more reasonable explanation for the arrival of Christianity into Egypt, but they too, cannot be historically validated.

## **2. 3 Nature of Early Egyptian Christianity**

The next question to be considered is the nature of early Christian teachings presented to the Egyptian people by Christian missionaries. These religious zealots faced a world dominated by Hellenistic philosophy, Gnostic thought, the entrenched presence of the ancient Egyptian religion, and the polytheism of the Graeco-Roman religions. At this time great interest was also shown in the so called mystery religions of the Orient, and there was a movement away from polytheistic beliefs, to an acceptance of a form of monotheism. This was no doubt assisted by the presence of Judaic thinkers, who maintained the existence of the one true god. The teachings of Philo were of a mystical nature, and greatly influenced the intellectual world of Egyptian Jewry, prior to the advent of Christianity. He showed great respect for the teachings of Plato, and attempted to prove that the Scriptural message was compatible with philosophical truths.<sup>35</sup> In an indirect way he has been credited with preparing the minds of the Jewish people for the arrival of Christianity.

The Christian message presented to the Egyptian people was apostolic in origin and expressed in terms of Judaic tradition. It seems logical to conclude that it gained a foothold in the Jewish enclaves and spread from there to the Greek communities.<sup>36</sup> It is possible to assume, as the number of Christian converts increased, they would have banded together in

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<sup>35</sup> J. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, Adam and Charles Black, London, 1975, p. 19. Philo was a devout Jew and also a brilliant scholar who made an attempted to reconcile the biblical teachings with rational thought and made a considerable contribution to Jewish thought.

communities and spread out to different parts of Egypt, mainly in the urban areas. Without the presence of a guiding authority, each community would have developed its own version of the Christian message.<sup>37</sup> The identity of the early missionaries to Egypt remains uncertain, as does the extent of their knowledge of the Christian message, and their ability to pass on the teachings of Christ to the people. It could be assumed that a somewhat informal version was taught, during the early days of Egyptian Christianity.<sup>38</sup>

The early church was closely associated with the Alexandrian Jewish communities, but this dependence was soon to change. In 115 the Jewish people revolted against the Roman authorities and the emperor Trajan ruthlessly repressed this uprising. In so doing he virtually annihilated Alexandrian Jewry, which resulted in the early Egyptian Christians losing their links with Judaism, and forced them to seek refuge with the Greek communities. This witnessed the radical demise of Judaic Christianity, and the evolution of a gentile form. At this time Christianity lacked a coherent and concise set of teachings, and there was little idea of what constituted orthodoxy and heretical teachings.<sup>39</sup> Demetrius, the bishop of Alexandria from 189 to 231, realized the perils facing the fledgling church in Egypt, and set out to establish an institutionalized and a more structured church. This was the atmosphere that prevailed at the time of Pachomius' conversion, and was responsible for encouraging him to seek refuge in the spirituality of the desert. The presence of Demetrius and later Athanasius

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<sup>36</sup> Griggs, op. cit., pp. 45-70 and W. Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1971, pp. 44-60.

<sup>37</sup> Griggs appreciated the dangers associated with this state of affairs and wrote 'no argument can be presented and defended which shows that doctrinal or ecclesiastical unity in the [early] Christian church was of great concern in the first and early second centuries in Egypt' Griggs, op. cit., p. 46. It is possible that ecclesiastical control of Christian teachings did not occur until the episcopate of Demetrius (189-231).

<sup>38</sup> This assumption is given some credence by the description in *Acts* of Apollo's ministry in the early days of Christianity. It tells how Apollo 'knew only the Baptism of John and how Priscilla and Aquila felt it necessary to take him aside and explained the Way of God to him more accurately'. Acts 19:24-27.

would have provided Pachomius with a more settled and traditional teaching of the Christian faith.

## 2.4 The World of the Desert Fathers

The world of the desert fathers was to become the most important influence in the life of Pachomius. After his conversion to Christianity he spent three years living in a Christian commune at Chenoboskion. There he followed a life devoted to caring for the needs of others, and was ‘encouraging toward anyone who came to him, and his renown went out to many people’.<sup>40</sup> He increased his knowledge of the Christian faith and attempted to follow the example of the Apostles. Towards the end of these three years he came to realize his spiritual life was stagnating, and decided to become an anchorite. He approached a holy hermit named Palamon and asked to be accepted as his disciple. Palamon instructed him in every aspect of the anchorite way of life, and for seven years they remained together. Pachomius heeded Palamon’s warning that ‘this work of God is not so simple; for many have come but have not persevered’.<sup>41</sup> However he became steeped in the values and customs of the desert fathers, and the spirituality of the desert was to remain with him until the day he died.

This world symbolized the emerging spirituality of Christian Egypt, and it was to become an integral part of Pachomian monasticism. The anchorites each day faced the reality of their mortality, as they sought to separate themselves from the mundane world and enter the realm

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<sup>39</sup> In *Early Egyptian Christianity* Bauer claims that ‘there were gentile Christians alongside Jewish Christians with both movements resting on syncretistic foundations’, Bauer, op.cit., p.53.

<sup>40</sup> SBo, p. 29:8.

<sup>41</sup> G1, p. 301:6.

of the sacred. Pachomius embraced their way of life, which became a form of martyrdom in which suffering replaced pleasure, fear and doubt took the place of certainty, and renunciation of the material world became the primary aim. It was a harsh life, which refused to accept any compromise. A number of would be desert fathers came to the desert, not motivated by a desire to serve God, but to escape from exploitation, oppression, poverty, famine, harsh taxation and the threat of conscription into the Roman army. They were offered a life that allowed them to share in the sufferings of Christ, an offer they soon refused. Pachomius and many of the desert fathers persevered in this spiritual purgatory, and emerged Christians in the full sense of the word. In the prologue to *Lives of the Desert Fathers* its author (possibly Rufinus of Aqueleia) wrote:

I saw new prophets who have attained a Godlike state of fulfillment by their inspired, wonderful, and virtuous way of life. For they are true servants of God<sup>42</sup>

A detailed study of the lives of individual desert fathers provides an insight into the evolution of the spirituality and humanity of the Pachomius of history. These holy men lived in a world immersed in the mores of fourth century Christian Egypt. Many of the supernatural events described in *Lives of the Desert Fathers* and *Sayings of the Desert Fathers* seem to belong to the world of religious fantasy, but perhaps this is too harsh a judgment. For the anchorites these remarkable events - the appearance of demons, angelic visitations and other miraculous happenings, including the direct intervention of God in their daily lives - were a reality. To gain an understanding of their traditions and beliefs, it is essential not to reject these events as being incompatible with rational thought, but to understand that for the desert fathers, they had actually occurred, and were an integral part of

their daily lives. Each anchorite sought to overcome all sensual and sexual desires and weaknesses, by enduring extreme practices of asceticism, and long hours of prayer, coupled with constant periods of fasting and manual work, in the solitude of the Egyptian desert. Their major goal was to attain the knowledge of and union with God, and they sought to become citizens of his kingdom.

John of Lycopolis epitomized the ideals of the desert fathers, which were to become an essential part of Pachomian spirituality. He treasured the solitude of the desert, and lived in a cave for forty years, practicing extreme forms of asceticism. His fame led many people to visit him, but he preferred to only ‘give his blessing through a window, and in this way greeted those who came’.<sup>43</sup> He possessed a deep understanding of the needs of people, and always treated them with compassion. He would advise them to ‘try through asceticism to free the appetites from passion’.<sup>44</sup> This concentration on overcoming sexual desire by self-inflicted suffering, is a recurring theme in anchorite thought, and Pachomius continually stressed it in his instructions to his monks. John was an extremely humble man who credited all his achievements to God, and this attitude was mirrored by Pachomius, who also attempted to make ‘humility the chief aim in [the] ascetic life’.<sup>45</sup>

The desert fathers’ refuge was the solitude of the desert, and even there they were subjected to demonic temptations, which gave them little peace. They had embraced a life of suffering in imitation of a God they could not see, and the only reality they knew was everything they

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<sup>42</sup> *Lives of the Desert Fathers: The Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*, trans. N. Russell, Mowbray, London, 1981, p. 49.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

had renounced. Abba John had become both a mystic and a contemplative, and he was able to ‘stand unimpeded in the presence of God without any anxiety holding him back’.<sup>46</sup> If this was the result of his life as a desert father, then its value is beyond question. John of Lycopolis died as he had lived: ‘bending his knees in prayer, he died and departed to God’.<sup>47</sup>

Towards the end of his life, Pachomius also became a contemplative and a mystic. This was illustrated in his prayer life and in the visions he described, in particular the account of his journey to Paradise.<sup>48</sup> His death stands in contrast to that of Abba John, for Pachomius died in agony from the effects of the plague, and was tortured by a sense of failure. Perhaps in death his experience echoed the rejection of Christ by the world.

The role the Scriptures played in the spiritual lives of the desert fathers cannot be over emphasized. Antony advised his followers: ‘Whatever you do, do it according to the testament of the Holy Scriptures’.<sup>49</sup> Pachomius completely accepted this anchorite tradition, modeled his rules on the scriptural message, and also urged his monks to continually read and memorize it. The Scriptures were virtually the only spiritual reading available to the desert fathers, and their lives revolved around the texts of both the old and the new testaments. The major part of the *synaxis*, which was held both in the morning and at night in every Pachomian monastery, involved studying the Scriptures. Perhaps this explains why the *Pachomian Vitae* and the writings of Pachomius, Horsiesios and Theodore are filled with biblical quotations.

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 62

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>48</sup> SBo, pp. 166-167:114.

<sup>49</sup> *Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*, trans., B. Ward, Mowbray, London, 1975, p. 2.

Two concepts constantly occupied the minds of the anchorites, the nearness of death and the inevitability of the final judgment, with its accompanying threat of eternal damnation. These two ideas were responsible for shaping their approach to eschatology, and it engendered a fear of God, which tended to increase their sense of the spiritual.<sup>50</sup> Pachomius, who appeared to fear God just as much as he loved Him, adopted this same approach to spirituality. He was continually tortured by the fear of eternal punishments, and he taught his monks of the horrors awaiting unrepentant sinners, in order that ‘they might have fear of God and avoid sinning and falling into such punishments and tortures he had seen’.<sup>51</sup> This fear of God, coupled with ascetic practices, belonged to the traditions of the desert fathers, and there is little doubt they shaped Pachomius’ own spirituality and moved him to introduce them to his monks.

The practice of asceticism became the anchorites’ major means of both increasing their spirituality, and at the same time, of combating the constant attacks of the demons that sought to seduce them away from God. These demonic forces assumed many forms, particularly those of monsters, or on occasion of beautiful alluring women. These manifestations belonged to the world of the desert fathers, and Antony believed the forces of evil acted by ‘fabricating phantasms, transforming themselves, and imitating women, beasts and reptiles’.<sup>52</sup> Pachomius and his monks, according to the *Paralipomena*, and the

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<sup>50</sup> ‘Just as a lamp lights up a dark room, so the fear of God, when it penetrates the heart of a man, illuminates him, teaching him all the virtues’. Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>51</sup> Sbo, op. cit., pp. 117:88.

<sup>52</sup> Athanasius, *The Life of Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus*, trans. R. Gregg, SPCK, London, 1980, p. 48.

*Pachomian Vitae*, also allegedly experienced these supernatural occurrences, and it appears they were an essential element of early Christian hagiography.

Ascesis became one of the most prominent features of the anchorite way of life, and Pachomius and the Pachomian monks practiced it. Pachomius and John of Lycopolis both preached moderation, as they realized excessive practices of asceticism could not only endanger health, but could also destroy spiritual life, by becoming an end in themselves. Antony also warned his followers that ‘some have affected their bodies by asceticism, but they lack discernment, and so are far from God’.<sup>53</sup> Despite these pleas for moderation, both the anchorites and the Pachomian monks continued in their zeal to achieve spiritual perfection, by indulging in excessive forms of self-mortification. It must be remembered that these so called religious exercises were an important part of the spiritual traditions of fourth century Christian Egypt, and it would have been unthinkable for authorities to outlaw them.

Pachomius was a dedicated anchorite, and renunciation, which in its purest sense became the keystone of Pachomian spirituality, also belonged to the ethos of the desert fathers. He refined the concept of renunciation, and it came to include even the practice of obedience, as the acceptance of lawful authority signified that a person had renounced his freedom of action, in both his mental and physical capabilities. Pachomius reasoned that by giving up personal freedom, an individual was able to follow and love God completely. Antony urged his followers ‘to devote all our time to the soul instead of to the body’.<sup>54</sup> It seems that the concept of free will was not a part of the world of the desert fathers.

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<sup>53</sup> Anon. *Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*, trans. B. Ward, Mowbray, London, 1981, p. 2

<sup>54</sup> Athanasius, *Life of Antony*, trans. R. Meyer, Newman Press, London, 1950, p. 65.

They embraced the virtue of poverty in all its forms, and this too became a part of renunciation, as it allowed the monks to separate themselves finally from all worldly cares and desires. Abba Andrew summed up the monastic life when he said ‘these three things are appropriate for a monk; exile, poverty and endurance in silence’.<sup>55</sup> Pachomius enlarged on this concept of the virtue of poverty, and placed before his monks the many practical applications associated with it. In their attempt to make each Pachomian monastery economically and agriculturally self sufficient, a number of monks erred in their charitable and ethical responsibilities. In one, case, when a sale of wheat produced an unfair profit for a monastery, Pachomius rebuked his monks and made them refund the money they had gained.<sup>56</sup> A further example of the problem caused by a rejection of the virtue of poverty occurred, when Apollonios of the monastery at Thmousons engaged in unfair financial dealings, and was censured by Horsiesios. Apollonios refused to accept the authority of Horsiesios and a division occurred within Pachomian monasticism resulting in Horsiesios’ resignation.<sup>57</sup>

Humility was a virtue prized by the desert fathers, and Abba John of the Thebaid taught ‘the monk must gain humility: for it is the first commandment of the Lord’.<sup>58</sup> He realized that without humility, any attempt at following a spiritual way of life was doomed to failure. This virtue was the basic element of all Christian virtues, and Abba Orr taught ‘the crown of the

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<sup>55</sup> Anon. *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, op. cit., p. 32.

<sup>56</sup> *Paralipomena* ch.21. ‘About the hundred coins of wheat’, *Pachomian Koinonia*, Vol. Two, Cistercian Publications, Michigan, 1981, p. 47.

<sup>57</sup> G1, pp. 387-388:127-128.

<sup>58</sup> *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, op. cit., p. 90.

monk is humility'.<sup>59</sup> Pachomius understood the importance of placing one's whole life in God's hands, and accepting that whatever was achieved, was directly due to God's help and not to a person's own ability. Obedience was an integral element of humility, as it involved placing authority above one's own wishes. Palamon had taught Pachomius that every virtue had its origin in the practice of humility, and Pachomius instructed his monks that 'humility is the rampart of the virtues, the treasury of works, the saving armor, and the cure for every wound'.<sup>60</sup>

The mystical nature of the spirituality of the desert fathers was perhaps its most enduring feature. Their concentration on asceticism allowed them to sanctify suffering per se. From this they argued that, as Christ brought salvation to the world through his death and passion, then it was their responsibility as 'other Christs' to share in his salvific sufferings. They carried this conviction a stage further, and came to believe that, like Simon of Cyrene, they could lift the cross from Christ's shoulders even for a short time, by extreme practices of self-mortification. The simplicity of their beliefs was the hallmark of their mystical spirituality, and they held that it allowed them to draw closer to God, by virtue of a faith that lacked the convoluted reasoning of theologians. Pachomius was to bring this spiritual ethos of the anchorites to the world of Pachomian monasticism.

The relationship between Pachomius and Palamon resembled that between a pupil and a teacher, and it was typical of the many relationships that developed between the desert fathers and their disciples. It became a training exercise in spiritual living, and this formed

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 207.

<sup>60</sup> 'Pachomius, Instruction Concerning a Spiteful Monk', *Pachomian Koinonia*, Vol. Three, Cistercian Publications, Michigan, 1982, p. 35.

the basis of the instructions which Pachomius, Horsiesios and Theodore gave to the Pachomian monks. It could be said Pachomius institutionalized the life of the desert fathers, and that Pachomian monasticism was a continuation of their world and its eremitic form of monasticism.

## Chapter Three

### Life of Pachomius

#### 3.1 Early Years

According to traditional belief Pachomius was born in Upper Egypt during 290 CE and died in 346. He was raised in a pagan farming community near Sne in the Upper Thebaid, and very little is known of his early years. It is possible to assume he would have followed the traditional life of a young Egyptian peasant, accepting the values, customs and religious beliefs that were a part of early Egyptian village life.<sup>61</sup> The influence of the Roman presence was certainly a dominating factor in Egypt during the fourth century, but it is debatable whether it would have reached the villages situated some distance from the urban areas. The possible exceptions would have been through tax collectors and members of the Roman army. There are two references to the youthful Pachomius in the Pachomian *Vitae*, but unfortunately the first is of a highly hagiographic nature. It describes in some detail Pachomius' alleged rejection of the pagan religion, when his parents took him to offer sacrifice to the pagan gods. He refused to take part in the ceremonies, and the officiating priest referred to him as 'the enemy of the Gods...and the boy [Pachomius] sighed after God and went away home'.<sup>62</sup> This description of Pachomius' alleged behaviour clearly belongs to a hagiographic tradition. It seems the authors of the *Vitae* were primarily concerned with disassociating Pachomius from any links with paganism, and not with providing historical information, at least on this occasion.

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<sup>61</sup> For a detailed description of Egyptian village life refer to R. Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1993, pp. 110-140, 181-225.

<sup>62</sup> Bohairic Life in *Pachomian Koinonia Vol. One*, Cistercian Publications, Michigan, 1980, p. 25:4.

The second reference is to Pachomius' being 'not too sturdy'.<sup>63</sup> This three-worded phrase is extremely important, as it is virtually the only reference to his physical appearance. From this brief comment it could be said that he was a rather frail, possibly timid youth, who did not possess any outstanding features or personality. It must be admitted this is purely conjecture, but it may provide a vague idea of how Pachomius appeared as a youth.

### 3.2 Conscript and Convert

No other definite information concerning Pachomius is available until he reached the age of twenty and was conscripted into the Roman army of Maximin Daia.<sup>64</sup> This was a turning point in the life of Pachomius, who was forcibly removed from the security of a close knit rural community and thrust into the harsh and completely strange world of the Roman army. His army service exposed him to a brutal way of life dominated by ruthless discipline and training in how to die for Rome. He also gained experience in the skills associated with the construction of bridges and encampments. At the same time he experienced a communal way of life based on a structured system of command. These skills stood him in good stead when he reached Tabennisi and established his first monastery. His style of cenobitic monasticism was an evolved blending of his experience as an anchorite and as a conscript.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 27:7.

<sup>64</sup> For information concerning the life of Pachomius refer to three *Pachomian Vitae*; fragments of three Sahidic Lives S1, S2 and S10; the *Coptic Composite Bohairic Life* Sbo; and the First Greek Life G1 in the *Pachomian Koinonia* Vol. One, Cistercian Publications, Michigan, 1981, pp. 19-70; Paralipomena in *Pachomian Koinonia* Vol. Two, Cistercian Publications, Michigan, 1981, pp. 19-70, P. Rousseau, *Pachomius: The Making of a Community in Fourth Century Egypt*, University of California, Berkeley, 1985, pp. 57-77.

<sup>65</sup> For a description of life in the Roman army refer to D. Campbell, *The Roman Army 31BC – AD 337: A Source Book*, Routledge, London, 1994, pp. 9-20, R. Alston, *Soldier and Society in Roman Egypt: A Social History*, Routledge, London, 1995, pp. 94-96, 111-112. As a general reference, J. Roth, *Logistics of the Roman Army at War from 264BC to 235AD*, Brill, Boston, 1999.

It was during his time in the army when he was ‘sunk in great affliction’<sup>66</sup> that he experienced one of the most important events in his life, a meeting with a group of devout Christians. These people treated the conscripts with great kindness and compassion, and introduced Pachomius to a world he had never encountered before. He wondered who they were, and was told ‘they are Christians and they treat [us] with love for the sake of God of heaven.’<sup>67</sup> This chance meeting sowed the seeds for his conversion to Christianity. After Maximin Daia was defeated, his army was disbanded and Pachomius felt disinclined to resume his former way of life. His experiences as a conscript and his contact with his Christian benefactors had become the catalyst that changed him thereafter.

For some time he felt dissatisfied and unfulfilled. He began spending time in the desert speculating on his future, and finally decided to join a Christian commune based at a village known as Chenoboskion. Here he became immersed in the teachings and values of Christianity and decided to become a catechumen, and in 314 received the sacrament of Baptism. He remained at Chenoboskion for nearly three years, attempting to follow a way of life based on the teachings of the apostles. ‘Pachomius made progress in that place by his charity for all...and his renown went out to many people’.<sup>68</sup> The period he spent with this Christian community enabled him to grasp the principles governing the successful establishment of a spiritually based community. Four phases in his early life, monitored the preparation for his role as the founder of Pachomian monasticism: the time he spent as a youth in an Egyptian farming community, his conscription into the Roman army, his conversion to Christianity, and the three years he spent following the apostolic traditions.

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<sup>66</sup> SBo, p. 27:7.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.,, p. 27:7.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.,, p. 29:8.

### 3.3 Anchorite

After spending three years at Chenoboskion, Pachomius realized his spiritual life was stagnating, and then ‘moved by the love of God he sought to become a monk’.<sup>69</sup> To achieve this goal he approached Palamon, a holy desert father, and asked to be accepted as his disciple. After many tests Palamon finally accepted Pachomius as his companion, and for seven years ‘they practiced the asceticism together and gave times to prayer’.<sup>70</sup> This was Pachomius’ introduction to the eremitic way of life, with its concentration on extreme practices of asceticism, long hours of prayer, fasting and repetitive forms of manual work. With Palamon’s help he became a desert father, immersed in the traditions of Antonian spirituality, which equated suffering with the love of God. It is important to understand that the anchorite way of life was a form of a bloodless martyrdom, and it reflected the sufferings of Christ in a mystical way. Pachomius was to incorporate this tradition into his cenobitic monasticism, and both suffering and the practice of asceticism became the yardstick by which the monks measured their spiritual advancement. Both systems witnessed such a concentration on these practices, that they tended to become an end in themselves, and therefore could have lost much of their spiritual value.

It was during his life as an anchorite that Pachomius allegedly received his most important message from God. ‘Stay here [at Tabennesi] and build a monastery for many will come to you to become monks’.<sup>71</sup> Throughout his life he was alleged to receive many visions, apparitions and prophetic messages from God. These mystical experiences

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<sup>69</sup> The First Greek Life in *Pachomian Koinonia*, Vol. One., Cistercian Publications, Michigan, 1980, p. 301:6.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 302:6.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 305:12

became an integral part of his life, and for him they represented reality. He based his decisions on these messages and according to the hagiographic Pachomian literature, God guided him at all times. Pachomius, his followers, and the authors of the Pachomian *Vitae* accepted their authenticity. There are a number of conflicting explanations concerning these supernatural events. For Pachomius and his followers they were real happenings, and they were an indication of both his personal sanctity and the closeness of his relationship with God. Another possibility is that Pachomius could have attempted to bolster his authority and standing, by claiming divine intervention, and perhaps he had convinced himself that these events had really occurred. Every religious movement relies to an extent on belief in the presence of the supernatural, and in particular of divine intervention in the daily lives of the faithful. Theodore offered an interesting explanation concerning the presence of visions and other supernatural events ‘Let no one have doubts if he hears a man of God has a vision, for he who gives the vision dwells within him’.<sup>72</sup>

The seven years he had spent with Palamon formed the most spiritually productive period of his life. He had come to understand and appreciate the enormous value of the eremitic way of life, but at the same time he came to realize its shortcomings. He saw it was possible that its followers could become more concerned with their own spiritual advancement, possibly at the expense of their fellow anchorites, and this behaviour showed a lack of concern for the common good. He thought it was possible that their concentration on extreme practices of asceticism and prayer had resulted in the emergence of a competition among the desert fathers, to prove who suffered and prayed the most, and not who really loved God the most. He also believed the eremitic way of life could have

been responsible for producing an exclusivistic and elitist society, in which the ordinary Christian had no place. Antony appeared to understand this, though to what degree remains a matter for conjecture. He said to Zacchaeus that ‘in the beginning when I became a monk, there was no community to nurture other souls...and then your father [Pachomius] did the beautiful thing [established the *Koinonia*] from the Lord’.<sup>73</sup> This is not an attempt to denigrate the Antonian eremitic way of life, but to understand how Pachomius could have become inspired to establish a form of monastic life, which was more suitable for the majority of Christians, while basing this new establishment on certain of the Antonian traditions.<sup>74</sup>

### **3.4 Founder of Pachomian Monasticism**

After the death of Palamon, Pachomius decided to remain in the desert near Tabennesi to discover how to carry out God’s command. At this time he was joined by his brother John and they agreed to stay together and to follow the eremitic way of life. ‘they practiced a great ascesis carrying the cross of Christ’.<sup>75</sup> The sanctity of their daily lives gained them an outstanding reputation among the neighbouring anchorites. After a time a degree of friction developed between the brothers, but they managed to settle their differences and continued to live together amicably. After a period of time they were joined by a number of anchorites and this laid the foundation for a basic Christian community. ‘By God’s

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 393:135,

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 383:120.

<sup>74</sup> It is interesting to remember that in to-day’s monastic world, particularly in the Carthusian monasteries, provision has been made for monks to follow an eremitic way of life within the traditional life.

<sup>75</sup> Sbo, p. 41:19 and refer to G1, pp. 306-7:14-15.

providence three men came to him, that is Psentaesi, Sourous and Psoi and said to him ‘We want to become monks in your company.’<sup>76</sup>

The number of would be Pachomian monks gradually increased, and Pachomius believed his vision of a new form of monasticism was taking shape. With the increase in the number of monks, many problems arose, mainly concerned with the newcomer’s refusal to accept Pachomius’ authority. Also there emerged problems regarding the sexual behaviour of some of the men who ‘had a carnal mind and he expelled them from his dwelling’.<sup>77</sup> It is possible that some of the monks were uneducated and barely literate, not spiritually motivated, sexually active, and therefore psychologically unsuited for living in a close knit spiritual community. His first foundation was not a success and Pachomius was devastated. His failure could be traced to two fundamental errors; first his inability to insist upon complete obedience from his followers, and second the lack of an adequate screening of all the applicants, to determine their suitability to become members of a spiritually based community. After this initial failure he was determined never to repeat his mistakes. He established his monastic rule, which was to become one of the foundation stones of Pachomian monasticism, and subjected all applicants to a searching series of tests. About this time he was approached by his sister (according to the *Pachomian Vitae* her name was Mary), to help her establish a monastery for devout Christian women. He realized she was sincere and sent ‘the brothers to build a monastery for her a short distance from his own’<sup>78</sup> and gave her a copy of his rule to assist in

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<sup>76</sup> SBo, p. 45:23.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 74:26.

<sup>78</sup> SBo, p. 50:27.

establishing her community. It became a great success and she ‘was their mother and their worthy elder until her death.’<sup>79</sup>

Pachomius displayed great determination and resilience to recover from the disaster, but he was obviously deeply affected as he believed he had failed God. Throughout his life he regretted what had happened, and he continued to be plagued by doubts about his ability to establish a lasting monastic system. He was beset by visions that foretold the imminent demise of the *Koinonia*. He saw in one apparition ‘the whole community of the *Koinonia* in great pain...some were surrounded by great flames...others were in the midst of thorns whose points would pierce them’.<sup>80</sup> He was also constantly worried about its future after his death and feared the brothers ‘would not find anyone capable of comforting them rightly in the Lord’.<sup>81</sup> It seems Pachomius was an extremely sensitive person, with a possible tendency to introversion, and could have lacked complete confidence in his own ability. This assessment seemed largely contradicted by his achievements in establishing nine successful monasteries for men and two for women, but his possible feeling of inadequacy would have made life extremely difficult for him.

It is hard to understand how Pachomius was able to achieve his dream of establishing the world of Pachomian monasticism. The term ‘monastery’ gives rise to visions of a Benedictine or Carthusian monastery with magnificent gothic buildings, but this would have stood in stark contrast to the humble buildings of Pachomius, which belonged to fourth century Egypt. The *Bohairic Life* describes the efforts of Pachomius to construct

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 50:27.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 87:66.

<sup>81</sup> G1, p. 347:71.

his first monastery: ‘One day as they [Pachomius and his brother] were building part of a dwelling, Pachomius wished to expand it because of the crowd that would come to them’.<sup>82</sup> It was from this humble beginning that Pachomius set out to establish his first monastic foundation at Tabennesi. His success was a tribute to his ingenuity, his innovative skills and his ability to cope with all the necessary planning, designing, and administrative problems. The actual supervision of the building, as well as all the logistical concerns would have presented many problems. This was a mammoth task as he was entering uncharted waters, and his only guide was the Antonian eremitic form of communal living, which consisted of a group of dwellings, cells or caves, situated around the abode of a particular anchorite. Pachomius wanted more for his followers.

The transition from a somewhat primitive building to an established well laid out monastery would have taken place over a long period of time.<sup>83</sup> By successfully achieving this goal, Pachomius proved he had overcome his former uncertainty and sense of insecurity, and had become a dedicated, devoted leader of men. Whether Pachomius was directly inspired by God to establish Pachomian monasticism, or whether he reached a decision based on his experiences as an anchorite, is open to question.

### **3.5 Father Superior**

As the father superior of all the Pachomian monasteries, he accepted complete responsibility for the temporal and spiritual welfare of all his brother monks. ‘Our father

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<sup>82</sup> SBo, p. 42:19.

<sup>83</sup> The actual structure and nature of a Pachomian monastery, and in particular its role as a spiritual haven, will be discussed in a later chapter. Evelyn-White, *op. cit.*, provides a great deal of information concerning this subject.

Pachomius moulded them as well as he could...becoming their servant according to the covenant he had made before God'.<sup>84</sup> This idea of being a servant as well as a leader became Pachomius' way of imitating Christ, whom he regarded as the servant of all mankind. He based his style of leadership on the principles enunciated by the Scriptures, and his ability to understand the needs and problems of his followers allowed him to gain their confidence and loyalty. He attempted to lead by example and proved to be an astute and capable father superior. He always referred to his monks as 'his brothers', and this illustrated the close relationship he had developed with them. They looked upon Pachomius as 'the man whose God given promises we are ready to inherit if only we observe his commandments'.<sup>85</sup> There is little doubt Pachomius possessed great charisma, and was able to draw men to himself, and then guide them to accept his teachings and his goals. Although he was a visionary he was also a realist, and understood that men could be governed by example rather than legislation, necessary as it was.

### **3.6 Later years**

For the remaining years of his life he devoted himself to ensuring the success of the *Koinonia*, and to also scale the heights of spiritual perfection. He instituted a regulated liturgical way of life for the monks, which incorporated a form of communal prayer (*synaxis*) and regular attendance at the celebration of the Eucharist. At the same time he insisted the monks attend instructions on the Scriptures, as well as undertaking private devotions, practices of asceticism and manual work. He urged his followers to 'carry out the

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<sup>84</sup> First Sahidic Life (S1) fragment three in *Pachomian Koinonia*, Vol. One, 1980, pp. 431-2:12.

<sup>85</sup> Instruction of Theodore, Instruction three in *Pachomian Koinonia*, Vol. Three, Cistercian Publications, Michigan, 1982 pp. 95:27.

works of monastic life, which are fasting, purity, silence, humility and self effacement'.<sup>86</sup> As their spiritual leader he was responsible for giving them special instructions and also monitoring their spiritual advancement, and they readily accepted his teaching, as they believed God guided him. The monks also understood he was responsible for looking after their temporal well being, as he had 'built an oratory and [he] made porticos for it and set up pillars of bricks and he furnished it well'.<sup>87</sup>

As he grew older he was subjected to many illnesses, which coupled with his constant practice of asceticism, weakened him physically. This contributed to the many bouts of depression that afflicted him and he developed a great fear of God's justice and the threat of eternal punishment, with all its horrors.<sup>88</sup> It is difficult to understand why Pachomius concentrated on punishment, when he served God so faithfully. Perhaps his obsession with suffering had, to some extent, clouded his judgment. It seems his fear of God's vengeance had come to overshadow to some extent his love for God. At this time there was also considerable unrest within the Christian community, with the appearance of schismatic and heretical teachings.<sup>89</sup> His main goal was to become a devout monk and a spiritual leader of men. It is difficult to understand why Pachomius refused to be ordained a priest, when bishop Athanasius of Alexandria and bishop Sarapion of Nitentori visited his monastery. It is possible Pachomius feared that if he were ordained he would be controlled by the Alexandrian authorities, who could then have interfered with his monastic foundations and possibly destroyed his dream, which was the fulfillment of his

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<sup>86</sup> Pachomius, 'Instruction Concerning a Spiteful Monk' in *Pachomian Koinonia* Vol. Three, Ibid., p. 37:51.

<sup>87</sup> *Paralipomena*, in *Pachomian Koinonia* Vol. Two, Cistercian Publications, Michigan, 1981, p. 55:32.

<sup>88</sup> For a description of the visions of divine punishment that plagued Pachomius refer to SBo, pp. 113-6:88.

spiritual life. He feared that as a priest he could become associated with ecclesiastical intrigues, and also feared ordination could lead to ‘jealousy, discord and envy’.<sup>90</sup> Against this if he were ordained, then he would not be dependent upon visiting priests to celebrate the Eucharist. Perhaps he believed his vocation was to serve God as a devout monk, and to carry out his duties as the father superior, without the added burdens associated with the priesthood.

Throughout his life Pachomius witnessed many tragic events, none more so than the many outbreaks of plague, which took the lives of thousands of Pachomian monks and finally his own life. ‘So many of the brothers died from that epidemic that one of them was dying everyday, indeed some days two died and other days three or four’.<sup>91</sup> These events would have been a cause of great sadness for Pachomius, as he watched the deaths of so many faithful monks. The latter years of his life were filled with sorrow and suffering and the fear of death and possible damnation. The presence of homosexuality in the monasteries was a constant source of worry for him. He warned the offenders ‘since you have committed these sins out of blindness of heart and ignorance, there is repentance for you, but you cannot be saved in the *Koinonia*. Go off alone somewhere.’<sup>92</sup> Pachomius faced the task of protecting the *Koinonia* against not only false teachings and the threat of disease, but also the actions of certain elements within the monastery.

### 3.7 Conclusion

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<sup>89</sup> The teachings of Docetism, Arianism and associated Christological heresies appeared. as well as the presence of the divisive Melitian schism.

<sup>90</sup> SBo, P. 52:28

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 179:119

After a life dedicated to serving God and his brother monks, Pachomius fell victim to the plague and, surrounded by the monks led by Theodore, he ‘made the sign of the cross three times with his hand...opened his mouth and gave up the spirit’.<sup>93</sup> There was perhaps an attempt by the authors of the Pachomian *Vitae* to draw a parallel between the life of Pachomius with that of Christ. Certainly Pachomius embraced suffering in imitation of the sufferings of Christ, and like Christ, was frequently rejected, endured pain, sorrow and vilification. He had also created a spiritual kingdom, and like Christ, died realizing that his dream would never be fully achieved. He was a fallible mortal who sought to become a pale imitation of Christ.

The western church has virtually ignored the existence of Pachomius, and it barely acknowledges the greatness of his contribution to the world of Christian monasticism. The orthodox and Coptic churches, in contrast, acknowledge the magnitude of the debt Christianity owes to Pachomius and his monks. Had he belonged to the western tradition, possibly he would have received the praise and acclaim he so richly deserved. It is difficult to understand why he has been so neglected and denied his rightful place in the history of the early church. Antony became a Christian icon, why not Pachomius?

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 155:107

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 178:123

## **Chapter Four**

### **Three Outstanding Figures of the Early Egyptian Church**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

The world of Egyptian Christianity was a complex one, and to gain an understanding of its religious and cultural ethos, the roles of three of its leading figures will be discussed in detail: Demetrius the twelfth bishop of Alexandria, Clement of Alexandria and Origen. To complete this analysis an appraisal of the importance of the Catechetical School of Alexandria will also be undertaken. The teachings of Clement and Origen, both which had links to Gnostic thought, played a vital part in the development of Christian teaching in Egypt. Demetrius as the leader of the Alexandrian church, led the struggle to protect his flock from false teachings which threatened their faith. The ecclesiastical history of this period was concerned, to a large degree, with the feud that grew up between Demetrius and Origen. These three men dominated the early world of Egyptian Christianity and were responsible for preparing it for Pachomius and his monks.

#### **4.2 Demetrius Bishop of Alexandria 189 to 231**

Demetrius became the leader of a church threatened by the teachings of Gnosticism, and this, together with a number of other dubious interpretations of the Christian message, began to destroy the unity of early Christianity. According to traditional belief, Demetrius was the twelfth bishop of Alexandria, and set about protecting the original teachings of Christ. He realized the fundamental importance of organizing the church into a unified body, controlled by an ecclesiastical authority, which would guarantee the purity of

Christian teaching. In order to bring the church to all parts of Egypt, he became an inveterate traveller, and ordained many priests and consecrated three bishops, but he also managed to upset a number of the early Christians by his reforming zeal.

He led the church during the horrific persecution of Septimius Severus, who decreed that to become a Christian was an offence against the state. In his battle to cleanse the church from all forms of heretical and dubious teachings, Demetrius tended to become inflexible in his judgments and autocratic when dealing with those under his authority. His feud with the scholar Origen has been well documented, and it underlined his inability to compromise.<sup>94</sup> Demetrius condemned Origen on three counts, firstly for preaching as a layman without his bishop's consent, secondly for accepting ordination at Caesarea in Palestine by bishops Alexander and Theoctistus, outside the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of Demetrius, and thirdly for his act of self-emasculation. Demetrius convoked two synods, with the result that Origen was banished from Egypt and his ordination declared invalid. This condemnation was accepted by Rome but rejected by Palestine, Arabia and Phoenicia.<sup>95</sup> Demetrius took a personal interest in the running of the Catechetical School of Alexandria, and the Alexandrian church owed Demetrius an enormous debt. He became the father figure of the early Egyptian church, but in his attempt to unify the teachings of Christianity, he became over zealous in his actions. His strengths became his undoing, to some extent, and perhaps his treatment of Origen was not his finest achievement.

### **4.3 Clement of Alexandria**

Clement of Alexandria was born in Athens to pagan parents, towards the latter part of the second century. Little is known of his early years, but he converted to Christianity towards the end of his adolescence. He travelled extensively, studying under various teachers, and came under the influence of the teachings of both Hellenistic philosophy and Gnosticism, in particular the teachings of the Christian Gnostic schools of Basilides and Valentinus. His most influential teacher was possibly Pantaenus, the director of the Catechetical School of Alexandria. Clement had developed into a brilliant scholar, and when, after the death of Pantaenus, he was appointed his successor, he guided the School with distinction for nearly twenty-five years. He died in 215 after a life devoted to defending the intellectual integrity of the church. It could be claimed Clement was the first of the Christian scholars to attempt to systematize the teachings of the early church. He possessed a brilliant intellect and illuminated the world of early Christianity. The obscurity of many of his teachings led to church authorities treating his works with caution. In later times Pope Clement the Eighth removed him from the Roman martyrology.

He became immersed in the world of philosophy and Gnosticism, and set out to prove that Christian teachings were compatible with the principles enunciated by Greek philosophy. He believed ‘philosophy which is in accordance with divine tradition, establishes and conforms providence’.<sup>96</sup> Clement was, throughout a large part of his life, a Christian Gnostic, and for him *gnosis* was ‘knowledge to speak generally, a perfecting of

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<sup>94</sup> For a discussion of this issue see. Bauer, op. cit., pp. 54-60; Griggs, op. cit., pp. 61-63; Eusebius, op. cit., Vol. 2, pp. 29-31, 63-65 and 70..

<sup>95</sup> Origen’s role in helping to formulate Christian teachings will be discussed in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

man as man is consummated by acquaintance with divine things'.<sup>97</sup> In the *Miscellanies* he offered a robust defence of Gnosticism, and wrote 'the Gnostic alone is truly pious'.<sup>98</sup> He believed philosophy was of a divine origin, and he originally admired the Gnostic teachings of both Basilides and Valentinus. Later in his life he bitterly opposed them, and came to the conclusion that perfect knowledge was a gift from God, to those whose life indicated their worthiness to receive it. The teachings of Clement were never condemned during his lifetime, and he appears to have rejected the dualism of Gnostic thought, together with its belief that the world was intrinsically evil. As a Christian Gnostic he taught that the true Gnostic finds fulfillment in his complete union with God, and believed they were a people whose 'whole life is prayer and converse with God'.<sup>99</sup> Throughout his life Clement appeared to have been an intellectual enigma. It is possible to discover a relationship between Clement's idea of *gnosis*, and that of faith, which is a gift imparted by God (a heavenly messenger) to a selected person (the Christian), and became the path to salvation.

His writings included the famous trilogy comprising *The Paedagogus* (the Tutor), *The Miscellanies* (*Stromateis*, writings in general) and the *Protrepticus* (Exhortation to the Greeks) and the *Quis Dives Salvetur* (Rich's Man's Salvation).<sup>100</sup> With his writings

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<sup>96</sup> *Miscellanies: or Stromata, The Writings of Clement of Alexandria*, trans. W. Wilson, Ante-Nicene Christian Library, *Translations of the Fathers: Down to 325 AD*, A. Roberts, J. Donaldson, Eds, Book One ch. XI p. 385. T and T Clark. Edinburgh, 1871.

<sup>97</sup> *The Writings of Clement of Alexandria*, Vol. Two, op. cit., ch.10, p. 446.

<sup>98</sup> for a description of a Gnostic, *Ibid.*, Book Seven, pp. 406-472.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 459.

<sup>100</sup> Translations may be found in two sources: G. Butterworth's in , *Clement of Alexandria; 'The Exhortation to the Greeks, The Rich's Man's Salvation*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge University Press, 1979, (reprint); pp. 3-269, 271-366, and W. Wilson's in 'The Writings of Clement of Alexandria' Vol. 1. Exhortation to the Heathen, The Instructor, Miscellanies, Book 1. Library; Translations of the Writings of the Fathers, Down to AD 325, ed. A. Roberts, D. Donaldson, Vol. Four, *Clement of Alexandria*, Vol. One, pp. 17-110.

Clement was attempting to encourage the Christian people to take up the challenge offered by Greek philosophy and Gnosticism. He hoped to increase their knowledge of the intellectual aspect of the Christian world. The *Paedagogus* consisted of three volumes and included his teaching concerning the *Logos*, which he considered to be the Word, the guide that would enable people to discover for themselves the reality of the attributes of God. They could then base their daily lives upon the nature of God. For Clement the *Logos* was ‘the heavenly guide, the Word, inviting men to salvation’.<sup>101</sup> This work became a virtual instruction manual, to be used by Christians who sought to achieve a degree of spiritual perfection.

*The Miscellanies* consisted of seven books, mainly concerned with discussing the value of philosophy and Gnosticism. For Clement, an ardent admirer of philosophy per se, it was ‘wisdom,,is the object of the desire of philosophy, which is kindly and lovingly disposed towards wisdom, and does everything to attain it.’<sup>102</sup> For Clement, the Gnostic was ‘a true worshipper of God and unjustly calumniated by unbelievers’.<sup>103</sup> He qualified his definition of *Gnosis* by teaching that it was knowledge imparted by God, and he insisted that a philosophical appraisal of revelation was essential, if the Christian message was to be fully appreciated. *The Protrepticus* allowed Clement to enlarge on his teaching that Christianity was far superior to all other religious beliefs. He taught that by surrendering oneself to Christ the *Logos*, each person could discover the fullness of truth. For Clement the true Gnostic was an educated person.

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<sup>101</sup> ‘Paedagogus’, in *The Writings of Clement of Alexandria*, Vol. One, p. 113.

<sup>102</sup> ‘The Miscellanies’ in the writing of Clement of Alexandria Vol. 1, p. 335; Clement’s teaching on philosophy, see the whole work, pp. 335-420.

At all times he considered himself to be a staunch supporter of every Apostolic tradition, and displayed this in his interpretations of the Scriptures. He attempted to add to the intellectual dignity of Christianity, by incorporating into its teaching appropriate elements of Hellenistic and Gnostic thought. He constantly stressed in his writings that *gnosis*, which was Christian knowledge, was the basis of a spiritual life, and believed that knowledge was the perfection of love. He attempted to establish a form of Christian philosophy, which offered an illuminating account of Christian intellectualism. He lived in an age, which witnessed the evolution of definitive Christian doctrines, and believed that every Christian teaching was based on the premise that Christ was the ultimate source of all truth. The effect of Clement's teaching on the world of Pachomius and Pachomian monasticism, would have been at best an indirect one. Clement had died well before the Pachomian era, and as Pachomius was not a part of mainstream Alexandrian Christianity, its effect on him would have been minimal. It is, however, possible that the spirituality contained in Clement's writings could have filtered through to the world of Pachomius and his monks.

## **4.4 Origen**

Origen became one of the most influential figures in the intellectual world of early Christianity. His defence of Christianity against the attacks of Celsus was a masterpiece of apologetics, and he was one of the most powerful figures in the intellectual world of the early church. Didymus the Blind, a director of the Catechetical School of Alexandria,

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 406.

referred to him as ‘the greatest teacher of the church after the apostles’.<sup>104</sup> Together with Clement of Alexandria he played a major role in expounding the Christian message during the ante Nicene period. He possessed not only an outstanding intellect, but also a deep sense of the sacred, and his innate humility endeared him to his disciples.<sup>105</sup>

Origen was a source of controversy and, towards the end of his life and for centuries afterwards, a number of his teachings caused a furore. Ecclesiastical authorities failed to take into account that he was a speculative theologian who was attempting to offer a rational explanation of Christian beliefs which during his lifetime had not been officially defined. Origen relied on a combination of philosophical and theological principles in formulating his teachings, which dealt with obscure and intangible subjects, and he offered theories rather than definitive doctrines. Butterworth offers an excellent resume of this issue in the introduction to his translation of *De Principiis*.<sup>106</sup> Among the writings that caused concern for church authorities were his teachings concerning the pre-existence of souls, in particular that of Christ’s soul; the transformation of material bodies into ethereal bodies at the time of resurrection; and the final salvation of all mankind.<sup>107</sup> When considered in the light of later, more traditional theological thought, Origen’s teachings on these matters are certainly dubious. It is necessary to repeat that he had formulated them in the early days of the third century and was essentially an explorer of uncharted

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<sup>104</sup> Cited in G. Butterworth’s Introduction p. 1 to his translation of *Origen on First Principles: Being Koetschie’s Text of De Principiis*, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, London, 1936.

<sup>105</sup> For a detailed account of Origen’s life refer to J. Trigg, *Origen*, Routledge, London, 1998, pp. 3-66.

<sup>106</sup> Butterworth, op. cit., pp. i-xxxvi.

<sup>107</sup> For details of Origen’s teachings on these matters refer to *Origen on First Principles*, op. cit., Origin of the Soul, p. 4, 67, Pre-existence of Soul in Christ, p. 110-111, The Soul of Christ, p. 121, Resurrection of the Body, p. 138-146.

theological thought and had devoted his life to zealously intellectualizing the world of Christianity.

Pachomius and his followers belonged to an era experiencing great theological turmoil, and the teachings of Origen had added to the unrest permeating the Egyptian Christian world. According to the *Vita Prima Graeca*, Pachomius felt Origen was a blasphemer and heretic:

Pachomius also hated the man called Origen, first of all because he was cast out of the church by Heraclas the archbishop of Alexandria, before Arius and Melitius who had uttered blasphemy against Christ. He hated him also because he recognized him as a blasphemer having heard that there were dreadful things in his writings.<sup>108</sup>

Since Pachomius lacked the theological knowledge required to make such an informed judgment on this matter, two possibilities exist. Firstly, that he was repeating someone else's opinion, or secondly, the authors of the *Vita Prima Graeca* were making use of Pachomius to voice their personal opinion of Origen, in much the same way as Athanasius made use of Antony to promote Orthodoxy. He certainly could not have read Origen's Preface to his work *De Principiis*.

The teaching of the church handed down in unbroken succession from the Apostles, is still preserved and continues to exist in the churches up to the present day, we maintain that, that is only to be believed as the truth, which in no way conflicts with the tradition of the church.<sup>109</sup>

## 4.5 Writings of Origen.

It is important to discuss the writings of Origen, as these works, together with those of Clement of Alexandria, were responsible for forming the intellectual background to the

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<sup>108</sup> G1, pp. 317-8.

pre-Pachomian era. The greater part of his writings has not survived, but a number of translations in Latin and Greek remain in existence.<sup>110</sup> One of his major works, *De Principiis* (Treatise on First Principles), was written in 229 and was a virtual compendium of Christian doctrines. It appeared at a time when Gnostic teachings were threatening the purity of the Christian message and his treatment of the Trinity was a masterpiece of theological thought. He claimed that everyone obtains ‘firstly their existence from God the Father and secondly their rational nature from the Word and thirdly their holiness from the Holy Spirit’.<sup>111</sup> In his exposition of the Scriptures he attempted to elaborate on each passage verse by verse, and he possessed a deep understanding of their spirituality.

Another important text was *Contra Celsum*, written at the request of his patron Ambrose to refute a sophisticated attack on the teachings of Christianity by Celsus, an ardent supporter of Greek philosophy. Celsus had published a work called *On the True Doctrine. A Discourse Against Christians*,<sup>112</sup> in which he claimed that Jesus was a sorcerer, who relied on pre-existing beliefs, which he re-arranged and presented as his personal teachings.<sup>113</sup> Origen’s reply was his *Contra Celsum*, a treatise of eight books consisting of over five hundred pages, and he wrote in his preface: ‘God forbid that there should be found anyone...has been shaken in his purpose by the words of Celsus’.<sup>114</sup> He was

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<sup>109</sup> Origen, *Origen :On First Principles*, p. 2.

<sup>110</sup> The works to be briefly discussed include: *De Principiis*, *Contra Celsum*, *Hexapla* and *His Commentary on the Gospel according to John*, Books One to Ten.

<sup>111</sup> *De Principiis*, op. cit., p. 38.

<sup>112</sup> *Celsus – The True Discourse Against Christians*, trans., R. Hoffman, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1987.

<sup>113</sup> Celsus claimed ‘there is nothing new or impressive about their [Christian teachings]; indeed when one compares them to other philosophies their simple mindedness becomes apparent’. Celsus, p. 91.

<sup>114</sup> Origen, *Contra Celsum*, trans. H. Chadwick, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1965, p. 4.

determined to show the world that Christianity was an intellectually credible religion and believed ‘we also need words to root out ideas contrary to the truth’.<sup>115</sup>

Perhaps his major work was the *Hexapla* (Six Columns). This text made use of six parallel columns in which six different versions of the *Septuagint* were placed side by side, so that a comparison of each one could be made. This was a massive work, which indicated Origen’s scholarship and deep love of the Scriptures. He was an outstanding biblical scholar, yet according to Pachomius, ‘there were dreadful things in his [Origen’s] writings...as a poisonous drug is mingled with honey’.<sup>116</sup> The *Hexapla* is a work of major proportion and indicated Origen’s outstanding scholarship and his deep love for the ‘breath of God’, the Scriptures.

Origen illuminated the world of Christianity, through his intellectual exposition of Christian teaching and his exegetical approach to biblical studies. Three centuries after his death, at the second Council of Constantinople held in 553, his name was included as a heretic in canon eleven of the Council. Neither the Emperor Justinian nor Pope Vigilius ever mentioned his name and it seems that the question of Origen’s orthodoxy was not a major concern of the Council. His fame as a biblical scholar and spiritual writer continued undiminished for many centuries. G. Prestige wrote very eloquently:

Origen is the greatest of that happy company of saints who, having lived and died in grace, suffered sentence of expulsion from the church on earth, after they had already entered into the joy of their Lord.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., p. 184.

<sup>116</sup> G1, p. 318:31.

## 4.6 Catechetical School of Alexandria

The Catechetical School of Alexandria became the most famous academy of learning for theological and philosophical studies in eastern Christendom. It played a major role in shaping the nature of Christian teaching, and provided the early Egyptian church with a body of scholars capable of defending it against the intellectual assaults of Hellenism, Gnosticism, and the doctrinal attacks of Arianism, Docetism and other heretical teachings. It formed a centre for various studies, including science, mathematics and the humanities, and was modeled on the pagan *Museion* that once dominated the intellectual world of Alexandria.<sup>118</sup>

The earliest known reference to it occurs in the life of Pantaenus who died around 190. Its origins remain unknown, though it probably evolved from the study groups set up to instruct early Egyptian catechumens. According to traditional Coptic belief Mark was the founder, however it was impossible to substantiate this claim. Its first known director was Pantaenus who was followed by a succession of outstanding Christian scholars including Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Heraclas, Dionysius the Great, and Didymus the Blind.

This school proved to be a vital link between Greek culture and Christian thought, and became the bulwark that protected the early Egyptian church against its enemies, in particular Gnosticism and Arianism. After the leadership of Didymus the Blind, it fell into a period of decline, but bequeathed to Egyptian Christianity a legacy of scholarship,

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<sup>117</sup> G. Prestige, *Fathers and Heretics: Six Studies in Dogmatic Faith, with Prologue and Epilogue*, SPCK, London, 1968, p. 43.

<sup>118</sup> R. MacLeod, *The Library of Alexandria: The Centre of Learning in the Ancient World*, I.B. Tauris, London, 2000.

which laid the foundations for the emergence of an institutionalized and stable form of Christianity.

## Chapter Five

### Gnosticism and its Influence on the Pachomian Era

#### 5.1 Introduction

Gnosticism is an extremely difficult term to define concisely and accurately, while at the same time doing justice to the complexity of its teachings, and the significance of its role in the development of early Christian thought. For the purpose of the thesis, only a brief overview of the nature of Gnostic thought will be undertaken. The main emphasis will be on the world of Christian Gnosticism and the depth of its influence on Pachomian monasticism. The term ‘Gnosticism’ refers to both Gnostic thought and to various loosely united philosophical and religious sects or schools. These were founded on the premise that a particular form of knowledge, known as *gnosis*, was the key responsible for unlocking all the mysteries surrounding both the sacred and profane worlds. From this basic belief various theories evolved, which attempted to offer answers to questions associated with many facets of existence. These included the reality of the Supreme Being, the nature of creation, salvation, the co-existence of good and evil, and many other questions that had troubled the minds of people for centuries. Gnosticism was to become the greatest challenge to the early church.

The basis of Gnostic thought was the concept of *gnosis*. For the Gnostics, *gnosis* was a particular form of knowledge or insight, which could not be obtained by study or a process of rational thought. It was revealed knowledge, which transcended formal knowledge, and was passed on in secret by a heavenly messenger to a select group of

people, deemed capable of receiving and then making use of it. These people became ‘the Illuminated Ones’, the Gnostics, and they were the elite, who belonged to an exclusive community. For them *gnosis* was much more than wisdom, it was a form of infused knowledge, which in some mystical way became their path to salvation.

Gnostics believed that *gnosis* revealed to them the true nature of themselves, and that of the Supreme Being, who was superior to the creator of the material world and all other creatures. The world brought into existence by the inferior Being, (the *Demiurge*), was a dark world and held in captivity the souls of people. They further believed that all people held within themselves a divine spark, the seed of intellect, and this seed was of the same substance as the Supreme Being, through the catalytic action of *gnosis*, it could be released from its earthly prison and return to its heavenly origin. For the Gnostics the human body was part of the prison from which release must be obtained. The eschatological thought of the Gnostics sees the ultimate salvation of all the selected souls, after which the material world, their prison, would come to its end. For the Gnostics the material world was evil, and to escape from it to the divine world represented salvation.

The different schools made use of myths to explain these beliefs, and in particular their own ideas of the cosmos. It seems that Gnosticism relied on the teachings and mythology of ancient religions, including Zoroastrianism, the religions of the Orient, Hellenism, Judaism and finally Christianity, in building up its complex and convoluted system of thought. It attempted to penetrate the mysteries that surrounded both the human and divine worlds, and to offer an explanation for them.

The origins of Gnosticism remain a contentious issue. Early Christian scholars considered it to be a corrupted form of Christianity, but the majority of scholars consider it existed a number of centuries before the advent of Christianity.<sup>119</sup> It also seemed possible that Gnosticism had its origins in the pluralistic teachings of Hellenism, which originated in Alexandria. This view is accepted by a number of scholars, including Amelineau, who saw a relationship between Gnosticism and the philosophy of Plotinus. A broadly based conclusion would be that Gnosticism was the result of a syncretism of pagan mythology, Hellenistic philosophy, and Judaic thought, and this occurred possibly during the third or fourth centuries BCE.<sup>120</sup>

## 5.2 Christian Gnosticism

Christian Gnosticism became an important branch of the Gnostic family, and it attempted to syncretize Gnostic thought and Christian teachings. It is possible to distinguish between two basic types of Christian Gnosticism: one a system of Gnostic thought that embraced elements of Christian teachings; the other a form of Christianity that incorporated certain Gnostic beliefs. In both cases there was always the possible danger that the fundamental teachings of Christianity could have been altered or modified by this

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<sup>119</sup> Pearson agreed with this conclusion and quoted M. Friedlander to support his view: 'Gnosticism is a pre-Christian phenomenon that developed on Jewish soil'. Cited in B. Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism and Egyptian Christianity*, Studies in Antiquity and Christianity, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1990, p. 28. It is difficult to disagree with Pearson's conclusion on this issue.

<sup>120</sup> Texts referred to regarding Gnosticism include G. Filoramo, *A History of Gnosticism*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1990; W. Foerster, *Gnosis: A Selection of Gnostic Texts 1*, Patristic Evidence, trans. R. McL. Wilson, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1972; W. Foerster, *Gnosis: A Selection of Gnostic Texts*, Coptic and Mandaean Sources, trans. R. McL. Wilson, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1974; K. Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of an Ancient Religion*, trans. R. McL. Wilson, T and T Clark, Edinburgh, 1983.

form of union.<sup>121</sup> During the first century Gnostic thought is considered to have begun to make an impact on the teachings of the early Christian church. Various forms of Christian Gnosticism started to emerge, and distinctive communities were formed as part of the developing church. These particular groups began to incorporate Gnostic beliefs into the teachings of the missionaries, and to adopt an elitist and exclusivistic outlook. It must be reiterated that in the early centuries of Christianity, Christian doctrines were in a developmental stage, and Gnosticism was only one of the forces, which were a part of this new religious movement. For the first two centuries, until the reign of Demetrius as bishop of Alexandria, Christianity was not institutionalized and no attempt had been made to codify or regulate the teachings of this fledgling church. The distinction between heresy and orthodoxy had not been promulgated, and so Gnosticism was not condemned in the early Christian period.<sup>122</sup> This state of affairs was substantiated by the fact that Valentinus, a prominent Gnostic teacher, was at one time considered for the post of Bishop of Rome.

The church authorities began to realize that Gnosticism presented a serious challenge to what they considered to be mainstream Christianity, when they saw it being promoted as an alternative form of Christianity. During the second and third centuries Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons, Hippolytus, Tertullian and other scholars, launched a bitter attack on Gnosticism. As a result many central tenets of orthodox theology were promulgated, but

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<sup>121</sup> References for Christian Gnosticism include R.M. Grant, *Gnosticism and Early Christianity*, Columbia University Press, New York and London, 1966; B. Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism and Egyptian Christianity*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1990; S. Petrement, *A Separate God: The Christian Origins of Gnosticism*, trans., C. Harrison, Harper, San Francisco, 1990; ed . A. Welburn. *Gnosis: The Mysteries and Christianity; An Anthology of Essene and Christian Writings*, Flores Books, Edinburgh. 1994.

the struggle against Gnostic intrusion into the world of Christianity continued until the fifth century. During this period Gnostic teachers were murdered or exiled, Gnostic books destroyed, and this situation could explain the burial of the Nag Hammadi Codices. Scholars of the early period of Christianity, such as Clement of Alexandria and Origen, found inspiration in certain aspects of Gnostic thought, and this made the task of the church authorities all the more difficult. Gnosticism permeated the world of the Pachomian era, and the degree of its influence on Pachomius and his monks will be discussed later in this chapter, under the heading of Gnosticism and Pachomian Monasticism (5:5).

The teachings of Christian Gnosticism are such a vast and demanding subject that it is extremely difficult to discuss them in detail in the thesis. The approach adopted will examine the lives and beliefs of two of the major teachers, Basilides and Valentinus, and in this way gain an understanding of Christian Gnosticism and its influence on early Egyptian Christianity.

### **5.3 Basilides**

It is necessary to repeat and stress that Gnosticism did not provide a uniform body of beliefs codified by a central authority. In reality it embraced a number of teachers, each with their own core of followers, and these formed sects or schools. Each school accepted basic Gnostic teachings, but then offered their own versions of the cosmos, salvation and other philosophical and religious beliefs. Little is known of the life of Basilides, but it

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<sup>122</sup> For a discussion of this issue Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, Fortress Press,

seems possible he was born in Antioch where he studied under Menander and Saturninus. He then travelled to Alexandria where, during the reigns of the emperors Hadrian (117-138) and Antoninus Pius (138-161), he continued to study and teach. According to B. Pearson, Basilides was greatly influenced by Greek philosophy, in particular by the school of Stoic philosophy.<sup>123</sup> It is claimed he had a son, Isidore, who followed in his path, and after his father's death edited and promoted his writings. Basilides remained a loyal member of the church, and never considered he was in any way responsible for teachings damaging to the integrity of Christian beliefs. He was never condemned by the ecclesiastical authorities during his lifetime, and died in full communion with the church.

Little if any of his writings are still extant, and it is necessary to rely on the commentaries written by Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons, Hippolytus, Tertullian and others. According to the scholar K. Rudolph, Basilides taught the souls of the faithful were saved by the action of *gnosis*, and their bodies perished due to the action of the *Demiurge*. Rudolph also wrote that Basilides believed sin was the direct result of an inborn evil principle present in every person, and as a result, human nature was fundamentally flawed. It is possible to assume from this that Basilides would have considered Jesus, in his humanity, was capable of sin.

With regard to his cosmology, it is necessary to rely on two commentaries, one by Irenaeus and the other by Hippolytus, both offering different versions. A detailed account of this will not aid in the search to discover the Pachomius of history. Rudolph

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Philadelphia, 1971, Ch. One. Bauer's conclusions are extremely interesting but on occasion tend to be provocative and dogmatic.

offered a concise account of Basilides' teaching and his influence on the development of early Christian thought.<sup>124</sup>

## 5.4 Valentinus

Valentinus was born around 100 into a Greek family living in a small village on the coast of Lower Egypt. Little is known of his early years before he settled in Alexandria, where he entered its intellectual and pluralistic way of life, and studied Hellenistic philosophy and rhetoric. It was here that he embraced Christianity, which was probably of a Gnostic nature, introducing him to the world of Gnostic thought. He became a teacher and began to develop his theory of Christian Gnosticism. After a time he travelled to Rome and became a part of its thriving Christian community. He began to expand and refine his teachings on Christian Gnosticism, and after a time they came to the attention of the ecclesiastical authorities. His teachings were finally condemned and Valentinus was excommunicated. He continued to write and teach, moving to Cyprus where he died in 160, unreconciled to the church.

Valentinus possessed a remarkable intellect and imagination, and by his rhetoric appealed to many of the Christians in Rome. His literary output was quite extensive, and was based on Christian, Gnostic and Platonic teachings, together with elements of pagan

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<sup>123</sup> Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism and Egyptian Christianity*, Studies in Antiquity and Christianity, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1990, p. 195.

<sup>124</sup>K. Rudolph offered a concise outline of Basilides' teaching in his work *Gnosis: The Nature and History of an Ancient Religion*, trans. R. McLachlan Wilson, T and T Clark, Edinburgh, 198, pp. 309-312.

mythology.<sup>125</sup> He possessed an extensive knowledge of the Scriptures but his interpretation was rather unorthodox. The teaching of Valentinus is extremely complicated and is a syncretism of Christian beliefs, Hellenistic philosophy, and Gnostic teachings overlaid with elements of pagan mythology and mysticism. His idea of the Cosmos is complicated, dualistic and emanationist and lies beyond the scope of the thesis.<sup>126</sup> Valentinus' cosmological system is elaborately and imaginatively conceived, and his concept of creation is considered to be a series of descending emanations. For Valentinus, the name of the supreme God was *Bythos*, whose thought was Silence. Together they produced thirty *aeons*, the last one being Sophia (wisdom). From Sophia finally came the *Demiurge*, who created the universe and three types of human beings, the elite (spiritual), the ignorant (material), and the psychic, who possessed the ability to choose salvation or damnation. It was to the third group that Jesus was sent to bring the *gnosis*.

Christian Gnosticism, as preached by Basilides and Valentinus, challenged the fundamental Christian teachings, and there is little doubt it would have added to the uncertainty, which existed in the minds of early Christians. The Christian Gnostics charged the bishops with distorting the teachings of Jesus, and claimed to be the only authentic interpreters of the Scriptures. Pachomius and his monks would have been sheltered to an extent by their virtual isolation in the monasteries. They would have been

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<sup>125</sup> Included among his writings were many Letters, homilies and treatises, and five of his works are held in the Jung Codex. They are *The Prayer of the Apostle Paul*, *The Apocryphon of James*, *The Gospel of Truth*, *The Epistle to Rheginos Concerning the Resurrection*, and his tractate *On the Three Natures*.

<sup>126</sup> For a detailed account of Valentinus' teaching, refer to Grant, op. cit., 1966, pp. 134-137; Pearson, op. cit., 1990, pp. 198-202; Petremont, , pp. 352-385; Rudolph, op. cit., pp. 318-323. Kelly described Valentinus' teaching as 'a bizarre mixture of speculation, fantasy and mysticism, interspersed with

further protected by the presence of Athanasius and the Alexandrian hierarchy, with their condemnation of all things Gnostic. The discovery of the Nag Hammadi Codices indicated that Gnosticism had infiltrated, to some degree, into the Pachomian monasteries, but this is open to debate.

## **5.5 Gnosticism and Pachomian Monasticism**

A number of Gnostic sects were extremely active during the early centuries of Egyptian Christianity. Their influence spread throughout the Alexandrian church and must have made an impact upon Pachomius and his monks. To what extent Pachomian monasticism came under the influence of Gnostic thought, remains a matter for speculation. It seems more than probable that many devout Christians, including monks, would have depended upon Gnostic devotional material and advice on ascetic practices to assist them in their spiritual life. It was not until Athanasius, in his festal Letters, condemned Gnosticism as heretical, that ordinary Christians would have become aware of the inherent dangers contained in its literature. To gain an understanding of any possible relationship between Pachomian monasticism and Gnosticism, a study of the Nag Hammadi Codices will be undertaken.

## **5.6 Nag Hammadi Codices**

During 1945 or 1946 an Egyptian camel driver found an earthenware jug buried at the foot of a cliff, near the village of Nag Hammadi in Upper Egypt. This jug contained

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Scriptural reminiscences, typical of Gnosticism. It was neither religion in the strict sense nor philosophy pure and simple, it is best described as a species of theosophy', Kelly, op. cit., 1975, p. 24.

thirteen papyrus codices, eleven of which were still in their original leather binding. Some deterioration and mutilation had occurred, but the majority of the manuscripts were in reasonable order. Now restored, the surviving texts are held in the Coptic Museum at Old Cairo, and in the Jung Institute at Zurich.<sup>127</sup> The Codices contain some fifty-one texts, many of which are original Gnostic writings, although some non-Gnostic material is also present. These texts are believed to have belonged to the early second century and, according to W. Foerster, the Gnostic material may be ascribed to different Gnostic schools.<sup>128</sup> The Valentinian school was represented by the *Gospel of Truth*, *The Treatise on the Resurrection*, *The Gospel of Philip* and *Exegesis on the Soul*.<sup>129</sup> The non-Gnostic material included fragments of Plato's *Republic*, references to Zoroastrianism and the magico-philosophical system of Trismetgistus.

The Nag Hammadi library provides invaluable information concerned with the nature of Christian Gnosticism, and raises the possibility that a link existed between the Pachomian monks and Gnostic literature. This conviction is based on the discovery of the Codices in close proximity to three Pachomian monastic foundations. The question whether the monks had made use of Gnostic material as an aid to both their spiritual and ascetic lives, raises several important issues. According to the *Vita Prima Graeca*:

The holy man [Pachomius] gave to the orthodox bishops and successors of the Apostles and of Christ himself, the heed one gives to the Lord ever presiding upon the Episcopal Throne.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Refer to Goehring, op. Cit., pp. 173-184; W. Foerster, *Gnosis: A Selection of Gnostic Texts 11, Coptic and Mandaean Sources*, trans. R. McL. Wilson, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1974, pp. 3-12; A. Veilleux, *Monasticism and Gnosis in Egypt, Roots of Egyptian Christianity*, Studies in Antiquity and Christianity, ed. B. Pearson, J. Goehring Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1992, pp. 278-291.

<sup>128</sup> Foerster, op. cit., p. 7.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>130</sup> G1, p. 318:31.

From this we can argue that Pachomius would have insisted his monks obey Athanasius' decree, contained in one of his festal letters in 367, that all Gnostic material be destroyed. The finding of the Gnostic material contained in the Nag Hammadi Codices possibly indicated that the monks had disobeyed Pachomius. The evidence available, that the Pachomian monks could have defied their bishop and continued to make use of the condemned material, is quite compelling. This includes the site where the material was buried as well as evidence contained on the cartonnage of the Nag Hammadi Codices.<sup>131</sup>

The proximity of the burial site of the Codices to three Pachomian monasteries, at Tabennisi, Phbow and Seneset, has given rise to certain speculative conclusions. The first suggests that the monks were making use of the Gnostic material to help them with their devotional as well as their ascetic lives. After Athanasius condemned these works, the monks buried the material in accordance with his request. The second puts forward the view that the monks, having found this material extremely helpful, had buried it so they could continue to refer to it, in defiance of Athanasius' decree. A third hypothesis claims that these texts did not belong to the Pachomian monks but to a nearby Melitian monastery. The fourth theory suggests the monks had been studying the codices to enable them to refute the teachings of the Gnostics, and then buried them when they were no longer needed. Unfortunately there is no firm evidence to support any of these four theories, but on reflection it does seem probable that a relationship did exist between the monks and Gnosticism.

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<sup>131</sup> For a discussion of the authenticity of the cartonnage evidence contained in the Nag Hammadi Codices refer to Veilleux, *op. cit.*, 1992, pp. 278-83, Goehring, *op. cit.*, 1999, pp. 174-9.

The discovery of two Letters amongst the Codices has provided further information, which however is not conclusive. The first letter contains a reference to a 'father Pachon', and this is taken to mean Pachomius. The second letter contains a reference to a person named Panoute, who was alleged to have been a prominent member of the Pachomian community. These references appear to provide only flimsy evidence for any claim that a connection existed between Pachomian monks and Gnosticism. The evidence provided by the cartonnage on the Codices is far more compelling. A number of the bindings on the Codices were strengthened by pieces of used papyri, and certain markings on them were taken to be dated, 333-348, which indicated the material belonged to a period just after the death of Pachomius.<sup>132</sup> Other markings are believed to be of monastic origin, but no conclusive proof has been offered to substantiate this claim. A number of letters and fragments found among the Codices could relate to the monks, such as a receipt for tax paid by the monastery, and lists of purchases for goods that could have been acquired by the monks. Goehring, on reviewing all the evidence, came to the conclusion that no firm proof existed which positively linked the Pachomian monks to Gnostic literature. He wrote that:

The number of scholars who argue for a Pachomian origin of the texts, however, is growing. While the evidence currently in hand cannot firmly establish the Pachomian origin of the Nag Hammadi texts, the circumstantial evidence is mounting for such a relationship.<sup>133</sup>

## **5.7 Conclusion**

After examining and then evaluating the evidence supplied by the Nag Hammadi Codices, it is possible to accept that a connection did exist between Gnosticism and the Pachomian

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<sup>132</sup>Veilleux, *op. cit.*, p. 278.

monasteries. It is necessary to speculate further regarding the liturgical activities instituted by Pachomius. When he established the practice of communal prayer (*synaxis*), he insisted that it consisted of readings of the Scriptures, recitation of the psalms, instructions, and frequent celebration of the Eucharist. Accepting that Gnostic literature was in use at the monasteries, it is possible then to assume that the monks would have relied on it to help them in their communal and private devotional and ascetic practices. Before Athanasius condemned Gnostic material, there would have existed no reason for the monks to reject it. Even after Athanasius acted, the monks could have decided he was more concerned with doctrinal teachings than with condemning Gnostic ascetic practices per se. It is also possible that Pachomius and his monks, as they were not trained theologians, were more involved with becoming devout monks, whose spiritual life was above reproach, than with taking part in theological disputations.

Gnosticism flourished in Egypt during the early part of the second century, and declined towards the beginning of the fifth century. It assisted in the development of early Christian doctrines, and it would be a mistake to underestimate the part it played in aiding both the devotional and ascetic lives of the Pachomian monks.

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<sup>133</sup> Goehring, op. cit., 1999, p. 73.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Docetism and Arianism: Their Impact on the Alexandrian Church**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

The first three centuries of Egyptian Christianity witnessed the gradual systematic formulation of Christian doctrines. This took place in a world dominated by the concepts of Hellenism, Gnosticism, and Judaism and the beliefs of pagan Rome and ancient Egypt. The apostolic message would have been influenced by the presence of this intellectual background. It is necessary to understand that the early Christian teachers were faced with the problem of attempting to explain the intricate, mystical, message of Christianity, in a way that would make it readily understandable to the average person and, at the same time, be compatible with philosophical principles. This could explain the rise of dubious teachings, which distorted or destroyed the original apostolic message.

Those men who put forward their speculative beliefs were not attempting to destroy Christianity, but rather to advance its cause by aligning it with rational thought. Perhaps in their enthusiasm they failed to realize it is not always possible to justify faith by the use of reason. It is arguable that many so called heretics were, in reality, sincere Christians who, in their attempt to explain Christianity, nearly succeeded in destroying it. Heretics are those who persist in spreading their teachings after they have been condemned as false by properly appointed ecclesiastical authorities. Sincerity is no guarantee that they are capable of preaching the ultimate truth.

Pachomius founded his cenobitic form of monasticism in a world enmeshed in theological disputes and ecclesiastical uncertainty. Docetism, Arianism and associated false teachings were on the move, and Pachomius offered his monks a place of refuge within Pachomian monasticism, under the leadership of Athanasius, the father of Orthodoxy. Pachomius, as the leader of nine thousand Pachomian monks, had come to understand that heretical thought was as dangerous ‘as a poisonous drug mingled with honey’.<sup>134</sup> He urged his monks to concentrate on their monastic vocation and to follow the directions of the Alexandrian ecclesiastical authorities.

At this time in Egypt, no definitive statement had been issued as to what constituted heresy, heterodoxy and orthodoxy, and it was possible heretical teaching existed side by side with traditional apostolic teaching.<sup>135</sup> When Demetrius was consecrated bishop of Alexandria in 189, he recognized the depths of the problems that faced the Egyptian Christian community, and set out to rectify that state of affairs. He was determined to uphold the supremacy of the Apostolic traditions, and he laid the foundations for Athanasius’ successful campaign against the Arian heresy and the Melitian schism.

## **6.2 Docetism**

Docetism was one of the earliest heresies to launch an attack on the traditional Christological teaching of the church. The traditional teaching is that Christ became man due to the intervention of the Holy Spirit, was born of the Virgin Mary, and was similar to a man in all respects, except sin. The Docetists taught that Christ was human in

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<sup>134</sup> G1, p. 318:31.

<sup>135</sup> Bauer, *op. cit.*, p. 48; Griggs, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

appearance only, since his humanity was an illusion, and only represented a non-existent entity. They claimed that the spiritual Jesus entered the human Jesus at the time of his baptism by John the Baptist, and then departed from his body prior to his crucifixion. Therefore it must follow that Christ's passion death and resurrection were 'the mystical fiction of the cross'. The origins of Docetism are possibly linked to the Gnostic belief that all matter is intrinsically evil, an idea held by many Christians. Other heresies associated to some degree with Docetism, included Adoptionism, Apollarianism, and Sabellianism.<sup>136</sup> One of the first church fathers to recognize the dangers of the teachings of Docetism was Ignatius of Antioch, who mentioned this in two letters, to the Smyeans and the Trallians, and vehemently defended the physical reality of Christ's humanity.

### **6.3 Arianism: Its Impact on the Pachomian Era**

Egypt in the early part of the fourth century witnessed the emergence of the Arian heresy and Pachomius' establishment of his cenobitic form of monasticism. This heresy threatened to destroy the foundations of Christianity and challenged the ecclesiastical authority of Rome and Alexandria. It became the greatest threat to the stability of the Christian church, and its influence would have spread throughout the Pachomian monasteries and threatened the faith of the monks. Arius' teaching swept across eastern and western Christianity, as a tidal wave of disruptive thought during the pre-Nicene period, and was finally checked in 325 when Constantine convoked the First Ecumenical Council. It was at this Council that Arius and his teachings were condemned, and the orthodox teaching concerning the divinity of Christ and the nature of the Trinity, was

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<sup>136</sup>Kelly, *op. cit.*, 1975, Adoptionism, pp. 115-119, Apollinarianism, pp. 289-295, Sabellianism, pp. 121-123.

proclaimed. Of particular interest for the Alexandrian church was the finalization for the date for the celebration of Easter, and the attempt made to support it in its struggle against the Melitian schism. It was at Nicaea that Athanasius gained recognition for his defense of the orthodox position, and this led to his consecration as bishop of Alexandria. This was to be an important event for Pachomius and his monks, as Athanasius became a loyal friend and supporter of Pachomian monasticism.

To gain an understanding of the impact Arianism made on the Pachomian era, a brief history of the life of Arius, followed by a discussion of his teachings and the role played by the First Council of Nicaea, and Athanasius as the leader of the Orthodox faction, will be made. For Pachomius, Athanasius was the ‘Christ bearer’ and Arius was a heretic ‘who had uttered blasphemy against Christ’.<sup>137</sup>

## **6.4 Life of Arius**

Arius was born in 260 and died in 336. He studied under Lucian of Antioch, who introduced him to dubious teachings of a Gnostic nature, and these became the foundations for the development of his heretical thought. Arius became a supporter of bishop Melitius of Lycopolis, and joined the Melitian schism, but later renounced it and became reconciled with his bishop Peter.<sup>138</sup> In 318 he began to attack the teachings of the church concerning the divinity of Christ, claiming he was not co-equal with the Father, and was a creature created by God, and therefore, not divine. In 321 he was condemned by Alexander and fled to Palestine, where he sought protection with Eusebius of Nicodemia, who was to become a loyal supporter of Arius and his teachings. To explain

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<sup>137</sup> G1, p. 317:31

his theological position he wrote *The Banquet (Thalia)*, and this further alienated him from the church authorities.

Despite a period of dispute and uncertainty, Arius' teachings were condemned and he was excommunicated, at the Council of Nicaea in 325, and banished to Illyrium. He died unrepentant and unreconciled with the church. Constantine played a pivotal role in the calling of the Council, in deciding its agenda, and its final decisions. It is difficult to justify how an unbaptized person, with a limited knowledge of Christian teachings and lacking any theological training, could make an informed judgment on such a complex issue as the teachings of Arius. Yet Constantine as the emperor, played a major role in influencing the council's decisions. Perhaps the bishops feared to lose the support of such a powerful man, and did not realize the enormity of the decision they had taken. This error would haunt the church down the centuries, as future rulers continued to interfere with ecclesiastical decisions.

## **6.5 Teachings of Arius.**

Every major heresy become the prime mover that has forced the church to proclaim a definitive doctrine, which in the case of Arius, was its teaching concerning the divinity of Jesus Christ.<sup>139</sup> Arius' concept of the nature of God formed the basis of his heretical teaching. For Arius, God was unique, the uncreated source of all reality. He alone was

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<sup>138</sup>Griggs, op. cit., p. 118-9,

<sup>139</sup>For an outline of Arius' teaching, H. Brown, *Heresy and Orthodoxy in the History of the Church*, Hendrickson, Massachusetts, 1988, pp. 104-143; Griggs, op. cit., 1991, pp. 118-125; R. Gregg, D. Groh, *Early Arianism: A View of Salvation*, SCM, London, 1981; J. Kelly, op. cit., 1975, pp. 226-240; R. Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*, Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 1987..

eternal, his essence could not be shared, and he was utterly transcendental.<sup>140</sup> From this premise Arius developed his teaching concerning the nature of the *Logos*, the Son of God. He claimed there was a time when the Son of God did not exist and that he was created by the will of God, not from the divine substance but from nothing. The Son, therefore, was a creature, albeit a perfect creature, but not divine and not consubstantial with the Father. Arius denied the presence of a human soul in Christ and claimed the *Logos* took its place. As for the Holy Spirit he taught it was created by the Son and was inferior to the Son, who was inferior to the Father. The Trinity then was a descending Triad, in which the Father alone was the one true God. Jesus then was the Son of God by adoption or participation, and the Father, Son and Holy Spirit were not of the same nature, being completely separated from each other. Arius taught that ‘they are in substance and in splendour wholly unlike each other infinitely unlike’.<sup>141</sup>

Arius based his teachings on a number of biblical texts including ‘the father is greater than I’ (John 14:28), and ‘he is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation’ (Col. 1:15). For Pachomius, his bishop Athanasius, who played such a prominent role at the Council of Nicaea, was the guardian of the deposit of faith. He believed when the church condemned Arius and his teachings, it was speaking for God. His faith was strong and unquestioning and he realized that Arianism threatened the very existence of his monastic foundations, which were dedicated to the honour and glory of God, the Trinity, and the church. He placed his trust in Athanasius and the Alexandrian hierarchy and was content to seek spiritual perfection as the father superior of nine thousand Pachomian monks.

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<sup>140</sup> For an excellent summary of this see Williams, op. cit., pp. 98-9.

<sup>141</sup> Cited in Williams, op. cit., p. 101.

## 6.6 First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea 325

It is necessary to consider briefly this Council, as its findings greatly influenced the future of Pachomius and his monks. In 325, in response to the urgings of the bishops, Emperor Constantine convoked the first Ecumenical Council, to refute the heretical doctrine of Arius. This gathering opened in Nicaea at the imperial summer palace, amidst all the pomp and ceremony that both Constantine and the church could muster. It is thought three hundred bishops, the majority of whom came from a Greek speaking background, attended. The bishop of Rome was not present, due to illness, and was represented by two priests. Athanasius accompanied Alexander the bishop of Alexandria, and these two Egyptians were in the forefront of the anti-Arian forces. The Council discussed the essence of Jesus Christ and his relationship to the Father, and rejected the teaching of Arius. The term *homoousios* was introduced to describe the Son's consubstantiality with the Father, and this use of a non-scriptural term was to lead to further controversy.<sup>142</sup> Finally, after bitter debate, the council unequivocally condemned Arianism and drafted the Nicene Creed, and required all the bishops to ratify it by adding their signatures to the document. It sought to bring about reconciliation with the Melitian schismatics, by offering terms that were most conciliatory. These were rejected and the Egyptian Christian world still faced the presence of an extremely active schism. Twenty canons

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<sup>142</sup> Kelly, op. cit., pp. 233-5.

were proclaimed<sup>143</sup>, mainly concerned with the many aspects of clerical life. The aftermath of the Council of Nicaea witnessed a period of further political and theological intrigue, and the Pachomian monks became involved in this dispute, as supporters of Athanasius and orthodoxy.

## 6.7 Athanasius: Father of Orthodoxy

Athanasius became one of the foremost dynamic leaders of the early Egyptian church. Throughout his reign he was exiled for a total of fifteen years as he opposed, not only the forces of heresy, but also the authority of the emperor Constantine. His opponents included Eusebius of Nicodemia, who was supported by the followers of Arius and those of bishop Melitius of Lycopolis. On the political front he was persecuted by the successors of Constantine, including his son Constantius, who supported the Arian cause. After his final exile he was re-instated as bishop of Alexandria by emperor Valens in 366, and retained this office until his death in 373.<sup>144</sup>

Athanasius spent five years in the Egyptian desert where he was cared for and hidden by the monks. It was during this time that he allegedly wrote his masterpiece, *The Life of Antony*, and witnessed at first hand the lives of the Pachomian monks. He became a great advocate for the spiritual value of the monastic life as well as an ardent supporter of

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<sup>143</sup> *The Seven Ecumenical Councils of the Undivided Church: Their Canons and Dogmatic Decrees Together with the Canons of all of the Local Synods which have received ecumenical acceptance*, ed. P. Schaff and H. Wace, W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Michigan, 1979, Vol. 14, pp. 8-50.

<sup>144</sup> For a discussion of the life of Athanasius and his teachings, refer to D. Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1955, pp. 1-16, 142-200; Griggs, op. cit., 1991, pp. 137-147; Kannengeisser, 'Athanasius of Alexandria vs Arius: The Alexandrian Crises', *Roots of Egyptian Christianity*, (Studies in Antiquity and Christianity), ed. B.A. Pearson, J. Goehring, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1992, pp. 204-215.

Pachomius and Pachomian monasticism.<sup>145</sup> He guided the church through a period of great turmoil, and it was his strength of character that enabled him to overcome the attacks of the enemies of the church and its teachings. The importance of Athanasius to the world of Egyptian Christianity, and in particular to Pachomian monasticism, was outstanding, and he is deservedly called the Father of Orthodoxy.

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<sup>145</sup> For Athanasius' relationship with Pachomius and his monks, refer to Brakke, *op. cit.*, 1955, pp. 80-141.

## Chapter 7

### Impact of Donatism on the Christian World of North Africa

#### 7.1 Introduction

The word schism derived from a Greek word that means ‘division’, in theological terms refers to a rupture or breakdown in ecclesiastical authority and unity. This rupture is a result of a refusal by a group of believers to accept the authority of the church in ecclesiastical matters. A schismatic therefore is a person who rebels against hierarchical authority, without rejecting any doctrine of the church. Though it does not follow that a schism is heretical, it is regarded as a most serious matter, and it affects the unity of the Christian church.

The Donatist schism created havoc in the early North African Christian church. It is difficult, however, to accept that its influence spread to Egypt, and that it had a major effect on the Pachomian era. Although a certain similarity existed between the basic teachings and origins of Donatism and Melitianism, it is highly problematical that any link existed between the two schisms.<sup>146</sup> A study of Donatism adds to the understanding of the ramifications of the Melitian schism that originated in Egypt.

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<sup>146</sup> W. Frend, *The Donatist Church: A Movement of Protest In Roman North Africa*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1952, pp. 22-23 for a discussion of the remote possibility that a relationship existed between Donatism and the Melitian schism.

## 7.2 History of the Donatist Schism

The Donatist schism emerged within the North African church after Diocletian's Great Persecution in 303 to 305. During the fourth, fifth and sixth centuries it became responsible for dividing this branch of the church, but entered into a period of decline towards the end of the sixth century. The schism continued to be a divisive force, until during the latter part of the seventh century, it was finally destroyed by the Arab invasion, and Christianity was virtually supplanted by Islam.

During the Great Persecution, Diocletian decreed that all Christian churches must be razed, all sacred texts handed over to authorities to be burnt and all sacred sacramental vestments and vessels be destroyed. He issued a further decree that incense offerings must be made to pagan idols. In this way he hoped to destroy all traces of Christianity in the empire.<sup>147</sup> A number of the clergy and laity apostatized rather than face martyrdom, and they became known as the *traditores*, the betrayers.<sup>148</sup> The clergy who had lapsed during the Diocletian era, repented and sought to be reconciled with the church. It was during this persecution that the seeds for the Donatist schism were sown, and after the persecution ceased, with the abdication of Maximinian, they began to flower.

A problem arose when Secundus, bishop of Tigisis in Numidia, together with Donatus, led the attack on Mensurius the bishop of Carthage, accusing him of being a *traditor*. In his defense he claimed that the texts he handed over were not the sacred books, but copies

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<sup>147</sup> For a detailed account of the Donatist schism refer to Frend, op. cit., 1952; G. Willis, *St. Augustine and the Donatist Controversy*, SPCK, London, 1950; a brief description by Kelly, op. cit., 1974, pp. 409-412.

<sup>148</sup> For a consideration of the *traditore*, refer to W. Frend, op. Cit, 1952, p. 8.

of heretical works.<sup>149</sup> When the two bishops stated that any sacrament administered by a former *traditor* was automatically invalid the church would not accept their ruling. The bishops also insisted that every member of the church should be free from sin and saw the church as being the 'bride of Christ', which must be spotless. This meant that the Christian church must be formed exclusively of holy men and women. Augustine argued against both these teachings, claiming that the validity of the sacrament was a gift from God, and the officiating priest was only responsible for bestowing the sacrament, not the grace associated with it. He also stressed that Christ brought salvation to sinners, not condemnation. This dispute raged on even after bishop Mensurius' death in 311.

He was succeeded by Caecilian, who was an unfortunate choice, as he had been accused of apostasy. It was also claimed that one of his co-consecrating bishops was guilty of being a *traditor*. Donatus led the attack on Caecilian and three appeals were sent to Constantine to have this election declared invalid, but each was rejected.<sup>150</sup> The split between the Donatists and the Catholic church widened, and the Donatist schism was firmly entrenched in North Africa. There is a definite similarity between the origins of Donatism and Melitianism, but there is no clear indication of any relationship between the two schisms.

In 317 Constantine turned against the Donatists and ordered the confiscation of all their churches and the banishment of their leaders. This caused the people to revolt against the authority of Rome, and led to the formation of the *Circumcellions*. They became a

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>150</sup> For a detailed account of this affair Frend, 1952, Ibid., pp. 144-54.

fanatical band of Donatist zealots, who terrorized the countryside in the name of Donatism. Twenty-five years passed before Gratus, the Catholic bishop of Carthage, made overtures to the Donatists to bring about a reconciliation. He was supported by papal legates Macarius and Paul, though all their efforts ended in failure. In 361, during the reign of Julian the Apostate, the Donatist bishops were allowed to return from exile and Donatism gained a new lease of life.

The Donatists became involved in a series of uprisings against Roman rule, and this behaviour damaged relations with the Roman leaders. In 411 a conference was established under the presidency of Marcellinus, and both Donatist and Catholic bishops attended this gathering.<sup>151</sup> Marcellinus was a devout Catholic and an associate of Augustine, and as a result the Donatists were placed at a great disadvantage. After three sessions he issued a decree that favoured the Catholic cause. In 412 Donatism was banned in North Africa and went into a decline, but had a resurgence during the latter stages of the Byzantine empire. It is possible to feel sympathy for the Donatists but, as time passed, their behaviour damaged their cause and Orthodoxy began to triumph. The two chief opponents to the Donatist schism were bishops Augustine and Optatus. There is no evidence that a relationship existed between Donatism and Melitianism, but a discussion of Donatism helps in understanding the Melitian schism.

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<sup>151</sup> W. Frend, *op. cit.*, pp. 275-89 for a discussion of this conference called the Conference of Carthage.

## Chapter 8

### The Influence of the Melitian Schism on the Pachomian Era

#### 8.1 Introduction and Brief History of the Melitian Schism

The Melitian schism emerged in Egypt in the early part of the fourth century and it exerted an enormous influence on the political, ecclesiastical and religious worlds of Egypt. Its origins bore a marked similarity to the Donatist schism in North Africa, but no relationship has been established between them. The Melitian schism had its origins in a bitter disagreement, which developed between Peter, bishop of Alexandria, and Melitius, bishop of Lycopolis, over the correct way to treat the *lapsi* who sought to be reconciled with the church. These two bishops were imprisoned together during Diocletian's persecution, and Peter believed the *lapsi* should be treated with compassion and understanding, while Melitius advocated a harsh and unyielding approach. It is important to emphasize that neither bishop believed these people should be excluded permanently from the church.

The division between the two men widened, and when they were released from prison Peter returned to Alexandria, while Melitius set about establishing power bases in various dioceses in Egypt.<sup>152</sup> It seems Melitius had ambitions to become the future bishop of Alexandria, and he began to ordain his supporters as bishops and deacons in the dioceses of four bishops who were still imprisoned. In 305 when these bishops were martyred, Melitius was able to take control of their important dioceses. At this time Peter was in

hiding and in 306, when he was made aware of Melitius' activities, he instituted ex communication proceedings against him.<sup>153</sup> Melitius was banished to Palestine but five years later, in 311, after Galerius' proclamation of Toleration, he was allowed to return to Egypt. After the death of Galerius persecution of the Christians began again, with renewed ferocity, and after Peter was beheaded Melitius continued to strengthen his position among the Egyptian Christians.

Achillas succeeded Peter as bishop of Alexandria but his reign was of short duration, ending in 318. Alexander succeeded him and ruled until 328. He was faced with the rise of Arianism and this, together with the presence of the Melitian schism, threatened the very foundations of Christianity in Egypt and the Christian world at large. Alexander condemned Arius and his teachings, and his stand was vindicated at the First Ecumenical Council. The council also offered generous terms to Melitius to bring about his reconciliation with the church. These concessions allowed Melitius to retain the title of bishop, but without the authority to carry out the duties of that office. Those who had been ordained by him must be re-ordained, but they could retain their rank and ability to function as bishops. Athanasius who had succeeded Alexander as bishop of Alexandria, believed these concessions contained the seeds for further dissension, and his fears were justified: the truce was only of a short duration. The Melitian schism continued to gain ground in Egypt, and with the appointment of John Archaph as Melitius' successor, it managed to achieve a degree of continuity.

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<sup>152</sup> The origins and history of the Melitian schism are discussed in detail in H. Bell, *Jews and Christians in Egypt: The Jewish Troubles in Alexandria and the Athanasian Controversy*, Greenwich Publishers, London, 1972, reprint of 1924; Griggs, op. cit., pp. 117-130.

The Melitians were believed to have formed a loose alliance with the Arians, in order to support their activities against the Alexandrian hierarchy. This is a possibility, as Arius at one time was a follower of Melitius, but if this was the case the Melitians were entering dangerous waters, since they could be accused of being heretics as well as schismatics. In addition, this alliance would have been a strange one, as it would have united the puritanical and mainly orthodox Melitians with the avowed heretical Arians.<sup>154</sup> This alleged union could have been for political purposes, as the Melitians were opposed to Athanasius' appointment to the See of Alexandria, and needed the support of the Arians in their struggle to depose Athanasius. They succeeded and he was exiled. In 335 Constantine intervened and at the synod of Tyre, Athanasius was allowed to return to Alexandria and John of Archaph was banished. During the fifth century the Melitian schism gradually began to decline and is believed to have finally disappeared in the early eighth century. This chronology has been queried by scholars: Bell believed it lasted until the early part of the eighth century.<sup>155</sup> Though the preceding account of the history of the Melitian schism is of necessity extremely brief, it lays the foundation for the discussion of the relationship existing between Melitian monasticism and Pachomian monasticism.

## **8.2 Relationship between Melitian and Pachomian Monasticism.**

The Melitians founded a number of monasteries where they could follow their own practices of asceticism and spiritual devotions, but it is important to remember their beliefs were orthodox, despite their rejection of the ecclesiastical authority of Alexandria. The Melitian schism emerged possibly in 305, and by 325 Melitius had established what

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<sup>153</sup> For details of Melitius' activities, Bell, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

could be referred to as the Melitian church. Pachomius was thirty years of age when he founded his first spiritual community, so this also would have occurred around 325. Pachomian monasticism, under the leadership of Pachomius, became a well-organized community, with its monks following a lifestyle regulated by his rule. It is probable that the Melitians based their monastic establishments on the Pachomian system.<sup>156</sup> Since the Melitians were schismatics not heretics, in the early days cordial relations existed between the two communities.

A number of Melitian monasteries were founded in the vicinity of Pachomian monasteries and, on occasions, Melitian monks lived with their Pachomian brothers, but followed their own spiritual practices. It is believed that the presence of these devout monks was a source of inspiration to the Pachomians. This positive co-operation was disrupted later, when the Melitian distrust and hatred of Athanasius surfaced, as they attempted to undermine his appointment to the See of Alexandria. Violence broke out and was marked by the destruction of property and by attacks on individual monks. Once again it is necessary to stress that this behaviour was motivated by political and not doctrinal differences, and in no way mirrored the violence associated with the Donatist schism.

The Melitian schism did not threaten the teachings of Christianity, since it was mainly concerned with how ecclesiastical discipline was to be implemented. The Pachomian monks were placed in an invidious position, as they felt obliged to support Athanasius in

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<sup>154</sup> For a discussion of this alleged alliance, Bell, *op. cit.*, p. 41; Griggs, *op. cit.*, pp. 118-21.

<sup>155</sup> Bell, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

<sup>156</sup> For information concerning the Melitian monastic system, Bell, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-5. He made use of evidence supplied by various papyri of Melitian origin: Goehring, *op. cit.*, 1999, pp. 187-95; Griggs, *op. cit.*, pp. 117-31.

his attempt to end the division between the two Christian communities. As is the case with many religious disputes, politics and personalities play a major role, and frequently the original issue is no longer the main concern. There is no doubt that the Melitian schism added to the spirituality of the Egyptian people, and the Melitians considered themselves to be normal Christians, attempting to become faithful followers of Christ.<sup>157</sup> The Melitian schism certainly affected the lives of the Pachomian monks, but there is no evidence that it was responsible for bringing about any real damage to the Pachomian way of life. It seems that the Melitian schism was of far greater concern for the Alexandrian ecclesiastical authorities, than it was for the Pachomian monks.

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<sup>157</sup> Goehring, *op. cit.*, 1999, pp. 202-8.

## Chapter Nine

### Review of Original Pachomian Literary Sources.

#### 9.1 Introduction

The surviving body of Pachomian literature remains the major source of information concerning the life and character of Pachomius and the world of Pachomian monasticism.<sup>158</sup> These texts belong to the genre of early Christian writings and are of a highly hagiographic nature, therefore their chronological and historical accuracy is open to question.<sup>159</sup> To enable a literary source to become an historical one, it is necessary to remove all hagiographic exaggeration, and then place the remaining material in the historical context of the period.<sup>160</sup> It is also important to remember it remains the only direct link to the Pachomian era.

Goehring has provided an extremely helpful chronological table, which places the Pachomian texts in their respective time frames.<sup>161</sup> Pachomius was not an abstract person nor the Pachomius of hagiography, but a man of flesh and blood who achieved greatness in the monastic world of fourth century Egypt. The spirit of Pachomius lives on in every Christian monastic foundation, and the Pachomius of history is to be discovered, not in historical tomes, but in the Pachomian literature. Chapter nine of the thesis is primarily

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<sup>158</sup> These sources include three *Pachomian Vitae*, *The Composite Bohairic Life* (SBo.), *The Paralipomena*, *The Writings of Pachomius, Horsiesios and Theodore*, *The Letter of Ammon to Theophilus*, *The Lausiaca History of Palladius*, the *Lives of the Desert Fathers*, and the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*.

<sup>159</sup> C. Stancliffe supported this conclusion, C. Stancliffe, *Saint Martin and his Hagiographer History and Miracle in Sulpicius and Severus*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1983, p. 187.

<sup>160</sup> An example of the historical inaccuracy of certain statements in the Pachomian literature is the claim in the *Bohairic Life* that Pachomius was conscripted into the army of Constantine, who was engaged in a campaign against marauding Persian forces. In reality he was inducted into the army of Maximin Daia, who was engaged in a struggle with Lucinius. SBo, pp. 24:27.

concerned with making a critical analysis of all relevant Pachomian texts, with the aim of discovering the reality of the historical Pachomius entrapped in the Pachomius of hagiography. It also discusses in detail the teachings, instructions, exhortations and spiritual soliloquies of Pachomius, as they were the expression of his innermost thoughts. The frustrating part of this study is that it has been possible to discover who and what Pachomius was, but his physical appearance remains a mystery.

This Chapter forms the centrepiece of the thesis and is concerned primarily with Pachomius the monk, and the nature of the Pachomian texts. It has been difficult to resist the temptation to fashion Pachomius in keeping with the traditions and customs of the twenty-first century, but this would result in a caricature and not an historical image. He belonged to fourth century Egypt and that is where he should be perceived. He encouraged his monks to live their lives in the shadow of Christ and in so doing every action became a prayer.

## **9.2 Role of Hagiography in the Evolution of Pachomian literature.**

Hagiography is the term used to describe that branch of religious writing concerned with preserving the memory of the lives of the saints. It is also associated with perpetuating the cults that grew up around the devotion accorded to these holy men and women. As it played such an important role in the development of Pachomian literature, it is necessary to discuss it in some detail. The Pachomius presented by the Pachomian *Vitae* is an hagiographic figure who has almost been deified, and is, in certain instances, far removed

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<sup>161</sup> J. Goehring, op. cit., 1999, p. 164.

from the real world. The authors of the Pachomian *Vitae* have wrapped him in a cloak of pious exaggeration, in order to present him in an idealized way, to perpetuate his memory.<sup>162</sup>

In the early church the hagiographic texts became a popular form of spiritual reading, and together with the Scriptures, were believed to add to the spiritual lives of the early Christians. The authors attempted to popularize their heroes, and used their lives as a way of spreading the Christian message. On occasions, historical and chronological accuracy was not their main concern. It is difficult to argue with the claim that Christian hagiography became a form of propaganda for the Christian religion, and was also responsible for the early Christians adopting both an elitist and an exclusivistic attitude. It seems possible that hagiographic literature evolved from the list of martyrs compiled during the years of the persecutions, and was gradually accepted as a source of liturgical readings. It therefore had the status of historical texts. This literature provided an insight into the lives of the early Christians and the developing world of Christianity, but as an historical source, it has its limitations.<sup>163</sup> The early years and the adolescence of Pachomius are virtually unknown, and it is only from the time of his conscription into the army of Maximin Daia that he enters the world of history.

The *Life of Antony* by Athanasius is a classic example of early hagiographic writing, and possibly the authors of the *Vitae* were influenced by it. Athanasius is believed to have written this biography between 357 and 362, while he was hiding in Pachomian

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<sup>162</sup> Rousseau, op. cit., 1978, p. 72.

monasteries from the forces of Arianism. As other hagiographic authors have done, Athanasius used his texts as a means of popularizing the monastic way of life, and presenting Antony as the ideal desert monk.<sup>164</sup> Athanasius saw life as a virtual battlefield for the souls of men and women, on which the forces of good and evil waged an unceasing war. Esoteric elements of the supernatural world formed an integral part of the life of his hero, who became closely associated with the world of the divine. These texts present the miraculous as if it were a daily occurrence, and they belong to the genre of the prophetic and apocalyptic traditions of Judaism and Christianity. This style of writing makes it extremely difficult to distinguish between what is historically acceptable, and what is pious exaggeration.<sup>165</sup>

### **9.3 The Role of Coptic, Greek and Latin Languages in Pachomian Literature**

The script used by the indigenous Egyptian people passed through a number of phases: the hieroglyphic, the hieratic, the demotic and finally the Coptic. It was with the advent of Hellenism that the hieroglyphic script began to decline. It managed to survive mainly because of the influence of the temples, and was used largely for inscriptions. As the influence of the Ptolemies increased, the hieratic script, which consisted of characters joined together in flowing strokes, gradually replaced it. This in turn gave way to a more

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<sup>163</sup> For the many devotional practices of the early Christians, P. Brown, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity*, University of California, Berkeley, 1982, idem., *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Late Antiquity*, SCM, London, 1981.

<sup>164</sup> B. Brennan, 'Athanasius' *Vita Antonii*: A Sociological Interpretation', *Vigiliae Christianae*, 39, 1985, pp. 209-227.

<sup>165</sup> Stancliffe referred to these hagiographic texts as 'an admixture of fable'. Stancliffe, op. cit., 1983, p. 158.

pronounced cursive script, known as the demotic script, which is referred to as a simplified form of hieroglyphics. These three scripts were extremely difficult to decipher, and this caused difficulties in the world of commerce and social interaction. The Egyptians however retained the demotic script, possibly to express their nationalistic fervour and to retain a link with their religious traditions. After the advent of the Romans, this evolved finally into the Coptic script and language<sup>166</sup>

Late in the third or possibly early in the fourth century, the Egyptians had gained a script and language, which became part of their national heritage. The Coptic language evolved from the demotic script, which was combined with the Greek alphabet, and made use of many Greek terms.<sup>167</sup> During the early years of Egyptian Christianity, Coptic became the national language and script of the indigenous Egyptian people. It took over the six main Egyptian dialects, including the *Sahidic* and *Bohairic*, which were associated with the lives of Pachomius and his monks. The importance of Coptic fell into decline, after the Arab invasion of Egypt late in the seventh century, but it still remains a part of the Egyptian way of life, mainly because of its use as the liturgical language of the Coptic church.

The Greek language played an important role in the development of the religious and cultural ethos of the early Egyptian Christians, however it must be realized that it failed to make headway in the villages and communities that lay outside the urban areas. There the

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<sup>166</sup> For details concerning the Egyptian script and language, T. Orlandi, 'Coptic Literature', pp. 51-81; L. MacCaull, 'Coptic Documentary Papyri as a Historical Source for Egyptian Christianity', pp. 42-50, both articles in *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity Studies in Antiquity and Christianity*, ed. B. Pearson and J. Goehring., Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1992, pp. 42-81.

people remained deeply entrenched in the mores of pre-Christian Egypt, though with the rise of the Coptic language and its association with the Greek language, the indigenous people eventually came under the influence of Greek culture. Pachomius and many of his monks spoke the Coptic *Sahidic* dialect of upper Egypt, and the *Bohairic* dialect of the Delta. In addition a number of his followers came from a Greek speaking background, and Pachomian monasteries included in their members both Coptic and Greek speaking monks.

After Roman rule was consolidated in Egypt, Latin took its place alongside the Coptic and Greek languages. It never became the dominant language in Egypt and was rarely used as a social language.<sup>168</sup> The world of Egyptian Christianity flourished in the presence of these three languages, Coptic, Greek and Latin.

## **9.4 Writing materials used during the Pachomian era**

It is highly probable that the authors of the early Pachomian literature would have used parchment sheets instead of papyri as their writing material, and these then were bound together with used papyri, to form codices. During the latter part of the second century, papyri would have been superseded by parchment, and this would have become the major form of writing material used during the Pachomian era.<sup>169</sup> The fact that Pachomian parchment is still in existence indicates the expertise of the early Egyptian artisans. Examples of these early manuscripts are housed to day in many libraries throughout the

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<sup>167</sup> For a detailed summary of the rise of the Coptic language see R. Bagnall, op. cit., 1993, pp. 235-240, 251-260.

<sup>168</sup> For a description of the importance of Latin in Egyptian society see Bagnall, op. cit., p. 231.

world, including the library of the British Museum and the Chester Beatty library in Dublin.

## 9.5 Original Pachomian Literature

Pachomian texts may be divided into three distinct groups based on the language used by their authors; they include Arabic, Coptic and Greek collections, together with a number of Latin translations. The Arabic translations include two lives of Pachomius, one held at the university of Gottingen, (Ag), yet to be published, and the other at the Vatican (Av). Some Arabic translations are held at the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris and the British Museum. Scholars, including Amelineau and Veilleux, relied on these works to help support their theories concerning both the authenticity and historical value of the Greek and Coptic Lives. It was from his study of these Arabic texts that Veilleux discovered, what he considered to be two hypothetical lives of Pachomius, the *Life of Theodore* (VTh), and the *Vita Brevis* (VBr).<sup>170</sup>

The Greek Pachomian collection comprises eight Pachomian *Vitae*, the *Paralipomena* and the *Letter of Ammon*. Francois Halkin, a Jesuit scholar, prepared a critical edition of these Greek Lives, and the Bollandist Society published them in 1932. This Society has been responsible for collecting, collating and publishing many valuable original documents,

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<sup>169</sup> For a detailed discussion of Christian papyri in the early years of Egyptian Christianity: Roberts, op. cit., pp. 1-25, and MacCullum, op. cit., pp. 42-50.

<sup>170</sup> For a detailed discussion of these two hypothetical lives and their place in his Genealogical Table see Veilleux's *Pachomian Koinonia*, Vol. 1, pp. 16-18.

mainly concerned with the lives of the saints,<sup>171</sup> and has also been responsible for preserving a number of early Pachomian documents. The *Paralipomena* is regarded as being an abbreviated additional Pachomian *Vita*, and the *Letter of Ammon* is considered to be an invaluable source of information concerning Pachomian monasticism.

The Coptic collection of Pachomian literature is perhaps the richest source of information concerning Pachomius and his monastic world. The French scholar Lefort undertook the daunting task of collecting, evaluating, translating and publishing all the existing Coptic texts. He laboured for twenty-five years and was finally in a position to publish his Coptic Dossier. In 1925 he produced a new and revised edition of the *Bohairic Life*, and between 1933 and 1941 published his critical edition of the fragmentary *Sahidic Lives*. Finally, in 1948, he presented a French translation of all the available Coptic material. Another scholar Amelineau, also carried out a great deal of research into the world of Pachomian Coptic texts, and was responsible for preparing two folios of Coptic material. This collection dealt with many aspects of the Pachomian way of life, and offered an illuminating insight into the lives, both secular and religious, of Pachomius and his brother monks. The *Sahidic Lives* (S1-S20), although of a fragmentary nature, provide a richly poetic portrait of Pachomius, and as the Sahidic dialect was the language of the early Pachomian monks, these lives are considered to be a direct link to the Pachomian era.<sup>172</sup>

## 9.6 Three Pachomian *Vitae*

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<sup>171</sup> A Jesuit, John Bollandus, (1596-1665), who was also the editor of the *Acta Sanctorum* during the seventeenth century, founded the Bollandist Society. Together with the Jesuit Order, this Society was banned in 1773 and did not reappear until 1873 when it began publishing the *Analecta Bollandiana*.

## Introduction

These Pachomian *Vitae* have been responsible for introducing Pachomius and his monks to the Christian world, and despite their hagiographic nature they remain a major source of information of the world of Pachomius. The *Sahidic Lives* are given the siglum (S), the *First Greek Life* (G) and the *Composite Bohairic Life* (SBo). The authors of the *Vitae* remain unknown, though it is logical to assume they were monks who either lived with Pachomius, or had an association with monks close to him. These biographies became the centre of much controversy, and scholars have become divided over the many issues raised by them.

Because of a lack of historical evidence, many of the questions remain unanswered, and the most fundamental one is whether Greek or Coptic was their original language? This still remains a contentious issue, despite many investigations and a great deal of scholarly research. Chitty became a great supporter of the theory that a Greek life (G1) was the original version of the life of Pachomius. He advanced an extremely well documented and convincing argument to substantiate his belief, and was supported to an extent by Goehring and Halkin.<sup>173</sup> Chitty spearheaded the Greek campaign, and believed it was possible that the first Pachomian life was written, either late in the fourth century or early in the fifth century. He admitted that the authors would have probably relied on Coptic material, but maintained their language was Greek. In his work he provided detailed

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<sup>172</sup> Goehring provides a detailed discussion of early Pachomian literature in *The Letter of Ammon and Pachomian Monasticism*, Walter De Gruyter, New York, 1986, pp. 103-122, Rousseau, op. cit., pp. 31-5, Veilleux, op. cit., Vol. 1, pp. 1-18, Vol. 2, pp. 1-13, and Vol. 3, , pp. 1-10.

<sup>173</sup> Throughout his life Chitty never wavered in his belief that Greek was the language used by the authors of the first Pachomian *Vita*. He wrote extensively on this subject and published two excellent articles

comparisons from both Greek and Coptic sources to prove his argument. Despite his research, he relied to a large degree on speculation and interpretation. Both Ladeuze and Halkin supported his stand, but they adopted a less dogmatic position. Goehring, in his translation of *Letter of Ammon*, offered a well-balanced treatment of the subject, and also favoured Greek to be the language of the first *Pachomian Vita*, but tended to leave his options open.<sup>174</sup> Other scholars, including Rousseau and Gould, also considered it possible that Greek was the language of the first life of Pachomius, but felt the answer to this question is still to be proved.<sup>175</sup>

The scholars supporting the claim that a Coptic life of Pachomius was the original one include Amelineau, Grutzmacher, Lefort and Veilleux. Amelineau was a noted Coptic and Pachomian scholar, and had gathered together two complete folios of Coptic texts.<sup>176</sup> Lefort had spent a virtual lifetime studying Coptic Pachomian material, and he collected all his work into his Coptic Dossier. His conclusions therefore cannot be lightly dismissed. He advanced the theory that the original Pachomian life was written in Coptic, but had been lost,<sup>177</sup> and according to Lefort, this lost Coptic life was the original source for all later Coptic, Greek and Arabic translations.

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‘Pachomian Sources Once More’, *Studia Patristica*, Vol. 10:1, 1970, pp. 54-64, and ‘Pachomian Sources Reconsidered’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 5, 1954, pp. 38-77.

<sup>174</sup>Goehring, op. cit., 1986, pp. 3-23.

<sup>175</sup>Rousseau, *Ascetics, Authority and the Church In the Age of Jerome and Cassian*, Oxford Press, Oxford 1978, Appendix 1, pp. 243-249 and op. cit., 1985 pp. 38-44; G. Gould, ‘Pachomius of Tabennesi and the Foundation of an Independent Monastic Community’, *Voluntary Religion: Studies in Church History* ed. W. Shiels and D. Wood, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1986, pp. 15-24.

<sup>176</sup>According to Veilleux, Amelineau was convinced both the *Bohairic* and the *First Greek Life* were translations of a Coptic source.

<sup>177</sup>Rousseau outlined Lefort’s argument in op. cit., 1985, p. 39.

Veilleux also believed a Coptic life was the original version of the *Pachomian Vitae*, and he made extensive use of Arabic translations to support his claim. He believed that a *Sahidic* life of Pachomius was the original *Vita*, and from this version were two translations, the hypothetical Coptic life of Pachomius the *Vita Brevis*, (VBr) and the hypothetical *Life of Theodore* (VTh). Veilleux claimed *The Bohairic Life* and the *First Greek Life* could be traced back to these three lives.<sup>178</sup> Goehring has presented an overview of all these claims made by Chitty, Lefort and Veilleux.<sup>179</sup> He raised the possibility that all the existing sources could be considered to be compilations, and as a result the possibility of discovering the original version of the *Vitae* is extremely remote. He managed to present a somewhat detached approach, in contrast to that adopted by both Chitty and Lefort, and this gives his conclusions a degree of cogency.

Each of these scholars offers a theory that is a compelling argument, yet finally inconclusive. Perhaps this issue has become too embroiled in literary and historical minutiae, and scholars have lost sight of the main question. It is possible to come to the conclusion that the original *Vita* was written in the Sahidic Coptic dialect. This was the language of Pachomius and his monks, and it seems logical that the first Pachomian life would have been written in this dialect. It is possible therefore to assume that the other *Vitae* were based on this original Sahidic life. The three *Pachomian Vitae* to be studied in detail include the three *Sahidic Lives* (S1, S2, and S10), the composite *Bohairic Life*

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<sup>178</sup> Veilleux, op. cit., 1980, p. 17 for a genealogical table of the *Lives of Pachomius* and his theory, *Ibid.*, pp. 1-6.

<sup>179</sup> Goehring, op. cit., 1986, pp. 3-23 where he concludes 'Lefort has been perhaps too harsh in his treatment of the Greek dossier, Chitty was equally too defensive of Greek priority and too negative in his attitude towards the Coptic material'. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

(SBo) and the *First Greek Life* (G1). The translations are by Veilleux and are contained in Volume One of his *Pachomian Koinonia*.<sup>180</sup>

### **a) Three fragmentary *Sahidic Lives*, S1, S2 and S10**

The *Sahidic Lives*,<sup>181</sup> so called because they were written in the Coptic *Sahidic* dialect of Upper Egypt, the language used by Pachomius and many of his monks, were written towards the end of the fourth or early fifth centuries and their authors remain unknown. They are believed to have been monks, associated in some way with Pachomius, and the works provide the earliest link to the Pachomian era. Because of their fragmentary and disjointed nature, they offer only glimpses into the life and character of Pachomius. On occasions these glimpses are extremely enlightening, but their value as historical sources are rather limited. There is a degree of poetic imagery in certain of the fragments, and while this manages to create a lasting impression, it does not add to its historical value. It is difficult to undertake a detailed study of these lives as many lines are missing, and therefore a degree of continuity is lost. The *sigla* given to the *Sahidic Lives* in no way indicates the order in which they were written.

The *First Sahidic Life* (S1) consists of seven fragments, and has proved to be the most valuable of the three *Sahidic Lives* to be studied. The third fragment introduces the ‘luminous man’ who repeated God’s message to Pachomius. ‘God’s will is [for you] to serve men in order to call them to him’:<sup>182</sup> this made Pachomius remember the message

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<sup>180</sup> *Pachomian Koinonia*, op. cit., Vol. One, 1980.

<sup>181</sup> These Lives have been translated by Veilleux and appear in his *Pachomian Koinonia*, Vol. 1, pp. 425-457.

<sup>182</sup> First *Sahidic Life* fragment three, *Pachomian Koinonia*, Vol. One, 1980. p. 428.

he had received from God before the death of Palamon. This fragment introduces the idea, which became a fundamental Pachomian belief, that Pachomius was ‘their father after God’.<sup>183</sup> The fragment also describes Pachomius’ sadness when his first monastic establishment finished in failure. His ‘heart was broken over them because they did not fear God in the work he was doing with them’.<sup>184</sup> Fragment Six tells how Pachomius set about introducing his fellow monks into the world of Pachomian monasticism. ‘He also fashioned as well as he could each soul individually’.<sup>185</sup>

The Second *Sahidic Life* comprises six fragments of which two and six consist of only four and five lines respectively, and offer no valuable information at all. It is possible that it is one of the earliest Pachomian documents, but this belief is difficult to substantiate. It is a somewhat disjointed text and is mainly concerned with the miracles performed by Pachomius and the visions granted to him. The first fragment contains an interesting view of Pachomius’ method of assessing the value of visions:

If their words accorded with those of the breath of the spirit of God in the Scriptures, he [Pachomius] consented to the revelation made to him by an angel of light.<sup>186</sup>

With regard to the healings attributed to Pachomius, fragment five describes how he, in all humility, disclaimed any responsibility for the miracles, attributing them solely to God, and urged people to ‘bless the Lord who healed you and watch that you do not sin

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid., p. 431:11.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., p. 431:15.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., p. 440:25.

<sup>186</sup> Second *Sahidic Life*, fragment One, op. cit., p. 445:3

against him all the days of your life'.<sup>187</sup> The humility of Pachomius is a constant theme throughout all the Pachomian *Vitae*.

The tenth *Sahidic Life* is a difficult one to interpret, as its seven fragments are extremely brief. It is considered to be a recension of three Sahidic manuscripts, S10, S11, and S20.<sup>188</sup> Unfortunately many lines are missing, which detracts from its value as a Pachomian source. Fragment five contains a striking description of Pachomius' original reception of Christianity: 'the dew of heaven descending upon him, condensing and becoming a honeycomb in his hand, and falling to the ground'.<sup>189</sup> The term 'honeycomb' was used by the authors of the tenth Sahidic life, and the use of the words 'manna' and 'dew' in Numbers 11:7, was also used to refer to the deposit of faith.

It is difficult to discover the Pachomius of history in the three *Sahidic Lives* S1, S2 and S10, as they are too disjointed, and consequently lack any degree of continuity in their description of events in his life. Certainly the Pachomius of hagiography lives in these texts, but unfortunately, the Pachomius of history is absent to a large degree.

## **b) Composite *Bohairic Life* SBo**

The original version of the *Bohairic Life* has been traced back to a *Sahidic Life*, which Veilleux believed to be a combination of large portions of the fourth, fifth and fourteenth

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid., p. 448:11.

<sup>188</sup> Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia*, Vol. One, op. cit., p.11.

<sup>189</sup> S10, fragment Five, op. cit., p. 455:5. It is interesting to compare this with the versions in Sbo, op. cit., pp. 28-29:8, G1, p. 301:5. Refer also to Numbers 11:7.

*Sahidic Lives*.<sup>190</sup> Over a period of time this life was subjected to a number of recensions, and the resulting version was translated into the *Bohairic* dialect of the Nile Delta. In 1889 Amelineau published a Coptic compilation, the *History of Pachomius*, which contained a life of Pachomius known as the *Memphitic Life*. In 1936 Lefort revised and modified this work and published a new and critical edition known as the *Bohairic Life*, which was given the siglum Bo. Veilleux made use of Lefort's *Bohairic Life* as the basis for his 1980 English translation. His recension of this work included making use of the Vatican held Arabic *Life of Pachomius*, (known as Av), to aid his clarification and correction of a number of passages in Lefort's version. This new biography is called the composite *Bohairic Life*, and referred to by the siglum Sbo, and it is this final version which is considered here.

This composite *Bohairic Life* is the most comprehensive of the Pachomian *Vitae*, and although the information it provides is not necessarily presented in an orderly, chronological and historical manner, it still manages to provide an enlightening portrait of Pachomius. Although this life is marked by a strong element of hagiography, it is possible, by sifting through its exaggerated claims, to discover the essence of the historical Pachomius.

The author or authors appear to be mainly concerned with presenting Pachomius as the perfect monk and father superior, rather than portraying him as a man with the failings and frailties of human nature, who achieved greatness despite these drawbacks. The period during which the *Bohairic Life* and the other Pachomian *Vitae* were written,

witnessed many attacks on the traditional teachings of the church, and the authors therefore could have intended their writings to defend the Orthodox position.

The *Bohairic Life* lacks the conciseness and direct approach of the *First Greek Life (Vita Prima Graeca)*, but is closer in style to the more poetic Sahidic lives. It is more expansive in its approach, and paints a more detailed portrait of Pachomius, which appears more lifelike than that presented by the other two *Vitae*. Perhaps this was the result of its authors being Coptic, and therefore possessed a better understanding of the nuances of Pachomius' character.

The seven years Pachomius spent as an anchorite are treated in some depth in the early part of the *Bohairic Life*, which relates how he 'made it a habit to leave his cell and to go often to tombs filled with dead [bodies] and spend the whole night there praying'.<sup>191</sup> It also describes the near obsession both Pachomius and his mentor Palamon felt for asceticism, though it must be understood that the traditions of the anchorites belonged to the religious ethos of fourth century Egypt. Both men firmly believed the dictum 'by doing violence to yourself that you shall enter the kingdom of heaven'.<sup>192</sup> This idea was virtually the spiritual manifesto of Pachomian monasticism.

Throughout this *Vita* there are many references to the temptations that beset Pachomius, and which indicate his humanity.<sup>193</sup> They are an integral element of his spiritual life, because by resisting them he showed his love for God, and most importantly, his fear of

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<sup>190</sup> Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia*, Vol. One, p. 2.

<sup>191</sup> SBo, p. 34:12.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., p. 32:10.

eternal punishments. In keeping with its reliance on the hagiographic tradition, the *Composite Bohairic Life* describes the visions, apparitions and other supernatural events in great detail. ‘He looked up to heaven and received great revelations’.<sup>194</sup> This *Vita* places great emphasis on the supernatural, in particular the presence of divine intervention in the lives of Pachomius and his monks. This *Vita* is a description of the spiritual journey undertaken by Pachomius, and it provides an insight into the distinctive nature of Pachomian monasticism. It also provides a far more extensive account than that provided in the *Vita Prima Graeca*, of the roles played by the two major successors to Pachomius, Horsiesios and Theodore.<sup>195</sup>

### **c) *Vita Prima Graeca* First Greek Life G1**

A total of eight Greek lives of Pachomius were written and the first offers the most comprehensive biography. It is believed to have been a modified version of an original *Sahidic* life translated by Greek monks, in order to make it more acceptable to the Christian world beyond the confines of Egypt. The other Greek lives, with the possible exception of the second, offer little further information concerning the Pachomian era.

In 1680 Papebroch prepared a collection of Greek Pachomian texts, which included the *First Greek Life*, the *Paralipomena*, the *Ascetica* and the *Letter of Ammon to Theophilos*. This compilation was responsible for introducing Pachomius to Western Europe, and was

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<sup>193</sup> Examples of his temptations SBo, pp. 44-45:21.

<sup>194</sup> For examples SBo, p. 87:66. For specific examples p. 95:73 (the glory of Christianity), pp. 108-9:82, pp. 113-6:88 (horrors of eternal punishment), pp. 105-7:82 (fate of souls at the time of death), p. 87:66 (concern for the future of the *Koinonia*).

published by the Bollandist Society in their *Acta Sanctorum*. Nearly two and a half centuries later, in 1932, Halkin published a collection of Greek Pachomian texts, which also included the *Vita Prima Graeca*. He made extensive use of both Florentinus and Ambrosianus texts. Many other versions of the Greek life have been published, including Festiguere's French translation in 1965, Athanassakis' English translation in 1968, and Veilleux's English translation in 1980, which was based on Halkin's version.<sup>196</sup> The thesis makes use of Veilleux's translation.

The *Vita Prima Graeca* also belongs to the genre of hagiography, and it makes a considerable contribution to the world's knowledge and appreciation of the life and attitudes of Pachomius. Its authors adopted a more restrained, almost detached approach, and this stands in contrast to the rather expansive and fulsome style of the Coptic authors of the *Bohairic* and *Sahidic Lives*. Many supernatural events are alleged to have occurred in Pachomius' life, and are described in the *Vita Prima Graeca*, with its authors managing to maintain a balance between simple faith and pious exaggeration. They portray Pachomius as the intermediary between God and the Pachomian monks: 'the Lord who always provides for the salvation of souls through the saints did many other healings through him [Pachomius]'.<sup>197</sup>

Pachomius' humility is stressed frequently throughout this *Vita*, and he always acknowledges the primacy of God's role in the miraculous healings attributed to him. He

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<sup>195</sup> The *Bohairic Life* devotes a lengthy section (72 pages in translation) to Theodore's reign as father superior. SBo, pp. 192-264. In this way it describes the golden years of Pachomian monasticism and is the premier biography of Pachomius.

<sup>196</sup> Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia*, Vol. One, , 1980.

<sup>197</sup> G1, p. 329:25.

once told his followers ‘in everything he does by God’s will, even if he should raise a dead man, the servant of God remains unhurt by pride or boasting’.<sup>198</sup> He accepted the many visions and angelic visitations, allegedly granted to him, in the same way. These supernatural happenings played an important role in the development of Pachomius’ spiritual life, and he came to rely upon them, to both legitimize and justify the many decisions he was required to make as father superior. Not all the visions he received came from God, and demonic apparitions, which threatened to destroy the foundation of his spiritual life, continually plagued him. ‘when he sat to eat they would come in the form of naked women to sit with him to eat’.<sup>199</sup>

Pachomius’ style of leadership is highlighted in this *Vita*. It tells of his wish that every monk should be a part of the decisions made to deal with the many problems arising within each monastery, ‘together we shall try to find the exact answer to each one of the problems’.<sup>200</sup> He stressed they should always do as ‘the Lord wants’<sup>201</sup> and his main aim was to make the common good, of paramount importance. He was constantly issuing ‘ordinances about the edification of the community but also [sending] many Letters to the fathers of the monasteries’.<sup>202</sup> He was an excellent administrator as well as a caring father superior, and the spiritual and temporal welfare of his monks was of prime importance to him. He possessed a deep understanding of their many needs, and realized,

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid., p. 330:48.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., p. 310:19.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., p. 362:95.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., p. 362:95.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., p. 366:99.

if his monastic foundations were to be successful, he must ‘care for their souls in everything...teaching them the way of salvation’.<sup>203</sup>

His role as a spiritual teacher is discussed on a number of occasions by the authors of the *Vita Prima Graeca*, and it tells how he would ‘often sit to instruct the brothers’.<sup>204</sup> Pachomius realized a number of his monks were barely literate, so he read the Scriptures to them nearly every day to ‘interpret for them the words of the divine Scriptures especially the deep and not easily comprehensible ones’.<sup>205</sup> The spiritual world of every Pachomian monastery revolved about the teachings of the gospels, and Pachomius based his rule on the spirit of the Scriptures. Each of his prayers and teachings is virtually bound together by biblical quotes.<sup>206</sup>

The *Vita Prima Graeca* provides an insight into the liturgical life of the monks. Mention is made of the importance Pachomius placed on the practice of a communal prayer life and frequent attendance at the sacrament of the Eucharist: ‘When there was a need for the Eucharist, he called in from the nearest churches, a priest who made the celebration for them.’<sup>207</sup> Pachomius attempted to make the *Koinonia* a living symbol of the teachings and life of Christ, and a haven for the Christian people seeking to serve God in a special way. The *Vita Prima Graeca* stressed his loyalty to Athanasius and his determination to protect his monks from the evil of heretical teachings:

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid., p. 315:28.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., p. 336:56.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., p. 336:56.

<sup>206</sup> For examples of this *ibid.*, pp. 336-8:56-7.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., p. 314:27.

The holy man [Pachomius] gave to the orthodox bishops and successors of the apostles and of Christ himself, the heed of one who sees the Lord ever presiding upon the Episcopal throne.<sup>208</sup>

This describes his deep hatred for heretics, in particular Origen and Arius,<sup>209</sup> stating he was determined that he and his monks would always support Athanasius in his struggle against the enemies of orthodoxy.

The composite *Bohairic Life* and the *First Greek Life* complement rather than supplement each other, and cover the same ground; any variation is only in minor details. Their portrayal of Pachomius also varies only slightly, perhaps because of their difference in style. The Coptic authors were more in touch with the character of Pachomius than were the Greek authors. The *Vitae* are remarkable works, in that they portray both the life of Pachomius and the lives of the Pachomian monks, and gave to the world of Egyptian Christianity a form of monasticism, that became the basis of future monastic foundations.

## ***9.7 Paralipomena.***

The *Paralipomena* is the name given to a collection of anecdotes dealing with various events, which occurred during the life of Pachomius. It is a Greek term meaning ‘that which is left over’, or ‘things omitted’, and was first used in 1680 by Papebroch, when he published this text amongst a collection of Greek works in his *Acta Sanctorum*. He referred to it as an abbreviated life of Pachomius, and depended upon the Florentine manuscript when preparing it. Halkin, several centuries later, published a critical edition of the *Paralipomena* and, in addition to the Florentine manuscript, made use of the

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<sup>208</sup> Ibid. p. 318:31.

Ambrosian fragments. In 1981 Veilleux based his English translation on Halkin's version. A Syriac translation is in existence, discovered amongst a collection of Syriac ascetical works published in the *Paradise of the Fathers*,<sup>210</sup> a compilation by a Nestorian monk Anan Isho.

The value of the *Paralipomena* and its historical authenticity has been queried.<sup>211</sup> In many instances it supplements the contents of the various Pachomian *Vitae*, and also has captured the ambiance of the Pachomian era. Its real value lies not in its historical accuracy, but in its ability to add to the world's understanding of the humanity of Pachomius. The author or authors of the *Paralipomena* employed the use of picturesque imagery to describe various events in Pachomius' life, in particular those of a supernatural nature. Their approach is highlighted in the vivid and dramatic description of the apparition of the devil's daughter, who set out to seduce Pachomius:

I am the devil's daughter and I am called his power, for every phalanx of demons serves me. It was I who brought down the holy luminaries to earth. It was I who snatched Judas from the Apostolic company. Now, Pachomius, I have received the power to make war against you... a time will come after your death when I will dance among them [the Pachomian monks] whom you now protect against me for you have made me to be trodden underfoot by such a multitude of monks.<sup>212</sup>

The *Paralipomena* makes mention of Pachomius' intense devotion to the sufferings of Christ. He urged his followers 'as long as you have breath in your bodies strive for

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<sup>209</sup> Ibid., pp. 317-8:31.

<sup>210</sup> Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia*, Vol. Two, , p. 1, Refer to E. Budge, *The Book of Paradise*, Vols. 1 and 2, W. Druglin, 1904.

<sup>211</sup> Rousseau wrote that the *Paralipomena* 'may have been compiled in circles unfamiliar with the communities of Upper Egypt' Rousseau, op. cit., 1985, p. 53. D. Chitty believed it 'was a collection of vivid stories not bent on historical accuracy', Chitty, op. cit., 1966, p. 22.

<sup>212</sup> *Paralipomena*, *Pachomian Koinonia*, Vol. Two, p. 48.

salvation’,<sup>213</sup> and explained to them the transient happiness experienced in this world. ‘Go to the tombs and see that the assurance of men is nothing: Why then does a man who is dust indulge in vain glory’.<sup>214</sup> Leaving the subject of the historical authenticity of this work to one side, its authors possessed the ability to convey the vitality of Pachomius’ teachings and to present him as a real person rather than an hagiographic figure. The *Paralipomena* describes Pachomius as the bulwark that stood between his monks and the power of evil, and it considered monastic life to be a virtual battlefield, on which the forces of God and the devil fought for supremacy.

The *Paralipomena* discussed the many problems that faced Pachomius in his role as the father superior. They included his concern that, by an over zealous approach to the practice of asceticism, his monks could not only damage their health but also their spiritual lives. He instructed them to ‘endure the monk’s contest nobly and blamelessly, directing your life according to what is pleasing to the Lord’.<sup>215</sup> He was constantly haunted by doubts concerning the future of the *Koinonia* after his death. He feared that Pachomian monasticism could be destroyed when ‘bad men shall rule the brothers and those without knowledge shall have control of the monasteries and shall fight for rank’.<sup>216</sup> There appeared to be a relationship between this fear and his deep concern about allowing priests to become members of his foundations, as outlined in the *Bohairic Life*.<sup>217</sup> The *Paralipomena* emphasized this insecurity, which had become an integral part of Pachomius’ emotional life, and this perhaps may be traced back to the conflict that

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid., p. 41:19.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., p. 42:19.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., p. 39:8.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., p. 39:17.

continued to plague him: his fear of God and eternal punishments, and his belief in the love and compassion of Christ. This is made clear in his petition to God: ‘do not condemn me to eternal punishments in your desire to sleep and take your rest’.<sup>218</sup>

Pachomius faced the problem of trying to communicate with Greek-speaking monks who did not speak his language, the Coptic *Sahidic* dialect. He overcame this, to some extent, by forming two communities in each monastery, a Greek and a Coptic house. He still believed it was necessary to do more, so according to the *Paralipomena*, he prayed to God for assistance and ‘a letter written on a piece of papyrus was sent from heaven into his right hand. Reading it he learnt the speech of all the languages’.<sup>219</sup> This is an example of the hagiographic imagery that permeates the *Paralipomena*.

The authors of the various *Vitae*, with the possible exception of the *Vita Prima Graeca*, are believed to have incorporated portions of the *Paralipomena* in their works. The second Greek Life is considered to be a combination of the *Paralipomena* and the First Greek Life, and it is possible to make use of the *Paralipomena* when attempting to solve contentious issues raised concerning the Pachomian *Vitae*. It stands in its own right as a valuable Pachomian source, as well as being an excellent example of the richness of Pachomian literature.

## **9.8 Letter of Ammon to Theophilos**

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<sup>217</sup> Compare the *Bohairic Life*, p. 47-8, which outlines Pachomius’ objection to the presence of the clergy in his monasteries.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44:20.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52:27.

This text was written by bishop Ammon to Theophilos, allegedly the Patriarch of Alexandria, in response to his request for information concerning the monastic life. It has been argued that the term ‘Theophilos’ did not refer to the Alexandrian patriarch, but was used as a mark of respect to refer to any devout Christian; Theo’ meaning God and ‘philos’ a friend, that is a friend of God.<sup>220</sup> Ammon was converted to Christianity during his seventeenth year, and was received into the Greek-speaking house of the Pachomian monastery at Phbow. Ammon stayed there for a period of three years, under the leadership of Theodore, and became an ardent admirer of his spirituality and leadership qualities. His Letter is an invaluable source of information concerning Pachomian monasticism, though it is of limited value as a source of direct information concerning Pachomius. Ammon moved on to a monastery at Nitria where he remained for a number of years and was consecrated bishop. It is believed he wrote his letter when he was sixty years of age.

In 1680 Papebroch published this Letter, which he had discovered in both the *Florentinus* and the *Atheniensis* manuscripts, and Migne, in the *Patrologia Graeca*, has reproduced Theophilos’ reply. Halkin published both Letters in a critical edition in his *Sancti Pachomii Vitae Graecae*, and in 1986 Goehring published an English translation of both Letters.<sup>221</sup> Ammon was mainly concerned with Theodore, his father superior, and his life as a Pachomian monk. Since Pachomian monasticism stood as a symbol of Pachomius’ life, Ammon’s description of monastic life was an indirect appraisal of Pachomian

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<sup>220</sup> Compare Acts 1:1 the opening sentence has a reference to ‘Theophilos’ in the sense of a friend of God.

<sup>221</sup> This information is drawn from by Goehring, *Letter of Ammon and Pachomian Monasticism*, Walter de Gruyter, New York, 1986, p.p. 24-33, Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia*, Vol. Two, op. cit., pp. 2-3.

spirituality.<sup>222</sup> Ammon lived in a time of great theological turmoil, and as a young monk became confused, but Theodore explained to him how Pachomius had overcome his doubts about the Christian faith. He compared faith to:

This lamp which you see shining like a morning star. will shine for you more than the sun. For it is the proclamation of Christ's gospel, which is proclaimed in his holy church in which you were baptized. The one who is calling is the Christ in Alexander, the bishop of the church of the Alexandrians. The other voices in the darkness are those of the heresies<sup>223</sup>

Theodore passed on to Ammon the teachings of Pachomius, in order to prepare him for the monastic life.

The Letter *of Ammon* is a virtual litany of praise for the sanctity of Theodore, and is mainly concerned with the many miracles attributed to him. After Theodore had healed a man bitten by an asp, some of the monks exclaimed: 'we bless Christ and marvel at Theodore, because he is so acceptable to him'.<sup>224</sup> It must be remembered that Theodore represented the Pachomian ethos and was a faithful and devoted follower of Pachomius. He became possibly the greatest of the Pachomian monks.<sup>225</sup> Theophilus, in his reply to Ammon, wrote: 'I praise you for your remembrance of the saints. You gladden us because you have sent in writing the things that have been heard by us orally'.<sup>226</sup> Ammon's letter, by its detailed descriptions of the monk's everyday living, provided an insight into Pachomian monastic life.

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<sup>222</sup> Ammon wrote concerning Pachomius: 'A certain Pachomius... was pleasing to God. God honoured him with remarkable gifts, making many things known to him Goehring, op. cit., 1986, p. 163.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., p. 165.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid., p. 177.

<sup>225</sup> 'Our father Theodore made fine progress of every kind living a courageous way of life. He was also growing up in the Instructions he would hear from the lips of our father Pachomius' SBo, p. 57.

## 9.9 Writings of Pachomius

### a) Eleven Letters

There are eleven letters attributed to Pachomius still in existence. Their authenticity is still being challenged and remains a contentious issue. They were originally written in the *Sahidic* Coptic dialect and were translated into Latin by Jerome in 404, until recent times his translation being the only available version of them. In 1968 A. Hermann and A. Kropp published a German translation of certain of the letters, which were found in two folios of Parchments dating from fifth to the sixth centuries. In 1972 H. Quecke announced the discovery of a fourth century Greek manuscript that contained five more letters, and in 1975 he published a complete version of the letters *of Pachomius*.<sup>227</sup> Since Pachomius only spoke Coptic, and his knowledge of Greek was minimal, the original texts must have been written in the Sahidic dialect.

Scholars have found it extremely difficult to interpret these texts, as Pachomius followed the early Egyptian tradition of employing cryptograms as a form of code, creating a mysterious style.<sup>228</sup> Their value as a Pachomian source is not great, due to their cryptic nature, and the constant use of biblical quotations. The translation studied is by Veilleux contained in his *Pachomian Koinonia*, Volume Two. Letters four, five and seven will be

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<sup>226</sup> Cited in Goehring, *op. cit.*, 1986, p. 182.

<sup>227</sup> When Quecke published the Greek text of these Letters from the Chester Beatty library in 1975, he added a long and careful analysis of this issue. He came to the conclusion they were written by Pachomius. Veilleux adapted a more cautious position and considered that it was impossible to conclude with any certainty that they were all written by Pachomius. Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia*, Vol. Two, 1981, p. 4.

<sup>228</sup> Chitty believed 'the Coptic alphabet provided the saint with some kind of code, the secret of which he shared with only a few disciples'. Chitty, *op. cit.*, 1966, p. 27.

discussed, as they deal to some degree with life within the Pachomian monasteries, and indicate the control Pachomius exerted over the lives of his monks.

In the fourth letter written by Pachomius to Apa Sourous and house master John of the monastery of Phnoum, he urged the monks ‘strive with all your strength to follow the custom of the monastery and to do what is prescribed’.<sup>229</sup> Pachomius was concerned his monks should maintain their loyalty to their monastic vows, and warned them against the heretical teachings which had emerged throughout the country. This particular letter was written to take the place of an Instruction by Pachomius, who was pressed for time during his visitation to the monastery.

The fifth letter, written to a large assembly of monks gathered at the monastery of Phbow during the days of the Passover, is filled with biblical quotations and allusions. The advice it contains is of such a discursive nature that it is difficult to discover any continuity in its message. His teaching in this letter is based on the premise that ‘if Christ is our master, then let us imitate him and bear his injuries, lest in the age to come we are separated from our brothers’.<sup>230</sup> Unfortunately Pachomius did not develop his ideas but limited himself to biblical allusions.

Letter number seven called for the fathers and housemasters of all the Pachomian monasteries to assemble in the monastery of Phbow, one day of the month called *Mesore*, to obtain forgiveness for their sins. ‘Let their souls be cleansed in sanctification and the

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<sup>229</sup> Fourth Letter of Pachomius, *Pachomian Koinonia*, Vol. Three, p. 59:2.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66:11.

fear of God.<sup>231</sup> He urged his monks to ‘seek the things that are pleasing to God’s will’,<sup>232</sup> and to always remain faithful to the laws of God and his rule, which came from God. These letters offer little information not already provided by the *Vitae* and the *Paralipomena*, and their cryptic nature makes them unintelligible in a number of instances.

## **b) Two Instructions of Pachomius**

These Instructions formed an integral part of the spiritual and devotional lives of the Pachomian monks. ‘He [Pachomius] would often sit to instruct the brothers,’<sup>233</sup> particularly discussing and explaining the teachings of the Scriptures to them. Within each monastery these addresses were given, either by the father superior or one of the housemasters of the monastery, and on special occasions, as during the days of the Passover, Pachomius would deliver these homilies. Usually they were given on Saturdays and Sundays as well as on holy days. They played a vital role in developing a spiritual camaraderie among the monks, and also instructed them in the niceties of monastic life.

### **b) 1 The Instruction Concerning a Spiteful Monk**

Pachomius gave this Instruction to a monk who bore a grudge against a brother monk. It is an original Coptic text and was first translated into English in 1913, by E. Budge. In 1956 Lefort published a new edition of the Coptic text with a French translation alongside it. He made use of an Arabic translation in editing the Coptic text, in particular in

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<sup>231</sup> Ibid., p. 69:1.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid., p. 70:2.

<sup>233</sup> G1, p. 336:56.

clarifying certain passages. The English translation referred to in the thesis is by Veilleux. He queried the Instruction's authenticity, but Budge and Lefort claim it is a genuine work of Pachomius.<sup>234</sup>

In this Instruction Pachomius emphasized the vital role played by asceticism in the attainment of spiritual perfection. 'Be like a poor man carrying his cross and loving tears. You too mourn, with a shroud on your head. May your cell be a tomb for you.'<sup>235</sup> It also offers a profound introduction to the ethos of the Pachomian era. Pachomius taught his monks to 'stay in the comfort of the monastic life right to the end'.<sup>236</sup> He was encouraging his followers to develop the Christian virtues of patience, humility, chastity and charity by imitating 'the lives of the saints'.<sup>237</sup> This Instruction became a virtual dissertation on monastic behaviour, and on the vital importance of the virtue of purity, as he advised them to 'flee concupiscence. It beclouds the mind and prevents it from coming to know the mystery of God'.<sup>238</sup> Pachomius was immersed in the teachings of the desert fathers, and taught that sexual desires can be overcome by the constant practice of asceticism. 'Do battle with prayers, fasting and mortification.'<sup>239</sup>

There is a wealth of Pachomius' spiritual teaching in this Instruction, showing that he was greatly concerned with creating an atmosphere of harmony, understanding and peace in each of his monastic foundations. He realized the importance of achieving these goals, as

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<sup>234</sup> Veilleux wrote that 'the fact that it contains a large quotation of Athanasius permits us to think it could be a Pachomian monk...a few other elements of the Instruction do not fit well into the context of Pachomian cenobitism'. Veilleux, op. cit., 1982, p. 2.

<sup>235</sup> 'Pachomius, Instruction Concerning a Spiteful Monk', Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia*, Vol. Three, 1982, p. 29:50.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid., p. 41:61.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid., p. 14:6.

his monks formed a diverse group of men, many of whom were semi-literate, troubled by sexual problems, and unused to living in a spiritual community. He urged them to ‘take Christ and his good Father as your counsellors’.<sup>240</sup> He fully realized the need for the monks to avoid friction and misunderstanding in their dealings with each other, as otherwise the whole fabric of Christian communal living would be destroyed. This Instruction stands as an excellent guide for people contemplating a monastic life, and it highlights Pachomius’ understanding of human nature with its failings and strengths. He taught his followers to ‘be aware of what you will give God each day’.<sup>241</sup> The quality of this Instruction indicates the reasons, for which Pachomian monasticism became the model for future monastic foundations in the Christian world.

## **b) 2 Instruction on the Six Days of the Passover**

This second Instruction of Pachomius has survived as a fragment, first published by Amelineau in 1895, and again published by Lefort in 1956. In the Pachomian tradition, the term Passover embraced the period of what may be called Holy Week. It ended with the celebration of the feast of the Resurrection, when the catechumens were baptized after a lengthy preparation. The various superiors of the *Koinonia* gave Instructions during this period, and this fragment is the surviving portion of one by Pachomius. These six days become for the monk a macrocosm of their monastic life. Despite its brevity, it manages to convey the uniqueness of Pachomian spirituality. Pachomius outlined the monastic way of life, which revolved around ‘silence, manual labour, manifold prayers, guard of the

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<sup>238</sup> Ibid., p. 20:19.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid., p. 21:22.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid., p. 39:55.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid., p. 39:55.

mouth, purity of body and holiness of heart'.<sup>242</sup> For Pachomius, the Passover was the most sacred part of the monastic year, and he believed it was 'given to us each year for the redemption of our souls'.<sup>243</sup> He saw a relationship between the six days of the creation and the six days of the Passover; reflecting the idea that the monks thus entered into a new life of prayer and sacrifice.

These two Instructions also indicate the mystic nature of his spirituality that equated the love of God with suffering. The *Paralipomena* described how, when Pachomius asked God to grant him mercy, he was sent a vision of the merciful Christ crowned with thorns. An angel said to him:

Since you have asked God to send you his mercy, behold this is his mercy: the Lord of glory, Jesus Christ His only begotten Son whom he sent into the world; you have crucified Him and have put a crown of thorns on His head.<sup>244</sup>

This is how Pachomius, the mystic, envisaged the way Christ achieved the salvation of the world and the way his followers should relate to Him. Whether this and other visions allegedly received by Pachomius are genuine supernatural events or hallucinations, cannot be decided by following the principles of rational thought. No matter how such experiences are judged, for Pachomius they were a reality, and he fashioned his life and that of his monks upon them.

## 9.10 Rule of Pachomius

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<sup>242</sup> Instruction on the Six Days of the Passover, Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia*, Vol. Three, 1982, p. 47:2.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid., p. 47:1.

<sup>244</sup> *Paralipomena*, op. cit., p. 40:18.

After Pachomius' conversion to Christianity he embraced the anchorite way of life, and in this way prepared himself for carrying out, what he considered to be, a direct command from God. He was 'moved by the love of God [and] sought to become a monk'.<sup>245</sup> Pachomius came to the conclusion that if any spiritual community was to be successful, its members must be governed by a set of rules that would regulate their daily activities. He was determined his first failure would never be repeated, and perhaps this explains their rather inflexible, even draconian nature. The original rule of Pachomius belonged to the oral tradition, and only later recorded in writing by members of his community in the Sahidic Coptic dialect. He understood that as circumstances changed, it would need to be modified and altered. After his death, his successors, Horsiesios and Theodore, added to the rule and adapted it to meet changing conditions, but at all times incorporated the ethos of Pachomius. Horsiesios, when he succeeded Pachomius as father superior, insisted the monks 'keep the rules of the community, which Abba Pachomius had established for its constitution while he was still alive, as well as the decisions of the fathers, the housemasters, and the stewards of the monasteries.'<sup>246</sup>

The monastery of Metanoia, established by the patriarch Theophilus, contained a collection of Pachomian documents, which included the *Rule of Pachomius* together with the writings of Horsiesios and Theodore. In 404, Jerome gathered these texts and translated them into Latin, and this collection became known as his *Pachomiana Latina*.<sup>247</sup> In 1919 Lefort included this rule (possibly only fragments) in his *Coptic*

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<sup>245</sup> G1, p. 301.6.

<sup>246</sup> G1, p. 384:122.

<sup>247</sup> Jerome divided the rule into four sections; *Praecepta, Praecepta et Instituta, Praecepta atque Judicia* and *Praecepta ac Leges*. This version has been translated by Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia*, Vol. Two, 1981, and is the version referred to in this thesis.

*Dossier*. Both Greek and Ethiopic translations remain in existence, but Veilleux claimed that these translations possess only a limited value as Pachomian sources.<sup>248</sup> With all the modifications, alterations and additions, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to discover the original rule of Pachomius. Jerome wrote in the prologue to his translation, ‘these [rules] were the first in the Thebaid and Egypt to lay the foundations of cenobitic monasticism according to the precepts of God’.<sup>249</sup>

The approach to be adopted in examining the rule of Pachomius involves discussing its structure, its goals and influence on both the spiritual and secular lives of the monks. The spirituality of Pachomius lived on in his rule, which also encapsulated his humanity. The four divisions in Jerome’s Latin translation were believed by Veilleux, not to be the result of an evolutionary process, but to have evolved at approximately the same time, but in a different context.<sup>250</sup>

### **a) *Praecepta*.** (Precepts)

These discussed in detail the behaviour of the monks, in every aspect of their daily lives: how they were to walk: behave in their relationship with their fellow monks: and their attendance at their liturgical duties, including *synaxis* and the celebration of the Eucharist. This was an extremely legalistic document and consisted of one hundred and forty-five Precepts. They incorporated the ideas and beliefs of a spiritual leader who was determined to establish a way of life that would enable his followers to achieve a degree of spiritual perfection.

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<sup>248</sup> Veilleux, op. cit., p. 9.

## **b) *Praecepta et Instituta*** (Precepts and Institutes)

This section of the rule became the housemasters' virtual guidebook, as they were responsible for maintaining a degree of harmony, stability and order within the monastery. The precepts of the *Praecepta et Instituta* regulated every hour of the monk's daily life, and this might have resulted in their becoming, to some extent, regimented robots incapable of any spontaneous spiritual act. The detailed nature of the regulations indicated Pachomius' belief that the final success of any monastic foundation depended upon each monk accepting the responsibility associated with communal living.<sup>251</sup> Once again Pachomius' fear of failure is evident in the framing of these rules and underlines his determination to ensure the *Koinonia* would be a successful foundation.

## **c) *Praecepta atque Judicia*** (Precepts and Judgments).

This section of the rule defines failures in duty and unacceptable behaviour and stresses in each case, the punishment to be meted out.<sup>252</sup> Pachomius always attempted to place a spiritual value on obeying the rule, and taught his monks that obedience to the command of a superior was, in reality, obedience to the will of God. The *Praecepta atque Judicia* contained sixteen precepts and judgments, and the prescribed penances were in proportion

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<sup>249</sup> Cited *ibid.*, p. 141.

<sup>250</sup> Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia*, Vol. Two, p. 10.

<sup>251</sup> Precept nine 'if they find someone contentious and arguing beyond measure, he shall be punished as his deed deserves'. *Ibid.*, p. 170. Precept eighteen is concerned with a number of restrictions, for example 'he shall not be carried away by the desires of his eyes,...he shall not desire beautiful clothes...he shall not eat the bread of fraudulence', p. 177. It added 'if the monk neglects any of these [restrictions] it shall be measured out to him with the measure he has used. p. 174.

<sup>252</sup> Precept one 'he [the guilty one] shall be separated from the assembly of the brothers [for] seven days and shall receive only bread and water'. *Ibid.*, p. 175. Precept four concerns the punishment for

to the seriousness of the offence. While these individual precepts appear to be harsh and uncompromising, it must be realized that they were the means by which Pachomius was able to control the behaviour of a diverse body of men, whose motives for entering the monastic life were sometimes suspect. They represent a legalistic side to Pachomius' character, which is not evident to any degree in the remaining Pachomian literature.

**d) *Praecepta ac Leges*** (Precepts and laws)

These precepts governed every aspect of *synaxis*, which usually took place morning and evening in each monastery. They also elaborated on the duties of the housemasters, with regard to the supervision of the monk's behaviour at the celebration of the Eucharist. Pachomius was obviously greatly concerned with establishing a uniform code of devotional behaviour within each monastery, to guarantee a spirit of harmony among the brothers. He believed the future of the *Koinonia* could only be secured, if the monks followed the spirit of his rule, as well as its precepts. These precepts indicate Pachomius' respect for the tradition of the early church, in particular to its developing liturgical life.<sup>253</sup>

This rule of Pachomius, even if it had been altered and modified, stood as a symbol of his spiritual and temporal leadership. It was through these precepts that he was able to establish his ideals of what constituted the monastic life. The teachings of the Scriptures were an integral part of his rule, and to what degree he was responsible for each individual precept remains a matter for speculation. The leadership qualities of the

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'perverting the souls of the simple...he shall be beaten before the gates and shall be given only bread and water to eat,' Ibid., p. 176.

Pachomius of history, together with his vision of an ideal form of cenobitic monasticism, are encapsulated in his rule.

## 9.11 Writings of Horsiesios

Horsiesios was a devout Pachomian monk, who became the father superior of all the Pachomian monks after the death of Petronios. He lacked a degree of confidence in his ability to become the leader, but felt obliged to take up the challenge. He exclaimed: 'I have not been convinced for a single day that I am the right one for the task'.<sup>254</sup> He believed he lacked the ability to be a leader and feared that if he failed, then God would punish him. Perhaps this explains his reluctance to succeed Petronios. Though he was an extremely devout monk who had lived in the shadow of Pachomius, he felt incapable of assuming his mantle. He ruled with caution, and when Apollonios, the father superior of the Pachomian monastery at Thmouson, openly defied him over a financial arrangement, Horsiesios was forced to resign in favour of Theodore who ruled the order for a number of years. After the death of Theodore he was re-appointed as the father superior, and ruled the Pachomian monasteries with a great deal of success.

Horsiesios was an enigma: an extremely devout monk who displayed complete loyalty to both Pachomius and Theodore, but lacked the confidence to emulate them as the father superior. He appeared to be an extremely sensitive person, possessed of an innate sense of the sacred, and his writings are outstanding examples of Pachomian spirituality and are

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<sup>253</sup> Precept two 'the brothers shall come to the *synaxis* after they have been summoned. Nobody shall leave his cell before the signal is given'. p. 181. Precept twelve 'when the housemaster teaches the brothers about the holy way of life, no one shall be absent without very serious necessity'. pp. 181-182.

<sup>254</sup> SBo, p. 188:131.

among the most valuable of the Pachomian era. They include his *Letters, Instructions, Testament* and *Regulations*. The Horsiesios discovered in his writings, was a dedicated monk, who achieved greatness by assuming a role that was anathema to him.

## **a) Letters of Horsiesios**

Four Letters of Horsiesios are still in existence, two contained in a manuscript published first by Amelineau, and later by Lefort in an edited version. The last two letters were addressed to Theodore and were discovered among the Coptic codices held at the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin. As with all other Pachomian literature, they contain many biblical quotations and allusions to figures from the Scriptures. There is no evidence to show when they were written, but they appear to belong to the period when Horsiesios was the father superior. Two letters held at the Chester Beatty Library have not yet been published, and the translation of them by Veilleux was based on T. Orlandii's transcription.<sup>255</sup>

The first letter is a virtual journey through the Scriptures, consisting of a discourse on a number of biblical passages, and provides little information concerning the life of Pachomius. The second, addressed to Theodore, is a letter of greeting, and also contains passages of biblical allusions. The third and fourth letters are addressed to Theodore and provide only minimal information concerning the Pachomian era. They are really homilies based on scriptural teachings, and are the letters of a deeply spiritual and humble man, immersed in the ethos of Christianity.

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<sup>255</sup> Veilleux, 'The Letters of Horsiesios,' *Pachomian Koinonia*, Vol. Three, 1982, p. 8.

## **b) Instructions of Horsiesios**

Of these Instructions, seven are attributed to Horsiesios while the eighth one is believed to have been written earlier by Pachomius,<sup>256</sup> and has not been included in Veilleux's translation. They are held in three manuscripts, folios of which have been distributed to various libraries throughout the world.

The first Instruction is a discourse on how a faithful monk should always conduct himself in a Pachomian monastery: 'with good deeds, let us wage every battle and let us not allow the demon to make us strangers to the kingdom of God'.<sup>257</sup> The fragment of the second Instruction is too brief to be of any value, while the third is a virtual sermon on the nature of the spiritual life. 'Let us hasten to fill our granaries with wheat worthy of heaven.'<sup>258</sup> Instructions four, five and six continue in the same vein and are concerned with the spiritual lives of the monks.

The seventh is the longest of the Instructions of Horsiesios, and is the most important one, as it deals with the perennial problem of homosexuality in the monasteries. It is the most explicit condemnation of this behaviour expressed in any Pachomian document. Horsiesios realized that any form of sexual behaviour threatened the very foundations of Pachomian monasticism, particularly sexual relationships between consenting monks. He exclaimed:

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<sup>256</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>257</sup> First *Instruction* of Pachomius, *Pachomian Koinonia* Vol. Three, p. 136:32.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid., p. 140:3.

O, monasticism, arise and weep over yourself; arise and weep over your respectable habit, which will be worn by those who are in a class with swine and mules. Arise and weep over your great men, one time great, and glory in your habit: but behold, they are about to die a startling death.<sup>259</sup>

He painted a detailed picture of the practices of debauchery and perversion, which existed side by side with the deep spirituality of devout Pachomian monks. This Instruction stands in contrast with the other six Instructions, and deals openly and firmly with a problem, endemic to gatherings of men despite the sanctity of their surroundings. After reading this Instruction it is difficult to understand how Horsiesios could doubt his ability to be a leader of men.

### **c) Testament of Horsiesios**

This is also known as *The Book of Our Father Horsiesios (Liber Orsiesii)*, and is considered to be the most important text in his writings. It consists of many biblical passages and allusions, which are interspersed with his views on the nature of Pachomian spirituality. The earliest version of this text is a translation by Jerome into Latin, and formed the basis for further translations into German, French and English. Horsiesios insisted that the monk's path to salvation had been charted by Pachomius, and urged them to 'study with an anxious heart each command of our Father [Pachomius] and those who have taught us'.<sup>260</sup> He taught that Pachomius was the image of the ideal monk, and counseled them to behave in such a way that their lives would mirror that of Pachomius. Horsiesios was obviously entrenched in the Pachomian way of life, and his loyalty to

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<sup>259</sup> Seventh Instruction of Horsiesios, op. cit., pp. 145-146:2.

<sup>260</sup> Testament of Horsiesios, *Pachomian Koinonia*, Vol. Three, pp. 173-175.

Pachomius could never be in doubt. He felt a deep empathy with his fellow monks, and when he was in authority always attempted to treat them with compassion and understanding. He stressed to his successors: ‘do not teach them spiritual things while oppressing them in their bodily needs’.<sup>261</sup>

Pastoral care could be said to have originated with Horsiesios, as he insisted that all those in authority should ‘guard the flock committed to him with all care and solicitude, let them [those in authority] imitate the shepherds of the gospel.’<sup>262</sup> The spirit of Pachomius lived on in Horsiesios, and his writings enshrined all the elements of Pachomian spirituality. He stressed the need for complete obedience, and urged the monks to ‘strive after humility and modesty and consider the various commands of the elders as a norm of common life’.<sup>263</sup> For Horsiesios each Pachomian monastery was ‘the house of God and the vineyard of the saints,’<sup>264</sup> and for him the life of a monk mirrored the life of Christ. In keeping with Pachomius’ teaching, he stressed the importance of the virtue of humility, which became the basis of a spiritual life.

Throughout his Testament he epitomized the ideals of Pachomius, and taught ‘we should therefore love one another and show that we truly are the servants of Our Lord Jesus Christ and sons of Pachomius and disciples of the *Koinonia*’.<sup>265</sup> His writings indicate the depths of his spirituality and perhaps, his vocation was to be a contemplative, immersed in the mystical aspect of Christianity. There is a sensitivity in his work that is lacking in

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<sup>261</sup> Ibid., p. 175:7.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid., p. 181:2.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid., p. 183:18.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid., p. 192:28.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid., p. 188:23.

the majority of the Pachomian texts, and it makes him one of the most engaging figures of the Pachomian era.

#### **d) Regulations of Horsiesios**

This work became a source of controversy and its authenticity has been questioned. In 1888 Amelineau published a series of its precepts, which he decided belonged to Apa Shenoute of Atripe, the founder of the White monastery, which became the centre for Coptic Christianity and Coptic nationalism. He was supported in this view, to a limited degree, by J. Leipoldt, a German scholar, who carried out a great deal of research on the life of Shenoute. He came to the conclusion that, if Shenoute was not the author, then it must have been written in a Shenoutian monastery. Lefort advanced a different theory and claimed Horsiesios wrote these regulations. He argued that the vocabulary used belonged to the Pachomian era, and since Horsiesios was mentioned in a Pachomian source as making additions to the rule of Pachomius, then it was highly probable that regulations attributed to Shenoute by Amelineau, were really written by Horsiesios.<sup>266</sup> Discovering the identity of the author of these regulations is extremely difficult, as the evidence is so meagre and any conclusion must be based mainly on conjecture.

The text lacks the legalistic nature of the rule of Pachomius, and is a collection of passages, which offer advice to the monks concerning their behaviour within the monastery. It is of interest to note that Horsiesios rarely mentioned punishments for monks who failed in their duties. His precepts are frequently prefaced with the words ‘let

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<sup>266</sup> For a discussion of this issue refer to Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia*, Vol. Two, p. 12.

us’, and this gives the impression of a form of advice. ‘Let us therefore guard against slothfulness in all things.’<sup>267</sup> There are sixty-four regulations in all, and they deal with many of the mundane tasks of monastic life. At all times Horsiesios adopted a commonsense approach when formulating his precepts, and they form a practical attempt to assist the monks as they go about their daily tasks. He urged his monks to ‘take heed for everything in faith, for the things of the *Koinonia* are not fleshy things like those of the world’.<sup>268</sup> The writings of Horsiesios present a more personalized approach than that adopted by Pachomius, and this possibly indicates the difference in the personality of the two men. Horsiesios stands as a symbol of what a Pachomian monk should be.

## 9.12 Writings of Theodore

This includes three Instructions and two letters. Theodore was the third successor to Pachomius as the father superior of all Pachomian monasteries. He joined a Pachomian community when he was fourteen years of age, and became one of the most famous of all Pachomian monks. His life symbolized the spiritual traditions of Pachomian monasticism, and as a monk he followed an exemplary lifestyle. As father superior of all Pachomian monasteries, he enabled Pachomian monasticism to reach its zenith.<sup>269</sup> Throughout his life he faithfully followed in the footsteps of his beloved father, Pachomius.

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<sup>267</sup> The Regulations of Horsiesios, *Pachomian Koinonia*, Vol. Two, 1981, p. 203:19.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 208:22.

<sup>269</sup> According to the *Bohairic Life*, ‘Theodore used to keep vigil, praying to God from evening until morning. Having become a son of our father Pachomius, he resembled him in every way’. SBo, p. 232:190.

## a) Three Instructions of Theodore

It is highly probable that Theodore would have issued a number of Instructions to his monks, but only three are still in existence, two of which are fragmentary. They were discovered as separate documents in a Coptic compilation, and were published by Lefort in 1956. The first fragmentary Instruction consists of eight lines, and is too brief to be of any value as a Pachomian source. The second Instruction is slightly longer, approximately thirty lines. Its importance lies in the comparison of the life of the Pachomian monks to that of the Apostles. ‘There appeared upon the earth the holy *Koinonia* by which he [God] made known the life of the Apostles to men.’<sup>270</sup> It also urged the monks to follow the rule of Pachomius strictly, as the entire future of the *Koinonia* depended upon this. ‘Let us then practice his commandments according to the whole law he imposed upon us.’<sup>271</sup>

The third Instruction is of reasonable length and deals with the ideals espoused by Pachomian monasticism. It also stresses the unique value of the *Koinonia* to the world of Christianity. Theodore urged the brothers ‘put your whole heart to walking in accordance with the whole law of the *Koinonia*’.<sup>272</sup> For Theodore, the *Koinonia* was based on Apostolic traditions and the rule of Pachomius was divinely inspired:

That [*Koinonia*] has as its authors after the Apostles Apa Pachomius, the man whose God given promises we are ready to inherit, only if we observe his commandments.<sup>273</sup>

This Instruction plumbs the depths of Pachomian spirituality, and it stands as one of the most appealing of the Pachomian texts. It manages to present the Pachomian message without the presence of hagiographic piety. He taught his followers to follow ‘the way in

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<sup>270</sup> Second Instruction of Theodore, *Pachomian Koinonia*, Vol. Three, p. 91:1,

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92:3.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94:4.

which the Apostle behaved, the elect of God who told us, be like me as I am like Christ'.<sup>274</sup>

There is a directness about Theodore's third Instruction that enabled him to explain, in simple terms, the most difficult scriptural passages. He referred to the teachings of the Scriptures as 'the doctrine which flows from his [God's] goodness'<sup>275</sup> and faith as 'the lamp that has been lit in us'.<sup>276</sup> The Pachomian *Vitae* contain many other examples of Theodore's Instructions<sup>277</sup> but they lack the clarity and depth of thought that belonged to his third Instruction.

## **b) The Letters of Theodore**

Two of Theodore's letters have been preserved one in Coptic and the other in Latin. The first one is referred to as the Easter Letter, as it was written to all the monasteries about the ceremonies involved with the feast of the Passover. In this letter he invited all the Pachomian monks to gather at the monastery of Phbow for the ceremonies. This epistle was translated into Latin by Jerome, and in it Theodore makes frequent references to the Rule of Pachomius, and urged the monks always to carry out Pachomius' wishes.<sup>278</sup> The letters of Theodore highlight his spirituality and also his wish that the Rule of Pachomius should always be remembered and followed.<sup>279</sup> Theodore never lost sight of Pachomius'

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<sup>273</sup> Ibid., p. 95:5.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid., p. 96:6.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid., p. 118:43.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid., p. 116:40.

<sup>277</sup> G1, pp. 390-1:131, pp. 397-400:140-142.

<sup>278</sup> The first letter of Theodore, *Pachomian Koinonia*, Vol. 3, p. 124.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid., p. 124:5

monastic ideals, and was determined they should always be kept in front of the Pachomian monks.

In his second letter he described Pachomius as their ‘mediator before God,’<sup>280</sup> and he begged his followers to remain faithful to their monastic vows. This letter is a relatively brief epistle and it is difficult to discover any further information concerning the Pachomian era. Although the Instructions and Letters of Theodore, rely heavily on biblical quotations, they provide a clear picture of the influence of Pachomius’ life and teachings on his followers. The writings of Horsiesios and Theodore are among the most appealing of all the Pachomian texts.

## **9.13 Original Texts from the Era of the Desert Fathers**

These texts include the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, *The Lives of the Desert Fathers* and the *Lausiatic History of Palladius*,<sup>281</sup> which are sources of information concerning the era in which Pachomius lived as an anchorite, and prepared himself to become a monk and the founder of Pachomian monasticism.

### **a) Lausiatic History of Palladius**

Palladius wrote his history during the early part of the fifth century possibly around 420. He dedicated it to Lausus, a chamberlain at the court of Theodosius the second. Palladius

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<sup>280</sup> The Second Letter of Theodore, op. cit., p. 128:3.

<sup>281</sup> *The Lives of the Desert Fathers*. Historia Monachorum in Aegypto, trans. N. Russell, Mowbray & Co. London, 1981. *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, The Alphabetical Collection, trans., B. Ward, Mowbray & Co. London, 1975. *The Lausiatic History of Palladius*, ed. W. Lowther Clarke, Macmillan, New York, 1918.

was born into a Christian family in Galatia, and died in 431. He was an extremely devout Christian, and decided early in his life to become a monk. He travelled extensively throughout Palestine and Egypt, visiting various monasteries to discover more about the monastic way of life, and finally settled in a monastery on the Mount of Olives in Palestine. He then went to Alexandria, where he made contact with the Catechetical School of Alexandria. From there he travelled to Nitria and then to Cellia, where he studied under Evagrius Ponticus. His health began to deteriorate and he finally settled at Helenopolis, where he was consecrated a bishop. It is believed it was here that he wrote his *Lausiatic History*.

In the nineteenth century, H. Weingarten launched a bitter attack against the value and historical authenticity of this work, and was supported by R. Reitzenstein. He claimed a large portion of this work was actually a reproduction of earlier documents.<sup>282</sup> Though O. Zoekler and Dom Butler sprang to the defence of Palladius, scholars continue to severely criticize this work. It is fair to say Palladius has managed to capture the ambiance of the spirituality of the desert fathers, and brought to life, to such a large extent, the world that moulded the character of Pachomius. In his prologue, Palladius virtually defends his work's lack of historical accuracy, when he wrote: 'the object of our enquiry is not the place where they settled, but the fashion of their plan of life'.<sup>283</sup> It should be judged, not as an historically accurate work, but as a sociological appraisal of the world of the desert fathers.

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<sup>282</sup> Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia*, Vol. Two, p. 5.

<sup>283</sup> *The Lausiatic History of Palladius*, op. cit., p. 46.

Two chapters are of vital interest, as they concern Pachomius and the Pachomian monks and nuns.<sup>284</sup> Chapter twenty-two introduces the legend of the angelic rule of Pachomius:

An angel appeared and said ‘you have successfully ordered your own life... so legislate for them’, and he gave him a brass tablet on which was inscribed [God’s rule for Pachomian monasticism].<sup>285</sup>

This legend has been included in the biography of Pachomius, but it is purely hagiographic and lacks any historical substantiation. The rules outlined in Palladius’ history bear some relation to the precepts in Jerome’s translation of Pachomius’ rule, but this is not sufficient evidence to suggest that this history is authentic. With regard to the Pachomian nuns, Palladius seems to have relied heavily on the account supplied by the *Bohairic Life*.<sup>286</sup> This *Lausiac History of Palladius* provides excellent background material concerning the era of the desert fathers, and this is the main reason for its value.

## **b) *Lives of the Desert Fathers***

The literature of the desert fathers includes two major works, the *Lives of the Desert Fathers* and the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*. They outline in graphic detail the customs and ethos of these holy men of the Egyptian desert, and bring to life the world of the anchorites. This was the world in which Pachomius first developed his spirituality, and it became the birthplace of Pachomian monasticism.

During the fourth century a number of devout Christians formed groups that undertook pilgrimages into the interior of the Egyptian desert, to discover the world of the desert fathers. Many famous figures of this period including Cassian, Basil, Jerome, Palladius,

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<sup>284</sup> Ch. twenty-two, pp. 112-116, and ch. twenty-three, pp. 116-118.

and Rufinus of Aquileia, took part in these pilgrimages. One pilgrim was Timotheus, an archdeacon of Alexandria, who wrote a book describing his particular journey, and the lifestyle of the desert fathers he encountered. This text, written in Greek, became known as the *Lives of the Desert Fathers*. Rufinus of Aquileia published a Latin translation of this work, which included many additions and alterations. Festugiere published a critical edition of this composite work in the *Studia Historiographica* in 1961 in Brussels, and an English translation by Russell was published in London in 1981.

This text describes the daily lives of a number of the desert fathers, as they sought to escape from the trappings of this world, to one dominated by their love of God. Asceticism permeated every hour of each day, and through prayer and suffering, they attempted to discover the essence of the Divine. Because of the sanctity of their lives and their harsh and unrelenting lifestyle, people came to regard them as living saints and virtual mediators before the throne of God. They saw them as channels that carried God's graces to the world. For an excellent summation of the life followed by these holy men, in particular those of Syria, refer to P. Brown, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity*, and *Cult of the Saints*.<sup>287</sup> It seems paradoxical that the withdrawal of the anchorites from the world brought the world closer to them.

There are many instances of the practice of excessive asceticism, as well as the genuine spirituality of these desert fathers. One example is the behaviour of Abba John who stood 'under a rock for three years in uninterrupted prayer, not sitting at all or lying down to

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<sup>285</sup> Ibid., p. 112.

<sup>286</sup> SBo, op. cit., pp. 49-50.

sleep'.<sup>288</sup> Abba Or summed up the ethos of the desert fathers, when he told his followers: 'I have Christ as my King whom I adore without ceasing'.<sup>289</sup> Unfortunately the anchorites appear to have turned asceticism into a form of competition, to see who could endure the most bizarre form of self-punishment. Apollo of Hermopolis severely censured those who wore chains and let their hair grow long, 'for these make an exhibition of themselves and chase after human approbation.'<sup>290</sup>

The *Lives of the Desert Fathers* is filled with accounts of supernatural events, and the miraculous is never far from being present in the daily lives of the anchorites. Rational thought would dismiss these happenings as being the result of hallucinations, brought on possibly by excessive practice of asceticism, or the presence of a psychological imbalance. It is difficult to argue with this conclusion, but it is possible that an element of truth remains in the accounts recorded in this text, particularly regarding the spirituality of these holy men.

### **c) *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers.***

There are three major collections which form the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, the Alphabetical, the Systematic (Subject) and Anonymous. The Alphabetical Collection consists of sayings grouped together according to the order of the first letter in the author's name. The Systematic is linked together according to the nature of the subject

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<sup>287</sup> P. Brown, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1982, and *Cult of the Saints*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1981.

<sup>288</sup> *Lives of the Desert Fathers*, *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*, trans. N. Russell, Mowbray & Co., London, 1981, p. 93.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64:10.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78:59.

matter, and the Anonymous collection is a compilation attributed to unknown sources. These collections originally belonged to an oral tradition, but were later transcribed into Greek, Coptic and Latin. Unfortunately the copyists felt free to re-arrange and embellish them, and on occasions, attributed them to the wrong source. There is little doubt that this text reflects genuine traditions of the desert fathers, which were mainly of an apocalyptic nature. It is believed to have emerged in the fourth century, in Egypt, Syria and Palestine, and was arranged in its present form towards the end of the sixth century. It is the Alphabetical Collection that is discussed here.

There are many examples of the sanctity of the anchorites contained in the *Sayings*, and a number of them will be discussed in order to gain an understanding of the world, which formed the character of Pachomius. Antony offered his followers the anchorite manifesto:

Always have the fear of God before your eyes. Remember him who gives death and life. Hate the world and all that is in it. Renounce this life that you may be alive to God.<sup>291</sup>

Abba Agathon gave a telling definition of charity: ‘if I could meet a leper, give him my body and take his, I should be very happy’.<sup>292</sup> That indeed is perfect charity. When Abba Macarius was asked how one should pray, he replied: ‘there is no need to make long discourses; it is enough to stretch out one’s hands and say ‘Lord as you will’.’<sup>293</sup> This text is filled with pithy spiritual sayings, which seem to have emanated from the heart of the spirituality of the anchorites. It is a far more enlightening work than the *Lives of the Desert Fathers*, as it lacks the excessive exaggerations of that work. The *Sayings of the Desert Fathers* belongs to the genre of great spiritual writings. Abba Poemen introduced a

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<sup>291</sup> *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20:26.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111:19.

theme of mystical spirituality, when he said: ‘my thought was with Saint Mary the Mother of God, as she wept by the cross of the Saviour. I wish I could always weep like that’.<sup>294</sup> The world of the desert fathers seems distant from to-day’s world, and yet it was the matrix from which evolved a particular, almost mystic, form of spirituality, excessive though it may seem to modern Christianity.

## 9. 14 Conclusion

Pachomius and Pachomian monasticism are enshrined in the original literature of the Pachomian era with its roots in the world of the desert fathers. Throughout these texts, the spirituality of the desert comes to life. Their authors were primarily concerned with perpetuating the memory of both the spirituality and achievements of Pachomius, and not with historical minutiae. The Pachomian *Vitae* and the writings of Pachomius, Horsiesios and Theodore are responsible for introducing Pachomius and Pachomian monasticism to the world and without them the Pachomian era might have passed by virtually unnoticed. The spirituality of Pachomius, together with that of his followers, formed the major themes of the Pachomian texts, which enlarged on them to great effect.

As with all literary texts some are more appealing than others, and if it were appropriate to make a personal choice concerning Pachomian literature, the *Bohairic Life* and the writings of Horsiesios and Theodore would be the chosen ones. The third instruction of Theodore, the seventh instruction of Horsiesios, together with his Testament, and in particular the description in the *Bohairic Life* of Pachomius’ last illness and death, are

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<sup>294</sup> Ibid., p. 157:144.

outstanding examples of Pachomian writing. They manage to bring to life, without the aid of hagiography, the essence of Pachomius' spirituality, and introduce to the world the Pachomius of history.

## **Chapter Ten:**

### **Pachomian Monasticism**

#### **10.1 Introduction**

A detailed study of the nature and structure of Pachomian monasticism opens a gateway to the world of Pachomius. It will involve examining the emergence and expansion of the Pachomian monastic foundation, the lifestyle of the monks, the role played by Pachomius as its father superior, and its importance, not only to Christian Egypt, but also to the whole of Christendom. Pachomian monasticism was the culmination of Pachomius' life's work and a tribute to him and to his monks.

During the early part of the fourth century, Christianity was still establishing itself as an integral part of the Egyptian world. It lacked a central religious authority and was forced to rely on a series of regional communities to present its teachings and establish an acceptable form of religious practices. This resulted in a lack of a united front against Gnosticism and other dubious teachings, and led to a degree of uncertainty among the Egyptian Christians. The Roman authorities were still exploiting and oppressing the people, and as a result many Egyptians fled to the desert to escape from poverty and persecution, and at the same time sought to find solace in offering themselves to God. In many instances it would have been difficult to decide which was the more important reason for their flight.<sup>295</sup>

#### **10.2 Origins of Christian Monasticism in Egypt**

The origins of Christian monasticism in Egypt have become quite a contentious issue. A number of theories have been advanced, and include the remotely possible influence of the Katachoi, who belonged to the pagan temple at Serapis, of the Hellenistic philosophical schools such as the Stoics, and the Therapeutae and Essenes of Judaism. With the exception of the Essenes, these other influences remain unlikely factors to have aided in the emergence of Christian monasticism. A more probable explanation is that Pachomian monasticism evolved from the anchorite eremitic way of life, which was established by Antony in the Egyptian desert.<sup>296</sup> This consisted of a group of devout Christians who lived in cells or caves in the vicinity of the abode of a particular holy anchorite, who became their spiritual mentor.

During the seven years he had spent with Palamon, Pachomius had witnessed at first hand this way of life. He came to realize its shortcomings, as its appeal was limited to a rather elite group of people and not to the majority of Egyptian Christians. He decided to reform this rather solitary way of life, and did this by following the model of the early Christian spiritual communes, which had sprung up in Jerusalem. The final result was his revolutionary form of cenobitic monasticism, Pachomian monasticism. Whether he was acting in accordance with a direct command from God, or whether he was inspired by his own observations, did not really affect the establishment of Pachomian monasticism per se, as Pachomius states he believed he was obeying the wishes of God, and acted accordingly.

### **10.3 Emergence of Pachomian Monasticism**

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<sup>295</sup> For a reference to this state of affairs in fourth century Egypt refer to Bagnall, *op. cit.*, 1993, Bauer, *op.*

After the death of Palamon, Pachomius was joined by his brother John and they decided to live together and follow the life style of the anchorites: 'there they were having nothing save the law of God'.<sup>297</sup> After a time they were joined by a number of devout Christians, and gradually a basic Christian community was formed. From this rather humble beginning, Pachomian monasticism emerged. It passed through many stages and, despite an early failure, a Pachomian monastery was established at Tabennisi. This was the first of nine monasteries for men and two for women, established by Pachomius and his monks. These foundations lasted for three centuries and became the model upon which all future Christian monasteries would be based. Pachomian monasticism added a new dimension to the world of Egyptian Christianity, and became a spiritual haven for the exploited and persecuted Christian people. It gave the ordinary person a chance to become a part of a new spiritual world and discover the presence of the sacred. It did not herald the demise of eremitic monasticism, as down the centuries and even in to-day's world, monks continue to follow the eremitic way of life.<sup>298</sup>

Pachomius lived in a world dominated by the presence of heretical and heterodoxical teachings, and also the divisive Melitian schism. Gnosticism together with the teachings of Arius, posed the greatest threat to the stability and unity of Christianity at that time. Political, social and religious unrest created a great deal of uncertainty in the Egyptian Christian world, and Pachomian monasticism became a stabilizing force in the midst of all this turmoil. The Pachomian monks were an inspiration to the Christians, and

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cit., 1971.

<sup>296</sup> Refer to *Life of Antony* by Athanasius, trans. R. Meyer, Newman Press, London, 1950.

<sup>297</sup> G1, p. 306:13

<sup>298</sup> In both Cistercian and Carthusian monasteries throughout the world, provision is made for monks to practice the eremitic life style within the confines of their monasteries.

Athanasius said of them: ‘happy and blessed are they always, until they are crowned, carry the cross of the Lord whose ignominy is glory and whose toil is refreshment’.<sup>299</sup> Pachomius offered his monks the means to become martyrs in an unbloody way, and encouraged them to reject the world, renouncing all its pleasures, and to follow a life of prayer and self-mortification as part of a spiritual community. The monastic life established by Pachomius was an attempt to mirror the life of Christ, and in so doing would have allowed the monks to obtain eternal salvation. The simplicity of the Pachomian way of life, with its lack of theological sophistication and its concentration on the basic teachings of the Scriptures, became a refuge for many devout Christians.

According to the Pachomian *Vitae*, Pachomius and his monks were loyal supporters of Athanasius and the Alexandrian authorities, in their struggle against the forces of heresy. ‘Pachomius emphatically ordered the brothers not only not to dare to read that man’s [Origen’s] writings but not even to listen to his sayings’.<sup>300</sup> Scholars who contend Pachomius was not overly concerned with engaging in theological disputations have challenged this view, claiming he was more concerned with caring for the spiritual and temporal welfare of his monks.<sup>301</sup> Pachomius was vital to Pachomian monasticism, and was virtually obsessed with the idea that if he failed, then he had betrayed the trust of God. This added to the stress, which began to dominate his life.

## 10.4 Establishment of Pachomian Monasticism

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<sup>299</sup> G1, p. 401:144.

<sup>300</sup> G1, p. 318:31.

<sup>301</sup> Goehring discusses this issue at length in *Pachomius Vision of Heresy*, Goehring, op. cit., 1999, pp. 137-61.

Pachomian monasticism was finally established when Pachomius clothed his followers in a monk's habit. 'He introduced them gradually to the life [of a Pachomian monk]'.<sup>302</sup> and became their guide and spiritual director. In its early stages the community faced many problems, and Pachomius was forced to expel a number of unsatisfactory monks. As a result the first Pachomian foundation ended in failure. The fundamental Pachomian ideal was the complete acceptance of the concept of renunciation and the practices of prayer and asceticism, and Pachomius believed Christ existed, in a mystical way, in the heart of every devout monk.

It is difficult to understand how Pachomian monasticism progressed from its failed first foundation, to become an organized and successful cenobitic monastic establishment. The *Pachomian Vitae* and the *Paralipomena* do not describe any of its evolutionary stages, except to mention Pachomius building a church for the villagers and also one in the monastery. 'When the brothers came to number one hundred he built a church in the monastery so that they might praise God there'.<sup>303</sup> How Pachomius achieved this feat of organizing the design and structure of his monastery is not outlined in Pachomian literature. He was obviously assisted by his monks, a number of whom would have been tradesmen, but that he managed to succeed without any model to guide him, was remarkable. He was the architect, builder, supervisor and driving force behind this mammoth task. and it is highly probable that Pachomius encouraged his workers by insisting that their every act was a prayer, and their efforts were for the glory of God. This approach would have been in keeping with Pachomius' idea of what constituted a

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<sup>302</sup> G1, p. 312:24

<sup>303</sup> SBo, p. 47:25

spiritual way of life, that is a life of prayer, and his spirituality permeated every Pachomian monastery.

The arrangement of the actual layout of the monastic buildings, in particular the living quarters of the monks, and the organization of their daily lives, must have been a major undertaking and would have tested Pachomius' ability to the limit. It appears that Pachomius was a pragmatist as well as an idealistic visionary, and this enabled him to turn his dream into a reality. It is possible to visualize the floor plan of a typical Pachomian monastery, which was the result of a definite idea, unlike the eremitic systems of Paul and Antony, which were spontaneous arrangements of a group of disciples around a teacher.<sup>304</sup>

The typical Pachomian monastery provided a series of houses, where the monks lived in separate cells, in which a housemaster, assisted by a number of monks acting as stewards, supervised them. In time a church, an infirmary, a library, and a building that acted as a meeting centre, were added. A bakery and kitchen were also built, as well as places where manual work could be carried out. A wall with a gate manned by a porter surrounded all this. The planning and building of this structure would have taken years, and was a tribute to the ability and determination of Pachomius and his fellow monks. He grouped his monks together according to their various skills, and was thus able to place them selectively where they could be used to best advantage. He had developed all the attributes of a charismatic leader and possessed the ability to inspire his followers to

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<sup>304</sup> A great amount of information was provided by C. Walters, *Monastic Archaeology in Egypt*, Modern Egyptology Series, Aris and Phillips, Warminster, England, 1974.

achieve the almost impossible. ‘This is why through the divine goodness which was in him he encourages whoever wishes to obey him’.<sup>305</sup> This is an extremely simplistic description of the possible layout of a Pachomian monastery, the first being built at Tabennesi, the second at Phbow, the third at Thmouson, followed by six other foundations.

## **10.5 Daily Life of a Pachomian Monk**

When the basic structure of the monastery had been completed and the monks placed in a number of houses, their behaviour and spiritual duties were supervised by a competent and caring brother, known as the housemaster. Pachomius was then faced with the problem of organizing their daily lives so they could become an active part of a spiritual community.<sup>306</sup> He appointed monks from among the brothers to act as cooks and porters, and made them responsible for maintaining the security of the monastery. Others were chosen to look after the sick and to supervise the manual work carried out by the monks. This was an important aspect of monastic life, as the goods produced could be sold, and the profits enabled the monastery to become self-sufficient. The next step for Pachomius was to introduce a monastic rule, which would guarantee the stability of the monastery, and allow the monks to follow an ordered and harmonious way of life.

The rule of Pachomius was designed to instill a degree of discipline in the lives of the monks, and to make them understand the need for obedience to the commands of those in

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<sup>305</sup> S1 fragment one, p. 426:3.

<sup>306</sup> For a detailed description of how Pachomius organized the daily lives of his monks see SBo, pp. 48-9:26, G1 pp. 315-6:28.

authority.<sup>307</sup> The precepts established by Pachomius were certainly of a legalistic nature, and virtually controlled every hour of the monk's day in a somewhat draconian way. He was not an uncaring autocrat, but fully understood the need for his followers to respect authority and the rights of their fellow monks. This rule bore the imprint of Pachomius' experience, and became the reason why Pachomian monasticism was so successful. The intrinsic value of Pachomius' rule was fully appreciated by Apa Ebonh, the superior of a small community at Seneset, who wrote to Pachomius asking him 'to establish for us too the rules appointed for you from Him'.<sup>308</sup>

## **10.6 Spiritual Life of the Monastery**

The monastic foundation by Pachomius was primarily a spiritual one, and if it was to be successful, then the spiritual life of each monk was of paramount importance. He attempted to ensure this in three ways. Firstly by legislation, which would not only protect the spiritual practices of the monks, but would also ensure that they paid particular attention to their temporal duties. Secondly, by insisting that the Scriptures should be read each day then discussed and memorized, as they were the word of God (the breath of God). Thirdly, by establishing a regulated liturgical life for his monks, he was able to ensure their participation in a communal liturgical regimen. He understood the frailties of human nature and decided, if the monks were left to their own devices, they could easily fall into undesirable habits. He felt it necessary to govern the behaviour of all his monks

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<sup>307</sup> The rule of Pachomius will be discussed in detail later in this thesis.

<sup>308</sup> Sbo., p. 72:50.

by introducing specific precepts in his rule, particularly in regard to the communal attendance at *synaxis* and the celebration of the Eucharist.<sup>309</sup>

Pachomian spirituality was essentially based on the Scriptures, and all his teachings, homilies and instructions came from his extensive knowledge of these sacred texts. ‘When he [Pachomius] began to read or write by heart the words of God [the Scriptures], he did not do this in a loose way as many do, but worked over each thing to assemble it all.’<sup>310</sup> He was required to act as a biblical scholar, as he found it necessary to explain and interpret many of the obscure and difficult passages for his monks: ‘he would interpret for them words of the divine Scriptures, especially the deep and not easily comprehensible ones’.<sup>311</sup> It is difficult to understand how Pachomius, with his minimal education, was able to discuss and really understand obscure scriptural passages, when scholars down the centuries have been unable to do this. Perhaps it could be that, as a true mystic and contemplative, he was able to appreciate the essence of Christ’s teachings.

Pachomius realized the vital importance of establishing a liturgical way of life, which would be suitable for all the Pachomian monks. This was a move away from the anchorite tradition, which concentrated on worshipping God in solitude. Communal prayers became the axis around which Pachomian liturgical life revolved. The celebration of the Eucharist represented the formal side of Pachomian monastic life and was celebrated twice a week or whenever a priest was available. During the feast of the Passover and the Harvest festivals, it was celebrated with a great deal of ceremony, and Pachomius referred to it as

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<sup>309</sup> With regard to attendance and behaviour at *synaxis* refer to the *Praecepta*, precepts numbers three to eleven, and as regards behaviour at the celebration of the Eucharist precept number fifteen.

<sup>310</sup> G1, p. 304:9.

‘the mystery of salvation’. He ‘would go to the village for the celebration of the Eucharist on Saturday evening, while the clergy would come to celebrate it for them at the monastery on Sunday morning’.<sup>312</sup> While Pachomius stressed the importance of communal prayer, he also encouraged his monks to undertake hours of private prayer as a means of drawing closer to God. Theodore appreciated this two pronged approach to prayer and claimed:

It is through our contact with such a righteous man [Pachomius] that we learnt the will of God even in such details as the manner of stretching our hands upward to the Lord and how we should pray to God’.<sup>313</sup>

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<sup>311</sup> G1, p. 336:56.

<sup>312</sup> SBo, p. 47:25.

<sup>313</sup> SBo, P. 239:194.

## Chapter Eleven

### Overview of the Historical Pachomius

#### 11.1 Introduction

This is an overview of the Pachomius of history, as a detailed account of his life occurs in Chapter Three of the thesis. Who was Pachomius? A prophet, a descendant of the apostles, a mover of mountains? Or was he a humble, devout, dedicated monk, driven to achieve greatness by an all-consuming love for the God of the Scriptures? In answering these questions it has been possible to discover the Pachomius of history.

It is feasible to imagine the existence of two paintings of Pachomius, one painted from hagiography and the other from the results of historiographic research. The hagiographic portrait would have been painted by the authors of the Pachomian *Vitae* and the *Paralipomena*, who belonged to the literary tradition of the early Christian writers. They offered an idealized image of Pachomius, which threatened to separate him from the world of reality. This painting would have belonged to the genre of Impressionist art and was concerned with providing an overview of Pachomius, concentrating on certain outstanding facets of his character, but succeeding in only providing a rather blurred image of the real Pachomius. The historical artists could be thought of as making use of the hagiographic portrait as their model, then employing the results of historical research to overlay its exaggerations with the results of incisive investigation. They would have relied on a detailed examination of Pachomian monasticism, which symbolized Pachomius' humanity, spirituality and idealism.

## 11.2 Historical Pachomius

Pachomius was a typical Egyptian peasant youth, who was raised in a farming community near Sne in the Upper Thebaid. Little is known of the early Pachomius until he was conscripted into a colonial Roman army at the age of twenty. For the next ten years he unwittingly prepared himself for the daunting tasks which lay ahead. For the first three years after his conversion to Christianity he lived as part of a Christian commune at Chenoboskion, where he attempted to follow a lifestyle based on the teaching of the apostles. He fulfilled his vow to 'serve you [God] with all the days of my life according to your command'.<sup>314</sup> Then, feeling his spiritual life was stagnating, he decided to become an anchorite and became a disciple of Palamon for seven years. This was the most important period of his life, as it introduced him to the mystical world of the desert fathers, with its emphasis on asceticism and long hours of prayer, interspersed with time spent at manual work. Palamon explained to him how an anchorite should live:

I have a hard asceticism. In summer I fast daily and in winter I eat every other day. By the grace of God I eat nothing but bread and salt. I am not in the habit of [using] oil and wine. I keep vigil as I was taught, always spending half the night and often the whole night in prayer and reciting of the words of God.<sup>315</sup>

After seven years as a desert father Pachomius emerged refined in the kiln of suffering and self-mortification, and achieved a mystical relationship with the world of the sacred. He was now hardened physically and mentally, becoming completely immersed in the spiritual ethos of the desert. There was little resemblance to the pagan peasant youth who lived as part of a farming community. At the age of thirty he had already received what he

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<sup>314</sup> G1, p. 300:5.

<sup>315</sup> G1, p. 301:6.

believed to be a direct command from God, to establish a form of monasticism. He would not have queried the authenticity of this divine revelation, as for seven years he had lived in an environment where the miraculous was accepted as a daily occurrence. It would not be difficult to write Pachomius off as another religious zealot or fanatic, but this would be both a mistake and an injustice to him.

The desert exacted a high price from Pachomius. He became subjected to a number of debilitating illnesses, possibly due to extreme practices of asceticism and a poor and limited diet. The *Composite Bohairic Life* told how Pachomius ‘was again ill to the point of being in danger of death because of his excessive asceticism’.<sup>316</sup> More importantly his intense concentration on suffering, in particular the sufferings of Christ, must have been directly responsible for his introspective outlook on life. He taught his monks that their lives should mirror Christ’s passion and urged them to carry ‘your cross and follow your Lord’.<sup>317</sup>

Pachomius suffered physically and psychologically for every brick he laid in the construction of his monastery, and for each of his followers’ journey along the path to spiritual perfection. He was constantly plagued by doubts concerning the future of the *Koinonia*, and was also tortured by a fear of divine retribution.<sup>318</sup> His spiritual life oscillated between his fear of God and his confidence in the mercy and compassion of a loving God. He equated suffering with sanctity, and seemed to have possessed a limited vision whenever God’s justice entered the equation. There is a theme of sadness, almost

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<sup>316</sup> SBo, p. 70:48.

<sup>317</sup> *Instructions Concerning a Spiteful Monk*, op. cit., p. 27:32.

<sup>318</sup> SBo, pp. 105-7.

one of unrequited love in Pachomius' life, as he strove to serve and love his unseen God with every fibre of his being, but God always seemed to remain just out of his reach.

It was in his life as the father superior of the Pachomian monasteries, that the other side of Pachomius' character came to light. His care and consideration for his monks was one of his most outstanding attributes.<sup>319</sup> He regarded himself as their servant, in the manner of Christ, and placed their welfare before his own. He came to realize that a leader, to be successful, must lead by example, legislate wisely, and become one with his followers. Pachomius had always enjoyed a good camaraderie with his fellow monks at Tabennesi, and as the number of monks and monasteries increased, he was sadly to feel the loneliness of the leader, as he sought to maintain discipline and his rule. There was another side to Pachomius' character, which enabled him to cope with the many difficult decisions he was required to make as father superior. Examples of this include his refusal to grant a monastic burial to an evil monk,<sup>320</sup> and his refusal to accept ordination to the priesthood.<sup>321</sup> Hagiography ill served the Pachomius of history, as it tended to exaggerate his sanctity and gloss over his decisions and feelings. It placed him on a pedestal, beyond the reach of the world, and in so doing dismissed the enormity of his efforts to become the father superior *par excellence*. He succeeded, not because he was a saint, but because he was a great man.

Pachomius belonged to the customs, values and religious traditions of fourth century Egypt. He should be judged by this ethos and not by the mores of the twenty-first century.

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<sup>319</sup> SBo, p. 73:52.

<sup>320</sup> SBo, pp. 123-4:93.

<sup>321</sup> SBo, pp. 51-2:28.

The desert fathers would be anathema to to-day's Christians, but to the early Christians who lived barely three centuries after the birth of Christ, they were saints and heroes. Pachomius was one of the most outstanding figures of the early Egyptian church, whose greatness has rarely been acknowledged. He died from the plague in 346, suffering great pain, and was buried in an unmarked grave, in the heart of the desert. Pachomius remained surrounded by an aura of sadness, as the God he loved so much always seemed to remain his 'Unseen God'.

## Conclusion

Pachomius lived in an era dominated by persecution, cultural and ethnic conflict, together with political and ecclesiastical intrigues. The period was further affected by the presence of bitter and unresolved theological disputes, and it was a time of great turmoil and uncertainty. During this period of dissension the world of the desert fathers evolved to become a spiritual haven for many Egyptian Christians. Pachomius spent seven years as an anchorite and became immersed in the cultural and religious traditions of the holy men of the desert. Their values were to remain with him until the day he died, and were responsible for his becoming a dedicated and devout monk. To gain an understanding and appreciation of the historical Pachomius, it has been necessary, because of the lack of substantial historical evidence, to rely on three main sources: Pachomian literature, Pachomian monasticism, and the external influences which governed his development. The approach adopted in the thesis was to research and evaluate all the information provided by these sources, and then to make an informed judgment based on the conclusions reached.

Chapter One of the thesis was concerned with discussing the development of the Egyptian nation under four occupying powers: the Assyrians, the Persians, the Greeks and the Romans. The Assyrians and the Persians oppressed and exploited the Egyptian people and plundered the wealth of the nation. Both these powers added little to the religious and cultural traditions of Egypt, but the two succeeding powers, Greece and Rome, played important roles in aiding the development of the cultural, economic, agricultural and political aspects of Egypt.

The Ptolemies provided Egypt with three centuries of prosperity and expansion, together with two legacies, Hellenism and the city of Alexandria, which added new dimensions to the cultural and social traditions of the Egyptian people. The effect of Hellenism was to play a vitally important role during the Pachomian era, in particular to the world of Pachomian monasticism. Roman rule followed in the path of the Ptolemies to a large extent, but added a greater degree of political stability due to the presence of the Roman military. It also aided in the development of agriculture, and both the Ptolemies and the Romans were responsible for indirectly preparing Egypt for the advent of Christianity.

The Christianization of Egypt was considered in Chapter Two under four headings: its origins, when and how it reached Egypt, the nature of early Egyptian Christianity, and the world of the desert fathers. For the first twenty years of his life Pachomius had lived as part of a farming community, immersed in the traditional values and religious beliefs of pagan Egypt. With his conscription into a colonial Roman army he experienced his first contact with Christianity. After his discharge from the army, he joined a Christian commune and converted to the Christian faith. To gain an understanding of the important role Christianity was to play in the life of Pachomius, it was necessary to discuss the origins, nature and evolution of early Egyptian Christianity. Chapter Two dealt in some detail with these issues.

The origins of Egyptian Christianity remain a contentious issue, and four theories were discussed. The conclusion reached was that no historically acceptable explanation had

been discovered. Exactly when Christianity entered Egypt still remained a subject for debate. Pachomius, as a Copt, would have accepted the pious Coptic Christian belief, that the presence of the Holy Family in Egypt was responsible for the advent of Christianity into their country. The most important issue discussed was the evolution of the Christian teaching, from that provided by the zealous but not necessarily well informed missionaries, to that proclaimed by the Alexandrian church. Bishop Demetrius had, to a degree institutionalized the church, and had also to some extent codified its doctrines. It was not an ideal religious situation, but Pachomius gained great help from the world of the desert fathers.

Chapter Two also considered in detail this desert spiritual haven, because it played such a vital role in moulding the character and spirituality of Pachomius. The ethos of the desert fathers symbolized the emerging spirituality of the Egyptian people, and it was to become an integral part of Pachomian monasticism. It was a world apart, dominated by asceticism, renunciation, solitude, prayer and a constant search for God. It was a virtual purgatory, which offered no material rewards, but promised a union with God and the world of the sacred. Pachomius lived there for seven years, enduring great hardship, both mental and physical, and emerged a hardened dedicated Christian. To gain an understanding of this world, Chapter Two discussed the lives of a number of individual desert fathers, in particular their unique sense of spirituality.

Chapter Three offered a history of the life of Pachomius relying on the Pachomian *Vitae* the *Paralipomena*, and the writings of Pachomius, Horsiesios and Theodore for

information. The hagiographic nature of these texts was a matter of concern, but as they were the only available sources of information, it was necessary to proceed with caution. The hagiographic figure of Pachomius was clothed in pious exaggerations, but by using it as a model and stripping away these excesses, it was possible to discover the Pachomius of history. This was achieved by undertaking research and then considering the results in the context of the history of the Pachomian era.

Pachomius belonged to fourth century Egypt not to the twenty-first century, and it is in the former historical context that he should be judged. He achieved greatness in the face of many difficulties, and through his efforts enriched the worlds of Egyptian Christianity and Christendom at large. The historical Pachomius was a far greater man than the hagiographic Pachomius. Chapter Three traced in detail the life of Pachomius and concentrated on discussing the major events in his life. Though neglected by historians and overlooked by the ecclesiastical authorities of the Western Church, he has been appreciated and honoured by the Eastern Church.

To discover the nature of the religious world of the Pachomian era, Chapter Four considered the lives and teachings of three outstanding figures of that period: Demetrius bishop of Alexandria (189-231), Clement of Alexandria (160-215), and Origen (188-251). It attempted to place in perspective the intellectual life of the Egyptian Church during the second and third centuries. Each of these men played a role in defending the integrity of the church's teaching. Demetrius was more of a political ecclesiastical figure than a scholar, while Clement and Origen were outstanding scholars and original thinkers.

Demetrius gave stability during a period of conflict, and the two scholars illuminated the early Christian church with the brilliance of their intellect. Origen was a speculative theologian, and certain of his teachings created a deal of anxiety among the ecclesiastical authorities. According to the *Bohairic* Life, Pachomius bitterly opposed Origen and warned his monks not to read his works. Gnosticism was influencing Christian beliefs, much to the concern of church authorities, and Chapter Four discussed the role of Clement and Origen in their attempts to create a union between Christian and Gnostic thought. It also considered the role played by the Catechetical School of Alexandria. This academic establishment became the defender and promoter of Christian intellectualism in Egypt and the eastern Mediterranean.

Chapter Five concentrated on Gnosticism, in particular Christian Gnosticism, and its influence on the Alexandrian church and on Pachomius and his monks. This chapter is an important part of the thesis, as it includes a discussion of the possible relationship between Gnostic thought and the Pachomian monks. It evaluated the evidence supplied by the Nag Hammadi Codices and came to the conclusion that such a relationship possibly existed, but it still remained only a probability and not a certainty. Christian Gnosticism was a powerful influence in Egypt and threatened to corrupt the original Christian message. Bishop Athanasius condemned Gnosticism as being incompatible with Christian beliefs, and ordered all Gnostic material to be destroyed. Whether all Pachomian monks obeyed this decree remains a contentious issue. Chapter Five raised the possibility that Pachomius and his monks were more concerned with following their monastic way of life than with taking part in theological disputations.

Chapters Six, Seven and Eight dealt with the presence of the heresies of Arianism and Docetism, and also the Donatist and Melitian schisms and their possible effect on the world of Pachomius and his monks. It was also concerned with the importance of the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea (325). The fourth century was a turbulent period in Egyptian Christianity, and these heresies and schisms threatened the foundations of Christianity and the stability of Pachomian monasticism.

Chapter Six considered the effect on the early Egyptian church of two heresies, Docetism and Arianism, as they attacked traditional teaching concerning both the humanity and divinity of Christ. Docetism was an invasive teaching and led to a number of associated heresies, undermining the reality of the humanity of Jesus and thus the reality of his Incarnation, sufferings and death. Arianism on the other hand denied the divinity of Christ and claimed that Jesus was created by the will of God, and was not co-eternal or equal with God. It saw the Trinity as a descending Triad, with one true God, the father, the Son as created by and inferior to the father, and the Holy Spirit being created by the Son, inferior to both. Arianism swept across the Christian world and threatened the very fabric and foundations of Christianity. Though these heresies would have created tension, even uncertainty among the Pachomian monks, they seemed to have risen above them by placing their trust in Athanasius and the Alexandrian hierarchy. The Council of Nicaea was also discussed in this chapter, as it played an important role in restoring the traditional Christological teachings and finalizing the date of Easter and attempting to settle the Melitian dispute. It condemned Arianism, and excommunicated Arius, but

Arianism continued to flourish for centuries to come.

Chapter Seven considered the Donatist schism, to clarify the ramifications and importance of the later Melitian schism to both the Alexandrian church and Pachomian monasticism. The two schisms had some similarity in their origins, and a key concern with the Donatists was the reconciliation of each *traditor*. The leading opponents to this schism were bishops Augustine and Optatus.

Chapter Eight dealt in detail with the Melitian schism, which placed enormous pressure on the Alexandrian church and Pachomian monasticism. It resulted in the establishment of the Melitian church and threatened the unity of the Egyptian church and the stability of each Pachomian monastery. Its origins were similar to those of the Donatist schism since they arose in the dispute of how the *lapsi* should be treated when they attempted to be reconciled with the church. Bishop Peter believed they should be welcomed with compassion while bishop Melitius advocated a stern and harsh attitude. A rift developed between the two bishops, and the Melitian schism was born and lasted until the end of the fifth century. Originally cordial relations existed between Pachomian and Melitian monks, and on occasions they lived in the same monasteries. It seemed that the Alexandrian hierarchy was more concerned with the effects of the schism than were the Pachomian monks. As time passed the Melitians made several efforts to replace Athanasius with Melitius, and this led to violence and an end to the cordial relations existing between the two communities. It was pointed out in Chapter Eight that for some time Pachomian and Melitian monks would carry out their devotional and ascetic

practices together, but this was discontinued.

Chapter Nine was perhaps the cornerstone of the thesis, as it considered in detail all the relevant extant Pachomian texts, including three Pachomian *Vitae*, the *Paralipomena*, the *Letter of Ammon to Theophilus*, the writings of Pachomius, Horsiesios and Theodore. Three other works were of importance: *Lives of the Desert Fathers*, *Sayings of the Desert Fathers* and the *Lausiac History of Palladius*. This body of literature remains the only surviving link to Pachomius and Pachomian monasticism. The introduction to Chapter Nine included an examination of the role of hagiography in Pachomian literature and a discussion of Egypt's three languages, Coptic, Greek and Latin, together with the nature of the writing material used during the Pachomian era. The approach adopted was to investigate all the publication details of the manuscripts, the identity of the authors, the authenticity and literary value of the texts, together with their status as historical sources. The results of the research by Goehring, Gould, Rousseau and Veilleux were of invaluable assistance in this discussion of Pachomian literature.

The Pachomian *Vitae* and the *Paralipomena* remain the only surviving biographies from the Pachomian era, and despite their hagiographic nature provide an insight into the world of the Pachomius. These texts have been the centre of much controversy, in particular the identity of the first Pachomian *Vita*, and this and other issues were discussed. The *Bohairic Life* (Sbo), written in the *Bohairic* dialect of the Nile Delta, offered the most complete life of Pachomius and was used as a general reference for the thesis. It brought to life the ambiance of the Pachomian era, and offered an excellent

account of the life of Pachomius. The *Vita Prima Graeca* is considered to be a Greek translation of an earlier Coptic work. Its authors adopted a more restrained, almost detached approach, in their presentation of Pachomius and Pachomian monasticism. The three *Sahidic* Lives examined are of such a fragmentary nature that their value is limited. Since they were written in the Sahidic dialect, which was Pachomius' language, it is possible its authors had a close relationship with him. There is a degree of poetic imagery in certain of the fragments, which is lacking in the Greek Life, perhaps due to the Coptic character of its authors. The *Paralipomena* was written in Greek and has been referred to as an abbreviated life of Pachomius. Its value as an historical source has been challenged, but its real worth lies in its ability to add to the understanding of the humanity of Pachomius. The *Letter of Ammon* provided invaluable information concerning the world of Pachomian monasticism, but added little to the world's knowledge of Pachomius.

This chapter of the thesis concentrated on the surviving writings of Pachomius, Horsiesios and Theodore. These texts included the Letters, Instructions, Testaments and Rules, and provided a great deal of background material. They enlarged on the nature of Pachomian spirituality and the great affection and loyalty both Horsiesios and Theodore felt for Pachomius. The writings of these two successors to him are among the more appealing of Pachomian literature, and Horsiesios stands out as an example of what a Pachomian monk should have been. His seventh instruction, which deals with the presence of homosexuality in the Pachomian monasteries, remains an outstanding example of Pachomian writing.

Chapter Nine concluded with a discussion of three texts: *The Lives of the Desert Fathers*, *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, and the *Lausiac History of Palladius*. These three works are extremely hagiographic, but they introduced to the world the lives of the desert fathers, which mirrored the sufferings of Christ, as they sought to establish a mystical union with God. The importance of these texts lay in the information they provided concerning the preparation Pachomius underwent, as he sought to capture the ethos of the anchorites. An understanding of the traditions and values of the desert fathers is to gain an understanding of the Pachomius of history.

Chapter Ten undertook a detailed study of the nature and structure of the Pachomian monastic foundations. The role played by Pachomius and the magnitude of his efforts in establishing nine monasteries and creating a revolutionary cenobitic way of life for his followers, has been discussed in Chapter Three. The spirit of Pachomius dominated the world of Pachomian monasticism, which stood as a symbol of both his humanity and spirituality. He had offered his followers a new way of life, which was based on the ethos of the desert fathers and the teachings of the Scriptures, but modified this by his understanding and concern for the needs of all men who desired to follow him. It was the deep spirituality of Pachomius, together with his compassion and understanding of the needs and ambitions of his followers, which bound them into a unified spiritual community.

Chapter Eleven reviewed the life of Pachomius, already outlined in Chapter Three. It concentrated on undertaking a psychological appraisal of him, rather than recapitulating

the major events of his life. Pachomius was a complex person, driven on by a love of God, but at the same time haunted by his dread of eternal damnation and the thought of the possible demise of his gift to God, Pachomian monasticism. This world, with its unique form of spirituality, was the major source of information concerning the historical Pachomius.

In response to what he considered to be a direct command from God, Pachomius established a cenobitic form of communal living, and this became a spiritual haven for many thousands of Egyptian Christians. He was a poorly educated Egyptian peasant who, after a limited service in a Roman colonial army, converted to Christianity and spent seven years as an anchorite in the Egyptian desert. Imbued with the zeal of a desert father he set about establishing what became known as ‘Pachomian monasticism’. This flourished and finally nine monasteries were founded, housing many thousands of monks. It is difficult to understand how Pachomius was able to accomplish this feat without any model to guide him, being dependent upon the knowledge and skill gained as a conscript in the army and later as an anchorite under the tutelage of Palamon. That he succeeded at all was a tribute to him and to the monks who assisted him in this mammoth undertaking.

He paid a heavy price for his success as, under the pressures exerted on him in his role as the father superior, both his physical and mental health deteriorated. Sickness caused periods of weakness and depression yet he continued to care for the spiritual and temporal welfare of his brother monks. He prayed:

Lord God Almighty, blessed God, grant us to carry through this service my fellow-members and I have begun, that we may be worthy of you; that you may dwell in our bodies, in our souls, and in our

spirits: and that we may always be perfect in your love, walking before you according to your good pleasure.<sup>322</sup>

A hagiographic explanation would be that God was further testing Pachomius and refining his spirituality. A more logical explanation would be that his extreme practices of asceticism undermined his health. He had attempted to be all things to all men by developing a great rapport with his followers, and accepting their problems and worries as his own. The stress of managing the daily requirements of the monasteries would have been enormous and together with his spiritual and physical problems would have exacerbated the deterioration of his health. There is little doubt that he possessed great charisma and was able to draw men to himself, and this became one of the reasons for the continuing success of the *Koinonia*. He had created a spiritual oasis dedicated to the honour and glory of God. Pachomius lived to see Pachomian monasticism flourish and so witnessed a dream turn into a reality. In some way he had transformed monastic life into a spiritual form of martyrdom in which the monks, by renouncing the world, entered into a spiritual relationship with God.

Pachomius was a mystic who remained in contact with the mundane world. He was both a visionary and a pragmatist who possessed the ability to inspire men to seek and discover the reality of the unseen God. Pachomian spirituality was encapsulated in his prayers, his teachings and in the way of life he established for his followers. He epitomized the ethos of the desert fathers with its emphasis on renunciation, asceticism, hours of prayer and a continual struggle to live with integrity and faith. Their goal was to find the presence of the sacred and to lose themselves in the love of God. He absorbed the

ideals of the anchorites and introduced them into the world of Pachomian monasticism, which became an expression of his spirituality. He believed the more a monk endured suffering the more he could prove his love of God. When he came to realize that this concentration on asceticism was self-defeating, as it became an end in itself and therefore lost its spiritual value, he concluded that God's love was a gift and therefore could not be bought by suffering.

The prayers of Pachomius as expressions of his yearning to discover the enormity of God's love also contained the fear he felt for divine retribution. He was an enigma as he loved God but also found it difficult to really trust His mercy and compassion. The Pachomian *Vitae* described his visions concerning the punishments facing those who faltered and disobeyed their divine master, and they highlighted the conflict which virtually destroyed Pachomius' peace of mind. He could never escape from the spirituality of the desert in his dealings with his followers, but he displayed a high degree of understanding of their spiritual and temporal needs, and insisted on the practice of moderation. Pachomius' spiritual teachings inspired his brother monks to seek the heights of spiritual perfection, and in so doing discover the presence of God in their lives.

Who was this Pachomius? Theodore, whilst attempting to console the Pachomian monks after the death of Pachomius, answered the question thus:

Listen to me my brothers, and understand well the things I am telling you. For the man we are exalting is truly the father of us all after God. God established a covenant with him to save a great many souls by means of him. And us also he has saved through his holy prayers. For he – I am speaking of our

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<sup>322</sup> Sbo., p. 138:101.

righteous father Pachomius – is also one of the holy men of God and one who did his will always and everywhere (Sbo. p. 237:194).

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