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Episcopal networks and authority in late antique Egypt : bishops of the Theban region at work

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Citation

Dekker, R. E. L. (2017, November 7). *Episcopal networks and authority in late antique Egypt : bishops of the Theban region at work*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/58727>

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Title: Episcopal networks and authority in Late Antique Egypt : bishops of the Theban region at work

Date: 2017-11-07

Chapter 8: The nature of Pesynthius' authority

INTRODUCTION

This final chapter analyzes the nature of Bishop Pesynthius' authority, while also bearing in mind the social, historical and practical aspects of his episcopate. As in chapter 6, the first section discusses the context in which he worked and recapitulates the new insights about him that we gathered in previous chapters. The next five sections focus on examples of spiritual, ascetic, episcopal, pragmatic and legal authority respectively, and the last section evaluates the weight of Pesynthius' responsibilities, while comparing them with Abraham's situation.

This chapter differs from chapter 6, in that the analysis will not only be performed on episcopal documents, but also on the homiletic and hagiographical texts relating to the bishop. This is an excellent opportunity to compare the idealized image of Pesynthius as presented in the well-known *Encomium* with the impression that we get on the basis of documentary texts. The analysis also includes additional homiletic and hagiographic sources, since they highlight particular aspects of Pesynthius' episcopate, some of which are not recorded elsewhere.

The texts are arranged according to their historical relevance:

- The episcopal documents (Dataset 4) come first, since they are contemporary sources.
- The *Homily on St Onnophrius* by Bishop Pesynthius follows next, since it is possibly an authentic text. It is only preserved in a late Sahidic manuscript (1031/32).¹⁰⁴²
- The circular letter on the consecration of extra bread during the Eucharist (ca. 643/4-665) is included, since it creates the impression that the "thrice blessed" Bishop Pesynthius was remembered for having established a liturgical practice.¹⁰⁴³
- The Coptic and Arabic versions of the *Encomium on Bishop Pesynthius* commemorate Pesynthius as a saint and good bishop. Examples are preferably drawn from the short Sahidic version, which was already composed in the late seventh century, but the long Sahidic, Bohairic and extensive Arabic version include additional anecdotes.¹⁰⁴⁴

¹⁰⁴² British Library, Or. 6800: ed. Crum 1915-1917, 43-67 (transl.); discussed in Wilfong 2002, 24-27.

¹⁰⁴³ Pap.Berlin P. 11346: ed. Camplani 2012.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Short Sahidic version: *Q* (Shaykh Abd al-Qurna, Field Inv. No. Coptic MS. 2, presently in the Coptic Museum; late seventh century), fols 1-72: Dekker is preparing the edition, but only has access to the first half of the manuscript; *S* (British Library, Or. 7026; 1005), fols 20a-82b: ed. Budge 1913, 75-127 (text), 258-321 (transl.); long Sahidic version: *W* (Nationalbibliothek, Wien, K. 9629, 9551-52; ninth century): ed. Till 1934, 31-36 (text), 37-43 (transl.); Bohairic version *B* (Rome, Vatican, Biblioteca del Vaticano Borgia copto 66; 917/8): ed. Amélineau 1887, 73-163; extensive Arabic version *A* (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, arabe 4785, fols. 97r-215r; 1883-85): ed. O'Leary 1930, 317-487. The versions of the *Encomium* are discussed in Dekker 2010 and 2016b.

- The notice in the Copto-Arabic *Synaxarium* on the enigmatic Bishop Pesynthius of Hermonthis is included, since it associates Pesynthius of Koptos with a consecration.¹⁰⁴⁵
- The Arabic *Life of St Andrew* is discussed, since it is the only source on the deposition of an abbot by Bishop Pesynthius.¹⁰⁴⁶
- The *Letter of Pseudo-Pesynthius* is an apocalyptic text that was probably composed in the tenth century and attributed to Bishop Pesynthius to increase its authority. It is nevertheless an interesting source, since it evokes Pesynthius' reputation as a visionary and a preacher, and seeks to imitate and emulate the pastoral epistles that he used to send to his flock, according to the *Encomium*.¹⁰⁴⁷

What makes the comparison between literary and documentary sources interesting is that in general, the documents seem to confirm that Pesynthius was already regarded as a holy man during life, but he also received fierce criticism. In order to get a picture of him that is as historically accurate as possible, we should first examine the social context in which he lived. His documents present a more dynamic picture of the Theban society than Abraham's dossier, for they reflect the situation in the 620s, of which Abraham witnessed the beginning only.

§8.1 THE CONTEXT IN WHICH PESYNTHIUS WORKED

Like his colleague Abraham, Pesynthius was a monk-bishop, who faced the challenge of organizing a relatively new Theodosian diocese.¹⁰⁴⁸ It extended on both river banks, for the see of Koptos lay on the east bank of the Nile, whereas the monastery where Pesynthius resided was located on the west bank, in the mountain of Tsenti near modern Naqada (§2.2.3). It was probably called the Monastery of the Cross (§3.1.2).

It is likely that Pesynthius was ordained bishop at the age of fifty (§3.1.2). According to the *Encomium*, his disciple John assisted him from the beginning of his episcopate until his death, but John does not appear in the episcopal documents (§3.1.2, 7.4.1). Contact with Epiphanius in Western Thebes is first recorded in ca. 615-620. At the time, Epiphanius had already attained the reputation of a holy man with extraordinary spiritual and ascetic authority and was prominent enough to receive letters from the patriarch and several bishops (§3.2.1).

¹⁰⁴⁵ Paris, Bibliothèque nationale arabe 4869, fol. 86v (seventeenth century): ed. Basset 1909, 490.

¹⁰⁴⁶ Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, arabe 4882, fols 1-14v (nineteenth century): unpublished, but summarized in Di Bitonto Kasser 1989, 168-70; cf. Troupeau 1974, 60.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, arabe 6147, fols 39-56v (1832): ed. Périer 1914, 79-92, 302-23 (text, transl.); cf. Van Lent and Van der Vliet 1996, 207-13; Van Lent 2010, 266-74.

¹⁰⁴⁸ On Bishop Timotheus of Koptos as Pesynthius' possible predecessor, see §2.3.1

Pesynthius' documents cover the second half of his episcopate, but most of them are tentatively dated to the 620s (§7.1.5). On the basis of the *Encomium*, it is assumed that the bishop lived in Western Thebes during the Persian period, and that he stayed at the *Topos* of Epiphanius, where archaeologists indeed found part of his dossier (§7.1.1.C, 7.1.4). Recently, Wipszycka expressed her doubts whether he actually remained there during the entire period, and observed that the *Topos* lacked space for a bishop and his retinue.¹⁰⁴⁹ I agree that Pesynthius did not necessarily dwell there for ten years on end,¹⁰⁵⁰ but should add that the large First Tower was built in ca. 620, probably to offer him a better accommodation or office (§3.1.2). The *Topos* was small compared to the ordinary episcopal residences in cities, but under the given circumstances, and having been used to living modestly as a monk, Pesynthius, may have been content with just enough space for his correspondence and rooms for him and his small retinue (the priest Moses in *P.Pisentius* 22?).

Officially, bishops were not allowed to stay away from their diocese for more than a year without a good reason,¹⁰⁵¹ but fear for the Persians was considered a good reason. The Chalcedonian Patriarch John the Almsgiver even left Egypt shortly before the invasion (§6.1), and the author of the *Encomium* did not question the need for Pesynthius to flee and hide.¹⁰⁵² It also mattered that the bishop did not get isolated from his flock, but tried to fulfil his pastoral duties as best as possible. Despite the distance, he was well informed about matters in his diocese, particularly at Pallas and Pshenhor, owing to a strong, well organized network and regular communication with the deacon Phanes, the priest Cyriacus and Abraham, the lashane of Pshenhor (§7.3.1-3). His network also included clergymen and officials at Koptos (§7.4.2, 7.5.1).¹⁰⁵³ The priest Mark occasionally acted as a messenger (§3.2.3, 7.3.6). In addition to the affairs in the Koptite diocese, Pesynthius seems to have temporarily acted as the administrator of the vacant see of Qus, and he got involved with matters in the Hermonthite district (§2.2.3, 7.5.2). In such cases, he benefitted from his position in the close-knit Theodosian network, and cooperated with Epiphanius and Psan, who were successful mediators with civil officials in their own right (§3.2.1, 7.3.5). Although Pesynthius was praised as “a protector, not only of our district, but of the entire country of orthodox

¹⁰⁴⁹ Wipszycka 2015, 41.

¹⁰⁵⁰ The bishop occasionally visited the clergyman Kalapesius (*P.Pisentius* 54, l. 4: “After you left this time”).

¹⁰⁵¹ *Novella* 6.2 (535), 67.3 (538), 123.9 (546), listed in Noetlich 1973, 49; cf. Feissel 1989, 812. See also Canon 14 in the *Apostolic Canons*: ed. Funk 1905, vol. 1, 568-69.

¹⁰⁵² Wipszycka 2015, 40.

¹⁰⁵³ The *Encomium* (*S*, fols 64a, 70a) records contact between Pesynthius and people from Koptos.

Christians”,¹⁰⁵⁴ it is not evident from the *Encomium* that he actually was an important religious leader on a regional level.

Episcopal and monastic documents record a variety of social problems in the districts of Koptos and Hermonthis, including the use of violence by Persians or civil authorities,¹⁰⁵⁵ officials who obstruct business,¹⁰⁵⁶ foreign marauders near Pallas and Ape,¹⁰⁵⁷ cattle theft at Jeme and Pshenhor,¹⁰⁵⁸ difficulties for monks and nuns to obtain the materials for their handwork,¹⁰⁵⁹ poverty,¹⁰⁶⁰ people leaving their homes,¹⁰⁶¹ imprisonment,¹⁰⁶² marital scandals,¹⁰⁶³ and violence against girls and women.¹⁰⁶⁴ Although the Persians disrupted families, took off cattle, hindered the transport of wheat, and required travel documents,¹⁰⁶⁵ most moral offences, particularly sexual transgressions, happened anyway, due to the lack of stability in Egyptian villages.¹⁰⁶⁶

When Pesynthius stayed in Western Thebes, he was probably in his seventies and had some health issues. On his behalf Gennadius consulted a chief physician, and at least once, the bishop was too ill to reply to a letter himself (§3.1.2, 7.5.1).

During an episcopate of over thirty years, Pesynthius witnessed the same events as Abraham: the military coups by Phocas and Heraclius, the deaths of the patriarchs Damian and Anastasius, the Persian conquest of Syria and Egypt, the fall of Jerusalem, the removal of the Cross to Ctesifon, a failing flood that resulted in famine, the reunion between the anti-Chalcedonian Churches of Alexandria and Antioch, and the Persian occupation of Egypt (§7.1). Later historical events include the death of Patriarch Andronicus on January 3, 626, and the ordination of Benjamin I as his successor;¹⁰⁶⁷ the end of the Byzantine-Persian war in 628 and the withdrawal of Persian troops from Egypt;¹⁰⁶⁸ the celebration of the recovery of

¹⁰⁵⁴ S, fol. 29a (= Q, fol. 23).

¹⁰⁵⁵ The Persians (“barbarians”) in *SBKopt.* I 295 and *O.Mon.Epiph.* 170; “civil authorities” in *P.Pisentius* 4, l. 40.

¹⁰⁵⁶ A financial administrator in *P.Pisentius* 21; a lieutenant in *O.Mon.Epiph.* 458.

¹⁰⁵⁷ The Atsoor in *P.Pisentius* 1; a “barbarian” and his accomplices in *P.CrumST* 178.

¹⁰⁵⁸ *SBKopt.* I 295 (by the Persians); *P.Pisentius* 2-3 (by the Psenhorites, after being robbed of cattle themselves).

¹⁰⁵⁹ *P.Pisentius* 28; *O.Mon.Epiph.* 277.

¹⁰⁶⁰ *SBKopt.* I 295; *O.Mon.Epiph.* 165.

¹⁰⁶¹ *SBKopt.* I 295 (the widow’s son left); *O.CrumVC* 67; probably Amsterdam, O.APM inv. 3871.

¹⁰⁶² *P.Pisentius* 5, 37; *P.Mon.Epiph.* 163, 167, 176-77, 181, 219, 466; *O.Mon.Epiph.* 172; *O.Crum* 209.

¹⁰⁶³ *P.Pisentius* 11, 17, 18ter, 19, 38, 51.

¹⁰⁶⁴ *P.Pisentius* 14, 18-18bis, 54; *P.Mon.Epiph.* 136.2; *P.CrumST* 175.1-2; cf. Wilfong 2002, 42-43.

¹⁰⁶⁵ *O.Mon.Epiph.* 170: Persians killed a husband and a son; *SBKopt.* I 295: Persians beat the son and seized cattle; *O.CrumVC* 67: since no corn could come south, a family went north in search for bread, hoping that the Persians would not come north as well; *O.Mon.Epiph.* 324: a man required a document, in order that the Persian in Ne/Thebes would allow him to go south to obtain corn.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Wipszycka 2015, 41.

¹⁰⁶⁷ Jülicher 1922, 23. On Benjamin, see Müller 1956.

¹⁰⁶⁸ On the overthrow of the Persian king Khusrav II in February 628 and the negotiations between his successor Khawadh and general Shahrbaraz, which ended the war, see Kaegi 2003, 174-91.

the Cross and the Holy Sponge at Constantinople on September 14, 629, and the restoration of the Cross to Jerusalem in the early 630s;¹⁰⁶⁹ the appointment of Cyrus, bishop of Phasis (in Colchis), as the *topoteretes* or imperial deputy for the Chalcedonian see of Alexandria in 631;¹⁰⁷⁰ and the restoration of the Chalcedonian hierarchy by Emperor Heraclius, who allegedly appointed bishops as far south as Antinoopolis.¹⁰⁷¹ Pesynthius died in July 632, before the council that Cyrus organized at Alexandria in June 633, in order to solve the Chalcedonian schism by means of the doctrine on the single energy of Christ (monenergism), and before the persecution of the Theodosians who rejected this doctrine.¹⁰⁷² Although the *History of the Patriarchs* states that Patriarch Benjamin went into hiding, as soon as he heard about Cyrus' coming to Egypt (in 631, when Pesynthius was still alive),¹⁰⁷³ it is more likely that he fled when the persecution started in 633 (after Pesynthius' death). A later date for Benjamin's flight fits better with another statement that he hid himself for ten years and returned in 643/4.¹⁰⁷⁴

In short, Pesynthius was in office during a turbulent period. In these conditions, he had to solve various social problems and made a memorable impression, as is indicated by the *Encomium* on him and confirmed by his documents.

§8.2 SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY

§8.2.1 *Episcopal documents*

Bishop Pesynthius was regarded as a bishop with extraordinary spiritual authority, judging from the unusual epithets with which supplicants addressed him, such as a “God-bearer”,¹⁰⁷⁵ “the successor of Christ on earth” and “thirteenth apostle”,¹⁰⁷⁶ a “true high priest”,¹⁰⁷⁷ the “light of the world”,¹⁰⁷⁸ and “beatitude”,¹⁰⁷⁹ who was “wise in the things of God”¹⁰⁸⁰ and

¹⁰⁶⁹ Kaegi 2003, 189.

¹⁰⁷⁰ Booth 2014, 205; Wipszycka 2015, 440 and 166-68, where the author follows the interpretation of Cyrus' title proposed by Marek Jankowiak in his dissertation *Essai d'histoire du monothélisme à partir de la correspondance entre les empereurs byzantins, les patriarches de Constantinople et les papes de Rome* (Paris: École Pratique des Hautes Études, Warsaw: University of Warsaw, defended in 2009).

¹⁰⁷¹ Wipszycka 2015, 220-21, based on the *History of the Patriarchs*; ed. Evetts 1904, 492.

¹⁰⁷² Evelyn White 1932, 253-254; Kaegi 2003, 216; Booth 2014, 206; Wipszycka 2015, 167.

¹⁰⁷³ Evetts 1904, 490. Evelyn White (1932, 253) places Benjamin's flight in 631; cf. Müller 1956, 325-29, who does not mention a precise date.

¹⁰⁷⁴ Evetts 1904, 490, 493, 502. On Benjamin's return in 643/44, see Jülicher 1922, 12; Müller 1956, 330.

¹⁰⁷⁵ **ΘΕΟΦΟΡΟΣ**: the addresses of *P.Pisentius* 15-16 and 52 + *O.CrumST* 176.

¹⁰⁷⁶ **ΠΑΙΔΟΧΟΣ ΠΠΕΧ(ΡΙΣΤΟ)C, ΠΠΕΖΗΝΤΩΜΤΕ ΠΑΠΟCΤΟΛΟC**: *P.Pisentius* 54, ll. 2-3 (from a clergyman). Pesynthius is again called “the thirteenth apostle” in *S*, fol. 27b (= *Q*, fol. 20).

¹⁰⁷⁷ **ΠΑΡΧΙΕΡΕΥC ΠΠΕ**: *SBKopt.* I 295, l. 7 (from a widow); *P.Pisentius* 44, l. 10 and address (from an ill man).

¹⁰⁷⁸ **ΠΟΥΟΕΙΝ ΠΠΚΟCΜΟC**: *P.Pisentius* 44, address (from an ill man); **ΕΤΡ ΟΥΟΕΙΝ**: *P.CrumST* 178, address (from a robbed man), as in *S*, fol. 21b (= *Q*, fol. 5): “an illuminator of the entire world”.

¹⁰⁷⁹ **ΜΑΚΑΡΙΩΤΗC**: *P.Pisentius* 20, l. 1-2 (Lucianus), 29, l. 21 (the priest Mark), 44, l. 2 and address (from an ill man), *P.Mon.Epiph.* 254, l. 1 and address (from someone who needed a lawyer).

“spiritual”.¹⁰⁸¹ Bishop Pisrael addressed his colleague reverently as “your fatherly and spiritual sanctity”,¹⁰⁸² whereas an official at Pshenhor, who blamed the bishop for not having intervened in a long-term conflict, still bore in mind “the Spirit of God who dwells within you”.¹⁰⁸³ Pesynthius was frequently addressed in the second person plural, which may indicate that the senders had both the bishop and the Holy Spirit in mind (§1.3.1).¹⁰⁸⁴ Among the bishops in the Theban region only Ananias of Hermonthis seems to have matched Pesynthius in spiritual authority.¹⁰⁸⁵

Several correspondents refer to the fragrance that surrounded the bishop,¹⁰⁸⁶ which recalls the odor of sanctity associated with holy persons after death and sometimes during life, as in the cases of Padre Pio and Epiphanius.¹⁰⁸⁷

Dataset 3 does not record instances when Pesynthius administered sacraments himself, but two documents indicate that he would ordain (and consecrate) clergymen soon (§8.3.A.1).

Several supplicants request Pesynthius to remember them in his prayers.¹⁰⁸⁸ The widow of Jeme, who feared expulsion from her house, appealed to his reputation as a successful intercessor before God as well as before civil authorities.¹⁰⁸⁹

§8.2.2 *The Encomium on Pesynthius*

The *Encomium* emphasizes that Pesynthius was a Spirit-bearer and presents anecdotes that demonstrate his spiritual abilities: the reading of souls, telepathy, foreknowledge, healing and knowledge of the divine.¹⁰⁹⁰ The bishop’s ability to read other people’s souls just by looking at them is illustrated by anecdotes featuring a shepherd who assaulted a girl and came to greet the bishop, thinking that he would not know about it; a father who did not know that his unmarried son had begotten a child; and a soldier who visited the bishop, in order to test his generosity, but heard to his surprise that Pesynthius knew that he had killed someone.¹⁰⁹¹

¹⁰⁸⁰ ΠΙΣΟΦΟΣ ΖῆΝ ΝΑΠΝΟΥΤΕ: *P.Pisentius* 44, l. 1, which recalls *S*, fol. 50b: “You became talented in the wisdom of God, and learned in the holy mysteries”.

¹⁰⁸¹ ΠΝ(ΕΥΜΑΤ)ΙΚΟΣ: *P.Pisentius* 7 (from Bishop Pisrael), 12bis (sender unknown), 45.1 (sender unknown).

¹⁰⁸² *P.Pisentius* 7, l. 15: ΤΕΚΖΑΓΙΟΣΥΝΗ ΝΕΙΩ\Τ/ ΜΠΝ(ΕΥΜΑΤ)ΙΚΟΣ.

¹⁰⁸³ *P.Pisentius* 3, ll. 10-11, 52-53.

¹⁰⁸⁴ *P.Pisentius* 6, 18, 20-21, 24, 29, 31, 41, 44, 47, 50, 52; alternated with the singular in *P.Pisentius* 3-4, 22-23.

¹⁰⁸⁵ In *O.Crum* 85 he is called a “Spirit-bearer” and “son of the Apostles”.

¹⁰⁸⁶ *P.Pisentius* 1 (the *lashanes* of Pallas), 54 (Kalapesius, a clergyman?); P.ANU Classics Museum 75.01, verso (the officials of Kratos).

¹⁰⁸⁷ Lesourd and Benjamin 1970, 132-36. For a recent study on the odor of sanctity in Latin hagiographic sources from the fifth to the ninth centuries, see Roch 2010. For Epiphanius, see *P.Mon.Epiph.* 163, l. 2.

¹⁰⁸⁸ *P.Pisentius* 12bis, 20, 22, 28, 38, 40-41, 44; Paris, Louvre, R49 + Phil.16402; *P.CrumST* 179.

¹⁰⁸⁹ *SBKopt.* I 295, ll. 9-10: “who intercedes for us before God and men”.

¹⁰⁹⁰ *S*, fols 61b, 77a. See also fol. 38b (= *Q*, fol. 49): “He filled you with the splendor of the Holy Spirit”.

¹⁰⁹¹ *S*, fols 57a-61b, 61b-65b and 75a-76b respectively.

The spiritual gift of telepathy is implied by the anecdote about Pesynthius' disciple John, who went to Western Thebes for business and was attacked by hyenas and wolves on his way back to the mountain of Tsenti. When John exclaimed "Prayers of my father, help me from the mouths of the beasts!", the animals withdrew directly as if they were being pursued. Upon his return, the bishop rebuked John for travelling at a late hour, being aware that "the beasts had almost eaten you". The author of the *Encomium* ended the anecdote by saying that Pesynthius "came to know about everything that happened, and that regardless the place where he was when it happened, he came to know about it".¹⁰⁹²

The gift of foreknowledge is demonstrated by Pesynthius' predictions that a woman who was falsely accused of adultery by her jealous husband would give birth to a son, that he himself had five more days to live, and that after his death there would soon be chaos, either in the monastery, the Church or Egypt.¹⁰⁹³ Shortly before the Persian invasion, the bishop sent pastoral letters, urging his flock to stop committing sins, in order that God would not deliver them to the barbarians and humiliate them.¹⁰⁹⁴ Considering the historical context, it was understandable that Pesynthius feared that the Persians, who had already conquered Syria, would invade Egypt as well. His letter is not cited to demonstrate his prophetic gift, but "to embellish the *Encomium*" with the bishop's own words,¹⁰⁹⁵ and to present an example of his teachings. However, the author of the *Letter of Pseudo-Pesynthius* integrated the theme of a foreign invasion in an apocalyptic text, according to which Pesynthius predicted the Arab invasion (§8.2.3).¹⁰⁹⁶

The author of the *Encomium* states that anyone on whom the bishop made the sign of the cross would be healed immediately, regardless of the nature of their illnesses.¹⁰⁹⁷ At one occasion, Pesynthius tried to prevent being praised for having exorcised a demon from a boy. He asked for water from the sanctuary, blessed it with the sign of the cross and instructed his father to give the blessed water to the boy at home. When the father returned after some days to thank the bishop, the latter replied that the healing was not due to him, but to the power of God that exists in sacred places.¹⁰⁹⁸ The extensive Arabic version includes many other healing

¹⁰⁹² *S*, fols 61b-63a.

¹⁰⁹³ *S*, fols 72b-73b, 79b, 82a; cf. Winlock and Crum 1926, 228. *S*, fol. 37a (= *Q*, fol. 46): "a man of foresight".

¹⁰⁹⁴ *S*, fols 43a-b (= *Q*, fols 57-58).

¹⁰⁹⁵ *S*, fol. 45a (= *Q*, fol. 66).

¹⁰⁹⁶ On account of the parallel between the *Encomium* and the *Letter of Pseudo-Pesynthius*, Crum (in Winlock and Crum 1926, 228) thought that the letter cited in the *Encomium* did demonstrate the bishop's prophetic gift.

¹⁰⁹⁷ *S*, fol. 66a. Pesynthius did not heal a woman suffering from a heavy menstrual flow, as Wilfong (2002, 37) and Donker van Heel (2014, 72) understood, but Jesus did (Matthew 9:20-22). The bleeding woman is mentioned in a discourse on the power of faith, in which the narrator argues that the audience should believe that Bishop Pesynthius was worthy to see Elijah the Tishbite (*S*, fols 31a-32b = *Q*, fols 30-31).

¹⁰⁹⁸ *S*, fols 66b-69a (= *A*, fols 149b-151b).

miracles attributed to the bishop, featuring a boy who accidentally swallowed a lizard (this time, Pesynthius gave him the blessed water himself); a woman with abscesses in her throat; a nobleman, whose wife gave birth to twins after consuming two dates and water blessed by the bishop; and a mother who was unable to feed her child on account of an infection in her mammary glands and almost died on account of it.¹⁰⁹⁹ Remarkably, Pesynthius did not directly heal the jealous husband, who was stricken with a serious illness, after falsely accusing his wife of adultery and refusing to listen to the bishop. Instead, he told John to “Leave him, until he has taken his punishment well. Verily, he is ignorant”.¹¹⁰⁰

Pesynthius is said to have had visions all his life, ranging from a column of fire during childhood, an altar veil that briefly floated above the altar without human agency, and a man of light who announces Pesynthius death (the apostles Peter and Paul, according to the Arabic version).¹¹⁰¹ When a priest suddenly fell fatally ill during mass, the bishop explained that it happened, since the priest spat and his phlegm hit the wing of a cherubim, who returned a deadly blow as a punishment for a lack of reverence at the altar during mass.¹¹⁰² The author of the Sahidic version of the *Encomium* emphatically states that Pesynthius was worthy to see Elijah the Tishbite, who consoled him when he suffered from his spleen as a monk.¹¹⁰³

Pesynthius’ conversation with a pagan mummy on the torments in hell is known from the Bohairic and Arabic version of the *Encomium* only.¹¹⁰⁴

After his ordination, Pesynthius’ appearance is said to have changed. Since his “eyes were burning like the morning star, while always casting forth lightning”, nobody could look into his face without fear or awe.¹¹⁰⁵ He is compared with Moses, whose face radiated after speaking with God on Mount Sinai, and with Joseph, whose brothers bowed and did not recognize him.¹¹⁰⁶ When the lover of an adulterous woman appeared before the bishop, he was so terrified by the eyes that “glowed upon him like a blazing fire” and read his soul, that he wet his pants and confessed immediately.¹¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁹⁹ *A*, fols 175a-178b, 190a-192a.

¹¹⁰⁰ *S*, fol. 71b. This quote seems to contradict the phrase “You became a chief physician, who healed everyone good-heartedly” on fol. 53a.

¹¹⁰¹ *A*, fols 104a-b (= *Q*, fol. 34-36; *S*, fol. 32b-33b), 141b-142a, 205b-206a (= *S*, fol. 79b). Pesynthius’ ordination is announced by a divine voice in the Sahidic version (= *Q*, fol. 54; *S*, fol. 41b), and by three angels, in the Arabic version (*A*, fol. 129b).

¹¹⁰² *A*, fols 161-164a (= *W*, ed. Till 1934, 37-39).

¹¹⁰³ *S*, fols 28a, 31a-b (= *Q*, fols 21, 28).

¹¹⁰⁴ *A*, fols 170b-173b (= *B*: ed. Amélineau 1887, 141-51).

¹¹⁰⁵ *S*, fol. 56.

¹¹⁰⁶ *S*, fols 42a-b (= *Q*, fols 55-56), 56a, with references to Genesis 34:29-30, 42:8.

¹¹⁰⁷ *A*, fol. 181b; cf. Rapp 2005, 251-52.

The *Encomium* states that Pesynthius diffused a sweet odor that smelled like cinnamon day and night, and that the fragrance from his ointments “reached to the limits of the inhabited world”.¹¹⁰⁸ Perhaps, the author implies that balm obtained from the bishop’s body or tomb was widely distributed as contact relics, a practice that still exists today.¹¹⁰⁹

Upon request the bishop blessed livestock. Once, Pesynthius allegedly blessed an ewe (or a cow, according to the Bohairic and Arabic versions) by making the sign of the cross on the outside of the belly, but the sign penetrated into her womb. When the lamb (or calf) was born, it had a white cross-shaped mark on its belly.¹¹¹⁰

The Sahidic version of the *Encomium* states that Pesynthius’ prayers during life were powerful, since he was a righteous man, and that he was once seen praying, while his fingers radiated like lamps.¹¹¹¹ The Arabic version ends with the prayer that Pesynthius may extend his hand and bless all people who have come to celebrate his feast.¹¹¹²

§8.2.3 *The Letter of Pseudo-Pesynthius*

In about half of the Arabic manuscripts that include the Arabic *Letter of Pseudo-Pesynthius*, it is preceded by a version of the *Encomium*.¹¹¹³ The apocalyptic sermon imitates the pastoral epistles cited in the *Encomium*, and presents the bishop on his deathbed as a visionary, who foretold the Arab conquest of Egypt and complete disruption of the social order, but also the restoration of peace, the end of the Chalcedonian schism and Judgement Day. As in the Arabic version of the *Encomium* the letter ends with a prayer for Pesynthius’ blessing.¹¹¹⁴

To give the modern reader an impression of the bishop’s unusual spiritual authority in the eyes of the faithful, he is best compared with Padre Pio, who is also said to have had the gifts of reading souls, telepathy, foreknowledge, healing and knowledge of the divine. In addition, he is said to have had frequent visions during mass and to have diffused – and telepathically transmitted – mystic odors that smelled like jasmine, lilies, violets or tobacco.¹¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰⁸ *S*, fol. 20b (not in *Q*), 53a.

¹¹⁰⁹ The Arabic version of the *Encomium* (*A*, fols 213b-214a) states that a cross appeared at the entrance of the tomb, producing a sweetly perfumed balm or myrrh, which flowed like breast milk.

¹¹¹⁰ *A*, fol. 149a (= *S*, fols 65b-66a; *B*: ed. Amélineau 1887, 129); cf. Wilfong 2002, 38.

¹¹¹¹ *S*, fols 35b, 38a-b (= *Q*, fol. 42, 48): “You asked and God granted all your requests”, 39b.

¹¹¹² *A*, fols 214b-215a.

¹¹¹³ Van Lent 2010, 266-67.

¹¹¹⁴ Périer 1914, 87-88, 445-46, 316-23. On the relation between the *Encomium* and the *Letter*, see

¹¹¹⁵ Resourd and Benjamin 1970, 122-31 (healing), 132-33 (reaction to mentally transmitted pleas), 152-55 (reading the mind and the heart), 155-58 (knowledge of distant things or underlying spiritual causes), 162-64 (foreknowledge), 159 (conversation with a soul in purgatory); 123, 133-34 (kind of smells), 161 (visions).

§8.3 ASCETIC AUTHORITY

§8.3.1 *Episcopal documents*

Like Abraham, Pesynthius was called “who truly bears the Christ”, “perfect in all virtues”.¹¹¹⁶

§8.3.2 *The Homily on St Onnophrius*

The *Homily on St Onnophrius* is attributed to Pesynthius, who is called Bishop of Koptos in the title and “(monk) of the mountain of Tsenti” in the conclusion of the only preserved text version, which came down to us in an eleventh-century manuscript.¹¹¹⁷ The difference between the two designations made Crum wonder whether Pesynthius delivered the sermon, before he was ordained bishop, but on the basis of the title he added that it seems unlikely.¹¹¹⁸ However, just as the title of the Sahidic version of the *Encomium* was changed, the title of the *Homily on St Onnophrius* may also have been a product of revision, and the episcopal title could have been added to the text.¹¹¹⁹ Nevertheless, Pesynthius taught his audience – not for the first time – with an authority that is expected from a bishop, but not from a monk or priest.¹¹²⁰

On the feast day of St Onnophrius, “the anchorite and perfect hermit”, Pesynthius delivered the homily at a church dedicated to this saint, probably at Pallas (§2.2.3).¹¹²¹ He presented Onnophrius as a model of virtue and chastity, and recommended his example to all men and women, even if they did not renounce the worldly life, but he said remarkably little about the saint himself, not even the date of his commemoration.¹¹²²

Pesynthius’ exhorted his audience to avoid exuberance, to be pious, honest and chaste, to fast at least during Lent and on Wednesday and Friday, but preferably every day till the ninth hour (three o’clock in the afternoon), and to be content with little wine and modest means.¹¹²³ As a monk-bishop, Pesynthius could recommend those ascetic practices, since he was used to a disciplined lifestyle himself and was admired for even heavier ascetic exercises, as the *Encomium* indicates.

¹¹¹⁶ **ΕΤΦΟΡΕΙ ΠΠΕΧ(ΡΙCΤΟ)C ZH OYME**: *O.Crum* 286 (incomplete); *P.Pisentius* 3-4, 6, 27, 28, 41, 47.2, 54-55; Paris, Louvre, R49; Katoen natie 685/2 (in the addresses); *P.Mon.Epiph.* 129, recto; *O.Mon.Epiph.* 515; **ΕΤΧΗΚ ΕΒΟΛ ΖΗ ΑΡΕΤΗ ΝΙΜ**: *P.Pisentius* 29 (address), 44 (reconstructed in l. 3).

¹¹¹⁷ Crum 1915-1917, fols 1, 34.

¹¹¹⁸ Crum 1915-1917, 40.

¹¹¹⁹ Pesynthius’ disciple John, surnamed “Matoi” in Q, fol. 1, appears as a priest in S, fol. 20a.

¹¹²⁰ Crum 1915-1917, fol. 16: “Now I write and ask you and I strongly urge you again” (addressing women); fol. “16 sic”: “For you know that I will not stop teaching you and exhort you about this matter” (addressing parents).

¹¹²¹ Crum 1915-1917, 41 (based on Phil. 16402 = *O.CrumST* 156), fols 1, 10, 33. Wilfong (2002, 24) did not explain why he thought that Pesynthius may have delivered the homily at several locations, in Koptos and Jeme.

¹¹²² Crum 1915-1917, fol. 5.

¹¹²³ Crum 1915-1917, fols 10-12.

§8.3.3 *The Encomium on Pesynthius*

In the *Encomium* Pesynthius is called a “Christ-bearer”, an anchorite, an ascetic and a perfect man.¹¹²⁴ The Sahidic version stresses that he tried to hide his ascetic practices, in order to avoid the praise of men, and that he was seriously upset, when people discovered that he meditated, thinking that their admiration had nullified the value of his efforts in the eyes of God.¹¹²⁵ According to John, Pesynthius often withdrew into the desert to pray on his own, while he was staying in Western Thebes. “No one would be able to find the totality of his prayers that he made by day and night”, but at night he used to pray four hundred times.¹¹²⁶ The *Encomium* creates the impression that Pesynthius enjoyed staying in Western Thebes, since it gave him the opportunity to live as an ascetic again.¹¹²⁷

The Sahidic version states that Pesynthius memorized the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. The Bohairic version adds the Psalms, the twelve minor prophets and the Gospel of John, whereas the Arabic version also lists thirty ecclesiastical books, which the bishop knew by heart and continued to recite until his death.¹¹²⁸

During the Persian period, Pesynthius allegedly spent the forty days of Lent in an ancient burial chamber filled with mummies and asked John to bring water and moistened wheat (instead of baked bread) every Saturday.¹¹²⁹

On his deathbed, Pesynthius wanted to be buried in his monastic garments and asked John to buy a shroud with a coin that he had earned as a monk and saved for the payment of his own burial. He affirmed that he did not keep money that belonged to the Church.¹¹³⁰

Pesynthius is compared to Pachomius, the founder of the Pachomian congregation, to the hermit Palamon, who instructed Pachomius, and to Petronius, Horsiesius and Theodore, Pachomius’ successors as leaders of the congregation.¹¹³¹ The same individuals are invoked in a Coptic inscription painted on a wooden cross together with other monastic saints, including Shenoute of Atripe, the anchorite Paul (of Thebes or Tammah?) and an abbot called Jacob.¹¹³²

¹¹²⁴ Christ-bearer: *S*, fols 20b (*Q*, fol. 2), 80a; perfect man/saint: fols 56b, 63b; anchorite: fols 22a (*Q*, fol. 9, but later in the text), 23b; ascetic: fols 22 (*Q*, fol. 5), 45a, 51a.

¹¹²⁵ *S*, fols 22a + 24a-b (*Q*, fols 5, 7, 11-12), 63a, 77a.

¹¹²⁶ *S*, fol. 77a.

¹¹²⁷ After praying in the desert, Pesynthius returned, “his eyes being full of light like the stars of the sky, and he was completely glad, like someone who returned from a drinking place” (*S*, fol. 48a).

¹¹²⁸ *S*, fols 23b-24a (*Q*, fols 9-10); *A*, fols 118b, 123b (= *B*: ed. Amélineau 1887, 75, 83).

¹¹²⁹ *A*, fols 167b-170a (= *B*: ed. Amélineau 1887, 141-44).

¹¹³⁰ *S*, fols 81b-82a.

¹¹³¹ *S*, fol. 56b.

¹¹³² Berlin, the Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum, inv. no. 9876 (presently called Bode-Museum): ed. Cramer 1949, 40-41.

§8.4 PROFESSIONAL AUTHORITY

A. Organization of worship

A.1 *Episcopal documents*

Two letters mention the ordination of clergymen. In the first one, a clergyman expressed his concern that Bishop Pesynthius would cancel the ceremony that was planned for the next day, on account of a possible impediment caused by the son of Psmou. It appears that the sender examined the matter and came to the conclusion that the ceremony could take place, but was unable to inform the bishop about the outcome himself. Therefore, he urgently requested his correspondent to contact the bishop in his stead, and expressed his hope that the clergymen would come for the ordination of several candidates.¹¹³³ The second letter, which was probably addressed to Pesynthius, refers to the ordination of a priest in the near future.¹¹³⁴

The bishop also decided whether certain girls should be clothed with the habit before the “Feast of the Cross”, that is, the celebration of the discovery of the Cross by Empress Helena on Thoth 17 (September 14).¹¹³⁵

A.2 *The circular letter*

The circular letter on the consecration of extra bread during the Eucharist invokes the “thrice-blessed” Bishop Pesynthius as an authority *par excellence* on liturgical matters: since “you brought the correct order of the celebration from the beginning, command us!” The preacher fully supports an order issued by Patriarch Benjamin through Bishop Peter (“I too”), adding that Bishop Pesynthius would agree as well (“he too”).¹¹³⁶

A.3 *The Encomium on Pesynthius*

Bishop Pesynthius is praised for “grabbing the rudders of the worship of God. For this reason, you became a steersman on the sea of the holy Mysteries”.¹¹³⁷

Two anecdotes refer to the celebration of the Eucharist by the bishop himself, whereas a notice in the *Copto-Arabic Synaxarium* states that he assisted during the consecration of

¹¹³³ *P.Pisentius* 35 + 36.2 + 45.3+2, l. 18: “if he will not ordain [them] at all”; l. 30: “in order that they will ordain them”, namely the bishop and the priests who would assist him.

¹¹³⁴ *P.Pisentius* 9, l. 15: **ἐπαφῆ πε[πρεσβύτερος]**, “in order to ordain the [priest]”.

¹¹³⁵ *P.Pisentius* 28; cf. Crum 1939, 181a (under e); Wilfong 2002, 40-41; Boud’hors 2012, 29-30, n. 12. Bagnall and Cribiore (2006, 241) understood: “to bind to do the work”. For the two “Feasts of the Cross”, see Basilios 1991, 1243. The second feast, which celebrates the Recovery of the Cross by Emperor Heraclius on Paremhat 10 (March 6), is less likely, since the celebrated event happened in 628, possibly after *P.Pisentius* 28 was written.

¹¹³⁶ Pap.Berlin P. 11346, l. x+3-5, 7, 9: ed. Camplani 2012, 379-80. I propose to read **† ετοτ[τηγτ]ῆ** in l. x+5 as an imperative. The editor hesitated to link the promotion of the correct liturgical order to the bishop.

¹¹³⁷ S, fol. 38a (= Q, fol. 48).

Pesynthius of Hermonthis (§3.1.11).¹¹³⁸ It is doubtful whether the latter officiated in the 620s, but the bishop of Koptos probably assisted during the consecration of Pisrael of Qus and Anthony of Ape, who were both ordained in ca. 620 (§3.1.8-9).

Pesynthius had to ensure that Lent was observed and that Easter was celebrated on the very days that the patriarch announced for these events in his festal letter.¹¹³⁹

B. Mission

B.1 *Episcopal documents*

Pesynthius' documents do not offer indications for missionary activities.

B.2 *The Homily on St Onnophrius*

The *Homily on St Onnophrius* was meant to be read on the feast day of St Onnophrius, which was on Paone 16 (June 10). By presenting Onnophrius as a model of virtue, Pesynthius aimed to exhort the faithful to live according to high moral standards, but he was perhaps aware that the promotion of the cult of this widely popular saint could also strengthen the position of the Theodosian Church. Since Onnophrius was already venerated at Asyut in the sixth century,¹¹⁴⁰ I wonder whether Constantine of Asyut could have been involved in spreading the cult, just as he may have contributed to the spread of the cult of St Phoibammon (§6.4.B). To my knowledge, no connection between Constantine and Onnophrius is recorded.

B.3 *The Encomium on Pesynthius*

The Sahidic version of the *Encomium* praises Pesynthius for preaching “your wisdom of the orthodox faith”,¹¹⁴¹ and reports that he celebrated Mass at the church of Tsenti on the feast day of Patriarch Severus of Antioch, which must have been on Amshir 14 (August 7).¹¹⁴²

The Arabic version of the *Encomium* also suggests a link between the bishop and the popular martyr saint Victor, the son of Romanus: when Pesynthius was hidden in Western Thebes, Jesus, the Virgin Mary and various saints would have appeared to him during prayer, in order to remind him that it was the feast day of St Victor (Parmoute 27, or April 22).¹¹⁴³ Probably on account of this passage, Boutros and Décobert assumed that Pesynthius revived the cult of this saint at Dayr Mar Buqtur (Monastery of St Victor), west of modern

¹¹³⁸ A, fols 141b, 156b (= S, fol. 75a); *Synaxarium*: ed. Basset 1909, 490.

¹¹³⁹ Pesynthius received clergymen who delivered Damian's festal letter in S, fol. 57a-b.

¹¹⁴⁰ Papaconstantinou 2008, 161-62.

¹¹⁴¹ S, fol. 37a (Q, fol. 46).

¹¹⁴² S, fol. 75b. For Severus' cult, see Papaconstantinou 2008, 188-90.

¹¹⁴³ A, fols 199b-200b. On Victor's cult, see Papaconstantinou 2008, 62-68.

Qamula.¹¹⁴⁴ However, the Sahidic version does not confirm a special connection between Pesynthius and St Victor, and the oldest architectural remains at Dayr Mar Buqtur probably date to the eighth or ninth century, at least a century after the bishop's death.¹¹⁴⁵ It is unclear why the bishop was associated with St Victor, but during his stay in Western Thebes Pesynthius could indeed have commemorated him at the Church of St Victor at Jeme, which already existed in ca. 595.¹¹⁴⁶

C. Church administration

C.1 *Episcopal documents*

As Wipszycka observed, the documents do not mention the episcopal steward.¹¹⁴⁷ It is unclear who assisted Bishop Pesynthius with the financial administration of his diocese.

When the bishop needed to appoint a steward for the Church (“*Topos*”) of the Archangel Michael, he told certain officials to propose a candidate, and they recommended Jacob, the son of Kalashire, whose father was already engaged in the administration of the church. Interestingly, they chose Jacob, although he was illiterate.¹¹⁴⁸ If their choice did not please the bishop, Jacob would bring his warrants, and they would take financial responsibility for the church. Two letters were possibly sent by stewards who had been dismissed by their superiors: one sender was expelled from the monastery with his papers, and the other one was responsible for the furniture of a church, until his employer fired him and claimed the money that he needed to provide for his mother.¹¹⁴⁹

Whereas the *Encomium* explicitly mentions the contribution that the bishop received annually (§C.3), only two documents record donations or gifts. An unknown correspondent sent at least six *artabes* of crushed wheat, two *artabes* of split lentils, some measures of lentils in a different form, a large plaited cover, large vessels with large cakes, small vessels with small cakes and cheese to “your fatherhood”, possibly Pesynthius.¹¹⁵⁰ Callinicus gave three lemons, a pomegranate and some vegetables, hoping that the bishop could prevent his wine

¹¹⁴⁴ Boutros and Décobert 2002, 90.

¹¹⁴⁵ Grossmann 1991d, 829; cf. Sadek 2010, 276-77.

¹¹⁴⁶ *P.KRU* 105, l. 30: “(Church) of Apa Victor”; cf. Papaconstantinou 2008, 63.

¹¹⁴⁷ Wipszycka 2007, 336 and 2015, 141.

¹¹⁴⁸ *P.Pisentius* 52 + *O.CrumST* 176, l. 6: “Jacob, the son of Kalashire, is illiterate (ΟΥΑΓΡΑΜΜΑΤΟΣ)”.

¹¹⁴⁹ *P.Pisentius* 6, 11; *P.Pisentius* 48, ll. 15: “[...] the entire material of the church (ΘΥΛΗ ΤΗΡΕ ΝΤΕΚΚ\Λ(ΗCΙΑ)) at the time when I was entrusted with it”. According to Revillout and Calament (2004b, 64-65), *P.Pisentius* 48 is a letter of complaint from a disinherited son, but ll. 3-6 rather indicates that the recipient is accused of claiming the money that the sender, his former employee, inherited from his father: “your servant, my old father, deposited it in a testament at the moment when he was about to leave the body”, (saying:) “provide for your mother from the portion that my fatherly lord gave (...) out of charity”.

¹¹⁵⁰ *O.CrumST* 189.

from getting spoilt.¹¹⁵¹ Pesynthius probably benefitted from the commemorative offering for the late Athanasius, on account of which he was requested to send for a lawyer.¹¹⁵²

Expenses are hardly recorded either. Tsheere and Koshe, probably two nuns, thanked the bishop for sending them six *artabes* of wheat, either to help a nunnery out of patronage, or to recompense the nuns for the garments that he received (§8.5.1).

Laymen working for the church appear in three documents: a man with young children was employed as a husbandman at the command of “your fatherly lord” (Bishop Pesynthius?), but on account of the patronage that he enjoyed the other workers wanted to leave or receive enough wage or chaff for an entire year; the bishop excommunicated one baker and decoded that another one should be employed; and George and Enoch asked him whether he wanted a guarantee from the craftsman Souai, who worked at the Church of the Archangel Michael, for there was a problem with a list that somebody drafted shortly before his death.¹¹⁵³

C.2 *The Encomium on Pesynthius*

Pesynthius is praised for “becoming a pious steward” and compared to Paul, who “took care of the entire church” as well.¹¹⁵⁴ It is said that he secretly sent the contributions that he received to pious citizens or villagers, who distributed them among the poor during the winter months, when there was usually a lack of bread.¹¹⁵⁵ He refused gifts from people guilty of serious offences, as some ecclesiastical canons require, and therefore ordered John to return the cheese given by a shepherd who had assaulted a girl.¹¹⁵⁶

Bishop Abraham sent clergymen to inspect churches (§6.4.A, C), but according to the *Encomium*, Pesynthius visited villages and examined the churches himself.¹¹⁵⁷

D. Care for the underprivileged

D.1 *Episcopal documents*

The people on whose behalf clergymen or officials pleaded to Pesynthius on account of their poverty or helplessness included two women, whose daughters were abducted; a fired and

¹¹⁵¹ *P.Pisentius* 21, ll. 7-8.

¹¹⁵² *P.Mon.Epiph.* 254; cf. Wipszycka 1972, 77.

¹¹⁵³ *P.Pisentius* 23, 25; *P.CrumST* 177, ll. 2, 6, 9: “the matter of Souai, the craftsman”, “[as for the] list, we sent it to you, after we came to know [...]”, “write us whether you wish to receive a guarantee from him”. Schmelz (2002, 169) suggested that Souai made a donation to the church shortly before his death.

¹¹⁵⁴ *S*, fols 37a (= *Q*, fol. 46), 55b.

¹¹⁵⁵ *S*, fols 42b-43a (= *Q*, fol. 56); cf. Wipszycka 1972, 122-23, where the Arabic version is cited.

¹¹⁵⁶ *S*, fols 57a-61b. *Chapters from the Constitutions*, canon 28: “It is not allowed to accept offerings from adulterers, fornicators, tradesmen or those who hinder widows or orphans (...)”: ed. Funk 1905, vol. 2, 142-43 (in Latin). For similar regulations, see Wipszycka 1972, 65.

¹¹⁵⁷ *S*, fol. 65a (= *A*, fol. 148b).

excommunicated baker, who was seriously poor; the husbandman Abraham, who had to sell his cattle to pay his tax; and the villagers of Pshenhor, whom the bishop punished from stealing cattle, but who had in fact been robbed of their cattle themselves three times.¹¹⁵⁸ Supplicants who sent letters to the bishop themselves were the widow Constantina, who thanked him for his charity towards her and children, and probably wanted to make another request; the widow who feared being expelled from her house (§8.5.1); and the man whom “the barbarian” and his accomplices had robbed and held captive in the desert near Ape.¹¹⁵⁹

The bishop actually arranged that Peter, a (single?) father with young children, got a job. He also made the people of Trikatan promise that they would not harm a prisoner.¹¹⁶⁰

Pesynthius seems to have shown a particular concern for the well-being of girls and young women, since abduction and rape happened regularly and ruined the chances for a good marriage. In general, female victims were often forced to marry their abductors, despite the fact that this practice was prohibited by imperial law.¹¹⁶¹ Several episcopal letters refer to the abduction of girls,¹¹⁶² some of whom were already betrothed,¹¹⁶³ and even married women were not safe.¹¹⁶⁴ When the bishop was informed that Mark had violated a girl and that the local clergy had expelled her, he reacted furiously, excommunicating both “this criminal” and the clergy, and he ordered the priest Paul to come and acknowledge that he had treated the girl unjustly.¹¹⁶⁵ As for the abducted married woman, Pesynthius asked Lord Lucianus to deal with this matter suitably.¹¹⁶⁶ On the basis of these letters, Wilfong’s idea that the bishop was more concerned with male culprits than with female victims can easily be proven wrong.¹¹⁶⁷ The girl Trakote appears to have had a different problem. Either she herself or her parents decided that she would not marry. It is unclear why she died, but before her death she made a confession, and the bishop is asked to inquire after the circumstances of her demise.¹¹⁶⁸

¹¹⁵⁸ *P.CrumST* 175.1+2 and *P.Pisentius* 18; *P.Pisentius* 25; *O.Mon.Epiph.* 165; *P.Pisentius* 3-4.

¹¹⁵⁹ *P.Pisentius* 39; *SBKopt.* I 295; *P.CrumST* 178.

¹¹⁶⁰ *P.Pisentius* 23, 37.

¹¹⁶¹ Beaucamp 2007, 278. However, Pesynthius agreed with the practice, following Deut. 22:29 (§8.6.3).

¹¹⁶² The abduction (ῥαπῆ) of girls is reported in *P.Pisentius* 1 (by the Atsoor); *P.Pisentius* 54 (by a shepherd); *P.CrumST* 175.1+2 (Abraham “brought me inside his house” and “bound me to him”).

¹¹⁶³ *P.Pisentius* 18-18bis report that Mark, the son of Makare, seized a girl violated (no. 18, l. 4: ἄρβιτῆς ἡβόνῃ), although she was betrothed to another man (no. 18bis, l. 2: ἐκκαῶτ ἡκερῶμε). Her husband blamed her for it and rejected her (no. 18, ll. 5-6: ἀπῆλαι [- - - ὅν λ]οῖδε ἐρος χε [ἀφῆ νοε]ῖ κ ἡμος ἐαφνοχς ἐβολ).

¹¹⁶⁴ *P.Mon.Epiph.* 136.2.

¹¹⁶⁵ *P.Pisentius* 18bis.

¹¹⁶⁶ *P.Mon.Epiph.* 136.2.

¹¹⁶⁷ Wilfong 2002, 42. The examples that Wilfong lists are drawn from reports addressed to the bishop, and do not tell much about how Pesynthius reacted (*P.Pisentius* 1, 54-55).

¹¹⁶⁸ *P.Pisentius* 31, l. 4-5: “young [girl], while she was still in the body”, l. 6: “my daughter Trako[te]”, l. 7: “in order that no husband would live with her”, l. 10: “this small transgression”, l. 16: “she made her declaration”; ll. 20-25: “your benevolence” is asked to contact “those who were with her at the end, when she went to rest”.

D.2 *The Encomium on Pesynthius*

Bishop Pesynthius is praised for taking care of all the traditional categories of people in need, like the orphans, the widows, the weak, the proselytes, and those who were hungry, thirsty or naked.¹¹⁶⁹ The *Encomium* describes how he distributed the contributions that he received every year: he gave alms himself or ordered John to do it, or he sent goods to pious people, in order that they would distribute them among those who needed them, especially during winter.¹¹⁷⁰ His generosity was not limited to his own diocese, but allegedly extended to every village and city as far as Aswan (§8.5.2). It is even said that, when he was informed that the Persians were coming, he distributed everything that he had, including his pillow.¹¹⁷¹ The claim that anyone who came to him received whatever he asked, is nuanced by the anecdote on the soldier who wanted to test the bishop's generosity: Pesynthius, who knew that he had robbed and killed someone, scolded him and the soldier returned empty-handed.¹¹⁷²

In prayers the deceased Pesynthius is invoked as “the bishop of our bodies and our souls” and as “the bishop of our poor diocese”.¹¹⁷³

E. Education and discipline

E.1 *Episcopal documents*

Dataset 4 includes just one reference to episcopal instruction: Kalapesius requested the bishop to reassure a baker that baking is useful work.¹¹⁷⁴

Various documents reveal that the bishop made inquiries,¹¹⁷⁵ or asked local agents to investigate a matter, for instance, whether Psmou and HjiI had already prayed to confirm that their children will marry.¹¹⁷⁶ Pesynthius also received requests to examine a problem.¹¹⁷⁷

At the bishop's command several people were excommunicated: an archdeacon, who was so angry about the sanction that he menaced the messenger and appealed to magistrates for support; the priest Cyriacus, who caused a scandal by meeting a married woman, although he previously promised to avoid her; Mark, who abducted a girl who was already spoken for,

¹¹⁶⁹ *S*, fols 50a-b. The hungry, thirsty and naked recall Matthew 25:35-36.

¹¹⁷⁰ *S*, fols 42b-43a (= *Q*, fol. 56) and 80a.

¹¹⁷¹ *S*, fol. 80a.

¹¹⁷² Compare *S*, fols 42b (= *Q*, fol. 56) and 74b-76b.

¹¹⁷³ *O.Crum* 25; Kaiser Friedrich Museum 9876: ed. Cramer 1949, 40-41, pl. 6.

¹¹⁷⁴ *P.Pisentius* 25, l. 6.

¹¹⁷⁵ *P.Pisentius* 16, ll. 1-3: “Well, you asked my humility about (...)”; 14, ll. 12-13; 19, ll. 2-3.

¹¹⁷⁶ *P.Pisentius* 15, ll. 3-4: “Well, your fatherhood wrote to us that we should ask (...)”.

¹¹⁷⁷ Requests to make inquiries through witnesses (ϣΙΝΕ 2ITN): *P.Pisentius* 3, l. 61 and 4, ll. 70-71; to inquire after a matter (ϣΙΝΕ NCΑ): *P.CrumST* 175.1+2, l. 9 and *P.Mon.Epiph.* 466, l. 16 (partly reconstructed); to investigate a matter (MOYOT): *P.Pisentius* 19, l. 14 and 31, ll. 22, 25.

and the people who rejected her, including the priest Paul, who had to come and admit that he acted unjustly; a man whose wife could not be reconciled with him (and the sender did not blame her, but did what the bishop had ordered, as if this outcome was already expected); a baker; and several bakers, who kindled too many ovens during a period of fasting.¹¹⁷⁸ The bishop actually prohibited the Eucharist in a village, where people fought with weapons, and probably at Pshenhor, since villagers had stolen the team of oxen of a monastery.¹¹⁷⁹ The authorities and villagers of Kratos apologized for celebrating (mass or a feast?) in a careless manner, and hoped that the bishop would forgive them.¹¹⁸⁰

The bishop warned that clergymen who allowed excommunicated bakers to partake from holy Communion would be excluded from the clergy.¹¹⁸¹ The priest Cyriacus was even close to being degraded, since he had met Pehroudion's wife outside of the monastery, although he had sworn to Bishop Pesynthius that he would avoid contact with her, in order to prevent a scandal. When Pesynthius heard about their meeting, he summoned Cyriacus and spoke to him menacingly, but Cyriacus begged for forgiveness and persuaded him by swearing an oath. At a council, in the presence of the bishops Pesynthius, Pisrael of Qus, Anthony of Ape and the hermit Psan, Cyriacus swore with his hand on the four Gospels that he had never approached the woman inappropriately. He added that, if he swore a false oath, he would be excommunicated and degraded,¹¹⁸² and promised never to contact the woman again, or to let her come to the monastery, or to give anything to her or her husband.

At the order of the patriarch two more councils needed to be organized. In ca. 615-620 the bishops Pesynthius, John (of Edfu) and John, the archimandrite and Epiphanius were exhorted to convene, in order to judge an affair according to the authority of the ecclesiastical canons (§3.2.8), and in ca. 620 the patriarch ordered that a council should be held, in order to investigate the case of the monk Elisaius (§3.1.7).¹¹⁸³ Several bishops were involved, such as Constantine, Shenoute and Pisrael, but remarkably, Pesynthius cannot be linked to the event.

¹¹⁷⁸ *P.Pisentius* 9: l. 11: [ΚΩ ΠΠ]ΑΡΧΙΔΙΑΚ(ΟΝ)ΟC ΖΙΒΟΛ; *P.Pisentius* 11: excommunication is implied by Cyriacus' appearance before a tribunal of religious authorities; *P.Pisentius* 18bis, 5-6: CΕΖΙΒΟΛ, Ν]ΓΚΑΛΛ ΖΙΒΟΛ; *P.Pisentius* 18ter, l. 8: ΑΪΛΦΟΡΙΖΕ ΠΜΟQ; *P.Pisentius* 25, l. 9: ΑΚ]ΚΕΛΕΥΕ ΝΑΪ ΕΚΑΛΛ ΖΙΒΟΛ; *P.Pisentius* 60.

¹¹⁷⁹ *P.Pisentius* 26, l. 7: "We are excommunicated" (ΕΤΖΙΒΟΛ), l. 10: "he will not hold mass at the *topos* again [...]" (ΗΛQΤ ΦΑ); *P.Pisentius* 2, l. 3: "The Pshenhorites who are excommunicate (ΕΤΖΙΒΟΛ)".

¹¹⁸⁰ P.ANU Classics Museum 75.01, verso, l. 4: "we have been careless"; l. 5: "celebrate in it (in church?) as in the [drinking] places" (ΠΗΛΑΝC[Ω?]); l. 9: "our negligence".

¹¹⁸¹ *P.Pisentius* 60, fragment 1: "Clergymen who will administer holy Communion to them will be excluded from the liturgy of the priesthood" (ΦΩΠΕ ΖΙΒΟΛ ΝΤΑΙΤΟΥΡΓΙΑ [ΝΤΜΝΤΚΛΗΡΙΚΟC], as on fragment 3); fragment 2: "he] who will do this will be excommunicated (ΦΩΠΕ ΖΙΒΟΛ) as well [...] the people of his village".

¹¹⁸² *P.Pisentius* 12, ll. 23-24: "estranged from the communion of the holy mysteries and the hand that is upon me" (his ordination through the laying-on of hands would be undone).

¹¹⁸³ *P.Mon.Epiph.* 133, l. 8; *P.Pisentius* 10, ll. 9-10.

Dataset 4 does not record instances when the bishop imposed fines or ordered that someone was arrested, as Abraham did (§6.4.E).

Bishop Pesynthius tried to solve conflicts within and between communities, but was not always successful. On account of the quarrel between the monk Moses and fellow-monk, whom Moses called “the way-layer”, the bishop visited their monastery and was kind to all the brethren. However, since the brethren thought that the bishop authorized them to decide about Moses as they pleased, they expelled him from the monastery and subjected him to a trial, where the “the way-layer” uttered unbearable words, supported by “three idiots”.¹¹⁸⁴ In reply to a letter from the bishop Moses apologized for making a critical remark (largely lost) and elaborated on what “the way-layer” said that made the monks decide to expel him.¹¹⁸⁵

The conflict between the village of Pshenhor and an unspecified group (tax-collectors or cattle-thieves?) formed another difficult case for the bishop. When the Pshenhorites stole cattle from a nearby monastery, the bishop excommunicated them.¹¹⁸⁶ A headman replied in defense that the villagers were robbed first: in the course of five years, men came at night to deport cattle three times. The first two times he informed the bishop, hoping that the latter would help the villagers, but he did not come with a solution. When the villagers stole cattle from the congregation, the first thing he did was to send a letter of reproach, which they forwarded to the financial administrators. That night, Pshenhor was robbed for the third time, and the value of the stolen animals equaled the tax of Pshenhor for six years. The headman pleaded the bishop to find a solution, but also warned him that, if he “spends another five years without jumping on our case, there will be no durable peace”.¹¹⁸⁷

At another occasion, there was a violent confrontation between Persian (?) authorities and the Pshenhorites.¹¹⁸⁸ The *lashane* Abraham informed the bishop that the authorities were guilty of evil deeds and bloodshed among the poor, and was displeased to notice that Pesynthius could think that the blame was on him or on the Pshenhorites. Abraham asked the bishop to make inquiries through particular reliable individuals, who would confirm that the villagers did nothing wrong. Although it is not explicitly stated, Abraham clearly wanted to prevent that the bishop imposed a sanction on his village. When he wrote, Pesynthius did not yet act as a mediator, but as a religious leader who called members of his flock to order.

¹¹⁸⁴ *P.Pisentius* 6.

¹¹⁸⁵ *P.Pisentius* 47.1.

¹¹⁸⁶ *P.Pisentius* 2.

¹¹⁸⁷ *P.Pisentius* 3, ll. 59-60.

¹¹⁸⁸ *P.Pisentius* 4, ll. 40: Van der Vliet proposes to translate $\text{N}\epsilon\text{z}\text{o}\gamma\text{c}\text{i}\alpha\ \epsilon\tau\text{z}\text{i}\text{b}\text{o}\lambda$ neutrally with “les autorités civiles”, but since Abraham described them as barbarians (“while they eat the intestines [of this] poor [people]”), and since $\text{z}\text{i}\text{b}\text{o}\lambda$ basically means “outside”, the term could refer to authorities from abroad, that is, Persians.

The bishop was also expected to solve various marital problems: a man wanted to give his daughter in marriage to someone working for him, but she refused to marry, saying that she would rather drown herself;¹¹⁸⁹ there was doubt whether Psmou and Hjiil had already prayed together before Apa Hello, a clergyman and match-maker, in order to confirm that their children would marry;¹¹⁹⁰ a man had who tried to abduct a girl was forced to pray in the presence of officials and clergymen, perhaps to make him promise that he would marry her, and only then her parents revealed that she was already engaged;¹¹⁹¹ Psmou's son was already betrothed, but since he started an affair with the daughter of the deacon Dios, his fiancée's parents wanted to return the bridal gift, and the clergymen of Qus tried to keep this scandal a secret;¹¹⁹² a couple broke up again, after the woman gave birth to a girl, for the man claimed that he could not be the father, since they were reconciled only six months before;¹¹⁹³ a man repudiated his wife, after finding her in a yard with another man, and neither she nor the man who was with her wanted to swear an oath to prove their innocence;¹¹⁹⁴ villagers pursued a woman to force her to be reconciled with her husband, while disobeying the orders of the priest to leave her;¹¹⁹⁵ Anthony expected that Daniel's daughter would be expelled on account of adultery, and felt uncomfortable about a colleague's order to keep aside;¹¹⁹⁶ and a woman accompanied her husband to another district, where he fell in love with another woman, who pretended to be his wife in public.¹¹⁹⁷ As Wilfong observed, Pesynthius' documents reveal "a great insistence on reconciliation when possible to avoid divorce", and in the case of adultery, the bishop ordered "not to constrain the husband to be reconciled with her".¹¹⁹⁸ However, at another occasion, he respected a woman's choice not to be reconciled with her husband and decided that the man should be excommunicated, since the blame was apparently on him.¹¹⁹⁹

Two letters concerning adultery indicate that the women involved did not marry out of love. The woman who accompanied her husband to another district remarked that her parents married her off with a man from the same village, after she made "this big [mistake?]"¹²⁰⁰ As

¹¹⁸⁹ *P.Pisentius* 13 + *P.CrumST* 180, l. 6: (The girl said: "I will) go to the water and die. I will not go [...]"). Wilfong (2002, 41-42) assumed that she was abandoned (κω), but l. 8 actually reads "May he leave with her" (μαρεκω νῆμας).

¹¹⁹⁰ *P.Pisentius* 16; cf. Steinwenter 1955, 20, n. 1.

¹¹⁹¹ *P.Pisentius* 14, l. 7: "he was about to abduct her" (εφνατωρη), but she was "betrothed" (l. 9:]ϣαωτϣ).

¹¹⁹² *P.Pisentius* 19; cf. Steinwenter 1955, 21.

¹¹⁹³ *P.Pisentius* 17; cf. Wilfong 2002, 44.

¹¹⁹⁴ *P.Pisentius* 38. In the *Encomium* the oath is part of an adultery test (§8.6.3).

¹¹⁹⁵ *P.Pisentius* 14, ll. 12-19.

¹¹⁹⁶ *P.Pisentius* 41.

¹¹⁹⁷ *P.Pisentius* 51.

¹¹⁹⁸ Wilfong 2002, 44 and *P.Pisentius* 38, l. 17.

¹¹⁹⁹ *P.Pisentius* 18ter; cf. Steinwenter 1955, 21, n. 2; Wilfong 2002, 44.

¹²⁰⁰ *P.Pisentius* 51, ll. 2, 4.

for the woman accused of “enchanting men” and of adultery, her mother declared that her son-in-law “did not hesitate to take her daughter (away)”, and that certain people involved “did not want the matter to be revealed”.¹²⁰¹ The sender apparently wanted the bishop to see that the woman is not just an adulteress, but also a victim to some extent.

Wilfong described Bishop Pesynthius as a dominant religious leader, who “sometimes threatened women and men with excommunication to get them to behave as he wanted” and attempted “to enforce biblical rules” on women, in order to control their behavior out of misogyny.¹²⁰² This impression may arise when passages regarding women in the *Homily on St Onnophrius* and the *Encomium* are read from a modern, feministic perspective.¹²⁰³ The letters present a nuanced picture of the bishop, who strongly condemned sexual offences, but was far from misogynistic. Pesynthius displayed concern for the well-being of girls and women, who were vulnerable, since they lived in a society where abductions and rape occurred frequently (§8.4.D.1). He blamed the priest Paul for rejecting a raped girl and excommunicated Mark “this criminal”; he did not force a woman to be reconciled, but ordered to excommunicate her husband instead; and he wanted to know who had abducted a poor woman’s daughter.¹²⁰⁴

E.2 *The Homily on St Onnophrius*

The *Homily on St Onnophrius* aimed to instruct laymen how they could lead a virtuous life, even if they did not live in a monastery. Pesynthius made a number of suggestions, exhorting the youth to guard their virginity until marriage, spouses to be faithful, superiors to maintain justice, the rich to be generous to the poor and to abstain from exacting usury, and everyone in general to remain patient with opponents.¹²⁰⁵ In order to really honor saints on their feast days, one should avoid exuberance and dishonesty, and strive for spiritual and bodily purity, for instance by fasting at least during Lent and on Wednesday and Friday, by being content with moderate means. In addition, Pesynthius exhorted the faithful to attend the vigil preceding the feast, to remain sober until receiving holy Communion, to behave piously also after leaving the church and to always be aware of God’s omnipresence.¹²⁰⁶ For women he had special instructions: they should avoid to make eye-contact with strange men, or impudently stare at any man, wear proper cloths that also cover their heads, be modest in their

¹²⁰¹ *P.Pisentius* 38, ll. 7-8; cf. Wilfong 2002, 42, where the text is incorrectly called “*P.Pisentius* 35”.

¹²⁰² Wilfong 2002, 30-31, without listing his sources.

¹²⁰³ Donker van Heel (2014, 71) wondered whether women would listen to “admonitions by – as so often – a man in a skirt”, a remark that voices modern scepticism towards traditional religious authorities in a humorous way.

¹²⁰⁴ *P.Pisentius* 18bis, 14 and *P.CrumST* 175.1+2 respectively.

¹²⁰⁵ Crum 1915-1917, fols 6-9.

¹²⁰⁶ Crum 1915-1917, fols 9-15, 18-26.

jewelry, always keep the Gospel in mind, and stop making noise when coming to church.¹²⁰⁷ Finally, Pesynthius instructed parents to teach their children to be respectable and to rebuke them when they fornicated, for if they did not correct their children, God would hold them responsible for the consequences (this topic reappears in E.3 and 8.6.2-3).¹²⁰⁸

The homily could have been inspired by the sermons of Shenoute of Atripe. Like him, Pesynthius called his audience “a people (worthy) of life”, and explicitly addressed men and women separately.¹²⁰⁹

E.3 *The Encomium on Pesynthius*

As a preacher and a teacher Pesynthius was compared with the apostles, particularly Paul, with the wise king Salomon and with the Cappadocian theologians Basil of Caesarea and Gregory the Theologian (of Nazianze).¹²¹⁰ He corrected a priest who spat before the altar by telling him that another priest who spat during the Eucharist fell instantly ill and died soon afterwards, since a Cherubim, who attended mass in the sanctuary and was hit by the spittle, gave him a deadly blow.¹²¹¹ By telling this story, the bishop (and the narrator of the *Encomium*) wanted to make the faithful aware of the presence of heavenly creatures during the Eucharist and to stimulate their piety in sacred spaces.

In a circular letter that is extensively quoted in the *Encomium* he argued that God delivered the country to merciless pagan nation (the Persians), in order to humiliate the people for sexual offences, like intercourse outside marriage and adultery. He blamed parents for not correcting their children: fathers did not find their sons a wife, and mothers supported their daughters, when they had illicit relations.¹²¹² In addition, wealthy laymen forgot to share their food and drinks with the poor, and even expected payment from them. Therefore, Pesynthius exhorted his flock to reflect on their sins, to repent and watch their mouths, and to have mercy with the underprivileged, in order that God would also have mercy with them.¹²¹³

When Pesynthius knew that a visitor had fornicated, he ordered to throw him out or refused to receive him.¹²¹⁴ According to another anecdote, he rebuked a man for not finding his son a wife and informed him that the son had already begotten a child. He urged the father

¹²⁰⁷ Crum 1915-1917, fols 15-16, 19. Pesynthius disliked women who sang lamentations and clapped their hands.

¹²⁰⁸ Crum 1915-1917, fols “16 *sic*”-17.

¹²⁰⁹ Crum 1915-1917, 41 n. 3 and fol. 33: ΟΥΛΛΑΟΣ ΕΠΩΝΕ; Wilfong 2002, 27, n. 6. Shenoute used the phrase “whether male or female” to stress the unity of the monastic community during crises; cf. Krawiec 2002, 98.

¹²¹⁰ *S*, fol. 37a (= *Q*, fol. 46), 56a-b. In *P.Mon.Epiph.* 460 Pesynthius is compared with Basil of Caesarea.

¹²¹¹ *A*, fols 161a-163a (partly in *W*, ed. Till 1934, 37-39).

¹²¹² *Q*, fols 57-58 (= *S*, fols 43a-b), 60-61 (omitted from *S*).

¹²¹³ *Q*, fols 62-66 (= *S*, fols 43b-45a).

¹²¹⁴ *A*, fols 142b-147a (= *S*, fols 57b-58a: a shepherd), 158a-161a (two priests).

to let his son marry the pregnant girl and added that the son was excommunicated, until he had taken the girl as his wife, in order to make up for having humiliated her.¹²¹⁵

The clergymen of a village informed the bishop about a man who was excluded from Communion for accusing his wife and another man of adultery without basis. Pesynthius summoned the man, but he protested loudly and only came after falling terribly ill. The bishop told him that the woman was innocent and would soon bear a son (it is implied that he knew about this, on account of his spiritual abilities). The birth of a son would prove her innocence (or rather that, if Pesynthius told the truth about the child, he must also be right about the woman), whereas the birth of a girl would mean that she was unfaithful. If the man still did not believe that his wife was innocent, the bishop suggested the possibility to make her swear an oath and drink the “water of the curse” (§8.6.3), but the man was already convinced.¹²¹⁶

Another woman who was repudiated by her husband on account of adultery came to the Monastery of the Cross, pleading loudly that the bishop would hear her story, how her husband had wronged her and her five children by throwing them out of the house. Pesynthius summoned the husband, who voiced his suspicions, but agreed to be reconciled to her, if the man suspected of being her lover could swear before the bishop that nothing had happened. However, upon seeing the fiery eyes of the bishop, the lover readily confessed. Since the woman insisted that she was innocent, the bishop tried a trick, hoping that she would confess her adultery out of her own. At first, he pretended that her lover had reassured her husband, and suggested that she could reassure him by drinking holy oil, but when she agreed to drink it, Pesynthius admitted that he did not believe that she was innocent and warned her that the oil had killed many people. Instead of letting her drink the oil, he asked the lover to retell what had happened, while her husband was present. Afterwards, the bishop ordered the woman to be beaten and driven from before him, and to be delivered to the governor.¹²¹⁷

As in the episcopal documents, Pesynthius appears in the *Encomium* as a bishop who strongly condemned sexual offences, but cared for the well-being of innocent women; as in the *Homily on St Onnophrius* he told parents to correct their children in case of transgressions.

The Sahidic version of the *Encomium* explains that the jealous husband fell ill, since he had defied Pesynthius, but the bishop did not condemn him. By contrast, some secondary anecdotes in the Arabic version present a harsher picture of him: acting as God’s prophet, the

¹²¹⁵ *S*, fols 63b-65b.

¹²¹⁶ *S*, fols 68a-74a; Wilfong 2002, 39.

¹²¹⁷ *A*, fol. 180a-185a (*W*, ed. Till 1934, 40-43); cf. Rapp 2005, 251-52. If an adulteress repented, the *Canons of Athanasius* (Canon 74) recommended that she did penance by shaving off her hair, wearing mourning garments and fasting forty days. Afterwards, she would be readmitted to Communion, but if she was caught committing adultery again, she would do the same penance and remain excommunicated; ed. Riedel and Crum 1973, 47-48.

bishop condemned the dishonest surveyor Damian and a priest who had committed sexual crimes, announcing that they would die soon and suffer in hell. He also condemned a thief for stealing a silver cup from a church, but the latter did not die, since he returned the cup.¹²¹⁸

E.4 *The Life of St Andrew*

The Arabic *Life of St Andrew* is the only source that states that Bishop Pesynthius deposed Jacob as abbot of the Monastery of Apa Samuel (Dayr al-Sanad), on account of his excessive expenditures, and that he appointed Moses and Joseph instead.¹²¹⁹

E.5 *The Letter of Pseudo-Pesynthius*

The tenth-century *Letter of Pseudo-Pesynthius* is inspired by the pastoral epistle quoted in the *Encomium*. Like Pesynthius, the author admonished his audience for their sins, exhorted them to avoid bad thoughts and deeds, and warned them for a merciless foreign nation.¹²²⁰ Unlike Pesynthius, he claimed to have received a revelation from the Holy Spirit, focused on “the correct, orthodox faith”, and condemned people for moral and sexual offences for eternity.¹²²¹

F. Giving directions for daily life

F.1 *Episcopal documents*

The documents do not specifically record how Pesynthius morally supported individuals, but the widow Constantina was comforted by his charity towards her and her children, and the monk Moses, who was expelled from his monastery, wrote that he was consoled by a letter from the bishop.¹²²²

F.2 *The Encomium on Pesynthius*

The *Encomium* describes Pesynthius as a true comforter: “Who would come to you, his heart being sad, and not return being happy?”¹²²³

¹²¹⁸ A, fols 140b-141b, 159b-161a, 188b-189a.

¹²¹⁹ Di Bitonto Kasser 1989, 168-70.

¹²²⁰ Périer 1914, 87-88, 90-91, 445.

¹²²¹ Périer 1914, 89-90 (ideas that are considered blasphemy), 91-92 (for any Christian: oppressing others for personal gain, bearing false testimonies, being a bigamist, neglecting people in need and having illicit relations; for women: failing to correct the misconduct of daughters, meeting insensible women, being unfaithful or disrespectful towards a husband, undergoing abortion; for priests: drinking too much and misbehaving in public, administering holy Communion to “bad women”, allowing people at the altar, neglecting liturgical duties and being hypocrite). Whereas the Pesynthius of the *Encomium* and the *homily on St Onnophrius* held both parents responsible for the conduct of their children, Pseudo-Pesynthius focused on the mothers.

¹²²² P. Pisentius 39 (partly cited in Wilfong 2002, 41), 47.1.

¹²²³ S, fol. 56a; see also fol. 79b-80a: “the comforter of those who were in sorrow”.

G. Intercession with state authorities

G.1 *Episcopal documents*

Pesynthius interceded with Lord Lucianus and was also asked to contact Apa Elias, two local authorities who probably lived in the district of Hermonthis (§7.5.2), and are best discussed in the context of the bishop's pragmatic authority (§8.5.1). Only two examples are linked to his own district. The Psenhorites hoped that Pesynthius would intercede with civil authorities, in order to solve the cattle theft problem, whereas Callinicus pleaded with the bishop to request a financial administrator to stop blocking a delivery of wine, since it was about to get spoilt.¹²²⁴

G.2 *The Encomium on Pesynthius*

The *Encomium* states that “rulers became lovers of the poor in your days”, implying that this was a result of the bishop's intercession with authorities on behalf of the poor.¹²²⁵

§8.5 PRAGMATIC AUTHORITY

§8.5.1 *Episcopal documents*

Several correspondents addressed the bishop as their “patron”, including the Jemean widow who feared expulsion from her house, the priest Kalapesius from the “eparchy” of Qus, the *lashane* Abraham of Pshenhor, and Daniel and Jacob, who were in financial difficulties.¹²²⁶

Pesynthius received several requests to contact civil or religious authorities outside his own diocese. Twice, he was asked to summon a lawyer, who worked at Hermonthis, either in order to write down the arrangements for the commemorative offering for a deceased, or to draw up a contract between Lord Lucianus and financial administrators.¹²²⁷ The Jemean widow begged him to persuade the *lashane* and the official Amos to let her stay in her house.¹²²⁸ It also happened that petitioners asked Psan to forward their requests for intercession to the bishop. Through Psan Apa John asked Epiphanius and “my lords the bishops”, including Pesynthius, to write to Master Elias for the sake of a husbandman who had to sell his cattle on account of the tax, but was already a poor man.¹²²⁹ Again through Psan's mediation, Luke hoped that the bishop could write two lines to Apa Elias, in order that he would address the citizens of Hermonthis. Luke did not dare to approach Pesynthius

¹²²⁴ *P.Pisentius* 3, 21. On Callinicus' association with the district of Koptos, see §7.5.1

¹²²⁵ *S*, fols 51a-b.

¹²²⁶ **ΠΡΟΣΤΑΤΗΣ**: *SBKopt.* I 295, ll. 9-10: “who intercedes for us before God and men”; *P.Pisentius* 19; *P.Mon.Epiph.* 129, recto, and 440. The sender of *P.Pisentius* 25 is unknown.

¹²²⁷ *P.Mon.Epiph.* 254; *P.Pisentius* 20.

¹²²⁸ *SBKopt.* I 295.

¹²²⁹ *O.Mon.Epiph.* 165.

directly, but expected that the latter would not turn down a request made by Psan.¹²³⁰ Pesynthius actually interceded with Lord Lucianus on behalf of a violated woman, asking him to deal with her case suitably.¹²³¹

People also requested the bishop to solve practical and economic problems. Nastasia ran out of papyrus and asked him to send her a scroll quickly, particularly because she also made efforts for him (as a patroness?; §7.6.5).¹²³² Two nuns, Tsheere and Koshe, wanted to send him extra clothes, hoping that he would find a customer and “sell them for us”.¹²³³ Since they lived south of him, that is, south of the mountain of Tsenti or – more likely – south of the *Topos* of Epiphanius, they probably fell under the jurisdiction of the bishop of Hermonthis, instead of the bishop of Koptos. Nevertheless, Pesynthius sent them corn, either to pay for earlier deliveries or out of patronage, and they appealed to him on account of their financial problems, for they were both distressed about their work. Another request to sell items came from a certain John, who added that the bishop could keep fifteen items for himself.¹²³⁴

Finally, a petitioner asked Pesynthius to inquire after family members, since they had recently experienced hardships, and somehow, the sender could not contact them directly. In the analysis, I consider the possibility that the sender was Susanna, and that she could have needed the bishop’s mediation, if she were a nun who had renounced her family.¹²³⁵

§8.5.2 *The Encomium on Pesynthius*

The *Encomium* describes Pesynthius as “a protector, not only of our district, but of the entire country of orthodox Christians”, who “began to give alms to every city and to every village as far as Aswan”, perhaps during the nation-wide famine of ca. 615 (§6.1).¹²³⁶

§8.6 LEGAL AUTHORITY

The following section discusses the use of sources of authority in the episcopal documents, the *Homily on St Onnophrius* and the short Sahidic version of the *Encomium* respectively. As for the Biblical citations, we only examine those that appear in speeches or letters attributed to the bishop, in order to get an impression of how he used the Scripture in his argumentation.

¹²³⁰ *O.Mon.Epiph.* 172.

¹²³¹ *P.Mon.Epiph.* 136.2.

¹²³² P.Dezaunay: ed. Sottas 1922.

¹²³³ *P.Pisentius* 28, ll. 26-27.

¹²³⁴ *P.CrumST* 179.

¹²³⁵ *P.Pisentius* 40. The name appears in l. 1 is preceded by **ⲙ** and could also be a matronym.

¹²³⁶ *S*, fols 29a, 42b (= *Q*, fols 23, 56). The term used for “protector” is **ⲛⲁⲱⲧⲉ**, instead of **ⲡⲣⲟⲥⲧⲁⲧⲏⲥ**.

§8.6.1 *Episcopal documents*

Bishop Pesynthius did not use Biblical passages in the few preserved letters that are ascribed to him (*P.Pisentius* 18bis and 60, *P.Mon.Epiph.* 133 and 136.2), but referred to ecclesiastical canons once, without specifying which corpus of canons he meant (*P.Mon.Epiph.* 133). He informed Epiphanius that the patriarch asked them as well as other religious leaders to judge a case in accordance with “the ecclesiastical canons”.

The official documents attested in Dataset 4 include a contract that was still to be drawn up, a testament, and replies from financial administrators to letters from Pesynthius.¹²³⁷

Many documents refer to episcopal commands. Correspondents of the bishop wrote that they acted as he had commanded,¹²³⁸ they asked him to send instructions,¹²³⁹ or promised to act as he commanded,¹²⁴⁰ and two letters simply indicate that Pesynthius issued orders.¹²⁴¹ Two documents in Dataset 4 record that the patriarch ordered to hold a council.¹²⁴²

Pesynthius’ documents do not include protocols, on the basis of which a transgressor could be summoned and questioned, but when the bishop made inquiries, correspondents did record as accurately as possible what other people had said: that Psmou agreed to give his daughter in marriage to Hjil’s son; that Taham and her daughter did not see Psmou and Hjil pray, but saw them enter Apa Hello’s house (where they were supposed to pray) and planned to drink wine, apparently to celebrate the engagement of their children; that Papas wanted to keep the scandal of a broken engagement a secret; and that a priest protested a little against the bishop’s proposal to have a housemate and imposed conditions on the monk who was going to live with him (as an assistant or a disciple?).¹²⁴³

Three documents mention oaths.¹²⁴⁴ The priest Cyriacus had to swear an oath by the four Gospels and in the presence of Pesynthius, two other bishops and Psan, and he also confirmed the oath in writing. When a village was excommunicated, since some inhabitants had fought with weapons, the priest swore that he would no longer celebrate in their church. Finally, a woman accused of adultery and her alleged lover were given the chance to swear an oath to prove their innocence, but the fragmentary text suggests that neither of them did it. In the case of the woman, no mention is made of the “water of the curse” (§8.6.3).

¹²³⁷ *P.Pisentius* 20, l. 5: Ε[ΓΓΡΑ]ΦΟΝ; *P.Pisentius* 48: ΔΙΑΘΗΚΗ; *P.Pisentius* 3 and 21: ΑΝΤΙΓΡΑΦΟΝ.

¹²³⁸ *P.Pisentius* 15, 18ter, 23, 25, 28, 37; *O.CrumST* 176; *P.Mon.Epiph.* 460.

¹²³⁹ *P.Pisentius* 17, 28, 29, 41.

¹²⁴⁰ *P.Pisentius* 13, 22, 54; *Katoen natie* 685/1.

¹²⁴¹ *P.Pisentius* 19, 57.

¹²⁴² *P.Pisentius* 10; *P.Mon.Epiph.* 133.

¹²⁴³ *P.Pisentius* 16 and 15 respectively, 19, 29.

¹²⁴⁴ *P.Pisentius* 11 (Cyriacus), 26 (the priest), 38.

Dataset 4 does not include guarantees, but George and Enoch asked if Pesynthius wanted to receive a guarantee, since a list of items turned out to be inaccurate.¹²⁴⁵

The bishop received two requests from officials to issue letters of protection. Stephen, an urban official associated with Koptos (§7.5.1), asked Pesynthius to give Papnoute such a letter and to send him, in order that Stephen could talk to him. Stephen promised that he would uphold justice for Papnoute. Similarly, Peter, the *lashane* of Pmilis, requested the bishop to issue a letter of protection for Phello and Theodore, in order that they would go home with their families and cattle.¹²⁴⁶ Although *lashanes* were authorized to send letters of protection themselves, Bishop Pesynthius was asked to act as a mediator, since he could better convince fugitives that it was safe to go home, for if the officials did not respect the letter of protection, he would excommunicate them.¹²⁴⁷

§8.6.2 *The Homily on St Onnophrius*

The Biblical passages in the *Homily on St Onnophrius* aimed to demonstrate that Pesynthius' teachings conformed with the Scriptures and were consequently authoritative. He explicitly quoted "the holy Scripture", David, Ezekiel, "the prophet" (Amos), Jesus and Paul,¹²⁴⁸ but usually did not identify his source. Pesynthius wanted to teach his audience that:¹²⁴⁹

- the commemoration of St Onnophrius was inspired by Paul's exhortation to Christians to commemorate their leaders and to imitate their faith, for "without faith it is impossible to please God" (Heb. 13:7, 11:6);
- people should not repay evil for evil (Rom. 12:17), for David said: "If I repaid those who repaid me with evil, I will fall by my enemies" (inspired by Ps. 7:4);
- saints are not honored with words only, but expect that people are pure in body and mind and honest, for even Christ did not endure people who "honored him with their lips" and called him "Lord", but did not do as he said (Matt. 15:8; Luke 6:46);
- parents should correct their children, for "the soul that sins shall die" (Ezek. 18:4);
- feasts should be celebrated appropriately, without dishonesty, in order that God will not turn feasts into mourning and reject the offerings (Amos 8:10, 5:21; Isa. 1:14);

¹²⁴⁵ *O.CrumST* 177, l. 9: **αὐφάλα**.

¹²⁴⁶ P.Katoennatie 685/1, O.APM, Inv. 3871.

¹²⁴⁷ Van der Vliet 2014, 260, where the documents are called "safe-conducts". The priest John excommunicated the estate managers Patese and Himai, since they arrested someone, although they had sworn by God not to pursue him (*O.CrumST* 394); cf. Winlock and Crum 1926, 172; Schmelz 2002, 137.

¹²⁴⁸ Crum 1915-1917, fols 1 (Paul), 9 (David), 11 (Jesus), 17 (Amos), 25 (the holy Scripture, David), 27 (the holy Scripture, Ezekiel). The references to the Psalms are based on the edition of the Sahidic version, Budge 1898.

¹²⁴⁹ The following teachings appear in Crum 1915-1917, fols 1-4, 8-11, 17-18, 23, 25, 27-28, 30-32.

- after the feast, people should eat modestly, thanking God and singing Psalms in their hearts, and also share food with the poor, since Jesus said that “if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, truly I tell you, he will certainly not lose his reward” (Eph. 5:19; Matt. 10:42);
- they should pray day and night, in order to keep the Lord in mind constantly, just as David recommended (variation on Ps. 36:4,¹²⁵⁰ 16:8);
- since the bishop believed that serious illnesses happened several times “on account of our sins”, he exhorted his audience “not to act like the pagans” (Matt. 6:7) and to stop committing sins, for “the wickedness of the wicked will not damage him on the day when he turns away from his wickedness” (Ezek. 33:12);
- God “can destroy body and soul in hell”, and people “who destroy the temple of God”, should know that the punishment for fornication will be terrible (Matt. 10:28; 1Cor. 3:17; Zech. 14:12; Isa. 66:24);
- bad habits and impure passions should be avoided, in order that people can say: “we leaped over a wall”, that is, the wall of passions (Ps. 17:29)];
- the audience should not leave these words at the church, but “write them on the table of our heart” (Prov. 7:3);
- people should reprimand sinners, in order that they can confidently say that “I will announce Your name to my brothers”, “I have hidden your Word in my heart”, and “of those whom you gave me, I lost not one” (Ps. 21:22; Ps. 118:11?;¹²⁵¹ John 18:9);
- and God desires mercy and does not want anyone to perish (Matt. 9:13; 2Pet. 3:9).

In short, the Biblical citations are almost evenly drawn from both Testaments. The Psalms and the Gospel of Matthew are quoted most often.

§8.6.3 *The Encomium on Pesynthius*

Judging from the Sahidic version of the *Encomium*, Pesynthius frequently cited the Bible, usually without indicating the exact source. He used Biblical passages for various reasons:

- to reassure people that they should not worry about food or water (Matt. 6:34), for God knew what they needed, before they asked Him (Matt. 6:8) and He would provide whatever they needed (Ps. 54:22), as he did for Elijah (3Reigns 17:6, 19:5-8),¹²⁵²

¹²⁵⁰ Budge 1898, 39; not identified by Crum (1915-1917, 64, n. 3).

¹²⁵¹ Fol. 32: ⲁⲓⲧⲁ[.] ⲉⲙ ⲡⲁⲛⲧⲏⲧ, not identified by Crum (1915-1917, 66). The Sahidic version of the proposed Psalm reads ⲁⲓⲛⲱⲡⲓ ⲛⲏⲉⲕⲱⲗⲁⲭⲉ ⲉⲙ ⲡⲁⲛⲧⲏⲧ; ed. Budge 1898, 127.

¹²⁵² S, fols. 33b, 47a-b (= Q, fols. 37, 70-72), 49a-b, which also cites Luke 12:24.

- to disclaim the merit of catching a fish for a sick monk by saying that God, who sent Daniel a meal, also provided the fish (Bell and the Dragon in Daniel 14: 33-39);¹²⁵³
- to pray that God would make the water rise from the well, just as Jesus ordered Peter to walk on water (Matt. 14:29), for Pesynthius forgot to bring his rope and bucket;¹²⁵⁴
- to reprimand his flock in a pastoral epistle, arguing that God allowed terrible things to happen on account of their grave sins, just as God punished the pharaoh with plagues, the Sodomites with sulfur and fire, and the fallen angels with imprisonment in endless darkness (Ex. 7:14-14:21; Gen. 19:24; Gen. 6:1-4, but retold as in 2Peter 2:4); that, if God had not promised that there would be no flood, he would already have erased the world with a second flood (Gen. 8:21); that the sins of his flock are worse than the Biblical sins, for parents knew that their children fornicated and allowed it to happen (Lam. 4:6; Rom. 1:32); that more plagues will come, “incurable and without passing”, if the people do not chastise themselves and “produce fruit worthy of repentance” (Deut. 28:59; Matt. 3:8); that they should repent and have mercy with others, in order to receive mercy themselves (James 2:13; Tob. 4:7, 4:10, 12:8; Luke 16:19-25); and that everyone will be judged on the basis of what he has done (2Cor. 5:10);¹²⁵⁵
- to reprimand John for accepting cheeses from a shepherd who had raped a girl, and for hiding them among other cheeses, thinking that the bishop would not know, just as Gehazi tried to fool Elisha (4Reigns 5:20-27; also cited are Ps. 141:5; 1Cor. 5:11; Heb. 13:4, 12:16; 1Cor. 6:9);¹²⁵⁶
- to urge a father to let his son marry the girl who carried his baby, and that the father was to blame, if he taught his son weakly, just as the priest Eli was blamed for the misconduct of his sons (variation on Deut. 22:28-29; 3Reigns 2:12-34);¹²⁵⁷
- to disclaim the healing of a boy by saying that “everything is possible for him who believes” (Mark 9:23).¹²⁵⁸
- to remove a man’s doubts about the fidelity of his wife by suggesting the possibility of making her swear an oath and letting her drink from the “water of the curse”: if she was guilty, her body would be “covered by leprosy”, but if she was innocent, the water

¹²⁵³ *S*, fols. 34b (= *Q*, fol. 39).

¹²⁵⁴ *S*, fols. 36a (= *Q*, fol. 44).

¹²⁵⁵ *Q*, fols 58-66 (much abbreviated in *S*, fols 43b-45a).

¹²⁵⁶ *S*, fols 60b-61b.

¹²⁵⁷ *S*, fols 64b-65a. Deut. 22:28-29 stipulates that the rapist should give the father of the victim fifty silver pieces and marry the girl, but Pesynthius argued that the rapist should give the girl “the crown” of marriage.

¹²⁵⁸ *S*, fol. 68b.

would not harm her and she could still bear children (cf. Num. 5:11-31, where the abdomen of a guilty women would swell up and her thighs would waste away);¹²⁵⁹

- to warn a murderer that his blood would be shed as well (Gen. 9:6);¹²⁶⁰
- to explain John that God protects the faithful from evil (Ps. 90:9-10, 13-15);¹²⁶¹
- to refuse food by recalling Jesus' words at the Last Supper, that He would not drink wine until he was reunited with the Apostles in his Father's Kingdom (Matt. 26:29);¹²⁶²
- finally, Pesynthius warned on his deathbed that wolves would enter the garden, and people would do as they pleased, "since the wall was smashed" (inspired by Acts 20:29 and Prov. 25:28).¹²⁶³

Pesynthius admonished people by comparing them to "bad guys" in the Old Testament (the pharaoh, the Sodomites, fallen angels, Gehazi and Eli's sons), but when he wanted to reassure others or stimulate their faith or benevolence, he cited 3Reigns, Tobit, the Psalms and the Gospels of Matthew and Mark.

The bishop knew what Deuteronomy and Numeri prescribed in case of rape or alleged adultery. He agreed that a rapist should marry his victim and stay with her, in order to compensate for having ruined her chances for marrying unblemished, but he did not mean that women accused of adultery should actually drink the "water of the curse". When Pesynthius mentioned the adultery test as a legal possibility to a jealous husband, he did not intend to place the burden of proof on the wife, as Wilfong argued,¹²⁶⁴ but tested the man's obedience. The aim of the anecdote was to demonstrate that the man was punished with illness after loudly refusing to obey Pesynthius, and that he was healed when he finally obeyed by coming to the bishop. By that time, he was convinced of Pesynthius' spiritual authority and no longer dared to disobey him.¹²⁶⁵ Since the man listened to the bishop and finally believed that his wife was innocent, she did not have to undergo the test. Likewise, Pesynthius prevented the repudiated wife from actually drinking the holy oil, for he did not propose the test to let the liquid expose her as an adulteress, but hoped that she would make a confession out of fear that the oil may kill her (§8.4.E.3). The anecdotes on "the water of the curse" may shock many

¹²⁵⁹ *S*, fols 72b-73a.

¹²⁶⁰ *S*, fols 75a-b.

¹²⁶¹ *S*, fols 77b-78a.

¹²⁶² *S*, fols 81a-b.

¹²⁶³ *S*, fol. 82a.

¹²⁶⁴ Wilfong 2002, 39.

¹²⁶⁵ *S*, fols 73a-b: "The man said: "From the moment when your fatherhood spoke with me, my heart was already convinced. And I will never stop obeying you again".

modern readers, especially since the test was only proposed for women and not for men, but we should also think about what happened if a woman was found guilty of adultery. Could it be that the bishop treated her harshly, in order to prevent an angry mob from taking the law into their own hands and killing her, as the Pharisees in John 8:1-11 planned to do (following Deut. 22:22).¹²⁶⁶ The novel and the film *Zorba the Greek* (from 1946 and 1964 respectively) demonstrate that a widow caught in a one-night stand still faced lynching in modern Crete.

Since Pesynthius cited Deuteronomy and Numeri, Wilfong argued that his attitude toward women was based on the Old Testament and his behavior toward men on the Gospels and the Pauline epistles, while implying that the bishop was misogynistic.¹²⁶⁷ However, the analysis of Biblical citations in the Sahidic version of the *Encomium* revealed that the bishop chose bad male examples from the Old Testament to correct John or instruct his flock. Even if the views of the historical bishop on women were traditional (misogynistic in modern eyes), he cannot be called misogynistic on the basis of a hagiographic text, since it presents the image of Pesynthius that a later author wanted his audience to remember. In fact, the *Encomium* indicates that the bishop's attitude towards women was reasonable, when he defended an unjustly accused wife, and did not enforce the adultery test on a woman whom he actually considered guilty.

The Sahidic version of the *Encomium* mentions the *Canons of the Bishops* once with regard to the annual contributions that Pesynthius received from the faithful, which is likely to refer to the *Didascalia* and the *Apostolic Constitutions*.¹²⁶⁸

§8.7 THE WEIGHT OF THE EPISCOPAL OFFICE

According to the Arabic version of the *Encomium*, Pesynthius endured many problems at the beginning of his episcopate.¹²⁶⁹ Many men had unlawful relationships, by marrying a niece or two sisters, or by having intercourse with mother and daughter. Many people – even clergymen and magistrates – behaved badly, since they did not know about (or rather, fear) God, nor did they believe in the day of Resurrection. People disrespected Pesynthius, calling him a “muddled lunatic” or a “one of the interfering busy-bodies who does not know what he says”. They also called him names or belittled him by using short names (“Pesyntiun” and

¹²⁶⁶ Daniel's daughter was about to be expelled on account of adultery (*P.Pisentius* 41). In the Arabic version of the *Encomium*, an adulteress was beaten and delivered to the governor, in order to be humiliated in public (*A*, fol. 184b-185a). This secondary anecdote may reflect the custom in Pesynthius' days or that of a later editor.

¹²⁶⁷ Wilfong 2002, 39 and pp. 30-31, where patristic authors and monastic leaders are described as misogynistic.

¹²⁶⁸ *Q*, fol. 56; *S*, fol. 42b: “the *Canons of the Apostles*”. *Didascalia*, chapter 9, section 26.2: ed. Funk 1905, vol. 1, 102 (Latin); trans. Brock and Vasey 1982, 11; reworded in the *Apostolic Constitutions*, Book 2, section 26.2: ed. Funk 1905, vol. 1, 103 (Greek).

¹²⁶⁹ *A*, fols 196a-197a.

“Pesente”), and clergymen did not correct such people, but brought them closer to the bishop, who had actually sent them away.¹²⁷⁰ It is also said that Pesynthius attracted large crowds every day, and that he did not want to take a rest, although he was exhausted, since the episcopal office was a heavy responsibility that obliged him to discipline fornicators, adulterers and impious or ambitious monks.¹²⁷¹ If he did not correct them according to the ecclesiastical canons, he feared that God would blame him for being negligent.

The episcopal documents confirm that Pesynthius was a zealous and conscientious bishop, who punished transgressors, particularly in cases of rape and adultery; that there were illicit close-kin relationships;¹²⁷² and that Pesynthius was criticized by angry people. A spokesman of the Psenhorites reproached him for not listening, for suggesting that he did not want peace, for believing accusations against him, and for not intervening in the conflict about cattle theft for five years, whereas the *lashane* Abraham of Pshenhor was insulted that Pesynthius could think that he was seeking trouble.¹²⁷³ Jacob, probably the archdeacon whom the bishop excommunicated, expressed his displeasure by threatening the episcopal messenger and by fetching magistrates to defend him, which was a blatant act of insubordination.¹²⁷⁴

Dataset 4 offers glimpses of all aspects of the episcopal office, except of mission. If we count the commemoration of Severus of Antioch and St Victor as hints for missionary activity, and the charity of rulers toward the poor as a result of intercession with civil authorities, all aspects appear in the Sahidic version of the *Encomium* (§8.4.B.3, G.2). The theme of education and discipline is the best recorded, not only in the documents, but also in the *Encomium*, the *Homily on St Onnophrius* (with a focus on education), and the *Life of St Andrew* (with an example of discipline). Pesynthius’ care for the underprivileged, church administration and the organization of worship are also relatively well attested, both in the documents and in the *Encomium*.

In the 620s, the period to which most documents are assigned, Pesynthius spent years outside of his diocese, which created more distance between him and his flock.¹²⁷⁵ However, even if the distance complicated and limited episcopal activities, particularly giving directions for daily life in private, the number of tasks was still considerable, since the bishop was also asked to intervene in various matters beyond his diocese. Other factors that made the

¹²⁷⁰ Pesente’s widow or her scribe called the bishop “Pesente” (*SBKopt.* I 295).

¹²⁷¹ *A*, fols 189b-190a.

¹²⁷² *P.Pisentius* 26, about a man and his niece. Abraham also condemned such a relationship (*O.Crum* 73; §6.4.E).

¹²⁷³ *P.Pisentius* 3, ll. 11-12, 44-46, 59-60; *Pisentius* 4, ll. 17-18.

¹²⁷⁴ *P.Pisentius* 9, ll. 4, 7-9.

¹²⁷⁵ *P.Mon.Epiph.* 152: “Were not the distance far”, the senders would have greeted the bishop in person.

episcopal office a challenge for the bishop, who was probably in his seventies, were his poor health; social unrest caused by tax problems, the Persian occupation, marauders and people lacking self-control; Pesynthius' conviction that God would blame him personally for the loss of souls, if he did not discipline his flock; and the high expectations of his petitioners, who regarded him as a holy man. Fortunately for him, officials like Lord Lucianus turned out to be cooperative, and he could sometimes work together with Epiphanius – the other holy man of the Theban region –, fellow bishops or Psan, at least during councils.

CONCLUSION

The episcopal documents and the *Encomium* reveal that Pesynthius must have been a man of immense charisma. In both kinds of texts he is described as a Spirit-bearer, who interceded with God and diffused the odor of sanctity, and as a Christ-bearer or ascetic. The combination of a strong spiritual and ascetic authority is unusual even for monk-bishops. The only person in the Theban region who could compete with Pesynthius in both respects was Epiphanius.

On account of his charisma, Pesynthius was widely regarded as a powerful patron and received several requests. Some petitioners asked him to contact civil or religious authorities in Hermonthis or Jeme, whereas others in or outside the diocese of Koptos hoped that he would solve their financial or practical problems, for instance, by selling their goods or sending a papyrus scroll. Such requests suggest that the bishop was considered accessible. At the same time, there was a physical distance between Pesynthius and his diocese in the 620s, when Pesynthius stayed in Western Thebes for years. In this period, the bishop probably was an elderly man with a poor health who could not always answer his mail himself. These conditions must have complicated his work as a bishop. If it is true that Pesynthius neglected the case of cattle theft at Pshenhor for five years, as an angry headman stated, it may have been due to the bishop's residence outside of his diocese and his condition.

The episcopal documents present a lively picture of the social problems that the bishop tried to solve, such as injustice, violence, sexual offences and poverty. Pesynthius disciplined several clergymen: he excommunicated an archdeacon, almost degraded the priest Cyriacus and summoned a priest who had unjustly expelled a girl. However, that he deposed the priest Jacob as abbot of the Monastery of Apa Samuel and appointed two new abbots in his stead is recorded in the Arabic *Life of St Andrew* only.

Interestingly, Pesynthius encouraged separated couples to be reconciled, but if the man was to blame, and his wife could not be reconciled, the bishop did not put pressure on her, but excommunicated the man. He showed a particular concern for girls and women who had been

abducted or raped and ran the risk of being rejected by their fiancé or husband and by their community. In one case, Pesynthius not only punished the violator, but also the priest who had expelled the victim. At any rate, he was not misogynistic, as Wilfong suggested on the basis of teachings attributed to him in the *Homily on St Onnophrius* and the *Encomium*.

Pesynthius' care for the underprivileged is demonstrated by his charity towards the widow Constantina and her children, and by his decision to employ a poor worker, who had young children as well. The *Encomium* praises the bishop for his generosity, stating that he distributed his income to the poor, particularly during winter and even beyond the boundaries of his diocese: he allegedly sent alms to Aswan, perhaps during the great famine of ca. 615.

Pesynthius' reputation as a living saint did not prevent some people from expressing strong criticism. The headman of Pshenhor reproached him for not intervening in a case of cattle theft for five years, and for believing false accusations. The monk Moses was displeased that the brethren thought that the bishop had authorized them to expel Moses from the monastery. In a second letter he apologized for a critical remark. The Arabic version of the *Encomium* states that Pesynthius felt disrespected at the beginning of his episcopate.

Like Abraham, Pesynthius was a conscientious teacher. The *Homily on St Onnophrius* and the *Encomium* indicate that he instructed his followers to be sincere, to avoid sexual offences, to live modestly and to share what they had with the poor. According to both sources, he exhorted parents to teach their children to be respectable and to correct them in case of fornication. The *Homily on St Onnophrius* added that he told women to stop making eye-contact with strange men, dressing fancifully and being loud. To modern readers it may seem that a bishop with such traditional views, and a monk-bishop at that, tried to control the behavior of women out of misogyny, but we should not forget the social context for which the text was meant: knowing the disruptive effect that sexual offences could have on families and communities, and how often they occurred, the bishop argued that women should avoid attracting unwanted attention, in order to protect them and maintain peace in the community.

The circular letter from the time of Patriarch Benjamin is the only document that presents Pesynthius as an expert in liturgical matters, especially with regard to the Eucharist.

Although the bishop's stay in Western Thebes is likely to have limited his activities in the diocese of Koptos, his involvement in matters relating to all four dioceses, made possible through his social network, indicate that he was a zealous bishop.

There is a clear difference between the episcopal documents and literary texts in the use of sources of authority: Dataset 4 includes commands, reports, letters of protection and some references to legal documents, whereas the *Homily on St Onnophrius* and the *Encomium*

mostly include Biblical citations. Although the low number of official documents (deeds, guarantees, appointments) is probably due to the loss of part of the archive, it is significant in comparison with Abraham's case: Abraham used written sources as instruments of authority, in order to increase his professional authority, but Pesynthius was revered as a bishop with extraordinary spiritual and ascetic authority. On account of his personal charisma, he made a memorable impression and is still commemorated as a saint.