1 General Introduction

1.1 The Great Persecution: History Becomes Memory

> It was the nineteenth year of the reign of Diocletian, the month of Dystrus, which would be termed March among the Romans, as the festival of the salvific Passion was approaching, when imperial letters were sent everywhere ordering the churches smashed to the ground, the writings destroyed by fire, and publicly proclaiming that those with status be stripped of status and the members of the [imperial] households, if they persisted in being disposed to Christianity, be deprived of liberty. Such was the first document against us. But not long after we were visited by other letters that ordered all the presidents of the churches in every place first be put to prison and then, later, that they be compelled by every machination to sacrifice.[1]

Not long after the Persecution, the bishop of Caesarea and great pioneer of ecclesiastical history, Eusebius, painted this picture of the beginning of the Great Persecution (*c.* 303-313).[2] His account of these times implies that the Persecution impacted the Christian communities in the Roman Empire greatly. The Scriptures were burned in public fires, churches were razed to the ground and Christians were captured, tortured and eventually even executed if they would not sacrifice to the Roman gods. In Egypt, writes Eusebius, countless numbers of men, women and children suffered martyrdom.[3] The nightmare ended in triumph, when an emperor who was sympathetic towards Christians came to power.[4] Eusebius and the Christian teacher of rhetoric Lactantius celebrated the reign of Emperor Constantine (306-337) and the latter author wrote extensively about the horrible ends of the former persecutors.

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1 Eus. *h.e.* 8.2 (trans. J.M. Schott, *Eusebius of Caesarea. The History of the Church: A New Translation* [Oakland, 2019] 398).

2 The date at which Eusebius wrote his *Church History* has been much debated, although scholars agree that the final editing was done sometime between 313 and 325. According to T.D. Barnes, 'The Editions of Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*', *GRBS* 21 (1980) 191-201, Eusebius wrote his *Church History* in four different stages. The original design (*c.* 295) consisted of seven books, including parts of Book 8 and all of Book 9. The second edition was written in 313, after the Persecution had ended, and included a short version of the *Martyrs of Palestine* and an account of the last two years of Maximinus. The third, revised edition (*c.* 315) ended at Book 10.7. The fourth and final edition was written after Licinius was defeated in 324. Most scholars, however, now agree with R.W. Burgess, 'The Dates and Editions of Eusebius' *Chronici Canones* and *Historia Ecclesiastica*', *JThS* 48 (1997) 471-504, who notes that there is no evidence that Eusebius carried out major revisions after the supposed first edition and therefore concludes that he must have finished his first edition after the persecution in 313. Cf. A.P. Johnson, *Eusebius* (London, 2014) 20-1 and 104-12, who has recently argued for a single edition in 324.

3 See esp. Eus. *h.e.* 8.8-9.

4 For an overview of the 'ending' of the Great Persecution in the different regions of the Roman Empire, see T.D. Barnes, 'From Toleration to Repression: The Evolution of Constantine's Religious Policies', *SCI* 21 (2002) 189-207.

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Today, our main sources for the Great Persecution are the writings of Eusebius and Lactantius, who had both been eye-witnesses, as well as a few contemporary papyri and hagiographical literature. Most of our evidence has thus been coloured by a Christian pen. What these Christian authors have remembered and forgotten, or chosen to or not to record, has shaped our image of the Great Persecution. As a result, the history of this period has become blurred, in hindsight, by their perceptions. And yet, these very same sources connote the significance of the Persecution for later generations of Christians. The shared remembrance of this time provided them with an image of the past, an understanding of the present and a design for the future.

The significance of the Great Persecution in the formation of a collective Christian memory, which would then ground the formation of a collective Christian identity, has much to do with the fact that it happened, retrospectively, at a pivotal moment in the history of Christianity. Only years before Christian authors would write about Constantine winning the Battle of the Milvian Bridge under the sign of the cross in 312, the imperial government made a last attempt to remove Christian presence from the Empire.[5] By this period, the beginning of the fourth century, Christians seem to have formed a large and visible minority in the Roman Empire. According to Eusebius, the Persecution was a divine punishment for this steadily growing but lazy, proud and divided Christian community.[6] Afterwards, however, Church and Empire would be reunited in a 'new and much stronger Jerusalem'.[7] In contrast, Lactantius writes that the personal hatred of Diocletian's co-Emperor Galerius towards the Christians caused the Persecution.[8] According to Lactantius, it would, however, be the last and the greatest of the persecutions leading to the triumph of Christianity.[9]

Although modern scholarship has shown that there is no evidence for Galerius' instigation of the Persecution, the exact circumstances and motivations of the Roman authorities remain unknown.[10] Nevertheless, there is a wide consensus that the

5 For an overview of the impact of Constantine on Christianity, including a concise bibliography, see H. Drake, 'The Impact of Constantine on Christianity', in N. Lenski (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Constantine* (Cambridge, 2012) 111-36. For the impact of the Great Persecution on the early Church, see the articles in M. Humphries and D.V. Twomey (eds.), *The Great Persecution, AD 303: The Proceedings of the Fifth Patristic Conference* (Dublin, 2009).

6 Eus. *h.e.* 8.1, 9.2. For Eusebius' reverberations on the Great Persecution see T. O'Loughlin, 'Eusebius of Caesarea's Conceptions of the Persecutions as a Key to Reading his *Historia Ecclesiastica*', in Humphries and Twomey, *Great Persecution*, 91-105.

7 Eus. *h.e.* 10.4.3: καινῆς καὶ πολὺ κρείττονος Ἰερουσαλὴμ.

8 Lact. *Mort.* 36.3.

9 For a discussion of Lactantius' response to the Great Persecution and its influence on Constantine, see E. DePalma Digeser, *The Making of a Christian Empire: Lactantius and Rome* (Ithaca, 2000).

10 The Great Persecution has been studied extensively, see especially the studies by H.C.W. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church. A Study of a Conflict from the Maccabees to Donatus*

Roman government considered Christians impious and therefore a threat to the wellbeing of the Roman Empire.[11] Precise numbers of executed Christians are lacking.[12] As for Egypt, the few contemporary papyri reveal that sacrifices were obligatory in court, Church property was confiscated and Christians were arrested, but they do not allow for generalisations about the impact of the Persecution on the Christian

(Oxford, 1965) 477-535, R. Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (Harmondsworth, 1986) 592-608, P.S. Davies, 'Origin and Purpose of the Persecution of AD 303', *JThS* 40 (1989) 66-96, G.E.M. De Ste. Croix, *Christian Persecution, Martyrdom, and Orthodoxy* (Oxford, 2006) 35-78 ('Aspects of the "Great" Persecution', 1954[1]), Humphries and Twomey, *Great Persecution* and T.D. Barnes, *Early Christian Hagiography and Roman History* (Tübingen, 2010) 97-150. For Galerius' role in the Great Persecution see M. Gelzer, *Kleine Schriften* (Wiesbaden, 1963) 378-86 ('Der Urheber der Christenverfolgung von 303', 1935[1]) and Davies, 'Origin and Purpose'.

11 Modern scholarship has been unable to give a definitive answer as to why Diocletian and his co-emperors initiated the Persecution. However, several possible motives have been suggested. Whereas scholars such as J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz, *Continuity and Change in Roman Religion* (Oxford, 1979) 247 and Davies, 'Origin and Purpose', 93 have argued that the Persecution occurred in a period of peace, which gave the emperors time to think about their political ideology, others, such as M. Humphries, 'The Mind of the Persecutors: "By the Gracious Favour of the Gods"', in Humphries and Twomey, *Great Persecution*, 11-32 at 25-7 and E. Manders, 'The Great Persecution and Imperial Ideology: Patterns of Communication on Tetrarchic Coinage', in J.H.F. Dijkstra and C. Raschle (eds.), *Religious Violence in the Ancient World. From Classical Athens to Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, 2020) 203-27 have alleged that the emperors initiated the Persecution as a reaction to political unrest. And whilst scholars such as T.D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge, 1981) 15-27 have argued that the origins of the Persecution depended on the personalities of the emperors, others, such as Davies, 'Origin and Purpose' and E. DePalma Digeser, *A Threat to Public Piety: Christians, Platonists, and The Great Persecution* (Ithaca, 2012) hold that philosophers convinced them to persecute Christians. For overviews of the different motives see P. Aubreville, 'Zur Motivation der tetrarchischen Christenverfolgung', *ZAC* 13 (2009) 415-29 and I. Alexandru, 'The Great Persecution of Diocletian and Its Consequences', in E. Dal Covolo and G. Sfameni Gasparro (eds), *Costantino il Grande alle radici dell'Europa* (Vatican City, 2014) 105-20.

12 In Antiquity, different numbers were mentioned. The late fourth-century *History of the Episcopate of Alexandria*, for instance, records a total of 642 martyrs during the time Peter was bishop of Alexandria (A. Bausi and A. Camplani, 'The *History of the Episcopate of Alexandria* [*HEpA*]: *Editio minor* of the Fragments Preserved in the *Aksumite Collection* and in the *Codex Veronensis* LX [58]', *Adamantius* 22 [2016] 249-302 at 275) whereas the fourth- or fifth-century papyrus *P.Köln* 354 AII 8, possibly from Middle Egypt, contains an ode to Egypt that mentions 83,721 martyrs, albeit without specifying during which time period they were martyred (G. Schenke, 'P.Köln. 354. Über Ägyptens Sonderstatus vor allen anderen Ländern', in M. Gronewald, K. Maresch and C. Römer [eds.], *Kölner Papyri. Band 8* [Opladen, 1997] 183-200 and 'The "Ode" to Egypt, P.Köln 354: Egypt as the Holy Land of Martyrs', *Journal of Coptic Studies* 20 [2018] 165-72). The conclusion drawn by Adolf Harnack in his 1890-letter to Theodor Mommsen – 'eine wirkliche Vorstellung von der Zahl der Märtyrer ist leider bis z.Z. des Decius m.E. nicht zu gewinnen' – is thus still accurate (S. Rebenich, *Theodor Mommsen und Adolf Harnack* [Berlin, 1997] 591). Recently, J.N. Bremmer, *The Rise of Christianity through the Eyes of Gibbon, Harnack and Rodney Stark* (Groningen, 2010[2]) 23 has likewise concluded that 'we simply do not have enough evidence to know the exact numbers'.

population.[13] Nevertheless, debates in Egyptian churches about the readmission of Christians who had lapsed from faith show that Christians from all social statuses had been affected by the Persecution.[14]

Yet, as Mark Humphries and Vincent Twomey remind us, 'the Great Persecution is important not only in terms of sufferings of Christians at the time or of the circumstances in which it arose, but also on account of its later reverberations'.[15] The fact that the last attempt by the Roman authorities to expunge Christianity from the Empire was followed so soon by the reign of Constantine meant that the Great Persecution became a symbol. Thus the fourth-century Church historian Rufinus of Aquileia and several authors of Church histories after him represented the Council of Nicaea (325) as a gathering of the champions of Christianity, the war-heroes who had survived the previous period of hostility.[16]

In Late Antique Egypt, colourful legends arose about the protagonists of the Persecution. Emperor Diocletian, for instance, is said to have been a Christian shepherd in Egypt before he became soldier, emperor and eventually persecutor of Chris-

13 For discussions of these papyri see A. Luijendijk, 'Papyri from the Great Persecution: Roman and Christian Perspectives', *JECS* 16 (2008) 341-69 and *Greetings in the Lord: Early Christians and the Oxyrhynchus Papyri* (Cambridge MA, 2008) 189-226. For the confiscation of the church property in the Egyptian village of Chysis see also E. Wipszycka, *Études sur le christianisme dans l'Égypte de l'antiquité tardive* (Rome, 1996) 415-20 ('Un lecteur qui ne sait pas écrire ou un chrétien qui ne veut pas se souiller', 1983[1]); M. Choat and R. Yuen-Collingridge, 'A Church with No Books and a Reader Who Cannot Write: The Strange Case of *P.Oxy*. 33.2673', *BASP* 46 (2009) 109-38. For a papyrus fragment containing Constantine's letter to the provincials, in which he deals at length with the return of confiscated property of Christians who had been exiled or executed, see T.C. Skeat, 'Two Byzantine Documents', *British Museum Quarterly* 18 (1953) 71-3 and A.H.M. Jones, 'Notes on the Genuineness of the Constantinian Documents in Eusebius' *Life of Constantine*. With an Appendix by T.C. Skeat', *JEH* 5 (1954) 197-200. The fragment, *P.Lond*. III 878, is written on the back of a petition dated 319/320.

14 The canonical letter of Bishop Peter of Alexandria (300-311), Petr. I Al., *ep. can*. 18.509 (Migne, *PG* 26, col. 509), distinguishes between clergy and laity and therefore indicates that all Christians were indeed involved in the Persecution. It furthermore gives an idea of how Christians reacted in the face of persecution: Peter addresses those who had lapsed after torture, without torture and without torture or imprisonment, those who had lapsed and were unrepentant, those who had sent non-Christian slaves, Christian slaves who had sacrificed, masters of Christian slaves who had forced their slaves to sacrifice for them, lapsed Christians who had later repented and confessed faith, zealots who had given themselves up voluntarily, fallen clergy, those who had given money to avoid sacrificing, those who had given up property and withdrawn and those who had lapsed under torture and had witnesses.

15 M. Humphries and D.V. Twomey, 'Editors' Preface. The Great Persecution, 303 AD: A Commemoration', in Humphries and Twomey, *Great Persecution*, 7-9 at 7-8.

16 Rufin. *hist*. 10.4-5 (*GCS* NF 6.2, pp. 963-5), on which Socr. *h.e* 1.11 (*GCS* NF 1, pp. 42-4), Soz. *h.e*. 1.10-1 (*GCS* NF 4, pp. 155-6), Thdt. *h.e*. 1.5 (*GCS* NF 5, pp. 30-3) and Gel. Cyz. *h.e*. 2.9-11 (*GCS* 28, pp. 56-8) are based.

tians.[17] Another story tells that the bitter persecutor Arianus converted to Christianity after a miraculous healing and subsequently became a martyr himself.[18] The persecutor Armenius, after a similar experience, nevertheless continued persecuting Christians.[19] Legend also has it that during the Persecution, Bishop Peter of Alexandria and his opponent Melitius were imprisoned in the same cell and had a heated discussion about whether to accept lapsed Christians back into the Church. The Melitian schism is symbolized by Peter hanging up his cloak in the middle of the cell and saying that those agreeing with him should come to his side whereas those agreeing with Melitius should go to the other side.[20]

After the Great Persecution, Constantine emerges as the ideal emperor. In Coptic hagiographical literature, he releases Christians from prison, builds churches and fights under the sign of the cross – albeit not at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge but against the Persians. Compared to the predominant role of Diocletian, however, Constantine seems to have played only a minor part in Coptic literature.[21] Indeed, during his reign quarrels and disagreements among Christians in Egypt led to what

17 J. Schwartz, 'Dioclétian dans la littérature copte', *BSAC* 15 (1958-1960) 151-66 hypothesizes that this legend was created because hagiographical authors simply did not know what had actually happened. According to him (p. 162, n. 1), Diocletian was made a shepherd because 'pour un moine égyptien, un chevrier devait être aussi impur, qu'un porcher en Israël'. Y.N. Youssef, 'La genèse de la légende sur le roi Dioclétien', *BSAC* 28 (1986-1989) 117-9 rejects this explanation, arguing that the story was strongly influenced by the legend of Gyges as told by Plato. The most probable explanation is given by S.A. Naguib, 'Martyr and Apostate: Victor Son of Romanos and Diocletian. A Case of Intertextuality in Coptic Religious Memory', *Temenos* 29 (1993) 101-13, who argues that Diocletian represents the oppressive powers after the Council of Chalcedon and the Arab conquest. A. Papaconstantinou, 'Historiography, Hagiography, and the Making of the Coptic "Church of the Martyrs" in Early Islamic Egypt', *DOP* 60 (2006) 65-86 at 81 also argues that after the Arab conquest, Diocletian became the stereotypical wicked emperor and the martyrs of the Great Persecution became representatives of those who fought against religious enemies. For an overview of Coptic passions and homilies mentioning Diocletian see G. van den Berg-Onstwedder, 'Diocletian in the Coptic Tradition', *BSAC* 29 (1990) 87-122.

18 T. Baumeister, *Martyr invictus: Der Märtyrer als Sinnbild der Erlösung in der Legende und im Kult der frühen koptischen Kirche: Zur Kontinuität des ägyptischen Denkens* (Münster, 1972) 92, 105-8, 172, 'Der Märtyrer Philemon', in E. Dassmann and K.S. Frank (eds.), *Pietas. Festschrift für Bernhard Kotting* (Münster, 1980) 267-79 and 'Arianus, Saint', in *Copt.Enc*. I (1991) 230-1.

19 *Passion of Paese and Thecla* (ed. E.A.E. Reymond and J.W.B. Barns, *Four Martyrdoms from the Pierpont Morgan Coptic Codices* [Oxford, 1973] 62-3). For a summary of the martyrdom see Baumeister, *Martyr invictus*, 123-4.

20 Epiph. *haer*. 5.68.3.

21 For an analysis of Constantine in Coptic hagiography see T. Wilfong, 'Constantine in Coptic. Egyptian Constructions of Constantine the Great', in S.N.C. Lieu and D. Montserrat (eds.), *Constantine. History, Historiography and Legend* (London, 1998) 177-88 and P. Buzi, 'Re-Interpreting History: Constantine and the Constantinian Age according to Coptic Hagiography', in P. Buzi, A. Camplani and F. Contardi (eds.), *Coptic Society, Literature and Religion from Late Antiquity to Modern Times. Proceedings of the Tenth International Congress of Coptic Studies*, 2 vols. (Leuven, 2016) 2.1117-28.

a work ascribed to Athanasius calls 'a new kind of people and persecution'.[22] When Timothy II (457-477) commissioned a history of the Church, the story thus did not end with Constantine, but with the re-establishment of Timothy as the bishop of Alexandria.[23] Only '[now] all divisions have left the Church [...] again. [...] there being [no cause of] offence [...], but there was peace [for] all the peoples that hated the tome of Chalcedon'.[24]

As soldiers of Christ, the martyrs of the Great Persecution naturally enlisted in the on-going wars.[25] While their stories have travelled a long way from history to legend, they nevertheless reveal how important the Great Persecution was in the collective memory of Christians.[26] Tales of courageous martyrs and evil persecutors fascinated later generations of Christians from Eusebius and Lactantius in Late Antiquity, to hagiographers in the Middle Ages and Christians in the present day.[27] Indeed, the *Coptic Church Review* of 1984 states that 'through the centuries, before and after Diocletian, the annals of the Coptic Church history have been filled with accounts of martyrdom and persecution. With the celebration of the feast of the

22 Ps.-Ath. *Ep. Luc.* 3 (ed. G.F. Diercks, *Luciferi Calaritani opera quae supersunt* [Turnhout, 1978] 306): *O novum genus hominum et persecutionis*.

23 The first part of the *Histories of the Church* consists almost entirely of reworkings of the first eight books of Eusebius' *Church History*. Chapters about the time of the Great Persecution until Timothy Aulurus have been added. It is assumed to have been originally written in Greek, but today only Coptic fragments survive. For the edition see T. Orlandi, *Storia della Chiesa di Alessandria. Testo copto, traduzione e commento*, 2 vols. (Milan, 1968-1970), for the current state of research see T. Orlandi, 'The Coptic Ecclesiastical History: A Survey', in J.E. Goehring, J.A. Timbie (eds.), *The World of Early Egyptian Christianity. Language, Literature, and Social Context. Essays in Honor of David W. Johnson* (Washington, 2007) 3-24.

24 *Histories of the Church* (ed. Orlandi, *Storia della Chiesa* 2, 57): [ⲧⲉⲛⲟⲩ] ⲛ̄ⲥⲭⲓⲙⲁ [ⲧⲏⲣⲟ]ⲩ ⲁⲩⲟⲩⲱⲥϥ [ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲋⲛ̄] ⲧⲉⲕⲕⲗⲏⲥⲓⲁ [.....] ⲙ̄ⲡⲉ ⲋⲙ̄ ⲡⲉⲥ [.....] ⲕⲉⲥⲟⲛ. ⲉⲙⲛ [.....] ⲛ̄ⲥⲕⲁⲛⲇⲁ[ⲗⲟⲛ] ⲱⲟⲟⲡ ⲛ̄ⲥⲁ ⲗⲁ [.....] ⲁⲗⲗⲁ [ⲁ ⲟⲩⲉⲓ]ⲣⲏⲛⲏ ⲱⲱⲡⲉ [ⲋⲛ̄ ⲛ̄]ⲗⲁⲟⲥ ⲧⲏⲣⲟⲩ ⲉⲧ[ⲙ]ⲟⲥⲧⲉ ⲙ̄ⲡⲧⲟⲙⲟⲥ [ⲛ̄]ⲭⲁⲗⲕⲏⲇⲱⲛ. Tr. based on W.E. Crum, 'Eusebius and Coptic Church Histories', *PSBA* 24 (1902) 68-84 at 83. As Crum notes, this passage is fragmentary and it is therefore not included in the translation of Orlandi, *Storia della Chiesa* 2, 90.

25 In their martyr stories, one could read how the martyrs had died for the beliefs of the various Christian communities in the Roman Empire. For examples see M. Detoraki, 'Greek *Passions* of the Martyrs in Byzantium', in S. Efthymiadis (ed.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography*, 2 vols. (Farnham, 2011-2014) 2.61-101. On pp. 62 and 85, however, she notes that the Arian crisis does not seem to have inspired many martyr stories. For the discourse of persecution used by Christians in the midst of ideological conflicts, see also W. Mayer, 'Heirs of Roman Persecution: Common Threads in Discursive Strategies across Late Antiquity', in É. Fournier and W. Mayer (eds.), *Heirs of Roman Persecution. Studies on a Christian and Para-Christian Discourse in Late Antiquity* (London, 2019) 317-340.

26 See also Humphries and Twomey, 'Editors' Preface', 8.

27 See also M. Humphries, *Early Christianity* (New York, 2006) 34-63.

Martyrs this year, the Coptic Church starts its fourth year under the latest Islamic and government-directed persecution'.[28]

The aim of this study is not to identify these legends as a particular form of narrative and then to try to use them to sketch a picture of the historical situation. These legends were not written as history books. Instead, their value lies in what they tell us about how the Late Antique Christians who told them articulated their memories of the Great Persecution. These stories are themselves part of the history of early Christianity, in that they contribute to an understanding of the conceptions that Late Antique Christians had of themselves and their pasts. Therefore, in this study I will attempt to reconstruct, in the words of Peter Brown, 'the constant dialogue between priests and flock, men and women, the rich and the barely visible but ever-present figures of pilgrims and the poor' in creating memories of the Great Persecution.[29] In short, the central question addressed in this book will be how Christians remembered the Great Persecution over the course of Late Antiquity.

1.2 Previous Scholarship: The Great Persecution in Late Antique Egypt

When studying the memories of the Great Persecution, Late Antique Egypt has the obvious attraction of providing us not only with hagiographical, epigraphical and archaeological material, but also with thousands of literary and documentary papyri. This particular rich array of sources allows for a multidisciplinary approach in order to answer the research question of how the Persecution was remembered in the Late Antique period. Even though, as we will see, these sources have their own limitations, they nevertheless offer us unique glimpses of a particular time and place in Late Antiquity. As a part of the Roman Empire, moreover, the experiences in Egypt should have been comparable to other provinces in the East. Although local and regional differences obviously did occur, the Egyptian material thus also reflects general developments in the Roman Empire in Late Antiquity. These developments include the gradual integration of Christianity into Late Antique society, its organization through the Church and the criticism that the Church fathers voiced

28 R. Yanney, 'About This Issue', *Coptic Church Review* 5 (1984) 74-5 at 74, quoted in S.A. Naguib, 'The Era of the Martyrs. Texts and Contexts of Religious Memory', in N. van Doorn-Harder and K. Vogt (eds.), *Between Desert and City. The Coptic Orthodox Church Today* (Eugene, 1997) 121-41 at 121. See also C.R. Moss, *The Myth of Persecution: How Early Christians Invented a Story of Martyrdom* (New York, 2013), who demonstrates that stories about persecutions under Roman emperors are still taught in Sunday school classes, celebrated in sermons and employed by politicians in the United States. Concerning the 'persecuted minority discourse' in Egypt see V. Ibrahim, *The Copts of Egypt: The Challenges of Modernisation and Identity* (London, 2010) 1-10.

29 P. Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago, 2014[2]).

about certain practices of Christian communities concerning the cult of the martyrs of the Persecution.

Before we start to discuss the process of remembering and forgetting in Late Antique Egypt, it is necessary to make a few remarks about the nature of the sources. To start with the Church fathers, the bishop of Alexandria, Athanasius, is one of many who discussed the rituals and religious practices among Christians. From his ambo in Alexandria, Athanasius sent out Festal Letters to Christian communities in Egypt informing them about the festal calendar. At the same time, he used the wide circulation of these letters to address other issues.[30] In his Festal Letter written for the Passover feast in 370, he voiced his disapproval of Christians visiting martyr shrines and expecting the martyrs to heal the blind, the deaf and the mute:

> When they say that many people who had unclean spirits have been healed in the martyr shrines, these are their excuses. Let them listen, and I will answer them by saying that they are not healed by the martyrs coming upon the demons, but they are healed by the Saviour, the one whom the martyrs confessed. (...) This is the humiliation of the saints and a sign of ignorance of what a martyr is. (...) Why do they even go to their tombs? They are doing this annoying thing, not because they want them to act as ambassadors in their behalf before God, but so that they might question the demons.[31]

Athanasius strongly criticizes the emphasis that devotees of the martyr cult placed on the veneration of the martyrs and on particular practices such as the visiting of martyr shrines to find healing or to ask oracular questions. Instead of focussing on the tombs of the martyrs, Athanasius argues, Christians should give all their attention to Christ.[32]

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30 On the Athanasian festal letters see e.g. A. Camplani, *Le lettere festali di Atanasio di Alessandria* (Rome, 1989) and *Atanasio di Alessandria: Lettere festali* (Milan, 2003).

31 Ath. *ep. fest.* 42 (ed. L.-T. Lefort, *Lettres festales et pastorales en copte* [Leuven, 1955] 64-7): ϵⲩϣⲁⲛⲭⲟⲟⲥ ⲇϵ ⲭϵ ⲁⲥⲁⲥ ⲧⲁⲗⲟ ⲥⲛ̄ⲙ̄ⲙⲁⲣⲧⲩⲣⲓⲟⲛ ϵⲩⲛ̄ⲡⲛϵⲩⲙⲁ ⲛ̄ⲁⲕⲁⲑⲁⲣⲧⲟⲛ ⲥⲓⲱⲟⲩ. ⲛⲁⲓ̈ ⲅⲁⲣ ⲛϵ ⲛϵⲩⲗⲟⲓⲟϵ. ⲙⲁⲣⲟⲩⲥⲱⲧⲙ̄ ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲟⲩⲱϣϐ̄ ⲛⲁⲩ ⲉⲓⲭⲱ ⲙ̄ⲙⲟⲥ ⲭϵ ϵϣⲁⲩⲧⲁⲗⲟⲟⲩ ⲁⲛ ⲥⲙ̄ⲡⲧⲣϵⲙ̄ⲙⲁⲣⲧⲩⲣⲟⲥ ϣⲱⲡϵ ⲥⲓⲥϵⲛⲇⲁⲓⲙⲱⲛⲓⲟⲛ, ⲁⲗⲗⲁ ϵϣⲁⲩⲧⲁⲗⲟⲟⲩ ⲥⲓⲧⲙ̄ⲡⲥⲱⲧⲏⲣ, ⲡⲁⲓ̈ ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲙ̄ⲙⲁⲣⲧⲩⲣⲟⲥ ⲥⲟⲙⲟⲗⲟⲅⲉⲓ ⲙ̄ⲙⲟϥ, (…) ⲡⲁⲓ̈ ⲡϵ ⲡⲥⲱϣ ⲛ̄ⲛϵⲧⲟⲩⲁⲁϐ ⲁⲩⲱ ϵⲧⲙ̄ⲙⲉⲓⲙϵ ⲭϵⲟⲩⲡϵ ⲙⲁⲣⲧⲩⲣⲟⲥ (…) ϵⲧϐϵⲟⲩ ⲇϵ ⲥⲱⲗⲟⲥ ⲥϵϐⲏⲕ ϵϐⲟⲗ ϵⲛϵⲩⲧⲁⲫⲟⲥ; ϵⲩϵⲓⲣϵ ⲅⲁⲣ ⲙ̄ⲡϵⲓⲥⲕⲩⲗⲙⲟⲥ ϵⲩⲟⲩⲱϣ ⲁⲛ ϵⲧⲣϵⲩⲡⲣϵⲥϐϵⲩϵ ⲥⲁⲣⲟⲟⲩ ⲛ̄ⲛⲁⲥⲣⲙ̄ⲡⲛⲟⲩⲧϵ, ⲁⲗⲗⲁ ⲭϵⲕⲁⲥ ϵⲩϵⲱⲓⲛϵ ϵϐⲟⲗ ⲥⲓⲧⲛ̄ⲛ̄ⲁⲁⲓⲙⲱⲛ; tr. D. Brakke, '"Outside the Places, within the Truth": Athanasius of Alexandria and the Localization of the Holy', in D. Frankfurter (ed.), *Pilgrimage and Holy Space in Late Antique Egypt* (Leiden, 1998) 445-81 at 478-80.

32 For an analysis of Athanasius' opinion towards the cult of saints see D. Brakke, 'Athanasius of Alexandria and the Cult of the Holy Dead,' in E.A. Livingstone (ed.), *Studia Patristica XXXII. Athanasius and His Opponents, Cappadocian Fathers, Other Greek Writers of Nicaea* (Leuven, 1997) 32-8 and 'Outside the Places'. For Athanasius' condemnation of the cult of relics, see R. Wiśniewski, *The Beginnings of the Cult of Relics* (Oxford, 2019) 190-1.

The tirades of Athanasius against what was happening at the martyrs' shrines seem to express an ideology rather than an attempt to abolish the cult of the saints.[33] Judging by their polemical writings and repeated condemnations in Church canons, bishops all over the Empire seem to have been confronted by their flocks venerating saints rather than Christ and focusing on the power of the saints in everyday life rather than on spiritual worship.[34] But however self-consciously Church fathers may have condemned the cult of the martyrs, they were well aware that it was also widespread and there was little they could do about it apart from attempting to integrate the cults into their ecclesiastical practice. Peter Brown describes the struggle about who would orchestrate the cult of the saints and the ways in which bishops 're-wired' the commemoration of the 'very special death' by relocating the martyrs from the private sphere into the public space of the Church.[35] The actions of these bishops have illuminated us concerning Christian approaches towards the cult of the saints from a top-down perspective. This study, however, does not focus on the normative process. Instead, it takes a closer look at the viewpoints of the congregations themselves by examining both literary and documentary sources.

The memories of the Great Persecution are most clearly visible in the written words of, mainly, hagiography. These literary texts reveal a flourishing martyr cult. However, despite the information that these texts provide about political, social and cultural life in Late Antiquity, hagiography has long been and still is an understudied subject. When the Bollandists first started studying hagiography in the seventeenth century – first in reaction to criticism on the saints by Protestants, later with more historical interests –, they were primarily interested in the historical situation behind the literary drama and as a result, these legends were soon discarded as unreliable historical evidence.[36] As for Coptic hagiography, when the Bollandist Hippolyte Delehaye (1859-1941) wrote his foundational article about Coptic hagiog-

33 J.N. Bremmer, 'From Heroes to Saints', in F. Heinzer, J. Leonhard and R. von den Hoff (eds.), *Sakralität und Heldentum* (Würzburg, 2017) 35-66 at 46-7 and 63-4 notes that Christians started to call certain persons 'holy' already in the second century, but only in the last decades of the fourth century was the term 'saint' used to denote individual holy persons. According to J.N. Bremmer, 'The Emergence of the Christian Martyr in the Second and Third Centuries', in J. Hahn (ed.), *Innovations in the Veneration of Martyrs in the Fourth Century CE* (forthcoming) the meaning of the term 'martyr' seems to have changed from 'witness' to 'somebody who dies for his or her faith in Christ' from about 150 onwards. For convenience sake, in this study I use the terms 'saint' and 'martyr' interchangeably despite their terminological difficulties.

34 For the criticism of Augustine see L. Grig, *Making Martyrs in Late Antiquity* (London, 2004) 37 and for John Chrysostom and Basil of Caesarea M. Girardi, *Basilio di Cesarea e i culto dei martiri nel IV secolo: scrittura e tradizione* (Bari, 1990) 201-8.

35 Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, see esp. pp. 23-49.

36 The Bollandists published the first volume of the *Acta sanctorum* in 1643 and the last in 1940, discussing saints from January 1 through November 10.

raphy in 1922, he even dismissed Coptic martyr stories as pure fantasies.[37] The fantastic miracles that the martyrs performed, the gruesome tortures that they endured and the multiple resurrections that they underwent before finally receiving the martyr's crown only showed that Coptic hagiographers had 'a taste for exaggeration that does not stop at the absurd'.[38] Moreover, Delehaye considered the literary talents of Coptic hagiographers mediocre and even spoke of 'miserable literature'.[39] The bad reputation of Coptic hagiography did not encourage successive scholars to study the subject.[40]

Although hagiographical literature takes place in historical time, its authors and audiences were not generally interested in historical facts. They knew what to expect from Emperor Diocletian but might not remember in which years he reigned, and they were familiar with the trials of Christians leading towards their inevitable conclusions but might not recollect or be aware of how the Roman legal system worked. As we shall see in the following section about remembering and forgetting, tracking the past is only one function of memory. Just like we need memory to construct and maintain our own individual identity and – going one step further – transmit 'cultural memories', the author of a martyr story was not so much interested in the correct dates, titles or even historical personalities, but wanted to identify the community with the persecuted Church. Additionally, martyr stories were meant to entertain, instruct and exhort. If the audience followed the desired devotional practices of the monastic leader Shenoute it would listen to the martyr story and suffer with the saint.[41] Likewise, if the advice of Bishop Athanasius of Alexandria

37 H. Delehaye, 'Les martyrs d'Égypte', *AB* 40 (1922) 5-154; 299-364 at 326. See also his monograph *Les légendes hagiographiques* (Brussels, 1905) in which he engages in the contemporary discussion about the historical value of hagiographical literature and examines the background of the hagiographer. At p. 69, he defines the term 'legend' as a story about a fictitious character without palpable attachment to reality.

38 Delehaye, 'Martyrs d'Égypte', 326: 'un goût de l'exagération qui ne recule pas devant l'absurde'.

39 Delehaye, 'Martyrs d'Égypte', 148: 'misérable littérature'.

40 W. Schenkel, *Kultmythos und Märtyrerlegende. Zur Kontinuität des ägyptischen Denkens* (Wiesbaden, 1977) 7 honestly admits that he did not research Coptic literature out of his own free will. A PhD-candidate chose it as topic for his dissertation, leaving Schenkel with no other option than to study it himself too.

41 Shenoute, *Since It Behooves Christians* (ed. É. Amélineau, *Oeuvres de Schenoudi: Texte copte et traduction française*, 2 vols. [Paris, 1907-1914] 2.205). For a reconstruction of this sermon see S. Emmel, *Shenoute's Literary Corpus*, 2. vols. (Leuven, 2004) 2.668-9, 858. For a discussion of Shenoute's opinion about the martyr cult see L.-T. Lefort, 'La chasse aux reliques des martyrs en Égypte au IV^{e} siècle', *La nouvelle Clio* 6 (1956) 225-30, Baumeister, *Martyr invictus*, 66-7, P. Maraval, *Lieux saints et pèlegrinages d'Orient. Histoire et géographie des origins à la conquête arabe* (Paris, 1985) 58 and J. Horn, *Studien zu den Märtyrern des nördlichen Oberägypten*, 2 vols. (Wiesbaden, 1986-1992). For Shenoute's opinion of the cult of relics, see Wiśniewski, *Beginnings*, 190-1.

were followed, the faithful would take the martyr as a Christian role-model.[42]

Following the twenty-fifth anniversary of Peter Brown's 1971-article 'The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity', more recent publications examine hagiographies as discourses between author and public.[43] Scholars now acknowledge that hagiographical literature written by a village priest tells us something about the memory of this particular priest but also gives information about his audience, the society to whose recollections of the past he was responding.[44] Often, these stories contain cult aetiologies, explaining the presence of a sanctuary dedicated to a martyr. In his study of Coptic hagiography, Theofried Baumeister points to the strong focus on the places where the martyr's relics were located.[45] As cult aetiologies, martyr stories provide us with evidence of the historical process that constructed and reconstructed the Christian landscape after the Great Persecution. 'Hagiography, as far as it writes history,' as Jacques van der Vliet formulates it, 'writes performative history, or, rather, represents itself in the historical process in that it links the landscape to past historical or mythical events that are finely at-

42 Ath. *ep. fest.* 41 and 42. For translations and a discussion of these letters see Brakke, 'Outside the Places'.

43 P. Brown, 'The Rise and Function of the Holy Men in Late Antiquity,' *JRS* 61 (1971) 80-101 and its rejoinder 'The Rise and Function of the Holy Men in Late Antiquity 1971-1997', *JECS* 6 (1998) 353-76. See also the papers in J. Howard-Johnston and P.A. Hayward (eds.), *The Cult of the Saints in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages: Essays on the Contribution of Peter Brown* (Oxford, 1999), which increased the interest in the genre of hagiography and the cultural institutions connected with it. C. Rapp, 'Storytelling as Spiritual Communication in Early Greek Hagiography: The Use of *Diegesis*', *JECS* 6 (1998) 431-8 introduces the term 'spiritual communication' for the discourse between the hagiographer and his audience. In a similar vein, J. Horn, *Untersuchungen zu Frömmigkeit und Literatur des Christlichen Ägypten: Das Martyrium des Viktor, Sohnes des Romanos* (Göttingen, 1988) lix notes that an analysis of hagiographical literature should not just focus on the composer, but also take the expectations of his audience into account.

44 Concerning Egypt, Horn, *Untersuchungen*, examines Coptic martyr stories as literature from Late Antique Egypt and at pp. v-vi motivates scholars to see the legends as expressions of the social and religious climate of Late Antique Egypt. For the intentions and narrative methods of Coptic hagiography see e.g. G. Schenke, *Das koptisch hagiographische Dossier des Heiligen Kolluthos: Arzt, Märtyrer und Wunderheiler* (Leuven, 2013) 13-21.

45 The topographical references in martyr stories once inspired É. Amélineau, *Les actes des martyrs de l'Église copte* (Paris, 1890) to write an historical reconstruction of the journeys of the persecutors. See also his *La géographie de l'Égypte à l'époque copte* (Paris, 1893). Baumeister, *Martyr invictus*, 92 notes that each persecutor indeed has his own sphere of influence: Arianus features in martyr stories located in Antinoopolis, Culcianus appears in stories in Alexandria, Lower and Middle Egypt and Pompeius of Pelusium and Armenius of Alexandria are the persecutors in hagiographies from Lower Egypt. For the strong local traditions in Coptic hagiography, see also P. van Minnen, 'Saving History? Egyptian Hagiography in Its Space and Time', in J.H.F. Dijkstra and M. van Dijk (eds.), *The Encroaching Desert: Egyptian Hagiography and the Medieval West* (Leiden, 2006) 57-91.

tuned to a precise present situation, but may be arbitrary from any other point of view'.[46]

When interpreting hagiographical literature, previous scholarship has often been looking for ancient Egyptian 'survivals' in Coptic literature.[47] Siegfried Morenz laid the foundations of what German scholars have called Survival-Forschung.[48] Morenz searched for Egyptian elements of death and afterlife in the story of Joseph the Carpenter.[49] Influenced by the work of Morenz, Baumeister argued that the literary motifs in Coptic martyr stories were essentially Egyptian. He examined the standard repertoire of scenes in Coptic hagiographies and focused especially on what he called the 'Coptic consensus', the many healings and resurrections of the martyr performed by the archangels before he eventually died.[50] This theme is not as omnipresent in hagiographical literature outside Egypt.[51] The reason therefore, according to Baumeister, is that it is rooted in Egyptian thoughts about the integrity of the dead body.[52] These views have been challenged by later scholars of Late Antique

46 J. van der Vliet, 'Bringing Home the Homeless: Landscape and History in Egyptian Hagiography', in Dijkstra and Van Dijk, *Encroaching Desert*, 39-55 at 54-5.

47 As early as 1913, E.A.W. Budge, *Coptic Apocrypha in the Dialect of Upper Egypt* (London, 1913) lxi-lxxiii stated that Coptic martyr stories contain conceptions that are essentially Ancient Egyptian. According to Budge, Christianity never succeeded in removing these 'pagan survivals'.

48 See e.g. M. Krause, 'Heidentum, Gnosis und Manichäismus, ägyptische Survivals', in M. Krause (ed.), *Ägypten in spätantik-christlicher Zeit: Einführung in die koptische Kultur* (Wiesbaden, 1998) 81-116.

49 S. Morenz, 'Die koptische Literatur', in B. Spuler et al. (ed.), *Handbuch der Orientalistik: Der nahe und der mittlere Osten, Literatur* (Leiden, 1970) 239-50 at 246 ('Die koptische Literatur', 1952[1]), however, acknowledges that 'in die Geschichte von Joseph dem Zimmerman bin ich zu weit gegangen'. See also his 'Fortwirken altägyptischer Elemente in christlicher Zeit', in O. Barthol and T. Krause (eds.), *Koptische Kunst: Christentum am Nil* (Essen, 1963) 55-9 and *Religion und Geschichte des alten Ägypten. Gesammlte Aufsätze* (Weimar, 1975) 590-5 ('Altägyptischer und hellenistisch-paulinischer Jenseitsglaube bei Schenute', 1953[1]).

50 The standardization of scenes in Coptic hagiography was first described by Amélineau, *Actes des martyrs*, 210. See also Delehaye, 'Martyrs d'Égypte', 138-48, J. Zandee, 'Het patroon der martyria', *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 14 (1959-1960) 1-28 and Baumeister, *Martyr invictus*, 95.

51 See e.g. the examination of the basic elements present in 'epic' Latin passions by M. Lapidge, *The Roman Martyrs: Introduction, Translations, and Commentary* (Oxford, 2018) 18-34. The resurrection scenes known from Coptic hagiographies are not present in this tradition, nor do the standard scenes in which the martyr heals an ill relative of the prison registrar or court official normally occur Coptic literature.

52 Baumeister, *Martyr invictus*. For research on the theological motives in Coptic literature see T. Baumeister, *Die Anfänge der Theologie des Martyriums* (Münster, 1980). Other examples of scholars who have searched for Egyptian elements in martyr stories are W. Kosack, *Die Legende im Koptischen: Untersuchungen zur Volksliteratur Ägyptens* (Bonn, 1970) and H. Quecke, '"Ich habe nichts hinzugefügt und nichts weggenommen": Zur Wahrheitsbeteuerung koptischer Martyrien', in J. Assmann et al. (ed.), *Fragen an die altägyptische Literatur. Studien zum Gedenken an Eberhard Otto* (Wiesbaden, 1977) 399-416.

Egypt.[53] They criticize 'survival' scholars for focussing too much on pharaonic elements in Christian art and literature and forgetting other spheres of influence. They argue that, having been part of the Ptolemaic Kingdom and the Roman Empire, Late Antique Egypt was not only influenced by local Egyptian traditions, but also by the Graeco-Roman world. Furthermore, they stress that aspects of Ancient Egyptian culture found in Christian contexts did not mean that pharaonic beliefs still lingered in Christian circles. Instead of interpreting Egyptian elements found in Christian texts as 'pagan survivals', they suggest that these aspects were rather like 'invented traditions' of Christians who created a new history for a new community. While, for instance, mummification is undoubtedly an old tradition, the obsessive interest in the afterlife is not necessarily a belief inherited from the pharaonic past.[54]

In a similar vein, Coptic hagiography is now reappraised as a literary genre. Eve Reymond and John Barns have looked for typical elements of the romantic style in Coptic martyr legends and found similarities with the Greek novel and even Greek tragedy.[55] Furthermore, a research team under the direction of Koen De Temmerman has studied the novel in Antiquity and its reception in Late Antique and early medieval hagiographical narrative traditions.[56] Recent research focuses on the question of the origins of the legends as well as on their development.[57] Critical about Dele-

53 See e.g. J. Zandee, 'Traditions pharaoniques et influences extérieures dans les légendes coptes', *CdE* 46 (1971) 211-9, J. Horn, 'Kontinuität im Übergang. Ein Beitrag zum Problembereich "pharaonisches" vs. "christliches" Ägypten', *ZDMG* 6 (1985) 53-73, Wipszycka, *Études sur le christianisme*, 9-61 at 29-31 ('Le nationalisme a-t-il existé dans l'Égypte byzantine?', 1992[1]), R.S. Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, 1993) 321-5, Papaconstantinou, 'Historiography, Hagiography', 74, H. Behlmer, 'Ancient Egyptian Survivals in Coptic Literature: An Overview', in A. Loprieno (ed.), *Ancient Egyptian Literature: History and Forms* (Leiden, 1996) 567-90 and A. Papaconstantinou, 'Aux marges de l'Empire ou au centre du monde? De l'Égypte des Byzantins à celle des historiens', *JJP* 35 (2005) 195-236.

54 See esp. Wipszycka, *Études sur le christianisme*, 30, Van Minnen, 'Saving History?', 74 and Papaconstantinou, 'Historiography, Hagiography', 84-5.

55 Reymond and Barns, *Four Martyrdoms*. See also J.W.B. Barns, 'Egypt and the Greek Romance', in H. Gerstiger (ed.), *Akten des 8. internationalen Kongresses für Papyrologie in Wien 1955* (Vienna, 1956) 29-36.

56 The project 'Novel Saints. Studies in Ancient Fiction and Hagiography' has recently reached its final stages and dissertations, monographs and edited volumes are currently being finalized. Among the publications from the project will be e.g. K. De Temmerman (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Ancient Biography* (Oxford, 2020). See also A. Bossu, D. Praet and K. De Temmerman, 'The Saint as Cunning Heroine: Rhetoric and Characterization in the *Passio Caeciliae*', *Mnemosyne* 69 (2016) 433-52.

57 See e.g. the project 'An Archaeological Atlas of Coptic Literature', in which the geography of Coptic literary production is examined: P. Buzi, J. Bogdani, N. Carlig, M.C. Giorda and A. Soldati, '"Tracking Papyrus and Parchment Paths: An Archaeological Atlas of Coptic Literature. Literary Texts in Their Geographical Context. Production, Copying, Usage, Dissemination and Storage": A New International Project on Coptic Literature and the Role of the Coptic Papyrus Codices of the Museo Egizio for Its Development', *Rivista del Museo Egizio* 1 (2017) 1-11, P. Buzi, 'Tracking Papyrus

haye's model of simple and short court proceedings changing into complex fictitious tales, more recent scholarship argues that the process could be described in a more nuanced way.[58] Arietta Papaconstantinou rightly questions the 'literary evolution' by pointing out that the current schemes take for granted that the development of hagiography was entirely linear. She notes that although biographies tend to grow more complex with the passing of time, different styles coexisted.[59] Moreover, in the sixth and seventh centuries, Byzantine hagiographers are known to have made complex martyr narratives more simple and logical.[60] Concerning a chronological reconstruction of Coptic literature, the only attempts have been made by Tito Orlandi in several successive articles, although about this topic too, the last word has not yet been said.[61]

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and Parchment Paths: An Archaeological Atlas of Coptic Literature. Literary Texts in Their Geographical Context. Production, Copying, Usage, Dissemination and Storage ("PAThs"). A New Project on Coptic Literary Texts', *Early Christianity* 8 (2017) 507-16 and J. Bogdani, 'The Archaeological Atlas of Coptic Literature. A Question of Method', *Vicino Oriente* 21 (2017) 59-69. See also the project 'The Cult of Saints' of the University of Oxford, which researches the cult of saints from its origins until around 700 CE, including in Egypt. The evidence has been collected in B. Ward-Perkins et al. (eds.), *Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 2014-2019), available as an online searchable database at http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk. References to entries in the database made throughout this book will include the author of the entry, the name of the database and the number of the entry.

58 H. Delehaye, *Les passions des martyrs et les genres littéraires* (Brussels, 1921).

59 A. Papaconstantinou, 'Hagiography in Coptic', in Efthymiadis, *Ashgate Research Companion* 1, 323-43 at 328-31. See also Detoraki, 'Greek *Passions*', 63-6, who points out that hagiographers did not just turn historical martyr stories into epic passions and that passions of different kinds existed from the very origins of the genre.

60 C. Rapp, 'Byzantine Hagiographers as Antiquarians, Seventh to Tenth Centuries', in S. Efthymiadis, C. Rapp and D. Tsougarakis (eds.), *Bosphoros. Essays in Honour of Cyril Mango* (Amsterdam, 1995) 31-44 at 36-9 explains that they removed elements that did not correspond to their criteria of authenticity and began 'cleaning up' by removing unbelievable elements and giving more details on places and persons. For examples of Greek passions, see also N. Kälviäinen, 'Not a Few Martyr Accounts Have Been Falsified from the Beginning. Some Preliminary Remarks on the Censorship and Fortunes of the Demonic Episode in the Greek Passion of St. Marina (*BHG* 1165-1167c)', in I. Lindstedt and J. Hämeen-Antilla (eds.), *Translation and Transmission. Collection of Articles* (Münster, 2018) 107-37.

61 T. Orlandi, 'Coptic Literature', in B.A. Pearson and J.E. Goehring (eds.), *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity* (Philadelphia, 1986) 51-81, 'Cycle', in *Copt.Enc.* III (1991) 666-8, 'Hagiography, Coptic', in *Copt.Enc.* IV (1991) 1191-7 and 'Letteratura copta e cristianesimo nazionale egiziano', in A. Camplani (ed.), *L'Egitto cristiano. Aspetti e problemi in età tardoantica* (Rome, 1997) 39-120. See also the discussions in A. Papaconstantinou, *Le culte des saints en Égypte des Byzantins aux Abbassides: l'apport des inscriptions et des papyrus grecs et coptes* (Paris, 2001) 31-4 and 'Hagiography in Coptic', 328-31, T. Baumeister, 'Die *Historia monachorum in Aegypto* und die Entwicklung der koptischen hagiographie', in M. Immerzeel and J. Van der Vliet (eds.), *Coptic Studies on the Threshold of a New Millennium: Proceedings of the Seventh International Congress of Coptic Studies*, 2 vols. (Leuven, 2004) 1.269-80.

All in all, *vitae*, acts of martyrs, 'epic' martyr stories and collections of miracles and homilies in honour of saints are now recognized in their own right and no longer dismissed as unreliable historical evidence and, speaking about Coptic hagiography, 'miserable literature'. During the last decades, hagiographical literature has come to be seen as representing its own reality.[62] However, whereas scholars have now acknowledged the literary themes of the genre and how they fit within a regional or local context, a synthesis about what these themes say about the perceptions of the Great Persecution has not yet been written.[63]

When studying the martyr cult, most scholars focus on hagiographical literature. Recent research, however, also attempts to locate the sanctuaries mentioned in these literary texts and makes use of archaeological evidence when studying the cult of saints. The martyrs were visible in the urban and suburban landscape through their sanctuaries.[64] Unfortunately, there is comparatively little archaeological evidence. Naturally, not all the churches found in excavations were dedicated to saints, and many of those who were remain unidentified. Nevertheless, the sources we do have give interesting glimpses of the cult of the martyrs. The most famous example is undoubtedly the sanctuary of the soldier martyr Menas in the Mareotis desert. With the passing of years, his shrine developed into a major pilgrimage site and today one could say that the inhabitants of the city lived, in the words of Gesa Schenke, of 'pilgrimage tourism'.[65] At his sanctuary, these 'tourists' could purchase

62 S. Efthymiadis, 'Introduction', in Efthymiades, *Ashgate Research Companion* 1, 1-14 at 1 opens the volume with the statement that today, 'a collective book on Byzantine hagiography hardly needs justification'. For an overview of recent research on hagiography see S. Efthymiadis, *Hagiography in Byzantium: Literature, Social History and Cult* (Farnham, 2011) 151-71 ('New Developments in Hagiography: The Rediscovery of Byzantine Hagiography', 2006[1]).

63 Only Naguib, 'Era of the Martyrs' and 'The Martyr as Witness. Coptic and Copto-Arabic Hagiographies as Mediators of Religious Memory', *Numen* 41 (1997) 223-54 has attempted to apply memory studies to hagiographical literature. Although her approach offers an opportunity to acknowledge that hagiographical representations are oriented on the present rather than the past, her articles lack a firm theoretical framework that can be applied to the sources and remain without reflection on the audiences of the representations in question.

64 For studies that use archaeological evidence to get a more complete image of the cult of the martyrs see B. Köttig, *Peregrinatio religiosa: Wallfahrten in der Antike und das Pilgerwesen in der alten Kirche* (Münster, 1950), N. Marcos Fernández, *Los Thaumata de Sofronio: Contribución al estudio de la incubatio cristiana* (Madrid, 1975) and Maraval, *Lieux saints*. For Egypt, see Papaconstantinou, *Culte des saints* and the various articles in Frankfurter, *Pilgrimage*.

65 Schenke, *Koptisch hagiographische Dossier*, 194 remarks: 'Heute würde man wahrscheinlich sagen, die Bewohner der Menasstadt lebten vom Wallfahrtstourismus'. On Menas, see Papaconstantinou, *Culte des saints*, 146-54. On his sanctuary in Abu Mena, see Maraval, *Lieux saints*, 319-22, P. Grossmann, 'The Pilgrimage Center of Abû Mînâ', in Frankfurter, *Pilgrimage*, 281-30 and N. Litinas, *Greek Ostraca from Abu Mina (O.Abu Mina)* (Berlin, 2008) ix-xi.

small terracotta flasks to take holy oil or water back home. These flasks, depicted with an image of the saint, have been found all over the Mediterranean.[66]

Not only archaeological remains from Late Antique Egypt have been preserved. The dry sands of Egypt have left us with a rich fund of source material that allows us to tell the stories of individual Egyptians in their own words and to draw conclusions 'in ways that are better documented and more secure than for other Greeks and Romans': numerous papyri – private letters as well as official correspondence – mention martyr shrines and feast days in honour of martyrs' anniversaries.[67] Much of the papyrological and epigraphical material has been collected by Papaconstantinou in her ground-breaking 2001-monograph. Papaconstantinou has shown that the evidence from papyri and inscriptions can supplement, or even dramatically alter, the picture painted by narrative sources. Her examination unearthed a mass of local saints, some of them unknown from hagiographical sources, alternated by a few well-known figures. Furthermore, her research indicates that – in contrast to statements made in hagiographical literature – some saints were more prominent than others from the beginning and would thus not have crushed a local cult of saints.[68]

Papaconstantinou has collected the papyrological material up to 1999, and since then newly discovered papyri have introduced new saints and new sanctuaries. The papyri confirm the hagiographical evidence in showing that a martyr cult only developed when the persecutions became matters of the past. The earliest attested *martyrium* appears in Oxyrhynchus in an order to pay wheat and vegetable seed dated 14 August 398.[69] However, 'only after 450 does the cult actually become visible in the field. In the second half of the fifth century, it rapidly started rising into prominence in the cities and villages of the Nile Valley, until it reached its full potential in the sixth century'.[70] Hagiographical literature follows this same pattern and it is not unimportant to note that most of our source material thus only appears about a century after the Persecution.

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66 For analyses of these flasks see e.g. Z. Kiss, *Les ampoules de Saint Ménas découvertes à Kôm el-Dikka (1961-1981)* (Warsaw, 1989) and S.J. Davis, 'Pilgrimage and the Cult of Saint Thecla in Late Antique Egypt', in Frankfurter, *Pilgrimage*, 303-39 at 303-8.

67 R.S. Bagnall and D. Rathbone, *Egypt: From Alexander to the Copts: An Archaeological and Historical Guide* (London, 2004) 25.

68 Papaconstantinou, *Culte des saints*. See also her discussion of the material in 'The Cult of Saints: A Haven of Continuity in a Changing World?', in R.S. Bagnall (ed.), *Egypt in the Byzantine World, 300-700* (Cambridge, 2007) 350-67.

69 *P.Haun*. III 67.

70 Papaconstantinou, 'Cult of Saints', 353. For the growth of the cult of saints see also W. Clarysse, 'The Coptic Martyr Cult', in M. Lamberigts and P. van Deun (eds.), *Martyrium in Multidisciplinary Perspective, Memorial Louis Reekmans* (Leuven, 1995) 377-95.

Although the documentary sources have been mostly collected, an analysis about what this material says about how the Great Persecution was represented and remembered has not yet been made. This study attempts to fill this lacuna in scholarship. The regional and local character of the voices of Christian Egyptian men and women enable us to see the reverberations of the Persecution from nearby. Listening to the localized responses to the Persecution and placing them in dialogue with Egyptian Church fathers I hope to be able to reconstruct a complete image of how the people who would eventually number the years according to the 'Era of the Martyrs' remembered this period.[71] Before we travel to Late Antique Egypt, however, it is necessary to ask a few methodological questions about remembering and forgetting.

1.3 Remembering and Forgetting: A Cognitive Approach

People's reflections on their past change when time passes and family history becomes the heritage of local communities, and eventually even leaves a long-term impact on society. The meaning of a certain event, place or person changes when those who remember it are further and further removed. It follows that, when that present lies years, decades or even ages back in the past, it becomes more and more difficult to grasp how the people living then conceived their past. Given these difficulties, it is not unreasonable to ask how to study the past of an ancient society, when even contemporary life of that society is hard to reconstruct. How do we study the memories of past peoples such as, in the case of this study, the memories of the Great Persecution of Christians in Late Antique Egypt?

Since the blooming of memory studies in the 1980s and 1990s, scholars have used the term 'memory' to explore the memories of individual people who actually

71 Although the 'Era of the Martyrs' is regularly used only after the Arab conquest and thus after the period this study examines, it does refer to an event that became fundamental for defining the collective past of Christian communities in Egypt. The name is first attested on tombstones from Nubia dated to 785/786 and 796/797. See R.S. Bagnall and K.A. Worp, *Chronological Systems of Byzantine Egypt* (Leiden, 2004^2) 63-87, in which they refute the earlier evidence given in L.S.B. MacCoull and K.A. Worp, 'The Era of the Martyrs II', in M. Capasso, G. Messeri Savorelli and R. Pintaudi (eds.), *Miscellanea papyrologica in occasione del bicentenario dell'edizione della Charta Borgiana*, 2 vols. (Florence, 1990) 2.375-408. At pp. 67-8 of the former study, Bagnall and Worp suggest that the name of the era was changed from Era of Diocletian to Era of the Martyrs to express the religious identity of Christian communities after the Arab conquest: 'The new designation of the Coptic era as that "of the Martyrs" emphasizes even more strongly than the name of Diocletian the fact that the community, religiously defined by its new non-Christian rulers, saw itself as the heir of the martyrs of the Great Persecution of the early fourth century'. Humphries, 'Mind of the Persecutors', 17-8 also remarks that the later Christian adaptation of the Diocletianic era suggests that the Great Persecution was an important period in the historical consciousness of Egyptian Christians. Cf. G. Ochała, *Chronological Systems of Christian Nubia* (Warsaw, 2011) 31-97.

experienced the event.[72] Additionally, the term has come to denote the representation of the past and the making of 'collective memory'. Memory studies have resulted in compelling and thought-provoking research, but often miss a clear, concise and coherent terminology and are much criticized for predictability and lack of focus.[73] There is, furthermore, a tendency in the humanities and social sciences to study solely the traditional philosophical questions about remembering and forgetting and to neglect practical research done by cognitive scientists. For whereas scholars from the humanities have made interesting observations about how the mind works, they often base their conclusions on a single example or a few case studies. As Karl Galinsky, the editor of *Memory in Ancient Rome and Early Christianity*, remarks, cognitive neuroscientists and psychologists are able to validate some of the ideas of the founding figures of memory studies with statistical evidence that was not available at the time.[74] Cognitive science is, furthermore, able to contribute a better understanding of the underlying neurology.

72 As concise histories of memory studies have already been given at other places, I will discuss in the following only the approaches relevant for my analysis. For an overview of previous scholarship, the current state of research and the various disciplines working on memory, see J.K. Olick, V. Vinitzky-Seroussi and D. Levy, 'Introduction', in J.K. Olick, V. Vinitzky-Seroussi and D. Levy (eds.), *The Collective Memory Reader* (Oxford, 2011) 3-62. Additionally, M. Berek, *Kollektives Gedächtnis und die gesellschaftliche Konstruktion der Wirklichkeit. Eine Theorie der Erinnerungskulturen* (Wiesbaden, 2009) 9-17 discusses the blooming of memory studies since the 1990s. See further C. Gudehus, A. Eichenberg and H. Welzer (eds.), *Gedächtnis und Erinnerung. Ein interdisziplinäres Handbuch* (Stuttgart, 2010) and A. Erll, *Kollektives Gedächtnis und Erinnerungskulturen. Eine Einführung* (Stuttgart, 2011) for the most important concepts developed in memory studies. The different approaches used in memory studies from 1902 onwards are more fully discussed in J.K. Olick and J. Robbins, 'Social Memory Studies: From "Collective Memory" to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices', *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (1998) 105-40. In addition, the journal *Memory Studies* (published since 2008) discusses in every issue an aspect of previous scholarship on cultural and social memory.

73 For criticism on memory studies, see e.g. A. Confino, 'Collective Memory and Cultural History, Problems and Method', *American Historical Review* 102 (1997) 1386-1403, W. Kansteiner, 'Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies', *History and Theory* 41 (2002) 179-97, H.L. Roediger and J.V. Wertsch, 'Collective Memory: Conceptual Foundations and Theoretical Approaches', *Memory* 16 (2008) 318-26, J.V. Wertsch, 'Collective Memory', in P. Boyer and J.V. Wertsch (eds.), *Memory in Mind and Culture* (Cambridge, 2009) 117-37 at 117 and, in the same volume, H.L. Roediger, F.M. Zaromb and A.C. Butler, 'The Role of Repeated Retrieval in Shaping Collective Memory', 138-70 at 138-9.

74 K. Galinsky, 'Introduction', in K. Galinsky (ed.), *Memory in Ancient Rome and Early Christianity* (Oxford, 2016) 1-39 at 16. In a critical evaluation of the contribution of cognitive studies to research in the humanities, D. Xygalatas, 'On the Way Towards of Cognitive Historiography: Are We There Yet?', *Journal of Cognitive Historiography* 1 (2014) 193-200 at 193 rightly states that 'if the humanities are to survive in the modern academia, they need to keep up with theoretical and methodological developments in other disciplines, and certainly with scientific approaches to the study of human nature'.

Therefore, it is important to first discuss the terminology and to integrate traditional memory studies with work done by cognitive psychologists and neurologists. The resulting methodological framework, the 'cognitive ecology', is a promising basis for researching the ways in which we today as well as people in ancient societies remembered the past.

Most scholars who study the human mind and how it creates cultural memories take the work of the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1877-1945) as a starting point. According to Halbwachs, the present paints its own picture of the past, adapting and adjusting it to the current social situation.[75] Knowledge of the historical truth is only of minor or even no importance, for stories are not necessarily told to preserve the past: they first and foremost serve present purposes. Furthermore, Halbwachs argues that memory is a social phenomenon and only develops through communication with other people. Following this theory to the extreme, some scholars have argued that this would mean that a human being growing up in total isolation would have no memories at all. Many historians felt uncomfortable with this determined anti-individualism and as a result distanced themselves from the term 'collective memory' as used by Halbwachs and instead proposed terms such as 'social memory', 'collective remembrance' and 'public memory'.[76]

In a purely semantic way, however, the word 'collective' is specific enough to connote a social group and vague enough not to specify the social structure and the number of people in this group. Furthermore, Halbwachs himself never followed his theory to this extreme anti-individualism. Individuals do remember, but they mostly remember in groups and thus influence each other's memories when they access their collective past together. This becomes clearer when we follow cognitive psy-

75 M. Halbwachs, *La topographie légendaire des évangiles en terre sainte: étude de mémoire collective* (Paris, 1941), *La mémoire collective* (Paris, 1950) and *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (Paris, 1952).

76 M. Bloch, 'Mémoire collective, tradition et coutume', *Revue de synthèse historique* 40 (1925) 73-83 continues to use the term 'collective memory', although he points out that one cannot simply borrow terms from individual psychology and then add the adjective 'collective'. For this reason, P. Burke, 'History as Social Memory', in T. Butler (ed.), *Memory: History, Culture and the Mind* (New York, 1989) 97-113 at 98, prefers the term 'social memory'. He explains that whereas it is the individual who remembers, the social group determines what will be remembered and how it will be remembered. Roediger and Wertsch, 'Collective Memory', 319-20 choose the term 'collective remembrance' to stress that the making of a collective memory is a continuous process, whereas G. Dickinson, C. Blair and B.L. Ott, 'Introduction: Rhetoric/Memory/Place', in G. Dickinson, C. Blair and B.L. Ott (eds.), *Places of Public Memory. The Rhetoric of Museums and Memorials* (Tuscaloosa, 2010) 1-54 at 6 prefer the term 'public memory' to emphasize the rhetorical understanding of memory. See also A. Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume: Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses* (Munich, 1999) 133-43, who distinguishes between two functions of memory. 'Storage memory' preserves all memories, like a limitless library. From this library, 'functional memories' can be chosen.

chologists and neurologists in differentiating between 'personal memory' (memories about our personal past), 'habit memory' (memories about how to do certain things) and 'factual memory' (beliefs about how the world works).[77] The most important reason for this division is that people with different types of brain damage might lose one type of memory, while maintaining others.

When we apply this to the ancient sources, we see that personal memories are unique and often emotional events. They are the personal memories visitors to martyrs' sanctuaries made, bringing their own fears and hopes to the martyrs' oracles and healing centres. Their 'habit memories' told Egyptian Christians to use certain amulets, divination techniques and healing rituals when they wanted to accomplish certain things.

How difficult it is to change habit memories can be aptly illustrated by the polemical writings of the monastic leader Shenoute (*c.* 348-465). According to Shenoute, laity and clergy alike are deceived by those who tell that they can find healing by sleeping in the cemeteries or that they can receive oracular dreams by sleeping near the bones and cadavers of the dead martyrs.[78] And as if this is not bad enough, people even reserve graves in the tombs of the martyrs and worship their relics: 'If the martyr now lived with us, we would know how angry he was at us!'[79] About a century after Shenoute formulated his angry speech, in Egypt these practices were apparently omnipresent and popular. In the past decades, scholars have indeed acknowledged that impressions of heated debates among Christians and deep distinctions between Christians and non-Christians appear sharpest in polemical writings and that the social experience was different.[80]

When visitors arrived at a martyr's sanctuary, they must have had at least a minimal knowledge about the life and martyrdom of the saint, and the miracles that he or she had performed after his or her death. This general knowledge can be described as 'factual memories', memories about how the world works. In his study about the role of memory in religion, the anthropologist Harvey Whitehouse argues that the information given during repetitively performed and routinized rituals is

77 For a comprehensive introduction to the philosophy of memory see D. Locke, *Memory* (London, 1971).

78 Shenoute, *Those Who Work Evil* (ed. Amélineau, *Oeuvres de Schenoudi* 1, 220). For a reconstruction of this sermon see Emmel, *Shenoute's Literary Corpus* 1, 649-50, 669-70.

79 Shenoute, *Since It Behooves Christians* (ed. Amélineau, *Oeuvres de Schenoudi* 1, 201-2): ⲱ ⲉⲛⲉⲣⲉ ⲡⲙⲁⲣⲧⲩⲣⲟⲥ ⲟⲛ̀ⲥ ⲛ̄ⲙⲙⲁⲛ ⲧⲉⲛⲟⲩ ⲛⲉⲛⲛⲁⲉⲓⲙⲉ ⲡⲉ ⲭⲉ ⲉⲫⲥⲟⲏⲧ ⲉⲣⲟⲛ. For a reconstruction of this sermon see Emmel, *Shenoute's Literary Corpus* 2, 668-9, 858. For discussions of Shenoute's opinion about the cult of the martyrs see Lefort, 'Chasse aux reliques', Baumeister, *Martyr invictus*, 66-7, Maraval, *Lieux saints*, 58 and Horn, *Studien zu den Märtyrern* 1.

80 See e.g. M. Kahlos, *Debate and Dialogue: Christian and Pagan Cultures, c. 360-430* (Aldershot, 2007). On the opinion of Church fathers versus the reality of oracular sites, see e.g. D. Frankfurter, *Christianizing Egypt. Syncretism and Local Worlds in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, 2018) 19-20, 105.

remembered as a 'factual memory'.[81] A martyr story, following the standard route from confession to trial to execution, is an example of a 'factual memory'.

Public sermons thus generated the necessary common knowledge about a martyr. The symbolic characteristics of a martyr – the martyrdom, the miracles and his or her portrayal as a physician, soldier, virgin, priest or monk – are worth more when they are widely understood.[82] Factual memories, however, are also formed in dialogue between priest and flock. For when a bishop preaches a sermon, he is also responding to the recollections of the past of his audience. Recent currents in memory studies confirm that the creation of collective memory is not just a top-down process, but a constant dialogue between members of all social strata.[83] 'Organizers' would therefore be a better term than 'Träger', as used by the German Egyptologist Jan Assmann, for the carriers of collective memories can only be the collective as a whole.[84] It follows that there has to be some kind of agreement between the ideas of the organizers and the 'receptiveness' of the collective: the inef-

81 H. Whitehouse, Modes of Religiosity: A Cognitive Theory of Religious Transmission (Walnut Creek, 2004). For earlier formulations see his Inside the Cult: Religious Innovation and Transmission in Papua New Guinea (Oxford, 1995) and Arguments and Icons: Divergent Modes of Religiosity (Oxford, 2000).

82 According to M. Suk-Young Chwe, *Rational Ritual. Culture, Coordination, and Common Knowledge* (Princeton, 2001) 'rational rituals' such as weddings, graduation ceremonies and presidential inaugurations are all communal activities that can serve a rational purpose: they can solve 'coordination problems' in which taking action requires common knowledge. A wedding, for instance, is not just about two people loving each other, but also about showing their relationship to others, who then recognize and treat the couple as married. Common knowledge of an inauguration is essential to the legitimacy of the office: people are more likely to support an authority, the more others support it. Mark Zuckerberg, the founder of Facebook, found Chwe's rational ritual theory 'an important idea for designing social media'. Personal experiences on Facebook become common knowledge, for instance, when people begin 'liking' a page, and others see, share and discuss it. See further the article by R. Feloni, 'Mark Zuckerberg Hopes This Book Will Help Shape his Vision for Facebook', *Business Insider* (April 1 2015) available online at http://www.businessinsider.com/-mark-zuckerberg-facebook-book-club-rational-ritual-2015-4.

83 The conception that memories are created in constant dialogue between different social groups follows the line of thinking that appears in the common expression 'power comes in many forms'. This line of thinking goes back to the ideas of the French philosopher Michel Foucault (1926-1984), who saw power as the ability to create change in the behaviour (or memories) of both individuals and society. He thus argued against the then widespread assumption that the only real power was sovereign power and proposed that power comes from multiple sources instead. In e.g. *Surveiller et punir: naissance de la prison* (Paris, 1975) and *Histoire de la sexualité*, 4 vols. (Paris, 1976-2018) he shows how social institutions like the Church, hospitals, the law and the police built and administered power in certain 'discourses' about madness, illness, crime or sexuality. These discourses can change when social movements resist traditional ways of thinking and propose a new mentality and set of discourses to convey it.

84 J. Assmann, 'Kollektives Gedächtnis und kulturelle Identität', in J. Assmann and T. Hölscher (eds.), *Kultur und Gedächtnis* (Frankfurt, 1988) 9-19 at 14.

fectiveness of Shenoute's polemics confirm that a potential memory can only become an actual memory when at least the majority of the group agrees with the organizers. All in all, these three kinds of memory, each with their particular mode of operation, all cooperate in the process of memorization.

To return to Halbwachs, he stressed that collective memories are created in a social context: when individuals remember, they formulate their memories by talking to each other, by reproducing and rewriting narratives and by materializing memories in the form of monuments.[85] Cognitive psychologists would say that the history of remembering leads through several social settings, various environments and different cognitive artefacts helping people to construct their memories. In this study, I will attempt to take what can be covered by the term 'cognitive ecology' into account.

The term 'cognitive ecology' was introduced about fifty years ago, in reaction to computational models of cognition used in computer science and neuroscience.[86] In these fields, memory was seen as a storehouse or archive. Moreover, in court, first-hand memory reports of victims, witnesses and suspects were and still are treated as crucial evidence – with far-reaching consequences when people are wrongly convicted based on somebody's false memory.[87] Indeed, throughout the centuries, memories have been described as wax-tablets, archives or libraries, as 'photographic memories', holograms and eventually computers.[88] All these metaphors have in common that they encourage us to imagine memories as preserving wholly intact pictures of the past. This image of our memory is unsurprising, as memories are indeed essential to everything we do. Without our memories, we would no longer be able to perform simple tasks, from making coffee to finding our way to the supermarket. We would even lose our sense of self, since we derive our identity from our memories. Memories, moreover, not only provide us with an understanding of the past, but what people remember of the past also determines their actions in the

85 See also S. Price, 'Memory and Ancient Greece', in B. Dignas and R.R.R. Smith (eds.), *Historical and Religious Memory in the Ancient World* (Oxford, 2012) 15-36, who posits that networks of memories are constructed in four different contexts: objects and representations, places, ritual behaviour and textual narratives.

86 For the 'birth' of cognitive science see J.-P. Dupuy, *The Mechanization of the Mind: On the Origins of Cognitive Science* (Princeton, 2000).

87 See e.g. A. Barnier, J. Sutton and M. Temler, 'Total Recall: Truth, Memory, and the Trial of Oscar Pistorius', *The Conversation* (11 April 2014), available online at https://theconversation.com/total-recall-truth-memory-and-the-trial-of-oscar-pistorius-25496 about a judge who did not accept the suspect's claim that he did not remember a certain event and interpreted his inconsistencies as lies (the same article appeared as 'Truth, Memory and the Trial of Oscar Pistorius', *The New Zealand Herald* [14 April 2014], available online at https://www.nzherald.co.nz/lifestyle/news/article-.cfm?c_id=6&objectid=11237871).

88 For these metaphors, see D. Draaisma, *De Metaforenmachine: Een geschiedenis van het geheugen*, (Groningen, 1995).

present and their plans for the future. Our memory is indeed a defining force, but also an elusive one. Whatever may have changed between the wax tablet and the hard disk, memories have never been carved in stone. Instead, they overlap and compete, change over time or are forgotten.

Therefore, psychologists pointed out that it has long been acknowledged that memory does not work like a USB-stick.[89] We cannot store a memory in our brain in the way we can save a file on a computer. For whereas the file remains the same every time it is downloaded, when we remember we do not reproduce the exact same event. This is not to say that memory is always false, but to point to the fact that tracking the past is only one function of memory. As Halbwachs notes, these memories are used to make sense of ourselves, to construct and maintain our own individual identity and – going one step further – to transmit the collective identity of society as a whole by means of what Assmann first called 'cultural memory'.[90]

When we remember the past, we are constructing a memory. And with our brains being different from the hard disks of computers, philosophers argue that the construction of a memory does not just take place inside the head. Between perception and action, between simple in-put and out-put, many more factors than just the naked brain – the hard disk – play a role. Memories can be provoked by a photo in a family album or an article in a newspaper, by the sight of an old school or house or by talking to friends or family. The mechanisms of memory are not all in the head. Instead, as embodied human beings, we live in a world full of things, people and institutions and the theory known as distributed cognition asks how all the components of these worlds – social systems, cognitive artefacts and the physical environment – work together in constructing memories.[91] When one component chang-

89 See e.g. A. Clark, *Natural Born Cyborgs: Minds, Technologies, and the Future of Human Intelligence* (Oxford, 2003) and A. Clark and R.H. Wilson, 'How To Situate Cognition', in P. Robbins and M. Aydede (eds.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Situated Cognition* (Cambridge, 2009) 55-77, in which the influential philosopher Andy Clark challenges the view that remembering and forgetting takes place only inside the head.

90 J. Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis* (Munich, 1992) 48-56 and *Religion und kulturelles Gedächtnis* (Munich, 2000) 16-20 makes a distinction between 'communicative memory' and 'cultural memory'. The former term refers to everyday communications about the meaning of the past and is strongly influenced by the contemporary situation. In contrast, the latter denotes memories formed by texts, rituals and monuments which are designed to recall the past. Assmann argues that just as Halbwachs has shown that people need bonds in order to develop a memory and to be able to remember, the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) has shown that people need a memory in order to be able to form bonds. In other words: alongside the bonding memory, there is also a collective memory whose task it is to transmit a collective identity. They are not built up gradually as with communicative memory and do not disappear again with the cycle of three generations. Instead, cultural memory is based on tradition. Cf. Van Minnen, 'Saving History?', 74-6.

91 Distributed cognition developed by way of independent movements, until the idea was integrated by Andy Clark in A. Clark, *Being There: Putting Brain, Body, and the World together Again* (Cambridge MA, 1997). It entered mainstream philosophy via A. Clark and D. Chalmers, 'The Extended

es, for instance when pencil and paper are replaced by an iPhone or when we move from the city we live in to the village in which we grew up, the way we construct our memories changes as well. The extended mind is both embedded in and extended into its worlds: inner and outer are complementary. In the past twenty years, researchers have recognized that such a complex phenomenon as memory must be understood across the entire system: across the entire cognitive ecology.

The first element of the cognitive ecology is the social system in which a memory occurs. Historians have, of course, always been concerned with social structures and how they influence the ways in which people viewed the world. They have long been influenced by the work of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002), who analysed the role of social structures in society such as the family we are born into, our educational background, our position in cultural life and in the economic order.[92] According to Bourdieu, our individual *habitus* – our taste, our accent, all those big and little details revealing the way we look at the world – is the unconscious consequence of the social structures we are living in. Cognitive researchers confirm that our memories are influenced by the culture and environment in which we grow up, by the way we learn to remember as children.[93] Some parents or caretakers, for instance, will focus more on the factual details about what happened in the past whereas others will focus more on emotions or moral lessons. There are, furthermore, gender differences in the way we talk to our daughters and sons.[94] Moreover, researchers have discovered that languages influence the way in which an event is remembered. For instance, when required to give a description of a robbery or a road accident, English and Spanish speakers would give an equally detailed report. However, English speakers, who use more active language than Spanish speakers, remembered the agents of the accidents better.[95] In short, the social systems we live in have a profound influence on the way in which we remember.

Apart from social settings, the two other elements of the cognitive ecology – available cognitive artefacts and the physical environment – have a profound influ-

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Mind', *Analysis* 58 (1998) 7-19. For an overview of previous research see K. Michaelian and J. Sutton, 'Distributed Cognition and Memory Research: History and Current Directions', *Review of Philosophy and Psychology* 4 (2013) 1-14.

92 P. Bourdieu, *Le sens pratique* (Paris, 1980). See also his *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique* (Geneva, 1972) 85-8.

93 C. Strauss and N. Quin, *Cognitive Theory of Cultural Meaning* (Cambridge, 1997) 44-7 note that Bourdieu's theory of practice relies heavily on the cognitive sciences of the 1960s and the 1970s and bears strong similarities to Dan Sperber's view of culture as a shared schema.

94 E.g. R. Fivush and C.A. Haden (eds.), *Autobiographical Memory and the Construction of a Narrative Self* (Mahwah NJ, 2003), K. Nelson (ed.), *Narratives from the Crib* (Harvard, 2006), E. Reese, *Tell Me a Story: Sharing Stories to Enrich Your Child's World* (Oxford, 2013) and Q. Wang, *The Autobiographical Self in Time and Culture* (Oxford, 2013).

95 C.M. Fausey and L. Boroditsky, 'Who Dunnit? Cross-Linguistic Differences in Eye-Witness Memory', *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review* 18 (2011) 150-7.

ence on how we look at the world and how we form our memories. According to Assmann, the very reason why the cultural heritage of ancient Greece and Israel has been preserved while other cultures were forgotten is that these societies produced texts and then canonized them.[96] Criticising scholars for relying too much or solely on textual evidence, archaeologist Susan Alcock explores how material culture, in particular landscape and monuments, can reveal commemorative practices and collective amnesia in past societies.[97] Pierre Nora calls these landscapes 'milieux de mémoire', and argues how they changed from real environments of memory to 'lieux de mémoire', artificial environments designed to recall the past.[98] Cognitive ecology does not focus on one set of artefacts, but brings all these approaches together, opening new windows through which changes in the way people remember can be seen.

Cognitive psychologists and neurologists agree that objects and landscapes profoundly influence the formation of our memories. If an object is strongly associated with one memory in particular – for instance the bracelet of a grandmother or a school painting made by the youngest child in the family – it makes it much more likely that a memory is stored. In a similar way, grave decorations, statues or paintings and indeed buildings can transmit, disrupt or renew memories. The small wooden hut, said to have been the house of Romulus, that stood next to the imperial palace in Rome until at least the fourth century CE reminded the Romans of Rome's origins. The amphitheatre that was built on the site where Nero's palace had been was actually meant to obliterate the memory of the infamous emperor. By the Mid-

96 Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis*, 163. See also J. Goody and I.P. Watt, 'The Consequences of Literacy', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 5 (1963) 304-45, who compare the transmission of cultural heritage in non-literate with literate – and, going one step further, alphabetic – societies. As such, they consider the city states of Greece and Asia Minor as the first literate cultures. Although they acknowledge the importance of material and oral culture, J. Goody, *Food and Love: A Cultural History of East and West* (London, 1998) 1 argues that literacy had allowed 'a quantum jump in human consciousness': he emphasizes that whereas oral societies transmit their cultural heritage almost entirely face-to-face, literate societies have a permanently recorded version of the past at their disposal. Since its first publication in 1963, this thesis has been much and vigorously debated: see e.g. M. Cole and J. Cole, 'Rethinking the Goody Myth', in D.R. Olson and M. Cole (eds.), *Technology, Literacy, and the Evolution of Society* (Mahwah NJ, 2006) 305-24.

97 S. Alcock, *Archaeologists of the Greek Past. Landscape, Monuments, and Memories* (Cambridge, 2002). See also J. Boardman, *The Archaeology of Nostalgia. How the Greeks Recreated Their Mythical Past* (London, 2002), who asks how the ancient Greeks reconstructed their history with the help of material culture. D. Frankfurter, 'Introduction: Approaches to Coptic Pilgrimage', in Frankfurter, *Pilgrimage*, 3-48 emphasizes at pp. 13-8 that pilgrims used the landscapes that surrounded them to articulate their beliefs. A. Hartmann, *Zwischen Relikt und Reliquie, Objektbezogene Erinnerungspraktiken in antiken Gesellschaften* (Berlin, 2010) gives an extensive overview of the material objects which the ancients from the eighth century BCE to the fourth century CE used to reconstruct their histories.

98 P. Nora, 'Between Memory and History', *Representations* 26 (1989) 7-24.

dle Ages, however, it was being called the Colosseum, after the enormous bronze statue that had once been commissioned by Nero and perhaps represented him. Today, the person and the place have become so interconnected that modern filmmakers show us Nero executing Christians in the Colosseum.[99]

Furthermore, memory researchers have confirmed statements by ancient and modern rhetoricians, showing that when emotions are involved, the chance that a memory remains increases. For instance, when you have enjoyed a happy childhood at your parents' house in the countryside, the smell of hay and fresh cut grass brings back joyful memories of summer and family life. In contrast, when you have been bullied at school, years later the sound of a school bell can bring back negative feelings. The sound of the school bell and the smell of grass respectively activate feelings of sadness and happiness *and* information about school and home. In the brain, this simultaneous activation strengthens the connections in the neuronal networks and makes it easier to remember these events.[100]

An understanding of our neuronal network also explains why we tend to fill in gaps with information that seems plausible, why we connect things with already existing neurological patterns. Our collective *habitus* indeed has a great impact on the way in which we remember: we often actively search for information that confirms our opinion. Human beings tend, to borrow a term coined by Hayden White, to 'emplot' themselves within already known traditions. According to White, when we tell a story or write about a historical event, false memories may slip in while we attempt to create a coherent narrative out of a set of data.[101] The tendency to create a

99 In ancient times, however, Nero's image was not always that pitch-black. In the sixth century, John Malalas (ed. J. Thurn, *Ioannis Malalae Chronographia* [Berlin, 2000] 189) paints a picture of a naïve emperor admiring Jesus: καὶ ἀγνοήσας, ὅτι ἐσταυρώθη, ἐζήτησεν αὐτόν ἀνενέγκαι ἐν Ῥώμῃ ὡς φιλόσοφον μέγαν καὶ θαύματα ποιοῦντα 'being unaware that he had been crucified, he asked that he be brought to Rome, since he was a great philosopher and wonder-worker' (tr. E. Jeffreys, M. Jeffreys and R. Scott, *The Chronicle of Malalas* [Melbourne, 1986] 133). The story continues with Nero executing Pontius Pilate. For movies about Nero see e.g. the most recent movie based on the 1895-novel by Henryk Sienkiewicz, *Quo Vadis*, directed by J. Kawalerowicz (Poland, 2001) and the ninth episode from the series *Horrrible Histories*, directed by S. Gibney and I. Curtis (England, 2015), based on the children's book published by Terry Deary in 2014.

100 See e.g. T. Takeuchi et al., 'Locus Coeruleus and Dopaminergic Consolidation of Everyday Memory', *Nature* 537 (2016) 357-62, in which they show that our memories remain longer when dopamine is released from the brain's *locus coeruleus*, for instance after an emotional event.

101 H. White, *Metahistory. The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore, 1973) and *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore, 1978). The title of the German translation of the latter monograph, *Auch Klio dichtet oder die Fiktion des Faktischen* (Stuttgart, 1986), explains White's statements. Clio, the daughter of Zeus and Mnemosyne, was the Muse of history as well as epic poetry. The radical conclusion is that this would make historians poets, not scientists.

coherent image is also visible in experiments done by cognitive researchers, who found that it is even possible to plant false memories in people's minds.[102]

It also follows that we generally do not accept or understand completely new ideas. When a novelty is entirely alien to an audience and they cannot place it in their world, or, in other words, when there is no connection in their neuronal networks, they will most likely reject the innovation.[103] An audience, in other words, is most likely to accept a new memory when the way the organizers formulate it corresponds with the *habitus* of that particular society. 'It is generally everybody's instinct,' ancient historian Ramsay MacMullen notices, 'to make the least possible tear in the fabric of already held beliefs when obliged to admit some urgent novelty'.[104] When something is entirely new, it becomes not only incomprehensible, but also unacceptable and undesirable. Instead, when potential memories are told in accordance with old schemata, they are more likely to become actual memories. What happens when an audience is not convinced can be aptly illustrated by Eusebius' description of Constantine's speech about how God had given him his earthly rule: whereas the audience applauded loudly, after the speech they went home and gave no further thought to the matter.[105]

All in all, the theory of cognitive ecology forces us to take all aspects of remembering and forgetting into account. By studying the effect that social systems, cognitive artefacts and physical environments have on memories, with theories from cognitive sciences contributing to existing studies from the humanities and social sciences, I have created a theoretical framework that we can use to study memories in the ancient world. Furthermore, by differentiating between 'personal', 'habit' and 'factual memories' we are able to bridge the gap between individual versus collective memories. Having given this overview of memory studies and cognitive science,

102 See e.g. E.F. Loftus and J.E. Pickrell, 'The Formation of False Memories', *Psychiatric Annals* 25 (1995) 720-5, for a memory experiment in which adults were falsely told that they had been lost in a shopping mall as a small child, but had been rescued by an elderly person and reunited with their family. During this experiment, several adults falsely recalled the made up 'lost in the mall' memory and even unwittingly invented several additional details of the false narrative, trying to make a logical story. For similar experiments see C.M. Heaps and M. Nash, 'Comparing Recollective Experience in True and False Autobiographical Memories', *Journal of Experimental Psychology* 27 (2001) 920-30 about false memories of nearly drowning but being rescued by a lifeguard and S. Porter, J.C. Yuille and D.R. Lehman, 'The Nature of Real, Implanted, and Fabricated Memories for Emotional Childhood Events: Implications for the Recovered Memory Debate', *Law and Human Behavior* 23 (1999) 517-37 about vicious attacks by an animal and witnessing demonic possession.

103 The Dutch research project 'Anchoring Innovation' currently examines the different ways in which ancient societies connected the new to the already known: I. Sluiter, 'Anchoring Innovation: A Classical Research Agenda', *European Review* 25 (2017) 1-19.

104 R. MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire* (A.D. 100-400) (New Haven, 1984) 21-2.

105 Eus. *v.C.* 4.29.

it remains to show how the theory of cognitive ecology can be applied to our ancient sources.

Cognitive ecology, the extended mind and distributed cognition were terms that had important consequences for disciplines such as linguistics, anthropology and educational theory.[106] In history, however, the terms have not yet taken ground.[107] Nevertheless, philosopher John Sutton suggested already in 1998 that the theory of cognitive ecology could be applied to research in history and the humanities. He proposed the term 'historical cognitive science' for studies focusing not on how an event had actually happened, but on how this event was remembered.[108] In 2011, this approach was applied for the first time to the English Reformation.[109] English scholars Evelyn Tribble and Nicholas Keene have shown how Reformers actively worked to shape new cognitive ecologies. They discuss prayer, catechisms, sacred space, print, hymns and education and conclude that late medieval Catholics thought with a different set of objects, artefacts and social surroundings than Protestants did.[110]

In the last five years, scholars of Late Antique Egypt have also acknowledged the usefulness of cognitive research on memory in their work. Hugo Lundhaug has shown that the reading, memorizing and interpreting of authoritative texts, and the

106 See D. Kirsch, 'Distributed Cognition: A Methodological Note', *Pragmatics and Cognition* 14 (2006) 249-62 for a discussion of the principles of distributed cognition and its usefulness in a wide range of disciplines.

107 Although they do not mention cognitive ecology, scholars in the field of religious studies have based themselves on cognitive theories since the end of the twentieth century. For a recent manifesto for the use of cognitive sciences in the study of ancient religion, see O. Panagiotidou and R. Beck, *The Roman Mithras Cult: A Cognitive Approach. Scientific Studies of Religion: Inquiry and Explanation* (London, 2017), who use this methodology to describe the experiences of members of the Roman Mithras cult. See also R. Beck, *The Religion of the Mithras Cult in the Roman Empire. Mysteries of the Unconquered Sun* (Oxford, 2006), in which he introduces a cognitive approach to the cult of Mithras.

108 J. Sutton, *Philosophy and Memory Traces: Descartes to Connectionism* (Cambridge, 1998) 10-2.

109 E.B. Tribble and N. Keene, *Cognitive Ecologies and the History of Remembering: Religion, Education and Memory in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke, 2011).

110 P. Burke, in a review of Tribble and Keene, *Cognitive Ecologies*, in *JEH* 63 (2012) 405-6 observes that their attempts to introduce cognitive psychology into historical research did neither result in new questions about the Reformation nor provide answers to old questions with a new methodology and he therefore concludes that the use of new technical terms has no additional value. A second attempt, however, harvested more fruitful results. In *Cognition in the Globe: Attention and Memory in Shakespeare's Theatre* (New York, 2011), Tribble asks how Shakespeare's company could cope with enormous mnemonic loads, performing up to six different plays a week. She addresses the material conditions of playing space, artefacts such as parts, plots and playbooks, the social structures of the companies, and actor-audience dynamics through the lens of distributed cognition. This time, the recasting of these questions into cognitive terms leads to what F.E. Hart, review of Tribble, *Cognition in the Globe*, in *Renaissance Quarterly* 65 (2012) 635-7 at 637 writes are 'compelling interpretations (...) worth further testing'. The 'further testing' is done in L. Johnson, J. Sutton and E.B. Tribble (eds.), *Embodied Cognition and Shakespeare's Theatre: The Early Modern Body-Mind* (London, 2014).

corresponding need to control such practices, shaped memories in early monastic communities. These texts were part of the cognitive ecology of the monks.[111] In a similar way, Malcolm Choat argues that monastic genealogies found in inscriptions in monasteries were important cognitive artefacts: 'literally embedded in the walls and floors of their cells, before their eyes every day as they walked throughout the monastery, prayed, ate, and worked, they are a much more direct and constant presence than the sermons of their abbots, or the texts they read or memorised as part of their education'.[112]

Although the observations made by Lundhaug and Choat are certainly interesting, critics of historical cognitive science have pointed out that they do not see what this new theoretical framework of cognitive ecology adds to what historians have already drawn from the primary sources themselves.[113] Questions of how societies remember can indeed be and have been approached via a wide range of sources and from a variety of perspectives. However, unlike what the saying presupposes, the stones do not always speak for themselves. Instead, memories preserved in ancient literature, written on papyri and in inscriptions, and lingering at museums and archaeological sites need to be put into context. For instance, when studying the continuity of ritual practices from Roman to Late Antique Egypt, David Frankfurter argues that the reason why Christians continued to visit oracular sites and healing centres was that these habits were culturally ingrained.[114] By focussing exclusively on habit memories and neglecting personal and factual memories, however, he fails to explain how these habit memories were integrated into the ideological framework of Christianity.[115]

Furthermore, in a recent article, Stephen Davis has shown that the use of memory in scholarship on the Egyptian desert fathers stands in sharp contrast to recent sociological and scientific studies. For whereas scholars use the category of memory to argue that the memories preserved in the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers* were historically authentic, cognitive researchers have shown that memories are far from static and unchangeable in character, but can be shaped and re-shaped over time.[116] In line with Davis' approach, in the following outline of the study we will

111 H. Lundhaug, 'Memory and Early Monastic Literary Practices: A Cognitive Perspective', *JCH* 1 (2014) 98-120.

112 M. Choat, 'Narratives of Monastic Genealogy in Coptic Inscriptions', *Religion in the Roman Empire* 1 (2015) 403-30 at 424.

113 See e.g. the comments by R. Parker, 'Commentary on *Journal of Cognitive Historiography*, Issue 1', *Journal of Cognitive Historiography* 1 (2014) 186-92 at 190.

114 Frankfurter, *Christianizing Egypt*, 103.

115 A. Hidding, review of Frankfurter, *Christianizing Egypt*, in *Journal of Late Antiquity* 13 (2020) 177-9.

116 S.J. Davis, 'The Category of Memory in Recent Scholarship on the Desert Fathers', in S. Moawad and Y.N. Youssef (eds.), *Coptic Studies from Old Cairo to the New World* (Leuven, 2013) 59-76.

take both memory studies and cognitive science into account when trying to sense in which ways Christians remembered the Great Persecution.

1.4 Plan and Scope of the Study

As the subtitle of this study indicates, I will attempt to trace the changing memories of the Great Persecution in Late Antique Egypt. My 'Late Antiquity' begins, as it has generally been defined, with the reign of Diocletian in 284 and ends with the Arabic conquest of Egypt in 641/642. In the more than three hundred years that passed between the Persecution and the Arabic conquest, stories about the Great Persecution were retold by several generations of Christians, adapted and adjusted to the needs of contemporary times.

Memories, however, do not just change because of the passage of time.[117] Studying memories means studying all the 'means and processes by which a sense of the past – as something meaningfully connected to the present – functions, is sustained, and is developed within human individuals and cultures'.[118] For after the Great Persecution, the society in which this event was remembered changed. As seen in the previous section, other social settings, cognitive artefacts and environments – in other words, a different cognitive ecology – led to different stories about the martyrs, the judges and the emperor(s) who started it all. An application of these three aspects to Late Antique Egypt leads us to the three following sub-questions within the overarching research question of how Egyptian Christians remembered the Great Persecution throughout Late Antiquity:

1) Who formulated and promulgated the dominant memories, and – if they did – in which social settings did these memories clash with other versions of the past?
2) What cognitive artefacts were used to remember, and commemorate, the Great Persecution?
3) Where was the Great Persecution remembered, and how did the environments where commemoration took place influence the way in which the persecution was remembered?

It is evident that if we would study all the memories circulating about the Great Persecution, we would no longer see the wood for the trees. The *Synaxarium* records

117 E. Esposito, *Soziales Vergessen. Formen und Medien des Gedächtnisses der Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt, 2002) 31 goes one step further and argues that time is only a by-product. According to Esposito, people remember to make sense of themselves and their history and forget everything that is not relevant to this purpose. The passing of time thus plays only a minor role in the process of remembering and forgetting.

118 This is the definition as given by Lundhaug, 'Memory', 99, who in turn adapts the working definition of G. Cubitt, *History and Memory* (Manchester, 2007) 9.

the stories of 254 martyrs and the catalogue in Papaconstantinou's *Culte des saints* lists no fewer than 167 saints. Therefore, I have chosen to offer chapters that are not so much complete overviews of all these martyrs and memories, but rather more in-depth discussions on particularly relevant aspects of what was remembered and forgotten about the Great Persecution in a specific local context. The sub questions above will thus be answered over a series of three chapters, each focusing on a different city in Late Antique Egypt where the combination of archaeological, papyrological and hagiographical material allows for more complete images.

In chapter 1, we will gain a general overview of the cult of the martyrs by exploring the memories of the martyrs in Oxyrhynchus. The thousands of papyrus fragments found at the city's rubbish dumps make Oxyrhynchus into one of the best documented cities in the ancient world: not only do the sources permit us to gain a vivid image of daily life in Oxyrhynchus, they also provide us with a treasure trove of information concerning the remembrance and representation of the martyrs. By analyzing the three different elements of the cognitive ecology, we shall see that the martyrs were embedded in each layer of everyday life. The Oxyrhynchites would pray to them, invoke them in their amulets, go to their churches to receive charitable help and by means of oracular tickets ask for advice about everyday concerns. In this way, the power of the martyrs was omnipresent. Although they had died long ago, the martyrs had become an essential part of social and religious life in the city.

Building upon the foundation given in the first chapter, the second chapter zooms in on details regarding a particular saint: the hagiographical, archaeological and papyrological sources concerning the physician martyr Colluthus of Antinoopolis provide us with a multifaceted picture of this saint. Furthermore, by examining the various perspectives from which these sources approach Colluthus, we will aim to get a better insight into the differences between individual and collective memory. Although the second chapter focusses on a specific martyr in his local context, the case of Colluthus nevertheless reveals some basic elements of the remembrance of the martyrs in the cities and villages of Late Antique Egypt. Among these elements are the ways in which his martyr story was told and how his miracles proved the power of the saint, a healing power still present at his sanctuary in Antinoopolis.

In the third chapter, we see how the growing monastic world came to influence the memories of the Persecution. In this chapter, we take a close look at the memories of the legendary martyr Paphnutius of Dendara. Paphnutius' passion tells us about an anchorite who converted a large number of inhabitants of Dendara to Christianity and thereby led them into martyrdom before he was executed himself. His rich hagiographical record and the occurrence of his name in graffiti from Esna and Western Thebes attest to the importance of this ascetic in the memories of Late Antique Christians. This chapter pays particular attention to martyr stories as cognitive artefacts and makers of factual memories by evaluating the recurring scenes, repetitive formulae and epithets used to describe Paphnutius' story. What role did

this ultimate martyr, who both lived a life of spiritual martyrdom and suffered a physical martyr's death during the Great Persecution while leading the entire Christian community of Dendara with him to martyrdom, played in the construction of memory of the Great Persecution?