

BIOGRAPHIES OF BISHOPS

The ancient literary form of the biography was taken over by the Christians, as is shown by the *Panegyricus* on [Constantine the Great](#) by [Eusebius](#) and Jerome's *De viris illustribus*. From the fourth century on, the lives of saints such as the *Vita Cypriani* of Pontius and the *Vita Antonii* of Athanasius were at the center of Christian biography. The latter work, a mixture of biography and encomium, had a considerable influence in Coptic literature, with greater emphasis on the element of eulogy.

The designations of these works vary between encomium and *bios*, and [occasionally](#) they are also called *politeia* (Abdel Sayed, 1984, pp. 272ff.). The first subjects of biographies or encomia were martyrs and then monks, followed by bishops. For example, an encomium on MACARIUS, [BISHOP](#) OF TKOW, is ascribed to [Archbishop](#) DIOSCORUS of Alexandria, the twenty-fifth patriarch. In the early fourth century, Archbishop Alexander I, nineteenth patriarch, had reportedly written an encomium on his predecessor PETER I of Alexandria, seventeenth patriarch (see Krause, 1979, pp. 710 and nn. 171f.; further examples at pp. 710-15).

In the seventh century, when [Coptic literary](#) works were increasingly written in Coptic and no longer translated from Greek into Coptic, a biography of [Bishop](#) Pisentius of Qift was written. This has been preserved in the Sahidic and Bohairic dialects and in [Arabic](#) translations (Abdel Sayed, pp. 5ff.). In each version a different author is named, although the content of the biography, apart from variations in length, agrees word for word.

The Bohairic version reportedly was written by [Bishop](#) Moses, the successor of Pisentius as bishop of Qift; the Sahidic, by the [priest](#) John, a disciple of Pisentius. The longer [Arabic](#) translation is said to have been [composed](#) by [Theodorus](#) of Scetis, with Moses and John as coauthors. Only in the short Arabic [recension](#) is [Theodorus](#) named as sole author.

Probably, however, John was the author, and Moses may well be named as author of the Bohairic version, because in this period many Coptic [bishops](#) are known as the authors of literary works.

The biography falls into individual narratives, which in the [Arabic](#) recensions are described as [miracles](#) and enumerated. In addition to *topoi*, which are also attested in other literary works, the recensions contain so many statements about Pisentius that a biography could be worked out from them (Abdel Sayed, pp. 304ff.).

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